



# **NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!**

**A brief guide on meaningful involvement  
of sex workers and their organisations  
in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA)**



**THE SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS ADVOCACY NETWORK (SWAN)  
In Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia**

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THE SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS ADVOCACY NETWORK (SWAN) is a network of 24 civil society organizations in 17 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia advocating for the human rights of female, male and transgender sex workers. SWAN member organizations work with or are led-by sex workers and sex worker leadership is an organizing principle of the network.

SWAN was founded in 2006 and was officially registered as the SWAN Foundation in January of 2012.

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# INTRODUCTION

The global sex worker movement has been advocating for the meaningful involvement of sex workers in the design, development, implementation, management, monitoring, and evaluation in programming, research, legislation, and policy-making for decades. In 2017, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) held an expert meeting with sex workers from all over the world to determine criteria for the meaningful involvement of sex workers, and to develop an evaluation framework for the Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT)<sup>1</sup>.

The SWIT tool offers practical guidance on effective HIV and STI programming for sex workers and was developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), The World Bank, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The NSWP meeting resulted in a checklist and a briefing note for organisations to self-assess whether they meaningfully involve sex workers, and for sex worker-led organisations to assess whether they are meaningfully involved.<sup>2</sup>

This brief guide builds on the recommendations formulated by the global sex worker movement and aims to provide law and policy makers, researchers, and civil society stakeholders in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA)<sup>3</sup> with practical advice on how to meaningfully involve sex workers in three areas, namely policy-making, research, and civil society advocacy and programming. The document also illustrates the exclusion mechanisms that sex worker groups currently face in CEECA and describes examples of positive and negative experiences of cooperation in local and international contexts. Finally, it summarises the recommendations of the members of Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) for law and policy makers, researchers, and civil society representatives.

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1 WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, NSWP (2013). Prevention and Treatment of HIV and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections for Sex Workers in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: Recommendations for a Public Health Approach, Geneva: WHO. Available: [https://www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex\\_worker\\_implementation/en/](https://www.who.int/hiv/pub/sti/sex_worker_implementation/en/)

2 NSWP (2018). Briefing Note: Meaningful Involvement of Sex Workers. Available: [https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/meaningful\\_involvement\\_document\\_en.pdf](https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/meaningful_involvement_document_en.pdf)

3 SWAN uses the term Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) to include the Eastern bloc countries; the independent states in former Yugoslavia (which were not considered part of the Eastern bloc); and the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania. The Central Asia (CA) region consists of the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This report also addresses sex work legal frameworks in Greece and Turkey as they are covered by SWAN's work.

## THE CONCEPT OF MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

The concept of meaningful involvement has been extensively used in health and social care literature and policy-making. A key catalyst for the mainstreaming of the concept into international law was the disability rights movement, which started to advocate for the realisation of the “nothing about us without us” principle already in the 1990’s. The movement used this motto to demand equal participation in social matters. Later on, meaningful involvement became a unifying call for people and movements around the world who are fighting for the right to participate in policy-making, research, and civil society, including sex workers and people living with HIV.

For the HIV movement, the formulation of the GIPA principle (Greater Involvement of Persons with AIDS)<sup>4</sup> represented a significant achievement. At the Paris AIDS Summit in 1994, the principle of greater involvement of people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS was a cornerstone of the Summit’s Declaration, describing the right to active, free, and meaningful participation. The World Health Organization also acknowledges that the involvement and contribution of affected communities reduces stigma and discrimination and increases the effectiveness and appropriateness of the HIV/AIDS response.<sup>5</sup> The organisation defines meaningful involvement - or social participation in their terminology - to address the following elements in the field of health:

- informing people with balanced, objective information;
- consulting, whereby the affected community provides feedback;
- involving, or working directly with communities;
- collaborating by partnering with affected communities in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of solutions;
- and
- empowering, by ensuring that communities retain ultimate control over the key decisions that affect their wellbeing.<sup>6</sup>

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4 See more on the GIPA principle: <https://www.hiveurope.org/gipa/gipa.htm>

5 See more: <https://www.who.int/3by5/partners/NGOguidingprinciples.pdf>

6 Learn more: [https://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/thecommission/countrywork/within/socialparticipation/en/](https://www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/countrywork/within/socialparticipation/en/)

In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), and the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWO) launched a key document for sex workers' rights advocacy, containing practical recommendations on implementing HIV and STI programmes for and with sex workers.<sup>7</sup> This standard-setting tool emphasised that building trust with sex workers is crucial in policy-making and HIV/AIDS programming and entails treating sex workers with dignity and respect, listening to and addressing their concerns, and working with them throughout the process of developing and implementing an intervention.

According to this document, meaningful participation means that sex workers:

- choose how they are represented, and by whom;
- choose how they are engaged in the process;
- choose whether to participate;
- and
- have an equal voice in how partnerships are managed.

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) also developed criteria for meaningful involvement of sex workers for non-governmental organisations working with sex workers or providing services to them:

- existing clear organisational policy on meaningful involvement of sex workers;
- public campaigning for sex workers' rights;
- set-up of a sex worker advisory group that is involved in the development of strategic plans and the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of advocacy and programming;
- existence of a recruitment policy that encourages sex workers to apply for staff positions;
- in case of outreach work, the inclusion of sex workers in outreach teams on equal terms;
- creation of a safe environment for sex workers, ensuring non-discrimination between sex workers and non sex workers within staff and across the organisation;
- participatory research, involving sex workers in the design, implementation, and analysis of data;

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<sup>7</sup> WHO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, NSWP (2013).

- clear and transparent processes that aim to build capacity of sex workers through developing and providing training with and for sex workers, nominating sex workers to attend external conferences, trainings, and workshops, and supporting sex workers to participate in exchange programmes with sex worker-led organisations;
- system of nomination in place that allows sex workers to represent the organisation at national and international policy fora;
- provision of technical assistance to sex workers who want to establish their own organisations.

## **SEX WORKER ORGANISING IN THE CEECA REGION**

Understanding the specificities of sex worker organising in the CEECA region is important for all stakeholders who wish to meaningfully involve sex workers in their work.

Sex workers' formal organising can be traced back to the late 1990's in CEECA and was accelerated by the outbreak of the HIV epidemic, not only due to sex workers being disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS but also the heavy stigma as "vectors of diseases" and a "threat to public health" present for centuries in the region. Simultaneously, the epidemic also facilitated sex worker groups' access to HIV funding, thus several sex worker groups were established as a direct and immediate response to the HIV epidemic, such as Tais Plus from Kyrgyzstan in 1997.

Mobilisation of various sex worker-led groups has been a dynamic process in the region, taking many forms, such as protests, creation of self-help support groups, and the founding of professional civil society organisations with long-term advocacy plans and matching infrastructure. Sex workers have organised into diverse types of groups, ranging from informal collectives to community-based non-governmental organisations and international coalitions. This variety in the type, size, and profile of sex worker groups significantly impacts what measures are required to involve them meaningfully in policy-making, research, and national or international civil society advocacy and programming.

A major bottleneck that prevents sex worker groups from influencing policy-making, research, and civil society priorities is their systemic exclusion from funding. Several analyses confirmed that despite the growing number of organisations led by sex workers globally and in the region, the availability of funding has remained limited. A 2010 mapping<sup>8</sup> concluded that organisations working for sex worker rights in four global regions operated on annual budgets averaging less than €30,000. Many sex worker-led groups accessed no funding at all. A recent survey with sex workers' rights organisation<sup>9</sup> also found that while there is increasing amount of foundation grants available for sex worker groups, financing from embassies, bilateral aid programmes, multilateral funding sources, and governments is marginal.

Sex worker groups across the CEECA region work to address intersectional forms of discrimination and violence against sex workers. This means that they are experts on issues that not only concern sex workers, but other marginalised groups as well, such as migrants, people living with HIV, LGBT people, women, and people who use drugs. For instance, in Turkey, Red Umbrella Association for Sexual Health and Human Rights, founded in 2013, centers the experience of transgender sex workers in their advocacy and programming due to widespread transphobia and hate crimes targeting their community. SZEXE, the Association of Hungarian Sex Worker focuses on Roma cis women, who face the most egregious forms of state and non-state violence. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where HIV prevalence among sex workers is high, organisations work extensively on improving the lives of sex workers living with HIV.

All these examples show that sex worker groups work to tackle the manifold structural factors contributing to sex workers' vulnerability and possess considerable expertise on non-strictly sex work-related policies and their impact on women, (undocumented) migrants, LGBT people, people living in poverty, and other marginalised groups. This implies that sex workers and their communities should not only be involved in policy-making, research, and civil society partnerships that address sex workers, but more generally in associated policy areas as well.

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8 Crago, Anna-Louise (2010). Sex worker organisations' and projects' funding priorities. A mapping commissioned by the Donor Dialogue to Advance Sex Workers' Rights. Available:

<https://studylib.net/doc/8614914/sex-worker-organizations-funding-priorities>

9 Mama Cash, the Red Umbrella Fund and the Open Society Foundations (2014). Funding for sex worker rights. Opportunities for foundations to fund more and better. Available:

[https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/report\\_funding-sex-worker-rights\\_2014\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/report_funding-sex-worker-rights_2014_final_web.pdf)

## EXCLUSION MECHANISMS ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Despite sex worker groups' expertise in various fields, they face a multitude of obstacles to participation in policy-making, research, and civil society advocacy and programming. Sex workers' mobilisation in the CEECA region has been traditionally hindered by various factors, such as criminalisation of sex work, migration, sexual orientation and gender identity, HIV status, the precariousness of those selling sexual services, state-sponsored attacks against civil society organisations, and limited financial and organisational resources. Currently, the strengthening anti-human rights and pro-family rhetoric and growing abolitionist mobilisation within feminist and women's rights movements also present threats to sex worker advocacy in the region.

Sex worker groups all across CEECA report that they are systematically excluded from funding opportunities, international policy consultations, and national and international civil society processes due to their lack of professional structures and funding and widespread discrimination in the sector. As already stated, some organisations and agencies include sex workers, albeit in a tokenistic way or in a manner that does not respect community processes i.e. inviting a person individually without consulting with the local or national sex worker organisation. In addition, professionalised NGOs often compete for the same funds as sex worker-led groups in the region and due to their status and infrastructure, position themselves and are considered experts on sex worker programming. Often, these service provider NGOs do not reach the community they are meant to serve, as they do not involve sex workers in the design and implementation of their programs, much less into their organisations as equal staff and board members.

The participation of sex workers and their organisations often remains tokenistic and limited even in fields where the overwhelming majority of actors have persistently been vocal in supporting the meaningful involvement of sex workers, such as in HIV activism. One recent example is the 2018 International AIDS Conference, which was attended by 120 sex workers from more than 25 countries. The bi-annual International AIDS Conferences are the largest global gathering of HIV academics, implementers, policy makers, people living with HIV and those most affected by HIV, including sex workers.

The theme of the 2018 Conference "Breaking barriers, building bridges" and its focus on the CEECA region were welcome by the sex worker movement. However, concerns were raised - as they had been raised at previous Conferences - about the tokenistic inclusion of sex workers in the official programme: lack of scholarships granted for sex worker activists, limited number of sex worker-led abstracts approved, high

costs for participation, which all led to greatly limited sex worker presence. Furthermore, the decision by International AIDS Society to hold its next 2020 conference in San Francisco, United States - where a travel ban on sex workers and people who use drugs will deny participation of two of the key populations - was protested by sex worker activists and allies during the Conference.<sup>10</sup>

Similar concerns had been voiced at previous AIDS conferences, such as in 2014, about the lack of meaningful coverage of HIV-related issues concerning men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender people, people who inject drugs, and sex workers.<sup>11</sup>

In 2016, various sex worker organisations, including the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) received an invitation from UN Women to participate in a formal e-consultation on their sex work policy. The online gathering of the input posed barriers to participation for the majority of sex workers in the Global South who have limited access to the Internet, do not speak the official languages of the United Nations and are not familiar with UN treaties and documents that guide UN Women. NSWP<sup>12</sup> and SWAN<sup>13</sup> criticised UN Women for their failure to organise any national or regional sex worker consultations and to recognise the centrality that sex workers should play in the development of sex work policies and programmes.

Mechanisms of exclusion limit sex workers' meaningful involvement in European policy-making as well. Notably, policy recommendations to Member States by the Council of Europe<sup>14</sup> and the European Union<sup>15</sup> were formulated without any consideration of input from national and international sex worker rights organisations and their allies in the HIV, anti-trafficking, and LGBT rights fields. In the area of anti-trafficking policies, similar barriers exist that render sex workers' participation difficult. In 2018, for instance, no sex worker organisation was accepted to the European Union Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings.<sup>16</sup>

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10 NSWP, SWAN, ICRSE, PROUD (2018). Sex workers at the 22nd International AIDS Conference (Amsterdam, July 2018). Available: <https://www.nswp.org/resource/report-sex-workers-the-22nd-international-aids-conference>

11 <https://www.nswp.org/news/sign-increase-meaningful-coverage-key-populations-the-international-aids-conference>

12 <https://www.nswp.org/news/un-women-petition-meaningfully-consult-sex-workers-now>

13 <http://www.swannet.org/en/content/swan-submission-un-women>

14 See the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) resolution entitled "Prostitution, trafficking and modern slavery in Europe". Available: <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-DocDetails-EN.asp?fileid=20559&wrqid=0&wrqref=&ref=1&lang=EN>

15 See the European Parliament resolution of 26 February 2014 on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality. Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2014-0162+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

16 See the list of organisations:

# PRINCIPLES OF SEX WORKERS' MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

## LAW AND POLICY-MAKING

Sex work laws and policies impact sex workers severely. Laws and policies that criminalise, penalise, and regulate/legalise sex work have a profound impact on the living and working conditions of those selling sexual services, making them vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and violence. Additionally, migration, anti-discrimination, health, LGBT, and gender equality legislation and policies greatly influence the lives of sex workers.

SWAN members report that they are hardly involved in law and policy-making processes on the national and international level. On the contrary, when they attempt to react to harmful legislative proposals, their concerns are disregarded. For instance, in Serbia, when public order laws were amended in 2016, increasing penalties for sex workers and newly introducing punishment for the clients of sex workers, Sloboda Prava, the Belgrade-based sex worker-led collective was not involved at all in the legislative process.<sup>17</sup>

Authorities also play a key role in preventing sex workers from self-organising, instead of providing resources for their community mobilisation. In May 2013, Russia's national organisation of sex workers, Silver Rose, was denied official registration as an NGO by Russia's Ministry of Justice. The Ministry declared that "there is no such profession as sex work," accusing Silver Rose of violating Article 29 of the country's constitution. Article 29 prohibits "campaigning and propaganda inciting social, racial, national and or religious hatred and enmity."<sup>18</sup>

Positive examples of meaningful involvement - although difficult to identify in the region - occur mainly in the HIV/AIDS policy field as sex work is often dealt with as a public health concern.

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[https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu\\_civil\\_society\\_platform\\_against\\_thb\\_2018\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu_civil_society_platform_against_thb_2018_0.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Information provided by Sloboda Prava (Equal Rights), Serbia.

<sup>18</sup> Learn more:

<https://www.redumbrellafund.org/sex-workers-stand-russias-discriminatory-draconian-laws/>

*Tais Plus actively participates in the development of the national HIV program. The development of the current state program on HIV for 2017-2021 was started in the summer of 2016. Tais Plus members took part in discussions on how the working group should operate and what mechanisms should be realised to ensure the full participation of affected communities in this work.*

*(Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan)*

*In countries where Country Coordinating Mechanisms of the The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria operate, representation and meaningful involvement of affected communities are weak or only a formality. In 2014, the leader of the Russian sex workers' group Silver Rose has been elected the Chair of the Coordinating Committee on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control in Russian Federation. The main task of the Coordinating Committee was to represent the members of the Country Dialogue in coordinating development and implementation of the program supported by the Global Fund to Fight AIDS in Russia between 2015 and 2017.<sup>19</sup>*

*(Silver Rose, Russia)*

*In 2018, a Methodological Guide on prevention, care, and support services for sex workers was presented for the employees of HIV-service organisations. This toolkit has been drafted with representatives of the National AIDS Center. Members of the sex worker and MSM communities, people who inject drugs and people living with HIV were part of the process and the assessment of the current regulatory framework.*

*(Ameliya, Kazakhstan)*

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<sup>19</sup> NSWP (2014). Leader of the Russian Sex workers' Movement "Silver Rose" elected as Chair of HIV/AIDS Coordinating Committee in Russia. Available: <https://www.nswp.org/news/leader-the-russian-sex-workers-movement-silver-rose-elected-chair-hivaids-coordinating>

*STAR-STAR, a sex worker-led organisation in North Macedonia, is part of the working group for the evaluation of the working program of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) office in the country. This involvement creates opportunities to include the organisation's perspectives related to sexual and reproductive health and rights among young sex workers in the program of the UNFPA office in Skopje. STAR-STAR also notes that the organisation is involved in the implementation of the National Program for the Protection of the Population from HIV in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, financed by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, the organisation was invited by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy to participate in the working group to amend the anti-discrimination law.*

*(STAR-STAR, North Macedonia)*

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO LAW AND POLICY MAKERS <sup>20</sup>

- **Remove laws against sex work that restrict sex workers' capacity to associate and organise, to undertake collective bargaining, and to improve labour conditions.**
- **Provide funding and capacity-building for sex worker organisations to support their community building, community-based research and services, training, advocacy, and campaigning activities. Eliminate barriers to funding, working together with sex worker organisations and other organisations representing marginalised communities.**
- **Invite sex workers to participate in all consultations, committees or fora where policies, interventions, or services concerning them are planned, discussed, researched, determined, or evaluated. Design measures to protect the anonymity of sex workers by actively involving their organisations.**
- **Ensure that victims/survivors of violence receive appropriate remedies and redress, including compensation and legal aid, and that sex worker groups are involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of victim support and anti-violence strategies.**

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<sup>20</sup> Based on the Consensus Statement of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP): <https://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/ConStat%20PDF%20EngFull.pdf>

## RESEARCH

SWAN members report that they are rarely approached with requests from research and academic institutions or individual researchers to be involved in research projects on sex work. Without sex workers' meaningful involvement, sex work research often reflects the biased views of health and social workers, researchers, and policy makers and even leads to supporting arguments in favour of sex work criminalisation.

The development of participatory community-based research methodologies is key to ensuring that sex workers and their communities benefit from research activities.

*SWAN implemented two community-based research projects with its membership. In 2008, the network initiated a project to map and document abuses, violence and discriminatory treatment faced by sex workers.<sup>21</sup> In 2014 and 2015, the network coordinated another community-based research project focusing specifically on violence from state- and non-state actors and on barriers to sex workers' access to justice and redress.<sup>22</sup> Both research projects were community led in that sex workers were the researchers, writers as well as the advisory body for the reports. And most importantly, the reports are focused on the priority issues of sex workers in CEECA and are meant to explain the lived experiences of sex workers and the consequences and implications of laws, policies, and practices on sex workers' lives, livelihoods, and health.*

*The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Turkey conducted research on sexual and reproductive health of sex workers in the country. According to Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association based in Ankara, civil society was involved in the design and implementation of the research project. UNFPA involved sex workers, service providers, academics, civil society organisations and the public health directorates in 8 provinces of Turkey in the project.*

*(Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association, Turkey)*

21 Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) (2009). Arrest the Violence: Human Rights Abuses against Sex Workers in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Budapest: Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN). Available:

[http://swannet.org/files/swannet/File/Documents/Arrest\\_the\\_Violence\\_SWAN\\_Report\\_Nov2009\\_eng.pdf](http://swannet.org/files/swannet/File/Documents/Arrest_the_Violence_SWAN_Report_Nov2009_eng.pdf)

22 Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) (2015). Failures of Justice. State and Non-State Violence Against Sex Workers and the Search for Safety and Redress. Budapest: Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN). Available:

<http://www.swannet.org/files/swannet/FailuresOfJusticeEng.pdf>

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO RESEARCHERS <sup>23</sup>

- **Consider sex work as an income-generating economic activity and use this framing when designing research methodologies, rather than considering sex work as deviance or crime.**
- **Consider how under-resourced sex workers and their organisations are and design compensation measures accordingly, consulting sex worker groups.**
- **When approaching sex worker organisations, state the purpose of research and how it will be conducted.**
- **Design strategies to protect sex workers' anonymity, considering how breaches in confidentiality can be prevented and how sex workers will be protected from discrimination, stigma, and other possible impacts of disclosure.**
- **Define how sex worker communities will benefit from research findings, jointly with sex worker organisations.**
- **Set-up a community advisory board comprised of members of the community. Include this advisory board at all stages of research, from research design to data analysis to dissemination.**

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<sup>23</sup> These recommendations build on:

SWOP-USA (2017). Fact Sheet: Ethical Considerations for Conducting Sex Work Research. Available:

[http://www.swop-seattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ETHICAL\\_RESEARCH\\_WITH\\_SEXWORKERS\\_FACTSHEET.pdf](http://www.swop-seattle.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ETHICAL_RESEARCH_WITH_SEXWORKERS_FACTSHEET.pdf)

## INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Sex workers and their organisations form partnerships with numerous NGOs, both on the national and international level. Increasingly, they are part of international policy processes as well, such as consultations and policy formulation processes coordinated by the United Nations. However, SWAN members report countless cases when their involvement is tokenistic or completely lacking or even instances when their participation in events or processes is denied.

*In 2016, the organisers of Budapest Pride excluded from the official Pride Week program a workshop on sex work, organised by the Hungarian Association of Sex Workers and Transvanilla Transgender Association. According to Pride organisers, who first accepted the workshop, this workshop presented a threat to Budapest Pride, because it suggests that sex work can be a voluntary job while it is in fact an institution based on patriarchal oppression in their view.*

*(Association of Hungarian Sex Workers, Hungary)*

*An NGO applied for a USAID grant and invited Tais Plus together with an LGBT organisation to the consortium. Tais Plus carried out its task calculating the costs that would be needed to implement HIV programs with sex workers and with men who have sex with men (MSM) from state resources. At the end of the project, a publication was launched with their logo. Tais Plus was not even aware that the publication had been planned and no one had discussed its content with them.*

*(Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan)*

*In Ukraine, several Facebook groups, such as FeminismUA, FemUA Nordicmodel and Resistanta withdrew from the 2018 Women's March, because Legalife-Ukraine, the sex worker advocacy organisation, was listed as an organiser.<sup>24</sup>*

*(Legalife-Ukraine, Ukraine)*

Partnerships with other civil society organisations might also be an empowering experience for sex workers and their groups if their contribution is valued and they are treated as equal partners.

*The Draft Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination has been blocked by certain MPs in the North Macedonian Parliament. Several civil society organisations, amongst them STAR-STAR, held a joint press conference to express their objection.*

*(STAR-STAR, North Macedonia)*

*Tais Plus have been working together with Labrys, an LGBTI organisation in Kyrgyzstan since 2008 when both organisations submitted shadow reports to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2015, they intensified the cooperation as both groups felt excluded from mainstream women's rights activism. Labrys and Tais Plus started to work on joint advocacy after the CEDAW Committee issued the Kyrgyz government with recommendations on improving the situation of LBT women and sex workers.*

*They worked with state actors and also pulled together resources to be able to carry out rapid responses to cases of violence against trans sex workers. Furthermore, they have collectively also achieved that a monitoring mechanism was set up by the ombudsman's office to monitor the situation and illegal detention of trans people, sex workers, people who use drugs and people living with HIV.*

*(Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan)*

<sup>24</sup> Semchuk, Kateryna (2018). Why are some Ukrainian feminists boycotting the International Women's Day march in Kyiv? Available: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/kateryna-semchuk/why-are-some-ukrainian-feminists-boycotting-international-women-s-day>

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY <sup>25</sup>

- **Adopt a policy or position that supports the human, health, and labour rights of sex workers, highlighting the precarious situation sex workers of all genders live in. Mainstream the message of removing legal barriers and punitive laws that impact sex workers across all organisational communications channels, including in campaigning.**
- **Support sex worker events publicly, such as the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers on 17 December.**
- **Design a transparent process for decision-making and allow ample time for consultation with sex workers and their communities, considering their needs, but ensuring that they have minimum one month to prepare.**
- **Design meetings and trainings in a way that create safe spaces for sex workers and other marginalised groups and allow for their meaningful involvement:**
  - **invite all sex worker organisations rather than just one sex worker representative, considering that sex workers may not be in a position to participate or attend meetings continuously or regularly. Provide sufficient time for these organisations to define whether and how they wish to be represented and to be engaged in the process;**

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<sup>25</sup> These recommendations build on: NSWP (2018).

- **allow for sufficient time for sex worker organisations to nominate their representatives and prepare for the meeting;**
  - **implement anonymity policies with the involvement of sex workers and other groups whose right to privacy is commonly violated, e.g. transgender people, (undocumented) migrants;**
  - **waive conference fees so that sex workers living in precarious situations are able to participate;**
  - **implement a honorarium scheme and organise childcare facilities that allow low-income sex workers - not employed by professional NGOs - to attend the event;**
  - **provide harm reduction services at the venue and arrange a local person who uses drugs to be available for support in a paid capacity;**
  - **choose accessible venues for events and carry out accessibility planning with disabled people's organisations;**
  - **organise events in locations where there are no restrictions to sex workers' and other marginalised groups' participation, such as people who use drugs;**
  - **allow for flexibility in meeting times and methods;**
  - **ensure that sensitive translation is provided at the meeting.**
- 
- **Implement trainings for staff members and other affiliates of the organisations on sex work and human rights;**
  - **Increase representation of sex workers and other marginalised groups among the organisation's staff, decision-making bodies and contractors.**

- **Involve sex workers and their organisations in the design of meeting agendas, strategic plans, policy documents, and the monitoring and evaluation of the organisation's programmes, creating transparent processes for participation. A transparent process should provide:**
  - **comprehensive information about decision to be made by the community in a timely manner and in the languages spoken by sex workers in the country (including migrants)**
  - **an electronic or written communication to document the consultation that occurred with sex worker groups across the geographic area**
  - **1 month, at least, to allow for consultation at national level.**

# DO

Respect community nomination processes.

Ask regional and national sex worker organisations to nominate representatives.

Use accessible language.

Allow for minimum one month to consult our communities before your event.

Provide scholarships and honoraria to those sex workers who are not in paid jobs in professional NGOS.

Guarantee confidentiality.

Realise that we are experts. Include sex workers as facilitators, employees and contractors in paid positions.

Adopt a position that supports the human, health, and labour rights of sex workers.

Organise events in venues that are accessible and provide harm reduction and health services.

Provide translation.

# DON'T

Invite only one sex worker.

Always choose the same sex worker(s) who you know and are comfortable with.

Assume we understand your abbreviations.

Invite us in the last minute and expect that we have extensively consulted our communities.

Assume that sex workers are well-off.

Identify sex worker participants as sex workers in your communications.

Think that sex workers cannot do more than participate in a meeting.

Talk about your support in private conversations over coffee.

Expect sex workers who are disabled, living with HIV or use drugs to participate in your meeting if their basic needs are not met.

Assume that we all speak English/Russian (colonial/official languages).

