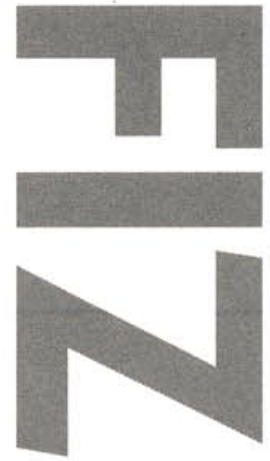


# news



Dear reader

We are glad to present to you the 5th FIZ Newsletter. The main focus is on women from Central and Eastern Europe migrating to Switzerland. They are an example, for all women – from the South and from the East – migrating to Europe who have limited possibilities to develop working and living perspectives. The restrictive Swiss residence and labour legislation hinders women from Central and Eastern Europe as well as women from Africa, Asia and Latin America from developing independent life perspectives.

FIZ has set up a documentation to illustrate the living conditions of migrants from Central and Eastern Europe in Switzerland. The bases for it was a survey and interviews with migrant women from Central and Eastern Europe, police authorities, owners of cabarets and agencies and representatives from women's organizations. You will find a summary of this survey in this newsletter.

Migrant women fulfil functions within the world market which are closely linked to their gender. They find work where there is a demand, in the reproductive, the emotional and the sexual sectors as maids, prostitutes, wivies etc. The Swiss legislation in fact fixes these functions, because women from Eastern Europe, as well as women from Africa, Asia and Latin America have only three options to migrate. Either they marry a Swiss man or they apply for a visa as a cabaret dancer (see Newsletter Nr.4) or they enter as a tourist with a visa, valid for three months.

It is FIZ's concern to promote, within the countries of origin, information and advice with regard the conditions in the target country. With this information migration should not be prevented because the freedom of movement is in our opinion a human right. But women who play with the idea of migrating should know which conditions they will encounter here. The project «La Strada» in Prague is fulfilling this purpose as well as offering counselling to concerned women. This Newsletter presents a portrait of this project.

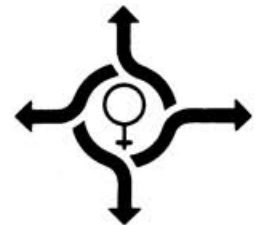
We hope you will find reading this article interesting and we look forward to your feedback.

FIZ International Network  
Doro Winkler and Maritza Le Breton

## **Documentation on Eastern Europe**

«Migration of women from Central and Eastern Europe to Switzerland - A documentation on the situation of cabaret dancers, prostitutes, maids and marriage migrants in the Zurich agglomeration».

This documentation in German can be ordered from FIZ for Fr. 15.- plus postage.



**FIZ**

Information

center for

women from

Asia, Africa and

Latin America

# The swiss borders are *for services, capital,*

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Women from Central and Eastern Europe associate the hope of migration to earning within a short time as much money as possible in order to provide for themselves and for their families a secure future in their country of origin. But in Switzerland their experience is - similar to that of women from Africa, Asia and Latin America - a big disillusionment.

Until the so called break down of the Eastern Block, women from Central and Eastern European countries had relatively secure life conditions even if they were modest. Access to work, free education and health care were matters of course. But since 1989 these conditions have changed radically as the former Socialist countries are in a process of transformation.<sup>1</sup> This is to be seen in the economic disintegration and the transformation from a socialist planned economy to a capitalist market economy.

Women are especially affected by radical changes in society. Most of them try to cope with the crisis in their own country with lots of energy, initiative and improvisation. Others look for the answer through migration.

1 The former socialist states cannot be seen as a homogenous block, neither before nor after the change. There are substantial differences in their economic structures and development as well as in their historical and cultural background and consequently for the living conditions of the people.

Women from Central and Eastern Europe who migrate to Switzerland experience a big disappointment. It is true that most of them have a good education (teachers, engineers, nurses, medical doctors or cooks). However the Swiss immigration legislation reduces women to their so called reproductive functions. So only three options are open for women from Eastern Europe as well as from Africa, Asia or Latin America to enter Switzerland: As a cabaret dancer, as tourist or by marrying a Swiss or a foreigner with permanent residence documents. All three options imply insecure status of residence and dependency on the husband or the employer.

## Switzerland's limits

Our survey and interviews indicate that insufficient or incorrect information has influenced the concept Eastern European women have of Switzerland before entering it. In most cases reliable sources of information are missing. Most of the women had extremely positive images of Switzerland. Images like «a beautiful, rich country with a high standard of living and happy open people» were predominant. For almost all the women it is a rude

awakening when they realize how limited their possibilities are in Switzerland. One woman says: «I had imagined Switzerland much more social.» Another one thought: «There is no place for me in this paradise».

## Cabaret dancers

As at the end of April 1998 a total of 1819 cabaret dancers were working with a short term permit L in Switzerland. This amount is made up of 537 women from the Caribbean and Latin America, 203 women from Africa and the Arabic countries, 73 women from Asia and 62 from Western European countries. More than half of the dancers – namely 944 women – came from Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>2</sup>

The ways in which Eastern European women came to Switzerland were very different. This goes from their own initiative – through information from friends or acquaintances – to being recruited and placed through professional agents. Most of the women know before their arrival that they will work as dancers, but they do not know what the cabaret conditions will be. So it is not possible for them to know, that for them their function as cabaret dancers in Switzerland is so intrinsically linked to the consumption of alcohol and with prostitution. In this context a woman reports: «I have to perform completely different tasks than I agreed to in the contract. In reality I have to animate clients to buy me champagne, so

2 Compare the Central Register of the BFA, August 1990, April 1998

# open information and products but not for people...

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I have to sell myself. If I do not sell enough I do not have my contract renewed for the next month. I have to make a turnover of more or less 10'000 Francs per month in order to get the provisional commission of 5% on that amount. If I only reach 6'000 or 7'000 Francs I do not get any commission or a renewed contract. The dancing is unimportant and acts only as an alibi in order to procure the Cabaret with a permit.»

Although prostitution is not allowed for women with a dancer's permit many cabaret owner's promote it. Many women see themselves forced into prostitution because they do not earn enough with dancing and the turnover commission of the champaign selling to support their families back home. Half of the dancers' salary is deducted before she gets it, for placement agents' fees, (inflated) room rents, social service contributions, taxes etc.

## Marriage immigrants

There are many different ways how Eastern European women and Swiss men become married: Tourism, sex tourism, couples who know each other through their work, cabaret dancers working in Switzerland who marry and marriages arranged through marriage brokerages. The number of marriages between Eastern European women and Swiss men are increasing. In 1990 only 28 marriages between women from the former Soviet Union and Swiss were registered, whereas in 1996 the number increased to 296.

The living and working conditions of Eastern European women married in Switzerland are very different. The interviews showed that many women endure

insupportable conditions in their marriage. Some of them are not allowed to take language courses, to work or even to make social contact with others. An Hungarian woman summarizes her experiences in the following way: «I knew my Swiss husband in Budapest. Then I came to Switzerland for the first time as a tourist. (...) Very soon I realized, that I was forced to marry in order to be able to start anything in Switzerland. (...) The more my creativity developed in this time, me becoming more independent and building up my own circle of friends and acquaintances, the more my husband criticized me. He tried to manipulate me and talked me into believing that I am doing everything wrong, being a young stupid girl. My personality was not really of interest to him, he did not take notice of me. He had the concept of a nice, caring, small wife, who embellishes his life with her Hungarian mentality and helps him to resolve his financial problems....».

## Illegalized women

The majority of women without a residence permit in Switzerland enter with a tourist visa which is valid for three months. They work in private houses as housekeepers or as Au Pair or in massage parlour and sex clubs. Men who make a profit from these women are pimps who have a total control over them as the women are working under illegal status.

According to information provided by the Zurich Vice Squad, the number of Eastern European women without a residence permit – namely illegalized women – have radically increased in Zurich since 1994. During 1994 in the City of Zurich

alone 51 had been arrested in police raids and controls, 18 of them Eastern European women. Since 1996 the number has increased to 440, more than a third of them Eastern European women. In most cases these women are expelled from the country within 48 hours. Additionally they are penalized with the imposition of a ban to re-enter Switzerland for three to five years.

The repressive measures of the judiciary and of the police are directed against the women and not against the men behind, the agents and pimps. Women who are willing to give evidence should be protected so that they can testify against women traffickers without fearing for their life and should be protected from being expelled. This would demand measures which explicitly protect the women concerned and not the women traffickers and perpetrators. One such measure would be the introduction of witness protection programmes.

# A project of prevention *against the trafficking of women* in Prague

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The Czech Republic – also called the «Heart of Europe» – in terms of women trafficking, is a country of origin, a transit country and also a target country. This represents an enormous challenge for «La Strada», an non profit organisation working in the field of prevention and counselling.

After the so called fall of the iron curtain Central and Eastern European countries developed with the lucrative Western European countries, the trafficking of women. In Germany more than 80% of the victims of traffic in human beings are people from Central and Eastern European countries.<sup>1</sup>

The Czech Republic has become a central place for sex tourism and the trafficking of women, with its street and club prostitution on the border areas of Germany and Austria. Here there are not only numerous women recruited for further placing and selling in Western Europe, but this border areas are becoming more and more attractive for women traffickers to contract women from Ukraine, Bulgaria, Russia and other Eastern European countries.

In 1995, to put a stop to this development different women's organizations from the Czech Republic, Poland and the Netherlands formed the network «La Strada – prevention of traffic in women in Central and Eastern Europe». Its objective was to built up structures of support in the

countries of origin for the returning women after having been expelled. Another goal was to provide information on working migration conditions to young girls and women and to develop lobby and advocacy work.

With these preventions programmes «La Strada» spreads information in and to schools, universities, social institutions etc. on the risks and opportunities of working migration and about working as prostitutes. A brochure is distributed by street workers within the Czech border zone to Germany, informing prostitutes about safe working methods and legal conditions. Additionally «La Strada» trains multipliers for prevention work, extending the reach of the information into the rural areas of Boehmen and Maehren.

A broad range of services are offered by «La Strada» for women having been trafficked to Western Europe and returning to their home countries. This service includes anonymous accomodation, legal, pychological and medical counselling. The biggest problem being the very limited availability of adequate accomodation and women shelters in the Czech Republic.

Structural violence against women and girls finds a high tolerance and little legal prosecution in the Czech Republic. One



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of «La Strada's» main tasks is to lobby and to translate this deplorable state of affairs into a political language in order to address the Czech Government.

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La Strada Prague

## **Masthead**

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics of the BKA: M.Weohner: Die Zuhälter drohen mit «russischem Roulette», Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 11th February 1998