



SEX WORK, HIV/AIDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Report on international survey produced by Central and Eastern European Harm Reduction Network (CEEHRN) in 2005

REPORT SUMMARY

Report Findings

- ✓ The report findings suggest that **the HIV/AIDS epidemic gathers steam throughout much of CEE/CA.**
- ✓ **HIV epidemic in the region is currently concentrated among specific population groups such as injecting drug users (IDUs) and sex workers.**
- ✓ **Targeted HIV interventions for sex workers and IDUs are needed to tackle HIV and prevent it from becoming a generalized epidemic.**
- ✓ **The health and safety of all citizens thus depends on working with and for sex workers to help them protect themselves from harm.**
- ✓ This will require a **greater commitment among all members of society** to accept and support the provision of **comprehensive, pragmatic services for those most in need.**
- ✓ It also depends on the recognition that **enforcing international human rights standards is a cornerstone of efforts to remove stigma and discrimination and enable the full participation in society of all people.**

Context

- ✓ Social and economic disarray in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union severely limited many women's ability to support themselves, thus precipitating a surge in the number of sex workers across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEE/CA).
- ✓ Soon thereafter, **drug use and HIV/AIDS began reaching epidemic proportions** in several countries of the region, notably in the former Soviet Union (FSU).
- ✓ This report offers sobering proof that the **plight of sex workers in the region grows bleaker every day due to a combination of economic desperation, surging health risks, discrimination, and violence.**
- ✓ As this report makes clear, these three developments—**growing prevalence of sex work, drug use, and HIV—are increasingly intertwined.**
- ✓ Sex workers are more likely to engage in high risk behaviors that greatly increase the possibility of HIV transmission, such as injecting drugs and unprotected sex. At the same time, they have limited access to the kind of services and assistance that can help them address these risk behaviors.

Exclusion, Discrimination and Stigma

- ✓ **This report illustrates how current policies and legislation fail to protect sex workers.**



- ✓ National drug policies, including **prohibition or restriction of harm reduction services; discrimination at health care services; police corruption; and wide-scale trafficking of women all serve to further marginalize sex workers.**
- ✓ In cases where sex work is not technically illegal, it is still not tolerated and **discrimination pervades**. Such attitudes greatly impede sex workers' access to public health services, including drug treatment and HIV prevention services. These multiple vulnerabilities are also further compounded by underlying social issues such as lack of education and economic opportunities.

The Way Forward: Equal Rights for All

- ✓ This report is grounded in the understanding that **sex workers have the rights to health and social support as do all members of society.**
- ✓ **This belief is at the heart of the recommendations derived from this report**, summarized into the following categories: for policymakers, for health authorities, for law-enforcement authorities, for service providers, and for researchers.
- ✓ The successful implementation of the recommendations specified in the report rely not only on policymakers and service providers, but also on **the ability of sex workers to advocate for their own rights.**
- ✓ In order for this to happen more consistently, **obstacles that prevent sex workers from organizing among themselves into working collectives or unions need to be removed.**
- ✓ As sex workers feel more comfortable and less fearful in general, they are able to work together more closely and consistently to advocate for their rights. As much as anything else, this development could have the most positive effect on their own health and the health of those in their lives.

The aim of this report is to raise awareness on the key concerns and issues affecting sex workers to enable planning and implementation of appropriate health and social policies. The report focuses on the following: HIV/STI epidemiological history and trends in the CEE/CA region; behavioral practices in relation to sex work; relevant national legislation and policies, including human rights, and their enforcement; and existing services for sex workers in the region.

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The Central and Eastern European Harm Reduction Network (CEEHRN) is a regional network with a mission to support, develop, and advocate for harm reduction approaches in the field of drugs, HIV/AIDS, public health, and social exclusion by following the principles of humanism, tolerance, partnership, and respect for human rights and freedoms. In 2005 the organization was granted a consultative status to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.