



# "WE NEED RIGHTS NOT RESCUE"

## Sex work and Migration

Migration describes the process in which individuals or groups of people leave their place of usual residence. People migrate for a range of reasons and almost all states in the world are countries of origin, transit or destination for migrants.

### Facts about migrant sex workers

Some sex workers are migrants who move far away from their homes to make a better life for themselves and their families.



In an increasingly globalised world, people move for a variety of reasons – to earn money, to access new opportunities, to improve their lives, to have new experiences, or to escape from difficult circumstances. Sex workers are no different.

*"I could not go back home as the people there needed my help. It was hard to work very far away from home, where I didn't speak the local languages and knew that it was a big crime to sell sex that could lead to deportation, harassment and rape." – Female migrant sex worker living in South Africa*



Migrant sex workers contribute to the local economies where they work, and also benefit their economies at home by sending remittances.



Migrant sex workers face a number of challenges including xenophobia from local sex workers and health and social service-providers, language and cultural barriers, as well as restrictive migration laws and enforcement.



They report moving away from their homes for three main reasons:

- 1 to get away from punitive laws and law enforcement practices.
- 2 to avoid discrimination and prejudice.
- 3 to make a better life for themselves and their dependents.



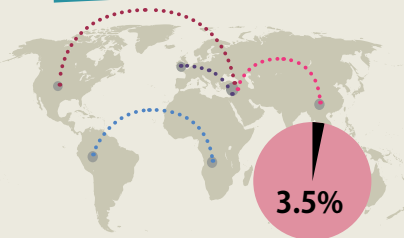
The popular assumption that migrant sex workers are victims of trafficking, increases their vulnerability to Raid and Rescue operations, increased stigma, and other human rights violations.



### Definitions

#### International migrant:

A person who moves to another country (for whatever reason). In 2019, there were an estimated **272 million** international migrants globally (only **3.5%** of the world's population).



#### Refugee:

A person who has crossed an international border for reasons of actual or feared persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (including gender). In 2019, there were an estimated **25.9 million** refugees worldwide.



#### Economic migrant:

A person who moves to another country primarily motivated by economic opportunities.



#### Internally displaced person:

A person who has been forced to flee to avoid the effects of armed conflict, violence, violations of human rights or natural disasters, and who has not crossed an internationally recognised State border.



#### Asylum seeker:

A person who seeks protection from persecution.



## MYTHS

**Most migrants come from countries other than their usual residence**

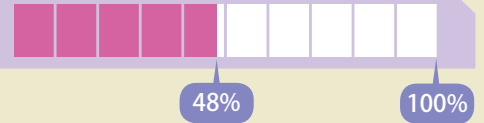
## FACTS

Most people migrate internally rather than across State borders. While internal migration is very difficult to estimate, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that more than **763 million** people had migrated internally in 2013. In other words, **1 in every 7** people was a migrant.



**Very few women migrate**

Women make up **48%** of international migrants.



## CASE STUDY

### The impact of restrictive migration policies

This is an example from the United Kingdom (UK) during political discussions on whether the UK would leave the European Union (EU) – a process popularly called Brexit:



*“As the clock ticks down to Brexit, EU sex workers, living and working in the UK, are demanding the right to stay on the basis of their work and the contribution they are making to the survival of families and even communities. Sex workers are disadvantaged and discriminated against because sex work isn’t recognised as work in the UK. Many people therefore don’t have the documentation, including the record of waged work, that is needed to establish a right to stay in the UK. Arrests and deportations of EU migrant sex workers have been rising, particularly since the Brexit referendum in 2016.”*  
English Collective of Prostitutes (2019)

### The importance of firewalled health and social services



People seeking health and social services should be secure that their information will remain confidential and that service-providers will not alert authorities about their immigration status. For example, if a sex worker is undocumented and they don’t trust the health care system to protect their information, they will not seek the health, social and legal services they need. Maintaining the integrity of this private information is often called a ‘firewall’.

### What is Needed



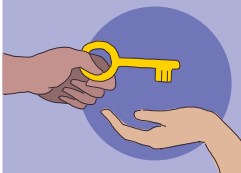
**Challenge restrictive and discriminatory migration laws** to ensure safe and legal migration.



**Decriminalise sex work and repeal laws** and policies that discriminate against migrant sex workers.



**Educate and sensitise legal, social and health care workers**, as well as non-clinical personnel who serve as gate-keepers to services related to sex work and migration. Ensure the provision of non-judgemental, migration-aware and confidential services.



**Ensure that all migrant sex workers have access to support**, services and to justice without threat of deportation.



**Support community-led projects that provide services to sex workers and migrants**, and ensure meaningful involvement of migrant sex workers in the design and delivery of these services.

**References:** Asijiki (2015) “Sex work, migration and tourism” Asijiki Fact Sheet; English Collective of Prostitutes (2019) “Sex workers are getting screwed by Brexit”; Global Network of Sex Work Projects (2018) “The Impact of Stigma and Discrimination on Key Populations and Their Families”; Global Network of Sex Work Projects (2018) “Briefing Paper: Migrant Sex Workers”; International Organisation for Migration “World Migration Report 2020”; International Organization for Migration “Migration in the world”; Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (2019) “Safeguarding the human rights and dignity of undocumented migrant sex workers”.