

Annual Report 2018 – Specialized Counselling Center SOLWODI Berlin

Facts and Figures

In the year of 2018, we counseled all together 379 women coming from 60 different countries. 282 of those were here for the first time. 70 % of the women came from Afrika, mainly from Nigeria, followed by Kenia, Kamerun and Somalia. For 167 women with 130 children we provided long-term support. Of these women, the percentage of those with African origin was 87 % and of those who had suffered violence was 91 %.

The amount of victims of human trafficking, which were supported by SOLWODI this year, has, once more, slightly increased from the year before. The tendency registered in 2017, that there are increasingly young women among these victims, was confirmed. The number of victims aged 14 to 21 has tripled compared to the year before.

Psychosocial Specialized Counseling

The specialization of the counseling center on human trafficking and Africa is one of the reasons why many women share their story of how they have been victimized by human trafficking. Thereby a considerable number of human trafficking victims was identified in the year 2018. A large number of the human trafficking victims who were counselled by us in 2018 came from Nigeria - as had been the case in the years before. But there were also increased numbers of women from French speaking countries of West Africa. Our numbers show that those affected by human trafficking from these countries are generally younger and therefore constitute a particularly vulnerable group.

Good networking with authorities and other organizations make it easier for us to help our clients find stabilization and connectedness. Usually this is a lengthy and time intensive process, because for those who have experienced violence and abuse it is very hard to regain the ability to trust someone. Therefore, it is important to have both, clear boundaries and good cooperation with the respective authorities. This way we can support the clients in their ability for self-determination as well as help them understand the complexity of the official structures and support them with difficult bureaucratic procedures.

Trauma-focused counseling was particularly intensive yet indispensable to help the women do the first steps in processing their traumatic experiences as well as their own reactions to those experiences. The multilingualism and long-term intercultural experience of our staff members facilitated these processes.

In the year 2018 our cooperation with the case officers for human trafficking issues of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) has been intensified. SOLWODI provided written expert comments that were received positively and thus conveyed the professional knowledge of its staff to decision-makers. Also the cooperation with the State Office for Refugee Matters (LAF) as well as that with the shelters for specially vulnerable women brought more support for our clients. Thus women affected by human trafficking were able to feel protected and safe.

Those are the first necessary steps for a professional risk and need assessment as well as for an assessment of the security situation in relation to our clients' experiences of violence and abuse. Again, in the year 2018, did the process of professional and empathetic support require time and competence from our staff to make healing and stabilization possible, as well as - with long-term support - integration and opening of new perspectives for the future.

Working with women who had experienced sexual violence and human trafficking, sometimes slavery, on their flight through the Sahara desert of Libya and Morocco or in southern European countries was a special challenge. It was particularly difficult with very young women, who had left their country when they were still underage to escape female genital mutilation as well as early or forced marriage. Often they had been victims of a whole series of violent experiences, and had to be afraid (because of the Dublin Regulation) to be sent back to countries where they would be exposed to the risk of re-victimization.

Networking and Public Relations

Public relations work of the counseling center of SOLWODI Berlin was especially intensive in the year 2018, with more than thirty public talks, workshops, training courses, interviews and exhibitions. The highlight was the 10-year anniversary of SOLWODI Berlin, preparations of which required much time and voluntary engagement. Part of the anniversary events was an exhibition with the theme "Life after Survival: Snapshots of Light." It consisted of posters of the Broken Heart Foundation, which showed the various forms of human trafficking as the dark side of migration, as well as pictures painted by SOLWODI clients illustrating their power of survival as well as a journey into light. The exhibition was framed by an artistic installation which illuminated the connection between darkness and light.

Training courses for identifying and interacting with those affected by human trafficking took place in several reception centers for refugees, and emergency shelters, as well as in one of the police headquarters. On various occasions, SOLWODI staff members were invited as experts in matters of human trafficking, e.g. by the German Bishops' Conference within an event concerning the Global Compact of Migration of the United Nations, by the Africa Center for the 150th anniversary of the Missionaries of Africa, by the Alice-Salomon University.

One of SOLWODI's staff members organized and moderated a five-day symposium for about thirty members of the network RENATE (Religious in Europe Against Trafficking and Exploitation) with the theme "Human Trafficking and Trauma". Among the speakers were experts from science and church as well as from the Federal Criminal Police Office. SOLWODI's staff members were also involved in areas of prevention, e.g. carrying out a workshop at the KAAD ("Katholischer Akademischer Ausländer-Dienst" - Catholic academic foreigner service) for scholarship holders from different countries, particularly African and South American countries.

Participation in various committees (e.g. Federal Working Group on Trafficking in Human Beings, KOK, Working Group Trafficking in Women, Working Group Refugee Women in Neukölln, Working Group Refugees of Berlin Archdiocese, Volunteer Working Group SOLWODI Berlin) was continued through the year 2018, so as to expand and convey expert knowledge, as well as to better support those affected by human trafficking and other forms of violence, and to jointly fight human trafficking.

Gratitude

The feeling of gratitude was a special gift in the jubilee year of 2018. Because of the participation of volunteers, the donation of many committed people, and the support of public and church-related funding agencies and associations, it was possible to look back with joy at the last ten years, where we had been able to support thousands of women together with their children. To those we are thankful as well, because they enriched our lives with their living power and vital energy.

The SOLWODI Team Berlin