

## Sex Trafficking Fact Sheet

**Trafficking women and children for sexual exploitation is the fastest growing criminal enterprise in the world.**<sup>1</sup> This, despite the fact international law and the laws of 158 countries criminalize most forms of trafficking.<sup>2</sup>

- Sex trafficking is a lucrative industry making an estimated \$99 billion a year.<sup>3</sup>
- At least **20.9 million adults and children are bought and sold** worldwide into commercial sexual servitude, forced labor and bonded labor.<sup>4</sup>
- About **2 million children are exploited every year** in the global commercial sex trade.<sup>5</sup>
- 54% of trafficking victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation.<sup>6</sup>
- **Women and girls make up 96% of victims** of trafficking for sexual exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

### SEX TRAFFICKING IS A HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATION

Sex trafficking – whether within a country or across national borders – violates basic human rights, including the rights to bodily integrity, equality, dignity, health, security, and freedom from violence and torture. Key international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), consider sex trafficking a form of sex discrimination and a human rights violation.<sup>8</sup>

Survivors of sex trafficking tell stories of daily degradation of mind and body.<sup>9</sup> They are often isolated, intimidated, sold into debt bondage and subject to physical and sexual assault by their traffickers. Most live under constant mental and physical threat. Many suffer severe emotional trauma, including symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and disassociation. They are at greater risk of contracting sexually transmissible infections, including HIV/AIDS. Many become pregnant and are forced to undergo often unsafe abortions.

### ENDING SEX TRAFFICKING

A holistic and comprehensive strategy is needed to combat sex trafficking effectively. Efforts must include both eliminating gender discrimination and curbing the demand for commercial sex. **Gender inequality and discriminatory laws that trap women in poverty and fail to protect them from violence, render them vulnerable to prostitution and trafficking.** Women who lack access to resources, such as housing, land, property, and inheritance, are at increased risk.<sup>10</sup> Women and girls trafficked for prostitution are caught in cycles of sexual violence and assault. **It is critical to implement legal safeguards for women and girls to alleviate poverty and create greater possibilities for non-exploitative options for girls and women.**

#### ELEMENTS OF SEX TRAFFICKING

**ACT:** Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons;

**MEANS:** Threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim;

**PURPOSE:** Prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, or slavery.

*- From the 2000 UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, ratified by 171 countries*

**Demand fuels sex trafficking and the commercial sex industry.** Holding “buyers” of commercial sex accountable reduces sex trafficking. Sweden, Norway, Iceland, France, Canada, Northern Ireland, and Ireland have effectively addressed the demand for commercial sex and sex trafficking by decriminalizing prostituted persons, and criminalizing those who purchase sex. As a result, street prostitution and sex trafficking have decreased.<sup>11</sup> Countries that neglect to focus on the demand that fuels sex trafficking, or have legalized the commercial sex industry, have witnessed increased prostitution and greater numbers of trafficked women and girls to fulfil an influx of international sex tourists as well as increased demand locally.<sup>12</sup>

**Addressing demand also includes eliminating sex tourism.** “Sex tourists” are individuals who travel to another country to buy commercial sex or exploit weak legal systems that ignore sexual abuse, especially of girls from poor and marginalized communities. Sex tourists can be both domestic travelers – traveling within their own country of residence – or they can be international tourists and many of them are situational offenders.

## EQUALITY NOW PIONEERS EFFORTS TO END SEX TRAFFICKING

Equality Now works with grassroots organizations around the world to curb the trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of women and girls. As the oldest international women’s rights legal advocacy group, Equality Now was among the first to highlight the harms of sex tourism. Along with local and survivors’ organizations, Equality Now adopts a broad human rights framework that addresses the root causes of gender inequality and the exploitative nature of the commercial sex industry.

Equality Now has successfully advocated for strong trafficking laws, legal protections and victims’ services. Many of our advocacy efforts have become a reality. For example, Equality Now has:

- Spearheaded the case of four Brazilian girls exploited in Brazil by U.S. sex tourists and helped them file the first U.S. federal civil action against a sex tour operator.
- Pushed for strong anti-trafficking laws in India and Pakistan that prevent trafficking, including domestic trafficking, and punish exploiters.
- Successfully advocated for the first U.S. law (in Hawaii) to explicitly criminalize sex tourism and successfully prosecuted a sex tour operator under state law criminalizing the promotion of prostitution.
- As a founding member of the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition, Equality Now helped pass the most comprehensive anti-sex trafficking state law in the United States.

---

<sup>1</sup> While some statistics exist on sex trafficking, more accurate and comprehensive research is still needed.

<sup>2</sup> 2016 UNODC Global Trafficking in Persons Report. [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016\\_Global\\_Report\\_on\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Persons.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> 2014 ILO Report, [http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS\\_243391/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_243391/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>4</sup> International Labour Organization, ILO global estimate of forced labour: results and methodology (2012) p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> UNICEF, Children Out of Sight, Out of Mind, Out of Reach; Abused and Neglected, Millions of Children Have Become Virtually Invisible (Dec. 2005).

<sup>6</sup> 2016 UNODC TIP Report

<sup>7</sup> 2016 UNODC TIP Report

<sup>8</sup> See CEDAW, Art. 6; also, trafficking for sexual exploitation is “incompatible with the equal enjoyment of rights by women and with respect for their rights and dignity. They put women at special risk of violence and abuse.” General Comment 19: Violence against women (11th Sess., 1992), para. 14.

<sup>9</sup> See e.g., Apne Aap, Redlight Despatch, at <http://apneaap.org/voices/rld/latest-redlight-despatch> (last accessed 8 Feb. 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Centre on Housing Rights & Evictions, Women and Housing Rights (April 2008) p. 52

<sup>11</sup> Swedish Ministry of Justice, English summary of the Evaluation of the ban on purchase of sexual services, 1999-2008, (2 July 2010) pp. 34-5, 37.

<sup>12</sup> See e.g., Nomi Levenkron, The Legalization of Prostitution: Myth and Reality, The Hotline for Migrant Workers, 2007, pp. 61-3, 68-9.