

# **REPORT ON PILOT STUDY ON MALE SEX WORKERS MIGRATORY BEHAVIOUR**

**Dr. Nick Mai, Department of Sociology  
LSE - University of London;**

**Justin Gaffney, Working Men's Project London**

**Dr. Anthony Price, City University London**

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## Background

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The main aim of this report is to present the main results of the pilot survey promoted and organised by the European Network Male Prostitution on the migratory patterns and behaviour of male sex workers within and across the European cultural, social and geographical space. Starting from the acknowledgement of the relevance of migration and mobility to understand sex-workers' life trajectories the pilot survey was designed so as to analyse in greater detail the relation between mobility and sex work with reference to three main migratory flows:

- Migration of sex-workers from Eastern European countries into the EU,

- Migration of sex-workers from other non-EU countries into the EU,
- Migration of sex-workers from the EU within the EU.

More specifically, the main aims of the survey were:

- to explore and document the migration phenomena,
- to identify factors which influence migration of male sex workers and their entry into sex work,
- to identify specific problems and cultural challenges for migrant male sex workers.

## Analysis

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As the pilot survey was an attempt to address the relationship between mobility and sex-work both at a broader European and at a more national level, the results will be presented in a way that will highlight the specificity of the condition of 'migrant' sex workers in comparison with the rest of the observed population. For the sake of clarity and given the 'pilot' nature of the research, in this report we considered 'migrant sex workers' merely all those whose country of origin is different from the one in which they work, live and were interviewed.

For the purpose of the report, the analysis will focus on the migration-specific sections of the questionnaire, addressing the legal status within the current country of residence, the time and the reasons for leaving home, the countries passed along the way, etc. All along the report, data regarding the non-migrant population will be compared with those regarding migrant sex workers, in order for the specificity of the regime of social inclusion or exclusion associated to both conditions to emerge more clearly.

First of all, as far as the way people were contacted is concerned, from the analysis of the data it emerges that 87 per cent of migrants were known to the projects before the interview took place against 78 per cent of the non migrant population. This, together with the fact that nearly 70 per cent of migrants were contacted while they attended the services offered or in the context of outreach programme run by the organisations involved against 53.2 per cent of the non-migrant population, might suggest that migrants tend to rely more on those services that their non-migrants colleagues.

As far as age is concerned, in general, both migrant and non-migrant sex workers tend to be between the age of 24 and 27 and very minor differences between the two groups were also encountered as far as the age they first had sex with a man is concerned, which is most recurrently between the age of 14 and 17 for both groups. However, migrant sex workers on the average first got paid for sex with a man slightly later than non-migrant sex workers.

Moving now to the more migration-specific questions, and focusing on the legal status of migrant interviewees, 43 per cent of migrant respondents had residence permits, 9 per cent had tourist visas, whereas 22.7 were undocumented. Only one migrant was a refugee, while another was an asylum seeker. The majority of the migrant interviewees left home between five and three years before they completed the questionnaire and chose the country they lived in for a variety of factors and reasons, which are different across the three countries involved in the project.

The majority of migrant interviewees indicated having decided to move to the UK in order to learn English and to have a holiday as the two main reasons. Only one indicated that he left his own country because of problems with his family related to his homosexuality, whereas three respondents indicated higher wages and discretion as the two most important factors. As far as France is concerned, knowledge of the French language and personal/family ties to France were mentioned as the main reason for having chosen France as the country of destination by nearly all respondents. In the case of Germany, the only two non-German respondents both indicated proximity and the necessity to move away from two different neighbouring countries as

the main reasons, although one respondent had to move because of legal problems he encountered in Denmark and the other because of financial constraints.

As far as the reasons for leaving their home country are concerned, unfortunately the fact that the respondents were left free to choose between different options has generated a plurality of answers which are very difficult to analyse, given the different ways in which the questionnaire was both coded and administrated in the different contexts. However, some general and specific trends can be hypothesised. For instance, the two German migrant sex workers indicated the combinations of discrimination, the possibility to learn the language, juridical problems and the possibility to earn money through sex work as the main reasons for leaving their own country, respectively. Most migrant sex workers living in England indicated 'family problems' alone or in combination to the necessity to find employment as the most common reasons for having left home, while other important reasons were the possibility to study or to join a friend/lover. Finally in France the necessity to find employment, combined with the desire to seek adventures and, less so, the need to flee discrimination and 'juridical problems' were the most common answers.

As far as the sex workers' migratory trajectories are concerned, 43 per cent of the migrants went directly to the country they were working and living in at the moment they compiled the questionnaire. However, the situation again changes when we analyse data country by country. In the case of Germany, both migrant sex workers were in neighbouring countries before entering. In the UK over 53 per cent of migrant respondents arrived directly and nearly all others usually stopped in one country 'of passage' such as France, the Netherlands or Venezuela, where they stayed for a short period of time. In fact, about 23 per cent of sex workers living in UK stayed between one week and six months in another country before moving to the UK and about the same percentage sold sex in that country. The case of France is very different because over 80 per cent of migrants passed through one or more countries, where they stayed between one and nine months and sold sex.

As far as accommodation is concerned, the most relevant difference between the two observed groups is that 62.5 per cent of non-migrant sex workers live in their own apartment against 43.5 per cent of migrant workers. Usually, migrant sex workers tend to live more in apartments shared with others or their partners, when compared to their non-migrant colleagues. The number of those sleeping rough was relatively low and not significantly different across the two observed

groups and in each of the three settings under examination.

From the analysis of the available data it emerges how 98 per cent of both migrant and non-migrant sex-workers sell sex across a variety of means, such as the internet; ads; escort agencies; bars/pubs; clubs; parks; toilets and other public sex environments; brothels; saunas; streets; with regular clients or through pimps or private introduction. Unfortunately, the way data were gathered and grouped together did not enable me to analyse them in more detail, as interviewees were offered the possibility to choose between 12 options in a way that could not be efficiently legible by the SPSS software package. As the way sex is sold is a key factor in understanding potential HIV/AIDS risks and in identifying efficient prevention strategies, this set of questions should definitely be kept but re-framed in a more readable way in future research projects.

Migrant interviewees were relying less on sex work as their only strategy for economic survival, when compared to their non-migrant peers. Nearly 72 per cent of non-migrant respondents indicated sex work as their only occupation, against about 48 per cent of migrant respondents. In fact, 21.7 per cent of migrant interviewees against 6.3 of non-migrant interviewees were students and a higher percentage of migrant sex workers (26.1 per cent against 18.8) had a part-time or a full time job. This is reflected in the fact that only 9.4 of non-migrant sex workers sell sex to support their studies, against 17.4 of migrant interviewees and could be reflecting a condition of higher economic vulnerability of migrants sex workers.

As far as access to health services is concerned, the fact that a large majority of both migrant and non-migrant interviewees were selected among people who were familiar with the various organisations involved did not enable me to notice a very significant difference between the migrant and non-migrant population in accessing: general medical services (migrant 87 non-migrant 96.8), sexual health services (non-migrant 95.7 migrant 93.8), Hepatitis B vaccination (non-migrant 95.7 migrant 96.8), HIV testing and counselling (non-migrant 94.6 migrant 95.7), HIV treatment and care (non-migrant 78.3 migrant 75), drug alcohol services (non-migrants 84.4 migrant 73.9), dental care (non-migrant 100 migrant 78.3), mental care/counselling (non migrants 87.5 migrants 82.6), ophthalmic care (non migrants 96.1 migrants 78.3) and emergency care (non migrants 93.8 migrants 82.6).

The conditions of differential social inclusion migrant sex workers are subject to were partly reflected in the fact that they seem to experience more legal problems (migrant 26.6 per cent non-

migrants 18.8) and to have less contacts with legal services (migrant 13 non-migrants 34.4) and more with migrant associations (migrants 8.7 non-migrants 3.4) than their non migrant colleagues. However, when we then analyse more closely the range of questions directly addressing issues of racial, verbal and physical abuse and violence from fellow sex workers, clients and law enforcement personnel the scenario that emerges is very confusing. In fact, in all cases non-migrants seem to be subject to a considerably higher level of abuse and violence by all of the actors mentioned above, when compared to their migrant colleagues. As I will explain in more detail in the next section of the report, this might be reflecting more the way in which the questionnaire was prepared, compiled and administered by the programmes involved and non-migrant interviewees' perceptions of 'abuse', 'violence' and their entitlement to 'rights' than their actual lived experiences.

Interestingly, the question asking sex workers whether or not they had reported cases of violence or abuse to the police was not generally answered by migrants in the UK. Moreover, the answers given by non-migrant interviewees indicated that the decision not to report was justified by referring to a perceived bias against male sex workers within police and other law enforcing institutions. This answer was the most common in France too, although two undocumented migrant sex workers do refer to their illegal status as the main motive, alongside the one mentioned above, for having decided not to report. In Germany, one of the two migrant sex workers did not answer the question, while the other indicated distrust in police's willingness to help sex workers the main reason for not having reported. Across the three countries, over 56 per cent of non-migrant sex workers and only 34.8 per cent of migrant sex workers sought medical treatment when injured.

The most interesting results emerging from the data on HIV/AIDS-sensitive behaviour is that migrant sex workers seem to act more responsibly than their non-migrant peers. This is mirrored in a range of different indicators. Firstly, 91.3 per cent of migrant and 84.4 per cent of non-migrant interviewees received an HIV test result, which was negative for 78.3 of migrant and for 78.1 of non-migrant sex workers. Secondly, whereas 56.5 per cent of migrant interviewees declared being definitely HIV negative, the same was true for only 37.5 per cent of non-migrant sex workers. Thirdly, the percentage of migrant sex workers who did have sex without condom is slightly higher than that of non-migrant sex workers (migrant 60.9 non-migrant 65.6). However, if we sum together those who didn't have sex without condom at all to those who had unprotected sex with their regular HIV-negative partners, the scenario changes considerably in

favour of migrant sex workers (71.9 non-migrants 77.3 migrants). In general, apart from what mentioned above, the most relevant difference in HIV-sensitive sexual behaviour seems to be a higher propensity for migrant sex workers to take risks with partners and a lower propensity to do so with unknown people. This is corroborated by the fact that whereas in the year preceding the research 21.7 of migrant sex workers never had sex without a condom with an unknown HIV status partner, against 18.8 per cent of non migrant interviewees, over 17 per cent of them had unprotected sex with their own unknown HIV status partner.

From the analysis of the data on drug use behaviour it emerges that if alcohol use patterns are very homogeneous across the interviewed population, non-migrant sex workers tends to make use of a wider range of drugs and on a more regular basis. For instance whereas 43 per cent of non migrant interviewees never used cocaine and 28 per cent take cocaine every two months, the same is true for only 34 and 26 per cent of non migrant interviewees respectively. Moreover, none of the migrant interviewees took methadone or crack, which is not the case with the non migrant population, whereas the rate and pattern of use of heroin are homogeneous amongst the two groups observed. Non-migrant interviewees were also making more use of cannabis, speed, ecstasy, poppers, acid/LSD and GBH, with the exception of ketamine, viagra and steroids, whose use is slightly more frequent among the migrant population. Overall, the drug behaviours of the two groups did not differ in very significant ways and it might be interesting to compare these results with data on youth drug-related behaviour in the UK, France and Germany more in general.

As far as sexual orientation is concerned, whereas only 3 per cent of non-migrant sex workers describe themselves as heterosexual, 68.8 per cent as homosexual and 25 per cent as bisexual, 13 per cent of migrant workers defined themselves as heterosexual, 78.3 as homosexuals and 8.7 per cent as bisexual. These data are comforted by the fact that 84.4 per cent of non-migrants declared to sell sex exclusively or mostly to men, against 91.3 of migrant sex workers. However, the higher percentage of heterosexual men selling sex among migrant groups could be reflecting a condition of higher socio-economic vulnerability 'forcing' them into sex work..

Finally, a last set of questions addressed the way sex workers felt about selling sex and the issue of future life trajectories in relation to their involvement in sex work. Perhaps, the most telling data about both of these issues is the fact that whereas only 17.4 of migrant interviewees saw sex work as a choice, the contrary is true for 53.1 non-migrant sex workers. The

way sex work seems to be more of a necessity than a choice for migrant interviewees is reflected in four main indicators. Firstly, 13 per cent of them indicated that sex work was the only way for them to support themselves economically. Secondly, 52.5 per cent of migrant sex-workers described their involvement in sex work as temporary, against 37.5 per cent of non-migrant sex workers. Thirdly, only 56.5 per cent of migrant sex-workers feel positively about selling sex, against nearly 70 per cent of non-migrant sex workers. Fourthly, whereas only 28 per cent of non-migrant interviewees consider their involvement in sex work as a short term measure, the same is true for 48 per cent of migrant sex workers.

As far as future life trajectories are concerned, most sex workers expressed the desire to develop their own professional attitudes outside sex work and towards a more normatively normal lifestyle, made of better and usually more autonomous working opportunities and conditions and stable relationships. Within this broader scenario, migrant sex workers frequently express the desire to return to their countries of origin to open a new economic activity, whereas undocumented migrants, simply express their desire to regularise their position and get on with their lives.

#### **METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Moving now on to methodological issues, the first 'macro' consideration that has to be made is that the percentage of 'migrant' sex workers on the total of the sample population varies considerably across the three countries involved in the project. Whereas in the UK only 40 per cent of interviewees were British nationals, the percentage is much different in France (68 per cent) and Germany (80 per cent). This is all the more important when one relates the composition of the sample to its size. In fact, particularly as far as Germany is concerned, usually the number of foreign interviewees is so small (2 on top of 10) as to potentially invalidate their representativeness in both relative and absolute terms. The fact that the percentage of migrant sex workers on the whole of the interviewed population was not set created relevant imbalances between the three settings where the research was carried out and the small size of the sample partially undermined its quantitative ambitions.

Secondly, in 84 per cent of the cases, the questionnaire was submitted to people who were already known by the associations involved. This is reflected in the fact that 44.5 per cent of the interviewees were contacted while they were benefiting from the services offered by the associations (drop in/clinical visits), whereas only 16.7 per cent were met during outreach activities (which does not prevent them from being known to

the organisation at all, as the overall percentage proves). These last considerations are very important when one considers that, because of the lack of documentation and of awareness of potentially available services and assistance, migrant sex-workers, particularly from non-EU countries, are known not to approach existing facilities and services for fear of being reported to the police or simply because they ignore their existence. In order to underline the way these consideration can affect the actual results of the research, I will return here briefly on the data about sex workers' access to health and other social services potentially available to them. Although there is an average gap of 5-10 per cent between migrant and non-migrant sex workers in accessing these services, sometimes migrants have better access to these services than local population. For the reasons mentioned above, I think this consideration might reflect more the fact that interviewees were selected among service users than the actual conditions of social inclusion and exclusion migrant sex workers are subject to and perhaps mirrors the fact that migrant sex workers rely on sex-work-specific services more than the non-migrant population. The very same trends and considerations can be extended to the analysis of the use rate of the very same services across both segments of the observed population. Significantly, 94 per cent of non-migrants and 95 per cent of migrants indicated that they had contacts with sex work projects. Had more marginalised and more country-specific vulnerable sex workers' groups been targeted, the difference between migrant and non-migrant population would have been much more revealing and significant.

Moreover, the way the questionnaire was framed did not enable the data to be analysed according to the specific country of origin of the interviewed population. This is particularly important as the conditions of vulnerability emerging from the relation between sex-work and mobility are deeply influenced by the socio-cultural background and the legal situation of the migrants themselves. This is usually determined by the conditions of entry into the EU which are attached to one's nationality. In trying to understand the way mobility interacts with the practice of sex work, it is important to trace disempowering or empowering dynamics to the specific socio-cultural conditions and legislative frameworks enforcing them. Whereas a EU citizen can be relatively free to move and work in any of the EU member states, non-EU migrants, whether they are European or not, enjoy very different regimes of entitlement and are subject to much stronger dynamics of stigmatisation, social exclusion and discrimination, within and without the sex work environment. For instance, the level of social entitlement and vulnerability enjoyed by a Greek sex

worker living in Germany is much higher than the one enjoyed by a Rumanian colleague and incomparably higher if the colleague was to be from Albania.

Considering the limits outlined so far, I suggest that when carrying out future research, more attention should be paid to:

- define the sample in a more coherent way, in particular as far as the ratio between the migrant and non migrant populations is concerned. This should be related to existing estimates of the ratio between migrants and non-migrants among sex workers' population and to the overall percentage of foreign citizens on the population of each national setting under examination;
- rationalise the overall purpose of the survey/research in order to focus more in depth on fewer strategic aspects of sex workers' condition rather than on a plethora of important but rather scattered issues;
- structure all quantitative questions in a way that enables data to be analysed by SPSS or other statistical analysis software packages more thoroughly and according to a set of key strategic features such as 'country of origin' or 'legal status';
- focus on a much wider range of sex workers' groups than those already referring to the existing services, in order to reflect the composition of the male sex work phenomenon in each specific setting and to address more specifically groups whose conditions of marginality, social exclusion and vulnerability are particularly exacerbated. In order to reflect the variety of the different national and regional settings in which sex work happens, it would be important to interview also public officials and representatives of local NGOs in order to analyse how their understanding of the phenomenon can influence the way this is addressed or ignored by social intervention policies and activities. In general, more co-operation should be sought with local sex-workers, migrants, HIV/AIDS, gay and other relevant associations and local institutions in the re-drafting of the questionnaire, in the carrying out of the research and in the drafting of its final conclusions.
- Finally, since the social practice of sex work is constructed, experienced and addressed very differently across the different national European settings, it should be extended to a wider range of

ENMP countries and in particular to those whose experience of sex work is representative of wider dynamics, emerging trends, or conditions of particularly acute invisibility and socio-cultural vulnerability.

Moving now on to the qualitative sections of the questionnaire, I think they were not sufficiently developed to enable an adequate in-depth analysis of single cases or groups within the observed population. My criticism here starts mainly from the fact that the questions addressing the reasons behind sex workers' mobility in the questionnaires did so by referring to migration as a condition of primarily physical displacement. Migration is a complex phenomenon, involving the imagination and the enactment of morally and economically sustainable life trajectories. These are rooted into or uprooted from different socio-cultural landscapes and are harnessed to locally hegemonic constructions of masculinity, femininity and their relations to sexual practices and moralities. The same is true as far as the issue of sexual orientation is concerned, since the way sexual practices are related to gender roles, individual and collective identities and to the perceived entitlement to social recognition varies significantly across different cultural settings. The complexity of these dynamics can not be addressed by a question framing them in terms of 'sexual orientation' as this is by no means an universal concept, not even in 'the West'. Moreover, the way sexual practices are related to the construction of morally sustainable gendered selves impacts heavily on HIV/AIDS-responsible sexual behaviour. In order to explore this complex scenario one needs to combine a large-scale, more focused and well coded quantitative study with an in-depth qualitative analysis, without which the meaning attached to specific actions in relation to the relevant discursive fields can not be investigated nor understood. The research should be more focused on migration-related issues and should be carried out through qualitative semi-structured interviews, conducted ideally by one researcher or by a small team of maximum two/three people on all of the different national contexts to be observed. Given the complexity of the topic, ideally further research in this direction should be carried out through the combination of in-depth qualitative interviewing, collection of quantitative data and participant observation.