

Fighting Human Trafficking in Ukraine

Human trafficking is out of control in Ukraine.

More Ukrainian men, women and children have been trafficked abroad and forced into indentured labor or prostitution than in any other Eastern European country since the Soviet collapse.

EFCA's Reach Global missionary Amy Richey says traffickers target the most vulnerable: "The most vulnerable in Ukrainian society today are kids currently living on the streets, and/or kids that are just coming out of the orphanages. Fifty percent to 60 percent end up in some sort of a trafficked situation."

That can mean being sold to a labor group or prostitution in Ukraine, or being trafficked across International borders.

Richey says street kids are most vulnerable: "Street kids are not registered in the country of Ukraine. There's no good way to know they exist and no good way to know they disappear."

Worldwide, many believe there are 27 million people currently victimized by human trafficking.

Sadly, Richey says, "Ukraine is considered a source country: meaning that's one of the places that's the easiest to take people from. It's usually listed at the top two or three countries."

Richey says her job is to assist Ukrainian churches in helping kids around them. Her local church in Kiev is involved in a local orphanage. She says Christ is the answer to human trafficking. Knowing that Jesus "loves me and that I'm adopted by Him gives children a very firm foundation to say, 'No, I don't need some stranger's approval,' or 'I don't need this

hope and dream of becoming a model in some far away country.'"

Human trafficking has just recently come to the attention of the church. "Five or 10 years ago, people were very afraid to talk about it [in the church]," says Richey. "Fear paralyzed them. Thankfully today, the sentiment is different. The church, as a whole, is much more engaged."

Richey says the church is getting involved in HIV/AIDS –another previous taboo –"as well as getting involved in trying to guard their children against human trafficking." Some of their children have disappeared.

Richey described a situation where college students were promised a year of studies overseas. They completed that, then went back home. The trip was then promoted again, and Richey says, "The group that those students recruited were actually sold into modern day slavery."

Pray that the church in Ukraine will begin to provide orphans and street kids with the tools they need to avoid human trafficking predators, that they will come to Christ, and that churches would be planted as a result of that harvest.