

# The “Natasha”Trade: The Transnational Shadow Market of Trafficking in Women

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*“Can people really buy and sell women and get away with it? Sometimes I sit here and ask myself if that really happened to me, if it can really happen at all.” - A Ukrainian woman who was trafficked, beaten, raped and used in the sex industry in Israel. After a police raid, she was put in prison, awaiting deportation.<sup>1</sup>*

## **Introduction**

Trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation is a multi-billion dollar shadow market.<sup>2</sup> Women are trafficked to, from, and through every region in the world using methods that have become new forms of slavery.<sup>3</sup> The value of the global trade in women as commodities for sex industries is estimated to be between seven and twelve billion dollars annually.<sup>4</sup> This trade in women is a highly profitable enterprise with relatively low risk compared to trades in drugs or arms. The moneymakers are transnational networks of traffickers and pimps that prey on the dreams of women seeking employment and opportunities for the future. The activities of these networks threaten the well being and status of women as well as the social, political and economic well being and stability of nations where they operate.

The transnational trade in women is based on supply and demand from sending and receiving countries. Countries with large sex industries create the demand and are the receiving countries, while countries where traffickers easily recruit women are the sending countries. For decades the primary sending countries were Asian countries, such as Thailand and the Philippines. The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up a pool of millions of women from which traffickers can recruit. Now, former Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia and Russia, have become major sending countries for women trafficked into sex industries all over the world. In the sex industry markets today, the most popular and valuable women are from Ukraine and Russia.<sup>5</sup>

This paper focuses primarily on the sending country of Ukraine, now the second largest country in Europe, and currently, one of the largest suppliers of women for prostitution. Although a comprehensive understanding of trafficking from the former Soviet republics is lacking, more

research on trafficking in women and advocacy for trafficked women has been done by non-governmental organizations in Ukraine than the other primary sending countries from that region.

At the beginning of the paper the scope of the problem of trafficking is discussed and the definition of the term trafficking is reviewed. Next, the international shadow market for women is located in the globalization process and characterized as a modern day slave trade. The role of transnational crime networks in the trafficking of women is examined with a few illustrative cases. A section on the methods of recruitment and trafficking describes how women are recruited from their hometowns and transported to sex industries in other countries. Although there are a number of ways that women are trafficked, their ultimate circumstance is entrapment in prostitution. How women are controlled and why it is so difficult for them to escape is described. The next section focuses on who is profiting from this slave trade and how official corruption and collaboration with organized crime networks facilitates and protects the traffickers. Some people suggest that prostitution and trafficking are shadow economies that enable unemployed women to earn a living. The idea that women and communities may benefit from the shadow market of trafficking in women is examined. This section describes who profits from trafficking in women. Although the problem of trafficking in women is gaining more attention, when the causes of trafficking are examined, the gendered dimension of the supply and, especially, the demand are frequently left out of the analysis. The section on the gendered supply and demand challenges a frequent assumption that poverty is the most important factor in determining which countries will become sending countries. The last section takes a closer look at the demand side of the dynamics of supply and demand from sending and receiving countries. The legalization of prostitution and brothels is examined and old and new legal remedies that address the demand are discussed.

## ***Numbers of Trafficked Women***

It is difficult to know how many women have been trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.<sup>6</sup> The trade is secretive, the women are silenced, the traffickers are dangerous, and not many agencies are counting. In examining trafficking from countries of the former Soviet Union, they are referred to as “Russian” or “Eastern European” without further information on the specific country. Also, the word “trafficking” does not have a universal usage, resulting in different numbers of women being counted depending on the definition used. In writing and analyzing trafficking in women, I use a definition of trafficking that I think includes the essential elements to be considered in trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation.<sup>7</sup>

Trafficking is any practice that involves moving people within and across local or national borders for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Trafficking may be the result of force, coercion, manipulation, deception, abuse of authority, initial consent, family pressure, past and present family and community violence, economic deprivation, or other conditions of inequality for women and children.<sup>8</sup>

This definition recognizes that trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation occurs within the borders of a country as well as across international borders, as women are sometimes recruited and exploited in local sex industries before they are trafficked transnationally. This definition accepts that trafficking occurs even if the woman consents, which is consistent with the 1949 United Nations Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.<sup>9</sup> Narrower definitions of trafficking require acts of violence or coercion against the victim before trafficking is said to occur. According to estimates from the United Nations,

one quarter of the four million people trafficked each year are exploited in sex industries. In the last decade, hundreds of thousands of women have been trafficked from Central and Eastern Europe and the republics of the former Soviet Union into prostitution throughout the world. In the European Union, there are an estimated half a million Central and Eastern European women in prostitution.<sup>10</sup> A criminal investigation in Germany in 1998 found that 87.5 percent of the women trafficked into Germany were from Eastern Europe. Seventeen percent were from Poland, 14 percent from Ukraine, 12 percent from Czech Republic and 8 percent from the Russian Federation.<sup>11</sup>

In 1998, the Ukrainian Ministry of Interior estimated that 400,000 Ukrainian women were trafficked during the previous decade; other sources, such as non-governmental organizations, thought the number was higher.<sup>12</sup> The International Organization for Migration estimated that between 1991 and 1998, 500,000 Ukrainian women had been trafficked to the West.<sup>13</sup> Popular destination countries for women from Ukraine include: Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Spain, Yugoslavia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, United Arab Emirates, Syria, China, the Netherlands, Canada and Japan.<sup>14</sup> According to a Ukrainian diplomatic source there are 6,000 Ukrainian women in prostitution in Turkey, 3,000 in Greece, and 1000 in Yugoslavia.<sup>15</sup> Ukrainian women are the largest group of foreign women in prostitution in Turkey<sup>16</sup> and the second largest group of foreign women in prostitution outside the U.S. military bases in Korea.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly, as a result of trafficking, Russian women are in prostitution in over 50 countries.<sup>18</sup> In some parts of the world, such as Israel and Turkey, women from Russia and other republics of the former Soviet Union are so prevalent, that prostitutes are called “Natashas.”<sup>19</sup>

## ***A Modern Day Slave Trade: The International Shadow Market for Women***

The growth of shadow economies and transnational criminal networks in newly independent states are negative manifestations of globalization, arising from expanding economic, political and social transnational linkages that are increasingly beyond local and state control. An important component of globalization is the transnational linkages created by migration. Members of organized crime rings establish contacts with willing collaborators in diaspora communities throughout the world and work within migrating populations to build transnational criminal networks. Increased migration also serves as a cover for traffickers in transporting women to destinations in the sex industry.

Privatization and liberalization of markets have created wider and more open marketplaces throughout the world. Another important component of globalization, computer communication technologies have enabled the increased volume and complexity of international financial transactions, which increases opportunities for transnational crime and decreases the probability of detection and apprehension. This technological aspect of globalization enables the money gained through illegal activities, like trafficking in women, to be transferred and laundered.

In the former Soviet Union, the shadow economy began long before the collapse of the communism. The state economy didn't supply the general population with the goods and services they needed or wanted. For decades, a shadow economy operated to meet those demands. There is even evidence that shortages were planned, so as to benefit those controlling and profiting from the shadow economy.<sup>20</sup>

When the political and economic system weakened and collapsed, existing organizations leaped to fill the vacuum. Following the end of a government run economy, privatization enabled previously illegal markets of the shadow economy to operate legally and expand, but they retained the same methods of doing business based on corruption and protection schemes. As independent states emerged from the former Soviet Union they lacked organized and efficient regulatory agencies to hinder the growth and activities of crime networks. When the state system was no longer able to pay the salaries of many employees, they joined the criminal networks.<sup>21</sup> In Ukraine, people who were no longer able to support themselves with one salary or weren't being paid for long periods of time, sought additional work. The only jobs available were in the newly emerging privatized, criminal businesses. By 1995, the shadow economy accounted for 50 percent of the GDP.<sup>22</sup> The result has been a criminalization of the economy in general and expansion of organized criminal networks.

Transnational trafficking of women is a new type of crime in the republics of the former Soviet Union. This activity first started in the Soviet Union during perestroika, when restrictions on international travel were eased. The disintegration of the Soviet Union opened borders for travel, migration and privatized trade, all of which facilitated the operations of criminal networks. Sex industries in receiving countries create a demand for women that transnational crime networks from the newly independent states organized to fill with relatively low risk and high profits for the networks. Trafficking exists to meet the demand for women, who are used in brothels, massage parlors, bars and stretches of streets and highways where women are sold to men in prostitution. Ukraine, especially, has become a major source of young women for the international sex markets.<sup>23</sup> Hundreds of victims of trafficking have recounted their experiences to non-governmental organizations, reporters and police. Although there are individual variations, there are similar themes of manipulation and violence from the traffickers and further persecution by the police.

Irina, aged 18, responded to an advertisement in a Kyiv, Ukraine newspaper for a training course in Berlin in 1996. With a fake passport, she traveled to Berlin, Germany where she was told that the school had closed. She was sent on to Brussels, Belgium for a job. When she arrived she was told she needed to repay a debt of US\$10,000 and would have to earn the money in prostitution. Her passport was confiscated, and she was threatened, beaten and raped. When she didn't earn enough money she was sold to a Belgium pimp who operated in Rue d'Aarschot in the Brussel's red light district. When she managed to escape through the assistance of police, she was arrested because she had no legal documentation. A medical exam verified the abuse she had suffered, such as cigarette burns all over her body.<sup>24</sup>

Lena, aged 21, was recruited by a woman who said her daughter was working in Greece and making a lot of money. When Lena arrived in Greece, her passport had been taken away and she was put into a small room in a brothel guarded by two dogs. She was sold in prostitution each night from nine in the evening until six in the morning. When she escaped and returned to Mykolayiv she had US\$55.00.<sup>25</sup>

Tatyana, aged 20, is from a small town in Lugansk oblast in Eastern Ukraine. She could not find a job there because the economy is very poor and the factories are closed. A friend of her mother told her that rich families in the United Arab Emirates were hiring housemaids and she could earn US\$4000 a month there. However, when she arrived in the United Arab Emirates, her passport was taken away and she was sold to a brothel for US\$7,000 and forced into prostitution to repay the purchase and travel costs to the owner. When she managed to escape and went to the police for help, she was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison for working in a brothel.<sup>26</sup>

Transnational crime networks take advantage of patterns of migration to traffic women. An example is the increased migration and trafficking of women from the former Soviet Union to Israel. After 1989, Soviet Jews started immigrating to Israel, resulting in 800,000 new immigrants to Israel. Russian and Ukrainian traffickers used this cover to bring 10,000 women into Israel for the sex industry. The sex industry in Israel has since grown into a US\$450 million a year industry, which is dependent on trafficked women from Eastern Europe.<sup>27</sup> Professor Menachem Amir of Hebrew University, an expert on organized crime in Israel, estimates that 70 percent of the women in prostitution in Tel Aviv are from the former Soviet republics.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, according to Israel's report to CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) Report, more than 95 percent of the women deported from Israel for illegal prostitution are repatriated to the former Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> From 1995-1997, Israel deported 1500 Russian and Ukrainian women.<sup>30</sup>

In Israel, a Russian or Ukrainian woman earns the pimp who controls her between US\$50,000 and \$100,000 per year. The women are enslaved and get to keep little, if any, of the money. Often, their only way out of the sex industry is a police raid, which results in deportation.<sup>31</sup> Women are held in debt bondage in which they must repay their purchase price, travel expenses and all other expenses charged to them, which can be considerable, before they are allowed to leave. A woman may be sold from one pimp to another at which time her debt to be repaid starts all over again. There are indications that pimps, working in collaboration with officials, tip-off police on the whereabouts of women just about the time the women have earned enough money to leave, resulting in the women being arrested and deported and the pimps keeping all the money.<sup>32</sup> A number of trafficking rings have been uncovered which reveal the tactics, financial rewards and transnational reach of traffickers.

In March 1999 in Sevastopol, Crimea, Ukraine, two men and a woman, using the firm "Sight" as a cover, were arrested for selling 200 Ukrainian women and girls, aged 13 to 25, for the sex industry in Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. They traffickers were intercepted as they attempted to send more women to Turkey by ship. The traffickers received US\$2000 for each woman. The women were held in debt bondage until they repaid their expenses. If they complained their debt was tripled.<sup>33</sup>

In Poland, where approximately 70 percent of the Ukrainian women are working under duress in the sex industry, a prostitution ring, called Agencija Tovazhyshka, controls three to ten women. Guards travel with the women and watch them at all times. The women are sold from one agency to another for DM2,000 to 5,000 and each time the woman incurs the debt that must be repaid.<sup>34</sup>

In August 1999 police arrested three people in Chernihiv Oblast, Ukraine for trafficking women to Hungary. They had previously sold 16 women to Italian and Spanish brothels for US\$800 each.<sup>35</sup>

In September 1999, a woman psychology teacher from Cherkasy, Ukraine was charged with being head of an international trafficking ring that sold young Ukrainian women into the sex industry in the United Arab Emirates. Along with criminals from Kazakhstan, Syria and the United Arab Emirates, the gang promised 30 young women jobs as dancers, waitresses or domestic servants, then sold them to buyers in the sex industry.<sup>36</sup>

## ***Methods of Recruitment and Trafficking***

Sex industries use up women, physically and emotionally, necessitating fresh supplies of women on a regular basis, which keeps the recruitment and trafficking of women so profitable. Recruiters, traffickers and pimps who engage in trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation have developed common methods of operation. One method of recruitment is advertisements in newspapers offering lucrative job opportunities in foreign countries for low skilled jobs, such as waitresses and nannies. Some advertisements promise good salaries to young, attractive women who will work as dancers and hostesses. An inspection of newspapers in Ukraine showed that each contained five to 20 suspicious advertisements.<sup>37</sup> Women are recruited through social events and auditions, such as photo sessions. The process is usually complex, with detailed deception calculated to reassure the women that the employment opportunity is genuine.<sup>38</sup> It is estimated that 20 percent of trafficked women are recruited through media advertisements.

Another method of recruitment is “marriage agencies,” sometimes called mail-order-bride agencies or international introduction services. According to the International Organization for Migration, all mail-order-bride agencies with women from the republics of the former Soviet Union are under the control of organized crime networks.<sup>39</sup> Many of these agencies operate on the Internet.<sup>40</sup> Recruiters use “marriage agencies” as a way to contact women who are eager to travel or emigrate. This route into the sex industry can take several forms. The recruiters may be traffickers or work directly with traffickers. The woman may meet with a man who promises marriage at a later date. The man may use the woman himself for a short period of time, then coerce her into making pornography and later sell her to the sex industry, or he may directly deliver the woman to a brothel.

Some traffickers use the woman’s legal documents and tourist visas to legally enter the destination countries. The women may be put on a circuit by pimps in which they are moved from country to country on legal tourist visas or entertainers’ visas. Other times, the woman is given false documents. In this case, the woman is even more vulnerable after she arrives in the destination country because she is there illegally. If police discover her, she is arrested and deported.

The most common way women are recruited in Ukraine is through a friend or acquaintance, who gains the woman’s confidence. An increasing phenomenon is called “the second wave,” in which trafficked women return home to recruit other women. Once a woman has been trafficked and trapped in the sex industry, she has few options. Escape may be difficult. Since women get to keep little of the money they earn, they often have little to show for their experiences abroad. Also, because of the stigma attached to women in prostitution, they often face discrimination at home. One of the few means of escaping the brutality of being forced to have unwanted sex each day with multiple men is to move from victim to perpetrator. To do this, women who have been trafficked return home to recruit new victims.<sup>41</sup> According to one report, for instance, in Ukraine, 70 percent of pimps are women.<sup>42</sup> A recruiter gets from US\$200 to \$5,000 for each woman recruited.<sup>43</sup>

Sometimes women are recruited in groups. In one case, women from Lviv, Ukraine were offered housekeeping jobs in the Czech Republic. The traffickers took their passports when they crossed the border. Upon their arrival in the Czech Republic, they were sold for US\$300-\$700 each to a pimp who forced them into prostitution on the Czech-German highway.<sup>44</sup>

## ***Entrapment of Women in Prostitution***

Whatever the recruitment method, the majority of women do not expect the sexual exploitation and violence that awaits them. Aleksandr Strokanov from Interpol-Ukraine estimated that

75 percent of the women do not realize they will be forced into prostitution.<sup>45</sup> After the woman has reached the destination country, the trafficker or pimp will tell her that she is not going to work as a waitress, nanny, or whatever more agreeable opportunity was offered, but will be in prostitution. The methods used to control women once they reach the destination country include: confiscation of travel documents, violence, threats to harm family members and debt bondage.

Even when women know they will be in prostitution, their expectations are usually far from the reality. One woman, who knew she would have to engage in prostitution, thought it would be like in the film "Pretty Woman," where one man would support her.<sup>46</sup> The women don't realize the lack of control they will have, the level of the violence used against them, and what small percentage of the money they will receive. In one case, a friend introduced a Ukrainian woman to a pimp, who told her she could make US\$2000 a month in a club in the Netherlands where prostitution was optional, but not required. When she arrived in the Netherlands, she was told that prostitution was a requirement and no man could be refused. When she protested, she was raped. She was forced to engage in prostitution seven days a week for three months before she paid off the debt. She feared trying to escape because the pimp knew where to find her at home in Ukraine. When she left she only got 50 percent of what she had been told she had earned.<sup>47</sup>

Even women who voluntarily travel to engage in prostitution do not anticipate the level of manipulation, deception and coercion to which they will be subjected. According to Narcisa Escaler, Deputy Director General of the International Organization for Migration:

"...the question of the voluntariness of the movement of trafficked migrants merits particular attention. For many migrants who are eager to escape poverty or political and social insecurity, and who are unaware or unmindful of the pitfalls of irregular migration ... But, in many instances, trafficked migrants are lured by false promises, misled by misinformation concerning migration regulations, or driven by economic despair or large scale violence. In such cases, the migrant's freedom of choice is so seriously impaired that the "voluntariness" of the transaction must be questioned."<sup>48</sup>

The networks that traffic women are modern day slave traders. There are even aspects of trafficking in women-such as auctions-that are reminiscent of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century African slave trade. In Milan, Italy in December 1997, police uncovered a gang that was holding auctions of trafficked women from the former Soviet Union. The women were stripped partially naked, displayed and sold for an average price of US\$1000.<sup>49</sup> Traffickers and pimps use extreme violence to control their women and territory. In Italy, police report that one woman in prostitution is murdered each month.<sup>50</sup> Women are mutilated and murdered as warnings to competing traffickers and pimps and as punishment for refusing to engage in prostitution. In two reported cases, women who resisted were killed as an example to other women. In Istanbul, Turkey, two Ukrainian women were thrown off a balcony and killed, while six of their Russian friends watched. In Serbia, a Ukrainian woman who resisted was beheaded in public.<sup>51</sup>

Levels of violence and discrimination against women trafficked into prostitution are extreme. Trafficked women get little sympathy or assistance once they are under the control of traffickers and pimps, either from the general public or social service agencies. In receiving countries, they are treated as criminals, either as prostitutes or illegal immigrants. When they are discovered, often in police raids, they are arrested or jailed pending deportation. Almost no services exist that address the needs of victims of trafficking who are suffering from trauma, poor health, and physical injuries.

Assistance to victims is hampered by the lack of recognition of the harm to trafficked and prostituted women.<sup>52</sup> Studies on the health of women in the sex industry indicate that many women

have serious health problems and are exposed to life-threatening risks. Women suffer from infectious diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, injuries from violence, drug and alcohol addictions, depression and other mental health problems as a result of trauma.<sup>53</sup>

Many people view the women as complicit in the trafficking, as immoral or as workers - a wide span of perspectives, all of which ignore the harm to the victims. An investigation on trafficking and prostitution in the Czech Republic found that people had little sympathy for victims of trafficking and assumed they were getting rich.

“It is typical for the Czech post-communist society that it is totally indifferent to the destiny of these victims. Our investigation .... confirms that the brothels operating in small towns and villages in the frontier zones are considered as a ‘tax for capitalism’ by local inhabitants. Practically nobody is interested in the living conditions of most Ukrainian, Russian and Bulgarian women. This commonplace [sic] is nourished even by the media which present prostitution mostly as a highly ‘profitable profession.’ ...NGOs which deal with the problems of trafficking in women and their slavery status are considered ‘too feministic.’”<sup>54</sup>

Societies and institutions still hold patriarchal attitudes toward women in prostitution, which blame the victims for crimes committed against them. Officials often minimize or deny the severity of the problem, the violence and coercion used in trafficking and the harm to victims. According to Gennadi Lepenko, Chief of Interpol-Kyiv, Ukraine, “Women’s groups want to blow this all out of proportion. Perhaps this was a problem a few years ago. But it’s under control now.”<sup>55</sup> Advocates for trafficked women report that officials’ acceptance of prostitution and trafficking exacerbate the problem. According to Kateryna Levchenko, Coordinator of La Strada-Ukraine, “Complacency on the part of government and law enforcement officials is as much to blame as financial difficulties. Our government bodies cannot understand that it is very, very important for women.”<sup>56</sup> Some government officials may be collaborators in trafficking networks. Investigations by the Global Survival Network documented the involvement of government officials in the trafficking of women from Russia.<sup>57</sup> Of course, male officials themselves may be buyers of women in prostitution, resulting in lack of empathy for victims of trafficking and prostitution.

## ***Profit and Corruption***

Once a woman is under the control of a trafficker or pimp, she can be exploited to make a large profit. Pimps can make five to 20 times as much from a woman as they paid for her.<sup>58</sup> Research by the International Organization for Migration indicates that trafficked women receive little of the money, but the profits for traffickers are enormous. In a case study of women trafficked into Germany, they found that each time a man buys a woman in prostitution, he pays DM30-50, but the woman gets to keep almost nothing. First, the trafficker or recruiter requires payment of US\$3,000 - \$30,000 for her travel expenses and her purchase price. Then she must pay for her room and board in the brothel, which can be as much as DM280 a day, the pimp’s fees, compulsory lawyer’s fees, doctor’s fees, and sometimes, private living expenses. In the end, the woman often is in debt.<sup>59</sup> Even after a woman has paid off her debt, she must turn over 50 to 75 percent of her earnings to pimps.<sup>60</sup> In numerous documented cases of trafficking, the pimps earn large profits, while the woman receives a small portion of the proceeds.

A Ukrainian woman in a massage parlor owned by a Russian in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA was allowed to keep only 30 percent of the US\$70 price for a massage. If she wanted more money she had to perform sexual services for tips.<sup>61</sup>



During a three-month stay in Germany on a tourist visa, a woman will make \$20,000 for a pimp, according to German police. An Eastern European woman will earn more than that for a pimp or trafficker in Japan, where Eastern European women are considered exotic.<sup>62</sup>

Oksana Rynievska, a Ukrainian doctor, operated a brothel with non-English speaking women from Eastern Europe in Essex, UK for eight months before she was arrested. During that time she made more than GBP130,000 (US\$210,000).<sup>63</sup>

Mikhail Lebed, Chief of Criminal Investigations for the Ukrainian Ministry of the Interior said, "It is a human tragedy, but also, frankly, a national crisis. Gangsters make more from these women in a week than we have in our law-enforcement budget for the whole year."<sup>64</sup> The money made from the sexual exploitation and often enslavement of trafficked women enriches transnational criminal networks. Trafficking in women has arguably the highest profit margin and lowest risk of almost any type of illegal activity. According to Michael Platzer, United Nations Center for International Crime Prevention, "There's a lot of talk about drugs, but it's the white slave trade that earns the biggest money for criminal groups in Eastern Europe."<sup>65</sup>

Corruption of officials through bribes and even collaboration of officials in criminal networks enables traffickers to operate in communities and states. Officials in key positions and at many levels use their authority to provide protection to criminal activities. During a two-year investigation of trafficking in women from Russia, the Global Survival Network found evidence of government collaboration in the Interior Ministry, the Federal Security Service and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>66</sup> As the influence of criminal networks deepens, the corruption goes beyond an act of occasionally ignoring illegal activity to providing protection by blocking legislation that would hinder the activities of the groups. As law enforcement personnel and government officials become more corrupt and members of the crime groups gain more influence, the line between the state and the criminal networks starts to blur. This merging of criminal networks and the government seems to have occurred in many of the states that have emerged from the Soviet Union.<sup>67</sup> Under these circumstances it is difficult to intervene in the succession of corruption, collaboration, crime and profit.

Kateryna Levchenko from La Strada-Ukraine made the following comment about the criminal networks' interests in creating and maintaining an environment favorable to trafficking in women:

"...the main part of income from this criminal business is obtained by foreign criminal organizations that are the ones interested in preservation of the current situation. They do not want any improvements in the status of Ukrainian women or in Ukrainian economy as a whole. The scale of this illegal business, huge monthly and annual turnovers, merging with certain power structures (first of all, the police) in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, make it a real national security issue."<sup>68</sup>

The cooperation of criminals and corrupt government officials in the trafficking in women ensures that traffickers can operate with little or no interference, leaving women vulnerable to whatever treatment and exploitation is profitable for traffickers and the sex industry.

## ***Impact on Communities***

Trafficking in women as a shadow economy does not bring financial prosperity to local communities. The women often end up with nothing, or any money they earn comes at great cost to

their health, emotional well being and standing in the community. The money made by the criminal networks does not stay in poor communities or countries, but is laundered through bank accounts of criminal bosses in financial centers, such United States, Western European countries or in off-shore accounts.<sup>69</sup> Transnational money laundering schemes often include proceeds from trafficking in women.

In Israel, for instance, organized crime groups from the former Soviet Union, collectively referred to as “Russian” organized crime groups, have invested profits from trafficking in women, along with other activities, into legitimate businesses. Israel is considered a “safe haven” for illegal profits because money laundering there is fairly easy. In 1995, it was reported that between 2.5 and 4 billion dollars had been invested in banks and 600 million in real estate.<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, trafficking in women has been found to be part of broader transnational criminal schemes. In August 1999, a money-laundering scheme was uncovered in the Bank of New York, USA. From early 1998 until mid-1999, US\$10 billion dollars had been laundered through the bank. The account belonged to known Ukrainian-born crime boss Semion Mogilevich, who the FBI and Israeli intelligence reported was involved in prostitution, weapons and drug trafficking and investment scams. According to one source, Mogilevich headed a large prostitution ring that operated in the Black and White Nightclubs in Prague, Poland and Budapest, Hungary.<sup>71</sup> Mogilevich’s crime network, called the Red Mafia, operated in Ukraine, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the United States.<sup>72</sup>

Cases such as these demonstrate that most of the money made from illegal operations, such as trafficking in women, does not make its way back to the community. The money goes to the top where crime bosses make enormous profits. The “dirty money” is laundered into clean money after which it can be used to buy legitimate businesses and properties.

## ***Gendered Supply and Demand***

Trafficking and prostitution are highly gendered systems that result from structural inequality between women and men on a world scale.<sup>73</sup> Men create the demand and women are the supply.<sup>74</sup> In this gendered system of supply and demand, little or no attention is paid to the legitimacy of the demand. The ultimate consumers of trafficked and prostituted women are men who use them for entertainment, sexual gratification, and acts of violence. Victims and advocacy groups for survivors of prostitution compare the dynamics of prostitution to battering and sexual assault. Survivors often recount their experiences spent in sex industries as being abusive, degrading, and harmful to their health and well being.<sup>75</sup>

The most crucial factor in determining where trafficking will occur is the activity of traffickers. Poverty, unemployment, inflation, war and lack of a promising future are compelling factors that facilitate the ease with which traffickers recruit women, but they are not the cause of trafficking. Many regions of the world are poor and chaotic, but not every region becomes a major supplier of women trafficked into the sex industry. Traffickers take advantage of poverty, unemployment and a desire to emigrate to recruit and traffic women into sex industries. Women, in large numbers, do not make their way across borders to enter prostitution, nor do they traffic themselves or organize themselves *en masse* to travel internationally to enter prostitution. Women do not voluntarily put themselves in situations where they are exploited, beaten, raped and enslaved. Without recruiters, traffickers and pimps, trafficking in women would not exist. According to Michèle Hirsch, a barrister in Brussels in her report to the Council of Europe:

“Poverty does not automatically and in every case lead to traffic in human beings and in fact only creates the necessary conditions. ... Trafficking will appear only when criminal elements take advantage of this desire to emigrate to entice people, particularly women, to the West under false pretences.”<sup>76</sup>

More than 120 million people in Eastern Europe earn less than US\$4 per day.<sup>77</sup> Where old Soviet economic systems have been disrupted or discarded, there has been economic contraction and hyperinflation, which has wiped out people’s savings and security. In Ukraine, over 60 percent of the unemployed are women, and of those who have lost their job since 1991, more than 80 percent are women. The average salary in Ukraine is about US\$30 a month, but in many small towns, it is only half that.<sup>78</sup>

Women’s NGOs report that the economic hard times has led to a depression of women’s psychological state with loss of self-esteem and hope for the future. Women accept unlikely offers of employment in unskilled jobs at high salaries with the resignation that “it cannot be worse” than their present lives.<sup>79</sup> Recruiters for the sex industry target the most economically depressed areas. According to an estimate by a Ukrainian women’s NGO, one-third of unemployed young women get involved in illegal sex businesses.<sup>80</sup>

There also tends to be a paucity of information about the problem in sending countries. MiraMed, an anti-trafficking NGO, asserts that there has been a “relative media blackout” on the subject of trafficking in women, which has left women without information about what is happening to women who have gone abroad.<sup>81</sup>

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a survey of 1,189 women and girls, aged 15 to 35, in ten urban regions of Ukraine. The purpose was to assess women’s attitudes and intentions toward migration. The IOM concluded that 40 percent of the women in Ukraine are at risk of becoming victims of trafficking mainly due to their interest in emigrating or seeking employment abroad. Although many young women are eager to travel to seek jobs, prostitution was viewed as absolutely unacceptable. When asked if “a job in the sex industry” was an “acceptable job abroad,” none of the women and girls in any age group (Ages 15-17, 18-19, 20-24, 25-35) said yes. When asked if being a “dancer” or “stripper” was an “acceptable job abroad,” however, all of the girls aged 15-17 indicated that it was, while none of the older women said yes.<sup>82</sup>

These findings indicate that when accurate naming of activities, such as “job in the sex industry” occurs, rather than the use of euphemisms, such as “hostess” or “entertainer,” women are not interested in these “jobs.”

### ***Legal Factors and the Demand for Trafficked Women***

Although trafficked women can be found almost anywhere, even in quite unexpected places, the destinations for most trafficked women are countries and cities where there are large sex industry centers and where prostitution is legalized or widely tolerated. Trafficking exists to meet the demand for women to be used in the sex industry. Although some women may appear to voluntarily enter prostitution, this number could never meet the demand. If prostitution were a desirable, rewarding, lucrative job, traffickers would not have to deceive, coerce and enslave women to get them into and keep them in the sex industry.

Most approaches to the problem of trafficking have focused on the sending countries. In countries of the former Soviet Union there have been prevention education projects aimed at potential

victims of trafficking and non-governmental organizations have established hotlines for victims of trafficking or women seeking accurate information about the risks of accepting job offers abroad. Less attention has been focused on curtailing the demand created in receiving countries. For example, in Summer 1998, I participated in the Training Program to Combat Trafficking of Women from Ukraine in which twenty Ukrainian representatives from government ministries, law enforcement, social services, media and non-governmental organizations came to the United States for training on trafficking in women. The site of the conference was New Jersey where hundreds of Ukrainian women have been trafficking into strip clubs and massage parlors. A Special Agent from the United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization service told the Ukrainian audience, "This is your problem that you are going to have to solve. Like drugs you have to get at the root of the problem, which is overseas."<sup>83</sup> He located the problem of trafficking of women in the sending country of Ukraine, even though there had been little action against the traffickers and pimps in the receiving country-the United States-or the demand made by the illegal sex industry.

The most popular destinations for trafficked women are countries where prostitution is legal such as the Netherlands and Germany. The Dutch Foundation Against Trafficking in Women (STV) surveyed women in the sex industry in the Netherlands and found they came from 32 countries. In 1994, in the Netherlands, 70 percent of the trafficked women were from Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>84</sup> A survey of women from Central and Eastern Europe found that 80 percent of the women had their passports confiscated, were kept in isolation and forced to work long hours for no pay and were physically and emotionally abused by pimps, traffickers and male buyers.<sup>85</sup>

In the Netherlands, in 1995, more women in prostitution were from Ukraine than any other foreign country and in 1996 they ranked second.<sup>86</sup> According to Dr. Gerben Bruinsma of the University of Leiden, 33 percent of the 25,000 women in prostitution in the Netherlands are from Ukraine, and three percent are from Russia. Most of these women are in conditions of slavery.<sup>87</sup>

In Germany, prostitution is legal for citizens of the European Union, but illegal for non-European Union citizens. Therefore, while it is legal for men to engage in prostitution and for pimps to run brothels, trafficked women are doubly victimized, first by being victims of trafficking and second for being foreign citizens. An estimated one quarter of the 200,000 to 400,000 women in prostitution in Germany are from Eastern Europe.<sup>88</sup> Another source estimates that 80 percent of the trafficked women in Germany are from Central and Eastern Europe and CIS countries. The German Family Ministry reported that 1500 trafficked women were caught by police in 1997. Ninety-five percent were deported.<sup>89</sup>

Legalization of prostitution, pimping and brothels causes an increase in trafficking in women to meet the demand created by a legalized sex industry. There is also evidence from Australia that legalized prostitution and brothels resulted in a "significant rise in organized crime"<sup>90</sup> and an increase in trafficking and enslavement of women.<sup>91</sup>

Legalized prostitution makes it difficult to hold traffickers accountable for their activities. Trijntje Kootstra, from La Strada, said that traffickers evade prosecution by claiming the women knew what they were getting into and that prosecutors generally have a hard time establishing the line between voluntary and forced prostitution.<sup>92</sup> When prostitution is legal the prosecution's case depends on proving that the woman did not consent. Considering how vulnerable the women are in these slave-like circumstances and that women often do initially consent to traveling or even being in prostitution, it makes the case much more difficult to prove. According to Michael Platzer, Head of Operations for the United Nation's Center for International Crime Prevention, "The laws help the gangsters. Prostitution is semi-legal in many places and that makes enforcement tricky. In most cases punishment is very light."<sup>93</sup> In the Plan of Action Against Traffic in Women and Forced Prostitution

for the Council of Europe, Michele Hirsch stated, “where only forced prostitution is illegal; inability to prove constraint has repeatedly led to international procurers being acquitted by the courts.”<sup>94</sup>

The trafficking of women for purposes of sexual exploitation is not a new phenomenon and international laws were drafted and ratified in the earlier half of this century. In 1949, the United Nations General Assembly passed the Convention for the Suppression of Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. The convention states that “prostitution and the accompanying evil of the traffic in persons for the purpose of prostitution are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person and endanger the welfare of the individual, the family and the community.”<sup>95</sup> Ukraine is a signature of the 1949 Convention (1954), along with Latvia (1992), Belarus (1956), and the Russian Federation (1954).<sup>96</sup> The 1949 Convention states that consent of the trafficked person is irrelevant to the prosecution of the exploiter.<sup>97</sup> The 1949 Convention was not widely ratified and did not create a monitoring body, so there has been no ongoing evaluation of its implementation or effectiveness. In 1998 at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, the World Federation of the Ukrainian Women’s Organizations and World Movement of Mothers called for governments to work toward suppressing the trafficking of women and girls and implementing the 1949 Convention.<sup>98</sup>

Currently, the 1949 Convention is under strong attack by those who favor legalized prostitution and “consensual trafficking.” The trend toward legalization of the sex industry and narrower definitions of trafficking which require proof of coercion or force will make the conviction of traffickers very difficult and will greatly benefit transnational criminal networks.

Another approach to ending trafficking is to intervene in the demand for women to be used in prostitution. In 1998, Sweden passed a law on violence against women that created a new offense-“gross violation of a woman’s integrity.” Prostitution was included as a type of violence against women. As of January 1, 1999, the “purchase of sexual services” was prohibited, punishable by fines and/or imprisonment up to six months. The Swedish government was clear that this new offense marked Sweden’s attitude toward prostitution as an “undesirable social phenomenon” and an act of violence against women.<sup>99</sup> The new offense of gross violation of a woman’s integrity and the prohibition on purchase of sexual services aims to eliminate acts of violence that stand in the way of equality for women.

Sweden’s approach recognizes the harm done to women under conditions of sexual exploitation. Their approach starts from the premise that women have the right to dignity, integrity and equality. This new law is the first that aims to protect women from violence by holding men accountable and thereby addressing the demand for women to be trafficked for prostitution. There are indications that Norway is also considering this approach as a way to combat the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation.<sup>100</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In the Soviet Union, a shadow economy, often controlled by government officials, existed for decades to meet the needs of the people for goods and services. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the shadow economy networks expanded to become transnational criminal networks that increasingly operate beyond the reach of law enforcement in any one state, and more ominously, operate in cooperation with law enforcement and government officials in some states. One of the commodities that is in great demand and Ukraine, and other republics of the Soviet Union, have in great supply, are women who were eager to travel and look for

opportunities abroad. The trafficking of women for purposes of sexual exploitation has become a highly profitable shadow market for organized crime networks. The lucrative trade in women garners billions of dollars for criminals, who use the money to enrich themselves and buy influence to further their activities. Although organized crime networks have benefited, trafficking in women is not a shadow economy that has brought prosperity to local communities. The growth in number and size of organized crime networks has become a threat to the safety of citizens and to legitimate economic, social, and political institutions.

Trafficking in women is a modern day slave trade that is consuming increasing numbers of women, especially from Ukraine and other republics of the former Soviet Union. The existence of recruitment and enslavement of women for purposes of sexual exploitation threatens the status of women throughout the world. There can be no true democracy in any country if half the population can be viewed as potential commodities to be recruited, bought, sold and enslaved.

Most analyses of trafficking in women focus on the supply side in the sending countries, with economic factors assumed to be the primary cause of trafficking. A more complete understanding of trafficking in women is achieved by also examining the demand for trafficked women in sex industries in receiving countries and the essential role played by organized crime networks in committing serious crimes against women. In addition, the gendered nature of the dynamics of the supply and demand has to be examined. It cannot be ignored that women are the sole victims in trafficking in women for prostitution and men are the sole players in creating the demand for women in prostitution.

Legalization of prostitution is sometimes thought to be a solution to trafficking in women, but evidence seems to show that legalized sex industries actually result in increased trafficking to meet the demand for women to be used in the legal sex industries. Increased activity of organized crime networks also accompanies increases in trafficking.

Legal remedies that address the demand side of trafficking have been passed at the international level at the United Nations and the national level in Sweden. The older 1949 United Nations Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others has not been widely ratified and lacks a monitoring body, so it has had limited impact against the transnational trafficking of women. The newly defined type of violence against women and crime in Sweden “the purchase of sexual services” has only been in place for one year and its effectiveness is yet to be evaluated.

Trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation has become such a large and severe crisis for the well being of women and the security and stability of some states that interventions are needed at all levels and points in the trafficking process. This modern slave trade is a shadow market that benefits only criminals.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Specter, "Traffickers' New Cargo: Naï ve Slavic Women," *New York Times*, 11 January 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation often includes girls under the age of consent. The percentage of victims of trafficking who are under age is not known, although raids on brothels frequently find girls as well as women. In this paper, I talk about trafficking in women, but it is assumed that many of the victims are under age girls.

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<sup>4</sup> "UN official warns of rise of new slaves of prostitutes," *Xinhua*, 21 September 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Specter, *New York Times*.

<sup>6</sup> Sexual exploitation is a practice by which a person achieves sexual gratification, financial gain or advancement through the abuse or exploitation of a person's sexuality by abrogating that person's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy, and physical and mental well-being; i.e. trafficking, prostitution, prostitution tourism, mail-order-bride trade, pornography, stripping, battering, incest, rape and sexual harassment.

<sup>7</sup> Human trafficking occurs for purposes other than sexual exploitation, such as for labor in sweat shops and as domestic servants and agricultural workers and children for adoption, but this paper will focus on trafficking of women and girls for the sex industry.

<sup>8</sup> This definition of trafficking was modified slightly from that put forth by the international non-governmental organization, the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

<sup>9</sup> The text and signatories of the 1949 Convention can be viewed at <http://www.uri.edu/dignity/49conven.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Roland-Pierre Paringaux, "Prostitution take a turn for the West," *Le Monde*, 24 May 1998.

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