



SWOP USA

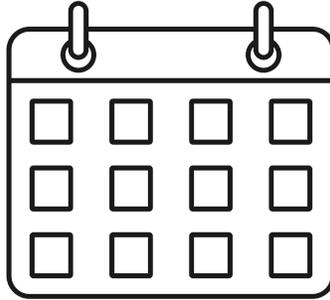
March 3rd Organizer Toolkit

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Contents

1. What is International Sex Worker Rights Day
2. Global Sex Worker Rights Goals
3. 10 Things to Do to Celebrate March 3rd
4. What Sex Workers and Advocates Say About Sex Worker Rights
5. March 3rd Fact Sheet
6. Explaining Sex Worker Rights & Regulation Fact Sheet



What is International Sex Worker Rights Day, and How Did it Start?

International Sex Worker Rights Day began in 2001 when over 25,000 sex workers gathered in India for a festival organized by a Calcutta-based group called Durbar [Mahila Samanwaya Committee](#) (Unstoppable Women’s Synthesis Committee). In 2002, Durbar invited organizations from around the world to join them in commemorating Sex Worker Rights Day on March 3rd:

“We felt strongly that that we should have a day what need to be observed by the sex workers community globally. Keeping in view the large mobilization of all types of global sexworkers [Female, Male, Transgender], we proposed to observe 3rd March as THE SEX WORKERS RIGHTS DAY.

Knowing the usual response of international bodies and views of academicians and intellectuals of the 1st world [many of them consider that sex workers of third world are different from 1st world and can’t take their decision] a call coming from a third world country would be more appropriate at this juncture, we believe. It will be a great pleasure to us if all of you observe the day in your own countries too...We need your inspiration and support to turn our dreams into reality.”

Since 2002, sex workers and advocates around the world have organized protests, gatherings, film screenings, art shows, and lectures on and around March 3 to raise awareness about human rights abuses sex workers face.

Ultimately, March 3rd provides an opportunity to shine a spotlight on sex worker activism, resilience, community and strength, and away from salaciousness, violations and paternalism. Sex worker organizing extends across the globe, with efforts aimed at demanding recognition of sex worker autonomy, freedom from criminalization and legal protection from violence and abuse.



Some Global Sex Worker Rights Goals

- Stop police harassment and violence against sex workers, including robbery and rape
- Ensure sex workers have safe, fair working conditions
- Eliminate barriers to accessing healthcare, housing, mainstream employment, and financial services.
- End stigma and discrimination.
- Identify and assist victims of sex trafficking and reduce vulnerabilities to trafficking.
- Increase economic, racial and gender equality to address economic compulsion.
- Stop harmful brothel raids, sting operations, and crackdowns on sex worker communities online and outdoors.
- Decriminalize sex work.



10 Things to Do to Celebrate March 3rd

- 1.) **Organize a film screening** - Show a feature film, like Live Nude Acts Unite! Or The American Courtesans. Or show a half-dozen short films from around the world! There are many amazing sex worker rights videos: we've organized some on [YouTube](#), and you can find more on other video-sharing sights.
- 2.) **March or Protest** - Organize a protest at the legislature, the court house, the public square. You can protest a specific local issue, or you can also just demonstrate to raise awareness about sex worker rights!
- 3.) **Organize a public discussion** - About global sex worker organizing, sex worker human rights abuses and what's being done to stop them, or how to be an ally.
- 4.) **Hold a community organizing and strategic planning day** - Use "International Sex Worker Rights Day" to bring your sex worker community together and create goals and advocacy objectives.
- 5.) **Use your event to create a consensus statement or new resource** - Organize a guided discussion about "decriminalization" or "how to be an ally" or "what I love about myself" or priority issues, take notes, and then turn your notes into a statement or hand out! Or hold a discussion of issues people in your community has and turn the notes into a needs assessment or the start of community participatory action research.
- 6.) **Launch a social media campaign** - Fighting stigma or to raise awareness about a specific human rights abuse or issue. Chose a slogan or hashtag, get poster board or dry erase boards and markers, and take photos of people with the signs - Tweet & FB post!
- 7.) **Hold a sex worker self-care day** - March third is just as much about celebrating sex worker communities as it is about making change -- and we need to take care of ourselves too! Organize a potluck picnic or brunch. Play beauty salon. Give each other back rubs.
- 8.) **Hand out and/or put up flyers in high-traffic areas** - If you want to do something public but are short on person-power, handing out flyers downtown, in a train station, or at a shopping center only takes one or two people. Shy? Put up flyers on coffee shop boards and flyer racks.

9.) Organize an art show - many sex workers are creative, talented people!

Showcase some of their work!

10.) Organize an open-mic night at a local bar or coffee shop!



RIGHTS NOT RESCUE

International Sex Workers Rights Day

How did International Sex Workers Rights Day begin?

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“We are not ONLY victims or ONLY empowered - the reality of the sex trade is complicated and our lives don't fit into a box. Don't ignore our reality by assuming we are one or the other (we might be both or neither - let us define how we view our lives.”
-YWEP & Different Avenues

“Legislation that governs sex work without consulting sex workers and advocacy organizations such as SWOP, inevitably falls short of understanding the complex nature of the sex industry. Sex workers demand inclusion. NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US!” -SWOP-Seattle

“Criminalizing sex work, and conflating the buying or selling of consensual sex between adults with trafficking, aggravates the risks sex workers face. It also undermines the response to HIV, and perpetuates harmful patriarchal ideologies and gender stereotypes.”
-Women's Global Network for

“In environments where many aspects of sex work are criminalized ? including, for example, soliciting, living off the earnings of a sex worker (the latter generally penalizing families and children of sex workers the most), or other provisions criminalizing third parties ? sex workers face discrimination and stigma which undermine their human rights, including to liberty, security of the person, equality, and health.”
-Sangram (India)

“As the largest network of service providers to the victims of trafficking in the US we are dismayed to see the continued conflation of sex trafficking with sex work, and the ongoing confusion between buyers of sexual services and traffickers. We are concerned about the consequences of such tactics on sex workers and trafficking victims alike. The unintended consequences of these programs include increased isolation and vulnerability to violence and exploitation, as well as a deepening of the rift that prevents many trafficking victims from reaching out to law enforcement when they seek to escape their situation.” -The Freedom Network-USA



RIGHTS *NOT* RESCUE

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- Increase economic, racial and gender equality to address economic compulsion.
- Stop harmful brothel raids, sting operations, and crackdowns on sex worker communities online and outdoors.

“The decriminalization model is the only legal model for sex work that is based within a human rights framework. Criminalization reinforces stigma against sex workers that facilitates continued violations of sex workers human rights.”
-SWEAT&SISKONE
(South Africa)

“The key demand of the sex workers movement in Burma, in Asia and all around the world is simple. We demand that sex work is recognized as work. But we have one other key demand, specific to certain parts of the women’s movement. We demand that we are not treated as victims.”
-KthiWin,
(Asia-Pacific-APNSW)

“As we have repeatedly argued, regulating autonomous sex work and repealing any laws that indirectly encourage harassment and violence against us is the suitable way to respect and guarantee the human rights of those who voluntarily choose to engage in sex work.” -Red Trasex
(South America)

“Even for those who believe that sex work is inherently harmful, criminalizing sex work creates harm in and of itself and only adds to the hardship of those working in the commercial sex industry. Criminalization creates stigma. Criminalization allows authorities to harass, intimidate, and exploit sex workers and individuals who are profiled as sex workers. Criminalization entrenches people in poverty and forecloses the ability of people to leave the sex trade. To protest the decriminalization of selling sex is to insist on further harming sex workers, including those trafficking victims who are forced into sex work.”

-Urban Justice Center, NYC Sex Workers Project



RIGHTS NOT RESCUE

Explaining Sex Worker Rights & Regulation

What Are Sex Worker Rights?

Sex workers' rights encompass a variety of goals being pursued by sex workers, advocates and organizations. They include a wide range of human, health, civil and labor rights of sex workers. The sex worker rights movement goals are diverse and vary from country to country and even between cities, but generally aim to decriminalize and destigmatize sex work and ensure that sex workers are treated fairly by government, private, and broader society.

Who Is a Sex Worker?

The term sex work is most frequently used to refer to the exchange of sex for money, drugs, or other things, especially in health literature. However, as a movement, we use it as an umbrella term to describe full-service sex workers, adult video performers, phone sex operators, dancers in strip clubs, and others who provide sexually-related services.

What human rights issues do sex workers face?

Sex workers face a myriad of human rights issues.

In the United States, the following issues are particularly common:

Discrimination: from health care, immigration officials, housing, family court systems, lending and educational institutions, & broader society.

Verbal and Physical Violence: from law enforcement, intimate partners, communities, clients, and management.

Asset Seizure: by the government and private financial institutions.

Racial and Gender-Based Profiling: resulting in the false profiling of people of color and trans women in public spaces.

Obstruction of a Safe Work Environment: Perpetual raids on or closures of stroll, red light districts, massage parlours, or online adult work spaces disrupt communities. Sex workers rely on each other and these systems to stay safe and economically independent.

“Discrimination against sex workers in India is as much an issue as the discrimination faced by other marginalized groups along lines of class, caste, race or religion. The result of this stigma is the denial of basic rights for both sex workers and their families: women cannot access good health care and are often subject to abuse, violence and exploitation by police and government officials, while their children face harassment in schools and the workplace.” -SANGRAM(INDIA)

The decriminalization model is the only legal model for sex work that is based within a human rights framework Criminalization reinforces stigma against sex workers that facilitates continued violations of human rights.
- SWEAT & SISKONE (South Africa)

What we want is a refocusing of laws to tackle acts of exploitation, abuse and trafficking ? rather than catch-all offences that only criminalize and endanger sex workers.
-Catherine Murphy, Amnesty International

Condom Seizure: by police, or the use of condoms as evidence.

Forced HIV and STI Testing

Arrest, Detention, and Deportation: including of victims of trafficking and children, often under the guise of rescuing victims.

Inability to Find Mainstream, Livable Wage Work: due to race, gender identity, status as a single parent, criminal history, or simply economic inequality and unemployment rates.



RIGHTS NOT RESCUE

Explaining Sex Worker Rights & Regulation

Some Global Sex Work Goals

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“Criminalization of sexual and gender minorities, sex work and drug use contributes to stigma, discrimination and violence against key populations, including by state actors, and is a key barrier to an evidence-informed, rights-based AIDS response.”

-UNAIDS

“When sex workers are no longer seen and treated as ‘criminals’ or ‘accomplices’ they are less at risk of aggressive police tactics and can demand and enjoy better relationships with and protection from police. Decriminalization returns rights to the workers, making them free agents.”

-Amnesty International

“Most interviewees cited a stable workplace with regular clients as key to maintaining good work conditions and improving safety. The majority of participants agreed that working with others was crucial in dealing with problems that arise at work.”

-X:Talk, A Migrant Sex Workers Organisation, (UK)

Regulating Commercial Sex

Criminalization: Criminalizes both clients and sex workers. This enables abuse of sex workers by law enforcement and clients. It disenfranchises and isolates sex workers. And it doesn't stop people from engaging in commercial sex.

Nordic Model: Aims to reduce the harms of full criminalization by only criminalizing clients and third parties. However, sex workers that share an apartment or work together are liable under third party laws, as are family members they share finances with and landlords. While clients are criminalized, this does not deter all clients equally, nor does it shift power imbalances between sex workers and clients. Frequently, sex workers wind up jeopardizing their own safety and screening practices to meet the needs of and new fears of their clients.

Legalization: Creates specific sex industry laws, allowing people to engage in commercial sex in specific contexts, like brothels or red light districts, if they register and qualify for and comply with the terms of registration. There are a number of issues with legalization: it can force sex workers to work in brothels, for management, which reduces sex worker negotiation power, autonomy, and invites labor exploitation and rights abuses. It can force sex workers into more dangerous areas. Registration can impede the ability of sex workers to travel or later get mainstream work due to stigma and travel bans on individuals who have engaged in commercial sex. It can force unnecessary, invasive tests onto sex workers. In order to work legally. Perhaps most importantly, legal regimes often it continues to criminalize the most vulnerable sex workers, such as street-based sex workers and migrant sex workers.

Decriminalization: Removes all laws that could directly or indirectly criminalize or penalize an individual sex worker for engaging in commercial sex, and allows limited regulation of formal, commercial businesses. General tax, business, and criminal laws still apply. This improves sex worker relationships with law enforcement, reduces opportunities for abuse of power by police, increases sex worker autonomy, and ensures the most vulnerable groups of sex workers are not criminalized for their involvement in commercial sex. However, sex workers are often criminalized in multiple ways. Even when sex work is decriminalized, many sex workers are still vulnerable under laws that criminalize drug users, migrant workers and homeless populations: laws against loitering, public alcohol consumption, trespassing, drug possession or sale, survival crimes or undocumented work. It is crucially important to work with harm reduction, homeless, prison and immigration reform advocates to fight the criminalization of not only sex work but the many ways that individual sex workers are criminalized.