

## RECOMMENDATIONS | summary

# Sex work in Europe

## A mapping of the prostitution scene in 25 European countries

**Sex Work in Europe** provides a mapping of the prostitution scene in 25 European countries and the analysis of changes and trends in sex work across Europe.

An understanding of the current reality of sex work and the situation of sex workers in Europe is critical to strengthening HIV prevention in sex work settings across Europe.

The Sex Work in Europe Mapping report aims to identify changing trends and tendencies in relation to sex work and the living and working conditions of female, male and transgender sex workers, including migrant sex workers within Europe. In addition, it provides an overview of migration patterns in relation to sex work across Europe and addresses the impact of the enlargement of the European Union on migration and on the situation of migrant sex workers in Europe.

This report also provides insight into how policies on prostitution and migration increase or diminish the vulnerability of migrant and mobile sex workers to HIV/AIDS and are closely linked to the vulnerability of sex workers to violence, drugs and alcohol use, discrimination, social exclusion, stigmatization, or legal status, for example.

The report provides an overview and analysis of the most common gaps in services provision to sex workers, looks at main factors of vulnerability for sex workers and surveys how legal frameworks create barriers to or support access to services.

In the report 25 countries analyse the changes in service provision and identify the gaps in quality of service, coverage and level of response to the needs of migrant and national sex workers. The result is an overview of the most common gaps that impact on the health and rights of sex workers across Europe.

The report shows a clear connection between gaps in service provision and a troubling trend toward increasing criminalisation and policing of prostitution. The policy shift away from prevention and toward regulation and criminalisation has also meant a significant reduction of funding for those institutions that provide outreach, prevention and other vital services for sex workers.

A lack of service coverage increases vulnerability. While the kinds of vulnerabilities faced by sex workers have not changed much the sharp decrease in outreach and referral services mean they are more isolated and experience greater social exclusion. All 25 countries report limited services available to sex workers and poor geographical coverage. Consequently many sex workers have less access to prevention and care, essential services, information, community and networking opportunities.

In addition to common barriers to achieving acceptable standards of health, living and working conditions, direct contact and outreach is more difficult as services lose funding or struggle to maintain capacity to provide direct services and state repression of prostitution drives sex workers into more clandestine spaces, in particular, those working in illegalised settings.

In many countries, national action programmes addressing HIV/AIDS face difficulty in targeting sex workers as a high priority group. The inability to provide effective coverage in contact with sex workers means that many do not receive vital information. It is therefore necessary to address this gap in service provision in a sectorial manner.

The specific characteristics of sex work must be taken into consideration in developing a holistic and comprehensive approach to supporting their sexual health. The specific needs and particularities of all

sex workers must be integrated into the development of services. To realize this, it is necessary to work together with the target group at all stages of planning and development of services in order to ensure differentiated and comprehensive coverage, to close the gap in service provision and to decrease the vulnerability of sex workers.

The Sex Work in Europe Mapping report highlights how the need for substantive change has never been more pressing if we are committed to providing comprehensive services to sex workers that respectfully respond to their needs.

The mapping undertaken by TAMPEP identifies a number of key gaps which are common across Europe. While each gap presents a threat to effective HIV and sex work programming, it also provides an opportunity for effective service development.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Gaps in Service Provision

- National mappings should be carried out on a regular basis, preferably annually, as sex work and sex work settings are fluid and mobile. Services for sex workers should operate at times and in locations where they will be accessible.

- When seeking to offer substantial HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, it is vital to work beyond ideological differences. Both service providers and their sponsors should seek common ground for establishing cooperation. Funding institutions should endorse referrals and networking and provide necessary resources to implement such practices. Empowerment should be a key issue for reducing the vulnerabilities of sex workers. An open and non-judgemental partnership of cooperation and referral, focused on the common goal, is essential for ensuring comprehensive support and services for sex workers.

- Government policies must address issues of exclusion and the health risks of having in their territory groups which are not covered by health care services. Sex workers must be recognised as an occupational group. The right to work and reside must be made available to migrant sex workers, as well as their full participation in the public health care system.

- There is a need for adequate, effective and specifically targeted services, prevention campaigns regarding HIV and STIs, counselling and treatment, as well as space and resources for specific empowerment and networking initiatives for ethnic minority groups. Community building is a powerful tool in counteracting the effects of multiple forms of discrimination, exclusion and isolation.

- Intervention and prevention activities should consider the involvement of clients as key actors. Addressing clients and their mobility is crucial to health promotion and HIV/STI risk reduction. Campaigns that aim to provide information for clients should consider different prostitution settings, cultural contexts and connotations of sex work, taking advantage of specific concentrations of potential clients (sporting events, conventions, tourist resorts, etc.).

- HIV/STI prevention and drug treatment options need to be integrated into outreach programmes for sex workers. A greater diversity of harm reduction activities are needed to respond to the types of drugs consumed and to the specific health risks linked to the use of different drugs. Such programmes must also take into consideration the context of the drug use, the drug users' behaviour and the community where it takes place, e.g. specific approaches for dealing with drug consumption among Roma sex workers. A holistic approach must consider the high level of injecting drug use, disadvantaged living conditions, poor access to health care, risky sexual behaviour, close contact with dealers and controllers, client behaviour, and the ability and/or opportunities for sex workers to negotiate safer sex practice under the influence of drugs, etc.

- Violence against sex workers must be included in gender-based violence strategies, protocols must be developed with policy-makers and law enforcement agencies (appropriate to the context in each country), law enforcement officers must be trained, and corruption among law enforcement officers must be addressed by establishing police liaisons and complaints procedures. The violence experienced by sex workers must be recognised as a relevant health risk and of vulnerability.

- Governments must recognise the necessity of providing long-term funding aimed at sustainability and continuity for key organisations providing necessary services - particularly prevention work - to reduce the vulnerability of sex workers on a

national level. Local and national funding for prevention, care and support are interlocking elements that must be guaranteed for a continuous and comprehensive approach.

Moreover, key organisations need to be involved in the creation of national and local financial plans, rather than being treated merely as recipients of donations. To this end, national financial plans must be transparent.

■ Governments must consider the increased mobility of sex workers in the creation of all policies and measures. Service providers must make wider use of cultural mediation (or interpreters) in public health and social care services. also Improvements must also be made in maintaining long-term contact between sex workers and service providers, e.g. if the sex worker moves elsewhere, referrals could be made to organisations and services capable of providing support at the new destination.

■ Community involvement in prevention and care efforts must be recognised as a top priority in policy making and funding. It is essential to acknowledge the significance of empowering community members, to create leadership models, to implement peer education and to create funded opportunities for a bottom-up approach and community outreach. In addition, sex workers must be directly involved and represented in the policy development process.

■ In order to empower sex workers, public campaigns and imagery - including materials produced specifically for sex workers - must be non-judgemental and respect them and their choice of work in the sex industry.

## **Structural Barriers to HIV Programming and Services for Sex Workers**

### **STATE LEVEL**

■ Guarantee an effective and comprehensive support system to reduce vulnerability to HIV based on equal access to support and care.

■ Guarantee access to prevention, care and treatment, as it is a universal right and a necessary measure in terms of combating HIV/AIDS. A better network of service

providers is important to provide policy-makers with examples of good practice based on the quality guidelines of the VCT (Voluntary Counselling and Testing) protocols.

■ Guarantee universal access to HIV/AIDS treatment regardless of legal and insurance status.

■ Guarantee the separation of medical care data from police (immigration authorities) reporting systems and provide anti-discrimination and awareness training to all health workers and administrators.

■ End the practice of compulsory health checks and introduce instead an anonymous and voluntary system for health checks. Mandatory registration of sex workers is a discriminatory and stigmatising method.

■ Ensure that national action plans prioritise the provision of resources, while taking into consideration local and regional contexts.

■ Create partnerships, forums and alliances to guarantee consistent, uninterrupted access to prevention and health care for all sex workers.

■ Deliver awareness training to law enforcement in order to monitor negative effects of public order measures connected with public health schemes.

■ Develop a framework regarding occupational health and hygiene. This would force managers of indoor establishments to comply with regulations that protect the health of sex workers in the workplace. It is also necessary to develop a network of general health care professionals to offer a broad range of medical support that is not limited to simply HIV and STIs.

■ Focus on reducing the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS in a comprehensive national plan geared towards sustainable long-term intervention programmes that take into account the high degree of internationalisation and cross-border migration within the sex industry.

■ Strengthen cooperation – particularly cross-border cooperation - between government agencies and NGOs with extensive experience in working with migrant and mobile sex workers.

## SERVICE PROVIDER LEVEL

- Improve referral systems between social care and medical care to meet the diverse needs of all sex workers.
- Organise anti-discrimination training and awareness-raising courses for law enforcement agents, social workers, medical doctors, and health and social assistance administrators nationwide.
- Develop low-threshold services together with NGOs and sex worker groups.
- Improve coverage either through an overarching umbrella structure or increase the capacity of outreach activities of already existing organisations.
- Consider all relevant areas as interlinked and incorporate them in your measures.
- Consider anonymous and free voluntary counselling and treatment, and STI screening and care, as an integrated part of the health care system. Consider close cooperation with outreach activities, particularly with NGOs and community-based organisations with linguistic and cultural knowledge, in order to meet the needs of migrant and mobile sex workers.
- Consider delivering training on cultural mediation, working with an international staff, cooperating with migrant sex worker community organisations, and peer education programmes targeting sex workers in order to reach key members of migrant sex worker communities.
- Increase the number of staff members with migrant backgrounds.
- Frequently assess the needs of service users and adapt services provided accordingly. In terms of cross-border, mobile and migrant sex worker populations, it is necessary to network and exchange assessments and information with other service providers across borders.
- Consider new and/or additional services geared towards covering the needs of (new) target groups. These services should primarily focus on providing useful (legal) information, bridging language barriers and increasing the self-confidence of sex workers through services aimed at empowerment and support.
- Consider developing specific cross-border cooperation work to reach sex workers who work in those regions.
- Consider addressing the topic of *conflict mediation* in order to mediate and support the rights of sex workers, particularly the right of protection and safety in their

workplace. The voices of service providers and sex workers must be heard as policy on prostitution is developed at a local level, particularly regarding the protection and safety of sex workers in their work settings - especially during law enforcement actions and clampdowns.

## SEX WORKER LEVEL

- When providing information for sex workers consider working together with them in compiling materials and disseminating information.
- Improve and promote the exchange of information, networking opportunities and forums among sex workers. It is absolutely necessary to include reliable and correct legal information by forming alliances with experts who work with migrant sex workers.
- Provide funding and resources for non-judgemental, specialised language classes and study materials (texts, audio and video) tailored to meet the needs of sex workers who are learning a new language.
- Improve sex workers' rights so that they can rely on legal protection if they choose to seek help from the public authorities. Increase their opportunities for exchange and self-empowerment.
- Grant all sex workers the same rights, regardless of their residential, insurance or work status.
- Include sex work as a focus of anti-discrimination and awareness training for public officials, including health administrators and social workers. Service providers should offer support, accompaniment and/or training for sex workers for them to gain information about the different authorities.
- Consider the legalisation of resident migrant sex workers and the creation of low-threshold outreach programmes linguistically capable of reaching migrant groups.
- Increase information provision online, mobile service provision units, telephone counselling and virtual networks.

## Removing structural barriers for universal access

### Diversity in the sex worker community

Multidisciplinary interventions are called for, particularly focusing on gender-based violence and sex workers' social vulnerability. Comprehensive efforts are needed in policy and service development. A global approach is essential, engaging multiple actors, local communities, states, international agencies, public and private service providers, and sex workers themselves.

### Human Rights

It is essential that service provision for sex workers takes place within a human rights framework.

### Service providers and migration, mobility and deportation

- It is essential to find methods of reaching groups who are liable to migrate, those who are in transit and those who have already migrated. The availability and structure of services needs to be continuous and comprehensive in order to reduce the vulnerabilities of these groups.

- Comprehensive policies of destination/repatriating countries must address the lack of support mechanisms in most migrant sex workers' countries of origin.

- An effective referral system must be part of a sustainable and continuous service. International cooperation, integrated services and readiness to work with mobile and migrant sex workers are vital in ensuring proper coverage.

### Involvement in Civil Society

- Governments must acknowledge the expertise of NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) by incorporating them in the policy-making process.

- It is essential to develop and strengthen international cooperation by building NGO and CBO networks through setting up referral systems and sharing good practices and knowledge.

- An integral element in building capacity for the provision of services in reducing the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS is ensuring empowerment and community participation of sex workers on all levels.

### Criminalisation of the Sex Industry and Law Enforcement

- Comprehensive service provision should involve law enforcement authorities and public and private sector engagement.

- Promote greater cooperation between those involved in national platforms on HIV/AIDS, civil society representatives and sex workers, in order to reach synergy and the harmonisation of efforts towards reducing the vulnerability of sex workers affected by violence.

- The impact of law enforcement actions on sex workers' vulnerability is exceptionally important to keep in focus when looking at issues of criminal activities within the sex industry.

- Consider the development of a policy framework that focuses on the safety and well-being of sex workers, ensuring equal treatment and protection under the justice system, regardless of their status.

### Awareness-raising

Awareness-raising in the community should have the ultimate objective of empowering sex workers. It should have the effect of more peaceful coexistence and enhanced mutual understanding, reducing the vulnerabilities of sex workers.

### Government responsibility

- Policy-makers' attention must be drawn to the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV and STI, and awareness raised among politicians with regard to ensuring an appropriate balance between prevention and treatment services as well as protection of sex workers' human rights to access non-discriminatory health services, including prevention, counselling, testing and treatment.

- The participation of sex workers should be facilitated, encouraged and supported, within a community framework, in all levels of activities developed for them.