# Ash Regan’s Nordic Model bill under fire for flawed costings and negligible impact on crime



Ash Regan’s recent proposal to overhaul Scotland's prostitution laws, particularly through the introduction of the Nordic Model, faces considerable scrutiny as her claims of an “epidemic” of abuse encounter stark contradictions. According to the documentation accompanying her Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill, it has been suggested that the implementation of this law could result in as few as 45 recorded crimes each year. This figure is disturbingly on par with the number of fines issued for littering, raising serious questions about whether the proposed legislation adequately addresses the systemic issues faced by sex workers.

Regan has argued that Scotland's existing prostitution laws contribute to a culture of violence against women and human trafficking, asserting that the Nordic Model— which criminalises the purchase of sex while decriminalising the selling of it— would serve as a potent deterrent against sexual exploitation. However, campaigners have pointed out the incongruence in her statement regarding the expected number of prosecutions, which suggests that only 25 individuals might face criminal charges for purchasing sex annually, with the likelihood of prison sentences being exceedingly low.

Critics, including sex worker advocacy groups and international NGOs, contend that simply criminalising clients does not eliminate violence and exploitation. Indeed, such measures frequently render sex work more clandestine, leaving individuals vulnerable and less likely to report abuse. This viewpoint echoes sentiments expressed by organisations like Human Rights Watch, which argue that criminalisation exacerbates the risks faced by sex workers.

The financial implications of Regan’s proposed legislation also raise eyebrows. She anticipates initial enforcement costs to be around £2.6 million, a figure she claims will decrease to £2.2 million in subsequent years. However, detailed analyses of the financial memorandum have revealed numerous mathematical inaccuracies that could inflate the actual costs significantly. For instance, Regan's suggestion that training police officers could be executed for merely 50 pence an hour appears distinctly unrealistic, particularly when considering the official hourly rate of £79.50 for police officers’ time. This discrepancy casts doubt on the overall feasibility and transparency of the proposal.

Furthermore, it has been reported that groups advocating for the Nordic Model stand to gain substantial funding should the bill be enacted. For example, the Trafficking Awareness Raising Alliance (TARA) could see its public funding doubled to £1.24 million annually. Critics view this as a potential misuse of taxpayer money, benefiting organisations over addressing the immediate needs of sex workers who often face significant risks and challenges in their line of work.

The potential for misjudging the complexities surrounding sex work was underscored by an official review of similar legislation in Northern Ireland, which indicated no reduction in the demand for sexual services following the implementation of such laws. In reality, the review suggested that the laws further marginalised sex workers, making it harder for them to seek help or report crimes.

Public sentiment in Scotland, as reflected in a recent YouGov poll, shows a significant portion of the population— 47%— advocating for the legalisation of purchasing sexual services, with 69% favouring policies focused on the health and safety of sex workers rather than punitive measures. This suggests a disconnect between policymakers’ proposed reforms and the views of the public they serve.

In light of these factors, many stakeholders argue for a paradigm shift towards full decriminalisation of sex work. Advocates for this approach claim that it would support sex workers more effectively, allowing them safer avenues to report abuse and receive the assistance they need. The current discourse surrounding Regan’s proposal calls for a deeper examination of legislative intent and its practical implications, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reform that genuinely prioritises the well-being of vulnerable populations.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://nen.press/2025/05/26/national-ugly-mugs-new-law-to-outlaw-purchase-of-sex-could-lead-to-just-45-recorded-crimes-a-year-ash-regan-admits/), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/grooming-gangs-scandal-shows-why-prostitution-law-needs-changed-says-ash-regan-4936689)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://nen.press/2025/05/26/national-ugly-mugs-new-law-to-outlaw-purchase-of-sex-could-lead-to-just-45-recorded-crimes-a-year-ash-regan-admits/), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-58435037)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425), [[4]](https://www.thenational.scot/politics/24635029.scotland-must-take-stand-ban-sexual-exploitation/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics-20296178.laws-leaves-sex-workers-unable-contact-police/), [[7]](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/25/sex-workers-safety-balance-scotland)
* Paragraph 5 – [[6]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics-20296178.laws-leaves-sex-workers-unable-contact-police/), [[3]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://nen.press/2025/05/26/national-ugly-mugs-new-law-to-outlaw-purchase-of-sex-could-lead-to-just-45-recorded-crimes-a-year-ash-regan-admits/), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/grooming-gangs-scandal-shows-why-prostitution-law-needs-changed-says-ash-regan-4936689)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://nen.press/2025/05/26/national-ugly-mugs-new-law-to-outlaw-purchase-of-sex-could-lead-to-just-45-recorded-crimes-a-year-ash-regan-admits/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/grooming-gangs-scandal-shows-why-prostitution-law-needs-changed-says-ash-regan-4936689> - Ash Regan MSP argues that the recent grooming gangs scandal highlights the urgent need to overhaul Scotland's prostitution laws. She believes that the current legislation fails to protect women and that introducing the Nordic model, which criminalises the purchase of sex, would send a clear message against sexual exploitation. Regan emphasises the importance of addressing male demand for prostitution to combat violence against women effectively.
3. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425> - Former SNP politician Ash Regan discusses her efforts to reform Scotland's prostitution laws by adopting the Nordic model. This approach criminalises the buying of sex while decriminalising the selling of sex. Regan argues that this model is more effective in reducing human trafficking and protecting women, stating that there is no way to make being raped as a job safe. She is confident in gathering the necessary support to introduce the bill to Parliament.
4. <https://www.thenational.scot/politics/24635029.scotland-must-take-stand-ban-sexual-exploitation/> - Ash Regan introduces the 'Unbuyable Bill' to the Scottish Parliament, aiming to tackle the commodification of human beings and sexual exploitation. The bill seeks to criminalise the purchase of sex while decriminalising the selling of sex, aligning with the Nordic model. Regan highlights the need to challenge men's demand for purchasing sex and to provide support for women to exit prostitution, sending a clear message that such exploitation will no longer be tolerated in Scotland.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-58435037> - An alliance of frontline agencies describes Scotland's prostitution laws as 'outdated and unjust.' Currently, soliciting in public, 'kerb crawling,' and brothel-keeping are illegal, but running a pimping website or paying for sex are legal. Campaigners advocate for shifting the burden of criminality to those who pay for sex. The Scottish government has pledged to develop a 'model for Scotland' that challenges men's demand for purchasing sex, aiming to protect women and girls.
6. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics-20296178.laws-leaves-sex-workers-unable-contact-police/> - Women involved in sex work have reported that current prostitution legislation in Scotland deters them from contacting the police, even if they are victims of crimes like rape. The lack of trust in law enforcement and fear of arrest result in underreporting of such incidents. This issue underscores the need for legal reforms to protect sex workers and ensure they can seek help without fear of prosecution.
7. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/11/25/sex-workers-safety-balance-scotland> - Human Rights Watch highlights concerns that Scotland's approach to prostitution, which criminalises some activities related to the sale and purchase of sex, makes sex workers more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The organisation advocates for full decriminalisation of sex work, arguing that criminalisation undermines sex workers' ability to protect themselves and seek justice for crimes committed against them.