

AN OVERVIEW:

Anti-Trafficking Funding in Canada



Understanding funders, funding priorities, and opportunities for organizations working to address human trafficking

There is a lot of money allocated to anti-trafficking work in Canada.¹ But is this funding being put to good use?

THE MONEY

Funding for anti-trafficking work comes from a variety of places:

- Government
- Charitable foundations
- For-profit corporations and businesses
- Private donors
- Public fundraisers, like galas or walk-a-thons

The money goes toward:

- Government institutions and initiatives
- Law enforcement
- Not-for-profit organizations
- Awareness campaigns
- Direct services

It might seem like anti-trafficking funding is reaching the right places, but there is more to consider.

NEGLECTED GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATIONS

Much of the funding for anti-trafficking work goes to large, high-profile organizations.

These organizations—with name recognition, prominent leaders, big campaigns and advertising budgets—have the engagement and momentum to hold public and policy makers' attention and continue pulling in steady, reliable money to do their work.

On the other hand, small community-led organizations often make do with little or no funding. This matters because it is these grassroots organizations that truly

know the communities they work in. Their staff have lived experiences, relationships, and community trust that bigger organizations often lack.

Grassroots organizations are best positioned to provide trauma- and culturally-informed support and address underlying vulnerabilities to exploitation and trafficking, preventing harm before it happens.

“...compared to funding for think tanks, research, capacity building, and costly conferences and projects without concrete outcomes, very little funding is made available for support services. [It is also recommended] that donors provide direct and flexible support to NGOs instead of channeling funding through intermediaries.”²

FLAWS IN THE FUNDING PROCESS

One reason community-led anti-trafficking work is so underfunded is the funding process itself.

Successful Prevention Can Be Invisible

Funders often require organizations to report quantitative results. However, without adequate context, these numbers may say little about the quality, effectiveness, or impact of a program or service.

For many small, grassroots organizations, their successes don't produce easily quantifiable results.

How do you measure the exploitation or trafficking that you prevented because someone had housing, groceries, mental health support, safe supply or other basic needs met when they needed them?

¹ Government of Ontario. (2025). *Province investing \$345 million to protect Ontario from human trafficking*; Government of Canada. (2021). *National strategy to combat human trafficking: Annual report 2019-2020*.

² Sharapov., Hoff., Mendel., & Gerasimov. (2024). *Editorial: Rethinking Anti-Trafficking Funding: Following the money, again*. *Anti-Trafficking Review* (23), 1-9.



The most meaningful impacts are often the harms that were prevented before they happened.

Funders' Criteria

Many community-led organizations are not able to meet funders' strict eligibility criteria without compromising their services or excluding people at risk. Many funders require people accessing services to be sober, exiting sex work, and cooperative with police.

This makes many organizations ineligible for much-needed financial support to do their work. It also limits victims, survivors, and at-risk people from accessing the support they need to be safe.

Structural Barriers to Funding

Large organizations often have dedicated grant-writing capacity and established funding relationships, giving them an advantage in securing grants over smaller, community-led organizations that may lack the resources or staff to navigate complex funding processes.

Yet smaller organizations are often expected to demonstrate the capacity to manage large grants before they can access them—creating a vicious cycle in which they need funding to build capacity, but need capacity to secure funding.

WHAT IS BEING FUNDED?

Another shortcoming of anti-trafficking work is a lack of evaluation.

Money is poured into awareness campaigns, but there is very limited research available on whether [these methods prevent or reduce human trafficking](#).

On the contrary, we do know that many anti-trafficking approaches can actually create harm for the people they are supposed to help:

“There is substantial evidence to suggest that anti-trafficking measures have had unacceptably negative consequences for marginalized categories of people, and that these measures have been counterproductive for some of the very people they are supposed to benefit most directly.”³

As more evidence emerges about the ineffectiveness and unintended harms of mainstream anti-trafficking work, it is important that funders consider whether anti-trafficking funding could create new risks or make existing problems worse.

GOING FORWARD

Funding is the lifeline that allows organizations to provide services and help people at risk. If more funding went toward front-line, community-led organizations that have deep connections to the people they serve, there would be more meaningful prevention and response to exploitation and trafficking.

We call on funders to reevaluate their criteria and processes and make it easier for grassroots organizations to secure sustainable funding to do their work. Additionally, the public should support organizations run by people with lived experience, who do more than raise awareness.

[There is a better way](#) to fight human trafficking, and much of that work happens out of the public eye.

3 Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women. (2007). *Collateral damage: The impact of anti-trafficking measures on human rights around the world*. Bangkok, Thailand.

About GAATW Canada

GAATW Canada is a federal non-profit organization and charity based in British Columbia.

GAATW Canada bridges community and scholarly expertise to address human trafficking through research, policy change, advocacy, education, and collaborative partnerships.

Since 1996, GAATW Canada's work has been grounded in several guiding principles. Our goal for a fairer Canadian society is to prevent, reduce, and address human trafficking while prioritizing the rights of those at risk or trafficked, as well as those harmed by anti-trafficking efforts.

We aim to build a fairer, more compassionate society where exploitation has no place.

We listen to diverse voices—including Indigenous peoples, migrant workers, sex workers, and other affected groups—to honour the varied experiences of exploitation at individual, community, and regional levels.

We move beyond rescue and criminal-legal approaches, fostering lasting change and creating a society where everyone can flourish, free from exploitation.

