

# Explosive growth internationally in trafficking of women and children for sex trade

Julie Hyland  
8 June 2000

Economic and social breakdown has fuelled an explosion in the trafficking of women and children internationally for the sex trade, according to recently published reports.

Last month the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) reported that sex trafficking in Kosovo had mushroomed since the end of NATO's bombing of Serbia and accused the UN and other agencies of fuelling a trade in forced prostitution. The IOM complain that UN and international aid agency staff are frequent visitors to the province's burgeoning brothel trade, disguised as bars and nightclubs. Many of the women have been press-ganged into sex work. Pasquale Lupoli, IOM's head in Kosovo, said the organisation had rescued more than 50 women in the province since last October, but that figure was just "the tip of the iceberg".

According to the IOM, more than 50 percent of the women forced to work as prostitutes in Kosovo are from the former Soviet republic of Moldova and more than two-thirds have never worked in prostitution before. Nearly all had been promised decent employment in the West, but once they left home their passports were taken from them and they were sold to pimps for between \$500 and \$1,500.

Lupoli said that such trafficking is increasing internationally. The IOM estimates that up to 500,000 women a year are brought into Western Europe and forced into the sex industry. Other estimates place the figure as high as one million. Increasingly restrictive immigration laws in the West have helped to fuel the trade, Lupoli continued, as people desperate to leave conditions of poverty and deprivation resort to illegal means and criminal gangs.

Those traded come from some of the poorest regions in the world. In the US, for example, an estimated 50,000 women are trafficked every year from "feeder" points in the Ukraine, Albania, the Philippines, Thailand, Mexico and Nigeria. The problem is growing in scope as the number of countries facing similar catastrophic declines in living standards rises.

At the centre of the recent growth in trafficking has been the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European regimes. The reality of capitalist restoration in these countries is illustrated by the fact that women from the former Stalinist-ruled countries form a large proportion of those being trafficked to the West. A survey on forced prostitution in Britain found that many of the women involved were originally from the Ukraine. An estimated half a million women have left the former Soviet republic, which has a 70 percent unemployment rate, since 1991.

Research by the University of North London's Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit surveyed immigration officers, customs officials and three-quarters of the police forces in England and Wales. It found that up to 1,400 women were being forcibly trafficked in England's sex trade. In London's back street brothels, six out of ten women are trafficked. They are deprived of their passports and must work for up to 17 hours a day. They often end up earning little or nothing, as they are told they must repay thousands of pounds in accommodation, food and travel costs to the gangs that brought them into the country and the brothel keepers—a modern day variant of debt bondage. Violence and intimidation prevent them from absconding.

Trafficking is more extensive in mainland Europe, particularly in Germany's major cities, which have

become the centre of the continent's highly profitable sex industry. Again, Russian women are a major component of the country's "new form of white slavery", according to one BBC report.



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**