



Astraea LESBIAN FOUNDATION FOR JUSTICE

Gender Justice and Sex Worker Organizing

What is Gender Justice?

Gender Justice addresses all the ways in which a rigid gender binary limits our experience and possibilities for liberation. It embraces a continuum of gender that is fluid and self-determined and ensures body sovereignty, self-determination, healing, equal access and liberation for all people. In order to realize Gender Justice, we must work to end sexism and transphobia simultaneously, as these are interwoven forms of gender oppression. In the same way that gender is nuanced by race, class and ability, Gender Justice is inextricably linked with racial, economic, and disability justice, and must be addressed in concert with these goals.

Astraea's Funding

In the face of profound challenges, and often at great personal risk, Astraea grantee partners are leading a global movement for human rights and safe, affirming, liberating societies for all people. Astraea understands our grantee partners to be experts in employing multiple strategies to address the issues affecting their lives. They are best positioned to be engines for transformative change, and their expertise should be at the center when devising solutions that affect them. We prioritize funding for lesbian and trans-led people of color organizations in the U.S. and in the Global South and East working for social, racial, economic and gender justice. Globally, Astraea grantee partners work at the intersections of multiple issues—for example working on economic justice platforms that include sex work in its particular impact on queer and trans communities.

ASTRAEA'S PRINCIPLES OF GENDER JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

All forms of trafficking are serious human rights violations and need to end.

Astraea opposes all human trafficking whether sex trafficking or trafficking for other forms of free or cheap labor including domestic and farm labor. However, sex trafficking and sex work are not the same issue, and this difference is important especially when developing strategies to end trafficking. The challenges and choices of those forced into prostitution through sex trafficking and those choosing sex work as a source of income can be radically different. Further, exit-only strategies that force women to exit the sex trade leave out the most important voices—those of girls/women involved in sex work OR being trafficked. We believe that human trafficking is a serious human rights violation, and that the trafficking of anyone, of any age or gender, for any reason, requires urgent attention and firm commitment from funders, policy makers, institutions, and most importantly, with those being trafficked themselves leading the discussion.

Solutions must be developed with the expertise of the most affected communities.

Those who are most affected by an issue must be leading voices in creating solutions in order for those solutions to be effective. Astraea supports strategies led by sex workers that address the root problems of economic exploitation and exclusion. Programs that are based on harm reduction and empowerment, often run by young women or trans people of color, provide non-judgmental safe spaces and violence-free environments are most effective in engaging women, particularly young,

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queer and trans women who are most at risk. These peer-based nonjudgmental programs provide sex workers with the space, tools and skills they need to gain self-determination and choice in their lives, and to build their power to be change agents. These programs provide concrete support and political education to build an understanding of the systems of oppression and how sex workers themselves can play a part in interrupting those cycles. Exit-only strategy funding prevents programs that serve sex workers from addressing their specific needs directly, and increases the homophobia, transphobia and sex-worker-phobia that already exists within communities, institutions and in the anti-violence movement. We support critical efforts that ensure that these autonomous powerful voices are articulated, shared and heard.

We urge the immediate support of efforts to address economic justice for LGBTI people, girls, women and trans women around the world.

We understand that sex work is not always connected to sex trafficking, and that not all sex work can be labeled as violence. For some it is a choice; for others, sex work is the only means of survival, especially for those who are compulsorily and systematically excluded from the existing economic structure.

Legal recognition of sex work as work is one step that would have enormous benefit for many of Astraea’s constituents, whether they are engaged in sex work, or are frequently profiled and harassed as sex workers as is the case for many trans women. It is possible to perform sex work without having been trafficked, just as someone can perform domestic labor without having been forced. For nearly everyone, choice of employment is based on the economic options available to them. Legal recognition, rights and protections for sex workers would not only prevent police harassment and extortion and make the profession safer; it could also reduce trafficking by cutting into the profits gained by traffickers. Further, international policy like the “Anti-prostitution pledge” launched during the last Bush Administration as part of the U.S. Global AIDS Act bars use of federal funds to “promote, support, or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution.” The Act forces HIV/AIDS organizations to publicly denounce sex work in order to receive funding from the U.S. and has prevented sex workers (especially those who organize for their rights as sex workers) from obtaining lifesaving health services and resources thereby undermining public health efforts.

We believe that the best approach is to draw attention to the devastating forms of violence that limit freedom and choice—family violence and sexual abuse, globalization, militarization, economic disenfranchisement, failed educational institutions, homelessness, limited access to health care, street and state violence—and work fiercely to organize the collective power to eliminate them. The comprehensive elimination of the many forms of violence will provide self-determination, body sovereignty and freedom of choice.