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With this quarterly newsletter, La Strada International wants to inform and update about developments in the field of trafficking in human beings and on the activities of La Strada International and the La Strada member organisations. We welcome reactions to this initiative and contributions for next issues.

The next deadline is Monday, 2 August 2007. If you have news, information about your organisation, a new report or documentary or an outspoken opinion on (inter)national developments, please contact us at [info@lastradainternational.org](mailto:info@lastradainternational.org)

## La Strada News ?

### LSI General Assembly Meeting in Minsk, Belarus

From 23 until 27 April 2007, the La Strada International General Assembly meeting took place in Minsk, Belarus. The national coordinators of the nine La Strada member organisations represented in the LSI Assembly discussed internal issues such as strategy, policies, finances and fundraising, as well as some specific lobby actions and common projects. The main outcomes of the meeting were:

- The La Strada network shall, with support of an external facilitator, develop a strategic plan for the coming years, including a plan for further improvement of internal and external capacity building and training, and a strategy on internal and external cooperation and communication. Further, LSI will work on the development of a fundraising and sustainability strategy and more harmonised actions, among which piloting common registration and data collection. Currently, a communication research is being carried out by an external trainee in order to evaluate the network communication and cooperation. For more information please contact Suzanne Hoff at [sh@lastradainternational.org](mailto:sh@lastradainternational.org)
- A new La Strada International board has been elected. The new board members are:



*Petra Burcikova* (Chair),



*Maria de Cock*, (Secretary)



*Nadia Khozhouharova* (Treasurer);

they are respectively the national coordinators of La Strada in the Czech Republic, The Netherlands (STV) and Bulgaria (Animus).

- A third international La Strada NGO platform will be organised in Skopje, Macedonia, from 15 to 17 October 2007, with the aim of extending LSI contacts with other NGOs in Europe. More information on the programme and invitations for non La Strada participants will be published in June 2007.
- Developments and highlights of the year 2006 were discussed in preparation for the annual report, which is expected to be finalised in July 2007. *More information is available upon request.*

## LSI Women's rights campaign



On International Women's Day on 8 March 2008, La Strada International will launch a (media) campaign on women's rights in the countries where La Strada is represented. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the lack/violation of women's rights and the unequal social and economic position of women in Central and Eastern Europe as the main root causes of trafficking in women. Although in nearly every debate and (international) treaty, measure or programme, addressing trafficking in human beings social, economic and cultural root causes are mentioned, very little attention is paid to the gender aspect and very little is been undertaken to address these root causes.

It is therefore necessary to raise awareness among the general public and governments in the countries in CEE, as well as among the policy makers in the European and International Bodies that deal with trafficking in human beings. The campaign aims to revive the debate on women's rights and the social and economic position of women in CEE countries in the media, in public debates and in politics. With this campaign that puts women's rights on the international agenda, La Strada International also aims to support women's organisations and individual women in CEE countries who work towards the improvement of women's rights and emancipation. For more information please contact Marieke van Doorninck at [mvd@lastradainternational.org](mailto:mvd@lastradainternational.org)

## Bulgaria's National Tourism Board wants to regulate prostitution

In late 2005, the Ministry of Interior and the National Tourism Board in Bulgaria established a working group for the preparation of a draft law regulating prostitution. The group comprises representatives of the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Justice, the State Tourism Agency and members of Parliament. Representatives of civil society groups are not involved in the process and publicly available information is limited to the media. According to the media coverage so far, the main reasons given by the authorities for wanting to regulate prostitution is twofold. Firstly, it is thought that by removing sex workers from the streets the image of Bulgaria as a tourist destination will improve, particularly after joining the European Union. Secondly, turning prostitution into a legal economic sector facilitates the taxation of persons working in the sex industry and would generate revenues. This recent initiative is not the first attempt to regulate prostitution in Bulgaria; efforts in this direction have been made for the past five years. Different political stakeholders have tried to change the legal status of prostitution in Bulgaria, but none of them have been successful so far.

Animus Association, the women's rights organisation representing La Strada in Bulgaria, believes that the reason for these failed attempts is that there are contradicting opinions and a general lack of understanding of and research on the phenomenon of prostitution in Bulgaria. Animus is concerned about the possible negative effects of the regulation in the form as it is proposed now on the position of sex workers and especially vulnerable women who are engaged in prostitution in Bulgaria. In order to develop a governmental approach adequate to the local context, and corresponding to the reality and the needs of the people involved in prostitution, several issues need to be addressed:



- the difference and links between prostitution and trafficking,
- the risks for sex workers,
- the expected impact of the regulation of prostitution on trafficking and sexual exploitation,
- the needs of the sex workers, and
- the public attitude towards sex workers.

Animus is intending to carry out a research with Bulgarian and international NGOs in order to provide both the government and civil society with the necessary information to develop a policy that corresponds not only to the needs of the state, such as fighting organised crime and HIV prevention, but also supports sex workers in their needs and rights: the right of free choice, of not being abused and subjected to violence, of having equal opportunities, and the right of not being discriminated by the law or being stigmatised and marginalised by society.

## What's going on ?

### NGO support for the Council of Europe Convention

On 3 May, the *Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings* celebrated its second anniversary. However, three ratifications are still missing for the Convention to enter into force. Around 150 NGOs that promote the human rights of trafficked persons in ten European countries took part in a [campaign initiated by the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women](#) and sent a letter to their governments and parliaments, demanding to ratify the Convention without delay.

[La Strada International joined this initiative](#) as a member of GAATW and coordinated the campaign in the La Strada countries. LSI also initiated an action with other international umbrella organisations such as Anti Slavery International, Plan, Terre des Hommes, Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME) and PICUM. These organisations addressed the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso, asking for his support to catalyse the rapid enactment of the Convention by its member states and urging him to take the necessary steps towards the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention in order for the European Commission to become party to this very important human rights instrument.



In a separate letter to President Barroso, written on behalf of the Expert Coordination Team of the Alliance against Trafficking in Persons (AECT), Eva Biaudet, the OSCE Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, also endorsed this demand. Although LSI believes that certain aspects of the Council of Europe Convention can still be improved (for example, protection of trafficked persons still depends on their cooperation with the authorities), it is the only legally binding instrument that contains provisions centring the human rights of trafficked persons by granting effective protection, rather than being exclusively an instrument for combating organised crime.

Another important aspect about the Convention is the establishment of the monitoring instrument GRETA, a group of independent experts that monitors the implementation of the Convention by the member states of the Council of Europe. GRETA will be established no later than one year after the entry into force of the Convention. La Strada International has great expectations of GRETA, as the group will not only monitor whether member states have adjusted their national laws, but also how those laws are implemented. Hopefully, GRETA will also monitor the effects of anti-trafficking measures on trafficked persons, on migrant workers and other affected groups.

La Strada International is therefore happy to have contributed to this campaign in collaboration with GAATW and will continue to lobby for the Convention with the aim of it coming into effect before the end of this year.

### European Commission presents policy priorities for 2008

The Commission has presented its Annual Policy Strategy setting out its political priorities for 2008. The Policy Strategy is presented every year around March and marks the beginning of the Commission's policy cycle. It outlines the Commission's policy objectives in the four key strategic areas of the Barroso Commission: prosperity, solidarity, security & freedom and a stronger role of the EU in the world. It also puts forward key actions on issues such as jobs, energy and climate change and migration management.

The Commission underlines the benefits to the EU of legal migration: "if well-managed, [legal migration] is a positive contribution to Europe's prosperity and cultural diversity". The Commission confirms that next year it plans to present "further next steps towards a common policy on migration and measures to achieve a Common European Asylum System by 2010". The EU also needs "to prevent illegal migration, counter human trafficking and protect its external borders", while a combined migration and development agenda, especially with Africa, forms the fourth element of the approach.



The Commission's specific plans for 2007 include two legislative proposals on labour migration (conditions for seasonal workers and paid placement students to enter and remain within a country) and the launch of an action programme on migration and development, particularly in Africa. In the area of border and migration control, it plans to tighten the control network for the EU's sea borders and to put in place a European monitoring system designed to assist member states to manage increasing flows of irregular immigrants. It also expects to finalise the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II) and the launch of a Visa Information System (VIS) to pave the way for a common visa policy.

### UN Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking

The UNODC launched its Global Initiative in London on 26 March 2007 to coincide with the bicentenary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. As the UNODC Executive Director Mr Antonio Maria Costa explained, the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT) is designed to motivate and assist governments and civil society. It aims "to understand factors of vulnerability to human trafficking; to reduce its impact and its human cost; to take action to prevent and stop it and to help states implement the anti-trafficking Protocol". At the organisational level, the goal is to harness and synergise current anti-trafficking initiatives.



Mr Antonio Maria Costa

UN.GIFT will have three phases. In the preparatory phase, which is already underway, the UNODC will consult with various stakeholders in different regions, raise awareness, identify partners and mobilise resources. The second phase will synthesise the insights shared in the previous months and culminate in a conference in Vienna on 27-29 November 2007. The UNODC expects the Conference to develop a set of goals, or a "Vienna Pledge", which will translate into a set of achievable action points. It also plans to establish a fund for anti-trafficking initiatives. The third and final phase of UN.GIFT will be the implementation of the action points.

In April this year, the UNODC held a consultation in Vienna with representatives of 19 non-governmental organisations. La Strada International was represented by Katya Cherepakha from La Strada Ukraine and Petra Kutalkova from La Strada Czech Republic. During the consultation, NGOs were invited to react to the plans and to define the goals for UN.GIT. In the opinion column 'What's on your mind' in this LSI newsletter, you can learn about La Strada International's thoughts on the "Vienna Pledge".

### Human rights expert calls on states to back UN treaty protecting migrant workers



The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Jorge Bustamante, called on UN member states to ratify the international treaty that seeks to protect the almost 200 million migrant workers around the world against abuse. The Special Rapporteur told the Human Rights Council in Geneva at its fourth session that it was time for countries to demonstrate their commitment towards improving the rights of migrant workers.

The [International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families](#) was adopted by the General Assembly in 1990, but so far only 34 countries have ratified it and the treaty only entered into force in 2003. Mr Bustamante said he hoped more states would ratify the treaty during the Global Forum on Migration and Development, to be held in Belgium in July, and he also called for the creation of a voluntary fund to allow the world's least developed countries to attend the Forum. The treaty also includes clauses providing for a halt to the clandestine employment of irregular migrants so that they do not work in abusive conditions but enjoy safe and decent work and equal wages, as well as assistance to the orderly return of migrants, so that they can enjoy adequate economic and social conditions for their reintegration.

## Director USAID resigns after a massage



U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, Randall L. Tobias, submitted his resignation after confirming that he had been a customer of a Washington D.C. escort service whose owner has been charged by federal prosecutors with running a prostitution operation. Tobias, the director of U.S. Foreign Assistance and administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), had previously served as the ambassador for the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief. Tobias acknowledged he had called the escort service several times for massages, but insisted that they had involved no sex.

The AIDS Czar, a term used in the U.S. to describe the wide remit granted to these state representatives with regard to policy implementation, was responsible for drawing up USAID policy detailing which countries would receive money from various U.S. agencies, how much they should receive, and the rules governing the assignment of those funds. Controversially, one of the assignment criteria is a pledge by recipients of USAID funding that denounces prostitution. Many NGOs, both in the U.S. and abroad, have [protested against the gag rule](#) and the Open Society Institute has pressed charges against the US government. Jodi Jacobson, executive director for the Center for Health and Gender Equity, an advocacy group based outside Washington D.C. said that "policy has led to the closure of numerous programs that had been teaching job skills to sex workers, forcing many prostitutes out of brothels and into the street. I think it is somewhat ironic and hypocritical that he would patronize an escort service while he was denying funding to organizations who want to help prostitutes and supporting a policy that obviously forbids fraternizing with prostitutes".

La Strada International believes the pledge is counter-productive and harmful to people engaged in the sex industry. Moreover, enforcing political approaches to social and economic problems through funding criteria seriously infringes NGOs freedom of speech and hampers the development of a critical civil society.

## World Bank report promotes 'Circular Migration'

Most migrants from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union would prefer to spend shorter periods abroad and then return home, says a new World Bank report '[Migrants and remittances: Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union](#)'. The Bank is discussing the launch of pilot projects with several European Union member states that encourage such 'circular migration'.

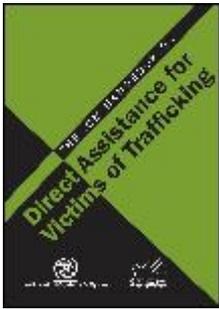
The current bilateral agreements for migration do not contain mechanisms to encourage circular or repeated migration. If it is costly for potential migrants to apply for a space on a temporary migration programme, they may well have an incentive to remain abroad for longer periods than they prefer. These measures cannot stem the current flow of undocumented migrants. Undocumented migration has important disadvantages for both sending and receiving countries, and migrants themselves are more likely to be subject to abuse. In addition, the agreements are often not able to facilitate large amounts of legal, unskilled migration.



An alternative framework stimulating circular migration offers employers in receiving countries the means to obtain affordable services while respecting the law in sectors where they cannot find workers in their own countries, says the report. It further claims such an alternative system would reduce illegal migration and the risk of abuse as well as meeting the wishes of some migrants to stay away from home shorter for periods. "Circular migration is indeed a promising idea", said Jean-Pierre Bou, policy officer at the directorate-general for justice, liberty and security at the European Commission. "We must invest in circular migration as an idea, but there are also a number of traps. For instance, we must find incentives for people to enter this type of migration and to return back home".

## What's new ?

### The IOM Handbook on Direct Assistance for Victims of Trafficking



The Handbook summarises and systematises the experience of IOM in over ten years of anti trafficking activities. IOM recognises that each victim is unique and requires and desires different assistance. The nature of trafficking is different around the world and is ever evolving, requiring changing responses. Therefore this Handbook does not aim to provide a single methodology for the provision of assistance to victims of trafficking, but to offer suggestions and guidance. The handbook is written for all organisations providing such assistance, but especially for organisations that are just beginning to develop victim assistance programmes as it provides guidance and advice necessary to effectively deliver a full range of assistance to victims of trafficking from the point of initial contact and screening, up to the effective social reintegration of the individuals

concerned. The handbook can be ordered at [publications@iom.int](mailto:publications@iom.int) or be downloaded [here](#).

### PICUM fact sheets on migration issues

PICUM, the Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants, has published three policy briefs on different aspects of migration. PICUM address some of the crucial areas of the current migration policies, including managed migration schemes, anti-trafficking measures and decent work for migrants. The aim of these policy briefs is to bring a human rights perspective into a debate that, at the governmental level, appears to be predominantly characterised by economic and security thinking. The three policy briefs are:

[Undocumented Migrants – Symptom, Not The Problem](#) The authors review some of the thinking behind current policy responses to managed migration and consider what they are attempting to achieve. Specifically, they ask whether the ‘enforcement agenda’ in particular is an adequate way to tackle the issues arising from this aspect of global migration trends.

[Human Trafficking and Forced Labour. What Perspectives to Challenge Exploitation?](#) This policy brief draws attention to positions being developed by politicians and policy makers across Europe for whom trafficking in human beings is regarded as more-or-less synonymous with irregular migration and the position of undocumented migrants.

[Decent Work for Undocumented Migrants](#) This policy brief aims at identifying the pressures involved in achieving decent work for undocumented migrants, building on the ILO Decent Work Agenda.

The policy briefs are available on PICUM’s website ([www.picum.org](http://www.picum.org)).

### Equal Rights, Equal Voices – Migrant women in the European Union

In January this year, the European Women’s Lobby organised a conference in Brussels on Migrant women in the European Union. Migrant women activists from European Union Member States and EU accession countries were brought together for a discussion on the main challenges that migrant women face in terms of integration and empowerment in EU countries. Participants were able to exchange positive and negative experiences and explore innovative ways to ensure that the particular concerns of migrant women are taken into account by decision-makers. The participants formulated recommendations around the following main issues:

- The legal status of third-country nationals living in the EU and its impact on integration.
- Women’s Human rights: violence, sexual and reproductive rights, health of migrant women
- Promoting the participation of migrant women in public, political and economic life (education, access to employment, working conditions, decision-making)
- Exploring the possibilities to develop and strengthen networking between migrant women and with women’s organisations at national and European level.

The [publication](#) is available in English and French on request at the EWL secretariat, [delorme@womenlobby.org](mailto:delorme@womenlobby.org)

## From policy to practice: OSCE Report on Trafficking

The OSCE has published a report on trafficking, entitled '[From policy to practice: combating trafficking in human beings in the OSCE region](#)'. The report covers the period from May 2004, the beginning of the term of the first Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human beings, Ms Helga Konrad and the establishment of the Anti-Trafficking Assistance Unit, to May 2006. Divided into four parts, the report presents an overview of efforts to combat trafficking in human beings (THB) and significant challenges encountered throughout the OSCE Region by the participating States as well as by the relevant structures, institutions and field operations. It concludes with a discussion on these challenges and recommendations.

## What's happening where ?

- **21 May 2007** Conference "[National Monitoring and Report Mechanism to Address THB: The Role of National Rapporteurs](#)", OSCE, Vienna, Austria. Katya Levchenko, national coordinator of La Strada Ukraine is one of the guest speakers.
- **25 May 2007** Conference "[Human Rights and Human Trafficking](#)", Human Rights Centre, Queen's University, Belfast, Ireland.
- **7 June 2007** Round Table "Minimum of standards in treating the victims/survivors of THB, ASTRA-Anti trafficking action", Belgrade, Serbia. For more information contact [astranet@sezampro.yu](mailto:astranet@sezampro.yu)
- **14 June 2007** Awareness-raising & communication event "Networking against Human Trafficking", organised as a conclusion of the [EQUAL Round 2 Community Initiative Programme](#), Brussels, Belgium.
- **28 - 29 June 2007** International conference on access to health care for undocumented migrants, [PICUM](#), Brussels, Belgium.
- **3 - 5 July 2007** Conference "[The European Slave Trade: Character, causes, challenges](#)", Trinity College Dublin, Ireland.
- **15-19 October 2007** La Strada International NGO platform (15 - 17<sup>th</sup> October) & Assembly meeting, Macedonia. More information will be published on the [LSI website](#) in June 2007.
- **End of October 2007** Triannual congress of the [Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women](#) (GAATW), Bangkok, Thailand.

## What's on your mind ?



*Marieke van Doorninck is Advisor Public Affairs at La Strada International and council member for the Green Party in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.*

### Are we prepared to pay the price?

Already more than 20 years ago, some women's rights organisations recognised the practice of trafficking in women. Next to providing support, their major task was to put trafficking on the national and international agenda, which was not at all easy at that time. But they succeeded.....

Today as an anti trafficking lobbyist, I could be at conferences, workshops, round tables and trainings all around the world at least twice a week. The rest of my working hours, I could spend analysing new National Action Plans, European Actions Plans, guidelines, researches, handbooks, toolkits and evaluations. Anti-trafficking is hot, every self respecting international organisation, whether governmental, intergovernmental or non governmental is somehow involved.

And now a new initiative is launched: the Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). It aims "to understand factors of vulnerability to human trafficking; to reduce its impact and its human cost; to take action to prevent and stop it and to help states implement the anti-trafficking Protocol". NGO's, among which La Strada, were asked to share their thoughts on what the goals of the Global Initiative should be.

La Strada welcomes this new initiative, especially because with this the UN takes the responsibility to harness and synergise current anti-trafficking initiatives globally and involves the voice of NGOs. We could, of course ask for new actions plans, for more ratifications of treaties, national Rapporteurs and so, as we regularly do, but as so many instruments do exist, have been developed and should urgently be implemented, La Strada International decided to use this opportunity to rather stir up the international discussion about how to address trafficking in human beings. It is our belief that as long as the debate and the actions are focussed on *fighting* trafficking and much less on *preventing* trafficking, no matter what new initiative is launched, trafficking will not diminish.

The Global Initiative wants "to understand factors of vulnerability to human trafficking". These factors, the root causes exist in all of the three phases of the trafficking process. The root causes in the countries of origin are poverty, gender discrimination, inequality, violence and corruption. Large investments are needed for de development of the economies in less advantaged countries, to support democratisation and the implementation of human rights. Root causes of trafficking are also linked to the global migration process. Strict and repressive immigration polices deprive migrant workers from legal possibilities to cross borders and find jobs. So they need the irregular and illegal ways that are controlled by criminal organisations who take advantage of the vulnerable position of migrants caused by their illegal status. What is needed is an open discussion on labour migration in which current trends and the reality of migrant workers are put at the centre of the debate. And last but not least, root causes exist in the countries of destination where there is a growing need for unskilled and labour intensive work in order to compete with low wages countries. This work is mostly done by illegal, irregular and unprotected migrant workers. Informal and unregulated work activities should be brought within the protection of Labour laws to ensure that all workers enjoy the same labour rights.

Millions are spend on anti trafficking measures but are we willing to really invest in solving the root causes? Will the European Union lift the restrictive trade barriers in favour of the development of the economies in less advantaged states? Are nations prepared to open the borders for migrant workers and share their wealth? And are we, as individual consumers, ready to pay more for our daily products in order to give migrant workers and workers in developing countries decent wages and labour conditions? The Global Initiative aims to reduce the human cost of trafficking. That can be done, but only if we are all prepared to pay the price.

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