

PART XII

Poverty and Economic Boom

When rapid economic growth moves nations such as Russia and Brazil out of decades of comparative poverty, the inevitable dislocations change the patterns of human trafficking there. As a nation experiences economic development it becomes attractive to migrant workers from other nations and also draws nationals from poorer sections to wealthier ones. By 2020 Russia and Brazil, along with China and India, are expected to be among the world's six largest economies.

As rapid growth in the Russian economy brings constant increases in the cost of living, the average Russian struggles ever harder to make ends meet. The poverty rate continues to decline, but progress has been slow. Those who are economically marginalized still have incentives to migrate to wealthier areas in Russia or to other nations, and they remain vulnerable to exploitation and human rights abuses, including human trafficking. The large cities are also epicenters of trafficking homeless and orphaned children for prostitution, pornography, begging, and selling drugs or stolen goods. During such times of great economic change, the supply of potential victims seems unlimited. As a result, traffickers have no financial incentive to ensure victims' well-being or health.

In 2011 Brazil became the world's sixth-largest economy. The nation has vast natural resources and a growing middle class. Some experts believe that the growing middle class is helping improve the trafficking situation within Brazil, particularly by decreasing the number of child laborers. But income inequality remains high, and the pairing of poverty with a booming economy and

a need for inexpensive labor in the burgeoning agricultural sector creates a scenario for potential exploitation and human trafficking. Today Brazil leads the biofuel movement with sugarcane ethanol, and at least half of forced laborers in the country have been found on sugarcane plantations. The average life expectancy of sugarcane cutters—from the time they begin work—is 10 years. Anti-trafficking experts would be among the first to challenge the claim that sugarcane ethanol is a “clean” fuel.

CHAPTER 23

Russia

A woman came up to me at the train station. She offered me part-time work in Germany as a nanny. I said “yes.” When I got there, though, she took away my passport. Then she drove me to a bar on the edge of town.

—NATASHA, SEX-TRAFFICKING VICTIM

The depiction of young Russian women as sex slaves is sensationalized in movies and the media. A decade ago this image was not necessarily false, but recently the number of Russian citizens trafficked abroad appears to have significantly declined. One reason is probably the nation’s economic resilience. Like other nations, Russia was adversely affected by the 1998 and 2008 global economic crises. Yet it maintained consistent economic growth after each crisis, averaging 7 percent economic growth since 1998, 4.1 percent growth in 2010, and 4.8 percent GDP expansion in the third quarter of 2011 over the same quarter in 2010. While growth is projected to continue, Kaspar Richter, the World Bank’s country sector coordinator for economic policy in Russia, projects that the rate of growth will decline from 4.3 percent in 2011 to 3.5 percent in 2012, and stay at 3.6 percent in 2013 (Economy Watch, 2010; Trading Economics, 2011; International Business Times, 2011; World Bank in Russia, 2012). According to Jim O’Neill, chairman of asset management at Goldman Sachs, along with Brazil, India, and China, Russia will soon enter the top five world economies. O’Neill, who coined the acronym BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) to designate the four emerging economies, believes that by 2020 the four economies will be responsible for nearly 50 percent of the increase in global GDP (Inman, 2011; Goldman Sachs, 2011; Reuters, 2011; Polina, 2011). These boosts in economic growth have resulted in a need for affordable labor, making this source and transit nation also a destination for human