

Migration, prostitution and human trafficking

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While human trafficking is an issue high on international, European and national policy agendas, it is often unclear what is meant by it and how it is delineated from other phenomenon. This is particularly true for how debaters conflate people smuggling and human trafficking and prostitution and human trafficking.

That the organization of irregular migration in the form of smuggling is sometimes presented as trafficking indicates to us that the delineation between the phenomenon is unclear, but also that representing something as trafficking might be a way to achieve particular outcomes. In a recent interview, the current head of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, spoke interchangeably of smuggling and trafficking when explaining why the military alliance were sending boats to the Mediterranean.¹ In debates over actions to curb boat migration, the difference between the two phenomenon disappears. In reality, people smuggling is a violation of state borders and a service migrants make use of to utilize their legal right to apply for asylum, not a violation of a person particularly the fact that what is violated by smuggling is state, not persons, as with trafficking. Stating that NATO will stop boats to rescue migrants from exploitation may be a convenient way to open up for actions that could not legitimately be taken with an explicit aim of reducing migration in itself.

Similarly, prostitution and human trafficking is often conflated in public debates. How the relationship between them is understood and framed is linked to whether prostitution is considered problematic in itself, e.g. as a form of sexual violence. Such a position on prostitution means that both phenomenon are framed as exploitative and as highly related, while others understand them as separate phenomenon. When presented as highly related, trafficking serves as an argument for criminalization of clients in prostitution and a more punitive approach to procurement.

This workshop deals with the relationship between migration, prostitution and human trafficking, both in peoples' lives and in politics and practical policing.

¹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/11/nato-tasks-naval-patrol-with-combatting-people-smuggling-in-the-mediterranean>