

Prostitution: The "Employment Contract" or the Right to be Lawfully Assaulted

Under the guise of social progress, Belgium has attempted to transform violence into bureaucracy. But the varnish is cracking: the employment contract for persons in prostitution is nothing more than a legalized contract of exploitation. In Brussels, people are finally beginning to understand that behind the "service" provided lies a system of violence that should not be glamorized, but rather exited through quality support.

They tried to sell us the moon, or rather the sidewalk with a gift ribbon around it. The major Belgian reform of the employment contract for persons in prostitution was supposed to represent the culmination of alleged feminist demands: "My body, my business." Except that in real life, the "business" is a permanent assault and the body is a battlefield.

The Scam of the Century: Employee of Oppression

The "sex employment contract" law achieved a surreal feat: transforming the pimp into an "employer" and systemic violence into a "pay slip." It was believed that by guaranteeing paid leave and access to social security, we could erase the violence inherent in the purchase of a body—a transaction that is far from trivial since it primarily concerns women whose sexual access is monetized by men. Three social contributions and a sick leave will not make the exploitation of women vanish by magic. What a joke!

The employment contract has been nothing but a smokescreen to mask a social failure. You don't regulate violence; you don't bring order to trauma. By wanting to normalize prostitution, the State has above all normalized the impunity of those who sell and buy bodies. The latter, the clients, are kept well away from any constraints—not even the basic one of wearing a condom. The result? A total fiasco. The "employers" continue "business as usual" without applying for legal approval. The much-vaunted employment contracts are not signed, women remain in the shadows, and violence continues with or without a time clock.

The truth is that this legal framework is a bureaucratic nightmare, unattainable for the overwhelming majority of women on the ground. Who is going to sign a contract when she has no papers, lives under constant threat, and needs money in the very short term? The law created a paper tiger to satisfy the conscience of politicians, while adding to State revenues the taxes collected from the performance of sexual acts by people simply trying to meet their basic needs. Meanwhile, no one cares about the invisible masses plunged into precariousness.

Brussels: Healing the Wounds of the Federal Government

While the federal government congratulates itself on its "historic" reform, Brussels finds itself managing the after-sales service of the disaster. Fortunately, a glimmer of common sense is breaking through in the latest regional strategies: there is finally talk of supporting people to exit prostitution.

This recognition of the need for specific support for persons in prostitution is an implicit admission: the law has failed. It failed because it forgot that prostitution is, first and foremost,

a question of violence against women and brutal power dynamics. Emphasizing support means finally admitting that these people are not budding entrepreneurs but human beings in a state of extreme vulnerability.

By placing the support of persons in prostitution within the "Equality" section (and thus, implicitly, within the fight against relationships of dominance), the Brussels Region recognizes that prostitution is a matter of violence against women, and not a simple branch of the hospitality industry.

Natasha Malviya, one of the spokespersons for isala, an association that supports persons in prostitution in Brussels, confirms this: "You don't regulate violence; you try to get out of it. And for that, you need boots on the ground and dedicated resources."

It's Not All Roses: The Harsh Reality on the Ground

It was time to set the record straight in Brussels. You don't fight sexual exploitation with contractual clauses. Street work, which isala carries out every day, does not consist of checking employment contracts, but of offering a space for listening and understanding, as well as supporting people in their life projects. Behind every unsigned "contract" and every failed reform, there is a woman waiting to be treated as a person, and not as an administrative statistic or official merchandise.

Recognizing the need to support persons in prostitution is to admit that federal law has abandoned them on the side of the road. Now, the resources must follow. Because to get a woman out of violence, it takes more than a paragraph in a report: it takes political will that does not tremble before pimps disguised as entrepreneurs. Instead of starting from a fantasized idea of clean contractual relations on paper, we must return to the basics: the needs that the people concerned express for their autonomy.

Notes to Editors

The association isala takes action to support people in situations of prostitution: our teams reach out to individuals at prostitution sites, offer them a listening ear and assistance during our weekly drop-in sessions, provide free French and IT classes, and develop holistic support programs with them. These programs aim to meet the personal projects and needs of individuals seeking to leave prostitution (housing, employment/training, administrative papers and residence permits, social rights, parenting/family, justice, social connection/integration, health). We develop concrete alternatives to prostitution through strategic partnerships and innovative projects within the Belgian social sector, such as through a transition house for 4 women that we co-managed for 3 years. Finally, we mobilize society by providing information on the reality of prostitution through training, advocacy, and public awareness campaigns.

www.isalaasbl.be

References

[Gender and Women's Rights Strategy 2026–2029, joint initiative of Wallonia and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation.](#)

[La Libre](#) and [Knack](#) published the previous op-ed in March 2025.

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