



**Subscribe!**

**January 2020**

Dear friends,

Greetings from Bangkok and Happy New Year!

This year will see increased international activism around women's rights and gender equality: it is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (BPfA) and the fifth year since the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the 64<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March, states will review the implementation of the BPfA and the outcomes of the [23rd special session of the General Assembly](#). This will include 'an assessment of current challenges that affect the implementation of the Platform for Action and the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and its contribution towards the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.' You can find the over 160 national-level and five regional-level reviews on [UN Women's website](#).

Two '[Generation Equality](#)' forums will be organised, in Mexico City in May and Paris in July. These will be civil society-centred, multi-stakeholder, global gatherings convened by UN Women to 'take stock of progress and set an agenda of concrete action to realize gender equality before 2030.' The events will culminate at the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly in September when the UN will officially commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BPfA.

This spotlight on women's rights and gender equality is most welcome - and long overdue - given the increasing strength of the movement against so-called 'gender ideology' in many countries (see this short video explanation by Sonia Correa for CREA, [part 1](#) and [part 2](#)), as well as the concerted [efforts at the UN level](#) by the United States and other governments to restrict women's reproductive health and rights. Given this, and the current nationalist, conservative context in many parts of the world, it is unclear how ambitious and transformative the outcomes of this year's events will be. We attended the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on the BPfA Regional Review and were disappointed with the weak language and lack of strong commitment to gender equality (see [a press release by the Asia-Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development](#)).

Part of civil society is divided too - specifically on the issue of sex work - just as it was in Beijing in 1995. In October, a number of individuals and organisations suggested that UN Women [is siding with sex worker rights advocates](#) because several members of the civil society advisory group to the Generation Equality Forum support the decriminalisation of sex work. This suggestion is incorrect, as the committee who selected the advisors [clarified later](#). Informally, we heard that there were tensions and disrespectful behaviour towards sex worker rights advocates at the Europe regional review of BPfA (unlike in Asia-Pacific, where discussions and participants were respectful and inclusive of sex workers). Unfortunately, these bitter divisions have been around for decades and are likely to have a negative impact on the activities and outcomes throughout the year - because divided we fall.

We will keep our members updated of opportunities to be involved in these events and we'll share any news we receive through our members and partners. As for us in the Secretariat, we

will need to prioritise, at least in the first six months of the year, getting our team on to the same page so we can give our new strategic plan the energy and attention it needs. Three of our team members - Alfie Gordo, Leah Sullivan and Chus Álvarez - left us at the end of last year, after having worked with us for between four and fifteen years, to pursue other life projects. We are extremely grateful for their immense contribution to the Alliance and were sad to say goodbye to them. We also welcomed three new colleagues and are going to welcome four more by the end of March. We are excited about the enlargement of our team, and the fresh ideas that new colleagues will bring. But we will need to invest some time to build cohesiveness within the team, and ensure that our new colleagues receive the induction and support they need to enable them to support the Alliance in the best possible way.

This year begins the implementation of our new five-year strategic plan. One of its main goals is to ensure that anti-trafficking and labour migration discourse and initiatives take into account systemic and context-specific factors and keep the human and labour rights of working class people at their core. This goal cannot be achieved without strong and well-coordinated social justice movements that engage in participatory analyses of socio political and economic realities and strive to change it by organising people. To realise this goal GAATW-IS will step up our Feminist Participatory Action Research programme with members and partners in various regions, organise inter-movement and inter-sectoral knowledge sharing forums and focus on grounded advocacy efforts. We will scale up our communications, with more regular publication of opinions and blogs on current issues, and better use of audio-visual materials. We will publish two issues of the *Anti-Trafficking Review* - under the theme of 'Technology, Anti-Trafficking, and Speculative Futures' in April and 'Everyday Abuse in the Global Economy' in September. The second Knowledge-Sharing Forum on Women, Work and Migration will be held in July 2020. In other words, this year will see us working much more closely with members and partners and supporting national and local level-initiatives while linking it to the global. In the coming months, the IS team will reach out to members and partners around the world to plan collaborative initiatives.

We look forward to an exciting new year with you all!

As always we welcome your feedback and contributions to future issues at [borislav@gaatw.org](mailto:borislav@gaatw.org).



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## News from the GAATW International Secretariat

### GAATW 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary

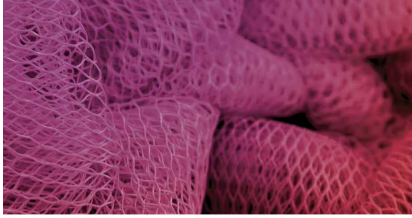


As many of you may know, GAATW was founded in 1994 by a group of feminists engaged in the international activism around violence against women and women's human rights. Since then, the Alliance has grown to a membership of more than 80 NGOs worldwide and has established itself as a leading voice in the anti-trafficking arena that advocates for the protection of the rights of migrant and trafficked women, and accountability of state and non-state actors who implement anti-trafficking initiatives.

To mark our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we published a [booklet](#) where 25 close allies of GAATW - Board members, former staff, representatives of member and partner NGOs and independent experts - share memories about their engagement with the Alliance, and reflect on developments in the migrant rights and anti-trafficking fields over the last 25 years. [Read on...](#)

**New report: *What a Way to Make a Living: Violence and harassment faced by women migrant workers in Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Guatemala and Mexico***

This report is based on research with 172 women migrant workers who spoke to eight of our LAC member organisations. Most of the women worked in the garment



*¡Menuda manera  
de ganarnos la vida!*

MUJERES MIGRANTES CONTRA LA VIOLENCIA Y EL ACOSO  
EN EL MUNDO DEL TRABAJO EN ARGENTINA, BRASIL,  
PERÚ, COLOMBIA, GUATEMALA Y MÉXICO



(*maquila*), domestic, service, sex and hawking sectors. The aim of the research was to explore gender-based violence in the world of work from the perspective of women migrant workers.

The research found that women migrant workers across the continent endure extreme violence in order to be able to provide for their families. They reported experiencing a spectrum of violence and discrimination, enabled by a culture of *machismo*, racism and xenophobia and an entrenched neoliberal capitalist economy. This is creating a 'new normal' of permanent precarity through a lack of social coverage, poverty wages, exploitative working conditions and job insecurity.

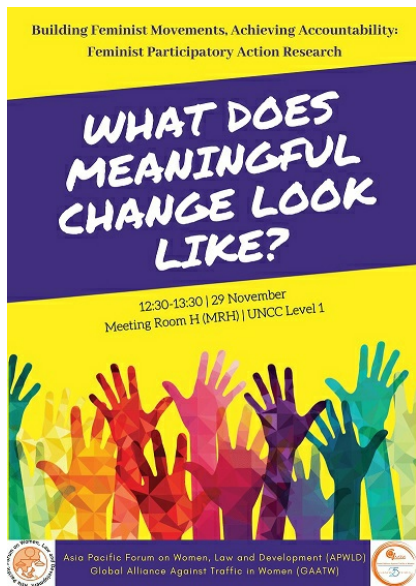
The research findings are evidence that exploitation and violations of labour rights are not an aberration of our economic system, but are integrated into the neoliberal, patriarchal economic paradigm, and breaking the cycle of

exploitation requires a transformative feminist and worker-centred approach.

The research identified actions for change and these will be developed by each organisation together with the research participants. These actions are varied and were defined in line with the reality of each country and labour sector, as well as the demands of the migrant workers who participated in the research.

Read the executive summary in English [here](#) and the separate country reports in Spanish [here](#).

### Side events at Asia-Pacific Beijing+25 Review



The Beijing+25 Asia-Pacific review meetings took place in Bangkok at the end of November with a formal inter-governmental meeting (IGM) on 27-29 November, preceded by the CSO Forum (24-26 November). GAATW organised side-events in both meetings, partnering with APWLD and Mahila Kisan Adhikar Manch (MAKAAM) respectively.

At the CSO Forum, our side event focused on "*Addressing gender-based violence in the world of work: Experiences of Women Workers in the Informal Economy*". Workshop participants discussed how the current models of development have eroded community control and decision-making over traditional natural resources, forcing both men and women into distress migration. At the same time, informality has crept into formal work sectors so that decent work conditions no longer exist for most women workers, and the vulnerabilities faced by women in informal sector is now experienced even by those in the

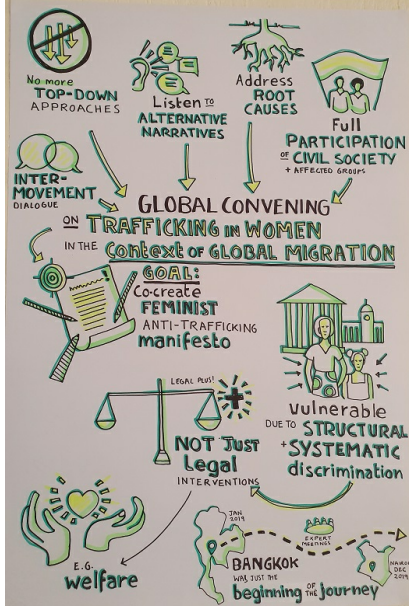
formal sector.

When reflecting on women's experiences of resisting physical and economic violence, the group noted that ground-up, community-based organising is increasingly taking place across Asia where women are building feminist movements to fight displacement, dispossession, and GBV. Three key points from the side-event emerged ... [Read on...](#)

### Second Global Convening on Trafficking in Women in the Context of Global Migration

In early December, the International Women's Rights Action Watch - Asia Pacific (IWRAP-AP), together with GAATW and FEMNET, organised this second Global Convening. The aim of the convening was to 1) analyse the structural causes of trafficking as a violation of women's human rights located at the intersections of gender, migration, development and labour, and 2) highlight positive and negative examples of anti-trafficking laws and policies and their implementation.

GAATW-IS participated actively by organising two sessions at the meeting. The first one focused on the experiences



of women from South Asia and Africa migrating for domestic work to the Middle East and was based on recent GAATW research. The speakers, from our members OKUP (Bangladesh) and WOREC (Nepal), project partner Amel Foundation (Lebanon) and independent consultant Nkirote Laiboni (Kenya), highlighted the root causes of this migration as lack of economic opportunities in the home country, pressure from family members, and the need to escape domestic violence, among others. In the Middle East, domestic workers are severely constrained by the labour migration regime and practically at the mercy of their employers. This creates an environment conducive to labour rights violations and human trafficking. All speakers agreed that in both origin and destination countries the authorities lack the willingness and capacity to identify cases of trafficking or assist abused migrant and trafficked women... [Read on...](#)

## News from our Member Organisations

### Justice at Last - European Campaign to promote access to compensation

On 18 October 2019, La Strada International (LSI) and its members called upon all European elected representatives and European governments to implement a [6-point action plan](#) to ensure access to compensation for victims of crime, in particular trafficked and exploited persons.

The same day LSI together with PICUM organised a [side event](#) linked with the 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Council of Europe (CoE) Committee of the Parties. Lilana Keith, Senior Advocacy officer of PICUM, Vassilis Kerasiotis, Country Director for the Greece Office of HIAS who represented the victims in the Chowdury v. Greece case, and Suzanne Hoff of LSI highlighted a number of legal, procedural, financial and practical barriers that still hinder the access of trafficked and exploited persons to effective remedies, including compensation.

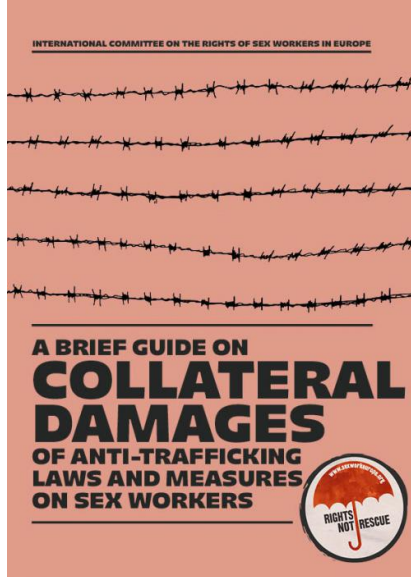


In 2019, the Council of Europe started its third monitoring round, which has a specific focus on [access to remedies](#). A number of provisions of the CoE Anti-Trafficking Convention establishing substantive and procedural obligations are relevant to this topic. Access to justice and effective remedies must be guaranteed to all victims of trafficking, irrespective of their immigration status or presence on the national territory and notwithstanding their capacity or willingness to cooperate in any criminal investigation. It is hoped that the monitoring will encourage CoE Member States to take more action on ensuring access to remedies. [Read on...](#)

### Collateral damages of anti-trafficking laws and measures on sex workers

On 18 October, EU Day against Trafficking in Human Beings, the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) published its new resource: '[A brief guide on collateral damages of anti-trafficking laws and measures on sex workers](#)'.

Sex workers' rights, migrants' rights and anti-trafficking organisations have for many years drawn attention to some of the negative impacts of anti-trafficking discourses, policies, laws and practices on the human and labour rights of sex workers. Raids, detention, forced rehabilitation, diversion of funding and denial of sex



workers' agency are all - consequences of the current anti-trafficking framework. Major anti-trafficking (umbrella) organisations such as GAATW and La Strada International have joined the sex worker rights movement in calling for a labour-rights and victim-centred approach to anti-trafficking. [Read on...](#)

### Access to justice for Bangladeshi migrant workers

In 2018, more than 730,000 Bangladeshi migrant workers travelled abroad, with over 80% travelling to eight Middle Eastern countries. These migrants make vital

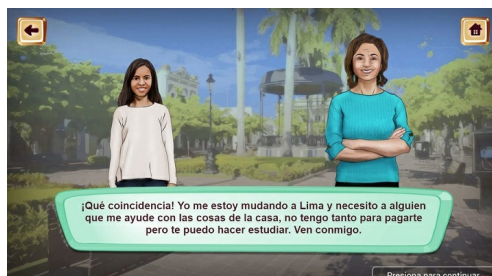


contributors to the Bangladesh economy, contributing approximately USD 15 billion in remittances in 2018 alone, making up almost 10% of Bangladesh's GDP. The number of women migrant workers has been growing every year and in 2018, over 13% of the total overseas migrants from Bangladesh were women. Remittances from women migrant workers have become increasingly important to Bangladesh, with evidence showing that women remit a higher percent of their income compared to men. Furthermore, overseas migration can offer women opportunities to contribute to their households, and in some cases gain more respect and influence in family and community decision making, thus contributing to their empowerment more broadly.

Despite the comprehensive labour migration framework, every year thousands of Bangladeshi migrants, particularly women and girls, face exploitation, abuse and corruption both through the recruitment process in Bangladesh and in the hands of overseas recruitment agents and employers. [This new research paper](#) by Oviyashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP), based on 110 cases of migrant women and girls who survived abuse and exploitation, aims to highlight the challenges and barriers to justice they face following migration to the Middle East for domestic work.

The report concludes with clear recommendations to improve the current justice system for migrant workers facing abuse and exploitation in the migration cycle.

### Campaigns to raise awareness of human trafficking in Peru



In October, CHS Alternativo (Peru) launched the campaign "[Don't Turn Your Back on Me](#)" to raise awareness about human trafficking for exploitation in domestic work. The campaign runs in Lima, Cusco, Puno, Loreto and Madre de Dios. Through videos and radio spots, an interactive online game, and participation in local fairs, more than 350,000 people learnt more about this issue and identified the actions that constitute it and where and how to

report it.

In Peru, trafficking for domestic work occurs mainly among women. There are approximately 378,000 women domestic workers in the country; of them, 27% are young, 33% have only completed primary school and 14.4% cannot read or write. Due to the often-informal status of domestic work, the lack of established minimum wages, and the lack of labour inspection, domestic workers are especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking. [Read on...](#)

### Impact of digital technology on social protection and human rights of migrant workers

At the 74<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights Philip Alston submitted a [thematic report](#) on digital technology, social protection and human rights, compiled from 50 reports sent in from around the world.

Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), Singapore, contributed [a detailed report](#) on how digitisation in Singapore, which the government promotes strongly, has knock-on effects that can undermine social protection for migrant workers, a large and vulnerable population.

When processes are digitised, members of the public need sufficient digital literacy and appropriate devices to interact with these processes. Low-wage workers may not have the economic resources to acquire the necessary devices like scanners and computers. Nor do manual workers spend enough time with computers to acquire the necessary digital literacy. Low-wage migrant workers are further disadvantaged because many digital interfaces are in English, a foreign language with which they have low verbal fluency and even lower reading/writing skills.

Moreover, to interact with many processes, one must have an electronic identity (so-called SingPass in Singapore), without which they can't even enter the digitised system. Work Permit holders are not issued SingPasses. Finally, some processes involve payment, and for that, one must have a credit card or a debit card. Having a bank account is still not universal for migrant workers. Even if they are keen on that, they cannot open an account unless their employer signs off on it - something required by many banks. (Source: [TWC2 website](#))

### ASTRA Crowdfunding Campaign



In late September, ASTRA, Serbia announced the launch of a [crowdfunding campaign](#) titled 'Let's show them that #TheyAreNotAlone: Urgent assistance to victims of trafficking and their children'. The campaign was launched on 30 October on the Donation.rs platform.

The total amount of funds ASTRA aimed to raise was RSD 350,000 (around USD 3,300), which was necessary to meet the needs of victims of trafficking and their

children supported by the organisation, identified by them as the most urgent: child and adult hygiene packages, shoes and clothing, food, firewood, medical expenses, ID processing costs, education, job placement courses and training, work tools, home appliances, transportation costs and school snacks. In the 40 days that the campaign ran, ASTRA collected a total of RSD 414,920 (around USD 3,900) - almost RSD 65,000 more than expected. The campaign ended on 10 December, International Human Rights Day, and the assistance was distributed throughout December and January.

This was the first local fundraising campaign that ASTRA has implemented, and it intends to continue with these and similar ways of ensuring assistance for victims of trafficking in the future.

[Read all news from GAATW members!](#)

If you'd like to contribute to this e-Bulletin, please contact [borislav@gaatw.org](mailto:borislav@gaatw.org)

[www.gaatw.org](http://www.gaatw.org)

## Resources

[Sex workers can tell you why sex work is work - speak to them](#)

*Borislav Gerasimov*

In this blog piece, Borislav from GAATW-IS shares about why the organisation stands in solidarity with sex workers and supports their organising efforts. This solidarity came about because the women who founded the Alliance in the 1990s spoke with and listened to sex workers. Furthermore, GAATW believes that women are better able to challenge power and bring about change when they organise and collectively analyse their situation. This is as true for sex workers as it is for Indigenous, Dalit, migrant or trafficked women, farmers, domestic workers, and hawkers. In all its work, GAATW-IS attempts to build bridges among women working in different sectors and foster inter-movement dialogue and learning.

[Trafficking: A Development Approach](#)

*Prabha Kotiswaran*

Trafficking is considered to be an urgent problem of global proportions warranting a robust transnational legal response. Almost twenty years since the adoption of the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking, scholars, activists and governments alike have debated criminal law, human rights and labour law approaches to the problem. With the incorporation of trafficking in the Sustainable Development Goals, this article goes beyond these conventional approaches to argue for a development approach to trafficking. It suggests that SDG 8 cannot be achieved by rehashing older debates on development in the key of trafficking. Instead, we must account for the expanding welfare functions of the postcolonial developmental state, reimagine labour laws from the vantage point of the informal economy and protect and enforce indigenous responses to extreme exploitation rather than exacerbate the negative externalities of a carceral approach in developing world contexts where the criminal justice system is built on a colonial edifice.

### [Mobile women and mobile phones: Women migrant workers's use of information and communication technologies in ASEAN](#)

*International Labour Organization*

This study finds that most women migrant workers in ASEAN use their phone for social networking, and it highlights opportunities for governments, unions, employers, and civil society to harness women's current use of social networking apps and mobile connectivity. Women migrant workers' use of mobile phones can enhance migrant organising, access to information on safe migration, and access to services, including in response to violence. The study finds, however, that the development of apps for smartphone use does not represent a panacea to the challenges that women migrant workers face. Not only are there numerous factors that impinge on women migrant workers' access to and current capacity to use mobile technology, but also significant structural barriers exist in terms of governmental and non-governmental capacity and infrastructure to maintain, monitor, and meet women migrant workers' needs, and to ensure safety through the use of any apps they establish.

### [Organising precarious workers: a view from the south](#)

*Ronaldo Munck*

The workers of the world face numerous challenges. Many debates around the future of labour, such as the rise of the so called 'gig economy', tend to focus on experiences and trends within the Global North. The shortcomings of the present are often contrasted to a nostalgic view of the past, with an idealised 'golden era' defined by 'standard employment contracts' serving as the primary benchmark against which practices today are measured. Once work is defined in these terms, the primary focus becomes the 'restoration' of labour rights and protections that have been lost or eroded. The re-invention of a vibrant global labour movement will not occur through a vain attempt to put the clock back to a mythical 'standard employment contract'. It is only through organising - recruiting, educating and mobilising - new members that labour can reinvent itself as a social movement. ...

### [Public attitudes towards migrant workers in Japan, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand](#)

*International Labour Organization*

This study surveyed 4,099 nationals of the four countries to assess public attitudes towards migrant workers. The findings indicate that support for migrant workers has decreased overall since the previous such study in 2010. Where there is public support for migrants, it is largely driven by the relationships people have with migrant workers, rather than demographic characteristics. Knowledge regarding migrant workers across the four countries remains low, and discriminatory attitudes prevail with significant numbers of members of the public stating that migrant workers should not enjoy equal working conditions with nationals. However, the findings also show support for policies that address gender equality, violence against women, and problems in women dominant job sectors. Respondents largely agreed that care work and sex work should be recognised as professions, and that women migrant workers should receive maternity leave.

### [Community-Based Responses to Negative Health Impacts of Sexual Humanitarian Anti-Trafficking Policies and the Criminalization of Sex Work and Migration in the US](#)

*Heidi Hoefinger et al.*

Due to their stigmatised status, sex workers and people with trafficking experiences often struggle to access affordable, unbiased, and supportive health care. This paper uses thematic analysis of qualitative data from in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork with 50 migrant sex workers and trafficked persons, as well as 20 key informants, in New York and Los Angeles. It highlights the work of trans-specific and sex worker-led initiatives that are internally addressing gaps in health care and the negative health consequences that result from anti-trafficking interventions that include policing, arrest, court-involvement, court-mandated social services, incarceration, and immigration detention. The authors argue that these

grassroots community-based efforts are a survival-oriented reaction to the harms of criminalisation and a response to vulnerabilities left unattended by mainstream to protection and service provision that frame sex work itself as the problem. Peer-to-peer interventions such as these create solidarity and resiliency within marginalised communities, which act as protective buffers against institutionalised systemic violence and the resulting negative health outcomes. Broader public health support and funding for community-led health initiatives are needed to reduce barriers to health care resulting from stigma, criminalisation, and ineffective anti-trafficking efforts.

### ["Digital welfare state": big tech allowed to target and surveil the poor, UN is warned](#)

*Ed Pilkington, The Guardian*

Nations around the world are "stumbling zombie-like into a digital welfare dystopia" in which artificial intelligence and other technologies are used to target, surveil and punish the poorest people, the United Nations' monitor on poverty has warned.

Philip Alston, UN rapporteur on extreme poverty, has produced a devastating account of how new digital technologies are revolutionizing the interaction between governments and the most vulnerable in society. In what he calls the rise of the "digital welfare state", billions of dollars of public money is now being invested in automated systems that are radically changing the nature of social protection.

### [Getting anti-trafficking advocates on board with decriminalised sex work](#)

*Emily Kenway*

In this blog piece, Emily Kenway highlights several areas where sex worker rights and anti-trafficking advocates can find a common ground. For example, she writes, "We all want to end trafficking for sexual exploitation. Whatever our personal views on sex work in general, no one thinks one person forcing another to provide paid sexual services is acceptable." She then offers several arguments that those advocating for the decriminalisation of sex work can use when speaking with anti-trafficking organisations.

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