

Women should not pay the price of the global economic crisis **La Strada International statement women's day 2010**



Today, 8th of March, women all over the world celebrate international women's day and claim their rights. La Strada International, the European anti-trafficking network welcomes the United Nation's theme for International Women's Day 2010: **Equal rights, equal opportunities: Progress for all.**

The call for gender equality is of extreme importance, especially now in times that the world faces the impact of the economic crisis. The existing economic, political and social structures have failed to provide equal and just opportunities for women. This unequal power balance is likely to increase due to the financial crisis. Historically, economical recessions have placed a disproportionate burden on women. Women are more likely than men to be in vulnerable jobs, to be under-employed or without a job, and to have limited access to and control over economic and financial resources and to lack social protection. Labour rights defenders and women's rights organisations alike have expressed their growing concern that the crisis could create even greater inequalities or undermine women's acquired rights.

While the economic recession worsens the already weak social and economic position of women in countries of origin, it also has its devastating effect on the situation of female migrant workers. It is generally known that in times of economic downturns migrant workers are among the most vulnerable. Reduced overall demand for labour has its effect on the job opportunities for migrant workers as well as their terms and conditions of work. Economic instability and insecure labour market can also lead to xenophobia and discrimination against migrant workers and their families. Countries of destination are likely to introduce more restrictive labour migration policies.

Without proper measures, the economic recession will lead to an increase in trafficking in human beings, as it creates a perfect breeding ground for abuse and exploitation of women; increased unemployment, poverty and gender inequality in countries of origin, reduced regular labour demand, xenophobia and restrictive labour migration policies in the countries of destination.

La Strada International calls upon governments and the international community to seize the opportunity to reform the traditional structures that have brought us this crisis and make fundamental changes in power balances between countries, between employers and employees and between men and women.

Equal rights, equal opportunities and progress for all are not only to be achieved out of solidarity but because without equality there is no prospect to sustainable global prosperity. The current crisis is the ultimate proof. Economic recovery or sustainable development needs the full empowerment and integration of women in all levels of economic, social and cultural activities.

The chances for fundamental change can only be made if the following preconditions for women's rights and empowerment and migrants rights protection are taken into account in both short-term and long-term measures.

- ◆ Ensure that the gains in women's empowerment and gender equality in the last few decades are not put in danger by implementing mechanisms to mitigate the negative effects of the crisis on women.
- ◆ Take into account the gender perspectives in relation to the impacts of the crisis on education, security, employment creation and investments in social infrastructure.
- ◆ Monitor the application of labour laws to migrant workers in order to ensure that legal conditions of work are respected and the rights established are protected.
- ◆ Prevent and combat all forms of hostility and discrimination against regular and irregular migrant workers.
- ◆ Avoid short-term and populist solutions such as repressive labour migration policies. Labour demand in specific sectors and occupations should be taken into account.
- ◆ Countries of origin should expand efforts to create decent work opportunities at home and to incorporate returning migrants into these efforts.