



# Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs

## NSWP STATEMENT

### HIGH LEVELS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST TRANSGENDER SEX WORKERS IN TURKEY

**NSWP is calling on the Turkish government, Turkish police, and the Turkish justice system to take urgent action to uphold the human rights of male, female, and transgender sex workers. Sex workers have the same right to protection from the law and access to justice as other people. They also have the right to be treated with dignity and respect without discrimination. The occupation and gender identity of sex workers should never be used to deny access to justice, health services, or social services.**

According to a 2015 survey by Transgender Europe entitled [Transrespect versus Transphobia Worldwide Project](#), 79 percent of transgender sex workers interviewed in Turkey reported experiencing police harassment. According to the [Project for the Mapping of Violence Against and Legal Support for Trans Sex Workers](#), one in every two sex workers has experienced violence, and 50 percent of this violence was perpetrated by the police.

Transgender sex workers in Turkey are particularly vulnerable to violence, including from the police. In May 2015, [NSWP published an article](#) about seven transgender women who were violently attacked in different cities across Turkey. Two days after these attacks, more than 100 people gathered in Ankara to protest about violence against transgender people in Turkey.

On 23 November 2015, transgender sex worker [Nilay](#) was murdered in Istanbul.

Reported murders of trans sex workers in Turkey are high. Three years ago, following the murder of Dora, [NSWP released a statement](#), which included the following comment on the situation in the country:

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“Stigma and discrimination against trans women in Turkey plays out in numerous ways, including the exclusion of trans people from education and employment. Many trans women begin sex work as a direct cause of this stigma and discrimination and the resulting exclusion from other employment options. For others this stigma is fuelled through involvement in sex work. Harassment by state actors is commonplace, with trans sex workers often complaining of abuse at the hands of police and other authorities. Turkey’s record on human rights remains particularly poor, however what is clear is that certain minority groups are targeted for acts of violence by those knowing that this can be carried out with little repercussion – often with impunity.”

More recently, Kemal Ördek, one of the founding members of the [Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association](#) sought help from the police when they were robbed and sexually assaulted. The Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association have produced a [YouTube](#) Video outlining the details of Kemal’s case.

The police in Kemal’s case placed the assailants in the backseat of the police car, and put Kemal in the “cage” at the back of the vehicle. Kemal was treated like a criminal because of their gender identity and occupation as a sex worker. This violates their right to be protected from the law, as set out in International Human Rights treaties.

Kemal Ördek has filed a separate case against the police officers who mistreated them. In the YouTube video Kemal states, “this case is a symbolic one and we are working hard to campaign around it as these incidents are regular incidents that all trans or sex workers experience. The majority of sex workers experience sexual assaults or other forms of violence and they do not go to courts either because they fear or don’t believe in the judicial system or because they are threatened by the perpetrators.”

In a statement on [Facebook](#), Kemal stated, “I came to the police station to find justice, found myself in the middle of prejudice, hate, and partisanship.” The police denied that Kemal had been raped, did not bring them to the hospital in a timely manner, and were uncooperative while they tried to report their rape.

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This type of treatment is not uncommon in Turkey, and in other countries throughout the world. Amnesty International, WHO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, and GAATW have all called for the decriminalisation of sex work as a means of ensuring sex workers have equal access to justice, and health and social services.

Perpetrators of violence, including the police, target sex workers and in particular transgender sex workers with impunity because they know that sex workers do not have equal protection of the law or access to justice and are often not believed when they charge their assailants.

**NSWP calls on all governments to ensure that the human rights of transgender sex workers are protected and that they are given the full protection of the law.**