

## Human trafficking: "Like any market, there must be a demand that drives it"

**Most of the victims of human trafficking in Europe are women and girls that come from EU countries, with sexual exploitation being the main reason. On Thursday 12 May MEPs will assess current European legislation to combat human trafficking and protect its victims as well as suggest improvements. We talked with Catherine Bearder, a UK member of the ALDE group who wrote a report about it, about how to tackle human trafficking.**

**Despite efforts to combat human trafficking in the EU, some data indicate it is nevertheless increasing. Why is this?**

I wish I knew why. We have better information for the public, we have better technology, the police forces are working better together but I guess like any market, there must be a demand that drives it. We made huge progress five years ago when we came in with the directive on human trafficking. But still we are not getting the data, we are not as joined up, it has taken a while for the member states to implement the legislation (and one still hasn't). I hope this report will give renewed impetus to the work of the anti-trafficking directive.

**Trafficking in women is driven among others by the demand for their sexual services. What concrete measures can member states take to decrease this demand?**

Different countries are trying different methods and getting different results such as the Nordic model of penalising the customer and the Dutch-German model of legalising. In this report I have not made any recommendations on either of those, but what we are saying is that we should make it an offence to knowingly use somebody who has been trafficked.

The whole industry around sex is an issue that needs a lot of debate, but it is not exclusively one of human trafficking. The debate does get dragged off into prostitution, but we must make sure that we are talking about all victims of human trafficking.

**Bearing in mind the refugee crisis and the surge in migrant smuggling, what should the new European Commission strategy to combat human trafficking focus on?**

We have to be very careful that we don't conflate the two issues. People smugglers are not necessarily traffickers. We are finding that people who have arrived in Europe at the hands of people smugglers are hugely vulnerable to be picked up by the traffickers, especially the

unaccompanied children. They are at risk of being brought into the sex trade, becoming petty criminals, pickpockets etc.

The very sad fact about trafficking is that the vast majority are picked up somewhere else. They either escape or they are arrested for some other crime. Very few slaves or trafficked people are rescued. Very, very few. The vast majority are identified when they are in police custody or when they are being deported.

### Further information

[Report](#)

[Procedure file](#)

[Catherine Bearder \(ALDE, UK\)](#)

[Women's rights committee](#)

[Study of the implementation of the human trafficking directive \(April 2016\)](#)

[Briefing on human trafficking](#)

[Briefing: the gender dimension of human trafficking \(February 2016\)](#)



Catherine Bearder