

## WOMEN AS CHATTEL: The Emerging Global Market in Trafficking

**In 1997, according to U.N. calculations, the procurers, smugglers, and corrupt public officials who ply the emerging international trade in human beings extracted \$7 billion in profits from their cargo.**

If these calculations are accurate, trafficking is now more lucrative than the international trade in illicit weapons.

The U.N. estimates that 4 million women, children, and men become victims of international trafficking each year. Some are captives taken as payment by mercenary armies. Some, especially young girls, are sold by their destitute families. Many victims are duped into slavery by fraudulent "employment brokers" who promise legitimate employment to anyone desperate to escape economic hardship.

Their servitude takes various forms. Some victims are forced to work as domestic servants, others as sweatshop labor. The U.S. Department

of State estimates that as many as 100,000 female victims are forced into prostitution each year. Other sources believe the number of victims pressed into the sex trade is much higher.

Much has been learned about this trade in recent years. Trafficking generally flows from poorer to wealthier regions. Although trafficking often occurs between rural and urban areas within a country or between neighboring countries, it has recently taken on global proportions. East European nations have emerged, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, as both source countries and transit countries along trade routes leading to destinations in Western Europe, the United States, the Near East, and the Far East. Traffickers are reported to be most active in South and Southeast Asia. And although traffickers often operate individually or in small groups, the trade also is organized into international criminal syndicates. These syndicates employ brokers who find victims, others who secure travel documents, smugglers who transport victims, and corrupt police and other public officials whose cooperation is essential to conducting this trade.

The growth of these networks has prompted countries around the globe to launch cooperative efforts to combat trafficking. The United States Department of State is taking a leading role in this campaign, and the United States Agency for International Development is working to develop a regional anti-trafficking strategy for South and Southeast Asia and a national program for the Government of Ukraine.

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The Clinton Administration is forging an anti-trafficking strategy that will help prevent trafficking through public education campaigns, provide legal protection and social services to trafficking victims, and strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies to bring traffickers to justice.

# What Is Trafficking?

Definitions of trafficking vary considerably, and this complicates the job of forging anti-trafficking strategies. Although most victims of trafficking are forced into non-sexual work, the term has been historically associated with prostitution, and efforts to condemn or curtail trafficking have often been linked with efforts to eradicate prostitution.

This association is reflected, for example, in the United Nations Convention on the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, promulgated in 1949. Only 70 countries have adopted this convention. The current U.N. Special Rapporteur on violence against women attributes the lack of support for this convention to its “uniquely abolitionist perspective” on prostitution. The association of trafficking with prostitution compounds the difficulties of forging multilateral anti-trafficking projects because many of the countries that oppose trafficking do not have national laws prohibiting prostitution.

The linkages between trafficking and prostitution also complicate the difficulties facing local law enforcement agencies. Women who are victims of trafficking and who have been forced into prostitution are more likely to be arrested than rescued by local authorities. Victims generally are brought into their destination countries illegally. Their employment in any field is usually a violation of workplace or immigration laws or both. If they are forced into prostitution by being held captive in brothels, they are vulnerable to multiple criminal charges. In fact, the ambiguous legal status of victims is one of the traffickers’ most powerful protections against prosecution.

The U.N. convention was revised in 1994 to focus on trafficking as a criminal commercial enterprise. The convention now defines trafficking as the

illicit and clandestine movement of persons across national and international borders, largely from developing countries and some countries with economies in transition, with the end goal of forcing women and girl children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations for the profit of recruiters, traffickers, and crime syndicates, as well as other illegal activities related to trafficking, such as forced domestic labor, false marriages, clandestine employment, and false adoption.

The Global Alliance Against Trafficking In Women, a Thailand-based nongovernmental organization active in combating trafficking for forced prostitution in Southeast Asia, has distilled this to simpler terms: “All acts involved in the recruitment or transportation of a woman, within or across national borders, for work or services, by means of violence or threat of violence, debt bondage, deception, or other coercion.”

The central feature in these definitions is the use of force and coercion to compel victims into activities they cannot refuse and under conditions they cannot control. Trafficking occurs across a diversity of cultural circumstances, but the common threads running through the enterprise are fear and force.

## Patterns and Practices of Trafficking

Trafficking, especially for the purposes of forced prostitution, has been long observed in South and Southeast Asia. Recruiters visit rural, poor villages, advertising employment opportunities for domestic and household servants, restaurant workers, entertainment workers, models, and hostesses. They might offer poor families of young children cash advances against a child’s future earnings. They might offer to advance their victims the funds required to secure travel documents and pay for passage to their destination countries. Or they may simply charge a fee for their job search services and defer collection until their victims have been smuggled into their destination countries and put to work.

These arrangements result in debts that compound at usurious interest rates and that grow each day as the trafficker adds charges for the victim’s room, board, and other living expenses. These debts may convince the victim that their enslavement is legitimate and that they have no alternative but to comply with the traffickers’ demands. At least the debts discourage victims from seeking legal protections. And because traffickers can re-sell these debts to other traffickers or employers, victims are often caught in a cycle of perpetual debt bondage.

It is not unusual for traffickers to require their victims to liquidate whatever assets they possess to pay service fees purportedly associated with employment search efforts.

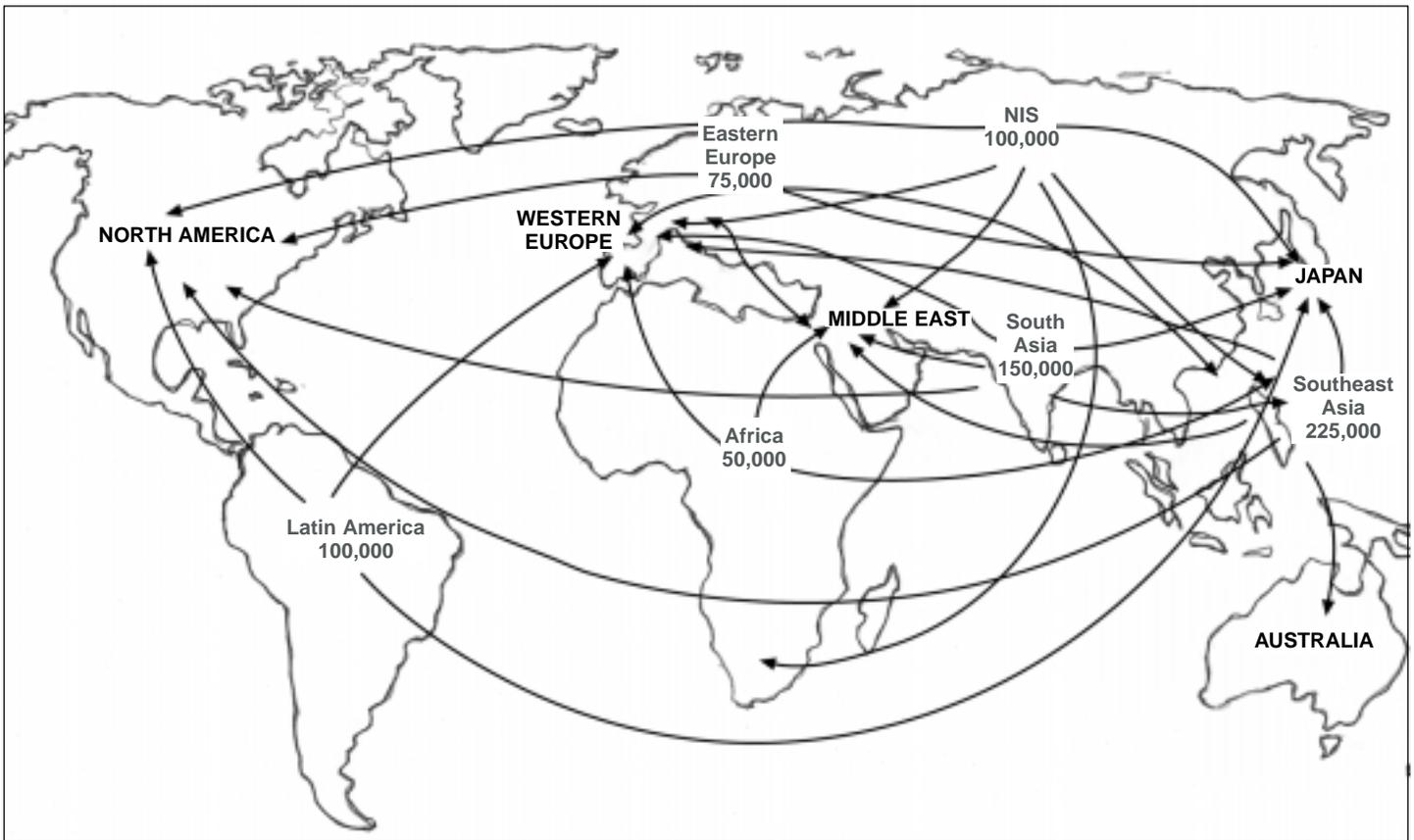
For example, the Associated Press reported in April 1998 on the rescue of 70 Bangladeshis, including 38 children, who had paid an employment broker to find them work in Middle Eastern cities. The broker, arrested in India buying fraudulent transit documents, was in fact a trafficker selling his human cargo to Persian Gulf buyers. According to the Global Survival Network, women in the New Independent States pay fees of \$1,500 to \$30,000 for brokers to conduct sham employment searches.

## Forced Prostitution: Source, Transit, and Destination Countries

A new trend has recently captured the attention of nongovernmental organizations and public officials. The International Organization for Migration, based in Brussels, estimates that as many as 500,000 women were trafficked into Western Europe for forced prostitution in 1996, and has identified Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and the Baltic states as supply countries. Hungary, Romania, and the Czech Republic are primary transit countries, while the United States has now joined West European countries, especially the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Italy, and Greece, as principal destinations. As many as 150 Bangladeshi women *a day* are forced into cross-border prostitution, according to Lawyers for Human Rights and Legal Aid, based in Lahore, Pakistan.

*Continued on page 4*

**Global Trafficking in Women and Girls: Major Source Regions and Destinations**



Trafficking in females younger than 18 years old—mostly for prostitution—accounts for approximately 30 percent of total trafficking. Males under 18 years old account for a very small fraction—approximately 2 percent—of trafficking, mainly for slavery.

Within each region, there is also intraregional trafficking. (The map is based on initial U.S. intelligence assessments.)

*Continued from page 3*

To the list of destination countries, Global Survival Network adds Japan, Israel, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Taken together, the connections between supplier, transit, and destination countries underscore the brutal logic of the traffickers market: where poverty and privation are chronic, potential victims are in abundant supply and wealthier countries generate demand.

The economic dislocations resulting from the transition of the New Independent States and Eastern and Central European nations to capitalism have opened new avenues to trafficking. Poverty and unemployment fuel the supply of potential victims. Between 70 and 80 percent of the unemployed workers in the Russian Federation, for example, are women, and they constitute a deep pool of potential trafficking victims.

## Trafficking and HIV/AIDS

The connection between trafficking for sexual purposes and HIV/AIDS makes a strong case for a regional approach to anti-trafficking campaigns.

Each year, trafficking victims forced into prostitution become infected with HIV and transmit the virus to the “clients” they service. Infection rates among these trafficking victims are at least as prevalent as infection rates among prostitutes in general. The World Health Organization and the International Division of U.S. Census Bureau track test results for prostitutes. These data reveal that seroprevalence rates among prostitutes depend on political,

economic, and cultural factors that vary within regions, and even within countries.

South and Southeast Asia, for example, are centers of sexual tourism and sexual trafficking. Census reports reveal that 31 percent of the prostitutes tested in Mandalay, Burma, were HIV positive in 1997, as were 44 percent of the prostitutes tested in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. But of more than 23,000 prostitutes tested throughout Indonesia in 1995 and 1996, the seroprevalence rate was statistically zero.

India is a major destination country for women and girls trafficked from Bangladesh and Nepal, but test results within India are equally extreme. According to the World Health Organization, 51 percent of the prostitutes tested in Mumbai, India, in 1993 and 1994 were HIV positive, but the rate among Calcutta’s prostitutes was 1 percent.

Infection rates among African prostitutes are often astronomically high. In Nairobi, Kenya, 85 percent of the prostitutes tested were HIV positive.

Several factors help explain the variations in these rates and support the idea that anti-trafficking campaigns must address the unique features of specific regions. Where prostitution occurs primarily in brothels, as in South and Southeast Asia, or where sex workers are organized for their own protection, as in a city such as Calcutta, protected sex can reduce infection and transmission rates.

Where prostitution is controlled by organized crime, as in Mumbai, India, or where prostitution occurs outside of brothels, as is often the case in Africa, women are less likely to have

the information or means to protect themselves from infection.

If anti-trafficking campaigns are to be effective, these must be tailored to the political, economic, and sexual practices distinct to the areas where trafficking occurs. And unless effective strategies are launched, public health officials will soon have to confront a new enemy in the effort to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

## Trafficking and Organized Crime

Small, violent, and well-organized syndicates traffic women and girls out of source countries using regular routes and devices. Trafficking for forced prostitution may be a profit center for criminal syndicates already expert in smuggling drugs, weapons, and other contraband. According to the International Organization for Migration and the Global Survival Network, the Russian mafia is beginning to exert control over Europe’s prostitution centers in Poland, Italy, and Germany. The Global Survival Network has found that Russian syndicates, in concert with the Japanese Yakuza, supply Russian women as prostitutes in Asia, while the Yakuza traffics women from Mexico and Thailand for local Japanese brothels.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that organized traffickers avoid arrest by cultivating partners among corrupt officials. For example, Greek authorities arrested 10 policemen in 1995 for engineering Russian and East European prostitution rings; the Chief of the Special Commission on Organized Crime in Frankfurt, Germany, was arrested in 1996 for collaborating with traffickers.

# Prevention, Enforcement, Protection

Trafficking is inextricably linked to poverty. Wherever privation and economic hardship prevail, there will be those destitute and desperate enough to enter into the fraudulent employment schemes that are the most common intake systems into the world of trafficking. Economic growth and stability are the long-term solutions to the problem, but more immediate steps must be taken to combat the spread of trafficking.

The United States is now working to respond to the growing threat of trafficking. The strategy being devised will prevent the spread of trafficking, protect the victims, and prosecute the individuals and groups engaged in the crime. It is premature to judge the effect of these efforts, but they are sure to improve our understanding of the problem.

Public awareness campaigns to warn potential victims of the dangers of entering into unorthodox employment schemes with unknown job brokers are an important element of USAID's anti-trafficking efforts. USAID/Kiev, for example, is working with the Government of Ukraine to incorporate these sorts of campaigns into that country's national anti-trafficking strategy. In addition, the Office of Women in Development has supported a strategy development team, sponsored by the USAID Asia and Near East Bureau. This team of experts is assessing the scope of the trafficking phenomenon throughout the region and analyzing the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns, victim services, and other anti-trafficking interventions.

Reducing the supply of potential victims, however, is only part of the solution. Victims rescued from traffickers will require social services and humanitarian assistance, from counseling to health care and possibly physical protection against retribution by the traffickers' confederates. These

measures will prove costly but by themselves are insufficient to staunch the spread of this practice.

Equally important, public institutions of law and order will need strengthening and professional training to recognize trafficking as a distinctive criminal enterprise. Border-control officers, local police forces, and other public officials must become accountable to evidence of corruption if traffickers are to be prosecuted for crimes more serious than relatively minor violations of immigration and employment laws. Without the protection and cooperation of corrupt officials, traffickers simply cannot conduct their trade.

In May 1988, Prime Minister Romano Prodi of Italy met in Washington with President Clinton to announce a wide-ranging joint anti-trafficking initiative aimed at organized criminal syndicates. The bilateral U.S.-Italy Working Group on Trafficking in Women and Children developed this initiative, with elements directed to helping law enforcement detect and prosecute trafficking, others to protect victims and their families from reprisals, and a joint public information program directed at source countries to warn potential victims of the risks arising from trafficking. The program resembles others the United States is conducting with Israel and Ukraine and reflects the overall strategy of prevention, enforcement, and protection.

For fiscal years 1998 and 1999, the U.S. government is devoting \$10 million to fund anti-trafficking measures. The amount reflects an increased sensitivity to the economic, social, and psychological dimensions of the problems posed by trafficking, as well as the urgent need to take the first steps toward halting the spread of this activity.

## Ukraine Initiative

Eastern Europe has recently emerged as a major source region for sexual trafficking. Open borders and economic hardships resulting from the shift to private enterprise have fostered an environment in which growing numbers of women are vulnerable to the recruiting efforts of traffickers specializing in sexual exploitation.

Last winter, the Government of Ukraine invited USAID to assist in developing a national anti-trafficking campaign. The USAID mission in Kiev helped design a comprehensive initiative to combat sexual trafficking, and the Office of Women in Development has extended technical assistance to the project. Following the U.S. model, the Ukrainian program will attack trafficking on three separate fronts. The program will help prevent trafficking through public education campaigns. It will extend new legal protections and relief to those who already have been victimized. And it will strengthen the ability of law enforcement agencies and the justice system to apprehend and prosecute traffickers.

**Prevention.** Because many women who fall prey to traffickers are attracted by what appear to be genuine offers of employment, effective education programs can help prevent the desperate and unwary from becoming victims. Job training and legitimate employment opportunities are the surest methods of prevention, and USAID supports job training centers serving women in Ukraine. The NIS-US Women's Consortium, funded by USAID, is establishing trafficking prevention centers in three Ukrainian cities and providing seed grants to local nongovernmental organizations participating in public information campaigns. The consortium is also incorporating anti-trafficking materials into public school curricula and will distribute 5,000 teacher training manuals. Libraries are being provided with

pamphlets aimed at children. A five-part docu-drama featuring Ukrainian television stars is being prepared for national broadcast; it will depict the realities of trafficking, from village life to recruitment to confinement in foreign brothels, and will discuss the difficulties of re-integration.

**Protection.** Women who have been victims of traffickers often require protection against retaliation if they are to cooperate with authorities and testify about their experiences. These women may require medical care, counseling, and other services if they are return to their communities or try to live normal lives. The NIS-US Women's Consortium is helping support clinics offering free legal services for trafficking victims. La Strada, a Ukraine nongovernmental organization supported by USAID and the International Office of Migration, provides social services to victims and operates a telephone hotline to receive information about trafficking activities throughout Ukraine. In recent months, La Strada's hotline has received as many as 40 calls per day.

**Prosecution.** Fourteen criminal complaints involving trafficking are now reportedly pending in the Ukraine, and prosecution in these and future cases will depend on the willingness of victims to cooperate with law enforcement. Victims, however, too often are subject to prosecution by authorities who do not recognize trafficking as the principal crime but instead seize the victim for violating immigration, employment, or anti-prostitution laws. Winrock International, a U.S. nongovernmental organization, is helping women's groups in Ukraine sponsor anti-trafficking workshops to train law enforcement officials and is contributing to the defense in three cases where returned victims of trafficking are themselves being prosecuted. In addition, U.S. agencies are helping train border-control officers to detect trafficking transport patterns and fraudulent travel documentation.

## USAID Anti-Trafficking Efforts in South and Southeast Asia

Trafficking is heaviest throughout South and Southeast Asia, and USAID is responding to the problem with anti-trafficking initiatives that address the issue at local and regional levels.

Target Country / Area	# USAID Programs	Total Budget / FY
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$116,000 for FY 1997, 1998</b>
<p>Funding to support a national network of NGOs able to provide legal aid to victims, train police officials to recognize trafficking victims, and conduct public awareness campaigns to educate the public about trafficking and its victims.</p>		
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>\$120,000 for FY 1998</b>
<p>Funding to support an NGO network to conduct a public awareness campaign and develop local community strategies for combating trafficking in young girls.</p>		
<b>Cambodia</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$41,000 for FY 1998</b>
<p>The Asia Foundation's Global Women in Politics Program is supporting initiatives to improve legal protections for victims. Legal services advocates, working with media-oriented NGOs, will press for criminal investigations into trafficking complaints and prosecution of those arrested as a result of these complaints, and for follow-up reviews of case resolutions.</p>		
<b>Philippines</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>\$27,000 for FY 1998</b>
<p>The Asia Foundation is supporting an NGO promoting public awareness campaigns and community advocacy groups in five provinces to alert local residents to the dangers of trafficking.</p>		
<b>Regional</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>\$870,000 for FY 1996, 1998, 1999</b>
<p>USAID provided a \$200,000 seed grant to The Asia Foundation's Global Women in Politics program in 1996 to expand and strengthen an Asian and Near East NGO network capable of addressing trafficking issues on a region-wide basis. Grants were awarded in 1998 to Family Health International, the Center for Development and Population Activities, and allied health organizations to support anti-trafficking efforts that will complement a regional anti-trafficking strategy to be developed in 1999 with additional USAID financial and technical support.</p>		

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## Organizations Involved in Anti-Trafficking Projects

Non-governmental organizations to contact for additional information:

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### **Global Survival Network**

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