



Government of the Republic of North Macedonia  
National Committee for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and  
Illegal  
Migration

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ANNUAL REPORT  
OF THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR COMBATING  
TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL  
MIGRATION  
2019

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## 1. Supporting framework

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### 1.1 COORDINATING STRUCTURES

The National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration<sup>1</sup> (the Committee) is a body which unites and coordinates all stakeholders involved in the fight against trafficking in human beings. The Committee is headed by the National Coordinator, with the participation of their Deputy, a Secretary and members of the Committee.<sup>2</sup>

Since 2003, there have been several working bodies within the Committee, such as the Secretariat<sup>3</sup> which is in charge of the implementation of Committee's decisions, and a Subgroup for combatting child trafficking (Subgroup) established in 2003, which follows the specific needs of children-victims and protects their rights.<sup>4</sup>

Due to staff changes in the Ministry of the Interior (Moi) in 2017, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) appointed a new Coordinator of the National Committee for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration.<sup>5</sup>

The Committee holds regular meetings,<sup>6</sup> where important decisions and efforts to promote the work in the field of trafficking of human beings and illegal migration are being discussed.

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<sup>1</sup>Decision published in the "Official Gazette of RNM" no. 18/2001 and 82/15.

<sup>2</sup>Members of the Committee, representatives of: Moi, MFA, MLSP, MJ, MES, MH, Ministry of Health, Basic Public Prosecution office for organised crime and corruption, Judge in the Primary Court Skopje 1, Bureau for Development of Education, State Labour Inspectorate and Employment Service Agency of RNM.

<sup>3</sup>Composed of representatives of international organizations, associations of citizens and experts from governmental institutions: Moi-NUSSMHT, MLSP-NRM, US Embassy, ICMPD, OSCE, IOM, UNHCR, GIZ, Regional Centre-MARRI, Council of Europe programme office, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, NCGE, Association of Citizens "Open Gate-La Strada", Association of Citizens "For a Happy Childhood", Association of Citizens "Semper" and the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia.

<sup>4</sup>Presided by the Advisor for Prevention and Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking in MLSP-NRM, composed of representatives of: Moi-NESKEKM, CGRM-Moi, the US Embassy; ICMPD, OSCE, IOM, Association of Citizens "Open Gate-La Strada", Association of Citizens "For a Happy Childhood", Association of Citizens "Equal Access" and the Deputy Ombudsman in the role of external member/observer.

<sup>5</sup>"Official Gazette of RNM" no. 84/2017.

<sup>6</sup>Three meetings were held in 2019: on 15.03.2019; 27.09.2019, and 03.10.2019;

Special mechanisms for the fight against human trafficking and illegal migration have been developed and a clear division of tasks between institutions and organizations at central and local levels has been made aimed at identifying, assisting, and supporting the victims of human trafficking and other risk groups.

In 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), as a coordinator of the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Human Trafficking (NRM) conducted the activities for prevention and protection of the victims of human trafficking in accordance with the National Strategy and Action Plan for Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2016-2020.

All activities were implemented in cooperation with the Committee, the Subgroup, the Centres for Social Work (CSWs), the National Unit for the Suppression of Smuggling of Migrants and Human Trafficking (NUSSMHT), associations of citizens and international organizations, which contributed to the promotion of cooperation and coordination in dealing with this phenomenon.

In order to achieve an aligned and coordinated approach, the MLSP initiated and implemented measures and activities related to the prevention and protection of victims of human trafficking (WHT), as well as activities for strengthening the capacity of experts in the CSWs and the labour inspection. NRM coordinates the activities through the social workers in the CSWs (in 30 cities in RNM) who have a crucial role in the whole process, from identification to resocialization and reintegration of the victims of human trafficking.

In order to decentralize the Committee, local committees for combatting trafficking in human beings and illegal migration were established in Bitola and Tetovo<sup>7</sup> in 2013, and in Shtip in 2014. Additionally, in 2016, the Committee adopted a decision to establish three new local committees in Prilep, Gevgelija and Veles. Namely, due to the changes that occurred as a result of the local elections, the Committee submitted a request to the municipalities where local committees had already been established for the appointment of chairpersons of the local committees and the revision of their membership. In 2019, a new committee was established in the Municipality of Kumanovo, which developed a Local Action Plan 2020 that was voted for and adopted by the Council of the Municipality of Kumanovo.

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<sup>7</sup>The local committee established in the Municipality of Tetovo is not in function due to unavailability and non-cooperation of the Municipality with the institutions and organizations.

In line with the recommendations of GRETA - Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, set out in the 2017 report, and the guidance provided in the US Department of State's 2017-2018 Progress Report on RNM, the Commission concluded that a National Rapporteur should be established as a *de jure* independent position with a mandate to monitor the activities for combatting trafficking in human beings and illegal migration, undertaken by state institutions and organizations. According to the decision of the Government of RNM<sup>8</sup> the systematization within the Ombudsman was changed and a new department was established i.e. National Ombudsman – National Rapporteur of Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration. Officially, as of 01.12.2019, one person was elected and appointed a National Rapporteur, and one person was appointed their Advisor.

## 1.2 LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

### *Adoption of a Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Crime*

In July 2019, the Ministry of Justice (MJ) formed an interdisciplinary working group, composed of representatives of all relevant institutions, associations and international organizations which are part of the Committee's Secretariat. During the past period, this group worked actively on the drafting of the *Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Crime*, which includes the crime of trafficking in human beings. This draft-law addresses one of the main recommendations of GRETA on the consistent implementation of the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings and other international standards regarding the effective exercise of the right to reparation of the victims of this serious crime by the State. The purpose of this law is to provide fair and adequate monetary compensation to victims of violent crimes, as well as to prevent secondary victimization. With the support of the Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje, expert assistance was provided for the preparation of the Draft-Law, which included comments from the foreign expert Van Dijk. The working group accepted the comments. During this period, there were comments from relevant institutions, i.e. the draft-law is in the process of intergovernmental consultation. In cooperation with

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<sup>8</sup> No. 45-278/1 dated 22.01.2019

the Assembly<sup>9</sup>, the Embassy of France and the EU Delegation, a panel-discussion was organized on the topic “Improving access to compensation for victims of human trafficking and gender-based violence”<sup>10</sup>. The draft-law sets out the conditions and the procedure for exercising the right to compensation of victims of these crimes, the types of material and non-material damage, establishment, status, composition and competencies of a special committee that will decide upon the submitted requests for compensation, information, and education of the victims, as well as other issues.<sup>11</sup>

One of the benefits of the long-term efforts of the Committee and the OSCE Mission is the **introduction of the principle of impunity for victims of human/child trafficking in the criminal legislation of RNM**. The amendments of the Criminal Code,<sup>12</sup> which entered into force on 1 January 2019, contained an explicit provision for impunity of the victims of human trafficking (Article 418-a, paragraph 7) and victims of child trafficking (Article 418-d, paragraph 8). The essence of this principle/provision is that it covers impunity, acquittal and non-detention of victims. The new provisions will contribute to more efficient identification, assistance and support for the victims which in most of the cases, regarding their situation, are forced by traders to commit other criminal offenses. The application of the principle of impunity will encourage victims to cooperate with law enforcement authorities in identifying and punishing the perpetrators.

The OSCE Mission, in cooperation with the Committee and the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, organized **a training cycle<sup>13</sup> on the application of the principle of impunity** for victims, intended for all relevant actors that work with victims of human/child trafficking on identifying and prosecution of these acts<sup>14</sup>.

The OSCE mission assisted in the development of **Guidelines for the application of this key principle,<sup>15</sup>** which elaborate in detail the national

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<sup>9</sup>Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

<sup>10</sup>On November 4<sup>th</sup> in the Assembly (around 100 participants in total) - phase II of the project.

<sup>11</sup>The draft-law is expected to be revised and adopted by the new Parliament after the elections scheduled for 12 April 2020.

<sup>12</sup>Official Gazette of RNM no. 248/18.

<sup>13</sup>Within this cycle, one “training of trainers” was held on 17-18 October 2019, and it was followed by two cascade trainings, the first of which was held on 18-19 November, and the second was held on 27-28 November 2019.

<sup>14</sup> All trainings were multi-disciplinary in nature and covered a total of 70 representatives of the judiciary, prosecution, police, social services, law and civil society organizations active in the field of protection and support to victims of human/child trafficking.

<sup>15</sup>Prepared by Prof. Vlado Kambovski and Prof. Gordana Lazhetikj-Buzharovska.

substantive criminal provisions and the provisions of the relevant international conventions and standards, which will be used in the next cycle of trainings planned by the OSCE for 2020.

In 2019, IOM<sup>16</sup> provided expert support for the draft of by-law “Rulebook on the House Rules of the Reception Centre for Foreigners”, in accordance with Article 196 paragraph 1 item 4 of the Law on Foreigners.<sup>17</sup>

### 1.3 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

In the past year, very significant activities were implemented in terms of strengthening international, regional and cross-border cooperation. In addition to the negotiations with Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro, which resulted in the signing of Protocols and cooperation agreements for combatting human trafficking, **bilateral talks were held between RNM, Bulgaria and Greece to conclude protocols on cooperation for combatting human trafficking.** The first official meeting within the **bilateral negotiations with the Republic of Greece** was held in the period 1-3 July 2019, in Ohrid. With the support of OSCE, **the negotiations with the Republic of Greece are planned to continue in March 2020,** with the visit of the negotiation delegation of RNM. In 2019, Macedonia took over the chairmanship of the Administrative group (AG) of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). At the 71-st meeting of the Steering Committee of ICMPD, the state secretary Magdalena Nestorovska presented the priorities of the Republic of Macedonia for 2019, with emphasis on the countries of the Western Balkans and the need for a coordinated and harmonized common approach to these countries as transit countries for illegal migration and their common needs and requirements.

On 14 and 15 May 2019, in Ohrid, the AG of ICMPD held its 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting. This was the first meeting of the AG during the Chairmanship of the Ministry of Interior of RNM with ICMPD. Important topics were discussed during the meeting, such as political recommendations for the new leadership of the EU, mixed migration flows along the Western Balkans route - current situation and prospects, which was proposed as a

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<sup>16</sup>within the project “Strengthening the national capacities in the field of asylum, migration and human trafficking” funded by the European Union.

<sup>17</sup>Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia 97/2018.

topic by the Ministry of Interior of RNM as chair of ICMPD, the Program of ICMPD member countries on the role of migration dialogues in migration management in Europe; Mobility Partnership Program (PPM).

At the second meeting of the AG, held on 9 and 10 October in Skopje, a **reactivation of the Working Group for Southeast Europe within the Budapest process** was proposed. This working group had minimum activities in the period after 2014, when Croatia entered EU. One of the priorities of RNM was to reactivate this working group and this idea was met with great approval by the authorities in ICMPD, as well as by other ICMPD member states. At the meeting, it was discussed that it is necessary to make an analysis of the existing *Standard Operating Procedures in the region within the group (for treatment of vulnerable categories of migrants, unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking)* given that these procedures are not harmonized in all countries, and each country regulates its SOPs individually. On the basis of such an analysis, if the countries in the region agree, it is possible to work on achieving harmonized Standard Operating Procedures at the regional level, which would significantly facilitate further procedures in all countries.<sup>18</sup>

In the period 30-31 January 2019, at the invitation of OSCE, the National Coordinator Magdalena Nestorovska visited Athens, Greece in order to participate in the **Regional Workshop on Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings for the purpose of labour exploitation in the global supply chain**. The workshop was part of the OSCE project on raising awareness for the prevention of human trafficking, with special emphasis on labour exploitation. Also, it was emphasized that the engagement of the private and business sector in the prevention and suppression of this phenomenon is undoubtedly very important in terms of the time we live in.

At the invitation of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, the National Coordinator Nestorovska, together with the Director of the Public Security Bureau Tasevski, MA and the Head of the Border Operations Sector at the Ministry of Interior participated in the **World Border Security Congress** held March 19-21, 2019 in Casablanca, Kingdom of Morocco. The congress addressed issues related to enhanced cooperation and exchange of intelligence in order to effectively address global challenges and threats

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<sup>18</sup> At this meeting, it was agreed that Poland would be allocating 20,000 euros for the meetings of this group during the next 3 years, and that the presidency would be on a rotational basis, i.e. after RNM, the chairmanship will be taken over by the Republic of Serbia. The first meeting of this WG will be held 4-6 May 2020 in Ohrid, North Macedonia, and preparations for the meeting are already underway. The topic of the meeting will be *Common Asylum Systems*.



to border security and integrity, especially by organized crime groups involved in human trafficking and illegal migration. At the Congress, Nestorovska gave a presentation on the topic “*Management of Migration and Measures against Trafficking in Human Beings*” which sparked great interest among those present. On the sidelines of the Congress, bilateral contacts were made with delegations from African and Asian countries and with representatives of various international organizations. The event was also used to promote the activities of RNM in the area of border management and the fight against human trafficking.

On 8 and 9 April 2019, in Vienna, Austria, at the invitation of the OSCE’s Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking of Human Beings, the National Coordinator Nestorovska and her deputy took part in the **19<sup>th</sup> Alliance against Trafficking in Persons conference** with the topic “*The use of technology in fighting human trafficking*”. The focus of the Conference was placed on the manner technology is being abused to facilitate human trafficking and how to use its potential in the fight against this type of crime for the purposes of sexual, labour and other forms of exploitation.

In the period 16-17 May 2019 in Durres, Albania, at the invitation of the international organization *Terre des hommes*<sup>19</sup>, in cooperation with Open Gate as project implementer, **a regional meeting of the National Coordinators for combating human trafficking** was held. The Regional Meeting was attended by the National Coordinator Nestorovska, one representative from her Cabinet and two representatives from NUSSMHT.

On 29 and 30 May 2019, in Becici, Montenegro, **a meeting of the National Coordinators for combating THB in Southeast Europe**<sup>20</sup> was held. The National Coordinator Nestorovska and her Deputy took part in the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to provide *a platform for discussing access to compensation for victims of human trafficking* as one of the key provisions of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against THB, as well as for strengthening the Partnership/Network of National Coordinators for Southeast Europe (SEE) in order to share information and to achieve a better cooperation.

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<sup>19</sup>within the project “Improving CTHB services and awareness in the Balkans - Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo.”

<sup>20</sup>The meeting was organized by ICMPD, in the role of Secretariat of the National Coordinators, the Permanent Mission of France to the International Organizations in Vienna, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and the Council of Europe (CoE).

In the period from 22 to 25 October 2019, the **OSCE** Mission organized a study visit to Madrid where two representatives of the border police and two representatives of the asylum sector at the Ministry of Interior took part. The visit provided an opportunity for a direct exchange of experiences with colleagues from Spain and introduction to the procedures for international protection and approval of asylum and dealing with illegal migration. During the study visit, special emphasis was placed on the restriction of the freedom of movement of asylum seekers and the current legal regulations and procedures of the European Union member states.

Moreover, at the invitation of the **OSCE**, several professionals participated in a regional workshop held on 18 July in Sarajevo on the implementation of the OSCE guidelines for the identification of victims of THB on the Western Balkans route. They also participated in the regional workshop held 9-10 December in Malta, on the topic of multidisciplinary approach and cooperation in the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings and illegal migration.

Within the **“Combating Human Trafficking along Migration Routes”** project, whose implementation started in 2016, on September 16-20, 2018, in Vicenza, Italy, the fifth training at the Center for Police Training and Stability (CoESPU) was held by the Office of the Special Representative and Coordinator of the OSCE against Trafficking in Human Beings in Vienna. There were four representatives of the RNM among the 70 participants from all OSCE participating states. This practical and interactive training with simulated scenarios enabled different profiles of professionals who work actively in the field of prevention, identification, assistance and support and legal representation of victims of THB, as well as those responsible for detecting and prosecuting the perpetrators of this type of crime, to upgrade their knowledge and practical skills in the fight against human trafficking in mixed migration flows.

On 28 February in Skopje, the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Open Gate Association organized a workshop on transnational cooperation in the prevention and fight against THB for the purpose of labour exploitation. Representatives of national institutions and associations, as well as representatives from Albania, Moldova, Serbia, Finland and the Netherlands (total 38 participants) participated in the workshop - Phase I of the project.

The Regional Centre of the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative MARRI, held a meeting with the Steering Committee of the

Project: Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans in Podgorica on 27 November 2019. The National Coordinator Magdalena Nestorovska attended the meeting as a member of the Steering Committee, representing the Republic of North Macedonia.

Two regional meetings of the project's steering committee were held with representatives from six Western Balkan countries, within the frameworks of the regional project.<sup>21</sup> The goals of the meetings were the main and current migration challenges and the fight against smuggling of migrants, as well as sharing good practices from the region. At the same time, within the same project, two meetings of border police chiefs from six countries were held in order to exchange experiences on the migration situation in the Western Balkans, new trends and preparation plans.

In 2019, the **Association for Action Against Violence and Trafficking in Human Beings "Open Gate – La Strada"** participated in several international events, such as:

- The 63rd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Transnational cooperation for identification and referral of potential victims with a focus on labour exploitation<sup>22</sup> in cooperation with the Council of Europe.
- International seminar<sup>23</sup> for Compensation of Victims as part of the "Finally Justice" project organized by La Strada International.
- The Police Academy<sup>24</sup> in Zagreb, Module 2 Human Trafficking and Smuggling of Migrants, at the invitation of the US Embassy in Skopje.
- Second regional social academy "Social Enterprises - innovative model for sustainable service delivery and integration of marginalized groups in the labour market and society"<sup>25</sup>
- Second regional meeting within the project "Improving Provision of Services and Awareness to Combat Trafficking in Persons in the Balkans: Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Enhancing capacities and mechanisms to identify and protect vulnerable migrants in the Western Balkans – phase III"

<sup>22</sup> 28 February 2019, Skopje, 38 participants from Albania, Finland, the Netherlands, Serbia and the host country.

<sup>23</sup> 27-28 May 2019.

<sup>24</sup> 27- 31 May 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Held in the period 27 - 30 May 2019 in Tirana, within the IRIS network.

<sup>26</sup> Financed by the United States of America through the Trafficking in Persons Monitoring and Control Program #jtip was held in May 2019 in Albania, 35 participants took part in the event, held by state institutions of the National Referral Mechanism, stakeholders in the relevant countries as well as partner organizations in the four countries.

- “Global Consultation on Prevention of Human Trafficking and Unsafe Migration.”<sup>27</sup>
- La Strada NGO Platform<sup>28</sup> was founded by 25 European CSOs, organizations working on THB. Press-conference and meeting of the partners of Balkans Act Now! BAN 3.<sup>29</sup>

### 1.3 INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS DEDICATED TO THE FIGHT AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS

As a result of intensive six-month negotiations, on 23 July 2019, in Ohrid, with the support of the **OSCE Mission**<sup>30</sup>, the RNM’s negotiating team led by the Minister of Interior, Mr Oliver Spasovski, and the negotiating team of Bulgaria, led by the Minister of Defense, Mr Krasimir Karakachanov, signed the **Protocol on Cooperation in the Fight against Human Trafficking** between the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Two expert meetings were organized between the delegations of RNM and Serbia within a regional<sup>31</sup> project. During the meetings, both parties determined the elements of the **Cooperation Agreement for Combating THB and the Cooperation Agreement for Combating Smuggling of Migrants**. The purpose of the agreements is to strengthen cooperation, exchange of information, experiences, and joint investigations between the two countries. On 16 December 2019, in Skopje, two Agreements were signed between the Government of RNM and the Government of the Republic of Serbia for *cooperation in the field of combating trafficking in human beings and cooperation in the field of migrant smuggling*. The agreements were signed by the Ministers of Interior of North Macedonia and Serbia.

In 2019, North Macedonia signed **agreements** for cooperation in the field of trafficking in human beings with Montenegro, Bulgaria and Serbia. The agreement with Greece is in the preparation stage.

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<sup>27</sup>03.04.2019 Bangkok.

<sup>28</sup>18-20 November 2019, in Istanbul, Turkey.

<sup>29</sup>Belgrade, 2-4 December 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Within the negotiations between the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria, two meetings of the negotiating delegations of the two countries were held - the first one on 7-9 February 2019, in Sofia, and the second one on 26-28 June 2019, in Skopje.

<sup>31</sup>“Enhancing Capacities and Mechanisms for Identifying and Protecting Vulnerable Migrants in the Western Balkans – Phase III”, implemented by IOM with the support of the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration.

Within a project,<sup>32</sup> a Declaration was signed bilaterally as an Annex to the additional Protocol for intensification of the cooperation in the fight against human trafficking between the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania to adopt Unified Standard Operating Procedures (USOPs) for transnational cooperation and case management of victims and potential victims of trafficking with a special focus on children. Additionally, by a decision of the National Committee, Mrs Ana Burageva Aleksova was appointed a contact person in case of identification of victims from North Macedonia and/or Albania.

## 2. Prevention

### 2.1 IDENTIFICATION OF REASONS FOR THE OCCURRENCE OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

In July 2019, ICMPD finished the implementation of the project *Study on Trafficking Resilience and Vulnerability en route to Europe (STRIVE)*. This was a research project that included Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary, North Macedonia and Serbia (transit countries and countries of first arrival in the EU along the Western Balkans route), Germany (one of the most important destination countries), and Italy (country of first arrival in EU), along the central Mediterranean route. The goal of the project was to provide information on the phenomenon of human trafficking in the context of illegal migration routes in Europe, as well as on the categories of refugees/migrants i.e. which one are more vulnerable, and which one are more resilient to the risks of human trafficking. The goal of the research was to stipulate activities for prevention of THB along migrant routes, more efficient identification and protection of victims, as well as prosecution of the offenders. ICMPD conducted an academic research in North Macedonia with all relevant stakeholders, among which there were representative of the Committee. The research stage of the project was completed in all participating countries in October 2018. In 2018, two research workshops were held in Belgrade (July) and Sofia (October). The findings of the research in RNM as a transit country in the route, were incorporated in the final study, which was presented officially at a conference in Athens, in March 2019. Four representatives of RNM participated at the conference.

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<sup>32</sup> “Improving Provision of Services and Awareness to Combat Trafficking in Persons in the Balkans: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosovo“

Moreover, the OSCE Mission helped in the preparation of **educational materials – Manual and Workbook for the protection of students from human trafficking (in Macedonian and Albanian languages)**, which are intended for teachers. The materials were initially prepared by the UNITAS foundation from Serbia and they were completely aligned with the applicable laws, procedures and institutional framework of the country. The educational materials were officially approved for use by the Bureau for Development of Education within the Ministry of Education and Science (MES).

At the initiative of the Open Gate Association, Working Groups<sup>33</sup> were established at a national level. They reviewed the indicators from the tool for monitoring the situation with human trafficking and the quality of services. The main recommendations of the Working Groups were as follows: to continue the process with the involvement of the National Rapporteur; to develop monitoring tools and data collection questionnaires; to develop software which will be easy to use and adaptable; to start / continue data collection.

## **2.2 STRENGTHENING CAPACITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTIVE ACTIVITIES**

In 2019, 542 representatives of MoI (NUSSMHT, RCBANM, SIA, PS) participated in several trainings, seminars, workshops, study visits and the like, organized by the MoI, international organizations and associations, the US Embassy, aimed at strengthening the capacities of police officers in the identification of cases of human trafficking and illegal migration; trainings on how to act in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); raising awareness for the suppression of human trafficking and illegal migration; strengthening the national capacities in the field of asylum, migrations and human trafficking IPA-2016; application of the new provisions of the Criminal Code related to the impunity of victims of human trafficking, etc.

On 3-4 December 2019, in Skopje, a two-day workshop was held **for the representatives of the Local Committees for combating trafficking in**

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<sup>33</sup>On **7 November 2019**, there was a meeting of the first Working Group (judges and prosecutors and CSOs); the second meeting was held on **11 November** with the second Working Group (Police, CSW, and CSOs). The next step was a second review of the indicators with all stakeholders at the third workshop held on **29 November 2019** in Skopje. The Working Groups consist of representatives of the Ministry of Interior, the Office of the Public Prosecutor, the Primary Court, the MLSP SWC, the Office of Civil Society Organizations and the Ombudsman, and the Office of the National Committee.

**human beings and illegal migration**<sup>34</sup>. The workshop was organized by the Committee and the Sector for negotiations and European integration at the Ministry of Interior, supported by **UNHCR**. The goal of the Workshop was for the members of the Local Committees to get to know one another, as well as to present the challenges they face at the local level and to detect the level of implementation of the local action plans.

Taking into consideration the importance of employee capacity building, a series of trainings was conducted for different profiles. The goal of the training sessions was to implement the recommendations from GRETA related to strengthening the capacities of social workers for identification and to the 2018 Trafficking in Persons Report by the US State Department which requires strengthening of the role of the National Referral Mechanism and a proactive identification.

In that context, the following activities were conducted with the support of IOM:

- January 2019 - training on working with child victims of trafficking with a focus on interviewing and trauma treatment, designed for psychologists and social workers, involving staff from small group homes, a total of 25 people;
- January – February 2019 – joint training of social workers with the Organized Crime Task Force and the Public Prosecutor’s Office, aimed at coordinated actions with the purpose of protection of victims, a total of 25 participants;
- Within the IOM’s project “Strengthening the national capacities in the field of asylum, migration and human trafficking“ funded by the European Union, 260 Mol representatives were trained; and
- In the period September-November, within the same IOM project, the capacities of another 299 Mol representatives and 93 social workers were enhanced through 18 basic training sessions for combating trafficking in human beings and illegal migration.

#### **Cooperation with the Council of Europe (*Horizontal Facility Action on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings*)**

Within the **Horizontal Facility Action on Preventing and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings** project, a simultaneous training was held for strengthening the capacities of all relevant institutions that work in the field of trafficking in human beings for labour exploitation.

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<sup>34</sup>45 participants from the National Committee, six Local Committees: Kumanovo, Shtip, Veles, Gevgelija, Bitola, Prilep and the mobile units.

From 16 to 18 December 2019, an advanced multidisciplinary training was conducted. It was a practical exercise (a simulation) based on a real-life scenario, aimed at labour inspectors with more advanced knowledge of THB for labour exploitation, police officers, social workers, lawyers and representatives of Associations with previous experience in THB cases. The training was attended by 25 participants.

In the reference period, **the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors “Pavel Shatev”** conducted 11 consultations in the field of trafficking in human beings and illegal migration, on the following topics: *Trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants; Conducting effective financial investigations, confiscation of illegally acquired assets and handling claims for compensation of victims of trafficking; Novelty in the Criminal Code regarding the impunity of victims of trafficking*. There were 275 participants in the consultations, i.e. 34 judges, 45 public prosecutors, 81 expert associates and 115 representatives of other institutions.

To strengthen the capacities of the detection and prosecution bodies, **the OSCE Mission to Skopje** in cooperation with the Committee organized several training sessions and educational activities. Thus, on 2-4 April, a training session on interviewing techniques for children and victims of sexual violence was conducted. The training session was attended by more than 30 participants, mostly NUSSMHT inspectors, as well as social workers and prosecutors. It enabled them to get acquainted with modern and internationally recognized techniques and methods of acting upon and taking statements from children exposed to violence and exploitation. On 7-8 October, a workshop dedicated to restricting the movement of asylum seekers following the EU Directive 2013/33 was held, which was attended by 12 representatives of the Ministry of Interior and several associations.

During the period 14 to 18 October, OSCE organized a five-day interactive role-play training which enhanced the operational capacities of 20 representatives of NUSSMHT, social workers and associations, as well as the mechanisms for inter-institutional cooperation and data exchange.

In cooperation with the Committee and MLSP, **OSCE** worked on improving the role, efficiency and sustainability of the mobile teams dealing with vulnerable categories of persons and victims of THB. For that purpose, on 25 and 26 November 2019, a workshop on stress management techniques was organized for the first time, based on the



needs and requests of the members of the mobile teams. A total of 20 members of the MTs attended the workshop.

The **OSCE Mission and MES** continued to strengthen the capacities for the realization of preventive activities in the education system by continuing the training cycle of the teaching staff, which started in the previous year. Namely, on 16 and 17 April 2019, a training session was held with the participation of 20 teachers from several high schools in the country. Subsequently, teachers continued to share the acquired knowledge with their colleagues, as well as with the new generations of students.

In 2019, **IOM**<sup>35</sup> organized 38 two-day training sessions for strengthening the capacities of experts in the fields of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants. The training sessions were conducted by national experts. The goal of the training sessions was to enhance the capacities of 889 (48% women) social workers, members of the Task Force, mobile teams for identification, referral and protection of victims of THB, representatives of MoI, judges and prosecutors<sup>36</sup>.

Also, two two-day regional training sessions were organized for public prosecutors in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption and for judges in the Department of Organized Crime in the Primary Court Skopje 1 Skopje on the topic "Cultural competence, knowledge and awareness for working with foreign nationals related to criminal investigations of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants."<sup>37</sup>

In February 2019, a specialized two-day training session was organized for 32 permanent police members of NUSSMHT and five public prosecutors from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption<sup>38</sup>.

**The Council of Europe Programme Office** in Skopje, through the project from the *Horizontal Facility of the Council of Europe and the European Union*, and with the support of the Committee and in cooperation with MLSP and the State Labour Inspectorate, conducted the following:

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<sup>35</sup>Within the project "Strengthening the national capacities in the field of asylum, migrations and human trafficking" financed by the European Union.

<sup>36</sup>Detailed information on the number of participants per training is shown on pages 12 and 13 of this report

<sup>37</sup>Within the regional project "Enhancing Capacities and Mechanisms to Identify and Protect Vulnerable Migrants in the Western Balkans" – phase III .

<sup>38</sup>The workshop is organized within the regional project "Enhancing Capacities and Mechanisms to Identify and Protect Vulnerable Migrants in the Western Balkans – phase III"

- Multi-disciplinary training on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings with the purpose of labour exploitation, intended for labour inspectors, members of the Mobile Teams and the Chamber of Commerce<sup>39</sup>
- Advanced training on trafficking in human beings with the purpose of labour exploitation<sup>40</sup> in the form of practical exercise-simulation intended for labour inspectors, police officers, social workers, legal practitioners and representatives of various associations,
- Multi-disciplinary training on trafficking in human beings with the purpose of labour exploitation intended for labour inspectors<sup>41</sup>, with the participation of a representative of NRM and NUSSMHT.
- In cooperation with MLSP and the Municipality of Centar, a workshop was organized for the detection and identification of preliminary victims of child trafficking with the purpose of labour exploitation,<sup>42</sup> intended for principals, psychologists and counselors in primary schools in the Municipality of Centar. The participants received a teaching material titled *“Indicators for Identifying Children / Students Potential Victims of Trafficking for Labour Exploitation for Educational Personnel.”*<sup>43</sup>
- In cooperation with MLSP and the Municipality of Centar, the first pilot-training on identifying the indicators of child trafficking for labour exploitation and referral of potential victims was organized.<sup>44</sup> Teachers, counselors, and psychologists from seven primary schools in the Municipality of Centar attended the training.
- In cooperation with the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, a training session on financial investigations, confiscation of illegally acquired property, and processing of claims for damages for judges, prosecutors and lawyers was organized.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>19-21 September, Hotel Drim, Struga (total of 39 participants). Within the training, a representative of MLSP gave a lecture on the NRM and the gender component, and a representative from the Ministry of Interior introduced the participants to the role of NUSSMHT - phase II of the project.

<sup>40</sup>16-18 December, Ohrid (total of 34 participants) – phase II of the project.

<sup>41</sup>24-25 January, Hotel Radika, Mavrovo (total of 48 participants) - phase I of the project.

<sup>42</sup>15 February, Hotel Holiday Inn, Skopje (total of 28 participants) - phase I of the project.

<sup>43</sup>The Indicators for Identifying Children/Students Potential Victims of Trafficking for Labour Exploitation for Educational Personnel prepared by focus groups with members of the Subgroup for combating trafficking in human beings, teachers and counselling services in schools, representatives of associations of citizens and other relevant actors. A list of indicators for identifying children/students potential victims of trafficking for labour exploitation was created and submitted to the Bureau for Development of Education in order for it to become an integral part of school curricula.

<sup>44</sup>2 April, Hotel Park and Spa, Skopje: - phase I of the project.

<sup>45</sup>27-28 March, Hotel Metropol, Ohrid: the training was conducted by three international experts (Italy, Netherlands and the United Kingdom) and by two domestic judges (total of 34 participants) - phase I of the project.

- In cooperation with the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, the HELP course Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was translated and adapted into Macedonian language by a judge and a public prosecutor. The following step is to launch it online on the HELP platform.<sup>46</sup> The training on financial investigations and confiscation of illegally acquired assets, as well as the HELP program for combating THB in Macedonian language, enable strengthening of the capacities of judicial bodies in the fight against THB by providing access to a tool for distance learning and comparative review of good practices from European countries.

The **Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)** through the **USAID Migrant and Refugee Human Rights Protection Project**, within the first component - *Strengthening the capacities of field workers*, conducted a training session for representatives of various organizations regarding the application of four Standard Operating procedures: SOP for treatment of unaccompanied minors, SOP for treatment of vulnerable categories of persons, SOP for treatment of victims of gender-based violence, SOP for treatment of victims of human trafficking. In all the training sessions related to the application of the SOPs, the focus was placed on the treatment of refugees and illegal migrants by field workers. In addition, MYLA held two specialized training sessions for combating THB<sup>47</sup> and application of the SOPs, which were intended for field workers. Also, MYLA organized two training sessions<sup>48</sup> for attorneys on representing and legal protection of victims of human trafficking.

In 2019, **MYLA's** representatives continued to participate in the Mobile Teams established in 2018 for identification of vulnerable categories, including victims of trafficking in human beings, and to provide legal assistance regarding the legal mechanisms for protection of the rights of the victim of THB and opportunities to file claims for compensation for the victims in contentious procedures.

In 2019, the **Open Gate-La Strada Association** conducted three training sessions on advocacy and data collection and analysis, intended for 10 grantee associations<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>August 2019 – present: - phase II of the project.

<sup>47</sup>15-17 March 2019 and 18-20 October 2019.

<sup>48</sup>27-29 November and 25-27 October 2019.

<sup>49</sup>Within the project #ПрепознајПочитувајОстварувајПрава (#RecognizeRespectRealizeRights) financed by the EU.

- 1 Three-day training for trainers “Prevention of human/child trafficking” intended for teachers and counsellors in secondary schools in RNM.
- 2 Workshop on Prevention of Child Trafficking<sup>50</sup> for representatives of educational institutions in Gevgelija (35 participants) who had the opportunity to get to know all the services provided by the Open Gate Association. In addition, the representative of the local committee in Gevgelija introduced the participants to the role and the work of the Committee at a local level.
- 3 Training on “Trafficking in Human Beings” intended for associations from Macedonia.

In addition to the training sessions aimed at strengthening the capacities of the relevant institutions, the Open Gate-La Strada Association organized the following:

- **Advocacy training**,<sup>51</sup> dedicated to the advocacy process and planning. A special part of the training was dedicated to budget advocacy, advocacy period and what changes can be achieved.
- From 26 to 28 June 2019, in Ohrid, **training on data collection and analysis** was organized (23 participants from 10 associations). The training focused on the need for data collection and analysis, as well as the importance of data collection along with the advocacy process.
- From 25 to 27 September 2019, in Mavrovo, **training on policy monitoring** was organized for 25 representatives of the same 10 associations. The training was aimed at improving the monitoring skills needed to ensure independent monitoring and monitoring of internal developments around THB.
- A workshop was organized for the Associations that provide social services, in order to acquaint them with the new Law on Social Protection.<sup>52</sup> The workshop was held on 31.10.2019 with 18 associations which provide direct social services to the vulnerable categories of citizens. A representative of MLSP presented the new Law and the opportunities for the Associations related to the provision of services, emphasizing the importance of quality services in line with the standards.

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<sup>50</sup>The Workshop was held on 22.05.2019, in Gevgelija, by Open Gate in cooperation with the Local Committee for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration from Gevgelija.

<sup>51</sup> on 16 and 17 May 2019, in Ohrid. A total of 22 representatives of CSOs were actively involved in the training.

<sup>52</sup>Adopted on 21 May 2019.

- On 11.12.2019, in Skopje, a **Workshop on the provision of services for CVTHB was organized** for the CVTHB employees, focused on the practical challenges faced by employees while working at the center.
- The Open Gate Association is actively involved in the initiative for developing the cooperation with the hotel industry through a joint meeting and additional training for the employees of the hotels of the Accor Group in Macedonia. The training sessions held on 19 and 25 June, and 2 and 3 July, 2019, talked about the phenomenon of THB, the current situation and the existing mechanisms for identification, referral and protection of victims of THB, especially the procedures related to child victims. Six organizations from Macedonia received assistance in the process of licensing social services through a Mentoring program provided through the Iris project.
- The organization, through the IRIS project, provided assistance to five associations from Macedonia to receive grants from the **Small Grants Scheme**. The Small Grants programme – was open only for the member organizations of the national IRIS networks in five countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, especially for small (grassroots) organizations.
- In June 2019, the organization awarded two grants from the project: “Balkans Act Now 3”. In the following period, two associations will implement their projects with the support of Open Gate. The main goal of this grant is the inclusion of other associations working in the fields of monitoring and implementing activities for advocacy and prevention of THB and protection of victims.
- On 01.03.2019, within the Social Dimension Initiative (a project implemented by the German organization ASB<sup>53</sup> in the countries of the Western Balkans), MLSP and Open Gate La Strada Macedonia started a cooperation with the municipalities for improvement of their social services. Nine municipalities from North Macedonia participate in the project, and during the Initiative they will develop projects for the improvement of social services for citizens.<sup>54</sup>
- 21 June, Skopje, National conference **“Social Dimension Initiative” (SDI) for the Western Balkans: “Leaving no one behind in the process of EU integration.”** This event (over 100 participants) was organized by the German non-governmental organization Arbeiter Samariter Bund, Southeast Europe, together with the local partner Open Gate – La

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<sup>53</sup> <https://asb-see.org/>

<sup>54</sup>The informative session was held on 20.2.2018 in Skopje. It was attended by 20 municipal representatives (Lipkovo, Resen, Kavadarci, Bogovinje, Gotivar, Bosilovo, Centar Zhupa and Vrapchishte).

Strada and MLSP. The event was attended by representatives of the Government, the German Embassy in RNM, representatives of local and regional associations, the international community and municipalities, as well as members of the regional IRIS network. The main topic was the socio-economic perspective of RNM. The Minister of Labour and Social Policy, Mila Carovska, presented the current situation in social policy and employment, as well as the reforms of these systems in the last few years.

- During 2019, as part of the project "Strategic Partnership for Development of Social Agenda for Change: Recognize, Respect, Realize Rights", Open Gate-La Strada Macedonia initiated a national platform for prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings.
- The Civil Platform for Prevention and Combating Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and THB, and 11 local associations, responded positively to the Open Gate-La Strada initiative and created a national platform for joint action to prevent and combat THB and other related social phenomena. In the period June-October 2019, through a series of workshops and electronic communication, the founders of the platform defined their strategy for action for the period 2020-2024. Along with the strategy, the members also drafted a Declaration to promote a human rights-based approach to combating THB.
- As part of the Strategic Partnerships for Change project, a new thematic website has been created. The website promotes all activities of the Associations that are part of the national platform for Prevention and Combating Exploitation.

Within the 2019 program for strengthening capacities, the **Association of citizens "For a Happy Childhood"** organized training sessions for 14 volunteers on psychological and social support of victims of THB. Also, in May, two volunteers participated in training on psychological and social support of victims of THB for youth leaders which was organized in Athens.

For the fifth year in a row, volunteers from the Association are attending training sessions for monitoring street children. This year in March, at the Faculty of Philosophy, two three-day training sessions were conducted and 15 students were trained. The training sessions were complemented with content for working with street children. Once a week, the volunteers had monitoring activities in five municipalities in Skopje at the busiest intersections in the city. 24 observations were made, out of which 11 street children were registered as potential victims of

child trafficking, of which 3 children were potential victims of labour exploitation.

In June, the Association of Citizens „**For a Happy Childhood**” conducted training on protection from trafficking for labour exploitation for people with disabilities employed at the “Umbrella” restaurant. The training was attended by seven persons with disabilities. Also, the association conducted training on prevention from THB for labour exploitation for 16 students who participate in the Work and Travel program.

### **2.3 RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION**

In 2019, the Open Gate-La Strada’s **SOS line 080011111 for assistance in case of human trafficking** continued to function, with telephone operators providing information, assistance, support and referrals every day from 8 am to 8 pm, 7 days a week.

In the period January - December 2019, the SOS telephone line registered 348 calls (207 from women, 141 from men). The calls were mostly preventive and educational. People called to receive information, and emotional and psycho-social support and assistance. Also, there are other calls related to TH.

- **European Anti-trafficking Day (18 October)**

The European Anti-trafficking Day was marked by organizing an informative event in Porta Makedonija with the support of **IOM**. The State Secretary at the Ministry of Interior and the National Coordinator together with the State Secretary from the MLSP and the Head of the Office of the International Organization for Migration - IOM Skopje gave a presentation at the event. Additionally, on the eve of the European Anti-Trafficking Day, the association **Open Gate - La Strada** in cooperation with Accor Group, the world leading hotel group, and the National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, signed a Code of Cooperation. The Code of Cooperation is first of its type in the hotel industry in our country, and it is aimed at protecting children from sexual exploitation in the travel/tourism industry. The signing ceremony took place at the Ibis Hotel, which was followed by the premiere of a video to promote the SOS line for Information and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings. The event was also used to distribute anti-child trafficking posters in three languages (Macedonian, Albanian and Romani) made with the support of the Council of Europe Programme Office.

On 17 October, the **Association for Equal Opportunities SEMPER**, organized two workshops for the students in the primary school „Sv. Kliment Ohridski” in Bitola. Also, in front of the VERO complex in Bitola, a street action was organized for distribution of informative educational material (leaflets, brochures) to the general public in Bitola. The aim was to raise public awareness among citizens about THB. Direct participants in the workshops were 70 students who were educated about the risks, dangers and consequences of THB, and the results of this type of activity were as follows:

- Raising public awareness about this type of organized crime,
- Over 200 students in the primary and secondary schools in Bitola received informative material (leaflets, brochures) for the human trafficking problem,
- Several articles have been published on the website of the primary school “Sv. Kliment Ohridski” on the topic of human trafficking and the activities implemented by the SEMPER Association.

**Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia** - As part of the celebration of the European Anti-trafficking Day (18 October), the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia held 28 workshops on peer education of young people in which 720 students from primary and secondary schools participated.

-It distributed 3,000 informative and educational brochures to students in primary and secondary schools.

-With the support of the Agency of Youth and Sport, the Red Cross held 3 forum theatres in Negotino, Veles and Sveti Nikole, and 27 workshops on peer education of youth for 814 students in primary and secondary schools.

On the occasion of the European Anti-trafficking Day (18 October), the **Association of Citizens „For a Happy Childhood”** organized one-day training on trafficking in human beings for first-year students at the Institutes within the Faculty of Philosophy. The training was attended by 91 students; Two focus groups<sup>55</sup> for the prevention of trafficking in human beings were organized for students who participate in the Work and Travel program. Special questions were raised on the topic of trafficking for labour exploitation.

- **Preventive activities**

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<sup>55</sup>The first focus group involved nine students; three of them had already used this program and presented their experiences. The second focus group involved eight students; five of them had applied for this program.



For the purposes of implementing the strategic goals, the Committee, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Skopje, and in cooperation with MES, MLSP and Open Gate, conducted a **comprehensive multi-year campaign to raise awareness among young people, students, teachers and vulnerable groups about the dangers and risks of exploitation and trafficking in human beings/children**. The campaign **#Отвори очи (#OpenYourEyes)**, started in 2017 and it is expected to last until 2021. In 2019, this campaign was conducted in 20 secondary and primary schools in the country and it involved around 400 students i.e. young persons who are especially vulnerable to violence, exploitation and child trafficking. The campaign featured the 30-minute educational film “Observers”, followed by a discussion with students, teachers and counselling services in schools to identify the risks and dangers of child trafficking. The OSCE Mission provided translation and subtitling of the film in Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Romani. The film was used in the implementation of preventive and educational activities carried out by many domestic government institutions and associations, as well as international organizations active in this field.

In 2019, **the Ministry of Interior**, i.e. the Sectors for Internal Affairs (SIAs), through the competent organizational units for prevention, implemented activities related to the prevention and protection of children from human trafficking, manifestations, opportunities for protection, as well as activities for prevention of abuse, neglect and violence.

At the same time, meetings with citizens aimed at raising public awareness for the prevention of human/child trafficking were organized. In the reporting year 2019, the activities that involved students from primary and secondary schools were realized through educational lectures, debates and activities in secondary and primary schools, with presentations and discussions on the topic of trafficking in human beings/children. Approximately 300 activities were implemented in the area of all regional SIAs. They were implemented within the activities **“Safety in schools”, “For a safe city”, “Prevention and protection from violence among students”**. **Legal socialization of youth and educational lectures for users of student dormitories.**<sup>56</sup>

Representatives of associations and regional centres for border affairs participated in the implementation of some of the activities.

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<sup>56</sup>(two in Bitola), student dormitories (one in Prilep) and one meeting in the Institute for Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities in Bitola.

In the municipality of Kumanovo, five thematic meetings were held with citizens from Slupchane, Opaje, Lojane and Vaksince. The participants discussed the identification of crimes, reporting and cooperation with the police or other bodies and institutions for the prevention of THB in all its forms.

In coordination with the Associations, members of the Roma ethnic community, CSW Kumanovo and representatives of the Municipality of Kumanovo organized two debates on the topic “Street children and child marriages”.

**With the support of the Council of Europe Programme Office** in Skopje, several activities were implemented:

- 25 January, EU Info Centre, Skopje: In cooperation with the Open Gate Association and MYLA, it organized a public lecture on THB given by an international consultant, intended for law students and representatives of various associations (a total of 22 participants).
- 6 January, Skopje: The Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in the cases *Chowdury and others v. Greece* and *Rantsev v. Cyprus and Russia*, as well as the Guide on Article 4 of the European Convention on Human Rights were translated and distributed.
- 9 April, Skopje: Organized lecture for students from the primary school “Kuzman Josifovski-Pitu” -Skopje (a total of 10 students) on the Council of Europe and children’s rights, including protection from THB.
- 5 November, Faculty of Law “Iustinianus Primus” Skopje: At the invitation of the Faculty of Law, the renowned expert in Criminology, Professor Van Dyke, gave a lecture on statistical processing and forecasting for the students pursuing postgraduate studies in Criminal Law (a total of 20 participants).

In 2019, **the Red Cross of RNM** implemented its activities for raising awareness on HB among youth, through 33 municipal organizations of the Red Cross and the Red Cross of the City of Skopje. Two training sessions on the prevention of THB were organized for peer educators, which included 15 Red Cross volunteers from Negotino, Sveti Nikole and Veles. Two trainers were trained for educators, in the period from 11-14 November 2019, organized by the Regional Office of the International Federation for Europe in Budapest, on the topic “Protection, non-discrimination on the basis of sex/gender and inclusion with a special focus on human trafficking in the context of migration”.

The association of citizens **Open Gate-La Strada**, as part of the prevention and education program, carried out:

- **12 Prevention workshops** (260 children) with secondary school students, in order to introduce them to THB, to inform them how to protect themselves and where to go in case of need.
- **Four-day training for secondary school students**, (65 students) organized by the OSCE, in order to introduce the students to THB, to inform them how can they protect themselves and where to seek help when needed.
- On 16-17 April, in Ohrid, the OSCE Mission to Skopje in cooperation with MES, MLSP and the Open Gate Association, organized two-day training for trainers intended for teachers, on the topic “Prevention of human/child trafficking”. The training involved 25-30 teachers and employees in the counselling services in the secondary schools. The goal of the training was to contribute to reducing vulnerability in youth.
- **Training for secondary school students from Shtip** - Open Gate organized training for 25 secondary school students from Shtip in order to introduce them to THB, to inform them how to protect themselves and where to go in case of need. Also, a **Youth Camp** was organized for young people aged 17-26 from Macedonia. It included 45 youth. Gaining knowledge and skills about THB, as well as creating and implementing youth campaigns and involvement in the fight against THB were the main goals of the camp.

Campaigns carried out by Open Gate:

- **Together against Human Trafficking – #YouthInAction** 11 youth teams were supported on the way to designing and implementing successful youth campaigns on the territory of the entire country, in Skopje, Shtip, Veles, Berovo, Prilep, Bitola and Kumanovo. 45 young people aged 16 to 26 were involved in the campaign. The youth campaigns covered more than 100,000 users.
- The **“Finally Justice”** campaign of the European project of the same name was conducted on social media from 1 November to 9 December 2019. The campaign consisted of a series of four promotional videos and nine designed statements with representatives of relevant institutions, lawyers working with victims of THB, representatives of associations and others. The purpose of the videos and statements was to raise awareness for the right to compensation and the new Law on monetary compensation for victims of THB and violent crime. The campaign was

launched on social media as the main tool for conveying the message, and the posts reached an average viewership of 15,000 per post.

- **Publication of a video** for raising public awareness about the phenomenon of THB in RNM and for the promotion of SOS telephone line. On the occasion of the European Anti-trafficking Day, Open Gate promoted a video in Macedonian and Albanian languages in duration of 46 seconds to raise public awareness of the existing problem and it was broadcast on two national televisions (Kanal 5 and Alfa TV). The video was broadcast a total of 33 times in prime time, in the period from 17.10.2019 to 31.10.2019.

**IRIS Balkan Media, Caravan on the way through the migrant route** - 20 journalists from five countries spent six days in a media caravan visiting three countries, seven migrant camps and 10 associations providing social services for migrants along the route. The Balkan Media Caravan is organized within the project “IRIS Networks of Civil Society Organizations for the Management and Protection of Sensitive Migration”. Over seven million people were covered by broadcasting TV reports, with an additional reach of nearly 50,000 people through newspapers, web and radio publications. The campaign on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram has brought us reach of over 200,000, so the outcomes of the IRIS Media Caravan potentially reached over 7.5 million people across the Western Balkans.

**Did You Know?** A short campaign launched on social media aimed at promoting the SOS line and the services it offers, who can use it, how to call and so on. The campaign consisted of designed informative announcements that reached over 1000 views and more than 20 shares.

**IOM conducted a web-based campaign** to sensitize the general public and the media, as well as high-risk categories, to the risks associated with migration, with a focus on THB, and to raise awareness of the dangers arising therefrom, as well as to inform on the ways in which exploitation can be reported; on 10 web portals.

**MYLA** implemented a special component for raising public awareness about migrants and refugees in RNM.<sup>57</sup> Within the component, *a campaign was launched to combat THB with the title – “Closer than you think”* which included making videos, creating separate Facebook and Instagram pages, creating fake news of work offers and other benefits in order to raise awareness among people that they can easily

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<sup>57</sup> Within the USAID’s project for the protection of human rights of migrants and refugees.

become part of the THB chain, making a billboard poster placed in many places around the city, including influencers who shared information from the campaign, creating a new website for the needs of the campaign. The campaign was supported by the National Committee for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration.

### 3. Support and protection of victims and migrants

#### **3.1 MECHANISM FOR IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL OF VICTIMS**

With the aim of strengthening the national capacities and increase the efficiency of the police and the prosecution authorities in the suppression of organized forms of smuggling of migrants and THB, NUSSMHT, which was established in 2018, continued to function effectively and efficiently. It was established in order to improve the coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and the **Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption** in the suppression of crimes related to THB and illegal migration. The National Unit is financed from the projected budgets of the Ministry of Interior and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Macedonia, as well as from international funds.

In order to strengthen the national capacities for identification of victims/potential victims of human trafficking, in January 2018, the Ministry of Interior and the MLSP signed a Memorandum of Understanding for the establishment of **Mobile Teams<sup>58</sup> for identification of vulnerable categories, including victims of human trafficking**, which contributed to strengthening the cooperation between these two institutions in order to identify the vulnerable categories of persons, including victims of THB.

Representatives of the institutions that are part of the Mobile Teams **(five MTs) in Skopje, Bitola, Kumanovo, Gevgelija and Tetovo** established within the project “Strengthening national capacities in the field of asylum, migration and human trafficking” funded by the European Union and supported by IOM, continued to work in 2020, while the engagement of the Associations is on a voluntary basis until the adoption of the budget of the MLSP which foresees their engagement. During the

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<sup>58</sup>The Mobile Teams are composed of a representative of CSW, a police officer and a representative of a citizen association. They worked from March 2018 until June 2019, and there is a possibility for them to be institutionalized.

reference period, the mobile teams achieved outstanding results in identifying victims and potential victims of THB who were referred to appropriate assistance and support to other relevant institutions.

The **OSCE** Mission donated technical equipment necessary for the work of the Mobile Teams, the MLSP and the Ministry of Interior in the fight against human trafficking. Namely, **10 laptops and five printers were donated** to be used by all members of the Mobile Teams.<sup>59</sup>

The International Organization for Migration, **IOM**, developed a web application for screening and identification of vulnerable categories of foreign persons. The application will enable screening, identification and referral of the vulnerable categories of foreign persons through the process to the institutions which will provide appropriate individual fulfillment of the special needs of the person identified as vulnerable. The application was developed as part of a regional project funded by the **US** Department of State, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. The application provides legal grounds for referring the person to that institution, i.e. to a specific official person in charge of a specific area.

### **3.2 IDENTIFICATION, REFERRAL AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS**

Child abuse through forced sexual exploitation and forced marriages remain dominant forms of THB in North Macedonia. During 2019, the institutions<sup>60</sup> identified **six victims of human trafficking**, four of which were **children/female**; three of them were citizens of North Macedonia, three were foreign citizens (two from Kosovo and one from Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The domestic victims originate from the Skopje, eastern and southeastern region, while their exploitation was carried out in the area of Tetovo, Radovish and Shtip.

The victims of THB were all female, three were victims of forced marriage (and sexual exploitation), two were victims of labour exploitation (one of which is forced begging) and one is victim of sexual exploitation.

Four of the identified victims of THB were accommodated in CVTHB, two were accommodated in the Reception Centre for Foreigners and one of the foreign victims was issued a temporary residence permit. Victims were provided with assistance and protection which includes the provision of medical assistance, education, food, hygiene materials,

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<sup>59</sup>Lap-tops were donated to the Office of the NRM-MLSP, the head of NUSSMHT, Open Gate/La Strada, MYLA and the Day Care Centre for Street Children in Shuto Orizari.

<sup>60</sup>Moi/NUSSMHT, MLSP/NRM and the Mobile Teams.

clothing and assistance for resocialization or referral to and liaison with other institutions and organizations depending on their individual needs.

With the support of **IOM**<sup>61</sup>, the CVTHB hired one psychologist and one social worker who provided psychosocial support and assistance to 89 potential victims and victims of THB through the **Direct Assistance Fund**<sup>62</sup>.

In the period January - December 2019, a total of 407 users were contacted and informed for the first time by the **Mobile Teams**, **five** of which were **identified as victims** of human trafficking. All of them were women; four of them were younger than 18 and one of them was older than 18. Three of them were citizens of RNM, while two of them were foreign citizens.

**86 potential victims of THB** (67 female and 19 male victims; 62 of them were under 18 years of age, while 24 persons were aged 19-50 years). Due to their particular vulnerability and the high risk of human trafficking, **316 of them fall into the category of vulnerable persons** but without risk of human trafficking. Of these, 243 were female and 164 were male. 357 were citizens of RNM and 50 people were foreign citizens.

The Association of Citizens “Open Gate-La Strada” continued to provide 24-hour support to CVTHB by enabling shift work of an expert team of “Open Gate-La Strada” in the Centre, for five people who were identified and accommodated and five people who extended their stay from the previous year.

Additionally, professional assistance was provided to seven persons involved in the Program for associated social work through activities for their reintegration into society. A standard package of services is provided to meet the basic needs (accommodation, food, hygiene packages) for all persons involved in the Psychosocial Support Program. A basic package of medical assistance, including hospital treatments and use of services by specialists, was provided for 10 persons. Expert examinations by a psychiatrist were provided for three persons. Psychosocial counseling was provided to all 17 people involved in the program and one protégé is re-involved in the educational process by taking an exam for completed grade, after which she was enrolled in secondary vocational education. Since last year, two persons who resided in CVTHB have continued their education in the school for adult

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<sup>61</sup>Within the project “Strengthening the national capacities in the field of asylum, migrations and human trafficking” funded by the European Union.

<sup>62</sup>It included support in food and hygiene materials, clothing, medical assistance, legal aid, vocational skills training and other activities for reintegration and resocialization of victims/child victims.

education “Makarenko”, while one continued their education in regular classes. In order to facilitate access to the labour market, a protégée was enrolled to and successfully completed a massage course. Four children are involved in the regular educational process with a special program for foreigners.

The organization continuously provided standard packages of services to meet the basic needs, and to provide legal, medical, psychosocial assistance and support, and inclusion in the alternative educational process of victims of THB/migrants and asylum seekers in Vizbegovo.

**UNHCR** provides continuous support to the Ministry of Interior and the MLSP in the implementation of the SOPs for treatment of unaccompanied foreign children and SOPs for treatment of vulnerable categories of foreign persons.

- Support of the counselling staff (one person) in a shelter for victims of trafficking through the partner Open Gate-La Strada (January-December 2019)
- Psychosocial support to 973 refugees/migrants and asylum seekers, potential victims and victims of THB in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers Vizbegovo and the Reception-Transit Centre Vinojug, through the partner Open Gate-La Strada (January-December 2019)
- One translator from Farsi in the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo through the partner La Strada (January-December 2019).

In addition, the **UNHCR** provides emergency medical intervention in life-threatening situations and limited humanitarian assistance to refugees and persons in need of humanitarian assistance transiting to various locations.

Free legal aid to persons who will seek recognition of the right to asylum, by providing access to lawyers involved in field work (MYLA in Vinojug and Tabanovce, as well as on the territory of RNM).

### **3.3 LEGAL AID FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING AND MIGRANTS**

**The association of citizens Open Gate-La Strada** provided legal aid and representation for three victims of THB, in different stages of the procedure for protection of their rights. Additionally, legal aid was provided for four people who have been residing in the Centre since last year, and they have been included in the psychosocial support program.



In 2019, **MYLA**, through its representatives in the Mobile Teams, continued to provide legal aid and legal counseling to victims of trafficking, potential victims and vulnerable categories of persons regarding the conditions and procedure for submitting a request for free legal aid to the regional offices of the MoJ in the cities where it has representatives.

Apart from the Mobile Teams, MYLA monitors the situation with the illegal migration in RNM and through its field lawyers in the Reception Centres in Tabanovce and Vinograd, and in cooperation with the representatives of the MLSP, it is involved in the identification and referral of THB victims to the Mobile Teams and to the Commission.

#### 4. Budget

The activities were implemented under the partnership between the Committee and the institutions, international organizations and associations from RNM, through donors and partners. These donors and partners contributed to the implementation of the activities for combating trafficking in human beings and illegal migration, and to the current work of the centres for victims of THB.

Table 1: Funds provided by:

|                                           |                   |
|-------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| MoI                                       | 194,160.00 MKD    |
| Reception centre for foreigners           | 2,211,960.00 MKD  |
| MLSP for CVTHB <sup>63</sup>              | 1,500,000.00 MKD  |
| International organizations <sup>64</sup> | 54,466,303.00 MKD |
| Associations of citizens <sup>65</sup>    | 35,710,942.00 MKD |

<sup>63</sup> MLSP finances overhead expenses in total amount of **1,500,000.00 MKD**. For the first time, a part of these funds is used to finance the CVTHB service in the amount of 1,200,000 MKD, in line with a signed contract with the association Open Gate.

<sup>64</sup>The International Organization for Migration IOM Skopje within the regional and national projects/activities provided rough calculations of the total project budgets provided for the implementation of about 25,000 USD or 1,381,785 MKD. OSCE Mission to Skopje € 85,000 or MKD 5,227,075, UNHCR 6,093,722 MKD, ICMPD provided for the implementation of the Study on Trafficking Resilience and Vulnerability en route to Europe (STRIVE) project: € 564,017.54 or MKD 34,685,800 to the Office of the in Skopje through the project of the Horizontal Instrument provided 114,867 € or 7,077,921 MKD.

<sup>65</sup>In the current 2019, the Citizens' Associations implemented their activities voluntarily and from their own funds without compensation for financing activities from the Budget of RSM. La Strada Open Gate used MKD 33,737,000 for human trafficking activities. The Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers provided funds 27,204 € or 1,676,942 mkd, the Red Cross of the Republic of Northern Macedonia provided funds for the

|              |                   |
|--------------|-------------------|
| Total budget | 94,083,365.00 MKD |
|--------------|-------------------|

## 5. Investigation and criminal prosecution of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants

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### 5.1 PRE-INVESTIGATIVE PROCEDURE

#### 5.1.1 Human/child trafficking

- Ministry of Interior<sup>66</sup>

In 2019, NUSSMHT undertook measures and activities in five cases of human/child trafficking. **Six female victims of human/child trafficking (aged 15 to 27) were identified, four of which were children and two were adult victims, three were Macedonian citizens, two were citizens of Kosovo and one of Bosnia and Herzegovina.**

Children: one victim of THB for sexual exploitation, one victim of sexual exploitation and forced marriage, one forced marriage, and one victim of labour exploitation Adults: one forced marriage and one labour exploitation combined with begging. All identified victims were **referred and accommodated according to the SOPs.**

Related to the reported cases and the identified victims of trafficking of human beings, NUSSMHT filed **three criminal charges** and provided material evidence for **six persons** who committed the crime of child trafficking. It also submitted two reports to the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption for two cases of victims involved in human/child trafficking.

In terms of *gender structure* of the offenders, four of the persons were male and two female, while according to the age, two of the reported persons were 38 years old, and the remaining four were 18, 20, 23 and 45 years old.

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implementation of activities for youth education through the Agency for Youth and Sports 297,000 denars. The Association for Equal Opportunities SEMPER Bitola as well as the Association of Citizens "For a Happy Childhood" conducted their activities on a voluntary basis.

<sup>66</sup>Data obtained from the Department of Criminal Intelligence and Analysis.

Regarding the detected, identified persons during 2019 for whom there were grounds for suspicion that they were involved in committing crimes of THB, NUSSMHT submitted five reports to the **Public Prosecutor’s Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption** for persons suspected of having committed human/child trafficking. Three of those reports resulted in three criminal charges against six offenders.

Moreover, NUSSMHT reported 43 persons (four criminal charges) for whom there were grounds for suspicion that they were involved in migrant smuggling.

Within the Ministry of Interior - Sector for Reporting and Coordination of Situations, there is an **app - Red Button** which allows citizens to electronically report certain crimes, knowledge or information related to child abuse, human trafficking and hate crime. In 2019, three reports of trafficking in human beings were registered, which were forwarded to NUSSMHT for further action.

- **Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption**

In 2019, no criminal charges were filed for the criminal offense of **Trafficking in Human Beings under Article 418-a of the Criminal Code**, therefore no case has been initiated for the same offense.

In 2019, the Ministry of Interior filed three criminal charges for the crime of **Child Trafficking according to Art. 418-d of the Criminal Code**, upon which three cases were initiated. The charges were against five male and three female persons; against two male and two female persons, actions have been taken in a preliminary procedure, while for one male person an indictment has been filed and the procedure is ongoing.

Table 2: Overview of identified victims of trafficking in human beings 2019

| VICTIMS              |                 |                            |                      |                 |                  |
|----------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 6                    |                 |                            |                      |                 |                  |
| Children             |                 |                            | Adults               |                 |                  |
| 4                    |                 |                            | 2                    |                 |                  |
| Domestic             |                 | Foreign                    | Domestic             |                 | Foreign          |
| 3                    |                 | 1                          | /                    |                 | 2                |
| Type of exploitation |                 |                            | Type of exploitation |                 |                  |
| Sexual               | Forced marriage | Forced marriage and sexual | Labour               | Forced marriage | Labour (begging) |
| 1                    | 1               |                            | 1                    | 1               | 1                |

|                                                                                                                                         |  |                   |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|-------------------|--|--|--|
|                                                                                                                                         |  | exploitation<br>1 |  |  |  |
| <b>Potential victims of trafficking in human beings</b><br><b>124*<sup>67</sup>, 85 of which are children (91 females and 33 males)</b> |  |                   |  |  |  |

*\* Of the total number of identified potential victims, 29 are foreigners, and 14 of them are identified as illegal migrants.*

Potential victims of trafficking in human beings were identified by:

- **NUSSMHT** – in 2019 it identified **13** potential female victims of trafficking in human beings; six of them were children;
- **The Mobile Teams** – they identified **86** potential victims of THB - 67 female, 19 male; 62 children and 24 adults;
- The association **Open Gate-La Strada** identified **14** potential victims among migrants (eight adults: seven men and one woman, and six children: 1 female and five male).
- The Association **“For a Happy Childhood”** identified **11** street children as potential victims of child trafficking (9 female; 3 male).

This type of proactive action and providing assistance and support to potential victims contributes to the prevention of human trafficking and emphasizes the need for greater outreach among vulnerable groups.

### 5.1.2 Smuggling of migrants

- Ministry of Interior

Migration dynamics in the Western Balkans have undergone fundamental changes during the past years. The current risk faced by the border police is the illegal movement of migrants from war-torn countries to Europe, where there are relatively better conditions for socio-economic life. They come primarily from Turkey, where the transit of migrants from the Middle East begins (mostly from the countries of North-West and East Africa and South Asia).

The strategic position of the Western Balkans, which connects the East and the West, is a factor that attracts migrants. Restrictive policies and increased border controls in the Balkans have contributed to the establishment of new alternative migration routes for illegal crossing of migrants - the so-called “Adriatic coastal route” which leads from Greece

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<sup>67</sup>All identified potential victims lack the element of exploitation, which means that they could not be identified as victims of THB, as provided by the essence of the crime.

via Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and a large part of RNM, towards Croatia and Slovenia.

The current threat in the neighbouring countries and the countries of the European Union also affects the borders of North Macedonia. Although our country is not the final destination, it is still part of the route that leads to the desired destination. In that direction, the number of attempts to illegally cross the border increased by 45.6% compared to 2018. A total of 24,601 illegal border-crossing attempts were registered, and it is important to note that the number of detected migrants increased significantly in the second quarter of 2019, and have continued with the same intensity.

The risk of illegal crossings of migrants is high at the border with Greece, with almost 90% of the number of attempts. In this part of the border, illegal migrants cross the state border mostly at night and early in the morning and use the period when patrol teams are deployed. They often travel in large groups of the same nationality to avoid the risk of being attacked or robbed.

At the border with R. Serbia, the number of attempts has increased by 27%. There is a change in the direction of movement of migrants - reverse direction of movement (from Serbia through our country to Greece). This situation is a result of Serbia's decision to return visa regime for Iranian passport holders, who previously used direct flights from Tehran and Istanbul to Belgrade, and then with the help of smugglers transited through our country to the Republic of Greece with the intention to go to one of the Western European countries.

An increased number of attempts was also registered at the eastern border with Bulgaria, where the number has increased fivefold as a result of the increased number of detected cases of migrant smuggling. The number of registered attempts was increased for over 63% at the western border with Albania as well, primarily due to illegal work in border villages.

The escalation and emergence of new armed conflicts, the closure of the Western Balkans route and some political decisions have influenced some changes in the structure of migrants and have contributed to the emergence of abuse of the asylum system as one of the key tools of migrants and smugglers. Unlike 2015 and 2016, when most of the migrants came from Syria, in recent years and especially this year, migrants come from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India or they are

stateless persons, and their dynamics of movement depends on certain factors and political decisions.

The key activity in the fight against the current security challenges and tendencies is international cooperation, strengthened international trust, increased exchange of information, and the like. They are the best proof of our readiness to create an even more favourable and secure environment, and thus make the progress of European integration even faster. The exchange of information is being done through already established channels such as Europol, Interpol, Frontex and liaison officers, and it is enabled based on membership in international organizations, initiatives, agreements and conventions. For that purpose, the organization and coordination of the overall activities related to the implementation of the **international “Joint operation for intensified surveillance of the southern border of RNM, by hiring police officers from abroad” continued. Police officers from eight countries (Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovakia)** are participating in this activity. They intensified surveillance of the southern part of the state border, together with members of the border police in joint mixed patrols, to prevent attempts for illegal entry or exit of migrants from and to Greece, as well as to detect cases of migrant smuggling.

**Illegal migration** carries the risk of an increased number of activities of criminal groups related to the smuggling of migrants who try to reach the desired destination at all costs. The number of detected cases, crimes and migrants is increasing, and four organized criminal groups have been suppressed. The cases prevented the **smuggling of a total of 1,529 migrants**, whose number also has a positive upward trend of 71.6% compared to last year. According to the structure, 43.5% of smuggled migrants are from Pakistan, and in the top three countries are migrants from Afghanistan with 28.2% and Bangladeshi migrants with 14.3%.

The number of both crimes and offenders increased by 11.4% i.e. 55% compared to last year. Measures of criminal prosecution were taken against 96 persons for 49 criminal acts of “smuggling of migrants”, 89.6% of which are Macedonian citizens, and the other ten are three Kosovo and Pakistani and one Indian, Nepali, Turkish and Bulgarian citizens.

NUSSMHT, which detected and suppressed four organized criminal groups, has a special role in dealing with this crime.

The first criminal group, composed of 21 members (including a police officer reported to be assisting), smuggled migrants in an organized

manner from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Bangladesh and other Middle Eastern countries, staying in Greece, across the surrounding green border at Dojran and Gevgelija, and then transported them to the Kumanovo-Lipkovo region and they were temporarily housed in the villages of Vaksince and Lojane and then smuggled to the Republic of Serbia.

The second suppressed criminal group was a three-member group, which illegally transferred 15 migrants originating from Pakistan, Eritrea, Iran and Afghanistan, from Greece to Gevgelija, and then tried to transport them to the Kumanovo-Lipkovo region.

The third group consisting of 14 people (including a person from the Middle East residing in Greece), smuggled 400 migrants from Greece to the RNM in a period of seven months, and acquired illegal assets of about 150,000 to 200,000 EUR.

The last group was a five-member group, part of an international migrant smuggling network, which in agreement with the organizer of a criminal group from Greece organized the transfer of nine migrants from Syria from an unknown location in Greece near “Gabrovski vodopad” in RNM.

For these criminal activities, criminal charges were filed against 39 persons for committing **eight criminal acts** “organizing a group and inciting the commission of human trafficking, trafficking in minors and smuggling of migrants”.

The main route for smuggling of migrants is **Corridor 10 Gevgelija-Veles-Skopje**, where the Kumanovo, Strumica and Stip regions are used as road routes for the transport of migrants and logistical support, i.e. the stretch from Gevgelija and Dojran to Kumanovo, to the border with Serbia. Strong logistical support is used to carry out criminal activities, which consists of more frequent change of vehicles, use of car rental-services, frequent change of license plates and so-called “road cleaners” who inspect the route of movement for police patrols and traffic control before smuggling.

This year, in five of the detected cases of migrant smuggling, the drivers, in order to avoid the police patrols, caused traffic accidents by hitting other vehicles. Also, another way to smuggle migrants is by hiding them in the vehicle when crossing the border. Four such cases were registered, two at the Bogorodica border crossing and two at the Dolno Blace and Tabanovce border crossings, where 12 migrants were found hidden in the vehicles (eight from Iraq, two from Nepal, one from Kosovo and one from India).

- **Reception centre for foreigners**

In 2019, 319 people were accommodated in the Reception Center for Foreigners in Skopje - 304 males and 15 females. According to the country of origin, most of them were from Pakistan-80, Afghanistan-59, Syria-35 and Bangladesh-31, and in terms of age, 249 of them were aged 18 to 35, 36 people were aged 36 to 59 years, 33 were aged 14 to 17 and one person was older than 60.

- **Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption**

In 2019, **52 cases** (44 cases were reports submitted by the Ministry of Interior and eight cases were initiated upon reports submitted by the Ministry of Interior) were initiated for the crime of **Smuggling of Migrants under Art. 418-b of the Criminal Code** against a total of 78 persons, of which 77 were men and 1 woman. The competent bodies acted upon the cases as follows:

- For three initiated cases against seven persons (men), decisions were made to take actions in a preliminary procedure, in one case for one male the application is resolved in another way, i.e. the case is merged with a previously initiated case against the same person for the same criminal offence. For five persons (four males and one female) verdicts were rendered on the basis of a draft-agreement in a preliminary procedure; two males were sentenced to imprisonment, and for two males and one female an alternative measure was imposed - a suspended sentence. In 22 cases against 28 men, indictments were filed, according to which first instance verdicts were passed for seven men (the main hearing is ongoing), and for 21 men; 10 men were sentenced to imprisonment, and 11 men were sentenced to an alternative measure - probation. After an appeal was filed against the first instance verdict for an alternative measure - probation, a second instance decision was made for one person, which confirmed the first instance verdict. In 21 cases against 36 men, orders were issued for conducting the investigation procedure; for one male person an order was issued to stop the investigation procedure, and for 13 men the investigation procedure is ongoing. A verdict was passed for four men on the basis of a draft-agreement concluded during the investigation procedure. Indictments were filed against 18 men after an investigation procedure, after which convictions were passed for 13 men and they were sentenced to prison, and for 5 men the court proceedings are ongoing. After an appeal was filed by a convicted male



person to the amount of the sentence of imprisonment of 6 years and 6 months, a second instance verdict was passed, which reduced the prison sentence to 5 years.

For the crime – **Organization of a group and urging for commitment of the crimes human trafficking, trafficking of juveniles and smuggling of migrants under Art. 418-c of the Criminal Code**, in 2019, the prosecution initiated two cases upon two criminal charges which were filed by the Ministry of Interior. Charges have been filed against 34 men, for whom investigation orders have been issued. Due to the death of one of the suspects, an order was issued to terminate the investigation procedure for one person, while for 13 persons the investigation procedure is ongoing. Indictments were filed against 20 persons, for two of them agreements were drafted after the filed indictment and the same sentences were imposed i.e. imprisonment of five years and six months, i.e. one year and four months.

## 5.2 CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

In 2019, the Primary Court Skopje 1-Skopje, received a total of 58 cases for crimes related to THB and illegal migration; 123 persons were charged; 55 cases have been solved and 96 persons have been charged.

In 2019, there were 44 final cases in which 50 persons were sentenced to prison, while a suspended sentence was pronounced to 33 persons, and the procedure for 1 person was discontinued. The duration of the final prison sentences ranges from one to 13 years.

The structure of the accused persons according to their nationality, gender and education is as follows: Albanians - 54, Macedonians - 35, Turks - 26, Roma - 5, Bulgarians - 1, and two from other nationalities. Of the total number of defendants, 121 are male and 2 are female. Regarding the level of education, most of them have secondary education, i.e. 51 people, followed by 40 people with primary education and 1 person with higher education, while the level of education is unknown for 31 people.

In the reporting period, no judgment was rendered resulting in the closure of a business involved in THB, nor in the confiscation of property or assets.

Table 4: Overview of court cases and convicted persons

| Article of the Criminal Code | Received  |                   | Finished  |                   | Enforceable |                   | Enforceable decisions – per person |           |                         |
|------------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
|                              | cases     | Convicted persons | cases     | Convicted persons | cases       | Convicted persons | Imprisonment                       | Probation | Discontinued proceeding |
| Art. 418 a                   | /         | /                 | /         | /                 | /           | /                 | /                                  | /         | /                       |
| Art. 418 b                   | 46        | 79                | 51        | 87                | 38          | 63                | 29                                 | 33        | 1                       |
| Art. 418 c                   | 11        | 42                | 4         | 9                 | 5           | 18                | 18                                 | /         | /                       |
| Art. 418 d                   | 1         | 2                 | /         | /                 | 1           | 3                 | 3                                  | /         | /                       |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>58</b> | <b>123</b>        | <b>55</b> | <b>96</b>         | <b>44</b>   | <b>84</b>         | <b>50</b>                          | <b>33</b> | <b>1</b>                |

## 6. Recommendations

- ❖ Effective implementation of the evaluation process of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2017-2020;
- ❖ Development of new **National Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration 2021-2024**;
- ❖ Revision of the existing SOPs for treatment of unaccompanied foreign children and SOPs for treatment of vulnerable categories of foreign persons;
- ❖ Strengthening bilateral and regional cooperation between the Committees by concluding agreements and memoranda of cooperation;
- ❖ Strengthening the communication and coordination between the Committee and Local Committees for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration;

- ❖ Strengthening the capacities of all members of all Local Committees for combating trafficking in human beings and illegal migration to be able to identify and refer victims of THB;
- ❖ Strengthening the work of the NRM through additional educational activities and cooperation with health and educational institutions;
- ❖ Continuous monitoring and support of the process for drafting the **Law on payment of monetary compensation to victims of crime**;
- ❖ Providing support in the implementation of NUSSMHT activities in order to better identify criminal groups and individuals who plan, prepare and commit the crimes of migrant smuggling and human trafficking in an organized manner;
- ❖ Providing continuous support for the mobile teams and their multiplication, for better identification of vulnerable categories, including victims of trafficking, due to their effective proactive action and providing assistance and support to potential victims, which contributes to the prevention of trafficking and emphasizes the need for greater field activity among vulnerable groups throughout the country;
- ❖ Providing support for the Direct Assistance Fund, to both victims of trafficking and potential victims, in order to ensure their reintegration and resocialization, and to prevent and reduce the risks of THB occurrence in potential victims;
- ❖ Continuous implementation of multidisciplinary training sessions in order to strengthen the capacities of professionals and improve the identification of victims and potential victims of THB;
- ❖ Strengthening the system for combating trafficking in human beings, especially in the area of labour exploitation, education and cooperation with the State Labour Inspectorate, trade union, private sector;
- ❖ Preventive activities aimed at street children and sensitization and recognition of this phenomenon, especially by educational personnel;
- ❖ Revision of the set of indicators for identification of victims of human/child trafficking;
- ❖ Preparation of indicators for identification of victims and trafficking in human beings specialized for health professionals;
- ❖ Continuous funding of the Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation.

- ❖ Promotion of the **Red Button application** which will enable citizens to electronically report certain crimes, knowledge or information related to child abuse, human trafficking and hate crime.