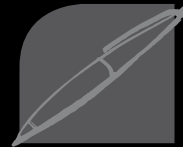


03

UK NETWORK OF  
SEX WORK PROJECTS

## GOOD PRACTICE GUIDANCE



# Working with Migrant Sex Workers

# Acknowledgments

As part of work funded by The Big Lottery Fund, the UK Network of Sex Work Projects (UK NSWP) undertook to produce a series of good practice guidance documents for sex work projects and agencies working with sex workers. As with all resources developed by the UK NSWP, members from across the UK have played a critical role in identifying the issues to be addressed and in developing the materials. The good practice guidance is based on the collective experience and knowledge accumulated by the working group, which was drawn from the UK NSWP membership.

The working group comprised Ruth Morgan Thomas, Chair (SCOT-PEP & UKNSWP Board Member), Georgina Perry (Open Doors & UKNSWP Board Member), Jane Ayres (Praed Street Project), Tina Threadgold (MASH), Effi Stergiopoulou (CLASH) and Michael Emberson (Salvation Army); supported by Geraldine Flanagan (UK NSWP).

Proof reading by Nine Davidson (SCOT-PEP). Design by Mitch Cosgrove – [www.cosgrovedesign.co.uk](http://www.cosgrovedesign.co.uk).

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[UK Network of Sex Work Projects](http://www.uknswp.org)

[info@uknswp.org.uk](mailto:info@uknswp.org.uk)

[www.uknswp.org](http://www.uknswp.org)

## UKNSWP aims

To promote the health, safety, civil and human rights of sex workers, including their rights to live free from violence, intimidation, coercion or exploitation, to engage in the work as safely as possible, and to receive high quality health and other services in conditions of trust and confidentiality, without discrimination on the grounds of gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, culture or religion.

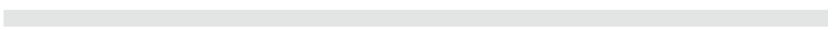
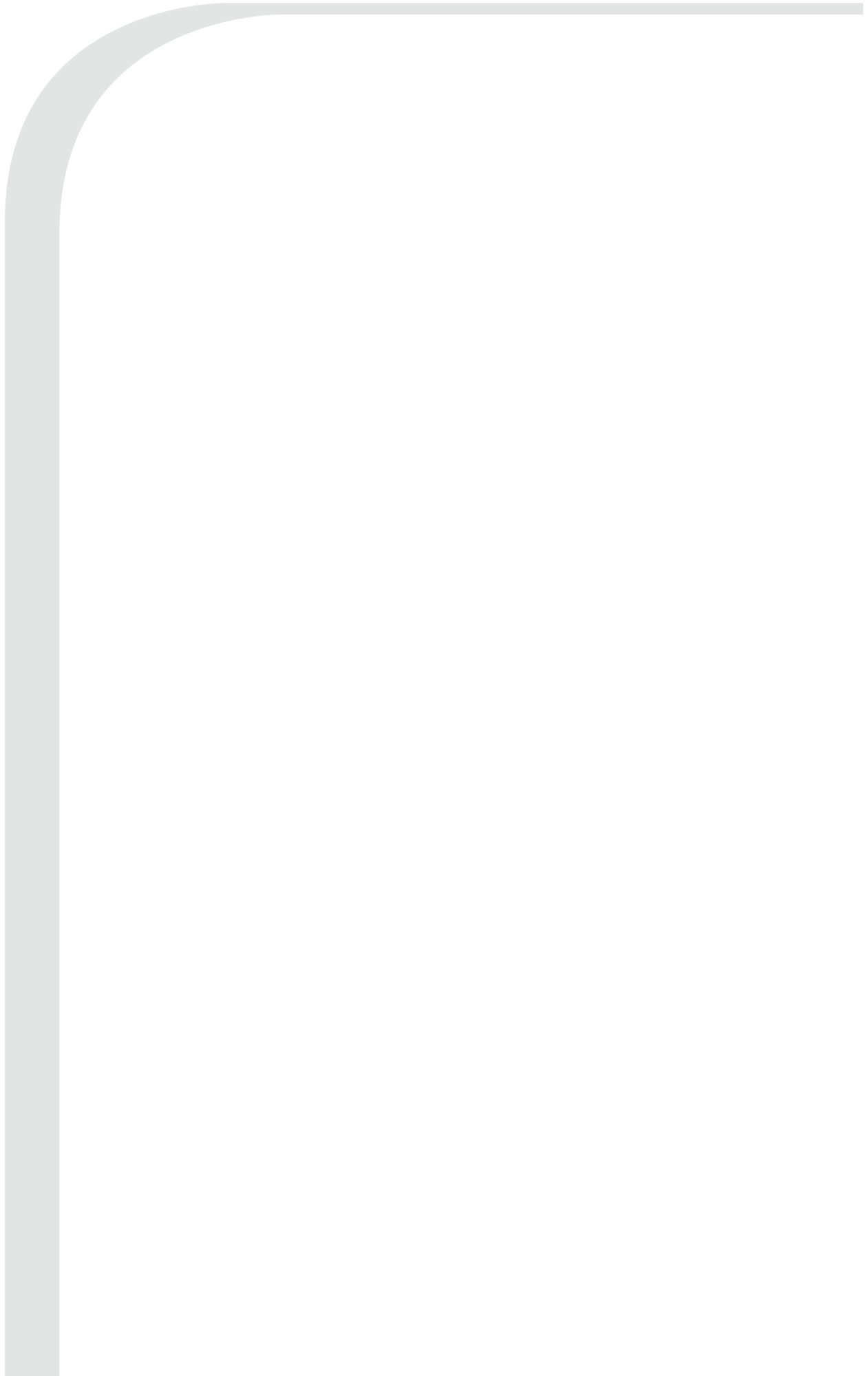
## Disclaimer

The content of this publication is for information purposes only. Some of the legislation and terminology may not be applicable across the whole of the UK. Whilst the authors have made every effort to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the text, we accept no legal liability for any errors or omissions.

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# Introduction

## Sex work and sex workers

Sex work covers a wide range of erotic economic activity, including erotic dance and stripping, phone sex, and pornography, as well as selling sexual services. However, the primary focus of the UK NSWP is to enhance the capacity of service providers to provide the highest quality support to female, male and transgender sex workers engaged in selling sexual services in any setting.

The UK NSWP accepts an individual's right to self-determination, including the right to enter, remain within and move on from sex work. The UK NSWP opposes any form of coercion used within the sex industry, as it opposes all forms of forced labour, servitude and slavery-like practices.

## Definition of migrant sex workers

This definition is intended to be inclusive. The issues facing migrant sex workers are complex, and the definition deliberately omits questions about the intention of individuals when they cross a border, or the degree of free will or control they have in the situation. Migrant sex workers are first and foremost individuals; as such, their circumstances change over time, as does the context of those circumstances.

For the purposes of this guide a migrant sex worker is:

*A person who, not being a UK national, enters the UK, for whatever purpose, by whatever means, with or without assistance, and who at any stage of their residence in the UK engages in sex work.*

## Trafficking and migration

Trafficking is, perhaps, most often defined in terms of the Palermo Protocol:

*'Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.'*

Broken down into its constituent parts, the definition comprises ACTS, MEANS and PURPOSE. The consent of a victim is irrelevant if any of the MEANS are used or if the victim is aged under 18 years. The three components are illustrated below:

ACT	MEANS	PURPOSE
Recruitment	Threat or use of force or other coercion	Exploitation
Transportation	Abduction	
Transfer	Fraud	
Harbouring	Deception	
Receipt of persons	Involvement in payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person	

One or more elements in each of the three components must be present to meet the definition. Assuming that the victim is aged 18 years or older, if *none* of the elements in one or more components is present, it is *not* trafficking as defined by the Protocol. Similarly, if the intended purpose of the act was not exploitation, regardless of whether one or more of the means was used, this is also not trafficking, even if the ‘victim’ was exploited.

However, UK trafficking legislation<sup>1</sup> focuses only on trafficking for the purposes of prostitution (in Scotland for the purpose of prostitution and/or pornography); criminalising the arranging and facilitating of travel – *into, within and from the United Kingdom* – with the intention of exercising control of prostitution or with knowledge that control will be exercised. ‘Control’ is defined as exercising control, direction or influence over a prostitute’s movements for the purpose of gain in a way which shows that an individual is aiding, abetting or compelling the prostitution. Traffickers can be male or female.

Trafficking in human beings, for any purpose, is a gross violation of human rights. However, not all migrant sex workers are victims of trafficking. Migration occurs in different forms along a continuum from coerced to independent migration.

**Coerced migration:** occurs when the individual concerned has no control over events, and no desire to cross a border or travel leading to eventual involvement in sex work.

However, more commonly encountered are cases of migration which do not involve coercion, including facilitated, smuggled and independent migration and which *may or may not* fall within the Palermo Protocol definition of trafficking *or* be considered an offence under the UK legislation relating to traffic in prostitution.

**Facilitated migration:** occurs when an individual contracts with another to cross a border or travel, legally or illegally, and when the desire to travel and engage in sex work at some stage is present. The contractual arrangement between the individual and the

<sup>1</sup> England, Northern Ireland & Wales – Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002: chapter 41 section 145 Traffic in prostitution. [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/20041-h.htm#145](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/20041-h.htm#145)

Scotland – Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2003: section 22 Traffic in prostitution, etc. [www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2003/30007--d.htm#22](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/acts2003/30007--d.htm#22)

facilitator does not normally end when the border is crossed but does not necessarily include 'control'.

**Smuggled migration:** occurs when an individual contracts with another to cross a border illegally, and the contractual arrangement ends when that border has been crossed and the individual has arrived at a pre-agreed destination.

**Independent migration:** occurs when an individual arranges their own travel, legally or illegally, and when the desire to travel and engage in sex work at some stage is present.

## Legal status

Once in the UK, migrant sex workers can fall into and move among the following categories:

**Legal:** those who have a legal right to be present in, reside in or work in the UK and are fulfilling all conditions attached to those legal rights. Coerced, facilitated and independent migrant sex workers can all fall into this category.

**Semi-legal:** those who have a legal right to be present or reside in the UK but not the right to work in the UK and who are therefore not fulfilling all conditions attached to their stay in the UK. Coerced, facilitated and independent migrant sex workers can all fall into this category.

**Illegal:** those who have no legal right to be present or work in the UK and for whom it is unreasonable to expect such permission to be granted. Coerced, facilitated, smuggled and independent migrant sex workers can all fall into this category.

## Human rights

All humans, including female, male and transgender sex workers, who decide to enter sex work and those trafficked and coerced into the sex industry, have the same entitlement under international human rights treaties.

In October 2005, the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe organised a European conference on Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration in the European Parliament at which The Declaration of the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe<sup>2</sup> was endorsed by 120 sex workers and 80 politicians and allies from human rights, labour and migrants organisations from 30 countries. The declaration is drawn from international human rights treaties and identifies the rights that sex workers, including migrant sex workers, should be entitled to under international law.

The declaration highlights state obligations to ensure that it does not violate rights, that others do not violate rights, and that all structures of the state are organised to ensure that diverse persons can enjoy and exercise their rights. It goes on to make recommendations for measures and practices to ensure that sex workers' rights are respected and protected. In so doing, it offers guidance to organisations and institutions seeking to develop a comprehensive and rights-based approach to sex work.

<sup>2</sup> [www.sexworkeurope.org/resources/declaration](http://www.sexworkeurope.org/resources/declaration)

## Rationale and principles

This good practice guide exists, in part at least, to redress the imbalances and added disadvantages that face migrant sex workers compared to other sex workers. Sex workers in the UK are stigmatised and face discrimination and sometimes criminalisation. When these factors are combined with the legal, cultural and language issues and racism faced by many migrants, a deeply disenfranchised, disadvantaged and excluded group of individuals is created with less agency and greater vulnerability than national sex workers.

All work with migrant sex workers should be based on the following overarching principles to create a person-centred approach:

- Migrant sex workers are individuals and it is difficult to make generalised assumptions without stereotyping
- The migrant sex worker needs to be at the centre of services and their involvement in services at all levels should be encouraged
- Migrant sex workers should be offered equal opportunity and access to services in a non-judgemental fashion that celebrates diversity
- As individuals, migrant sex workers have the right to make their own informed decisions about their own lives
- Services, within existing constraints, should be holistic, offering assistance with all aspects of an individual's needs
- Services should be committed to a professional approach, including maintaining professional boundaries, confidentiality and a realistic approach to the management of expectations

## Common challenges

Working with migrant sex workers can be challenging and difficult. These difficulties are made more complex and demanding by certain characteristics of the work. These are listed below. Workers should be prepared to face these difficult issues. Throughout this guide you will find useful tips and helpful information drawn from experience.

- Workers may find it difficult to separate their own cultural background and value system from those of the migrant sex worker with whom they are engaging
- The needs of an individual sex worker will always need to be weighed against the needs of other sex workers and the organisation
- Staff and volunteers in organisations are likely, at times, to experience feelings of helplessness and inadequacy about what they can achieve in this difficult arena. It is important to recognise both individual and organisational limitations and manage the expectations of staff, volunteers and service users alike
- Individual and organisational views about migration and sex work are often strongly and passionately held – very often from moral or religious standpoints – so there is potential for conflict and confrontation
- Resources will always be limited and there are likely to be difficult issues around gatekeeping services, supplying only what has been contractually funded and competition with other organisations
- Difficult moral and ethical issues such as child sexual abuse through prostitution, poor decision making by service users and the need to stay within the law will often arise



**Useful tip:** difficult issues are likely to be part of everyday work in this field, so organisations should ensure they have appropriate systems to support staff and volunteers.

### TAMPEP UK mapping and Pentameter 2006

In the UK, it is estimated<sup>3</sup> that there are between 50,000 and 80,000 female sex workers of whom around 28% (14,000 to 22,400) work in street prostitution while the remaining 72% (36,000 to 57,600) work in indoor establishments and as escorts. Overall, around 37% (18,720 to 29,952) of female sex workers in the UK are migrants, with an estimated 52% of migrant sex workers coming from former Eastern Bloc countries and the Balkans. The 2006 mapping exercise<sup>4</sup> demonstrated a continuing absence of migrant sex workers in street prostitution in the UK, primarily because of high visibility and policing. Amongst indoor-based sex workers, an

estimated 52% are migrants. London projects reported that 76% of their female contacts are migrant indoor-based sex workers. The presence of migrant indoor-based sex workers outside London varies across the country with percentages ranging from 0-40%.

Operation Pentameter (a three-month national campaign targeting trafficking) involved a publicity campaign, which aimed to raise awareness of trafficking amongst clients and the public, with law enforcement officers handing out leaflets to migrant women at airports and law enforcement raids on sex work establishments. 188 women and girls were 'rescued' during 515 raids (estimated to be 10% of the sex industry establishments operating in the UK). 72 women and 12 girls aged between 14 and 17 were confirmed to be victims of trafficking during the operation, and an undisclosed number of migrant sex workers are believed to have been voluntarily repatriated or deported.

<sup>3</sup> UK NSWP estimate based on members' reports

<sup>4</sup> TAMPEP 7 UK Prostitution Mapping

# Context

## Sex work legislation and law enforcement approach

Selling and buying sexual services are not illegal in the UK. Rather, associated activities relating to public nuisance and exploitation have been criminalised<sup>5</sup>.

With the establishment of the UK Human Trafficking Centre in Sheffield, a police and crown prosecution service partnership to coordinate anti-trafficking measures in the UK, law enforcement initiatives to combat trafficking are likely to continue to target sex work establishments. Migrant sex workers should not be treated differently from national sex workers for prostitution-related offending, but they inevitably face the additional impact of immigration legislation.

Despite slight variations in Northern Ireland and Scotland, the impact of legislation is similar throughout the UK, with governments committed to targeting clients and kerb-crawlers and disrupting sex markets.

While individuals under 18 may be prosecuted for sex work-related offences, this should only happen in the most extreme and persistent cases, and generally, the police should refer young people involved to social services. Migrants and trafficked persons under 18 have additional protection *as children* under human rights legislation.

## Immigration and right to work

UK laws on immigration are complex and are best approached with reference to an individual's family situation and their country of origin. Country of origin may be grouped into two categories: European Economic Area including Switzerland (EEA) and others.

### EEA countries

All EEA nationals have the right to free movement to and residence in the UK. However, although all EEA nationals can establish themselves as self-employed in the UK (but must be registered as self-employed with HM Revenue and Customs) not all have an equal right to seek employment.

Nationals from the following countries have full freedom to seek employment in the UK: Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland.

Nationals from the following countries are required to register with the Worker Registration Scheme (run by the Border and Immigration Agency) on securing employment: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.release.org.uk/store/showItem.php?category=publications&id=3](http://www.release.org.uk/store/showItem.php?category=publications&id=3) for summaries of current offences

Nationals from Romania and Bulgaria require authorisation from the Home Office **before** starting work in the UK, unless they are exempt, and the UK government has established quotas for 'unskilled' workers from these two countries.

### Other countries

Non-EEA nationals normally have to seek entry clearance to come to the UK, and require authorisation to legally stay and work here. Conditions for entry clearance and authorisation to stay and work vary depending on country of origin and individual circumstance. If in doubt, this should be checked with an immigration specialist.

Some migrant sex workers arrive in the UK legally, but once they start work or overstay their visa they may become illegal. Others have obtained visas by deception and their entry to the UK is therefore illegal. Some may arrive on spouse visas and can be sub-divided into those who have contracted a genuine marriage; those who knowingly colluded to a bogus marriage; and those who are deceived into marriage. Those who were 'duped' into a bogus marriage may have *legal* status. Those who entered into bogus marriages are likely to have *illegal* status if they have obtained entry by deception. Spouses of genuine UK citizens may be able to gain *legal* status under one of the Home Office's concessions, depending on circumstances.

Anyone without an appropriate visa and authorisation will be considered illegal by the Border and Immigration Agency (BIA) and is liable to removal if discovered. Once an illegal or semi-legal migrant sex worker comes to the attention of the BIA, they will be classified as an illegal immigrant and the BIA will seek to remove them. The only way to delay, and possibly prevent, removal would

be for the individual to identify themselves as a victim of trafficking and/or legally challenge removal by claiming asylum on a human rights issue.

### Asylum and human rights claims

Some migrant sex workers may be afraid to return to their home country for various reasons. They may have been trafficked, have left their country through fear of persecution, or the country may be unsafe. Depending on their circumstances the following may be possible:

- Claim asylum as members of a particular social group fearing persecution
- Claim asylum under the European Convention on Human Rights through fear of their rights being abused by '*cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment*'
- Claim asylum or discretionary leave to remain in the UK if they are ill and in need of medical care which their country of origin cannot provide
- Claim Humanitarian Protection under immigration rules. Under this claim, they will have to satisfy the Home Office that if removed to their country of origin they would face a serious risk of unlawful killing or torture, or inhuman and degrading treatment
- Discretionary leave can also be granted to 'unaccompanied' migrants under 18 for whom no reception arrangements are in place or where circumstances are so compelling that it is appropriate to grant some form of leave

The main issue to be proved is the lack of protection from their own government if they return. Each case has to be judged on its own merits.

## Benefits or other assistance

With the enlargement of the European Union (EU) in 2004, the UK introduced changes to the benefit laws to limit the rights to claim benefits of nationals<sup>6</sup> from Central and Eastern Europe (A8) and Bulgaria and Romania, which became members in 2007. This means that A8, Bulgarian and Romanian nationals are treated as not habitually resident and therefore, unable to claim benefits unless they have a right to reside in the UK. A8 nationals have the right to reside if they are working *and* apply to register under the Worker Registration Scheme (WRS) within a month of taking up work. This can be any work, as long as it is more than 10 hours per week. This entitles them to apply for 'In-Work' benefits, the most important of which are Tax Credits and Housing Benefit. If an A8 national loses their job within the first 12 months of employment, they will need to re-register under the WRS when they find new employment. Once an A8 national has worked for 12 months under the scheme, they will be treated the same as any other EU national and have the same entitlement to benefits as any other settled person in the UK.

EU nationals can legally obtain any other assistance from charities or other sources before they find work or while they are unable to get work for any reason such as a language barrier. They are also entitled to claim Disability Living Allowance and healthcare under the NHS.

Non-EU nationals are not entitled to any state benefits but if they claim asylum, or make any claims under the Human Rights Convention, they can claim support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

So far, courts have decided that if an asylum seeker claims within three days of arrival in the UK, or if there are special circumstances why they could not claim before then, they will be entitled. As soon as a service is in contact with a migrant sex worker who wishes to claim asylum they should arrange for the individual to make a claim in person at Croydon or Liverpool. If the individual is granted refugee status, they are entitled to the same benefits as any person normally settled in the UK. They are also entitled to full benefits if granted Discretionary Leave or Humanitarian Protection. They are entitled to treatment under the NHS even before any leave is granted.

## A charity's responsibility to inform the BIA

Immigration law makes it an offence to assist or condone illegal immigration in the UK. The maximum penalty is 14 years' imprisonment. There is, however, a defence for staff employed by some charities. This allows that the offence does not apply when a person does not act 'for gain' or if the person is acting on behalf of an organisation which 'aims to assist asylum seekers' and 'does not charge for its services'. As such, most charities do not act illegally in assisting illegal and semi-legal migrant sex workers. If a migrant sex worker claims asylum, they will normally be granted temporary admission which stipulates the conditions of their admission into this country. One of the conditions is to reside at a specified address notified to BIA. The applicant should keep the Home Office informed of any changes in address because to fail to do so would be

<sup>6</sup> but not the rights of nationals from the new members Cyprus and Malta

a breach of the terms on which an asylum seeker may remain in the UK pending the process of their claim. If a charity were to receive direct enquiries from BIA about the residence/address of a specific individual who is claiming asylum, it should be up to their arrangement with, or extent on which they act on behalf of, an individual how they answer. The charity would be advised to refer BIA to the applicant's solicitor, if they have one.

# Common issues

## Confidentiality and data protection

Confidentiality is paramount when working with migrant sex workers. Staff and volunteers should adhere to their organisation's confidentiality policy at all times and inform service users about the policy.

### Breaching confidentiality

There are circumstances when staff and volunteers have a statutory obligation to breach confidentiality:

- When someone under 18 is involved
- If by keeping confidentiality the client or another person is likely to suffer injury or harm
- If information disclosed relates to the Prevention of Terrorism Act (1990)
- If subpoenaed under court order

If a member of staff or volunteer becomes aware of any of these circumstances, every effort should be made to inform the service user that a disclosure is being made, and to encourage them to take appropriate steps themselves.

**Useful tip:** confidentiality statements should include *any* circumstances when confidentiality may be breached and should be translated into relevant languages, so that migrant sex workers can understand it.

Migrant sex workers can distrust services because of experience in their home

countries, where, despite assurances of confidentiality, information may have been routinely shared with state agencies, such as the police or immigration service. Be extra sensitive to the fact that they may not be familiar with the UK system. They don't know that they can trust you, so you need to work on building it.

**Useful tip:** be explicit about what confidentiality means in the UK, and assure people that information is not passed on to police and immigration or friends or partners.

Migrant sex workers want anonymity because:

- They do not want to be identified as sex workers because of the stigma attached to working in the sex industry
- Their families, friends and even partners often do not know they work in the sex industry and they fear being found out
- They may believe that selling sexual services is illegal in the UK and they will be arrested, taken to court, sent to prison or be deported if caught
- They fear that the authorities/family in their home country may be told that they are working in the sex industry
- They fear deportation if they have illegal immigration status
- They fear that their citizenship application / asylum process will be jeopardised

These beliefs can arise from their own or their colleagues' previous experiences, or lack of information, but sometimes 'controllers' perpetuate these beliefs to keep migrant sex workers fearful and stop them from seeking help.

**Useful tip:** the detail you need to have about an individual depends on the work you are doing with them. For example, you do not need a full name and address for monitoring purposes, but you might need them for registering someone at a clinic.

**Useful tip:** accept that migrant sex workers may give you a false name and details or not be prepared to give you their address or say where they work. Try to find a way of maintaining their anonymity while ensuring they are known to your project by one name, to avoid confusion, for example the name of their favourite actor or singer. Over time, they may realise that they can trust you.

**Useful tip:** in clinic settings, explain that notes/results may get confused if they can't remember the name they used at the clinic previously.

### Information sharing

In an individual's home country, information may be shared automatically, so it is important to stress that this is not the case in the UK. Reassure migrant sex workers that relevant personal information about them will only be given to other agencies with their permission (for example when making referrals). Staff and volunteers must communicate the procedure for obtaining consent to share information with other service providers (and the use of interpreters) so that the migrant sex worker knows the organisation's procedures and can make informed decisions.

**Useful tip:** when looking to refer a service user to another service provider or

organisation ensure that you *and the service users* are aware of that organisation's confidentiality policy. Some organisations may involve immigration and the police from point of first contact, and a migrant sex worker has the right to decide not to go to that service.

### Record keeping and data protection

The organisation, staff and volunteers must safeguard all confidential information collected and ensure that systems are reliable and safe.

The extent and nature of the work with a migrant sex worker will determine the format of record keeping to be used (for example anonymous contact recording for statistical monitoring, outreach log, clinic file, case file).

Where identifying information is recorded, staff and volunteers must seek consent to keep written or electronic records. This can be difficult with migrant workers because of lack of trust through language barriers, lack of knowledge of the system in the UK and/or illegal immigration status.

Where consent has been obtained for records to be kept, the following apply:

- **Note:** a service user's individual file is a legal document and can be subpoenaed by the courts. Write clearly, using appropriate language and do not put other service users' names in, as this could breach their confidentiality. You must not use Tippex if you make a mistake – simply cross it out
- Keep accurate records; stick to facts not opinions; note any concerns
- Do not record information about third parties (including other sex workers) in records without consent, as this could breach their confidentiality

- When not in use, all files should be kept securely locked away. All IT systems should be password protected, and computer records stored in accordance with the Data Protection Act

Service users have the right to see their personal files, so long as doing so would not lead to harm, either to themselves or another person. They do not have the right to see information from other agencies held in their file. So, they do not have the right to *immediate* access to their files. They should make an appointment to go through the file with a staff member. If they are given the file, all copies of other agencies' letters, reports, notes and so on should be removed. Migrant sex workers may require an interpreter to ensure they can understand the file's contents.

All organisations which store personal data are required by legislation<sup>7</sup> to register. It is an offence not to do so. For further information about data protection and freedom of information see:

- Information Commissioners Office  
[www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)
- Scottish Information Commissioner  
[www.itspublicknowledge.info](http://www.itspublicknowledge.info)
- Department of Constitutional Affairs (data protection – frequently asked questions)  
[www.dca.gov.uk/ccpd/faqdp.htm#2](http://www.dca.gov.uk/ccpd/faqdp.htm#2)
- People's rights under freedom of information [www.foi.gov.uk](http://www.foi.gov.uk)

## Health and health care

Migrant sex workers are not a homogeneous group, and bring their own experiences and health profiles. It is important to consider the cultural background and the differences

between nationalities when approaching healthcare. There are, however, common factors which can exclude migrant sex workers from healthcare. Most migrant sex workers are unlikely, on arrival, to have family, social or professional support; the necessary language and local knowledge; or know how the UK healthcare system works. These factors may also affect an individual's psychological health: separation from family and friends simply makes life harder.

### Meeting you

Migrant sex workers will be much more suspicious than other sex workers about who you are and why you want to help them. There are many reasons for this including anxiety about immigration status and beliefs about and experiences of healthcare services.

### Language

There is significant need for translation and multi-lingual resources (see language section below). For clinical interventions, clinicians will need to use hospital interpreters or a telephone interpreting service.

**Useful tip:** it helps if you can provide interpreters who have had awareness raising training, and offer interpreters support and debriefings for complex cases.

**Useful tip:** consultation using an interpreter will take twice as long so adjust the clinic appointment times accordingly.

**Useful tip:** provide service users with orientation materials, maps, travel information and information about local services; these can be empowering and therapeutic for service users.

<sup>7</sup> Data Protection Act 1998 – [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980029.htm)



### Controllers

Migrant sex workers who have been coerced or facilitated are often told by their ‘controllers’ that service providers will ask to see their passports and report them to immigration and the police. ‘Controllers’ may maintain isolation and control by minimising or disrupting contact with maids/receptionists, other sex workers, regular clients and potential support services.

**Useful tip:** persistence in offering free condoms, health promotion information and confidential and free clinical services can help build trust.

### Transience

High mobility across establishments and the country can affect agencies’ ability to provide health services and follow up clinical care to migrant sex workers.

**Useful tip:** provide regular, clear and up-to-date contact information about your own and other services to migrant sex workers and establishments.

### Working conditions

Migrant sex workers may experience discrimination in sex work settings making their employment position insecure. They often work longer hours, possibly because they have less negotiating power, and may have significant financial commitments to family or ‘debt bondage’ to pay to traffickers. Long working hours may make it difficult for them to come to clinic appointments so try to adapt your service accordingly.

### Access to healthcare

As a general guideline, sexual health services (excluding HIV care), contraception and the accident and emergency department

(including emergency gynaecology) are free to anyone regardless of immigration status and recourse to public funds. Once someone is admitted to a hospital ward or referred for a follow up appointment from A&E, they will be charged if they are not entitled to free NHS hospital treatment or their country does not have a reciprocal arrangement with the UK government. The Department of Health website provides detailed information about entitlement for overseas visitors including a list of countries with reciprocal agreements with the UK<sup>8</sup>.

One of the most important things for you to say to migrant sex workers is that if health staff ask about immigration status and health insurance this is to assess entitlement to free treatment and ensure any payment. They will not contact immigration.

**Useful tip:** raising awareness of service users can avoid frightening and potentially fatal situations. Some migrants have run away without receiving essential medical attention when seriously ill because of fear of being reported to immigration.

**Useful tip:** there is usually an ‘overseas officer’ attached to each healthcare authority who can provide you with information. They are responsible for making decisions about entitlement to free NHS treatment and payments. It is helpful to liaise with the local officer to raise awareness about migrant sex workers and to advocate for service users. Sometimes a compromise is acceptable such as paying for treatment by instalments. Some authorities may accept a letter from a sexual health clinic as proof of residence for a migrant who has no documents.

<sup>8</sup> [www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/International/OverseasVisitors/index.htm](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/International/OverseasVisitors/index.htm)

## Sexual health

Some migrant sex workers come from areas of higher prevalence of STIs, HIV, TB and Hepatitis. It is important to know about epidemiological trends<sup>9</sup>. Clinicians and other service providers should not assume high rates of infection among migrant sex workers<sup>10</sup>.

**Useful tip:** Genito-Urinary Medicine (GUM) departments provide free, confidential, sexual health care for uninsured migrants (excluding HIV treatment) to anyone within the UK regardless of immigration status.

## General health

Other health issues include alcohol and drug use, smoking, irregular and extensive working hours and personal safety. Irregular status, increased isolation and lack of peer support can make migrant sex workers more vulnerable. Other health problems may include injuries following violence at work, complications after plastic surgery and hormone treatment for transgender individuals.

Access to primary health care and referrals to specialist health services can be problematic, particularly for those without entitlement. EEA nationals and those from countries with reciprocal agreements with the UK can attend a local GP. Some GPs may accept other migrants as temporary patients. For information about local health care services see NHS websites<sup>11</sup>.

**Useful tip:** compile a list of 'friendly' GPs and other local health care providers such as dentists (with clear maps showing their location).

## Psychological health

Psychosocial issues can add significantly to stress. These include secrecy, exposure, exploitation, stigma, financial insecurity, arrest, fear of deportation and cultural conflict. Other factors associated with migration can exacerbate mental health difficulties. Separation from family and friends can be very distressing, particularly if children have been left in their home country for extensive periods; discrimination is harder to address as a stranger in a new country without friends; the pressure to reach a financial goal within a six month visa period can be overwhelming especially when an extended family is relying on an individual to change the family fortune.

There are often complex psychological issues for migrant sex workers who have been coerced or facilitated; have experienced rape and multiple rape, psychological and physical abuse, deliberate disorientation, isolation and extensive working hours; or have had no choice – either about the simplest daily tasks or the sexual service they can offer. These require informed, sensitive and professional support based on the service user's choice.

<sup>9</sup> For detailed information on HIV prevalence see [www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

<sup>10</sup> Ward, H., Day, S., Green, A., Cooper, K., Weber, J. Declining prevalence of STI in the London sex industry, 1985 to 2002 *Sex Transmitted Infections* 2004;80(5);374-379 <http://sti.bmjournals.com/cgi/content/abstract/80/5/374>

<sup>11</sup> **England** – [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/find/results/index.aspx](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/find/results/index.aspx)  
**Northern Ireland** – [www.n-i.nhs.uk](http://www.n-i.nhs.uk)  
**Scotland** – [www.show.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk)  
**Wales** – [www.wales.nhs.uk/directory.cfm](http://www.wales.nhs.uk/directory.cfm)

## Male sex workers

The number of migrant men selling sex has increased over the last few years, especially from Eastern European countries. Nearly two thirds of male sex workers in London are reported as migrant by sex work projects.

Projects report anecdotal evidence of 'international recruitment' to male brothels, particularly men from new EU member states, such as Poland and the Czech Republic. The picture is of economic migration into sex work with full knowledge and consent.

Complex issues shape some men's experience of sex work. Gay and bisexual men may become involved in selling sex as a result of rejection by family and society because of their sexual identity. For others, immigration and visa status may be contributing factors.

Migrant male sex workers face many of the same issues as their female colleagues. For most, English is not their first language. They may be unfamiliar with how or when to access services. In their home country, a GP or dermatologist may look after sexual health, and the concept of a sexual health clinic may be new to them. Those with illegal or semi-legal immigration status may fear arrest and/or deportation. The transient lifestyle of migrant sex workers can make getting services and completing treatment (such as hepatitis B vaccination) problematic. Many male sex workers face the stigma of being involved in sex work, and like their female colleagues, are at risk of isolation.

## Sexuality

Men selling sex in the UK, whether they identify as gay, bisexual or heterosexual, may encounter discrimination and homophobia, because most sell sex to other men. A recent survey undertaken by the European Network Male Prostitution (ENMP) indicated that most migrants surveyed identified as being heterosexual or bisexual, but declared as selling sex exclusively to men<sup>12</sup>. Discrimination, real or perceived, can be a barrier to accessing services and support.

## Drug use

Some migrant male sex workers engage in habitual drug use. While intravenous drug use is rare, many men selling sex use mainstream recreational drugs and alcohol. It is often when high on recreational drugs that unsafe sexual behaviour occurs; yet few will admit that they have a drug problem or addiction.

## Accessing health care

Many migrant men do not have their own accommodation, and often share with other migrants who may not be involved in sex work. They may also have other occupations, such as study or part-time jobs (commonly service and cleaning industries). This can mean they have little spare time and makes it difficult for them to get to health or other services.

**Useful tip:** offer a range of opening times, including early morning or late clinic appointments, if resources will allow.

**Useful tip:** UK NSWP has produced good practice guidance for working with male sex workers and a male sex worker resource. You can download these from [www.uknswp.org.uk](http://www.uknswp.org.uk)

<sup>12</sup> Mai, N., Gaffney, J., & Pryce A., 2003. *Report on Pilot Study on Male Sex Workers Migratory Behaviour*. ENMP, Amsterdam, Netherlands

## Personal safety issues for migrant sex workers

Language barriers and illegal status means that sex workers are much less likely than other members of the public to report crimes against them as they fear deportation and are often not clear about the legality of sex work in the UK. Experience of the authorities in their own countries can be negative and they may not trust law enforcement agencies in the UK. Some police forces perpetuate these fears by using heavy-handed tactics and showing a lack of respect when dealing with migrants.

When engaging with migrant sex workers, think about the barriers which make them vulnerable and how you can reduce these.

- Lack of language and cultural differences mean that migrant sex workers may not be able to negotiate the type and price of sexual services they are willing to provide, negotiate safer sex, or talk an aggressive client down. Cultural differences can make it difficult to defuse a situation. What is offensive in one culture may be perfectly normal in another
- Lack of knowledge about the norms/culture of sex work in this country can mean that third parties take advantage of and exploit migrants
- Migrant sex workers may have limited links into community networks and most do not tell their families/friends what they are doing. Some may feel guilty for religious reasons and be in conflict with themselves
- Migrant sex workers are open to discrimination / racism

- Often migrant sex workers work in isolation, which can greatly reduce their physical and psychological safety

**Useful tip:** create a *safe space* for migrants in your service; clients have to battle with many of the above issues every day. To receive a good service, they need to be able to trust you and your organisation.

**Useful tip:** encourage peer education among migrant sex workers. This can help build support networks of trusted friends and colleagues. Encourage all sex workers to look out for each other and 'take new people under their wing'.

**Useful tip:** help migrants orientate themselves. Advise them to make copies of their passports and other essential documents in case of theft/loss, and offer to keep copies for them.

**Useful tip:** when giving information about outreach be discreet so you do not compromise a person's safety. **Remember:** someone could be controlling them so do not force information onto them.

**Useful tip:** distribute leaflets in appropriate languages which highlight how to work safely. Provide written and verbal information in appropriate languages about how to get support.

**Useful tip:** establish good links with projects which offer places of safety and assure migrants that you can help them if they want to leave their situation.

**Useful tip:** provide emergency telephone numbers such as police, health services, safe houses, Women's Aid on discreet cards.

**Useful tip:** when speaking to a sex worker about personal safety try to find a private area so that they feel safe to disclose. If necessary, use an interpreter to assess any immediate risks.

### Self-defence

Build up rapport and find out more about personal circumstances before promoting self-defence. **Remember:** encouraging a woman to use self-defence if she is being controlled by a third party who expects her to be compliant could compromise her safety or result in disengagement.

**Useful tip:** offer or promote training on managing aggression and de-escalation techniques. **Make sure** that any leaflets you give out are discreet.

### Moving on within and from sex work

Migrant sex workers may talk to you about changing their situation within, moving away from or getting out of the sex industry. The pace of any discussions should be led by the sex worker and not by any agenda you or your project may have about exiting. Sex workers may wish to move into different areas of the industry (for example from selling sexual services and into 'maiding' or dance work). Sex workers may start talking about 'moving on' but it may take years before everything is in place to enable them to do so.

A sex worker may move away from selling sexual services and into procuring, facilitating or coercing other women into the sex industry. You may find out about this from a third party. This can be extremely difficult to deal with. How you work with this information will depend on the evidence you have and on your organisation's protocols for managing violent and/or coercive behaviour.

**Note:** migrants who have the correct papers and immigration status for the UK are in a different position from those who are illegal. Migrant sex workers without legal rights to stay in the UK may make the decision to 'disappear' when they leave the sex industry. In such cases, it is likely that you will lose touch with them altogether

**Useful tip:** ensure that your project has good links with local training and adult education services so you can refer sex workers wishing to embark upon the moving on process. Make sure these services know about the needs and difficulties of migrant sex workers attempting to move on from the sex industry. These include:

- Long periods of sex work that are difficult to explain on a CV
- Lack of confidence and self-esteem about re-integrating into the 'straight world'
- Inability to recognise transferable skills
- Feeling de-skilled because of years outside of mainstream employment
- An education and employment record gained in a country other than the UK that can be difficult to translate into UK-required skills or is not validated by UK employers

# Special issues

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## Language

Many migrant sex workers have very limited understanding of English when they arrive in the UK and, for the vast majority, it is not their first language. This makes it difficult for you to give written and verbal information about complex health and other issues. Interpreters and translation services are therefore essential.

## Awareness of language

Use simple language. Avoid using jargon and/or slang and speak slowly and clearly. Body language can make people feel comfortable. Sometimes the only English a migrant sex worker learns is at work from clients or colleagues, so don't be offended if they use words you would not normally use – it may be the only English they know.

**Useful tip:** learn a few words in different languages, even if it is only “Hello, how are you?” or “I am an outreach worker”<sup>13</sup>. It can make a huge difference. Sign language can also help overcome language barriers.

**Useful tip:** be creative, buy phrase books and dictionaries, have magazines in different languages in your drop-in and waiting rooms.

## Interpreting

There are several possibilities for providing interpreting service. The type of interpreter used will depend on the setting and resources available. The strengths and weaknesses of the various types of interpreters are listed opposite:

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<sup>13</sup> Translation should focus on getting across the professional nature of the worker.

TYPE OF INTERPRETER	STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
<b>Professional: face to face</b>	Interpreter may find out more than the actual questions asked	Interpreter may be interfering and/or give their own advice; may also be shocked by content
<b>Professional: telephone</b>	Anonymity	Slow, expensive; misunderstandings
<b>Professional or volunteer cultural mediator</b> (see page 20)	Understands culture as well as language	Not all migrants feel comfortable talking to someone from their own culture, because of concerns about stigma and/or confidentiality
<b>Sex worker</b>	Understands the issues; has relationship with client	Is unlikely to be trained; lack of confidentiality
<b>Family</b>	Trust; useful in absence of professional interpreter	May not be genuine family member and/or may be a 'controller'; lack of confidentiality
<b>Friend</b>	Trust; useful in absence of professional interpreter	May not be genuine friend and/or may be a 'controller'; lack of confidentiality
<b>Partner</b>	Trust. If in clinical setting they may need treatment too	May not be genuine partner or an abusive partner; may be a 'controller'; lack of confidentiality

### Useful tips to ensure good interpreting

- Before you get an interpreter decide what exactly you want them for
- Spend some time with the interpreter explaining the issues for migrant sex workers and what the interpreter should expect
- If possible, the interpreter should be trained in/know about issues affecting migrant sex workers. It can also help if the interpreter has a special interest in women's issues, LGBT issues or migrant issues
- Interpreters should be bound by confidentiality and be non-judgemental and objective
- Once you have found a good interpreter, try to get the same one every time
- Build relationships with interpreters; make them part of the team
- If service users do not attend appointments, interpreters' time could be used for training/supervision or to translate materials if allowed within their contract

**Note:** professional interpreters may be restricted in what they can do. For example, they may only be allowed to translate word-for-word rather than pick up on other issues that may be going on with the service user.

**Note:** an interpreter needs supervision and support just as much as any other worker.

### Useful tips on finding good interpreting

Recommendation: ask organisations dealing with refugees and/or migrants, women's issues, HIV support and so on. Their interpreters may be more sensitive towards migrant sex workers.

Send a summary sheet to interpreting providers so that interpreters know in advance that they will be working with sex workers, rather than finding out when they arrive. This way you may eliminate, through self-selection, interpreters who would not want to work with this client group.

### Multi-lingual resources for migrant sex workers

TAMPEP, a European network of sex work and migrants projects working with migrant sex workers across 25 countries, has produced a wide range of resources specifically for female and transgender sex workers and those working with migrant sex workers. TAMPEP health promotion leaflets are available on CD in the following languages:

- For female sex workers: Albanian; Bulgarian; Czech; Estonian; French; German; Hungarian; Italian; Lithuanian; Polish; Portuguese; Russian; Romanian; Spanish; Slovak; Thai and Ukrainian
- For transgender sex workers: English, Spanish and Portuguese

The CD can be ordered from SCOT-PEP in Edinburgh<sup>14</sup> (UK coordinator for TAMPEP), the UK NSWP or TAMPEP Coordinating Centre in the Netherlands via its website<sup>15</sup>.

Some UK sex work projects have produced their own multi-lingual resources. See [www.uknswp.org](http://www.uknswp.org) for examples.

**Useful tip:** if possible, get promotional leaflets and cards translated into other languages. This will improve access to services.

**Useful tip:** there are websites which provide free translation of various languages. You type in the text and it's translated for you. Keep the language simple and translate the text back into English so that you can check it makes sense.

**Useful tip:** pictures/visual aids can also help, especially for those who do not read and write. For example, use a picture of a human body to help someone point to where they hurt; or pictures of happy/sad faces to find out how someone is feeling.

### Cultural influences

Working with migrant sex workers means working with people from a huge variety of cultural backgrounds. This can be exciting as everyone involved can learn a lot, but at times it can be confusing and challenging. Guiding principles are to remain open-minded and non-judgemental; avoid making assumptions; be sensitive to migrant sex workers; acknowledge and respect cultural differences; and try to overcome cultural barriers. Don't be afraid to ask people about their culture.

### Cultural mediators

Cultural mediators, who come from the same country or cultural background as the migrant sex worker, can be a great asset to an organisation. Because they can speak the service user's language and understand their culture, it can be easier for them to gain trust. However, there are times when some migrant sex workers prefer someone who is

<sup>14</sup> [www.scot-pep.org.uk](http://www.scot-pep.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup> [www.tampep.com](http://www.tampep.com)



not from their home culture. It is important to consider what the service user wants and not make any assumptions. Cultural mediators should be trained and supervised properly to ensure that they are working within the ethos of the organisation and have the correct information to pass on to service users.

**Useful tip:** don't make assumptions. Check with the service user if they are happy to work with a cultural mediator.

### Health beliefs

Migrant sex workers may be used to different health practices in their home countries. Staff and volunteers should acknowledge the validity of people's experiences and beliefs. You should clearly distinguish between legitimate health beliefs and health myths while informing service users about standard practice in the UK so that they have relevant information and can make an informed choice.

### Health myths

Some health myths such as "the pill makes you put on weight" are universal; others are country-specific. Staff and volunteers should be sensitive to this and inform and educate service users about any health misinformation.

### Mannerisms and expressions

UK culture can seem very different and challenging to other cultures. Clients may put on a front to mask their insecurities and/or lack of understanding. Some people may seem arrogant or rude, as defence mechanisms for not understanding.

**Useful tip:** don't feel threatened or offended by this. Try to find other ways of getting information across.

**Useful tip:** what is acceptable in one culture may not be in another; try to navigate around that. Workers and volunteers should always aim to give service users the benefit of the doubt as long as there is no risk to personal safety.

**Useful tip:** be aware of your body language: being open, friendly and reassuring can help overcome cultural differences.

### Health and social care services

Be aware there are differences in how services are organised in different countries and cultural differences in how professionals are perceived.

**Useful tip:** explain how health and social care services are organised in the UK and how your service runs.

### Government organisations

Migrant sex workers often report corruption in government organisations in their home countries (such as police, immigration).

**Useful tip:** reassure and explain that your agency is not connected to the government/immigration service. If you are a health project, explain that NHS health services are not linked to other arms of the government (see section on confidentiality).

### Voluntary repatriation

If a migrant wants to leave the UK but does not have the correct documentation or enough finances to do so, encourage them to contact the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)<sup>16</sup>. The alternative is (and many do this because they don't realise they have other options) to hand themselves in to a police station. This can make things difficult for them. Some projects have worked with sex workers who have not been believed

<sup>16</sup> [www.IOM.org](http://www.IOM.org)

by police officers or who have been sent straight to detention centres and deported without being able to collect belongings or make plans to leave the UK. However, other projects report positive experiences so it is worth liaising with your local police so that plans can be made for people to leave with dignity.

**Useful tip:** ensure that all migrant sex workers you work with are made aware of the IOM voluntary repatriation scheme. This scheme is open to individuals in the UK who do not have the right to remain here and wish to return to their home country. The scheme supports sex workers with the cost of flights home, reception and support upon arrival, and, in some cases, a small financial incentive.

**Useful tip:** cultivate links with sex work projects in other countries. These organisations may be able to help those returning to their home country who may need health checks or general support.

## Identifying and supporting victims of trafficking

If you come into contact with a migrant whom you believe has been coerced into sex work or who is clearly unhappy with their situation *do not* ignore it. It can feel overwhelming and there are not always clear answers. An ‘all guns blazing’ approach is rarely the right one (unless the situation clearly demands urgent action). If you are concerned and you see the person regularly, build a relationship and ask them sensitively if they want any help. If they do, they are likely to need considerable

reassurance about their situation and how it will be handled by you and anyone else who becomes involved. You may be able to help them find a place of safety and intermediate support. However, in most cases, they will refuse your help.

**Note:** you must be honest. Leaving a ‘controller’ or an abusive situation does not often guarantee a ‘happy ending’ with the migrant allowed to stay in the UK.

**Note:** ‘controllers’ tell migrants horror stories about what will happen to them. They may be terrified of being imprisoned or that serious harm will befall themselves or their family.

You may come into contact with a migrant whom you are unlikely to see again but feel sure that they face immediate danger. This is when projects face difficulties.

If you believe a migrant to be under 18 or in danger of significant and serious harm, you must take action and follow local child protection, vulnerable adult protection or support for victims of trafficking guidelines. There are places of safety in the UK where victims of trafficking have the right to go. These are limited by legislation and can only provide temporary respite (usually for 30 days). The person is expected to work with the authorities to give information about their traffickers and the situation they were in. Even if a migrant complies with this requirement, it is not likely that they will be given authorisation to stay in the UK and will be deported and asked to return if they are required to act as witnesses. Not surprisingly, this is the point at which many migrants disappear.

When assisting a migrant sex worker to escape coercion, factors to consider are:

- Safety of other sex workers who may be involved. You must consider any other migrants who may be coerced by the same person/group, as their safety may be severely compromised by one of them running away
- When is the best time to escape? When are they on their own?
- Where should the escape be from? Work? On the way to/from work?
- Who will organise the escape and coordinate support after?
- Where are they going to go? IOM? Hostel? Home?
- What can they take so they don't make everyone around them suspicious?

**Note:** you may jeopardise the organisation and its relationships with other service users if the escape is arranged from your premises.

**Useful tip:** people may need help to decide what to take; they may not be able to take everything.

**Useful tip:** it is helpful to know the ethos/culture/ideology of the organisation you are referring the migrant to *before* making the referral. This can help pre-empt difficult situations. Where possible do your research beforehand.

### Confidentiality

If helping migrants to escape abusive or coercive situations, the confidentiality of staff/volunteers and the organisation must be maintained. If it becomes common knowledge that your organisation is assisting migrants to escape, other sex workers, receptionists, maids, establishment owners and so on may become suspicious of your organisation. This could jeopardise your work. Also, if organisations are seen to be working with the police, even to help someone, there may be loss of trust, which will be very hard to re-build. If police assistance/involvement is required, this should be arranged as discreetly as possible and away from your premises. You may need to be creative in working out a plan which ensures everyone's safety and confidentiality. It is, therefore, important to build close links with local police.

# London issues

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This section describes particular issues for projects in London because of the size of population, diversity of cultural groups and ever-changing localised trends in sex work.

The information may also give sex work projects outside London useful ideas and an indication of future trends.

## Migrant sex workers in London

The last five years have seen huge changes in the sex industry in London. Most of these relate to the influx of female migrant sex workers who, in certain areas of the city, represent the majority of indoor-based sex workers, and increased levels of coercion and abuse.

Whereas at one time, the majority of working establishments were owned by UK bosses, now ownership and management reflects the many nationalities migrating to the UK. Some establishments are run to cater for specific cultural groups, advertising in niche language papers, employing maids/receptionists and sex workers who speak only the language of the establishment and encouraging customers from specific cultural groups.

**Useful tip:** ask translators or local migrant community organisations to help you go through niche language papers to identify working establishments and also to assist in making calls to introduce your service.

These changes can often make it impossible for sex work projects to reach establishments and migrant sex workers, if staff largely do not speak foreign languages. These establishments tend not to trust outreach projects and their management actively discourages sex workers from making contact with support services.

**Useful tip:** make links with local services that may be able to help you understand specific cultural trends. In East London for example, a women's organisation which supports Turkish women who are victims of domestic violence has helped the sex work project Open Doors to understand the dynamics of the sex markets in one area of Hackney.

**Useful tip:** most sex work projects find they build specific and more intense relationships with certain service users, who become able to trust the service and are happy to discuss trends within their working environment. Use these relationships to check out how movement, safety, working conditions and access to services of sex workers serving different cultural communities change.

## Tensions in sex work markets in London

The London indoor sex market has reached saturation point, and there are now far more working establishments and internet-based services than ever before. Many

establishments (with the possible exception of Soho) rely on regular customers and there is massive competition. In the City of London, flats open and close with alarming regularity, often making it difficult for sex work projects to maintain consistent contact.

**Useful tip:** keep one step ahead. During outreach, remind maids and sex workers (even in establishments that have a longstanding history and especially in ones that come and go) that circumstances are always liable to change and that they can keep in touch with the project if the establishment moves or closes. Make sure that outreach workers give out project cards and clinic details regularly.

Migrant sex workers may take leaflets and cards but may not be able to keep the information with them in case someone finds out what they do.

**Useful tip:** cards which give outreach workers' first names and telephone numbers plus a logo that identifies the service rather than words stating 'sexual health service', 'outreach' or a PCT logo are more discreet and acceptable.

The fact that establishments are opening and closing more quickly affects the investment that owners or bosses feel it's worth making in premises. Sex workers often work in run down and sub-standard properties for which they must pay a large daily rent before they can earn any money for themselves. Owners may be less keen to install security cameras or security guards, as they do not wish to spend the money; this means premises are more vulnerable to attack and robbery. London sex work projects report a significant increase in daytime robberies over the last four years. This has safety implications for maids, sex workers and outreach workers.

**Useful tip:** find ways to introduce the subject of how maids and sex workers might react if the establishment is attacked. Many establishment owners do not tell their staff about robberies or attacks as they don't want them to panic and leave. This leaves sex workers ill prepared for dealing with repeat attacks and gives them a false sense of security.

### Specialist services and unprotected sex

As competition among establishments increases, some sex workers may offer 'specialist services' such as bondage, S&M and anal sex to increase their income. Others may offer unprotected vaginal and/or oral sex. This leads to tension among sex workers and skews clients' perspectives of what is acceptable safer sexual practice. Some migrants owe large debt bonds that can be paid off sooner if they offer unprotected sex. Their bosses may actively encourage (and in some cases coerce) them into having unsafe sex to repay their debts more quickly.

Migrant sex workers may have been told by their bosses that rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV are very low in the UK and that they are unlikely to catch anything from clients.

**Useful tip:** assume that any sex worker may at any time be in a situation where they offer unprotected sexual services (even if they say they don't). Give information to everyone about how best to manage unprotected intercourse and oral sex. This can be given as information about what to do if a condom 'splits' and a client ejaculates in the mouth, vagina or anus so that they do not think that they are being accused of having unprotected sex.

## Availability of services and resources

Due to its size and the number of sexual health clinics and support services available in London, migrant sex workers should have plenty of options of where to get services. Outreach projects may meet a migrant sex worker who lives in another part of the city. When this is the case, making appropriate referrals to services is important.

**Useful tip:** find out whether a migrant sex worker is more likely to use a service near their home or their place of work. Refer as appropriate and remember that some services offer specific language support clinics with permanent interpreters and cultural mediators.

## Clubs and vice (CO14) and policing the sex industry

London is split into boroughs and each borough has its own police force. They make up the London Metropolitan force, except for the City Police which has jurisdiction in the City of London only. This system of policing can cause problems for sex work projects and working establishments. For example, an establishment may dial 999 after a robbery, but the force sent to deal with the problem may be from another borough (it will depend on the squad cars and personnel available in the area at that time). This can result in insensitive policing by officers who do not know or understand the area or issues and who do not have relationships with or knowledge of particular premises. Establishments can receive poor treatment at the hands of overly keen and insensitive

officers who, when called to an incident, become intent on questioning the occupants rather than dealing with the crime that has been committed.

The central Metropolitan police unit that deals with sex work in London is CO14. This unit is (by and large) staffed by officers who have a good understanding of sex work in the city and are interested only in protecting minors and coerced and trafficked women. Most sex work projects report good relationships between themselves and CO14 and have had positive experiences when seeking assistance from the unit.

**Useful tip:** if your project encounters an officer who is respectful, helpful and clearly interested in policing the criminal incident, commend them. It is important for the police to hear that they are dealing with incidents in a way that is helpful to ALL members of the general public. That includes sex workers.

**Useful tip:** encourage migrant sex workers (if they can, and this is not always possible when they are scared and disempowered) to take the name and number of an officer who attends a scene of crime and who has been unhelpful or bullying. You may be able to advocate on a service user's behalf. You should go high up the chain of command to make your point. This is worth doing as the police should know that they have a duty of care to ALL members of the general public and not only those they think are 'deserving'.

# Practice

Sex work projects and other organisations should follow their normal protocols and procedures when engaging with migrant sex workers, and should ensure that migrant sex workers are not discriminated against within their services.

## Scope for using peer educators and volunteers

Peer education has been recognised as one of the most effective and empowering means of disseminating information among marginalised communities. It is important that service providers see sex workers, including migrants, as more than targets for education or assistance. Given the very high levels of national and international mobility among migrant sex workers, and the variable opportunities for outreach contact in establishments, they are in an ideal position to disseminate information to their colleagues. Various innovative peer education programmes for migrant sex workers have been developed across Europe<sup>17</sup>. These include accredited training for peer educators leading to paid employment within service providers; training programmes for volunteer peer educators; and techniques for encouraging and supporting migrant sex workers to share educational resources and promote access to services.

**Useful tip:** many migrant sex workers are in social and professional networks through which information can be passed. Give sex workers extra copies of any multi-lingual resources and promotional materials distributed by your project and encourage them to pass them on to other sex workers they know.

Many sex work projects use volunteers. Volunteering not only provides personal and professional development opportunities and benefits for individuals, it can also improve the skills base within a team and provide a sense of worth among service users.

**Note:** training, support and supervision are as important for volunteers as they are for staff.

**Note:** peer educators who become volunteers within a project must not go into situations or take on tasks which a project would not ask of its staff or other volunteers.

**Useful tip:** when advertising for volunteers, include an appeal for multi-lingual volunteers to work with migrants.

## Personal safety issues for staff and volunteers

Organisations should already have a health and safety procedure which supports and protects the physical and psychological safety of all staff and volunteers.

<sup>17</sup> See TAMPEP – [www.tampep.com](http://www.tampep.com)

Some personal safety reminders:

- If escorting a migrant sex worker to appointments ensure that you stick to the arrangements made. Take the service user to the appointment then back to the location where you picked them up. Do not let them monopolise the situation, for example change venue or use your services to transport them about
- If you are working with a migrant sex worker who wants help to find a place of safety ensure that this is planned with everyone's safety in mind. Make sure your colleagues know your exact moves and whereabouts at all times if involved in directly assisting the escape. You should never do this single-handedly
- Know your limitations when engaging with migrant sex workers. Imposing too much on a person's private life could put you in danger
- When you do not understand what is being said, be vigilant in undertaking risk assessment particularly body language and atmosphere

**Useful tip:** disclosures made by migrant sex workers can be upsetting or disturbing. Offer regular crisis support and supervision to ensure workers and volunteers are supported appropriately.

## Making contact for the first time

When meeting a migrant sex worker for the first time, be aware of possible language barriers and how you may come across if you do not understand or sound incoherent. Some migrant sex workers don't like 'officials' and/or have had bad experiences, so your demeanour and approach are very important.

**Note:** a first contact may be reluctant or frightened to engage with you. A person-centred approach that allows them to set the pace is very important.

Some suggestions for making positive first contacts:

- Be non-judgemental and sensitive. You must demonstrate respect for the person. Introduce yourself clearly and without rushing. Use 'good' body language – smile, make eye contact, allow body space. Be aware of the other person's body language as this will also give you an idea of how they are feeling
- Wear ID badges discreetly, preferably on your waistband. Identity badges can look very official and could make a first contact wary
- During the first contact try to explain who you are, where you're from and what services you provide
- If you are unable to communicate with a migrant sex worker, someone in the establishment such as a friend, colleague or receptionist may be able to help you. If someone volunteers to interpret, ensure that the person is happy to communicate through them
- If possible, enquire about the person's preferred language and offer the possibility of telephone interpreting if on outreach or to arrange an interpreter for future appointments. Ensure that any interpreter makes it clear that they are impartial and offer a confidential service
- During first contact try to minimise the amount of information you ask for. Asking too many questions could be seen as intrusive. Get essentials such as working name or initials and date of birth. Ask if they want to discuss how they feel



- Provide translated leaflets with information about sexual health, vaccinations, contraception, working safely, condom use and useful contacts such as domestic violence helplines, projects providing places of safety, police, freephone number of your project and so on. This will give the person time to read the information and consider any services they might use
- Sometimes a first contact will not say much because there are other people around such as a receptionist, other sex workers or a controller (or because of fear of a controller). Tell them how to contact you. Put your name and telephone number on a small card that you can give out discreetly

## Establishing and sustaining relationships

Building rapport with migrant sex workers may be difficult. Language can restrict the level of engagement and hinder meaningful dialogue. However, you should try to build up rapport and find ways of communicating if you want the relationship to continue and be beneficial. Establishing trust is about listening and understanding without judging. When interacting with migrant sex workers try to focus on how the person feels and listen to what they want to achieve from the interaction. Focus on their agenda and not yours. Migrant sex workers may have had negative experiences with trust broken. Keep this in mind and be honest, empathetic and warm.

### Some suggestions for sustaining relationships:

- Make sure you listen to and understand what the other person is saying. If you do not understand them, they will not understand you. **Remember:** people feel validated and affirmed if they are understood. This can be the first step to building rapport
- Building up rapport with a service user is essential if the relationship is to last. Be genuine, empathetic and sensitive. First impressions often stick
- Visiting the establishment often may help migrant sex workers feel they can trust you. Interacting with service users who know you can help a new person feel more at ease. Try to establish common ground, speak about positive interactions and outcomes which relate to a person's situation
- Promote your service and discuss the level of support you can offer. Be realistic when discussing ongoing support. If you don't have the resources to provide what the person is requesting, be honest about what you can offer
- When service users ask about other services, give them information and offer to go with them on their first visit if appropriate and possible
- Don't give advice if you are uncertain about the facts. Explain that you are not sure and will find out the correct information. Giving false information can result in loss of trust in your competence and honesty and therefore loss of contact
- Migrant sex workers who have appointments with officials such as the police or immigration may need support. Offer to arrange an advocate or lawyer who can represent their interests
- Once trust is forming encourage service users to give more information if they require or want more support

- If you make an appointment with a service user, always make sure it is kept – if not by yourself then at least by someone who can provide support or rearrange the appointment. Letting any service user down without notice will hinder positive relationships

### Working with the media

While protecting the confidentiality of service users is paramount, it is also important to give migrant sex workers a voice in the media and a chance to speak about their experiences. Some sex work projects and sex workers have had great experiences with the media, while others' experiences have been bad. Consider whether the benefits of working with the media outweigh potential difficulties. Points to consider with a service user are:

- If migrant sex workers are in the UK illegally and their identity is not protected, they could be identified and deported by BIA
- Migrant sex workers may have less recourse if something goes wrong
- The media cannot be controlled! There is no such thing as 'local media'. News could reach a migrant worker's home country

### Working with researchers

Projects often get requests for interviews with migrant sex workers from researchers. While research has its place, migrant sex workers should not feel pressured to participate, and the project's relationships with service users should not be jeopardised.

Researchers have to pass ethical approval (see guidance on research ethics on the UK NSWP website<sup>18</sup>).

Ask the researcher to write a summary of the research project and provide their contact details so that service users can decide if they want to participate.

Interviews and questionnaires can sometimes ask very private information. So, ask to review the questions beforehand, and tell the researcher if there are inappropriate questions.

<sup>18</sup> www.uknswp.org

# Resources

## Organisations

**EUROPAP:** *European Network for HIV-STD Prevention in Prostitution* [www.europap.net](http://www.europap.net)

**GAATW:** *Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women* [www.gaatw.net](http://www.gaatw.net)

**ICRSE:** *International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe* [www.sexworkeurope.org](http://www.sexworkeurope.org)

**Immigration Advisory Service** [www.iasuk.org](http://www.iasuk.org)

**International Organisation for Migration** [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int) UK office: 0207 233 0001

**NSWP:** *Network of Sex Work Projects: global network of sex work projects* [www.nswp.org](http://www.nswp.org)

**Refugee Action** [www.refugee-action.org.uk](http://www.refugee-action.org.uk)

**UK Lesbian and Gay Immigration Group** [www.uklgig.org.uk](http://www.uklgig.org.uk)

**TAMPEP:** *European Network for HIV/STI Prevention and Health Promotion Among Migrant Sex Workers: good practice guidance and multilingual resources for migrant sex workers* [www.tampep.com](http://www.tampep.com)

**Asylum Aid** [www.asylumaid.org.uk](http://www.asylumaid.org.uk)

**Refugee Council** [www.refugeecouncil.org.uk](http://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk)

**UK Human Trafficking Centre** [www.ukhtc.org](http://www.ukhtc.org)

**X TALK:** English classes run by the International Union of Sex Workers in London for migrant sex workers [www.xtalkproject.net](http://www.xtalkproject.net)

## Useful reading

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Kempadoo, K., & Dozema, J., 1998. ***Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition***. London: Routledge.

Mai, N., Gaffney, J., & Pryce, A., 2003. ***Report on Pilot Study on Male Sex Workers Migratory Behaviour***. Amsterdam, Netherlands: ENMP.

Van den Anker, C., & Doomernik, J. (eds), 2006. ***Women's Rights and Trafficking***, Palgrave.

Watts, C., Adams, B., & Nelson, E. (ed), 2003. ***The health risks and consequences of trafficking in women and adolescents***. London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.