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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 15 November 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

La Strada News !

Documentation centre

On 5 July, La Strada International launched an online [searchable database](#) holding a wide variety of background documents, legislation and opinion pieces on trafficking in human beings and related human rights issues. The documentation centre was set up with the aim to promote knowledge-sharing between practitioners, policy-makers and trafficked persons so as to provide a sound evidence-base for anti-trafficking actions. Publications and research from La Strada International and the national offices are also included. The online searchable database currently provides access to over 300 downloadable PDF files, to be regularly updated. LSI hopes that practitioners and policy-makers alike will make use of this resource and that it will be helpful in their work towards the prevention of trafficking.

Women's rights campaign

On International Women's Day 2008, La Strada International will launch a Women's Rights Campaign in all nine La Strada countries. The campaign will focus on the connection between the violation of women's rights and trafficking. For the research of the campaign, LSI has contracted Bregje Blokhuis, who will be working at the LSI office in Amsterdam from October onwards to conduct a literature research on women's rights in the nine La Strada countries. The campaign will be based on the results of the research.

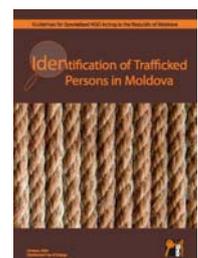
La Strada Express on reintegration



Reintegration - a process or an outcome? This is the question asked by the authors of the third thematic edition "[La Strada EXPRESS](#)", issued in April 2007 by La Strada Moldova. Not only theoretical but also practical aspects of reintegration are highlighted and contributions discuss problems of terminology, stages of the victims' assistance, as well as principles and approaches that are recommended with regard to assistance provision. Factors that influence the success of reintegration (physical and psychological health, support of close relatives/friends, community attitudes) are outlined and precise suggestions and recommendations are provided.

Guidelines for the identification of trafficked persons

La Strada Moldova also published guidelines for non-governmental organisations that provide assistance to trafficked persons in the Republic of Moldova, based on results of the national implementation of international anti-trafficking legislation. The handbook outlines theoretical issues and the practical expertise gained by La Strada Moldova and other La Strada offices, with the aim to establish criteria (indicators) for the identification of - and for structuring interviews with - trafficked persons. A hard copy can be ordered at the national office of [La Strada Moldova](#).



“Viable alternatives” - social inclusion in the Czech Republic

In March 2006, La Strada Czech Republic launched a two-year project “*Viable alternatives – social inclusion of victims of trafficking and commercially exploited persons*”, implemented together with the Czech Ministry of Employment and Social Affairs and co-financed by the European Social Fund and the state budget of the Czech Republic. The project concentrates both on prevention of THB and on social assistance to victims. It aims to increase social inclusion and find long-term life solutions for trafficked or commercially exploited persons by providing them with real alternatives to the environment of exploitation through employment opportunities. La Strada is conducting research into possibilities of increasing employment of the target group. One of the outcomes will be the formulation of legislative and institutional recommendations for improving the current situation. For this purpose, in May this year, La Strada started cooperation with a Prague based law office on an analysis of existing Czech legislation. La Strada will further implement an information campaign aimed at preventing THB among risk groups, especially migrant workers, and increasing social inclusion of the target group. With regard to social assistance, the project is aimed at a long-term support of clients. The social assistance team provides social services, consultancy (social, psychological and legal) on issues related to employment, training, education or direct support to individuals so as to increase their chances to return to the labour market.

Awareness campaign targets the demand side of human trafficking



La Strada Czech Republic, together with Caritas, has joined a nationwide information campaign from IOM Czech Republic. The information campaign, funded by the Czech Ministry of Interior, addresses the demand side of trafficking and is set for a time-frame of five-months. “Don't be afraid to say it for her”, aims at raising awareness among the general public and, more specifically, among potential or actual clients of prostitution. As part of the campaign, a [website](#) in Czech, German and English has been set up to provide up-to-date information on trafficking and details on telephone hotlines for people who wish to report suspected cases of trafficking. Posters, flyers and other information materials in Czech, German and English will be displayed in high visibility locations, such as public transportation hubs, at border crossings with Germany and Austria, and in clubs and pubs in Prague and other main cities.

Educational Centre on trafficking in Macedonia

On 30 May 2007, Open Gate expanded its work on the SOS Line by opening the Informational Educational Centre against Human Trafficking. The goal of the Info-Educational Centre is to offer consultations and assistance not only through the SOS Line but also through direct contacts between the clients and Open Gate. The SOS line is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10.00 to 12.00 a.m. for all citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. Everybody who needs information, emotional support, consultations, and other types of assistance related to the issue of human trafficking can schedule a meeting via the toll-free number 0800 11111, which is open 24 hours a day or by sending an e-mail to: sosline@lastrada.org.mk

More male victims in the Netherlands

Since the law was amended in the Netherlands in 2005 to define all forms of trafficking for labour exploitation as acts punishable by law, La Strada Netherlands (Foundation against Trafficking in Women - STV) is confronted with a new target group: men who have been trafficked not only into the sex industry, but also into forced labour in the harbour, in factories, in domestic work and in restaurants. In 2006, 30 men - mostly from Asia - have been reported to STV. It is still very difficult to provide these men with the appropriate shelter and social assistance as there is no experience with social work for male victims of trafficking. Even for men that are under threat, it is very hard to find a safe house as these are exclusively for women. STV is therefore lobbying for more shelter capacity for men, including safe housing, as part of its ongoing lobbying efforts to create more shelter facilities for trafficked persons in general.

Pressing charges anonymously in the Netherlands

The Dutch ministers of justice and internal affairs are preparing a draft law that will enable victims of trafficking to press charges anonymously. Two years ago, the possibility to report a suspicion of trafficking anonymously was introduced through a special hotline. However, those reports cannot be used as evidence

in a court case. The possibility for pressing charges anonymously is of great importance as it is often scary and even dangerous for a victim if their identity becomes known. If the trafficked person wishes to remain anonymous, the planned legislation intends to make the personal details of the plaintiff known only to the police, the public prosecutor and the court.

Campaign against domestic violence in Belarus

In early 2007, YWCA Belarus, which La Strada Belarus is part of, participated in an Amnesty International (AI) campaign against domestic violence in Belarus. The campaign aimed to support survivors of domestic violence and the organisations providing services for them. It expressed its support by AI members sending chocolate and messages of solidarity to women's organisations in Belarus. YWCA Belarus, together with five other NGOs, received postcards, chocolate and warm greetings from individuals, local organisations and national offices of AI and passed them on to clients assisted by La Strada Belarus as well as NGO activists in small and rural areas of the country. Irina Alkhovka, YWCA Belarus General Secretary, underlined: "It is very inspiring to know that women, sisters in other countries, support us and pay attention to what we do. This solidarity means a lot and to us, it means networking in action, without loud resolutions and public statements."

The Amnesty International lobbying strategy also included writing letters to the President of Belarus, urging him "to act now in order to improve protection for women against domestic violence, to end impunity against the perpetrators of domestic violence and to raise awareness about the problem of domestic violence". The letter also draws attention to the AI report "Belarus: Domestic Violence - more than a private scandal", published in November 2006.



What's going on ?

18 October: EU Anti-trafficking day

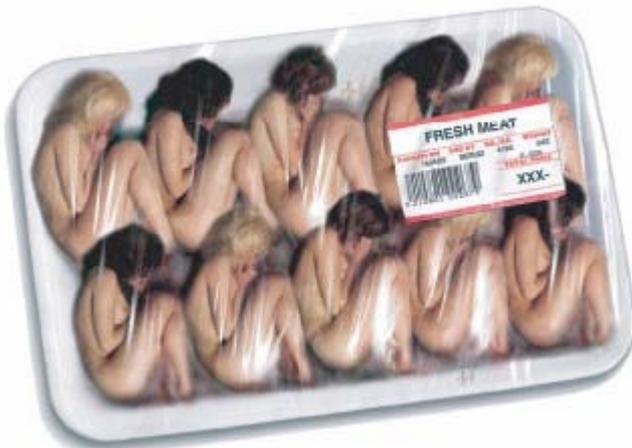
Almost two years ago, in January 2006, the European Parliament unanimously adopted the own-initiative report, [Strategies to prevent trafficking in women and children who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation](#), drafted by Christa Prets. By adopting this report, Members of European Parliament urged the EU member states to put more effort in combating trafficking and to grant more rights to trafficked persons. One of the recommendations in the report was for the EU to establish a European anti-trafficking day.

This recommendation has now been implemented: the European Commission has declared 18 October an annual anti-trafficking day and organised a conference for its launch. The event, entitled "Trafficking in Human Beings: Time for Action", aims to highlight the pressing need for the implementation of practical measures to prevent and combat trafficking and protect the rights of trafficked persons at the national, European and international level. Part of the discussions will focus on the outcome of the work carried out by the European Commission's Expert Group on trafficking in human beings, which has developed a list of indicators as part of a policy evaluation method in order to enhance national policies in areas of concern. Furthermore, the Commission will present a set of recommendations on victim identification and assistance that should lead to strengthening its policy tools. The document endorsed by the meeting should eventually lead to the further development and implementation of policies in combating trafficking. LSI is initiating a common NGO statement to the EU Commission in the framework of the anti-trafficking day, and LSI member organisations are preparing activities to raise awareness at the national level.

The image of women and the empowerment principle

In June 2007, the Council of Europe adopted a [Resolution](#) on the image of women in advertising. In its statement, the Council of Europe concludes that in advertising, women are often presented in situations that are humiliating and degrading, or even violent and offensive to human dignity. Moreover, by presenting

slim women as beauty idols, advertising can cause serious damage to the health of young girls. The Council of Europe [recommends](#) all Member States to conduct an in-depth study on the image of men and women in advertising and to prepare for a European Code of Conduct.



An example of an image used in anti-trafficking campaigning which LSI would argue works against the principle of empowerment.

La Strada International recommends that this research should not only focus on advertising for commercial products, but also on how women are portrayed in non-profit actions, for example, in media campaigns against trafficking in women. Women are often depicted as vulnerable, weak and helpless or in chains and beaten up; typically with very little clothes on or even naked. Although LSI understands that some NGOs choose to use confronting images to get the message across, we do not believe this practice complies with the notion of empowerment. Portraying women as victims or as trade objects devoid of agency can adversely affect the empowerment of women in general, and trafficked women in particular.

EU discussions on labour migration

Labour migration has become a serious issue for states and international organisations in recent years. It has become evident that the sole focus on repressive policies does not work and governments have become increasingly aware that a different approach towards labour migration is needed. The last LSI newsletter reported on the European Commission proposal to present the Policy Plan on Legal Migration as well as the plea of the World Bank for regulatory mechanisms supporting circular migration.

In June this year, the [Portuguese employment state secretary Fernando Medina](#) said that, during its Presidency of the European Union, Portugal will push for a more "realistic" approach to legal migration. "If we try to be too restrictive on legal migration, this is not a realistic approach" he said, "Realistically, we have to approach the question of illegal migration connected to legal migration". Such an approach would consider "the reality of economic migration", which constitutes the "big bulk" of migration.

At the opening of the first meeting of the [Global Forum on International Migration and Development](#), a government-led initiative open to all 192 UN Member States that wants to address issues related to migration and development, UN General Secretary [Ban Ki-moon](#) referred to the benefits of migration: "Migration can be an enormous force for good. If we follow the evidence, and begin a rational, forward-looking conversation about how to better manage our shared interests, we can together help to usher in the third stage of globalisation - a long-awaited era where more people than ever before begin to share in the world's prosperity."



Belgium, host to the first [Global Forum on International Migration and Development](#) meeting in July 2007, organised a Civil Society Day prior to the meeting with 200 selected organisations and individuals. The participants were diverse, ranging from development and human rights NGOs and networks, to private sector and money-transfer associations, trade unions, faith-based and Diaspora organisations, as well as independent researchers. The agenda of the CSD largely mirrored the [government agenda](#) for the GFMD.



Mary Robinson, President of *Realizing Rights. The Ethical Globalization Initiative*, addresses the audience during the first panel session.

Suzanne Hoff, coordinator of La Strada International attended the day and [reports back](#):

"Although states are ready to explore a different approach to migration, many NGOs in the field of migrant rights and anti-trafficking also detect some worrying trends. While governments are becoming more coordinated in their efforts to 'manage' migration and migrant labour, human rights, civil society and migrants themselves are almost completely excluded from substantive discussions. Rather than

considering the experiences and well-being of migrants themselves, the debate centres on maximising the economic returns of migrant labour for both sending and destination countries.

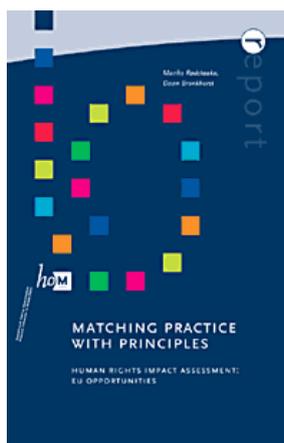
In general, it is evident that the human rights approach to migration and anti-trafficking is still being undermined and that many of the discussions and recommendations were initiated partly as an attempt to actually reduce migration. The question to be asked is whether civil society should be hesitant to join discussions on 'how to tackle irregular migration'. Regulation of labour migration by governments might only lead to more repressive measures being taken against irregular migrants and those groups that are left out.

The Civil Society Day (CSD) was followed by a two-day [Global Community Forum](#) (GCF) on Migration, Development and Human Rights, organised parallel to the GFMD by a group of migrant rights organisations. The GCF sought "to reintroduce the voice and concrete contribution of migrants, non-governmental organisations and civil society in the global debate". Next to workshops that focused on the issues that migrant workers come across, the discussions during the Community Forum very much debated the need for further inclusion of civil society in the international migration discourse. One of the overall conclusions was that if NGOs want to take a bigger role in this discussion we need to organise ourselves and take action. NGOs should start the preparations for participation of the civil society at the Global Forum on International Migration and Development next year in Manila."

Human rights impact of anti-trafficking interventions: developing an assessment tool

In recent years, non-governmental organisations, specialists and advocates in the related fields of trafficking in human beings, migrants' rights, sex workers' rights and related fields have observed with growing concern various negative consequences of anti-trafficking interventions. Examples are the stigmatisation and marginalisation of women working in non-formal labour sectors, the ineffectiveness of protection schemes, and 'protection' interventions that actually harm instead of benefit the rights of those who are actual or supposed victims of trafficking.

To be able to minimise negative impacts and maximise positive impacts of anti-trafficking interventions, it is important to analyse the precise relation between interventions and the human rights of the people affected by those interventions. This is why Marjan Wijers and Lin Chew, together with [HOM](#) (Dutch Humanist Committee on Human Rights), took the initiative to develop a human rights impact assessment tool, which can help stakeholders in such a process. HOM runs a [Human Rights Impact Assessment Programme](#) which aims for Human Rights Impact Assessment to be recognised "as a practicable instrument to structure policy development and to measure its effects, both within the European Union (EU) and the United Nations, as well as at the civil society level."



In 2002, HOM published an outline for the development of Human Rights Impact Assessment for EU policy measures with an external effect.

As the first step in the proposed project to develop a human rights impact instrument for the documentation and assessment of anti-trafficking laws, policies and measures (henceforth, the tool), an international consultation was held 11-13 June 2007 in Utrecht. Aim of the consultation was to assess the need for such a tool and to discuss possible objectives, functions, scope, content and process to develop the tool. The consultation brought together twenty persons, including the organisers. Participants were representatives of NGOs, independent specialists and researchers, working in the related fields of anti-trafficking and forced labour, human rights, labour rights, sex workers' rights and migrants' rights. Participants unanimously affirmed that there is a need for an assessment tool to analyse and assess anti-trafficking laws, policies and measures and to help NGOs to bring human rights principles into practice in relation to anti-trafficking measures. The existence of a single, comprehensive human rights analysis could help NGOs develop sets of "best practices," and compare experiences of anti-trafficking measures across distinct geographic/sectoral contexts. In addition, the tool might also be used for self-assessment by NGOs. However, whether or not these two functions are compatible needs more discussion and research. With the recommendations for the process of development and for the tools itself, the organisers will continue a disciplined and transparent consultative process to develop the tool.

What's new ?

Handbook for Safe Migration to Germany

[Ban Ying](#), a German anti-trafficking organisation and member of the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women has produced a handbook on safe migration for women who plan to come to Germany for a long or short period of stay. The booklet, entitled [Migrating to Germany? Be safe!](#) gives practical information about Germany, immigration issues, employment possibilities (especially in sectors typical for (female) migrants such as domestic work, au pair and sex work) and legal information for women who have come to study or who have married a German man. The booklet also contains information for women on where to find support and what to do if they have problems or find themselves in a dangerous situation.



The philosophy behind the book is that knowledge is power and information, both legal and practical, is the best instrument against deceit and abuse. The handbook is available in English, German and soon also in Russian.

“An Unbalanced Approach” in the US

The Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children has published a report on the U.S. Response to Human Trafficking, entitled [An Unbalanced Approach](#). The report covers the United State’s efforts to protect persons trafficked to the United States. This is the last of a four-part series; previous reports focused on Nepal, Columbia and the United Kingdom. The recent report also draws attention to the law enforcement approach currently in practice in the United States and recommends a shift to a rights-based, protection-centred approach.

Literature on trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation in the UK

The Immigration Research and Statistics Service (IRSS) in the UK conducted a [literature review](#) on trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation. The review highlights that there is not much accurate evidence pertaining to the trafficking of both adults and children to the UK for the purposes of labour exploitation. The review features literature on the potential benefit of tackling human trafficking, both as an issue of borders and law enforcement, but also employment, exploitation and human rights.

Compensation for trafficked persons

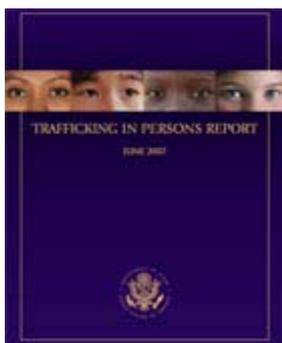
Alliance News, the bi-annual GAATW-IS newsletter, provides in-depth analysis by way of interviews and articles, as well as information on resources and links on a chosen theme. The July 2007 issue, entitled [Material Justice: Seeking Compensation in Trafficking Cases](#), focuses on compensation for trafficked persons and/or migrant workers. The lack of avenues for trafficked persons to get compensation, or the difficulties in implementing the existing ones, is a major and growing concern of many human rights based anti-trafficking organisations. Trafficked persons have experienced serious crimes ranging from fraud, abuse of power and physical, sexual and emotional violence to the deprivation of liberty, inhumane treatment, loss of personal possessions and serious labour violations. The fact that in practice, victims do not receive adequate compensation, which constitutes a fundamental human right, requires concerted action.

This is not to say that nothing is being done. The newsletter analyses different strategies that NGOs, lawyers and governments are exploring to ensure trafficked persons and exploited migrants are compensated, even if only partially. It looks at countries of origin and destination such as Thailand, Israel, the United States, and Japan, and criminal proceedings, civil proceedings, labour claims and state compensation schemes.

GAATW hopes that the newsletter will provide a tool to disseminate critical thinking on compensation to the broader anti-trafficking community, to share findings and to advocate for improvements in the recognition of the right to compensation for trafficked persons and exploited migrant workers.

La Strada International has contributed to this issue with an article in which we advocate for compensation and remuneration to be integrated into (international) anti-trafficking measures. Together with other NGOs and international organisations, LSI is also planning to set up a common research project on compensation for trafficked persons.

U.S. Trafficking in Persons report



On 12 June, Mark P. Lagon, the new Director of the U.S. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons [presented the new TIP report](#) for 2007. The U.S. annual [Trafficking in Persons Report](#) analyses efforts of governments worldwide to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons. It serves as the primary diplomatic tool through which the U.S. government encourages partnership in the fight against forced labour, sexual exploitation, and modern-day slavery. The report, published annually by the [Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons](#) assigns countries into Tiers: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List, and Tier 3. A country falls into Tier 3 if the U.S. finds that its government is not making significant efforts to combat human trafficking and "can be sanctioned if it does not take seriously anti-slavery action in the next 90 days".

In comparison with earlier reports, this year's edition of the TIP report includes more information on other forms of trafficking than only for the sex industry and also focuses on the profits people and industries in developed countries make from using forced labour. "Profits from using forced labour can be very lucrative for labour-intensive businesses. These exploitative commercial entities are as guilty of trafficking in persons as the organized crime boss who sells women into the commercial sex trade. Hiding behind legal and legitimate facades of business and trade, they often succeed in profiting from the exploitation of people desperate for work. Only through greater research, consumer and stakeholder activism, and aggressive enforcement of legislation such as the Tariff Act can a deterrent effect be realized."

The main focus, however, remains on prostitution: the majority of the examples given concern women and girls forced into the sex industry and the majority of the report's illustrations depict sex trafficking and prostitution. The U.S. government is convinced that "where prostitution is tolerated, there is a greater demand for human trafficking victims and nearly always an increase in the number of women and children trafficked into commercial sex slavery". Despite this claim, all countries that have a legalised sex industry, such as Germany, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands, remain in Tier 1. Regrettably, the reporting on each country is limited to only two pages, which does not allow for adequate analysis of a country situation. Moreover, there appears to be a close correlation between the general foreign policy of the U.S. government and its decision regarding the Tier ranking. These issues have been addressed by La Strada Belarus and the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women in an online consultation and a face to face meeting with Director Mark Lagon.

Capacity building in Roma communities to prevent trafficking

Next to poverty, the main root causes of trafficking are marginalisation, discrimination and social exclusion. This is why minority groups, such as the Roma and Sinti, are often more vulnerable to trafficking. A report has recently been published as a result of the roundtable "[Making Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings Effective: Building Regional and Local Capacity of Roma Communities](#)", which was organised by the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues and the OSCE Anti-Trafficking Programme of ODIHR in September 2006. The roundtable focused on an exchange of practice between organisations and countries to tackle trafficking in human beings in Roma communities.

Social exclusion and a lack of official documentation make Roma 'invisible' to state institutions and authorities, and therefore particularly vulnerable to trafficking. At the same time, discrimination against Roma (including gender discrimination within communities), weak national child protection systems, a general distrust of criminal justice systems by Roma, and the risks faced by organisations engaging in anti-trafficking work, all contribute to undermining anti-trafficking action. The need to tailor interventions to assist trafficked and vulnerable persons to individual circumstances, and to support not only the individual concerned but also families and communities affected by trafficking, was central to much of the discussion on exchange of practice. For instance, social interventions to protect adolescents living and working in exploitative environments are more likely to succeed when they acknowledge the willingness of Roma adolescents to work, and refrain from imposing one-size-fits-all solutions for minors, which have sometimes led to (re-)victimisation, criminalisation, and harm to the individual and the community.

The overall conclusion of the roundtable was the importance of awareness-raising within Roma communities about exploitation, including exploitation perpetuated by some traditional practices.

What's happening where ?

- **27 - 28 September** Paris, France. [Council of Europe Regional Seminar](#) on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Criminal and Procedural Measures.
- **8 - 9 October** Porto, Portugal. Conference on "[Human Trafficking and Gender](#)" in the framework of the Portuguese presidency of the EU.
- **15 - 16 October** Skopje, Macedonia. La Strada NGO platform "Responding to Root Causes and Creating Equal Opportunities".
- **17 - 19 October** Skopje, Macedonia. La Strada Assembly meeting and thematic meeting.
- **18 October** Brussels Belgium. European launch of the [EU anti-trafficking day: "Time for Action"](#).
- **18 - 19 October** Belgrade, Serbia. Council of Europe, [Council of Europe Regional Seminar](#) on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings: Measures to Protect and Promote the Rights of Victims.
- **18 - 19 October** Vienna, Austria. 3rd Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting "[Sexual Exploitation of Children](#)", organised by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.
- **5 - 8 November** Bangkok, Thailand. Tri-annual congress [GAATW](#).
- **8 - 9 November** Strasbourg, France. [Conference on the Monitoring Mechanism](#) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).
- **10 - 11 December** London, UK. [Council of Europe Regional Seminar](#) on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.
- **12 - 13 December** 20th anniversary of [STV](#), La Strada Netherlands.

What's on your mind ?



Ann Jordan is Director of the Initiative against Trafficking in Persons section of 'Global Rights' and member of the La Strada International Advisory Board.

Hype and hysteria

Even though human trafficking is a serious problem worldwide, and even though the accounts related by its victims are horrifying, all too frequently the media, governments and NGOs veer away from the facts about trafficking and enter into the murky territory of hype and hysteria to gain attention to the issue or to push an ideological position. Unfortunately, all too often, the consequence of the hyped numbers is hysteria, and ill- or uninformed reactions that do harm.

The hype and the facts *

Hype: "Germany rolls out Welcome Mat for Sex Traffickers and Pimps - Thousands of Women Trafficked for Prostitution During World Cup Games" and "An additional 40,000 women, mainly from eastern Europe, are expected to be brought to Germany to meet demand for commercial sex at World Cup games."

Fact: An IOM and SIDA investigation of the 2006 World Cup revealed that "the estimate of 40,000 women expected to be trafficked was unfounded and unrealistic."

Hype: "Of the estimated 600,000 to 800,000 people trafficked across international borders annually, 80 percent of victims are female, and 50 percent are children."

Fact: UNESCO has investigated many of the figures cited for the number of persons trafficked and found wildly divergent numbers from 500,000 to 4 million. The investigation revealed that most figures are not based on methodologically sound research and are simply repeated as authoritative, and so take on the air of 'fact.' The International Labour Organization (ILO) has published more reliable estimates that are based on a replicable methodology; it estimates 2.45 million victims of trafficking worldwide, of which about 56% are women and girls.

Hype: “[T]here are 30,000 to 50,000 sex slaves in captivity in the United States at any given time.”

Fact: No accurate estimates exist on the number of persons trafficked annually in the U.S. or on the number of persons who are in a trafficking situation at any given time. Further, the term ‘sex slave’ is not defined, so who exactly is included in the above quote is unclear. The U.S. government estimates 14,500 -17,500 persons trafficked into all types of forced labour annually, but it does not estimate the number being held at any given time.

Hype: “25 Pct. of Global Human Trafficking Victims are Filipinos.”

Fact: The article does not cite research supporting this alarming figure. The ILO report attributes 55% of all trafficking to Asia and the Pacific, which would mean that the Philippines alone would have to have more victims of trafficking than all of the rest of Asia.

The hysteria and the harm

These types of unsubstantiated figures are continually repeated, without citation, for years by ‘experts’ and officials, which makes it very difficult to trace the origin. In one case, a researcher reported that a UN number of 1 million was traced back to a UN meeting in which someone responded to a question with a guess – 1 million – that eventually became ‘the’ UN figure for victims. Continual repetition of such unsubstantiated and very high numbers has resulted in a panic or hysteria among the media, government officials and concerned citizens, who respond in large and small ways that are dangerous.

First, many laws, policies, practices and funding decisions are ineffective because they are not based upon sound evidence or a real understanding of the nature or scope of the problem. The persons and organisations most willing to use exaggerated numbers in order to elicit strong reactions are often then funded to carry out projects based on their figures. Evidence-based research that questions or refutes mythical figures is rarely funded because it would challenge myth-based government policies and some NGO practices.

Second, governments react in ways that are harmful and incapable of addressing the reality of the lives of potential and actual trafficked persons. For example, the Indian government has just decreed that women under 30 may not emigrate for domestic work and care-giving, with the proclaimed aim to ‘protect’ them from possibly being trafficked. The new law violates the rights of the women in multiple ways and does nothing to address the underlying reasons *why* the women are leaving their homes and seeking work abroad. Another example is a French crackdown on pimps and sex workers allegedly to stop trafficking, which has reportedly only succeeded in causing a “surge in police harassment” and convictions of sex workers based on coerced testimony of clients.

Third, governments use the hysteria about millions of innocent, virginal women and girls held as sex slaves (as well as unspoken images of migrant prostitutes) as support for carrying out anti-immigrant, border control projects. As governments close down borders and deport immigrants, they acquire public support, in part, by deploying images of the state as a saviour of sex slaves as well as the protector of the public from hordes of migrant prostitutes. Migrant women who do not easily fit into the ‘sex slave’ image are rejected and deported.

The response

The only response to hype and hysteria is, of course, to focus on reality and rights. We need, at more than 10 years into the anti-trafficking movement, to abandon sloppy methodology and slippery data and engage in honest fact-finding, even when it leads us to evidence that conflicts with our comfortable beliefs about migrants, girls and women from poorer countries, the role of governments and NGOs and the scope and nature of the phenomenon. We also need to place rights at the centre of all anti-trafficking measures in order to ensure that adults, particularly women, are not deprived of their rights, that women are not harmed by ill-devised schemes to ‘save’ them, and that trafficked persons are not used as vehicles for fundraising or tools for anti-immigrant policies.

* A full list of sources is available on request from LSI office

In 2007, La Strada International receives its main structural financial support from the Dutch Foundations DOEN, ICCO and Cordaid. La Strada members are supported by various other donors. We greatly appreciate financial support from private donors for our work. For more information on how you can contribute to La Strada’s work see, [please consult our website](#).