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# AT WHAT COST

HUMAN TRAFFICKING |

| FORCED LABOR |

| CHILD LABOR

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## AT WHAT COST:

### Sex

The trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation is a booming, global industry. The industry's revenues were reported at \$51 billion in 2007—about twice as much as all tickets sales for Hollywood movies worldwide. As a source of trafficked women and girls, Moldova plays an important role in enabling this trade.

Why Moldova? Again, consider the sums involved. The owner of a trafficked sex worker in Central and Eastern Europe can expect to net roughly \$78,000. Move her to Western Europe, and her value nearly doubles, to \$156,000. These values represent incredible returns on investment when the average cost to a brothel of acquiring a Moldovan sex worker is only \$3,300. Initial costs to traffickers are much lower: the original sale price—a payment to an acquaintance to initially deceive the victim, for instance—can be as little as \$100.

The cost of acquisition is low in part because trafficked women are typically desperately poor to begin with. With an average income of \$1,470, Moldovans are the poorest people in Europe. Most trafficked women did not fare even this well: 80 percent of victims came from households with incomes less than \$16 per month; less than \$50 for 95 percent. With few economic opportunities at home, and now with the prosperous European Union just across the border, Moldovan women are eager to get abroad.

Traffickers prey on these desires. They rarely need to resort to outright kidnapping. It is far more common for an ad for a low-skill, high-wage, foreign job to be placed in the classifieds newspaper Makler. A girl who responds may be presented with a forged visa or convinced to travel on a tourist visa. She then gets in a car with the would-be employment agent, and is driven over the border. There, she is handed off to men who rape her, take her passport, and inform her that she must pay off the exorbitant debt she has just acquired in crossing the border. She is kept in check through violence to her and threats to her family at home. Once she manages to pay off her debt, she may then simply be re-sold and forced to pay off a new arbitrary debt. Or she may be offered a role in “happy trafficking”: she may be released in exchange for recruiting another victim.

This is just one mode of trafficking, albeit a common one for Moldovans. Trafficking victims can just as easily be forced into construction or agricultural work. Sex trafficking is more visible, because it is more sensational, and it is typically more profitable than other types of forced labor. It is so popular, in fact, that the growth of sex trafficking has the effect of pushing down prices for sexual services in destination countries. In Italy, for instance, prices have fallen by half: sex with a Moldovan prostitute can go for as little as 30 euros. The result of increased availability is growing cultural acceptance of prostitution, which further fuels the demand for trafficked women. Culture also plays a significant role in enabling the supply side of the sex trade. The anti-trafficking organization La Strada found that seven out of ten Moldovan women were subject to violence prior to being trafficked; most of this violence occurred within the family. Abuse undermines prevention