

## **Human Trafficking from the Former USSR and Eastern Europe**

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The countries that have emerged from the socialist bloc of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union represent an enormous range of countries. They include those of the recent accession countries to the European Union such as the Czech Republic and Hungary whose economic level is approximately 40 percent of that of the long time members of the European Union and the impoverished countries of Central Asia, Caucasus and Moldova where income levels may average as little as \$50 monthly. These economic differences are marked by equally significant political differences where many Eastern European states are emerging as stable democracies whereas other countries, particularly in Central Asia, are more authoritarian than in the final years of the Soviet period. Despite the great differences among this very diverse region, all share a serious problem of human trafficking and illegal migration often into slave like conditions<sup>1</sup>.

The problem of sexual trafficking and trafficking into slave like labor conditions is a global phenomenon in the former socialist bloc only since the late 1980s. The problem of sexual trafficking from this region has been so notable because of its volume, geographical reach and the relatively high level of education of the women who are its victims. Much less attention has been given to the problem of labor trafficking which is increasingly a problem within the former socialist bloc as individuals are trafficked as laborers and beggars<sup>2</sup>. The labor trafficking has been growing increasingly since the late 1990s as Russia and Ukraine have recovered from the collapse of the ruble and there is a market for cheap labor from the former USSR. An ILO Report in 2004 estimated that 20% of the 5 million illegal immigrants in Russia are victims of forced labor<sup>3</sup>.

The problem has been very persistent despite significant assistance programs from the European Union and the United States. Extensive resources have been dedicated to fighting trafficking, establishing law enforcement and victims' assistance programs and supporting NGOs to work in these areas. There are many reasons for the endurance of this problem that are a result of the common socialist legacy of these countries and the absence of domestic political will to address them. The post-socialist transition which has been particularly hard on women combined with the corruption and the collapse of the existing law enforcement structures has made it very difficult to address this problem.

### **Defining the Problem**

Trafficking for sexual exploitation is now outlawed in most of the former countries of the socialist bloc but there is less legal clarity in relation to the question of

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<sup>1</sup> Donna Hughes, "The 'Natasha' Trade: The Transnational Shadow Market of Trafficking in Women," *Journal of International Affairs*, 53, Spring 2000, pp.625-51.

<sup>2</sup> Second Annual Report on Victims of Trafficking in South-Eastern Europe 2005, [www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/Second\\_Annual\\_RCP\\_Report.pdf](http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/Second_Annual_RCP_Report.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> [www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/33192.htm](http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2004/33192.htm); Elena Teriukanova, *Prinudie telnyi Trud v Sovremnoi Rossii: Nerugliermaya migratiia i tovgovliia liudmi*, Moscow: International Labour Organization, 2004, [www.american.edu/traccc/resources/publications.html](http://www.american.edu/traccc/resources/publications.html).

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slave labor. Yet this problem is becoming increasingly problematic within the territory of the former USSR. As the Russian and Ukrainian economies have experienced economic growth and demographic decline, there has been a demand for labor. With no effective border controls or labor laws, tens of thousands of impoverished individuals have come from Central Asia, particularly Tajikistan, to work in the affluent Slavic countries<sup>4</sup>. Often deprived of their passports and living in slave labor conditions, they work in construction, particularly the most dangerous aspects of the construction sector. Fatalities and injuries are very frequent<sup>5</sup>. The economic incentives to exploit this labor, the lack of penalties and the absence of alternative sources of workers has made this a significant problem that is likely to increase in the future.

### Persistence of the Problem

Trafficking and enslaved labor are relatively new problems for the former socialist countries. It is less than twenty years that the tight border controls of the socialist world and the guaranteed employment of the countries of this region, limited human trafficking and slaved labor. Although the countries of Eastern Europe had more possibilities for employment outside of the state, this was not possible in any of the former states of the USSR. All men had to work and women had to be employed unless they were married. Therefore, there was no available pool of individuals who could be trafficked or enslaved<sup>6</sup>.

The emergence of this phenomenon was not without precedent. In the decades before the rise of the Soviet Union, many of the countries that became source countries for trafficked women in the 1990s and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, were once sources of the white slave trade in the pre-revolutionary period. Women were trafficked out of the Baltics, Odessa and what is now Moldova in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, we are examining a phenomenon that disappeared because of the rise of an international anti-slavery movement and the closing of the borders behind the “Iron Curtain” that limited crime to within the domestic confines of the USSR and Eastern Europe. The authoritarian rule of the Soviet state and of the socialist regimes of post-World War II Eastern Europe prevented any non-state actors from running illicit businesses such as human trafficking and smuggling. But these were among the first large scale transnational illicit activity to emerge after the fall of the socialist system, even before a large scale international trade in drugs emerged.

Although no direct linkages can be found between the traffickers of the white slave trade of the pre-revolutionary period and those that conducted this today, many of the conditions that once facilitated the trade endured despite as much as 70 years of

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<sup>4</sup> Tiuriukanova.

<sup>5</sup> Elena Tiuriukanova, “Social, Economic and Criminal Effects of Migration in Russian Megalopolises,” [www.american.edu/tracc/resources/publications.html](http://www.american.edu/tracc/resources/publications.html).

<sup>6</sup> Louise I. Shelley, “The Changing Position of Women: Trafficking, Crime and Corruption,” in *The Legacy of State Socialism and the Future of Transformation* ed. David Lane, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, pp. 207-222.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight Against White Slavery 1870-1939* New York: Schocken Books, 1982; Isabel Vincent, *Bodies and Souls: The Tragic Plight of Three Jewish Women Forced into Prostitution in the Americas* New York: William Morrow, 2005.

socialist rule. First, respect for individual or human rights was part of neither the tsarist nor the Soviet system that ruled the USSR and dominated Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the anti-slavery movement that acquired such intensity in western Europe and the United States was not part of the Soviet or the pre-revolutionary system where citizen mobilization on social issues was possible. Law enforcement in the pre-revolutionary period was notoriously corrupt. The authoritarian Soviet system had initially curbed the corruption of the Tsarist law enforcement through brute repression but long term one Party rule resulted in a law enforcement system that was as or more corrupt than its pre-revolutionary predecessors<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, by the end of the Soviet Union, the former socialist states had no capacity to enforce the law and no commitment to defending individual rights.

#### Feminization of Poverty and the Collapse of the Socialist System

The rise of criminal trafficking occurred with the dissolution of the USSR and the end of the socialist system in Eastern Europe. This process began in the mid-1980s as the controls and social supports of the Soviet period disappeared and the coercive apparatus of the Soviet state began to disintegrate. This was true in the Eastern European countries as well as the former Soviet Union<sup>9</sup>. The phenomenon was most profound in many of the Slavic states and in Moldova where there was greater proximity to the lucrative and extensive Western European markets and less tight family structures and support networks than in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Women suffered disproportionately in the collapse of the USSR and in the demise of the socialist system in Eastern Europe as they lost their guaranteed employment, child subsidies and the social welfare system. Feminization of poverty ensued, many children were left abandoned<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, the criminal actors who acquired strength in the political void which existed were beyond the control of the poorly equipped, corrupted and demoralized law enforcement structures. Women became an important commodity of the criminal groups in the post-Soviet space and in Eastern Europe. Although the political situation in Eastern Europe improved more rapidly than in the former Soviet Union with the establishment of multi-party systems in many of the countries, the corruption of the elite which was a legacy of the Soviet system allowed many of the trafficking organizations to operate with impunity.

#### Conflict Regions and Human Trafficking

With the demise of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia, many of the ethnic conflicts which had been controlled by the authoritarian nature of the socialist system were no longer suppressed. Many regional and ethnic conflicts emerged in the former Soviet states that resulted in the rise of organized crime including trafficking. Among the most notable conflicts were those in the former USSR including Kosovo, TransDniester with Moldova, Nagorno-Karabagh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Abkhazian and Ossetian conflicts between Georgia and Russia and further conflicts in Central Asia such as in the Ferghana Valley and the Civil War in

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<sup>8</sup> Louise I. Shelley, *Policing Soviet Society The Evolution of State Control* London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Farr, *Sex Trafficking: The Global Market in Women and Children* New York, N.Y.: Worth Publishers, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Sally Stoecker, "Human Trafficking A New Challenge for the United States and Russia," in *Human Traffic and Transnational Crime Eurasian and American Perspectives* eds. Sally Stoecker and Louise Shelley, Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, pp. 13-28.

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Tajikistan. All these conflicts led to displaced and impoverished individuals. Many of them had a direct impact on trafficking today as it is these conflict regions that have become major sources of trafficking victims.

The Albanian crime groups, primarily those emanating from the former Yugoslavia rather than from Albania itself have become a major source of trafficked women throughout Western Europe and also to the peacekeepers who are working in the region. They have also trafficked children for begging and illegal adoptions<sup>11</sup>. It is the conflict regions where many women caught in the chaos have been available to be trafficked and where the crime groups have the most ability to operate freely. The Transdniester conflict has impoverished Moldova and has also led to the entrenchment of crime groups in the Transdniester region<sup>12</sup>. In Russia today, large numbers of Tajik workers are trafficked into conditions of slave labor<sup>13</sup>. Therefore, the regional conflicts have provided sources of women and migrant labors to be trafficked and the criminalized conflict regions allow the traffickers to hide with full immunity.

#### Economic Reasons for Human Trafficking

The economic situation in many Eastern European countries has improved significantly, there the persistence of trafficking is less explained by economics than in many of the countries of the former Soviet Union. There are a variety of economic conditions that help explain the endurance of trafficking in the increasingly diverse countries of the former Soviet Union. Significant economic growth has occurred in Russia and Ukraine. An enormous economic disparity now exists between the major Slavic states and the Central Asian countries that were formerly part of the USSR. In both Russia and Ukraine, massive construction and renovation has accompanied the economic growth. With shortage of personnel, significant illegal immigrant populations have come as construction workers, many of them enslaved in their place of work<sup>14</sup>.

The extreme wealth of those in Moscow has provided a market for sexual services. Women are trafficked into Moscow from poorer areas of Ukraine and Moldova to service the Moscow market. Therefore, many of the women forcibly engaged in prostitution in Moscow are non-Russian. The same situation is also existing in Baku, Azerbaijan where the oil market and the presence of highly paid oil workers is resulting in women being trafficked from other parts of the USSR to satisfy the demand for sexual services.

The impoverishment of Central Asia and the non-oil rich states of the Caucasus has led to an increase in trafficking and labor trafficking that was not previously known. This phenomenon is different from the irregular migration that consists of highly

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<sup>11</sup> Farr, pp.108-9; Vasilika Hysi, "Organised Crime in Albania: The Ugly Side of Capitalism and Democracy," in Organised Crime in Europe Concepts, Patterns and Control Policies in the European Union and Beyond edited by Cyrille Fijnaut and Letizia Paoli Dordrecht: Springer, 2004, pp.546-551.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Galeotti, "the Transnistrian Connection: big problems from a small pseudo-state," Global Crime, vol.8, issue 3 and 4 (August-November 2004, pp.398-405.

<sup>13</sup> Elena Tiuriukanova, "Social, Economic and Criminal Effects of Migration in Russian Megalopolises," , [www.american.edu/tracc/resources/publications.html](http://www.american.edu/tracc/resources/publications.html) .

<sup>14</sup> Ibid and Non-Traditional Immigrants in Kyiv

[http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=1424&fuseaction=topics.publications&group\\_id=96024](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1424&fuseaction=topics.publications&group_id=96024)Ruble, kyiv

educated individuals who often work in menial jobs overseas to support their families<sup>15</sup>. ( But instead represents the trade in women to countries in the Middle East, Asia and as far as the United States. The absence of economic investment in most of Central Asia and the concentration of wealth in the resource rich states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan has left most of the population in a desperate financial situation vulnerable to both labor and sexual trafficking. In the Caucasus, trafficking to Turkey and the Black Sea region has remained a consistent problem.

Education and public awareness programs can only go so far in stemming a problem where many of its root causes are economic. For example, although the European Union has emphasized preventing trafficking of women from Moldova, its economic policies run counter to these efforts. Moldova is still a highly agricultural society but many of the farmers cannot market their products to the European Union because of existing trade barriers. Although these economic barriers to combating trafficking have been acknowledged within the OSCE in relation to the trafficking issue, nothing has been done to address the economic policies that contribute to trafficking<sup>16</sup>.  
Demand for Trafficked Individuals

The vast territory that adjoins Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union represents a large area with significant market demand for trafficked individuals. The countries of Western Europe are a large market for trafficked women as there is a large demand for sexual services and the welfare states of the western Europe do not have sufficient number of women who engage in prostitution to satisfy the market demand. In some countries in western Europe, women can engage in prostitution legally if they have the right to work but the women who come from much of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union cannot acquire these work permits. Therefore, they are forced into the illicit aspects of the sex industry and become victims of trafficking as they are entering these countries and working there illegally.

The Middle East and Turkey also provide a large market for the women trafficked from the former Soviet Union. Turkey, which does not require visas in advance, has a large prostitution market in the major cities and resort areas. There is a strong demand for women from the Soviet successor states and Romania, countries from which women can easily be trafficked across the Black Sea. Other significant destination countries in the Middle East include Israel, Dubai, and Egypt. In Israel, women through fake documents and marriages can rapidly acquire Israeli citizenship and then can travel more easily internationally. Women from the Moslem countries of Central Asia are often trafficked to Arab countries of the Middle East and Turkey<sup>17</sup>.

The former Soviet Union stretches from the borders of western Europe to Asia. In Japan, Korea and China there is a significant demand for women from the former Soviet

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<sup>15</sup> Saltanat Suleimanova, "Trafficking in Women from the former Soviet Union for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation," in *Trafficking and the Global Sex Industry* edited by Karen Beeks and Delila Amir Lexington Books (forthcoming).

<sup>16</sup> Eleventh OSCE Economic Forum on "Trafficking in Human Beings, Drugs, Small Arms and Light Weapons: National and International Economic Impact," 20-23 May 2003.

<sup>17</sup> Suleimanova, International Organization on Migration, "Shattered Dreams Report on Trafficking in Persons in Azerbaijan," [www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/azerbaijan%5Freport.pdf](http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/azerbaijan%5Freport.pdf).

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Union<sup>18</sup>. In Korea, women have worked in the sex industry not only for local clientele but for American servicemen on the bases there<sup>19</sup>. In Japan and China, there is a demand for Caucasian women in the sex industry that is not pursued aggressively by law enforcement.

#### Population Being Trafficked

The problem has been persistent because despite the diverse prevention programs, there are many individuals from the former socialist bloc countries who are ready to be trafficked. For some, they believe that their fate will be different from others and they will actually be working only as a dance girl in a nightclub or that they will earn enough from this work that they will be able to support their family back home no matter what they themselves may endure.

For others there is the “Pretty woman” concept that the life of being a prostitute is glamorous and may lead you to a secure situation at the end. Furthermore, in the post-Soviet world many of the women have developed a concept of working as a prostitute as a desirable occupation according to opinion polls that have been taken among high school age students in Russia.

Some trafficked women come from the lowest tier of post-Soviet society. These are the homeless, children of alcoholic and abusive parents and the hundreds of thousands of abandoned and orphaned children and youth confined to children’s homes who are all natural sources for the traffickers. The decline in expenditures on these homes has left the hundreds of thousands of residents in egregious conditions. The number of children in these homes swelled in the immediate post-Soviet period but as Russia has become more affluent the numbers and conditions of the most indigent children has not declined<sup>20</sup>. The individuals institutionalized there have had low self esteem and the corruption of the administration in these institutions has resulted in individuals exiting children’s homes and becoming trafficking victims.

Other women were vulnerable to the traffickers. Without economic opportunities and needing to support parents and children, are often were susceptible to offers of foreign employment abroad that offered them relief from their economic destitution. Some agreed to work in clubs or dancers, unaware of the conditions they would face<sup>21</sup>. Instead of finding a way to support their families, they were enslaved overseas, deprived of their passports, received little or no pay, physical abuse and often intolerable living

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<sup>18</sup> Liudmila Erokhina, “Trafficking in Women in the Russian Far East: A Real or Imaginary Phenomenon?” in Human Traffic and Transnational Crime Eurasian and American Perspectives eds. Sally Stoecker and Louise Shelley, Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, pp. 79-94.

<sup>19</sup> Geon-Soo Han, “Current Situation of Migrant Women Employed in the Sex and Entertainment Sector of Korea, presented at the conference on Human Trafficking and Human Security, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan, December 12-13, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Clementine K. Fujimura, Sally W. Stoecker and Tatyana Sudakova, Russia’s Abandoned Children: An Intimate Understanding, Praeger, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Sue Bridger, Rebecca Kay and Kathryn Pinnick, No More Heroines? London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 165-78.

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conditions<sup>22</sup>. Few have returned and those that have are often psychologically broken by the experience, addicted, alcoholic and HIV infected<sup>23</sup>.

Traffickers also drew on another vulnerable category-- women subjected to domestic violence and spousal abuse. Violence against women has a very long history in Russian society, but the collapse of the USSR and the accompanying economic crisis in many families contributed to a rise in domestic and sexual violence, a problem inadequately addressed by social and law enforcement resources<sup>24</sup>.

There is an increasing problem of intra-generational trafficking that had not been seen before. Although this is a known phenomenon in India, where the trade in women and minors has gone on for a long time, it was not known in the Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union where this phenomenon was suppressed under socialism. But with mothers leaving their children for work abroad, the unsupervised children have become vulnerable to being trafficked themselves. Therefore, some of the children of trafficked women have themselves been trafficked into situations as beggars, illegal adoptions or into situations of sexual exploitation<sup>25</sup>.

Individuals trafficked into slave labor conditions are primarily male and usually emanate from Tajikistan and from Vietnam. With no alternatives to support their families, they are vulnerable to the recruiting techniques of the traffickers who place them frequently in extremely dangerous work situations, deprive them of their passports and supply them the most minimal provisions for their survival. Under these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that the Tajik diaspora community in Moscow reports on a significant number of fatalities among its members<sup>26</sup>.

### Rise of Organized Crime

The crime groups which have emerged from the former Soviet Union have been among the most flexible in adapting to the globalized environment. While the socialist bloc dissolved, the criminals from the former USSR preserved their relationships. Many of the criminals from the former USSR obtained a foothold in the countries of Eastern Europe in the early years of the transition. Therefore, the criminal networks of the socialist bloc established working relationships that stretched from Europe to Asia. Many

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<sup>22</sup> E.V. Teriukanova and L. D. Erokhina, eds. Torgovlye Liudmi Moscow: Academia 2002.

<sup>23</sup> The Baikal Women's is held every two years. At the one held in July 2002 in Irkutsk, the author attended a session on this topic.

<sup>24</sup> Igor Kon and James Riordan, eds. Sex and Russian Society Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, p.6.

<sup>25</sup> International Organization for Migration Counter-Trafficking Service, "Changing Patterns and trends of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkan Region, Assessment carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Province of Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova" 2004  
[www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans%5Ftrafficking.pdf](http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans%5Ftrafficking.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> "Crime and Corruption Related to Migration in Russian Megalopolises," September 30, 2005,  
[www.american.edu/tracc/events/hosted.html](http://www.american.edu/tracc/events/hosted.html).

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of the criminals were highly educated, therefore, they had skills useful to other crime groups such as document fraud, money laundering. Within their ranks, they also included former members of the military and security apparatus. Therefore with their skills and their personnel, they were able to forge alliances with criminals in all parts of the world that explain their endurance today.

While many criminal groups were active in the drug trade, post-Soviet groups were less active in this branch of the illicit economy. Rather, they found a commodity in high demand that provided them enormous profits--the trade in young women. With little attention internationally to this form of activity, they faced little risk of apprehension. With the opening of borders, the criminals of the former socialist bloc moved women to destinations in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the United States because of their international contacts with diverse criminal organizations.

The crime groups from the former Soviet Union are particularly violent. They often use former military personnel as their enforcers. Individuals brutalized by the wars in Yugoslavia or in Chechnya including Chechens themselves often brutalize the women who resist working as prostitutes. In contrast to crime groups in other regions of the world who are known in their home communities, the process of recruitment for trafficking in Eastern Europe is more random. The future supply of trafficking victims does not depend on those who have been trafficked. Therefore, there is more violence applied to the women and the Albanian and former Yugoslav groups in the Balkans are noted for their particular ruthlessness.

The individual traffickers are not necessarily large scale entrepreneurs. Rather, they are often small groups of criminals who established links abroad to market a relatively small number of women. Often women are initially recruited by someone who knows them and then are passed on to the transporters and then to the individuals who sell them to the brothel keepers in the country of destination. The resale of women several times and their constant movements among locales are central to the methods of the traffickers as it increases the disorientation of the women and the possibility of them being rescued by the community where they are. Many of the women are recruited by women who themselves have been trafficked and are now part of the criminal networks bringing younger women into the business.

The involvement of large scale criminal organizations is not frequent in this activity. The larger criminal organizations such as Uralmash crime group focus in the early post-Soviet period was on the acquisition of significant sectors of heavy industry rather than in the sex trade<sup>27</sup>.

Research done by the IOM in the Balkans reveals that the trafficking organizations are very flexible. They adjust to changes in market conditions and changes their routes, structures and methods to adjust to new law enforcement techniques and laws<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup>Stephen Handelman, *Comrade Criminal: Russia's New Mafiya* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995. pp.72-92.

<sup>28</sup> ; International Organization for Migration Counter-Trafficking Service, "Changing Patterns and trends of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkan Region, Assessment carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Province of Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova" 2004  
[www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans%5Ftrafficking.pdf](http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans%5Ftrafficking.pdf)

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The profits were significant as illustrated by criminal cases which have been initiated in the United States since the TIP act. In Texas, two professors from Uzbekistan who trafficked women from their home country made \$400,000 on profits on these two girls before their business was halted through an investigation<sup>29</sup>. In the White Lace Case in Los Angeles, the police determined that the prostitution ring, many of whose participants had been trafficked through Mexico from Russia, Ukraine and the Baltics was a \$ 7 million a year business. The profits of the business were laundered through money orders and some of the profits went into real estate and were laundered abroad.

Increased awareness of the problem and the subsequent introduction of legislation in the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has not stopped the problem. Not only do the profits remain high and the supply of women still exists but the legal systems have been too corrupt and inefficient to make much of a dent in the problem. The corruption exists not only in the countries of the former socialist bloc but in the consulates of receiving countries that issue visas to women. Individuals on the payroll of the crime groups issue the visas and in even more extreme cases such as in the US embassy in Prague, a member of the crime group worked in the visa section of the embassy. Border officials in neighboring countries such as Turkey turn a blind eye to the trafficking of women.

The crime groups continue to operate because of the corruption, the ineffectiveness and unwillingness of law enforcement to act and the absence of demand for action by leading government officials. The absence of witness protection programs for the victims and their families, the difficulties in collecting evidence across countries and the lack of resources to devote to this problem by law enforcement in the host country means that there is little effective prosecution. With large profits to be made, with little chance of punishment or forfeiture of profits and a ready supply of women or potential slave laborers, it is understandable why the problem proves so persistent.

International Cooperation

The problems of mounting a successful international investigation of a human trafficking ring are difficult if you are the relatively honest and well financed law enforcement in a developed country or the investigators in poorer countries that are the source of supply of the women. The following analysis of the problems of international cooperation are based on numerous interviews with law enforcement in the United States, Western Europe and in Russia, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.

The segmentation of the criminal network across several countries makes it very difficult to address the entire organization. For example, in the White Lace Case in Los Angeles, the women were recruited from Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine<sup>30</sup>. Some of the women were transported to Mexico and then moved across the U.S.-Mexican border. Some of the proceeds of the crime may have been laundered to Switzerland. Six countries

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<sup>29</sup> Beatrix Siman Zakhari, "Legal Cases Prosecuted Under the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000," in *Human Traffic and Transnational Crime Eurasian and American Perspectives* eds. Sally Stoecker and Louise Shelley, Lanham, Md: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, pp. 125-50.

<sup>30</sup> Los Angeles Police Department Press Release, Operation White Lace, [www.lapdonline.org/press-releases/2002/12/pr02726.htm](http://www.lapdonline.org/press-releases/2002/12/pr02726.htm).

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at least were involved in this trafficking ring and investigation of this crime required cooperation not only with police in the source countries but with financial specialists and with branches of law enforcement investigating visa fraud. With this complexity, the members of the vice squad could get at the perpetrators in the United States but the legal complexities of communicating across borders with law enforcement with whom there are linguistic, procedural and even corruption problems means that only the domestic side of the criminal investigation was completed and those in the US sentenced.

Other cases pose other challenges of international cooperation. A Detroit case in which the women were trafficked by a larger Ukrainian criminal organization with ties to other crime groups meant that both the women in the United States and those in the source country were reluctant to give testimony. The absence of witness protection programs in the source country was a great barrier to the collection of evidence by law enforcement<sup>31</sup>.

In the late 1990s, a leading Belgian law enforcement official was investigating the trafficking of Albanian women to his country. A group of Albanian law enforcement were invited to Belgium to assist in the investigation. One of the senior police officers who came with the group immediately went off with a local Albanian crime leader. Subsequently the Belgian police official received a death threat by phone from the Albanian police officer who was supposedly part of the investigation team<sup>32</sup>.

The corruption, the penetration of organized crime into the police structures, the lack of protection for the victims' families and the complexity of the crime networks impedes international cooperation for law enforcement that have the resources and the desire to pursue these crimes.

Both the NGO community and the multi-lateral community have not been able to effectively address the problem of corruption in law enforcement, border patrol or in consular bodies that issue visas based on payments. Most governmental assistance programs focus on training law enforcement failing to recognize the impact of the corruption issue. Although some of the non-governmental community has built bridges with well meaning law enforcement, the problem of the lack of political will, economic resources or desire to address the trafficking problem remains a major impediment to effective change in the situation.

The problems of international cooperation are different in the source countries. Many of the law enforcement officials, even in the special anti-trafficking units that have been set up with foreign assistance, are reluctant to do anything against the traffickers. In many cases, the women leave the country through some recruitment agency. Their departure from the country is not illegal and the crime against the women often only takes place outside the country. Often the law enforcement do not even know in which country the women wind up. Therefore, the investigators in the source country do not know where to turn to find the end of trafficking organization they seek. With limited financial resources, they are unable to travel or communicate with law enforcement in the destination country. The complex procedures for introducing evidence across borders

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<sup>31</sup> For information on the Detroit case see <http://www.detnews.com/2005/metro/0509/09/B01-308518.htm> for the coverage of the guilty plea and <http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/mie/pr/maronov.pdf> for the press release.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Belgian law enforcement official, TraCCC offices Washington, 2000.

complicates any prosecution that involves two legal systems. Often there are even more than two countries involved.

Despite the signing of international agreements between many countries to combat human trafficking, there is little effective cooperation. Often the police are reluctant to share information because they distrust each other and are concerned about corruption of their counterparts. The police forces in some countries such as Turkey and Greece, major destination countries, choose to deport the women they find on their raids of brothels back to their home countries rather than to investigate the traffickers who are operating in their country.

The number of prosecutions internationally of the traffickers is small relative to the numbers engaged in the phenomenon. Furthermore, almost none of the individuals from the former socialist countries who has facilitated such crime by providing visas, fraudulent documents or transporting the women has been prosecuted. Ukraine may have initiated the largest number of prosecutions but the cases are not often seen to completion and even when individuals are sentenced, their sentences are mild compared with the gravity of the offense<sup>33</sup>. Russia has only had its first case of trafficking for slave labor although trafficked Ukrainian laborers were recently located in the Far East. In the United States, there have been few prosecutions of trafficking of women from the former socialist bloc even though law enforcement is aware of brothels or prostitution rings with women from the former socialist bloc. The problems of conducting an international investigation with law enforcement from the former socialist bloc is only one of the reasons for the limited prosecutions and the endurance of the problem. In most cases in the United States, investigation of trafficking cases is not a high priority by law enforcement and falls under the jurisdiction of local vice units that are not trained in the complexities of investigating transnational crime.

#### What happens to the victims? How are they being helped?

There is very little knowledge of what is happening to the victims of trafficking from the former socialist bloc. There are a variety of victims including children who are trafficked as beggars, boys and minor age girls as well as women who are trafficked for sexual exploitation. Little is known as to what happens to these categories of victims as well as those trafficked for labor although much work has been done in different countries of the region by the International Organization of Migration to understand the victimization.

A certain number of women die each year, killed by the traffickers or their customers but there is no hard data because most of the women are part of an illicit population and have often been deprived of their passports and are frequently traveling under forged documents that mask their real identities<sup>34</sup>. Police report that they often cannot identify the nationality let alone the name of the women who has died. Many individuals in labor trafficking are injured and crippled and some die or simply disappear.

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<sup>33</sup> Frontline documentary on trafficking from Moldova and Ukraine to Turkey, [www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/slaves](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/slaves) aired on public television on Feb. 7, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Presentation of Brian Willis at the Conference on Trafficking in Persons Research, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, November 14, 2005.

Very few of the trafficking victims from former socialist countries return to their home countries and very few are rescued from their situations of sexual slavery. In raids that have become conducted in Eastern Europe and in the Balkans, some rescued women even after being repatriated are caught again by the criminal organizations that trafficked them and are forcibly returned to their work as prostitutes. Others who are “rescued” but provided no social, medical or psychological support return to the life of sexual slavery because they are not able to create an alternative existence for themselves. As one IOM official working in Moldova explained to me, “We can repair the broken teeth and noses, that is the easy part but we cannot repair the psychological damage that has been done.”

In the west, there is very little data on the fate of women who have been trafficked. From interviews with law enforcement, researchers on this issue and from my own research on this topic, it is clear that very few women who are liberated from a trafficking ring are able to subsequently construct a decent life for themselves. The women have been profoundly changed by the experience and there are limited support services in the United States and Western Europe which at best can reach only a small number of the women who have been trafficked.

The victims have no social support in many countries to which women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have been trafficked. In Turkey, the Middle East, China and Japan, for example there is no victim support. Trafficking victims in Turkey are likely to be thrown in jail prior to being deported. In Japan, a major migration official reported that he had received death threats while trying to address the issue of trafficking and its victims<sup>35</sup>. A Kyrgyz diplomat discussed with me his posting in an Arab country in the mid to late 1990s where he went to collect the imprisoned women who had been engaged in prostitution. One of them, a former Moscow conservatory student, had been the victim of trafficking. But he had little optimism that these women could exit this life even after being returned to Kyrgyzstan because there was no possibility of reintegration.

The victims of trafficking are often not recognized in the former socialist bloc as victims. The women are often viewed as greedy women who engage in prostitution to make money. This is a view not only within the law enforcement community but within the community at large. Within the Asian context, with much more traditional views of women, the fact that women have engaged in prostitution is a source of dishonor not only for the women involved but for her family. This despite the fact that many Central Asian women seek work abroad specifically to aid their families<sup>36</sup>.

Less attention is paid to the victims of labor trafficking than to that of women. Apart from their community organizations, such as the Tajik community in Moscow, there are no groups concerned about their welfare. There are not funds for their medical care or support in the socialist bloc. Their victimization remains unaddressed by the state, most non-governmental and multi-lateral organizations.

Women in Russia, Ukraine and many Eastern European countries have become strong advocates in fighting trafficking. Non-governmental organizations such as La Strada, Syostri in Russia and the Angel Coalition have worked to prevent trafficking and

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<sup>35</sup> Ritsumeikan conference on Human Trafficking and Human Security, December 12-13, 2004.

<sup>36</sup> International Organization of Migration, 2001 “Deceived Migrants from Tajikistan A Study of Trafficking in Women and Children, [www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/tajikistan%5fstudy%5Faugust2001.pdf](http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/tajikistan%5fstudy%5Faugust2001.pdf).

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run crisis centers and prevention programs. The resources available to women who run these centers are limited. While some of the women who work in these are professional educators, psychologists and lawyers who dedicate their time, they are unable to contribute much money. Most of the funding for the Non-governmental organizations comes from the foreign community as there is a lack of indigenous financial support and consequently a lack of sustainability. In Russia, activists in the movement are concerned that the recent crackdowns on financial assistance from abroad may have serious repercussions for the support of anti-trafficking activity<sup>37</sup>.

The multi-lateral organizations working in this area are also foreign supported. Significant resources have been committed by the international community to IOM in the Balkans, Moldova, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan as well as in other countries to document the problems of trafficking, to set up prevention programs and support programs for the victims<sup>38</sup>. These programs have been able to prevent victimization but have been less successful in assisting repatriated victims where there is little for the women to do economically in these impoverished countries where the women have few economic alternatives. The programs address the impact of trafficking but not enough is being done to address economic development for women as a fundamental means of preventing trafficking.

#### The Future: Trends and Necessary Measures

The problem of trafficking is going in very different directions in the enormous territory that comprises the former socialist bloc. The problems are diminishing in the recent accession countries of the European Union but still remains a notable problem in the Baltic states and the Balkans. The Slavic regions of the former USSR are not only suppliers of trafficked women and children but also recipients of trafficked women and trafficked laborers. The impoverished countries of Central Asia are suppliers of trafficked women and laborers. The entire region is also a transit territory for individuals moving from Asia into western Europe.

Even though the problem of trafficking has emerged only within the last two decades, it is now deeply rooted within these societies. There is not one cause but a combination of economic, political and social factors that contributes to the perpetuation of the problem. There is not one solution but this problem will take decades of focused effort to address. But the limitations are clear because one is dealing with societies with enormous economic disparities, high rates of corruption, low levels of competence of law enforcement and a lack of political will to address these issues.

The problem needs much more attention to the demand side that will reduce the demand for trafficked women in laborers in western Europe and Turkey and in the more

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<sup>37</sup> Voice of America Russian language radio show on human trafficking with representatives of OSCE, Syostr, Jan.23, 2006.

<sup>38</sup> International Organization for Migration, "Victims of Trafficking in the Balkans," 2001, [www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkan%5Ftrafficking.pdf](http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkan%5Ftrafficking.pdf); International Organization for Migration Counter-Trafficking Service, "Changing Patterns and trends of Trafficking in Persons in the Balkan Region, Assessment carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Province of Kosovo, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Moldova" 2004 [www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans%5Ftrafficking.pdf](http://www.iom.int/documents/publication/en/balkans%5Ftrafficking.pdf)

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affluent countries of the former socialist bloc. Much more attention also needs to be paid to promoting social welfare and economic development for women and children. The resolution of the outstanding conflicts in the region which endure in the Balkans, Central Asia and the Caucasus are at the heart of much of the trafficking problem.

More attention must be paid to reducing corruption and improving the rule of law. The corruption in the police, border services and in investigation and the courts lies at the heart of much of the problem. Cases are not initiated as needed and international investigations are not seen to conclusion. The profits generated from this illicit business make the resources of the crime groups ever more potent.

Indigenous support for the victims needs to be developed as the societies need to understand that these are not just women who want to be prostitutes or laborers who are there to perform any activity. But this requires a significant change in human rights and concept of women's rights. Although the influence of the European Union is most evident in this area in Eastern Europe where there is the development of democracy and civil society, a similar evolution is not observed in most of the countries of the former USSR.