



TO SEE OUR POWER

Sex Workers' Stories of Fighting for their Rights
in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

SWAN

To See Our Power

**SEX WORKERS' STORIES OF FIGHTING FOR THEIR
RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE
AND CENTRAL ASIA**

A Community-Based Research Project of
the Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network in
Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

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PREFACE

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) is a network of non-governmental organizations and self-organized sex workers' initiative groups from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. These groups are united through their efforts to ensure sex workers are granted the same rights as any other person, sex work is recognized as work, and sex workers are empowered to be at the forefront of initiatives to defend their rights, health, homes and families.

SWAN began in 2006 as an initiative of the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU/TASZ) with the support of the Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP) of the Open Society Institute. Since its founding, the network has grown to include sex worker groups and sex work projects from 16 countries across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.¹ Though SWAN's member organizations vary in size, cultural and economic background, and overall priorities, they are joined by their commitment to recognizing sex workers as individuals who deserve respect and are capable of making their own decisions and taking charge of their own lives.

SWAN's member organizations work together on efforts to end official and social discrimination against sex workers, advocating for an end to laws and policies that penalize or criminalize sex work, endanger sex workers' health, or violate sex workers' rights. "To See Our Power" captures the stories of sex workers from across the region – bringing to light their personal experiences, daily challenges and remarkable achievements. Many of the stories shared here illustrate the barriers sex workers face in society for things many citizens take for granted – such as quality health services or police protection. As you read the following pages think how you can support sex workers in your own town, city or country by:

- Ensuring sex workers have the opportunity to speak on their own behalves;
- Opposing laws, polices and practices which criminalize and penalize sex workers; and
- Denouncing the human rights abuses frequently perpetrated against sex workers.

Thank you for taking the time to get to know us and the issues we care so deeply about. If you would like to learn more, please read a copy of our latest report "Arrest the Violence" available on our web-site at www.swannet.org.

Aliya Rakhmetova
SWAN Coordinator

1 Albania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine

TO SEE OUR POWER

INTRODUCTION

This booklet is a compilation of articles that were written for the SWAN, the Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network of Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In 2007, I had the great honour of being asked by the Sexual Health and Rights Project (SHARP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI) to work for SWAN. At my first SWAN meeting, in Kiev in the spring of 2007, I began interviewing sex workers from around the region about their experiences; the injustices they were facing, the nascent movements they were building, and the every day reality of being a sex worker.

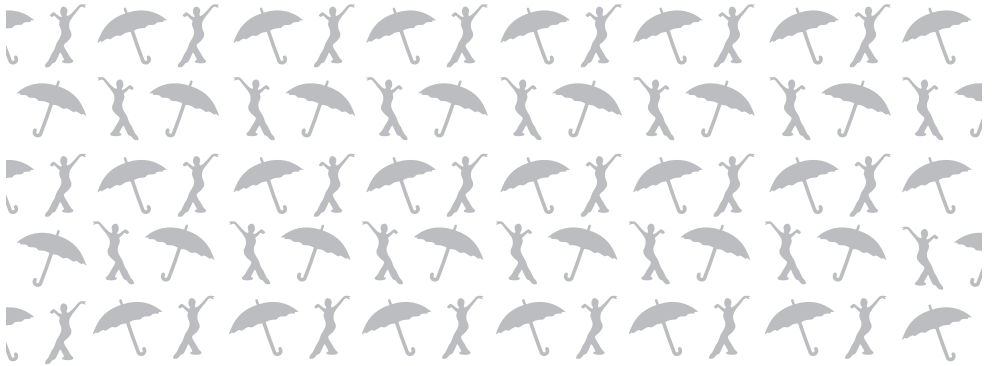
Since then, these interviews have appeared on a regular basis in SWAN News' Sex Worker Report column. I hope that as a reader, you will feel as I did, a privileged witness to the incredible courage, compassion and tenacity of the men, women and trans sex workers in SWAN. I hope too, that as you read their stories, you will become a steadfast ally in their struggle for sex workers' rights.

To help you understand the issues, we have included "The Curious Sex Worker Guides", a series I wrote for SWAN News to try and explain some of the debates, issues and occasionally, amusing trivia about sex work.

And finally, some information on SWAN so that you can become better acquainted with us.

Yours,
Anna-Louise Crago

TO SEE OUR POWER



Sex Workers' Report



TO SEE OUR POWER

Good Client, Bad Client (2007)

Six sex workers from Sofia, Bulgaria, answer SWAN News' questions about what makes a good client and a bad client. (Thank you to Angelina from HESED for doing the interviews!)

Four Sex Workers from Sofia's Ring-Road Answer Our Questions

Do you like or dislike your clients?

All sex workers mention that in general, they like their clients.

“Since 2000-2003, I haven't had bad clients – all of them are paying the money that are negotiated without any problems.”

For the other girls the clients are good in general but from time to time there is somebody who is rude.

What is a good client? What is a bad client?

“People are getting poorer and poorer but good clients pay and they are kind.”

“Bad clients are rude and don't want to give any money for services.”

What do you think about criminalizing the clients of sex workers?

All of these girls are against the criminalization of the clients.

“The client is coming just to have some fun and to take some pleasure and they want to make him feel like a criminal!”

“It's obvious that the politics is to make the clients not to use our services- that's why it's that issue with our legalization”

“The politicians don't have benefits from us and that's why they don't like us”.

Two Sex Workers from down-town Sofia Answer Our Questions

Do you like or dislike your clients?

“We are thinking that there are good and bad clients and most of them are bad.”

What is a bad client?

“Bad clients are rude, indifferent, unkind and ‘cold’”.

What do you think about criminalizing clients of sex workers?

“If the client is paying for the services- why does that need to mean he is a criminal???”

“I’m totally not agreeing with their criminalization”.

What do you think about politicians who think all clients abuse sex workers and are bad?

“All the politicians are worried about is to get money from us.”

100 Flavours of Sex Work (2008)

SWAN News interviews Victoriya tells about the many different ways of doing sex work in Kazakhstan.

You said that most sex work in Kazakhstan is now in-doors in saunas, cafés, clubs, flats or by call. Can sex workers advertise these services in the media?

Yes. They don’t say “sex work” because maybe the police would start checking in on them. They say “Beautiful charming ladies waiting for a charming prince” or “I can do everything and I will do as I wish!” Also, the internet is popular. There are websites where people can meet and under heterosexual contacts there is a spot “I provide sex for money”.

Has sex work changed over the years?

It has. Before men came for classic intercourse but in different positions they couldn't have with their girlfriends. Now, they want S/M, some oral, but anal sex is more interesting to them. I don't offer it, but others do. Also, role-playing is in demand. Popular role-plays are "French maid", "nurse", "waitress" and certain animals, like a woman pretends to be a cat.

Are there any men who sell sex to women?

In our city, there is one sauna where this happens but many men want to provide services to women.

Are the prices the same?

No, it can be twice as expensive because there are fewer men who sell sex to women. The usual prices are so high an ordinary girl can't afford them. So a richer woman could, a woman who lives alone but the biological need for sex is still there. Sometimes young women too, if they are wealthy, but often older, like in their 50s. The male sex workers are young, about 25-35. If the women are afraid to go to the sauna, the men can go to their flat.

Do police bother male heterosexual sex workers?

I don't know. They probably don't realize that they are selling sex.

Are there sex workers who sell gay or lesbian sex?

Yes. There are man-man services and woman-woman services. Not only in the saunas but in general too. Women can also sell sex to heterosexual couples. There is also group sex. But a woman will make more selling to men, because there is more interest and more opportunities.

My message to all the sex workers who read SWAN News is: it doesn't matter what kind of sex you are doing, the most important is for it to be safe.

The Police and The Pimps (2009)

Nata, a sex worker from Ukraine involved in Legallife the Ukrainian National Network of Sex Workers tells us about working on the street in Moscow and being caught between a rock and a hard place...

SWAN News (SN): Please tell us about your experience of sex work.

I worked for two years in Moscow on the main street for the “standing” girls [street sex workers]. We were standing on the street but the job took place in hotels or apartments.

SN: Did you have any trouble with police?

In Moscow, we had no problems with the police because the pimps were dealing with them. The problems were only for immigrants, you must always have your papers with you. We would get administrative fines for having no [legal migration] documents, but we didn't get fined for prostitution because of the pimps.

SN: What was the relationship between sex workers and pimps?

The pimps got a 50/50 split of profits from our sex work in Russia. They are not boy-friends or husbands, the relationship is strictly professional.

SN: Is it possible to work without a pimp?

Yes, independent girls can work without pimps. They are all Russian, though. But that was not the case for those of us without documents, who were in Russia illegally. Most of us in that situation were Ukrainians.

SN: Why can't migrant sex workers work independently in Moscow?

They can do this but you would need a lot of money in advance to come to Moscow, to cover your costs of living and so on- so quite a big amount of money upfront. But a pimp pays for everything. Also, to work individually is dangerous because of the clients and because you don't have anywhere to report problems to at all. The police are a major issue. If you have a pimp, he will speak to the police and make the deals, and cover many things for you, so you are protected from the police. If you are independent, you are at the mercy of the police- they give you administrative fines that you have to pay

or they force you do have sex with them.

SN: How do sex workers end up with pimps?

Women who want to work abroad, look for a pimp in Ukraine and he helps and he arranges for the women to get to Russia and work for the Russian pimps. The women know they are going to do sex work, and going to work for someone but they don't know for how much, what conditions or the deals of the pimps.

The pimps, say when you have paid off, you can go out and be independent but every time they punish her for something and make her pay more. So it is difficult for her to go out and to work freely. I worked for two years in Moscow like this, I couldn't bring any money home at all. Every time the pimps, they make you pay more money. They will bring small things for you and then make you pay more.

In Russia, the pimps don't care about the girls at all. In the Ukraine, the pimps work professionally, they take 50-50 but they give security and as a sex worker, you feel safe.

SN: How did you leave your pimp?

A client was nice and he helped me get away from the pimps. He became my boyfriend, I moved in with him and we came to Ukraine to have a child. After that, I lived in Russia for several years. I tried to live there legally but couldn't get papers because I have a health condition. They wouldn't let me stay in Russia or get any job so I went back to Ukraine with my child. My boyfriend still helps me by sending money through western union.

So I Can Stay in the Country (2009)

In this issue of Sex Workers' Report, SWAN News interviews Victoriya about human rights abuses against migrant sex workers in Kazakhstan.

What is the situation for girls from Uzbekistan or other countries in Kazakhstan?

Recently, the migrant girls have the most problems. Let's say their documents are ok. But the police take them to the police station and say we have to check your documents

and then take the documents away, and lock the girls up. In a recent case that happened this July in Taldykorgan, the police held the girls for six days, while they “checked” their documents. For six days, the girls were raped, beaten. They gave them nothing to eat. They were treated horribly while they were imprisoned. At the very end, they give their documents back and said, “Your documents are fine, you can go.”

What did the girls do?

They came to the drop-in center and they lived there for 3 days in the center. The psychologist spoke with them and we had doctors treat them for free. Not just a gynaecological check-up, we also had a surgeon come because they were beaten so heavily, not just raped.

Did they report the case to other authorities?

They didn't go to the court or the police, because there is no point. The case will be closed, it is of no use. They did not want to live through the humiliation again and see that no one care about what happened.

What has happened to those women?

They went to work a sauna owned by a police man. Since the owner is a police man, they are relieved, because they are protected from the police now. They are happy now, he is a good owner. The girl gets 70 % and the policeman gets 30%.

Is this an average arrangement?

Most sex workers split their profits 50-50. They are also some migrant girls without documents, who are totally controlled in slavery-like situations, they work only for food, this is a very small percentage, though. It is now more and more popular for sex workers to work independently.

If most women keep most of their profits, why are there some migrant women working in really horrible conditions?

The situation is that women are coming to work in Kazakhstan, because they have no money or education. So they choose this job. Or, the girls come from the villages maybe for another job, but then they see there is no job market, so they do sex work. The problems come for the girls with fake documents.

If they come with fake documents, the pimps are really not nice to them because they control the situation 100%. If a migrant woman works alone, the police come along and she is deported. If they work with the pimps and the police comes, the pimps pay the police and they let her stay in the country with her fake documents. The independents can also have problems with bad clients, who can beat or humiliate them. So, the girls work with pimps because of this. A lot of the pimps are women, but these pimps very often treat the women badly. They can force them to work, tell the women they can not reject clients.

The girls from Uzbekistan say that to come to Kazakhstan is very profitable for them. Because in 1 month they earn what they would have in 6 months in Uzbekistan, so the risk is worth it to them.

How do women get out of bad conditions?

Here is one example. There are some local girls, who came from the village to the capital to go do sex work. They looked for a pimp to work for, they found pimps, everything was ok, he gave them money. But then one day, they decided to run away and work independently. That is when their problems started, because they didn't manage to run away. The pimps caught them and stabbed them. When they recovered, in punishment, he forced them to work for no money at all.

So the girls went to the police on their own. They managed ok with the police and the police intervened, not to help the girls but because the pimps were dealing drugs. The police took the pimps to jail- but not for what they did to the girls, for the drugs. They do not care about the girls, but the drugs....well, it was the drugs that saved the girls.

So the girls were free and they went to work for another sauna and they are now doing well, working in conditions that are ok. In saunas, it is safer, because it is your space and there are admin staff who run the place. They offer some security because they don't want the girls to be beaten by bad clients, it is bad for their business too.

Pimps are an issue. But there are other important ones for migrant sex workers, like access to treatment for health issues and trying to obtain legal documents.

What happens to the girls when they are caught by police working with fake documents?

There was a raid recently and 7 girls were deported but one girl was allowed to stay. She said, "One police man liked me a lot. Now, I have to have sex with him every Saturday,

so I can stay in the country.”

If they are officially deported, they are kept in the police station for 3 days and then deported. It becomes an official government deportation and so, they are generally not humiliated. When a girl is deported, the government pays for a bus. We don't know what happens on the other side of the border when they get there. In 3 months they can come back again and they do. Many women manage to come back before the 3 months are up by paying the police to pass through the border.

Mostly Decriminalized (2007)

Justyna Sobeyko and Maria sex work, clients and the possible effects of a proposed anti-client law (“The Swedish Model”).

Please tell us who you are.

Justyna: I am a lawyer who works with TADA in Poland.

Maria: I am a sex worker in Poland.

Please tell me about sex work in Poland?

Maria: I was almost 48 when I started to do sex work and now I am 50. It was hard for me at first, but I was easily accepted by other girls when I started working. I started working in someone else's agency and there was a great variety of ages so even the young women accepted me. What was difficult for me personally was to switch, after the end of my marriage and my job, from my previous roles as mother and house wife with a husband for many years, as accountant, as a person who had a regular job from 8-3. But then I told myself that my aim was to feel free of my debts and make money. Now I am comfortable and I really like this job but it was a transition process.

I prefer to work with young women because I can easily make relationships with them because we don't compete – we have a very different client base. When I started sex work, I benefited a lot from young colleagues. They taught me how to do this job, how to do it more safely, how to use condoms, how to put them on clients and they taught me a lot about sexy things. And I taught them too: when you work, use your ass but also use your head!

Sex work has helped me in financial terms. There are only four months left that I need to work as a sex worker to pay off all my debts. I work alone in my own flat now so I am a bit isolated.

Is your experience with clients different working alone?

Maria: So far, I have had no bad experiences in my contacts with clients. If I need help, I either contact TADA or police. It is legal to work in a flat in Poland. It is not criminalized at all for clients or sex workers, it not even an administrative offense. But it is not legalized.

So, sex work is decriminalized in Poland?

Justyna: Mostly. But you cannot profit from somebody else's sex work, like by owning an agency or a brothel. Poland signed an old UN Convention which obliges states to criminalize everyone who profits from sex work. This is a big obstacle for full decriminalization. A few years ago, the law against owning a brothel or agency meant that most of the brothels and agencies were run by organized crime or drug-dealers. But now, a lot of agencies are run by rich hotel owners and a lot of sex workers themselves run them as "entertainment" agencies. Agencies can employ sex workers as dancers, waitresses and legally register...and unofficially they also offer sex. In the hotels, the waitresses might offer sex later. In which case, the waitress must pay the owner a part of the money.

Sex work in Poland is not legalized though, which means that if you do sex work, you do not have to pay taxes on it legally. Different people are against legalization in Poland: Churches and conservative society in general, sex workers who are not ready to come out. And some business people, because if you have extra money and you did not pay taxes on it, you can always say you earned it through sex work. It happens sometimes with huge amounts of money.

Would you prefer decriminalization, where there are no laws against sex work, or legalization where sex work is regulated and you have to register, with all the benefits and responsibilities that that means?

Maria: I had another job before sex work. When I am older, I will get my pension because of my work at my previous job, so that isn't a priority for me like for others who need a pension. Personally, I want to be anonymous. I don't want to have to register anywhere as a sex worker. I live in a completely different city than where I used to live. I don't want my family to know. And when you run your own legal business, you have

to pay the state a lot of money (social and health insurance, and pension contributions, income tax, value added tax). It worries me that it could happen that you would end up paying the state the equivalent of 3 out of 4 weeks' income and then you might have to spend the fourth week's income paying for your flat, your clothes.

Justyna: Many sex workers fear that they would lose money if we moved from mostly decriminalized, like now, to legalized. They fear that legalization would make it so unwieldy to work for themselves that many sex workers might end up working for a brothel owner instead and handing over some of their money.

What is sex workers' relationship to the police like in Poland?

Maria: The police treat sex workers respectfully. And, what is important is that even if our clients do something wrong like break a window or disturb the peace, the police never blame the sex workers for the offense.

Police respect sex workers. When I used to work in one agency, two guys appeared offering "security", they threatened us –"You will pay us...otherwise there will be trouble!" I said "NO! I will call the police". The two guys didn't believe me but I called the police so the guys left the agency and went to another one and did the same the thing. Those sex workers were very scared. I called the girls in all the agencies I knew to warn them. In the third agency, that these guys went to visit, they fell on the police because after being notified, the police also went from agency to agency looking for these guys.

Justyna: TADA's cooperation with police is really important. The police are very reliable for sex workers. They also collaborate easily with NGOs because in Poland, we have a multi-sectoral approach to different issues. The police is used to cooperating with NGOs for example, on preventing domestic violence.

Maria: Unfortunately, I do not know if it is as good for sex workers in smaller towns or where there are no NGOs who advocate for them. In Poland there are just two resources: La Strada for trafficked persons and TADA for sex workers, but only in four cities.

Recently, certain politicians have proposed criminalizing clients of prostitution in Poland. Do you think your relationship with the police would be the same if clients were criminalized?

Maria: Absolutely not! If sex work or clients were criminalized it would be so difficult to call the police. We would be hopeless when facing situations like the one I just mentioned. Mafia and gangs would benefit. There was strong pressure from police to get rid of all these mafias and gangs. Indeed, there are very few gangs now. And we have a lot of migrant sex workers, Russian, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, who can feel relatively safe in Szczecin. The success in getting rid of mafia was due to cooperation between sex workers and police. Sex workers contributed greatly to this. Violence against sex workers exists - rapes, assaults from clients. But in each case, sex workers know that we can call the police- and we do. We even call the police if clients want to leave without full payment! There is a clear message sent from police to sex workers, "If you are in trouble, just call us." Although this is typical of this city, but not of the Polish experience in general.

How would an anti-client law (the Swedish Model) change work in the sex trade?

Maria: Some clients would never appear again – at least at the beginning. It would threaten them. Less clients mean less money, so for me, it would mean a longer term working to pay off debts. It also means less choice of clients.

Everyone Knows (2009)

Irina from Taldykorgan, Kazakhstan talks to SWAN News about how sex workers choose to hide or be open about the kind of work they do with those close to them.

What kind of sex work do you do?

I do sex work in an apartment. I put an advertisement in the newspaper. You can make only short ads. They advertising is always something like: "European girl, 25 years old looking for high paid job". Clients call me on the phone and make an appointment to come to my apartment.

Do people close to you know that you are a sex worker?

In my family, everyone knows I work as an escort, only my son doesn't but my daughter does. And my friends, they all know. When I divorced, I started to do this job and told my mother very simply that I needed money. With my father, I don't have a good relationship, but he doesn't care that I do sex work even though we live together.

Do you face discrimination for being a sex worker?

In my personal life, I have no problems with discrimination because I also have a “regular” job in a beauty salon doing manicures and pedicures, so people don’t realize that I also do sex work.

Do most sex workers tell their families?

No. I am a quite unique, because we are a minority in Kazakhstan who are open to our families. Most sex workers hide what they do, because they are Muslims. They just tell their family they are going to another town to get a job. They don’t do sex work in the region or the town where their family is.

What is it like to do sex work in a country that is mostly Muslim?

It is the same as in the Christian world, with the same problems. There is one paradox: all the Kazakh politicians say that Kazakhstan girls must not do this job, it is the foreign girls who must do it, not theirs. But the irony is that all the Kazakh men want local girls, for them it is a plus. So, the job is not very good for immigrants.

Sex Work Along the Information Super Highway (2009)

Lina, from Vilnius, Lithuania talks to SWAN News about how the internet has changed sex work. Client forums, escort forums, photos, web design... Lina discusses the pleasures, possibilities and pitfalls of sex work along the information super highway.

Can you tell me about the sex work you do?

I started sex work 7 years ago, when I was 22. I work as an escort advertising on the internet and that is how I started.

Tell us about how you work?

I work independently but I hired someone to do my website: the photos and all the design. I want to put my advertising on many international sites but the sites compete with each other and say you have to sign out of one to sign into the other. So, I link in to the large sites through my own sites and using different photos so that I can advertise in many different places.

I do out-calls, I don't receive clients. For me, it is the easiest and safest way to do sex work. Because I can go out and work when I want to and no one knows where I live. I do escort work only with foreign clients and not with locals. This allows me to protect my reputation and privacy locally since on the internet, you cannot see my face.

What advice would you give to someone who is just starting out?

If you advertise on the internet, posting your photos and advertising is free. It means you don't need to have a place to do your sex work from. If you work with foreigners, then they have hotels. You can work and live with your family, no problem. You don't even need internet at home, you can just go to an internet café, put up photos on a site advertising sex work if you want or even advertise without photos. So, zero investment.

What advice would you give to a sex worker who is just starting out working on the internet?

Look at the market on the internet to set your prices. There is no rule that if a price is expensive, the girl is beautiful. You just have to look at the general prices on the internet, now there are price lists everywhere. You don't have to be young and a beauty to get a good price. You just have to provide some kind of passion to the client.

Never meet with clients in the cafes, because some of them come only to look and if they don't like you, they leave. If you go to an apartment or hotel, and he says "I don't like you", you should ask for money to cover your transit, for your taxi, like 10 euro and then you leave.

What advice do you have about safety?

I have never had any bad experiences with clients. Only drunk clients, they are just a bit crazy- like they want you to stay all night for free. You have to be a bit diplomatic. But I know if I met local men, I would face humiliation. They do not respect escorts, whether you are expensive or cheap. They wouldn't beat you, but they might humiliate you, speak to you as if you were a slave. I know this because I read the clients' forums on-line in Lithuanian and they speak about the sex workers as if they were dogs or cats, not-nice words. It is never positive feedback. They are always unhappy and complaining about prices.

If you work with locals in Lithuania or Latvia, never go at night. No night client is the safest approach. Strictly no. No drunk clients. I never work at night, even with

foreigners because normal people are sleeping at night. That is why I have no problems at all.

Client on-line forums (also called “review boards”) are sites on the internet where clients can anonymously talk about their experiences with sex workers in a particular city or place. They have developed a lot over the last few years. What should sex workers know about client forums and how they can affect their work?

If a sex worker is going to give a discount and offer a low price to one customer, all of Lithuania will know about it because it will get discussed on the forums and all the clients will be asking for the discount. The same is true, if she has unprotected sex. If it appears on the forum, everyone will ask for it. This is very bad for her.

The same is true with foreign clients. That is why I never do discounts- never ever. The foreigners respect women, everything is ok, very nice reviews on the review sites but they are really looking for discounts. They also want unprotected sex a lot. The men who have university degrees, the CEOs, all these highly educated people want unprotected sex. They will give you a proposal- in a kind way, not insulting you, but asking if it is possible. They accept though, when I say no.

What are some other things sex workers should be careful of?

Don't let clients take your photos, even when they say they are private because they sometimes post them on the client forums. I had this kind of experience with a foreigner. The same goes for locals.

If you do business with local men, then a lot of police can pose as clients and contact you to ask you to meet in a café or at a restaurant. Sometimes they don't want to punish you, they just want to know if you work under a pimp because they want to go after pimps.

Is it illegal to do sex work in Lithuania?

In terms of working in-doors, there are no brothels in Lithuania. There are striptease clubs that are a form of sex work, but not all of the girls do escort service. If a client asks to have sex with a girl later and she doesn't want to, girls tell the man to call an escort service.

For escort work, both the sex worker and customer can get a fine of 100 Euro as punish-

ment. If it is the third time you are caught, you can go to prison. I have never been caught...but I had many strange calls from men to meet in cafes and refusing to meet in hotel rooms and I suspect that it was the police.

The police constantly bother the girls who do sex work out of their own apartments. But if you are friendly, there is not usually a problem. You give them escort service [have sex with the police]-and then you don't have to pay the fine. This is what all the escorts say on the local escort forums [web sites, sometimes part of client forums where escorts can chat on-line]. The police don't pay but they only bother you for 20 minutes, they don't humiliate you.

What happens if a sex worker says 'no' to having sex with the police?

They won't beat you. Of course, if you shout and make a scene, they will beat you. But if you don't they just give you this administrative fine. But the police officer might come constantly and give you a fine. If he comes often, you will have to pay 200 Euro. He could come every day, and give you the fine every day. Then you would have to choose to go to prison or pay the fines. So, sex workers will have sex with the police. They decide this is the most diplomatic solution because they live in the apartments where they work, they know the police know everything about them and can come every minute if they want.

Bullets Whistle Over Your Head (2010)

Shahnaz Islamova of Tais Plus shares how sex workers are trying to stay safe in the midst of a revolution in Kyrgyzstan that has turned violent.

Can you explain, very basically, for SWAN readers what has been happening this spring and summer in Kyrgyzstan?

On the 4th of April, K. Bakiev, the President of Kyrgyzstan, was overthrown and a temporary administration seized power. This new administration was not able to hold down the political unrest and 80 people died. In June the situation repeated itself, but it took an international turn: in the south of the country, conflicts between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbek broke out. According to official data of the Ministry of Health, 180 people died, but unofficial sources say that dead people were buried right away, so there is no way to guess the exact number. Some people think it is as many as 500.

How has the political upheaval impacted sex workers?

There were some sex workers who suffered during the first wave of the revolution. Places where they used to work were burnt down by a group of unidentified men. It took place on the “spots” near one of the biggest markets where sex workers lived and worked in small hotels. Five sex workers who made to our center told us that they had been beaten up and their hotels burnt. Unfortunately in that situation, we were not able to help them, as there were shootings in the streets and we were trying to ensure safety of our families and our houses and it was impossible to get out to the street. The sex workers stayed in our center where it was safer. Currently, our center is prepared to host all sex workers who need refuge until the end of these difficult days. Sex workers are ready to share space to sleep and food to eat when it is needed.

How have sex workers dealt with the curfew?

There was no curfew in Bishkek, but in the country street sex work stopped. Those who can, work during the day time, they mostly survive by working in saunas if they can.

What are sex workers doing to compensate for lost earnings?

The lost earnings are impossible to compensate. The only thing we can do is to offer place for temporary living and food at our drop-in center.

Lately media reports have said that there is a great deal of violence against Uzbek-Kyrgyzstanis, how are Uzbek sex workers being affected?

I don't have information about it right now. I suggest sending these questions to the countryside to get a bigger picture.

Is there solidarity amongst sex workers across ethnicities or have some of these tensions emerged in the sex worker community?

There is not discord in the community because everybody understands that the problem is not about ethnicity but about political actions.

In Thailand, workers are being compensated for lost wages due to the political crisis. Empower, the sex worker group are petitioning the government to have sex workers compensated as well. Would this work in Kyrgyzstan?

Here, it is impossible to make sex work accepted as work. We are a Muslim country where there is no place for sex workers. Even though sex work is decriminalized, nobody speaks aloud about it.

How should sex worker groups prepare to support sex workers (financially, psychologically, medically) during times of political crisis?

The only thing we could do was to phone them and find out how they are dealing with the current situation. We asked everybody not to leave their homes. This was the only method to save your own life. We gave shelter to those who could make it to our center.

Are there any lessons that Tais Plus has learned that you would like to share with other sex worker groups?

It is very difficult to speak about any lessons, when bullets whistle over your head. You understand very clearly that you cannot do anything to help others. This makes it even harder. But we did understand that when you communicate with each other, you can warn others about the most dangerous places at that moment and tell where it is safer.

The Road to Being Free-Lance (2007)

Jana from Bliss Without Risk, in the Czech Republic tells SWAN News about sex work, abuse and the important role customers can play!

Jana, please tell me a bit about yourself:

I grew up with my grandmother but she kicked me out of the home for some stupidity. I had regular work but I had nowhere to live. I met a man and he offered that I could go work as a sex worker. I agreed, I was not eager for this job but I felt ok about it. He took me to an area near the German border. I did not want to be a sex worker in Prague because I knew too many friends there. He took me to As and sold me to a family there. My position was not so bad, it was a little bit better. I had accommodation and some

basic meals but they made me tidy the whole house. In sex work, I made 800 crown and only got to keep 200 crown. I didn't use condoms then. I was not forced to work without condoms, but it was my own unprofessionalism in As, I didn't know that I should work with condoms. And, I didn't know how to say "Take condom." in German (The majority of my customers were Germans). I was more popular than other girls and the whole time I always wondered why the clients asked for me so much!!! Now, I understand! In German, they call condoms this special term "gummi", sometimes we call the German clients "without gummi".

I was allowed to go home and I didn't want to stay anymore. So I called back the man I first met, and he promised to help me leave, but in the end, he just sold me back again to the same family. So I told the family: "I'm done, I'm going home." There were plenty of other girls. They did not want to keep a girl who would cause them trouble. No money and housework that was what it was like, but I do not have a bad relationship to them after all this. Ah, no! I do not feel like revenge. The personal relationships were not bad. I was friends with their daughter. She helped me to tidy up the house. It was more like a family relationship.

Nine to ten months after I left, I ended up working under this terrible small bastard pimp Rudi. I worked under this Rudi on the street because I knew him through the family from As and he was connected to the mafia that controlled a lot of street prostitution. After four months, I moved from Rudi to Mirek. Mirek told me there are these good guys go with them and I went with them to the flat and got beaten by them and had to go to work with bruises all over. That's when I decided that I didn't need to work for these stupid bastards. One girl told me, go to this other street where you can work for yourself. Her and her boyfriend were clients actually, they had hired me to do a three-some. She saw how I had been beaten and she said, "why are you here? You could be free-lance." The girl was an ex-sex worker. She told me to go to this street and she also said, "if anyone threatens you, just lie and tell them you are working for me!" I wasn't really working for her of course, it was just a friendship. This woman, she showed me that I could be free. It was the most important information for me.

I worked on my own then for 3-4 years with some interruptions but free-lance was hard work. My whole career was 7 years. Free or not, I no longer like to do this work. I wouldn't go do sex work now unless I was in big financial trouble. Now you have my curriculum vitae!

Is there any advice you would give to people in the sex trade who are being forced or being abused?

I think the best strategy is to agree with everything. To obey. To look like a passive obeying woman. Not to resist and so on and then to escape at the first good opportunity. The best is a customer to help to escape. I know another woman who was helped to escape by a customer, too. Customers are the best because this is the person with whom you come into contact with. A pimp can't control that. He knows just the license plate of the car. You return once or twice from work and the third time you don't come back. You can offer the customer sex without paying to get you out. Of course, you also have to be a psychologist and know who to ask for help.

What about the police, why not go straight to them for help instead?

Laughter. Hmph. It depends how much the given policeman is corrupted by the mafia. Would it have been possible for me to go to the police? I'm not so sure. When the police would come to control my id card, I was scared to tell them 'Get me out from under them'...you never know if they are not corrupted too and then things could be worse for you. Especially in Prague, there are certain districts where things have not changed and I wonder if the police are not friends of the Mafia.

Do you have any advice for other sex workers?

Tell them to be free-lance. These guys are for shit. It is not necessary to feed all the people around you.

It's a Business Doing Pleasure! (2007)

Beata of the Hungarian Prostitutes' Interest Group talks about how sex workers in Hungary are learning about business skills and their legal rights in a sex worker school on a bus!

What is the legal context of sex work in Hungary?

Sex work is legal under certain circumstances since 1999. It happens that sex workers are arrested because they are not standing within the right place (200 metres near

school or church) but there is a legal aid service that can defend them. Our organization provides lawyers that are available at night. There are still some problems with the law though: municipalities have to assign zones where prostitution is tolerated but the municipalities have not opened zones. Since the government allows sex workers to set up businesses and pay taxes, they should have places to work!

Since the new law, our organization has been able to negotiate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education, and present our proposal on how to improve the rights of the prostitutes.

Please tell me about some of the project you have you done to improve the rights of sex workers.

We have a few new projects. The first one is a project that teaches peer mentors how to teach sex workers how to set up their own businesses and what their legal rights are. It's great because there are sex workers employed in the project. It grew out of a pilot project we did 3 years ago, in which we trained 17 sex workers. All 17 sex workers studied entrepreneurship, marketing and information sciences as part of a recognized certificate program. Out of 17, 14 passed and got their certificate. Some of them went to work for companies and 9 of them became employed by the organization for 6 months as peer mentors.

We wanted to use their knowledge for further projects so now, we have this new project where the peer mentors will be further educated on how to connect sex workers and share information and on how to teach business skills and entrepreneurship (for any type of business, including sex work). We go directly to the sex workers with this teaching education bus. We take the bus onto the street and we are looking to do it in brothels, as well. Sex workers take a break for 2 hours and come visit the bus. In this bus, you also have a lawyer to teach you legal rights and an accountant and financial expert who can teach you how to set up a business.

The Real Test (2007)

Angelina Georgieva, an outreach worker with HESED speaks to SWAN news in Bulgaria a proposed new law in Bulgaria that would introduce zoning and mandatory testing of sex workers. The real test will be whether such a law would violate sex workers' rights.

Please tell us about the proposed law that would legalize prostitution in Bulgaria.

If the law goes through, women will be able to work in delineated tolerance zones or indoors. They will be registered and subject to taxes and once they pay their contributions, will be eligible to receive medical insurance and to social benefits.

The positive thing is that some of the sex workers will have the ability to see their work recognized like every other person in the country, and will receive the same benefits.

However, we are very concerned about the desire expressed by Bulgarian parliament to implement forced regular medical examinations for sex workers as part of the law.

Please tell us why you oppose mandatory testing of sex workers.

Mandatory testing for HIV goes against human rights. You have the right to choose to get tested or not. It is discriminatory to impose it on a group, why doesn't anyone go to the teachers for example and say, you have to get tested. Sex workers have just as much a right to privacy and confidentiality of results. We don't know what would happen if you tested HIV-positive on these mandatory health tests either. Would you be forbidden from working? We don't know.

Mandatory testing of sex workers sends the message that safer sex is only the responsibility of sex workers, but clients also need to take responsibility for taking care of sexual health. And beyond that, safer sex is everyone's responsibility not just those in sex work: when you go to a bar and want to have sex with someone, it is your responsibility to have safer sex.

Does the law present other concerns?

There is the question of what happens to sex workers who are unable to, or chose not to register, to pay taxes, to work only within the zones or to undergo mandatory health tests.

Sex work is not criminalized in Bulgaria now, but if the new law passes, a lot of sex workers will all of a sudden become illegal. Those who are unable to pay taxes, possibly because they are homeless or drug-users will have a big problem because if you are a citizen and don't pay taxes, it is a crime and the law can punish you. Those who do sex work outside of the tolerance zone will be breaking the law. This violates another human right because as a social worker, I can go wherever I want to work but as a sex worker, no. This is the big dilemma about the law: It is good that sex work is recognized as work and for the men and women who are able to pay the taxes and follow the rules, their situation will get better in some ways. However, the persons who are not able to, who are often the most vulnerable to HIV, will go deeper underground to avoid being caught by the police. It will be difficult for outreach workers like us to reach them, and so it will be harder for them to get health services or to get condoms which can save their lives.

What legal situation would you prefer?

The current legal situation is the best from a health perspective and though it is not perfect, it is better from a human rights perspective than the proposed legislation. There is no law on prostitution. We have this hypocritical and vague law against getting money in immoral ways. Unfortunately, the police sometimes use that and an article about disturbing the public order to arrest the prostitutes. But technically, they can't arrest you for selling sex.

The law, as it exists now, only punishes people who are violent or force someone to sell sex. Unfortunately, that law used to be stronger than it is now. A few years ago, they arrested a famous Bulgarian rap singer for trafficking women into the sex trade. It was a big media scandal and they changed the whole law because of this case. Now the law says that if you have trafficked people and use drugs to make someone sell sex, then you are can be punished with 10 years or more in prison. However, if you do not use drugs to force people to sell sex, the penalty is about 2 years or just a fine. Of course, most of the prosecutors cannot prove that a trafficker was using drugs to force someone. It was an obvious case of corruption. The singer who was accused will be released in only a few months.

Please tell us about how sex workers are involved in this discussion of the law.

I think one of the biggest victories so far, is that in discussions among the government, health services, and policy makers about the proposed new law on sex work, a sex worker active with HESED who started her own sex work organization was invited

to participate and bring her opinions on behalf of sex workers. And that is really great news. The policy makers also tried to survey sex workers about the new law with a questionnaire to find out what they think and what they would like. And I think that is also a great step forward. Including sex workers' opinions in the process, inviting sex workers to their meetings and to their consultations, all this sounded totally impossible a few years ago.

Economics (2008)

In this interview, we speak with Riza, a sex worker, activist and SWAN member from Kyrgyzstan about the economics of sex work. People are so focused on the sex part of sex work, they often forget the money side of the equation. Riza shows us how sex workers' struggle to eke out a living while their earnings are supporting extended families, babysitters, landlords, clinics, and police officers.

Tell us a little about sex work in Kyrgyzstan.

On the street, sex work is very structured. Most women work for a madam (a "mamma"). She is responsible for their safety, she writes down license plates, picks them up after a client and bails them out of jail.

Is it an exploitative relationship?

No. It is a positive relationship. This is the most convenient way to work. Any girl can leave her madam. There are some who might try and find her, but it is rare.

What issues are sex workers facing in Kyrgyzstan?

The first issue is the police. The second is housing and where to live. The third is taking care of and providing for their families and children. The fourth is getting enough food.

Tell me about why the police are an issue?

Even though sex work is decriminalized in Kyrgyzstan, the police still regularly do unauthorized raids. They collect girls and load them in the minibus and the mammas

have to bail the girls out. Those who cannot be bailed out by someone, don't have mamas or can't pay are sent to the police station. They are kept in detention and then they are taken to court. When they take the arrested girls to court, they don't say they were arrested for prostitution, they are charged with "resisting police officers", "standing inappropriately", "disturbing public order", "having no documents". Every day, the police come to the sex work spots and force the girls- or their mamas- to pay money. They collect 3-5\$ US each time and it can happen several times a day. To put it in perspective, on the street, each contact with a customer is between \$4-6 and \$10-15 for a full hour.

In your experience, are police ever violent with sex workers?

If the girl they arrest starts talking about her rights, they can offend her verbally or beat her up. Sexual violence is rare now.

Tell me about the housing issue?

The rents got higher and since everybody comes from outside of the city, the minimum rent now for a 1-room apartment is \$150. That's why it is difficult to rent a flat. Most of your money goes for food or to pay off the police. It's too much to be able to save up enough rent for a month. So a lot of sex workers stay in a hotel where they have to pay \$15-20 a night.

Other sex workers pool their money and rent a flat together. They never bring clients these because then clients would know where they live and keep coming back to the place. Instead, they have sex with clients in hotel rooms that the client pays for. Nonetheless, if the landlord finds out they are sex workers, they are kicked out of the apartment and the landlord keeps the rent money.

What are the issues around families and children?

Usually, sex workers come to work from villages or smaller cities and so they usually send a part of their money home to support their extended families. When they come to the city, they often bring their children and someone has to care for their children while they are working. Babysitters cost \$10-20 a night. This is all very costly.

Many sex workers' children can not go to school or get healthcare because they have no documents. They have no documents because their moms have no passports and so they were never issued birth certificates. Often sex workers do not have passports

because their parents were under-privileged and could not arrange it. Or they have a passport but cannot access it because they left it somewhere as a guarantee that they would pay for a room, or food or drinks.

The only medical services that are free of charge are the maternity house, diabetes and cancer treatment, and, with the help of TAIS plus, HIV-testing and ARVs. However, the blood test for your CD-4 count, any other HIV related health care or any other health care in general, and you have to go to a clinic and pay.

What is the issue of food?

You are standing on your spot on the street, and you are constantly raided and robbed by the police, with what you have left, you have to pay your rent, send money for your family back home, spend money on childcare, money for medical care. So, tea, bread and macaroni are all you can afford. And now the prices are rising very rapidly. Last year a small bread was less than 25 cents US, now it is a dollar. The price for a large bread has more than tripled.

How are sex workers organizing for their rights?

Sex workers are very afraid to organize. Some sex workers finally went to the police to report abuse and at the end, they blamed her (the victim) and pressed accusations against her in retaliation.

How do sex workers help each other out?

There were cases when sex workers would press charges against an assaulter when others would report with her as witnesses, but often they backed out at the last minute.

What changes would you like to see happen for sex workers in Kyrgyzstan?

If I was the government, I would raise the police's salary so they would be afraid to extort money from sex workers because they would be afraid of losing their salaries.

The System Works Like This (2007)

In this interview, Ira Mishina, Iriska and Natasha tell SWAN News about sex workers' rights in the Ukraine and the founding Ukrainian Network of Sex Workers.

Please tell me about the Ukrainian Network of Sex Workers?

Ira Mishina: The decision to create this network was made in March 2007 in Kiev at the first meeting of sex workers and the representatives of organizations that serve sex workers. The conference was called the "All-Ukrainian Conference of Sex Workers" and as a result of it, we founded the network. The participants at the conference were representatives of organizations but you have to understand that the mentality of Ukrainians is that a person from outside will not go into this sphere to work with sex workers, so outreach workers are usually ex-sex workers or drug-users or they were once raped and people found out about it. So even though, all the participants were representatives of organizations, almost everyone was a sex worker. Half were active sex workers, and half had previously worked as sex workers. There were 24 people from 14 provinces in Ukraine.

Iriska: In October 2006, there was a two day pre-conference to prepare for this conference. At the pre-conference, it was the first time many of us met. It was exciting for the sex workers there to share common problems, to know that somebody is interested in these problems. Everyone was very active and motivated there. We talked about the main problems in Ukraine: abuse from police, from pimps, and from clients, the negative attitude of society towards sex work, the lack of medical care, black mail and extortion from police.

Can you tell me about some of these problems?

I.: For example, the police will threaten you and say "We will make it known publicly that you are a sex worker if you do not tell who is a drug-user, or if you do not do favours for us. We will write an article and take a picture of you and put it in the newspaper."

I.M.: "We will tell everybody who you are and what you do."

I.: Police officers take women's passports away. They take away their passports, they tear them up, they take girls to the bomje, this kind of prison for homeless people where

they force the girls to do physical work and they cannot move about freely. They are kept there for 30 days. For example they are forced to wash cars and to clean the streets. Or they are made to work painting the walls inside the police station or inside this prison. It is a kind of punishment.

I.M.: There is a case I know, where they put a girl in this prison for drug-use, she was a sex worker too, and they took away her child and put the child in the state house for children. They won't give back her child now that she is out. She is going to court for this. But it is very hard to get a child back. One sex worker I know fought for 2 years to get her children back.

Another thing, is that for prostitution, according to the law, the police can only give you an administrative punishment, fines basically. But what they do now is that they fine a girl 5, 6 times in a row and when the sum is really high, well, if a girl has a flat she runs into debt and loses the flat...It means she loses the place where she lives and is homeless.

I.: They don't do this in a legal way. They are making them lose their flat as punishment for prostitution but through a tricky way.

I.M.: They cannot sue her for using drugs or sex work, so they will invent something to find a way to put a criminal charge on her. So, the system works like this: They tell a girl, if you want you can be sent to prison for 5 or 6 years for selling drugs or you can pay us a big amount of money. She doesn't have any money. The police say "Oh, well then, we can "help" you to sell your flat." So what to do ! The police put a fake name for the buyer of the flat and she loses her home. It doesn't matter if they work on the street or in the flats because the police keep an official register with photographs of sex workers and fingerprints. It is impossible to escape the bomje [prison], sex workers can't go on the street alone, if she escapes, they will catch her again.

What do you wish for sex workers in the Ukraine?

I.: I would like sex work to be legalized and for us not have problems with the legal system. Because there needs to be recourse, if sex workers are hurt by someone, psychologically or physically, it doesn't matter by whom, that person should be punished. There was a case in Chernigov, there were 3 girls working in a flat together, somebody tipped off the police and the police came in and arrested the girls and blamed them for prostitution. They were given the usual administrative punishment for prostitution but they decided to put one girl up on charges of pimping. This is serious. Pimping is a

criminal offense in Ukraine. Now the trial is over and they gave her one year probation. One day after the arrest, somebody called for one of these girls to set up an appointment and said that he was a good friend of her client's. She went with him, he took her to the outskirts of town and another two cars came and they all raped her. Nine people raped her. The girl recognized one of the rapists as a police officer. So they think it was set up by the police. Afterwards, there was no way she could go to the police for help because they had just arrested them for prostitution. This is why we want it to be legalized and they could not do such things! Lots of things like this happen, it is not only one case.

Are there any ways that sex workers have tried to protect their rights or watch out for each other informally before this network?

I.M.: In Chernovtsy, in Western Ukraine, girls work together, often in pairs. They have a practice where one girls stands and waits or watches out for the other. If a sex worker is in trouble, she will try to inform her friends or warn them if they could be in trouble too. For example, one girl went to buy cigarettes and the police were in street clothes and caught her and said you must come with us. They were taking her through a place where other sex workers were standing. So, she made a sign on her shoulder to let the others know "This is a police man who has got me." She gives the sign to protect the others, so they know. Another example, is two sex workers I knew who worked together. When one would get into a car to go for a job, the other would take her money for her for safe-keeping. If everything is ok, the one who is waiting would meet her at the end and walk away with her, if anything is wrong she has the license plate number and she can go and get help.

Natasha: I worked this way. Once my friend went to work with a client. This client's place was at a house 2 hours outside of town. So I went with her and stayed outside the house waiting for her and chatting with his three friends. During this time, my friend was inside and sat on the bed and she felt that it was hard. The client showed her that under it is a place where he keeps guns. When she saw those guns, she just got up and ran away. She came out and grabbed me and we started to run but there was nowhere to go for help, we were so far outside the city. We just ran. The men were drunk and they ran after us and shot us at us with their guns. Then, they got in their car, and came after us shooting. We saw that across the road there was a corn field. So we ran into it and crouched, and hid and waited. Quiet. We waited and waited and when we heard nothing we started trying to make our way back towards town. We were scared of all the cars, so we walked the whole way back in the night. It was very lucky that we were two.

I.: I think the network will change things, if everyone can come together and our voice can be heard. Maybe not right away but some time later. I think we will get what we want if we are together and if we are one power.

Is there anything you would like to say to other sex workers ?

I.: I would like us to be united so we can make an impact on relationships between society and sex workers.

A Star Is Born (2008)

Boban from Macedonia talks about work and the founding of STAR, Macedonia's sex worker action group.

Boban, can you tell me about how you do sex work?

I have been a sex worker for four years. I find my clients on the internet and in ads in the media. On some of our tv channels, we have programs like one called "Good Night Messages" and you can send a message like "Boy meets woman for sex...or for shower together or for strip dance or for hot line". "Hot line" is phone sex.

I offer my clients great services in a luxurious apartment, with a red carpet and lots of candles. Because of this, I can charge them a lot more.

Do police ever bother you?

Once, I had problems with the police but I told them that I only give a massage. I am also a physiotherapist. I pay to have my physio certificate so when I show the police the certificate, well, the relationship changes.

I do sex work two days a week because I have another job. I can do sex work later, around midnight so it fits well.

Tell me about STAR, the Macedonian sex worker group.

STAR started at the end of 2007. Laura Feer was the leader and when she left Macedonia

to work on a ship, I took her place. She believed in me and we had worked together. All of my friends are sex workers. Laura knew that I am careful with clients and with police and with what is happening around us. It is SO important for sex workers to have other sex worker friends or a sex worker group. We give so much support to one another.

Tell me about what sex workers are facing in Macedonia.

Well, sexual work is illegal in Macedonia, but we have more and more sex workers. When the police come where sex workers work, we have to give services free of charge. I did once but in my case, it was because the police was so cute not out of fear or because he might arrest me! All our sex workers have sex with police. But some consider it rape because they are very afraid of the police.

Does this affect your working conditions?

This can cause another problem with our clients. For example, I had a client come to me and first he had to pay me and then I offered my services. After that he said “Do you know that I am a police officer? Give me back the money!”. I refused. I wouldn’t give back the money because I don’t think he was a police, only a customer pretending to be a police so he could get away with taking advantage of me.

People Don’t Go into Hospitals and Beat Up the Doctors for Doing Their Job! (2008)

SWAN News talks to Victoriya from Kazakhstan about confronting abuses in the workplace.

Can you tell me about sex work in Kazakhstan?

About two years ago, you could see girls on the street. Right now, the Department of Internal Affairs is trying to convince people that there is no prostitution in Kazakhstan so most sex work takes places in saunas, cafes, clubs, private flats or by call. In saunas though, men get drunk and beat up girls and force them to do things they have not agreed upon against their will.

What recourse does a sex worker have in that situation?

There are some groups you can contact after for medical and social help. Saunas will tell men who are notoriously dangerous that “All the girls are occupied”.

Will management of a sauna support a sex worker who is being attacked?

The security guards will throw him out if he is considered to be “disturbing the order”.

If there is security, why is there so much violence in the saunas?

Some of the girls work for pimps and some work for the police. Before, the police would take [sexual] services and not pay. Now some police pay, and are frequent clients. But when police demand sex, the girls are afraid of the police and don't know the law. They are afraid if they resist or refuse that he will have the power to put them in jail. So they do it out of fear.

What would you do to make the abuse stop?

First of all, you should talk about sex work as work. It is the same as a shop owner who sells bread or doctors. I am selling a service too. It is work. People don't go into the hospitals and beat up the doctors for doing their job! The media should do coverage on discrimination [against us] and develop peoples' tolerance.

By the way, if a client comes to us, it is to get a sexual service not to beat someone up. If you want to beat someone up, go to boxing.

It could also be great if sex work was legalized. Part of the money could go to the state and there would be no violence. Usually, sex workers are arrested for not having proper documents – registration in the town where we work or live, passports, visas. This way we could have visas or papers to work legally.

Why do the authorities in Kazakhstan want to pretend there is no prostitution?

It is an issue of national mentality. In Asian countries, it is not appropriate if a woman – never mind sells sex – but even just shows her body before marriage. And the police are lazy enough, so they benefit from being able to live off of us, taking all our money.

Do police treat migrant sex workers differently?

Migrant sex workers are treated differently. The authorities say they are not contributing to the economy but just being prostitutes. They are taken by the police and held until the police find out who they are and where they are from and if there is a problem with their documents. I know of 3 cases where sex workers were deported. But it doesn't always happen. It depends on how she settles the matter...

In terms of?

Money or sex.

I Know Too Much Information About What They Do (2009)

This year, SWAN, along with the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and Human Rights Watch issued a letter denouncing police abuse of sex workers and intimidation of outreach workers in Kirovograd Ukraine. More than 50 organizations from around the world signed our letter to the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior and the Ukrainian Human Right Commissioner.

Below, in an interview with SWAN News, Natalia Issaeva, an outreach worker for Legalife a organization offering services to sex workers in Kirovograd Ukraine describes what happened in her own words.

What is the relationship between sex workers and police like in Kirovograd?

In our town, there are three policemen who work like violent pimps and take money from the girls [sex workers]. Once a week, they go along the road and every sex worker is forced to pay them 10 Euros. Then on top of that, they force the girls to sign the administrative protocols [confessing to prostitution], and pay that too, which is another 10 Euros or more.

One girl refused to pay, so the police beat her in front of the other girls. She had long hair so they cut it short in front of the other girls on the street. They also said that she was using injection drugs, but it was not drugs, she was sick and taking medicine, but

the police said she was using heroin. So they laid serious charges against her for drug use.

Kalyna*, another sex worker, also decided to refuse to pay off the police. In the summer of 2008, on the day of her 20th birthday, she was found dead below a bridge.

Kalyna was a sex worker who helped other sex workers a lot in Legalife, the sex worker organization. She was a fighter. She lived with her step-father and brother and supported them. They didn't have much money and her brother had no legs and couldn't walk, so she had a tough life. She liked knitting and doing these kinds of crafts. But most of all, she liked fighting for her rights and the rights of others. She was really an activist. She was so committed that she always went out on outreach work with Legalife.

Before her death, Kalyna had not only begun refusing to pay the police, she decided to wear a hidden microphone to record their threats and extortion. Some other sex workers found out and reported her to the police. The three police officers became extremely angry and had a public fight with her.

The night she died, she went to a bar. She was really upset and told the barman that she had just been raped by the police. While she was there, she got a phone call in the bar and then she told the barman that she had to go, that it was urgent and left. That was the last time she was seen alive by witnesses.

The initial investigation said that she had been pushed off the bridge, forced to jump. Later the police closed the case saying they had uncovered a witness that said she jumped so no more investigation was necessary, no trial would take place.

The police were threatening her life and torturing her but knowing her and her mind, it is clear to me that she would never kill herself. Kalyna never gave up.

When she died, her family, her step-father and brother had no money to bury her or for the funeral. So all the people from the different organizations that she was volunteering in and participating in, they all contributed, and bought her a grave.

How has her death affected sex workers?

Now, since this happened, all the girls pay money to the police and don't make any complaints at all about mistreatment. The girls are really not happy they have to live under the police like this, they complain to the community organizations and the orga-

nizations say: “We will go to trial, we will help you.” But the girls are too scared now of being killed.

Has the situation changed for your organization?

Ever since then, these same policemen have started coming often to the Legalife office [the center for sex workers] and trying to communicate “nicely”, trying to get information on sex workers, looking on the tables and on the walls for the girls’ contact information.

On September 10th, 2009, the same three policemen arrested me doing outreach work. They arrested me because I know too much information about what they do. I am close to the sex workers and I know what they do in detail: I know Kalyna’s story and many others.

They wanted to find out how much I knew about what they are doing to the sex workers and the rights violations they are committing. They are scared because they are worried that some of us know, that we could tell the government. They also wanted to get the names of all the girls [sex workers] I know, along with their phone numbers and addresses.

Our outreach work includes providing services to men who buy sex. At 16:15 a man called and asked for a consultation. Supposedly he got my phone number from an acquaintance. The story did not arouse my suspicions, so I explained that currently I still need to run around a bit to finish the job. He suggested giving me a lift and picked me at hotel Europe. He took me to the place where I needed to go, stopping on the way at a gas station for gas and a cup of coffee. When we were at the place where I needed to go, two cars stopped next to us, the guys got out of them, and without any introduction pulled me out of the car and forced me into theirs. It was around 16:40. I demanded explanations, however they did not reply, neither did they introduce themselves. They took me to the Department of Combating Trafficking, where they started searching my bags without registering my detention and serving the charges.

They humiliated me and wouldn’t tell me why I was being detained. They said, “You have to sit and think by yourself about why you are here.” They said they would accuse me of prostitution, they were trying to pressure me to give information on the girls but they couldn’t make me give them any.

They broke all the rules of arrest, they contravened many of my rights. I know what an

arrest must look like because I have been arrested many times before. I tried to appeal for my rights, but they just laughed at me. They didn't tell me why I was being detained. They wouldn't show me their documents. They wouldn't let me call a lawyer. They took all my belongings and tried to search me, but I said, "No, I want a woman to search me". I forced them to stop and said "I know you can't do that."

Only in half an hour a woman arrived. She started writing a protocol of detention registering the valuables that have been seized: mobile phones Sony Eriksson 320 and z520i with e-mails, 35 euros, 622 grivnias, 350 grivnias the origin of which is unknown to me, flash drive, mp3 players, passport, social worker card, and a note-book. My request to make a phone-call was not satisfied. In the meanwhile the staff called the numbers from my telephone books and read the sms [text messages] that were arriving during my detention. During the whole procedure of detention and seizure of valuables only one witness was present – a staff member of the Department.

They asked me to sign the protocol of seizure of valuables, but I refused because only one witness was present. After this, 1.5 hour from the start of the search, they brought another woman who signed the ready protocol, after which I also signed. I refused however to sign the administrative detention protocol. After this all the valuables (except for the 350 grivnias) were returned to me and, I wrote an acknowledgement of return of valuables. My fingerprints were taken.

They kept me a few hours, they wouldn't let me sit down the whole time. Then, they pressured me to sign an administrative protocol saying I am a prostitute. I refused and they got frightened then, so they said that they would do everything to have me brought up on charges of being a pimp [a criminal offense punishable by up to 2 years imprisonment]. I said that the detention was illegal and with the violation of due process. They said that I am suspected of both prostitution and pimping, however no sufficient evidence was mounted. I have previously met those people during my work and I can say that those present were Alexander Gonchar, Vitalii Ivanchenko, Roman Vysokovskii and three people whom I have met, but whose names I do not know. I was released at 19:15.

They confiscated my cell phone with all the names and numbers in it and have refused to return it. Then, they let me go.

What did you do next ?

On the next day, with the help of a lawyer consulting with Legalife, I went to the higher level of the police and registered a formal complaint for what happened. It is now in process. The three policemen who arrested me now they have their jobs suspended.

Did the police drop the charges?

The anti-trafficking department hasn't been able to substantiate any further charges against me and they have resorted to publicizing my health status in the city. The police have also told women not to cooperate with our organization for sex workers and not to use our outreach and other programs and that the police have not finished dealing with our organization.

What are your next steps?

We are writing an open letter now about the formal complaint to the police. SWAN members can help by sending it to the Minister.

I am terrified of revenge by those police officers. But I hope that now that this story is out in the open, on the TV and the radio, they will not be able to do anything to me.

***Kalyna is a pseudonym used in this article to respect the wishes of her family who requested privacy.**

Update: Despite SWAN's campaign, no actions were taken by the government. The three police officers remain employed. Natalia is, thankfully, currently safe.

So That Our Voices Will Be Heard (2007)

In the following interview, SWAN News speaks with Elena a sex worker, drug user, social worker, and newspaper editor from Kiev about the health and rights of sex workers who are also drug-user.

Please tell us about yourself and why sex workers' rights are important to you.

For about 10 years, I injected drugs. After the third year, I started to do sex work so that I would have money for drugs and could afford to live in a separate flat on my own. About three years ago, I stopped using drugs and started to work for an organization and a newspaper called "Butterfly", for groups who are vulnerable to HIV. But I remember very well what kinds of problems I faced when I was a sex worker and how difficult it was for me and for others to stand up for our human rights. That is why I want to unite as many sex workers as possible around this problem, so that our voices will be heard and others will hear us and so that everybody knows that we are just as much citizens as everyone else. We have rights that nobody is allowed to violate. I also want sex workers to respect themselves and their profession.

In Ukraine, is there a division between sex workers who are using drugs and those who are not? If so, what are ways to unite?

That's true. In Ukraine, sex workers who are using cheap and heavy drugs face prejudice from sex workers who are not using drugs. I think this can be changed if sex workers who are drug users are given access to therapy through harm-reduction or sex work programs. Then they will be able to live and work normally and their behaviour won't be asocial or aggressive.

Do sex workers who are drug-users watch out for each other?

In most cases, sex workers who are using drugs only watch out for themselves and this is an additional obstacle. But if they use drugs and live in the same flat or a brothel, then can take care of each other, help each other with drugs or money.

Is there discrimination against sex workers who want to access detox?

There is no such discrimination as sex workers do not publicize their status in rehab centers. The difficulty is that in general in Kiev and in other big cities of Ukraine, a large

proportion of sex workers are from other provinces and do not have registration papers to live in the city which means that they cannot access the rehabilitation programs in the cities where they live.

Are there good possibilities of detox for free? And what about access to substitution therapy?

There is no absolutely free detox in Kiev. But there is one type that is relatively cheap. In order to go through it, you have to stay in the hospital for several weeks after which, you have to switch to substitution therapy. There is a lack of places for those who don't live in the city and those places are not free. In addition, the substitution medication (buprenorphine and adnoc) that are prescribed are not strong enough and have side-effects. Sex workers cannot and don't want to live like this. Recently, methadone was registered in Ukraine but there are still discussions going on about introducing methadone programs in the country. The opposition comes mostly from people who have no idea about the issue or from charismatic churches. Such institutions do not let harm reduction and substitution programs develop.

Is there discrimination against sex workers who are drug users? How do police treat them?

Police express discrimination against sex workers who are using drugs when they treat them with more aggression and disdain compared to those who don't use. They can be purposefully held in the police station for several days (especially since most do not have registration). The police taunt them when they start going into withdrawal and are not feeling well. They can be blackmailed and they can be offered drugs in exchange for information or for confessing to things they haven't done.

In Ukraine, do sex workers who use drugs have problems with drug-dealers? For example, can dealers force them to work if they have a big debt?

I am not sure. According to my experience, only drug-dealers who sell expensive drugs to expensive sex workers can [make them work]. Smaller or lower-class drug dealers prefer no conflict with anybody. They just stop their communication with those who owe them until they get their debt paid.

What are the top five things that could lead to concrete and good changes for sex workers who are using drugs?

1. Prostitution shouldn't be an administrative offense anymore.
2. Access to free medical care.
3. Access to free detox that comes with social and psychological treatment and support.
4. Trainings for police forces and police representatives to raise their tolerance towards sex workers in general, and especially sex workers who are drug users.
5. Development of projects such as drop-in centers for sex workers.

Do sex workers of all genders work together in the Ukraine?

In most cases, they work separately, but there are agencies that have sex workers of all genders working under them.

As a journalist, what do you like to write about?

I like to write about things that I know. I like to write about news events, about violations by law enforcement structures (when such violations are supported by facts), about human rights in my country, about peace. I like to give coverage to different actions. I try to do it objectively. And for this I usually get into trouble. Or simply my materials do not reach the reader.

To See Our Power (2007)

Sasha, a male sex worker from Macedonia shares his excitement at the country's first sex worker parade.

Sasha, please tell us a little about sex work in Macedonia.

I have a lot of experience working as a sex worker in many countries in Europe. I have had good experiences in Europe. There is something that I don't like though, that I would like to change in my country. Many young men are going with older men for very small amounts of money and they are lowering the price.

I have a nice cooperation with sex workers who are girls. I have good cooperation with them when we go with customers. We do threesomes. Or we help each other find good

customers. I would like to make this job a little bit more upper level like in European countries because many of the sex workers in Macedonia don't know that they can charge more and demand respect. Because of all the stigma and discrimination, they don't have confidence. They need to appreciate themselves because sex workers in all history have something God gave you to give pleasure to people and make people happy. And I work very hard on this, to help girls have more confidence and feel good and strong: for us to see our power, to not be ashamed, to be proud of this. And to feel like me, I feel very powerful and I'm very happy because I am very good in my job! And nobody can stop us! I can be soldier for our rights. I can support everybody who is a sex worker who needs help.

Sasha, can you tell us a little about the first sex workers' parade that took place in Skopje this year with the help of HOPS?

It was a parade for April 1st which is Fools Day in Macedonia, a day when everyone wears costumes and celebrates at masquerade balls. We got together in the sex work community. We were 15 people, sex workers and our friends. We were all dressed up as sex workers. We had a signs that said "Sex workers, we are too good to be true! or what!" We got together in front of the very fancy hotel in Skopje and then we paraded around as a community chanting "Sex for money, love for free!" and "Rights for sex workers!" It was our first attempt to put the idea out there and for a lot of sex workers, the chance to parade around being themselves. Most people didn't know who we were, because it was Fools' Day, there was the safety of everyone around being in costume. It was an experiment – to feel the pulse, to see if we could do it, to see how it would feel.

We were a mixed group, there were transgender women who used this as a first chance to walk out in public dressed as women and feel good, as part of the group. There were sex workers from the Roma community who are usually isolated and don't come to the city center so for them, it was a very important opportunity to walk proudly as they are and as they feel, in the town center. We were a whole mix: male, female, working on the street, working in the Roma community, working by phone or over the internet.

We were chanting our slogans, and we decided to go up to the parliament. Even though, it was night, and there were only guards working. We stood in front of the parliament and said "Give rights to sex workers!" It was like a small exercise.

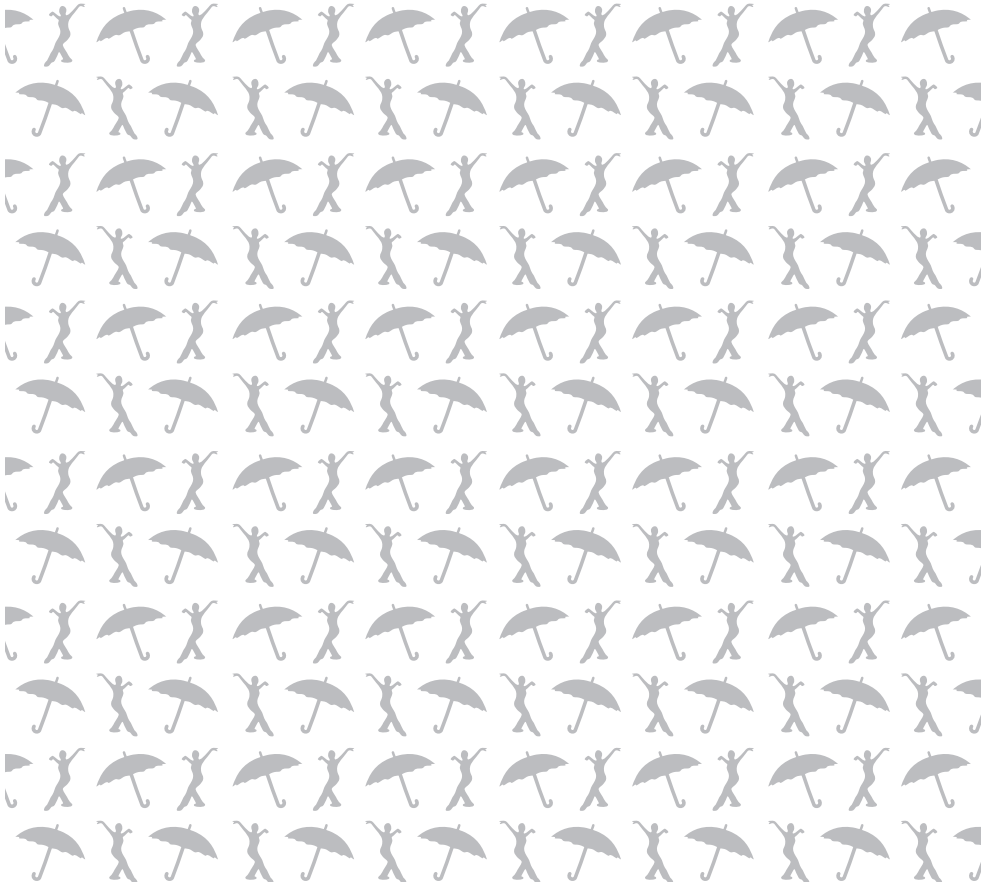
It was very crowded in the city center that day. We got whistles and cheers and cars honking to support us. It was very fun. But the other side of it, was very serious for us. It was the first time, at night, when we are usually working, that we all decided to

take off work and come together and walk together and say our message. It was very powerful. People felt powerful and beautiful. It was ice breaking. Because we all had so much fun and felt so amazing so if something is organized again, we will all come. It was a first step and people trust each other now and feel comfortable. They are all asking: "Can we do some kind of other event!"

TO SEE OUR POWER



The Curious Sex Worker Guide



TO SEE OUR POWER

The Curious Sex Worker Guide to International Aids Conferences (2008)

Find out about the International Aids Conferences, why they matter, why they matter to sex workers, and lastly, what Richard Gere has to do with all of it!

What are the International Aids Conferences?

The International Aids Conferences are very large conferences started in 1985 that take place every two years in a different country. The last four conferences have been in Durban (2000), Barcelona (2002), Bangkok (2004), Toronto (2006) and the next conference will be this August in Mexico City (2008).

They bring together over 20 000 people working on or interested in HIV. That is the same amount of people as in a small city! Some of the people who attend the AIDS conferences are: scientists studying HIV and trying to develop medicines, vaccines or new ways of preventing HIV; social scientists studying how HIV affects people and communities; groups working on HIV and groups of HIV+ people who want to share their experiences and knowledge; government and United Nations officials; pharmaceutical companies who want to make deals with scientists or governments; activists who want to have their message heard; media from around the world; and the occasional celebrity or billionaire !

Why do they matter?

Some people find that the conferences matter very little to them and are turned off by the circus-like atmosphere or the large amount of money it costs to have such events. For others, the conferences are a chance to learn, to share, to meet people or to organize.

Important new discoveries are often announced at these conferences. For example, at the 1996 conference in Vancouver, Dr. David Ho announced that he had been treating patients with great success with triple-therapy.

Activists have also been able to have an important impact at these conferences. At the Durban conference in South Africa in 2000, HIV activists organized forcefully and successfully to bring the need to make HIV-treatment available to people in poor countries an international priority.

Why do they matter to sex workers?

The International Aids Conferences can be really exciting and important places for sex workers to have a presence and a voice. The Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) has had a presence at the International Aids Conference since the early 1990s.

Because there are media and important decision-makers from all over the International, the conferences can be important places for campaigns.

In 2004, at the Bangkok conference, Cambodian sex workers led protests against an unethical clinical trial recruiting sex workers to test their drugs. With support from other sex workers and Act-Up Paris, they interrupted a presentation by someone from the pharmaceutical company who had been running the trial. The news toured the world and the trial was soon shut down. An international discussion about ethics in HIV research started as a result.

In Bangkok, there were over 100 sex workers from different countries present. Thai sex work activists set up the “Go-go Bar” a fake stage like a go-go bar in the middle of the community village. Sex workers did safer-sex workshops, hung out and had fun at the go-go bar. When someone from the Thai government threatened to shut down the go-go bar for indecency, sex workers remained defiant. They were on the front page of many newspapers saying “The show must go on. We sex workers are leaders in the fight against HIV.”

In 2006, sex workers in Toronto led a large march, all in bright turquoise t-shirts, demanding recognition of their human and workers’ rights to fight HIV.

Sex workers also interrupted a speech by Bill and Melinda Gates chanting for an end to dangerous raids on brothels by a program supported by the Gates Foundation.

Conferences are also places for sex workers to learn about new developments in HIV-prevention and treatment and think about how they will affect our communities, how we need to prepare and how we need to make sure any new developments support our rights.

How do sex workers find each other at the Conference?

The conference has three major parts: the academic or science part, the community village and the arts and culture program.

There are usually some sex workers presenting in each part of these programs. The community village is an area where there are NGO booths, market-place booths where people sell things, networking zones and a positive lounge where HIV+ people can relax, nap or get a massage.

Networking Zones are places for people to meet up and this is the best way to meet other sex workers and find out what presentations on sex work are happening (and where the good parties are). Usually there is a women's zone, a youth zone, a gay zone, an injection drug-user zone, and a sex worker zone among others. In Thailand, the go-go bar was the sex worker zone. In Toronto, it was called the Stiletto Lounge and even Bill and Melinda Gates came by to visit it! In Mexico, it will be hosted by APROASE (a Mexican sex worker project) and the NSWP.

Is the International Aids Conference a good place to pick up clients?

There is no consensus on this. Many sex work activists are too tired from activism during the conference to keep an eye open for clients! However, some South African sex workers told journalists that the Durban conference in 2000 was great for business. There are definitely many doctors, businessmen and officials who have good disposable incomes...and you can hope that if you met them at the Aids Conference that they might be more educated about safer sex than most clients!

Is it true that at the 2006 conference there was a contest to see which sex worker could get her picture taken with Richard Gere (known for his movie "Pretty Woman" where he falls in love with a sex worker)?

Yes, Richard Gere was at the Toronto conference and this contest idea started in the sex worker zone. The prize was a sexy pair of very-high boots. Unfortunately, no sex workers managed to have their pictures taken with him! Definitely, his loss!

How do I participate?

You can apply for a scholarship to go to the next AIDS conference. The community village part of the conference, where a lot of exciting things happen, is usually open for free to the public. If you can't go but are interested in what takes place, some conference presentations may be broadcast live on the web. Other groups will have blogs and conference reports that talk about how the conference went. Check out www.nswp.org for a post-conference report from sex workers' perspective.

To read a blog and see pictures and videos from the sex worker zone in 2006, in Toronto and 2008, in Mexico: <http://www.chezstella.org/stella/?q=en/toronto2006>

To read NSWP reports about previous AIDS conferences: <http://www.nswp.org/nswp/conferences/>

The Curious Sex Workers' Guide to Anti-Customer Initiatives (2009)

Find out about the ways that some governments and police are trying to crack down on sex workers' clients, what sex workers think about it...and what they've done to stop it.

What Does "End-Demand Legislation" Mean?

"End-Demand Legislation" refers to laws that make it a crime to purchase sexual services (to be the customer of a sex worker). This type of law is endorsed by many anti-prostitution feminists, religious fundamentalists and conservatives in Europe, North America and increasingly, other parts of the world too. Supporters of end-demand legislation believe that women can't choose sex work, that they are always forced to do it and that sex work is a form of violence against women and sexual slavery. They believe that prostitution and trafficking are the same thing and this confusion is reflected in most end-demand laws. They see sex work as harmful not just to sex workers, but to all women, and to all society and therefore want to eliminate all sex work completely.

Because they believe all women in sex work are victims –they see all brothel-owners and clients as being perpetrators who should be criminalized. They believe that sex workers shouldn't be criminalized but should be "rehabilitated". Either there is no recognition that some sex workers do not want to be "rehabilitated" or there is an emphasis on punishing those who refuse to be "rehabilitated". Many supporters of end-demand legislation support detaining sex workers in order to "save" them.

"End-demand legislation" usually concentrates on street prostitution and women. Rarely is there any acknowledgment of male or transgender sex workers or of female or transgender clients.

What Is “The Swedish Model”?

Unfortunately, “The Swedish Model” is not a 6-foot tall blond woman posing for magazines! The Swedish model refers to a law Sweden passed in 1998 criminalizing the purchase of sexual services with a fine or up to 6 months in jail. At the time, Sweden had an estimated 1000 sex workers in the whole country- less than in many mid-size European cities.

Swedish researcher Don Kulick, has described how prior to the law, racist fears of Eastern Europeans invading Sweden whipped up support for the law. One newspaper claimed 100 000 sex workers in Eastern Europe were coming to Europe and might get to Sweden. Another newspaper Kulick mentions read: “The biggest threat is the outpouring of prostitution from the former communist countries. A Russian woman can earn half a yearly salary from a couple of acts of intercourse in Sweden. There are those who think that it’s OK to come here and sell themselves.”

Sex workers were never consulted as part of the law-reform. Anti-prostitution activists and the Swedish and U.S. governments have invested substantial money in promoting the Swedish model in other countries. In 2004 Korea passed a law premised on the Swedish model, with the difference that sex workers unwilling to leave the trade are penalized and not allowed to access government support services or shelter.

Interestingly, the laws in United States are quite different from the Swedish Model in a couple of ways: prostitution is legalized in the state of Nevada and selling sexual services is criminalized in the rest of the country.

What Are Some of the Results?

Well, to start with, countries that criminalize prostitution, including criminalizing clients (i.e. United States (except for Nevada), Canada) have not seen their sex trades diminish or disappear.

In Korea, the police announced in 2006 that in two years and despite thousands of arrests, the new-law had not diminished the buying or selling of sex but had just moved it to new kinds of venues: private residences advertised on the internet, massage parlours, and barbershops.

As for Sweden, a report from the Norwegian Ministry of Justice and the Police (2004) found that “Sweden’s legal experiment did not greatly reduce the number of women engaging in street sex work. Figures from Stockholm show that the total number of

women on the street has remained stable 1999-2003. The report found that during this period street sex workers became more fearful of violence, were pressured to reduce prices and were pressured to engage in unprotected sex.” (Ironically, Norway is now considering the Swedish Model.)

A study by the Sweden’s own National Health and Welfare Board also found that the law had put sex workers at increased danger of violence due to fewer customers to choose from. A study by the Swedish Police Board found that competition for few clients meant that prices dropped and sex workers were more likely not to use condoms or take more clients to try and earn enough money. The same study reported that people in the health care system expressed concern about health getting worse among sex workers.

The police board further mentioned that the law was an obstacle to prosecuting traffickers, since clients, who had previously assisted women and been key witnesses, were no longer willing to come forward since they were considered criminals themselves.

According to Don Kulick: “The law has been a catastrophe for non-Swedish sex workers – if the prostitute found with a client is not a citizen or legal resident of Sweden, she is immediately deported; in fact government prosecutors complain that in a number of cases they were unable to gain convictions against clients because the prostitutes they were found with had been deported before they could even give a statement.”

What Have Sex Workers Said About Working Under the “Swedish Model”?

According to 20 Swedish sex workers that Petra Ostegren interviewed, many sex workers have moved to work indoors by placing ads on the internet. However, sex workers in flats complain that they must work alone and face isolation. Ostegren reports that the sex workers who were in the worst conditions to begin with, often drug-users or homeless sex workers, have seen the worst changes since they have remained on the street where conditions have deteriorated the most.

Sex workers report that police in trying to enforce the law swarm the streets where women are working with video cameras, even filming inside cars to find “evidence”. Police have also used condoms “evidence” of prostitution, discouraging both women and customers from carrying them.

What Are Other “Reduce or End-Demand” Programs?

Aside from using laws, people have tried to stop sex work through other means. In some places police and local government have used means such publicly as shaming clients of sex workers by publishing their names or license plates, impounding their cars, or sending them to “John School”. “John School” is a program in the United States and parts of Canada where clients can avoid going to court if they take a class where they are taught that prostitution is wrong. In these classes, sex workers are usually presented as victims who are mentally unstable and reckless spreaders of sexually transmitted infections.

In a number of places, certain types of “behaviour change” programs meant to prevent the transmission of HIV, teach men to “avoid prostitutes”. Some of these programs also include messages related to abstinence and sexual fidelity within (heterosexual) marriage. These types of programs often reinforce stigma against sex workers and the idea that sex workers are to blame for HIV.

What Have Sex Workers Done In Response?

In Sweden, sex workers have just formed SANS, a network of Swedish sex workers and allies.

In the United States, many sex workers groups lobbied hard and were instrumental in making sure that 2005 Anti-Trafficking Act did not contain extremely damaging sections on reducing demand through police repression of commercial sex acts.

In Montreal, in 2001, a large-scale police crackdown on clients resulted in a three-fold increase in violent attacks and a five-fold increase in violent attacks with a deadly weapon reported by sex workers to Stella, the sex workers’ group. Stella and the Public Health Department held a joint press conference to condemn the police measure.

In Korea in 2004, sex workers held a month-long (rotating) hunger strike in front of the National Assembly building, protesting the proposed criminalization of clients. On October 7 and November 1, 2004, more than 2,000 sex workers marched in Seoul in protest against what they saw as a threat to their livelihood.

In 2007, in Padua, Italy, sex workers have marched in the streets and began wearing pink badges to indicate that they will offer sexual services for free to clients who are fined by the police.

The Curious Sex Worker Guide to the UNAIDS Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work (2007)

[Update at the end]

The bad news is that the 2007 version of UNAIDS document on HIV and Sex Work proposes measures that are harmful to sex workers' health and human rights all around the world. The good news is that at an action-packed UNAIDS meeting this past June 25, 2007, sex worker networks and NGOs mobilized with supportive governments and have forced UNAIDS to redraft the document! Sex workers need to stay alert and ready to make sure their voices are represented and that the next document doesn't propose things that are equally damaging. Here is a quick look at what this is all about, why you should care and how you can get involved.

Why should I care what UNAIDS says about HIV and Sex Work?

In most places in the world, male, female and transgendered sex workers are disproportionately affected by the HIV pandemic. This is in no small part due to a lack of respect for our human and workers' rights. Sex workers in many places urgently need better access to HIV prevention materials (like condom and lube), information, support and access to treatment. These need to be based on respecting our rights if they are to work!

The guidelines UNAIDS puts out can either help sex workers (and our clients) fight HIV if they are good or they can make it even harder for sex workers to fight HIV if they are bad. UNAIDS programs will affect sex workers in many countries...maybe even your own. The guidelines will also set an example that governments may choose to follow on their own.

What is the UNAIDS Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work?

UNAIDS is the United Nations program responsible for preventing and treating HIV globally. They work with many other United Nations offices. Each office is responsible for different areas. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime is responsible for HIV and Trafficking. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is responsible for HIV and Sex Work.

This year, the United Nations Population Fund produced for UNAIDS a document called a “guidance note” which tells UNAIDS how to deal with the issue of HIV and Sex Work. This “guidance note” gives guidelines and directions for all the types of programs the UNAIDS and UNFPA intend to fund and put in place related to HIV and sex work.

How did the UNFPA come up with the “Guidance Note”?

In July 2006, the UNFPA organized a global consultation on HIV and Sex Work in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to get input on how to address HIV-prevention and treatment for sex workers. There were representatives from many UN offices (UNICEF, UNODC, UNESCO, UNAIDS, etc.), from certain governments (Brazil, United States, Sweden...) and NGOs. Among the NGOs were sex work groups from many countries: from Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia, there was Tais Plus (Kyrgyzstan) and Humanitarian Action (Russia). The Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers, The Latin American and Caribbean Network of Sex Workers and the Global Network of Sex Workers (NSWP), were also all there. Sex workers at the meeting talked forcefully of the negative effects of criminalization, police raids, stigma and violence on their ability to fight HIV.

Sweden sent one person from the government and one anti-prostitution activist. The United States sent 4 people to the meeting. Three worked with the government and one was an anti-prostitution activist. The Americans were very against sex work or harm reduction projects. They supported criminalizing clients and “rescuing” women from sex work. They also had a very intimidating presence. One UN person told me that after they said in the meeting that research showed that not all sex workers were trafficked, their boss at the head office in another country received an angry call from the US government almost immediately. When the UN people had a meeting after the consultation, the Americans sat nearby and appeared to be listening in and taking notes.

The first version of the Guidance Note that came out was called “Three Pillars”. It contained a lot about getting sex workers out of sex work, preventing women from going in to sex work and trying to stop men from being clients of sex workers. There was almost nothing about male or transgender sex workers. The last pillar, was ok. It encouraged working with sex workers and sex worker groups. Unfortunately, as one sex worker activist in Asia pointed out...if they succeeded at Pillars one and two, then maybe they were hoping there would be no sex workers left for them to work with ! The latest version of the document to come out is WORSE !!!

Why is it so bad?

The impact of the American and Swedish anti-prostitution perspectives is clear all through the document. The document even uses language developed by the Swedish government to try and blur the difference between sex work and trafficking. For example, a third party (brothel owner, agency owner, or flat owner) is called a “controller”. Sex work and trafficking are very confused in the document.

The document still concentrates on getting women out of sex work, keeping women from going in to sex work and keeping men from paying for sex. Men and transgender sex workers, with male or female clientele are still basically ignored. Many sex workers fear that the emphasis on “getting women out” of sex work will mean violent police raids and deportations as is happening already in many countries even though raids have not been proven to have any positive affect on trafficking or preventing HIV.

Now, there is no longer a pillar about sex worker or sex worker groups involvement! Instead, there is what many read as a push for public health programs that will include mandatory HIV-testing of sex workers by police. (This type of program is already in action on the country-level by UNFPA in places like Mongolia.)

So, basically, it is a stew of some of the worst approaches to sex work and HIV, ones that will do little to empower sex worker to protect themselves but instead will stigmatize sex work more and make working conditions even worse. There is no mention of sex worker rights-based or harm reduction or peer-led approaches even though, these are the only approaches shown to have made a big difference in reducing HIV among sex workers.

How was it stopped?

On Monday, June 25, 1997, there was a meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board (PCB). The PCB is like a board of directors that makes decisions for UNAIDS. It has countries, UN agencies who work on different HIV issues and NGO representatives for different areas. To see who is on the PCB go here: http://data.unaids.org/pub/InformationNote/2007/pcb%20members%202007_en.pdf

Members of the Asia-Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), based in Thailand, prepared a full-colour document that talked about how sex workers’ voices were totally ignored in the document and explaining in detail why the actions proposed are harmful to sex workers.

Meanwhile, sex worker groups in Brazil and Australia pressured their governments who sit on the UNAIDS PCB to support sex workers and block the guidance note. Other groups contacted the NGO representatives for their region and asked that they do the same.

ICASO, the international group of Aids-service organizations supported Andrew Hunter of the APNSW to attend the UNAIDS meeting. There, they strategized with the help of the International Women's Health Coalition to put the issue of the HIV & Sex Work Guidance Note on the Agenda.

Peter Piot, head of UNAIDS spoke in support of the document but Andrew Hunter and other allies were very successful in pointing out the human rights problems of it. Finally, Brazil and Kenya passed a motion that said that the document had to be rewritten
What next?

The UNFPA and UNAIDS will rewrite the document. It will be important for sex workers to stand together and pressure for meaningful programs that recognize the importance of sex workers' human rights and workers' rights, that include sex workers' voices in a meaningful way and that improve access to HIV-prevention material and information and treatment. If you or your group are interested in helping out with this process, one way to do so, is to contact members of the NSWPF.

Update: In 2008, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects issued an official response called "The Delhi Document". Sex workers campaigned loudly and in many different ways against the Guidance Note at the 2008 International Aids Conference in Mexico City. In 2009, the UNFPA reissued a guidance note that had some improvements but still put the most emphasis on stopping sex work, rather than stopping HIV. All in all, it still represents a tremendous step backwards for sex worker groups due to the lobbying a powerful group of ultra-conservative governments.

The Curious Sex Worker Guide to Different Kinds of Sex Work! (2010)

Do you know about soap clubs? Orange-juice girls? Dungeons? What do these have to do with sex work? Read on to find out!

Isn't sex work just selling sex, how can there be different kinds of sex work?

Sex work happens all over the world and takes many different shapes. Men, Women and Trans Sex Workers sell sex to Men, Women and Trans People in many different settings. For example, historically, geishas in Japan offered not only sexual services but had to be well-trained musicians and dancers. Hetaira in Ancient Greece had to be highly educated and well-read women able to converse with clients. Local culture, law enforcement and the creativity of sex workers have led to the invention and re-invention many ways of selling sexual services.

Are there different kinds of sex work in the CEE/CA?

In different parts of the CEE/CA sex workers work in traditional venues for selling sex: on the street, in apartments and in hotels. But that is not all! Sex workers in some countries in Central Asia work in “saunas” where they service clients. Many sex workers in Slovakia work along highways and do clients in trucks or cars. Some sex workers who use drugs, work out of places where drugs are sold. Male sex workers in some countries pick up clients gay bars. Some male or trans sex workers even sell sex in prison. Sex workers increasingly use the internet to solicit clients across the world, including in the CEE/CA.

What about other parts of the world?

This diversity exists in other regions as well. According to Ann Macharia, during the 1st Regional Workshop for Sex Workers from the Sub-Saharan Africa, held in Nairobi in June 2000, the participants (who were mainly sex workers and their clients) came up with the following list of 14 types of sex workers mainly found in Kenya and most areas of East Africa:

1. Bar sex workers (in bars)
2. Brothel sex workers

3. Twilight sex workers (in night clubs)
4. Street sex workers (Mainly street children)
5. Waiting sex workers (wait in bars and restaurants)
6. Beckoning sex workers (operate along main highways and beckon clients)
7. Married sex workers (operate in homes or brothels)
8. Women hawkers (Market)
9. Sugar mummies sex workers (rich women with money and operate in high-class
10. hotels)
11. Student sex workers (mainly University students)
12. Working class sex workers (operates in offices)
13. High Class sex workers (Advertise their services and operate from their
14. apartments)
15. Massage Parlor
16. Male sex workers (beach boys)

They type of service offered by sex workers all over the world can also be quite diverse. Some sex workers offer domination or S/M services to make more money by offering a “specialty service”. Others offer a full-body massage. Some sex workers offer sexual services along with active listening or emotional support or services such as food preparation.

Here are a few modern day examples of different types of sex work from around the world:

1. **Ships** – In Thailand, sex workers sell services to sailors whose ships are docking in port cities. Since many sailors are not allowed to leave the ships. Sex workers go in speedboats out to the big ships and then climb up long ropes (in high heels !!!) to get aboard the ships, make their money and climb back down to the boat waiting to take them back to shore.
2. **Soap Clubs** – In Japan, “soap clubs” emerged as a way to get around the law banning sex work. Naked sex workers offer to “wash” clients with an erotic full-body soapy washing technique.
3. **Stool Workers** – In Mali, West Africa, many women, when they are divorced or widowed turn to sex work to make a living. Many of them simply set up a small stool outside their huts and sit on it to attract passers-by.
4. **Dungeons** – In many parts of the world, including Europe and North America. Sado-masochistic, fetish or role-play services can pay above general rates for sex

services. Some establishments are equipped with rooms decorated along a theme, costumes or sex toys conceived for specific fetishes (such as whips, or nipple-clamps).

5. **Beach Boys** – In many parts of the Caribbean and Africa, beach boys hang out at highly frequented beaches to pick-up clients. Many sex workers seek out foreign or tourist clients who may be more wealthy and well-paying. Beach boys can refer to male sex workers seeking out either men or women as clients.
6. **Karaoke Bars** – In many parts of Asia, including Thailand, karaoke bars are a venue where women pick up clients. Many sex workers who work there are talented singers. Some karaoke bars are large established bars. Others are small one-room structures with three walls, a few plastic chairs and a karaoke machine that is rented. Some karaoke bars can be a place for migrant workers to sing songs from home in their language and in the company of migrant sex workers
7. **Dingdong Ladies, Beauty Salons and Barber-Shops** – In China, the police divide sex workers into 7 tiers or categories of workers! Here are two categories quoted from Wikipedia:

“**Doorbell girls**” (“dingdong ladies” Fourth tier) – This refers to “women who solicit potential buyers of sex by phoning rooms in a given hotel.”

falangmei (“hairdressing salon sisters” Fifth tier) – This refers to “women who work in places that offer commercial sexual services under the guise of massage or health and beauty treatments; for instance, in health and fitness centres, beauty parlours, barber shops, bathhouses and saunas. Common activities in these premises are masturbation or oral sex.”²

In Korea, to avoid police raids, sexual services are often sold under the guise of hair cuts at “barber shops”.

8. **Orange Juice Sellers/Market Sellers** – In Cambodia, to try and avoid problems with the police or being seen by nosy neighbours, many sex workers go out onto the street selling freshly pressed orange juice---and also offer sexual services. Similarly, some sex workers sell peanuts, food or tailored clothing in open-air markets in sub-saharan Africa. In some places, women signal that they also sell sexual services by particular revealing clothing or by discreetly informing customers.

2 (Quoted from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prostitution_in_the_People's_Republic_of_China).

9. **Sexy Internet Chat** – The internet has meant that pornography has become interactive and sex work has moved on-line. One form of this is women, transgender and male sex workers, in places like Canada work for sexy internet sites. They do stripteases, masturbate (or pretend to) or perform sexual acts with others in front of cameras that broadcast their show live to paying customers on the web. Some “Web-cam” workers simultaneously talk or chat (by typing) erotic conversation with clients. Very dexterous indeed!
10. **Service on Wheels** – Trans sex workers in Paris work out of their own vans or trailers which they park alongside a park known for transsexual and transgender sex workers. Services are offered inside the vans which are outfitted with beds as well as often, pretty curtains and furnishings. Some sex workers leave windows of the vans open to be able to call out if they are in trouble and so outreach services can throw condoms in, if they are too busy to come out.

In Korea, since the new law criminalizing clients, a number of “mobile erotic massage parlours” have tried to stay above the law by offering erotic massages in the back of a van as it tours the city.

TO SEE OUR POWER



**Sex Workers' Rights
Advocacy Network
in Central and Eastern
Europe and Central Asia**



TO SEE OUR POWER

Sex Workers, Human Rights and the Fight against HIV in CEE/CA

Sex Workers Rights' are Human Rights

In many parts of Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia sex workers' fundamental human rights are being violated. These include among others, sex workers' rights to be free from violence, to be free from discrimination, to bodily integrity and privacy and to work.

Violence and State violence

In many countries in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia, sex workers are subjected to physical and sexual assault by law enforcement officers, including police, military and paramilitary officers. Violence on the part of law enforcement constitutes a grave abuse of sex workers' human rights, and is one of the factors that aggravate sex workers' risks for HIV infection. Such violence also creates a hostile environment and poor relations between law enforcement and sex workers, and this prevents sex workers from benefiting from the law's protection when they suffer under abusive working conditions or when clients, partners or family members commit violent acts against them.

Access to condoms

In many countries, including Macedonia and Serbia, where sex work is criminalized or penalized by the law, sex workers may be intimidated from carrying condoms because police may confiscate them or threaten to use them as proof of the "crime" of prostitution. Since sex workers are constantly under threat of arrest, they may be reluctant to keep even a small number of condoms with them. These policies and practices prevent sex workers from protecting their health.

In many areas where HIV has had a strong impact on sex workers, price can still be a barrier to accessing enough condoms and appropriate lubricant.

Discrimination in access to treatment and services

In many countries, sex workers—particularly those who are in prison; those who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or transsexual; those who are drug users and those who are migrants—suffer from discrimination and mistreatment from health professionals impeding their access to proper care and treatment.

Sex workers who are HIV+ may also suffer from repeated treatment interruptions due to routine imprisonment and arrest by police

Police repression and imprisonment

In countries where sex work is criminalized, prohibited or repressed, sex workers need to hide and work in secret to avoid law enforcement. The resulting isolation makes sex workers more vulnerable to violence and poor working conditions. This isolation also impinges upon their access to health and HIV prevention services.

Police raids carried out in places where sex workers ply their trade—raids performed under the pretext of anti-trafficking measures, neighbourhood cleanups or morality policing—are often an excuse for police brutality, arrest and imprisonment, with or without court trials. In many countries in CEE/CA upon arrest, sex workers are forced to clean police stations, to pay extortion money to police and sometimes may lose custody of their children. A high number of physical and sexual assaults against sex workers are reported to take place in the context of raids. These assaults create additional HIV infection risks for sex workers.

Forced testing, breaches of confidentiality, and imprisonment for “treatment”

In some countries, such as Latvia and Kyrgyzstan, sex workers are required to undergo compulsory HIV or STI testing either upon arrest or as part of a government policy of routine testing. Confidentiality is not always respected during these tests, and sex workers do not control the conditions under which they are tested. In Uzbekistan, sex workers with STIs are forcibly confined in a “hospital” until their treatment is complete, and they must pay the costs of their treatment and food themselves.

Lack of respect for workers’ rights

Fair and just working conditions save lives. Where they do exist, the HIV infection rates among sex workers are often no higher than in the general population. Yet, in countries where sex work is considered by government to be a morality issue or inherently exploitative, sex workers have no recourse to defend their right to workplace health and safety.

When police are not combating sex work, they can instead work on partnerships with sex workers to combat violence against them. In Poland, sex workers report that respectful collaborations with the police have enabled safer working conditions.

This infosheet is produced by the Sex Workers' Advocacy Network of Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN)- <http://www.swannet.org/>. It is an adaptation of a version of "SEX WORKERS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV" made by Stella, with support from the NSWP for the 2006 AIDS Conference and financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Open Society Institute (OSI). The opinions expressed here are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the CIDA or of OSI.

Arrest the Violence: Human Rights Violations Against Sex Workers in 11 Countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

A Community Research Project of the Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) of Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia

This 2009 report is based on interviews with more than 200 male, female and transgender sex workers between 2007 and 2009 and chillingly documents widespread violence and discrimination against them, particularly by state actors.

According to Rebecca Schleifer of Human Rights Watch's Health and Human Rights Division:

"Arrest the Violence is the first piece of research done under the leadership of sex workers to document human rights violations they face across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Sex workers throughout the region report that they face verbal and physical abuse, including beatings, kidnapping, and sexual violence, by police and private citizens. Sex workers also report that police confiscated condoms as "evidence" of sex work, and subjected them to mandatory HIV testing.

These are not isolated incidents. The physical, sexual, and verbal violations of sex workers' rights are part of a pattern of abuse by police and in the community that is documented throughout the region.

It is my sincere hope that this report will serve as a catalyst to awaken the broader human rights community to the importance of documenting and denouncing human rights abuses against sex workers, and working with sex workers to end these abuses."

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SWAN Contact, Subscription and Donation Information

To access the report, please go to: <http://swannet.org/node/1639>.

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