OFFICIAL REPORT
AITHISG OIFIGEIL

DRAFT

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 8 October 2025

Session 6

The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Wednesday 8 October 2025

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CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
27th Meeting 2025, Session 6

CONVENER

*Audrey Nicoll (Aberdeen South and North Kincardine) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab)
*Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con)
*Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP)
*Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP)
*Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP)
*Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Niki Adams (English Collective of Prostitutes)
Bronagh Andrew (Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance and Routes Out)
Laura Baillie (Scotland for Decrim)
Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Diane Martin CBE (A Model for Scotland)
Amanda Jane Quick (Nordic Model Now!)
Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba)
Lynsey Walton (National Ugly Mugs)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Stephen Imrie

LOCATION

The David Livingstone Room (CR6)

Scottish Parliament

Criminal Justice Committee

Wednesday 8 October 2025

[The Convener opened the meeting at 09:32]

Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill: Stage 1

The Convener (Audrey Nicoll): Good morning, and welcome to the 27th meeting in 2025 of the Criminal Justice Committee. We have received no apologies this morning, and we are joined by Ash Regan and Rachael Hamilton.

Under our first item of business, we will begin our scrutiny of the Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill. Two panels of witnesses are joining us, and I intend to allow up to 90 minutes for each panel. I refer members to papers 1 and 2.

I welcome Diane Martin CBE, from A Model for Scotland; Amanda Jane Quick, from Nordic Model Now!; and Bronagh Andrew, who is an operations manager at the trafficking awareness-raising alliance and Routes Out services. You are all very welcome, and I thank those of you who were able to send a written submission in advance of the meeting.

Before we start, I remind everyone that we are here today to consider the bill's provisions, so I would like questions and answers to stay focused on that, whenever possible. If anyone needs a break at any point, just indicate that to me or one of the clerks, who are sitting on my left.

I will begin by asking some very broad opening questions. What parts of the bill are you supportive of and why? Is there anything in the bill that you disagree with or that you think could be changed or improved? I will come to Bronagh Andrew first.

Bronagh Andrew (Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance and Routes Out): I am here to represent the Routes Out and TARA services, which provide front-line support to women who are selling or exchanging sex in Glasgow and women across Scotland who are recovering from being trafficked for sexual exploitation.

We are very supportive of the bill; there is no aspect of it that we do not support. For a long time, we have been supportive of a Nordic model or an equality model that focuses on criminalising the purchase of sex, decriminalising the sale of sex and ensuring that there are robust support services for women. Such a model would not work without robust support being in place for women who wish to exit prostitution.

We are very supportive of all aspects of the bill. We particularly support the quashing of criminal convictions under section 46 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982, because they have an on-going and long-term impact on women and their ability to move on from sexual exploitation. Our service provided support to women at the time of the Prostitution (Public Places) (Scotland) Act 2007, which introduced kerb-crawling legislation. I will perhaps get a chance to talk more about that, but our service was very supportive of that approach and the equality that it brought for women.

We are very much of the view that prostitution is a form of violence against women. We are very supportive of the argument that women should not be charged for surviving male violence. Our focus must be on the perpetrators and on supporting women to exit prostitution.

Amanda Jane Quick (Nordic Model Now!): I am very supportive of the criminalisation of men who buy sex. From the point of view of my lived experience, there needs to be accountability. A change in the law would govern behaviour and, for me, change the thoughts, attitudes, values and beliefs of society and uphold a more civilised, humanitarian perspective. It would also reduce demand and reduce violence. It is very apparent, through my previous lived experience, my professional experience and the statistics, that there is a strong connection between the buying and commodification of women's bodies and childhood sexual abuse and violence against women, girls and children, as well as against boys and men. There is a holistic perspective in relation to the fact that a global grooming process is going on.

A law is a boundary and a rule. It constitutes the upholding of a civilised society. In my experience, buying sex is not civilised—it is no more civilised than any other primitive response that we all hold as human beings. Primarily, there needs to be a change of thought and attitude, which will take a while. Buying sex is not a birthright. It might be a need and an urge, but it is no more a right than killing is.

Diane Martin CBE (A Model for Scotland): Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity for us to come together—I really appreciate it.

I and A Model for Scotland whole-heartedly support every aspect of the bill, including, as has been said, the quashing of convictions. Even though some women will have historical convictions, it is not historical for them. They still live under that shadow, because such convictions prevent them from applying for voluntary work or

moving on. Even 20 or 30 years later, women who have exited and are doing well find that a conviction hangs over their heads.

I support all aspects of the bill. In relation to my lived experience, I was prostituted in London, at the supposed highest end of prostitution, but being in a five-star hotel is no different from being in an alley. I do not expect policy to be based on my personal experience. Policy needs to be based whole-heartedly on the women who are exploited through prostitution, and there is so much evidence that shows the realities of prostitution.

We are trying to talk about those realities today, but we cannot really—we can do only a PG-13 certificate version. This morning, I looked up AdultWork.com, which we consider to be a pimping website. There were 961 women advertised for sale in Scotland, and six of the first 10 had been advertised by an agent. Bronagh Andrew is probably a good person to speak about trafficking, but we know how much of that goes on.

We must decriminalise the women—we cannot criminalise them for their own exploitation. There is evidence that decriminalising the women removes barriers and means that they are not scared to report violence to the police. On criminalising the sex buyers, those men have largely been invisible—there is no accountability for what happens. Where such legislation has been adopted, it works. It has been in place in Sweden for about 25 years, so there is an evidence base there.

You asked about improvements to the bill. What could be exciting for us in Scotland is that we could do what other countries have done since Sweden introduced its law. We can improve the law, look at how society has changed and make adaptations, which France has done in an excellent way. I totally support the bill.

The Convener: Thank you very much. A lot of members are keen to ask questions, so I will hand over to Liam Kerr.

Liam Kerr (North East Scotland) (Con): Good morning. I will direct my questions precisely, but catch my eye if you want to come in. I will come to Diane Martin first. The committee has received evidence that states that the criminalisation of those who buy sex would put sex workers at greater risk of violence and would not reduce demand for prostitution or reduce trafficking. Do you take a different view? If so, why?

Diane Martin: I whole-heartedly thank you for asking that question, because what I consider to be mythology has been on my mind this morning. I have been listening to those myths for 20 years, and they are in complete contradiction to our evidence. Such legislation reduces prostitution and creates an inhospitable environment for traffickers. Right now, Scotland is not an inhospitable environment for traffickers.

The first myth is that criminalising buying sex can push it underground. If you dig into that, you will see that it is a complete logical fallacy. The very nature of prostitution is that the buyer has to be in contact with the person who is selling sex—it cannot go underground. Where such legislation has been introduced, the buying of sex does not go underground and does not even get displaced; it is reduced.

Another myth is that such legislation would make selling sex more dangerous. It is already completely dangerous, and we cannot make it safe unless we have legislation to back up what has been Government policy for more than 10 years, which is that prostitution is violence against women. It is said that criminalising the buying of sex would mean that people who sell sex would not be able to vet the men, but those men are not vetted now. Even if they give information, it will not be accurate. The vetting is on the women—when the men turn up, the door is opened and then the door closes. There is no vetting.

Sometimes, you will hear people argue that, if such legislation is introduced, the so-called good punters will stop and we will be left with the bad punters. We only have to look at Ipswich to see that there are no good punters. Steve Wright, who is on a whole-life tariff for murdering five young women in Ipswich, was known as a good punter. The women said, “We trusted him, we would see him all the time, we would speak to him and we felt safe with him.” He murdered five of them. That argument is complete mythology.

The good news is that there will be a large group of men who, if they fear criminalisation, their partners finding out or their work finding out, will probably stop buying sex.

I will not take up more time on that, but thank you for raising that point.

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful for your answer.

09:45

Amanda Jane Quick: Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

When I sold sex, I was also selling silence and secrets—not just my body. I might well become graphic in my explanation—that is how it is; it will be uncomfortable. I often hear people discuss and ask questions about safety and the risks of pushing it underground. As Diane Martin said, that is a myth. No man is going to come out of a brothel or a home waving a flag and saying that he has just bought sex. That is never going to happen. It needs to stay underground; it always will. It thrives in silence, and it thrives in violence.

The Nordic model does not proclaim that it will make it safe. In my personal experience, it can never be made safe. Talking about safety, I often wonder how I would have a conversation about a 16-year-old having work experience in a brothel. How would that look? If we are going to have conversations about selling sex and men who buy sex, how do we talk about safety to young people? Where is the next generation of prostituted girls and, potentially, boys coming from? They will come from previous generations: the children we know now. Would we have conversations with them about safely going into a brothel? We do not always ask the right questions in the right way.

We need to be more honest about what we are really talking about. We are talking about human trafficking, global grooming and issues of consent—what we might feel to be consent is not. Being honest, I never knew what I was going into—no more than the men did sometimes. When we talk about myths, we are talking about years and years of indoctrinated misogyny, patriarchy and somebody's right to buy sex. It has become more available but, in my lived experience, it became more violent, because the entitlement and the demand grew. People disconnect. I disconnected from what I did as a woman, and I disconnected from the families I was causing harm to. I had to.

If you had questioned me 10 years ago I would have given very different answers, but I have got out, I have done some work and I have woken up to what I did and what the men do. From that perspective, it can never be made safe, and it will always be underground, because the men and the women who sell do not want anybody to find out. If you had asked me 10 years ago, I would have been selfish—it would have been in my best interests to sit here and say, "Yeah, we can make it safe," and to tell you that we could do all the things required. It will never be made safe.

Liam Kerr: I put the same question to Bronagh Andrew. According to the bill's policy memorandum, the measures are intended to "reduce the number" of people in prostitution. Is there any evidence that models such as the Nordic model achieve a reduction in the number of people in prostitution?

Bronagh Andrew: I echo what Diane Martin and Amanda Jane Quick have shared, reflecting the experiences of the women who are supported by Routes Out. I am not sure what vetting could ever create a safe environment for somebody on their own and isolated in a private space with an individual. Sex buyers do not go around with "good" or "bad" written on their forehead, so I am not sure what vetting would achieve to prevent and mitigate the significant risk. The act of prostitution is itself psychologically harmful to the women we support, and that needs to be considered, too.

On the subject of a Nordic model working, over a number of years, Glasgow has worked with Police Scotland on kerb crawlers. There have been a number of police operations—most recently, operation outgoing and operation waterdale—in which, in partnership with Routes Out, the police focused on challenging demand. They focused on the offence under section 1 of the Street Offences Act 1959—soliciting for sex, or street purchasing. At the same time, the number of women who were charged was reduced to almost zero. They went for the men, and they did not charge the women selling sex on the street; they referred them to Routes Out for support and advocacy.

It has begun to be shown that, if that approach is applied consistently, we can reduce the number of sex buyers and the number of women involved. We have also found that, when there are fewer sex buyers around, that provides greater opportunities for the Routes Out outreach team to go out and talk to women in Glasgow where they are selling sex. That provides longer and better-quality engagements with those women, which supports them to consider moving on from prostitution.

Does that answer your question?

Liam Kerr: Yes, and I want to take that forward. If you do not mind, I will stay with you for this question. You talked about the work that you have been doing jointly with Police Scotland. Last week, I read a report in the *Daily Record* that said that Police Scotland is supportive of criminalising the purchase of sex but "could not afford to enforce a crackdown". Given that, to what extent does the effectiveness of a Nordic model hinge on enforcement by the police and courts, or is it more about messaging and driving a culture change?

Bronagh Andrew: To be honest, it is about both. The model in any legislation needs to be consistently implemented. Going in for a week and charging kerb crawlers might disrupt things for a short time, but, when that stops, the punters come back. The approach must be robustly and consistently implemented. That does not mean that police need to patrol a red-light area seven nights a week, but that needs to be done consistently to ensure that there is support.

We also need to provide a message. I know that the law is not there to do that, but a clear and strong message needs to be sent out to civic society that paying for sex causes harm to a significant number of women and is a result of the patriarchy and on-going commodification and objectification of women's bodies. Overwhelmingly, men are the ones who pay for

sex and it is women who sell sex. That needs to be reflected and understood better. A clear message must go out that it is not a harmless activity and that it causes harm to women and to society in general.

Diane Martin: Regarding the police, I set up an exiting service in the London borough of Lambeth. I have worked closely with police over the years to try to adopt the model that we are talking about—but without the legislation, so, to a certain extent, their hands were tied. When you work with the police, you realise that the officers on the ground who are in contact with the women who are exploited through prostitution totally know the realities. We got as close as we could—we followed Glasgow's model and got a statement from the council that prostitution was violence against women. The police stopped arresting the women and there were kerb-crawler investigations, but their hands were tied in relation to any off-street work.

Ipswich pretty much eradicated street prostitution. That was independently assessed by the University of East Anglia. Alan Caton OBE, who has been a colleague, was the detective superintendent who oversaw the murder cases in Ipswich. When that happened, everyone came together and said, "This is unacceptable. We can't allow this here." There was a completely holistic approach, with support agencies, the police and health services. Two years later, there was no street prostitution, and the evidence showed that that was not because it had been displaced.

Sorry, I am nervous and my mouth is going dry—I will drink some water.

I also went to Sweden to meet police and detectives. Along with Alan Caton and a police sergeant from Nottingham, we went on a fact-finding mission for the Westminster all-party parliamentary group on prostitution and the global sex trade. That was in 2015, I think, and we came back and produced a report. The reason why we went to Sweden was to ask, "Why did you do this, what did you do and how did you implement it?", with the sole task of coming back and writing a report about how the approach could be implemented here. The report was called "How to implement the Sex Buyer Law in the UK".

It is possible, and Sweden has seen radical change that is cultural, too. When I was talking to some young male police officers there, I asked them, "How would you feel if one of your friends said that they'd paid for sex?" The look on their faces—it was like the "Computer says no" sketch; they could not even imagine it. Sweden has had probably two generations of boys becoming men in that 25-year period, and there has been a massive culture shift. The percentage of the public who support the legislation has gone up year on year. The legislation has public support, and it has had a massive impact on culture.

We should want that for Scotland. We think of ourselves as a progressive country, and we need to put the "Not for sale" signs out. The police can implement the Nordic model—it does not take millions and millions of pounds. It will take some initial funding; there are always initial costs to something new. However, as Ipswich found, it is a spend-to-save model—for every £1 that was spent on supporting the women to exit, £2 was saved for the public purse.

Amanda Jane Quick: Going on from what Bronagh Andrew and Diane Martin said about the change in thoughts and attitudes in society, I want to add that France has had the Nordic model for about eight years, and the European Court of Human Rights has upheld that approach. About 250 prostitutes, or sex workers, took France to court, but the court found that there was no evidence that any further harm had been caused or that violence had increased for those women. If we look holistically around the world at changes in thoughts and attitudes, we see that the idea that the model increases violence is a myth—the evidence is clear that violence does not increase when a country criminalises men for buying sex. That was made clear by the European Court of Human Rights more recently, in 2024. I can send the committee the information after the meeting, although I point out that I am not an academic—I am speaking from lived experience.

A Hungarian woman did a study of the attitudes and values of men in Sweden in comparison with those in Germany. We all know what is happening in Germany—the aspects of selling sex are abhorrent over there, and there is a lot of trafficking and so on. Women in Sweden felt safer than those in Germany, just as a result of the behaviour patterns and the comments of men. I can send those studies to the committee.

I have one more point. Child-on-child sexual abuse and violence used to account for a third of the total—it now accounts for 52 per cent. I can send all this information to the committee after the meeting. Children are copying adult behaviour—pornography and prostitution. Pornography is similar to prostitution: it is bought and sold, and it is no different whether it is on a screen or in person. Even though pornographers are now bringing in some form of safety provision—when people go online, they have to give their age and so on—the younger people I work with have, from the age of eight, been exposed to sexual acts of strangulation, spitting and violence, and child-on-child violence is occurring more and more.

The Convener: I will stop you there. We are getting quite long and very helpful responses, but I remind our witnesses to focus on the bill's

provisions. I know that that is difficult, because there are so many interconnections with other issues.

Is that you finished your questions, Liam?

Liam Kerr: Yes, convener. I am very grateful to all the witnesses.

Jamie Hepburn (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (SNP): Good morning. Thank you for your evidence so far.

I will start with a question that is perhaps a little more unfair on panel 1 than on panel 2. With your permission, convener, I will go on to ask panel 2 the same question, so those witnesses will have the benefit of having heard the previous responses, whereas the current witnesses have not had that benefit.

Do you perceive that there is common ground on any element of the bill proposal with people who oppose the bill?

Bronagh Andrew: I am happy to pick that question up. I think that there is more common ground than people realise. The disagreement is around sex buyers. In the responses to the committee's call for evidence we can see that people are in agreement about the impact of criminalising the women and how important it is to decriminalise them. Everyone is very concerned about women's wellbeing and safety. The bill will go some way towards supporting that and making a difference for women on the ground.

There is common ground. Everyone is here, doing what they do and speaking out because of our commitment to improving women's lives. That is a key point to hold on to.

10:00

Jamie Hepburn: I do not know whether Amanda Jane or Diane might have anything to add to that. It is okay if you do not.

Diane Martin: I agree with and reiterate what Bronagh said. Whichever side of the argument you are on, everyone cares about the health, lives and safety of women. We all agree on decriminalising those who sell sex. The problem is that those with an opposing view generally support the full decriminalisation of the whole sex industry, whereby pimps and traffickers would just become managers and facilitators, and sex buyers would become clients. That is a really dangerous slippery slope. We agree with decriminalisation, but we would disagree with what those with an opposing view would want to see as regards policy on that.

Amanda Jane Quick: We need to be careful about the language that we use. There is a jointly held holistic view that we care about the woman who sells and that we do not want to criminalise her; we want to decriminalise her.

Some glamorisation goes on in the language that is used—in the term "sex work", for one. From my experience of selling sex in a brothel, it was not the same as an ordinary job.

On the language that is used by us and by those who are for full decriminalisation, men are "buyers of sex" and not "clients"; those terms send a really different message to people out there. There is confusion, because we stand in solidarity on the decriminalisation of the women, but the language that we use around it is different.

When I exited prostitution, I realised that it is not work. One of the reasons why I needed to exit was that, when I became pregnant, the pregnancy was fetishised. I was contacted and asked to stay because men liked young pregnant women and I would have made more money. How you can implement a working union to regulate those sorts of attitudes and values about a female body is beyond me. That is the difference that I stand in from a lived experience perspective.

Jamie Hepburn: I appreciate that. You have all spoken about the concern, which I think we all share, about ensuring that the safety of those who are involved in prostitution—who, clearly and overwhelmingly, are women, primarily—is paramount. That is imperative. I was taken with the point that you made, Amanda Jane, that no system can make prostitution safe. The question that we are grappling with in this context is whether changes under the bill would make it less safe or more safe for those who are involved.

I am happy to hear general observations. However, as well as your helpful written evidence, for which I am very grateful, we have had a variety of evidence submitted by people who are opposed to the bill. Information has been provided that suggests that, in other jurisdictions, changes that have been made that are similar to the proposals in the bill have made the experience of those involved in prostitution less safe.

Ugly Mugs Ireland has found evidence showing that the number of crimes against sex workers—that is the terminology that the organisation uses, I should say—almost doubled in the two years following the introduction of the law in the Republic of Ireland. HIV Ireland has found that, under the Nordic model, sex workers who experience violence at work are increasingly reluctant to report to the police. The Northern Ireland Department of Justice, in a 2019 review, reported that

"assaults against sex workers ... increased by 225% from 2016 to 2018."

Médecins du Monde has reported that the law in France has led to 42 per cent of workers being exposed to more violence and 38 per cent finding it increasingly hard to demand condom use.

On the face of it, those are concerning figures, obviously. What is your response, on hearing that evidence?

Amanda Jane Quick: I will go back to speaking about France, where there was no evidence that there was increased violence. I also reiterate what I said about the differences between attitudes and values in Sweden and those in Germany.

Stealthing—which is the removal of a condom without the woman's knowledge—is very common. I have experienced it. No more of that would occur behind closed doors, if any form of law could prevent that. The Nordic model suggests that demand is reduced because of the law, and there is evidence of that. The law will be a deterrent.

A study was done of 110 men who bought sex. I cannot remember the details of the study—I read only the statistics that were given in it—but I could send them to the committee. All the men said that if there were a law to deter people from buying sex, it would work to deter them, and that if their wives were to find out about their activities as a result, that would work to deter them, too.

It is hard to come across or speak to men who are open and honest about buying sex. All the studies are biased, so we do not get a balanced view. It is difficult in that sense. Having a law does reduce demand from men, and there will be a change in thoughts and attitudes to buying sex.

The other point that I was going to make—. [*Interruption*.] Please excuse me while I drink some water—this is really stressful for me.

The law is a deterrent. It does reduce trafficking, as has been proven in various countries. It also reduces demand. Statistically, an increase in violence will occur if there is an increase in demand.

In my experience, once the door was closed, it did not matter whether I had seen a punter—a man—eight or nine times; eventually, they would turn. It is a grooming process, and it is insidious. Each of those men has a different way of doing that and a different level of violence that they will exert.

As I progressed and became more traumatised when I was living that life, I became quite isolated. I will go on to talk about the exit strategies in the Nordic model that are very supportive of women. I became more isolated. I did not talk. I did not report the rapes that I had experienced. Society does not usually support any woman who is raped, let alone a woman who is being sold. That is the society that we live in. The men were unpredictable. In my experience, if even the kindest of the men had had a bad day, I got it through whatever sexual means they chose.

Diane Martin: I was going to say "respectfully", but I am not respectful of whatever that supposed research is. It flies in the face of many other reports and research on what has happened in Ireland. I know that Ireland has had some implementation issues, but that just does not make sense. How could the law make things more violent? The sex buyers are violent because they are violent. I cannot see how the law being changed, meaning they are criminalised, would have an impact on violence at all.

In Ireland now, the women report violence more freely because they are not criminalised so they do not have to worry about being arrested any more. They can report violence, and they are doing so.

It does not make any sense to me that the model in the proposed legislation would make things more violent. The violence is there already, with the men who are responsible for it. I cannot see how the bill could possibly impact that.

Bronagh Andrew: I echo what Diane Martin said. I would be interested to know whether the increased reports of violence towards people who sell sex were as a result of their feeling able to report that violence because they knew that they were not risking criminalisation.

The women whom TARA supports have frequently been told by traffickers that they have broken the law and that, if they report to the police, they will be arrested and charged as prostitutes. That prevents them from being willing to speak to the police. Being able to provide those women with reassurance that they are not in any trouble and have not committed any offence leads to them feeling able to make formal reports to the police and agreeing to do so.

The effect is twofold. Some of it is about women's confidence. I would be interested to know the timing of those increased reports. Were women more confident in telling law enforcement about violence that they had experienced because they knew that they were not at risk of further criminalisation?

Jamie Hepburn: Perhaps we will need to look into that a bit more.

I have one final question, convener. I could ask a lot of questions, but I recognise that all members will be in the same boat.

I bring us back to the provisions of the bill, which talks about a duty to provide assistance and support to people who are looking to exit prostitution. What might that support look like, and could it be provided on a non-statutory basis?

Bronagh Andrew: Glasgow City Council has been funding dedicated support to women selling sex—predominantly those selling sex on the street but also women selling sex off street—since 1989 in one form or another. I am joined by my colleague RoseAnn Cameron, who manages that service. We are also members of the Encompass Network, which is a network of services throughout Scotland that provide that support.

Support needs to be robust and considered. The bulk of the role of the case management workers at Routes Out is to work closely with women, listen closely to them, find out what their needs are and then robustly advocate for them to access their rights and entitlements.

Support is fundamentally needed. If the support is legally mandated, it helps to ensure that there is continued and consistent funding. The Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Scotland) Act 2015 lists the support to which survivors of human trafficking are legally entitled. That significantly helps engagement and reassurance when we are working with vulnerable people who have a lack of trust or engagement and have been let down. To be able to say to the women whom TARA supports that they are entitled to support, that it is their legal right and that the Government must fund it goes a huge way towards encouraging trusting relationships and providing the foundations for women to begin the journey of moving on.

Support is fundamental, and having it on a statutory footing has benefits in a number of direct and indirect ways.

Diane Martin: It is an intrinsic and incredibly important aspect of the bill that it supports women to rebuild—or perhaps to build for the first time—the lives that they want for themselves. We need a twofold approach. We absolutely need the specialist support, such as the support that is provided by the Women's Support Project in Glasgow, TARA or others across the country. Those services are specialised because they are on the ground, working with the women and, as Bronagh said, building up trust.

However, exiting projects have to address multiple issues at the same time, because things can fall down easily. They have to look at housing, physical health and mental health. They might have to work with the probation service—we had a project in the courts. We need everybody, including a lot of statutory bodies and charities that are set up for other kinds of projects, to all come together to give that support. There is specific knowledge, but it is also about mainstreaming.

10:15

On what support could look like in Scotland, we need to remember that we are not starting from scratch. We have excellent infrastructure around violence against women and everything. At the moment, people are working on engaging all those projects, so we are not starting from scratch.

On cost, I come back to spend to save, which is very much proven. The costs to the public purse of a woman remaining in prostitution are astronomical, because the women are just recycled around all the different systems and things break down. There needs to be case management and coherent support. That is very important.

One of the best things in my life has been seeing women go from first contact on the street, when they cannot even look you in the eye, they have no self-esteem and they are suffering horrific abuse, right through the process of exiting and rebuilding. It is absolutely astounding. Some women are still in touch with me 20 years on from when we supported them to exit.

At the project, it was like a touchstone to hear women that we helped say, "I am still doing this," or, "I have moved on to that". We helped women to get their first voluntary job or their first interview, when we had to do massive work on their criminal records and building up their confidence. I can look on LinkedIn now and see a few of the women who I supported. Some of them are now in their fourth managerial job, supporting the very agencies that they got support from.

We can do this. We have the knowledge and the expertise. The women have a right to that support, because everyone has a right to it—we have a right to it. As Amanda Jane Quick said, those women have often been systematically let down from childhood on. It is just amazing. I am sorry; I get carried away.

The Convener: I will have to ask you to conclude.

Diane Martin: I know. I talk too much.

The Convener: That was a very comprehensive answer. It was particularly empowering to hear your final comments. Is that you, Jamie?

Jamie Hepburn: Yes, thank you very much.

The Convener: I ask again for slightly more concise responses. I will bring in Rona Mackay and then Pauline McNeill.

Rona Mackay (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (SNP): I thank the witnesses for coming today. We know that this is a polarising issue and we are about to hear from people who do not agree with the bill, but we all have women's safety as our primary concern.

I want to ask Bronagh Andrew and Diane Martin about the support that is offered to women and how the Nordic model would change that. Can you give me a rough idea of the scale of engagement that you have with women sex workers at the moment?

Bronagh Andrew: Are you asking how many women the Routes Out service is working with?

Rona Mackay: I am just wondering how many are falling through the net and not getting support from you.

Bronagh Andrew: Routes Out provides a service that is fully funded by Glasgow City Council; it does not receive any equally safe funding. It started off as a joint partnership many years ago. It provides a case management service during office hours, but it also has an outreach service that goes to where women are selling sex on the street. That operates four nights a week, from 7 pm to midnight.

For the past six months, the service has worked with 68 individual women. As Diane Martin said, the support is holistic and very much based on the women's needs. Much of it is crisis support, which means supporting women into homeless accommodation. It also helps women who are on that journey to maintain their tenancies.

I sit in an open-plan office and I hear the team. They are frequently on the phone, advocating hard with other agencies to ensure that the women get the support that they are entitled to and that they need.

As I said, that service has been operating in Glasgow for a number of decades now, and it is well established and has good partnership links.

It would be beneficial to the committee to hear from services in other parts of Scotland that provide similar support, and to hear about some of the challenges that they might have, particularly around funding. That is one of the reasons why I think that having named basic entitlements to support in legislation will improve consistency of access to that support across Scotland, not just in Glasgow.

Rona Mackay: Opponents of the bill would argue that full decriminalisation would give women the same health and safety rights that all workers are entitled to. That is not what you believe in—you do not think that that would be a good model. However, would it not also help with trafficking? If there was full decriminalisation, that would take away the criminal element to it.

Bronagh Andrew: I am not sure how that would work with trafficking. I also have oversight of the trafficking service, and I do not think that full decrim would support women and prevent them from being trafficked in to meet the demand. I could talk for a while about that, but I am aware that you are looking for brevity in answers.

I am not sure whether a full decrim approach would guarantee women access to specialist services to exit, if that is what they want to do. That is one of the challenges around a full decrim model and treating this like any other occupation, given that it is fairly unique in the harmful impact that it has on women.

Diane Martin: The aspect of the bill that gives a statutory right to support to exit would be very powerful, and it would generate a coming together of all bodies to take it forward.

You also asked about support.

Rona Mackay: Yes.

Diane Martin: I am not front line any more, but I know that when my project first started in the borough of Lambeth—that is just one borough, and we had 250 women on our books—we worked it that so that there were different tiers of support. The women whom you just met on street outreach might take a long time to come to the drop-in, so that would be the contact. Next, the women would come to the drop-in to access support and we would identify what they needed support with. That would be the middle level of support. Finally, there would be the women who exited and did drug and alcohol rehab—most of them needed that. We worked for a couple of years with women who had exited.

Full decriminalisation has an extreme impact. Legalisation or full decriminalisation just does not make it safer. Look at Germany—it is called the brothel of Europe. If you go to one of those mega brothels with all their floors of women for sale, you would be hard-pressed to find a German woman or even a woman who speaks English. So, whereas we have said we agree that we want improvements for the women, it would be dangerous to implement full decriminalisation for many reasons.

It is not about labour rights. How would you implement health and safety? That is just ridiculous to me, but I will stop there.

Rona Mackay: Amanda, do you want to comment?

Amanda Jane Quick: Okay. I will gently come in if I may, and I will try to stay on point. I work professionally with women who sell because they were trafficked, they work remotely on AdultWork.com, or they work on the street. The push-pull to get women to trust and to get into services is the initial challenge. It is a huge process.

If the men who sell or run brothels, or women for that matter, are not criminalised or brought to

account, it is safer to stay there than to exit, in a sense. That was the pull-back for me. I knew all the services that were available. I knew that I could go to hospital. I knew that I could go to the police. I knew that, but the overwhelming power that traffickers have—that men have—meant that, believe it or not, it was safer to stay there than it was to reach out. There was no accountability for them.

The services have always been there, from my perspective—even as a young woman, and as an older woman. I have sold sex two times in my life. The successful second exit was because there were services available for me. Beyond the Streets supported me for two years. I had a professional job in between, but I could not cope.

Rona Mackay: Would there be stigma attached to your accessing those services?

Amanda Jane Quick: No, it is not a case of stigma. It is a case of power imbalance, accountability and how they have a hold over you. I exited once, and I collapsed in a heap. I went into psychiatric care, I had alcohol and drug addiction, and I struggled. I could not go back to work because I was penalised because of my sick time. I was a professional woman at one point. I went into prostitution. I exited. I knew that there were services available, but people did not ask me the right questions. There was no accountability for men—there was nothing. All the services have always been there for me—they were there eight years ago. That includes Beyond the Streets' support for two years and all the things that we have talked about.

Rona Mackay: Brothel decriminalisation is not included in the bill, and opponents would say that that that makes women less safe, because they can no longer work together.

Amanda Jane Quick: May I answer that?

Rona Mackay: Yes, of course.

Amanda Jane Quick: I sold sex in a brothel. I came off the streets at 17 and went into a brothel at 18, because I felt that I would be safer. I was not safer. Believe it or not, I escaped vaginal rape on the streets—not oral. In the brothel, a man wanted to stealth, and I refused. He had me face down in the brothel and he raped me, when I was 18. I thought that the women there had my back, but, because I was younger and their regulars turned to me—because they always want younger—they got jealous. There is a real vileness that goes on in selling. Those women did not have my back and I got beaten up by them. I hope that that answers that question.

Bronagh Andrew: Our view is that no woman should be criminalised for what we consider to be an act of male violence towards them. The Scottish Government includes that in its definition of violence against women. Therefore, we support any measures that mean that women are not charged for what we consider to be survival behaviour and for selling sex.

The Convener: We will have to suspend briefly to deal with a technical issue.

10:27

Meeting suspended.

10:32

On resuming—

The Convener: Thank you very much for your forbearance. We had a slight technical issue, which we hope is rectified now—we are crossing our fingers. I remind members that we have about 30 minutes left and that a number of members still wish to come in. As ever, I make a plea for succinct questions and answers.

Sharon Dowey (South Scotland) (Con): Good morning. Following on from Jamie Hepburn's question, I want to come back to the right to assistance and support. Amanda Jane Quick, you said earlier that services exist but that they do not ask the right questions. Bronagh Andrew, in your submission, you say that

"Glasgow City Council has facilitated specialist services ... since 1989",

so it has already done a lot of work on this. I am wondering about the costs. The financial memorandum that was published along with the bill estimates that the Scottish Government would need to provide additional funding of between £1.2 million and £1.9 million to cover the cost of the support that is envisaged. Do you have a view on whether that support would be enough? Is there enough in the financial memorandum to provide the support that will be required?

Bronagh Andrew: The financial memorandum was based on the funding that the Routes Out service receives from Glasgow City Council and the funding that the TARA service receives to support survivors of trafficking. I imagine that the bill could increase the number of women who are coming forward looking for support to exit. It is not just about the support that is provided in Glasgow. Support needs to be provided robustly and consistently across Scotland, so significant and consistent funding will be needed. In our written submission, I think that we referred to the commission on violence against women funding and the equally safe strategy funding, which highlighted the fact that services that provide specialist support around commercial sexual exploitation are, for want of a better description, almost the poor cousins in the sector and do not

receive the same proportion of funding. Our view is that significant funding would be required, particularly in the early stages, alongside ensuring that there is a safety net for the women who we hope will be impacted by the bill.

Amanda Jane Quick: I will build on what was said about the cost to society and the economic cost of services. As I said, people did not ask the right questions. There were missed opportunities throughout my experience of selling, primarily during adolescence. I attempted suicide at 17, but nobody explored sexual abuse or prostitution or asked me any questions about a history of violence—there were no questions asked. I am in my 50s now, and we were in a different society then, so we have learned from that. I made a timeline of all the missed opportunities when I accessed the prevention services on offer—historical and current—and I tallied that I, one woman, utilised services worth £361,000.

If that could be picked up sooner—for example, if the bill could be supported through media attention, through a change of thoughts and attitudes, through advertising, through supporting men to change their attitudes and by setting up a parallel process for men as buyers, with women being primarily the sellers, in order to support both—that would reduce the violence and the number of men who are being charged. Lots of young boys are now on the sex offenders register, and their futures are being destroyed as well as the futures of little girls.

There is an economic cost, and I can provide all the evidence of the opportunities throughout my life that were missed primarily because the services were not robust enough. That can be changed by the issue being brought to the forefront through public awareness raising, through a change in the law and through a heightened awareness of the violence. It starts everywhere—through us, through the media and through all those things. The costs that we are talking about will be reduced as time goes on, because women will be able to exit sooner.

There is enough money in the pot. Look at the timeline and at how much I and other women cost services. A few of us did timeline studies of all the opportunities that we could have had to get out. I could have got out a long time ago, but I did not—it was rinse and repeat. There was no awareness, no conversation, no law and no accountability. It is doable from a cost perspective, and I can provide you with the evidence on that.

Diane Martin: I agree with what Bronagh Andrew said about there initially being a significant outlay, but the bill would save money in the long run. We are investing in the women's lives.

On what Amanda Jane Quick said about her experience of the right questions not being asked, the beauty of the specialist services is that they know the right questions to ask and they can and do provide training for mainstream services and the points of contact that the women will access first. That might be a general practitioner or it might be in a hospital.

It is about upskilling the mainstream and increasing knowledge. If more people have the knowledge to be able to pick up on trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation, they will be able to ask the right questions and there will be a more cohesive pathway to get help. There will, of course, be initial costs, but I cannot think of a better place to spend our money. The bill would have a significant impact on the women's lives and on our culture as a whole. It would save so much of the money that we are now spending on shifting women from pillar to post.

Sharon Dowey: What are the barriers to accessing services just now? What barriers did you find that you had?

Amanda Jane Quick: It was the power imbalance on every level. I even feel it here today. It was the power imbalance, a lack of trust, nobody stepping up, a lack of education, a lack of understanding, a lack of compassion and a lack of empathy. We have become a really violent and power-focused society that is demanding and entitled.

The Convener: I can see that that question resonates strongly with you, Amanda Jane, so we can return to that point later.

We will move on—I am conscious of the time. I will bring in Pauline McNeill.

Pauline McNeill (Glasgow) (Lab): Good morning. I have a question for Amanda Jane Quick. One of the big differences between this panel of witnesses and the next panel is that one of the submissions we have received says that there is a "false assumption" about prostitution or sex work, according to which it

"is not driven by men's demand for sex, it is driven by women's need for an income."

The submission goes on to discuss inequality and poverty. Are you able to respond to that?

Amanda Jane Quick: If there is a demand, women will sell. Thinking about it from an inequality perspective, I might ask why, if that is all I feel I am worth in society, I would go into another job. I will be honest: initially, it felt like easy money—"I'll get paid X amount, and it will be all right." But it was not. It was glamorised, and I convinced myself about it.

For me, the patterns were along the lines of, “You’re a woman. You’re a pair of tits and a vagina. That’s for sale—it’s for the taking.” For a while, I earned money, but I lost my purpose and potential as a person in society. That was all that I was worth as a young woman. That is the message that I had been sent for a very long time up until that point—whether through an insidious TV advert or by somebody else who had seen it. Since the internet came in, I have seen it all the time.

Even if somebody has intelligence and the potential to work and do another job, it is fast and furious: it is earn, earn, earn—money, money, money. Before you know it, you are in that system and you feel like dirt. It is really hard to get out of it, to get a job and work. The trauma that comes with it is unbelievable. I still struggle today. I have retrained and done all the stuff: I do work on myself, and I do therapy. There is this pull, though—it takes you back.

Economic opportunities will be missed. More women and girls will be trafficked, going into the mindset that that is all they are worth, with more men demanding. Yes, there is poverty, and all these things are interconnected, but there is a blatant message that, as long a woman’s body is for sale, that is all she is bloody well worth.

She is not worth only that. No young girl or young woman should be growing up in a society that normalises her body—her vagina, her ass—being sold. I am more than that. We are all more than that.

Diane Martin: Could I say something about poverty?

Pauline McNeill: I have some other questions for you, if that is okay.

Diane Martin: Sure.

Pauline McNeill: It is just that we are short of time.

I want to ask you about the different models. There has been criticism of the Irish model versus the Swedish model, which seems to be more effective. Could you tell the committee why that would be? Is there any particular country whose legislation has been more effective than the legislation elsewhere?

Diane Martin: I am not too up on the criticisms of Ireland; I just know that there have been some implementation issues early on, which is probably natural.

I thought that France did a very thorough job, and those in Sweden thought so, too—they were really impressed by how France developed its model. For us, there is an opportunity to make the model here very specific to ourselves and to how things are on the ground here. I know that Sweden has enjoyed seeing other countries develop the model, because that means that they can improve it. I would be very confident about what we could do in Scotland with our own model.

Pauline McNeill: The figures that the committee has seen refer to 4 per cent of men and show the age group and rough profile of those who are buying sex from women. Do you have figures on the prevalence of violence among that group?

10:45

Diane Martin: The violence that they inflict?

Pauline McNeill: The violence from that group of men. Amanda Jane Quick talked a lot about that, and other women experience it, too—for example, stealthing and strangulation. Strangulation has been a big issue for the Parliament, and we have talked about the need to legislate on such issues. Do you have any information at all on the levels or prevalence of violence?

Diane Martin: I learned about the levels and prevalence of violence through the testimonies of the women we supported to exit. You would be hard-pressed to find a woman who had not experienced rape, physical assault and control. It was from their lived realities that we got that information, but there might be some other research out there—I do not know.

Amanda Jane Quick: I have some recent information—I will just try to find it. It is specifically about Scotland. It is a briefing from the commercial sexual exploitation group about those who have experienced rape while selling.

Sorry—I disassociate quite a lot. If you do not know what that means, I can explain.

Bronagh Andrew: I can come in. The Encompass Network has, over the years, done a number of snapshots with front-line services in Scotland about women’s experiences, including violence. I can ensure that that information is sent to the committee, to support consideration of that aspect.

Pauline McNeill: Thank you very much.

Lastly, I want to ask about the figures for human trafficking—this is probably for Bronagh Andrew. I think that some of those figures have been disputed. What can you tell the committee about the prevalence of human trafficking, and about the profile of trafficking and what it looks like in Scotland, in particular?

Bronagh Andrew: I can talk about the commercial sexual exploitation and the trafficking of women. I would be interested to know what

disputed figures you are referring to. Are those the national referral mechanism figures?

Pauline McNeill: I read somewhere that the prevalence of trafficking may not be as high as some are asserting. If you could give us any information on the figures for that, it would be helpful.

Bronagh Andrew: Sure. I can tell you about TARA's stats; I do not have the Scottish national referral mechanism information to hand, but I can certainly ensure that the committee gets that. Across the UK, something like 20,000 people were referred as potential victims of trafficking—that includes men, women and children. That is through the formal process to access support. It is not perfect—there are views about that—but those are the figures.

I can tell you only about the women who are referred to TARA. In 2024-25, we supported 115 individual women. In the past six months, we have worked with 43 newly identified women who were referred to our service and supported 115 individual women. Those are women who have been trafficked and sexually exploited on their journey into the UK. Some of them are UK nationals and have been moved around the country.

All those women have been commercially sexually exploited. Men have paid to abuse those women—for the women who have been trafficked, I am quite careful in the language that I use—because they have not consented to be there. The men who are paying for sex with those women are the same men who are paying for sex with women across the industry.

The women whom the TARA service sees have never benefited financially from that. We have women arriving at our door and waiting outside our office space at 8 o'clock in the morning, with only the clothes they are standing up in. They do not get any financial benefit from their sexual exploitation, some of which occurs directly in Glasgow or in other parts of Scotland—across Scotland, in fact.

I can tell you about the women who make their way to us and about the barriers that they face when they want to access support and ask for help. We see the tip of that iceberg. That is the profile, if you like. Some of those women are advertised on AdultWork.com, Vivastreet.co.uk and other websites across the UK. Others do not know what happens. All they can tell us is that multiple men are brought to them. There are many myths around trafficking and how it presents in Scotland, but my view is that, of the 115 women we have supported in the past six months, it is 115 too many, because somebody, somewhere, has made financial profit from their abuse.

The Convener: We are short of time because of the interruption and quite lengthy responses, so if I may, I will bring in other members who have not spoken. If we have time at the end, we will come back to some of the outstanding issues. I will bring in Katy Clark and then Ash Regan.

Katy Clark (West Scotland) (Lab): I am happy to leave my questions to the next evidence session to save time.

The Convener: Thank you. In that case, I will bring in Ash Regan and then Fulton MacGregor.

Ash Regan (Edinburgh Eastern) (Alba): Thank you, convener, and good morning to the witnesses. Thank you for attending.

It often seems that a voice is missing from the debate, and for me, that voice is that of the buyers. We know that sex buyers are around 99 per cent male, so it is the voices of the men who pay to buy sex that are missing. Could Diane Martin and Amanda Jane Quick give the committee an idea of what the attitudes of sex buyers are to the women whom they pay? As I probably will not get a follow-up question from the convener, I will add the second part of my question, which is, if the Parliament decides that it does not want to progress the bill, what do you think the consequences of doing nothing will be for Scotland?

Diane Martin: I am glad that you brought up the invisibility of the sex buyers. I did not know that I would get a chance to sneak this into an answer somehow, but you probably are not aware, and I am glad that you are not in one way, that there is a site called Punternet.com—there are also other sites—where men go to review the women they have bought and sexually exploited. I will share a few comments from the site, so that we can bring those voices in—this is the Disney version; if you went on the site, you would be horrified, and you would pass the bill in about five seconds.

"No smile. Her atrocious English made the interactions even more impossible. I asked for OW—oral without a condom—which she did reluctantly. This was a very substandard service from someone who is not interested in providing customer satisfaction."

"She basically just laid back, shut her eyes and let me get on with it."

"She made no noises. I put up with about five minutes of her lying there like a side of beef before sitting up. Bad attitude. Everything was off limits. I finally got her to lay there, but it is like shagging a dead fish."

If we do not bring in legislation to enact the current policy that prostitution is violence against women, not only are we keeping the status quo, but not doing something is still an action that says that this is not worth doing anything about, which sends a message. This is the only legislation that

has been effective in reducing prostitution and human trafficking and supporting women to exit.

Amanda Jane Quick: The tipping point when I felt I needed to exit prostitution was Punternet being brought to my attention by another woman who was more familiar with the internet and how it worked. I looked up my alias and I read the comments. I sat and cried for about two days. Because I had refused an act—it was the point where I was nearly raped—he put up a bad review about me. I realised that any form of consent that I had was out the window. I had not consented to that. I was not even aware when I went back in that that internet site was available for men to comment on my body.

I then went on to read about other women and how they had spoken about them. Basically, what happens is that, if they do not get their needs satisfied, however that looks—whether they want a young girl to pretend that she is 12 years old with plaits in her hair or they want you to talk dirty to them—they turn. They just turn, and, if they cannot turn on you in the room, they go away and they turn on you outside the room. It is an insatiable industry; it is an entitled, demanding industry. If I do not look the right way or if I do not say the right thing, I am punished, either behind closed doors or out there for everybody to see, hear and read about. I heard them comment about stretch marks and saggy breasts. They said things like, "She wasn't really there," or, "She stank of alcohol"—all these really derogatory comments. If you behave, you will get away with, "She's pleasant," or, "She's good enough", but if you do not—if you look the wrong way or say the wrong thing or if you are just tired that day—you are done for.

The Convener: Thank you. I will have to come in there and ask Fulton MacGregor to ask his questions.

Fulton MacGregor (Coatbridge and Chryston) (SNP): Thanks to everyone on the panel. Your evidence has been very, very powerful—I want to put that on the record. My first question is not something that I planned to ask, but it comes from something that Amanda Jane Quick mentioned much earlier. It was a reference to child sexual abuse and children carrying out the abuse. I chair the Parliament's cross-party group on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Recently, we did a very harrowing piece of work on sibling sexual abuse, which we brought to the chamber for a members' business debate. I will read some small extracts from the motion that we debated.

The Convener: I will maybe ask you to just ask your question, if you can, please.

Fulton MacGregor: Okay, convener. I draw members' and witnesses' attention to the motion. It is a major and complex issue and something that even professionals perhaps do not fully understand. It is much more common than is perhaps recorded, so I want to ask what role you think prostitution has in this unspoken shame that is happening in our communities, and do you think that the bill can help to address that?

Amanda Jane Quick: I will read something from an article that I wrote recently in the *Morning Star* in answer to that.

"Child sexual development research shows teenagers"—

and very young children, as young as eight at the moment, are

"learning about sex primarily through pornography and prostitution, which normalises violence, coercion and commodification. Young boys are now being charged with rape or registered as sex offenders. Young girls are beginning to report having fissure repairs of their vagina or anus",

and they are interacting within families to do so, as well as in schools.

"Many teachers have reported that education systems are crumbling as sexual violence is increasing. Exchanging, exposure and sending of nude images by children is common and becoming problematic for adolescent boys and girls. Today's children are exhibiting sexualised aggression and are following a trajectory. Society is experiencing peer sexual violence at unprecedented rates. The 'stepfather/stepdaughter' or 'step-sibling' content referenced in"

prostitution and

"pornography—and in my lived"

and professional

"experience, talking with other prostitutes—were often requests of punters who wanted to 'play this out.' And economic desperation is associated with sexual commodification: as children reach economic stress in their twenties (around 2035) ... Children are learning sexual scripts through social acceptance of the right to buy sex, the right to make pornography. Children will reach adulthood with sexual objectification integrated into their sexual development. There is a preventative time window in which we can change the law, as well as make a call to action for men and women to have brave conversations ... Think about it. Eighty to 90 per cent of women who sell sex experienced a form of childhood sexual abuse"—

sibling to sibling, father, uncle, auntie. Stranger danger does not exist. We educated children in the wrong way—I educated myself in the wrong way in the 1980s, because it was someone I knew who sexually abused me.

"Children are watching and being exposed daily"

to such content. It is a normalised message, thus they are experiencing childhood sexual abuse by proxy—it is non-contact.

The Convener: Can I ask whether any of the other witnesses want to come in on that, in the interests of time?

11:00

Bronagh Andrew: I would have to ask our service about the individual disclosures of women, but, from a past life when I did front-line support many years ago, I am aware of the complexities around familial relationships, women's involvement in selling sex and family reliance on that income but also of acts that women were compelled to undertake by family members, including siblings. It is not rare—it is not unheard of.

Diane Martin: I am thinking about the stats that I used to have to pull together for the women who we supported in south London. Around 75 per cent had experienced childhood sexual abuse. Often, as adults, the women have such a background of multiple issues, including childhood sexual abuse. It is very prevalent.

Rachael Hamilton (Ettrick, Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con): I have a supplementary question to Pauline McNeill's question, which is probably for Bronagh Andrew. Should the bill extend criminalisation to those facilitating prostitution rather than just the buyer?

Bronagh Andrew: I take it that you are referring politely to pimps, so people who are managing and—

Rachael Hamilton: Well, I am interested in the human trafficking element and child sexual exploitation and in what Amanda Jane Quick spoke about in relation to the pimps who are pimping prostitutes in the industry.

Bronagh Andrew: For the sake of brevity, yes, we would fully support the criminalisation of anyone who is profiting from the sale of women's and children's bodies.

Diane Martin: It is not in the bill, but, in the future, I would want to include those who facilitate adult websites—what we call pimping websites. They just say, "Oh, our hands are clean. We're just letting this person get in touch with that person," but that is not the case, because they are totally facilitating it and they are having a big impact on culture, too. Anyone who exploits anyone should face criminal sanctions.

The Convener: Thank you very much indeed. I am sorry that we had to slightly rush after the earlier technical hitch. That concludes our first evidence session. Thank you very much for coming today. I know that this has been a stressful time, but we greatly appreciate your contributions. I will now suspend the meeting for five minutes for a comfort break and a changeover of panel members.

11:03

Meeting suspended.

11:10

On resuming—

The Convener: Welcome back, everybody. We move on to our second panel of witnesses. As with the previous panel, I will allow up to 90 minutes for questions.

I welcome to the meeting Lynsey Walton, chief executive at National Ugly Mugs, and Laura Baillie, political officer with Scotland for Decrim. We are joined online by Niki Adams, from the English Collective of Prostitutes. I welcome them all warmly. I also thank those of them who were able to send in written submissions in advance of the evidence session.

I remind everyone that we are here to consider the provisions of the bill, so I am keen for questions to focus on those.

If at any point anybody needs a break, they should just indicate to me or the clerk on my left-hand side.

I begin with broadly the same opening question as I asked the first panel of witnesses. What parts of the bill are the witnesses opposed to and why? Is there anything in the bill that they support or that could be improved?

Lynsey Walton (National Ugly Mugs): I thank everyone for the opportunity to speak and say a huge thanks to Bronagh Andrew, Diane Martin and Amanda Jane Quick for their contributions.

I am the chief executive of National Ugly Mugs. We are the UK's national sex worker charity and I am a former sex worker myself. We provide a wide range of safety and support services to around 9,000 sex workers in the UK. To put a bit of context around it, in Scotland, we have 600 members.

The previous witnesses covered pretty well what we agree on. We are all here to make everyone feel safer, more included and that they are supported by the system that is around us. Where we differ is that we do not think that the Nordic model is the way to achieve that. We think that supporting sex workers through decriminalisation is the way to go.

Laura Baillie (Scotland for Decrim): Hello everyone. Thank you for having us along today. There are elements of the bill that we agree with, such as quashing historical convictions. It is always good to provide support, of course, and we

agree with removing the penalty for soliciting. However, we strongly oppose the section of the bill that would criminalise the buyer. The reason that we do so is because our members tell us that that is what they want.

First of all, criminalising the buyer would increase the likelihood of violence against sex workers. It would put them in more danger because it would limit their ability to conduct safety checks, such as asking for identification or requesting a deposit so that there is a record of a financial transaction.

Street-based sex workers often work in the same area for reasons of safety. The Nordic model would mean that they would no longer be able to, especially with the increased enforcement. When they work together, it means that they can take note of identifying features of clients with whom workers are leaving or their licence plate numbers.

National Ugly Mugs has an app through which sex workers are able to check clients to see whether they have been abusive or exploitative before. We are concerned that, if the bill was passed, the app would no longer be hosted because it could be seen as facilitating a crime or facilitating prostitution. The app is a lifeline for many sex workers.

People have also pointed out that the penalty for brothel keeping would not be removed. The penalty and the language of the law regarding brothel keeping means that two or more sex workers who work from the same premises, not necessarily even at the same time, can be criminalised. That prevents people from working together for safety.

11:15

Apologies—I need to refer to my notes. There are also cases of our members working with other sex workers but being unable to call the police when clients began to become abusive, because the client stated that they knew that, if the police were called, the sex workers would be at risk of arrest for brothel keeping. Dangerous clients should not be emboldened by the current laws, but they are, and they will still be emboldened by the new legislation.

The bill does not tackle the fundamental reasons why people enter the sex industry, which is primarily because of economic need. We know that 76 per cent of sex workers enter the industry because of poverty.

There are also issues in relation to public health. The World Health Organization and all major HIV charities support full decriminalisation because the evidence demonstrates that rates of HIV go down with decriminalisation. Any form of criminalisation, whether that is of the buyer or the seller, increases the likelihood of sex workers experiencing violence three times over and the likelihood of contracting HIV twice over. Those figures are from a systematic review of 28 years of research in this area, which found that

"diverse forms of police violence and abuses of power, including arbitrary arrest, bribery and extortion, physical and sexual violence, failure to provide access to justice, and forced HIV testing"

all increased under criminalisation. It also showed that

"in contexts of criminalisation, the threat and enactment of police harassment and arrest of sex workers or their clients displaced sex workers into isolated work locations, disrupting peer support networks and service access, and limiting risk reduction opportunities. It discouraged sex workers from carrying condoms and exacerbated existing inequalities experienced by transgender, migrant, and drug-using sex workers. Evidence from decriminalised settings suggests that sex workers in these settings have greater negotiating power with clients and better access to justice."

It is primarily for those reasons that we oppose the criminalisation section of the bill.

The Convener: Thank you for that full response.

Niki Adams (English Collective of Prostitutes): Hello. I am from the English Collective of Prostitutes. We are a sex worker collective that was founded in 1975, so this year is our 50th anniversary. We have gained an enormous amount of experience over the years and we have seen how things have changed. We provide support and assistance to hundreds of women each year, including helping them to defend themselves against criminal charges and also to get justice after rape and other violence. We also help women get housing and benefits to help them get out of sex work if they want to, or to work in less risky and exploitative ways.

We are campaigning for decriminalisation, safety and rights. We have a wide network, including in Scotland. One of the women in our group who was providing a safe space for other sex workers was prosecuted and recently had her charges dropped—rightly so. She, like many other women in our group—the majority, in fact—is a mother. One of the shocking aspects of her situation was that, after she was arrested, social services were called and she felt that there was a threat of having her child taken away.

I am a sex worker myself, and I have worked in many different areas. We have never glamorised prostitution—it is really important to say that. We often do not even say that it is a job; it is an income-generating activity. I was glad to see that people made reference to the fact that prostitution

is driven by women's need for an income, not men's demand for sex.

With regard to the bill, we agree with Lynsey Walton and Laura Baillie on opposing the offence of paying for sex. The evidence shows that that endangers sex workers and pushes us underground. If there is time and it is appropriate for the questions, I would like to say how the issue of being pushed underground works in practice. There is no evidence that it reduces prostitution. I would also like to speak about the Ipswich example that was given in the previous evidence session, because we are very familiar with that situation.

The biggest flaw of the bill is that it does not address poverty, homelessness, lack of pay equity, expensive childcare or the many other reasons that push women—and mothers in particular—into sex work.

We agree with the ultimate aim of trying to reduce prostitution, not because we think that it is inherently violent, but because we think that women should have the option to leave if they want to. We do not understand why the focus is not, therefore, on ending women's poverty.

We agree with the provisions on expunging historical convictions and abolishing the equivalent law of loitering and soliciting. We have a lot of experience of that.

The Convener: I will not ask any supplementaries at the moment. I am conscious from our evidence session with the previous panel that I want to leave as much time as I can for everybody to put their particular questions. I hand over to Liam Kerr.

Liam Kerr: Good morning. Niki Adams, I will come straight back to you. The committee has your evidence that the criminalisation of those who buy sex puts sex workers at greater risk of violence and does not reduce demand for prostitution or reduce trafficking. Panel 1 took a different view and talked about France, specifically, as an exemplar. Your evidence speaks to specific research in France that has a very different, negative take. Can you help the committee understand why there is a discrepancy on that point? Why is one panel of witnesses telling us that France is an exemplar, while you seem to be saying that it is not, and you conclude that criminalisation will not work?

Niki Adams: The evidence from France that we have came from Médecins du Monde, and that came directly from sex workers. It surveyed 600 sex workers, which is a good number, and found that criminalising clients had a detrimental effect on sex workers' safety, health and overall living conditions. It increased poverty, especially among people who were already living precariously, such as undocumented migrant women working on the street. I feel that that is a very credible source of evidence.

I wish to speak to the issue of safety. In some ways, the only way that we can understand the situation is based on our own experience as sex workers. I would give an example of women in east London. At a certain point there was a very severe crackdown, supposedly targeting kerb crawlers but, in fact, it was women who were being arrested most. Women then moved to a place called Wanstead Flats, which is a wooded area, so they were working in much less well-lit places. They were having to keep in the shadows, out of the way, because clients were worried about arrest. They had less time to check out clients.

That may not sound very serious, but it can really make the difference between life and death. It is not that we rely on our instincts completely, but if you have a chance to check out whether there is somebody in the back of the car or whether the man is drunk, it can make a massive difference. If you have to jump into the car immediately, you are more likely to get yourself into trouble.

In the context of working together from premises, one of the women in our group was recently very seriously attacked. The police found the man who did it because the woman had his details from his credit card when he made the booking. In relation to safety, the problem with the criminalising of clients is that, for practical reasons, they will not want to give their details in the same way. We have had experience of people wanting to pay only in cash, not giving their details and not wanting to present themselves somewhere where you can see them before opening the door to them. There are many factors like that.

There is also the question of women being able to work together. Ideally, what decriminalisation would do—and what it has done in New Zealand—is give women the ability to work more inside, rather than out on the street, which is much more dangerous, and to work together with others. It is absurd that you cannot work from premises together with others.

That is why we would say that, practically, criminalising clients increases danger.

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful for that evidence.

I put a similar question to Laura Baillie. You also raise the subject of safety in your evidence, although your evidence says that criminalisation would mean that sex workers

"would be less able to screen potential clients"

and less able to get a deposit. You refer to an app that enables some form of screening.

The witnesses on panel 1 gave a different response to that—they seemed to suggest that screening and checking is not currently happening in practice. That is clearly different from what you say in your evidence. Can you help the committee to understand why there is that difference and tell us, in your view, what is actually happening on the ground?

Laura Baillie: Absolutely. In terms of screening, this is what our members tell us—this is what current active sex workers are telling us. It is an important point: the bill would impact people who are currently selling sex right now. Although Ms Regan has said that the voices that are missing from the debate are those of the buyers, it is actually the voices of the women who are currently selling sex that are missing. I would like to put their voices into the debate, if you do not mind.

When asked, upwards of 96 per cent of active sex workers say that they want full decriminalisation. I am sure that the committee will understand that it is almost impossible to get 96 per cent of people to agree with anything. In terms of safety, we can look at Ireland and Northern Ireland. I believe that it was Jamie Hepburn who brought up our evidence that, in Northern Ireland, following a couple of years in which the type of legislation before us was introduced, the level of violence experienced by those women went up by 225 per cent. That is an astronomical number. In Ireland, it was 92 per cent.

A 2020 study that was commissioned by HIV Ireland found that sex workers who experience violence at work were increasingly reluctant to report to the police under the Nordic model, and that both their physical health and mental health were impacted by the introduction of the legislation. Sex workers also reported that stigma against them had increased following its introduction.

To go back to France, I can give you the statistics just now, as I have them in front of me. The "What do sex workers think about the French prostitution act?" report by Médecins du Monde—apologies for my terrible French pronunciation—says that the law has led to 42 per cent of workers being exposed to more violence; that is from a survey of 600 sex workers. It also said that 38 per cent were finding it increasingly hard to demand condom use; 70 per cent observed no improvement or a deterioration in relations with the police; 78 per cent were losing income; and 63 per cent were experiencing a deterioration in living conditions. Across the board, the best evidence shows that the Nordic model is not safe for sex workers.

I want to highlight the research by Dr Lynzi Armstrong, from Victoria University of Wellington—who also submitted written evidence to the committee—as it is very important. She has conducted research—some of the only research—into the different legal models and their effect on sex workers. Her research focused on New Zealand, which has decriminalisation; Ireland, which has the Nordic model; and Scotland, which has partial criminalisation.

She found that the countries that have adopted the Nordic model have high rates of harmful consequences for sex workers. Examples include

"increased vulnerability"

and physical violence;

"barriers to accessing justice, increased economic precarity, discrimination"

due to higher levels of stigma; and various forms of structural violence. In contrast, where countries and states—in Australia, sex work is regulated at state level—have decriminalisation, it is demonstrated that sex workers have an increased ability to refuse clients if they so wish; they are more aware of their rights; and strategies for safety are better supported.

As I have mentioned, that research fills a gap. A total of 70 sex workers were specifically interviewed, and hundreds were surveyed. Both stigma and structural violence were more deeply experienced in Ireland, which has the Nordic model. All who were interviewed in Ireland did not support the current legislative framework, and they were very critical of support organisations that the Government funded, as they believed these feed into

"stigmatising narratives and do not provide meaningful support."

I would like to talk about the Scottish participants; I will be very quick. Stigma was also a common talking point from Scottish participants, who directly blamed Government policy and rhetoric from some politicians. They also said that they did not believe that sex workers were listened to by those in power. That lack of agency had a profoundly negative effect on their mental health, as they felt they could not have any say in determining their own fate. Current laws were regarded as bad, but the fear of the Nordic model was much higher.

Liam Kerr: I am very grateful. Lynsey, you heard Laura Baillie talking about the Irish experience. Your written evidence also refers to Ireland. You said that, in Northern Ireland, the Department of Justice found "no evidence" of

"a downward pressure on ... demand ... or supply".

You also refer to a minister in the Republic of Ireland saying that "demand has not decreased."

Towards the end of the evidence session, the first panel said that the bill is the only legislation

that reduces prostitution. You cited the example of Ireland. What, if anything has happened to supply, not just the demand side? You said that only 15 men were convicted in seven years in the Republic, so is it actually a policing issue?

11:30

Lynsey Walton: It is good to look at Ireland because the Irish are our closest neighbours, so it is a nice way to make a comparison. It is worth pointing out that both Governments accept that the approach has not worked. That is not coming from us; the systems themselves have said that they have not worked.

I will take a small liberty and steal a little bit of Laura Baillie's question, because you talked about the alerting system and I can add some numbers to that.

Our checker tool and the reporting and alerting system that we use is not an app. I will not go off on why, because I could talk all day about it. However, in the past 12 months, the number of alerts that we released to sex workers across the UK was pushing 1 million. That says that the system is being used.

Since we started in 2012, we have sent about 4.4 million alerts around the sex worker community. Sex workers are using the system to check various details, such as usernames or car registration numbers. It is very worrying that that might not be available to them in the future.

I will go back to Ireland now—I promise. I will check my notes. [*Interruption*.]

The Convener: Do you want to come back to that?

Lynsey Walton: Yes, we can come back to that. I do not want to waste any more time.

Liam Kerr: I will ask one tiny question on something that you just said, Lynsey Walton. You talked about millions of alerts going out to users. Given what we heard, how much power does the sex worker have to decline the transaction or instruction once they receive that alert?

Lynsey Walton: That question assumes that decline is the only answer when it gets to that point. The system is about giving information to sex workers and helping them to make informed decisions based on what is happening for them in that moment. I am happy to share some data after the meeting on the types of alerts that we share. The range of alerts that we share empowers the sex workers with information enables them to take action.

When we get a report of harm from a sex worker, the interesting information is whether they make the choice to go to the police—that links to your comment about the policing in Ireland. In only 35 per cent of the reports that we get in—in the past 12 months, around 900 reports of harm came in—is the person willing to give anonymous information to the police. If we are talking about giving full information to the police, the number of people willing to do that hovers at around only 12 per cent.

We are given information that we share with the community so that sex workers can make decisions to help themselves. However, they do not trust the police to be able to protect them at the moment. That is really concerning for me.

Jamie Hepburn: When speaking with the previous panel, I promised to put my question about common ground to the second panel. Those whom we heard from on panel 1 are in favour of the bill and you oppose it. Do you perceive there to be any common ground between you?

Lynsey Walton: Absolutely. I know that they had the advantage of going first, but I definitely echo the comment that we are all looking to keep people safe. The difference for me is that I want to ensure that people have the opportunity not only to be safe but to find work that they want to do. I want them to have access to benefits, safe housing and healthcare. I want them to have the financial security that comes along with that. It would be better to focus time and resources on that than on criminalising clients, which will put the system under even more pressure.

Laura Baillie: There are commonalities. We are all striving for women to be as safe as they possibly can be; we just differ on how to do that. We all agree that poverty is the main driver for people who enter sex work. However, the Nordic model does not seek to mitigate any of that poverty. Women will still have to sell sex to make ends meet.

It is important that we take an evidence-based approach, especially for something that is so difficult to talk about and that is emotionally heightened for everybody. My role as an academic is to ensure that we use the best available evidence. I am in favour of full decriminalisation because it is proven to lower the rates of violence against sex workers.

Niki Adams: The other thing that we agree on is that sex workers who work on the street should be decriminalised. We have a big campaign against prostitute cautions. You have a slightly different system in Scotland, but prostitute cautions in other parts of the UK are scandalous in that they stay on your record until you are 100 years old. You do not ever have to agree to the caution and there is no right of appeal.

Our campaign has highlighted the impact of criminalisation on sex workers—of having a

caution and a conviction—and how that can set the trajectory of your life from an early age. As soon as you get a caution and conviction, that can stop access to other jobs, it can stop you being able to travel, it can threaten the custody of your children and it can mean that you cannot even get basic things like insurance and a bank account. We have seen from our campaign that prostitute cautions open a window on to the general harm of criminalisation.

We definitely agree that street-based sex workers should be decriminalised and convictions should be expunged. At the moment, the only thing that has happened is that someone with such convictions does not have to reveal those to an employer, but if they get an enhanced disclosure and barring service check—a criminal records check—they still come up. We are fighting to get cautions and convictions taken off women's records permanently, so that they will not be a bar to other jobs.

I will say one other thing on the question of declining a client. From my experience and that of women in my network, the power to decline a client or to set boundaries around the services that you provide is an important litmus test of how exploitative your working conditions are. You may not know that after New Zealand decriminalised sex work, 65 per cent of sex workers said that they felt that they had more power to decline clients. That is an important test of how effective a change in the law can be.

Jamie Hepburn: Thank you. Liam Kerr covered much of the territory that I wanted to cover around making sure that we protect those who are involved in prostitution and sex work against forms of violence, and I was going to draw on everyone's submissions in doing so. However, my next two questions are specifically about the written evidence that Lynsey Walton has provided. Paragraph 180 of the policy memorandum for the bill sets out that the approach

"would ensure that Scotland meets its obligations under international and European human rights law".

I was struck by your evidence, which says that the bill

"is contrary to international human rights standards".

Those are two polar opposite views, and I am intrigued to understand why you take your particular view.

Lynsey Walton: I note that there are already laws in place that are trying to handle the trafficking and exploitation element. The bill will not introduce something new in that regard, as trafficking is already a criminal offence. The bill will not support the handling of that, because it will not create the environment for that, as it were—that is not its target audience. If the aim is to stop the trafficking and exploitation of people, that law already exists. The bill is about criminalising the consensual exchange of funds for sexual services, and there is no evidence that that has an impact on the organised crime and trafficking element.

Jamie Hepburn: I take your point about the existing legislation that deals with areas of human rights concern, but you said in your submission that the bill is

"contrary to international human rights standards".

Will you expand on that?

Lynsey Walton: I cannot expand on that right now, as my brain has gone blank, but I will absolutely come back to you on that.

Jamie Hepburn: That would be helpful.

I have another question—

Lynsey Walton: Sorry, but I think that Laura is about to jump in.

Laura Baillie: Apologies.

Jamie Hepburn: Not at all.

Laura Baillie: I believe that the bill is contrary to international human rights because of the increased risk of violence and the increased risk of police harassment and violence. A recent article in *The BMJ* pointed out that 42 per cent of street-based workers in London had experienced police harassment and violence. That is very obviously contrary to human rights.

Jamie Hepburn: Your point is more about the consequences, which you think would run contrary to people's human rights, rather than about the provisions of the bill per se.

Laura Baillie: Yes.

Jamie Hepburn: Okay. That is useful to understand.

Lynsey, your written evidence states that there is

"strong evidence that the Scottish public oppose the proposed measure to outlaw the purchase of sex."

You talk about opinion polling that you commissioned involving more than 1,000 Scottish adults in May 2024. You state:

"The results showed that 69% of Scots say the Scottish Government should focus on protecting the health and safety of sex workers, and providing support to people who want to leave the industry, compared to 14% who support the government passing new laws to prevent people exchanging sexual services for money."

It is only fair to place on record that a poll out this week from the polling agency Find Out Now suggests that 68 per cent of people say that they back

"stronger laws against buying sex as a way of tackling pimping, organised crime and sex trafficking."

I know that the questions in the polls are not precisely the same, but I want to place the results in context.

To go back to the poll that you commissioned, which YouGov undertook, were those two options mutually exclusive? I presume that some of the 14 per cent could also support what some of the 69 per cent said.

Lynsey Walton: I am not entirely sure what you mean by the exclusivity of both parts. I can provide the full details to you after the meeting, so that you have the breakdown. There is an on-going survey—I think that it is run every six months—that goes back several years and that looks at a very similar issue. Laura Baillie might have to correct me on the numbers, but I think that, in that, there is a rate of about 2:1 in favour of decriminalisation of sex work. I am happy to give you the details, so that there is transparency.

Jamie Hepburn: Forgive me if I am not being clear. The point that I am trying to drive at is whether people could subscribe to both points of view or could support only one or other of the options. I appreciate that you might not be able to answer that right now so, if we could get more information, that would be helpful.

Lynsey Walton: I can absolutely follow up with the information on that.

Laura Baillie: I thank Jamie Hepburn for bringing up the issue of polls. There is also an Amnesty International poll that shows that the majority of adults in the UK support the decriminalisation of sex work. On the poll that Jamie Hepburn mentioned that found that 68 per cent of people want to criminalise the purchase of sex in order to combat trafficking, the question was misleading, and a lot of the associated questions in that poll were also misleading. Elected officials need to be careful not to mislead the public or to get a result that they want rather than truly reflect what the people of Scotland think.

Jamie Hepburn: That is helpful to understand. Clearly, we will have the opportunity to ask questions about that, just as I am asking questions about the poll that Lynsey Walton's evidence cites.

I have one final question, because it is important to ask the same question of panel 2 as I did of panel 1. It goes back to the duty to provide assistance and support to those seeking to leave prostitution and sex work. I think that all the people on the panel have said that they support that provision. What would that support look like? Could it be provided on a non-statutory basis?

11:45

Lynsey Walton: A lot of the elements that the previous witnesses mentioned are exactly what we would want it to look like. We would want there to be anti-discrimination protections in law for sex workers, as well as robust evidence in policy making, so that everything is evidence based. We would also want sex workers to be listened to with regard to what they want. That is what we would like to see.

The difference in the approach that our members and I would suggest is that we would want there to be no obligation for someone to say that they want to exit the industry in order to access those protections. If that were not the case, a huge divide would be created between people who could get support and those who could not. My exit journey was a long one. A lot of people are in and out, and are sometimes in dual roles, so you need to make sure that, as part of that provision, everyone has equal access to all the support, not just people who say that they want to leave the industry.

Laura Baillie: We support the increasing of service provision in theory but, in reality, the two funds that Ms Regan claims would be able to provide the financial backing for the support are already overstretched, and the women's sector is severely underfunded as it is.

In a letter to the committee on 9 September, Ms Regan claims that a new budget will come into effect in the next session of Parliament, but there is no indication that that budget would be increased or where that increase might come from.

Nordic model advocates lean on the provision of exit services as a justification for increasing criminalisation. However, if we look at Sweden, and at France, which had similar provisions in its legislation, we can see that that has not been realised, and, instead, the money has been spent on policing. Further, in Ireland, Nordic model supporters acknowledge that there is no evidence that those things are in place there.

As Lynsey Walton has already said, there is also a risk that such services would align with common practice in support services and, therefore, would require the women to leave the sex industry in order to gain access. The Scottish Government's own research highlights that support services for sex workers are not adequate, and that, often, those services rely on the worker leaving the industry in order to access support. That leaves people in an extremely vulnerable position, either because they have left sex work with insufficient financial support to replace their earnings or because—as we have found in many cases—they continue working in the industry but

do not tell support services about that, which means that they are less able to access help and support when they need it.

Often, the help that is provided is given from only one perspective, and that can affect who goes to what service, whereas services such as NUMbrella lane in Glasgow, which Lynsey oversees and which provides a vital drop-in service for current sex workers, are not able to access Government funding at the moment.

Niki Adams: On support services, there is evidence from France that the support services that were provided there were completely inadequate. The amount of money that was provided to people never met their economic needs, and the services benefited only a tiny number of people because they were not suitable for most. We would say that services have to be non-judgmental. If they are tied to criminalisation of any kind, you end up with surveillance and forced exit.

Our sister organisation, the US PROstitutes Collective, oversaw a guaranteed care-income pilot in which women were given $2,000 a month for one year. It involved single mothers, most of whom were sex workers, who were at risk of criminalisation and of losing their children to child welfare services. The results of that pilot, which have just come in, show that, significantly, those women felt that they did not have to go into sex work, were more able to leave sex work and were more able to work in less risky and exploitative ways. That demonstrates that direct money support to women, particularly to mothers, is the most effective kind of service to help people get out of prostitution if they want to.

Katy Clark: The evidence in relation to proper resourcing is extremely helpful and is important for everybody in the debate to understand. However, many of us will be looking carefully at the provisions on paying for sex, because that is probably the area where there is the biggest divide in people's views. We will be looking at what evidence we can find in relation to how that model or other models might impact on levels of prostitution, violence against women and human trafficking. I know that you have already said quite a bit about that in relation to other questions, but any further information that you can give us would be helpful.

The previous witnesses made a point about the impact of prostitution on wider society, and I think that we need to think about that carefully. How would you respond to the points that were made about the attitudes of prostitutes' clients towards prostitutes and the more general issues about the objectification of women and the increased normalisation of pornography in our society? This Parliament has been considering the increased levels of sexism and misogyny, the attitudes of young men and young women, and what that means for society more generally—it is a massive issue. I am asking about what the Parliament tells people in Scotland is acceptable and the impact that that has on how people behave.

Laura Baillie: It is important to note that there is no good evidence that demonstrates that the Nordic model reduces trafficking. The only place where we have data from before and after the introduction of such legislation is either Northern Ireland or Ireland—I can double check which. It shows that there was no reduction in demand or in trafficking. Again, it is important that we take an evidence-based approach.

I understand the point that you are making about wider society and acknowledge that there is an epidemic of violence against women and girls. However, it is not right to put the people who are currently in the position of selling sex at greater risk of violence in order to send a symbolic message, because that would enact real harm.

On the issue of what can be done in wider society, we absolutely need better sex education and we need to have it delivered in a way that is appropriate for various age levels. I would also like to see Andrew Tate banned, but that is probably a matter for a different committee.

Misogyny is absolutely a problem, but the proposal would increase the risk of violence against the people whom you are trying to protect, and that is why we do not agree with it.

Katy Clark: We know the issues around human trafficking, but we also know that the prostitution industry is a multimillion-pound industry that profits from women. We have heard evidence in relation to that, and our witnesses have been very clear about poverty being a massive driver for women entering the industry. In terms of what the Parliament can do to support women, what other impactful measures would you suggest be included in the bill? For example, it has been suggested that there could be amendments that would allow women to work in groups as long as no profit was extracted by anyone else. Is that the kind of thing that you think the committee should consider?

Lynsey Walton: Yes, absolutely. That is definitely the sort of thing that we need to look at. International non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International and the World Health Organization will have more evidence about steps that can be taken. They also support decriminalisation, and can suggest a lot of things that that would do exactly what you say with regard to keeping people safer.

I fully agree with what Laura Baillie said: sending a message should not be down to the

people who are the most marginalised in society and who face violence. I think that we can do better than that.

I can see Niki champing at the bit to say something.

Niki Adams: Not at all.

Lynsey Walton: Sorry—I thought you were.

Katy Clark: I have a question for Niki Adams. You said that you felt that the model that is being proposed meant that the prostitute would have less time to check out the client. However, would completely decriminalising the regime for women not empower them in that situation?

Niki Adams: Not really, because, if the client who you are looking to get money from is hiding from the police, that literally forces you to relocate to areas that are more isolated, with less street lighting and so on. It also affects how you are able to work in relation to clients in premises.

On the question about the level of prostitution, I want to talk about the Ipswich example, which is a good one. Following the horrific murders, we set up the safety first coalition, which brought together a load of different people, including people involved in the church and in health pilots as well as local residents. We pressed for decriminalisation and safety, because we found that people really understood the connection between criminalisation and violence, and how criminalisation had put women at much more risk of violence. There was a claim that prostitution was reduced because the police cracked down on clients, but, in fact, what happened as a result of the work of the women in our network, who were very active at the time, was that very focused resources were given to women. In the initial stages, time was spent looking at the situation of each woman and asking her what she needed to get out of prostitution, and at least £10,000 was spent on each of them. Most of the interventions concerned housing, but there was also debt relief and things such as dentistry—really practical things like that. It is an example that could be looked at in quite a lot of detail with regard to what actually helps women get out of prostitution.

Unfortunately, after some of that financial help fell away, women ended up going back to work and are now working in industrial areas in Ipswich. There is a view that people do not want prostitution in the city centre, so it has become much more hidden and underground, but women are still working on the streets, only on the outskirts of the town. That is how it works in practice.

On the police and safety, people have to be able to go to the police to report crimes. However, at the moment, there is a massive deterrent to doing that, partly because women feel that the police do not protect them—they seem to be focused on prosecution of prostitution offences rather than on protection. We have spoken to women who have come forward to report rape and violence but who have found that, instead of their attacker being pursued, they have ended up facing charges for prostitution. That is a big problem.

I reiterate that no one is talking about decriminalising trafficking. We have to look at the effectiveness of the law in that regard and the effectiveness of the support for victims of trafficking, but that is completely unconnected to the question of criminalising clients. You really should consider that a lot of migrant sex workers in particular say that they go into prostitution to escape exploitative labour conditions in other jobs. That is a really serious, concrete consideration: we have to look at the employment alternatives that are available to people, particularly young people, migrants and people who are generally discriminated against.

Pauline McNeill: Good morning. First, I say to Laura Baillie that I agree that the person she mentioned—I will not use his name—should be banned.

There is a commonality of view among the members of the committee and the witnesses about the importance of the safety of women. Whatever issues we might agree or disagree on, we have to wrestle with whether the legislation does what it sets out to do.

I want to continue on the issues of violence against women and girls and the wider harm that is done to women, which Katy Clark talked about. There have been many debates in this Parliament about the attitudes of men and boys and how we really have to tackle them. I would like to hear a bit more about how you feel that prostitution or sex work feeds into normal male attitudes that women are just available to buy sex from. How can we make the necessary distinction in our society? That is what concerns me more than anything when I am wrestling with the issue of how we keep women safe and what the right thing to do here is. Both panels of witnesses have made excellent cases, and what has been said has been very powerful. However, it is really important for me to hear what you have to say about the issue that I have just raised. I ask Lynsey Walton to respond first.

12:00

Lynsey Walton: Similar to what you allude to, the important thing for me is that the stigma causes big problems for sex workers when it comes to approaching places for help and so on. That allows bad actors or people who may want to

do them harm to get away with it, because there is a stigma attached.

I am sure that one of the ladies will be able to jump in and tell me which country this is, but in one country, the tide turned against sex workers in this very situation, because the idea was perpetuated that the sex worker is doing something wrong. We may think that this is about criminalisation of the client, but in any kind of criminalisation around the work that the sex worker is doing, the stigma is sticky, and it sticks to the most vulnerable, rather than giving them a way out.

I am sure that one of you ladies knows which country that is, but I am not sure.

Laura Baillie: I do not want to guess.

Lynsey Walton: I will find out and send the information to the committee.

Laura Baillie: Misogyny in society is a very big issue, but increasing violence against women is not related to an increase in sex work. It is important that we consider things such as pornography and social media. On the comments that Amanda Jane Quick said that she has seen online, I have also seen such comments about women on Facebook, so it is not just related to sex work—it is a general and very real issue in society. I absolutely want the Scottish Government to do more to tackle it, but I do not think that the bill is the right way of going about it, because it will enact more harm on women. I understand what you are saying about sending a message to wider society, but if we want to tackle violence against women, this is not the way to go about it. It will increase violence against women.

Pauline McNeill: You talked quite a bit about the Irish model, which does not seem to have been effective compared with other models. Have you covered everything that you wanted to say about that?

Laura Baillie: Probably not.

Pauline McNeill: Please continue.

Laura Baillie: In Ireland, a report from the Department for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration—so I think that we can say that it is pretty unbiased—found that there had been increased violence against sex workers and no reduction in demand or in trafficking, and that the legislation had not achieved its objectives. In a letter to the committee on 9 September, Ms Regan pointed out that that was because there was a "reasonable inference" clause. Although that might help the case of her bill, but we would argue that it would be an absolute disaster for sex workers. For example, if they are working from their home, anybody who enters their home could be reasonably inferred to be there for the purposes of sex work. That further isolates these women and drives sex work further underground. They will go to places where they will not be detected by the police. The fundamental issue with the Nordic model is that it places the emphasis on women avoiding police detection rather than on them asking, "How can I be as safe as I can be while I do this?"

The Convener: I think that Niki Adams wants to come in before Pauline McNeill asks her final question.

Niki Adams: I will add something in answer to the previous question about the levels of violence against women and whether the objectification of women contributes to that. It is a question of how much power women have to refuse, and I think that it would be useful to look at what is happening with domestic violence in that regard. The level of violence against women in this society is terrifying. It is absolutely scandalous that two women a week are killed by their partner or former partner and that the levels of reported rape and convictions are so low. The question in relation to domestic violence is, what power do women have to refuse or to leave? What resources and support are there? What is happening with effective prosecution of violence? We have to ask the same questions in relation to sex workers. What options and what power do sex workers have to work in safer, as opposed to less risky, ways?

At the moment, we have a choice every day: either we can work more safely with others and risk criminal charges, or we can work on our own, which would be legal, but is much more dangerous. We have to start with the empowering of women.

Pauline McNeill: I completely understand what you are saying. However, I clarify that my question was about the wider harm that male attitudes cause society, and I think that we are all probably agreed on that point.

I want to ask what is, for me, quite an important question for Niki Adams or Lynsey Walton about the men who organise sex workers. Do we call them pimps? I not know whether that is the right language. I sat on the Roots Out of Prostitution board many years ago, when I represented the Glasgow Kelvin constituency, which was quite different 20 years ago. Things were not so organised then, but I know that it has changed a lot. Anything that you can tell us about who organises things and who these men are—is it men?—would be really helpful.

The Convener: I ask Laura Baillie to come in, and then Lynsey Walton.

Laura Baillie: Me? Okay. I can tell you that the majority of sex work is carried out indoors and is arranged online. It is mostly undertaken by

independent people who advertise themselves on AdultWork.com and websites such as that.

Lynsey and Niki can probably speak more to the issue than I can.

Lynsey Walton: I would be simply guessing if I gave an answer to that right now, but I can certainly go away and have a look at it. As Laura said, the majority of the work is indoors. It would be interesting to look at how things are organised.

Niki Adams: Can I add something?

The Convener: Yes—in you come, Niki.

Niki Adams: I would define a pimp as somebody who takes women's money by force, through coercion and violence. We should distinguish between them and people who maybe take on an employer-like role in a brothel. Most of the latter are women, in fact—in most cases, as people have said, it is women working together. That is definitely our experience. The problem is that anybody who takes on a tenancy or a lease or does the advertising gets categorised as a third party and, I think, is labelled as a pimp, which should not be the case. You must distinguish between those two types.

When it comes to violent pimps on the street, our experience is that the police absolutely will not tackle that. If the first thing that changed was that the police focused on and started to address the violence that sex workers report to them, that would bring significant change, and we would be able to start cleaning out of the industry the people who are violent and exploitative, and who, to a certain extent, are being protected at the moment.

We have a lot of evidence that the police really will not tackle that issue, in the same way as they are very inadequate in tackling violence against women and girls generally. We have even seen some collaboration between the police and pimps, both those on the street and the more organised, exploitative bosses.

I know that this is not a popular view, but sex workers' experience of the police is not a good one. The police, even in Scotland, have a reputation of being very toxic, sexist, misogynistic and discriminatory—that is our experience of the police. You will be asking the same police force to implement this law, and will be giving them more powers, yet the powers that they have at the moment are being abused, and we are often the targets of that abuse.

Rona Mackay: My question follows on from what Niki Adams was saying about brothel keeping, which I guess is just an old-fashioned way of saying "women working together". I will just draw out a few bits from Laura Baillie's written submission, which says:

> "Brothel-keeping laws are used overwhelmingly to target migrant women: research from the Republic of Ireland found that 85% of those convicted in Ireland for 'Brothel-keeping' in recent years were migrant women. One of our members was charged with brothel-keeping, despite only seeking to create a safer environment for herself and her colleagues. Police arrived in large numbers with a battering ram, arrested her, and then proceeded to make stigmatising comments associated with her being a sex worker."

In the same vein, the submission says that, although the

> "bill proposes to decriminalise"

women,

> "the police would still hold power over sex workers due to their ability to refer sex working mothers to social services"

and

> "to refer migrant sex workers for potential immigration enforcement".

I think that that is a really powerful part of the submission.

Knowing full well that you do not support the bill anyway, Laura, I wonder whether, if it were to pass, you would be in favour of brothel keeping being decriminalised.

Laura Baillie: Yes, absolutely. We definitely want brothel keeping to be decriminalised. For example, when co-operatives of up to four women were decriminalised in New Zealand, the result was that there were fewer larger brothels and exploitative situations, because women were able to work with one another independently.

With regard to our members' experiences, I think that this highlights one of the issues with believing that more police involvement in sex workers' lives is a good thing. From what we have seen from our members—and as Niki Adams has mentioned and as Lynsey Walton will tell you—there is no trust in the police among sex workers. They will actively try to avoid police detection. Irish sex workers will tell you that, when they are approached on the street, they will just say, "Yes, that's great. Thank you so much for these services. I will definitely join them." Then they just walk away down the street, because they still have money to make.

That is the issue here: they still have money to make, they still have rent to pay and they still need to feed their families. Increased criminalisation will force them more into isolation and further underground. One of the members in question is actually in the public gallery, and I am sure that she would be very happy to speak to committee members about her experience.

I am going to stop talking now, because I am getting a bit emotional about it.

Rona Mackay: I will let in others in a second, but essentially, you are saying that if this law were to be passed, the police would be unlikely to say to women, "Oh, you're not the criminal here. Are you all right?" Are they unlikely to have that attitude? Are we just supposing that? I just do not know. Lynsey, do you want to respond?

Lynsey Walton: I talked about levels of trust when we were discussing engagement with the police. To go from the current position to decriminalising brothel keeping is fine, but where are the bridges to build trust in that situation? That is going to take a lot of effort, so I agree with everything that Laura Baillie has said.

Rona Mackay: Niki, do you want to come in?

Niki Adams: Our big experience here is that the police might say that they do not prosecute women for brothel keeping, but what they do instead are so-called welfare visits. They call them welfare visits, but women experience them as raids; it is still a number of police officers coming in with immigration officials. Instead of prosecuting anyone then, the police will often say, "This is a brothel; it's illegal; and if you don't move within three days, we're going to prosecute you", and the women will, of course, move on.

Women are constantly on the move, and not one woman to whom I have spoken who has moved from a brothel to another place of work has had improved working conditions. Things are always worse. All the security things that you manage to establish such as closed circuit television and a pool of regular clients are completely dismantled by these so-called welfare visits, which women experience as an increase in surveillance and, indeed, an increase in terror.

From what we have seen, the majority of women who are targeted by these raids are migrants, because anti-trafficking is often used to justify the raids as well as arrests on the street. I do not know whether it is the same in Scotland—it is definitely true here—but the police get designated funds for anti-trafficking and modern slavery work, and they show that they are doing those activities by carrying out brothel raids. That is why so many migrant sex workers get picked up in these raids—and they do not get protection; instead, they get deportation.

Let us get the police out of this. Let us ensure that sex workers have rights like other workers and that they can actually come forward and demand protection from the police.

Rona Mackay: Thank you.

The Convener: I call Ash Regan, to be followed by Sharon Dowey.

Ash Regan: Good afternoon, as it is now, and thanks to the panel for attending today.

To start with, I want to pick up on the comment that Lynsey Walton made quite a while ago about millions of National Ugly Mugs alerts. I might have heard you wrong, but did you say that the figure was 4 million?

Lynsey Walton: It is 4.4 million since inception in 2012, which I suppose is a little while ago.

12:15

Ash Regan: That really sounds like a lot of violent men about whom you have to send out alerts. However, I will move on.

National Ugly Mugs openly states that it is funded by Vivastreet. For the benefit of the committee, I note that Vivastreet makes millions of pounds every year from facilitating the prostitution of thousands of women. Lynsey Walton, do you perhaps see a conflict between representing the women's interests on the one hand and, on the other, being funded by, and possibly representing the interests of, those who profit from those women?

Lynsey Walton: The sad fact is that our pool of resources for keeping the safety mechanism that we have been talking about going has definitely been diminished. Most of our funding comes from private grants and from organisations such as the Robertson Trust and the National Lottery. The Vivastreet element of our funding has been around for—gosh, I am not going to guess, but it has been around for a while. One of the elements that it helps us fund is vocational support, which helps sex workers think about their careers and provides bursaries for sex workers who might want to leave.

I can totally understand why, on the face of it, there might appear to be a conflict of interest, but the amount of money that is given is certainly not substantive. We definitely do our due diligence when it comes to whom we partner with, what is put in place behind the scenes and what we do with that.

Laura Baillie: I would point out that Scotland for Decrim is a volunteer-run grass-roots organisation. We have no funding, so we are completely independent and are solely driven by what our members want.

Ash Regan: Can you tell us a bit more about your members? Who would be in that category? I guess that you would use the term sex workers, but would that include women who are currently working in prostitution, as well as women who do lap dancing, webcam work, dominatrix work and so on? Would it cover that whole range? Would it include managers—pimps—too?

Laura Baillie: No. We have no pimps in our membership, and that is quite an offensive suggestion. We are very much worker based, and

our membership takes into account people who are involved in what we would call full-service sex work, which other people might know as prostitution, as well as people who work in lap-dancing clubs and a range of other areas. Our members are mostly current and former sex workers, but there are also academics, trade unionists, representatives of third sector organisations and some talented artists.

Ash Regan: I want to ask you the same question about the buyers that I asked the previous witnesses. My view is that we very much do not see or hear from the buyers, and that the best that we can get when it comes to understanding their views on prostitution and the women they pay for sex comes from looking at things such as Punternet, where you can see women being reviewed as commodities, like takeaway meals. Do you have any views on why the buyers do not come forward to make the case with regard to their right to buy sex? Do you have any idea why that is?

Laura Baillie: First, I would say that we do not agree that there is a right to buy sex. Lynsey, would you like to come in on that?

Lynsey Walton: Can you clarify the question, Ms Regan? Are you asking why buyers do not come forward to talk about the fact that they want to buy sex?

Ash Regan: I suppose that I am just curious about it. In the 25 years since Sweden brought in its legislation, there has been a debate about the issue in many countries. The arguments against moving to a Nordic model are always exactly the same in every country, and it is always women who make the cases for and against the proposal. I am genuinely curious as to why we do not hear from the punters in this debate, when it is one that concerns them.

Lynsey Walton: From my point of view, I do not specifically serve sex buyers—I represent the voices of sex workers. However, the idea of asking people who buy sex for their opinion is certainly interesting. What sorts of questions would you want to ask them?

Ash Regan: Well, if we could find any who would want to talk to us, I am sure that the committee would be interested in hearing from them. I will hand back to the convener.

The Convener: I call Sharon Dowey, to be followed by Fulton MacGregor.

Sharon Dowey: Sections 6 and 7 of the bill seek to put a duty on the Scottish Government to ensure that assistance and support are provided, and the financial memorandum published alongside it estimates the cost of that at £1.2 million to £1.9 million. Do you have a view on whether that amount would be sufficient? What types of support are needed? Would the provisions in the bill be helpful in achieving that?

I will ask Laura Baillie first, as she commented on the issue in her submission.

Laura Baillie: No, I do not believe that that is a realistic amount. Indeed, the written response that Scotland for Decrim provided to the Finance and Public Administration Committee on the financial memorandum highlighted not only the current support for the women, but the effects of the Nordic model, which would be increased policing and a strain on the national health service.

Some of our members entered sex work because they were in such long queues to get medical help or assessments for mental health, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or autism—which I understand has recently been brought to the forefront of the conversation—or for chronic illness and so on. Some entered sex work to be able to pay for private healthcare. We should not be seeing that in a country with an NHS.

With the introduction of the Nordic model, we would see an increase in STI transmission and HIV rates, and that has not been costed in the financial memorandum. It is just not realistic in the current situation, because there are more sex workers who require help than we know of and because of the financial implications of introducing the Nordic model.

Lynsey Walton: Laura Baillie has just said all the things that I was going to say, but that is okay. I completely agree about the amount of money that has been suggested; I think that significantly more would be needed, because we would want to include more areas of risk and other elements.

I have already said this, but it is important to me that any assistance is not connected with a desire to leave the industry; it should be just support, regardless of what you want to do from there. That approach should be built into all levels of support in the bill.

Sharon Dowey: Laura, I know that you are not in favour of the Nordic model, but is there a model that you are in favour of?

Laura Baillie: Full decriminalisation.

The Convener: I call Fulton MacGregor.

Fulton MacGregor: Good afternoon, and thank you very much for your very strong evidence so far.

Amanda Jane Quick, who was on the previous panel, told us that if she had been in front of us 10 years ago, she would have been saying something very different. Presumably, she meant that she would have been against the criminalisation of buyers at that point, but now that she is out of it—

to use her words—she realises that that is what is needed.

I know that this panel of witnesses are clearly representing the views of women who are currently working, but is there a risk that many of those women will one day change their mind, because of, say, a change in life circumstances, a specific traumatic event or an accumulation of trauma over the years? Is it perhaps better to make a mark just now and draw a red line, instead of waiting for that cycle to potentially repeat itself?

I am not saying that that will happen, or that I have a view on it just now—after all, we are just starting to take evidence on this. There are strong arguments to be made for both cases, as we have heard today. I thought that Amanda Jane made a very powerful point, but what do the witnesses think about it?

Laura Baillie: I would reiterate that Scotland for Decrim is made up of active and former sex workers. It is not the case that all former sex workers believe the same thing across the board.

Again, the people who will be most affected by the bill are those currently selling sex, which is why we have placed such an emphasis on hearing their voices and hearing what they want. They are saying that they do not want the Nordic model, because it will increase their risk of violence.

Lynsey Walton: For me, the risk of putting in place something that will increase harm now is too great, and, as has been said, people might change their minds or how they feel at a later date.

I would never want to speak to another sex worker's experiences, and everyone is always going to have their own unique experiences around this, but we can always go back to the evidence from the many studies that have been done around the world, and reflect on the fact that a lot of institutions believe that full decriminalisation is an evidence-based approach. We should go with the evidence, which shows that that approach is safest and what sex workers want. As Laura Baillie has said, we should prioritise what current sex workers want while putting in place a framework that will support people throughout the rest of their lives.

Niki Adams: I would add only that we should aim to end women's poverty and help women exit. After that, we can see how many women are left in prostitution and ask them what they think of the proposal.

The fact is that, if the proposal causes harm now, we should not do it. If we are focusing on trying to reduce prostitution, because we believe that it is harmful, we should be ending women's poverty. That would not mean that every woman would get out of prostitution, but it would make a massive difference.

At that point, after we have addressed women's poverty, homelessness and all the other reasons that women go into sex work in the first place, we can see how many people are left in prostitution. Those are not the only reasons for people going into prostitution—there are others, which were addressed by the previous panel—but they are a massive part of the issue. Therefore, let us focus all our efforts on that approach, reduce prostitution and see where we are at.

The Convener: As we have no more questions, I thank our witnesses for their extremely helpful contributions. This is our first evidence session on the bill, and we look forward to hearing from subsequent panels.

That concludes the public part of our meeting.

12:27

Meeting continued in private until 12:59.

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