



**MIGRANT SEX WORKERS
& HOUSING IN
IRELAND**

2023-2024

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INTRODUCTION

This community report addresses the pressing housing issues faced by migrant sex workers in Ireland, based on firsthand accounts from those living in the country.

Their voices reveal the complex challenges encountered in securing safe and stable housing.

Key themes include:

- difficulties in finding suitable accommodation
- substance use
- entry into sex work
- experiences of discrimination
- predatory behaviour by landlords and property management companies

By presenting these lived experiences, the aim is to inform and engage community members, service providers, and policymakers about the urgent need for supportive housing solutions and protective measures including changes in the current laws.

The goal is to expose the systemic barriers and injustices faced by migrant sex workers and advocate for practical, community-driven actions to improve their living conditions and overall well-being. This report seeks to foster a more inclusive and understanding environment, paving the way for meaningful change

With funding from ESWA (European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance), SWAI (Sex Workers Alliance Ireland) created this community report between 2023 and 2024.

A heartfelt thank you is extended to all the sex workers who participated in this project. Their courage and willingness to share their stories have been instrumental in shedding light on the systemic issues they face, and their voices are vital in advocating for much-needed change.

SEX WORK LAW

EARLY 20TH CENTURY

In the 1920s, the Irish Free State government, heavily influenced by Catholic morality, began implementing laws to regulate sexual conduct and align public behaviour with religious values.

The influence of the Catholic Church was pervasive in the Free State, shaping social and legal norms around sexuality and morality. This period saw significant censorship of publications, film, and policing of dance halls.

In 1935, under the Fianna Fáil government, the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, was amended to criminalise brothel keeping and increase penalties for engagement in sex work. This legislation aimed to reinforce Catholic moral standards and reduce what was seen as immoral behaviour.

During this time, workhouses established in the 1700s became state-sanctioned prisons for "fallen" women which usually meant sex workers and unmarried, pregnant women.

These institutions, known as Magdalene Laundries, operated with the cooperation of the state, and the women within them were subjected to slave labour and faced severe and degrading punishments, including head shaving, solitary confinement and deprivation of meals.

LATER 20TH CENTURY

As with many global North countries, the dominant narrative in Ireland is one of carceral, liberal feminism which frames all sex work as gender-based violence. This, combined with a history of colonisation by the British and their attempts to impose Protestantism on Ireland, meant that historically Irish nationalism was synonymous with Catholicism. When the 26 counties gained independence in 1922, the Irish Free State could not afford to run schools and hospitals so these institutions were handed to the Catholic Church to manage.

The influence of the Catholic Church on Irish legislation continues today.

The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 1993 introduced significant changes to sex work laws. The 1993 Act criminalised the organisation of sex work and living off the earnings of sex work, which can mean renting to a sex worker or splitting bills with a sex worker as roommates, and loitering with the intent to supply sexual services.

This change forces sex workers to work alone to avoid legal repercussions, making it difficult or impossible for sex workers to operate safely.

THE NORDIC MODEL

The Nordic model is also known as the Swedish Model because it originated in Sweden in 1999.

This model purports to eliminate sex work by criminalising the purchase of sexual services, however, this approach has been shown to increase violence against sex workers in countries where it has been implemented, including Ireland, without reducing numbers of those engaged in sex work [1][2][3].

The Nordic model has been adopted by several countries, including Norway, Iceland, Canada, Northern Ireland, France, and Israel.

In 2009, the Turn Off the Red Light (TORL) was launched, aiming to implement the Nordic model in Ireland. This campaign was spearheaded by Ruhama, the Immigrant Council of Ireland, and the Religious Sisters of Charity.

The Immigrant Council of Ireland was founded by the Religious Sisters of Charity, while Ruhama was founded by the Good Shepherd Sisters and the Religious Sisters of Charity, both orders with histories of running Magdalene Laundries.

The last Magdalene Laundry, run by the Religious Sisters of Charity, closed in 1996[4].

Under the Fine Gael leadership, the Irish government passed the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, criminalising the purchase of sexual services, instituting fines and doubling the sentences for brothel keeping and organising sex work.

[1] Ellison G, Ní Dhónaill C, Early E (2019) A review of the payment for sexual services in NI. Queens University, Belfast School of Law and Department of Justice Northern Ireland, UK.

[2] Campbell, R., Smith, L., Leacy, B., Ryan, M., & Stoica, B. (2020). Not collateral damage: Trends in violence and hate crimes experienced by sex workers in the Republic of Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology, 28*(3), 280-313.

[3] Vuolajärvi, N. (2021). Preventing violence against women or violence work?—The Swedish model of prostitution. In SFK research seminar, 2021: Sexual violence in the Nordic Countries.

[4] Berry, A., & Frazer, P. (2021). How sex workers understand their experiences of working in the Republic of Ireland. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy, 18*, 869-884.

ISSUES WITH CURRENT LAWS

The current laws in Ireland create a precarious situation for sex workers.

INCREASED VULNERABILITY

Criminalising brothel keeping and the organisation of sex work forces sex workers to operate in isolation, increasing their risk of violence and exploitation. The fear of raids and legal repercussions from Gardaí pushes sex work further underground, making it more dangerous for sex workers.

HOUSING INSTABILITY

The 1993 legislation makes it very difficult for sex workers to secure stable housing, as landlords can be prosecuted for knowingly renting to them. This contributes to housing insecurity, and makes sex workers more vulnerable to exploitation and homelessness. The fear of eviction adds to the instability and stress experienced by sex workers.

SAFETY CONCERNS

Client criminalisation under the Nordic model has not eliminated sex work but has instead driven it underground. This makes it harder for sex workers to screen clients and negotiate safe working conditions. Research shows that sex workers experience increased violence^[5] and are less likely to report crimes against them due to fear of further criminalisation and stigmatisation^[6].

[5] Campbell, R., Smith, L., Leacy, B., Ryan, M., & Stoica, B. (2020). Not collateral damage: Trends in violence and hate crimes experienced by sex workers in the Republic of Ireland. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 28(3), 280-313.

[6] Ellison G, Ní Dhónaill C, Early E (2019) A review of the payment for sexual services in NI. Queens University, Belfast School of Law and Department of Justice Northern Ireland, UK.

STIGMATISATION & MARGINALISATION

Sex workers in Ireland face significant stigma and discrimination, which affects their mental health and ability to form stable relationships[7]. The laws exacerbate this stigma by treating sex work as a criminal activity, further marginalising those involved in the industry. The societal perception of sex work as immoral and illegal contributes to the reluctance of sex workers to seek help or report abuses.

[7] Berry, A., & Frazer, P. (2021). How sex workers understand their experiences of working in the Republic of Ireland. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 18, 869-884.

[8] Ellison G, Ní Dhónaill C, Early E (2019) A review of the payment for sexual services in NI. Queens University, Belfast School of Law and Department of Justice Northern Ireland, UK.

[9] Miren, F. (2019, June 12). A change in Irish law was meant to help sex workers. So why are they being jailed? *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/12/change-law-sex-workers-jailed>

NORDIC MODEL EFFECTIVENESS

Research shows that the Nordic Model has failed to minimise sex work anywhere it has been implemented[8], with valuable resources often misallocated to evicting and arresting sex workers[9] instead. This approach overlooks the structural inequalities and socio-economic factors that drive individuals into sex work: poverty and inequality.

Current sex work laws, influenced by lingering Catholic morality and evolving through legislative changes, have created a precarious and unsafe environment for sex workers in Ireland[4].

The Nordic model, purported to protect sex workers by the conservative religious organisations who introduced it, **has instead increased sex worker vulnerability and marginalisation**[5][6].

Addressing issues faced by sex workers requires a more nuanced approach that prioritises their safety, rights, and access to resources including healthcare and housing.

METHODOLOGY

Voices of sex workers in Ireland are constantly omitted and excluded from conversations leading to laws and policies directly affecting them. This constant omission guided our approach to this research.

DATA COLLECTION

Participants were sourced through a snowball sampling method and interviewed by a member of Ireland's sex work community.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight migrant sex workers over Zoom and recorded on an iPhone before being meticulously transcribed by SWAI.

Participants were given open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed reflections on their circumstances, challenges, and coping mechanisms.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. All participants were given pseudonyms of their own choosing to protect their identities.

PURPOSE

The aim of this research is to understand personal experiences and perspectives of migrant sex workers, focusing on the intersection of housing and sex work.

This report offers a thorough and empathetic exploration of the housing issues faced by migrant sex workers living in Ireland.

Understanding these experiences is crucial for a range of reasons, including human rights, equality and policy development

Understanding the housing experiences of migrant sex workers in Ireland is important as it is key to the betterment of their wellbeing, and it unveils broader societal issues.

These issues include

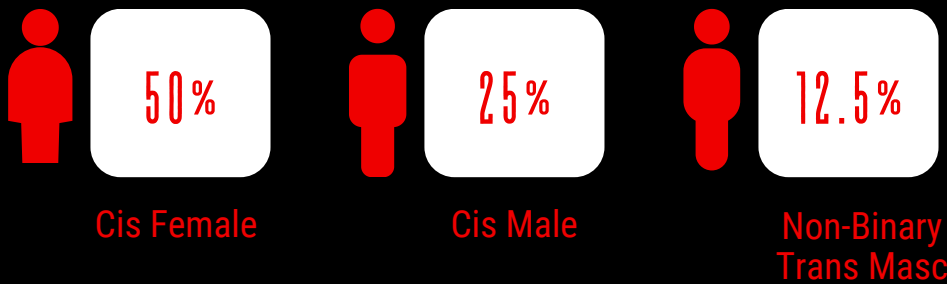
- a national housing crisis
- historical anti-sex worker prejudice in the Irish government
- society and policing
- racism
- discrimination, anti-migration sentiment.

Our goal is that this evidence will contribute to the fostering of an informed and inclusive environment for positive change.

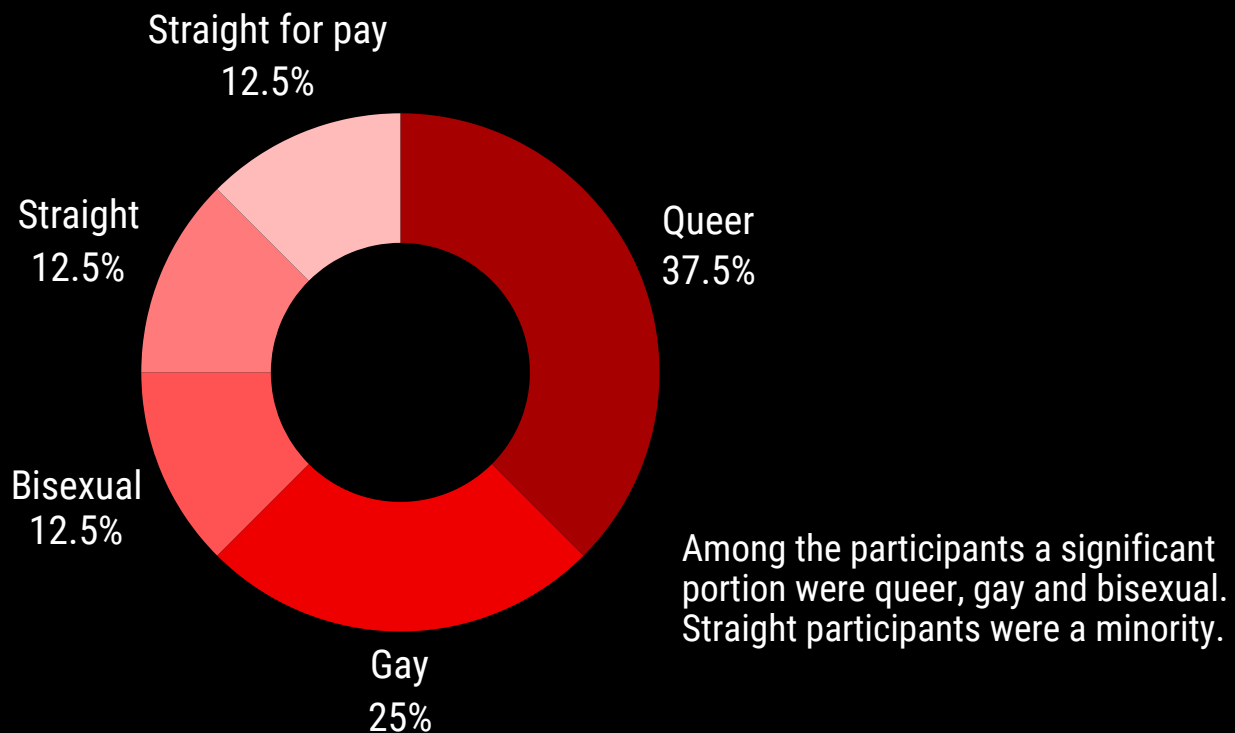
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

This section provides a detailed overview of the demographics of the sex worker participants. Understanding their demographic profile is crucial for interpreting the findings, contextualising their experiences, assessing the results and giving valuable suggestions for targeted recommendations.

GENDER IDENTITY



SEXUAL ORIENTATION



COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

The majority of participants identify as migrants: 87.5%

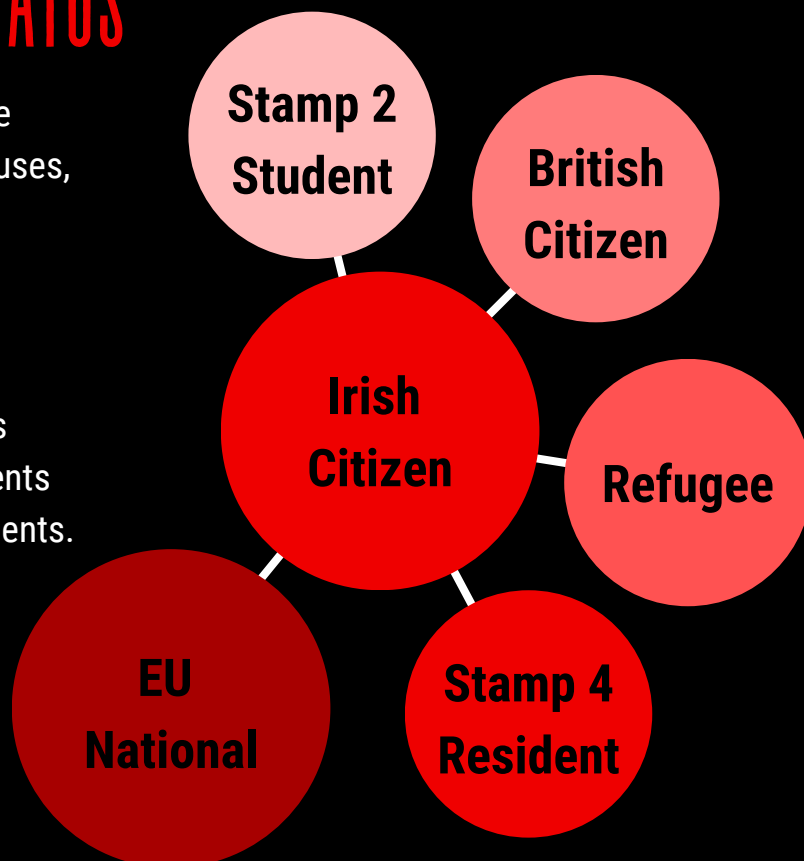


Participants originate from a diverse range of countries, including Ireland, the United States, Germany, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, Romania, and Mexico.

IMMIGRATION STATUS

Participants had a diverse array of immigration statuses, including:

- 25% Irish citizens
- 25% EU nationals
- 12.5% Refugees
- 12.5% British citizens
- 12.5% Stamp 2 Students
- 12.5% Stamp 4 Residents.



FORMS OF SEX WORK

Participants have experience in:

87.5% indoor
full service*

50% camming
phone sex, sexting

37.5% erotic/exotic
dance

25% porn,
content creation

12.5% street work
full service*

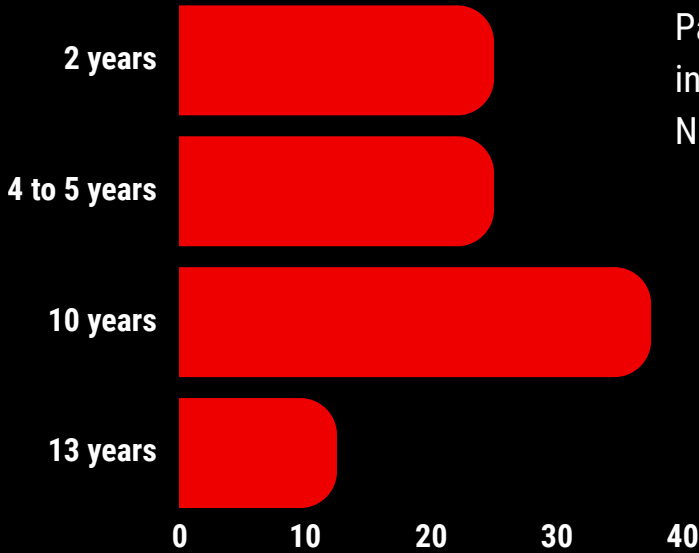
12.5% massage

12.5% kink/fetish-based
services

* In person, oral and vaginal sex

CAREER SPAN

How long have participants been sex working?



Participants had been actively engaged in sex work for various amounts of time. None less than two years.

- 25% started 2 years ago
- 25% started 4 to 5 years ago
- 37.5% started 10 years ago
- 12.5% started 13 years ago

BEGINNING COUNTRY

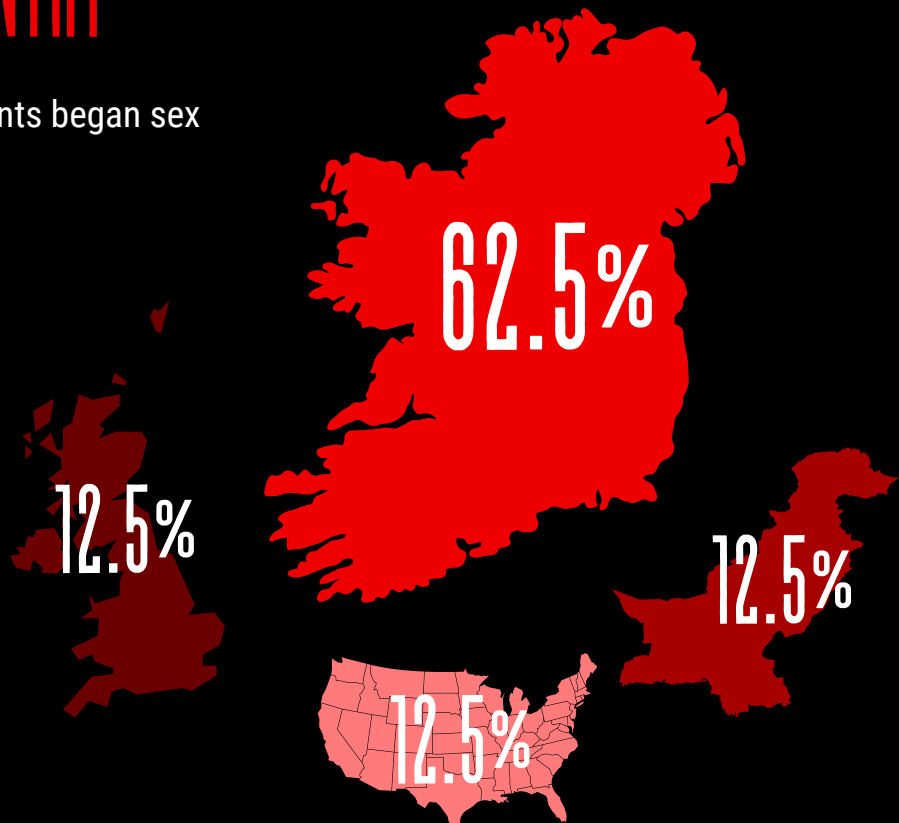
The majority of participants began sex working in Ireland.

Ireland: 62.5%

United Kingdom: 12.5%

Pakistan: 12.5%

United States: 12.5%



REASONS FOR STARTING SEX WORK

Three-quarters of participants reported engaging in sex work for financial reasons. Other reasons included flexibility, and one participant cited supporting an addiction.

"I needed money." - Julia

"it had to do with strictly being a financial decision. The final one was convenient. I worked for the NHS for a while. The salary was absolute bullshit." - NK

"...when you work for yourself you have the **freedom to pick and choose when you work...**"

- Stella

"... starting off I **suppose to feed my addiction...**" - Mandy

"... I don't have any like skills for the job market necessarily that would qualify me for any well-paid job, so it just seemed like the only possibility..." - Stella

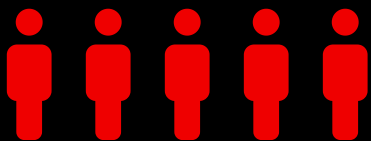
"...it just happened... I would be out and somebody would offer me, and **I would need money and I would need food...** And I would just go with them..." Jacob

"I started working at the club and then realised that I could make better money. I was making good money, but I could make better money than what I made." - Lux

"I needed a job that would help me cover expenses... just so that I could live... I had done very different work back [home] and didn't feel like I could sustain that work anymore." - Fran

"...I met someone... **he offered some financial help, and I accepted it...** I didn't know anything about laws back then so I look for help and then I found out more about this life..." - Roberto

WORKING INDEPENDENTLY VS MANAGEMENT



Independent workers



Independent and under management



Managed workers

A significant proportion of participants worked independently, illustrating sex workers' attitude toward working under management.

Sex workers that had experience with management had an over all negative attitude about it. Safety was the main advantage mentioned for working with management. Most felt that under management they had less autonomy and were financially exploited. Because of the brothel keeping laws in Ireland sex workers can not protect themselves from predatory management.

"...we're **not guaranteed any rights to sick days**, we're **not guaranteed any money**, and yet they... they just have a lot of little **methods that they use to control our behavior** and to kind of make it clear to us that yeah **they're the ones who get to call the shots** around the club and so I think that for me doing the full service work outside on my own feels like I'm getting to make more of my own choices" - Fran

"When it comes to if you are being managed, there is maybe some other party who's like, it feels hard to say responsible for your safety. I don't know that third parties... are ever feeling a responsibility for their workers' safety. But.. **there's just more of a trail or something** there." - Fran

"...as sex worker, you have a lot of freedom but you don't have any rights so there was nobody I could go to and you know they'd [management] be... calling me in the morning on the weekends or like try and call me on my birthday and it's just constant" - Stella

WORKING INDEPENDENTLY VS MANAGEMENT

" I had a friend that... always said to me, ring if you ever feel like you're in trouble. But at the same time, wouldn't have been my pimp or have anything like got to do with who I'm meeting... I suppose that felt, that gave me that little bit more security" - Mandy

Like working together, I think all the advantages because escorting it's a very dangerous job, you know?... Even if it's out of the law, I will not work alone." – Julia

Sex workers who worked independently appreciated their autonomy, yet felt that it would be an advantage to their safety and business to have some aspects of management, yet because of Irish law it's not possible for sex workers to work with management in a mutually beneficial way.

"There are some times where it would be lovely to have that safety net. But on the whole, I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. And legality-wise, it's easier on your own" - NK

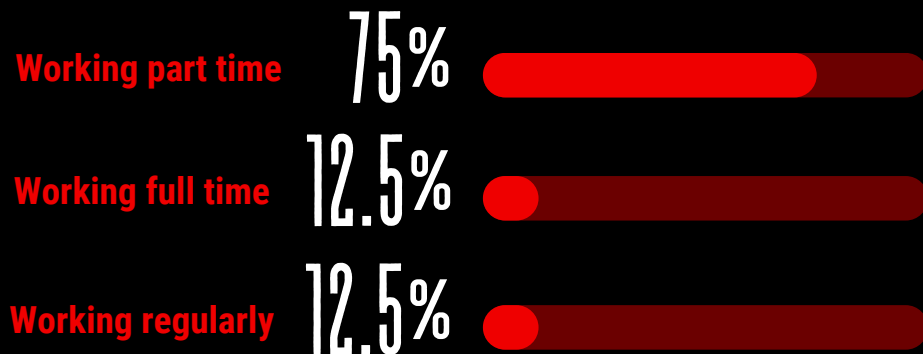
"...I don't like to work alone... it would be amazing if I don't have to go through the stress of dealing with people like clients and taking requests if I were just like a normal job with a shift even if it's a sex worker, I'd love that instead of having to deal with people. – Roberto

"it would be amazing to have someone that like does your admin and answers your phone calls and does all that.... Honestly, I wouldn't mind paying, you know, whatever percentage of what I make to someone who does all of that. - Lux

"I think working like if you have a receptionist, it's easier, to be honest. I never had, but I'm so sick of answering the same freaking questions, a thousand times same, same." – Julia

FREQUENCY OF WORKING TIMES

An overwhelming majority of participants worked part-time.



"I have a **normal job that is part-time**, and I **also do a masters** and so sex work, I cannot be full time" - Roberto

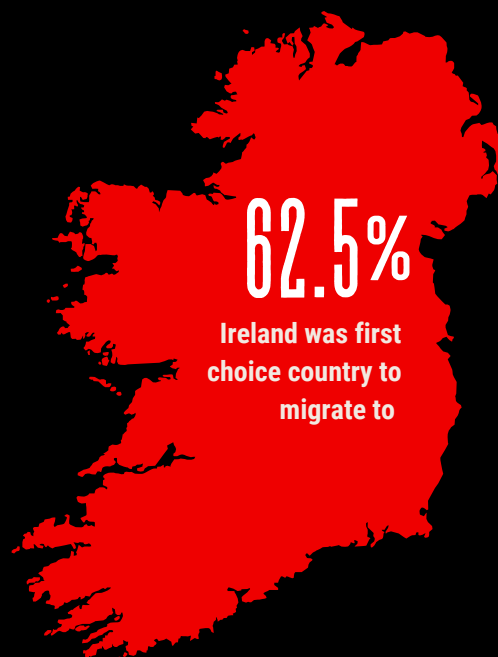
"I used to work full-time now because I **have a kid I cannot work**" - Julia

"...because of **the housing situation** and all that... I can't work all the time but I'm trying to sort that out." - NK

"I'm in a homeless accommodation... where I live at the moment **I'm not allowed let anyone in** so I haven't the opportunity of doing work..." - Mandy

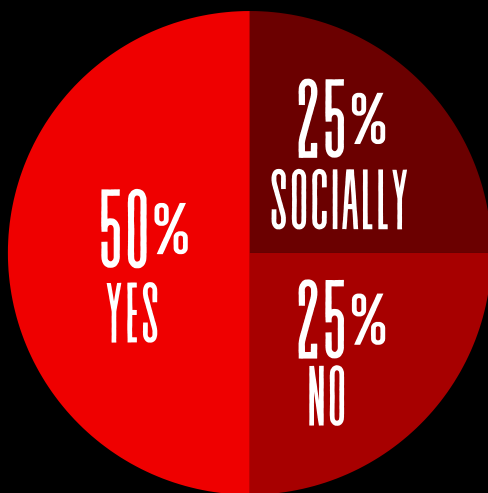
FIRST CHOICE COUNTRY

A majority of participants said Ireland was their first choice country. **37.5%** said Ireland was a second or third choice country.



SUBSTANCE USE

DO PARTICIPANTS USE DRUGS?



A significant portion of participants have engaged with substances, 50%. A subset doing so in social contexts, 25%. Another 25% has abstained entirely.

Stella employs substances to manage her mental health issues, “I’ve been doing that like on and off for a year and a half and kind of like to try to treat depression and PTSD ...even kind of anxiety drinking.”

Mandy briefly details her history of drug use, “I would have started out at 17 on like heroin. I would have smoked for years and then I ended up injecting”.

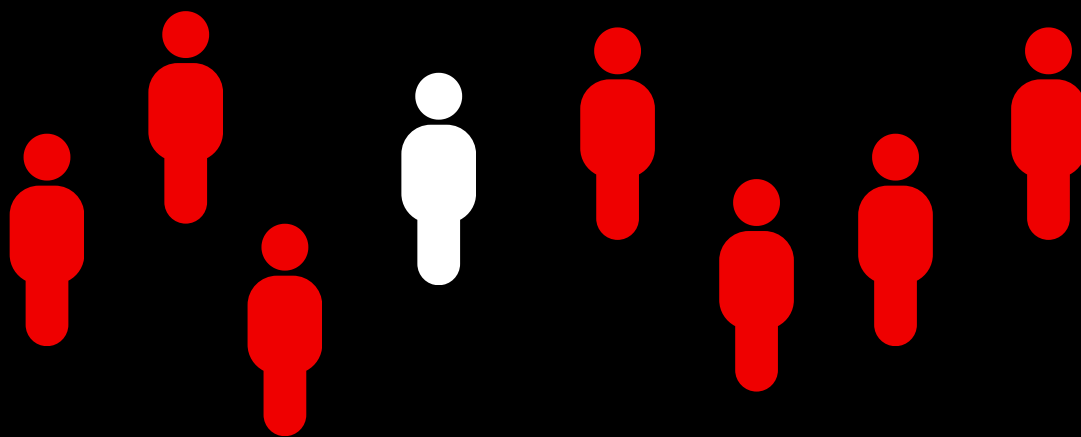
Mandy employed drugs for mental health reasons, “But I used everything, anything that would take me away from myself, I suppose...”

After three and a half years clean, Mandy relapsed, “So I’m going next Tuesday to a treatment centre for six weeks just to mainly to detox and to deal with grief. I’ve lost my mother, my father and one of my friends that died in my house...”

TYPES OF SUBSTANCE



DRUG DEPENDENCY PROGRAMS



1 IN 8

participants have been in a drug dependence program

SUBSTANCE USE AT WORK

Anxiety, boredom, frustration over lack of control and drug illness were some of the reasons sex workers used substances at work.

Stella used to drink alcohol and smoke marijuana before and at work to ease her nerves and help with her anxiety,

“I got drunk there because I was very nervous... and sometimes I'd have a joint and stuff before the strip club or the parlour when I was still smoking more you know? ...the way that I used weed a lot of times was for anxiety as well...”

While there were times that Mandy would have preferred to have remained intoxicated at work, sickness associated with heroin use made her job difficult,

“I would have definitely, at the beginning... preferred to have used all the time and [to] have been... cured beforehand but there's been times where I've been sick and I had to go out and meet someone before I'd be able to actually cure myself. Which was quite tough because when you're sick from heroin or any of those drugs you're actually physically sick and even if it's a blow job you're kind of, it's not as easy as after you use so I kind of used to try to keep money from the night before for the next day to work.”

Fran points out, while alcohol makes work more bearable, intoxication can make it harder for them to assert boundaries

“alcohol makes working so much more bearable, but it also makes it harder to react to the customers when they're violating your boundaries or it also it makes it harder to work sometimes because you just lose motivation”. - Fran

Fran occasionally drinks at work to dull their boredom and frustration with clients,

“...at the club, we make money off of selling drinks... alcohol dulls the boredom, dulls the just, the frustration with having to interact with men who feel so entitled and who can be so shit”.

SUBSTANCE USE AT WORK

Participants stress the importance of staying sober at work to ensure safety and maintain professional boundaries,

While he enjoys drugs recreationally, Roberto stays sober at work,
“I like them but I decided not to, to do them and in my job”.

Jacob accepts drinks from clients but only if they offer,
“Yeah, if they offer me, like, you know, if somebody they have, they offer me a drink. But if they don't, I don't, I don't ask for it”.

He worries that being intoxicated at work would endanger him, and like Fran, weaken his ability to maintain boundaries with clients,



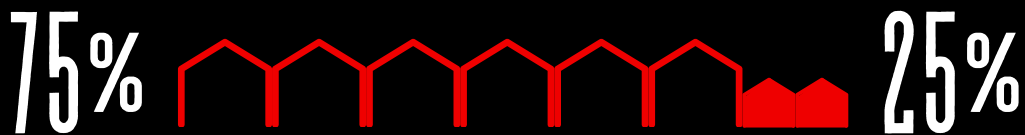
...I wouldn't use it because I wouldn't be myself in the sense that I wouldn't be able to take care of myself. Or probably I would accept things that I wouldn't normally do, and I would put myself at risk if, that's why I wouldn't do it and if they take then they get too crazy they might hurt me or they would put me in danger”. - Roberto

Lux, a dominatrix, stresses the importance of remaining sober at work due to the risk of endangering clients during BDSM activities,

“...for me, it's always been important not to do any drugs while I'm doing any type of Domme work because we're doing some dangerous things. It's always been my attitude that if I'm doing some really mean, awful, cruel things to you that could really hurt you, I need to respect you enough to not do it while I'm on, even if I've just had some alcohol, it's better that I don't, you know that I'm completely of my own mind to be able to like, do the kind of play”.

HOUSING

CURRENT HOUSING SITUATIONS



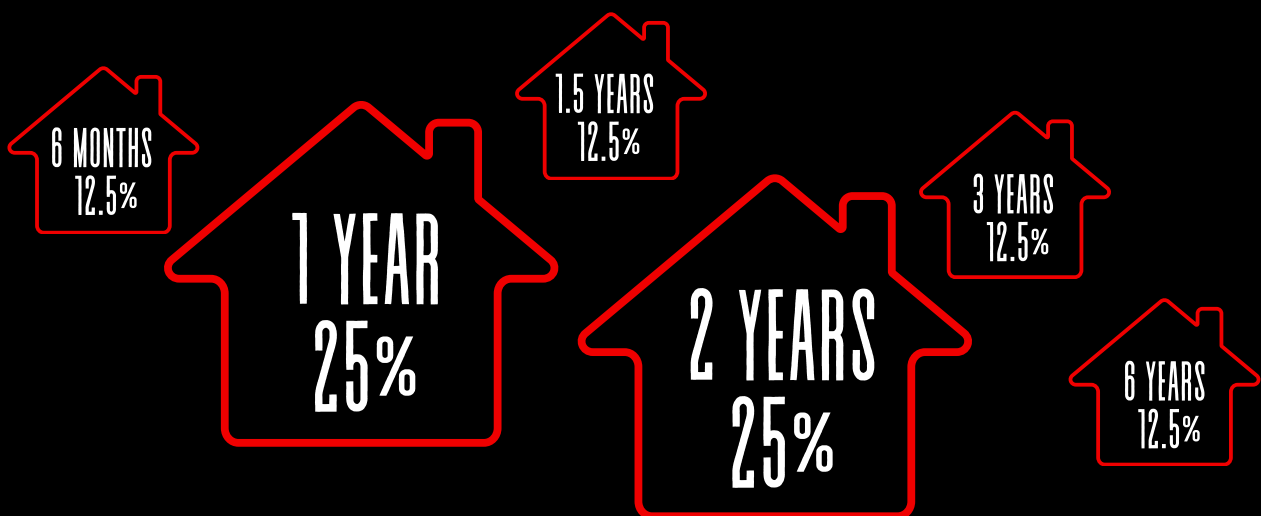
Living in privately rented accommodation

Homeless living in hostel

Three quarters of participants rented private accommodation while 25 percent were homeless or lived in hostels. 83 percent lived with roommates or partners while 80 percent of those living with someone else lived with non-sex workers. 2 of the 8 are homeless, living in a hostel. Of those privately renting, 33% avail of HAP (Housing Assistance Program).

It is illegal under Irish law to rent to a sex worker or for sex workers to have roommates or to live with a spouse or partner.

TIME AT CURRENT HOUSING



The majority of participants lived in their current housing for 1 and 2 years.

HOUSING

Julia found her accommodation through the internet but alludes to how much more competitive the rental market has become, “Daft or rent.ie, I can't remember on internet was easier back then to rent. It was a small town...not so busy like you know like Dublin... Well it's not easy now because everybody wants a house”.

Roberto too searched for accommodation through the internet, however, the competitive nature of Ireland's rental market presented many challenges that were exacerbated by his being a student who is only allowed to work part-time by law, “...websites such as Daft, that's where I found it, daft.ie. I went to many state agencies, but they tell you the same, to apply online. And then it's very difficult to apply online because being a student, they practically say no to you. And when they take you for viewings, you show up and you're a student there with part-time job and in the queue there's a software engineer from Amazon, so they don't take you. It's very difficult...The only thing that I had is... If I were able to chat with the agents or the landlords, they would even take me for a second interview or something. But it was very difficult. There was always someone better. So, some viewings, there were like more than 50 people queuing. So, it's very difficult”.

Jacob suggests that knowing someone in a position to give help and having references can be beneficial when seeking accommodation,

“...you can look at online. Mostly you would get it by reference. Online they don't reply... like send an email to them, call them. They never reply to you. ...you have to look for a reference and you know somebody and then you know. They know somebody and then you get it”

Fran eventually found housing through a queer housing group they were a member of on Facebook,

“ ...I was looking for housing for... three months before I got this place. I would go see flats, I would respond to ads, most stuff was out of my budget, most stuff... people responding were really long...” - Fran

As a trans-masc person, looking for accepting roommates with similar values added to the challenge of finding suitable housing,

“...I'm a bit particular about wanting the people I live with to align with my values... I know that's a huge privilege, but to be a trans person who's just got like specific commitments and values in the world. I wasn't turning down housing around this reason, but I was trying to find a space where I would feel more at home with the people I lived with, I just got lucky that this room opened up and I interviewed with the person who was living here and he and I got along. There were a lot of other people who were trying to get this room... I got lucky”.

HOUSING

NK finds renting from private landlords less stressful and invasive than renting from agencies,

“You want a private landlord. I really do not like the drama with agencies because it's usually excessive drama. Bring this, bring that. And quite frankly, if I pay you, I do not want to be stressed out unnecessarily. ... if I can pay your rent, I don't really need... to be handing over that much information to you if you get what I mean ...when it comes to that private landlords are much better at that than having to deal with agencies. So, I kind of prefer that.”

Until recently, Stella had been living with others in squats or otherwise uninhabited buildings or squats,



So this is like my first rental accommodation... I stayed in like pretty horrible squats that I didn't want to stay in because I didn't have anywhere else to go... I don't really know where I would have ended up...because, if the housing market wouldn't be such a catastrophe... I would have probably looked for something else but here I'm not even bothered because... where will I find? ...I'm just glad I'm not homeless.”
- Sydney

If it weren't for her good fortune in finding an affordable rental situation, Stella believes she would still be squatting,

“I would probably be keeping squatting, but it was really difficult, the social dynamic for me there... I think the squatting scene is quite classist and sexist in many ways. It's also been difficult because... people in my house... struggle with mental health issues and addiction... there is this... power dynamic... it's been difficult...”

She knows that not having a record as a renter would present challenges to finding conventional rental situations and she fears being discovered as a sex worker,

“...I have no paperwork to like make me look like I'm a good tenant, so either I have to fake everything and lie about it, which is stressful in its own way.... and then I'm on the dole and I have like HAP, I'm not appealing to any landlord. But even if I have a job, it's hard enough... I'm not even bothered like looking, you know, on these things because like I have to yeah either fake a lot of paperwork or, or I'm just not going to be any viable option to anybody, who would want to take me, you know? And then maybe if people find out this while I do sex [work]”

HOUSING

Stella fears finding herself in the same situation as friends of hers who are homeless and lacking supports,

"I have friends who like sleep in tents...and like kind of see myself and those who also don't have the family support... I'm just really scared of getting into that. So...while, I find this situation here quite stressful at times. I'm just really grateful to have a house".

Stella describes conditions at the squats she stayed at as less than ideal,

"...often there was times we didn't have any electricity, we didn't even have a toilet or even a shower or bucket flush or, you know, it was moldy as fuck ...I lived in houses without running water and where we like all shit in one toilet that started to leak because it didn't actually have any pipe you know".

Stella would prefer to avoid squatting in future if possible due to the toll it took on her mental health,



...yeah I feel like before I would start squatting I probably I'd rather... move to the countryside somewhere closer, there it's somewhat cheaper I mean, than start squatting again... there's too much trauma and too much conflict and too much stress and I don't think I've realised how much it's been gnawing on my mental health... I was out of it".

- Stella

Lux also relates how competitive she found the rental market in Dublin,

"We came at a time that is slightly less insane as it is now... but of course it's gotten miles more insane... instead of the lines going twice around the block, it might have just gone once around the block ...we had about a month to find something and we were just like, we were at it. Like, we were like seeing two and three properties a day."

Lux considers herself fortunate to have found an acceptable place only because it seemed less desirable to other renters,

"...almost every time we went to look at a place, it was [a] line down the block, clearly 700 people had been applying for this place. And it would just be, trash ... who would want to rent this? People lining up to try to get this apartment. It was terrible...it was one of the only places that we had found...there had been a couple of other people that looked at it but didn't want it because it was above this pub. It was probably the only apartment we looked at that didn't have a line around the block to see".

Julia enjoys living in her rural home,

"Yes, it's a small town, yeah, I love it. Never Dublin or big cities in my home ...I'm too calm myself to live somewhere else, like in big cities. I don't like big cities."

HOUSING

Fran's living situation is trans and queer friendly and affordable,

"Our flat has been continuously occupied... through [the] pandemic... so they've been limited on how much they could up our rent... it's relatively affordable it's a flat that's had queer and trans people in it for...the past five years."

However, the isolated location makes working from home difficult despite positive aspects of the situation,

"Overall, it has felt stable and chill... It's not cheap rent and we're a little ways out of town. But, you know, it's like a neighbourhood that's not very well-serviced by public transit and that's hard for work."

Fran's neighbourhood has other issues too,

"...they never do repairs like my bathtub is broken... like mould coming back in my bedroom. I'll email them about it. It's coming from the stairwell, but they're not gonna do anything about it ...people have been breaking in and they're blaming it on the Tenants and they're threatening to evict entire apartments if people don't close the very broken gate properly".

Mandy is currently living in homeless accommodation,

"It wouldn't be with my option in early recovery. But I'm grateful I... have a bed to go back to... At least I have my own room here. I can lock myself in and go to what groups I choose to go to and do my own thing... It's not too bad. It's like your own little apartment... I'm hoping that I won't be here very long ...they did talk to me about private renting again".

NK is also living in a hostel for the homeless, which she describes as a chaotic scene. She too looks forward to being back in rented accommodation in the near future,

"...I have never seen that amount of chaos. God bless the staff. ...My sleep patterns have had to change... I'm more of a person who likes to stay up late, eat late... I had to change that pattern... I don't think my body likes it ... I'm really anxious about the housing so that I can go back to my normal routine."

At the hostel, NK fears for her safety around other tenants,



...you can't determine who you're going to be dealing with and that's the worry there. You don't know the persons and health history and things like that... It's a very stressful process... I wouldn't wish it on my enemy. That's how bad it is ...for a couple of days she'd been laughing like a... hyena... because of my experience with health work, I knew something was not quite, let's just say the person was short a few marbles... I've been kind of watchful... They're very unpredictable... kind of like you're on the edge". - NK

HOUSING

Jacob describes the unsatisfactory circumstances of his living situation,



“[It’s] a very small studio... just two by two metres. It’s a very small place. I have problems with cooking and washing... There’s no bed here, I just sleep on the mattress on the floor. When I cook I have to be really careful... if something falls down, you’re going to be sleeping there, you know? And I cook here, and my clothes are inside, it smells... And then there’s not enough pressure on the washing machine, so I have to put water in the washing machine to wash my clothes... it is hard. I have an electric shower...If I take a... very quick shower, it charges me like one euro, 1.50... there’s...no normal heaters, so it charges you a lot. I was sick like last month... I was in the house... for two weeks. It was charging me like 15 or 20 euros per day...”

- Jacob

In a previous accommodation for asylum seekers, Jacob shared one room with 10 people in a very overcrowded building, “...they were charging the government a lot of money. ... this is not like a human situation, you know We are not animals you know to live here like this. It was really dark inside of there... There was an old pub there... they put board, like wooden boards, and...they were pretending, it’s a room, you know. They put 10 beds...inside, they built a... kind of toilet and shower. There was no window there... for inside the toilet.... You just smell everything from the inside.... All the beds were very close to each other. ...you have to put your bags either under the bed or beside the bed. Like 10 people in a small place. 10 people here, then 10 people here, and 10 people here. It was like you know a war zone.”

The living situation of Jacob and his housemates took a toll on the mental health of some of them,

“...what you are charging you have to give proper service and the people were ... becoming mentally sick. They were beating each other... There were two or three guys, they were mentally sick... they were behaving in a very strange way”.

At this facility, Jacob began to fear for his life,

“then in one room, there were six bunk beds, you know, and very, very dark in every room, six bunk beds and it was all dirty, you know, like dirty things on the floor and you know on the beds and people had like, you know, all the people were drug addicts and you know they have like, you know like some people are very dangerous, you know, they hate blacks and you know and I said somebody will kill me.”

THE COST OF HOUSING

Almost every participant spoke about how exorbitant rent prices are in Ireland,

“...it's very hard to find places now, you know. So, the people who are living in the places like long time, you know, because they have been renting for a long time. So, their rent is low. But if you like if you rent it now, it's very high, you know. But like most of the people, they're living there for a long time, you know. So, they are paying the old like the rent, which they were paying 10 years ago, you know, five years ago”. - Lux

Even though Jacob receives HAP payments, his utilities are expensive, meaning he pays a large percentage of his income to home related expenses,

“If I stay more in the house, it's charging me more, most of the time like I'm at work, you now, so it's different, but in the winter it's very high”.

Stella too receives HAP,

“I pay like an extra because the rent was higher than what HAP is paying”.

While Stella feels her rent is expensive, she thinks it is reasonable compared to rental prices in Ireland's capital city,

“I might say my rent is cheaper but I find my rent very expensive but I think in comparison to Dublin it's a pretty good deal. Like, I have a big room ...not a fancy area but I really like the area I live in. It's like a working-class area... I prefer it to any kind of fancy area anyway”.

Lux's accommodation is expensive but less than other flats of similar sizes

“... definitely on the lower end of how much it would cost... Price wise, it's a good deal.”

NK's housing is paid for by the council. Her largest expense is food as the hostel she lives in does not have anywhere for her to prepare meals,

“20 euros so that is also a cost that has to factor so by the time you are factoring at least 20 euros a day times seven that's also a cost in itself... maybe snacks or drinks, fizzy drinks and stuff like that. So that would be mostly the expenses and all that. Then like personal hygiene stuff too.”

THE COST OF HOUSING

Fran feels that the rent they pay is comparable to average rents for the area,

“I think it's like average or similar.. It's cheaper than like places in town. Like a bunch of my coworkers live in town like a few minutes from our club and they pay a lot more than I do”.

Fran pays a high percentage of what they make,



...like anywhere between like half to 75 percent, I'd say, depending on how I do that month...”. - Fran

Mandy, who lives in homeless

accommodation, says that after rent, “Oh God...I'm lucky if I'm left with about 50 or 60 quid a week, to be honest”.

Because of the instability of Roberto's source of income, it can be difficult to budget,

“Well, it's difficult to say because I don't have like a stable income... I don't know, depends on how the month goes. But it's expensive, it's very expensive rent. It's almost with electricity like two thousand”.

Roberto highlights how expensive the rents are where he lives, especially considering how dangerous the area is,

“I live in city centre. Which is good because it's close to everything, but it's bad because it's very dodgy... I know that the apartment I used to live before this was way better, better location and way cheaper. But also in the past two years or maybe one-year rents increased crazy like. They're very expensive at the moment.”

Due to Roberto's precarious status as a student, he is limited in the type of work that he can engage in,

“Yeah, actually my normal job, like they closed during COVID, so I had to only do sex work... I kept working... If I wanted to be legally here, I had to keep paying [for] a degree or English courses, but I was doing a degree. So, I had to keep working. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to afford my rent. And if I had asked for a loan and stopped meeting people, I don't know if I was going to be able to pay back all the interest”.

WORKING FROM HOME

For Julia, the thought of working in her old house was unthinkable,

“...I never worked in that house. Never ever worked in that house. Never ...Before, before baby I said this is my home like you know my home I don't want anyone you know And then my, the baby came and I said no that's not, I did not even think to do that”.

While she believes her neighbours at her current home do not know how she supports herself, she believes her landlord, a member of An Garda Síochána, is fully aware,

“My neighbours I don't think so. But my landlord, he was from Garda. I gave him fake references but for sure...he knew what I was doing...I took care of his house... I never make problems”.

Jacob complains that his space is too small to work from,

“I don't have a space here. It's a very small place. If it gets dirty, I have to wash everything. It's very hot. It's a carpet here. Small mattress. There's no space here”.

Additionally, Jacob never knows when his landlord is going to be present,



“My landlord is here all the time....he comes to take out the coins from the metre, you know. So, he has the keys, so he all the time, he can come here all the time.” - Jacob

Until recently, Roberto had an ideal living situation,

“I was living in a beautiful apartment and it was cheap. It was comfortable, good location but the landlord sold. So, I had to move.”

Roberto feels that his current accommodation is overpriced but he can work from there,

“It is what was available for me...it's too expensive for what it is. It's not worth it but... I can work from here. It was available... didn't choose a place. I said yes to around 40 places and this one took me. I always said yes, even if I didn't like the place because I needed to find somewhere to live.”

WORKING FROM HOME

Roberto feels safer working from his own home than visiting clients at theirs,

“ I feel safer from my place. I know if I go to someone else's place, I don't know if they have weapons or if they're alone. In my place I have control ...I feel safer in my place...I've only worked here so I've never toured. I've travelled to other places, but specifically to meet someone. I've never been to a place where I pay for a hotel and I'm waiting for calls. I never did it that way.”

Nonetheless, Roberto still harbours safety concerns around his clients visiting his home,

“...I've had this the situation where a client comes and they are too high... I ask them to leave, and I never know if they kept inside the building because I cannot see the front door from here. So, I feel unsafe sometimes that they stay around, or they knock at neighbours' doors or something”.

Closed circuit television monitoring in their apartment complex makes the possibility of working from home unrealistic for Fran,

“I think it would be really hard to work from here. Especially with the management... They remind us frequently that they have CCTV on. They send us emails. Before they were all concerned about this front gate, they were really going after people for smoking... we're very frequently reminded that CCTV is going all the time, that like a single apartment, an entire apartment will be evicted if anyone is found to be doing activity that they don't condone. So no, I would be really, I'd be quite afraid to work out of here... Very, very high risk”.

Irish sex work laws forbid landlords from renting to sex workers and forbids sex workers from living with roommates, spouses or partners, exacerbating Fran's difficulties,

““

“They would try to go... after my flatmates as well... I would not only be evicted immediately... they would try to evict my entire apartment... Like no question. And I don't think that they would hesitate to not only evict me but to like report me in whatever way they could like I'm just yeah I would have no, yeah I don't think they would be like discreet about it”. - Fran

WORKING FROM HOME

Stella used to live at a squat where several housemates engaged in sex work,

“...back when I was squatting, I didn't really consider full service yet. So, I feel like it might have been different because I know actually one of the squats I lived in, I know there's a bunch of folks who moved in there, and they are seeing clients out of that house... I actually asked a friend if they had any squats at the moment where I could see clients but yeah there wasn't really anything viable.”

Like Fran, Stella is afraid to work from her current home for fear of getting herself and her housemates in trouble with the law,

“I would be scared to put my housemate in [that] position because they own the house. I think technically they could maybe get done for brothel keeping or something, you know, so I would also be scared to put them in that situation, you know?”

Mandy is unable to work from where she is currently living,



“I'm in a homeless accommodation... There is nowhere down here to do street sex work. So, I haven't got the opportunity of that. And also... I'm not allowed let anyone in so I haven't the opportunity of doing work at the current moment... [The hostel workers] are actually very uneducated around this. Again, another female hostel that doesn't talk about something that happens regularly, you know?” - Mandy

NK describes where she will soon live as ideal for work,

“You're coming nobody exactly there's a kind of big hedges and trees between me and the next door neighbours... A very very good place exactly because the person just drives in, do their shit and drives out nobody is the wiser not having you know what I mean having to deal with people who don't mind their business that sort of thing... let's just say it's my business to my business and your business to your business that sort of thing”.

EVICTED AND HOMELESSNESS

Several participants in this study have experienced eviction and some level of homelessness.

Stella and her squatmates were evicted from a squat following an incident where someone with mental health issues set fire to their home,



“...one time someone had a psychosis and set our house on fire and it took us like an hour to put the fire out or ...one time we got arrested but I managed to run away or like you know we just were allowed to leave without being arrested. Like one reason we got kicked out of one was that the cops and the Fire Brigade they turned off our electricity like in February because they think it was unsafe we didn't have any electricity or heat in February so we had to build like a stove inside the living room and the living room filled up with smoke and we had to like fill up our power banks from neighbours houses or friends houses... And usually we would go, there would be back up squats, like from friends of places we stayed before in between, that we would stay in between until finding another place”. - Stella

Fortunately, a friend of Stella's was willing to help her out,

“...my landlord is a friend. They were willing to do all this bureaucracy stuff and she was willing to go down a bit with the rent and I didn't have to pay a deposit... if I didn't have that network already, I don't know ...in the past probably... some sex worker friends I maybe could have stayed with but there wouldn't really be any viable options even now... there wouldn't even be anyone with like a spare room I could think of in Dublin... maybe a couch and that's also not many people”.

Jacob experienced homelessness after leaving the hostel he lived at while awaiting being granted asylum seeker status,

“I came here to Ireland, you know, so I was kind of homeless. And... I left the hostel. I was homeless. And then after I got my status, when I left the hostel”.

For a few weeks Jacob found accommodation with a Syrian man he met,

“So, there's one guy from Syria and he asked me to move into his house... I talked to him and said I'll pay you rent, and he had one room. And then after a few weeks, you know, he got some letter from the council or from somebody, you know? He's not allowed to sublet... He got scared from the landlords... He asked me to leave because he didn't want to get into trouble from the council or from the landlords ...then I have to leave, you know, so it wasn't like an eviction...”.

EVICTED AND HOMELESSNESS

After being asked to leave, Jacob moved around, even sleeping at work until he was discovered,

“And then I left his house, you know, and I was sleeping here and there... Yeah, so it happened to me a few nights, but I would just walk on the streets, you know, or sleep somewhere and then walk again. But it is very difficult, you know. And then I was working, so I spent few nights in the workplace... then [they] said, ‘You’re not allowed to sleep there’...”

A friend allowed Jacob to sleep in his car,

“...and then, one of my friends... he said, I can sleep in his car. So, I slept a few days in his car, you know, like three nights”.

Jacob initially faced difficulties accessing homeless accommodation,

“I went to the council and I said, ‘I don’t have any place. I need a hostel’. And they said, ‘we don’t have a place’. I was going to them every day and they would call the security or take me out. So, it was hard...they sent me to a hostel where everybody was drug addicts and [had] mental health issues. And I went there and I just left it because I can’t live here. There was no doors on the toilets. Like, it was no door it was like, just like curtains”.

After staying with different friends for a while, the council were eventually able to find him a place in homeless accommodation,

“I went to one of my friends and he said...you can stay here only for one night, but you have to go the next day because we’re sharing a house with some other people... and people in the house will not allow this. And then, well I was here and there for about a week. And then I called the Council and these other departments. And then they let me stay in one of the hostels”.

Julia was evicted by the Gardaí shortly before Christmas,



“[I] pay for a full week and on Thursday or Friday, the Gardaí came like directly at the door. And they said, ‘you have to leave’. ‘Where do you want me to leave?’ It was just before Christmas... I told them, ‘I have to go on Christmas with money, I need presents ...I can’t leave right now,’ I told them. So, I told them, ‘...I need my money back, I paid like, you know what I mean?’. And they said to me, ‘yeah okay you’ll have your money back but you’ll have to leave’. Imagine... It’s like a precedent... Before Christmas... every year they come...”. - Julia

EVICTED AND HOMELESSNESS

Following her eviction, Julia moved into a different hotel,

“Yeah, yeah I had to go to a hotel for three days so I can work so... Going to a hotel but you know before Christmas because the prices are so up, so I used to book months ago so I can have a better price ... I can't tell you the the feeling like because it's oh my god what the fuck I'm going to do like, and I need money you know”.

After receiving a tip from neighbours, NK's landlord asked her to leave,



“...I get a knock on the door and the landlord is like, ‘the neighbour said you have too many visitors, too many male visitors’, and I told him, I said, ‘I'm a single woman, the last time I checked... it's not against the law for me to do what the hell I want.’ That's what I was evicted for, It's kind of terrible... then I said, ‘I will leave at the end of the month,’ so, I left”. - NK

Like other participants in this study, NK believes that her landlord knew what she did and was okay with it, but was afraid of the legal repercussions associated with renting to a sex worker,

“...the trouble is usually with the neighbours. That's the funny thing. Because it's not like the person lives with you, the landlord lives with you there. It's always the neighbours that bring the drama and everything... It's always the neighbours that bring the drama and not minding their freaking ass business ...as I said, generally it's never a problem. 90% of the time it's always the very nosy idiots who never mind their business”.

“Dublin's a pretty dangerous city, you know? Like, even the places that you would say would be fine can have issues”

Lux says. After eventually finding a suitable location, it took her a long time to transform it into somewhere she was able to work from, “... it took me around six months to a year to be able to set up and get a dungeon put together ...I basically told them I did photography work... Ireland is very far behind in the BDSM scene... it doesn't matter what you say. If you say you're a dominatrix, they really genuinely do not know what you're talking about... if I were to have said I'm gonna do domme work I don't know that the landlord would even know [what] I was talking about, but you know doing photographs, whatever, was actually very close. We did film in the space a lot, that sort of thing, so it was really used for that also. It was used for a lot of things”.

EVICTED AND HOMELESSNESS

Similar to NK, Lux's space was raided by Gardaí after being tipped off by neighbours, "...I didn't know that he [the neighbour] had a major grudge against the people that owned the building and, of course, against me because in his mind, [I] had stolen his workspace, which I didn't know anything about until much, much later... It was just, I'm a stranger in a neighbourhood, they don't know me. I'm American and my, my spouse is trans and there's a... you know, there's a trans person walking down their lane way. And it was just, it was very, it was awful. And they treated us very badly. Treated me very badly ... eventually they called the Gardaí and had the Gardaí come and they, and of course the Gardaí came in and they did a, they did a, you know, search of my place... The space that I had for work was a commercial space, but the entire thing was just, it was such a disaster. It was horrible... the Gardaí came in and they got the landlord involved. And at that time, my lease was coming up for renewal... they wouldn't let me renew my lease, even though I had done a lot of work on the place, really fixed it up and made it great... I very cruelly lost the place... I was treated very horribly... it was very scary. I was very intimidated".

The raid by Gardaí was followed by months of harassment,



"There was another Garda that kept intimidating me. He kept taking pictures of my space and he would come and harass me. He would tell me things I was doing were illegal, or like he was going to call the fire brigade on me, basically threatening me all the time ...he would come and like knock on my door... I knew he was there because he was on the cameras... it was just real constant intimidation by this one Garda...". - Lux

Lux tried reporting him to the Garda Ombudsman to no avail,

"I did eventually go to Ombudsman about it. And the Ombudsman did find a case against him but the Ombudsman has no power to do anything... it was really horrible. And I was very horribly kicked out of my space when I did nothing wrong, and it was all just basically because sex work [is] so stigmatised... it was very, I mean it was a very, very tough thing... It was really terrible... the dungeon got closed, there was the expense of getting rid of the dungeon, I grieved for quite a bit".

EVICITION AND HOMELESSNESS

Following the eviction, Lux's partner found work tattooing while she found work with temp agencies,

"...when I stopped sex working... my partner was able to start tattooing a bit, so was making some money that way... and I started just working a regular job because I had to do that. I just kind of took whatever job I could get and temping, temping was a good job because I'm an older lady. And so like I don't get taken seriously ...I made enough money to be able to cover the rent... I would say it was probably about three fourths or more of our income ...by that point, I wasn't sex working, I was working at a regular job. I mean, which is kind of the only saving grace really for that job was that they, you know, gave me a computer, set me up and I went, I worked from home. So yes, we were able to pay the rent because I had, my [non-sex work] job working from home."

Lux feels fortunate to not have ended up homeless following the Gardaí raid and eviction,

“ “ ...we didn't, but we could have very easily ...literally one wrong step, it's possible we could have been homeless... We were spending so much of our income on housing, like one thing went wrong, we could be homeless” . - Lux

Roberto was faced with homelessness when his landlord sold the house he was staying in,

"Oh, I was living in a beautiful apartment and it was cheap. It was comfortable, good location but the landlord sold. So, I had to move ...He gave me, he told me that I could move when I found a place, which took me eight months to find a place ...he was not happy. Like he actually gave me a letter notice to move".

Mistakes in the landlord's letter afforded Roberto some extra time to look for somewhere to live,

"But I looked for help... and they found mistakes in the letter ...in a way to protect myself because I didn't have a place to go so, I called I don't know if they are lawyers but they, they told me that if there was not a letter to move out, I didn't have to, even if I had a contract. And then if there were mistakes in the letter, they have to send it again. And that was the way it was... So, I was gaining more, more months to keep looking for a place ... Staying legally. And the landlord was angry, but I think he understood that I was going through a bad time because we didn't argue, he just expressed that he was just hard to worry, that I had to keep looking for it... So, I tried my best so when I got the yes even if I was not fully happy about this place I moved".

EVICTED AND HOMELESSNESS

If he had not been able to find a place in time, Roberto believes he would have been able to rely on the community for temporary accommodation,

“Back then I thought I had more friends as well. So, I would have asked for a space in their living room or something in the meantime. Or probably the Mexican community here, I've seen when they're facing this kind of issues, they offer a couch or they offer a mattress at least for a couple of nights...”

Like Roberto, Mandy was told she had to move because her landlord was selling the house she was living in,

“I don't really think they were ever selling the house. I think it was said that there was people coming in and out and that was their excuse really”

She believes that neighbours complained about her to the landlord,

“It would have been allegations like that, oh there is a man coming in and someone has peed in the elevator and stuff like that... they kind of let me know that there was men coming to my house, but saying that, ‘oh, they were doing things they shouldn't have been doing’, which wasn't the case. [They were saying] there was two black men in my house, which never happened. And I used to meet them [clients] and come up the elevator with them. So, it wouldn't have been the case at all... [the landlord] said that one of the neighbours had complained that they didn't like the look of the people that were coming in out of my house...”

This situation led to Mandy losing her home and having to avail of homeless services,

“... He tried to and then there was no proof so I ended up getting... I actually ended up getting... [the landlord] To say that I had paid my rent all the whole time and stuff like that... I ended up just basically leaving because that place has been sold ...I was going to take them through the RTB, to the tenancy board because it was unfair and then when they said they were selling up that's totally legal and so I'd been involved with the homeless services then”.

Fran lives in fear of being evicted by the agency she rents from,



I haven't had problems, but I would be worried ...it's a building where it would be pretty noticeable if I did get a number of clients coming through ...I do fear that because they're so huge, and because even if what they're doing isn't legal, I know... how the world works that they could still just give us such a hard time that it would hardly be worth, they could just make our lives so difficult”. - Fran

She believes she would be able to avail of community and family support should she need it,

“...my first stop would be community, it would be friends. I know that I could sleep on some friends' couches for a little while. And then also I have family, cousins that I could stay with... that would be the first option”.

EXCHANGING SEX FOR HOUSING

Although offered accommodation in exchange for sex, Lux has never had to avail of it,
“No, I've never been in that situation. I think I would need to be very desperate to do that”.

Stella says that she would feel unsafe going to clients' houses,
“No... I don't think a relationship with any client that I would feel comfortable going because I also have never been to a client's home so far”.

Julia is in agreement with Lux and Stella,
“The client's house? No”.

NK, like Lux, has been offered accommodation in exchange for sex and like Lux has refused those offers,
“No, no, no, no. I have a lot of them offering, and I'm like, no, no thank you.... I just, it's not something I want to do. I really do not want to get messed up in that... It can be unpredictable”.

Roberto too has declined offers of sex in exchange for accommodation,



“Yeah, it was like, I think it was three people that offered. But I'm sure, I mean, I don't know them, but I could sense they, they expected more for it. And I was, I wasn't going to live in a place where I don't feel comfortable. I mean, if, if that was my last option before going home, I would have taken it but thank God I didn't have to ...my job is doing sex but when I want or when I'm working and it would be totally different if I'm in a place and they ask for it whenever they want. It's not the same. I don't know how to explain it, but I like my privacy as well. I can live with friends but not with a client. It would be too much” - Roberto

EXCHANGING SEX FOR HOUSING

Mandy, however, has exchanged sex for drugs and a place to live,

“Yeah, like, I would have stayed with a drug dealer that was feeding my habit and being with them just for a roof and my habit to be fed. You know, they wouldn't be giving me money but they'd feed my habit kind of”.

Jacob too has accepted an offer of accommodation in exchange for sex,



“Yeah, I did it during the cold, you know. And it was a terrible experience... I was in the hostel at that time and I was talking to this guy on Grindr... he asked me, he showed me his house. And he showed me the room. He said, I have this room. And for the time being it's COVID, I don't need to pay the rent, until I go back to work”. - Jacob

For a short while, this seemed like a good situation for Jacob,

“Yeah, I was talking to him for a few days and I told him look, tell me properly, because if I would leave this place I'll have nowhere to go. And he said, 'no, no', he understands everything and he wouldn't charge me for bills and he wouldn't charge me even for food. He would buy the food and you know, he gave me so much confidence. He wanted sex, I think he was feeling lonely and he had nobody for sex. Then after a few days, he was like, you know he got what he wanted”.

This offer turned out to be too good to be true,

“...I think he was very dangerous... a psychopath, he had different personalities... he started intimidating me and starting insulting me and things like that. And then I said, where would I go now? I have nowhere to go now because I left the hostel, they wouldn't take me back... And this guy, he was mentally torturing me... then just I said, 'look I'm leaving, I have to go”.

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Several participants related experiences of discrimination when seeking or applying for housing.

Mandy feels that her discrimination centred around signs that she was in addiction,

“**Definitely. If I've been in active addiction and I look like I'm in active addiction, they don't go near you, There's always some other excuse**”. - Mandy

Jacob suspects that racism may have played a role in the disregard he was shown, “I think it's, like, I went to this council a few times and they would say, ‘okay, call this number’. I would call that number, they would say, okay, wait one week more, wait for next week. We don't have places now. So, I don't know if it was racism or it wasn't... they didn't offer me a place. So, I don't know what was the issue”.

Lux believes transphobia contributed to the Garda raid, harassment and eviction she and her partner suffered,

“And we were definitely discriminated against when it came to my dungeon space. I'm almost positive one of the reasons they had a problem with us is because I have a trans spouse and they didn't like, you know, a weird looking person walking down the laneway”.

NK encountered racism when applying for housing in Ireland. After she was invited to come see the property that was for rent she was told that the property was no longer available,

“It's a very common thing, and you can't tell them. Even though you know what they're doing, it's not like you can say anything, can you? ...There was a place up in West Cork... I called him, and I said I was coming over, and I get there. He's like well, the former tenant says he's going to stay on, which I knew was a lie ...you know, so, I just said, ‘oh, okay’. I was kind of irritated because I spent all the time and the effort going down... I said the least he could have told me was to let me know over the phone without having me go down there... I think when I spoke with him he didn't realise I was a black person, so he met me and he thought, ‘okay’...”.

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Fran finds some requirements for accessing housing in Ireland discriminatory as they place sex workers at a disadvantage,

“**...while I wouldn't worry about being discriminated against, I would have worry about finding housing that requires you prove your income in some way... not like discrimination based on my identity, but just like based on the fact that I'm a sex worker. That's something I worry a lot about because I have, like, no letter of employment. I have no pay stubs... I just have no way to prove an income... this was an open place in a flat where people already had a lease... But if I were trying to take on a lease on my own in the future, I would be really nervous about that income proof part... I do think that like my being a sex worker and not having an acceptable taxed income or proof of income, would just be something that I would be really worried about” . - Fran**

Roberto often found himself skipped over for selection at viewings of rental properties,

“... I remember one situation where the landlord, he was saying hi to all the visitors and he had a list and he was like marking next to the Names which ones were like suitable and when he came to me and I said I'm a student, he didn't mark my name...and then the next person was...Yeah, next person ... he marked his name like he was choosing the next candidates for the next interview according to their employers, to their jobs”.

He wonders if his status as a student may have contributed to his being excluded,

“I don't know if that was one of the things why they didn't choose me. I had proof of income. As I said, I always had a daytime job, a part-time job. So, I had a way to show that I could afford it, but I guess maybe it was not enough ...everywhere I went there were people from all over the world. So, I don't think I was refused because of that. Mostly because of my, I guess, from my visa. That's what I felt. Yeah, I don't think it was because of my race or sexual orientation ...in this place where I am right now they gave it to me but then they said, 'no more than two', because I think they assumed that because I was a student I was going to bring a lot of people to live here with me”.

ACCESSING ASSISTANCE

Mandy relates some of the barriers to accessing help with housing that she encountered,

“I went to the Second Treatment Centre and they want you to complete that before they let you put your name down on the housing list. Basically, they have the power of saying you can stay in Waterford or not stay in Waterford. You need a letter after stating if you're homeless... when you move to a different county it's harder to get rent or HAP or any of those things unless you're considered living here a while and homeless...”

Even the process of getting added to waiting lists for social housing can be lengthy,

“...there was three HAP accommodations in the whole of Waterford at the moment so they'll also be hard to get... At the place I'm in they have their own houses as well. But again, it depends how long you're on the housing list and your needs and how much work you're doing and stuff like that... I've been on the housing... about three and a half years. I would have been down here about six months before they let you on the housing list”.

After securing what is considered to be long term housing, Mandy still lived with the fear that the property would one day be sold leaving her homeless again, which is what came to pass for her and her family,

“...they try to get you your forever home. And I've been doing private rentals for years now and it's like I'm selling off and you could be three years into living in a house and they can just send you a letter and tell you 90 days of selling up and you haven't a choice but to leave, you know?”

Jacob relates his experiences of accessing social housing in Ireland,

“It's very hard ...they ask you for proof of address, and for proof of your income and proof of work. They need a lot of documentation and then you have to wait for a few months...they would ask you again, oh, your document is missing and the document's missing. I submitted the same documents again and again, and then finally they accepted me. And then once you are on the housing list, so they say, okay, you are now on the housing list... okay, you are eligible for the HAP now... You must stay in a house for two years, you know? Otherwise, you won't get HAP next time”. - Jacob

ACCESSING ASSISTANCE

In addition to their fears of not having enough of their income left to live on, Fran acknowledges that there are people more in need than them,

“...on top of paying half of my income or more to cover my basic expenses, if I'm then being taxed as an independent, like as a self-employed person on top of that, that's what, like another 20 percent gone. So, I think, yeah, I feel I haven't signed up for any of this stuff because I feel a lot of anxiety around them coming for me... I know that the housing list is also long... I think there's also a part of me that like, wants other people to be prioritised over me for that...”.

Stella too relates to the complexity of navigating the system to access social housing in Ireland,

“... I think I got on it a year and a half ago... It was a tedious, long, bureaucratic, really difficult process. Especially, like it felt a little bit more complicated and there was a few things... I was squatting for six years... I didn't have any rent or anything like to prove so and it was kind of this complicated thing where I got a lot of advice which all turned out to be wrong anyway and which is usually my experience with bureaucracy in Ireland”. - Stella

Like Jacob and others, the application process for Stella was lengthy and arduous,

“...then they tried to contact me per phone and I was waiting kind of for five or six months and I kept contacting them and not hearing from them and then eventually I got through ...then turned out they tried to call me and tell me they actually needed an address and that my process just been halted but instead of sending but they couldn't because I claimed that I'm homeless... So, it could have all gone through like way quicker. ...that took six months maybe. And then I got on the housing list.... HAP took probably another three, four months. In the meantime, I had to pay the full rent, which you know was okay at the time. ... but I also wasn't earning well in the strip club, you know?...it's just very inaccessible because it's like you need to prove that you can pay the rent without HAP but that doesn't make any sense to me, you know? It's like, very different in Germany... I just feel like they're trying really hard to keep you being homeless”.

Roberto chooses to avoid government interaction where possible and is unsure of what assistance he is entitled to as a student,

“I know I'm entitled to end of the year I think rent tax credit or something like that. I didn't really check... The less interaction I have with the government the better for me... I don't think I'm entitled to be on that list because of my passport ...that's one of my goals as well. Eventually, if I manage to change my status or I don't know, somewhere I'm not a stamp two anymore, maybe stamp four, yes, I would totally go for help”.

ACCESSING ASSISTANCE

NK has decided against applying for social housing, referencing the toll the process might take on her mental health,

“No, the thing is that takes forever. And kind of, I don't have the patience to start doing that drama. So, I just want to kind of stay here, get a house and get out... I don't have the energy or the inclination to be playing games. I need to feel that, nah. I've lost that energy for that level of stress, drama. So, I'm just like, what is easiest for me?”-

Julia applied for social housing but found herself caught in cycles of sending paperwork back and forth with the state with no end in sight,

“**The only thing I had was the... COVID payment... For a few months, I don't know, four months or five months, something like that and then no. That's it... I remember really well because I tried four or five times. They sent me back everything. They said, 'oh, you need to do that'. I did that, I sent them back again. 'Oh, it's not good. Send again. Send again from the GP'. I sent everything they asked for. Still not, they don't give me. So, I did not have any help from the government” . - Julia**

After her experience of being evicted by the state, Lux was not optimistic about receiving any sort of assistance from them,

“I was like, there's just no way I'm going to be trying to get on any kind of list of nothing, like, I'd rather just be homeless. I did one time go to an office to try to check into, there were some courses you could take, but they kept trying to get all my information to get me [to] sign me up for benefits. And I kept saying, 'I'm not here to get benefits. I'm here to inquire about these courses' ... instead of just saying, 'you have to be on benefits to get these, to do these courses', they wouldn't answer any questions I had until I was signed up for benefits ...they wanted all this original paperwork, some very important paperwork that are expensive to get. I brought them in and said, you can take a copy of it but like no, you will not have an original of this... I think I pissed off the people by saying, 'you can have a copy of it, I don't want you to lose it. It's an expensive piece of paper’”.

Fran harbours fears that applying for assistance of any kind might subject them to greater scrutiny by the state,

“I haven't tried to get on it... I'm just really nervous about the fact that I haven't paid any tax this year and I've been here for two years, and I've been making my money under the table... I've gotten recommendations from people to go to Citizen Information. I don't feel like, I feel like so far I just haven't made enough that the government really cares. But people have told me that once I go on the housing list, once I apply for a medical card, once I'm actually trying to get into the system, that's when they might take a look at me” . 42

PARTICIPANT RECOMMENDATIONS

MANDY

Safe, secure, and affordable housing should be available to sex workers and their families,

"...first and foremost I think I should have a house, a safe house because I have a kid... Just to have housing first... it's not going to ever be your home but it's where you'll be staying for a long period without getting a letter saying oh we're selling up this house... just something that's more long-term". -

Education should be available to teach sex workers about sex work law in Ireland including education on the law as it applies to housing for sex workers,

"And definitely with sex workers I just think again, they're uneducated, it's still not something that's out there enough for even landlords to know".

NK

Safe, secure and affordable housing and a safe place to work from,

"I think for me I just want something one bedroom... preferably a bedroom with an ensuite. That sort of thing... You walk into your room and just your shower, do your business, and then walk outside. There's like a business toilet that would be an extra bonus too... I mean, when you're a single woman on your own, you need to be very, very, very careful. You know what I mean? You can't take, you cannot take your safety for granted... I said it would just be nice if there was more homes for everyone and available properties".

JULIA

Julia calls for an end to or assistance with the current system that limits options for sex workers by demanding work references,

"The escort references, work references, where the fuck will we get them [from], like from the clients?"

JACOB

Destigmatisation of sex work as well as support and protections afforded to other people,

“...the kind of stigma and the things. I think there should be some support from the government”.

FRAN

Sex work needs to be decriminalised in Ireland and brothel keeping laws scrapped,

“...first, I think that sex work should be decriminalised because I think that the laws that exist around sex work harm sex workers in all kinds of ways, but in particular the ones around brothel keeping prevent sex workers from being able to access safe housing...”.

More affordable and social housing would help sex workers,

“... there needs to be more public and social housing generally to meet the needs of people. It's ridiculous that people pay so much of their income on their housing. That's not okay. It's not sustainable... people have all kinds of other needs in their lives around health care...taking care of other people in their lives, and have people spending that much of their income on rent. It makes it impossible for people to get out of renting and unstable housing situations. Because if you're always paying all of your money in rent... I can't imagine myself having enough money to take on a mortgage ever. It just feels so out of reach. So yeah, there just needs to be more housing for everyone. Sex workers included”.

ROBERTO

Rent in Ireland needs to be capped,

“...limits in rents, some rents are very expensive, I don't think they should be... I remember when I moved to Ireland five years ago and I saw apartments in €2000, but luxury apartments I said like, 'who's able to pay that?' And then €2000 is just for an average apartment... So, I'm scared that in three years it would be €3000”.

LUX

Destigmatisation of sex work,

“Sex work is extremely, extremely stigmatised. It's stigmatised all over the world... It's really bad... I think that there could be less stigma in Ireland. It would take work... if the right people took it seriously, it could be less stigmatising”.

Decriminalise sex work,

“sex work shouldn't be criminalised in the first place”.

More available and affordable housing,

“Ireland is exceptionally expensive. Finding housing is almost impossible... I feel for migrant workers, even ones that don't even do sex work, I feel for them because you cannot know how terrible the housing situation is in Ireland until you were here. I mean, hell, there's people that own rental properties that have no idea how bad the problem is... It's like even the people that live there have no idea how terrible and hard it is... the people that are moving and trying to find a place are people that are new. And a lot of those people are gonna be migrant people”.

STELLA

Abolish Brothel keeping laws, affording sex workers more security and allowing them to hire administrative assistants or secretaries,

“the brothel keeping laws need to be abolished, because then it wouldn't be such a problem if I could live with someone... because then I could invite clients to my house and I would not face legal trouble in the same way... But if we wouldn't have brothel keeping laws, we could have brothels with secretaries and security... I have friends in the States who are like secretaries in massage parlours, and they do all the admin...”.

Destigmatising sex work in Ireland,

“...removing or fighting the stigma against sex work because it traps us in this position where we can't admit what we are doing so either we're faced to do some sort of tax evasion stuff like that...”.

More social housing in Ireland,

“social housing needs to happen... I think what needs to happen is foreign landlords, like, I'm not talking about like foreigners, I'm talking about like foreign landlords who don't live here, especially corporations, should not be allowed to just buy houses unless they can prove that they're actually going to live in that house”.

Destigmatise and decriminalise sex work in Ireland

“...I think destigmatising sex work needs to happen and decriminalising it”.

CALL TO ACTION

1

FULLY DECRIMINALISE SEX WORK

Full decriminalisation of sex work would provide sex workers with access to legal protections afforded to non-sex working residents and citizens of Ireland, such as the right to rent accommodation and live with partners, family or roommates.

Decriminalisation would mean sex workers in Ireland no longer fear eviction, imprisonment or deportation by Gardaí for the crime of being sex workers renting a home or working with others for safety.

Current legislation pushes sex workers to work in dangerous circumstances to avoid Gardaí and reduces their ability to choose which clients to see.

2

ABOLISH BROTHEL-KEEPING LAWS

Brothel-keeping laws infringe on the human rights of sex workers by restricting their ability to choose their living and working conditions and their ability to live and work with others for safety and support.

Abolishing harmful brothel keeping laws would allow sex workers to live and work safely, sometimes together, without fear of legal repercussions.

Sex workers should be allowed to live with partners, spouses and roommates if they wish.

3

INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Increased affordable and secure housing options, including public and social housing contributes to safety and stability for Ireland's most vulnerable, amongst whom sex workers are overly represented.

Addressing the housing crisis also addresses the issue of predatory landlords offering places to stay in exchange for sex with them.

4

STRENGTHEN TENANT PROTECTIONS

Stronger tenant protections would help protect sex workers from discrimination and exploitation by landlords based on their occupation.

Introducing policies that limit rent increases should provide stability in housing costs for sex workers.

The abolishment of proving income for housing applications helps sex workers access accommodation.

5

DESTIGMATISE SEX WORK

Destigmatisation of sex work through funded sex worker-led public awareness and education campaigns will help shift harmful misunderstandings surrounding the reasons people engage in sex work.

Destigmatisation should contribute to legal reforms protecting sex workers from exploitation, harassment, housing and healthcare discrimination and other unfair legal practices.

6

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAMS

Develop housing programs specifically to support vulnerable people, including sex workers and migrant workers, assisting them with secure and supportive options for living.

Create emergency housing options for sex workers who may be fleeing dangerous living situations or facing homelessness.

Work with SWAI to integrate social services within housing programs providing access to healthcare, legal aid, counseling, non-judgmental addiction services and other essential support services.

7

GARDAÍ FIREWALL

Similar to practices in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, a firewall should be established between immigration law enforcement and sex worker evictions.

This would allow sex workers to safely report issues such as theft or violent clients without fearing eviction, imprisonment, deportation, or the seizure of their money and children.

8

BROADER STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Campaign for broader structural change.

Create conditions that allow people to make choices other than sex work or leave sex work if they wish.

Attention should be focused on addressing broad systemic issues such as poverty and inequality rather than policing sex workers for trying to earn a living.

Reasons that people enter sex work such as disability, employment discrimination, migration status need to be addressed.

Access to affordable housing, education, non-judgmental healthcare, counselling and addiction services would decrease sex workers vulnerability.

9

RESPECT SEX WORKER KNOWLEDGE

Sex workers have valuable insights from their lived experiences and peer connections.

They should be the primary voices consulted when considering policy changes related to sex work.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- FULLY DECRIMINALISE SEX WORK
- ABOLISH BROTHEL-KEEPING LAWS
- INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING
- STRENGTHEN TENANT PROTECTIONS
- DESTIGMATISE SEX WORK
- SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAMS
- GARDAÍ FIREWALL
- BROADER STRUCTURAL CHANGE
- RESPECT SEX WORKER KNOWLEDGE