

ANNUAL REPORT

2016





ABOUT SWAN

The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) is a network of sex workers and allies engaged in advocating for human rights of sex workers in Central and 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 recognizes 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.

SWAN currently unites 28 members of 18 countries in Central Eastern Europe and Central Asia.





ACTIVITIES IN 2016

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**

Regional meeting on Concluding Observations of the CEDAW Committee and the rights of sex workers and women who use drugs

In November, SWAN in collaboration with iWRAW Asia Pacific hosted a meeting in Budapest to discuss the follow-ups to concluding observations given by CEDAW to 10 countries in the region: Georgia, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine. Through work from the previous years, including SWAN and iWRAW support, some of the participants already submitted shadow reports to CEDAW, of cases of discrimination and violence against female sex workers and women who use drugs. During the 3 day meeting the groups revised issues and violations of women's human rights, mapped required measures from own shadow reports, went through the Concluding Observations given by CEDAW Committee, assessed governmental measures/gaps and gains, as well as actions and strategies implemented by NGOs/good practices and barriers. Based on this analysis country action plans were developed and strategies for collaboration and advocacy at the regional level were discussed.

Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on the Rights of Sex Workers under CEDAW

In July 2016, 40 participants from sex worker groups and networks, women's groups and allies convened in Bangkok for an expert group consultation, to build



consensus on advocacy themes and goals with CEDAW. Among the participants were representatives of: Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), CREA, Amnesty International, NSWP, ASWA, SWAN, APNSW, DMSC India, SANGRAM India, NZPC (New Zealand Prostitutes Collective, Tais Plus, Silver Rose, Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform, Rose Alliance Sweden, SWEAT/Sisonke South Africa, Community Strength Development Foundation Sri Lanka, Show-Bangladesh, SANGRAM-India, UN WOMEN. CEDAW Committee member Patricia Schultz also attended the meeting.

The EGM resulted in the various participating groups agreeing on key points to be included in the framework: rights of women sex workers identified under numerous articles of the convention and not only Article 6. In particular, employment rights, access to justice and equal protection, right to health and freedom from stigma and discrimination are priorities were identified. Recognition of sex work as work and opposing conflation of trafficking and sex work were identified as key points around which the framework should be centered.





- **Statements and responses**

SWAN joined the efforts of the global sex workers movement in responding to the UN Women online consultation on “sex work, sex trade and prostitution”. [Our response to UN Women](#) highlighted the concern that many sex workers groups would not have access to the internet. Furthermore, the limited amount of time for replying to the consultation, together with at times inaccessible language of the survey risked to further hinder sex workers’ voices from being heard. To make the case of how sex workers would benefit from full decriminalization and depenalization, together with labour rights, SWAN based its response on evidence gathered and published in previous years by the network and members, including SWAN research studies (*Arrest the Violence, Failures of Justice*). SWAN also joined NSWP and other 190 sex workers’ rights, women’s rights and human rights organizations, issuing [a joint response to UN Women](#) and calling for centering sex workers’ experiences and involvement, and employing a more participatory approach for consultation.

- **Technical Assistance through the Community, Rights and Gender Department of the GFATM**

The Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Department received a technical assistance (TA) request from the Albanian Association of People Living with HIV to support the engagement of sex workers in Global Fund processes. CRG TA Provider, the Community Leadership and Action Collaborative, in partnership with the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) and the Sex Workers’ Rights Advocacy network (SWAN) responded to this TA request with the aim of ensuring appropriate programming for sex workers in Albania’s HIV Global Fund grant. The TA was meant to help assess suitability and potential sustainability of the approaches currently being proposed by the National AIDS program as well as strengthen the engagement of sex workers in ongoing country dialogue and grant making processes.

Research, including desk review was conducted. The research took place in three cities in Albania- Tirana, Durres and Vlora in the period of April-September 2016. 40 sex workers and more than 10 institutions were interviewed. A set of conclusions and recommendations were developed and delivered as baseline for future work in Albania.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2:

Improve sex worker capacities to engage in advocacy

- **Media support for SWAN members**

Following its commitment to support members in their campaigns, in 2016 SWAN continued to amplify the voices of sex workers groups and allies from the region, while also operating the separate members-only email list to ensure the safety of sex worker activists.

Current communication channels include [SWAN website](#), twitter account, [public Facebook group](#), a Facebook moderated group and a [Community Learning website](#).



● Trainings and follow ups

2016 “Nothing about us without us” SWIT regional workshop and follow ups

In June 2016, SWAN and ICRSE organized a regional workshop on SWIT. The training was based on past experiences in 2015 of rolling out SWIT in the region, and was supported by RCNF through NSWP, and UNFPA EECARO. During 5 days, 33 participants from 7 countries (Georgia, Macedonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Serbia, Ukraine) exchanged experiences, knowledge and strategies around mobilizing. The in-depth training covered all components of SWIT, from community empowerment, mobilization against violence, advocacy, community led services, HIV programming, to programme management and organizational capacity building. The training was organized by sex workers for sex workers, with trainers from ICRSE and SWAN, and participants equally leading sessions based on their areas of expertise. One goal of the training was to share and build the skills of in-country teams to organize, and use SWIT as a potential tool for programming or advocating for meaningful involvement and/or community-led services.





As part of a longer 3-year project, this regional workshop meant to kickstart the roll out of SWIT in all participant countries throughout 2016-2018. Thus, in-country teams organized SWIT follow ups in autumn 2016 with the technical assistance of ICRSE and SWAN, agreeing together on common work plans and SWIT national-level workshops and roll outs to be organized for the upcoming year.

Global Fund capacity building

The regional community experts trained on GF in 2015, continued a country level activities in 2016.

The country level activities in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia consisted of further trainings of the sex worker community on Global Fund processes, development of national action plans for advocating for rights based programming, the inclusion of the SWIT as normative guidelines, meetings with stakeholders, and preparations for entering transition working groups, preparations for CCM elections and national HIV strategy planning.

In Kyrgyzstan, Tais Plus wrote an appeal to the Global Fund country team on the raids on sex worker places of work, which were a direct threat to long-term HIV prevention programs. Also, 23 sex workers participated on the “Meaningful Engagement of Sex Workers in the Global Fund’s Processes” Training.



In Georgia, SWAN and NSWP Senior Program Officer assisted in writing a CGR TA request for further assistance for the group in Georgia to be included in transition planning and other national processes, as well as a legal framework analysis.

The sex worker network consortium will be applying for a continuation of this grant in 2017, to prepare the sex worker groups more in depth in the transition and sustainability planning.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3:

Expand support of regional / international bodies and NGOs working on rights and health towards SWAN mission and values

With the Global Fund transitioning out of the ECA region, regional key population networks and technical partners have focused their attention on budget advocacy (ie EHRN “Harm Reduction work, fund it!” regional project) and national transition planning. Within this context, sex workers in the region face various challenges. Sex workers communities have gone through years of criminalization and violence, whilst being excluded on all levels from policy/decision making, country processes, to programs targeting them. Within an environment where community mobilization is difficult, it is even more difficult to mobilize around Global Fund, understand its complicated processes and advocacy strategies for inclusion. Furthermore as a criminalized community, it is even more challenging to advocate for meaningful involvement, or domestic funding for services, much less of community-led services, as there are no guarantees that governments will implement rights based programming after transitioning from the Global Fund.





SWAN's have focused its efforts on advocating for community involvement on all levels, and capacity building of community led organizations, in order to enable them to navigate the national level process which are often complex and out of reach to communities.

To be able to catch regional trends, needs and opportunities, and secure involvement of local key sex workers groups in ongoing debates and activities, as well as ensure that any response is based on normative guidelines i.e SWIT, SWAN joined several regional initiatives and projects, and attended all relevant regional meetings and debates.


- **Regional projects and initiatives:**

Regional Transition Taskforce

SWAN has been included in the Regional Transition Taskforce, made up for key population networks and technical partners. The task force's main goal was to coordinate jointly in countries to ensure that transition plans include human rights based programming for key populations. Unfortunately, this task force did not evolve into a functioning task force beyond the initial meeting, as the issue of taking the lead in coordinating it proved to be challenging.

Regional Communications Platform EECA

This one-year regional project was implemented by EECA Consortium (EHRN, ECUO, ECOM, SWAN, ENPUD, TBEC), with the lead of Alliance for Public Health Ukraine. The Regional Platform was financially supported by the GFATM within the Community, Rights and Gender (CRG) Special Initiative. The aim of it was to facilitate the access of communities to information on Global Fund and its processes, and increase the demand for technical assistance. SWAN participated in this project as a partner, with sharing information from partners to SWAN members and from SWAN members to the wider community.



Also, within this project SWAN is developing community tools - video and publication on the community's engagement in Global Fund supported processes on the national level. The final products should be published and promoted in 2017.

Community Regional Action Plan for Enhancing Sustainable Access to Quality and Continuous HIV Care for All Who Need It in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in 2017-2020 (Regional Plan).

East Europe and Central Asia Union of People living with HIV (ECUO) coordinated a regional consultation and discussion about situation with access to HIV care continuum for PLWH; drug users; sex workers; MSM; transgender people; persons without documents and other migrants; prisoners and PLWH affected by TB in EECA region. SWAN participated in the process together with EHRN, ECOM, EWNA, ENPUD, ITPCru, Teenergizer, TB people and Regional Network of legal aid for people affected by HIV/AIDS. The development of the plan was supported by GFATM.

The regional Plan is available online at:

<http://ecuo.org/en/eeca-regional-plan-is-available-online/>

Regional GF EECA Cities Initiative

In 2015-2016 SWAN was invited to join several organizations and networks in applying with a concept note to Global Fund. Primary recipients are Alliance for Public Health Ukraine, AFEW, and Contact Netz (from Switzerland), while SWAN is partner and sub-recipient. The main aim is to develop a pilot network of cities (Almaty, Beltsi, Sofia, Tbilisi, Odessa) where municipalities closely collaborate with service provider NGOs. In 2016, negotiations were ongoing, with SWAN attempting to secure funds for capacity building of local sex workers groups, and advocating for inclusion of communities within city taskforces and other relevant bodies part of this project.



Regional Program on “Partnership for equitable access to the HIV care continuum in the East Europe and Central Asia region” led by ECUO

This Regional Program is planned to ensure the increase in efficiency, accessibility and sustainability of the HIV-infection treatment programs through promoting the HIV care continuum provision to people living with HIV (PLWH) with special focus on KAPs in the EECA region.

SWAN is partnering in this project through participation in a Regional Expert Group (REG) which is established to ensure that the KAPs (i.e., sex workers, people who use drugs, MSM, women who live with HIV and PLWH/TB) are actively involved into the process of advocating the access to HIV-care continuum, as well as for coordination and provision of technical support in issues of scaling-up the access to HIV-care continuum to KAPs representatives in the countries within the project and to accumulate the technical expertise.

• Some of the regional and global meetings which happened in 2016:

Global and regional communities’ networks meeting, Amsterdam, 29-31 January 2016

This meeting was co-funded and organized by global networks NSWP, INPUD, MSMGF, GNP+, with the attendance of regional networks from CEECA - SWAN, ECOM, ENPUD, ECUO, Trans Coalition for EECA, EHRN. The key objectives of the meeting were:

- Getting to know the work and the structure of other CEECA regional and the global networks;
- Discussing the opportunities of joint efforts at global and regional levels for EECA to address key challenges as well as building mutual understanding and solidarity in order to set and achieve common goals in the region.

The main outcome of the meeting was joint calendar of events and identified opportunities for collaboration.



HIV implementation tool for Young Key Populations, developed by UNFPA EECARO and IPPF

In 2015-2016, UNFPA regional office worked in cooperation with in-country offices in 10 countries of the region, undertaking consultations with partners and a research on young key populations, for the purpose of developing a programming guideline which would be similar to other key populations implementations tools (SWIT, MSMIT etc).

Drafting the sex work chapters were challenging for all partners. Beside criminalization of sex work in general, young people under 18 who sell sex face multiple victimization via mandatory reporting laws, parental consent laws, lack of access to various services and blurry concepts about consent and exploitation. SWAN and sex workers collectives in the region haven't had the capacity so far to develop programs specifically addressing young sex workers which will serve as best practices to rely on, so we hope that this tool will manage to cover all critical aspects and provide guidance for future developments.

Sex workers' rights workshop as counter-event to the Budapest LGBT Pride, 24th of June 2016

SWAN together with ICRSE, SZEXE (sex workers' association in Hungary), Transvanilla (trans rights association in Hungary) and with the support of Association of Hungarian Women and Amnesty International Hungary, held a workshop titled "Invisibility, exclusion and stigma: sex workers' voices should matter". The workshop was initially focusing more broadly on LGBT sex workers, and proposed by SZEXE and Transvanilla for the Budapest Pride week. Budapest Pride organizers, however, rejected the workshop for ideological reasons, claiming sex work "is patriarchal violence". Thus, together we decided to still hold the workshop, but as a counter event, and talk about exclusion of sex workers from queer and trans communities. The panels featured presenters from SWAN, ICRSE, SZEXE, Transvanilla, Sloboda Prava (sex workers' organization in Serbia), STAR-STAR (sex workers organization in Macedonia). The event attracted media attention, and more debates within local LGBT and feminist activist circles ensued.



13th International AWID Forum, 8-11 September 2016

The 13th International AWID Forum took place in Costa de Sauipe, Bahia, Brasil - with this edition's theme "Feminist Futures", by attempting to look critically at 20 years of diverse social movements and carry lessons forward. SWAN and ICRSE applied successfully together for scholarship with a common panel on sex work. The panel, "Forging alliances: Sex workers call for cross-movement solidarity" was presented in several languages by Kemalita Ördek (SWAN board member, president of Red Umbrella sex workers' association in Turkey), Paula Ezkerra (Prostitutas Indignadas, Spain), Roxana Vasi (SWAN Program Officer) and Boglarka Fedorko (ICRSE Campaign and Advocacy Officer). During the session, the panelists talked about stigma and structural violence against sex workers, and potential strategies towards building alliances with the broader feminist and LGBTQIA movements. In this edition of the forum, several sex workers' panels were held, with various collectives from all over the world making their voices heard. Besides the panels, several informal sex workers networking meetings were held, including a meeting to strategize on responses to the UN Women consultation happening at that time.

21st International AIDS Conference, 18-22 July 2016

For the 21st International AIDS conference held in Durban, South Africa, SWAN staff supported Kemalita Ördek from Red Umbrella in Turkey to submit an abstract to present Failures of Justice (SWAN community research study on state and non-state violence). Unfortunately, due to the attempted coup in Turkey, Kemalita was not able to travel.

Women for Humane Drug Policy networking meeting, November 2016

As part of a bigger project Eurasian Harm Reduction Network is leading, a networking meeting for the campaign was held in November 2016. SWAN was represented by one of its board members Natalia Zholnerova (from sex worker collective Ameliya in Kazakhstan). Her presentation, drawing from the *Failures of Justice* community research study, and own work in Kazakhstan and within the region, focused on the intersections and double stigma and violence faced by women sex workers who use drugs.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4:

Strengthen SWAN governance and financial sustainability

- **Development of SWAN new Rules of Organization and Operation; New membership structure**

In May 2016, the board of SWAN held a meeting during which they approved the new Rules of Organization and Operation. Through this, the membership structure was changed: sex worker collectives and organizations meaningfully involving sex workers according to clear criteria would receive full membership and decision making rights, while allied organizations would take on the status of associated members. The document also offers a clear overview of roles and responsibilities between Secretariat, Management Committee; procedures and protocols, hiring policies, and guidelines for representing SWAN. These new Rules of Organization and Operation were endorsed by all members of the network.

- **Management Committee elections**

In 2016 SWAN held elections of Management Committee members. 1 member from Russia stepped down, and 1 member from Kazakhstan was elected through established election process within the network.





- **Financial support**

This year, SWAN work was financially supported by the following partners:

Open Society Foundations

Global Network of Sex Work Project

Robert Carr Civil Society Network Fund

Regional Communications Platform EECA

UNFPA - United Nations Populations Fund

Global Forum on MSM and HIV