

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Only a minority of migrant sex workers are trafficked!

New evidence released today (28 October 2009) by the ESRC-funded research 'Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry' by Dr Nick Mai of the Institute for the Study of European Transformations (ISET) at London Metropolitan University shows that, contrary to popular perceptions, only a minority of interviewees felt they had been trafficked into the UK sex industry.

This policy-relevant and evidence-based research draws on the life experiences of 100 migrant women, men and transgender people working in all the main jobs available in the sex industry in central London.

Dr Nick Mai from ISET said: 'Very few of the migrants we interviewed felt they were forced to work in the UK sex industry. On the contrary, the majority consciously decided to work in the sex industry as a way to improve theirs and their families' lives.'

The new Policing and Crime Bill under discussion in the Houses of Lords would make it illegal to buy sex and easier to close down commercial sex premises, as a way to stamp out trafficking and sexual exploitation.

The research findings raise concerns that the government is going down the wrong path and that the proposed legislation on sex trafficking could leave the sex workers it is trying to protect even more vulnerable.

'Most interviewees thought that these provisions would merely push the sex industry further underground and that they would be less safe as a result,' said Dr Nick Mai

Dr Mai concluded: 'The findings of this research go against the grain of the idea that the majority of migrants working in the sex industry are exploited or trafficked and that further criminalisation of the sex industry, including clients, or restrictive migration and licensing measures are the best ways to fight cases of violence and abuse. Rather, measures towards the decriminalisation of the sex industry and the regularisation of its migrant workers are the best ways to decrease their potential vulnerability to exploitation in the sex industry as in any other sector they might choose to work in'.

-Ends-

Notes to Editors

1. A copy of the Final Policy-Relevant Report of the 'Migrants in the UK Sex Industry' project can be found on the project webpage:
<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research-units/iset/projects/esrc-migrant-workers.cfm>

2. The project is funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council - RES-062-23-0137)

3. Dr Nick Mai is a member of the Institute for the Study of European Transformations (ISET) at London Metropolitan University. ISET is an interdisciplinary team researching social, economic, cultural and political transformations in contemporary Europe.

<http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/research-units/iset/>

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