Strategies to prevent the trafficking of women and children vulnerable to sexual exploitation

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Christa PRETS (PES, AT) on strategies to prevent the trafficking of women and children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. The report began by pointing out that trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes was the fastest growing criminal activity in the EU and that it was time to adopt "clear and specific" goals, such as halving the number of trafficking victims over the next 10 years. MEPs regretted that there was a lack of recognition of the links between trafficking and migration, social protection and development policy, and called for a more coherent external policy on trafficking. They also urged international organisations such as the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO to address the battle against the feminisation of poverty and child poverty as priority issues.

The report stressed that the supply and demand side of the problem must be addressed as well as the traffickers. It called for research to be carried out at both national and EU level into the underlying causes of trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation, i.e. what factors place people at risk and what factors affect demand for sexual services and sexual exploitation of women and children. And it stressed that action should be taken first and foremost with a view to explicitly discouraging demand "by means which include educational, social and cultural measures".

The committee made a number of practical recommendations, such as awareness-raising campaigns to inform of the dangers and educate the vulnerable members of society in the countries of origin, to alert the public about the problem and reduce demand in the countries of destination. It called on the Commission to launch an EU-wide Anti-Trafficking Day with an international anti-trafficking logo to raise general awareness of the phenomenon and address the public "with one coherent message". The Member States were also urged to set up national and international telephone helplines.

MEPs also highlighted the need to tackle the tendency to use new technologies, in particular the Internet, for sexual exploitation. The report further called on the Member States, especially Germany , to take appropriate measures in the course of the World Cup football tournament in 2006 to prevent trafficking of women and forced prostitution.

To take action against traffickers, the committee called on the Member States to implement and enforce legislation that would strengthen the prosecution and punishment of traffickers (both natural and legal persons), their accomplices, persons encouraging, arranging or using sexual services from minors and persons attempting to institute such activities. Continuing action must also be taken against the laundering of the proceeds of trafficking.

Lastly, MEPs urged all Member States to follow the example of Belgium and Italy , which grant a "right of residence" for victims after the traffickers have been tried. They pointed out that this would encourage victims to give statements and help secure the conviction of offenders. They also stressed that it must be possible to give anonymous statements in the context of investigations into trafficking in order to ensure that more offenders are convicted.