

No Trafficking in Women: Toll-free Hotline Service in Ukraine

HRWF Int. (11.07.2006) - Email: info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - It is uncontested that every year tens or even hundreds of thousands women are sold and forced into situations of exploitation from which there is almost no escape. These women are abused as commodities by a transnational criminal industry, from which there is almost no escape.

Trafficking in women is one of the most globalised criminal businesses in the world today, one that almost no country is immune from.

The OSCE launched the first national, toll-free hotline service in 2002, which complemented a network of seven regional hotlines in Ukraine. The service provides information and support for anyone who plans to go abroad for work, marriage or other reasons. It also assists in identifying potential victims.

Since the establishment of the regional hotlines in 2000, 22,000 people have phoned for help and advice. The network was established through the co-operation of non-governmental organizations.

The national service is run by *La Strada* in close co-operation with the Ukrainian State Committee for Family and Youth Affairs, which is responsible for the implementation of Ukraine's National Anti-trafficking Program.

The *La Strada* network is composed of nine independent women's rights NGOs in the Netherlands (STV), Poland, the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Moldova.

It aims to prevent trafficking in human beings, especially women and children in Central and Eastern Europe.

Training hotline consultants, to equip them with the psychological skills and with the factual information they need on the job, is a very important part of the anti-trafficking initiative.

The *La Strada* hotline is available toll free 24 hours a day seven days a week. It provides objective, unbiased information and counseling about the risks and realities of human trafficking.

Counsel callers on danger signs and provide them the information they need to protect against the traffickers. They provide contacts of governmental and non-governmental groups that offer support and assistance for victims trafficked abroad and make available information about working and going abroad safely and legally.

Every week, the hotline receives calls from individuals who have been offered jobs abroad (often illegal and often from traffickers), those with other opportunities to emigrate, such as marriage and education, and others who are just curious about working abroad.

Callers include people of all ages, but in particular young girls at risk, parents worried about their children, relatives and friends looking for a missing loved one and victims desperate to escape from the grips of their traffickers. The hotline also includes country-by-country information on study, tourism, au pair programs and how to obtain visas and work permits.

The *La Strada* mission is threefold to make the issue of trafficking in women visible and to influence authorities, the media and the public opinion to address this violation of human rights, to educate women and girls about possible dangers of trafficking and to refer victims to support networks

To achieve these aims, *La Strada* has developed a multi-disciplinary approach program, consisting of information and lobbying , prevention and education and social assistance to victims of trafficking.

The key priority of *La Strada* network is to focus on the importance of improving the position of women and to promote their universal rights, including the right to choose to emigrate and to work abroad and to protect them from violence and abuse.

La Strada considers that one of the primary needs of women is their right to freely work, with just compensation and under proper conditions, whether in their own country or in a country with a demand for their labour in accordance with the legal framework of that country and international conventions.

Source: www.osce.org / www.lastradainternational.org

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