

Press release

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Experiences of Switzerland – Sex work

3.7.–1.11.2026 and 12.1.–25.4.2027 | National Museum Zurich

Sex work has been legal in Switzerland for over 80 years – and yet public attitudes towards it remain polarised. Between stigmatisation, legal regulation and the right to self-determination, sex work highlights key areas of tension in society: from questions of privilege, power, sexuality and gender to issues surrounding migration, racism, poverty and social inequality.

This is the theme of the new edition of 'Experiences of Switzerland'. The video installation centres on 11 contemporary witnesses talking about their experiences of sex work. Their personal stories provide a rare glimpse into lived realities that often remain behind closed doors. The interviews highlight the very different routes into sex work and the extent to which individual circumstances shape these experiences.

The people portrayed talk of financial hardship, migration, family obligations and the desire for agency over their own lives. Some ended up in sex work due to financial pressures, while others appreciate the flexibility it affords them and the opportunity to lead a self-determined working life. At the same time, these contemporary witnesses speak about stigma, violence and discrimination, but also about solidarity, autonomy and professional pride.

To complement the video installation, an interactive media station explains historical developments, legal frameworks and social debates around sex work. Its history is closely linked to ideas of morality: from 'prostitute registers' held by the police in the 1950s and feminist debates of the 1970s to today's discussions about human trafficking, workers' rights and a potential ban on the purchase of sexual services.

The 'Experiences of Switzerland' format intentionally foregoes traditional museum objects, focusing instead on voices, memories and personal experiences. The large-format projection with headphones allows visitors to engage with the testimonies in an immersive and immediate way. This edition of 'Experiences of Switzerland' was designed and realised as a participatory process in collaboration with the Sexworkers Collective.

The video installation will be on display at the National Museum Zurich from 3 July to 1 November 2026 and from 12 January to 25 April 2027.

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