

October 24th, 2019
Prague

Dear friends and colleagues,

On Thursday 24th of October 2019, during the ILGA Europe Conference in Prague several trans sex workers from Central Asia organised a session to discuss the specific issues they face and how the LGBTI and sex workers' rights movement can support them.

The meeting was attended by around 15 LGBTI activists including ILGA Europe, TGEU and ICRSE staff members. Following this meeting, ICRSE supported the draft of this letter which we hope will raise awareness of the urgent issues faced by Central Asian trans sex workers.

The issues identified are listed below as well as recommendations to LGBTI, trans and sex workers' networks and funders.

Trans sex workers in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan face similar issues regarding discrimination, human rights violations and violence. The political situation in Turkmenistan make it difficult to obtain information from the local community.

Tajikistan:

Trans sex workers face very high levels of stigma and discriminations and many report harassment, blackmail and extortion by policemen and abuse and hate crimes from society, influenced by conservative religious beliefs. In 2019, already four trans sex workers were murdered, victims of transphobic hate crimes.

There is no access to hormone therapy and counseling for transitioning. Ministry of health has not published/developed normative guidelines for trans healthcare, and all trans community members access hormones through black market.

Sex workers face administrative fines for sex work in amount of 110\$, (250\$ for recidivism, administrative arrest for 15 days).

In order to escape poverty, violence and discrimination, many Tajik trans sex workers, migrate and work in Russia. Due to continual audits by police men they are then often deported back to Tajikistan facing violence and harassment in the process. There is no friendly access to hormone therapies and community members afraid to visit for medical observations because of document and migrant phobia issues. This summer, one trans woman overdosed from hormones. After being deported, they often face family rejection and homelessness. Several trans sex workers have committed suicide after finding themselves in this situation. High levels of corruption within authorities including migration officer and police create a climate of impunity for perpetrators of violence and bribery.

In 2017, Tajik government introduced mandatory registration of LGBT individuals with ministry of internal affairs together with general prosecutor's office. This led to increased harassment LGBTI individuals including trans sex workers.

These actions led to the isolation of the LGBT community in Tajikistan.

Kyrgyzstan:

One of the main issue faced by trans sex workers in Kyrgyzstan is violence from society and law enforcement agencies. This violence takes many forms: stigma and discrimination, harassment, transphobia, blackmail, threats...

Many trans sex workers work in streets, parks and cafes as well as social networks. Whilst sex work is not directly prohibited, 'public morality' / loitering laws are used to target street based trans sex workers.

In 2017-2018, 16 trans sex workers were arrested for a period of 8 months each: the police justified this long imprisonment period by saying the victims 'resisted arrests'. Conditions in prison are inhumane.

A large number of trans sex workers from Kyrgyzstan have migrated to Russia in order to survive. In Moscow and St Petersburg, they do not apply for healthcare, do not have access to hormone therapy and use black market hormones. Kyrgyz trans sex workers in Russia do not have access to HIV testing and counselling. They are also facing police harassment, fines and deportation.

They are not able to register in Russia as migrants (Kyrgyz migrants can usually register for 3 months but this is not possible for trans people).

In Russia, trans sex workers can be targeted by the 6.11 Code and face repeated administrative fines.

Drug use is high within the trans migrant sex worker community in Russia and also affect their mental and physical health. Racism against central Asian people in Russia is also severe and impact migrant trans sex workers.

Finally, intra community violence between sex workers, and in particular against new and younger trans sex workers is high and not addressed.

Uzbekistan:

Trans sex workers in Uzbekistan face many similar issues as their colleagues from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In 2017, a trans sex worker was killed by authorities when deported from Russia. Article 120 of the Criminal Code for same-sex relations has not yet been decriminalized in Uzbekistan. Law enforcement agencies have intimidated members of the LGBT community, including trans-sex workers, for many years, which in turn leads to external migration to Russia.

Confronted with so many urgent issues, trans sex workers from central Asia demand a greater inclusion in the LGBTI and sex workers' communities and movements and that more attention be paid to living and working conditions.

Recommendations:

- To implement the normative guidelines for access to hormone therapy/ physician counselling,
- Development and implementation of anti-discrimination laws,
- Professional and activists training and education for trans sex workers, including online training,
- Inclusion of trans sex workers in national and regional NGOs programmes as well as staff members,
- Research on needs of trans sex workers in Central Asia,
- Core and programme funding for organisations working with and led by trans sex workers as well as LGBT organisations working on trans sw issue and sex workers organisations inclusive of trans sex workers,
- Collaboration with Russian NGO working with trans and sex workers communities for better access to counselling hormone therapy, health care, violence, linkage services and condoms

Signatories

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