

1. Ladies and gentleman, It is an honor to be here today, and thank you Helga for inviting us.
2. Just yesterday my colleague tweeted from the Slovak Conference on Extremism that the new Minister of Education said following sentence: *“Refugees may increase extremism, because there are many among them who want to hurt our country. But yes, intolerance is a bad thing and it is threatening especially young generation.”* Last year also Minister of Labor announced on TV, in the evening news of the TA3 television channel, that Ministry will stop issuing work permits to foreigners immediately, as a reaction to the ongoing refugee crisis, and as an attempt to “protect” native population from immigrants stealing their jobs. Without a legislation change it resulted in decrease in issued work permits. **We in CVEK are of the opinion that such political discourse legitimizes and pushes the boundaries of social practices. When political elites speak from their position of authority and power - it has much more weight. Moreover, political elites have a unique approach to discourse - that is, they may identify the topics and decide on what is said, what will be the topic and how it will be held. Moreover, these may translate their words into policies.**
3. When it comes to the Slovak reality, in our opinion, possible (unrecognized) victims of trafficking in Slovakia who are foreigners already are in a difficult situation. According to the last TIP evaluation report of the US State Department: Generally, Ukrainian, Moldovan, Bulgarian, Romanian and Vietnamese nationals are becoming victims of forced labor in Slovakia. Eastern European women are reportedly transported through Slovakia and forced into prostitution in Slovakia and other European countries. Slovak Roma women are particularly exploited in trafficking for sexual exploitation and forced to commit a crime in the UK. Roma men, women and children are forced to beg in the whole of Western Europe. But - when it comes to officially registered and recognized foreign victims of trafficking in Slovakia? The number is **ZERO**. Now, why is that? According to the previously mentioned report the Slovak government continues to struggle with the problem of identifying victims among migrants who were routing towards assisted voluntary return. Providing legal aid to victims is not sufficient. Those who cooperate with law enforcement agencies, have been exposed to re-traumatisation. The Government approved the National Programme for the Fight against Human Trafficking for the years 2015 - 2018, but some NGOs have consistently raised the ineffectiveness of cooperation in the expert working group. As an immigration lawyer, I remember several years ago, we NGOs who worked with foreigners did not have enough experience and information about various aspects related to trafficking of immigrants – when we realized it, we started professionalizing our practice and referring victims to the state agencies for further investigation.
4. Ten years ago, in 2006, police in Slovakia discovered a criminal gang of human traffickers. Members of the organised crime group allegedly recruited 343 Ukrainians using promises of well-paid jobs in Slovakia. The victims were subsequently trafficked to Slovakia where they were exploited in many bakeries, storages, shops around the Bratislava. The case is after 10 years still pending, while all the possible victims were expelled from Slovakia very long time ago, immediately after the crime was detected. The Specialized Criminal Court decided in March 2014 that the criminal offence of human trafficking was not proved and decided it was just a case of smuggling. At the moment the case is still under appeal.

5. I would also like to inform you about the work that our organization does on the local level. Under the project financed by the US embassy we have cooperation with 7 Slovak cities in the area of refugee integration. Among other things related to integration of immigrants/refugees and a role of local municipalities in this process, we will talk during our workshops with state officials and community workers also about human trafficking where municipalities could play an important role in assisting the recognized victims on their territories.