

Combating Human Trafficking: How the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Leads the Way

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The human trafficking industry preys on vulnerable young women throughout the world who seek to escape poverty, violence, and oppression. These women are often lured by sex traffickers through false promises of a better life, only to find themselves trapped in a cycle of abuse. The trafficking industry earns [profits](#) of approximately \$150 billion a year, nearly \$100 billion of which comes from commercial sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking victims do not profit, but they are often, in many jurisdictions, the ones being prosecuted.

Last week, Proskauer, along with the [New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition](#), hosted Valiant (Val) Richey, the Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe \(OSCE\)](#). The Office of the Special Representative assists the 57 OSCE countries—including the United States—in their efforts to combat human trafficking.

Numerous international organizations analyzing the issue of human trafficking have approached the problem with a view toward the negative effects of trafficking on children's rights, gender equality, transnational crime, migration, and public health, among other issues, and have focused their efforts on mitigating these harms. The OSCE is unique among these organizations in that it analyzes the issue of trafficking directly – the goal is to take action that will stop trafficking from occurring in the first instance.

The OSCE has identified the elimination of demand for commercial sex as a key to ending sex trafficking, and is researching and sharing promising practices, including education and outreach programs as well as criminal prosecution of sex buyers and traffickers. Instead of prosecuting prostituted people, the OSCE's focus is on how to disrupt and deter the demand that fosters all forms of trafficking, while ensuring that survivor services are being provided.

Some advocates have argued that legalizing commercial sex buying is the solution, but studies show that countries that have legalized prostitution have experienced [higher rates of trafficking](#). In short, legalizing sex buying can actually increase trafficking profits.

In his former role as a prosecutor in Seattle, Richey spearheaded the “Ending Exploitation Collaborative,” an anti-trafficking project. This initiative utilized the dual approach of reducing demand while also facilitating an exit strategy for victims of prostitution. Examples of programming include engaging high school and college students in conversations about healthy relationships and the harm of commercial sexual exploitation, and using new technology such as “chatbots” to send messages of deterrence to those attempting to purchase sex online. The emphasis on victim support has greatly contributed to the success of this program.

Proskauer thanks the OSCE and Valiant (Val) Richey, as well as our co-host the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition, for their insights on and efforts toward ending human trafficking.

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