

In the framework of the Agreement No.: HOME/2013/ISEC/AG/THB/400005845 Project “**Preventing Human Trafficking and Sham Marriages: A Multidisciplinary Solution (HESTIA)**” is being implemented from 01/01/2015 to 31/12/2016.

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).

## **EVALUATION SUMMARY**

### **of training sessions**

#### **conducted by the Immigrant Council of Ireland**

The Immigrant Council of Ireland, unfolded a wide training programme with a view to maximising the impact of the HESTIA project in Ireland, among relevant practitioners and information service providers. Two sessions were conducted in September 2016 and further two in October 2016. These training included targeted audiences that were selected on the basis of likelihood to encounter cases of exploitative sham marriages on the one hand and the need to be knowledgeable in responding to such cases on the other. The first training targeted the service providers working with vulnerable women in the country in the general area of violence against women, with focus on trafficked women, domestically abused women and migrant women. Secondly, a major high-level training session with representatives of state agencies working on THB and marriage registration as well as embassies and other respondents in the project research enquiry. Using our established training networks, we also delivered training to the Citizen Information Board (which has offices all around the country) and to the Refugee and Immigration Practitioners Network who are offering legal aid to suspected victims of trafficking. In total 96 people were trained. The trained experts further multiplied the training in their respective organisations and networks and acted as multipliers of knowledge for the Hestia project in Ireland.

The overwhelming response from the training has been extremely positive. The sessions brought the issue of exploitative sham marriages as a variation of trafficking crime on to the agenda of many agencies. It helped professionals to clarify and solidify their perception on human trafficking on the one hand and to develop in-depth understanding of the complexity of trafficking involving exploitative sham marriages. As a result trainees feel equipped to recognise the problem and to offer adequate direct intervention or informed referral, whichever is more appropriate for the nature of



their agency or organisation. A number of positive conclusions and useful feedback was received through the specially developed evaluation forms, which are summarised below.

Three important recommendations that were present in majority of the evaluations related to identification, support, and legislation. In regard to identifying victims of both human trafficking and sham weddings, it was generally agreed that there is a need for a better framework. Those present wanted to be taught how to identify these victims and were hoping for a better understanding of cases involving human trafficking and sham marriages. Similarly, most of those present recognised the need for better support for the victims of both trafficking and sham marriages. The need for specific legislation on the issue was also discussed, which it was felt should address the differences between marriages that are done for 'business' and those that are actually sham, due to trafficking. Another key point made was having a clearer definition of 'consent' especially when it came to the marriages and trafficking.

In terms of improving the presentation, a number of participants recommended the use of more statistics, which could help improve their understanding of human trafficking and sham marriages and assist in the creation of legislation on the issue. It was generally agreed that the availability of such data could help build a more effective response to human trafficking and sham marriages. At the same time, a number of participants stated the need for more information on the connection between sham marriages and human trafficking, which could help clarify the distinction between marriages that are done for 'business' and those that are actually sham, due to trafficking. The participants expressed the need for them to understand that connection for the purpose of putting in place policies that could help protect women exploited in sham marriages. Thus, the main point taken from this section should be the need for more evidence and information regarding sham marriages and human trafficking and how to assist those exploited in such circumstances.

An additional area where participants felt there was a need for change was in respect of those victims unwilling to report their situation or come forward to authorities. Two possible approaches mooted in this regard were the possibility of continually developing approaches to assisting such victims, so that they are not being forced away, or simply having a number of different options in place for assisting victims, so that they are aware we are here to help as oppose to do harm, which some victims might think due to their surroundings.

There were a number of recommendations for prevention of trafficking for sham weddings. The largest number of participants recommended that there should be training for all GNIB/INIS staff to recognise victims and respond to their needs, thus ensuring early access to available services. Similarly, a number of those present there recognised the need for improved access to legal aid, in order to create a better legal platform for victims. A suggestion put forward in this regard was the creation of a set of guidelines on the possibility of reporting suspected cases of exploitation, without hindering their confidentiality clause with their client.

Individual recommendations that emerged included the need for more accessible information for victims and such having information available in different languages and in places they possibly frequent. Another suggestion was having an interpreter present during any interview or meeting so that victims could have their voices heard and understood by those conducting the interviews. Also having an interpreter present when they are filling out paperwork is important, so that they can understand all aspects of the process. Victims should also be notified of the possibilities of recovery and assistance available, so as to increase their trust in authorities and those responsible for helping them.

The need for training seminars on 'consent' was mooted by a number of participants, focusing on the need for consent in marriage, and its particular meaning in that context. Such seminars could be aimed, in the first place, at the GNIB and INIS, increasing their knowledge of important indicators of human trafficking for the purpose of sham marriages, and how they can assist those in such circumstances. There was also a recognised need to educate who are being trafficked, so as to reduce the risk of re-trafficking.

Finally, a large number of participants recommended improving the accommodation available to victims, in particular to ensure their security, ensuring that victims do not have to live in constant fear of harm. Given the poor conditions in RIA centres, where victims of trafficking are currently being accommodated, the need for possibly moving away from the current model of accommodating victims was recognised on a number of occasions. In terms of improving the current arrangements for accommodating victims, the need for improved accommodation plans, and specific guidelines for those working in RIA centres was recognised.

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