

Housing Exclusion among Sex Workers in Brussels

- quantitative part -

housing exclusion among sex workers

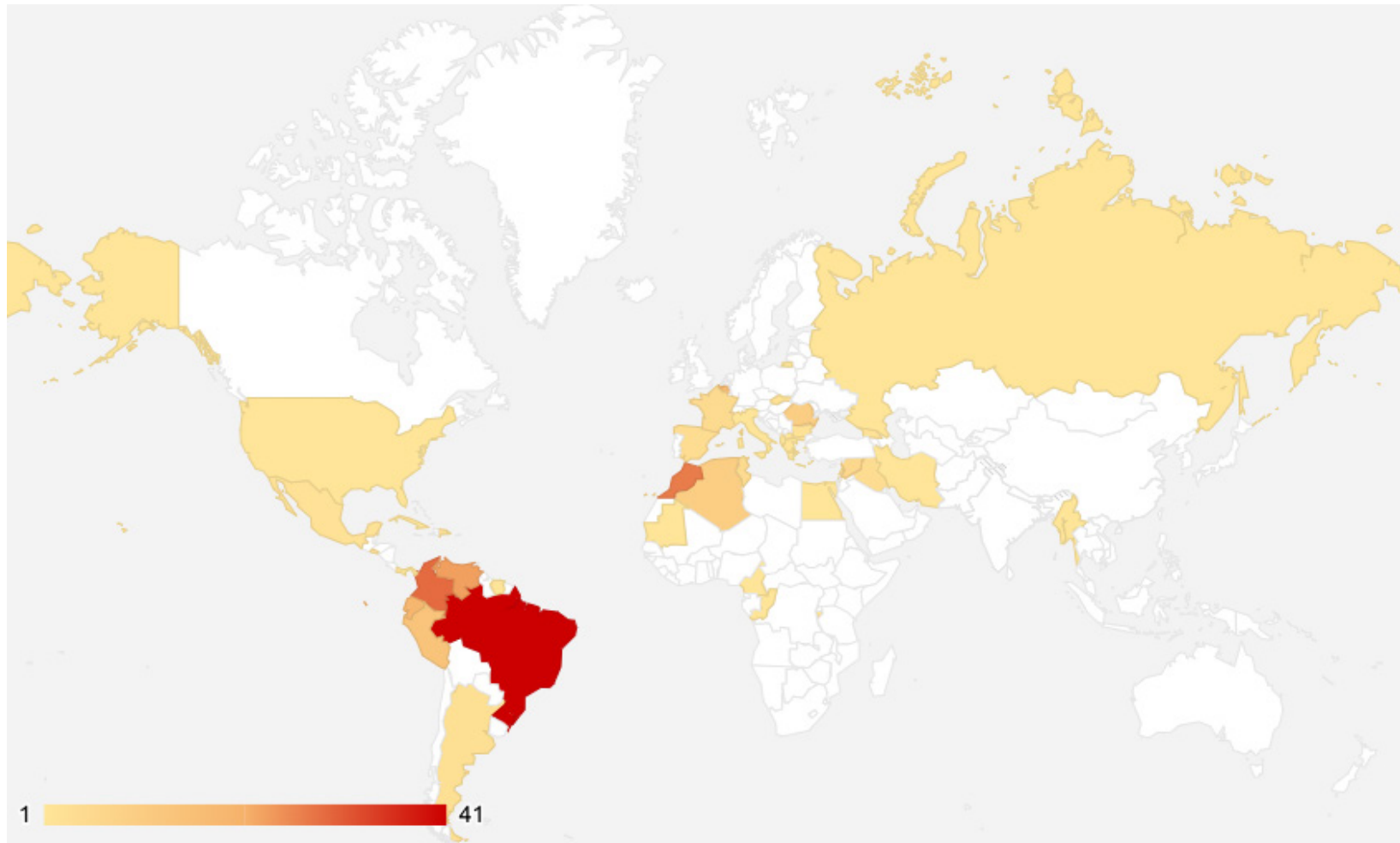
- Which sex workers? Trans* individuals and men having sexual relations with other men in exchange for money or services.
 - Specific target: Alias' beneficiaries, which mostly means people who live in precarious conditions
 - Wide definition of sex work that includes people who used to do sex work
 - Research funded by the Fondation Roi Baudoin
- Objectives
 - To analyse housing exclusion and the impact on living conditions;
 - To understand the reasons of non take-up of services for homeless people
 - To identify the obstacles to access to stable and adequate housing
 - To identify and analyse the informal alternative strategies used by sex-workers to find housing
 - To better understand the pathways of beneficiaries temporarily housed with third parties

housing exclusion among sex workers

- Methodology based on
 - The analysis of quantitative data of 2023
 - Interviews with approx. 20 beneficiaries.
- A steering committee that includes academics and field workers gives advice and accompanies the researchers.

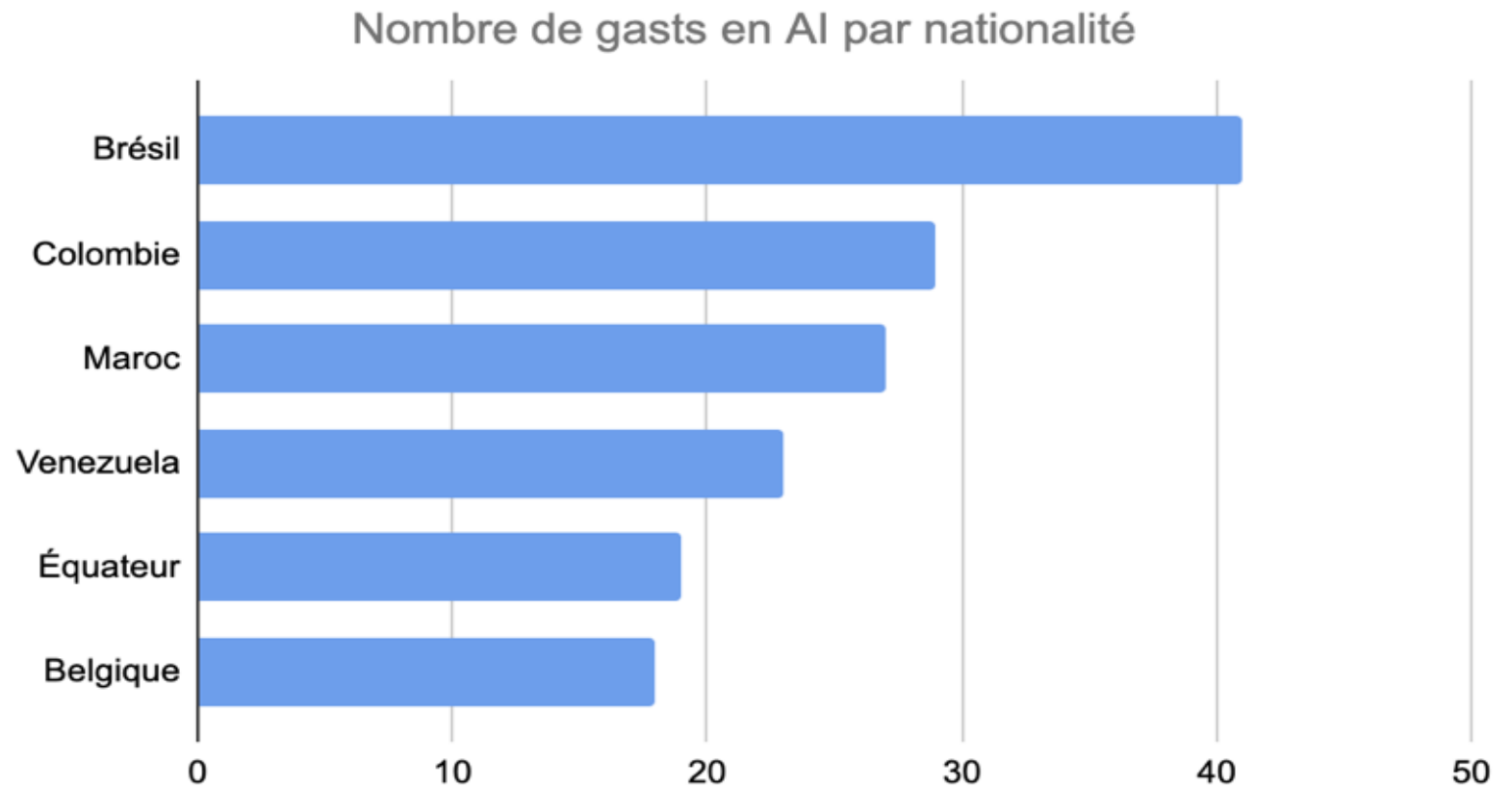
demographic data (social support)

- 59.3 MSM, 40.7% trans* individuals
- 55.6% from Latin America, 18.4% from Europe, 17.6% from North Africa



demographic data (social support)

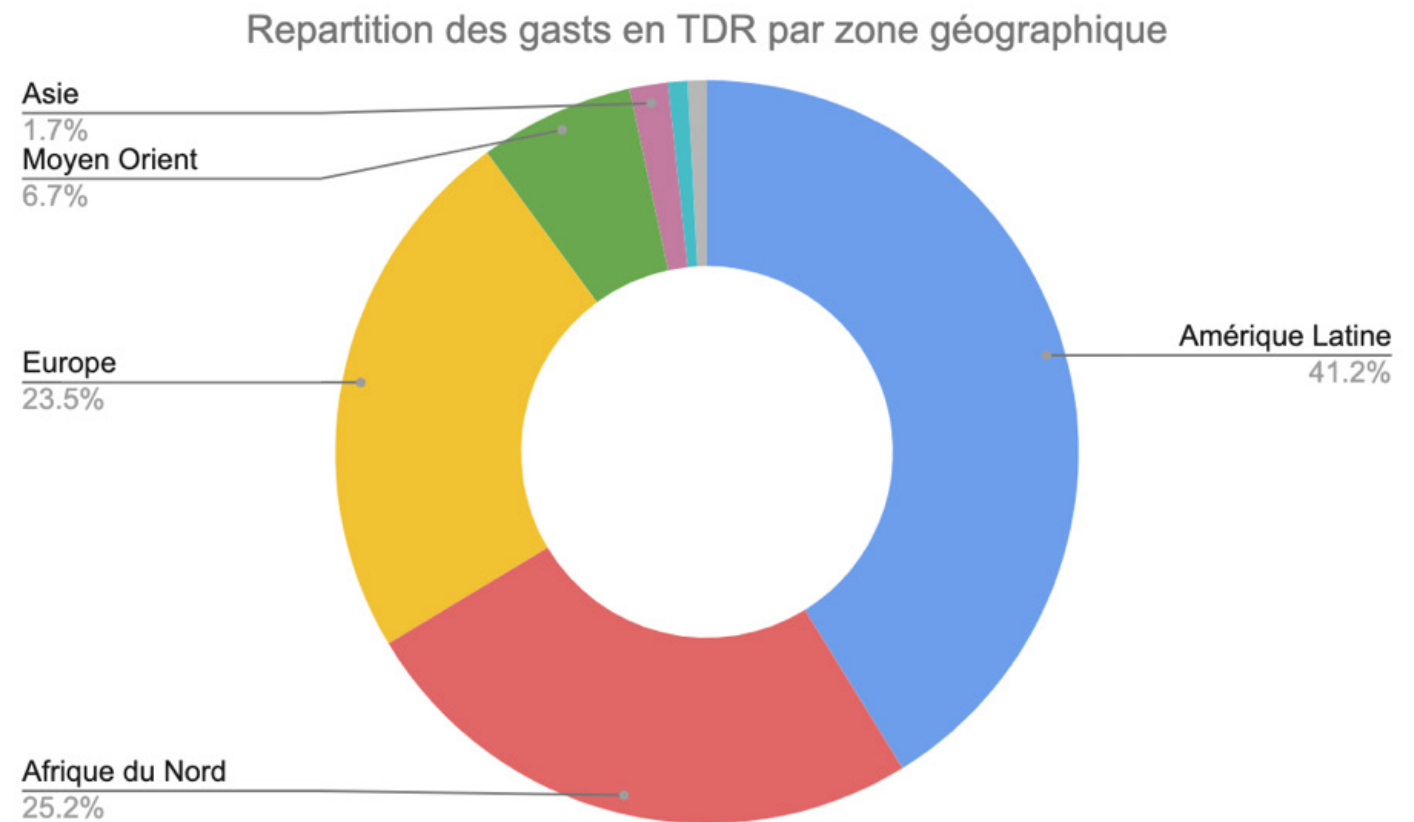
- Average age: 33.3 years
 - more than 2 beneficiaries out of 3 have between 25 and 39 years old



N : 263, year : 2023

demographic data (street work)

- The 3 nationalities most represented are Ecuadorian (17.6%), Moroccan (15.1%) and Brazilian (10.9%)
- Average age: 37.1 years old

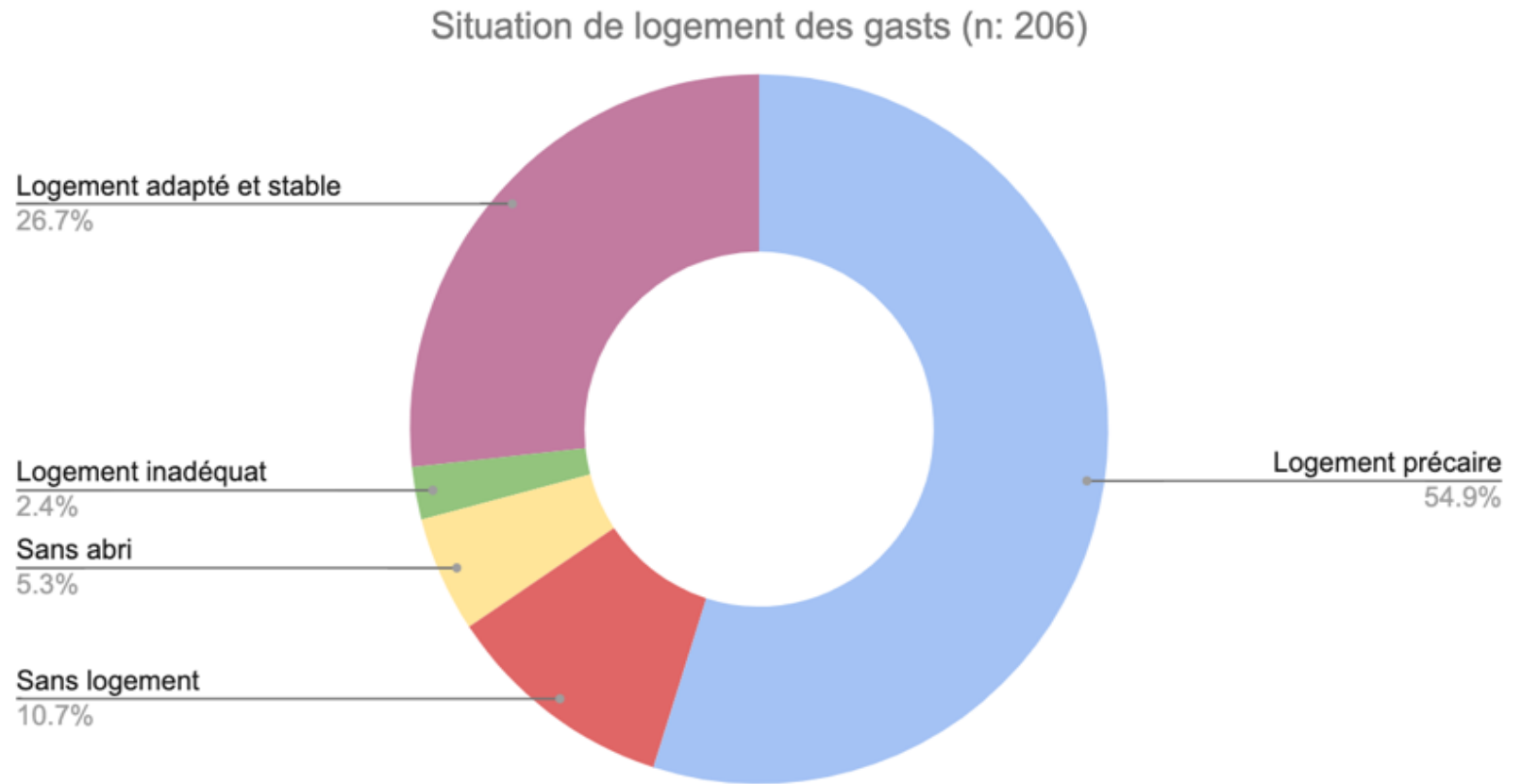


housing as a main challenge

- In 2023, 1466 interventions with 263 beneficiaires
 - 184 beneficiaries (70%) punctual support
 - 44 beneficiaries (16,7%) regular support
 - 35 beneficiaries (13,3%) intensive support
- In 393 interventions out of 1466 (26,8%), beneficiaires asked support in relation to housing.

Social data (housing)

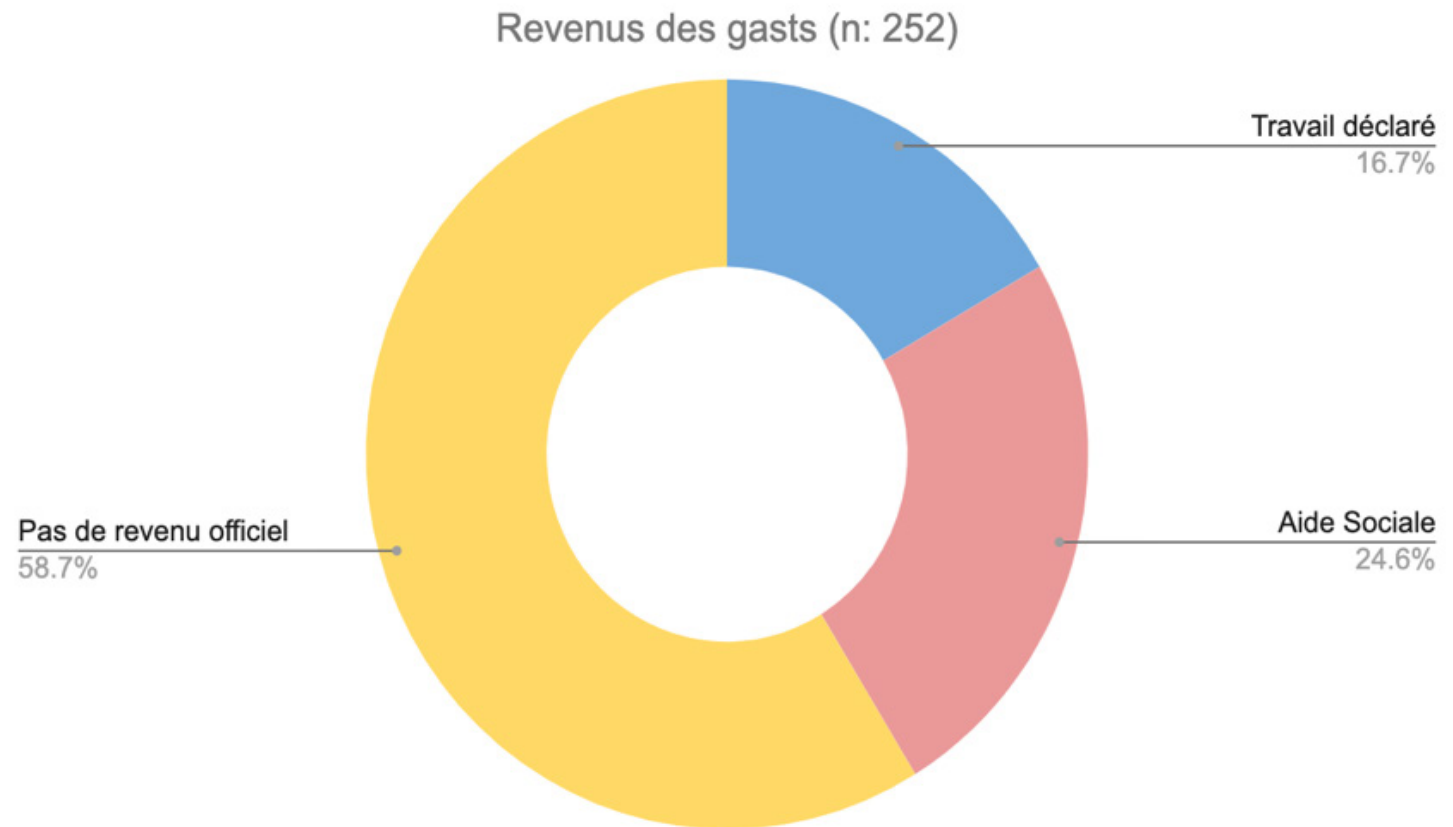
- In relation to 2022, increase of beneficiaries in precarious housing (from 49.2% to 54.9%)



year : 2023

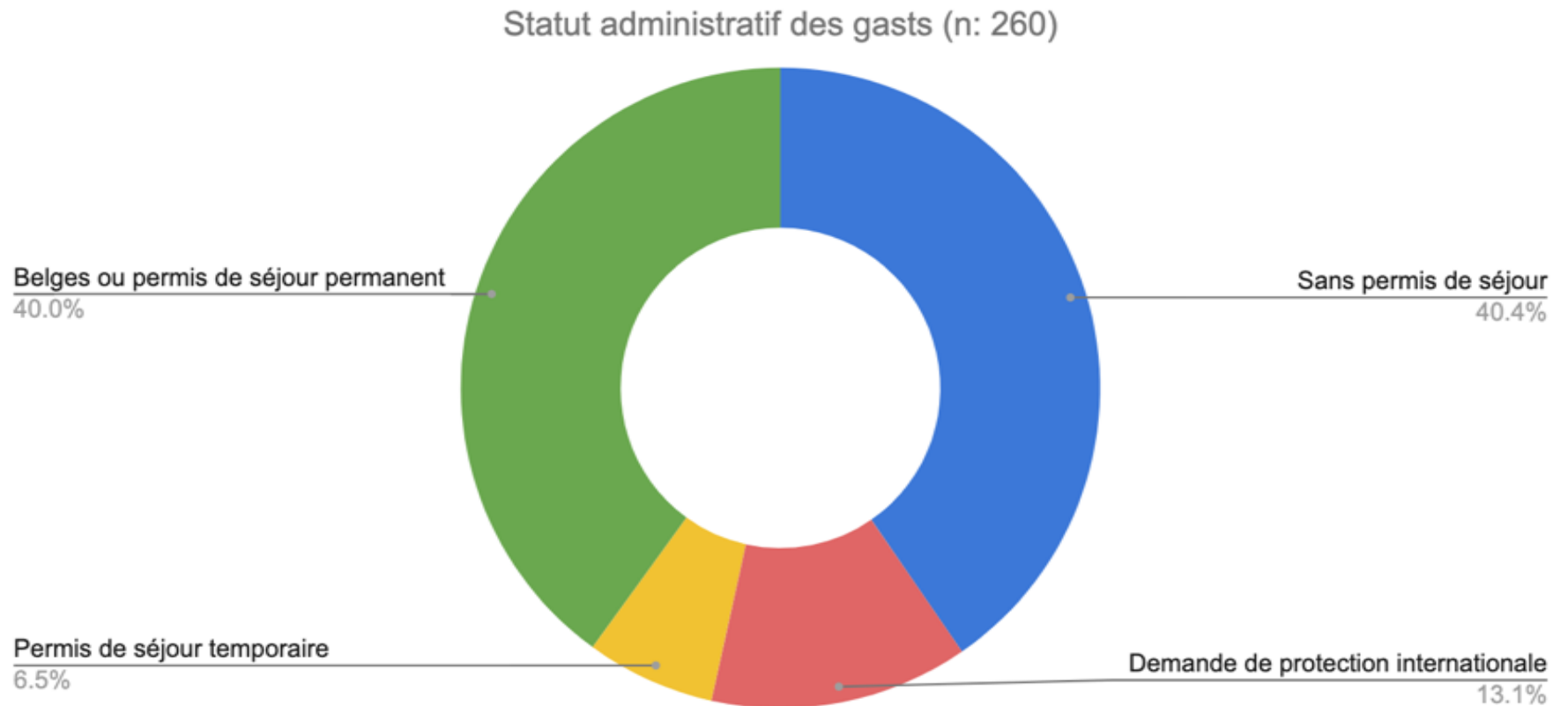
Social data (income)

- 9 out of 10 beneficiaries without official income are homeless – 69.2% live in precarious housing



Social data (residence permit)

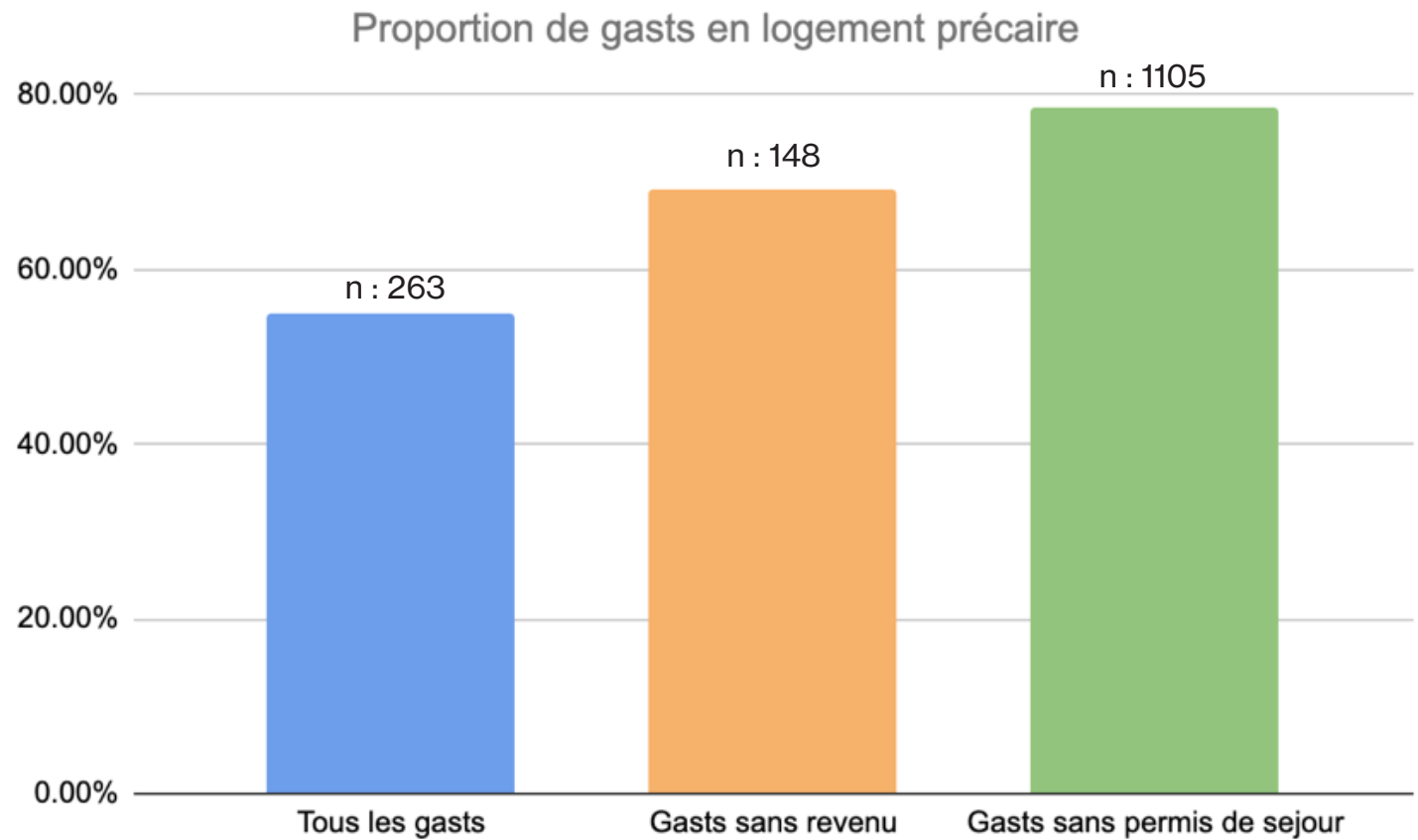
- Among the beneficiaries without residence permit, almost 4 out of 5 live in precarious housing



year : 2023

Precarious housing

- Out of 30 asylum seekers of whom we know the housing situation, only 8 (26,7%) live in a reception centre



Housing Exclusion among Sex Workers in Brussels

- qualitative part -

qualitative part

context

- Ongoing qualitative part (April - November 2024) with 20-30 sex workers to be interviewed
- Purposive and theoretical sampling
- Type of interview : semi-structured / open interview
- Duration : 1 h - 2 h
- Focus on understanding the trajectories and different types of housing and/or homelessness encountered since the arrival in Belgium.
- Themes :
 - Current housing situation, housing trajectory,
 - access to medical services, social services and other resources,
 - relation housing and sex work,
 - recommendations

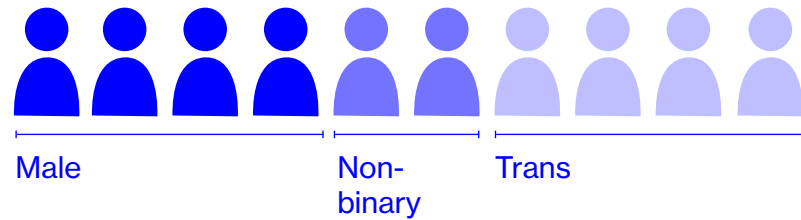
limits

- Different migratory backgrounds (Latin America & Maghreb countries)
- Sex workers are in different stages of the 'arrival process'
- Interviewees are exercising their work in different forms and spaces
- Differences in male and trans sex work
- Focus on housing issues : positive aspects less present

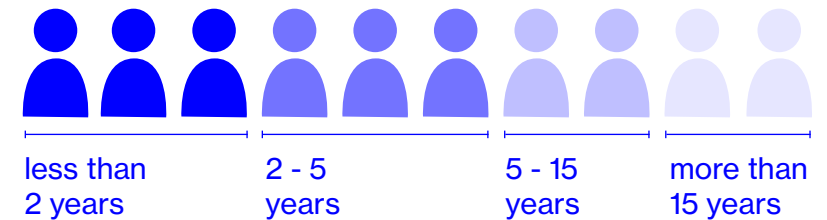
socio-demographics of the sample

Current state of the 10 interviewees (sample as of July 2024)

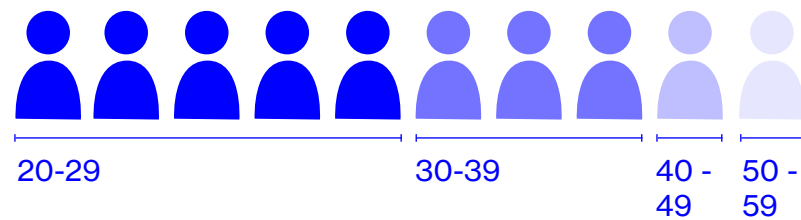
gender



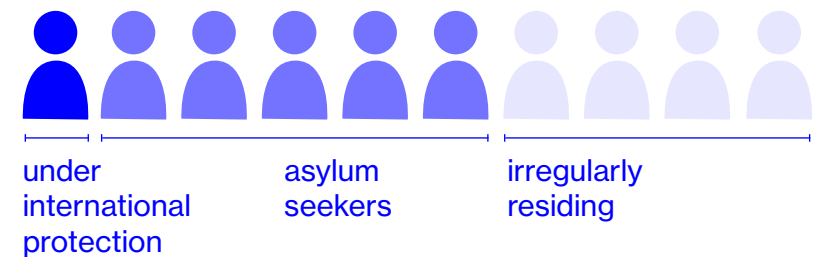
in Belgium since ...



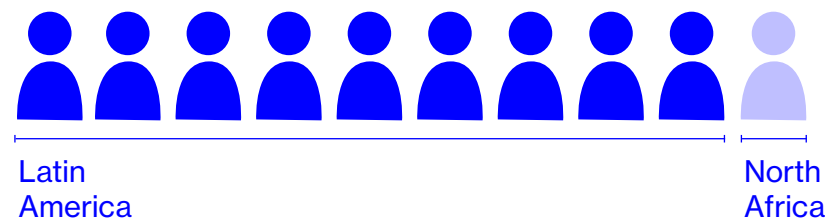
age



official status



origin

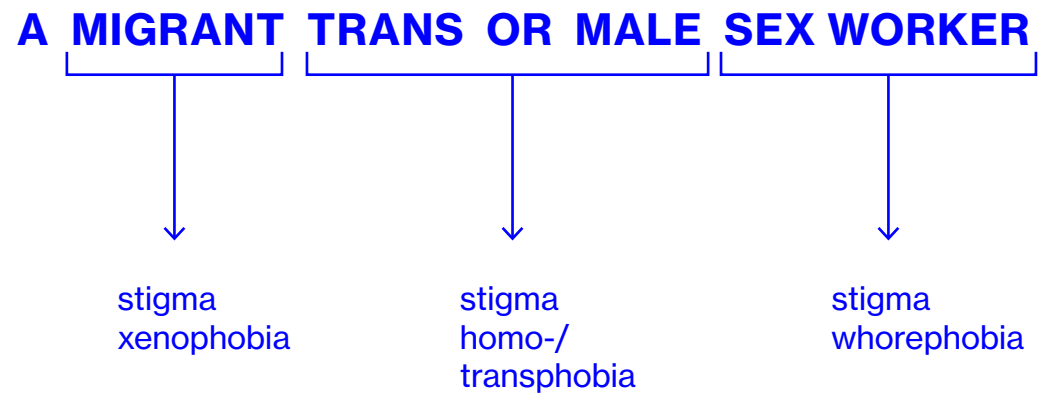


socio-demographics of the sample

Current state of the 10 interviewees (sample as of July 2024)

- Current housing situation:
 - 1/10 receiving long-term support in adequate housing
 - 1/10 in a reception center for asylum seekers
 - 1/10 in a non-recognised accommodation for homeless people
 - 5/10 in insecure accommodation (1 with no legal tenancy, 1 with third parties, 1 in a working apartment, 2 in an AirBnB)
 - 2/10 in unfit housing
- All people interviewed have gone through very different housing situations
- Administrative status changed over time for most of the people interviewed
- Official income: only one person interviewed, the one who has obtained refugee status, receives a minimum income.

multiple stigma



housing situation of interviewees (based on ethos)

		Operational category	Living situation		
Conceptual category	roofless	1	People living rough	1.1	Public space or external space
		2	People in an emergency accommodation	2.1	Night shelter
	houseless	3	People in accommodation for the homeless	3.1	Homeless hostel
				3.2	Temporary accommodation
				3.3	Transitional supported accommodation
		4	People in Women's Shelter	4.1	Women's shelter accommodation
		5	People in accommodation for immigrants	5.1	Temporary accommodation/reception centres
				5.2	Migrant workers accommodation
		6	People due to be released from institutions	6.1	Penal institutions
	6.2			Medical institutions	
	6.3			Children's institutions/homes	
	7	People receiving longer-term support (due to homelessness)	7.1	Residential care for older homeless people	
			7.2	Supported accommodation for formerly homeless people	
insecure	8	People living in insecure accommodation	8.1	Temporarily with family / friends	
			8.2	No legal (sub)tenancy	
			8.3	Illegal occupation of land	
	9	People living under threat of eviction	9.1	Legal orders enforced (rented)	
9.2			Re-possession orders (owned)		
10	People living under threat of violence	10.1	Police recorded incidents		
inadequate	11	People living in temporary/non-conventional structures	11.1	Mobile homes	
			11.2	Non-conventional building	
			11.3	Temporary structure	
	12	People living in unfit housing	12.1	Occupied dwellings unfit for habitation	
13	People living in extreme over-crowding	13.1	Highest national norm of overcrowding		

LEGEND

blue = current situation of one or more interviewees

light blue = past situation of one or more interviewees

grey = situation not encountered

roofless : people living rough (public or external space)

at least 4 out of 10 interviewees

- Reasons for living rough :
 - Issues with the landlord or third person living in the accommodation
 - Payment issues
- Encountered issues :
 - Lack of knowledge about supportive associations
 - Homophobia
 - Lack of public shelters open during the night

*[There was] a mess with this girl who brought me from Brazil and some of her friends. And then, I didn't really understand, I think I was only 100 € short of paying for a week [...]
[The owner] told me I had to leave, so I went and left. I stayed on the street, I slept on the street for a day.*

The flats are delivered at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. So if I have left [my friends house after a disagreement] at dawn, I have to sleep in the street, literally. I already stayed at the train stations. [...] At 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning they take us out of the station. So you can't sleep in the train station. So you have to wake up in the street, with your suitcases, and wait until the next day.

*I used to sleep on the street a lot of times, for example, there was that house there, that I used to stay in. But I couldn't stay there because there was already too much stuff there. [...]
Sometimes I was very tired too, I'd fall asleep... on any pavement I stopped on and everything.*

houseless : reception center for asylum seekers

at least 3 out of 10 interviewees

- Reasons (for desire) to exit a refugee centre :
 - Discrimination due to homosexuality by staff and other residents
 - Forced to hide sexual orientation
 - Lack of support from the working staff
 - Feeling of insecurity

[After a suicide attempt, the security agent] said, if you want to die, you can die. We don't need someone like you.

Because I'm not going to stay with those guys. [...] A few hours and I left. They made me take off my clothes. They were checking my breasts. They had me fingerprinted. And that was it. And then I left.

I didn't take the treatment for 20 days because she [the nurse] simply didn't give me the document. And it's a document that doesn't take two minutes of your time to print out.

insecure housing : temporarily with family / friends

at least 4 out of 10 interviewees

- Different relationships with the other person :
 - Volunteer
 - Family member
 - Partner (not always mutual relation)
- Reasons to exit the accommodation :
 - Stay only foreseen only as a temporal stage
 - Rising conflicts & tension of cohabitation or about the relationship

She says, are you sure you're gay? Are you sure you're gay? Always like that. [...] she said to me, I love you, I really do, I love you. I said to her, I love you, but like my mother. I went back home and she said, pick up your clothes [and leave].

[I was staying with a family member] but I knew it was something that could not last because I felt the pressure that I had to leave because she already had a home and I was not working, I could not make a burden, my savings were running out.

He said to me, [...] tomorrow you're going to live with me. And you works in my house, and you don't pay me anything, he didn't ask me for anything to win me over. [...] Actually, he never asked me for money. At first he was very nice to me. [...] But you already see a lot of defects, and things that you don't want in your life.

insecure housing : **no legal (sub)tenancy**

at least 4 out of 10 interviewees

- In first place used for housing, but sometimes simultaneously working apartment or working apartment only
 - Caters towards people without a recognised legal status or that are still in the procedure of seeking asylum
 - Stricter renting conditions can apply
 - Housing stability relies on trustful relationship with the person renting out the apartment

It was nice, but I can't receive friends or clients [...] Even if a friend comes to my house, she charges me an extra 150 € for one visit. [...] She turns the heating off. I wake up at 3am, having cold. It was really cold.

And I lived there six months [...] And when the contract ended, I went back. Because she had already, rented the place to other people. I couldn't renew the contract.

I didn't need any papers but had a responsibility towards the apartment: being deported for 2-3 months posed problems of trust. So there was the condition that if we were deported and didn't come back the owner could empty the flat and give it to someone else.

inadequate housing : **overcrowded, shared apartments**

at least 3 out of 10 interviewees

- Situation at the moment of arrival of several Latin American respondents
 - Often considered as a first transitory phase
 - Shared with other sex workers of same gender and sexual orientation
 - Linked with the reimbursement of a debt or where half of the money earned goes to the provider of the apartment
 - Payment per week
 - Working apartments, often simultaneously also for living
- Reasons to exit the accommodation :
 - Overpriced
 - Overcrowded
 - Issues with other tenants
 - Desire to become independent and to find a place that feels like 'home'

There was a living room and a little room with a bed. So we slept in the living room and in this improvised little room next to the living room. And the other two rooms were for work. [...] And when there were a lot of girls we slept on the mattress on the sofa... There was a double bed that we shared. [...] The rent was of 350€ per week per person.

Then I came at the house, so the guy managed my ads, my publicity and he answered my phone. All I had to do was go out to work, but we worked 50/50. The guy gave me the housing, he gave me the advertising and I had to cover my food. And the room was shared between 7 or 8 of us. All Colombians and Venezuelans. [...] The bad thing was that there was only one bathroom and there were 12 of us.

insecure housing : ,plazas‘

at least 2 out of 10 interviewees

- Accommodations rented out only to sex workers through informal networks
 - Often with several working accommodations within one building / apartment
 - Exist as studio's or shared flats
- Impressions :
 - Payment per week, suitable for working on-the-move
 - Working apartments, often simultaneously also for living
 - Varying quality of the apartments
- Reasons to exit the accommodation :
 - Overpriced (often twice or more or of the regular housing prices)
 - Issues with other tenants
 - Desire to quit a 'sex-work-only' environment

There are eight studios [in total, all occupied by sexworkers], one of which two people live in. [...] And it looks like there's another building, but a little further down. Another building with I don't know how many flats. [...] I pay 2.000€ a month.

*The rooms were made of ... a wall of wooden carton.
So whatever happened, everyone heard it.*

The house belongs to a guy, a man who has flats where he rents out the rooms, but only to boys. Not to trans or women, only to boys. [...] 'So, you pay by the week. [...] At that time I think it was like 400€ per week at that time for the room.

insecure housing : **airBnB, Booking, online platforms and hotels**

at least 7 out of 10 interviewees

- More privacy than shared apartments and plaza's
 - Payment per week or day
 - Working apartments, often also used for living
- Rather continuous use, not only punctual
 - Sometimes linked to the necessity to move around (in the city or from city to city) to find new clients
- Reasons to exit the accommodation :
 - Overpriced
 - On-the-move incompatible with desire to find one's own home

And the key thing that those who are, let's say, more demure, or more discreet when working, are looking for are B&Bs and Booking.

[I moved from city to city] because I couldn't afford the flats, they were too expensive. So I moved to whatever was cheaper.

Although the truth is, from my experience with the B&Bs and Booking, which I have rented, that the owners, the landlords, already know what we are doing. It's just that we don't talk about it.

inadequate housing : **housing in a neighbourhood with street-based sex-work**

2 out of 10 interviewees

- Owners are aware that the tenant is a sex worker
 - Poor housing conditions
- Given that by-the-hour-hotels are closing down, sex workers rely on these apartments as working place.

A man broke down the door. I had to buy everything. I'm the one who fixed it. [...] If anything goes wrong, I'm the one who's held responsible.

The bathroom is outside of the studio. [...] And in winter it's cold in the flat. [...] The doorbells don't work, so clients knock on the door, and sometimes the door is left open... Things go missing, condoms and wipes are sometimes lying around, and there are cleaning problems.

to be continued ...