



# ANNUAL REPORT 2021



# ABOUT SWAN

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

**OUR MISSION:** SWAN brings together sex worker-led organisations and their allies to work towards creating societies in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia where:

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

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

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

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

# OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2021

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

## 1. Building the capacity of national and local sex worker-led initiatives and their allies to promote and advocate for human rights and evidence-based policy and programming.

### 1.1 Enabling exchange of experience and learning between SWAN members

One of the fundamental purposes of SWAN is to serve as a platform for learning and sharing between our members. This is done through identifying, documenting and disseminating good practices of SWAN members, facilitating mentorship or internship programmes, and organizing meetings and training that enable groups to share their experiences and learn from each other. Due to the pandemic, learning and sharing in 2021 happened predominantly through web meetings and online training.



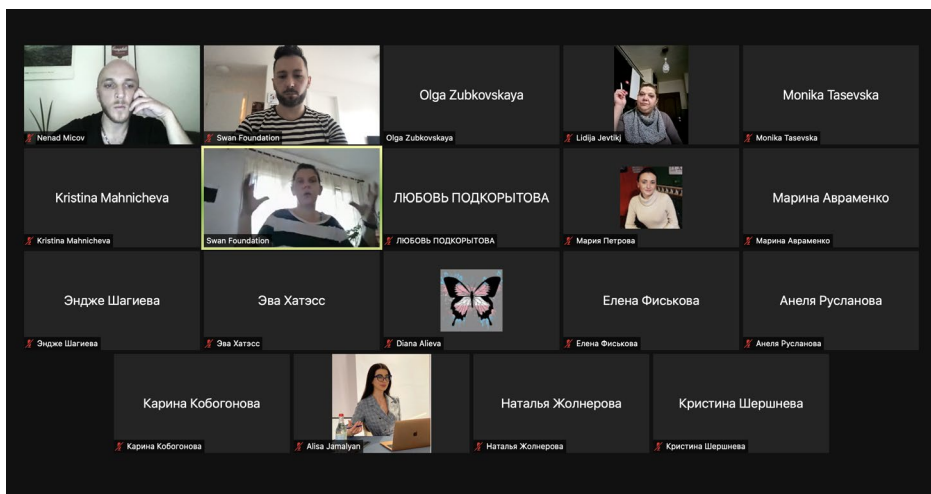
**INFORMATIONAL WEBINARS ON THE TOPIC OF  
INTERNATIONAL REPORTING MECHANISMS/SHADOW REPORTS.**

Date	Webinar Title
29.09.2021 Wednesday 11:00 CET	<b>Webinar 1:</b> Using UN mechanisms to advocate for sex workers rights - Country experience before UN treaty bodies and UPR process.
06.10.2021 Wednesday 11:00 CET	<b>Webinar 2:</b> Using Council of Europe mechanisms to advocate for sex workers rights
13.10.2021 Wednesday 11:00 CET	<b>Webinar 3:</b> Strategic cases and data collection (practical work on case studies and drafting reports)

ZOOM



- Webinars on UN mechanisms:** SWAN conducted a series of informational capacity-building webinars on the topic of International reporting mechanisms and shadow reports. The webinar provided the opportunity to learn about the experiences of civil society organizations in using the shadow report mechanism to promote the human rights of sex workers at a national level and an expert overview of regional and international mechanisms that can be additionally used as advocacy targets/opportunities.
- SWIT program closing web meeting:** SWAN hosted an online event to mark the closing of the SWIT regional program which has been running since 2013. Within the [Sex Worker Networks Consortium](#), funded by [Robert Carr Fund](#), SWAN has been working on the promotion and roll-out of the [Sex Worker Implementation Tool](#) (SWIT), an international standard of practical guidance on providing effective HIV and STI programming for sex workers, in 8 countries in the CEECA region. 21 participants from 7 countries participated in this online event to share experiences and lessons learned, to discuss challenges, and acknowledge all the hard work and successes achieved in the past 6 years.



## 1.2 Provide training and technical assistance to members.

In 2021, despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic restricting travel and our ability to organize physical meetings, SWAN continued to provide extensive training and technical support to its members by combining resources and opportunities from different programs and projects. Following a basic principle of SWAN's work, training and technical support were tailored to the needs of our members and adjusted to the new reality of online communication and collaboration.

**In Armenia**, SWAN member *Right Side* translated the *Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT)* into Armenian and made a short SWIT guide in the national context, making SWIT accessible for use by sex workers in Armenia.

**In Georgia**, SWAN has provided technical support to our member organisation *Women for Freedom* through consultation, writing reactions and letters of concern, and engagement in national-level advocacy aimed at including sex workers in processes led by other stakeholders and NGOs in the country, which are of interest to the sex work community in Georgia.

**In Kazakhstan**, we assisted NGO *Amelya* with organizing community elections for *Country Coordinative Mechanisms (CCM)*.

**In North Macedonia**, basic technical support was provided through virtual meetings, supporting social media campaigns and events, and providing support to the national platform for the decriminalization of sex work which in 2020 worked on the amendment of the Criminal Code and provision on third parties in prostitution.

**In Russia**, support was provided through webinars and knowledge exchange with other SWAN members experienced with topics raised by *Sex Work Forum Russia*.

Members in **Georgia, Kazakhstan and Moldova** were also provided with technical support in the form of online training under the regional *TIBERIUS* project. This training was conducted in collaboration with *ECOM*, *EHRA* and *HIV Legal Network* where SWAN provided an overview of legal frameworks on sex work and shared regional experience on documenting human rights violations and violence to be applied under the *TIBERIUS* project. The purpose was to refresh paralegals' skills and understanding, in order to document the

human rights violations sex workers face, including those encountered whilst accessing HIV services.

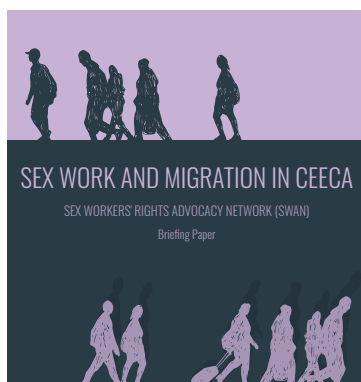
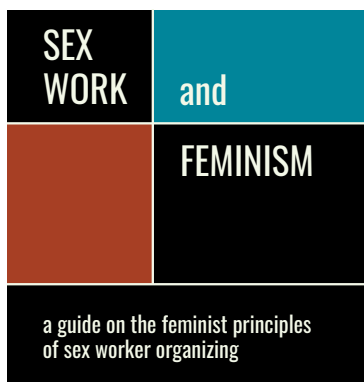
Under the same project, the *Shadow Report Guidelines on CEDAW & Rights of Sex Workers* by IRAW-AP and NSWP have been translated into Russian: [Руководство По Составлению Теневых Докладов О Правах Секс-работников В Кддж](#), to serve as a resource for future advocacy work for all Russian speaking members.

## 2. Advocating for regional and global stakeholders to increase the degree to which they meaningfully involve sex workers and to address their needs in their programming around rights and health in the CEECA region.

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

#### 2.1.1 In 2021, we launched two regional community resources:

- [Sex Work and Feminism: A Guide on the Feminist Principles of Sex Worker Organizing](#)
- [Sex Work and Migration in CEECA](#)

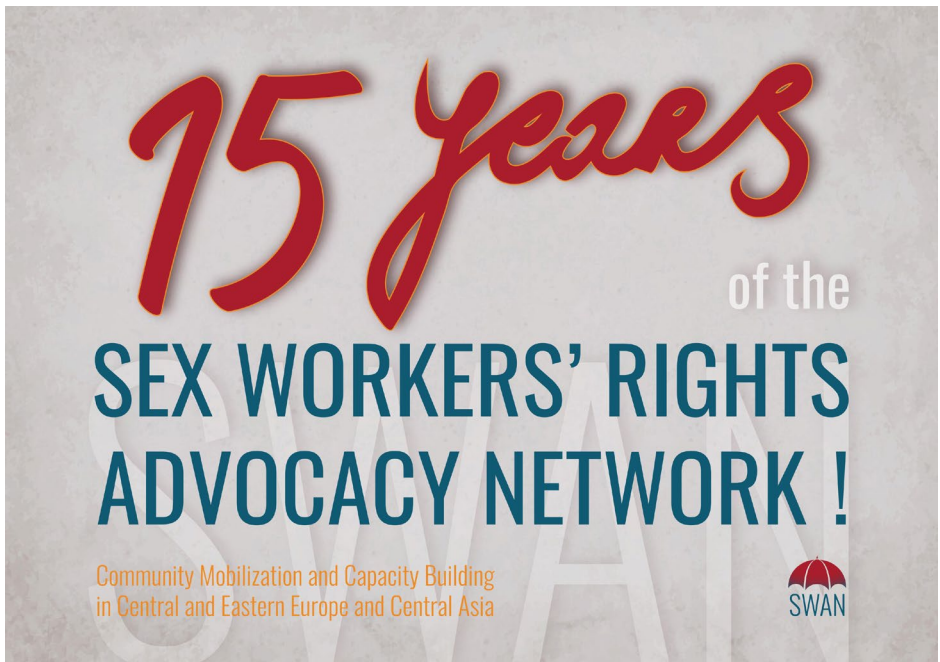


## Additionally, we worked on developing two new regional resources:

- SWIT video digests (a series of animated videos elaborating each SWIT chapter);
- Briefing paper on LGBTQI sex workers in the CEECA region;

Both resources were developed in consultation with members during 2021. Their launch and distribution are planned for 2022.

With great pleasure and a strong feeling of accomplishment, in 2021 we marked the 15th anniversary of SWAN by publishing our [15 years report](#) highlighting our achievements and successes since our formation in 2006. Once again, we took the opportunity to express our immense gratitude for the power and resilience we have witnessed through our incredible community and supporters.



## 2.1.2. CEDAW, General Recommendation on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration.

In 2019, the global sex work community started a campaign for the *CEDAW Committee* to recognise, respect and protect the human rights of sex workers in the process of the development of *General Recommendation (No 38.) on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration*. SWAN joined the global movement demanding the committee draw a clear distinction between trafficking and sex work and recognise the need for different sets of measures when addressing the needs of victims of trafficking and of sex workers. In that process we gave written submissions, presented an oral statement during the CEDAW hearing and sent written commentary to the draft Recommendation in 2020.

Unfortunately, the Committee chose to ignore the voices of sex workers and instead support the abolitionist approach, thus failing to provide a basis for eliminating discrimination against all women equally. Instead, the Committee developed a General Recommendation which is regressive and will lead to further harm and human rights abuses of sex workers, namely: how women engaging in sex work and potential exploitation that might occur at workplaces are referred to; in continuing to conflate and overlap sex work and trafficking; and in the promotion of the “end demand” approach which has always been harmful to sex workers due to increased policing, violence and criminalization.

SWAN has invested many years of capacity-building with our members on how to engage with *CEDAW* and use it as an advocacy opportunity, in parallel to working on sensitizing *CEDAW* Committee members in framing sex worker issues under *CEDAW*. During the last few years, we had seen the first progress in formulating recommendations (Macedonia, Tajikistan) and were hopeful that progress had begun. Unfortunately, with the adoption of the regressive *General Recommendation (no.38) on Trafficking in Women and Girls in the Context of Global Migration*, regression in their approach to sex work and increased promotion of the “end demand” approach have already been identified (Russia, Kyrgistan).

As a final comment and response, on the occasion of the 8th of March, International Women’s Day, we have sent and published a [\*Statement on CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendation No.38\*](#) reminding the *CEDAW* Committee that its role is to promote human rights for all women and sharing our profound disappointment that in this instance the *CEDAW* Committee has failed to hear the voices of sex workers globally.



## 2.2 Making the voices of sex workers heard and influential.

As a sex worker-led network, we must maintain and deepen dialogue with our member organisations, stay connected and support national movements by amplifying their voices using different channels and advocacy opportunities. Usually this is done by attending local and international meetings throughout the year, ensuring sex workers' voices and demands are heard. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the working environment has changed this year. Most conferences and meetings were canceled or postponed and national or regional dialogues were delayed. However, we used every given opportunity to raise and amplify community voices.

### Attended meetings/forums/dialogues:

- SWAN collaborated with regional key population networks to issue a joint [Statement from EECA key populations on key priorities in HIV and AIDS response](#) to the *United National General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV and AIDS*;
- Natalia Isaeva represented SWAN in a Handover dialogue with *Special Rapporteur on Health: Re-thinking criminalization: drugs, sex work, same-sex relations and HIV*, where she talked about the criminalisation of sex work and its impact on the lives and health of sex workers;
- SWAN Secretariat participated in the regional dialogues initiated by *Women in Migration Network (WIMN)* under the topic: *Feminism: breaking the isolation of our movements*. The goal of the dialogue was to analyze the intersections between migration, gender, ethnicity and race, work and climate change. It involved groups from different backgrounds and locations working together on issues such as antiracism, LGBTIQ+ rights, migrants' rights, workers' rights, and climate change to share experiences and seek proposals for intersectional mobilization.
- [SWAN's Executive Director contributed to the roundtable "Migrants' access to healthcare in Eastern Europe and Central Asia: shaping interventions grounded in research evidence"](#) organized by [Regional Expert Group on Migration and Health](#) in EECA. The event was organized on the eve of December 18th, International Migrant Day;
- SWAN's Program Officer, jointly with representatives of member organisations *Tais Plus* - Kyrgyzstan, *Legalife*- Ukraine, and *Sex Work*

*Forum - Russia*, participated in a regional panel at *ESWA's Exploratory Convening on Sex Workers' Access to Justice - Violence, Exploitation, Trafficking and Victims' Rights* between 2nd-4th of December, held in Brussels and online;

- We collaborated with *Front Line Defenders* and their [Cypher Comics](#), a webcomic that advances the organization's storytelling and features stories of human rights defenders, their work and the challenges they face. We used this collaboration for wider promotion of the work, passion and achievement of one of our most prominent sex work activists, spokespersons and community mobilisers [Natalia Isaeva](#), and the beginnings of the human rights movement of sex workers in Ukraine;
- *Funders Concerned About AIDS (FCAA)* panel - Stasa Plecas, SWAN Executive Director was a panelist at the *COVID-19 and Systemic Inequality: Community-led Lessons for Funders* meeting, where issues around community resilience and flexible funding needs were presented to donors;
- *Chase the Virus, Not People*, was a campaign launched by regional key population networks (SWAN, EHRA, ECOM, EWNA, ENPUD, Teenergizer, Dance 4life, AFEW) during the XXII International AIDS Conference and was running for 4 years. Its goal was to draw attention to the problems of key populations in the context of the catastrophic HIV / AIDS epidemic in the EECA region, encouraging comprehensive support for the region from the world community. Additionally, it aimed to prioritise overcoming discrimination and stigma against vulnerable groups and communities as a key condition for an effective response to the HIV epidemic in EECA countries. In December 2021, the consortium of networks agreed that it is time to close this stage of the campaign and start another one. The partners met online for a [Chase the virus, Not people ZOOM BOOM party](#) to share memories, analyze completed tasks, acknowledge successes and celebrate the collaboration.

## 2.3 Building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders:

As a regional sex worker network, SWAN strongly values cooperation, partnerships and solidarity with other regional and global networks and NGOs representing key populations. In 2021, SWAN continued to work closely with its partners across the region and globally.

- ESWA is our European sister network and we regularly coordinate and update on different actions and strategies. In 2021, we have worked on a collaborative proposal on HIV programming for *Gilead Foundation*;
- SWAN is a part of a sex work consortium led by NSWP together with other regional networks: *Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW)*, *African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA)*, *Caribbean Sex Work Coalition (CSWC)* and *La Plataforma Latino América de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS)*. In 2021, within this consortium, we worked on several programs and initiatives:
- We implemented the final year of the global SWIT program, which was implemented in 8 countries in our region over the last 6 years: Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Serbia, Russia and Ukraine;
- We developed a collaborative proposal to RCF on capacity building on social protection issues. The proposal was approved and will be initiated in 2022;
- We developed a collaborative proposal for the exceptional opportunity funding provided by RCF, specifically around issues related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The proposal was approved and will be initiated in 2022.
- Regional key population networks (*EHRA, ECOM, ENPUD, EWNA*):
- The *Radian program/Tiberius project* was initiated in 2020 in a consortium with *ECOM, HIV Legal Network* and *EHRA* as the lead organization. It is currently being implemented in Georgia, Kazakhstan and Moldova and will end in September 2022. The main activity is to document the legal barriers key populations face whilst accessing the HIV continuum of care and to provide support in overcoming these barriers, and SWAN is responsible for those activities relating to sex workers.
- A collaborative proposal with regional key population networks was submitted to the Robert Carr Fund's grant call and was approved in 2021. Under this 3-year program "*Moving Together Towards Quality and Equality: Improved Sustainable Services for ISPs in EECA*" SWAN will focus on budget advocacy, social contracting, community-led monitoring and intersectionality.

### 3. Strengthening SWAN as a sustainable, well-governed network responsive to its members' needs.

The leadership and meaningful involvement of sex workers are core elements of SWAN. In 2021, SWAN continued to improve its governance and boost organizational strength.

#### 3.1 Maintaining good governance of SWAN as a sex worker-led network and strengthening the SWAN Secretariat.

- The SWAN Steering Committee and Management Committee meetings: Due to travel restrictions, a physical meeting was not possible. However, web meetings were organized for both Committees with the full participation of Committee members.
- **Membership renewals.** In 2021 all members were invited to renew their membership status and voting rights through up-to-date information on their work and the level of involvement of sex workers in the organisations. Updated data shows that SWAN currently has 27 members from 20 countries, out of which 10 are sex-worker-led organisations with full voting rights and 17 are associate members.
- **Annual secretariat meeting.** SWAN Secretariat held its first face-to-face meeting in 2 years in Budapest. Secretariat staff discussed ongoing programs, developed the annual work plan, reviewed the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, Communications Strategy, list of tools and resources to be developed, as well as other practical aspects of Secretariat work.

#### 3.2 Improving communication and increasing visibility of the needs and achievements of SWAN and its members.

SWAN website, listserv and social media accounts continuously store and share brief news stories and more in-depth reports on the ongoing trends and activities in the region and globally, as well as examples of good practices from SWAN members, meetings and training SWAN has organised or participated in, and key

dates that are important for the sex worker community. (i.e. [17th of December](#) The International Day To End Violence Against Sex Workers and, [2nd of June](#) The International Sex Workers' Day, [8th of March](#) International Women Day).

- Use of social media

Social media is emerging as a key way to stay connected to our members and the wider sex worker community, and SWAN's engagements keep increasing. As of 1/1/2021, SWAN has:

- 4,937 followers on [Twitter](#), with over 244K impressions over the course of the year;
- 1,480 likes on the [SWAN Facebook](#) page, with a reach of 6,707;
- 518 Followers on [Instagram](#), with our reach increasing 580% from the previous year;
- Kept in touch with members and stakeholders through our private Facebook group with 370 total members;
- Peaked engagement across all platforms with the release of our reports. The launch of our paper on *Sex Work and Feminism* was by far our most popular post, reaching 576 accounts, 500 of which were not followers.



# OUR DONORS

The programs reported above have been implemented through the support of *Open Society Foundations (OSF)*, *Robert Carr Fund (RCF)*, *EHRA-EECA Regional Platform* and the *Red Umbrella Fund (RUF)*.

We thank our donors and allies for their collaboration and support!

