

FEDERATION STUDY DAY 2018

(To be used as close as possible to October 26th –

Federation Constitution Founding Day)

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Europe: Continental Area



Europe Continental Area has chosen 2 goals out of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. You may choose one of these or even reflect on both goals, feel free to use this material and our prayer is that you may be blessed by taking action and doing good in the name of our precious Lord Jesus Christ for the transformation of the whole world.



Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Extreme poverty rates have been cut by more than half since 1990. While this is a remarkable achievement, one in five people in developing regions still live on less than \$1.90 a day, and there are millions more who make little more than this daily amount, plus many people risk slipping back into poverty. Poverty is more than the lack of income and resources to ensure a sustainable livelihood. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. Economic growth must be inclusive to provide sustainable jobs and promote equality.



Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals is dedicated to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, the provision of access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels. source: [https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/)

[development-goals/](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/)

Worship Service

**For this worship service put items before the altar or on the altar that symbolize peace,
justice, poverty.**

GATHERING AND FOCUSING

We are here

in the name of Christ Jesus.

So ask right now,

and it shall be given to you.

Seek right now,

and you will find.

Knock right now,

and the door will be opened.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy, awesome Friend, some of us have come here feeling hassled and corrupted by the pressures and temptations of life. We need help.

Please forgive and restore us.

Holy Friend, some of us have come here feeling not so much sinful as frustrated by our clumsiness and stupidity. We need help.

Please quieten and reclaim us.

Holy Friend, some of us have come here feeling not sinful but rather care-less or even cynical about ourselves and others. We need help.

Please confront and redeem us..

Holy God, we thank you that our judge is our saviour and our saviour our judge. You know best what needs rooting out or disinfecting, pruning or nourishing, weeding and nurturing.

By the grace of Christ Jesus, may we be saved from all that is ruinous and reestablished in all that is healthy and strong. For your love's sake.

Amen

HYMN

“God of the poor (Beauty for brokenness) from Graham Kendrick or **“Jesus, Lover of My Soul”** from Charles Wesley

SCRIPTURE READING

Psalm 85 and Luke 12,13-21

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

God of all nations, God of women and men, God of the universe, God of just and unjust, we come to you in humble worship.

Father of orphans and shelter of widows we ask you to protect, lead, love and comfort us.

We confess that very often we do not reach out to the poor because it is so uncomfortable to see them, to meet them. We all are vulnerable but tend to hide it. We all depend on you, on your gracious providence. Have mercy on us, not to close our hearts but open for your love and for the love of our neighbors.

Guide us and give us courage to speak in the name of the voiceless people.

We ask you in the name of Jesus who was rich but became poor so that by his poverty he could make us rich. Amen

CONFESSION AND ASSURANCE

The Scripture declares: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but that the world through him might be saved."

So ask right now,

and it shall be given to you.

Seek right now,

and you will find.

Knock right now,

and the door will be opened.

In the name of the Son the word of God declares to each repentant soul: Your sins are forgiven!

Thanks be to God!

Meditation

"Let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

These words of the prophet Amos are found chiselled into the marble stone of the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, Alabama (USA) in remembrance of Martin Luther King Jr who on December 5, 1955, proclaimed these words to the Assembly of the Montgomery Improvement Association in the Holt Street Baptist Church, during a speech to decide on the boycott of buses right after the arrest of Rosa Parks.

In these few words we find the decisive appeal of all the prophetic faiths and it was exactly Martin Luther King, prophet of his time and not only, who made them his own in all of his ministry committed to black rights.

The image that Amos offers us is that of a dynamic justice, in movement. Righteousness and justice must flow like water, like an ever-flowing stream, seething and purifying. We are not dealing therefore with an idea, but an **action**, a commitment for righteousness; "justice is really love in

action”. This needs prophets like Martin Luther King, but also needs many men and women, courageous like Rosa Parks. Justice put into practice, dynamic, tears us from our secure shores and carries us away. Evidently there is still the need of Rosa Parks and of Martin Luther King, of believers able to raise their voices and denounce, resist and if necessary boycott. There is no time to loose. Be inspired by wonderful men and women in history and be the voice of the voiceless!

OFFERING

During this Study Day Worship an offering, as part of our commitment to be good stewards of all God has given us, is to be received. This offering is the Unit's / Area's annual gift to the Federation's work. It is to be sent to the World Treasurer (contact world.treasurer@wfmucw.org for banking details) or give to the World Treasurer at the Area Seminar or World Assembly.

HYMN “For everyone born, a place at the table” (*text: Shirley Erena Murray*)

ACTION TAKING

Do something to spread peace on earth, do something to end poverty!

- Learn the name of a homeless person living close to you. Do not think of him/her as a “homeless”, don’t call him or her “homeless”, call by his/her name.
- Be inspired by the House of Bread Church in Stafford (UK), who offer food, but not just food, they let people come in and bake their own bread in the kitchen of the church building. <https://www.hobstafford.co.uk/about-us/>
- Support the poor by giving them opportunities to study, work and earn money.
- Let the poor and broken people serve you with everything that they have. Do not want to help them all the time but make friends of the poor, treat them equally as you treat your best friends.

HYMN “Wonderful Peace” (*Warren D Cornell*) or “Peace like a river”

SENDING: STEPPING OUT WITH GOD

Go out into the world in peace and love.

If you want to be more high Spirited:

ask and you will receive,

seek and you will find,

knock and the doors will open.

Ask not for challenges to match your wisdom

but for wisdom to match the challenges

In the name of the Three Person'd God, I bless you.
More saving grace than you can contain,
more providential love than you can measure,
more friendship than you can ever fully explore,
will be with you now and ever more. *Amen*

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Bible study

“Woe to you who are rich”

Luke: beatitudes and woes as a political agenda

In the gospel of Luke the issues of wealth and poverty are surprisingly stressed more than in the other gospels. There are especially three texts that are related to the rich and poor: Luke 6:20-26; Luke 12:16-19; Luke 16:20-31.



The first text to be recalled is that of the beatitudes and woes, because it gives us the perspective from which Luke sees the issue of wealth: Jesus, according to the tradition he considers reliable, talks about real poverty and real wealth, without giving any indication about its sinful or virtuous origin. Wealth in itself is condemned, and this changes radically his perception of the identity of God's people.

Luke in fact, pictures himself as a faithful disciple of Jesus, Luke belonged to the elite and read Jesus' words with respect but also with the need to come to terms with this problem: how can a rich person, placed by Jesus under God's judgment, be saved? This is why in the gospel the issue is dealt with very seriously and more thoroughly than in the other gospels. The rich can find a place in God's kingdom following examples like the one of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), namely welcoming Jesus, renouncing every unjust behavior and using personal wealth to support the mission and the poor, with the strong conscience of having received an immense grace and being the last among the rescued. In Luke's view, then, these woes are a datum of Jesus' tradition that needs explanation, the clear witness of a precise world view in which he tries to find a place for those who, like probably himself or his friend Theophilus, were not poor at all.

This is clear also in the other two passages quoted. In the first one we see a tradition where the rich gathers wealth foolishly, without considering its consequences and how short human life can be. Especially in Luke 16 an interesting datum emerges: according to Jesus'/Luke's words, the rich man is condemned only because of a reversal of human conditions in the afterlife. Nothing is

said explicitly about his having been unjust.

The woes against the rich become the witness and expression of a clear new political perspective in Luke's (and early Christian) theology. With his resurrection, Jesus has been proclaimed the new "emperor", *so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father* (Philippians 2:10f.). The good news is that the ancient promise of a restoration of justice and peace has been realized and proclaimed true in Christ. Jesus' woes are not warnings nor calls to conversion, but a clear statement of who's in and who's out of God's Kingdom, a new creation made visible and actual in the Church.

In other words, beatitudes and woes reflect very well the political dimension of the gospel, a radical reshaping of the Israelite former identity into a whole new world view, here with a very strong social connotation. Luke himself is the example of this new identity: an educated (and rich?) Greek, most probably a God fearer, by God's infinite mercy and grace, who in Christ has been accepted in the holy people, has become part of His kingdom and has received a whole new identity. God's ancient promises have been realized in Christ, the real Lord of this world.

What is poverty today?

Invite your Local Government Council or someone from social department to provide information / a speaker on what it is doing for ending poverty in your city/area/country.

Migration – an example of poverty

Degradation is the general condition that today characterizes the greater part of these developing countries where it enters into almost every social, economic and environmental context. This is a condition that represents exactly the opposite of what were the goals that had inspired the constitution of the United Nations system and the various agencies destined for the struggle against poverty and the result of which leads to the mass immigration we face today.

As everyone knows very well, the debate on how to handle the problem is very open. I would like to remove from this discussion the naive idea that we could define with the slogan "let's make everyone obtain wellbeing in their own country". The idea is to create happy countries where, thanks to available work and therefore conditions for making a comfortable living, nobody would be pushed to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Simple, right? We might ask ourselves then why this same recipe cannot be applied to those countries that, even being the destination of migrants, are going through difficult situations on economical and social levels.

How can we face the problem? The proposal of "human corridors" started by the Waldensian Church (protestant in Italy, Europe) and the Community of Saint Egidio in Italy, appears to me to be one of the most sensible solutions and inspired by a true humanitarian spirit. First of all this

proposal is sensible in that it does not think of resolving definitely the problem of immigration, but seeks to lighten the problem in favor of migrants and the host countries, a first step toward a possible solution. The migrants who enter the program are selected in terms of humanitarian priorities (cohesive families, single women, children, sick, disabled, etc), checking at the same time their effective desire to integrate in the host countries; this is also to avoid the entrance of people linked to terrorism or criminal activity. In order to help the integration of the migrants this proposal offers adequate assistance in each phase in their transfer to a new country and a new life (medical assistance, professional formation and job opportunities, etc.). This program is above all a humanitarian action and therefore demonstrates that between racial separation and prejudice and indiscriminate goodwill there is a third possibility.

But, as mentioned above, this program does not claim to be a solution to the problem of immigration, which has more profound and ancient roots. The worldwide aggressive economic system that we witness today has had devastating effects, provoking a great increase in wars, in poverty, the distance between the rich and the poor, environmental destruction, urbanization and immigration. This reality destroys the myth “economic growth = well being” and has favored the rebirth of an analysis of an economy that can be made “more just” (for example, through greater decision making power in economic matters by government) or through the establishment of other economic forms and organizations in society.

The debate is open, but, to return to the problem of immigration – seen as the fruit of the present day model of economic development – it seems an illusion that the fire can be extinguished by the same force that has provoked it. The world today is governed by groups of economic power that express political classes that agree with the system and are often corrupt with the result that the interests of many are regularly sacrificed for the interests of few.

OUR CHURCHES TAKING ACTION

Migration

Rome – On March 20, 2017, more than 520 migrants landed in Lampedusa, the tiny sicilian isle in front of the african continent. Waiting for them, on the dock, there were also the operators of Mediterranean Hope (MH). A project started in 2014 by the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI), with an observatory on the island with the aim to give the first help to the immigrants.



“The landing operations started around 3 AM and continued all day long, up to 11 PM – said to NEV Press Agency, Alberto Mallardo, MH operator -. Although the conditions were generally good,

the immigrants who arrived were exhausted, many had difficulties in walking, they had cramps and were shivering with cold. As usual, we offered them hot tea, water and fruit juices, but also thermal blankets and a smile. Once again there were many young people in front of us, men and women, several children including a five month baby accompanied by his parents”.

The good sea and weather conditions helped 3500 people to leave north-western Libya for the Italian coasts from Sunday dawn and for the whole day of Monday; 25 rescue operations were coordinated by the General Command of the Coast Guard, assisted by the European Union mission *Eunavformed* and by private lifeboats. Up to now, 38 are the confirmed victims. *“To avoid that thousands of people are forced to risk their lives first in the Libyan hell and second at sea – said Mallardo – from Lampedusa we renew our call for legal and safe ways that enable vulnerable people to reach Europe without having to rely on traffickers”.*



The Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI), together with the Community of Sant’Egidio and the Waldensian and Methodist Church, in a year, thanks to its pilot project of ‘humanitarian corridors’ has brought 700 refugees, mostly Syrians, from Lebanon to Italy.

Goal 16: Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies

Bible study:

Peace and justice (Psalm 85: 8-13)

Peace and justice, two very important and significant words that we find many times in the Scriptures and that are often found together. In fact, it has no sense at all talking about peace without taking into consideration the necessity of obtaining and enjoying justice in our lives.

The term “justice” is often found translated as “righteousness”, which opens the door to a



wide range of ideas and considerations. What is just? What is right? What is right and just for some may be unjust or wrong for others. My justice or righteousness is something like what Martin Luther said about liberty or freedom. My liberty extends only as far as the liberty of my brother or sister.

Justice is hard to achieve. Our various cultures have sought to establish justice through systems of law, create order through enforcement of those laws, and have courts with judges and juries to determine just decisions. Psalm 85 gives us a good starting point for our study, especially

the last six verses. God promises peace to his people and to all who wish to turn to him and trust in him. But what is peace for us? It is certainly the absence of war, of violence and of hatred, but it is also peace of mind, a sense of security and well being and the lack of concerns. Therefore real peace is something we can only hope for but almost impossible to attain for any long period of time. The Lord in this Psalm tells us that peace depends on his deliverance which will bring glory to the land. He talks of love and fidelity, justice, peace and prosperity.

The psalm is filled with promises in the midst of a time of waiting and uncertainty. The first two verses encourage us to remember what God has done for Israel and for us - looking favorably on the land, and most particularly on the forgiveness of sins. The emphasis of the psalm is not so much on personal sin as on corporate and national sin. Both ancient traditions and scholarly consensus invite us to think of this psalm as being sung in response to the return from the Babylonian exile when land indeed had been restored, national forgiveness had been experienced, and the people waited for God's promises to be fulfilled. This being said, the proclamation of the psalm is not limited to that time alone as each new generation brings to this psalm its own deep sense of the sins of their own community or nation and the experience of forgiveness.

Verses 10-13 are filled with rich images which bring to life the promised salvation of verse 9. The principle image of this indwelling promise is God's "path." Psalm 85's path of God links us to the "way of the Lord" being prepared in the wilderness, the path is being made straight. Psalm 85 invites us metaphorically to walk along that path and to experience the realities which accompany God on the way. All along this path we find that love, faithfulness, righteousness, and peace meet, kiss, spring up from below and look down from above.

A group dedicated to biblical renewal in the church created a physical space where the people could literally walk the "Road to Shalom." The path was filled with road signs and stopping places where the reality of God's "shalom" was illustrated by various passages of Scripture. At one point, the travelers arrived at "Promise Alley" where they were asked to hold up signs imprinted with the words: STEADFAST LOVE (*hesed*), FAITHFULNESS (*'emet*), RIGHTEOUSNESS (*sedeq*), and PEACE (*shalom*).

Shalom is first linked to God's steadfast love. This is a love which, like *agape*, is rooted in God's promise. Shalom is linked secondly to God's faithfulness, God's dependable presence and commitment. And shalom is linked finally and most intimately to righteousness.

Clearly part of what constitutes the promise, the "good" that the LORD gives, is actual increased produce, real food abundantly available for all. But more than this, or perhaps better, making this possible is the increased faithfulness and righteousness of both God and God's people.

All of this leads us resolutely to the final verse in which we see the footprints of God's path. God is walking on this path with righteousness leading the way.

The Roma Today: people who suffer injustice

1. A DAY IN THE LIFE of ROMA

As told by Lila Balovski, pastor of Jabuka UMC in Serbia (Europe), a day in the life of Romani people in Jabuka looks like this:

“They live in very small houses; often in one room to live, to sleep, and to bath. The families have many kids; three to four generations live together. In our place, they don’t know where they come from and do not know their language. They were born here, speak Serbian, and have no interest in the school. For the Roma, it’s important to have enough food for each day and to have a shelter. They get up early in the morning. The first thing to do is a fire in the oven, then a Turkish coffee and a bread will be prepared. When it’s summer, the work is done outside, in winter time it’s done in the only room inside. Food will be made ready or a soup. If money is there, they buy their favorite food, no matter what it costs. And it’s of no matter what tomorrow will be. This is typical for the Roma. On the day that the garbage is transported away, they collect glass, iron, and paper. This they sell and with that they earn some money. The kids have to go to school until eighth grade (14 years), but they don’t have any interest in it. When it’s summer, most of the time is spent outside, they sit until late in the evening with their neighbors, eat, drink, speak and sing. Where the Roma live, there is always a lot of noise, because they have many kids and talk in loud voices. They are not worried about tomorrow, the important thing is today. They are happy with small things and they are very hospitable. They are ready to give the last thing they have for a guest.”

2. TODAY

Today it is estimated that ten to twelve million Roma live in Europe. They can be found in every European country, but most live in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia and Spain. They constitute Europe’s largest ethnic minority. (Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. “Creating a European Roma Policy.”) Between six and eight million Roma live in eastern Europe. Actual numbers are difficult because government census figures are generally lower than the reality. Romania has the largest population with about 1.8 million Roma. There are between 400,000 and 800,000 in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Serbia. (Migration Information Service). Some have achieved success, fighting their way out of poverty to become physicians, teachers, business people, and political leaders. For the majority, however, life is extreme and it is hard. Blinding poverty, racial hatred, official policy, lack of education, and limited access to health care are only part of a long list of agonies faced by Romani men, women, and children.

In the midst of this human crisis can also be found opportunities and signs of hope. In 2005, several European countries joined together to launch a “Decade of Roma Inclusion.” The goal was to improve the economic and social lives of the Romani people living in their countries. Focus points included employment, education, health care, and housing. The initiative was supported by the

World Bank, the Council on Europe, the European Commission, and the United Nations Development Programme. With more than 75% of the ten years now elapsed, the results are spotty at best.

In Serbia, for example, most of the Roma who live there fled the crisis in Kosovo. They have no documentation to prove who they are, and their children have no birth certificates. Without official documents, they are not eligible for help of any kind. Likewise, they live in temporary housing and have no official residence. Without an official residence, they cannot access health care, and their children cannot go to school.

(Roma children, families opening new doors to education and the future Friday, November 19, 2010 Church World Service.

<http://www.churchworldservice.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=10379>)

Unfortunately, Roma have been portrayed as perpetrators of trafficking. More often, however, they are the victims. They are especially vulnerable because of racial and gender discrimination, impoverishment, and low levels of education. Being forced to pay off debts at exorbitant rates of interest (usury) also plays a role. Children who have no homes and are in the care of the state are targets as well. (Roma, Migration and Human Trafficking, by Ostalinda Maya. March 12, 2012. Romedia Foundation). <http://romediafoundation.wordpress.com/2012/03/12/roma-migration-and-human-trafficking/>)

One Romani woman escaped sexual bondage in Germany and fled to the Czech Republic. There she was captured by a group of pimps and again was sexually exploited. They placed her in a “shopping window” where purchasers could select her as they would any item for sale. If she did not meet her pimps’ expectations she was starved and even raped. Eventually, she escaped again. She never told the police what had happened. (European Roma Rights Centre).

Parallel submission to the committee on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women for the Czech Republic. No. 10.

http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/docs/ngos/ERRC_2_CzechRepublic_CEDAW47.pdf)

3. ROMANI WOMEN

Romani women face two kinds of discrimination, first because they are Roma and second because they are female. Because theirs is traditionally a patriarchal society, the men tend to receive better treatment and have more rights than the women. In addition, several other factors play into Romani women’s issues.

Child Marriages. Arranged marriages of female children as young as early teens continue in some Romani communities. With these forced marriages, the girls drop out of school. (Education levels are much lower among Romani women than among Romani men.) Another reason for girls dropping out of school is the high expectation that girls will be virgins when they marry. In fact,

girls are sometimes tested before marriage to insure they are virgins. Parents fear that girls will lose their virginity during or after puberty if they continue to attend public schools, and pull them out of the educational systems. The result of all this is that Romani women with little education become practically unemployable. In a speech given at the Second European Meeting of Roma Women in 2010, Nyamko Sabuni, Minister for Integration and Gender Equality in the Swedish government, said:

“It is time to agree upon and implement concrete actions that guarantee all women and girls their fundamental freedoms and rights. Even if this means going against traditional customs and practices.

“One such custom is underage marriages. A consequence of premature marriages is that girls are denied access to education. Access and quality of education are crucial elements for the inclusion of Roma as equal members of society. Access to high quality education can help break the vicious circle of exclusion from the labour market, poverty, poor housing, poor health and segregation. Education empowers individuals.” (<http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/12456/a/137708>)

4. CHANGES IN THE WIND

Women taking charge.

While the numbers are still low, Romani women are becoming active and are taking leadership roles in their societies. Agnes Osztolykán, for example, is the first and only woman to be elected to serve in the Hungarian Parliament. She wrestled her way through primary and high school and attended the Political Science Faculty in the university in Miskolc. She faced ostracism from both students and faculty, but managed to graduate. In 2009 she joined a newly formed political group called LMP, which stood for “politics can be different.” This group encouraged her to run for office and she reluctantly agreed to do so. In an interview, she reflected on her election to Parliament, “At that moment it dawned on me that we had won seats in the parliament. I called my father and told him ‘Dad, I think I’ve become a member of the Hungarian Parliament.’ He was stunned; he said ‘I see,’ wept, and then hung up the phone.” In 2011, she received the International Women of Courage Award, and was honored by U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at the awards ceremony.

(Politics Can Be Different”: A Conversation with Agnes Osztolykán. June 1, 2011 by Bernard Rorke. <http://blog.soros.org/2011/06/politics-can-be-different-a-conversation-with-agnes-osztojkan/>)

In recent years, mother centres have emerged in Albania and Bulgaria. The centres are designed to be places where young mothers can gather to discuss issues of importance to them. They are run by the mothers. In Simitli, Bulgaria, a centre called “Mother’s Love” grew quickly after its inception and began to focus on programs where non-Roma and Roma could be together. Another mother centre, this one in Albania, developed the core idea for establishing a space in the National Museum

of Albania where Roma folklore costumes could be displayed. The exhibit opened in 2008 with the Albanian prime minister officiating.

(Roma Mother Centres in Albania and Bulgaria. by Lili Makaveeva. European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network.

<http://www.ergonetwork.org/media/userfiles/media/egro/Case%20BG%20mother%20centres%20ERGOsite%2022%20april%202010.pdf>

OUR CHURCHES TAKING ACTION

Counseling during the path to womanhood

The United Methodist Church has established an advisory service for Roma girls in Ohrid (Macedonia, Europe). After a trial phase and an evaluation period, this service will continue to provide valuable help and advice on the girls' path to womanhood.

Roma girls who are already at puberty, or will soon reach puberty, are confronted with hormonal related changes which they often cannot discuss with their parents. This has lasting consequences for the girls, in particular if they are pushed into marriage much too early and become mothers when they themselves are still children. They are not yet mature enough to bring up children and have no idea how to take care of them. This is the background for establishing the UMC's advisory service in Ohrid – with the object of changing the Roma girls' way of thinking about early marriage, and directing their attention to education and a better economic and social future.

During the four-month trial phase, a team of women composed of a nurse, a pastor and volunteer helpers offered an educational and advisory program in which various subjects were discussed. These subjects were partly suggested by the girls themselves, which ensured that the program was closely related to their lives. In addition to this carefully prepared and flexible program, social services as well as individual medical and pastoral advice were available.

Initial experience showed that the invitation flyer was attracting increasing interest among the Roma girls and that the teaching units, which were partly carried out by specialist brought in for the occasion, were really valuable. At the outset, communication with the girls proved to be quite difficult. The participants were embarrassed by subjects such as menstruation, genital hygiene, mycotic infections and sexually transmitted diseases, but also the hormonal related changes of the bodies, way of thinking and behavior of young girls, and it took a while to build up a relationship of trust that admitted of more than bashful giggling and answers limited to a yes/no or a movement of the head.

Later, the number of the girl participants increased, and an encouraging openness developed that allowed discussion of subjects and questions which were taboo in the families of origin – for example inferiority complexes, teenager depressions and the mental health of girls.

One group of subjects aimed at showing the girls possible alternatives with regard to the traditional practice of child marriage, and in particular at emphasizing the value of education (even university education!). The physical and mental consequences of very early marriages were likewise discussed – consequences which also have implications for the children of such early marriages. In the course of these talks it became clear how much the girls longed for better values for their lives, but also how much they are trapped in their traditions and subject to pressure from their parents.

Another subject which was raised was the consumption of addictive drugs, widespread in Roma families, as well as the painful topic of domestic violence. It was distressing to hear to what extent these girls were affected by these subjects – and it likewise emerged how difficult it is to give them real help here, as long as the institutions in this country do little to protect the victims and the girls are too afraid to testify against offenders in their own families. Giving understanding, encouragement and love is one thing – and the girls have all experienced this. But more is really needed....

At the end of the trial phase, an evaluation was made regarding the work of the advisory service. It is difficult to say what the long-term effect will be of accompanying the Roma girls on their path. Certainly, valuable relationships to the girls have been created which form a good basis on which to build. And the feedback from the girls was clear: the discussed subjects were all described as very helpful, and the wish for further meetings and talks was expressed.

The advisory service started its work again in December 2017, and in response to a lively information campaign, 18 young girls came forward who would like to make use of the service offered. The persons in charge will need a lot of staying power – as well as people who support this work, particularly in prayer. But they are prepared to do their utmost to ensure that the path of the Roma girls to womanhood can also be a path to a promising future

Source: Julijana Mileska, Ohrid / Christina Cekov, Strumica / Urs Schweizer, Zurich

What about you?

- Discuss what your family does, your church does, your town/village does to end poverty! Share your ideas!
- Have you ever felt you were one of those on “the other side of the tracks?” If so, what was it like?
- Watch the documentary *Fuocoammare* (Fire at sea) to have an insight what it means being a migrant, discuss the situation of migrants.

Trailer on this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0IUZI53fse0>