

Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation: The Case of the Russian Federation

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trafficking in human beings is a grave and growing problem in the Russian Federation, and one, which is misunderstood, barely acknowledged, and easily tolerated. Trafficking in women is a multibillion dollar industry and is a key source of revenue for Russian organized crime groups.

This study shows that the trafficking of women from the Russian Federation occurs on a global scale. Russian women are known to have been trafficked to 40-50 countries around the world, including most European countries, North America, and parts of Asia and the Middle East. Trafficking also occurs within Russia. No one really knows how many women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation from the Russian Federation. The US State Department estimates that more than 100,000 women were trafficked from the countries of the former Soviet Union in 1997 alone.

There are a multitude of reasons why the trafficking business thrives in Russia, including great profits which can be made by the traffickers, corruption of officials and police at many levels, and reluctance of lawmakers to intervene due in part to fear of reprisals by violent criminal syndicates.

Moreover, with the downturn in financial and economic conditions that has occurred over the last decade throughout Russia and the former Soviet republics, there are more and more children and women who are too vulnerable, too uninformed, or too desperate to prevent themselves from falling prey to the sex industry. Many of them then discover that, once they have become a part of this trade, it is almost impossible to be extricated.

Many women have few choices because they have become impoverished and find themselves devoid of options for jobs or means of survival. This is the plight of many women in poor rural and remote areas in Russia or those attempting to survive urban poverty.

For others, such as the new groups of street children and orphans which did not exist in Russia ten years ago, they are recruited at an early age, virtually sold into slavery, and may never know another way of life. This is true for countless young Russian girls and boys, some as young as 12 years of age, who may later become a part of criminal syndicates themselves and perpetuate this phenomenon. In this way, more and more people without options are lured into sub-human and degrading conditions, often for the rest of their lives.

This growing trend in Russia, the former Soviet republics, and, in fact, throughout much of the world, is dangerous and insidious, and the refusal of governments, to confront it, is alarming.

According to a recent second report prepared by the US State Department on “Trafficking in Persons”, Russia has still done fairly little to combat the problem of trafficking, primarily due to lack of resources, training and adequate legislation. However, the Government has recently acknowledged trafficking as a problem.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian Federation is a sending, receiving, and transit country for women and children trafficked into the global sex industry. The number of women and children who have become victims of this illicit market is unknown, but it is estimated to be in the tens-of-thousands, and possibly the hundreds-of-thousands.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has gone through ten years of severe economic decline, which has included the demise of the social welfare and health care systems, leaving many Russian citizens without jobs, social benefits or adequate health care. While many people have suffered since the collapse of the Soviet Union, women and children have in many ways suffered disproportionately.

In addition, there has been a substantial increase in criminal activity within the last decade.

To escape the drastically deteriorating conditions, many people, especially women, are seeking ways to go abroad.

In contrast to the deteriorating conditions in Russia, the people of Russia have been bombarded with images of glamour and wealth from the West by the media. Many Russians believe these images represent the average standard of living and way of life in the US and Western Europe.

The material changes in living standards, the psychological and attitudinal changes of people, especially women, and the belief in a utopia in Western countries, has caused many women to seek ways to migrate for work or emigrate permanently. The favoured destinations are receiving countries for women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation.

Trafficking in women and girls is caused by the compounding factors of economic collapse and unemployment, the decreasing social status of women in the transition to a market economy and the increase in transnational organized crime groups, many of which are involved in prostitution and trafficking.

POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT – THE CONTEXT IN WHICH TRAFFICKING HAS DEVELOPED

The break-up of the Soviet Union eliminated most of the systems and infrastructures that provided social safety nets and a minimal standard of living for the Russian population. In the transition to a market economy production has fallen, there has been substantial capital flight and foreign investment has been minimal. All of this has resulted in economic instability and newly impoverished populations, accompanied by high unemployment, unpaid wages, savings lost or spent on subsistence, and little hope of change.

Even before 1998, the economy continued to contract. Then in August of 1998, a severe economic and financial crisis caused the value of the rouble to collapse, and savings that people had managed to accumulate were gone.

In 2000, almost 60 million Russians, over 40 per cent of the population, lived below the poverty line or subsistence level and some 80 million adults spent half their income on basic food staples.

The abandonment of the centralized, controlled economy and the change to a market economy also created an economic class system that had not previously existed. For example, in 1994, following three years of reform, the top 10 per cent of the population earned 11 times as much as the bottom 10 per cent.¹

Economic inequality for women

Through the period of transition to a market economy certain occupations have shifted in their prestige and earnings, many jobs were eliminated, and many women have been forced out of their positions.² This has occurred in a context in which many Russian women are highly educated, since, for the most part, education was equally available to women and men in the Soviet Union, resulting in many highly trained women in Russia compared to other countries. Unemployment has disproportionately affected these educated women.³

Thus, overall, the contracting economy has caused a sharp rise in unemployment for women and men of Russia, and often the first people to lose their jobs have been women, while concomitantly in the transition, workplace benefits that assisted women were lost and childcare facilities in the workplace were closed.

Various studies indicate that women make up between 60 and 80 per cent of the registered unemployed and, in some regions, as much as 90 percent.^{4 5 6 7}

This new phenomenon of extensive unemployment among women strikes hard at families. Twenty per cent of women are the sole wage earners for their families,⁸ and at the end of 1998, over half of the children under age six were living in poverty.⁹

All of these economic factors have accumulated and put tremendous pressure on the population, and unemployment has been a significant contributing factor to the trafficking of women. Unemployment has created virtual labour pools of desperate women and mothers who can be recruited with promises of jobs and good incomes outside of their region or country. Numerous women in the sex industry in Russia and abroad have cited the need to support children as the principal reason for being involved in prostitution.

Moreover, the appearance of highly educated Russian women in sex industries abroad has been one of the unique phenomena of trafficking in women from Russia. Elsewhere, trafficked women are usually far less educated.

Regional variation in unemployment

The gap between the richest and poorest regions in the Russian Federation is great and is increasing, and the transition to a market economy has caused a greater economic crisis and more unemployment in some regions than others. The planned Soviet economy structured entire regions around specific types of industries. During that time, a number of planned towns would be built around one large factory. In the new economy, if one type of industry failed or reduced production, entire cities or regions can be devastated.

From 1989 to 1995, 5 million Russians, of which roughly 50 per cent were women, lost defence industry related jobs.¹⁰ The first to be laid off were female engineers.¹¹

Moreover, employees lost far more than their jobs when the industry shut-down. The Russian defence enterprises also functioned as self-contained towns, with goods, services, and social welfare benefits provided. When employees lost their jobs at these plants, they lost all social benefits as well.¹² For example, in the region and city of Tver, on the Volga River, unemployment is now rampant, and in 1998, 70 per cent of the officially registered unemployed workers were women, with 79 per cent of the

‘long-term unemployed’ being women.¹³ The economic and employment situation for women has been grave since 1992, but the economic crisis of 1998 severely aggravated the problem.

In the Volga region there were reports of hundreds of women – teachers, nurses, single mothers and even schoolgirls – going into prostitution to survive.¹⁴ As a result, diseases such as syphilis, tuberculosis and AIDS have increased in this region, with syphilis rates reported to be four times higher in 1998 than they were in 1995.¹⁵

Similarly, in 1999 in the Tartarstan Republic of Kazay, women accounted for 83 per cent of the registered unemployed,¹⁶ while in the Amur Oblast, north of China, the lack of jobs has also caused mothers to go to extremes such as selling their blood to blood banks to earn small sums of money to support their families. In other regions, women living in the countryside are increasingly growing poppy and hemp,¹⁷ and drug traders often offer children’s clothes and schoolbooks as payment for crops.

These conditions are now replicated throughout the Russian Federation. Women in regions such as these, including many who have never left home before, increasingly are going abroad in search of work, having given up on finding employment in their own towns or regions.

If unemployment is a significant cause of trafficking, areas of high unemployment of women are prime target locations for recruiters and traffickers to operate. As criminal gangs engage in diverse crimes to make money, and as women and girls come in increasing contact with criminals and organized crime groups, they become increasingly vulnerable to being trafficked.

STATUS OF WOMEN IN RUSSIAN SOCIETY

There are many negative stereotypes that excuse or justify discrimination and violence against women, such as perceptions that women are masochists who desire, or at least do not object to violence and humiliation, and that women secretly want to be raped.

In the last decade, women have been documenting an increase in battering, rape, and sexual harassment. Many people assume that women engaged in prostitution abroad migrate for prostitution voluntarily. In general, violence against women in public and private spheres has increased and has caused many women to become desperate to escape conditions at home or in the workplace, thus also making them vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers.

Battering

An attorney with the American Bar Association Central and Eastern European Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI) has reported that there are 12,000-16,000 domestic homicides per year in Russia,¹⁸ with 60 per cent of the women murdered each year killed by their own husbands.¹⁹ In the first half of 1997, there were 18,000 battered women registered in casualty wards.²⁰

Yet, police do not take complaints of domestic violence and sexual assault seriously, and there have been reports of police taking bribes to drop charges.²¹ Concomitantly, the shortage in housing means that women have few options of finding another place to live, and often, divorced couples have to continue to live together.²²

According to the Director of the Moscow Women's Crisis Centre, in surveys of women, a full one-third of respondents reported violence in their families.²³ And between 1994 and 1998, 8,000 women called the Moscow Women's Crisis Centre. The calls were described as "a vast outpouring of ... grief".²⁴

These conditions contribute to the growing phenomenon of women going abroad to search for work and ending up within the sex industry.

Domestic violence is also frequently a reason that children run away from home, and these victims and witnesses to battering and abuse are especially vulnerable to being recruited for prostitution and trafficking. According to one report, "Girls who

have seen their mothers beaten at home are particularly vulnerable. Many come to see women as inferior beings that men can use and abuse as they please”.²⁵

While domestic violence is a serious problem, acknowledging it can also be dangerous. In one reported case, the director of a battered women’s shelter was fired for making a critical statement in the media.²⁶

Sexual violence

Women in Russia are often blamed for sexual assaults against them and accused of being provocative. Women know this and therefore seldom report incidents of sexual violence. When women do report these crimes, the police and the official procedures often re-traumatize them, and even families of victims frequently condemn them.

Thus, even when women are willing to admit that they were recruited for jobs abroad through false advertising, they are reluctant to say that they were raped or involved in prostitution, although the details often make it obvious. For example, one NGO representative reported that “a Moscow firm offered modelling work in Greece to several young girls. In reality, they stripped in a bar and possibly engaged in prostitution. They will not discuss it... Several wound up in the hospital with venereal diseases.”²⁷

Sexual terror

Sexual harassment or “sexual terror”, as it is called in Russia, was not discussed during Soviet times, but is now acknowledged as widespread. Sexual harassment is frequent on the street and in the workplace. According to one expert, the “sexual terror” experienced by women in the labour market is part of an overall social climate which is becoming increasingly sexualized, threatening, and particularly hostile to women.²⁸ Women are usually expected to tolerate sexual harassment as part of their jobs, and even to provide sexual services to their bosses. Job advertisements often list one of the requirements of the job as “no hang-ups”.

The high rate of battering, sexual harassment and sexual assault exposes and contributes to the lower status of women in Russia. Lack of recognition and response to this violence in the past and present creates extremely precarious conditions for women in Russia and victims of these types of violence are more vulnerable to recruitment by traffickers.

Western glamour, the sex industry and trafficking in women

During perestroika and after the collapse of the Soviet Union there was an influx of western images of glamour, and Russian women and girls were presented with an idealized view of western glamour, women, and foreign life. However, glamour quickly turned to pornography and sexual exploitation, and imported and locally made pornography became widely available.²⁹ Along with this came greater employment recruitment based on appearance. Simultaneously, a less glamorous type of sexual exploitation appeared, the exchange of sex for material needs such as room and board.³⁰

The biggest problem with the influx of sexualized glamour was that few were able to differentiate between liberalization and exploitation.

CRIMINALIZATION AND THE STATE

As Russia moved from a state controlled economy and state ownership of industries and natural resources, no regulatory infrastructure was put in place to oversee privatisation and business transactions.³¹ Nor did western governments or businesspersons advising Russian enterprises in the process of privatisation provide proposals for methods to limit or regulate the flow of resources from state to private ownership. For this reason, many commentators believe that the problematic transition in Russia has been in part the responsibility of western advisers who failed to understand the full context and ramifications of the transition. Moreover, unfortunately, the unregulated “transition” in Russia occurred in an environment conducive to the development of organized crime.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs estimates that in 1996, 40 per cent of private businesses, 60 per cent of state-owned enterprises, and more than half of the country’s banks were controlled by organized crime.³² The Ministry of Internal Affairs also estimated that there were 8,000 criminal gangs in the former Soviet Union, with 300 of them operating internationally.³³ Russian organized crime groups have in many ways replaced the state in providing employment, protection, and security. The majority of private enterprises are compelled, by force if necessary, to pay ‘protection’ of up to 30 per cent of their profits to organized crime.³⁴

Concomitantly, in Russia, there is no legal definition of corruption. Moreover, all members of the *Duma* (Federal Parliament) and the regional governors have immunity. In 1998 surveys by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development and the Control Risks Group, Russia ranked among the top three most corrupt states in the world.

The criminalization of the state and the lack of political will to change this situation has made it difficult to pass and implement laws aimed at preventing and punishing various types of high-profit violent criminal activities such as sexual exploitation and the trafficking of children and women. (Also see section on Law and Legislation).

CRIMINALS, ORGANIZED CRIME, PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

The main sources of income for the mafia are trafficking of drugs and the female body. *Major Alla Georgievna Aristova, Head of the Division for Crime Prevention Among Minors, Saratov Department of Internal Affairs*³⁵

Prostitution and trafficking are staple money-makers for pimps and organized crime groups all over the world. The size and scope of the criminal activity varies. It can range from an individual criminal controlling and pimping local women in a local venue, to several men controlling and domestically trafficking a group of women in a medium-sized locally-based prostitution ring, to large organized crime groups with international connections for trafficking women to destination countries where they also control the sex industry venues. Organizing a few pimps who each control several women, running a brothel, or collecting protection fees from smaller bars, clubs and brothels is a simple, brutal way to make money. It requires little skill, organization, or technology and is usually a low risk, low investment, and high profit enterprise.

Trafficking exists to meet the demand for women in the sex industry. When pimps cannot recruit enough local women, they first domestically traffic women from poorer, usually more rural regions within the same country or recruit and transport women from regions or countries where it is easier to find vulnerable women. As the size of the trafficking operation increases, the cost of “doing business”, increases also. An individual pimp or trafficker may be able to get a woman into another country on a tourist visa, but if a number of women are needed for the trafficking/prostitution operation, the organized crime group needs false documents or more complex, organized ways of transporting women. The larger scale operations are also more likely to rely on corrupt officials, especially in the sending countries.

Because prostitution is widely tolerated, it is an entrance point for organized crime into a city or country. A few pimps can move in with control of a few women and establish a territory, or a manager can pressure a few independent pimps into paying protection fees and can collect money from all pimps operating in an area.

Organization of prostitution and trafficking in Russia

In the Russian Federation, crime groups are referred to as *mafiya*, although they do not resemble traditional Mafia families and/or groups. The groups that are referred to as *mafiya* range in size and organization from a few people who act as co-conspirators to hundreds of people organized into large networks.

Organized crime groups control most prostitution and domestic and international trafficking in Russia. Some individuals may operate independently, but once they start making noticeable amounts of money, they draw the attention of organized crime groups who control the territory. In order to continue to run their prostitution operations in that territory they have to pay “protection money”. Thus, extortion is the most common crime in Russia, with organized crime groups operating by extorting money from criminals and businesses. An estimated 80 per cent of all local and foreign companies have received extortion demands. In 1996, an estimated 70 per cent of businesses had a “roof”, meaning they had to pay money to an organized crime group.

Outside Russia, Russian organized crime groups operate through extortion schemes among Russian émigrés and smaller groups. They use extortion to control the targeted company, demanding increasing control or payments in stocks or shares that quickly give them control over legitimate businesses.³⁶

The trafficking gangs are likely to be on the lower end of the *mafiya* hierarchy.³⁷ Recruiters and pimps who control women in prostitution are the lowly “soldiers” of the organization, with several layers of “managers” above them in the hierarchy of the organization. When individuals or smaller crime groups establish a lucrative business, larger organized crime groups move in and extort money from them in order to allow them to continue to operate in a territory controlled by the larger group. In one case in Moscow, teen-aged street boys started a child prostitution ring in which they pimped younger, homeless children. When they started to make money, up to \$200 per day, the bigger criminals operating protection schemes threatened them and demanded protection money.³⁸ This is an example how small prostitution rings become connected to larger organized crime groups. In this case, the teenage pimps now have a possible future career in organized crime.

Many of those trafficking in women from Russia are career criminals who are now involved in buying and selling women to make money. They set up fake or marginally operational businesses in destination countries, and then issue letters of invitation to women to visas.³⁹ Trafficking in women is very profitable for these criminals. Accord-

ing to Michael Platzer, of the United Nations Center for International Crime Prevention in Vienna, “The white slave trade... earns the biggest money... for criminal groups in Eastern Europe”.⁴⁰

Experts estimate that 70 per cent of prostitutes in Russia enter prostitution at the age of 14-15 and that encouragement of minor girls from rural areas or provincial towns and of young girls with learning difficulties into the sex industry is a growing trend.⁴¹ A representative from the Russian Federation Border Guards reported that there were many under aged children, the majority of them girls, being trafficked abroad using fake documents.⁴²

Domestic trafficking in women and children occurs within Russia, with women and children being recruited and transported from rural areas to urban centres and from one region to another. Aleksandr Igorevch Tryanov, Chief Commissioner for Special Cases, Far Eastern Regional Organized Crime Unit, noted that trafficking in women within Russia is an increasing problem.⁴³

North-Western Russia

The north-western border areas of Russia are destination sites for domestic-ally trafficked women and prostitution tourists from western Europe. Women are also trafficked across the western border of Russia to eastern and western European countries.

Leningrad Oblast in western Russia shares a border with Finland. Many Finnish tourists come to Petrozavodsk for the nearby tourist spot – Kizhi Island. Petrozavodsk is also a principal site for trafficking because of its closeness to the Finnish border.⁴⁴

Finnish men can cross the border into Russia and buy women and girls in prostitution for \$20-60 per hour as compared to \$240 in Finland.⁴⁵ The Finnish men come looking for a variety of women and girls, from the very young to the middle aged. The Finnish men, especially former army and police officers, have created a demand for women over the age of 50 who they use for domestic services as well as sex.

The city of Vyborg has become a site for prostitution tourism for Finnish men. In 1995, police reported that there were five large groups controlling hundreds of women in prostitution rings in Vyborg. Major Tyunin, the deputy head of the police force on

Vyborg, who deals with crimes involving foreigners, says the increase in prostitution is associated with other related crimes, such as robbery of the Finnish men and murders among rival prostitution gangs.⁴⁶

In 1995, police broke up a child prostitution ring composed of 15 girls, aged 13 to 16. Many of the girls had left home because of alcoholic or abusive parents. The pimp offered them an apartment to live in, then forced them to steal or engage in prostitution. Each of the girls had to pay him 500 Finnish marks (\$70) for his “protection”. One girl said, “When we delayed payment, he beat us, drowned us in the bath and raped us”. One of the girls had previously been pimped by her alcoholic mother. Another 14-year old girl said that when she was raped at age 11, her mother just collected money from the rapist.⁴⁷ The pimp who controlled the girls in this case had four previous convictions.

In Vyborg, a small police force with only 17 officers has been frustrated in its attempts to curb prostitution. The women are often too frightened to proffer evidence against the pimps. And criminals who had previously been convicted were granted amnesty with a presidential Victory Day decree that freed hundreds of petty criminals. The previously convicted brothel owners, now released from prison, reopened their establishments. Major Tynin said, “Without laws it is very hard to get enough evidence to sentence criminals for organizing prostitution. We went through so much trouble to convict these people, and now they are free.”⁴⁸

In Murmansk, a variety of sex businesses have opened. Women can be bought for 30-100 roubles along the highway.⁴⁹ Murmansk Oblast in far north-western Russia shares a border with Norway. With the opening of the border, women started crossing between countries. Organized crime gangs have now organized the traffic of women across the northern border to Norway for prostitution on the weekends, or give Norwegian men the option of arranging for a woman to stay with him for an indeterminate period of time.⁵⁰

Bride trafficking from Russia

There is much cross-border travel between Norway and Russia by men and women for the purpose of marriage. Lyubov Romanovna Vertinskaya, Department of Family, Youth, and Children’s Issues, Murmansk Oblast, said that 150 women per week go to Norway to find a husband.⁵¹

One man said,

Norwegian women are very independent...[they] do not need men any more.... I am hoping the Russian women will be more like Norwegian women used to be – keeping the home nice and looking after the family.⁵²

In 1997, one man in Norway set up a “marriage camp” in the village of Evie in southern Norway.⁵³ Another site like this one has also been established in Lillesand. The operator, Alf Loining, has advertised Russian women through “bride catalogues” for years, but in this operation, he brings Russian women into Norway on tourist visas. Norwegian men then come to the “marriage camp” to meet and select a woman. Around 20 women from north-eastern Russia – largely Murmansk and St. Petersburg – arrive in groups during the summer months. Most of the women are in their late thirties. Some bring their children with them. The women do not speak Norwegian, so communication during the introductory period is limited. The men may select a woman to take home for the three-month period of her tourist visa, and if they marry and remain married for three years, she can obtain Norwegian citizenship. If she is divorced during the three-year period, she will have to return to Russia.

Norwegian men pay 80 pounds for one month’s access to the “marriage camp”. If they decide to take a woman home, they pay an additional 350 pounds. The proprietor of the “marriage camp” claims that the women only pay a fee of 200 pounds and that he pays for their return flights, travel expenses, and their stay at the camp. Others, such as women’s organizations who have taken an interest in the “marriage camp”, tell a different story. They claim that the women pay large sums to attend the “camp”. A Russian physician who formerly worked as the “camp’s” secretary claims that Loining has agents working for him in Murmansk who charge the women 1,300 pounds to find them a foreign national husband. She also claims that during the year she worked for him he made two million kroner.⁵⁴ When a reporter questioned the women about fees they paid, their answers were evasive.

The Norwegian men often treat the women like exchangeable commodities. One man visited the camp in 1999 and took home a 20-year old woman, but returned in 2000 for another woman. He said the relationship with the 20-year old had not worked out because “...she was too young for me, and, coming from St. Petersburg, she didn’t like the quiet country life”.

The manager of the women's crisis centre in Arendal, Norway reports that every year women from the camp come to them for assistance. She indicates that the worst kind of men – alcoholics, unemployed, and those with psychological problems – go to the “marriage camp” to select women. She states that the Norwegian men view the Russian women at the “marriage camp” almost as prostitutes who can be bought, sold, or sent back to Russia if they do not please the men. Since the women have given up their flats and have no jobs, they become “...like slaves or sex toys”.⁵⁵

St. Petersburg

In St. Petersburg, police estimate that there are 4,000 to 6,000 women in prostitution, although NGOs in St. Petersburg suggest that the number is probably closer to 10,000.⁵⁶ St. Petersburg police estimate that there are between 200 and 400 prostitution “agencies” in the city. In 1998, a woman in prostitution estimated that there were several hundred pimps in the city who each controlled about 15 women.⁵⁷ St. Petersburg is also a major site for the production of pornography.

St. Petersburg has a vice unit consisting of eight officers and one car. According to Vasily Belyanko, the head of the unit, in 1997 they shut down ten prostitution agencies and 80 pornography production facilities. But the last time a pimp was arrested and sentenced to a jail term was in 1996. Belyanko said, “It is nearly impossible to prove that a pimp is a pimp”.⁵⁸ So, instead of targeting the pimps, they target the women. The women are fined \$25 for passport violations or “...obscene behaviour in public places”. Police corruption is also an obstacle to addressing the problem.

An NGO representative that works with sexually abused children in St. Petersburg reported that many children who are sexually abused are vulnerable to recruitment by pimps into prostitution. She said the girls who have been molested have been seriously harmed and lack self-esteem; therefore, it is easy to use them in the sex industry. The NGO had worked with one girl who was being pimped by her mother. Other children are so poor they have to engage in prostitution to buy basic food products. She reported that these girls never had a choice. And after they are prostitutes, they are labelled with derogatory words and no one wants to help them.⁵⁹

St. Petersburg has a reputation as a centre for organized crime. It is strategically located, with a seaport across the Baltic Sea from western European countries. It is known as a site of smuggling operations. According to one source, there are four major organized crime groups in St. Petersburg, all involved in prostitution. Two of the gangs are suspected of being involved in smuggling of illegal immigrants. Three of

the gangs are reported to be involved in drug and arms smuggling. One of the gangs has been reported to be involved in operating prostitution rings in Finland, Sweden, and Germany.⁶⁰ According to the Transnational Center on Crime and Corruption of American University, St. Petersburg is one of the major sending cities for women trafficked to Europe and Asia.⁶¹

A crisis hotline in St. Petersburg has received 130 calls from victims of trafficking. Most of the women just want to talk. They do not want to report what happened to them because they do not trust the police. The victims say they were trafficked to Greece, Israel, and the Netherlands. One woman was the victim of a false marriage to an American man. He invited her to come to the United States to be his wife, while continuing to contact other women by Internet.

St. Petersburg is a destination site for domestically trafficked women and a transit site for internationally trafficked women. An NGO representative in St. Petersburg said that she was aware of a girl who was kidnapped in Azerbaijan and brought to St. Petersburg. She had been raped by many men and was about to be transported to another country when she was discovered by an agency and received assistance.⁶²

Moscow

According to Moscow police, in 1999 there were approximately 80,000 women involved in prostitution in downtown Moscow.⁶³ In 1998 and 1999, police detained 70,821 and 68,000 women for prostitution, respectively.^{64 65} Most of the women were released after paying a fine, although in 1999, 104 of them were taken to a special detention centre for prostitutes.⁶⁶

In Moscow and throughout the former Soviet Union, a significant number of pimps are women. In Moscow, each pimp controls 10 to 25 women.⁶⁷ One reporter interviewed two pimps, both women, who complained about having to keep their women out of sight of the police, even though they turned over half their earnings to the police as bribes to allow them to operate.⁶⁸ Once a week, the women are required to do *subbortnik* or free labour. The police send their bus to take the women to the station so the police can have sex with the women at the station.⁶⁹

Moscow is a receiving city for trafficked women from regions surrounding Moscow and other countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).⁷⁰ Of the 68,000 women detained for prostitution in 1999, 44 per cent were from other former Soviet republics.⁷¹ Many of the women are from Ukraine and Moldova.^{72 73} Women

from Georgia, some of them trafficked, are involved in prostitution in Moscow. The sex industry advertises them to tourists and businessmen as “exotic Asian” women.⁷⁴

Another of the sending countries is Tajikistan. The Moslem women in Tajikistan think it is acceptable for their daughters to leave to get married, and accept that one man can have four wives (polygamy). Traffickers manipulate these cultural and religious attitudes to recruit women. Recruiters pay a mullah and register the marriage for \$10.00. Of four women who were known to leave under these circumstances, one committed suicide in Moscow, two were sent to “public houses” (brothels), and a fourth woman killed a man who was raping her. In another case, a woman from Tajikistan was promised work in Moscow. When she arrived, she was beaten and sold repeatedly. She is now home, but very fearful that people will discover what happened to her.⁷⁵

There is a class system in prostitution based on the wealth and status of the men who buy the women, the appearance and health of the women, and the location at which the women are offered. The ‘top of the market’ serves the foreign businessmen and tourists in downtown Moscow. This market is divided and controlled by the pimps and the higher-level criminals and authorities who control them. As in all systems of prostitution, pimps take the largest percentage of the money and the women bear the cost of maintaining a “high-class” appearance.⁷⁶ Most women in prostitution are pimped in less prestigious venues, such as railway and bus stations and on streets and roads. In these places, “...it is not bundles of dollars that change hands, but practically pocket change”.⁷⁷

Women in prostitution on the streets of Moscow gather in groups with pimps and bodyguards overseeing them.⁷⁸ The women themselves can become the targets of violence in power struggles between pimps and organized crime groups. In September 2000, 15 women were injured when someone threw a grenade into a group of women standing on the street.⁷⁹ The women were hospitalized for leg injuries.⁸⁰

As a result of complaints about the increase in prostitution in Moscow in 1997, a special ten-person police unit was formed to counter prostitution. Viktor Yegorin, head of that unit, attributed the cause of prostitution to the economic collapse in Russia and said that the problem would not be solved until the economic situation improved. He also noted that the unit’s efforts to reduce prostitution were undermined by police corruption. The police accept bribes to assist the women in getting residence permits and to ignore the prostitution.⁸¹ As in many towns around the world, police respond to complaints about prostitution by forcing the women out of one area and into another. In 1999, the police in Moscow forced women off Tverskaya Street, so they moved to Dinamo Street.⁸²

According to one source, by the mid 1990s, there were 150 *mafia* gangs in Moscow, with 20 of them being well-armed, relatively large organizations, and six of them having the most power.⁸³ The smaller international gangs in Moscow have connections to one foreign country or control certain sites associated with prostitution, such as bars in hotels. The largest, most powerful groups have numerous regional and international connections. One pimp in Moscow said the *organizatsiya* controls each woman “the moment she goes abroad”.⁸⁴

According to one source, one of the most powerful organized crime groups in Russia is the 21st Century Association, which operates in 18 Russian regions. Prostitution is reported to be one of their principal operations. This group is reported to work closely with corrupt officials in regional and municipal administrations, and also has connections abroad.⁸⁵ In 1996, Moscow’s *Finansovye Izvestiya* reported that approximately 65 per cent of domestic criminal gangs had links to other CIS or Baltic countries.⁸⁶

There are several ethnic Chechen gangs that operate in Moscow and allegedly have connections at the “highest level in both the Moscow City Government and the national government”.⁸⁷ One of the principal operations of these crime groups is prostitution (along with car and drug smuggling, illegal oil deals and banking).⁸⁸ The Chechen gangs from Moscow operate internationally in Germany, Austria, the UK, Poland, Turkey, Jordan, the Netherlands, former Yugoslavia, and Hungary. Ethnic Slav organized crime gangs based in Moscow also derive a significant portion of the income from prostitution. The largest gang, with an estimated 3,500-4,000 members, is involved in prostitution and is active in Germany, Austria, Poland, Belgium, the United States, the Czech Republic, Italy, and the UK.⁸⁹

One gang reportedly based in the Moscow suburb of Podolsk controls 25 per cent of the street trade and prostitution in the centre of Moscow.⁹⁰ Its main international connection and activity is in the Netherlands.

NGOs in Moscow are aware of victims of trafficking, but at this point feel that there is little that can be done for them other than offering counselling. In one case, a victim who returned to Moscow was afraid of being recaptured by the traffickers and her family was threatening by the traffickers. She was afraid to go to the police for fear that they were corrupt and would give or sell her back to the traffickers.⁹¹

The US Customs Agency believes that the trafficking of children in and from NIS [Newly Independent States] countries for purposes of pornography is on the increase.⁹² Recently there have been documented cases of trafficking in child pornography made in Moscow.

According to the US Assistant Customs Attaché in Moscow, Marshal Heeger, the making and selling of child pornography sharply increased in Russia in 1998, following the economic crisis. Historically, child pornography has not been a serious problem in Russia; consequently, there are no laws against either child or adult pornography. It is illegal for an adult to have sex with a child under the age of 14, effectively setting this as the age of consent. Distributing pornography, even child pornography, is not illegal, or considered a problem worthy of action by police or the courts.

In February 2000, Dimitri Kuzentsov was arrested for molesting children during the production of pornography in Moscow. Four hundred tapes, 300 of them originals used for production, were seized. Kuzentsov made these pornographic films using boys who spent most of their time on the street in Moscow and who were vulnerable as a result of neglect or abuse by alcoholic parents. The tapes were marketed and distributed by an unemployed Russian stockbroker who bought the tapes and resold them over the Internet.⁹³

Moscow is also becoming a destination site for child sex tourists. Kuzentsov, who was arrested for molesting boys in the making of child pornography, also acted as a pimp for child prostitution tourists coming to Moscow. In another case, in March 2000, an American was arrested for travelling to Moscow to have sex with young boys. Between September 1999 and March 2000, he travelled to Moscow seven times. When he was arrested, one of his former victims was acting as an interpreter, guide, and pimp for him in locating vulnerable boys.

These types of crimes are new to Russia and people do not yet fully recognize the harm to the victims or the mode of operation of these types of criminals. An indicator of this lack of awareness is that the parents of the boys defended the man, saying that since he was so nice to the boys, he could not have done such a thing. He was tried and convicted, but given amnesty and released.⁹⁴

In Tver Oblast, a reporter interviewed women along the road in Domoslavl, between Moscow and St. Petersburg. The women charged 50 roubles for oral sex and 100 roubles for intercourse. A pimp, who controlled the women, watched and wrote down car registration numbers. The women were afraid to talk while the pimp watched. Police say the prostitution was mafia controlled and police take a portion of the money.⁹⁵ A junior detective at the Vyshny Volochok police station said,

We know who all the pimps are. And the ex-prostitutes, who are now madams. We know....something stands above them ...the mafia. The girls are mostly local. They get transported from village to village by

minibus. ...Of course, the girls are only to be pitied, really. We would like to help them but it is a hard struggle. They simply won't give evidence against the people using them.⁹⁶

In Archangelsk Oblast in 1998, police picked up 9,000 teenagers for sleeping on the streets. There is a significant problem of sexual exploitation of these children, as evidenced by criminal proceedings against 319 people for using children in unlawful activities, with 18 people being sentenced for sex with minors.⁹⁷

Romance and wife-seeking tours to St. Petersburg and Moscow

In 1998, there were an estimated 200-250 bride agencies operating in the United States, and 80 of them offered exclusively women from Russia or Eastern Europe.⁹⁸ The larger agencies offer thousands of women. Foreign Affair, one of the largest bride agencies in the United States, which includes women from the Russian Federation, claimed in 1998 that they had more than 15,000 customers in the first three years they were in business.⁹⁹

The role of these agencies in the trafficking of women is unclear. According to the Global Survival Network, most of the mail order agencies have links to Russian organized crime groups. Recruiters take part in the "socials" or parties and build databases of women who are eager to travel, work abroad, or emigrate.¹⁰⁰ In many cases the men who buy the "romance tours" that are offered by these agencies seem to treat them as prostitution or sexual exploitation tours.

Although alcoholism, unemployment, and domestic violence are serious problems in Russia, the bride agencies often resort to Russian male bashing in their promotions. "The reasons [the Russian women] give [for signing up with the bride agencies] are that the men of their country are extremely lazy alcoholics who beat their women."¹⁰¹

Men pay \$8.00 per address (with a minimum \$100 payment) to the bride agencies. Other agencies charge \$1,000 for 15 personal introductions.¹⁰² The letters the men write to the women are often computer-printed, photocopied form letters. In their letters, some men ask for specific sexual details about the women. One wrote:

[Send me] at least three poloroids [photographs] of yourself in the nude showing me all of your body. ...How do you like sex? Toys? What do you enjoy doing? And having done to you? ... I will send you \$500 for a flight.¹⁰³

Women do not always know their photographs have been put in catalogues or posted on the internet. One woman, a model, whose nude pictures appeared in the American-produced “From Russia” catalogue claimed that a photographer for whom she had worked sold the pictures to the agency, along with her address and phone number, without her permission. She said, “They’re still printing my picture, and I still get hundreds of letters and calls from ill, dirty men.” She said she has met with some of the men. “This is insulting; if Russian ladies knew how these Americans saw them they would be horrified.”¹⁰⁴ The owner of one model agency that specialized in pornography (“erotic models for men’s magazines”) admitted that he sold a bride agency photographs of women for \$5 each.

Some of the bride introduction services appear to operate as little more than prostitution tour agencies. The men often expect to have sex with the women as part of “getting to know them” and considering them as a marriage partner. One man admitted, “We’re not here to get married”. Some of the women, naively thinking that the men were really interested in taking them home to the US or Western Europe were distressed at being treated “like pieces of meat”.

Men in the United States formed an 800-member Internet group called RLW – “Russian Women’s List” – as a place to discuss different bride agencies and how to approach Russian women through letters and “romance tours”.¹⁰⁵ In 1997, 747 US fiancée visas were issued to Russian women, and 282 to Ukrainian women.¹⁰⁶ According to one immigration lawyer in California, one-third of the women who come to the US on fiancée visas return to Russia.¹⁰⁷

South-Western Russia

Saratov Region is located in south-west Russia, north-west of Kazakhstan, with the city of Saratov on the Volga River. Over the last decade, there has been an increase in prostitution and trafficking in this region. About 80 per cent of the women in prostitution are from 16-25 years old, with the remaining 20 per cent being between 14-15, with an occasional girl as young as 12. The youngest girls are from the orphanages in the area.¹⁰⁸ Only 30 per cent of the women and girls are from the city of Saratov, the other 70 per cent are from rural areas of the region. Approximately, 50 per cent of the women are Russian, the other half are Kazakhs.¹⁰⁹¹¹⁰

There are also reports of women being recruited from Voronezh. Seven women from Voronezh were invited to California to be professional dancers. They received P-1 (performer) visas, and when they arrived, they were taken to topless clubs and

bars and told to watch the other women. They were instructed to sit with men to get them to buy drinks and engage in prostitution. The women refused and said they would call the police. All seven women were immediately given return tickets. They were told they had to pay their own return travel expenses, but they refused. When the women returned home they saw the same advertisement with the same phone number in the newspaper. Another woman from Voronezh was invited by Russians to go to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to perform as a dancer for Russians living there. She contacted friends in UAE and told them where she would be. A Russian man picked her up at the hotel and took her to an apartment, where he started sexually harassing her. She found out she was expected to be his mistress. She told the man her friends would call the police if she did not return within three hours. She was immediately sent back to Russia.¹¹¹

Another area, Sochi, on the coast of the Black Sea, is a resort area for Russians and a sending and transit site for Russian women being trafficked to Turkey and the Middle East.¹¹²

West Central Russia

In 1998 there was a case in this region where two people were arrested and convicted for taking a 14-year-old girl to Moscow for prostitution. The girl was rescued after she managed to send a message to the police.¹¹³

In Nizhniy Novgorod there are a large number of cultural schools for dancers, artists, and musicians. Due to the large concentration of young women looking for jobs in these areas, it is a prime site for the recruitment of women for the sex industry. The Department of Psychological Support for Nizhniy Novgorod runs a hotline for the city. They believe the Nizhniy Novgorod Oblast is the largest source of girls for traffickers.¹¹⁴ School administrators in Nizhniy Novgorod say that many of their students have gone abroad to be “dancers and musicians” in recent years. None of them have been heard from since.¹¹⁵

NGOs are working to raise awareness of trafficking in this region, but encounter denial from police and officials. To prove that the problem of child prostitution existed, several women went to the railway station and “conducted a raid”. They were able to show the police that girls there who claimed to be 17-18, were actually 11 and 12 years of age. A pimp controlled the girls. After that, the NGO was able to convince the police that a problem existed and that there were criminals and victims, not just consenting workers.¹¹⁶

There have also been cases of sexual exploitation of children in Tartarstan Republic. Recently, a former police officer, and manager of the Fund for Protection of Mothers and Children, was found to be running a pornographic studio where children from orphanages, boarding schools, and problem families were exploited (Helsinki Group reference).

An NGO representative from Tartarstan reported that it is easy to buy a visa for Turkey in Tartarstan. She believes that women are being trafficked in this way to Turkey.¹¹⁷

In Yaroslavl, when education and prevention programmes on trafficking in women were presented to school administrators, many participants recognized the warning signs of traffickers operating in their region.

The ads confirmed their fears that these groups are actively working in Yaroslavl. There were emotional outbursts, tears and then anger as the group realized that they all knew girls from their districts who had gone abroad to work for these supposedly legitimate businesses.¹¹⁸

Ural Mountains Region of Russia

According to one source, there are at least two organized crime groups operating prostitution rings in Yekaterinburg. Both of these gangs have connections in western European countries. Yekaterinburg is known as one of the sending cities for women trafficked to Europe and Asia.¹¹⁹

One NGO representative has estimated that trafficking of women from Chelyabinsk Oblast began in 1994-1995.¹²⁰ Agencies in the city began recruiting women to go abroad and work as housekeepers, babysitters, waitresses and dancers. This NGO representative estimates that from 20 to 100 young women are trafficked from the Chelyabinsk city and region each month to the destination countries of Cyprus, Greece, Syria, Turkey, Israel, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the beginning of 2000, a group of 40 women were taken to Cyprus.¹²¹ In autumn 2000, a woman from Chelyabinsk escaped from a brothel in Cyprus and returned home.¹²² In Spring 2000, several "tour groups" of women from Chelyabinsk were also taken to Italy, Greece, Syria, and Turkey. It is also known that women, including some girls under the age of 18, go abroad as tourists, attempt to find work and are forced into prostitution.¹²³

One woman was trafficked from Chelyabinsk to Israel, then to Palestine, and back to Israel. She escaped and returned to Chelyabinsk. She is one of the few victims of traffickers who is willing to speak about her experience, and in fact she travelled to the United States to testify about her experience at US Senate hearings.¹²⁴

Recruiting advertisements in newspapers are also being researched. For several years there have been suspicious advertisements on notice boards on the street and in local newspapers. The advertisements offer well paying jobs for “pretty” girls to go abroad and work in hotels and bars as waitresses.¹²⁵ In early Summer 2000, the placement of the advertisements on street notice boards ended. The reason why is not known, but NGO representatives have reason to believe that the traffickers are still recruiting women in this region, but have changed their methods of reaching women.¹²⁶

In two surveys on public awareness of trafficking conducted in three Chelyabinsk Institutes, an NGO found that 97 per cent of young girls want or intend to go abroad to look for jobs, but have a low level of awareness of the risks involved.¹²⁷

Siberia

As one moves eastward through Siberia to the Far East of Russia there are fewer reports of trafficking, but many scholars, including researcher Sally Stoecker of the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, believe that trafficking in women and girls is increasing rapidly in Siberia. Little is known about trafficking from Siberia for two reasons: (1) there is less media reportage from this area to western news agencies, and (2) there is less reportage on trafficking in women in the Asian destination countries to which the women are trafficked.

Concomitantly, law enforcement officials in the Irkutsk Oblast say that trafficking of women and girls to China and Japan is growing.¹²⁸ There are also reports from Khabarovsk, a city near the border with China, that women are routinely trafficked to China, Japan and Korea for prostitution.¹²⁹

NGO representatives in Irkutsk have reported suspicious newspaper advertisements offering work for Russian women in Japan. However, when they called the Japanese embassy to inquire about such work and the trafficking of women to Japan, the official with whom they spoke ridiculed their inquiry and refused to answer any questions.

Eastern Russia

Less is known about prostitution and trafficking in eastern Russia. There are many indicators that it is a significant source area for the trafficking of women, due to high unemployment and the operation of organized crime groups, especially those that specialize in migrant smuggling.

Vladivostok

Prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Vladivostok was a closed city, with strict control on the movement of people. The lifting of restrictions on movement and the proximity of Japan and Korea has led to increased organized crime activity. The goal of organized crime groups has been control of the ports and the import/export trade, and thus far, Federal influence in controlling or regulating the cargo shipping in the Far East ports is reported to be ineffective.

In the Far East, it is commonly known that there is cooperation among businesspersons, regional authorities, and organized crime groups. By 2000, almost all ports and shipping had been privatized and were largely controlled by organized crime groups.¹³⁰ One of the regions in which there has been substantial influence and control by organized crime and collusion with the regional governor is in the Far East, in the Primorskiy Krai.¹³¹ According to a human rights report, the local executive bodies in these regions “tend to exercise absolute power that verges on despotism”.¹³²

By the mid-1990s, there were nine major organized crime gangs in Vladivostok, six of them involved in prostitution. A 100-member gang involved in smuggling goods, arms and drugs and managing illegal hiring of Chinese labour, is also believed to be involved in running prostitution rings in Macao.¹³³ Another gang, with approximately 50 members, is reported to be involved in prostitution in Hong Kong and Macau. Another small gang is known to be involved in car smuggling from Japan and local prostitution in Vladivostok,¹³⁴ and in March 1999, a Russian woman from Primorskiy Krai believed to be involved in prostitution in was found murdered in Seoul, Korea.

In a recent report, Sally Stoecker reported on homeless children in Vladivostok.¹³⁵ Contradictory laws that prevent children from obtaining access to shelter, result in many of the children living on the street, becoming drug addicts and being drawn into criminal activities. Primorskiy Krai has the highest reported number of drug addicts in the Russian Federation. Official figures cite 7,000 chronically addicted persons, although one researcher believes the figure is closer to 100,000. In the first half of

1999, more than 2,000 people were charged with possession and distribution of narcotics.¹³⁶ Given the combination of drugs, drug trafficking, organized crime and geographical location, this is a likely recruiting and transit site for trafficking in women.

Russia is no longer only a transit country for drugs, but also a destination country.¹³⁷ Increasingly, organized crime groups are moving into Russia. North Korean organized crime groups have established a presence in the Primorskiy Krai of the Russian Far East to smuggle drugs and immigrants.¹³⁸ In Vladivostok, Asian crime groups, such as the Chinese Triads, are operating and gaining influence.¹³⁹ The Triads are also well known for their activities in trafficking in women.

ORGANIZATION AND CONTROL OF PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING
IN DIFFERENT SIZE CITIES

Locations	Women in prostitution	Characteristics	Organization and control
Towns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local women 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women driven from town to town 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local pimps
Medium size cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local women • Domestically trafficked women from within the region • Internationally trafficked women if city is near the border of another CIS country 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local pimps • Regional recruiters / traffickers • Connections to a cities in other CIS countries • International recruiters • Regional organized crime groups, or branches of larger organized crime groups
Large cities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local women • Domestically trafficked women from surrounding regions • Internationally trafficked women from other CIS countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transit site for transnational trafficking to countries outside the CIS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local pimps • Local gangs that pay protection money to larger organized crime groups • International recruiters / traffickers • Large organized crime groups

VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Estimation of the number of trafficking victims

No one really knows how many women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation from the Russian Federation. A few agencies have offered estimates as a way to convey the seriousness and magnitude of the problem. The US State Department estimates that more than 100,000 women were trafficked from the former Soviet Union in 1997 alone.¹⁴⁰

There are a number of reasons that estimation of the figures is difficult. After women have been victimized and return to Russia, few report their experiences to the police. Women do not expect a sympathetic response from police, and further, many have legitimate concerns that the police are corrupt and in fact working with the traffickers and/or with organized crime. Moreover, often women remain fearful of the traffickers, many of whom continue to operate in the hometowns of the victims.¹⁴¹

Definition of trafficking

It might be easier to estimate the number of trafficked women by reviewing estimates of numbers of women in conditions of sexual exploitation in destination countries. A drawback to this method is that sexual exploitation is not always indicative of being trafficked. This assessment has been further complicated by the lack of a universal definition of trafficking that can be applied. In October 2000, a definition of trafficking was adopted for the new United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime. The following is the definition adopted:

Trafficking in person shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in the preceding paragraph have been used.

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons”.

“Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Identifying victims

Few victims of trafficking from Russia have felt safe enough to speak openly about their experiences, even among friends and family. NGOs know the identities of a few survivors, but most victims only speak anonymously through hotline support services.

Consequently, victims of trafficking remain one-dimensional figures whose terrifying stories are condensed and simplified for media reporting. In the view of many, including law enforcement and government officials and some NGOs, there are two distinct categories of women who are in the sex industry abroad – the “innocent” victims and the “willing” victims. In addition, there are the “invisible” victims who fall through the cracks and are never brought to the attention of the public, officials, or NGOs.

“Innocent” victims

The “innocent” victims have their stories told in the mass media. They are the ones who apply for jobs abroad and expect to work as waitresses, models or nannies when they arrive in destination countries. But, at some point in their travel their identity documents are confiscated and they are forced into prostitution. They are held in debt bondage until they repay the amount set by the traffickers and pimps, or until they escape or are freed by a police raid.

Traffickers commonly recruit women through employment, tour, and modelling agencies. The traffickers choose women who will be vulnerable and easy to control. For example, in one city recruiters ask the women if they speak the language of the destination country. If women indicate that they do, the recruiters say they are not interested.¹⁴²

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Russian Federation, approximately 50 per cent of women who are trafficked are offered employment in the following areas, and are coerced into prostitution upon arrival in the foreign country.

The job offers for women who are eventually trafficked fall into three general categories. The first and largest is unskilled labour, followed by the “glamour” jobs that Russian women have unrealistically come to expect. The smallest group is made up of women with skills, such as foreign languages, and it is easy to trick these women into believing that there are really positions available.

Employment offered	Percentage
Waitresses or bartenders	25
Fruit gatherers	19
Photo models	14
Nannies and tutors	10
Dancers in bars	8
Fashion models	6
Cooks	6
Saleswomen	3
Other such as translators, secretaries, night nurses	9

Source: Analytical Paper on Illegal Transfer and Exploitation of Women and Children Abroad, by VNII (All Russian Scientific Research Institute) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia

“Willing” victims

If the victim has had prior knowledge that she would be recruited into the sex industry, or if there is any indication that she was not entirely a victim of deception, coercion, violence, and enslavement, she quickly loses the status of “innocent” victim and falls into the category of “willing” victim. These women are often said to “have known what they are getting into”. Mr. Aleksandr Igorevch Tryanov, Chief Commissioner for Special Cases, Far Eastern Regional Organized Crime Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Khabarovsk said that women know what they are getting into when they accept offers of employment abroad and are not misled in most cases.¹⁴³ If there is any indication that the woman was involved in the sex industry prior to leaving Russia, she is characterized as a “professional prostitute”. According to the Ministry

of Internal Affairs, more than half of the women engaged in prostitution in foreign countries knew they would be involved in prostitution before they left Russia.¹⁴⁴

Local and domestically trafficked women usually fall under the category of “willing” victims. In media stories, law enforcement officials make the most references to these women. Rarely are the circumstances under which women and girls enter prostitution acknowledged as being similar to those under which women are internationally trafficked. For local women, domestically trafficked women, or those “who knew what they were getting into” there is no sympathy. Any violence against them is denied or dismissed. They are assumed to have free choice, or “agency”, in the language of some feminists.

Within this category of victims are those who are unlikely to be recruited by international traffickers. Among them are women who are addicted to drugs and alcohol and, as a result of their addictions and the circumstances of their lives, have often lost their youthful, attractive appearances and their health. As a consequence, they have no value for the recruiters and traffickers on the international market.

Invisible victims

There are many victims of sexual exploitation and trafficking who are neither the “innocent” nor the “willing” victims. They are invisible. These are the orphans and homeless children who exist with no protection. They do not have families or friends who can assist when they disappear. There are approximately 650,000 children in orphanages in Russia,¹⁴⁵ and an estimated 1 to 2.5 million Russian children living on the street.^{146 147} According to UNICEF, more than 500,000 Russian children lost a parent prematurely between 1990 and 1995.¹⁴⁸ In the last nine years, as economic circumstances have deteriorated, there has been an increase in “social” orphans, meaning those who have been abandoned by their parents.¹⁴⁹ In Moscow, there are over 30,000 homeless children, and an estimated 17,000 of them engage in prostitution to survive. Moreover, one-third of them suffer from syphilis or gonorrhoea and one-tenth of them are infected with HIV.¹⁵⁰

The orphans in Russia are an especially vulnerable group. If orphanage officials are sometimes corrupt, they can easily collaborate with trafficking groups to supply them with selected girls or boys. Even after the children leave the orphanage they are vulnerable targets for traffickers and pimps. According to MiraMed Institute, which provides services to teenagers and young adults, when the children reach the age of 16 or 17 they leave the orphanages but they are badly prepared for independent life. In

the orphanages, the children are not given social educations or taught living skills that most children acquire through growing up in families or within the general society. Children from the orphanages often do not know how to care for themselves or how to plan and organize their lives. For example, MiraMed officials cited examples of one girl who did not know how to make tea, and another who did not know how to use the Metro. Frequently, because of the isolation in the orphanages, the children don't know what skills they are lacking.¹⁵¹ MiraMed estimates that 30 to 50 per cent of them will be recruited into crime, prostitution and trafficking.¹⁵²

In Tartarstan Republic there are almost 7,000 orphaned children. The number has increased in recent years as a result of impoverished parents abandoning their children. Human rights monitors have reported that children are kept in conditions similar to those of prisons. These children are extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation, as evidenced by the arrest of the former police officer who was the manager of the Fund for Protection of Mothers and Children. As noted earlier, it was determined that he was using children from the local orphanage, boarding schools and problem families in the making of pornography in a local studio.

Girls and boys from orphanages are the invisible victims of the sex industry. Their life experiences in the orphanage provide them with little sense of their entitlement to basic rights and little opportunity to make decisions about their own lives.

Women in the sex industry

Women and children in the sex industry often contract sexually transmitted infections, and, in general, sexually transmitted infections have risen sharply in Russia in the past decade. In 1997, Russia recorded 450,000 new cases of syphilis; by comparison, new cases in the United States, where the population is more than twice that of Russia, numbered 8,000.¹⁵³

Kaliningrad Oblast, the only Russian territory separated from the Russian Federation by foreign states and the sea, has been declared a free economic zone. This status has increased trade and movement in the region and provided the basis for a self-sustained region. According to the Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, Kaliningrad is one of the major sending cities for women trafficked to Europe and Asia.¹⁵⁴

The Interior Ministry reported in 1997 that 90 per cent of those arrested for prostitution or drug-related crimes in Kaliningrad Oblast were infected with HIV, and his region has the most recorded cases of AIDS in Russia.^{155 156}

Contrary to the assumptions of many officials and the general public, few women freely choose jobs in the sex industry. If any choice is made, it is usually after all other options have been exhausted. An NGO in St. Petersburg did a survey among women to estimate their vulnerability to being trafficked. The women reported a very high desire to go abroad to find a husband and become a citizen. The most popular destination countries were the United States, Germany, England and France. None of the women said they wanted to work in the sex industry, although 2 per cent said they were willing to accept any work in any place.

However, once women or children enter the sex industry, it is difficult to leave. According to one observer in Moscow, "If someone has invested money in a prostitute in this country, she will never get out of prostitution. No one talks about that."¹⁵⁷ Women under the control of pimps may have little awareness or knowledge of the organization above the person who controls them. In Russia, as in many countries, the state provides no services for victims.¹⁵⁸ Victims must depend on the few non-governmental organizations for any assistance they may need.

Non-governmental organizations that do anti-trafficking work frequently complain that police and officials are uninterested in the problem of trafficking. According to NGOs, most police and officials deny the existence of trafficking or are unresponsive to proposals for dialogues or meetings. As noted above it is widely known that numerous police officials have been found to be directly or indirectly involved in prostitution and trafficking. There is also reluctance to talk about trafficking as a crime. An NGO representative recently pointed out that it is often acknowledged that trafficking is caused by economic crisis and poverty, but seldom is it acknowledged as a crime.

DESTINATION COUNTRIES FOR TRANSNATIONAL TRAFFICKING FROM THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Trafficking in women is a multibillion-dollar industry, and their employment in prostitution is a key source of revenue for ROC [Russian organized crime] groups.¹⁵⁹

Russian women are known to be in the sex industry in 40-50 different countries around the world.¹⁶⁰ According to one research group,

So far we've tracked young women being trafficked from Russia to 43 countries at the last count – pretty much every Western European country, Canada, the US, Mexico, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand.¹⁶¹

Russian organized crime groups operate prostitution and trafficking rings throughout Europe, Asia, the Middle East and North America.¹⁶²

Russian criminals and members of organized crime groups have moved with migration flows into countries where opportunities are available and the potential for profit is high. Former Soviet citizens have found front organizations in their new homes that provide sites of operation for Russian based criminals.¹⁶³ Criminals also rely on contacts they made while in the military, which had a presence in countries in most major regions of the world.¹⁶⁴

Prostitution of a few trafficked women can provide income for expansion into larger, more sophisticated and more expensive criminal activities. Outside Russia, Russian organized crime groups operate extortion schemes among other émigrés and smaller groups of criminals. They use extortion to control the targeted company, demanding increasing control or payments in stocks or shares that quickly give them control over legitimate businesses.¹⁶⁵ One of the types of businesses they frequently target is prostitution services, such as escort services.

During the last decade, there has been a steady increase in the operation of Russian criminals and organized crime groups abroad. In June 1996, the Russian Interior Ministry reported that 110 Russian organized crime gangs operated abroad in 44 different countries, either independently or in cooperation with foreign partners. Most of them had permanent bases abroad, and about 30 of them included prostitution and trafficking operations.¹⁶⁶ By 2000, the number of large Russian organized crime groups

had increased to 200 groups operating in 58 countries. In recent years the countries of increased activity were the United States, Canada, Israel, Brazil, Colombia, Austria, Turkey, Hungary, Poland and Sri Lanka.¹⁶⁷

Russian organized crime groups cooperate with other organized crime groups, such as US crime syndicates, the Cali drug cartels, the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC), the four main Italian organized crime groups – The Sicilian Mafia, ‘Ndrangeta, Camorra and Nuova Sacra Corona – as well as Hungarian, Czech and Polish organized crime groups. Russian crime groups have also established ties to Serbian crime groups, the Albanian Fares, the Japanese Yakuza, Israeli and Turkish organized crime groups, and Chinese Triads.¹⁶⁸ There is evidence that Russian organized crime groups also cooperate with Georgian crime groups to traffic young women for sexual exploitation and older women for labour exploitation.¹⁶⁹

An indication of the transnational nature of trafficking is seen in the advertisements of the sex industry, in which “an international selection of girls” is commonly offered. For example, in Thailand an advertisement reads “Highlight Escort Service: Yes, we also have foreign ladies. Russian, Spanish, British, and American. Our foreign escorts are 5,000 baht for three hours.”¹⁷⁰

Europe

Throughout Europe, Russian organized crime groups cooperate with other foreign and domestic organized crime groups. Hungarian, Czech and Polish organized crime groups are known to work with Russian crime groups. In some cases, the Russian crime groups dominate and control the other groups or take a share of their profits.¹⁷¹ Some of these cooperative efforts include trafficking of women from the former Soviet Union.¹⁷²

Although the former Soviet Union is now divided into 15 different countries, these divisions and borders are not impermeable, and criminals operate across borders quite easily. The same is true for other Eastern European countries where the Soviet Union had control and influence.

Russian organized crime groups are reported to operate large smuggling networks throughout Europe, Russia and the CIS.¹⁷³ How much overlap there is between migrant smuggling and trafficking for sexual exploitation is unknown. According to one source, Russians, Ukrainians, Yugoslavs, Turks, and Albanians control most of the prostitution networks in Europe.¹⁷⁴

Violence is also a by-product of the operation of criminal networks as groups compete for control of territory. By 2000, violence related to Russian organized crime had been reported in every major European capital, with Poland and Hungary having the worst problems.¹⁷⁵

Russian organized crime groups have heavily infiltrated Hungary. They often build networks from contacts established while the Soviet army was in Hungary. By 1998, there were 200 Russian controlled gangs in Budapest alone.¹⁷⁶ Many of the groups are involved in running prostitution rings and controlling Budapest's "night-life". Fighting among Russian organized crime groups to control these activities has resulted in at least several murders.¹⁷⁷

Budapest has become the pornography industry capital of Eastern Europe, making use of women from Russia and other former Eastern European countries. In 1997, there were between 100-120 feature-length pornographic films made in Hungary for western markets. Women from former Soviet countries are most often used in the production of these films. One producer said, "They cost less and do more. Even excruciating and humiliating acts usually cost the producer only US\$200 to \$300." The pornographic films are made by those associated with international criminal groups, not Hungarians.¹⁷⁸

Budapest is a source, transit and destination city in the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. One of the most important east-west routes for trafficking is from Budapest to Vienna, with Budapest being the organization site.¹⁷⁹

There are informal reports of Russian women involved in prostitution in various cities and towns in Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Belgrade is a destination, sending and transit site for international trafficking in women. In Belgrade, Russian (and Ukrainian and Romanian) women are known to be under the control of pimps in escort services and strip clubs. In central and eastern Serbia, there are large numbers of women from Russia (and Ukraine and Romania) in the bars in the towns of Homolje, Stig, Resava, Golubac, Pomoravlje, Veliko Gradiste, Pozarevac, Petrovac, Svilajnac, Zajecar, Negotin and Simicevo. Newspaper stories report that the price for young Russian women is from DEM 300 to 3,000. The person in control of the women takes the women's passports to prevent them from escaping. When their current "owner" is finished with them, they are sometimes sold to another pimp in Italy.

Russian organized crime groups traffic women throughout the Balkans. Russian traffickers smuggle women from Russia (as well as Moldova, Ukraine, Lithuania, Romania, and Bulgaria) into Serbia and deliver them to local organized criminal groups

in Belgrade who pay DEM 3,000 to DEM 4,000 for each woman. The women are dispersed throughout Serbia, and then sold in Bosnia or other Balkan locations.¹⁸⁰

In Novi Sad, Vojvodina, in one single strip bar there are 22 to 37 women from Russia, Ukraine and Serbia. In Subotica, there are reportedly large numbers of women from Russia (and Ukraine) who work in the bars as lap dancers and in prostitution. The number of sex trafficking cases in the Subotica and Palic areas near the border is also increasing.

In Montenegro, in 1999, 143 women from Russia (and Romania and Moldova) were deported. There are known to be Russian women in prostitution in Podgorica, Bar, Ulcinj, Budva and Berane. The following is a description of trafficking in Montenegro:

[Women] respond to job advertisements for babysitters, hairdressers, maids, waitresses, models, or dancers. Employers even visit families of these women and girls, promising good employment abroad, easy jobs, high wages, and monthly support sent regularly to their families. It is important to note that some of these women and girls are aware that they are going to work in the sex industry, but unaware of the unbearable conditions. The ones who come to work as erotic dancers and strippers are forced into prostitution as well. Others agree to work as prostitutes until they earn enough money to live normally in their home countries. They rarely reach their goal. ...others... are sold several times in ...different countries or cities to fulfil the demands of the clients and nightclub owners for the new, fresh women and girls (fresh meat, as they call it). At the very moment of their arrival, their passports and all other documents are taken away. In order to "break" them, individuals or groups starve, drug, beat, and rape them several times a day. When they succeed or exhaust the women so that they can no longer defend themselves, women are forced to work day and night, sometimes having 15 or 20 clients per day. Middleman or "traffickers", often cooperating with the local authorities or police, buy and sell women over the border. They rarely use the actual border-crossings; they do it over illegal crossings, hills, lakes, or rivers. It is common that some women have student, tourist, and legitimate working visas.¹⁸¹

The researchers who are studying the trafficking in women in Yugoslavia find it very hard to obtain precise information. It is usually difficult or impossible to speak directly to the women. When they ask police and other government officials about trafficking, they receive no information or acknowledgement of the problem.¹⁸²

In Austria, especially in Vienna, Russian organized crime groups are also involved in prostitution. In the mid-1990s they were known to control over 700 women in prostitution in Vienna, making approximately US\$300 million per year. Due to the large sums of money being made, there have been gang wars for control, and at least one organized crime group member known to be involved in controlling prostitution rings was murdered in 1994.¹⁸³

As noted earlier, Finland is another transit and destination country for women trafficked from Russia. Finnish police have reported that Russian organized crime groups control prostitution rings in addition to other types of smuggling and illegal activities.¹⁸⁴

Information about the movement or trafficking of Russian women to Finland is somewhat inconsistent. The movement of Russian women across the border for prostitution started in the early 1990s, when an estimated 600-700 women from Russia came to Helsinki to work as prostitutes. Police indicate that in 1998 hundreds of women from Estonia and Russia came to Finland on tourist visas to stay for a few weeks.¹⁸⁵ An NGO reported that Finland is a transit and destination country for “mobile prostitution”. It is also the origin of prostitution tourists who travel to Baltic and Russian destinations. “At present, there are prostitutes from the former Soviet Union providing sexual services both in Helsinki, the capital, as well as along the eastern EU border and in the northern part of Finland. There are also prostitutes from other countries, such as the Philippines, Thailand, USA, Poland, and Jamaica.”¹⁸⁶

According to one researcher, Finland is more of a transit country and less of a destination country than other Western European nations in which prostitution is more organized and operates as a large industry.¹⁸⁷ Police report that they do not expect trafficking to be a problem in Finland, although at least one Russian woman was murdered after being trafficked to Finland.

Russian organized crime groups also use Sweden as a transit country for smuggling people into the west. In Sweden, there are significant operations producing false identity and travel documents and trafficking in stolen documents.¹⁸⁸ In 1998, Stiftelsen Kvinnoforum (Women’s Forum) reported that there was an increase in women involved in prostitution from Baltic countries and Russia both on the street and in various types of “indoor” prostitution. The women were around 25 years of age and entered Sweden on tourist visas permitting them to stay for an average of three weeks. The observers of this trend have reason to believe that there are “third parties” organizing these activities.¹⁸⁹

Beginning in 1993, Russian women were transported by buses for weekends in Norway. Initially the women sold cigarettes, then moved into prostitution. According to the Norwegian consulate in Murmansk, Russia, about 150 women per week travel across the border. The women come mainly from Murmansk and vary in age from 16 to 50, but most are in their early twenties. Many of the women stay over only weekends at camping sites; others stay for 10-15 days in the homes of men to provide sexual and domestic services. Norwegian citizens organize the sex trade in Northern Norway by taking “orders” for Russian prostitutes and transporting them to the men’s homes.¹⁹⁰

Germany is also a popular base of operation for Russian organized crime due to its central location in Europe. Approximately 50 Russian organized crime gangs are thought to operate in Germany, with about 20 of them from the Moscow region, with the others from the regions of Krasnodar, Rostov and Kemerovo. Their principal activities include controlling prostitution. Many of the Russian criminals are using contacts they made when they worked in Germany prior to the fall of the Berlin wall. The German Federal Police estimate that there have been at least 10,000 Russian women forced into prostitution in Germany. In 1994, four women known to be involved in prostitution, their pimp and his wife, all from St. Petersburg, were killed in Frankfurt in a Russian organized crime-based power struggle.¹⁹¹ In Germany, Russian organized crime groups are also forcing out local groups. In 2000, according to a former German ambassador to the United States, Russian organized crime syndicates had “muscle out or co-opted German crime gangs” in Berlin.¹⁹²

A 1999 Trafficking in Human Beings Situation Report by the Federal Criminal Police Office of Germany reported that 801 victims of trafficking had been found in 257 investigations in 1999. Eighty of the women (11.4%) were from Russia. (Two countries had a higher number of victims: Poland, 14.4% and Ukraine, 21.7%). The 805 suspected traffickers in these cases were predominantly citizens of Germany (38.9%) and Turkey (15.3%). Only 3.7 per cent of the suspected traffickers were citizens of Russia, although it should be noted that 17 of the 313 German suspects had been born in Russia. Sixteen per cent of the suspected traffickers were women.¹⁹³

The report indicated that 42.5 per cent of the victims for whom they had information were deceived about the type of work for which they were recruited. As noted earlier, they had been promised jobs as waitresses, dancers and domestic servants. Violence was used in “recruiting” 7.1 per cent of the victims. Twenty-two per cent of the women indicated that they knew that they would be involved in prostitution before they left their home country, although the police said it was doubtful whether they

actually knew the type and extent of the prostitution. Fifty-three per cent of the women said that violence had been used against them to force them into or keep them involved in prostitution. In 19 per cent of the cases, the victims or their families were threatened.¹⁹⁴

The Foundation Against Trafficking in Women (STV) in the Netherlands started becoming aware of trafficked women from Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. With each year, the number increased. STV reports that:

[T]he traffic in women from the former socialist countries seems to be mainly controlled by Eastern European criminal groups, operating in the recruiting as well as in the destination countries. They are highly organized, extremely violent, and often involved in other criminal activities as well, such as arms trading, drug smuggling and bribery of authorities.¹⁹⁵

Russian organized crime gangs in the Netherlands specialize in prostitution and pornography. A significant number of the women and boys in prostitution in Amsterdam come from Russia or other Eastern European countries. Many of the pimps are members of Russian organized crime groups.¹⁹⁶

Great Britain is also a destination site for trafficked Russian women. In 1997, a Lithuanian man was known to have trafficked 55 women from Russia to be prostitutes in flats in central London.¹⁹⁷ Russian organized crime groups, especially Chechen groups, are active in London.¹⁹⁸ Their activity seems to have increased since the Russian financial crisis of 1998, which forced Russian groups to expand their activities outside of Russia.¹⁹⁹

One man made this report on his observations in Soho in London:

Some of the flats have English girls but some of them have foreign ladies and it always seems to me that these girls are here for less than legitimate reasons. You may have heard about the International Sex Trade and how women are brought from countries like Thailand and Russia to work in Europe and how they get almost none of the money they earn. I'm convinced that some of the girls in the Soho flats are in this situation – some of them can hardly speak English and one experience with a Russian girl really worried me. It was so obvious that she didn't want to be working as a prostitute but her English was so poor that she could hardly tell me how much sex would cost.²⁰⁰

Russian organized crime gangs are also involved in trafficking Russian and other Eastern European women to France and Belgium. In Paris and a few other cities, there are Russian gangs who control prostitution rings and some bars and nightclubs. In Belgium, they are known to specialize in prostitution and pornography.²⁰¹

In southern Europe, Greece is a popular destination for women trafficked from Russia. There are an estimated 20,000 foreign women in prostitution in Greece, many of them from republics of the former Soviet Union. A professor and researcher at Athens' Panteion University believes that Greece is one of the commercial centres for the trade in women for prostitution to Europe and the Middle East.²⁰² In 1998, a 20-year-old Russian woman committed suicide while being confined in a brothel in Salonica. The tragedy stirred police and officials to action, resulting in a series of raids and dozens of arrests.

Unfortunately, police and official corruption exacerbate the trade in women in Greece. In 1999, the former head of the national police and 15 others were charged with corruption and taking bribes for residency permits for foreign women with probable links to prostitution rings. Some police officers were also reported to be under investigation for providing protection to pimps and their prostitution rings. In November 1999, police charged 33 people with running a network of 13 brothels that confined hundreds of women from the former Soviet Republics. In this case, the pimps were Greeks.²⁰³ In July 1999, police raided a nightclub outside of Athens and found nine women from Russia, Moldova, and Belarus being forced to work as waitresses and strippers until they paid off their US\$1,500 smuggling fee. The nightclub was equipped with extensive security apparatus, including a six-foot high fence fitted with surveillance cameras that surrounded it.²⁰⁴

Farther east in the Mediterranean, Cyprus is another favoured destination for trafficked women from Russia. In 1999, there were an estimated 1,200 foreign women, most of them from Russia, Romania and Ukraine, in 70 cabarets on Cyprus. In June 1998, three Russian (and five Romanian) women were found imprisoned in a room above a cabaret in Larnaca where they were forced to have sex with men. Three men were arrested for pimping and forcing women into prostitution.²⁰⁵ Here, as well, corruption and collaboration with traffickers is rampant among police and officials. In October 1999, the brother of the leader of Cyprus' ruling party was arrested for taking bribes to issue illegal residency permits for women coming to work in the sex industry. The rise in organized crime associated with prostitution, trafficking, drugs and gambling has led to gang wars, with a dozen murders since 1995, and NGO representatives in Russia report that it is easier to obtain a visa for Cyprus than for most other destinations. In the past year, several Russian women have escaped from traffickers and pimps in Cyprus and returned to Russia.²⁰⁶

Central and South Asia

Georgia is a destination and transit country for women trafficked from Russia. In Autumn 2000 a group of Russian women were known to be dancing in hotels and not being paid.²⁰⁷ Georgia also serves as a transit country for Russian (and Ukrainian) women being taken to Turkey and other Mediterranean countries. It is fairly easy to get false documents in Georgia. It takes approximately two weeks to obtain an identity card and another month to obtain a passport. In addition, citizens of Georgia can pay \$20 at the border and pass into Turkey.²⁰⁸ In one case an organized crime group purchased Georgian passports for Russian (and Ukrainian) women to enable them to travel easily to Turkey.²⁰⁹

Turkey is frequently reported to be a destination country for women from Russia and other former Soviet Republics. Turkey is a less favoured destination country than those in Western Europe, but it is easier to traffic women to Turkey. Moreover, there is little information about the sex industry or the trafficking of women from inside Turkey. As one newspaper reported, "...thousands of women from the former eastern bloc come to Turkey each year to work in the booming sex trade. Trabzon, close to Georgia and with frequent flights to Russia and Central Asia, is a popular destination for the prostitutes nicknamed 'Natashas' by Turkish men."²¹⁰ In mid-2000 126 women from the former Soviet Union were deported from Turkey.²¹¹

Children from Russia, including girls as young as 12 and 13, are reported to be in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in "ghost houses", where they are sold in prostitution by older children. There are 15,000 to 30,000 street children from regions in Uzbekistan, Russia, Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries in Tashkent. Many of the children are controlled, exploited and abused by the police and the mafia. Tashkent is reportedly divided into sections controlled by the mafia, and children are forced to pay the mafia to be allowed to beg in those sections of the city.²¹²

Russian crime gangs are also known to be trafficking women from the former Soviet republics to Pakistan, where light skinned, blond women are an exotic commodity for wealthy men. Prostitution is severely punished in Pakistan, so women can languish in jail for months if they are caught. Many of the women in Pakistan were reported to have previously been in Arab countries before being brought to Pakistan.²¹³

East and South-East Asia

In addition, Russian women are known to be working in the sex industry in many eastern and south-eastern Asian countries.

One of the first investigations of trafficking in Russian women abroad was conducted by the Global Survival Network after it was discovered that in addition to selling Siberian tiger skins, criminal groups were selling Russian women to pimps in Japan. Women often use entertainers' visas to enter Japan. In 1989, 378 women from the Soviet Union entered Japan on such visas. By 1995, the number from Russia, alone, was 4,763.²¹⁴

In January 2000, nine Koreans and one 21-year-old Russian woman were arrested in Seoul for running a prostitution network using Russian women. In one year, approximately 50 Russian women were brought to Seoul for use in this network. A Russian gang rented the women to the Koreans for US\$1,000 per month each. The Koreans were agents and bar owners and the Russian woman was the contact for the Russian gang and the Koreans.²¹⁵

There are estimated to be 3-4 million women in prostitution in China, 80 per cent of them under the age of 25. In Shenzhen, one of the thriving sex industry centres, there are an estimated 200,000 women. Most of the women and girls come from rural Chinese provinces, but some come from Russia, as well as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.²¹⁶ Russian women are known to be involved in prostitution in China, but information about them is rare. In July 1999, police in Sheung Wan in Hong Kong arrested the manager of a web site and the web-hosting company for soliciting for prostitution over the internet. This was the first case of its kind in China. Of the three women used for prostitution, one was Russian and the others were Korean and Chinese. The Russian and Korean women were charged with violating their tourist visas.²¹⁷

In June 2000, a Chinese man was arrested in Heilongjiang Province, which borders the Russian Far East, for selling three Russian women in their early twenties. The women, who entered China on tourist visas, were under the control of a local crime boss named "Fourth Brother". He sold the women for HK\$11,280 to another criminal who planned on reselling them for further profit in Sichuan Province. This was the first arrest of its kind in mainland China, although there are reports of many Russian women in the mainland's larger cities, who are popular for their "exotic" appearance.²¹⁸

Macau, formerly a Portuguese territory, but now returned to China, has many casinos and prostitution is openly available. Russian women are reported to be among the women available.²¹⁹ Although Macau has reverted to control by China, there seems to be little interference in the prostitution trade there.²²⁰

Blond, Russian women are also a prestigious commodity for wealthy Thai businessmen. Russian organized crime groups have responded by working with Thai crime groups to meet the demand. In 1996, Thai-Russian syndicates were reported to be managing more than 200 Russian prostitutes in eastern resort provinces such as Pattaya. When new women and girls arrived they were sent to work in cocktail lounges, karaokes and pubs in Chanthaburi, Rayong and Chon Buri. From there, they were sent to hotels by request of Thai or foreign men. At that time, a procurer in Pattaya, who had Russian girls working for him, commented, "As far as I know, there are three procurers of Russian girls in Pattaya". He said that most of 'his' girls were from outside of Moscow and had signed contracts with Russian syndicates. If the women broke the contract, their families would be harmed.²²¹

In 1998, Russian women were made available to men in the most expensive night spots in Thailand. Prostitution rings in Pattaya and Bangkok were also known to supply women. The trafficking networks charged the Russian women from US\$1,000 to \$3,000 to arrange for their travel to Thailand, and after they arrive they are kept in constant fear.

One local pimp said that he was introduced to Russian traffickers who wanted to locate someone who could connect them to wealthy Thai men. This particular pimp's clients were mostly government officials, including policemen. As a result he had immunity from arrest. Local law enforcement officials have appeared to ignore the expansion of Russian traffickers into Pattaya. A Russian living in Thailand noted,

We know, you know, the police know, but since there is still no major crime on them people want to keep that issue small. I think it's unfair for the Russian women; they work very long hours and get little money. They also threatened to kill the women's families in Russia if they do not do what they're told.

One Russian woman reported that she responded to a newspaper advertisement for a job in Thailand. "The contract [from the job placement agency] was clean, it addressed all relevant issues in detail... medical insurance, food and accommodation, and travel to and back from Thailand. She even paid US\$3,000 in brokers' fees for the job. But soon after arriving in Thailand, her passport was taken away. "When I asked for it, they demanded US\$15,000." Another Russian woman said that language barriers,

lack of knowledge of her legal rights and constant threats of violence kept her from going to the police.

If I go back to Russia, the Russian mafia will simply kill me. These people know my family very well. Sometime, we were brought to sleep with government officials for free. We're so afraid they would turn us back to the pimps if we reported to police.²²²

In Pattaya many Russian organized crime groups operate behind legitimate businesses like bars and restaurants. They are known to be involved in trafficking narcotics, prostitution, contract killings, and extorting money from other Russians living in Pattaya.

In January 1997, another Russian was believed to be the 'boss' of a large network of illegal activities in Thailand, including passport forgery, mobile-phone cloning, prostitution and trafficking in drugs and people. He was suspected of smuggling foreign workers into Japan and providing Russian prostitutes for men staying in luxurious hotels and apartments, with prices ranging from between Bt8,000 to Bt12,000 per session.²²³

Another destination site for Russian women in the Asia Pacific is the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, a territory of the United States. The sex industry in Saipan is reported to be a top destination for sightseeing and sex tours in the Pacific. The sex industry caters to Japanese tourists, some of whom like "exotic" Russian women.²²⁴ Officially, the local government denies the existence of prostitution tourism. Russian women and the many Asian women from the Philippines and other countries are recruited for jobs in the United States, not realizing that their destination is the Northern Mariana Island, a long distance from mainland US. One half of the women in the sex industry who were interviewed by one investigator said that they expected jobs as waitresses, not prostitutes. Although the Russian women were free to move about the island, their passports had been confiscated, so they could not leave.²²⁵

There were a number of allegations against the Government of the Northern Mariana Islands and US government investigators and officials of collaborating to limit the trafficking and exploitation investigations. According to one source, the local government had lobbied the Republican members of the US Government at a cost of over US\$11 million dollars to prevent legislative intervention that would interfere with immigration and the manufacturing industries in the Northern Mariana Islands. As part of this effort, over 90 members of the House of Representatives and their families and aides had expensive paid trips to Saipan.²²⁶

Australia

According to a representative of the Australian Embassy in Moscow, Russian women are also being trafficked to brothels in Australia. They are reported to enter the country legally to dance, and then forced into prostitution. Others are known to have entered the country illegally. Women have been found in brothels in Sydney.²²⁷ In 2000, the Australian Government put the Russian Federation on its list of source countries for high risk of illegal immigration. The list is based on visa overstays.²²⁸

United States

The United States is a favoured site for Russian criminals and organized crime groups. During the 1970s and 1980s, 200,000 people from the Soviet Union, mostly Jewish refugees, immigrated to the United States. Criminals accompanied the new immigrants and some have speculated that the Soviet Government used the emigration to rid the country of criminals.²²⁹

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, a Russian man suspected of being associated with Russian organized crime in the United States was involved in an incident connected to the sex industry. He was charged with the rape of a model he drugged while she posed for him. He escaped to Russia when *Playboy* financed his trip to photograph women there.²³⁰

By 1992, loosely connected Russian criminals had established a presence in the United States, especially in California.²³¹ One of the criminal activities that the newly formed groups engaged in was prostitution.²³² By 1996, there were a number of loosely connected Russian crime groups and four structured Russian criminal organizations in California. Prostitution was one of the earliest criminal activities they embarked upon because of the ease of organization and operation.

In the United States, most Russian crime groups are viewed as opportunists operating through threats and extortion, followed by acts of violence if initial threats fail to achieve the desired results. Russian organized crime groups are involved in migrant smuggling and trafficking in women into the United States.²³³ Russian criminals, probably with organized crime group connections, are involved in trafficking women from Russia, Central Europe and other states of the former Soviet Union, such as Ukraine and the Baltic States. The women are used for stripping in bars and for prostitution, and held in debt bondage. There is also evidence that Russian criminals are trafficking

women to cities in Florida, including Miami, Orlando, Fort Lauderdale, Jacksonville, and Palm Beach.

In 1996, a Russian with suspected ties to the Russian organized crime group *Kazanskaya* bought two strip clubs in Florida for US\$8 million. According to the FBI, the *Izmailovskaya*, *Dagestantsy*, *Kazanskaya* and *Solntsenskaya*, all major Russian organized crime groups, are involved in prostitution in the United States, and it is likely that they traffic women for their prostitution operations.²³⁴

Brighton Beach, New York is the home of the largest Russian community in the United States. There are many small businesses, such as marriage agents, dating services, and immigration services. Police say many of these businesses are fronts for prostitution brokers, paper marriages, and other forms of fraud.²³⁵

The US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) believes there are 10 to 12 “dance agencies” and hundreds of escort services in New York and New Jersey, and that each controls 60 to 200 Russian women. These agencies are suspected of being fronts for Russian organized crime groups. According to official sources, Russian organized crime groups are cooperating with Italian organized crime groups: the Russians supply the women; the Italians own and control the sex businesses.²³⁶

It is commonly known that Russian and Ukrainian women are housed in Brooklyn and Brighton Beach, New York and transported daily to strip clubs and massage parlours in New Jersey. In 1997, police in North Brunswick, New Jersey found a Russian juvenile when they were investigating a prostitution ring. The girl lived in Brooklyn, from where she and several other Russian women were regularly transported by drivers to central and northern New Jersey.²³⁷

The state of New Jersey has more “go-go” and “juice” bars than any other state. These are common venues for prostitution. According to one source, it is not unusual for politicians and city officials to be offered a prostitute in exchange for tolerant treatment.²³⁸ Walter Zalisko, Assistant the Police Director, Jersey City Police Department, reports that there are 3,500 women from Russia, Ukraine and Belarus enslaved in the sex industry or used as domestic servants in the New York-New Jersey Metropolitan area.²³⁹ He has interviewed over 300 women and reported that three-fourths of them came to work in other jobs, but were forced into stripping and prostitution. About one half of the women come to the US on student visas, the other half say they used false identification papers provided by organized crime groups. All the women say they are attending college in New York City and studying English. “This response

sounded as though it was scripted for them, because they all had the same answer, regardless of what bar we went to.”²⁴⁰

In New York, Frank Barnaba of the Paul and Lisa Program, an organization that provides social services to women and girls in prostitution, says his informants note an increase in young Russian women working the network of escort services, with Russian limousine drivers sometimes acting as the procuring agents. There have been several murders of Russian women in the United States that are suspected of being linked to prostitution and trafficking rings.²⁴¹

In 1999 in Brooklyn, New York, six members of a Russian organized crime ring known as the Gufield-Kutsenko Brigade pled guilty to racketeering involving arson, extortion and kidnapping. In an incident related to prostitution, the men admitted they had targeted the owner of a prostitution business for extortion. When the victim refused to pay, they set her car on fire.²⁴² This particular case marked the first time that US federal racketeering law was used against Russian criminals in the New York area.²⁴³

Russian organized crime is believed to be spreading beyond the New York area to other states including California, Colorado, Illinois, and Florida. According to one law enforcement official, Russian criminals in the New York-New Jersey area are forced to pay a “tax” to the La Costa Nostra crime syndicate on the profits they make on illegal activities. Consequently, the Russians are moving to other areas.²⁴⁴

In the United States, as elsewhere, trafficked women are more likely to be treated as criminals than victims, while the traffickers and pimps are seldom punished. In 1996, a Russian-American man recruited Russian and Ukrainian women as au pairs and waitresses, but then forced them to work in a massage parlour in Maryland. When they were discovered, the women, who had received no money, were arrested and deported. The charges against the owner of the business were dropped on the condition that he not operate another business in Montgomery County.²⁴⁵

A senior State Department official acknowledged that, “Until now, the trafficking in Russian women has taken a back seat to US law enforcement’s efforts to fight such Russian mafia activities as extortion, medical insurance fraud, and scams to evade gasoline excise taxes.” Since a few cases have demonstrated the possible connection between the trafficking in women and other forms of racketeering, US officials have become more interested. For example, in Miami, Florida, Russian-born Ludwig Fainberg, was accused of using his strip club, Porky’s, as a clearinghouse for criminal activities, which included the procurement of prostitutes.²⁴⁶

Russian organized crime groups trying to corrupt government officials in the US are known to have made financial contributions to some of the most prominent and highest ranking government officials in the US.²⁴⁷

Middle East

Israel is one of the countries criminals have moved into along with the migrating population. The Jewish diaspora has provided many contacts to criminals for operation abroad. In addition to an ethnic community of operation, the laws of Israel were optimal for setting up trafficking and prostitution businesses. All the basic elements needed for operation of a high profit sex industry were present in Israel: Prostitution, trafficking, slavery, belonging to an illegal organization and money laundering were not illegal. Brothels and other manifestations of the sex industry provided easy establishment of criminal operations in Israel.²⁴⁸ Criminals took the money they earned from their activities, laundered it and invested it into legitimate businesses. In 1998, the former police chief, Asaf Hefetz, said that US\$4 billion from organized crime groups had been invested in real estate, legitimate businesses and banks.²⁴⁹

Russian organized crime groups are now firmly in control of the prostitution trade in Israel and the trafficking necessary to meet the demand for women used in the trade. In 1998, Russian women were being traded in Israel for US\$10,000 to \$15,000.²⁵⁰ Israeli police estimate the annual turnover from the prostitution trade in Israel to be more than US\$400 million.²⁵¹

As the power of the Russian crime groups expands, so too does their power to corrupt police and government officials. There have been a number of reports of Russian crime groups trying to influence officials and politicians in countries where they operate. They have contributed to political candidates and parties throughout the world. In one case Russian organized crime tried to buy a seat in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.²⁵²

The United Arab Emirates are also a frequent destination for women from Russia. Less is known about the fate of many women there. One man wrote this about his observations in Dubai:

Russians – These are the most commonly available prostitutes. Some are from Moscow, but the rest are from the smaller breakaway republics of the confederation, though they may lie that they are from Moscow. The myth being that prostitutes from Moscow are better (and more

expensive). They vary in ages from 16-40. They are found all over Dubai, and are easy to spot. You can pick one up almost any hour of the day. They are found in rooms in hotels and 'furnished apartments', in bars and on the streets. You may encounter pimps while walking in the streets of Deira.²⁵³

LAWS AND LEGISLATION

In its recent report on *Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act 2000, Trafficking in Persons Report*, the US Government classifies countries according to their efforts to combat “severe forms of trafficking in persons”. As of 2003, sanctions will be applied against countries which do not comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and are not making significant efforts to do so. The “minimum standards” require that governments “prohibit severe forms of trafficking in persons and punish acts of such trafficking” for sex trafficking “prescribe punishment (for traffickers) commensurate with that for grave crimes, such as forcible sexual assault, and for trafficking “prescribe punishment that is sufficiently stringent to deter” traffickers.

According to the US Government’s assessments, Russia is ranked as a Tier 3 country which does not yet meet the minimum standards²⁵⁴.

Trafficking of women is not a crime in the Russian Federation, although activities involved in trafficking such as compulsion into prostitution, illegal deprivation of freedom, illegal departure abroad and document fraud are included in the Criminal Code.²⁵⁵ Prostitution is not a criminal offence in the Russian Federation, but it is an administrative misdemeanour that can be punished by a warning or a fine of up to 100 roubles. If the woman is caught engaging in prostitution again within one year after the first offence, she can be fined up to 200 roubles.²⁵⁶ Coercing or forcing a woman into prostitution is a crime. Running a brothel is a crime punishable by a fine of or up to five years in jail.²⁵⁷

Several cities, including St. Petersburg, Kaliningrad and Saratov, have considered legalizing prostitution. Governor Dimitry Ayatskov has proposed legalizing prostitution in the Saratov region to bring tax money into the regional treasury. Police estimate the monthly illegal income from prostitution exceeds US\$417,000 in that region.²⁵⁸ Kaliningrad Oblast governor Leonid Gorbenko advocated legalization of prostitution as a way to combat AIDS.²⁵⁹ However, the Russian Orthodox Church and the Communist Party are strongly against legalization.²⁶⁰

Alla Georgievna Aristova, a police major Head of the Division for Crime Prevention Among Minors in the Saratov Department of Internal Affairs, and a member of the Commission on Sexual Culture, which concerns itself with public morality, pornography and prostitution, had a negative response to the proposed legalization of prostitution in Saratov.²⁶¹ Major Aristova does not believe that government regulation of prostitution will control the spread of sexually transmitted infections.²⁶² Nor does

Major Aristova believe that legalization will eliminate criminal protection schemes. She said,

If we already have thousands of different structures – government and commercial – which are located under the criminal “roof” – then there’s no way that public houses [brothels] will escape their attention. They will be headed up by the criminal world also.²⁶³

She went on to say that if prostitution is legalized,

[T]here is the ugliest and most unthinkable paradox of the whole idea – that the same money that the pimps currently get from prostitutes would be collected by the state. That means that the state will step into the role of a pimp.²⁶⁴

Major Aristova believes that to combat the trafficking of women there needs to be more effort placed on prevention, especially legal obligations on both the sending and receiving countries and any legal agencies involved. She is frustrated that there is so little attention paid to the “root causes”.²⁶⁵

Although trafficking in women from Russia has been going on for at least a decade, with increasing severity, the Russian Government has taken little notice of the problem. There is no specific law against trafficking in women, and the Duma has taken little action to pass such a law. One of the largest problems is the lack of political will to recognize and address the problem of trafficking in women. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, which has responsibility for intervention in trafficking, has the following view:

The Interior Ministry is not particularly concerned about that problem as there are no criminal contents in it. All offences against the women who departed are committed in the territories of the countries to which they go. That means it is those countries’ problem. In general, the discussion about trafficking women has come to us from the West. The noise on that occasion is maintained by audacious feminist organizations that promise help, but do not help the victims in any way. They receive grants and for the money they disseminate information that does not correspond to the reality.²⁶⁶

In October 1997, a conference and parliamentary hearing on trafficking in women and children was held in the Russian State *Duma*, the lower house of the Russian Parliament. One participant made this comment:

The conference reflected the tensions and difficulties the issue poses to our societies: grassroots organizers were all but left out; the Russian law enforcement community was supposed to provide several speakers, but many refused to do anything but stare stonily; substantive discussion of the organized crime element was daintily sidestepped, given the dangers of confronting it (contract killings are common and a crisis center worker was murdered in Nizhny Tagil two years ago); the politicians tended to focus on nationalistic themes related to children, adoption and abortion. [It] was discouraging for all who see this as a global problem.²⁶⁷

In addition to the specific issue of trafficking in women, there has been a lack of political will to deal with organized crime, which is behind much of the trafficking. According to the Centre for Strategic and International Studies:

The paramount problem with Russia's handling of its native [organized crime] problem is that there has been neither a policy nor concerted action to combat it. No political will exists at the leadership level to address the problem as a critical issue, largely because the Russian Government is part of the problem rather than the solution. ... Too often... key officials in... government... had direct connections and dealings with organized crime syndicates – operating in collusion with them or turning a deaf ear to their activities – rather than fighting them.²⁶⁸

NGOs concerned about the trafficking in women have tried to lobby the *Duma*, but with no success. One described the Government as “passive”. Another said the Government is “extremely resistant” to addressing the problem or changing the criminal code to make the trafficking in women illegal in the Russian Federation.

ROLE OF PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

In the current Russian process of transition involving crime and corruption, little priority is given to combating the trafficking of women through law, policing or prevention.

Much of the work of prevention education and providing services to victims to the emerging and poorly funded NGO sector. As one NGO points out,

Relying on struggling women's NGOs to lead the battle against multi-billion dollar criminal trafficking is completely unrealistic and dangerous. NGOs are intimidated by the very real threat of [organized crime] violence – particularly in villages.²⁶⁹

Even though it is a daunting task, the non-governmental organizations attempt to take responsibility for warning women, and society in general, about the risks to women who travel abroad for work and the harm to women who are trafficked. NGOs throughout Russia report that there is a great demand for information on how to go abroad to work. Those NGOs that have telephone lines are frequently asked questions about employment and travel abroad. One NGO noted that when it began outreach work in the summer of 1998, there was “virtually no information about trafficking available to at-risk Russian girls, educators, administrator and officials”.²⁷⁰

NGOs have little money to undertake extensive prevention programmes, especially in rural areas, where they have been intimidated by threats of violence, presumably from the traffickers.²⁷¹

In this milieu, the role of prevention and education programmes by non-governmental organizations is crucial. Since the Russian Government has been slow to take action against the traffickers by passing laws or substantially arresting criminals engaged in pimping and trafficking, the only action open to NGOs is prevention and awareness education to try to slow the recruitment and trafficking of women and girls.

CONCLUSION

This report has sought to demonstrate that trafficking in women and the virtual buying, selling, and trading of women and children is a growing and dangerous phenomenon throughout the Russian Federation. It has attempted to reveal the violent and degrading conditions that trafficked persons endure and to illuminate the numerous factors and conditions that have led up to this extraordinary crisis of conscience.

Whether through poverty, desperation, naiveté, deception, or some combination of these factors, thousands upon thousands of Russian women are leaving their homes in search of livelihood abroad and ending up violently exploited, and sometimes enslaved, in the international sex industry.

Moreover, additional thousands of girls and boys as young as 12 and 13 years of age who live in the streets or in orphanages are natural prey for the entrepreneurs of the sex industry, who exploit these youngsters for pornography and prostitution.

This is not a crisis affecting a small handful of people, but, rather, a growing epidemic that is tainting civil society in Russia as a whole, as well as the societies of the receiving countries.

Nonetheless, for the most part, neither lawmakers in Russia nor those in receiving countries are confronting or even acknowledging the breadth and depth of this crisis. It is hoped that reports such as this one will encourage lawmakers in Russia, the United States, western European countries and other participating nations to take proactive action to prevent trafficking in women and children. Such measures should include adoption of relevant laws backed by vigorous enforcement. Such laws must be drafted in ways which do not punish or further terrorize victims, but which define a clear zero-tolerance policy for recruiters, traffickers and pimps, and those who benefit financially from the sex trade.

Within Russia, agencies combating trafficking should be granted adequate resources to expand targeted prevention and information programmes for both urban and rural areas, together with victim assistance programmes. Undertaking bold and proactive measures such as these will not be easy for the *Duma*, or for the lawmakers of receiving countries. But ending the dehumanizing practice of trading in human beings is a critical next step in advancing the community of nations.

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some steps forward have been made but the minimum standards are still not met. Therefore Russia is still ranking in Tier 3.

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Trafficking in human beings is a grave and growing problem in the Russian Federation, and one which is misunderstood, barely acknowledged and easily tolerated. Trafficking in women is a multibillion dollar industry and is a key source of revenue for Russian organized crime groups.

This study shows that the trafficking of women from the Russian Federation occurs on a global scale. Russian women are known to have been trafficked to 40-50 countries around the world, including most European countries, North America, and parts of Asia and the Middle East. Trafficking also occurs within Russia. No one really knows how many women and children are trafficked for sexual exploitation from the Russian Federation. The US State Department estimates that more than 100,000 women were trafficked from the countries of the former Soviet Union in 1997 alone.

