

Sex Work Is Work

Definition

Sex work has generally been defined to reference individuals working in the sex industry who provide direct, **consensual** sexual services with the clear goal of producing a sexual or erotic response. This includes prostitution, escorting, erotic dancing, pro-dom/pro-sub work, web/cam work, sensual massage, adult film, phone sex, sugar baby and companionship, and can also include the staff working within these industries.

Importance of Decriminalization

Individuals engaged in the sex trade are faced with violence, stigma, and discrimination, which consequently limit the ways in which many sex workers navigate in society. The systemic oppression many sex workers encounter is compounded for racial and sexual minorities, individuals with histories of drug use and criminal system involvement, persons living with HIV, people from immigrant backgrounds, etc. Criminalization exacerbates marginalization and work related safety and health hazards. Creating pathways for folks in the sex trade to assert their rights through the decriminalization of sex work can improve life outcomes and center their voices.

Basic Labor Rights Declaration

Sex workers are entitled to the basic labor rights set forth under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹. Sex workers are entitled to live free of discrimination, stigma, and violence. Sex worker rights have generally focused on decriminalizing sex work as a tool to ensure fair treatment and to create a safe environment while working.

Legal Models²

Sex work is governed by a variety of legal models.

- *Criminalization*: The specific law will vary from setting to setting, but normally there will be a prohibition on the act of receiving money or goods in return for sex (i.e., being a sex worker); for providing money or goods in exchange for sex (i.e., being a client); and/or being connected with or otherwise profiting from the sex industry (e.g., being a “madam” in a brothel).
- *Partial criminalization*: Often referred to as the “Swedish model” or the “Nordic model” because of its adoption in Sweden and Norway, this approach decriminalizes the selling of sex but the purchasing of sex remains a crime.
- *Legalization*: Sex work is made formally legal, but is heavily regulated and treated differently than other forms of work. Typical requirements relate to permissible working areas, mandatory health checks, and registration—failure to comply can result in criminal sanction. Senegal and the Netherlands are examples of this model.
- *Decriminalization*: Criminal penalties for sex work are removed. Sex workers receive the same protections and recognition as workers in any other occupation. New Zealand fully decriminalized sex work in 2003.

¹ [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

² [All Women, All Rights: Sex Workers Included](#)



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We must have a voice