

National Ugly Mugs statement on the All Party Parliamentary Group on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade's report 'Behind Closed Doors - Organised Sexual Exploitation in England and Wales'

National Ugly Mugs (NUM) joins the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP)¹ and Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM)² in condemning the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade's report³ as a deeply flawed and biased piece of work.

Before addressing the content of the report itself, NUM believes it is important to qualify the nature and role of the APPG in making policy recommendations on sex work. It is an informal group of MPs which has no official status in Parliament and therefore we believe their work should not be given undue significance. This APPG is comprised of members with deeply held objections to sex work and a demonstrable bias against it.

Additionally, NUM is deeply concerned by the APPG's refusal to engage with sex workers and safety organisations during its evidence gathering. Sex workers are most affected by policy making and legislative reform on this issue and so it is incredibly wrong that sex workers themselves have not been consulted at any stage of the process. We believe this fact points toward the biased nature of the APPG. Indeed, the APPG have shown themselves to be completely opposed to engaging with sex workers, academics or safety organisations who disagree with their moral agenda to criminalise sex work.

Furthermore, NUM is deeply critical of the methodology and terms of reference used within the report. The APPG makes no distinction between 'sexual exploitation', 'trafficking' and 'sex work' which encourages the reader to believe all sex work is exploitation. We know this rhetoric is particularly dangerous because it presumes sex workers cannot identify their own experiences of sexual violence or exploitation and compounds the difficulty they face in reporting violence to the authorities.

The APPG fail to recognise the role migration plays within the sex industry and this is evident in their discussion of trafficking. There is no explanation of how the report distinguishes between migrant sex workers and those who are victims of trafficking, leading to a general implication that all migrant sex workers must be victims of trafficking which we know is not the case. Sadly,

¹<http://prostitutescollective.net/2018/05/press-release-another-sham-inquiry-from-the-self-appointed-partisan-all-party-parliamentary-group-on-prostitution/>

² <https://www.swarmcollective.org/>

³<https://appgprostitution.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Behind-closed-doors-APPG-on-Prostitution.pdf>

the APPG fails to realise that it is not only coercion by ‘traffickers and pimps’ which cause victims of exploitation to not come forward, but in fact it is the threat of detention and deportation which compounds their vulnerability.⁴ Trafficking relies on vulnerability, the criminalisation of sex work and of migration creates that vulnerability. If the APPG wish to make a real stand against trafficking, they must begin with decriminalisation.⁵

NUM joins sex worker rights groups from across the globe, human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International⁶ and Human Rights Watch⁷, as well as international bodies, such as UNAIDS⁸, in calling for the full decriminalisation of sex work. We strongly oppose the APPG’s principle recommendation, to introduce a ‘sex buyer law’ which would criminalise the purchase of sex because an overwhelming body of evidence shows that criminalisation of any kind harms sex workers. These harms include increased police surveillance, an increase in violence, a reduction in access to justice, poorer health outcomes and increased stigma and discrimination against sex workers.⁹ The harm perpetuated by the Nordic Model is even recognised in Sweden by officials: As the Head of Sweden’s anti-trafficking unit, one of the architects of the Swedish Model, said: *“Of course the law has negative consequences for women in prostitution but that’s also some of the effect we want to achieve with the law”*.¹⁰

The APPG also focuses on the role of the internet in sex work. It mistakenly identifies advertising platforms as fueling sexual exploitation. However, evidence has shown that indoor sex workers who use the internet to advertise their services are safer than sex workers who do not.¹¹ We need only look at the destruction caused by the introduction of FOSTA/SESTA in the USA to see how shutting down sex worker online spaces puts sex workers at risk.¹² NUM strongly opposes the introduction of these types of laws in England and Wales.

NUM further wishes to highlight the need to repeal brothel keeping laws and prostitution related offences. The APPG consistently identifies managed brothels as the area most in need of attention; however, they fail to recognise that it is the current brothel-keeping law - which criminalises two or more workers sharing a premise for safety - which pushes sex workers

⁴ <http://prostitutescollective.net/2016/04/facts-on-trafficking/>

⁵ <https://www.swarmcollective.org/blog/2018/4/5/shame-on-police-scotland-migrant-sex-workers-need-rights-not-raids>

⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/05/amnesty-international-publishes-policy-and-research-on-protection-of-sex-workers-rights/>

⁷ <http://www.nswp.org/timeline/event/human-rights-watch-affirm-support-decriminalisation>

⁸ http://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2017/june/20170602_sexwork

⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR3640342016ENGLISH.PDF>

¹⁰ <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2014/01/20/valeria-costa-kostritsky/on-malmskillnadsgatan/>

¹¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2018/jan/23/internet-making-sex-work-safer-report-finds>

¹² https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/bjqvz/fosta-sesta-sex-work-and-trafficking

towards working for managers in exploitative conditions. Without the fear of brothel-keeping charges, sex workers would be able to work together independently of third parties.

Finally, we welcome the APPG's recommendation to repeal solicitation as a criminal offence. No sex worker should be criminalised for working outdoors, particularly given the fact that outdoor workers are often more at risk of violence. Nevertheless, this recommendation does not go nearly far enough, too often parliamentarians refuse to acknowledge the harm caused by criminalisation. Sex workers must never become collateral damage in politicians' moral crusades. We know that sex workers can never hope to fully achieve their human and labour rights without the introduction of full decriminalisation.