



# WHAT IS THE ‘NORDIC MODEL’?

Millions of women and girls around the world are exploited in the commercial sex industry (i.e. the buying and selling of sex), which is often the end destination of sex trafficking. While human rights activists, government officials and the United Nations all agree that the trafficking of women and girls for prostitution is a serious – and growing – problem, there is disagreement as to the best way to prevent trafficking and exploitation.

One approach is the ‘Nordic model’ (also known as the ‘Swedish model’), which is a set of laws that penalizes the demand for commercial sex while decriminalizing individuals in prostitution based on an approach first adopted in Sweden in 1999, followed by Norway and Iceland. The Nordic model has two main goals: curb the demand for commercial sex that fuels sex trafficking, and promote equality between men and women.

## CURBING THE DEMAND FOR COMMERCIAL SEX AND 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 men who pay for commercial sex. Traffickers, pimps and 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.

Men who buy sex and provide the demand that fuels trafficking have stated that greater criminal penalties, having to spend time in jail 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 to satisfy the demand for commercial sex are treated as commodities to be bought, sold, exploited, and raped. 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 unlimited access to a diverse supply of women and girls whose bodies they can purchase.

Exploitation in the commercial sex industry is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality. It is a form of violence against women and girls and violates their human rights, including 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 women’s and girls’ bodies are for sale to satisfy the male demand for sex. The Nordic model challenges this construct by promoting women’s and girls’ right to safety, health and non-discrimination, and by challenging men’s 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 as a way to combat sex trafficking and sexual exploitation.<sup>iii</sup>

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## SWEDEN - PIONEERING A NEW APPROACH

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.<sup>iv</sup> Sweden understood that gender inequality and sexual subordination could not be fought effectively by assuming a gender symmetry that does not exist. Alongside this law, the Swedish government made a significant investment in exit programs for those who wish

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to leave prostitution 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 halved (while increasing dramatically in Sweden's neighbors<sup>v</sup>) and Sweden has become an undesirable destination for sex traffickers.<sup>vi</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>vii</sup>

## A GROWING MOVEMENT

Several countries have followed Sweden's example, and many more are considering this approach. In 2008, Norway passed a law criminalizing the purchase of sex (within Norway and abroad) while keeping the sale of sex decriminalized to help combat human trafficking.<sup>viii</sup> Due to concerns regarding sex trafficking and exploitation after legalizing prostitution in 2007, Iceland passed a law in 2009 criminalizing the purchase of sex to better promote gender equality and fight exploitation.<sup>ix</sup> As these laws are relatively recent, there has not yet been a comprehensive evaluation of the effects of these laws on sex trafficking and exploitation in these countries. Other countries, including South Korea, have adopted Nordic model influenced provisions, while there are strong movements to introduce the Nordic model in Ireland, France, Denmark and Latvia.

There is a growing international consensus on the need to address demand: the UN Trafficking Protocol<sup>x</sup>, the UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women<sup>xi</sup>, and the head of UN Women<sup>xii</sup> have all called for countries to combat the demand for commercial sex in order to prevent sex trafficking and promote gender equality. Equality Now supports and advocates for laws based on the Nordic model to combat trafficking and exploitation and promote gender equality. **Learn more at [www.equalitynow.org](http://www.equalitynow.org).**

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<sup>i</sup> In a survey of 113 men who had paid for sex in the Chicago area, 83% said that jail time would deter them from buying sex and 75% said greater criminal penalties in general would do so. CAASE, *Deconstructing the Demand for Prostitution: Preliminary Insights from Interviews with Men who Buy Sex*, May 2008, available at: [http://g.virbcdn.com/\\_f/files/40/FileItem-149406-DeconstructingtheDemandForProstitution.pdf](http://g.virbcdn.com/_f/files/40/FileItem-149406-DeconstructingtheDemandForProstitution.pdf). A similar survey in Scotland found that 79% of men said that having to spend time in jail would deter them from buying sex, and 72% said that greater criminal penalties would do so. 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 2012*, available at: [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2012.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf).

<sup>iv</sup> An individual who engages in a casual sexual relation for compensation shall be convicted of buying sexual services and fined or sent to prison for a maximum of six months. This law took effect on 1 January 1999; however, it was rescinded in connection with the 2005 sex crime reforms and replaced by a new penal provision – the purchase of sexual services (Chapter 6 Section 11 of the Penal Code).

<sup>v</sup> As Norway recently adopted the Nordic model, we believe street prostitution will decrease in Norway as well.

<sup>vi</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 trying to determine the prevalence of illegal activities (such as trafficking and the purchase of sexual services), but even with these limitations, it is confident in the statements listed above.

<sup>vii</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>viii</sup> Norwegian General Civil Penal Code, Section 202A

<sup>ix</sup> Icelandic Law No. 54 of 2009, which amended the General Penal Code

<sup>x</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).

<sup>xi</sup> See e.g., CEDAW Committee, *Concluding Observations: Republic of Korea*, para. 23(f), U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/KOR/CO/7 (2011) (calling on the Republic of Korea to “[t]ake appropriate measures to suppress the exploitation of prostitution of women, including by discouraging the demand for prostitution”); CEDAW Committee, *Concluding Observations: Botswana*, para. 28, U.N. Doc. CEDAW/C/BOT/CO/3 (2010) (calling on Botswana to take actions to discourage the demand for prostitution).

<sup>xii</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, available at: <http://www.unwomen.org/2012/04/remarks-of-michellebachelet-fighting-human-trafficking-partnership-and-innovation-to-end-violence-against-women/>.