

8 March 2026

WOMEN'S RIGHTS DAY

La Strada International

Millions of women worldwide continue to face structural inequality, gender-based violence, abuse, and exploitation, including severe forms such as human trafficking. Within Europe, these injustices are **particularly evident in the lives of migrant and displaced women**, who play an essential role in sustaining our societies and economies. They provide vital care for older people and children and occupy crucial positions in sectors such as garment, hospitality, food services, cleaning, domestic, and broader care sectors.

Celebrated as “*essential workers*” during the COVID-19 pandemic, migrant and displaced women, are often left with little choice, frequently experience precarity, low pay, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, and heightened risks of exploitation and violence. This disproportionate exposure to abuse and structural inequality not only undermines their rights but also reduces their access to justice and remedies, while provoking profound and lasting impacts on their mental health and overall well-being, particularly for trans women.

According to 2024 Eurostat figures, 67% of identified trafficked persons in Europe are women and girls, and the majority of the registered and assisted persons were third-country nationals (64%).

The harm does not end when the abuse stops

The psychological impact of gender-based violence, abuse, exploitation and human trafficking, often endures long after the immediate harm. Violence against women remains widespread and is strongly linked to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Victims often experience complex trauma, especially when abuse is prolonged or begins in childhood.

Women and girls who have been trafficked or experienced violence, including, but not exclusively, sexual or labour exploitation, frequently suffer severe psychological harm, including dissociation, suicidal ideation, and long-term emotional instability. **Structural gender inequality, poverty, displacement, gender identity, sexual orientation and insecure migration status can further increase vulnerability and reduce access to mental health care.**

Although the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention – not yet ratified by all Council of Europe countries - and the EU Directive on VAW/DV set standards for protecting women from violence, implementation remains uneven and insufficient across Europe.

Migrant, displaced and trafficked women and girls often lack access to safe, culturally sensitive, and trauma-informed mental health support. Legal impediments, overly complex administrative procedures, intrusive asylum and trafficking processes, stigma, language barriers, lack of information, delays in decision-making, and fragmented support systems, next to long waiting list and lack of trauma-informed services, continue to prevent many from receiving the care they need.

In particular, asylum and protection procedures frequently fail to recognise psychological trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health symptoms, which deprives victims of access to support and increases the risk of possible abuse, violence and exploitation.

Effective support must be long-term, consistent, trauma-informed and victim-centred, integrated with legal, administrative and social assistance, including housing. Addressing mental health needs also requires understanding of cultural differences and tackling the structural drivers of harm, including violence, inequality, stigma, discrimination and systemic barriers.

Through the EU funded [RESILIA project - Resilient Mental Health and Empowerment for migrant and displaced women in Vulnerable Contexts \(2025 – 2028\)](#), we join partners across Europe to strengthen access to trauma-informed mental health support for migrant and displaced women.

On this Women's Rights Day, we must **make these invisible women visible** and unequivocally demand that support systems are trauma-informed, victim-centred and accessible in practice.

Our Call to Action

We call for bold and coordinated action to prevent and address violence, exploitation and human trafficking of women and girls across Europe and restore their agency and control, which protects mental health and prevents trauma.

- 1. Adopt gender-responsive anti-trafficking and migration policies**, by ensuring anti-trafficking and migration laws, policies and practices systematically integrate a gender perspective and address the specific risks faced by women and girls.
- 2. Fully implement and enforce EU and Council of Europe standards**, including the Istanbul Convention and the EU Directive on VAW/DV, ensuring mental health support is a guaranteed part of the protection of victims.
- 3. Invest in long-term, consistent trauma-informed mental health services**, including specialised care for complex trauma, and embed psychological support within shelters, asylum systems and anti-trafficking services.
- 4. Strengthen prevention and early detection and intervention**, including trauma-sensitive screening for abuse and exploitation within healthcare settings.
- 5. Provide comprehensive training for frontline professionals** to recognise trauma responses and indicators of exploitation and human trafficking, and to apply trauma-informed approaches in practice.
- 6. Remove legal, administrative and practical barriers to mental health support and provide accessible tailored language courses and social reintegration** for migrant and marginalised women and ensure culturally competent, language-inclusive and accessible services, as well as access to tailored language courses.
- 7. Ensure stable, multi-year funding for frontline organisations**, including through programmes managed by the European Commission, to ensure sustainable support systems.
- 8. Enhance data collection and research**, including gender-disaggregated data and research on long-term mental health impacts of violence and human trafficking.
- 9. Strengthen cross-sector coordination**, creating integrated and victim-centred services that combine legal, health, housing, and social support.
- 10. Address structural gender inequality**, including economic dependence, poverty risks, barriers in accessing health care services and unpaid care burdens, as part of a comprehensive mental health and equality strategy.



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