



LA STRADA INTERNATIONAL NGO PLATFORM STATEMENT

Ahead of the vote in the European Parliament on the Report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality (2013/2103(INI))

La Strada International (LSI), the European NGO Network against Trafficking in Human Beings, and its partners in the *LSI NGO Platform - united against trafficking in human beings*¹, strongly oppose the report by the FEMM committee, prepared by Rapporteur Mary Honeyball, which calls for criminalisation of clients of sex workers (the so-called “Swedish model”) as the only prostitution policy that successfully combats human trafficking and protects the rights of trafficked persons.

The partners of the LSI NGO Platform have supported many women and men who were trafficked in the sex industry in the past nearly two decades. We know from experience that criminalisation does not solve any of the problems that our clients face, nor does it prevent or stop human trafficking.

Criminalisation stigmatises and marginalises both domestic and migrant sex workers and it deprives them of the tools to protect themselves from violence and seek redress. It drives the sex industry even more underground, which results in less access to health, social and legal assistance for sex workers, and significantly lower chances to identify individuals who have been trafficked.

We do acknowledge that the sex industry is one of the economic sectors in which human trafficking occurs, as it does in many other industries, in particular those where workers are invisible, unprotected, excluded and disempowered. Therefore, we believe that sex workers rights organisations, just as trade unions, are important allies in the efforts to protect workers from exploitation, violence and abuse and to prevent trafficking in human beings.

By equating sex work to trafficking in persons, the very complex phenomenon of human trafficking is narrowed down to a moral issue, an approach that fails to address the economic, political and social root causes of trafficking. Moreover, by doing so, trafficked persons in all other industries are not recognised and remain unprotected.

¹ *The LSI NGO Platform - United against trafficking in Europe* aims to strengthen the cooperation in Europe (EU and Non-EU) among civil society organisations combining practical work with trafficked persons and affected groups with political advocacy for human rights based policies to eradicate trafficking in human beings

The conflation of sex work and trafficking in persons leads to inadequate counter-trafficking policies and to counter-productive prostitution policies. The two issues are both complex and need their own individual approach and policy.

Furthermore, it leads to a polarisation in the international counter-trafficking debate, which takes away the focus from what is needed now the most: the protection of the rights of those who have been exploited, violated and abused.

The partners of the *LSI NGO Platform - united against trafficking in human beings*, therefore call on Members of the European Parliament to vote against Ms Honeyball's report on sexual exploitation and prostitution and to support the Alternative Motion for a Resolution on Sexual exploitation and prostitution and its impact on gender equality.

La Strada International

LEFÖ, Austria

Gender Perspectives, Belarus

PAG-ASA, Belgium

Animus Association, Bulgaria

La Strada Czech Republic

Open Gate, Macedonia

La Strada Moldova

CoMensha, the Netherlands

La Strada Poland

Astra, Serbia

La Strada Ukraine