

Europeans warned on female trafficking: Churches urged to step up efforts to fight practice

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Churches in Europe are being urged to step up efforts against trafficking in women, a problem estimated to affect hundreds of thousands of women every year. "The trafficking of so many women and children is a human rights abuse that shames us all," said Baroness Sarah Ludford, a member of the European Parliament who spoke in Brussels about a new publication offering guidance on the topic.

The 48-page document, produced by two Brussels-based agencies, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and Catholic-run Caritas Europa, was issued last month. "Christian churches and related organizations, along with their partners from civil society, have repeatedly denounced trafficking as an unacceptable new form of slavery," said their statement at the Belgian offices of the European Parliament.

A report drawn up for the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe, which include 45 countries, said that decreasing possibilities for migrants to enter the European Union (EU) legally increase their reliance on smuggling organizations and thus their risk of being trafficked and exploited by traffickers.

CCME General Secretary Doris Peschke said she hoped the enlargement of the EU by ten countries this year would reduce trafficking in women since it would allow more women in Central and Eastern Europe "access to legal status and legal travel." As a result, they would "not need to use smugglers and end up in the hands of traffickers to enter [another] European country." -*Ecumenical News International*