



# WHAT IS THE ‘NORDIC MODEL’?

Millions of women and girls around the world are exploited in the commercial sex industry, mainly in prostitution, which is often the end destination of sex trafficking. While most activists, lawmakers and international and regional organizations agree that the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution is a serious problem and a human rights violation, there is disagreement as to the best way to prevent sex trafficking and exploitation in prostitution.

An effective approach to preventing trafficking and exploitation is the ‘Nordic model’, a human rights and gender equality-based approach also known as the ‘Swedish model’. This set of laws and policies penalizes the demand for commercial sex while decriminalizing individuals in prostitution and providing them with support services, including help for those who wish to exit prostitution. The Nordic model has two main goals: to curb the demand for commercial sex that fuels sex trafficking, and promote equality between men and women. It is based on an approach first adopted in Sweden in 1999, and followed by Norway and Iceland.

## CURBING THE DEMAND FOR SEX TRAFFICKING

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Sex trafficking is a criminal industry that operates on the market principles of supply and demand. Demand is created by the (mainly) men who pay for commercial sex. Traffickers, pimps, brothel owners and other facilitators profit from this demand by supplying the women and girls who are exploited every day in the commercial sex industry. Sex trafficking does not just exist because its victims are vulnerable - it exists because there is a demand for commercial sex that traffickers can exploit and profit from. Thus, addressing the demand for commercial sex is a key component of any plan to prevent sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

Men who buy sex and thereby create the demand that fuels trafficking have stated that greater criminal penalties, having their name publicized and having a letter sent home stating that they were arrested for buying sex would deter them from buying

sex.<sup>i</sup>

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

Women and girls who are trafficked and exploited to satisfy the demand for commercial sex are treated as commodities to be bought, sold, exploited and abused. An estimated 98% of sex trafficking victims are women and girls<sup>ii</sup> and the vast majority of commercial sex “buyers” are men. Buyers often have specific preferences regarding the women and girls they buy - including “young” or “fresh” girls, specific races/ethnicities, and body shapes and sizes – but most importantly, they want on-demand sexual access to a diverse supply of women and girls.

Exploitation of women and girls in the commercial sex industry is both a cause and consequence of gender and other inequalities. It entails numerous human rights violations, including of the right to equality and non-discrimination, dignity, health and to be free from violence, torture, inhuman and degrading treatment. It perpetuates the idea that it’s acceptable to buy women’s and girls’ bodies as long as a buyer can pay for it. The Nordic model challenges this construct and tries to redress these inequalities by promoting women’s and girls’ right to safety, health and non-discrimination, and by challenging men’s perceived – but nonexistent – “right” to buy women’s bodies for sex. Unsurprisingly, 3 of the top 4 countries with the highest level of gender equality have adopted the Nordic model.<sup>iii</sup>

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3 of the 4 countries with the highest level of gender equality have adopted the Nordic model as a way to combat sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.

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## SWEDEN – PIONEERING A NEW APPROACH

Sweden has become an undesirable destination for sex traffickers.

In 1999, as part of a Violence Against Women bill, Sweden passed a law that criminalized buyers of sex while keeping the person who sold or was sold for sex decriminalized. Sweden understood that gender inequality and sexual exploitation, including sex trafficking, could not be combated effectively as long as it was considered acceptable to purchase access to another – often more vulnerable and disadvantaged – person’s body. Alongside this law, the Swedish government made a significant investment in exit programs for those who wish to leave prostitution and to provide comprehensive social services for victims of exploitation, which is essential for a victim-centered, human rights-based approach to combating trafficking.

Since the introduction of the law, street prostitution has decreased (while increasing dramatically in Sweden’s neighbors) and Sweden has become an undesirable destination for pimps and traffickers.<sup>iv</sup> In addition, the new law has influenced attitudes regarding the purchase of sex: from 1996 (before the law) until 2008, the number of male sex buyers decreased from 13.6% to 7.9%.<sup>v</sup>

## A GROWING MOVEMENT

Several countries have followed Sweden’s example, and many more are considering this approach: Norway and Iceland passed similar laws in 2008 and 2009, respectively, and in December 2014, Northern Ireland became the first country in the UK to do so. Canada also adopted a law in this spirit in November 2014<sup>vi</sup>. In the last few years, Nordic-model style legislation has also been discussed in the parliaments of France, Ireland, Scotland and England and Wales. In early 2014, the parliaments of the European Union and the Council of Europe both adopted non-binding resolutions recommending member states to consider the Nordic Model.<sup>vii</sup> An increasing number of activists and organizations across the globe, many of which are survivor-led<sup>viii</sup>, including in countries such as South Africa, India, Lebanon, Germany, Denmark, Austria, New Zealand and the U.S., are calling for lawmakers to recognize the realities of prostitution and to enact the Nordic model.

This is in line with countries’ international legal obligation to address demand.<sup>ix</sup> The UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>x</sup>, and the former head of UN Women<sup>xi</sup> have also called for countries to combat the demand for commercial sex in order to prevent sex trafficking and promote gender equality. **Learn more at [www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org).**

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<sup>i</sup> See e.g. CAASE, *Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Men who Buy Sex*, May 2008, available at: [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_files/40/FileItem-149406-DeconstructingtheDemandForProstitution.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_files/40/FileItem-149406-DeconstructingtheDemandForProstitution.pdf); Jan Macleod, Melissa Farley, Lynn Anderson, and Jacqueline Golding, *Challenging Men’s Demand for Prostitution in Scotland*, 2008, available at: <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/pdfs/ChallengingDemandScotland.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> International Labour Organization, *Minimum Estimate of Forced Labour in the World*, April 2005, p. 6.

<sup>iii</sup> Iceland is 1, Norway is 3 and Sweden is 4. World Economic Forum, *The Global Gender Gap Report 2013*, available at: <http://www.weforum.org/issues/global-gender-gap>.

<sup>iv</sup> Swedish Ministry of Justice, *English summary of the Evaluation of the ban on purchase of sexual services (1999-2008)*, 2 July 2010. The report acknowledges the limitations in determining the prevalence of illegal activities, but even with these limitations, it is confident in the statements above. See also Presentation by Simon Haggstrom, Stockholm police, 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o6O4xzzTqSU>

<sup>v</sup> Kajsa Claude, *Targeting the sex buyer*, the Swedish Institute (2010), available at: <http://www.si.se/upload/Human%20Trafficking/Targeting%20the%20sex%20buyer.pdf>.

<sup>vi</sup> While Canada’s new *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* largely decriminalizes people in prostitution, it includes as an offence the selling of sex in or near playgrounds, schools or daycare centers.

<sup>vii</sup> European Parliament resolution: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20140221IPR36644/html/Punish-the-client-not-the-prostitute>; Council of Europe resolution: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/News/News-View-EN.asp?newsid=4964&cat=8>.

<sup>viii</sup> See e.g. <http://sextraffickingsurvivorsunited.org/>, <http://spaceinternational.ie/>.

<sup>ix</sup> Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, Article 9(5); General Assembly resolution 67/145, para 22 (‘Encourages Governments and relevant United Nations bodies...to discourage, with a view to eliminating, the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation, including sexual exploitation’).

<sup>x</sup> See e.g. CEDAW Committee Concluding Observations for Finland (UN Doc CEDAW/C/FIN/CO/7 (2014), Para 21; Republic of Korea (U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/KOR/CO/7 (2011), para. 23(f); Botswana, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/BOT/CO/3 (2010), para. 28.

<sup>xi</sup> Michelle Bachelet, ‘Fighting Human Trafficking: Partnership and Innovation to End Violence Against Women and Children’, United Nations General Assembly Interactive Dialogue, 3 April 2012.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: [WWW.EQUALITYNOW.ORG](http://WWW.EQUALITYNOW.ORG)**