



Newsletter

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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 **1 March 2008**. 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 !

La Strada Belarus receives UNIFEM prize in Bonn, Germany



On 22 November, La Strada Belarus/YWCA was awarded the [German UNIFEM prize 2007](#) in Bonn, Germany, for its anti-trafficking work in Belarus. The UNFEM prize supports organisations working towards ending violence against women and preventing trafficking. The award (a grant of €10,000) was shared with the project “Maiti” from Nepal. [La Strada Belarus](#) was put forward for nomination by the German migrant women’s rights organisation “Ban Ying”. The award ceremony included a thematic panel discussion with representatives of the European Parliament, the Federal Crime Police Authority and the Federal Ministry of Family and Women’s Affairs. Irina Alkhovka,

national coordinator of La Strada Belarus emphasised that “the prize is a sign of recognition for the work of La Strada Belarus as well as of La Strada International as a whole and its efforts to prevent trafficking in human beings”. More information about the event is available on the [UNIFEM website](#).

La Strada International NGO Platform 2007 (Skopje, Macedonia)

On 15 and 16 October, La Strada International organised its third annual NGO platform in Skopje, Macedonia. This year’s theme was “*Responding to Root Causes and Creating Equal Opportunities*”. Prior LSI NGO platforms were organised in Warsaw, Poland and Kiev, Ukraine.

The annual platform offers the possibility to promote and present La Strada and its work. It further creates an opportunity for both La Strada members and other NGOs active in Europe to commonly discuss issues of concern, share experience and best practices and to promote openness and transparency among NGOs. Plenary sessions, thematic workshops, smaller bilateral sessions and side events were organised for a group of over 60 NGO representatives, among which La Strada member organisations. A first workshop round focussed on tailor made prevention work with minority groups; access to labour markets and social inclusion of trafficked persons; access to Justice – trial monitoring, compensation and prevention of trafficking in children. A second round of workshops dealt with prevention work and campaign images and messages; transnational NGO referral mechanisms; internal trafficking and lastly, monitoring human rights and joint lobby (specific actions towards European institutions). The third workshop round focussed on networking in Europe and uniting actions, equal access to asylum for trafficked persons; addressing all forms of trafficking, as well as the issue of domestic violence in relation to trafficking.

Space was provided for bilateral meetings, too, for fostering cooperation among organisations present, for questions related to national actions and programmes, and to allow for networking for possible membership of LSI and the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW). At the end of the NGO platform, a closing session highlighted the main findings and recommendations developed in the workshops, followed by a closing round table, which focused on how the recommendations could be implemented in Europe, and specifically in Macedonia. Further, the [common NGO statement](#) towards the European Commission on the

occasion of the launch of the EU anti-Trafficking Day on 18 October was read out and made available for co-signing. A full report on the NGO platform will be available on the LSI website soon.

Research: labour migration and trafficking from Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova to Russia

In 2007, [La Strada Ukraine](#) initiated a research project on the risk of trafficking for migrants searching for work in the Russian Federation with the aim to improve prevention methods. The research was conducted with [La Strada Moldova](#), [La Strada Belarus](#) and the Russian Academy of Science and funded by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Interviews held with trafficked persons showed that upon recruitment, trafficked persons were deliberately misinformed about the future place of work, and generally lacked information about the dangers of human trafficking, about different kinds of employment and contracts. The absence of contracts was found to increase the probability of being trafficked. Those interviewed were rarely provided with signed labour agreements and if contracts existed they rarely included social insurance. There is almost no legal protection for migrant workers in Russia; the main problems they face are difficulties with registration, housing, and employment. The most common labour rights violations are irregular working hours, absence of compensation for overtime and no sickness pay. Long delays in salary payment, bad working conditions and psychological violence were also reported. A publication of the findings and main recommendations will be available soon, for more information [contact](#) La Strada Ukraine.

What's going on ?

Council of Europe conference on GRETA

On 8 and 9 November, the Council of Europe organised a [conference](#) about its [Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings](#) and in particular the related monitoring body GRETA. Council of Europe experts shared their views about the content, selection criteria of members and working methods of GRETA with representatives of states, the OSCE, the European Commission, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, and civil society, represented by Anti-Slavery International, Amnesty International and La Strada International. The issues raised by the [presentations](#) ranged from the importance of the Convention and its monitoring mechanism (“the effectiveness of treaties can be measured by the effectiveness of its monitoring mechanisms”) and guidelines for the selection, nomination and election of expert group members, to practical information-sharing from members of other monitoring bodies such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) as models for GRETA.

The Convention will enter into force on 1 February 2008; 10 countries have signed so far. Amnesty International presented [14 recommendations](#) to ensure the election of independent experts of the highest calibre to monitor the implementation of the Convention.

La Strada International believes that GRETA can become a very important and influential instrument in the protection of the rights of trafficked persons and can promote the human rights based approach to trafficking in human beings. GRETA will adopt its own rules of procedure and determine its own focus and means to carry out its duties. The election of its members is therefore of utmost importance as GRETA will be only as strong as its membership. Together with Anti-Slavery International, LSI promotes the active involvement of civil society in the selection, nomination and election procedures and supports national NGOs in the countries that have ratified the Convention in their lobby activities to achieve this critical civil society involvement.

18 October – European Day against Trafficking

Since 2007, 18 October is the official EU Anti-Trafficking Day. The European Commission celebrated its launch with the conference “Time for Action”. Two documents, based on the recommendations of the EU Expert Group (2004) were presented and discussed, namely, the

- [Recommendations on identification and referral to services of victims of trafficking in human beings](#), which call for early and proper identification of trafficked persons, national referral mechanisms and adequate unconditional support and assistance, and

- [Measuring Responses to Trafficking in Human Beings in the European Union: an Assessment Manual](#) (written by Mike Dottridge), a manual offering governments a tool to assess their own anti-trafficking policies and to measure the outcomes and impact on trafficked persons as well as immigration, employment and labour rights.

La Strada International contributed to the panel discussion and presented the [NGO Statement "Time for Action"](#) which was drafted together with leading international NGOs. The statement calls upon the EU and its Member States to start implementing measures to end the human rights violations that are the result as well as the cause of trafficking in human beings, and to protect trafficked persons at the national, European and international level. In order to really make progress in preventing and combating human trafficking, the signatories propose a series of specific actions. As well as urging governments to sign, ratify and implement the relevant Conventions, they call for concrete steps to be taken to facilitate legal (labour) migration, to identify trafficked persons and support and protect them, as well as to ensure access to an effective remedy, including remuneration.



Report on the GAATW International Members' Congress (Bangkok, Thailand)

From 5 to 8 November 2007, the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women (GAATW) held its International Members' Congress (IMC). GAATW currently comprises 84 NGOs from all over the world that are active against trafficking in human beings. Some members work predominantly on lobby and advocacy; others focus on direct support for trafficked persons or are self-organised groups of trafficked persons and migrants. The Members' Congress is organised every 3 years. This year the focus lay on a thematic discussion on advocacy and direct support to trafficked persons. Furthermore, issues of communication among members, the organisational structure of the alliance, and common programme priorities for 2008 to 2010 were discussed in depth. At a two-day conference that took place prior to the members' congress, the findings and recommendations of the [recent GAATW report](#) on the impact of anti-trafficking measures on human rights (*see below*) were presented and discussed.



Better regional representation within GAATW and forging partnerships in the Middle East and African regions was identified as a future priority for the Alliance. The few member organisations from Africa were concerned about GAATW's weak presence in their continent and promised to help addressing this gap. All sessions underscored not only the need for making stronger links and fostering mutual learning, but participants also identified their most urgent priorities and made very concrete suggestions to the International Secretariat for better facilitation of partnership.

European members of the alliance, including all La Strada members, Bonded Labour in the Netherlands (BLinN) and FIZ (Switzerland), drafted a first common action plan for 2008 to 2010 within the framework of GAATW. A brief summary of the IMC is published in the GAATW e-bulletin (25.11.2007) and a complete report will be placed on the [GAATW website](#) by the end of January 2008. Photos of the IMC event have been published on a [web album](#).

New UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery

In September this year, the UN Human Rights Council adopted a [Resolution](#) to replace the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery with a Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and its consequences, to be appointed for a three-year period. [Anti-Slavery International](#), a close cooperation partner of LSI, has lobbied for this mandate for many years because the deliberations and recommendations of the UN [Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery](#) - which has been active for thirty years - have had little impact in those states where slavery exists. In the discussions about the replacement of the Working Group by a Special Rapporteur it was suggested by some that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on trafficking could be incorporated in the contemporary slavery mandate. The majority of the countries represented in the Human Rights Council, however, wanted to hold on to the specific mandate for trafficking. The mandate of the new Special Rapporteur therefore clearly states the

Rapporteur should “focus principally on aspects of contemporary forms of slavery which are not covered by existing mandates of the Human Rights Council, but also instructs the Special Rapporteur to cooperate fully and effectively with other existing human rights mechanisms and treaty bodies”, taking full account of their contribution while avoiding duplication of their work.

La Strada International will closely follow the mandate’s implementation and will continue to follow developments in the office of the Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, Mrs Sigma Huda, whose mandate will be evaluated in March 2008. In the light of the above-mentioned new Rapporteur, and the fact that Mrs Sigma Huda is currently detained in Bangladesh on the basis of corruption charges against her and her husband, it is unclear whether the trafficking Rapporteur and mandate will remain.

Migration policy developments in the EU

On 12 September, the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament amended a Commission proposal on [forced return of undocumented migrants](#). Unfortunately, the Parliament has not only backed the use of force to deport undocumented migrants but has also increased the maximum detention period of migrants from the proposed 6 months to 18 months. Human rights and migrant rights advocacy groups have long demanded an end to the wide-spread and inhumane practice of immigration detention in the EU. The parliament’s contradictory stance on migrants’ rights was also reflected in a [parliamentary debate](#) on 26 September on two reports on migration: whilst the tragic images of migrants drowning in the Mediterranean were recalled and the economic need for immigration was stressed, the Council and Commission called for the EU's external border force, Frontex, to be strengthened and illegal immigration to be firmly combated.



On 1 October, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (CoE) discussed a [CoE report on regularisation programmes](#) for irregular migrants, recognising the fact that a lack of legal status often subjects migrants to exploitation. The report contends that over 5.5 million irregular migrants live within the EU with a further 8 million in Russia and that “it is becoming increasingly clear that a large proportion of these persons will remain in Europe and will not return or can not be returned to their countries of origin.” It urges CoE member states to “examine how they should handle this large number of persons who live in the shadows of European society [...] often subjected to the worst forms of exploitation.” An NGO round table discussion was also held on the subject led by [CIMADE](#) (Service oecuménique d'entraide) in cooperation with PICUM and non-governmental organisations with participatory status with the Council of Europe.



On 16 May 2007, the European Commission adopted an [EU directive providing for sanctions against employers of third-country nationals](#) who are staying irregularly or working in breach of their residence status. The working group on fair working conditions of the [Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants](#) (PICUM), comprising selected organisations with expertise on labour issues and undocumented workers, has examined the directive and its possible implications for undocumented workers. A PICUM position paper and a joint position paper with other European NGOs working on migration and trade unions are expected to be finalised at the end of this year.

Regularising sex work – developments in Europe

Hungary has revised its legislation to allow sex workers to work legally, pay taxes and make social security contributions. This recent move was welcomed by Agnes Foldi, head of the National Association of Hungarian Sex workers, which held a press conference together with Hungary's tax authority APEH in Budapest on 24 September 2007. APEH spokeswoman Agnes Bakonyi informed that the sex industry “is one of the leading sectors of the shadow economy” and that regularisation is an attempt “to help a group of professionals, in what is called the world's oldest profession, who have never paid taxes in their life.” Agnes Foldi said about 20 sex workers already had been issued permits and more than 500 had applied to attend counselling sessions organised with the help of APEH on issues such as financial planning and accounting, as well as legal matters. “Our aim is to make sex work become accepted like any other job.”



Rebeka, Hungary's first legal sex worker, shows her business permit. (AP Photo/MTI, Laszlo Beliczay)

Despite this recent move by the Hungarian authorities, a trend towards criminalisation of prostitution can be detected in various European countries, among which Bulgaria. Governments are arguing that regularising prostitution has a negative impact on human trafficking, even though the evidence base on the correlation

between the two issues is inconclusive as well as country and situation-specific. Nadia Kozhouharova, international coordinator of La Strada Bulgaria ([Animus Association](#)), who also works as a psychotherapist with victims of trafficking, warns of the consequences of criminalising prostitution for women and trafficking victims. She said in an interview with the [New York Times](#) that “if they make prostitution illegal, it will go much more underground, more inaccessible for services and help, for police and for protection.”

Religious network to support trafficked women



More than 30 religious women from 26 nations launched an “International Network of Religious against Trafficking in Persons” (INRATIP) during a conference on human trafficking between 15 and 19 October in Rome, Italy with a [public statement](#). An international steering committee was set up to oversee the next steps of developing the network to support trafficked women in countries of origin, transit and destination, which will meet again in January 2008 in the Netherlands.

Evidence on sport events and human trafficking and NGO responses

A 25-page report has been published in Canada ([Faster, Higher, Stronger: Preventing Human Trafficking at the 2010 Olympics](#)), aiming to explore the connection between human trafficking and international sporting events by reviewing governmental and nongovernmental reports, media stories and statistical data from law enforcement agencies. It considers two case studies, the 2006 Germany FIFA World Cup and the 2004 Athens Olympics and although it admits that “there is relatively little research on the impact of international sporting events on human trafficking” it claims that the absence of an expected increase in trafficking during the German World Cup is a direct result of state prevention measures (e.g. greater police presence at “high-risk venues”, police raids, a temporary reinstatement of border controls). This claim is based on a [government report](#), as no independent research seems to exist providing an in-depth exploration of the link between the German government’s policy and its effect on trafficking. The report makes recommendations with regard to police identifying victims of trafficking to facilitate consequent protection of trafficked persons.

LSI believes that although attempts to identify victims and prevent trafficking are to be welcomed, a distinction should be made between voluntary sex workers and those who are trafficked, as government action on clamping down on prostitution can have serious impacts on the rights of sex workers and trafficking victims alike. The question of how to deal with increased media attention on trafficking during sports events and the tendency towards sensationalist reporting and consequent suspension of evidence-based policy is a concern for all anti-trafficking NGOs and women’s rights organisations. In Switzerland, a coalition of more than 25 NGOs, counselling centres, faith organisations and trade unions launched the [“Euro 08 campaign against Trafficking in Women”](#), which will inform a wide audience prior and during the European football championships due to be held in June 2008 about the trafficking of women specifically for the purpose of prostitution. However, although the campaign explicitly views the Euro 08 as an opportunity to inform a huge audience about the issue, it has also warned against misguided policy and explicitly focuses on improving protection mechanisms rather than calling for restrictive measures on immigration or prostitution. The [EU Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings](#), whilst acknowledging the opportunity of using such events for awareness raising on the issue of trafficking in human beings, stressed in a [2006 report](#) that “increased international attention towards trafficking in human beings, which in its complexity and structural causes, will not be solved by one-off activities around the World Football Cup or other similar events”.

Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking launches website

The office of the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings has launched a website, offering background information on trafficking in the Netherlands. All past and current annual reports as well as other useful publications and (inter)national legislation are available for download. The site is also available in [English](#).



NGOs gagged for criticising labour rights violations in India

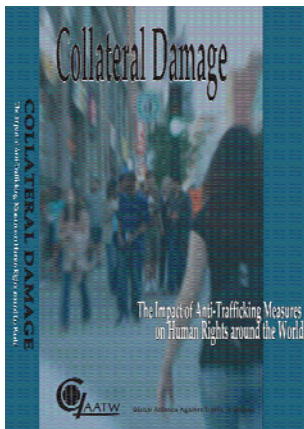


On 1 December, the Bangalore magistrate court ordered the arrest of seven Dutch human rights activists from the [Clean Clothes Campaign](#) (CCC), the [India Committee of the Netherlands](#) (ICN) and the internet provider Antenna. In 2005, local Indian labour rights groups, supported by CCC and the ICN, had [exposed labour rights violations](#) in two garment companies in Bangalore that export to the Netherlands and other countries in the West. Following this, FFI took legal action in 2006 to ban the local groups, CCC and ICN from speaking about or publicising the violations. The CCC subsequently took the issue up under the procedures of the [OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises](#),

stressing that under the gagging order, local trade unions cannot operate freely and that corporate social responsibility programmes could not be implemented. FFI then filed a court case against the CCC, ICN, internet provider Antenna and ADSL supplier XS4ALL, alleging that they engaged in cyber crime, defamation, racism and xenophobia. The Court now issued summonses against the four organisations and seven individuals because it did not accept that they be represented by a lawyer rather than travelling to India to appear in person. This development has caused concern amongst labour and human rights campaigners for setting a dangerous precedent of stopping human rights defenders to hold employers and states accountable for rights' violations by way of legal action. [Amnesty International \(AI\) reports](#) that the practice of filing apparently unsubstantiated criminal charges against defenders of workers' rights in several parts of India is not new, and that the Indian authorities have repeatedly failed to take action to prevent this practice. AI believes the filing of charges against the activists based in Netherlands is aimed at curbing the circulation of the reports in countries to which the companies' garments are exported.

What's new ?

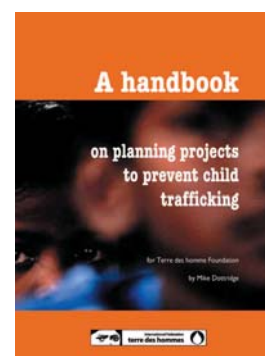
GAATW reports on the human rights impact of anti-trafficking policy



GAATW has published a report on the impact of anti-trafficking policy entitled [Collateral Damage: The Impact of Anti-Trafficking Measures on Human Rights around the World](#). Eight human rights and trafficking experts analyse policies and practices in Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, India, Nigeria, Thailand, UK, and the United States. The case studies point to the conclusion that while much has been done to combat trafficking, anti-trafficking and other related policies have in fact harmed the very people they were intended to protect, as well as migrants and sex workers. The reasons for this range from a lack of evidence-based policy-making and a lack of consultation with those that will be affected by the policies, to clearly pushing other agendas, such as stopping migration or suppressing prostitution. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) has produced a [review of the report](#). LSI and other European GAATW members will continue to collect further findings on European collateral damage, with the aim of publishing a European report.

A handbook on planning projects to prevent child trafficking

[Terre des Hommes](#) has published a [handbook on preventing child trafficking](#). It looks in particular at activities organised as projects or programmes, but also comments more generally on what actions are likely to be effective in preventing children from being trafficked. It is presented as a handbook so that project designers can follow it as they go through the process of developing activities to prevent children from being trafficked. The handbook is intended for anyone who plays a role in designing or organising activities to prevent child trafficking and, by implication, for a wider audience of policy makers in government, inter-



governmental organisations (IGOs) and organisations involved in deciding what preventive activities should receive priority or in financing anti-trafficking activities.

Tackling the trafficking of young footballers in France



On 4 October, the Paris-based NGO [Culture Foot Solidaire](#) and the Union of Professional Football Clubs (UPFC) launched a joint project and guidebook entitled “The Welcome Book for the Young African Footballer” (*Le livret d'accueil du jeune footballeur africain*), to be distributed to professional football clubs in France in order to facilitate the integration of young football players into footballing life in Europe as well as to ensure awareness of their rights and the services available to them. Many young African footballers are lured to Europe with promises of money and glory only to end up exploited or abandoned. The International Organization for

Migration (IOM), a partner organisation in the project, welcomed the initiative and [reported](#) that earlier this year it had assisted 34 Ivorian adolescents who had been recruited in the south of Mali after their parents had been tricked into paying a rogue agent to bring them to Europe. *Culture Foot Solidaire* has been in direct contact with at least 800 young Africans in France abandoned by traffickers, middlemen and football clubs.

Violence against women migrant workers - Report of the UN Secretary-General

On 1 August this year, the General Assembly of the United Nations published its biennial report on [Violence against women migrant workers](#), which analyses activities of Member States. The report notes linkages between trafficking and violence against women migrants and the subject of trafficking in women and girls will be addressed separately in a report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. The need for gender-sensitive international migration policies that support the empowerment of female migrants is noted, including efforts to provide female migrants with independent residency permits, and further assessment of the effectiveness of general legislative and policy measures in the prevention and elimination of violence against women migrant workers. The report also highlights the need for Member States to ratify international instruments, particularly the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and concludes with a series of recommendations for future action.

Conference Report “Sex Work, Human Rights, Labour and Migration” (Brussels, 2005)



In 2005, a coalition of sex workers and activists from across Europe organised a conference with the concrete aim of developing a set of tools which could be used by sex workers to defend and extend their human, labour and migrant rights. The conference led to the formulation of a [Sex Workers' Manifesto](#), a [Declaration of the Rights of Sex Workers](#) and a list of demands and [recommendations](#) which were presented to the European Parliament. In late 2007, the [International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe](#) (ICRSE), set up especially for the purpose of this conference, published a conference report outlining how the conference idea and organisation came about and was implemented as well as detailing the development of ICRSE, now a Europe-wide network for sex workers' rights. The conference report is now available via the [ICRSE website](#).

Findings of a participatory research on the life and situation of child camel jockeys (2005)

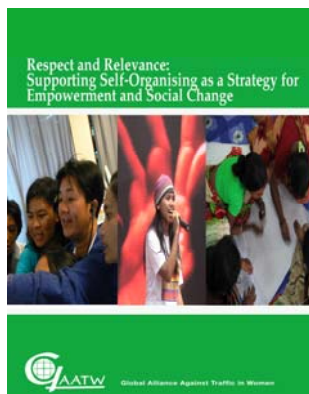


Trafficking of children for camel racing from Pakistan to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been going on for more than 30 years. [This research](#) from 2005 conducted by Save the Children Sweden and Pakistan Rural Workers' Social Welfare Organization is included in this LSI newsletter because despite the increasing awareness and concern, there have been very few initiatives to gather facts and investigate the issue in depth. The present research is unique in gathering data from repatriated children, who had returned to Pakistan after working as camel jockeys in the UAE and provides a detailed account of

the situation which the children faced at the hands of sheikhs, bedus or their cohorts. The information shows the severity of abuse and exploitation of children, which persists in the camel racing industry until today. It also gathers important information from other sources such as parents, caregivers, agents, and some adults

who had worked in the UAE as camel trainers and supervisors of camel farms. The research explains the modus operandi of trafficking mafia and identifies different groups of people involved in child trafficking and those who collaborate with traffickers at different levels. Its purpose is to provide facts and guidance for initiating intervention programmes aimed at combating child trafficking for camel racing.

Supporting Self-Organising as a Strategy for Empowerment and Social Change



A new [publication](#) by the Global Alliance against Traffic in Women documents information from GAATW's (self-organised) members and responds to the question of how self-organised groups contribute to empowerment and social change and how NGOs and donors can support them. GAATW comprises self-organised groups of trafficking survivors, migrant workers, domestic workers and sex workers, amongst others. On the basis of data collection through interviews and secondary analysis of GAATW materials, the report draws a series of conclusions and details needs and problems identified by the interviewees. It is found that NGOs and external stakeholders should critically reflect on their own assumptions and that donors, NGOs and external stakeholders must respect the boundaries of their own role, ultimately, as a supporter rather than as a driver of self-organising efforts.

What's happening where ?

13-15 February 2008. Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking, Austria Center, Vienna

The Vienna Forum to Fight Human Trafficking will take place at the United Nations Headquarters in Vienna from 13 to 15 February 2008. More than a thousand senior government and UN officials as well as private sector and civil society representatives are expected to participate in the Forum, which will focus on ways to effectively fight human trafficking. This event is part of the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking (UN.GIFT). LSI and [LEFÖ](#) (Austria) are planning to organise a side event.

The UN.GIFT was launched in March 2007 by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) together with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The discussions will focus on the three overriding themes of vulnerability, impact and action, which will be addressed in a number of plenary sessions and a series of interactive workshops. More information is available on the [UN.GIFT website](#).

What's on your mind ?

Bas de Visser and Maria de Cock work for the Dutch Foundation against Trafficking in Women (La Strada Netherlands). STV will reveal a name change at a conference celebrating its 20th anniversary.

Celebrating 20 years of STV: a plea for supporting trafficked persons to organise themselves

The Dutch Foundation against Trafficking in Women (STV), one of the nine member organisations of the La Strada network and co-founder of the La Strada programme in 1995, is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Maybe this is not really a reason for celebration, which is why we named the anniversary conference (organised together with the Dutch Ministry of Justice) "*Human trafficking: more actual than ever*". Despite the fact that much has happened over the last 20 years, trafficking in human beings is unfortunately still a daily practice.

At the conference, we want to look in particular at how trafficked persons can cooperate with the Dutch government without having to press charges and discuss the improvement of cooperation among all key actors within the (Dutch) anti-trafficking framework. Given the focus on alliance and cooperation work, we

want to discuss the issues at hand with a wide range of organisations and have therefore invited representatives of the Office of the Dutch National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, the police, NGOs, representatives of law enforcement and the judiciary, the immigration services and social support services, including shelters.

We believe it is necessary that all key actors in the anti-trafficking field have the opportunity to join the discussions, especially now that pressing charges against their traffickers is no longer a strict precondition for persons who have been trafficked to the Netherlands to receive a residence permit. Undoubtedly, new cooperation agreements must be made, promises and commitments are necessary and workable solutions should follow. However, one important group is absent from this debate, namely, trafficked persons themselves. What does this say about the situation in the Netherlands? Why do we not succeed in giving a voice to trafficked persons? At the end of 2003, a self-organisation of trafficked persons was established in the Netherlands: *Atalantas* works for - and was set up by - persons trafficked into the sex industry in the Netherlands. The aim of *Atalantas* was to prevent anti-trafficking measures to be taken without their voice being heard, but we hear little from them today.

How did this happen? Has it been impossible for trafficked persons to unite themselves and raise their voice because the protection of their rights is still insufficiently ensured? It appears that trafficked persons often have to move from one place to another, having to change their contact details and telephone numbers and having to start all over again, trying to reintegrate, settle or generally rebuild their lives. How many opportunities do they actually have to rebuild their lives here and to really organise themselves and stand strong together? Or is it perhaps the existing stigma, preventing them to do so? Once you present yourself to the outside world as a trafficked person, you will remain to be a trafficked person for the rest of your life, whether you want to or not. This will affect your life in different ways, especially your career. To be continually confronted with the fact that you were once a victim of exploitation, that you worked in prostitution or another sector where you were exploited, is a difficult - and for many an undesirable - situation.

However, the existence of a self-organisation of trafficked persons is very important so as to give a voice to the group for which we advocate so hard - to get them support and ensure their rights are protected. Such an organisation would help us enormously - in being more effective and more careful in our work and in working towards solutions that are better tailored to the persons they are intended to support. We believe it is a serious lack that there is currently no active organisation representing trafficked persons. Even though cooperation efforts amongst key actors in the anti-trafficking field are extremely important, maybe a more pressing issue that we should be even more concerned about is this lack of self-organisation - and our efforts should concentrate on how to solve it.

In 2007 - 2008, La Strada International receives its main structural financial support from the Dutch Foundations DOEN, ICCO and CORDAID and the Sigrid Rausing Trust. 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](#).