

# ITALY: Sicilian police charge five men over trafficking of women in Ragusa

## *Romanian men taken into custody after raids targeting criminal exploitation and forced prostitution on farms*

The Guardian (07.06.2018) – <https://bit.ly/2kVuswg> – Sicilian police have charged five Romanian men with human trafficking after a series of police raids targeted the criminal exploitation and forced prostitution of workers in farms across the Ragusa region.

Police said the arrests have exposed an organised inter-EU human trafficking operation between Romania and Sicily that is forcing men and women to live in conditions of modern slavery in one of Italy's largest vegetable producing regions.

The arrests follow an investigation by the Observer last year into the widespread forced labour and sexual exploitation of Romanian women employed as seasonal farm workers in Ragusa.

After a series of raids on farms across the region, Antonino Ciavola, chief of police in Ragusa, said he was shocked by the conditions in which dozens of workers – including a number of Romanian women – were being forced to live and work.

Ciavola said: "This is a first for Italy. We found that women are being recruited in Romania and promised good job

opportunities in Sicily. But they all ended up being slaves''.

Police said they found women living in dilapidated houses who were given rotten food to eat, beaten, made to work without pay and forced into prostitution with locals. A number of children were with them. If they refused to work or tried to leave they faced extreme violence.

"It's hard to imagine that a human being is capable of doing this to another," said Ciavola. .

The five men arrested were charged with human trafficking, labour exploitation and exploitation of prostitution.

"We have been surveilling these men since last year, for about seven months. We wiretapped their conversations, we were assisted by some victims who were brave enough to collaborate. [During the course of the investigation] we discovered a world where men and women are treated like animals."

In March last year, the Observer revealed that up to 5,000 Romanian women working on farms in Ragusa were facing conditions of forced labour and severe labour exploitation. The women said in interviews that they had been subject to routine sexual assault and forced to work 12-hour days in extreme heat with no water. They also complained of non-payment of wages and being forced to live in degrading and unsanitary conditions in isolated outbuildings.

Ciavola credited the Observer investigation with kick-starting police inquiries into the abuse of Romanian women in Sicily. He said that police in Sicily have arrested more than 15 men and investigated a further 40 over the past 12 months as they step up their attempts to tackle widespread criminal exploitation on the island.

“I want to publicly thank the Guardian,” he said. “This operation is the result of your investigation”.

“We want to stop this,” Ciavola added. “We want to end the exploitation. We need to free these women”.

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# MEXICO: Study finds sex trafficking and child marriages linked

By Sebastien Malo

Reuters (11.05.2017) – <http://tmsnrt.rs/2q8HXJH> – Girls being trafficked for sex in northern Mexico often have been forced into exploitation as under-age child brides by their husbands, a study showed on Thursday.

Three out of four girls trafficked in the region were married at a young age, mostly before age 16, according to Mexican and U.S. researchers in a yet-unpublished study.

Human trafficking is believed to be the fastest-growing criminal industry in Mexico, and three-quarters of its victims are sexually exploited women and girls, according to Women United Against Trafficking, an activist group.

Under a 2012 anti-trafficking law, those convicted of the crime can spend up to 30 years in prison.

Nevertheless, nearly 380,000 people are believed to be enslaved in Mexico, according to the 2016 Global Slavery Index published by rights group Walk Free Foundation.

The researchers interviewed 603 women working in the sex industry in the Mexican cities of Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez, both along the border with the United States.

Most said they had been trafficked as under-age brides, often by their husbands, said Jay Silverman, the study's lead author and a professor of medicine at the University of California, San Diego.

In about half the cases, the brides were pregnant, so

healthcare workers could play a critical role in thwarting sex trafficking, the researchers said.

“Within being provided pregnancy-related care, there’s the opportunity of interviewing that girl to understand her situation,” Silverman told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

“We can support and assist those girls to reduce the likelihood that they will become trafficked,” he said.

Under a 2014 law, the minimum age for marriage in Mexico is 18 but girls can marry at age 14 and boys at age 16 with parental consent.

The researchers include members of the United States-Mexico Border Health Commission, a joint effort launched in 2000 by the two nations’ governments to improve health and quality of life along the border.

They also came from Mexican economic institutions, and one was a medical doctor.

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# **IRELAND: International human rights group applauds Ireland for law targeting buyers of sex**

## ***Survivors of prostitution and sex trafficking lead groundbreaking campaign***

Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (15.02.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2lszkdo> – The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) commends the Republic of Ireland for the historic passage of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill, which decriminalizes prostituted people and penalizes the purchase of sex. After years of intense efforts, the bill passed Ireland's lower house, Dáil Éireann, on Feb. 7 and was approved in the upper house, Seanad Éireann, on Feb. 14.

The new Irish law will help efforts to end demand by holding sex buyers accountable and will also ensure that prostituted individuals and survivors can access comprehensive support services. In addition, it strengthens national laws against sexual grooming, child pornography and sexual harassment in the Republic of Ireland.

Rachel Moran, founder and executive director of SPACE International (Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment), was a key Irish abolitionist activist who advocated for the law as part of the Turn Off the Red Light

campaign, a coalition of direct service providers, survivor-led groups, women's rights organizations, labor unions, medical providers and other groups in Ireland.

"It's been six years almost to the day since I first spoke publicly in Dublin about the harm and damage of prostitution and the need for our government to do something about it," said Moran, also the author of "Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution." "With great relief, our government has formally responded to the Turn Off the Red Light campaign and voted overwhelmingly to criminalize the demand for paid sexual access to human beings. Ireland is now a hostile territory for pimps and traffickers, and a place where men can no longer legally use women's desperation to buy their way inside our bodies. This is a historic day that sends a message of hope."

The Republic of Ireland follows the example of Sweden, the first country to legally recognize prostitution as a form of violence and discrimination against women in 1999. Norway, Iceland, Canada (with exceptions), Northern Ireland and, most recently, France have also enacted demand-focused, abolitionist laws to combat the multi-billion dollar sex trade and its economic engine, sex trafficking. This legal framework is known as the Swedish or Nordic model.

In enacting the new law, the Irish government upholds its international obligations under the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol). Respectively, these international conventions call on state parties to enact national legislation and policies that address the exploitation of prostitution of others and

the demand that fosters the sex trade and sex trafficking, among other human rights violations.

“Passage of the Irish law is a testament to the survivors of prostitution and sex trafficking who tell us with immense courage about the unspeakable horrors they’ve endured at the hands of sex buyers, traffickers and pimps,” said Taina Bien-Aimé, executive director of CATW. “This victory belongs to them. Millions, mostly women and girls, continue to be exploited in the sex trade worldwide with unacceptable impunity, but today we applaud Ireland for honoring the tireless campaigners and for showcasing its vision of human rights and equality for all.”

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) is one of the oldest non-governmental organizations working to end human trafficking and the commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of women and girls worldwide. CATW engages in advocacy, education and prevention programs, and services for victims of trafficking and CSE in Asia-Pacific, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

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# **NIGERIA – ITALY: Number of Nigerian women trafficked to Italy for sex almost doubled in 2016**

*Life of forced prostitution awaits majority of the 11,009 Nigerian women who arrived on Italy's shores last year, says International Organisation for Migration*

By Anne Kelly

The Guardian (12.01.2017) – <http://bit.ly/2kVhS1W> – The number of Nigerian women travelling by boat from Libya to Italy almost doubled last year, with the vast majority of new arrivals victims of sex trafficking and exploitation, according to the International Organisation for Migration.

The IOM believes approximately 80% of the 11,009 Nigerian women registered at landing points in Sicily in 2016 were trafficked, and will go on to live a life of forced prostitution in Italy and other countries in Europe.

The figure is almost double that of 2015, when 5,600 women were registered by the IOM. The 2016 figures represent an almost eightfold increase from 2014, when 1,450 Nigerian women were registered at landing points in Sicily.

“We have seen a huge increase in the number of Nigerian women arriving last year,” said Carlotta Santarossa, a counter-trafficking project manager for the IOM.

“According to our indicators we believe the majority of Nigerian women who are arriving into Italy are victims of trafficking and are likely to end up exploited in Italy or other European countries. In Italy the numbers are too high to provide all of them with the services they need.”

The IOM said the increase reflected a dramatic rise in the overall numbers of Nigerian men, women and children being registered at landing points in Italy. According to the agency’s latest figures, 37,500 of the 180,000 migrants arriving in Italy by sea last year were Nigerian, the first time they have eclipsed Eritreans as the largest national group. The total number for 2015 was 22,000. About 3,000 of the 37,000 Nigerian migrants were unaccompanied minors.

Alberto Mossino, director of Piam Onlus, an anti-trafficking NGO working with Nigerian migrants, said the increase in Nigerians arriving by sea is indicative of the power of the highly organised trafficking gangs operating alongside Libyan militias to control migrant flows from north Africa.

“Before, migrants could arrive alone in Libya and make their way by boat to Europe,” he said. “Now, it is too dangerous: there is civil war and it is only the Nigerian and Eritrean trafficking gangs who are able to transport large numbers of people through the country, where militias are controlling the borders and ports.

“These are not smuggling gangs, their intention is to exploit and profit from the migrants they are transporting along the way, and women are the most lucrative cargo.”

According to surveys conducted by the IOM at landing points last year, more than 70% of migrants travelling overland through north Africa to Europe showed indications of human trafficking, organ trafficking and exploitation along the way.

Among those questioned, 49% reported having being held in a location against their will, often for ransom. The majority of the cases occurred in Libya.

“Libya is a black hole at present, from a humanitarian point of view – all migrants arriving from Libya have faced violence and human rights violations,” said Flavio Di Giacomo, a spokesperson for the IOM in Italy.

Mossino said existing anti-trafficking services were at gridlock, with the Italian government providing only 1,600 places for victims of trafficking at specialist shelters.

“If there are 11,000 women arriving in one year, there is simply no way of providing them with any help or security,” he said. “There is nothing we can do to help them.”

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## **USA: Human Trafficking Intervention Court has helped many prostitutes get off the streets**

WUNRN (16.11.2016) – A New York State approach of treating women – accused of prostitution-related offences – as the victims of trafficking has caused consternation as well as praise. In October, I spent a day in the Queens Human Trafficking Intervention Court (HTIC), founded in 2004, and used as a model for a statewide 11-court program which began nine years later.

So far, over 3,000 defendants have passed through their doors. The concept behind the HTIC is to help women caught up in the sex trade, to recover from their experiences, and to exit prostitution. A defendant can be referred to drug treatment or immigrant legal services, as well as being offered general support and counselling. The HTIC is partnered with a large network of counsellors and court advocates, including two that work with the Asian women that make up the majority of the defendants in the Queens courtroom.

Laws on prostitution in the US unfavorably target those selling, rather than buying sex. A woman can be arrested on a prostitution-related charge whether or not she has been seen soliciting sex for money. Police have the right to arrest someone for waving at men, being seen in an area known for prostitution, or, until recently, carrying condoms.

Friday is the busiest day of the week for the HTIC. I am in the Queens court, observing cases and speaking with court officials, lawyers and defendants. None of the women wanted to go on record, but all were both critical of being treated as criminals, but grateful that the court at least provided support and assistance with the multitude of problems women in the sex trade face.

The Queens court piloted the HTIC approach when Judge Fernando M Camacho became dismayed at seeing the same teenage girls reappearing in his court for prostitution. The young women would be fined, and were forced to sell sex to pay the fine. Camacho wanted to break the cycle by offering them alternatives to a criminal record or jail.

The majority of the defendants in court, the day I observed, were either Latin American, and older, undocumented Chinese or other east Asian immigrants. According to statistics from the court office, Asian women make up 40% of all defendants.

Service providers available during the court mandated

programmes offer yoga classes, art therapy or group therapy. Social workers help clients sort issues with immigration, housing, or child care.

When the sessions are completed, the judge then grants an adjournment in contemplation of dismissal of the charges. If the defendant is not arrested for up to six months, the record will be sealed. Records for 2013-14 show that her court has issued adjournments in more than half of all cases heard. There is no onus on the woman to self-identify as a trafficking victim or to name, or assist, with a prosecution of a pimp or other third party exploiter.

One woman has come to court to hear her criminal record for prostitution from 1990 expunged. The judge congratulates her, and her friends clap. The atmosphere is, compared to any other court room I have been in, friendly and relaxed.

The HTIC system has its critics, in the main, campaigners for blanket decriminalisation of the sex trade. NYC based writer and artist Molly Crabapple, wrote in Vice that, "To the courts, anyone who's been arrested for sex work is raw material, incapable of making his or her own choices," and described those of us who consider prostitution to be abuse as, "pious, middle-class feminis[ts], devoted to the moral uplift of the poor. By ministering to prostitutes, middle-class women got both respectable jobs and the frisson of proximity to vice."

Dorchen Leidholdt is director of the Centre of Battered Women's Legal Services at Sanctuary for Families, one of the 140 organisations that makes up the New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition (NYATC). Leidholdt, is, like all those I spoke to during my observations, against the criminalisation of women for prostitution offences.

Prior to the foundation of the HTIC, the NYATC had been advocating for ambitious legislation that would strengthen New

York's anti trafficking laws, by strengthening penalties against perpetrators, traffickers, pimps, and buyers, as well as measures that would help empower victims of trafficking.

"[The creation of the HITC] was about ending the victimisation and re-victimisation of people in prostitution by the criminal justice system," Leidholdt told me when we met in a Manhattan cafe. "We vehemently oppose the arrest of people in prostitution and holding to account their abusers and exploiters accountable."

The court system is powerless to stop the arrest of people for prostitution, but the NYATC is working hard to change that, and doing an enormous amount of advocacy to stop the arrests. The organisation recently submitted a White Paper to the new police commissioner, which spells out the fact that arresting the women for prostitution is re-victimising them and is often strengthening the power of their exploiters, both pimps and buyers.

"With the HTIC, it's often really the first time that anyone in our justice system has treated someone arrested for prostitution with respect, has provided assistance, has listened and has offered a way out," says Leidholdt.

The definition of sex trafficking in US federal law equates trafficking and pimping, as it describes the activities that pimps engage in. There is no requirement of force, fraud or coercion.

"We're not saying all prostitution is trafficking," says Leidholdt, "we're acknowledging that some people, a very tiny percentage, may make an affirmative choice, but usually the options are very constrained. Prostitution is invariably a condition of profound gender oppression that is deeply harmful to people in prostitution."

I met Lori Cohen, director of the anti-trafficking initiative at Sanctuary for Families (SFF), in her busy office next door

to the court, and asked how SFF became involved with the HTIC. "Sanctuary was seeing a number of domestic violence victims who were also being sold for sex," said Cohen, "but the clients didn't really have the vocabulary to self-identify as trafficking survivors."

A number of SFF's clients are Mexican women who are sold by pimps for around \$30 for 15 minutes. For the pimps to make money they are sold to, on average 12-16 sex buyers per day.

"In one case I had a client who had 70 clients in a 24 hour period. So intensely painful, very brutal, very dangerous, a number of the men were drunk," said Cohen, "they would try to strangle the women, they were very violent."

Whilst the women that go through the HTIC should not be in court in the first place, at least under this system they have a chance to be heard, and for their charges to be dismissed if they take advantage of the support on offer.

"We have clients where their convictions have been vacated who feel like [the HTIC] has given them back their life," said Cohen. "Now that they can apply for a job and get housing, they could have a chance in life no-one has ever offered them before."

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