

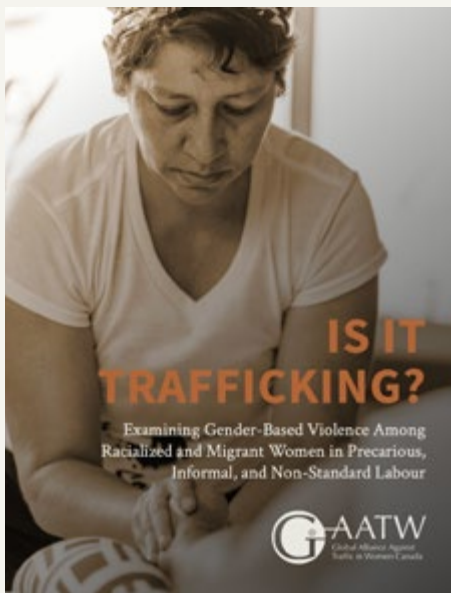
FUNDING WHAT MATTERS:

Rethinking Anti-Trafficking Funding in Canada



About the Series

In February 2026, [GAATW Canada](#) released the findings of a three-year project documenting experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) among racialized and migrant women working in precarious, informal, or non-standard labour.



The study examined how the women's experiences of GBV are understood and responded to by the women themselves and service providers delivering essential support across four provinces and one territory in Canada.

Particular attention was given to how racialized and migrant women's experiences are positioned within broader anti-trafficking discourse, including how being recognized (or not) as a victim of human trafficking influences the services available to them, and the barriers they may face in accessing support.

The research also explored how government funding shapes the services available to migrant and racialized women experiencing GBV, and the ways in which human trafficking is understood and responded to in Canada.

In this brief document, we summarize the research findings in relation to funding.

We highlight the political nature of funding for human trafficking, migrant rights, and GBV services as they emerged from GAATW Canada's research, and how funding can actually operate as a key driver of systemic and practical change.

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The Politics and Consequences of Anti-Trafficking Funding

Organizations described providing a wide range of services to racialized and migrant women experiencing GBV, including legal rights information, assistance with residence and work permit applications, safe housing, accompaniment to hospitals and courts, harm reduction supplies, and emotional and peer-based support.

Yet the availability and delivery of these services are shaped by how funding is structured and distributed, shaping who is eligible for funding, what services can be provided, and how services are delivered.

THE STRUCTURE OF FUNDING

Organizations shared that funding is often short-term and tied to specific projects or programs, while core costs such as staff salaries, office space, supplies, and emergency assistance go largely unfunded.

The constant need to apply for grants and report on projects also creates significant administrative burdens, taking time away from direct support and contributing to staff stress and burnout.

More importantly, short-term funding can undermine continuity. Organizations spend years building trust and relationships within a community, only to have services end when a grant expires, leaving the people who rely on them without the support they need.

FUNDING PRIORITIES

The structure of funding also raises broader questions about which services receive funding.

Participants emphasized the need for greater investment in social services, including shelters for unhoused people and survivors of intimate partner violence, and support and harm reduction for people who (mis)use drugs, among others.

The under-funding of these services becomes especially

significant as funding is increasingly being poured into anti-trafficking initiatives that focus on awareness, rescue, and policing.

FUNDING ELIGIBILITY AND EXCLUSION

Another example of the political nature of funding can be found in the restrictions that determine the scope and terms of service provision. Research participants pointed to several constraints imposed by funders that determine which services can be provided, how they can be delivered, and who is eligible to access them.

Many organizations reported that some federal or provincial funding can only be used to provide support to women with regular immigration status in Canada, such as refugees or migrants with valid visas. This effectively excludes women with irregular or undocumented status, who are particularly vulnerable to GBV, exploitation, and trafficking.

Other funders require women to have reported their abuse to the police to access services. Such requirements undermine survivor-centred support, as many survivors, particularly those with precarious immigration status or who navigate criminalization or experience colonial harm, may fear police and other authorities and therefore avoid reporting.

As a result, they may be effectively denied access to services that are otherwise well-funded and available to those who meet these requirements.

In the context of women who work in the sex trade, some funders require that services are only provided to women who denounce their labour and wish to exit the industry.

This requirement is aligned with Canada's criminal justice approach under the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA), which seeks to "end the demand for prostitution." However, much like the criminal justice policy itself, this requirement completely removes a woman's agency to choose sex work as a legitimate income-generating activity.

If sex work is how someone earns their money to provide for themselves and their family, requiring that they leave the industry as a condition of support puts them at greater risk of harm.

Some funders also impose sobriety requirements. This not only excludes people who use substances from accessing support, but obscures the challenges and realities of addiction by treating substance use as a condition that must first be resolved, rather than as a potential part of the circumstances in which people experience violence and exploitation.



WHERE FUNDING GOES

Participants also shared that government funding tends to be allocated to large, established organizations with the administrative capacity to manage substantial grants, whereas smaller grassroots organizations that

provide direct, practical support often receive little to no government funding.

Participants thus pointed to a disconnect between where resources are concentrated and where people are actually accessing direct support.

Other funders impose ideological views on potential applicants. For example, several participants described deliberately choosing not to apply for anti-trafficking funding because calls for proposals conflate human trafficking with sex work. As a result, organizations applying critical or alternative approaches in their work may be excluded from the government funding system.

ORGANIZATIONS WORKING WITHIN AND AGAINST FUNDING CONSTRAINTS

Our research participants employed various strategies to navigate funding constraints. As noted, some refused to apply for government funding if it came with conditions contrary to their community's values.

Instead, they conducted their work on a volunteer basis, and often with community members. Thus, organizations can exercise agency within funding systems, even if at a significant financial cost.

Others described engaging in lengthy communication with funders and negotiating potentially harmful provisions of their funding contracts.

While some sex worker rights organizations described choosing not to apply for or accept anti-trafficking funding because of concerns about its requirements, one organization took a different approach: it applies for and accepts anti-trafficking funding but uses these short-term resources in “value-aligned” ways.

This means they direct funding toward providing assistance and support, and addressing the needs identified by the people who access its services.

This was significant because it was the only sex worker rights organization in the research that reported applying for anti-trafficking funding and aligning its use with the organization's values and priorities.

This shows that organizations are not passive recipients of funding and do not have to comply unquestioningly with all funder requirements.

What Can Be Done?

DEAR FUNDERS,

- **Invest in the organizations closest to the communities they serve.** Allocate more resources to local, grassroots, worker- and community-led organizations supporting racialized women experiencing GBV. Prioritize organizations with deep community relationships and knowledge of the realities facing the people they serve.
- **Remove restrictions on who can access services.** Ensure that the funding you provide does not exclude people based on factors such as immigration status, substance use, involvement in sex work, or whether they have reported violence to police. Trust organizations to determine how best to respond to their communities' needs, rather than imposing eligibility requirements that can prevent those most in need from accessing support.
- **Provide flexible, long-term funding.** Move beyond short-term, program-specific grants and provide flexible, sustained funding that trusts organizations to set priorities based on the current and emerging needs of their communities. Give organizations the time and space to reflect on their work, learn from successes and failures, adapt their strategies, and meaningfully consult with the people they serve.
- **Shift toward trust-based philanthropy.** The expectation to account for every dollar, and onerous reporting requirements, can create dynamics of surveillance and mistrust between funders and grantees, rather than fostering the partnership, autonomy, and shared accountability needed for meaningful and sustainable work.

DEAR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC,

- **Continue learning about the ineffectiveness or harms of anti-trafficking funding.** Inform yourself about how funding priorities and approaches can reinforce ineffective, harmful and exclusionary practices, and promote carceral responses to GBV and human trafficking that can further marginalize communities that do not view law enforcement as a source of safety or protection.
- **Support organizations rooted in their communities.** If you are able, donate to local, grassroots, worker- and community-led organizations supporting racialized women experiencing GBV. Consider directing your support toward organizations that provide direct services and are accountable to the communities they serve.
- **Demand greater investment in the services communities need.** Ask your elected representatives to increase funding for services that address the root causes of systemic vulnerability, including housing insecurity, intimate partner violence, and substance use. Advocate for investments that strengthen the broader social infrastructure people rely on, rather than focusing resources narrowly on anti-trafficking awareness campaigns and carceral approaches.
- **Use your vote to shape funding priorities.** Ask political parties and candidates how they plan to fund social services and community organizations, and consider their track record when deciding how to vote. Support those who demonstrate a sustained commitment to adequately funding the services and organizations that communities need because investing in housing, healthcare, income security, labour protections, and other community supports is also an investment in preventing trafficking and exploitation.

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.

