

Press release 17.12.2021 - International Day against Violence against Sex Workers

On the occasion of this year's International Day against Violence against Sex Workers, the network consisting of sex worker self-organisations sexworker.at and Red Edition, as well as the counselling centres maiz (Linz), PiA (Salzburg), iBUS (Innsbruck), SXA-Info (Graz) and LEFÖ (Vienna) denounce structural violence against sex workers. We want to draw attention to the following grievances:

- Stigmatisation of sex workers
- Victimisation of sex workers

On the part of many authorities, socio-political actors and various groups, sex workers are seen as victims affected by violence and exploitation, as criminal or amoral persons and as carriers of diseases. Migrant sex workers are often equated with trafficked persons.

These attributions lead to stigmatisation, discrimination, social exclusion and devaluation. In addition, this attribution of a generalised passive victim role deprives sex workers of any ability to make decisions and act.

The ongoing covid-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated the precarious situation of sex workers in Austria. This pandemic was and is characterised by prohibition to work and discrimination.

We denounce the following abuses:

- Lack of information or lack of clarity and inconsistency of information regarding the regulations of sex work during lockdowns.
- Resulting legal uncertainty, unjustified charges and high penalties.
- Arbitrariness and discrimination on the part of the authorities, especially in connection with the mandatory examinations.
- Increased undercover investigations that violate human rights.

The constant discrimination against sex workers compared to other professional groups is an expression of social moral concepts and must not be allowed to influence the legislature.

We therefore demand:

- A destigmatisation: abolition of compulsory registration and compulsory examinations.
- The recognition of sex work as work and thus an end to victimisation.
- Complete decriminalisation of all aspects of sex work and an end to illegalisation.
- The involvement of sex workers, their self-organisations or their elected representatives in political decision-making processes that affect them. Sex workers are experts of their own needs.
- Competent and transparently communicated regulations.
- Low-threshold access to compulsory examinations regardless of the situation.
- The facilitation of self-determined and independent work.
- The implementation of a migration policy that respects the human rights of sex workers and guarantees their legal protection.