

# AG AboutGender

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## Call for articles

### **Sex, work and rights: contested meanings and transformative knowledge on sex work in a globalised Europe**

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Recent years have seen a remarkable transformation of sex work in Europe, with the increased visibility of migrants operating in the sector - some of them in situations of severe exploitation - and a move towards internet-based work (Kempadoo *et al.* 2015; Sanders *et al.* 2018; di Ronco 2022). In many European countries combined criminalisation of sex work and migration has drastically reduced street-based sex work in favor of apartments or clubs, to reduce the risk of being arrested or deported by the police (Abbatecola 2018, Mai *et al.* 2021; Di Ronco 2022), and simultaneously new technologies have opened up new spaces for interaction and work on platforms, such as OnlyFans (Sanders *et al.* 2018; Swords *et al.* 2023). Correspondingly, in the last decade, issues linked to sex work and trafficking have attracted renewed attention in policy making, public discourse and research (Jahnsen, Waagenar 2018), as well as from increasingly transnational civil society and grassroots movements (Dewey *et al.* 2019, Garofalo Geymonat, Selmi 2019, Ward Wylie 2017) In spite of the persistent marginalisation and stigmatisation affecting sex workers and their rights organisations, their mobilisation has become more visible and more connected across Europe, and have increasingly contributed, in collaboration with feminist, post-colonial and queer researchers, to a better representation of the experiences of sex work and the impact that policies on prostitution, but also on migration, anti-trafficking, urban spaces and digital spaces have on sex workers' lives and basic rights (Le Bail, Giametta 2022; Smith, Mac 2018; Garofalo Geymonat, Macioti 2016, Mai *et al.* 2021). Today, knowledge on sex work is more accessible and more sophisticated, and in particular there is increased awareness that the world of sex work encompasses a wide array of subjects and practices, spaces and working conditions - from exploitative to favorable, with a whole range in

between.

However, the complexities of sex work industries and their links to the rest of society often remain invisible and under-researched in most contexts in Europe, contributing to what can be seen as a form of ‘epistemological stigmatisation’. Such stigmatisation means that the realities of sex work - including exploitation, violence, as well as economic emancipation and self-determination, and all the nuances standing in between - are read exclusively in relation to the exchange of sex for money *per se*, neglecting the social, economic and legal conditions that these exchanges are embedded in. Sexual services are often seen as an exception confirming both the norm of (supposedly) equal and pure intimate relationships (Zelizer 2005) and the norm of (supposedly) non-exploitative labour market relationships (O’Connell Davidson 2015). This obscures the way in which sex work is part of both a continuum of sexuo-economic exchanges (Tabet 1989, 2004) and of exploitative labour relationships. As a consequence, sex work is most often understood as the cornerstone of patriarchy, capitalism or colonialism, which ironically often coexists with a glorification of some of its forms as spaces of exceptional freedom for the sex workers who choose them. This in turn reproduces a dichotomy between ‘good’ women (those who don’t engage in sex work, and those who are forced into it) and ‘bad women’ (those who engage in sex work by choice) and reinforces processes of stigmatisation according to which the former deserve rights and social protection, while the latter do not (Pheterson 1993, 1996; Zambelli 2022).

In order to avoid relying on simplistic interpretations of a complex phenomenon, it is central that research on and representations of sex work recognise the ways in which it is embedded in a system of intersectional inequalities, based on gender, class, nationality, race, sexuality, disability - to name but a few of the most relevant in a European context. Such a system is not specific to the sex market, but pertains to society in general, and shapes other forms of social reproduction - such as domestic and care work - in similar ways. It suffices to consider how, in Europe, the labour necessary for both the material and symbolic reproduction of human life is increasingly commodified and performed by racialised cis and trans women (Ehrenreich, Hochschild 2002; Parreñas, Boris 2010).

Bearing in mind these complexities, this special issue aims to become a space for transformative knowledge on sex work, capable of challenging simplistic understandings of the sex industries in favour of interdisciplinary and intersectional analyses, with the purpose to identify also how to improve the rights and lives of those who engage in sex work - whether by choice, by force or by circumstance. We welcome collaborative submissions co-written by academics, activists and community members in order to put sex workers’ perspectives, experiences and priorities at the centre of the sociological, political and policy debates affecting them.

Submissions are welcome to address, yet not limited to the following topics:

- Digitalisation and platformisation of sex work (incl. digital rights)
- Sex work in the context of migration
- Trafficking and forced labour in the sex industries
- Sex work, intersectional and ‘whore’ stigma’
- Disabilities and neurodivergence in the context of sex work
- Hierarchies and stratification among sex workers
- Policies on prostitution, migration, anti-trafficking, urban space, digital space, and their impact on sex work
- Sex workers’ unionisation, activism and resistance
- Professionalisation of sex work
- Peer-based and peer-only service provision, education and research
- Social work with sex workers
- Sex workers’ health and wellbeing
- Sex workers and housing
- Feminist mobilisations on sex work
- Theorising sex work alongside other forms of work: body work, intimate work, social reproduction
- Consent and negotiation in sex work
- Sex work and sexual citizenship
- Sex work and sexual and reproductive rights
- Ethics in research on sex work

The papers should be between 5000 and 8000 words (excluding references) and can be submitted in Italian, English or Spanish - the official languages of AG - AboutGender. Submissions must include a title, an abstract (max150 words) and a set of keywords (3 to 5) in English and follow the “Guidelines for Authors” available on the [Journal website](#). All documents must come in Windows system compatible formats (.doc or .rtf), following the directions provided by the Peer Review Process.

Please submit by uploading your paper on the [Journal website](#) by **May 15, 2024**.

**The expected schedule for publication is as follows:**

15 May 2024: Articles’ submission

30 July 2024: Authors receive anonymous peer reviews

30 September 2024: Articles’ final submission following peer reviews

30 November 2024: Publication

Do not hesitate to contact the editors for further information:

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