

POLICING AND DETENTION OF SEX WORKERS IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

CRIMINALISING AND REPRESSIVE LAWS AND POLICIES

SEX WORK RELATED

- sex work is an administrative or criminal offense, punishable by fines or imprisonment
- arbitrary arrests: sex workers are arrested or fined for "offering" services to passers-by or "waiting" for clients at a sex work venue
- municipal by-laws are used to punish sex workers locally even if sex work is not criminalised by national legislation
- based on brothel-keeping laws, sex workers are prosecuted when working together

NON-SEX WORK RELATED

- sex workers are disproportionately targeted by:



traffic regulations

public order laws, e.g. hooliganism

morality laws



drug possession laws



other repressive laws and policies, e.g. to control homeless people

POLICING AND DISCRIMINATORY PROFILING

HIGH LEVELS OF SURVEILLANCE BY AUTHORITIES

- sex workers are hyper-visible to authorities, especially if they work on the street, are gender-nonconforming, (undocumented) migrants or homeless, or belong to racial or ethnic minorities
- gender and racial profiling is a frequent law enforcement practice across the region:
 - Thai women in Sweden face random identity checks as they are assumed to be sex workers by the police
 - Roma women in the Balkans report harassment from the police in their daily lives outside of their work
 - Chinese sex workers in Paris are afraid to leave their home and workplaces due to the fear of police targeting based on their migration status
- repressive policing (arrest, detention, displacement from a workplace, and police violence) leads to: ¹

3x

likelihood to experience sexual or physical violence

2x

likelihood to have HIV and/or another STI

1.5x

likelihood to engage in sex without condom



ANTI-TRAFFICKING AND MIGRATION LAWS



65% of sex workers in Western Europe are estimated to be migrants²

16% of sex workers in Central Europe are estimated to be migrants²

FORTRESS EUROPE:



tightened border control



strict entry conditions



detention and deportation

IMPACT OF ANTI-TRAFFICKING MEASURES:³

- unexpected raids on sex worker venues, often part of anti-trafficking strategies, cause trauma and an inability to continue working
- undocumented workers are frequently detained and deported after being detected during raids
- earnings can be confiscated as evidence and sex workers might become homeless if they reside at their workplace
- trafficked persons face hurdles accessing compensation in contexts where sex work is not recognised as work

POLICE ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEX WORKERS

” A Brazilian cis woman sex worker, who was in the UK on a visitor visa, was robbed at knifepoint by five men. When the victim called the police, she said their focus seemed to be more on her activities as a sex worker than the attack itself. After returning from a recent trip to Spain, she was detained at Gatwick airport for several hours and later given a letter by the Home Office demanding that she leaves the UK.⁴ ”

” Three trans women sex workers were detained in a police station after a police raid in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. They were kept in the police department for two days. They were tortured, forced to have sex with police, and drink alcohol. The victims were not given the opportunity to communicate with relatives, nor was a lawyer provided. The reason for detention was alleged hooliganism.⁵ ”

” A cis female sex worker in a Hungarian city was beaten severely by someone who posed as a client. She reported the incident to the local police, who ridiculed her appearance when checking her online advertisements. They threatened to take away her Hungarian citizenship for being a sex worker, when in fact selling sex is legal in the country. ”

41.7%

of sex workers in a survey carried out by the Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) reported having experienced physical violence by police in the year before the survey⁶

2. bit.ly/icrsepolicing2

3. bit.ly/icrsepolicing3

4. bit.ly/icrsepolicing4

5. bit.ly/icrsepolicing5

6. bit.ly/icrsepolicing6