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## **G R E T A**

Group of Experts on Action  
against Trafficking in Human Beings

GRETA(2023)11\_MKD\_rep

# **Reply from North Macedonia to the questionnaire for the evaluation of the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings**

Fourth evaluation round

## **Thematic focus: Addressing vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings**

**Reply submitted on 27 October 2025**

Questionnaire adopted by the Group of Experts on Action against  
Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) on 30 June 2023

## Introduction

In accordance with Article 38, paragraph 1, of the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings ("the Convention"), GRETA evaluates the implementation of the Convention following a procedure divided into rounds. At the beginning of each round, GRETA selects the specific provisions on which the evaluation procedure is based.

The first round of monitoring of the Convention provided an overview of its implementation by States Parties. The second evaluation round of the Convention examined the impact of legislative, policy and practical measures on the prevention of trafficking in human beings (THB), the protection of the rights of victims of trafficking, and the prosecution of traffickers, paying particular attention to measures taken to address new trends in human trafficking, in particular trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, and the vulnerability of children to trafficking. The third evaluation round focused on trafficking victims' access to justice and effective remedies.

GRETA has decided that the fourth evaluation round of the Convention will focus on **vulnerabilities to human trafficking** and measures taken by States Parties to prevent them, detect and support vulnerable victims, and punish the offenders. This includes a focus on the use of information and communication technology (ICT), which brings structural changes to the way offenders operate and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities.<sup>1</sup>

A number of provisions of the Convention establishing substantive and procedural obligations are relevant to this topic. The concept of "vulnerability" appears in Articles 4 (definitions), 5 (prevention of trafficking in human beings) and 12 (assistance to victims) of the Convention. According to paragraph 83 of the Explanatory report to the Convention, "by abuse of a position of vulnerability is meant abuse of any situation in which the person involved has no real and acceptable alternative to submitting to the abuse. The vulnerability may be of any kind, whether physical, psychological, emotional, family-related, social or economic. The situation might, for example, involve insecurity or illegality of the victim's administrative status, economic dependence or fragile health. In short, the situation can be any state of hardship in which a human being is impelled to accept being exploited. Persons abusing such a situation flagrantly infringe human rights and violate human dignity and integrity, which no one can validly renounce."

GRETA refers to the ICAT Issue Brief No. 12/2022 on Addressing vulnerability to trafficking in persons which refers to vulnerability as "those inherent, environmental or contextual factors that increase the susceptibility of an individual or group to being trafficked". It classifies vulnerability factors in three categories: personal (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, disability), situational (e.g. destitution, unemployment, legal status) and contextual (e.g. discriminatory laws, policies and social norms, armed conflicts, crises) factors, which interact and may increase the risk of human trafficking for certain individuals, groups and/or communities.<sup>2</sup> Vulnerability to human trafficking is also subject to intersectional factors, such as gender, belonging to a minority group and socio-economic status.

Applying a socio-ecological approach to the analysis of vulnerability to human trafficking demonstrates how different risk factors influence vulnerability, and how protective factors

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<sup>1</sup> [Paolo Campana, Online and Technology-Facilitated Trafficking in Human Beings, Council of Europe, April 2022.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ICAT Issue Brief No. 12 on Addressing vulnerability to trafficking in persons - Search \(bing.com\)](#)

may reduce the risk of victimisation by increasing resilience.<sup>3</sup> The socio-ecological model considers the complex interplay between individual, relationship, community and societal factors. It helps to understand how anti-trafficking strategies should: (a) reduce the vulnerability of individuals, (b) work with the communities (which may also include relationships) concerned to ensure that their practices or current dynamics do not exacerbate or contribute to vulnerabilities to human trafficking and, (c) change a number of system-driven or structural elements (such as policies) so that they do not facilitate but discourage an environment conducive to human trafficking.

In addition to the thematic focus on vulnerabilities to human trafficking, GRETA has decided that each State Party will receive **country-specific follow-up questions** related to recommendations not implemented or partially implemented after the third evaluation round.

States Parties are requested to transmit to GRETA a reply to this questionnaire **within four months** from the date it was sent. The reply to the questionnaire should be submitted in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe (English and French), and preferably also in the original language. Where appropriate, in order to avoid unnecessary repetition, the reply may refer to information contained in the report submitted by the national authorities on measures taken to comply with the Committee of the Parties' recommendation concerning the implementation of the proposals made in GRETA's third evaluation report. States Parties should provide links, copies or extracts of relevant legislation, regulations, national action plans and case law mentioned in the reply to the questionnaire, in the original language and, wherever possible, also in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe.

A variety of stakeholders and civil society representatives should be effectively consulted in the preparation of the reply to the questionnaire, to ensure that the information provided is as comprehensive as possible.

## **Part 1 – Addressing vulnerabilities to trafficking in human beings**

### **I. PREVENTION (Articles 5, 6 and 7)**

1. Do you have specific data/research/analysis of what makes people vulnerable to trafficking in human beings (THB) in your country? Please provide information on the categories/groups of people identified as being at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking, and how they are addressed in the national anti-trafficking strategy and/or action plan. Have you identified geographical regions or economic sectors in your country as particularly vulnerable to THB, and how do you address them in your strategy or policy?

In the Republic of North Macedonia, there are data and analyses that indicate the factors that make individuals and groups vulnerable to human trafficking. Several risk categories have been identified: children without parental care, children from the Roma community, people living in poverty, women and girls victims of domestic violence, seasonal and low-skilled workers, people with mental disabilities, as well as people recruited through online platforms, especially minors.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.avoiceforcentraloregon.com/uploads/1/3/9/9/139904528/socio\\_ecological\\_model\\_and\\_trafficking.pdf](https://www.avoiceforcentraloregon.com/uploads/1/3/9/9/139904528/socio_ecological_model_and_trafficking.pdf)

These categories are systematically addressed in the National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration 2021–2025, through measures aimed at prevention, education, early identification and special protection.

Research and field assessments conducted by the National Commission and civil society organizations show that the Skopje region, but also the southeastern and eastern regions, as well as certain parts of the Polog region, are at higher risk due to their geographical location, poverty and the increased presence of seasonal labor. In the economic context, sectors such as agriculture, construction, services and home care/domestic workers have been identified as particularly vulnerable to labour exploitation. These findings are used to target prevention activities, including info sessions, outreach activities, training and communication campaigns, as well as to adapt services in risk areas. In addition, activities based on local vulnerability assessments are implemented within the framework of mobile teams and local coordination bodies.

2. What specific measures are taken to reduce children’s vulnerability to THB by creating a protective environment for children? Please provide information in the following areas:

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia has adopted the National Action Plan (NAP)<sup>4</sup> for Children's Rights 2025-2029. It is a multi-sector strategic document, developed in a broad participatory process, with the involvement of a large number of state institutions, civil society organizations and with the active participation of children.

The plan is based on the fundamental principles contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child:

1. best interests of the child,
2. participation of children,
3. non-discrimination and equality, and
4. right to life, survival and development.

The National Action Plan includes 40 measures and 140 activities structured in 8 key priority areas:

- 1) child poverty,
- 2) children's rights and freedoms,
- 3) violence against children,
- 4) family environment and alternative care,
- 5) children with disabilities,
- 6) health,

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<sup>4</sup> At the 99<sup>th</sup> Session held on 5 of August 2025

7) education, and

8) strengthening the state's capacities for effective implementation of children's rights and monitoring.

The adopted action plan envisages the adoption of amendments to the Law on Child Protection by introducing provisions for a Commission on the Rights of the Child as a mechanism for coordinating the implementation of the NAP and supervising the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

- a. protecting children's rights from attitudes, customs, behaviour and practices that can have an adverse effect (including child, early and forced marriage, and illegal adoption);

In order to minimize the impact of the human factor in the decision-making process in the adoption procedure, the amendments to the Family Law<sup>5</sup> have introduced a new method of selecting the most suitable adopter, which is the selection of an adopter electronically. According to the Law, the Adoption Commission is obliged, at the first session following the entry of the child's data into the electronic program, to make an electronic selection of the most suitable adopter from the first three possible adopters from the single list of the program. The more detailed criteria and the method of selecting an adopter electronically are set out in the Rulebook<sup>6</sup> on the more detailed criteria and the method of selecting an adopter electronically.

The Republic of North Macedonia is a signatory to international conventions relating to the adoption of a child, i.e. it is a signatory to the European Convention on the Adoption of Children, which sets out the conditions that potential adopters must meet to adopt a child, as well as the conditions that a minor child must meet in order to be adopted.

The Republic of North Macedonia is also a signatory to the Hague Convention on Protection of Children and Cooperation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, which establishes security measures to ensure the implementation of intercountry adoption, as well as a system of cooperation between the contracting states in order to ensure compliance with security measures to avoid the abduction, sale or trafficking of children.

The Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia also provides for a prison sentence of at least four years for illegal adoption.

Amendments to the Law on Family are underway, where the provision that provides for the conclusion of a minor marriage will be abolished in its entirety.

In accordance with the above, the legislation prohibits child, early and forced marriages, as well as illegal adoption.

Through institutional cooperation between the Centers for Social Work, the police and schools, high-risk cases are identified, especially in communities where these practices are more common. Campaigns and educational activities aimed at changing cultural customs have been implemented, with a particular focus on girls from marginalized communities. The National Commission, through the Subgroup for Combating Child Trafficking as well as mobile teams, is working to improve interdepartmental coordination in these cases.

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<sup>5</sup> "Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia " no. 80/1992, 9/1996, 79/2001, 38/2004, 60/2005, 33/2006, 84/2008, 117/2009, 67/10, 156/10, 39/12, 44/12, 38/14, 115/14, 104/15, 150/15 and 122/18 and "Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia" no. 51/21, 53/21, 199/23 and 192/25

<sup>6</sup> Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia 60/12

- b. developing children's life skills (including media literacy and online safety skills), knowledge and participation;

Within the framework of the project "Youth Thinks " Media Literacy in Education, the Bureau for the Development of Education in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science (MES), the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) and the Macedonian Media Institute, within the framework of a USAID project, implemented trainings for primary school teachers. The trained teachers gained knowledge on the integration of media literacy into regular teaching. The topics discussed during the trainings were the following: types of media, critical analysis of media content, recognition of disinformation, protection of personal data and online safety, as well as creating media content with students. The trainings were held in Macedonian and Albanian. Additionally, public performances and conferences were held where the importance of media literacy, as a tool for protecting children from manipulation, hence hate speech and potential abuse via the Internet was highlighted.

- c. putting in place a system for monitoring and reporting cases of abuse;

Social work centers have a legal obligation to act upon any suspicion of abuse, and teachers, pedagogues and psychologists are obliged to report suspicious cases. In addition to the official case reporting numbers 192 and 112, the Ministry of Internal Affairs operates a Red Button application to which reports can be submitted electronically, as well as the SOS number 0800 11111, which operates 24/7, and cases are automatically forwarded to the competent authorities. Also, through mobile field identification teams, proactive detection of vulnerable children is carried out.

In cases of sexual abuse of children, action is taken in accordance with the *Protocol for Action in Cases of Sexual Abuse of Children and Pedophilia*<sup>7</sup>, which was developed by the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Skopje.

- d. providing training to child care professionals, legal guardians, education professionals;

The Bureau for Education Development (BED) has prepared a *Guideline on the procedure for reporting and protecting a student - a victim*<sup>8</sup> of any form of violence, abuse and neglect. This document is a practical tool for teaching staff and school management in identifying, acting and cooperating with relevant institutions in situations where there is suspicion of violence or other types of child abuse. The Guideline aims to be part of the early warning system of schools, which, through educators, can recognize risk indicators in a timely manner and initiate an appropriate institutional response in accordance with national protocols and the referral system. Through this guide, schools are encouraged to publish it on their websites, to form teams for dealing with crisis situations and to develop internal protection mechanisms in cooperation with professional services, social work centers, the Ministry of Interior and other partners in the child protection system.

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<sup>7</sup> See annex

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<https://oubm.edu.mk/soopstenija/%D1%83%D0%BF%D0%B0%D1%82%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B2%D0%BE-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D0%BE%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BF%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B0-%D0%B7%D0%B0-%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%98%D0%B0%D0%B2%D1%83%D0%B2%D0%B0%D1%9A/>

In 2022, the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth provided support in the implementation of activities within the framework of the Horizontal Instrument of the European Union and the Council of Europe for the Western Balkans and Turkey "Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in North Macedonia" for the following activities:

- Seminar on the needs of child victims of human trafficking, i.e. for the resocialization and reintegration of child victims of human trafficking.
- Workshop on the gender perspective of human trafficking and
- Thematic discussion on proactive identification and referral of child victims of human trafficking.

In cooperation with GIZ, basic and advanced training for mobile teams was conducted.

In cooperation with IOM, a workshop was conducted with mobile teams for conducting fieldwork.

- Seminar on the needs of child victims of human trafficking, i.e. for the development of a training program concerned with the protection and reintegration of child victims of human trafficking.
- Bilateral thematic discussion on proactive identification and referral of child victims of trafficking for the purpose of begging.

A multi-disciplinary training on the best interests of the child was conducted on 21-22 May 2024, in Veles with 37 participants (Sectors for Internal Affairs, Department for Blood Crimes, THB Unit, social workers, lawyers, NGOs). The aim of this training was to train participants on a more complete application of the principle of the best interests of the child and to improve interdepartmental cooperation.

A Conference on the situation of child trafficking and the risks for improved prevention was held on 27 May 2024, Skopje with 24 participants (members of the Subgroup for Combating Child Trafficking, NGOs, international organizations).

- e. access to education and health care for vulnerable children, including from minority groups, unaccompanied migrant children, and children of migrant workers;

As part of their joint efforts to improve the well-being and mental health of students, the Ministry of Education, the Bulgarian Educational Development Organization and UNICEF continuously undertake activities aimed at supporting schools and teaching staff. In 2024, a Module for Improving the Mental Health of Adolescents was developed, which builds on the Psychosocial Support Program developed since 2022. It is intended for professional services working with children and youth, in order to strengthen their competencies in providing psychosocial support. The module provides for measures for prevention, early intervention, individual and group forms of support, guidelines for monitoring and assessment, as well as activities for building support measures.

- f. birth registration for all children born in the country.

Registration of children at birth is a legal obligation. For children who are not registered in the birth registry, especially among members of the Roma community and migrants, activities are being carried out in cooperation with civil society organizations to provide personal documents, as a prerequisite for access to rights and services.

3. What measures are taken in your country to address vulnerabilities related to the gender dimension of human trafficking?

The Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, within its competences, undertakes several measures and activities aimed at addressing vulnerabilities related to the gender dimension of human trafficking. These include:

- Recognition of gender aspects in the treatment of victims of human trafficking: When planning and implementing policies and measures for protection, support and reintegration, particular attention is paid to the specific needs of women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by certain forms of exploitation, especially sexual exploitation.
- Accommodation and support of victims in gender-sensitive conditions: Victims of human trafficking, women and girls, are accommodated in a Center for Victims of Human Trafficking where they are provided with access to psychosocial support, health services, legal aid and educational activities.
- Gender-responsive education and training: Within the framework of training for professionals working with victims of human trafficking, content related to gender equality, discrimination and gender-based violence is included.
- Inter-institutional coordination with a gender perspective: The Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth actively participates in the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, where through thematic subgroups and action plans, a gender perspective is included in policy-making. Gender-responsive policies are part of the Gender Equality Strategy and the Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

4. What specific measures are taken to reduce the vulnerability to trafficking of persons from disadvantaged minorities? Please provide information on policies and measures in the following areas:

a. research;

The Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth contributes to national analyses and reports, with which it participates in the preparation of the Annual Report on the Situation of Trafficking in Human Beings, provides data and analyses for periodic reports to GRETA, EC, UN and other bodies.

In 2023, the **Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)** prepared a public policy document entitled "Identification of Victims of Labor Exploitation within the Western Balkans." The document aims to present the current situation in the Western Balkans related to trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labor exploitation, as well as to provide conclusions and recommendations. The proposed recommendations aim to contribute to the creation of measures and activities that will lead to a reduction in the level of vulnerability of workers, improved regional cooperation and a reduction in the risks of trafficking in human

beings, especially labor exploitation. The document was appropriately forwarded to all relevant institutions in the Western Balkan countries.

In 2024, with the support of the Council of Europe Office, a Survey on Child Trafficking was prepared for: labor exploitation, child marriage, begging<sup>9</sup>.

b. information, awareness-raising and education campaigns;

In order to support and mark the "October 18 - European Day for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings", the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth supported the activities of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration and the citizens' associations that are members of the Secretariat and participated in video materials to raise public awareness on the prevention of human trafficking. In this context, training was conducted for mobile teams in cooperation with GIZ, on acting according to the Standard Operating Procedures for Treatment of Victims of Human Trafficking.

In 2024, in cooperation with the OSCE, training was held for representatives of the Social Affairs Centers (SAC) with the aim of raising awareness, educating and building the capacities of the employees of the SACs in the fight against human trafficking. The training focused on the implementation of the Standard Operating Procedures for Treatment of Victims of Human Trafficking, which regulate procedures and ways of providing assistance and protection to all victims of human trafficking through a human rights-based and targeted approach towards victim in the form of an institutional framework of cooperation.

Through working meetings with the mobile teams, information is regularly exchanged on the implementation of the Work Program and discussions on trends and specificities in the actions aimed at improving field work.

The functioning of the five Mobile teams since 2018 has been supported by IOM and their work has been continuously focused on field visits, contacts and information, referrals and assistance to vulnerable groups, including victims of human trafficking.

The National Commission, in cooperation with partners, continuously undertakes measures aimed at reducing the vulnerability of persons from socially endangered and marginalized communities, as well as at raising public awareness about the risks of human trafficking. Activities are implemented through intersectoral coordination of institutions, civil society organizations and international organizations, with an emphasis on prevention, information and education of vulnerable categories.

During 2022, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission and the association "Open Gate", the project "Reaching Out to Children on Street" was implemented, aimed at protecting children at risk of labor exploitation and forced begging, including children from marginalized groups<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, the campaign "Children are for Love, Not for Sale" was implemented in the same year, with the aim of raising awareness about the vulnerability of Roma children and preventing forced child marriages. The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia held 22 prevention workshops with young people from primary and secondary schools, with volunteers from Red Cross Youth Clubs, and one workshop with people from Afghanistan. The prevention lessons aimed to raise awareness among young people, recognize the ways in which they can be drawn into human trafficking and their self-protection. The workshops covered over 660 people.

The MYLA produced a video in English (translated into Arabic, Farsi and Pashto), posters and flyers, with a QR code that, when scanned, leads to the video in the specific language. The

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<sup>9</sup> See annex

<sup>10</sup> During the project: 1) six workshops were conducted with 150 children and their parents in Skopje, Prilep and Delchevo; 2) a social media campaign "Children are for loving, not for selling" was implemented and 3) several locations such as squares, intersections, large supermarkets, etc. were visited to meet children and their parents while they were begging.

official campaign was to share 6 videos<sup>11</sup> on social networks to raise awareness of the risks of human trafficking. The MYLA began a process of regional dissemination of awareness-raising materials throughout the region, 84 posters and 780 leaflets were distributed in the region in order to be placed in transit centers, camps and centers for asylum seekers (Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina). In 2023, the Prevention Departments in the Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to implement preventive activities and suppress begging, as one of the forms of neglect and abuse of children, as well as labor exploitation prepared plans for joint actions with the Centers for Social Affairs. The Protocol for Inter-Sectoral Cooperation for Dealing with Street Children from 2022 has also been shared in all SIAs. At the same time, the Association "For a Happy Childhood" held two focus groups on prevention of human trafficking for students, potential beneficiaries of the "Travel and Work" program, in which 14 students from different faculties at the University of Sts. Cyril and Methodius participated.

In 2024, the association Open Gate-La Strada conducted seven workshops<sup>12</sup> aimed at raising awareness of children and their parents, especially those marginalized and on the street, about the dangers of human trafficking. The Council of Europe Program Office supported a theater play in Prilep on the topic of forced marriages, realized with a grant awarded to Radio Pella. At the same time, a distribution of posters and leaflets against labor exploitation was organized, organized by the Business Confederation of Employers, which also issued a statement to raise awareness about this problem and produced a leaflet to inform about workers' rights in Turkish. The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia conducted peer education with young people on the prevention of human trafficking.

During 2024, a total of 57 workshops were held, covering 1,697 young people from primary and secondary schools. The Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Interior implemented the campaign "Privacy is Priceless. Protect your digital world!". The main goal of the campaign was to raise awareness of digital safety and the recognition of online risks, especially among young people as the most affected group. These activities have a direct contribution to the prevention of human trafficking by strengthening digital awareness and protection among young people. The campaign addressed the risks of online exploitation and misuse of personal data – common ways of recruitment and manipulation by traffickers. Key activities included: education through workshops for high school students (172 participants) and law students (14 participants), interactive posts for social media and guerrilla actions. The Open Door/La Strada Association conducted an interactive workshop with 61 high school students (44 girls and 17 boys) from four high schools<sup>13</sup> in Prilep, with whom it was discussed the consequences

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<sup>11</sup> The videos were promoted on social media and produced in Macedonian and Albanian. A total of 2,976 people were informed with the published videos to raise awareness among migrants, refugees and asylum seekers about the risks of human trafficking through social media – Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

**18/04/2022** RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN EUROPE! [English] Поблиску отколку што мислиш / Më afër se sa mendon- Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/kazistop/videos/490412702820027> 1601 people reached

**18/04/2022** RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN EUROPE! [English] Поблиску отколку што мислиш / Më afër se sa mendon (Youtube) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8spk3clAYA&t=3s> (103 views)

**18/04/2022** RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN EUROPE! [Arab] Closer then you can imagine / Më afër se sa mendon Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xHPrdVnYmqM&t=9s> (35 views)

**18/04/2022** RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN EUROPE! [Farsi] Closer then you can imagine / Më afër se sa mendon Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fFvHEMiJoMo&t=9s> (36 views)

**18/04/2022** RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN EUROPE! [Pashto] Closer then you can imagine/ Më afër se sa mendon Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TAT9n7NXd1s&t=6s> (31 views)

**18/04/2022** RISKS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS WHILE LOOKING FOR A JOB IN EUROPE! [ENGLISH] kazistop Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/p/CcfKQ5CIDOP/> 467 views

<sup>12</sup> In Stip, Kumanovo, Bitola, Kochani, Skopje, Prilep, Gevgelija.

<sup>13</sup> High school „Gorce Petrov“, High school „Orde Chopela“, High school „Riste Risteski Ricko“ и High school „Kuzman Josifovski Pitu“

of child and forced marriages, which negatively affect physical and mental health, limit educational and economic opportunities and disrupt the future of young people. Recognition and protection from human trafficking, which is often associated with forced marriages. Additionally, during this period, the Association promoted the new video "For a World Where Children Are Not Objects", through which it reminds the public and state institutions that they must not be indifferent to the fact that children, primarily from the Roma population, are exploited and live under difficult exploitative circumstances, including practices such as begging, forced marriages, etc.

c. socio-economic initiatives targeting underlying and structural causes;

The 2019 Law on Social Protection<sup>14</sup> provides temporary accommodation for victims of human trafficking for a period of 3 months to 1 year (Article 83), intervention care for child victims of human trafficking for up to 30 days (Article 92), and the right to health care (Article 66). Community services (Article 79) include day care, temporary accommodation, resocialization, rehabilitation services in order to enable beneficiaries to continue living in their own home, i.e. the community, and to prevent the need for out-of-family care. The Law defines the application of preventive and social protection services. Article 67 describes preventive measures implemented to protect against social risks, as well as to prevent social problems and mitigate the consequences of the emergence of social problems among citizens. It provides an opportunity to encourage the establishment of support and self-help groups in order to prevent social problems. Preventive social measures can be implemented by social protection services through cooperation with educational and health institutions, police stations, local government units and other state bodies, legal and natural persons and civil associations. The law provides for: information and referral services, professional assistance and support services, counselling services, placement in a small group home, community services and services for non-family protection. It includes rights in the field of social protection and available services, initial assessment and referral to other institutions. Professional assistance and support services for individuals and families are applied in situations of personal or family problems through the process of assessment, planning and evaluation, as well as monitoring the situation after the intervention is completed, with the aim of strengthening the capacities and well-being of the beneficiaries, as well as a long-term form of independent living and overcoming existing social problems. Counseling services are provided with the aim of preventing, mitigating and overcoming the consequences of social problems of individuals and families, namely for preparation for marriage, family life, parenthood, marital and partner counseling, family mediation, disrupted family relationships, psychosocial support for victims of domestic violence and other specialized types of counseling.

The Family Law provides for guardianship of minors who are victims of human trafficking, which is of particular interest in the identification and reintegration processes.

d. education, vocational training and job placement programmes.

The Employment Agency (EA) is a public institution that performs professional, organizational, administrative and other tasks related to employment and unemployment insurance and provides support, assistance and services to participants in the labor market.

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<sup>14</sup> Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia 104 from 23.5.2019, <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/zakoni.nspix>

The legal competences of the Employment Agency include, among other things, the implementation of active programs and measures for employment and labor market services, keeping records of unemployed persons, employment mediation, as well as the competence to issue an opinion in the procedure for regulating residence on the basis of work of a foreigner, issuing a work permit to a foreigner (who has regulated residence on another basis) and registering the work of a foreigner.

In connection with the implementation of active programs and measures for employment, the Government annually adopts an Operational Plan for Active Programs and Measures for Employment and Labor Market Services, which determines the programs, measures and employment services that will ensure the creation of new jobs and increase the employment of unemployed persons, especially young people, the long-term unemployed and beneficiaries of guaranteed minimum assistance. At the level of an individual employment program/measure, multiple target groups are defined, taking into account the inclusion of multiple vulnerable categories of unemployed persons.

When implementing employment programs and measures, the principle of diversity and inclusiveness is respected for all social categories in the private sector in accordance with the principles of fair and adequate representation of ethnic, gender, religious, racial or any other vulnerable category of citizens, in accordance with the standards and practices of the United Nations and the International Labor Organization.

Based on the above-mentioned activities implemented by the EA, the inclusion of persons in active employment programs and measures is ensured and/or they are referred for employment with employers, i.e. inclusion in the state system - through formal/legal channels for training, vocational training and work (all participants in active employment programs and measures conclude an Agreement for participation in an active measure and/or an employment contract - if it is an active measure leading to employment).

5. What specific measures are taken to reduce the vulnerability to THB of persons with disabilities? Please provide information in the following areas:

- a. deinstitutionalisation, including community and family-based services for children and support for independent living;
- b. monitoring institutions and foster families accommodating persons with disabilities;
- c. procedure for the selection and appointment of legal guardians and monitoring of their work;
- d. access to adequate accommodation, education and work;
- e. access to information and reporting/complaints mechanisms which are accessible to persons with disabilities.

\* answer below covers all points (a-e)

From the perspective of identifying the challenges faced by persons with disabilities, the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth adopted a strategic document - National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2030<sup>15</sup>, which sets ambitious benchmarks for the advancement of the rights of persons with disabilities, based on the United

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dokumenti.nsp> See annex

Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Union's Equality Union - Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, as well as the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, together with the Action Plan 2023-2026. The National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023-2030 is followed by the Action Plan 2023-2026, on the basis of which activities are implemented towards achieving the goals envisaged in the priority areas contained in the strategy itself, such as: Accessibility; Equality, access to justice and active participation in public and political life; Access to healthcare; Child, social protection and independent living; Right to education; Employment and right to work; Local inclusive communities; Public awareness; Culture, sports and recreation.

National Deinstitutionalization Strategy 2018-2027 "Timjanik" laid the foundations for the deinstitutionalization process, which is making significant progress. It is a process in which institutions are transformed into community services and the facilities of the institutions are no longer used for residential care. In recent years, all children from institutions in the field of social protection have been covered by social services in the community. The institutions that house these categories of beneficiaries will complete the transformation process with a parallel development of social services in the community, primarily with a focus on the municipalities (or regions) to which the beneficiaries will be resettled, while in the second phase (2024-2027) the process will be intensified for the other two groups of beneficiaries (elderly persons and persons with long-term mental health problems) and in all other regions of the country. Enabling continuous, pragmatic and non-discriminatory resettlement of beneficiaries results in continuous development and support in the establishment of the service, with an increase in the number of persons using supported living services, which is 255, beneficiaries of the service through licensed and certified social service providers and public institutions.

During 2025, the Ministry of Social Policy, Youth and Demography, through the conclusion of a management agreement, provided financial support to four licensed providers of the social service of supported living, for a total of 34 housing units intended for persons with disabilities. Licensed providers of the supported living service are CMA KRIK - Skopje, Center for Youth Activism, Center for Assistance to Persons with Mental Disabilities "Poraka" from Negotino, Association for Support and Development "HUMANOST" - Skopje, branch office Demir Hisar and Association for Persons with Cerebral Palsy and Other Disabilities - Veles.

In order to provide support to the persons who need it most in a way that strengthens the beneficiary, affirms his dignity and enables him to actively participate in the life of his community and society as a whole, a total of 57 residential units for supported living for 258 children and persons with disabilities are currently operating. Additionally, in the next period, and by 2027 inclusive, the remaining institutions for persons with disabilities should also be transformed, i.e. an additional 100 persons should move to live in the supported community.

In terms of establishing a system for monitoring and assessing the quality of social service delivery, active work is being done to develop indicators for the quality of social service delivery that include the accessibility and availability of services for people with disabilities. Namely, in 2024, the project "Support to the Quality Assurance System for Social Services" was launched, which will be implemented until 2027 by WYG Consulting Ltd with CGM Consorzio Nazionale della Cooperazione Sociale Gio Mattarelli. The aim of the project is to improve the functional framework for the implementation of quality assurance standards in the provision of social services. This will be enabled by improving the monitoring and

evaluation system and framework for conducting measurements at national, regional and local levels, strengthening the capacities of relevant stakeholders to use a comprehensive set of methodology and tools for monitoring and evaluation in the provision of social services, strengthened reporting and planning capacities at national, regional and local levels, as well as improving the capacities for conducting supervision and inspection of relevant institutions. According to current regulations, every licensed social service provider has a legal obligation to establish a mechanism for evaluating the quality of the service, whereby service users have the opportunity to express their dissatisfaction through a form of complaint, appeal, or comment.

6. How do you ensure in practice that an assessment of the vulnerability and special needs of asylum seekers is carried out at an early stage? What procedures are followed when vulnerability to THB is detected? Please provide information on policies and measures in the following areas:

- a. provision of comprehensive and accessible information, in a range of relevant languages, on the rights of asylum seekers, indicators of THB, rights of victims of THB, and contacts of relevant organisations;

With support from IOM, UNHCR and civil society organizations, asylum seekers receive comprehensive information in understandable and appropriate languages (including Arabic, Farsi, Pashto, Kurdish, English, French and Romani), on their rights, the asylum procedure, indicators of trafficking in human beings and protection mechanisms.

In 2022, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) prepared and implemented a campaign with videos, flyers and posters, accessible via QR code, in all temporary transit centers and reception centers, with clear messages about the risks of human trafficking and available forms of assistance. The materials were distributed across the Western Balkan countries.

**b. access to legal aid and representation;**

MYLA provides legal aid and represents asylum seekers in the asylum procedure. All asylum seekers, upon submitting an application, are accommodated in the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo, where the MYLA also has a daily presence and office. Additionally, the MYLA also has offices and presence in the temporary transit centers Vinjovce and Tabanovce. Upon the arrival of the asylum seeker and when granting authorization for representation, the MYLA conducts an interview with the asylum seeker in order to gain insight into the current situation of the applicant, personal experiences, fears, reasons for fleeing their home country, method of arrival and reasons for seeking asylum in North Macedonia and other important information. Hence, the MYLA perceives the full picture of the case and determines potential risks, vulnerability of the person or the existence of indicators for a potential victim of human trafficking. The MYLA has developed its own specific form for conducting an interview through which it can identify the person's situation. If it is not possible to immediately detect the vulnerability of the person, it continuously monitors all cases and is in daily contact with all asylum seekers, so the vulnerability can also be detected at a later point during the representation in the asylum procedure.

If the existence of an indicator/risk of trafficking in human beings is determined, the MYLA follows the steps of the Standard Operating Procedures for Treatment of THB victims and notifies the competent authorities, the Center for Social Affairs, the National Unit for

Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking (Task Force) and the National Referral Mechanism at the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs with all the information at its disposal. In addition, it acts as part of the mobile teams for the identification of vulnerable categories of persons and victims of human trafficking. During the conduct of the procedures, it provides legal assistance for all legal issues related to the case and ensures the presence of an interpreter in some of the rare languages for the purpose of easier communication. At the same time, it also represents the applicant throughout the entire asylum procedure before the competent authorities and institutions in the country.

- c. access to decent accommodation, health (including psychological) care, work and education.

Vulnerable categories of asylum seekers are accommodated in safe conditions in the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers, with access to basic services. They receive medical and psychological assistance, including social support through dedicated teams.

Child asylum seekers are included in the educational process through local schools, and adults are provided with opportunities to learn Macedonian and participate in informal educational programs. In certain cases, asylum seekers also have access to measures for inclusion in the labor market, especially through cooperation with local organizations.

In accordance with the Law on Foreigners<sup>16</sup> and the Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners<sup>17</sup>, the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia is responsible for issuing an opinion based on the fulfillment of the quota and checking the current situation on the labor market. This opinion is issued by the Employment Agency to the Ministry of Interior in the procedure for regulating residence on the basis of work for a foreigner, as well as for issuing a Work Permit for a foreigner who has regulated residence in the Republic of Macedonia on another basis.

A request for a work permit may be submitted by a foreigner who has regulated his/her stay in the country on another basis, including the following categories of foreigners:

- a foreigner seeking asylum whose application for recognition of the right to asylum has not been decided within a period of one year, after the expiry of the one-year period (the work permit is issued for three months with the possibility of extension)
- a foreigner with recognized refugee status;
- a foreigner under subsidiary protection and
- a foreigner under temporary protection.

On the other hand, the legislation also provides that a work permit is issued to victims of human trafficking who have acquired a temporary residence permit for the purpose of work for humanitarian reasons for the period of validity of the temporary residence permit.

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<sup>16</sup> Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia and Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia no. 108/19, 294/21, 284/23 and 193/25 <https://mvr.gov.mk/mk-MK/legislativa/zakoni>

<sup>17</sup> Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia no.199/14 and 147/15 and Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia, no. 18/20 and 86/25) ; See annex

7. What specific measures are taken to reduce the vulnerability to THB of migrant workers (including seasonal workers, seconded/posted workers, domestic workers, diplomatic household employees)? Please provide information on policies and measures in the following areas:

- a. provision of comprehensive and accessible information, in a range of relevant languages, on migration and labour laws, worker protection and contacts of relevant organisations;

The Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners regulates the conditions and procedures under which foreigners may be employed or work in the Republic of North Macedonia, unless otherwise determined by a ratified international agreement. A foreigner is considered an employed person when, on the basis of an employment contract, he or she establishes an employment relationship with an employer whose seat or place of residence is in the Republic of North Macedonia or when he or she acquires the status of a self-employed person in accordance with this or another law.

Within the framework of the Employment Agency of North Macedonia and its regional employment centers throughout the republic, it is planned to open information offices in the future where foreign workers will be able to obtain information related to their easier access to the labor market. Also, in these offices they will be able to obtain information on their integration into society (information on the cost of renting an apartment, the nearest schools and kindergartens, as well as the possibility of other members of their family finding employment.)

- b. provision of clear employment contracts;

According to the above-mentioned law, foreigners who, in accordance with this or another law, may be employed, self-employed or work in North Macedonia must necessarily possess a temporary residence permit for work purposes issued by the Ministry of Interior or a work permit issued by the Agency for Employment and regulated residence on another basis. In the procedure for obtaining a temporary residence permit for work purposes in accordance with the law, the Agency issues an opinion based on the utilization of the quota and the current needs of the labor market in North Macedonia. The person must necessarily register his work as a foreigner's work. When employing a foreigner, the employer may not place the job seeker in an unequal position due to age, health condition or disability, religious, political or other beliefs, membership in trade unions, national or social origin, family status, property status, sexual orientation or other personal grounds. Regardless of whether it is a foreigner, the employment itself determines the general regulations for labor relations as for any other worker. In this sense, these contracts should contain all the elements provided for by the Law on Labor Relations, which serves as a systemic law.

- c. access to decent work and housing, health care, social services and education;

Additionally, by registering the employment relationship, the foreigner is also enabled to enter the mandatory social insurance system. According to Article 14 of the Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners, foreigners who are staying for the purpose of studying may perform short-term or auxiliary work without a work permit, if the total period for performing such work does not exceed 10 working hours during a week. The condition for performing short-term or auxiliary work, in accordance with the paragraph of this Article, is registration of the work with the Employment Agency.

- d. possibility to change employers;

The possibility of changing the employer is a regulated issue, but it is tied, that is, it can only be done during the period when the regulated stay is valid and in a position or qualifications for which the foreigner was previously allowed to enter and work in the country.

- e. access to confidential complaints mechanisms;

In accordance with the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners, appeal mechanisms are available to this type of worker.

- f. right to join trade unions and to engage in collective bargaining;

Considering that a foreign worker is equal to domestic workers, s/he has the right to union membership as well as the right to collective bargaining.

- g. legal avenues for regularising their stay in the country.

The legal basis for regulating residence in the country is contained in the Law on Foreigners. The rights of applicants are given and regulated by the Law on International and Temporary Protection (they are not specific to human trafficking, they apply to all asylum seekers).

The Centers for Social Affairs act in accordance with the existing Laws and Standard Operating Procedures for Human Trafficking. A Program for Field Work of Mobile Teams for Identification of Vulnerable Categories of Persons, Presumed and Identified Victims of Human Trafficking is also applied where they have been established. Some of the experts from the Service for Social Inclusion of Persons at Risk have undergone basic training on human trafficking and they need continuous education and support.

In order to provide specific education and further education at all levels of experts, employees and other engaged persons acting as part of the project "Strengthening regional cooperation on migration management between the Western Balkan countries and neighboring EU member states, in accordance with EU regulations and international standards - MIRCO - a project co-financed by the EU and concluded with ICMPD/International Center for Migration Policy Development through the Migration Partnership Fund, a draft version of the training curriculum "Prevention of Torture and Protection of Migrants' Rights" has been prepared.

8. Do labour inspectorates and other authorities checking workplace conditions possess a comprehensive mandate, and adequate human, financial and technical resources, to conduct regular, proactive workplace inspections in all economic sectors, with a particular emphasis on high-risk sectors prone to exploitation? How do labour inspectors co-operate with other authorities and trade unions? Is there a separation between labour inspection and immigration control functions?

The State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) has a role in identifying and referring potential victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation when conducting inspections. Labor inspectors have the authority to conduct inspections in all, both registered and unregistered legal entities, without requiring an order from a competent institution for this (unless it concerns housing) and can identify potential victims of THB. The inspectorate is taking actions to target risky activities and increase inspections in those activities. To this end, inspections in the construction and catering industry (HORECA sector) have been increased. One of the problems facing the SLI is the lack of a clear mandate for action established by law, then the lack of a sufficient number of inspectors, technical equipment, clear written internal

procedures, nor sufficient financial resources. The lack of an appropriate and integrated database is also a problem facing the Labor Inspectorate.

The State Labor Inspectorate has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in the detection of crimes related to human trafficking and labor exploitation and the referral of potential victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation with the Ministry of Interior in March 2023.

In 2024, 194 extraordinary inspections were carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Interior. Also, in 2023, the SLA has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Confederation of Trade Unions of Macedonia, as well as an Agreement on Data Exchange and Cooperation with the Public Revenue Office. The State Labor Inspectorate cooperates with all relevant institutions, both in the exchange of data and in conducting inspections (the State Market Inspectorate, the Directorate for Protection and Rescue, the State Sanitary and Health Inspectorate, the Public Prosecutor's Office, etc.).

In the State Labor Inspectorate, there is no division of labor inspection and immigration control. State labor inspectors control the provision of employment rights for both domestic and foreign employees and persons hired for work.

9. How are employment and recruitment agencies regulated and monitored? Are all stages of the recruitment process, including advertisements, selection, transport, and placement, subject to regulation? Are recruitment fees and related costs prohibited from being borne by workers or jobseekers?

The conditions and procedure for the establishment and operation of private employment agencies are regulated by a separate Law on Private Employment Agencies<sup>18</sup>. According to this law, private agencies may perform temporary employment, mediation for employment in the country, mediation for work abroad and mediation for employment in the country and abroad. The competent Ministry issues licenses to this type of agency. The law also regulates the conditions that must be met in order for a private agency to be established and operate, especially for the purposes of obtaining an appropriate license. It also regulates issues related to temporary employment and mediation in employment, defining all mandatory elements, procedures and documents.

These agencies may charge a fee for the services provided only from a user employer or a potential employer.

Namely, according to Article 35, a private employment agency with a license for mediation for employment performs mediation on the basis of a request submitted by a potential employer for the employment of persons referred for possible employment for a specific job position. The private employment agency performs:

- informing job seekers about open job offers,
- preliminary interviews to determine the qualifications of the job seeker,

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<sup>18</sup> Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia no.199/14 and 147/15 and Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia no. 18/20, 86/25; See annex

- checking the skills and competencies of the job seekers and –

interview (conversation) with a potential employer. "

Article 36 paragraph 1 stipulates that employment mediation in the country is carried out on the basis of a previously concluded agreement between the private employment agency and the employer to whom the person will be referred for possible employment in the country, and additionally regulates the mandatory elements of the agreement. "

At the same time, according to Article 37, employment mediation abroad is carried out on the basis of a previously concluded agreement between the private employment agency with a license for employment mediation abroad and the potential employer from abroad with whom an interview for possible employment of the job seeker, who applied for employment through the private employment agency with a license for employment mediation abroad, will be organized. The contract shall mandatorily determine the conditions and manner in relation to the mediation for employment abroad. The contract for mediation for employment abroad shall mandatorily contain the following elements: - full name of the legal or natural person - potential employer, registered office and country; - responsible person at the potential employer; - employment conditions regulated by the legislation of the country to which the job seeker will be referred (working hours, job position, salary amount and method of payment, working conditions, as well as accommodation conditions and other conditions in accordance with the legislation of the country to which the job seeker is referred); - conditions for repatriation (in case of termination of the employment contract) and - other general conditions related to the mediation in employment and the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the private employment agency with a license for mediation for employment abroad and the employer to whom the person will be referred for possible employment abroad. Before referring a person for possible employment abroad, the private employment agency with a license for mediation for employment abroad shall conclude a mediation agreement with the job seeker, which shall determine the mutual rights and obligations in relation to the mediation for employment. The person referred for possible employment abroad shall have the right to compensation from the employer for unfulfilled obligations under the employment agreement, i.e. compensation from the private employment agency with a license for mediation for employment abroad for unfulfilled obligations under the mediation agreement.

Article 38 stipulates that the Private Employment Agency is obliged, no later than the fifth of the current month for the previous month, to submit data on persons referred for employment abroad to the Employment Agency.

The Law, in Article 39, stipulates that a private employment agency with an employment mediation license may not: - force persons referred for possible employment with a potential employer to accept the offered job, - force a potential employer to accept as an employee the person referred for possible employment, - use child labor in the mediation for possible employment and - insult the dignity and morals of persons referred for possible employment. The private employment agency with an employment mediation license is obliged, before concluding the mediation agreement, to properly and timely notify persons in writing of possible employment and the conditions for the offered job.

According to Article 40, the provisions of the general labor regulations shall apply to all employment rights not regulated by this Law.

10. How do you prevent and sanction abuses of legal constructions such as self-employment, letter-box companies, sub-contracting, and posting of workers, which may be used to commit THB?

Prevention and protection from possible abuses in the area of labor migration and employment are regulated by the Law on Labor Relations, as well as by other special laws. The laws regulate the employment of an employee by another employer, as well as self-employment. Control and sanctioning of compliance with and application of laws and other regulations regulating issues of employment and labor migration are carried out by inspection bodies and institutions competent for a specific area. Also, in accordance with the Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners, the agency is also competent for the registration of the work of a foreigner in the Republic of Macedonia.

Preventing and sanctioning abuses of legal forms such as self-employment, shell companies, subcontracting and sending workers, which can be used as forms for human trafficking, is broader and encompasses the competence and actions of multiple institutions (Ministry of Economy and Labor, Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, Ministry of Interior, State Labor Inspectorate and other inspections, Public Revenue Office).

11. How do your country's migration legislation and policies seek to prevent THB by enabling lawful migration and legal employment opportunities accompanied by decent work conditions?

The Labor Relations Law regulates the labor relations between the employer and the employees, which are established by an employment contract. In addition to other issues, according to Article 13, the employer is obliged to submit an application/deregistration (electronic form M1/M2 printed from the Employment Agency system for the employee in the social insurance (pension, disability and health insurance) in accordance with the special regulations. In addition, this law also regulates the ways in which the employer can employ an employee:

- Advertising a public advertisement in the daily press or in other means of public information printed or electronic at the expense of the employer
- Advertising in the service responsible for employment, without payment, in accordance with the law
- Mediation by the service responsible for employment mediation by referring persons from the records of unemployed persons and
- Employment mediation agency with payment from the employer in accordance with the law, with prior entry of the public advertisement in the electronic system of the Employment Agency of the Republic of Macedonia as well as to register the employee/employment.

This law also regulates the issue of performing work in abroad.

The Law on Private Agencies regulates the conditions and procedure for the establishment and operation of private agencies, the types of licenses, the procedure for assignment and mediation, etc.

The Law on Foreigners and the Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners regulate the access of a foreigner to the labor market in the Republic of Macedonia, regulating the bases for work (employment, referral, other work that a foreigner can perform in the Republic of Macedonia), the employer's obligation to register/report the work of the foreigner through the Agency for Employment of the Republic of Macedonia, the conditions, procedure and documentation for regulating the stay of the foreigner on the basis of work or for obtaining a work permit, exchange of data and the submission of data by the agency to the Ministry of Interior on employers who have or have not registered the foreigner, the envisaged sanctions, etc.

12. How do your country's law and policies to discourage demand that leads to THB address particular vulnerabilities and groups at risk of THB?

In the Republic of North Macedonia, national policies and legal mechanisms to combat trafficking in human beings include measures to reduce demand, as one of the key links in preventing human trafficking. The Criminal Code<sup>19</sup> criminalizes the use of services by a person known to be a victim of human trafficking, which is a direct sanction against demand. In addition, sanctions are also applied to legal entities that profit from the exploitation of victims.

The National Strategy (2021–2025) recognizes that demand is closely linked to structural factors, such as poverty, gender inequality, discrimination and lack of opportunities. Therefore, measures are envisaged targeting at-risk and marginalized groups. Training is being conducted for labor inspectors, the hospitality and private sectors in order to recognize and report suspicious cases, public campaigns with a focus on the gender dimension, as well as the involvement of the media in order to protect the identity of victims. In this way, policies address demand not only through punitive action, but also through prevention, education and structural interventions, with special attention paid to the most vulnerable categories of the population.

13. How do your country's legislation and practice ensure that there is an individual assessment of protection needs at the borders prior to any refusals of entry or expulsions?

Individual needs assessment at the borders before making decisions to refuse entry or expel is guaranteed by law and is consistently implemented. The Law on Foreigners stipulates that "the return of the foreigner shall be carried out in accordance with the principle of non-refoulement, the best interests of the minor child and the needs of other vulnerable persons and victims of human trafficking, family life and the health of the foreigner." (Article 146, paragraph 1) and that "the removal of the foreigner may be postponed for an appropriate period, taking into account the specific circumstances of the individual case and when it violates the principle of non-refoulement" (Article 156, paragraph 1). The Law on Foreigners also allows for the approval of the entry of a foreigner who does not meet one or more conditions for entry for humanitarian reasons, due to the national interest of the Republic of Macedonia or due to the fulfillment of obligations under international agreements (Article 11). All of the above provisions are consistently respected. Additionally, the Law on International and Temporary Protection allows a foreigner at a border crossing to express orally or in writing his intention to submit an application for recognition of the right to asylum (Article 25) and to submit an application for recognition of the right to asylum at a border crossing point (Article 26).

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<sup>19</sup> <https://jorm.gov.mk/category/zakoni-i-podzakonski-akti/zakoni/>

14. What measures are taken to prevent THB in sports? What sectors and categories/groups of people have been identified as being at risk?

From the previous practice, the way to help prevent human trafficking in sports and sporting events is most often organized training that national sports federations conduct within the framework of their rules and propositions through educational workshops, training to raise awareness among younger age categories of children who play sports. However, they are of course under a strictly controlled training process in the presence of expert teams that provide continuous education during training.

However, numerous associations of citizens-sports clubs, sports schools, which have an organized system of competitions and which include a large number of athletes of all categories and ages, have a training model that does not allow human trafficking.

It is assumed that the risk factor is the persons who are temporarily residing in our country, who make a transfer from one sports club to another, who come from different countries, but who, in accordance with the rules and propositions of the national sports federations, together with the international sports associations, have established mandatory obligations that for an athlete represent a professional relationship from which arises an engagement of dedication, professionalism and the way in which they represent the country in which they reside.

All established associations that are members of the national sports federations, keep a register and at the same time issue membership cards for each individual who is a member of a sports club. Therefore, we cannot speak of categories or groups of people who identify themselves as risky.

Major sporting events attract not only fans, but also a larger mass of people who come from different parts of the world. However, the organization of this type of sporting events is exclusively under the control and supervision of the national sports federations, which through their management invest and help in preventing any type of risks in this field.

So far, no suspected victims of human/child trafficking have been detected in the sports sector.

15. Have you identified online practices that may increase the risk of becoming a victim of THB for different forms of exploitation? What mechanisms have been developed to prevent the misuse of information and communication technology for THB purposes? What is the practical effect of their implementation?

In the past period, the Department for Suppression of Organized and Serious Crime at the Ministry of Interior conducted proactive and reactive investigations related to the online model of human trafficking, based on which online sites advertising foreign nationals offering sexual services, the use of Internet applications for recruitment and posting of videos with explicit content of children were identified, which increase the risk for potential victims of human trafficking. In the context of the above, regional coordination meetings were also conducted with representatives from Kosovo and Croatia, where the same phenomena were identified, with the aim of coordination and cooperation. Websites offering work in the construction and hospitality sectors for foreign workers and where labor exploitation is possible have also been identified, for which the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human

Trafficking organized coordination meetings with the competent organizational units within the Ministry of Interior in order to be more vigilant regarding the granted residence permits on the basis of employment and to inform the National Unit if certain irregularities are detected.

Open Gate/La Strada conducted a specialized research<sup>20</sup> on online exploitation and trafficking of children, which indicates that social networks, online games and messaging applications are the most commonly used channels for recruitment and control. The research identified trends such as "grooming" and other manipulative practices, which opens up a wide space for exploitation.

Open Gate has identified several online practices that directly increase the risk of human trafficking, and what is particularly worrying is their diversity. The most common are fake job advertisements posted on social media or irregular websites, where young and unemployed people are lured with promises of high salaries and secured accommodation. Another common risk is sextortion, where minors and young people are tricked into sending intimate photos or videos, which are then used to extort or coerce them into sexual exploitation. Cases of the so-called "lover boy" recruitment model have also been reported, where perpetrators establish a relationship online and then manipulate victims into exploitation. New technologies also enable new forms of manipulation, where traffickers use fake or AI-generated photos to create profiles and present themselves as other people. Webcams and live streams further provide a space for exploitation, as in one formally identified case in North Macedonia, a victim who was exploited via online platforms live by a Balkan network of traffickers. In addition to recruitment, digital technologies are often misused to control and monitor victims, and even to mediate forced marriages in closed online groups.

Open Gate has developed and implemented prevention and support mechanisms. Through preventive programs in schools, workshops have been organized for students to recognize the risks of human trafficking and online exploitation. Within the framework of these workshops, material and instructions have also been shared with teachers, who help them timely recognize and report risky online behavior in children. The organization also cooperates with the Ministry of Interior to proactively report suspicious advertisements and profiles. They offer psychosocial support to victims, especially in procedures related to online blackmail and misuse of digital content. The SOS line and anonymous online chat provide safe channels for reporting, informing about risks, as well as prevention and protection measures. At the same time, they are regularly involved in public awareness campaigns, such as the European initiative Safer Internet Day, together with UN agencies and partners, where the focus is on protecting children and young people from the risks of the digital world.

On their part, an increased number of self-reports following preventive activities and campaigns has been noted, which indicates a growing awareness of the possibilities for protection. Open Gate believes that cooperation with institutions contributes to strengthening the capacities of professionals in identifying specific cases of online exploitation, but also to increased responsibility among teachers and parents in monitoring children's digital behavior.

16. What measures are taken to raise awareness of the risks of technology-facilitated THB, including among children, parents, teachers, child care professionals and social workers? What technology-based initiatives exist in your country to disseminate information to groups/communities at risk of THB?

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<sup>20</sup> <https://lastrada.org.mk/priracnici/page/3/?lang=en>  
see annex

The Cybercrime Sector of the Ministry of Interior and the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking monitor online activities and cooperate with other institutions for the early prevention of risks of human trafficking. Regarding technological initiatives for the dissemination of useful information for the prevention of this phenomenon, it is implemented through public announcements and campaigns in cooperation with non-governmental organizations. All activities for raising awareness of the risks of THB are actively monitored, taking into account new trends and the impact of technology, social networks and internet applications through the active participation of their representatives in educational workshops intended for different groups and ages, campaigns and other in coordination with international organizations, citizen associations and other competent institutions working in the field of human trafficking and being part of the National Commission. Among other things, the annual plans of the Internal Affairs Sectors of the Ministry of Interior provide for preventive activities on the topic of combating human trafficking. Campaigns, educational workshops, forums and meetings are also planned, where the target group is primary and secondary schools, educational and psychological staff, parents and teachers. These activities provide advice on protecting vulnerable categories – children, present ways to recognize this phenomenon via the Internet and social networks, and what the penalties are for committing them and the consequences. The activities are carried out either independently or with social work centers, the Red Cross and other non-governmental organizations. In addition, campaigns are also carried out within which experts talk to young people and advise caution when looking for work and caution when accepting job offers via social networks, the Internet and unverified employment agencies.

Also, the activities of the mobile teams at the local and central level are aimed at preventive activities and work with youth and children at risk, as well as other target groups of professional workers in the field of social work, health workers, teaching staff, etc.

Additionally, measures and activities are being undertaken to monitor new trends in online recruitment and indoctrination and to provide digital evidence in investigations through participation at regional and international levels in meetings, conferences, trainings, working groups, platforms, projects, as well as exchange of information through the channels of the Sector for International Police Cooperation.

17. How do you cooperate with ICT companies and Internet service providers, including content hosts and social media, in preventing THB?

The Cybercrime Sector has continuous cooperation with national telecommunications operators, but also with international internet service providers. They cooperate with them in accordance with their rules and regulations for cooperation with investigative and judicial authorities. Some of them have platforms for submitting requests, with some communication is carried out simply via email.

From the cooperation with international internet service providers such as Meta platforms, Google, Tik Tok, Telegram, three types of data can be requested: user data, traffic data (IP addresses) and content data. There are three types of requests with which data can be requested from ISPs. Urgent request for data delivery, request for data storage and request for data delivery.

Some of the ISPs cooperate with the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but of course the Ministry of Internal Affairs also faces uncooperative providers that make the investigation difficult.

If the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking needs to provide electronic evidence relevant to the criminal procedure, the Cybercrime Sector immediately acts upon its request and addresses the relevant provider. Technical support of this type is requested through the competent public prosecutor's office.

18. How are policies and practices aimed at preventing THB informed by the experiences of victims and at-risk individuals?

Policies and practices for the prevention of human trafficking are created with a clear focus on the experiences and needs of victims and persons at risk. In this regard, on May 13, 2024, the National Commission for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration established a Group for Advocacy of Survivors – Victims of Human Trafficking, which is an independent body composed of survivors proposed by the association "Open Door – La Strada". This group aims to ensure the direct participation of survivors in the creation of policies, mechanisms and activities related to their protection, assistance and resocialization. Through this initiative, the experiences of victims are directly included in the identification of weaknesses in existing mechanisms, defining recommendations for legal changes, creating strategies and action plans, preparing research materials and educational campaigns, as well as in supporting advocacy and prevention activities. The formation of this Group represents a significant step towards establishing a human rights-based approach and active participation of stakeholders, which strengthens the national response to human trafficking and contributes to an efficient and inclusive approach to dealing with this phenomenon.

## **II. IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS AND PROTECTION OF THEIR RIGHTS (Articles 10, 11, 12, 14 and 16)**

19. Among the victims of THB identified, were any subjected to exploitation on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity (LGBTI+: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex), especially teenagers and young adults? If yes, did any of them report on police misconduct?

No, in the records and reports to date, there are no registered cases of victims of human trafficking who were exploited on the basis of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. There are also no reports of negligent police action related to this category of victims.

20. What specific measures are taken to ensure that trafficked persons who are migrant workers, including in an irregular situation, are identified as victims of THB and have access to the rights provided for in the Convention? Is there cooperation with specialised NGOs, trade unions, and employers to enhance the identification and protection of potential victims within these at-risk groups?

Regarding measures for the identification and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings who are migrant workers, including those in an irregular situation, North Macedonia is actively improving its capacities through several regional and national initiatives and collaborations. In 2022, the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) organized a national training on combating migrant smuggling in the Western Balkans for representatives of the Ministry of Interior (various organizational units/sectors), the Office of the Prosecutor General and the Office of the Prosecutor General. The training was attended by 33 representatives of state institutions and citizens' associations from Macedonia. The aim of the training was to build and strengthen the capacities and skills of national institutions and concerned associations in combating migrant smuggling in the Western Balkans and protecting

the rights of victims of trafficking. Additionally, during 2022, a conference entitled: "Combating human trafficking through institutional and non-institutional mechanisms" was held. The conference emphasized the need to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation, cooperation with associations, the private sector and trade unions. In the same year, an awareness-raising campaign was launched through multilingual video materials produced in English (translated into Arabic, Farsi and Pashto), posters and flyers, with a QR code that, when scanned, leads to the produced video in the specific language, which were distributed in the region in order to be placed in transit centers, camps and asylum seekers' centers (Serbia, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina). In 2023, the National Commission hosted a conference on due diligence in supply chains, with the support of the OSCE, in order to strengthen measures against human trafficking and labor exploitation. In the same year, a public policy document "Identification of victims of labor exploitation within the Western Balkans" was prepared by the MYLA. The document aims to present the current situation in the Western Balkans related to trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation, with recommendations for improving regional cooperation and reducing risks.

In 2024, representatives of the National Commission participated in a regional meeting organized by UNODC in Moldova, dedicated to the fight against labour exploitation and trafficking in human beings caused by migration due to armed conflicts. The same year, IOM organized a regional conference focusing on liberalization of access to the labour market and prevention of trafficking in human beings, where representatives from North Macedonia also participated.

During 2024, the Council of Europe Programme Office supported awareness-raising campaigns on labour exploitation, including the premiere of a theatre play, the distribution of educational materials and activities aimed at secondary school students, including the production of illustrated comics.

These activities confirm the systematic and coordinated cooperation between state institutions, the non-governmental sector, trade unions and the private sector, in order to ensure the identification and full protection of migrant workers - victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as their access to the rights provided for by the Convention.

21. What measures are in place to encourage victims of THB to report their situation to the authorities and/or civil society organisations?

The Republic of North Macedonia has taken several measures to encourage victims of trafficking in human beings to report their situation to the competent authorities and civil society organizations. Victims have access to accommodation, psychosocial and legal support, which increases their sense of security and facilitates their decision to cooperate with the authorities. The legislative framework guarantees a period of recovery and reflection, as well as the right to temporary residence for foreign victims, measures that are applied in practice. In addition, continuous training for police, social workers, prosecutors, judges and health workers, implemented in cooperation with international organizations and the civil society sector, as well as the implemented prevention campaigns that inform about the risks and direct potential victims to appropriate support mechanisms, significantly contribute to building trust with victims and encouraging them to report their exploitation. In addition, confidential reporting channels have been established, including the mobile application "Red Button" and hotlines, and cooperation with NGOs provides alternative avenues for those who do not trust institutions.

22. What specific measures are taken in your country to detect/identify and refer to assistance possible victims of THB at the borders? What measures are taken in your country

to identify victims of THB during the examination of asylum applications and prior to the return of persons whose applications are rejected?

SOPs for dealing with victims of human trafficking have been developed and adopted, which regulate the entire process from developing a referral network and resources, through identification and referral, to return and support during the criminal procedure. SOPs for dealing with unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of persons – foreigners (August 2024)<sup>21</sup> have also been developed and adopted, which represent a unified and upgraded version of the previous SOPs for dealing with unaccompanied children – foreigners (November 2015) and SOPs for dealing with vulnerable categories of persons – foreigners (June 2016), updated in accordance with the best practices acquired over the past ten years. According to this SOP, victims of human trafficking are recognized as a vulnerable category of persons.

The Border Police also participated in the development of these documents and is one of the bodies responsible for their implementation.

Trainings are organized for the proper implementation of the above-mentioned SOPs for frontline police officers. The recognition of indicators for vulnerable persons, including THB victims, is also part of various other trainings for police officers.

All detected persons are interviewed – briefed and screened.

All persons for whom direct or indirect information is obtained indicating that they could be potential victims of human trafficking, are informed to the competent authorities in the National Referral Mechanism.

The identification of victims is carried out by the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking. Persons who have been determined to be victims of human trafficking are not subject to return.

23. What measures are taken in your country to identify victims of THB in immigration detention centres and prisons?

All police officers working at the Reception Center for Foreigners of the Ministry of Interior receive continuous training on how to act in accordance with the SOP for dealing with victims of THB and the SOP for unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of foreign persons. Also, the Reception Center for Foreigners ensures the regular presence of citizen associations, international organizations and organizations and associations that provide free legal aid.

24. What services are available in your country to provide specific assistance to particularly vulnerable victims, such as:

- a. persons with disabilities;
- b. LGBTI+ persons;
- c. victims with children;
- d. victims with severe mental and physical trauma;
- e. homeless persons;
- f. other.

The Republic of North Macedonia provides specialized support services for victims of trafficking in human beings, tailored to the individual needs of particularly vulnerable categories. Within the framework of the National Referral Mechanism, an individual risk assessment is carried out and a support plan is prepared, in order to ensure a human rights-based approach and

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<sup>21</sup> [https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2024/%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BF/sop\\_web\\_2709.pdf](https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2024/%D1%81%D0%BE%D0%BF/sop_web_2709.pdf)

see annex

sensitivity to vulnerabilities. Victims have access to safe accommodation, psychosocial and legal support, health services, as well as educational and social services. For persons with special health or psychological needs, medical care is provided, and in cooperation with civil society organizations and specialized services, additional forms of assistance and advocacy are provided.

25. How do you support the (re)integration of victims of THB? What processes are in place in your country to provide assistance to victims of THB exploited abroad after their return?

Open Gate provides a comprehensive reintegration program for victims of human trafficking, which is implemented through several phases.

The first phase begins in the shelter, the state-run Center for Victims of Human Trafficking managed by Open Gate, where victims receive initial support: safe accommodation, health and social protection, psychosocial support and legal assistance. During this phase, an individual reintegration plan is developed, through an assessment of personal needs and risks.

In the second phase, the process continues in the shelter and/or outside, with preparatory activities for community integration. This includes educational and vocational training, life skills development, employment mediation, support for returning to the family environment (if safe), as well as mentoring and continuous psychological support. This approach encourages victims and facilitates their gradual and stable integration into society. Also, within the framework of the trainings, special attention is paid to the development of new skills, including communication, self-confidence, financial literacy and stress management, which allows victims to more successfully cope with the challenges of everyday life and build a stable foundation for their future. An important component in the process is providing access to all relevant administrative and social services, including assistance in renewing personal documents and exercising social rights.

The third phase refers to long-term support and permanent integration. Open Door remains in contact with victims for several years after they leave the shelter, in order to monitor progress, deal with new challenges, provide additional services and prevent re-victimization. Services such as access to health and social protection, legal aid, support for economic independence and housing, are part of this phase.

A key aspect in preventing re-victimization is the development of individual safety plans that address the specific risks and needs of each victim and her family. In addition, long-term support includes the organization of support groups and survivor networks, which provide solidarity, encouragement and exchange of experiences, which is important for psychological stability, building a social network and improving social integration. Social inclusion programs are also being developed through activism, where survivors are given the opportunity to become advocates and supporters of other victims, which allows the power of experience to be translated into positive change and community empowerment. This model emphasizes the important aspect of strengthening the voice of victims and their role as active actors in the fight against human trafficking. For victims returning from abroad, Open Gate provides specialized services for the reception and support of victims in cooperation with foreign NGOs and relevant institutions (Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, Centers for Social Work, as well as international partners such as IOM). These services include, preparations for return and reception, emergency and appropriate support in a shelter or alternative accommodation. Assistance with personal documents, assessment of needs immediately upon arrival, emergency support, such as health and psychosocial care, as well

as support for reintegration into education or employment are also provided. In addition, access to social, legal and other public services necessary for their full integration is facilitated.

26. If there is a provision in your country's law that provides for the possibility of issuing a residence permit owing to the victim's personal situation, how is this interpreted in practice? Please provide examples.

The issuance of residence permits is regulated by the Law on Foreigners. According to Article 20 of this Law, temporary residence for humanitarian reasons is granted as an exception to a foreigner who does not meet the conditions for granting temporary residence established by this Law, if there are grounds for suspecting that he is a victim of the crime of "Human Trafficking" established by the Criminal Code. The Law on Foreigners also defines in detail the period of recovery and reflection and the rights of THB victims during this period. Article 124 clearly states that during the period of recovery and reflection, a foreigner who is determined to have the status of a victim of human trafficking will be issued a temporary residence permit, if his stay is necessary due to his personal situation.

27. What measures are in place to ensure that the identity, or details allowing the identification, of a child victim of trafficking are not made publicly known?

According to the Standard Operating Procedures for the Treatment of Victims of Human Trafficking<sup>22</sup>, the state ensures strict protection of the identity of victims/child victims of human trafficking. The SOP stipulates that all personal data are confidential and is handled in accordance with the Law on the Protection of Personal Data<sup>23</sup>. During formal identification and referral, measures of anonymity and limited access to documentation are applied, and in criminal proceedings, the possibility of closed hearings and protected testimony is provided for. Data published in the public or in statistical reports are always anonymous, thus preventing public disclosure of the identity of victims.

28. What measures are in place aimed at encouraging the media to protect the private life and identity of victims?

The Republic of North Macedonia has taken a number of measures to encourage the media community to protect the privacy and identity of victims of human trafficking. The legal framework, in particular the Law on Protection of Personal Data and the Criminal Code<sup>24</sup>, prohibits the public publication of information that could lead to the identification of victims, especially children. In this regard, in 2021, a Guide "The Media and Human Trafficking"<sup>25</sup> was published, which is publicly available online and serves as a practical resource for journalists for ethical and responsible reporting. In recent years, specific activities have also been carried

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<sup>22</sup> See annex

<sup>23</sup> Law on personal data protection, Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia, no. 42/20, 294/21, 101/25  
[https://azlp.mk/azlp/propisi-i-dokumenti/domasni\\_propisi/](https://azlp.mk/azlp/propisi-i-dokumenti/domasni_propisi/)

<sup>24</sup> Criminal Code (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia "no. 37/1996, 80/1999, 4/2002, 43/2003, 19/2004, 81/2005, 60/2006, 73/2006, 7/2008, 139/2008, 114/2009, 51/11, 135/11, 185/11, 142/12, 166/12, 55/13, 82/13, 14/14, 27/14, 28/14, 115/14, 132/14, 160/14, 199/14, 196/15, 226/15, 97/17, 248/18, 36/23 and 188/23)

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[http://nacionalnakomisija.gov.mk/mk/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8/trgovija-so-luge-alb\\_za-web/](http://nacionalnakomisija.gov.mk/mk/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B8%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%87%D0%BD%D0%B8%D1%86%D0%B8/trgovija-so-luge-alb_za-web/)

out for the media community: in 2022, media investigative stories were supported through micro grants, in order to encourage responsible and investigative reporting on human trafficking<sup>26</sup>; and in May 2024, a basic "Training on Gender-Sensitive and Targeted Information and Reporting on Human Trafficking" was held in Strumica, attended by communication officers of the Ministry of Interior, the Office of the Commissioner for Human Trafficking and Journalists, and journalists.

29. Have there been cases of diplomatic households (of your country's diplomats abroad and of foreign diplomats in your country) employing domestic staff in conditions which could be forced labour or human trafficking? If yes, how was the issue of diplomatic immunity addressed? How were the victims identified, assisted and protected?

There have been no recorded cases in which diplomatic missions – either of the Republic of North Macedonia abroad or of foreign diplomatic missions in the country – have employed domestic staff under conditions that could qualify as forced labor or human trafficking. Accordingly, no proceedings related to diplomatic immunity have been initiated, nor has any victim been identified, assisted, or protected in such a context.

30. What specific steps are taken in your country to identify victims of THB amongst persons recruited and exploited by terrorist/armed groups?

The National Committee for Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism also monitors the situation with human trafficking, especially from the aspect of possible connection with radicalization, violent extremism and countering terrorism. The institutions responsible for the post-penal treatment of returnees from Syria and Iraq, as well as their family members (women and children), among other things, collect information that could indicate that they are not the target of human trafficking or that they are not organizers. Within the framework of activities related to the Islamic State, intelligence and counterintelligence services, directly and through cooperation with partner intelligence services, come across information about the involvement of women in prostitution or in a specific type of trafficking in women. So far, such phenomena have not been registered in North Macedonia.

Through the implementation of the strategies, if any of the institutions, action or local multidisciplinary teams receive information about the involvement of returnees in this type of crime, in accordance with the National Plan and the Standard Operating Procedures, they have the obligation to inform the national committee.

31. Are there requirements in your country's legal framework for the detection and removal of THB-related Internet content, and what are the sanctions for non-compliance? Is there a code of conduct for providers? If a person is detected as a presumed victim of THB in the process, how is this person referred to assistance?

In accordance with the legal framework and internal procedures, the Ministry of Interior is obliged to act upon all submitted reports regarding potential /victims of human trafficking

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<sup>26</sup> Documentary movie "FROM DUSK TILL DAWN THEY BEG AT THE CROSSROADS AND DREAM OF BETTER TOMORROW."

- Investigative story: economic emigrants entangled in the web of labor exploitation.

- Nova TV - outside of the system - in the magic circle (research story).

- Nezavisen - Elena's closed circle, the most dramatic case of child trafficking.

- Svedok - Covid - 19 crises changes the course and forms of human trafficking in North Macedonia.

- Globi - Economic emigrants entangled in the web of labor exploitation.

reports, regardless of whether they are submitted in a written, electronic or oral report by the police, citizens, organizations, institutions, SOS lines, or the victim himself in cooperation with the National Referral Mechanism in accordance with the SOP for dealing with victims of human trafficking.

In relation to the discovery, i.e. upon a report, the Cybercrime Sector conducts an investigation into it, then notifies the competent public and prosecution authorities in order to obtain orders from relevant telecommunications or internet providers, and in order to obtain additional guidelines for further action. Also, in relation to the removal of internet content, the Cybercrime Sector does not have the authority to remove or delete internet content. The removal of internet content that constitutes a criminal offense is carried out exclusively through an order from a Court to the relevant web portal, social network profile where the internet content is published.

### **III. INVESTIGATION, PROSECUTION, SANCTIONS AND MEASURES (Articles 4, 18, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28 and 30)**

32. Is the abuse of a position of vulnerability part of the human trafficking offence in your country's law? How are the concepts of "vulnerability" and "abuse of a position of vulnerability" defined in law? Have they been subject to judicial interpretation? If yes, please provide relevant case-law.

The terms "vulnerability" and "abuse of a position of vulnerability" do not have their own specific definition in the Criminal Code, which in Article 122, "Glossary" gives the meaning of the expressions from this law. This article contains a definition of the terms "victim of a crime" and "child victim of a crime", and how they are expressions that are mentioned in criminal acts, including in the subject. At the same time, the description of the criminal act of Trafficking in Human Beings and Trafficking in Children in the Criminal Code includes the condition of "abuse of the position of the perpetrator towards the victim or her state of pregnancy, infirmity or physical or mental incapacity". A detailed description of all forms of committing these criminal acts is regulated in the legal provisions of Articles 418-a and Art. 418-d.

However, although these terms are not defined in the law, they are subject to judicial and prior prosecutorial interpretation (in some cases with a description of vulnerability and abuse of the position of vulnerability in the description of the indictment), they can be subject to judicial interpretation in a specific criminal legal event, and given the complex nature of the nature of the crime and appreciated by the court when determining the type and amount of the criminal sanction, as an aggravating circumstance. The provisions of the Criminal Code of the indicated articles are referred to with the term "abuse of position", when the perpetrator abuses the position of the victim, in the sense of the role he has towards the victim - parent, guardian, or other person to whom the victim is entrusted or is in a certain dependent and subordinate position towards the perpetrator.

Example - Excerpt from a verdict "*the accused N.N abused her position, by being the mother of the child who was not yet 14 years old and with whom she lives in the same family community, and by force and abuse of her position as a mother, she induced her to perform sexual acts for monetary compensation with the third defendant, took her to his home, forced her to undress for him and have sexual intercourse, both oral and vaginal, and if the child refused, her mother used physical force on her and beat her all over her body with her hands*"

The following is an excerpt from relevant case law, when the state of vulnerability is contained in the description of the indictment, and consequently in the ruling of the court verdict KOK.no.145/24 of 05.11.2024 in the following way *"the perpetrator sheltered and accepted the child at the age of 13, bringing her to delusion that they would live in an extramarital relationship and he would take care of her, after which abusing his position as the child's unmarried husband and taking advantage of the child's state of helplessness and vulnerability... which is why her mother did not approve of the relationship, daily giving the child to consume narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, ecstasy, amphetamine, heroin and marijuana, on several occasions for monetary compensation, he lures the child into sexual exploitation by performing sexual services in hotels, apartments and vehicles.... "*

33. Is the special vulnerability of the victim considered as an aggravating factor for the offender's sentence?

The particular vulnerability of the victim is considered an aggravating circumstance when sentencing the offender.

34. According to national case-law, what forms of vulnerability are mostly abused by offenders in human trafficking cases? Please provide specific examples that show how the concept of "abuse of a position of vulnerability" is used in practice. What are the challenges in its application? Is it sufficient to prove the existence of a position of vulnerability of the victim, or must it also be proven that the defendant knew or should have known of the victim's vulnerability, and intentionally manipulated the victim on this basis?

According to national case law, the most common forms of vulnerability are due to the victim's age, health condition, position of powerlessness, economic, financial dependence on the perpetrator. We indicated how the concept of vulnerability is applied in the first question of this chapter. Given that this is a crime committed intentionally, it is necessary to prove the existence of a position of vulnerability in the victim, which, given the object of protection, is often a child (national legislation operates with the term "child" up to the age of 18, on a factual level, it is demonstrable the existence of helplessness, the vulnerability of the victim, as well as that the defendant knew or should have known about it and intentionally exploited it, this in relation to the perpetrators of this crime, and as it is not strictly regulated in the legal provision to require the perpetrator-accused "to have known or should have known about the vulnerability and intentionally exploited it", but given that it is stated as a form of committing the exploitation of the state of helplessness", it refers to the perpetrator's knowledge of the same and proof of that element.

35. Is the concept of "abuse of a position of vulnerability" addressed in criminal justice training? Is there any specific guidance on applying this concept? Please provide copies of guidance and/or training materials that shed light on how this concept should be applied in practice.

The concept of "abuse of a position of vulnerability", as a concept, has not been included or is insufficiently included in criminal justice training and there is no specific guideline, but there are educational materials that explain how this concept should be applied in practice. Every judge who acts and makes a decision on these crimes has a multitude of educational professional literature, domestic and international, in which he can seek the answer to this concept, among which the "Guidelines for the application of the principle of non-punishment of victims of human trafficking and child trafficking", which also elaborate on international regulation, specifically referring to Directive 2011/36/EU where in Article 2, paragraph 2 it is

explicitly stated what the state of vulnerability in which the victim of human trafficking/child is found is "A position of vulnerability means a situation in which the person concerned has no real or real alternative, except to submit to the abuse". At the same time, the Council of Europe and UNODC have their own materials, analyses, and manuals regarding these crimes. In the future, the new AP towards the national strategy for combating trafficking in human beings and illegal migration will foresee a greater number of specialized mandatory trainings, especially for prosecutors and judges, as well as for the Ministry of Interior and all other stakeholders, which will also include this concept.

36. What procedures and measures exist in your country to take into account the specific needs of vulnerable victims at the different stages of criminal proceedings?

The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption is responsible for acting in accordance with the articles of the Criminal Code, namely for the Establishment of Slavery and Transfer of Persons into Slavery, Human Trafficking and Child Trafficking, and fully applies the legal provisions of Article 53, paragraph 1, Article 54 and Article 55, paragraph 1, item 1 of the **Law on Criminal Procedure**<sup>27</sup>, which provide for **special rights for vulnerable categories of victims**.

The provisions are applied in order to protect the rights of the victim. So far, in all cases, victims have been represented by an attorney-at-law or counselor during the pre-investigation and investigative procedure. Also, access to legal services for victims of human trafficking is guaranteed through the **Law on Free Legal Aid**<sup>28</sup> and international ratified documents. In certain cases, if the legal conditions are met and in order to protect the life, health, freedom and physical integrity of the victims and their families, provisions of the **Law on Witness Protection**<sup>29</sup> may also be used.

In addition, the Standard Operating Procedures for the Treatment of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings regulate the procedures, procedures and ways of providing assistance and protection to all victims of trafficking in human beings (regardless of whether they are domestic or foreign, legally or illegally residing in the country), through a comprehensive human rights-based and victim-centered approach in the form of institutionalized cooperation frameworks. The SOPs aim to ensure coordination between institutions and to ensure the rights of victims, including the right to legal aid at all stages of the process. Presumed or identified victims have the right to free legal aid during the identification process, court proceedings and other legal procedures.

The Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers also provides support in strengthening the system of free legal aid for victims. In North Macedonia, legal advice for victims is available through primary free legal aid. Legal aid for victims in criminal proceedings is provided for in national legislation and there are no obstacles to its implementation. It is a positive practice that three requests for free legal aid were approved in an urgent procedure and a lawyer was appointed for the victims by the Ministry of Justice. Thus, the victims realized their right to

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<sup>27</sup> Criminal Code („Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia “no. 37/1996, 80/1999, 4/2002, 43/2003, 19/2004, 81/2005, 60/2006, 73/2006, 7/2008, 139/2008, 114/2009, 51/11, 135/11, 185/11, 142/12, 166/12, 55/13, 82/13, 14/14, 27/14, 28/14, 115/14, 132/14, 160/14, 199/14, 196/15, 226/15, 97/17, 248/18, 36/23 and 188/23)

<sup>28</sup> Guidelines for the application of the principle of non-punishment of victims of human trafficking and child trafficking <https://www.osce.org/mk/mission-to-skopje/450130>

<sup>29</sup> Law on Criminal Procedure, (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia 150/10, 51/11, 100/12 , 142/16) See annex

legal aid for the first time. The Ministry of Justice acted in accordance with the latest recommendations of GRETA and showed that the **department for free legal aid is sensitized to the importance of legal aid for victims of trafficking in human beings** and is taking steps to inform them about the appropriate procedures and to enable them to access legal aid.

In May 2023, the **Law on Payment of Financial Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes**,<sup>30</sup> which also incorporates the crime of trafficking in human beings, entered into force. This demonstrates consistent implementation of the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Persons in terms of the effective exercise of the rights to compensation of victims of this serious crime. The law regulates the right to monetary compensation for victims of violent crimes, conditions for exercise, types of compensation, as well as the establishment, status, election, mandate of the Commission that will decide on the submitted cases. According to the law, in 2024 the Commission began its work as an independent body in the capacity of a legal entity. In order to increase accessibility, a website<sup>31</sup> of the Commission was also developed with the support of the OSCE. In terms of inter-institutional cooperation, the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Persons continues to operate successfully.

In June 2025, the prosecution implemented a top priority and recommendation given in some of the reports from the previous period, and in the new premises it provided for a separate part of two rooms in the building intended for interviewing children (child friendly) and other potential victims. The room is connected by a video link and is prepared in accordance with international standards. The project was implemented with the support of the European Union regional project "EU Support to Strengthen the Fight against Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans" (EU4FAST).

The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption also increased its capacities by establishing an Investigation Center and a Forensic Laboratory.

In terms of the initial treatment of victims, the same is regulated in the aforementioned SOPs, and the Criminal Procedure Law provides **measures of procedural protection for victims**, and especially for victims of crimes of Trafficking in Human Beings/Children, as well as the Law on Justice for Children<sup>32</sup>, the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence<sup>33</sup>. Namely, the Criminal Procedure Law regulates the rights of the victim in Art. 53, the special rights in Art. 54, where the special measures of procedural protection are also regulated, and towards a child when he is a victim of trafficking in human beings, as well as Article 55, further in the provisions that regulate a special manner of participation and examination of a witness in the provisions of Art. 232 of the CPC - which regulates the **Examination of Particularly Vulnerable Victims and Witnesses**, when exceptionally it is necessary for the victim to give a statement in the court procedure, the court applies this legal provision.

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<sup>30</sup> Law on free legal aid (Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia, no. 101/19, 194/2024 See annex

<sup>31</sup> Law on Witness Protection (Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia , no. 28/2005, 58/2005, 70/2018

<sup>32</sup> Law on the Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes, (Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia) no. 247/22 <https://komisijazanadomestoknazrtvi.mk/en/laws/>

<sup>33</sup> <https://komisijazanadomestoknazrtvi.mk/en/>

Although our Criminal Code does not explicitly mention the term "victim vulnerability" as such, but rather as "a state of victim powerlessness", the Criminal Procedure Code, as a procedural law, incorporates the term "particularly vulnerable victims and witnesses", which provision is used in case law when dealing with victims of human trafficking/children.

37. If you have criminalised the use of services of a victim of THB, how is this provision applied in practice? Please provide any relevant case-law.

Unlike in the past, when victims were treated as witnesses in the proceedings, now this issue is criminalized in a clear paragraph of the criminal offenses of Human Trafficking and Child Trafficking. Namely, in the criminal offense of "Human Trafficking" regulated in Article 418-a of the Criminal Code, in a special paragraph, paragraph 3, the punishment of perpetrators is regulated in the following way "a person who uses or enables another to use sexual services or other types of exploitation from persons whom he knew or was obliged to know were victims of human trafficking, shall be punished with imprisonment from 6 months to 5 years". If this offense is committed by an official, the punishment is more severe. Such an attitude towards punishing users also exists in the criminal act of Child Trafficking, regulated in Article 418-d of the Criminal Code, and paragraph 3 provides for a sentence of at least 8 years, but if it concerns a child who has not reached the age of 14, the user is punished with imprisonment for at least 12 years.

In the case law, for the years reported, there have been convictions against users, with effective prison sentences imposed. The amount of the prescribed sentence is indicated as an indicator that when it comes to a child victim of the criminal act of "Child Trafficking", the court, in accordance with the law, makes a distinction whether the child has reached the age of 14 or not, and even by mitigating the sentence, which legal institute in our legislation is not excluded for these criminal acts, **it cannot impose an alternative measure, but only an effective prison sentence.**

Illustratively, there is a specific case in the Macedonian court, where, given that the perpetrator had used sexual services from a child victim of trafficking for a long period of time, the perpetrator received a prison sentence of 15 years for the crime of child trafficking and, together with another crime, the perpetrator received a single prison sentence of 18 years.

*Quote from a specific decision "from 2015 to 2018, taking advantage of the same opportunities, in his house on street.//, Skopje, for monetary compensation he used sexual services from a child who was under 14 years old, which child he knew and was obliged to know was a victim of human trafficking in a way that after her mother introduced him to the child, she enabled him to use sexual services from the child for monetary compensation of 2,000.00 denars, and sometimes 500.00 denars".*

38. What technology-based tools and initiatives exist in your country to support investigations and enhance prosecution of THB cases? What training is provided to law enforcement officials, prosecutors and judges on THB facilitated by information and communication technology?

In order to provide support for investigations into human trafficking and secure digital evidence (email, computer systems, mobile phones, internet platforms and other digital evidence), the Department for Suppression of Organized and Serious Crime at the Ministry of Interior cooperates with the Sector for Computer Crime and Digital Forensics and the competent Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and

Corruption, and, if necessary, other organizations and institutions that are needed during the investigation.

In the past period, several joint simultaneous trainings have been conducted for public prosecutors, judges, the Ministry of Interior, State Labor Inspectorate, MSPYD with the aim of recognizing, referring and identifying potential/ victims of THB, and joint action of the listed institutions in identifying potential/victims of THB, covering all forms of exploitation, as well as identified challenges in the process. In order to identify victims of THB and successfully prosecute the perpetrators of this crime, trainings have also been conducted in the area of securing digital evidence in response to the challenges in conducting investigations into human trafficking.

Also, police officers actively participate in trainings, workshops, conferences that address current challenges in addressing the misuse of information technologies in the context of trafficking in human beings, including the digital model of trafficking in human beings for all forms of exploitation, exchange of good practices in detection, use of parallel and joint investigations in order to strengthen cross-border cooperation, in particular by using digital forensics, electronic evidence, sharing experiences on new trends in the recruitment of victims of trafficking in human beings via the Internet, and ensuring protection and using a victim-centered approach. In response to the rapid development of digital technologies that have reshaped the criminal landscape and brought new challenges in addressing serious human rights violations - in particular trafficking in human beings (THB) and migrant smuggling (MS), an urgent need has arisen to strengthen the capacities of law enforcement agencies in the area of digital investigations of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling throughout the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. Recognizing these challenges, a Basic National Training for Police Officers in the field of digital investigations of human trafficking and migrant smuggling was conducted in cooperation with IOM, which took place from 9 to 10 June 2025 in Ohrid, North Macedonia. A total of 12 Macedonian police officers were exposed to in-depth training delivered by their counterparts from Serbia, who had previously completed the Digital Investigations Training course within the WBJAST project. The engagement of the Serbian counterparts added a regional dimension to the otherwise national training, enhancing synergies between the working groups from both countries and creating opportunities for further cooperation in joint regional investigations.

39. In what ways, if any, does your country utilise provisions from the Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention (Budapest Convention) to fight THB? If not, why is that the case?

The provisions of the Budapest Convention are used through cooperation with foreign telecommunications/internet providers as well as through official international cooperation with other competent institutions.

Otherwise, activities related to the ratification of the Second Additional Protocol to the Cybercrime Convention (Budapest Convention) are ongoing. Namely, the Ministry of Justice is preparing a pre-ratification analysis of the compliance of the legislation of the Republic of Macedonia with the Protocol. This is a regular practice and an integral part of the ratification process of international conventions.

After finalizing the analysis and conducting consultations with the competent institutions, the Ministry of Justice will submit the Proposal for Ratification of this Protocol by the end of 2025 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, which is then competent to prepare the Law on Ratification of this Protocol.

After the Proposal for Ratification is approved by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, it will be submitted to the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia for adoption. Ratification is scheduled for 2026.

## **Part II – Country-specific follow-up questions**

40. Please provide information on measures taken in your country in respect to the following recommendations made in GRETA's previous reports:

- ensure that the legislation provides a clear basis to provide legal assistance as soon as there are reasonable grounds for believing that a person is a victim of trafficking, and that victims of THB are effectively provided with free legal aid;

The right to legal aid for victims of human trafficking is guaranteed and regulated by the Criminal Procedure Law, the Children's Justice Law and the Free Legal Aid Law. The Criminal Procedure Law, Article 53, paragraph 1, item 1, stipulates that, in accordance with special regulations, the victim of a crime punishable by imprisonment for at least four years has the right to a counsellor at the expense of the budget funds before giving a statement, i.e. a statement or submitting a property legal claim, if there are psychophysical damages or more serious consequences of the crime. In addition, in Article 55, paragraph 1, item 1, the victim of crimes against sexual freedom and sexual morality, humanity and international law, in addition to the rights under Article 53, has the right to speak with a free counsellor or attorney before the examination, if he participates in the procedure as a damaged party.

According to Article 167 of the Law on Justice for Children in Police and Criminal Proceedings before the Center, the child victim has the right to legal assistance from a lawyer before giving a statement, i.e. a statement or submitting a property legal claim and a proxy from the time the first statement is taken, as well as throughout the entire procedure. Legal assistance to a child victim is usually provided by a lawyer from the list of lawyers who have attended training on children's rights and child delinquency.

A victim of human trafficking also has the right to free legal assistance in accordance with the provisions of the Law on Free Legal Aid. This law provides for two types of free legal assistance – primary legal assistance and secondary legal assistance, which is provided by a lawyer. Primary legal assistance is provided by an authorized person of the Ministry of Justice, an authorized association or a legal clinic. Primary legal assistance is provided to any interested person and includes: initial legal advice on the right to use free legal assistance, general legal information, general legal advice and assistance in completing the application for secondary legal assistance. Secondary legal aid excludes criminal proceedings and provides for secondary legal aid at all levels in civil court proceedings, administrative proceedings and administrative disputes. According to Art. 13 of this law, secondary legal aid is granted to a person who needs professional assistance from a lawyer for a specific legal matter and who is unable to pay the costs of the procedure due to his financial situation and whose request is justified. According to Art. 17, a person may receive secondary legal aid if, due to his financial situation, he cannot exercise the rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia and the law, without endangering his family with whom he lives in a common household. The costs in accordance with the procedures provided for by this law are provided from the funds of the budget of the Ministry of Justice. As of 2019, funds in the amount of 5 million denars have been provided for free legal aid. Activities related to free legal aid are carried out through the Department for Free Legal Aid as well as regional departments of the Ministry of Justice. The department keeps records of received and rejected requests. At the same time, in accordance with Article 166, paragraph 1, line 9 of the Law on Justice for Children, a child victim of a crime has the right, together

with the parent or guardian, to participate in the criminal procedure as a damaged party by joining the criminal prosecution or for the realization of a property legal claim for damage.

In North Macedonia, legal advice for victims is available in practice through primary free legal aid provided by NGOs. Legal aid for victims in criminal proceedings is provided for in national legislation and there is no obstacle to exercising this right when victims themselves provide themselves with a lawyer in the proceedings.

A positive practice is that, upon request of the MYLA, requests for free legal aid have been approved in an urgent procedure and a lawyer for victims of trafficking in human beings has been appointed by the Ministry of Justice. Thus, this right in the Law on Free Legal Aid for Victims has become feasible in practice for the first time. The Ministry of Justice is acting in accordance with the latest recommendations of GRETA, i.e. it has shown that the department in the Ministry of Justice responsible for free legal aid is sensitized to the importance of legal aid for victims of human trafficking and is taking steps to inform them about the appropriate procedures and to enable them to access legal aid. However, the Law on Free Legal Aid has not yet been amended and this right of victims is still unclearly regulated in transitional and final provisions of the law, referring to the previous invalid law.

- ensure that human trafficking offences are investigated proactively and promptly;

The National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking (Task Force) since its establishment in 2018 continues to work on strengthening national capacities, increasing the efficiency of the police and the prosecution in suppressing organized forms of migrant smuggling and human trafficking, as well as the coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption of North Macedonia for suppressing crimes related to migrant smuggling and human trafficking.

The task Force undertakes measures and activities to detect potential cases before there is a victim or report, mapping risk sectors, profiling vulnerable categories or potential victims especially in migrant groups or among asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, poor families, collecting operational information, analyzing previous cases, data from other sectors, through criteria given in the API/PNR unit, cooperation with other organizational units within the Ministry of Interior, as well as other competent institutions.

Also, to strengthen the pre-investigation and investigative procedure, it includes investigations using PIM, financial investigations and the use of financial digital evidence for the purpose of effective research, analyzing financial documents, accounts, bank transactions and digital evidence (such as e-mail, computer systems, mobile phones, internet platforms and other digital evidence) so that the investigation is not based only on the statements of victims of , which in the past three years has resulted in the implementation of specific investigations into "Human Trafficking" and "Child Trafficking" as well as crimes against sexual freedom and sexual morality, such as crimes committed while victims of human trafficking or their close family members were in the phase of exploitation, which resulted in high prison sentences against the perpetrators, confiscation of property and seizure of movable and immovable property used by the perpetrators to commit the crimes.

- ensure that child-sensitive procedures are followed when investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating cases of THB;

In terms of ensuring that the investigation, prosecution and trial of trafficking cases follow child-sensitive principles, the Republic of North Macedonia has taken systemic measures to

align practices with this principle. In 2023, new Standard Operating Procedures for the Treatment of Victims of Trafficking were revised and adopted, which clearly define the procedure and the obligation for a mandatory individual risk assessment and protection plans for each victim, as well as limited information sharing and the use of protected testimony measures (including the possibility of closed hearings with the exclusion of the public and videoconference testimony) always in coordination with the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the National Referral Mechanism, in order to avoid re-victimization and ensure access to necessary support for the child victim throughout the entire judicial and pre-investigation procedure.

In parallel with specific trainings that were provided for various needs regarding the implementation of the SOP, institutions strengthened capacities where for the police, public prosecutors, judges, social workers and health workers..

- guarantee effective access to compensation for victims of human trafficking, including by adopting the necessary legislative and administrative measures with a view to ensuring the effective implementation of the Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Violence.

In terms of ensuring effective access to compensation for victims of trafficking in human beings, the state has taken specific legislative and administrative steps to facilitate the exercise of the right to financial compensation.

The Ministry of Justice is focused on strengthening the capacities of the Commission for Financial Compensation to Victims of Crime. A functional office/office for the Commission was launched in 2024, facilitating victims' access to compensation procedures. Furthermore, work is ongoing to improve the system of free legal aid for victims, including the engagement of legal networks, networks of lawyers and NGOs that provide free legal aid and support in the process of submitting compensation claims. The SOP and operational plans mandate and oblige the referral of victims to services that inform them about the right to compensation and assist them in submitting claims, while training for legal and social officers includes practical modules on managing compensation claims and guiding them to relevant procedures.

41. Please provide information on developments in your country since GRETA's third evaluation report concerning:

- emerging trends of trafficking in human beings;

In the reporting period, changes have been observed in the forms and types of exploitation of human trafficking. There is an evident increase in the number of foreign victims, as well as some identified cases of sexual and labor exploitation. Children continue to be a vulnerable category and most often appear as specific forms - forced marriages.

- the legislation and regulations relevant to action against THB;

In the reporting period, continuous harmonization of national legislation with international standards is taking place. On November 16, 2022, the Law on Payment of Financial Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes, which includes the crime of trafficking in human beings, was adopted. This law addresses one of the main recommendations of GRETA for the consistent implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and international standards in terms of the effective exercise of the right to compensation of victims of this serious crime by the state. Significant was the revision and

adoption of the new SOPs (2023) that include determined procedures for identification, referral and protection of victims. In order to regulate the procedures for dealing with foreigners, on August 27, 2024, the Standard Operating Procedures for Dealing with Unaccompanied Foreign Children and Other Vulnerable Categories of Persons were adopted.

- the institutional and policy framework for action against THB (co-ordinating bodies, specialised entities, national rapporteur or equivalent mechanism, involvement of civil society, public-private partnerships);

The National Commission continues to act as the central coordinating body, and its Secretariat, the Child Trafficking Subgroup and the newly established Operational Team for Formal Identification carry out operational coordination. The ministries, the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking, the National Referral Mechanism, the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office function seamlessly through the above-mentioned bodies. The civil society sector (Open Door/La Strada, For a Happy Childhood, MYLA) plays a significant role in providing services, training and advocacy for victims; international partners (Council of Europe, IOM, UNHCR, UNODC, OSCE, ICMPD, GIZ, etc.) provide technical and financial support. **A Survivors' Advocacy Group** was also established in 2024, which aims to convey the voice of survivors in policy-making, which strengthens the inclusiveness of the system.

- the current national strategy and/or action plan for combating trafficking in human beings (objectives, main activities, budget, bodies responsible for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of results);

The National Strategy and the National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration (2021–2025) remain the basic strategic document. The activities implemented in accordance with the action plans are monitored in operational plans that define the priorities: prevention, capacity building, identification and protection, and criminal prosecution. The Commission is responsible for implementation, monitoring and evaluation, while the annual reports present the budgets of institutions, citizens' associations and international organizations and are also used as a monitoring of the activities implemented in accordance with the planned plans..

- recent case-law concerning THB for different forms of exploitation.

In terms of the type of forms of exploitation, sexual exploitation, forced marriages, and child marriages are still the most common. In some cases, the method of recruitment has changed, through social networks, blackmail, threats, coercion, and most often by abusing the position, vulnerability of the victim, as well as a form of exploitation by begging, but given the fact that there is a similar criminal offense "Neglect and abuse of a child under Article 201 of the Criminal Code, one case ultimately ended as this criminal offense, and began as child trafficking in the form of begging.

### **Part III - Statistics on THB**

42. Please provide the following statistics, per year starting with 2022, where available disaggregated as indicated below:

- Number of presumed victims and identified victims of THB in the sense of having been recognised by a state institution or mandated NGO as bearers of rights to services

provided for by the Convention (with breakdown by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation, internal or transnational trafficking, and body which identified them).

		2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Total identified victims</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2</b>
Gender	Male	1	2	2	/
	Female	8	5	38	2
Age	Children	7	6	2	2
	Adults	2	1	38	/
	Domestic	7	7	2	2
	Foreign	2	/	38	/
Nationality	Nationality	Serbian – 1 Macedonian – 3 Roma – 4 Pakistan - 1	Macedonian – 2 Roma – 4 Albanian- 1	Roma – 2 Bangladesh– 1 Albanian– 3 Brasilian – 5 Russian – 11 Ukranian – 6 Columbian – 6 Serbian - 6	Roma - 2
Type of exploitation	Sexual	1	5	37	
	Labor			2	
	Begging		1		
	Forced marriage	6		1	1
	Labor exploitation and begging		1		
	Online	1			
	Trafficking in human organs	1			
	Illegal adoption				1
Type of trafficking	Internal	6	7	2	2
	Transnational	3	/	38	/
Presumed victims		13	9	8	3
Identifying body	All presumed/ victims have been identified by the Operational Team for Coordination, Monitoring and Management of Human Trafficking Cases, Formal Identification of Victims and Their Status				

- Number of victims of THB identified as part of the asylum procedure (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation).

In the Republic of North Macedonia, **no victims have been identified** who were part of the asylum procedure..

- Number of victims of THB who received assistance (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation, internal or transnational trafficking).

	2022	2023	2024	2025
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<b>Total number of identified victims of THB who received assistance</b>		9	7	40	2
GENDER	Male	1	2	2	/
	Female	8	5	38	2
AGE	Children	7	6	2	2
	Adults	2	1	38	/
NATIONALITY	Domestic	7	7	2	2
	Foreign	2	/	38	/
	Nationality	Serbian – 1 Macedonian – 3 Roma – 4 Pakistani - 1	Macedonian – 2 Roma – 4 Albanian - 1	Roma – 2 Bangladesh– 1 Albanian– 3 Brasilian – 5 Russian – 11 Ukranian – 6 Columbian – 6 Serbian - 6	Roma - 2
TYPE OF EXPLOITATION	Sexual	1	5	37	
	Labor			2	
	Begging		1		
	Forced marriage	6		1	1
	Labor exploitation and begging		1		
	Online	1			
	Trafficking in human organs	1			
	Illegal adoption				1
TYPE OF THB	Internal	6	7	2	2
	Transnational	3	/	38	/

		2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Total number of presumed victims of THB who received assistance</b>		13	9	8	3
GENDER	Male	3	1	2	/
	Female	10	8	6	3
AGE	Children	8	9	7	1
	Adults	5	/	1	2
NATIONALITY	Domestic	9	8	7	3
	Foreign	4	1	1	/
	Nationality	Venezuela – 1 Chechen– 1 Germany– 1 Iran – 1 Roma - 3	Macedonian – 3 Roma– 5 Albanian- 1	Macedonian – 1 Roma – 3 Albanian – 3 Syria- 1	Albanian - 3

		Macedonian - 4 Albanian - 2			
TYPE OF EXPLOITATION (in relation to some of presumed victims, the type of exploitation is not determined)	Sexual	3	3	1	2
	Labor			2	
	Begging	3	1		
	Forced marriage	2	4	1	1
	Labor exploitation and begging			1	
	Online				
	Unaccompanied minors among illegal migrants	1			
	Illegal adoption	1			

- Number of child victims of THB who were appointed legal guardians.

In the period from 2022 to September 2025, the competent Social Work Center has appointed a legal guardian for a total of 42 children, presumed victims of human trafficking. In accordance with the Law on Child Protection and the Standard Operating Procedures, a legal guardian is appointed immediately upon establishing suspicion, regardless of whether it is a presumed or formally identified child victim.

- Number of victims of THB granted a recovery and reflection period (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation).

		2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Total number of victims of THB granted a recovery and reflection period</b>		9	7	40	2
GENDER	Male	1	2	2	/
	Female	8	5	38	2
AGE	Children	7	6	2	2
	Adults	2	1	38	/
	Domestic	7	7	2	2
	Foreign	2	/	38	/
NATIONALITY	Nationality	Serbian – 1 Macedonian – 3 Roma – 4 Pakistani - 1	Macedonian – 2 Roma – 4 Albanian - 1	Roma – 2 Bangladesh– 1 Albanian– 3 Brasilian – 5 Russian – 11 Ukranian – 6 Columbian – 6 Serbian - 6	Roma - 2
	Sexual	1	5	37	

TYPE OF EXPLOITATION	Labor			2	
	Begging		1		
	Forced marriage	6		1	1
	Labor exploitation and begging		1		
	Online	1			
	Trafficking in human organs	1			
	Illegal adoption				1

- Number of victims of THB granted a residence permit, with an indication of the type of the permit (for the purpose of co-operation in the investigation/proceedings, on personal grounds, other) and its duration (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation).

Number of victims of THB granted a residence permit, with an indication of the type of the permit (for the purpose of co-operation in the investigation/proceedings, on personal grounds, other) and its duration (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation).					
		2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of victims of THB granted a residence permit		1	1		
Type of residence permit		Law on Foreigners / Article 80 - A temporary residence permit for humanitarian reasons may be issued as an exception to a foreigner who does not meet the conditions for issuing a temporary residence permit set out in this law, in the following cases: - if there are grounds for suspicion that he is a victim of the crime of "Human Trafficking" set out in the Criminal Code, - to a foreigner who is under the age of 18 and who is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian, - to stateless persons or - other justified reasons of a humanitarian nature. The permit referred to in paragraph 1, lines 2, 3 and 4 of this article is issued for a period of up to one year and may be extended if it is determined that the humanitarian reasons still exist.			
GENDER	Male	/	/	/	/
	Female	1	/	/	/
AGE	Children	1	/	/	/
	Adults	/	/	/	/
NATIONALITY		Serbian	Serbian(Roma community)	/	/
FORM OF EXPLOITATION	Forced marriage	1	1	/	/

- Number of persons given refugee status or subsidiary/complementary protection on the grounds of being victims of THB (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation).

There is no one who acquired this status.

- Number of victims of THB who claimed compensation, who were granted compensation and who effectively received compensation (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation, with an indication of whether the compensation was provided by the perpetrator or the State, and the amount awarded).

### **Criminal court data from analyses**

In 2024, out of the five child victims of trafficking, in only one case did the criminal court award partial compensation (60,000 MKD), while four children were referred to civil proceedings. In 2024, five injured persons were recorded in cases of child trafficking, four of whom were girls and one boy – all of whom were minors.

### **Open Gate 2024**

### **Compensation by criminal acts for 2022**

	<b>418-a</b>	<b>418-g</b>	Amount granted
Granted	0	1	300.000 denars
Partially granted	0	1	400.000 denars
Referred to a civil court	1	0	/
No data	0	0	/
n/a	0	0	/
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	

### **Compensation by criminal acts for 2023**

	<b>418-a</b>	<b>418-g</b>	Amount granted
Granted	0	1	400.000 denars
Partially granted	0	1	300.000 denars
Referred to a civil court	2	3	/
No data	0	1	/
n/a	0	1	/
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	

- Number of victims of THB who received another form of financial support from the State, with the indication of the amount received.
- Number of victims of THB who received free legal aid.

	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>Total number of vicims</b>	7	9	6	
<b>Victims from the current</b>	1	2	1	
<b>Victims from previous years</b>	6	7	5	

- Number of victims of THB who were returned or repatriated to/from your country (disaggregated by sex, age, country of destination, form of exploitation).

		2022	2023	2024	2025
No. of victims of THB who were returned or repatriated		2	/	1	/
GENDER	Male	/	/	1	/
	Female	2	/	/	/
AGE	Children	2	/	/	/
	Adults	/	/	1	/
Country of destination	North Macedonia	1	/	/	/
	Serbia	1	/	/	/
	Bangladesh	/	/	1	/
TYPE OF EXPLOITATION	Sexual	/	/	/	/
	Labor	/	/	1	/
	Begging	/	/	/	/
	Forced marriage	2	/	/	/
	Labor exploitation and begging	/	/	/	/
	Online	/	/	/	/
	Trafficking in human organs	/	/	/	/
	Illegal adoption	/	/	/	/

- Number of investigations into THB cases (disaggregated by type of exploitation, with an indication of the number of victims concerned).

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of investigations into THB cases	6	11	6	
No. of victims	6	4	2	
Type of exploitation	Forced marriage - 4 Labor and sexual - 1 Begging - 1	Sexual – 2 Begging-1 Forced marriage – 1	Sexual - 2	

- Number of prosecutions in THB cases (disaggregated by type of exploitation, with an indication of the number of victims and defendants concerned).

	Type of exploitation	No. of prosecutions	No. of convicted
<b>2022</b>	Total	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b> (15 m / 6 f)
	Article 418 – a	8	8 (6 m / 2 f)
	Article 418 – d	9	13 (9 m / 4 f)
<b>2023</b>	Total	3	27
	Article 418 – a	3	27(24 m / 3 f)
	Article 418 – d	/	/
<b>2024</b>	Total	/	/
	Article 418 – a	/	/
	Article 418 –d	/	/
<b>2025</b>	Total	/	/
	Article 418 – a	/	/
	Article 418 –d	/	/

- Number of convicted perpetrators of THB (disaggregated by sex, age, nationality, form of exploitation).
- Number of convictions for THB, with an indication of the form of exploitation, whether the victim was adult or child, the type and duration of the penalties, and whether they were effectively enforced or suspended.

➤ **Final judgments for the period 2022**

<b><u>No. of subject</u></b>	<b><u>Crime</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s gender</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s citizenship</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s nationality</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s age</u></b>	<b><u>Type of punishment</u></b>	<b><u>Victim</u></b>	<b><u>Type of exploitation</u></b>	<b><u>Confiscation</u></b>
KOK 172/22	Trafficking in human beings	1-female	North Macedonia	Macedonian	67	5 years of imprisonment	Woman	Sexual exploitation	
		1-male		Turkish	50	4 years and 8 months of imprisonment.			
		1- male	North Macedonia	Macedonian	52				
			North Macedonia			10 months of imprisonment			
KOK 143/22	Trafficking in child	1- male	North Macedonia	Macedonian	62	16 years of imprisonment	Child under 14	Sexual services for money	

➤ **Final judgments for the period 2023**

<b><u>No. of subject</u></b>	<b><u>Crime</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s gender</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s citizenship</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s nationality</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s age</u></b>	<b><u>Type of punishment</u></b>	<b><u>Victim</u></b>	<b><u>Type of exploitation</u></b>	<b><u>Confiscation</u></b>
KOK 152/22	Trafficking in human beings	1- female	North Macedonia	Macedonian	48	6 years of imprisonment.	Woman (same person from KOK 172/22)	Sexual exploitation	
		1- male	North Macedonia	Macedonian	55	8 years of imprisonment			
		1- male	North Macedonia	Macedonian	69	7 years of imprisonment.			
KOK 142/22	Trafficking in child	1- female	North Macedonia	Roma	42	15 years of imprisonment	Child under 14	Sexual services for money	
KOK 212/22	Trafficking in child	1- female	North Macedonia	Albanian	43	8 years of imprisonment	Child under 16	Sexual services for money	
KOK 51/23	Trafficking in child	1- male	North Macedonia	Roma	27	5 years and 6 months of imprisonment.	Child under 14	Forced marriage for money	
		1- male	North Macedonia	Roma	51				

						4 years of imprisonment.			
KOK 22/23	Trafficking in child	1- female  1- male	Serbia  Serbia	Roma  Roma	53  53	4 years and 6 months of imprisonment +Expulsion of a foreigner in a duration of 5 years 4 years and 6 months of imprisonment +Expulsion of a foreigner in a duration of 5 years	Child 14 years	Forced marriage for money	

➤ **Final judgments for the period 2024**

<b><u>No. of subject</u></b>	<b><u>Crime</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s gender</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s citizenship</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s nationality</u></b>	<b><u>Convict`s age</u></b>	<b><u>Type of punishment</u></b>	<b><u>Victim</u></b>	<b><u>Type of exploitation</u></b>	<b><u>Confiscation</u></b>
KOK 145/24	Trafficking in child	1- male	North Macedonia	Roma	26	5 years of imprisonment	Child 13 years	Sexual services	
KOK 217/22	Trafficking in child	1- male  1- male  1- female	Belgium  North Macedonia  North Macedonia	Belgian  Roma  Roma	40  35  35	6 years and 6 months of imprisonment+ Expulsion with permanent entry ban. 5 years of imprisonment 5 years of imprisonment	Child under 14	Forced marriage for money	
KOK 6/24	Trafficking in child	1- female	North Macedonia	Albanian	51	4 years and 6 months of imprisonment	Child	Sexual services for money	



- Number of judgments in THB cases resulting in the confiscation of assets.

In six cases that the Court has acted on during 2023, it has awarded confiscation in the amount of 248,555.00 euros and 31,500.00 denars.

During 2024, the Court, when acting in two cases, in the first case, the defendant, in addition to the offense under Art. 418-c, is also charged with the criminal offense of Money Laundering under Art. 273 para. 1 in conjunction with Art. 45 of the Criminal Code. In this procedure, property gains acquired by committing criminal offenses in the amount of 15,027.00 euros, i.e. 924,160.00 denars, were confiscated. While in the second case, against another defendant also for criminal offenses under Art. 418-c and Art. 273 para. 1 inc. Article 45 of the Criminal Code, property gains in the amount of 31,788.59 euros, or 1,954,998.28 denars, were confiscated. Total confiscated assets: 46,815.59 euros, or 2,879,158.28 denars.

- Number of convictions of legal entities for THB.

There is no judgment against a legal entity so far.

## APPENDICES TO THE REPLY

- [Proactive investigation, effective prosecution and adjudication of cases of trafficking in human beings with focus on migrants at risk from trafficking in human beings](#)
- [Criminal Code](#)
- [Online exploitation and child trafficking – Research report | Association for Action against Violence and Trafficking in Human Beings – OPEN GATE / LA STRADA](#)
- [Law on free legal aid](#)
- [RULEBOOK on the Manner of Reporting and Protecting a Student Victim of Any Type of Violence, Abuse and Neglect](#)
- [Protocol on the cooperation between competent institutions in cases of child sexual abuse and pedophilia](#)
- [Preventing child trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation, begging and forced child marriages](#)
- [Standard operating procedures for treatment of victims of trafficking in human beings](#)
- [Standard operating procedures for dealing with unaccompanied minor children of foreign nationality and other vulnerable categories of foreign nationals](#)
- [Family law](#)
- [Law on employment and work of foreigners](#)
- [Child protection law](#)
- [Decree on the promulgation of the law on justice for children](#)
- [Law on private employment agencies](#)
- [Social protection law](#)
- [Decree on proclamation of the law on prevention and protection from violence against women and domestic violence](#)