

Side-event/panel CSW 63: “Advancing Sex Workers’ Rights to Social Protection”

When: Thursday 14 March 2019 (8:15 AM – 9 :30 AM)
Where: Room CR – 7, United Nations Building, New York
What: Side-event CSW 63: “Advancing Sex Workers’ Rights to Social Protection”
Organized by: The Count Me In! (CMI!) Consortium and the Kingdom of the Netherlands

Summary:

The session focuses on delineating some of the key social protection issues for sex workers from the perspectives of governments, women’s rights movements and sex worker activists from the Global North and Global South. The session is co-organized by The Count Me In (CMI)!¹ – a consortium comprised of women’s rights funders, NGOs and networks from both the Global South and North – and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Panel:

The session will have a moderated panel discussion format, with opportunity for Q&A by the audience. The panel will consist of **Mette Gonggrijp** (Director Social Development / Ambassador Women’s Rights & Gender Equality, the Kingdom of the Netherlands); **Catherine Healy** (New Zealand Prostitutes Collective); and **Lala Maty Sow Ndaiye** (African Sex Workers Association and And Soppeku, Senegal) (TBC). The session will be moderated by **Geeta Misra** (Director of CREA)

Background: It is an important feminist principle that sex workers are rights holders and decision makers. Recognizing sex worker’s labour as work, not dissimilar to other forms of labour, and hence of their economic contribution to society, is integral to respecting, protecting and fulfilling sex workers’ human rights. In fact, ‘(T)he International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that sex workers support between five and eight other people with their earnings. Sex workers also contribute to the economy. In four countries surveyed, ILO found that the sex industry provides between 2 and 14 percent of gross domestic product².’ As workers, sex workers’ human rights claims, including the full range of economic and social rights and well as civil, political and cultural rights.

The struggle for the recognition of sex work as work is closely tied to the struggle for decriminalisation³. Criminalization and the application of other punitive or restrictive regulations that violate the rights of sex workers and foster discriminatory practices and stigmatizing social attitudes, do not eliminate sex work, but rather, create barriers to sex worker’s access to essential social protections such as health care or legal redress, as well as their access to safe working conditions. It places women engaging in sex work at a higher risk of violence, and reduces sex

¹ The CMI! Consortium consists of [Mama Cash](#), including the [Red Umbrella Fund](#), the [Association for Women’s Rights in Development](#) (AWID), [Just Associates](#) (JASS), [CREA](#), [Urgent Action-Africa](#) (UAF-Africa), including its sister funds [Urgent Action Fund](#) (UAF) and [Urgent Action Fund Latin America](#) ([UAF-LAC](#)).

² Global Network of Sex Work Projects Policy Brief on Sex work is Work (http://www.nswp.org/sites/nswp.org/files/policy_brief_sex_work_as_work_nswp_-_2017.pdf)

³ *ibid*

workers' ability to organize with the aim to improve their health and safety or advance their rights⁴. Similarly, conflating consensual adult sex work with human trafficking severely undermines the human rights of sex workers while failing to secure rights of people who are trafficked and leads to the implementation of inappropriate responses that fail to assist either of these groups in realizing their rights, and can contribute to stigma, discrimination and violence⁵. While recognizing that exploitation and labour rights abuses exist, the best way to address these human rights abuses is through the fulfilment of sex workers human rights, including their rights as workers, and through the opposition to all forms of discrimination in law and practice against sex workers⁶.

The session will explore what social protection would mean for a sex worker, and/or what it does mean where it exists. The larger framework of the side event would be on delineating urgent social protection issues for sex workers combined with a focused discussion on decriminalisation and trafficking. In the line with the theme for CSW63, the panel will explore what social protection would mean for a sex worker. Not recognising sex work as work does not end demand. Rather, it makes a sex worker further more susceptible to violence by clients, partners, pimps, brothel owners and the police. Sex workers need to be considered as informal sector workers, and their labour rights, including ensuring minimum wages, right to highest standard of health and social benefits guaranteed. The panel will further explore how decriminalising sex work can (and does) strengthen anti trafficking efforts. Sex worker groups affirm that force and coercion (trafficking) is illegal, and that no one should be forced into sex work. However, the rights and entitlements of consenting adults who enter into sex work on their own volition should be recognised and not confused with the rights and needs of people who are forced into sex work (or any other form of labor). In addition, comprehensive mechanisms that sex worker groups have themselves adopted to ensure that persons who are either underage and/ or have been brought into the fold of sex work against their will, have a dignified way out needs to be recognised and adopted on a larger scale. These are some of the areas the panel will address and explore as a social protection issue. The diverse panel provides a unique opportunity to addressing this issue from a government perspective, women's rights movement perspective, and the perspective of sex worker's rights activist, from both the Global North as well as the Global South.

⁴ <http://www.creaworld.org/sites/default/files/Submission%20to%20UN%20Women.pdf>

⁵ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Anand Grover. New York (NY): United Nations; 2010 (A/HRC/14/20); see also Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW), "The Cost of a Rumour" available at <http://www.gaatw.org/publications/WhatstheCostofaRumour.11.15.2011.pdf>; and Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) "Sex Work is not Trafficking" available at <http://www.nswp.org/resource/sex-work-nottrafficking>.

⁶ See citations listed in footnote 6. See also the Lancet Special Issue on HIV and Sex Work, July 2014 at <http://www.thelancet.com/series/HIV-and-sex-workers> Decker, et al., "Human rights violations against sex workers: burden and effect on HIV, in the Lancet, Volume 385, Issue 9963, 10–16 January 2015, Pages 186–199; J. Amon et. al., Evaluating Human Rights Advocacy on Criminal Justice and Sex Work, International Journal of Health and Human Rights, Jun 2015, Vol. 17 Issue 1, p91-101.