



## NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2025

*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 [e-mail us](#).*

**Do You or Someone You Know Needs Help?** To report suspicions of human trafficking, seek advice or support, check our [members' help and hotline numbers](#).

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### LSI NEWS



### Celebrating our 30th Anniversary

On 18 September, a high-level conference “[30 Years Anti-Trafficking Work in Europe & Supporting Victim Rights](#)” took place in Warsaw, Poland, marking the 20th anniversary of the Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Convention and the 30th anniversary of the La Strada programme. It was hosted by the [Polish government](#), and co-organised with the [Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Division](#), [La Strada Poland](#), and La Strada International.

The conference brought together policymakers, experts, and civil society representatives. Speakers highlighted the developments over the years in the anti-trafficking field, threats and migration flows linked to wars and conflicts, and the anti-migration approaches, next to challenges related to shrinking space for NGOs, rising cases of labour and child trafficking, and persistently low conviction rates. Speakers called upon governments for more investment in

anti-trafficking action, including civil society's direct support programs, and to uphold their commitments under the Convention.

## LSI NGO Platform Meeting in Warsaw

From 17–19 September, La Strada International held its General Assembly (NGO Platform Members Meeting) in Warsaw, adopting a new five-year strategy and welcoming [Doro Winkler](#) as a newly elected board member, next to discussing issues of concern and joint strategies. For the coming five years, the Platform aims to enhance its victim-centred support services; strengthen the financial basis and visibility of the platform, extending our partnerships, next to advancing our data collection & monitoring work, and evidence-based advocacy.

Our central themes for the coming years include countering the shrinking CSO space, promoting inclusive victim identification and recognition, next to fair migration policies, decent labour rights, and corporate accountability, as well as victims' access to justice, among others through strategic litigation.

Repeat after me:

**I DO NOT CONSENT  
TO FORCED MARRIAGE**

**#thisisnotfreedom**



Every passing day means another victim of forced marriage left without protection.

  
**AMBASSADE  
DE FRANCE  
EN MACÉDOINE  
DU NORD**  
*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

 Co-funded by  
the European Union

 **ОТБОРЕНА ПОПТА**  
AGAINST VIOLENCE AND TRAFFICKING

  
**La Strada**  
INTERNATIONAL

## Regional Conference on Forced Marriage

From 10–12 September, a [Regional Conference on Forced Marriage](#): National and European Perspectives was held in Skopje, North Macedonia. This event, organised by Open Gate and La Strada International with support of the French Embassy in North Macedonia, focused on the prevalence and consequences of forced marriage practices across Europe, as well as its link with human trafficking. Now Forced Marriage, including for the purpose of Human Trafficking, is criminalised in EU law. A report of this event will still be published. We encourage you to continue supporting our joint awareness campaign “I Do Not Consent to Forced Marriage” via Open Gate’s [website](#), [Facebook](#), and [Instagram](#), as well as LSI’s [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#) channels.

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## LSI Input to the EU Civil Society Strategy

For the upcoming European Commission’s Civil Society Strategy, LSI is [advocating](#) for stronger protection and meaningful participation of CSOs. Between 2023 and 2024, LSI conducted a study among its members on civic space in the anti-trafficking field, which revealed widespread constraints. NGOs report superficial involvement in legislative processes, limited consultation windows, weak collaboration channels with governments, and frequent disregard for their input. Despite these challenges, CSOs remain essential to the anti-trafficking response. They provide legal and psychosocial support, run prevention programmes, raise awareness, and contribute to national referral mechanisms and strategic litigation.

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## Webinar Series | Exploring the Additional Forms of Exploitation in the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive

During the Human Trafficking Awareness Week, from 13 to 18 October, La Strada International is launching a [webinar series](#) to explore the three added forms of exploitation included in the revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive: the exploitation of surrogacy, of forced marriage, and of illegal adoption. Each webinar will feature expert discussions and mark the launch of new LSI research publications.

**Webinar on Human Trafficking for the Exploitation of Surrogacy:** 16 October, 12:00–13:30  
Register [here](#)

**Webinar on Human Trafficking for the Exploitation of Forced Marriage:** 17 October, 12:00–13:30 Register [here](#)

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## Kick Off Trafficked En Route Project

The project Trafficked En Route, coordinated by LSI's member [FairWork](#), in which LSI and several members participate, was officially launched on 25 and 26 September in Amsterdam, the

Netherlands. The 24-month EU (AMIF) funded project aims to address gaps in the identification, transnational assistance, and protection of TCN victims of trafficking for labour exploitation.

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## Over 230 Organisations Oppose the Deportation Regulation

LSI joined PICUM and over 230 organisations in a [joint statement](#) opposing the EU's proposed [Return Regulation](#), challenging its focus on detention, deportations, containment, and control. If adopted, the Regulation would expand immigration detention to unprecedented levels, enable deportations to countries where people have no ties, as well as fuel racial profiling and intrusive surveillance. For these and further reasons, we call on co-legislators to reject it.

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## LSI MEMBERS NEWS

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### Highlights from LSI Members

- **Helen Bamber Foundation**, a UK human rights charity, welcomes the [government's decision](#) to scrap current "inaccurate, expensive and harmful" methods to assess asylum-seeking children's ages. However, they state they are concerned about [government proposals](#) to use AI and facial recognition technology instead.
  - **On the Road**, is offering free training courses, aiming to facilitate the employment and reintegration of workers, especially targeting young and elderly people, those receiving social safety nets or other income support, next to women in disadvantaged conditions, people with disabilities, people with very low incomes, and unemployed people not receiving any income support. The trainings are part of the GOL (Guarantee of Employability for Workers) Program established by the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies within the framework of the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR).
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## HIGHLIGHTS

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### US TIP Report 2025 is Finally Published After a 3-Month Delay

The US Department of State published its [2025 Trafficking in Persons \(TIP\) Report](#) reflecting 2024 data. Initially, the report was expected to be published by the end of June. The report shows a decrease in both prosecutions and identified victims compared with previous years: 18,865 victims were identified in Europe, while only 2,960 convictions were recorded.

Each country is ranked in one of four categories based on government efforts to meet the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) minimum standards. This year, 19 European countries were placed in Tier 1 (including 16 EU Member States), while most European countries fall under Tier 2 (23 countries, including 11 EU). No European country is put on the Tier 2 Watchlist. Russia and Belarus are the only European countries ranked in Tier 3.

Globally, the report records the highest ever number of convictions for labour trafficking. It also highlights state-sponsored forced labour, the growing risks linked to artificial intelligence, and the persistence of forced criminality as evolving forms of human trafficking.

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## Von der Leyen's 2025 State of the Union Speech

In her [State of the Union](#) address, EC President Ursula von der Leyen highlighted the need to step up measures to sanction traffickers and smugglers, including tackling online recruitment tactics in cooperation with digital platforms. However, migration was framed primarily as a security challenge. While she did refer to the need to address poverty - eradicate poverty by 2050 -, and protecting jobs - proposal for a Quality Jobs Act -, she excused the regretful weakening of the Corporate Social Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) and other EU law by the Omnibus proposal with the need for 'less paperwork, less overlaps, less complex rules' for businesses. Human and fundamental rights were not mentioned once throughout the speech, nor was gender equality or the role of civil society organisations in shaping migration policy. This omission raises concerns over the political commitment to safeguard one of the EU's most fundamental values - human rights.

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## UNHRC Considers Merging Mandates

As part of the rationalisation process, the [United Nations Human Rights Council](#) is proposing to merge the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery with that of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons. A [draft resolution](#) has been tabled. If adopted, the new post "Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery and Trafficking in Persons" is envisaged to start on 1 May 2026, and further details on recruitment and appointment will follow.

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## Council & EU Parliament Want Stronger Role for Europol on Migrant Smuggling & Human Trafficking

The Council Presidency and European Parliament negotiators have reached a [provisional agreement](#) to amend the Europol Regulation and reinforce the agency's mandate in supporting member states against migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The deal puts particular focus on strengthening information sharing between member states and Europol to improve cooperation at EU-level and assist in identifying trafficking victims and other vulnerable individuals. It also foresees the creation of a European Centre Against Migrant Smuggling and additional resources (around 50 new staff and €50 million).

With this stronger role given to Europol and Frontex, and the growing focus on returns, it is important to note that these agencies also have obligations and responsibilities to help identify victims and refer them to support services.

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## EU Council Agrees on Transition from Temporary Protection for People Who Fled Ukraine

The EU Council has [agreed](#) on a coordinated approach to transition people who fled Ukraine under the Temporary Protection Directive. The plan includes enabling access to residence permits already available under national and EU law, while also preparing for return and reintegration once the war ends. To prevent people from becoming undocumented, member states should develop dedicated residence permits and provide a one-year period for individuals to prepare their return through a voluntary return programme.

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## UNODC Report on Organized Crime in Ukraine

A new [UNODC report](#) shows how criminal groups in Ukraine are shifting their business models as the war, now in its fourth year, fuels displacement, trafficking risks, and demand for synthetic drugs. The analysis covers organized crime structures and their evolution, focusing on five areas, including online scams and fraud as well as human trafficking. The report provides practical recommendations for Ukraine and the international community on countering and mitigating the impact of organised crime in the country.

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## Annual Anti-Trafficking Meeting

On 11–12 Sept, anti-trafficking leaders from 54 countries gathered in Strasbourg for the [Annual Meeting of National Anti-Trafficking Co-ordinators and Rapporteurs](#). Participants reinforced their commitment towards integrating crisis-related provisions into National Action Plans for combating human trafficking, enhancing preparedness of the national counter-trafficking mechanisms, and discussed the links between human trafficking and drugs and forced criminality, and engagement with the private sector in combating human trafficking. The meeting was co-organized by the [Council of Europe](#) and the [Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings](#).





# New Report from Global Commission on Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking

The Global Commission on Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking has released a comprehensive [new report](#) that issues a stark warning: modern slavery is a global crisis, deeply intertwined with climate change, conflict, migration, and economic inequality. The report examines the causes of vulnerability to modern slavery and the role of technology in both facilitating and combating human trafficking and exploitation. Key recommendations urge governments, businesses, and civil society to act in concert: strengthen legal frameworks, enforce supply-chain accountability, improve victim identification, invest in prevention tools, and ensure that crisis contexts don't weaken protections.

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## SHRINKING SPACE

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## European Civic Forum Briefing on CSO Support

The new [ECF briefing](#) highlights the importance of an EU civil society strategy and outlines recommendations to better support civil society, including sustainable funding and stronger dialogue. The briefing stresses the role of strong and healthy CSOs as a key pillar of resilient democracies. See also [LSI's input](#).

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## Funding Gaps Undermine Community-led Due Diligence

Swedwatch's new report "[Overdue Diligence](#)" shows how limited funding for worker- and community-driven approaches undermines human rights accountability. It provides case studies and recommendations.

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## UN Experts Call to Protect Civic Space in Anti-Corruption Fora

UN human rights experts have urged States Parties to the UNCAC to enhance transparency and safeguard civic space in the Convention's review mechanism. In a [joint statement](#), they stressed the need to ensure meaningful civil society participation in anti-corruption efforts at both national level and UN fora. The experts called on states "to recognise civil society not as an obstacle, but as an indispensable partner in combating corruption and promoting human rights". See [OHCHR's press release](#).

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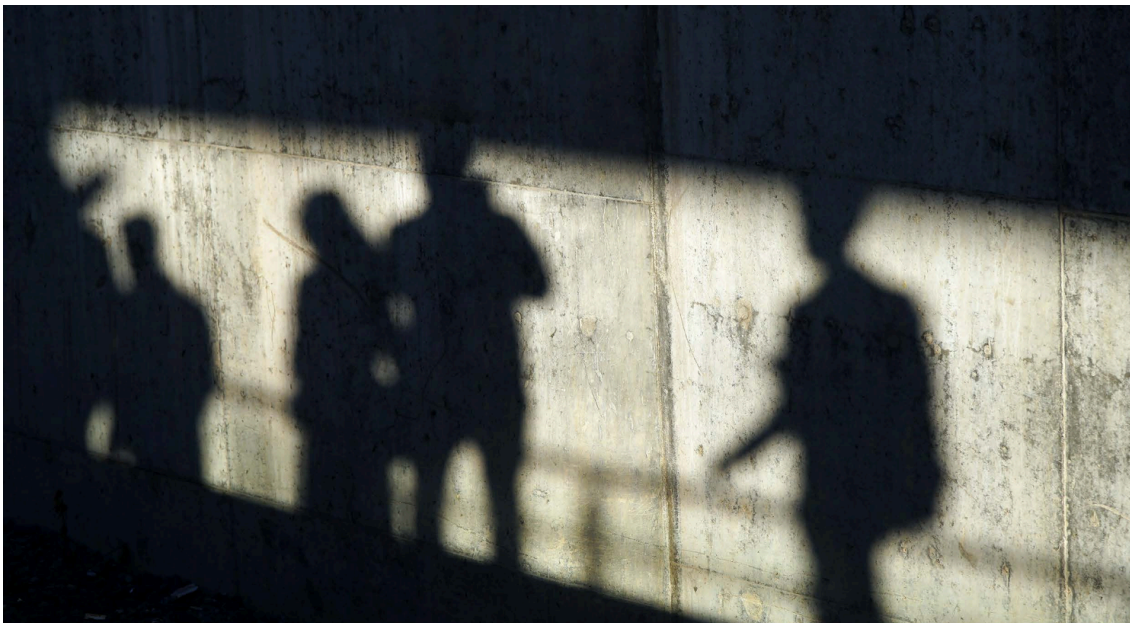
## (FAIR) MIGRATION

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### Moldova to Survey Unpaid Domestic and Care Work

From July to December 2025, the Republic of Moldova will conduct a [national labour force survey](#) with support from the ILO to measure unpaid domestic and care work. The survey will cover a representative sample of around 10,000 households. This will enable a deeper understanding of the real value and contributions of this work to economies and societies. Data will be collected through face-to-face interviews using tablet-based devices.

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### New CoE Report on Externalisation and Human Rights

The Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner, Michael O'Flaherty, published a report titled [Externalised asylum and migration policies and human rights law](#), highlighting the serious human rights risks of outsourcing asylum and migration policies. The report stresses that externalisation exacerbates vulnerabilities of people already in precarious situations, increasing the risk of exploitation and human trafficking.

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### OHCHR: Leveraging Regular Migration Pathways for Protection & Dignity



OHCHR launched a [paper](#) at the Global Forum on Migration and Development, outlining how States can expand and better use legal routes for migration as a means to reduce irregular migration, protect human rights, and support sustainable development.

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## **EUI's Seminar on Countering Misinformation & Training on Migration Governance**

The Migration Policy Centre (MPC) at the European University Institute has published the recording of its seminar "[Countering Misinformation about Refugees and Migrants](#)". Available [here](#).

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## **PICUM & Red Cross Speak Up Against the EU Facilitation Directive**

Organisations have raised concerns that the EU Facilitation Directive, currently under negotiation in the European Parliament, leaves the door open to the criminalisation of humanitarian assistance and could expand the grounds for criminalising migrants.

PICUM is actively working to prevent this outcome. Among other initiatives, PICUM has filed a complaint to the European Ombudsman, to which the Ombudsman has decided to [open an inquiry](#), joined the new EU-funded [project WING](#) to map cases of criminalisation of solidarity, engaged with journalists across Europe (see [interview](#)), and collaborated closely with MEPs and [speaking](#) and writing to journalists all over Europe, as well as collaborating with MEPs.

Red Cross has issued a [statement](#) on the EU Facilitation Directive, warning that its current implementation has had harmful consequences for people on the move and for humanitarian actors. It highlights that the Directive often blurs the line between criminal smuggling and acts of solidarity, leading to the criminalisation of those providing humanitarian assistance. The ongoing review of the Directive is an opportunity to reaffirm the EU's commitment to human rights and to put an end to the criminalisation of solidarity.

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## **LABOUR RIGHTS**

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A row of hanging slaughtered carcasses, on 19 March 2010, Norway. Photo: Thomas Bjørkan / Wikimedia Commons

## Investigations Expose Exploitation, Migrant Smuggling & Human Trafficking Across Europe

Reporting Democracy published an [investigation](#) revealing systemic abuse within the recruitment of Romanian migrants in the Netherlands. Nearly 40,000 Romanians are employed in Dutch logistics, agriculture, and meat processing, with many facing low wages, false promises, poor working conditions, precarious contracts, unstable housing arrangements, and much more.

Similarly, Equal Times [reported](#) systematic recruitment by temporary labour agencies of Spanish migrants to work on logistics warehouses since the euro crisis based on false promises, precarious working conditions, lower pay than expected, and inadequate accommodation.

In [Ukraine](#), Uzbek farmworkers have reportedly been employed in “inhumane” conditions in greenhouses. Workers were subjected to intimidation, coercion, and restrictions on their movement.

Meanwhile, UN experts expressed alarm over the exploitation of migrant workers on a citrus farm in northern [Cyprus](#). Workers reportedly faced excessive working hours, withheld wages, unsafe living conditions, and intimidation. The experts stressed that these abuses highlight broader risks of exploitation in agricultural supply chains and urged stronger accountability from states and businesses.

This month, Europol also disclosed several major operations targeting human trafficking and migrant smuggling. Eight suspects were arrested for running a [global trafficking network](#) that exploited people across multiple continents. Another investigation rescued dozens of victims of [human trafficking for sexual exploitation](#) in Austria, leading to five arrests in Colombia. In a separate action, four individuals linked to a [criminal network smuggling](#) over 600 migrants across the Western Balkans were arrested, in cooperation with law enforcement and judicial authorities from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Slovenia.

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## Trade Unions Urge Action on Workers' Rights, Banking Reforms, and Migrant Protections

The Global Union (UNI) has reported that European trade unions are calling for EU rules to ensure that [public funds](#) are only given to companies where workers are covered by collective agreements. Each year, over €2 trillion is spent through public procurement across the EU, yet most contracts are awarded solely based on the lowest price offered.

UNI also expressed concern about the current trajectory of the [European banking sector](#) and its regulatory framework, stressing that debates on banking structures and capital requirements cannot be separated from their impact on workers, communities, and citizens.

On 7 October, trade unions across the globe will mark the [World Day for Decent Work](#) under the theme “For democracy that delivers decent work.” This year’s action calls for urgent measures to end corporate capture of public policy and ensure that democracy upholds workers’ rights and decent employment.

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## MEPs Push for Stronger Protections for Trainees

MEPs in the Employment and Social Affairs Committee have adopted a report proposing [reforms to EU traineeship rules](#) to guarantee fairer working conditions and discourage misuse of “traineeship” status. Key proposals include a clear definition of “traineeship”, obligation of written contracts, detailing pay and duration, and to enhance access to health insurance, unemployment benefits, and pension contributions

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## PRIVATE ACCOUNTABILITY



## Debates on the Future of the CSDDD Intensify

As EU institutions continue negotiations on the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD), debates over its scope and effectiveness are intensifying across Europe.

On 23 September, the OHCHR [convened](#) a discussion with EU and tripartite negotiators to emphasise that simplifying the Directive must not weaken human rights, highlighting that integrating human rights into the CSDDD strengthens competitiveness by making compliance clearer and more effective for businesses. The Fair-Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO) and partners also released a [paper](#) on responsible disengagement, warning against “cut-and-run” practices that would harm small operators and self-employed workers.



Moreover, more than 200 companies and investors, and almost 500 signatories in total, [urged](#) EU lawmakers to uphold due diligence rules and strengthen the sustainable finance framework. Meanwhile, Triodos Bank's chief economist pointed to the [withdrawal of several UK banks](#) from the Net-Zero Banking Alliance as evidence that voluntary measures are insufficient, reinforcing the need for binding rules.

Civil society groups are [calling](#) on the European Parliament to resist pressure to weaken the CSDDD as trade talks with the US, political pressures, and corporate lobbying threaten to dilute its human rights, environmental, and climate provisions. A coalition of [35 NGOs](#) has also urged MEPs to preserve a review clause on whether financial institutions should be legally obliged to identify and address their impacts on people and the planet.

Beyond Brussels, in Germany, [NGOs](#) and the [national human rights institution](#) are challenging a draft amendment to the Supply Chain Due Diligence Act (LkSG) that would remove dedicated reporting requirements and reduce sanctions in the transition period before the CSDDD comes into effect.

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## **IOM Publishes Grievance Remediation Guidance & Handbook**

IOM, with the Remedy Project and Ergon Associates, published an [Handbook](#) and [Practical Guidelines](#) for businesses to address migrant worker grievances. Framing remedy as one of the most neglected areas in business and human rights, the tools provide both conceptual grounding and practical steps to help companies build credible, worker-centred grievance systems that address exploitation and root causes of harm.

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## **NLJ Journal Issue on UNTOC's 25th Anniversary**

The Transnational Criminal Law Review has released a [special issue](#) to mark the 25th anniversary reflecting on the influence, as well as challenges and controversies of the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and the 3 related protocols including the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Human Beings, especially women and children, which was adopted in November 2000.

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## **CHILD LABOUR & EXPLOITATION**

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## Child Circle: New tools to support children affected by Online Sexual Abuse

Child Circle has published "[Looking Ahead](#)," summarising resources developed under the PROMISE/ELPIS project, which seeks to bring early identification, specialised assistance, child-friendly justice, and hope to children affected by online child sexual abuse. The publication connects practical tools for practitioners with evolving EU legal and policy developments, helping bridge the gap between frontline support and systemic change.

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## Victim Identification Task Force Identifies 51 Sexually Abused Children

During the 17th edition of the Victim Identification Task Force (VIDTF17), 51 sexually abused children were [identified](#). The operation, held at Europol's headquarters from 8–19 September 2025, brought together 27 experts from Europol, INTERPOL, and 22 countries worldwide.

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## STRATEGIC LITIGATION

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## ESWA Report on Safe and Ethical Sex Work Research

On 16 September, ESWA launched the [Gold Standard Guidelines for Safe and Ethical Sex Work Research in Europe](#) in collaboration with the [European Sex Work Research Network \(ESWORN\)](#), and sex worker-led organisations. The [online launch](#) was attended by diverse participants, including representatives from academia, sex workers' rights organisations, human rights defenders, and both private and government sectors.

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## ACCESS TO RIGHTS

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### CoE New Human Trafficking Database

The Council of Europe Anti-Trafficking Division has launched a new [human trafficking case-law database](#) within the HUDOC-GRETA platform. The database compiles selected judicial decisions identified during GRETA's evaluation visits, as well as cases submitted by members of the Council of Europe Network of specialised lawyers and NGOs providing legal assistance to trafficked persons. The database offers flexible search options by legal and thematic criteria and legal practitioners can still submit cases.

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### GRECO Paper on the Right to Access Information

The [Council of Europe's Group of States against Corruption](#) (GRECO) published a new [thematic paper](#) on the right to access information. GRECO underlines that an effective system for accessing official documents is essential to combat corruption, strengthen accountability of governments and public officials, and enable citizens to participate fully in public life.

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## CALLS FOR INPUT

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- **ITUC:** Trade union affiliates are invited to provide feedback on the [draft Guidebook Applying Human Rights Due Diligence](#) (HRDD) in the Workplace to Achieve a Just Transition. The resource offers practical guidance for unions to engage with company management on climate change and Just Transition issues. Deadline: 9 October 2025. Feedback can be submitted in English, French, or Spanish. Contact: [amalia.hammarlund@ituc-csi.org](mailto:amalia.hammarlund@ituc-csi.org)
  - **GREVIO:** NGOs are invited to submit shadow reports as part of GREVIO's [evaluation procedure](#) to assess the EU's compliance with the Istanbul Convention, using the baseline evaluation questionnaire. Deadline: 28 November 2025.
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## UPCOMING EVENTS

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- **6 - 7 October** - 15th Meeting of the Intergovernmental UN Working Group on Trafficking in Persons, in Vienna, Austria. Followed by the Constructive Dialogue on Trafficking in Persons on 8 October 2025. [Read here](#) to gain further insight into the work of the Working Group and on the [dedicated meeting webpage](#).
- **6 - 8 October** - EUI is organising a training on [Effective Migration Governance: Policy Impacts and Trade-Offs](#), in Florence, Italy. The training course provides original strategies to navigate dilemmas and trade-offs in migration governance.
- **21 October** - ILO Regional Consultations in preparation of the Sixth Global Conference on the Elimination of Child Labour (2026), for Europe and Central Asia, online. [More information here](#).



- **21 - 22 October** - 10th Vienna Migration Conference (VMC2025) organised by ICMPD, in Vienna, Austria. Further updates on sessions and speakers will be shared on the [VMC website](#). [Register now to follow the livestream](#).
- **3 - 4 November** - meeting of CoE specialised network of lawyers and NGOs, Strasbourg, France.
- **11 - 13 November** - [PILnet Global Forum Pro Bono & Public Interest Law](#) in a Shifting World, in Rome, Italy.
- **3 - 4 December** - [European Forum against Trafficking and Organised Crime](#) (THBxOC 2025) organised by CBSS & Europol, in Stockholm, Sweden.

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## 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.

**Donate Now**

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