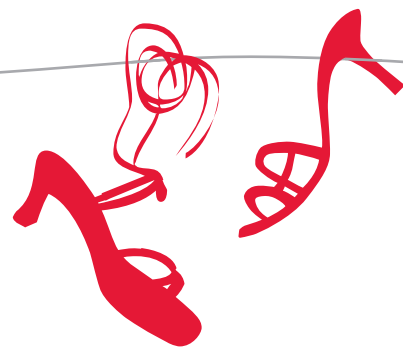


Sex workers talk about
their life and work
experiences within the
indoor sex work setting
in nine European cities

PICTURES OF A REALITY



Sex work is work and a profession; sex workers are workers and must be recognised as such.

We demand the protection of our labour, social and human rights on an equal footing with other workers, especially social rights such as access to social security, health care and minimum wages.

European Conference
on Sex Work,
Human Rights,
Labour and Migration
Brussels, October 2005

Sex work is by definition consensual sex.

Non-consensual sex is not sex work; it is sexual violence or slavery.

Manifesto
Sex Workers in Europe
Brussels, October 2005

PICTURES OF A REALITY



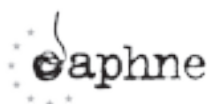
INDOORS

Support and empowerment of female sex workers and trafficked women working in hidden places

This book is based on contributions by the nine partners of the INDOORS project. It was compiled within the framework of the INDOORS project (January 2011-December 2012), under the coordination of the following organisation:

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The contents of this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

The book **Pictures of a Reality** is part of a series of other resources produced by the INDOORS project:

- **Capacity Building and Awareness Raising** | A European guide for the empowerment of sex workers
- **Equal Rights** | advocacy video
- **INDOORS Outreach Report** | Sex workers' working and living conditions in nine European cities
- **Indoor Sex Work** | Analysis and good practice manual on indoor sex work settings in seven European cities
- **Safer Work** | leaflets for sex workers in six languages

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- Bundeskanzleramt: Frauen | Federal Chancellery: Women | Austria
- Agence Régionale de Santé, Conseil Général des Bouches du Rhône
Regional Health Agency, General Council of Bouches du Rhône | France
- Sidaction, Ensemble contre le Sida | Sidaction, Together against AIDS | France
- Hamburger Behörde für Gesundheit und Verbraucherschutz
Hamburg Secretary for Health and Consumer Protection | Germany

Publisher Autres Regards, Marseille, France
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October 2012





“ I am 51 years old and I have been working as a prostitute since I was 29. For fifteen years I led a double life. I lied to my loved ones and felt ashamed, until one day I decided that I was the only one who could take charge of my life. I decided that my attitude to life should not depend on the expectations or the morals of others. Today I am a fulfilled, happy woman, and every day I feel prouder and prouder to be a prostitute.

Montserrat Neira

Spanish sex worker, activist
Madrid

“ We are sex workers during our working hours, ladies when we finish work, mothers and wives at home, and whores when we are in bed with our partners.

Heidi Rueda

Ecuadorian sex worker, activist
Madrid

“ Sex workers should participate in all public debates. We have to hear their voices. Who better than them to tell us how their lives and work can be improved?

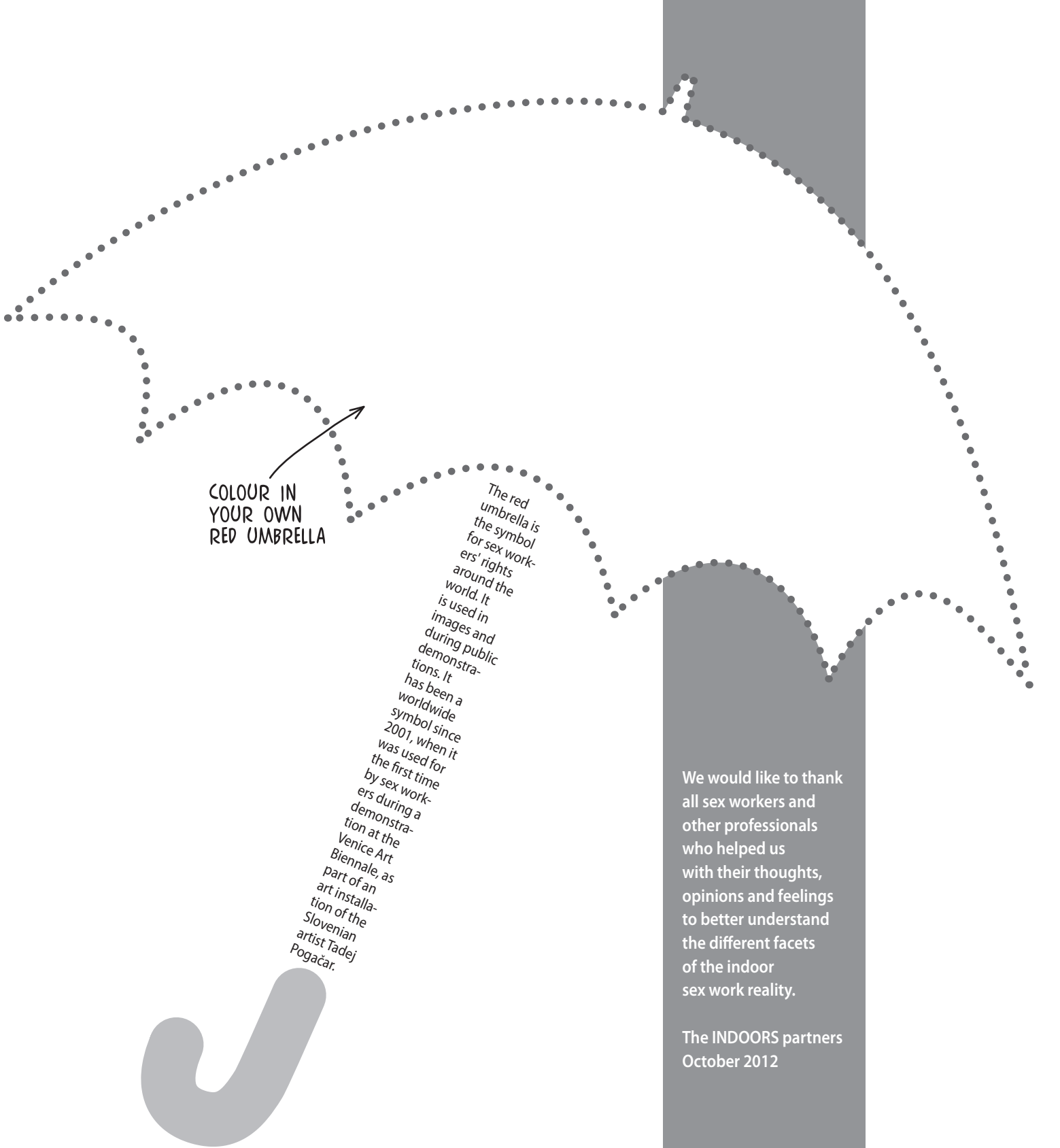
Felipa Alvim

Researcher
Porto



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COLOUR IN
YOUR OWN
RED UMBRELLA

The red umbrella is the symbol for sex workers' rights around the world. It is used in images and during public demonstrations. It has been a worldwide symbol since 2001, when it was used for the first time by sex workers during a demonstration at the Venice Art Biennale, as part of an art installation of the Slovenian artist Tadej Pogačar.

We would like to thank all sex workers and other professionals who helped us with their thoughts, opinions and feelings to better understand the different facets of the indoor sex work reality.

The INDOORS partners
October 2012

the INDOORS project

The aim of the INDOORS project is the empowerment of female sex workers working indoors, i.e., in apartments, brothels, massage parlours, windows, bars, clubs, saunas, other private places, and via the internet.



The project's intention is to develop strategies for female sex workers to protect themselves against violence, while giving them the means to become active agents in terms of their well-being, physical and mental health.

Further objectives

- facilitate their access to social and health services, to labour and human rights.
- empower and improve their self-esteem and professionalism.
- make more visible and audible their voices against violence, discrimination and stigmatisation.
- sensitise the general public to policies that reduce violence, discrimination and stigma suffered by female sex workers.
- enhance the knowledge of outreach workers and other professionals regarding the indoor prostitution setting.
- develop local networks of NGOs, social services and health services dealing with indoor-based sex workers.
- facilitate and extend the exchange of information in Europe regarding indoor prostitution, good practices and lobby strategies for sex workers' rights, especially their right to protection and access to justice.

The project

The INDOORS project was carried out between January 2011 and December 2012, within a partnership of nine organisations in nine member states of the European Union: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.

The goal of INDOORS was to carry out an analysis of the working and living conditions of female sex workers in nine cities of these countries: Amsterdam, Genoa, Hamburg, Helsinki, Madrid, Marseille, Porto, Sofia and Vienna.

The project was financed by the European Union, within the framework of the Daphne III Programme of the European Commission.

INDOORS produced four final products.

They are available at www.autresregards.org and at the partners' websites.

- **Capacity Building and Awareness Raising**
A European guide for the empowerment of sex workers
- **Equal Rights** | advocacy video
- **INDOORS Outreach Report** | The working and living conditions of indoor-based sex workers in nine European cities
- **Pictures of a Reality** | Sex workers talk about their life and work experiences within the indoor sex work setting in nine European cities

The INDOORS project had a previous phase, carried out between January 2009 and December 2010, also within the framework of the Daphne Programme III. It had six partner organisations in five European countries: Bulgaria, France, Germany, Italy and Portugal.

the INDOORS network



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TAMPEP is the European Network for HIV/STI Prevention and Health Promotion among Migrant Sex Workers founded in 1993 to address the needs of migrant sex workers in Europe. It operates a community development and participation model that is rooted within a human rights perspective. TAMPEP advocates for equitable access to services and support for sex workers. The TAMPEP International Foundation carries out EU and international projects concerning sex workers' rights, health promotion and advocacy.



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Le Graziöse, created in 2007, is the Genoese group of the Committee for Civil Rights of Prostitutes (CD-CP-ONLUS), founded in 1982. It is a non-profit association that promotes the civil and human rights of sex workers, provides information and advice on issues related to sex work, applies empowerment strategies for sex workers, is involved in projects to combat exploitation and trafficking, and supports information campaigns on AIDS, STI and harm reduction interventions.



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ragazza is a NGO that, since 1991, offers support and counselling on health and social issues for drug-using female sex workers in Hamburg. It offers a room for safe consumption of drugs, needle exchange, meals, showers and overnight accommodation. Other activities are outreach work, harm reduction interventions, and advocacy to draw attention to the situation of drug-using sex workers and their lack of human rights.



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Pro-tukipiste ry (Pro Centre Finland), founded in 1990, is a registered non-profit organisation which supports and promotes the civil and human rights of individuals involved in sex work. It offers professional low threshold social support, health care services and legal advice for sex workers in Helsinki and Tampere. Services are free of charge and anonymous, politically and religiously independent. The organisation also offers training on issues concerning sex work and trafficking in human beings.



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Hetaira was founded in 1995 by sex workers and activists from other professional areas, in order to advocate for sex workers' rights, fight stigmatisation, denounce the violence sex workers face, facilitate their organisation, and sensitise the general public to their situation. Hetaira is a human rights advocacy group, offering counselling and outreach activities for indoor and outdoor-based sex workers.



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Autres Regards is a community-based organisation that since 1995 has worked with and for street-based sex workers of all genders. The organisation works on STI/HIV prevention, health promotion, and the improvement of access to health services and fundamental rights for sex workers. Since January 2009, Autres Regards' work has also been extended to indoor-based sex workers.



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APDES (Agência Piaget para o Desenvolvimento) is a NGO founded in 2004 to promote sustainable development. It works with vulnerable populations to improve access to health, employment and education. APDES invests in the promotion of sex workers' rights and citizenship through the promotion of initiatives towards sex workers' rights and participation in national and international networks.



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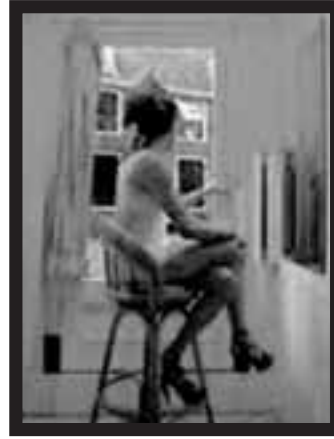
HESED (Health and Social Development Foundation) was founded in 1998 as a successor of the first organisation working in the field of HIV/AIDS prevention in Bulgaria. The organisation's mission is to create opportunities for personal and community development, health and social well-being, to develop and promote effective approaches for successful integration of disadvantaged communities.



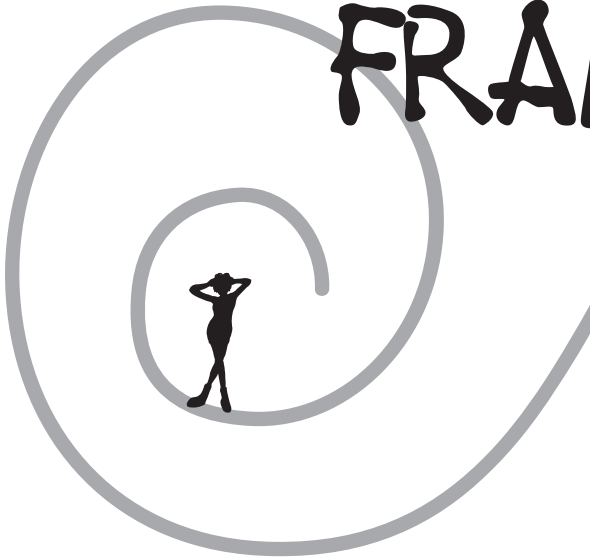
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LEFÖ (Counselling, Education and Support for Migrant Women) is an autonomous migrant women's organisation that was founded in 1985 in Vienna. LEFÖ supports migrant women, migrant sex workers and migrants who are affected by trafficking. It provides a broad spectrum of holistic and largely first-language-based outreach and empowerment activities, counselling and support for legal, psychosocial and health issues. LEFÖ advocates for the rights of migrant women and sex workers.



FRAMES



A gallery showing a European exhibition on sex work, where the artists – sex workers – come from all over the world. **Pictures of a Reality** presents fragments of feelings, opinions, statements, reflections, fears, thoughts, hopes, dreams, doubts and questions. The topics vary. The point of view is, however, shared – that of sex workers. They show parts of their lives and experiences, seen through their own eyes. Pieces about the various facets regarding the art of living and working in sex work, told from the artists' perspectives – sex workers – the main actors, the experts.



The aim of this book is to dismantle the idea that sex work is a uniform universe where sex workers are part of one and the same group.

This exhibition presents sex workers in their entire complex human dimension, which is composed of all sorts of opinions on the same subject, of joy and fear over their work, of happiness and doubts regarding their lives.

These are, then, the main objectives of **Pictures of a Reality**: to show the diversity within the sex work context, the multiplicity of its population, but also to dismantle the idea of victimisation of sex workers, demonstrating that not all sex workers were deceived or threatened, but that the world of prostitution is composed of people of all genders who are conscious of their choice. Even if it is not the best choice for some of them, it is a concrete labour alternative at a given moment in their lives.

The idea behind this book is to show that sex work is a reality, part of society, of any society, independently of whether or not that society recognises it as a matter of fact. This recognition process depends on the level of the moral and/or political discussion taking place in a given society, regarding not only sex work itself, but also topics such as migration and the labour market.

Pictures of a Reality was developed as an instrument against stigma, discrimination and clichés, as a tool to break taboos regarding sex work, sex workers, and the indoor prostitution setting in Europe.

This was achieved because, for a change, sex workers were the ones talking about themselves and their environment, without 'taboos' or distortion. They were the ones to show us the reality: *their* reality.

Reality has, however, multiple faces, as individuals will have different perceptions of any given situation. Therefore, to show a wider dimension of this reality, to contrast these perceptions, the book also presents

the opinion of 'other' professionals, persons who are directly or indirectly involved with sex workers.

Sex workers' declarations are there to reduce and deconstruct myths about them, by painting a picture of what they really are. However, through all the differences, one aspect is common to all sex workers in all nine European cities: their demand for rights and respect.

THE GOALS

- 🌀 Draw a realistic picture of the situation of indoor-based sex workers in Amsterdam, Genoa, Hamburg, Helsinki, Madrid, Marseille, Porto, Sofia and Vienna.
- 🌀 Give sex workers the space to talk about working and living conditions, the migration process, the legal situation, clients, health, family, and their experiences with physical and/or psychological violence within the indoor sex work scene. Moreover, give sex workers the opportunity to express their dreams and life expectations.
- 🌀 Strengthen and empower indoor-based female sex workers by giving them a voice.
- 🌀 Increase awareness of the situation of indoor-based female sex workers while considering the context from their perspective.
- 🌀 Present the vulnerable situation of indoor-based sex workers as a consequence of repressive migration and prostitution legal systems.
- 🌀 Due to sex workers' lack of human rights, show their vulnerability when having to deal with exploitation, stigma, discrimination or other forms of violence.
- 🌀 Demonstrate the important role of cultural mediators when dealing with migrant sex workers, their role as facilitators between languages and cultures, or as those who explain habits and beliefs.

☉ Show how workshops and other interactive actions developed during outreach work are important in carrying out health and violence prevention activities.

☉ Point out how legal and health counselling are equally important in the aim of empowering sex workers to face physical and psychological violence.

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Pictures of a Reality has as its target audience all those who are interested in issues related to sex work, its population and environment.

The book is aimed at people who are, in one way or another, already engaged with the subject of 'sex work' and who wish to broaden their knowledge, as well as those who have never had any contact with the issue or have little information about it. The book therefore targets society in general, including NGOs, public authorities, policy-makers, lawyers, medical doctors, students, graduates, academics and journalists.

The aim is to show the reality of sex work and to raise social and political awareness regarding the living and working situation of sex workers, with a view to reversing the stigmatisation and criminalisation of sex work.

THE CREATION PROCESS

The statements were collected during outreach and contact activities carried out by the nine partner organisations. The idea was to collect comments on various topics, short stories, anecdotes and narratives, all related to sex workers' lives and work, independent of whether each individual had a positive or negative attitude or opinion towards sex work.

Because the sex work context varies across the nine cities, the methods used were also accordingly diverse, but the goal was common to all: to contact sex workers new to the indoor scene, to maintain already established relationships with more experienced ones, to distribute information, to answer questions, to make referrals to the outreach organisation or to other ones, and to develop empowering activities.

Outreach methods ranged from visits to apartments, brothels, massage parlours, bars or clubs; the delivery of workshops (spontaneous or programmed, in sex work venues or at the organisation's premises); contact via telephone, or the maintenance of chats and blogs on the internet.

Outreach teams varied, depending on the method used, the city and the organisation. They were composed of one or more of the following professionals: social workers, cultural mediators, peer educators, activists, medical doctors, nurses and psychologists.

THE PICTURES

The statements were collected under a range of circumstances, including outreach, workshops, formal or informal interviews, or other types of discussions or direct exchange between sex workers and the outreach teams. They are the result of 18 months of activities in the nine cities, and were put together by the nine partner organisations.



The aim was to collect the statements through the facilitation of a safe environment in which sex workers and outreach workers could speak freely.

The outreach teams were instructed to reproduce the statements or dialogues as accurately as possible, without adding any form of personal interpretation or judgement, in order to guarantee that the declarations are as genuine as possible.

NAMES – In order to respect the privacy of sex workers, all statements are anonymous. The names appearing in 'Stories' are all fictitious.

GENDER – the majority of the statements were given by female, non-transgender sex workers. Those given by male and transgender sex workers are specified.

NATIONALITIES – The nationalities mentioned are the ones declared by the sex workers.

AGE – The information on sex workers' age varies according to the method used by each organisation to collect data during outreach. This is the reason why some statements have a more exact age, some just an estimation (25, 30, 35), and some have no indication whatsoever.

VENUES – Not all statements are followed by information regarding the workplace of the sex worker. This is due to the fact that in some cases, like in Marseille, the contact is done via telephone, which makes it impossible to have exact information about the venue.

THE SURROUNDINGS

The sex work context is like any other segment of society: it is complex, multifaceted and contradictory; it is composed of various characters, of people with different opinions about every issue possible, and particularly those issues concerning themselves.

Therefore, in order to present a more realistic picture of the sex work context, to be able to show how complex, multifaceted and contradictory the sex work environment is, **Pictures of a Reality** presents the opinions of other 'actors' who are directly or indirectly part of this environment.

Through written, formal interviews, the partners asked the opinions of brothel and club managers, medical doctors, police officers, lawyers, outreach workers, cultural mediators, social workers, nurses, journalists, politicians, sociologists and researchers.

Those interviewed could decide how they wished to be cited in the 'exhibition'. For this reason some appear with their full name, some just with initials, and others just with their profession.

SCENES

The reproduction of small dialogues intends to show a little more of the sex work context, to present situations briefly, to zoom in on sex workers' environment, their relationships and daily lives.

STORIES

The presentation of life stories aims to show processes and the personal development of those who are living or have lived through specific situations within sex work.

VOICES

This chapter presents contributions from European activists for sex workers' rights, women who publicly demand more respect and human rights for sex workers of all genders.



HOW TO USE THE PICTURES

The content of **Pictures of a Reality** can be used in different ways.

- ⑥ To **INFORM** – as a reference for issues regarding sex workers and the sex work context, to better understand the different elements, as seen from the perspective of the main actors: the sex workers.
- ⑥ To **EMPOWER** – the statements can be used for input during activities like workshops. They can be used in a role-play situation, to start a discussion on a specific subject or just to initiate an exchange of different ideas and opinions. The statements or the dialogues can be read out by sex workers, by outreach/social workers, or by both together. This type of exercise can be very empowering for sex workers because they will be examining and analysing the opinions of their colleagues.
- ⑥ To **STIMULATE** – the statements can be used as elements for a performance, for example for an audience of people interested in the theme of sex work. The statements can be read out loud or interpreted by professional actors or lay people. The performance can be a show in itself, with an open discussion afterwards, or it can take the form, for instance, of the initial part of a round table discussion. In both cases, the performance should stimulate and encourage discussion and the exchange of ideas among those present at the event.

HOW TO SEE THE EXHIBITION

As in any exhibition, the viewing or 'reading' is not necessarily continuous, linear. You can enjoy just parts of it, go back and forth, look twice at something you especially liked, decide to see some 'rooms' today and go back to see the rest some weeks later.

The gallery is now open.

You can look at the 'Pictures' in different ways: concentrating only on the various issues presented, or by travelling around the cities and discovering their differences, which include a remarkable variation of nationalities among their population.

The exhibition can also be seen as a video-clip, or as a series of film frames, which presents one theme in different colours, forms and sounds.

It all depends on you. It depends on your mood, your interest or curiosity, but also on the time you have at your disposal, how much you want to browse...

Just take your time, enjoy it, and draw your own conclusions.





This session will give you an overview of the context in which sex workers live and work in Amsterdam, Genoa, Hamburg, Helsinki, Madrid, Marseille, Porto, Sofia and Vienna. A picture of each city will show you how the local indoor scene is structured, what sort of workplaces exist, and where sex workers come from. A summary of the national legal framework, regarding legislation on sex work, access to health services, and migration, will present you with external factors that directly influence the living and working conditions of national and migrant sex workers in these countries. Both will give you the necessary background information to understand the circumstances under which sex workers made their statements.

CONTEXT





AMSTERDAM THE NETHERLANDS

Amsterdam is the biggest city in the Netherlands, although not the capital. It has 780,000 inhabitants, with a migrant population of approximately 50%¹.

There are between 5,000 and 7,500 sex workers of all genders in Amsterdam, depending on the time of year, including those working in both licensed and unlicensed venues. About 70% are migrants, mainly from EU countries such as Hungary, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Indoor sex work represents 98.5% of the sex work scene².

Licensed venues are windows, sex clubs or brothels, and escort agencies. About 5,000 sex workers work in licensed venues, with about 70% of these in windows.

There are about 400 windows in Amsterdam, located in three red light districts. About 60% of migrant sex workers working in windows come from EU countries, mainly Hungary.

There are about 20 sex clubs or brothels, with about 400 sex workers, the majority being Dutch women.

There are about 110 escort agencies. About 1,500 sex workers work for these agencies, including about 500 male sex workers. The majority of female escorts are between 18 and 25 years old, and come from EU countries, mainly Romania.

Non-licensed venues include both private flats and individual escorting. About 2,500 sex workers work in non-licensed venues; about 80% of them in private flats.

There are about 2,000 individual private flats, where around 1,700 female and 300 male sex workers offer their services. Around half are Dutch; the rest come from EU countries, Africa and Asia.

About 300 female and 400 male sex workers offer escort services independently. They are mostly Dutch and over 30 years old.

There are about 30 Thai and Chinese massage parlours, all non-licensed venues.

■ Making contact with sex workers

The Prostitution & Health Centre is an initiative by the municipality of Amsterdam to attend to sex workers' needs. The team is composed of nurses, counsellors, cultural mediators and social workers. Outreach activities to indoor venues in Amsterdam are conducted by the Centre and other collaborating organisations. The Rode Draad (the Dutch organisation of sex workers), SOA/AIDS Netherlands and PIC (the Prostitution Information Centre) are also active in contacting sex workers in the city. Outreach is done regularly, on a weekly basis.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | Sex work has been recognised as a profession since 2000. Prostitution is only permitted in licensed sex work establishments; in principle, there is no street prostitution, apart from in four authorised zones. The government drew up guidelines for the municipalities to regulate commercial exploitation of prostitution within the municipalities. The municipal authorities have a great deal of freedom in choosing how they deal with prostitution, but they cannot ban it.

Only establishments that comply with the regulations may receive permits to start or continue business. The municipalities are obliged to determine regulations concerning the location, size of brothels, hygiene, and safety. These regulations differ from one city to another.

¹ Municipality of Amsterdam, Gemeente Amsterdam, Dienst Onderzoek en Statistiek, 2010–2011

² TAMPEP Mapping 2008, TAMPEP International Foundation 2011; Kwetsbaar beroep. Een onderzoek naar de prostitutiebranche in Amsterdam, Van Wijk et al., 2010

At the moment, sex workers are not obliged to register with the municipalities. However, in the near future, due to a new law proposal that was voted in by the Dutch Parliament in March 2011, general registration on a national register would be mandatory for every sex worker.

The new law proposal would also prohibit prostitution businesses unless they have a municipal licence. This includes escort and internet agencies.

Unlicensed businesses that provide access to sexual services would be closed. Self-employed sex workers who work without registering would be fined.

Moreover, clients who purchase services from unregistered sex workers could be sentenced to six months in prison.

Health | There is no mandatory testing for sex workers. In some municipalities a condition of the licence system obliges brothel owners to stipulate a safer sex policy and to allow the health authorities access to sex workers.

Uninsured migrant sex workers have access to free STI screening and treatment. For EU citizens, their own national health insurance is applicable for temporary health care. Private health insurance is obligatory for all residents of the Netherlands. Undocumented sex workers have very few possibilities to access public health care; there are few health centres run by voluntary doctors. In case of emergency, however, doctors and hospitals cannot refuse basic health care.

Migration | Only EU citizens are allowed to work in prostitution, as they have no obligation to apply for a work permit. This is due to the general labour law on access to the Dutch labour market. For people from outside the EU, sex work is the only type of work where it is not possible to obtain a visa through a work permit form.



GENOA
ITALY

Genoa has 600,000 inhabitants, about 10% of whom are migrants.

There are between 250 and 300 female sex workers in Genoa, including transgender women. About 75% of them are migrants, mainly from Latin America. Indoor sex work represents 70% of the sex work scene.

The majority of the indoor sex work venues in Genoa are located in two areas in the city centre, with apartments and flats called *bassi* located on the ground floor.

The **Ghetto** is the workplace of about 20 Italian transgender sex workers, all around 45 years old, who own these apartments. In 2008 they formed a committee and signed an agreement with the Municipality that excluded the Ghetto from the closure of the *bassi*. Being a working class neighbourhood, the presence of sex workers has not led to protests from the residents.

Maddalena is the workplace of about 120 female sex workers, mainly from Latin America along with some older Italians. There was a significant increase in sex workers in this area, leading to some difficult situations among sex workers and strong protests from the residents and shopkeepers of the area.

In 2008 the Municipality of Genoa prohibited the use of the *bassi* by sex workers. The majority of these premises are registered as storerooms and may not be used for other purposes. According to this measure, if someone is found in one of these rooms with sofas, beds, etc., the person will be penalised and the *basso* confiscated. Therefore sex workers moved to rooms on the upper floors of the same buildings and started to appear on the streets more, which created more problems with the residents.

There are also night clubs where sexual services are offered. These are mostly located in the areas where street prostitution takes place. They are organised as private clubs, with membership cards.

Furthermore, there are sex workers who work in isolated apartments spread throughout the city. Some work independently while others are controlled by pimps.

■ Making contact with sex workers

Le Grazie has a drop-in centre for sex workers in Via della Maddalena. The outreach team is composed of social workers, peer operators and sometimes lawyers, who visit the apartments and *bassi* to offer legal assistance and information about the organisation's activities. Sex workers who are active in Le Grazie facilitate contact with new colleagues and with those working in bars and clubs.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | In Italy, prostitution is neither legal nor illegal. The Merlin Act of 1958 shut down the state-run brothels and freed women from mandatory registration and medical check-ups. However, in its spirit and intent, the law is abolitionist. It imposes numerous restrictions on sex workers, who are forced to work at the margins of the law.

It is prohibited to work in closed quarters of any sort. However, in practice, private apartments that contain only one sex worker are 'tolerated'.

Whoever aids and abets a woman (the law deals solely with women) in prostitution, by letting a house or a building, tolerates the presence of prostitutes in bars, clubs or other public facilities, employs any person to work as a prostitute, or helps a sex worker on the street is severely punished for the offence of aiding and abetting. The law also penalises exploitation, soliciting and juvenile prostitution.

Recently, with the Interior Minister's decree on security, cities have the autonomy to enact their own ordinances. In Genoa for instance, in 2010, an order was signed that prohibited prostitution in public areas, along with indecent clothing and any behaviour that might offend public decency.

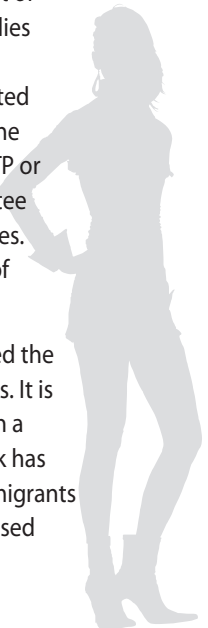
Sex workers and their clients have also become the subject of special ordinances that allow municipal police to hand out fines of up to €500. This public security law enables the territorial Chief Constable to impose and to enforce the mandatory expulsion of a person from a city of which she is not an official resident.

The Constitutional Court has partially blocked the government's security package, defining it as unlawful because it violates the Constitution in granting excessive powers to mayors in the area of public safety, but the ordinances are still applied in many cities.

Health | All citizens have access to the public health care service through the issuing of health cards. Disadvantaged citizens enjoy the right of access to free health services. The same applies to all legal immigrants who work.

Most migrant sex workers are not documented and not health insured. They can apply for the special health card for irregular migrants (STP or Temporarily Present Alien card) that guarantee treatment in hospitals and health care centres. Many do not use it because they are afraid of being denounced as irregular.

Migration | The immigration law penalised the presence of immigrants without legal papers. It is impossible for migrant sex workers to obtain a permit of stay for sex work because sex work has always been unregulated. Undocumented migrants or those without a work permit are criminalised and imprisoned for up to 18 months.





HAMBURG GERMANY

Hamburg is the second biggest city in Germany, with the largest and most important port. It has 1.8 million inhabitants, with a migrant population of approximately 30%³.

There are about 3,000 sex workers of all genders in Hamburg. About 70% of them are migrants, mainly from Thailand, Poland, Bulgaria, the Baltic states and Romania. Indoor sex work represents 80% of the sex work scene. The biggest group is aged between 25 and 35 years old. The mobility of sex workers between apartments, brothels and *Laufhäuser* in Hamburg itself is usually very high. The internet is the main vehicle used by sex workers to advertise their services.

Apartments | About 80% of the indoor scene is composed of small apartments, which are spread all over town and occupied mainly by migrant sex workers. There are about 400 of them in Hamburg, shared by one to three sex workers at a time. Some are occupied by German and migrant sex workers, some have sex workers of just one nationality, and there are some with migrants of multiple nationalities. For some of them the apartments are also where they live, but for the majority they are just workplaces. The majority working in these apartments do so independently.

Brothels | Venues with more than three sex workers, mostly occupied by sex workers of multiple nationalities, including Germans.

Laufhäuser | Large houses with individual rooms spread over two to four floors, which are rented by sex workers on a daily or weekly basis. The doors are closed, with only names on them. These private rooms are financially appealing to some sex workers because they offer both a working and a living possibility for them.

Massage parlours | All the massage parlours are occupied by Thai sex workers. Some offer only massages with 'happy endings', but the majority offer additional sexual services. On average, about five sex workers work in each massage parlour. They are normally run by a so-called *mamasang* (brothel mom), many of whom are former sex workers.

■ Making contact with sex workers

The ragazza indoor outreach team is composed of cultural mediators from Bolivia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia and Thailand, and nurses from Kazakhstan, Poland, Colombia and Uganda. Outreach is carried out in apartments, brothels, *Laufhäuser* and massage parlours around once a week, between noon and 6pm, covering almost all of the city of Hamburg. The team provides information on legal and health issues, distributes condoms and lubricants, and makes referrals to support organisations.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | Since 2002, when the Act Regulating the Legal Situation for Prostitutes came into force, sex work is no longer regarded as immoral. In Germany sex work is legalised and recognised as a labour activity. Sex workers have the right to sign work contracts, to work as self-employed, and to benefit from social security.

The Act made the agreement on services and price between sex worker and client a legally binding contract; it decriminalised the promotion of sex work, thus making suitable working conditions no longer punishable.

Nationals of EU member states (with the exception of Bulgaria and Romania, who need a work permit) can work as employees, and any EU national (including those from Bulgaria and Romania) can easily work as self-employed through a fairly uncomplicated bureaucratic process.

³ HH-Abendblatt, August 2010

The Prostitution Law applies only to documented migrant sex workers. Improvements to the working and living conditions of this group depend upon their residential status.

Pimping and the exploitation of sex workers are prohibited. The promotion of sexual services is also prohibited but tolerated, in newspapers as well as on the internet.

In some cities, like Hamburg, Munich and Dortmund, the city centre and/or other parts of town are out of bounds for street-based sex work. They are called 'prohibited zones' (*Sperrgebiete*). Sex workers and their clients can be fined.

Brothels are permitted only in commercial and industrial areas, but self-employed sex workers may work in apartments in residential areas.

Health | There are no mandatory health checks for sex workers in Germany. HIV and STI testing is voluntary, anonymous, and free of charge. They are offered in public health care services for all citizens, including sex workers (Germans and migrants), regardless of whether the person is documented or has health insurance. Those who do not have valid health insurance must pay for all costs related to HIV/AIDS treatment.

Most German and migrant sex workers in Germany are self-employed. They can obtain private health insurance without any risk assessment (no medical examination is required beforehand) and without risk loading (no higher costs are demanded because of the job's risks). Since 2009 all people in Germany must have health insurance.

Migration | Despite the fact that sex work has been recognised as an activity, this recognition is not sufficient for non-EU citizens to apply for a visa, residence and/or work permit as a sex worker. These migrants need residence and a work permit to be able to engage in sex work in Germany.



HELSINKI FINLAND

Helsinki, Finland's capital, has 590,000 inhabitants⁴, with a migrant population of approximately 10%.

Indoor sex work represents 95% of the Helsinki sex work scene. There are few bars and night clubs, approximately 50 Thai massage parlours, and 10 to 15 shops and clubs where striptease is performed. There are also apartments and private flats which are used as workplaces. Venues are spread across the downtown area and there is a specific area where most of the Thai massage parlours are situated. Mobility of sex workers is very high, both cross-border and inside the country.

The estimated number of indoor-based sex workers Pro-tukipiste met in Helsinki in 2011 was about 1,500, with male and transgender sex workers together comprising around 5% of the total. The percentage of migrant sex workers was approximately 80%, mainly from Russia, Estonia and Thailand, but also from Latvia, Lithuania, Nigeria, the Czech Republic, Romania, Brazil and Colombia.

Indoor-based sex workers find clients through the internet, sex bars and massage parlours. There has been a shift from outdoors to indoors because of intensified street control based on the Public Order Act. The opening hours of the most popular sex bars have been restricted: they now have to close two hours earlier.

■ Making contact with sex workers

Pro-tukipiste conducts outreach work on the internet once a week, in sex bars once a month, in Thai massage parlours every second week, and weekly on the streets. Outreach is done on the internet in the early afternoons; Thai massage parlours are visited in the afternoons, and the streets and sex bars at night.

⁴ http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html

Outreach work includes support on social and health issues, free condoms and lubricants, and needle and syringe exchange. Due to limited resources, Pro-tukipiste does not contact sex workers in apartments or extensively on the internet.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | Working openly as a sex worker in Finland is difficult because sex work is regulated and restricted in many different ways. It depends on nationality (EU or non-EU) and residential status, and the intended form of sex work. Prostitution is not considered a profession. However, in May 2011 the Finnish Trade Register accepted for the first time that selling sexual services is a business. Whether this decision will lead to any changes in the legal interpretation remains to be seen.

Penal Code

In the Penal Code there are many sex work-related laws. Pandering and trafficking are criminalised, as well as buying sexual services from a person who may be suspected to be a victim of trafficking or target of pandering. Buying sexual services from someone aged under 18 is also criminalised. Aggravated forms of pandering are easier to perceive, but ordinary pimping is difficult to interpret because of its wide scope (deriving benefit from someone else's prostitution can be interpreted as pimping).

Public Order Act

Selling or buying sexual services in public places is prohibited. Condoms in sex workers' bags have been used as evidence of selling sexual services and police have given fines of between €50 and €60 based on this.

Health | There are no mandatory health care or treatment provisions for sex workers in Finland.

In principle, all Finnish citizens are eligible for social security benefits and public health care. Residents with a health insurance card may use the public health system.

For an uninsured or undocumented sex worker, it is impossible to gain access to public HIV/AIDS care and treatment centres except in emergency cases.

Migration | According to the Aliens Act, an alien may be refused entry to the country if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that he or she may sell sexual services. If a person was refused entry on an earlier occasion, a new visa will not be granted.

In general, a residence permit for an employed person is granted in a two-phase process. First, the Employment Office ascertains that the preconditions for the work are fulfilled. In the second phase the Finnish Immigration Service decides whether or not to grant the permit. These principles are applied to foreign sex workers as well. However, because the legal status of sex work remains vague and the legal provisions relative to the penal code and the Aliens Act have an influence on the employment as well, it is not possible to furnish any general rules or definitive principles. Another way to get a residence permit is through marriage.

Sex workers' mobility has increased. Those from countries outside the EU usually have legal residential status but have little or no information about their rights when selling sexual services. The fear of deportation is therefore a big obstacle regarding their rights.





MADRID SPAIN

Madrid, the capital of Spain, has around 6.5 million inhabitants, with a migrant population of approximately 17%.

There is no official data estimating the number of sex workers in the city. Hetaira contacted about 1,300 sex workers in 2011, but this is just a fraction of the total. About 95% of them are migrants, the majority from Romania and Ecuador. In Madrid, most indoor sex work takes place in clubs and flats, where most women work for third parties.

Clubs or brothels are situated all over the city and on the outskirts, off motorways. The suburban ones tend to host a large amount of sex workers – some even offering full room and board. The small ones, in town, are only used for work. In both cases, rent can be paid on a daily or weekly basis.

The employment relationship between club managers and sex workers is not recognised, therefore there are no set rules or standards. Working conditions are imposed. The managers claim to have only a room rental relationship with the women, but it works out that they keep 50 to 60% of sex workers' income. Due to this situation, street prostitution ends up being a better and a less exploitative option for some sex workers.

Flats are small and spread throughout town, though the majority are in the city centre. They are usually advertised on the internet and in the daily press. Many sex workers use these flats periodically, for example working for three weeks before taking one week off during menstruation. The mobility inside these flats is very high. Sex workers move frequently between flats in Madrid and between other Spanish towns. Only a small minority work independently. The majority work for third parties, to whom they may give 50 to 60% of their income.

In Spain, some club owners have organised themselves in an association called ANELA, which is pro-prostitution but from a business perspective, not taking into consideration sex workers' interests.

■ Making contact with sex workers

The Hetaira outreach team is composed of trained staff (social workers) and volunteers, both Spanish and foreign. Outreach takes place once a week to various indoor venues, mainly apartments, from 5pm to 8pm, in the city centre. Outreach to outdoor-based sex workers is conducted weekly on the streets and in industrial areas by other teams.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | In Spain, prostitution is not regulated and is therefore neither prohibited nor recognised as work. It was decriminalised in 1995 but sex workers' rights are not recognised. Only pimping is considered a criminal offence (article 188 of the Criminal Code).

Since prostitution is not specifically regulated each council is able to create its own measures. This most frequently takes the form of police harassment, fining, and the creation of specific regulations of public spaces.

In 2004 Madrid launched a 'programme to combat sexual exploitation', which actually entailed police harassment against street sex workers, checks on clients walking around red light districts, and random alcohol testing of potential clients.

Barcelona pioneered a by-law prohibiting the 'inappropriate use of public places', which included sex work among the activities defined as inappropriate. This law permits the police to administer fines to both sex workers and clients. This has become the prototype by-law for many municipalities that wish to eliminate street prostitution.

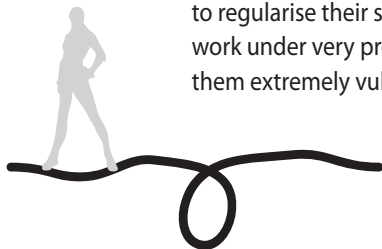
In Bilbao clubs have to keep a certain distance from schools and maintain certain rules on hygiene.

On a national level, there has been pressure put on the government to prohibit newspaper ads offering sexual services, because it is suspected that organised criminal networks are behind these adverts and that these sex workers are victims of trafficking. It is also felt that these ads are derogatory to women and offend their dignity.

Health | Since August 2012, access to healthcare in Spain has become much more controlled due to a reform. Now only those registered as residents before 24th April 2012 have access to free and universal healthcare. Migrants from EU states or otherwise, now have to show proof of healthcare cover should they wish to get residency. Hospitals can only take undocumented people in emergency cases, and even then, they may be diagnosed, but will not receive medication. Medical treatment for undocumented victims of trafficking will be covered, as will uninsured pregnant women. Those without cover can pay a monthly quota to access state-run healthcare on a regular basis.

Migration | There are no specific laws on sex work and migration. There is, however, legislation on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. There is a restrictive immigration law, as in other EU countries.

Under the Spanish Immigration Law it is prohibited to remain in the country without a residence or work permit. Prostitution is not considered a job and those working in prostitution have no legal means to regularise their situation. They therefore live and work under very precarious conditions which make them extremely vulnerable.



MARSEILLE FRANCE

Marseille is the second biggest city in France. It has 850,000 inhabitants, with a migrant population of approximately 15%⁵.

There is no reliable data about the number of sex workers in Marseille. Autres Regards contacted about 550 outdoor-based sex workers in 2011, and about 700 indoor-based sex workers since the beginning of the indoor project in 2009. But the number of contacted indoor sex workers only represents part of the reality, because a large proportion of that sector is unreachable.


Indoor sex work represents about 60% of the sex work scene, with a high percentage of national workers. There is no precise figure about migrants' origin countries. Migrant sex workers are less visible and therefore very hard to reach. On the streets, around 60% are migrants, mainly from Algeria and Bulgaria.

In Marseille, indoor sex work venues are mostly private apartments spread across the city. Indoor sex workers receive clients in their own apartments or in special ones rented solely for working purposes. Others prefer going to the client's place or to a hotel. Indoor prostitution also takes place in saunas, hotels, sex shops, bars and clubs, but these are not official and therefore remain hidden venues. About 15% of indoor sex workers contacted are transgender, and a further 5% are men. The majority work alone and have no contact with other sex workers. The reasons why they work alone are that they could otherwise be accused of pimping each other, and because they want to retain their anonymity and not be recognised as sex workers.

Making contact with sex workers

The Autres Regards indoor outreach team is composed of a social worker and a peer, who worked

⁵ INSEE, Census of 2007



indoors for ten years. The presence of a peer during outreach significantly facilitates contact with other sex workers. Contact is mostly made by telephone, through chats on general and specialised forums, and through visits to bars. Direct visits remain exceptional as indoor sex workers want to stay anonymous. The organisation's business cards are left in strategic venues.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | Prostitution in France is neither prohibited nor regulated. There is no legislation that clearly targets 'sex work' or uses that term.

Since the Law on Inner Security in 2003, active and passive soliciting is prohibited. Passive soliciting concerns any person who 'has the intention' to propose a remunerated sexual service. This is forbidden in any public place. The punishment for passive soliciting is two months' imprisonment and a €3,750 fine. This legislation is national in scope, but its application is regional and is dependent on the action of individual prefectures.

Since April 2011, despite the high mobilisation of sex workers and allies, the French government has increased its promotion of a bill on the criminalisation of clients.

Pimping, human trafficking and sexual exploitation are forbidden. Pimping covers a broad range of actions, thus partners of sex workers can also be charged with pimping if they can't prove that they have their own financial resources.

Organising indoor sex work is forbidden. Sex work is prohibited in hotels, saunas, bars, clubs and other areas open to the public. There are no rules concerning private apartments, but sex workers may be prosecuted for pimping if they do not have all their names on the lease.

According to recent practices by police forces, sex workers advertising on the internet are checked and the evidence may be used by the tax administration for an audit.

Health | There is no mandatory testing for sex workers. France has a medical coverage system for unemployed or low-income people.

- Universal Medical Care – for low-income people, including migrants, who have lived and worked on a regular basis in France.

- National Medical Aid Programme – an aid programme for illegal migrants and EU citizens, who reside occasionally in France for a short period of time.

- Access to HIV/AIDS treatment – Nationals and migrants, including sex workers, legalised or not, have access to HIV and STI testing and treatment, which is free of charge, voluntary and anonymous, provided that this testing is done in the special centres known as CIDAG. HIV/AIDS infection is considered a long-lasting illness, and those infected get free care and enjoy 100% coverage.

The actual tendency is, however, to reduce both the scope and coverage of public health insurance to avoid having migrants stay in the country for medical reasons.

Migration | EU citizens enjoy the right to enter and to stay in France with the possession of a valid passport or a valid identity card; however, nationals of Bulgaria and Romania need a residence permit in order to work in France, to sojourn or to stay for a period that exceeds three months.

Non-EU citizens need to meet basic criteria to enter France. They must have a visa to cover their stay and must possess a valid passport. In addition, they need to prove that they have accommodation, that they have the financial resources to live in France, and that they possess insurance that covers costs in the event of repatriation.

Knowledge of the French language and the Republic's laws and values are also checked for non-EU citizens wishing to stay in France.



PORTO PORTUGAL

Porto is the second largest city in Portugal with 1.28 million inhabitants⁶, and a migrant population of approximately 2%.

There are no reliable statistics about the number of sex workers, either in Porto specifically, or in Portugal as a whole. In the city of Porto, in 2010, about 800 sex workers contacted a NGO. According to APDES' data, about 5% of these were men and a further 5% transgender. About 80% were migrants, comprising 75% from Brazil and the other 5% from Romania, Mozambique, Nigeria, Colombia, Venezuela and Ukraine. More than 50% of migrant sex workers have no residence permit and are not used to accessing the Public Health Service.

More than 80% of the sex work scene in Porto is located in indoor settings. Since 2008, during outreach work, APDES has identified 120 apartments, 35 bars and clubs, several massage parlours and swinger clubs, with apartments being the most common workplaces in the city.

Usually sex work is structured in a collective way: apartments have at least 2 sex workers and the largest apartments up to 5. Sex workers often work together, and sometimes owners or receptionists of the apartments are also present.

Most sex workers already have a residence, and use the apartments specifically to work. Some apartments offer 24-hour services, but the majority have a nine-hour working schedule.



⁶ 2010, INE/Instituto Nacional de Estatísticas

Most sex workers often move from one town to another or from one country to another and it is also common, for those who work in the apartments, to change every 15 days to a different apartment.

■ Making contact with sex workers

Sex workers are contacted through visits to apartments and bars. Initial contact, however, is made by phone in order to explain the outreach work, ask permission to show up, and make an appointment. The visits occur Monday to Friday, from 10am to 7pm. During these visits condoms and lubricants are distributed, and discussions are had on sexuality, safer sex, the social, legal and health support available in town, and the rights of migrants and sex workers in Portugal.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | Criminal penalties regarding sex workers were removed from the Portuguese Penal Code at the beginning of 1983, but there is no specific legislation related to sex work in Portugal: it is neither legal nor illegal. Voluntary prostitution is not a crime – sex workers cannot be arrested for selling sexual services – although it is not recognised as a profession.

Given that sex work is not considered to be a profession, it is impossible to stipulate a work contract to carry out this activity, to declare this activity in one's finances or to qualify for National Social Security benefits with it.

The lack of a legal framework to protect sex workers renders them vulnerable.

The penal code designates as a criminal offence 'pandering' (Article 107, 1995), describing it as "professionally or with a profitable intention to promote, to favour or to facilitate the exercise of prostitution by another person or the practice of sexual acts of relief, exploiting a situation of desperation or of economic necessity."

Health | There are no mandatory provisions with specific regard to sex workers. Article 64 of the Constitution states: "Every citizen has the right to health and the duty to protect it." Therefore, an immigrant within the national territory who is ill or in need of health care has the right to be assisted in a hospital or health centre. The person cannot be refused on grounds of nationality, lack of financial resources, lack of legalised status, or any other reason. In practice, however, bureaucratic procedures and some misinformed professionals sometimes block effective access to health.

Migration | There are no specific provisions for migrants with regard to sex work.

For EU citizens there are no restrictions with regard to their stay in the country.

For non-EU citizens, the possibilities for official sojourn in the country are by means of a work contract, marriage, motherhood (if the other parent is Portuguese or has a residence permit), or official matriculation as a student or as a researcher. Additionally, the person has to demonstrate financial resources to live in Portugal.

For non-EU citizens, since sex work is unregulated, it is impossible to obtain a work contract for this activity, which places sex workers in the realm of illegality regarding their permanence in the country. If the person is in an irregular situation, he or she risks receiving a letter with an invitation to voluntarily leave the country.



SOFIA
BULGARIA

Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria, has 1.35 million inhabitants⁷.

There are about 2,500⁸ sex workers of all genders in Sofia, working both indoors and outdoors. About 98% of them are nationals. There are very few migrants among sex workers; however, an enormous amount of Bulgarians go abroad to work in the Western European sex industry, mainly in Germany.

60% of sex work in Sofia takes place indoors⁹.

The indoor sex work scene is composed of about 45 brothels, apartments, clubs, bars and truck stops. There has been, however, a decrease in the number of brothels, apartments and other indoor venues. Many were shut down by the police because of the restrictive policy of the present government, forcing sex workers to move outdoors and to other venues, like strip bars and go-go bars. Numbers of these venues increased significantly, while keeping up the appearance of offering other services as well.

As a result, sex workers often have to work in hidden conditions, under the protection and rules of the managers, rendering them extremely vulnerable. There is a low level of violence in this context. Indoor managers take care of sex workers practising in their venues.

Pimps and traffickers are rarely imprisoned. Domestic mobility of sex workers is mostly seasonal. In the summer, sex workers often head to the Black Sea resorts, and in the winter to ski resorts like Borovets, near Sofia.

⁷ <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/pagebg2.php?p2=36&sp2=37&SSPP2=39>

⁸ According to the expert opinion of HESED's outreach team

⁹ idem

■ Making contact with sex workers

The HESED outreach team consists of social workers, psychologists, a medical doctor and a nurse. The main outreach approach of HESED is through direct visits to indoor venues both by the standard outreach team as well as by the mobile medical unit. Each venue is visited every 30 to 45 days. Venues in a nearby ski resort outside Sofia are also visited during the winter season. Since 2011 HESED's team has been contacting sex workers on the internet through specialised websites and chat sessions.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | In Bulgaria sex work is not regulated by any specific law, and is neither legalised nor criminalised. On the other hand, pimping, trafficking, forced prostitution and underage prostitution are criminalised. Organising and offering venues for prostitution are also criminalised. As a result of this, not just managers but also indoor sex workers who work collectively may be punishable under the law. As yet, there are no regulations on offering sexual services via the internet.

The situation of Bulgarian sex workers changes rapidly, especially if taking into account the increase in closures of indoor premises in the country.

The lack of representation of sex workers' rights is still a problem in the country.

Health | The law does not regulate sex work in Bulgaria and there is no distinction between the general population and sex workers with regard to access to health care (in terms of health insurance). Every insured person may use public health care services in exchange for payment of the appropriate taxes (fixed by the state) and for a small fee paid at the doctor's office.

If migrant sex workers have Bulgarian citizenship, they also have access to free of charge HIV/AIDS testing and treatment, just like the general population.

If migrants do not have Bulgarian citizenship, but have permission for a legal stay in the country (e.g. students, those with working visas, etc), they also have access to HIV/AIDS treatment during their sojourn.

Migration | Following Bulgaria's accession to the European Union in 2007, the law makes a distinction between two categories of foreigners:

- EU citizens, those from the European Economic Area and Switzerland are allowed to enter the country for a term of three months, without any formality. They need only an ID card or passport. A visa is not required if the person has a document for sojourn released by another EU member country. A citizen of the EU may stay in the Republic of Bulgaria long-term, or permanently, with a certificate issued by the National Police Service in Bulgaria.
- Non-EU citizens need a visa, which is based on the purpose of a sojourn in Bulgaria. One can obtain a visa from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies for Work. Also required is an international labour contract, and permission given by the National Police Service, responsible for processing foreigners.





VIENNA AUSTRIA

Vienna, Austria's capital, has 1.7 million inhabitants, with a migrant population of approximately 20%.

The estimated total number of sex workers in Vienna is 4,500. There are about 2,300 registered sex workers, while an approximate 2,200 are unregistered. Fewer than 100 women work on the streets; the remainder operate indoors. The proportion of migrant sex workers is approximately 80%, mainly from Bulgaria, Romania and Hungary.

According to the police there are about 560 indoor venues in Vienna, of which 260 are brothels and *Laufhäuser* (large houses with individual rooms which are rented by sex workers on a daily or weekly basis).

The indoor sector changes continually, mainly due to constant police raids on the outdoor scene.

The Viennese indoor scene is composed of clubs, bars, brothels, contact cafés, Thai massage parlours, private apartments (officially forbidden), escort agencies, and certain cafés catering to specific communities, such as the Turkish community. In addition to these, there are studios (small apartments) and the *Laufhäuser*, numbers of which have increased significantly in recent years.

The *Laufhäuser*, with their private rooms, offer the opportunity for sex workers to work, but also to live in the same place. This often merges the work environment with free time and creates a round-the-clock work setting.

Making contact with sex workers

The LEFÖ outreach team is composed of cultural mediators from Bulgaria, Romania and Poland, and a medical doctor from Guatemala. Outreach to indoor venues – studios, *Laufhäuser*, bars and clubs – as well as outreach on the streets, is conducted about three times a week, either in the afternoon or at night, covering the whole city of Vienna.

NATIONAL REGULATIONS

Sex Work | In Austria the principle is regulatory and sex work is only tolerated. It is compulsory for sex workers to register; they are taxed as self-employed and must undergo regular mandatory health checks. In Vienna, sex workers must register at the police department.

According to the Austrian Federal Supreme Court, sex work is, since April 2012, not considered to be 'against good morals' anymore. With regard to the current laws, that allow and regulate sexual services, a general immorality of contracts between sex workers and customers is reversed. The impact of this landmark decision can only be evaluated in a near future.



There are national and provincial laws regulating sex work in Austria. According to article 118 of the National Constitution, the prostitution issue belongs to the provincial sphere, which regulates the initiation and provision of sexual services. Legislation is divided into two major groups:

- Brothel system: exercising and soliciting sex work is only permitted in a licensed brothel.
- Protected areas: sex work is allowed only if it takes place outside certain protected areas (also called prohibited zones).

In the city of Vienna, since November 2011, according to an amendment to the Prostitution Law in Vienna, the whole residential area of the city constitutes a prohibited zone for outdoor sex work. Outside the residential area there are only two permitted zones on the outskirts where soliciting is explicitly allowed. More permitted zones for outdoor sex work can theoretically be defined by decree.

Apart from the decoupling of residential areas and street sex work, the amendment introduced, among other things, a licensing system for sex work venues and the penalisation of clients in prohibited zones and unlicensed venues.

Penalties in Vienna for the offences against specified prohibitions are between €500 and €800, and in the case of recurrence may be as much as doubled. The here stated sums for penalties are based on an average benchmark and represent various administrative offenses.

Health | Following the national legislation on HIV/AIDS and STIs, sex workers have to go for a health check-up for STIs once a week, and once every 3 months for HIV. Sex workers receive a green card with his or her name on it, and each health check-up is registered on this card. In the event of an infection, the sex worker must return the control card, which must be shown each time the police make checks.

According to the new Viennese Prostitution Law only the pursuit of sex work without registration is punishable, not the missing card in the control. Although in this case there is also a penalty imposed, when subsequently demonstrating the card, however, the sex worker can appeal and so avoid the charge respectively fine.

Self-employed sex workers have health insurance, provided that their income reaches a certain amount. Below that limit they have the possibility of optional health insurance in order to gain free access to public health care services.

Migration | National and EU citizens may officially register as self-employed sex workers. Since 2003 asylum seekers are also able to engage in sex work as self-employed persons.

Non-EU citizens face a drastic increase in obstacles since the immigration package of 2006: the former 'prostitution visa', a short-term residence permit for self-employed sex workers, has been replaced by a standard visa for a maximum of 6 months within a 12-month period. The initial application and any extensions must be made from abroad and, in practice, may require proof of previous work experience in the sex industry in the homeland or an EU country.





PICTURES OF A REALITY



“ Please understand that we are not in prostitution because we want to do it for the rest of our lives, but because we have the responsibility to support our families, and because we want to have a better life than the one we had at home. So, don’t think we are different from other migrants. Prostitution is not our goal but it is the way to make money and to help our families. What people must understand is that we are heads of families. Children, parents, and many other people depend on our work and earnings. This responsibility is sometimes unbearable, much more so than earning our money in prostitution. We are workers, migrants, with a heavy weight on our shoulders.

Colombian sex worker, Amsterdam

THEMES

BACK HOME

AMSTERDAM



■ I was studying in Colombia before coming here, but I had to leave due to financial reasons. I would like to go back to my country for holidays, to have kids and to stop this kind of work.

Colombian, 28

■ My family in Colombia has no idea what I am doing for work. When I was living there, I was home all the time and helped my family.

Colombian

■ I used to sell clothes for a living, when I met a lady who told me about Holland. She lives in Caracas and her daughters in The Hague. I borrowed US\$15,000 from this lady. I paid most of it back already. As soon as I have paid off my debt, I will go back to my country and never come back.

Colombian

■ I was a hairstylist in my country, before coming to Holland. I still want to go back to my country and open my own business.

Colombian

CHILDREN

HAMBURG



■ I have three children and my husband has left me. He gives me no maintenance and I don't know where he is. Caring for my children and the high mortgage rate from the bank have pushed me into prostitution.

Polish, 35

■ I am five months pregnant. Many of my clients are old men; they give me presents for my baby. I will have my child in Germany. When my baby is three months old, I will fly to Santo Domingo and leave the baby with my boyfriend's sister. My two older children are with my mother. Samantha (another sex worker) was able to bring her children to Germany because she had money. I have no money.

Dominican, 30

■ I did not study anything. I was always at home, for my children. My husband brought the money home, until he lost his job. Because the children are grown up now and fairly independent, I decided to go abroad. A friend of mine told me what she was doing in Hamburg and how much she was earning. In my situation, this was my only option. In addition, my oldest son began Navy School and I urgently needed money to finance him. The costs of the semester contribution, the lodgings, the books, are incredibly high! This was, actually, the true reason for starting this job. In two years he will be finished and I will stop prostitution.

Polish, 45

HELSINKI



■ I am a bit stressed now. It's my daughter's birthday next week and I want to get something special for her. But as it is, I'm totally broke... So, I think I'll need to do some extra work, even though that stresses me out too.

African, 46

■ Basically I have my income sorted out, but it does not cover my living costs. I have two teenagers at home and they need clothes and other stuff. And not only that, but I don't have money for the school stuff either, like textbooks and so on. So, I have to earn some extra money with sex work.

Latvian, 40

■ I can't claim custody of my children because I don't have an apartment or a job and I can't speak Finnish. My children's Finnish father can offer them a much better life.

Thai, 24

SOFIA



■ I do this for my daughter. She is four years old and lives with my parents in the countryside because I have to work here.

Bulgarian, 29

■ I will never abandon my child! If I have one, I will work as a sex worker forever, but will provide him with everything he needs to be happy.

Bulgarian, 28

■ I worked for four years in Germany. I returned only because I am pregnant and in Germany it is too expensive to bear a child. Probably I will have to stay here with the baby; I will not be able to travel any more.
Bulgarian, 34

■ I have three children and a grandchild too. But now I want to get pregnant again. If I do, my man will not make me do sex work any more.
Bulgarian, Roma origin, 40

■ I got pregnant once. It was the result of a condom burst with a client. I did not know what to do and I told the girls in the club that I had this big belly because I had stomach problems. I had an abortion. It was my first one. I have had three abortions so far...
Bulgarian, 31

■ Sorry, but I could not come to our appointment the other day because I had to take my child to the hospital. He injured himself and had to receive about 10 stitches.
Bulgarian, 28

VIENNA



■ I have six daughters. They all live with their father in Bulgaria. I go to Bulgaria as often as I can to visit them, which means every time I have saved some money. And I send them money every week. Today I just sent €500, because my older children need a computer. Every school kid needs a computer nowadays and I want my children to go to school and get a good education.
Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ I have three children with my ex-husband in Barcelona. I am the only person earning money in the family. I save as much money as I can and once a month I travel to Barcelona to visit my children and give them money and spend time with them.
Colombian, in a café-restaurant

CLIENTS

AMSTERDAM



■ Clients normally agree to use condoms. In my experience, migrant men are the ones who most frequently don't want to use condoms or try to talk me out of condom use. I don't compromise on condom use, and I won't provide sexual services without condoms for more money. My life is more important than money.
Dominican, 29

■ I select my clients by the way they are dressed and by the way they make contact with me. Some of them try to have sex without condoms, but this I refuse. I am really afraid of diseases. I only ever have short conversations with my clients, because I want them to leave as soon as possible.
Colombian, 28

■ Most of my clients are Dutch and German, but I prefer to work with Dutch clients, because they are not too wild. It is very easy to work with them. Here, in comparison to other countries, clients prefer the use of condoms. I work 8 to 10 hours per day and I have around 8 to 10 clients daily.
Colombian, 29

■ I am very democratic in choosing my clients; I don't select men based on their nationality. Here we also work with tourists, but some girls refuse to work with migrant men, because they think they are more difficult and often try to haggle over the price. For me there is no difference, it all depends on your skills and how you deal with the clients.
Dominican, 32

■ I don't take just any client. Of course not! Only the rich ones...
Bulgarian, 27, in a window

■ Clients of other nationalities often don't pay well. I prefer Dutch men...
Bulgarian, 29, in a window



■ I am here because I want to make money. Any client is welcome, as long as he's clean and not aggressive. I discuss the price and the sexual services at the door of the window before letting the man in, so that everything is clear before we start. It is also safer. Through this work I have learned to sense whether someone is OK or not. Very often I am more of a psychologist and social worker than a sex worker. I learned a lot by communicating and observing human behaviour... Our work is not only about having sex with men: many other skills are needed in order to be a good sex worker.

Dominican, 30

■ I've just arrived in the Netherlands. I was working in an office before, in Bulgaria, but now I've chosen to do this. However, I refuse drunk clients, I only take clean ones.

Bulgarian, 25, in a window

■ I have all sorts of clients. Some are ugly, old, or fat. I don't care. But sometimes they are also good-looking, thin and young. Some are even good lovers!

Dutch, in an apartment

■ I have worked with disabled clients, people with big challenges in life. In the beginning I got the clients through an agency, but after a while I started getting my own clientele. One of them had autism, and used to live in a care home.

Dutch, 50, escort

GENOA



■ Young clients spend more. They offer more drinks and pay better. The more I ask, the more they give me. It is up to you to negotiate what is better for you...

Italian

■ One day a client was going down the staircase leading from my flat, when he met one of my neighbours who was coming up to see me. They greeted one another: "You're here too?" "Yes, me too."

Italian, 30

■ We do no harm; we force no one to go with us. Who comes to us? Foreigners, Americans (nearby there is a NATO base), but mostly Italians, of all ages. They are our main clients.

Romanian, 30

■ For the client, if you work in a bar you're not a whore but an escort, and you're treated a little better.

Italian

■ There are clients who ask for a discount as though they were in a marketplace...

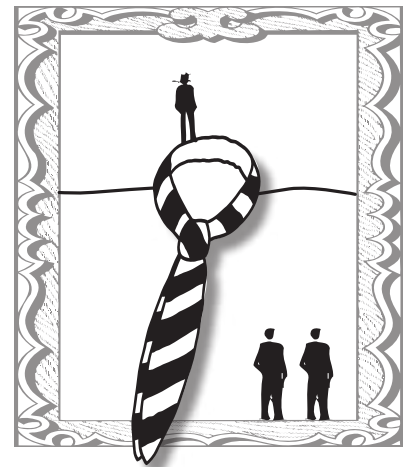
Italian

HAMBURG



■ Some regular clients are worse than one's own man. I have one who's already been coming to me for three years, who only wants to talk about his problems...

Russian, 35



■ I only work until 7 in the evening because clients then are usually working men and are mostly OK. After that time, the clientele is not recommended because many men live alone and drink a lot...

Bulgarian, 30

■ A German lawyer wanted €200 in order to regularise my situation, but then a client helped me and I paid no money to that lawyer. I would like to work independently and pay taxes. I want to make everything legal here.

Venezuelan, 30

■ Here in Germany the work is much harder because of the demand for unprotected oral and vaginal sex, for which clients are willing to pay a lot of money. It is not like that in Spain, but here in Germany it is very, very common. The problem for us is the language. If you don't speak German it is almost impossible to negotiate and to talk the client into doing something else.

Colombian, 30

"To improve the working conditions of sex workers we should work regularly with their clients around the issues of safer sex and how to deal with and respect sex workers."

Olga B., Russian cultural mediator,
Hamburg

■ We must always stay alert because clients attempt tricks to get sex without a condom...

Ecuadorian, 30

■ Many clients know nothing about hygiene. They are dirty. But above all, they have no idea about the hygiene of the penis.

German, 30

HELSINKI



■ If a client stands on the street, near a bar, at 4 in the morning, is sober and quickly agrees on a high price for a service... that means that something is wrong.

Russian

■ I had a very good regular client. He was a very nice man. Once he invited me to go out for dinner with him. I agreed and we went out together, but this time no money was involved. And suddenly he changed; he left me in the middle of the dinner. He said that he can't spend time with a hooker. I was amazed because he was always very nice to me when money was involved. His reaction insulted me and I don't want to see him any more.

Finnish

■ It's good to do sex work in Finland, clients are so kind here. Finnish men long for company, we are like psychologists. They just want to talk.

Russian

MADRID



■ God! I have to get out of this work. I can't stand these stinking men any more. They have no respect for us. Why can't you wash yourself before coming to a whore?

Colombian

■ Sometimes you get some really stinking men. You say to them "Darling, why don't you come for a quick wash?" But they say "No, no, I have already showered." The worst is when they take off their shoes. You want to vomit...

Romanian

■ I am very clean. I wash myself after every client and I always use a condom. Do you know that I never sit on a toilet? Even in my mother's house! I only sit on my own, at home.

Romanian

■ I can't stand men with bad breath. If a guy with bad teeth comes along I just refuse him! Ugh!

Romanian, 30

MARSEILLE



■ I have no problems with clients. When they call, I select them based on their voice and the sort of language they use, which must be respectful. You have to be patient and take your time to talk a little with them. I imagine what he looks like, I ask questions... I am always very careful. It happens that I refuse some clients if they are dirty or old, because I can see them from my balcony, before they enter...

French, 24

■ Clients always come to my place. I have never experienced any violence so far, but sometimes I am afraid, because we don't know who is calling... That's why I don't work at night. I select my clients by their voice.

French, 30

■ I have been assaulted both physically and verbally, but this is rare, because in general the clients are OK. I think there is a greater risk when I go to the client's place than when I receive him at home...

French, 38

■ I usually have no problems with clients, except when some of them ask for or demand unprotected sex. I get annoyed and impatient. Or when they try to perform oral sex... I cannot stand it!

French, 30

■ One night a young man came to my place, brought champagne and started chatting. After 30 minutes, I asked him to pay me. He was very surprised because he was not aware that he had to pay! He had neither money nor a credit card so I threw him out. There was no violence in this case, but my time was wasted with him...

French, 30

■ Often clients coming to your apartment think they can occupy more space, and quickly become demanding. I am often afraid of their reactions. If they are too arrogant I put them on my blacklist.

French, 25

■ With time, I learned to deal with the clients, because one thing is common to all: as soon as they pay, they believe that we are a toy, and that everything is allowed...
French, 45

■ I am an escort, so it's not prostitution. I wanted to know if it is legal to tell the prices of my services to clients on the phone. I have been advertising for a year and I have worked on the street for one month. Clients disgust me because they have perverse requests. Sometimes I agree to do things that I don't like because I need the money...
Transgender sex worker, 30

PORTO



■ Many clients are not aware of important things. That is why I think it would be very important if you would do outreach work with them to...
Portuguese, 45

■ I think that there are a lot of clients that really don't know the risks, that still ask for unsafe sex, with no condoms... They are very misinformed! I have lost many clients because they do not like condoms...
Brazilian, 45

■ I can talk about myself, but not about my clients without their consent.
Brazilian, 41

■ Some clients talk a lot. They are quick to fuck, but then they go on talking, talking... Sometimes it is very boring.
Ukrainian, 40

■ Some time ago, when work was going well, I used to have a blacklist of clients in my mobile phone, and I wouldn't answer their calls. If I didn't like the client for whatever reason, I would add him to my blacklist. Today I cannot afford to do that. I have to answer the calls from my blacklist too...
Ukrainian, 40

■ Men are increasingly demanding. That's where the problem lies. They have no money in their pockets but always want something special...
Portuguese, 40

■ Clients who pay more, around €60, get you on all fours, turn you inside out, while those who pay €20 do what we want them to do. They cannot be too demanding...
Brazilian, 35

■ Portuguese men fuck a lot and pay little! [Laughter...]
Brazilian, 42

■ They all say that unprotected oral sex is not dangerous... I answer: "Please, read this!" But it is very difficult... They are very stubborn!
Portuguese, 50

■ Often men come to us quite high, very crazy, or smelling of alcohol... It is difficult to deal with them at such times.
Brazilian, 40

■ I am struck by the amount of men who request unsafe sex. I tell them: "You don't know who I am. You want to put your life, mine and that of your wife in danger, just like that?"
Brazilian, 39

■ They are more afraid of catching flu than gonorrhoea. If I cough, they immediately ask if I am sick.
Brazilian, 36

SOFIA



■ I was raped once. It was an awful experience. I told one of my regular clients about it. He was so upset and mad about what happened to me, that he wanted to go and find the guy who did it. That's what I call a 'good client'!
Bulgarian, 24

"Clients are as important as sex workers. We have to offer them services as well. This is one way to prevent HIV and STIs. Unfortunately, work targeting clients of sex workers, or involving the general public on this issue, is not popular or common in Bulgaria."

Petar T., outreach worker, Sofia

VIENNA



■ Last year business got worse everywhere and the prices fell. Before, clients used to allow themselves an hour with me. Now they can afford only 15 minutes.
Bulgarian, in a bar

■ It is crazy what sorts of things some men want! I only offer normal things, like vaginal and oral sex. I don't do perverted things, no matter how much money they offer me.
Bulgarian, in a *Laufhaus*

■ A lot of men want oral or anal sex, but I offer only traditional sex. Most of the clients agree to this. And if not... well, then I don't need them.
Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I decide on the spur of the moment how much money I will ask a client for. Most of the time I can tell how much a man is ready to pay. Usually the lowest price is €50 for half an hour. Even if the client comes earlier and it is over sooner, I still take €50.

Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ I work mostly with regular clients, who I've known for many years. Sometimes they just want to talk. I am not afraid of violence, because I know my clients well and they are all decent men.

Austrian, in a studio



COMPETITION

GENOA



■ Working indoors with other colleagues is better because it is safer, but more than two working in a bar is impossible, because of jealousies and disputes. I believe that two working together is the best way.
Italian

HAMBURG



■ They opened many Thai massage parlours in Hamburg in recent months. We have to fight very hard to get clients...

Thai, 34

■ In this house there are two Poles working on the ground floor. They are a disaster! They steal all our clients! If one passes by and we don't open the door fast enough, they approach the client immediately. I really hate them for it. This is absolutely uncooperative.

Bulgarian, 46

■ I made a special deal with the owner: he gave me these two rooms for only €150 a week. But please don't tell the other women in the building, otherwise they will want the same price and in the end the owner will throw me out for not keeping it quiet.

Dominican, 40

HELSINKI



■ It's irritating. There are some new sex workers around again and they are willing to sell services at very low prices. I've heard they also sell sex without a condom. That's not fair, because they get the clients and later on these clients will demand low prices from me too...

Russian, 45

MARSEILLE



■ I know three others who do the same work, but I don't speak much with them, I don't like to go out with them. For me, the relationship between the girls is too hard, there is too much jealous...

French, 38

PORTO



■ There is lots of competition in this area, really... price competition. On a physical level, competition doesn't affect me that much, seriously. But if we think in numbers... yes, I am also affected by competition.

The apartments are also in crisis, just like the shops in shopping centres. We have also reduced our prices... If all the apartments would offer the same price, the clients would choose the ones that have women with nice and seductive voices on the phone, who know how to negotiate in a nice way, and finally, the ones that have the most beautiful women.

Portuguese, 40

SOFIA



■ I have changed apartments and brothels several times because the managers didn't give me enough work. They always gave the best clients to other girls and I earned very little. I am in a better position now, in this place.

Bulgarian, 24

■ There are about 40 girls here in this bar. We work in two shifts, with about 20 girls every evening. I know all of them but we are rivals because there are not enough clients for all of us.
Bulgarian, 27

VIENNA

■ There are women who work for €20 or €30 and do everything without a condom, especially Romanians and Bulgarians... That is why the clients go to them. It is awful. I have a family, I cannot work without condoms. These women take all the clients! But when I hear that a woman works without condoms or without a green card, I tell the police about it.
Slovak, in a flat

■ I don't see migrant sex workers as competition because I only see Austrian clients and they are happy when they find an Austrian sex worker. Three other Austrian women work here; I get on well with them.
Austrian, in a bar

■ The other women don't see me as competition. You see, I am old, I know I don't look attractive. I cannot afford to buy cosmetics or nice clothes either. That is why I charge far less than the other women here. But they are not angry with me. I can't steal their clients. They even help me with money when I need it. The others are really very nice to me. I even live with a couple of colleagues now. There are four of us now in a small flat. Two are sharing a room. We pay only €70 per month per person.
Bulgarian, in a studio

■ All the women in this *Laufhaus* charge the same prices. Unfortunately, sometimes some of them do the services for less money than we've agreed on.
Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

ENTERING SEX WORK

AMSTERDAM

■ Before coming to the Netherlands, I worked as a hairdresser, waitress, bartender, and in a bingo hall, back in Bulgaria. I left my country because I met a pimp who took me to Belgium to work. But I managed to come alone to this town.
Bulgarian, 32, in a window

■ I came to Holland to work in a launderette, but the lady who hosted me here had to leave and left me in an apartment with other girls. One of them took me to work in sex work in another city. I was very lost and didn't know anything, so I couldn't do anything else...
Colombian

HELSINKI

■ I was kind of hanging out in the centre with a friend, no money as usual, and feeling a bit restless because of that. Then this older guy approached and made us a proposal: "For a small sexual favour you'll get some money. What do you say?" It sounded like an easy way to earn

some money and off we went with him. As time went by, I learned that it was not that easy at all, but stopping it was even harder, when your life is a mess and you need to get your next fix.
Finnish, 26

■ I have had several official jobs in recent years and managed to support myself somehow. Nowadays I have found myself in the situation that even if I had a job, I would not be able to cover my basic living costs, as prices have gone up and wages have not, at least not enough. So, I returned to sex work, even though it's not easy work either. The competition is hard and the money you get is not that much either...
Estonian, 50

MARSEILLE

■ I've been doing this work for about a year now, since being dismissed. Because my boss had not declared me as an employee, I did not get any unemployment benefit. I have children to feed and bills to pay, so I threw myself into sex work...
French, 28

■ I am 53. I started in sex work when I was 19, in the champagne bars in Paris, where the client had to pay for half a bottle to go out with the girl. I also worked on the street. I was married and I have two children. After my divorce, eight years ago, I started to work as a sex worker again, in an apartment...
French, 53

■ I do this for pleasure and necessity, but without being pressured. I was a business manager for 10 years but I went bankrupt, due to mismanagement. Before that I was a transvestite, for fun. I met men, it was a game, it was part of my sex life, but two years ago I started to place ads as an escort...

French, transgender, 42

SOFIA



■ All my life I worked in a pastry shop. I had a man and two children, a normal life. A year ago I lost my job, my husband left me for a younger woman, and my children went to study in another town. Suddenly, I was at home, alone, and had no more responsibilities. I had a friend who was a sex worker. She invited me to visit her in her workplace. I went. We spent time talking, drinking and laughing. Then some clients came and one of them said: "Hm, you have new faces here..." and after an hour I had had my first client... Today he is one of my regulars.

Bulgarian, 40

■ I started with sex work on the street. Then I came to this apartment. It is safer here.

Bulgarian, 26

■ I was 19 years old when I decided to try sex work. I opened a daily newspaper with ads, picked one and just called. That evening I was in a bar with my first money earned through sex work. I worked for a while on the street, and now I am in this apartment.

Bulgarian, 25

■ I was very stupid when I was young. I was in love with a man, and he led me into sex work. He lied to me so much... but I believed every word. Now I know the truth, but it is too late...

Bulgarian, 35

FAMILY

AMSTERDAM



■ I've been working in the Netherlands for five years now, always as a prostitute, and in the same place. In Bulgaria I was working in a boutique, but I chose to leave my country to change my life. I still don't know if I want to go back home. Although I live here by myself, I still have the dream of finding my prince someday and having a family.

Bulgarian, 28, in a window

■ I need to spend more time with my family. The last couple of months, I've been working like crazy... I could hardly see my son and my husband during the week. But that is going to change because they need me as much as I need them...

Dutch, 37, in a brothel

GENOA



■ When my children and my partner saw my picture in the paper they were very upset. They know what work I do, but felt ashamed in front of their friends...

Dominican

HAMBURG



■ My son has cirrhosis of the liver and needs surgery urgently. That is why I do this job. I need money, a lot of money, to pay for his operation. He is still very young, only 15 years old. He lives with my mother. My husband worked as a paramedic and had an emergency once. However, he forgot to put on the gloves, injured himself and thus infected my boy. My husband is healthy, but my son will die if I can't get the money together.

Bulgarian, 46

■ My husband was working in England, but he got ill and is not able to work any more. Because he has British health insurance, he stayed there. We have a 23-year-old daughter who is at university and whose tuition fees I have to pay. Therefore, I had to find a way of earning money in order to support the family.

Latvian, 49

■ My mother is the only one who knows what I do. Friends know nothing about my work...

Latvian, 35



■ I worked for over 20 years as a cleaner in a factory in Poland. The factory, however, closed down and I was left with no source of income, even though I have four children...
Polish, 42

■ I came to Germany 20 years ago because I got married to a German man. My husband knew that I am a sex worker and at first he had no problem with it. We were married for 17 years and we have a son. After a few years, however, he started putting pressure on me to give up this job, but I did not want to, so we separated...
Jamaican, 48

HELSINKI



■ My husband didn't participate in my life; he didn't help me to solve problems or tell me how things should be done. He didn't give me any money but, at the same time, didn't approve of me working in the massage business either. He applied for a divorce. He just asked me to pick up some papers from a lawyer's office. I didn't even know where it was! I was wondering how he could apply for the divorce without me... He also changed the house locks without telling me. After the divorce, I started living in massage parlours owned by friends. My ex-husband was very jealous. I have been living with friends and moving around, from one friend's place to another...
Thai, in a Thai massage parlour

■ What awful weather, rain and cold all week long! But it's okay, in two weeks I'll be off for a sunny and warm holiday in the south. And it's going to be fun. We have this tradition in my family, to go once a year somewhere, all together, children and adults. It will be a good break from my daily life, looking at the rainy streets.
Estonian, 45

■ My husband beats me, but I don't want to divorce him or report him to the police because I'm still indebted to him. He brought me to Finland, where I found a job, and now I am able to send money to my family in Thailand.
Thai, 44

MADRID



■ I am living with a man and both of us work for a living, but if he becomes unemployed he can be accused of pimping just because he is living with me! Why don't they also consider a pimp to be an unemployed worker who lives off a woman who washes stairs?
Spanish, sex worker and activist, 30

■ I know God will forgive me for having done such a job, but somebody had to support my little brothers back there in Romania...
Romanian, 21

MARSEILLE



■ I have been working for the last six months to make ends meet at the end of the month. I have two children; my husband left me. I have custody of one child and rent to pay. I do this for money; I have no other work. I have a cousin who does the same thing, which gave me the idea to do it too when I started needing money...
French, 30

■ I am African, my brothers and sisters live in France, and my parents are still in Africa. Nobody knows, they would not understand, and that's why I do not speak to anyone about what I do, even my friends. It's too hard; people judge you or reject you.
African, 30

SOFIA



■ I have an aunt. I love her and her four children very much. Every month I go to see them, but first I always go to the supermarket to buy them some food, and only after that do I go to visit them. Sometimes, I also leave some money for them...
Bulgarian, 26

■ I've lived with my partner for three years now. I had other men before and always worked together with them. We rented this apartment some months ago and invited other girls to work with us. We share everything within the family, good or bad.
Bulgarian, 42



■ I think my parents know what I do here in Sofia. But we have never talked about it. They live in the countryside and my child lives with them. I send them money regularly and they do not ask any questions.
Bulgarian, 29

■ I have only one friend who knows how I make my money. I cannot share this with anybody else. If I tell my parents or relatives they will disown me.
Bulgarian, 33

■ I always use condoms with my clients. But my husband does not want to put a condom on. The result is that I have three children and have had six abortions. I cannot get pregnant again! And I just do not know what to do...
Bulgarian, 35, Roma origin

VIENNA

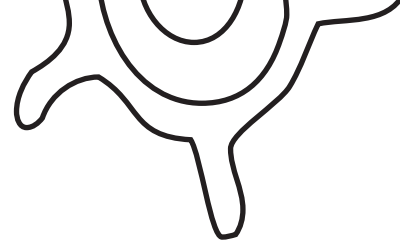


■ I work one week in Vienna, for 10 to 12 hours daily, and then I go back to Hungary for two weeks to take care of my child. When I am not at home, my husband takes care of our son and when I am there, he goes to work.
Hungarian, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I think it is possible to live off sex work, but recently it has become more difficult. Six people live on my earnings: my two children, my parents, my grandmother and my niece, who is an orphan and lives with my family. They all live in Bulgaria and I send them money regularly.
Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I was married to an Austrian guy for many years. That is why I have a work permit. I used to work as a cleaning lady or as a kitchen help. Then I met my new husband in the Dominican Republic and I wanted to bring him here to live with me. But my income was not enough to pay for a visa for him; that's why I decided to start working independently, to be able to declare a higher income. The only possibility was to start working in prostitution. I have a daughter who lives in the Dominican Republic, and a son, who is here with me. My son was the reason why I stayed here after my divorce. But now he is 19 years old and has a good job and as I cannot bring my husband here, I think I will go back to the Dominican Republic. I am really tired of Austria...
Dominican, in a massage studio

■ My man kidnapped me from school when I was 16 years old. We married according to the Roma tradition and we have been together for nine years now. We have six daughters. Not too long ago, I married an Arab guy, who paid me to marry him because he needed a Bulgarian visa. Afterwards he was deported from Bulgaria, because he had been involved in some criminal activity. I am still married to him, but I have no idea where he is now. My man has beaten me twice really badly, because I married behind his back and without his permission.
Bulgarian, in an apartment



■ I live with my boyfriend, who has no job at the moment. I have no children, although I'd love to. My boyfriend has a child in Bulgaria and I send some money to his child when it's needed. I also regularly buy clothes for my little niece, who is in Bulgaria too.
Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ I have three children in Bulgaria, but I have no contact with them. They live with my ex-husband. I think they are doing well. Anyway, I don't have to send them money.
Bulgarian, in a studio

■ I don't want to work in prostitution for a long time. At first I just wanted to earn enough money for a ticket back home. But I also want to take something to my children, like money and presents. However, in the seven months I've been working, I haven't been able to save anything. Everyone in my family is jobless. I have to send small amounts of money to my parents every week, so that they can survive and take care of my children. The rest goes on my costs here...
Bulgarian, in a studio

■ My daughter is grown up and already married in the Dominican Republic. My parents are dead, so I don't need to send money to anyone. I save it for myself for when I grow old. I plan to live on my savings.
Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*



■ I travel once a month to Barcelona to visit my children and take them some money. I am divorced and have to pay back the mortgage for my house in Barcelona. I just want to work in prostitution until I find a normal job from the AMS (Austrian Employment Service).

Colombian, in a café-restaurant

■ My boyfriend and my son live in Barcelona. I send money to my son in Barcelona and to my family in Venezuela. I try to spend as little money as possible, because I want to save it and get out of this business as soon as possible.

Venezuelan, in a studio

■ I work from Monday to Saturday, from 8pm to 5am, and rest on Sundays. Every month I travel to Hungary for one week to visit my children. I am a widow with two children and the only person in my family who has a job. I have to care for my children and for my parents, who look after the children. One of my children is handicapped from the car accident in which my husband died. He died immediately. I was badly injured and had to be in physiotherapy for a long time, until I was able to walk again by myself. My oldest son was also badly injured but he didn't recover completely and needs a surgical intervention, which is the reason why I came here to earn money.

Hungarian, in a bar

FUTURE PLANS

AMSTERDAM



■ I work 8 to 10 hours every day. I know it is a lot, but I am saving money to go back to my country, someday...

Bulgarian, 27, in a window

■ In Bulgaria I was doing different odd jobs, but it was too boring. Now I live here with a friend and work as a prostitute. I am not that selective about clients because I want to make money fast and start my own business.

Bulgarian, 24, in a window

■ I came to the Netherlands by myself, with a student visa, because I didn't want to be illegal. With the money I earn here, I will buy an apartment for myself in Bulgaria, I am sure of that!

Bulgarian, 24, in a window

■ I am tired of living in my neighbourhood; I can't wait to move on, with my boyfriend and son. I have been working hard for that, to earn money quickly to go elsewhere.

Dutch, 25, in a brothel

■ I would love to be an artist, a singer, one day... Now I just rehearse for fun.

Dutch, 54, in a window

■ I live with my husband and my daughter, but I go home only on the weekends. I would like to study, have a normal life, and in some years go back to my country...

Colombian

■ My family and my husband are in the Dominican Republic. They don't know what I am doing here, and every time I call them, it hurts a lot because I have to lie. I have plans to go back to my country and open a clothes store.

Dominican

■ I would like to go back to my country within one year, find a husband and have children...

Colombian, 25

GENOA



■ Of course I have plans. I will work just one or two more years. After that I will stop and open an import-export company between Colombia and Italy. I'm just waiting to get my Italian citizenship in order to move more easily between the two countries.

Colombian

HAMBURG



■ I am still very young and am only here temporarily. Before, I lived in Lübeck. I don't want to do this job for long. I plan to start an education. Which? I don't know yet...

Thai, 20

"Some sex workers with whom I have contact made astonishing progress with the German language within only one year. I would be very happy if they could finish school or take some sort of qualifying educational course during the time they are here..."

Medical doctor, Hamburg



■ I want to stop the job in about five years. I would like to study philosophy or, who knows, maybe psychology...

Brazilian, transgender, 32

MADRID



■ One day I want to open a shop of my own, back home...

Dominican, 37

"Whether Portuguese or migrants, sex workers' dreams are the same as everybody else's: recognition, good working and living conditions, better economic situation and adequate opportunities to raise their children."

Social worker, Porto

MARSEILLE



■ I'm thinking about an alternative, because I don't want to work like that all my life. I wish I could have enough money to do something else. I have some ideas, like to start a business or create a website within the sex work field. I even put money aside for that. I will look for some training and internships...

French, 40

■ I would like to stop and have a more stable life, with a traditional job. I am planning to see a social worker about that. As for my current work, I am very careful and I know how to avoid bad clients.

Transgender sex worker, 27

SOFIA



■ I want to have a baby. I'm planning it with my boyfriend. I really hope to be a mother soon!

Bulgarian, 29

■ I do not want to have a child right now... I want to live my life a little bit more... What have I seen so far? Only dicks!

Bulgarian, 22

■ As soon as I have made enough money to get my life in order, I will stop sex work.

Bulgarian, 29

■ I have no future plans. I have to work as much as possible to earn money for my child and my mother, who is ill. And I have to pay back money to my boss. After I return all his money, I can start thinking about the future...

Bulgarian, 26

VIENNA



■ I have saved some money over all these years. I will only work this summer, and then I will stop. I plan to invest my savings in a small shop.

Austrian

■ I can give wonderful massages. I learned it from my uncle. Unfortunately I have no certification for it. But it would be perfect if I could work as a masseuse in the future. Maybe I could go to France; my uncle has been living and working there for many years now.

Bulgarian, in a studio

■ I work all day long. I just take a break when I am sick, because I came to Austria only to work. I want to save money and go back to the Dominican Republic to rest there.

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ At the moment, I am working from 2 to 11pm, because I am taking a German course with the AMS (Austrian Employment Service) in the morning. I plan to work in prostitution just for a little longer. I am already looking for a 'normal' job.

Colombian, in a café-restaurant

HEALTH

AMSTERDAM



■ Last time I got an HIV test was two years ago, in my country. To protect myself from sexually transmitted diseases, I have been using condoms for years.

Colombian, 28

■ I have a private doctor, but I don't understand him very well. My doctor doesn't know about my work because I prefer to protect my private life. That is why I work in a different city than where I live. Because of the language problems and lack of confidence in my doctor, I don't know what my health problems are. Usually I have problems with my lungs, flu and headaches, but this is because of the cold and the stress of the work.

Colombian, 29

■ I prefer to have my check-up and other tests in my own country. I go back home every year, where I have the HIV and STI tests, as well as gynaecological check-ups. I am very careful in my work. I use condoms all the time and I can tell if my clients have a sexual disease by pressing their penis. When washing their penis before sexual intercourse, I check whether there are any abnormal symptoms. I've never had any sexual disease. However, this job can lead to other health problems besides STIs. It is our lifestyle that is not healthy.

This work affects us as a whole, not only our bodies but also our nerves. We have to stay alert all day long. In addition, we need to stay awake for many hours, since our working hours are so long. We are also slaves to ourselves, because it is difficult to stop and also to keep private and professional life separate. Sometimes the stress of having one client after another is enormous, but there is no other way because the competition in this work is massive...

Dominican, 30

■ I check whether my clients have any sexual disease by seeing and touching their penis. I've never had any sexual disease. I get tested every year in my country; last time was three months ago. I prevent myself by using condoms and vaginal douches. I think that homosexuals and drug addicts are at more risk of getting AIDS. I never got tested for AIDS because I am really afraid...

Colombian, 29



■ I have been working as a prostitute for 10 years already, but started using condoms only recently.

Dominican, 38

■ I feel pains since I had an abortion three years ago... The last time I got tested for sexual diseases was three years ago. I think that people with AIDS have stains on their skin or are very skinny. I am very afraid of this virus. My brother infected his wife and they have a child, who is undergoing treatment.

Dominican, 38

■ I medicate myself every time I have something. It is common in my country to just take medicine without a prescription. I even know how to give myself injections...

Dominican, 41

■ If the penis is dripping smelly liquid and there are other symptoms that one can see, for sure the person has an STI. This I learned by myself, from experience. But I know that not all symptoms of STIs are visible on the penis or the anus. It is why we need to be protected every time, independent of whether you can or can't see symptoms of STIs.

Dominican

■ I get tested for HIV every year and for other sexual diseases every three months. I feel safer this way... it is more a psychological need, because I work with condoms all the time. I want to be sure that everything is OK with me.

Colombian

■ I have had some inflammation in my uterus. Every time I have sexual relations I feel a lot of pain and I bleed a lot.

Colombian, 25

"Due to language barriers and lack of knowledge about the way public health works in the Netherlands, migrant sex workers do not have the same sort of access to public health care services as Dutch sex workers do."

MG, fieldworker, Amsterdam

■ I have been to the doctor only twice. Last time was two years ago. I am always afraid of bad news...

Colombian, 41

■ Every three months I get tested for sexual diseases. I have an Italian doctor in Germany who speaks Spanish...

Dominican, 41

■ Oh, if a condom breaks, I take a morning-after pill, use a vaginal douche and get a check-up. But I prefer getting the check-up in Bulgaria because I am not satisfied with the doctor here.

Bulgarian, 27, in a window

■ I know everything about AIDS. When the condom breaks I take a morning-after pill. But this has been happening a lot... what else should I do?

Bulgaria, 25, in a window

■ I didn't dare to get tested, because many of my friends have died of AIDS. But at a certain point, I simply had to do it. HIV has changed my life. My world got smaller, I grew isolated. Now, I appreciate everything much more and I try to enjoy each day.

Male sex worker

■ I had syphilis seven years ago, but I had all the treatment in my home country. My doctor here has no idea that I am a sex worker. Due to my work, I also have some vaginal irritations.

Colombian

HAMBURG



■ I use iodine, antibiotics, toothpaste and different medical ointments as prophylactic bactericidal medicine. I have many clients who perform oral sex on me and some have very bad teeth and bad breath.

Bulgarian, 25

■ I want to get an HIV test but I don't know where to go. In Poland this is very complicated because if somebody sees you in a waiting room, immediately everybody will say you have AIDS. But we are susceptible to other illnesses too... For instance, I constantly have cystitis, which I think comes from cunnilingus... By the way, what should I do if a condom bursts? Put the shower head inside my vagina?!

Polish, 25

■ I don't know if I can find the health service by myself... It is far away from here and I do not speak German to ask someone for information. I will try to wait until I am back in Spain...

Colombian, 30

■ The doctors in Germany are very bad. They have many machines and computers, but they are not able to make a good diagnosis. Once I had a Candida infection. As you know, it is a 'normal' infection among women... but they did not recognise it and said everything was OK. That is why I always go to my doctor in Russia. I have to pay privately, but they are much better than here. And if I cannot fly home, my family sends me the medicine by post.

Russian, 30

"Many migrant sex workers have no experience with the kind of health services offered in Germany, which diminishes their trust in such services. If they are undocumented they are afraid, because even in so-called humanitarian organisations there is racism..."

Tonka, social worker, Hamburg

■ How do I tell if I have been infected? And how do I tell if a client has gonorrhoea?

Thai, 30

■ I know everything about prevention and health. I use medicine that I order from the internet. This medicine cures all sorts of viruses, bacteria and sexually transmitted diseases, so I don't need any special explanations about health...

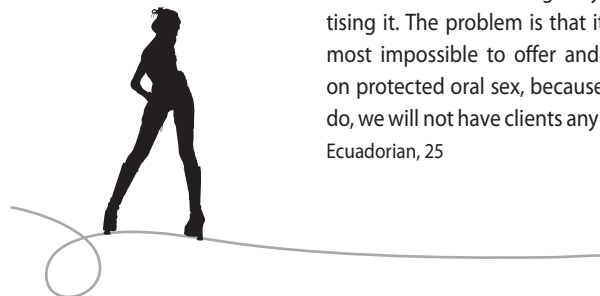
Ukrainian, 25

■ I am 45 years old and have been in prostitution for a long time. I have, however, a big problem: the IUD [intra-uterine device] doesn't work for me, so I was pregnant several times and had to have several abortions.

Polish, 45

■ Oral sex without condoms is always a subject among us because clients request it over and over again. Therefore we want to know which illnesses we can get by practising it. The problem is that it is almost impossible to offer and insist on protected oral sex, because if we do, we will not have clients any more.

Ecuadorian, 25





■ Can I get an infection if I kiss a client on the mouth? And by having oral sex without protection?
German, 20

■ People told me so much about these illnesses, that I am afraid now. Of course I only do it with a condom, but what happens if it bursts? Recently, a condom got stuck inside... I spent two hours in the shower to get it out.
Latvian, 20

■ I have not had my period for the last eight months, but I am not pregnant, that I am sure of. Once, a colleague had a condom with sperm stuck inside and she got pregnant afterwards. Since then, I always take the pill. Sometimes, I have belly pains, where my ovaries are. So I went to a German gynaecologist but she could not understand what I was telling her. It would be very nice if you could give me the address of a Polish doctor...
Polish, 24

■ I have many health problems: my kidneys do not work properly; often I have pains. I am always very tired and would like only to sleep...
Thai, 27

"In Italy, there are different public health services for nationals and for migrants, independent of whether the migrant is documented or not. A migrant only has access to public health services in the event of emergency. Public social services are, in theory, guaranteed for migrants too, but in practice only NGOs fulfill this role."
Outreach worker, Genoa

■ I am allergic to latex. The gynaecologist gave me tablets for it and they work perfectly. I wanted to buy latex-free condoms, but they are substantially more expensive and therefore I had to give up on them.
Czech, 30

■ A colleague got pregnant by a client, but she waited too long and could not abort it in Germany any more. She had to go to Bulgaria to have it done there. If this happens to me, how is abortion regulated in Germany? Where can I be tested? Do I need any special documents?
Hungarian, 30

■ I am familiar with vaginal douches from Hungary. I always buy them there, when I am on holiday. In Germany I can never find them. Do you know where I can get them? They give me a feeling of cleanliness... although I know I should not use them too often because they interfere with my vaginal flora. Correct?
Hungarian, 25

■ I know a lot about preventative things. I always use condoms, I will not go without them. It doesn't matter how much the client pays! And what is this?!? Ah, I know! This is a dental dam for women. But forget it! No client wants it. They only want to lick without...
Hungarian, 28

■ Just yesterday I had a condom burst, but I don't feel like taking the morning-after pill. I did it a couple of times before and I felt sick afterwards. The pill that I am taking daily will protect me...
Dominican, 40

MARSEILLE



■ I regularly have blood tests, but I do not tell the medical staff what I do. I find them too judgemental; they look at you funny when you go there every month... There was even someone out there who told me that it was impossible for a condom to break!

African, 30

SOFIA



■ I have serious kidney and ovary problems because I have to wear only underwear during work. I feel cold almost all the time, but this is what I have to do...

Bulgarian, 20, in a strip bar

■ I am new here; I just started with sex work. I have never been to a doctor... The other girls tell me I have to do some tests and check-ups, but I do not want to. Why should I?! God protects me and I know I am healthy!
Bulgarian, 19, Roma origin

■ I never use contraception. From time to time I use condoms but only with some clients. With my husband I do not use condoms. If I'm worried that I may be pregnant, I put aspirin into my vagina and I am OK!
Bulgarian, 29, Roma origin

■ Most sex workers work out of necessity, they have no other choice. Their access to health services is not equal to other people's. Sex workers feel ashamed to share what they do, for instance if they had a condom break. They think they will be badly treated...

Bulgarian, 35

"Portuguese and migrant sex workers do not have the same access to the National Health Service due to the frequently 'illegal' situation of migrants in the country and their lack of awareness about their rights."

Outreach worker, Porto

■ I have HIV tests once or twice a year. Some of my colleagues do it every month, but I think it is not necessary so often.

Bulgarian, 26

■ Every female sex worker in Bulgaria has had abortions. I am sure about this. It is normal. I have had four abortions so far.

Bulgarian, 30

■ I prefer to have HIV and STI tests at a private clinic. I do not trust the other laboratories. I have a good doctor; she is very attentive to me. I only go to her.

Bulgarian, 26

■ When I was a young sex worker I didn't know anything about condoms or protection. I ended up getting syphilis. Now I am afraid of every result, afraid that the old infection has come back or that I have a new one.

Bulgarian, 29

■ I cannot afford to go to a private clinic for testing and check-ups. It is really good that you came with your mobile medical unit. I haven't had an HIV or STI test for over a year!

Bulgarian, 36

VIENNA



■ I used to work 10 hours a day, 7 days a week. I earned good money, but eventually I just broke down. I became so mentally unstable that I needed to spend some time in the hospital and take medication. I feel better now, but I decided to stop working so much and care more about my health.

Czech, in a studio

■ I smoke too much, especially during work. That is why I have some problems with my lungs now. The doctor told me I need to quit smoking, but as long as I do this job, I can't.

Bulgarian

"Migrant sex workers prefer to go to the doctor in their own countries, where the health insurance is cheaper, or if they are not insured, they can afford to pay a doctor, as is usual in Eastern Europe."

Sophia S., Bulgarian cultural mediator, Vienna

■ I am so slim because I get my period every 10 days and I lose a lot of blood. The doctors who give us the health checks here in Vienna gave me some pills, but they didn't help. They also said that it is good for me, because when I lose blood, my body cleans itself. But I don't believe this. And it bothers me when I work. I use a wet napkin. I make it into a tampon and put it inside during work. It absorbs the blood. I have tried the sponge too, but it hurts me when I use it. The wet napkin is better.

Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ Once, a doctor hurt my vein during a blood test. I have had no other problems there. But I think it isn't necessary to go there every week...

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I need braces, but here in Austria it is too expensive and therefore I have to save money to travel to the Dominican Republic. For this reason I have to work extra hours, because I can't afford it on my current income.

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

HEALTH INSURANCE

AMSTERDAM



■ I don't have health insurance because I just arrived. I have a private doctor and get tested for STIs every two weeks. I went to him soon after arrival because I was having vaginal problems...

Dominican, 29



■ I had cystitis, but since I have health insurance in Holland, I can go to the doctor. I also had fleas but they've gone now.

Colombian, 28

■ I don't have health insurance. I have a private doctor who I pay for. But I know that here in Holland I need to have health insurance. It is compulsory since the legalisation of prostitution. I need to arrange it with my husband... I have been in Holland for eight years now; I have Dutch citizenship, so for me it is easy to arrange that, because I have the same rights as Dutch citizens.

Dominican, 30

■ I have no health insurance, but I found a doctor with whom I can speak Spanish. In my country, hospitals are not well-equipped. I usually go to the GGD [public health service] in Amsterdam. Last time I went was six months ago.

Dominican, 38

■ I have health insurance, and every time I need something, I go to the doctor, but he doesn't know I am a sex worker.

Dominican

■ I have medical insurance. I found out this year that I have diabetes. I also have a lot of headaches, but haven't found out the reason yet.

Dominican

■ I have only been to the doctor to have my babies. I don't have medical insurance because I have been working on these window streets for only a few weeks, so if I need something, I go to the private doctor.

Dominican

HAMBURG



■ I have no health insurance here; it is too expensive for me. That is why I periodically go home to see a doctor there.

Latvian, 30

HELSINKI



■ I am so happy to have a European Health Insurance Card, which my husband gave me in Spain. A few months ago I got malaria and had to stay in hospital for several days, but I got the money back – a €3,500 bill – the moment I showed my insurance card to the hospital administration.

Nigerian, 40

SOFIA



■ I work here without a contract and have no health insurance. I do not trust the Bulgarian health system and do not want to give money to the state. When I get sick, I prefer to pay directly to the doctor, even if the price is higher, but I know I will be well-treated and well-received.

Bulgarian, 25

VIENNA



■ I have no insurance. I prefer to save money in the event of me or my child getting sick. And I really do that! I don't spend all my money on clothes or parties like many young women in this profession do.

Hungarian, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I pay no taxes and I have no insurance either. No one in my family back in Bulgaria has insurance.

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ As my income is below the tax level, I don't have to pay taxes, but I must pay my insurance. I pay about €280 every three months.

Dominican, in a massage parlour

■ I had an ectopic pregnancy and I lost the baby. I owe the hospital €5,600 because I have no insurance. But I will get some now in Bulgaria. You pay €100 per year and you can go to the hospital in any EU country. Of course, only in emergency cases, but it is still better than having no insurance at all...

Bulgarian, in a studio

INTERNET

GENOA



■ I work with webcams and, in general, I pass the time writing. Often I make a panoramic sweep of the viewers, especially to see if there is someone with available credit amongst them. I am always mindful that anyone may have access to a chat line, so I do nothing particularly daring because the presence of minors is always a possibility.

To while away the time spent waiting for viewers that pay, I sometimes have pleasant chats with viewers without credit; however, I sometimes find maniacs who incessantly ask to watch for free or I find cretins who start being offensive, in which case,

I ban them from the chat line for at least 24 hours or forever. At times, I would like to have the option of pressing a key to permanently ban certain idiots from planet earth...

Italian, 25

HAMBURG



■ Clients have chats or blog sites on the internet where they exchange information and write about us. Sometimes it is interesting to read an opinion about oneself...

Latvian, 35

PORTO



■ I have never had pimps. My pimps... do you know who they are, and always have been? The internet sites and the newspapers where I place my ads, they are my pimps. If this work becomes legal in Portugal one day, newspapers won't be needed any more...

Portuguese, 40

SOFIA



■ I work in this apartment but I also have an ad on a website. I have to be as well-known as possible, to earn more money!

Bulgarian, 25

MANAGERS

AMSTERDAM



■ The window owners are nice and the clients don't cause any problems.

Dominican, 29

■ I only see my landlord when I pay my rent.

Colombian, 28

"We are happy to have organisations like yours coming to visit our club. We are sick of being accused of harbouring trafficked women. When they make a documentary about trafficking in Madrid, they regularly show our premises. This is totally untrue and unfounded. The media say what they want about prostitution..."

Spanish manager, Madrid

■ If I could, I would tell the window owner not to come with his cigarette to my window. I hate that, because it took me so long to stop smoking... But I am afraid he would not rent the room to me any more...

Dutch, 30, in a window



GENOA



■ I work in different bars and the managers are fine with it. It's good for him because he gets money from both sides: from what I drink and from what I make the clients drink. I do not work in the bar; I go out with the client, and we go either to a hotel, to his car or to his home. Some time ago, some guys approached me asking if I wanted to work for them, saying that it would be better for me. They would bring clients to me and I'd give them a percentage. I told them to leave, because I know them, no woman should trust them... The problem is that younger sex workers or those who are new to the business often give in...

Italian

SOFIA



■ My boss makes me bleach my hair. I do not want to, but she thinks I will get more clients like this...

Bulgarian, 21

"To be honest, I do not consider sex work to be a profession. It is just a way to earn good money! Most of the girls are free to make whatever choices they want. Violence?! No, there is no violence, at least not in my bar. I don't use such methods; we have a clear business relationship."

Manager of a bar, Sofia



■ All the girls in this bar are obliged, by the manager, to go to a private lab for HIV and STI tests. Afterwards we have to show him the results... Bulgarian, 27

"Of course sex work is work. It is the only way for some girls to earn money. And the money is not always as much as people think! I try to provide them with all they need to work. Some of them have really bad living conditions. They don't go out with friends, some of them have never been to a doctor, and sometimes they come here bruised. I do not force them to work here. They come of their own free will, because they are in need."

Manager of a truck stop venue, Sofia



■ The boss sleeps with many of the women who work here and he doesn't pay for it. The other boss, who is in prison now, also had a relationship with one of the women. She was afraid of him and when he got arrested she went back to Romania. Now she doesn't want to come back, because she is afraid that he could harm her because she left him...

Romanian, in a *Laufhaus*

■ Hey, we should talk lower, because there are cameras all around and I don't want my bosses to hear everything we talk about!

Slovak, in a *Laufhaus*

MANDATORY HEALTH EXAMINATIONS



■ The health check is totally annoying. There are not enough doctors there. I hate being forced to spend a whole morning there, and every week! I am even willing to pay for the check, but I would prefer to be allowed to go to my own doctor!

Czech, in a studio

■ The health check doesn't function properly. There are no clear criteria regarding when a woman should stop working if she is ill. Once I had an infection and went to the health check, but they said nothing and gave me my green card back. Afterwards I went to my gynaecologist and he prescribed me antibiotics...

Bulgarian, in a studio

■ The health check is really drastic! They should be open at least once a week in the afternoon as well, until 6pm. Several afternoons a week would be even better! It is very difficult for me to get up early to go there, because they only open in the morning. After all, I work till 5 am! And if I get there even 5 minutes late, they send me back home. Moreover, I don't think it is necessary to get checked every week. That is too much! What should women do who also have a regular job? How

can they explain to their bosses that they need a morning off once a week? That's why most of the women who have a regular job prefer to work unofficially as prostitutes. The doctors there at the health check are also very unpleasant. They always take blood with the biggest possible needle. I really don't think this is necessary!

Slovak, in a bar

"Access to the public health system should be removed from the context of coercion and force, as is the case in Austria. There should be a free choice of medical practitioners who guarantee qualitative health counselling for sex workers."

Marta J., Polish cultural mediator, Vienna

■ What I hate most at the mandatory health check is that you have to wait there for so long, and the doctors are so stressed. They are particularly unfriendly, especially if you don't speak German well.

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I don't speak German and it is very difficult for me to communicate with the doctors at the health check. Not understanding each other makes us both nervous and angry. And I feel that the doctors there don't like me.

Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ The quality of the health check got worse since there are so many registered sex workers, because the government doesn't want or can't afford to put so much money into this. The government has to either invest more money in the health check or

introduce a small fee, for example, for those sex workers who can afford to pay for the blood tests. It would also be good if sex workers could have the blood tests in any laboratory, so that they wouldn't have to wait so long in the STI ambulance. I personally go to my own gynaecologist twice a year for a whole check-up.

Austrian, in a studio

■ The health check is... hm... it is what it is. But I don't really mind going there. It's a distraction, a small change for me. Otherwise I am either at home sleeping or at work. So, it's not that bad.

Bulgarian, in a studio



■ Once, during a mandatory health check, they hurt my vein when taking blood to test. For me it would be much better if I didn't have to go for the health check every week...

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I think the weekly mandatory health check doesn't make sense and it just wastes my time. Furthermore, I feel very uncomfortable there.

Romanian, in a bar

■ The weekly health check is really disturbing. There are always so many people there, which makes me lose a lot of time. The front door always has to stay open because the queue is so long, and in winter we often catch cold while waiting outside. It happened already that some women fainted because they had to wait for 3 or 4 hours in the queue! A lot of them worked all night and came directly to the health check without even eating something. But none of the staff helped them, so we were the ones who tried to help... The nurses are very unfriendly, but I don't think they will ever change. I would already be very happy if I didn't have to wait so long every time I go for the health check...

Ukrainian, in a night club

■ It would be great if the staff from the health check would be a little kinder to us... I think the health check is necessary and important for all sex workers.

Venezuelan, in a studio

"Language may be an obstacle to migrant sex workers' access to social and health services, but so are general moralistic views on sex work in connection with racism."

Outreach worker, NGO maiz, Linz

■ I had problems at the health check when there were lots of people. Once, a nurse also yelled at me! I don't like to go for the weekly health check; I would prefer to go there just once a month.

Romanian, in a hotel

MIGRATION

AMSTERDAM



■ Before coming to the Netherlands, I already knew what I would be doing. My mother is also a prostitute. She worked back home, then in Curaçao, in Spain, and later in the Netherlands. I made a conscious choice when I decided to join my mother here, although she was not happy when I said I was going to work in prostitution too. I had no problem with it, because for me it was the only job with a good income and freedom, compared with other jobs. I don't see a future for me in my own country. I prefer to stay in Europe and go back only when I am economically independent for the rest of my life. My mother is going back now. Half of my brothers and sisters are in Europe and the other half are in the Dominican Republic. Our family is, like other migrant families, living emotionally between two countries, two continents.

Dominican, 30

■ I have been living in the Netherlands and working in this window for the last two years. Before, I worked for two years in Belgium and in France. But here it is more relaxed... I still want to keep working in prostitution, but not forever.

Bulgarian, 27, in a window



■ I have been in Holland for only three months. I came here with the dream of making money, but I never imagined myself doing this. I had a tourist visa, but now I am here illegally...

Dominican

■ I have a master's degree and I could be doing something else, but I decided to leave my country. I worked one month for a pimp. Now I am working 20 hours a day, can you believe it?! But I work for myself! Because of that I have no time left for my private life.

Bulgarian, 35, in a window

GENOA



■ Foreign women are more subject to exploitation than Italian women. This is inevitable because an Italian woman can decide to work without protectors, whereas it is usually enforced on foreign women.

Apart from that, foreign women, especially undocumented ones, fear health checks because these can be used by the authorities to check their legal status. They do not have the same access to health services that Italian women do. Being in a foreign country also renders them more vulnerable to acts of violence.

Italian, 30

HAMBURG



■ I came to Germany ten years ago to work as an au pair. My visa expired after three years but I still wanted to stay, so I got married. Now I can stay as long as I want. I also brought my daughter, who is now 15 years old, and who I had left in Thailand. My daughter has applied for German citizenship and things look good. I do not want to apply for it because I think I would like to go back to Thailand someday...

Thai, 32

"If I cannot speak the country's language, have little knowledge of the structure of the prostitution scene and limited residence status, I will depend on others, become vulnerable, easily exploitable and, moreover, criminalised."

Christiane Howe, sociologist, Berlin

PORTO



■ I feel lonely because I'm an immigrant, because I do not know many people here. I don't think that it has to do with this work. I came to Portugal alone...

Brazilian, 45

■ I came here in search of a dream... to achieve something and never to fail! Now it's become a matter of pride. Even if I am experiencing difficulties, I will never confess it to my family in Brazil! For them, I'm always OK!

Brazilian, 27

■ A Brazilian who leaves Brazil to work in sex work is prepared to face everything. The opinion of others here in Europe doesn't matter at all, it makes no difference. But I would not do this work in Brazil; it would be seen badly there. I would have to do it in a hidden way...

Since I don't have my permit, I am forced to do this work. If I had the freedom to do something else, I would do it, because I don't think this is a dignified job.

Brazilian, 45

■ A Brazilian woman does not cross the ocean looking for love, does she? She comes here in search of money, in search of work to send money home.

Brazilian women are more liberal than the Portuguese. I even think that many Portuguese women have already learnt something from Brazilians. It is a cultural issue. Portuguese women are more closed...

Brazilian, 45

■ In Brazil we know what luxury is, but we cannot afford it. However, when we get here, we start working hard in order to get those nice things. This happened to me, but I cannot say that it happens with everyone the same way. I didn't buy Gucci sunglasses yet, but I could!

Brazilian, 31

■ I live in a kind of virtual prison. I can't do other work or go elsewhere because I'm in the country illegally.

Brazilian, 35

SOFIA



■ As soon as I can, I will leave Bulgaria and go somewhere else. Nobody has good living conditions here. We just exist; we do not live a real life.

Bulgarian, 28

VIENNA



■ Seven years ago I left Venezuela and went to Spain. In Barcelona I was working as a cleaning lady in hotels. Then I came to Vienna, because a friend told me that I could earn a lot of money doing sex work. I needed the money to pay back debts I incurred when buying my house in Venezuela. But I want to go back to Barcelona. In the next few weeks I will get my Spanish citizenship! Venezuelan, in a studio

“There is a need to implement a residence and work permit for migrant sex workers and remove the obstacles of the Aliens Law, especially for non-EU citizens.”

Marta J., Polish cultural mediator, Vienna

■ I have a permanent residence permit because my mother took me with her to Austria when I was 14 years old. My mother has Austrian citizenship. I was trained as a cook, but I never practised it as a profession.

Cuban, transgender, in a *Lauffhaus*

MOBILITY

AMSTERDAM



■ Before coming to Holland I worked as a prostitute in Italy, Denmark and Germany for about four years. I often change workplaces for security reasons.

Colombian, 28

■ I once worked in another big city in Holland, but I didn't like it because it's a city with a lot of problems: some women work without condoms, some clients are drug addicts and drunk, there are fights every day. There is a social service which instead of supporting us only causes more problems.

Colombian, 28

■ Before coming to Holland, I was in Germany for two years and Spain for one year. In Germany I worked in windows and clubs, but I was not earning much. I always had to give half my earnings to the club owners. Here the only contact I have with the window owner is when I pay my rent. I like this because I am independent and I just have to pay the rent for my own work space.

Colombian, 29

■ Before coming here, I was living in the United States, but I was always afraid, so I decided to come to Holland. I was in another city before, but women there were working without condoms and there were a lot of people on drugs.

Dominican

GENOA



■ I live in Italy but I work in Switzerland in the city of Chiasso, where I am registered at the office for the control of prostitution. I work legally and I pay the required taxes, which are not much. I have a doctor who checks my health and I make appointments whenever I want. No one is obliged to undergo medical check-ups, but it is best to do so. Besides, the check-ups are free of charge.

Argentinian, 38

HAMBURG

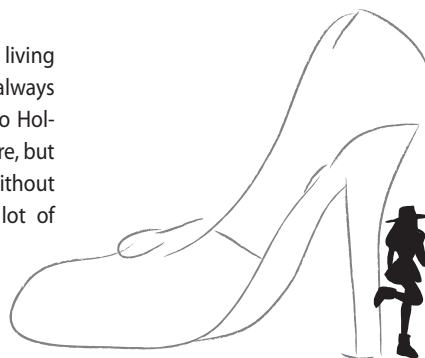


■ Because men always like to see new women, it is much better not to stay so long in the same place. I earn much more if I work short periods in different towns.

Hungarian, 30

■ I have already worked for a long time in Germany. Here in Hamburg I change flats with other women every two weeks.

Polish, 35



■ I often go to the south of Germany, where business is very good. Here in Hamburg competition is very high; there are many women working without condoms, which I don't do.
Ukrainian, 30

■ I was working in Spain with a colleague from Brazil. We decided to come to Germany because we thought we would earn more money here. The financial situation in Spain is very bad...
Venezuelan, 25

■ I plan to stay for one year in Hamburg. I don't know yet where I will go next. I recently came from Dresden; now and then I work in Berlin. With the intercity express it is very easy and fast. It's worth it to change workplaces every two weeks, because you earn much more.
Czech, 30

■ I work in Germany and in Denmark, but in Denmark everything is more expensive. Although you earn more money, you also have to spend more. For instance, we pay €500 a week for the flat, but for 20 minutes a client pays €80.
Lithuanian, 25

■ Clients are always glad to see a new face. They're not looking for the woman of their dreams, they just want to relax. Although, [smiles] I already have a few admirers who miss me when I am not here...
Latvian, 25

■ Women change rather often here. Sometimes they work only for a couple of months and then go to another town. They stay here the whole day; they work and sleep on the sofa.
Thai, 27

■ I came from Hannover to Hamburg for the weekend because on the weekend business is much better here, especially in the evenings, when there are many businessmen arriving at the airport. [The flat was very near Hamburg Airport.]
Thai, 25

■ I have a Thai friend who came from Sweden to work in Hamburg, but business here is quite bad at the moment, so she went back. That's why I don't understand why they keep opening new apartments.
Thai, 30

■ We are new here, and need some information. Until two weeks ago I was working in Bremen. There I knew some counselling centres, but here I don't know anything!
Hungarian, 25

■ I would like to work only in Hamburg because here I have a flat and I feel quite safe. The problem is, if I only stay here, I cannot make enough money. That's why I will be travelling next week to Amsterdam and then to Basel.
Brazilian, transgender, 32

■ I travel by boat, from Latvia to Germany and back, once a month. I tell my daughter and husband that I work with a friend as a barmaid. Usually I stay two weeks in Hamburg, but I plan to stay a bit longer this time.
Latvian, 49

HELSINKI

■ I come to Helsinki quite often, sometimes only for one day, but sometimes, if I get a cheap place, I stay for a few days. Luckily, the travel costs are quite low, so I manage to make some money after expenses, but, of course, only if I get enough clients... Coming to Helsinki is an option because people don't know me here and the risk of meeting someone I know is quite small.
Estonian, 40

■ I started selling sex with a friend of mine in Italy, on the streets. Life was hard back then. You had to be tough to survive, with all the pimps hanging around. It's safer in Helsinki, working in bars...
Romanian, 24



MADRID

■ I work between Malaga and Madrid. But right now, in the winter, Malaga is dead, with almost no work. I can make much more money in this bar in the capital.
Romanian

■ I live in Galicia, but I have come to this flat to work 24 hours. I can make more money this way. Next month I am going to work in a friend's flat in Sicily. But you have to be careful there because of the Mafia. In Sicily you should only work indoors, with people you know and trust.
Brazilian

■ I am here now, but there is better pay in the northern countries. You can make real money there. But it is just so damn cold and dark!
Argentinian

■ I come and go as I please. I work here for a few months, then go back home to Valencia. I come to Madrid whenever I need to...
Colombian

SOFIA



■ I feel like a migratory bird. In summer I go to the seaside, in winter I am in the mountains. For four years already I have lived like this, season after season.

Bulgarian, 23, in a strip bar in Borovets (ski resort near Sofia)

■ I live in a town 80 km away from Sofia. Almost every evening I take a bus to work in this bar, and in the morning I get the earliest one back home. It is not easy, but is the way it is now...
Bulgarian, 28

VIENNA



■ Before coming to Austria, I worked in a restaurant in Spain, but I lost my job and couldn't find another one, because of the [economic] crisis... A friend of mine works as a prostitute in Klagenfurt, so she invited me to come and try it. At first I didn't want to, but I tried it and I made good money. I worked the first two weeks in a club in Klagenfurt. Then I came to Vienna, because I wanted to live in a bigger city.

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

OUTREACH WORK

HAMBURG



■ Nice that you are here! I always learn something new from you. In this job, the exchange of information is very important!

Latvian, 30

"It always gives us a sense of achievement when a woman tells us: 'I learnt this from you; it was in your pamphlet. I always use it!'"

Katharina H., Kazakh cultural mediator and nurse, Hamburg

■ I am really surprised that you are so interested in us. Before now I never had such a nice experience with social workers. I have already worked

in Bremen and Braunschweig, but there they were always arrogant towards us. I just ask myself why they do this job if they have so many prejudices against prostitutes...

Polish, 24

"For those who intend to work with sex workers: reflect on your own position regarding sexuality, prostitution and gender relations; forget pre-conceived notions, myths and legends; do not just accept things, always ask further questions. Have curiosity and openness towards people and situations that are different from the ones you know..."

Christiane Howe, sociologist, Berlin

■ Oh God! I thought you were a client. Sorry, I am totally irritated. Today I had no clients yet. I wait and wait and nothing... This is shit! But please, come in. I am alone today. My colleagues took the day off. We can chat a little bit...

Bulgarian, 46

MADRID



■ I'm so happy you are here again... you really do a useful job.

Mexican, 28

"When working with sex workers, personal experience of sex work may be beneficial. The needs and concerns of sex workers should always be the guiding principles."

Outreach worker, NGO maiz, Linz

MARSEILLE



■ Since your calls, I have changed how I work. I now offer a relaxation service too. I've started giving priority to human contact and I don't agree to everything any more. I am more selective about my clients. I found out what my limits are. There are things I do not want to do. But I still love this job.

French, 40

■ When you work as an escort, there is no solidarity and you feel very lonely. There are rivalries because of the money involved in this work. I find it good that an association like Autres Regards exists, because it is good to talk to someone...

French, 33

"It is necessary for social and health workers to adapt to the life rhythm of sex workers. This rhythm does not often match the opening hours of the organisations but this is an essential condition to meet in order to offer good services for sex workers."

Cyrille Casanova, nurse, Marseille

■ I find your approach interesting. I'm glad to know that there is an association like yours, because I have two friends who do the same thing and, just the other day, we wondered what to do and who to contact in case of an attack, for example. We wanted to know what is legal and what is not...

French, 24

■ I started working 15 years ago and have never heard of an association that helps people who do this work. I think it's a very good initiative.

French, 35

■ I'm glad you called, because usually people forget about us; no one really cares how we feel... It's good to know that there are people who support us, because sometimes there are really difficult days...

French, 45

"Don't be paternalistic. Support sex workers without intending to change them."

PM, medical doctor, Marseille

■ I have been working for more than a year but now I want to get out of my isolation. I found your contact details through the internet. I would like to talk about my job. People often talk about what they do, but I don't. I would like to meet other escorts. I have trouble with a client and I was threatened, but I don't know who to talk to.

French, 27

"To work with sex workers you need an open mind to create a dialogue based on respect for individual choices. Regardless of what you think about prostitution, you have to respect the person's choices."

Maria Rosa Scala, Project against Trafficking, Genoa

■ I'm studying economics and I have been working for about three years in order to finance my studies and pay my rent. Before I started to work, I got information from Sida Info Service [the national AIDS advice hotline] about fellatio. I am well-informed about the risks and I regularly get tested. But your call has come at the right moment, as I was wondering what I am risking from a legal point of view, particularly concerning soliciting.

French, 25

■ Sorry, I don't know your organization. I am an occasional worker; I only work when I need money.

French, 38

PORTO



■ I think it's great what you're doing, distributing condoms, information about diseases... I think it's great!

Portuguese, 45

■ If something is offered for free, people are doubtful at first... but Porto G is great for people who do this work. It opens the door to more information, which gives us tools to do the job in a safer way; we can protect ourselves as well as others!

Brazilian, transgender, 35

■ You do an important job but the people who need to hear all this are not sex workers, but clubbers. They don't carry condoms with them. Incredible! I have condoms in each of my wallets!

Brazilian, 39



■ Since knowing Porto G, I have started to give lectures on safe sex to my clients...

Brazilian, transgender, 35

■ The natural and gentle approach your team has with us is very important! It makes us feel that we have feelings too... Other people would probably not talk to us like that...

Portuguese, 45

"When visiting windows I just knock on the door or wave. I show them some informational materials they might be interested in. In massage centres or clubs I first ask the host for permission to enter, and then try to talk to some of the girls who are not working."

MG, fieldworker, Amsterdam

■ I like being with the outreach workers, to talk about everything. But also because I feel a bit lonely...

Brazilian, 45

■ I'm 23 years old. I would like to thank you guys for the support you give us through Porto G. It's a great help, it makes us feel like 'people like everyone else'. I felt the need to tell you this because of the kind way you treat us, but particularly because of the respect you show for us.

Brazilian, 23 (Email sent to Porto G)

■ If I were 'legal' in your country I would design a project to talk about sexually transmitted diseases in the factories. These men are not well-informed and if two out of 200 learned something in 15 minutes, it would already be a great thing, a great achievement! That way we would start changing mentalities...

Brazilian, 39

"We contact sex workers by visiting them in their apartments or in places reserved for 'street unit' activities. We offer them something to eat and to drink, materials on STI prevention, and we talk, but mostly we listen to them. Their reaction is generally very positive, but good relations take time to be built up. Sex workers need time to trust us and our work..."

Outreach worker, Genoa

■ Yep, your newsletter is great. You are really active, taking steps for social justice... Congratulations!

Portuguese, 36

SOFIA



■ I want to take an HIV test in your mobile medical unit. But please! Don't show the result to anybody, not even if my boss asks you to.

Bulgarian, 32

■ Your work is great. You come here regularly and give us condoms and brochures. If we need something or if we have problems, we can always ask you for help. Really great job!

Bulgarian, 30

■ Last year you came and gave us a small training session. You explained how to protect ourselves, about the diseases, and showed us interesting pictures. We want to do it again this year. We have many new girls here and if you give such training again, it will be of great use to them.

Bulgarian, 27

■ I want to get some tests, but free and anonymous. This is very important for me. I respect your work very much because you help the girls and teach them how to protect themselves!

Bulgarian, 24, on the internet

"Young girls usually think that sex work is the easiest way to earn some money. They start and then find out it is a hard job. Sex workers need much more than just information on health! But in Bulgaria we have big gaps in the provision of services for sex workers."

Polina A., outreach worker, Sofia

PEER EDUCATION

HAMBURG



■ I have no regrets, and if I get out at some point, I want to be politically active for sex workers. In Poland I was an elementary school teacher. I always pass on information to other women; this is why I still have some questions about AIDS transmission...

Polish, 35

■ I will call some colleagues who work just across the street and let them know that you will pass by, to be sure they will open the door for you.

Russian, 35

■ I am independent and I advise other colleagues to be too. I know a Lithuanian woman who wants to marry a German man so she can work legally, but he treats her very badly. Do you know what she can do to make herself independent and not have to marry him?

German, 30

■ A tip for other sex workers: condoms that are brought in by clients should be kept away and, if possible, not used! There are also some clients who use tricks to burst sex workers' condoms that are lying out, by scratching them with their nails...

Russian, 30

■ I am 50 years old, married and I have worked for a long time as a sex worker. My husband comes to visit me sometimes at work, but he is not really happy with what I do. My oldest daughter just found out recently and was shocked... It is difficult for them... However, it is my work and I am very much involved in it. I want to learn a lot in order to give other women the right information. I am, for instance, against offering low-priced sexual services, and always recommend that my colleagues charge a minimum of €50.

Dominican, 50

HELSINKI



■ Quite a lot of women working in Thai massage parlours are afraid that outreach workers want to persuade them to stop their work. I have tried to tell them that they can get help and support at Saphaan, a special service for Thai sex workers at Pro-tukipiste. I have invited 90% of them to Saphaan's low threshold language school, but they didn't want to come because they were afraid that we will try to persuade or force them to stop. It is some sort of misunderstanding. They are afraid, but Saphaan is a good thing, they don't say that you have to stop your work or business.

Thai, peer sex work activist

MARSEILLE



■ I have been working for two years. I started in hostess bars, also called American bars, and now I work in my apartment, which I rent on a seasonal basis. When I started, I was working with a friend and we were summoned by the police who wanted to know if we were independent... I will talk about your organisation to other escorts, I think your approach is interesting and I am glad to know that you exist.

French, 28

PORTO



■ When are we going to meet with all sex workers to ban ads that advertise unsafe oral sex?

Portuguese, 37

SOFIA



■ We want you and your colleagues to give some more workshops in our bar again. What you tell us is so interesting, different things every time.

Bulgarian, 27

■ I have lived in Germany for 10 years now. I left Bulgaria to work as a sex worker, but I did not know the German language and I had no documents. I had a really hard time there... Now I am not a sex worker any more, I work as a cultural mediator in a drop-in centre for sex workers in Hannover. My goal is to help as many sex workers as possible. I was in their position once, I know how it is.

Bulgarian, former sex worker, 43



Leave a message to your colleague!



Messages left by sex workers for sex workers,
on a board at the HESED medical mobile unit

- May you all “shake your hips”,
and have success in business.
- Do not work without a condom.
- You decide what services you
offer.
- Have respect for yourselves!
Be healthy!
- I wish you success at work,
and use condoms! Do not be
tempted by money!
- Don’t be too late; test yourself, so
that you and I don’t have to worry!
- Dangerous viruses attack us with
no fear. Protect yourself, have no sex
without a condom, no matter how
much you would earn.

C = A AIDS is fatal
Π = I Use condoms
И = D Test yourself
H = S AIDS is not curable

VIENNA



■ Of course we try to help young colleagues. With advice, information, with anything we can. And we try to protect them from becoming victims of violence or exploitation. It will be a pleasure to give our colleagues all the information you are giving us about support organisations and info centres. It is good to know that there are places where you can get help, if you have problems...

Slovak, in a bar

POLICE

HELSINKI



■ You know, sometimes police officers see me and my friend walking on the street. They stop us and start asking all kinds of questions, like what are we doing there, and whether we are doing something illegal. Sometimes they even ask us to leave. Some policemen may have seen us there before and maybe they think we have been working, but they don’t have any official evidence against us, so we just tell them that we have the right to walk there like everybody else. Nevertheless, it’s irritating and ridiculous. We feel very uncomfortable.

Estonian, 45

■ I keep condoms in a freezer, because I’m worried that if the police come to raid, they might use them as evidence against me.

Thai, 43

“Prostitutes are potential victims of trafficking in human beings. Only through personal contact is there a chance to ascertain indicators of trafficking in human beings. Therefore, police contact with prostitutes serves to build up trust, which should lead prostitutes to have the courage to confide their problems to the police.”

Detlef Ubben, Police Department on
Organised Crimes, Hamburg

■ I feel embarrassed when a police officer takes me to the police station and gives me a fine. It’s so embarrassing...

Russian

■ I got really annoyed the other day. I feel I don’t deserve this kind of treatment. I was standing in a queue outside a snack bar in the city centre when a police car stopped by. The policeman rolled down the window and shouted in a loud voice: “Could you just go to hell, you f*** whore, instead of standing here on the streets.”

Russian, 50

MARSEILLE



■ I’m worried because three weeks after I started working, the police came to see me and put me on file. I am worried about the consequences this could bring to my future private and professional life, when I stop...

French, 28

"An example of courage and creativity: A Public Order forbade a woman to go on working in her *basso*. She then decided to convert the place into a small restaurant, and started cooking ethnic dishes for her colleagues."

Outreach worker, Genoa

■ I have been working for two and a half years now. Ten days ago, policemen from my city came to my place and took the phone I'm using to work, my computer, and arrested me. They accused me of soliciting because of my personal escort website, which gives information on my prices and the sexual services I offer. They had a big file on me, with pictures and details of my private life. They gave me 15 days to present myself at the Chamber of Commerce and to delete my personal website.

French, 30

PORTO



■ I was caught by the police. They treated me really badly. I asked for a glass of water and they told me to drink water from the toilet... Still, in Spain it is even worse!

Brazilian, 26

■ I have never felt as humiliated as when I was arrested. I felt like I was a criminal.

Brazilian, 27

"Sex workers are people just like anyone else, but the prejudices of society are difficult to remove."

Felipa Alvim, researcher, Porto

SOFIA



■ All policemen are nasty bastards. They always just want free sex from me, and make an ass of me every time I complain about a bad client!

Bulgarian, 31

■ I have clients who are policemen. Some are good, others are not. But they all like to have sex.

Bulgarian, 28

■ I was once at a police station to submit a complaint about a rape that happened to me the day before. I was so surprised with their reaction! The police chief came to me and said, "Don't worry, we will find him." All the police officers were very nice and concerned about me. Although I told them I am a sex worker, they behaved so well!

Bulgarian, 24

VIENNA



■ I got a lot of police fines in the period between 2007 and 2010. I've already paid €10,500! I have to pay another €3,150, but I have no money left and I am really scared that they could send me to prison. That is why I work without a work permit now, so that they cannot find me at the weekly mandatory Health Check or something...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I owe €12,000 to the police, for fines! They said they'll take my green card if I don't pay soon...

Bulgarian, in a hotel



■ Once, while working in a contact café, I was fined by the police because I didn't have a work permit. After this horrible experience I changed my workplace and got my permit. Now I work in a bar and feel much calmer and more confident.

Dominican, in a bar

"Police reports can't be the basis from which to develop news, articles or reports on prostitution. The women are generally presented as 'freed'. But there's never any information on how many of them there are, how many could get a working and residence permit, how many end up in a protection programme..."

The worst is when the National Police videotape these women, immobilised and detained, against the bar. Nobody thinks about their privacy or that of their families, nor the fact that they could be victims of human trafficking. The image the viewers get is one of delinquency – or at the very least, a message that they are partly to blame for ending up like this. Of course a picture of the suspected traffickers' faces is never taken..."

Carmen Briz, journalist and co-founder of Colectivo Hetaira, Madrid

■ I haven't had any experiences with the police yet. I live in a very quiet area...

Hungarian, in a studio

■ Not too long ago I had a problem at the Austrian border with Hungary, because I crossed the border twice in a short period of time. I was detained and questioned and they didn't want to believe that I went to Hungary for a medical check. They detained me for a long time and then they let me go. I felt very offended by the discriminatory behaviour of the police officers. They just detained me because I am who I am.

Cuban, in a *Laufhaus*

PRIVATE LIFE

AMSTERDAM



■ My husband won't have sex with condoms. I prefer it this way too, because then I can feel the difference between having sex for my own private pleasure and having sex for work. It is a psychological question that for many sex workers is very important: to find ways to keep these things separate. I never kiss my clients, and I don't allow them to touch certain parts of my body, which are only for me and my husband.

Dominican, 30

■ I have a Dutch friend. He is 67 years old and wants to marry me. I am afraid to marry him and lose my nationality. I want to go back to my country in the future, but I can't do that with only Dutch citizenship. I am also concerned about what his sons will think about me. When they find out that I work in the windows, they will be against our marriage.

Colombian

■ My friends have no idea what I do. I would love to spend more time with them, but I end up avoiding them.

Dutch, 31, in a club

GENOA



■ I arrived in Italy expecting a better life. After being maltreated twice by my pimp, I fled to Genoa, where I met the father of my son. We lived together and I got pregnant right away, but after an outrageous burst of jealousy, I left him. After giving birth, I obtained my passport from the Romanian Consulate in Serbia and a sojourner's permit in Italy.

Romanian, 30

HELSINKI



■ Religion is very important to us. However, what we do is very dirty and people don't understand it. For this reason, it is very important for us to find a priest who is able to understand sex workers. Once my friend went to a Russian monastery where many people go for confession. The priest forgave her and offered her directions to follow in order to

rectify her soul so that God could forgive her sins too. Next time when she went back to confess and started talking about her 'mistake', in other words about sex work, the priest got so mad that he threw her out of the monastery. He locked the gates and said that the place was not suitable for people who spread sins like her.

Russian, 50

■ I have a good relationship with my boyfriend. We are engaged and are planning a future together. Only sex is a problem for me. I'm not into it any more; it feels too much like work to me. My fiancé doesn't know that I feel this way. Since I started to sell sex I haven't had a proper orgasm, so I have to fake it. This is OK for me, because sex is not an important part of the relationship for me. I prefer intimacy and doing things together...

Finnish

MARSEILLE



■ I am not working any more but I have worked for six months, mostly doing fellatio. I am a little bit worried because I have given fellatio without a condom, and so I would like to know the risks. I am four months pregnant by my boyfriend, but I have many questions...

French, 29

"Sex workers ask for help with different things, like abortion, medical check-ups, STI tests, or even to solve family problems. We help where we can but sometimes our help is refused, either because they still do not trust us or because they do not see themselves as sex workers."

Outreach worker, Genoa

PORTO



■ Outside my workplace, no one needs to know what I do for a living.

Brazilian, 45

SOFIA



■ In my 'normal' life nobody knows what I do. My parents and relatives live in the countryside. I am in Sofia to study. I tell them I work as a waitress, that's why I have to work at night. During the day I go to university. Selling sex is only a way to pay some bills.

Bulgarian, 24

■ All sex workers live a double life. To talk openly and honestly with parents and friends about this work is impossible, they will never understand you!

Bulgarian, 36

VIENNA



■ If a woman is in love, she is simply blind. Nobody can help her in this case!

Hungarian, in a bar

■ Yes, my husband is a puncher, but he is *my* puncher!

Bulgarian, in a hotel

RACISM

HAMBURG



■ Foreign women?! No, we don't have any around here. Forgive me; I have nothing against foreign women, but...

German, 30

■ I see only German clients! Nothing against foreigners... but some of them want to haggle in a very disrespectful way, and in the end you have to work more. I don't want to work like this. Russian and Polish men are the worst. Black Africans are very nice, but when well-treated, the next day there is a queue outside the door because the news has spread among the community. This means that German clients don't come any more...

German, 35

"In Germany there is a generally prejudiced atmosphere against people who look, speak or behave 'differently'..."

Elisabeth von Dücker, historian,
Hamburg

■ I am busy, but you can go and ring next door where an arrogant Polish woman just started working...

Lithuanian, 25

PORTO



■ I am not discriminated against because I am Brazilian... rather because of what I do. But there isn't much prejudice in Porto.

Brazilian, 45

"There is no evidence that migrant sex workers are more exposed to violence than national ones. However, migrants are more vulnerable to racism, which can come from society in general, pimps, managers, or even institutions that are there to support them."

Helga Amesberger, social scientist,
Vienna





RIGHTS

AMSTERDAM



■ Due to all the negative proclamations about sex work, like its being equal to human trafficking and forced labour, and through the discussions on the upcoming Law on Obligatory Registration for Prostitutes, people end up with an opinion that increases stigma and diminishes tolerance of prostitutes like me.

Dutch

"Sex workers should be guaranteed the right to participate in all discussions and decision-making processes concerning their working and living conditions."

Elisabeth von Dücker, historian,
Hamburg

MADRID



■ What do you mean by 'sex workers' rights'? What is that? Tell me more, please...

Ecuadorian

■ The first step to get over self-hatred is for you to accept yourself as a sex worker.

Spanish

■ What?! I didn't know that I could register myself as a freelancer. Does that mean I can start paying social security and get a pension? Here is my email. Please tell me what steps I have to take.

Spanish

■ Everyone thinks that because you are a whore, you don't have any rights. I thought differently, because despite my job I am a human being, and I thought I would be protected because of all the hype in the media about us being victims all the time. Well, I was attacked by a client not that long ago. He must have thought he could get away with it because I am Latina and a prostitute. I reported him to the police... and you know what? They didn't even bother filing the report. It was his word against mine... Guess who they believed! Now, how does that fit with the protection of us poor victimised whores?

Colombian

■ We are sex workers. And like most of you, we are trying to live our lives the best way we can, within the conditions that life gave us. We offer sexual services. It is a job, but one without social or workers' rights. To keep refusing these implies that prostitutes keep being exploited, persecuted and accosted by the police.

Ecuadorian

"How can you report on prostitution without falling into the same stereotypes or clichés as always?

We still have a long struggle ahead in that respect, at least here in Spain. There is a multitude of confusing terms that are directly contaminated by political milieux, indiscriminately mixing up smuggling, trafficking and prostitution, or speaking of the anachronistic 'white slave trade' or sexual slavery without properly explaining what they mean.

There is an overwhelming lack of rigour when it comes to media reporting on the subject, and an excessive 're-victimising' approach to those who are in a situation of human trafficking.

There is an overwhelming lack of people to listen to those who stand up as 'sex workers' and an excessive amount of people who treat them as 'delinquents' or 'marginalised women'."

Carmen Briz, journalist and co-founder of
Colectivo Hetaira, Madrid



■ The recognition of sex workers' rights is a matter of justice and there is no excuse for postponing it. Prostitution exists. It is a topic that cannot be ignored. Don't let such a vast sector of working women be stripped of their most basic rights by moralists and politicians looking for votes.

Ecuadorian sex worker and activist

■ They should just legalise sex work once and for all. I am so sick of hearing and reading that I am a victim, and that I am forced into this. Well, maybe some girls are, but I don't know them. You know what?! There are girls in this flat studying medicine! Some have husbands and families. We are not miserable victims. We lead normal lives, like everyone else.

Paraguayan

■ First and foremost it is essential that we get rid of the stigma attached to sex work. It is something that we all need to do together, starting with the media, who have a great responsibility because they are the ones to 'inform' the general public. I say 'inform' in inverted commas because in reality they usually break all codes of ethics when they speak about prostitution in general, and about sex workers specifically. You

cannot keep publishing headlines like 'Four prostitutes were detained by the police'. Prostitutes cannot just be detained like that, because prostitution is not an offence or a crime. You cannot keep printing that we 'sell our bodies'. We use our bodies like any other person. There are thousands of examples!

Sex workers cannot be judged just because they are sex workers.

Sex work should be legalised, taking into account the specifics of the job. The work conditions, like selection of clients, work hours, fees, and services offered, should be in the hands of the sex workers and not those of third parties.

Finally, more resources are needed to combat the trafficking of human beings, because on paper everything is great but in reality there are many gaps and a lack of resources.

Spanish sex worker and activist

■ Look me in the eye. I am a human being, just like you.

Spanish sex worker and activist, 46

MARSEILLE

■ I would like to talk to you about rights because I got threats from one of the hotel managers where I have been working. He noted down my licence plate and he threatened to lay charges on me for soliciting. Has he the right to do that?

French, 30

"Sex workers' situation should be legalised so that they are given the same rights as any other citizen."

JRC, medical doctor, Marseille

SOFIA



■ In Bulgaria nobody talks about rights. And you want sex workers to be more active?! No, no chance!

Bulgarian, 25

"People, especially social workers, need to be sensitive to the topic of 'rights'. They need to be aware that sex work is a market where exploitation is rife. In order to support sex workers, it is necessary to achieve the equality of men and women in society, as well as an equal distribution of financial resources.

The fundamental message for those working with sex workers is that we must preserve their human rights. Sex workers are strong people who have the right to be heard and to insist on their rights. They deserve our trust and must be encouraged to make decisions on their own. In work with sex workers, professionals need to be both partners and human rights advocates."

Petra Schwaiger, Austrian social worker, Sofia

■ We are in a very disadvantaged position. We cannot talk about rights because we are not recognised by the law. We do not exist within the labour market and therefore we cannot pretend to have any rights!

Bulgarian, 38

■ My boss in the club wanted me to show him the result of my HIV test. I don't think he has any right to ask me this, but if I refuse, he will kick me out.

Bulgarian, 28

■ I consider sex work as work and a profession. I am in favour of its legalisation, but in Bulgaria I think this is not possible right now.
Bulgarian, 41

SAFER SEX

GENOA



■ I just started working as a prostitute, voluntarily, but I don't know much about STIs. I always use condoms for vaginal sex, but I don't know what I should do about blowjobs, masturbation or cunnilingus. With blowjobs I know there is a risk of infection, certainly when swallowing, which I don't do. For masturbation there shouldn't be any problem. As for cunnilingus, I don't know...
Italian

■ For me it's hard to go to a hospital, declare that I am an 'at-risk person' and ask for a check-up. I feel ashamed...
Italian

■ When clients ask: "With or without [a condom]?", responding "with" is like losing €500. Very often, when it's over, they ask me: "Are you healthy?"
Italian

■ For clients, having unprotected sex means more enjoyment, while for me it means fear. It is as if I would be in their hands, with them thinking: "You're mine."
Italian

■ If you do not use condoms, it could be that a client ejaculates inside you and continues as though nothing had happened. With a condom it's different, this wouldn't happen.
Italian

HAMBURG



■ If I know that it will be quick, for instance anal sex, that after two or three minutes the client is finished, then it is not worthwhile to use a condom. Only if it lasts longer, let's say half an hour, then I use one. I get a test every year and so far the results have always been negative. I always use condoms, except with friends.
Bulgarian, 25

■ Clients report that girls from the new EU countries in particular offer unprotected sex. A client told me that a Bulgarian offered him sex for €50 without a condom. The problem is that they then come and ask for the same from us. But with us it does not work like this. If a client wants it cheaper, we send him away. We have rules and fixed prices of €70 to €80, and always with protection. Of course we provide oral sex without, otherwise you cannot earn money. The Eastern Europeans are responsible for this situation. Earlier there were unwritten whores' laws: no kissing on the mouth, no sex without a rubber. Now there are other rules, other standards, unfortunately...
German, 30

■ Sooooo many requests for unprotected sex, it is unbelievable! However, I never agree to have unprotected sex. I tell them: "If you want to have sex without a condom then you are not only putting yourself at risk but also your wife and kids. It is your responsibility to protect them." Most change their minds then...
Brazilian, transgender, 32

■ I always use condoms. If a condom bursts (it has never happened!!!), a friend advised me to insert a crushed aspirin tablet in the vagina, as it helps to kill the germs.
Latvian, 49



"It was an old address. Nowadays there were women from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. All the women were very self-confident and open. They declared, as usual, that they only work with condoms. However, during the conversation, one of them admitted that she sometimes also works without a condom..."
Katharina H., Kazakh cultural mediator and nurse, Hamburg

■ Many men insist on unprotected sex but I never agree to it. I use both condoms and contraceptive pills to doubly protect myself against pregnancy. Sometimes condoms slip off if the penis is too small or a condom may burst if the penis is too big. The problem I have now is that the supply of contraceptive pills I brought from Poland finished and I have no health insurance here in Germany... Polish, 42

■ I have to use a condom because if I do not, I will surely die and leave my son alone in this world. Jamaican, 48

HELSINKI

■ Regarding safety in this business, I assume that everyone knows that if sex work is open and legal, it's safer for the sex worker and for the client. Finnish, male sex worker

■ I don't offer services that are unhealthy. Everything happens with protection. That's all I want to say. Migrant

MADRID

■ I use a Nuvaring¹⁰... it keeps me protected... it prevents me from getting pregnant, and also from getting diseases. Romanian, 30

■ No, I never give blowjobs without a condom – no matter how much the client is willing to pay. My health is worth much more than €30! Colombian, 27

SOFIA

■ I always use condoms. If a client comes and asks for a service without a condom, I just leave... Bulgarian, 25

■ I always use condoms. Sometimes, however, if a client offers me more money, I feel tempted to agree, but then a voice shouts in my head "Don't accept this! If you give away your health for money now, later you will have to give away money for your health!" In the end, I always put a condom on! Bulgarian, 33

■ Here the prices are only for services with condoms. We offer different sexual services with different types of condoms, and this is part of the speciality... Bulgarian, 26

■ I have been in sex work for five years now. I use condoms regularly, and all along I thought there was no way I put them on incorrectly. But lately I have had several condoms burst. A couple of weeks ago a social worker passed by to give us free condoms and I told her about this. She made me show her again exactly how I put the condom on and explained to me that I was doing it wrong. You can learn new things all your life! Bulgarian, 24



■ I know girls who work without condoms. I never do that. I refuse such clients and give them their money back. I had an STI once and I do not want to have it again. Bulgarian, 31

VIENNA

■ I am the one who decides the services I offer. And I offer no kissing, no licking and no anal! No dominant games either. And I do everything with protection! Slovak, in a Laufhaus

■ I wish it were forbidden for men to want to have sex without condoms, but I know that this is unrealistic. The biggest problem comes from the porn films, where everything is done without a condom. This influences the men. At least this should be forbidden... Slovak, in a Laufhaus

¹⁰ Nuvaring: contraceptive vaginal ring

■ I use condoms only when the client wants me to. I am old and can't have children any more, so I am not afraid of getting pregnant. Diseases?! I don't know... I stayed healthy somehow so far. I am not really afraid of that.
Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ A lot of men have offered me a lot of money for having sex without a condom, but I won't accept that.
Romanian, in a bar

SEX WORK

AMSTERDAM



■ I believe that women who stay in this life for more than one year do it because they like it. It's like an obsession, it is attractive to know that you can earn money every day, and the environment of the sex industry is quite exciting...
Dominican

GENOA



■ To tell you the truth, the problem today is not finding a job, but finding a job that gives you a reasonable wage... I prefer to do striptease than to work 8 hours for a miserable salary.
Italian

■ This work is not easy; you have to swallow more than you would think...
Italian

■ Sex work would be better if it were regulated; it would be cleaner...
Italian

■ At the end of an evening, once outside, I tell myself, "I worked", and I feel happy. But then I think: "How long will this still go on? I cannot be an escort all my life; I want to stop at 45..."
Italian

"Yes, sex work is work, because sex workers use time, abilities and their body the same way others use time, abilities and their body in other jobs. The only difference is the part of the body sex workers use..."

Outreach worker, Genoa

■ Any performance of work enjoys a monetary value and proper remuneration. Therefore, sexual work is no different from any other labour activity. Each person who carries out sexual work lives out his or her personal experience, cultural heritage, and societal traditions. Personally, I think that most foreigners, especially Brazilians and Romanians, live sex work in an excessively mechanical way. I live this experience as humanly as possible; therefore, non-positive situations are rare with me. I select my clients by telephone and I have enough experience to be able to determine if the person is a suitable client or not.
Italian, transgender, 28

■ The money earned is quickly spent. Once I get it I spend it...
Italian

HAMBURG



■ I was married to a Spaniard and worked in Barcelona with handicapped children. Because my life situation was stable, I decided to bring my seven-year-old son from Venezuela. But suddenly everything went wrong: I separated from my husband and I lost my job because of the difficult financial situation in Spain. I could not pay my rent any more and had to send my son back to Venezuela, to my parents.

At that time I had a friend who told me that you can earn a lot of money, and quickly, as a sex worker in Germany.

I have now been in Hamburg for two months. The work was very difficult at the beginning and I cried a lot, but one gets used to everything. I call my mother a lot, talk to her; she has helped me very much. Only my mother knows about the work I do here in Germany. My friends and relatives in Barcelona have no idea. That is why I can only do this in Germany, because nobody knows me.
Venezuelan, 30

■ The financial situation in Lithuania was very bad. I am a nurse and have a seven-year-old daughter. My former life partner has been in jail for the last five years. I decided to come to Germany because I thought I could earn more money here. For two days I worked in a care centre for old people but then I saw that I can make much more money, and much faster, if I work in sex work. I have now been in Germany for one year.
Lithuanian, 30



■ I am 50 and already a grandmother. Nobody, only my friend, knows about my activity. I entered the business by chance, when I got an offer to be a bartender. It was not bad, but one could earn much more money as a sex worker... At the beginning it was very difficult, because of the unusual requests of the clients, but I rejected most of them. My knowledge about hygiene, for instance, I gained through conversation with colleagues.

German, 50

■ I don't like this flat. It is humid and smelly. But I don't want to move now because I intend to stop doing sex work in the spring. I am already attending a German course at an adult education centre. I have many regular clients, including some Russians. Sometimes I serve regular clients for free, when they have no money at the time...

Russian, 35

■ I work from Monday to Friday. The weekend is for my family. I have many regular clients, who pay very well. This is why I try to satisfy all visitors, so they will always come back to me. I really cannot complain about business!

Dominican, 35

■ I see my work as a circus and myself as a clown. In this way I can better handle the psychological exertion this job demands. In the evening, at home, I put on my usual clothes and then I feel like myself again.

Polish, 25

■ I like working with Eastern European women very much because they are honest and open. We manage to communicate through gestures...

Venezuelan, 25

"Sex work is a service offered for remuneration. It does not concern a private, personal, or intimate love relationship."

Christiane Howe, sociologist, Berlin

■ I have many debts and few clients. In the flat I feel like I'm in a prison because I spend most of the day in here, always waiting for clients. I pay €250 weekly for the rent, plus the costs of the ads. I don't have much left to live on...

Dominican, 30

■ The owner here is quite nice. I pay my rent of €350 per week and she leaves me alone. I am independent and work only for myself. When I am working in Germany, I live in the flat because it is not worth it for me to rent another one to live in. I have already looked for a flat in Hamburg, but as a migrant and a prostitute you have no chance... I would like to stay in Hamburg; I just have to find someone to vouch for me...

Latvian, 30

■ I have now been here one week, but did not earn anything; just enough for my ticket back home. I am doing this for the first time, that's why I am so afraid of all these illnesses. I am married, you know, and have a child. My husband thinks I have gone to Germany to work in a restaurant. He does not know the truth; I still have to cope with that... I think that this job here is not worthwhile for me. In Latvia I worked in an erotic massage club, where for one hour of massage with 'happy ending' I earned €80. The clients were all very content, paid gladly, and I didn't have to have sex with them. Here they start laughing if you ask for €60. And they all want to do it 'in the arse' and even worse... I don't do that, not even with my husband.

Latvian, 25

■ I am happy in this apartment, I enjoy my freedom. The owner has known me for a long time, she trusts me, doesn't make any checks, only sends me the bill. It is nice this way...

Thai, 40



■ In Germany, I started working in different Asian snack chains. The salary was very low, though. For 10 hours of work a day, I earned only about €600 a month. I have a child and this was not enough financially for me. So I started here. I don't really like the job because you have to deal with different clients, even drunk ones, but I send those ones away...

Thai, 28

■ I am an independent, autonomous sex worker, and I am registered as such with the financial authorities. I pay taxes and contributions to the public health system. It is much better for me this way. Before, I had to pay a lot to third parties and had to work much more. Nowadays everything is different; women have more possibilities to structure their own work. They just have to be informed...

I am happily married and luckily don't have to work every day. It is very important for me to keep a distance from the work, to have a clear separation between my private life and my work. That's why my work is far away from where I live. I wouldn't like to meet my clients when I'm shopping or going for a walk. I have children, a family. Such meetings would be embarrassing for the clients and bad for me.

I take care of my health and have regular check-ups. Please, leave your materials. There are many beginners working here, they can really benefit from them.

Russian, 35



■ We have no sex; we only offer massages, so we need no condoms...

Thai, 25, in a massage parlour

■ I started working in the 90s. At that time everything was different. Sometimes, I earned up to 1000 DM a day [approx. €500]. We had strict rules for the clients: what they could and couldn't do. Today, because of competition, everything is offered and permitted. Sex without protection became 'normal'. Two out of three clients ask for unprotected sex. But before sending them away, I explain to them why I don't do it. Most react with surprise... I would be very happy and call it a big success if my words caused one out of ten clients to change his behaviour...

At work my thoughts are always with my family. Although I am here, in the apartment, mentally I am either with my children or thinking about what I still have to do privately. This helps me to cope with this work. I do not believe that there are sex workers for whom this activity leaves no mark. The marks stay for good, even if they only appear after some years.

Russian, 50

■ I have already worked for five years in Germany. I learned German, and so I accompany my colleagues to their medical appointments and translate for them. There are four of us Bulgarians working here. At the moment not much is going on. Because of Easter and Mother's Day, men are saving for the summer holidays. Sorry, but I have no more time... I must go and get ready for work. Bye!

Bulgarian, 30

■ I come to Hamburg, from Schwerin, every day [100 km]. Since the beginning of the year, business is quite bad and I only work to cover my expenses. It is almost not worth it any more... Even during the world-wide economic crisis it wasn't as bad as it is now. People are insecure, afraid about their lives and future. In addition, prices are exploding, whether it's the food or the petrol. It's crazy! No surprise that men hold on to every cent. I think I will soon stop completely...

German, 45

■ I've been working for three years now as a sex worker in Hamburg. I have already worked in different parts of town. I've been in this apartment the last two weeks, but I'm very dissatisfied. Business here is very bad. Today I've had no clients so far, yesterday I only had one, though the day before yesterday it was better. However, it is not enough; I have no time to wait. I need money urgently, for my son. I even have three ads running online! I invested a lot of money and nothing happens. This really annoys me. Do you perhaps know of any apartments where they are looking for women and where business is good?

Bulgarian, 46

■ I don't need any information on health. I am a qualified nurse. In Bulgaria I worked in a hospital and liked my work very much. If it weren't for my son's illness, I would still be working there. But on that salary I would never be able to afford his operation.

Bulgarian, 46

■ I enjoy doing this job. Sometimes, men come and only want someone to talk to. I talk to them and they pay. Sometimes I get really young, good-looking clients.

Latvian, 49

■ I like my job because I earn my own money. I can't imagine living without a job and depending on state welfare.

Jamaican, 48

HELSINKI



■ In the prostitution scene you can find lots of people who are very creative, like me. We are artists; our approach is artistic in a way. For me sex work is performance; one possible way to explore social reality, the human mind and myself.

Finnish

■ I hold a high position in the business world. I work for long hours and my work is very stressful. For me selling sex is a way to relax. While I'm with a client I can be somebody else, another person. I feel very relaxed because I don't have to sell sex for money. I do it for entertainment and relaxation.

Finnish

MADRID



■ I have sex with my shirt or bra on. I don't let clients kiss my breasts – that is something only my lover can do. They pay for penetration and that's what they get.

Romanian

■ I want to get out of this and do something else. I don't know, in an office doing a proper job, paperwork, you know... People look down on you when you sell sex. They think they can call you lots of names. I don't want to be treated like this. They should let us work in peace. We are hurting no one.

Nigerian

■ This used to be a marvellous job. There was money, respectful clients... But now the economic crisis and the Eastern European girls have brought down the prices. Clients want everything for €10! And that's if they come...

Spanish

■ I don't consider this a profession. How could you? I would be too ashamed to fill out my tax form and announce that I am a sex worker...

Romanian

■ Of course this is work. My god! We work hard for our money! People think it is easy and quick. I have to wait for hours for clients and you have to know how to treat the men and get them in the mood. It is not easy...

Portuguese

■ I want things to stay the way they are. I don't need rights. I am only in this for as long as I can, then I will get a real job. I don't want anyone to know what I am doing here. This is perfect for me. On the other hand, this is not easy money. You work hard for it and put up with a lot of things.

Argentinian

MARSEILLE



■ I was shocked by the story of the escort who was arrested in Toulouse, in October 2009. I don't understand it. Sex work is work, isn't it?!

African, 24





■ I don't like what I'm doing, it disgusts me, and clients are dirty, repulsive. I think that prostitution has changed; clients ask for things that they didn't ask for before, like kissing, sodomy... I don't do this.
French, 53

■ I like my work and I am not pressured to do anything. Friends of mine got me into it. I studied at university for five years, I gave private lessons in mathematics and English, but it didn't bring me enough money, because I'm the head of the family...
French, 40

"In one sense, sex work can be compared to any professional occupation. But in another, there are no job descriptions, pay scales or training, which would acknowledge this activity as a professional occupation. Although your organisation highlights the professional skills developed by a sex worker, I don't know if those skills are valued in the labour market."

J., social worker, Marseille

■ I would like to stop as soon as I have reached my financial target; this is just a transitional period in my life. I do this to send some money to my family in Africa, but they don't know that I'm a sex worker. For the moment I feel good in this situation, but I will not help my family all my life. This is the last year. Sex work also allowed me to meet people. There are really nice clients; some helped me to get my papers.

African, 26

■ I work out of necessity, to live. I have worked in sex work since I was 20 years old. I cannot find other work now because nobody will hire me. I think I threw my life away... I don't feel good. At my age, I would prefer not to have to do sex work any more to survive.

French, 43

■ The other day, I went to eat at a very elegant restaurant. A regular client of mine pays me every month to find a new place for us to go together. I lived for pretty long in the countryside so I find these monthly evenings great! These are the good moments, to compensate for the less fun ones...

French, 30

"If freely chosen, I do consider sex work to be work, in the sense that it is an activity that requires specific skills, know-how and interpersonal skills."

Cyrille Casanova, nurse, Marseille

■ I have been registered with the tax authorities as a self-employed masseuse since 1999. I think there are many advantages in doing this: you're not afraid, you get points for retirement, and peace. I left my parents when I was 18 because I wanted to earn my own money. I was working and studying at that time. I don't want to work under pressure or under any sort of authority. I want to do what I want, when I want. I am single, I have no children, and it was my decision to join this profession. I think there are too many taboos around sex work; there are not only people working under coercion in sex work.

French, 46



■ I do not care about what society thinks! I care about me, because I am the one who has to pay my taxes. I do not live for free, you know... Whether the country treats me well or not is totally immaterial to me... I really do not care about the lives of others...

Brazilian, 41

■ This is not a nice, dignified job... There will always be prejudice against this work. It will never be viewed well by society. It is a job for people who don't have any other choice, or a very limited choice... for those who don't have any other alternative.

Brazilian, 45



■ I consider this a means of survival, not real work. I only feel ashamed because people associate transsexuality with prostitution.

Brazilian, transgender, 28

■ We become psychologists... often more psychologists than prostitutes.

Ukrainian, 40

■ What makes it even more difficult is the number of women who are still arriving, every day! I wouldn't say it's an easy life. It is not easy money, not at all, but it's quick money. And the [economic] crisis pulls more and more women into it...

Brazilian, 45

■ I think that this work is more valued in other countries. For example, I've been in Germany, where we paid €25 income tax per day. They don't mess around with the girls. I think that in countries like that, you feel safer. The girls know they can work without worrying...

Brazilian, 31

"No, prostitution is not work, although I admit that it may turn out to be considered as such. I am hesitant to link sex to a service. I don't think that it should be considered a job."

Border police officer, Porto

■ In terms of luxury, I can say that I've worked in the best places. If I wasn't here, if I didn't have this job, I would never have achieved what I did.

Brazilian, 31

■ You have the option to earn less, but still take care of your health and respect your own limits. I probably won't earn as much as others do; while they have three, four or five clients a day, I have only one. You know why? Because I only work with condoms! Get it?!

Portuguese, 36

■ This work is a game. You need to play with the client. If he wants anal sex, he will get it, but I charge €20 more. You need to have a lot of patience, know how to play...

Brazilian, 30

■ During the summer I got a small job at a cleaning company. I was very happy with it. I am no longer doing this dirty work. At the moment, I am just making a little extra money, but it's worth it...

Brazilian

■ This is not work. I don't see it as work. It is just a quick way to earn money and accomplish my goal, which is to put some money aside. But it is like a drug. It messes with people's minds. I will stay in this activity for only a few more months and then I will leave.

My son knows what I do; he knows about my whole life. In the beginning he used to ask, "How come you have so much money now? Are you trafficking like Dad is? Or are you killing people?" I had to explain everything to him. It is not trafficking, it is not drugs, it is not killing people... although it is also very bad. The only reason that keeps me here is I do not want my children to lack anything.

I do not want my two daughters to know anything... I don't want them to choose the same path I did. I really do not want this to happen to them. It happened to me... but it can't happen to them!

Portuguese, 36

■ Doing other work, other than sex work, is good in order to relax a little bit!

Brazilian, 42

■ It is getting worse. There are so, so many clients asking for 'natural [unprotected] sex'! If I did it, I would not have to pay for an ad in the newspaper any more... But a lot of women do it.

Portuguese, 50

■ Nobody is born a sex worker... There may be people who are more predisposed to do it, but nobody is born a sex worker!

Portuguese, 46

■ I have a poor life, a fucking life. The whores take advantage of me. The other day one slept with a homeless person here. I told her: "Look, soon we'll open the door and instead of clients we'll have homeless people and drug users. Do you think this is a shelter for the homeless? You already have debts in this house. If you have nowhere to live or to take your friend that is your problem." Do you think I cared whether she had somewhere to go? I threw her out of here. I do not have to give them sustenance.

Portuguese, 36

■ I was already a sex worker before coming to Portugal. I knelt and said to God, "I am not stealing, I'm not killing. I'm doing this to get what I've always dreamed of." If I didn't have this job I would have none of this...

Brazilian, 32

"Sex work is work because it is a way of earning money to support and provide better education to children and grandchildren, to help the family in the home country, to start a business. And in the case of drug users it is a way to survive."

Outreach worker, Lisbon

■ Sometimes I don't even put the penis in my mouth. What clients want is therapy. At the end, it is cheaper for them to come here than to go to a psychologist.

Portuguese, 37

■ This life is a nightmare. People who say they like this life are lying.

Brazilian, 47

■ Within these walls I'm a bitch. Outside I am a lady, a Madame.

Brazilian, transgender, 50

SOFIA



■ To work in this job you have to be a bit of an actress, but today's generation does not have such skills...

Bulgarian, 36

"Yes, sex work is work. It meets all public and economic criteria for labour, or a profession, which is 'to offer services for payment'. It is a matter of personal choice, like any other job. Therefore, I think that the legalisation of sex work is the way to assure protection and good working conditions for sex workers."

Elena Kotseva, journalist, Sofia

■ All I can do is sex work. I have never worked at anything else before and cannot even imagine working in a shop, or in an office or whatever. I am a prostitute and that's it.

Bulgarian, 30

■ I want to leave sex work. I am tired of all these men coming and asking me things. All the women here are mentally unstable and argue all the time. I try to stay far away from them but we work in the same apartment and it is not always possible. I hear their stories the whole day long, about their clients, the services they offer or don't offer. I just want to stop...

Bulgarian, 35

■ I just do sex work from time to time. I have another job and offer sexual services only when I need more money. I am a student and have to pay for my studies. My parents do not live here and cannot help me financially, so I have to take care of myself, on my own.

Bulgarian, 25

■ We all want a special law for prostitution in Bulgaria. We want the law to protect us and not be against us; we want the police to guard and not arrest us.

Bulgarian, 34

■ I think the legalisation of sex work would make things worse than they are now. A law would give the police even more power to tyrannise us, to come every day to check us out, and with their usual nasty behaviour...

Bulgarian, 26

VIENNA



■ If I were to die tomorrow, I know I had a happy life. It doesn't matter what I do. Today I do this, tomorrow something else. I am producing illusions. The most important thing is, however, to keep an inner balance.

Bulgarian, in a bar



■ We work together with men from our country, because they protect us. For instance, if a client threatens me, I cannot call the police, because I don't speak German. But my bodyguards are always nearby to help me if something bad happens. They are all strong men. We agreed on everything before coming here. We pay them 50% of our earnings. Listen, we have families to feed and they do too!

Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ I earn enough from sex work now. The problem is that I have debts and until I pay them all back, I cannot save any money...

Czech, in a studio

■ I started to work as a prostitute two years ago, when my boyfriend's company went bankrupt. Both of us invested in this company, but lost all our money and incurred a lot of debts. At first, I was working as an escort and visiting the clients in their apartments. Then I started working in a bar, but I didn't like that because I had to drink a lot of alcohol, so I quit. Now I work in a studio, alone. It is much better. I pay the rent and can keep everything I earn for myself.

Bulgarian, in a studio

■ It would be great if sex work were recognised as normal work. Now, I cannot get credit from a bank; I can't even get a contract for a mobile phone, if I say that I'm a sex worker! That's why I prefer to work unofficially. I don't want to pay taxes in a country where nobody helps me with anything.

Slovak, in a bar

"Sex work is work because it is a service. I am glad that the general image of sex workers is changing in a positive way, from being criminals and of minor value, towards serious service providers who establish themselves in society. I think this is very important."

Wolfgang Szirba, Federal Police
Directorate, Vienna

■ I feel fine doing this job. I cannot imagine working in a shop, for example. It would be boring... I don't want to change jobs, even if society thinks that it would be better than what I do now...

Hungarian, in a *Laufhaus*

■ It is very difficult to live off the income from sex work. Before, I used to earn €2,000 a month, but now I earn no more than €1,000. But my monthly expenses are high: I have to pay back the mortgage on a flat in Bulgaria; €100 per week go on taxis; another €100 for condoms, lubricants, cosmetics, etc. The rest goes on renting my flat, on food and cigarettes. And I just got health insurance too, but I don't know exactly how much I will have to pay per month. And I have to pay fines too, because I often miss the weekly mandatory health check. I just can't get up on time to go there, when I have worked till 5 or 6 in the morning...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ To tell you the truth, I don't like my job. I don't like to go in the room with men. That's why I always work where I get fixed pay plus a percentage of the alcohol consumed. This isn't the best either, but for me it is better than having to have sex with the men...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I don't believe that there could be good working conditions in this job. You always have to deal with perverse people, no matter where you work. I hope to get a pension when I'm old, because I worry very much about what will happen, when I get old or sick and cannot work any more...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I am very ashamed of what I am doing. I think that I have an alcohol problem too. Every morning I come home drunk. I worry that my neighbours will see me like this. I know a lot of Bulgarians in Vienna, but I avoid contact with them, because you always have to talk about your job. And of course I cannot possibly tell them what I do. I am really afraid that my parents in Bulgaria will somehow find out about my work. Most of the time I feel very lonely... All I do is work, drink and sleep. Sometimes I meet other women who do the same job, but they have their own problems and we don't do much together. I really need to talk to someone, but I don't want to go to some organisation to do this. All I want is to have real friends...

Bulgarian, in a bar



"It is necessary to raise awareness in society, to deconstruct myths and prejudices about sex work and sex workers, in order to fight stigmatisation, criminalisation and the use of sex work to further specific agendas. We are in the 21st century. It is time to detach the discourse on sex work from the one on morality."

Marta J., Polish cultural mediator, Vienna

■ My two sisters are sex workers too. My oldest sister was forced into sex work by a man in Amsterdam, with whom she had fallen in love. He brought her there, forced her to work as a prostitute, took all her money and documents. A client helped her to escape from him. Now she is married to that client. My other sister and I decided to work as prostitutes because we needed money. We came to Vienna because nobody knows us here.

Slovak, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I have been doing this job for ten years now. I started at 18. A friend of mine tried it and suggested I try it too. I didn't like the first two bars in which I worked, so I only stayed there a week or two. Then I came here and everything was fine for me. I have been working here for the last 10 years. I have never tried to work anywhere else, but maybe I will, when I get older...

Austrian, 28, in a bar



■ I started to work in prostitution voluntarily, because no one in my family had a job, and in Bulgaria, especially in the small towns, it is very difficult to find a job. Other women in my family have worked or still work as prostitutes. My aunt, for example, has already worked 8 years in Vienna, on the street. That's the reason why I came to Vienna, because I already had contacts here.

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I hardly earn enough to survive. Business is going very badly, the prices are very low. I charge €10 to €15 for 10 to 15 minutes, and even then, it is very difficult to attract clients...

Czech, in a studio

■ I started to do this job a year ago. I came to Vienna with my boyfriend but we couldn't find any jobs because we had no work permits. My boyfriend, however, knew the owners of two bars; that's where I started working and where I still am today...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ I have tried to work in other jobs too, as a waitress and shop assistant, for instance. I earned less money in them, which was not such a big problem, because I can live on less too. But of course I prefer to have more money. I cannot say that I really like my job, but it is definitely better than other jobs that a person without education could find.

Austrian, in a studio

■ I came to Vienna with my uncle, who had arranged a marriage for me here. But the man I had to marry was very old and ugly, so I refused to marry him. My uncle was very angry with me, called me ungrateful and left me here alone, on the street, with no money. Thank God I heard some women on the street speaking my dialect. They worked as prostitutes. They explained everything about this work to me and helped me to get a green card. They also took me to their flat to live with them. We are now friends and colleagues...

Bulgarian, in a hotel

"Various encounters with sex workers forced me to change my perception and my 'black and white' thinking, and strengthen my position that we can change their situation, even though politically it is not easy. That's how I see my job, my political function."

Birgit Hebein, spokeswoman of the Green Party, Vienna



■ I always go to a Turkish market to buy food. The owner knows what I do and used to be very disrespectful to me. He told the customers there that I am a prostitute. Once I got really angry and told him that I am a customer there, like any other, that he should treat me with respect. He was very ashamed and since then he doesn't talk to me at all, just the necessary words when I buy something...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ Sex work isn't a secure job. One day it is good, the next bad. You cannot rely on it for a secure income. That's why I work every day and take a break only when I am ill. I can't afford to waste my time. After all, that is why I came to Austria!

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I can live off my earnings, but if I want or need something else, like shoes or clothes, I have to work more hours. Also, I support my parents. I cannot save any money, since I use it all up on my monthly expenses. I pay €200 a month for the studio, plus €100 for food and €100 for my health insurance in Hungary.

Hungarian, in a studio

■ I started to work as a sex worker in 2000, together with a friend who told me that I would earn more if I had my own apartment, and to do it without a green card. I took my friend's advice, because I was young and I didn't want my mother to know about this. But since 2005 I have been working on a professional basis. And my mother has known about it for the last three years. She was very mad at me at first but now we are good friends again. It is actually possible to live off sex work. I don't save money because I spend it all and I sometimes send money to my grandmother in Cuba. I use up a lot of my money. I have health insurance which costs me €175 a month, and every two months I need new hair extensions, which cost €600... I have silicone breast implants. Four years ago, I had surgery for the first time, in Cuba, for US\$800; the second time it was in Croatia, for US\$3,800. Three weeks ago I went to Hungary for liposuction, for which I paid €1,800. It is very important for me to have a good figure...

Cuban, transgender, in a *Laufhaus*

SITUATION

AMSTERDAM



■ I got to know this country through a friend. I thought I would be working at a bar... For me working behind a window is new. Sometimes I feel sad, depressed and stressed, because of this job and because of my life as a migrant in a foreign country. The problems I have bring me lots of stress and sometimes my mind is full of worries. You need to deal with many things and I have many responsibilities to fulfill.

Dominican, 29

■ I already knew what I would be doing before I came here. I am here legally now because I married a Dutch guy a year ago, after being deported. I don't like him; I just did it for the papers... Sometimes I have nightmares about the devil. I often feel really lonely, but I don't talk to my colleagues much because my head is already full of my own problems. Living here is like being in another reality, another world, another life...

Colombian, 28



■ In my previous workplace, I was feeling really pressured and dependent. Nowadays, I am independent. I am the one who decides my working hours, and I can choose my clients. However, I don't really like to work behind windows. I want to feel free, to change places. I would like to work outdoors, but in this country street prostitution is not allowed. In clubs we are more dependent on the club owners and have many problems with papers and taxes, which I don't know how to solve.

Colombian, 28

■ I have been in Holland for more than two years now. I live with a Dutch man and I am in the country legally. My family back home doesn't know what I do here. I am looking for work somewhere else, but it's difficult. I still need to help my family and I can't ask my Dutch partner for money. He doesn't understand that I must support my family financially. He has a different mentality when it comes to family and relationships with relatives...

Colombian, 28

"Dutch sex workers have better living conditions because they are more likely to find a place to live for a fair price. Migrant sex workers, however, often have to pay over €1,000 for a room in a flat that they have to share with several other migrant sex workers."

MG, fieldworker, Amsterdam

■ Prostitutes in Holland have many obligations and rules they have to follow, like taxes and registration. It's difficult for me to understand. I have to pay somebody to do my administration and book-keeping, so I don't see the regulation of prostitution as an advantage for me. We now have more obligations, are more controlled, and have less income. It is a fact that prostitution in Holland is more civilised than in other countries, but on the other hand, on the streets they still see you as a *puta* [whore]. The legalisation of prostitution didn't change the mentality, or the prejudices of the people. Even my clients – when we meet outside of work – look away, pretending they don't know me. Sometimes they offend me with double entendres when I meet them in a shop, for instance. For me, in practice, legalisation didn't bring any benefits to my situation as a worker. Now we just have more obligations but fewer rights.

Dominican, 30

■ In order to live in Holland legally, I married a Dutch man. He used to exploit and rape me. We divorced, but I got my Dutch citizenship. I have two daughters who live here in Holland. I live by myself. In total, I have five children and already have grandchildren! Apart from my mother, my family knows what I am doing. My children always ask me to quit my job, and I might do this by the end of the year. I had other jobs before. I worked as a cleaning lady and was working with flowers. However, I didn't make enough money...

Dominican, 38

■ My husband brought me to work here. When I got married, I thought I would have a normal life, but after two months, my husband told me he didn't have money. Since I didn't speak any Dutch, I had to start working in prostitution. Actually, he was the one who brought me to work here... I work about 15 hours a day. The girls working here agreed only to work with condoms and to charge the same prices. However, some girls charge less, which is not fair...

Colombian

"To improve sex workers' living conditions, it's important to increase access to information for both Italian and migrant sex workers, as well as to improve and facilitate networking amongst them."

Outreach worker, Genoa

■ I have a friend who gave me 'the stamp' for me to be here legally. We live together, and I still owe him some money. My plan is to work for one more year...

Dominican

■ I came to Holland through my cousin. My sister also worked here and I decided to come to make some money. I am here illegally. I travelled through Germany. I want to go back to my country and have a normal life.

Colombian



■ My aunt told me that I could make money in Holland, but did not tell me about this job. When I saw this work, she started telling me that I should be calm and have patience. I was a virgin and had never had sexual intercourse with a man.
Colombian, 25

■ I came here without a visa. While I was working in another city, I met a man who became my client for a long time. He is from India; he gave me 'the stamp' so that I could work without problems. But now he wants my money and is threatening to report me to the police. In the end, I will have to pay everything back to him...
Colombian, 36

■ I started early in prostitution. I've been doing this work for eight years now, the last three years in the Netherlands. Before, I worked as an escort; now I work in windows, between 8 to 12 hours a day. I get very exhausted, but that's how it is.
Bulgarian, 29, in a window

■ The client asked me if I was registered. It was so funny; we ended up having a discussion about the new prostitution law, which will criminalise us both.
Dutch

HAMBURG

■ Do you know the lawyer B.? He is very bad. I have already given him €500 but he has done nothing for me so far!
Thai, 30

■ Is prostitution legal in Germany? I didn't know this! Where can I find out more about it? And also about other things... e.g., I would like to bring my son here from Poland, but I don't know how the schools are set up here...
Polish, 30

■ I have lived in Germany for seven years, I am married and have health insurance through my husband. Work is not going well now, I still haven't had any clients today. You don't earn as much as before. It is because of the euro... Everything has become more expensive and people have no work. Only women who work for low prices, and sometimes without condoms, have many clients. But I don't want those clients. I don't work for less than €60...
Russian, 35

"I was struck by a sex worker who told me that she has worked in prostitution for the last 17 years, but that her husband has no idea whatsoever about her activity."
Medical doctor, Hamburg

■ The police have forbidden us to work in the windows because a building with shops and flats was being built just in front. The police said that they want to keep the streets clean... because of the families and children living there. This is why many of us have gone to [a well-known bar]. However, there was a lot of competition and little work. Now it has improved a bit. Nevertheless, it was much better when we worked in the windows.
Dominican, 25



■ Business is very good. The first time, I was in Germany for three months. Now, I have been working for the last two months, but I am going back home for the Christmas holidays...
Polish, 25

■ At the beginning, when I started to work in prostitution, I had big psychological problems. I began seeing a psychologist to overcome them, because my experience as a prostitute was traumatic for me. After the therapy, though, I resumed the work. Nobody in Poland knows about my job in Germany. I will work here only for a while and then I will return home.
Polish, 25

"The living conditions of German and migrant sex workers differ because migrant sex workers have little access to resources like legal advice, opportunities to move on from sex work, or further education. Moreover, if their status is not secure, they experience dependency and violence."
Habermann, lawyer, Hamburg

■ We are relatively new in the business and we are considering becoming independent in order to work legally in Germany. However, we have no health insurance...

Polish, 25

■ I do a lot of sport. I need it to keep healthy. I must think about my mental health too when doing this job, where you have to wait for hours, doing nothing...

German, 25

■ This flat belongs to a friend who is on holiday. The housekeeper lives just opposite. He takes care of my security. That's why I can only receive clients until 10pm...

Czech, 30

HELSINKI



■ For me it's important to get information and learn the language so that I can communicate with other people all by myself, without needing help. I don't know much yet, but it is already much better than before! Thai, in a massage parlour

MADRID



■ I go to a Romanian doctor... I can tell him my health problems more easily... oh, no, really, I'm OK with him, I don't want to go to a Spanish doctor. Why? ...because he'll ask me what I do for a living... and I don't want to talk about it.

Romanian, 23

MARSEILLE



■ I find the work psychologically and physically very hard, and that sex workers are often rejected and isolated. But for me, it is a choice. Even if I don't want a client, I always play the game...

French, 38

■ I'm an occasional worker. I only work from time to time, when I need money to finish the month. The rest of the time I'm a hairdresser. I started sex work three months ago. I have never worked on the street. Friends of mine told me about the ad system because they also do this towards the end of the month.

French, 24

■ I do several small jobs in hotels, like catering, cleaning, or hairdressing. I work as a sex worker for extra income or when I need it for something special. I used it, for instance, to pay for my son's driving licence. I do this for my children, so that my daughter won't have to do it some day too...

African, 38

■ I have been working for 10 years. I am a professional. I started as a dancer in bars, then I began advertising. I have had a difficult and an unusual life. I was in jail... If I had known 10 years ago, I would have chosen another path. But that's it, it's my life...

French, 44

■ I have been working for over a year; first in parlours, then in an apartment that someone is renting to me. I am looking for a job as a home-help for old people. But I don't really know how to read or write. It's a handicap and I am losing self-confidence. I am also looking for a job as a waitress but I lack experience... I have nobody to talk to and I am upset about that...

Female sex worker, 30

PORTO



■ Our life is a lie. We have a double life. What we are here, we cannot be out there...

Portuguese, 28

"Raising social awareness regarding sex workers' situation, dismantling prejudice and stereotypes, fighting racism and sexism, and giving them rights and recognition would considerably improve sex workers' working and living conditions. Sex work should not be judged from a moral perspective."

Outreach worker, NGO maiz, Linz

■ This is a very stressful life. We spend a lot of mental resources on it!

Brazilian, transgender, 35



■ I assume several characters. I did it all my life. This is something that makes me cry a lot. You know why? I am in love with someone with whom I have a relationship, but it is sometimes quite difficult for me to separate the characters I assume during work from the person I really am. And that's quite worrying... That's what this work does to you!

Portuguese, 40

■ The highest price I paid for doing this work was to not be able to be with my children.

Portuguese, 40

■ I really admire people who can live on €475 per month. I do not believe that anybody can have a normal, a satisfactory life, with €475 per month! The life I'm living gives me many reasons to suffer, but I earn much more... so why should I go back?!

Portuguese, 36

■ *'Sing, sing my people,
Leave the sadness behind.
Sing strong, sing loud,
Let life go forward.'*

Brazilian, 40

"Sex workers do an important job in an increasingly lonely society..."

Outreach worker, Porto



■ I am spiritualist. In previous lives I have always been a sex worker. In the time of the kings, I worked in brothels.

Brazilian, 35

■ I would like to ask my family: why do you accept my money if you think I'm doing something wrong?

Brazilian, 42

■ I've worked for others for a long time but now I just work for myself. I charge €30 for the service, but upstairs, my neighbour, she charges €15! If I have to charge €15 for the service one day, I will go back to Brazil immediately!

Brazilian, 46

■ I get really mad when clients want me to get an erection, or to ejaculate, because I'm here as a woman! I have a good relationship with the neighbours. I always say hello, I do not wear heels and I clean the common stairs once a week.

Portuguese, transgender, 23

■ I got a job in a restaurant but I still don't have a work contract because it is too early to ask. I do not want my boss to think that I'm there only to get the contract...

Brazilian, 33

■ I want to change my life as soon as possible. I cannot stand it any more...

Portuguese, 48

■ This life is a game, a lie. My husband has no idea about the work I do. But I like the way it is: I tell him that I'm taking care of an old woman, from 8 in the morning to 5 in the afternoon, and that I earn €300 a month. When he gets home, I'm already there. Before this old woman, there was another one that I 'killed' after a while. One day my husband arrived home and I started to cry, saying that I was dismissed. These are the games I have to play...

Nobody ever should know I do this for a living, not my husband, my mother, my sister or my children... nobody! This is just a way to get some money for myself.

Now my husband believes that I am on a trial work placement. I told him, "Let's see how it goes... whether they like me." Of course what will count is the amount of clients I have here. As business is quite bad at the moment, I think I'm going to tell him that they didn't like me and take the next week off to take care of my granddaughters who are on holiday...

Portuguese, 48

■ It is important to know how to manage money in order to achieve your goals.

Brazilian, 32



■ I am my own tribunal, with the worst jury. No one condemns me more than myself.

Brazilian, 36

■ I have little work, and things didn't go as I expected. I don't want to do this for a lifetime.

Brazilian, 35

■ My children are my pimps. No-body else.

Portuguese, 47

SOFIA



■ We have to go through the mill every day, because of our work. And we only do it because we need to earn money. We have no other choice!

Bulgarian, 39

■ I work as a dancer and receive clients for sex work once or twice a month, no more. I am independent, I have no boss and I can decide by myself what to do.

Bulgarian, 26, in a strip bar

■ I used to work on the street but now I work in this apartment. On the street I had a pimp. For the right to stay in a given place and be protected by him, I had to pay him 50:50. Now I work alone, without a pimp, but I also have to split 50:50 with the manager of the apartment... At least I am in a warm place now.

Bulgarian, 28

TAXES

HAMBURG



■ I will not pay taxes because I will have nothing in the end. Listen, I must pay €100 every day for living costs, €50 for rent, €25 for the ad and picture on the internet, and €25 for the ad in the newspaper.

Russian, 30

■ I am married to a German man and work as self-employed. I have my regular clients and pay my taxes like a normal employee.

Brazilian, 30

HELSINKI



■ I want to do a normal job and pay taxes, so that when I'm old I can enjoy my pension and I won't need to beg for money from others.

Thai, 45

■ I ended up doing sex work because I didn't want to earn my living by participating in labour market training sessions from the employment office, one after another. You cannot find a real job in places where the employment office sends you, anyway. Besides, working in the formal labour market is not profitable. Taxes are so high and progressive taxation is not a fair idea. I don't want to pay taxes to support people who abuse social services.

Russian, 45

■ If I apply for social benefits, I'm afraid I will lose my residence permit in Finland.

Thai, 47

SOFIA



■ I work mainly as a dancer, and go out with clients from time to time, but only if I like them. I have a contract here in the bar and my boss pays my taxes and insurance fees. I prefer it like this, it gives me a greater feeling of stability.

Bulgarian, 29, in Borovets (ski resort near Sofia)

VIENNA



■ The manager of the sauna where I worked before filled in the tax declaration for me. I don't know what sum he wrote, but now I have to pay €500 a month in taxes! I think it is too much, don't you?

Hungarian, in a *Laufhaus*

TRANSGENDER ISSUES

GENOA



■ Prostitution gives me the freedom to be what I feel I am. My outside feels free, and my inside makes me work.

Italian, transgender

■ In my previous job, when they saw me dressed like a woman, they fired me. So I asked a friend who already worked as a prostitute to take me with her.

Italian, transgender



HAMBURG



■ When I started working I had no papers. At that time my gender was still male and I paid a German woman to marry me. This woman was addicted to drugs and started blackmailing me. I had to give her a lot of money. Finally, I decided to flee from her and move to Hamburg. Here I had my sex change. Later, at work, I met my current man, and after a few years I received an unlimited residence permit. I am self-employed and pay tax. I have the same rights as Germans!

Ecuadorian, transgender, 30

"Even if sex workers are granted access to health services, they face barriers due to a lack of understanding of what sex work and/or trans identity really is. For instance: transgender sex workers may fear that they will be judged negatively or receive bad treatment if they go to a medical centre outside of their usual network."

Cyrille Casanova, nurse, Marseille

■ I have nine brothers and sisters and 24 nieces. My father left the family when my youngest sister was still a baby. Often we had nothing to eat. Later I worked in Quito as a hairdresser, but I earned very little money and was strongly discriminated against because of my homosexuality. Because I had nothing to lose, I decided to come to Germany. Through my work as a sex worker, I have built a house in Ecuador and I regularly send money to my family. My mother is 72 years old now and very ill. I would like to fly to Ecuador, but first I have to get my German nationality. As soon as I get it, I will visit my mother. Ecuadorian, transgender, 35

■ I rarely see female clients as it is quite difficult to get an erection. I get many requests from couples, but I usually turn them down.

Brazilian, transgender, 32

HELSINKI



■ I have a good official job, but I don't have friends with whom I can talk honestly about my life, about my transvestite desires, my current experiences in sex work or the ones I had when I was younger. I haven't even mentioned my sex work background to my therapist; I wasn't sure how she would react. However, we have talked a bit about the subject lately, so I am starting to consider the possibility of telling her.

Finnish, male, 50

VIOLENCE

AMSTERDAM



■ I was once threatened by a client with a knife. I managed to escape, but I injured myself. It was my landlord who took me to the hospital.

Dominican, 29

■ I feel safe here. We have an internal security system, with cameras on the street. The girls are always helping each other...

Dominican, 29

"Migrant sex workers who used to work in sex work in their home countries often tell me that they experienced lots of violence from police and clients."

MG, fieldworker, Amsterdam

■ Once two men came in and while one was holding me, the other one took my money. I ran after them but I could not get my money back. Now I use an alarm, but only God can save me.

Colombian

■ Sometimes, when we have problems with guests, the landlord makes us give the clients their money back. This is not fair at all.

Colombian

■ Once they robbed me and I lost my money. They came again, but I learned to defend myself and I wasn't afraid any more, because now I have an alarm.

Colombian, 25

GENOA



■ There is little respect for us, for our rights and safety at work. You must defend yourself by your own means. After having done this job for a while, I know who I can go with, and who I should not. For instance, if there is a group of two or more, I do not go with them.

Italian

"Undocumented migrants, in Italy, have no rights or negotiating power because they are not recognised as citizens, and therefore suffer physical or psychological violence without reacting or complaining."

Outreach worker, Genoa

■ There are policemen who expect free sexual gratification. Then there are those who enjoy insulting and threatening sex workers who are taken to the police station. On my mobile phone I have photographs of the disgusting security cells, which contained the remains of old bread, empty bottles, and blood-smeared walls. I have been held for more than 12 hours, whilst being taunted and threatened with deportation.

Romanian, 28

■ You always find assholes who keep their money but take ours. There are clients who demand too much, and are not satisfied with having intercourse once...

Italian

HAMBURG



■ There was a gang of black men who constantly robbed sex workers in this area. They attacked one of our colleagues. Luckily this gang was arrested. There is now a trial going on and some of us will testify.

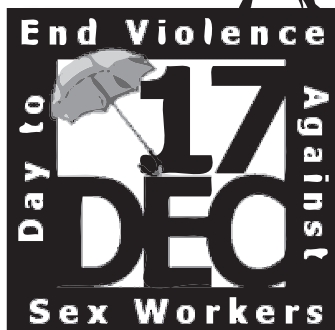
Russian, 35

■ I am not afraid of the police. A few days ago they were here and left their card. They said that I can always call when I need them. Women who are afraid are illegal. Thank God I have only experienced one difficult situation. This was long ago, when I was illegal. Two men came, with weapons. They wanted money. I escaped through the window. At that time I was also afraid of the police, but not any more.

Russian, 30

■ In this cold weather, men long for a little tenderness... I have never experienced violence. My clientele is very nice, I cannot complain. But I admit that I don't take just anybody...

German, 30



■ In Germany, compared to Lithuania, there is no violence. One third of the women in Lithuania has been raped at least once. I myself was violated by many men when I was 12 years old. All my friends have also experienced this. There is a lot of violence there...

Lithuanian, 30

"If one has suffered violence, it is very difficult to express feelings, even if it is said in one's mother tongue; imagine for migrants..."

Tonka, social worker, Hamburg

■ Once I had a client who got violent. I talked to him, slowly, and tried to calm him down. Since this incident he has never come back again.

Polish, 25

■ I once had a client who didn't want to pay for a certain service which had been agreed beforehand. We started to discuss it; he became furious and started to threaten me with the police. I reacted by saying that I, myself, would call the police! He calmed down, paid and left.

Portuguese, 30

■ Once there was a client who asked for sexual practices I did not offer. He didn't want to accept this and started shouting. I asked him to leave the apartment. He refused. I then went to the door and stood there until he left.

Kenyan, 30

■ A client once tried to force anal sex without prior consent. The situation escalated, until I got him out, with the help of my colleagues. We didn't call the police because we managed it ourselves.

German, 35

■ Once a client became aggressive because I wanted to use a condom and he didn't. With the help of my colleague we threw him out.

Polish, 30

■ We have no problems with violence here. Our manager is always present; moreover, a security camera was installed and we feel safe.

Thai, 27

■ No, I can't say I have experienced violence, because I am very careful in the way I choose my clients. I don't take drunk clients. If I realise the client is drunk, I send him away tactfully, by suggesting that he should make an appointment (which they never do). From your leaflets I got a few tips about how to deal with violent clients...

Brazilian, transgender, 32

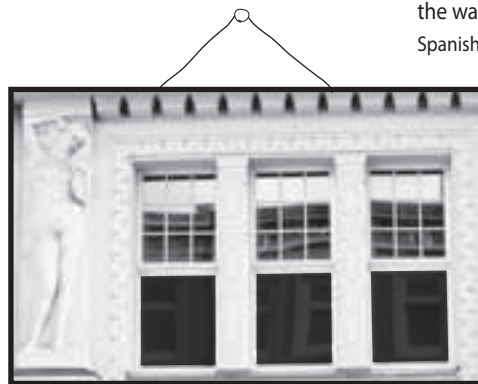
■ I myself have never experienced violence from clients. There were some who wanted to hit me, but I didn't let them and they had to leave. But a Russian colleague had less luck. She worked alone in an apartment in an industrial zone. Without knowing it, she let a man in who was highly aggressive. The colleague got several cuts but was able to jump out of the window in time. She had to stay in an intensive care unit for a while, with several serious injuries. One more case: a guest wanted a girl who would scream. When she

started shouting nobody paid attention. After some time, however, colleagues looked in on her. She was already dead...

Latvian, 35

"Migrant sex workers have fewer opportunities to resist abuse due to lack of awareness, lack of alternatives and often extremely low levels of education."

Habermann, lawyer, Hamburg



■ One day a Turkish man came here posing as a policeman. When we let him in, he demanded money and searched the whole place for money and valuables. Luckily enough I did not have any money on me. A friend, however, who works in another part of town, had the same experience and the man took €1,000 from her. I never called the police to report this incident because I can't speak German. Now I have pepper spray, in case such a situation should arise again...

Polish, 42

MADRID



■ From time to time the police conduct raids here. They are really violent and harsh with their words and manner. They treat us very badly, shouting at us and demanding to know where the drugs are... What drugs?! The worst is that you recognise some of them as clients from previous weeks. What bastards! The police in Barcelona are more respectful. They say "Let's do this as quickly as possible. We are sorry, but we have to do this." I was shocked by the way they do things in Madrid.

Spanish

"Whenever we identify that a girl has a pimp, we report it to the police. Just the other week we had a girl who was crying, and we knew there was a guy waiting for her every day. It turns out that he had violently threatened her and wanted the money she was making. We reported it to the police and offered the girl protection. It doesn't happen often but whenever we identify these cases, we have a zero tolerance policy."

Spanish hotel manager, Madrid

■ That other Romanian girl, you know, from around the corner, she got beaten up by these three pimps. She got into a fight with another girl. And that girl came back with these three brutes. They ripped the whole front of her hair out of her head. Luckily the police came and arrested them. But still, it's disgusting.

Romanian

MARSEILLE



■ I was raped by a client six years ago; he had also assaulted other girls.

French, 38

■ I had quite a severe attack when I worked in my old apartment... It was an anonymous caller. I didn't press charges because I was afraid of going to the police and receiving some sort of retaliation afterwards. I was also afraid that my son might discover what I was doing, if it became public...

French, 40

■ I had a problem once, but I managed to calm the client down before he hit me. I didn't press charges because I handled the situation by myself. I sensed from the client's voice that it might go wrong, but I needed money, so I still took him...

French, 25

■ I went to another town. I wanted to work in a hotel for three days, but the cops came very quickly and told me that I was not allowed to work in a hotel unless I registered with the tax authorities. They took me to the police station under 'suspicion of undeclared work.' They kept me there for three hours and took my fingerprints. I had to ask for, and insist on making, a phone call... The hotel manager was arrested the next day. The fact was that the police didn't want me to work in this city...

French, 46

"Psychological violence suffered by sex workers is fed by daily discriminations such as insults on the street or harassment by the police, like their refusal to register a complaint because the victim is a sex worker. Migrant sex workers are exposed to additional psychological violence when undocumented: they are often blackmailed, their passports are taken away, or they are threatened regarding their families back home. This double stigmatisation – being a sex worker and an illegal immigrant – has an extremely damaging impact on their self-esteem."

Cyrille Casanova, nurse, Marseille

■ I had some problems in my neighbourhood, with young people who found out about my work. They broke the windshield of my car and I received threatening phone calls. So now I don't answer anonymous calls any more...

French, 40

■ I have no problems with clients. But violence doesn't have to be only physical, it can take different forms: for the money you get, very often guys think they can ask you for anything...

French, 33

■ I never had problems of violence, except once, at the beginning, when I worked in a hotel: a hooded man came in, with a gun, and took all my money. I went to the police, but they did nothing...

French, 24

■ I have already had a lot of incidents. Once a guy came in with a gun, saying he was a cop, but his police card was false. Another time a client pretended to be a security guard and wanted to have sex for free...

French, 25

"The French Law of Inner Security of 2003 and the repressive political context have led to growing vulnerability and increased insecurity for sex workers. They are much more exposed to violence from clients and the police, and their access to medical and social institutions is much more complicated."

Cyrille Casanova, nurse, Marseille

■ I was attacked just yesterday. I did not know that one should not take two clients at once. They saw where I put the money; they attacked me and took everything...

French, 24



■ I had a small problem three weeks ago, with a young man, a student, who lives in a studio on a Marseille university campus. First, he lied about his age, because he was under 30. Then, as soon as I arrived, he started to warm me up, to touch me, but I stopped him and told him to pay me first. He told me it was not necessary, that I could trust him... I refused. He told me that he would give me a cheque. I usually refuse cheques, but for once I agreed. I barely had time to put the cheque away in my bag, when he took it from my hands. Suddenly he got angry, and pulled out a knife, threatening to call his friends. Although I work alone, I told him that I also had friends... but he took my mobile out of my hands. Finally he let me go. I did not press charges because I'm not registered with the tax authorities, and I'm afraid the police would start asking too many questions... French, 30

PORTO



■ Discrimination is in everyone... But if you are the first to discriminate against yourself, then society will do it too. Brazilian, transgender, 35

"Indoor- as well as outdoor-based sex workers told me that if prostitution were recognised as work and protected as such, the violence they suffer could be avoided or even eliminated."

Felipa Alvim, researcher, Porto

■ There are many women who want to carry the stamp 'whore' on their forehead, instead of sex worker. It depends on the attitude of each one after work, because no one is obliged to accept your way of life... Brazilian, 41

■ I've never been a victim of prejudice, whether here or in Brazil. Brazilian, transgender, 28

"Sex workers suffer violence or exploitation because of the stigma that hangs over them, which often legitimates this violence. The fact that sex work is not recognised as work exposes them to these situations."

Outreach worker, Porto

■ I have already been discriminated against. First, because I am Brazilian and I am black, and then because I am a sex worker. I've been expelled from an apartment here in Portugal because the neighbours threatened to call the police.

Brazilian, 39

SOFIA



■ I am very careful when doing sex work. I have my personal bodyguard – my boyfriend. He always knows exactly where I am and when I should be back. So far, nobody has caused me any problems...

Bulgarian, 25

■ I have already suffered violence several times. Some clients have beaten me, my bosses swear at me every single day, but the greatest problem is the police. Once they came and made us lie on the cold floor, with our hands behind our backs, and they shouted and shouted! We were wearing only underwear and could not threaten them with a weapon or whatever. We are only women here, what could we do against armed men?! This was one of the worst incidents I ever had.

Bulgarian, 28, in a strip bar

"Sex workers face violence very often. This is, unfortunately, one of the main characteristics of this job. Violence from criminal networks controlling the business, from clients, partners, and the police... People think that if someone chooses this work, he or she agrees to be beaten, humiliated and oppressed.

The hardest part of this job is, however, the psychological violence, because it comes from different directions. Sex workers are often manipulated and brutally harassed by their pimps as well as by the business organisers."

Boryana Madjova, social worker, Sofia



■ Yes, I experienced violence. But I can't talk about it. Please, don't make me remember it...

Bulgarian, 26

VIENNA



■ We all know women, mostly young girls, who are exploited by some men. We see them crying, going out of the bar and waiting nervously for someone on the street. Or we see women with bruises at the Health Check. For us it is difficult to reach these women. On one hand, because they are very closed and distant, on the other, because we sometimes don't really want to get mixed up with them.

Slovak, in a bar

■ It is good that you talk to the women about things they usually see as unpleasant, but which they accept because they think it is part of their work, like violent clients or pimps...

Romanian, in a *Laufhaus*

■ My ex-girlfriend was the one who forced me to become a prostitute. She is a prostitute too. I came to Austria because of her. She kept manipulating and pushing me to start working as a prostitute, all the time! Then she started taking all the money that I earned...

Czech, in a studio

■ I was forced to start working as a prostitute. I was promised a job in Greece, but when I arrived there, they made me do this job. I didn't want to at first, but they beat and threatened me. It was hard at the beginning, but when I saw how much money I made, I decided to keep working. Afterwards I escaped from those people and started working on my own.

Bulgarian, in a hotel



"Victim support organisations are seldom accessed by sex workers. I presume they might be afraid of being treated with disrespect because of their sex work background. There has been a lot of discussion about victims of human trafficking and their rights. However, the crimes related to sex work are often processed through the courts as pimping offences and therefore sex workers are viewed as witnesses instead of victims of crime. The status of the witness is weaker than the victim's status. There are different drawbacks related to that, like they cannot get a lawyer to assist them and they cannot get compensation. This is an example of their unequal status in the judicial system."

Petra Kjällman, Victim Support Programme, Helsinki



■ I live with a man who has a couple of women working for him. But I don't work for him. He even helps me with money, when I need to send some to my children and don't have enough at the time. I sleep with him, but I want to leave because I am not sure he wouldn't force me to start working for him if our relationship goes bad. I am especially scared now, because most of the other women ran away from him and maybe he will try to use me... Sometimes he hits me, but usually I am the one to start fighting and hitting him; he gets angry and hits back... He keeps my passport and the passports of the other women, because very often we get robbed during work and it is more secure when he keeps them...

Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ I think that it is necessary to have harsher punishments for pimping. All the time I see Bulgarian and Romanian pimps bringing women to work and taking them back home in the morning. They control them all night! Sometimes I see a car with a driver and five women inside. It used to be better before. There were less women and we used to decide among ourselves where and how we should work. Now the pimps control this. I personally never had problems with pimps because they know that Austrian women will call the police immediately if they bother us.
Austrian, in a hotel

“Often migrant sex workers come from countries where human and women’s rights are constantly violated, so they have a different perception of violence. However, I have found a greater capacity for change among them than among Italian women, who remain trapped in situations of domestic violence for years.”

Maria Rosa Scala,
Project Against Trafficking, Genoa

■ My parents arranged a marriage for me when I was sixteen. My husband used to beat me almost every day, for no reason! It was not an official marriage, so I couldn’t get divorced. Thank God my family realised how bad my situation was and helped me to leave him. They accepted me and my two children back. I lived with this man for three years!
Bulgarian, in a studio

■ I have been working for seven months now. But the job is very dangerous. I have already had two very bad experiences with clients. The first time was when I asked for the money before starting and the guy refused to pay. We had a discussion. He got angry and hit me in the face. I didn’t do anything and I didn’t call the police because I don’t speak any German and I wouldn’t be able to tell them what happened. The second time was when a client tried to strangle me. I shouted very loudly, till the waitress and some of my colleagues came and helped me. The waitress called the police. They took me and the man, and arranged for a translator for me. Because the man threatened me with revenge when he comes out, I decided to change my workplace.
Bulgarian, in a studio

■ When a client gets violent with me I quickly put a finger in one of his eyes and run away. But violence has decreased recently. I haven’t heard of any problems in the last two months...
Bulgarian, in a hotel

■ Of course, I see violence every day. Last week I was beaten by a client. But I called the police. Now there may be a trial.
Nigerian, in a hotel

WORKING CONDITIONS

AMSTERDAM



■ I work 11, 12 hours a day, behind the windows. I think that’s a lot! However, I am independent and I am the one who decides how long I work. I need three clients a day to pay for the weekly rent of the window.
Dominican, 29

■ I am responsible for cleaning the window, though this was not included in the agreement! I work about eight hours a day and have around 15 clients daily. I need at least 14 clients a week to pay the rent for my window. During my breaks, I try to go for a walk and eat something, but I can’t sleep. The food here is terrible!
Colombian, 28

■ I have been working at the same place for the last eight months now. There are girls working for cheaper prices, but I never drop mine.
Colombian, 29

■ Working on the street makes me nervous. I have bad thoughts about it. I prefer the windows. I often leave my window and go out to talk to the other girls. I have many friends here; we share our problems and help each other.
Colombian, 29



"Dutch sex workers have better working conditions than migrants. They are more likely to have an active social life beyond their work as a sex worker, whereas migrant sex workers usually work for longer hours. Furthermore, migrant sex workers are more vulnerable because they often cannot communicate so well with clients about what they offer and how much it costs."

MG, fieldworker, Amsterdam

■ I work nine hours a day. When working in windows, the first two or three clients are to cover the daily rent, the others are for your own income. I rent my window per week, so I need about 14 clients to pay for one week. I find the rent quite high but we don't have any alternative because it is difficult to find other places to work. The municipalities have reduced the number of the windows, fewer clubs than before are legal, and I don't like to work in an apartment or through an escort agency because of the lack of security. I see more clients in the windows. I like to be visible for the clients. I also like to be with other colleagues and I enjoy the environment of the red light district. There is more life there than in closed places. I also feel like the window is my own place, and I like to be my own boss.

Dominican, 30

■ I've been working in this same place for the last three years. I like it because it's very calm and I really like the freedom that I have working here. I already knew I would work in prostitution before leaving my country... I work about 12 hours every day and have around 10 to 15 clients a day. My clients are mainly Dutch, older men, but I'm not selective about my clients. Anyone can come in.

Dominican, 38

■ In previous places, I felt really pressured and dependent. Here I feel like I am imprisoned...

Dominican

"The lack of knowledge makes migrant sex workers very vulnerable. Cultural mediation is very important in this context, to inform and support this group."

MG, fieldworker, Amsterdam

■ The girls working here have an agreement to charge the same prices. Some girls of other nationalities are, however, setting a much lower price. This is not helping us at all!

Colombian

■ The place here is very calm, but the work is bad. There are not so many clients... Before coming, I had no idea that I would be working here. I imagined that I would be in a club, dressing formally.

Dominican

■ Once I had a client with a lot of bubbles on his penis. I refused to have sexual intercourse with him and gave him back his money. Later, a colleague told me that the bubbles were not a sexual disease, but it was something that some men put on their penis to give pleasure to the ladies.

Colombian

■ I feel really good here, but when I have to go to the city centre, I feel annoyed because I have to wear clothes.

Dominican



■ I never work with alcoholics or drug users...

Italian

■ Working as an escort has taught me to distinguish between good and rotten people, and to know where I can go and where I can't.

Italian

"Italians, compared to migrants, have better working conditions because they have more rights and bargaining power, while migrants live with the constant pressure of an unstable situation, of expensive trips back home, of little knowledge about sex workers' rights. The living conditions of migrants are also more difficult because they have very little emotional support or family networks, as most of them are alone."

Outreach worker, Genoa



■ Visibility is the key to improvement of working conditions. We hide what we do because we have to. Of course, all of the following is wishful thinking, but it would be nice if we were allowed to directly advertise in various media, if we could get VAT authorisation, if we adopted a code of conduct with respect to others, with regard to noise, work hours and so on, if we were allowed to work at home and to hang out a shingle in the same way that other professionals or tradesmen do.

Italian, 35

■ If I go to the same bars every night, everyone ends up knowing me. Usually, clients go out with me twice, and then either they like me very much or they change to someone else. But if I go out only two nights a week, I meet different people and have more opportunities to get new clients. I have three places where I go quite often. If I had to stay in the same place all the time I'd rather shoot myself!

Italian

HAMBURG



■ The working conditions here are quite good. We pay an unusually low rent: only €800 a month for three rooms. Our clients are mainly regulars. Our rooms are clean and well-maintained. All men take a shower before they get their massage. The prices are fixed: €50 for a one-hour massage, €20 extra for masturbation. This establishment has been around for a long time. Nevertheless, it is difficult to find new women to work with us. Many are inexperienced and only want to earn quick money. And competition is high; at the moment there are many apartments offering a similar service. Sometimes we have to wait for a very long time until a client comes. But we are never bored; we chat or watch TV...

Thai, 32, in a massage parlour

■ Ah, I know you! – from when I was working in Billstedt... I've been here for a few months now. I didn't feel good there, but many Bulgarians are still working there. This apartment is much better. Business is good and there's not so much competition. In Billstedt everybody was very young and silly. Here the team is mixed. At the moment it's quiet because of the holidays. There are rarely clients in the mornings, so I use that time to clear up, clean and wash the bed covers. These are our duties...

Hungarian, 35

■ I have worked in Stuttgart and Frankfurt 'on a percentage basis', i.e., I kept 70% for myself and 30% I had to give to the manager. It was much better to work that way. I had many more clients. Here, if I have two or three clients per day, it's a good day!

Latvian, 35

"What would improve the working conditions of German and migrant prostitutes? Clear and understandable rules for all in prostitution; standards for prostitution venues within the scope of company responsibilities; permits for brothel managers (only possible with no previous convictions for criminal acts); police checks of prostitution venues, not of prostitutes."

Detlef Ubben, Police Department on Organised Crimes, Hamburg

■ Who I work with is very important for me. When searching for an apartment, I always ask which girls are there. If I know them to be good colleagues, I agree to work there. There are many cheeky, arrogant and greedy women who handle colleagues very badly. I don't like to work in such an atmosphere. With e.g., K., we have often worked together elsewhere, and when I found out that she was here in this apartment, I immediately accepted.

Latvian, 35

HELSINKI



■ It has been very hard for me. I always think that it will get better as soon as I have paid for certain things, but it doesn't. I paid for my mother's treatment; now she is dead. I helped my relatives... but they don't care about me. The situation is really bad now, with very few clients and not enough money to even pay the rent. And there are the police... I'm afraid of them, they already fined me twice...

Migrant sex worker

PORTO



■ I feel isolated because we are stuck in the apartment. It's like a reality show... to be stuck in your own home, waiting for the clients to come. You have no relationships, don't go out or take public transport... Yes, we suffer from this kind of loneliness...

Brazilian, transgender, 35

SOFIA



■ I am very pleased with my work. I earn a lot of money; I have plenty of free time, and contact with interesting people, mainly foreigners. I like this very much.

Bulgarian, 26, in a strip bar in Borovets (ski resort near Sofia)

■ I think we have good working conditions here. For example, when my parents found out about my work, they kicked me out of the house. My boss allowed me to sleep here on the sofa until I solved the problem with my parents. Now I live in lodgings on my own and my parents are talking to me again...

Bulgarian, 27

■ I come to Borovets for the winter season. In the summer I work in a resort at the seaside. I prefer the sea and the summer. Dancing naked in this cold weather is horrible! But I have to do it...

Bulgarian, 32, in a strip bar in Borovets (ski resort near Sofia)

■ Some of the sex workers on the streets are in a really bad situation. It is very difficult to work outdoors. Here in the club things are different. We have everything we need, I feel more protected.

Bulgarian, 30

■ The work is hard but I have to do it. I don't like the conditions here. Before, I was in another place – that's why I know that working conditions can be better...

Bulgarian, 31

VIENNA



■ I have been working as a prostitute for nine years now. It was really bad at the beginning. I started in a bar in the 10th district. The boss received the money from the clients and paid the women their 'paycheques' only once a week. It was not unusual, though, for a woman to work two days and then be fired by the boss with no pay. Later, I worked in a bar in the 5th district. The women there had to bring their own towels and were not allowed to drink from the glasses, which were only for the guests; they had to drink out of plastic cups! I personally had no serious problems with the bosses, because when I was annoyed about something, I just left. But not every woman in this job has the courage or the opportunity to do the same...

Slovak, in a bar

■ Nobody forces me to drink alcohol, but I have to do it if I want to earn some money. In the bar where I work, a cocktail costs €25 and if the guest buys one for me, I get €5. It is difficult to say no when a guest wants you to drink. And of course men want you drunk, so that you are helpless and they can, in the room, do whatever they want with you. I know that this is dangerous, but I see no alternative for me. I don't want to work in a studio or in a *Laufhaus*, because there I have to pay rent and I don't earn enough for that. Furthermore, I wouldn't get a fixed sum there, as I do here. I am always afraid I will not earn enough money to pay all my bills...

Bulgarian, in a bar

■ The most important thing for me is to be sure that I am the one to make the rules!

Czech, in a studio

■ I used to work in a very luxurious establishment and I made lots of money. But there I had to look perfect all the time, I had to be friendly and smile at everyone, and I could not choose the services I offered. Eventually I couldn't cope with all the pressure any more, and left...

Slovak, in a *Laufhaus*



■ Every day a cleaning woman tidies up my room. I get the blankets from the owner and I can also wash them here in the washing machine. I think we have quite good working conditions here.

Colombian, in a café-restaurant

■ The working conditions here are pretty bad. The managers don't take care of the *Laufhaus*. There is no security; sometimes there are problems with the heating or hot water. The whole house is very old and needs to be repaired. We pay €300 per week for practically nothing. But I stay here because I don't like to change workplaces too often. You have to organise new photos and advertisements every time you change workplace, and this is quite expensive.

Romanian, in a *Laufhaus*

"Austrian sex workers work independently and have higher self-esteem and more control over their working conditions, while migrant sex workers are often dependent on third parties to organise business for them. Austrian sex workers work mostly to maintain a higher standard of living, while migrant sex workers work to survive."

Sophia S., Bulgarian cultural mediator, Vienna

■ We even have a fitness studio here in the *Laufhaus* and we can all use it whenever we want. It's free.

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ Work is quite tiring... I work from 10 in the morning to 10 at night, from Monday to Saturday. I only rest on Sundays...

Dominican, in a *Laufhaus*

■ I am not happy with my work. I work from 8 in the evening to 5 in the morning, from Monday to Saturday. I cannot choose my own working hours, but every two months I go to visit my parents in Romania.

Romanian, in a bar

■ I can choose the working hours I want. The price is fixed; all of us have the same tariff.

Colombian, in a café-restaurant

■ I work every day, from Monday to Sunday, from 8 in the evening to 5 in the morning. Twice a year I take two weeks holiday.

Ukrainian, in a night club

■ I work 6 days a week, 10 hours a day. On Sundays I rest. I can choose my work schedules. I also decide my own prices. For example: for 15 minutes, €50, for 30 minutes between €70 and €100, and so on...

Venezuelan, in a studio

“What could be done to improve working conditions in Austria?! Abolish the notion of sex work as a violation of morality, abandon administrative penalties, create safe permitted street zones and self-managed venues, permit sex work in private apartments, abolish the penalisation of sex workers’ clients, promote the socio-political destigmatisation of sex work, introduce residence and work permits for migrant sex workers, recognise sex work as a trade, create a trade union to represent them, offer equal rights to end structural dependencies, and make a clear differentiation between sex work and human trafficking.”

Birgit Hebein, spokeswoman
of the Green Party, Vienna

■ There are three people working in this studio and we decide our own working hours. I also decide the type of services I offer. I offer vaginal and anal sex. I always use protection, because I’m still young and I want to have a family in the future, so I don’t want to catch any diseases. For vaginal sex I charge €80 for half an hour and €150 for one hour. For anal sex I charge €100 for half an hour and €200 for a whole hour. Each of us decides her own prices. Sometimes there are men who ask for lower prices, and you can agree or not. Everything I earn belongs to me. I don’t drink alcohol during working hours, but sometimes we go out for a beer outside of working hours. We never use drugs.

Hungarian, in a studio

■ I decide my working hours. Sometimes I work from 10 in the morning to 9 in the evening, and sometimes only from 1 in the afternoon to 10 in the evening; always from Monday to Saturday. If I don’t feel like working, I just take a day off. If business is going badly, I change my workplace for a while. I reserve my room in the *Laufhaus* in Vienna and pay for it, or I ask a friend of mine to step in for me, and I go for two weeks to a *Laufhaus* in Graz, where everybody knows me already and where I feel at home. Twice a year I go on holiday to visit my family and partner in Cuba. I also decide on the services I offer: I offer anal and oral sex, always with protection. We decide on the prices we charge and we never take less than €120 an hour. I ask for €200 an hour, €100 for half an hour, and between €70 and €80 for less than half an hour, but this is rare... My earnings belong to me. I have to pay €250 a week rent. There is no obligation to drink alcohol, and drugs are not allowed.

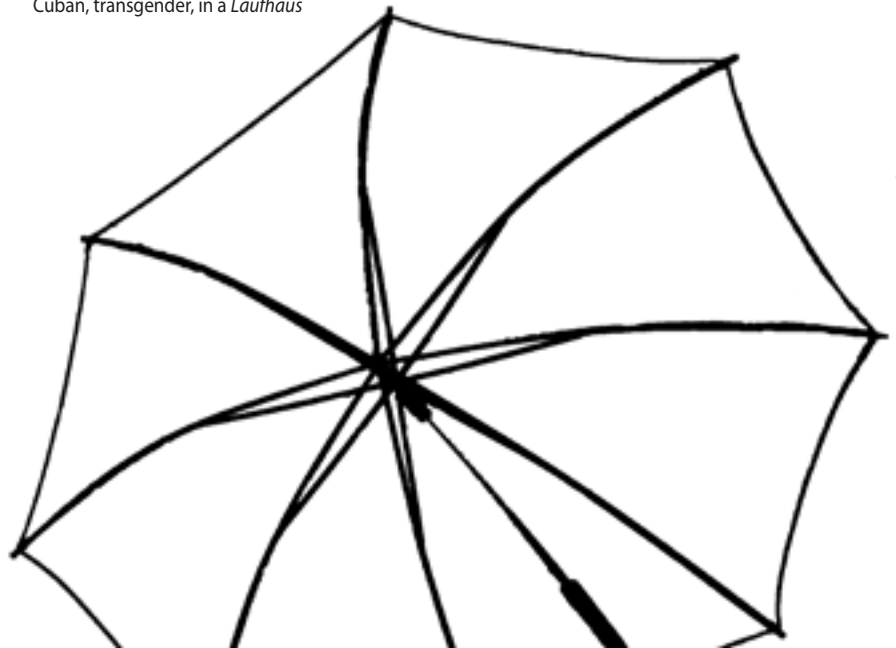
Cuban, transgender, in a *Laufhaus*

■ The studio is small. It consists of two rooms, a small kitchen and a front hall where clients can wait. We are in charge of keeping our rooms clean.

Hungarian, in a studio

■ We have a fitness studio, a pool, a sauna and a kitchen. Three men are in charge of cleaning the common areas. I have my own ensuite bathroom. Every tenant is in charge of cleaning their own room and changing the sheets.

Cuban, transgender, in a *Laufhaus*



SCENES



AMSTERDAM

Experiences of a fieldworker

"Once I was talking to a girl who had obviously been hit by someone. She was crying, but did not want to admit that her 'boyfriend' was forcing her into prostitution, because she said that he would harm her child. This was very difficult for me to handle, because she didn't want any help. On the other hand, on one occasion I was able to give support and a girl finally got rid of her pimp, and was happy to be able to work independently."



HAMBURG

Estonian sex worker with a nurse

"Condoms always burst with me... Why?"

"Here, take this dildo and show me how you do it."

She takes the condom out of the box, opens it with her teeth, rolls it out like a cap and puts it on the dildo. We showed her the right way to use a condom and told her what to do if she has another condom burst.

Colombian sex worker with a cultural mediator

"My boyfriend gives dance lessons. He teaches salsa, cha-cha-cha, merengue..."

"And does he know about your work?"

"NO!!!!!! Nobody knows. He thinks I work in an Italian restaurant. I would like to earn a lot of money and stop this work."

"How did you get here?"

"A friend helped me. She taught me everything about this work. How much to ask for, how to speak to the clients..."

"Also how to take care of yourself?"

"Yes, that too. Always with condoms! But it is hard work and I can only speak to my friend about it. I need money... that is the problem."

Polish sex worker with a cultural mediator

"I have been in Germany for some years now; before, I worked as a cleaning lady. I didn't want to do this work because I found it dirty."

"Why did you decide to work as a sex worker?"

"I needed money. I have to pay for many things and must send money home."

"And have you earned enough money with this work?"

"No, not really, because there are things I do not do, for instance oral and anal sex without condoms."

An apartment with three Polish women

"We don't know any organisations here in Hamburg. I will write down the opening hours of the one you're talking about."

The consultation is done in Polish? This is unbelievable! What is the adviser called? Agnieszka!

A typical Polish name... But what is she like about sex work?

I don't want to deal with an arrogant or discriminating person. I have enough experience with that...

Sex workers are treated very badly in Poland, at such counselling centres. Are you sure she is not like that?!"



A male Dominican manager with outreach workers, in a brothel

"I am the manager. The boss is upstairs, in a meeting. I know your organisation; you have been here often and spoken to the women. You do a nice job. Please, leave some leaflets in Spanish and Portuguese. I will lay them on the table."
A German woman was leaving a room. He said to her, "If you work here you will often see these nice women who come to visit and bring lots of information." While we stood there, in the hall, three men came out of the back room. The boss welcomed us with a pat and said, "Hello! Just go on doing your work..."

"This is an amusing job!"

A Latvian to an outreach worker:
"I have been doing this for a couple of years now. Before, my husband earned enough money and I never had to work. But then he got ill; and we have a daughter, who is studying. Who would pay for her studies and his medicine?!... For me this job is like theatre. I am not myself, but someone else. Every two months I take a boat from Latvia to Germany. I buy myself a cheap ticket, with no cabin. During the trip I always find a nice man who invites me into his cabin. Many fall in love very fast, and give me expensive presents. [Laughs] Once, one put a green bow on his

penis, as a present for me. So sweet! And some come to me only to talk. They don't want sex. They just want someone nice to be near them..."

A lawyer describes a case

"A client who is a sex worker is massively exploited emotionally and financially; her lover/pimp uses violence to intimidate her and get by. One day, a 'loving' client notifies the police, she is released from the apartment, and moves to the client's house. The client declares himself her 'life companion' from now on and controls her contact with authorities, the police, etc. During the process she is very reluctant to give a statement, but finally she agrees. The lover/pimp confesses afterwards and is sentenced. The police and the Witness Protection Programme try to prevent every possible contact between them because it would be dangerous for her. Later, however, quite depressed, she admits to me that she still loves the lover/pimp, that it is awful that he has to leave the country and that they will not see each other any more. Although he will get married, and despite everything he did, he is the love of her life..."

A social worker on a very positive development

"Some time ago, a transgender Romanian woman came for counselling. She always came with very loud earphones and was always very demanding, like 'I want everything now, immediately'. She was homeless and came to Germany due to false promises. At the beginning, she came almost every week, even if only to get condoms. But slowly things started changing... She had her facial hair removed by laser,



she took a German course, and meanwhile has become very well established in the sex work business. She cannot think of another occupation for herself... Last week she showed us, very proudly, her new breasts. She rented an apartment for herself and has very exclusive clients. It's nice to see how she found her own way and was able to realise her dreams. I was not sure at the beginning if she would manage all that..."

A massage parlour with five Thai women

A cultural mediator recalls:

"I spoke with one of them, whom I had known for a long time, but I had the feeling that she didn't want to talk about sex work, although I am sure that she doesn't only offer massage... Because I didn't want to embarrass her, I did not distribute condoms or leaflets. We then talked about other subjects, like German courses, visas and general health questions."

Please, help me! I have to do something for this girl, she is ill. She has uterine pain, it hurts when she works. Please, find a doctor for her. But she does not have health insurance...

Thai mamasang (female manager),
Hamburg

Images seen from the perspective of outreach workers

■ The door was opened by a German woman. She rejected us immediately.
"You are at the wrong address. We all work here voluntarily. We don't need all that..."

■ A big house with many flats; two women work in each flat. Altogether we contacted eight women of different nationalities, including one transgender German woman. A Polish woman who seems to be the manager works and lives in the first flat. We saw that she had six screens on a table, from which she could observe the entire staircase.

■ A luxurious flat, nicely furnished, with four women: a Slovak, a Lithuanian, a Russian and a Pole.

■ This house had many clients, who were up and down the stairs, so that we could not have long conversations with the sex workers. Most of the clients were young men...

■ Only German sex workers work in this house. Just the day before, they organised a Christmas party for their clients...

■ A brothel with six women, from Germany, Bulgaria, Turkey and Romania. We had a long conversation on health issues and working conditions. The sitting room was enormous. On the table in front of the sofa were lots of sweets. The women were eating ice cream. One of the mobile phones rang and one of them said, "A home visit costs €150 for one hour." Suddenly the brothel owner and his wife, both Romanians, came in with a new vacuum cleaner, which made all of them very happy!

■ A very old house on a main street. A separate entrance in the basement leads to the flat of a very nice Lithuanian woman who works alone at the moment, but has capacity for another two women. A client was with her when we arrived. We waited for her in a small side room...

■ The house has several flats. On one of the floors are two flats with women from Poland, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. Downstairs is a flat with two transgender women from Latin America.

■ A flat with three older women: two Germans and one Pole. They have already been working together for seven years, mainly with regular clients.

"The crisis should not be overlooked; our expenses, however, remain the same... We are therefore planning to go on working for two more years and then retire..."



■ At this address the door is always opened by a manager. She is very nice but never lets us speak to the sex workers. She took leaflets in Polish and Russian, condoms and lubricants.

■ The conversation with the Latin American sex workers took place at the bar of the establishment. The boss stood behind us. Although he seemed nice, the women were somehow frightened by his presence. With one of them we were able, however, to speak later in private, in Spanish.



At the drop-in centre, on a cold winter evening

A sex worker meets with two outreach workers. The woman, about 40, comes in with a plastic bag in her hand and is pleased to see the staff.

"Hello! I have something for you." She digs in the bag, takes out chocolate and a bottle of sparkling wine, and hands them to the workers. Surprised, but delighted, they all sit down for a chat. She says: "I know, you don't want any presents or anything, but I want to thank you this way for your existence."



I hear all kinds of shit from the clients and other people. People treat me like shit. But you don't, you are kind and treat me like a normal human being. This is a place where I can be myself in peace. Thank you."

Conversation with a Russian sex worker

"Why did you choose to do sex work?"

"I started doing sex work for economic reasons. As a 45-year-old woman it is hard to find a job that is well-paid. 15,000 roubles [about €420] is not enough to live on, but even so you have to work every day, from morning to evening. In this job, sex work, I know I have to do an unpleasant job for a certain period of time, one month for example, but at least afterwards I can do whatever I like, buy things or have the beauty treatments that I always dreamed of. Once you've started this job you will never go back to normal work. You become spoiled..."

"What do you mean by 'spoiled'?"

"To be spoiled by people who love you means that you get used to things being too good. Whereas, when you are spoiling yourself or your soul, it feels as if you are

ruining yourself, but you don't have an alternative."

"How did you end up in this situation?"

"I took a housing loan from a bank in Moscow. I bought an apartment that was under construction.

The problem was that the estate agent sold the same apartment to different people. After conning people like this, the agent went underground and people never got their money back. Then came the financial crisis in Russia, the construction firm went bankrupt and we were asked to pay even more money in order to build the house. It was a lot of money. I couldn't pay it but I had to, otherwise I would lose the whole apartment."

"What are you planning to do when you have paid off the rest of the housing loan?"

"I'm planning to rent out this apartment and continue to live in the same one-bedroom apartment that I am living in at the moment."

During outreach...

"Cheers for the condoms, and thanks! But I can manage, I've got used to doing this." This was said by a tiny African sex worker, about 50 years old, to a bemused outreach worker offering condoms and assistance. She had a broad smile on her face, whilst practically carrying a fragile old gentleman up the stairs from a night club to a waiting taxi.



Dress codes

After answering a phone call from a client: "Another 'undressed' client on the phone..."

('Preservative' in Portuguese is 'little shirt' (*camisinha*), so unprotected sex is called 'undressed' or 'without shirt' (*descamisado*).



Outreach 1

"Why do you use condoms?"

"What a question?! To protect myself, I want to be healthy!"

Outreach 2

The outreach team visited a club with the mobile medical unit (MMU). They entered and informed the sex workers about the services offered by the MMU. One of them, however, declared that she didn't need such tests.

"I go regularly to the health centre and do my tests there."

It emerged, however, that she hadn't been at the health centre for more than a year, and that during this time she had been abroad, which meant that she had not been tested since returning.

The club manager responded:

"You went to Greece, nobody knows if you brought anything back with you, and you haven't had tests?!"

The girl tried to excuse herself, but the manager insisted that she go to the MMU and get tested.

Fun on outreach

A night club with a strip show.

The atmosphere is relaxed.

The girls are preparing the schedule for dancing:

"Mariana will dance first, Diana is second, then Mr. Sasho [the male outreach worker], after him Miss Maria [the female outreach worker], and the last one is Gary..."

A job offer

A club. A girl is talking to two female outreach workers about their jobs:

"I have two occupations: during the day I work as a lab assistant, at night I am an outreach worker."

"And I work in the office of HESED and also do outreach work, but I am looking for an additional job."

"Oh, great! We have a place for you here in our club!"

Tools of the trade

In a club, at a ski resort near Sofia, outreach workers were distributing and promoting soft tampons for single sterile use. The owner of the place said:

"Oh, no. Please do not leave these things here. The girls do not want to use them."

"Why not? What do they use when they work during their period?"

"I make little foam sponges for them. They only use these. I will show you..."

He went behind the bar and looked for something for a while. Then he took out a big, dirty piece of foam and cut it into little pieces, with scissors. Afterwards, the girls explained that they use these chopped pieces for the whole day, then wash and reuse them. It took the outreach team several visits to explain why the soft tampons are good and should not be washed or reused.

Outreach encounter

In front of a club, the female outreach worker asks a manager for his name. He looks surprised and responds seductively:

"Why do you ask my name? Do you like me?"



STORIES

AMSTERDAM



MARIA

Dominican, 45

Statement given to the TAMPEP International Foundation in 2008

I am forty-five years old and have been working since I was ten. I have never experienced anything other than poverty and the struggle to earn enough for a meal a day. I grew up in a village. My parents were farmers and everybody had to work hard in order to earn enough for our food. My father did seasonal work on the big coffee plantations. And all of us worked on a small piece of land that surrounded our house.

When I was thirteen I went to Santo Domingo and found work as a maid with a rich family. The father of my first child, whom I had when I was sixteen, was my employer. He threatened to fire me if I told his wife. But what could I do with a baby on the way? I was fired anyway, with some money, which was soon used up.

Then I went to live with the father of my other four children. We lived in one of the city's slums and my husband worked in a coffee-bean factory. I was a washerwoman and what we both earned together was just enough for food. But he left me and I stayed alone with the children.

At that time I was working as a maid for a rich family. One time, a Dutch guest came to visit the family. He was nice to me and gave me presents for the children. After a while he asked me if I would go with him to the Netherlands to work as a maid there.

He would arrange everything and I would pay back the expenses he incurred with my first wage. I agreed because I thought I would be able to earn enough in a few years to assure a better future for myself and my children. Then, he said I had to marry a man from the Dutch Antilles in order to be able to get into the Netherlands.

It was with great difficulty that I parted from my children, who I had to leave behind with friends and family, promising them that I would send money and come back to visit them very soon.

I never met my Antillean 'husband'. Everything was arranged by the Dutchman. I thought it was strange that he made such an effort for me, and spent so much money because of me. However, he said he did it because there were so few good maids in Europe and also because he wanted to help me and my children. I had no other choice. I was twenty-eight years old, my children were getting older and I wanted them to be able to study.

Arrival in the Netherlands

When I arrived I was taken to a friend of this man. He told me I had to stay with him for a few days and then he would bring me to the Dutchman's house. I had believed everything, until the day the second man said that my life of luxury was a thing of the past; that from now on I had to work hard to pay back all the money they had invested in me.

Instead of taking me to the house of the man who brought me to the Netherlands, he took me to a house outside the city. There, I met another Dominican woman who explained to me what kind of work it was and that it would be wise of me not to “make a scene”, or I would be beaten up. There was no point, she said, since I couldn’t run away.

The first 5 years

With my first clients I only cried. The woman told them I was new to the business...

I was taken to this window in the afternoon and picked up at night. I lived in a house with ten other Latin American women. We weren’t allowed to go outside and didn’t dare to anyway, because we didn’t know the city, and the man told us that the police would arrest us.

Twice a day he passed by the windows and took all the money from us. I managed to hide some of it sometimes, but our handbags and clothing were often searched for money. After one year of living like this, with the help of another Dominican woman, I managed to run away, and moved to another city.

I began to work as a prostitute there too, since I really needed the money. I hadn’t been able to send money to the children for a whole year, and I was really worried about whether they were still being well looked after. And everyone back home thought I had good work and that I would become a rich woman!

After three years of hard work I’d saved a bit of money. In those first three years I would not have been able to manage without the help and support of my compatriots. We do everything together, and even when we argue, we still care for each other. I wouldn’t be able to do anything without them...

But I missed my children very much and I was worried about them, so I decided to have them come over. Life together is better than life apart!

In the meantime I’d had another baby and the children had to stay alone in the house all day. I had to work even harder then, and I was away from early morning until late at night. The children couldn’t go to school because they had no residency permit and I was too scared to get information about this, scared that we would be found by the man I had run away from, scared of the police, scared that we would have to leave. And how could I go back home with no money?!

I had a big babysitting problem. The children were looked after by friends, but that couldn’t go on forever because everyone had the same problem.

And the children had to have an education! So finally, I got a cousin of mine who was a teacher, but unemployed at the time, to come over, look after the children and give them lessons. We’ve organised a sort of school, for other children as well. Everyone paid something for it.

But sometimes I didn’t earn enough to pay for everything, the living expenses for me and my family, and the wages of my cousin. When we really couldn’t manage any more, or if she wanted some extra money, my cousin also worked in the windows. But she didn’t like doing it all the time, and only worked for a certain price.

Life wasn’t easy for me. Everyone took advantage of us; I didn’t speak the language so I couldn’t do anything to defend myself. The only source of strength in those moments was and still is the solidarity between us.

Sometimes I got ill, as a result of all the worry and the problems I had. When I was ill, it was a catastrophe, because there was no money coming in for the six of us, and on top of that I had to pay for a doctor!



In the first difficult years, whenever anyone asked me if I thought about the future, I said no. My future was just a black hole, and I couldn't allow myself to think about this sort of thing, otherwise I would become ill with sorrow.

But at least we were all together and we were able to survive and save some money. Our goal was to never have to be dependent on anybody.

My idea was to open a shop back home, where my children could also work. But I needed more time to save more money. The life here, with the children, was very expensive. It was clear to me that my dream of financial independence in my country needed more time and work here in the Netherlands.

The next 13 years

Then, little by little, things started changing for the better. I finally got Dutch nationality; the children could go to school; we had more rights and were not so afraid of everything. The hard work for me remained though. Before the legalisation of prostitution, in 2000, there were many police raids on colleagues without residence documents. The Dominicans who were able to work, because they had a residence permit, had to support many others who couldn't work any more.

Meanwhile, my cousin also found a way to stay in the Netherlands. She helped me all the time with the children, who now have school diplomas and jobs.

We are not rich, but we have a reasonable life, a life that we could not have had in my country, if I had gone on working as a maid.

I am still working in the window, even if the children ask me all the time when I will stop. I always answer that this is the last year... but then there is not enough money, or another problem, and I go on...

Since they legalised prostitution, I feel more calm, because for me it has become a job, but at the same time, we face new and complicated things that I did not understand and do not know how to handle. The government has closed many windows, and only a few Latinas still work in the street windows.

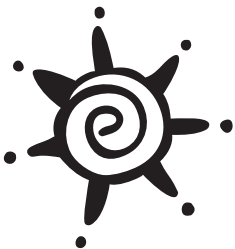
Before legalisation it was a 'jungle', but after it, it became a mass of rules, and you never know what they will invent to control us even more. But now I am smarter and independent. I make my own decisions and know who can help me if I need it.

Nowadays I work mostly with regular clients. I rent my window per week, because I feel like being in my own place.

I prefer to continue making money through prostitution than seek other jobs. I will not be a servant any more. I am fine as a *puta* ['whore']. I am my own boss and for me it is my job, even if some people have problems with it and judge us badly. In Holland I am a *puta* but in my country I am a *señora* ('lady'). My children love me because they know the sacrifices I made and make for our family. And I don't care what other people think about me, I know who I am.

If I look back at my life I am proud of myself and of what I achieved with my own strength. Maybe, some day, I will return home, but without a certain amount of money I don't have a future in my country. And to be frank, it all depends on what my children will do. I will always live where my children are!

We just managed to finish building and furnishing our house back home, so that we can always go back when we want, to live and rest there...



AMSTERDAM



ANNA

Dutch, 45

Statement given to the TAMPEP International Foundation in 2011

I have eighteen years' experience in the sex industry, partly working for myself, partly for others. During all those years I have seen the industry from many different sides.

Myself, I have always worked voluntarily and have always enjoyed doing my work. At the same time, I haven't closed my eyes to the women who ended up in less favourable circumstances. Nowadays, as a fieldworker, I travel the whole country and talk to lots of sex workers.

Nobody, really nobody at all, whether working voluntarily or less so, sees anything positive in the Registration Law that the government wants to impose on sex workers in the Netherlands.

The law disadvantages women who work voluntarily. They will not register themselves and will choose to continue working through the internet or through appointments in hotels. It will therefore be harder for outreach organisations and the public health agencies to trace them. How will registration influence sex workers' lives in the future, if they change career and their registration suddenly emerges?

The law is equally disadvantageous for women who do not work voluntarily. It is easy to send a woman to the municipality and instruct her about what to say or not to say, and let her get a registration number.

How is this system supposed to counter coercion and exploitation?

All the sex workers I talk to are worried about the stigmatising and discriminating effects that registration creates. Besides this, they are very concerned about a central IT system of registration for personal data. How safe is the registration system?

How do they imagine a client having to call a number in order to check whether a woman is registered or not? How does the client know whether the registration number and the woman belong together? Do they want to approve a system that isn't going to work in practice at all?

Everything that has been built up pragmatically over the past decades – the good contacts with social workers, the police and the health sector – will now be swept away because of this new moral order.

It really hurts me that such a change is taking place in prostitution in the Netherlands. Not everything is good, but not everything is bad in sex work!



GENOA



SABRINA

Italian, 30

Interview given to CDCP in 2011

I am a university graduate who comes from a good family from the south of Italy. Even though my parents tried to give me and my brothers a good education and to have us lack nothing, I was always aware of their economic hardships. Often I felt guilty about their sacrifices for me. So over the years, I developed a strong desire to provide for myself alone so that I would not weigh down my family any more, along with the hope that I might even succeed in helping them. I moved to Venice some years ago in order to finish my studies and to find a job.

After graduating, I moved to Genoa, full of dreams, with the hope of finding more stable economic conditions that would allow me to pursue what I had studied; however, the money I earned was not enough to survive. My work contracts were always temporary and this precariousness in a city where I was all-alone was not easy to bear, but turning back would have been a personal defeat. I did not want to and could not ask my parents for money, because they had little, so I had to make a choice and I did it!

I do not believe that I started prostituting myself only because of the lack of money, even though this was an optimal excuse. In reality, I have always been fascinated by sex, which for me is also a way to get to know a person, often allowing me to discover his dark sides.

I read an article on webcam girls and, given my unstable economic situation, I thought that it would be a good idea to undress on webcam for money and, because I would not have to personally meet the clients, I would risk little and maintain my anonymity. So I started to get to know clients via chat and taking payments through PayPal.

Through a chat I met a man of about fifty years old who offered me €2,000 to go to bed with him, which for me would have been the 'first time'. I did not like him, so I refused his offer, but the idea that a man would pay me so much just to go to bed with him gave me an incredible thrill and a sensation of power which really excited me. Asking for money in exchange for sex did not humiliate me at all.

The initiation

Then I met L., an ex-gigolo from Romagna, who, as they say, initiated me in the profession. He encouraged me by saying that I would earn more by working as an escort.

And the idea of actually meeting clients fascinated me because I felt that I wanted to live out this experience and to enjoy the elation of transgression and, at the same time, to overcome the economic hardships that I had.

My very first client was a man twenty years older than me. I got to know him through frequent encounters on chat. He was a very cultured and kind man, but somewhat depressed. I remember our first encounter as though it were yesterday. He waited for me in a hotel outside the city. I was very tense and I had cramps in my stomach and my heart was in my throat, but I was ready!

I was there and I had to play my role; I had to be self-assured and sexy.

So I went to him with a splendid smile. Oh, what a marvellous night of intense emotions, and during that night I did my very best to assure that these rich emotions did not lose their glow!

I felt that those banknotes, immediately given to me as agreed, would inevitably change something inside of me because I had inexorably crossed over the threshold that lies between fantasising and reacting.

From that day on I had various encounters with clients whom I selected through a chat line or, at times, via a web advertisement, but only occasionally, no more than three or four encounters a month, nearly always with the same people. However, at times, it was not easy to maintain the proper distance from these clients, and because of this, I preferred married men who wanted only to enjoy a sane transgression.

Views of sex work and sex workers

Today I have a steady job and I have neither time nor desire to run risks. Over time I have become well aware of the risks, which are many, so I decided to stop and to be content with a steady job, with a low but assured salary.





The major risks for me were invasion of privacy and the possibility that my loved ones would find out. I feared the vendetta of someone to whom I had said no or of someone who, in general, hates women and therefore could do me harm. Not enjoying the same level of respect as a man or a so-called respectable woman in our society, a prostitute is easily blackmailed. Fortunately, things went well for me, but bad-intentioned men are encountered more often than anyone can imagine, and, if such men know that a woman exercises prostitution, this often brings out all their repressed anger against women.

Often respected within their communities, these men are either married or divorced or are fathers who are the heads of households. At first, they are gallant and kind, and then, wanting to enter into your private life, they begin to ask for more and more and, when you try to distance them, they are offended, since you, a lower being, a woman and a prostitute, have dared to refuse them. They are convinced that you have been nice to them only for their money and not for their brilliant sexual performances. So compliments turn into insults, if not threats of blackmail.

Hypocritical society

In the face of real or imminent danger, I would not hesitate to call the police, but I would prefer to avoid having to explain what I do to law enforcement officials. I strongly believe that our society is very hypocritical and preponderantly male-oriented. I say hypocritical because our society views prostitution as either victimisation, thinking that it concerns only exploited women, or as the deviant choice of mentally unbalanced people. I say male-oriented because in this society the female is mostly viewed as a sexually passive subject.

Despite the negativity involved with sex work, this view of female passivity excludes the idea that a woman may decide to become a sex worker through her own rational and responsible choice of work and personal happiness.

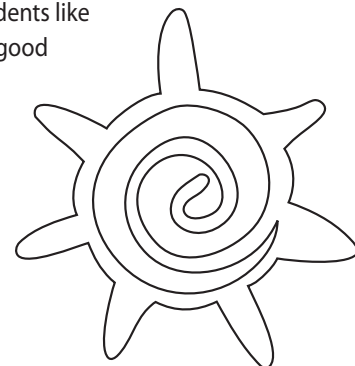
For me, prostitution is an expression of human sexuality, and those who practise it ought to be respected and treated just like any other citizen, something that I wish my loved ones could understand, but they are not ready to accept it.

Notwithstanding this, I have no regrets at all concerning my experience and for certain I am without shame, but I do not feel ready to make those who love me suffer, knowing that they would not understand my point of view.

An important experience

For me my past has been a very meaningful experience that has helped me in my personal growth. Throughout the years I have known people that I would never have met if I had not done this work, like managers and businessmen, and also other sex workers. As an escort, I accompanied them to dinners or to dance at private parties and, after sex, they usually wanted to chat. I was very fascinated with their stories because they allowed me to know points of view very different from my own.

The colleagues that I have known were girls who were usually very intelligent, sometimes with children to look after; others were students like me, far from home. I established very good friendships with some of them.



Reconciling my *real life* with my *second life* was not always easy. I loved my routine: study, work, and seeing my friends, which exalted the sensation of transforming myself, as in a theatrical work, into another person. Perhaps what fascinated me more than the act of prostitution was being at the cross-roads between being oneself and being a personage that you knowingly decided to embody, a sort of double personality.

I will never forget the emotion one feels while preparing for an encounter: you beautify yourself, you put on sexy underwear, and express the highest degree of your femininity by altering your walk, your body movements, your gaze, your tone of voice, all of which makes you feel more sensual, which is just like donning a mask that for a few hours transforms you into another you. Who knows, perhaps another you that is more authentic than the everyday you.

MADRID



PAULA VIP

Spanish, 35

Interview given to Hetaira in 2011

There is no doubt that young prostitutes in the current professional sex industry scene know how to tread firmly and break through boundaries quicker and bolder than before. Within a short time, I could see the maturity, courage and will of these girls, all under thirty, raising the banner of freedom.

But there's no doubt that damned stigma still has the power to make things go backwards when the situation gets tough and ugly.

Let's say a client becomes aggressive, and cockily thinks the whore will shut up because she has too much to lose.

Or we imagine a furious boyfriend, who wasn't clued in to your true profession. After finding out, he 'rearranges' your face, even threatens to expose you... yes, that's the way some guys are. This guy also believes his actions will remain unpunished because of the girl's fears. Besides, it's 'his' girl...

A third case could be the pimp who loses it with his 'protégée' because she didn't make him enough money, or maybe because after a few too many drinks he sees 'his' girl's ass as bigger than usual. This guy's actions come more from wickedness than from being a pimp. He's convinced he has all power and control. His bitch won't denounce him. He can do whatever he wants to her.

There are as many cases as there are people and I think these three examples demonstrate that things change, and they change fast.

So does this new generation of free and liberated whores, with the help of veterans, and through the path opened by organisations and NGOs, of course. But they tread firmly, they move along with strength, serenity and steadiness.

Because of my work, I can speak about those named by the media as 'high class prostitutes'. And yes, there are those who are educated and cultured, as well as many women who make many spelling mistakes and lack the most basic education. What really unites us is the loneliness of this job, the need to communicate, know each other, touch each other, kiss and hug, give and receive advice, love each other, go out together... the need for fellowship.

United, we whores are stronger. United, we can do and say many things that only a few years ago were unthinkable. Social networks, internet forums, are not the future but the present for professionals in any sector willing to gain visibility.

Not only to attract more clients – the internet is certainly the perfect tool for that – but basically to keep in touch with colleagues, to get more and better information on where to get free medical tests, or which police station has better-trained staff to attend you. Also to share websites with the best lingerie at a good price, to get offers to renew your photographs, or laser hair removal. The great advantage offered by this means is unity. And of course, strength...

Our youngest prostitutes do it this way, alleviating the loneliness this job brings, helping other companions who will often become friends; reinforcing at the same time their unity as a group, giving them more strength and the will to fight for what they know belongs to them: the same rights as any other working woman in their country.

They are fighters, they are young, and they are conscious of their knowledge, they feel secure and protected. NGOs have done a great job in this sense and now the trend is for this newly opened path to be filled with lots of feet walking together towards a common objective: the normalisation and acceptance of sex work.

MARSEILLE 

CAROLINE

French, 53

Interview given to Autres Regards in 2009

Caroline told us that she started sex work at around the age of 19. She was studying in a stewardess school and began to work on the street, to pay for her studies.

"... but finally I quit the school and continued with sex work."

She also worked in Paris, in champagne bars, with a friend from Marseille. She tells us about the bars of Pigalle.

"There was a kind of rota, so that all the girls would work, unless the client wanted someone in particular. Some girls kissed the clients, but I didn't do it, even now I can't! There are clients who ask if I kiss. But no, it is impossible for me. In bars you had to get the client to drink more than half a bottle and pay for it. Poor clients... You know, it was only *blanc de blanc*, which is just white sparkling wine, and not real champagne. And at what price!"

She earned a lot of money, she felt safe in bars, and clients were not like nowadays: they had the means to pay. She also went to the Ivory Coast once for two months, to work in brothels in Abidjan.

"They paid for the plane ticket. It was nice there. I went with a friend because we had heard of girls who came back with lots of money!"

She explained that she returned to sex work six years ago, after a break of more than 20 years. During this time she had been married and worked in a restaurant with her husband. After the divorce, eight years ago, he did not leave anything to her. But as she did not want to lose her standard of living, she resumed sex work.

"I could have done anything else, couldn't I?! But I'm too old to be a stewardess, and this is an alternative. I didn't want to live on less than I had before, with my husband..."

Working in apartments

Initially, she worked with a friend, because she was nervous about starting alone.

"We worked together, for a while, in her apartment."

Then she worked with another one, in her own apartment, because there were two rooms.





"But it did not work because she was too loud and once a client left angry and made a lot of noise. My neighbour is aware of my work but I have to be careful because if I lose the apartment, I cannot work any more!"

She said she also chose to work in an apartment because she has two sons, 20 and 24 years old, and she does not want to risk being seen by them on the streets. She knows some women who work on the streets, especially those near the Opera, because that's where she used to work before.

"It was not like it is today. There were many of us at that time, you should have seen it! But it was safe, even though it was the pimps' spot too. A friend and I, we worked at a bit of a distance, to be away from the pimps."

She also did not go back to the streets because it felt like "returning to the same old thing again".

"... and at my age, on the streets, I think it would be very sad. It is already hard to start working again... When I was 19, it didn't bother me, I was young, I was not asking myself about anything, but now it's different, I don't see it the same way any more."

Safety and violence

Caroline said she had never had any problems with clients. She spoke of aggression encountered by colleagues, and said that they exchange phone numbers of aggressive clients. Nevertheless, she spoke about some inconveniences, like clients trying to haggle over prices, sexual services, and the use of condoms. She complained a lot about their dirtiness. She told us about a client who, one day, was waiting for her in the corridor.

"He came without an appointment. He managed to get into the building with someone else. He was waiting for me in the corridor, behind the door leading to the stairs. But I am careful. Every time I leave my flat I turn on the light in the corridor and I always check the door to the stairs. He was waiting there to surprise me. I went back into my flat, took a knife, went down in the elevator and waited for him downstairs. I told him that I did not want to see him any more."

She has developed strategies to keep herself safe.

"I already select my clients on the phone. I do not see Arab or black men. It is not racism but these are my limits. I select them by their voices. If a client starts haggling, I don't take him. Then I tell him to stop on the corner, in front of my building, and call again. That way I can see him from the window. It also allows me to be careful in case it is a friend of one of my sons or someone else I know."

She said she prefers young men.

"... when they arrive, they are already so excited that it does not take much time for them to come! And as they are not so experienced, they are also not so demanding."

She always uses condoms, and has done for a long time.

"On the street, there were only two of us who used condoms, because at that time there was no AIDS. In bars, I was also the only one to use them, especially when different girls had to go, one after the other, with the same client. I started to use them because I got syphilis, before I started in sex work. I went to a health centre in Marseille, where a doctor explained everything to me and told me that condoms were a means of protection. Since then I use them all the time."

MARSEILLE



CHANTAL

French, 40

Interview given to Autres Regards in 2010

She is about forty and has worked as a sex worker for a long time. Prior to working in an apartment in Marseille, she worked in luxury saunas and flats in Germany, Belgium and England, always independently. She also worked on the streets in Paris, where she used the place of a friend.

She returned to France about six years ago, in order to take care of her ill mother. She was, however, wondering if she should not, from time to time, return to London, to work in a flat with a friend. In Marseille she advertises on Missive, a general website, and previously advertised in the daily newspaper La Provence. She had the impression that clients from each medium were different, because she received many more anonymous calls when advertising in the newspaper.

Chantal is concerned about the lack of clients. She was wondering if it had something to do with her personally, but she checked on a website where clients have a discussion blog and saw that she had received good ratings. This website also allows her to reply to comments.

Sexual practices and competition

According to Chantal, there is a lot of competition. Girls are much younger than her, and agree to do everything. "I do not kiss and I do not practise sodomy. Even when I was 20 I didn't do it, so I don't do it now either. Young women offer everything, and clients like it, but there are things I cannot do.

The price of the service is €80. Some clients want to flirt with me... that is all nonsense..."

She selects clients on the phone, gives them an address close to her workplace and then asks them to call. She asks them to come forward so that she can see them from her window. If she doesn't have a good feeling, she refuses. She is careful who she receives in her flat because of the neighbours.

"I must be careful, otherwise they might suspect, mainly if they see people who are a little weird. That is why I only take two clients a day..."

She has her dog with her at home. It stays under the bed. Clients do not see it but it is there, and it makes her feel more confident. She receives clients only from 1pm to 6pm. In the morning she goes for a walk and then waits for her clients' calls.

"I have nothing to do anyway, so I stay at home! If they call after 6pm, I negotiate..."

Isolation

Chantal has a cousin who is transgender and also works in prostitution. She is the only person she can talk to, because neither her family nor her friends are aware of her work.

"I don't want to go to your centre because I know people living in the same street. I don't want to be seen... That's why I was so glad when you said you would come to my place. I don't know any other indoor sex workers and so I am not used to talking about my work."

Prevention

She arranges HIV tests through her doctor, but not STI tests. We spoke about unprotected oral sex.

"Before, I always did everything with condoms, but hey, there are so many clients asking for it without! Because I don't work much, I can't always refuse, so I started to give oral sex without condoms, whenever a client asks for it."

We informed her about the risks of HIV and STI transmission. She says she doesn't swallow.

"I don't want to do this work for much longer. I am taking a graphic design course on the internet and would like to work in that field after finishing the training..."

MARSEILLE



OLGA

Russian, 28

Interview given to Autres Regards in 2011

Olga came to meet us at the association; she found the address on the website of STRASS, the French sex work union. She is 28 years old, Russian, and has lived in Spain, in Alicante, for the last five years.

She is working in Marseille at the moment, in a hotel. She is often 'on tour'; she travels regularly to France and to other European countries. Olga is independent and works alone, because working with another person is complicated and she doesn't like it.

Violation of rights

While travelling in Norway and Sweden she had some unpleasant problems.

"My rights were violated, I was humiliated and I want to lodge a complaint."

She wanted to work in Sweden but was arrested at the airport, under the pretext that she was not European. She had to submit to a urine test for drugs but nothing was detected.

"I felt really bad..."

Yet they did not allow her to stay in Sweden. The police put her in a detention centre for foreigners and she had to return to Spain.

"I had all my papers! I have a residence permit in Spain, I booked my hotel in Sweden, and I had enough money on me. I have the right to travel! I was there legally. But they sent me back to Spain and I think that's illegal. It's because I'm a sex worker... Though I know that in Sweden sex work is not prohibited, it is prohibited to buy sex; clients are penalised. That's why I don't understand it. Probably because I'm Russian they suspected me of having drugs... But I had a lot of condoms on me, that's why they knew I was a sex worker..."

Bad time in Norway

She had another bad experience, this time in Norway.

"I was thrown out of the hotel after three days, although I had paid for eight days. But they didn't give me my money back. I do not know if they have the right to do this. Does it happen like that in France too? I was with a client, it was about 10pm and the police entered the hotel room; I was naked, the client half-undressed, and three police officers burst into the room, without knocking at the door. I don't think that it's legal, that they have the right to do that.

I would like to challenge all that. They took a picture of my passport and I think they gave this picture to all the hotels, because suddenly I could no longer make a reservation. Is this legal? They must have put me on file as a sex worker. I didn't know where to go when they threw me out of the hotel at night. I was alone on the street with my bags. I think it is inhuman and that they are not allowed to do this."





Support and networking

"No organisation could help me in either of those countries. The Swedish association that I contacted told me that all this was legal. I felt unprotected as a sex worker. I'm sure they were tapping my phone, too. It affected me a lot, and I am afraid to return to work there."

Olga would like to challenge all this and contacted us for support and assistance in her fight. She believes that the more associations involved in her complaint, the greater her chance of being heard. We advised her to contact the European network TAMPEP, the French union STRASS, and the Spanish Committee for Sex Workers Support, which she already knew. She also wanted to contact Swedish lawyers living in Spain. Finally, she asked about the legislation in France, about her rights, the possibilities for working in a hotel, and what the risks were.



PORTO MARCOS

Brazilian, male sex worker, 36
Statement given in 2011

I started when I was 17. My dad had just died and we were going through difficulties. I didn't want to spend five years studying to get a job in an office, like my family and friends did.

At that time I had a friend who was a sex worker in the centre of Rio de Janeiro. I was curious and I asked him to take me there. It was like a meat market: young men standing on the street, showing their private parts, clients in their cars, choosing who they wanted to fuck. It was very dangerous.

The police appeared out of nowhere, beat the boys and took their money, or other guys working there beat and robbed us. I used to get into the car without looking to see who was inside...

After working on the streets for a while I went to work for a person who had an apartment. I paid him half of what I earned. After a year and a half I rented my own apartment, near the Copacabana beach! That's when I started being an independent professional.

After working in an apartment, no one wants to go back to the street, although in apartments it can also be dangerous because you receive people you have never met before, but it is much more comfortable.

It is a process... The next step was that I wanted to buy my own apartment. That's when I started travelling around Europe to make money as a sex worker.

I paid about €6,000 to the people who brought me to Europe. There is a system for recruiting people for sex work. They first come to Europe and make contacts; then they go back to Brazil and tell people, "I will pay for your ticket, I'll get you a place to stay, and I will give you some help."

In Europe

Today, most people come to Europe alone. But back in 2001, I met some who had paid about €9,000! People who live here do not believe it, but Europe is a paradise for Brazilians. In six months I paid back the €6,000 and saved about €13,500!

That was my first trip. I made my debut in Switzerland. I never felt so cold. The food was horrible. I was hiding from the authorities and I hardly dared to go outside... So I went back to Brazil.

I thought I had the right to spend all that money. I spent six months travelling only by taxi, and going to the beach. I bought my mother new furniture. But when my bank account started getting lower, I knew it was time to return to Europe.

With the savings earned from this second stay I bought my apartment in Rio. And from then on I decided to stop focusing on just saving money, and start living my own life.

My third period in Europe lasted for four years. I gave myself the freedom to travel. I went to Portugal, Spain, Italy, France and England. I was in Spain for a couple of years. I found myself there. It's my favourite country. People talk loudly. The weather is great. When I saw the gay village of Madrid I was amazed. To me being there was like being at Disneyland. And once again, I was not lacking work. When I had no work, I just went back to Barcelona...

In Portugal

In 2004 I finally settled down in Portugal. I fell in love. I began to put down roots. When I noticed, I was already living here. But we know how this life is: money comes and goes. Sometimes I work for a season in other countries. If it is going well, I stay; if not, I leave. When I am in Porto I also work as a cultural mediator at Porto G, a project promoted by APDES.

In Portugal, most Brazilian sex workers do it that way. They came to work for a while to save money to buy an apartment or set up a business. Moreover, many send money home to help their families.

I have a boyfriend. At first he didn't deal well with my activity. He thought that prostitution was something for a waster. That's what people think: being a prostitute is being lazy, stupid, dirty. That is not true. I enjoy being a whore. I like the idea of not having a boss, a routine. I like to live my life this way. This is not a life of suffering as some people imagine.

People sometimes talk about sex workers as if they were poor people. I am doing this because I want to! I do not feel violated and I am not a victim. Thanks to the whoring, I saw many countries, I have improved my English, I have learned to speak Spanish and Italian.

I'm not saying it is easy being a whore. What I want to say is that I learned to overcome situations.

My family does not know what I do. To this day, they think I work in restaurants, cafés. It would be very hard for my mother and I don't want to do that to her. And she also doesn't ask me where I get the money I send her.

For me it is clear that my personal life is totally separated from my professional life. I never fell in love with a client. I never stopped charging for the service. I don't see a person there. I see €50.

In the past this profession has been more profitable. Business has decreased in the last four years. Today, a good day's work is when you have five clients. In the past I used to have 10 or 11 clients in one day! Today, I'm happy when I have three clients... With this crisis!

I am 36 years old. Sex work is a career like that of a top model. I'm not going to do this for much longer. I want to marry and become stable. I don't plan to make investments or return to Brazil. Actually, I don't know what I'm going to do later on. Sometimes I do shows as a transvestite. Maybe I am going to do that... I can do transvestite shows even when I'm old. A lot of older people do that...



VOICES

AMSTERDAM 

Mariska Majoor

To the Members of the Dutch Senate

November 2011

Concerns: **The Law for the Obligatory
Registration of Prostitutes**

Dear Madams and Sirs,

With pain in my heart I have, for years, been following the political and public debates on my old profession: prostitution. Pain in my heart because of the lack of understanding, and the constant and belittling urge to save prostitutes, thereby making them into victims.

I have worked as a prostitute myself for a couple of years and although I acknowledge that it is not an easy way to make a living, I did it out of free will and I have never felt the need to be saved. Most prostitutes prefer to take care of their own business.

We even had to laugh when social workers came to our door with stories about 'some kind of better life' that was supposedly meant for us. What is it about people who are so convinced of their own morality that, with every single person who thinks differently, something has to be wrong?

I understand very well that sex work will never end up on the career list, and most prostitutes will even agree with you if you say that it is not a 'normal profession'. Prostitution is just a complicated topic. It always has been and always will be. I comprehend the agitation and insecurity it evokes in people who don't know anything about it besides what they have read in the newspaper. This also goes for you. You have undoubtedly been overwhelmed with reports and numbers on coercion, exploitation and violence. Police, social workers, exiting projects, officials, parents of sex workers, etc; they all alert you to the drama that is taking place everywhere and you want to do something about that.

And you should do something about that. The question is what... and whether the current plans are the answer to that question. The extent to which dramas are taking place is not even that important. I could plead that the situation is not that bad concerning forced prostitution, but that isn't going to help. The human trafficking campaign has proven to be so strong that I'm not even going to try to make you believe that the majority of sex workers choose to do this work themselves, and that they don't need belittling social workers and officials who come to check whether they really work safely, and come to offer them 'fitting work' by means of a highly costly 'exit prostitution' project led by people many of whom don't even know what they are talking about.

What all prostitutes need are safe workplaces, the opportunity to stand up for their rights, the opportunity to work freely and independently and obtain information. Prostitutes who need help should of course have the opportunity to seek that help and

people who want to offer help should have the opportunity to find them. Whatever way you look at it, and whatever element you look at, two things are absolutely essential for prostitutes in order to obtain the above: the legal status of sex work and a feeling of safety and acceptance. Without legal acceptance, a prostitute is not traceable or approachable, and without a feeling of safety and acceptance she won't easily stand up for her own rights or dare to ask for help when in trouble.

Another very important point is privacy. Working voluntarily or not; happy hooker or not; sex workers all have to deal with the societal taboo that weighs on their work. And especially because of this, they don't want it to ever become known that they do this work or have done this work.

This is something you cannot underestimate. Once you have taken the first step to work as a prostitute, in whichever way, you stop caring about many things. Especially rules and permits. I can predict for you that the majority of prostitutes will refuse to register and will look for ways to get around it. The visible and legal workplaces that will thereby become available will be filled with (even more...) Eastern European prostitutes, which will make it look, at first sight, like a success of the registration law.

Precisely the group that you want to help so badly will later, provided with permits, be placed in the legal and visible working places by their untouchable pimps. With the feeling that they will never be able to get rid of them again.

I therefore urgently advise you to refrain from the registration law. That which you would like to achieve will have to happen by other means.

Discuss with the sex industry itself and with the people who are able to shine light on all different sides of this topic and you will be able to accomplish your goal without this happening at the expense of sex workers' rights.

Invest your (our) money and energy, for example, in setting up a group of well-informed people – who are able to position themselves neutrally with respect to prostitution – who will concern themselves full-time with the visiting of workplaces and maintaining contact with sex workers, brothel owners and clients.

Not like in Amsterdam where the supervisors of the licensed brothels work from the municipality; nor like in the multiple city projects run by social work: but neutral. Pull apart sex work and human trafficking. Try to set up policy separately. Cooperating is only necessary if forced labour is really the case, or to inform each other; not by definition. There is already a lot of knowledge in the field and there are a couple of organisations where people have already been working for years with this topic, who can't wait to both tackle abuse in this way, and at the same time improve the position of (voluntarily working) sex workers. In the end still an important result of the abolition of the brothel ban in 2000...

Instead of penalising the client of the illegal or forced prostitute, I advise you to use the information that clients can provide, to tackle abuse. A client who is afraid of being punished won't come forward with any knowledge or information he has about someone who is forced to work, or about, for example, bad workplaces. View a client as an important source of information; stay friendly with him and you'll know exactly what is going on in the sex industry.

Yours sincerely,

Mariska Majoor





Tom Kroon

2012

As a regular client of sex workers...

...I am deeply concerned about the victimisation of sex workers within the public debate, which considers the demand of clients to be the cause of forced prostitution.

It must be clarified to the general public that it is not in the interests of clients that sex workers do their job under forced circumstances, because if a sex worker does not like what she is doing, she will also not be able to satisfy the client.

The problem is that people often have an erroneous perception of clients of prostitutes. They think these men are in some sort of strange need, are dirty, or macho. People have no idea how much clients enjoy women who are able to give themselves during sex work. There is nothing more satisfying than that!

Unfortunately, clients of prostitutes are not strong enough to go against the anti-prostitution lobby. Sex workers' opponents are quite powerful; they stick together and have well thought out reactions. They continuously assure each other that they are right. They keep saying the same things over and over again, so that people believe that what they say must be true. Like for instance, that up to 90% of sex workers are forced into sex work under miserable circumstances, a statement which has no proven basis whatsoever.

This supposed 'majority of forced sex workers' gives the government the ideal excuse to introduce the drastic measures they are now applying against sex work, such as the compulsory registration of prostitutes and the punishment of clients.

It would be better if clients of prostitutes would not be seen as punters who only think about their own pleasures and are indifferent as to whether the women they visit do it on a voluntary or forced basis. But unfortunately, prejudice caused by ignorance impedes the possibility of maintaining a constructive discussion...





Stephanie Klee

Sex worker, activist
highLights-Agentur Berlin
www.highlights-berlin.de
2011

Cinderella's double life: a curse or an opportunity

In the context of prostitution, a sex worker's double life becomes almost a mandatory situation, an expected basic condition, or it is considered implicit. And many whores declare that they would not be able to do the job without this double life.

But maybe this coin also has two sides!

The playful handling of realities, the theatricality of the different roles, and the change from one side of the shore – over a 'fighting, strongly flowing' river – to the other side, has something adventurous, dangerous (in terms of a danger which one can consciously face up to and harness), something alive and mobile.

But also something to weigh up: the price of one against the price of the other.

It has, anyway, a connecting component. Whoever goes for this path in an easy, light-hearted and uncomplicated manner, or even with joy and desire, must, however, draw from special abilities. Because the demands of the two worlds must be fulfilled:

■ The world of prostitution requires a quick capacity for judgement, a large amount of human kindness, huge flexibility and a big organisational talent, combined with brilliant theatrical achievements, significant anatomical know-how, and empathy



Drawing by S. Klee

towards the male (and female) soul and sexuality. Moreover, team spirit and negotiation skills are absolutely necessary.

■ The so-called 'normal', often labelled as 'middle-class', world requires the care and maintenance of a certain social network. Values like security, continuity, order – embedded in reliability, loyalty, mutual existence and support – are very much expected within the family, with parents, partners and children, but also with friends and neighbours.

At the beginning, the switch between the two worlds gives, in most cases, a lot of pleasure. The prostitution world is connected with many adventures, and the permanent breaking of taboos excites. It is still not socially accepted for a woman to voluntarily have sex with many partners, and to do so for money, and not for love, or a lasting relationship.

The charm of the forbidden is a huge pull, provides a permanent sense of achievement, and increases self-esteem. The 'normal' world strengthens 'real' life, guarantees warmth and security. Here one is able to be, with all its heights and depths; one belongs to it and is loved.

Oh, how lighter and nicer life would be if we could do without the hide-and-seek play, and could introduce and openly communicate the values and professional competence from one world into the other!



Cristina Garaizabal

Psychologist

Co-founder of Colectivo Hetaira, Madrid

www.colectivohetaira.org

2011

Slut Stigma

Sex workers are scorned by society, and not just by well-meaning members, but also by so-called 'enlightened' people linked to certain feminist schools of thought. In terms of traditional ideology prostitutes represent what women should not do on sexual grounds and that is why they are held in contempt and discriminated against. In the area of feminism, they represent not just the victim **par excellence** of the all-encompassing and oppressive masculine sexuality in the case of those who regret having worked in prostitution – but they also represent the traitor of women's interests – in the case of those who proclaim themselves as sex workers.

This scorn and lack of consideration is internalised by the prostitutes themselves, meaning that, frequently, sex work is experienced by these women with great ambivalence and many times their lives are full of personal contradictions related to this activity. Usually these women have been brought up with traditional ideas about feminine sexuality and for them the stigma of **slut** represents the limits of their transgression. This means that they feel like **bad** women and at times experience their profession with **shame** and at other times with **flashes of assertiveness and pride** for having successfully achieved a good financial position and for having survived and made something of themselves independently.

This ambivalence is ignored and generally, when speaking of prostitution, the tendency is to show exclusively the **dark and victimised** side of social control, repression, lack of protection, abuse and vulnerability that sex workers experience. However the **transgressive aspect** experienced by assertive prostitutes, self-proclaimed professionals, is hidden.

And, even though it hurts to admit it, certain **abolitionist**-positioned feminist groups have actively collaborated in concealing this aspect and have disregarded the voice of the majority of sex workers, who wish to continue in sex work, but with better working conditions. It is this sector of women that is frequently forgotten when prostitution is spoken of in terms of victimisation and from an overprotective perspective, linking everything with gender violence and sexual slavery. The representation of sex workers as victimised does not help them at all to become assertive and, on the contrary, only reinforces stigma and the view that they are second-class citizens, incapable of deciding for themselves.



MARSEILLE



Pepsy

French sex worker

2012

For a foreigner

You, the foreigner who knocks at my door

You need me to give you

A moment of absolute relaxation

An impulse to have more energy

For a moment, with care provided in bed

You'll forget all your worries

Maybe you would like to talk about them

I also like to cure souls!

My hands will explore your aching body

To awake your energies

My soul will explore your curious spirit

To relieve you as much as I can

The money you will give me

Will protect us from troubles

It is an honourable service offering

For a fair exchange

To fully respect the stranger

Is a way to get stronger

A good exercise

Which keeps vice at bay

And vice versa

For you and me



The following definitions seek to clarify the terms used in this book. They provide a basis for a better understanding of the terminology around sex work.

GENERAL DEFINITIONS

These definitions were provided by the TAMPEP project¹¹.

Client

This term is used to describe those purchasing sexual services.

HIV

This term is used in preference to 'HIV/AIDS', 'HIV virus' or 'AIDS virus' (unless specifically referring to AIDS). Since HIV means 'human immunodeficiency virus', it is redundant to refer to the HIV virus. Since AIDS is a syndrome, it is incorrect to refer to the virus as the 'AIDS virus'. AIDS is what people die of; HIV is what they are infected with.

Indoor-based sex worker

This term refers to sex workers who establish contact with clients in an indoor setting or via the internet. Indoor sex work is often advertised in the media or online.

Manager (of a sex business)

This term is used to describe individuals who run sex businesses but who do not determine an individual's involvement in sex work or the sexual services they provide.

Outdoor-based sex worker

This term refers to sex workers who establish contact with clients in outdoor settings. Outdoor sex work settings are not advertised, but are areas which sex workers are known to frequent.

Partner (of a sex worker)

This term is used for individuals in a relationship with a sex worker, and should not be seen as synonymous with 'pimp'.

Public services

This term refers more specifically to the public organisations that provide services to sex workers.

Safer sex

This term is used in preference to 'safe sex' which may imply complete safety. The term 'safer sex' more accurately reflects the idea that choices can be made and behaviours adapted to reduce or minimise risk.

Service providers

This term is used to describe any kind of organisations, public and private, that provide services such as health promotion, legal and social support to sex workers.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

This term is used in preference to 'venereal disease (VD)' or 'sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)' which do not convey the concept of asymptomatic sexually transmitted infections. Sexually transmitted infections are spread by the transfer of organisms from person to person during sexual contact. In addition to the 'traditional' STIs (syphilis and gonorrhoea), the spectrum of STIs now includes HIV, which causes AIDS; Chlamydia trachomatis; human papilloma virus (HPV) which can cause cervical or anal cancer; genital herpes; chancroid; genital mycoplasmas; hepatitis B; trichomoniasis; enteric infections; and ectoparasitic diseases (i.e., diseases caused by organisms that live on the outside of the host's body). The complexity and scope of sexually transmitted infections have increased dramatically since the 1980s; more than 20 organisms and syndromes are now recognised as belonging in this category.

Sex worker

This term is used in preference to 'prostitute'. The term 'sex worker' is intended to be non-judgemental, focusing on the conditions under which sexual services are sold. The term 'commercial sex worker' is no longer used, primarily because it is considered to repeat the same meaning using different words.

Trafficker

This term is used only when all three components of the definition of trafficking are present.

Trafficking¹²

"Trafficking in Persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation." Broken down into its components, the definition comprises acts, means, and a purpose. One or more elements in each of the three components must be present to meet the definition. The consent of a victim is irrelevant if any of the means are used or if the victim is under 18 years.

Transgender

The term 'transgender' includes transsexuals and transvestites as well as others who do not feel they fit into society's gender classifications. Transsexuals are individuals who identify with a physical sex different from their biological one. Transvestites are people who wear the clothing of another gender.

Unprotected sex/unsafe sex

This term is used in preference to 'risky sex' or 'high-risk sex'.

¹¹ www.tampep.eu

¹² Definition in: Work Safe in Sex Work, a European manual on good practices in work with and for sex workers, TAMPEP International Foundation, 2009

SPECIFIC DEFINITIONS

The following terms are specific to the INDOORS project and were defined by the project's partners.

Apartment

An apartment used in the context of sex work is a place where one to three sex workers work, mostly self-organised. It may be their home as well as their workplace.

Bassi

Bassi are only found in Italy. They are rooms in the historic centre of Genoa where sex work has long been practised. These rooms are located on the ground floor and have an independent entrance accessible directly from the narrow streets (*vicoli*) of this area. Generally they are made up of one or two rooms with no windows and a small bathroom. In the past, they were used as shops or storerooms, though in the last fifty years they have been transformed into alcoves.

Bar

In the context of the sex industry, a bar is a place to meet sex workers and have a drink. Sex workers generally go elsewhere (hotels, apartments, etc) with clients to perform sexual services, but some bars may have private areas used, officially or not, for this purpose.

Brothel

A brothel is a place where four or more sex workers work. This place is mostly organised by a third party.

Club

A club is a place to meet and have a drink, with strip shows, and private rooms where sex workers go with clients to provide sexual services.

Community-based approach

This describes work undertaken in partnership with sex workers during all stages of the projects or actions. It implies that sex workers are active in the preparation, implementation and/or evaluation of the project. This approach recognises the skills and resources of the sex workers and does not limit them to a particular role.

Incalls

This term refers to sexual services provided by the sex worker at his or her workplace or home. The client visits the sex worker's place to purchase sexual services.

Laufhaus

Laufhäuser are very common in Austria and Germany. They are big houses with several individual rooms which are rented by sex workers on a daily or a weekly basis. *Laufhaus* means 'walk house' because men walk around the corridors until they choose a sex worker.

Massage parlours and saunas

These settings are places where the primary business is massage and sauna facilities, but where sexual services may be provided.

Migrants

Migrants are people who were born in another country, including EU citizens.

Sex shop

A sex shop is a commercial place selling a range of sexual accessories, with private rooms where clients can watch live or video shows and seek sexual services.

Studio

Studios are found in Austria. They are apartments at ground level which have a separate entrance from the other apartments in their building. They are places where one to three sex workers work. They are organised autonomously or by a third person, mostly the owner.

SM Studio

Used in Germany to describe venues offering sadomasochistic practices.

Outcalls

This term refers to sexual services provided by the sex worker outside his or her workplace. Outcalls can take place in hotels, at the client's home or in another location.

Windows

Windows, or window brothels, mostly found in the Netherlands, are small rooms used by self-employed sex workers, who rent them for work purposes per day or night shifts. They are not allowed to live there. The windows (like shop windows) are normally on the ground floor of the building. Sex workers sit or stand behind the window and negotiate with the clients at the door. There are two signs to show that the sex worker is busy: the outside red light is on and the window curtains are closed. Windows are concentrated in those streets allowed by the municipality and the window owners are responsible for the working condition and policies in their enterprise.

Other indoor venues

Cinemas, saunas, peep shows, strip bars.



