Written evidence submitted by Dr Jonathan Mendel and Dr Kiril Sharapov

Our research\(^1\) has focused on trafficking and ‘modern slavery’, rather than sex work, so our response will focus on this rather than addressing the much wider scope of the Inquiry. We agree that it is important to challenge exploitative labour practices. However, trafficking and the type of exploitation classed as ‘modern slavery’ takes place across a range of legal, illegal and ambiguous industries. We would therefore strongly argue that concerns about trafficking should not be used as a justification to criminalise aspects of sex work and related transactions; this Inquiry therefore is not likely to be a helpful place to discuss this.\(^2\) We agree that it is important that “exploiters are held to account”, but this should take place across all industries and not just be used as a justification to criminalise additional aspects of sex work.

In Scotland, Jean Urquhart MSP’s consultation (p.3) is focussed on how to “promote the safety and uphold the rights of people selling sex in Scotland”. This seems a much more productive focus than the Inquiry’s idea of a ‘balance of criminality’: an idea which implies, falsely, that there is a balance between criminalising the purchase or (aspects of the) sale of sex, and thus effaces the possibility of outright decriminalisation.

Dr Jonathan Mendel is Lecturer in Human Geography at Dundee University. His research analyses issues around trafficking, technology, networks and conflict.

Dr Sharapov is Senior Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Bedfordshire. His substantial research profile in the field of trafficking in human beings provides him with a critical insight into these discussion points both from a grassroots level to one of national and European significance.

---


\(^2\) The Inquiry might find it helpful to look at Jean Urquhart MSP’s well-researched consultation on sex work (see [http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/91949.aspx](http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/91949.aspx)) which argues (p.25) that “trafficking is an issue that affects a range of different industries and takes place in a variety of contexts outside of sex work”. It is therefore appropriate that, as the Consultation states, the “proposed Bill will not address the matter [of trafficking]”. Westminster could learn from some of the good work taking place on this topic in Scotland.