



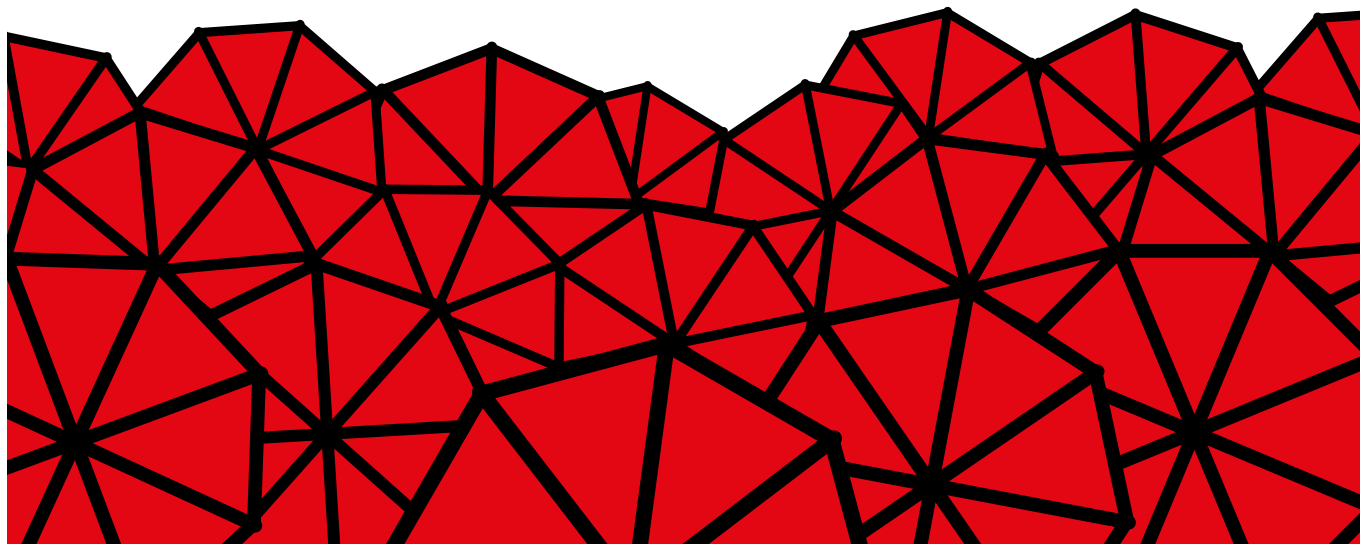
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Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

**BRIEFING
PAPER**

#09

The Needs and Rights of Trans Sex Workers



The Needs and Rights of Trans Sex Workers

Introduction

This briefing paper focuses on the issues and needs identified by trans sex workers (TSW) as disclosed in NSWP forums including an online questionnaire and face-to-face focus groups. Attention is first given to the issue of intersectionality, aiming to give context to the community of TSW before examining the needs and

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rights of this group. Legal situations are then discussed, noting how legislative systems can have an impact on the lives and work of TSW worldwide. Discussion then moves to look at the issues and needs of TSW, beginning with a discussion on violence before looking at how discrimination impacts access to education and employment, housing, justice, and appropriate health care services. The paper concludes by

drawing attention to the need to support the advocacy and activism of TSW groups around the world in challenging the needs identified and offering recommendations for those who design and implement policy and programmes, and those who represent and work directly with TSW. The paper includes examples of NSWP member groups' efforts to mobilise communities of TSW to advocate for their rights, showing activism that is being carried out by the community.

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to the representatives of the NSWP member organisations who contributed to the consultation process for this briefing paper through surveys, face-to-face interviews, Skype talks, phone calls and email communication, and provided us with important documents like reports, articles, fact sheets and briefing papers on the situation of trans sex workers in their own respective countries. Without this collaboration, the preparation of this briefing paper would not have been possible.

Trans Sex Workers – Intersectional Realities and Oppressions

Trans¹ sex workers (TSW) are amongst the most marginalised and vulnerable sex workers due to widespread social stigmatisation attributable, in general, to transphobic prejudice in almost all countries. Sex work is a highly risky sector in almost all countries of the world due to several reasons, including a lack of legal frameworks that offer protection from violence, while promoting whorephobia²; lack of political

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will to create programmes to support sex workers; religious and cultural approaches that foster whorephobic legislations and policies; and other factors that enhance stigma and marginalisation of sex workers. TSW are highly vulnerable to the risk of violence as they work and live at what can be described as an intersection of whorephobia and transphobia. The experiences of trans sex workers can also be affected by other factors, including but not limited to poverty, ethnic

and religious background, disability, HIV status, and residency status. All these factors can serve to increase the impact of transphobic and whorephobic discrimination³. This intersectionality of oppressions must be recognised in policy-making platforms and discussions on programme implementation.

In many countries, a large number of TSW are also undocumented migrants who have left their countries of origin in order to escape transphobic violence, family rejection or poverty and build a better life for themselves. Like any person who has an insecure residential status, migrant TSW can face additional barriers, for example language barriers, difficulties in accessing social security benefits such as housing, monetary safety nets when unemployed, access to health care services and/or health insurance schemes. The insecure residency status of migrant TSW can create significant barriers in accessing full citizenship rights, leaving this group particularly vulnerable and marginalised and often unable to access protection for fear of being deported. TSW in rural areas and/or those experiencing other issues as mentioned above are often more difficult to reach in terms of community mobilisation and therefore often experience a heightened sense of discrimination. An intersectional perspective that accounts for issues such as class, ethnicity, religious background, HIV status, migration status, gender, gender identity and sex work is necessary to have a better understanding of the lives of trans sex workers in different parts of the world and is a useful perspective to consider in reading this briefing paper.

1 In this paper, following the practices of trans organisations such as GATE (Global Action for Trans* Equality) and TGEU (Transgender Europe), the term *trans* is used as an open-ended social umbrella term to denote persons whose gender identity is different from the gender they were assigned at birth and those who wish to portray their gender in a way that differs from the gender they were assigned at birth.

2 The term *whorephobia* is used to denote forms of hatred, disgust, discrimination, violence, aggressive behaviour or negative attitudes directed at individuals who are engaged in sex work. Whorephobia operates in several contexts, resulting in excessive forms of violence, institutional discrimination, criminalisation and all other negative and hostile environments that target sex workers.

3 In the USA, 50 percent of black, 34 percent of Latina, and 16 percent of Asian trans people have made a living in underground economies, including sex work, compared to 11 percent of white trans people (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011).

Legal situation

TSW experience varying levels of criminalisation across the world depending on the existence of laws that criminalise or protect trans people and sex workers. TSW are often particularly exposed to criminalisation due to the dual impact of these laws targeting their gender identity and/or their work. Furthermore, media coverage of sex work often concentrates on the trans sex work population for sensationalism, which can negatively visibilise the population, making them more open to criminalisation and stigma. Some countries have laws in place that criminalise, for example, crossdressing and homosexuality (e.g. Nigeria, Samoa, Tonga, Namibia, Uganda, some parts of India, Solomon Islands, Trinidad and Tobago, some parts of Argentina, Turkey and many Middle Eastern and North African countries). In addition to countries that criminalise trans people, few countries have policies or programmes that aim to protect trans people from human rights violations or support trans people in accessing justice when these violations occur.

Furthermore, sex work as an occupation is criminalised, directly and/or indirectly across various legislative frameworks around the world⁴. Within regulated systems, TSW are unable to register as sex workers if only cisgender persons are entitled to apply. Trans people have to undergo a gender reassignment process, which is generally a costly process, in order to change documents and then register as sex workers. Many TSW cannot afford this process and choose to work unregistered – which in a system of criminalisation can be potentially dangerous as it forces these sex workers to work in very discreet hidden ways – often creating a dislocation between sex workers and support services. Trans

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people in many countries face barriers in accessing the process for changing names and gender in their legal documents like ID cards, passports, birth certificates or other documents that are needed for various types of registration. A lot of countries either do not allow TSW to do this or, where this is a possibility, it comes with certain requirements that are abusive and often constitute a breach of human rights⁵. This can also be a very expensive and lengthy process, which can deter trans sex workers from applying. For some TSW,

sex work is seen as a means of earning the required finances to cover gender reassignment treatment costs or hormone therapies, or in some cases to cover the costs associated with travelling to other countries to seek this service.

Very few countries have decriminalised sex work and sex workers (exceptions are New Zealand and the state of New South Wales, Australia, although some provisions do still exist in these contexts that can criminalise sex workers). Like all migrant sex workers, migrant TSW are often targeted by anti-trafficking policies and legislation. These policies often target migrant sex workers in ‘raid and rescue’ campaigns, which can result in deportation and/or detention.

⁴ For more information see NSWP briefing papers on Sex Work & the Law, and Criminalisation of Clients.

⁵ For instance, requirements of ‘sterilisation’ or ‘psychiatric diagnosis’ of ‘gender identity disorder’ (GID).

The Issues and Needs of Trans Sex Workers

Violence Against Trans Sex Workers

Like all sex workers, TSW are heavily stigmatised around the world, and varying levels of criminalisation fuel this stigma. For TSW this is compounded by laws that criminalise acts associated with transgender people, therefore TSW often work without the right of protection of the law. In such contexts, TSW fear violence from a number of people, including official authorities such as the police.

TSW in many parts of the world are targets for violence, including physical, sexual and psychological violence and hate crimes based on transphobia. The context in which TSW work can have an impact on the types and levels of violence faced. Traditionally cisgender women and men have occupied indoor sex work premises, such as massage parlours, brothels and saunas. For various reasons, TSW around the world have often chosen to work outdoors. Whilst it may not always be the case that

people working outdoors are more susceptible to violence, TSW do note that violence from a range of people is commonplace. Working outdoors often means a lack of the security measures that would sometimes be put in place in indoor locations. Transphobic attitudes in societies can fuel violence based on hatred. TSW, particularly those who work outdoors, are a visible population, easily targeted for acts of violence and hate crimes, resulting in rapes, beatings, public humiliation and at times murder⁶. Regular police interference with the work of street-based sex workers can

also heighten the risk of violence as sex workers have less time and space to negotiate with clients and carry out a personal assessment of their character. Perpetrators of violence against TSW include, but are not limited to, passers-by, law enforcement officials, people who pose as clients to commit violence, gangs, and groups who target TSW based on transphobic hate.

Police forces and individual police officers have been known to perpetrate violence against TSW, particularly in contexts of criminalisation – where laws that criminalise sex work and/or trans behaviour fuel a sense of impunity for police officers who target this group. TSW note experiences of police brutality, threats, intimidation, and times when police have used force and threats to bribe them for money and extortion⁷. Several cases of extortion and rape have been recorded in previous studies where TSW have disclosed that they have been threatened with imprisonment or violence and are expected to give money or to provide sexual services for free to police officers.⁸

Gangs are also perpetrators of violence in many countries, especially in the form of extortion where TSW have to pay a fee to a gang to be able to work in a certain area. In many cases, those who refuse to, or cannot, pay are physically attacked and in the worst cases have been murdered⁹. In addition to financial exploitation, some gangs use violence to ‘cleanse’ areas of TSW in close collaboration with other groups, such as local residents and law enforcement officials¹⁰. Transgender Europe (TGEU)’s Trans Murder Monitoring Project (TMM) reveals that

Trans sex workers, particularly those who work outdoors, are a visible population, easily targeted for acts of violence and hate crimes, resulting in rapes, beatings, public humiliation and at times murder.

6 For more information see NSWP, 2013.

7 See Godwin, 2012; Crago & Arnott, 2009, pp. 2–3; ASWA, 2011, pp. 32–35; SWAN, 2009, pp. 28–36.

8 Balzer & Hutta, 2012, pp. 35–36; ASWA, 2011, pp. 32–35; SWAN, 2009, pp. 28–36; Galvan & Bazargan, 2012.

9 For example in many Latin American, Caribbean and Asian countries and in Turkey.

10 For example in Brazil, Guyana and Peru, where ‘death squads’ and vigilante groups are mainly paid by state actors to ‘cleanse’ the areas of ‘unwanted’ groups. See Amnesty International, 2012; Maltchik, 2011, p. 3.

75 percent of all trans victims of murders between January 2008 and December 2011 were sex workers¹¹. As the project demonstrates, many TSW are regularly subjected to hate crimes fuelled by transphobic and whorephobic stigma and the overall number of these crimes is alarming. Studies and reports that have been conducted to date unfortunately provide only a part of the reality, and real figures for hate crimes and murders are much higher due to a lack of safe and accessible reporting systems for TSW.

Discrimination

The most common issue identified by TSW was discrimination, which underpins many of the injustices and struggles they face and remains high amongst the priorities of TSW groups to mobilise and fight against. Discrimination against trans people is commonplace across the world and impacts their access to many basic provisions and rights. The areas focused on in this section are education and employment; housing; access to justice; and appropriate health care services for TSW. Whilst discrimination is an issue that impacts many minority groups, TSW are often not protected by anti-discrimination policies

and/or legislation¹² – leaving little recourse to justice in cases of rights violations and lack of appropriate support in accessing services. For TSW, discrimination may be targeted at gender identity and/or their work as sex workers – meaning TSW often experience what has come to be known as a dual context of discrimination¹³ in which transphobia and whorephobia combine.

Discrimination in Access to Education/Employment

Discrimination against trans people in general can act as a significant barrier to education and employment opportunities. Trans people may be reluctant to access education services due to their position as a minority and the accompanying stigma attached to this. Furthermore, a lack of anti-discrimination legislation/policy for trans people allows employers to exercise discrimination against trans people in hiring and firing practices. The high representation of trans persons in sex work around the world is arguably partly a result of this discrimination experienced by trans people in accessing education and alternative employment. Sex work for some TSW is seen as an opportunity to work without dealing with the social transphobia that can exist in other employment. Furthermore, trans people often find working amongst other trans people to be a source of support and sex work can often provide a sense of community that may not exist in settings where trans people represent a very small minority – e.g. education settings and other employment settings.

Discrimination in Access to Housing

Many TSW experience difficulties in accessing basic housing services alongside other social security services that exist as a safety net in some countries for those in need. TSW note that they are often forced to pay above the average price for rent due to discrimination by landlords based on their gender and their work status. It is common for landlords and/or neighbours to file complaints against TSW due to

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11 More than a third of all the murders reported by the TMM Project have information regarding profession, occupation or source of income. Of all victims for whom such information is provided, sex workers form by far the largest group.

12 Anti-discrimination laws that specifically include 'gender identity' as grounds for discrimination exist only in Croatia, Ecuador, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Sweden and some parts of Australia. There are law proposals that aim to include 'gender identity' as grounds for discrimination in Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Chile, Japan, Mongolia, Namibia, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Puerto Rico, Switzerland and Venezuela.

13 In some countries, trans people, mainly trans sex workers, are harassed by public officials in a routine manner through laws which do not criminalise 'transgenderism' or 'crossdressing'. These laws include 'anti-nuisance', 'loitering' or 'traffic' laws. This is a general policy in many countries in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, and in Turkey. For more on this, see Balzer & Hutta, 2012.

their personal feelings against them, which can result in homelessness and/or a lack of safe spaces to carry out their work. TSW also complain of increased raids on their homes by police based on accusations that they are 'providing a space for prostitution', 'benefiting from one's prostitution', 'human trafficking', 'spreading STIs', 'creating noise', etc¹⁴. In situations where legal means cannot be used to force TSW to leave their homes, cases have emerged of residents starting campaigns of threats and violence against them¹⁵. Homeless TSW are put at increased risk of violence from a number of people including the police, passers-by, gangs and people posing as clients in order to conduct violence.

Discrimination in Access to Justice

Lack of anti-discrimination legislation and policies can contribute to the barriers experienced by TSW in accessing justice in cases where their rights are violated. Widespread criminalisation of both gender

identity and also of sex work means that TSW may be reluctant to access justice out of fear that they will be arrested or imprisoned. Furthermore, experiences of TSW in accessing justice demonstrate widespread discrimination by those involved in the justice process including police, public officials, legal practitioners and judges. This discrimination can further discourage TSW from bringing forward complaints of violence, knowing that they are likely to experience transphobic and/or whorephobic attitudes at the various points of access. Many TSW note that police officers are reluctant to carry out effective investigation

into their complaints and that they are often not believed at the point of disclosure. Furthermore, experiences suggest that perpetrators of violence against TSW are awarded impunity for their crimes, with many perpetrators going unpunished or receiving inappropriately short sentences¹⁶. Police officers in many countries are not seen by TSW as people to protect them but rather as potential perpetrators of violence and discrimination. Police brutality is commonplace against TSW around the world, creating a relationship of distrust and fear, which further limits TSW's access to justice.

Discrimination in Access to Appropriate Health Care

The high prevalence of HIV amongst sex workers and clients in some countries has led sex workers to be targeted for inappropriate health care services, including mandatory/coercive testing, forced treatment, forced registration and biometric tracking/profiling of sex workers. TSW, seen as a key population in terms of the global HIV epidemic, are also often similarly targeted by inappropriate and often abusive health care interventions. Health care services for TSW often fail to take account of their specific needs (or provide trans-specific treatment at extremely high costs). Lack of provision of medically supervised hormone therapies and gender reassignment treatments forces some TSW to travel abroad or seek alternatives from the black market. Many TSW acquire black-market hormones without any medical supervision or apply industrial silicones or heavy oils, which cause severe health problems¹⁷.

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14 These phrases are used by law enforcement officials to target unregistered sex workers who work at their apartments, houses or other places with more than one person. Generally penal codes that are designed to eliminate 'human trafficking or 'prostitution' or to ensure 'public order' are intentionally misused to harass sex workers and their clients through blurry terms as mentioned above.

15 For example, trans sex worker residents – including those who do not identify as sex workers – of Meis Residence Campus in Avclar, Istanbul, Turkey have been targeted by other residents with physical violence since January 2013. Some of the houses were raided and closed down by the police and a trans sex worker who started to live on the streets was beaten up and died at a hospital in March 2013. A few other trans sex workers were severely beaten up by the residents in the following months.

16 Hammerberg, 2009, pp. 36 – 37; Council of Europe Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011, pp. 54 – 62; Balzer & Hutta, 2012.

17 For instance in many Central and South American countries. The main health problems suffered by trans sex workers include infections, necrosis of limbs, sepsis, gangrene, thrombosis, cancer and death. See Adrian, 2012, pp. 91–92.

As per the experiences of sex workers in general, TSW in many countries experience discriminatory attitudes at the point of accessing health services. In countries where 'transgenderism', 'homosexuality'¹⁸ and/or sex work is criminalised and/or heavily stigmatised, it is nearly impossible for TSW to access quality health services; they fear possible prosecution if they disclose their trans identities or engagement in sex work¹⁹. In countries where laws do not prevent their access to health services, many trans people hesitate to go to hospitals or health clinics for fear of being humiliated and/or responded to in a hostile manner. TSW in many countries, especially where trans and sex worker networks or organisations do not exist, have very limited access to information regarding trans-specific health care or STI prevention, treatment, care and support. Where these services do exist, many TSW are unaware of how and where to access them.

Like all sex workers, TSW require prevention services including access to condoms and other STI prevention tools. There is a lack of availability of prevention tools for TSW in some countries, and in

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some contexts access to prevention tools is provided alongside abusive practices – including mandatory testing and treatment²⁰ which can lead TSW to participate in unprotected sexual practices to avoid being targeted by abusive health care programming. Health care programming that is designed and implemented without consultation with TSW communities/ organisations often fails to account for the community's needs and desires. There have been instances where law enforcement officials

collaborate with health care providers to enforce condom use, a practice that has discouraged TSW from accessing health care due to fear of criminalisation/prosecution. Furthermore, condoms have been confiscated from sex workers and used as evidence of 'prostitution' – a practice that has been widely criticised for hampering HIV prevention efforts worldwide.

Very few studies have been conducted on the health care needs of TSW, with this group instead being included in more general studies of sex workers and/or studies on men who have sex with men. This has led to a significant knowledge gap around the health care needs of TSW, rendering this group invisible in the HIV response worldwide. This knowledge gap creates a situation whereby TSW do not receive appropriate health care provision, and groups that aim to provide this specific service are often under-resourced and experience difficulties in mobilising for change. Only a few countries have examples of health services designed based on the needs and sensitivities of TSW. Many HIV-positive TSW cannot access quality treatment, care and support services and often experience difficulties in accessing required HIV-related medicines including ARVs and diagnostics. Where these services are not provided for free or at a reduced cost, TSW often struggle to afford access. Some reasons for this are that many TSW are not included in national or private insurance systems. Social security opportunities for TSW are highly limited for various reasons, including laws criminalising sex work and gender expression; poverty; discrimination; low levels of access to information; and complexities around legal change of name and gender.

18 In many countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East, trans people are perceived as 'homosexuals' due to a lack of awareness in society or among public officials. Thus, anti-homosexuality laws not only target gay men but also trans women.

19 In Kuwait, trans people cannot apply for health services disclosing their trans identity as many doctors report them to the police for 'impersonation of the opposite sex'. See Human Rights Watch, 2012.

20 For instance in Cambodia, China, Vietnam, Mongolia and Indonesia.

Conclusions and Recommendations

TSW across the world can be seen as a marginalised community, due to being a minority and the issues identified and outlined throughout this paper, including criminalisation, violence and discrimination. Occupying a marginalised status in any society can lead to existing, living and working at the margins – a space where human rights violations often occur and will often go unnoticed and/or ignored.

Occupying a marginalised status in any society can lead to existing, living and working at the margins – a space where human rights violations often occur and will often go unnoticed and/or ignored.

For many sex worker community groups, organisation and advocacy often takes a back seat to the provision of health services. This is due to funding priorities of donors that are often in line with international health goals. Human rights violations are detrimental to efforts to reduce HIV prevalence, and create significant barriers to TSW access to health and other services. Therefore,

in order to work towards the goals related to health and HIV – namely reduced prevalence – these issues identified by TSW groups must be recognised and challenged collectively. Community advocacy and mobilisation must be supported by those who design and implement policy and programmes, and those who represent and work directly with TSW. Below are some recommendations that have arisen from this consultation with TSW, aimed at groups, people and organisations that wish to contribute to the efforts of trans sex worker groups.

Recommendations to policy makers and programme designers

- ▮ Implement international human rights standards without discrimination and prohibit discrimination on the grounds of gender identity, gender expression and sex work status in all sectors, including health care, housing, employment, commercial services, and education.
- ▮ Eliminate laws that criminalise ‘homosexuality’ or ‘crossdressing’, and cease implementing discriminatory laws that are used to target trans people.
- ▮ Enact hate crime legislation that affords specific protection for trans people against transphobic violence and incidents, which could be utilised by TSW.
- ▮ Support sex workers’ calls to decriminalise sex work.
- ▮ Develop transparent and efficient procedures for changing trans people’s name and gender on every relevant legal document, including birth certificates, ID cards, passports, educational certificates and other documents.
- ▮ Establish the basis for legal gender recognition with efficient procedures allowing trans sex workers to access quality trans-specific health care services including hormone therapy, treatment, surgery and psychological support. End requirements like ‘psychiatric diagnosis’ and ‘sterilisation’, and improve the quality of trans-specific health care services.
- ▮ Provide training to health service professionals, law enforcement officials and public officials with regard to the needs and rights of TSW.

- ▶ Ensure legal and policy-based protection for TSW victims of police brutality, addressing impunity and lack of fair trial in investigation and prosecution processes.
- ▶ Consult TSW and their associated organisations in regard to all legislation or policies that affect them.

Recommendations to donors

- ▶ Ensure that funding is allocated to communities of TSW who are actively engaged in activism and advocacy for the realisation of the rights of TSW.
- ▶ Ensure that funding for HIV prevention takes into account the specific needs of TSW and does not assume that these needs are fully met in programmes aimed at sex workers in general, or programmes targeting men who have sex with men.
- ▶ Ensure information regarding project calls is sent to TSW organisations and develop easier procedures for applications.
- ▶ Work with TSW groups to develop programmes that aim to respond to the urgent needs of TSW, such as tackling crisis situations, murders, extreme violence, etc.
- ▶ Ensure inclusion of labour rights, human rights and identity rights of trans people and sex workers as priorities within project calls.

Recommendations to those who want to support and work with TSW

- ▶ Respect the diversity of the TSW community and ensure that services cater to the multiple realities and needs of TSW.
- ▶ In all services provided, ensure that opportunities are created for the self-organisation and mobilisation of TSW.
- ▶ Build networks with sex workers' rights organisations and groups to better understand the situation of TSW, and support sex workers' organisations in their call for the decriminalisation of sex work.
- ▶ Understand the links between gender identity, gender expression and sex work within local or regional realities, and advocate for change accordingly.
- ▶ Carry out training for TSW on capacity building, project cycle management, advocacy and lobbying, language, IT skills, etc.

Recommendations to media reporting on issues related to TSW

- ▶ Stop circulating false information about the lives of TSW or about incidents involving TSW, such as raids, arrests, court cases, etc. Instead consult TSW organisations in regards to news around trans issues or sex work.
- ▶ Try to gather first-hand information from TSW themselves rather than relying on the views of police or other actors who are transphobic and/or whorephobic.
- ▶ End discriminatory language against TSW.
- ▶ Train media staff on the issues, needs and demands of TSW, in close consultation with TSW organisations.

Trans Sex Worker organisations' activism and advocacy successes

Successful 'Don't Cut My Hair' Campaign by the Alliance for Transgender Prisoners, Hong Kong

(no website)

The 'Don't Cut My Hair' campaign was initiated by Midnight Blue, a non-governmental organisation for male and trans sex workers, and led by trans sex workers. Five other LGBT organisations were later invited to join forces and the Alliance for Transgender Prisoners was formed, aiming to advocate for changes in the practices of the Hong Kong Correctional Services Department toward transgender inmates, many of whom are in detention for soliciting and sex work-related offences.

The campaign's target group is Southeast Asian transgender sex workers in Hong Kong, as members of the group are often ignorant about their rights on arrest, in custody and in prison.

Outreach work began in April 2012 to connect with the target group, distribute vital information and provide support. Meanwhile, public education activities (e.g. touring show, talks and leaflet distribution) were organised in May 2012 for the International Day against Homophobia & Transphobia, 1st July parade and Human Rights Day in November.

After laying the groundwork and preparing both the target group and the public, in September 2012 the Alliance filed a complaint to the Commissioner of Correctional Services, stating that transgender female inmates, after sex reassignment surgery (SRS), should be treated as

women and requested the department to align treatment of transgender inmates with that of their cisgender counterparts.

The Correctional Services responded that when inmates make known to officers that they have undergone SRS, their hair will not be cut, as is the case for male inmates.

The campaign was able to secure change in Correctional Services' practices toward transgender inmates, thus eradicating the discriminating treatment of transgender inmates.

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Trans sex workers in Turkey lead the struggle for sex workers' rights!

<http://www.kirmizisemsiye.org/kapali.html>

Turkey has one of the highest rates of violence and murders of trans sex workers worldwide, and the highest in Europe. 31 trans sex workers were murdered between 2008 and 2012, and the incidents of violence are countless. Confronted with structural stigma and discrimination, trans sex workers have been at the forefront of the struggle for sex workers' rights for many years.

On 3 March 2014, to celebrate International Sex Worker Rights Day, activists from the Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association organised a two-day event to bring the community together in raising awareness about the situation of sex workers of all genders. Though many presentations were to focus on trans sex workers' issues, the event was also to include presentations by cisgender male and female sex workers. By doing so, the trans sex worker community highlighted the structural issues faced by all sex workers.

Activists were to come together from many social movements, including LGBT organisations, women's rights and trade unions.

The event also included a protest in front of the statue of human rights in Ankara.

Turkey has one of the highest rates of violence and murders of trans sex workers worldwide, and the highest in Europe.

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