

Brief to the Standing Committee on the Status of Women  
***National Consultation on Human Trafficking of Women, Girls  
and Gender-Diverse People in Canada***

Submitted by Resist Exploitation, Embrace Dignity (REED), May 2023

**Human trafficking cannot be separated from prostitution.** Trafficking has increased exponentially in countries such as Germany and the Netherlands where prostitution was legalized. Intending to improve conditions for women in prostitution and combat human trafficking in The Netherlands, the Dutch legalized prostitution in 2000. However, as Amsterdam's Mayor Cohen explained in 2016, women's sexual exploitation actually increased as did the numbers of Eastern European women being trafficked into the NL.<sup>1</sup> Conversely, countries such as Sweden that hold purchasers accountable have seen a dramatic reduction in trafficking, as well as a reduction of violence and prostitution.. (By way of contrast, in 2015 Germany had 70 murders of those in prostitution while Sweden had 0.)

Human trafficking feeds a demand created by a flourishing sex industry. As more men seek to purchase sex, more women and those identified as women and girls are trafficked to meet that need. Human trafficking cannot be combated without also combating prostitution.

**Addressing the demand for paid sex is essential in order to eradicate the market for trafficking.** International organizations such as the UN General Assembly, the European Parliament, and the OSCE, explicitly urge the world's nations to end human trafficking by addressing the demand for paid sex.<sup>2</sup>

**Sex trafficking is highly gendered** (in Canada 96% of the sex trafficked are women and girls) and disproportionately affects Indigenous women and girls, those in the child welfare system, and otherwise vulnerable youth. In other words, being female and poor predisposes people to be trafficked and prostituted from within and outside our borders.<sup>3</sup> Prostitution arises in an environment of sexual inequality, in which women's bodies are objectified through porn, advertising, and a culture that glamorizes and normalizes women's value as bodies used for men's sexual gratification. At the same time, prostitution is an abuse of power that perpetuates inequality. The buyer has the money, the privilege and the power. The women being purchased are disproportionately racialized, poor, marginalized and Indigenous.

**Canada must recognize that women's human rights to equality and security of the person are incompatible with prostitution.** Canada should learn from the progressive feminist stance of Sweden, Norway, Iceland, Ireland, North Ireland, France and the European Parliament, who recognize the need to criminalize sex buyers. Instead of seeking only to reduce the male violence enacted against women in prostitution, the time has come for us to eliminate the market for it by stopping men from buying sex.

**Our recommendations:**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://endsexualexploitation.org/articles/the-failure-of-legalization-of-prostitution-in-the-netherlands/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/f/489388\\_2.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/f/489388_2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00010-eng.htm>

1. **Ensure that Canada's human trafficking laws comply with the United Nations 2000 Human Trafficking Protocols.** The law should recognize the intersecting realities of sexism, poverty, colonialism's legacy, and other forms of social power.
2. **Bolster the efforts of those who enforce the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*** by arresting those who buy sex, as well as those who profit from the prostitution of others; compel all law enforcement agencies to enforce the *Act*; and defend the *Act* against constitutional challenge. Within a year of its passing, a new government came into power stating their intent to repeal rather than implement the law, which instructed municipalities and police to ignore it also. As well, law enforcement and social services must collaborate to ensure trauma informed care for survivors. Locally in Vancouver, BC, as in most places across the country, no training was given to police to implement the law.
3. **Fund a national public awareness campaign**, addressing law enforcement and the courts, social services, and all educational systems, from children to adults, **about women's equality and about the realities of sexual exploitation.**
4. **Budget funding to advance women's equality**, beginning with a Guaranteed Living Income. Fund a comprehensive network of social supports for trafficking and prostitution survivors, such as safe housing, addictions treatment, childcare, employment training, and trauma counseling. and with social services such as addictions treatment; long-term housing; childcare; trauma counseling; and employment training to benefit women.
5. **Delete or expunge the records of those who were previously criminalized for selling sexual services** under Criminal Code articles 210.1 and 213(1)(c), which have since been repealed.

Thank you for your consideration,

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*REED is a non-profit Vancouver organization. We stand with and for sexually exploited women and challenge the demand for paid access to their bodies. Beginning in 2005 REED has engaged in friendships with women in the sex industry and provided crisis intervention, practical assistance, and connections to resources and supports.*