



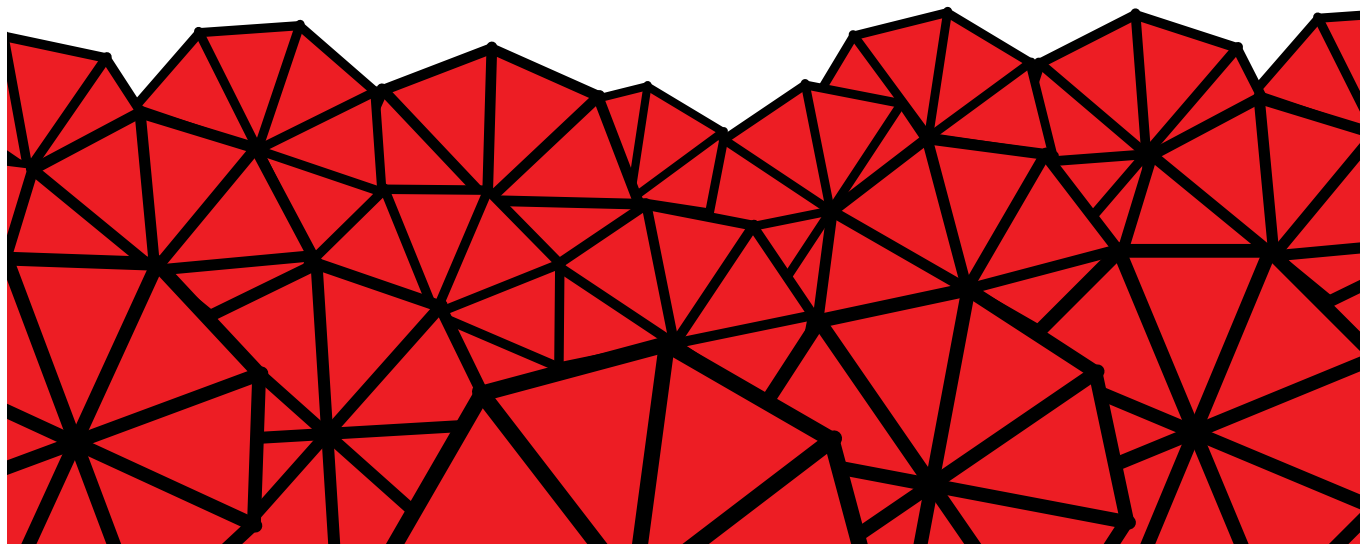
**nswp**

**Global Network of Sex Work Projects**  
Promoting Health and Human Rights

**POLICY BRIEF**

**From Resistance  
to Reform:**

***Sex Worker-Led Legal  
Reform Initiatives***



# From Resistance to Reform: Sex Worker-Led Legal Reform Initiatives

## Introduction

The sex worker rights movement faces growing challenges, from the rise of anti-rights movements to the shrinking pool of funding for sex worker-led organisations. These shifts have threatened the movement's

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sustainability and fostered a more hostile environment for advocacy. Yet, sex worker-led organisations continue to resist, challenging harmful laws and carving out new paths for legal reform.

This paper highlights recent examples of sex worker-led resistance and progress in legal reform, gathered through key informant interviews and

a global e-consultation with NSWP members. It recognises that success is not limited to achieving decriminalisation, but also encompasses a range of milestones along the way – from legal empowerment initiatives to strategic litigation. Drawing on members' firsthand experiences, this paper also explores strategies, challenges, and lessons learned from sex worker-led organisations pushing for change.

## Decriminalisation Progress

Achieving the full decriminalisation of sex work is one of the sex worker rights movement's most significant victories, resulting from decades of dedicated advocacy. In 1995, New South Wales, Australia, became the first jurisdiction to decriminalise sex work at the state level. Following this, New Zealand became the first country to decriminalise sex work nationwide in 2003. Since then, momentum for decriminalisation has only grown, with sex worker-led organisations advancing efforts across multiple regions.

### Recent Decriminalisation Milestones

#### Belgium

In 2022, Belgium became the second country in the world to decriminalise sex work nationwide. This success was catalysed by years of advocacy from **UTSOPI**, **Espace P** and **Violet**, and was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, powerful images of sex workers standing in food lines, unable to work or access unemployment benefits, underscored the urgent need for decriminalisation and equal labour rights. Sex worker-led organisations' advocacy and media efforts played a critical role in amplifying awareness of these inequities amongst lawmakers and the public, resulting in the landmark decriminalisation victory in 2022.<sup>1</sup> UTSOPI, Espace P, and Violet continued to work with lawmakers to secure additional labour rights and protections for sex workers, culminating in the Sex Work Labour Law of 2024.<sup>2</sup>

1 Joanna Gill, "How COVID-19 helped sex workers in Belgium make history," Thomas Reuters Foundation, 31 May 2022.

2 "Belgium's sex workers get maternity leave and pensions under new law," NSWP, 5 December 2024.

## Australia (Specific States and Territories)

Multiple Australian states and territories continue to decriminalise sex work, driven by the ongoing advocacy of sex worker-led organisations. After **New South Wales**, the **Northern Territory** decriminalised sex work in 2019, followed by **Queensland** in 2024. In **Victoria**, the *Sex Work Decriminalisation Act* was passed in 2022, eliminating the previous licensing system and criminal penalties. However, the sex worker-led organisations **Scarlet Alliance**, **Australian Sex Workers Association**, and **Vixen Collective** have emphasised that discriminatory restrictions on street-based sex work remain under the new model, falling short of full decriminalisation. These organisations continue to advocate for the full decriminalisation of sex work across all sectors.<sup>3</sup>

## Ongoing Decriminalisation Campaigns

Decriminalisation is an ongoing process that requires sustained efforts and resilience. Across the globe, countless sex worker-led organisations are advocating for decriminalisation, challenging structural barriers and amplifying their communities' voices. While it is impossible to capture every effort, below are several recent examples from NSW's membership.

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### Multi-Pronged Decriminalisation Approach in South Africa

Sex worker-led organisations **Sisonke** and **Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT)**, along with the **Asijiki Coalition** –

a coalition of sex workers and allies – have led decriminalisation efforts in South Africa. Their strategy combines legal challenges, parliamentary engagement, and grassroots mobilisation.

In 2022, SWEAT, Sisonke, and Asijiki contributed to the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Bill*, aiming to repeal existing laws criminalising sex work. Sisonke ensured that sex workers' voices were centred during public consultations for the bill, however the Department of Justice questioned its constitutionality, stalling progress.<sup>4</sup> In response, Sisonke organised marches and sent multiple appeals to the Minister of Justice, leading to further consultations in 2024.

Simultaneously, SWEAT launched a legal challenge against the Department of Justice, with an anonymous sex worker and SWEAT serving as applicants. Backed by multiple organisations, the case adds additional pressure on the government to prioritise decriminalisation, while also serving as a fallback strategy in the event that legislative reforms are further delayed.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Vixen, 2022, "Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022: Factsheet for Sex Workers."

<sup>4</sup> Yonela Siqu and Nelson Dlamini, "Sudden Ditch of the Sex Worker Decriminalization Bill an Unwarranted Travesty of Justice," The South African National AIDS Council, 2 August 2023.

<sup>5</sup> SWEAT, "SWEAT Launches Landmark Legal Challenge to Decriminalise Sex Work in South Africa," 9 October 2024.

## Empower's Decriminalisation Campaign in Thailand

In 2018, the Thai government began revising sex work laws without consulting sex workers, proposing harsh restrictions, such as requiring sex workers to be unmarried and not have any children under the age of 20. In response, the sex worker-led **Empower Foundation** launched a decriminalisation campaign, publishing a parallel report, holding seminars, and demanding inclusion in the policymaking process. Their persistence secured them a seat on the government subcommittee shaping the new law.

By 2020, Empower gathered thousands of signatures to repeal the existing *Prostitution Suppression Act*, but the COVID-19 pandemic stalled progress. In 2022, sex workers helped draft the *Sex Workers' Protection Act*, which recognises sex work as work and guarantees social protections without mandatory registration. However, government delays continued.<sup>6</sup>

Empower took matters into their own hands in 2024, drafting their own decriminalisation bill. In addition to removing criminal penalties, the bill proposes establishing sex worker-inclusive Sex Work Protection Committees and a Sex Work Protection Centre to ensure access to welfare and social protection. In 2025, Empower launched a large-scale campaign to collect 10,000 signatures in support of the bill's adoption, and presented the proposal to Parliament.<sup>7</sup>

## Challenging the Nordic Model

The Nordic Model, or "End-Demand" model, continues to gain support worldwide, driven by anti-sex work abolitionist and feminist groups. Despite substantial evidence proving otherwise, supporters frame the Nordic Model – which criminalises the purchase, but not sale of sex – as a way to promote gender equality and end human trafficking.<sup>8</sup> Sex worker-led organisations are actively pushing back against this model, demonstrating the disastrous consequences it has had for their communities.

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## Constitutional Challenge to the PCEPA in Canada

In 2014, Canada introduced the Nordic Model through the adoption of the *Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act (PCEPA)*. In 2021, the **Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform (CASWLR)**, a coalition of 23 sex worker-led and allied organisations, launched a constitutional challenge against the sex work-specific criminal offenses in the PCEPA. The challenge described how these offenses violate sex workers' constitutional rights, including the rights to security, health, safety, and bodily autonomy. In 2023, the Ontario Superior Court upheld all offences in the PCEPA as constitutional. CASWLR are currently pursuing an appeal of this ruling, which may take several years to process.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, the Alliance remains committed to continuing this legal challenge and achieving justice for sex workers.

6 Krueg Prachakul and Ruj Chuenban, "Thai sex workers, rights advocates push to decriminalize prostitution," Benar News, 11 June 2024.

7 "Empower Foundation to propose sex worker protection law," Prachatai English, 13 March 2025.

8 NSWP, 2017, "Smart Sex Worker's Guide: Challenging the Introduction of the Nordic Model."

9 "Canadian Sex Workers Deeply Disappointed with Ontario Superior Court Decision," NSWP, 11 October 2023.

## Challenging France at the European Court of Human Rights

In 2019, 261 sex workers, many of them migrants and trans, filed a case against France before the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), arguing that France's criminalisation of clients under the 2016 Prostitution Act violated Article 8 (right to respect for private life) of the European Convention on Human Rights. The case was accepted by the ECtHR in 2023. In 2024, while acknowledging that the law interferes with applicants' right to private life, personal autonomy, and sexual freedom, the Court ultimately upheld its legality.<sup>10</sup>

Although this ruling was a significant setback, sex workers' success in bringing this case to the Court must be acknowledged, as only 5% of cases submitted to the ECtHR are admitted.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates the viability of this litigation strategy for promoting sex workers' rights and provides a precedent for future legal challenges in the region.

## Blocking Abolitionist Proposals in Spain

In recent years, Spain has faced increasing pressure to adopt the Nordic Model from multiple social and political sectors, including the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. Despite this, sex worker-led organisations in Spain have successfully blocked several abolitionist proposals from being passed, including one rejected in May 2024 in Congress. In June 2024, the sex worker-led organisation **Sindicato OTRAS** presented its own legislative proposal for the decriminalisation of sex work, offering a rights-based alternative to Spain's current legal framework and the ongoing abolitionist agenda.<sup>12</sup>

## Local and State Initiatives

**Many sex worker-led organisations focus on local, municipal, provincial, or state-level policymaking...**

Many sex worker-led organisations focus on local, municipal, provincial, or state-level policymaking, where building connections with decisionmakers may be more accessible. Achieving success at these levels can help build momentum and serve as a model for wider policy change.

## Promoting Migrant Sex Workers' Rights in Machala, Ecuador

In Ecuador, **Plataforma Latinoamericana de Personas que Ejercen el Trabajo Sexual (PLAPERTS)** has actively advanced sex workers' rights within local governance structures. In 2020, in response to violations against sex workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, PLAPERTS convened the municipal Council for the Protection of Rights, which subsequently led to the formation of the Inter-Institutional Network for the Protection of Migrants' Rights. This network addresses sex worker-specific concerns, as well as broader issues such as health, housing, violence, and legal documentation for migrants.

<sup>10</sup> Sarthak Gupta, "European Court upholds Criminalization of Sex Work not Workers' Rights," Health and Human Rights Journal, 27 August 2024.

<sup>11</sup> "Milestone Victory at the European Court of Human Rights: Joint Statement with Medicins du Monde," European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance and Medicins du Monde, 31 August 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Irene Adan, "A Step Forward in the Rights of Sex Workers in Spain," NSWP, 24 September 2024.

As part of these efforts, the network drafted the *Ordinance for the Protection of Migrants' Human Rights*. PLAPERTS advocated for the ordinance with city council members, the mayor, and other stakeholders, leading to its approval in 2024. The network is now establishing thematic working groups, with PLAPERTS co-leading committees on Health, Protection and Rights, Labour, and Violence.

## Amending State Laws in California, U.S.A.

In the United States, sex worker-led organisations have successfully campaigned to repeal and amend state laws undermining sex workers' rights. In 2019, the **Sex Workers Outreach Project Los Angeles, St. James Infirmary, US Prostitutes Collective, and Erotic Service Providers Legal, Education and Research Project** collaborated to help pass Senate Bill 233 in California. This legislation grants sex workers immunity to report violent crimes to the police without fear of arrest, and prevents condoms from being used as "evidence of prostitution."<sup>13</sup> In 2022, sex worker-led organisations reconvened to pass Senate Bill 357, the "Safer Streets for All Act," which prohibits arrests for "loitering with intent to commit prostitution" and allows people previously convicted under this offence to expunge their records.<sup>14</sup>

## Promoting Inclusive Public Health Policies

Sex workers have made significant gains in influencing public health policy. Through their involvement, sex worker-led organisations have advocated for the inclusion of sex workers within public health frameworks and ensured that more policies are rights-based. This is particularly evident in the areas of HIV, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and gender-based violence. However, sex workers' inputs are also important in shaping policies on other health issues which affect their communities.

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## National HIV Plan in Central Asia

Despite intensifying political challenges, a sex worker-led organisation in Central Asia has continued to play an active role in shaping national HIV policies and plans. As a member of the expert working group drafting the State HIV Plan, the sex worker representative has advocated for greater acknowledgement of sex workers and the inclusion of sex worker-specific recommendations, challenging the tendency to generalise language around key populations. Although the Plan was ultimately not approved due to external political challenges, sex workers remain engaged. One sex worker representative, along with another community representative, are now included in the consultative group for drafting the new state HIV programme, which is expected to incorporate more direct input from affected communities.

<sup>13</sup> "New legislation in San Francisco to protect sex workers when reporting serious crime," NSWP, 14 February 2019.

<sup>14</sup> "Gov. Newsom Signs The Safer Streets For All Act (SB 357)," ACLU California Action, 1 July 2022.

## Amending Local Health Policies in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the sex worker-led organisation, **Open Heart Community-Based Initiative for Health Empowerment and Sustainable Development**, collaborated with regional key population networks,

such as the MSMTG Network Nigeria, to lobby policymakers for inclusive legal and health reforms. Their efforts contributed to policy amendments in Anambra State, improving sex workers' access to HIV testing, treatment, and counselling services. In addition, Open Heart and its partners have been involved in broader efforts to integrate sex worker-specific healthcare services into Nigeria's National HIV/AIDS Strategy. Beyond policy changes, Open Heart reports that there have

been noticeable shifts in public perceptions of sex workers, with greater recognition for sex workers' rights to dignity and legal protection.

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## Labour Rights Advocacy

Recognising sex work as work is crucial to advancing sex workers' human rights and reducing criminalisation, violence, stigma, and discrimination. Even where sex work remains criminalised, sex workers can push for policies which promote their labour rights, setting precedents for broader legal recognition.

## Recognising Sex Work as Work in India

In 2020, following a submission from the **National Network of Sex Workers (NNSW)**, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of India issued an advisory recognising sex workers as informal workers. The advisory also called for ensuring sex workers' access to social protection and protection from violence.<sup>15</sup> In 2022, India's Supreme Court expanded on this, defining sex work as a dignified profession and emphasising sex workers' entitlements to equal protection under the law, along with measures against violence.

This success was the result of over a decade of advocacy centring sex workers' lived experiences, including contributions from the former director of Durban Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC), who served on the Supreme Court panel examining issues faced by sex workers. Sex worker-led organisations in India celebrated the ruling as an important step towards decriminalisation and recognising sex workers' labour rights.<sup>16</sup>

## Sex Work Labour Law in Belgium

In 2022, Belgium became the first country in Europe to decriminalise sex work. Despite this achievement, the original decriminalisation framework did not extend to sex workers working under contracts, such as in brothels. Recognising this gap, **UTSOPI, Violet, and Espace P** worked alongside the Belgian Ministries of Labour, Health, and Justice to develop the Sex Work Labour Law. In 2024, the Belgian Parliament passed the law, guaranteeing sex workers the right to work under an employment contract and access the full range of social protections, including pensions, unemployment, maternity leave, and health insurance. The law also ensures workplace protections and safety measures, promoting safer and more equitable working conditions.<sup>17</sup>

15 National Human Rights Commission, 2020, "Human Rights Advisory on Rights of Women in the Context of COVID-19."

16 "Sex workers in India celebrate Supreme Court ruling recognising sex work as a 'profession,'" 1 June 2022.

17 "Belgian labor law for sex workers: what and how?," UTSOPI.

## Legal Reform Strategies

***There is no one-size-fits all approach to legal reform, as each context – whether local, national, or global – presents its own unique challenges.***

There is no one-size-fits all approach to legal reform, as each context – whether local, national, or global – presents its own unique challenges. Additionally, sex worker-led organisations may differ in terms of their resources, capacity, and experience. With these differences in mind, NSWP members have identified key strategies for building community capacity and advancing legal reform, which can be adapted to different settings.

### Legal Literacy and Empowerment

Mobilising for legal reform starts with raising awareness and empowering communities to advocate for change. Sex worker-led organisations have developed various strategies to build capacity and promote understanding of laws and policies, their impacts, and pathways for change.

#### Peer-to-Peer Learning

Peer-to-peer learning can take many forms, including in-person schools and workshops, online seminars, and virtual learning platforms. For years, this approach has been an invaluable strategy for raising community awareness of fundamental rights, while also cultivating leadership skills for effective legal advocacy.

- Since 2014, **VAMP (Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad)** has run the **VAMP Institute** to empower sex workers and sex worker advocates across India. The Institute aims to strengthen community leaders' skills and support them to meaningfully participate in policy changes. The curriculum covers topics such as international positions on sex work, the impact of anti-trafficking policies, and understanding abolitionist campaigns. Over the years, VAMP has also held issue-focused Institutes to address policy developments, including those related to national anti-trafficking laws and bills and the Universal Periodic Review process.<sup>18</sup>
- In 2022, the **African Sex Worker Alliance (ASWA)** launched the **Africa Leadership Sex Workers' Academy (ALESWA)**, building on the peer-to-peer training model of the previous Sex Worker Academy Africa, which began in 2014. ALESWA trains sex worker leaders across Africa to advocate for legal reforms and rights-based policies, particularly within African human rights frameworks.<sup>19</sup>
- In Latin America, **PLAPERTS** runs an online **School of Experts**, providing a free platform with information and training on advocacy strategies tailored to their regional context. Courses cover topics such as fundamental human rights, community mobilisation, and political communications strategies. The platform also hosts a repository of webinars.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> "VAMP Institutes – Training Sex Workers And Activists Working With Sex Workers," SANGRAM, 30 November 2018.

<sup>19</sup> "Africa Leadership Sex Workers Academy (ALESWA)," ASWA, 22 February 2024.

<sup>20</sup> "School of experts," PLAPERTS.

## Paralegal Training for Legal Empowerment

Many sex worker-led organisations have developed paralegal training programmes for sex workers to build legal literacy and improve community members' access to justice.

- In Africa, **Voice of our Voices** (Eswatini), **Springs of Life** (Zimbabwe), **Sisonke/SWEAT** (South Africa), the **Kenya Sex Workers Alliance (KESWA)**, and many others have trained sex workers as paralegals, equipping them to help peers navigate legal systems, challenge rights violations, and access legal representation. These initiatives not only improve individual access to justice, but also strengthen collective capacity to challenge unjust laws, including through strategic litigation.

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## Legal Guides and Toolkits

Many sex worker-led organisations have published guides and toolkits to support their communities in navigating legal frameworks and policymaking processes.

- **NSWP** regularly publishes tools and guides to support sex worker-led organisations to engage with legal and human rights frameworks and advocate for decriminalisation. These include resources on engaging with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),<sup>21</sup> as well as in-depth guides to specific legal models, including a 2024 guide, *Decriminalisation vs. Legalisation: Understanding Key Differences in Sex Work Legislation*.<sup>22</sup>
- Sex worker-led networks have also developed regional-specific guides: the **Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN)** published a guide on legal models in the Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA) region,<sup>23</sup> **ASWA** has published a brief on challenging criminalisation in Africa, while the **European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA)** published a myth-busting factsheet on the Nordic Model.<sup>24</sup>
- At the national level, groups like **CASWLR**, Canada have created toolkits for sex workers on how to engage with Parliament and its processes.<sup>25</sup> In Kenya, **KESWA** have produced a manual to support sex worker paralegals, covering the national legal system, civil and criminal procedures, human rights related to sex work, HIV, violence, and more.<sup>26</sup>

## Strategic Partnerships and Alliance-Building

Sex workers' rights are inherently intersectional, overlapping with other social justice and human rights agendas. Building strategic partnerships and alliances not only amplifies sex worker rights agendas, but can also facilitate access to decisionmakers and strengthen capacity for law reform. NSWP members have successfully collaborated with a range of stakeholders, including women's rights organisations, labour unions, other key population groups, UN agencies, lawyers, politicians, and more. Below are only a few of the many examples from NSWP's membership:

21 "CEDAW," NSWP.

22 NSWP, 2024, "Decriminalisation vs. Legalisation: Understanding Key Differences in Sex Work Legislation."

23 SWAN, 2019, "Sex Work Legal Frameworks in Central-Eastern Europe and Central Asia (CEECA)."

24 ESWA, 2022, "Myth-Busting the Swedish Model: The Evidence Debunking 10 Key Claims of Client Criminalisation."

25 "Advocacy Guides," Canadian Alliance for Sex Work Law Reform.

26 KESWA, 2017, "Legal Literacy for Sex Workers in Kenya: A Training Manual for KESWA Paralegals."

**As a result of the coalition's efforts, a law previously banning HIV-positive women from accessing state-run crisis centres was amended, ensuring all women could access these services.**

## Women's Movement

- In Kazakhstan, the sex worker-led **Public Association "Amelia"** joined an NGO coalition representing women key populations and women living with HIV to submit a Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee. In 2019, for the first time in Central Asia, the Committee issued recommendations urging the government to address violence, stigma, and discrimination against sex workers, and end forced HIV testing.<sup>27</sup> The coalition worked with UNAIDS to monitor implementation. As a result of the coalition's efforts, a law previously banning HIV-positive women from accessing state-run crisis centres was amended, ensuring all women could access these services.

## Labour Unions

- In Ecuador, **PLAPERTS** are collaborating with the national Union of Workers and have been invited to participate in their march. They have also met with one of the union leaders, who expressed their commitment to jointly advocating for the recognition of sex work during their official assembly.

## Government

- In Kenya, the **Bar Hostess Empowerment and Support Programme (BHESP)** has formed alliances by conducting sensitivity trainings and outreach with civil servants across various sectors, including public health, the judicial service, county assemblies, and Parliament. These trainings focus on barriers to justice created by criminalisation, as well as intersections with women's rights issues. Through this engagement, BHESP has cultivated a network of allies within the public sector and legislative bodies, helping them better navigate the legal environment.

## Intersectional Alliances

- In the United States, amidst the growing influence of anti-rights groups, the **Best Practices Policy Project (BPPP)** has joined forces with other social justice movements to campaign against anti-trans laws and the policing of sex workers. They have also partnered with groups like the **Black Sex Worker Collective** to challenge harmful environmental policies that further marginalise these communities.

## Evidence and Representation

Evidence is essential for demonstrating how harmful laws and policies violate sex workers' rights. It is equally important to document the positive impacts of rights-affirming policies, emphasising that sex workers' demands are grounded in facts – rather than ideology. Evidence can also be supported by personal testimonies, which help humanise sex workers' struggles and challenge stereotypes.

<sup>27</sup> NSWP, 2021, "Case Study: Sex Worker-led Organisations' Engagement with the Women's Movement."

## Community-Led Research

Sex worker-led organisations worldwide conduct research and community-led monitoring to highlight their communities' lived experiences.

- The **Sex Worker Networks Consortium (SWNC)**, a partnership between regional sex worker-led networks and NSWP, conducted a large-scale community research project on social protection and SRHR across 27 countries in 2022–2023.<sup>28</sup> For many participating countries, this marked the first research ever conducted on sex workers' access to social protection, revealing significant gaps in both awareness and access. These findings have provided a basis for new legal advocacy efforts aimed at expanding sex workers' access to social protection at the national level.

## Representation at Policymaking Forums

- **NSWP**, with support from allies such as IWRAW Asia-Pacific, the Count Me In! Consortium, and the Sexual Rights Initiative (SRI), has facilitated the participation of sex worker delegations at key international policy and advocacy forums, including the **UN Commission on the Status of Women**, **CEDAW** review sessions, and **UN Human Rights Council** sessions. NSWP and its members also participate in other forums, such as the **International AIDS Conference**, the **AWID International Forum**, and various regional and national policymaking platforms. These platforms provide important opportunities for sex workers to raise awareness of their communities' priorities and lived experiences, while establishing connections with policymakers and allies.

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## Key Learnings from Sex Worker-Led Organisations

Drawing from their experiences, NSWP member organisations have shared their most valuable insights on the law reform process:

### 1 Build and sustain alliances – don't work in isolation

Strong partnerships and alliances across movements can help build collective power and amplify advocacy. Engaging with government and people in positions of power, while often challenging, is necessary for law reform. Being part of supportive alliances and coalitions can make this process easier by facilitating access to decisionmakers and providing a buffer against potential hostility.

### 2 Learn from each other to strengthen the movement

Sex worker-led organisations have decades of experience pushing for law reform and resisting legal challenges. While legal and political contexts vary, many lessons can be transferred between countries and regions. Sharing knowledge, skills, and strategies between sex worker-led organisations can help save time and resources, while fostering a stronger, more connected movement.

<sup>28</sup> NSWP, 2024, "Global Findings on Sex Workers' Access to Social Protection and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights."

### 3 Maintain clear and consistent advocacy messaging

Clear, consistent messaging helps create a united front for advocacy, keeping key messages at the forefront of legal reform efforts. Aligning advocacy messaging across the movement makes it easier for policymakers, media, and the public to understand sex workers' core demands. This consistency is also important for countering harmful and misinformed narratives promoted by anti-sex work groups.

### 4 Use evidence and personal stories to drive change

Sharing evidence and sex workers' lived experiences is a key aspect of impactful law reform advocacy. Evidence can take many forms, including community-led research, case studies, and firsthand testimonies, which demonstrate the real-world impacts of laws and policies. This evidence is also important for countering the misinformation that fuels anti-sex work policies.

### 5 Expect resistance and persevere

Law and policy reform is a long-term process, often full of setbacks and opposition. In these challenging environments, sex workers' ability to hold back harmful new laws and maintain existing rights is an achievement that must be recognised. Resistance, persistence, and adaptability are some of the sex worker rights movement's greatest strengths, and are key to long-term success.

## Conclusion

Sex worker-led organisations continue to fight for their communities' fundamental rights in myriad ways. They advocate, campaign, and engage with policymakers at the national, regional, and global levels.

On the ground, they provide legal support and empower their communities, challenge unjust laws, and develop legal reform strategies that adapt to shifting political and funding landscapes. Despite setbacks, the sex worker-led movement remains resilient and committed to driving change. Every effort – whether big or small – brings sex workers closer to achieving justice and meaningful reform.

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The Global Network of Sex Work Projects uses a methodology that ensures the grassroots voices of sex workers and sex worker-led organisations are heard. The Policy briefs are the result of desk research and a global e-consultation with NSWP member organisations, including gathering in-depth information from some members.

The term 'sex workers' reflects the immense diversity within the sex worker community including but not limited to: female, male and transgender sex workers; lesbian, gay and bi-sexual sex workers; male sex workers who identify as heterosexual; sex workers living with HIV and other diseases; sex workers who use drugs; young adult sex workers (between the ages of 18 and 29 years old); documented and undocumented migrant sex workers, as well as and displaced persons and refugees; sex workers living in both urban and rural areas; disabled sex workers; and sex workers who have been detained or incarcerated.



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