

Mr. Pedro Sánchez
The Prime Minister's Office
Complejo de la Moncloa.
28071 Madrid

Dear Prime Minister Sánchez,

We the undersigned ____ advocates from the international community write to thank you for your recent public statements about the harms of prostitution, and for your support of the segment in the 2019 election manifesto which recognized that prostitution is “one of the cruelest aspects of the feminization of poverty and one of the worst forms of violence against women.” Thank you for listening to the 100 Spanish survivors with lived experiences in prostitution, academics, jurists, and more who spoke out in 2020 about the harms of prostitution.¹

We applaud your public recognition that prostitution is a form of violence against women which thrives due to poverty and social vulnerabilities.

- **Systems of prostitution exploit vulnerability.** Many people in systems of prostitution suffer from vulnerabilities and marginalization. Some people attempt to claim that these individuals have no reasonable alternative but to submit to abuse by pimps and sex buyers who exploit these vulnerabilities. Common adverse experiences that are pathways to prostitution include childhood sexual abuse,² homelessness,³ and poverty.⁴ Other factors associated with prostitution involvement include a history of foster care,⁵ not having a high school degree,⁶ being a racial minority,⁷ an immigrant,⁸ an indigenous minority,⁹ or LGBT person,¹⁰ as well as “entry” into prostitution as a child¹¹ (i.e., sex trafficking). Systems of prostitution prey on and exploit these vulnerabilities.
- **Full decriminalization of prostitution does not make prostitution safe.** Prostitution creates trauma that cannot be regulated or decriminalized away.¹² or fully decriminalized,¹³ occurs indoors¹⁴ or outdoors,¹⁵ online¹⁶ or off.¹⁷
- **Normalized Prostitution Increases Sex Trafficking.** Brothels, illicit massage parlors, escort agencies, and online platforms are overlapping systems of prostitution and sex trafficking occurs in all of them. Normalization of prostitution expands demand for paid sex. This emboldens sex traffickers who see this as a conducive “business” environment. Cross-national studies have found higher levels of human trafficking in countries with legalized or decriminalized prostitution.¹⁸ Research has also found 100% of convicted sex traffickers support full decriminalization of prostitution.¹⁹

Tragically, the legal approaches to prostitution by many countries do not confront these exploitive underpinnings of the sex trade, but assent to them by legalizing or fully decriminalizing prostitution. Thus, we encourage you to pursue rigorous laws and enforcement mechanisms to hold accountable those who fuel the marketplace of sexual exploitation: sex buyers.

This is particularly vital in Spain, given reports of a 2003 survey by Spain's National Statistics Institute which noted that one in 14 Spanish men bought sex in the previous year, while 27% admitted having paid for sex at least once. Researchers noted that this was a higher percentage than other European countries.²⁰

Without sex buyers, there would be no prostitution and no sex trafficking.

Evidence points to the effectiveness of demand reduction tactics to combat prostitution. In 1999, Sweden passed the Sex Purchase Act which criminalized sex buyers, without criminalizing the people sold in prostitution. In July 2010, the Chancellor of Justice presented the Special Inquiry report to the Swedish Government which noted that in 2008, only 7.8% of Swedish men had purchased someone in prostitution compared to 13.6% of Swedish men prior to the coming into force of the legislation.²¹ Further, studies in Jersey City, New Jersey, and San Francisco, California, and Bolton, UK, found that arresting and educating men for soliciting produced 40-75% reductions in prostitution.²² In France, 100% of the sex buyers that have attended mandatory awareness-raising programs on the realities of prostitution upon arrest said they changed their mind about prostitution.²³ An evaluation of an education program in San Francisco reduced re-arrests by over 40%, was simple, and implemented at no cost to taxpayers.²⁴ The fees paid by the offenders fully covered the cost of the program and generated over \$3 million in additional revenue that was used to support programs for survivors of prostitution and sex trafficking.²⁵ An evaluation of a similar “johns school” program in England found like benefits.²⁶ While many men have purchased sex, most have not.²⁷ Buying sex is not inevitable.

It is also vital that resources are provided to support vulnerable populations to prevent entry into prostitution, and to establish robust programs—including mental and physical health plans, safe shelter, and job training—for those who wish to exit prostitution.

We therefore encourage you to consider implementing the Abolitionist Model/Law,²⁸ which rightly criminalizes sex buyers, pimps/traffickers, and brothel owners, yet decriminalizes and provides social support to victims of prostitution. The abolitionist model targeting the purchase of a sexual act has been recognized as the most efficient tool to fight prostitution and trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation by the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2014.²⁹

This model has been embraced by many countries around the world, including France, which passed the law in 2016 and documented the following results:

- 54% increase in procedures against pimps
- 2.35 million euros have been confiscated from pimps and reinvested in the rehabilitation of victims
- 7 more times compensation for the victims
- No more prostituted persons arrested contrary to 2500 per year before the law: the law has shifted the burden from the victim to the perpetrators
- 600 women benefited from an exit program
- 5,000 sex buyers arrested³⁰

This model meets the historical commitment that Spain affirmed when it ratified in 1962 the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the

Prostitution of Others (1949) stressing in its preamble “prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person.”

Thank you for your willingness to confront the harms of prostitution. Please know that the international community of survivors and human rights advocates stand with you.

Sincerely,

¹ Tori Sparks, “Sex Workers’ Unions: Providing Protection or Institutionalizing Exploitation?” *Barcelona Metropolitan* (2021) <https://www.barcelona-metropolitan.com/features/controversy-of-sex-workers-unions/>

² Bridget Diamond-Welch and Anna E. Kosloski, “Adverse Childhood Experiences and Propensity to Participate in the Commercialized Sex Market,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 104 (2020): [doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104468](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104468); Christine Kaestle, “Selling and Buying Sex: A Longitudinal Study of Risk and Protective Factors in Adolescence,” *Prevention Science* 13 (2012): 314–322, [doi: 10.1007/s11121-011-0268-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-011-0268-8); Kym R. Ahrens et al., “Association between Childhood Sexual Abuse and Transactional Sex in Youth Aging out of Foster Care,” *Child Abuse and Neglect* 36, no. 1 (2012): 75–80; [doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.07.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2011.07.009).

³ Courtney Cronley et al., “Entering Prostitution in Adolescence: History of Youth Homelessness Predicts Earlier Entry,” *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma* 25, no. 9 (2016): 893–908, [doi: 10.1080/10926771.1223246](https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.1223246); Kaestle, *ibid*; Eric C. Wilson et al., “Transgender Female Youth and Sex Work: HIV Risk and a Comparison of Life Factors Related to Engagement in Sex Work,” *AIDS and Behavior* 13 (2009): 902–913, [doi: 10.1007/s10461-008-9508-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-008-9508-8).

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⁶ Cronley, *ibid*; Joan R. Reid, “Risk and Resiliency Factors Influencing Onset and Adolescence-limited Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Disadvantaged Girls,” *Criminal Behavior and Mental Health* 24 (2014): 332–344, doi.org/10.1002/cbm.1903; Clarke et al., “Age at Entry into Prostitution: Relationship to Drug Use, Race, Suicide, Educational Level, Childhood Abuse, and Family Experiences,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 22 (2012): 270–289, [doi: 10.1080/10911359.2012.65583](https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2012.65583); Wilson et al., *ibid*.

⁷ Kaestle, *ibid*; N. Eugene Walls and Stephanie Bell, “Correlates of Engaging in Survival Sex among Homeless Youth and Young Adults,” *Journal of Sex Research* 48, no. 5 (2011): 423–436, [doi: 10.1080/00224499.2010.501916](https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2010.501916); Wilson et al, *ibid*; Lisa A. Kramer and Ellen C. Berg, “A Survival Analysis of Timing of Entry into Prostitution: The Differential Impact of Race, Educational Level, and Childhood/Adolescent Risk Factors,” *Sociological Inquiry* 73, no. 4 (2003): 511–28. See also, Cheryl Nelson Butler, “A Critical Race Feminist Perspective on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking in America” *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* (2015): 95–139, <https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlf/vol27/iss1/3> (accessed October 13, 2021).

⁸ Licia Brussa, *Sex Work in Europe: A Mapping of the Prostitution Scene in 25 European Countries*, TAMPEP International Foundation, Netherlands, 2009 (accessed October 6, 2021); Manuela Ribeiro and Octávio Sacramento, “Violence against Prostitutes. Findings of Research in the Spanish-Portuguese Frontier Region,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 12, no. 1 (2005): 61–81, [doi: 10.1177/1350506805048856](https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506805048856).

⁹ Melissa Farley, Jacqueline Lynne, and Ann J. Cotton, “Prostitution in Vancouver: Violence and the Colonization of First National Women,” *Transcultural Psychiatry* (2005): 242–271, [doi: 10.1177/1363461505052667](https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461505052667); Gillian Abel,

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²⁴ Michael Shively et al., 2008, *ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* Total fee amount generated during the life of the program through the date of the program evaluation.

²⁶ Poland, Boswell, and Killett, *ibid.*

²⁷ Dominique Roe-Sepowitz, Stephanie Bontrager, Justin T. Pickett, et al., “Estimating the Sex Buying Behavior of Adult Males in the United States: List Experiment and Direct Question Estimates” *Journal of Criminal Justice* 63 (2019): 41-48, doi: [10.1016/j.jcrimjust.2019.04.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjust.2019.04.005).

²⁸ First implemented in Sweden in 1999, this prostitution legal framework is known by several names including the Swedish, Nordic, Equality, Abolition, and Accountability model.

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