Annual Report

SWAN
SEX WORKERS' RIGHTS ADVOCACY NETWORK

2025



Introduction

The year 2025 marked a period of significant transition, challenge, and resilience for SWAN. It was a year shaped by organizational change, political uncertainty, and financial instability across the region, as well as by fresh energy, solidarity, and important achievements that laid the groundwork for SWAN's future development.

In 2025, Trajche Janushev officially started his position as the new Executive Director of SWAN, taking over leadership during an especially difficult moment for the network and the broader civil society landscape in the CEECA region. The beginning of the year was marked by severe financial constraints, shrinking donor support, and reduced funding for community-led initiatives. As a consequence, SWAN was forced to implement difficult adjustments, including cuts to programmes, activities, and the Secretariat capacities.
At the same time, the political climate across the region continued to deteriorate. Increasing attacks on civil society organizations, anti-rights narratives, and restrictions targeting human rights defenders directly affected many SWAN members and partners. In particular, the ongoing hostile political environment in Hungary, where SWAN is legally registered, created additional uncertainty and operational risks for the network. Discussions about restrictive NGO legislation, foreign-agent-style measures, and growing pressure on independent organizations raised serious concerns about the sustainability and safety of regional civil society work.

Despite these challenges, 2025 also became a year of rebuilding and strategic repositioning. Through collective efforts, strong partnerships, and the dedication of SWAN members, staff, and the Management Committee, the network successfully secured new funding streams and strategic partnerships by the end of the year. These developments created renewed opportunities to strengthen regional advocacy, expand organizational resilience, and continue supporting sex worker-led organizations across the CEECA region.
Importantly, 2025 reaffirmed the essential role of regional solidarity and community leadership. SWAN continued to advocate for the rights, dignity, health, and safety of sex workers in increasingly restrictive environments, while also investing in long-term sustainability, organizational development, and new models of regional cooperation. The year demonstrated not only the movement's vulnerabilities but also its strength, adaptability, and determination to continue resisting shrinking civic space and growing criminalization across the region.

As this report demonstrates, although 2025 began with uncertainty and crisis, it concluded with renewed direction, stronger partnerships, and a clearer vision for SWAN's future.

SWAN Membership

In 2025, SWAN also continued to strengthen and expand its regional network, growing its membership to 30 member organizations across 19 countries. Among them, 13 organizations hold full membership status, while 17 are associate members, reflecting the increasing interest in regional collaboration and collective advocacy for sex workers' rights across the CEECA region.

Partnerships and projects

Sexual Rights Initiative

The Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI) is a coalition of organizations working to advance human rights related to sexuality within the UN system, particularly through engagement with the Human Rights Council, Treaty Monitoring Bodies, Special Procedures, and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). SRI members include Action Canada for Sexual Health and Rights, Akahatá, CREA, and Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights.



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SWAN's partnership with SRI continued to be an important strategic collaboration in 2025, particularly in the areas of international advocacy, feminist movement-building, and engagement with United Nations human rights mechanisms. Through this partnership, SWAN strengthened the visibility of sex workers' rights within global sexual and reproductive rights advocacy spaces and expanded opportunities for voices from the CEECA region to be represented in international human rights discussions. Through the partnership, SWAN gains access to advocacy spaces, coordination meetings, side events, trainings, and networking opportunities connected to the UN Human Rights Council and broader International Geneva ecosystem.

The partnership has also supported SWAN's efforts to bring greater attention to the realities faced by sex workers and community-led organizations in the CEECA region, including criminalization, anti-rights mobilization, shrinking civic space, and barriers to participation in public and political life. Through collaboration with SRI and allied feminist organizations, SWAN has continued advocating for the recognition of sex workers' rights as human rights within international policy and human rights frameworks. SWAN maintains regular monthly coordination calls with SRI partners, creating an important space for ongoing strategic discussions, joint advocacy planning, knowledge exchange, and strengthening collaboration across global feminist and human rights movements.

SWAN & International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network

In 2025, SWAN continued to strengthen its collaboration with the IPPF European Network (IPPF EN), with a particular focus on advancing the implementation of IPPF EN's position and commitments related to sex work and the rights of sex workers.
The partnership focused on translating policy commitments into concrete regional actions, including strengthening cooperation between sex worker-led organizations and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) actors/IPPF national partners across the CEECA region. Through ongoing communication and coordination, SWAN and IPPF EN worked together to identify key regional priorities and opportunities for more inclusive and rights-based SRHR programming for sex workers.

An important component of this collaboration was the planning and preparation of a regional meeting with six IPPF EN member organizations and six SWAN national members with the goal of better understanding the realities faced by sex workers in the region and strengthening their approaches to community engagement, advocacy, and service provision. This partnership represents an important step toward building stronger bridges between sex worker-led movements and mainstream SRHR networks, ensuring that sex workers' rights, voices, and lived experiences are meaningfully included within regional SRHR advocacy and programming.

Regional Networks Collaboration

SWAN continued strengthening its collaboration with key regional community and human rights networks: ECOM (Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity), EHRA (Eurasian Harm Reduction Association), EWNA (Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS) The collaboration focused on strengthening coordinated regional approaches to advocacy, community mobilization, fundraising, and protection of human rights across the CEECA region. Through regular monthly coordination calls, the networks exchanged updates on political developments, shrinking civic space, donor opportunities, emerging legal threats, and ongoing advocacy initiatives affecting key populations and community-led organizations.

The partnership also included joint fundraising efforts, development of collaborative regional projects, shared advocacy activities, and coordination around international human rights mechanisms and policy processes. By working together, the networks aimed to amplify community voices, strengthen cross-movement solidarity, and promote more sustainable and coordinated regional responses to the growing challenges faced by civil society organizations and marginalized communities across the region.

An important component of this collaboration was the continued engagement within the regional Rise & Decriminalize movement, which brings together community-led networks across Eastern Europe and Central Asia to advocate for decriminalization, human rights, and protection of civic space. Through this collaboration, SWAN contributed to joint advocacy and regional analysis on shrinking civic space and the impact of restrictive laws on marginalized communities, including sex workers.



RESILIENT Project

Since June 1, 2025, SWAN has been implementing the 2-year RESILIENT project, led by EHRA (Eurasian Harm Reduction Association), together with regional partner networks: ECOM (Eurasian Coalition on Health, Rights, Gender and Sexual Diversity) and EWNA (Eurasian Women's Network on AIDS)

The project aims to strengthen the resilience of NGOs and community-led organizations across the EECA region in the context of increasingly restrictive political and legal environments. In many countries in the region, governments have introduced or are considering legislation that limits the work of civil society organizations, including so-called "foreign agent" laws, restrictions on freedom of expression and information sharing, and laws specifically targeting key and marginalized populations.

The RESILIENT project covers 10 countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine.

Within the project, SWAN's role focuses on preparing submissions to international human rights mechanisms addressing different dimensions of shrinking civic space and the impact of restrictive legislation on sex workers and sex worker-led organizations. SWAN also contributes to ongoing advocacy and normative changes in Ukraine regarding the legal conditions of sex work through support for Legalife-Ukraine.

One of the most important components of the RESILIENT project is the monitoring of legal and political developments related to shrinking civic space, including emerging restrictive laws and practices across the region. The project supports joint regional advocacy, rapid response planning, and coordinated actions aimed at preventing or mitigating the negative consequences of these developments for community-led organizations and human rights defenders.

Sex Worker Networks Consortium (SWNC)

Since 2013, SWAN has been part of the global Sex Worker Networks Consortium (SWNC), established in collaboration with regional sex worker-led networks and coordinated with the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) to access support from the Robert Carr Fund (RCF).

The consortium was created to strengthen global and regional sex worker-led movements and to ensure sustainable, flexible, and long-term funding for community-led advocacy, movement building, and human rights work. Since its establishment, the SWNC has successfully secured five consecutive funding cycles through the Robert Carr Fund.
The consortium currently includes the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers (APNSW); African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA); Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network for Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (SWAN); and La Plataforma LatinoAmérica de Personas que EjeRcen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS).

The Robert Carr Fund recognizes that communities most affected by HIV must play a central role in the HIV response. At the same time, sex worker-led organizations globally continue to face severe funding shortages, shrinking civic space, criminalization, exclusion from policy-making processes, and limited access to justice and health services. Through its support, RCF enables regional and global networks to strengthen their organizational sustainability, advocacy capacity, and leadership within the global HIV and human rights response.

During the current grant cycle (2025–2026), the consortium continued to invest in organizational strengthening, regional advocacy, and movement building. Due to donor liquidity challenges and broader funding constraints affecting the global HIV response, the current grant cycle was unfortunately reduced to only two years, with the consortium receiving approximately 40% of the originally planned budget. As a result of these significant reductions, SWAN's capacity to engage and financially support national partners across the region was considerably limited during this grant period.

The collaboration within SWNC continues to be strategically important for SWAN, strengthening regional and global solidarity among sex worker-led movements and ensuring that sex workers remain visible, represented, and actively engaged in international discussions related to HIV, health, human rights, and social justice.

Webinar Report (including presentations):

https://harmreductioneurasia.org/harm-reduction/quality-of-services/intersectionality

(RUS) https://harmreductioneurasia.org/ru/harm-reduction/quality-of-services/intersectionality

News Article:
https://harmreductioneurasia.org/news/intersectional-identities
(RUS) https://harmreductioneurasia.org/news/intersectional-identities



SWAN & IPPF EN Strategy Meeting on SRHR for Sex Workers

(5–7 November 2025, Skopje, North Macedonia)

In November 2025, SWAN and IPPF European Network (IPPF EN) organized a regional strategy meeting in North Macedonia focused on improving access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for sex workers across the CEECA region.
The meeting brought together SWAN members and IPPF EN members and partner organizations from across the CEECA region to strengthen collaboration on SRHR, exchange experiences related to regional challenges, and jointly plan future advocacy and capacity-building initiatives. The discussions focused on strengthening solidarity between sex worker-led organizations and SRHR actors, improving community-level support, enhancing membership engagement, and identifying opportunities for long-term regional cooperation.

Participants attended from several countries across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, including Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, and North Macedonia. Together, participants reflected the diversity of the CEECA region and represented organizations working on sex workers' rights, SRHR, community mobilization, healthcare access, and advocacy.



The meeting marked an important step in strengthening connections between sex worker-led organizations and broader SRHR networks such as IPPF EN. By creating space for regional dialogue and exchange, participants were able to share lived realities, discuss common barriers faced by sex workers in accessing healthcare and rights-based services, and develop concrete ideas for future collaborative actions.

In a regional context shaped by stigma, criminalization, shrinking civic space, and unequal access to healthcare, this cooperation represents an important effort toward building more inclusive, community-led, and rights-based SRHR approaches in CEECA. The meeting also resulted in a renewed commitment between SWAN and IPPF EN to continue working closely together to advance the health, rights, dignity, and meaningful participation of sex workers across the region.



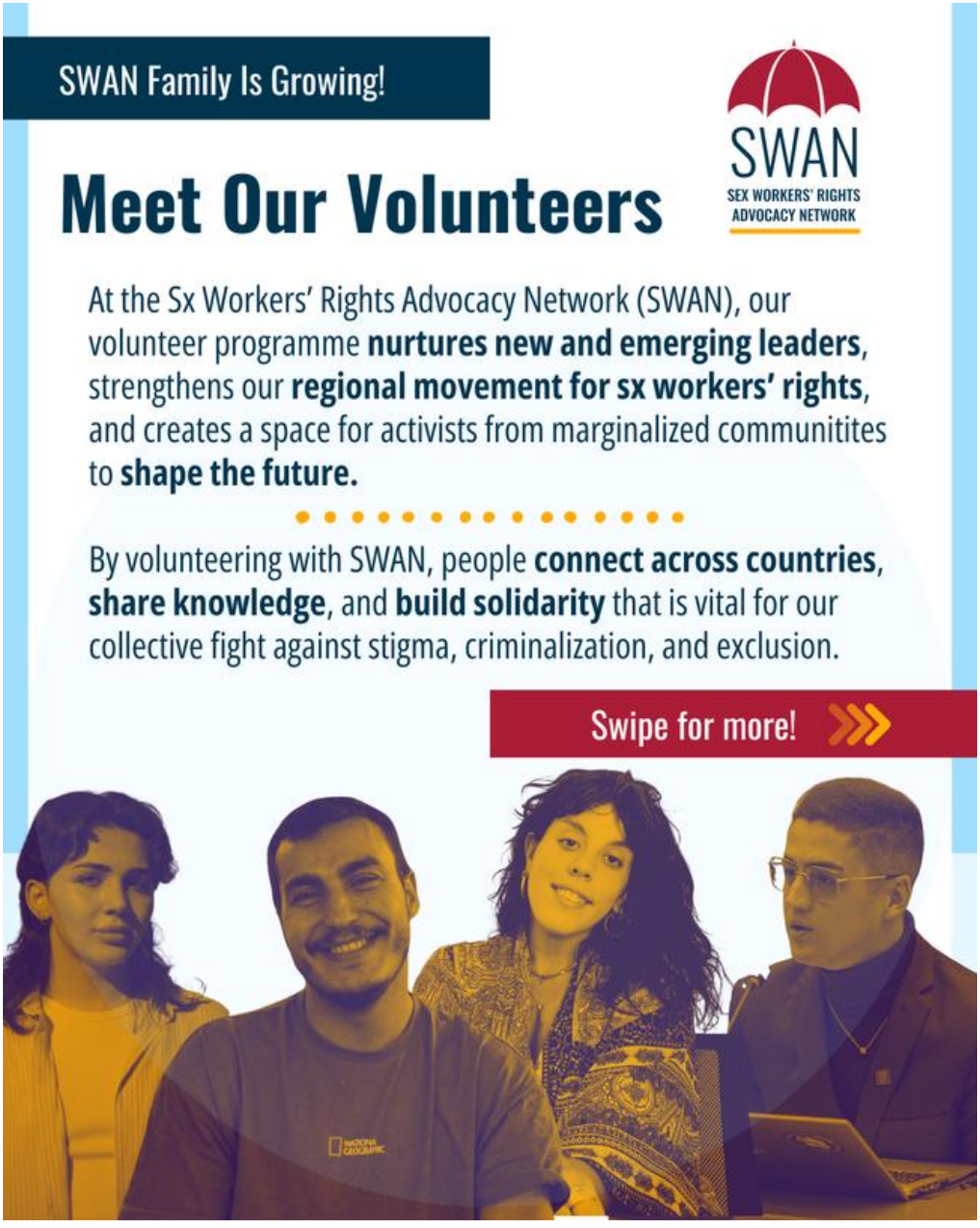
SWAN Volunteer Programme

In 2025, SWAN launched its first regional volunteer programme, opening opportunities for activists and community members from across the CEECA region to become more actively involved in the network's work and advocacy efforts. The initiative was developed as part of SWAN's broader commitment to movement building, leadership development, and strengthening community participation within the regional sex worker-led movement.

The open call for volunteers invited sex workers and allies from Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia to support different areas of SWAN's work, including communications, social media, research, policy monitoring, advocacy support, fundraising assistance, and translation. The programme was designed to be flexible and accessible, allowing volunteers to contribute based on their interests, skills, and availability while gaining experience in regional and international human rights advocacy.

Particular emphasis was placed on creating opportunities for sex workers and people from marginalized communities to strengthen their capacities, develop new skills, and engage more directly with regional advocacy processes. Through the programme, volunteers gained opportunities to participate in trainings, workshops, meetings, and ongoing movement-building activities organized by SWAN and partner networks.

Following the launch of the initiative, SWAN welcomed a group of volunteers from different countries in the region, reflecting the growing interest in community-led advocacy and regional solidarity. The volunteer programme also represents an important investment in the future sustainability of the movement, creating pathways for new activists and community leaders to become more involved in sex workers' rights advocacy at both national and regional levels.



ADVOCACY

Advocacy at the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

Throughout 2025, SWAN maintained an active presence and engagement within the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), continuing to advocate for the rights of sex workers and marginalized communities from the CEECA region within international human rights spaces.
For SWAN, participation in UN human rights mechanisms remains particularly important in the context of increasing criminalization, shrinking civic space, and growing restrictions on civil society organizations across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In many countries in the region, sex worker-led organizations face hostile political environments, foreign agent-style legislation, limited access to justice, and highly politicized legal systems.

As highlighted by SWAN Executive Director, Trajche Janushev:

> "For sex workers, especially from countries with strict political environments and foreign agent laws, where legal remedies are often unavailable and justice systems are deeply politicised, participating in HRC processes is not just symbolic. It is a critical tool of visibility, resistance, and learning. Through this engagement, sex workers become more aware of how to use international mechanisms to document rights violations, raise community voices, and put pressure on states — even when local systems are closed or hostile."



During the year, SWAN participated in multiple HRC-related advocacy activities, side events, and consultations together with international feminist and human rights partners, including the Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI).

SWAN contributed to SRI's side event "Sexual Rights at the UN HRC: Past, Present & Future," which brought together activists and partner organizations to reflect on the evolution of sexual rights advocacy within the Human Rights Council and discuss future challenges and opportunities. Discussions highlighted important achievements related to the recognition of sexual rights and bodily autonomy, while also addressing increasing political backlash, funding cuts, anti-rights mobilization, and shrinking civic space affecting movements globally.

The organization also participated in broader advocacy initiatives related to International Safe Abortion Day, digital rights, online safety, bodily autonomy, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), strengthening connections between sex worker-led movements and wider feminist and human rights struggles globally.

A major part of SWAN's advocacy work was connected to engagement with the United Nations Human Rights Council and other international human rights mechanisms.

In June 2025, SWAN prepared and submitted input to the **UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association for the UN General Assembly 80th thematic report on "Freedom of assembly and association rights, collective action and human solidarity facing existential threat: preserving the fundamental principles."** This submission highlighted the impact of restrictive laws, shrinking civic space, funding cuts, and political pressure on sex worker-led organizations and community-led movements in the region.

SWAN also participated in the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva from 22–27 June 2025, represented by the Executive Director and the Advocacy Officer. During this session, SWAN participated in preparatory meetings with the **Sex Work Delegation** and sex worker allies, strengthening coordination among global partners and ensuring that the realities of sex workers from Eastern Europe and Central Asia were represented in international advocacy spaces.

As part of HRC59, SWAN contributed to several important advocacy moments. On 25 June 2025, SWAN Executive Director Trajche Janushev delivered an intervention during the Interactive Dialogue with the **UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, bringing attention to the specific forms of violence, exclusion, and institutional barriers faced by sex workers.** SWAN also participated in the side event "Key Achievements of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity," .On 26 June 2025, SWAN joined the protest "Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs," standing in solidarity with sex worker rights movements and allied organizations.

In September 2025, SWAN continued its international advocacy during the **60th session of the UN Human Rights Council** in Geneva, where the Executive Director represented the network from 15–20 September. SWAN contributed input to the Interactive Dialogue with the **Special Rapporteur on the right to development** through a joint statement led by the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

In October 2025, SWAN submitted input to the **UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls** for the 2026 thematic report on gender equality, digital space, and artificial intelligence. This submission focused on how digital technologies, online surveillance, platform restrictions, algorithmic discrimination, and digital exclusion affect women, transgender, and gender-diverse sex workers, especially in restrictive political environments.

In December 2025, SWAN contributed to the call for input on **Draft General Comment No. 38 on Article 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, focused on freedom of association.** This contribution was prepared jointly with ECOM, EHRA, and EWNA, reflecting SWAN's commitment to cross-movement regional advocacy and collective responses to shrinking civic space.

Overall, SWAN's advocacy activities in 2025 strengthened the visibility of sex workers' rights in international human rights spaces, deepened cooperation with feminist, HIV, harm reduction, LGBTQI+, and SRHR movements, and contributed to stronger regional responses to political repression, criminalization, and shrinking civic space.

Strengthening Governance, Internal Systems, and Organizational Resilience

In September 2025, SWAN's Management Committee (MC), SWAN Executive Director and SWAN Operations Manager Lilla Kantor gathered in Vienna for a four-day strategic meeting focused on governance, organizational development, and risk assessment. Part of the meeting was facilitated by Front Line Defenders, supporting SWAN in conducting an in-depth organizational risk assessment and protection planning process.

The discussions addressed some of the most urgent challenges affecting the organization and the broader regional movement, including the increasingly hostile political environment in Hungary, the risks connected to anti-NGO and "foreign agent"-style legislation across the region, shrinking civic space, and the ongoing global funding crisis affecting community-led HIV and human rights responses.

The meeting also created an important opportunity to strengthen collective decision-making, clarify governance roles and responsibilities, and improve internal coordination between the Secretariat and Management Committee. As part of this process, SWAN reviewed, updated, and strengthened a number of key internal policies and governance documents to ensure that organizational processes remain transparent, accountable, participatory, and aligned with evolving organizational needs.

During 2025, SWAN revised, updated, or further developed several important organizational policies and manuals, including:

- Conflict of Interest Policy
- Grievance Procedure and Complaint Form
- Safeguarding Policy
- Equality Policy
- Sub-granting Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Flexible and Remote Working Policy
- Human Resources Policy
- Financial Management Procedures
- Rules of Organisation and Operation

These efforts strengthened SWAN's internal accountability mechanisms, improved operational clarity, and reinforced shared leadership and collective responsibility within the network.

At the same time, reduced funding and staffing capacities continued to create operational challenges for the Secretariat throughout the year. In response, SWAN adopted flexible and adaptive approaches to maintain organizational continuity and support core activities despite limited human resources and reduced staff working hours.

Throughout the year, the Secretariat also continued improving internal communication, coordination, and task management systems to ensure greater efficiency, continuity, and collaboration within a remote and geographically dispersed team structure. These adaptive strategies allowed SWAN to maintain its visibility, advocacy work, and regional coordination role despite ongoing financial and political pressures.

Looking Ahead

While 2025 was largely defined by resistance, resilience, and adaptation, it was also a year of important groundwork for SWAN's future. Throughout the year, the organization focused on sustaining its core work despite significant financial uncertainty, reduced staffing capacity, and growing political pressure across the region.

A crucial priority in 2025 was fundraising and rebuilding SWAN's financial stability. After a difficult start to the year, marked by funding cuts and reduced programme capacity, SWAN invested significant effort in donor engagement, partnership development, proposal writing, and exploring new funding opportunities. By the end of the year, these efforts had already started to show concrete results, with new funding streams and programme opportunities being finalized.

These developments are expected to create a stronger and more stable foundation for SWAN in 2026. They will allow the organization to strengthen its Secretariat capacity, deepen support to members, expand regional advocacy, and continue investing in organizational resilience and movement-building. At the same time, SWAN will remain focused on responding to shrinking civic space, restrictive legislation, and the growing challenges faced by sex workers and sex worker-led organizations across CEECA.
Looking ahead, SWAN enters 2026 with renewed energy, stronger partnerships, and a clearer strategic direction. The lessons of 2025 reaffirmed the importance of solidarity, flexible funding, community leadership, and regional cooperation. They also demonstrated that even in moments of crisis, SWAN and its members continue to adapt, resist, and build the conditions for a stronger and more sustainable sex worker-led movement.

Donors:

Numun fund
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