

The Reimagining

Sex Work Media Guide

A guide for journalists and sex workers
by journalists and sex workers



Julia on the doorstep at PIC Amsterdam. Photo: Sabine Joosten

Colophon

This guide is published by Reimagining Sex Work, an initiative of sex workers in collaboration with scientists, photographers and journalists.

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www.ReimaginingSexWork.nl

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We are very proud of the remarkable collaboration between sex workers, models, photographers, scientists, journalists and editors to realise this guide, and of this media guide resulting from it.

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The first photography workshop took place during the summer of 2021 at the Red Light District in Amsterdam.
Photo: Sevla

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Introduction

This guide was created after many joint discussions and exchanges of knowledge between journalists, photographers, (image) editors and sex workers. Together they sketch a nuanced, honest and complete picture of the portrayal of sex work in the media for the first time. The guide discusses important points for attention, pitfalls and gives tips for good cooperation between sex workers and journalists.

Sex work in the Netherlands is a legal profession about which there are many prejudices and misconceptions. These are often unintentionally and unconsciously confirmed and reinforced in the media. This affects how society views sex work, and it increases stigma. That stigma attached to sex work has serious consequences for the safety and well-being of the people who do this work. Journalism can play an important role in reducing stigma and prejudice.

As part of the Reimagining Sex Work project, sex workers, journalists, photographers and editors discussed sex work and the media in a series of online focus group meetings. This interesting exchange of experiences, stories and perspectives led to understanding and cooperation. The proceeds of these conversations were the input for this guide. In addition to these online meetings, photography workshops were organized for and by sex workers. And in collaboration with sex workers and photographers, we worked on better images about sex work for the Dutch image banks.

This guide provides tips and tricks for anyone involved in media and sex work. It consists of a general part and specific information for various specializations such as reporters, editors-in-chief, image makers and of course sex workers themselves. After reading this guide, you will know more about sex work and how you can help tell a more nuanced sex work story.



Niki under her red umbrella. Photo: Robin Haurissa

What
everyone
should
know
about
sex work

What are we actually talking about when we talk about sex work? In this chapter we go back to basics.

Everyone has something to do with sexuality. Like it or not, we all have a personal relationship with sexuality. That relationship is shaped by our own experiences, but also by how our society views sexuality. That is why it is often difficult to talk to each other about sex. This applies to teenagers aged 16, to people in their midlife crisis, to journalists and to sex workers. Objectivity does not exist, and certainly not on this subject. Our personal relationship with sex informs our professional relationship with sex. It colors, even though we don't always realize it, how we judge other people's sex. This applies to journalists and sex workers. Some of us may have more experience exploring those relationships.

What is sex work. Sex work is the provision of a paid sexual service. This includes many different types of sex work, such as a webcam show, a performance in a porn film, offering worn panties, a striptease, a tantric massage or penetrative sex. When someone offers these acts as a paid service, we are speaking of sex work. The professional group therefore includes strippers, cam and porn performers, erotic masseurs, escorts, people who work behind the window, and so on.

Who does sex work. Sex workers, like all people, have different genders. Women and transgender women are in the majority with more than 95 percent, but non-binary people, transgender men and men also work as sex workers. We do not know how many sex workers there are in the Netherlands. There are estimates that more than 20,000 people work in prostitution in the Netherlands. The majority of the sex workers have Dutch nationality. But there are also many sex

workers with a migration background.

Policy. Prostitution is the only form of sex work for which special laws have been written. In theory, we speak of prostitution when the customer pays for



Nils-Anders during the pop-up strip club Striptopia at the Whore House film and art festival. Photo: Sabine Joosten

sexual intercourse or for touching genitals. But in practice, there is not always a clear dividing line between the different working methods. And the services offered vary as much per person as per form. The same laws and regulations apply to all other forms of sex work as to any other job in the Netherlands. Prostitution is basically legal. However, legal in this case means that you are only allowed to work if you meet a number

of specific rules. For example, prostitutes must work in a licensed workplace, such as a window brothel, club or private house. Sex workers who work through a club, private house or escort agency are required to be paid through the opting in regulation. As a result, they have considerably fewer rights than ordinary employees or self-employed persons. For example, they were not entitled to Corona emergency support.

Legality. Sex work has been legal in the Netherlands since the time of Napoleon. There was a ban on brothels, but that was lifted in 2000. The brothels that had been tolerated until then could now obtain a permit from the municipality. Yet, since the lifting of the ban on brothels,

more than two-thirds of the licensed places disappeared. The policy on sex work is determined at the municipal level. Many municipalities choose to test individual sex workers against the same rules as sex establishments such as brothels and sex clubs. In practice, this makes it virtually impossible for an individual sex worker to work independently at home or as an escort. Individual sex workers who nevertheless work in these municipalities without a permit are popularly referred to as ‘illegal prostitutes’ and their homes as ‘illegal brothels’.

Decriminalization. Because sex workers around the world experience violence and exclusion due to their profession, they are committed to their own safety



Sex workers from SAVE and Striptopia organise several charity bingos for their colleagues in financial need during the pandemic. This one took place at PIC Amsterdam. Photo: Nadia





on a global scale. The red umbrella is the international symbol for that struggle. A lot is also organized in the Netherlands, and this guide is an example of that. Sex workers in the Netherlands state that an amendment to the legislation is an important step towards safer working conditions. For this, they look at the decriminalization model that has been in place for years in New South Wales in Australia, where sex work before the law is a profession like any other. In practice, this means that sex workers have more and better access to the legal, financial

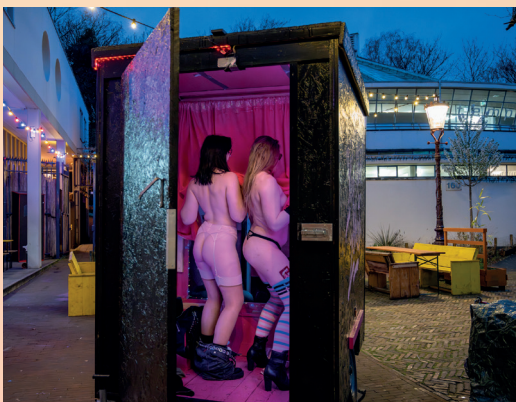
and healthcare systems. For example, they are more likely to go to the police or a doctor if they experience violence and win lawsuits when managers in brothels go beyond their limits. And they can just rent a house, open a bank account and take out insurance. That is not the case in the Netherlands. Decriminalization strengthens the position of all sex workers, especially those who experience labor exploitation or violence. The decriminalization model has also been adopted in Belgium in 2022.



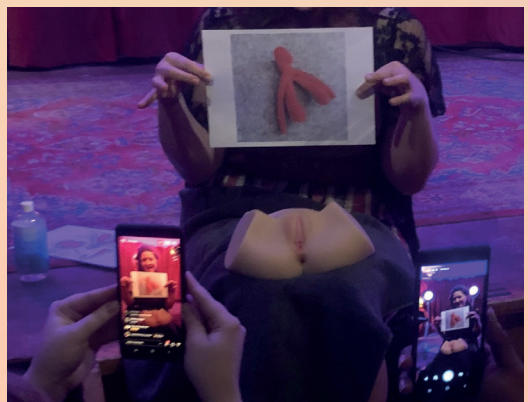
During the charity bingo in Vrankrijk (Amsterdam's oldest squat), someone won a lap dance. And a hug!
Photo: Sabine Joosten



During the charity bingo in Vrankrijk
Photo: Sabine Joosten



Peep Show Hoes at Queer Red's festival. Models: Megan and Feya Fern. Photo: Sabine Joosten.



Sex lessons from a professional are streamed live during an online charity bingo at cafe 't Rozenknoepje in Eindhoven. Photo: Farid



Sex work in the media

This chapter consists of a general part, with information that is important for everyone, a glossary and a part with tips and tricks for the various specializations and roles.

For journalists and sex workers

During the development of this manual, it soon became apparent that journalists and sex workers have many ideas about each other's work that do not always help a smooth cooperation. It may therefore happen that reporting on sex work paints an incomplete picture of the work and the people who do it. Below you will find the biggest common thematic challenges and ways to deal with them.

To trust. Every good relationship is based on trust. This includes the one between a sex worker and a journalist. For news reports about sex work, sex workers are often not approached themselves and if they are, the quote is sometimes incorrect. A journalist with good intentions is therefore often behind with one-zero, even before they have even been introduced.

It therefore helps to be transparent about the journalistic process and how your article or video comes about. Explain your working method, what you want to achieve, be generous where possible with agreements to read back and correct a piece, and so on.

But journalists also do not simply trust the sources they speak to, so neither do sex workers. Expertise is not assumed and must be verified. That can sometimes feel uncomfortable for sex workers. Especially if you've often had the experience that your real story doesn't matter. That experience is so recognizable for sex workers that the slogan 'nothing about us without us' is also frequently used at sex worker rights demonstrati-

ons. Here too, it helps to clearly express mutual expectations to each other.

Expertise. Journalists and sex workers often know little about each other's work practices. In fact, journalists and sex workers themselves sometimes know little about each other's way of working. For example, it is customary in some editorial offices for an editor to have virtually no influence on the title or image that appears with a piece, while in other editorial offices everything related to a publication is discussed. Treatment and language use differ not only per person, but also per publisher. In some editorial offices there are specific guidelines for inclusive language use or there is a diversity working group.

The same applies to sex work: one form of sex work is not the other. Someone who works behind a window has to deal with completely different rules than someone who receives customers in a hotel room, a working practice that is very different from that of someone who uses webcams. Fortunately, there are quite a few sex work organizations that can answer questions about the broader context of the work.

Stigma on sex work also means that not all sex workers will describe themselves as sex workers. Or that they tend to use language that makes one form of sex work 'less bad' than the other. We call this the 'whorearchy', and it often sounds like 'I may work as an erotic tantra masseur, but at least I'm not behind the window' or 'I may have sex with peo-



Sex workers in debate about the decriminalisation of sex work in Belgium during the Whore Arts & Politics festival Snap 2022 organised by sex workers. Photo: Sabine Joosten

ple in a room, but at least I'm not standing naked for everyone on the internet'. Journalists themselves sometimes look differently at works for the online editors of a commercial channel and the research editors for a background documentary at a public broadcaster, though they all work with the same elements. For sex work, however, the less prestige a certain form of work has, the more the sex workers suffer from stigma and often violence. As a media maker and as a sex worker, therefore, try to avoid contributing to this.

Contact. Journalists and sex workers have trouble finding each other. And that is actually quite strange because we all work in the public space. Journalists can often be found through the publishers they work for and sex workers nowadays very often have an online presence in the form of advertisements or content platforms. Of course it is not always desirable that you bother someone when

they are busy with something else, so to do a search for someone's social media is often best. Both journalists and sex workers are well represented on Twitter and/or LinkedIn. Once you have contact, maintain it. Let us know if you change publisher, work email or work number. But also let us hear from you for general knowledge sharing. For example, sex workers are not only sex workers, but also parents, independent entrepreneurs, informal carers, and they have identities that are also interview-worthy in a different context. Sex workers are often also well aware of what is going on in terms of newsworthiness within their own community. So use each other in this.

Safety. Due to the stigma that rests on sex work, being out as a sex worker is not always safe and in many cases downright dangerous. Sex workers experience violence because of their profession. Sometimes during their work, but also

outside of it. The violence ranges from physical violence to stalking to harassment, eviction or exclusion from financial services. Clients are not the only perpetrators, but also people from a sex worker's environment, such as parents at school, neighbours, relatives, and so on. So discuss in advance what the risks could be for the sex worker who participates in an interview. Think of recognisability, not only in image but also in context. And ask yourself what risks you are willing to take as a sex worker, journalist or editor and to what extent you can take care of that.

Questions, questions, questions. Assuming that we cannot know everything, we do not always know what desirable language is. And that's okay. But do mention that at the start of a conversation and ask about someone's preferences. In general, people would rather answer an honest question than defend themselves against stigmatizing language and inappropriate treatment.

There are also questions that sex workers have been asked a hundred times without being really important to the item in question. The 'what do your parents think of it', 'how did you get into the profession', 'how much do you earn exactly', 'is your work sexually satisfying' are downright boring and really irrelevant for an item about legislation, a demonstration and often not even for a personal interview. So it's not surprising if they do feel a little inappropriate. Avoid them or work together on another item in which they do fit.

The same applies to questions about the so-called 'other side of sex work', which then refers to any abuses. Asking questions about human trafficking and exploitation in the sex industry to an average sex worker is about the same as asking a cashier how the labor rights of asparagus pickers can be guaranteed. Such a question often hijacks the entire conver-

sation and ensures that a lot of urgent issues that are now playing in the sex worker community never get discussed, let alone make the news. Unless the title of the article is 'How do sex workers feel about combating abuses', the question is almost always stigmatizing and links criminal offenses to the legal activities of sex workers.

Everyone has an interest in a frame.

How and where sex work is published often has a political purpose in addition to an informative purpose. This guide, for example, aims to destigmatize sex work. We try to do this as nuanced as possible, but of course we do not always escape our own framing. We see a number of frames in the media that are stubbornly repeated, like the human trafficking frame mentioned above. But also the 'happy hooker vs. forced sex worker' frame. By thinking in such dualities, you place the average 'I choose this job, but I also prefer to sit on the beach with a book' sex worker outside the debate. Or even the 'pathetic girl' frame that never pays attention to (trans) men and non-binary sex workers.

These frames are often accompanied by figures about coercion and exploitation. Reports often use figures that are scientifically questionable. Despite the fact that these kinds of figures are important information for an item, we unfortunately have to conclude that really measurable figures about coercion and exploitation are simply not available. No, not even with the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings. But these reports are often widely picked up by Dutch journalism. They are therefore a powerful instrument for coloring the public debate. For example, we see that an organization such as the CKM regularly republishes previous studies prior to the consideration of a law on sex work. It is good to know that the press officer there also co-wrote the program section on sex

work for the Christian Union. Larger ideological and financial interests regularly play a role in publications on exploitation and coercion. It is therefore important to also listen to each other in these types of situations because an article about laws and regulations that influence the lives of sex workers, without mentioning the consequences for sex workers, makes the lives of people in the profession much more dangerous.



Sex workers travel from the Netherlands to Brussels with their own built peepshow on wheels to celebrate the recent removal of sex work from the Criminal Code in Belgium. Photo: Sabine Joosten

Glossary

Journalists and sex workers know the impact of language like no other. When you write or speak about sex work, you run the risk of using terms that are not entirely unambiguous, or of which the sex work community 'prefers not to use that word'.

This glossary contains a large number of terms and explains why something is and is not okay to say or write.

Which concepts are and are not ok?

PROSTITUTE

- is often used and experienced as negative. In many cases it does not cover all the services that a sex worker offers.

WHORE

- swear word, and always condescending (just like: 'of easy virtue' or 'girl of pleasure')

SEX WORKER

- umbrella term for anyone who provides a paid sexual service. The term was coined by the sex work community itself and is used

SELLING YOUR BODY

- a sex worker simply takes their own body home after work, the body does not change hands.

OFFERING A SEXUAL SERVICE

- a sex worker offers a certain service for a fee, just like a masseur or an accountant also offers a service. It is inclusive of all forms of sex work.

'WINDOW DISPLAY' OR 'BODY ON SALE'

- is often used when referring to people who work behind the windows, they have to acquire customers. Displaying or 'selling out' turns a person into an object.

ACQUIRING CUSTOMERS

- that is literally what it is

WHORE OR SEX BUYER

- it is derogatory to both sex workers and clients, and it contributes to stigma. In addition, a customer who is ashamed of his visit is a risk of violence.

CUSTOMER PAYING FOR A SEXUAL SERVICE

- that's what a sex worker's customer does when they visit a sex worker.

BUYING SEX

- you don't buy a massage or a new haircut either. You pay for a service.

DRUG ADDICT/JUNKIE

- junk means garbage and people are not garbage, and it is not always the case that someone who uses drugs also lives with an addiction.

SOMEONE WHO USES DRUGS

- neutral wording of someone who uses drugs

ILLEGAL BROTHEL/ILLEGAL SEX HOUSE/ILLEGAL SEX ESTABLISHMENT.

- It often just concerns a home where someone has a workspace or lounge. Sometimes it is a house where several sex workers work who do not want or are not allowed to work in a licensed workplace.

SEX WORKER WORKING AT HOME

- factually correct way to explain the situation when it comes to working from a residential house.

VULNERABLE WOMEN

- everyone is vulnerable and women are not necessarily more vulnerable than men or non-binary people. Moreover, people are often made (more) vulnerable. By law and regulations, by lived experience, by discrimination and exclusion. It is not okay if such processes are not mentioned, but the sex worker is still labeled as vulnerable without further explanation. In addition, there are sex workers who experience problems, coercion or exploitation in their work, but who are not women.

SEX WORKERS IN A VULNERABLE POSITION

- This refers to vulnerabilities in which someone's access to justice is hindered. It is even more ok if you name that or the person who put a sex worker in a vulnerable position, as in: 'sex worker who was excluded from Corona-related government support'; 'sex worker whose municipality does not offer legal possibilities for working from home'; or: 'sex worker who has been evicted from her home because of her work'. This puts the responsibility back on the agents that can really make a difference.

ILLEGAL PROSTITUTION

- sex work in the Netherlands is legal, but sex workers can work in an unlicensed workplace. We are also not talking about illegal driving (driving without a license).

UNLICENSED SEX WORK - someone is doing sex work in an unlicensed location where a permit is required. An unlicensed sex worker can have a Chamber of Commerce registration and simply pay taxes.

STEPPING OUT/ EXITING SEXS WORK

- is a term often used by agencies that claim to want to help sex workers, but where after 'stepping out' the help often stops. You would also not use this term for quitting a different job (e.g. Prof. Bintjes exited university; Minister Rutte has stepped out of politics, etc.).

CAREER CHANGE OR CAREER SWITCH

- someone no longer does sex work and instead focuses on a different career.

PIMP

- this term refers to a criminal who forces people to do sex work. The term is in current political debate falsely connected to third parties, such as a partner, adult children living at home, security guard, accountant, driver or colleagues.

THIRD PARTIES

- or a term that indicates a relationship between that person and the sex worker, such as a partner, adult children living at home, security guard, accountant, driver or colleagues, etc.

USING HUMAN TRAFFICKING WHEN IT COMES TO SEX WORK

- the term is often used interchangeably for sex work, when it is something completely different. Sex work is not human trafficking and human trafficking is not sex work.

SEX WORK

- when it comes to sex work. Or human trafficking if it is actually about human trafficking.

BOY PROSTITUTION

- is used for (young) adult men who have sex with other men for money. Sex work is not child abuse and child abuse is not sex work.

MSM SEX WORK

- MSM stands for Men Who Have Sex With Men. There are male sex workers who offer them a service.

And then some concepts

Decriminalization assumes that all separate rules and laws that criminalize sex workers will disappear and that people who do the work have the same access to justice and health care as anyone else. According to human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, decriminalization is the only model that enables sex workers to effectively claim their (labour) rights and thus offers them more security.

Legalization means that the work is legal, but that there are still a lot of rules that do not apply to other professions. In the case of regulation, it may be the case that sex work is prohibited by law, but that it is tolerated, for example, with separate rules, as we see, for example, with the sale of soft drugs.

Criminalization is the last option in tackling sex work. In addition, sex work is prohibited by law and there are penalties for practicing the profession.

The **Swedish model** or **Nordic model**: this form of legislation originated in Sweden and criminalizes the clients of a sex worker. In the Netherlands it is mainly Christian political parties and organizations that want this model. Extensive scientific research in the various countries where the model has been introduced shows that the introduction of this model makes sex workers less safe and more often confronted with violence, because their work is forced 'underground'. In many places in the Netherlands, a sex worker must have a permit to work, which we call the permit system. The

municipality issues such a permit and can therefore decide not to grant a permit, which means that in theory someone cannot do sex work. The more than 300 municipalities in the Netherlands often apply different rules with regard to granting a permit, which means that there is a lot of uncertainty about this. Because in some places sex workers who want to work at home have to comply with the same rules as a large brothel, it is almost impossible for them to get a permit. For the application of this personal sex work permit, the applicant enters with name and address among the other permit applications, such as an alcohol or terrace permit for a catering company or an environmental permit for a construction company, on the municipal website or in the local newspaper. Since the lifting of the ban on brothels in 2000, more than two thirds of the licensed workplaces in the Netherlands have disappeared.

Tips and tricks per specialist

Sex workers

When you are asked to participate in an interview as a sex worker, there are several things to take into account.

What do you want to show of yourself?

Before making any commitments, it is helpful to ask yourself; “What do I want to say about myself?” Maybe you want to give your opinion about a new law, but don’t want to talk about what your parents think of your work. Do you want to be recognizable or not? Do you want to be interviewed at home or in a neutral place? Do you use your own name or your work name or maybe a completely different name? Make clear agreements about this with the journalist. Think carefully in advance about the risks, but also about the benefits of your media appearance. Because once online or broadcast it will remain findable forever. If you are still in doubt, talk to a colleague or contact a sex work organization.

Who is the journalist? In addition to someone’s name and the medium they work for, you can also ask why someone wants to write about sex work, have they done this before and can they send you an example? Of course you can always google it. If you think someone has enough knowledge and does a good job, then that can be a reason to participate in the story. If you read pertinent untruths, that may be a reason not to participate. Also ask the journalist which choices they make themselves and which ones are made by the editor-in-chief (for example the title) or the image editor (the photo accompanying a story). And ask whether the journalist has read this guide.

What is the purpose? The approach of an article is always different. Sometimes it is a more personal story, sometimes a news report on a subject that only needs a brief explanation or an opinion. Ask the journalist to speak to you for your own expertise or for a general answer about sex work. If you think a journalist is still missing information, tell them. Journalists often like it when you think along. Also ask if other people are being interviewed and who they are; google them too. Are these people for sex worker rights or against? These can also be reasons to participate or not. Often conversations or articles are conceived as a debate, where two opinions oppose each other. Kind of like a fight. In such a case, ask yourself whether your contribution will receive the attention and role it deserves. When in doubt, consult a colleague or contact a sex work organization.

Is it a live performance? A program can be recorded in advance or it can be a live broadcast. Both have advantages and disadvantages. With a live broadcast, it cannot be cut, so you know exactly what is being broadcast to the world. But you can also be faced with unexpected questions or situations, which you have to be



Photo: Red Insight



Herkenbare beelden voRecognisable images for sex workers made by sex workers. Photo: Red Insight

able to deal with. For example, unexpected opponents of sex work may suddenly join a conversation. Then be assured that you always know more about the subject and that your lived experiences outweigh their opinion.

Will you email it to me? Record agreements made. Have you discussed with the journalist which name you want to use, whether a photo will be added, whether and how you will be unrecognizable? But also that you can check the text beforehand for factual inaccuracies and if the journalist wants an agreement on this? Put these appointments on the email or on an app with each other. Explicitly ask for an ‘agreement’ to that message. Of course, trust is most important in a relationship, including with a journalist. But when you have agreements made on paper, you are more firmly in your shoes if something does go wrong. Do know: wanting to correct the substantive part sometimes clashes with the journalist’s freedom of the press. If you do not agree with a certain choice of the journalist, you can try to bring it up.

What are you asking me now? You can often ask the journalist to send you the questions in advance so that there are no surprises. Be careful with your answers,

because ‘off the record’ does not exist. Sometimes journalists ask questions under the motto “playing the devil’s advocate”, even if they are not really related to the topic. Think in advance what you are going to say to that. It could also be something as simple as “I think we were talking about a different topic.” During an interview about sex work, avoid using the word human trafficking. Because sex work and human trafficking are often mentioned in the same sentence, many people believe that they are the same thing. And the audience often forgets the denial in an answer. When you say “I am not a victim” someone remembers “I am a victim”. So rather say phrases like ‘I choose this profession myself’ or ‘I decide how I organize my work’. Also know that a journalist sometimes also gives a cross in a question so that you get the space to say what is really important. Even if you talk to the journalist in front of you, your answers are mainly intended for the audience at home.

Am I in the picture? Together with the journalist or photographer, think about the location where and how you will be in the picture. The media likes to have images that make it immediately clear that it is about sex work. This often results in clichéd images. The photo or video may

soon go all over the country, so let yourself be depicted in a way that you think is suitable. Ask whether your photo is only for this article or whether the photo will also be included in an image bank. And indicate, for example, that your image may not be linked to forced sex work or documents about unlicensed sex work. Sometimes you can make agreements with the photographer about the distribution of the compensation if photos are placed in an image bank.

Adjust something? The headline above an article is sometimes put above the piece by someone other than the writer. The journalist you spoke to sometimes has no say in this. That depends on how an editor works and that varies quite a bit. In a newspaper there is a good chance that the writer of the article has nothing to do with the headline, whereas in an internet editorial office it is often the journalist who comes up with the headline. Even if there is a non-fitting photo above an online article, you can always ask whether it can be adjusted. If you ex-

plain to the journalist why you think this is necessary, they will often be open to it. A newspaper or magazine is printed, so that is unfortunately no longer possible afterwards. Even an online video can be adjusted if, for example, your name title is not as agreed. Keep in mind that this is much more work for a journalist and editors than adding an adjustment to a text or a different photo. If you cannot come to an agreement and the relationship has come to an end, as an interviewee you can also demand rectification from the Council for Journalism or through the courts in the event of factual inaccuracies. But it is preferential to be ahead of both through good communication from the first contact.

Good relationship! Finally: build a good relationship with one or more journalists who you think are interested in the subject. You can also approach them yourself by pitching a story to them. They often just like that.



Photo: Red Insight

Writing journalists and reporters

Audience. It may seem obvious, but sex workers are not just a subject, they are your audience. Especially when it comes to items about sex work.

Know who you ask. Sex workers are the experts in sex work. They know the trade like no other and can tell you all about it. About the legislation, the daily practice and about the problems that arise. But like journalists, not all sex workers are the same or do the same job. Keep that in mind when approaching people. Someone who webcams does something completely different from someone who works as an escort.

Also ask yourself: to what extent can this speaker say something that actually makes my story better? Especially in a publication that does not rely solely on a per-

sonal story, it is very nice if a sex worker has a strong bond with the community. These are often the people with the most knowledge, at both national and international level. And also the people who can possibly refer you to other good sources. Many stories have not two sides, but several sides. So think carefully about who you allow to speak as the 'other side'. Are the numbers and claims you get correct? Is it scientifically based? And how neutral is neutral? It may sound exaggerated, but: google a spokesperson. What else do people care about? Especially with politically charged subjects such as sex work, your story is guaranteed to improve.

Advocates. In the Netherlands, a large number of organizations are involved in sex work in various areas. Throughout



Linda Lush at her workplace in a Dutch brothel. Photos: Sabine Joosten



the country there are groups of sex workers who stand up for their interests and there are health clinics that specialize in helping sex workers. These types of organizations have an enormous amount of knowledge about the work and the people who do it. Take advantage of this. If they can't help you right away, they always know someone who can call you about a certain subject.



Importance of the headline. We all know how incredibly important the headline above a story is. No matter how good your story is, if your headline isn't that good, no one will read it. It can therefore be tempting to 'go to the edge'. Which is an option. Keep in mind that you are talking about people. Detailed violence or swear words are never pleasant to read, and certainly not in large letters above a story that you contributed to about a sex worker. It is of course possible that you do not decide on the headline at all, but your editor-in-chief will put the headline above it later. Then always discuss what you have agreed with the sex worker(s) you have spoken to and what you would like yourself.

Photographers and image makers

Sometimes it seems like there are only three ways to portray sex workers. Like a pair of legs in high heels next to a stationary car, working in a window area at night or crying in a corner. These often seem to be the only images used in news items about human trafficking. Many sex workers do not recognize themselves in these images. After all, hardly anyone works on the street in the Netherlands and window brothels are also under pressure nationwide. Not to mention regularly seeing your profession portrayed as something fearful and sad. So time for new images. Together with sex workers and image makers, we therefore worked on a collection of new images that are also available through a number of large image banks.

Anonymize. In order to combat stigmatization, it would be preferential to have a full picture of sex workers. Photos in which someone has a bar in front, or worse a cut off head, depersonalizes and reinforces the idea of criminogenicity. Yet not every sex worker wants and is able to be safely recognizable in the photo. There is a whole range of possibilities to anonymize an image of a sex worker in a chic way. Think of an actual, not eye-catching disguise, but also by working with the sharpness/depth effect. Keep in mind that the environment can also reveal - or conceal - someone's identity. So discuss well with each other what will be shown and how, and adjust the location accordingly where necessary.

Cliches. A good press image speaks for itself. Since the public often has a one-dimensional image of sex work, we unfortunately often have to rely on the aforementioned clichés. Because no one recognizes a photo of a sex worker who brings their children to school as a sex

worker. But by continuing to repeat clichés, we also repeat the negative stereotyping. So do use them, but try to use them to broaden the image we have of sex workers.

Ask a sex worker. Sex workers know very well what their daily activities look like. For sex workers that may sometimes even feel a bit boring, but for non-sex worker photographers they can sometimes not even be imagined in advance. Talk to each other about this when you portray sex work or a sex worker.

Text. When you offer a photo to an image bank, provide an appropriate text. Provide information about the context in which the photo was taken and what articles the image may be used for. In sex work, a 'do not use with' wish often applies. If you note this, such a photo will be shown if someone uses a certain search term. You can get around this by replacing a few letters with asterisks, or an i with a l, or an o with a zero. For example, 'do not use with articles about coercion, exploitation or human trafficking'.



Sex workers have built a mobile brothel in protest against the many closures of safe and legal workplaces.
Photo: Sabine Joosten

Image editors

Diversity. Sex workers are not only young blond (trans) women from Eastern Europe who work behind the window in Amsterdam. Sex workers are also non-binary people and (trans) men, from the Netherlands or anywhere in the world, who have a whole range of specializations. Show that!

The right job. We regularly see an article about unlicensed home work with a photo of window workers in Amsterdam, which is not only incorrect, it also further obscures the coverage of sex work and thus increases the stigma. An image of the actual type of sex work mentioned in an article is therefore important.

Check the caption. When you, as a sex worker, participate in a report about the closure of your licensed workplace and then see your photo in every article about human trafficking, then that sucks, to say the least. So check carefully in which context a photo was taken. Also check whether the photographer has provided information on which subjects a photo may or may not be used for.

Place a sex worker. In addition to sex workers, sex workers are also parents, informal carers, lung covid patients and entrepreneurs. So if you still want to choose a photo of a window area, place it with an article about self-employment.



Research by the GGD and RIVM shows that there are fewer STIs among sex workers than other people. In the Netherlands, sex workers can visit special STD clinics free of charge and anonymously. Photos: Sabine Joosten

Editors-in-chief

The consequences of your headline.

Of course, as many people as possible should read your articles and watch videos. That is also great for the sex worker(s) in your story. Keep in mind that you are always talking about people and that you cannot drag in those clicks at all costs. Stick to what's in the piece, don't mix up quotes and let people be as they are. The latter can also mean that a speaker may use swear words, but you consciously choose not to use them in the headline (or perhaps not to use them at all), no matter how 'nice' it may sound. That way you can also take violence into account, for example. Ask yourself: how specifically do you want to state that?

Of course you shouldn't lie about what might have happened, but how many details should you include? Sex workers, like journalists, are vulnerable creatures; no one likes to read a potentially traumatic event letter by letter, especially in thick bold letters on the front page.

Protect your interviewees. Think carefully about aftercare for a publication. For example, is someone available to moderate comments under a Facebook post? And what do you do if a sex worker is recognized despite all precautions? It can greatly promote mutual trust if a sex worker talks about this with a journalist beforehand and you make agreements



Jorma Bos: "There are a lot of people who lack cuddles and sex. I can express my love and bliss in this profession"
Photo: Tammy van Nerum



Dennis: "You are allowed to charge for all types of services. Except for sex. Then it is taboo. Why?" Photo: Tammy van Nerum

together. Of course you can never completely seal it, but if your interviewee is aware of possible risks and possible measures in advance, it may save a lot of hassle or violence afterwards.

Sex work in the diversity committee. In many editorial offices there are groups of colleagues who talk and think about diversity together. This often (rightly) concerns ethnic or cultural background, religion, skin color or gender. It is now very logical that in a story about trans people, trans people actually have their say and that a story about racism does not only have white speakers. Yet it of-



EliteVIPelite: “The police beat me and locked me up. I am discriminated against in my country because I live a transexual life. I could do nothing but prostitution. I fled from Moldova to the Netherlands. Even here I am not always safe. There is a lot of hatred towards us” Photo: Tammy van Nerum

ten happens that in publications about sex work, the people who actually do the work cannot be seen or read. On average, the members of a diversity committee are very concerned with representation and therefore the colleagues are pre-eminently the first to bring this to attention.

Who doesn't or does write about sex work? During the focus groups, it became clear that not just anyone is allowed to write an article about sex work. For example, there was a sex worker who was not allowed to address colleagues about errors in stories about sex work during a media internship. The editor-in-chief and internship supervisor had too much trouble with his sex work. An editor, and partner of a sex worker, was banned from making articles about sex work or even sexuality. The same rules did not apply to other expertises or to partners of, for example, teachers or police officers. This is a shame, because often such a person has very good access to the community or already has a head start in terms of knowledge. That is really no different with sex work.

Share this guide. It's great that you're reading this guide now, but especially share it with people who make stories on a daily basis. If your colleagues know what is expected of them when dealing with a speaker, the interview, story or video will come about more easily. The sex worker feels heard and the journalist who makes the story has a good feeling about it.



Amanda: "There are many people who would like to do this job. But wanting it is not the same as being able to do it."
Marlene Vivas Amador: "I was born in Nicaragua as an activist. Trans women are not born in the wrong body, but in the wrong society" Photo: Tammy van Nerum

Students

Know who you ask. Many sex workers who are visible in the media get a lot of questions from students for interviews, surveys and general information. Now that is first of all very flattering, but it also often takes a little more time than when a seasoned journalist calls for a quote. So read well. Try to research general questions or ask sex worker organizations rather than individual sex workers. Also find out whether your questions really fit the sex worker you want to interview.

Know what you're asking. A bachelor's thesis or a 'short news item' assignment is of course very important, but it does not yield much to a sex worker. If there is no publication, there is no exposure for 'the good cause' or for the sex worker

themselves. For some sex workers, financial compensation is the only way to free up time for these kinds of interviews. If that is not an option for you as a student, see if you can contribute in another way. You could volunteer your time. Maybe you can help with the next sex worker rights demonstration or your study expertise will come in handy in another way.

Keep in touch. Feedback what you did with an interview or a survey. It is always nice to read that a contribution has led to a good grade. And a copy of a short video or a text is now also shared that way. If you are going to work in your field after your studies, please let us know, because the basis for a good working relationship has, after all, already been laid.



Julia: "When the coronavirus hit the world, I was alone, in a new country where I had no family or friends. I survived through sex work. Sex work and its community helped me when I thought nobody cared. That's why it's important for me to be part of a community. Together we can face these challenges." Photo: Sabine Joosten

Conclusion

With this project we hope to take a joint step towards a fairer and more nuanced image of sex work in the media. By using this guide, providing more visual material and by entering into and maintaining a dialogue with each other, we reduce stigma and prejudice about sex work.

It won't always be easy. While organizing the focus groups, we noticed that both journalists and sex workers sometimes interpreted 'improving image' as 'rosy' or 'good'. We strive for a complete picture of sex work. An image that does justice to the stories of all sex workers, especially in all their diversity. We don't have to like sex work to want to contribute to less violence against sex workers. Media coverage plays an essential role in this.

Thank you! By reading this guide, we have hopefully helped you a bit on your way to creating more nuanced media about sex work. Also feel free to share this guide with colleagues. And don't forget to use the visual material that was created through this project. For more information, images, useful links and updates on this guide, visit

www.ReimaginingSexWork.nl

We believe that every little bit helps. This is how we ensure a safer world for sex workers step by step and contribute to a well-informed society.

Thank you,

Reimagining Sex Work.



Photo: Juan



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