



nswp

Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

COMMUNITY
guide

The Impacts
of Anti-Rights
Movements on
Sex Workers





Introduction

Movements organised against the rights of marginalised and criminalised groups have grown in influence and impact around the globe. Fundamental feminists and abolitionist groups continue to attack the human rights of sex workers; in addition sex workers endure attacks from other anti-rights movements due to their intersecting identities as migrants, women, black, indigenous, and people of colour, LGBT+, trans, and gender-diverse people, people who use drugs, people living with HIV, and others.

Anti-Rights Movements and Intersectionality

Anti-rights movements consist of organisations and groups which push to restrict human rights. Anti-rights organisations have infiltrated civil society spaces and governments. Many are conservative, including religious fundamentalists, white supremacists, and ethnic nationalists. Some anti-rights groups frame their advocacy as being 'pro-rights.' Fundamental feminists and abolitionist groups are some of the most prominent anti-rights groups affecting sex workers, conflating sex work with trafficking and exploitation. They are key actors in the anti-gender movement, advocating against rights for trans and gender-diverse people. Other anti-rights groups and movements have various focuses, such as anti-SRHR, anti-migration, and anti-civil rights. Sex workers are impacted as workers, as well as in their intersectional identities.

Anti-Rights Tactics and their Impacts

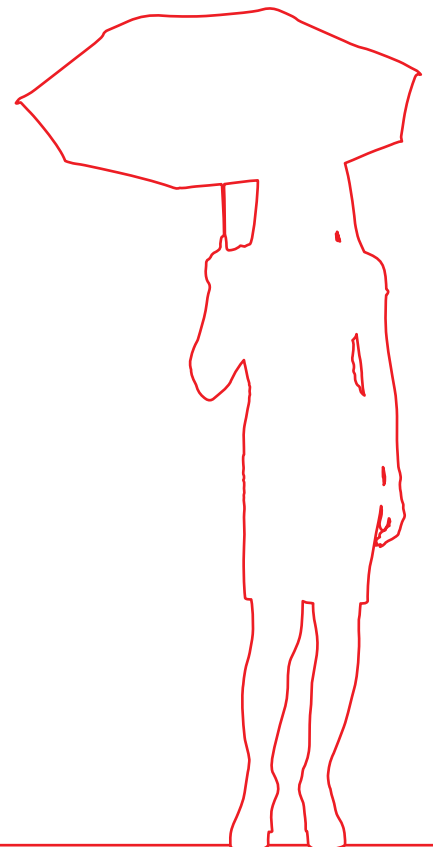
Dangerous Alliances

Alliances between religious fundamentalist groups, fundamental feminists, and abolitionist groups have allowed these actors to extend their influence, consolidate funding, and legitimise harmful policies. Although some groups may disagree over certain topics, they are often united in their positions against sex work, trans and gender-diverse identities, and marginalised ethnic and religious groups. Anti-rights alliances cause harm when they infiltrate governments and other institutions of power.

Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Migration Policies

Many anti-rights narratives and policies are tied to the anti-trafficking movement, due to the conflation of sex work and migration with trafficking and exploitation. Through this, anti-trafficking organisations justify border policing and violent 'raid and rescue' operations on sex workers' workplaces. Sex workers who are migrants are more likely to be targeted as 'victims of trafficking.' Migrant sex workers' human rights are often overlooked in favour of driving broader anti-rights agendas to restrict migration and criminalise sex work.

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The 'End Demand' Model

Fundamental feminists and abolitionist groups have influenced governments to enact policies aiming to eliminate human trafficking by abolishing sex work. The 'Nordic' or 'End Demand' Model, which criminalises the purchase, but not sale of sex, continues to gain traction worldwide. The 'End Demand' model is promoted as a measure to increase gender equality and combat exploitation, despite ample evidence demonstrating that it only exacerbates exploitation and violence.

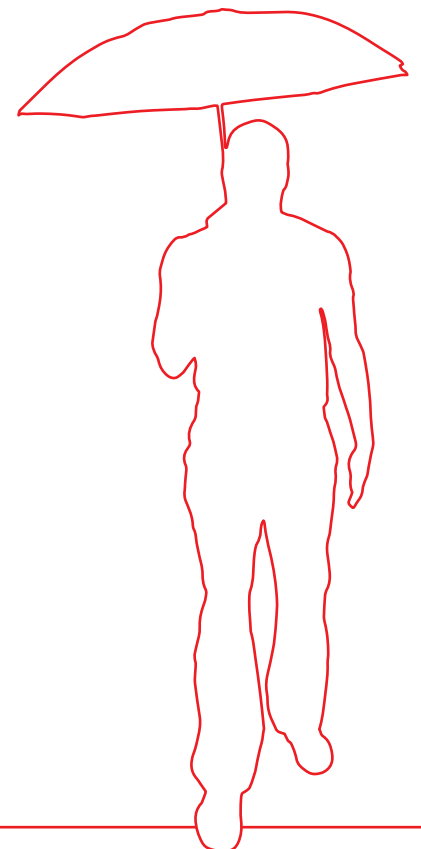
Harmful Narratives and Hate Speech

Anti-rights actors claim to seek 'protection' for populations they consider vulnerable, including women, sex workers, refugees, and children, all while restricting their rights. By disguising discrimination and bias within 'pro-rights' language of 'protection,' anti-rights movements spread misinformation, perpetuate harmful practices and policies, and reinforce stigma and discrimination. Anti-rights movements use this narrative to promote policies aiming to 'protect' sex workers from themselves and claim to 'protect' the general population from people they perceive as being dangerous, immoral, or deviant. Narratives promoted by anti-rights movements are often accompanied by or incite hate speech.

Anti-Rights Public Health Policies

Rhetoric of 'protection' is used to promote harmful public health policies that contradict evidence- and rights-based practices. These include the criminalisation of HIV exposure, non-disclosure, and transmission. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments expanded punitive policies and practices against sex workers, subjecting sex workers to increased financial hardship, violence, and criminalisation, while reducing access to essential health services and excluding them from social protection schemes. Anti-rights movements have also advocated against access to contraception, safe abortion, gender-affirming care, and other rights-based sexual health services. Anti-rights movements have increased their efforts to undercut SRHR, which will disproportionately affect sex workers – the majority of whom are women, and many of whom are LGBT+.

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Gender Inequality and Transphobia

Sex workers of all genders are impacted by the anti-gender movement. In campaigning against sex work as form of 'patriarchal oppression' against cisgender women, anti-rights movements undermine women's rights and autonomy while invisibilising and invalidating male, trans, and gender-diverse sex workers. Women sex workers are disproportionately affected by policing, 'raid and rescue' operations, and coercive 'exit' and 'rehabilitation' programmes. The push to 'protect' and 'save' women from trafficking and exploitation mirrors anti-gender narratives, which portray cisgender women as 'victims' of the 'transgender agenda.'

Trans and gender-diverse sex workers face disproportionate levels of stigma, discrimination, and violence, as well as increasing attacks from feminists who label them as predators. Trans and gender-diverse sex workers are disproportionately targeted by law enforcement and incarcerated in facilities which do not match their gender identity.

Impacts on Sex Worker Rights Organising and Advocacy

Anti-rights movements have attempted to undermine sex worker rights organising and advocacy. Women's movement spaces pose challenges due to the prevalence of anti-sex work ideology from fundamental feminists and abolitionist groups. Sex workers are habitually excluded from these spaces, and those who do gain access face abuse. Anti-rights organisations are receiving increasing funding, while sex worker-led organisations are underfunded. Insufficient funding, coupled with attacks and violence from anti-rights actors, have accelerated rates of burnout and trauma among sex worker leaders. Anti-rights groups have also sought to discredit human rights defenders who support sex workers' rights.

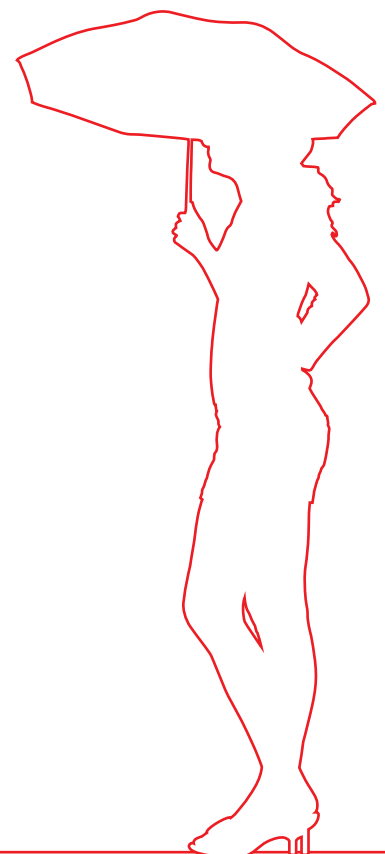
Sex Worker-led Resistance to Anti-Rights Movements

Sex worker-led organisations have built alliances to counter anti-rights movements, including with organisations focused on women's rights, LGBT+ rights, migrants' rights, key population rights, and the rights of people living with HIV. Alliance-building has been an essential strategy within advocacy and policymaking platforms, particularly in the women's movement.

Recommendations

- Fully decriminalise sex work.
- Identify the tactics of anti-rights movements and develop strategies to counter them.
- Increase funding for sex worker-led organisations.
- Strengthen cross-movement alliances between sex worker-led organisations and other human rights stakeholders.
- Promote the meaningful involvement of sex workers in all discussions, policies, and platforms which concern them.

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The Global Network of Sex Work Projects uses a methodology that ensures the grassroots voices of sex workers and sex worker-led organisations are heard by using Global and Regional Consultants as well as National Key Informants.

Community Guides aim to provide simple summaries of NSWSP's Briefing Papers, further detail and references can be found in the accompanying Briefing Paper.

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.



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Mitchell House, 5/5 Mitchell Street
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK, EH6 7BD
+44 131 553 2555 secretariat@nswp.org www.nswp.org

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