

LOOKING BACK

WHAT HAVE WE DONE IN 2025?

La Strada International

In 2025, **we shaped EU and international policy debates** on various forms of human trafficking, forced labour and victims' rights and collected further evidence via research and exchange, advancing recognition of all forms of exploitation.

We pushed for civil society space and victim-centred approaches and bridged grassroots practice with European and UN policymaking through linking our members' direct assistance work with our engagement in advocacy and formal roles in EU and global platforms.

Our members assisted several thousand persons*, and we kept victims' rights visible, ensuring that those most affected by trafficking remain visible, protected and heard. We represented the perspectives of migrant persons, displaced individuals, and third-country nationals in debates on migration, labour mobility, and returns.

Your continued support in 2026 is essential to sustain our vital watchdog and service-providers role in the anti-trafficking field.

***In 2024 LSI members assisted 5,400 presumed victims. The data for 2025 are not yet available.**

Corporate Accountability

We consistently defended **corporate accountability and human rights due diligence**, following developments around the EU due diligence directive (CSDDD) and strongly opposing rollbacks under the Omnibus proposal, while closely following also the **Forced Labour Product Ban Regulation**, by regularly participating in an NGO consultation group, joining the [EU informal expert group on forced labour](#) and supporting the drafting of **Recommendations for the Designation of National Competent Authorities** under the Regulation.

Together with Anti-Slavery International we published a policy brief titled [Recommendations for the Designation of National Competent Authorities under the EU Forced Labour Product Ban Regulation](#) and a publication on [due diligence in relation to State Imposed Forced Labour](#), launched at a side event at the 14th UN Business and Human Rights Forum 2025. All of this to help safeguard human rights standards within emerging EU enforcement frameworks.

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

We advocated for **women's rights and gender equality**, including clear standards on consent and challenging gender stereotypes. In January we submitted our joint [Input to the addendum to the report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls](#) on the concept of consent in relation to violence against women and girls. Throughout the year we monitored the transposition of the Directive on Violence against Women (VAW/DV) and the Gender Equality Road Map. In close cooperation with other NGOs, we called for inclusion of meaningful references to women who face multiple and intersecting discrimination, namely related to their racial or ethnic origin, and migrant women, especially those in informal employment or without legal residence. This work also related to our [research](#) and [campaign](#) work on the exploitation of forced marriage, our monitoring of EU's accession to the Istanbul Convention, and our social media campaign work during the [16 days of Violence Against Women](#).

Migration and Asylum

We maintained targeted engagement on **migration and asylum** files and closely followed policy developments related to migration, wars and conflicts. We called for **fair migration policies**, opposing the stricter border measures, detention and returns of vulnerable migrants without proper risk assessments. We also continuously paid attention to the situation in **Ukraine**, participating in UN and NGO task forces, issuing statements, and launching a case study report [on Trafficking Risks Among Displaced Ukrainians](#), marking three years of war to show the continuous risks of exploitation and abuse. We advocated for the prolongation of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) and pathways to more permanent residence, while highlighting the need for fair migration pathways and the rising exploitation risks, ensuring that all vulnerable migrants remain visible in EU and UN policy discussions, despite declining political attention and the strong focus on returns and securitisation.

Shrinking Space

We actively responded to **shrinking civic space and funding instability**, including monitoring developments in the United States, organising a [webinar on US funding cuts](#), and maintaining regular exchanges with affected members and partners. We also addressed deteriorating civic space in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Belarus, and monitored restrictive legislation in Hungary, Italy, and Slovakia. We further provided [input for the EU Civil Society Strategy](#) and contributed to **reports and articles on shrinking civic space** and engaged with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) and the Human Rights and Democracy Network (HRDN) to strengthen collective responses.

We defended global development aid and promoted anti-corruption and rule-of-law standards. Joint collective advocacy across sectors helps strengthen civil society coordination, solidarity and international visibility of risks, reinforcing civil society's role as a credible watchdog within international human rights mechanisms.

Combating All Forms of Trafficking and Supporting Victims

We spoke out against all forms of human trafficking, promoting equal access to protection across all labour sectors, such as care work and hospitality, and advancing non-punishment, trauma-informed care and victim assistance to ensure that victim-centred approaches remained central in EU and international anti-trafficking debates. In 2025 we joined projects related to addressing exploitation in the hospitality sector - [HOST](#) - and improve access to trauma care - [Resilia](#).

Research & Publications

To ensure that our advocacy work is evidence-based, we worked on **nine research papers** in 2025 (four published) focusing on different forms of exploitation. We published two comparative legal studies covering 38 countries, including case-law analysis on the **exploitation of [surrogacy](#), and of [forced marriage](#)** and their links with human trafficking, while also looking into [how surrogacy ended as a form of human trafficking in the revised EU Anti-Trafficking Directive](#). We also conducted desk research into the **exploitation of illegal adoption**.

We stressed the need to clearly distinguish between non-exploitative and exploitative practices, emphasising that for human trafficking coercion, deception, abuse of power, or exploitation need to be present. We underlined the obligation of governments to combat abuse while fully respecting fundamental rights, notably the right to marry, form a family, and or adopt children. Our baseline evidence will shape further understanding of under-recognised forms of exploitation.

We further published a [case study paper on non-punishment](#), assessing the practical application of the non-punishment principle based on analysis of a unique collection of 28 cases from 11 countries across Europe. The report concluded that despite the existence of both European and in some cases national provisions, the principle was often not applied or only partially applied, which leads to grave breaches of the rights of the trafficked persons. See also the Romanian version of the [Explanatory brief on non-Punishment](#) published this year - now available in [10 languages](#).

We also advanced research on **NRMs, victim identification, compensation and asset recovery**, and a chapter for an academic book on shrinking space, with publications scheduled for 2026. With this research work, a stronger evidence base was built to improve victim protection and access to justice in future reforms. On 13 May the book [Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation Around the World](#) was launched. La Strada International wrote Chapter 13 - A critical look at the criminalization of the “Use of Services” of trafficked persons.

Next to our own research, we contributed to four other research initiatives, particularly through our involvement in the [EU Anti-Trafficking HUB](#).

Moreover, LSI also published our 2024 [Annual Report](#) and [Financial Report](#), as well as the [2024 overview of LSI members data on victim assistance](#) and the [joint conclusions on forced marriage event](#), with Open Gate.

Ongoing Projects

Currently, we are part of **eight international projects consortia**. [COMCRIM](#) focused on conducting research on patterns of human trafficking with the use of online financial flows data and banking records, while [Trafficked en Route](#) is focused on the exploitation of third-country nationals. InfoRights aimed at enhancing victim’s access to rights and LSI worked on a chatbot for posted workers. LSI is also working on a project on the hospitality sector ([HOST](#)), on access to trauma care ([Resilia](#)), and research on funding for anti-trafficking work, which included the launch of a PhD post with Dundee University. From 2024 to 2025 LSI researched and [raised awareness](#) for forced marriage with Open Gate. The [Mobile project](#), focused on the need to enhance social dialogue to improve conditions for intra-EU mobility of workers, especially posted third-country nationals (TNCs), was also launched this year, which aligned with research work conducted in the project Info Rights, that looked into the posting of TCNs in agriculture and manufacturing. These projects will continue in 2026 and are mostly funded by the EU.

Social Media, Campaigning and Public Awareness

Through strategic communications and targeted campaigning, LSI helped shift public and institutional narratives on human trafficking and exploitation.

We published **five standalone statements** throughout the year, focusing on key international days and advocacy priorities, including **forced marriage as a form of human trafficking** on the [International Women’s Day](#) and on the [Global Day against THB](#), [all forms of trafficking in the EU](#) (Anti-Trafficking Day), [exploitation in the hospitality sector](#) on the Human Rights Day, and [protecting people on the move from exploitation](#) on the International Migrants Day.

In addition, LSI **co-signed 13 joint statements** with broad civil society coalitions on major EU and global policy developments, notably **opposition to the [European Commission’s Omnibus proposal](#) and safeguarding EU corporate accountability laws, [gender stereotypes](#)** (CEDAW input), calling on EU leaders to [protect global development aid](#), [sustainable support for civil society](#), long-term solutions under the [Temporary Protection Directive](#) for displaced people from Ukraine, solidarity with Serbian civil society ([6 March](#) & [12 March](#)), [advancing human rights-based anti-corruption efforts](#) – see also [open letter](#) to the Human Rights Council -,

[shrinking civic space concerns in Italy](#) related to the Security Decree, and [inhumane deportation rules linked to the EU Return Directive](#).

We delivered targeted awareness campaigns around EU Anti-Trafficking Day with a **Human Trafficking Awareness Week** focused on the newly recognised forms of human trafficking included in the amended EU Anti-Trafficking Directive, next to joining the [16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence](#), and the [No Penalty campaign](#) with private sector actors to raise awareness and drive action against human trafficking. LSI also joined Open Gate's campaign '[Ring or Chain?](#)' to call attention to forced marriage.

We also relaunched our annual [Conscious Christmas Calendar](#) to promote conscious consumerism and awareness for exploitation and abuse among workers providing services and producing consumer goods. These efforts were supported by sustained digital outreach across our **website, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn**, amplifying advocacy messages and calls to action throughout the year to shift public narratives.

Internal Governance and Network Strengthening

LSI strengthened its Platform by expanding membership – we welcomed Helen Bamber Foundation (UK) and SHOP (NL) as new associate members in 2025 - and holding monthly (online) members meetings and celebrating our **30th anniversary** with the Council of Europe and the Polish government in a [public event](#), in Warsaw, Poland. Numerous member anniversaries were also marked across 2025.

International Representation & Events

We (co-)organised **nine international events**, including the [Regional Freedom from Slavery Forum](#) (5-7 May), and a [regional conference on forced marriage and human trafficking](#) (10-12 September). We also organised our NGO Platform meeting in Warsaw, Poland, from 17 to 19 September.

LSI also organised three webinars focusing on forced marriage (16/10), with IMPACT, exploitation of surrogacy (17/10), and [funding sustainability](#) (30/04) and contributed to **73 international and regional events**. We further co-organised study visits and exchanges with Council of Europe delegations from [North Macedonia](#) and [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), as well as a visit for a Turkish delegation by ICMPD, next to meetings with the OSCE and the Council of Europe. We facilitated dialogue on victim support, legal aid, and compensation, and strengthened capacity among state authorities and civil society.