



Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs

NSWP STATEMENT

In Response to EWL Call for a 'Prostitution Free Europe'

The Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) exists to uphold support the voices of sex workers globally and to connect regional networks advocating for the rights of female, male, and transgender sex workers. We have a growing membership of over 150 sex work organisations worldwide. NSWP condemns the European Women's Lobby (EWL) recent statement "Together for a Europe free from prostitution" on the basis that the evidence used to support the call is biased and ill-informed; there is a dangerous conflation between sex work and trafficking, and most notably, sex workers' voices and experiences are rendered invisible in this campaign.

The EWL call is based on unfounded, ill-informed statistics that misdirect the campaign towards an approach disguised under the rubric of ending "violence against women". Presenting poorly evidenced and biased facts about sex work and the lives of sex workers, is an approach that enhances the stereotypes associated with sex work and which undermines the agency of the individuals involved. This is a clear and strategic dismissal of sex workers' wide-ranging experiences, which stops any informed debate about sex workers' lives and choices that could positively challenge the stigmatising misconceptions perpetuated by anti-sex work lobbyists like EWL. At the expense of meaningfully engaging with sex workers, EWL presents an ideological and moralistic agenda that is dangerously ill-informed. Attempting to end the sex industry, the call presents an appraisal of the 'Swedish Model' of criminalising demand. Evidence of the success of this approach is limited and whilst EWL present one side of the argument, there is substantial evidence to suggest that in reality, the Swedish model has significantly reduced the safety and well-



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

NSWP The Matrix 62 Newhaven Road
Edinburgh EH6 5QB Scotland UK
secretariat@nswp.org +44 (0)131 553 2555
www.nswp.org

NSWP is a private not-for-profit limited company. Company No. SC349355



Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs

being of sex workers in Sweden. Simultaneously, the sex worker groups in Sweden have made clear that the legislative framework has resulted in increased vulnerability of sex workers to violence and abusive practices. Furthermore, the absence of a rights-based legal framework for sex workers in Sweden has meant that in cases where rights are violated, sex workers have little or no recourse to justice. By giving stigma a legal stamp in the context of further criminalisation, sex workers are further pushed to the margins of society. It is within this climate of fear and repression that the rights of sex workers are more open to being breached.

The conflation of trafficking with sex work in the EWL call appears to be a tactic that is strategically used to silence the voices of sex workers who do not accept their victimhood status but rather assert their right to livelihood and to work within a legal framework that promotes their right to health and dignity. As a global network of sex work projects, we speak from our experience of the dominance of anti-trafficking laws and campaigns implemented into our communities without consultation with sex workers. This common tactic has been used by religious groups, fundamentalists, and those who may term themselves “radical feminists”, in misguided attempts to abolish prostitution. While many of these initiatives may seem well intentioned to the public because they exploit a public concern over trafficking and violence against women, the reality of this approach is a series of negative consequences for sex workers globally including giving police additional powers to raid sex workers’ premises. This practice is not conducive to safe working conditions and can allow for exploitation. Sex workers within this approach are pushed upon a trajectory of forced rescue and rehabilitation, practices that involve extreme violations of the human rights of sex workers. These practices have become commonplace, yet under the rhetoric of anti-trafficking and ending violence against women, police and other “law enforcement agencies” have systematically violated the rights of sex workers across the globe. This agenda fails to recognise the benefits of including sex workers in the fight against forced labour, exploitation, and any other violence within the industry. It also puts both sex workers and victims of trafficking in vulnerable situations of exploitation and violence, whilst impeding healthcare initiatives that sex workers have worked together with international government agencies to



Only Rights Can Stop the Wrongs

develop in the joint effort to prevent the transmission of HIV and reduce the prevalence of HIV/AIDs (see <http://hivlawcommission.org/index.php/report>). Sex workers will disengage with criminal justice and health agencies if these agencies are legally encouraged to disrespect their human rights by treating them either as criminals or victims in need of rescue and rehabilitation.

The EWL Call “Together for a Europe Free From Prostitution” is an extremely dangerous campaign and NSWP supports the European sex worker groups and networks in their condemnation. We aim to highlight the poorly evidenced nature of the claims underpinning the campaign, the inappropriate conflation of sex work with trafficking, and the exclusion of sex worker input in informing this call. The call’s outlandish claims are unworkable in practice and will result in a significant misdirection of law enforcement to people who are voluntarily engaging in sex work (including migrant sex workers) and those associated with them. The call will also impact upon valuable resources that could instead be spent on developing and providing necessary welfare support services for victims of human trafficking or engaging sex workers to develop rights-based approaches.