



The Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
Direct Communications Unit
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

Our Ref: SC9026

2 April 2020

Dear Home Secretary

We write to seek reassurance that the Home Office is responding to the heightened risks faced by prostituted people during the Coronavirus emergency by enabling them to access support and exiting services.

Sexual exploitation is gendered: it is predominantly women and girls who are subjected to sexual exploitation, and it is overwhelmingly men who pay to sexually exploit them. Sexual exploitation drives modern slavery in the UK. The overwhelming majority of women reported to the National Referral Mechanism are brought here to be prostituted.

This week, Lord McColl of Dulwich wrote to you highlighting concerns around lack of support and accommodation for those identified as trafficked and victims of slavery during the pandemic. We would reiterate this, and ask that safeguards are put in place to make sure the support system is robust.

An inquiry by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, found that the sexual exploitation of women

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by organised crime groups is widespread across the UK.¹ Third party exploiters, including traffickers and brothel owners, dominate the off-street sex trade, exploiting women in order to profit from the minority of men in the UK who pay for sex. Methods used to recruit women into sexual exploitation include deception, coercion and the exploitation of pre-existing vulnerabilities. It has been estimated that approximately 50% of women in prostitution in the UK started being paid for sex acts before they were 18 years old².

Prostitution is a profitable business. We are therefore hugely concerned that when the exploiters are unable to use the women to make money because of coronavirus, the women's lives literally become worthless to them.

We welcome the Home Secretary's strong position on tackling Domestic Violence during the pandemic. As part of this campaign, it must be recognised that forcing women into prostitution is a recognised form of coercive control used by abusive partners. We ask that the commitment given to tackle domestic abusers is applied to anyone trying to profit from sexual exploitation, and that similar support is given to the victims.

There are multiple factors that can act as barriers to women exiting sexual exploitation. Research by Eaves, in *Breaking down the barriers: A study of how women exit prostitution*³, identified the following challenges:

¹ Behind Closed Doors, Organised Sexual Exploitation in England and Wales, An Inquiry by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade, 2018

² 'Paying the Price: a consultation paper on prostitution', Home Office, 2004. See also: M. Hester & N. Westmarland, 'Tackling Street Prostitution: Towards a Holistic Approach', report, Home Office, 2004.

³ 'Breaking down the barriers: A study of how women exit prostitution. Executive Summary', Eaves, 2012.



“1) problematic drug use; 2) problems with housing; 3) physical and mental health problems; 4) having had experiences of violence as a child; 5) criminalisation; 6) the role of money – managing debts or high levels of disposable income; 7) experiencing coercion from others to remain in prostitution; 8) a lack of qualifications or training; and 9) entering prostitution at a young age. Many women experienced particular obstacles or patterns of obstacles that required a coordinated, individualised and tailored package of support to unravel.”

Overcoming these barriers to exit is complex and requires specialist support. We would argue that the majority of these barriers will be exacerbated by Covid-19. The Home Office should consider how it can best work with and continue commissioning specialist organisations focussed on supporting women to exit prostitution, both now and after the pandemic, and working with DWP to retrain people for the workplace.

We would urge you to commit to the following during the coronavirus pandemic;

- Victims of sex trafficking and modern slavery be granted reliable accommodation and support services.
- The police are advised to consider sexual exploitation when responding to cases of Domestic abuse.
- Specialist services for victims of sexual exploitation receive the funding they need to continue to deliver exiting support and adapt to likely emerging service user needs, ensuring every woman subjected to sexual exploitation in the UK is able to access adequate support and existing services.

Finally, we wish to condemn, in the strongest possible terms, the attempts of some lobby groups to exploit the coronavirus pandemic to advocate for legalising pimping, brothel-keeping and sex-buying



through 'full decriminalisation' of the sex trade. Legalising the 'industry' of sexual exploitation would be a disaster for vulnerable women and girls. It is the very opposite of what the Government should be doing, which is ending commercial sexual exploitation by tackling demand for it.

We look forward to receiving your reply.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Champion MP
Chair of the APPG on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade

Baron Hogan-Howe QPM Kt, former Head of London's
Metropolitan Police
Revd Vivienne Faul 56th Bishop of Bristol, Church of England lead
on Modern Slavery (in House of Lords)
Lord Alton of Liverpool
Baroness Gale
Baroness Grey-Thompson DBE
Lord Kennedy of Southwark
Lord McColl of Dulwich
Rt Hon Diane Abbott MP, Shadow Home Secretary
Fiona Bruce MP, Chair of the Conservative Party Human Rights
Commission and Vice Chair of the APPG on Prostitution and the
Global Sex Trade
Ronnie Cowan MP
Angela Crawley MP
Carolyn Harris MP, Shadow Minister Women & Equalities
Dame Diana Johnson MP



Pauline Latham MP

Jess Phillips MP

Fiona Broadfoot, survivor

FiLiA

Not Buying It

Nordic Model Now!

Dionne Reid, CEO Women Work

Rosemary Hack, Director, Press Red

Equality Now

Lynda Dearlove, CEO, Women at the Well

Harriet Wistrich, Centre for Women's Justice

Zarin Hainsworth, National Alliance of Women

Phil McCarthy, CEO Caritas Social Action Network