

## **NGO Networking- The la Strada Concept**

### ***Expert Conference on the implementation of the EU plan on trafficking in Human beings- Brussels 28/29 June***

#### **Introduction**

The last ten years trafficking in persons has become an issue of growing concern in the international community, both on national and international level. New laws, protocols and conventions have been developed and adopted to combat trafficking, including the mentioned EU action plan and other European measures.

However, although trafficking is widely recognised as a serious human rights violation – as also stated in the current EU action plan - state policies and actions still tend to concentrate on measures in the area of crime control and migration policies and much less on the assistance and protection of the human rights of trafficked persons.

Earlier – when the EU action plan was being drafted - La Strada has addressed the Council and the European Commission together with the members of the Expert Coordination Team of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons, initiated by Mrs Helga Konrad. The members have stated to regret that also in the EU action plan the actions still focus mainly on addressing the criminal aspects of trafficking, rather than on measures to guarantee the adequate assistance and support to trafficked persons. Several recommendations have been made of which some I will later refer to.

I would like to use this opportunity to stress again that adequate assistance and support to trafficked persons allows them to regain control over their lives and to reduce the risk of re-trafficking. This also contributes to an effective prosecution of traffickers, as adequate assistance and support encourages trafficked persons to report to the authorities.

Unfortunately still most states – even European member States - do not provide adequate aid for victims, such as assistance, protection and compensation. Moreover they lack adequate coordination structures, National Referral Mechanisms and independent bodies to monitor actions or gather information or figures. We hope that the European Action Plan will help to change this situation.

#### **La Strada Methods of work**

La Strada is a network of 9 independent NGOs in 9 different countries. La Strada promotes the Human rights based approach to the issue of trafficking in human beings.

Like other NGOs, La Strada works on prevention, advocacy and information sharing and direct assistance to trafficked persons. La Strada cooperates with La Strada member organisations and other NGOs in the country of origin and country of destination. This cooperation contributes to safe return and reintegration of trafficked persons.

Maybe as significant, is that La Strada plays at the national and international level an important role as watch dog by monitoring the process of implementation of national laws and action plans on combating trafficking in human beings. La Strada also observes the work of governmental institutions and the quality of services provided to trafficked persons.

La Strada also tries to look critically at its own activity and those of other NGOs.

It is important that governmental and NGOs actions are complementary and not overlapping or contradictive and that in general actions and measures taken are not causing harm to trafficked persons in practise. NGOs should continue to look critical at the European Action Plan and its implementation.

LSI is happy with the elaboration of a European Action Plan, aimed to strengthen the commitment of the EU and the member States to prevent and fight trafficking in human beings, committed for the purpose of all forms of exploitation and to the protection, support and rehabilitation of its victims.

As acknowledged by the European Union Council, for the implementation of the EU action plan and its effectiveness, an integrated approach should be needed, on basis of the respect of the human rights and taking into account its global nature.

Like the European Union, La Strada is convinced that all actors, including actors from the labour market institutions; as well as from the law enforcement and NGOs, should be involved in common and harmonised anti-trafficking approaches. Also La Strada works at national and international level at a daily basis closely together with international organisations and governmental institutions.

La Strada offices participate actively in the work of the national working groups and commissions set up to implement national action plans and have implemented numerous projects with International Organisations. La Strada also cooperates with Ministries on awareness raising, prevention and direct assistance and has trained law enforcement and judiciary on the issue of trafficking.

Therefore we support the intention of the European Action Plan to develop a model protocol between members States and NGOs including minimum levels of support and standards of working practises, to be based on existing good practise and hopefully existing models and practises. Additionally, La Strada recognises the need for good national referral mechanisms – as highlighted in the Action Plan of the OSCE. NGOs and Governments should continue to closely work together in addressing the issue of trafficking; both actors should however play a different role and provide different inputs.

Governments are responsible for creating national frameworks for protection and assistance to trafficked persons, and they need to involve NGOs in the development and implementation process. Member States should indeed consolidate the cooperation with civil society organisations related to the protection of trafficked persons, prevention of and the fight against human trafficking. Moreover governments should support NGOs for their assistance to trafficked persons, especially for services offered that are not provided by the State.

As reflected in the actions of the European Action Plan we would like to see the relations with and capacity of relevant NGOs to be strengthened and institutionalised” and hope that the European Commission and member states indeed will evaluate current funding streams and consider ways in which sustainable financing may be available to non governmental support and reintegration services.

We also would like to stress the need for continued close involvement of the NGOs in an ongoing debate; it is important to keep in mind that the debate should not be limited to these kinds of events like we have today but that the real debate should take place at a more structural level.

As for building a more solid network of NGO's and international Organisations providing support and reintegration services, as mentioned in the European Action Plan, this is very important indeed. I would like to mention here the existing European network of NGO's, IO's and GO's that is operating now; The Alliance Expert Coordination Team, which was initiated by the former OSCE Special Representative on trafficking in human beings, Mrs. Helga Konrad.

This independent alliance of representatives of organisations shares information and good practises and reacts on international developments in the field of human trafficking. We regret the fact that currently the mandate for the OSCE special representative has been frozen, and it would be a shame if the joint expertise and critical contribution of the Alliance in the trafficking debate would disappear as well.

As for ensuring common standards across the EU, we would like to see these standards especially be designed for identification, referral and minimum support to trafficked persons. Taking into account existing international obligations and guaranteeing access to: reflection periods, temporary residence permits; risk assessments and proper treatment of victims, including protection and compensation. I hope that in the workshops, planned for tomorrow, we can together develop improved identification mechanisms and share best practises and a possible list of criteria.

As for scoping and improving the knowledge on the scale and nature of trafficking in human beings, we would like to stress the need for Common guidelines for collection; It is important that there is collection of information that can be compared and is preferably linked with the establishment of national Rapporteurs that ensure independent reporting and monitoring at national level.

As for the development of an EU wide directory of services, we think that it is very important that such a directory exists, but would like to know as well, how information can be shared and how the directory can be used by outsiders as well.

As for prevention and addressing root causes, we would like to stress that member states and EU institutions support broader measures addressing root causes, especially poverty, insecurity and exclusion and gender inequalities. As for prevention we also would like to offer our expertise and involvement.

Last but not least we would like to stress the need for monitoring of the implementation of the EU action plan. We are interested to hear how the implementation of the EU action plan will be monitored, including the implementation on the level of the Commission, on the level of EU institutes and on the level of the individual Member States. As I stressed in the beginning, monitoring and evaluation of the implementations of the plans should have an extra emphasis on the human rights aspect.

We would recommend the appointment of an independent person or body (special representative) to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the EU action plan. This for sure will improve the effectiveness of EU Action Plan