

Use Your Vote to Protect Human Rights

La Strada International's review of the EP parties' manifesto's

As the 2024 European Parliament elections approach soon, La Strada International has reviewed the manifesto's of the main EU political parties' for their stance on human rights issues, we advocate for. Earlier La Strada International also addressed all candidates and political parties to commit to safeguarding the fundamental rights, freedom, and dignity of everyone living in the EU and beyond. Victims of crime, including trafficked people and those vulnerable to severe exploitation and abuse, require the utmost attention from the new EU Parliament to guarantee their access to protection, justice, and support in Europe. See our manifesto [here](#).

The Need for a Human Rights-Based Approach

Current EU policies often focus on fighting crime, restricting migration, and repressing sex work or irregular migration. Unfortunately, these anti-trafficking policies are frequently framed within an anti-migration discourse, justifying restrictive measures that paradoxically increase the likelihood of human rights violations. The rise of anti-migration sentiments and xenophobia, both publicly and politically, increases discrimination against migrants, leading to more exploitation and abuse.

La Strada International calls for a human rights-based approach to combat these issues. We need legal and accessible migration channels, strong workers' rights, decent work and fair pay, social rights protection, and a healthy civic space. Victims of crime, including trafficking victims, deserve unconditional support, legal aid, non-punishment guarantees, adequate remedies, and enhanced access to regularization or residence on humanitarian grounds.

If you can vote in the upcoming elections, use your vote to influence future policies. Vote for a candidate that promotes human rights and the work of civil society to support the rights of trafficked and other vulnerable persons to access justice. Below we highlight which EU political parties support our causes.

Building Civic Space

The role of civil society is crucial in European policy development, monitoring, awareness-raising, and victim support. However, CSOs in Europe face increasing legal and practical challenges, including restrictive 'foreign-agent laws', funding limitations, and difficulties engaging in policymaking. To counteract these issues, we need a strategy to protect civic space in the EU and beyond, especially in countries where it is under threat.

CSOs should be consulted in policy creation, program development, policy debates, and agenda-setting. Additionally, restrictive policies that hinder anti-trafficking CSOs must be removed, and sustainable funding must be ensured for CSOs to offer direct services to victims and monitor anti-trafficking laws.

If you believe that building the civic space should be supported by politicians in the EU parliament, know that both the Greens and S&D have explicitly mentioned the need to counteract shrinking space, in their manifesto's. Moreover, more than 300 candidates have already signed the **Civil Society for EU pledge**, promising to support civil society, and to back a Civil Society Strategy and a Civil Dialogue agreement if elected. You can check out the list of supporters [here](#). La Strada International and other CSOs across Europe strongly welcome this and we hope to see more support for the civic space across MEPs in the coming time.

Enhancing Fair Migration and Upholding Rights

There are limited safe, legal, and regular migration pathways in Europe, especially for third-country nationals. The recent EU Pact on Migration and Asylum focuses on restricting residence access, increasing detention, and facilitating immediate returns, conflicting with international human rights obligations. This increases the risk of exploitation and trafficking. It is essential to strengthen legal pathways and protections for migrants and asylum-seekers and to monitor the implementation of the EU Migration Pact to ensure it upholds refugees' and migrants' human rights.

The European Left, the Greens and S&D have highlighted the issue in their manifestos. The Green party recognizes the link between migration and human trafficking susceptibility, and calls for migration policies acknowledging the benefit migration poses to Europe. We are also happy to see that the European Left recognizes the harm of the new Pact on Migration and Asylum and calls, just like S&D, for a better approach to legal migration within the EU. If you want to know more about EU political parties stance on migration, see PICUMs [Blog](#)

Promoting Decent Work and Labour Rights

Migrant workers, both from within the EU and third countries, are often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. They work in precarious conditions, often in low-paid, unregulated jobs, and many are undocumented. EU standards on decent work need enhancement to ensure reliable permits, fair and safe working conditions, and social protection. Informal and unregulated work should be incorporated into labour laws, and businesses must be monitored for compliance with labour standards and human rights.

If these issues are important to you, you should consider voting for candidates from the European Left, Renew Europe, the Greens and S&D. All these parties advocate for stronger and fairer labour rights.

Enabling Safe Reporting

Safe reporting mechanisms are essential for victims to report exploitation without fear of arrest or deportation. A clear 'firewall' is needed to separate the enforcement of labour laws from immigration control. Creating opportunities for safe reporting for all workers, including undocumented ones, without fear of arrest or deportation, and promoting the delinking of labour law inspections from migration control are crucial steps. During the negotiations on the revision of the Trafficking Directive, the Greens were the ones, who advocated for safe reporting mechanisms for trafficked persons. But also the LEFT have supported this during negotiations on EU law.

Ensuring Access to Justice and Remedies

Access to justice involves the right to seek legal remedies for wrongs suffered. However, victims face barriers such as insufficient information, financial constraints, and lengthy legal processes. Many trafficking victims are wrongfully detained and prosecuted for offenses committed due to their trafficking situation.

Strengthening victim rights by better information and legal assistance, ensuring compensation is handled in criminal procedures, and revising the 2004 Compensation Directive to improve access to justice are necessary measures. Despite the urgency of the topic, only the European Greens are currently talking about it in their manifesto for the 2024 elections.

Enhancing Access to Residence and Regularisation

Access to residence is critical for the safety and stability of trafficked persons. However, policies on granting residence permits vary widely across Europe, often linking permits to cooperation with authorities, which contradicts the unconditional nature of victim assistance. This means that victims of trafficking only can stay during a short period of 1-3 months, during their reflection or recovery period. If they are not able to cooperate with the authorities, they must leave. We believe that those who faced severe forms of exploitation should have access to longer term stay, including on personal or humanitarian grounds.

If our demands are relevant for you, consider voting for the parties advocating for these issues in their manifestos. **Your vote can change the course of EU politics in the upcoming term and promote human rights.**