

## Promemoria

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### **EXIT International Seminar -Women's human rights not to be prostituted, Lisbon, 29 October 2021**

Excellencies, distinguished participants and dear colleagues,

I would like to start by thanking the Portuguese Platform for Women's Rights (PpDM) organisations for the invitation to speak to you today here at this important EXIT International Seminar -Women's human rights not to be prostituted.

I am happy to participate and share some of the SE experiences to address the purchase of sexual services, exploitation in prostitution and trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation during the last 20 years.

We cannot talk about prostitution without talking about trafficking in human beings as these two phenomenas are inextricably linked.

It is unfortunately clear from recent reports that we are not doing enough to prevent trafficking and to protect victims of this crime. Data from the UN as well as the EU show that a far too many people in the world are being sexually exploited as victims of trafficking, the vast majority of them are women, and far too many of them are children.

The latest report from the UNODC from July this year show us that trafficking and exploitation has further increased during the Covid-19 pandemic. Women and children have been put in more vulnerable situations as a result of lockdowns and closed schools. Traffickers have changed their modus in order to recruit and exploit vulnerable individuals from the growing risks groups.

To counter this problem and to prevent further exploitation and safe guard the protection and support to victims we need to take a whole-of-society approach and and to ensure relevant gender sensitive responses and legislation.

In order to end trafficking for sexual exploitation we need to address the core root cause, namely the demand. We need to acknowledge that sexual exploitation and trafficking exists due to the fact that some one – the demand- is paying for it.

The work against prostitution and trafficking is a high priority issue for the SE government and it is addressed and included in the work to combat men's violence against women. The work is further an integral part of the SE feminist foreign policy.

The ban on the purchase of sexual services is central to SE efforts to reduce the demand for prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes.

The Swedish ban on the purchase of sexual services came into force on 1 January 1999. Sweden was then the first country in the world to criminalize the purchase, but not the sale, of sex. All forms of procuring are illegal.

Sweden has an abolitionist approach to prostitution and the Swedish view is that prostitution causes harm both to the individuals involved and to society at large. Not the least does it affect gender equality.

Prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation are highly gendered issues. Men are the predominant purchasers of sexual services, users of victims of THB, whether that services be provided by women, girls, LGTBI people, men or boys. And most people in prostitution are women.

By exclusively targeting the demand, Sweden aims at disrupting the market while at the same time equalising an inherent power imbalance between men and women.

The law was not developed in a vacuum but evolved over decades stemming from the women's movement and with a strive to enhance gender equality in society.

Several other countries have followed including neighbouring Norway and Iceland as well as Ireland, Northern Ireland, Canada, Israel and of course France. What was first referred to as the SE model then became the Nordic model and now it is more and more being referred to as the gender equality model. A development that we highly welcome.

Given our similar approach to these issues we are currently working closely with FR and implementing a joint diplomatic strategy to address THB for sexual exploitation - a cooperation that we highly value.

Since 2019, FR and SE have been running a joint diplomacy against human trafficking for sexual exploitation. (The agreement was signed by the Swedish and French foreign ministers on 8 March 2019 and was then followed by a more operational strategy in 2020. The cooperation is based on Swedish and French legislation, both of which focus on combating demand and the strategy contains proposals for joint activities in the bilateral as well as multilateral work.

Within the framework of the co-operation, a number of trainings on prostitution and human trafficking have been arranged jointly by French and Swedish embassies, e.g. in Germany, the Netherlands and Romania. In addition, a number of joint events against human trafficking for sexual exploitation have been carried out together with UNODC.)

Legislation is a clear signal and also often has a normative effect. Statistics show that street prostitution has gone down significantly, indicating that this has been an important tool to counteract THB as it has made Sweden a less attractive market for traffickers. It has worked as a deterrent for traffickers and been an important tool for the law enforcement in trafficking cases.

Also, we see that our legislation has had a normative effect in that we can see a reduction in demand. Overall, there is strong support for the legislation amongst the population ( 2014 -72 % )

At the same time availability has increased due to the internet. Prostitution and trafficking for sexual purposes is a complex area in the sense that it is constantly

taking on new expressions, for example as a result of technological developments.

We see new phenomena such as sugar dating and different forms of online exploitation in SE just like in other countries. Phenomenas that risk to normalise exploitation and prostitution. The fact that adds and transactions are taking place online of course pose a challenge for the law enforcement as well as social workers as it requires a different type of outreach work.

It is further clear that a ban on the buying of sexual services is not enough to put an end to sex purchases in Sweden. Prostitution is a social problem to at least as great an extent as a criminal law problem.

A ban can only be a complement to social efforts. People in prostitution need solid exit strategies and support just as well as victims of THB needs protection and support.

Girls, women and LGBTI people who are in prostitution are often extremely vulnerable and we need to do more to prevent people from being recruited into prostitution and ensure they receive the support they need, also to leave their situation.

Legislation is indeed a clear signal and it is evident that this law, which enjoys strong support amongst the Swedish population, has had a normative effect in society. Having said this, Sweden still faces challenges in the area of trafficking in human beings, and like many other countries, we continuously have to review and develop our processes to counter the phenomena and ensuring the rights of victims.

### **Impact assessments are important**

A number of evaluations have been done. The Swedish Gender Equality Agency is in charge of our national coordination against THB and have recently presented a mapping of prostitution in SE which shows increase vulnerability of children and young adults to recruitment and exploitation on line.

In order to follow up on the effectiveness of the sex purchase legislation and also see how it is applied by authorities, the Crime Prevention Council (Brå) has been commissioned by the government to follow up and analyze the application of the ban on the purchase of sexual services ((BrB Chapter 6, Section 11) and the exploitation of children through the purchase of sexual acts (BrB Chapter 6 9 §).)

Support to people in prostitution and victims of THB as well as cooperation between the police and social services will be assessed.

### **National coordination**

It is important that identification, including protection and support, is offered to victims of trafficking and that the work against trafficking in human beings for all purposes is prioritized by the responsible authorities. Within the framework of its national coordination assignment, the Gender Equality Agency is responsible for the "Manual in the Event of Suspicion of Trafficking in Human Being", Sweden's equivalent to a national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking in human beings (NRM) which clarifies the various actors' responsibilities in the support process.

The manual provides an overall picture of the support and protection offered, provides support and practical guidance to professionals who may come into contact with people who have been trafficked. An important player in the support process is the Regional Coordinators against Prostitution and Trafficking in Human Beings, who work in the social services and act as a support to authorities regarding these issues and create conditions for linking the regional work with the work that takes place at national level.

### **Prevention is also about changing norms and attitudes.**

In order to counteract the long-term demand for the purchase of sexual services, we see a need for universal prevention measures aimed at boys and young men as well as efforts to change harmful norms and stereotypes that justify violence and restrict women's and girls' scope for action and life choices.

We also need to work with the demand. Buyers of sexual services in Sweden who wants to stop, can on a voluntary basis, be offered social support and therapy.

Furthermore, in 2018 a new sexual offences legislation based on consent was introduced in Sweden, meaning it is now an offence to perform a sexual act with someone who is not participating voluntarily. We see this as one very important step towards preventing abuse and ensuring bodily integrity.

Put in relation to prostitution and THB, this legislation means that anyone who buys sex from someone who has been trafficked, and who therefore does not participate voluntarily, can be convicted of rape or negligent rape.

Providing a comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is also a significant part in reducing gender-based violence. Evidence shows that CSE has positive effects on young people's knowledge and attitudes related to sexual and reproductive health and behaviours.

The SE government has recently decided to change the school curricula on CSE and Swedish schools will now equip boys and girls with an understanding that sex must be based on consent and free will.

It is clear that we all need to do more – together - to address this crime. Countries of destination have a responsibility to identify and protect VOTs. And prevention efforts need to be in place in countries of origin. And these prevention and protection mechanisms also need to be there when the exploitation takes place online.

No matter what our national laws looks like we all have an obligation to address the root cause of THB, namely the demand. In accordance with the UN protocol, all MS have an obligation to address the demand that fosters THB for all forms of exploitation. This needs to be done whether it is via legislation or other measures.

We cannot accept the abuse that comes with buying sex and that people are indifferent to the situation that people who sell sex find themselves in. We must do more to prevent women from being exploited, children being sexually abused and victims of human trafficking exploited and raped.

We need to disrupt this business model of exploitation and find efficient mechanism and cooperation models to do so. Addressing the demand needs to be an integral part in all prevention work.

We still don't know how long we will have to live with the negative implications of the covid-19 pandemic. We can all learn from the effects of the pandemic though - and ensure that we do better and build back stronger after the pandemic as our societies are opening up again.

In order to stop exploitation in prostitution and THB we need solid cooperation models.

A lot has been done in terms of legislation, cooperation models, capacity building and allocation of resources. Now we need to find the flaws, loopholes and properly address the obstacles for successful prevention, identification and the ultimate protection of victims and vulnerable groups. It is clear that addressing the demand and the online dimension needs to be a part of the equation.

Thank you!