

- *Poverty, gender inequality and violence and discrimination in the countries of origin*
Fighting these root causes is in line with the Millennium Development Goals numbers 1, 2 and 3: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, Achieve universal primary education, Promote gender equality and empower women.
- *Lack of safe and legal migration opportunities due to restrictive immigration policies*
There is a need for more tolerant and flexible immigration policies and liberalised labour regulations. Start an innovative and open international debate on labour migration is needed in which current trends in labour migration and the reality of migrant workers are central.
- *Demand for cheap and exploitative labour and the lack of protection for irregular workers*
Attention must be paid to labour protection in those sectors or activities where forced labour or services are likely to occur. Informal and unregulated work activities should be brought within the protection of Labour laws to ensure that all workers enjoy the same labour rights. Criminalisation of those who make use of services or products from trafficked persons will only have an symbolic value and can actually harm those in vulnerable situations. Empowering people by protecting their rights is more effective. All states, but especially countries of destination/employment should ratify, implement and enforce the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant workers and their Families.

3. Respect and value the independence of NGOs

NGOs should be supported to operate independently from state and other actors, and raise a critical voice – regardless their funding - and be supported to implement activities based on the grass roots experience (field work) and not dictated from above. In cooperation (agreements) it is vital to recognise and respect the different interests, to define the different tasks and responsibilities and to safeguard autonomy of NGOs/civil society. This ensures that the various aspects of the complex phenomenon of human trafficking are all dealt with and that all actors can concentrate on their primary tasks and responsibilities.

4. Stop talking and drafting, start working

The anti trafficking community is very keen on organising more conferences and drafting more action plans, tool kits and instruments. At the same time, implementation of existing legislation, and therefore results, is lacking at all levels, especially in the field of support and assistance to trafficked persons. So start implementing existing measures, monitor and assess the effects on the human rights of trafficked persons and adjust if/where needed.



La Strada International, the European network on prevention of trafficking in human beings in Central and Eastern Europe starts its one year 15th anniversary campaign on 15 September 2010.

Since 1995 the La Strada network has grown from a three-partner project to an independent international association with member organisations in Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Macedonia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland and Ukraine. In those countries, La Strada was amongst the first independent women's initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe and owes a great deal to the energy and creativity of the women's movements involved which enabled civil society to grow strong and influential.

The work of la Strada International is based on the principles of the universal human rights – equality, non-discrimination, participation, empowerment, accountability and transparency.

Achievements

La Strada International (LSI) combines national direct assistance programmes for trafficked persons and prevention work for groups at risk with international advocacy work for anti trafficking policies that are founded within the Human Rights framework. This unique combination provides La Strada with a special position in the anti trafficking world, in which the organisation is both trusted and respected by national and international NGOs and governmental organisations. This position is reflected in the membership of La Strada members in the EU Expert Group, the OSCE Alliance Expert Coordination Team, the ECOSOC status and the leading role La Strada has taken in the advocacy work on Council of Europe Convention and its monitoring instrument GRETA, EU Directives and the Palermo Protocol. In 2004 La Strada International received the MTV Free Your Mind award that aims to encourage freedom from all kinds of intolerance and prejudice.

The innovative working methods in prevention work and campaigns, using different methods and tools to reach vulnerable groups, including working with peer groups and using new media technologies, have been an inspiration for many other organisations.

LSI's commitment to the development of strong and independent civil society in Central and East Europe on the issue of human trafficking and related issues like women's rights, migrant rights, sex workers rights and labour rights is apparent via trainings and consultancy provided at a regular basis to other NGOs and at the biennial La Strada NGO platform for NGOs that work in these fields for cross sector networking, capacity building and cooperation.

At the national and international level, LSI plays an important role as watch dog by monitoring the process of development and implementation of international legislation and national policies. La Strada International is as critical towards itself and partner NGOs as it is towards the authorities.

Recommendations

Working in the field of anti trafficking for 15 years, LSI has gained a lot of experience on the many issues that human trafficking involves, like migration, gender (in) equality, discrimination, sex work, labour exploitation etc, but also on international politics. In those years the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings has changed from a marginal issue that mainly women's NGOs were interested in, into a highly politicised issue in which all major intergovernmental organisations are involved in. The result is that in the anti trafficking debate, there are many and sometimes conflicting interests at stake that are not only dedicated to prevent people from being exploited and prosecute the exploiters. While recognising this political reality, on the occasion of its 15th anniversary La Strada International has formulated recommendations on how to bring anti trafficking policies back to the core: To end exploitation, violence and abuse.

1. Take on the Human Rights Approach

Although trafficking in human beings is recognised as a gross violation of human rights, current national and international anti trafficking policies are instruments to fight organised crime and do not effectively address the roots causes of trafficking nor do they deal with the human rights violations that trafficking causes. A human rights based approach requires unconditional support and assistance for trafficked persons and opposes anti-trafficking measures that can harm the human rights of trafficked persons or other affected groups, for example by restrictive migration policies, closed shelters or compulsory cooperation with the police, raids on brothels.

Human rights should be at the core of any anti trafficking strategy and the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system are to be integrated into all legislation, policies, programs and processes.

2. Focus on root causes

Anti trafficking policies should focus on the causes of trafficking instead of only on the consequences. The root causes can be identified at the three phases of the trafficking process: