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Deliverable No. 3.3: Summary of Workshop

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<tr>
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Acronyms

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Executive summary

On 19 June 2018, the DESIrE project hosted a validation workshop in Zagreb, Croatia. The workshop was attended by project partners and external stakeholders with the purpose of presenting preliminary findings from the empirical research which has been undertaken as part of WP3. The partners presentation of country findings and the discussion facilitates the development of a final comparative report which will culminate the finalisation of primary research data collection within the project. The overall findings will then feed into the preparation of the final report and handbook where the conclusions and recommendations will be conveyed.

1. Introduction of project DESIrE

The DESIrE project aims at contributing to prevent trafficking in human beings for sexual exploitation by generating a better understanding of the impact of the different law and policy approaches to sex work on the prevalence of human trafficking. The project focuses upon four different regulatory models (Croatia, the Netherlands, Poland and Sweden) that are currently being implemented regionally.

More generally, the project seeks to enquire whether a demand reduction strategy is an effective strategy for the prevention of trafficking in human beings. In the context of this project, demand is understood as ‘demand for sexual services provided by trafficked persons’. In this regard, the state of the art understanding of the main concepts (demand, sexual exploitation and prevention) was explored in the initial phases of the project.¹

What came out of this exercise is the importance of adopting a holistic approach to the conceptualisation of demand in the sex industry by going beyond a mere economic understanding. In this respect, our research shows that there is not a “demand for sexual exploitation” (or in very minor cases) or “for trafficking” as such, but rather, there is a multiplicity of actors who have different interrelated demands (for better opportunities, for cheap labour, for protection, and so on) and decision-making strategies. These actors range from facilitators (that includes a wide range of different agents), sex workers, and buyers.

In the satisfaction of the demands of the different actors, certain elements may, but not always, come into play, such as means used by those actors to satisfy their demand (physical and/or psychological coercion) against the backdrop of other underlying dynamics (paradox of choice², vulnerability, etc.). In order to assess whether a particular demand for sexual services leads to a situation of sexual exploitation, all the afore-mentioned elements should be apprehended together.

After this initial stage of defining the most important notions for this research, the DESIrE Project team members conducted a thorough analysis of the law and regulatory approaches of the four countries of study.³ This enabled us to move on to the third stage of the project, where we seek to determine:

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³ DESIrE Deliverable, Report on Legal and regulatory approaches towards sex work in four EU-countries (October 2017).
- If there is indeed a relationship between national legislation and policies on sex work on human trafficking;
- What legislation and policies would make sex workers feel safer from trafficking in human beings;
- The attitudes towards sex work against the backdrop of social attitudes, marginalization, religion and other factors on the ground;
- How sexual exploitation is understood by different actors;
- And how the demand for sex services which fuels trafficking for sexual exploitation can be curbed.

2. DESIrE Fieldwork Research Design

The project has engaged with various actors (sex workers/persons selling sex, buyers, civil society, policy makers, law enforcement officials and victims of trafficking) as well as the general public in order to seek to answer the questions and objectives set out above.

2.1. Research sample size and target groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>General public (G)</th>
<th>Buyers (B)</th>
<th>Sex Workers/ Persons selling sex (SW)</th>
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2.2. Engaging hard to reach populations: Hope Social Innovation Model (Kaime-Atterhög, 1999)

In order to reach out to these target groups, the project partners implemented an adapted version of the Hope Social Innovation Model developed by Kaime-Atterhög.  

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In particular, the partners followed two key phases:

1. In order to **identify and build trust with the stakeholders**, the partners undertook the following steps:
   - Identify the stakeholders; find, map match and invite stakeholders
   - Meet & engage the stakeholders: as the Hope methodology emphasises an emergent design, partners held participatory workshops with the stakeholders identified, in order to inform them of the project’s objectives and to collate feedback on the development of research tools e.g. research design, interview guides etc. feedback was taken into account when finalising the research tools.

2. In order to **better understand the context and begin to define the problem**, the partners collected primary data with all target groups:
   - **Semi-structured interviews**: sex workers/persons selling sex, buyers, NGO workers, policy makers, law enforcement officials and victims of trafficking. The interviews were semi-structured so as to ensure that the questions were open ended, providing the researchers to adopt a reflexive approach and for participants to develop their own narrative.
   - **Online survey**: general public. An online survey was conducted in the four case study countries to determine the predominant attitudes, opinions and understanding of the general public.

### 2.3. Development of research tools

The Swedish team led the development process of the research tools, involving all partners, in addition to local stakeholders in Sweden, in intense discussions in order to ensure consistency among the many voices in the Consortium. As a result of this process, the following tools were developed:

- Research design
- Methodology briefs 1-4: implementation of HOPE social innovation model
- Interview guides
- Online Survey
- Information sheet
- Consent form
- DESIrE Training Workshop: Interviewing vulnerable persons in a criminalized context

### 3. Presentation of preliminary results – Croatia: Iva Jovovic, NGO FLIGHT

#### 3.1. Sex workers

The fieldwork in Croatia has mostly been carried out in Zagreb where NGO FLIGHT conducts weekly outreach work with street sex workers - not the only form of sex work, but the most visible, cheapest and most dangerous. All sex workers interviewed were female. Drug addiction is not seen to be a predominant problem, however there was a persistent pattern of alcohol addiction, and increasingly, gambling which, in some cases, generates a permanent

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3. Other relevant tools include: Data management protocol (March 2017) & Guidelines for Safeguarding the Physical & Psychological Wellbeing of Researchers (March 2017).

8 Developed by Kaime-Atterhög, Uppsala University

9 Developed by Kaime-Atterhög, Uppsala University
status of debt leading to difficulty in exiting the sex industry. As for how the sex workers entered the sex industry, money often played a crucial role, as many experienced a precarious socio-economic situation before entering the sex industry. For many, involvement in the sex industry is a survival strategy.

The sex worker target group consisted of those who worked with and without a pimp, with self-employed sex workers often being the oldest and experiencing health problems. For those who work with a pimp, they recounted difficulties in ensuring that they earned enough money to pay their pimp, as a result, they end up reducing their prices which increases the risk of violence and the impossibility of being able to negotiate the use of a condom or a safe environment.

The majority of persons interviewed became involved in sex work through an acquaintance or a friend who was already providing sexual services, it is however important to note that it is not necessarily persuasion by a third party that leads to this choice, but rather their proximity with the industry. Only 2/15 decided to start working in sex work after having various sexual experiences.

Sex workers shared experiences of difficulties of being involved in sex work, for example, some shared the frustration of feeling unsupported by state authorities such as the police and the government and more broadly by the general public (due to the stigma and prejudice of the sex industry). Other difficulties referred to competition within the sex industry, as competition exists between new, more attractive sex workers who enter the business potentially jeopardizing the business of those already involved in sex work. Finally, the sex workers encountered difficulties from various issues such as fear of violence, money and health concerns, long term prospects for retirement and fear of recognition from social pressure (e.g. some have not told their close relatives and fear that people can recognize them).

3.2. Buyers

All buyers interviewed were male. Most buyers interviewed had completed secondary education and two were currently students in higher education. Most of the buyers had a vocational education and currently work in sectors such as construction, transport or mechanics. Most live in rural areas and come to Zagreb for employment purposes – often just during the week.

 Buyers interviewed stated that they prefer to purchase sex services from sex workers with whom they have developed a relationship, as they know their preferences. Similarly, sex workers also stated a preference for working with clients they know as they are more trustworthy.

Policy makers, civil society and law enforcement

The interviews with the various stakeholders took different directions according to the kind of stakeholders they were. The researchers noticed a difference in levels of openness between civil society interviewees -who freely shared their personal opinion and policy makers and law enforcement representatives – who were sometimes reluctant to share personal opinions due to an official position from their institution/organisation. Overall, the stakeholders in this target group felt that sex workers should be given more social assistance in order to exit the sex industry by offering assistance in finding employment, housing and access to health care.
3.3. Victims of trafficking

The researchers were unable to identify any victims of human trafficking who were willing to be interviewed. This was due to a number of reasons, including the fact that very low numbers of human trafficking victims have been officially given victim status, and research fatigue.

3.4. Limitations

The researchers acknowledge that the exclusive inclusion of female street sex workers does mean that there are sex workers who have not been engaged with the research.

4. Presentation of preliminary results – Netherlands: Maria Shaidrova, Tilburg University

4.1. Sex industry in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, there are different ‘hotspots’ for different kinds of sex work. There are districts where window prostitution is more prominent, others where street prostitution is more prominent, or escorts, sex clubs or private houses. However, in general there is a growing tendency for home prostitution, which is characteristically more underground and clandestine. In particular, gay sex clubs have, since 2000, more or less disappeared and any remaining now operate very much underground. The researchers noted a discrepancy in the nationality of the sex workers and the type of sex work they engage in: Dutch nationals are often working for escort agencies or in sex clubs, whereas non-Dutch nationals are working in red light districts.

The policy approach to regulating sex work differs according to each municipality. However, regardless of the regulation adopted by the municipality, there is, overall, a general discrepancy between the regulations and their implementation.

Due to the labour and migration legislation many foreigners make it extremely difficult to receive a work permit for engaging in the sex industry, as a result many work in an unregulated capacity. Some of the reasons for this is that the bureaucratic process for registration is too complex, leading to “brokers” providing assistance, often charging a high fee e.g. completion of tax return. For the sex workers interviewed, it appears that such a situation was the norm, and did not consider the provision of such services by “brokers” and the fees they charged to be exploitative.

4.2. Sex workers

The sex workers target group includes a diverse nationalities, with a notable Spanish speaking south American community and an Eastern European diaspora e.g, Bulgaria, Balkan countries, Romania.

4.3. Buyers

Although purchasing sex services is not criminalized in the Netherlands, buyers have been a very hard group to reach. The interviewers are thus facing ongoing difficulties in entering in contact with this target group.

10 NB there is a legislative reform underway with the Integrity Assessment Act (Wet Bibob) – see DESIrE Deliverable, Report on Legal and regulatory approaches towards sex work in four EU-countries (October 2017).
4.4. Victims of trafficking

The number of victims is also low in the sample, as this group is experiencing research fatigue with gatekeeper organisations seeking to protect them from too much exposure to research.

4.5. Preliminary conclusions

There is an official discourse around sex work being generally accepted as an occupation, however there are outstanding issues that have emerged from the research. For instance, the industry is poorly regulated and regulation *per se* does not eliminate vulnerability. In particular, assistance is often provided with a view to exiting the sex industry, however limited assistance is offered to those who are currently providing sexual services but have difficulties with the formalities of regulation e.g. tax returns. Therefore, despite this occupation being legally regulated, the legalisation has not led to it being "commonly accepted" and practical problems exists, such as ensuring safety in the workplace and access to housing and financial services. Furthermore, as the regulation is not fully comprehensive, "loopholes" lead to an emergence illegal/unregulated practices.

Another aspect that has emerged from the interviews was the implementation of the regulation in practice, where in some instances, the focus on identifying illegal practices sometimes overshadowed the possible identification of victims. Thus, the involvement of actors such as law enforcement or immigration authorities was often considered to be "heavy handed" with too much focus on identifying illegal practices and not providing information and support that could help protect those who are involved in such a vulnerable sector.

Finally, when asked about exploitation, the most often referred type was that of financial exploitation. Sex workers did not refer to exploitation on the part of the buyers, experiences of violence were raised, but not of exploitation. When asked which actors were considered to be exploitative, the sex workers identified facilitating actors such as pimps and other intermediary agents and the municipalities whose regulations can facilitate their perceived financial exploitation. Buyers considered the role of brothel owners and other intermediary agents as to contribute to the financial exploitation of those involved in sex work. Victims interviewed especially referred to the exploitation by pimps and other agents. In relation to exploitation, the interpretation of the human trafficking legislation also emerged as something that led to a varying perception of victimisation, with a focus on prevention being needed when it comes to ensuring that individuals involved in the sex industry were aware of their rights in terms of employment, housing, social security etc.

5. Presentation of preliminary results – Poland, Kamila Rejmer and Dr Łukasz Wieczorek, Warsaw University

5.1. Sex workers

In the Polish sample, three main sectors were represented in the interviews: escort agencies, private flat, street prostitution. The large majority of respondents are Polish with remainder being Ukrainian and Bulgarian. Almost all respondents declared that they started working in the sex industry for financial reasons, with varying triggers including: lack of career prospects, flat renovation and illness of a loved one. The background of the victims varied, with some mentioning family problems such as a death of a family member/partner, irresponsible partners e.g. gambling, financial problems. Two of the sex workers said that their closest family were aware of their occupation. A third of the sex workers were either in higher education or had completed higher education.
Some of the sex workers explained that street prostitution has changed tremendously in Poland. Whilst, it remains the most dangerous form of sex work, it appears that there has been an increase in the number of self-employed sex workers, with fewer workers using pimps. Indeed, some sex workers reported being approached by pimps asking if they wanted help or protection in exchange of money at numerous occasions. The situation therefore seems to have shifted from the recruitment of sex workers by a pimp, to the sex workers recruiting a pimp should they need it.

5.2. Buyers

Here again, they were the most difficult group to reach, with many not willing to provide information on their background. For the ones that agreed to be interviewed, the most common reason invoked for purchasing sex services are loneliness or difficulties in establishing a relationship with women (disabilities, illness).

5.3. General observations and preliminary conclusions

*Attitudes towards sex work and prostitution.* Sex Workers agree that the term "prostitution" is understood by them in a negative, pejorative context, whereas for Buyers, both prostitution and sexual work associate it with sexual intercourse in exchange for money. Experts on the one hand, associate term prostitution as a synonym of sexual work, but on the other, they emphasize that the term prostitution is associated more with enforcement, violence and more pejoratively. Prostitution can be profitable and can be form of enslavement. Sexual work, on the other hand, is associated more with voluntariness.

*Protection of sex workers.* Most research participants supported the idea that the legalization of sex work would give law enforcement agencies and sex workers the tools to combat sexual abuse. Respondents also spoke about the need to educate the public and sensitize people to the problems of sexual abuse and sex workers themselves about their rights as human beings.

*Role of the internet.* The sex workers stated that the most common way to reach clients is through the internet (photos, websites for establishing relationships based on sponsoring, website and dating applications are becoming more and more popular, flat advertisement (free of charge), websites where drivers share information on where they can find roadside sex workers), in nightclubs (upon consent of the owner), and in erotic dance clubs.

*Understanding of sexual exploitation.* The majority of respondents described sexual exploitation as any attempt of engaging in a sexual contact that is not consensual for both parties. Other responses referred to sexual exploitation as being connected to paedophilia, or when there is use of violence or of the vulnerability of a person. Some mentioned that the changing of the term of the contract during intercourse leads to exploitation. Finally, some experts were of the opinion that any form of sexual services provided in exchange of money or benefits amounts to sexual exploitation.

*Awareness and attitudes towards the legal framework.* The interviewees showed a good general understanding of the legislation regarding sex work in Poland, and also made reference to the Swedish and the Dutch models. Respondents are polarized regarding the Polish legal and policy approach to sex work. Some were of the opinion that the Polish model is a good one but that it is badly implemented, whereas some sex workers think that the current legislation in Poland does not work at all and that there is no motivation to fight pimps (which
are the ones criminalized under the Polish model). Similarly, there seems to be limited interest in adopting the Swedish approach of criminalisation of the clients. The respondents unsatisfied with the Polish model seem to be more sympathetic to the Dutch approach of decriminalisation.

6. Presentation of preliminary results – Sweden, Uppsala University

The Swedish team as well as Swedish Stakeholders did not attend the Meeting due to queries raised nationally on the DESIrE project, which were not addressed by the time of the meeting.

7. Online study

As part of the data collection, all partners have conducted online surveys with members of the general public. The data collection is ongoing in the Netherlands and Sweden. Poland and Croatia have received the national data from the research polling companies. A comparative analysis of the four national data sets will be conducted and the findings will be integrated into the final report. During the workshop, the Croatian and Polish national findings were briefly presented.
Annex – List of Participants

Attendees

Brian Varma (CoMensha)
Olga Wanicka (La Strada, Poland)
Iva Jovovic (FLIGHT)
Hana Kutil (FLIGHT)
Lukasz Wieczorek (UW)
Kamila Rejmer (UW)
Conny Rijken (TiU)
Maria Shaidrova (TiU)
Amy Weatherburn (VUB)
Sibel Top (VUB)

Apologies

Branka Žigante Živković (Misdemeanour Court)
Abida Pehlic (Novi put)
Sasa Tkalec (Iskorak, projekt Odgovoran)
Matea Janković (CroMSIC)