

Readout: Fairwork Sex Work Project Report Launch

15 May 2025

[Fairwork](#) is a research project at the Oxford Internet Institute focused on labour conditions in the platform economy. Yesterday, they launched a [report](#) on working conditions experienced by sex workers using four different digital platforms: OnlyFans, AdultWork, Streamate and Chaturbate.

Key points:

- Online sex trafficking legislation like FOSTA/SESTA has pushed sex workers into gig economy platforms with increased precarity and poor working conditions
- Poor working conditions include financial insecurity/precariety, widespread abuse and harassment by clients, stalking, doxing, workers have their content stolen and reposted, no access to collective representation, and inadequate support from platforms.
- Fairwork researchers developed principles/minimum standards that platforms should implement to make sure work is just - enable annual scoring of platforms that mediate sex work (*interesting methodology to look at for WAGOS report)
- Platform safety measures are important (interesting discussion of using cryptocurrency to bypass financial governance from payment providers) but true platform safety would also require rebuilding trust with platforms and underlying financial security

Full notes:

- Background/context
- Research summary
- Panel & Q/A

Background/context

- FOSTA SESTA led to closure of many important sites for sex workers, including closed Facebook pages for sharing info on eg bad clients
- This legislation pushes sex work into gig economy platforms but legislation not doing much to protect labour rights on gig economy platforms

- For example: EU platform directive - meant to protect misclassified workers in gig economy, but does not mention sex workers

Research/summary

- Report fills gap on role online platforms play in sex worker conditions
- Fairwork principles/minimum standards that platforms should implement to make sure work is just - enable annual scoring of platforms that mediate sex work [REDACTED]
- Four platforms: OnlyFans, streammate, Chaturbate (freemium model on tips), Adult work (range of different services - offers capacity to organise in person meetings)
- Sample: majority are cis women, some trans women, and a small minority of men
- Lots of positives about online sex work: financial stability, overcoming challenges such as disability which exclude them from mainstream work
- Issues with platform mediated online sex work:
 - Pay instability: account suspensions and payment platforms removing sex workers
 - Poor working conditions:
 - 69% experienced harassment, often on the basis of race and gender, often violent and sexual
 - Doxxing (34% experienced)
 - Stalking (26%)
 - Contracts: often unclear, account suspensions arbitrary/inconsistent and poor recourse if account is suspended
 - Representation: none of the platforms made efforts to engage with trade unions, none formally recognised unions

Panel

- Blake (sex worker, sex worker trade unions) - acknowledges research for centering sex workers
 - Platforms are de facto employers, but up till now have no accountability
 - Regulation like FOSTA/SESTA increases financial discrimination and reliance on gig economy platforms
 - Really stressful to live with precarity of account being easily suspended
 - OnlyFans discrimination between how they enforce against sex workers vs non sex workers
 - Appeals and edits are important, not just for account suspensions but also eg platforms misgendering trans sex workers
 - Unions very important for battling financial discriminations and getting better working conditions
- Jessica ([MintStars](#) co-founder, phd student looking at sex workers in Latin America, founding member of Boston Sex Workers and Allies collective)
 - MintStar aspires to be an ethical company, but there is not ethical consumption under capitalism

- Poor working conditions amplified by regulatory barriers and discrimination among worker
- Censorship towards kink and queer content
- Uses cryptocurrency to address financial discrimination - once you have cryptocurrency no one can block you - when you interact with traditional payments systems that's when you can get cut off
- Lots of things are in platform control, eg fees - adult platforms pay higher fees to payment processors - many platforms take advantage of that
- Yigit (senior program officer at European sex workers alliance, PhD student at university of Sheffield)
 - Labour rights, safety and privacy: How to centre sex workers' needs on advertising platforms (2024) https://www.eswalliance.org/labour_rights_advertising
 - Sex workers belong on social media: Recommendations for platform accountability (2025) https://www.eswalliance.org/social_media_platform_accountability
 - Platforms should provide essential safety features free of charge
 - Platforms don't exist in a vacuum - poor working conditions on platforms are not technical failures/design flaws - symptoms of criminalisation and stigma
- Vex
 - At every level of platform governance, workers producing non-normative work/in non-normative bodies are restricted/disadvantaged

Q&A:

- Ecosystem of platforms and payment systems - space is shrinking
- Laws in US & UK control what people can post - makes more accounts deleted
- Getting shut down by platforms is traumatizing - feels like being accused of being a criminal, like a second class citizen who doesn't have access to the same infrastructure as the rest of society
- For many people account closure is the difference between being able to pay rent/becoming homeless
- What are the most important safety features platforms can offer?
 - Account protection - real life person to person moderation
 - Customer blocking & reporting for NCII and harassment - being able to block clients without sex workers being penalised for it
 - Financial security is safety - if we have no financial security online then we have to do offline work which is more unsafe.
 - Using cryptocurrency to avoid financial restrictions
 - Workers have adversarial relationship with platforms - workers do not feel platforms do anything to support them - so little trust that platforms will do anything good - safety features is also about rebuilding trust
 - Advocate for decriminalisation of sex workers