



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

La Strada International

Statement on UN Review Mechanism & constructive dialogues

On 9 and 10 of July, representatives of La Strada International and several of its member organisations joined online the constructive dialogues related to the UN Review Mechanism. Aiming to still use this possibility to comment and share our CSO review, we would like to submit the following input:

La Strada International is a European NGO Platform against trafficking in Human Beings, existing next year for 30 Years. We represent 33 anti-trafficking NGOs in 24 European countries, both EU and Non-EU countries. Due to our long history of working in the anti-trafficking field, we are among those civil society actors, that monitored the process of establishing the UN Palermo Protocol, back in 2000 jointly with the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW). In the years 2016 – 2018, we also jointly with GAATW promoted and monitored the establishment of a UN Review Mechanisms for this Protocol.

Since such a UN Review mechanism has been established in 2018, we have tried to closely follow the developments, trying to engage our European members partly by developing a guidance note for NGOs, again together with GAATW, even though there are other – maybe more relevant - monitoring mechanism in place for European NGOs, and civil society has been given a very limited role in this Review Mechanism.

When the first lots were drawn and the pairing of States became clear, we reached out to European governments and several of our members, including KOK in Germany and FIZ in Switzerland have been in contact with their governments and invited to contribute to the review process. We are glad that this has been acknowledged in the update reports by the UN Review Mechanism secretariat. But as we heard during the constructive dialogue this is rather exception than rule and only 9 States globally did directly work with NGOs on the review mechanism. This has also been noted by our members.

Over the last 3-4 years we have regularly consulted with our members about the UN Review Mechanism, also to learn about possible further updates by European countries. We also followed the constructive dialogues in previous years and have contributed earlier to panel discussions. This year we only submit our feedback in written.

As for our feedback, firstly, we are quite worried about the still limited space provided for NGOs in this Review Mechanism, as still much is depending on the willingness of States to work with us. We see the need for effective and useful involvement of NGOs, especially noting the general shrinking space for civil society, including in Europe. Many NGOs working against human trafficking, lack the capacity and financial resources to closely follow the work of all the different monitoring mechanism and other opportunities that can be used, to advocate for the rights of trafficked persons. It is therefore essential that processes are transparent and inclusive, and that NGOs are timely involved and informed. Especially as we noted how much reliance there is on NGOs – and strong expectations from them - to encourage States to commit to this Review Mechanism.

Secondly, we are very concerned about the limited commitment by States into the UN Review mechanisms. We have observed a very slow process with the result that now after nearly 4 years since



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

the start of the implementation of the mechanism, not even one single country report has been finalised globally and 109 reviews (57,6, %) ¹ have not even started, even though the first cluster review was supposed to be finalised by the end of 2023 for all 3 groups. While apparently 7 reviews are now nearly finalised, we regret to see this slow progress over the last year(s), clearly showing a lack of commitment and willingness by States, including European governments.

In Europe, where we closely monitor the situation at international and national level related to human trafficking, we note that governments, do not see the UN Review as a priority and even until now, seem not very much aware of or updated on the process and their own responsibilities. So far governments seem not to follow the process, or only little, due to which it remained unclear for many of our members who the national focal point is and or who is in charge for the reporting. We also learnt that still in many countries no focal point has been appointed. which results also that NGOs have no access to information and can contribute little.

To encourage the involvement of European countries, we see an urgency for the UN Review Mechanism to work more closely with the other monitoring mechanisms at the European level, including the monitoring and country visits by the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Commission. As European anti-trafficking NGOs are invited by all these bodies to be engaged – next to being member of national consultative groups and mechanisms - we also would like to ask for more insight and opportunities for NGOs to be involved in the UN Review Mechanism.

Thirdly, with the current political climate in Europe and beyond, it is important to ensure that the UN Review Mechanism monitoring includes a large focus on the assistance and protection for victims of trafficking, as challenges to enhance the rights of victims are noted by our members at all levels, next to a lack of will to enhance victims's rights.

- All over Europe, we see lacking access to – or even absence of - safe reporting and complaint mechanisms. While we often hear claims made by States and various other actors that victims are not self-identifying due to lack of trust, we like to highlight that potential victims would come forward, if effectively reached, informed and offered adequate protection and support, instead of being at risk to be deported or detained when reporting crime. Moreover, the current strong dependency on successful criminal investigations and procedures, and the lack of guarantees that victims – when reporting the crime – will have access to any right and receive at least temporary support and residence, prevents victims from reporting and thus access to support and protection. It is high time that this is acknowledge broadly and unconditional support measures – or the so called social paths – are established for trafficked persons.
- Much more attention also remains urgently needed to identify victims among groups of undocumented persons, refugees and migrants in general, as we see that these are the most vulnerable for exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking. This requires a mindset change to extend attention and strategy and policy focusses to include migrants groups.
- Lastly, we see lacking application of existing legislation on all fronts related to victims rights. Victims of trafficking that have been identified, still lack access to adequate assistance and

¹¹ Information of 8th of July 2024, that was also presented during the Constructive Dialogue on 10/7/2024.



Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women

support, as well as to justice, including to be protected against punishment for crimes committed as a victims of trafficking (non-punishment provision) and effective access to compensation. Also we see that it still very difficult for victims to have access to longer term residence including on personal or humanitarian grounds.

With the protocol celebrating its 25th anniversary next year, we hope these recommendations are taken into account and NGOs are not just consulted and updated once a year, but rather effectively involved in the process.