

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 done 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 referral and networking and provide necessary resources to enable 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 these exclusion scenarios and the health risk issues derived from having in their territory groups which are in fact not covered. It is necessary that sex workers are recognised as an occupational group. The right to work and reside must be made possible for migrant sex workers, as well as their full participation in the public health care system.
- There is a need to provide adequate, effective and specifically targeted services, prevention campaigns regarding HIV and STI, counselling and treatment as well as accommodate space and resources for specific empowerment and networking initiatives for these groups. Community building is a powerful tool for counteracting the effects of compounded 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 prevention 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 (sport events, conventions, tourist resorts, etc.).

- There is a necessity to integrate HIV/STI prevention and drug treatment options into outreach programmes for sex workers. There is a need for a greater diversity of harm reduction activities that are able to respond to the types of drugs consumed and to the specific health risks linked to the use of different drugs. Such programs must also take into consideration the setting 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 injected drug use, disadvantaged living conditions, poor access to health care, risky sexual behaviour, close contact to dealers and to controllers in these settings, client behaviour and the capacity and/or possibility of sex worker to negotiate safe sex practice under the influence of drugs, etc.
- Violence against sex workers needs to be included in gender based violence strategies, protocols need to be developed with policymakers and law enforcement agencies (appropriate to the realities and possibilities in each country), law enforcement officers need to be trained and corruption among law enforcement officers needs to be addressed by establishing police liaisons and complaints procedure. Violence experienced by sex workers must be considered a relevant factor of health risk and of vulnerabilities.
- Governments need to be sensitised to the necessity of providing long-term funding which on a national level aimed at sustainability and continuity for key organisations providing necessary services - particularly prevention work - to reduce the vulnerability of sex workers. Local and national funding for prevention, care and support are interlocking elements that must be guaranteed for a continuous and comprehensive approach. Moreover, key organizations need to be involved in the creation of national and local financial plans, not just treated as receivers of donations. For this purpose it would be necessary to make the national financial plans transparent.
- Regarding the Government response, the aspect of increased mobility must be considered in creation of all policies and measures. In terms of service providers, cultural mediation (or interpreters) needs to be more widely implemented in public health and social care services. Adjustments should also be made in maintaining long-term contact between sex

workers and service provider, e.g. if the sex worker must move, referral could be made to the organizations that could be contacted in 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 the community members, to create leadership models, to implement peer education and to create funded situations for a bottom-up approach and community outreach. In addition, sex workers must be directly involved in and represented in the policy development process.

■ In order to empower sex workers, the public campaigns and representations - including materials made specifically for sex workers - must respect and empower them, be non-judgemental and respect 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 fighting against HIV/AIDS. A better network of services 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 one's legal and insurance status.

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

■ Substitute compulsory health checks for an anonymous and voluntary system of health checks. Mandatory registration for sex workers underlines a discriminatory and stigmatising method.

■ Ensure that the national action plans priorities provide resources and clarity, while taking local and regional characteristics into consideration.

■ Ensure the creation of partnerships, forums and alliances to guarantee consistent, uninterrupted access to prevention and health care for all sex workers.

■ Ensure sensitisation and training for law enforcement in order to monitor a system of negative effects regarding public order measures connected with public health misuse.

■ 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 at 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 only limited to HIV and STIs.

■ Focus on reducing the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV/AIDS in a comprehensive national plan geared toward sustainable long-term intervention programmes that consider the high extent of internationalization and the cross-border migration within the sex industry.

■ It is essential to strengthen the cooperation between government agencies and NGOs with extensive experience in working with migrant and mobile sex workers, particularly the cooperation between organisations across borders.

Service Providers Level

■ Improve referral system between social care and medical care to meet the needs of all different kinds of sex workers.

■ Organise anti-discrimination and sensitisation training courses for law enforcement agents, social workers medical doctors, health and social assistance administrators nationwide.

■ Develop low-threshold services together with NGOs and sex worker groups.

■ Improve the coverage either through an overarching, umbrella structure or increase the capacity of outreach activities of already existing entities.

■ 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 a close cooperation with outreach activities, particularly with NGOs and community based organisations with language and

cultural competences, in order to meet the needs of migrant and mobile sex workers.

- Consider creating training on cultural mediation, working with an international staff, cooperating with migrant sex worker community organizations, 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 migration background.
- Consider frequent assessment of the needs of the service users and adaptation of the offer. Regarding the cross-border and mobile and migrant sex worker population, it is necessary to network and exchange assessment and information with other service providers across borders.
- Consider new and/or additional services geared toward 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 providing measurements aimed at empowerment and support.
- Consider developing a specific kind of cross-border cooperation 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 of sex workers must be recognized in the policy developments on prostitution on 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 sex workers when compiling, conceptualising materials and disseminating information.
- Improve and stimulate the exchange of information, networking possibilities 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, in order to disseminate, prepare and offer useful information.
- Provide funding and resources for non-judgmental, specialised language classes and study material (texts, audio and video) tailored to meet the needs of sex workers who are learning a new language.

- Increase sex workers rights so that they can rely on legal protection if they choose to seek help from the public authorities. Increase their possibilities of 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 sensitisation 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 programs with linguistic capacities to reach 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 those that focus on the gender-based violence and sex workers' social vulnerability. Comprehensive efforts are needed in policy and service development. What is essential is a global approach, which engages various actors, local communities, the states, international agencies, public and non-public service providers and sex workers themselves

Human Rights

It is essential that service provision for sex workers are done within a human rights framework.

Service providers and migration, mobility and deportation

- It is essential to find methods of reaching the potential groups who want to migrate, those who are in transit and those who already migrated. The offer 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 inexistence of a support

mechanism in most of migrant sex workers' countries of origin.

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

Civil Society Involvement

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

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

- An integral element in building the 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.

- Stimulate more involvement and 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 the 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.

Sensitisation

Awareness rising in the community should have the ultimate objective of empowering sex workers. Its impact would favour a more peaceful cohabiting and better mutual understanding, decreasing the vulnerabilities of sex workers.

Government responsibility

- There is the need to call attention of policy makers to the vulnerability of sex workers to HIV and STI, to sensitise politicians to ensuring an appropriate balance between prevention and treatment as well as protect sex workers' human rights to access non-discriminatory health services, including prevention, counselling, testing and treatment.

- There is the need to facilitate, encourage and support the participation of sex workers, within a community participation framework, in all levels of activities developed for them.