

4 vital steps towards ending violence against racialised sex workers

[Blog](#), [Sex Work](#)

Racialised sex workers provided a cornerstone to the LGBTI movement as we know it today, yet the protection of sex workers is often overlooked when it comes to queer activism. To mark International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers on December 17, we look at key ways to better protect sex workers from violence.

LGBTI sex workers have always been part of the LGBTI movement; the names of Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera are not just historical references, their contributions to the 1969 Stonewall uprising provided a cornerstone to the global LGBTI movement as we know it today. And yet, many sex workers are excluded from modern-day LGBTI activism.

Both Johnson and Rivera were racialised sex workers, and back in 1969 their protection was overlooked. Sadly, three decades later, racialised sex workers, who constitute a significant group of sex workers in Europe, are still frequently excluded, neglected and forgotten, and as a result many are victims of violence that is in some quarters deemed acceptable. This year on International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, we feel it is important to look at the recommendations of the European Sex Workers Alliance (ESWA) to end violence against racialised sex workers.

Racism is entangled in anti-sex work

ESWA [conducted a report](#) earlier this year to explore how racism is entangled in anti-sex work, anti-trafficking, and anti-immigration legislation in Europe. Following an in-depth analysis of literature review, they collected key policy recommendations to help eradicate the violence experienced by all sex workers, and even more so racialised sex workers, in the European region. They are:

1. Decriminalise sex work now

Decriminalisation is the cornerstone of the protection of sex workers' human rights. When sex work is not considered a criminal activity, it is easier for sex workers to report crimes to the police, without the fear of facing prosecutions themselves. It also contributes to the recognition of sex work as work and therefore the adoption of safe working conditions and access to health services. Decriminalisation will not eliminate all of the violence racialised sex workers might face in their work, but it will enable them to access support from healthcare providers, law enforcement, and other services.

2. When speaking about oppression and empowerment, look beyond the binary

Seeing oppression and empowerment as two sides of a binary is harmful for sex workers. Simplistic definitions overlook the diverse, rich and complex range of experiences and identities of racialised sex workers. Legislation that falls in this binary fails sex workers by criminalising or ignoring those who do not fit in one or other definition.

3. Adopt an intersectional approach

Through an intersectional lens, we can recognise how systems of oppression are interlinked and harm racialised sex workers through discriminatory laws, institutions and social practices. Using intersectionality as a policy tool, racialised sex workers can be better protected when designing legislation that takes in account race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, migrant status, and more.

4. Adopt an anti-racist approach to combatting exploitation and violence against racialised sex workers and survivors

This means not only addressing racist and xenophobic anti-sex work laws and their effects on racialised sex workers and adopting an intersectional approach to understanding how certain groups of racialised people are criminalised and marginalised under current ASWTI laws and policie, but to listen and believe racialised sex workers, and consult them as they are the experts of their own experiences.

At ILGA-Europe we are committed to raising awareness on the human rights violations which all sex workers are facing and to continue to raise awareness of the specific experiences and added discrimination racialised sex workers face. We will continue to call for decriminalisation of sex work across our regions. Find out also about the vital work of ESWA [here](#).