



ICRSE Statement on Mandatory and Forced Testing
European HIV-Hepatitis Testing Week

Stereotypes of sex workers fuel the perception that those who sell sexual services play a major role in the transmission of HIV and other STIs. Despite a strong evidence that links increased criminalisation and legal oppression of sex work with higher HIV prevalence, sex workers remain the target of many repressive control measures on their behavior. Human rights violations of sex workers and other stigmatised and criminalised communities, often take place with impunity, justified as a “public health” necessity. One of the examples are mandatory and forced testing of sex workers taking place in many countries across the European region.

Mandatory and forced testing for HIV and other STIs is not only a clear violation of sex workers’ human rights, including their right to privacy, dignity, bodily integrity, autonomy, and non-discrimination, but also a repressive and degrading form of exercising control over sex workers and their health. Coercive testing practices severely stigmatise sex workers as ‘vectors of disease’, thus framing them as entirely accountable for the spread of HIV and other STIs, and put sex workers at greater risk of violence, from police, clients, managers, families and co-workers. Also, in those contexts where sex workers’ rights are not upheld or protected and HIV is heavily criminalised, HIV status is often not kept confidential, exposing sex workers to blackmail, discrimination, stigma, arrest and prosecution.

Mandatory, forced and coercive testing practices furthermore contradict the fundamental principles of good and effective public health policies and have been shown to be counterproductive in addressing HIV vulnerabilities among sex workers and other key populations. They push sex workers and other stigmatised communities underground, away from medical settings and HIV prevention programmes, and prevent them from accessing healthcare services in fear of discrimination, arrest, harassment and violence.

To address HIV prevalence, sex workers and other key populations must have unabated access to appropriate, rights-based health services and prevention tools (such as safe sex supplies and safer injecting equipment) and HIV-related information. Sex workers must also be supported in their efforts to challenge the structural conditions that put them at greater risk of HIV, including but not limited to state-endorsed stigma, widespread discrimination, criminalisation and penalisation, violence and other human rights violations, often carried out by state officials with impunity. Sex workers are not the problem, but part of the solution to ending HIV in Europe and globally.

ICRSE Headquarters, Van Diemenstraat 194, 1013 CP Amsterdam, Netherlands

<http://www.sexworkeurope.org>

info@sexworkeurope.org

+31 (0) 20 693 1300 / + 44 (0) 7 460 06 05 06