



## **International call out: Protest the Swedish government's proposition of increasing criminalization of sex workers environments!**

On the 31st of May a proposition of a series of legal changes by the government is to be voted on by the parliament in Sweden. The title of this is: "Sharpened view of rape and other sexual violations". We want to make it clear that we support the initiatives to increase the protection of children and adults who are exposed to sexual abuse. The only change we oppose is the raise of the minimum punishment for purchase of consensual sexual services from a fine, to a prison sentence.

Neither Red Umbrella Sweden, nor any other sex worker rights organization in Sweden was officially invited to give our input on the matters of this political process. Matters that will have a detrimental effect on our lives. We independently sent our input to the government, voicing our concerns about how this change will worsen the already harmful conditions for sex workers, upheld by the current Swedish legal system, and asking that they acknowledge research, showing how the criminalization of sex workers' clients contributes to increased stigma, violence, less access to justice and ultimately less protection against sexual abuse.

With a surge in police surveillance, it will not be our clients who are being followed and raided to a larger extent, but sex workers will be the main targets. We fear that as usual the harshest consequences will be targeting the most vulnerable in our communities, such as migrants, trans women, people of colour, mothers, LGBTQIA+ folks, drug users and those who are experiencing poverty. We are also scared of the possibility of other countries, especially those who already have adopted this "model", to follow Sweden's example.

The government has made it clear in their official documents that their point of view, no matter what upcoming studies will show, is that they are supporting the law change regarding sex work. The conflation of abuse and sex work inherently being the same thing is in fact making sex workers more vulnerable to abuse. We are tired of not being listened to and we fear the consequences this upcoming proposition will have on our lives.

The stigma that seems to be rising steadily against sex workers in Sweden is excluding us from social, medical, and legal help and we are forced to work in a criminalized environment that punishes us for making a living. From a study made by Jari Kuosmanen, we can see that, in 1996, 30% of Swedes believed that selling sexual services should be criminalized, whereas, in 2012, 52% believed it should be prohibited by law.[1]

In the already unsafe legal framework, where sex workers are being harassed by police, lack access to rights and safety, are being evicted from our homes, and where migrant workers (as well as trafficking victims) are being deported and racially profiled, we are terrified of

what is coming next. Are we the last piece in the puzzle to be directly criminalised? Will there be a proposition to punish us with fines first and then finally to imprison us?

We want to invite you to **stand together** and join us on the **21<sup>st</sup> of May at 15.00 in Stockholm** for a **demonstration against the Swedish governments proposition** and its systematically unjust treatment of sex workers! For those who cannot join us in person we will also try to organise a series of online protests which there will be more information about soon!

Here is a letter of complaint that you can easily sign so we can then send it to the government: <https://bit.ly/3y06BC8>

To be able to arrange the demonstration, invite members, sex workers and allies locally as well as internationally, we have also started a fundraising campaign. We encourage you to spread this amongst your networks, with your friends, and on social media platforms.

Feel free to donate over at: <https://bit.ly/39pYaWH>

Warm regards,

Red Umbrella Sweden  
<https://redumbrella.se/>