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The Human Trafficking Conspiracy

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There is no such thing as ‘forced prostitution’. Prostitution is a voluntary sexual service which requires a contract agreed between two business partners. If no such agreement has been made, then this is not prostitution, but forced sexuality, and thus, sexualised violence.

Around the world, many people migrate to different countries to earn their living, some of them to earn their living through prostitution. This migration is part of the globalisation process. Often, it is women who take this route, in order to secure their own survival and that of their families. They work in households, in restaurants and bars, in nursing care – and in prostitution. For these women, it is difficult to cross national borders and find ways of entering their target countries. Given this situation, they are dependent on the help of others. If women in this situation are robbed of their liberty and forced to carry out sexual services for third parties, this is not prostitution, and thus, it is not ‘forced prostitution’, but a violent crime.

The majority of migrants work under difficult conditions because of their illegal status with regard to labour and immigration laws. However, most of them are not subject to physical and psychological violence

The figures propounded by German publications ranging from the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Rundschau* to the feminist magazine *Emma*, which suggest that there are up to 140,000 women in ‘forced prostitution’ in Germany, are greatly exaggerated; there is no foundation for these figures and they cannot be taken seriously. The experiences gained by organisations active in this area – advisory centres and the police – suggest that the number of victims is much lower. The Federal Criminal Police Office, for example, suggests that in 2003, there were 1,235 victims in Germany.

Any victim of sexualised violence is one victim too many. But violence towards migrants must not be used and misused for the purposes of political electioneering. Blurring the boundaries between human trafficking, prostitution and violence is an attempt to create a political climate in which it will be easier to prevent labour migration and immigration. Simultaneously, the entire prostitution industry is vilified and defamed as a font of violence and a refuge for violent criminals.

Populist absurdities such as the debate surrounding criminalising the clients of prostitution, the deletion of parts of the Prostitution Act, or making it more difficult for women in third countries to immigrate to Germany all promote anti-foreigner sentiment. This will not prevent violence, nor will it help the victims. On the contrary, it makes the conditions which migrants have to endure more difficult and blocks improvements to working conditions in prostitution.

Electioneering that exploits prostitutes, migrants and the victims of violent crimes is cynical and callous. Those who truly wish to tackle human trafficking must ensure that legal options for labour migration are created – including migration in order to work in prostitution.