

SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS ADVOCACY NETWORK
in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia - SWAN

STRATEGIC PLAN
2024 - 2028





WHO WE ARE

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 2012.

SWAN's member organizations are either led by sex workers or work closely with the sex worker community. Sex workers' leadership is an organizing principle of the network. SWAN's work is overseen by a democratically elected Management Committee.

Our vision is for sex workers in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia to enjoy human rights, safety, well-being, health, and dignity.

Our mission is to - together with our allies - work towards creating societies in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia/ the region where: sex work is depenalized and decriminalized; sex workers can live and work free from violence, and stigma and discrimination; they are empowered and actively engaged in issues that directly affect their lives and health.

Our values:

- We recognize the right of sex workers to take agency in their lives, health, and decision-making
- We commit to actively involve sex workers in all levels of SWAN governance and to the protection of human rights.
- We recognize 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 (such as, migrants, people who use drugs, people living with HIV, LGBTI people and others) as well as their diverse range of work environments and lived experience.
- We prioritize support of sex worker-led initiatives and also support their allies to address the needs of sex workers.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

When SWAN was first launched, the region was lagging behind in recognizing sex workers as a valid community with specific needs. Until 2006 most of the projects carried out with and for sex workers formed part of existing harm reduction initiatives, focused on HIV prevention, and scattered around the region. Human rights and advocacy strategies were limited, and the involvement of sex workers in the work - occasional.

In 2006, the first meeting of sex worker rights activists from the region was held in Budapest, marking the launch of the informal Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) with 16 member organizations from 15 countries. This was the beginning of the self-organized sex workers' movement that perseveres to date.

Today, SWAN continues to play a crucial role in connecting and strengthening the capacity of sex worker rights activists in the region. Throughout the years, the network provided space for experience exchange and learning between activists and organisations, benefitting all and unlocking mobilising potential. It also helped sex workers develop a variety of skills such as public speaking, presenting, and working with the media, strengthening their activism and advocacy capacities.

SWAN believes that sex workers are experts in their own issues, and should be treated as such. This is why, facilitating access for sex worker rights activists to various advocacy and policy-making fora has been an ongoing priority for SWAN. The network continues to work with activists supporting them in their national advocacy efforts, raising issues faced by the community in the regional fora, and making the sex workers' voices heard by the decision-makers. The resources and materials produced by SWAN's Secretariat, are highly regarded by its membership as useful tools for conducting advocacy and campaigning at the national level.

The Sex Worker Implementation Tool (SWIT), and the role SWAN has played in its promotion throughout the region are deemed particularly valued. The toolkit includes practical guidance on effective HIV and STI programming, a comprehensive source of data about decriminalisation, and the information needed for engaging sex workers in policy development. The rollout of the toolkit took six years to complete, and included capacity-building workshops and learning events. SWIT programme was implemented in 7 SWAN membership countries– Russia, Armenia, Macedonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine. In 2021 SWIT programme was finished and SWAN produced a video digest for further and easy use of all six SWIT chapters.

SWAN's priority is to actively respond to the needs of its community. At times, these needs have been dictated by geopolitical shifts and humanitarian crises and emergencies. During the covid-19 pandemic SWAN provided crucial support for its member organisations and their communities adapting priorities, providing relief funding and working with donors to ensure the most pressing needs were met. Similarly, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, SWAN provided resourcing, funding and fundraising support for all member organisations affected.

In 2023, SWAN is still here, sustaining and strengthening the network and its members, moving forward in a united front of strong, empowered activists ready to tackle the many challenges head on.

CONTEXT

Despite some advances made in the region, significant challenges for sex workers persist, with continued stigmatisation and criminalisation of sex work, threats to our safety, and administrative and socio-economic barriers to full participation in our societies. Like in many other parts of the world, we see far-right ideologies and the anti-right, anti-gender, anti-LGBTQI narratives on the rise and our basic human rights threatened. The abolitionist discourse and policy continue to affect us, with a limited understanding of the needs and rights of sex workers amongst the institutions and actors from across the political spectrum. Against the backdrop of these ideological threats, sex work continues to be criminalised in the region, with countries either explicitly criminalising selling sex, or criminalising the working environment and relations. We see continued malpractice in the implementation of the legal frameworks targeting and harming sex workers even in countries where selling sex is not explicitly illegal.

Having a strong position on tackling criminalisation within the region, and a shared understanding of different legal frameworks amongst our members, partners, and allies, will be crucial going forward. Whilst the full decriminalisation of sex work remains a long-term ambition, we are determined to make steps in that direction, continuously working towards our vision where sex workers are able to enjoy all of our rights without criminalisation and discrimination. This is why we will ensure that our decriminalisation efforts are coupled with initiatives that help us make progress towards the realisation of our rights, including our socio-economic rights, and our rights to work, health, and well-being. Working in a united front with our members, partners, and allies, SWAN will continue to respond to the rollback of the rights and challenge ideological threats and harmful narratives with clear arguments, information, and evidence. We will also continue to prioritize the safety of our community, both personal and digital, and ensure sex workers and sex worker rights activists have access to adequate protection mechanisms without silencing them or threatening their agency.

In the past few years, we observed increased levels of violence and militarization in the region, with the war in Ukraine and other conflicts impacting our security, health, and income generation. With even more people on the move than in previous years, the priorities of our member organisations are shifting, with more attention needed to support mobile and migrant sex workers and develop a better understanding of their needs. This is why for the next five years, SWAN will prioritize strengthening its mechanisms to address emerging crises to ensure we effectively support sex worker organisations operating within the crisis and emergency contexts.

In this challenging environment, our community needs a strong movement of sex worker rights activists that will stand for our rights and principles, represent the voice of the community in policy and decision-making fora, and promote our agency. Our member organisations continue to support sex workers in their countries despite all obstacles, with limited financial and human resources, often risking their own safety. Strengthening our movement and ensuring its continuity and sustainability for the years to come has to remain our priority. SWAN will continue to support its member organisations through fundraising efforts, capacity-strengthening initiatives, and facilitating access to regional-level decision-makers. We will continue to provide a platform to strengthen solidarity amongst our members even further, facilitate thought exchange and the development of common strategies and goals, and work with our members to support the well-being of our activists.

OUR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

OUR VISION

is for sex workers in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia to enjoy human rights, safety, well-being, health, and dignity.

OUR MISSION

is to - together with our allies - work towards creating societies in the region where: sex work is depenalized and decriminalized; sex workers can live and work free from violence, and stigma and discrimination; they are empowered and actively engaged in issues that directly affect their lives and health.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS

IDEOLOGICAL THREATS

GOAL 1:

SWAN is able to effectively respond to the ongoing ideological threats and harmful trends targeting and affecting sex workers and other intersecting movements in the region.

DECRIMINALISATION

GOAL 2:

Progress is made towards the removal of any administrative barriers and criminal and punitive laws pertaining to sex work, with sex workers increasingly able to enjoy their labour rights and lead lives free of stigma and discrimination.

REALISATION OF SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS

GOAL 3:

Sex workers within the region are increasingly able to enjoy their economic, social, and cultural rights, with their labour rights progressively realised, and improvements noted in their socio-economic conditions, health, and well-being.

CRISIS & GEOPOLITICAL SHIFTS

GOAL 4:

SWAN is agile and able to effectively respond to the ongoing and emerging conflicts and humanitarian crises in the region, including armed conflicts, emerging diseases and pandemics, and other major shifts in the geopolitical and economic environment.

STRENGTHENING OUR MOVEMENT

GOAL 5:

The sex workers' rights movement in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia is further strengthened, continuously funded, and better resourced, with a strong regional network and national sex worker rights organisations adequately supported and able to effectively conduct their work.

OUR TACTICS

- Regional and International Advocacy and Policy Development
- Monitoring key policy, legal, and political developments that affect sex workers in the region
- Building and strengthening the regional movement of sex workers' rights activists
- Capacity-building and support for national sex worker rights organisations in national level advocacy, community-led research, the full suite of rights (including economic social cultural rights, right to work, right to health, etc.), issues around decriminalization of sex work etc.,
- Data gathering and community-led research;
- Awareness raising around sex workers' rights and issues affecting them
- Challenging harmful and abolitionist narratives
- Collaborating and partnering with Key Populations and other social justice movements, other civil society organisations, and INGOS
- Creating spaces for learning and thought exchange
- Developing technical toolkits & guidelines
- Resource mobilization for the sex workers' rights movement in CEECA

OUR VALUES

1. We recognize the right of sex workers **to take agency in their lives, health, and decision-making**
2. We **commit to actively involve sex workers** in SWAN governance and to the protection of human rights.
3. We **recognize sex work as work**, an unforced sale of sexual services between consenting male, female and trans adults.
4. 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 & their diverse range of work environments and lived experience.
5. We **prioritize support of sex worker-led initiatives** and also support their allies to address the needs of sex workers.

OUR STRATEGIC GOALS FOR 2024 - 2028

Ideological threats

OUR GOAL:

GOAL 1: SWAN is able to effectively respond to the ongoing ideological threats and harmful trends targeting and affecting sex workers and other intersecting movements in the region.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 1.1: Harmful and/ or abolitionist narratives are effectively challenged, countering the existing stigma, discrimination, harmful/ repressive laws, and loss of agency within the region.

OBJECTIVE 1.2: Effective cross-movement alliances are created, and maintained, to build solidarity, and constructively challenge the harmful ultra-right, anti-gender, and anti-right narratives and ideologies.

OBJECTIVE 1.3: Sex workers' rights organisations have the capacity and tools to effectively respond to safety and security issues related to the digital and personal security of the sex worker community and its activists.

KEY ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER THIS GOAL:

- Building and expanding partnerships and alliances including working with women's rights/ feminist groups, religious groups, researchers/academic think tanks
- Expanding coalitions with other key populations and partners, formulating common advocacy/ campaigning strategies and goals, drafting joint position papers, organizing joint events, informational campaigns

- Building a joint position throughout the movement on key anti-abolitionist arguments
- Documenting human rights violations around the safety and security of sex workers and sex worker rights activists
- Advocacy activities such as submissions to UN treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms
- Countering abolitionist rhetoric and terminology used within the relevant regional advocacy/policy-making fora
- Drafting a road map for activists who might face risks of human rights violations
- Connecting sex workers' organisations with human rights defenders groups and relevant safety/ security mechanisms
- Developing tools/ materials on digital and personal security/ safety of sex workers and sex work activists

Decriminalisation

OUR GOAL:

GOAL 2:

Progress is made towards the removal of any administrative barriers and criminal and punitive laws pertaining to sex work, with sex workers increasingly able to enjoy their labour rights and lead lives free of stigma and discrimination.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 2.1:

There is a greater awareness and understanding of decriminalisation of sex work within the region amongst SWAN members, partners, allies, and advocacy targets.

OBJECTIVE 2.2: Steps are taken towards creating enabling legal environments for sex workers throughout the region, with sex workers' rights respected and written into national legal frameworks.

OBJECTIVE 2.3: Progress is made to minimise the use of non-sex-work specific policies and laws to target the sex workers community.

OBJECTIVE 2.4: Incremental progress is made towards removing harmful criminal laws and administrative articles related to sex work within the region.

KEY ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER THIS GOAL:

- Developing a road map for decriminalisation of sex work within the region, including the best practice examples and legal/ contextual analysis
- Working together with other Key Populations to build awareness about sex workers' experiences of criminalisation, building a shared understanding of criminalisation amongst the KPs
- Participating in and inputting into global processes and targets pertaining to criminalisation of sex workers and other Key Populations
- Documenting the impact of relevant harmful laws, policies, and regulations around sex work and harmful practices
- Strengthening the capacity of SWAN members in advocacy and supporting their national advocacy efforts
- Regional-level advocacy initiatives/ activities; submitting and monitoring the implementation of recommendations of UN treaty bodies
- Awareness-raising about different legal frameworks (decriminalisation vis-a-vis legalisation/regulation) among community and partners
- Influencing women's rights groups, engaging them on joint interests/messages
- Carrying out community-based research

Realisation of sex workers' rights

OUR GOAL:

GOAL 3:

Sex workers within the region are increasingly able to enjoy their economic, social, and cultural rights, with their labour rights progressively realised, and improvements noted in their socio-economic conditions, health, and well-being.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 3.1:

Progress is made towards the realisation of the socio-economic rights of sex workers within the region, with the administrative and legal barriers to accessing basic public services and social protection mechanisms progressively removed.

OBJECTIVE 3.2:

Steps are taken towards the realisation of the labour rights of sex workers, with sex work increasingly recognised at work, and right-based policy and programming effectively promoted and adopted within the region.

OBJECTIVE 3.3:

Sex workers within the region are increasingly able to have their right to health and well-being realised with right-based policy solutions adopted, and access to quality health care improved.

KEY ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER THIS GOAL:

- Raising awareness amongst partners and advocacy targets about the socio-economic barriers faced by sex workers e.g. in access to health, housing, and social care, amongst others
- Support for SWAN members that provide socio-economic/ social care support for sex workers in their countries

- National and regional level advocacy to promote labour rights for sex workers and capacity building for SWAN members to enable effective advocacy on the issue
- Working with the SWAN members, partners, and allies to increase the understanding of the issues around labour rights in different national contexts and legal environments
- Identifying stakeholders, allies, and relevant policies on labour rights
- National and regional-level advocacy on issues related to sexual reproductive health, mental health, HIV treatment and prevention, and broader health outcomes relevant to sex workers
- Ongoing capacity-building support for SWAN members to strengthen their ability to carry out national-level advocacy related to the socio-economic and health rights of sex workers

Responding to crisis and major political and economic shifts

OUR GOAL:

GOAL 4:

SWAN is agile and able to effectively respond to the ongoing and emerging conflicts and humanitarian crises in the region, including armed conflicts, emerging diseases and pandemics, and other major shifts in the geopolitical and economic environment.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 4.1:

SWAN strengthens its mechanisms to address emerging conflicts and crises and effectively supports its members and sex worker organisations operating in emergency and crisis contexts.

OBJECTIVE 4.2: SWAN increases its understanding of, and is more responsive to, the needs of migrant and mobile sex workers in the region, working towards their rights being respected, and living conditions improved.

KEY ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER THIS GOAL:

- Collaborating with and influencing humanitarian aid agencies and funders, to ensure needs of sex workers and other vulnerable populations are increasingly considered within the humanitarian/ crisis response
- Documenting best practices and experiences from current and previous crises to share lessons learned with other organisations and networks
- Providing emergency resourcing and technical support to SWAN members affected by conflict and crisis
- Facilitating information and experience exchange of sex workers' rights organisations and other Key Populations movements addressing issues around migration and mobile sex workers
- Mapping out key policy, legal, and political developments that affect migrant and mobile sex workers
- Networking with and influencing partners, service providers, and advocacy targets to improve circumstances and policy solutions pertaining to migrant and mobile sex workers
- Raising awareness amongst partners and policymakers around sex work in the context of anti-trafficking narratives and laws

Strengthening our movement

OUR GOAL:

GOAL 5: The sex workers' rights movement in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia is further strengthened, continuously funded, and better resourced, with a strong regional network and national sex worker rights organisations adequately supported and able to effectively conduct their work.

OUR OBJECTIVES:

OBJECTIVE 5.1: The capacity of sex worker-led initiatives and their allies to promote and advocate for human rights- and evidence-based policy and programming- is strengthened, with local and national organisations able to engage effectively in the relevant advocacy and decision-making fora.

OBJECTIVE 5.2: The sustainability of sex workers' rights movement in the region is improved with more flexible and longer-term funding solutions available, more awareness about sex workers' rights amongst donors, and sex worker rights organisations and activists adequately supported and cared for.

OBJECTIVE 5.3: The visibility of SWAN externally, and the internal communications within SWAN membership, are improved with relevant, widely shared communication materials and effectively convened spaces for movement-wide collaboration.

KEY ACTIVITIES TO DELIVER THIS GOAL:

- Providing technical assistance to members, including effectively assessing members' needs, assisting them in finding the experts they need, developing

tools for members to build their capacities, fundraising to address member technical assistance needs, and evaluating the impact of technical assistance provided through SWAN

- Liaising with and influencing donors on the needs and rights of sex workers within the region, aiming to secure more flexible and sustainable funding mechanisms
- Mapping out donors/ funding opportunities and other funding strategies outside of the core donors engaging with sex workers' rights to date
- Supporting well-being initiatives for sex worker rights activists, addressing burnout amongst the existing activists
- Working with national and local sex worker rights organisations to identify new activists and address issues related to activists' engagement and retention
- Supporting sex work initiatives where there are no sex work organisations
- Creating spaces for information, experience exchange, and learning among members
- Issuing regular communications e.g. newsletters and/ or more in-depth reports to the movement about key legal/ policy developments, advocacy opportunities, examples of impact, etc.
- Expanding SWAN's external communications and social media presence, developing content around key issues affecting sex workers, and successes and achievements of the movement and SWAN.

HOW WE WILL KNOW WE ARE MAKING PROGRESS

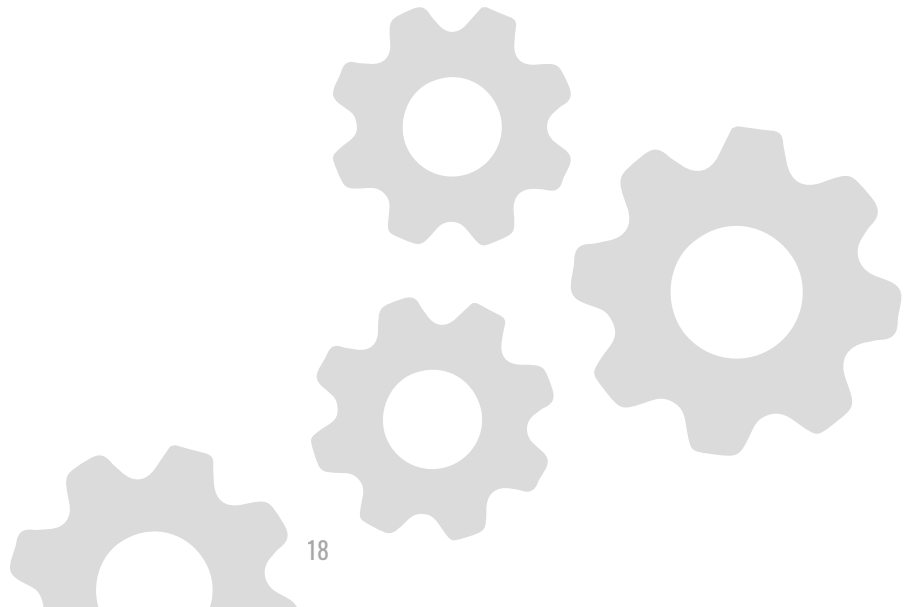
Whilst some of our goals and objectives form aspirational, longer-term ambitions, we want to ensure we are progressively moving towards them. In striving to fulfil the commitments expressed in this strategy, we will continue to build on the existing monitoring, evaluating and learning systems at SWAN, and ensure we regularly assess our progress and impact.

A monitoring, evaluation, and learning framework has been established for this strategy based on our strategic goals and objectives to articulate a set of key performance indicators related to each goal. We will aim to review the delivery on these indicators on an annual basis via an organisational-wide annual reflection process.

In doing so, we will continue to emphasize learning and adaptation of our programming, to ensure we continue to make a difference and remain relevant to our community. Whilst our commitment to monitoring, evaluation and learning is strong, we will ensure we only gather the data that is meaningful and useful, and which helps guide our work and identify any potential gaps. Our approach to these processes will be as inclusive and participatory as possible, aiming to effectively engage our members, without burdening them excessively and adding to their already high workloads.

HOW WE DEVELOPED THIS STRATEGIC PLAN

To develop this strategic plan, SWAN commissioned an external qualitative review to assess the delivery of the previous strategy, and reflect on SWAN's strengths, areas for development, and the most significant examples of impact. Representatives of SWAN's members and partners from 12 countries in the region were engaged in the process via an online survey sent to the membership (13 responses), interviews (15 participants), and panel discussions (7 participants). The feedback received from the members and partners was discussed together with our Management Committee in a 4-day planning session in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in May 2023. After the Bishkek meeting, an external consultant worked with the SWAN's leadership and staff to write the strategy, which was subsequently approved by the Management Committee on 26th of October, 2023.





SWAN

**SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS
ADVOCACY NETWORK**