

## Ukrainian women refugees: their vulnerability to exploitation

More than two million people, mostly women with children, have fled from Ukraine by now.

They are extremely vulnerable. They have lost almost all that made them feel safe and protected: their husbands who had to stay behind, their friends and neighbours, their jobs, their cultural embedment. Many of them have traumatic war experiences. Coming to a safe country and receiving food and shelter is only a first relief. The future is more than uncertain for most of them.

And it can be dangerous:

These women, many of them pregnant or with small children, who are tired and frightened, are easy prey for criminals. They are in fear of being robbed of the few belongings they still have, and from being sexually assaulted. Criminals seek to traffic them into all types of exploitation. This is happening already, and it has to stop!

We know of women being offered transport at the Ukrainian border, but after gratefully having accepted it, they ended up in forced labour or prostitution. Others are relieved to find housing, only to discover that it entails domestic servitude or sexual services. This is trafficking in human beings and IT IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY. It is banned by international treaties.

Soroptimist International of Europe, true to its maxim "We stand up for women" calls upon all Europeans to protect Ukrainian refugees from trafficking and from any other forms of crime. All victims of trafficking, to a large majority of them women, need our protection and our support. We, Soroptimists in Europe, are ready to provide both.

Soroptimist clubs have already in the past been active to prevent trafficking and they have helped victims. In the present situation with millions of women at risk, our vigilance and our efforts will be multiplied.

**Soroptimist International of Europe**

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