

JUSTICE FOR MIGRANT SEX WORKERS

JUNE 3, 2021



On March 16th, 2021 eight people in Atlanta, Georgia lost their lives as part of a mass shooting targeting spa and massage parlours. Out of the eight people killed six were Asian-American women. This brutal act of workplace violence was a hate crime driven by racism and misogyny at a time when anti-Asian racism has been increasing at disturbing rates.

Discrimination experienced by Asian and migrant spa employees and sex workers also influenced these events. While there is no indication that the victims participated in sex work, the perception that they were is among the root causes behind why someone took their lives. and this cannot be disregarded if we are going to learn anything from the act of hate that caused their deaths.

Anti-Asian racism and misogyny is now a well-identified problem in Canada. Further, the same stigma and marginalization that make Asian and migrant sex workers vulnerable to these kinds of attacks also exists within Canada. On a daily basis these workers are harmed by racial profiling, surveillance, over policing, and consequential discrimination that compound human rights violations against migrant communities working in the sex industry.

Many of these harms are caused directly and indirectly by the continued criminalization of sex work which prevents these workers being able to access the very resources that could protect their human rights and ensure their personal safety.

- Sex workers are denied the labour and employment protections available to the majority of workers, including the right to join a union.
- Criminalization also makes sex workers vulnerable to being targeted for sexual assault, assault and robbery as perpetrators know that they are less likely to report these crimes out of fear that interactions with the police or other law will lead to abuse, detection, surveillance, apprehension, deportation and/or losing custody of their children.

Migrant sex workers are further marginalized by challenges not faced by domestic sex workers. These workers often work without permits, (such as visitors and those without status) as they are not allowed to work legally in Canada. Even those who have open work permits (such as international students, refugee claimants, or those under sponsorship) are not allowed employment in the sex industry and risk losing their immigration status if they choose to engage in sex work. This risk is made all the more real by the fact that migrant sex workers are often perceived to be victims of sex trafficking which can result in them being the target of anti-trafficking investigations driven by racist, anti-sex work, and anti-migrant beliefs.

Labour Council's 2017 policy statement recognized that sex workers are workers and supported the decriminalization of sex work. Now, migrant sex workers are calling on allies to declare that their health, labour and human rights matter need to be protected and respected. Migrant sex workers are workers and as such need access to the same legal protections, health, human and labour rights available to all workers along with access to migrant and racial justice including anti-racism and status for all. The best way to prevent and resist exploitation, violence and oppression against migrant sex workers is through rights not rescue.

On June 3, 2021, the Labour Council resolved to:

1. Continue to stand in solidarity with sex workers, including migrant sex workers, and sex worker advocates by supporting the full decriminalization of sex work which, among other things, will afford all sex workers access to full rights including labour and employment rights.
2. Stand in solidarity with migrant sex workers and advocates such as Butterfly (Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network) in their work challenging the use of immigration, policing and anti-trafficking policies and programs on migrants engaged voluntarily in sex work.