



## PREVENTION: FIGHTING SEX TRAFFICKING BY CURBING DEMAND FOR COMMERCIAL SEX ACTS

If there were no demand for commercial sex, sex trafficking would not exist in the form it does today. This reality underscores the need for continued strong efforts to enact policies and promote cultural norms that disallow paying for sex. Too often, trafficking victims are wrongly discounted as “consenting” adults. The use of violence to enslave trafficking victims is pervasive, but there are other—more subtle—forms of fraud and coercion that also prevent a person from escaping compelled servitude.

A number of other factors that may lead to a person being overlooked as a victim by authorities are a sex trafficking victims’ initial consent, the belief that they are in love with their trafficker, not self-identifying as a victim, or being away from a pimp’s physical control with what seems to be ample opportunity to ask for help or flee. None of these factors, taken alone or in sum, mean that someone is not a victim of a severe form of trafficking. Dispelling these myths should be an essential part of training for every government employee and everyone who does business with or on behalf of a government.

### Government Policies to Address Demand for Commercial Sex

Zero-tolerance policies for employees, uniformed service members, and contractors paying for sex—even if legal in the country where these individuals work—and commensurate training for such individuals can help raise awareness regarding the subtle and brutal nature of sex trafficking and how individuals subjected to this crime are victimized through coercion. Moreover, by implementing these policies in procurement activities, governments can have an impact on a wide range of private-sector actors as well.

### Beyond Government: Cultural Leadership in Addressing Demand

Rejecting long-held notions such as “boys will be boys” and sending the clear message that buying sex is wrong is not just a task for governments, but will require partnerships throughout society, including the faith and business communities. Business leaders can adopt codes of conduct that prohibit purchasing sex. And leaders in civil society—from teachers to parents to ministers—must foster the belief that it is everyone’s responsibility to do their part to reduce the demand for commercial sex. It is especially important to reach young men with a strong message of demand reduction to help them understand the exploitation that permeates the commercial sex trade.

It is every person’s individual responsibility to think about how their actions may contribute to human trafficking. Laws and policies, partnerships and activism will continue to be critical to this struggle, but it will also be the day-to-day decisions of individual men and women to reject exploitation that will bring an end to modern slavery.

