



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

Reviewing Sex Worker-led Organisations' Use of International Guidelines

Third Edition

case **STUDY**



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Introduction

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) and its members have advocated for the development of evidence-based international guidelines and policies to ensure the respect, protection and fulfilment of the human rights of sex workers. NSWP calls for the meaningful involvement of sex workers in policy development, as they are best placed to inform and develop legislation, policies and programmes that affect their lives and work.

This is the third in a series of case studies that NSWP is conducting over a five-year period to monitor and document the impact of international guidelines and policies that NSWP and its members use in their work, many of which we helped develop. NSWP will also monitor how these international guidelines are used in local, national and regional advocacy efforts.

NSWP

NSWP is a global network of sex worker-led organisations with over 265 members in 80 countries. It exists to uphold the voice of sex workers globally, and connect regional networks advocating for the rights of female, male and transgender sex workers. It advocates for rights-based health and social services, freedom from abuse and discrimination, and self-determination for sex workers.

All NSWP members endorse the NSWP Consensus Statement on Sex Work, Human Rights and the Law and confirm their commitment to three core values:

- Acceptance of sex work as work.
- Opposition to all forms of criminalisation and other legal oppression of sex work (including sex workers, clients, third parties¹, families, partners, and friends).
- Supporting self-organisation and self-determination of sex workers.

The Global Secretariat is responsible for the implementation of the NSWP Strategic Plan and the day-to-day running of the organisation. The Global Coordinator, under the direction of the Board of Directors, leads the Secretariat. The Board includes sex workers from all five regions and is elected by and accountable to the sex worker-led member organisations.

The majority of NSWP staff and consultants are sex workers, and priority is given to suitably qualified applicants who have sex work experience in the recruitment process. NSWP does not require that all staff, consultants, or board members publicly disclose their sex worker status. However, the Global Coordinator, the President and Vice-President must be current or former sex workers who are prepared to speak publicly as sex workers.

NSWP is a sex worker-led organisation. Voting member organisations are therefore expected to be sex worker-led and to ensure the meaningful participation of sex workers in every level of their organisation.

1 The term 'third parties' includes managers, brothel keepers, receptionists, maids, drivers, landlords, hotels who rent rooms to sex workers and anyone else who is seen as facilitating sex work.



Background

Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI Programmes with Sex Workers: Practical Approaches from Collaborative Interventions, also known as the Sex Work Implementation Tool (SWIT), was developed in collaboration with NSWP member organisations across the world. It was published by WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, NSWP, The World Bank and UNDP in 2013 as a core international guideline for rights-based, community-led HIV/STI programming. Since then it has become the international normative guidance for sex worker programming. It has been adopted by the Global Fund, the Dutch-funded Bridging the Gaps international key population programme, and the USA-funded Linkages key population programme. Since its publication, NSWP has partnered with the regional sex worker-led networks: African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), Caribbean Sex Work Coalition (CSWC), Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN), International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE), and Plataforma Latinoamericana de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS) to increase sex workers' knowledge of the SWIT and strengthen sex worker-led organisations' capacity to advocate for the implementation of the SWIT. The SWIT Case Study documents the development of the SWIT, as well as NSWP's efforts to advocate for the roll-out and implementation of the SWIT.

In 2016, Amnesty International published a Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect, and Fulfill the Human Rights of Sex Workers, as well as four in-depth reports on the human rights of sex workers in Buenos Aires in Argentina, Hong Kong, Norway, and Papua New Guinea. NSWP documented the impact of this policy in Amnesty International's Resolution on Protecting the Human Rights of Sex Workers, as well as in the first case study in this series.

Objectives

NSWP identified the following objectives for this five-year study:

Objective #1

Monitor and reflect on the impacts at the local and national level of various policies that support the protection of sex workers' human rights and the full decriminalisation of sex work.

Objective #2

Monitor and reflect on the impacts at the local and national level of various policies that hinder sex workers' access to rights as outlined in the NSWP Consensus Statement.

WHY? International policies on sex work impact sex workers' lives at a grassroots level.

Actions Monitored and Documented

Action #1

Working with international womens' rights organisations to promote rights-affirming positions on sex work, including advocacy with the CEDAW Committee.

Action #2:

Working with regional sex worker-led networks to build the capacity of sex worker-led organisations to advocate for the roll-out and implementation of the SWIT.

Action #3:

Continue to document the impact of Amnesty International's sex work policy at global and national levels.



ACTION #1:

Alliance building with international women's rights organisations

In 2013, the NSWP Board approved a Strategic Plan that called for the strengthening of alliances with the women's movement. Despite attempts at cooperation, sex workers' rights advocates continue to experience hostility within the mainstream women's movement. Potential allies were identified and communications initiated following the Board meeting. Structured alliance-building didn't begin until 2016 when two concrete initiatives started as a result of:

- 1 UN Women inviting NSWP to contribute to the development of a new policy on sex work, and;
- 2 IRAW-AP inviting NSWP to join a global expert meeting on the rights of women sex workers under CEDAW.

The 2016 UN Women proposal to develop a new policy on sex work, based on an e-consultation, raised serious concerns about a lack of transparency in its' development and the lack of meaningful involvement of sex workers. These concerns were shared by NSWP members and many women's rights activists and organisations. This led to a collaboration between NSWP and sex worker allies in the women's rights movement to challenge UN Women by submitting a joint letter of concern signed by 190 women's rights, human rights, and sex workers' rights organisations.

In 2017, NSWP continued to monitor UN Women and collaborate with allies in the women's rights movement to demand meaningful involvement of sex workers if a new policy was to be developed, beyond the position that UN Women signed up to as a Co-Sponsor of the United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS.

To further develop collaboration with women's rights organisations, NSWP invited a small number of international women's rights and human rights organisations to consider joining an informal alliance. Throughout 2017 and early 2018, the core group of alliance members worked on a set of shared principles and values; great care was taken to ensure all members had time to consult with and receive endorsement from their own organisations. The alliance held its first face-to-face meeting in Geneva from 29 June–1 July 2018 where the alliance was named Sex Worker Inclusive Feminist Alliance (SWIFA)². A concept note identified three priority areas for collaborative action:

- Ensuring alignment of a rights-affirming position on sex work across the United Nations system.
- Supporting sex worker-led organisations engaging with UN Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures.
- Supporting sex workers' engagement in women's movement space.

During this time, NSWP continued to collaborate with IRAW-AP to develop tools that would support sex worker-led organisations' engagement with the CEDAW Committee.

Throughout 2017 NSWP worked jointly with IRAW-AP to develop a Framework on Rights of Sex Workers and CEDAW and Shadow Report Guidelines on CEDAW and Rights of Sex Workers, published in April 2018. NSWP also published the Smart Sex Workers' Guide to CEDAW in July 2018, which summarises the Framework in plain English and has been translated in Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish.

2 SWIFA core members include: African Women's Development & Communications Network (FEMNET), Amnesty International, Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), CREA, Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC), International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IRAW-AP), Open Society Foundations (OSF), Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR).



NSWP has been monitoring the Concluding Observations about sex work and women sex workers made by the CEDAW Committee in their country reports to Member States. They have called on countries to remove laws that criminalise or penalise sex work and to uphold sex workers' human rights. However, the trend of conflating sex work with human trafficking continues, as do recommendations to introduce 'end demand' legislation. Sex workers in every country that has introduced such legal frameworks report their increasing vulnerability to violence and other human rights abuses. In 2017, NSWP responded to this dangerous trend by publishing a Policy Brief on The Impact of 'End Demand' Legislation on Women Sex Workers. With financial support from Mama Cash, NSWP hosted a thematic briefing with CEDAW Committee members to present the Policy Brief during the Committee's 68th Session. The briefing was attended by 8 CEDAW Committee members, along with representatives from NSWP member organisations: KESWA and BHESP, Kenya; PION, Norway; Project X, Singapore; and SANGRAM, India. Representatives from the women's rights movement also attended, including: Amnesty International, IWHC, IWRAW-AP, WGNRR, CREA, and Mama Cash.

NSWP has continued to provide technical support to country-based teams to draft and submit shadow reports on women sex workers in their countries. NSWP raised funds from PITCH to support country teams from Mexico, New Zealand, Macedonia and Nepal to submit shadow reports and attend the 70th and 71st CEDAW Sessions in 2018.

Sex workers are frequently marginalised by mainstream women's groups and excluded from the national coalition shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee. Sex workers who presented shadow reports in Geneva had diverse experiences of this process. In some countries sex workers were able to work collaboratively with supportive women's groups presenting shadow reports. In countries where fundamentalist feminists and abolitionist groups dominate women's spaces, sex workers experienced hostility and exclusion.

NSWP will continue to support its members to engage with the CEDAW Committee in 2019.

“Part of our role as human rights advocates is to help people understand the impact – the unintended consequences sometimes – of things that instinctively feel right for some people; we have a huge ideological and moral force at play that says that sex work is inherently bad and evil and that sex workers are ‘damaged’ people, and it’s about trying to counteract that.

...We’ve opened up a conversation within the Committee about respecting and protecting all women’s human rights, not just around freedom from violence but also other rights. Any change starts with a conversation.”

Ruth Morgan Thomas, NSWP Global Coordinator

National Impact of Engaging with CEDAW

Shadow reports submitted by sex workers during the 68th and 70th CEDAW sessions, led to governments being questioned about issues raised by sex workers; the Committee addressed some of these issues in their Concluding Observations, including police violence and arbitrary arrest (Australia, Kenya, Macedonia, Mexico, Nepal), compulsory HIV and STI testing (Kenya), access to health services, legal services and social protection (Macedonia, Nepal), criminalisation (Australia, Kenya, Norway), access to justice (Kenya), discrimination against sex workers (Macedonia) and transgender people (Mexico, Singapore), prosecution of sex workers under anti-trafficking legislation (Mexico, Nepal) and the rights of migrant sex workers (Singapore, New Zealand). However, the CEDAW Committee continues to make recommendations that fail to protect sex workers' rights. These recommendations include 'exit' programmes (Kenya, Nepal, Norway, Mexico, Macedonia), and measures to reduce demand for sex work (Kenya, Australia), which impact sex workers' access to justice and essential services.



KENYA

While initially Kenyan women's rights organisations were reluctant to work with sex workers, engaging with CEDAW has helped KESWA and its members to build alliances within the Kenyan women's movement. After the CEDAW session, Kenyan NGOs established a committee to explore how the national Concluding Observations can be used to advance the rights of all women. Additionally, KESWA engaged with the Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya and FEMNET to strengthen their capacity.

“Often sex workers are isolating themselves with their issues, so bringing the sex workers together with the women's movement was a very important component.”

Phelister Abdalla, KESWA Coordinator

NORWAY

In 2016, the Norwegian government attacked the legitimacy and methodology of Amnesty International's *The Human Cost of “Crushing” the Market*. However, during the CEDAW country review, a senior advisor of Norway's Ministry of Justice and Public Health revised their approach. They acknowledged criticism of the research used to justify the criminalisation of purchasing sex, and recognised the legitimacy of Amnesty International's report which documents the negative consequences of the law.

The CEDAW Committee, for the first time, acknowledged ‘unintended’ consequences of the Nordic Model in its *Concluding Observations to Norway*:

“The Committee is concerned at the unintended consequences of the criminalization since 2009 of the purchase of sexual activity or a sexual act from adults, in particular the higher risk for the personal safety and physical integrity of women in prostitution as reflected in the low reporting rate of physical and sexual violence, exploitation and harassment; and the risk of being evicted from their premises when used for prostitution.”

The CEDAW Committee recommended that Norway align its policy with a rights-affirming approach to sex work and conduct long-term research to develop evidence-based programmes that safeguard sex workers' human rights. Following the CEDAW session, the Norwegian Ministry of Justice invited Amnesty International, PION, Norway and other sex worker organisations to discuss the draft policy. However, in 2018 the Norwegian government announced it would draft a broad policy on crime prevention including sex work. PION has requested an explanation for this decision.

SINGAPORE

Police violence against sex workers was highlighted in both the sex workers' shadow report and the Singapore coalition shadow report, but was not discussed in the Concluding Observations to Singapore. However, when Committee members asked questions about police violence against sex workers during the CEDAW session, the Ministry of Home Affairs responded that they work closely with Project X and other women's groups to encourage sex workers to come forward and report police violence. Following the CEDAW session, the Ministry of Home Affairs reached out to Project X to discuss the CEDAW Session. While no formal collaboration has been established, it has resulted in an ongoing relationship that facilitates Project X reporting to the Ministry when sex workers experience police violence or migrant sex workers need assistance.

MEXICO

CEDAW's Concluding Observations to Mexico recommended the government carry out a study to develop services for sex workers. APROASE, A.C. plans to work with national organisations to advocate for the meaningful participation of sex workers in the research and development of the services recommended by the CEDAW Committee.

NEW ZEALAND

Sex workers provided the Committee with testimony of the reality and lived experiences of sex workers under decriminalisation. During their review of New Zealand, the CEDAW Committee expressed concern over a lack of ‘exit programmes’ for sex workers.



However, the evidence given by both the state and sex workers demonstrated that sex workers' access to social protection and services under decriminalisation adequately address the needs of sex workers who wish to find alternative employment.

During the country review the New Zealand government acknowledged the harms caused by the exclusion of migrant sex workers from decriminalisation and indicated possible future change in this area. New Zealand Prostitutes Collective continue to build awareness on this issue with governmental and non-governmental organisations.

MACEDONIA

STAR-STAR led the development of a coalition shadow report with four allied NGOs representing people living with HIV, people who use drugs, LGBT people, and other marginalised communities. During the CEDAW session, the Committee Chair asked if the Macedonian government had considered the Nordic Model of sex work, despite a lack of support for this model from the Macedonian coalition. The Macedonian government responded with a commitment that any laws proposed would be developed in consultation with the sex worker community. The Committee's Concluding Observations did not recommend 'end demand' legislation. Instead, they recommended the government prioritise addressing discrimination against sex workers and other marginalised groups by strengthening cooperation between civil society organisations and sex workers to address violence against sex workers, and improve their access to health and social protections. STAR-STAR will use these recommendations to advocate for sex work law reform.

NEPAL

Engagement with the CEDAW Committee has motivated SWAN, Nepal to re-form a women's rights coalition group to advocate for the implementation of the Committee's recommendations and collect further evidence to support decriminalisation of sex work. In addition, one of the SWAN representatives is a Global Fund Country Coordination Mechanism member and will use the CEDAW Concluding Observations to advocate for sex workers' rights in this role.

ACTION #2 Sex Worker Implementation Tool

Global SWIT capacity-building

NSWP and regional networks have advocated for the roll-out and implementation of the SWIT internationally since its launch in 2013. It has become accepted as the international normative guidance for sex worker programming and it is the framework used by regional networks to develop capacity-building programmes across all 5 NSWP regions. 62% of NSWP members report using the SWIT in their advocacy – the SWIT has become a powerful advocacy tool for sex worker-led organisations. However, they report that it is not being utilised consistently at national and local levels.

“I don't remember having ever been to a meeting without having mentioned SWIT. I don't remember any of our members doing anything, without having mentioned SWIT ...I seriously doubt that there is any programmatic area or any advocacy area where we haven't mentioned SWIT.”

Staša Plečaš, SWAN Executive Director

NSWP's call for a UNAIDS evaluation of the roll-out of the SWIT was ignored. Instead NSWP raised funding for their members to develop their own Community-led Evaluation Framework to evaluate the roll-out of the SWIT and the meaningful involvement of sex workers in policy and programme development and implementation. In September 2017, NSWP convened a Global Expert Meeting in Kiev, Ukraine to develop this framework. The meeting was attended by representatives of NSWP member organisations from Africa, Asia Pacific, Central & Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America, alongside external stakeholders from UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNDP, WHO, the Global Fund, Aidsfonds and LINKAGES – PACT.



“[D]uring our UNFPA regional HIV meeting in Istanbul [in October 2017] most of country offices expressed the need to have an evaluation mechanism in place that would allow them to monitor and assess effectiveness of rolling out of SWIT (along with MSMIT, IDUIT and TRANSIT). This directly echoes with the initiative that you are undertaking now on developing a community-led evaluation framework. I think that it will be extremely useful for all our Country Offices in this region.”

Andrey Poshtaruk, UNFPA Regional Advisor

The inclusion of external stakeholders at the meeting fostered commitment to promoting the SWIT and gave them the opportunity to experience a community-led process.

“I thought it was very powerful...for me, it was really a successful example of how the community takes the lead and develops a useful M&E system...And I think that is one of the things we can all learn from...when you ensure that sex workers are in the lead in developing such processes, there will be ownership, but also, it will be tailor-made, so they really can use it...I hope that we can learn from such experiences.”

Lynn Werlich, Head of Aidsfonds International Sex Work Programme

In 2018, the framework was piloted by NSWP members in four countries: Indonesia, Kenya, Suriname and Ukraine, which NSWP documented in a [Global Report](#). The pilot programme allowed sex worker-led organisations to strengthen relationships with external stakeholders and increase their shared understanding of the SWIT.

IMPACT IN INDONESIA (OPSI)

OPSI conducted interviews with a variety of stakeholders including UNDP representatives. As a result, UNDP invited OPSI and APNSW to train their staff in Community Empowerment and Addressing Violence. In addition to strengthening relationships with external stakeholders, the process enhanced all parties' understanding of meaningful involvement, and created insight into how government and INGO requirements had prevented OPSI from accessing funding. Engaging in this process led to OPSI receiving a contract to serve as a Global Fund technical assistance partner on programming for female sex workers, and motivated them to prioritise strengthening their own capacity.

IMPACT IN KENYA (KESWA)

The pilot programme enabled KESWA to increase understanding of the SWIT among external stakeholders, many of whom either did not know of its existence, did not fully understand it, or were only familiar with certain sections of it. The pilot also helped KESWA strengthen their organisational relationships, particularly with local government.

“We were surprised that they were available and agreed to do interviews. There was a time when it could not happen like that, but at least now we are in that position to do that.”

Phelister Abdalla, KESWA Coordinator

Stakeholders have developed a better understanding of the meaningful involvement of sex workers and, as a result, increasingly involve the sex worker community in activities. For example, UNFPA engaged KESWA in discussions about condom programming and making presentations at UNFPA meetings.



IMPACT IN SURINAME (SUCOS)

Prior to the pilot, many stakeholders did not have experience of meaningfully involving sex worker-led organisations in programme development. The pilot involved SUCOS members interviewing representatives from the CCM, UNFPA, the Suriname Ministry of Health, and service providers, which helped SUCOS build organisational relationships. It enabled SUCOS to identify gaps in stakeholder's knowledge and implementation of the SWIT, as well as openings for meaningful involvement of sex workers.

Recognising the value of the SWIT as an advocacy tool, SUCOS have continued to strengthen relationships with stakeholders and to advocate for meaningful involvement of sex workers. SUCOS is a national partner in the Caribbean Sex Work Coalition's programme to strengthen sex workers' engagement with Global Fund national processes. SUCOS has used the SWIT to successfully advocate for the inclusion of sex workers in the Suriname National HIV/AIDS strategy, and within the CCM.

IMPACT IN UKRAINE (Legalife-Ukraine)

Legalife-Ukraine reported new and strengthened relationships and an enhanced understanding of the SWIT as a result of the pilot.

“In the process of conducting the evaluation, we really did have new partners, more understanding.”

Nataliia Isaeva, Legalife-Ukraine Director

A new relationship with the secretary of the CCM emerged, which was key to ensuring that funding for sex worker-led programmes was included in the Ukrainian transition plan for the Global fund.

Regional SWIT Capacity-Building

NSWP continued to respond to requests for technical support from regional sex worker-led networks to support their national capacity-building programmes, supported through both the Bridging the Gaps programme and the Sex Worker Networks Consortium grant from the Robert Carr Fund.

In turn, regional sex worker-led networks continued to provide training, technical support and small grants to enable national sex worker-led organisations to strengthen the capacity of sex workers to promote best practices (as outlined in the SWIT) at national and local levels. Over 1500 sex workers from 98 sex worker-led organisations in 42 countries participated in SWIT capacity-building activities in 2017. This included a wide range of activities: developing sex worker-led programmes; accessing HIV funding for community empowerment, violence prevention, and comprehensive services for sex workers; training HIV service providers; advocating for meaningful involvement of sex workers in the development of national HIV and STI strategic plans, and Global Fund national funding proposals; and holding governments, INGOs, and HIV service providers accountable.

IMPACT IN BANGLADESH (HARC)

In September 2016, APNSW and HARC organised a 3-day training event on the SWIT for sex workers in Bangladesh, during which participants developed a plan to implement the SWIT in Bangladesh. Participants prioritised the development of a comprehensive plan to address violence. In February 2017, HARC translated the SWIT into Bengali and organised a two-day development workshop.

“At the beginning we thought to submit to donors by our-self. We share our report with APNSW, and they were also interested to submit a regional project... We were also very happy and interested to work with APNSW.”

Niger Sultana, HARC Coordinator



Many of the sex worker-led organisations that participated in SWIT training events organised by APNSW (like HARC) identified violence against sex workers as a priority area not covered under existing programming. In 2017, APNSW successfully applied to the South Asia Women Fund for support for a two-year, regional programme based on the SWIT chapter on violence – they applied in collaboration with HARC (Bangladesh), JMMS (Nepal), OPSI (Indonesia), and AMA (Myanmar).

HARC also uses the SWIT locally to inform their own programmes, in community empowerment, and in advocacy with the government and national/international NGOs.

IMPACT IN KYRGYZSTAN (Tais Plus)

Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan continues to use the SWIT to inform their work and to advocate for rights-based programming for sex workers. In 2015, Tais Plus developed a sex worker-led training programme on the SWIT for HIV service providers, and they continue to strengthen sex workers' capacity as SWIT trainers and facilitators.

“Employees of HIV service organizations in 2017 began to say that they now understand why SWIT is useful and why it should be used.”

Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan receives most of its funding for HIV and STI programming for sex workers from international donors, primarily the Global Fund. In 2017, Kyrgyzstan submitted a Programme Continuation Request to the Global Fund for 2018–2020 utilising components of the SWIT such as community-led services, creating enabling environments and monitoring of quality of services.

“Both at the stage of application development and at the stage of preparing answers for TRP, we promoted SWIT as a tool to be used in programs with sex workers.”

Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan

In addition, Tais Plus advocates that programmes based on the SWIT must be included in transition planning from the Global Fund, as well integrated into government-run HIV services.

ACTION #3: Amnesty International

Since the Amnesty International Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil The Human Rights of Sex Workers was adopted in May 2016, the international secretariat continues to promote a human rights-affirming approach to sex work.

In 2017, Amnesty International initiated projects that integrate sex workers' rights into the broader scope of Amnesty's work on sexual and reproductive rights, discrimination and detention. In March 2018, Amnesty International published the Body Politics: Criminalization of Sexuality and Reproduction series – a toolkit for activists on criminalisation of sexuality, sexual behaviour and reproduction.

At an international level, Amnesty International has continued to work with the sex workers' rights movement in advancing rights-affirming policies and positions on sex work through the Sex Worker Inclusive Feminist Alliance.

At a national level, Amnesty International Sections have supported sex workers' rights organisations:

INDIA: In July 2018, AI India condemned an anti-trafficking bill for its conflation of sex work and trafficking.

IRELAND: In March 2017, AI Ireland worked with Sex Workers Alliance Ireland to oppose the criminalisation of sex workers' clients, addressing it in their shadow report to CEDAW.

NORWAY: In 2017, AI Norway addressed the criminalisation of sex workers' clients and the human rights situation of sex workers in their shadow report to CEDAW. They also participated in a panel on sex work with PION, Norway. In 2018, AI Norway worked with PION to advocate for the implementation of the CEDAW Committee's recommendations.

RUSSIA: In August 2017, Amnesty International profiled Irina Maslova, Director of Silver Rose, as part of a campaign on human rights defenders in Russia.

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: In June 2017, Amnesty International referenced the 2016 sex work country report and included sex worker issues in an Op-Ed about upcoming elections and human rights issues in Papua New Guinea.



While work with Amnesty International Sections has been limited, NSWP members reported that the Amnesty International policy remains a valuable resource.

“...it’s been really useful to have a huge organisation like Amnesty publish a decrim position, because then it’s easy to just point different groups who want to have a position to it, like you don’t have to reinvent the wheel. You can just [model after] Amnesty.”

Luca Stevenson, ICRSE Coordinator

IMPACT IN THE USA (COYOTE-Rhode Island and HIPS)

Amnesty International is a well-known and respected organisation in the USA, with over one million supporters and over 200,000 paying members. The Amnesty International Council resolution on sex work has catalysed two legislative initiatives to decriminalise sex work at the state level in New Hampshire and Washington D.C.

In New Hampshire, COYOTE-Rhode Island, US PROStitutes collective, and other sex worker organisations lobbied for decriminalisation in 2016 and 2017. In January 2018, a bill to authorise a study on the impact of decriminalising sex work in New Hampshire passed by a substantial majority in the State House of Representatives. Unfortunately, due to opposition from a state anti-trafficking task force, the Governor and fundamental feminist and abolitionist groups, the Senate decided not to vote on the Bill in 2018.

On August 11, 2015, Washington D.C. councilman David Grosso issued a statement supporting Amnesty International’s adoption of the resolution on sex work and calling for discussion on sex work law reform in Washington, D.C.

“I applaud Amnesty International for taking a position in support of decriminalization of sex work as a means to prevent human rights violations against sex workers... It is my hope that by having a well-respected human rights organization like Amnesty International support decriminalization, we can begin the conversation about reforming similar D.C. laws and policies.”

Councilman Grosso

In 2016, NSWP member HIPS led the creation of the Sex Worker Advocates Coalition, which worked with Grosso’s office to draft legislation that would uphold sex workers’ rights. In 2017 Grosso introduced a bill to decriminalise adult sex work: Reducing Criminalization to Promote Public Safety and Health Act of 2017. The bill was tabled in 2018, but the Coalition continues to mobilise support from the public, allies, and city council members to support re-introduction of the bill.

IMPACT IN HUNGARY (SZEZE)

The first case study documented the development of SZEZE’s relationship with AI Hungary, and their support for SZEZE and transgender organisations in demanding inclusion in Pride 2016.

In 2017 and 2018, AI Hungary has continued to support SZEZE.

“They are really reliable – every time we invite them to participate in an event, they join.”

Boglárka Fedorkó, SZEZE

AI Hungary consulted with SZEZE in the development of their 2018 strategy plan and priorities, and has undertaken work relating to sex workers’ families and rights as parents. In addition, their support has helped SZEZE build relationships with civil society organisations, especially human rights and LGBT organisations.

However, increasing conservatism and nationalism in Hungary have influenced the role of AI Hungary in SZEZE’s public advocacy. Hungary’s right-wing coalition government has led a campaign against international organisations like Amnesty International and Open Society Foundations, branding them as ‘foreign agents promoting liberal western values’. This has impacted public support for Amnesty International.

In September 2017, SZEZE launched a comprehensive advocacy package. SZEZE had wanted to include a list of civil society organisations who support decriminalisation and sex workers’ rights-affirming policies, however, due to increasing conservatism and nationalism in Hungary, SZEZE decided not to publicly mention their support.



“Unfortunately, we can’t really use these strategic alliances to promote our agenda more broadly these days because of the country and political situation here.”

Boglárka Fedorkó, SZEXE

IMPACT IN BRAZIL (Davida)

The first case study documented the impact of increasing conservatism in Brazil on sex workers’ use of international guidelines, as well as difficulties working with Amnesty International Brazil. This trend continued in 2017.

“From 2005–2010, rights was the context. People talk about rights all the time. In the past few years, with Parliamentary Coup – there has been an extinguishing of that....”

Laura Murray, Davida

Conservatism and broad human rights violations in Brazil have banded organisations together and moderated opposition from fundamental feminists and abolitionist groups. However, the battle has overstretched progressive organisations, including Amnesty International. As a result, the capacity of allies and potential allies to work with sex worker-led organisations like Davida is limited.

Although the conservative government limits sex workers’ use of international policies and guidelines in proactive political advocacy, they remain useful with where legislators continue to hold international human rights organisations in high regard. The criminalisation of sex workers’ clients and declassification of sex work as a recognised occupation are legislative threats currently facing Brazilian sex workers.

Conclusion

Rights-affirming international policies and guidelines continue to be a valuable resource for sex worker-led organisations. In 2017–2018, NSWP members continued to use these tools to build alliances, design comprehensive HIV programming by and for sex workers, access funding, and advocate the meaningful involvement of sex workers in law reform and the development of evidence-based programming.

Despite the adoption of rights-affirming policies and guidelines on sex work by international organisations, implementation by their national offices, affiliates and partners remains inadequate. Consequently, sex worker-led organisations are frequently burdened with national and local promotion of these directives with little support, and often face opposition and non-action.

Transition from Global Fund funding and that of other international donors in large parts of Asia Pacific, Central & Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America threatens to undermine recent progress in implementing rights-based programmes, once governments and national implementers are no longer accountable to international donors.

Rising conservatism has resulted in governments increasingly failing to implement UN recommendations and rights-affirming guidelines, and in some contexts, has resulted in attacks on international human rights organisations and human rights defenders.

Fundamental feminist and abolitionist groups remain the largest threat to evidence-based and rights-affirming approaches to sex work. These groups attack sex workers’ rights organisations and seek to undermine rights-affirming positions on sex work taken by the UN and other international organisations, while arguing for the introduction of harmful policies and laws that increase sex workers’ vulnerability to human rights violations.

NSWP, our members, and our allies in the human rights and women’s rights movements continue to work to protect existing rights-affirming positions on sex work taken by the UN, to promote policies and practices that will advance, respect and fulfil sex workers’ human rights, and to prevent the adoption of policies and laws that undermine human rights and increase sex worker’s vulnerability.

NSWP and its membership have limited resources and power. Despite this we have made remarkable progress in promoting a rights-affirming position on sex work and will continue the struggle. However, in the face of continuing and escalating criminalisation, violence, stigma and discrimination, and social exclusion, sex worker-led organisations need more proactive and vocal support from international organisations.

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects uses a methodology that ensures the voices of sex worker-led organisations are made visible. Case studies examine the strategies, activities and impact at global, regional and national levels of NSWP and regional sex worker-led networks in consultation with NSWP members. Case studies are based on ongoing monitoring, utilising internal reports, in-depth interviews, and site visits.

The term 'sex workers' reflects the immense diversity within the sex worker community including but not limited to: female, male and transgender sex workers; lesbian, gay and bi-sexual sex workers; male sex workers who identify as heterosexual; sex workers living with HIV and other diseases; sex workers who use drugs; young adult sex workers (between the ages of 18 and 29 years old); documented and undocumented migrant sex workers, as well as and displaced persons and refugees; sex workers living in both urban and rural areas; disabled sex workers; and sex workers who have been detained or incarcerated.



Global Network of Sex Work Projects

Promoting Health and Human Rights

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NSWP is an alliance partner of Bridging the Gaps – health and rights for key populations. This unique programme addresses the common challenges faced by sex workers, people who use drugs and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in terms of human rights violations and accessing much-needed HIV and health services. Go to: www.hivgaps.org for more information.