

Sex Workers and The Nordic Model

Speakers: Luca Stevenson (LS) – European Network of Sex Worker Rights; Ophelia (O) – Fuckförbundet; Mimi (M) – STRASS; Kate McGrew (KM) – Sex Workers Alliance Ireland, European Network of Sex Worker Rights; Hanna (H) – Prostitute Interest Organisation of Norway.

In May 2019 SWARM hosted a three day festival involving panel discussions across a wide range of topics that impact on sex workers, and that connect and intersect with sex worker rights organising and broader struggles for justice.

This recording is from that festival.

0:00:00 LS Hi everyone. So my name is Luca Stevenson, I am a sex worker, and I'm the coordinator of ICRSE, which is the European Network of Sex Worker Rights. We are a network for on hundred organisations and thirty countries in Europe and Central Asia. Is that working? Seems weird. And, so the panel is about the Swedish Model, and we're going to hear directly from sex workers in several countries with the Swedish Model. So, I will actually let everyone introduce themselves, because people have different hats and different identities or different personalities, and it's easier if you introduce yourself. I just want to also mention that... that we will be discussing about the Swedish Model which has like a very serious consequences on sex workers in different countries. I'm from France originally, and been living in the UK for fifteen years. And we will also make mention and remember some of our colleagues who have been murdered, who have now passed away since the introduction of the law in different countries, and this can be quite emotional for people who are speaking on the panel, people who have friends with these people. So, you know, if it's getting too much, you know you can like, of course, like there is a quiet space, or you can like talk with somebody from the conference to talk about it. So, I just wanted to mention that at the beginning. So I'll just let everyone first say their name and who they are, and then

we'll have five minute presentation about the Swedish Model in each country, and then a couple of questions, and then opening up to the room.

00:01:45 O I'm Ophelia. I'm from Sweden, and I'm in an organisation called fuckförbundet, and that's there about two years ago. We've had the Swedish Model for twenty years. We were first. [laughs]

00:02:02 M Hi, I'm Mimi. I'm a transgender migrant, originally from Thailand, so I live and work in France as a sex worker, and I'm working with STRASS. It's like a sex worker trade union in France, and acceptance day, and organisation network for transgender people who are migrants and sex workers, and HIV positive people. Yeah.

00:02:26 KM I'm Kate McGrew, I'm a performing artist and a sex worker and the director of the Sex Workers Alliance Ireland and co-convenor of ICRSE. And we've had the Swedish Model now for two years.

00:02:44 H Hello everyone, I'm Hannah. I work for PION, which is the Prostitute Interest Organisation of Norway. I'm a sex worker and we've had the Nordic Model for about ten years now.

00:03:00 LS Also, we have a few pictures that will be on a loop in the background. It's some pictures from an action done by several collectives, as well as some information about some research that has been done with the key findings. So, if you have any questions about the slides, you can ask after if anything is unclear. Thank you. So I'll let everyone introduce the situation in each country for around five minutes. Okay.

00:03:29 O Shall I start?

00:03:29 LS Yes, directly.

00:03:30 O Okay, yeah. So we've had the model now for around twenty years, and... it's a problem in Sweden because there's really not much research from before we got the model, and there's not been much research since. But I think it's hard for outsiders to sort of understand how crazy the situation in Sweden is. Because there's really, really no one on

our side, and it's not really allowed to question the superiority of this legal model, or even ask questions about it. So I know that people who have done research in Sweden, they've had a really hard time because no one's helping them out, no one's giving them numbers. Like, to each and every citizen of Sweden, it is a personal belief in this legal model, and yeah, that makes things really hard for us to organise and to do any research. And I think there's like one dominant narrative of what a sex worker is. Like we don't have this, "Oh, they're bad, slutty immoral whores who want to steal men." It's none of that. It's just like only victim. It's a person who's been kidnapped and then is forced to sell sex, and that's it. Lately, after Me Too, we've also had the story about young women who self-harm by selling sex. So that's a small newish thing, but in general it's like the kidnapped victim from another country. And I think because of that, and because everyone believes in that, it's pretty hard when we talk about things like, "Oh, we experience a lot of stigma," or, you know, "our clients won't give us their names," or, "we can't access healthcare on the same terms as everyone else," because of course that's better than being kidnapped and raped, you know? So whatever we say, it's like, well, the alternative is so much worse. And because it's such a consensus, then, like, trying to question the model, it's almost like, oh, it's like, you're like questioning, is murder wrong? Like why do you want to do research to prove murder is fine? That's basically how absurd Swedish people think it is to question this model. Yeah, and we've had a hard time organising in Sweden because everyone's against us, but we're trying to make alliances with the other Swedish Model countries and sort of show—because you have more research, and we can show Swedish people, Swedish politicians what actually is going on, when that model moved to other countries. Because that's our priority now, like we're not very hopeful of getting rid of it in Sweden soon, but we want to stop it from spreading even further. So, you're next.

00:06:39 H Hiya, so again I'm Hannah, and no photos please. So yeah, we've had the Nordic Model in Norway for about ten years. I just want to make clear that there is no one Nordic Model, like it's always, it's a bit different in every country. Which also makes it harder to actually understand what's going on, and it makes it harder for us to kind of combat it, because different countries will have smaller variations of it. So the introduction of the Nordic Model in Norway came in 2009, and it was widely believed that, you know, prostitution is a societal problem. We want to stamp out prostitution. And I just want to alert you to that language as well, like 'stamping out' is very kind of aggressive, and the policing of sex work in Norway is also very aggressive. So nowhere in the law or in the working up to the law was

it said that we want to help people that sell sex. That is not the aim. They want to stamp out prostitution from society, because it's a societal problem. There's no like, "Oh, let's rescue these whores." No, we just don't want prostitution at all in society, because that will make, that means that every woman can be bought, and the other women didn't want it. You know? So it's had some quite severe effects, and the political climate is very harsh. Now if you look at the photo behind here, that's my friend Jean, she's super awesome. That banner said, "Sex Worker Rights Equal Human Rights," this was on International Women's Day. So we're not allowed, really to attend Women's Day and the parades and everything; we have to walk all the way in the back, which is symbolic as fuck. We're not really allowed to attend political meetings either. They will come up and say, "You're not welcome here, you should go." So at this parade, we were just standing around in a city square and also waiting for the parade to start walking, and this organiser came up, and she's like, "You're not supposed to be here, you need to leave." We're like, "No, we can be here, we just need to walk behind everyone else." And she said, you know, "We don't allow advocating for prostitution on International Women's Day, because it's slavery." We're like, "Well, we're not advocating for prostitution, we're just trying to get some human rights, y'all." And her response was to actually tear the entire banner apart. She physically attacked us, and she tore the banner apart. So, we have sex workers in Norway who are now terrified of attending physical meetings, they're terrified of walking with us. They're terrified of being outed, because people will scream in your face. I've had coffee cups thrown at me, I've been screamed at, I've lost most of my friends because the societal stigma is so hard. And that was also the point of the law. So, if you look at it that way, the law is working perfectly. Stigma is worse than ever, and everyone is just so happy for this, this is amazing. And so, another thing is the way that we kind of look at the law and how it's working. So there was an official review of the law in 2014, and they found that the law was working very well, it was perfect. Nowhere in that report do they try to measure if it's more violence or less violence now or before. Like that's not an aim of this survey at all. They did, however, find that because of the stigma that is so hard and so ingrained in people, people that sell sex now experience more harassment from the police. And so, this is what we're celebrating ten years of. We also find that people don't report violence to the police at all, like there's a report called, "Am I not a human being like you?" which you should all check out, it's in English. And one of the workers there was quoted saying, "You only call the police if you think you're going to die." People don't call the police, and we previously thought that this had something to do with immigration or visa status; it's actually for everyone. I don't call the police either, I'll lose my

apartment, I'll be kicked out of my home, I'll lose my civie job, I'll lose everything. So this is, you know, as you can understand, a massive problem. We don't also—like we don't use healthcare providers anymore, because we're so terrified that they will alert the police. So we don't really have anywhere to go. We don't really have a lot of people protecting us. The police also had an official operation, which they literally called 'Operation Homeless.' Where they kicked out people, like in a three year span they evicted four hundred apartments. And as you know, sex workers tend to work together, so it's more than four hundred people. We have no clue how many they really were. And so, this got some media attention, and they decided to kind of scrap the operation. But they do admit that it's happening still, in just less controlled forms. And there's no stats being done on this, there's no research being done on this, they just do it. So this is where we're at in Norway; we can't call the police, we don't want to use healthcare providers, we're shouted at in the streets if we out ourselves, we're physically attacked if we try to advocate for human rights. Ten years. The radical feminists are actually having a massive festival where they're actually celebrating this. Just wanted to put that out there. Thank you.

00:11:55 KM I think you were before me.

00:11:56 M [inaudible].

00:11:57 KM [inaudible], that's okay.

00:12:00 M Hi everyone. So, first of all, I would like to introduce the introduction of how the penalisation of clients is adopted in France. So this law was adopted on 13 April 2016 by the socialist government. So the social government in France, at that moment, this one like to reproduce the discourse, like, "Yeah, we need to save the victim, we need to rescue them." It's the same kind as the Swedish Model; that is the main inspiration of this government. Actually, for this government, they didn't care about the precarity of the people. So, but they tried to protect the woman from sex work without proposing a real thing. So I will tell you what happened right now in France. So, it's been already three years that we have these laws. So the things it is saying that the clients are penalised or criminalised, and sex workers are not illegal. So we have the right to do our sex work, but there's always archaic laws, like the pimping laws, that are so proven [inaudible 00:13:11] from working in a safe space, according to the pimping law that can be interpreted in the last sense, but it's

nonsense in reality. So, the laws of the penalisation of clients in France, it has been a way of producing the negative effect towards the sex workers who are Muslim migrants, trans women, and HIV positive women. Especially in this moment. So, I so want to show you the statistics that the Médecins du Monde is the organisation that wrote on the healthcare and international area, but the Médecins du Monde in France try to focus on the reality of the effect. But after two years, after the lulls, it was all put into our lives. So we see that, yeah. According to the statistic behind me, so we will see that, yeah. There are five hundred and eighty-three sex workers in the world, from all over France. It's mean that 00:14:21 Médecins du Monde work directly with the organisation that are led by sex workers. For example, like Acceptance Day 00:14:30 in Paris, STRASS in Paris, in Waterbalu 00:14:33, there's one there, in Marseille. All around the world, all around the country, sorry. And so, they are still working with the, how you say, the allied organisations, like Bus des femmes, is like the Women's March, they are not sex worker led, but they are the ally that came to provide help the things to all the facility to the sex worker who are around Paris, and in other areas. So yeah, from twenty-four organisations. And, yeah, we will see that there are lot of negative effects that have been produced by this law. So, sixty-three percent of sex workers have experience more and more, the isolation and stress. Isolation, here, it doesn't mean that they lock themselves in their room, but in France, the isolation means that when the police try to, how you say, to pretend to protect us from the bad clients. So they will go to the place where we work on the street. So the street worker will be affected directly, because the police want to come there to monitor, to look after you as if you were a kid, an innocent kid who haven't their consciousness about what they are doing. So they do that on their streets, and then the sex workers who are on the streets, at least they work at the same place, like before. We will not have the clients. So we have to go to a place that is far away from the place we have been working in for the whole time. So, it's, I mean, that many, migrant sex worker or other street sex worker, in, [inaudible 00:16:24], for example, where the trans sex workers, the trans migrant sex workers work, they have to go a place where there's no light. Go to the isolation. The isolation physical, and also, and also it increases a lot of violence because it's a place where no one can get inside so easily. And this, the things that I would like to say, that is one of our friend, [Camilla, and Camirad 00:16:50. One is a [inaudible 00:16:51] who died because of this isolation, because of this law that made the people to work in the place where we can get nothing like the access to justice, access to public visibility. All kind of things, the bad things, are put into is, because we are put far away from the place where we deserve to be safe. Yeah. And yeah, the next thing is the loss

of income. As you see, that isolation to find more clients, in order that the client will not be arrested by the police. And there is a sort of fear. There are not many clients that are arrested, but there are real effects that [inaudible 00:17:34], it's, I mean—many clients, they didn't come to us so often, so, like before. And then the loss of income, it creates the precarity, or precarisation of the sex worker people, and decrease of the number a lot. And right now, the people who are coming to us, to the sex workers in France, they are not clients right now. They are like [inaudible 00:18:01] they are the raper, because they know that right now, when they are the loss of the number of clients, we lost, how'd you say, the power of negotiation, the negotiating power. It's, I mean, before there were a lot of clients, I can choose that, I want to work with this price, I will do with condom only. And right now, no, you have no choice. You have to accept any kinds of clients, or even aggressive that came to abuse you. And you see that the reality of this law doesn't help our situation or improve our situation to be better. And because of the less number of clients, so we lost the power. And so, it increased something that is very horrible right now, is the increasing number of the HIV positive people who are sex workers. Because in Acceptance Day and organisation, we witness this reality that there are more trans people who we follow them for a long time, there are five new trans sex workers who became HIV positive like after one or two years after this law was put in. So why it's happened, because yeah, when you've lost your power of negotiation, you have to accept the, any kind of the sexual relations without condoms, you have to do everything that seems to be dangerous to your healthcare problem. And that is the thing that yeah, this law created precarisation, isolation, loss of income, and loss of all autonomy, autonomous power. And as well, yeah, we will see that, yeah, thirty-eight person, yeah. It's the constatation 00:19:48 of the reality that we have right now in France. Vanessa Compass 00:19:54 was killed, the trans women, who is from Peru, she worked in Waterbalu, as I told you, that's, yeah. Because of this law she became everything that is really horrible, because she was there to protect her clients from being robbed and aggressed by the gangster, and it's the reason that we need to focus more on how to help the sex worker to have autonomy regarding to their self-defense, regarding to their how to get access for the justice. Because right now, with this law, we do not have the confidence in the institutions. Because it's the institutions that builds this. And so, we are so abused by the clients, but not the clients, but It's the law that creates the bad people, and they come to us because of this law. But before this, we had many, many choices to refuse some of the bad clients, but right now, many people are going down and down. And this the thing that I need to raise it up, and before ending this part, I would like to, how you say, to raise, hear that, we don't need

someone to rescue us. It's us who know what we are doing, it's us who know at which condition of working and lives we deserve to have. We should not, like, let someone who are not sex worker to say or speak at our place. Because, yeah, it's kind of like they try to protect us, but never understand or listen to our voice or needs. And the result is that is the crime committed by the state. And the celebration of the Swedish Model, the Swedish Model people is a kind of celebration of genocide against sex workers people. And I need to condemn this kind of people who lost their whole moral in their heart. They want to say that they are better than us, they have more morals than us, but in reality, they are going to laugh, to spit at our grave. Terrible and disgusting. [Audience applauds]

00:22:22 KM Yes, echoing what everybody has said here. So Northern Ireland passed three years ago, and in the Republic passed two years ago. And yeah, it's been diabolical. So, I guess I'll just start off by saying that in the Republic, according to Ugly Mug stats, in the past two years we've seen an increase in violent attacks on us by ninety-two percent, and that's at the same time as there has been a near twenty percent decrease in people wanting and willing to have their reports sent to police. So similarly, so our government, when they were investigating to bring in this law, they went to Sweden on what was essentially a cherry-picking endeavour. They refused to meet with the one sex worker organisation at the time, which was Rose Alliance. And, you know, they listened to a few of us, I think there were six sex workers in total that were able to feel supported and have the amount of privilege to decide to engage and talk to politicians about this, and then they ended up choosing two whose voices they were going to kind of represent the sex worker population at that point, and they chose them very much based on, I think, what they wanted those voices to sound like. You know, there's people saying that they wanted us to be—I mean, was it even nearly saying license, it was definitely like, you know, make sure they get tested all the time, and kind of like a, nearly like a legalisation kind of perspective. A group of us went to talk to the politician whose baby this was, who was kind of championing it for a political strategy for herself, mainly. And it was Laura Lee, our dear colleague, rest in power Laura Lee, our dear colleague that passed last year, she said to Frances Fitzgerald, this politician, she said, "Do you remember in the nineties when they criminalised outdoor work, do you remember the escalated violence? Do you remember the murder of Belinda Pereira?" And Frances Fitzgerald just straight up responded to Laura, "Yes, I remember that. Don't you think this would serve as a deterrent from entering the industry?" So, we know, we know that that—and it was always what they were saying: it's more important, literally the

words, it's more important that we send a message to the world, Ireland does not tolerate the purchase of women. So—and they're still banging that drum today, of course. I met with a politician there last week and was describing to her examples of direct and indirect ways that this criminalisation has led to bodily harm, and mental harm as well. And she just said to me, she said, "But Kate, you know, we don't pass laws just for people that they affect today, we pass them for the people of the future." You know, for the people—so, I just responded to her, "But not at our expense. That's not what laws are meant to do, they're meant to protect people from harm today, not these future prostitutes." And I also said to her, "There has been nobody that has come out of Sweden that has said, 'This law has prevented or improved a situation in prostitution.'" And I could see that really sink in with her, so that's why we, you know, we do feel like, sort of allegiance to find in the way, to support you guys, because it's so important that that happened globally, because it's a big deal that they've been able to just say whatever the fuck they want about Sweden. You know, and we do have more cultural support than you do in Sweden. On the hearts and minds front of it, feminism, et cetera, we're winning that shit in Ireland. Sorry for all the cursing! It's going to go on. Yeah. But, you know, oppressors are going to oppress. So, just to say, what they changed is for the first time, they, for the first time they criminalised the purchase of sex. And it was already illegal to sell sex alone, but it was illegal to sell sex in pairs or groups, that's called a brothel. And for this crime, they doubled penalties and introduced the possibility of a jail sentence. Something that we, what we fought for during then bringing in this law was decriminalisation of outdoor workers, all seven of them or whatever. But we're very happy that, you know, that is an improved thing for them. But part of the reason that we're able to do that is because we actually, we reached out to Ruhama 00:27:43 who are the anti-prostitution prostitution outreach, and so we reached out to them to say, "Would you be willing to raise your voices and come on board with this to fight for the decriminalisation of outdoor workers?" An awkward meeting, but it worked. So, however, the situation is still shit. Like I said, people are even less willing to engage with Gardaí police over there, of course we know that. Let's see, a few more things. So yes, so there's also now recently been a bit of a, what they'd like to say is sort of a crackdown, I guess. And this was very clearly orchestrated by Ruhama too. It's important to mention this organisation that seeks to abolish prostitution, they are very much in bed with the police, if you will. So they very clearly organised this, over three days there were multiple migrant sex worker workspaces that were being surveyed, and the police talked to thirty-six men, were able to stop thirty-six men as they came out of these places. And now, and so they made this big song and dance

about it and are going to try and have this lead to arrest. So, you know, there's a very, there's a very real push to surveil our home and work spaces now, and to actually really start arresting clients, you know? And by some accounts, you know, so far there's been one client arrested, I think one in the north and one in south now, at this point. You know, when we look at the statistics, there have been fifty-five workers that have been arrested for so-called brothel keeping. So, but, wait, what was I going to say about that. So, right. It has been happening that when that was in the news, and when these thirty-six men were in the news, you know, our clients are starting to talk about it. Clients still have this kind of impervious male self-entitlement, not being afraid of it, and certainly not the ones who need to be afraid would be afraid, we know that. They knew it was already illegal to attack a person. But our sweet clients, if you will, now are kind of skittish and talking to us, and going, "Oh, I think my days might be numbered here," and everything. But more than that, we're seeing a shift in where people work. So, while white workers are seeing an increase, even in work, and we're hearing that from our clients, that they're choosing who to, where to go, who to see, we're having to support, SWAI is having to support other demographics of worker, that are saying, "I am taking riskier clients, I am offering services that I wasn't previously." So, and also it seems that there is an increase in massage parlours in certain areas of the city. Just a second, I'll be done, just one more thing, I want to say. Just because of the Me Too movement, I think it was so interesting. We saw it coming down the line, we were like, this is not going to be good. This is really going to be harmful for sex workers, we're going to be dragged into it in a really bad way. And in Ireland, that was, you know, the Me Too movement, and there was a rape case where a woman, there were three rugby players, famous rugby players, who raped this woman, and she took a case. So, there were marches and parades and all of this to try and support her, she took the case and failed, unfortunately. But at this parade, they had a survivor of prostitution, an abolitionist, stand up on stage and say that prostitution is what leads to rape. And so, that's challenging. We'll get to start talking about the solidarity.

00:32:05 O Can I just say something, so in Sweden, even though I said that the population believes that we are rescuing these victims, and that's how the law's being sold to us by politicians and the rest of the world, like, that is not what it's actually about. It's about, like, in Norway it's about stamping out prostitution at any cost. Just like with drug use, it's like we have a zero tolerance, we're not a country that has prostitution, we're not a

country that has drugs, and that's it. And it's like a racist project, it's to stop migrant, it's to stop middle-class women from having to see prostitutes or be treated like a prostitute.

00:32:47 M Yeah, I agree with you totally. Because what I'm going to raise after is about that; the criminalisation of clients is a racist law and transphobic laws, sexist law in general. And especially for the migrants, sex workers, trans people, they suffer a lot from this kind of law because there are not many clients—in France, it's not like in Ireland right now. There are not so many clients who are arrested. It's just a little fear that they have in their mind. But in reality, it's the migrant sex worker who work on the streets who are more so [inaudible 00:33:22], more needed. And so, the police that came are friendly, and so often, and so often to see that, yeah, you're safe from the client, but actually they come here to harass many sex workers who work on the street. The Chinese sex worker in [inaudible 00:33:39], all the trans migrant sex workers in Waterbalu, and they face more and more the harassment from the police, like the paper control, identity control. Do you have the paper? In order to arrest the aggressor, they came to ask for us if we have the paper, and most of the migrant sex workers in France, they don't have the paper. And so, I wanted to learn more about the, how you say, the program of the exit from the prostitution. So it's kind of like the government, the socialist government, when they put this law in place, so they tried to add that, it's the law that would like to protect you, because we propose you our kind of, like, the program to make you go out of from the prostitution. And this law affects a lot negatively to the migrant sex workers, because for the French sex workers—for every sex worker in general, you have to sign a contract that you will not commit sex work again. You will not redo it again, this kind of activity. And then you will get a kind of light 00:34:47 three hundred euros a month. Three hundred euro, if you live in Paris, London, or any kind of city; can you pay for your rent? Can you pay for your food? Can you pay for your children, your family? Who live in a really a poor country, so far away? No, it's not possible. And with this law for the French people, okay, it decides they can redo easily because they will not be deported. They can like go where they want, because they have French nationality. But for the migrants, like us, each time we sign it, because we think that we will get the paper. Because according to the laws, they say that if you sign this, you come to this program, you will have the paper. But after we sign this, we get three hundred euro, and they tell us, don't do it again. If you do it again, we will cut all the money, you will not get anything. No house, no—even how, they do not propose us. But the money, and all the thing, they told us that you miss all this thing. And then some people who don't have choice, they'll redo it. And their

paper, the residence permission card, was cancelled. And a lot of them are now in the process of being sent back to their old countries. And right now, except in Paris, a lot of trans migrants who are HIV positive people, they are facing the deportation, mass deportation. And it targets only the sex workers, trans migrant people who are sex worker and who are HIV positive. And this reality is around fifty dossier 00:36:26 right now, at organisation, only in Paris, you see. And if you calculate for the whole France how many it would be, how many people who are trans migrant people who don't get access to our organisation, how will they be able to survive with this kind of the racist, transphobic, sexist laws? We need to stop it. [Audience applauds]

00:36:53 H Yeah, thank you. I'm going to echo a little bit of what Mimi said as well. We find that anti-prostitution is anti-migration, or anti-immigrants, really. So the police are now posing as clients and they'll go to people that they know are selling sex, and they'll check their documents, and then say, "Oh, we think that you're doing sex work, so we're going to have to deport you." The thing about that—or, they'll say that, you know, you don't have a worker's permit, so we can deport you because you're working illegally. But sex work isn't work, so they have committed no crime, and selling sex is not a crime. But they're still being deported. And you have to pay your own ticket, by the way, which is really expensive.

00:37:30 KM We pay for our deportation.

00:37:31 H Yeah, we pay for our own deportation.

00:37:34 KM No, no, no. We pay for them to get deported. So we're a little bit—

00:37:37 H Oh my God, so you're human traffickers, really? (Laughs) Because you're paying for them to fly to a different country. Yeah. But the thing is, the most marginalised are those who suffer the most under the Nordic Model. I want to make that absolutely clear. The Nordic Model is very racialised, it's very, as I said, anti-immigrant. And the thing about clients, as you said, like the nice clients are now gone, but people who pose as clients, they will come to our apartments, they'll rob us—because, you know, we have to take cash, we can't exactly use a bank card. So they know that we have a lot of money and they'll go after us specifically because of that. And then if you try to go to the police, the police will alert your landlord, and you'll lose your home. Which is really expensive as well, like the deposit

for my apartment is really high and I'll lose that, whereas if a client gets caught, it's a fine of 200 pounds, not two thousand pounds. Whereas I'll lose my job, I'll lose my apartment, I'll lose everything that I have, I'll be on the streets. So this is really not about the clients, this is about us, this is about stamping out prostitution, this is about making prostitution disappear for no real reason. Or I find at least. Also, we can't screen clients anymore, because no one is going to give us their personal information, they're not going to give us their names, they're not even going to give us their real address. So I went to a client, and I was outside, and I was like, "Hey, I'm here, where do I go?" And he's like, "Actually, it's on the opposite side of the street." So, the safety information that I had given my friend was not even real, so if something happens, they don't know where to go, they have no clue where I've last been. I also want to touch a little bit on the mental health stuff that was also mentioned here; we have mental healthcare providers now in Norway refusing to work with sex workers. "Because we can't treat you if you continue like this, this is self-harm." And also, they don't want to receive money from prostitution, because you know, then that's pimping. And they don't want us to go and sell our bodies so that we can pay them. Whereas I'm like, it's labour, and if you want to help me, can you please provide some mental healthcare? And also, the only exit programs that we have at the moment, you can become a nail designer, and I'm like, can you fuck off? I have like a business diploma, that would be great. Another exit program that we have is that you can become a cleaner, you can clean houses in hotels. And the thing is, I have arthritis, I can't do that labour. I do sex work specifically because it is a lot of money but with very little work, I get to lie in bed, which is better for my body anyway. So the exit programs don't really work. Again, this model is not about helping anyone. This is about stamping out prostitution, this is about borders, this is about, you know, deporting people. I just really need to press that point.

00:40:35 LS I'm the worst timekeeper in the world. So we actually started a little bit late, so if it's okay, we will continue a little bit after, unless you're really hungry for salad and it's available there. I'm going to have just one question, and then we're going to open it, if that's okay. Oops sorry, it's really strong. So I think this situation is pretty depressing, so like coming from France, this year's the ten years of SWARM, but it's also the ten years of STRASS, the French union of sex workers, and they will have the ten year anniversary in France. But, the Swedish Model has a really huge impact on like precarity, which also means that people can spend less time doing activism because they have to spend more time looking and waiting for clients. Huge effect on mental health; many of our close friends,

you know, in France, in the movement, are really suffering from like, really violent mental health issues et cetera, because of the law, because of fighting against the law, because of violence of abolitionism against them. And my one question was, at the moment we see there is a global call for decriminalisation of sex work, we see, you know, Amnesty International calling for decriminalisation, the World Health Organisation, more recently the LGBT [inaudible 00:41:47] world. So, and lots and lots of evidence coming from all around the world that criminalisation of sex workers, and negative impact on sex workers. But when it comes to in Europe, in particularly other countries on the ground, there seems to be like no obstacles to abolitionism. So we see four countries, the recent attempt 00:42:06 to criminalise clients in Spain, you know, like comparing the sex industry in Spain and Sweden would be very interesting given the amount of like, number of sex workers in Spain. The same with Israel, the same in like Italy, et cetera. One thing that is rarely mentioned is that actually Serbia also criminalised clients, which was applauded by organisations like the European Women's Lobby. What they forgot to mention is that they didn't decriminalise sex workers, they just basically added criminalisation of clients to criminalisation of sex workers. So it's kind of like Swedish Model, you know, hardcore version, where you keep the sex worker criminalised. And I feel like in many countries, this model, like Ukraine for example is debating it at the moment as well. And they're not going to decriminalise sex workers, they're just going to take this feminist approach to criminalising clients, but basically to, like, stamp out the sex industry. So not to end on something too negative, I wanted to ask, quite briefly so we have time for questions, what is your organisation doing as a strategy to fight against the Swedish Model, and maybe, like, choose one example, and in particularly in relationship to like building alliances. So we heard from like, in different countries, feminist movement can be divided, you were saying in Ireland you are winning the culture war, in France it can also be very divided. So maybe you can give an example as to what is your strategy, what is the next steps towards reversing this model.

00:43:29 O Well, I'm here to make friends with you guys. We're really just trying to make alliances with people in other countries, because we don't have much in Sweden. We have a few LGBT organisations, and the HIV and drug user associations are friends with us, but yeah, really—we have a conference actually coming up, in September, on the twenty-seventh, that you're all invited to. And yeah, we hope that hearing from the other countries that have the Swedish Model might... might educate Sweden on the actual consequences of what they're doing.

00:44:14 M Yeah, that's interesting, that we have almost the same, the similar experience, almost the same actually. So, in France, yeah, we have a lot of support by many organisations that we regard as our allies, like the Bus des Femmes, and the HET 00:44:29], the organisation that run with HIV people, and so they support us enormously. And there are so many academic people who see the reality and try to show the real face of this law, the blood on the hands of abolitionists. It's like many people who work like Nicola May, or, the professor from [inaudible 00:44:54], I forgot her name, Hiller Labeille 00:44:54. Hiller Labeille, yeah. They try to work with many parts two years after the laws [inaudible 00:45:02], and there is evidence that is strong, and we have a lot of researchers under the, how'd you say, repressive effect on laws against sex work, and so the criminalisation of clients. But the thing is that in France, the situation is really, like, divided. There are people who are pro-abolitionists, they don't accept the fact, and they try to reproduce the same statistics that was, how you say, is was, how you say, is like a waste food that they found it in the garbage. It's like they reproduce the same cheat, and they just try to say that, the reality is the absolute fact, the absolute reality of sex worker. Like ninety percent, eighty percent of sex workers in France are immigrant who are exploited, trafficked, blah blah blah, smacked 00:45:53. So, kind of, the police ideology in their mind. Like we have to criminalise this, that, send back migrant to the country. So, they don't accept the reality from our side, although we have enough of their evidence. But right now, statistically, we try to do more activism, more works on many dimensions. For example, for the art. We know that maybe to present the paper in front of you, the university people, it may be easy because you are the people who are honest to accept what is happening. But for some people, maybe we need to use the art in order to present the reality of sex worker. So STRASS, the sex worker union in France, so we created a festival. Sex Worker Narrative festival, SNAP. And we go to many countries and to many cities all around France, and to Brussels, to prisons, that the sex worker is only the sex worker that can say about their reality, about their lives, about what they need. And yeah, by art, by kind of lie the performance, and in the same time, we use the art to make it easier to get access to this activism. And we put sort of academic things in the festival; like, if you want to see the performance, maybe there's one table, a table before, to talk about the situation in France. And yeah, we try to integrate these kinds of things to make people think more and more. And right now, we are so proud that there's a mainstream press—not press, the journal that also publishes about this kind of thing; there are more visibility on this because it's like the people, when we talk about sex work in public,

they will, “No, no. Don’t talk about it.” It’s like a taboo. But when you use the art, or any kind of form that the society can yeah, can see it as, “Wow!”. It’s interesting, it’s cultural, it’s some kind of positive things. Yeah, it may be that things, that maybe everyone here can adopt it to use it. And, besides that, we also, like you said to me, two movements. In France, actually, it’s also divide. There’s the feminists that are really like rad cis, mainstream feminists, white feminists, who think that, “Yeah, we are better than Muslim people, we are better than sex workers, we are better than the fat people, or any kind of like a minority, a people, a woman, or queer people.” So, we told that we will not join the Me Too movement, but we will join the Me—how you say—

00:48:39 LS Nous tous—

00:48:39 M Nous tous, et nous aussi.

00:48:42 LS For the Me Too movement, and then all the marginalised feminists that created Us Too. So Nous tous, et nous aussi.

00:48:49 M Us too. Yeah, so we try another alternative Me Too movement. Nous aussi, nous tout et tout ça, something like that, yeah, and it’s like a we, we block the head of the parrot, of the Me Too movement. And like we occupy them, like the sex worker, Muslim women, all the women who are exclude, queer people, non-binary people, who are excluded from this kind of institutional feminism, violent feminism. And let these women who are oppressed by capitalists, sexism, racism, to talk about their problem. And this gets a lot of the, how’d you say, the attention by the media. And so, I’d like you to, yeah, here, even though you see that we face a lot of repressive things in our lives, many people in France they lost a lot of confidence in themselves. Many people don’t want to go to protests anymore, because they think that we fight for a long time, and then Swedish Model wins. But actually, we will not stop it. And if you stop it, it means that our fight that we have fought, like, for ten years, twenty years, it will finish. We need you, we need the power you have inside. The force you are having, don’t lose it, and I am still with you, and I think that the victim in this room, there are some, there are a friend that I know, who come with us, Anais 00:50:15, who was a [soldier 00:50:17 victim after the Vanessa Campus Watt 00:50:19 murder. But she’s still here with us. I’m so proud that she’s here, she’s fighting with us. She’s trying to represent the

voice of the sex worker in France. And here's the thing that I want to say that, being the victim of this system doesn't mean that you lost. You are fighting, you are listening 00:50:35, and you are the fighter. Believe me. [Audience applauds]

00:50:46 KM So I'll start with a slightly sad story and then go happy. So, the movement in Ireland that is quite big right now, politically, our social justice rises 00:50:58 the housing movement, because it's such a, the market is so bad right now. So there's a lot of, people talking about and participating in the housing movement, so something, SWAI have ended up, we've been doing a lot more casework now that the law has come in, and we got a call that there were two trans, undocumented workers who had had a brick thrown through their window, and when they then put up a board in the window, the landlord had torn it down and then put cement blocks in front of their place, so that they couldn't really leave. And then we arrived and there was a mob on the street, and they were shouting stuff in and throwing rocks and stuff like this. So we called our lawyer and we called our liaison officer, who sent police, that when they showed up, they talked to the landlord first in private, and then they talked to me, and I said, "Look, I want to go in to kind of be able to negotiate with the girls and see what the story is, can you make sure, they're scared to let me in. Because we were working with a translator to find out that they're scared to let me in because they're afraid the mob is going to come in, can you make sure that doesn't happen?" And he said to me, "We're just here to watch." So we had to navigate through this whole thing, and was able to get in, and it resolved okay-ish. But we had also called housing activists, because this was an illegal eviction that was happening, and the landlord was going to throw their stuff out, et cetera. And the housing activists showed up, but something that was interesting, was that it ended up revealing a rift in the housing movement because apparently half of them ended up saying after that, these are not the people, these are not the situations that we're supposed to interfere with. This is antisocial behaviour, this was a community response to antisocial behaviour. So, solidarity building is so important, solidarity amongst movements, and also like really clear, clearly communicating within that allyship. We have—so that's something we have to sort out now, but at least now we know. But we repealed the eighth amendment last year in Ireland, legalised abortion. [Audience applauds] Yes. And there were excellent natural allies with us, and there was a group called Abortion Rights Campaign, and they adamantly centred marginalised voices. So for the big March for Choice March, with thousands and thousands and thousands of people at this march, they gave the mic, the people they invited to speak were marginal voices; they were undocumented, they

were travellers, and sex workers as well. So to just pass the mic to people acting like that's the way it should be, because it is the way it should be. So these things are really important. We also, um, you know, the more people that can come out with motions, and statements, provides cover for other organisations and bodies to do that. Chrysalis 00:54:12 is a really wonderful outreach organisation, they're here today, in Ireland. And in a long time, they had a kind of decrim perspective, but weren't able to say it until the landscape was a little bit, until there was more cover provided for them to be able to do that without being afraid of losing their funding for sticking their head above the parapet. Other things we've done is, you know, Neville Southall is an ex-footballer, football goalie, and he has this huge Twitter following, and so he's done Twitter takeovers. So he gave us the account, and we were able to tweet out to his hundreds of thousands of followers, our perspective. That kind of thing is a really good strategy in this day and age, because a lot of times people just aren't connecting the dots, so we have to do that for them. Just a couple more things is that, you know, we're having a review of the law in a year. And so, there's a lot of talk, you know, in the north particularly, but in the south, politicians, a little bit more, are starting to say, "We understand the problem with this brothel-keeping law, so we're going to be really focusing on that." But we've done up like ask your candidates document, so that when—now the first one that came to my door, he said, I said, "What do you think about the new prostitution law in Ireland?" And he said, "Oh, I'm going to have to get my wife to answer that one for me." But we, I made him stay there and we continued talking. So we've given a little guide to people, because candidates are, there's elections happening, candidates are coming to our door, so it's a little bit of mini lobbying as well, and gives the language to our allies. The last thing that I'll say is, obviously it's the people who have the most privilege and support structure already that generally can be out, so we're finding it really important now, it is often myself, who is speaking for sex workers in Ireland. So we've been trying to do more of me just getting somebody to write something for me, and me reading out that testimonial. Or, you know, they really try and say, SWAI is the happy hooker club, and Ruhama are the people that really care about the people having a hard time. So we're having to break that down, and say we have people with SWAI who have had a horrible time in the sex industry, who are survivors of sexual violence, and they've still come to the conclusion of decrim. So, it's just penetrating the conversation by reading their voices, by reading their voices out. [Audience applauds]

00:57:06 H Okay, I know that we are short on time, so I will try to keep this kind of brief. So what is PION doing to challenge the Nordic Model? We wrote a shadow paper for the UN. Actually, I was a part of that as well, as well as other people in PION. You can find that online, if you Google Pion C Door 00:57:24, Norway, I reckon. It's a very short little paper, I do recommend you to read it if you are interested in the effects of the Nordic Model in Norway. We are also trying to push for a whitepaper in government. It was supposed to come out in 2017, and then it was supposed to come out last year, and it's 2019 and it's just not happening. So we are trying to challenge governmental bodies, we do try to reach out to the Ministry of Justice, we do try to reach out to political parties. And we go to them, and we have a little paper, and we're like, "Are you aware of this, this, and that? Do you actually care? What is your position? What are you doing?" We are trying to be visible in media as well, we've got articles, we do host debates, we have art shows, we have, you know, small things that we do throughout the year. So, third of March is a thing, as you all know, the International Day for Sex Workers' Rights; second of June is the International Whore Day; the seventeenth of December is the International Day to End All Violence Against Sex Workers, I think it is. Yeah. We do also try to advocate with mental healthcare, and try to kind of get them to change their language a little bit. I mean, I had a mental healthcare provider, and he didn't even know that I was a sex worker. And he was like, "Well, I don't believe in the myth of the happy hooker." And I'm like, "Do you believe in societal stigma? Because you're displaying quite a bit of it, right here, right now." And he was like, and then, I outed myself a bit later, and he was like, "Oh, we need to talk about the impacts of that, you know, the impact of your job on your mental health." I'm like, "Well, do you ask that to dentists, or to gynaecologists?" I mean, they have some pretty horrific stories to tell you, and I bet they're really tired when they go home after work. So yeah, we do try to, you know, change the narrative—

[End of recording]

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Sex Workers And The Nordic Model