



Participants at the EU Forum Labour Trafficking (Vilnius, 17-19/10/2013)

“We know what the next steps are...”

Interview with CCME ExCom member Elena Timofticiuc on the 1st EU Forum on Labour Trafficking

From 17th to 19th October 2013, CCME organised the first EU Forum on labour trafficking in Vilnius. Read a few thoughts of Elena Timofticiuc, participant and CCME board member

Q: EU Forum on labour trafficking – this sounds very broad, so what was the forum about?

The forum mainly dealt with cases of bigger groups being trafficking for forced labour in countries across Europe. We heard about cases in which bigger groups, sometimes hundreds of persons are exploited like the ones of the tree worker, which were exploited in the Czech state forests

Q: was that a meeting of Christian groups like yourself?

It was mixture of different parties - Trade unions, specialised NGOs and Christian organisations. That is a good format, if we only met among Christian organisation I guess it would be too small, too limited. I believe the mix of different organisations is good in order to learn from each other, but of course we also are keen to look what other Christian initiatives are doing – Caritas, Diakonia and other church-related groups.

Q: so tell us, how widespread is this labour trafficking

It is difficult to quantify in absolute numbers, as it is by definition a criminal, hidden phenomenon. All in all it is more widespread than we imagine, there are many hidden cases; we also learnt that many cases of exploitation are not taken seriously and dismissed as “people quarrelling over money”

On the other hand we have to be careful: not everything bad happening in labour relations is trafficking. In trafficking the clear purpose and outcome is exploitation - in some instances we might not yet have labour trafficking, but rather see something which is labour discrimination

Yet there are cases which are clearly resulting in dramatic exploitation and still they are not taken seriously. It is in this context good to learn from the positive examples, for example the Belgian labour inspector who proactively investigated a case of trafficking of cleaning staff in restaurants along Belgian motorways. I was very impressed by this active role of labour inspectorate and think Romanian labour inspectors could learn from that.

Q: Are there any practical solutions in sight

We are getting closer and know what the next steps are. We think that through better cooperation between trade unions, NGOs, churches and others we will be able to respond better. The international contact with the International Trade-Union Confederation has for example helped us a lot in our cooperation with the Romanian trade unions. In addition international follow up of international trafficking cases will help a lot – we can for example help some of the tree workers who were mentioned above: their case is still not going anywhere in the Czech republic, some of the cases have made it to court in Romania – here an international cooperation obviously helps to solve the case !