

# UNITED AGAINST SEXUAL SLAVERY

Girl group activities in Lithuania



THE ÅLAND ISLANDS PEACE ASSOCIATION-EMMAUS (FINLAND)  
THE ÅLAND ISLANDS PEACE INSTITUTE (FINLAND)  
MISSING PERSONS' FAMILIES SUPPORT CENTER (LITHUANIA)

## THE MOST SEVERE VIOLATION OF GENDER EQUALITY

According to 2006 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) report, about four million people around the world fall victim to trafficking every year, of which around 80% involves trading in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The overwhelming majority of them are women and children.

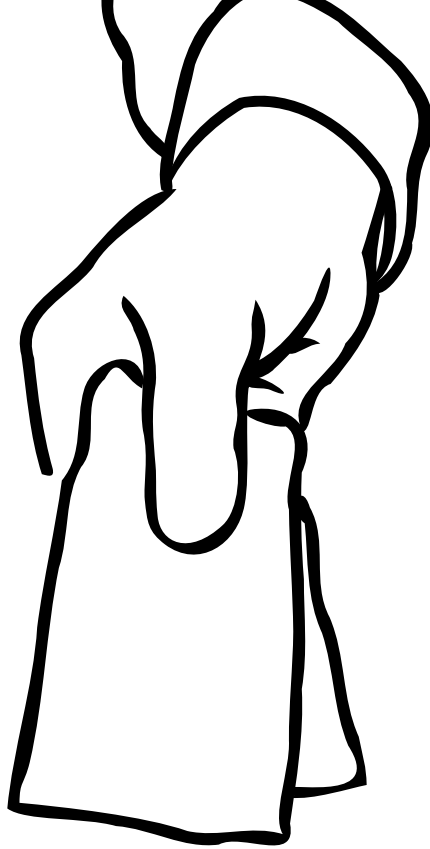
According to the International Organization for Migration, IOM (2005), at least 500,000 women and children are sold as sex slaves to Europe every year, whereupon they are raped, exploited and physically and psychologically abused in local prostitution markets. Since trafficking in persons is a criminal activity, reliable statistics are hard to obtain and the number of unrecorded cases is large.

Research in Europe and the rest of the world shows a continual increase in sexual slavery. Countries of origin, transit and destination are interlinked in a complex network. A country of origin for one victim may function as a country of destination for another. Traffickers primarily send women and children from the poor countries of the South to the rich countries of the North and from Eastern Europe to the West, where the demand for sexual slaves is highest.

Trafficking in human beings is the second most profitable organized crime activity after drugs and weapons smuggling. According to the UN (2006), the profits from trafficking comprise up to 756 million euro per year. Unlike drugs, women and children can be sold as sex slaves over and over again on the international market.

According to a report presented by the UN bodies UNICEF and OHCHR and regional security organisation OSCE in March 2005, there is still a lack of long-term methods and strategies to combat trafficking.

*”Research in Europe and the rest of the world shows a continual increase in sexual slavery.”*

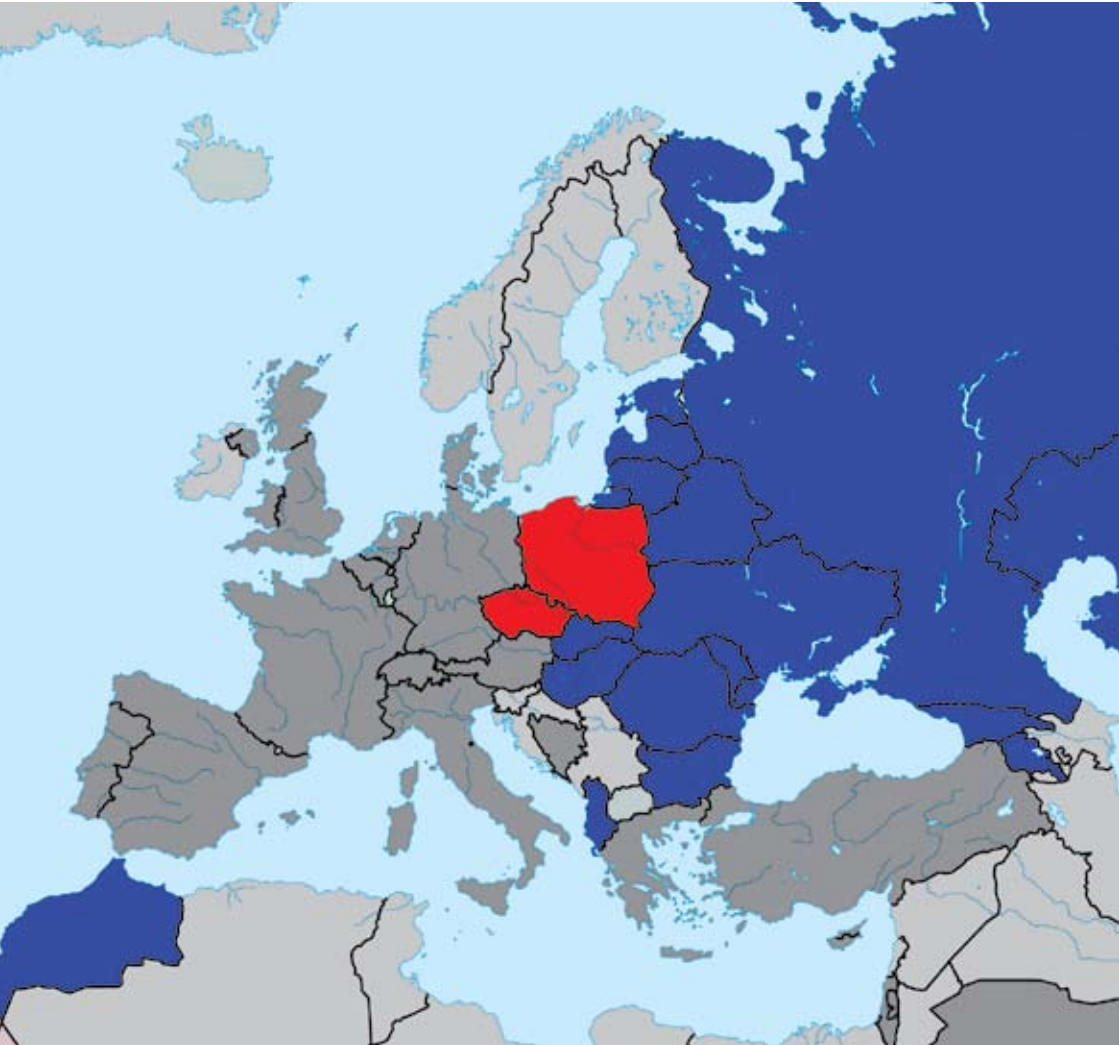


**Trafficking** is defined by the UN as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

### **Sexual slavery**

Trafficking is frequently referred to as “the contemporary slavery”. Emmaus International has agreed on using the term “slavery” instead of “trafficking”, since the term “trafficking” mainly aims at transaction of persons. The focus should instead be on the slave-like conditions, which victims are forced to live in. “Sexual slavery” is a generally accepted term when talking about trading in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

## Reported trafficking in Europe



- n Main reported destinations
- n Both origin and destination
- n Main reported origins

Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), April 2006.

## What can be done about this problem?

Long-term gender equality work can help to get hold of the root cause of trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation. The challenge lies in questioning and transforming the existing concepts of gender, sexuality, power and purchase of sex.

The work of combating sexual slavery must, first and foremost, include different measures aimed at reducing demand, which drives sexual exploitation of women and children. But it is also very important to consider and highlight the background mechanisms that force women and children into sexual slavery. It is therefore necessary to strengthen the position of women and their rights in origin countries.

### **The Palermo Protocol**

*In 2000 eighty member states of the UN signed a "Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children". The protocol recognizes the need for a combined approach that integrates the effective prevention of trafficking and prosecution of traffickers, protection of human rights and assistance to trafficking victims. The protocol requires that countries adopt extensive measures for the prevention of trafficking through their international cooperation.*



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## POWER STRUCTURES THAT SUBORDINATE WOMEN

Anyone who buys sexual services exercises power. Sexual slavery is one of many manifestations of men's power over women. In order to understand the background of trafficking in women and children, one must be conscious of and understand the position of women in society.

The concept of gender power structure describes the oppressive structures that subordinate women as a group to men as a group and creates a power-based relationship between the sexes. The gender power structure is a result of traditional gender roles which are assigned to and learned by women and men from a young age. A distinctive trait of the power structure is the tendency for the needs and desires of men to be the key factor for the way in which societal life is organized.

*”Sexual slavery is one of many manifestations of men's power over women.”*

In many societies, gender positions are constantly brought to the fore through conscious as well as subconscious actions related to how both sexes are expected to behave. Depending on which gender one is born with, one's upbringing and society's expectations create distinct norms and values, behaviours and goals.

From childhood, girls are typically raised to view boys and men as the norm and to adapt to it. Girls do not necessarily have lower self-confidence than boys but they are brought up not to make any demands in public. In order for a girl to become accepted in various areas of society, she must adapt to male structures. A girl who takes initiative is often perceived as dominant and aggressive. For this reason, partaking in power or even wanting to partake in power is difficult for many women.

## SEXUAL OBJECT & COMMERCIAL COMMODITY

One result of the gender power structure is the sexual objectification of women and their bodies in our society. Women are exploited in the public sphere on a daily basis through media, film, pornography, the fashion industry, music and commercial advertising.

Objectification reduces women to passive objects whose value depends on whether they bring pleasure and use to others, instead of being treated as independent actors. Women accept objectification

**Gender** is a social and cultural construction, which is formed through interaction between people and is a continually ongoing and changing process. Gender is constructed, reproduced and validated in every-day life and in all areas of the society.

**Femininity and masculinity** are constructions and conceptions of how women and men should be and behave. The ideals of masculinity and femininity are not fixed, but constantly changing. Things termed "masculine" in the society are generally valued higher than things termed "feminine". This can be characteristics, behaviours, interests, professions and words in the language.

**While talking about women and men as groups** one refers to the power structures, through which women generally have lower positions and worse conditions in the society than men. Men as a group become part of these power structures through actions and behaviours, which consciously or subconsciously, voluntarily or involuntarily suppress and subordinate women as a group. The fact that men are in a superior position to women does not contradict the fact that certain women have power or even more power than men in some situations.

and learn that status and recognition can be achieved with the help of their looks.

Men, in their turn, are brought up to view women as sexual objects. In today's world, the sexuality of women is, to a large extent, formed by the male perception of female sexuality, rather than from the female perspective. Women acknowledge and identify their own sexuality through emphasizing their "femininity" and showing themselves as easily approachable to men. However, a "real" woman is not supposed to be sexually emancipated, at the same time as women are expected to satisfy the sexual needs of men upon demand. One might describe this as men monopolising female sexuality, which reinforces the dominating position of men in society.

Sexual objectification reproduces and upholds gender patterns in society. Women are considered to represent emotions, love and sexuality, whilst men are described as analytical, rational, active and work-oriented. These perceptions are deeply rooted and are formed by male dominance of power, but are maintained and passed on by both men and women. Objectification contributes to and intensifies other forms of every-day oppression, which women continually face due to their gender. The oppression takes the form of discrimination in the labour market, sexual violence, harassment and marginalization of the value of the work and achievements of women.

### Why do men buy sex?

Purchase of women by men is sometimes seen as the result of a natural and uncontrollable urge. When sex-buyer's actions are justified by saying that men have strong sexual desires which must be satisfied, deeply rooted ideas of men's and women's sexuality are disclosed. Views of sex and individual's capacity to control their own bodies and sexuality are influenced by how conceptions of womanhood and manhood are constituted in society. Men are permitted a self-evident

**Typically** a consumer of sex is a man, but this does not mean that all men buy sex or that female sex-buyers don't exist. It does not necessarily have to be solely women and children who fall victims to sexual slavery, although this is the most common case.



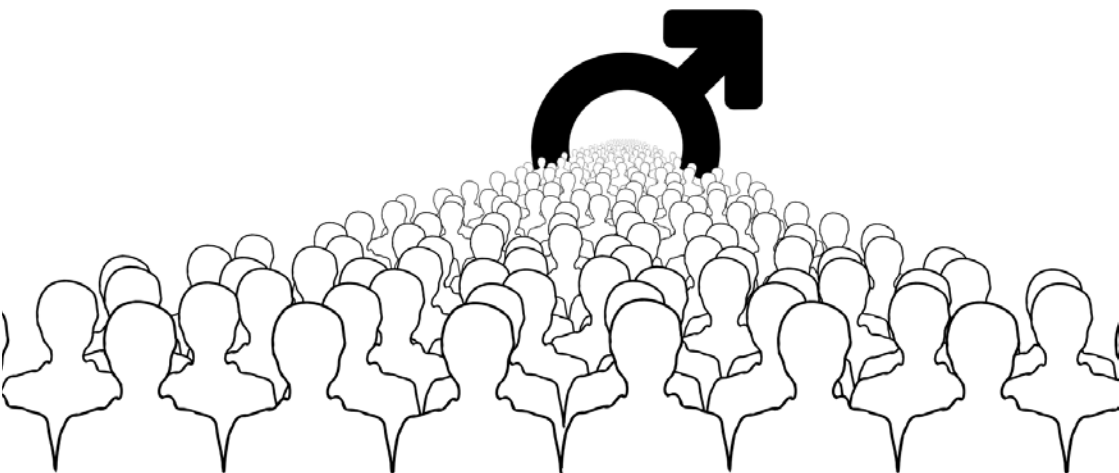
“right” to their desire, while women in practice have a limited right to choose or to reject sex.

Men’s right to sexual satisfaction is sometimes accepted as a human right equal to other basic needs such as sleep, food and shelter. It is important to see the difference between the purchase of sex and the right to one’s own sexuality. When men purchase sexual services, women are reduced to commodities in an international market.

The sex industry is created by men for other men and is a result of the gender power structure. It is the wishes and sexual fantasies of the sex-buyer that ought to be met, which is closely connected with the deeply rooted idea of woman’s role as satisfying the man. When a man purchases sex from a woman, traditional gender roles are reflected: a man is in a power position and a woman is subordinated to him. Sexual slavery is one of the most extreme manifestations of men’s power over women.

*”The sex industry is created by men for other men and is a result of the gender power structure.”*

Equal economic, legal and political rights is a prerequisite for gender equality, but it is not enough. Images of men as possessors of “natural and uncontrollable urge” as well as the sexual objectification of women and the view of female body as a tool for men’s sexual satisfaction needs to be questioned and changed before an equal society, without sexual slavery, can be achieved.



## CHALLENGING THE GENDER POWER STRUCTURE

The gender positions of humans are formed by the society in which they live. The society, in its turn, is formed by people who live in it. Gender power structure exists because people both create and uphold it. Women reproduce their gender patterns to the same extent as men do, that is, women subordinate themselves to a large extent. It is therefore not correct to portray women as helpless due to their subordinated position. Instead, focus should lie on women's possibilities to change their position in society.

In the Nordic Countries, the girl group method, a method for gender equality work, has been developed in order to make girls visible and facilitate the development and strengthening of their self-confidence. By exposing the connection between gender, sexuality and power, the girl group method can contribute to questioning the structures that reflect the boys' collective power over girls as something self-evident.

A girl group consists of six to eight teenage girls, who gather on a regular basis under the guidance of one or two female leaders. The group usually includes teenage girls within a certain age group. The small size of the group fosters a sense of security. The main emphasis lies on discussion, which is combined with different activities. The girls decide for themselves what they want to discuss or to do during girl group meetings. In the girl group, girls are also given the opportunity to come together on their own terms, without boys. This provides the girls with sufficient space to display their real selves and to feel respected and accepted for who they are.

The purpose of the girl group method is to make girls – a group,

which is frequently marginalized by the prevailing male norms in society – more visible and to strengthen them. The girl group activities bring out the interests and knowledge of the girls, and problematizes their subordination. The girl group can provide the girls with a sense of community and loyalty towards one another and learn them to support each other instead of acting as competitors in society.

A value-free approach is fundamental for discussions within the girl group. Following this approach, everyone is allowed to express any opinion, as long as one is prepared to listen to the opinions of the other participants. All opinions are of equal value, no rules are set as to what is right or wrong in the discussion and one should not judge the opinions of others. The principle values are human rights and democracy. The girl group is a forum in which the participants are given the opportunity to discuss questions that are important to them.

In the girl group, the girls are given space to express their creativity through drama, photography, film, handicraft, painting etc. Creativity is an important platform to strengthen and develop the girls. It provides girls with an opportunity to air their ideas, opinions and feelings and makes them more aware of themselves and their social environment.

The girl group can be of considerable support to teenage girls facing a period of difficulty while growing up to become adults. The group also functions as a network, which helps to prevent social marginalization, drug addiction and criminality.

One reason girls are lured into sexual slavery is the lack of gender equality in their home countries. If women had better future prospects, greater trust in themselves, better access to the labour market and if their rights were strengthened, fewer women would come into contact with traffickers. Thus, the girl group method is essentially a way for working towards gender equality and can be effective in preventing girls from falling victims to trafficking.

”The girl group method is essentially a tool for working towards gender equality.”

**When administering gender-segregated activities,** it is important to retain a consistent gender perspective and to set clear goals of equality, otherwise the girl group can reinforce the gender patterns instead of breaking them down.

## Main goals of girl group activities

- To strengthen girls' self-confidence and self-consciousness, which is a prerequisite for becoming active both on the political and the personal level.
- To highlight girls' strengths both for themselves and for the others.
- To give girls an opportunity to discover positive things about themselves.
- To give girls an opportunity to develop their personality and their inner resources.
- To give girls training in democracy by encouraging them to take responsibility and decide about the girl group activities on their own.
- To support girls so that they can cope with the stresses and strains of being girls and teenagers.



*Girl group meeting in Lithuania.*

## WORKING AGAINST THE DEMAND

The fundamental reason for the problem of sexual slavery is the continuing demand for women and children to be used for sexual purposes. Without men who pay for sex, sexual slavery would not exist. The common misunderstanding is that those paying for sex are rejected and maladjusted men, but research shows that the majority of consumers of sex are “normal” men who have a family and a well-paid job. Naturally, all men don’t pay for sex, but almost all of the consumers of sex are men. Therefore it is important to see the purchase of sex as a societal problem, not one that is caused by only a small number of people.

In order to counteract trafficking and create an equal society, male demand for prostitution should be put to an end. This is why it is extremely important that men should be involved in working against sexual slavery and learn to take responsibility themselves. Discussing gender equality in boy groups is a good start.

Boy group activities are organized in the same way as girl group activities with a strong focus on gender equality and building up understanding of gender development in society. The boy group functions as a place where the masculine norm and society’s masculine ideal is problematized and questioned. During the boy group meetings young men have the possibility to discuss such topics as gender equality and power as well as their own behavioural patterns and attitudes, and their view of women. What does it really mean to be a man? How can friends influence everyday decisions taken by young men? It can be tough for young men to meet the expectations of society. Men are also confined in their gender position although they have more power, privileges and space for action than women. The

*”The boy group functions as a place where the masculine norm and society’s masculine ideal is problematized and questioned.”*

main principle is that both women and men can benefit from living in an equal society.

Boy group activities are aimed at promoting gender equality and equal value of people, breaking the norms, highlighting cultural perceptions of gender and sexuality as well as empowering boys to make their own choices and decisions. Boy group activities could be an important tool for both destination and origin countries in the fight against sexual slavery.



*Mia Hanström, trainer of girl group leaders in Lithuania since 2003. "Looking back at the development of the project I am really impressed. The active involvement of girl group leaders combined with a simple but effective method is an important piece in the puzzle for building a democratic and equal society as well for working against sexual slavery. It has benefited me greatly to be able to contribute to this work and I hope that we can share this method with other countries".*

## FIGHT AGAINST SEXUAL SLAVERY IN LITHUANIA

Lithuania is one of the countries which ranks very high on the UN's list of origin countries. Lithuania also serves as a transit and destination country for human trafficking. According to research conducted by IOM, trafficking to and from Lithuania has increased since the country's accession into the EU. The number of trafficking victims in Lithuania is the highest among the three Baltic states. Data collected by Interpol indicates that between 1,500 and 2,000 Lithuanian women are annually trafficked abroad for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Lithuania has also become a transit point for the sex trade with women from Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. According to the Lithuanian Ministry of the Interior, on average, two girls from every high school disappear annually. The number of underage victims has increased significantly during the last few years.

In 2006, the IOM carried out a study of 102 Lithuanian victims of sexual slavery. The study showed that only 23% of the victims were raised in a family with both parents. Many of the girls were brought up in institutions or by a single parent. 52% of the victims had not completed their high school education.

Most of the girls who have suffered from trafficking are not aware of their rights, lack motivation and don't have any vision for the future. They are insecure, have low self-confidence and are highly susceptible to outside influence. The girls think that there's a better life waiting for them abroad and feel tempted by the images in mass media portraying attractive, successful and highly desirable women.

Since 2003 the Åland Islands Peace Institute has co-operation with the Missing Persons' Families Support Center (MPFSC) in Vilnius, Lithuania, which is focused on working against sexual slavery. Together

*„Most of the girls who have suffered from trafficking are not aware of their rights, lack motivation and don't have any vision for the future.”*

the two organisations have adopted the girl group method in order to prevent young Lithuanian girls from becoming victims of trafficking. Another goal of the girl group method is to make substantial impact in the field of gender equality in Lithuania.

The first girl group leader education in Lithuania was organised in November 2003 with trainer Mia Hanström from the Åland Islands. The project "Girl Power in Lithuania" was launched during the same year. Today the project is running at full capacity and is financed by Save the Children in Sweden, Save the Children on the Åland Islands, the Åland Islands Peace Association-Emmaus and the Åland Islands Peace Institute. The project focuses on seeing society from a gender perspective and aims at highlighting structural injustices that women have to face daily due to their gender. Girl group activities are also meant to assist girls in developing their own set of values and to confront the influence of other youngsters in socially vulnerable situations.

The target group of the project are girls from socially marginalized families who are at risk of becoming victims of sexual slavery. Many of the girls are selected from high schools and raised by single mothers, alcoholic parents or brought up in institutions. Even girls who have suffered from sexual slavery and returned back to Lithuania have a chance to join girl group activities thanks to this project.

*”The target group of the project are girls from socially marginalized families who are at risk of becoming victims of sexual slavery.”*



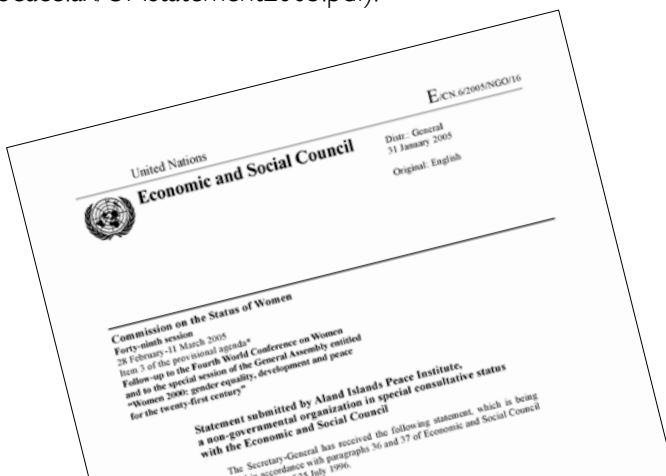
*Inesa Zukauskaite, 16 years, has been in a girl group at "Nendre" for three years. "We have good discussions which help us to gain more knowledge about ourselves, our relationship with the opposite sex and about our health. Here I have found true friends with whom I can share joy and sorrow."*



## The project “Girl Power in Lithuania” has helped to achieve following results:

- About 200 girls each year have participated in girl group activities run by 20 different organisations all around Lithuania.
- Girls have increased their self-confidence and learned how to take control over their own lives and their sexuality. They have also learned about the right to say “no”.
- Girls have improved their school results and developed a higher motivation to continue their studies. They have grasped an opportunity to shape their future plans. Girls who had dropped out of school decided to return to their studies after joining a girl group. Additionally, they have strengthened their relationship with teachers, parents and other girls in the girl group.
- The project has received extensive attention in the media and has helped to initiate a public debate on sexual slavery and gender equality in Lithuania.

Since 2004 the Åland Islands Peace Institute has had a special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). In 2005, representatives of the Peace Institute participated in the 49th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The Peace Institute presented a statement about the girl group method as a preventive measure against sexual slavery. The statement was included in the official documentation from the session ([www.peace.ax/UNstatement2005.pdf](http://www.peace.ax/UNstatement2005.pdf)).



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# PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

## Training of Trainers

In order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the project, the Åland Islands Peace Institute and the Åland Islands Peace Association-Emmaus have taken the initiative to start the training of trainers in Lithuania, so that the dissemination of the method would be more effective and more girls would get the opportunity to take part in girl group activities. There is a strong interest among social workers, teachers, psychologists and NGO-activists to educate themselves and become qualified as girl group leaders. Unfortunately, this demand could not be fully met due to financial limitations.

In order to provide a more cost-effective solution and develop the long-term sustainability of the project, Lithuanian girl group leaders were given the opportunity to attend training of trainers education. The first group of Lithuanian trainers was educated in 2006 and started their training activities for the new girl group leaders in 2007.

## Expansion of girl group activities

The future plan is to provide girl group leader education in countries neighbouring the new EU states such as Belarus and the Kaliningrad region, which mainly function as origin countries for human trafficking. The problem of sexual slavery is not fully recognized by their state authorities, which makes it more difficult for NGOs to involve themselves in trafficking prevention projects.

## Focus on guys

Both in the Nordic countries and Eastern Europe the fight against sexual slavery has mostly concentrated on preventive measures aimed at reducing the risk for women to be seduced into trafficking. Very little attention has been directed to men who pay for sex, though it is the root cause of the problem. Several girl group leaders in Lithuania and the Nordic countries have noted the considerable need for boy group activities and are ready to educate themselves in the new method. Hopefully this can lead to a decrease in men's demand for paid sex and the creation of a more equal society.



*Milda Zilikiene, girl group leader at the Center for Women and Children "Nendre" since 2004. "Most of the girls come from single-mother families and are brought up in poor circumstances. The relationship between the parents and children is weak and the girls spend a lot of time out on the street. The girl group helps to strengthen the girls' resistance to the negative influence of their environment, promotes personal values and stimulates cooperation and a positive attitude to life."*



*Meeting of two Lithuanian girl groups.*

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# NETWORK AGAINST SEXUAL SLAVERY

## Missing Persons' Families Support Center

[www.missing.lt](http://www.missing.lt)

Missing Persons' Families Support Center (MPFSC) is a Lithuanian NGO founded in 1996 by parents and relatives of missing people.

Main activity fields of the MPFSC are:

- Provision of temporary housing for victims of human trafficking.
- Support for social reintegration through counselling, psychological support and social assistance.
- Education and preventive activities for young people in high-risk groups.
- Opinion building and active participation in the public debate on trafficking, purchase of sex and gender equality.
- Lobbying and network building in order to make the search for and integration of trafficking victims more effective.

*Missing Persons' Families Support Center • P. Zadeikos 3-21 •  
LT-06319 Vilnius, Lithuania • [centras@missing.lt](mailto:centras@missing.lt) •  
phone +370 5 2483373*



*On 20th May 2006 the project "Girl Power in Lithuania" received an award from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Lithuania as one of the four most successful and methodologically innovative projects of the year.*

## The Åland Islands Peace Institute

[www.peace.ax](http://www.peace.ax)

The Åland Islands Peace Institute was established in 1992. The main activities of the Institute are research, conflict management, education and youth work. Focus areas include democracy and security issues, autonomies, minority rights, gender equality and social inclusion. The Institute has also developed regional co-operation with NGOs in Lithuania, the Kaliningrad region and Belarus, which aims at protection of human rights and empowerment of socially marginalized groups.

*The Åland Islands Peace Institute • Hamngatan 4 (PB 85) •  
AX-22101 Mariehamn, Åland, Finland • [peace@peace.ax](mailto:peace@peace.ax) •  
phone +358 (0)18 15570*

## The Åland Islands Peace Association-Emmaus

[www.emmaus.ax](http://www.emmaus.ax)

The Åland Islands Peace Association-Emmaus is a non-profit organisation founded in 1989. The Emmaus group on Åland is a member of Emmaus International and works for peace, justice and solidarity on the Åland Islands and in the world. The organisation implements several local labour market integration projects and is involved in development assistance cooperation with Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Russia, Ukraine and Peru. Emmaus also supports girl group activities in Lithuania and Belarus and is involved in spreading information about the problem of sexual slavery to the public.

*The Åland Islands Peace Association-Emmaus • Köpmansgatan 11 (PB  
85) • 22101 Mariehamn, Åland, Finland • [emmaus@emmaus.ax](mailto:emmaus@emmaus.ax) •  
phone +358 (0)18 16069*



*Girl group leader education in Vilnius, November 2005.*

## Your support to girl group activities

You can support the training of girl group leaders in Lithuania, Belarus and the Kaliningrad region by making a payment marked "Girl Power" to the Åland Island Peace Institute's account at Bank of Åland (Ålandsbanken). You can also pay by credit card. Please contact Robert Jansson (robert@peace.ax) at the Åland Islands Peace Institute for further information.

### *Banking details*

Account holder: Stiftelsen Ålands fredsinstitut

Bank: Bank of Åland (Ålandsbanken), AX-22100 Mariehamn, Finland

Account number: 660100-1118595

IBAN: FI36 6601 0001 1185 95

BIC/SWIFT: AABAFI22



*Lithuanian girl group.*

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*united against sexual slavery*

**T**his booklet tells the story of how three organisations work together against sexual slavery.

We believe that a fundamental change is required in order to cope with this problem. This can be accomplished by challenging the existing gender power structure. The booklet addresses the structural causes of sexual slavery and presents a method of trafficking prevention called the girl group method.

*United against sexual slavery*

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