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All activists have good years, bad years and the rare great one. For sex worker rights activists 2012 was a great year.

In July, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law recommended that (<http://www.hivlawcommission.org/resources/report/FinalReport-Risks,Rights&Health-EN.pdf>) countries repeal laws against sex work to encourage safe working conditions and access to effective HIV and health services and commodities for sex workers and clients.

It also warned against mandatory testing for HIV and criminalization of HIV transmission. Later in the year the United Nations Development Programme released another important document, 'Sex Work and the Law in Asia and the Pacific'. (<http://www.snap-undp.org/eLibrary/Publications/HIV-2012-SexWorkAndLaw.pdf>) It maps the laws and policies that affect sex workers' human rights and health in 48 countries and also recommends removal of laws against selling, buying and brokering commercial sex.

In July, the 2012 International AIDS Conference (<http://www.aids2012.org>) attracted up to 25,000 delegates to Washington DC, but because sex workers are prohibited from entering the United States an alternative conference hub for sex workers (<http://www.nswp.org/page/iac-2012-kolkata>) was held in Kolkata. Sex workers and their allies in Kolkata attended conference sessions, held a street march and produced a film (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jtKeSSri5Dg>) and some sessions were interactive with Washington. Ironically sex worker activism being divided like this may have meant that AIDS 2012 was particularly successful for sex workers because so much attention was focused on the discriminatory and counterproductive policies of the USA on sex work, as Melissa Ditmore explained to Forbes magazine (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/womensenews/2012/07/25/sex-workers-raise-tricky-hiv-aids-issue-for-u-s/2/>).



([Maggiemcneill.wordpress.com](http://Maggiemcneill.wordpress.com))

The Red Umbrella Fund (<http://www.mamacash.org/uploads/File/Red%20Umbrella%20Fund/Red%20Umbrella%20Fund%20-%20Governance%20Administrative%20Charter.pdf>) was launched to strengthen the sex worker rights movement through sex worker-led organisations. The fund says that sex workers will 'act as majority stake holders in deciding how funds are allocated.' The Global Fund for HIV, Aids and Malaria has also taken steps toward ensuring more funding for sex workers.

Throughout the year we saw a steady stream of good news from countries. We saw discussions about legalizing sex work countries in places as diverse as Rwanda (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201211010487.html>) and Fiji (<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=218517>). (See PRLI Twitter (<https://twitter.com/PLRI>) for news of sex work law reform globally). In the United States, Human Rights Watch came out against police confiscating condoms as evidence of prostitution with measurable success (<http://castrobiscuit.com/2012/10/08/sfpd-announces-they-will-stop-using-condoms-as-evidence-in-sex-worker-investigations/>). Sex workers challenged mandatory testing in Macedonia (<http://aktivizam-video.net/node/11>), the US ([http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/IAC\\_actioncall\\_20121.html](http://www.bestpracticespolicy.org/IAC_actioncall_20121.html)), Greece (<http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/article/2012/05/07/prosecutions-hiv-positive-sex-workers-bad-human-rights-and-bad-public-health>), and Australia ([http://www.afa.org.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/11198/Mandatory\\_Testing\\_for\\_HIV\\_and\\_STIs\\_among\\_Sex\\_Workers\\_-\\_A\\_Barrier\\_to\\_-\\_Prevention.pdf.pdf](http://www.afa.org.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/11198/Mandatory_Testing_for_HIV_and_STIs_among_Sex_Workers_-_A_Barrier_to_-_Prevention.pdf.pdf)). Court cases as well as legislatures continued to make important differences to sex workers lives. We saw more evidence of this from Canada and South Africa (<http://news.howitz.msn.com/victory-for-sex-workers-in-jhb-court#scpsrhtu>) where courts have overturned sex work laws (<http://www.ontariocourts.ca/decisions/2012/2012ONCA0186.htm>) and recognised some sex workers rights. (See Pivotlegal Twitter (<https://twitter.com/pivotlegal>) for news on court cases.) In India, the Supreme Court moved (<http://lawreports.wordpress.com/>) to ensure that sex workers and their children can access the same services and benefits as other citizens.

Sex worker groups grew stronger all over the world (<http://www.nswp.org/>), including in Africa (<http://africansexworkeralliance.org/>) where there is a new regional network as well as national groups in many countries. (Kenya, Uganda, Namibia, Malawi (<http://www.nyasatimes.com/malawi/2012/11/10/malawi-sex-workers-alliance-demand-respect-legalisation-of-prostitution/>)). Sex workers are now routinely invited to conferences about issues that affect them and they made a big impression at the Association for Women's Rights in Development Forum (<http://www.forum.awid.org/forum12/about/2012-forum-theme/>) (AWID) conference this year (<http://www.plri.org/story/awid-istanbul-linking-sex-worker-rights-feminism-and-development>).

Of course like most things in life sex workers rights in 2012 can be seen as a glass half full or half empty. Oppression and violence continues. Criminalization of clients or 'the Swedish Model' (<http://rightswork.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Issue-Paper-4.pdf>) has been taken up by more countries (including Ireland (<http://www.ihra.net/contents/1275>) and Scotland (<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/Bills/54314.aspx>)). Sex workers continue to complain that sensationalism and myths about trafficking drives bad laws and violent 'raids and rescues' — often by corrupt or abusive organisations (<http://www.cambodiadaily.com/news/questions-raised-over-symbols-slavery-story-4809/>). Calls for abolition of sex work through law enforcement sometimes seems to be increasing among governments, large media interests, powerful interest groups and celebrities alike. We have just heard that the European Women's Lobby (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-20591726>) has added their voice to that call. Although sex workers groups have limited power to challenge those demanding stronger state action against sex work, 2012 saw some success in working with academics (<http://www.amazon.com/Trafficking-Prostitution-Reconsidered-Perspectives-Transnational/dp/1594510970>) who are also questioning the discourses (<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2012/05/25/whats-the-truth-behind-somaly-mam/>) that define sex work as trafficking/exploitation.

PEPFAR (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/jul/24/prostitution-us-aids-funding-sex>), the Presidents Emergency Plan for Aids Relief, appears on both sides of my 2012 ledger. By preventing U.S. money going to sex workers, the PEPFAR anti-prostitution pledge has done enormous damage. (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/2012/jul/24/prostitution-us-aids-funding-sex>) Hopefully it will be overturned in court in 2013. At the same time, PEPFAR has saved millions of lives, including sex workers', with Anti Retroviral Treatment for HIV. Although there are some good results (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22424777>) about HIV prevention in some places sex workers remain very vulnerable to HIV in many places. Worrying spikes (<http://www.newvision.co.ug/news/629853-37-ugandan-sex-workers-are-hiv-positive.html>) in HIV and STI persist as well as issues such as significant numbers of sex workers not

collecting HIV results ([http://www.plusnews.org/Report/96779/UGANDA-Sex-workers-missing-out-on-HIV-care#.UKQjPYCQa\\_1.twitter](http://www.plusnews.org/Report/96779/UGANDA-Sex-workers-missing-out-on-HIV-care#.UKQjPYCQa_1.twitter)) . This reminds us that stigma, poverty, criminalization and abuse continue to form powerful barriers to access to services.

The year ended on a bright note with an activists meeting ([http://www.pivotlegal.org/an\\_incredible\\_global\\_meeting\\_on\\_the\\_decriminalization\\_of\\_sex\\_work](http://www.pivotlegal.org/an_incredible_global_meeting_on_the_decriminalization_of_sex_work)) in Sydney to discuss decriminalization of sex work. That takes us into 2013 with confidence that the sex workers rights movement will continue to build on its successes and lessons and be 'part of the solution.'

Follow Cheryl Overs on Twitter, @CherylOvers (<http://twitter.com/CherylOvers>)

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**Big Shoes to Fill: Solis' Departure Calls for Nomination of Workers' Rights Advocate** (</article/2013/01/14/big-shoes-to-fill-soliss-departure-calls-nomination-workers-rights-advocate>)

by Sheila Bapat (</user/sheila-bapat>) Jan 14, 6:52pm



Who could fill Solis's shoes and demonstrably make progress on policies impacting vulnerable workers?

**Weekly Legal Roundup: Federal Courts Continue To Split On Birth Control Benefit** (</article/2013/01/14/federal-courts-continue-to-split-on-birth-control-benefit>)

by Jessica Mason Pieklo (</user/jessica-pieklo>) Jan 14, 6:32pm



Another ruling in the more than forty legal challenges to the contraception mandate in Obamacare shows the fight is far from over.

(</article/2013/01/13/good-year-red-umbrellas-advances-in-sex-workers-rights-in-2012>)

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