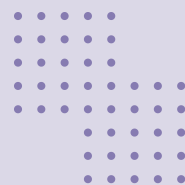




UTSOPI

ANNUAL REPORT



2024

With the support of



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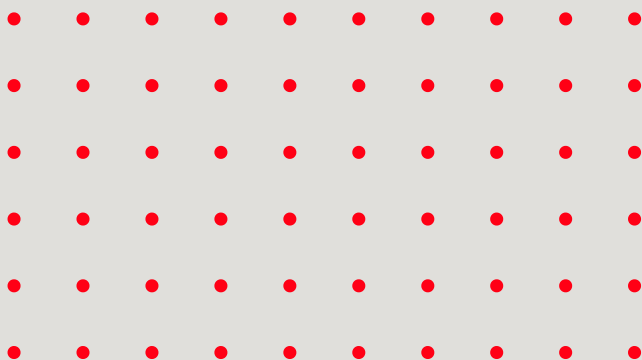
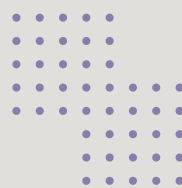
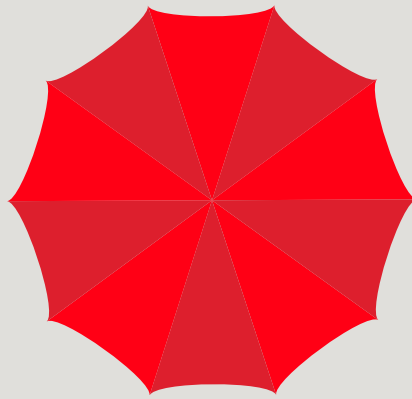


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Abbreviations:

ESWA: European sex workers' rights alliance

IEWM: Institute for the equality between women and men

KU: Katholieke Universiteit (catholic university)

SW: Sex work or sex worker(s)

SWAD: Sex work alliance destigmatisation

SWEAT: Sex workers education and advocacy taskforce

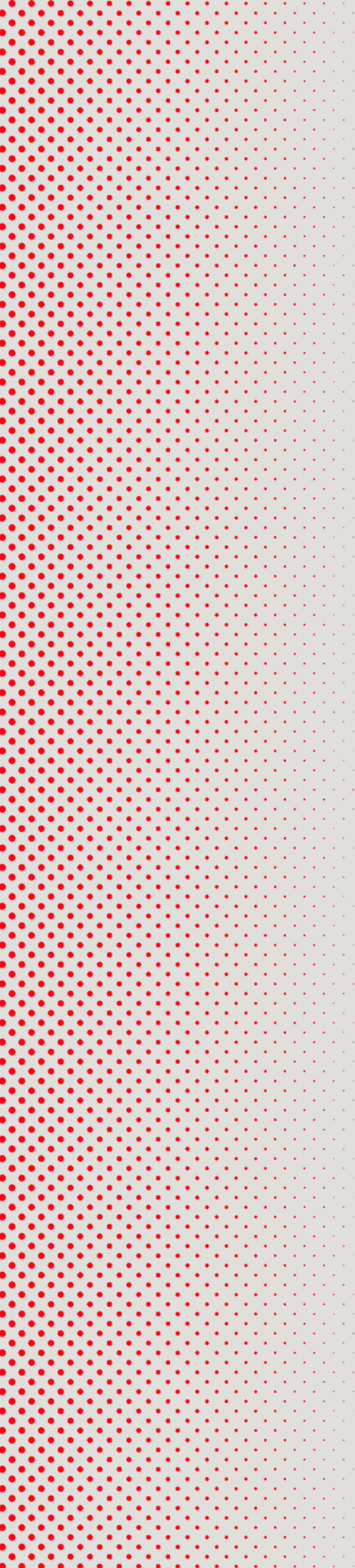
TDS: Travail du sexe (sex work)

TPG: TransPédéGouines

UK: United Kingdom

UZ: Universitair Ziekenhuis (university hospital)

VUB: Vrije Universiteit Brussel (free university of Brussels)



1. General introduction



UTSOPI - l'Union des Travailleuses du Sexe Organisées Pour l'Indépendance, the Union of Sex Workers Organised for Independence - was founded in 2015 as a result of a meeting between three activist sex workers working in Belgium. Despite the diversity of associations in Belgium (and more particularly in the Brussels region), none of the organisations for sex workers were run by sex workers.

At the end of 2015, new police regulations were introduced in the municipality of St-Josse, placing sex workers in a dangerously precarious position. UTSOPI decided to step out of its comfort zone and enter the political arena, representing and defending the rights of sex workers.

In 2017, after just over a year of rich and intense activities as a collective, UTSOPI decided to transform itself into a **nationally registered and recognised not-for-profit** eligible for state subsidies. An important decision, as it did not quite follow the original intention, namely to remain a more or less informal collective of sex workers. However, as the association's activities grew day by day, the need to formalise the self-organisation became unavoidable and governmental subsidies would become necessary.

In 2018, UTSOPI moved into its new premises at rue d'Aerschot in Brussels, in the heart of the Brussels red light district.

In 2019, UTSOPI received its first funding, having previously been operated through donations, support evenings and the support of other organisations in the sector. This was a major turning point for UTSOPI, which saw its potential, but also its responsibilities grow. It is also the year in which the UTSOPI Flanders branch was launched.

In 2020, UTSOPI stood out for its involvement in the **COVID-19 crisis**. In a matter of months, the organization was recognized first by the press, then by politicians as the voice of sex workers in Belgium. Protocols for reopening the sector under conditions were drawn up with the entire civil society, with UTSOPI taking on the role of central contact for the government.

This remained as such in 2021. For UTSOPI, 2021 was the year of political advocacy, with countless negotiations with cabinets, virologists and parliamentarians, all with the first aim of reopening the sector, and the overall aim of decriminalising sex work in our country.

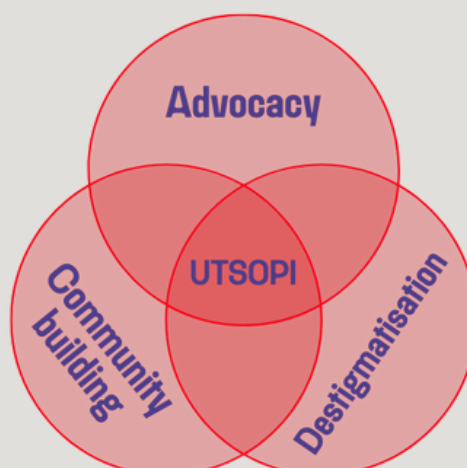
This goal was achieved in 2022 when, on the night of March 17-18th 2022, the Federal Parliament passed the reform of the sexual criminal law, which included the gradual **decriminalisation of sex work**. It was the end of a battle that had lasted for years, but also the start of a new battle. Over the course of 2022 and 2023, consultations were ongoing with ministerial cabinets for the drafting of a labour law for sex work under contract.

At the same time, 2023, was the year in which UTSOPI needed to professionalise. With a growing number of members, a growing number of team members, with political weight and with growing responsibilities, UTSOPI became a more stable, mature organisation, with the wish to keep growing and remain a safe haven for all sex workers in Belgium.

In 2024, UTSOPI celebrated another major victory. On March 03rd 2024, the **law on sex work under employment contracts** was passed by Parliament. Of course, as you will see in this report, this was not the only action taken by UTSOPI over the past year.

1.1. Missions

Since its creation, UTSOPI's objective has always been to defend the interests of sex workers in Belgium. To achieve this goal, our actions are set in **three domains**: community building, destigmatisation and political advocacy.

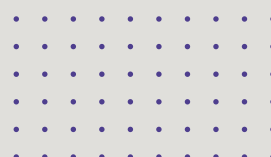


Community building, strengthening and developing the capacities of the sex worker community, is the foundation of the association. This is both the alpha and the omega, the aim of the association and its driving force. UTSOPI aims to develop a strong community of sex workers, free to make their own choices and able to support each other.

UTSOPI's philosophy can be summed up as follows: the emancipation of sex workers can only be achieved through their full inclusion and participation in the issues that concern them, hence its motto: "**Nothing about us without us**".

Sensitising on sex work and sensitising and informing sex workers is an important part of UTSOPI's work. As an organisation run by sex workers and allies, for sex workers, we want to mobilise sex workers to raise society's awareness - through events and the media - of the discrimination and stigmatisation they encounter in life. Sex workers are still one of the most stigmatised groups in our society. We encourage sex workers to speak out and make our voices heard by the general public. We organise events at which sex workers present their reality to the outside world. We make sure that realistic, non-sensationalist stories prevail in the media. In addition to events and media, we sensitize media professionals (directors, writers, script writers, journalists, ...) to deconstruct their stereotypes and provide the best possible support, free from the prejudices that surround the activity of sex work.

Political advocacy is UTSOPI's other main domain. Even if UTSOPI cannot represent the entire sector of sex work (an impossible task), it aims to defend the rights of all those involved in sex work, whether occasional or regular, voluntary or forced. Our political work covers issues from women's rights, the rights of LGBTQIA+ people, social and legal rights in the workplace, the rights of migrants and asylum seekers, and the right to health and protection. We carry out our political work on the local, regional, national and international level. Everywhere decisions are being taken on sex work, those who will experience the consequences of those decisions must be consulted and have a say in policy that might endanger them or put them at risk.





2. The backbone: developing and supporting the organisation

2.1. Membership



At the end of 2023, our organisation had 107 members. A year later, we counted **119 members**. This is an **11.3%** increase in the number of registered members.

2.2. Team development

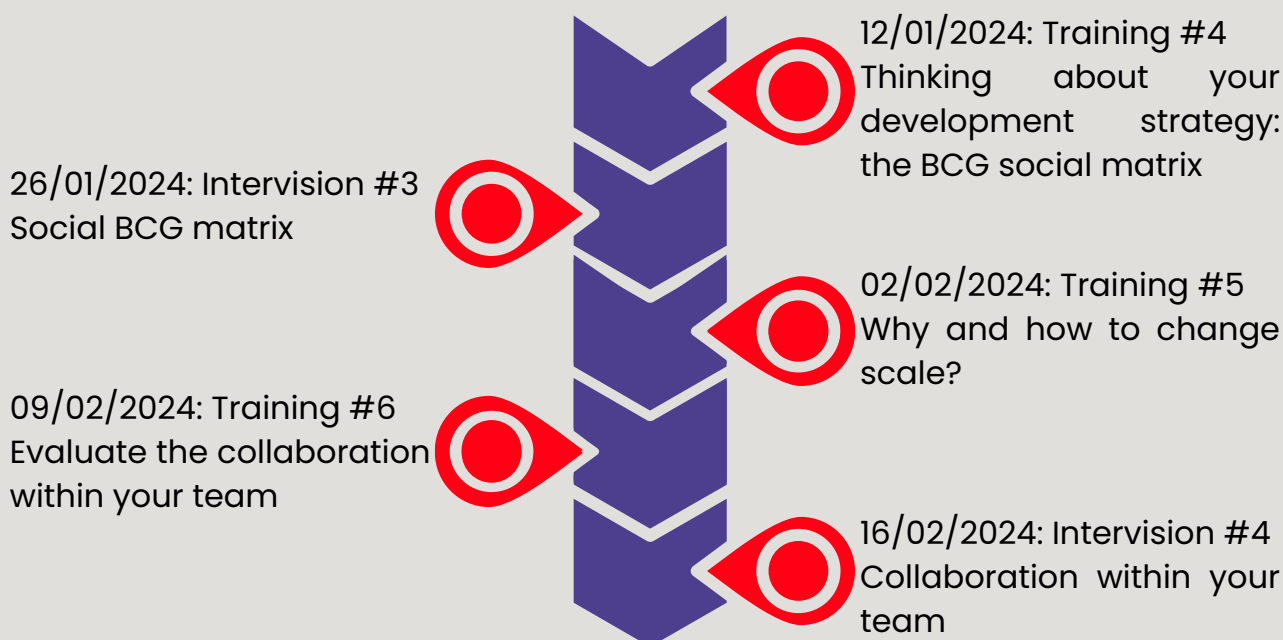
Team composition and working hours

At the beginning of 2023, we had a team of six people and **5.6 FTEs**. We ended the year with four employees, with a decrease in working hours due to declining resources to **3.8 FTEs**. Four employees remained with the organisation from the beginning to the end of 2024.

Skills development

Between October 20th 2023 and March 05th 2024, three members of our team received training under **COOPCITY's** Blossom program. COOPCITY is a Brussels-based cooperative incubator for the social economy. UTSOPI has been growing at a rapid pace in recent years, so there are new challenges that require new skills.

In a set of lessons spread over **ten sessions** (theory and practice), skills were acquired in terms of focusing on the mission and goals, economic and financial planning, with the strategic analysis and planning of the organisation making up the bulk of the lesson series. The lesson series took place in French. The knowledge acquired was shared with the other members of the team during practical sessions.



Within the team, a strategic plan was initiated on **January 31st**. This took place in the presence of team mentor Bart Van Gysel (Febecoop Flanders-Brussels), who would guide us in drawing up a strategic plan until the end of the year. This mentorship was part of the Blossom program.

At the end of the program, UTSOPi's staff prepared a final analysis regarding the organisation's purpose and social impact, economic model, development paths, team functioning and governance structure, followed by a detailed action plan aimed at future development.



Figure 1. Full program of the Blossom curriculum.



Strategic planning

At the start of the new year, staff members took three days to conduct an analysis of all the organisation's goals, based on current or newly achieved grants. Each staff member took charge of one grant and related the goals of the grant to ongoing or new actions. From this, a list of concrete projects or themes for the coming year was drawn up, which was then given a place within one of the organisation's fields of action: community mobilising, information/sensitisation and policy advocacy. All projects were finally assigned to one of the staff members.

As mentioned above, the team then launched a strategic process on **January 31st** in which the organisation's missions and goals, fields of action and objectives were analysed with a view to a strategic plan for the period 2025-2030. These thinking sessions were supported by mentor Bart Van Gysel (Febecoop Flanders-Brussels). This mentorship was inherently part of the Blossom programme (see above). Strategic planning was resumed during the coordination and strategy midweek in June, guided by the mentor. During 2024, time was made for five moments when the team worked together around strategic planning, three of which were guided by the mentor. Final steps were taken in early October and the strategic plan was finalised by the end of December. The work made it possible to delineate a nicely delineated set of tasks for each employee, leading to a clearer division of tasks and a better grip on the time allocation per task, as well as a better understanding of the long-term evolution of the work.

Coordination and strategy weekend (03rd to 06th June 2024)

Like every year just before the General Assembly, this year the UTSOPI team retreated to the countryside to do a six-monthly review of the work done. This year it was the turn of the rural municipality of Haut-Ittre where we stayed on an organic farm.

During the midweek, time was made to read and improve the 2023 annual report together based on the experiences of each. Then the result of the work done as part of the formation of COOPCITY was shared with the whole team and it was defined how we would incorporate the results of that work into our actions. Finally, we received a visit from our strategic mentor Bart Van Gysel (Febelcoop Flanders-Brussels) to begin work on our strategic plan 2025-2030.

3. The basis: community building and mobilisation

In the operation of UTSOPI, community building (or community mobilising) is one of the three pillars or fields of action. This means that UTSOPI always ensures that there are places where sex workers can come together, where a support network can be developed, where experiences can be exchanged. The purposes of these moments are manifold: the exchange of experiences service as a form of education and prevention; not infrequently, safety tips are exchanged. It is also a place where the stress and anxiety associated with secrecy and a double life can disappear for a while, where one can be completely oneself and have nothing to hide.

These moments also make sex workers feel less alone and less alone in life. Indeed, loneliness and isolation are common in the lives of too many sex workers, also due to social stigma and secrecy. Finally, these meetings are one of the ways to be in touch with the grassroots, with the field. It is one of the ways our organisation knows what actions are urgent or what projects need to be developed in one of our two other areas: information/sensitisation and political work.



Figure 2. Full schedule of Listen To You meetings for the second half of 2024, as published on our social media and our website.

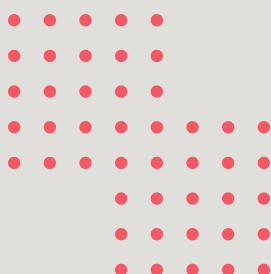
Listen To You Brussels

The moments for sex workers to meet each other always continue in our organisation's premises and are called '**Listen To You**'. A total of **11 meetings** were held in Brussels during 2024, accounting for a total of **69 contacts** with sex workers. Two of these moments were organised and provided by members, without the presence of team members. It is the explicit intention of the organisation to pass on responsibilities to members towards the future, so that there is more diversity in who takes a leadership position in the community. To keep an active, vibrant community going, such investment is much needed. Our role is to give full space and create opportunities for a new, young generation of leaders.

Here is an overview of the themes that were discussed during the evenings:

- ▶ Brainstorming workshops for 2024 (self-defense and dance);
- ▶ Sex work and personal/love relationships;
- ▶ Writing workshop based on completing the phrase: 'Je suis TDS, bien sûr que...';
- ▶ Answers to questions from inexperienced sex workers present: am I doing it right?;
- ▶ What to do with clients who don't show up/dates cancel?;
- ▶ The new labour law;
- ▶ The funniest moments while working;
- ▶ What does it mean to be a member of UTSOPI?;
- ▶ Where can I find legal help?;
- ▶ What happens at the SNAP! festival and what does the festival stand for?;
- ▶ KINK-QUIZ;
- ▶ How do you ask for payment from a client?;
- ▶ Sex work and family relationships;
- ▶ How to find professionals who are not stigmatising sex workers?;

After the last question, it was decided to create a questionnaire so that sex workers can help the community by creating a database of safe professionals for sex workers. The Listen to You 2024 in Brussels show that there is a strong demand among sex workers to take on more responsibility within the organisation.



Listen To You Flanders

The Listen to You's in Flanders take place in the premises of our socio-medical partner organisation Violet in Ghent and Antwerp. As in previous years, the Listen to You was organised monthly alternately in Ghent and Antwerp. From April 2024, responsibility over the organisation of the Listen to You was passed on to the active members of the organisation, with the UTSOPI team only taking on a supporting, coordinating and logistical role.

A total of **eight meetings** were held in Flanders during 2024, accounting for a total of **36 contacts** with sex workers.

Here is an overview of the themes that were discussed during the evenings:

- ▶ Decriminalisation and the labour law for sex workers;
- ▶ Different forms of work and the specifics for each form of work;
- ▶ How do I arrange my financial affairs?;
- ▶ Accounting;
- ▶ Personal life stories;
- ▶ The grey areas of exploitation;
- ▶ Sex work for persons with disabilities;

From the Listen to You's in Flanders, there was often a request to invite members of the UTSOPI team from time to time, irrespective of whether they are sex workers or not. Many attendees at the Listen to You's underlined the importance of the transmission of important information from the organisation's executive team to sex workers.

On **July 16th**, a Listen to You was organised in Antwerp at which an UTSOPI team member (non-sex worker) came to explain the new legal framework. Also present at this meeting was sex worker activist and academic Bianca Bee from Oregon (US). Bee currently lives in New Zealand and spoke about sex work in New Zealand, 21 years after decriminalisation. Present at the same meeting was Marjan Wijers. Marjan Wijers is a top expert on sex work and human trafficking from the Netherlands.

Listen To You Liège

For the first time in 2024, Listen to You meetings took place in our new venue in Liège, with a total of **33 contacts** and **seven informal meetings**. Of those who attended the Listen to You in Liège, four became members of our association. For a more detailed description of these meetings, please refer to Chapter 5.

Formal member meetings

In preparation for the 2024 General Assembly, two formal meetings were held with members from the French-speaking and Dutch-speaking sides. During these meetings, future forms of leadership were discussed, as well as the creation of a new charter for the organisation. These meetings brought together seven members from the French-speaking side and six members from the Dutch-speaking side.

Manifest-OH Brussels

From August 17–19th 2023, the Flemish section of UTSOPI organised a three-day writing course, with the aim of laying the first building block of the first Belgian sex workers' manifesto. Our staff members Marianne Chargois and Lola Docx organised a follow-up to this writing workshop in Brussels in March 2024, in order to arrive at a Belgian sex workers' manifesto. Six sex workers attended this workshop.

Second anniversary of decriminalisation: Brussels and Ghent

On 18 March 2022, sex work was decriminalised in Belgium. Every year we organise a day to put this victory back in the spotlight. This year, we chose to organise a small-scale initiative among sex workers, giving an update on progress after decriminalisation and answering questions about decriminalisation or about the organisation UTSOPI. On **March 16th**, a brunch was organised at the premises of UTSOPI. It gathered 13 sex workers, including **8 sex workers** who were not yet members of our organisation.



To re-establish the link with UTSOPI's Flemish antenna, an additional programme was provided in the afternoon in Ghent. The event 'Whorephobia' at KIOSK, curated by KIOSK's artist and public contributor Mercedes Sturm-Lie, focused on the hatred, fear or taunting of sex workers. The event was at the intersection of politics and art and included lectures, performances and film screenings and debate. Our own staff member Marianne Chargois screened one of her films there and engaged in debate with the audience. There were **5 members** of UTSOPI present at the event.

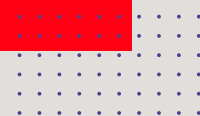
Figure 3. Invitation to the brunch at our premises.

4. The bridge: informing and raising awareness in two directions

UTSOPI fulfils the role of the voice of the sex worker community. Since its launch in 2015, our aim has been to be present in all places where decisions are taken that may affect the living and working conditions of sex workers. UTSOPI thus fulfils a bridge function between the field (our members, including the wider community of sex workers) and the political level. To build this bridge, it is necessary to make the two worlds communicate with each other as much as possible. This is done through our second field of action: information and awareness-raising.

Sex work encompasses many realities and profiles. It is sometimes said that there are as many types of sex work as there are sex workers. The reality of sex workers is multi-layered, complex and does not conform to simple, simplistic stereotypes. UTSOPI's job is to make it clear to the outside world how layered and diversified the reality of sex work is.

We do this primarily through our cultural work: events and festival collaborations, where sex workers and non-sex workers come together and sex workers themselves shape their own stories through storytelling and performance art. We do this by reaching out to journalists and filmmakers, provided they show themselves capable of presenting a nuanced picture of this sector rather than cheap sensationalism. When necessary, we publicly show our dissatisfaction with stigmatising narratives and productions.



4.1. Personal Support Services

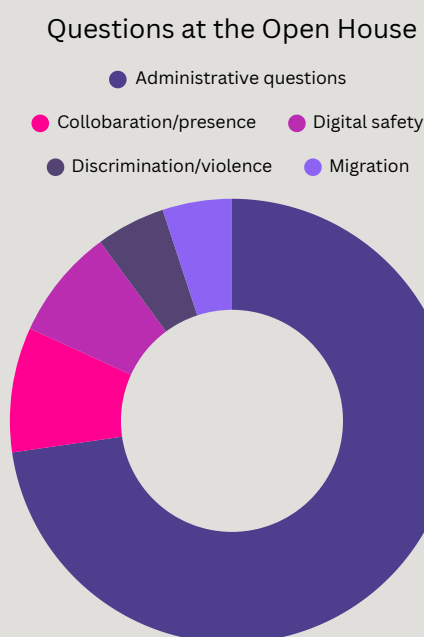
Open House

In the period 2022–2024, a new legal framework for sex work was established in our country. The major principles of the decriminalisation law are clear; however, the practical implementation of this new legal approach is accompanied by a large number of questions. It is the role of our organisation to provide individual support to sex workers as much as possible, to give them answers to their questions or to search together with them for the right answers. The aim is also for our organisation to identify the most urgent needs, in order to determine which themes and cases are more pressing than others.

To achieve this, UTSOPI decided to organise its “Open House” every Tuesday afternoon starting in February 2024, a walk-in moment during which sex workers can come to ask questions about their guaranteed rights, how to organise themselves as self-employed sex workers, and which administrative and tax obligations must be fulfilled. Sex workers can also come to us during these afternoons if they are confronted with violence, racism, stigma and discrimination. Those who need a place to focus on their own project, or who wish to carry out a project together with UTSOPI, are also welcome.

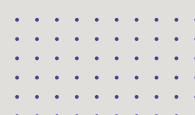


Figure 4. Invitation for the Open House on our social media.

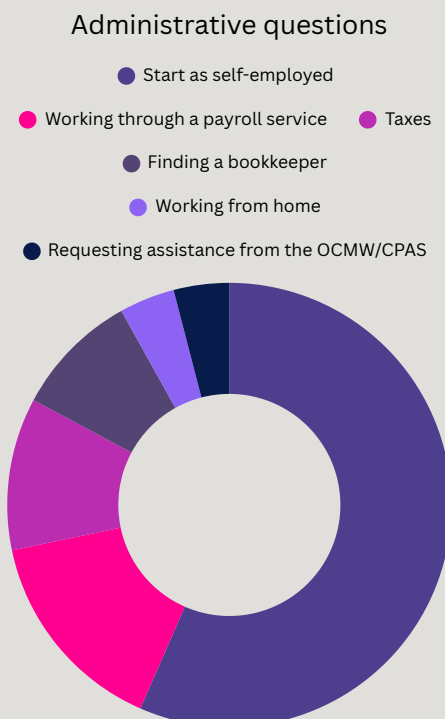


Open House was organised **24 times** in our premises. We received **42 sex workers**, who asked us a total of **62 questions**. These can be divided into five categories: administrative questions, collaboration/presence (co-working, getting to know the organisation, an informal conversation, consultation of the library), digital safety, discrimination/violence, and migration.

Regarding questions about discrimination and violence, these concerned threats of revealing their activity to family or loved ones, harassment, discrimination by a government service, and suspicions of human trafficking/exploitation. Regarding migration-related questions, these involved the equivalence of a diploma obtained abroad, an order to leave the territory, and finally, one question each about working abroad as a self-employed person registered in Belgium and vice versa.



The majority of the questions concerned administrative matters (43). This is not so much a reflection of the needs of the entire target group, but rather an indication that our organisation is known as a center of expertise in these matters and provides a specialised service that is not offered by other services. The subdivision regarding administrative questions can be found in the following graph.



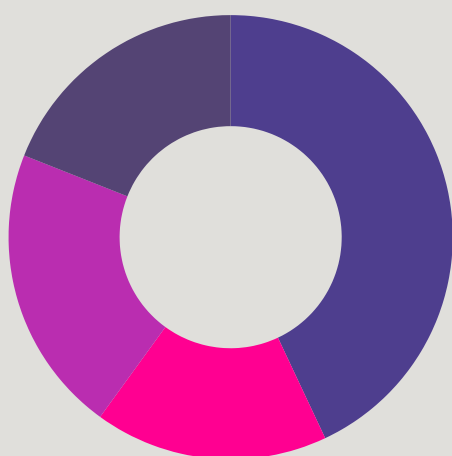
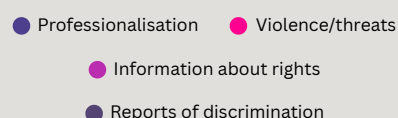
Four sex workers were referred to another specialised service for their question. All others could be helped by our organisation. In six cases, sex workers were referred to us by other organisations. Regarding the regional

breakdown of sex workers, we saw that the majority of visitors (65%) lived or worked in Brussels, 20% in Flanders, and 7.5% in Wallonia.

Helpdesk through email and phone

For some, or perhaps even most, sex workers, it is a big step to come to our premises. Therefore, our organisation also answers questions from sex workers via telephone and email. In the course of 2024, UTSOPI responded to **105 support requests** from **98 sex workers** from both within and outside the country.

Questions through phone/mail



Except for eleven instances, all questions were handled by UTSOPI. In three cases, UTSOPI worked together with the socio-medical service Espace P to find a solution; in four cases with the organisation Violet. In one case, a referral was made to the organisation Vluchtelingenwerk Vlaanderen, and twice to the federal migration center Myria. In three cases, referrals were made to specialised centers for support to victims of human trafficking, PAG-ASA or Payoke.

The support questions can be divided into four categories: professionalisation of the activity (43%), what to do after violence or in case of threats (17%), general information about rights (21%), and reports of discrimination due to the activity of sex work (19%). Again, we must emphasise that this is not a reflection of the needs of the entire target group, but rather an indication that our organisation is known as a center of expertise in these matters and offers a specialised service that is not provided by other services.

Regarding the questions about professionalisation, the most frequent questions were about starting as a self-employed person or the regulations concerning the self-employed status (33%), followed by questions about the new labour framework (27%), questions regarding finding a space (or the regulation thereof) for sex work (11%) and finding an accountant and/or insurer (11%).

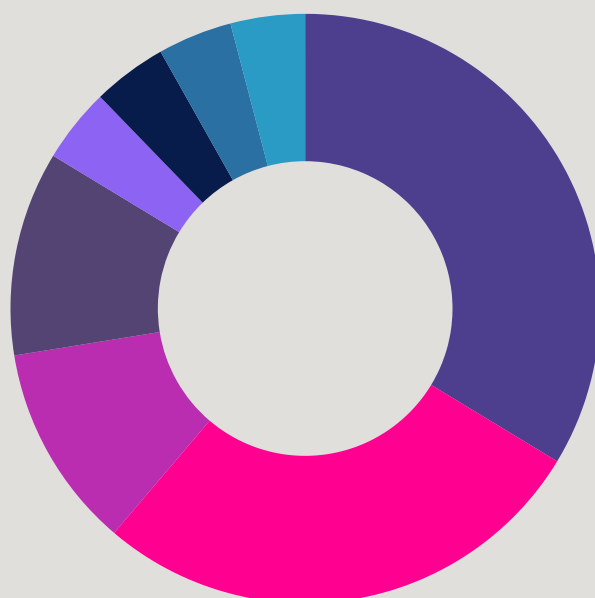
Regarding the section on violence/threats, we broadly encounter the same problems that we have seen in recent years, in more or less equal proportion: threats of outing to family members and loved ones (3 support requests), clients not respecting previously indicated boundaries (also 3 support requests), reversal of payments or refusal to pay by clients (4), stalking (3), suspected cases of human trafficking (3), and non-consensual distribution of nude images (2).

Regarding the section on information about rights, this involved questions about information following a police and/or labor inspection raid (3), questions about the legal validity of contracts (4), fines (2), or the lawfulness of a dismissal (1). As many as 12 questions concerned the negative consequences and legal sustainability of regulations issued at the local level. One question was about starting an asylum procedure. This was immediately referred.

Regarding discrimination, we were contacted by sex workers who were refused a loan, bank account, or insurance due to their activity as a sex worker or sex work as a business activity (17). There was one report of refusal of affiliation by Payconiq, one dismissal as an employee of a company due to the side activity as a sex worker. One case of discrimination was reported involving a subsidised aid organisation for young job seekers in Brussels because of the sex work activity.

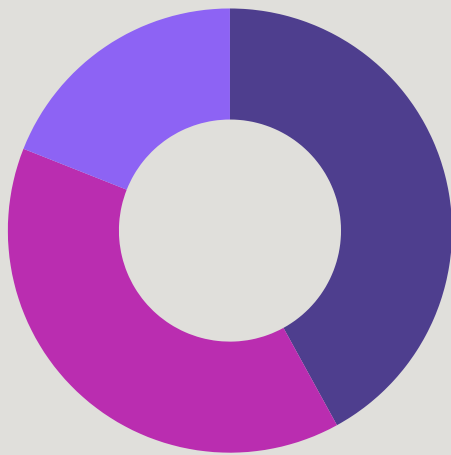
Questions about professionalisation

- Starting as self-employed
- New labour framework
- Finding a place to work
- Insurance/bookkeeper
- Working from home
- How to start under contract
- Competition
- Publication of business info



Geographical distribution

● Flanders ● Brussels ● Wallonia



In terms of origin, it is no surprise that most questions were asked by sex workers with Belgian nationality (64). In 2024, 16 sex workers from other EU countries contacted us, namely from Sweden, Italy, France, Poland, Hungary, the Netherlands, and Spain. Eighteen people from non-EU countries were helped: Israel, Brazil, Peru, Argentina, Congo-Kinshasa, Ukraine.


Regarding sex workers who live or work in Belgium, we saw the following regional distribution: the majority of people who contacted us were from or work in Flanders (42%), Brussels accounts for 39%, and Wallonia for 19%.

Outreach in the North Quarter (Brussels)

This concerns street outreach (or outreach work), in which the team goes out and seeks contact with sex workers in the window district of Brussels. This concerns a target group that is difficult to convince to participate in our community activities, often out of fear of losing their anonymity. In the North Quarter of Brussels, this target group mainly consists of sex workers from Eastern Europe (the majority of whom are Albanian) and West Africa (primarily Nigerian).

On these occasions, the team distributes hygiene and health materials (such as condoms, lubricant, sanitary pads, etc.), inquires about the condition (health, safety, administrative or otherwise) of the target group and answers their questions and needs. In addition, the team also monitors possible cases of human trafficking.

In 2024, **22 outreach rounds** took place, mainly in the second half of the year. On average, **25 people** were reached through outreach. **Nine individuals** received follow-up on a personal basis after being contacted through outreach by our organisation. The personal or WhatsApp follow-ups concerned health problems (4), the need for psychological support (1), or administrative help (4).



In the course of 2024, we observed **a serious deterioration in the safety situation** in the North Quarter. Reports of street fights and open crack use increased month after month. Direct confrontations between sex workers and drug users also increased. Every month we counted more broken windows as a result of conflicts between users and sex workers.

For the sex workers in rue de la Prairie and rue Linné, this means not only a deterioration in safety, but also a significant drop in the number of clients. This of course leads to an increase in precarious living conditions. As an organisation, we often feel powerless. Due to the lack of safety for our staff, some outreach rounds have been suspended, as is also the case with our partner organisation Espace P.

Distribution of gift vouchers

In 2024, UTSOPI distributed **€18,025** among **103 sex workers** in the form of gift vouchers. The budget for the vouchers and the operational costs for this food aid were granted by the Joint Community Commission of Brussels through a grant application submitted by UTSOPI, Alias and Espace P.

It was decided to support the most vulnerable sex workers. This involved sex workers working at night in the "carrés" of the Brussels North Quarter and street-based sex workers in the Yser district. It was also agreed among our three organisations to work with a limited list, in proportion to the available number of gift vouchers. Three outreach rounds in the Yser district of Brussels, in tandem with Espace P in the spring of 2024, made it possible to contact 112 sex workers to inform them about the distribution of the vouchers. This resulted in the distribution of 103 sealed envelopes at the offices of UTSOPI. It was decided to give each sex worker a support amount of **€175**. During the meetings at the UTSOPI offices, sex workers were given explanations about how and where they could use the vouchers and about the workings of our organisation.



4.2. Awareness-raising among sex workers

Campaign: Red Flags of Exploitation

Since 2024, sex work has been fully recognised as labour under Belgian law. This is an important step forward, but does not mean that our sector is now free from abuse. To combat coercion, exploitation, and human trafficking, sex workers need guaranteed labor rights. Within our association, a large-scale audiovisual awareness campaign was developed, aimed at informing sex workers, their surroundings, and social and healthcare professionals about signs of exploitation and illegal practices in the sector. After nearly two years of preparation (research, writing, filming, and editing), four short awareness videos on exploitation were launched on June 24, 2024. Belgian media outlets **Belga**, **DHNet**, and **BX1** reported on the campaign after the launch. The first publication about the campaign on our social media, on July 3, 2024, was viewed more than 10,000 times.

Each video highlights a different form of exploitation in a specific context and aimed at a specific target audience. Each video ends with a list of warning signs of exploitation (the red flags) and the contact details of support organizations: **UTSOPI**, **Violet**, **Espace P**, **Alias**, **Boysproject**, **Payoke**, **PAG-ASA** and **Sürya**. At the request of the three centers for victims of human trafficking – Payoke, PAG-ASA, and Sürya – reference was also made to the central reporting point and the website **stophumantrafficking.be**.



The idea for this campaign came from a member of UTSOPI, a sex worker who had herself been a victim of exploitation. According to her: *"If you don't know your rights, you don't have them."* After a series of conversations with experts active in the fight against exploitation and human trafficking, and inspired by her own experiences, she wrote the scripts and assembled a film crew. In this way, UTSOPI remains true to its motto: **"Nothing about us without us."**

Figure 5. Fragment from the awareness video on the exploitation of Nigerian sex workers.



In 2024, time was reserved for the final editing of the videos, spread over one day of editing in April and two in May. In June, a web page dedicated to the campaign was designed. In the fall of 2024, promotional material was designed and presented for the first time during the event on the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, on December 17th (see below).

On UTSOPI's website, the videos were viewed **596 times**. On the website vimeo.com, where the videos are hosted, they were viewed an additional **42 times**. The video about the exploitation of sex workers from Eastern Europe in English was the most viewed (100), followed by the Dutch version about Eastern European sex workers (68). The video about the exploitation of Nigerian sex workers completes the top three with 62 views.

The Flag System for sex workers

The "**Flag System**" is a methodology developed in Flanders to assess sexual behaviour and respond to it appropriately. Using **six criteria**, sexual behaviour can be classified into four categories, ranging from acceptable to completely unacceptable. These categories are indicated by different colored flags. An appropriate response is suggested for each flag. The flag system addresses sexual situations according to two basic principles: sexual development and sexual integrity. The system was developed by **Sensoa**, the Flemish center of expertise for sexual health.

The flag system is a tool that, on the one hand, provides sex workers with better information and gives them an overview of sexually violent behaviours and, on the other hand, helps them take care of themselves. It is a tool for self-management of health. It is also a tool designed to better inform counselors and provide them with a framework for better managing experiences of sexually violent behaviour within their target audience. During 2023-2024, UTSOPI developed a flag system specifically applicable to the situation of sex workers. Several meetings with the organisation Sensoa preceded the drafting of the guide.

In collaboration with the socio-medical association Violetta and members of our association, a list of practical examples has been compiled. The Antwerp-based socio-medical association Boysproject, for men and trans* people in sex work, has also been involved in this guide from the outset. The final version of this guide was submitted for approval to a working group in April. Publication is scheduled for the **second half of 2025**.

Guide for the self-employed

The 2022 decriminalisation law guarantees equal legal treatment between independent sex workers and other independent workers. It was essential for our organisation to publish a guide for sex workers to help them organise themselves as independent workers, emphasising the importance of health insurance and social security, for the following reasons:

- Sex workers often lack access to clear and reliable information about their rights and obligations as self-employed individuals. A guide can fill this gap and inform them about the options available to them within the system;
- Without registering as self-employed, sex workers do not have access to essential social rights such as health insurance, disability benefits (income security in the event of illness or accident), statutory pension accrual, maternity leave and family allowances;
- A guide helps sex workers understand how to obtain these rights by registering correctly and paying contributions;
- By working independently and in a regulated manner, sex workers increase their autonomy. They can make their own decisions about their work, their clients, and their conditions, which can improve their safety and well-being;
- Registering as self-employed offers legal protection against exploitation and human trafficking;
- Sex workers often face stigma within official institutions (such as health insurance or social security). A well-designed guide can help them overcome these obstacles by being better prepared and better informed;
- The guide offers practical help, for example: how to register as self-employed, what taxes to pay, how to calculate social security contributions, what documents are needed, where to find help (e.g., from unions or support organisations). A guide promotes the empowerment and protection of sex workers. It provides practical knowledge that helps them to work independently, legally and safely, enjoying the same social rights as other self-employed workers.

After five months of preparatory research and investigative work, the first version of the guide was published on our website in **mid-May 2024**. A second, more comprehensive and graphically refined version will appear on our website in **June 2025**.



4.3. Awareness-raising among the general public

Guide for the client

With funding from the Flemish Government, Violett is working with UTSOPI to develop an awareness guide for clients on how to interact with sex workers in a pleasant and respectful manner. The UTSOPI team met with Violett three times in 2024 to discuss the various stages of finalising the client guide. Sex workers, operators and clients were interviewed by both organisations about the content of this guide.

“In her Heels” with Doctors Without Borders: 16/09 and 20/11


On **September 16th**, UTSOPI was invited by **Doctors Without Borders** to participate in an awareness workshop called “**In Her Heels**”, led by Lucy O’Connell. UTSOPI was present to represent the sex worker community and helped participants understand what decisions they were making and why these could have negative consequences for a sex worker. The participants were international regional focal points for health promotion and similar roles.

These workshops are intended to equip MSF staff to conduct their own awareness and training sessions on issues affecting sex workers and other key populations. The activity “In Her Heels”, which includes interactive exercises, helps participants better understand stigma, discrimination, violence, and access to healthcare and social services. This activity was co-designed by sex workers from SWEAT and greatly benefits from the presence of community representatives during the reflection and debriefing sessions.

We were invited again for a second edition of “In Her Heels” on **November 20th** by Doctors Without Borders, which further strengthened the collaboration.



Figure 6–7. Visual from the “In Her Heels” workshop (left). Photo of our UTSOPI team member Daphné Davin with the organisers (right).



During the first session, the invited expert panel consisted of a UTSOPI team member, a member of the board of ESWA (the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance), a male sex worker and a representative from Doctors Without Borders Belgium. The audience consisted of **8 participants**.

During the second session, the expert panel consisted of a UTSOPI team member, another UTSOPI member, a member of the ESWA board and a sex worker. The audience then consisted of **10 participants**.

Trainings on sex work and human trafficking

As in 2021, 2022, and 2023, UTSOPI organised awareness modules in 2024 on the realities of sex work in the North Quarter and human trafficking. These trainings were offered to the **local police of BruNo** and the **neighbourhood stewards (peace-keepers) of Schaerbeek**, to strengthen ongoing contact.

Additionally, these modules were also offered in 2024 to three neighbourhood organisations: **Gaffi, Maison Biloba Huis** and **De Schakel**. The sessions took place at our premises for the neighbourhood stewards and associations, or at Police Station 5 for the local police. The awareness trainings were held on the following dates: November 15th, November 22nd, November 29th, December 6th, December 13th and December 20th. These trainings were developed and delivered **in collaboration with Espace P and PAG-ASA**.

Operation Alert: collaboration with Ghent University Hospital and ICRH

Operation Alert is a support program for healthcare providers and support staff in all Belgian hospitals. It teaches professionals to recognise signs of sexual violence, domestic violence and female genital mutilation, and provides them with tools to talk about violence with patients, offer appropriate care and refer them to specialised services when necessary.

On behalf of the Federal Public Service of Health, a series of e-learning modules was developed by the team of the International Centre for Reproductive Health (ICRH), Ghent University and Ghent University Hospital. From February 2024 to March 2025, UTSOPI worked with this team on the development of a module on violence and sex work, and how healthcare professionals can interact with sex workers who have experienced violence in a non-stigmatising way.

The collaboration started on **February 05th** with a meeting at Ghent University Hospital. The UTSOPI team then worked on writing a script.

The following meetings between the ICRH team and UTSOPI took place on **July 03rd, August 07th, October 09th** and **October 23rd**. On **November 20th**, final revisions were made to the script and texts during a last meeting. Filming took place on **December 09th** at Ghent University Hospital. One Dutch-speaking and one French-speaking member of UTSOPI explain the legal framework for sex work in Belgium to the users of the e-learning module.

Contacts with new organisations

Soralia is the left-wing feminist movement of the Solidaris Network. Soralia is recognized by the Wallonia-Brussels Federation as a continuing education movement. In this context, the movement carries out actions, projects and campaigns on various themes such as secularism, equality, health and citizenship. On **January 18th**, our team welcomed two representatives from the organisation for an afternoon of discussions on the reasons for decriminalising sex work and detailed information on labour rights for sex workers.

The **Projet Lama** medical center offers all drug users who come to its door a thorough assessment of their social, psychological and medical situation. It defines an approach tailored to each individual situation. An initial meeting between our organisation and Projet Lama took place on **February 7th 2024**. This first meeting was followed by a meeting between our two teams on **June 25th 2024**. In May 2025, Projet Lama will move into our building at 208, rue d'Aerschot.

VVVUUR (Vrouw en Vrij) is committed to equal opportunities and empowerment. The organisation is committed to creating a safe, inclusive and equitable work environment, and reaching a broad and diverse audience. It takes concrete steps to promote inclusion both within and outside the organisation, in line with its vision of gender equality, diversity and intersectionality. With more than 10,000 members, the organisation is present in hundreds of Flemish municipalities. On **March 9th**, UTSOPI was invited to present the organisation and the decriminalisation of sex work at the organisation's general assembly. UTSOPI then entered into debate with the women of the assembly, accompanied by our socio-medical partner Violet.

Fedasil is responsible for receiving applicants for international protection and ensuring the quality and compliance of the various reception facilities. A meeting between Fedasil and UTSOPI took place on **April 25th**.

The Dutch foundation **Fair&Square** is committed to improving the position of sex workers, removing the taboo surrounding sex work and countering the stigma attached to sex work. On **October 22nd**, UTSOPI welcomed two representatives from the organisation.

Hangar d'Amour (Ostend)

A new red-light district will be created in Belgium in the port city of Ostend in 2025. UTSOPI visited the site of this new district on **December 06th 2024**. The project developer promised that the opinions and needs of sex workers would be taken into account when the project is completed. UTSOPI gathered the opinions of sex workers at Villa Tinto in 2025, and their needs and opinions were forwarded to the project developer in April 2025.

4.4. Events

Pink Screens (Ghent): Januari 25th

During the LGBTQ film festival PinX in Ghent, the film "Pornomelancolía" by Manuel Abramovich was screened at Sphinx Cinema. In this film, Abramovich plays a porn actor in a film inspired by the Mexican Revolution. Reality and fiction become intertwined as he increasingly feels alienated from the world around him. Implicit pornography and explicit melancholy make us share in Lalo's isolation as a queer man and sex worker.

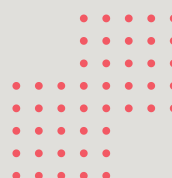
After the film, a Q&A took place in the cinema with a member of the UTSOPI team, to talk about the reality of sex work and the work of our organisation.

Là où les Putains n'existent pas (Charleroi): March 15th

Invited by the organisation Doctors of the World, Le Ciré, UTSOPI and Espace P spoke at a film discussion following the screening of the film "Là où les Putains n'existent pas" about the plight of a sex worker in Sweden. The film was screened at the Quai 10 cinema in Charleroi.

Love and Eroticism Fair – Erotix (Brussels): April 12th

On April 12th, UTSOPI was invited to host a stand at the Brussels Eroticism Fair (Erotix), with the goal of informing visitors about UTSOPI's mission, as well as about the sex workers present at the event. We were present together with Espace P and the Plateform Prévention Sida.



Brussels Porn Film Festival (BxIPFF), collaboration SNAP! & UTSOPI (Brussels): from May 2nd to 05th

The BxIPFF is the first international festival for alternative pornographic films in Belgium. It focuses on sexualities and their contemporary representations from an activist, queer, sex worker and feminist perspective. The festival creates a space for dialogue and reflection to question stereotypes around sexual cultures (such as gender, sexual orientation, age, ableism, race, body type). Since pornographic actresses, actors and performers form an important part of the sex worker community, it is essential that UTSOPI is involved in events that make their challenges and struggles visible.

The collaboration between UTSOPI and the Brussels Porn Film Festival focused on setting up a program on “Porn Work,” meaning the professions within the porn sector. This allowed visitors to learn more about changes within the sector and the complexities that come with them. Two main themes were explored at Beursschouwburg and Cinema Aventure:

Online sex workers

In an increasingly digitalised world, this part featured a roundtable discussion with researchers, UTSOPI members and experienced sex workers reflecting on the realities, challenges and opportunities for sex workers on online platforms, social media and in virtual worlds. Although this evolution offers certain advantages — such as selling content directly without intermediaries — difficulties were also discussed: platforms keep a large share of the earnings, do not acknowledge adult content, there are administrative obstacles, censorship, and a lack of visibility on social media, which is often hostile to sex work and pornography.

The speakers also pointed to the lack of recognition for the professional and technical skills within this sector and emphasized that it is a very time-intensive profession that requires constant availability.

➤ Pornographic archive: historical and marginalised perspectives

The archiving of sexual cultures is crucial for marginalised groups such as sex workers and LGBTQIA+ communities. What stories do old and new forms of pornography tell about non-normative sexual identities?

Through classic film screenings, a roundtable on archiving and a meeting with former actress Marilyn Jess, the aesthetic and political history of porn was reviewed and there was reflection on what it means to grow older in these activities.

Attendance: At this third edition, the festival succeeded in reaching a broad audience. A total of **2,240 entries** were counted over the four days, and more than **1,000 people** participated in the activities organised in collaboration with SNAP and UTSOPI at the Beursschouwburg (roundtables, open mic, performances, info stands and an expo). Despite its niche character, the growing attendance continues to demonstrate strong public interest.



Figure 8. Roundtable discussion on online sex work.

Static Pride by TransPédéGouines (Liège): May 11th

For the fourth consecutive year, TransPédéGouines organised an unconventional pride: queer, militant, and anti-institutional, at the Esplanade Saint-Léonard. The program included an activist village, DJ sets and, of course, speeches, in which UTSOPI participated.

This event was important for us, given the intersections between sex work and LGBTQIA+ communities. Having just arrived in Liège, it was important for UTSOPI to be visibly present — to show sex workers in Liège that they are not alone and that we also stand up for their rights. We met several sex workers who did not yet know UTSOPI and have since become members of the organisation.

Inauguration at the Willy Peers Center (Namur): May 16th

On May 16th, we were invited to the inauguration of the new psycho-medical-social consultation at the Willy Peers Center focused on trans* identity. This visit gave us the opportunity to present UTSOPI, meet other civil society actors in Namur, and also connect with some political representatives.

Screening of Sex? Work! at Les Grignoux (Liège): May 30th



On May 30th, we organised a one-time screening at the Les Grignoux cinema in Liège, followed by a discussion with the organising associations: the SNAP! festival, the BxlPFF (Porn Film Festival) and UTSOPI, in collaboration with Espace P. The program included six short films that shed light on different aspects of sex work, at the intersection of documentary, experimental fiction and explicit sexual art film.

The screening was a great success and attracted around **150 people** to the cinema, including a number of sex workers.

Figure 9. Visual post on social networks for "Sex? Work!".

h. Homografía Festival (Brussels): June 28th

On June 28th, UTSOPI had an information stand at the Homografía Festival, an international festival of queer videos and performances about sexuality beyond the norm.



Figure 10. Poster of the Homografía Festival.

From Brussels to Montreal with CATS Canada (Brussels): September 10th

On September 10th, at the initiative of CATS (Comité Autonome du Travail du Sexe) in Montreal, a meeting was organised under the title "From Brussels to Montreal: Struggles and Organisation in Sex Work." It was an opportunity to discuss sex work and the ways in which workers in this sector are organised, with the presence of UTSOPI. A member of CATS presented the work of the committee in Montreal and their latest study on the organisation of massage parlours. UTSOPI contributed to the discussion by sharing about the current struggles in Belgium. The presentation was given by two members of the UTSOPI team and the guest from Montreal.

The audience consisted of one member of the organisation, **three not-yet-members sex workers** and **about ten interested participants**.

Au-delà des beaux discours (Brussels): October 03rd

At the invitation of the Brussels Forum Against Inequality, UTSOPI participated in a panel discussion on the unionisation and politicisation of experiential expertise. This panel was organised as part of the conference day "Au-delà des beaux discours", on the place and impact of experiential knowledge in the social and health sector.

Nuit Blanche against the Liste Noire (Liège): October 11th

This year, UTSOPI participated for the first time in Nuit Blanche Contre Liste Noire (White Night Against the Blacklist) in the city of Liège. The aim of NBLN is to raise awareness about the dangers of sexist, homophobic and xenophobic rhetoric during a festive and cultural night. Our struggle intersects with these issues, making our presence essential. We opened our doors (at the premises of Espace P in Liège) for conversations, awareness-raising, and an engaged, participatory activity. The event was facilitated by the association La Cible.



Figure 11. The visual of the event as used to announce our participation on our website.

SNAP! (Sex Workers' Narratives, Arts and Politics) Festival (Brussels): from October 17th to 20th



Figure 12. The flyer announcing the new edition of the SNAP! festival.

SNAP! is a festival entirely dedicated to representations, discourses, and stories about sex work. Since 2022, UTSOPI has been actively involved in this event, which raises awareness among the general public and brings together the sex worker community in Belgium and beyond. For this year's edition, several institutions pledged their support to SNAP!.

The SNAP! festival is fully grounded in our motto: "Nothing about us, without us." The festival features only content created by sex workers themselves, or produced in active collaboration with them.

During this 2024 edition, more than **80 sex workers** of various ages and backgrounds were featured in performances, films and public readings, and they led conferences and workshops, as well as presented artistic and community-based projects. Some of the central themes included:

➤ Focus: "Coming out in sex work"

The intense stigmatisation of sex work leads most people who practice it to hide their activity from those around them in their everyday lives. Sometimes, however, sex workers choose to publicly disclose their work, acknowledging it through a "coming out" that ends the secrecy. Whichever choice is made, both come with risks — physical, professional, and emotional. Hiding or exposing oneself depends on the context and can be as much an act of self-preservation as it is a sacrifice. Through **three performances and a community film** developed with the support of UTSOPI especially for SNAP!, these complexities were sensitively addressed by involved sex workers.



Figure 13. The opening night at Cinema Galeries.

➤ Where studies and community knowledge

What we refer to as Where Studies encompasses both formal and informal knowledge and research about sex work, developed by sex workers themselves or in active and ethical collaboration with them. Conferences and panel discussions were held on topics such as antifascism within BDSM sex worker communities, sex work in virtual brothels, the history of sex work in Berlin, how communities can build their own archives and the need for self-managed spaces for sex workers.

➤ History of sex work and community cultures

Like all minorities, sex workers have a need to construct and tell their own stories to claim a place in the world and to become visible. There is also a strong desire to feel connected to a shared history, to identify with figures from the past and to become agents of social change themselves. Within this framework, SNAP! welcomed the **Sex Workers Who Changed History fashion show**, an initiative by a Dutch-speaking UTSOPI member. This performance brought together 20 sex workers from the Dutch collective

SAVE, who walked the catwalk to a soundtrack narrating the history of famous sex workers across time and around the globe. The costumes were crafted by the Trans Sisters Group — a collective of transgender and migrant sex workers — from secondhand clothing. The entire process was thus a community effort.

The Ballroom Showcase, in turn, brought together trans* and racialized sex workers from Belgium to share the codes of the voguing subculture — a movement born in the 60s and 70s within Afro- and Latinx-American communities. Sex workers have historically played an active role as pioneers in this movement.



Figure 14. *Final scene of the ballroom show “Sex Workers Who Changed History” at Les Halles.*



➤ Reclaiming the narrative

The issue of sex workers reclaiming their own narrative was the central thread running through SNAP! This was particularly evident in the presentation of community-created podcasts, offering reflections on the potential of contemporary media to spread situational and contextual discourse. The traditional Saturday night performance was especially powerful, featuring three hours of music, singing, dance and theatre by sex workers, addressing themes like empowerment, trauma, healing, romantic relationships, legislation, decolonisation and feminism.



Figure 15. The team of the “Bal des Putes”.

➤ Workshops

Four free workshops were organised to address concrete questions around safety, autonomy and relationships, directly with those involved. These included a **digital self-defense workshop**, a **sharing session** on risky clients and a **photoshoot** to create your own advertisement. **Around 30 sex workers** participated in these educational activities. Since those close to sex workers also face stigma and complex issues, a workshop for **partners of sex workers** and a discussion space for **clients of sex workers** were also held.



Beyond the warm and enthusiastic responses from the audience, the public and community success of SNAP! can also be measured by the fact that all program elements were **sold out**. The opening screening at Cinema Galeries (214 seats), featuring a selection of short films in collaboration with the Dutch queer.red collective, even had a waiting list. Evening shows and performances at Les Halles de Schaerbeek sold a total of **888 tickets**, while the daytime program, which was freely accessible, drew **between 250 and 300 visitors** daily. No exact count was made, but the total attendance for the festival is estimated at around **1,700 people**.

Figure 16. The audience and the MC of the evening at Les Halles de Schaerbeek.

Trans* Day of Remembrance (Liège): November 20th

In light of the increasing transphobia and general passivity, we were contacted regarding T.D.O.R. (Trans* Day of Remembrance). The event consisted of an outdoor gathering at Esplanade Saint Léonard, followed by a meal indoors (at the C.P.C.R.). The day concluded with a screening of the film "20.000 espèces d'abeilles".

The day was fully in line with the mission of UTSOPI, given the close intersection between sex work and LGBTQIA+ communities. Moreover, many of the transgender individuals murdered in 2024 were also sex workers. Therefore, we wanted to be present and speak at the conference.

"Paying for It" (Gembloux): November 28th

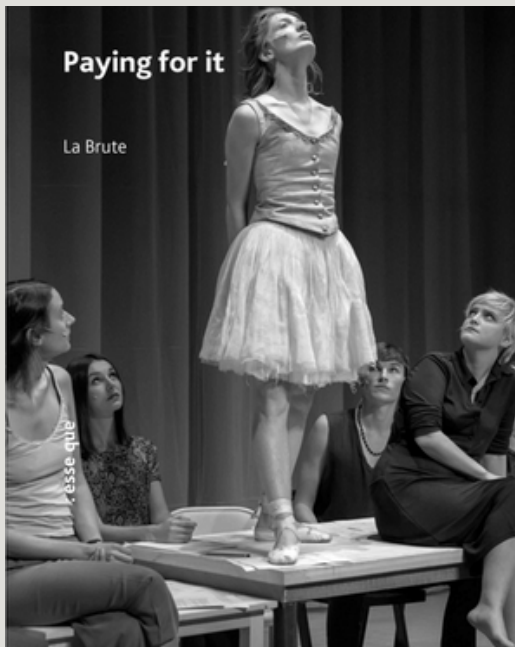


Figure 17. Promotional image for the play "Paying for It."

On November 28th, we attended the performance of the play **"Paying for It"** by the Liège-based collective **La Brute** at ATRIUM57 in Gembloux, organised by Espace P. One of our team members was present for the second part, which included a question-and-answer session on stage with the audience, focusing on the theme of sex work.

Collectif La Brute tackles a subject that remains taboo: prostitution. Or rather, prostitutions. This documentary performance is the result of impressive fieldwork and makes a vital statement. On stage, the ten performers embody the women and men whom society seldom wants to hear. They testify to the precarious situation many of them find themselves in, as well as the discrimination

and stigma they bear as sex workers. They know the shame and secrets of many men, who listen, welcome, and care for their bodies.

QueerMarket (Luik): December 07th

TransPédéGouines organised the QueerMarket in Liège on December 7th. At this event, which brought together artists, craftsmen, designers, etc., from the queer community, two of our members ran a stand where they spoke with sex workers about UTSOPI. These individuals then participated in our events in Liège.

ESWA conference (Brussels): from December 10th to 11th

On December 10th and 11th, UTSOPI was invited to the conference organised by ESWA, titled "**Exposed from All Sides: The Role of Policing in Sex Workers' Access to Justice.**" ESWA is the European organisation advocating for the rights of sex workers.

UTSOPI was present to present the labour law on employment for sex workers to other European sex worker organisations. Additionally, our presence as a member organisation of ESWA was more than necessary to ensure the voice of Belgian sex workers was heard and to share our expertise and knowledge on the decriminalisation of sex work and the related laws.

The first day consisted of presentations of various reports and analyses, as well as discussions and roundtable talks. The second day focused on the launch of the results of ESWA's research on police violence against sex workers in Europe at the European Parliament, with the presence of Estelle Ceulemans (S&D).



Figure 18. ESWA Event Invitation.

International day to end violence against sex workers (Brussels): December 17th

On December 17th, Alias, UTSOPI, and Espace P organised a symposium on the post-decriminalisation context of sex work in Belgium. The three organisations took the opportunity to present their work, findings, and current issues. The event was titled **Sur les violences faites au travailleur·euses du sexe : Regards croisés** (On Violence Against Sex Workers: Crossed Perspectives).

The day was organised around a plenary presentation, during which the three organisations gave presentations on specific issues. Alias presented a monitoring study on the violence faced by MSM and transgender individuals involved in sex work in Brussels, between 2021 and 2024. Espace P focused on the specific issues of sex workers in rural areas, particularly regarding stigma and access to healthcare for sex workers in Wallonia.



UTSOPI chose to address issues at the **intersection of complex legislation, working conditions and the fight against violence and stigmatisation**. This presentation highlighted the frictions arising between the theoretical rights of sex workers and other social or legislative dynamics that hinder or effectively implement these rights in practice, first focusing on workplace issues, followed by municipal regulations, and then the issue of victim protection for sex workers and safe reporting for sex workers without residence rights.



Figure 19. Flyer for the event on December 17th.

The afternoon continued with workshops to form dynamic discussion groups. UTSOPI led these special sessions on the fight against human trafficking in the sex work sector, based on the awareness video campaign developed by the UTSOPI team. The recent employment framework, which offers new legal frameworks for sex workers and enables salaried employment, was also the subject of a very detailed presentation. This made it possible to highlight the positive opportunities this offers, as well as the complexities that may arise in practice.



Figure 20. Flyer for the screening of the documentary "Revolución Puta".

For UTSOPI, it was important that this special day included a moment that brought the sex worker community together. Maria Galindo's documentary **Revolución Puta** (51 minutes, Bolivia, 2024), a film that is both militant and celebratory, is the result of 20 years of struggle by sex workers from the Bolivian collective OMESPRO (ORGANIZACIÓN DE MUJERES EN SITUACIÓN DE PROSTITUCIÓN) about self-managed sex work, without bosses or pimps.

The event brought together a mixed audience of care and support workers, sex workers, and researchers from various disciplines with an interest in developments in legislation and fieldwork related to sex work. In total, **94 people** attended the afternoon conference and workshops, while **87 people** attended the screening of the film *Revolución Puta*. Since the number of people shifted between the two program modules, approximately 200 people attended the event on December 17th.

4.5. Press

Thanks to the commitment of two interns from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, we were able to carry out an extensive press analysis for the first time this year. The history of our organisation clearly shows that press coverage is of the utmost importance. Only in this way are we able to raise awareness on a large scale among the general public. It was the press that created **public support** for equal rights for sex workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Without that support, we would never have achieved the goal of decriminalisation.

In the analysis of the year 2024, we look at how often sex work was discussed in the Flemish and French-speaking Belgian press. How often did sex work appear in the news in a negative, neutral, or positive way? We also look at how often our organisation appeared in the press, and in what way sex work was approached in articles where UTSOPI had a voice.

In 2024, our organisation also reached a new milestone. On **May 03rd 2024**, the labour law for sex workers was voted on in Parliament. This labour law provides extra social rights and additional labour protections for sex workers. On **December 01st 2024**, the labour law came into force. Both events generated a flood of press coverage, not only in our own country, but also internationally. For example, NRC, De Volkskrant, NPR, CNN, BBC, New York Times, The Washington Post, Le Monde, El País and Der Spiegel reported on the news. In our analysis, we try to determine what kind of international attention these two moments generated. The results are only an indication, since the research could not be conducted in all languages.

For this analysis, we limited ourselves to the written press, with the exception of the results from the BBC. In the case of the BBC, it concerned both a written report and a 27-minute television report, which was translated into **29 languages**.

Sex work and UTSOPI in the national press

In total, we counted **340 articles** about sex work in the Belgian press. In the Flemish written press, sex work was discussed **272 times**. That is four times more than in the French-speaking written press. In French-language newspapers and magazines, only **68 articles** about sex work appeared.

In the Flemish press, it is notable that **139 articles** describe sex work in a criminal context, or in a context of nuisance or human trafficking. On the other hand, sex work in the Flemish press was described **143 times** in a neutral (71) or positive (62) way. This latter category includes all articles that approach sex work from a human rights or labour rights perspective.

In the French-speaking press, there were **26 articles** that describe sex work in a criminal context, or in a context of nuisance or human trafficking. On the other hand, **42 articles** described sex work in a neutral (34) or positive (8) way.

Articles in which our organisation was mentioned were exclusively neutral or positive in tone. UTSOPI appeared more frequently in the Dutch-speaking than in the French-speaking press, namely **26 times in the Dutch-speaking press** and only **7 times in the French-speaking press**.

We observed an increase in the number of articles about sex work after the entry into force of the labour law. However, this increase only occurred in the Flemish press, with an **almost doubling** (38 articles instead of the average of 20 articles in other months) in December. A comparable increase was not observed in the French-speaking press. Likewise, a similar effect was absent in May in both language communities.

In the Flemish press, we found a significant decrease in the percentage of articles portraying sex work negatively during the months of May and December. In the French-speaking media, we found instead an increase in the number of negative articles about sex work for the same months.

Collaboration with the BBC

During September and October 2024, UTSOPI collaborated with the BBC on a written report and a television report about the labour law for sex workers. One French-speaking member and two Dutch-speaking members of UTSOPI were actively supported and trained by the team on the content of the labour law and on speaking to the media. BBC was also invited to the SNAP! Festival in October 2024.

The article “Belgium's sex workers get maternity leave and pensions under world-first law” by BBC reached **634,600 users** via X. The reel of the BBC report was viewed **4.4 million times** on TikTok and **5.7 million times** on Instagram. The full-length report was broadcast on BBC on the day the labour law came into force, namely December 01st 2024. The written report was published the same day and translated into **29 languages**. On Monday, December 02nd 2024, our member Mel Melicious was a guest on the British broadcaster's midday news.



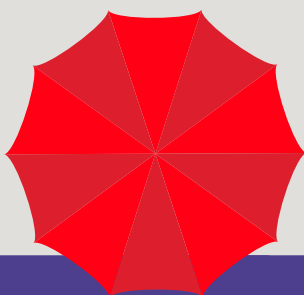
Figure 21. UTSOPI member Mel during the live interview on the BBC.

The labour law and UTSOPI in the international written press

The parliamentary vote and the entry into force of the labour law generated a great deal of international attention. After the parliamentary vote, we found **49 news reports** in **18 countries** about the new law. In nearly all of these articles, UTSOPI was mentioned. We received the most attention from France (9), the United Kingdom (6) and Spain (11).

After the law came into effect, **110 articles or reports** appeared in **36 countries**. Remarkable was the attention in the United States, where ten articles appeared on the subject. In France and the Netherlands, there were 16 and 15 articles or reports respectively. In almost all articles, the Belgian sex worker union UTSOPI was mentioned, very often with quotes from interviews conducted with team members, board members, or members of the organisation. This time we appeared in internationally renowned media such as NRC, NPR, CNN, BBC, New York Times, The Washington Post, Le Monde, El País and Der Spiegel.

The international press attention was undoubtedly the result of the fact that the British national broadcaster BBC widely reported the news on December 01st 2024. The count of the number of articles is in any case only an indication —there are undoubtedly sources and articles we did not find. The 110 articles are therefore a lower bound. It shows that in 2024 we succeeded in raising global awareness of the fight for, and the importance of, sex workers' rights.



5. Political advocacy

Between 2022 and 2024, an entirely new legal framework was created in Belgium that aims to offer sex workers equal rights. This is the result of the political work that UTSOPI has been doing since its founding in 2015. **The decriminalisation of sex work** in 2022 was the result of an intense collaboration between UTSOPI and the cabinet of the then Minister of Justice Vincent Van Quickenborne. Immediately after the Parliament voted in favour of decriminalisation, talks started with the federal cabinets of Social Affairs & Public Health, Justice, and Labour, with the goal of making **a law on sex work under employment contract** possible before the end of the legislature (2019–2024). These discussions were conducted by a coalition of UTSOPI with the socio-medical partner organisations Violett and Espace P.

However, 2024 was not limited to consultations with the federal cabinets in preparation for the vote and entry into force of the labour law. At the same time, it was necessary to ensure that the preconditions for rolling out a system with social protection for sex workers could be made possible. After all, which employer is going to be able to pay wages and social contributions if banks refuse to work with sex work businesses? What about the recognition of occupational diseases, and how can we guarantee the anonymity of sex workers in the systems of social security and social insurance agencies?

Finally, it is still unclear to anyone how the new legal framework will be implemented. In order to ensure that the rights of all sex workers are protected, it is necessary to proactively engage with the police, the public prosecutor's office, and the labour audit office. Lastly, we paid extra attention to the legal treatment of sex workers in very vulnerable situations, such as undocumented sex workers, who have no access to the labour market, neither as self-employed nor as employees, and who run a high risk of exploitation.



5.1. Local level

Individual contact moments: Brussels–Capital Region

2024 saw a total of **twelve individual contact moments** with actors at the local political level within the Brussels–Capital Region. During the first three months of the year, there was intensive contact between the municipality of Schaerbeek and UTSOPI in the context of the socio-cultural project Go Aerschot! The goal of this project was to restore the feeling of community and solidarity in the Brabant district by beautifying certain locations in the neighbourhood with murals. This project was supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT Community), in the framework of the “co-creation” call of the New European Bauhaus program. The project proposal was submitted at the end of 2024 by UTSOPI together with the municipality of Schaerbeek to the EIT. Despite a good start, our organisation had to make the difficult decision to withdraw from the project as of April, due to insufficient resources and staff. Our partner organisation **Fédération des Services Sociaux** agreed to take our place. On September 18th, our organisation was invited to provide feedback on the project as a stakeholder. Finally, UTSOPI was present at the closing event in Rogier Street on Thursday 05th December, where two murals were presented to the public.

To get an idea of the plans and policy of the municipality of Saint-Josse during the last months before the municipal elections, and to have a discussion about possible future scenarios, UTSOPI, together with the organisation Espace P, met in May with one city councillor from Ecolo in the municipal council. In preparation for the municipal elections of October 2024, our organisation, again in the presence of Espace P, met with a delegation from the political party MR, Saint-Josse branch. Also in preparation for the municipal elections, we met with one member of the Ecolo party, Ixelles branch.

Platform Prostitution Schaerbeek

Every three months, UTSOPI participates in the Platform Prostitution Schaerbeek, a large meeting that brings together all local actors of the red-light district, including the local and federal police and organisations that provide help to victims of human trafficking, to discuss the evolution of the situation in terms of safety and the living and working conditions of sex workers.

In 2024, UTSOPI was present at all three Platforms Prostitution Schaerbeek, on **March 28th**, **July 02nd** and **October 15th**. The new person responsible for missions in the Northern District has already secured a place by sharing her viewpoints and building relationships with the actors already present at the platform.

Schaerbeek Kiest (Schaerbeek votes)

At the request of community centre De Kriekelaar in Schaerbeek, our organisation formulated a central question to the Dutch-speaking representatives of various parties. We submitted the following question to the community centre: *"During the past legislature, Belgium has resolutely chosen to improve the legal position of sex workers. However, the decriminalisation of sex work has had little effect on the working conditions and safety in the Brussels Northern District. Isn't it time for the municipality of Schaerbeek to consider whether a centralised Eros Centre can be created in the Northern District, where the layout is developed in consultation with sex workers, where sex workers pay fair rent, where safety can be guaranteed, and where support organisations have easy access?"*

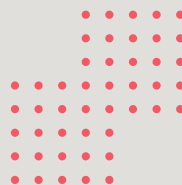
Our question and the answers were published in the online publication **"Schaerbeek Votes: 8 Questions for Politicians."**

2000 Antwerp

On two occasions, UTSOPI, always in partnership with the Flemish socio-medical organisation Violet, was invited by the prostitution officer of the City of Antwerp for a discussion on the regulations in the Antwerp window prostitution district following decriminalisation. This took place on **April 09th** and **June 28th**. Informal communication between the city and the organisation continues organically, with regular exchanges by email or phone.

9000 Ghent

At the end of 2024, on the initiative of UTSOPI, contact was established for the first time between our organisation and representatives of the Ghent City Council. This first meeting took place on **November 19th 2024**, and was followed by a follow-up meeting on **March 12th 2025**, again attended by our socio-medical partner Violet. The topic of discussion was the administrative implementation in the red-light district of Ghent following the decriminalisation of sex work.



2300 Turnhout

On **October 08th**, UTSOPI provided advice to the municipality of Turnhout on the administrative application of duty rules and best practices that the municipality could demonstrate in terms of risk reduction strategy in a context of social vulnerability and poverty.

Research: legal leeway for local authorities

In Belgium, sex work is regulated at the federal and municipal levels. During the last legislative term, a new federal legal framework recognising the fundamental rights of sex workers was developed, which aims to remove barriers that prevent sex workers from carrying out their activities transparently and legally. At the same time, we see that a number of municipal councils regulate sex work in a way that creates new barriers and encourages hidden work under the radar, where the risk of violence and exploitation is higher. In doing so, the intended effects of decriminalisation will not materialize. Legally, discrimination and stigmatisation continue to exist.

The Belgian federal law on municipalities (the New Municipal Law) governs the legal leeway of local authorities in regulating sex work. The legal grounds for regulating sex work are well defined and limited. Unfortunately, many mayors do not respect the leeway provided by the federal law on municipalities and violate their legal leeway.

In December, a **research project** was launched within our organisation. It focuses on municipal regulations and the extent to which they comply with their legal scope and, if not, how these regulations may jeopardise the fundamental rights of sex workers, with the ultimate goal of creating an awareness-raising tool for, or discussion with, local political authorities.

5.2. Regional level

Brussels–Capital Region

On **March 20th**, a meeting took place between the director of UTSOPI and the person responsible for UTSOPI's activities in the North Quarter with the administration of Brussels Minister Alain Maron, member of the College of the French Community Commission (COCOF), responsible for Welfare and Health, and member of the United College of the Common Community Commission (COCOM), responsible for Health and Welfare (together with Minister Elke Van den Brandt).

On **April 19th**, UTSOPI participated in the plenary meeting dedicated to drafting **the Brussels action plan on prostitution**, where the partner organisations Espace P, Alias and PAG-ASA were also present. On **May 12th and 16th**, UTSOPI provided detailed feedback and proposals on the report of the first meeting to safe.brussels, the institution responsible for organising the plenary session, also pointing out elements that we believed were missing from the plan.

On **May 13th**, UTSOPI welcomed Delphine Chabbert (PS), member of the Brussels parliament, to take stock of the work done so far and especially to analyse how she and her political party can continue to support us and our cause in the future, as we approach a new federal legislative term. Delphine Chabbert has often worked with various structures to bring the voice of sex workers to the political level. This meeting was attended by Delphine Chabbert and her staff, UTSOPI, Espace P, Alias and sex workers of Latin American origin.

Flanders

In Flanders, UTSOPI organises the **Platform Prostitution Flanders** together with its socio-medical partner Violet. This platform brings together sex workers, operators, academics, the organisations PAG-ASA and Payoke (support centers for victims of human trafficking), Aditi (sexual services for people with disabilities), Boysproject (support center for male and trans* sex workers) and Sensoa (the Flemish expertise center for sexual health), the prostitution team of the Antwerp police (PTA), the prostitution officer of the city of Antwerp, and a representative of the Department of Care and Health of the Flemish government.

These meetings took place three times in 2024, namely on **March 01st, June 28th and October 11th**. Given the significant transition the sector was going through, extra attention was paid to updates on the legislation regarding sex work under employment contracts, the Royal Decree on online platforms, and the further follow-up of other Royal Decrees (recognition procedure, extension of PC Horeca, well-being at work). The large condom study by Sensoa was also discussed, as well as the study on violence against sex workers by Boysproject and Violet and a retrospective on two years of Meza, the shelter for non-minor unaccompanied foreign victims of human trafficking. Finally, extra attention was given to the problems that operators and sex workers encounter when opening a bank account.



5.3. Federal level

Online platforms

The 2022 reform of sexual criminal law (also known as the “Decriminalisation Act”) aimed to remove consensual sex work from the legal gray area in which it operated and to establish clear rules to prevent abuse and exploitation in the sector. This also applies to advertising for sexual services. In principle, the new law prohibits and penalizes advertising for sexual services. However, exceptions exist, particularly for online platforms (or other media) explicitly intended for the promotion of sexual services. In return, these platforms must take measures to protect sex workers and prevent trafficking and exploitation. These terms and conditions are specified by Royal Decree.

On **January 09th**, UTSOPI held an initial bilateral meeting with the Justice Department regarding the content of the draft Royal Decree on online platforms. Two days later, on **January 11th**, a meeting was held with UTSOPI, Violet and Espace P to discuss the first draft of this project. After receiving the revised version of the text, three additional meetings were held on **February 01st**, **February 02nd** and **February 21st** between the three partners. Their comments were sent to the cabinet by email on the same day. A brief correspondence followed. The Royal Decree was published on May 18th 2024.

However, the Royal Decree is far from perfect and, in our opinion, offers too few guarantees in terms of privacy for sex workers. In order to identify the problems and consider possible legal solutions, a consultation was organised with Violet and criminal law professor Gert Vermeulen (Ghent University) on **July 10th**.

Information website for internet platforms

The Royal Decree for providers of internet platforms states the following: *“The provider shall offer advertisers useful information to help ensure their safety when posting an advertisement and during interactions with visitors. He shall also provide advertisers and visitors with useful information on protection against sexually transmitted infections. The provider shall provide advertisers with useful information about safely developing and carrying out their activities and about the options for reorientation. The provider shall give advertisers the contact details of recognised specialised centers, government-funded support services, and professional organisations for sex workers.”*

To facilitate the application of this provision, the FPS Justice provides a webpage with standard information on its website.

On **February 29th**, a meeting was held between the organisations UTSOPI, Violet, Espace P, Alias and the three support centers for victims of human trafficking, together with the FPS Justice. This meeting addressed which information should be included and how it should be organised. After email correspondence with proposals and requested changes, the first version of the information website went online on **July 03rd**.

Labour law: final tensions and parliamentary vote

In December 2023, the organisations UTSOPI, Violet and Espace P held their final meeting with the Justice, Social Affairs & Public Health, and Labour cabinets regarding the text of the labour framework for sex workers working under an employment contract. The advice of the National Labor Council, published on **December 14th 2023**, objected to the right of sex workers to receive unemployment benefits, even when voluntarily ending their contract. This caused significant discussion within the government, delaying the dossier. Tensions rose: the current legislative session was coming to an end. The bill still had to be addressed by the Social Affairs Committee and then added to the agenda for the final plenary session. On **March 20th 2024**, the text was finally approved by the Council of Ministers in a second reading. It was immediately submitted to Parliament.

On April 11th, employer organizations wrote a letter to the members of the parliamentary committee on social affairs, employment and pensions, who were now responsible for voting on the proposal: *"We understand and support the concerns addressed by these rules, namely the need to protect workers' consent, maintain their dignity, and respect their bodily integrity. However, legally establishing the right to refuse to work with a guaranteed wage contradicts the basic principles of the employment relationship between employer and employee as defined by the law of July 03rd 1978. Performing work, receiving payment, and a relationship of subordination are the three elements of an employment contract. The absence of one of these elements is enough to exclude such a contract. Article 7 of the draft thus creates a precedent that could unravel the fundamental principles of labour law"*, they wrote.

At the request of the socialist union ABVV/FGTB, UTSOPI got in touch with the employers' organisation.

The problem for our associations: not only are the four freedoms an absolute minimum for us in terms of the safety and sexual integrity of sex workers, but without these four freedoms, the law — including access to social security and labour protection — is inapplicable because it contradicts sexual criminal law.

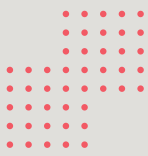
The employer organisations were soon joined by 25 French-speaking feminist organisations, led by the neo-abolitionist group Isala. In a text on Isala's website titled *Réaction féministe à l'avant-projet de loi sur le statut salarié pour les personnes prostituées*, Mireia Crespo, director of the Isala association, stated: *"There is good intention behind it — namely to protect prostitutes as best as possible — and we acknowledge that. However, we believe that this bill will increase the isolation they experience and will not help them exit prostitution and pursue other life projects if they wish to do so. Those who wanted to be protected by an employment contract already had the possibility, but they are a minority. The majority is trapped in this activity and Belgium is not doing enough to support them."* And also: *"This project should not lead to the trivialisation of what is generally known as the commodification of the human body, especially women's bodies."*

Aside from a publication on Les Grenades (the feminist site of RTBF) and the newspaper *Le Vif*, Isala's response was not picked up elsewhere. When the bill was discussed by the Social Affairs Committee on **April 17th 2024**, a delegation of UTSOPI members and employees was present in the room. Neither the employers' letter nor the feminist organisations' publication seemed to have had any impact. The text was approved and proceeded to the plenary session, the final stage.

On **May 03rd 2024, at 00:29 a.m.**, the Belgian Parliament passed the law on the employment of sex workers under contract. There were 93 votes in favour, 33 abstentions and zero votes against. Six months after the vote, on **December 01st 2024**, the new law will enter into force.

Royal Decrees following the labour act

Between May 03rd and December 01st, a lot of work still had to be done. The May law mentions a supplementary Royal Decree regarding the recognition procedure for employers, a Royal Decree on the well-being of sex workers at work, a Royal Decree on the recognition of occupational diseases, a Royal Decree on the Joint Committee under which sex work will be included, a Royal Decree on the designation of the inspection service that will mediate when a sex worker frequently uses the right to refuse and a Royal Decree on home-based work.



The Royal Decree on the well-being of sex workers at work was issued on October 20th after intensive cooperation between the ABVV/FGTB (socialist union) and the organisations UTSOPI, Violett and Espace P. Our coalition had a first meeting on **June 14th**, followed by a second meeting on **June 18th** in preparation for a meeting with the socialist union ABVV/FGTB on the same day. An opinion on the Royal Decree from the High Council for Prevention and Protection at Work, taking our input into account, was finally published on July 02nd.

Also **June 18th**, our three organisations held a meeting with the federal Cabinet-Dermagne (Labour) on the next steps needed to ensure the proper implementation of the law on December 01st.

The Royal Decree on the Joint Committee for social dialogue was issued on **August 12th**, without requiring additional actions from our organisation or our partner organisations during the process. The Royal Decree on the inspection services for mediation was also issued on **September 12th**, again without requiring action from our organisations.


As for the Royal Decree on the recognition procedure for employers, UTSOPI was consulted by the Justice Cabinet on **October 07th**. The Royal Decree was published on October 20th.

In preparation for the Royal Decree on the recognition of occupational diseases, UTSOPI was consulted on **May 17th** by FEDRIS, the federal agency for occupational risks, to estimate the total number of sex workers who, once the labour framework is fully operational, would work under an employment contract. A draft Royal Decree was sent to us, but the dossier was blocked in the caretaker government. It was stated that a government with full powers was needed to issue this Royal Decree.

On **October 16th**, our three organisations held a final meeting with the caretaker federal Labour Cabinet regarding the Royal Decree on home-based work. Ultimately, the Royal Decree was not published during the legislative term. It is therefore currently not possible to carry out sex work under contract in the form of home-based work.

Monitoring the labour act: sectoral consultations

To monitor and facilitate the implementation of the Labour Act as much as possible, four consultation moments were scheduled with the UTSOPI coalition and the socio-medical partners Espace P and Violett. On **July 05th**, the process was launched with a morning meeting on the rights and safety of vulnerable sex workers under the new legal framework.



Alias, the socio-medical organisation for male and trans* people engaged in sex work, was also present at this meeting. In the afternoon, the priorities for the coming months were determined. The sectoral consultation with the UTSOPI-Violet-Espace P coalition was repeated on **October 04th, October 31st** and **December 13th**.

During these meetings, the following topics dominated: VAT on sex work, the follow-up of the Royal Decrees, meetings with labour auditors, the priorities of social dialogue in the joint committee, flexibility in remuneration, awareness-raising among sex workers about their new rights, and local policies under the new legal framework.

Monitoring the labour act: wages and working conditions

Since the sex work sector would be placed under the hospitality joint committee, it was of the utmost importance for our organisation and our partner organisations (Espace P and Violet) to understand how a joint committee functions and how we could defend and promote the rights of sex workers within it. Is it possible in the sex work sector, where sex workers can refuse any client or act, to work with flexible remuneration systems? In 2024, we counted a total of 5 formal meetings with trade unions.

In the joint committee, all employees are represented by the three trade unions: ABVV/FGTB, ACV/CSC and ACLVB/CGSLB. We have been in close contact with all three unions since December 2022. On **February 19th**, UTSOPI met a representative from the ACV/CSC to receive information about flexible remuneration systems. On **June 18th**, UTSOPI together with our partner organisations Violet and Espace P met a delegation from ABVV/FGTB to discuss the Royal Decree on well-being aspects for sex workers.

On **September 12th**, a consultation took place between Espace P, UTSOPI and ACV/CSC regarding the steps to be taken now that the sex work sector is included in the hospitality joint committee. Specifically, the discussion focused on guarantees for anonymity, the usefulness of a reference function "sex worker" and a corresponding salary scale. On **September 20th**, UTSOPI and Espace P met the Director of Social Affairs of ABVV/FGTB. The topic of the meeting was the possibility of flexible remuneration systems. On **September 24th**, the final meeting took place: a bilateral consultation between UTSOPI and ACV/CSC, again regarding flexible remuneration systems.

On **October 29th**, Espace P and UTSOPI held a meeting with two lawyers from the law firm Xirius to discuss possibilities concerning flexible remuneration systems, social security payment systems and VAT rates.

Monitoring the labour act: approach of police, public prosecutors and labour inspection

On May 03rd 2024, the framework law for sex workers was passed by Parliament, with an effective date of December 01st 2024. Our organisations wondered what approach the labor auditor and the public prosecutor's office would take once the law came into force. Would there be a transition period to allow establishment operators to comply?

On **January 25th**, UTSOPI spoke at the New Year's reception of the Ghent labour auditor's office, where initial contacts were made. On **April 30th**, UTSOPI and Violett were welcomed by the Social Information and Research Service (SIRS), the coordinating body for labor inspections, to discuss changes in labour inspection policies and priorities following the entry into force of the new labour framework. A consultation was held on **May 29th** between UTSOPI and two representatives of Fairwork Belgium, the organisation that defends the labour rights of people with precarious residency status.

On **August 06th**, UTSOPI and Violett met with the Antwerp labour auditor at the courthouse. On **November 04th**, the organisations met with the East and West Flanders labour auditor in Ghent.

On **October 31st**, a broad coalition (UTSOPI, Violett, Espace P, Boysproject and Alias) met to develop a joint strategy to raise awareness among the public prosecutor's office, the police and the labour inspectorate. It was decided to involve Fairwork Belgium, PAG-ASA and Payoke. On **November 19th**, an initial draft policy statement was sent to the partners. On **November 21st**, the eight partners met to discuss and improve the text.

On **December 12th**, UTSOPI and Violett met with the federal judicial police in Ghent, human trafficking section.

Monitoring the labour law: sex work behind windows

What possibilities does labour law offer for improving the legal and social situation of sex workers behind the windows of red-light districts? To answer this question, several meetings were organised with the cities of Ghent and Antwerp (see above).

It was also necessary to discuss the situation and the future with window owners, in particular window owners in Ghent who operate mainly as employers.

On **March 07th**, an initial consultation took place with a window owner in the Ghent window district to see how the framework for work could be applied in the context of window sex work. After a consultation on **April 09th** with Violett Antwerp, a meeting was held on **April 11th** with Yves Jorens, professor of social law and criminal social law (Ghent University). This meeting resulted in a concrete proposal to amend social security legislation, which would allow sex workers to benefit from the new legal framework. A consultation with five window operators in Ghent followed on **November 14th** to inform them of the changes that would come into force on December 01st 2024.

IEWM sex work study steering committee

Following the reform of sexual criminal law that came into force on June 01st 2022, the Institute for Equality between Women and Men (IEWM) commissioned a study aimed at providing a reference framework for future research on the sex work sector in Belgium, as well as an initial assessment of decriminalisation, to the extent that this proved possible. The report consists of four parts: (1) a systematic review of global literature on the effects of prostitution/sex work policies; (2) an overview of the current market in Belgium; (3) an initial assessment of the effects of the new law on various aspects; and (4) recommendations for policymakers based on the conclusions of the various chapters.

As the initiator of the decriminalisation of sex work in 2021, UTSOPI was invited by the institute to be part of the steering committee for this study. This steering committee began its work on June 15th 2023. In addition to UTSOPI, the socio-medical organisations Espace P, Violett and Boysproject, the Dutch-speaking Women's Council, the inter-federal migration center Myria and the anti-human trafficking organisation Payoke were also part of the committee. The abolitionist (or anti-prostitution) side was represented by French-speaking politician Viviane Teitelbaum.

Following UTSOPI's suggestion to also survey sex workers, consultations took place on **February 28th** between Benno Stevens (KU Leuven), the principal investigator responsible for conducting the study, and our organisation. Best practices for reaching sex workers were shared. In order to obtain the most objective results possible, we explicitly ensured that the sex workers interviewed were not members of our organisation. This could have skewed the results. On **May 12th**, UTSOPI provided extensive, detailed and comprehensive feedback on the entire study.



Monitoring and facilitating case law

The judiciary plays an important role in policy advocacy because it acts as a monitoring mechanism: do new laws protect the people they are supposed to protect? A court ruling can set a precedent or encourage policymakers to adapt laws or policies. Policymakers take previous rulings into account to avoid legal problems in the future.

In 2024, UTSOPI joined a lawsuit as a civil party on behalf of a client who had repeatedly withdrawn payments to sex workers for this reason. The man used the same modus operandi each time: he made an appointment with a sex worker via the Quartier Rouge (Red Lights) website, showed or sent proof of payment, but scheduled the payment for a day later. After the sexual service, he canceled the payment. **The defendant was convicted on May 22nd of rape and sexual assault.** The Antwerp Criminal Court sentenced him to 10 years in prison.

This is the second decision handed down by a judge in a case in which our organisation played an active role. The first decision dates back to 2023.

At the same time, UTSOPI closely monitors case law in which the organisation has not played a role. For example, in 2024, there were 12 contacts with lawyers who were active in cases where the provisions of the 2022 decriminalisation law led to convictions. In two cases, people in the sector were put in touch with specialised lawyers after our mediation. One of the cases concerned **financial discrimination** by a Belgian bank. The other case concerned an **illegal municipal regulation** that had disastrous consequences on the life and work of a sex worker. The municipality had made it clear that its new regulation, accompanied by heavy taxes, was aimed at driving sex work out of its territory. This practice is contrary to the new law on municipalities, which specifies the powers of the municipality in this area.

Defense of labour law before the Constitutional Court

At the end of the year, several meetings were held with coalition partners Violet and Espace P to prepare a response to an appeal for the **annulment of labour rights for sex workers**. This appeal for the annulment of the labour law was filed by a coalition of anti-prostitution groups from Brussels and Wallonia, led by Isala asbl. A meeting with constitutional experts followed, after which UTSOPI and Espace P brought together an international group of experts to prepare the defense.

Obligation to disclose company contact details

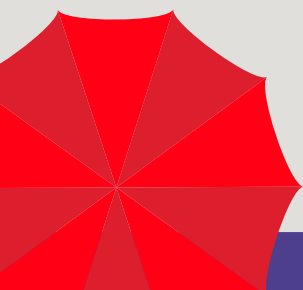
In our country, independent workers are required to include their business contact details in advertisements. Given that sex workers are often exposed to violence, threats, and blackmail, we believe that this requirement poses a danger to independent sex workers who advertise their services. Indeed, dishonest individuals who wish to threaten a sex worker or commit violent acts can find the contact details of an independent sex worker directly in the CBE. On **February 22nd**, UTSOPI held an initial consultation with the Federal Labour Cabinet and the FPS Economy **to explore the possibilities of lifting this obligation for security reasons.**

Next, we checked with the SPF and the cabinet whether, as in the Netherlands, it would be possible for sex workers to hide their contact details in the Banque Carrefour des Entreprises. In the Netherlands, sole proprietorships have the option of concealing their business address. Since December 15th 2022, this option also applies to other legal forms in the event of concrete or probable threats. The main reason for this is to combat intimidation and various forms of threats at home.

Rights of victims without legal residence status

During research for the Guide to Preventing Violent Sexual Behaviour (2022–2023), UTSOPI encountered a lack of clarity in legislation regarding the rights of undocumented victims of violence or violent sexual behavior. To what extent is it possible for them to file a complaint with the police without suffering negative repercussions (detention, deportation)? It was clear that our organisation, which also protects the rights of undocumented sex workers, needed to work on this issue.

In 2023, UTSOPI organised a meeting with the inter-federal migration center Myria to understand the issue. This meeting was followed on **January 21st 2024**, by a visit to Karin Minnen, commissioner of the Vice Squad of 1000 Brussels. At the meeting on **April 19th** at safe.brussels, this issue was brought to the table and possible solutions were proposed. On **September 26th**, an initial partnership was proposed to the organisations Myria and PAG-ASA.



5.4. Third-party awareness-raising

One might rightly ask whether raising awareness among third parties falls under the pillar of political advocacy. Why do we include this work in this pillar and not in the awareness/information pillar? The parties mentioned in this section, namely banks, social secretariats, and a payroll service such as Smart, play a necessary role in the success of decriminalisation and labour law for sex workers.

Raising awareness in the banking sector

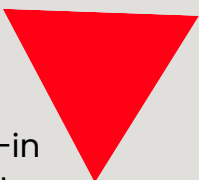
The decriminalisation of sex work grants self-employed sex workers the same legal rights as all other self-employed individuals. Labour legislation ensures equal access to social security (pensions, unemployment benefits, etc.) and provides additional labour protections.

A necessary condition for sex workers to benefit from these new (and equal) rights is access to banking services. Social rights can only be accrued if a recognised employer of sex workers can pay social contributions, which must also come from a bank account. However, we hear from the sector that banks refuse to open professional accounts for sex workers, that sex workers' accounts are blocked without reason, and that account applications or existing accounts of business operators are rejected or terminated.

The online survey ran **from December 20th 2023 to February 06th 2024**, and was distributed via our website and social media, through flyers and posters in our offices, and on Redlights/Quartierrouge, the most commonly used advertising platform in Belgium. This platform is mainly used by escort sex workers who receive clients at home. In less than two months, **759 sex workers** participated in the survey. It was available in six languages: Dutch, French, Spanish, English, Portuguese and Romanian. The wide range of gender representation, language choice, and work status among respondents indicated that we reached a diverse group of sex workers.

On **February 20th, March 29th, August 08th** and **October 11th**, we reviewed next steps with our partner Violett. We revisited our strategy with SWAD, the coalition of sex worker organisations in the Netherlands, on **March 04th**. The year prior, SWAD had successfully convinced the Dutch banking sector to accept sex workers. We presented the results of our study to **Febelfin**, the Belgian federation of the financial sector, on September 19th, together with Violett and Espace P. On **October 14th**, bilateral discussions started with Belfius Bank, which continued on **December 02nd**.





Following consultation with external experts on the approach and strategy—in the presence of Violet—UTSOPI was given the opportunity to address the **compliance managers** of all major banks at a Febelfin meeting on **November 14th**.

The survey results were published on our website on Monday, December 02nd. The Dutch-language financial newspaper **De Tijd** published an article about the survey, its findings and the responsibility of the banks on Friday, December 06th.

Social secretariats

Before the working framework came into force, some very important questions needed to be answered. How can the working framework be applied in practice? How can sex workers be paid flexibly? What adjustments can be made to working hours? To better understand these issues, UTSOPI visited an erotic massage parlour on **March 06th**. On **April 05th**, UTSOPI contacted the SD Worx social secretariat to propose a collaboration, with a view to jointly answering the many questions raised by the sector.

The entry into force of the new framework was clearly highlighted in communications from all social secretariats across the country. Group S also reached out to UTSOPI to collaborate on facilitating the transition to this new legal framework.

An initial meeting took place in Ghent on **December 11th**, followed by a meeting with the head of Group S's legal team on **December 23rd**. This meeting provided an opportunity to discuss, in particular, what an employer of sex workers should—or should not—mention in a contract, in the interests of the anonymity of a salaried sex worker. The types of flexible working hours that could be considered within the framework of the HoReCa joint committee were also discussed, as well as possible flexible payment methods.

Smart

Smart is a cooperative that allows workers from various sectors to work independently within the secure framework of employee status. Specifically, it offers administrative, accounting, and financial management services that allow workers to invoice for their services while remaining employees of the Smart company (on fixed-term or permanent contracts).

Until December 01st 2024, sex workers had only the option of being self-employed. However, this option is not satisfactory for everyone, as this status is automatically classified as self-employed as a primary occupation if the person does not have more than 50% salaried employment elsewhere. In addition, the administrative and accounting workload is a barrier for many sex workers who are unable to manage these aspects. This is why the services offered by shared companies and business cooperatives such as Smart have quickly become extremely attractive to our sector.

Thus, when on May 03rd 2024, the Belgian Parliament approved the law on the framework for salaried work for sex workers, the way was opened for this possibility. UTSOPI then began negotiations with Smart to include sex work among the activities that could be accommodated there. On **July 08th**, a first meeting brought together UTSOPI, Alias, Espace P and Smart. Since then, UTSOPI has been following up on these negotiations, organising a second meeting on **October 08th** and providing legislative information and details on the needs of the sex worker community in terms of potential use of Smart. While there are still some complexities to be resolved before the cooperative can be opened to sex workers, such as access to professional insurance (discrimination in insurance is still a problem encountered by the sector), UTSOPI welcomes the ethical and principled support from Smart, which has shown a genuine desire to integrate the sex work sector by 2025.

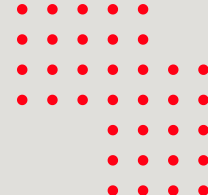
5.5. International level

Informal meeting of EU Justice Ministers

In 2022, ESWA (the European Sex Workers Alliance) held its first congress in Brussels, focusing on the decriminalisation of sex work, which had been approved earlier that year in Belgium. On the final day, a debate was held in the European Parliament, where then-Minister Vincent Van Quickenborne promised to put sex work decriminalisation on the EU agenda during Belgium's 2024 EU presidency. In November 2023, UTSOPI contacted the Ministry of Justice to follow up on this promise.

This led to a brief collaboration with the Ministry of Justice, where an agreement was reached on the main messaging to be presented to EU Justice Ministers. A suitable speaker was chosen with input from UTSOPI. UTSOPI suggested several experts, and together with the Ministry, chose **Irena Konečná**, policy officer at ESWA.





During a Justice and Home Affairs Committee lunch on **January 26th**, where all 27 EU Justice Ministers discussed new ideas and developments, a discussion paper on sex work decriminalisation was distributed, and Irena Konečná gave a speech.

UK-BE high-level meeting

On **January 30th** and **January 31st**, a meeting took place between the Belgian Ministry of Justice and experts from the UK Home Office on sexual violence, sex work and criminal law policy. UTSOPI was invited on **January 31st** to explain the Belgian decriminalisation model and respond to questions from UK experts.

Meeting with BesD, Germany

BesD (Berufsverband erotische und sexuelle Dienstleistungen e.V.) is a German national organisation representing sex workers from all backgrounds and regions. Operating like a professional union, it advocates for fair and dignified working conditions. On **March 12th**, UTSOPI met with BesD to exchange best practices and brainstorm strategies for improving Germany's legal framework for sex workers.

Belgian response to Reem Alsalem's report

Reem Alsalem (Jordan) is the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls. In June, she presented a highly anticipated report on prostitution. Reem Alsalem is known for her critical and often highly controversial positions on the rights of transgender people. In the report presented to the UN, clearly erroneous and misleading information was disseminated about the situation in Belgium. On **June 18th**, the Belgian federal government contacted her to formulate a counter-position, back it up with solid arguments and denounce the misinformation contained in the report. The nine arguments provided by UTSOPI were forwarded to the diplomat stationed in New York and were included in the Belgian statement. The Belgian government has unreservedly defended the decriminalisation of sex work before the United Nations. The same information was shared with our contacts within the Austrian government. The delegations from Belgium, Austria, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland and Greece all criticised the report's one-sided nature and the numerous inaccuracies it contained.

SWAD exchange in Amsterdam, Netherlands

SWAD is an alliance of 22 initiatives and organisations working to reduce stigma around sex work. On invitation from SWAD, UTSOPI's Flemish team visited Amsterdam on **June 02nd** for meetings with window operators in the Red Light District, site visits, and a discussion with the team from the Prostitution Information Center (PIC).

Contact with SOCIEUX+

SOCIEUX+ (EU expertise in social protection, labour and employment) is a technical assistance project group set up at the request of the European Commission. This group supports non-EU countries in developing labour market strategies and policies, institutional and legislative reforms related to employment, and the development of social protection systems.

At the request of a Central American country, SOCIEUX+ contacted our organisation on **September 12th** for an exchange of information on legislation, experts and strategies to be implemented in order to develop a legal framework for sex workers.

High-level meeting, The Hague, Netherlands

On **September 25th**, UTSOPI had the opportunity to inform staff from the Dutch, German and Austrian ministries of justice about legal changes in Belgium. The meeting was organised in The Hague by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security. Daan Bauwens of UTSOPI participated in the meeting at the invitation of the Belgian Federal Public Service Justice.

International meeting, The Hague, Netherlands

On **September 26th**, UTSOPI was invited to the “International Meeting on Sex Work Policy, Sex Worker Empowerment and Combining Sex Work Policy with Anti-Trafficking Efforts,” a study day with representatives from international politics, researchers and representatives from organisations fighting for equal rights for sex workers. This study day was organised at the Museon-Omniversum in The Hague, on the initiative of the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security. In the afternoon, Daan Bauwens of UTSOPI and researcher Joep Rottier of the Dutch think tank Sekswerkexpertise led a workshop on decriminalisation in Belgium and New Zealand.

Symposium “Sex Work, Stigma and Resistance in Times of Repression”, Amsterdam, Netherlands

On **September 27th**, UTSOPI was invited to Amsterdam for a symposium on “sex work in times of repression.” At the symposium, Marjan Wijers, an expert in sex work policy and lawyer, presented her doctoral thesis on sex work from a human rights perspective. Gail Pheterson, founder of the Dutch sex workers' movement and author of the book “The Prostitution Prism,” was also in attendance.

International exchange with Hydra, Berlin, Germany

On **September 30th**, the UTSOPI team welcomed a representative from Hydra, a self-help and advocacy group for sex workers in Berlin. The name refers to a nine-headed sea monster from Greek and Roman mythology. The Hydra employee got to know UTSOPI, participated in the team's activities for a week, and shared her knowledge and experience within our German sister organisation.

Meeting with Amnesty International and Decrim Now, UK

An online meeting took place on **December 05th** between Chiara Capraro from Amnesty International UK and a representative from the international campaign platform Decrim Now, with UTSOPI, to discuss the content of the new legal provisions in our country.

Meeting with Kassandra, Nuremberg, Germany

On **December 06th**, an online meeting took place between UTSOPI and the German organisation Kassandra. This organisation is a point of contact for anyone working as a sex worker or in the sex industry and for anyone interested in the subject of sex work. The association is recognised as a non-profit organisation and has been working for the rights of sex workers since 1987. The association focuses on the legal equivalence of the industry with other professions and on social recognition. The conversation on decriminalisation was recorded and used by Kassandra to widely inform its members about the progress made in Belgium.

5.6. Research

Research is a crucial tool for political advocacy, as it provides the foundation for informed, effective, and responsible policymaking. When conducted with sound methodology, it produces objective, factual data and analysis that help policymakers understand complex issues. Since 2023, UTSOPI has actively invested in research to generate new ideas and approaches that can help policymakers find innovative and more effective solutions to societal challenges.

RAP (Participatory Action-Research) on workplaces in the sex work sector

The need for workspaces

A recurring issue faced by sex workers is the lack of access to spaces that provide decent working conditions. Although the decriminalisation of sex work opens up the legal possibility of renting or acquiring a space for sex work, but

the practicalities of doing so officially remain relatively complicated. Indeed, the opening of commercial spaces is still subject to the approval of mayors and landlords, and cannot be done without the tolerance of the neighbourhood. Furthermore, real estate speculation is making living and working spaces increasingly inaccessible to the least privileged urban populations.

So how can sex workers exist in a decriminalised context? How can we measure the impact of decriminalisation if the lack of choice in places to work continues to create illegal or unsatisfactory working conditions for sex workers? Furthermore, one of the main vectors of exploitation in the sector is through workspaces. Sex workers often find themselves agreeing to rental conditions or working arrangements that are not entirely suitable for them, rather than not being able to work at all. Thus, the lack of adequate options in the available workspaces weighs on the well-being, autonomy, and safety of sex workers.

For this reason, UTSOPI has chosen to develop **participatory action-research** (RAP) on sex work spaces in Belgium, in order to assess the current situation and the needs of sex workers. The aim is also to develop, in collaboration with sex worker communities, prototypes for self-managed sex work spaces, or even cooperatives.

Process and objectives

In 2024, a team of researchers was assembled to develop this project. Ana Dresler (urban planner, ULB), Julie Sojcher (criminologist, ULB), Julien Charles and Pierre Demotier (social scientists, CESEP) are currently working with UTSOPI.

The first part of phase one consists of qualitative interviews with sex workers active throughout Belgium in a variety of settings (behind windows, private homes, love hotels, temporary rentals, etc.). So far, **22 interviews** have been conducted, yielding important initial insights. An additional 28 interviews will be conducted in 2025. Transcripts and analyses of these interviews will provide an initial overview of the difficulties and concrete needs of sex workers in the field.



Figure 22. Announcement shared via our social media.



The second phase of the RAP project will involve thematic focus groups with sex workers (late 2025 / early 2026). The third phase will focus on experimenting with spaces that align with the working models developed during the focus groups (2026).

The goal of the RAP project is to strengthen and support sex workers' self-determination by setting up and documenting different types of shared workspaces—ranging from temporary to more permanent solutions. Practical tools such as guides and project support will be made available to sex workers by UTSOPI at the end of the RAP process.

6. A new chapter: UTSOPI in Liège

UTSOPI defends the interests of all sex workers in Belgium. Our political actions primarily take place at the federal level: Justice, Social Affairs, Employment and Public Health are federal competencies in our country.

To fulfil our role as a voice and expertise center on sex work—through all the necessary activities such as mobilizing sex workers, awareness-raising/two-way information sharing, and political advocacy—we have been able to rely on the growing support of the community governments of Flanders and Brussels.

In 2024, a new stream of international funding allowed us to open a new chapter for our organisation south of the language border. Thanks to the logistical support of our socio-medical partner Espace P, we opened a new branch in the city of Liège and launched numerous activities there. We hope our contribution to the well-being of sex workers in Wallonia will be recognised and that policymakers will give us the opportunity to further develop in the region.

In what follows, we describe all the actions we have taken to bring our new branch to life, beginning with a **launch event** at the offices of Espace P on **April 26th 2024**, together with the full UTSOPI team and sex workers living and working in the city.

Community meals for sex workers, organised by Espace P

First and foremost, sex workers must know that we are here, who we are, and what we can do for them. Thanks to the community meals organised by Espace P Liège on **May 23rd**, **October 17th** and **December 12th**, we were able to introduce ourselves to a growing number of sex workers living or working in Liège.

Listen To You Liège

Starting in June 2024, we organized a total of **7 Listen To You sessions** in Liège. These Listen To You meetings allowed us to establish contact with **33 sex workers** living or working in Liège—a promising and encouraging beginning. Among the individuals we met, 4 decided to become members of UTSOPI.

The questions raised and topics discussed during these LTYs included:

- How to claim money from a client who refuses to pay;
- How to cope with social isolation as a sex worker;
- Questions about the new labour legislation framework;
- How to deal with aging as a sex worker;
- Personal life stories;
- Questions related to sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

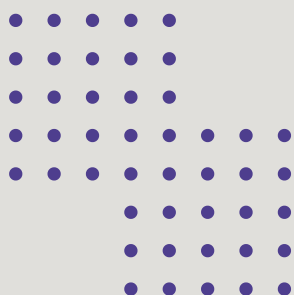
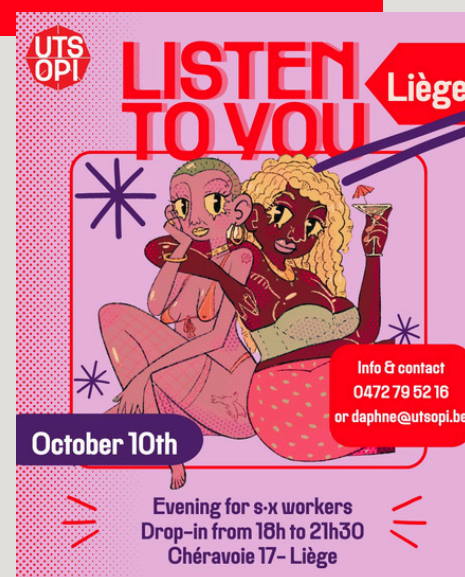


Figure 23. Image for our Listen to You in Liège.



Meetings with the Liège associative sector

It is very important that other organisations (with or without the same target audience) also know who we are. To that end, we actively participated in five events in Liège – all of which are listed in Chapter 3 of this annual report. We also took the opportunity to introduce ourselves to the Liège associative sector.



➤ **May 23rd – Meeting with ICAR Wallonia:**

ICAR Wallonia provides counselling services for sex workers and vulnerable women. They operate in Liège and Seraing, where their offices are located. Therefore, we decided to meet them to announce our arrival in Liège and to explain our different missions.

➤ **May 30th – Meeting with the media SCAN-R:**

Following the TPG's static Pride (see chapter 3), we were contacted by the media SCAN-R to offer writing workshops in non-mixed groups to sex workers.

➤ **July 03rd – Meeting with Centre S:**

The Centre for Sexual Health in Liège offers free prevention materials, as well as testing for HIV, hepatitis and STIs, with the possibility of anonymity. They also offer medical, psycho-sexological and social counselling. The organisation also conducts out-of-home actions among priority target groups, such as sensitisation with peer volunteers, anonymous rapid testing and training for (future) professionals. Because of the strong intersection between our target groups, we contacted them to discuss possible cooperation on future projects.

➤ **September 12th – Meeting with the Relais Social of the Land of Liège:**

This is a public service. The Relais Social is a partnership that fights against social exclusion, poverty and homelessness. During their street work, they come into contact with people doing survival sex work, so we thought it would be useful to meet them with a view to possible cooperation.

➤ **September 19th – Meeting with Barricade:**

Barricade is a space for individual and collective emancipation, a self-managed cultural venue, bringing together different forms of expression. The non-profit association supports itself on its bookstore Entre-Temps, its activities, publications, convivial spaces (café, terrace, exhibition hall, etc.), its partners, public and association and activist network. We met with them, because they make several spaces available to associations committed to activism. These spaces can be used free of charge for exhibitions, info sessions, colloquia, etc..

➤ **November 13th – Meeting with the TransPédéGouines:**

The TransPédéGouines is an LGBTQIA+ collective from Liège dedicated to creating events and cultural spaces by and for LGBTQIA+ people in the city of Liège. Having already participated in some of their events, we decided to formalise the collaboration by inviting them to our premises in Liège.

➤ **November 05th and December 11th – Participation in the Liège Platform for the Promotion of Relational, Affective and Sexual Health:**

Founded in 2000 by the Liège Centre for Health Promotion (CLPS), the Liège Platform for the Promotion of Relational, Affective and Sexual Health brings together professionals from different sectors. The active members of the platform came from some 30 associations within the psycho-medical-social sector and from government departments. These meetings aim to break down walls between sectors, share resources, exchange good practices, coordinate actions, and disseminate coherent messages, etc. In addition, the CLPS promotes partnerships between schools and social actors (such as through an address guide, school needs assessments, and a catalogue of educational resources) in the areas of addiction prevention (PAA) and relational, affective and sexual education (EVRAS).

We were first invited to participate in these platforms on **September 05th**. Indeed, UTSOPI was invited as an expert on sex work, together with Espace P, to speak on the introduction of a course at ULB on the topic of consent. According to that introduction, sex workers would not be able to give consent once the sexual relationship is for payment. Naturally, we seized this opportunity to speak from a perspective of destigmatising sex work.

Outreach

Outreach in zones where sex work takes place consists of approaching sex workers directly. This outreach has several objectives, but one of the most important is to build relationships of trust.



In total, we did only **three outreach moments** in the province of Liège, using our Liège antenna as a starting point. These moments were mainly aimed at introducing UTSOPI, explaining our actions and – above all – giving sex workers our contact details.

They took place on the 'Chaussée de l'Amour' on **October 24th** (9 sex workers) and in rue Marnix on **October 17th** (10 sex workers). A smaller outreach took place on **November 21st** (10 sex workers) in rue Marnix, to inform sex workers about an upcoming meeting (see below).

We also organised 'virtual outreach' on the Quartier Rouge website to inform Liège sex workers about our presence in Espace P premises, as well as about our events. In this way, we were able to reach **about 50 sex workers**.

Political meeting (Seraing): November 21st

This meeting, organised in collaboration with Espace P Liège, aimed to bring sex workers from the Marnix street and the owners around the table to discuss the new regulations that prohibit sex workers from sleeping in their work premises between 01h and 06h in the morning. This meeting followed an earlier meeting in June 2024 between the local police, Espace P, ICAR Wallonia, the sex workers themselves and the city of Seraing. **Four sex workers** participated in this meeting and shared their views on the situation.



7. Educational role of the organisation

Student requests

It is important for our organisation to engage with students in the context of their theses, both from a strategic and a social perspective. By engaging with students in the context of their theses, the organisation contributes to the **dissemination of knowledge** and **awareness**. Students are often future policy makers, humanitarian workers, researchers or journalists. Informing them now about the realities of sex work helps break down prejudices and, in the long term, creates more understanding and nuance in public debate. Students working on issues such as human rights, sexual well-being, work, and gender can use their research to contribute to scientific knowledge that strengthens the functioning of society. In addition, their findings can influence policymakers, the general public, or other organisations. UTSOPI thus **strengthens its social and academic visibility**.

Unfortunately, our organisation lacks the time and resources to respond to all student requests. The number of student requests increases every year. In 2024, we received **72 student requests**. We were only able to respond favorably in **25 cases**. The students came from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), the Université Libre de Bruxelles, the Université Catholique de Louvain, KU Leuven, the University of Ghent, the University of Mons, the Karel De Grote Hogeschool and the Artevelede Hogeschool.

UTSOPI also responded to requests from students outside Belgium. These included the University of Oxford (United Kingdom), Birkbeck University (United Kingdom), Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (United States), Fordham University New York (United States), Di Tella University (Argentina), University of Strasbourg (France), University of Deusto (Spain) and Lund University (Sweden).


In a very rare move, UTSOPI took the time in May to meet with three students from Sint-Lievenscollege in Ghent. As part of their final exam for their last year of secondary school, they had been asked to find arguments against the thesis that “brothels should become public enterprises.”

Special mention goes to Laura Mathelot, who first contacted us in 2023 as part of her law thesis at the École supérieure des affaires de Namur. Laura chose not to stop her research after submitting her thesis in June 2023. She decided to write a book on decriminalisation and labour law for sex workers. For this reason, several meetings were held with UTSOPI, including two in 2024.

On-site visits

In certain cases, UTSOPI is happy to welcome groups of students on study trips. This is the case, for example, for groups coming from France. Given the hostile political climate towards sex workers in this country, it is interesting to talk to students in person and engage in conversation about the particularly negative effects of French legislation.

On **March 18th**, we welcomed **28 students** studying Social Innovation at the University of Mons. This is an annual event, supervised by our ally and anthropologist Pascale Jamoulle. On **May 03rd**, we welcomed **21 students** studying for a professional degree in social, socio-cultural and socio-educational activities (IUT Bobigny, Sorbonne Paris Nord University).



On **September 18th**, we welcomed **16 students** from the “Certificate of Aptitude for Management and Social Intervention Unit Manager” training program (IRTS Parmentier, France). This program involved professionals who were already working in the sector and who often had experience supporting sex workers in the French context. Finally, on **October 30th**, we welcomed **16 students** in their final year of the specialised educator training program at the École de Formation Psycho-Pédagogique (EFPP) in Paris.

Internships

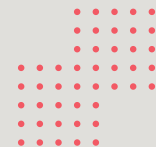
Interns often bring **new perspectives, skills, and energy**. They can contribute to research, communication, administrative tasks, or policy preparation. It is a **reciprocal relationship**: the organisation supports the student's learning process, while the student strengthens its daily activities.

In 2024, we were able to offer an internship of this type to two criminology students from the VUB. During their internship, they focused on the organisation's information and awareness-raising work. The students conducted research and developed useful guides for sex workers. First, the interns worked on a guide that raises awareness among sex workers about their rights under the **sexual penal code**. They then continued to work on **the flag system for sex workers** (see above). Finally, the interns created a guide on exploring, communicating, and asserting **personal boundaries**. A focus group was organised on **May 16th**, during which three active members of the organisation gave their opinions on this final guide. The guides will be published in 2025.

In September 2024, our team was joined by a master's student in International Relations (Peace and Conflict Studies) from the University of Turin, who holds a bachelor's degree in Intercultural Communication. Of Italian-Albanian origin, her mission was to assess the situation of Albanian sex workers in the Northern District.

UTSOPI also assisted an intern from the VUB who created a series of awareness-raising videos on sex work as part of her internship at the Huis van de Mens (Brussels).





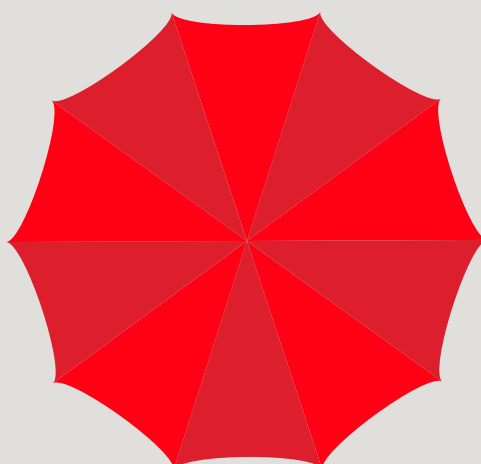
Partnership in the field of qualitative criminological research VUB

As part of an internship by a VUB student in 2023, UTSOPI began exploratory research into ways of **improving working conditions in the porn industry**. The VUB intern worked with people active in the industry, including performers and producers. The renowned intimacy coordinator Philine Janssens (who worked on the set of “Knokke Off,” among others) was also closely involved in the project.

Pornography actors are also sex workers. UTSOPI therefore also defends their interests. In fact, we have a number of performers among our members. Working conditions in the sector are important to us. However, to date, our organisation has no funding for this sub-project. Although we started in 2023, we had not yet been able to conduct a qualitative survey of performers or producers by mid-2024.

This changed thanks to a collaboration with the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB). In the fall of 2024, UTSOPI worked as a field partner with two groups of five students from the VUB's criminology program. They were tasked with conducting qualitative interviews. The first group focused on performers, while the second focused on producers. UTSOPI contacted the interviewees and provided an introduction to the students. The students conducted the interviews and produced the transcripts. As part of this project, five performers and four producers were interviewed.

The research results were shared by the VUB students with UTSOPI. They will serve as a starting point for the work of an **internal working group**, composed of several members with experience in the pornographic sector.



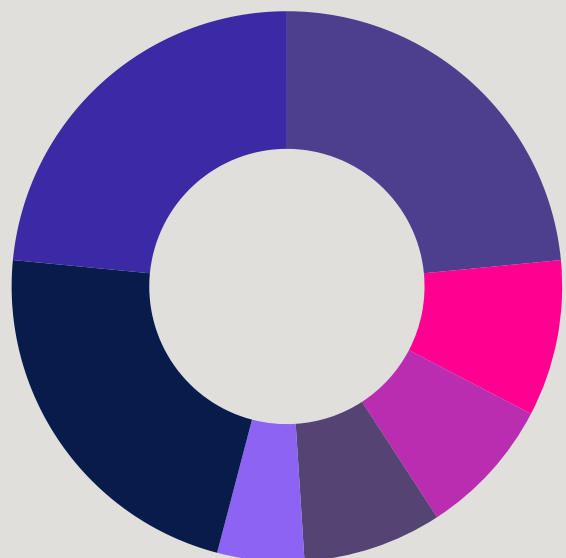
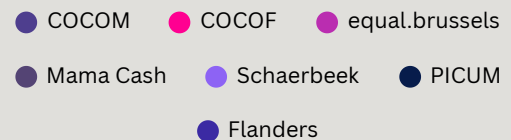
8. Funding

In 2024, we received approximately **€366,000** in grants. A significant portion (21.7%) of this funding came from the international organisation PICUM, which defends the labour rights of people with precarious residence status. These grants have, in particular, supported our efforts to monitor voting and the implementation of labour rights for sex workers. The grants were also used to establish the new branch in Liège, in order to expand our network in Belgium and be closer to sex workers, regardless of their work or residence status.

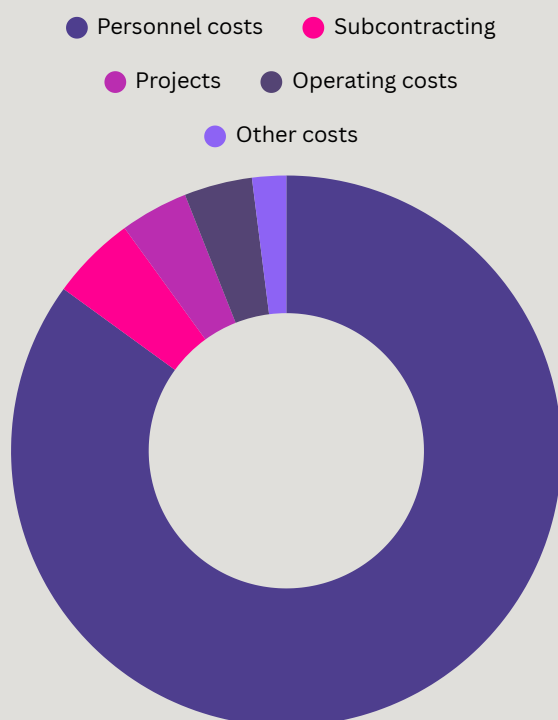
Subsidies from the Brussels-Capital Region (COCOM, COCOF, and equal.brussels) account for 41.1% of the total and are used for our general operations, our activities in the Northern District of Brussels, and specific research and awareness-raising projects. The subsidy from the Flemish Community represents 23.5% and is used to finance all our actions aimed at the Flemish community. Our actions in the Northern District of Brussels and awareness-raising among local actors in Schaerbeek are partly financed by the municipality of Schaerbeek. Finally, 8.2% of our grants come from the international feminist donor Mama Cash, which supports our general operations, with a focus on our political actions aimed at improving the legal status of sex workers.

Subsidies 2024

365 811€



Costs repartition 2024



As in previous years, most of our subsidies (85.4%) were used to cover personnel costs (net salaries, social security contributions, employer contributions, vacation pay, end-of-year bonuses, insurance, etc.). The second largest item of expenditure was subcontracting (5.1%). This includes, for example, accounting costs, but also the costs of the annual audit of our accounts, the management of our website and the graphic design of our educational materials. A significant portion of outsourcing also consists of allowances for the volunteer work of members who are involved in organising our activities.

