

## A Refuge for the Trafficked

*"We live in a world where the unequal distribution of wealth is a reality." - La Strada, Trafficking in Human beings and Forced Labor Report*

In such a world it is quite apparent that the movement of persons from poor to better off countries is also a reality. Especially when restrictive migration policies, meant to deter individuals, force these very individuals into finding more flexible and less legal alternatives.

The situation of Trafficking in the Czech Republic has grown steadily since the fall of communism in the early 90's, but fortunately so has awareness. The term trafficking itself has been stretched in the public consciousness, as well as legal terrain, to include any person who has been coerced with the intention of exploitation - female, male and child.

This feat has been largely accomplished by NGO's, like La Strada, that deal on an everyday basis with Human trafficking. La Strada was established in 1995 as a trilateral anti-trafficking project, and the Czech La Strada is one of the oldest members of this international network. Currently La Strada operates in nine European countries: the Netherlands, Poland, Bulgaria, Belarus, Moldova, Macedonia, Bosnia & Herzegovina and the Ukraine.

Here in the Czech Republic La Strada plays an important role in combating the trafficking of human beings. For the victims of trafficking, La Strada offers assistance in many forms. It provides them with temporary and anonymous accommodation, food and clothing, legal and medical assistance, rehabilitation, consultations and financial support. "At the moment we have four social workers, two shelters, capacity of about 7 rooms - 1 room for men - but we are mostly dealing with women," says an anonymous worker. "We have also just started a helpline for Vietnamese victims."

Beyond working with those who have been trafficked, much of La Strada's work deals with advocacy and prevention. La Strada provides educational information for young people in their last years of elementary and secondary school, as well as for "high risk groups", such as young people living in institutional care, sex workers, persons living in socially excluded localities, and migrants living in or coming to the Czech Republic. "We distribute a lot of information and objects like make-up holders with our helpline on it, you know things which are discreet."

La Strada, also cooperates with other NGO's in the Czech Republic such as *Rozkoš bez rizika*, the IOM, and occasionally the Czech government. They generate research, publications and hold seminars to bring awareness and advocacy for victims. "The key priority of our work is to focus on the importance of improving the position of (potentially) trafficked persons and to promote their

universal rights, including the right to choose to emigrate and work abroad and to be protected from violence and abuse.”

Currently La Strada has a series of projects, one of which involves the issue of forced labor, as it is akin to modern day slavery and should be addressed under the umbrage of Human trafficking.

If you are anyone you know is in need of help, you can contact La Strada on their SOS/info line.

For more information go to the NGO's website at [www.lastrada.cz](http://www.lastrada.cz)

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