



**La Strada International statement for International Women's Day 2014,  
"Equality for women is progress for all"**

On 8 March 2014, International Women's Day, La Strada international, the European network against trafficking in human beings, calls for full empowerment and integration of women in all levels of economic, social and cultural activities.

Trafficking in human beings is not a gender-neutral phenomenon. Violence against women, stereotypical gender roles and gender discrimination on the labour market together act as root causes of human trafficking. The social position of women in the majority of La Strada countries is characterised by unequal power relations between men and women and by the high prevalence of domestic violence. This situation impacts women's economic position, as the latter is affected by a lack of equal opportunities in the labour market and the corresponding feminisation of poverty, that forces women to migrate. They are more likely to accept promising job offers in other countries, which could put them in a position in which they are vulnerable to exploitation, violence and abuse.

While the economic recession has aggravated the already weak social and economic position of women in countries of origin, it also has its devastating effect on the situation of women migrant workers. Reduced overall demand for labour has an effect on both the job opportunities for migrant workers as well as the terms and conditions of work. At the same time, reduced demand for labour results in perceived or actual competition with nationals can be seized upon to spur xenophobia and discrimination against migrant workers and their families. Countries of destination are likely to introduce more restrictive labour migration policies.

Although some of the sectors where women migrant workers are overrepresented, such as health and domestic service, have not seen the same reduction of demand as for example construction and manufacture, in which men are often employed, the informality of sectors women work in, their often irregular or temporary status makes them very vulnerable to the effects of the economic crisis.

Now that the world is struggling its way out of the economic crisis, 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 for 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.

Improving and promoting women's rights will not lead to instant successes, but it is the only way to create a long-lasting new equilibrium in world society in which women are free from violence, exploitation and abuse and empowered to determine their own futures.