



RELIGIOUS IN EUROPE NETWORKING  
AGAINST TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION

## WINTER NEWSLETTER

»» NOV – JAN 2025 ««

# CELEBRATING JUBILEE YEAR



# A HOLY YEAR OF HOPE



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## THE JUBILEE YEAR 2025 – A HOLY YEAR OF HOPE.

The Jubilee Year 2025, declared by Pope Francis, is a time for renewal, reflection, and action – a Holy Year of Hope. Rooted in the biblical tradition of jubilee, this special year emphasizes justice, liberation, and restoration, offering a profound opportunity to deepen our commitment to combating human trafficking and supporting those who have been marginalized and exploited.

The theme of hope resonates deeply with RENATE's mission. Human trafficking thrives on despair and exploit-

ation, targeting those who feel powerless and isolated. The Jubilee Year invites us to renew our faith in the possibility of change, strengthening our resolve to build a world where justice and compassion prevail. This is a time for unity, across all communities of faith and action. By working together, we embody the essence of hope, showing survivors and those at risk that they are not alone, and their voices matter.

Let us embrace the Jubilee Year 2025 as a powerful reminder of what we can achieve together—hope renewed, justice pursued, and lives transformed.

## RENATE TRAINING EVENT: TRAUMA AND MENTAL HEALTH IN ANTI-HUMAN TRAFFICKING WORK.

From the 13th – 17th November 2024, 16 RENATE members gathered in Deurne, a suburb of Eindhoven in the Netherlands, for an intensive and insightful training on trauma and mental health for practitioners working in the field of anti-human trafficking.

The event began with a presentation by Ivonne van de Kar, RENATE Co-President, who introduced the RENATE Europe Network, its mission, vision, values, and structure. Ivonne provided an overview of the nature and scope of human trafficking and sexual violence in the Netherlands and explored the systems and practices in place to address trafficking and support carers in this work.





The training was led by Professor Antoaneta Mateeva, Associate Professor at New Bulgarian University, Bulgaria. With her vast experience and deep understanding of trauma, she guided participants through:

- The definition, types, and systemic factors of trauma.
- How life experiences, including early childhood trauma, shape reactions and decisions in personal and professional contexts.
- Theories and approaches to support survivors of violence and human trafficking, including Trauma-Oriented Care and the Mentalization-Based Model of Care.

Participants engaged in thoughtful discussions, reflecting on their personal reactions to trauma, exploring resilience, and considering a strengths-based model of support.

Professor Mateeva highlighted the significance of community, culture, and local attitudes in shaping support for survivors of violence and trafficking. She also addressed structural discrimination and the role of local service structures in mobilizing community efforts. A key focus was the profound impact of a survivor's trauma on carers, explored through the AMBIT Mentalization-Based Model.

The training emphasized the importance of prevention policies and practices, as well as the transformative role of forgiveness in recovery and resilience. Participants shared their professional experiences, enriching the collective understanding with diverse perspectives from across Europe.

The RENATE network expressed deep gratitude to Professor Mateeva for her expertise and compassionate approach, which made the training a truly transformative experience.



## KEY INSIGHTS FROM RENATE MEMBER BRIAN O'TOOLE ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND CARE FOR THE EARTH.

We are delighted to feature two powerful reports by Brian O'Toole, RENATE Working Board Member for Ireland and Director of the Presentation Sisters Justice Desk. These reports provide profound insights into two critical areas central to RENATE's mission: human trafficking and environmental care.

### 1. Human Trafficking from a Faith and Justice Perspective:

This report brings together the voices and perspectives shared during an event at St. Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Through contributions from experts like Sr. Abby Avelino, Dr. Ethna Regan, and Kevin Hyland, the report examines the vital intersection of faith, justice, and the global fight against human trafficking.

Read the full report: [Human Trafficking from a Faith and Justice Perspective](#)

### 2. COP29 and the Care for the Earth:

This accessible and thought-provoking piece reflects on COP29, highlighting the essential role of religious communities in environmental stewardship. Brian emphasizes how climate change disproportionately affects marginalized populations, often increasing their vulnerability to human trafficking.

Explore the insights: [COP29 and the Care for the Earth](#)

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to Brian O'Toole for his dedication to these important issues. His work not only deepens our understanding but also encourages meaningful action to address these pressing challenges.

Dive into these insightful reports to discover more about the intersection of faith, justice, and care for the Earth.







## SR. VIKTORIJA SIMIC SCSC: A MONTH OF ACTION AGAINST HUMAN TRAFFICKING.

This November, Sr. Viktorija Simic SCSC has been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at combating human trafficking and raising awareness across schools, parishes, and the broader community. Her dedication has reached students, parishioners, and readers through workshops, media engagements, and preparations for a global day of prayer and reflection.

Sr. Viktorija has been visiting schools to educate seventh and eighth-grade students about the dangers of human trafficking, emphasizing prevention and awareness. Recent highlights include: A workshop with 28 eighth-grade students and teachers at a primary school in Gradište, a session engaging 25 students and their form teachers at a primary school in Vrbanja, a planned visit to a primary school in Drenovci to work with 31 students, and a meeting with a smaller group of 14 students at a school near the Serbian border.

Sr. Viktorija's message has also reached a wider audience through media outlets. Following her interview with Croatian Catholic Radio in October, a feature titled "The Light of Hope and the Voice of the Fight Against Human Trafficking" was published in Vinkovački List and made available online. An interview with Radosna vijest (The Good News), a magazine by the Pope's Missionary Works, was also published in November, showcasing her tireless advocacy. Our gratitude to Sr. Viktorija as she continues to shine a light on the urgent need to combat human trafficking.



# UKRAINE: MORE THAN 1000 DAYS OF WAR

As the war in Ukraine persists, its devastating impact continues to displace millions and heighten the risks of human trafficking. Significant population displacement, economic instability, and the destruction of infrastructure have created fertile ground for exploitation.

## Ukraine in Numbers:

- 400,000 refugees fled to the EU in the first six months of 2024.
- 4.7 million people remain displaced within Ukraine.
- 11,973 civilians and 583 children have been killed.
- 19,546 children have been deported to Russia or occupied territories.
- 1,932 children are reported missing.
- 170,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) fled the east of Ukraine since August 2024 due to intensified bombings and front-line movements.
- 250,000 homes, 3,798 schools, and 1,911 healthcare facilities have been destroyed.

This grim reality underscores the vulnerability of many Ukrainians to trafficking and exploitation, as traffickers prey on those already suffering from displacement and hardship.

## Escalation of Human Trafficking Cases:

Reports from Ukraine's National Social Service reveal a sharp rise in human trafficking:

- 182 cases were documented in 2024 as of December, up from 118 cases in 2023.
- 123 cases involved multiple types of exploitation.
- 19 individuals were forced into armed conflict, while 15 suffered labor exploitation and 13 were sexually exploited.



Experts at Caritas Ukraine emphasize that armed conflict, occupation, and civilian captivity have amplified trafficking risks. "Traffickers know exactly who to target and how to exploit individuals under stress," says Natalia Holynska, Counter Trafficking Project Manager at Caritas Ukraine.





## Caritas Ukraine's Efforts

In the past six months, Caritas Ukraine has made significant strides in countering trafficking:

- 120 potential victims and 78 survivors were identified.
- 77 survivors received comprehensive, tailor-made assistance, including psychological support, legal aid, social services, medical help, and financial grants for micro-businesses.

Through outreach and education, nearly 70,000 people received vital information, helping prevent potential trafficking risks.

Caritas Ukraine also launched an online course on the Prometheus platform titled "Human Trafficking: How to Protect Yourself and Your Loved Ones." The course received overwhelmingly positive feedback, with participants rating it 8.6 out of 10, and 90% recommending it to others. This initiative is part of Caritas Ukraine's broader mission to equip communities with the knowledge and tools needed to resist exploitation. Despite immense challenges, Caritas Ukraine remains steadfast in its mission to combat trafficking and support survivors. As the war continues, their work offers a beacon of hope and resilience in the face of overwhelming adversity.



## SOLWODI HUNGARY'S AWARENESS RAISING INITIATIVES, NOVEMBER 2024.

November was a busy month for SOLWODI Hungary, with key events and initiatives aimed at combating human trafficking and supporting vulnerable women and girls.

On November 12, 2024, SOLWODI Hungary participated in a panel discussion at a conference organized by the Hungarian Women's Lobby. The event, held at the Budapest University of Jewish

Studies, focused on the 4Ps framework: Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, and Partnership in the fight against human trafficking in Hungary. Reem Alsalem, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Trafficking and Violence Against Women, served as the keynote speaker, presenting her findings and reports on violence against women and girls.

During the panel discussion and subsequent workshops, SOLWODI Hungary representatives exchanged views on the current state of human trafficking in Hungary. They shared best practices with other anti-trafficking organizations, national helpline operators, police, and social workers, fostering fruitful conversations. A key outcome of the conference was the development of plans for an upcoming interfaith dialogue focused on preventing and combating trafficking and sexual exploitation.

On November 15, 2024, SOLWODI Hungary visited Patrona Hungariae, a Catholic girls' school in Budapest, as part of a recurring engagement. Sister Klarissza SSND invited the team to raise awareness about human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The workshop, attended by girls aged 16-18, featured constructive discussions and numerous questions, reflecting the students' active engagement. This initiative aims to empower young women with knowledge to help prevent victimization.

Finally, SOLWODI Hungary began collecting Christmas gift bags for women and girls involved in street prostitution. Last year's efforts resulted in the distribution of 34 bags filled with thoughtful items, including chocolates, homemade cakes, handwritten cards, warm clothing, candles, and other small gifts. This year's goal was to replicate last year's success and bring a moment of care and kindness to those in vulnerable circumstances during the holiday season.





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## “BEYOND BORDERS”: LAUNCH OF SHORT FILM ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

On December 10th, RENATE hosted an inspiring online event that brought together over fifty members and network partners to launch their latest short film, RENATE Beyond Borders. The film sheds light on the harsh realities of human trafficking in the UK and Ireland, offering a poignant and thought-provoking narrative designed to spark action and awareness.

The watch party was introduced by the RENATE Advocacy Task Group, who shared the story behind the film's creation. They highlighted the critical need for such creative works in amplifying the voices of survivors and addressing the often-hidden exploitation within local communities. Attendees were also privileged to hear from filmmaker Sister Gini George (SSpS) through a heartfelt pre-recorded message, in which she reflected on the importance of storytelling as a tool for advocacy and change.



The event was more than just a screening; it served as a reminder of the collective strength within RENATE's network and the shared commitment to eradicating human trafficking. Participants engaged in meaningful discussions after the screening, sharing their thoughts on the film's impact and exploring ways to integrate its message into their ongoing efforts. By combining the power of film with community action, RENATE Beyond Borders aims to reach wider audiences, encouraging individuals to recognize and address the signs of trafficking in their own communities. **Watch the film [here](#).**

# OPEN DAY PROMOTES ACCESS TO FREE LEGAL AID IN VAU DEJËS, ALBANIA

On December 6, 2024, the organization Different & Equitable hosted an Open Day in the Municipality of Vau Dejës to promote awareness about “Free Legal Aid and Mechanisms for Obtaining Legal Aid Online.” This initiative, conducted in collaboration with the Municipality of Vau Dejës, aimed to inform citizens about their rights to free legal assistance and how to access it using the e-Albania platform.

The event took place at a stand located on the city pedestrian walkway in front of the Municipality building, where community members engaged directly with representatives from Different & Equitable. Attendees received valuable information on accessing free legal services and navigating the online platform designed to streamline these processes.

This Open Day was part of the broader project, Improving Access to Free Legal Aid Through Online Platforms for Victims of Crime and Vulnerable Groups in Shkodra. The initiative aligns with the overarching project, Advancing e-Justice Services for Legal Empowerment and Improved Access to Justice for Women and Men in Albania, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, with financial support from UNDP.

By raising awareness and offering practical guidance, this activity represents a significant step toward empowering citizens to access justice more effectively and equitably. This initiative underscores the commitment to advancing equitable access to justice for all, particularly for vulnerable groups and victims of crime. Through continued collaboration and support, Different & Equitable, UNDP, and their partners are paving the way for a more inclusive and accessible justice system in Albania.





# CARITAS SLOVAKIA CELEBRATES VICTORY IN THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

RENATE is proud to share the remarkable achievement of our member organization, Caritas Slovakia, whose efforts have culminated in a landmark victory for human rights and justice.

On 24 October 2024, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) delivered a unanimous judgment in the case of B.B. v. Slovakia (Application no. 48587/21), declaring that the Slovak Republic violated Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits slavery and forced labor.

The case originated from the failure of Slovak authorities to conduct a sufficient investigation into a credible allegation of human trafficking. Ms. B.B., a highly vulnerable individual, was trafficked to the United Kingdom in 2010, where she was forced to work as a prostitute for over a year. While a perpetrator was convicted of pimping, the authorities limited their investigation to this charge, neglecting to address the larger context of human trafficking.

Thanks to the dedicated advocacy of Caritas Slovakia, through its Stop Human Trafficking project, and the legal representation of renowned human rights lawyer Parosha Chandran, the Court found that the Slovak authorities failed in their obligation to thoroughly investigate this plausible accusation of trafficking. This judgment not only underscores the systemic shortcomings in addressing human trafficking but also emphasizes the need for robust legal and social support for survivors. It is a victory for Ms. B.B. and a testament to the life-changing impact of providing victims with access to justice.

RENATE congratulates Caritas Slovakia and all involved in achieving this milestone. This case reaffirms the importance of our collective mission to combat human trafficking and advocate for the rights of survivors.





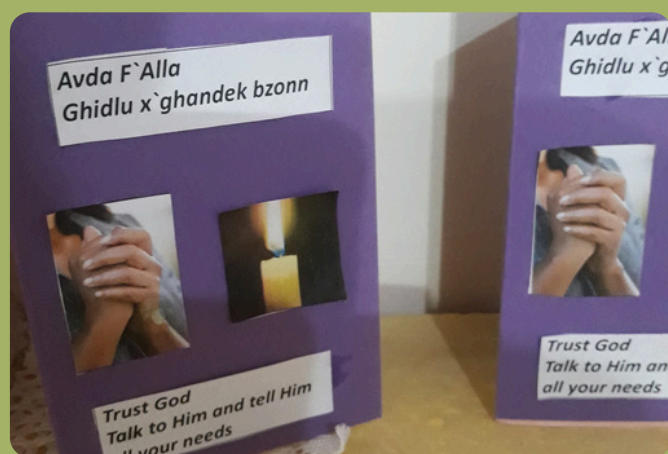
## A HEARTFELT CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION AT DAR HOSEA, MALTA.

On December 17th, Dar Hosea, a shelter and safe house in Malta and part of the RENATE network, hosted its first Christmas Lunch for service users. To ensure everyone could participate despite limited space, the celebration was spread over three days, with additional lunches planned for December 18th and 19th. The event brought together service users and volunteers in a spirit of community and festivity.

Dedicated volunteers went above and beyond, preparing a meal infused with love and care. The tables were beautifully set, creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere for all who attended. Lunch began at 12 PM, marking a moment of connection and gratitude during the holiday season. This special gathering embodies the essence of Dar Hosea's mission: providing safety, support, and a sense of belonging to those in need, especially during this season of giving.

## MASS AND PRAYERS UNITE COMMUNITY AT DAR MERHBA BIK SHELTER, MALTA.

On October 18th, Sr. Margaret Gonzi, alongside RENATE members in Malta, joined the residents of Dar Merhba Bik shelter for a heartfelt Mass and prayer gathering. The residents led the prayers, creating a deeply meaningful moment of shared reflection and spiritual connection.



This gathering offered a space for unity, personal prayer, and collective hope, strengthening the bonds within the shelter's community. Such moments highlight the power of faith and solidarity in nurturing resilience and fostering hope among those who come together.





## SPOTLIGHT ON PORNOGRAPHY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING: SOLWODI HUNGARY'S EU ANTI-TRAFFICKING DAY CONFERENCE AND NGO COLLABORATION.

On 17th October 2024, SOLWODI HUNGARY marked the European Union's Anti-Trafficking Day by organizing an international conference and round table discussion in Budapest titled "Pornography: A Tool and a Path Towards Human Trafficking."

Renate van der Zee, a Dutch investigative journalist, revealed how women are often coerced into creating pornographic content under false pretenses, with many subjected to violence and prostitution. Fr. László Tokodi OP from the Saint John Paul II Institute in Hungary discussed pornography's societal impact, especially on young people.

The event concluded with a lively discussion, emphasizing that pornography is inherently violent, harmful to both producers and consumers, and must be actively opposed. Fr. Tokodi also introduced a bestselling book aimed at helping families address and prevent exposure to pornography. The conference, hosted by the Jesuit community, included a Holy Mass for victims of human trafficking.

On 18th October, SOLWODI HUNGARY also hosted a meeting for faith-based NGOs working against trafficking, including the Salvation Army, Baptists, Anonymous Ways Foundation, and others. These regular meetings foster collaboration, share best practices, and address key issues with the Hungarian National Anti-Trafficking NGO Round Table to advocate for solutions and policy changes.

# A CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION OF FRIENDSHIP AND HOPE AT AMARANTA FOUNDATION

On December 19th, the Amaranta Foundation Centre in Madrid was filled with the warmth of Christmas as women with children reunited, greeted by the Adoratrices sisters with hugs and laughter. The event brought together women currently in the program, past participants who had rebuilt their lives, volunteers, and supporters, creating a sense of pride and mutual encouragement.

The annual Christmas gathering goes beyond festivities, symbolizing the journey from victimhood to empowerment. The event included those who have helped support these women, like professionals and volunteers. The hall, decorated with a long table of food set by local school volunteers, was filled with joy and togetherness. Before the meal, the Novitiate community of the Adorers sisters led a prayer of gratitude and reflection, honoring the resilience of the women involved.

The children's laughter brought an innocent joy, while the adults shared heartfelt conversations. A special moment of the evening was the recognition of Marta and Iris for their 25 years of dedication to the Hope Project, now Amaranta Foundation. Their commitment to transforming lives was celebrated with flowers and a token of appreciation. Although Marta couldn't attend due to a personal loss, Iris expressed gratitude on behalf of the team. The evening ended with hugs and promises to reunite at future celebrations. This gathering served as a reminder of the power of friendship and hope, with more milestones to come in their journey of resilience.

Begoña Iñarra







## THE RENATE HOUSE OF PRAYER TASK GROUP: ANCHORING OUR FAITH-BASED MISSION

The RENATE House of Prayer Task Group continues to be a cornerstone of our identity as a faith-based organization, deeply grounding our mission in prayer and reflection. Their recent work exemplifies this, particularly their efforts in facilitating a powerful online prayer service on October 18th, raising awareness for the European Day Against Trafficking in Human Beings. This service united members across borders in a shared moment of solidarity and hope, demonstrating the strength of collective prayer in the fight against human trafficking.

The prayer service not only highlighted the group's dedication to RENATE's mission but also reinforced the importance of faith as a driving force in our work. By weaving prayer into our advocacy, the House of Prayer Task Group reminds us that our actions are rooted in compassion, justice, and a higher calling. Their steadfast commitment continues to inspire and energize our community, ensuring that prayer remains at the heart of all we do. Through their work, they provide a spiritual foundation that propels RENATE's efforts forward, uniting us in purpose and strengthening our resolve to bring about a world free from human trafficking.

### A Message from the RENATE House of Prayer Task Group:

*"May this Jubilee Year be a time of renewal, hope, and steadfast commitment to our shared mission. As we journey together in faith, may we be guided by the light of solidarity and prayer, standing united against exploitation and injustice. May our hearts be strengthened with courage and love, sowing seeds of peace and healing in a world in need of transformation."*

## »»» ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ««« AND NEWSLETTERS

- [Secours Catholique, Lutte Contre la Traite des êtres Humains Newsletter.](#)
- [STOP Trafficking November Newsletter.](#)
- [STOP Trafficking December Newsletter.](#)
- [STOP Trafficking January Newsletter.](#)
- [SOLWODI Germany Newsletter.](#)
- [Conrad Hilton Foundation End-of-Year Newsletter.](#)

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