

“Brides-to-be” as victims of human trafficking: Challenges and the importance of coordination between public services

**Conference “Exploitative Sham Marriages:
Exploring the Links between Trafficking in Human Beings
and Sham Marriages”**

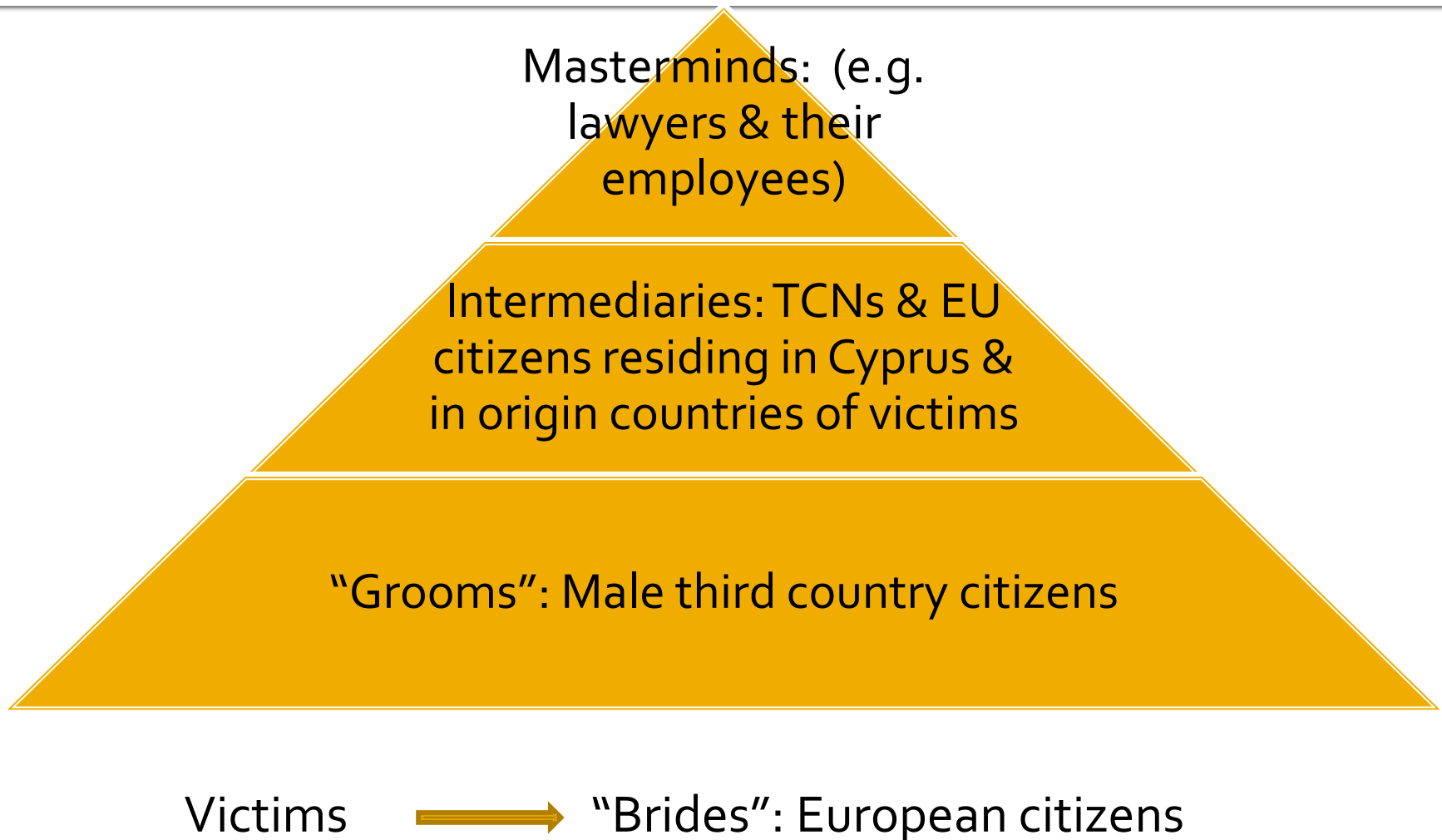
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Structure of organized criminal group



Future “grooms”

- **Third-country nationals, mainly from:**
 - Pakistan
 - India
 - Bangladesh
- **Residing legally in Cyprus**
 - Student visa
 - Employment visa
- **Residing illegally in Cyprus or the resident permit will soon expire**
 - Submit application for asylum
- **Contact either intermediaries or directly female EU citizens**
- **Objective:**
 - To travel and reside in other EU MS
- **Expenses:**
 - 3000 to 6000 euros

Future “brides”

- EU citizens, mainly:
 - Romania
 - Bulgaria
- Brought up in fragile conditions
- No education
- Vulnerable
- Recruitment through deception
- Travel to Cyprus
- Asked to bring a certificate that they are not married

“Marriage” procedure

- Future “grooms”:
 - Also obtain a certificate that they are not married
- Purchase of flight tickets
- Tickets issued & given upon departure
- Future “brides” travel to Cyprus
- Escorted by intermediaries

“Marriage” procedure

- Upon arrival in Cyprus, “brides” received by intermediaries or future “husbands”
- Accompanied & placed in apartments
- Personal documents confiscated
- Announced the real reason they came to Cyprus (if they were deceived)
- Means of control

“Marriage” procedure

- “Brides” registered at the Social Insurance Services that they are working for a certain employer
- Companies created by masterminds & registered under their business partners or relatives
- More persuasive to the authorities that the “brides” are active members of the society working in Cyprus
- “Brides” have no idea about these procedures

“Marriage” procedure

- Officially translated Certificates of non-marriage of “couples”
- In some cases these certificates are false and/or forged
- Rental contracts to demonstrate that “couple” resides under the same roof
 - Owners of residences deny that they have signed such agreements
 - Addresses that they declare do not exist
 - Rent agreements presented before Head of the Communities in order to verify that the “couples” live together

“Marriage” procedure

- “Marriages” take place at specific municipalities
- Arrangements of the “ceremony” taken care by masterminds
- “Marriages” submitted by masterminds upon Civil Registry & Migration Department
- Applications for obtaining residence permits in Cyprus submitted on behalf of TCNs as “husbands” of EU citizens
- Affidavits submitted that “couples” intend to leave Cyprus permanently & reside in another EU member states
- Residence permits of TCNs issued
- The “couples” depart from Cyprus
- Finally, TCNs remain in EU member states they desire, while EU citizens return to countries of origin

Numbers

- 2015: 1 case investigated
2 adult victims
- 2016: 7 cases investigated
21 adult victims (1 male)
21 suspects
3 cases before Assize court, 2 before
District court, 2 under investigation

Investigations

- Office of Combating THB of Cyprus Police
- Statements taken, assistance requested by Europol & Interpol, financial investigations & in process of issuing EU arrest warrants & sending rogatory letters
- Cases investigated under the anti-trafficking law & submitted for trial before Assize Court
- Offences:
 - THB for the purpose of committing criminal offences
 - Participation in organised crime
 - Money laundering offences
 - Committing sham/forced marriages
 - Conspiracy to commit felony and misdemeanour
 - Forgery, making and uttering false documents
 - Illegal entrance and residence in the Republic of Cyprus , etc

Investigation Challenges

- Complicated composition of the OCG, involves numerous people, difficult to identify all participants and to establish the trafficking chain.
- Victims of low intellectual level, cannot provide adequate information
- Victims having children in their country of origin unwilling to remain in Cyprus to testify and assist in criminal proceedings
- OCG threaten witnesses , unwilling to cooperate with Police and Prosecutors
- Weak victim protection system
- Weak witness protection system
- Free movement of people in the EU
- Complex cases require transnational cooperation which takes long in the adoption and execution of European arrest warrants

Measures taken to address the phenomenon

- Governmental authorities involved had indications that the system was abused but not able to connect with THB
- Multidisciplinary approach
- Awareness
- Cooperation between all the relevant authorities was established
- Information is shared
- Action Plan (3 stages: prevention, wedding, investigation)

Action Plan

- Prevention stage (arrival of the European citizen / TCN and before performing the wedding)
 - Arrival / Departure registration
 - Interview at the airport
 - Checklist when applying for non-marriage certificate
- Wedding stage
 - Checks by Municipality
- Investigation stage
 - Issuance of Registration Certificates
 - Notification via Europol

	CHECK-LIST Indicators
1	Couple unable to present adequate answers in relation to how and when they met and the conditions under which they met.
2	Arrival dates of European and/or TCN and submission of application to obtain a non-marriage certificate are made within a short period.
3	References of the couple regarding details of their identity (name, home address, date of birth, nationality, education, profession), or other important information of personal character are contradictory or do not coincide.
4	Residence permit of TCN is about to expire
5	Suspicious that marriage has been arranged by a third person that does not fit to this purpose (e.g. not a friend or relative, or a wedding service), or a suspected person to be connected to OCG.
6	Suspicious of a fake home address.
7	Couple cannot communicate in a mutually comprehensible language
8	European citizen is in dire financial situation
9	Documents appear forged or fake
10	Other suspicious elements

Public discourse, role of the media

- Society not really aware that sham marriages linked to THB
- Sham marriages usually concern TCN married to locals in order to gain permanent residency / nationality
- Recently newspaper articles talking about police raids in apartments to tackle THB for sham marriages.
- Culprits are always the “grooms”, who take advantage of poor eastern-european women.
- No reference to the masterminds who can be Cypriots.

Thank you for your attention!

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