

Dramatic Increase in Forced Prostitution?

The World Cup and the consequences of an unscreened rumour

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In April 2005, the Association of German Cities for the first time talked of up to 40.000 prostitutes, who were to come to Germany for the World Cup. This number was published several times in the media. Nobody double-checked its credibility. Sometimes, the Association of German Cities is being mentioned as the source; but most of the times it is not clear where the number comes from. But why exactly 40.000 ? Nobody knows, but the number is making a national career and has turned into a steady figure. In retrospect it is not possible to reconstruct at which point prostitutes turned into forced prostitutes.¹

Big media interest

The focus on 40.000 “forced prostitutes” is characteristic for a discourse which does not make exact distinctions between undocumented sex workers who work here without a visa and a work permit but on a voluntary basis; and sex workers who are trafficked. Even big associations such as the Protestant Church in Germany or the German Women’s Council were spreading the rumour and thereby helped to create big media interest.

Meanwhile domestic and international journalists are calling the counseling centers which are supporting trafficked women searching for a confirmation of the “scandal”. Organizations such as Ban Ying have been trying for a year to put facts and expert knowledge against this charged debate. Ban Ying is not alone with its stance. In Berlin, the Senator of the Interior as well as the Senator for Economics, Labour and Women, the Chief of Police as well as several labour unions, counseling centers and sex workers organizations are of the opinion that a dramatic increase in trafficking of human beings in relation to the World Cup is not going to take place.

Dismantling a rumour

Several reasons can be named in our analysis against the massive increase of “forced prostitution” during the World Cup.

- 1) Trafficking in human beings is a business; traffickers want to make profits. It is costly to bring a woman without valid residence papers to Germany. Women who would be “forcibly carried off” to Germany just for the World Cup

¹ From our point of view the term “forced prostitutes” does not really fit the issue, because many trafficked women have not been forced into prostitution. They are willing to work in the sex industry, but they are being deprived off their income and have to work under conditions which resemble those in slavery.

would not make enough money for the perpetrators within the four weeks of the tournament. In general, the women who are being supported by Ban Ying have had to work much longer for the perpetrators than “just” four weeks.

- 2) Trafficking in human beings in most cases means that the women are residing illegally in Germany. But there will be an increased police presence in the cities where the games are being played. Therefore, the risk to be uncovered is much higher during the World Cup than during other times. In practice it is evident that traffickers are avoiding places where they could arise suspicion due to the “illegality of the women under the immigration laws”.
- 3) Some sources are claiming that some brothels have opened their business just for the World Cup. One should look at the relation between the costs to build such an establishment – which could be up to six million euro – and the duration of the sports event (four weeks). The absurdity of this claim becomes obvious.
- 4) The priority of soccer fans traveling to the cities where the games are taking place is to watch the games. The cities are trying to organize the World Cup as an ongoing, four-week-long party. How much money, time and energy will then be left for a visit to a sex worker? It is likely that the sexual services will be more expensive during the World Cup than during other times. A big brothel in Berlin seems to think along similar lines. Therefore, the clients are being shown soccer games instead of porn movies – in hope of thereby attracting soccer fans. Some fans will certainly want to visit sex workers. But in our opinion an above-average demand for sexual services seems to be unlikely.

Self representation during the World Cup

Regardless of such analyses a lot of money was spent by political institutions on campaigns against trafficking before the World Cup started. So far, the counseling centers that assist trafficked women have not profited from that spending. We have not heard that more money than usual has been provided on a national level for counseling and assisting (potentially) affected women. However, if one indeed assumes the above mentioned increase, one would expect to also see a budget increase for counseling. And, in particular, it would be urgent to create new shelters for the affected women. Instead, large sums are being spent on national campaigns without a joint concept which are meant to reach both the women affected as well as clients of sex workers. While these hectic activities took place, which ensure big media interest for the big associations, the question where all those additional trafficked women could turn to, was neglected. The existing counseling centers have been stretched to the limits of their capacities for quiet some years now.

In Berlin alone several campaigns are taking place turning the World Cup with different hotline numbers – organized mostly by associations and organizations which have not participated in assisting trafficked people either concretely or financially in

this city so far. While some initiators of campaigns had been actively working on the issue at least in other parts of Germany, others neither stood up for the issue nor for trafficked persons in the past. This leads to the suspicion that the goal is mainly to increase one's own reputation by using the issue of trafficking in human beings.

Prostitution during big events in the past

The Olympic Games in Athens are mentioned regularly when the issue of an increase in forced prostitution during a big event comes up. In Athens about 20.000 forced prostitutes had been anticipated.² The Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs however reports "only" 181 victims of trafficking in human beings for the whole year of 2004.³ Even if one takes into account that the estimated number of unreported persons is much higher than that, the figure of 181 persons affected throughout one year does not indicate a massive increase of trafficking in human beings during the Olympic Year 2004 in Greece. Other big events such as the World Exhibition "Expo" 2000 in Hanover were even a disappointment for all those who had been hoping for big business in prostitution. For example, The German Press Agency reported on August 2nd, 2000 about brothel owners who had opened up new houses for the start of the World Exhibition. But expectations were disappointed, because business was much slower than before the World Exhibition.

Lack of rights for trafficked women

Regardless of what is going to happen during the World Cup – the real scandal is the fact that trafficked women have very basic access to rights. They have very little options in Germany to proceed against their perpetrators. To do so means to take a high personal risk. The government is not willing to enhance this situation by changing the legal situation. Living and working conditions of those affected are often called modern slavery, because the affected people have no or very little influence on their work situation. Working under these conditions in the sex industry means that one cannot turn down any clients nor decline to perform sexual practices or insist on using condoms. The possibilities to gain an income – if they exist at all – are in a gross discrepancy compared to the profit margins. Fictitious or real debts have to be paid back under conditions and with interests that are solely being determined by others. Some of the women affected are being robbed of their freedom and experience violence. None of the above mentioned has anything to do with self-determined labour in the sex industry.

Women who have managed to escape such a situation and turn to the police are being assessed according to their "value" as a witness. If they testify as a witness in court, they are granted a temporary residence permit and a minimal amount of 194 Euro per months in social welfare assistance on the basis of the Asylum Seekers'

² Harry De Quetteville, Some Experts Concerned Greek Sex Trade could increase as Olympics near, report for Voice of America, www.voanews.com, looked at: March 21rd, 2006

³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, Progress Report on the National Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Persons, 2004, p. 9

Benefits Acts. They have a right to their own legal representative, which means to be represented by a lawyer as a joint plaintiff in court. However, this applies only to indictments in grave cases of trafficking in human beings. In general, the state pays for the woman's lawyer. Theoretically women affected by trafficking have the right to work. But in practice it is very difficult to find a job or an educational training due to the limited residence permit which is only valid for up to six months. It is also very difficult for the witnesses that they are de facto not allowed to work during that period of time. Trafficked women are thereby forced into idleness and cannot earn any money during that period of time. However, they are under intense financial pressure – also in this situation. Due to the long waiting period for a trial to start they are losing important time which they desperately need in order to establish a perspective for their future. The women have no right to psychological assistance during that period of time.

The women are not allowed to see their children or other relatives during that period of time. They are also not allowed to start an education. It can take up to three years from the first statements as a witness until the start of a trial against the perpetrators. It is a heavy burden to live without family contacts during such a long period of time. Especially, because there is the legitimate concern that their relatives are especially endangered due to their statements in a German court. At the latest the women have to leave Germany once the trial is over. If they are endangered upon returning to their country of origin there is a theoretical option to be granted a residence permit based on Section 25 sub-section 3 Residence Act. This requires that the Federal Office on Migration and Refugees has determined the existence of certain obstacles for a deportation. However, the Federal Office on Migration and Refugees continues to be focused on victims of state violence, whereas trafficked people mostly are threatened by individuals and not by the respective state entities. Accordingly it is difficult for the Federal Office on Migration to adequately determine such an endangerment. This is especially true for countries where measures to protect trafficked people show deficiencies. Women who cannot or do not want to testify are not even entitled to those minimal rights. In general, they have to leave Germany immediately. There has been virtually no media coverage of this scandal during the last few months.

The political exploitation of the issue of trafficking

Instead of taking a stand for improving the legal situation of the women affected, the issue of trafficking is often being used to criminalize sex workers. It also seems to serve as an argument for a restrictive entry policy. One example was the so-called visa affair during the era of the Social Democratic/Green coalition government. The intention was to prove that a less restrictive visa issuing and entry procedure – for example for Ukrainians – served to open the gates for trafficked people. To this date there is no actual proof that this policy has indeed abetted trafficking in human beings. But despite expert testimonies disclaiming this theory, some parties continue to vehemently insist on its validity. So far it has only been possible to prove that some migrant workers have used these visas in order to enter Germany and work here voluntarily without the required work permit. However, there is no proof for an

increase in trafficking in persons from Ukraine. To our knowledge there is only one trafficked woman who entered Germany with such a visa.

Those who want to keep up the tale of 40.000 forced prostitutes during the World Cup are using similar arguments. For example, the EU Commissioner on Justice, Franco Frattini, stated: "We have to implement or re-implement temporary visas for all third-party countries that are possible states of origin in trafficking in women and children."⁴ Frattini had to retract this demand a few days later and pointed out he had never intended to "implement visas exclusively for women." Still, this demand is a perfect example for the erroneous belief that entry restrictions are a sensible measure to prevent trafficking in persons.

Offering labour options to migrants

We believe that the best prevention against trafficking in persons is to create regular labour options for migrants. Some experts even assume that restrictive immigration policies are responsible for an increase in trafficking in human beings. For example, the E.U. Expert Group on Trafficking in Human Beings stated in one of their reports:

" State policies in promoting immigration restrictions and reducing opportunities for regular migration have not been effective in preventing migration. Rather, they have created a market for irregular migration, often as organized serious crime, through trafficking or smuggling of people."⁵

The option for regular labour and employment opportunities for migrants should also entail the option to work in prostitution. If an increased demand in sexual services during the world soccer tournament really exists, then prostitutes willing to migrate should be enabled to a legal and temporary entry. The World Cup would be a good opportunity to test such a measure.

⁴ According to an article in Franfurter Neue Presse Online, www.rhein-main.net, last seen: March 8th, 2006

⁵ Report of the E.U. Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings, Brussels 2004, p.11