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The objective of the project is to create a shared understanding of a new, evolving form of trafficking in human beings - through sham marriages, provide a precise definition of sham marriages as a form of human trafficking hitherto inexistent at the EU level, and initiate a comprehensive action for its prevention.

Project contracting partner and coordinator is Ministry of the Interior (Latvia) and project partners are "Shelter "Safe House" (Latvia), "Living for Tomorrow" (Estonia), "Caritas Lithuania" (Lithuania), Immigrant Council of Ireland (Ireland), Ministry of the Interior (Slovakia), The European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, affiliated with the United Nations (HEUNI) (Finland).

DISSEMINATION AND ADVOCACY PLAN: LITHUANIA

According to the United States 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report (US 2015), Lithuania is in the category of source and transit countries for women and girls that are recruited into the network of prostitution and sexual exploitation in Western Europe. Lithuania is also considered a source country for males who are subjected to labour trafficking and forced labour. In addition, Lithuania has become a source country of children and adult trafficking victims who are forced to engage in criminal activities in Northern countries, France, Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom. Even though Lithuania is considered the source and transit country for trafficking victims, it has been observed that it is also a destination country for women who are brought for sexual exploitation and prostitution. So far, exploitative-sham marriages are not recognised in Lithuania as a significant form of trafficking in persons. Organisation of sham marriages (as a crime against the state) has not been criminalised in Lithuania. For this reason, identification of victims, initiation and organising of pre-trial investigation, assistance for victims and recognition of the crime itself are very complex tasks indeed.

As was revealed in HESTIA research, regardless of the coordination system, systematic implementation of tools for combating and preventing human trafficking in practice does not function as effectively as it may appear when analysing political documents and seeing how the system functions 'theoretically speaking'. Research data has revealed that even though government institutions and non-governmental organisations are actively engaged in the fight against human trafficking, there is a lack of cooperation and coordination of joint actions. For example, there is no formal procedure that would direct a victim to the right government institutions or non-governmental organisations. In addition, organisations, that assist victims and implement tools of prevention, do not have their roles formally defined. It appears that, at a theoretical level, the national coordination system allows for the establishment of a strong background for cooperation and a network of expert-institutions to combat human trafficking; however at a practical level this mechanism does not seem to be very effective or successful. Practical barriers to implementing the fight against human trafficking can be illustrated by the lack of political priorities, on the one hand, and the absence of programmes for the control and prevention of human trafficking since 2012, on the other hand.



According to the representatives of non-governmental organisations and law enforcement institutions, for criminals, recruitment for exploitative-sham marriages is easier than recruitment for other forms of exploitation as (potential) victims feel 'safer', and recruiters have more opportunities to provide incentives. In addition, victims not only do not feel threatened, but they are also seduced with complex arguments: easy earnings, decent 'work' conditions, an opportunity to see a new country and experience adventures. Easier modes of recruitment influence the massive character of the phenomenon and extend the areas for recruitment even to unexpected places: that is, as opposed to large urban places, rural villages are potential sites for recruitment. In addition, as research data revealed, it is often ex-victims, who were involved in exploitative and exploitative-sham marriages and recruit victims themselves. This way a network is created that covers previous and current victims and organised criminal groups.

Recommendations:

1. With regard to the gaps in the political system and the structure of the fight against human trafficking, it is recommended to return to long-term programmes in order to create a strategy and action plan, with adequate funding and appointment of a national coordinator (or an independent coordinating agency) who will serve as an independent speaker.
2. With regard to the processes of international migration and the role of Lithuania in these processes, more attention needs to be paid to the questions of human trafficking and exploitative-sham marriages in the contexts of both the emigration of Lithuanian residents and the immigration of third country nationals to Lithuania.
3. Parallel to international trafficking in people, it is necessary to pay more attention to the internal exploitation of Lithuanian citizens.
4. In pursuit of more effective cooperation, it is of utmost importance to create an inter-institutional, intersectional and international model of cooperation, which would be coordinated by the appointed agency
5. It is necessary to consider the general context of human trafficking, victim profiles and preventative actions in the fight against this crime.
6. In attempts to alter the given attitude to victims, it is desirable to initiate not only 'traditional' preventative measures (education about the risks of human trafficking and visits of good practices), but also organise courses, regarding questions of gender equality and equal opportunities.
7. Intervention of preventative measures is necessary in the social services of smaller towns and villages as well as target groups – i.e. vulnerable families and persons.

