



GRETA

Action against Trafficking in Human beings



Event on the occasion of the 50th plenary meeting and 15th anniversary of the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)

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How could the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention be strengthened at national level through independent national monitoring mechanisms and lobbying by civil society ?

First of all, on behalf of La Strada International I want to congratulate GRETA with its 15th anniversary celebration, and we are very pleased to be present during this important event.

As a European Network NGO, with 25 members and 5 associate members in 24 European countries we experience first-hand and on a daily basis the importance of GRETA's work in monitoring governmental compliance with the CoE convention.

We have seen that GRETA's work is at its best when it is able to build on a wide variety of information sources, not only governmental input but also from civil society and national monitoring mechanisms.

GRETA goes the extra mile to engage with civil society on a country's performance. It considers the shadow reports with great attention and civil society are the first invited to speak with the GRETA delegation during country visits. This is why we, at La Strada International, strongly encourage NGOs to submit shadow reports and to engage with GRETA as their advocacy, gaps and challenges will certainly be considered.

As civil society organisations, working directly with trafficked persons and seeing the challenges in realizing their rights and the victim-centred approach on a daily basis, it is extremely important to work together and to share our common voice, since our voice may be soft when we speak alone but will be loud and strong when speaking together.

And this is not only true for civil societies working together across countries, like LSI does, but also within countries, to have a strong national civil society voice. Many of our members have set up joint NGO groups either ad hoc around GRETA monitoring or structurally (examples of which being the Strategic Council on Human Trafficking in the Netherlands in which 13 civil society organisations are represented, and who submit together their findings to GRETA and the UK Anti-Trafficking Monitoring Group about which James from ASI will likely tell more about).

GRETA truly listens to NGOs and oftentimes our concerns find their way into GRETA reports. The 'back-up of the GRETA report' in turn helps us in our advocacy and lobby for better rights and protection at the national level to hold governments to account.

GRETA reports are not only instrumental to monitor the compliance in a particular country, but have also been extremely useful in comparisons and the sharing of good practices by other countries. We have used the GRETA reports for example to highlight best practices in different countries related to access to residence and unconditional support, as well as for compensation.

It is not only relevant what is written by GRETA on the country itself, but GRETA reports can also be used, by sharing good practices of other countries, example REST research on access to residence, where we often referred to the Convention and best practices in different countries related to access to residence and unconditional support. Same for compensation.

Finally I want to stress that, to ensure the proper implementation of the CoE Convention, independent monitoring mechanisms are key. Civil society can address challenges and concerns, but these might be set aside on premises of bias or subjectiveness. Yet independent monitoring mechanisms, like national rapporteurs, can exceed this, due to their position. Therefore, to balance the arguments given by governments and civil society and to validate them on their merits, independent monitoring mechanisms are key. This is why we regret that in the recast EU THB Directive, EUMS have now lobbied for wording that focus more on “national coordination” making independent Rapporteurs more an optional instrument, while we would strongly call for independent rapporteurs.

What emerging issues of concern should be monitored as a priority by GRETA?

As La Strada International we have provided input for each of the monitoring rounds, with input from our members. For the upcoming round we have advocated among others to look into the vulnerability of refugees and specific groups, which we are happy is now a focus.

Other important issues we think need more rigorous attention is data on rights granted to victims (for example access to residence, the reflection period, et cetera), which we have addressed in our reaction for the 4th monitoring round. We had asked for more focus also on Dublin returns. When we look at LSI’s identified priorities, we would also be happy with more information collection by GRETA on recruitment schemes/recruitment agencies, non-punishment, and compensation.

Further, we think it is important for GRETA to monitor the way governments treat and engages with NGOs in the field as we witness an increasing shrinking space for NGOs. The monitoring should focus on whether and how governments work with NGO’s, are they taken their voice (seriously) into account, do they fund NGOs, do they allow them to be critical watch dogs, in line with article 35 of the Convention.¹ This is relevant in countries where NGOs face many challenges and shrinking space including in countries like Belarus, but also Ukraine, Turkey, Serbia, Bosnia etc. We will soon publish a report on shrinking space, based on interviews with our members and desk research, which might be instrumental in this regard.

In general, we see that the anti-trafficking field becomes an increasingly crowded space, resulting in much competition at the national level from INGOs and also an increase of new religious based NGOs

¹: *“Co-operation with civil society Each Party shall encourage state authorities and public officials, to co-operate with nongovernmental organisations, other relevant organisations and members of civil society, in establishing strategic partnerships with the aim of achieving the purpose of this Convention”.*

who wish to work closely with law enforcement without engaging (sufficiently) with the existing NGOs, which is at times concerning.

GRETA should also remain concerned with new forms of THB, or the forms/sectors of which little is known.

Finally, the reflection period and on strategic litigation and plea bargaining, which are issues that GRETA has regularly highlighted as important, could possibly get more attention in GRETA's reports.