

**2020 HELP Network e-Conference, organised under the auspices of the Greek Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
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HELP courses: spreading through Europe - Michaela CHLADEKOVA, HELP Info Point for Slovakia

Dear colleagues across the Europe!

My name is Michaela Chládeková and I work at the Slovak Bar Association as International Relations Director as well as HELP Info Point for Slovak advocates.

First of all, allow me to thank the organisers for the opportunity to share our experience with you. Our Bar currently associates up to 6000 lawyers and 2000 trainee lawyers. One of the Slovak Bar Association main tasks is to provide training - mandatory training for trainee lawyers and facultative training for advocates. Therefore we are much grateful for being part of the HELP Network that enables us to extend the training opportunities for our members.

On the scale of the "HELP experience" I would say that Slovak Bar Association is on the pre-intermediate level. After approximately four years of our involvement,

- we implemented three different courses - Data Protection and Privacy Rights, Procedural Safeguards in Criminal Proceedings, Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings;
- we organised two extra rounds repeatedly ourselves because of high interest in participation (Data Protection and Privacy Rights);
- two of the implemented courses were launched in cooperation with the Czech Bar Association (DPPR and Procedural Safeguards) – thus, we have a very good cross-border experience with Czech colleagues;
- we experienced both physical kick-off meetings as well as one on-line launch;
- and much to my delight, one of the courses (Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings) accommodated all three professions - judges, prosecutors as well as lawyers in one group. In this respect I am thankful for excellent cooperation with the Judicial Academy of the Slovak Republic, especially due to the fact that cross-professional training in Slovakia is very rare.

I was wondering what would be the best message I could convey to the audience and I decided to focus on HELP newcomers – to encourage you and to share with you three positive lessons learned.

Lesson No. 1: Nothing to lose, much to gain

When I attended the first HELP conference I must confess that for some time it was all a bit overwhelming. I was not able to imagine the implementation of the course in practice I had thousands of questions, as this was a very new experience for the Bar. I kept asking myself - what's the catch? Well, there wasn't any. It was just as good as it sounded. With the assistance of the HELP Secretariat and the colleagues from the HELP Network (Czech, Belgian, Polish, Spanish) I got all the answers and I was confident enough to stand before my superiors with a proposal to get more involved in the HELP activities because - we had nothing to lose and much to gain.

Lesson No. 2: There are no gains without pains.

HELP requires dedicated individuals, professionals who are enthusiastic about training, persons with pro-European and pan-European identity as well as people positively inclined towards digital tools. At the beginning it requires you to invest some time to design a system that suits your training institution best. HELP is flexible, allows for creativity and personal input. It takes some additional effort to acquaint yourself with the platform, to devise a strategy of your own course based on the HELP methods but it pays off. However, there is no need to worry - the online platform is intuitive and easy to work with.

Lesson No. 3: “Win-win-win” situation

Our experience show that all parties involved win:

- First of all, we have so far received only positive feedback from participants. They win unrestricted access to course materials for unlimited time, personal tutor and a certificate.
- Training institution wins a valuable partnership with the Council of Europe and access to wide network of training institution representatives.
- Tutors win quality teaching experience in distance training and Info Points win fulfilling activity – working with satisfied participants and within mutually enriching HELP Network.

Of course, none of this would be true without the patient and devoted approach of HELP Secretariat who works around the clock to keep this amazing machine operational.

As for the practical tips we found effective:

- Although HELP platform is a distance training tool; it has proved to be effective to organise a few mutual meetings or videoconference calls or even informal events to create a sense of common experience. Man is a social animal and it is helpful in order to engage participants more in the discussion forums and feedback.
- If it suits the tutor, we also included specific timeslots when participants can contact tutor online in real time, for example once in two weeks.
- If possible, go for cross-border courses and courses with mixed participants. It brings new dimensions and new horizons to the training and mutually beneficial to see things from the opposite side.
- Design a strategy that fits your needs – we appreciated the possibility to launch courses with one administrative tutor and one expert so that the expert could concentrate on the content and leave the technical and organisational issues to the tutor.

To conclude, I may say on behalf of the Slovak Bar Association that we are proud to be part of the HELP Network. HELP courses complement domestic training with the needed European and human rights dimension and high interest of lawyers in the courses proves there is a demand for it. Many thanks to the Council of Europe and HELP Team for this opportunity and experience!