

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT: COVID-19: Sex workers want to be part of 'essential service'

Sex workers are calling on President Cyril Ramaphosa to include them as an essential service during lockdown. Courtesy #DStv403

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5y0TUMvo38&feature=emb_logo

sex workers are calling on the President to include them as an essential service during lockdown to discuss this now I'm joined via skype by Lisa Haleh from the sex workers education and advocacy task force that sweat for sure as it's better known is achill good morning to you just explain your rationale why do you want to be considered an essential service at this time I mean as we all know that sex work is one of the oldest profession in the world and with us being sexual activists we consider this work which is providing for families and for for the workers so for us at this point sex workers of the hardest-hit at this point because of the nature of the work they do it requires physical contact and with the national lockdown enforced it means that does not contact that sex workers can do with the clients or ways of making money in this is during this pandemic so we say into the government while you're looking at assisting and aiding other workers during this time also think of sex workers who also had his hit who also a losing income due to this pandemic so we saying to the government it's yes how do you propose that should happen from what I know correct me if I'm wrong most sex workers are not registered as employees yes and that is the problem we're having right now because as soon as you may know we have been fighting for the decriminalization of sex work for over 20 years now and so that may affect if sex work was decriminalized sexual would be considered work and they would enjoy labor rights as other African in the country so it is saying that sex work needs to be dick relized so that in times like these they can also be able to go and train for you YF going claim for the temporary relief scheme but the president is speaking about but because currency sex work is criminalized they can't do that right they are left

in the margins they are left that they don't know what yeah now well the status quo is that it is not decriminalized you are now saying a switch you'd like the president to consider including sex workers in one way or another exactly why form could that take what kind of support are you looking to the president to give I mean for for now I mean I know the president has spoken about releasing casual workers getting some sort of release through maybe their companies or whatever but me saying if then the president decides to do something they could be instances like how the current system works where sex workers can then go in and receive some sort of grant payment for this period while they don't have jobs you know I mean in this I know would come with some kind of dangers because with the criminalization you are being you can be arrested for being a sex worker so it means then sex workers have to take to say I'm a sex worker and they can't risk them getting arrested but we're saying the government needs to see that this is a situation which is a disaster and they need to be lenient a bit with the police to say how can we in this month work with sex workers to make sure that they also are covered is the situation but moving forward making sure that we give them rights that will allow them to access services like any other correct me if I'm wrong what I'm hearing the circle is the following is that under the circumstances because sex work in South Africa is still a criminal offense with a lockdown where nobody is supposed to go out of their homes unless it's essential you are asking for the sex workers to be considered in one way or another in terms of a financial support now how do you get that financial support to somebody who's not registered in any way how can they go in to a place and say I am a sex worker how is that

going to be viewed as legit I'm just trying to be practical for a while that's one aspect the second aspect the second aspect which you are raising is something for the future that you are still asking a switch for sex wait to be decriminalized I don't think that's going to be addressed at this point but just going back practically now how could a sex worker be assisted when they are not registered is not a recognised profession it's a criminal offense when you look at it on a practical level it doesn't seem like it but I feel like if we try it will work because we have organization such as sweat such as Sasaki which is the national movement of sex workers which have a membership base that we know of that we have on record that we can vouch for to say these people are sex workers because they access ok so your suggestion could be that organizations an agency like yours sweat and the adjective mentioned could be use as vehicles therefore to allocate distribute any amount of financial help that the president could give correct yes because we've been there we existing and real legitimate organizations it could work as a type of a funding that will go out there to sex workers to say this funding is allocated for sex workers similar to any other funding waste gbb with HIV we can make this funding available for sex workers then organizations such as ours can manage it and we can be accountable for because we know like as you know that in their recent studies that we did we have about a hundred and fifty-eight thousand sex workers in South Africa so you can just imagine that out of that majority of which are female as find themselves in a predicament and their dependents also meaning that they won't have any means of living in this time ok finally well I have you know that you've clarified how you think practically it could work have you knocked on the right doors have you sent your plea to Social Development to a health to the presidency how are they receiving it if you have I mean we currently we receiving some funding from from the Department of Health obviously to do health outreaches and stuff but

we've been in conversation with them to say since at this time we can't conduct any health outreaches to sex workers can we redirect the funding that we get from you to age sex workers in terms of grocery vouchers or other things the necessities that they might need and these are conversations that we have an ongoing conversation with other funders as well that fund the work that we do so that we can redirect the money but also looking into government because these are the fundings project-specific so looking into government to do a special grant that then eight sex workers at this time thank you very much elisee ho there from sweat that's calling for some kind of an insured support at this time for sex workers now