

Q & A: International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers (17 December)

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

1. What is 17 December and why is it important?

17 December is the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. It is a global day of action that highlights the ongoing violence, stigma, and human rights violations faced by sex workers. It also serves as a call to protect sex worker rights, promote safety, and advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work.

2. Why does ILGA-Europe work on sex worker rights and safety?

LGBTI sex workers have always been part of the LGBTI movement. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera are not just historical figures; their activism at Stonewall in 1969 shaped Pride events and the global LGBTI movement as we know it today. And yet, many sex workers are excluded from modern-day LGBTI activism.

[In ILGA-Europe's view](#), LGBTI organisations have a key role to play in fighting against stigma affecting LGBTI sex workers, both within and outside the LGBTI community. Sex workers of all sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteristics face serious human rights violations and violence. ILGA-Europe acknowledges that sex work is a multigendered phenomenon. While it is clear that the majority of sex workers are women, as an LGBTI organisation, it is our role to give visibility and to speak about the high number of LGBTI people in sex work and their specific vulnerability and needs.

[Research](#) shows that many trans people, queer migrants, and racialised LGBTI communities engage in sex work due to structural inequalities. Criminalisation and stigma increase the risk of violence, discrimination, and anti-sex-work sentiments. Human rights based approaches and harm reduction strategies are essential for protecting LGBTI sex workers in Europe and Central Asia.

3. What types of violence do sex workers face in Europe and Central Asia?

According to [TGEU's Trans Murder Monitoring](#) report, sex workers (34%) are the most targeted group among murdered trans people globally. Sex workers face multiple forms of violence, including physical assault, sexual violence, harassment, discrimination in housing and employment, police abuse, online hate, and institutional violence linked to punitive sex work laws. Racialised sex workers and migrant sex workers face even higher risks due to racism, xenophobia, and migration control systems. This violence is made worse by stigma and the criminalisation of clients, third parties, or sex work related activities.

4. How does criminalisation increase violence against sex workers?

Decriminalisation of sex work removes significant barriers to the effective enjoyment of human rights for LGBTI people who engage in sex work. It contributes to reducing [police violence and abuse](#) and to facilitating access to police protection and justice. Indeed, where criminal prosecution of sex work is removed, it becomes easier for sex workers to report crimes to the police and seek redress, without the fear of facing potential prosecution themselves.

[Decriminalisation](#) also contributes to recognition of sex work as work, and therefore opens up the adoption of measures for safe working conditions, access to labour unions, and better access to health services, which is important considering that LGBTI sex workers are more at risk of getting infected with HIV or other sexually transmitted infections.

Criminalisation pushes sex workers into unsafe environments, reduces access to health care and justice, and prevents sex workers from reporting violence. Criminalising clients (as in the so called [Nordic Model](#) or Swedish Model) or any part of sex work creates greater police surveillance, displacement, and harassment, and also often pushes sex workers into more dangerous situations. Court rulings and research show that [criminalisation policies in Europe](#) do not reduce exploitation but instead increase violence against sex workers and violate their human rights.

5. What is ILGA-Europe's position on sex work?

[ILGA-Europe](#) supports the full decriminalisation of sex work and all consensual adult sex work-related activities. Decriminalisation improves safety, access to justice, health outcomes, and labour rights. ILGA-Europe's policy is grounded in human rights principles and developed in consultation with sex worker led organisations, including LGBTI sex workers, racialised sex workers, and migrant sex workers. Empowerment, combatting exclusion, and 'nothing about us without us' – these principles are at the core of ILGA-Europe's policy on sex work.

At ILGA-Europe, we will do our best to include the voices and concerns of LGBTI sex workers across our work, in the same way as we aim to include all diverse voices in the LGBTI community.

6. Why are LGBTI sex workers particularly affected by violence?

LGBTI sex workers often experience intersecting forms of discrimination such as transphobia, homophobia, racism, and anti-sex worker bias. In [2025](#), 34% of the reported trans murders were sex workers. Many trans women, non-binary people, and queer migrants face barriers in employment, housing, and health care, which push them into criminalised or unsafe work conditions. Structural inequalities make LGBTI sex workers more vulnerable to violence, police abuse, and social exclusion.

7. What challenges do racialised sex workers face?

[Racialised sex workers](#) face racism, racial profiling, immigration raids, housing discrimination, and barriers in accessing services. They are more likely to be targeted by police and excluded from protection systems. Structural racism and stereotypes make racialised sex workers highly vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Initiatives like the [Black Sex Worker Collective](#) highlight the need for intersectional policies that address racism and sex worker marginalisation together.

8. Why is decriminalisation of sex work a human rights issue?

Decriminalisation is essential for protecting the human rights of sex workers. It enables safer working conditions, reduces violence, improves access to justice, and strengthens labour protections. Global evidence, including from the European context, shows that decriminalisation supports public health, reduces exploitation, and aligns with human rights standards.

9. What does the research say about empowering LGBTI sex workers?

[Research](#) shows that empowering LGBTI sex workers requires addressing discrimination, improving access to housing and health care, supporting community led initiatives, and removing punitive laws. LGBTI sex workers consistently report that decriminalisation, community support, and recognition of sex work as work are essential for reducing harm and violence.

10. How can Europe protect sex workers and reduce violence?

Effective steps include:

1. Removing punitive and criminalising laws.
2. Recognising sex work as work and increasing labour protections.
3. Ensuring access to safe housing, health care, and social services.
4. Supporting sex worker led organisations and advocacy groups.
5. Addressing racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and transphobia in policy and practice.

These measures reduce violence and support the safety and rights of sex workers across Europe and Central Asia.

11. Are there good examples in Europe of policies that protect sex workers?

Yes. [Belgium](#) is a notable example. The country recognises sex work as work and provides legal frameworks that support safer working conditions, access to health care, and social protection. Belgian authorities also involve sex worker organisations in policy discussions and initiatives, showing how collaboration between government and communities can reduce violence, stigma, and discrimination against sex workers, including LGBTI and racialised sex workers.

12. Why does anti-sex worker bias need to be addressed in EU policy?

Whorephobia fuels discrimination, stigma, and violence against sex workers. It prevents sex workers from reporting crimes, accessing services, or being recognised as rights holders. [EU policy](#) discussions often ignore or misunderstand whorephobia. Addressing it is crucial for building inclusive justice systems and protecting LGBTI and racialised sex workers.

13. What can activists, allies, and organisations do on 17 December?

People can support sex worker rights by sharing information, amplifying sex worker led campaigns, promoting harm reduction approaches, and challenging stigma online and offline. Organisations can publish solidarity statements, host events, collaborate with sex worker groups, and advocate for policy change that protects sex worker human rights.

14. How does ILGA-Europe collaborate with sex worker movements?

ILGA-Europe works closely with sex worker-led organisations, LGBTI community groups, feminist organisations, racial justice movements, and human rights defenders. Collaboration ensures that policy work reflects lived experiences and contributes to stronger protections for sex workers in Europe and Central Asia.

ILGA-Europe is part of the [European Coalition on Sex Workers' Rights and Inclusion](#) with 15 other organisations working towards the rights of sex workers in Europe.