



ANNUAL REPORT 2019



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ABOUT SWAN

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) is a sex worker-led regional network in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia that advocates for the human rights of female, male and transgender sex workers. SWAN was founded in 2006 and was officially registered as the SWAN Foundation in January of 2012.

OUR MISSION: SWAN is a regional network of sex worker-led organisations, and their allies that works to create societies in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia where:

- sex work is depenalised and decriminalised.
- sex workers can live and work free from violence, stigma and discrimination.
- sex workers are empowered and actively engaged in issues that directly affect their lives and health.

OUR VALUES: SWAN's member organisations either work with or are led by sex workers and sex worker leadership is an organising principle of the network. SWAN's work is overseen by a democratically elected Management Committee. SWAN operates with the following values:

- We recognise the right of sex workers to take agency in their lives, health and decision-making.
We commit to actively involve sex workers in all levels of SWAN governance and to the protection of human rights.
- We recognise sex work as work, which is an unforced sale of sexual services between consenting male female and trans adults.
- We seek to address the needs and engage the strengths of the diverse range of people who are sex workers, recognising their intersectionality with other population groups (such as, migrants, people who use drugs, people living with HIV, LGBTI people and others) as well as their diverse range of work environments and lived experience.
- We prioritise support of sex worker-led initiatives but also support their allies address the needs of sex workers.

OUR GOAL: Sex workers will enjoy human rights, safety, well-being, health and dignity in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2019

This Annual Report shows SWAN's work in diverse areas in order to achieve our objectives as laid out in our Strategic Plan 2018-2022.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1: To build the capacity of national and local sex worker-led initiatives and their allies to promote and advocate human rights- and evidence-based policy and programming.

1.1 Enabling exchange of experience and learning between SWAN members

One of the fundamental purposes of SWAN is to serve as a platform for learning and sharing between our members. This is done through identifying, documenting and disseminating good practices of SWAN members, facilitating mentorship or internship programs, and organising trainings and meetings that enables groups to share their experiences and learn from each other.

In 2019, SWAN worked with its members to make this exchange of experience and knowledge possible in many countries:

In May, activists from Tais Plus in Kyrgyzstan, Legalife-Ukraine, AMELIA in Kazakhstan and Women for Freedom in Georgia came together at the [regional convening](#) SWAN organised in Tbilisi, Georgia to discuss transitioning from Global Fund to Fight AIDS Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) to state funding and exchange of experiences between community led organisations implementing the Global Fund Capacity Building Program. Eurasian Harm Reduction Association (EHRA) provided additional technical assistance within the framework of the Communications Platform. Community monitoring, social contracting, standards for services for sex workers, community mobilisation and activism were part of the topics discussed.

In June, [Legalife-Ukraine](#) hosted a [study visit](#) by activists from Moldova. The visits were organised at Legalife-Ukraine's main office in Kiev and at their branch in Cherkasy with the financial support of Global Fund's Fast Track Cities Project. This study visit was part of SWAN's mentoring plan to build capacities of sex workers in countries where there is no sex worker-led organisation such as Moldova. The study visit included interactive discussions as well as office and field work allowing participants to exchange information and experience in various areas as well as development of sustainability and community mobilisation plan in Moldova for 2019-2020.



In July, another [study visit](#) took place between the team from [Initiative for Health and Social Development \(HESED\)](#) in Bulgaria and other SWAN members, [Healthy Options Project Skopje \(HOPS\)](#) and [STAR-STAR](#) in North Macedonia. This visit was facilitated by SWAN within the regional Fast Track Cities Project. The Global Fund left Bulgaria several years ago and this has caused the majority of services for sex workers to close down. This challenging environment for services and the lack of adequate support also affects the level of community mobilisation and participation. To tackle this issue, a few interested community members supported by HESED visited North Macedonia to learn about Macedonian experience in community mobilisation, the role of service providers and legal support in community mobilisation as well as strategies to sustain services and interventions within the community. The group met with street-based sex workers during outreach activities and visited a drop in centre run by HOPS, where they had the opportunity to talk to community activists as well as social workers and lawyers. The group also visited the national sex worker-led organisation STAR-STAR and discussed experiences in community mobilisation and capacity building processes. SWAN will continue to support this initiative and additional in-country community gatherings and sharing between activists from Bulgaria and other countries in the region (see 1.2).

In October, SWAN, in partnership with the [International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe \(ICRSE\)](#), organised a [regional convening](#) on movement building and community mobilisation under the Robert-Carr Fund (RCF) SWIT program in Budapest with participants from Ukraine, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia and Georgia.



During the 3-day long meeting participants discussed a variety of topics such as threats and trends in the region related to sex worker movement building, better understanding on how to build intersectional social justice movements in a way that is inclusive of all sex workers, existing tools from ICRSE on intersectionality, SWIT program activities, next steps and community mobilisation strategies.

1.2 Provide training and technical assistance to members.

In 2019, through combining resources from different programs and projects, SWAN provided extensive training and support to its members in several areas tailored to their needs:

Bulgaria: Between 26-28th of November, SWAN together with HESED, organised a 2-day community mobilisation training in Sofia. In the previous year HESED implemented a series of other sex worker-led activities aimed at mobilising community such as yoga classes, outreach work, 17th December community-led event, human rights training, legal support, etc. Unfortunately, due to lack of funds, in 2019 HESED closed their sex work program which left the sex worker community without a reliable service provider and ally in the country. Future developments and opportunities for community mobilisation in Bulgaria are yet to be explored.

Georgia: Women for Freedom and SWAN partnered in implementing three programs in 2019. SWAN's role was to provide technical assistance in budgeting, activity planning and implementation when there were challenges or need for changes in activities.


Under RCF-SWIT program, Women for Freedom organised a summer school where they brought together new and emerging leaders for 5 days to discuss the Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT), the importance of its endorsement by the international and national partners and to receive more information on Women for Freedom's history, mission and vision.

Within the GF program, in July and December 2019, Women for Freedom implemented community-led monitoring of the existing services in 4 service providing organisations in Tbilisi.



Greece: ICRSE, SWAN and [Red Umbrella Athens/Positive Voice](#), organised a 3-day community mobilisation training between 5th-7th February, in Athens. The goal of this training was to empower the sex workers' movement in Greece, to advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work by highlighting the problematic nature of criminalisation of clients and to help develop a strong network of allies against it.

The training provided a comprehensive introduction to the different legal frameworks on sex work, their impact on sex workers lives, advocacy examples of the sex worker's rights movement globally and the legal situation in Greece. At the same time, this workshop aimed to open up a space for dialogue amongst community members and



relevant stakeholders, to gather their input and encourage the participants to engage in an action planning process. A full report developed by Red Umbrella Athens can be read [here](#).

Kazakhstan: AMELIYA, the local sex worker-led organisation in Kazakhstan, under the RCF-SWIT program, organised 7 community meetings in Taldykorgan for strengthening the community's potential to mobilise, protect rights, reduce stigma, eliminate violence against sex workers, and implement the SWIT tool.

Within the same program, they continued to maintain an online platform which proved to be a very efficient tool for information sharing, consultation and problem solving. Additionally, members of AMELIYA made visits to Almaty to meet local sex workers and establish some communications with the community. These visits and mobilising activities in Almaty will continue in 2020 as well.

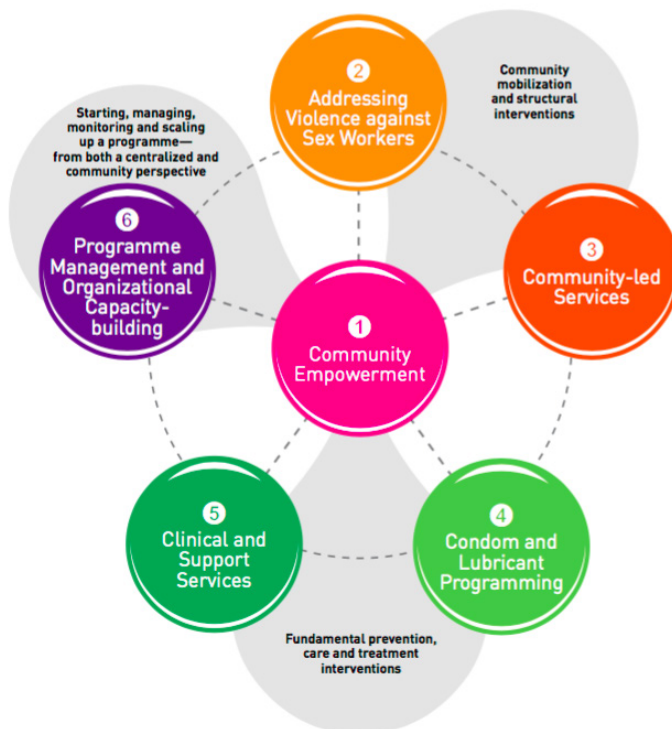
AMELIYA also submitted a shadow report to 74th CEDAW session, in coalition with other vulnerable groups of women, but with special chapter/annex on sex workers' status. They received technical and financial support to attend the session through NSWP and SWAN provided technical assistance in structuring the report, issues and recommendation. CEDAW Committee expressed concern about "social stigma, widespread discrimination, including gender-based violence, experienced by women in prostitution, including at the hands of police and reported refusals to register complaints by women in prostitution about cases of violence. The Committee made separate recommendations for victims of trafficking, and women in prostitution and recommended to State Party to:

- register, investigate and prosecute cases of gender-based violence and discrimination against women in prostitution and bring perpetrators to justice
- end the practice of forced HIV testing. Conduct awareness-raising campaigns to challenge the stereotypical perceptions of women in prostitution and related stigma
- provide exiting programs/ alternative income-generating opportunities for women wishing to leave prostitution.


Kyrgyzstan: In January, SWAN and the NSWP co-organised a [workshop](#) in Bishkek on the SWIT Evaluation Framework and meaningful involvement of sex workers. The focus was on introducing the Monitoring and Evaluation framework, discussing the aim of the country reports and how they will be used as well as practicing interviewing skills, mapping and identifying the national stakeholders.

Later on, in June, in-country technical support was provided to Tais Plus, from Kyrgyzstan, under the Global Fund Capacity building program. NSWP Senior Program Officer held a 3-day training with sex workers with one day open to MSM and PUD community activists. He provided input and clarifications on specific Global Fund issues, engaged with discussions and presented on key topics such as CCM functions and transition from Global Fund.

Tais Plus developed a very useful module of delivering Global Fund trainings for activists, which has resulted in an increase of sex workers' understanding Global Fund and CCM and one more activist being involved in the CCM.



Tais Plus continues to participate in meetings and activities around implementation of the national action plan, HIV and Human Rights. The project aims to increase the participation of sex workers in Global Fund processes. Tais Plus' actions are targeted at strengthening community systems and overcoming legal barriers for sex workers when accessing HIV prevention and treatment.



In 2019, under the RCF SWIT program, Tais Plus trained a team of 6 sex workers to act as national team which will conduct community monitoring of services. Following this activity, a monitoring visit was conducted in Osh, where 15 sex workers participated in the activity. This helped Tais Plus to consolidate recommendations and suggestions that informed the organisations' advocacy.

Moldova: Two sex worker activists, supported through Cities Project, organised around 20 meetings with sex workers in Balti where more than 100 sex workers participated. The most popular topics for discussion were sexual and reproductive health, protection and contraception, women's rights, sex slavery, stories of trafficked sex workers, PREP - pre-exposure HIV prevention.


Activists also organised the second community led public campaign/event in the country, dedicated to December 17th, International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. The event was held in the city centre of Balti with participation of 22 sex workers. Activists, volunteers and representatives of the sex work community distributed informational materials.

North Macedonia: In the framework of the RCF SWIT program, Macedonian sex worker-led organisation STAR-STAR, organised 9 different workshops in three different cities where STAR-STAR has branches in order to build the members' capacities and increase their knowledge on SWIT, public speaking, program management and decision-making processes in the country.

The working group on decriminalisation together with members of STAR-STAR, HOPS, Coalition Margins and SWAN continued to meet regularly and implement a joint action plan that is focused on strengthening capacities of sex workers to advocate for decriminalisation of sex work and create tools and partnerships for the achievement of their plans. These activities included community meetings for activism and advocacy, participation at different national advocacy opportunities events, group discussions and strategic planning.

Serbia: In 2019, Sloboda Prava (Equal Rights), sex worker-led organisation from Serbia and SWAN partner in implementing the RCF-SWIT program, received online and in-country technical assistance (TA) from SWAN.

The online TA for Equal Rights consisted of ongoing consultations and guidance in reporting, budget planning, project management and activity implementation. The in-country TA consisted of two visits, one in co-facilitating the SWIT capacity building training in Novi Sad and 3-days meeting with Equal Rights in Belgrade where two SWAN Program Officers facilitated the discussion on the strategic planning for 2020.



In February 2019, Equal Rights submitted a shadow report on the status of female sex workers in Serbia to the 72nd [CEDAW Session](#). Preparation of the report, as well as oral statement, lunch briefing and advocacy during the session were technically supported by SWAN and Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) jointly. The result of this activity was that although the Committee didn't recognize the overall problem with full criminalisation of sex work, nor address criminalisation of clients as part of the problem, they did express concern that "Women in prostitution are punishable under article 16 of the Public Law and Order Act (prostitution) by fines of up to 150,000 RSD (1300 EUR) and imprisonment of up to 60 days;" Additionally, The Committee recommends that the State party: "Repeal article 16 of the Public Law and Order Act and ensure that women in prostitution are not criminalized by the laws, including the Public Law and Order Act; provide exit programs and alternative income-generating opportunities for women who wish to leave prostitution."

Ukraine: Legalife-Ukraine, sex worker-led organisation, and SWAN continued implementing 3 different regional programs in 2019.

In 2019, Legalife-Ukraine efforts were focused on community mobilisation, developing community activists' knowledge and confidence in order to build capacities and promote leadership. In July, Legalife-Ukraine organised the RCF and GF training sessions focusing on leadership skills and the importance of community involvement in the Global Fund process.

In October, All-Ukrainian Forum was organised in Odessa. The idea was to gather sex workers from all 14 different regions in Ukraine, to get to know each other better, to share information, experience and good practices.

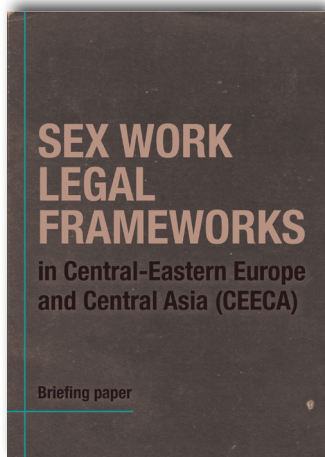
Additionally, Legalife-Ukraine puts a lot of focus on decriminalisation, as well as documentation of human rights abuses, analysis, and community led monitoring of existing services in all their activities. As a result of their events the number of sex workers involved in the national movement has increased.

EHRA training on community led monitoring of services Between July 3rd-4th, SWAN together with members from Tais Plus from Kyrgyzstan, AMELIA from Kazakhstan, Women for Freedom from Georgia and Legalife-Ukraine, participated in a training on community-led monitoring of services, organised by EHRA. During the training three different ways/methodologies of community monitoring were presented. The meeting was also used for sex workers-only discussion on next steps and feedback of the training.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2: To advocate for regional and global stakeholders to increase the degree to which they meaningfully involve sex workers and address their needs in their programming around rights and health in the CEECA region.

2.1 Building and documenting consensus among sex workers on priorities and positions.

To publish new resources that help to strengthen the common language used amongst our members and provide necessary information to keep our movement dynamic and up to date has always been one of our priorities. In order to keep up with this objective in 2019:



- SWAN published two briefing papers: [Sex Work Legal Frameworks in CEECA](#) and [Meaningful Involvement of Sex Workers and Their Organisations in CEECA](#).
- SWAN submitted a report to the CEDAW Committee discussion on general recommendations on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration. [SWAN submission](#) can be found amongst the list of submissions at OHCHR website. Additionally, SWAN Management Committee Chair, Marina Avramenko, gave an oral statement at the expert group meeting organised by the CEDAW Committee on 22nd of February 2019, in Geneva, Switzerland during the 72nd CEDAW session.

2.2 Making the voices of sex workers heard and influential.

As a sex worker-led network, it is crucial for us to maintain and deepen the dialogue with our member organisations, stay connected and support the national movements through amplifying their voices using our channels, links and advocacy opportunities. For this purpose, SWAN organises and attends many local and international meetings throughout the year ensuring sex workers' voices and demands are heard. SWAN board members, staff members or sex worker spokespeople attended a series of other meetings where sex workers voices were shared or amplified. Some of them are:

- **General Discussion on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration during 72nd CEDAW Session:** Marina Avramenko, Chair of MC, on behalf of Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN), 22nd of February 2019, Geneva, Switzerland;
- **National Conference on Evidence-based approach and best practices in comprehensive STI and HIV prevention programs with key populations:** March 2019, Minsk, Belarus. Natalia Zholnerova, MC member attended and presented on behalf of SWAN;
- **Global Consultation on Unmet Needs on Family Planning:** UNFPA, 18-20th of June, Antalya, Turkey. Attended by SWAN Program Officer for Policy and Advocacy.
- **First EECA Regional Judges' Forum on HIV, Human Rights and the Law:** The first Judges' Forum, organised by UNDP EECARO offices, took place in Chisinau, Moldova on October 3-4, 2019. This Forum is a continuation of the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, launched in 2010. Country delegations from 7 countries (Belarus, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Ukraine) attended the Forum. SWAN Management Committee Chair Marina Avramenko presented on experiences of sex workers in Russia around laws in practice, Natalia Isaeva from Legalife-Ukraine presented on SWAN's work as well as legal frameworks in the region and in Ukraine. SWAN Executive Director also attended the forum.
- **Roundtable discussion** between Proud Netherland, SWAN, ICRSE, NSWP and members of EU parliament on 15th of October in Brussels.
- **Beijing+25 Regional Review Meeting:** Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva between 29-30 October 2019, SWAN Chair Marina Avramenko attended the meeting and made a presentation at the UNECE side event on the theme of shrinking spaces for women human rights defenders in our region.

- **ICPD 25 Summit:** SWAN Executive Director was invited to participate at the Summit to mark the 25th Anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development between 12-14th of November in Nairobi.



- **GFATM regional meeting “AIDS and Tuberculosis in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: time to face the facts 26-27 November 2019 “,** Istanbul, Turkey: This regional meeting for Eastern Europe and Central Asia was organised by the Global Fund and co-hosted by UNAIDS. SWAN Executive Director was invited as a civil society representative.
- **EECA Cities Leadership Forum, 6th of December, Kiev, Ukraine:** SWAN Executive Director attended this closing event of the Alliance for Public Health Ukraine Fast Track Cities project that was hosted by Vitaly Klitschko, Mayor of Kiev and met another 7 mayors from cities within the project as well as additional cities that have signed the Paris Declaration.
- **1st Ukrainian Sex Worker Conference:** SWAN member organisation Legalife-Ukraine organised the first sex worker conference in Ukraine on December 17-18th, 2019. SWAN Executive Director attended the conference to support Legalife-Ukraine and was invited to speak at a panel discussion together with representatives of [Eurasian Women’s Network on AIDS \(EWNA\)](#), the Helsinki Committee and UNAIDS.

SWAN executive director spoke about regional trends, legal frameworks and how the EECA region is absorbing and responding to new feminist/abolitionist ideas on sex work that are new to the region. The event brought many sex workers' rights activists together from Europe and Central Asia.



2.3 Building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders:

As a regional network of marginalised communities, SWAN strongly values cooperation, partnerships and solidarity with other regional and global networks and NGOs representing key populations. In 2019, SWAN continued to work closely with its partners across the region and globally.

- In 2019, SWAN has continued to implement joint capacity building programs with NSWP, namely the SWIT and GF capacity building programs. NSWP has also agreed to be on the Oversight Committee for the regional GFATM grant SoS which Alliance for Public Health won.
- SWAN and ICRSE remain close networks and have regular meetings, [write joint statements](#) and [have synchronized reactions](#). Bigger joint events are being discussed for the upcoming years.
- Collaboration with regional key population networks (EHRA, ECOM, ENPUD, EWNA) on joint campaigns, projects and fundraising. As mentioned in various segments of this report, SWAN collaborates with other regional networks as opportunities arise.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3: To strengthen SWAN as a sustainable, well-governed network responsive to its members' needs.

Sex worker-leadership and meaningful involvement of sex workers is a core element of SWAN. In 2019, SWAN continued to improve its governance with regular meetings with the Steering Committee and Management Committee to make decisions on the topics that are important to boost the organisational strength.

3.1 Maintaining good governance of SWAN as a sex worker-led network / 3.2 Strengthening the SWAN Secretariat.

- The SWAN Steering Committee met for a one-day meeting in Budapest on May 13th, 2019 to approve the audited financial report before submission to the court.
- SWAN Management Committee held its 4-day annual meeting May 31st-June 3rd, 2019 in Budapest. The MC made minor revisions to Rules of Operation and Organisation, approved the financial report, approved the annual work plan, identified advocacy goals (for publications and papers), discussed ongoing programs and reviewed the communication strategy.
- Membership Renewals: In order to keep SWAN up to date and safe, we undertook a membership review process where members were encouraged to renew their memberships and update their organisational details. As a result of the process the membership list was updated, as well as SWAN's listserv and website. SWAN currently has 27-member organisations from 18 countries, with new member organisations from Uzbekistan, Armenia, Russia and Belarus.

3.3 Improving communication and increasing visibility about the needs and achievements of SWAN and its members.

SWAN website, list-serv and social media accounts continuously store and share brief news stories and more in depth reports on the ongoing trends and activities in the region and globally, as well as examples of good practices from SWAN members, meetings and trainings SWAN organised or participated in, and key dates that are important for sex worker community (i.e. [17th of December, The International Day To End Violence Against Sex Workers](#) and [1st of December, The World AIDS Day](#)).

- Use of social media;
SWAN social media accounts were updated regularly throughout the year to improve SWAN's online presence. SWAN communication strategy was updated accordingly with the new [Strategic Plan 2018-2022](#).

As of 31/12/2019 SWAN has;

- 2,954 followers on [Twitter](#).
- 1,080 likes on [Facebook](#) page.
- SWAN [Instagram](#) account was created

- Use of website:
SWAN published 19 news articles this year on its webpage. The website traffic is increased compared to previous years with daily active user numbers ranging between 28 and 123. Most of the website traffic was created by visitors from the United States, Russia and Bulgaria.

OUR DONORS

The programs reported on above have been implemented through the support of Open Society Foundations (OSF), Robert-Carr Fund (RCF), Red Umbrella Fund (RUF), NSWP Global Fund Capacity Building program, GFATM Fast Track Cities and some travel support through UNFPA and UNDP.

We thank our donors and supporters for the collaboration and support!