

# Annual report 2022

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La Strada International  
Postbus 15865  
1001NJ Amsterdam  
The Netherlands

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## Background and context

### La Strada International

La Strada International is a European NGO Platform against human trafficking, that works from a human rights perspective in support of trafficked persons, by preventing human trafficking and by providing adequate assistance and support and access to justice and effective remedies. We believe in a world where all people are free to migrate and work in the labour sector of their choice, and are free from trafficking, exploitation, and abuse, knowing that their rights are respected at home, abroad, and on the way. Human trafficking can only be stopped if people's rights as human beings are recognised, respected, and realised.

La Strada International is active at a broad European level. While human trafficking is a global issue, the Platform focusses on the situation in Europe (both EU and non-EU countries) and on addressing all forms of human trafficking. It comprises 31 member organisations, including 6 associate members, from 24 European countries. Members provide (psycho) social, medical, legal and vocational counselling, safe accommodation, long-term reintegration and employment support, and other direct and indirect services for trafficked persons and at-risk groups. Furthermore, members build the awareness, knowledge and capacity of relevant stakeholders, conduct awareness campaigns and engage in policy advocacy on the national level to realise change. LSI's international secretariat facilitates cooperation, capacity building and expertise sharing and provides support in setting standards and incorporating international developments into national actions. The secretariat collects and analyses this information for evidence-based advocacy and invites international organisations and other social movements to cooperate and support our work.

La Strada International aims to be a transparent, open-minded, and reliable knowledge actor, which takes up a critical watch dog role. As such, we engage independently with other actors to enhance and multiply our joint actions and ensure greater impact and accountability. We realise that counter-trafficking policies can have (unintended) negative effects on the rights of trafficked persons and affected groups. Hence, we call for impact assessments of all counter-trafficking actions, policies and legislation, built on evidence and adequate data.

### Human trafficking in Europe

Trafficking in human beings is a crime and a human rights violation. All over the world, men, women and children are brought, through coercion, abuse of power or vulnerability, into situations of severe exploitation. This can include sexual exploitation, forced labour, the forced removal of organs, and slavery or similar practices. Such exploitation occurs in particular in the most precarious sectors with weak labour rights, such as the sex industry, construction, agriculture, and domestic work. People are also trafficked for begging or illegal acts such as pickpocketing, drug dealing and cybercrime. Trafficked persons experience a series of rights violations, ranging from restriction of movement and confiscation of pay to severe physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Trafficking does not always involve the crossing of borders; it can also occur within a country. Although trafficking is widely recognised as a

serious human rights violation, support for trafficked persons is still inadequate, with only a small fraction of trafficked persons identified, and an even smaller portion receiving support.

Human trafficking is rooted in global inequality, (gender) discrimination, oppressive social structures, exclusion, poverty, political instability and (armed) conflicts. These factors lead large groups of people to seek work, safety, and stability away from their home. The demand for cheap labour and products, globalisation, and deregulation of labour have made workers more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Restrictive migration policies and the growing anti-migrant sentiments and xenophobia by public and political figures in many countries also lead to discrimination of migrants, further driving situations of exploitation and abuse.

The 2022 [Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage](#) suggest that 50 million people are in a situation of modern slavery globally and that the number has risen by ten million in the past five years. They reveal that approximately 28 million people are trapped in forced labour and 22 million in forced marriage. The five sectors accounting for the majority of total adult forced labour (87 per cent) are services, manufacturing, construction, agriculture (excluding fishing), and domestic work. Migrant workers are estimated to be three times more likely to be in forced labour than other workers.

This translates to nearly one out of every 150 people in the world to be in a situation of severe exploitative. For the region Europe and Central Asia it is estimated that 4.1 million people are in a situation of forced labour. For the EU (447.7 million inhabitants), that means nearly 3 million people to be in a situation of 'modern slavery', including 1.68 million in forced labour. However, only around 7,000 victims of human trafficking are identified annually within the EU, which is less than 0,5% of the estimated number of victims.<sup>1</sup>

## Operational environment and challenges

The LSI Platform operates in a challenging environment. The current anti-migration sentiment in European politics makes it difficult to advocate for greater rights for migrants who are victim of trafficking and those who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Policy measures often remain focussed on fighting crime, restricting migration, and repressing prostitution, rather than tackling the root causes of human trafficking and improving protections for victims and vulnerable persons. Indeed, the criminal justice framework often undermines the rights of trafficked persons and vulnerable groups, and its scope is far too limited to deal with the complexities of human trafficking. Additionally, the way human trafficking is portrayed and discussed by the media and political figures, is often very one-dimensional, focusing disproportionately on trafficking for sexual exploitation without much recognition for other forms of human trafficking.

The inclusion of protective measures in international legislation has been a major step in the recognition of trafficked persons as bearers of rights. However, the implementation of these rights in

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<sup>1</sup> The EU's [fourth progress report](#) on the fight against trafficking in human beings, covering the years 2019-2020, shows that 51% of registered victims were trafficked for sexual exploitation and 28 % were trafficked for labour exploitation and . 11 % into other forms of exploitation, including begging and forced criminality; removal of organs; forced marriages; illegal adoption and benefit fraud.

practice remains weak. Moreover, many of the people supported by La Strada International members – who have experienced exploitation, violence and abuse – are not officially identified as victims and are therefore excluded from accessing those rights. Through our members, we work diligently at the grassroots level and have a strong insight into the varying national situations on the ground and remaining gaps.

## Addressing the impact of the war in Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has led to the largest movement of people in Europe since the Second World War. Thus, much of our attention in 2022 was related to Ukraine and the situation of the over 8 million displaced persons. We raised awareness and monitored the situation; provided information and direct support to refugees in the neighbouring countries (Poland, Romania, Moldova) as well as other EU and non-EU countries.

La Strada Ukraine continued the operation of their national helplines, counseling and other support services to trafficked and exploited persons in the country under difficult circumstances. Initially several staff members left Kyiv and continued working from safer locations, but later in the year all staff returned to the capital.

From the start of the full-scale war, it was expected that organised criminal groups and individual profiteers would take advantage of the turmoil to target vulnerable Ukrainians for sexual and labour exploitation. Hence, in Ukraine and in neighbouring countries national (emergency) task forces were set up by governments and international organisations, which LSI members joined. In Ukraine and Poland, LSI members co-organised these task forces with IOM.

Staff of La Strada International's secretariat joined two regional task forces on Ukraine, one on human trafficking and one on gender-based violence, set up by UNHCR, UNODC and IOM. During the year, we participated in around 26 regular meetings of the two task forces. LSI secretariat also coordinated regular meetings with several European NGO Networks that work on the protection and assistance of refugees from Ukraine at risks of human trafficking, including Red Cross, Child Helplines International, Missing Children Europe, WAVE, PICUM, and others.

LSI and members organised three webinars on Ukraine, co/organised with Ukrainian NGOs, ILO and others. In 2022, LSI and members were further regularly invited for consultations and exchanges on the national situation related to Ukrainian refugees, including by UNODC, CoE/GRETA, the office of the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons and the OSCE.

## Our work in 2022

### Providing assistance to trafficked persons and vulnerable groups

It is estimated that around 4,000 presumed trafficked persons were assisted by La Strada International members in 2022. *Statistics are available after July 1, 2023.*

While La Strada Ukraine received a larger number of testimonies by people facing conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in the occupied territories and also many calls were received from people seeking advice, not many reports were received related to human trafficking or labour exploitation. The same goes for the organisations operating in countries neighbouring Ukraine that received large numbers of displaced persons from Ukraine. In 2022, LSI members assisted only 21 persons who fled Ukraine whose stories showed indications of human trafficking, some of these persons had fled Ukraine before February 2022. Most of these cases related to presumed trafficking for labour exploitation. Some members assisted less Ukrainians than before the war broke out. It is possible that due to the high level of attention and information provided to Ukrainians, and their access to Temporary Protection, they have been at less risk of human trafficking.

On 4 March 2022, the Council of the EU adopted unanimously an implementing decision introducing temporary protection due to the mass influx of people fleeing Ukraine as a consequence of the war. Temporary protection is an emergency mechanism which can be applied in cases of mass entry of people and which aims to provide an immediate and collective (i.e. without the need for the examination of individual applications) protection to displaced persons who are not in a position to return to their country of origin. The objective was to alleviate pressure on national asylum systems and to allow displaced persons to enjoy harmonised rights across the EU. These rights include residence, access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance, and education for children.

Other members however assisted more persons with the Ukrainian nationality as they received many more calls from Ukrainian persons in comparison with earlier years. For example, La Strada Poland received 749 calls in 2022, specifically related to Ukrainians. FairWork in the Netherlands received calls from 175 Ukrainians in 2022. In comparison in earlier years they received around 10 calls from Ukrainians per year. The calls they received in 2022 did not relate to human trafficking, but to violation of labour rights. Many of these calls were from Ukrainian workers that did not fall under the temporary protection directive. This group is likely more vulnerable for exploitation and abuse, in comparison with those that are entitled to the temporary protection.

Ukrainian nationals, as well as third country nationals or stateless persons benefiting from international protection in Ukraine and their family members can benefit from temporary protection if they resided in Ukraine before or on 24 February 2022. For third country nationals residing in Ukraine before or on 24 February with a permanent residence permit and who cannot safely return to their country, EU member states shall apply either temporary protection or adequate protection under their national law. EU Member states can also apply this decision to other persons, including any third country nationals residing legally in Ukraine and who are unable to safely return to their country of origin, as well as Ukrainians who fled not long before 24 February or who found themselves in EU territory just before that date, for example for holiday or work purposes. However not all EU countries did do so.

## Reports received by our members

Our members received generally many complaints from workers about their employers, both from Ukrainians and persons with other nationalities. The most common problem reported is non-payment

of wages, or payment of only part of promised wages or receipt of lower wages than national workers receive. There were also issues related to absence of adequate work contracts, long working hours, bad recruitment practices, poor accommodation and dependency on employers including through accommodation. Generally we see issues when accommodation is linked to employment, which prevents workers also to complain out of fear of losing their housing, or workers are housed in remote locations, with employers organising their transport. This leaves them very isolated from the rest of the community and disproportionately reliant on their employer.

Many victims assisted by LSI members in 2022 came from Central and Eastern Europe, Africa (especially Nigeria), Latin America and Asia (especially Vietnam, Philippines). All presumed trafficking persons were assisted directly with shelter, psychological and legal support or referred to other organisations for services. Both at bilateral level and broader Platform level, cooperation took place for referral and assistance to victims of human trafficking, including with other NGOs, NGO networks and other relevant stakeholders. The LSI secretariat was contacted to facilitate support and referral of around 15 trafficked persons in 2022.

## Building evidence: data collection and research

The international secretariat and LSI members register and analyse data about human trafficking in Europe, in line with international privacy and data protection rules. All LSI members collect data related to victims assisted; including country of origin; gender; age; type of exploitation and the sector of exploitation. They provide this data, in anonymised form, to national and international bodies (particularly their national governments or GRETA) for statistical and analytical purposes.

The LSI secretariat and members conduct research at national and European level to build evidence for our advocacy work. To get more insight into the risks for Ukrainian refugees, we conducted research both at European level and national level in 2022. Firstly, in partnership with the Freedom Fund we undertook [a rapid assessment](#). This assessment reviewed the main trafficking-related risks to Ukrainian refugees in Eastern and Central Europe; the actual or potential pathways into human trafficking and how these vary according to age, gender, or other factors; and the response of government, international organisations, civil society, and community leaders to the risks, and remaining gaps. For this assessment, La Strada International conducted an online survey and in-depth interviews with stakeholders, and a visit to Poland. The research found that unaccompanied children, undocumented people and those who might not have access to the temporary protection offered in EU countries faced the greatest risks, which would grow with the war continuing.

Another research we conducted for HEUNI was based on literature review and stakeholder mapping in Poland and Ukraine. Data collected and analysed related to current labour exploitation and Human trafficking statistics, practices and challenges, focusing on the latest trends and modus operandi, and information concerning the consequences of the war, the current routes and actors involved in trafficking, and the risk of exploitation of Ukrainian refugees both within and outside Ukraine.

With our member Anti-Slavery, we further worked on a guidance for the private sector, which was published in 2023. This guidance explains how businesses can mitigate some of the risks affecting



displaced people and to guide their due diligence activities to prevent and remedy the exploitation of displaced people.

Other LSI members conducted research too, including in Germany, Moldova, Poland and Ukraine, related to the war and its impact on the anti-trafficking field. In Ukraine, a survey was conducted among Ukrainians about their plans to leave the country and about the living and working conditions they would be ready to accept. La Strada Moldova reviewed the national response and its impact<sup>2</sup>, while KOK in Germany looked [at the impact of the war](#) on counselling centres that assist Ukrainian refugees. Other research conducted in 2022 by the LSI secretariat included: desk research on posted care workers in the Netherlands; the (legal and practical) situation of Asian exploited migrants in Poland, the Czech Republic and Romania; a desk research related to legal provisions for (undocumented) migrant women in hidden and exploitative situations; and [on the criminalisation of the "knowing use"](#) See further: *Projects*.

In 2022, LSI secretariat and members contributed further to numerous researches of others. La Strada International, for example, contributed to FRA [consultation](#) on the experiences of CSOs; provided [input](#) to a report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and the Council of Europe GRETA Survey and report on human trafficking and technology. LSI continued providing input to scholars and other researchers.

## Contributing to policy and advocacy

Awareness raising and advocacy is an important part of LSI's work to promote victim protection and accountability. LSI advocates for the rights of trafficked persons and vulnerable groups. The Platform promotes women's rights, labour rights and migrants' rights to ensure people are protected from exploitation and abuse. This also includes the protection of those working in irregular sectors like domestic workers and sex workers.

To ensure compliance with international legislation and accountability for the effective implementation of policies and regulations, LSI advocates for legislation that recognises and respects the rights of all trafficked persons and monitors the implementation of legislation to help ensure that those rights are realised. For this, the Platform targets European and inter-governmental bodies (European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE, and UN bodies) through news media and social media, petitions, statements and campaigns, and joint NGO advocacy.

## Advocacy at European Union level

### *THB Directive*

La Strada International responded to three public consultations and provided two interviews to evaluators responsible for the evaluation of **the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive**. When it became clear that the Directive would be revised, LSI published a public statement and established an expert group

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<sup>2</sup> ["Mapping of services existing in Moldova for displaced people from Ukraine. Identification of risks of exploitation and human trafficking"](#).

in November 2022 to propose own amendments to the Directive and also organised two meetings with the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator. When the EC presented its proposal to amend the Directive on 19 December 2022, LSI published our first reaction three days later. LSI also established an informal consortium of European networks to cooperate on this work. On 7 December LSI published a policy paper on criminalising the knowing use of services by trafficked persons, as the Commission proposed such a binding provision.

Article 18(4) of the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive recommends the criminalisation of the knowing use of services which are the objects of exploitation, as one of the ways to curb demand. The European Commission proposed to revise the THB Directive on this point and make it a binding provision for EU Members States. It has been suggested that the added value of such legislation is to ensure that people who cannot be criminalised under current human trafficking legislation can still be punished under this legislation for facilitating or fostering human trafficking, by knowingly making use of the services of trafficked persons. La Strada International believes the revision of the EU Trafficking Directive should not lead to a binding provision, as this not only seems to have very limited impact on combatting human trafficking, but is also very likely to have severe harmful effects.

The work of LSI related to monitoring the revision of the THB Directive continues in 2023.

### *Victims' Rights Directive*

La Strada International also contributed to the evaluation of the **EU Victims' Rights Directive** by providing an interview to the evaluators and attending several sessions with Victim Support Europe (VSE) and other European networks, as well as four meetings of the EU Victims' Rights Platform. In addition, we provided written input to the public consultation for this Directive. The proposal for a revision of the EU Victims' Rights Directive will receive more attention in 2023; the proposal for a revision is expected around July 2023.

### *Directive on Violence against Women*

Concerning the new proposed **Directive on Violence against Women/Gender Based Violence**, LSI joined an NGO consortium and a joint submission on the draft proposal, published on 8 March 2022. In the lead up to International Women's Day, 8 March, and prior to the draft publication, La Strada International together with 11 other international and European networks and organisations adopted a [manifesto](#) for a truly inclusive EU law and policy. This manifesto called on the European Union to adopt a forward-thinking and truly inclusive approach to gender-based violence, and to promote inclusion, safety, protection, well-being and effective remedies for those most at risk. The Council and parliament position and negotiations on the directive will be monitored in 2023.

### *Proposal for a Directive for Corporate Social Responsibility*

In its [proposal for a Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive](#), published in February 2022, the European Commission set out due diligence obligations for larger companies to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for actual and potential adverse impacts on human rights, including labour rights and the environment along global supply chains. LSI joined an NGO consortium that follows the developments under the lead of the [Justice is Everybody's Business](#) campaign.

### *EU regulation for a forced labour ban*

In September 2022, the European Commission proposed a [regulation](#) to ban products made with forced labour, within and outside the Union. Our member Anti-Slavery International set up an NGO consortium to follow the development and provide expert input. LSI attended several meetings and contributed with a submission for the public consultation. While La Strada International supports the proposed ban, we are concerned that the current proposal does not include measures to secure rights and remedies for affected workers. Another point of critique by us and other CSOs is that EU's proposed ban does not specifically mention state-induced forced labour. NGOs have demanded that the ban and related measures focus on improving conditions and access to remedy for all workers, including undocumented workers and those in irregular work.

LSI further followed developments around the revision of the **Single Permit Directive**, the **EU care proposal** and **EU action plan on smuggling**. LSI contributed to submissions and feedback for consultations.

## Other international and regional advocacy

### *UNTOC review mechanism*

LSI continued following the **UNTOC review mechanism**. In 2022, the review of the second group of the first round started. La Strada International and its members tried to monitor the process, but noted that it was not very transparent and states were either reluctant to provide more information, or ignorant about the process and their responsibilities. On 1 July UNODC organised a constructive dialogue for the Review Mechanism to brief stakeholders, including NGOs on how the review process has developed. LSI and members provided short interventions during the session on human trafficking.<sup>3</sup>

LSI further followed developments around the [Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration](#); ratifications of relevant ILO conventions; the work of the UN Special Rapporteurs; and the CEDAW elections.

LSI also observed the drafting of the [CoE recommendation THB for labour exploitation](#) during three online meetings and provided written input. This recommendation was adopted in September 2022. LSI also monitored and formally observed the GRETA elections of 25 November 2022. Two of the seven (re)elected candidates, Ms Antoaneta Vassileva and MS. Biljana Lubarowska, were strongly supported by La Strada International.<sup>4</sup> LSI also provided input for GRETA's 4<sup>th</sup> round questionnaire to be adopted in 2023.

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<sup>3</sup> See here [intervention](#) by La Strada International, as well as the [intervention by KOK](#); [LEFO IBF](#) as well as the [video intervention](#) by GAATW.

<sup>4</sup> See also <https://www.lastradainternational.org/news/25-experts-nominated-for-upcoming-greta-elections/>

## Thematic advocacy

Next to more reactive work related to international legislation and policies, LSI's advocacy focussed around specific thematic priorities as per our 2021 – 2025 strategic plan: Countering shrinking space for Civil Society; Unconditional support; Recognition of all forms of human trafficking; Safe reporting; Access to Residence; Fair migration policies; Access to justice; Fair labour rights; and non-punishment. In 2022 LSI worked in particular on promoting access to residence, which included the development of a policy paper together with our member LEFO IBF in Austria, advocacy meetings, a joint statement and a side event together with the Council of Europe in 2022. On unconditional support, LSI contributed to the OSCE Conference on the issue and included the topic in all its advocacy work. A desk research and policy paper on shrinking space is foreseen for 2023. For Non Punishment a working group by LSI members was set up, to discuss further LSI action.

## International representation

LSI continued contributing to high-level international events and providing expert advice and opinion. LSI secretariat representatives attended 81 events in 2022 including online events (excluding network meetings, research, and project meetings), at which LSI shared its work and expertise. La Strada International representatives spoke at 44 of these events. In addition, LSI was involved in over 60 networking meetings.

## International projects in 2022

### *Strengthening Support and Protection Systems for Victims of Human Trafficking in Europe*

(April 2019 – June 2022)

This programme funded by Porticus, focused on improving access to the rights of trafficked people. La Strada International was contracted to support the exchange and cooperation among the supported anti-trafficking NGOs in Europe, including several LSI's members. In 2022, LSI organised online meetings, one webinar and an in-person exchange meeting for all partners involved. Together with the Good Lobby, LSI organised a public debate with MEPs and representatives of international organisations including ILO and PICUM. In 2022, an [evaluation report](#) was published on the programme, which found evidence of 28 cases of systems change at local, national and European level. In all these cases, at least one actor had changed, such as a ministry, service provider or law maker. In addition, the report concluded that "partners cooperating with others has functioned as an essential mechanism through which they contributed to systemic change."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See more <https://www.porticus.com/en/articles/article-placeholder-i7351-anti-human-trafficking-programme-closes-with-exchange-of-lessons-learnt/>

### *Cross-Continent Collaborations to Protect Asian Trafficking Victims in Europe*

In January 2022, the second year of the *project Cross-Continent Collaborations to Protect Asian Trafficking Victims in Europe* started. La Strada International coordinated project activities in Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic, which focused on reviewing relevant legal frameworks and jurisprudence and identification of practical challenges in legal formulation and its interpretation, next to networking and engaging other stakeholders to raise awareness on these issues. On 7 October 2022, World Decent Work Day, La Strada International co-organised the webinar ‘Protecting Asian Migrants in Europe’, together with Freedom Collaborative and Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). This webinar marked the launch of LSI’s report [Protecting Asian Trafficking Victims in Europe. In Focus: Czech Republic, Poland, and Romania](#) and its accompanying [Policy Paper](#). The report is based on desk research and interviews conducted by LSI members La Strada Czech Republic, La Strada Poland and ADPARE (Romania). The research shows that many Asian migrant workers end up in low-paid jobs in Europe, where they are not properly protected against serious forms of exploitation and risk falling prey to human trafficking or forced labour. On paper, Asian migrant workers are protected against severe forms of labour exploitation and abuse, as the Czech, Polish, and Romanian legal frameworks comply with international and EU legislation relating to the prevention of human trafficking and forced labour. However, in practice, access to support and access to justice are often lacking. Many Asian migrants in exploitative situations are never identified as (potential) victims of human trafficking and consequently do not receive the crucially needed support.

### *Hidden at Work - Labour and sexual exploitation and harassment of women in the (private) work sphere*

In 2022, the second phase of the project [Hidden at Work](#) was implemented, together with LSI members FairWork (NL), La Strada Czech Republic, and LEFO IBF (AT). This project, coordinated by FairWork, focused on workers who face harassment and exploitation at work in Austria, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. Eight consortium meetings were held, next to meetings with the advisory board and regular email exchanges. In November 2022, a live meeting was held in Paris, France to conclude the project. La Strada International conducted (a desk mapping) research on the state of the art regarding the legal instruments and rights provisions in place to support this vulnerable group. At the end of 2022, LSI published a report on the main bottlenecks identified related with accessing rights.

### *Postcare – Posting of Third Country Nationals in Care work*

LSI continued working on the project [Postcare](#), focusing on research related to the posting of third-country nationals in European care services. Funded by the European Commission and coordinated by the Italian trade union association CONFESAL, the project was implemented by an international consortium of trade unions, universities and research institutes and expert organisations in eight European countries; Italy, Spain, Serbia, Slovenia, Poland, Germany, Greece and the Netherlands. LSI conducted research on the posting of third-country national care workers in the Netherlands and their possible exploitation, which included desk research, nine interviews and one focus group meeting. The joint research report was finalised in 2022.

### *Trainings to enhance trafficking investigations and prosecutions*

In January 2022, the Academy of European Law (ERA) launched the project “Countering Trafficking in Human Beings – Practice-oriented training on measures to enhance investigations and prosecutions, disrupt the financial business model and intensify preventive measures projects.” This project foresees

in the training of around 300 EU practitioners (judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, financial and compliance officers and NGOs) in how to effectively counter human trafficking from a perspective that encourages better cooperation between Member States. Together with other partners, La Strada International joined this project to support the organising of a total of six training events. During these trainings, European legislation, standards and forms of cooperation that are applied in the field of addressing human trafficking are debated and assessed, in particular, related to intensifying investigations, including intelligence-led ones, and prosecutions to dismantle the trafficking chain. Moreover, financial investigations into human trafficking and disrupting the business model of criminals is also examined. La Strada International contributed to two trainings in Lisbon, Portugal on demand and Thessaloniki, Greece on compensation in 2022.<sup>6</sup>

### *North Korean forced labour case and appeal against two Dutch companies*

On 4 December 2020, La Strada International with (legal) support of Prakken D’Olivera and Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) filed a complaint with the Dutch Public Prosecution against two Dutch shipbuilding firms. These two companies are suspected to have acquired ships from Polish shipyards, aware that these ships were constructed at wharfs employing North-Korean workers under inhumane, slave-like conditions that are in clear violation of international labour laws. On 8 December 2021, the complaint was dismissed by the Dutch Public Prosecution.

La Strada International decided to lodge a written complaint with the Court of Appeal in The Hague, pursuant to Article 12 of the Dutch Code of Criminal Procedure. On 16 December 2022 – one year after the dismissal by the Dutch Public Prosecutor’s Office – an appeal challenging the Dutch government’s failure to investigate the use of North Korean forced labour in the shipbuilding supply chains of two Dutch shipbuilding firms has been filed by La Strada International with support of Prakken d’Oliveira, Global Legal Action Network (GLAN) and Freedom Fund.<sup>7</sup>

## Visibility and (social) media work

Awareness of the problem of trafficking in human beings has significantly increased and has gained more attention, including of national and international governmental bodies and the media. However, the way that human trafficking is portrayed and discussed by the media, governments and other actors is often one-dimensional and primarily focussed on exploitation in the sex industry. Therefore, LSI contributes to the creation of a more realistic picture of human trafficking, its root causes and different manifestations. In 2022, LSI tried to develop new and interactive communication strategies, and enhance its social media work. LSI secretariat’s social media work has been extended and its outreach is clearly more noticed. Next to two webpages ([www.lastradainternational.org](http://www.lastradainternational.org) and [www.justiceatlast.eu](http://www.justiceatlast.eu)), LSI maintains two Facebook pages, and a Twitter and LinkedIn account. Information on new developments and related LSI and LSI members activities was regularly shared via LSI’s social media channels and monthly newsletter.

In 2022, LSI provided 66 interviews to the media (mainly related to the war in Ukraine) including to quite well known media agencies, such as CNN, BBC, the Guardian, Reuters, Euractiv and many others.

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<sup>6</sup> See further the [project website](#)

<sup>7</sup> See further information about the case and the appeal on the [case website](#).

Much of the media attention related to the risks of human trafficking for Ukrainian refugees, including related to surrogacy and forced adoption of children. The fact that the Directors of La Strada Ukraine and La Strada Poland received the US TIP Hero award in July 2022 also raised more visibility for La Strada's work, the same for the fact that the Director of LS Ukraine spoke at the UN Security Council.

On 19 July, the US government launched its Trafficking in Persons Report, which assesses the efforts by governments worldwide to prevent human trafficking; protect victims and prosecute traffickers. La Strada International is proud that two of our colleagues, the President of La Strada Poland, Ms. Irena Dawid Olczyk and the President of La Strada Ukraine, Ms. Kateryna Cherepakha were both awarded the '2022 TIP Report Hero Acting to End Modern Slavery Award'. was a huge recognition for their and our joint work.

In addition the following statistics can be provided:

- Regular news updates via LSI's website, a total of 88 website posts at [www.lastradainternational.org](http://www.lastradainternational.org) and [www.justiceatlast.eu](http://www.justiceatlast.eu)
- New website pages were launched related to North Korean appeal case <https://www.lastradainternational.org/nkforcedlabour/>
- Regular Facebook posts; 67 Facebook post via two Facebook accounts of LSI.
- Adventscalendar with posts for a series of 24 days from 1 till 24 December 2022.
- 12 newsletters published
- LSI hotlines numbers shared via EU, and OSCE and many other websites. LSI members support services also available now via the EU victim support service <https://envr.eu/find-my-victim-support/>

On 20 April, Journalismfund.eu's Modern Slavery Unveiled programme and La Strada International co-organised a webinar on Promoting NGO – media partnerships: reporting about human trafficking. Speakers including representatives of LSI, ASTRA and the media who discussed the role of journalists in raising awareness about human trafficking, reducing vulnerabilities and holding governments, law enforcement and businesses to account. The recording is available [here](#).

## Campaigns

La Strada International joined several campaigns by others in 2022.

- #PayYourWorkers/#RespectLabourRights campaign
- Forced labour ban campaign
- ESWA Violence against Women campaign
- [Be safe campaign](#) by OSCE

## Statements

LSI published the following statements in 2022:

- **16 February 2022** - (together with PICUM and others): [A manifesto for an inclusive and comprehensive EU gender-based violence policy for all](#)

- **22 February 2022** - statement on the occasion of EU Victims' Rights Day: [States should offer trafficked persons access to a residence permit on personal grounds](#)
- **17 March 2022** - [La Strada International calls for urgent measures to protect Ukrainians and other refugees](#)
- **18 October 2022** - on the occasion of EU Anti-Trafficking Day '[Ensure access to trafficked persons' rights](#)'
- **20 December 2022** –[Joint NGO Letter to the European Parliament on Proposals to Halt Human Rights Activities](#)
- **22 December 2022** - [Statement by La Strada International on revision EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#)

## Cooperation and partnerships

The La Strada Platform has built an extensive network of contacts and allies over the last 27 years. These include law enforcement, legal professionals, service providers and NGOs, media, and governmental actors. LSI is a member of the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN), the OSCE Alliance Expert Coordination Team (AECT), the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA). LSI has observer status to the Council of Europe and the UN (ECOSOC), and is a member of the EU Civil Society E-Platform on trafficking in human beings.

LSI's advocacy work is done in close cooperation with, in particular, PICUM, ESWA, Victim Support Europe (VSE) and the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW). In 2022, LSI undertook several common advocacy actions with these networks and held regular exchange meetings. LSI joins two working groups of PICUM and is also part of VSE's NGO round tables that discuss and prepare actions related to Victim Rights (including the VR Strategy and evaluation of the VR Directive). Through membership of HRDN, LSI mainly follows human rights issues at EU level and related to EU's cooperation with third countries.<sup>8</sup> With GAATW, cooperation relates to European advocacy and joint monitoring of the [UN Review Mechanism](#).

With ESWA, La Strada International follows policies that impact sex workers' rights. On 13 October 2022, the [European Coalition on Sex Workers' Rights and Inclusion](#) was launched during ESWA's first Congress. Fifteen organisations, including La Strada International, joined this coalition calling for decriminalisation of sex work and meaningful inclusion of sex workers and sex worker rights defenders in decision-making..<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See for example this [statement](#).

<sup>9</sup> The organisations who make up the Coalition are leading European civil society networks and human rights organisations. Next to La Strada International and the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA), the coalition includes Aids Action Europe (AAE), Amnesty International, Correlation European Harm Reduction Network (Correlation EHRN), European Aids Treatment Group (EATG), European Digital Rights (EDRI), European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Equinox – Racial Justice Initiative, Fair Trials, Human Rights Watch, International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network (IPPF EN), International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association Europe (ILGA-Europe), Platform for International



In 2022, La Strada International developed and strengthened strategic partnerships with new relevant stakeholders, in particular child rights organisations and other European networks with whom LSI started to cooperate related with monitoring EU law and the situation in Ukraine. La Strada International is also member of the specialized [THB lawyers network](#) (around 45 lawyers) established by the Council of Europe. LSI also tries to engage businesses more in its work.

## LSI management in 2022

### LSI Membership and exchange among members

In 2022, La Strada International comprised 25 member organisations and six associate members in 24 European countries. La Strada aims to further grow into a platform with membership in all European countries. To ensure we maintain our role and capabilities in the field, it is not only important to build our cooperation with the ‘outside world’ and extend our membership, but also to continuously invest in the organisation, in the expertise of our staff, and in our member organisations. In 2022, we actively reached out to, and sought cooperation with, NGOs from multiple strategic European countries where La Strada International is not yet represented. We also worked on capacity building programmes and exchange for LSI members by organising monthly members meetings and other regular live and virtual events, including capacity building training and events and (bi-)annual NGO Platform meetings.

Twelve monthly exchanges were organised for LSI members by LSI secretariat. At these meetings, updates were provided related to international policy developments, next to regular exchanges via LSI’s members mailing list. In addition over 40 bilateral meetings online or live were held with LSI members. In particular, the membership provides them with more access to (strategic) information and updates, joint advocacy, and a bigger voice at the European level.

We further worked on developing joints policies and strategies related to due diligence, diversity and gender, and staff and volunteer policies to invest in the capacity and quality of the platform and its members. We initiated common projects and (advocacy) actions with members and have supported the formation of self-organised groups of survivors of human trafficking and sex workers, and support them in their work, alongside engaging trafficked persons in LSI’s work and organisation.

### Annual NGO Platform (General Assembly) meeting

From 20 to 22 June 2022, the annual NGO Platform meeting was organised in Helsinki, Finland. Next to plenary sessions on strategic LSI actions, European advocacy and legal developments, 9 workshop sessions were organised, as well as a public seminar and meetings with several relevant Finnish anti-trafficking stakeholders, including the National Anti-Trafficking Coordinator and the National

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Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM), and Transgender Europe (TGEU). See more information on [ESWA’s website](#).

Rapporteur on human trafficking, the research institute HEUNI, and representatives of law enforcement, lawyers, media etc.

The workshops focussed on various themes including access to residence on personal grounds, non-punishment, data collection; NGO involvement in the identification of trafficked persons; the impact of criminalisation of the knowing use of trafficked persons; labour migration schemes; strengthening migrant and trafficked women's rights to inclusive re/integration, and identification of labour and sexual exploitation and harassment of women in the (private) work sphere. Members also discussed challenges of civil society at the national level, including the shrinking space in Europe, but also the war in Ukraine and the difficult political situation in Belarus and several other countries which negatively impacts the work of LSI members.

On 21 June, La Strada International and its member organisation RIKU (Victim Support Finland) organised a seminar on access to justice for victims of human trafficking. The seminar focuses on methods to improve trafficked persons' access to justice through complaint mechanisms, highlighting a case study from Finland, where an article focusing on challenges related to human trafficking investigations led to a broad review process by the Finnish Deputy Chancellor of Justice. This resulted in a wide range of measures to improve current practices and internal review mechanisms. The article, "The Investigation is Closed" by journalist Paavo Teittinen, recently won the European Press Prize for investigative journalism. Panellists included the journalist Paavo Teittinen, Mikko Puumalainen (Deputy Chancellor of Justice), Venla Roth, Anti-Trafficking Coordinator of Finland and Suzanne Hoff, LSI's International Coordinator Pia Marttila of RIKU moderated the event. Watch the YouTube livestream [here](#).

## LSI board and board meetings

The LSI secretariat and board ensured exchange and knowledge building between the members through regular email updates and policy exchanges; monthly online exchange meetings and webinars; as well as joint (advocacy) actions, related to new proposed legal and policy measures. Six board meetings were held in 2022, next to consultation calls with board members, including one live board meeting on 20 June in Helsinki, Finland. At the General Assembly in Helsinki, LSI board elections were held and Evelyn Probst (Austria) and Eefje de Volder (Netherlands) were re-elected. Mona Chamass, Director of CCEM in France was elected for the first time. Earlier in the year, Lilianna Sorrentino stepped down as board member.

## LSI staff

In 2022 La Strada International staff comprised: Suzanne Hoff, International Coordinator, also responsible for Public Affairs; Merel Brouwer, Project Manager; Nuala Keyser, Financial manager and Mitsuru Suzuki for social media work. For marketing, design, website and internet facilities, as well as for salary administration, La Strada International makes use of external agencies and freelancers. In the first months of 2022, a legal intern worked for LSI.

## Engaging trafficked persons

Both at the international and national levels LSI aims to ensure more engagement of trafficked persons in our work, in order to inform our services, policy and advocacy. LSI has been working to further integrate the voices of trafficked persons in our services through self-monitoring and the participation of trafficked persons into our daily work. Following workshop sessions in 2019 and 2021 on how to engage victims more in the work of the Platform and its members, the LSI board has been developing a policy on how to engage the target group in LSI's work and several LSI members have involved trafficked persons in their work as well as in participatory research.

## Financial management and fundraising

In 2022, LSI invested more in fundraising strategies and worked on LSI's donor and due diligence policies. LSI submitted nine funding applications w, of which five were successful (OAK, WP Fund, Chooselove and Freedom Fund (2)). Through these donors, LSI also managed to raise funds for LSI members.