



# TRAFFICKING IN MIGRANTS

QUARTERLY BULLETIN



IOM International Organization for Migration

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## NEW IOM FIGURES ON THE GLOBAL SCALE OF TRAFFICKING

*For this special issue, we have taken a temporary departure from our usual format to present some new statistics on trafficking resulting from a short questionnaire sent to IOM's Field Missions.*

In most countries, there are few statistics on the scale of trafficking. The most recent global estimates of the scale of trafficking in women and children were prepared in 1998 by the US Government. It was estimated then that between 700,000 and 2 million women and children are trafficked across international borders annually, although the calculations used to arrive at these figures are unclear.

The reasons for the lack of data on trafficking include:

- The underground and illegal nature of trafficking;
- The lack of anti-trafficking legislation in many countries;
- The reluctance of victims to report their experiences to the authorities;
- The lack of government priority given to data collection and research.

Given this lack of data IOM felt that it would be useful to conduct a quick survey of IOM field offices to collect:

a. Basic statistics on trafficking arising

from trafficked person's participation in IOM programmes.

b. Additional data and estimates based on other sources of information.

Our short questionnaire asked about the scale of trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation, the profile of victims and current trends in trafficking. We also requested information on the number of trafficked persons who were returned to their country of origin either voluntarily or forcibly. We received 41 responses from IOM's 120 offices in 89 countries.

### MAIN FINDINGS

- Given the lack of hard data on the numbers of persons trafficked, the persons who are assisted in IOM's counter-trafficking programmes provide useful indicators of current trends in the scale and pattern of trafficking.
- For example, in 2000, IOM assisted 703 victims of trafficking to return home voluntarily to their countries of origin.
- These victims of trafficking originated from a broad range of countries, but were predominantly women returned

from the Balkans to Moldova, Romania and Ukraine and from Thailand to Cambodia.

- Results from our survey illustrate the global scale and growing complexity of trafficking. Many countries in Africa, Asia and Eastern and Central Europe are both sending and receiving countries for trafficking in women.

The results of our questionnaire are presented in more detail below by region according to the information the IOM offices provided. The figures presented below are based on national figures and may not necessarily be comparable with the statistics of other countries.

### AFRICA

There is growing concern about the growth in trafficking in Africa. In February 2000, Nigeria, the most populous country in the continent, hosted the first pan-African conference on human trafficking. The conference was opened by Nigerian President Obasanjo who reported that 1,178 Nigerian women and children who were believed to be victims of trafficking were deported to the country between March 1999 and December 2000. President Obasanjo said that:

## ASIA

“Child labour and women trafficking are very much akin to the slave trade era of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and we must take the battle with the same doggedness that we took against the slave trade.”

Our survey highlighted the increase in trafficking from other African countries. In Ghana, trafficking is said to have increased in recent years, judging from a visible increase in the number of traffickers, referred to locally as “connection men”, noticed at border crossings, along with an increase in the number of fake visas. The Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) estimates that 3,582 women were trafficked from 1998 to 2000. Some 535 trafficked women were returned to Ghana in the two years 1999-2000.

These women were trafficked to neighbouring countries, such as Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire, as well as to Lebanon, Libya, the United States, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands. These three Western European countries also represent the main destinations of trafficked Nigerian women (see section below on Western Europe).

In Central and Western Africa, trafficking is not just limited to women, who are trafficked as domestic servants to Saudi Arabia and to Kuwait from Mali, but includes children as well, a subject which is receiving more and more attention. Children, largely from Mali and Benin, are exploited as workers on plantations, as

domestic servants and in the sex industry, primarily in Nigeria and Côte d’Ivoire, with a number remaining in Burkina Faso.

In December 2000, IOM, together with the Government of Mali and UNICEF, began the assessment phase of the *IOM Assistance Programme for the Return of Malian Children Victims of Cross-Border Trafficking between Mali and Ivory Coast*. This 18-month project, intended to reunite children with their families in Mali, will provide approximately 2000 Malian children in Côte d’Ivoire and Burkina Faso with return and reintegration assistance.

From Ethiopia, many women migrate to work in the Middle East and the Gulf States. In 1999, it was estimated that there were between 12,000 and 20,000 Ethiopian women working in Lebanon, where average wages are ca. US\$100/month. The Ethiopian women working in the Middle East and Gulf States are, it appears, primarily domestic workers who are in many cases severely abused. From 1997 to 1999, 67 bodies of Ethiopian women were returned from the Middle East and Gulf countries to Ethiopia. Other cases of abuse, suicide and mental and physical traumatization are reported, suggesting very bad conditions and, indeed, as some have suggested, virtual slavery. There are reports of Ethiopian women having been trafficked to Mongolia, where they were forced to work as nude dancers.

### South-East Asia

In South-East Asia, again, a great deal of trafficking occurs within the region as well as from the region. Women and children are trafficked not only for work in the sex industry, but also for sweatshop labour, for marriage and for street begging.

Many of the trafficking flows in South-East Asia are familiar to the international community such as the trafficking of women and children from Viet Nam to Cambodia and China, and the trafficking of Vietnamese and Cambodian women to Thailand and Singapore (see Table 2). For example, Chinese police rescued 123,000 women and children in a national six-month operation against human trafficking in 2000.

A new trend, however, is the trafficking of women from Eastern Europe to Asia. For example, in 2000, IOM assisted five Romanian and two Moldovan women who, under the belief that they would be dancers, were trafficked to Cambodia. Shortly thereafter, three women from Peru were assisted to return home from South Korea. These women were trafficked far from home, to places where their looks made them exotic and hence more profitable to the traffickers. According to information from our offices, these figures are just a very small indication of the numbers of Eastern European women trafficked to Asia, and this trend is likely to continue.

**Returns:** IOM administers several programmes of assisted return for victims of trafficking in South-East Asia. In Thailand, for example, IOM has returned:

- 235 women and children to Cambodia in 2000. This figure is up from 119 in 1999.
- 13 women to Myanmar and 8 to Viet Nam.

### South Asia

In South Asia the pattern of trafficking is different from that in South-East Asia. For example, South Asian women are trafficked to the Middle East and Gulf states, often for forced domestic labour. In an effort to curb exploitative practices, Bangladesh has banned the emigration of women as domestic maids.

TABLE 1

TRAFFICKING FLOWS FROM AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Origin countries	Destination countries
From Ghana	To Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands, Lebanon, Libya, USA
From Nigeria	To Italy, Belgium, Netherlands
From Ethiopia	To Middle East, Gulf states
From Mali	To Côte d’Ivoire, Nigeria (children), Saudi Arabia, Kuwait (domestic labour)

Source: IOM field missions

TABLE 2  
TRAFFICKING FLOWS WITHIN SOUTH-EAST ASIA

From	To	Type
Viet Nam (Northern regions)	China	Marriage
Viet Nam	Taiwan	Marriage
Viet Nam	Cambodia	Sex industry
Cambodia	Internal	Sex industry
Cambodia (N, NW)	Thailand (children and women)	Primarily begging, also sex industry and domestic labour
Cambodia	Taiwan, Singapore	Sex industry, domestic
Thailand	Internal	Sex industry

Source: IOM field missions

TABLE 3  
TRAFFICKING FLOWS IN SOUTH ASIA

From:	To	Type:	Scale:
Nepal	India	Sex industry	5,000-7,000 women and girls/year
Bangladesh	India	Sex industry	Of 500,000 prostitutes in India, it is estimated that 13500 are Bangladeshi.
Bangladesh	Pakistan	Sex industry	4500 women and children/year; 200,000 over 10 years.
Total Bangladeshis trafficked:	Middle East		200,000 women and children over last 20 years; 3397 children (1683 boys) in last 10 years.
Sri Lanka	Internal	Children: begging, labour, sex industry, child soldiers	Affects ca.100,000 children in Sri Lanka under age of 16.
Sri Lanka		Unclear; some sex industry, domestic labour	2,000-3,000 children/year

Source: IOM field missions

The trafficking of Bangladeshi children is also a significant problem. Over the last ten years, 3,397 children were trafficked from Bangladesh, of whom 1,683 were boys, mostly under ten years of age. Boys are trafficked to the Gulf states to act as camel jockeys – the lightest possible riders are sought for camel races.

In addition to trafficking from South Asia to the Middle East and Gulf states, trafficking also occurs within the region, generally from the poorest countries in the region, Bangladesh and Nepal, to Pakistan and India, primarily for work in the sex industry.

## LATIN AMERICA

In Latin America there is much less data on trafficking available than in other regions in which IOM is active. This does not, however, mean that trafficking is not a significant problem.

For example, in Colombia it is estimated that some ten women a day are trafficked out of the country, with ca. 500,000 women and children currently outside Colombia, trafficked either into sexual exploitation or forced labour. As the internal conflict in Colombia has

worsened, the pool of those who are potentially subject to trafficking has expanded greatly as more and more persons are seeking to leave the country at all costs.

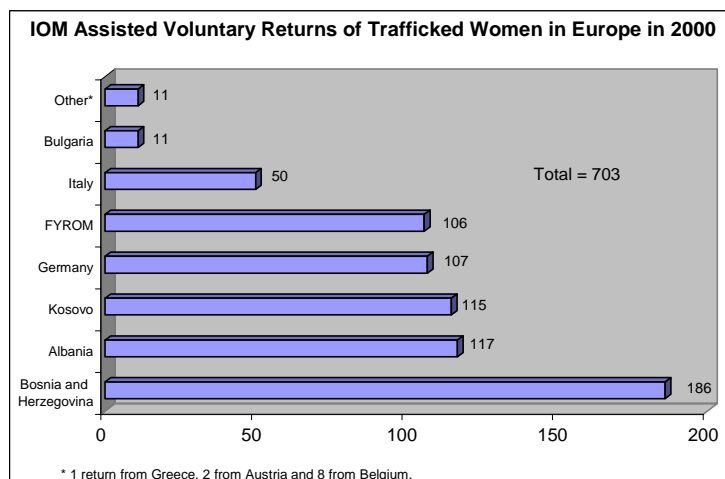
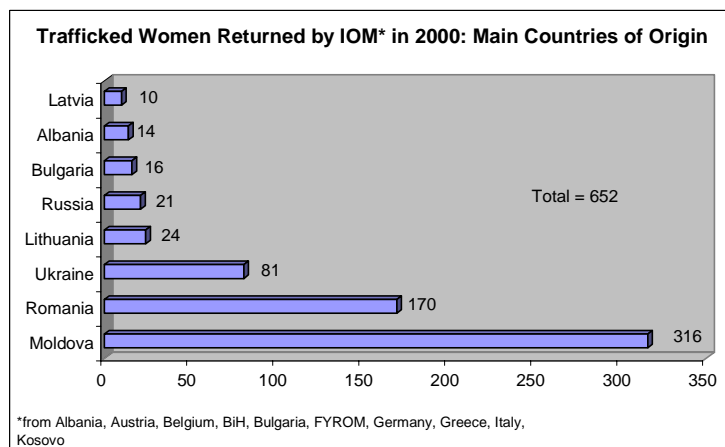
IOM is also increasingly aware that women are being trafficked from Latin America to Central America, the USA and South-East Asia. Recently, for example, IOM provided assistance through its Global Fund for Victims of Trafficking to women who had been trafficked from Peru to South Korea and from Ecuador to Honduras.

TABLE 4  
TRAFFICKING FLOWS: CENTRAL ASIA

From	To	Scale	Returns	Type	Recruitment
Kazakhstan (southern)	Either by charter flight or regular flight to UAE	For all of Kazakhstan: Extrapolating from one known case of 50 women trafficked from a city of 150,000: 5,000 women in 1999	All of Kazakhstan: In 1999, 25 from Greece, 21 from UAE, 16 from Turkey	Sex industry	Promises of jobs
Kazakhstan (northern)	By train to Moscow and with falsified Russian passports onward to Greece and other locations.			Sex industry	Promises of jobs
Kyrgyzstan	Within CIS (ca. 37%), Middle East, Turkey; Transit via Kazakhstan and Russia	4,000 (IOM/OSCE estimate)	Via Kazakhstan and Russia	Sex industry	
Tajikistan	Middle East, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan	At least 20 known cases in 2000			

Source: IOM field missions

FIGURE 1  
VOLUNTARY IOM-ASSISTED RETURNS OF TRAFFICKED WOMEN FROM THE BALKANS AND WESTERN EUROPE IN 2000



Source: IOM.

## EASTERN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

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For many years there have been numerous reports of women being trafficked from Central and Eastern Europe. A recent IOM study highlights that there is also considerable trafficking from the former Soviet republics of Central Asia.

A recent IOM research report on Kyrgyzstan suggests that of the 4,000 women who are estimated to have been trafficked in 1999 from Kyrgyzstan, about one-third were trafficked to or through other CIS countries and the rest were trafficked to the Middle East, China and Europe (see *TiM* No. 22).

From southern Kyrgyzstan, it is known that women are trafficked primarily to the United Arab Emirates, while from northern Kyrgyzstan, they are trafficked mainly to Russia and Kazakhstan and onward to Europe. From Kazakhstan, the main transit country for Kyrgyz trafficked women en route to the UAE, there are little hard data, yet estimates suggest that at least 5,000 women annually might be trafficked.

In Georgia, IOM's office has undertaken a study on irregular migration and trafficking. One of the preliminary findings of this study (see *TiM* No. 22) was that, of the 39,000 visas issued by the Turkish embassy and consulates, some 31,200 were issued to women. As there is a great deal of cross-border traffic with Turkey, including business deals, informal trade and consensual prostitution, it is unclear how many of these women might have been the victims of trafficking. Nonetheless, the very high percentage of women among the visa applicants is worthy of notice.

## FORMER SOVIET UNION: RUSSIA, UKRAINE, BALTICS

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In 1998, the Ukrainian Ministry of Interior estimated that 400,000 Ukrainian women had been trafficked in the past decade, although Ukrainian NGOs and researchers believe the number to be higher. In October 2000 alone, 185 Ukrainian women, nearly two-thirds of

whom (120) were in their mid-20s, were returned to Kyiv airport by authorities of other countries. These women were returned from Turkey, Israel and numerous European countries, mainly Germany, Italy, Greece and Switzerland.

In 2000, IOM assisted 81 trafficked Ukrainian women to return to Ukraine – 27 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, 9 from Kosovo, 18 from Germany, 11 from Bulgaria and 8 from Italy, while the NGO La Strada has assisted 44 persons to return in the last two years.

Over the past two years, the Russian Border Guard has intercepted 5,000 Russian women attempting to leave Russia with invalid documents. Their principal intended countries of destination were Turkey, Italy, Germany, Bulgaria and Finland. While these interceptions do not necessarily imply trafficking, Russian women are the third largest group of trafficked women assisted by IOM Bonn (Germany), following Lithuanians and Ukrainians. Fifteen Russian women were assisted to return to Russia in 2000, and 11 in 1999, from just four (of sixteen) states in Germany. In 2000, IOM also assisted 7 women to return from the Balkans to Russia.

In the Baltics, IOM's return data suggest that there is considerable trafficking from Lithuania. A quarter of the trafficked women assisted by IOM Bonn to return home in 2000 were from Lithuania.

Figure 1 shows that Moldovan and Romanian women make up the majority of trafficked women assisted to return from Western Europe and the Balkans, followed by Ukrainian women. These figures underline the inter-regional nature of trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe. Trafficking does not just occur from East to West, but also from North to South.

IOM assisted return statistics suggest that the pattern of trafficking to Western Europe is different. Neither Moldovans nor Romanians are found in significant numbers among the trafficked returned from Western European countries (see Figure 1). Only Ukraine is a significant sending country for both Western Europe and the Balkans.

## THE BALKANS AND CENTRAL EUROPE

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In Eastern and Central Europe and the Balkans, IOM has a number of assisted return programmes specifically for victims of trafficking; consequently, much better data is available. The return data below, even if not indicative of the absolute numbers trafficked, indicate the relative significance of various sending countries.

For the Balkans, Moldova, Romania and Ukraine are clearly the three most significant sending countries in terms of scale. IOM return data, as well as anecdotal reports, have confirmed this. Kosovo and Bosnia Herzegovina are primarily receiving countries, while Albania is primarily a country of origin. In Albania, the victims are becoming younger, and the numbers are increasing.

In FYR Macedonia, during just the last five months of 2000, 60 trafficking victims were assisted by IOM Skopje. In Romania, IOM Bucharest reported that, in 2000 alone, it had assisted 205 Romanian women returning to Romania, all of whom had been trafficked to the Balkans. They had been promised jobs as waitresses, but were forced into prostitution.

The conventional wisdom is that young, naïve women and girls, generally from very rural surroundings, are the most at-risk group. In this respect, it is very interesting to note that, of the 130 women assisted by IOM Pristina from February 2000 to February 2001, 93 were from urban areas or from the capital cities of their countries (80 were from Moldova, 25 Romania, 12 Bulgaria and 10 from Ukraine).

Another questionnaire administered by IOM Skopje to 56 trafficked women revealed similar results: 66 per cent were from either a big city or capital city. Of those assisted in Kosovo, nearly half (48) had been recruited into trafficking by a woman. Well over half (63) believed they were leaving their homes to take up well-paid employment and some 12 per cent were kidnapped. Some 79 per cent of the IOM Skopje group had been promised a well-paid job.

TABLE 5  
VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN BELGIUM (1999)

Origin	Number	Origin	Number
Nigeria	59	Bulgaria	15
China	51	Philippines	15
Albania	39	Poland	13
Thailand	22	Ecuador	12
Turkey	21	Yugoslavia	12
Romania	20	Morocco	11
Russia	18	Others	26

Source: [www.antiracisme.be/fr/cadre\\_fr.htm](http://www.antiracisme.be/fr/cadre_fr.htm),  
1999 annual report.

In Hungary, the available figures are based on information from Hungarian consulates abroad. In the first 11 months of 2000, eight Hungarian consulates had requested IOM assistance in helping 97 Hungarian trafficked women. From these figures, the widespread scale of trafficking in Hungarian women becomes evident. In 2000, 33 trafficked women were assisted in Mexico City, 32 in Madrid, 12 in Barcelona, 9 in Bern and 8 in Bonn, Germany.

## WESTERN EUROPE

In Western Europe the pattern of trafficking is different from that in Central and Eastern Europe with victims of trafficking coming from a much wider range of source countries. For example, Nigerian women are trafficked to Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands, Thai and Brazilian women have been trafficked to Great Britain, Ukrainian women to the Balkans and Germany, and smaller groups of women have been trafficked throughout Europe.

### INFORMATION EXCHANGE

This bulletin aims to improve the exchange of information on migrant trafficking among governments and international organizations. As such, we solicit information from readers on migrant trafficking – magnitude, new incidents, trends, policies – which would be appropriate for publication. Commentary or analysis is also welcome. Organizations that wish to be included in the Networking column should send in a resumé of their work and a contact address. Reproduction of the bulletin, in part or in its entirety, requires prior authorization by IOM. All queries and contributions should be addressed to:

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TABLE 6  
FEMALE VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING  
IN THE NETHERLANDS (1998)

Region of Origin	Number
Central and Eastern Europe	131
Africa	35
Latin America	24
Asia	15

Source: Foundation Against Trafficking in Women (STV)

In Italy, IOM Rome reports that of the estimated 20,000-30,000 irregular female migrants who are believed to enter the sex industry each year, 10-20 per cent (2000-6000) are believed to be trafficked.

In Greece, few data are maintained, yet one study showed that slightly over half of trafficked women are from Russia and Ukraine, with about one-third from the Balkans and just a few per cent from Asia and Africa.

In Belgium, of the 334 persons identified as victims of trafficking in one of the three assistance centres in 1999, the largest group were Nigerians. 20 per cent of victims were men. Table 5 shows the country of origin of victims of trafficking in Belgium.

During 1999 and the ten first months of 2000, IOM Brussels assisted 19 trafficked women to return to their home countries. Returns were organized to a wide range of countries including Nigeria, Ukraine, Thailand and the Philippines.

In the Netherlands, according to data from STV (Stichting tegen Vrouwenhandel – Foundation against Trafficking), there were 288 female victims of trafficking in 1999 and 205 in 1998. Of those, the majority were from Central and Eastern Europe (see Table 6).

In Germany, IOM Bonn assisted over 100 victims of trafficking in 2000, from just four states in Germany. Ninety-nine of 107 assisted victims came from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

## CONCLUSION

This brief review of data on the scale of and recent trends in trafficking demonstrates once again the paucity of reliable data on trafficking across the world. In the absence of such data IOM's counter-trafficking programmes provide an important source of current information on trafficking flows. These programmes clearly indicate, for example, some of the most important sending countries and receiving countries involved in trafficking.

**Trafficking in Migrants** bulletin is also available online at the following internet address:

[http://www.iom.int/iom/Publications/Trafficking\\_in\\_Migrants.htm](http://www.iom.int/iom/Publications/Trafficking_in_Migrants.htm)