



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Justice

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further
Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill:
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

28 November 2013

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Justice

Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Further Provisions and Support for Victims) Bill:
Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

28 November 2013

Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mr Paul Givan (Chairperson)
Mr Raymond McCartney (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Sydney Anderson
Mr Stewart Dickson
Mr Tom Elliott
Mr William Humphrey
Mr Alban Maginness
Ms Rosaleen McCorley
Mr Patsy McGlone
Mr Jim Wells

Witnesses:

Ms Annie Campbell	Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
Ms Noelle Collins	Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland

The Chairperson: I formally welcome Annie Campbell, director, and Noelle Collins, team leader, from Belfast and Lisburn Women's Aid. The meeting will be recorded by Hansard and will be published in due course. I will invite you to make opening comments and then open the meeting to members for questions. You are very welcome, and thank you for making yourselves available for the Committee. Annie, I will hand over to you.

Ms Annie Campbell (Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland): Thank you very much. It is a pleasure to be here, and we thank the Justice Committee for inviting us. We are very keen to open up this dialogue with you.

I have a wealth of papers in front of me, so please forgive me. We submitted an extensive document and are keen to discuss anything that you want to talk to us about on that. I do not want to take up too much time at the beginning but will just set the scene a little for you. Many of you are long-term supporters of Women's Aid and we have met you in other contexts. Women's Aid has a network of refuges and support services across Northern Ireland for victims of domestic violence and now sexual violence, an area of work that we are moving into more overtly.

We have been in existence over 33 years. I am proud to say that I front the organisation, albeit that behind it there is a horrible story of misery, degradation and abuse in what happens to victims. We also run a 24-hour domestic and sexual violence helpline, which, in the past year, managed 47,500 calls. We really know clearly the story behind abuse, whether it is domestic, sexual or other types of abuse.

Noelle has been in a front line refuge that deals with human trafficking and she will speak about that later. We have seen trafficking victims coming through over the past 20 years. In 2006, we put together the first piece of research on trafficking in Northern Ireland, entitled "Crossing Borders". We took that research to the Joint Committee on Human Rights, at Westminster at the time because it was calling for evidence. I think that that Committee was a wee bit surprised that people were popping up from Northern Ireland and saying, "Actually, it is happening with us as well".

We thought that it was not rocket science to think that there are porous borders between the UK and Republic of Ireland. Trafficking was happening in great quantity everywhere else, therefore, logically, it had to be happening here. From experience, we also knew that women had been trafficked. Often, their stories did not come out for some time, but when they did so, they were graphic and dreadful, so we wanted to press to get the provisions here.

Over the past year, we have supported 47 women who were victims of human trafficking. Of those, interestingly, 27 came through the project with the Department of Justice. The rest are victims of historical trafficking. Those women are in our communities and need support.

We very much welcomed the UK signing the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. We very much welcomed the Department of Justice here taking forward the work to put support measures in place. We provide support for women victims and Migrant Help provides support for male victims.

Our submission is based on the detailed, intimate knowledge of what abuse does to victims, the reality of it and the sort of support that they need. We believe that the Bill improves the support available to human trafficking victims. As that is our main concern, the Bill will have our full support. We are aware that human trafficking crosses a lot of areas. We deal with sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Equally, a lot of women who are migrant workers or who are trafficked in the field of economic exploitation also end up as victims of domestic and sexual abuse. It is a vicious cycle once you get into an abusive cycle. Although some provisions are in place, the Bill takes them that bit further, so we are supportive of it.

We are 100% behind the proposed criminalisation of those who seek to buy sexual services. It is time that society woke up to that degradation, primarily of women and girls but also of boys and men, and sent out a clear message about it. We would like to see that taken forward.

Underlying that, we have a strong concern about women who are currently trapped in prostitution. We urge that there be a specific addition recommending pathways of support for those women who can then get out of prostitution and start to live a full life. In just the same way that women are in a domestic violence situation, it is a long journey for them to heal. Women who are in prostitution need support and pathways to achieve that.

Briefly, as regards specific clauses, we are very supportive of clause 7 because it opens the door a little to have what are deemed victimless prosecutions so that the successful prosecutions of traffickers are not dependent on the one frightened woman who is the victim at the centre of it. In the same way that we are pressing for that in the domestic violence field, we would like to see that happening. We are supportive of clause 9, because many women who come in who may not be deemed to be strictly human trafficking victims under the national referral mechanism (NRM) are still victims of dreadful exploitation, so we need to keep some form of support for them in place. Clause 10, and I am aware that I am rattling through, but I do not want to hold you up —

The Chairperson: No, you are doing well.

Ms A Campbell: We are very supportive of having a longer period of reflection. The period of 45 days, in our view, is just not enough. You are dealing with people who are in severe trauma. It can take them quite a while just to get out of that place and be able to think in any way clearly. Sometimes it is enough, but not always. We always point to the support models such as those in Italy, which have the three- to six-months temporary residence.

We are keen to see the inclusion of a clause stating that victims must be offered assistance from people of the same gender. For us, that is a very important point. When you see the women who come into our refuge, you will be in no doubt that they would be terrified if they were approached by any man, no matter how well meaning. They need to get support from another woman.

Also in clause 9 is something that has not happened to date. We recommended on a number of occasions that, if a victim is taken for any form of questioning or discussion, then the person giving them support from their support organisation should be able to be with them, as of right. That does not happen at the moment. Because they are not being charged with a crime, they do not actually have anyone with them, which leaves them in a very vulnerable position. It can also mean that the victim can end up feeling re-victimised because they have to continually keep retelling their story. That is something that we are very careful to avoid in Women's Aid, because you can really be deepening the trauma rather than helping with it.

In clause 16, we support the establishment of an independent rapporteur. I know that there is a move afoot UK-wide, but we support having some sort of independent mechanism. From experience in other fields, we have found that if it becomes UK-wide, then we can simply lose focus sometimes on what is happening here on our doorsteps in Northern Ireland. That is our position of support for general clauses, with some clarification.

I have no doubt that we will talk further about clause 6, but we are unequivocal about it: the majority of human trafficking is for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and we need to send a message out to society that, if you are engaging in the sex industry, you are supporting slavery. That is the clear message that we want to send out. The second message would be that research has proven time and again, across all sorts of international borders, that the links with prostitution, with abused young people, with vulnerable adults, with those who are vulnerable because of drug addiction or mental health issues or indeed end up in drug addiction or with mental health issues because of prostitution, are legion. The fantasy that there are some people who are choosing this is, I think, a myth propagated by those who want to make profit from abuse. Prostitution is not a choice; it is a trap that women and girls are lured into or fall into. They need a humane society to send out a zero-tolerance message of no abuse to support them to get out of that trap.

We are very glad to say that all the major agencies who understand violence against women and who work with victims are supporting us on this. The End Violence Against Women campaign, the European Women's Lobby, which has thousands of organisations as its membership, and the trade unions including the Irish Congress of Trade Unions ICTU are fully supportive of us, among many others.

Fundamental to this — and it links very closely to our work with domestic violence victims — is trying to find a way to end it rather than just tolerate it. We have to find a way to create a culture of respect for all of us, and certainly for women and girls. We teach all children in school settings — and, indeed, adults in adult settings when we can go there — about healthy relationships and the difference between healthy relationships and unhealthy relationships and abuse. A model of prostitution, with society actually saying that it is OK because it is not a criminal offence, undermines all that work. It sends out a very dangerous message for the future to the society that we are trying to create.

We are very supportive of the Bill. We hope very much that, at the end of your deliberations, the Justice Committee will also support it. Thank you.

The Chairperson: Annie, thank you very much for your contribution. I will ask couple of questions and then bring in other members. I am sure that other members will get to clause 6 as well, but you have been very clear in that respect. I will ask a couple of points unrelated to it initially. On clause 4, you state in your submission:

"Women's Aid believes that two years is not sufficiently lengthy to reflect the serious and despicable nature of the crime of slavery."

Do you want to elaborate on why you believe that? What do you believe would be appropriate?

Ms A Campbell: I would love to have the chance to rewrite all the rules about how long people get for different crimes. It is simply that. I appreciate that we are not putting this into the whole framework of the rest of the sentencing because we are not coming from a legal perspective. However, frankly, I think that, if you are engaging in aiding and abetting the crime of international slavery, two years is just a rap on the knuckles. We recognise that that would be an improvement but, if I were to hazard a guess of what the sentence should be, I would say 20 years. *[Laughter.]*

The Chairperson: You suggest that there should be a new clause after clause 10 to deal specifically with assistance and support for those in prostitution. Do you want to give us some more detail on how

you think that that legislation should be framed? How would you determine who receives that type of support?

Ms A Campbell: It might be good to bring Noelle in to talk about the sort of support and pathways for women who are in prostitution that we would need.

Ms Noelle Collins (Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland): The women in prostitution who we work with feel that they do not have an option. They feel that they have to stay there to fund whatever it is, usually an addiction, or because they are forced to be there by a pimp. There needs to be resources to address the issues and the needs of women. There is not a particular organisation that is doing that at the moment. Women's Aid has been trying to help women to exit the sex industry for many years, but it is particularly difficult to do so with the lack of resources.

Ms A Campbell: If that were to be considered, we would be very happy to give our experience and help to set it up. As Noelle said, we have women in our services. Domestic violence also includes an element of sexual coercion. A lot of women are already being forced into some sort of prostitution or sexual activities with strangers that they do not want. We have experience of giving support, but you would want to be doing it in conjunction with the health services. A lot of models of support have been set up in Glasgow and elsewhere. Partners with whom we have good communication offer models around it. It could be quite dangerous to start to criminalise primarily men who are buying these services and not set up the pathways. We see it as two sides of the same coin.

Ms McCorley: Go raibh maith agat, HSIRI. Thanks very much for the presentation. Women's Aid sees the coalface probably more than any other organisation. You have probably seen more abuse of women than any of us can imagine. In a year, about how many women do you see who want to come out of prostitution?

Ms Collins: Prostitution takes many forms. There are women who are involved in the sex industry, independent of relationships. We talk to quite a lot of women who, through relationships, are forced into the use of sex for money or for power and control. Obviously, there is abuse within relationships all the time. There are women who have, historically, been in the sex industry who have tried to exit it and still cannot do so, and that is reflective of the relationships that they are in. They have tried to move on, and get into relationships, but it was thrown up at them, with name calling, and they find it very difficult to move on. Prostitution is not something that happens and then you leave it, have a party and move on to another job. It stays with you for the rest of your life. It has a massive impact on women. It brings shame. Probably a lot of them cannot sustain a normal relationship after that. It differs. It would be quite hard to put a number on that.

Ms McCorley: Around how many, then? I am trying to get some sense of the enormity of the issue.

Ms A Campbell: It is one of those things where, because there is no official pathway, then it is a case of, "If you do not look for it, you cannot find it". It is a bit like human trafficking. In our initial discussions with the PSNI, when we brought out the research, it told us that there were none because it did not know of any. Anecdotal numbers come through, but you are not actually looking for it. You are not advertising that there is a support pathway, so it would be hard to estimate.

Ms McCorley: What percentage of those women would you say are victims of human trafficking?

Ms A Campbell: We have had 47 identified victims over the past four years, 27 of whom have gone through the project, as we are service providers, with Migrant Help and the DOJ. The other 20 did not actually recognise the fact that they were trafficked. They came to us through other sources and after talking to them we found that, historically, they had been trafficked, not only into Northern Ireland but into England.

Ms McCorley: Do you suspect that there are a lot of women who are unidentified who are actually trafficked victims but are hidden?

Ms Collins: Yes.

Ms McCorley: Is it possible to judge how many you might be talking about?

Ms Collins: If you look at the National Association for Asylum Seekers (NASS) accommodation here, you can see that there are 329 in the greater Belfast area alone. A lot of those women are isolated, and I would deem that a lot of them may have been trafficked, but we do not know that.

Ms A Campbell: Again, if women are trafficked for any purpose, they can be subject to sexual exploitation. It often goes with the terrain.

Ms Collins: Of the 47 women we have worked with in Belfast and Lisburn alone, 45 had been trafficked for sexual exploitation, and the other two for domestic servitude.

Ms A Campbell: The comparable figures in the Republic and the UK indicate that we are not finding all the victims. I do not think there is anything special about Northern Ireland that would mean that we do not have roughly the same number of human trafficking victims.

Ms McCorley: So you just speculate that there are loads of people.

Ms Collins: Last year the South of Ireland identified over 350 victims. I think in Northern Ireland we had 12, so I do not think there is a comparison.

Ms McCorley: We say that there should be a national rapporteur, but the Minister says that the interdepartmental group does that work and we do not need a rapporteur. I am not sure whether a rapporteur might do a better job. That group recently produced its second annual report, which was very comprehensive and gave a lot of statistics. What I thought was notable was that there was a huge number — well over a thousand — of victims of trafficking, and the vast majority were in England. I think there were 15 in the North here and a small number in Scotland and Wales. Nowhere in the group's strategies or action plans did it suggest that criminalising paying for sex was a way to deal with it. What do you think about that? You would imagine that that group would look at every way to reduce demand, because that is what people want to do. Why would you think they did not see that?

Ms A Campbell: Well, I think —

Ms Collins: It is certainly linked.

Ms A Campbell: It is, and the truth is that, when people are embedded in a system and that is the way that it has been running, they do not often think about what you can actually do differently or upstream that will stop or halt it. You are basically managing a problem rather than thinking about how you can stop it. So, on the business of criminalising the sexual services, I am sure you will know, from reading some of the research now, the Nordic model, which we advocate. It has been working successfully. Equally, other models such as legalisation of prostitution have become a disaster as far as the increase in human trafficking numbers is concerned, in Germany and so forth. So, it is out there, but it is not always the case that the organisation that will produce that report will be tasked to think about solutions. The great thing here is that, out of the relatively new Stormont, we have an opportunity to think about new things and think, "Let us be a model for Europe", rather than waiting to be the tail that wags. Let us do something radical. We have identified the problem. I very much hope that, in 50 years' time, people will look back and think, "Good grief, there was a wide swathe of slavery rocking across the world, and nobody was really thinking about how you stop this". It is just being managed. It is not good enough. I do not mean that in any way about people in the system, but the systems have to change, not your aim, which is to stop this.

Ms McCorley: I take it that the Nordic model that you are referring to is the Swedish model. There is evidence contrary to the evidence which says that it has worked. It is difficult when you are reading academic research that says different, so who is right and who is wrong here?

Ms A Campbell: I suppose that I look at what the experts are saying. In this respect, I have to say that, without trying to be boastful, you have to look at the organisations that are providing the support to the victims, such as us and that wide European Women's Lobby, which has thousands of women's organisations in it. The End Violence Against Women campaign includes all of the black and ethnic minority (BME) women's organisations, which are working on all of those issues around honour killing and female genital mutilation. They are very clear that this is a good route to take. Again, as I am sure you will all accept, research can be used in the most disingenuous fashion to create false information. How many years ago was it that we were having loads of research saying that tobacco

was good for you? I have to question the motivation behind some of those reports. In Sweden, the police now favour that model. Initially, they did not, but they are now seeing that is getting results.

Ms Collins: Prostitution is linked with trafficking. It is the same market out there. The market is men who want to use women for sex. That is linked. It is in our society. When we talk about the market that is there and the people who use women in the sex industry, we think that someone comes up to the north-west of Ireland on a Friday night in a boat. That is not the case. Our society is where the market is. It is among us. It is our families, our friends and our colleagues. That is who the market is. The men who are using women who are trafficked are using women who are in the sex industry for prostitution. So it is linked.

Ms McCorley: I accept that there is a definitely an overlap. There is no doubt about that. The difficulty is that you have made a very broad statement that anyone who pays for sex is guilty or basically supports sexual slavery and degradation. I think that that is a very broad statement that people might find insulting. I do not know any, but there may very well be people who do not abuse anyone but who maybe pay for sex at times. So, I do not think that you can say across the board that, if you do this, that automatically makes you that. I have wee questions about that.

Ms Collins: In our experience, the women who we work with who are in the sex industry — women who have not been trafficked but women who are local in Northern Ireland — are very vulnerable women. Most of those women do not have choices. I do not think that women, when growing up, say that they want to go into the sex industry. Women have been in forced into that for all sorts of reasons and are in there now, and it is usually because someone else is profiting off them. If it is not through drugs, it is through making money off them for what they are doing. I hear about women who choose to go there as a way of making money, but that is very rare. In my experience of working with those women, they all regret it.

Ms A Campbell: Some men think, "Well, I'm doing it this way or that way, and that's not really abusive". That may well be their intention, but they should look at the facts, such as the average age at which girls enter prostitution and their background. They could be in care. There is a whole scandal at the moment about what has happened with young people out of their care homes. Who ends up in prostitution and why? At some point, you cannot have this little bubble where you can buy sex off somebody who says that they want to sell sex and think that you are OK. You are part of that chain of abuse. We stand over that statement. We are not actually recommending that each person caught in that situation should get 20 years, but you have to give a short, sharp message that it is abuse. We have not done figures for the components of brothels or whatever here, but some of the statistics across the rest of the UK show that a staggering number of women in the sex industry are known to have been coerced into it. If you do that, you take the risk that you are absolutely defending that chain of slavery. You have to wake up to that and stop doing it.

Ms Collins: We had the same argument 30 years ago in relation to domestic violence. People were saying, "It happens in the home. It is one else's business. They are at it again this Friday night. People have drink, and that is what causes domestic violence". It is the same.

Ms A Campbell: It is not an individual right to override community safety in general and the rights of a group — in this case, the rights of women and girls to live in safety. We and other organisations argue that the very existence of a prostitution industry that is, effectively, protected or treated like any other respectable industry is a threat to women and girls. It is a form of abuse that needs to be challenged.

Ms McCorley: The end result is what everybody is seeking. Nobody doubts that. It is about how you get there. I do not really see the analogy with domestic violence, because you just target the abusers; you would not dream of going into a home presuming that somebody might be committing domestic violence, but —

Ms Collins: What I meant was that the attitude around prostitution is the same now —you know, it is like the oldest profession. There is a mindset in our society that needs to be changed. Prostitution is violence against women in another form.

Ms A Campbell: It is also very much linked to the adult protection agenda. We would all be clear that, if a child were being prostituted, there would immediately be a prosecution, and the child would be protected. As soon as you step over that line, you become an adult. Our view is that, if you are in prostitution, you are a vulnerable adult. The likelihood is that you will have a background in all of that,

but just by being in there, you are a vulnerable adult who needs protection. Instead of offering that protection, society just says, "No. A few of you have made the choice, so we'll let the rest of you just fester".

Ms McCorley: No, I do not think that you do that. I think that you use the laws that we have to pursue the abusers and the human traffickers.

Ms A Campbell: In prostitution, there is so much violence. Surveys of prostitutes show the amount of violence that is enacted on them. They never get a prosecution. They are not protected.

The Chairperson: To pick up on that in terms of the message that you want to go to society, I had a debate with students only yesterday. One of the boys at it — I think that they were below 16 — put it to me that we should just legalise prostitution. The girl from Bangor said that any form of prostitution was violence against women. Elaborate on how you see that as a message to society to try to address those attitudes that you think need to be addressed.

Ms A Campbell: I am glad to hear that some young girl out there tied it together. I also understand why a young lad would start thinking like that. We have to recognise that we are living in a society that uses sex, sexual attractiveness and all the rest of it as a commodity. It has linked us all into a real distortion, so that, instead of being a healthy part of a relationship and so on, it becomes commodified and sold. There has always been an issue around how women are valued in society. Are they valued as full human beings with full human rights, or is it just about their role as an accessory to a man in some way? Part of that is what it is about; it is still about the unequal position between the genders. If you had full respect on the basis of us all being human beings, we would not need to have a lot of these conversations.

There are international standards for protecting women. Globally, there is a huge epidemic of violence against women and girls. We have it in the form of domestic violence here; as Noelle said, it is rife in Northern Ireland. It is there in all classes and cultures. We have that, but internationally, there are the things that I mentioned earlier such as female genital mutilation. There is a lack of protection for women. You have women being stoned if they have, apparently, been adulterers in Saudi Arabia. All of that ties up into a huge amount of violence against women and girls, both by individuals and by states. That is fully recognised by the UN in a lot of countries. The UK has signed up to a lot of that protection, but there is often a gap when you translate it into what you do on the ground.

That is the framework, but for us, fundamentally, it comes down to building a more decent, respectful society where people are respected and abuse, of whatever kind, is just not tolerated. To instil that, you have to educate young people. You also have to do some unpicking educational work with older people, because they are carrying some of those assumptions. You need to send out the message that abuse will not be tolerated.

I am veering off a wee bit from what you were saying, Chair, so apologies for that. Effectively, for us, the very idea that you can say that a person can be bought is fundamentally a form of abuse. That is the essence of slavery, and that is exactly what prostitution does. It says that you are no longer a human being with rights; you are a commodity, a thing that can be bought so that things can be done to you, and you do not have any say in that. That is just what happens. Our model in the deep recesses of our minds is that, somehow, this is a safety valve or this is the way it is going to be or this is how men and women are. We are saying no. There are other ways in which people live lives and are respectful. We do not have to accept that model of society for boys or girls into the future. You do not have to say that prostitution will always be with us. I personally hope that it will not. I hope that poverty will not, either. We can change all those things. It is within human ingenuity and intellect. Did I answer your question?

The Chairperson: You did, yes.

Mr Wells: You certainly did.

Mr Humphrey: Thank you very much for your presentation, ladies. What I have heard so far, I have found extremely powerful. I imagine that some of the contributions that you have already made will be heavily quoted from when the Bill is discussed on the Floor of the House.

In your submission, you state:

"We believe that this Bill is a bold and radical opportunity for Northern Ireland to lead the way in the fight against human trafficking and sexual exploitation."

It would be helpful to this Committee and for the Northern Ireland Assembly if you could expand on why you feel that is the case.

Ms A Campbell: Well, it comes back to the beginning when I was trying to recap the fundamental reasons why we are supporting it. First, we believe that the Bill's clauses go that little bit further than we have gone so far with the Department of Justice's support packages. It takes things beyond some of those lines that we have in the sand at the moment.

For example, there are some provisions around counselling which would mean that victims could access counselling in matters like that after a period of time, rather than just the 45 days. Certainly, in our experience, that is crucial, because no one is ready for full counselling within 45 days. The provisions just take it that bit further and take the support for victims further.

We have to be very mindful to treat these victims as victims. Sometimes, they run up against the immigration laws and so forth. Of course, those laws have to operate, but in society, I think, we have to carve out a special place for victims of this type of crime to make sure that they are being protected and supported. That is the first thing. The second thing is the very radical step of thinking about the criminalisation of those who want to purchase sexual services, because that has never come onto the agenda in the UK. In the Republic of Ireland, there is a Turn Off the Red Light campaign. That has been getting a lot of support, but it has not translated into any legislation yet.

Mr Humphrey: Our party's concern would be that action is not taken. Given that there is an all-party Committee in the Dáil looking at legislation for the Republic of Ireland, we could become the soft underbelly for human trafficking and prostitution. As you said — I think that I quote you correctly — supporting the sex industry is supporting slavery. In the society that we are trying to build in Northern Ireland, it is not conceivable to leave people completely exposed in that way without putting protections in place for them. You mentioned the Nordic position, and this Committee is going to Stockholm in a few weeks to look at how Sweden has implemented protections there. Do you think that that is a valuable thing for the Committee to do?

Ms A Campbell: I think that is excellent. I am delighted to hear it. It is a great idea.

Mr A Maginness: Thank you very much, ladies. It has been very helpful and very robust.

Some people argue that clause 6 should not be in this Bill at all because it deals with prostitution per se; that we, as an Assembly, should be dealing with prostitution but not in the context of this Bill; and that, therefore, it is not the right time or place in terms of legislation to deal with the issue of prostitution and the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services. What do you say about that argument?

Ms A Campbell: I am not trying to be facetious, but would we start here if we could choose? This is where we are. I understand, as an outsider looking in, that it is not the easiest thing in the world to get legislation through Stormont. So, if you actually have a live proposal, you go with it. That is my first thing: the pragmatic reality. When will this issue get back on to the agenda? Another 10 or 15 years? How many women will have died who have been locked into that servitude? The other thing is that there is a clear logic for us in entwining the two because, more and more, the sexual industry is being populated by people who are victims of human trafficking, and most of the victims are then exploited for sexual reasons. So, there is a clear logical link. It is not as if the two are not linked. The rise in protections for women and girls in Northern Ireland or western Europe will lead to women who come in and are more vulnerable from countries that have not got those protections being shunted into this sexual services industry. So, you need to protect them in order to protect all the women in a society. For me, there is a clear logical link, and unless you are some sort of legislator purist, I cannot see why there is a problem with it. I cannot understand that argument, as a punter or a person on the street.

Mr A Maginness: There is another argument — I suppose that you have met the argument — that whilst a lot of those involved in prostitution are exploited, some are not exploited. Do you accept that argument, or is it a spurious argument?

Ms Collins: I certainly do not accept that. In our experience, we do not come across women who had those choices. We come across women who had perhaps been abused as children, who are vulnerable and who had been led down that path, with no choices.

Ms A Campbell: If a woman or young girl has been groomed to be abused, it will often take her quite a while to realise that. There are parallels with domestic violence in that it can take quite a while, and space and support, for a woman to actually realise what has happened to her in a violent marriage or partnership. If that has been your life, it can be hard to put yourself outside it or to get the information and support required to see, "Good grief, that is what was happening to me." We should absolutely never say "Never". There may be one or two cases, but they really do not count for a hill of beans, because the mass amount of women are being exploited and are coming from extremely vulnerable positions.

Mr A Maginness: So, in most cases, it is an exploitive and, indeed, abusive relationship.

Ms Collins: Those are the cases that we come into contact with.

Mr Anderson: Thank you, ladies, for coming along to present to us today. I also refer to clause 6, about which there is much debate. A number of groups and individuals coming from the feminist perspective have suggested that clause 6 is anti-women for a variety of reasons. As you are a feminist group supportive of the approach outlined in clause 6, can you tell the Committee why you believe that that approach will actually be good for the women of the Northern Ireland?

Ms A Campbell: Certainly. For clarification, did you say that some feminist organisations are saying that it is not abusive?

Mr Anderson: Some feminists have suggested that it can be anti-women for a variety of reasons.

Ms A Campbell: There is always healthy debate in any movement, and some of those debates have certainly been aired over the past month or so. What I would say is that — this is on page 2 of our position paper — the list of long-term organisations who are in the women's movement and the feminist movement — some people just say "women's movement" — are, if you like, the big hitters. Something like the European Women's Lobby ranges from small organisations to major umbrella organisations across all of western Europe. Our own Women's Resource and Development Agency is in there, and its membership includes all our major women's centres here, smaller women's groups in local areas, and so on. Not necessarily feminist; there are women's institutes and things like that. However, they are all very supportive of criminalising the actual act of buying sexual services.

Some of the other debate, to be quite honest, is a wee bit academic. It is all about three people somewhere who may have made that choice and the fact that, in the 21st century, maybe that is OK. However, if you ask just about any woman in any community in Northern Ireland, you will get a clear answer: criminalise it. They do not want it. That is the strength of feeling there. The reality is that when women are involved in sexual services and are being degraded in that way, the whole of womanhood is degraded. That is not to say that a woman who is trapped in it is in any way to blame. She needs help, but we need to stop what is going on. Society needs to say no. It was only when we got everyone working together on domestic violence that we managed to turn it around so that it was not acceptable to make jokes about beating your wife any more. That happened in all our lifetimes. So, we need to do the same thing with this. Again, we need to think in terms of pathways for those women, because otherwise they will still be condemned to that abuse and its after-effects.

Mr Anderson: Thank you for that and for your clear vision. Considering your stance and support for clause 6, what is your reaction to the argument made by the Department that more research is required before any action can be taken on reducing demand for human trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution?

Ms Collins: More research?

Mr Anderson: Yes, allow more time for research.

Ms Collins: We have the evidence. The evidence has been hundreds of years in the making, and it is very clear. In Women's Aid, we work with tens of thousands of women in Northern Ireland over the course of a year. We hear about sexual exploitation on a daily basis from these women, whether it is

by strangers or within relationships. We are very clear that the evidence is out there. I do not think that there is any need for further research.

Ms A Campbell: If I recall, the DOJ did research a couple of years ago; it might be cited in our paper. What else do you need? I do not think any of us will have a cap on what the numbers will be or exactly what will be needed in a few years. However, we could start out on the path and present the pathways and support for women who are in it. We could do it carefully. No one wants some huge furore around it all. You would do it carefully and review it so that you are putting in place what is required. More changes may be needed in terms of police protocols etc, but I do not think that that should stop you from starting out on that path.

Mr Anderson: As my colleague said, the Committee is going to Sweden. Do you think that that is a good model? They are some 14 or 15 years in the process. The idea and what has happened there, and maybe the way it started — do you think that it is now a perfect model to take a lead from?

Ms A Campbell: I think that it is a very good model. I doubt whether there is a perfect model in any area of life. There may be aspects of that that we can draw on or modify a little. From what we have read and from what people have told us, it sounds an awful lot better than what we have here at the moment. Basically, what we have here at the moment is society turning its face away and saying, "It is happening; let it happen."

Mr Elliott: Thanks very much for your presentation. Everybody else has focused on clause 6, so I might as well start there as well. To some, it may seem almost out of context in that it is dealing specifically with prostitution, as opposed to just trafficking. It has been suggested that clause 6 would not deal with the issue of prostitution in its entirety. Is there anything else, then? Annie, I take your point that, if we were starting over again, we would not start from here. However, we are here. Is there anything that should be added to that, or should it go into a much bigger package somewhere to try to deal with prostitution overall? Do you still see gaps, even if that clause is put into the Bill?

Ms A Campbell: Our suggestion is that we need a new clause setting out that there will be pathways and support for anyone who is in prostitution; obviously, there are some young men as well. We need that. We do not pretend to know what else you might need in the legal sphere. I am not sure if anything else would be required in the Bill to criminalise it and take that forward. However, if it were in the Bill and in statute that there have to be pathways and support, the details of that could be worked out in the same way that the details of support for human trafficking victims had to be worked out. None of us had been doing that, so we had to sit down with the DOJ, work that out and explain to the DOJ what we have and how it could be made available. We would do the same thing for the support pathways for women in prostitution.

Mr Elliott: I am just trying to get a handle on it. Let us not hide the fact that there are suggestions that putting one clause into the Bill to deal with prostitution is not a good way to deal with the issue. I am trying to tease out whether you are better with a separate Bill or trying to deal with it in this Bill and, if so, whether that one clause is enough or we need more. That is really what I am trying to get a handle on. Maybe that is as far as you can go on that.

Ms A Campbell: If it said very clearly in the Bill that pathways and support packages for exit routes out of prostitution had to be set up, that would be the law and everybody who is responsible would have to get on with it.

Mr Elliott: OK. My second query is around what you stated in your presentation. You have not raised it in respect of clause 8, which gives a level of immunity to those involved in prostitution. On clause 6, you state in your submission:

"It is essential that the criminalisation of buyers is accompanied by the decriminalisation of those in prostitution".

Could that not be significantly abused? I see where you are coming from, especially in relation to trafficked people. I have huge concerns about the possibility of that being abused and the potential abuse of it by people who will say, "I had no option other than this". That may be quite difficult to prove. It might be difficult — I do not know — first, to get a prosecution and, secondly, to prove that they were not forced. I am trying to get an idea of where you are coming from and how you would get over those difficult issues.

Ms Collins: It is a very difficult one. On 90% of the occasions on which we hear from women who tell us their stories, they do not have proof. We have to believe them. We, in Women's Aid, have had the experience of being able to relate to women who genuinely have been abused. I imagine that there need to be investigations all the time.

Mr Elliott: Do you see the potential for it to be abused?

Ms Collins: Everything that is out there may well be abused. I heard recently from an Garda Síochána in the South who said that they now spend most of their time dealing with supposed victims of human trafficking who have not actually been victims of human trafficking but are saying that to try to get leave to remain in the country. It is necessary to go through that. Unfortunately, it taints everything for genuine victims. If you ever sit with someone who has genuinely been trafficked across the world and gone through the most horrendous ordeals, you will surely see that saving one person from that is worth it.

Ms A Campbell: Our point is that we do want to get into a situation in which, when the police use their powers to go in and arrest people who they have reason to think are trying to buy sexual services, they automatically tack on the women whose services are being bought as a kind of accessory to the crime. The crime is in the buying of the services not in being the vulnerable person who is providing the services. You should be looking at treating that person as a victim in the same way as, when the police rescue people who they think are human trafficking victims, the presumption is that they are victims and not that they have committed a crime. In that way, human trafficking and that aspect of it are very much linked.

As Noelle said, there is always the possibility of abuse. However, in a culture in which the victim is centralised, reputable services that are providing support are not going to cover up victims who are coddling. We do not do that in Women's Aid, because that would undermine our reputation in respect of what we do for genuine victims. There might be a bit of muddy water at the beginning, but I think that that could be sorted.

Mr Elliott: I am genuinely trying to get to the bottom of it. Your presentation makes it seem black and white: criminalise the buyers and decriminalise those who you would almost interpret as sellers. To me, it is not as black and white as that. On the ground and in practical terms, it is probably not as black and white as that. I am trying to get to the bottom of it. You have gone to some length to explain it, but I still have concerns about the decriminalisation aspect being abused by some people. Anyway, maybe that is for another time.

Ms A Campbell: That is probably the case in a lot of areas when protections are put in place. The people who are there to make a profit out of abuse will try to find a way around it. You continually have to try to outsmart them. I suppose that that is partly the police's role.

The Chairperson: You mention sending a strong message to those who buy sexual services here or worldwide. Sweden did not apply it to those who engage in the activity worldwide, but Norway did. If the Assembly takes forward clause 6, do you think that, as well as people who buy sexual services in Northern Ireland, those who are found to have bought them in any other country should be liable to prosecution?

Ms A Campbell: Well, yes. Interestingly, when we were saying that it was more that we felt that Northern Ireland and Stormont could actually be a model of innovative, forward-thinking practice and, in that way, send out that signal. I am quite sure that, for example, Scotland, England and Wales and so on would be very interested in it. If we are going to end it globally, that has to happen. You cannot just export the problem. So we would be in favour of that. You are not trying to say that you cannot exploit or abuse people in this country but you can go and do whatever you like in any other country.

Mr McCartney: Thank you very much indeed for a very powerful presentation. I commend you on the work that Women's Aid does. Tom Elliott and Alban have already spoken about the fact that there is a view abroad that the two things should be separate. You can already see it clearly as human trafficking equals sexual exploitation and sexual exploitation equals human trafficking, but we know that human trafficking is wider than sexual exploitation. The Oireachtas report, in its trajectory, has to deal with prostitution as a single issue, so here there might be a feeling that we are clouding the issues. Do you have any view on that?

Ms A Campbell: All of the provisions in the Bill that improve the support services for victims are for all victims of human trafficking, not just for victims of sexual exploitation. I will repeat that, of all of the victims of trafficking who come in, whether it is domestic servitude or economic, there will always be victims of sexual exploitation. For me, it is a double indemnity thing. It is good because it puts the spotlight on that and on what can actually happen to the most vulnerable. We see the linkage. The working-out of it, how it is going to be implemented, how the police are going to prosecute and how the packages of support are going to be set up will all be detailed and in the nitty-gritty stuff, but, when just setting out the case in legislation, we see it as positive that they are linked, because it actually sends a message out to society — a reality check that this is what is happening. We need to do some of the same things like asking where your ordinary mushrooms are coming from and all of those sorts of things —

Ms Collins: Apples in Armagh at the moment.

Ms A Campbell: Who is working on the trawlers and in the fields? All that stuff.

Mr McCartney: That is what I am saying: the servitude aspect of it gets pushed to the side. It now almost looks like a Bill solely focusing on prostitution.

Ms A Campbell: It is one clause. Obviously, it has opened up a huge debate. Society obviously needed that, but still, if it goes into legislation, all of the other support measures are there for all victims of human trafficking. That has got to be great.

Mr McCartney: In your presentation and your paper, you stated very clearly that, in your experience in Women's Aid in particular, people who present themselves to Women's Aid who are there as a result of prostitution have been coerced, abused and put in a position of doing things that they do not want to do, yet there are laws in place to prevent that happening. Where do you see the weakness in the structure there?

Ms A Campbell: I must be missing some of the laws. I do not think there are. There are child protection measures in place, but what about vulnerable adults? We actually have no services for young women —

Mr McCartney: No, I understand about the services at present, but the Department has presented us with a number of pieces of legislation that deal with exploitation, abuse and coercion of anyone, particularly women, for sexual services.

Ms A Campbell: To be honest — I am saying this with respect — maybe there are cases where they have helped, but I just see them as sleeping clauses, because they are not being activated.

Mr McCartney: That is a point that I would like to explore, because laws are put in place to have an impact. We could enact this legislation, but it might not be employed. We might say to ourselves that it will bring about the end of prostitution, so we sit back, rest on our laurels and say, "There you are, that is the legislation. That is the end of that for time immemorial". Take the analogy with domestic violence. Domestic violence did not come to people's attention and focus simply because we brought in new laws. The laws were already in place; assaulting another person was a crime. It was about awareness, campaigning and breaking down the barriers that often led society to believe that domestic violence was acceptable. Sometimes, I think that we have to prevent this idea that, if we enact a law, it will bring something to an end. We may not achieve that. Do you see any merit in that?

Ms Collins: The laws were not there to protect women from domestic violence for many years. Although it was a draconian law, until 1979 it was legal to beat your wife as long as you did not use a stick that was wider than your thumb. The laws were not there to protect women, and groups like Women's Aid had to actively promote the issue of domestic violence, change the mindset of society and say that it was a crime that was happening in the home.

I do not think that people are aware that there is a law to prevent someone from buying sex. I do not think that that is well known.

Ms A Campbell: Or to prevent someone from being coerced into it. It is a form of grooming, and people are not aware that what is happening to them might be a criminal act. At the end of the day,

the prostitution industry is not seen as illegal. If it was, people might think, "They are trying to make me do something that is illegal".

Although there may be clauses somewhere in other laws, it is not clear to society that we have taken a stand and said that prostitution is unacceptable. That sort of sea change could come from this clause. I would not want the clause to override all the other positives that could come out of enacting the Bill. As we said, we see the Bill as being very positive in taking forward support for all human trafficking victims. However, equally, the clause is getting so much attention because it is so different.

Why would we be afraid to take that step? We are not naive enough to think that it will end prostitution, but it will put down a big marker, and it will start people on the journey of thinking that, if prostitution can be ended, we can have a different society in which we do not have it.

Mr McCartney: You talked about the pathway and the aftercare. Do you think that the Bill is rigorous enough with the pathways and dealing with the impact afterwards?

Ms A Campbell: We would like an additional clause that specifies that there would be exit routes, pathways and support for those who are in prostitution now.

Mr McCartney: What about those who are involved in human exploitation rather than sexual exploitation? Would you also like to see aftercare for those people?

Ms A Campbell: Some of the other clauses deal with aftercare in the form of broad support, but we are in favour of anything that would strengthen that. There are particular issues around the trauma that people can be locked into when they have been victims of sexual exploitation, and they need long-term care. We see those victims in prostitution. Human trafficking victims do not really fall into that zone. Victims of sexual exploitation really need a lot of care and support to get out of it.

Mr McCartney: Reading through it, there does not seem to be enough research about the extent of the problem that we are trying to deal with. Notwithstanding your everyday experience, it is not translated into research or —

Ms A Campbell: When the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was brought in and we set out support pathways here for human trafficking victims, the only piece of research in Northern Ireland was the one that we had done. It was very hard to get the figures because it is a hidden problem. The same is true for prostitution. You have to acknowledge that it is there, that you do not know the parameters, start on the pathway and be rigorous about trying to determine how much is there and so on. That is part of it. However, you are not going to know that in advance. If research is done now, people will not be able to find out the extent of it.

The Chairperson: Should legislation be used to make a statement about what this society takes a position on?

Ms Collins: It helps.

Ms A Campbell: I do not think that it should just be a PR brief, but definitely. Is that not what it is partly about?

The Chairperson: How much research do you think would be needed to enable support of this legislation? The argument seems to be being made that we need research. How much research and evidence do you think that someone would need to be able to make a decision on supporting this Bill, particularly clause 6?

Ms Collins: I repeat that the evidence is there. We see it very clearly as sexual violence against women. It has been going on for hundreds of years, and we are dealing with it daily. We would say that we have the evidence.

I have listened to researchers and academics talk about comparisons in other countries and how prostitution works in other countries where the sex industry is legalised, and you could have a shopping mall and lots of rooms that are let by the day. Is that the sort of society that we want to live in — where there are panic buttons for women who are being used in prostitution and security come up if there is any sort of bother? I do not want to live in that sort of society, and I am sure that many of

you do not either. Let me use this comparison: who has a panic button in their daily work? Who has to live and work and have a panic button to protect them?

Ms A Campbell: And who has to be drugged to the hilt to get through their working day?

Ms Collins: We hear horrific stories from those women.

Ms A Campbell: There is obviously a big responsibility on the Justice Committee. We recognise that doing a bit of targeted fact finding, such as going to Sweden, makes sense, but you have to call a halt on it somewhere and say, "OK. We will do what we can here".

The Chairperson: Tell me about the type of abuse that women you have dealt with have suffered.

Ms Collins: The trafficked women that we have talked to refer to their journey. We have taken women from countries from all over the world. They are perhaps from Afghanistan, where the Taliban raided their villages, and they were moved along a path through Europe from Athens to Northern Ireland. Along that pathway, they were abused, put to work and locked up, not knowing what countries they were in except for the weather. They do not know what they are doing in Northern Ireland, and they do not speak the language.

You can imagine what it is like to arrive in a country where you continue to be abused before you are rescued by the PSNI. Then you come to live with others who you do not trust, who do not speak your language and who do not have the same culture as you. How do you begin to tell your story and recover from that? It is a long and a very slow process to gain recovery.

I do not want to sensationalise it, but we also deal with women from Northern Ireland who have been forced into prostitution by their partners. They told them that they loved them and then took them to various places in Northern Ireland and expected them to sell their bodies — they did not gain the money — and be used and abused by so-called friends of their partners. We hear those horrible stories daily.

The Chairperson: What do those women suffer daily?

Ms Collins: What do they suffer?

The Chairperson: Yes.

Ms Collins: They are being raped. I suppose that some of them are addicted to alcohol and drugs and, as Annie said, that is how they get through the day. They think that that is their lot. They are self-harming, they are suicidal, and they certainly have mental health problems. They are exhausted by their lives, and quite a lot of them just do not wish to go on. They have been estranged from their families, they are totally isolated from friends and, most days, they only have organisations to help them to get through the rest of the day.

Ms A Campbell: Many of them will also suffer from straightforward physical problems, such as gynaecological problems, broken bones that were never set or health conditions that were never checked. Even something as simple as not getting to the dentist can create misery in their lives.

Ms Collins: Some of them also have pregnancies as a result of rape.

The Chairperson: And you think that this Bill will help to reduce the problem?

Ms A Campbell: It will not be an automatic switch. However, it will start society out on the path of saying that that is not acceptable, it is not what we want in society, and we are going to do everything that we can to target those who are creating it and help those who have been trapped in it.

Mr Wells: I welcome entirely your evidence. As Mr Humphrey said, you should not be surprised if large chunks of your evidence are quoted on many occasions to support the Bill. That is a perhaps an indication of my initial view on the Bill.

I do not know whether you saw 'Prime Time'; RTÉ in the Irish Republic had quite a remarkable exposé of women, mostly Romanians, being trafficked in the Irish Republic, but some of them came up here. Indeed, all six counties of Northern Ireland featured on the website that marketed the women. What was noticeable — I am playing devil's advocate — was that, on several occasions, the police intervened and the women were asked to report individually to the local Garda station, but at no time did they actually reveal that they were being trafficked or how they were being treated. When they had the opportunity to say to the guards confidentially, "Look, I am not here voluntarily; I was shipped in from Romania", they did not. Does that surprise you?

Ms A Campbell: No.

Ms Collins: Women are so afraid. They are living in fear. We have had women who were trafficked right across the world and can remember every single detail and yet cannot remember what happened to them in Northern Ireland. I think that that is selective memory; they are so frightened that whatever happened here in Northern Ireland could continue.

It is a bit like relationships in domestic violence. Women live in relationships for 20 or 30 years and do not tell anyone about it at all. It is that inverted fear that they have. Women tell us that they were hit 20 years ago and never had to be hit again because they knew what was going to happen. They live their lives walking on eggshells. I am not surprised that women who have suffered that ordeal do not say anything. Traffickers have power and control over the women. They are frightened. They believe that, no matter how well we try to protect them, those people will get them. One woman, after living with us for nearly nine months, was still suspicious of us. She thought that we were in league with or worked for immigration.

You have to remember that quite a lot of the women who come to us do not have a lot of security in their country of origin. Their police service may have been corrupt at times. They have no faith in their criminal justice system at all.

Mr Wells: The other interesting revelation in that programme was that the controllers were making €27,000 a week from 14 women through the website and through selling their services. Some of them had 22 clients in 24 hours.

Ms A Campbell: It is big business. That is why it is being so fiercely protected. I talked earlier about some of the misinformation that goes out. If you really examine the root of some of those, they are quite shady. There are websites and so on where, allegedly, women who have been prostitutes are speaking, and, sometimes, some of the bodies are putting them up to it — it is not an authentic voice. There are a lot of authentic organisations; I think that Ruhama came up —

Mr Wells: Sarah Benson.

Ms A Campbell: Yes. But some women are being manipulated.

Mr Wells: We, as MLAs, have been approached by various cooperatives representing sex workers that say that this is nonsense. They say that there are women out there who have made that career choice, and that, if you take that away from them, they have no other option. Again, I am playing devil's advocate. They are saying that it is not a choice between a good life and a bad life; it is between a bad life and a terrible life. They are saying that prostitution at least offers vulnerable women from poor backgrounds an opportunity to survive in this world, and that, although it is not the optimum choice for their life, it offers them some prospect of putting bread on the table. What is your reaction to that?

Ms Collins: Sorry. I am exhausted. I do not think that it is a choice for women. We are here to represent the vulnerable women who have no choices. There are thousands of those women. The women who we come in contact with daily are being abused. They are vulnerable; they do not have choices. If you are in a position to have a choice, it is our duty to look at options.

Ms A Campbell: You definitely need pathways for those women. You cannot just cast them out without the means to live. That is why we are saying that you need the support pathways. I really question, in some instances, who is putting those women up to doing that. Manipulative abusers are not above getting a few women in a room and telling them what to say.

Mr Wells: Most of the spokeswomen would say that they have been through the industry themselves and have been practising for decades.

Ms A Campbell: The other aspect of that is, if you get the pathways in place, the argument that there will be no economic support goes. The other side of it is whether that is good enough. Do you say that, just because some people are making money or a living out of abuse, it should continue? If you take that argument, you could say that we should never have had the emancipation of black slaves because where would they go after the plantation? There is a bit of disruption, but you have to do something to change society. You have to care for the victim and not just say, "That industry is providing people with a bit of money, so let it carry on no matter what the consequences".

Mr Wells: You have detected that there is opposition to this private Member's Bill from the Department and members of this Committee. One point that has been frequently made and must be addressed is that, if you introduce clause 6, you will drive prostitution in Northern Ireland underground. It will make women even more vulnerable, they cannot be seen for medical care and will just disappear. Therefore, clause 6 worsens the conditions for vulnerable women who have been trafficked for sexual services.

Ms Collins: It already is underground. You cannot just walk out. The police have to have intelligence to detect where those places are and rescue trafficked women. I just do not get that argument. It is almost saying that we will do nothing. What is the alternative to it?

Ms A Campbell: Yes, it is already underground. In general, it has moved off the street. I am not a police officer, but there are investigative tools to track where people are promoting services through the internet and so on. There must be ways. If they are selling a service, there has to be a bit of publicity around it, so you find it that way.

Again, that is like saying that because the spotlight is going to be turned on something, you do not turn it on, you just let it continue, because if you turn the spotlight on, they will try to find another way to get around it. They will. But then you have to get cleverer and find ways to get around them and expose them.

Mr Wells: You say that the national referral mechanism fails some victims who experienced the most trauma, and those people need support as well. What safety net should be in place if it is not the NRM? That is a more technical issue but I am sure that it will be raised. You are not happy with the present national referral mechanism, but what do you put in its place?

Ms A Campbell: It is more the issue of timescale.

Ms Collins: Yes, it is more the timescale of the 45-day reflection period that bothered us. I suppose that the NRM works if someone is willing to go down the criminal justice route and can give that evidence. Women who still feel frightened and do not want to go down that route will probably not get a positive, conclusive decision. Support needs to be put in place for those women.

Ms A Campbell: They could still be genuine victims of human trafficking but still be frozen in fear that they are not engaging enough and will not get a conclusive determination. There is a cliff that they just fall off after the 45 days, which is why we push for a longer reflective period.

Mr Wells: Women are also trafficked from other parts of the United Kingdom and within the United Kingdom. Do you see the absence of the National Crime Agency in Northern Ireland as an encumbrance to tracking down those women?

Ms A Campbell: The option of it?

Mr Wells: It will not be operational in Northern Ireland.

Ms A Campbell: I am not au fait enough with the technicalities of that. They should be being tracked by whoever can do it.

The Chairperson: Thank you. We are nearly finished.

Mr Dickson: I appreciate very much the length of time that you have spent with us and the information that you have given us. You give a graphic description of the people you work with and the type of things that they have to face. Do laws not already exist to cover all the issues that you described today? Is any law missing in respect of any of the items that you raised today?

Ms Collins: Apart from the criminalisation of prostitution, I suppose the laws are there. I suppose that the use of the laws has been a problem for the women who we deal with.

Mr Dickson: As an organisation, you will know your own statistics. How many trafficked women have you dealt with?

Ms Collins: In four years, 47.

Mr Dickson: The greatest fears of anyone who is being trafficked, according to one organisation, are the debt that they incurred in getting here, destitution, and the fear, particularly for asylum seekers, of being returned to the issue that they have sought asylum from in the first instance. The greatest fear, in that case, is that of deportation. How do you see the improvement of pathways for dealing with that citation of the greatest fear being that of deportation?

Ms Collins: Some of the women who we have dealt with who have been trafficked for sexual exploitation have chosen to be repatriated to their home. There have been other women who, as you mentioned, have been in debt bondage, and they feel that they cannot go back home or feel that their families, usually in Asia, mostly China, are under threat. That is very difficult because, obviously, it is an international problem. I think that a lot more needs to be done there so that the protection is on the other side.

Many of those women do not wish to be deported. For instance, some of the Chinese women who we have dealt with cannot be deported because they have no papers. They are known as the "black women" of China. They may be a second child and were therefore never registered and have no papers; they are in no-man's-land. There are women who, believe it or not, do want to go back home, but for those who do not, having been through this, to be given leave to remain as a human right is probably the right thing to do.

Mr Dickson: Mr Wells made reference to the national agencies that deal with trafficked people. They are primarily women, and I accept that that is the argument we are talking about today. Do you think that it is counterproductive for the UK trafficking centre phone service to be manned by immigration officers rather than by civil servants who are dealing with trafficking as opposed to the UK Government's stated aim of deporting people?

Ms Collins: It is worrying.

Ms A Campbell: It is very difficult. As we said earlier, there has to be a clear recognition of what happens when you are a victim of human trafficking. Therefore, if you find someone who you have reasonable grounds to think is a victim, they have to be treated with respect and care. One call of that nature could be enough to drive someone back to the trafficker.

Mr Dickson: How many of the people who have been trafficked who you have dealt with have been trafficked specifically for the purpose of sexual exploitation or prostitution?

Ms Collins: Of the 47, 45. The other two were for domestic servitude. One of them was given the option of working in a brothel as a housekeeper or working in the brothel, so she chose to work as a housekeeper.

Mr Dickson: In those particular circumstances, the prosecution of those who are operating a brothel currently falls within the legal framework and there are penalties for that. If there is a criminalisation of prostitution in the sense of decriminalising it for the provider, and we have always got to remember that this can include men, but it is predominantly women, do you have any concerns that the Swedish model or the change in the law has the potential to lead to blackmail?

Ms Collins: Blackmail?

Mr Dickson: Yes. In other words, the provider decides, for some reason, that they are innocent. They know that, under the law, they are innocent, and therefore, if they gave information to the police regarding their clients, they could extort further from their clients above and beyond that which they have got through the services that they provided by the threat of going to the police.

Ms A Campbell: I suppose that potential exists already.

Mr Dickson: Yes, but it is potentially redoubled.

Ms A Campbell: My sympathy would not lie with that, given the scale of all the crimes that are committed in that regard. Blackmail is possible in any walk of life. It is not something that I would consider. It should be about ensuring that the person who is being exploited is not criminalised and criminalising those who are making the demand, and that is clear. In practice, it will be a little less black and white, and there will be things to work out, but if you have the principles —

Mr Dickson: But those are not things that you can work out. This is a piece of law that we are making.

Ms A Campbell: That would be about implementation.

Mr Dickson: Therefore, we need to look at all the unintended consequences of any changes in the law. This is not opposition to clause 6; this is simply attempting to ensure that there are no unintended consequences of what we are trying to achieve by way of this change.

You made reference to support from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions on this matter. Why, then, is the International Union of Sex Workers a member of the GMB, which, in turn, is a member of the Irish Congress? How is it going to deal with that issue?

Ms A Campbell: It was voted through at the ICTU conference. I suppose that not every individual member of any large umbrella body always wins a vote.

Mr Dickson: How will it represent the views of the GMB in this discussion?

Ms A Campbell: In the normal way, I suppose. With an umbrella body, there might be elements in it that do not like what has been taken as a national policy.

Mr Dickson: It is more than a national policy. It has a member trade union that actively represents workers in the sex industry. That union is one of its member unions.

Ms A Campbell: All I can say is that it would not be unusual in the trade union movement for a branch to feel that what it wanted —

Mr Dickson: This is not a matter of policy; this is a matter of an actual trade union being a member of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

Ms A Campbell: Yes, but I am saying that individual trade unions may not all agree with every resolution that is passed any more than every branch might agree with a resolution that is passed at your national conference.

Mr Dickson: It is, perhaps, unfair to ask you, but you made reference to the ICTU. Perhaps it will explain it to us when it gives evidence.

The Chairperson: Mr Humphrey has a supplementary question, just to wrap things up.

Mr Humphrey: You were talking about women from China who do not have papers, rights and whatever. Obviously, in every case, that is the worst example because, effectively, they do not even exist in their home nation. Annie, you said that victims' support groups should be allowed to attend with victims. I would have thought that, in a case like that, that would be absolutely essential, particularly when someone is unable to speak English or speak it fluently. If someone has no papers and, effectively, no identity, there is no question that that would have to happen. Do you agree?

Ms A Campbell: It should be, but it is not happening at present.

Ms Collins: Quite often, they have to go down the asylum route, especially if there is no conclusive decision from the NRM. I know of at least four women who have been refused asylum and are still living in NASS accommodation. One of those women has been living in that accommodation for four years.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your time. Annie, you opened this session, and I am going to let you finish it. In a couple of months, we will have to vote on this, and there are differing views. I want to give you the opportunity to conclude this part of the meeting with what you would say to members, ultimately, when they come to vote on this.

Ms A Campbell: I say to everyone on the Committee that it is wonderful to come here and feel that everyone is so engaged and that you want to hear our input. We appreciate that very much. I urge everyone here and all the political parties at Stormont to give the Bill their full backing. This may be the one chance that we have in this generation to do something very specific and targeted to stop the tide of degradation against women that is flooding across the globe. This is the bit that we can do. Please back the Bill and back the victims of human trafficking.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much.