

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR SEX WORKERS



In most countries sex work is criminalised and not recognised as work.



Sex workers are **denied labour rights, face exclusion from financial services, increased vulnerability to violence, exploitation, stigma and discrimination, and barriers to accessing justice.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how unprotected sex workers are, as most states do not recognise sex workers as workers entitled to social protection.



Many economic empowerment programmes fail to meaningfully involve sex workers in their design and focus on 'rehabilitation', ignoring calls for rights-based programming centring the needs of sex workers. Successful sex worker-led programmes are often overlooked and underfunded.



Supplementary and realistic alternative income sources, combined with access to banking, loans and saving schemes, combat the discrimination and exclusion that foster economic insecurity among sex workers.



Read the NSWP Briefing Paper on Economic Empowerment for Sex Workers: <https://www.nswp.org/resource/nswp-briefing-papers/briefing-paper-economic-empowerment-sex-workers>

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Sex worker-led economic empowerment initiatives

Sex worker-led and rights-based economic empowerment programmes offer tools relating to social security, savings, economic planning and pensions, tax advice, classes for strengthening existing skills or building new ones, knowledge exchange between workers, and, if desired, structured plans for exiting sex work and moving to different sectors.



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Sex worker-led economic empowerment initiatives

Successful sex worker-led programmes prioritise sex workers' perspectives, from the identification of needs to the design, implementation, and assessment of initiatives.



They provide a rights-based approach giving sex workers the economic power to make informed choices about their lives.



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RECOMMENDATIONS



Decriminalise all aspects of sex work.



Recognise sex work as work.



Economic empowerment programmes must be rights-based, accessible, and ensure meaningful involvement of sex workers.



Economic empowerment projects must offer opportunities for supplementary income as well as realistic alternatives that match the income generated through sex work.



Respect and build on sex workers' existing skills.



Funding for sex worker-led organisations must include core costs, be flexible and for a minimum of three years.



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