



Sweden Must Reject the Expansion of Sex Work Criminalisation: Protect Rights, Not Repression

23/04/2025

We, the undersigned civil society organisations and individuals, strongly oppose the Swedish government's proposal (prop. 2024/25:124 - Chapter 6, p. 28-38)¹ to expand the criminalisation of sex work to include the purchase of sexual acts performed remotely, such as webcamming and erotic modelling. This proposal represents a regressive and dangerous step that threatens the human rights, privacy, safety and livelihoods of sex workers and digital creators in Sweden and beyond.

Under the guise of protecting vulnerable individuals, this proposal risks intensifying state surveillance, expanding unaccountable policing of digital platforms, and reinforcing a legal regime that systematically erases the consent, autonomy and voices of sex workers themselves.

While the government frames this proposal as a necessary step to protect individuals from exploitation in the digital age, its actual impact will be deeply harmful. Rather than offering meaningful protection, the expanded criminalisation of sexual acts, especially those performed remotely, will further marginalise the very people it claims to defend. To understand the real consequences of this proposal, we must look beyond its stated intentions and examine how it will function in practice. As it stands, we see many harmful impacts that are guaranteed by this proposal.

1. It criminalises consensual digital labour.

Digital sex work, such as webcamming or erotic content creation and distribution, is a legitimate source of income and form of self-expression. For many, it is a form of work that

¹ <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/proposition/2025/04/prop.-202425124>

offers greater control over boundaries, scheduling and visibility². Criminalising remote sexual services will eliminate a vital option for those seeking to work independently and securely.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, digital platforms became a lifeline for sex workers who lost in-person income overnight. Many turned to camming, subscription platforms, and other forms of online sex work to survive³. This shift was not only adaptive, it was protective. Taking this option away will undermine harm reduction and increase economic vulnerability.

2. It expands and exacerbates the harms of client criminalisation.

Sweden's model of criminalising clients has been repeatedly shown, by global research, to harm sex workers, not help them. Studies by Amnesty International⁴, UNAIDS⁵, and academic research across Europe⁶ have documented that client criminalisation increases

² Cunningham, S. *et al.* (2017) 'Behind the screen: Commercial sex, digital spaces and working online'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2017.11.004>.

Kelberga (Kelberg), A. and Martinsone, B. (2023) 'Motivation of sex workers who provide camming services to engage in sex with their real-life and virtual partners'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1173902>.

³ ESWA (2023) *Conditions, Control and Consent: Exploring the impact of platformisation of sex work*. Available at: https://www.eswalliance.org/conditions_control_and_consent_exploring_the_impact_of_platformisation_of_sex_work.

⁴ Amnesty International (2016) *The human cost of 'crushing' the market: Criminalization of sex work in Norway*. Available at: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur36/4034/2016/en/>.

⁵ UNAIDS (no date) *Criminalisation has hurt sex workers and perpetuated the AIDS pandemic. UNAIDS welcomes South Africa's call to end it*. Available at: https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/pressreleaseandstatementarchive/2022/december/20221204_south-africa.

⁶ Oliveira, A. *et al.* (2023) 'Understanding the Impact of EU Prostitution Policies on Sex Workers: A Mixed Study Systematic Review'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13178-023-00814-2>.

Vuolajärvi, N. (2022) 'Criminalising the Sex Buyer: Experiences from the Nordic Region'. Available at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/women-peace-security/assets/documents/2022/W922-0152-WPS-Policy-Paper-6-singles.pdf>

Stadtman, G. and Sonnabend, H. (2019) 'Good Intentions and Unintended Evil? Adverse Effects of Criminalizing Clients in Paid Sex Markets'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545701.2019.1644454>.

Levy, J. and Jakobsson, P. (2014) 'Sweden's abolitionist discourse and law: Effects on the dynamics of Swedish sex work and on the lives of Sweden's sex workers'. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895814528926>.

stigma, pushes sex work underground, reduces safety and limits access to justice for sex workers facing violence.

Adding remote sexual services to the scope of criminalisation will only worsen these effects. It will make clients more fearful, more secretive, and less willing to communicate or engage with safety protocols. It will further isolate sex workers, particularly migrants and trans people, who already face disproportionate marginalisation and barriers to support.

3. The proposal relies on vague, unenforceable legal standards.

The proposed language hinges on ambiguous terms like “induce” and “primary purpose,” which legal experts and courts have warned will lead to confusion, overreach and the potential criminalisation of consensual adult relationships, especially those involving financial inequality or emotional complexity.

4. The proposal expands surveillance and undermines digital rights.

The enforcement of this law will rely on invasive monitoring of online communication, platform activity, and financial transactions. This will expose not only sex workers and creators to intensified data surveillance and breaches of privacy, disproportionately affecting women, LGBTQI+ people and migrants.

For sex workers, privacy and data protection are not luxuries⁷, they are essential to safety, autonomy and dignity⁸. The ability to control how one is identified, tracked, and exposed online is a matter of survival for many sex workers, especially those facing criminalisation, migration precarity, or stigma. Privacy is a human right, enshrined in international law⁹, and sex workers, like all people, are entitled to live free from invasive state surveillance and policing of their digital lives.

Sex workers have long been the canaries in the digital coal mine. When their rights are eroded, through censorship, criminalisation, or surveillance, those same tools and tactics are often later used against other communities: journalists, LGBTQI+ people, youth, and political dissidents. The criminalisation of digital sex work sets a dangerous precedent that puts everyone’s human rights at risk.

⁷ EU AI | *Protect Not Surveil* (no date). Available at: <https://protectnotsurveil.eu/#resources>.

⁸ ESWA (2022) *Contested and Misunderstood: The value of privacy and data protection for sex workers*. Available at: https://www.eswalliance.org/contested_misunderstood_value_privacy_data_protection_sex_workers.

⁹ European Union (2012) *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. [online] Official Journal of the European Union, C 326/391. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>

5. The proposal endangers online communities and platforms.

Websites and platforms hosting or facilitating consensual digital sex work could be prosecuted for “digital pimping” creating a chilling effect that may lead to mass deplatforming of sex workers¹⁰, mirroring the harms documented under regressive FOSTA/SESTA law¹¹ in the United States that was enacted by the Trump Government in 2018. The result of this proposal will be the same: increased precarity due to sex workers losing their income, not protection.

6. The proposal undermines legal clarity and constitutional protections.

The proposal introduces inconsistencies with Sweden’s own Freedom of Expression Act¹². In doing so, it threatens to erode constitutional safeguards and opens the door to selective enforcement and censorship, which puts everyone in Sweden in danger. Sweden’s constitutional protection of free speech and media is a cornerstone of its democratic identity. Expanding criminal law into this space, without careful legal distinction, proportionality and protection for lawful expression, undermines that foundation.

If sex workers and digital creators can be criminalised for engaging in or facilitating constitutionally protected expression, no one’s rights are safe in Sweden.

Based on our concerns, we ask the Swedish Government to:

- Withdraw this proposal in its current form.
- Consult directly with sex workers and digital rights experts before drafting any further reforms.
- Protect the digital safety and economic rights of workers across platforms.
- Invest in services, not criminalisation: Provide financial support, adequate housing, healthcare and rights-based outreach.

Sweden once positioned itself as a global leader on gender equality and social justice. But equality without consent is coercion, protection without listening is paternalism, and a society

¹⁰ Blunt, D. and Wolf, A. (2020) ‘Erased: The impact of FOSTA-SESTA and the removal of Backpage on sex workers’. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201220148>.

¹¹ NSWP (2018) *U.S.A. FOSTA/SESTA legislation*. Available at: <https://www.nswp.org/resource/nswp-briefing-notes/usa-fostasesta-legislation>.

¹² Government Offices of Sweden (2023) *The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression (1991:1469)*. Available at: <https://www.riksdagen.se/globalassets/05.-sa-fungerar-riksdagen/demokrati/the-fundamental-law-on-freedom-of-expression-2023-eng.pdf>

that claims to care for the most vulnerable must not criminalise their means of income generation and deny their agency.

We call on the Swedish government and Parliament to reject this misguided proposal in its entirety and commit instead to a model of policy-making that is inclusive, evidence-based and grounded in human rights.

Sex work is not a crime. Digital labour is not a threat. Sex workers' safety and human rights are not up for debate.

Respectfully,

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2. Access Now, Brussels, Belgium
3. AIDS Action Europe, Europe
4. APROSEX, Spain
5. Aspiration, Europe
6. Association for Support of Marginalized Workers STAR-STAR Skopje, North Macedonia
7. Bristol Sex Workers Collective, UK
8. CATS, Spain
9. CO "LEGALIFE-UKRAINE", Ukraine
10. Comitato per i Diritti Civili delle Prostitute , Italy
11. Correlation-European Harm Reduction Network, The Netherlands
12. Danes je nov dan, Inštitut za druga vprašanja, Slovenia
13. Decrim Now, UK
14. Dekrim Kolektiv, Czech Republic
15. Equinox Initiative for Racial Justice, Europe
16. ESPACE P, Belgium
17. European AIDS Treatment Group, Belgium

18. European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Europe
19. European Network for the Promotion of Rights and Health Among Migrant Sex Workers, Europe
20. Fair Trade Sex Work (FTS), Finland
21. Glitch, UK
22. Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP), Global
23. Grisélidis, France
24. GSPF, Gesellschaft für Sexarbeits- und Prostitutionsforschung, Düsseldorf, Germany
25. HPLGBT, Ukraine
26. Human Rights Watch (HRW), Global
27. Hydra e.V., Germany
28. iBUS Innsbrucker Beratung und Unterstützung für Sexarbeiter*innen, Austria
29. Intersex Ireland, Ireland
30. Kamelia Collective, Poland
31. KASSANDRA e.V., Germany
32. La Strada International
33. LEFÖ/TAMPEP - Beratung und Gesundheitsprävention für Migrantinnen* in der Sexarbeit, Austria
34. Life Quality Improvement Organisation Flight, Zagreb, Croatia
35. Movimento dxs Trabalhadores do Sexo (MTS), Portugal
36. NGO Juventas, Podgorica, Montenegro
37. Northern Police Monitoring Project, UK
38. Odysseus Civic Association, Bratislava, Slovakia
39. Oikeus työhön (Right to work), Finland
40. OTRAS, Spain
41. Peace Institute, Slovenia
42. PICUM - Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, Europe
43. PION - The Sex Workers' Interest Organisation in Norway, Norway
44. Pro-tukipiste, Finland
45. ProCoRe, Switzerland
46. Prostitution Information Center, The Netherlands
47. Rauða Regnhlíf/Red Umbrella Iceland, Iceland
48. Red Edition – Verein zur Unterstützung und Beratung marginalisierter professioneller Migrant*innen, Austria
49. Red Insight Media, The Netherlands
50. Right Side HRD NGO, Armenia

51. Roter Stöckelschuh, Germany
52. SekswerkExpertise, Platform for the Advancement of Sex Workers' Rights, The Netherlands
53. SexworkersCollective, Switzerland
54. Sex Work Research Hub, UK
55. Sex Workers Alliance Ireland (SWAI), Ireland
56. Sex Workers Union, branch of BFAWU, UK
57. Sex Worker Action Group (SWAG) Berlin, Germany
58. Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement (SWARM), UK
59. SIO (Sexarbejdernes Interesseorganisation), Denmark
60. Statewatch, UK
61. STRASS, Syndicat du Travail Sexuel, France
62. SUPERRR Lab, Germany
63. SWASH - Sex Work And Sexual Health, Japan
64. SWIPE (Sex Worker Intersectional Peer Education), Italy
65. SXA - Info Information und Beratung für Sexarbeitende und Multiplikator:innen, Austria
66. The 6x6 Collective, Berlin, Germany
67. The Black Sex Worker Collective, Global
68. The Red Van - Safety, Health and Dignity for Sex Workers, Denmark
69. The Sex Workers' Rights Advocacy Network, CEECA region
70. TGEU - Trans Europe and Central Asia
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