

SWAN Glossary of Terms

Unless otherwise specified, these definitions were developed by SWAN to reflect the experiences of the women we serve.

Unless specified, these definitions are not necessarily legal or universal in nature.

SEX WORK	The exchange of sexual services for money or goods between consenting adults.
SEX WORKER	A term often used to describe people engaged in sex work.
ENGAGED IN SEX WORK	Indicating that someone is working in the sex industry in some capacity. Not everyone who is engaged in sex work will self-identify as a sex worker, nor will everyone working in the sex industry be providing their own sexual services (e.g., receptionists, salon owners, etc.).
INDOOR SEX WORK	Referring specifically to sex work conducted indoors – e.g., in a massage parlour or private home. Distinguished from outdoor/street-based sex work.

IMMIGRANT	Someone who has permanently relocated to a country other than where they were born. For SWAN, the term ‘immigrant’ is used to refer to someone with a secure legal status in their destination country (i.e., citizenship or permanent residency).
MIGRANT	Someone who has relocated, temporarily or permanently, to a country other than where they were born for a variety of possible reasons including temporary work, transition to a third country or to apply for or claim a legal status, etc. For SWAN, the term ‘migrant’ is used to refer to someone with a temporary or precarious status with specific conditions that must be met for them to legally reside in the destination or transit country (e.g., a temporary resident (visitor/study/work permits), a refugee or asylum seeker or an undocumented person).
IM/MIGRANT	A broader term used to encapsulate the diversity of experiences and situations of people relocating to a country other than where they were born. These people may be recent arrivals or long-term residents, citizens or permanent residents, asylum seekers, refugees, refugee claimants, protected persons, temporary residents (visitor/study/work permits), undocumented persons, or someone with a lapsed visa of any kind. ¹
IM/MIGRANT WOMEN	Women living in Canada who originated in another country – The term “woman” is inclusive of trans women.

¹ This definition is adapted from [Hamel-Smith Grassby, Wiedmeyer, Lavergne, & Goldenberg \(2021\)](#).

PCEPA	The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act – criminalizing many aspects of sex work.
IRPA/IRPR	The Immigrant and Refugee Protection Act/Regulations – criminalizing sex work for im/migrants .
PARTIAL DECRIMINALIZATION	The current legal model for sex work in Canada . Also known as the Nordic model or an ‘end demand’/‘equality’ model. It should be noted that while this is the current model in Canada by name, it does not accurately reflect a true partial decriminalization model of sex work because sex workers themselves are still criminalized in many ways.
PARTIAL CRIMINALIZATION	Another term for partial decriminalization – many believe this more accurately describes the effect of Canada’s laws on the sex industry and sex workers.
ASYMMETRICAL CRIMINALIZATION	Another term for partial decriminalization/the Nordic model.

<p>MULTILAYERED CRIMINALIZATION</p>	<p>Referring to the double criminalization im/migrant sex workers face – criminalization within the Criminal Code from PCEPA <u>and</u> criminalization of sex work for im/migrants specifically within the IRPA/IRPR. Additional criminalization also comes from bylaw enforcement, anti-trafficking laws/policies, and immigration laws more broadly.</p>
<p>LEGALIZATION</p>	<p>A model of sex work where the industry is fully legalized and regulated/licensed by the government.</p>
<p>DECRIMINALIZATION</p>	<p>A model of sex work where the industry is fully decriminalized (not illegal) but is not specifically regulated or licensed by the government. Sex work under this model must adhere to all existing laws in Canada. This is the model advocated for by sex workers and allies.</p>
<p>THIRD PARTY/PARTIES</p>	<p>A term in Canadian sex work legislation referring to anyone involved in providing sexual services other than the individual sex worker selling their own sexual services. This could refer to a secondary sex worker, a receptionist, a bodyguard, a driver, a salon owner, etc.</p>
<p>BC BDAR</p>	<p>A ‘bad date’ reporting system for sex workers in British Columbia that allows sex workers to safely communicate with each other about dangerous or potentially dangerous clients.</p>

HUMAN TRAFFICKING	“The recruitment, transportation, harbouring and/or exercising control, direction or influence over the movements of a person in order to exploit that person, typically through sexual exploitation or forced labour”. ² Learn more about Canada's human trafficking laws .
SEX TRAFFICKING	A form of human trafficking specifically related to sexual exploitation.
LABOUR TRAFFICKING	A form of human trafficking specifically related to labour exploitation.
EXPLOITATION	The act of taking advantage of another person for profit or gain that may not meet the legal threshold for ‘human trafficking’. All trafficking is exploitation, not all exploitation is trafficking.
ANTI-TRAFFICKING	The opposition to human trafficking. Many organizations, non-profits, campaigns, and movements brand themselves as anti-trafficking initiatives.
ANTI-TRAFFICKING HARMS/ANTI-TRAFFICKED	Referring to the negative effects and outcomes , typically experienced by sex workers, that are caused by the misinformation and misguidance inherent in most anti-trafficking efforts.

² [Public Safety Canada](#) definition.

<p>BODY RUB ESTABLISHMENT/ MASSAGE PARLOUR</p>	<p>A business where clients may purchase massage services, with or without sexual services.</p>
<p>HARM REDUCTION/ OUTREACH</p>	<p>The act of engaging with vulnerable communities to reduce negative experiences or outcomes (e.g., giving condoms to massage parlours where sex work is conducted to reduce the risk of STIs) and connecting with people to assess their needs and provide additional support (e.g., appointment accompaniment, English language classes, etc.).</p>
<p>RIGHTS NOT RESCUE</p>	<p>A slogan/mantra referring to the need for sex work to be decriminalized so that sex workers may have full access to their human, legal, and labour rights, rather than be targeted by ‘rescue’-oriented campaigns and initiatives that view them as powerless victims and conflate sex work with human trafficking.</p>

For more resources for journalists, visit ResponsibleReporting.ca



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Canada