

COVID-19 exposes Ukraine's booming baby-for-sale business

They are the children of foreign couples born to Ukrainian surrogate mothers at the Kyiv-based BioTexCom Centre for Human Reproduction, the largest surrogacy clinic in the world. They're stranded in the hotel because their biological parents have not been able to travel in or out of [Ukraine](#) since borders closed in March because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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The babies' plight made [headlines](#) around the world, but a month on, some 50 babies remain in the hotel and the saga is casting a harsh spotlight on the ethics and scale of the booming commercial child-bearing industry in Ukraine.

Mykola Kuleba, Ukraine's ombudsman for children, has now said reforming a system he described as a violation of children's rights was not enough and that surrogacy services for foreign couples in Ukraine should be banned.

In a cash-strapped economy however, where the average wage is £300 a month and the war with Russia and its proxies continues, many impoverished women, especially in small towns and rural areas, are still lining up to carry babies for money, even if they are paying a heavy health and psychological price, as campaigners believe.

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"I didn't want to give her away, I was crying," [surrogate mother] Liudmyla recalls. She says that after two days of caring for the infant in the maternity ward, letting her go was a wrench. "But I knew what it was all about."

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