

Regarding the request from the UN Secretary General inviting Member States to provide input/contributions in relation to the resolution A/RES/77/194 on "Trafficking in Women and Girls: Report of the Secretary-General" we hereby send the following answer within the scope of the competences of the Ministry of Interior:

One of the key institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia for combating trafficking in human beings, in this case trafficking in women and girls, are the Ministry of Interior and the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, which has an inter-institutional composition and whose task is to coordinate all institutions competent for the matter in question

Since 2018, for the purposes of preventing and dealing with all forms of trafficking in human beings, **the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration** (established in 2001), made significant changes in order to improve victim identification by strengthening national capacities and increasing the efficiency of the police and prosecution in suppressing organised forms of smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. In that sense, a **National Unit for the Suppression of Smuggling of Migrants and Trafficking in Human Beings (Task Force)** has been established in the Ministry of Interior in order to improve coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption for the suppression of crimes related to smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings. Conducting criminal investigations, reactive and proactive investigations in the field of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants, as well as detection and identification of presumed victims/THB victims (including illegal migrants), their protection and referral are also within the scope of competence of the unit. It identifies the perpetrators of a crime and provides material evidence for the existence of the crime, conducting financial investigation simultaneously.

After the formation of the National Task Force, **5 Mobile Teams** were established in Skopje, Kumanovo, Bitola, Tetovo and Gevgelija in order to contribute to the improvement of victim identification through proactive action in the field, mapping, assistance and support of vulnerable categories of citizens (mostly women and girls) and conducting proactive investigations thereby strengthening national capacities at the central and local level and increasing the efficiency of services in terms of identifying THB victims and presumed victims. Namely, the establishment of the Mobile Teams was in accordance with the recommendations from the evaluation of GRETA for the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention Action against Trafficking in Human Beings regarding the promotion of multi-disciplinary action and a proactive role in the process of identification and dealing with THB victims. Based on the previous successful work of the mobile teams and the compactness in the actions of the institutions and associations of citizens, the Commission ascertained the need to expand these mobile teams, which is planned for the next period.

Over the past years, the Republic of North Macedonia has created a broad legal framework for combating trafficking in human beings, which has been strengthened and harmonized and is in full compliance with the *acquis communautaire* and the international standards, especially in the sense of identification, prevention, providing legal assistance and support to victims, and sanctioning human traffickers. Thus, **the Law on the Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes** was recently adopted (in 2022), which is of great importance for all the victims of violent crimes because, according to the analyses, it will provide better protection for the victims of violence and will improve their access to justice. The purpose of the law is for the victim to be able to receive compensation for damages at the earliest stage, and to prevent possible victimization and secondary victimization as additional suffering caused by the attitude of the competent authorities. In February 2024 the **State Commission on Compensation for Victims of Violent Crimes** was also established in

North Macedonia for the purposes of providing support to victims of violent crimes, including THB victims, by awarding state compensation to the victims for the damage suffered.

Also, with the amendments to the Criminal Code in 2019, **the principle of non-punishment of THB victims/children** was introduced into the criminal legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia, providing for an express provision for non-punishment of THB victims (Article 418a, paragraph 7) and victims of child trafficking (Article 418-d, paragraph 8). The essence of this principle/provision is that it covers non-punishment, non-prosecution and non-detention of victims. These provisions will enable more efficient identification, assistance and support of victims, who in a large number of cases, given the situation they are in, are forced by the traffickers to perpetrate other punishable acts. The application of the principle of non-punishment will encourage victims to cooperate with law enforcement authorities during the detection and punishment of perpetrators.

In 2024 in order to include survivors in the creation of policies at a strategic level, the National Commission adopted a Decision on the Establishment of a **Group for the Representation of Survivors – THB Victims** who will have the opportunity to make their contribution and to include the THB victims in the decision-making process and in the process of finding adequate solutions. This group will be consulted by the Commission and its bodies when revising, creating and developing any documents, strategies and action plans for the purposes of improving the protection of victims of trafficking in human beings, materials for the awareness raising campaigns, support of current activities in the field of trafficking in human beings and the like.

The Commission's analysis and statistics show that in the period from 2010 to 2020, the number of detected victims of sexual exploitation prevailed, while labour exploitation was significantly less present in that period. Since 2021, the situation changed drastically, with labour exploitation taking the first place in terms of the number of detected victims with the discovery of large number of foreign victims of labour exploitation. And according to the latest data from 2023, sexual exploitation is again the most dominant form, followed by labour exploitation, while the occurrence of forced marriages, which remains continuously present as well as begging is at the third place. Also, the gender representation at the expense of women/girls as victims has been confirmed, and in the period of 2022 and 2023 over 80% of the identified victims were women and girls, of which 85% were girls.

When we mention identified victims in our country, we are mostly talking about people from a vulnerable category, motivated by various social, economic and social factors, such as poverty, gender discrimination, domestic violence and other similar conditions of the victim. This is confirmed in many of the cases, that is, the economic situation is confirmed as one of the most important and significant factors for domestic victims, mostly children and especially girls, to end up in the internal network of trafficking in human beings. Other risks include violence against women and girls, as well as domestic violence which is very high, especially in rural areas, in underdeveloped regions, among ethnic minorities (Roma people), socially excluded persons, unemployed, etc.

On the other hand, when it comes to victim protection, the Republic of North Macedonia provides an assistance and protection to THB victims, including information to victims, temporary residence, attorney in the procedure, free legal aid, procedural protection, compensation for damages and non-punishment for the acts they committed and were forced to commit during the time they were trafficked, or which are directly related to the situation they were in as THB victims. Victims receive additional support at **the Centre for THB Victims**, where special attention is paid on their stabilisation, resocialisation, reintegration and professional activities that are applied according to prepared individual plans for overcoming trauma, easier and more successful inclusion in the current processes of social life. Part of the activities undertaken relate to strengthening the personal potential of the victims through counselling and support, provision of alternative education, occupational and creative

workshops to improve intellectual capacities and psychophysical health. Psychosocial counselling is included in daily activities, which is given through individual and group sessions using techniques and interventions from different directions of psychosocial therapy.

	2022		2023	
	children	adults	children	adults
Domestic	6	1	6	1
Foreign	1	1	/	/
Total	7	2	6	1
Sex (m/f)	(7 girls)	(1 woman/1 man)	(4 girl 2 boys)	(1 women)
Identified victims	9		7	
Presumed victims	13		9	

As part of the activities of the Ministry of Interior in the field of trafficking in women and girls, mandatory and continuous action controls are carried out, where the sectors of Internal Affairs conduct controls on catering and accommodation facilities in order to find and catch traffickers (of women and girls), as well as victims of this criminal act.

The police stations of general competence within the framework of their work tasks, through the reporting police officers, monitor this phenomenon, both for foreign nationals and for the citizens of our country in order to early detect emerging forms of this crime.

The organisational units for prevention within the sectors of internal affairs provide for and implement projects in their annual programs for the prevention of trafficking in human beings, where the students in primary and secondary schools are the target group. Measures have also been undertaken to raise awareness among this target group about the sources and dangers of this phenomenon, as well as about the manners of protection, in order not to become a victim of this crime.

We also want to emphasize that the military conflict in Ukraine brings specific secondary risks and effects to our country that must be monitored. The security and economic crisis resulting from this military conflict has its own negative implications for the Ukrainian citizens, making them potential victims of trafficking in human beings and exploitation as a result of their internal and external forced displacement. There is a real risk for these potential victims to end up on the Macedonian criminal market, primarily for sexual and labour exploitation, of which children and women are still the most vulnerable category.