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### ***Human Trafficking: Russia***

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## Recognition of human trafficking in Russia

In Russia the problem of human trafficking was acknowledged as a national security issue in the early 2000s, above all, in relation to the threat of terrorism. In March 2004 Russia ratified the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. In doing so Russia undertook a number of commitments against human trafficking. By that time there were already alarming estimates warning that Central and Eastern Europe, including the former Soviet Union, ranked second in the world in terms of human trafficking after south-east Asia [1] and every year around 175,000 women (1997 estimate) were taken from the region in human trafficking schemes [2]. Russia, according to expert estimates, may account for 20-30% of this flow [3], i.e. at least tens of thousands a year. These estimates do not take into account human trafficking in both women and men *within* the CIS region, i.e. large-scale flows of migrants illegally transferred from CIS countries to Russia for labor and sexual exploitation.

Following the ratification of the Palermo Protocol Russia amended the Criminal Code by introducing article 127.1. (trafficking in human beings) and article 127.2 (use of slave labor). This contained a definition of human trafficking in terms of exploitation and also in terms of the notion of exploitation. Most migration flows link Russia to the CIS countries, with which Russia has a visa-free entry regime, and this creates “favorable conditions” for the development of the criminal business of human trafficking in the region and complicates prevention. As a result of weak border control and the absence of a visa regime only a small fraction of human trafficking cases can be stopped at the border and prevented using border-control measures [1].

The mid-2000s were characterized by a number of research projects on the scale and characteristics of human trafficking in Russia [3; 4; 5]. In recent years the prevention of and the fight against human trafficking has become a priority in Russia at the national, regional and international level. For instance, the fight against human trafficking and assistance to victims of the same are the subjects of Cooperation in the Combat against Human Trafficking Program of the CIS Member States<sup>1</sup>. In 2006-2008 the EU project “Prevention of Human Trafficking in the Russian Federation” was implemented and this resulted in the publication of a massive report [5]. At present Russia participates in regional projects combatting human trafficking within the Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS) and the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). The regional project of the CBSS Task Force against Trafficking in Human Beings was implemented in 2012-2014 and was entitled “Countering human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation through partnership, improvement of prevention and enhancement of organizational component”; on the Russian side it is supervised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## Russia – donor country in human trafficking

Women and children are taken from Russia mostly for prostitution. Their number is estimated at 30,000-60,000 a year [16]. According to the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, over the past two decades, over 500,000 women were sold from Russia to other countries [6]. Experts indicate that routes used by carriers when taking human trafficking victims from Russia change depending on the situation at the border. However, the main routes are: (1) ‘Baltic’ – via Lithuania to Germany, with subsequent shipment to other European countries and the USA, which despite tightened border-crossing rules remains the main destination countries for criminal human trafficking from Russia [7; 8]; (2) ‘Mediterranean’ – to Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Israel and Italy; (3)

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<sup>1</sup> The latest Program covers 2011–2013: <http://cis.minsk.by/reestr/ru/index.html#reestr/view/text?doc=2980>

‘Caucasus’ – via Georgia and Turkey to Greece and Italy; (4) ‘Middle Eastern’ – via Egypt to Israel and the Middle East; and (5) ‘Chinese’ – from Siberia and Primorye to Northern China [4].

In addition to sexual exploitation, which implies engagement in prostitution, organization of sex tourism, production of pornography etc., the objectives of criminal human trafficking from Russia include: a) marriages for exploitation (e.g. the use of the ‘mail-order brides’ system and use of ‘a bride’ for forced carrying of a child and child birth, and for servicing sick and elderly relatives); b) forced surrogate motherhood; c) transplantation of organs and tissues; and d) trafficking children for illegal adoption [1].

The vulnerability of Russian citizens facing recruiters who turn humans into merchandise can be explained by poverty and the failure to find employment. This pushes people towards drastic actions, and makes them use risky economic behavior models and agree to illegal migration, exploitation and slave labor. The grave economic position of these persons lowers their social standards and expands the boundaries of social norms making them unacceptable in terms of human rights and human development [1].

The most vulnerable social groups are: children, adolescents, youth, and young women; villages and small towns dwellers; recent migrants to the cities; people with low education levels; lack of professional education; the unemployed; women engaged in prostitution; persons psychologically inclined towards risky behavior; children from “at risk” families (poor, families of alcoholics, dysfunctional families, persons experiencing family violence etc.); drug addicts; single mothers; persons without permanent residence etc. Table 1 presents some quantitative estimates of “at risk” groups in Russia.

**Table 1. Some quantitative estimates of “at risk” groups in Russia**

Indicator	Value
Share of population with income below minimum subsistence level, 2011 <sup>1</sup>	13%, 50% of them are children and young adults (thirty or younger)
Children from families with income below minimum subsistence level, 2011 <sup>1</sup>	Around 4 mln. persons
The unemployed (based on ILO methodology), 2012 <sup>1</sup>	4.5 mln. persons
Women aged 18-29, 2010 <sup>2</sup> , among them:	14 mln. persons
Women with no professional education	3.5 mln. persons
Women with no secondary education	177,000 persons
Unemployed women <sup>1</sup>	700,000 persons
Persons employed in commercial services of a sexual nature <sup>3</sup>	From 400,000 persons to 1 mln. persons (according to expert estimates, mass media and non-governmental organizations)
Children from “at risk” families	500,000 persons
Orphans and children left without parental care <sup>5</sup>	700,000 persons
Homeless and persons with no fixed abode <sup>6</sup>	3 mln. persons

<sup>1</sup> According to Rosstat

<sup>2</sup> Results of the 2010 Russian Census

<sup>3</sup> From the interview of Mark Levin, head of the Microeconomic Analysis Chair, High School of Economics, January 2013 <http://www.profile.ru/article/lyubov-nelzya-kupit-imeet-li-smysl-legalizovat-v-rossii-prostitutitsiyu-74216> From the statement of the deputy head of the Ministry of Interior Igor Zubov at the Russian State Duma on 25 January 2013 <http://www.mr7.ru/articles/76498/>

<sup>4</sup> UN Children’s Fund (2011)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.tass-ural.ru/details/spravka\\_polozenie\\_detey\\_v\\_rossii.html](http://www.tass-ural.ru/details/spravka_polozenie_detey_v_rossii.html)

<sup>6</sup> According to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

## **Russia – destination country in human trafficking**

Over the last decade Russia began importing “human commodities”, primarily from the countries of the former Soviet Union. These “commodities” are turned into merchandise for slave labor exploitation, in sweatshops, in the informal and shadow economy, in underground production facilities and in the production of counterfeit products, in households (household slavery) etc. Numerous cases of human trafficking, forced confinement and forced labor were identified in the Russian construction industry. Thus, the 2008 report of the International Organization for Migration on human trafficking victims from Belarus and Ukraine notes that “adult men in most cases were sold for forced labor primarily in the Russian construction sector” [9]. The Human Rights Watch report “Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in Russia” (2009) indicates the facts of slavery or similar state of foreign workers employed at unqualified construction jobs in a number of Russian regions [10]. The 2012 Trafficking in Persons Report drawn up by the US State Department includes Russia in the category of countries where “the absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing;” and at the same time “there is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year” [17].

Labor migrants entering Russia from CIS countries and ready for illegal employment are very likely to become victims of human traffickers. Human traffickers use the extreme plight of a significant part of the population in CIS countries. Often the actual organizers or accomplices in human trafficking are the foremen, representatives of national diasporas, private recruiters or other employment intermediaries in Russia. The following methods are widely used by intermediaries and employers to retain migrants and force them to work: confiscation of passports; non-payment of wages; violence; psychological pressure; threat of reporting to the authorities; as well as turning migrants into debtors with the help of fines and deductions [11]. As a result migrants have to put up with: unsatisfactory labor and accommodation conditions; lack of wages; overtime; lack of opportunity to leave the facility; unsatisfactory nutrition or starvation conditions; and beatings and unacceptable living conditions. Hence the positive potential of migration for participating countries and migrants themselves is not fulfilled [12].

According to the Russian Ministry of Interior, there are millions of human-trafficking victims in Russia, i.e. persons subjected to exploitation and forced labor [8]. A special place among them is held by migrant children who are sold to Russia for labor and sexual exploitation, as well as for begging [13]. The above-mentioned report of the US State Department gives an estimate of one million persons who found themselves in labor slavery in Russia [17], including for the construction of facilities for the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi (see also [18]).

## **Russia – country of transit in human trafficking**

Russia’s position between east and west, the relative ease of crossing borders in the post-Soviet space, corruption, the existence of numerous criminal intermediaries– all makes Russia an object of attention for international criminal networks involved in smuggling and human trafficking. These use Russian territory for migrant transit, primarily from central Asia, as well as from south and south-east Asia to European Union member states.

Europol experts indicate “Eastern European” and “Baltic” routes, part of which is Russian territory, as the most frequently used by intermediaries organizing the illegal shipment of persons from the Middle East and south east Asia to Europe [14]. Experts from Poland, which is often the next step after Russia on the transit route to Scandinavian countries or Germany, indicate that citizens of Afghanistan, India, Pakistan and Iraq (primarily Kurds) get to Europe via trans-Caucasian countries (usually Azerbaijan), and then via Russia; migrants from Afghanistan, China, Vietnam and Bangladesh, on the other hand, enter Russia via central Asian countries [15].

## **The fight against human trafficking in Russia**

The Russian Ministry of Interior posts a lot of information on its official website about combatting organized criminal groups involved in human trafficking and initiating criminal cases related to this type of crime. Official statistics indicates that, in the course of 2005–2011, around 250 criminal cases went to court in connection with articles 127.1 (human trafficking) and 127.2 (use of slave labor) in the Russian Criminal Code [8]. In 2011, Russian law enforcement agencies registered 46 crimes in connection with article 127.1 of the Russian Criminal Code. Predominant forms of human trafficking include trafficking for sexual exploitation, slave labor exploitation, as well as trafficking in children for illegal adoption. Besides, in 2011 Russian law enforcement agencies solved over 2000 crimes dealing with related articles: for instance, articles 240 (engagement in prostitution); 241 (organization of prostitution); and 242 (illegal dissemination of pornographic materials) of the Russian Criminal Code. In 2012, the Ministry of Interior posted a leaflet “Warning: human trafficking and how not to become a victim” on its website<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://59.mvd.ru/For\\_human/Torgovlya](http://59.mvd.ru/For_human/Torgovlya); <http://59.mvd.ru/upload/site86/61bf33ec6d2a35cce844b74eec4ee4d1.pdf>

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