### Trafficking in human beings

Labour exploitation Sexual exploitation Forced criminal activities and begging

### Organised ritual abuse





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#### 1. Introduction

Trafficking in human beings is defined as a set of circumstances whereby a person is pushed into an exploitative situation by an individual or individuals taking advantage of their plight. This can manifest itself in various forms and occur in different contexts:

- Exploitative employment relationships
- Sexual exploitation
- Exploitation in marriage
- Forced begging
- Forced criminal activities
- Forced removal of organs

Trafficking in human beings is both a severe human rights violation and an infringement of the principles of human integrity and dignity.

In the early 1980s, counselling centres for women in Germany began seeing more and more persons subjected to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation, and this issue began receiving an increasing amount of attention. Specialised support services have since been created, many of which now also handle cases of trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation or exploitative employment relationships. More recently, cases of individuals being forced to beg or commit criminal offences and thereby subjected to exploitation have also emerged. In the past few years, professionals involved in services for victims of sexual exploitation and abuse of children and young persons or victims of trafficking in human beings have increasingly become aware of the issue of organised ritual abuse and its repercussions.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, this remains a little known form of violence that is seldom examined by academia. Who are those affected? What are the structures underpinning this phenomenon? To what extent does this form of violence overlap with others such as trafficking in human beings? Who can help and what can be done? Knowledge about these issues remains extremely piecemeal, be it among the general public, public authorities or professionals working in the psychosocial field. The mere existence of this form of violence is even regularly called into question. Due to the often particularly brutal and seemingly bizarre depictions of organised ritual abuse, cases are sometimes misinterpreted by those on the ground as conspiracy theories.

Over the past few years, specialised counselling centres supporting trafficked persons that are part of the KOK network have also handled cases of this specific form of violence. Although fairly limited in number, they have proved particularly challenging in practice for counselling centres.

The aim of this brochure is to offer brief and basic information on this issue and any aspects in which it overlaps with trafficking in human beings.<sup>2</sup>

It is part of a series of brochures, each examining one form of exploitation in detail and providing information on counselling and support services available to affected persons in Germany, with a special focus on the work and services of specialised counselling centres that are members of KOK.

<sup>1</sup> This is the case for the German National Council on Combating Sexual Violence against Children and Young People or the Expert Committee on Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and Ritual Structures of Violence that was part of the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth in 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The texts used in this brochure are mainly based on the 2021 KOK information service publication Organisierte und Rituelle Gewalt und Menschenhandel (Organised and Ritual Violence and Trafficking in Human Beings, only available in German). This publication can only offer an overview of this issue as it is very complex.

# 2. Organised ritual abuse and trafficking in human beings

Although there is no internationally consistent and widely used definition of this form of violence, there are a few terms used to refer to it: ritual abuse, organised abuse, organised ritual abuse.

The Expert Committee on Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and Ritual Structures of Violence came up with the following definition:

"Organized structures of violence and ritual structures of violence involve the systematic use of severe, sexualized violence (in conjunc*tion with physical and psychological violence*) against children, adolescents, and adults by several perpetrators working together and are frequently associated with commercial sexual exploitation (forced prostitution, trafficking in children, child pornography/violent pornography). If an ideology is used as an explanation or justification of violence, this is referred to as a ritual structure of violence. Some structures involve the integration of families across generations. A bond is formed with the perpetrators, group, and ideology in early childhood. There is also a rule of silence. Those who attempt to leave are subject to pressure, extortion, and persecution. Organized and ritual structures of violence can include extensive control and exploitation of others by

means of mind-control methods. The regular and repeated use of severe violence brings on a child's specific dissociation and/or splits the child's personality intentionally. The dissociative personality parts that result are trained and used for specific purposes. The goal of this systematic training is to create an inner structure which the perpetrators can control at any time, a structure of which the child, and later the adult, has no conscious memory in everyday life. For people who have experienced this, it is particularly difficult to obtain protection and appropriate support."<sup>3</sup>

This brochure will use the term "organised ritual abuse", defining it as a complex form of violence in line with the definition above but that can manifest itself in many different forms. According to persons who have been subjected to this form of violence, it generally also involves sexual exploitation and forced prostitution.

As a consequence, this form of violence occurs in various contexts, with some overlap. It is often linked to organised crime, manifestations of which include commercial exploitation and trafficking in human beings.

To date there are no representative academic studies on the characteristics, preva-

<sup>3</sup> Expert Committee on Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and Ritual Structures of Violence of the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, 2018, Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and Ritual Structures of Violence. Strengthening Prevention, Intervention and Help for Victims and Survivors. Recommendations for Policymakers and Society, p. 5. https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/fileadmin/user\_upload/medien/KOK\_ informiert/Fachkreis\_Empfehlungen\_2018\_web.pdf

lence and incidence of organised ritual abuse in Germany. This form of violence is also not included as a specific item in criminal statistics. What is known and has been reported about this issue tends to come from persons directly affected or professionals working in psychosocial professions (psychotherapists, doctors or specialised counselling centre or supported accommodation staff). As the available data is insufficient and no perpetrators have been sentenced, organised ritual abuse is difficult to have recognised as a form of violence, and both persons who have been subjected to it and professionals are often faced with disbelief. This is, among other things, due to the fact that many people cannot or do not want to imagine that such a targeted form of exploitation and violence over many years is indeed possible. This also explains why it is so difficult to achieve recognition among policymakers and the general public.

This type of violence generally starts in early childhood. From an early age, perpetrators resort to various forms of mind-splitting techniques and manipulation to impose a belief system (e.g. Satanism, fascism, religious ideologies) on the child and root it deeply in their psyche. In such belief systems or ideologies, violence is seen as a legitimate tool. It shows that a person belongs to the group and those subjected to it are made to remain silent by different means<sup>4</sup>, including by turning them into perpetrators who also use violence against others. Systematically and repeatedly using serious violence against their victims from early childhood onwards, perpetrators sometimes deliberately bring on dissociative identity disorders to split their victims' personalities. Many of those victims even refer to their experience as "torture". By doing this, perpetrators gain control over their victims and generally prevent them from having any memories of what actually happened in their everyday life.<sup>5</sup> Some support workers report that perpetrators can trigger a sort of "inner programming" which will stop their clients from talking about their experience or can cause suicidal thoughts.

Their aim is to strengthen the victim's bond with the perpetrator(s), the group and the ideology as well as ensuring they are obedient and are able to function normally. Affected persons are mainly exploited sexually. Known cases are often linked to other forms of crimes such as forced prostitution, sexual abuse imagery or drug trafficking.<sup>6</sup> Violence and exploitation can either be part of the ritual abuse used by a cult or an ideological group or can be used to access financial resources.

<sup>4</sup> Nick, Schröder, Briken, Richter-Appelt (2018) Organisierte und rituelle Gewalt in Deutschland. Kontexte der Gewalterfahrung, psychische Folgen und Versorgungssituation. Trauma & Gewalt, Vol. 12, pp. 244–261.

<sup>5</sup> https://beauftragte-missbrauch.de/themen/definition/organisierte-sexualisierte-und-rituelle-gewalt

<sup>6</sup> https://www.vielfalt-info.de/index.php/rituelle-gewalt/definitionen (only available in German)

Deliberately inducing split personalities often leads those affected to develop a dissociative identity structure.

According to the KOK member organisation staff who have dealt with such cases, their clients' personality can be split into multiple parts which can be triggered by perpetrators using specific cues. Other professionals also report violence being used in a similar way in cases of organised ritual abuse. According to affected persons, dissociative parts of their personalities can be trained and used in a targeted manner by perpetrators, who may be parents, grand-parents or other relatives, for specific purposes. This is sometimes called "brainwashing" or "mind control". Trauma-induced dissociative amnesia and fragmented memories are then exploited to conceal serious criminal offences.7

#### Overlaps with trafficking in human beings

As explained above, organised ritual abuse tends to revolve around deliberately abusing ideologies and belief systems to justify violence and to systematically exploit victims. Perpetrators are often well organised and act as part of a network. This type of planned approach and the use of ideologies is also observed in some forms of international trafficking in human beings

and of sexual exploitation of women (and girls) brought to Europe. Religious rites, for example, play a key role in a number of forms of trafficking in human beings. This is particularly true for groups of perpetrators from Nigeria, who often carry out traditional voodoo/juju rituals in their country to make sure those subjected to these rituals obey and do not speak out, with lasting success. As a result, women often feel powerless and effectively bound to their tormentors. These rituals form part of a cultural belief system and are traditionally used to seek protection on a journey or to better cope with everyday life situations. Traffickers exploit the beliefs of women and girls in the effects of such rituals in order to bend them to their will and exploit them. They then live in fear of the negative and sometimes even life-threatening consequences of breaking the oaths they made during the ceremony. Once they have managed to escape their traffickers, they often need help to understand the consequences of the sexual, but also psychological and spiritual abuse they experienced and eventually overcome it.

Perpetrators using juju/voodoo exploit rites and belief systems to keep women in exploitative situations and make sure they never report their ordeal. Perpetrators involved in organised ritual abuse have similar aims. They use ceremonies/ideologies to justify their actions and allegedly give them meaning. In the case of organised ritual abuse, the ideologies and

Nick, Schröder, Briken, Richter-Appelt (2018) Organisierte und rituelle Gewalt 10 in Deutschland. Kontexte der Gewalterfahrung, psychische Folgen und Versorgungssituation. Trauma & Gewalt, Vol. 12, pp. 244–261.

values exploited tend to differ from those of the society the group lives in, which only compounds the isolation of victims and disbelief of anyone they report their experience to.

Trafficked persons can also suffer serious dissociative disorders and PTSD. However, these usually appear as a side-effect—they are the result of what the person has experienced and not, as in the case of organised ritual abuse, intentionally brought on by perpetrators.

#### A PROTOTYPICAL EXAMPLE

Marie, 18, is a law student. On Monday mornings, she often finds it difficult to concentrate in lectures. She is tired and feels kind of ill. What's more, she has obviously bumped into something again and has to wear long sleeves to hide the bruises on her arms. She feels like the weekend was exhausting, but why? There was nothing unusual, all she did was study for a test. And then her mother phoned. Marie heard a certain piece of music in the background, her mother said a sentence that did not make sense and then it was as though a "brain fog" descended. Later on, she went back to studying and cleaned her flat.

What she does not know is that there was a party for well-paying customers at the weekend that verged on prostitution. The trigger (music and a coded sentence) prompted a change, and another part of her identity went to the agreed meeting point. Different parts of her identity took turns, all of them having been trained to cater for the market of commercial sexual abuse. The partygoers know the codes to trigger the part of her identity that will fulfil the extreme wishes of various "customers", wishes that cannot be satisfied in legal prostitution circles: personality A cannot feel pain and can put up with extreme sexual violence, B experiences no disgust and is ready to accept any sexual practice, C is a young, fearful child ... Not only does Marie have multiple identities, but these identities are split into multiple sections within her mind. For example, there is one section containing identities that play specific roles in cult rituals and only become active in this scenario. Marie is unaware of that too. All she knows is that she sometimes wakes up at night soaked in sweat after dreadful nightmares full of bizarre acts of violence. When she tentatively tries to tell her GP about them, she suddenly faints. Her doctor thinks it might be epilepsy and sends her off to get tested.

Source: Vielfalt e.V. (2020) Organisierte und Rituelle Gewalt – Unterstützung für Betroffene, p. 12

#### 3. Law enforcement

Organised ritual abuse lacks sufficient recognition, and its mere existence in Germany is still called into question by some. Affected individuals also have to go through a long and gruelling process to extricate themselves from their ordeal, and perpetrator structures are complex and well established within society. All these factors make prosecuting these crimes more difficult.

Organised ritual abuse is not classified as an independent criminal offence. There can be different forms of sexual, physical and mental abuse and exploitation involved, which can each fall under a number of criminal offences. Victims rarely report their ordeal, and even then, various factors tend to hinder prosecution: victims may suffer serious post traumatic disorders or be at high risk and not eligible for witness protection programmes due to their excessively high prerequisites, or findings regarding trauma and structural dissociation may fail to be taken into account during a credibility assessment.<sup>8</sup>

In many cases, affected persons manage to provide a coherent account of what happened and the perpetrator structures once their personal protection and security has been ensured and they have worked hard on overcoming dis-

<sup>8</sup> Expert Committee on Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and in Ritual Structures of Violence of the Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2018) Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and in Ritual Structures of Violence. Strengthening Prevention, Intervention and Help for Victims and Survivors. Recommendations for Policymakers and Society, and statements and experiences of counsellors.

sociative barriers and conditioning. Many never get enough support to achieve this, and others need several years of therapy and help in their daily lives before this is the case. Even then, their testimony usually can no longer be used in court and too much time has passed for the police to secure any other evidence. On some occasions, it has been possible to have perpetrators sentenced for certain offences, such as rape, but this has not shed any light on the organised ritual abuse structures or brought the key individuals to justice. Regarding organised sexual violence against children, the Lügde, Bergisch-Gladbach and Stauffen<sup>9</sup> scandals in the past few years have led to significant findings about how the rings and structures work and the modus operandi used to exploit children and produce and spread sexual abuse imagery. These cases also ended in more sentences than previously.

On its website, the information portal on ritual abuse ("Rituelle Gewalt") points to court rulings handed down on grounds of sexual violence in faith communities, sects or ideologically motivated groups that could be counted as cases of organised ritual abuse but could not be treated as such as this does not constitute an independent criminal offence.<sup>10</sup>

## 4. Specialised counselling centres of KOK

The specialised counselling centres that are members of KOK are independent from public authorities and offer free, anonymous, confidential and holistic advice and support to persons subjected to trafficking in human beings and exploitation. They provide a vast array of services and support to affected individuals, seeking to improve their lives in the long run and help them enforce their rights. Their services also include psychosocial support and advice on legal issues, be it with regard to social security. residence permits, labour rights or civil matters, or refer clients to lawyers. They also offer or organise accommodation, as well as access to healthcare and psychosocial support during proceedings. Finally, they often accompany clients to official appointments. If necessary, they also organise their client's journey back to their country of origin.

Services are not limited to clients from any particular region or country. Any person can receive assistance and advice, regardless of their nationality and residence status.

Counselling centre staff have a wealth of experience in providing psychosocial support to trafficked persons and are very aware of the specific needs of traumatised persons they advise. Thanks either to the use of counsellors who speak the same mother tongue as their clients or the use of interpreters, affected individuals can access holistic, intensive and individual counselling. Due to the circumstances in

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<sup>9</sup> In these German cities, major cases of serious, organised and commercial child abuse have been uncovered in recent years.

<sup>10</sup> https://www.infoportal-rg.de/juristische-fragen-und-antworten/ist-rituellegewalt-in-deutschland-strafbar/ (website only available in German)

which they were founded, many of the specialised counselling centres that are members of KOK focus on women, regardless of the type of exploitation. Many member organisations sometimes work with male clients or entire families. They also support and advise trafficked minors.

Specialised counselling centres provide not only comprehensive and holistic support to those affected, but also training and information to raise awareness of trafficking in human beings.

A few examples of what they offer:

- Prevention courses
- Training courses for law enforcement agencies
- Information for persons who may be affected
- Networking workshops with police officers, lawyers, members of relevant authorities, etc.
- Talks with pupils or educators

Some specialised counselling centres that are members of KOK have already advised and supported individuals subjected to organised ritual abuse. This very complex and challenging task is often quite different from what they know from working with victims of trafficking in human beings or sexual exploitation.

Although specialised counselling centres have had to fight for many years for trafficking in human beings to be recognised by policymakers, authorities and law enforcement agencies, and there are still significant gaps in knowledge and much progress to be made regarding support structures and prosecution, many are aware that trafficking in human beings and exploitation do occur in Germany and that steps need to be taken. Cooperation frameworks have been established at regional and local level and, although they cover neither all fields nor all forms of trafficking in human beings, prosecuting authorities know about the issue and there is now a network of specialised counselling centres that are seen as key stakeholders in combating trafficking in human beings and that are taken seriously.

The same cannot yet be said of organised ritual abuse. Outside the circle of professionals working in this field, there is still a lot of ignorance and many simply do not believe that these extreme forms of violence and exploitation do indeed exist in Germany. The complex structure of violent rings and the fact that clients are highly traumatised require a different approach on the part of professionals. They need special knowledge of dissociation, trauma and ritual abuse structures, for example. Clients require a lot of time, and they may need support and someone to accompany them for many years. However, there are very few training or supervision opportunities available on these issues. Psychosocial professionals and support services provided by the healthcare

system are mostly unable to cope with the complex consequences of the trauma experienced by victims and with the often still ongoing violence. In many cases, women's shelters refuse to offer them a place and there are hardly any specialised shelters for this specific target group in Germany. There are many gaps in the support systems across the country, which often makes supporting these individuals particularly challenging. Many specialised counselling centres also lack the necessary experience as well as the time and staff resources to advise individuals affected by this form of violence.

The support services for victims of organised ritual abuse in Germany are still insufficient. Advice and support are mostly provided by psychotherapists and specialised counselling centres, including some working with trafficked persons. However, these offers are very limited. There is a specialised helpline, BERTA, dedicated to this target group, and a number of small organisations and associations are working on this issue and providing information.<sup>11</sup> Victims also report organised ritual abuse in claims submitted to the Fund Against Sexual Abuse (Fonds sexueller Missbrauch) or during hearings before the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (Unabhängige Kommission zur Aufarbeitung sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs) or

11 This is the case of the foundation Emanuelstiftung and the association Vielfalt e.V. – Information zu Trauma und Dissoziation oder die Selbsthilfegruppe Lichtstrahlen e.V. in Oldenburg. contact the Helpline on Sexual Abuse (Hilfetelefon sexueller Missbrauch).<sup>12</sup>

12 National Council against Sexual Violence against Children and Young People, 2021, Gemeinsame Verständigung des Nationalen Rates gegen sexuelle Gewalt an Kindern und Jugendlichen, p. 79 (only available in German), https://www.nationaleer-rat.de/downloads/Gemeinsame\_Verstaendigung\_Nationaler\_Rat.pdf

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#### 5. Recommendations

In the past few years, progress has fortunately been made in terms of the knowledge on this issue and experience with supporting, advising and treating clients who have experienced organised ritual abuse. Experts working in the field of trafficking in human beings or the specialised counselling centres that are members of the KOK network are increasingly engaging with experts in organised ritual abuse. In 2018, the Expert Committee on Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and in Ritual Structures of Violence published its recommendations on prevention, intervention and help for affected persons.<sup>13</sup> The Common Statement by the National Council took up these recommendations and built on them, agreeing on measures to raise awareness, increase training and improve support for affected individuals.

These include:

- Improving data and research on organised ritual abuse
- Awareness-raising and education on this issue, e.g. by creating an information portal educating the general public and providing help on organised ritual abuse

 The statement also proposes that CPD opportunities on dissociative personality disorders in the context of organised ritual abuse be offered as part of a special service for outpatients.

Raising awareness among professionals and the general public about this issue is also among the key recommendations. As with trafficking in human beings, organised ritual abuse must be seen and recognised as an issue that does occur in Germany so as to develop strategies to combat these structures and support affected individuals.

On the one hand it is essential that the issue, any cases and affected individuals are taken seriously. On the other, it is paramount that a clear distinction is made between this work and conspiracy theories, and that it is not exploited for the benefit of any particular ideology or group.

It is essential that this work continues and is implemented at all levels to see improvements on the ground, and this is an endeavour KOK specialised counselling centres can contribute to.

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<sup>13</sup> Expert Committee on Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and in Ritual Structures of Violence of the Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (2018) Sexualized Violence in Organized Structures of Violence and in Ritual Structures of Violence. Strengthening Prevention, Intervention and Help for Victims and Survivors. Recommendations for Policymakers and Society. https://www.kok-gegen-menschenhandel.de/fileadmin/user\_upload/medien/KOK\_ informiert/Fachkreis Empfehlungen 2018 web.pdf

#### 6. KOK's work

The German NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings was founded in 1999 and provides support for persons affected by trafficking in human beings and migrants subjected to violence. KOK is the only coordination centre in Germany and Europe specialised in this issue and is considered to be a model of successful networking.

The main objective of KOK and its member organisations is to improve the lives of trafficked persons and help them enforce their rights.

Its other aims include:

- Implementing national and international standards with regard to trafficked persons
- Implementing a women's and human rights perspective in politics and society
- Supporting the existing network of counselling centres

Most specialised counselling centres supporting trafficked persons in Germany and other organisations dealing with this issue are members of KOK. KOK's membership base includes:

- Specialised counselling centres and shelters for trafficked persons
- Projects working with female migrants
- Counselling centres working with sex workers
- Women's shelters and specialised safehouses
- Women's and human rights groups, lobby organisations
- Umbrella organisations representing charities

KOK also has two associated member organisations: a specialised counselling centre in Switzerland and another in Italy (South Tyrol).

KOK takes an intersectional approach, meaning it takes into account how the many forms of discrimination interact and compound each other. Its main aim is to advocate the rights of women and especially migrant women. In view of its experience, the organisation is able to provide expertise covering all affected groups. The KOK Office tends to focus on the following areas:

- Networking at national and international level with specialised counselling centres and other NGOs
  - Organising regular networking events and conferences
- PR work
  - Publications, newsletters, website etc.
- Raising awareness and providing training on trafficking in human beings and violence against female migrants
  - Training courses, talks, touring exhibitions etc.
- Participation in committees and networks
  - Interministerial/interdisciplinary working groups
- Advocacy and policy consultation
  - Statements, policy consultation at regional, national and European level

KOK is funded by the Federal Ministry of Family, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth.

# 7. Specialised advisory and information services:

#### Helpline against organised sexual and ritual abuse:

Berta Telefon - N.I.N.A. e.V. https://nina-info.de/berta Phone: +49 (0)800 30 50 750

Vielfalt e.V. – Information on trauma and dissociation vielfalt@vielfalt-info.de https://www.vielfalt-info.de/ Phone: +49 (0)421 7 94 94 34

Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse https://www.aufarbeitungskommission.de/english/

Independent Commissioner for Child Sexual Abuse Issues – UBSKM https://beauftragte-missbrauch.de/themen/ hilfe-angebote-fuer-betroffene-von-sexualisiertergewalt

Information Portal on Ritual Abuse (only available in German) https://www.infoportal-rg.de/

Short video produced by ECPAT Germany and the Child Protection Centres on organised ritual abuse (video in English right at the bottom of the page): www.kinderschutz-zentren.org/organisierterituelle-gewalt

#### Organisierte und rituelle Gewalt – SUPPORT: Ein Leitfaden für den Ausstieg

[Escaping Organised and Ritual Abuse: A Guide, only available in German] Published by N.I.N.A. e.V. https://nina-info.de/berta/infos-hintergruende/ 204-support-ein-leitfaden-fuer-den-ausstieg

#### **Contact and donations**

Provisions made for adequate support or for secure accommodation of trafficked persons are insufficient in Germany. This needs to change through lobbying and PR activities. We need your support – every donation helps.

#### Account for donations:

Evangelische Bank eG IBAN: DE43 5206 0410 0003 9110 47 BIC: GENODEF1EK1

#### Donation Line: 0900 - 156 53 81

(only within Germany) For each phone call, € 5 (including a € 0.75 phone service charge) will be donated to KOK. The amount will appear on your next phone bill. KOK is happy to issue a donation receipt.

#### Donate while shopping online:

You can support KOK directly by simply donating while shopping online via the website www.wecanhelp.de

KOK is funded by



Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth The **Trafficking in human beings** information brochure also has a version on

- Trafficking in human beings sexual exploitation
- Trafficking in human beings labour exploitation
- Trafficking in human beings forced begging and criminal activities

Also available in German.

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