



An Update: No Improvement in the Plight of North Korean Women in North Korea, China, and South Korea

Jubilee Campaign wishes a very happy holiday season to you and your family, and we hope that you will find a way to celebrate safely with your loved ones.

In the week leading up to Christmas, we will be updating you on Jubilee Campaign's biggest projects of 2021 and the various successes we made in the realm of international religious freedom. For the first time in over a year, we were able to meet with our colleagues in person at the inaugural IRF Summit in Washington, D.C., where we planned future advocacy initiatives, held an event, and made new friends and partners. We are fully prepared and excited to bring our advocacy plans to fruition in 2022!

North Korea

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2020 and 2021 saw relatively the same pattern of human rights violations taking place against North Korean women as had been recorded in previous years, including violence against women, trafficking and exploitation, and discrimination, all of which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. There have also been a few newer trends and violations during the coronavirus pandemic. For example, in August 2020, it was revealed that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea had established "buffer zones" along its shared border with China where military and other state authorities can fire at individuals crossing the border irregularly, which is tantamount to extrajudicial killings; such measures were taken purportedly to prevent the spread of the coronavirus pandemic via transnational movement. These actions disproportionately impact women, who are, willing or not, significantly more involved in unauthorized travel and cross-border exchanges than men.



Human trafficking and sexual exploitation of North Korean women also persisted in 2020 and 2021. North Korean women who are repatriated to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea continue to face forced abortions, infanticide, and forced miscarriages if they became pregnant while abroad; these procedures are often performed without follow-up medical care. Moreover, The pandemic also resulted in increased violations and discrimination specifically against North Korean women. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Kim regime pressured women to be both active workers and also fully present mothers; in July 2020, state-run propaganda urged women over 60 years old to participate in

agricultural work to combat the famine, and in July 2021 officials of Democratic People's Republic of Korea mobilized married women to participate in the strenuous construction of a border wall.

China

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North Korean defector women continue to face a myriad of human rights abuses in the People's Republic of China. Traffickers and 'brokers' convince vulnerable North Korean women that they will find employment abroad; instead, they sell these women for low prices into exploitative sectors such as forced marriage, prostitution, and the cybersex industry. Girls and women as young as 15 years old that are sold into prostitution are required to serve multiple male 'customers' each night and are subjected to rape and face a higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections. Girls and women in the cybersex industry are forced to work hours on end performing sex acts on camera to a paying audience.

The pandemic has presented numerous challenges to North Korean defectors residing in China, including women. In February 2020, hospital staff turned away a North Korean defector woman, married to a Chinese citizen, after she exhibited coronavirus symptoms but was ultimately unable to produce a Chinese identification card. Furthermore, in December 2020 it was reported that North Korean factory workers in the Jilin Province of China were experiencing high rates of tuberculosis as a result of malnutrition and coronavirus prevention measures which restricted their movement and relegated them to cramped shared living, working, and eating spaces. A large portion of North Korean workers in Chinese provinces are women.

South Korea

The coronavirus pandemic and resulting travel restrictions and lockdowns have resulted in the lowest defection levels of North Korean refugees to the Republic of Korea (South Korea) within the past twenty years. Still, South Korea has a substantial population of North Korean defectors, primarily women, and their continuous struggles are therefore worth highlighting. One of the most noteworthy problems faced by these women is a deterioration in mental health during and following their defection; North Korean defector women express high rates of depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, insomnia, and suicidal ideations and attempts.

North Korean defectors often experience difficulties finding steady employment and suffer from economic hardships, usually due to their lack of higher education, technology skills, and linguistic adjustment to South Korean society. While 7.1% of North Korean defector men were paid less than 1.5 million won a month (\approx \$1300), 30.6% of defector women made such an income. 14.1% of North Korean defector women earned less than 1 million won (\approx \$866) per month. Even when they are able to find employment, North Korean defector women are paid the bare minimum and are often unable to lift themselves out of poverty. Perhaps the greatest issue faced by North Korean defector women in South Korea during the pandemic is unemployment, specifically because service jobs at restaurants, cafes, pubs, and more, were effectively paused while businesses across the country shut down to prevent the spread of the virus. By December 2020, the unemployment rate for North Korean defector women increased from 7.7% (2019) to an astounding 11.4%.

The Situation of North Korean Women

One of the most vulnerable populations in the world are North Korean women. Already, citizens in North Korea face a plethora of hardships including poverty, starvation, and a complete lack of personal and human rights, regrettably, women in North Korea are made even more marginalized due to their gender. In August 2020, the North Korean government announced that to combat the transnational spread of COVID-19 it had established 'buffer zones' along the border with China where individuals engaged in irregular movement could be fired at and killed; this disproportionately impacts women who are significantly more involved in travel due to smuggling jobs and even forced trafficking. The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced even more problems for North Korean women. Throughout 2020 and 2021, the Kim regime pressured women to be fully present mothers while simultaneously participating in strenuous agricultural work to combat the famine that the North Korean government had exacerbated on its own by rejecting international aid.

With regards to the situation of North Korean defector women and girls in South Korea and China, they continue to be tricked by 'brokers' into following them out of the country with the false promise of careers. In reality, they are sold into forced prostitution, marriages, and the exploitative cybersex industry. North Korean defector women face a strong negative stigma in both China and South Korea, and this can have a drastic effect on their livelihood. In February 2020, Chinese doctors turned away a defector woman exhibiting symptoms of COVID-19 because she was unable to present a national identification card; in December 2020, it was reported that North Korean factory workers in China's Jilin Province - many of whom are women - were facing high rates of tuberculosis because they were relegated to cramped living and working conditions. Meanwhile in South Korea, North Korean defector women who worked in restaurants and cafes, faced unemployment as businesses closed down to mitigate the spread of the pandemic.

% of North Korean defectors (in South Korea)

Chinese Traffickers	75%
Deportees	50%
PTSD	25%
Abuses from Family	40%
Sexual Harassment	30%
Smuggling Attempts	15%

Of North Korean Defectors Trafficked into China

Forced Prostitution	50%
Forced Marriage	30%
Cybersex Industry	13%
Other	5%

Of North Korean Defectors Trafficked into China

Sold Once	41%
Sold Twice	40%
Sold More Than 3 Times	7%
Other	7%

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