

# **Safeguarding the Global Anti-Trafficking Response: A Call for Sustainable and Independent Support for Civil Society**

**Recent changes in U.S foreign aid, in particular the USAID funding freezes, have caused global uncertainty and disruption, impacting many organizations, including those working to address human trafficking and exploitation around the world. The U.S. has long been a source of funding for anti-trafficking efforts, particularly in regions where national funding is scarce, restrictive legislation hinders access to alternative sources, and funding competition remains high. Without urgent intervention from other governments, donors, and international organizations, these funding gaps threaten the stability of critical anti-trafficking monitoring and policy engagement, as well as related awareness and support programs for trafficked people and vulnerable groups.**

As funding landscapes evolve, it is essential – especially against the current backdrop of hostile anti-immigration rhetoric – to build a strong, independent, and adequately resourced civil society to continue its critical grassroots and monitoring work. Without engaged and supported civil society, not only are frontline services impacted, but many anti-trafficking and rights protection policy frameworks risk becoming ineffective. These frameworks, developed over past decades, are designed to ensure that response efforts do no harm, remain sustainable, and drive long-term systemic change. In turn, this creates greater resilience and stability within communities, reducing vulnerability to human trafficking, exploitation, and organized crime.

## **Ensuring a stable and predictable funding environment is crucial for sustaining global momentum in combating human trafficking and supporting its victims.**

The reduction of key funding sources threatens critical anti-trafficking efforts led by civil society, including victim assistance, prevention initiatives, and policy advocacy. The expertise of these frontline groups, acknowledged by international bodies and embedded in international legal instruments, is crucial in shaping, implementing, and evaluating anti-trafficking policies. Without their input, policy frameworks risk becoming disconnected from reality and ineffective in practice.

However, for many grassroots and frontline organizations, even in Europe, alternative funding options are scarce, leaving them financially vulnerable with limited recourse. This instability weakens long-term planning and capacity building, making it even more challenging to develop holistic interventions.

## **Sustainable and diversified funding allows civil society to focus on what is most needed rather than adapting to external agendas.**

In many countries, no official government body fully addresses all aspects of human trafficking, and national budgets lack an adequate anti-trafficking response, leaving civil society to fill critical gaps in victim

identification, support, and advocacy. Despite their critical role, many anti-trafficking CSOs struggle to access national and foreign funding, including EU funding, due to a lack of specialized funding streams, bureaucratic and complex application processes, competition with better-resourced international organizations and commercial consultancy businesses, restrictive foreign agent laws, and political barriers which limit funding options.

Furthermore, over-reliance on any single funding source can allow external influences to shape anti-trafficking narratives and strategies, undermining long-term impact. Without a survivor-centered, independent, and human rights-based approach, responses risk being dictated by shifting political priorities or short-term donor trends, ultimately failing those in need.

## **Governments, donors, and international organizations must recognize civil society as an essential security partner.**

Human trafficking and other severe forms of exploitation are not just human rights issues – they are also global security and economic challenges. Trafficking fuels organized crime, weakens labour markets, and deepens social instability, while effective anti-trafficking efforts strengthen governance, disrupt criminal networks, and reduce vulnerability in at-risk communities. Recognizing that anti-trafficking policy processes rely on civil society's participation is crucial – without CSO engagement, many national and international frameworks will struggle to function effectively.

## **Governments, donors, and international organizations should actively support civil society as a key anti-trafficking stakeholder by ensuring its inclusion in decision-making and providing access to sustainable funding.**

By stepping up support for civil society, we can protect those most vulnerable to trafficking, safeguard progress, and reinforce global stability. A commitment to long-term, diversified, and flexible funding is essential to ensuring that anti-trafficking efforts remain effective, rights-centered, and sustainable.

## **Five urgent actions to sustain the anti-trafficking response**

1. **Bridge the funding gap with emergency grants** Now is the time for donors, philanthropic foundations, and international organizations to step up with rapid-response funding to keep services running, protect frontline staff, and ensure victims and vulnerable groups continue receiving essential support.
2. **Unfreeze and reallocate existing funds** Governments and multilateral agencies can play a critical role by expediting the release of committed funds and redirecting unspent resources to sustain anti-trafficking efforts through this crisis.
3. **Increase direct support to local organizations** Grassroots and survivor-led organizations are at the heart of the response but are often the first to be impacted by funding cuts. Flexible, direct and trust-based funding to these groups ensures that vital services continue uninterrupted.
4. **Invest in networks that strengthen the sector** In times of crisis, fragmentation is the enemy of effectiveness. Funders must support coalitions and partnerships that help CSOs stay connected, visible, and resilient, ensuring the sector remains strong and coordinated.
5. **Safeguard civil society's ability to lead** Now, more than ever, we must ensure CSOs have the resources, stability, and space to carry out their mission and continue their rights-based and independent work. Strengthening organizational capacity, amplifying civil society voices, and supporting long-term sustainability will help ensure that global anti-trafficking efforts continue and vital progress is not lost.

Signed by [Freedom Collaborative](#), [Freedom United](#), [Global Learning Community](#), and [La Strada International](#).

We invite groups to [sign our statement](#) – please join us in calling for stakeholders to urgently step up and safeguard the future of anti-trafficking work.

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