The Sex Workers’ Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) is a network of civil society organizations engaged in advocating the human rights of sex workers in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Founded as a regional project in 2006, the Network was officially registered as SWAN Foundation in January 2012.

SWAN seeks to unite sex workers and their advocates to defend sex worker rights and improve sex worker quality of life, including their social, economic, legal and health status in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

SWAN provides a platform for current and former sex workers and their advocates to act together nationally and regionally, to support and inspire each other and learn together. We speak as one voice and mobilize partners. Our issues are highlighted at regional and global dialogues focused on human rights, sexual and reproductive health, gender and criminal justice.

Today SWAN unites 24 member organizations from 18 Eurasian countries. The Network operates in English and Russian.
Introduction

The year 2013 was a huge and productive year for the SWAN network. So many things happened in such rapid succession, it has been hard to make sure that all the members are aware of the hundreds of actions, including campaigns, partnerships, grant proposals, advocacy meetings and so much else, that SWAN has been a part of.

This is only a summary of the most salient of those activities. Throughout the year SWAN continued the every-day functioning of the network by liaising with members, maintaining the website, translating important documents, seizing opportunities and responding to crises as they arose.

Despite not having all our wishes granted for 2013, we managed to support sex workers in achieving some landmark victories in the region, and in the world. So may we suggest that once you have read all that took place this year, you have a cheer for the steps forward that continue to be made in the struggle for sex workers’ rights.
The year began with the continuation of a large campaign led by TAIS Plus to oppose a bill in Kyrgyzstan that would criminalize prostitution. SWAN helped rally international support from women and human rights groups, as well as from regional and international UNFPA and UNDP offices. After an incredible campaign that included media and strategic advocacy, TAIS Plus and their supporters secured a remarkable victory in having the bill withdrawn.

SWAN supported member groups from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary and Tajikistan to submit shadow reports to the UN Committee that monitors states’ compliance with CEDAW (The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women). SWAN groups participated in a training about advocacy using the CEDAW mechanism offered by the International Women’s Rights Action Watch (IWRAW). The CEDAW Committee recommendations to the Hungarian government introduced some of the most progressive language ever issued from the CEDAW Committee on sex workers’ rights and highlighted the government’s responsibility to ensure sex workers could work in health and safety. This was a victory for the international movement for sex workers’ rights.

Inspired by the Human Rights Abuse Documenting Projects (HRADP), a number of groups started documenting abuses on their own. SWAN members and the SWAN secretariat continued to draw attention to the issue of violence against sex workers in public conferences and at pivotal opportunities including with UNAIDS, the UN Committee on the Status of Women and with the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women.

SWAN also wrote a public letter to the Government of Turkey to express concern regarding impunity for the murders of transgender sex workers. To end the year SWAN continued marking December 17th, the Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers, by issuing a joint press release with its European partners, ICRSE and TAMPEP.

SWAN’s work on decriminalization and depenalization was put on hold in 2013 as the network coped to respond to growing demands in other key areas.
SWAN worked closely with regional UNFPA offices, the WHO and regional partner, the Eurasian Harm Reduction Network (EHRN), to ensure quality, accessibility and sustainability of services to sex workers. SWAN worked with TAMPEP to co-organize a conference on HIV, sex work and legislation with Russian and Ukrainian sex workers.

SWAN participated in writing the UNFPA and WHO “Sex Work Implementation Tool” to guide governments and NGOs in applying the WHO Recommendations on Sex Work programmatically and in policy. SWAN also reviewed and contributed to a number of UNFPA country reports on sex work and HIV.

SWAN has also translated a number of resources from English and Hungarian into Russian to ensure that they are available to Russian-speaking SWAN members and for advocacy in Russian-speaking contexts.
Strengthen leadership and involvement of sex workers and their groups in decision making

This year, SWAN and the UNFPA organized an occupational safety training-for-trainers for 33 sex workers from 13 countries of CEE/CA. SWAN representatives served as co-trainers, leading discussions on safety and ways to address violence and rights abuse. The event allowed sex workers to learn issues in other countries and share inspiration and encouragement. It also allowed sex workers involved to acquire presentation and public speaking skills.

SWAN supported Borce Bozinov, Director of STAR-STAR in Macedonia in his successful self-nomination to join the NSWP Board. SWAN also recommended Kristina Mahnicheva’s application to join the Delegation of Developing Country NGOs on the Board of the Global Fund (GFATM) to represent Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan sex worker and LGBT communities.

SWAN tried to support sex workers having greater leadership roles locally by writing a letter to regional UNFPA offices requesting that they work with local sex worker groups as partners and communicate meaningfully with them.

Establish clear governance structures, including the development of an effective Secretariat

The secretariat held three steering committee (SC) meetings. Elections to the SC this fall meant SWAN welcomed both old and new members to the SC.

Work with the UNFPA on grant proposals helped the SWAN secretariat to better understand the structure of the UNFPA and the complexity of EU grants. Through partnerships developed with regional UNFPA and UNDP offices, members in most of the countries are in a better position to contact UN country offices.

Establish clear governance structures, including the development of an effective Secretariat

SWAN partnered with members in grant applications, shared funding opportunities through the list-servs and supported a number of members to apply for grants.
This year, SWAN welcomed two new members: Women for Freedom (Georgia) and Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association (Turkey).

New members have invigorated the network with new ideas and expertise over the past few years. However, the fact that many members have not yet had the chance to meet and interact has been an obstacle to maintaining enthusiasm and mutual support amongst the whole membership. As the network grows, it grows in strength and reach, but the work to sustain it grows too.

**OBJECTIVE 7**
Establish clear governance structures, including the development of an effective Secretariat

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To try and meet the objectives of supporting a dynamic and growing network and to ensure its long-term viability, SWAN’s Secretariat submitted many large and complex funding requests for this year. These included a joint application with the UNFPA to the EC that was elaborated over a 3-day meeting in Istanbul and funding applications to: the Global Fund for Women, the Red Umbrella Fund, the Robert Carr Foundation (with ICRSE as part of NSWP global application), NED, EC Human Rights Defenders Fund, and Open Society Foundations (OSF).

Despite these huge efforts, the Secretariat has had a very challenging time diversifying its funders and is primarily supported through the generosity of OSF. OSF however have been incredibly helpful in helping to approach new funders.