



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

BRIEFING PAPER:

How Sex Work Laws Are Implemented on the Ground and Their Impact on Sex Workers

A Study of Ten African Countries

Introduction

Legislation around sex work can be extremely complex and different legal models exist in different countries, and sometimes even within countries. NSWP produced a mapping¹ of the written laws used to criminalise and regulate sex work in 211 countries and dependencies (including Islands and overseas territories, etc.), with sub-national legislation additionally provided for some countries (Australia, the USA & the United Kingdom). The map, first developed in 2018 and most recently updated in 2021, brings together information on laws which affect sex workers through the criminalisation of the sale and purchase of sexual services, and the facilitation, management, or organisation of sex work, as well as other laws used to regulate sex work such as mandatory health checks and travel restrictions.



Global Mapping of Sex Work Laws, NSWP, 2022

While understanding the written laws and regulations is important, it does not provide a complete picture of the impact of sex work laws on the lives of sex workers. To understand this, it is essential to understand how the laws are interpreted, enforced, and implemented on the ground.

¹ NSWP, "[Global Mapping of Sex Work Laws](#)."



The Love Alliance programme seeks to significantly reduce HIV infections by influencing policies, raising awareness, and organising key population communities in ten African countries, with a specific focus on LGBT+ people, people who use drugs, female, male, trans and gender diverse sex workers, and people living with HIV.

NSWP, as one of the global advocacy partners in Love Alliance, commissioned national consultants from sex worker-led organisations (and a women's network in the case of Morocco) in ten African countries to better understand how the sex work laws in those countries are enforced and what impact this has on sex workers. The ten countries, spanning the entire continent, were Burkina Faso, Burundi, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

Methodology

National consultants were appointed in the ten countries and were tasked with carrying out focus groups and interviews with sex workers using a detailed enquiry framework, to build a picture of how the countries' sex work laws are enforced and, in turn, the impact this has on sex workers. As part of their consultations, consultants were required to try to include the views and experiences of a diversity of sex workers, including, where possible: sex workers across a range of ages (over 18); female, male, trans and gender diverse sex workers; bi-sexual, gay and lesbian sex workers; migrant sex workers (documented and undocumented); sex workers living with HIV; sex workers who use drugs; sex workers from both rural and urban areas; and sex workers from different sectors of the industry. To enhance this inclusive approach, and work in partnership with the other organisations who are part of the Love Alliance programme, NSWP reached out to organisations representing other key populations to suggest sex workers who use drugs and young sex workers living with HIV in each of the countries concerned, to include in either a focus group or to be interviewed as key informants.

National consultants were also asked to include interviews with other stakeholders, specifically the police and lawyers who have experience of representing sex workers, to document their understanding and interpretation of the countries' laws and how they are actually implemented. Consultants were only expected to interview the police in contexts where it was safe to do so and presented no risk to the consultant or indeed to local sex workers.

Each of the ten in-depth country case studies summarises the lived experiences reported by sex workers of how sex work laws are implemented on the ground and their impact on sex worker communities in their countries, as well as incorporating the feedback from the other stakeholders. They have been published in full on their relevant country page of NSWP's legal mapping.

This briefing paper reflects on the sex work laws in the region, exploring key themes that are consistent across all of the case studies, and includes an analysis and recommendations on the way forward to strengthen advocacy for decriminalisation in these countries and the region as a whole. A short summary of each national legal case study is included at the end of this paper.

Sex work laws in the region

The legal model applied to sex work across all ten case study countries is, in essence, a system of criminalisation. In some countries (Egypt, northern Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda) the act of

selling sex itself is a criminal offence and in several of the other countries (Burkina Faso, Burundi, Kenya, Morocco, southern Nigeria, Zimbabwe) it is the activities associated with selling sex (that are none-the-less essential) that are criminalised, such as soliciting in a public place. All of the above countries also criminalise the managing and organising of sex work with laws against living on the earnings of sex work, brothel-keeping and acting as an intermediary.

Mozambique is a slight exception, as there are no specific criminal laws against selling sex or against soliciting in a public place. The only sex work laws in Mozambique relate to the management and organisation of sex work. In 2014, the main piece of legislation (Article 71 of the Penal Code) used to criminalise sex workers was repealed. However, there remains a provision in the Penal Code that criminalises actions that are deemed to be against public decency, which continues to be used to arrest sex workers in Mozambique.

Similar public order laws exist in all of the other countries studied and participants reported that these laws, which criminalise activities like loitering or being a public nuisance, are used to arrest sex workers more often than the sex work specific laws. This may be because the public order laws are vague and can be interpreted widely and do not require any evidence of sex work actually taking place.



Illustration by Molly Hankinson

Experiences of sex workers in the region: key themes

The ten case study countries span the entire African continent taking in North Africa (Egypt and Morocco), West Africa (Burkina Faso and Nigeria), East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, and Uganda) and Southern Africa (Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe). Despite the wide geographical spread there is remarkable similarity in the experiences recounted by sex workers. The sex work laws in the case study countries, which are exclusively criminal laws, cause a range of harms to sex workers. What is clear from the case studies is that the criminalisation of sex work directly contributes to the vulnerability of sex workers to serious

forms of abuse at the hands of state authorities. These harms include arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, and bribes, as well as verbal, physical and sexual violence. The criminalisation of sex work also means that sex workers experience a lack of access to justice and cannot seek help from the authorities when they are the victims of crime. This means that sex workers are disempowered in their interactions with clients, as it is known that sex workers have no legal redress and there are no consequences for those who commit crimes against sex workers.

Arbitrary arrest and detention

The criminalisation of sex work means that sex workers are treated as criminals and outlaws by the police. In many of the case studies it is noted that sex workers are frequently arrested simply for walking down the street, being present in an area known for sex work, being out late at night alone, or for dressing in a particular way. These arbitrary arrests are common and represent a clear violation of sex workers' human rights. In many instances, the sex work laws require evidence of sex work having taken place to prove that a crime has been committed but the police arrest and detain sex workers regardless, without any such evidence.

In Zimbabwe, there was one small victory in 2014/2015 when a judge ruled that sex workers could not be arrested under the soliciting laws without evidence of sex work having taken place.² If the police have difficulty justifying arrests under the sex work laws, they can fall back on laws against loitering or public nuisance, which are not sex work-specific, but which are used commonly against sex workers. These laws are vague and can be interpreted and applied by the police in a wide manner. It was also reported, in some of the case studies, that the police sometimes do not even pretend to have proper legal justification for raids on sex work workplaces and arrests of sex workers, using broad powers, for example, to "check ID documents" or something similar.

The arbitrary nature of the arrests is highlighted by the fact that many of the sex worker participants involved in all the case studies reported that it was common for them to be kept in detention overnight or for a short time and then released, instead of being brought before a court at the earliest opportunity. The abuse of police power does not end with arbitrary arrest and detention as sex workers, across all of the case studies reported further human rights violations by state authorities, including extortion and physical violence.

Extortion and bribes

It was a universal experience in all the case studies that sex workers are required to pay bribes to the police in order to secure their release from detention or to avoid being arrested in the first place. The police understand that sex workers are stigmatised in society and see them as easy targets for unlawful acts of extortion. It is clear from reports made in all the case studies that when sex work is criminalised the police hold significant power over sex workers, and one of the main ways that they exercise this is by extracting bribes.

² Busza, J. et al, "[Good news for sex workers in Zimbabwe: how a court order improved safety in the absence of decriminalization](#)," Journal of the International AIDS Society (2017); 20(1): 21860.

Police violence

While police extortion is a major issue across the region for sex workers, even more concerning was the frequency with which sex workers reported experiencing all forms of violence at the hands of the police and other law enforcement officials. In every single case study reports were made of verbal abuse, physical violence, as well as rape and sexual assault. This included 'casual' violence where the police insult, kick, and slap sex workers during raids or in the course of arrest, which was commonplace, through to extremely distressing accounts of kidnap, rape, and sexual assault. Many sex workers reported how the police, if they did not demand a bribe to secure their release or to avoid arrest, would instead demand sex from them for this purpose. Sex workers also reported degrading conditions while in detention and in some instances HIV+ sex workers were prevented by the police from taking their HIV medication. The experiences reported by the sex workers interviewed for the case studies accords with existing research on sex work and violence, which consistently shows that law enforcement are key perpetrators of violence against sex workers in criminalised contexts.³

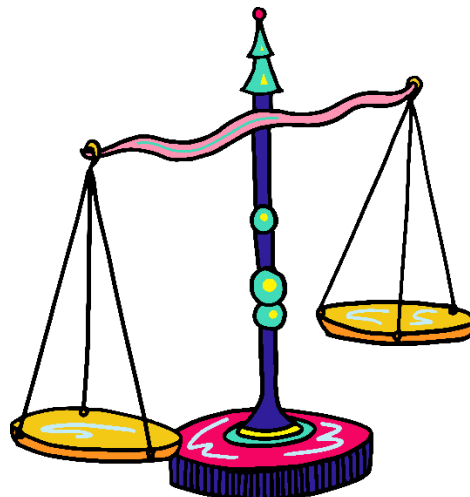


Illustration by Molly Hankinson

Access to justice

A lack of access to justice was another consistent theme across all ten case studies. This included instances where sex workers were charged with sex work-related offences and had difficulty securing good legal representation, partly due to the stigma associated with sex work. Furthermore, when sex workers themselves are victims of crime they find it impossible to report this to the authorities and seek assistance due to the criminalisation of sex work. Every case study highlights the difficulties sex workers have in obtaining justice for crimes they experience. This, again, reflects what is already known about the harms caused by criminalisation with access to justice routinely denied to sex workers when sex work is criminalised.⁴

³ NSWP, 2017, "[Policy Brief: The Impact of Criminalisation on Sex Workers' Vulnerability to HIV and Violence](#)," p 5.

⁴ NSWP, 2020, "[Briefing Paper: Sex Workers' Lack of Access to Justice](#)."

The case study from Mozambique, however, does present a more hopeful picture on how this can be improved. Mozambique has repealed its sex work laws and the only law remaining on the books that can be used to arrest sex workers relates to public decency. While this is still used to arrest sex workers it appears from the reports in the case study that the balance is starting to shift and sex workers in Mozambique are gaining more power and are able to try and seek access to justice. It notes how training has been undertaken with the police and judicial authorities, and while further work is required, some progress has been made in making the system more responsive to the needs of sex workers. The experience in Mozambique highlights how repealing criminal laws against sex work is a crucial first step in securing access to justice for sex workers, but that concerted effort is then required to re-educate the authorities to meaningfully address the crimes and violations that sex workers experience.

Access to health services

Like the denial of access to justice, sex work criminalisation also creates barriers in sex workers' access to health services⁵ and has other detrimental health impacts⁶. The criminalised context, as noted above, increases the power that clients have over sex workers as clients know that they can act with impunity. This decreases sex workers' ability to negotiate safe sex practices with clients. For example, in the Kenyan case study sex workers reported that clients can pressure them to engage in sex without condoms and they do this from a place of power knowing that sex workers are unable to report any violence or harassment they receive. Societal stigma also presents a huge barrier in sex workers' ability or willingness to access health services, with many sex workers reporting discriminatory treatment within services due to their work, which is further compounded by criminalisation. This is documented in the Burkina Faso and Burundi case studies. There are also laws in various case study countries, which criminalise the transmission of HIV, which has a negative impact on sex workers' ability to seek healthcare and support when living with HIV. Finally, sex workers reported difficulties, at times, in accessing HIV medication when taken into custody by law enforcement as discussed in the South African case study. Medication was sometimes intentionally denied as a form of punishment.

Third parties

As noted above, all of the case study countries have laws in place that criminalise the organisation and management of sex work, like laws against brothel-keeping. Laws that criminalise third parties also have a direct and negative impact on sex workers themselves. For example, when brothels are raided under brothel-keeping laws sex workers are caught up in this and in several of the case studies reported experiencing harm from being arrested themselves, to having their possessions seized by the authorities, and being forced to pay bribes. Brothel-based sex workers in Zimbabwe also noted that when the owners of brothels are forced to pay bribes to the police this affects them as the brothel owners then increase the price they charge sex workers to work in the premises. These negative impacts on sex workers underline why the decriminalisation of third parties is fundamental to advancing sex workers' rights.⁷

⁵ NSWP, 2018, "[Briefing Paper: Sex Workers' Access to Comprehensive Sexual and Reproductive Health Services.](#)"

⁶ NSWP, 2017, "[Policy Brief: The Impact of Criminalisation on Sex Workers' Vulnerability to HIV and Violence.](#)"

⁷ NSWP, 2016, "[Policy Brief: The Decriminalisation of Third Parties.](#)"

Sex workers can also find themselves arrested for ‘living on the earnings of prostitution’ if they work together for safety. The effect of such laws exposes sex workers to increased risks of violence. In some instances, the existence of laws that criminalise selling sex or soliciting push sex workers to rely more on third parties, to help them find clients. This may be particularly the case for migrant sex workers. A migrant sex worker interviewed for the Moroccan case study reported that she relied on third parties to find her clients because the risks were too high for her to work independently due to criminalisation.

Intersectional impacts

The experiences of migrant sex workers were reported in several of the other case studies. In Kenya, for example, the sex workers involved in the focus group discussion felt that migrant sex workers were particularly discriminated against due to their migration status and were often targeted by the police for arrest. A female migrant sex worker is quoted in the case study as she describes the continual harassment she experiences from the police.

LGBT+ sex workers are another group of sex workers that experience particular harms due to the criminalisation of sex work as well as the criminalisation of homosexuality. Male sex workers in Zimbabwe, for example, are reported to be disproportionately charged with the offence of sodomy. It was also reported across the case studies that trans and gender diverse sex workers experience extreme forms of discrimination and harassment that compound the harms faced because of the criminalisation of sex work. An example of this was provided by a trans sex worker interviewed for the Egypt case study who reported their experiences of being kept in solitary confinement and being subject to abuse and violence in a men’s prison while serving a prison sentence for sex work-related offences.



Illustration by Molly Hankinson

Conclusion – analysis and recommendations

The experiences reported by sex workers in the ten case studies show, without doubt, that the criminalisation of sex work is the cause of immense harms to sex workers in the region. It gives the authorities power over sex workers, enabling them to harass, abuse and extort with impunity.

It is worth also noting that many of the laws that criminalise sex work in the case study countries have their origins in laws imposed by former European colonial powers. The sex work laws in Kenya and Uganda, for example, still mirror the language used in some of the sex work laws that exist, or previously existed, in the United Kingdom. The law that criminalised sex work in Mozambique was based on the Portuguese Penal Code of 1886 and this remained in force until 2015 when the law was reformed, as explained above.

There are different approaches to addressing the deep injustice of sex work criminalisation. Mozambique provides one example of a gradual approach to change. This starts with the repeal of the criminal laws against sex work. For as long as sex work, or its associated activities, is criminalised sex workers will remain vulnerable to serious human rights violations. In addition to the repeal of specific criminal laws against sex work, work remains to be done to repeal the myriad, often vague public order laws that are used to criminalise sex workers and other marginalised groups. These are open to such wide interpretation and can be used by the police to arbitrarily arrest and detain, which leads to further violence and abuse. Reforming the public order laws has to be tackled in addition to reform of the sex work-specific criminal laws, as these continue to be used against sex workers, as is clear from the Mozambique case study. The findings from other case studies show that public order laws may even be used more than the sex work-specific laws as the evidential burdens are lower.

In addition to repealing the laws that harm, a priority focus is needed to have sex work recognised as work. This is necessary to give sex workers access to the same legal, labour, and social protections that may exist in the country on the same terms as other workers⁸.

After these crucial legal reforms, work must focus on re-educating state actors, including the police and justice systems, to transform the way they interact with sex workers. The case study from Mozambique shows that this work can be done and, while it requires patience and determination, some positive effects are beginning to be seen. Sex workers deserve access to justice and the authorities need to be trained to see them not as criminals but as individuals deserving of protection, like any other citizen.

An alternative approach to gradual reforms is to attempt large scale legal and social reform at once, for example, through pursuing a sex work decriminalisation Bill, which not only repeals the criminal, and other, laws that harm sex workers but also introduces a system of legal and social protection for sex workers⁹. A key element in this approach is building social and political support for such reform, which involves public education work and a significant amount of political lobbying. One strategy to assist in this is to use international platforms and

⁸ NSWP, 2020, "[Smart Sex Workers' Guide to Decent Work](#)."

⁹ NSWP, 2020, "[Smart Sex Workers' Guide to Decriminalisation](#)."



mechanisms, like the United Nations human rights treaty bodies, to build the case for decriminalisation¹⁰.

Sex workers' rights activists and sex worker-led organisations are the experts on what strategy best fits their own social and political context and what change is required to meaningfully improve the lives of sex workers in their particular country¹¹.

The importance of sex worker organising, therefore, cannot be underestimated. There is a profound need for support for sex workers' rights activism from international donors, which could include direct funding but also technical and legal support to help organisations advance their legal and political goals. Allied organisations should also be encouraged to partner with sex worker-led organisations to support them in moving the fight for the decriminalisation of sex work forward. While sex worker-led organisations have to be in the driving seat when it comes to deciding on strategy and priorities, organisations that can offer help and support are crucial partners for the sex workers' rights movement.

Summary of the ten country Legal Case Studies

Burkina Faso

Public soliciting in a public place is criminalised in Burkina Faso, which is the main law in the country that is used against sex workers. The police misunderstand the law, however, and often act as if all sex work is criminalised when it is not. This means that sex workers are arrested under this law whether they are soliciting in a public place or not. If sex workers are charged and tried, they can receive a fine or be sent to prison, or sometimes both. It is, however, much more common for the police to bribe sex workers and then release them without charge.

The criminal laws against soliciting in Burkina Faso mean that sex workers are more vulnerable to human rights abuses at the hands of the authorities. Sex worker participants reported experiences of violence, extortion, and rape from police. Often, the police raid sex work workplaces without any clear legal justification and simply start arresting sex workers. To be released sex workers must pay bribes and / or are raped in detention. Sex workers see the police as a threatening force and do not feel able to report crimes against them.

Burundi

In Burundi there is no criminal law against selling sex but there are offences related to sex work such as incitement to debauchery and "prostitution", soliciting, and "providing facilities for prostitution". There is also an offence of public outrage against good morals, which is used against sex workers, often purely based on their appearance in a public place. Sex workers in Burundi prefer to work in indoor venues because of the risk of arrest under the soliciting and public order laws.

Arbitrary arrests and detention of sex workers is common in Burundi and the police often demand bribes from sex workers for their release. Sex worker participants also reported

¹⁰ NSWP, 2018, "[Smart Sex Worker's Guide: Rights-Affirming International Policies Relating to Sex Work](#)."

¹¹ NSWP, 2020, "[Smart Person's Guide: Recognising Sex Workers as Experts](#)."



experiences of sexual harassment, violence, and abuse from the police. Sex workers do not feel able to report crimes against them to the police and have no access to justice.

Egypt

In Egypt, all forms of sex work are fully criminalised and the most common offences that sex workers are charged with are “practicing habitual debauchery or prostitution” or “inciting and advertising of debauchery or prostitution”. In the law, debauchery refers to male sex work and “prostitution” describes female sex work. There are other offences in the Penal Code that can be used to criminalise sex work.

The majority of participants used online sources to connect with clients and reported that police entrapment is a huge concern for them. The vice police regularly pose as clients to try and convince sex workers to meet so they can be arrested. Sex workers have adopted particular strategies for trying to avoid entrapment including the screening of clients and always taking a different phone to the meeting, which has no evidence of sex work involvement in it. Despite these strategies, participants spoke of negative experiences with the police including verbal and physical abuse by the police when they actually are arrested.

Lack of legal representation is a big issue and when sex workers are taken to court, they often do not have a competence defence team. The sentencing they receive often depends on the socio-religious background of the judge and can range from six months to three years in prison. Due to the way the police treat sex workers they do not feel able to report any crimes against them to the authorities, as their fear of arrest is too high.

Kenya

In Kenya, selling sex itself is not criminalised but there are laws on the books that criminalise soliciting, loitering or “importuning for the purposes of prostitution”. These offences exist both in the national Penal Code and in municipal by-laws. There are also laws against managing and organising sex work, including the criminal offence of living on the earnings of sex work, and offering premises to be used for sex work.

The core issue raised in interviews and focus groups with sex workers was their experiences of violence and extortion at the hands of police officers and local county law enforcement officials. Participants recounted experiences of being arrested and detained only to be released without charge upon the payment of a bribe or experiencing rape and sexual abuse at the hands of the police while in detention. The authorities use the soliciting laws as the main justification for arresting sex workers and sex workers are sometimes arrested simply for walking down the street if they are known to the police as sex workers.

These experiences mean sex workers cannot rely on the police when they are victims of crime, and they feel unable to report these. Furthermore, sex workers are disempowered in their interactions with clients as the clients know that sex workers will not be able to report any violence or harassment they experience.

Nigeria

Sex work laws vary in the different federal states of Nigeria. In the northern states that adopt an Islamic Penal Code all aspects of sex work are illegal. In the southern states, which adopt the Nigerian Criminal Code there is no law that criminalises sex work itself but there are laws against the activities of third parties and operating brothels.

However, even without the direct criminalisation of selling sex, sex workers are arrested by law enforcement on the basis of administrative offences like loitering or public nuisance. Human rights violations of sex workers by the authorities are commonplace including unlawful detention, violence, and abuse. Sex workers reported experiences of being robbed, beaten, and raped by the police during raids and arrests. It is common for sex workers to pay bribes to the police to avoid arrest or to secure their release.

Morocco

Soliciting for “prostitution” and incitement to debauchery are criminalised in Morocco, which can be interpreted as passive standing in a public place. Incitement to debauchery is particularly vague and can be used to criminalise all sorts of behaviour including being alone in a place after sunset or how someone is dressed. There are other sex work-related laws, such as “living off the earnings of prostitution”, “promoting prostitution”, owning or managing a brothel. Sex workers described the street as the place where sex work laws are most heavily enforced. Male, trans and gender diverse sex workers face additional scrutiny and are also arrested under the laws that criminalise same sex sexual activity. The way sex workers are handled by the police and justice system is inconsistent with some being released without charge and others being prosecuted.

Police entrapment is an issue with officers patrolling out of uniform. Participants described law enforcement as violent and dangerous although treatment can often depend on the individual officer involved. Given the risks of arrest and ill-treatment at the hands of police a migrant sex worker interviewed relied on third parties to find her clients for added security and to avoid the police. Sex workers do not feel able to report violence they experience to the police and are fearful that they will simply be arrested if they do so.

Mozambique

Mozambique has undertaken significant law reform processes in recent years. In 2014 the main provision in the Penal Code used to criminalise sex work was repealed. The offence against public decency remains in the Penal Code, which can still be used to arrest and detain sex workers. Police officers use this offence to take economic advantage of sex workers by bribing them and the police are also known to commit acts of violence against sex workers.

There are no specific laws that provide protection to sex workers in Mozambique, although sex workers can make use of other laws (like the law on domestic violence) to try and seek redress when they experience harm. With the law reform processes and with increased training and education the relationship between the police and sex workers has improved somewhat. Sex worker participants reported some positive experiences of reporting violence against them to the police although there are still many challenges in the justice system. More



rights education is needed for sex workers and further training with the justice institutions is necessary to see sex workers have proper access to justice.

South Africa

In South Africa, sex work is fully criminalised as it is an offence to sell, to buy, or to engage in a sex work-related behaviour. The authorities use this law to arrest sex workers, even for “being a sex worker”. In other words, sex workers are arrested and charged simply for being known to the police as sex workers. There are also local by-laws against soliciting, loitering and public nuisance that are used to criminalise sex workers and these are often interpreted and enforced differently depending on the municipality, which leads to many unlawful arrests.

Almost all sex worker participants reported being subject to human rights violations and ill treatment at the hands of law enforcement, including abuse and violence by the police during arrest and while in detention. The police routinely demand bribes to protect sex workers from arrest or to ensure their release. Sex workers also reported having no sense of legal protection, which affects their negotiating power with clients, and they do not feel able to report crimes against them to the police. When they do attempt to report a crime, they are treated unfavourably and not taken seriously.

Uganda

Sex work is fully criminalised in Uganda under the Penal Code. It is extremely difficult for the police to prove that sex work has taken place, so it is more common for sex workers to be arrested for the offences of being idle and disorderly, being a rogue / vagabond, or being a common nuisance. If charged with any of these offences, sex workers can be punished with community work, or imprisonment of 3 to 6 months. There are other laws in Uganda that impact on sex workers, including laws against same-sex sexual activity, and laws that criminalise the attempted or intentional transmission of HIV. A new Sexual Offences Bill proposed in Uganda will further criminalise sex work.

There is rampant police brutality directed against sex workers, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the police enforcement of COVID-19 regulations. The police often arrest sex workers with the main aim of extorting money from them through bribes.

Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe there are offences against soliciting for the purposes of sex work, living off the earnings of sex work, “facilitating prostitution”, and keeping or running a brothel. Historically, the police would use the soliciting law to arrest sex workers, but it is a difficult offence to prove and a court ruling from 2014/2015 held that there must be evidence of sex work having taken place for someone to be arrested and charged. It is no longer enough for someone to be arrested purely for being in a public place known for sex work. However, there is limited knowledge about this ruling especially among younger sex workers, so the police still try and use this law to demand bribes and / or sex from them. The brothel-keeping laws also affect sex workers, as police action taken against the brothels (including bribes) means that sex workers have to pay more for accommodation in the brothel, or also bribe the police, to avoid arrest.



Sex workers do not feel able to seek help from the police when they are victims of crime. Participants reported experiencing violence and abuse at the hands of the police when they are arrested, including sexual violence. The police also use laws against loitering or public nuisance to arrest sex workers, but it is also difficult to prove those charges and the cases rarely make it to court – this means that the police use these offences primarily to demand the payment of bribes.

Project supported by:

