Dear excellences, dear guests,

My name is Sabrina Sanchez, a woman with trans experience and the coordinator of the European Sex Workers Rights Alliance - a sex worker-led network with membership in 30 countries across Europe and central Asia. I am very pleased to be joining you today.

I came to Europe from Latin America in 2005. Although I was legally authorised to live and work in Spain after a few months, because of the significant barriers that prevent trans women from finding employment, I have been a sex worker since I arrived in Europe. It is amazing that trans individuals aren’t recognized as a minority, given that our lives are one of the arguments for the Russian invasion too.

Our community is very familiar with the concept of the ‘ideal victim’. Our grassroots experience of organising for our human rights is that sex workers are seen as those who deserve punishment, detention and deportation instead of rights and help, unless we can perform a very limited definition of the ‘ideal victim’, who are
considered to be only those victims of the worst forms of exploitation and trafficking. This has dangerous consequences: as my colleague migrant sex worker said, the only instance in which she would engage with police, would be in the extreme circumstance of an immediate threat to her life.

Globally, sex workers organise, and develop structures and strategies to protect themselves from violent clients, and to support themselves to work independently, and free from exploitation. Our member organizations also play a vital role in preventing children from being forced into the sex industry, as well as supporting those who have been trafficked into it. We are the only organizations that can build trust, and bridge the gap between official anti-trafficking structures and stakeholders, and the most marginalized people selling sex. Yet, we remain systematically excluded and silenced. The exclusion and silencing of certain groups of people is defined as institutional discrimination.

As recognized by UN agencies like UNDP, UNAIDS, WHO or UNFPA, or human rights organisations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and now, the Belgian Government. It is only through dialogue and partnership with the sex worker community, that trafficking in persons can be reduced, and sex workers’ human rights concerns addressed.

Thank you very much for your time.