

An example of a sex workers' rights campaign in Austria

Sex Workers Lust For... Their Rights!

History

For more than 20 years LEFÖ (Information Education and Support for Migrant Women) has worked for the rights of migrants in Austria and since 15 years it has focused on migrant sex workers. As the first organization in Austria, LEFÖ has been advocating for the rights of sex workers and has supported migrant sex workers through counselling, street work and cultural mediation.

To make society more aware of the double morals related to prostitution and migration and to promote the human rights of all sex workers, a campaign on sex workers' rights was conceived together with Maiz, a centre for the integration of migrants based in Linz. The nationwide 'Sex Workers Lust For Their Rights' campaign was organised for the first time in 2007. From March 8 (International Women's Day) to June 2, 2007 (International Sex Workers Day) the campaign called for the implementation of the human, labour and migrants' rights sex workers are entitled to according to international conventions and agreements.

Together, LEFÖ and Maiz organised more than 25 events, performances and presentations in the whole of Austria, reaching out to a wide and very diverse public. The activities dealt in many different and provocative ways with the topic of sex work. The campaign included a slogan, a poster, a debate with citizens, a red umbrella demonstration (the red umbrella is the symbol of European sex workers), a theatre production and the collection of signatures of well-known people in Austria. At public events, the organizers had stands providing information. The campaign is an example of a long-term campaign aimed at changing people's attitudes towards sex workers and their rights.

In 2008, the campaign was repeated, but this time with an extension until 29 June 2008 to cover the European Soccer Championship, which took place in Austria and Switzerland. Large male-targeted events such as soccer championships always create a huge demand for sexual services. The example here uses information from the 2007 campaign. For more information on the 2008 campaign, please visit www.lustaufrechte.at (in German).

Objectives

1. To deconstruct the public and political perception that links prostitution automatically with concepts of victimization and violence and to raise public awareness about the double moral standards and ambiguity which society and political decision makers apply when it comes to prostitution.
2. To contribute to a greater sensibilization at all levels of society by distributing information leaflets and posters.

3. To reach out and inform a wide and diverse audience by organizing a variety of different events, which also incorporate arts and culture.
4. To claim and advocate for the recognition and implementation of sex workers' human rights – as women, as migrants and as sex workers:
 - to promote their right to self-determination
 - to promote a policy of social and political integration
 - to provide protection against exploitation and violence as well as discrimination, sexism and racism
 - to advocate for an improvement of sex workers' living and working conditions.
5. To demand equal treatment of sex workers and other economically active people, which implies the legal recognition of sex work as a regular occupation.
6. To incorporate the field of prostitution into labour law, trade, commercial and industry regulations as well as into contract law instead of linking it to public policy.
7. To promote changes in legislation relating to aliens:
 - amnesty for all those sex workers who were illegalized by the Austrian Aliens Act 2006 (which included the abolition of the former "prostitute-visa")
 - creating possibilities for migrant sex workers to obtain permits of residence and of settlement.

The programme

March 7, 2007	Press conference and presentation of the campaign Sex Workers Lust For... Their Rights!
March 8, 2007	Demonstration on International Women's Day themed "Sex Workers' Rights Are Women's Rights!" – In the centre of Vienna people demonstrated for sex workers' and women's rights carrying red umbrellas, the European sex workers' symbol.
March 15, 2007	Panel discussion on the topic "sex workers' rights are women's rights" and subsequent screening (Austrian premiere) of the movie <i>Princesas</i> by Fernando León de Aranoa. The evening was organized in cooperation with FrauenFilmTage (Women's Film Days) 2007.
April 13, 2007	Theatre performance "Fair Fuck" – Forum theatre as developed by Augusto Boal on the topics sex work and migration; acted out by Kollektivtheater (Collective Theatre).
May 2007	Street work – Intensified mobile counselling for sex workers through cultural mediators.
May 2, 2007	Reading from " <i>I am a whore and I am proud of it</i> ". <i>Views on a job without rights</i> – A reading compiled by narrations, interviews and texts written by sex workers.
June 2, 2007	"Sex workers rights are women's rights!" – Informative event, concert, performance

Results

- Many individuals as well as organizations (small and medium-sized social organizations, representatives of the arts and cultural communities, politicians, scientists, writers, etc.) supported the campaign and have therefore promoted a greater sense of social awareness.
- In Vienna events were attended by more than 800 visitors, most of whom gave positive and strong feedback.
- The campaign's main message, i.e. "sex workers' rights are an inalienable part of human and women's rights", was reinforced.
- The recognition and implementation of sex workers' rights have been taken up by several political decision makers.
- The campaign was followed with great interest by the media and received widespread media coverage.
- The campaign led to a continued discussion of the topic.