

Press conference: Platform against Exploitation and Human Trafficking

Vienna, 19. January 2017

Implications of the Planned Tightening of the Austrian Fremdenrecht (Immigration Laws) on Victims of Human Trafficking

Human trafficking or traffic in women is a complex and severe violation of human rights. LEFÖ-IBF (Intervention Center for Trafficked Women) supports women who have been traded into work and/or living conditions in Austria. The types of exploitation differ and are not closed categories: thus, there is sexual exploitation, work exploitation in house work, care work and assistance for the elderly, but also within seasonal occupations, agriculture and construction. These relations are characterized by abuse and violence. Our goal is to support women and girls on their way towards a self-determined and independent life. To achieve this goal, we offer hidden, secure apartments, counselling and legal support. Women are only able to stabilize their lives when their basic needs are covered. Hence, this is the precondition for the acceptance of extensive psychosocial support.

For this to be possible, women and girls need a safe, protective environment. An unlimited resident permit in Austria is part of that environment. Receiving a resident permit must be uncomplicated, based on the rights of the victims and embedded in legislation. Since 2009, residence permit is linked to the ability to prove the offense. Hence, women only receive a residence permit if they testify against their offenders! Human traffickers convince their victims that they will be deported if they contact police – this system must be dismantled. Help for victims of traffic in women can be provided when they receive a secure residence permit. The consequence of the current amendment of immigration legislation in Austria would be that those women who are

LEFÖ-IBF Interventionsstelle für Betroffene des Frauenhandels

Lederergasse 35/12-13, 1080 Wien

Tel: +43 (0)1-79 69 298 | Fax: +43 (0)1-79 69 298-21

E-mail: ibf@lefoe.at | Web: www.lefoe.at

not immediately recognized as victims are additionally punished for it. Women who are sent across Europe by their exploiters and who do not even know that their residence in another country is illegal, are met by a penalty for illegal entry to and residence in Austria. The victims of traffic in women should not bear the responsibility for the crimes they have suffered from. Therefore, we demand a secure residence permit for all affected women and girls.

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