

# **Transactional Sex and Health Repercussions in Forced Displacement: A Multi-Country Study**

## **Final Report: Executive Summary**



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## Executive Summary

The increasing number of conflicts, crises, and disasters has led to a significant rise in forced displacement, with many refugees seeking safety and security in Europe. However, European governments have implemented stricter security measures and border controls in recent years, pushing refugees to embark on longer and more dangerous journeys. Instead of providing safe and legal pathways, EU policies prioritize border securitization. Once in Europe, refugees continue to face numerous challenges, including poor reception facilities, inadequate housing, limited livelihood options, and extended legal uncertainties. These precarious conditions create an environment where refugees engage in transactional sexual practices as a survival strategy and coping mechanism.

Our research represents a pioneering effort to shed light on the complex and diverse nature of transactional sexual practices in forced displacement settings, focusing on Greece, Switzerland, and France. Building upon our previous research in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, we aimed to understand the gendered drivers, patterns, and health implications of transactional sex, particularly regarding sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and mental health. Our study included women, men, and individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, aiming to uncover the gender nature and interplay between vulnerability and agency in these contexts.

Through the collection and analysis of qualitative data, we gained valuable insights into the individual, social, and structural factors that shape transactional sex and its impact on health outcomes. While the qualitative nature of our study prevents us from drawing conclusions about the prevalence of transactional sex in forced displacement, the abundance of accounts detailing such experiences underscores its significance in this context.

Our analysis revealed the complexity of transactional sex, with narratives across genders, ages, and ethnic groups indicating that it often arises due to structural factors. Despite economic and political differences between the countries studied (Greece, France, and Switzerland), we identified common structural factors, such as asylum procedures, housing precarity, and limited employment and livelihood opportunities, that shape the experiences of asylum-seekers and refugees, pushing them into economies of transactional sex. Additionally, while our research highlighted the agency of refugees in navigating precarious conditions and complex asylum procedures, it also revealed the power imbalances, violence, harassment, and abuse they face in engaging in these practices.

Our research emphasizes that transactional sexual encounters are shaped by sexism, xenophobia, and homo- and transphobia. These intersecting forms of discrimination compound the challenges faced by individuals, particularly refugees with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Addressing systemic issues and fostering inclusive societies that uphold the rights and dignity of all individuals are crucial to addressing these challenges.

By bridging the evidence gap, our findings call for targeted policy interventions to address the multifaceted issues surrounding transactional sexual practices in forced displacement settings. Specialized services tailored to the unique health and protection needs of individuals involved in transactional sex are essential. Additionally, bottom-up approaches that actively involve communities in the development of effective strategies are necessary. Our research provides a foundation for informing policy and programming that supports the well-being and rights of refugees affected by transactional sex in forced displacement settings.