

## **SEX WORKERS IN EUROPE MANIFESTO**

We come from many different countries and many different backgrounds, but we have discovered that we face many of same problems in our work and in our lives. Within this document we explore the current inequalities and injustices within our lives and the sex industry; question their origin; confront and challenge them and put forward our vision of changes that are needed to create a more equitable society in which sex workers, their rights and labour are acknowledged and valued.

### **BEYOND TOLERANCE AND COMPASSION FOR THE RECOGNITION OF RIGHTS**

We live in a society where services are bought and sold. Sex work is one of these services. Providing sexual services should not be criminalised.

Sacrificing sex workers for religious or sexual morals is unacceptable. All people have the right to hold their own personal religious and sexual morals, but such morals should not be imposed on any individual or determine any political decision.

We wish to see a society in which sex workers are not denied social power.

We condemn the hypocrisy within our societies where our services are used but our profession or businesses are made illegal. This legislation results in abuse and lack of control over our work and lives.

We oppose the criminalisation of sex workers, their partners, clients, managers, and everyone else working in sex work. Such criminalisation denies sex workers of equal protection of the law.

Migration plays an important role in meeting the demands of the labour market. We demand our governments acknowledge and apply fundamental human, labour and civil rights for migrants.

### **The right to be free from discrimination**

We demand the end of discrimination and abuse of power by the police and other public authorities. Offering sexual services is not an invitation to any kind of violence. The lack of credibility of sex workers must end.

We demand that crimes against us and our testimonies are taken seriously by the justice system. Sex workers should, to the same extent as anyone else, be presumed innocent until guilt is proven.

Defamation of sex workers incites discrimination and hatred. We demand that sex workers be protected by anti-discrimination legislation.

**The right to our bodies**

Sex work is by definition consensual sex. Non consensual sex is not sex work; it is sexual violence or slavery.

We demand our right as human beings to use our bodies in any way we do not find harmful; including the right to establish consensual sexual relations, no matter the gender or ethnicity of our partners; regardless of whether they are paying or not.

**The right to be heard**

We assert our right to participate in public forums and policy debates where our working and living conditions are being discussed and determined.

We demand our voices are heard, listened to and respected. Our experiences are diverse, but all are valid, and we condemn those who steal our voice and say that we do not have the capacity to make decisions or articulate our needs.

**The right to associate and gather**

We assert our right to form and join professional associations and unions.

We assert our right to demonstrate publicly.

We demand the right to form business partnerships, both formal and informal, and to participate in social projects.

**The right to mobility**

We assert our right to be in all public spaces.

We assert the right of all persons to move within and between countries for personal and financial reasons, including seeking gainful employment and residence in the area of their choice.

The trafficking discourse obscures the issues of migrants' rights. Such a simplistic approach to such a complex issue reinforces the discrimination, violence and exploitation against migrants, sex workers and migrant sex workers in particular.

Violence, coercion and exploitation related to migration and sex work must be understood and tackled within a framework of recognising the worth and fundamental rights of migrants.

Restrictive migration legislation and anti-prostitution policies must be identified as contributing factors to the violation of migrants' rights.

Forced labour and slavery-like practices are possible in many trades. But where trades are legal and the labour of its workers recognised, it is more possible to denounce and put an end to the violations of rights and prevent abuse.

We demand our governments prioritise and protect the human rights of victims of forced labour and slavery-like practices, regardless of how they arrived in their situation and regardless of their ability or willingness to cooperate or testify in criminal justice proceedings.

We call upon our governments to give asylum to victims of forced labour and slavery-like practices, and to provide support to their families and friends. Failure to do so perpetuates their exploitation and further violates their fundamental human rights.

### **Abuse in sex work**

Abuse happens in sex work, but does not define sex work.

Any discourse that defines sex work as violence is a simplistic approach that denies our diversity and experience and reduces us to helpless victims. It undermines our autonomy and right to self-determination.

Restrictive legislation contributes to discrimination, stigma and abuse of sex workers.

We demand our governments decriminalise sex work and end legislation that discriminates against us and stigmatises us. We demand the right to report abuses against us without risking prosecution.

Granting rights for sex workers would allow them to report infringements of their human rights.

We demand protection from those who threaten us and our families for exposing them.

We demand methods that allow us to remain anonymous when reporting grievances and crimes against us.

### **Abuse of young people in sex work**

It is essential that education focuses on empowering young people to have sexual autonomy. We demand that support, services and outreach be provided to young people to give them real choice and the possibilities of alternatives.

Young people should have a voice in legislation and policies that affect them.

Excerpt from: International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe. *The Sex Workers in Europe Manifesto*. Elaborated on and endorsed by 120 sex workers from 26 countries at the European Conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration. 15 & 16 October, 2005, 1-11.