

# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2015





## List of abbreviations

- CEECA - Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- CEDAW - Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
- ECOM - Eurasian Coalition on Male Health
- ECUO - Eastern Europe and Central Asia Union of PLWH
- EECA - Eastern Europe and Central Asia
- EHRN - Eurasian Harm Reduction Network
- ENPUD - Eurasian Network of People who Use Drugs
- GF - Global Fund
- HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
- ICRSE - International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe
- IWRAW - International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific
- LGBTQIA - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, asexual
- NGO - Non-governmental organization
- NSWP - Global Network of Sex Work Projects
- RCNF - Robert Carr Civil Society Networks Fund
- STI - Sexually Transmitted Infections
- SWIT - Sex Worker Implementation Tool / Implementing comprehensive HIV/STI programed with sex workers
- TB - Tuberculosis
- OSF - Open Society Foundations
- UNAIDS - Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
- UNDP - United Nations Development Programme
- UNFPA - United Nations Populations Fund

## About SWAN

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) is a network of civil society organizations and groups 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, with its headquarters in Budapest, Hungary.

SWAN seeks to unite sex workers and advocates and strengthen advocacy for a safer legal environment that ensures human rights of sex workers in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

SWAN recognize the right of sex workers to take agency in their lives, health and decision-making, commit to actively involve sex workers in all levels of SWAN governance and the protection of human rights and recognize sex work as work, which is an unforced sale of sexual services between consenting adult women, men and transgender individuals.

Today SWAN unites 30 member organizations from 18 countries.



## Introduction

2015 was in many ways a challenging year for SWAN and the beginning of a new phase in the network; a new Executive Director was hired; the Secretariat was expanded; new rules of organization and operation were under development and we saw new members from CEECA join our network. All of these changes brought some ups and downs to the network, but overall these changes had a positive impact on our work, and also on the work of our members. SWAN is now more visible in the region and globally, and our members are stronger, louder and more resilient.

This report outlines some of the highlights of activities led or supported by SWAN in the response to the continuous human rights abuses of sex workers, the response to the HIV epidemic and our internal growth as a network.

We will continue to amplify the voices of sex workers in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and to support our members in advocacy for their rights.



## ACTIVITIES IN 2015

### Strategic objective 1:


**Create and sustain a platform of CEECA country advocates for monitoring, analyzing and improving the legal environment around sex work, including exchange of tools and advocacy experiences**

### Engaging with CEDAW

In 2015 SWAN continued to work with CEDAW on advancing the rights of women sex workers. SWAN members were offered support on a continuous basis during the national submissions processes.

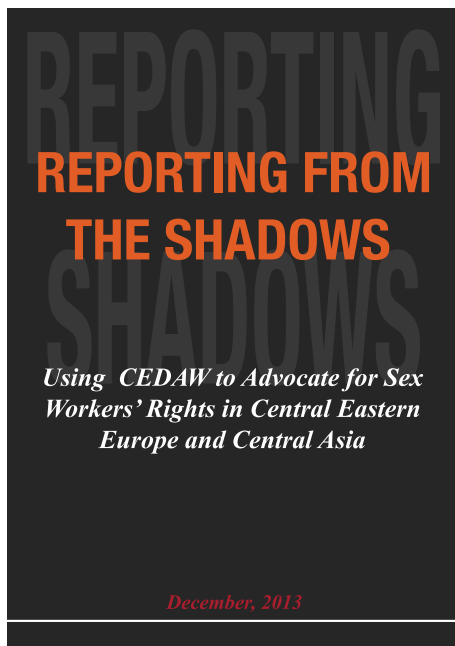
In order to support national submissions and also move forward the discussion on framing sex workers issues under CEDAW, SWAN and IWRAW Asia Pacific organized a thematic briefing meeting with CEDAW Committee members. The meeting was held on the 24th of February in Geneva, Switzerland, during 60th CEDAW session, between SWAN and its members Tais Plus from Kyrgyzstan, HOPS from Macedonia, Silver Rose from Russia, and 15 CEDAW Committee members. The meeting was supported by OSF.





During the meeting the most common and severe human rights violations against sex workers in the region were presented, followed by a discussion on different legal approaches towards sex work, specifically the criminalization of clients. Participants also touched upon advocacy goals of the sex workers movement and the visibility of sex workers' issues on platforms like CEDAW.

In order to share experiences in using CEDAW for advancing recognition of sex workers rights, in 2015 SWAN also launched the publication 'REPORTING FROM THE SHADOWS: Using CEDAW to Advocate for Sex Workers' Rights in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia'.




You can find the publication at [http://swannet.org/userfiles/Reporting\\_from\\_the\\_shadows\\_EN.pdf](http://swannet.org/userfiles/Reporting_from_the_shadows_EN.pdf)

## Human Rights Documentation Project

With support from NSWP and Robert Carr civil society Networks Fund, in 2015 SWAN supported NGO Ameliya from Kazakhstan in the development of a human rights documentation project and an advocacy plan. In previous years such projects were developed in Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Macedonia, Serbia and Tajikistan.

The methodology for data collection was developed based on the work already done in Ukraine. One representative of Ameliya went on a week-long internship to All-Ukrainian Charitable Organization Legalife to learn about the methodology developed and used in Ukraine. Furthermore, Ameliya organized a training on human rights for the sex workers engaged as data collectors. A local lawyer and



an experienced colleague from Tais Plus Kyrgyzstan who also took part in the human rights documentation project in Kyrgyzstan for many years, were invited as trainers and facilitators. During the project period Ameliya documented 60 cases of human rights violations, mainly committed by police and medical staff in health facilities. Based on the data collected, Ameliya developed a report with recommendations to different key institutions.

You can find the research report here:

<http://swannet.org/en/content/amelia-ngo-kazakhstan-publish-report-sex-work>

SWAN provided technical assistance to Ameliya throughout the project and supported the development of a 3 year organizational strategy and short term advocacy plan. The advocacy plan was developed around two of major issues listed as top priorities in the report, such as disclosure of HIV status by medical personnel/outreach workers of the AIDS clinic, and forced testing on HIV by police. In collaboration with OSF, SWAN managed to financially support Ameliya to implement the advocacy plan in its fullest. Activities included individual meetings with representatives of key institutions – AIDS Clinic responsible for outreach, testing and treatment of HIV/STI, Regional Health Department responsible for health policies and Ministry of Internal Affairs. Institutions were open for collaboration and agreed to participate in suggested activities – training on medical staff and police on human rights and HIV/STI, and exposing and solving the issues around voluntary and confidential testing and treatment. Two separate trainings were organized by Ameliya, one for medical staff/outreach workers and one for police officers.

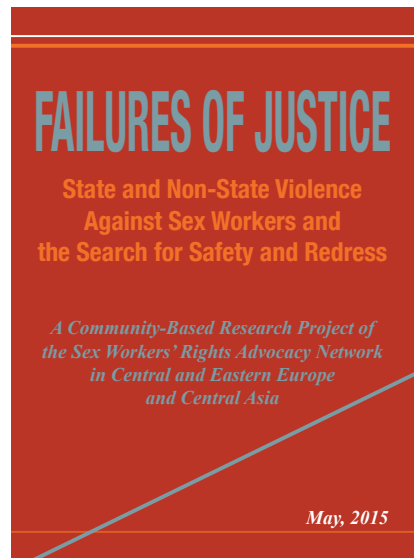
Ameliya also organized a community event on December 17th. Sex workers gathered to discuss the issues faced by the community in Taldykorgan, as well as strategies to organize as part of the sex workers' movement, on a local, regional and global level.

## Developing tools for advocacy

**“Failures of Justice - State and Non-State Violence Against Sex Workers and the Search for Safety and Redress”**: A Community Based Research Project of SWAN in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

SWAN and its members undertook an extensive study in 16 countries of our region, with local research teams comprised of sex workers and allies, and a transnational sex worker advisory team who overviewed the whole process. 320 semi-structured interviews were taken with sex workers of all genders, age, experience of doing different types of sex work outdoors and indoors. Six in-depth interviews with sex workers from Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Serbia further complete the picture.

The resulting report provides an insight and evidence on how criminalization and abusive practices of law enforcement are causally associated with violations of basic human rights, displacement, child custody issues and increased violence against sex workers who are women, queer, trans, Roma, migrants, drug users or living with HIV. It examines how sex workers try to resist and halt the impunity of law enforcement, but are confronted systematically with stigma, discrimination, and more police abuse through extortion, threats, raids, confiscation of condoms as evidence, or more physical and sexual violence.



The publication includes recommendations for governments, ministries, ombudsman, UN agencies and member states, and donor organizations on how to cease, or actively involve in ending violence against sex workers, as well as committing to the advancement of sex workers' human and labor rights.

You can find this publication at:

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



**“A Guide For Sex Worker Human Rights Defenders”**. This publication is aimed at sex workers of all genders and backgrounds, sex worker projects, human rights organizations and advocates. It contains practical information on how to start human rights documenting projects, to organize human rights campaigns and to use formal human rights mechanisms.

Publication is available at:

<http://www.swannet.org/files/swannet/A%20Guide.pdf>



**Community of Learning website** is a library/repository of knowledge, information and resources on successful advocacy tactics to defend sex workers’ rights.

The website contains:

- Documentation tools and examples of questionnaires;
- Sample Open Letters and Letter Campaigns;
- Manuals on Advocacy;
- Country Reports;
- Guides for Media Sensitization, Police Sensitization etc.

SWAN will continuously be updating the website with new resources, so please check it regularly at:

[www.sexworkersrightscommunity.org](http://www.sexworkersrightscommunity.org)



## **Strategic objective 2: Improve sex worker capacities to engage in advocacy**

### **Advocacy and media support for SWAN members**

Throughout the whole year, SWAN as per its strategic goals, supported network members, or joined their campaigns. This was in the form of issuing open letters and statements (i.e. in support of Kemal Ördök in Turkey, who has been subjected to violent crimes and later discrimination and mistreatment from the police; or in support of the global sex workers' call to Amnesty International to vote for an internal policy in favor of decriminalization). Media officers have provided support by increasing the visibility of members' statements and actions for May 1, June 2, December 1 and December 17, together with other specific events organized by them.

SWAN has also participated directly in members' events marking December 17th. Several staff and board members actively participated in the events organized in Bratislava by Odysseus, Budapest by SZEXE, and Ankara by Red Umbrella Sexual Health and Human Rights Association.

### **SWAN Mentorship Program**

#### **Internships and exchange visits**

Five internships for sex worker activists were implemented through the Red Umbrella Fund grant. Tais Plus from Kyrgyzstan, All-Ukrainian Charitable Organization Legalife from Kirovograd, Ukraine, and HOPS from Macedonia have mentored sex worker activists from Silver Rose in Russia, All-Ukrainian Charitable Organization Legalife, Ameliya from Kazakhstan, and Equal Rights from Serbia.

During 5 working days, each mentored activist had the opportunity to learn practical skills and gain experience through helping or working at the hosting organization. This in turn allowed them to develop plans and implementation strategies for their group or organization back home. All internships were based

on the needs expressed by applicants following a filled in survey. The topics covered were: Global Fund projects implementation, developing documentation work and setting up indicators, using CEDAW for advocacy, documentation of human rights abuses, data analysis and developing methodologies for researching models of regulating sex work.

## Trainings

### • SWIT regional training

In November 2015 SWAN organized the first big regional training meant to roll out the SWIT tool (Implementing Comprehensive HIV/STI programs with Sex Workers) with 24 sex workers from 4 countries (Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Ukraine) in Budapest, Hungary. The training was funded by the RCNF through NSWP. As part of the preparations and development of the training curriculum, SWAN's Program Officer participated in Sex Workers Academy in Africa, organized by ASWA - the African Sex Worker Alliance.



The main priority areas of the training were sex workers' human rights, responses to violence, community empowerment and mobilization, community-led services (with additional focus on HIV programming and safer spaces/drop-in centers) and community-led clinical services. The overarching aim of the training was to build the capacity of sex workers to advocate for meaningful involvement and, ideally their own services. This training also served as a pilot for future regional and local trainings to roll out SWIT, as well as technical support and knowledge exchange workshops starting in 2016.



- **Community mobilization and media training**

In December, SWAN organized a training on community mobilization and media, for sex workers from countries in the Central European region, where the movement is less strong and/or there are no formal or informal groups of sex workers. 10 sex workers from Poland, Slovakia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Albania and Serbia had the opportunity to talk, learn and share about sex work regional and global movement, activism, outreach, self-mobilizing, building alliances, fundraising as well as offline and online media, social activism, creative activism, online privacy and online identity and how to coin advocacy messages.

- **NSWP Global Training for Regional Community Experts and Training for Country teams on the Global Fund**


In July 2016, SWAN was invited to participate in a training for regional community experts on the Global Fund. Representatives from Legalife in Ukraine, Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan and SWAN participated in this training held in Cambodia.

An additional training was held in December 2015 for country teams, where sex worker groups from Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia were provided with all information necessary to understand the funding mechanism, identify CCM members and other stakeholders in their country, understand the grant-negotiation and grant making cycles, learn how to access information on the GF website and learn which cases of abuse they can report to the Office of the Inspector General.

- **Ukraine: Global Fund and community empowerment training/ Support for new legal proposal regarding sex work**

In December 2015, SWAN supported gathering of 26 representatives of partner organizations from various Ukrainian regions (Krivoi Rog, Rovno, Vinnitsa, Kiev, Lvov, Kirovograd, Znamenka) in order to:

1. Mobilize sex worker leaders to discuss broader community mobilization and creation of initiative groups in their home regions;
2. Discuss new bill on legalizing\decriminalizing sex work in Ukraine and to take into account sex workers' experiences, expectations and attitudes into the draft law that community want to advocate for.



Lawyers who specialize in drafting bills and lawyers were invited to facilitate the discussion and help achieve the objectives. Legalife-Ukraine staff members who had participated in the training on using “SWIT: implementing comprehensive HIV/STI programmes with sex workers” in Budapest and training on the principles underlying the Global Fund’s activities in Cambodia were also among the trainers.

As a follow up activity of the training participants have organized a working group to further develop a new law proposal on sex work in Ukraine and steps for its advocacy in the Ukrainian parliament.


### **Strategic objective 3: Expand support of regional / international bodies and NGOs working on rights and health towards SWAN mission and values**

As sex workers’ are affected by intersecting systems of oppression, SWAN put in 2015 an effort to further build alliances and solidarity with groups, organizations and networks of people who are also facing violence and discrimination as LGBTQIA people, people using drugs or people living with HIV.

### **Global Fund Technical Support Platform – Consortium of Networks**

SWAN has joined a Consortium of regional networks for a joint application for the GFATM technical support platform. The lead organization on this project is Alliance for Public Health Ukraine, and other partners are: ECUO, EHRN, ENPUD, ECOM and TB Europe. The main goal of the platform is the establishment and maintenance of the effectively functioning Regional Civil Society Community Support, Coordination and Communication Platforms (Regional Platform) with a focus on Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) issues in the area of HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia Region (EECA).

In a preparatory phase a series of meetings and regional dialogues were organized where SWAN Secretariat staff participated. While drafting joint activities SWAN



committed to get involved in the communications processes of the consortium: by sharing its news on publications and events, sharing more information about the technical support hub with all its members and developing a video and a brief publication on sex worker’s concerns about GF transitioning out from some countries; their messages to the Global Fund regarding their involvement in national processes and dialogues and in general how the GF has impacted sex worker’s access to health and rights.

## **Global Fund Cities Project**

In October, SWAN was invited as potential implementing partner to contribute to the development of a new regional concept note submitted by Alliance for Public Health Ukraine. The aim of this project is to build a network of healthy cities, by preparing the ground for potential collaborations between a few selected municipalities, service provider NGOs, and key populations groups and NGOs. The year ended with ongoing negotiations between partners around this project.

## **Regional GF grants/projects**

In 2015, SWAN was invited to support 2 regional projects submitted to GFATM.

- Eurasian Coalition on Male Health (ECOM) invited SWAN to support its Regional Program “Community Actions to Increase Access of MSM and Transgender People to HIV Services in Eastern Europe and Central Asia”;
- East Europe and Central Asia Union of People Living with HIV (ECUO) invited SWAN to its program “Partnership for equitable access to the HIV care continuum in the East Europe and Central Asia region”;

SWAN participated in consultation meetings and nominated SWAN representatives to Regional Experts Group in both projects.

Such regional projects are important step toward recognition of sex workers issues as intersecting in the region, recognizing SWAN as key regional partner and strengthening regional partnerships as a way for advocacy and change.



## **Strategic Objective 4: Strengthen SWAN governance and financial sustainability**

In 2015 continued to work on strengthening SWAN internal structure and governance, through several meetings to discuss in-depth the functioning and structure of the network.

### **Secretariat expansion**


In 2015, Ekaterina and Maria joined the Secretariat as Communication Officers.

The two media and communications officers drafted a communications strategy, wrote numerous articles, populated SWAN website and taken on moderating of the list-serv. They also gathered country information from members to be included into the website and conducted a preliminary assessment on member's needs in terms of media trainings. In addition, the med/communications officers encouraged and followed national actions on May 1st as well as June 2nd, December 1st and December 17th.

Roxana Vasi joined as Program Officer in 2015, after an internship at SWAN in 2014. As Program Officer, Roxana has supported SWAN's activities in terms of capacity building (by organizing a regional SWIT roll out training with 24 sex workers participants from 4 EECA countries, participating as co-facilitator and resource-person in an ICRSE training in Romania, and SWAN Media and Capacity Building training), contributed to SWAN'S sustainable functioning, and the expansion of collaboration with other key players and communities networks in the region. The Program Officer position was generously supported by UNFPA in 2015.

### **SWAN Secretariat Staff meetings** (June and November)

On June 15-17, and November 2-4, the SWAN Secretariat met for staff meetings in Budapest. The purpose of these meetings was to meet in person, given that



3 staff members work remotely, and there were 3 new hires during the year. We had the opportunity to thus ensure a better coordination of activities for the rest of 2015, update on fundraising efforts and coordinate the activities planned for 2016. In terms of governance and sustainability, the Secretariat pinned down more clearly the roles and responsibilities of each staff member and also agreed on a common transparent mechanism of reporting, including uniform report forms.

### **Steering Committee Meetings** (May and November)

Steering Committee Members met 2 times in 2015 to work on organizational documents and start the process of writing an organizational manual, which would include all roles and responsibilities, procedures and protocols for members, Secretariat and Steering Committee itself.

This included revising of hiring policy, grievance procedures, key decisions in terms of the organizational structure and membership/voting rights, guidelines for representing SWAN, etc.

NSWP provided technical support to SWAN during the meetings and discussions.


### **Steering Committee elections** (August- September)

In August 2015, 2 Steering Committee members had to step down, due to their mandate finishing. The results after elections brought in the board two new members from Silver Rose/Russia, STAR-STAR/Macedonia and one member from Tais Plus/Kyrgyzstan who was re-elected.

### **Fundraising**

In light of the many changes in the network and Secretariat, SWAN focused on internal development and a new financial management structure and so did not seek out new and diverse funding, but rather funding that would support the ongoing activities.





OSF remained a key funder in 2015 and was very supportive of SWAN during the transition period 2014/2015.

UNFPA has also provided comprehensive support for SWAN not only as Implementing Partner, but also by funding SWAN's Program Officer position in 2015, through invitations for various meetings, or supporting SWAN's efforts to roll out SWIT. UNFPA EECARO partially funded and offered valuable feedback during the drafting stages of the Failures of Justice report, and further helped to promote it once published. As partners for rolling out SWIT, UNFPA supported the first training held by SWAN on SWIT, in November 2015. This training was a pilot for the development in 2016 of an extensive program between SWAN, ICRSE, NSWP and other regional sex workers' networks in building the capacities of sex workers in SWIT, be it for community mobilization, responses to violence, advocacy, or community led programs - as based on each local groups' needs.

SWAN has also collaborated with UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub as implementing partners. The collaboration consisted of a research on sex workers' access to legal aid in 5 countries in EECA, partial funding of the Failures of Justice report, and invitation to participate in the annual meeting of the newly formed Regional HIV Legal Network.

