

Women and Equalities Committee inquiry – Reform of the Gender Recognition Act (GRA).

Written submission from the English Collective of Prostitutes, November 2020

The ECP is an organisation of sex workers, working both on the street and in premises, with a national and international network with sister organisations in Thailand and the US. Since 1975, we have campaigned for the decriminalisation of prostitution, for sex workers' rights and safety, and for resources to enable people to get out of prostitution if they want to.

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As a sex worker and women's organisation, our original submission to the Government inquiry on the Gender Recognition Act (2004). supported reforms that –

1. Are based on a self-determination model which requires no medical diagnosis or presentation of evidence for trans people to legally change their gender. This would be in line with international human rights best practice (such as in Argentina, Ireland, Malta, and Norway).
2. Recognizes non-binary people
3. Gives legal recognition to those under 18.

Trans people, especially trans women go into the sex industry for the same reason as other women – because of poverty and lack of financial alternatives.

As women - cis and trans - we share the same experiences of sexism, poverty, and violence. For trans women these experiences are compounded by transphobia in similar ways to how racism compounds discrimination for those of us who are migrant/women of colour.

The recommendations of the Women and Equalities Committee were reduced by the government to the issue of reform of the GRA and the "debate" then framed in such a way as to encourage and promote a transphobic witch-hunt.

The government stood by or encouraged misinformation, fearmongering and [lies](#) which created a hateful and hostile environment, especially for trans women. We note in particular, the intentional misrepresentation of the impact GRA reform would have on other areas of law, implying that it would remove or threaten protections in the [Equality Act 2020](#).

As a direct or indirect result, reports of anti-trans hate crimes have surged. One report from the LGBT anti-violence charity Galop revealed that [four out of five trans people](#) in the UK have experienced a hate crime in the past 12 months. yet only one in seven reported to the police. Seventy per cent said this was because they felt that the police could not help them. A third said they expected the police to be transphobic, while another third said they experienced too many transphobic incidents to be able to report them all. Trans women were particularly targeted in a number of areas.

The outcome after years of consultation and delays, is that the government has backed down from measures to protect trans people from discrimination and abuse and proposed only minimal administrative changes to the GRA. This is despite overwhelming public support for change. Stonewall commented that *"the government has sufficient evidence, provided by a significant number of trans people, which means there is an opportunity for them to act now."*

Instead, the government has used a vocal minority of women who call themselves feminists, who claim that to protect women's single-sex spaces, trans women must be barred from entering them, to justify its position. In doing so it has strengthened and given legitimacy to this view that at its foundation denies that trans women are women. These same women have also voraciously campaigned to increase the criminalisation of sex work and horrifyingly formed [unholy alliances](#) with right-wing religious fundamentalists in the process.

As an organisation, we have direct experience of anti-trans campaigners viciously attacking trans sex workers – both online and in public spaces. One migrant trans woman in our network recently spoke about her experience of violence and discrimination only to be investigated and vilified online – including images being taken from her sex work profile and posted alongside sickening abuse from so-called feminists.

As a women's organisation, we strongly object to trans women being characterised and targeted as a threat to cis women's safety – often premised on the view that trans women are not “real women”. This is a dangerous distraction from the real threat to (cis and trans) [women's safety](#) - for example: how rape and other sexual violence is systematically downgraded and dismissed (to the degree that campaigners have commented that rape has effectively been decriminalised); the [decimation of services](#) for women survivors; how benefits, wages, and every available resource [have been cut](#), which has left women poorer and consequently more vulnerable to exploitation and violence. Those who have focussed their campaigning against trans women have let the government off the hook from its devastating anti-women policies starting with austerity cuts -- 86% of which have [targeted women](#).

We join others in demanding action and holding the government to account on GRA reform, but also on wider issues – the crisis in trans healthcare, the escalating violence, widespread discrimination in the provision of services as well as employment and housing which leaves trans women with few other options than sex work to earn a living – as documented in the Women and Equalities 2016 [parliamentary inquiry](#)

The same women who in the name of feminism claim to know better than sex workers what is good for us are the ones who claim the right to decide that trans women are not the “right kind of woman”. Their elitism and separatism weakens all of us in our fight against violence, poverty, discrimination and injustice.

Women of colour [have also raised](#) that: *“In the UK, the ‘gender-critical’ anti-trans lobby is populated by cisgender, predominantly white women, many of whom hold powerful positions within the UK’s gender-based violence sector”.*

Support for trans rights and GRA reform in the UK is growing, from the [Trade Union Congress](#) (which said that the government has “used trans rights as a ‘wedge issue’ to divide working class people.”) to the British Medical Association. And as the growing international Black Lives Matter movement demonstrated, in its [determined inclusion](#) of trans people, there is no room anywhere for bigotry.

We enclose here, a link to our [original statement](#) on the Gender Recognition Act reform, which addresses some of the issues raised in the terms of reference of this inquiry, such as the right to self-determination, lowering the age limit to apply for a Gender Recognition Certificate and the removal of fees.