# Ash Regan pushes controversial bill to criminalise buying sex amid divided Scottish opinion



The topic of prostitution remains a deeply controversial issue in Scotland, with current legislative proposals stirring significant debate. Ash Regan, a Member of the Scottish Parliament (MSP), has openly challenged her colleagues to confront the realities of prostitution, stating, “Prostitution is something that a lot of politicians do not want to engage with. They are more than happy for this to be in the shadows.” This assertion is timely, particularly given her proposed Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill, which seeks to criminalise the purchase of sex while decriminalising the selling of sexual services.

At present, while paying for sex is not illegal in Scotland, related activities such as operating a brothel or soliciting in public are criminal offences. Regan argues that her bill, inspired by the Nordic model implemented in countries like Sweden and Norway, aims to significantly reduce sex trafficking and enhance the safety of women involved in prostitution. Speaking to The Herald, she said, “The data that we have shows that in Sweden, prostitution has reduced to a very low level… sex trafficking is almost non-existent in Sweden.” Her aim is ambitious: to create a legislative framework that supports women in exiting prostitution and to ensure the accountability of those who seek to exploit them.

Despite her intentions, Regan faces substantial opposition. Critics, including advocacy groups like Scotland for Decrim, believe that her proposals neglect the underlying economic factors that drive individuals into sex work. Laura Baillie, the group’s political officer, pointed out, “Prostitution has been around because of the economic exploitation of women. If we really want to combat that, what we want to see are better anti-poverty measures.” The division within Scottish society regarding how best to address prostitution is evident, as polls indicate that nearly half of Scots favour the legalisation of paid sex, viewing it as a legitimate occupation.

The complexity of this issue is further highlighted by contrasting narratives surrounding the safety and welfare of individuals involved in sex work. Proponents of the Nordic model claim that criminalising the purchase of sex increases the safety of sex workers by reducing demand. However, evidence from places like Northern Ireland shows that reported assaults against sex workers increased by 225% after similar laws were introduced. These contradictions fuel ongoing debates over policy efficacy and the real-life implications for those within the industry.

Moreover, the issue of expunging past convictions for those involved in prostitution has become a focal point. Supporters of Regan's bill contend that such measures are essential for helping individuals rebuild their lives and find employment, while groups like Christian Concern argue against pardoning past offences, advocating for continued deterrents against sex work.

Amidst these discussions, it’s important to consider the voices of those directly affected. Fiona Broadfoot, a former sex worker, shared her harrowing experiences at the launch of Regan's bill, emphasising the trauma that often accompanies involvement in the industry. Although speaking passionately in favour of support mechanisms for vulnerable individuals, Broadfoot also resonates with a broader concern for safety and public perception.

Despite varied opinion within the Parliament, with several MSPs from the SNP and Labour backing Regan’s proposals, opposition remains firm from parties like the Greens and the Liberal Democrats, who advocate for full decriminalisation. The Greens specifically warn that Regan’s approach could lead to an underground system, compromising the safety of sex workers.

With a significant portion of the Scottish public seemingly favouring decriminalisation, it raises the question of whether lawmakers are aligning with societal views or leaning into a more traditionally punitive approach. Regan herself acknowledges the tight timeline for her bill, expressing hope for increased support as discussions unfold within Parliament. “I will admit, the time frames are tight... but I am confident it can be done,” she asserted.

In a landscape marked by shifting attitudes and entrenched beliefs about both the moral and legal frameworks surrounding prostitution, Scotland stands at a crossroads. The ongoing discussions around Regan's proposals, and the nuanced views on prostitution and sex work, underscore a complex interplay of social, economic, and ethical dimensions that will shape the future of sexual autonomy and safety in Scotland.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss), [[3]](https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/how-can-we-be-ordering-sex-like-pizza-bill-to-aid-victims-trapped-in-prostitution/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss), [[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_Scotland)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/pardons-under-scottish-prostitution-law-christian-concern-ash-regan-bill-4812774), [[4]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/majority-of-scots-oppose-scottish-government-stance-to-overhaul-prostitution-legislation-4651578), [[6]](https://www.amodelforscotland.org/about)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/how-can-we-be-ordering-sex-like-pizza-bill-to-aid-victims-trapped-in-prostitution/), [[4]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/majority-of-scots-oppose-scottish-government-stance-to-overhaul-prostitution-legislation-4651578)
* Paragraph 5 – [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/pardons-under-scottish-prostitution-law-christian-concern-ash-regan-bill-4812774), [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss)
* Paragraph 7 – [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/pardons-under-scottish-prostitution-law-christian-concern-ash-regan-bill-4812774), [[3]](https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/how-can-we-be-ordering-sex-like-pizza-bill-to-aid-victims-trapped-in-prostitution/)
* Paragraph 8 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/pardons-under-scottish-prostitution-law-christian-concern-ash-regan-bill-4812774)
* Paragraph 9 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/majority-of-scots-oppose-scottish-government-stance-to-overhaul-prostitution-legislation-4651578)
* Paragraph 10 – [[3]](https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/how-can-we-be-ordering-sex-like-pizza-bill-to-aid-victims-trapped-in-prostitution/), [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425)
* Paragraph 11 – [[1]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/pardons-under-scottish-prostitution-law-christian-concern-ash-regan-bill-4812774)
* Paragraph 12 – [[7]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/25204449.ash-regan-i-wont-hide-prostitution-issue-like-msps/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/pardons-under-scottish-prostitution-law-christian-concern-ash-regan-bill-4812774> - Christian Concern, a church group, has expressed strong opposition to proposals for pardoning individuals convicted under existing prostitution laws in Scotland. While advocating for the criminalisation of purchasing sex, they argue against issuing blanket pardons for past convictions, stating that individuals who violated the law should not have their offences erased. The group believes that continuing to criminalise soliciting is essential to deter entry into prostitution and to convey that such activities are inherently immoral. This perspective contrasts with Ash Regan's proposed Prostitution (Offences and Support) (Scotland) Bill, which aims to decriminalise the selling of sex while criminalising the buying of sex, and to provide support for those exiting prostitution. Regan contends that pardoning previous convictions is crucial for helping women rebuild their lives and access employment opportunities. The debate highlights differing views on balancing justice, support for individuals involved in prostitution, and the broader societal message regarding the legality and morality of sex work.
3. <https://www.sundaypost.com/fp/how-can-we-be-ordering-sex-like-pizza-bill-to-aid-victims-trapped-in-prostitution/> - Ash Regan, a Member of the Scottish Parliament, is advocating for comprehensive support measures for individuals trapped in prostitution, often due to addiction or poverty. She proposes the expungement of previous convictions related to prostitution to assist victims in rebuilding their lives, pursuing education, and improving employment prospects. Regan also highlights the increasing issue of women being trafficked into Scotland by organised crime gangs, citing cases of women being abducted from their homes to settle family debts. She emphasises the urgency of addressing these issues to protect vulnerable women and provide them with viable alternatives to exploitation.
4. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/majority-of-scots-oppose-scottish-government-stance-to-overhaul-prostitution-legislation-4651578> - A recent YouGov poll indicates that the majority of Scots oppose the Scottish Government's proposed overhaul of prostitution laws, which aims to criminalise the purchase of sex, known as the 'Nordic model'. The poll reveals that only 13% of Scots support this approach, and 47% believe paying for sex should be legalised. The Scottish Government maintains that prostitution is a form of violence against women and is committed to challenging men's demand for prostitution. However, the poll results suggest a significant public divide on the issue, with many Scots favouring the decriminalisation of sex work.
5. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_Scotland> - Prostitution in Scotland is legal, but associated activities such as public solicitation, operating a brothel, and other forms of pimping are criminal offences. In 2017, the Scottish National Party supported changes to prostitution laws to criminalise those paying for sex, but not those selling it. This decision faced criticism from sex workers and organisations advocating for the full decriminalisation of sex work, who argue that such measures do not ensure the safety of sex workers. The Scottish Green Party supports the decriminalisation of sex work, along with full legal protection from exploitation, trafficking, and violence, and access to better support and healthcare for sex workers.
6. <https://www.amodelforscotland.org/about> - A Model for Scotland is a campaign advocating for a progressive legal model that shifts the burden of criminality from victims of sexual exploitation to those who perpetrate and profit from this abuse. The campaign highlights that while prostitution itself is legal in Scotland, associated activities such as running a brothel, soliciting in public, and trafficking for sexual exploitation are illegal. The campaign calls for the decriminalisation of victims, the criminalisation of buyers, and the provision of comprehensive support services for those involved in prostitution. It also seeks to hold pimps and traffickers accountable and to challenge men's demand for purchasing sex.
7. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/ash-regan-prostitution-legislation-alba-party-msp-nordic-model-4810425> - Ash Regan, a Member of the Scottish Parliament representing the Alba Party, is advocating for the introduction of the 'Nordic model' to tackle prostitution in Scotland. This model legalises the selling of sex while criminalising the buying of sex, aiming to reduce human trafficking and the market for prostitution. Regan argues that prostitution is inherently unsafe and that there is no way to make it safe, emphasising the need to shift the criminality onto the men who buy women for sex. She is confident in gathering the necessary support to introduce a bill to Parliament within the next 18 months.