



europäische allianz katholischer frauenverbände
european alliance of catholic women's organisations
alliance européenne d'organisations féminines catholiques

Extreme Poverty in Europe

October 2014

Report on activities of member organisations of Andante, to the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, meeting on the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, in Turin 17th October 2014

Andante is an alliance of 25 Catholic women's organisations in 15 European countries representing approximately 1.2 million women. It has participatory status as an International NGO, with the Council of Europe.

Andante member organisations are all concerned with the rise of poverty in Europe, and most are actively engaged in projects and activities to address the issue of poverty in their own communities.

This report is based on the outcome of a conference on Poverty, organised by Andante, for its member organisations, and in preparation for the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, which was held in Riga, Latvia on 3rd October 2014. Delegates from 18 member organisations from 13 countries, and representatives of the two European organisations attended. They all gave reports on their work towards poverty reduction in their own countries. A summary of this work is included in this paper. A full list of participating organisations is listed in the appendix.

This report will briefly summarise the activities of the organisations in each country. Representatives also commented on the issue of poverty in their countries, especially from listening to the voices of those affected by poverty.

Reports from each organisation are listed below. Further information on specific projects can be obtained directly from the relevant organisation, via the secretariat of Andante.

email secretariat@andante-europa.net

REPORTS FROM MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

Albania

Mary Ward Loreto (MWL)

This relatively new organisation works on projects concerned with the needs of women, children and young people. They work on economic empowerment, especially in the north of Albania, in poor areas. They have set up social businesses for women, helping to develop markets for their products. They also support, through networks, prison chaplaincies, programmes for youth and for the health and education of Roma children.

Austria

KAV Fraueninitiative (KAV/F)

This organisation of catholic university women had held many talks and presentations for Austrian catholic women, on the subject of Poverty, to raise awareness and to raise consciousness. They also work with women from other churches.

They also are engaged in a project for homeless people and had held one event to discuss the issue of homelessness.

Katholische Frauenbewegung Oesterreichs (kfbo)

They have produced guidelines for their members 'Why we work against poverty' 60,000 copies have been sold.

They hold a Family Action Day each year, when families have a simple meal only, and donate the savings to a solidarity fund which is used for disadvantaged women (This raises 100,000 euros each year)

They support empowerment projects in Africa and Latin America, but also support projects for women in Siberia; Kosovo; and Moldova.

Fund-raising activities from the sale of decorated candles raise over 100,000 euros for projects in Slovakia; Albania and Romania.

Czech Republic

Unie Katolickych Zen (UKZ)

This organisation has, in collaboration, developed a programme for the integration of ex-prisoners into the labour market. This has been done in partnership with organisations in Western Europe and in Lithuania.

They organised a gathering of NGOs caring for prisoners, to meet with parliamentarians. They are also developing a mediation project.

Their latest project is a laundry, for centres for the homeless, managed by ex-prisoners.

France

Action Catholique des Femmes (Acf)

This organisation, which is more than 110 years old, had conducted a country-wide survey amongst their members as well as other women. Based on the outcome they produced a book "Etre femme au Coeur des pauvretes", and organised a symposium.

They commented that increasingly poverty is a woman's issue. That the interruption of women's lives for childcare puts them at risk of poverty in later life as their pensions are less.

Their book gives many suggestions for the way forward in reducing female poverty.

Germany

Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund (KDFB)

Their representative talked about the fact that women suffer from lower salaries and have lower pensions. This leads to increased poverty in elderly women. They have been conducting a campaign for equal pay.

They are campaigning against low pay for caring jobs.

They have produced a 'Return to work' guide for women giving the risks and benefits of leaving work for any reason (e.g. Child care or care for elderly relatives) They have been promoting the need to value women's experience as carers, when they do return to work.

Latvia

Latvijas Katolu sieviesu apvieniba (LKsa)

This organisation presented a picture of the levels of poverty in Latvia, since the financial crisis of 2007, and the impact of emigration on family life.

They are engaged in helping the poorest and most deprived of people.

They support a project in the town of Liepaja (Martinshause) which provides food, clothing and psychological help to street children.

This project also supports single parent families, helping them towards self- sustainability.

The leader of this project spoke of the poverty of being – Unloved; Unwanted and Uncared for.

Hungary

Kereszteny Noi Feinottkepzési Egyesület (KNFE)

This organisation runs self-awareness seminars for women, to improve their communication skills and self-confidence. One theme is solidarity, which is strongly needed to avoid material, emotional and spiritual poverty.

Netherlands

Katholiek Vrouwen Dispuut (KVD)

This organisation, which is 50 years old, provides discussion groups for Catholic women. They have promoted the need for solidarity with those experiencing poverty. They have campaigned on care policies, with particular emphasis on savings. They also work in telephone emergency services, for people in crisis.

Konferentie Nederlanse Religieuzen (KNR)

The representative of this association of religious in the Netherlands, presented work that they had done on 'How to achieve a sustainable and fair economy'. They had held a series of meetings and workshops, and had written articles. An open letter on the Economy and poverty was sent to all Catholic Parishes, and to the Council of Churches in the Netherlands

Unie Nederlands Katholieke Vrouwenbeweging (Unie NKV)

This umbrella organisation, founded 60 years ago, has held Study Days on Poverty for its members, and other interested people. Many have active experience of working with people living in poverty. Topics covered by these study days included, Food Banks and Prison work, and empowerment training for women in situations of extreme poverty.

One of their members had held a meeting for Prison Governors on Poverty. She runs a budgeting course for prisoners, in order to prepare them for a return to society. They are campaigning on Poverty in Children.

Zijactief Katholiek Vrouwennetwerk Nederland (ZijActief)

This organisation arranges Study Days for Catholic women, many of these days are on the theme of Poverty particularly of women living in rural areas. Many of their members are also active in the other activities mentioned for the Netherlands.

Slovakia

Katolicke Hnutie Zien Slovenska (KhzS)

This is the umbrella organisation for Catholic women's organisations in Slovakia, founded in 2005.

- During times of fasting such as Lent, They organise the production and sale of soup, in order to express solidarity with the poor. The proceeds of these sales (approximately 20,000 euros per year) are directed into support for poor families.
- In partnership with other charities, they support women with crisis pregnancies and single mothers.
- They also support a counselling centre for women with pregnancy-related problems

Norway

Norges Katolske Kvinneforbund (NKKF)

The Norwegian Catholic Women's League, was founded 90 years ago. Their representative commented that although there was little material poverty in Norway, there was loneliness and emotional poverty, which they were trying to address.

Romania

Asociatia Crestina Andragogica a Femeilor (ACAF)

This is the Christian Women's Training Association. They run seminars for women to help them to - develop life skills; face problems; seize opportunities; and to know their rights. They promote tolerance between nationalities, ethnics groups and religions within Romania.

Switzerland

Schweizerischer Katholischer Frauenbund (SKF)

Their representative talked of the increase in poverty in Switzerland, despite its being a rich country and having good social support. People particularly affected were single parent families, and mothers with more than 5 children.

They run a project for supporting mothers with children up to school age, and get 800-900 applications per year for help. This project works in all 26 cantons of Switzerland.

They have produced a manual for writing wills.

Vie et Foi (Action catholique generale de la Suisse romande)

Their representative commented that people affected by poverty in their country were embarrassed by their poverty and were reluctant to let their families and neighbours know of their needs. Parents found it difficult to say 'no' to children, especially at Christmas, and this led to debt.

The poor often had to 'demand' help, as it was not readily accessible.

Various local branches of Vie et Foi, were actively involved in food banks, soup kitchens, support for single parents, and other local social programmes.

United Kingdom

National Board of Catholic Women (NBCW)

This umbrella body of Catholic women's organisations has, for 75 years, represented the voice of catholic women. In the last two years it has held a series of Study Days on Poverty around the country. These bring together local activist, politicians and national experts to explore how poverty affects people in that area, and what measures can be achieved to alleviate it. The aim is to raise the awareness of local catholic women and to engage them in local action.

The NBCW has also held a series of training days on parliamentary lobbying for its constituent members.

European

RENATE (Religious in Europe Network against Trafficking and Exploitation)

Their representatives explained that poverty, poor education and employment opportunities, as well as low self-esteem, are all factors that make young women in many countries vulnerable to trafficking both for prostitution and exploitative work. RENATE members run many help schemes for victims of trafficking, with housing, support and counselling as well as retraining and reintegration. They also run training and employment schemes to reduce the vulnerability of women to becoming victims of trafficking.

Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ)

Their representative described the problems faced by some people in her city in the North West of England, with changes in benefit systems and 'zero-hours' contracts (these mean that in any week there is no guarantee of work but the employee is unable to seek other work as they must be available for work if called) She described the food bank she ran in her local community. Many of those who were needing food support were ex-construction workers from Eastern Europe, whose work had ceased, but who were unable to return home