



Global Network of Sex Work Projects
Promoting Health and Human Rights

COMMUNITY
guide

The Real
Impact of the
Swedish Model
on Sex Workers





Introduction

In 1999 Sweden changed its sex work laws. Under the new laws, selling sex remained 'legal', but clients and third parties were criminalised.

Originally, the intention of this new legal framework was to achieve gender equality, though currently the idea that sex work and trafficking can be eliminated by 'ending demand' is used to justify and promote it. There is pressure in many countries to adopt this model.

This model has damaging consequences for sex workers' health, rights and living conditions. However, these negative impacts are rarely discussed, and sex workers' voices are consistently silenced.

Sweden's Abolitionist Understanding, and Modes of Silencing Opposition

Since the introduction of the new laws, there has been much advocacy and activism both for and against the legislation. The voices of sex workers and sex workers' rights organisations have been consistently and systematically silenced in the debate about what is often called 'the Swedish model', both in Sweden and internationally.

The beliefs about sex work contained in this law that feed into these 'modes of silencing' also impact how Swedish service providers view sex work and treat sex workers.

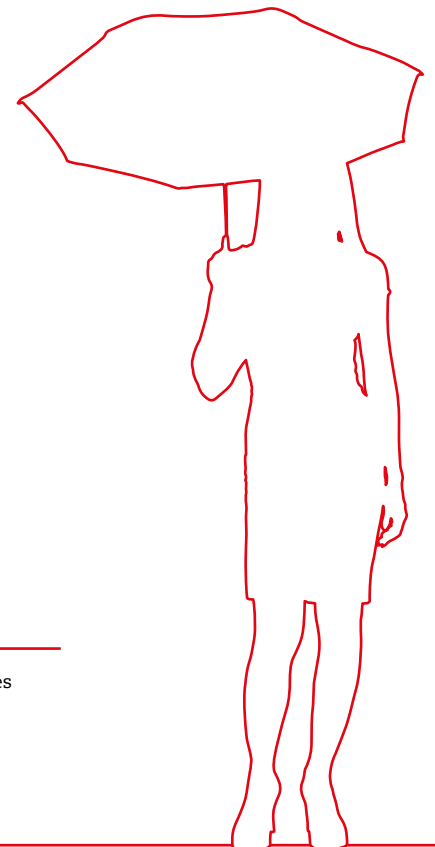
In Swedish law, sex work is seen as a form of violence against women in and of itself. Sex workers' clients are seen to be exclusively men and sex workers exclusively victimised women.

Not everyone agrees with this 'mainstream' Swedish understanding. Sex work – like many other forms of work – is extremely variable. This includes rates of violence and harm that can be associated with sex work. Most sex workers do not identify as victims. Many stress agency and self-determination in the context of their sex work, and motivations for sex work are as diverse as experiences in sex work.

This understanding of sex work tells us that all sex workers are disempowered (cisgender¹) women, and that their clients are men. This fails to recognise the existence and experience of male and transgender sex workers, and female and LGBTQI² clients.

In spite of this, Sweden's consensus on sex work remains. While it has been emphasised on a political level in Sweden that sex workers themselves should contribute to political debate and discussion they are instead excluded and silenced.

This model has damaging consequences for sex workers' health, rights and living conditions. However, these negative impacts are rarely discussed, and sex workers' voices are consistently silenced.



1 Individuals whose gender identity matches their gender assigned at birth, as opposed to 'transgender'.

2 Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex.



Sweden has a long history of using force, segregation and silencing of groups considered to be socially deviant and disruptive. In the case of sex work, several tools, called 'modes of silencing' are used to maintain a crude 'mainstream' understanding without being successfully challenged. These modes are used to undermine the testimony of sex workers and those critical to the sex purchase law:

1 False consciousness

'False consciousness' is an old idea that says that certain groups cannot fully understand their own situation or their motivation. Because the group or individual in question has had their self-awareness undermined, their perspective and description are dismissed and considered untrue.

Trauma undermining self-awareness and choice: Assumes that sex workers are so traumatised by their experiences in sex work (or by the abuse that they are assumed to have experienced before entering sex work) that they are unable to truly understand their situation.

This mode of silencing falls down when we look at how variable and diverse sex workers' experiences are.

Desperation undermining true choice: Assumes that sex workers options are so limited that it is meaningless when sex workers say they choose their work. The assumption is combined with generalisations that sex workers are desperately poor, have mental health problems, and are dependent on drugs/alcohol.

This mode of silencing falls down when we recognise that 'choice' is limited in many areas, not just sex work. In the context of capitalism, very few people have complete freedom of choice. In addition, many sex workers choose sex work from a variety of different options.

Social conditioning undermining objectivity: Assumes that sex workers are unable to see through their own oppression. It assumes that sex workers cannot see the 'truth' about their work.

This is extremely patronising and allows some sex workers voices to be silenced while others are allowed to speak for them.

2 Lying and putting on a brave face

There is an idea that sex workers actively lie or put on a brave face when they speak about their own opinions, experiences, motivations, and lives. This assertion is made in the context of the claim that sex work is universally problematic and traumatising, resulting in sex workers wishing to conceal the 'true' nature of their work.

This mode of silencing undermines sex workers' experiences, and also the validity of research and writing that actively includes sex workers' voices.

3 An un/misrepresentative perspective

There is an assertion that a perspective that differs from the 'mainstream' understanding is **not representative of sex workers** generally.

This is usually used when sex workers have proved impossible to silence, where their empowerment and activism has gained recognition and standing in the debate. Since they cannot be credibly accused of false consciousness or lying, it is claimed that their testimony does not represent the experience of the vast majority of sex workers.

This mode of silencing is particularly used to silence sex workers who are not cisgender women. Since justifying the Swedish model relies on seeing sex work as a form of male violence against women, male and transgender sex workers' existences are ignored.

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4 **Caricaturing and/or demonising testimony and the speaker of the testimony**

Individuals and organisations that focus on a rights-based approach towards sex work (as opposed to abolitionism) will have their perspectives distorted. They may be misrepresented as being liberal, actively pro-sex work, promoting promiscuity, and even supporting ‘pimps’ and ‘traffickers’.

This mode of silencing is usually used when the others have failed.

These modes of silencing are powerful tools: they can be used interchangeably, or together. These tools are used in many situations where sex workers, sex worker activists, their allies, academics, and so on, make arguments that conflict with fundamentalist feminist beliefs.

By understanding these modes of silencing, they may be more effectively challenged when arguing against the understandings that justify the Swedish model.

Impacts of the Sex Purchase Law: Street-Based Sex Work and Levels of Sex Work

When the law was introduced, there were voices in the debate in Sweden that expressed concern that sex work may move underground, and that sex work could become more dangerous. Those in favour of the law said that there would not be negative impacts, and since the law criminalised only clients, sex workers would be shielded from harm. This has not been the case. The reality is that sex workers face increasing difficulties.

Sex workers who have been most impacted by the sex purchase law are those who are marginalised and most in need of services, protection, and

assistance. Instead of support, they have experienced oppression, stigma and criminalisation.

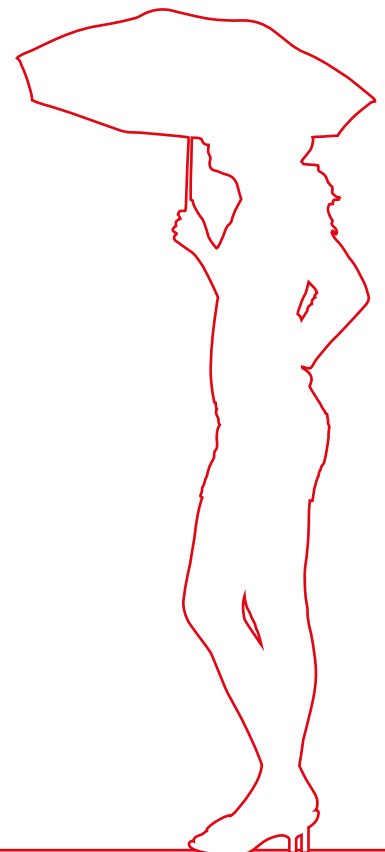
Since the introduction of the law, stigma against sex workers has increased. There is a near-consensus on this, and it is supported by a large body of evidence, including the state’s investigation into the effects of the law.

The law has also created increased competition, and sex workers have less power when negotiating with clients.

The direct negative impacts of the sex purchase law are very much cause and effect:

- The sex purchase law has been used to target public sex work in Sweden.
- Therefore, fewer clients are willing to buy sex on the street, for fear of arrest.
- Some sex workers moved off-street to continue working, which increases their distance from service providers and police protection.
- Sex workers who continue working on the street are often marginalised or do not have the resources or knowledge to establish themselves indoors.
- Street-based sex workers now have to accept lower incomes and provide more services. Fewer clients means increased competition which has pushed down prices.
- As clients are fearful of arrest, sex workers on- and off-street have difficulties in screening and negotiating with clients.
- This places sex workers at risk of danger and violence. Fear of being arrested also means that clients are less likely to report suspected abuse and exploitation.
- The law has given more power to clients and has disempowered sex workers.

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Have levels of sex work in Sweden decreased?

Despite the lives of many sex workers now being more difficult, there is absolutely no convincing evidence demonstrating that overall levels of sex work have decreased in Sweden.

Immediately after the law was introduced there was a substantial drop in levels of street-based sex work. However, only a small percentage of sex work in Sweden was street-based. A decline in levels of street-based sex work does not indicate an overall decrease in sex work.

It is not even certain that street-based sex work decreased permanently: soon after the law's introduction in 1999, street-based sex work levels increased again. Levels today may be in line with those that were recorded previous to 1999.

Some argue that the negative impacts of the law indicate its success. Yet despite claims that the law protects sex workers, and despite claims that the law has reduced levels of sex work, there is no evidence that people have stopped buying or selling sex due to the sex purchase law. There is no evidence that levels of sex work have declined as the law intended.

The Swedish model may be challenged on two key points:

- 1 The Swedish model has failed in its aim to decrease levels of sex work in Sweden.
- 2 The Swedish model has resulted in increased difficulties and danger associated with sex work.

Impacts of the Swedish Model's Justifying Discourses on Service Provision

The ideas used to justify the Swedish Model have a negative impact on the services that sex workers rely on. These ideas – advocated by abolitionist radical feminists – include:

- That sex work is a form of violence.
- That the violence that can be associated with sex work is constant and unchangeable.
- The generalisation that sex workers are passive, disempowered victims.

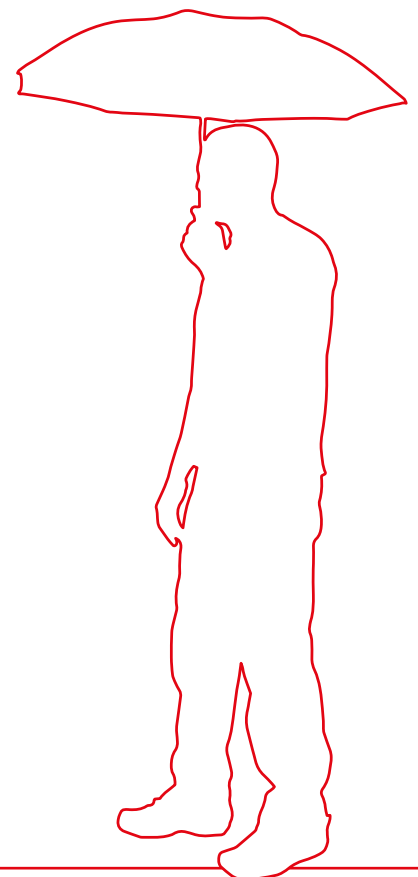
What is harm reduction and why is it needed?

As with many other jobs, harms can be associated with sex work. These harms are created or made worse by criminalisation and stigma which marginalise sex workers, increase social exclusion, and push sex work into underground and hidden spaces.

Violence, stigma, and discrimination are all significant harms that can be associated with some sex work. Other concerns include the transmission of HIV and other STIs and blood-borne infections. Like all potential harms that are associated with work and working environments, they can be addressed and reduced.

Harm reduction initiatives do not try to reduce levels of the activity in question, but instead aim to reduce the harms that may be associated with this activity.

There is no evidence that levels of sex work have declined as the law intended.





If harm reduction is important, why is there opposition to harm reduction?

Abolitionist feminists see sex work as a form of violence, and see the variable harms that can be associated with sex work as constant. This means that harm reduction is simply dismissed since:

- 1 Harm reduction does not aim to reduce levels of sex work, and is therefore seen as conflicting with abolitionist aims.
- 2 Abolitionists believe harms surrounding sex work cannot be reduced, and so efforts to reduce harm are seen to be pointless and unrealistic.

Harm reduction for sex workers is opposed, since it is not just seen to be pointless in the context of what are asserted to be unavoidable harms, but is actually seen to encourage and facilitate sex work.

These views on harm reduction have resulted in the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare opposing condom distribution to sex workers, despite sex workers and their clients being a focus in HIV and STI prevention. The Swedish model has resulted in street-based sex workers not being provided with condoms during outreach.

There is also opposition to providing clients of sex workers with condoms. Because purchasing sex is seen as an act of violence, giving condoms to sex workers' clients is viewed as providing the tools to commit a violent offence, not as a means to promote health and harm reduction.

Distributing guides to safe sex work and to harm reduction is also opposed. These guides are felt by some key stakeholders in Sweden to actually encourage sex work, and to even encourage people to *begin* sex work.

Since the purchase of sex has been criminalised, providing harm reduction and information regarding safe sex work is even seen as providing information on how to encourage a crime.

With few harm reduction services, sex workers in Sweden learn how to avoid harm from doing their own research, from educating each other, or from having experienced harm personally.

Selective and conditional service provision for sex workers in Sweden

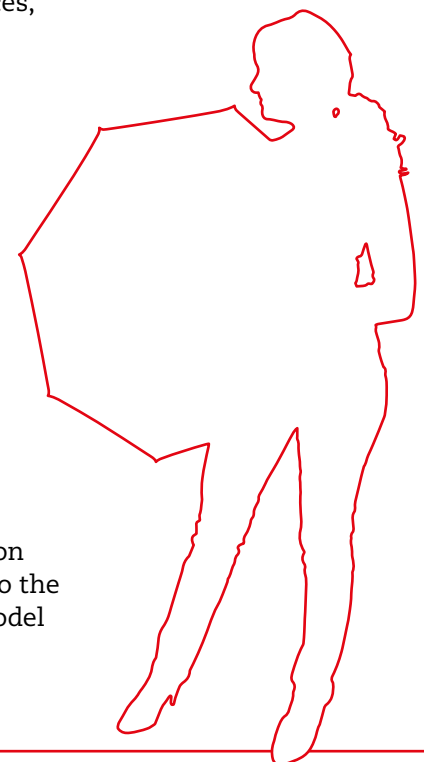
The idea that all sex work is violence and all sex workers are victims means that sex workers who do not identify with these assumptions are excluded from state-sponsored services. Sex workers 'who feel good' are not seen to be worthy of the 'energy' of service providers.

In order to access services, sex workers are often required to stop selling sex and adopt a 'victim' status. Failing to do so may result in important services and support being denied by social workers.

This creates a vicious cycle that perpetuates the idea that all sex work is harmful and all sex workers are victims. In order to access services, sex workers may identify as a victim or claim their sex work is a problem, even if it is not. Sex workers who 'feel good' about their sex work may not even try to access services. Therefore, service providers only encounter sex workers who view their sex work as problematic.

Although the Swedish model is advocated as a progressive piece of legislation, the refusal to provide even the most basic services and harm reduction initiatives to sex workers – due to the ideas that frame the Swedish model – undermines such claims.

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Impacts of Other Legislation and Policy – The Danger of Seeing the Swedish Model in a Vacuum

Though the law has negative side-effects on sex workers, the Swedish model only directly criminalises people who buy sex. It is claimed that sex workers are legally protected from direct interference from the state and that this is what would make the Swedish model 'progressive'.

This sort of assurance is frequently used to promote the Swedish model. It is regularly asserted that this legislation will protect sex workers from the sort of state-sponsored harassment to which they have often been subjected in other states and contexts.

Does the Swedish model protect sex workers from state-sponsored harassment?

No. It must be stressed that the Swedish model – the law criminalising the purchase of sex – should not be analysed in a vacuum.

The claim that sex workers are not directly harassed and 'interfered' with is untrue. The Swedish model has not resulted in an end to sex workers being targeted by the state. Sex workers suffer displacements from public spaces, deportations internationally, evictions from private property and their own property, and issues related to child custody.

Laws and policies other than the sex purchase law

Harassment during client arrests

The Swedish police claim that they do not directly target sex workers, only their clients. This is misleading, since police need to target sex workers in order to target sex workers' clients. For a successful prosecution, the police require either testimony from the sex worker in question, from witnesses, or to catch a sex worker and their client 'in the act'.

This involves highly invasive raids. Sex workers have reported that during raids police have refused to allow them to dress, have verbally assaulted them, have recorded their identity, and have documented the events on film.

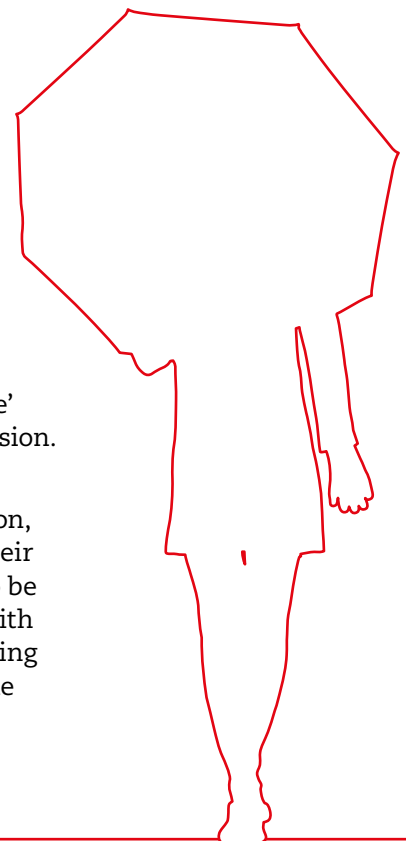
Evictions and domestic harassment

Sex workers have been targeted when not even seeing clients. It is illegal in to provide a location for sex work to take place, or to do sex work on your own property. Police have reported sex workers to their landlords, in order to force an eviction (or the landlords will be prosecuted). Sex workers who are caught doing sex work on their own property lose their right to own it.

Police have also reported sex workers to hotels and venues, causing sex workers to be forced to leave and/or barred from returning. There was also a case of women being denied entry to a venue simply because they were assumed to be sex workers due to their being 'perceived to be' Asian. The court upheld this decision.

Some sex workers may choose to work together for safety, protection, and to avoid feeling isolated in their work. These sex workers can also be targeted by the police, charged with pimping one another under pimping legislation, a law that predates the Swedish model.

Sex workers suffer displacements from public spaces, deportations internationally, evictions from private property and their own property, and issues related to child custody.





Sex workers' partners or adult children can be prosecuted for receiving the income of sex work.

The police have been known to visit sex workers' homes and overtly threaten them with police interference.

It is clear that these laws do not serve to protect sex workers from exploitation, and the law is often used to deliberately make sex workers' lives difficult.

Deportations

Immigration authorities work to displace sex workers internationally through deportations. The Swedish Model sees migrant sex workers as victims of human trafficking. One might think that, with the assumption that all sex workers are victims, that they would be considered in need of protection and assistance. However, both migrant sex workers and victims of trafficking are deported when they come to the attention of the authorities in Sweden.

Migrant sex workers, even EU citizens or individuals with a temporary permit to work in Sweden, are deported. Sex work is not considered an honest way to make a living, so sex workers can be deported in accordance with the Alien Act.

The treatment of migrant sex workers and victims of trafficking undermine Sweden's claims to be a country that prioritises the welfare of sex workers and victims of trafficking.

Child Custody

Sex workers report losing custody of their children, with their sex work being cited as the reason for such interventions.

In Sweden, sex workers are seen as traumatised, abused, vulnerable, disempowered victims, unable to exercise choice and agency in their decision to sell sex. Since sex workers are viewed as unstable victims, they are not seen as capable parents.

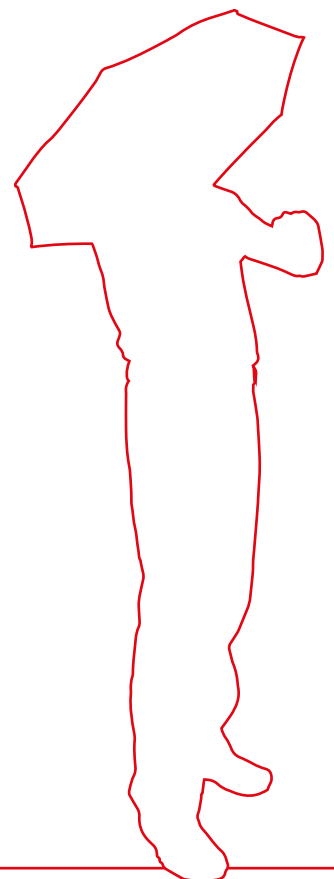
The mode of 'false consciousness' is used to undermine sex workers who do not see their work as a problem. In this view, if a sex worker is seen to be unable to engage with their reality 'objectively', they are seen to be unable to take care of their children.

In opposing the Swedish model, it is important to not only focus on the direct and indirect outcomes of the law itself, but to consider the wider impacts of laws and policies upon the lives of sex workers in Sweden. It conceals the fact that sex workers remain persecuted and criminalised in Sweden. The assertion that sex workers are legally protected by the Swedish model is untrue.

Right to Work and Other Work-Related Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment."³ These provisions of the Declaration are expanded and made legally binding in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which requires countries to "recognise the right to work, including right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he freely chooses or accepts"⁴. It further mandates countries to ensure "safe and healthy working conditions"⁵ and a fair wage.

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3 <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml#a23>

4 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>, Part III, Article 6

5 <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>, Part III, Article 7b



Yet the criminalisation of sex work prevents sex workers from accessing labour rights and protections against unfair treatment in the workplace. Criminalisation allows governments to not recognise sex work as legitimate work. As a result, sex workers' labour rights are not protected. Criminalisation also undermines sex workers' own capacity to protect themselves in the workplace.

When sex workers are criminalised they are not legally able to form collectives, trade unions, or other organisations that could ensure safe working conditions.

The criminalisation of clients of sex workers undermines the rights of sex workers to work and to choose the work that they do. It also shapes negative public perceptions, whereby sex work is not viewed as legitimate work, but rather as victimisation.

There is a very wide range of labour rights which sex workers are entitled to under human rights treaties that are widely ratified, including by the vast majority of states that criminalise sex work. Many of the rights of workers that are well established in human rights law are particularly relevant to sex workers, and lacking in the lives of many sex workers:

- protection against police interference with workers' rights.
- the right to form associations and unions.
- the right to a full range of benefits.

Women in sex work should be supported as parents and should receive all maternity and parental benefits enjoyed by other women in the workforce.

Policies based on the idea that sex work is not legitimate work, or that sex workers do not have agency to choose their work, contradicts a large body of human rights law

and principles that all UN member states have endorsed. In failing to respect, protect, and fulfil the labour rights of sex workers, most countries in the world are in breach of the commitments they have made to workers' rights and women's rights and to fundamental guarantees of safety and non-discrimination.

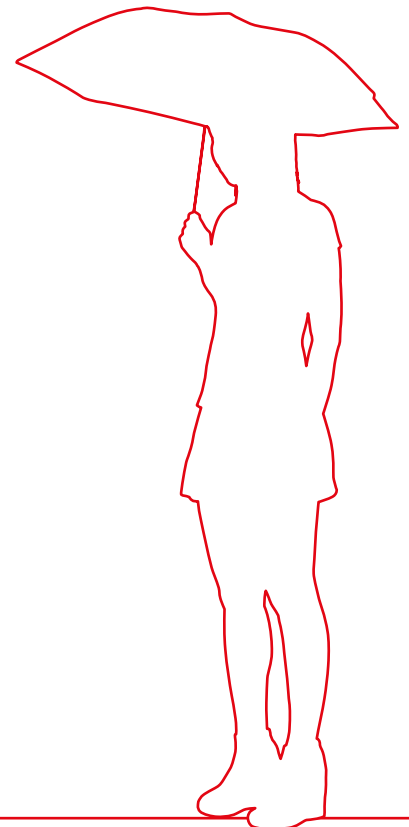
The most important step towards improving sex workers' access to labour rights is the decriminalisation of sex work. Sex work and all activities and persons associated with it, should be removed from criminal law.

International and regional organisations concerned with human rights, workers' rights, HIV, and women's rights, such as the United Nations agencies and the International Labour Organization should be vocal advocates for decriminalisation of sex work and promote the recognition of sex work as legitimate and decent work. They should provide guidance and support for including sex work in existing labour frameworks in relation to conduct and health and safety standards. Sex workers should participate meaningfully in these reforms.

National governments should allow and encourage the formation of sex worker collectives and unions and enable their registration as legal entities. Sex worker organisations can be a valuable channel for information on occupational health and safety and workers' rights. Sex workers should be included in programme and policy decision-making in these areas.

Finally, national human rights institutions and mainstream labour leaders should help to educate policy-makers and the public on the universal right to choose one's work, including sex work, and to practice one's chosen profession.

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Sex work and the Right to Health

All people have the right to health. In human rights law, this means the right to a certain standard of health services. Having access to health services delivered in an ethical, respectful and scientifically sound way is an important part of living a life of dignity. Unfortunately, health services can also be a source of discrimination, stigma, and actions that are disrespectful and even abusive.

Sex workers in many parts of the world lack access to health services that respect their dignity and provide non-judgmental, affordable and good-quality care. Where sex work or activities related to it are forbidden under the law, sex workers may be afraid seek care at government health facilities, even if government services are often the most affordable.

Sex workers are routinely kept from realising their right to health by stigma, discrimination, criminalisation, unjustly punitive health regulations, violence, and ill-conceived donor policies. Where they are unable to ensure consistent use of condoms by clients and other safe sex practices, they are vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. UNAIDS reports that HIV prevalence amongst sex workers is on average 12 times higher than in the general population. In spite of facing increased HIV risk, sex workers are often excluded from comprehensive HIV prevention, treatment and care services.

Alarmingly, research carried out by Rose Alliance in Sweden in 2014 found that 30% of those interviewed have experienced problems in getting an HIV test in Sweden.

The anti-sex work policy of the U.S. government, which remains the most important donor to HIV programmes internationally, has been an important

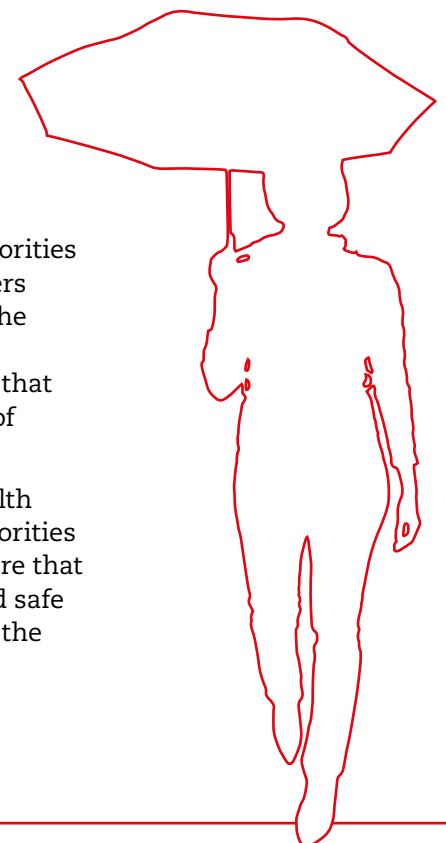
barrier to funding health services for sex workers. Both U.S. anti-trafficking laws and the law enabling U.S. funding for HIV programmes internationally restrict U.S. funding to organisations that are formally opposed to 'prostitution'. Other countries, notably Sweden, also have anti-sex work policies built-in to their foreign aid requirements.

In countries where sex work is legal under certain circumstances and regulated by the state, mandatory health examinations, including HIV testing, may be administered in punitive or disrespectful ways. '100% condom use' programmes have been implemented in ways that violate the rights of sex workers.

Successful experiences in improving sex workers' access to good-quality health services lead to a number of lessons and recommendations:

- **Decriminalisation is a key to the right to health:** it is essential for removing many barriers to health care for sex workers.
- **Right to organise and associate:** organisations or collectives of sex workers may be able to do more than individuals to remove barriers to health services.
- **Quality and accessibility of health services:** the whole community benefits when the right of sex workers to good-quality health services is respected. Public health authorities should ensure that sex workers participate meaningfully in the design, implementation and evaluation of health services that they use and in the training of health care workers.
- **Workplace health:** public health and occupational safety authorities should work together to ensure that sex workers have healthy and safe working conditions, which is the right of all workers.

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Sex Work and Arbitrary Interference with Families

Everyone has the right to establish and/or create a family. Everyone also has a right to protection from arbitrary interference with his or her family and privacy. The Convention on the Rights of the Child⁶, the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world, grants children the right to enjoy the protection of their parents. The state can separate parents and children only in rare cases, involving abuse or neglect of the child by the parents, or other extreme circumstances.

Yet sex workers often face the removal of their children; an extreme form of discrimination. This is based on moral judgements or negative assumptions judging sex workers as irresponsible and unable to make decisions. Criminalisation of sex work makes it easy for authorities to portray sex workers as unfit parents. When sex workers are portrayed as traumatised victims, it is also easy to make the case that they are incapable of being good parents.

International legal protections and standards on this issue are clear:

- Children must not be removed from the care of their parents except as a measure of last resort. There must be evidence to justify the removal of children, based on the best interests of the child.
- Judging sex workers as incapable of being parents solely on the grounds of a moral judgment against sex work is contrary to human rights norms.
- All people have the right to be free from arbitrary interference with their family life and privacy and from arbitrary, discriminatory, and unjust attacks on their honour.

It is clear that many countries grossly violate these basic standards. Policies, laws and social attitudes perpetuate negative assumptions about sex

workers' ability to parent. Connecting sex work to unfit parenting is not only discriminatory: it is an unjust attack on the honour, rights, and dignity of sex workers.

As part of decriminalisation of all aspects of sex work, governments should review their laws, policies, regulations, programmes, and social services. They should ensure that actions taken to protect the children of sex workers do not violate the rights of the sex worker or the children involved. The actions should reflect the best interests of the child.

International organisations should provide guidance for the review of laws, policies, and practices.

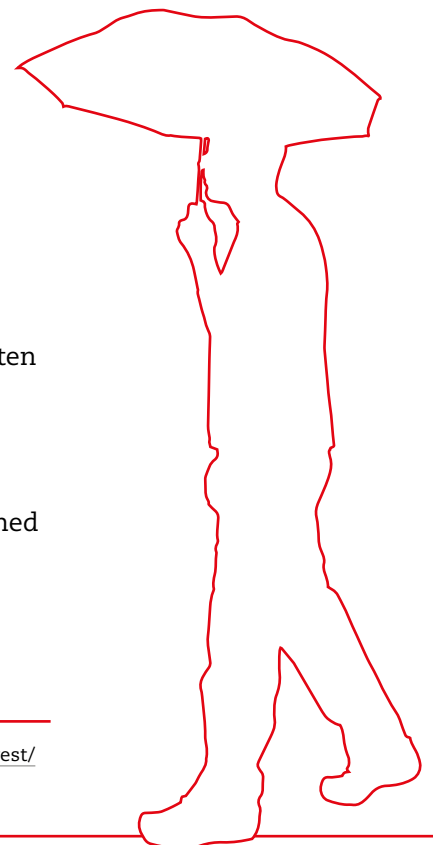
National and international human rights bodies should make public statements about the injustice of using sex work as the reason for removing children from their parents. They should also advocate and facilitate the review of cases in jurisdictions where sex workers have lost child custody rights.

Sex workers should be allowed to form organisations and collectives like any other group in civil society. They should be supported by the state to use their collective capacity to fulfil their responsibilities as parents.

Sex Work and Violence: Obligations of the State

Sex workers are vulnerable to violence in many settings. They often experience violence at the hands of the police, from clients and the general public. Many experiences of violence stem from stigma and discrimination, which are heightened when sex work is criminalised.

Connecting sex work to unfit parenting is not only discriminatory: it is an unjust attack on the honour, rights, and dignity of sex workers.



⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>



Violence against sex workers may take the form of rape, physical violence, torture, and homicide. Sex workers also experience psychological and emotional violence, vilification, hate speech, and social isolation. Female, male and transgender sex workers are all vulnerable to violence.

Depicting sex work as inherently victimising is a form of violence against sex workers that contradicts the spirit of human rights protections to which Sweden and other Nordic countries are committed. Under human rights law, all persons have the agency to choose their livelihood, and all persons have a right to bodily security, to lives of dignity, and freedom from stigma and discrimination.

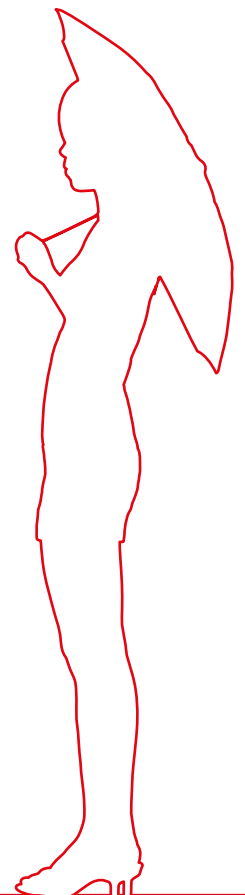
Information on violence against sex workers is, in some places, very limited. Sex workers who experience violence are often afraid to report it to the police. Police may not take sex workers' reports seriously and, in many cases, police are the perpetrators of violence against sex workers. In some places such as Sweden, police and social service agents may work together to target sex workers as a way to arrest clients, or to make the case that sex workers are unfit parents. These actions also make it unlikely that sex workers will risk reporting violence.

International law prohibiting violence against all persons, as well as commentaries of UN treaty bodies, reports of UN Special Rapporteurs, binding regional prohibitions, and some court decisions, highlight the vulnerability of female sex workers to violence. It is the responsibility of states to address this vulnerability. While most states are grossly negligent in this area, there is emerging experience in many countries demonstrating effective measures for protecting women sex workers from violence.

Some actions that should be taken to reduce violence against sex workers include:

- **Decriminalisation of sex work, including decriminalisation of both the sale and the purchase of sex.** Decriminalisation would limit abusive and violent practices by police, enable sex workers to organise for their own protection more easily, and, over time, reduce the stigma associated with criminality that causes social disdain and abuse.
- **Ensuring capacity of sex workers to seek justice:** where decriminalisation is not immediately possible or during periods of transition to decriminalisation, it should be a priority of governments, international donors, United Nations leaders, and civil society groups focused on human rights, to ensure that sex workers to have access to legal services and justice.
- **Participation of sex workers in documentation of abuses and follow-up action:** in order to protect sex workers from violence, abuses must be documented. Follow-up actions, including ensuring that reported abuses are pursued in the criminal justice system, must be transparent and independently monitored.
- **UN leadership:** there is a clear need for legally binding UN-level human rights law on violence against women that recognises the vulnerability of women in sex work to violent abuse
- **Human rights institutions:** in some countries, such as Sweden, laws and policies are based on the demeaning and dehumanising idea that sex workers lack agency. Human rights institutions and leaders should educate policy-makers and the public on fundamental human rights standards. Sex workers have the right to choose their means of livelihood, to live in dignity, and to be free of stigma and vilification.

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NSWP is part of Bridging the Gaps – health and rights for key populations.

Together with almost 100 local and international organisations we have united to reach 1 mission: achieving universal access to HIV/STI prevention, treatment, care and support for key populations, including sex workers, LGBT people and people who use drugs.

Go to: www.hivgaps.org for more information.

