

Universal Declaration of the Rights of Adult Sex Workers

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Inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), contemporary human rights jurisprudence, and grassroots sex worker movements.

Preamble

Whereas the dignity and rights of all human beings must be universally recognized, and whereas adult sex workers—irrespective of gender identity, sexual orientation, or lifestyle—have long been subject to marginalization, criminalization, and violence, this Declaration affirms their fundamental human rights, bodily autonomy, and labor protections.

Recognizing that sex work, when conducted by consenting adults, is a legitimate form of labor deserving of legal recognition and social respect;

Affirming the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), including the rights to life, liberty, security, privacy, work, freedom of expression, and protection from discrimination;

Acknowledging international advocacy frameworks from Amnesty International, the Global Network of Sex Work Projects, and regional sex worker collectives;

This Declaration sets forth the following rights to be respected, protected, and fulfilled by all governments, institutions, and societies.

Article I. Right to Legal Recognition of Sex Work as Work

Adult sex work shall be legally recognized as a legitimate form of labor. Sex workers shall be entitled to labor protections, including fair wages, occupational safety, and employment benefits.

Legal Basis: UDHR Articles 23 (Right to Work), 7 (Equality before the Law)

Article II. Right to Freedom from Criminalization and Harassment

Consensual adult sex work shall not be criminalized. Sex workers shall be protected from police harassment, arbitrary detention, and surveillance.

Legal Basis: UDHR Articles 3 (Right to Life, Liberty, and Security), 9 (Freedom from Arbitrary Arrest)

Article III. Right to Non-Discrimination and Equal Protection

Sex workers shall not face discrimination based on their occupation, gender identity, sexual orientation, or relationship structures.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 2 (Freedom from Discrimination), Article 7 (Equal Protection Under Law)

Article IV. Right to Bodily Autonomy and Integrity

Every person has the right to control their own body. This includes choosing services offered, use of sex toys, participation in kink practices, and personal boundaries.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 3 (Right to Security of Person), ICESCR Article 12 (Right to Health)

Article V. Right to Privacy and Confidentiality

Sex workers have the right to the confidentiality of their medical, legal, financial, and personal data. Protection against non-consensual disclosure is essential.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 12 (Right to Privacy)

Article VI. Right to a Safe Working Environment

Sex workers are entitled to work environments free from violence, coercion, and exploitation, with safety standards tailored to their needs.

Legal Basis: ILO Conventions, UDHR Article 23 (Right to Just and Favorable Work Conditions)

Article VII. Right to Health and Well-being

Unimpeded access to healthcare services, including sexual, reproductive, and mental health, must be guaranteed without stigma or discrimination.

Legal Basis: ICESCR Article 12 (Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health)

Article VIII. Right to Access Justice and Legal Recourse

Sex workers shall have equal access to justice, legal representation, and redress for human rights violations.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 8 (Right to an Effective Remedy), Article 10 (Right to Fair Trial)

Article IX. Right to Unionize and Collective Bargaining

Sex workers shall have the right to form and join unions, cooperatives, or collectives to advocate for fair conditions and protections.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 20 (Right to Peaceful Assembly), Article 23(4) (Right to Join Trade Unions)

Article X. Right to Fair and Legal Commerce

Sex workers must be granted equal access to financial systems, digital marketplaces, and lawful business operations, including sex-related products.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 17 (Right to Own Property), G20 Principles for Digital Financial Inclusion

Article XI. Right to Free Expression and Association

Sex workers may publicly express their identities and participate in political discourse, including sex work advocacy and organizing.

Legal Basis: UDHR Articles 19 (Freedom of Expression) and 20 (Freedom of Association)

Article XII. Right to Informed Consent and Negotiation

Sex workers have the legal right to define and negotiate the terms of service with clients, including the right to withdraw consent at any time.

Legal Basis: CEDAW General Recommendation 19, UDHR Article 3

Article XIII. Right to Social and Economic Support

Sex workers shall have access to social safety nets, public benefits, education, and housing support without prejudice.

Legal Basis: ICESCR Articles 9–11 (Right to Social Security, Housing, and Education)

Article XIV. Right to Protection Against Exploitation and Forced Labor

Governments must ensure protections against trafficking, forced labor, and coercion in all forms, with systems for safe reporting.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 4 (Freedom from Slavery), Palermo Protocol

Article XV. Right to Digital and Technological Autonomy

Sex workers shall be free to use digital platforms for work and receive protection from surveillance, censorship, and financial exclusion.

Legal Basis: UN HRC Res. 20/8 (Online Rights Equal to Offline), UDHR Article 19

Article XVI. Right to Participate in Policy Formation

Sex workers must be included in policymaking processes that impact their work, safety, and rights.

Legal Basis: UN Declaration on the Right to Development

Article XVII. Right to Immigration and Cross-Border Protections

Sex workers who migrate for work must be protected under international human rights laws and free from discriminatory immigration policies.

Legal Basis: International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (1990)

Article XVIII. Right to Educational and Professional Development

Access to education and training must be available to sex workers, both within and outside the industry, to support personal and professional growth.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 26 (Right to Education)

Article XIX. Right to Economic Independence and Financial Inclusion

Sex workers have the right to have their income recognized legally, access credit, and participate in formal financial systems.

Legal Basis: G20 Principles on Financial Inclusion, UDHR Articles 17 and 22

Article XX. Right to Cultural and Social Recognition

Societies must affirm the dignity, contributions, and diversity of sex workers, combat stigma, and promote cultural inclusion.

Legal Basis: UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity (2005), UDHR Article 27

Article XXI. Right to Produce, Trade, and Consume Legal Pornography

Adults have the right to create, distribute, and access legal pornographic content as a form of artistic, commercial, and sexual expression. This includes the right of sex workers to participate in the adult entertainment industry and to control the terms of their representation and labor within it.

Key Provisions:

- The creation and sale of legal adult content, whether independent or commercial, shall be protected under freedom of expression and enterprise.
- Access to legal pornographic content by consenting adults shall not be restricted on moral or ideological grounds.
- Sex workers shall retain the right to control the use of their image, likeness, and performance.

Legal Basis: UDHR Article 19 (Freedom of Expression), Article 27 (Right to Participate in Cultural Life), and free speech protections in international human rights law.

Closing Statement

This Declaration affirms that the rights of adult sex workers are human rights. Governments, institutions, and communities are called upon to uphold these principles and to center the voices of sex workers in building a world of justice, equality, and freedom.

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Appendix: Legal and Normative Frameworks Supporting This Declaration

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948

- **Article 1** – All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
- **Article 2** – Non-discrimination on the basis of status or identity.
- **Article 3** – Right to life, liberty, and personal security.
- **Article 5** – Freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman treatment.
- **Article 7** – Equality before the law.
- **Article 8** – Right to effective remedy.
- **Article 9** – Freedom from arbitrary arrest or detention.
- **Article 12** – Right to privacy.
- **Article 19** – Freedom of opinion and expression.
- **Article 20** – Freedom of peaceful assembly and association.
- **Article 23** – Right to work, to just and favorable conditions, and to join trade unions.
- **Article 25** – Right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being.
- **Article 26** – Right to education.
- **Article 27** – Right to freely participate in cultural life and benefit from the arts.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 1966

- **Article 2** – Right to remedy.
- **Article 9** – Protection against arbitrary arrest.
- **Article 17** – Protection of privacy.
- **Article 19** – Freedom of expression.
- **Article 22** – Freedom of association.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966

- **Article 6** – Right to work.
- **Article 7** – Right to just and favorable work conditions.
- **Article 9** – Right to social security.
- **Article 12** – Right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

- **Article 13** – Right to education.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions

- **C087** – Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (1948)
- **C098** – Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (1949)
- **C190** – Violence and Harassment Convention (2019)

United Nations General Recommendations and Declarations

- **CEDAW General Recommendation No. 19** – Violence against women, including protection of sex workers.
- **Yogyakarta Principles (2006)** – Application of international human rights law in relation to sexual orientation and gender identity.
- **UN Human Rights Council Resolution 20/8 (2012)** – The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet.
- **Palermo Protocol (2000)** – UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.
- **UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).**

Additional Advocacy References

- **Amnesty International Policy on Sex Work (2016)** – Calls for decriminalization and protection of sex workers' rights.
- **Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP)** – Human Rights Standards for Sex Workers.
- **G20 Principles for Digital Financial Inclusion** – Financial inclusion as a global right, applicable to digital sex workers.