

# Sex Workers condemn ‘Equality Now’ attack on their rights

**Sex worker-led organisations and allies have come out in force to condemn Equality Now’s attack on the UN’s support for the decriminalisation of sex work.**

In recent letter to Helen Clark, administrator at UNDP, Equality Now requested that the UN ‘re-examine’ the findings and recommendations of two recent UN reports on HIV and the Law, and Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific respectively.

NSWP rejects the attacks on these recent UN reports which recommend decriminalisation of sex work. The campaigners leading these attacks are crucially misrepresenting several key factors.

While NSWP is delighted that attention is being drawn to these recent UN reports, which both strongly recommend the decriminalisation of sex work as the best way to ensure sex workers have full access to human rights, health, and justice, we condemn:

- The attack on the rights of sex workers to effective rights-based

- programming as their best protection against HIV;
- The irresponsible and deliberate conflation of sex work with trafficking;
  - The continued promotion of the failed Swedish model as a ‘solution’;
  - The denial of the existence of sex workers and sex work;
  - The deliberate misrepresentation of the UN reports, as “failing” to “include” the voices of those who have sold sex.

You can read the [full statement from NSWP here](#).

The [Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers](#) (APNSW) also resoundingly criticised Equality Now noting:

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**“This offensive campaign is an attempt to silence sex workers and replace us with hand-picked ‘survivors’, to advance the view that all sex work is ‘violence against women.’”**

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In their [statement](#) APNSW continue,

**“We reject the Swedish Model because it is de facto criminalisation of sex work. The intent behind this model is to eradicate the sex industry**

**worldwide, leaving millions sex workers without a livelihood. We are of the view that sex workers have the right to consent and to have their consent respected. The idea that women’s consent can be ignored perpetuates gender inequality. The idea that it is okay to ignore a woman’s consent because she is in sex work ignores the fact that women have rights based on multiple identities.”**

The African Sex Workers Alliance (ASWA) also **released a statement**, highlighting that as an organisation run by and for sex workers in Africa, they stand firmly against the attempt by campaigners in the global north to campaign against their human rights. They state that sex work is work, and that:

**“many women who would otherwise live in poverty support themselves and their families through sex work: those who seek to further criminalize those women have no suggestions for replacing their income.”**

Joining the condemnation of this attack, the [National Network of Sex Workers](#) (NNSW) India in their statement said,

**“These groups want people to believe that all sex work is trafficking. Their continued assertion that there is no such thing as ‘voluntary sex work’ is a denial of reality.”**

## Other news headlines

**Much more news is available on our [website](#) and on our [Twitter](#)**



### Protests for Jasmine and Dora

**Following the murders of Dora Özer and Petite Jasmine on the 9th and 11 of July 2013, sex workers, their friends, families, and allies came together to demand an end to stigma, criminalisation, violence and murders.**

In a campaign coordinated by the International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) on 19<sup>th</sup> July protest were held against the loss of Dora and Jasmine, but also for the senseless and systemic murders and violence against sex workers worldwide. 36 cities on four continents held demos, vigils, and protests in front of Turkish and Swedish embassies or other symbolic places.

**[Read more here.](#)**

### Canada: Concern mounts after two sex workers found dead



**Sex workers and sex worker rights advocates are speaking out with mounting concern in British Columbia, Canada, after two indoor sex workers were found dead in the same apartment block, two weeks apart.**

The police have been criticised for not issuing a warning more swiftly after Lyons was found. Kate Gibson, executive director of the WISH drop-in centre, said "I think two [women], two weeks apart, is extremely alarming ... In Vancouver, we've already seen this happen. Not stepping up, not dealing with this. And could they have prevented a second death? Maybe they could have." Read the full story in [CBC News](#).

### Bangladesh: Sex Workers evicted in gentrification drive



**Up to five hundred sex workers in Dhaka, Bangladesh, have been left homeless and without work in the last week, as anti-sex worker activists "rampaged" through a two-hundred year old brothel district.**

Sex worker activists highlighted that these actions are not just those of rogue extremists, but part of a wider pattern of sex worker evictions, where the state permits the land to be bought up for development against the wishes of current residents. The Dhaka Tribune **noted** that most of the time, law enforcement agencies have remained silent whenever influential locals influential tried to evict the brothels.

Joya Shikder, leader of the Sex Workers Network, **said**, "We are not doing anything illegal. Evictions take place all the time to grab our land - which either inherently, or by purchasing, belongs to us". She continued, "Due to such eviction acts we are compelled to scatter across the country and run our businesses on the streets, parks or by hiring apartments in different areas. Is this how the government thinks it is bringing welfare and morality to the society?"

Sex workers are often subject to geographical dispersal, either through criminalisation and crackdowns, or through gentrification and urban re-development. These dispersal efforts are widely acknowledged to make sex workers less safe, cutting people off from communities and making outreach services less accessible.

Skikder concluded, "usually after evicting, the government hands over ... a sewing machine to the sex workers, in the name of 'rehabilitation'. Read the full story in the [Dhaka Tribune](#).

It has now emerged that sex workers were refused vital hospital treatment in the aftermath of the attacks. Read more on this development [here](#).

## Caribbean: CSWC calls for end to discrimination



The *Caribbean Sex Workers Coalition (CSWC)*, a regional collective of sex worker-led civil society organisations and sex worker advocates, is calling on Caribbean states to end discrimination against sex workers, recognise transgender people and create laws to protect sex workers from stigma and discrimination.

These and a raft of other proposals, dubbed the “Montego Bay Declaration” was issued by the CSWC following the conclusion of its annual general meeting in Montego Bay, Jamaica at the end of August.

The Coalition reiterated that:

**‘sex work is work and must be recognized and treated at par with other professions where labor conditions are just.’**

In addition, the group called for the decriminalisation of sex work saying ‘selling sex should not be a crime; there are practices and policies that harm sex workers.’

You can read more coverage of the conference and read the full set of demands – as well as watch video news coverage of the event [here](#).

## Ireland: ‘Ugly Mugs’ app launches



‘Ugly Mugs’ schemes have been in many parts of the world, as a tool to warn sex workers about violent people posing as clients - but until now, there have been no such projects formally set up in Ireland.

The Irish state - influenced by various *anti-sex work organisations* - has never felt the need to aid sex workers in making the job safer. As *recent proposals* to further criminalise sex workers show, the Irish state has not changed that stance; however, there is now a formal ugly mugs scheme running in Ireland, facilitated by a project called *Ugly Mugs.ie*.

The new ugly mugs scheme uses modern technology in the form of an app that warns sex workers if they are receiving calls from a number that has an ugly mugs warning out against it.

In other news, the first ever wide-scale *survey of indoor sex workers in Ireland* has revealed a far more complex picture of who does sex work, and why, than is commonly portrayed in the Irish media, which is dominated by claims from anti-sex worker organisations - with links to the Catholic Church and the *notorious Magdalene laundries*. They claim that all sex work is exploitative and all those who engage in sex work are victims.

In contrast to those claims, *this survey* reveals that sex workers experience their jobs as work, albeit work that is more dangerous due to the legal context that forces them to work alone.

## France: Sex Workers national conference



As sex workers in France face the *imminent possibility of further criminalisation*, sex workers of all genders and from all sectors of the industry gathered in Paris in early June to hold a national conference.

Organised by *STRASS*, the conference has now been turned into a campaigning video, *‘Putes en Lutte’*, subtitled in English, in which street-based sex workers, migrant sex workers, women who have been working for thirty-five years or more, male sex workers and trans\* sex workers speak of their need for rights, not rescue.

Sex workers speak movingly of the power of self-determination, and community organising. “It is the first place where we can speak, where we can talk freely”, said one woman, reporting that her friend had cried with happiness to be surrounded by other sex workers. A male sex worker spoke of the power of sharing knowledge and building solidarity: “You know what is problematic in each community ... this helps us to find solutions with all sex workers”.

The video is produced in partnership with the *Sex Worker Open University* and *ICRSE*.

# Publications

## Human Rights Abuses and Sex Work in Africa

**A study of sex workers in four African countries has found out that sex workers face gross human rights violations and abuse due to the criminal nature of their work.**

***'Human rights abuses and collective resilience among sex workers in four African countries: a qualitative study'*** released in early August by a team of researchers who talked to female, male and transgender sex workers in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe, found that unlawful arrests and detention, violence, extortion as well as societal exclusion 'had an extreme impact on the physical, mental and social wellbeing of this population.'

'The majority of countries in the world have punitive laws against sex work,' the report states, '... virtually throughout Africa, this occupation is an explicit criminal offence.'

'This criminalization and the intense stigma attached to the profession shapes interactions between sex workers and their clients, family, fellow community members, and societal structures such as the police and social services.'

## SA Commission for Gender Equality: Position Paper on Sex Work

**The South African CGE have now published their *'Position Paper on Sex Work'* which lays out the reasons and evidence behind the Commission's**

**recommendation that sex work in South Africa should be decriminalised.**

This resource could be useful for advocacy in contexts where the criminalisation of clients is proposed, as it demonstrates an official acceptance that the Swedish model has failed, and evidences that failure across multiple issues (e.g. trafficking, stigma, gender equality.)

The position paper concludes that the criminalisation of sex work:

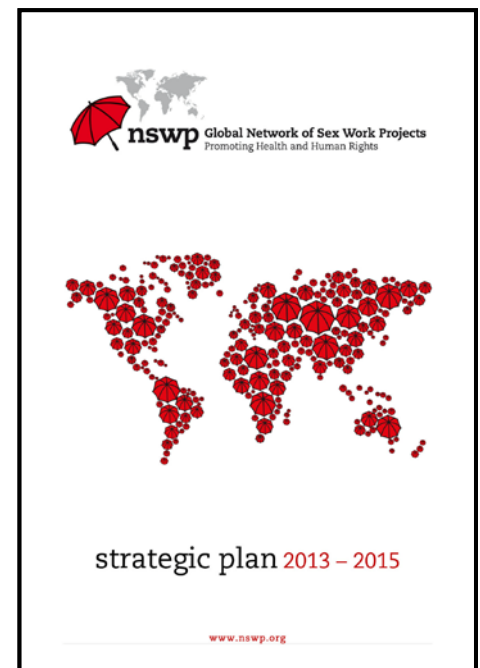
- Has failed society in general, and sex workers in particular
- Is difficult to implement and enforce, and has not resulted in the reduction of the levels of sex work or violence against sex workers
- Harms sex workers and denies them access to the rights contained in our constitution. Sex workers are subjected to numerous human rights violations, predominately harassment and abuse at the hands of police officers, and are not able to access and exercise legal or labour rights, or social protections.

## Scarlett Alliance / Rose Alliance – Swedish model

**Scarlett Alliance – the Australian Sex Workers Association, and Rose Alliance (Sweden) have produced this useful briefing paper on the *Swedish Model of criminalising sex work since 1999.***

This paper looks at what has changed and what has stayed the same since the change in Swedish law over a decade ago and provides a good summary of the issues.

## NSWP Strategic Plan 2013-2015



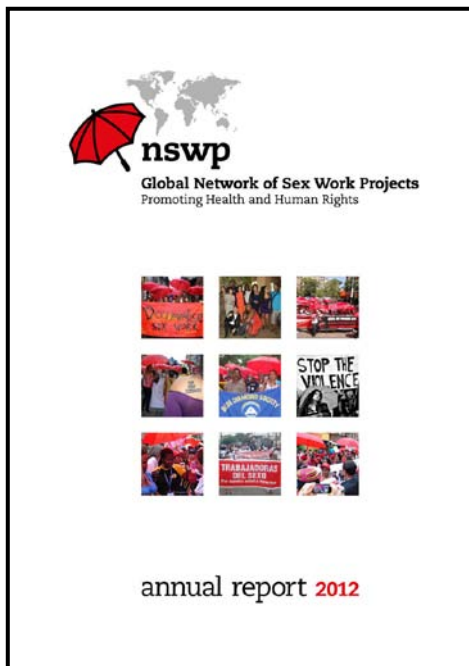
**This Strategic Plan sets out the updated priorities of the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) for the period 2013-2015.**

It records the outcomes of the strategic planning process undertaken by the NSWP Board in April 2013. It is intended to inform internal discussions within NSWP and conversations with donors. The Strategic plan outlines NSWP's planned focus for the period and the strategies and activities that will be employed to achieve NSWP's goals, which are:

- Goal 1. Convene, and further build on NSWP achievements as the global network committed to the realisation of sex workers' human rights
- Goal 2. Build capacity within sex worker-led networks and organisations and support emerging sex worker leaders
- Goal 3. Promote rights and evidence based policies and programmes affecting sex workers

**[Click here to read the Strategic Plan.](#)**

## NSWP Annual Report 2012



**Our Annual Report provides an overview and 'View from 2012' of NSWP's activities and achievements during the year.**

It includes narrative on how we performed against our goals, highlights the main activities undertaken, provides a financial summary and takes a look forward to the 2013-14 priority areas identified by our Board of Directors.

**[Click here to read the Annual Report.](#)**

## GNP+ & UNAIDS release new Guidelines

**GNP+ and UNAIDS have released 'Positive Health, Dignity and Prevention: Operational Guidelines' this week introducing 'Treatment 2015'. With less than a 1000 days remaining to reach the critical target of 15 million people on antiretroviral therapy by 2015.**

Sex workers are one of the key populations that HIV testing and treatment programmes fail to reach. Stigma often lies behind this failure of HIV testing and treatment programmes reaching key populations. These guidelines recognises that key populations such as sex workers should not be denied access to treatment services and that denial of access should not be state sanctioned through punitive laws and policies.

The guidelines recommend that countries should take steps to overcome the deterrent effects of stigma and discrimination. Countries should speed up the legal and policy review process to eliminate barriers to HIV treatment uptake. Recommendations include that laws which allow for the mandatory testing of sex workers and people who use drugs, among other discriminatory laws, be replaced with laws that protect against discrimination and support access to voluntary HIV testing, counselling and treatment.



**nswp**

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The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) advocates for the health and human rights of sex workers. We work to uphold the voices of sex workers globally and to connect regional networks advocating for the rights of female, male and transgender sex workers.

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