

Comments on the on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence by Poland by Kolektyw Kamelia, sex workers rights collective in Poland



General comments

The prevention and response to gender-based violence in Poland remain insufficient from an intersectional perspective. Current policies do not adequately consider the compounded vulnerabilities of LGBTQ+ victims or migrants, leading to inequitable access to protection and support services.

Comments on Violence and Protection Gaps Affecting Sex Workers

Prevention of gender-based and sexual violence in Poland fails to recognise the specific situation of sex workers and does not include any tailored protection measures or support services for this group. Polish authorities do not identify sex workers as a population disproportionately exposed to multiple, intersecting forms of violence, including sexual, physical, psychological, and economic violence. Such violence is not limited to interactions with clients; evidence shows that it is frequently perpetrated by law enforcement officers themselves. According to the ESWA report co-authored by Dziuban & Dominic (2024), which includes findings from Poland, the majority of sex workers who approached the police as victims reported discrimination and mistreatment. Police practices routinely normalise violence against sex workers, disregard reported incidents, and, as documented, police officers are at times direct perpetrators of abuse, including sexual violence.

These systemic dynamics create a climate of fear that significantly discourages sex workers from reporting crimes. Anticipated discrimination fuelled by stigma, retaliation, and the risk of further violence at the hands of police contribute to chronic under-reporting (Dziuban, 2024; Ratecka, 2023; Ślęzak, 2023). This reinforces a cycle of impunity and deepens mistrust between sex workers and state institutions thus also has consequences in sex workers very limited access to justice as victims of crimes.

As highlighted in the ESWA report, sex workers in Poland experience violations of both the EU Victims' Rights Directive and the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention. Sex workers "are often deprived of the protection and support to which they are entitled. Many do not receive access to psychological or medical services, victim compensation, or information about their legal rights and available aid. For migrant sex workers, language barriers further hinder their access to justice" (Dziuban & Dominic, 2024, p. 19). These gaps demonstrate the urgent need for structural reforms that centre the lived experiences of sex workers and ensure that prevention, protection, and support mechanisms are accessible to all victims of gender-based violence without discrimination.

Recommendations: key measures to prevent mistreatment of sex workers

- Recognise sex workers as a vulnerable group within GBV prevention strategies and ensure their inclusion in national policies.
- Introduce strong safeguards against police violence, including independent complaint mechanisms and mandatory human-rights-based training for law enforcement.
- Ensure access to non-judgmental support services, including psychological, medical, legal, and shelter services, with multilingual options for migrant sex workers.
- Remove barriers to reporting by guaranteeing that sex workers can report violence without fear of discrimination, arrest, or retaliation.
- Work with sex-worker-led organisations in designing policies, outreach, training, and monitoring.
- Ensure compliance with EU Victims' Rights Directive and the Istanbul Convention, guaranteeing equal access to protection, justice, and compensation for all victims.

Referneces

Dziuban, A. (2024). Imposed Mobility , Legal Ambiguity , Institutionalized Abandonment : Exploring the Sex Work Crimscape in Contemporary Poland. *Critical Criminology*, 0123456789. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-024-09778-0>

Dziuban, A., & Dominic, C. (2024). *Exposed From All Sides: The Role of Policing in Sex Workers' Access to Justice*.

Ratecka, A. (2023). Sex Work Policy in Poland and Its Impact on the Lived Experience of Sex Workers. *Politicka Misao*, 60(4), 35–60. <https://doi.org/10.20901/pm.60.4.02>

Ślęzak, I. (2023). Officer in the Line of Duty, Client, Third Party. Female Sex Workers' Interactions with the Police in Poland. *Politicka Misao*, 60(4), 82–111. <https://doi.org/10.20901/pm.60.4.04>