

# National Ugly Mugs MSP briefing

## Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill



- National Ugly Mugs (NUM) is the UK's national sex worker safety charity, supporting more than 9,000 UK sex workers.
- We provide face-to-face services to more than 600 Scottish sex workers via our NUMbrella Lane drop-in centre, in central Glasgow, making us **Scotland's largest sex worker support service**.
- **NUM urges MSPs to oppose the Bill – on the grounds that it seeks to criminalise the purchase of sex (“the Nordic Model”) – which would only make life more dangerous and difficult for those selling sex, by driving the industry underground.**
- Opposing the Nordic Model is not about “siding with pimps and traffickers”, it is about **protecting vulnerable women** – many of whom face limited options to feed their children or heat their homes – from being exposed to a greater degree of harm.
- Leading international NGOs including **Amnesty**, the **World Health Organisation**, **UN AIDS** and **Human Rights Watch**, oppose this legislation.

### The facts about sex work, and why this Bill is dangerous and won't work:

- **NUM does not seek to glorify sex work.** Many sex workers experience violence, and many would ideally leave the industry. Some prefer the flexibility of the work, and the high pay – compared to minimum wage jobs. Many move into sex work because of a lack of other viable options – due to poverty, discrimination, disability, migration status or addiction. A small proportion are trafficked - but **trafficking people is already a crime in Scotland**.
- We know from talking to our members that many face a choice each day as to whether to carry out sex work in order to put food on the table, clothe their children, or keep the electricity on. **Criminalising clients does not remove these vulnerable individuals' need for money to survive, and this Bill does not offer them replacement income. It would make life more difficult and dangerous for them, by making it harder to earn money, and by forcing transactions underground, out of sight of the authorities.**
- Sex workers typically manage risk by carrying out advance screening of clients, including by requesting proof of ID, pre-payment (to confirm identity via banking information), or by using a range of screening tools, such as our own [NUM Checker](#) (which distributed 850,000 safety alerts last year). **Criminalising sex buying will make it impossible for sex workers to carry out screening, as clients will not disclose personal information that could be used as evidence against them.**
- **If buying sex is outlawed, clients have a powerful incentive to avoid being detected.** This adds to the risks sex workers face, by **forcing them into time-pressured negotiations, and less visible settings.**

### The Nordic Model has failed in neighbouring nations, and will fail in Scotland:

- Scotland's nearest neighbours to have piloted the Nordic Model – Ireland and Northern Ireland – have accepted that **it has failed to reduce demand for sex work, and has led to an increase in violence reported by sex workers.**

- In Northern Ireland, a review by the Department of Justice [found](#) that there was “**no evidence that the offence of purchasing sexual services has produced a downward pressure on the demand for, or supply of, sexual services**”. It also [found](#) that “**the legislation has contributed to a climate whereby sex workers feel further marginalised and stigmatised**”, and that **reported assaults against sex workers [increased by 225%](#)** after the legislation came into force.
- In the Republic of Ireland, a government review found that after seven years of the legislation, **just 15 men had been convicted for buying sex**. Publishing the review, Justice Minister Jim O’Callaghan [said](#): “**Regrettably, the review highlights that despite the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services, demand has not decreased.**”
- In Scotland, the Lord Advocate has [warned](#) that, in order to obtain prosecutions under the Bill, prosecutors may **require women providing consensual sexual services to testify against their clients** – something we say raises serious ethical concerns. The Crown Office [warned](#) that the “challenges” posed by the fact that sex workers will not wish to give evidence means the new offence would face the same “evidential barriers” that have led the law to fail in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

#### Scots overwhelmingly oppose criminalising the purchase of sex:

- Gold standard, [impartial opinion polling carried out by YouGov](#) on behalf of NUM shows that the Scottish public are overwhelmingly against criminalising the purchase of sex. When asked, “do you think it should or should not be legal in Scotland for a person to pay someone to have sex with them?”, **47% said legal, and 32% said not legal**.
- These figures mirror YouGov’s own long-term [tracking polling](#) of public attitudes towards sex work, which has shown stable opposition – by a margin of around 2:1 – to the criminalisation of the purchase of sex. (**Most recent data, [January 21, 2026](#), for Scottish adults: 62% say should not be a crime, 28% say should be a crime**).
- **YouGov’s polling shows that SNP voters are more likely than the average voter to oppose outlawing the purchase of sex.**
- The pro-Nordic Model campaign has produced polling, featuring leading questions (eg “Do you support stronger laws against buying sex as a way of tackling pimping, organised crime and sex trafficking in Scotland?”) designed to elicit public support for the Bill. We understand the polling industry regulator is currently investigating the pollster in question, over concerns about the quality and impartiality of the survey.

#### Leading international NGOs oppose the Nordic Model:

- It’s not just sex workers and the organisations representing them that oppose outlawing the purchase of sex, many leading international NGOs are also against this Bill.
- Proponents of the Nordic Model like to deride all opponents as the “pimp lobby” – but this is demonstrably untrue. [Amnesty International](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), the [World Health Organisation](#), and [UN Aids](#) all oppose the criminalisation of the purchase of sex – warning that it has damaging impacts for sex workers’ safety and health.
- A significant proportion of the trade union movement oppose the Nordic Model, including the University & College Union (UCU), Communication Workers Union (CWU), GMB, Royal College of Nurses (RCN), ASLEF and Equity. These unions collectively represent around 1.5 million workers in the UK.