

## **Sex Work and State Regulations in North Cyprus**

By

Leopoldo Rodríguez<sup>a</sup>  
Fatma Güven-Lisaniler<sup>b</sup>  
Sevin Uđural<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Economics Department, Portland State University  
<sup>b</sup>Economics Department, Eastern Mediterranean University

**DRAFT**

**Please do not quote or distribute without permission.**

We would very much appreciate comments and suggestions. Please contact us at:

[leopoldo@pdx.edu](mailto:leopoldo@pdx.edu)  
[fatma.guven@emu.edu.tr](mailto:fatma.guven@emu.edu.tr)  
[sevin.ugural@emu.edu.tr](mailto:sevin.ugural@emu.edu.tr)

# Sex Work and State Regulations in North Cyprus

By Leopoldo Rodríguez, Fatma Güven-Lisaniler and Sevin Uđural

## I. Introduction

North Cyprus provides an ideal location for the study of sex work and immigrant sex workers because its small size and existing government regulations facilitate the collection of data.<sup>1</sup> Geographical location and close ties to Turkey -destination of a large contingent of Eastern European sex workers- has resulted in a steady flow of sex workers from the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European nations over the last decade. The prevalence of Slavic women in the industry is so pervasive that sex workers in North Cyprus and Turkey are commonly referred to as "Natashas." The case of North Cyprus is particularly interesting because legislation has been recently enacted to regulate nightclubs, altering the working conditions and profitability of the industry with direct consequences on immigrant sex workers.

This paper presents the preliminary results of an ongoing study of the sex industry in North Cyprus. The study relies on government data, regulations, interviews with a club owner and a legislator, and surveys of 16 sex workers at two nightclubs. Government data was collected from several sources including the Department of Labor, the Immigration Office and the Tax Office. Agencies differed in the amount of access that they provided us to their data. The most important source of government data was the Civil Section of the Immigration Office, where we enjoyed unrestricted access to all the files of sex workers admitted with a working permit. Unfortunately, the office does not have a computer to keep and update their files, so we had to enter the data manually into a spreadsheet and were only able to do so for the years 2000 and 2001. Data from one government source did not always coincide with data from another government source, so we used our judgment in selecting the data that appears most reliable. With time we hope to collect data from a wider sample of establishments and their workers and plan to conduct a survey of clients.

## II. The Nightclubs

Our study focuses on sex work at so-called "nightclubs." These establishments typically employ foreign sex workers within the existing legal framework, seeking work permits and abiding to regulations that provide a decade of data and documentation. Nightclubs are establishments licensed to serve alcohol and employ the services of "konsomatrices,"<sup>2</sup> defined by the law as "women who eat and drink with clients at a nightclub and make an income out of this."(Law of Nightclubs, 2000:24) Although it is illegal for konsomatrices to engage in prostitution, they routinely engage in sex acts for

---

<sup>1</sup> North Cyprus refers to the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), a small nation that has declared itself independent from what formerly was the Republic of Cyprus (aka South Cyprus). Only Turkey recognizes the TRNC, but its government has *defacto* control over the territory with the support of the Turkish Armed Forces.

<sup>2</sup> Konsomatris apparently originates in the word *consommatrices* which means consumption in French.

money, both in the nightclub premises and outside, a well-known secret that, as we will see below, does not escape the police or legislators.

In April of 2001, there were 27 nightclubs and 16 pubs employing foreign konsomatrices in North Cyprus, employing a total of 292 registered foreign sex workers. (Labor Office, 2001) Legal incentives exist for their location outside urban areas, so they tend to cluster along highways just outside large towns. The majority of nightclubs are located around Lefko<sup>o</sup>a, where they are close to the majority of mid and high-income customers and a short drive from casinos in Girne.

**Table 1**  
**Establishments and Konsomatrices by District (April 2001)**

<b>District</b>	<b>Nightclubs</b>	<b>Pubs</b>	<b>Konsomatrices</b>
Lefko <sup>o</sup> a	10	14	134
Gazimađusa	6	-	57
Güzelyurt	6	2	55
Girne	3	-	31
Ýskele	2	-	15

When we began our study, we expected that the presence of a large contingent of Turkish troops was the driving force behind the existence of numerous nightclubs in the outskirts of every major town. We rapidly found out that the sex industry in North Cyprus is divided into at least two segments. Nightclubs and some pubs provide services for high and medium income customers including casino tourists and local men, while shady *kahvehanes* (traditional coffee houses reserved for men) and registered bordellos in downtown Lefko<sup>o</sup>a specialize in sex work for soldiers and other low income patrons.<sup>3</sup>

The clientele of nightclubs largely depends on location, but is primarily composed of young and middle-aged Turkish Cypriots and middle-aged Turkish casino tourists. Pre-marital sex among Turkish Cypriot women is strongly condemned, while in young men it is either condoned or openly encouraged, resulting in a significant demand for sexual services by young men between 18 and 25 years old. Middle-aged married men apparently constitute a significant proportion of clients. Although it is impossible to confirm, current legislation designed to prevent the marriage of konsomatrices to local men is widely perceived to be an effort to preserve local families. A club owner estimates that before the banking crisis that hit North Cyprus in 1999, approximately 40% of clients were of Turkish nationality and 60% were Turkish Cypriot. After the crisis, business slowed down by 60%, and the share of Turkish clients increased to roughly 80%, making the clubs increasingly reliant on casino tourists. (Club owner interview, 2001) Non-Turkish customers (meaning neither Turkish nor Turkish Cypriots) are rare; primarily

---

<sup>3</sup> Other establishments also act as fronts for sexual services. In Gazimađusa there is at least one "massage parlor" that is known to conceal prostitution. These establishments are not subject to the laws governing "nightclubs" and therefore do not have authorization to sponsor work permits for foreign konsomatrices. However, they can sponsor work permits for masseuses. Two Turkish masseuses were registered to work at said establishment. Their permits are for one year with no renewal waiting period and they were not subject to the stringent health controls required of konsomatrices.

composed of members of the United Nations Peace Keeping Forces based in North Cyprus. It must be pointed out that not all customers attend nightclubs seeking prostitution services. Some attend to drink with friends and watch or dance with konsomatrices.

The legal revenue of the nightclubs is primarily from alcohol sales, but some also charge an entrance fee and offer table dances to boost their legal receipts. The legitimate, above-the-table job of konsomatrices is to consume alcoholic beverages purchased by club patrons and to dance with them. When invited for a drink, a konsomatris will leave the couch where she sits with her coworkers and will sit at the table of the patron while the drink lasts. Konsomatris and patron may engage in rudimentary conversation and dance a few songs. The bulk of the legal revenue for a nightclub is designed to be the drinks purchased for the konsomatrices. The establishments have two price lists, one for customers and one for drinks purchased by the customers for the konsomatrices. Both lists have prices higher than would be found in comparable establishments. The client prices that we observed were three times higher than in regular bars and restaurants, while konsomatrices' drinks prices were double those of patron prices. In some nightclubs there is a small cover charge to enter the establishment.

Needless to say, undeclared, illegal proceeds from the prostitution of konsomatrices are an important source of revenue for the owners of nightclubs. According to our estimates, in the Summer of 2001 a nightclub with 10 konsomatrices could earn somewhere around US\$200 net from prostitution in one hour during peak business hours, down from somewhere around US\$350 before the devaluation of the Turkish Lira in February 2001. Actual earnings depend on the number of konsomatrices and the pace of business on a particular evening. Nightclubs actually hire their konsomatrices to clients for one hour, the evening (what they call a night out) or the day. The price of sexual services varies only slightly from one nightclub to another and tends to be lowest in pubs. A particularly lucrative practice in the industry is the hiring of konsomatrices for the entire evening to casino-hotels. These casinos in turn offer their customers "package" deals where gambling and prostitution are mixed.<sup>4</sup>

### **III. The Regulations**

The early 1990s witnessed a large inflow of foreign sex workers to North Cyprus, fueled by a booming nightclub industry and the rapid growth in supply of sex workers that followed the fall of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Apparently the business proved to be extremely profitable, luring people from diverse backgrounds to open new establishments and many foreign women to seek employment in North Cyprus.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Casino tourism constitutes an important source of income for North Cyprus. Gamblers come primarily from Turkey, where gambling is illegal.

<sup>5</sup> In 1995, 602 work permits for foreign (non-Turkish) konsomatrices were issued. Although Turkish citizens are required to register if they wish to work in North Cyprus, since 1993 many enter the island with an ID card and opt to work without legal registration. Consequently, the number of Turkish citizens registered as konsomatrices has dropped from 23 in 1995, to 7 in 2000. (Immigration Office, 2001a)

However, it was well known by the government that these establishments had earnings far above the revenues from legal operations such as alcohol sales and entrance fees. As the number of foreign sex workers increased, legislation was implemented granting the immigration office authority over special work permits required from foreign female workers seeking employment in a nightclub. The immigration office established guidelines that did not apply to foreign workers in other areas of employment, or even to men in the same business. Although prostitution was explicitly forbidden, the immigration office required foreign women seeking a work permit as a konsomatris in a nightclub or barmaid in a pub to undergo physical check-ups for transmittable diseases upon arrival. Detection of a transmittable disease was cause for immediate deportation.

The industry operated and prospered under the shelter of administrative rules dictated and administered by the immigration office. In early 1999, however, a nightclub owner applied to the immigration office for new work permits intending to increase the number of konsomatrices working in his establishment. The immigration office denied an increase in the number of work permits for the establishment, leading to a lawsuit by the nightclub owner against the government. The government responded by closing all nightclubs, which led to a strong public reaction including a march on the Parliament organized by club owners. At the time no legislation existed establishing clear regulations for the industry, leaving nightclubs and employees at the mercy of administrative rules that could be arbitrarily changed. The club owners sought legislation to clarify the legal status of the industry. The legislators saw an opportunity to establish a legal framework where the state could extract revenue while prostitution at nightclubs remained illegal. As we shall see below, the interests and concerns of sex workers were far from the minds of the legislators when the law was drafted. The guiding principle of the legislation appears to be the collections of tax revenue while outside appearances of concern over public health and the welfare of the foreign workers are kept.

The Law of Nightclubs and Similar Establishments (LN) was approved in January 2000, with nightclubs reopening their doors in February of the same year. The law basically provides the framework within which the state can tax nightclub income stemming from sexual services while prostitution remains an illegal activity for nightclub employees.<sup>6</sup> The legislation increased the restrictions and pressures placed on foreign sex workers through immigration and health controls giving little or no protection to their trade in return. As it turns out, the new tax revenue collected by the government comes out of the pockets of the sex workers because club owners pass the costs of the tax directly on to their employees.

The LN establishes detailed conditions and procedures in the areas of health control, work permits, taxation and operating permits for nightclubs and pubs that hire konsomatrices, who must be, by law, foreign. There are several elements in the LN that warrant detailed discussion. First, the LN requires nightclubs to establish written contracts with the konsomatrices that they hire. A nightclub intending to sponsor a konsomatris for a work permit must present a signed “pre-contract” before the arrival of

---

<sup>6</sup> Although a law of prostitution exists allowing the establishment of bordellos, few of these establishments are in operation. No provisions are made for bordellos to hire foreign sex workers.

the applicant to North Cyprus. The pre-contract informs the work permit applicant, in Turkish, of some of the conditions and regulations of employment including age requirements, health controls and the detention of her passport by immigration authorities. Upon arrival to North Cyprus, after passing health controls, she must sign an official written contract, again in Turkish, at the labor office. The contract requires the determination of a wage level, which is almost invariably filled out as the minimum wage (TL 207 million per month, the equivalent of US\$172 in the Summer 2001). The contract also states other specific rights and obligations of a konsomatris including the payment of all payroll taxes, extra-pay regulations and an 8-hour work day. It would be disingenuous to think that the minimum wage would bring so many young women to the nightclubs of North Cyprus or that other benefits in the contract are respected. The low wage stated in the contract protects nightclub owners since this is the only legally binding document that may carry weight in a court of law if a dispute was to arise over a konsomatris' earnings. Practically all the konsomatrices we interviewed did not understand the contract at the time they signed it, nor did they know anything about the regulations that would bound their work in North Cyprus. The authorities do not provide any translation services, leaving at the discretion of club owners to explain to their employees their rights and obligations.

Second, health controls required of foreigners with regular work permits (all other professions) differ from those required from foreigners with konsomatris work permits. The LN clearly states that acts of prostitution by a konsomatris are illegal and will be punished with a TL 1 billion (US\$833 in the Summer 2001) fine and/or 2 years jail for the offender "and those who encourage" her. (Law of Nightclubs, 2000) Nonetheless, the LN requires extensive and periodic health controls for sexually transmitted diseases from foreigners holding konsomatris work permits. Other foreigners holding a work permit are subject to health controls that are generally arranged one or two months after arrival. These health controls amount to a chest X-ray for tuberculosis and an AIDS blood test and are carried out only once, at the first time of application for a work permit. Positive results lead to deportation. Health controls for applicants of konsomatris work permits are different. The applicant is taken directly from the airport to a hospital ward where she is tested for a wide array of sexually transmitted diseases including AIDS, syphilis and gonorrhea.<sup>7</sup> A positive test results in immediate deportation. In the records of the immigration office (civil section) we identified 35 deportations taking place within 3 days of arrival between February 2000 and July 2001, most likely the result of positive tests for sexually transmitted diseases.<sup>8</sup> If the tests are negative the woman is granted the work permit, but she is obligated to attend weekly check ups for communicable diseases.

Third, the LN requires konsomatrices to leave their passport and return ticket with the police department. Legislators speaking in favor of the LN argued that this was

---

<sup>7</sup> The LN actually does not specify the diseases that must be tested for, requiring health controls for "communicable diseases." The by-laws explicitly mandate testing for sexually transmitted diseases.

<sup>8</sup> According to *Kýbrýs* newspaper, in January 2001, an 18 year old konsomatris tested positive for AIDS and was deported days after arrival. The same newspaper reports that out of 55 konsomatrices who entered the TRNC between February 17 and 27 of 2000 (immediately after the LN was approved), 2 were deported upon arrival without a clearly stated reason and 7 tested positive for syphilis and were deported immediately after detection.

necessary for the protection of konsomatrices by the state, because prior to the legislation club owners held the passports and return tickets. (Parliamentary Minutes Magazine, 2000) Critics claim that leaving the passports and return tickets in control of the immigration office (police section) is meant to facilitate deportation procedures if they were necessary. If previously the sex worker was left to deal with her employer as best she could, current practice leaves the sex worker at the mercy of the goodwill of the authorities in case of a dispute with her employer.

Fourth, the LN places serious limits on the ability of konsomatrices to adapt and integrate to local work and living conditions. The duration of the work permit is for a maximum of six months, at which time the konsomatris must leave North Cyprus. A konsomatris who wishes to return must spend at least two months abroad before a nightclub can sponsor her for a work permit again. Konsomatrices must live in accommodations provided by the employer in the same building housing the nightclub. They are forbidden from establishing friendships with men outside the workplace and cannot marry a local while working in North Cyprus, having to leave the island immediately upon engagement and begin the marriage procedure from their home country. These conditions effectively prevent konsomatrices from establishing closer ties to locals or sex workers in other establishments. Some people believe that the intent is to prevent the break up of local marriages by impeding opportunities to establish long term, close relations.<sup>9</sup> Needless to say, these conditions are not placed on foreign workers holding regular work permits.

Fifth, the LN establishes that the employer must cover transportation costs to and from the country of origin, housing, as well as other unspecified expenditures necessary to carry out the job (perhaps such as health control expenditures, clothing, etc). It explicitly forbids the employer from deducting these costs from the konsomatris' salary stated in the contract. The LN also forbids the konsomatris from working for an employer other than the one who sponsored her work permit. Although these items appear to be to the benefit of konsomatrices, the fact that she cannot change employers makes her presence on the island, and therefore her employment, fully dependent on the interests of the original club owner. If a konsomatris wishes to change employers, she must abide by the regulations requiring her to leave the country for two months and apply for a new permit incurring all associated costs.

Sixth, the number of konsomatrices that a club may hire is tied to its classification. The classification is assigned according to points earned on criteria such as number of tables, air conditioning, number of toilets, parking space, number of waiters per table, location relative to an urban area, hygiene, etc. The minimum allowance is 3 konsomatrices for pubs, with the highest ranked nightclubs being allowed a maximum of 12. The larger the number of konsomatrices working for a club, the larger the potential revenue. A given owner cannot operate more than one club.

---

<sup>9</sup> In the files of the immigration office we came across a letter from a Turkish Cypriot woman who complained to the government that her husband had practically abandoned the home seeking the favors of a konsomatris. The agency replied it would investigate, but took no action against the sex worker, who was allowed to finish her contract.

Finally, nightclubs pay a wide variety of fees and taxes. The annual operating permit costs one minimum wage, no matter the classification of the establishment. In addition, for each konsomatris hired, the club must pay 10% of the minimum wage per month. Some of the fees are tied to the classification of the club and therefore to the number of konsomatrices that it employs. Opening fees must be paid every year and go from nine times the minimum wage (US\$172 in Summer 2001) for a first class establishment, to half the minimum wage for a pub.

Both club owners and sex workers pay income taxes. Konsomatrices pay 13% of their gross income for social security. Tax office officials estimate the income of a konsomatris to be TL900 million per month, leaving her at the higher rates of taxation because as a foreigner she cannot apply the standard deduction of 12 times the minimum wage. Club owners pay up front 6 months of income taxes at a rate of TL275 million per month (US\$214) on behalf of each konsomatris employed, resulting in a income tax rate of 30% over gross income (35% net of social security taxes). The fact that TL900 million is much more than the agreed wage stated on the contract does not bother tax officials. They consider that konsomatrices have other forms of income that must be taxed such as free housing, meals, etc. Between January and August of 2001, the largest 4 nightclubs in North Cyprus had paid between TL14 billion and TL18 billion (US\$11,600 to US\$15,000) each in income tax from konsomatrices. When it came to explaining the calculation of income taxes for club owners the tax officials were more elusive, stating that they change from time to time and even admitting that they depend of the power position of the club owner to negotiate the way in which their income will be calculated. After much insistence, we were able to get an idea of a typical calculation. They estimate revenue per day per konsomatris employed at a given club, multiply this number by the number of konsomatrices at the club and multiply said number by 26 days in a month (4 days are discounted for menstrual periods when it is assumed a konsomatris will not work). Actual numbers will vary according to each club. The example we were given is as follows:

One hour clients per day (min. 3, max. 5) x TL 40 million = TL120 million

Day or night outs per day (min. 1, max. 2) x TL70 million = TL70 million

Number of drinks (min. 3, max. 5) x TL 10 million = TL30 million

As a result, the club's revenue per konsomatris per day would be TL220 million (US\$183), or TL5.72 billion per konsomatris per month (US\$4,767). Since revenue is shared with konsomatrices, owners are taxed on half of this amount. Two aspects deserve some reflection. First, the calculation of konsomatris income is separated from the calculation of club income, although the tax officials themselves recognize they are tied. Second, for tax calculation purposes, tax officials openly recognize that konsomatrices engage in prostitution and proceed to calculate income taxes owed by club owners based on estimates that appear exaggerated in terms of the number of transactions, but are extremely accurate in relation to the price of services.

### **III. The Sex Workers**

There are no males registered as konsomatrices. The vast majority of registered konsomatrices come from Eastern European nations, primarily from Moldova and Ukraine (see table 2). Very few come from further away nations such as Central Asian republics that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. Turkish konsomatrices predominated before the 1990s, but the numbers hired by nightclubs has decreased steadily since then. The legislative changes of 2000 meant higher costs per worker hired with full working permits, and as a results clubs have practically stopped registering konsomatrices of Turkish nationality.<sup>10</sup> We found no evidence of sex workers from South or East Asia. A club owner told us that they had looked into hiring women from the Far East and Indochina, but the costs were prohibitive. As we shall see below, the hiring process also favors nationals from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

**Table 2**  
**Konsomatrices by country (February 2000 to July 2001)**

Country	Number	Percentage
Moldovia	496	63.4%
Ukraine	141	18%
Russia	75	9.6%
Romania	48	6.1%
Belorus	14	1.8%

By law, a konsomatris must be at least 18 years old. Clubs generally do not hire women older than 25 because they are considered by club owners to lose their attractiveness. In the data for the period February 2000 to July 2001 we found that only 8.7% are older than 25, while a full 48% are younger than 21. The average age was 21.7 with a standard deviation of 3 years. A club owner admitted that, before the legislation of 2000, when the bureaucratic procedure was less strict, many clubs hired minors, including women as young as 14. (Club owner interview, 2001) Club owners would simply lie on the forms and alter the birth date shown on the passport. More sophisticated passports and tougher controls on the industry have curbed this practice according to our source. Between February 2000 and July 2001, we found the file of a konsomatris who was 17 when she entered North Cyprus, but who shortly afterward turned 18. The oldest konsomatris we identified during the same period was 32 years old. We suspect that the preference for young women may also be related to less experience in the trade and therefore less demands and problems for the club owners.

Many foreign konsomatrices had had access to education, with a few of them holding university degrees. Besides Russian, the native language for most of them, many speak some English as well as a bit of Turkish, generally learned at work since arrival in Turkey or North Cyprus. Many had work experience in a wide variety of trades. The most common occupations declared by konsomatrices who entered between February 2000 and July 2001 included self-employed (6.8%), salesperson (1.6%), secretary (2.5%),

---

<sup>10</sup> Since 1993, Turkish citizens can enter North Cyprus with their national identity card only. Although admittance into North Cyprus does not convey a work permit, many Turkish citizens indeed work illegally in North Cyprus. Nightclub owners complain that pubs often hire Turkish konsomatrices without engaging in the expense of seeking work permits.

teacher (1.9%), waiter (2.5%), nurse (1%) and hairdresser (1.7%). 29.6% declared to have worked at home prior to their employment as sex workers. An additional 7.8% declared having been students, implying that 37.4% had little or no previous work experience, something that should come as no surprise given the low average age. Although 76.5% declared they were single, 6.4% were married, 3.2% were divorced and 1.5% were widowed. 23.8% declared having worked as konsomatris, artist or dancer before, answers that can generally be considered work in sex-oriented establishments. Several of the 16 women we interviewed had previous work experience as sex workers outside their country. Three had worked in Istanbul, Turkey, two in Poland and one in Germany. All cited high income or lack of opportunities at home as the reason for seeking work as konsomatris in North Cyprus.

#### **IV. The Trade**

Club owners rely on recruiting agents located primarily in Istanbul, but also utilize agents in the countries of origin of the women. As explained above, work permits expire after six months, and a sex worker must leave North Cyprus for a period of two months before she can apply for a new work permit. As a result, nightclubs are periodically searching for konsomatrices through their recruiting agents abroad. Club owners do not resent this regulation because they are always looking for "new faces."<sup>11</sup> The trade has become rather sophisticated, with club owners and agents exchanging information, including pictures of the potential workers, through internet. Agents receive a commission directly from the club owner. The amount of the commission depends on several variables including age, nationality and beauty of the sex worker, but is generally around US\$800 for Eastern European women. (Club owner interview, 2001) Common reasons given to enter the profession are expectations of good earnings and lack of economic opportunities at home.

According to the konsomatrices we consulted, friends who had previous work experience in the industry helped them establish contact with recruitment agents back in their countries of origin. They would then meet the agent, who would proceed to explain the nature of the job and the working conditions. If the conditions were accepted, then the agent would make the woman available for hiring to contacts abroad. All the konsomatrices we interviewed stated that they had full knowledge of the type of work they would be doing in North Cyprus. Club owners told us that they would not consider bringing someone without precise knowledge of the job because it would represent a serious problem (and a loss of money) for them, not necessarily legally, but in terms of dealing with a konsomatris reluctant to perform her work.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Clients apparently keep track of the arrival of new konsomatrices to a club, and frequent those establishments with the most recent arrivals.

<sup>12</sup> This does not mean that all konsomatrices who work in North Cyprus had full knowledge of the nature of the job they were coming to perform. Our limited sample is not representative and cannot be used as anything more than an indication of conditions in a few cases. From our previous discussion, it should also be clear that konsomatrices are not well informed of the legal rights and obligations as spelled out in their contracts and by the LN.

The written contract signed by a konsomatris with the club in front of a labor office employee may have legal validity, but has little or no meaning in practice. The real contract, legally unenforceable, but the one that regulates the worker-employer relations, is a verbal agreement. The specifics of this agreement vary from club to club, but they generally establish the earnings of the sex worker on a monthly basis or as a percentage of the earning from sexual services performed. It also spells out the sharing of costs between workers and employer such as electricity bill, food costs, clothing, transportation, taxes, etc.

At two of the clubs that we had an opportunity to study, the verbal contract divided costs and revenues as follows. The earnings of a konsomatris for sexual services performed is split in halves between the konsomatris and the club owner. Waiters receive 10% of the total, 5% coming from the konsomatris and the other 5 % from the club owner. At these clubs, for one hour at the club's premises a customer pays TL 40 million (US\$33). A night out, from 3 am to 8 am, costs TL 70 million (US\$58). If a customer wishes to take a konsomatris out during the day the price is TL 60 million (US\$50). This translates into earnings for the sex worker of TL 18 million (US\$15) for one hour of sex work at the premises and TL 31.5 million (US\$26) for a night out. According to our source, in their home countries they would have earned between US\$5 and US\$10 for the same work. Rates in other clubs we consulted were comparable, but we have no information regarding the way in which club owners at those establishments share the proceeds.

At the two clubs we studied, the owner provides housing on the club premises as established by the LN. However, in violation of the legislation, these clubs subtract the cost of electricity from the konsomatrices earnings claiming that they keep the air conditioners running the entire day at a high cost to the club. The clubs provide the kitchen and personnel to cook for the konsomatrices, but the cost of the food is also deducted from their earnings. Clearly contravening the LN, these clubs also deduct from the konsomatrices' earnings the cost of the round trip air ticket from their countries of origin (usually between US\$500 and US\$650), the cost of weekly health checks (US\$21) and some of the new taxes and fees paid up front by the nightclub to the government (including the TL 275 million per month per konsomatris discussed above). By the time a konsomatris begins work in North Cyprus, she has already "borrowed" approximately US\$3,000 and in many cases continues to pay expenses such as electricity and food during her stay. Her work during the first few months at these clubs goes directly to repay this debt, after which she is able to start saving. We were told that not all clubs have the same arrangement with their konsomatrices. Some allegedly establish a fixed amount that the konsomatris will have at her disposal at the end of the contract, reducing uncertainty, but also returns.

Earnings vary from one nightclub to another depending on the verbal agreement with the club owner, the going rate for sexual work at the establishment and the demand for the particular konsomatris in question. A club owner told us that, before the banking crisis of 1999, konsomatrices working for him were taking home between US\$4,000 and US\$10,000. Take-home money after the banking crisis has dropped to somewhere

between US\$2,000 and US\$5,000. Tax officials estimate that konsomatrices currently return to their home countries with somewhere between US\$3,000 and US\$4,000 after 6 months of work. But the steep reduction in the profitability of the industry for the konsomatris' point of view does not stem solely from the sharp decline in demand, or the recent devaluation of the Turkish Lira. The LN imposed new taxes and fees (operating, opening, etc.) on the nightclubs, which the club owners directly passed on to the konsomatrices. Our source spoke of these taxes as if the government was actually levying them directly on the konsomatris' income from prostitution, which although illegal, enters in the calculation of club income by tax officials.

## V. Conclusions

Foreign sex workers, almost exclusively from Eastern Europe and working as konsomatrices at nightclubs, dominate the upper end of the sex industry in North Cyprus. The Law of Nightclubs and Similar Establishments regulating their trade leaves them in a precarious legal position. They are admitted to North Cyprus on a work permit that explicitly forbids prostitution, but regulates their life around the assumption that they engage in prostitution.<sup>13</sup> Not only does the LN dictate the place where they can live, who they can and cannot befriend, whether or not they may marry a Turkish Cypriot man, but it also mandates weekly tests for sexually transmitted diseases and requires them to hand over their passports and return ticket to the authorities. Because the LN fails to provide legal ground for the primary source of income of konsomatrices, they must operate on the fringes of the law, where they are vulnerable to abuses by club owners and local authorities.

As a result of the legal framework and current practices in the trade, konsomatrices work as indentured servants. Most konsomatrices do not understand the legislation regulating their trade. The labor and immigration offices have not bothered to translate the written contract and other regulations into Russian or Romanian. Even if they were to understand the terms of their contracts, they would not be able to ask for its enforcement, particularly the clauses granting them paid round-trip transportation, paid work-related expenses, etc. They are patently aware, however, that the LN, the legislation that through the imposition of new taxes and fees siphons part of their earnings into government revenue, forbids them from engaging into the activities that provide them those earnings. In our limited coverage of nightclubs we did not find evidence of direct abuse or violence. All konsomatrices consulted complained of excessive taxes and fees that they are forced to pay such as health control expenses, but none mentioned abuse on the part of clients or club owners. However, the LN leaves them with little or no legal protection in case of problems with a client or employer.

Not all is bad with the LN. It may have improved the work conditions of konsomatrices in two respects. First, as appalling as it may be that the authorities hold the passports and return tickets of konsomatrices, this practice may be an improvement over

---

<sup>13</sup> Government authorities even distribute preservatives and offer free contraceptive injections to konsomatrices.

the previous practice of the club owner taking them. Club owners used to hold them to ensure that the konsomatris would not leave North Cyprus before she had paid off her "debt" to the club. At present a konsomatris may have the opportunity to leave North Cyprus before payments end, although this remains at the discretion of the government officials holding her documents. Second, the new legislation is apparently more efficient in preventing the entrance of minors to the trade. The legislation seems to have had a bit of a sobering impact on the industry. Since it provides greater legitimacy to the business, establishes clear procedures, and requires documentation, club owners have greater incentives to abide by those aspects of the legislation that the government is likely to enforce such as health controls and age limits.

## References

Club owner interview. Wednesday, April 25, 2001. 17:30 to 19:00. Lefko<sup>o</sup>a, TRNC.

Immigration Office. Lefko<sup>o</sup>a, TRNC. April 2001a.

Immigration Office. Nightclub desk. Lefko<sup>o</sup>a, TRNC. July 2001b.

*Kýbrýs*. "2 trilyonluk piyasa." July 16, 2001. pp. 16-17.

*Kýbrýs*. "AIDS'li konsomatrisler sinir disi." January 7, 2001. Available at <http://kibrisgazetesi.com/2001/ocak/7ocak/ichaber.htm>

*Kýbrýs*. "Konsomatrislerin yuzde 15'i frengili." February 29, 2000. Available at <http://kibrisgazetesi.com/2000/subat/29subat/ana6.htm>

Labor Office. Lefko<sup>o</sup>a, TRNC. April 2001.

Law of Nightclubs and Similar Establishments (LN). *Official Newspaper*. TRNC. January 28, 2000.

Ministry of Finance and Economy, Central Tax Office, Lefko<sup>o</sup>a, TRNC. Interview with 3 staff members of the Evaluation Department. November 3, 2001.

Parliamentary Minutes Magazine, TRNC, 29<sup>th</sup> Congress, January 18, 2000, pp. 2696 to 2733.