

2026 - 2030



Strategic Plan

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Introduction

La Strada International at 30: A Milestone Amid Turbulent Times

In 2025, La Strada International (LSI) marks its 30th anniversary amid rising global instability. War, political unrest, and economic hardship continue to drive migration, with millions of people displaced—particularly from Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, other countries in Central Asia, West-Africa and Northern South America including Columbia and Venezuela.

Right-wing political gains have led to stricter, anti-migration policies. The EU Pact on Migration and Asylum (in force since June 2024) emphasizes deportation, externalized border control, and fast-tracked procedures, while NGOs face increasing restrictions, funding cuts, and negative public rhetoric. Identifying and protecting trafficking victims remains a major challenge.

Despite these obstacles, significant progress has been made over the decades. Key legislation—such as the UN Palermo Protocol, the European Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings, the (amended) EU anti-trafficking Directive and various other EU law —has established rights for victims, including access to protection and support, including legal aid and accommodation and access to remedies, and protection from punishment for crimes committed due to being trafficked.

LSI and its members play a key role in monitoring victims' access to rights and protecting victim rights through their direct assistance and outreach work and their participation in national referral systems, strategy implementation, and policy development at national and European level. Recognized for their expertise, they engage with major international organisations and institutions like the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and European Union, including through membership of different fora, including the EU Victims' Rights Platform, the EU Anti-Trafficking Hub and EU Civil Society Platform against trafficking in Human Beings.

However, major challenges persist. Many victims remain unidentified, and there is still insufficient awareness, access to information, outreach to vulnerable groups, and availability of safe reporting mechanisms. Greater attention is needed for all forms of human trafficking and all victims, including those affected by the new forms of exploitation added to the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive: exploitation of forced marriage, surrogacy and or illegal adoption; forced organ donation, and forced criminality. There is also a lack of clarity regarding when severe forms of exploitation constitute human trafficking and when they do not.

Referral, protection, and support for trafficked persons remain closely tied to the criminal justice system and dependent on criminal investigations and victims' cooperation with the authorities. In practice, even where rights exist, they are often not fully implemented due to various bottlenecks. Access to justice, remedies, non-punishment provisions, and residence rights generally remains limited. Additionally, many NGOs in Europe face a shrinking civic space, rising workloads, and unstable funding.

Despite all these challenges, LSI and its network have supported thousands of people over the past 30 years and remain committed to fighting trafficking and protecting victims' rights across Europe.

Going forward

This direct assistance provided by LSI's members to trafficked persons and those at risk is essential, as it offers the Platform with unique grassroots experiences and insights into developments on the ground. The recognition, respect, and realisation of the rights of trafficked persons and affected groups are, and remain, the focus of our work. We will continue to support their rights through outreach, direct services, awareness, information provision, research, monitoring, advocacy, and strategic partnerships with all relevant actors. We aim to further build the platform's capacity and strengthen its services for trafficked and exploited persons. Moreover, we aim to ensure that the voices of trafficked persons and direct groups are better imbedded within our services, through engaging them in our work, in defining our policy actions, and in the promotion of rights.

The coming five years (2026 – 2030) we want to use our advocacy, data collection, research, monitoring, direct assistance, prevention work, partnerships and strategic litigation to:

Protect the Rights of Trafficking Persons, and marginalised third country nationals and EU workers by

- Enhancing outreach and access to information for vulnerable groups.
- Promoting need assessments and identification of presumed trafficked persons – including of those in mixed migration flows - and their adequate referral to protection and support.
- Demanding access to justice, including safe reporting, compensation, non-punishment, and access to residence.
- Requesting accountability for misconduct by companies and recruitment agencies.
- Further integrating the voices of trafficked persons in our services through self-monitoring and the participation of trafficked persons into our daily work.

Remain visible, recognised and respected at the broad European level and guarantee our future work and independency by:

- Acting against the shrinking space for Civil Society in Europe and enhancing our watchdog role.
- Elevating visibility for our work, goals, and the prevention of human trafficking.
- Strengthening our platform, membership, partnerships and services, next to building our financial basis and sustainability.
- Building the evidence for adequate (implementation of) policies and legislation and addressing misinformation and misconduct.
- Contributing and engaging in building national and European capacity and coordination, including the establishment and strengthening of NRMs and focal points.

We look forward to continuing our work against human trafficking in the coming years and remain committed to review our own work by evaluating our progress and impact in the field. This strategy plan serves as a confirmation that the platform is stirring in the desired direction given the vision and the mission of the organisation.

Vision, mission, and values

Vision

La Strada International is a European NGO Platform against human trafficking, that works from a human rights perspective in support of trafficked persons. LSI believes in a world without human trafficking, where persons are free to migrate and work in the labour sector of their choice, and are free from trafficking, exploitation, and abuse, knowing that they have their rights and dignity respected at home, abroad, and on the way.

Mission

The crime of trafficking in human beings can only be stopped if persons' rights as human beings are recognised, respected, and realised. LSI promotes human rights, women's rights, labour rights, and migrants' rights to ensure people are protected by law from exploitation and abuse.

LSI wants to contribute to a world free from trafficking and exploitation through positioning ourselves as a leading innovative platform with a clear NGO voice and a grass-roots identity. We protect and realise trafficked persons' rights by providing access to adequate assistance and support, justice and effective remedies.

We are committed and aim to further develop our role as a platform which acts on collected information and evidence obtained via information and knowledge exchange, capacity building of NGOs and other stakeholders and cross-sectoral cooperation, next to monitoring and advocacy, which calls for accountability, effective application of legislation and adequate rights protection and support for trafficked persons and risk groups.

While human trafficking is a global issue, the LSI Platform focusses on the situation in Europe (both EU and non-EU countries) and on addressing all forms of human trafficking. Through membership and partnership with global actors (like GAATW) we also contribute to global actions.

Values

Our work over 30 years with trafficked persons and on the international stage to combat human trafficking and protect and promote human rights has taught us much. LSI recognises that trafficking in human beings is a highly complex phenomenon. It has its root causes in global inequality, (gender) discrimination, oppressive social structures, exclusion, poverty, political instability and (armed) conflicts. These factors lead large groups of people, including migrants and refugees, to seek work, safety, and stability away from their homes. The demand for cheap labour and products, globalisation, and deregulation of labour have made workers more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The growing

anti-migration sentiments and policies and even xenophobia by public and politicians in many countries also lead to discrimination of migrants, further driving situations of exploitation and abuse.

We further realise that counter-trafficking policies can have (unintended) negative effects on the rights of trafficked persons and affected groups. Impact assessments of all counter-trafficking and related advocacy by grass-roots NGOs are therefore urgently needed to bring those effects to light, and should be able to operate in a healthy civic space. These assessments should be built on evidence and adequate data. The needs that trafficked persons have in order to realise their rights are not static nor universal. The accountability and work of others should be assessed, but we should also remain critical about our own role in the field. The services that LSI's members provide should be assessed on a regular basis to ensure they continue to meet trafficked persons' needs and do no harm. We are committed to robust self-regulatory risk mitigation and enhance due diligence procedures, to ensure we comply with our own high (ethical) standards and values, are accountable, and able to grow professionally.

We follow empowerment and participatory approaches in achieving the organization's goals and promote equality, non-discrimination, non-victimizing and non-discriminatory behaviour in support of victims of trafficking.

Through being a transparent, open-minded, and reliable knowledge actor, and taking up a critical watch dog' role, we are able to engage independently with other actors. By promoting dialogue and cooperation, and working together with others, we can enhance and multiply our joint actions, ensure professionalism, greater impact, and accountability.

Operational environment

The LSI Platform operates in a challenging European environment. The current anti-migration sentiment in European politics makes it difficult to advocate for greater rights for trafficked persons and those who are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. It can also foster further discrimination of migrants, thereby increasing the likelihood of migrants being susceptible to situations of exploitation and abuse.

Policy measures often remain focussed on fighting crime, restricting migration, and repressing prostitution, rather than tackling the root causes of human trafficking and improving protections for victims and vulnerable persons. Indeed, the current criminal justice framework often undermines the rights of trafficked persons and vulnerable groups, and its scope is far too limited to deal with the complexities of trafficking. Additionally, the manner in which human trafficking is portrayed and discussed by the media, civil society, and government figures, is often very one-dimensional, focusing disproportionately on trafficking for sexual exploitation without much recognition for other forms of human trafficking.

The inclusion of protective measures in international legislation has been a major step in the recognition of trafficked persons as bearers of rights. However, several of these rights are not (yet) fully transposed to national legislation – and when they are, they are rarely implemented in practice. The formal recognition of these rights has not catalysed the practical respect for them in practice. Moreover, many of the people supported by La Strada International members – who have experienced exploitation, violence and abuse – are not officially identified as victims and are therefore excluded from accessing those rights.

Another challenge is that over the last 10 – 15 years the anti-trafficking field has grown enormously, and many new and varied actors have acquired influential positions in the field - especially those actors that enjoy access to large funding resources. This had led to an increase in anti-trafficking activities and also to overlaps, competition between and for donors, and an urgent need for better coordination.

In particular, the extensive focus on data collection, research and innovative actions, along with the general calls for greater leveraging of technology, has led to more demands on LSI and its members for innovation and data. Developing reliable, robust and trustworthy data science tools requires not only time but also financial resources and the relevant professional skillsets. The data that is currently collected is shared with, and used by a range of these new actors, but without sufficient recognition for the time, effort, and work undertaken by civil society actors.

Over recent years, NGOs have raised concerns about the legal and practical challenges affecting civil society's daily work. These range from changes in the legal and regulatory environment, to challenges in funding and accessing resources, to obstacles in accessing policymaking, and threats and attacks. Generally speaking, NGOs depend on a few donors and much on project funding instead of long-term core funding, having limitations to their own resources; the same goes for most of LSI's members. Because LSI members and the LSI secretariat have a limited capacity and much of their work is undertaken by a relatively small group of people. There is a strong dependency on those who manage the different organisations and the LSI secretariat, which creates risks for the continuity and

sustainability of the organisations and the Platform as a whole. In order to be able to remain a critical voice, the independence of the LSI Platform is of paramount importance. The most effective way to guarantee LSI's independence is to secure a variety of donors to support our work and to allow us to extend our capacity and resources.

La Strada International is recognised by stakeholders in the anti-trafficking field as a long-standing, resilient and reliable partner, with a clear leadership position in anti-trafficking and human rights efforts based on expertise and experience. The extension of the Platform, now with members/associate members in 24 European countries, has further contributed to elevating this recognition of LSI, its visibility, and its critical role in helping to build knowledge in and around the anti-trafficking field.

Through our members, we work diligently at the grassroots level and have a strong insight into the varying national situations on the ground. In our anti-trafficking work, we are acknowledged for our broad understanding of the intersections of migration, development, labour market, and social policies. Our pro-active and constructive approach is considered powerful in identifying the key issues in relation to promoting the rights of trafficked persons and developing effective strategies to place these issues on the international agenda. However, we also receive strong opposition against our approach to the protection and promotion of sex workers' rights. We are sometimes wrongly viewed as focusing exclusively on sex workers rights, whereas, in reality, LSI advocates for the rights of all workers regardless of the situation they are in, the work they do, or (the legality of) their work.

Our core values guide all our work. These are:

- We work from a human and victim rights perspective to address the crime of trafficking in human beings. This means we oppose all anti-trafficking measures that undermine or adversely affect the human rights of the groups concerned. We understand trafficking in human beings as both a (root) cause and a consequence of the violation of human rights.
- We believe every person should be free to choose the work that fits their situation best, whether in a regular or irregular setting, and have their rights respected. We accept that sex work is an occupation in which adults can choose to engage. We consider exploitation and abuse in the sex industry a form of labour exploitation.
- We believe in the power of people. Our services are focused on supporting people to regain that power after a situation of exploitation. We recognise that trafficked persons are victims of crime and their status as a victim means that they are claimant of rights according to international law. However, their victim status routinely leads governments and non-governmental organisations to treat them as powerless and without agency. Consequently, rather than label them as 'victims' in this anthology, we refer to them as 'trafficked persons'.
- The experiences and needs of trafficked persons and affected groups determine our activities, actions, and advocacy.
- We aim to contribute to the actions of others and align our work with national, European and international strategies and actions.

Enhancing Support Services

La Strada International's core work revolves around the promotion of the rights of trafficked persons and affected groups. The LSI Platform works from a bottom-up approach, with member organisations working with and for trafficked persons.

Our member organisations strengthen trafficked persons' rights through hotlines, education, information provision, and campaigns to prevent people from being exploited and having their rights violated. Members provide direct access to assistance and justice to trafficked persons via (legal) support programmes and shelters, and monitor the implementation of international legislation on the ground, while also advocating for changes.

In turn, our international secretariat works for our members and coordinates the platform, but it also takes up monitoring, policy, and advocacy work. LSI secretariat facilitates cooperation, capacity building, information and expertise sharing and provides support in setting standards and incorporating international developments into national actions. The secretariat collects and analyses this information for evidence-based advocacy and invites international organisations and other social movements to cooperate and support our work. Both at the international and national levels we aim to ensure more engagement of trafficked persons in our work, in order to inform our services, policy and advocacy.

In the coming years, LSI will:

- Promote victims' identification, referral and support - also across borders -, including by contributing to the development of national legislation and policies and the establishment or formalisation of national referral mechanisms (NRMs) and focal points.
- Strengthen (potential) victims' access to information and consultation and reduce risks of exploitation, through the promotion of hotline services, information campaigns and materials and other awareness raising (see also visibility)
- Further build qualitative and sustainable needs-based assistance for trafficked persons and risk groups and address challenges and bottlenecks, including bureaucratic burdens (e.g. complex digital/online procedures) that prevent victims to obtain support.
- Build the capacity of NGOs and other relevant stakeholders via exchange, guidance, training and best practices
- Monitor the implementation and quality of our services by monitoring the compliance of our standards, seeking regular feedback of our relevant partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries
- Further integrate the voices and participation of trafficked persons in our services and into our daily work, based on an adopted strategy.

Strengthening the Platform

La Strada International is recognised by stakeholders in the counter-trafficking field as a long-standing, reliable, and leading NGO partner, based on our knowledge of the field and our expertise and experience of providing direct services. However, the precise nature of our work and that of our members might be less known more broadly, especially since many new organisations and initiatives have been established, creating a large and diverse field of actors.

Hence, the Platform recognises the need to expand and deepen our cooperation beyond current contacts and networks, engaging with new organisations and initiatives to maintain oversight and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the broader landscape.

To ensure we maintain our role and capabilities in the field, it is not only important to further build our cooperation with the 'outside world', but also to extend our own membership and invest in our organisation, the expertise of our staff and members and build a sustainable professional team and network. Such investment requires adequate staff and organisational policies and the continuous learning of our employees, ensuring we can keep our people inspired and motivated. La Strada International is aware of the importance of healthy, committed, and engaged employees who are given opportunities to develop themselves further. This ensures job satisfaction, low absenteeism, and productivity.

This also requires good communication and cooperation among our staff and member organisations. It is important to ensure that members can regularly meet, exchange thoughts and share information, to get to know each other and their work, learn from each other, and take joint actions. This will build commitment and ownership of the Platform, supported by a feeling of community, cooperation, and belonging.

In order to transform into a more visible and influential European NGO Platform, in 2017 we began the process of extending membership of the platform throughout Europe and currently comprise 33 member organisations in 24 European countries. This process should continue during the coming years, aiming to be represented in all European countries.

In the coming years, LSI will:

- Promote LSI member and partnership and extend the platform to ensure that La Strada International enjoys a diverse representation in as many European countries as possible. For the next five years, we aim to have a least a LSI member in each of the 27 EU countries¹
- Develop and align members and platform policies and strategies related to protection and safeguarding policies² - including our gender and equality approach - and engaging people with lived experience in our organisation.

¹ We are currently not formally represented in 12 EU countries.

² Including related to integrity, respect, anti-discrimination, confidentiality, conflict of interest, data protection, due diligence, (research) ethics, inclusive staff management

- Strengthen cooperation and exchange of LSI members via adequate information provision, regular meetings, capacity building, common projects and actions and representation of members' work and services
- Provision of (emergency) support to members in case of political, financial, or legal constraints.

Broadening our financial basis

Financial sustainability of LSI and its members remains a priority for the coming years. Access to financial resources enables La Strada International and our members to remain independent and guarantee autonomy, to maintain a strong position in the anti-trafficking field and to continue providing high-quality services.

However, in recent years, many NGOs in the field have faced difficulties in obtaining funding, including La Strada International and its members, due to US freezes and cuts in European development aid and NGO support. To address these current funding cuts and financial difficulties and better safeguard the financial continuity of the platform, LSI should enhance fundraising activities with members and other social movements and create multiple financing flows and become less dependent on one or a few donors. Not only should we ensure a diversified financing base but also ensure the availability of unearmarked resources and financial reserves, allowing us to grow and extend our capacity and to prepare for possible financial cuts in the future.

To this end, LSI will for the coming years:

- Analyse and adapt its fundraising strategies and build and invest in fundraising (staff) capacity, considering LSI's donor and due diligence policies.
- Further invest in and foster relationships with donors, including non-European funds and donors, private donors, governments, equity funds, companies and social enterprises, and other subsidy providers
- Further explore possibilities for generating resources from the public, including ways of crowdfunding and build unearmarked resources among others by requesting financial compensation for services and seeking cooperation with other social movements.
- Influence and increase donor awareness to guarantee funding for rights-based counter-trafficking work and raise concern about the increasing funding cuts for civil society actors/work; as well as funding influenced by religious, conservative or anti-gender values.
- Ensure adequate financial management and control, including improved insight into the budget allocation versus realisation, along with improved forecasting and regular planning and control.

Enhancing our Visibility

In the past decade, awareness of the problem of trafficking in human beings has significantly increased and has gained more attention, including of national and international governmental bodies and the media. However, the way that human trafficking is portrayed and discussed by the media, governments and other actors is often one-dimensional and primarily focused on exploitation in the sex industry and often over-sensationalised, hyper sexualised, and depoliticised. However, more attention is given nowadays to labour exploitation of migrants. Trafficking in human beings is a phenomenon that is well researched and over-written about, but often the stories about trafficking do not reflect the reality of the crime, nor the reality of the experiences and needs of trafficked persons.

Therefore, LSI would like to contribute to the creation of a more realistic picture of human trafficking, its root causes, and the different forms of human trafficking. Next to changing the narrative, more awareness is also needed in the coming years about new forms that have been added to the EU definition of trafficking, including the exploitation of forced marriage, surrogacy, and illegal adoption, to ensure that all forms of human trafficking are getting attention. Moreover, LSI aims to raise more awareness and visibility for LSI members' work on child trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation of children as well in the field of forced labour, related to due diligence and business accountability.

It is important that LSI can maintain its position and, where possible, exert influence on the national and international (European) level. This requires greater visibility for the organisation and its work, as well as for our concerns related to human trafficking issues. La Strada International is mostly known among NGOs and IGOs, academics and professionals, but is still relatively unknown among the public, trafficked and vulnerable persons³, and the private sector, as well as donor organisations outside the trafficking field. Greater awareness and support for our work can help the organisation grow, attract new funding, and build new opportunities for partnerships. Realising this objective requires that we further invest in external representation, (social) media work, and campaigning.

In the coming years, LSI will:

- Develop new and interactive communication strategies to promote LSI, its members and our work, including draw up and implement a multi-year communication plan with joint communication and external representation actions.
- Conduct an active media policy to reach new target groups via close cooperation with journalists and media representatives; (public awareness) campaigns, thematic webinars, (social) media activities, and academic articles.
- Enhance the use of ICT and AI tools to enhance the effectiveness of our work and for online outreach, including the use of chatbots to reach out to workers and vulnerable groups.
- Promote LSI's expertise and share LSI's evidence and findings based on monitoring and data collection to change narratives and policies
- Enhance internal communication channels, among others by using and promoting intranet

³ Trafficked and exploited persons are mainly in contact with our member organisations.

Building partnerships

LSI secretariat facilitates cooperation, capacity building, expertise sharing, and provides support in setting standards and incorporating international developments into national actions and invites international organisations and other social movements to cooperate and support our work.

The Platform has built an extensive network of contacts and allies over the last 30 years. These include law enforcement, legal professionals, service providers and NGOs, media, research and educational institutions and (international) governmental actors. LSI has an observer status to the Council of Europe and the UN (ECOSOC), is member of the CoE Conference of International NGOs (CINGO) and the CoE Network of anti-trafficking Lawyers and NGOs. Further, we are partner of the EU Anti-Trafficking Hub and member of the EU Civil Society Platform against Trafficking in Human Beings, the EU Victim Rights Platform, the informal Expert Group on the Forced Labour Ban, the OSCE Alliance Expert Coordination Team (AECT), Alliance 8.7, as well as the UN Task force on Human Trafficking and Ukraine. LSI is also member of the Human Rights Democracy Network (HRDN), the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM) and the European Sex Workers' Rights Alliance (ESWA).

Next to close cooperation with intergovernmental bodies and NGO networks, the platform also maintains close contacts with academics, universities and think tanks (e.g. Brookes, Dundee, Napier, VU, Maastricht University and HEUNI), NGOs actors in closely related field (e.g. those promoting awareness about women rights (WAVE), human rights (Amnesty, Human Rights Watch), migrant and refugee rights (PICUM ECRE), sex workers rights (ESWA), LGBTQ1 rights and others. Also through the cooperation with ERA and the CoE specialised lawyers and NGOs networks, there is cooperation with lawyers and barristers. While our members closely cooperate with the judiciary and law enforcement including police and labour inspectorate, LSI has little contact with police network like Europol and Interpol and Frontex or the EU specialised prosecutors network. There is some contact with the European Labour Authority (ELA).

In the coming years LSI will:

- Review stakeholder analyses and develop new strategies and plans to influence stakeholders and develop and strengthen strategic cooperation and partnerships with identified relevant stakeholders including businesses on corporate social responsibility, IT sector and financial sector, IT experts, academics, and universities, as well as legal professionals.
- Ally and establish cooperation with other social movements working on women, children and human rights, labour, migration, asylum⁴, to address the intersections based on broad stakeholders' assessment and strategy;

⁴ Including Human rights watch, Amnesty, WAVE, those working on (undocumented) workers' rights, sex workers rights, minority and LGBTQ+ rights, ITUC and ETUC and trade unions and workers' rights organisations, and financial institutions (Comcrim)

- Map, establish contacts and strengthen cooperation with those that are relevant for the identification and referral of victims including organisations working on forced marriage, surrogacy, illegal adoption, organ adoption, and or specific labour sectors (hospitality sector, meat sector etc),
- Strengthen cooperation with bodies representing people with lived experience, including national survivors for a, UNODC Survivors Forum and ISTAC, the survivors platform of the OSCE.

Data collection and monitoring

La Strada International is known for its advocacy and the services provided by the members. However, it is often not that easy to measure the effectiveness and impact of our work, both on the grass-root level and on the advocacy level. In order to stay on top of changes in the needs of trafficked persons and to be able to respond to new emerging trends on the international level, we need better monitoring and evaluation of our activities as an integrated part of our work.

The secretariat collects and analyses this information for evidence-based advocacy. NGOs can access a wide range of data not available to other institutions, and they also possess the required knowledge and experience regarding understanding the implementation and impacts of counter-trafficking policies. LSI and its members register and analyse data and facts about the nature and extent of human trafficking in Europe/at the European national level. La Strada organisations have developed standards regarding which information they collect and for which purposes. La Strada follows international privacy and data protection rules to the extent possible under national law.

For our work, related to policy making, advice, monitoring, and advocacy we need correct and useful data and to ensure more use of the data collected by LSI and members. This data will help to obtain a clear understanding of the effectiveness and impact of the work of LSI through ongoing monitoring of our work, LSI will be able to react quick and effectively on trends and changes. In addition, there are increasing external demands on LSI and its members for innovation and data. As mentioned earlier, collected data is shared with, and used by, a range of actors, but without sufficient recognition for the time, effort, and work undertaken by civil society actors.

To enhance our data and create more ownership, we need better optimisation of data collection, increase the supply of registration data, and increase the willingness to share data amongst LSI members, while maintaining observance of the provisions of the EU General Data Protection Rules (GDPR). Developing reliable, robust and trustworthy data science tools requires not only time but also financial resources and the relevant professional skillsets.

In the coming years, LSI will:

- Develop a Europe-wide NGO monitoring system on access to justice and further optimise and standardise LSI's data collection system and data storage
- Enhance its data protection policies and victim-friendly online reporting mechanisms by developing clear (data collection) guidelines and standards
- Enhance online monitoring and identify possibilities for the use of (free) ICT tools and potential collaboration with pro bono services and other options/resources to monitor, collect and analyse relevant data

- Publish annually an assessment report including annual statistics on the support provided by our members, based on common definitions/terminology for data sharing, the conclusion of data exchange agreements and internal safety protocols with LSI members
- Conducting further analyses and publish joint monitoring and annual research/shadow reports, including reporting and contributing to the monitoring bodies of key international organisations (such as the UNHCR's complaint mechanism, Eurostat and EU progress reports, GRETA, UN Review Mechanism, CEDAW, TIP).
- Conduct a project on data protection that addresses digitalisation and potential harm, misinformation, claims that lack evidence and fake news in the anti-trafficking field

Evidence-based Advocacy for change

LSI advocates for the rights of trafficked persons, as well as those vulnerable for exploitation and trafficking. La Strada International believes that persons should be free to migrate and work in the sector of labour of their choice and be free from trafficking, exploitation, and abuse. The Platform therefore promotes women's rights, labour rights and migrants' rights to ensure people are protected by law from exploitation and abuse.

To ensure accountability for the effective implementation of policies and regulations, LSI advocates for legislation that recognises and respects the rights of all trafficked persons and seeks to monitor the implementation of legislation to help ensure that those rights are realised. For this, the Platform targets European and international governmental bodies (European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE and UN bodies). While being realistic about our sphere of influence and about the scope of what we can and cannot contribute to make meaningful change, it is nevertheless essential to avoid working in isolation and instead to link our lobby and advocacy work with others pushing for the same.

The victim and a human rights approach stand central in our advocacy and solutions proposed should promote the interests of victims of human trafficking. It is within their interest that bottlenecks are identified and placed more prominently on the political agenda.

This work for the coming years includes the monitoring of compliance with international legislation and to ensure that policies and measures addressing human trafficking are based on a human rights-based approach. For the years 2026 – 2030, several advocacy focuses have been identified, which are further explained below. For each of these priorities we will define who to engage for what advocacy priorities based on a stakeholder mapping. To advance our advocacy, we will use all our possible means, such as consultative bodies, our partnerships and our communication work, next to research work. This should build a stronger body of evidence and knowledge, including by taking up strategic litigation, (participatory) research, and collection of cases and surveys.

Strategic Policy Focusses

LSI advocates for the rights of trafficked persons as well as those vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking. To ensure accountability for the effective implementation of policies and regulations, La Strada International advocates for legislation that fully recognises and respects the rights of people and monitors implementation of policies and laws to ensure rights are realised. The Platform targets European and international governmental bodies for the promotion of rights protection. LSI has defined its strategic focus areas for the next five years (2026 – 2030), including concrete strategies and actions for each of these focus areas.

For the coming years, we will closely monitoring and contribute to the implementation of the new EU strategies on combating human trafficking, gender equality and women rights, children rights and victim rights and the revised EU THB Directive, Victim Rights Directive, VAW/DV Directive (and the transposing of the Istanbul Convention by the EU), and the FLB and CSDDD directives. Also, LSI, will

invest in providing advice and consultancy to the newly established EU Anti-Trafficking Hub. Through membership of PICUM and cooperation with ECRE and possible membership of the EU AA advisory group, LSI will also follow developments around the implementation of the EU Asylum and Migration Pact and related anti-migration and anti-smuggling policies and legislation.

Countering shrinking space for Civil Society

In general, the role of civil society in addressing social and human rights issues is strongly acknowledged by international governmental organisations, and it is regulated by both international and national law. However, over the past few years, NGOs have raised concerns about the legal and practical challenges affecting civil society's daily work. These range from changes in the legal environment, challenges in funding and access to resources, obstacles in accessing policymaking, and threats and attacks against members of staff.

Of course, this differs by country, but several of our members have reported such difficulties. As there is no proper framework in place to uphold civic rights. CSOs are often excluded from political decision-making and/or face increasing difficulties in accessing decision-makers and providing meaningful input into the legislative and policy-making process.

- Monitoring the civic rights situation, including relevant new (EU) legislation⁵ and speak out on examples of shrinking space, also in cooperation with other CSOs, the FRA and other IOs.
- Conduct research on the role of religious and conservative groups in the anti-trafficking field, next to follow up research and publications on shrinking space in the field.
- Make more use of different CSO fora for a united CSO response including the EU Civil Society Platform against Human Trafficking and the EU Victim Rights Platform and enhance the effectiveness and CSO ownership of these bodies.
- Ensure strong CSO involvement in the development of European anti-trafficking policies and legislation including the EU THB strategy & anti-trafficking Directive transposing process

Inclusive Victim Identification and Recognition

The number of identified trafficked persons in Europe remains low. Only a small percentage of the estimated high number of victims is recognised as such. Many persons facing severe forms of exploitation – with clear indications for human trafficking – are not recognised as victims of trafficking. Moreover, we continue to see a narrow focus on persons trafficked for sexual exploitation with a correlating lack of commitment and attention to other forms of human trafficking.

Even though trafficking for sexual exploitation is still the most detected and reported form of human trafficking in Europe, there are clear indications and growing evidence for/of other severe forms of exploitation in other regulated and unregulated labour sectors, like agriculture, construction, domestic

⁵ E.g. the upcoming EU Civil Society Strategy and the EU Directive on Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (Anti-SLAPP) – Directive (EU) 2024/1069))

work, and others. So long as other irregular and regular sectors continue to receive less policy attention and fewer efforts are made to regulate these sectors and their workforces, the identification of vulnerable, exploited, and trafficked persons in these sectors will continue to lag. Additionally, there is hardly any information on trafficking for forced criminality, forced marriage, exploitation of surrogacy, illegal adoption, and/or forced organ donations in Europe.

- Enhance awareness and recognition for victims of forms of exploitation that receive less policy attention and specific vulnerable groups and sectors.
- Conduct research and awareness and build capacity on the exploitation of forced marriage, surrogacy and illegal adoption and monitor the transposing and implementation of the EU THB Directive on these forms by EU Member States
- Invest in building knowledge around trafficking for forced criminality, including scamming practices in Europe and organ trafficking ⁶

Fair migration policies

While EU Member States and the European Council and Commission have recognised the need for regulated international migration channels for (highly) skilled labour, they remain reluctant to publicly acknowledge their dependence on low-paid and informal forms of migrant labour. Indeed, in general there are limited possibilities for people from outside Europe to migrate to, and find legal employment in, Europe. However, restrictive policies can contradict their proclaimed purpose, as they may engender situations in which human rights violations are more likely to occur. Low-skilled or low-paid labour is often unregulated. There is a clear need to regulate to improve the protection of fundamental rights at work standards and prevent the creation of conditions that foster labour exploitation and consequently human trafficking.

For these reasons, in the next five years LSI will continue to monitor EU legislation and vulnerability assessments in relation to EU migration and anti-smuggling policies as well as monitor the identification of victims in migration flows and by EU bodies in the assessment, identification and return of trafficked persons, including Frontex, EUAA, Europol and Eurojust. Moreover, LSI will also raise awareness around the risks of forced returns and call for safeguards.

- Monitor vulnerability assessments in relation to the Migration & Asylum Pact and the identification of victims in migration flows, as well as the role of international and EU bodies in the assessment, identification and return of trafficked persons
- Monitor the developments around anti-migration and anti-smuggling policies and its impact, including developments around criminalisation of support, and return and deportation policies,

⁶ Among others by seeking contact or cooperation with the organ trafficking research project of the Erasmus University in Rotterdam <https://www.organtraffickingresearch.org/>

- Promote opportunities and possibilities for fair migration, decent employment schemes and migrants access to the (EU) labour market (e.g. EU Talent Pool, EU Platform Work Directive, and the transposing and implementation of the EU Single Residence Permit Directive)
- Raise concern about forced returns (deportation and detention of vulnerable groups) & call for safeguards

Fair Labour rights & Accountability private sector

Many workers in Europe work without adequate protection or decent minimum wage, and those in irregular work or in an irregular situation are especially at risk of severe labour exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking and forced labour. Businesses find legal loopholes to avoid compliance with labour rights standards, like abusive subcontracting practices and making use of letter box companies to deny responsibility for the exploitation and abuse. Such misuse must be addressed. Decent working conditions should be promoted more widely. Informal and unregulated work should be brought within the protection of labour laws. It should be ensured that labour rights are applied to all workers, without discrimination, and irrespective of their migration and residence status.

Binding legislation and control mechanisms should be established to ensure businesses' compliance with labour standards and human rights, enacting sanctions for businesses that do not respect human rights and the law. Further, there needs to be a greater focus on monitoring contractors and subcontractors and job recruitment agencies, particularly in high-risk labour sectors, such as the hospitality sector. LSI will also monitor EU developments on business accountability and engage businesses in ethical recruitment and labour protection.

- Monitor recruitment and employment schemes and the role of recruitment agencies⁷ and align with ILO fair recruitment initiative
- Promote business accountability through advocacy, research and action of NGO consortia and membership of the (EU) DG Grow Forced Labour Expert Group and active engagement in Alliance 8.7 and European Forum Freedom from Slavery (2026 and beyond).
- Conduct (litigation) research and awareness on the offence of criminalising the knowing use;

Access to Justice

Although European countries have ratified international laws granting victims' rights, many fail to fully ensure access to justice in practice. Access to support is often tied to cooperating with criminal investigations. Those unwilling or unable to cooperate frequently miss out on support. Some countries only recognize trafficking victims if they "tick all the boxes" or agree to assist authorities, excluding many vulnerable individuals. Next to a lack of identification of victims, barriers include lack of information in understandable languages, insufficient legal aid, financial constraints, and lengthy legal

⁷ E.g. via HOST project & Trafficked en Route, Info Rights & Mobility project

proceedings. Lack of assistance can discourage reporting and lead to further harm. Conversely, proper recognition and support encourage victims to report and testify and to access justice. This means having access to the necessary protection and support, but also having the means and legal protection to seek remedies for wrongs suffered.

Key focus areas for improving access to justice include:

Unconditional support – Victims of human trafficking should be entitled to adequate assistance and support on the basis of (indications of) their presumed victimhood and violations of human rights, and not based on their cooperation with the authorities. Adequate unconditional support can have a positive impact on access to justice for victims of trafficking, in relation to access to identification, residence, compensation, non-punishment and long-term integration, including victims' access to the labour market.

Safe reporting: Many undocumented migrants fear arrest or deportation if they report exploitation. A “firewall” between reporting abuse and immigration enforcement is needed to protect victims and encourage them to come forward without fear.

Non-punishment: Despite legal standards, trafficked persons are often wrongly prosecuted or punished for crimes they were forced to commit, undermining trust in the justice system. The non-punishment principle should be applied in accordance with a human rights-based approach, fully complying with the available legal instruments and not being limited in scope, but applying to any civil, administrative or criminal offence, including serious offences.

Compensation: Access to compensation is limited and varies widely between countries. Trafficked persons should be informed about their rights to compensation in a timely and appropriate manner and be able to obtain compensation via criminal proceeding, next to civil proceedings. To ensure compensation awarded is paid to victims, a greater focus on the confiscation of the criminal assets of traffickers is required to ensure that more money becomes available for compensation awards to victims, next to prefinancing of awards and extension of legal aid during enforcement procedures.

Access to residence: Criteria for granting residence permits to trafficked persons differ greatly, causing many victims to lack legal status. Residence should be promoted based on personal or humanitarian grounds.

Hereto La Strada International will:

- Promote and conduct a EU-wide legal needs assessment of trafficked persons and their access to trauma care, (unconditional) assistance and support, legal aid, third-party reporting, compensation, non-punishment and residence
- Continue to promote the Non-Punishment principle both at the national and European level by collecting case law and evidence, development of further guidance and capacity building.

- Enhance access to compensation by promoting (online) financial investigation and assets recovery, joint (project) cooperation⁸, awareness, training and capacity building and provision of further guidance to relevant stakeholders.

Strategic litigation

La Strada International wants to promote and use strategic litigation as a method to select suitable cases ('test cases') to bring to court in order to achieve a positive broader impact on anti-trafficking law and policy development, especially related to LSI's priority (advocacy) focuses. This work will help us to obtain judicial clarity on the application of policies and law and establish legal precedent enforcing rights and attract attention from relevant stakeholders including the media, to shed light on these issues, especially issues related to policies and practice which have a possible negative effect on trafficked persons and related groups.

- Support members in strategic litigation work and link them with (pro bono and specialised) lawyers and support the establishment of lawyers & NGOs networks
- Work with CoE Network of anti-trafficking Lawyers and NGOs on filing, monitoring and enforcement of ECtHR judgements.
- Develop further guidance/a capacity building programme for members on strategic litigation⁹ including research on the European Court of Justice and article 5.

⁸ Rights & Remedies, with research, campaigning and capacity building elements.

⁹ E.g. Resubmit Sue4Change application