

La Strada International wishes to inform and update you on developments in the field of trafficking in human beings and activities of the Platform and member organisations. We welcome your feedback and input. Please [email us](mailto:info@lastrada.org).

LSI NEWS

Assessment on Indications of Human Trafficking and Labour Exploitation among Displaced Ukrainians

Since Russia invaded Ukraine three years ago, on 24 February 2022, La Strada International (LSI) and its members ran different programmes to ensure that displaced persons from Ukraine would receive adequate assistance and be protected from exploitation and abuse. Our members assisted over 1517 persons from Ukraine who were exploited. We conducted a case assessment study, analysing 62 cases to discover which human trafficking and labour exploitation practices have materialized over the past three years, and to gather more insight into risk factors and the most vulnerable at-risk groups. Check our [case assessment report](#), which includes our findings, several case descriptions and our recommendations.

Call for Sustainable and Independent Support for Civil Society to Counter US Freezes

The recent [U.S. foreign aid](#) shifts, particularly USAID funding freezes create uncertainty and disruption worldwide, also impacting organizations working to address human trafficking and exploitation in Europe. In reaction, we launched a [joint statement](#) calling for sustainable and independent support for civil society. See also a [statement](#) by our member Anti-Slavery International on the impact of the US Freeze. Earlier, we also co-signed an [Appeal](#) to the Heads of State and Government and the institutions of the European Union to take action to fill the gaps in international development aid created by the U.S. Presidential Executive order. Concerning also the UK, Switzerland, Germany, France and the Netherlands have announced cuts in development aid, with the Dutch government putting an end to support for gender equality and women's rights, while 2024 saw a cut from many European donors, including in the European Commission.

Addressing Gender Stereotypes

La Strada International co-signed a [Position Paper on Gender Stereotypes](#), submitted by the Dutch CEDAW network as input for the CEDAW's [General Discussion on Gender Stereotypes](#). All documents relating to the Committee's work, including reports submitted by States parties, can be found on the session's [webpage](#).

LSI MEMBERS NEWS

Highlights from LSI Members in February

- Payoke, MIST and Adpare developed several resources to support survivor engagement as part of the Voiceover project, including [7 Days to Change Your Life](#) – a coaching podcast created by survivors for survivors; [Expert Talks](#) webinar series on survivor engagement, as well as a [awareness-raising video](#). These Europe more can be found on the project [website](#).
- FLEX has launched a [new research programme](#) in London, aiming to enable migrants with insecure immigration statuses to report abuse and exploitation to the authorities, without fear of their personal details being passed on to the Home Office. The two-year research programme which will develop a blueprint for a holistic, secure reporting pilot in London has been funded by the Greater London Authority. FLEX also continues to make progress towards launching the [Worker-Driven Social Responsibility pilot](#).
- Astra [announced](#) the establishment of the Western Balkans Network of Child Internet Safety Centres (WB-SIC Network) to protect children and young people from risks and threats in the digital environment, and to educate and build capacity of professionals and parents and professionals, as well as raising awareness among the general public about online risks.
- Fundación de Solidaridad Amaranta has introduced the initiative [#Unfollow](#), aimed at preventing trafficking and sexual exploitation among young people. Combining individual learning, group debates, and an interactive video game, #Unfollow equips young individuals with the knowledge and skills to identify risks and patterns linked to sexual exploitation.
- Vatra, in collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Justice launched an information campaign to raise awareness about the rights of victims of crime across Albania.
- Adpare launched the project SafeBorders, an EU-funded transnational project bringing together eight EU countries and the Western Balkans to combat child trafficking. With prosecutors, judges, social workers, law enforcement and CSOs working together across borders, SafeBorders is committed to closing legal gaps and bringing traffickers to justice.
- MRCI is currently [representing](#) another exploited migrant chef at the Workplace Relations Commission in Ireland.
- Anti-Slavery International published - jointly with EOCCHR – the analysis ["Understanding the EU Forced Labour Regulation: Assessment and Recommendations"](#). This analysis explains the provisions of the EU instrument and outlines what needs to be done for its implementation. It aims to help civil society organisations and allies active in the sector to advocate for the effective implementation of the Regulation and support enforcement of the ban of forced labour goods. ASI is also calling for a UK ban on goods made with forced labour - [sign now](#).



WHAT IS HAPPENING?

Omnibus Proposal: Prioritising Big Businesses over Human Rights

On 26 February, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [published](#) the [Omnibus package](#), confirming fears that corporate interests are being prioritised over human rights and sustainability. Under the guise of "simplification," the proposal significantly weakens the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), scaling back key due diligence requirements and enforcement mechanisms.

The proposal reduces due diligence obligations to direct suppliers only and limits them to companies with over 500 employees, requiring monitoring only once every five years instead of annually as foreseen. Additionally, enforcement mechanisms would be severely weakened, removing minimum penalties and eliminating civil liability, leaving enforcement entirely at national discretion. Financial institutions would be exempted from additional due diligence obligations, while implementation delays would push key guidance to mid-2026. See [more](#).

Despite widespread warnings and opposition by businesses, CSOs and others, the Commission appears to have disregarded concerns, undermining corporate accountability, environmental protections and labour rights. This is a remarkable step in the light of the European's commitment to work the coming five years on promoting social fairness in the modern economy including by supporting good working conditions and fair wages.

EU Tightens Scrutiny on E-Commerce Over Forced Labour

Likely partly also to protect EU businesses, the European Commission has [announced](#) [a Comprehensive EU Toolbox for Safe and Sustainable E-commerce](#), introducing stricter customs checks on goods shipped directly by e-commerce retailers like Temu and Shein to EU consumers. Referring to multiple allegations of forced labour, this move aims to ensure fair competition, enhance product safety, and protect consumers in online marketplaces by tightening controls on online purchases that present significant safety hazards and risks of non-compliance. The precise list of products will still be determined in agreement with EU Member States.

Upcoming Strategies on VAW, THB and Victim Rights

EU's strategies on Victim Rights, Combating Human Trafficking and Gender Equality have all entered their final year. This week, the EU Victim Rights Coordinator announced plans for a new EU strategy on Victim Rights, and stated that consultations for such a strategy might only start once the revision of the EU Victim Rights Directive is finalised. This would allow for gaps not addressed with this revised legal act to be taken up under policy measures in the strategy. The Polish Presidency still hopes to finalise the Directive's revision before July 1, with trilogues being scheduled for April and May.

Poland earlier also announced to aim to take a lead in discussions around a new EU Strategy on Combating Human Trafficking, but consultations have not started yet. On 5 March, the European Commission plans to launch a public consultation round on the new Gender Equality Strategy, after publishing an EU gender Road Map on the same day.

Poland Refuses to Obey to EU Migration Pact

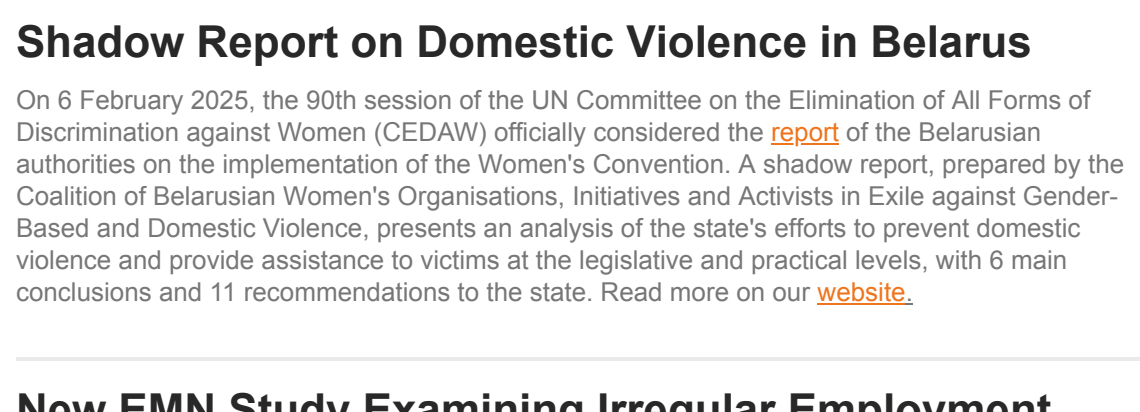
Polish President Donald Tusk has once again [criticised](#) the EU Migration Pact, reaffirming Poland's refusal to implement the reform, which aims to collectively manage the arrival of asylum seekers across the European Union. The Pact, set to come into force in 2025, will be mandatory for all EU Member States, introducing the principle of "mandatory solidarity". Tusk strongly opposes this mechanism, arguing that it would force Poland to accept migrants against its will. The Commission [denies](#) this claim, emphasising that the Pact provides various options for solidarity. Poland's stance could undermine the solidarity mechanism and weaken the entire Migration Pact, raising concerns about EU cohesion on migration policy ahead of its implementation.

Spain Announces Regularisation of 25 000 Undocumented Migrant Victims

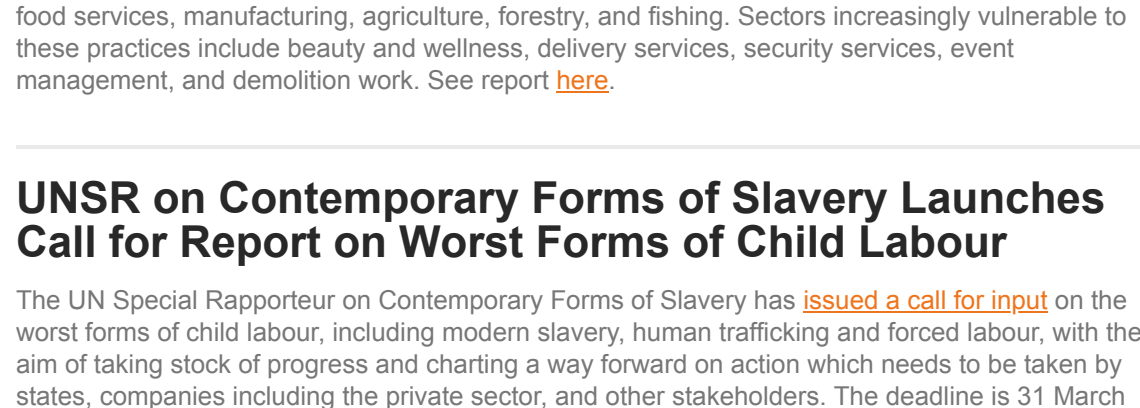
The Spanish government will grant one-year residence and work permits for undocumented migrants affected by the Valencia floods, along with their closest relatives. In a demonstration of solidarity following this devastating disaster, authorities estimate that the measure will provide relief and legal stability to at least 25,000 people.

American Apparel and Footwear Association Warns Cuts to USAID Threaten Workers' Rights

Following the recent [shifts in U.S. foreign aid](#), in particular the USAID funding freezes, the American Apparel & Footwear Association (AAFA) has [voiced](#) serious concerns, warning that these actions are tantamount to the dismantling of the USAID. In response to global outcry over the freeze's impact, AAFA is urging the Administration to work with Congress and stakeholders to ensure that USAID remains fully funded and staffed, and that key programmes remain operational, robust, and effective.



WHAT IS NEW?



UNODC Report on Human Trafficking Risks for Ukrainians Fleeing War

On 19 February, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has published the study ["Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants in the Context of Displacement Caused by the War in Ukraine"](#). The study finds – based on case studies, interviews and assessment of statistics, that while trafficking risks have increased during the war, national protection schemes, such as visa-free entry, temporary protection, and anti-trafficking measures across Europe, have played a crucial role in mitigating trafficking and smuggling risks. However, ongoing challenges remain. The study highlights the need to strengthen the capacity of Ukrainian anti-trafficking stakeholders to effectively identify and prevent both domestic and cross-border trafficking. Additionally, it highlights that it is fundamental to maintain and reinforce national protection schemes for Ukrainian refugees across Europe, ensuring safe housing, legal support, and safeguards to prevent traffickers from exploiting the vulnerabilities of those fleeing the war. See [more](#).

Shadow Report on Domestic Violence in Belarus

On 6 February 2025, the 90th session of the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) officially considered the [report](#) of the Belarusian authorities on the implementation of the Women's Convention. A shadow report, prepared by the Coalition of Belarusian Women's Organisations, Initiatives and Activists in Exile against Gender-Based and Domestic Violence, presents an analysis of the state's efforts to prevent domestic violence and provide assistance to victims at the legislative and practical levels, with 6 main conclusions and 11 recommendations to the state. Read more on our [website](#).

New EMN Study Examining Irregular Employment between 2017 and 2022

A new EMN (European Migration Network) study explores illegal employment of third-country nationals (TCNs) in EMN Member Countries. It outlines how they engage in illegal work, the challenges faced by workers and authorities, and the laws and policies addressing the issue. According to the report, small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the most common employers of irregular TCNs, particularly in sectors like construction, accommodation, food services, manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, and fishing. Sectors increasingly vulnerable to these practices include services and wellness, delivery services, security services, event management, and demolition work. See report [here](#).

UNSR on Contemporary Forms of Slavery Launches Call for Inout on Worst Forms of Child Labour

The UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery has [issued a call for inout](#) on the worst forms of child labour, including modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour, with the aim of taking stock of progress and charting a way forward on action which needs to be taken by states, companies including the private sector, and other stakeholders. The deadline is 31 March 2024.

Europol Warns for Rise of Violent Child Abuse Online by Cult Communities

Europol has raised [concerns](#) on the rise of online cult communities, this form of extremely violent child abuse. According to Europol's [Intelligence Notification](#), dedicated to violent online exploitation, specifically pressuring young people to join cult communities, has grown significantly in recent years. Their main targets are minors and vulnerable youth, who are identified and groomed on mainstream online platforms, and manipulated through psychological coercion.

FLEX Publishes Analysis of UK's Border, Security, Immigration and Asylum Bill

Our member Focus on Labour Exploitation (FLEX) has published its [analysis](#) of the UK's Border, Security, Immigration and Asylum Bill, calling it a continuation of the previous government's anti-migrant policies. According to FLEX, the proposed legislation does not address the key drivers of exploitation and leaves victims without vital support or meaningful opportunities to recover through security and decent work.

FRA Launches Position Paper on Planned Return Hubs for TCNs

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has published a [Position Paper](#) on "Planned Return Hubs in Third Countries", recognising the serious fundamental rights risks posed by return hubs. The paper provides a legal analysis on the conditions that must be met for these hubs to respect fundamental rights and comply with EU Law. These include valid and enforceable return or refusal of entry decision issued by Member States, adequate legal basis for transfers to the return hub, guarantees for lawful treatment in the third country hosting the return hub, and the creation of independent fundamental rights monitoring mechanisms.

ILO Report on Application of International Labour Standards 2025

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has released its 2025 [Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations](#), featuring an extensive analysis of forced labour and child exploitation across multiple countries. For Europe, the report put special attention on Turkey and the UK. In Turkey, while the addition of trafficking offences to the Criminal Procedure Law is welcomed, the under-reporting of and low conviction rates in trafficking cases continue to be concerning. The Committee warns the UK that joint enforcement operations between labour market authorities and immigration control undermine trust among migrant workers, deterring them from reporting exploitation due to fear of dismissal or deportation. The report also dedicates a section to the elimination of child labour and the protection of young persons, referencing multiple European countries, including Belgium, France, Albania, and Serbia.

I-CLAIM Report: Discourses about Irregularised Migrants in the Netherlands

The I-CLAIM has released a new [report](#), providing an in-depth analysis of how irregular migration is framed across politics, media, and civil society in the Netherlands. The study highlights key differences in terminology and narratives, revealing the politicized nature of the discourse and the tendency to depict irregular migrants either as a policy challenge or as vulnerable individuals in need of support. By examining cases such as the regularization programme for children, the report sheds light on how migration debates shape public perception and policy responses.

CINGO Publishes Reports on Shrinking Civic Space

The European Union of NGO Law of CINGO – the Council of Europe's Conference of International NGOs of which LSI is member - has released two publications. Firstly it published its [fifth review of developments in standards, mechanisms and case law affecting NGOs throughout the Council of Europe and beyond in the period running from 1 January 2020 to 31 December 2024](#) as well as its [Opinion on Slovak Republic's law on "Foreign Supported Organisations"](#).

The Good Lobby Launches Trafficked To Trace CRS Initiatives

The Good Lobby [Tracker](#) is the first comprehensive assessment of major corporate political responsibility initiatives, from sustainability frameworks to ESG ratings. The Tracker evaluates the methodologies of these initiatives against a model set of expectations, aiming to enhance their transparency, accountability, and usefulness. It is designed to assist business practitioners, investors, civil society advocates, policymakers, regulators, and other stakeholders in selecting the best methods and standards when assessing the corporate political footprint of companies.

PODCAST

The I-CLAIM [podcast](#), Mobility, Work and Rights explores key issues surrounding irregular migration in Europe, while challenging common misconceptions and unpacking public and political narratives around irregular migration. With four episodes already released, the latest episode, "The Night Shift and the Politics of Exhaustion", explores the relation between migration status and working conditions.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- 5 March - [International Women's Day Talks – Parliament Events](#) and launch of EU Road Map on Gender Equality & opening of consultation for new EU Strategy on Gender Equality.
- 10-21 March - The 69th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations Headquarters, New York. More information [here](#).
- 20 March - European Labour Authority (ELA) hosts an event on the posting of third-country national workers, Brussels, Belgium.
- 26-27 March - UNODC Regional Conference: "Addressing crime prevention, criminal justice, and the Role of Modern Technology" - Dubrovnik, Republic of Croatia.
- 31 March - 1 April - 25th High-Level Alliance against Trafficking in Persons Conference entitled "Protecting Childhood, Shaping Futures: A Call to End Child Trafficking" Hofburg, Vienna, Austria & online.
- 9 - 10 April - Polish EU Presidency Event on Human Trafficking, Warsaw Poland – see [announcement](#) EU TRB office.
- 5 - 7 May - Europe Regional Forum "Harmonizing Efforts to Eliminate Forced Labour and Child Labour: Sharing Progress and Best Practices" in Europe and Globally, Brussels, Belgium.
- 25 - 30 April 2026 - 15th United Nations Crime Congress from in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates under the overall theme "Accelerating crime prevention, criminal justice, and the rule of law: protecting people and planet and achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the digital age" In preparation thereof, the UNODC Civil Society Unit, in cooperation with the Alliance of NGOs on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, is conducting a global survey to gather insights from non-governmental stakeholders.

Support us

We are fully dependent on donations and subsidies. By making a donation, you will help us continue our monitoring and advocacy work to ensure accountability for the effective implementation of European anti-trafficking policies and the support to trafficked persons.

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