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Ukraine: Christian fight against trafficking in women “faith in action”

Visit of anti-trafficking network underlines central role of Christian organisations in prevention and assistance

“We have seen the impact of faith in action” concluded Sister Lynda Dearlove of the Sisters of Mercy after the visit of an ecumenical delegation to Ukraine, which discussed initiatives against trafficking in the country. During the visit the group learnt about the initiatives of Caritas Ukraine against trafficking and gave advice on further action in the field. The ecumenical group of representatives from different Churches and church-related organisations co-operating against trafficking in women visited Ukraine 14th-17th November. The visit was part of the activities of the European network, “Christian Action and Networking against Trafficking” (CAT). The activities of the anti-trafficking network have one focus on supporting Christian organisations in countries of origin in their anti-trafficking work.

The delegation of practitioners from five European countries met with representatives of Churches, Christian organisations, as well as state agencies and different NGOs active against trafficking in Ukraine. They visited some of the sites within the Caritas Ukraine’s anti-trafficking programme in Western and Central Ukraine. Ukraine is among the countries in Europe with the highest number of citizens being trafficked as well as returning survivors of trafficking.

During the visits and discussions, strong emphasis was put on prevention activities, such as advice hotlines and specialised counselling services for women facing unemployment in remote areas in Ukraine. Caritas Ukraine, the charity organisation of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and CAT’s Ukrainian partner, also outlined how they work to reach out to trafficked women who return to Ukraine. Very often these women do not use the counselling services for survivors of trafficking immediately after their return, and subsequently encounter lasting problems, e.g. post-traumatic stress symptoms. There was also a chance to meet with representatives of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) who shared their insights into the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings from Ukraine, in particular women and children, and the role of non-governmental actors. Participants also developed an understanding of how closely the lack of legal and safe migration channels and trafficking are related in countries such as Ukraine. The participants concluded that as long as the irregular migration remains a main model of „successful“ migration abroad among Ukrainians, it will always be easy for traffickers to find their preys.

The visit underlined how Churches and church-related organisations, such as Caritas Ukraine, which are active all across the country and enjoy a high degree of trust, can have a unique contribution in combating trafficking in women. While services of prevention and assistance are well developed in bigger cities, better access to information and counselling in more remote and rural areas is still a challenge. Often these areas are most affected by trafficking.

Torsten Moritz, coordinator of the CAT project, commented: “This visit was very informative and important for us. It underlined the huge potential of churches in providing services in areas and situations, which other civil society actors can hardly address. The partners in Ukraine through their own work and cooperation with NGOs and state actors, give an excellent example of how this potential can be used. ”

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