

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

Reflecting on a Year of Resilience and Advocacy

In 2023 we've faced challenges and celebrated triumphs together, driven by our shared commitment to sex workers' rights. This was a significant year for SWAN, marked by the development of a new strategic plan, crafted with our elected board of sex worker representatives, to guide our work for the next five years. This year also saw us venture into the digital realm for the first time, thanks to support from the Numun Fund. Our digital security assessment, a pioneering effort in the CEECA region, lays the foundation for future capacity building, advocacy, and partnerships within the feminist tech world. Additionally, we began building the "Rise and Decriminalise" movement, a solidarity effort with partner networks like ECOM, EHRA, ENPUD, and EWNA, to campaign for the decriminalization of sex work, drug use, HIV transmission, and LGBT rights across the CEECA region. Let's honor our progress, recognize key contributors, and renew our dedication to our shared principles, as we continue our journey toward greater empowerment and impact.

OUR ACTIVITIES IN 2023

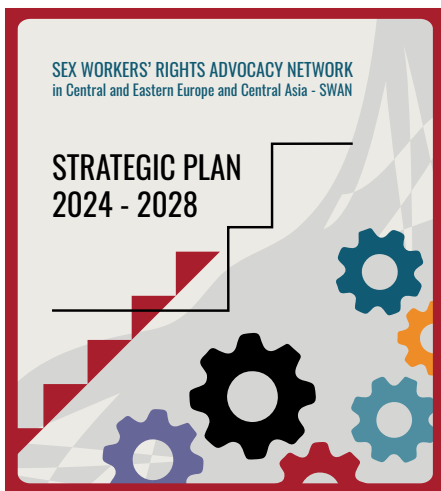
A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2024-2028

Our next four years of resistance and advocacy

The development of our strategic plan for the next five years involved a thorough consultation process. This included surveys and interviews with members, focus group discussions with the Secretariat, working meetings with Management Committee members and interviews with partners and stakeholders. Through this extensive input from members, the Secretariat, partners, stakeholders and the Management Committee, we have developed a comprehensive plan to guide our efforts moving forward.

Our strategic plan focuses on five key goals to advance sex workers' rights and address regional challenges. First, we aim to effectively counter ideological threats and harmful trends targeting sex workers and intersecting movements. Second, we seek to remove legal barriers and discriminatory laws to ensure sex workers can fully enjoy their rights without stigma. Third, we strive to enhance the economic, social, and cultural rights

of sex workers, improving their overall well-being. Fourth, we will respond with agility to conflicts, crises, and geopolitical shifts affecting the region. Lastly, we are committed to strengthening and resourcing the sex workers' rights movement, ensuring robust support and sustainability for regional and national organizations. Our mission is to create societies where sex work is decriminalized, and sex workers are free from violence, stigma, and discrimination, empowered to engage in issues impacting their lives and health.



PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

A NEW PROJECT FOR 2023 WITH NUMUN FUND

Exploring the impact of the Internet on sex workers in our region

This year we partnered with **Numun Fund** for a groundbreaking 2023 program specifically focusing on sex workers' use of digital technology in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA). This initiative tackles digital inequalities, safety and security for sex workers and organizations in our region. Under this project we developed and published our resource "Sex Work and Digital Technologies in CEECA" In total, 47 participants took part in the survey. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of five SWAN member organizations: Ameliya (Kazakhstan), Legalife (Ukraine), Sex Work Polska (Poland), STAR-STAR (North Macedonia), and Tais Plus (Kyrgyzstan). We hope this resource will be the first step in guiding our future work on safety, security, and bridging the digital divide.

As part of the same project, SWAN **provided two small sub-grants** to members in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. National activities in these two countries were tailored to meet the specific needs of local communities and included ongoing technical assistance. In Kazakhstan, **NGO Amelya** created and populated their organizational webpage. In Kyrgyzstan, **NGO Tais Plus** conducted an assessment on sex work and digital technologies, with the aim of developing tools to help sex workers access digital services provided by state institutions, such as social services, online reporting of violence, and scheduling appointments for IDs.

In **March**, we participated in a **panel** at @moz_fest, organized by Numun Fund, alongside global feminist groups. We explored reshaping the tech landscape, and discussing alternative approaches to power dynamics in social movements. Our insights focused on working with sex workers, women with disabilities, and migrant women

BUDGET ADVOCACY AND SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

Giving sex workers a voice in funding processes

For the grassroots community-led organizations in our network who are fighting hard to deliver services vital to sex workers health and wellbeing, available finances and the systems by which these become available, which are linked to wider funding bodies and governments, are often inaccessible and not well-understood, and this can severely hinder the life-saving work that they perform. SWAN's new program on budget advocacy, funded by the Robert Carr Fund, aims to illuminate these processes for our members so that they may begin to have more of a voice in the funding processes which so strongly influence their day-to-day activism.

Five SWAN members in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine received comprehensive support to initiate their small grants focused on budget advocacy. Each organization has different levels of experience and operates in unique contexts, so the support was tailored to their specific priorities and capacities. By June 2023, work plans were developed, and implementation had begun.

SOCIAL PROTECTIONS PROGRAMME

Sex workers demanding access to state support

In 2023, we entered the second year of implementing the social protection program under the Sex Work Consortium, led by The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP). This consortium includes four Regional Sex Worker networks including SWAN from around the world: the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW), the African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA), and La Plataforma LatinoAmérica de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS). SWAN provided small sub-grants to seven community-led organizations.

Throughout 2023, we conducted interviews with 364 sex workers across six countries: Armenia (n=63), Georgia (n=50), Kazakhstan (n=51),

Kyrgyzstan (n=50), North Macedonia (n=50), and Ukraine (n=100). These interviews led to the development of six national reports, along with one comprehensive regional report that aggregated data from across the region. The findings from these reports will inform upcoming advocacy activities.

As part of this project, we also provided technical assistance, both in-person in Georgia, and online for STAR-STAR in North Macedonia and Right Side in Armenia.

CONTINUED RESPONSE TO THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

Sex workers practicing solidarity in times of crisis

In 2023 we finalized emergency support for refugees and displaced people due to the war in Ukraine by February. This support included distributing food, medicines, hygienic materials, STI/HIV prevention kits, and providing legal and psychological support to members in Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland.

With support from UNAIDS, SWAN initiated an assessment of the war in Ukraine's impact on sex worker communities in the CEECA region. This assessment documents how the Russian invasion has affected the lives, work, migration, and well-being of sex workers, as well as the operations of sex worker-led organizations. The goal is to inform sex worker-led collectives, donors, and policymakers about the needs and challenges faced by these communities, enabling better responses to such crisis situations.

We were invited by **ECOM** to help review emergency support applications for a program focused on mitigating the impact of the Russian war against Ukraine on key populations' access to HIV and humanitarian services in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) region.

EVENTS AND WEBINARS

SWAN TAKES PART IN THE GENDER ASSESSMENT BY EWNA

Sex workers taking our place with the feminist movement

SWAN participated in a **virtual event** on July 27th, discussing challenges in HIV services for women in the CEECA Region, with a focus on the obstacles sex workers face.

Our presentation, “Sex Workers’ Rights Are Women’s Rights!” explored how sex workers’ rights connect with broader women’s rights, giving women autonomy over choices, finances, and bodies. We discussed the silencing of sex workers in the women’s rights movement due to anti-sex work views and emphasized the importance of sex worker involvement in discussions about their lives and livelihoods.

STANDARD TIME

Raising the visibility of sex workers in the conversation around HIV

SWAN Programme Officer Trajche Janushev appeared on the online talk show Standard Time where he shared insights from a sex work perspective on this episode’s topic of HIV and STIs. For SWAN, this was a great chance to reach a new audience and tackle the stigma surrounding sex work in relation to these health issues.

MEETINGS AND TRIPS

THE FIFTH EECA JUDGES' FORUM ON HIV, HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE LAW IN CHISINAU, MOLDOVA

A major victory for our members HOPS from North Macedonia

In October, after nearly 15 years of legal battles, the European High Court in Strasbourg ruled in favor of four sex workers from Skopje who endured degrading and inhumane treatment during a 2008 police crackdown. This landmark decision followed the unlawful detention and abuse of 23 sex workers, 13 of whom initially filed a lawsuit with support from the HOPS Association. Although the Civil Court's initial ruling in their favor was overturned by the Court of Appeal, four victims persisted, ultimately securing €13,300 in compensation from the European Court of Human Rights. This case, highlighting systemic police violence and discrimination against sex workers, was presented by Natasha Boshkova of HOPS at the Fifth EECA Judges' Forum on HIV, Human Rights, and the Law in Chisinau, Moldova, where she led an interactive session on the judiciary's role in protecting sex workers' rights. SWAN Program Officer Marija Tosheva attended the Forum alongside Boshkova, contributing to the discussion of the practical implications of the Strasbourg verdict. Supported by UNDP, the Forum brought together judges and regional community networks to discuss the impact of criminalizing laws on key populations, emphasizing the need for legal reforms to protect human rights and improve health outcomes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, a region grappling with challenges like economic disparities, geopolitical conflicts, and a growing HIV epidemic. The Strasbourg ruling serves as a crucial call for reform in policing practices across CEECA nations and underscores the broader fight for justice and human rights for marginalized communities.

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

Sex workers leading SWAN's work for the next 5 years

From May 8-11, 2023, SWAN held its annual Management Committee meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, bringing together SWAN staff with four elected representatives from sex worker-led organizations

throughout the CEECA region. Key topics included planning the 2023-2028 Organizational Strategy, transitioning of the Executive Director, and addressing organizational maintenance like documents, programs, grants, and membership. A facilitator helped guide discussions on the SWAN's strategy for the next five years along with the upcoming leadership transition.

REGIONAL MEETING ON COMMUNITY LED MONITORING (CLM) IN ISTANBUL.

Sex worker communities at the forefront of research and monitoring SWAN collaborated with other regional networks (including those focused on drug users, harm reduction, MSM, and PLHIV) and national partners in a three-day meeting to build consensus on the region's definition of Community-Led Monitoring (CLM). This effort aims to advocate for the inclusion of community-led research and data in national GFATM grants, population size estimates, and all HIV-related funding decisions.

GLOBAL CONVENING ON CAPACITY BUILDING AND SEX WORKER FUNDING PRIORITIES, NAIROBI

Enhancing Capacity and Funding Strategies for Sex Worker Networks

NSWP set up a meeting for regional sex worker networks to discuss improving their capacity and addressing funding issues. The discussions aimed to develop better strategies for organizing and funding sex worker groups, especially given the challenges of shrinking resources. The goal is to improve our advocacy for more practical and comprehensive approaches to organizing and financing sex worker initiatives, especially in a climate that's becoming less supportive and more hostile to these efforts.

PUBLICATIONS AND RESOURCES

EXPERIENCES AND TIPS IN COMMUNITY-LED MONITORING

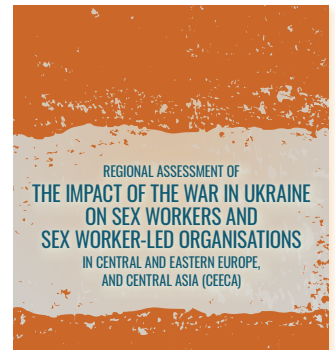
Insights from our members

This resource dives into the experiences of Community-Led Monitoring (CLM) by our members. Legalife-Ukraine and Tais Plus, Kyrgyzstan, have shared their unique insights, offering a glimpse into the specifics and recent trends around CLM in programs with sex workers. This material not only sparks inspiration among our members but also serves as a valuable tool for NGOs looking to better understand sex workers' community priorities and perspectives. International partners will gain insights into the challenges and needs of sex workers-led organizations, helping them plan and support CLM initiatives on a larger scale.

REGIONAL ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON SEX-WORKERS AND SEX-WORKER-LED ORGANISATIONS IN CEECA

Challenges, Resilience, and Community Responses Amidst Global Conflict

This report examines the impact of the war in Ukraine on sex workers and sex worker-led organizations in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) region. It explores how the war has affected sex workers' living conditions, economic stability, and access to healthcare and social services, with a focus on the work of Legalife-Ukraine. The report also addresses the broader regional impact, including the challenges faced by sex workers fleeing Ukraine and the responses of sex worker groups across CEECA countries. Additionally, it assesses the difficulties encountered by sex worker-led organizations and offers recommendations for improving donor support and programming in these challenging times.



SEX WORK AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN CEECA

Navigating Opportunities and Risks in the Digital Age

A briefing paper that delves into the fascinating connection between digital rights and the rights of sex workers in today's fast-paced world.



Digital technologies shape our lives in ways we may not always realize, especially in the world of sex work. In Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA), the rise of digital tools has brought both amazing opportunities and unexpected challenges for sex workers.

Developed by SWAN in collaboration with Numun Fund, this paper is the result of a project from April to September 2023. We gathered insights from our member organizations in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Poland, North Macedonia, and Kyrgyzstan through surveys and interviews. The paper offers a deep dive into how digital technologies impact sex work in the region, covering everything from reaching more clients to facing new challenges like online harassment.

Our goal is to use this paper to influence policies, support sex worker communities, and push for a fairer society. By exploring the connection between digital technologies and sex work, we want to start a conversation that goes beyond the usual boundaries, fostering understanding about the challenges faced by sex workers in the CEECA region. Join us on this journey of discovery!

NETWORKING, ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIPS

SCALE INITIATIVE

A Regional Task Force to Combat HIV Criminalization and Discrimination

SWAN joined the SCALE initiative, which is dedicated to strengthening and expanding community efforts to combat discriminatory laws, policies, and HIV-related criminalization. SWAN also submitted an overview of its work in resisting legal oppression of sex workers at various levels to the initiative.

Following the SCALE initiative, a working group was established, including all regional networks. This group's scope has been expanded, and it will now function as the Core Regional Group on the 10-10-10 targets announced by the Global AIDS Strategy 2021-2026. These targets focus on removing punitive laws that criminalize key populations and expanding supportive laws and policies to combat stigma, discrimination, gender-based violence, and gender inequity. The Core Regional Group's work is financially supported by UNDP and will extend to establishing a regional Task Force to support efforts on the 10-10-10 targets.

SCOPE

Strengthening Community Collaboration for HIV Prevention

The SCOPE (Strategic Community HIV Prevention Empowerment) project, led by EATG, aims to strengthen community partnerships to increase access to and use of HIV prevention methods for the people most affected by HIV. SCOPE worked closely with representatives from key populations, along with key population networks, European networks, academics, doctors, and EU and UN agencies.

RISE & DECRIMINALISE

Solidarity Across Key Populations Advancing the Decriminalisation Movement in CEECA

In 2023, the Decriminalisation Movement in EECA (Rise & Decriminalise) made significant strides. After two key meetings in Warsaw and Vilnius, the movement's official name, brand, and mission were solidified, while ongoing efforts continue to shape its specific objectives, messaging, and scope. Founded a year ago, the movement is built on four fundamental pillars—Bodily Autonomy, Access to Justice, Freedom from Legal Restrictions, and Availability of Comprehensive Care Services—aimed at addressing the challenges faced by sex workers, drug users, LGBT communities, and individuals living with HIV across the region. This year's gathering focused on critically evaluating and adapting the decriminalization concept to the unique needs of EECA countries. Representatives from participating networks and member delegates from across the region worked collaboratively to create a clear and actionable blueprint, including mapping out opportunities, setting specific targets, timelines, and success indicators, all under the guiding principle of solidarity.

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