To the attention of Mrs. Magdalena Andersson, Prime Minister of Sweden, and Mrs. Eva Nordmark, Minister for Gender Equality of Sweden.

It has come to our attention that there will be a vote on the 21st of June on a proposal to increase the minimum punishment for the purchase of sexual services from a fine to a prison sentence.

Sex workers in Sweden, as in many countries in Europe and globally, are amongst the most marginalised and discriminated against members of society, and experience high levels of violence and human rights violations.

We urge you to listen to sex workers, to consider current, as well as upcoming, research on the matter, and to take into account the countless recommendations from organisations, including the sex worker-led organisation Red Umbrella Sweden, to start committing to supporting a legal framework for people working in the sex trade, that protects and affirms those individuals' human rights.

We are deeply concerned that research indicates that the current Swedish government's “pursuit of sex buyers and combatting sex trafficking functions as punitive and racialised policing, targeting people in the sex trade and resulting in forced evictions, deportations, and police harassment. This increases their vulnerability for violence and experiences of stigma”.[1]

It is also very alarming to hear that the Swedish government is positioning themselves to support this, when there are many recommendations that Sweden should be adapting the approach and policy making regarding sex work and people in the sex trade. From WHO, Amnesty International, UNAIDS, ILGA Europe, ESWA, NSWP, La Strada International, the Global Alliance Against Traffic In Women, TGEU and independent researchers, there is a clear recommendation to decriminalise sex work, because of the negative effects of any form of criminalisation of sex workers and their environments.[2] The European Convention on Human Rights recognises, under Article 11, the fundamental right to form and to join trade unions, making unionisation an established right that applies across the member states of the Council of Europe.

By this letter we wholeheartedly condemn the inclusion of this legal change, and ask you to remove it from the proposition “Skärpt syn på våldtäkt och andra sexuella kränkningar”, and that it be reconsidered, based on input from sex worker-led organisations, recommendations from international human rights organisations, as well as current and upcoming research, showing that a criminalisation in any aspect of the environments of sex workers is harmful to those it claims to protect.
Från RUS remissvar:

Vi stödjer initiativen att utöka skyddet för barn och unga som utsätts för sexuella kränkningar, förslaget om att förbättra spårsäkringen vid sexualbrott och förslaget om att göra det möjligt att åtala även distansbrott. Däremot avvisar vi förslaget om att utmönstra böter ur straffskalan för köp av sexuella tjänster. Vi anser att regeringen bör beakta forskning som pekar på de negativa konsekvenser som olika typer av förbud mot att köpa sexuella tjänster har för sexarbetare. Vi är också starkt kritiska till att inga organisationer som företräder personer som säljer sexuella tjänster och arbetar för sexarbetares stärkta rättigheter har bjudits in att lämna remissvar.

From RUS' statement of opinion (translated):

We support the initiatives to expand the protection for children and young people that are being sexually violated, the proposal to improve how evidence is secured when a sexual offence has been committed, and the proposal to make it possible to also indict crimes committed at a distance. However, we dismiss the proposal to abolish fine from the penalty scale of purchasing sexual services. We believe that the government should consider research, indicating the negative consequences for sex workers, that different forms of prohibition against the purchase of sexual services have. We are also very critical of the fact, that no organisations representing people selling sexual services, and working towards the strengthening of sex workers’ rights, have been invited to leave a statement of opinion.

[1] Criminalizing the Sex Buyer: Experiences from the Nordic Region. Niina Vuolajärvi Ph.D. Policy Brief, will be published on the 24th of May in the Centre for Women, Peace and Security Policy brief series

[2] Ireland: “We live within a violent system.” Structural violence against sex workers in Ireland - Amnesty International

Stopping the Traffick? The problem of evidence and legislating for the ‘Swedish model’ in Northern Ireland | Anti-Trafficking Review (antitraffickingreview.org)

Search | ILGA-Europe; Empowering LGBTI sex workers – new position paper | ILGA-Europe
This letter is signed by the following civil society organisations:
This letter is signed by the following activists, academics and subject matter experts:

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This letter is signed by the following members of the public:

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