

LYDIA PROJECT INSIGHT



Two young women from Eastern Europe were in Edinburgh in April to give members of the Church of Scotland Guild a unique insight into the work they are doing as part of the Lydia Project, one of the Guild's six "Let's Live: body, mind and soul projects".

The Lydia Project is a Scottish based organisation that seeks to empower women to take control of their own lives

and enable them to address the issues that are priorities in their own communities.

Natalia Pleskachova, a psychologist from Minsk, Belarus and Tamara Botin a teacher from Moldova have been involved with the Lydia project since 1999 and 2002 respectively.

They told the gathering that the fall of communism left entire communities, but especially the women, bereft of jobs,

income and hope.

Word began to filter through about great opportunities in the wealthy West and the fragile economic situation at home inevitably meant that some decided to take their chances abroad, responding to apparently secure jobs on offer in the care sector or as mother's helpers, with all the necessary paperwork promised.

Entire families were split up. So many parents were desperate to give their children a future that both adults would go abroad and send money home to provide for the family. Entire villages have been cleared of adults with youngsters running uncared for and completely unrestrained - and easy targets for the traffickers who tempt them away across borders and lead them into lives of destitution and exploitation.

One of the sub-projects Lydia helps in Moldova produces booklets detailing the dangers faced by anyone who is thinking of trying their luck in the west. Distribution was a challenge until the women managed to gain the trust of the Moldovan Orthodox church.

Tamara and Natalia found that establishing contact with the priests of the Moldovan and Belarus Orthodox churches was an effective way to reach those who were contemplating the move, although initially, reaction from the priests tended to be extreme and incredulous. But Tamara and Nata persevered and their message is beginning to be taken seriously.

The women were in Scotland with the Lydia Project for just over a week, and did a whistle stop programme of speaking engagements all over the country from Galashiels to Aberdeen culminating in a presentation at the Lydia Project AGM.

KOBIA - WELCOMING THE STRANGER IS NOT OPTIONAL

"Migration is a fact of life. It is as much an instinct to survive as it is an inevitable consequence of globalization." At a hearing on Migration and the Changing Ecclesial Landscape in Beirut, Lebanon, World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, also said "Migrants are not commodities, illegal aliens or mere victims, they are human beings. Welcoming the stranger

is not optional for Christians. Nor is it conditional.

The church should strengthen its hospitality in an era of new forms of migration, whilst being an advocate and defender of the right of people to move freely within their own nation and leave their home and live elsewhere in search of their God given right to life with dignity," he added.