Government of the Republic of North Macedonia
National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration

ANNUAL REPORT

OF

THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR COMBATING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

2023

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1. SUPPORTING FRAMEWORK

1.1 COORDINATING STRUCTURES

The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration[1] (the Commission) is a body unifying and coordinating all stakeholders in the fight against trafficking in human beings. The Commission is managed by the National Coordinator[2], along with two deputies[3] of whom one deputy is in charge of the situation and activities related to trafficking in human beings, while the other deputy is in charge of the situation and activities related to illegal migration, secretary and members of the Commission[4].

Working bodies have been operating within the Commission since 2003: the Secretariat[5], which provides support in the implementation of the Commission's decisions, and the Subgroup for Combating Child Trafficking (Subgroup), which monitors the specific needs of child victims, protecting their interests and rights[6].

During the year, the Commission and its bodies maintained regular contacts with members and collaborators at the national[7] and regional level, where solutions and commitments for advancement in the field of human trafficking and illegal migration were discussed and proposed.

The National Commission continuously implemented activities that are foreseen in the National Strategy and the National Action Plan for the fight against trafficking in human beings and illegal migration and the National Action Plan for the fight against child trafficking for the period 2021-2025 (NAP).[8]

The National Unit for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings (NUSMSTHB) under the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in 2023, continuously realizes its main task - Detection and prosecution of the perpetrators of crimes of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. It continuously acts in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for dealing with victims of trafficking in human beings, and for all identified

[1] Decision published in the "Official Gazette of RNM" no. 18/2001, 82/15, 18/2019 and 240/2020.
[2] "Official Gazette of RNM" no. 309/2020.
[3] "Official Gazette of RNM" no. 309/2020.
[4] Commission members, representatives of: MoI, MFA, MLSP, MJ, MES/Education Development Bureau (EDB), MH, Public Prosecutor's Office for prosecuting organized crime and corruption, Judge from the Primary Court Skopje 1, State Labour Inspectorate and Employment Service Agency of RNM. Last changes were made in 2022 and published in Official Gazzette of June 24 no. 144/2022.
[5] Members are representatives of international organizations, citizen associations and experts from governmental institutions: MoI - Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings (USMSTHB), MLSP-National Referral Mechanism (NRM), PHI Institute of Public Health of RNM, US Embassy, ICMPD, OSCE, IOM, UNHCR, GIZ, Regional Centre-MARRI, Council of Europe Programme Office, MYLA, Citizen Association for Action against Violence and Trafficking in Human Beings "Open Gate – La Strada", Citizen Association "For happy childhood", Citizen Association "Semper" and the Red Cross od RNM.
[6] It is chaired by the Head of the Department for equal opportunities at MLSP – NRM, members are: MoI - USMSTHB, EDB, Council of Europe Program Office, ICMPD, UNODC, OSCE, IOM, GIZ, UNICEF, Associations "Open Porta-La Strada", " For a happy childhood", SOS Children's Village and deputy Ombudsman as an external member/observer.
[7] Three meetings were held during the last year on April 5, June 30 and October 6, 2023.
[8] The Strategy and NAP were adopted at the 66th session of the Government of RNM held on April 20, 2021.

victims of trafficking in human beings (VTHB), it reports to the National Referral Mechanism for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (NRM), conducts assessments for the security risk of the victims and refers them to the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (Center/CVTHB).

Police officers from NUSMSTHB are part of the National Unit for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings (Task Force), who participate in the exchange of information through already established channels such as Europol, Interpol, SELEC, Frontex, liaison officers and related units from the Ministry of Interior in the countries of the region and also actively participates in the Western Balkan Task Force for the detection of international organized crime groups.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), Sector for Equal Opportunities is the coordinator of the NRM, and in 2023, it continued cooperation with the Commission and coordination with the members of the Subgroup, the Centers for Social Affairs (CSA), the State Labor Inspectorate (SLI), the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption for the suppression of crimes related to migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings (BPPO POCC) and the Ministry of Interior/NUSMSTHB, the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human beings and relevant citizens' associations (CA). NRM monitors and coordinates the activities (in 30 cities in RNM) in the CSA that have an extremely important role in the entire process from identification to resocialization and reintegration of victims and child victims of trafficking in human beings. The Chairman of the Subgroup is a representative from MLSP who during 2023 coordinated the process of preparation of the Report on the implementation of the Operational Plan to combat child trafficking for the period 2021-2022, which was submitted and adopted by the National Commission, and a revision of the membership of the Subgroup was made.

The **Operational team for coordination, monitoring and management of cases of trafficking in human beings, formal identification of victims and their status** (Operational Team) [9] continued its work during 2023 and held 5 coordination meetings in order to review current presumed cases of human /child trafficking and made (14 formal decisions on the status of the victims).

In November and December 2023, with the support of IOM, specialized equipment was donated to strengthen the operational capacities of the members of the National Unit in the implementation of activities to suppress trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants.

The Commission is in continuous coordination with the **National Rapporteur for the Fight Against Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration**, [10] during which necessary information is exchanged about the implemented activities and data that are needed for the preparation of the report by the National Reporter of the RNM.

[9] Established in 2022 by decision of the National Commission.
[10] From 01.12.2019, a person from the Ombudsman of RNM was selected as National Rapporteur.

1.2 LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

In 2023, on the initiative of the National Commission, **Standard Operating Procedures** (SOP) for dealing with victims of trafficking in human beings were prepared for the third time, which were reviewed and adopted by the RSM Government.[11] SOPs regulate procedures, proceedings and manners of providing assistance and protection to all victims of trafficking in human beings (regardless of whether they are national or foreign citizens with legal or illegal entry into the country), through a comprehensive approach based on human rights and focused on the victim in the form of institutionalized frameworks of cooperation. The development of the new SOP was supported[12] by GIZ within the framework of the Regional Project for the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans (PaCT). All members of the Commission, the Secretariat and the Subgroup for combating child trafficking actively participated in the revision. Key changes that were noted in the SOP were made in changing the term "potential victim" to "presumed victim," revising the forms to be followed, introducing the established Operational Team for the formal identification of victims of human trafficking and its role. Particular attention was paid to the coordination between the institutions and their timely and appropriate action in the identification of the victims, the sharing of information, the provision of appropriate assistance and support to the victims, as well as the provision of key evidence for sanctioning the perpetrators.

On the initiative of the Commission, and with the support of the Council of Europe Program Office in Skopje, a **Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of the Interior and SLI**[13] was drawn up, which was signed on March 16, 2023. The purpose of this Memorandum is to improve mutual cooperation between the signatory parties in the direction of prevention, timely detection and suppression of crimes related to human trafficking and labor exploitation and referral of presumed victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation to the competent institutions.[14]

Based on the Rulebook on the manner, scope, norms and standards for the provision of social services for temporary residence and for facilities, funds, personnel and the necessary documentation for a center for temporary residence[15] in accordance with the Law on Social Protection, which refers to a Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings[16], a **Decision on determining the prices of social services in the home, for non-family protection, for professional help and support and for temporary residence for 2023** was made, which also provides for the price of the service for temporary residence in

[11] On October 31, 2023 at the 196th session of the Government of RNM.
[12] Engagement of experts, maintenance of the workshop for the members of the Commission, language editing in Macedonian, translation in Albanian and English, and graphic design.
[13] The memorandum was prepared by the MYLA with the support of the project of the Horizontal Instrument II, of the CoE and the European Union, in coordination with the competent services of both institutions.
[14] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/25394
[15] Official Gazzette of RNM, no. 91/21
[16] https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/pravilnici.nspx

the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings according to the Methodology for the formation of service prices depending on the norms and standards for providing social services.[17]

MLSP with the support of the Office of the Council of Europe in Skopje developed an **Operational Plan for the fight against child trafficking 2023-2025** in accordance with the National Action Plan 2021-2025.

In order to regulate the procedures for dealing with foreigners, in 2023, UNHCR provided support for the drafting of **SOPs for dealing with persons traveling in mixed migration movements** and **SOPs for the accommodation of foreigners, asylum seekers and migrants in a reception center for foreigners**. These two documents are expected to be adopted during 2024.

In cooperation with the Basic Court in Gevgelija, UNHCR will support the development of **SOPs for dealing with persons traveling in mixed movements in judicial proceedings**.

The association "Open Gate/La Strada" signed a Memorandum of Cooperation[18] with the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje at the University "St. Cyril and Methodius", through which it aims to establish cooperation programs for scientific and professional training, focusing on improving students' skills to prevent violence and human trafficking.

1.3 INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS DEDICATED TO THE FIGHT AGAINTS TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

In the direction of promoting international cooperation on 12.12.2023 in Rome,[19] the RNM, with its representative from the Ministry of Interior, was part of and is one of the signatories of the **Declaration on the establishment of a rapid response mechanism for the Task Force Western Balkans**, which represents a model of cooperation between foreign forces in joint activities with the aim alliance and support for an effective partnership, in order to realize the goals and obligations related to the fight against migrant smuggling.

The working group for the Western Balkans "Western Balkans TASK FORCE" was established at the Ministerial Conference dedicated to solving the challenges related to migration in the region, which was held on June 7, 2018 in Sarajevo. It deals with the issues of the current situation in the Western Balkans in the field of illegal migration, in terms of the exchange of intelligence data in real time with the involved partners (EU member states, as well as third countries), conducts joint investigations and joint actions, as well as application of the principle of visiting officers. The meetings of the Working Group are held

[17] Official Gazzette of RNM, no.264/19

[18] Key components include joint projects, analysis and assessments in social services; training of staff for association and state services in social protection; and practical teaching for students, especially within the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy.

[19] Organized by the Central Directorate of the Criminal Police of the Ministry of Interior of Italy and the Criminal Intelligence Service of the Federal Ministry of Interior of Austria, with the support of the project IPA III - EU support in strengthening the fight against migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans.

continuously, and since 2018 it has been led by the Republic of Austria. As an independent operational activity, it is part of the EMPACT Operational Action Plan, "Migrant Smuggling."

1.4 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

- ***Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Convention of the Council of Europe***

In 2022, the third evaluation round for RNM was carried out, in accordance with Article 38(4) of the Convention of the Council of Europe on taking action against trafficking in human beings, by the team of the **Expert Group on taking action against trafficking in human beings (GRETA)**. The visit was of exceptional importance for the RNM, because after the visit, the third Report on the implementation of the Convention was prepared, which was **published on March 24, 2023**.[20]

In the current year, at a meeting held on April 5, 2023, the Commission reviewed the report of the **Expert Group for Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA)**, from where, according to the conclusions and recommendations, with the support and coordination of the Council of Europe Program Office in Skopje, a working group was formed to prepare an Action Plan for the implementation of the recommendations of GRETA 2023-2025. The Working Group prepared the Action Plan on November 5, 2023, and submitted it to the Commission, which will be continuously updated every six months by the Working Group.

- ***Network of Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings***

On February 06-08, 2023,[21] the National Coordinator together with a delegation from the Ministry of Interior and prosecutors from the BPPO POCC, with the support of the International Organization for Migration IOM[22], attended a regional conference: "Suppression of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants in the region of the Western Balkans" in Budva, Montenegro. On the margins of the conference, an annual regional meeting of the National Coordinators and the representatives of the Strike Groups for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings was held.

On May 31, 2023, the 8th meeting of the Steering Group[23] of the PaCT project of the MARRI Network of Coordinators for Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was held in Skopje. The meeting was organized in 3 main sessions and the National Coordinators or representatives from their offices participated in it.

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[20] http://nacionalnakomisija.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/III-GRETA-report-for-North-Macedonia_MKD.pdf

[21] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/24750

[22] Within the regional project "Joint activities of the countries of the Western Balkan region against migrant smuggling and human trafficking (WBJAST), financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark."

[23] Which acts as the Steering Group of the regional project for the Prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans.

On the same day, the National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings of Southeast Europe (SEE) and their representatives held their 17th meeting. The meeting was coordinated by ICMPD, in the role of NATC SEE Secretariat[24], and the Ministry of Interior of Slovenia. *All NATC-SEE members expressed their support for the proposed amendments to the EU Anti-Trafficking Directive and indicated their willingness to adopt these changes in their national legislation if approved.* The Coordinators agreed that during 2024 they will work on a new Strategic Document, using the previously used methodology and including comprehensive consultations with all members of the network.

In the period 6 – 7 June 2023 in Strasbourg, France, the Deputy National Coordinator participated in a meeting of National Coordinators and Contact Points for the fight against trafficking in human beings. The event was organized by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings.

In the period 26 – 28 April 2023 in Skopje, the Deputy National Coordinator attended and addressed the Regional Workshop[25] for the exchange of experiences from the Western Balkans, organized by the MYLA with the support of MARRI and GIZ. The workshop discussed the risks of labor exploitation, challenges in the process of identification of victims of trafficking in human beings, good practices for more effective identification of victims of trafficking in human beings. At the end of the workshop, conclusions and recommendations were made for improving the existing legal framework.

- *International cooperation of NUSMSTHB*

In terms of international cooperation in the field of trafficking in human beings, information was exchanged through INTERPOL, with the aim of identifying an international criminal group, documenting criminal activities and providing material evidence against the perpetrators of the criminal acts "Trafficking in children" according to Art. 418-d and a criminal act under Art. 193-a "Production and distribution of child pornography" pursuant to the CC of RNM, in cooperation with the Croatian and Bosnian police services.

Within the framework of EUROPOL's EMPACT platform, joint action days against trafficking in human beings, sexual and labor exploitation under the name of operational action "CHAIN" were carried out by Austria as the coordinating country in the period from 08.05 to 14.05.2023, which were also attended by representatives from the National Unit for the Suppression of

[24]More information about the activities of the Network can be found here: *Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South-East Europe (NATC SEE) - ICMPD.*

[25]The event is supported by the Regional Project to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (PaCT) commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) implemented by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) in partnership with the Regional Initiative for Migration, Asylum and Refugees (MARRI). The workshop was attended by 14 (representatives of the Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers (MYLA), the Offices of the Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and the State Labor Inspectorates from the Western Balkans, IOM, the Council of Europe in RNM, the "Open Gate/La Strada" Association, State Labor Inspectorate).

Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings. During the implementation of the action days the NUSMSTHB in cooperation with the public prosecutor from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for POCC, 11 (eleven persons) were arrested and 1 international warrant was issued for reasonable suspicion of the crime of "trafficking in a child".

NUSMSTHB also participated in the operational actions: 8.6-Trafficking in human beings from the Western Balkans, as well as in the operational action 6.1-Sexual exploitation of children on the Internet, ie 8.4 - Operational cooperation with the Western Balkans.

- *Other international activities*

In the period 18-19 January 2023 in Tirana, Albania, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) organized a Regional Expert Conference (REC): Strengthening the identification and protection of victims, with a special focus on forced commission of criminal acts, through training curricula in SEE, in which 3 female persons participated.

UNODC in cooperation with the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia and the National Commission of the RNM organized three joint multidisciplinary trainings[26] (simulations of investigations) for the investigation and prosecution of migrant smuggling, in which a total of 20 representatives from the RNM participated (14 male /6 female).

From February 27 to March 3, 2023, a study visit to RNM was organized by ICMPD within the project "Further strengthening of the network of international law enforcement coordination units (ILECUs) in SEE and in the countries of the Eastern Partnership",[27] which was attended by 15 representatives from SEE countries and the Eastern Partnership.[28]

From 6 to 8 February 2023, in Budva, Montenegro, a two-day regional conference was held in the organization of IOM on the topic "Suppression of trafficking in human beings and smuggling of migrants in the Western Balkans region, which was attended by 6 female and 1 male participant.[29] Within the framework of the conference, a one-day coordination meeting of the representatives of the Strike Groups for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings was held together with the National Coordinators.

In Skopje, on March 16, 2023, in organization of the Council of Europe Program Office, a regional workshop was held on the topic "Prevention of child trafficking: The role of education staff." The workshop was attended by

[26] January 24 to 26, 2023, in Nis, Serbia; February 21-23, Mavrovo, RNM; March 14-16, 2023, Vrsac, Serbia.

[27] The project began implementation in 2022 with the aim of strengthening the ILECU network in SEE countries and countries with a focus on Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, RNM and Serbia, as well as supporting stakeholders in implementing joint law enforcement activities in neighboring countries. countries.

[28] Within the framework of the study visit, visits were organized to the Sector for International Police Cooperation at the Ministry of Interior, NUSMSTHB, the Sector for Computer Crime and Digital Forensics, the Asylum Unit and the Section for Foreigners and Readmission and the Police Academy. The group also visited the Contact Center of the Border Police, BCP Tabanovce, the airport in Skopje and RC MARRI.

[29] 7 participants (1 m / 6 f) took part, representatives from the Ministry of Interior and BPPO for POCC.

delegations from the field of education from Pristina and RNM, in a total number of 20 representatives (4 male and 16 female)[30].

On March 27, 2023 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) supported a working meeting between the delegation of RNM and Serbia in Belgrade to exchange experiences and information in the field of migration management.

A Regional Expert Conference (REC): "Addressing the risks, threats and forms of trafficking in human beings caused by the conflict in Ukraine" was held in Bucharest, Romania from March 28-30, 2023, organized by UNODC, which was attended by 2 representatives (1m and 1f).

From March 29-31, 2023 in Durrës, Albania, a delegation from the Ministry of Interior participated in a Regional dialogue of practitioners/ meeting on migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans, which was attended by practitioners and senior officials from the six MARRI Parties' authorities, as well as representatives from the relevant EU and international organizations.[31]

From 4-6 April 2023, in Skopje, in the organization of UNODC, a Regional Conference[32] "Strengthening the criminal-legal response to adequately address the challenges in gathering evidence in the process of investigating cases of trafficking in human beings in SEE" was held, which was attended by a total of three representatives from RNM (1m and 2f).

On April 18, 2023, a representative of the "Open Gate/La Strada" Association participated in a validation session for the draft Country Gender Equality Profile for RNM, a key document that is being prepared within the framework of the "Gender Equality Facility" project and presents relevant data on trafficking in women and girls.[33]

At the invitation of the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,[34] on April 18 and 19, 2023,[35] the National Coordinator participated in the 23rd Conference of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Human Beings "It's About People: National Leadership to End Trafficking in Human Beings", in Vienna, Republic of Austria. At the conference, the chairman of the OSCE for 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs

[30] The workshop was conducted within the framework of the EU and CoE Horizontal Instrument 3 project "Strengthening activities against trafficking in human beings" in which "Judges, Public Prosecutors, Police, Social Workers and Citizens' Associations participated.".

[31] (IOM, INTERPOL, EUROPOL, FRONTEX, GIZ, ICMPD, OSCE, Council of Europe and GRETA, as well as representatives from the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Spanish University of Nebria).

[32] The regional conference brought together practitioners from Albania, Austria, BiH, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, RNM, Romania, Serbia and Slovenia responsible for the investigation and prosecution of trafficking in human beings and organized crime.

[33] The key findings of the profile were presented at the session, divided into four areas: Governance and participation in public life, Economic participation and education, Gender-based violence and well-being of women and women, peace and security, and disaster risk reduction. The association "Open Gate/La Strada" shared relevant data related to trafficking in women, as well as views and suggestions. The UN Women office in Skopje organized the event.

[34] https://www.osce.org/cthb/541569

[35] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/25940

of the RNM, Bujar Osmani,[36] gave a video address, which emphasized the priority features of the OSCE as well as the systemic approach in the fight against trafficking in human beings and the commitment to end modern slavery.

From 27-28 April 2023,[37] a Regional Expert Conference (REC) was held in Dubrovnik, Croatia, organized by UNODC: "Strengthening the response to trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, especially in women and children by addressing the demand in SEE" in which the National Coordinator from RNM took part.

On May 11, 2023[38] in Skopje, the National Commission hosted a Conference on "Due attention to human rights: Taking measures against trafficking in human beings and labor exploitation in supply chains". The conference was held with the support of the OSCE Mission in Skopje and the Office of the OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings.

In Skopje, on May 30, 2023, the Regional Final Conference of the Regional Project to Prevent and Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in the Western Balkans (PaCT) "Successful Together! Regional insights and approaches for prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings." was held.[39] The conference was attended by more than 100 participants from the entire region of the Western Balkans. As part of the Conference, an exchange of partners was organized where all project partners (8 Citizens' Associations, MARRI and ICMPD) had the opportunity to present their prepared promotional materials dedicated to the prevention and fight against trafficking in human beings, most of them developed within the framework of the PaCT project.

On June 15, 2023, with the support of IOM, a working meeting was organized between RNM and the Republic of Serbia to strengthen cooperation in the field of combating trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling in accordance with the cooperation agreements[40] signed between the two countries.

In Strasbourg, France on June 16, 2023, the 32nd Meeting of the Committee of Signatories of the Council of Europe Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings was held. The Deputy National Coordinator participated in this event, as a contact point for GRETA from RNM.

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[36] https://mfa.gov.mk/mk/page/13/post/3376/osmani-povika-na-liderstvo-vo-regionot-na-obse-vo-borbata-protiv-trgovijata-so-lugje

[37] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/26074

[38] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/26338
The "Open Gate/La Strada" Association held a presentation on the panel dedicated to Monitoring and Implementing Human Rights Due Diligence: Challenges in Access to Legal Remedies.

[39] The conference was opened by the Minister of Interior Oliver Spasovski, the Minister of Labor and Social Policy Jovanka Trenchevska, the Deputy Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in the RNM Otto Graf, the Director of GIZ in the RNM, David Oberhuber and the Director of MARRI RC Sashko Kocev. The "Open Gate/La Strada" Association participated as a panelist at the Regional Conference.

[40] Agreement on cooperation in the field of the fight against trafficking in human beings and Agreement on cooperation in the field of the fight against smuggling of migrants, signed on 16.12.2019 in Skopje, between the RNM and the Republic of Serbia.

In the period 20 – 22 June 2023, a Regional Expert Conference[41] (REC) "Review of information technologies in the context of trafficking in human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including children in SEE" was held in Podgorica, Montenegro under the organization of UNODC, which was attended by 3 female participants from RNM.

In the period 21 – 22 June 2023,[42] the National Coordinator participated in the 80th meeting of the Steering Group of the International Center for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), which coincided with the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the organization. On the margins of the conference, a bilateral meeting was held between the General Director of ICMPD Mr. Michael Spindeleger and the National Coordinator.

On September 6, 2023 in Sarajevo, in the organization of the Council of Europe Program Office, a regional workshop was held on the topic of Prevention and fight against the trafficking in children for begging. A total of 16 delegations from B&H and RNM participated in the workshop (2 m and 14 f),[43] and it was carried out within the framework of the project.[44]

In the period 18 - 19 September 2023, an annual meeting of the NGO Platform / General Assembly of the "La Strada" network against trafficking in human beings was held in Bucharest, Romania, which was attended by 35 members, including the "Open Gate/La Strada" Association.

In the period 18-21 September 2023,[45] the National Coordinator, together with the National Coordinators from B&H and Serbia participated in a panel discussion on the topic of Trafficking in Human Beings and (In)Security, at the 27th International Scientific Conference dedicated to National Minorities, Migration and Security Brioni – Croatia. The National Coordinator dedicated her address to the victims of trafficking in human beings on the topic "Are victims invisible or are we blind?"

From 19 to 22 September 2023, in Jahorina, B&H, organized by UNODC, a Regional training[46] "Systemic analysis and dismantling of organized criminal networks of trafficking in drugs, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in human beings" was held, which was attended by 3 male participants from the RNM, the Ministry of Interior and the PPO.

In Durrës, Albania, in the period 28-30 September, 2023, the Regional Conference for decent work for the Western Balkans region was held, organized by the Institute for Social Policy "Musine Kokalari" and the Center for Emancipation Policies. The "Open Gate/La Strada" Association participated in

[41] The association "Open Gate/La Strada" participated in the meeting where it presented the latest research on online exploitation and trafficking of children, the main results and recommendations.
[42] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/26895
[43] Judges, public prosecutors, police, social workers and citizens' associations.
[44] EU and CoE project Horizontal instrument 3 "Strengthening activities against trafficking in human beings".
[45] https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/28197
[46] Experts and practitioners from Bosnia and Herzegovina, RSM, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania identified the deficiencies in the procedure and have acquired new knowledge and skills for their appropriate addressing.

the conference, which was one of the 20 organizations that signed the Manifesto[47] for Decent Work for the Western Balkans region.

In the period 10-11 October, 2023, the National Coordinator participated in the 8th annual Conference on Migrations in Vienna (Vienna Migration Conference) organized by the International Center for Migration Policy Development - ICMPD. On the margins of the Conference, the National Coordinator held a bilateral meeting with the General Director of ICMPD, Mr. Michael Spindelegger, who expressed his satisfaction with the active role of RNM in the Steering Committee of ICMPD, especially for developing the ICMPD Re-Pact project "Round Table for Strengthening of migration management in the Western Balkans in tandem with the EU's asylum and migration reform."

On November 16 and 17, 2023, with the support of IOM, a Regional Round Table was held in Sarajevo, B&H on the topic "Strengthening the response of the criminal justice system in relation to trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling in conditions of mixed migration movements".[48] Some of the conclusions include: initiating legal changes to regulate remote translation, establishing a register of authorized translators, adopting a common definition of a victim in procedural laws, and prioritizing intensive and continuous training for digital investigations for competent authorities as well as strengthening the awareness of the trends regarding modern technologies.

In Brussels, Belgium, on November 23, 2023, in the organization of ICMPD, two representatives from ICMPD of RNM and at the final conference of the project, where the achievements and results of ILECUs project "Further strengthening of the network of international law enforcement coordination units (ILECUs) in SEE and Eastern Partnership countries" were summarized.

On December 5-6, 2023, a Regional Expert Conference [49] (REC) "Addressing Child Trafficking in SEE" was held in Skopje, organized by UNODC in cooperation with the National Commission and the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, which was attended by 5 men and 16 women.

National coordinator upon invitation from and in the organization of ICMPD in the period of 07-08 December 2023, participated in the European Forum on trafficking in human beings against forced labor and forced begging in Stockholm, Sweden.

In 2023, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" continued with an active contribution to the work of the thematic networks together with other civil society organizations. It continued to actively participate in the European La Strada International/Platform against trafficking in human beings. During 2023, the association contributed to the management board of the Clean Clothes Campaign network, participating once a month in all coordination meetings organized as part of this network.

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[47] You can read the Manifesto at the following link: https://decentworkbalkans.com/

[48] Representatives from the Ministry of the Interior, the Office of the Ombudsman and the Basic Court Skopje 1, Skopje, participated in the round table (4 women).

[49] The association "Open Gate/La Strada" participated as a panelist, presenting experiences related to child trafficking in Southeast Europe.

2. PREVENTION

2.1 IDENTIFYING REASONS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

- In November 2023, the **Subgroup for Combating Child Trafficking**, with the support of the Council of Europe Program Office in Skopje, produced a Report on the implemented activities for 2021-2022. The report includes an analysis of the situation and statistical data, risk factors, trends and phenomenology of child trafficking, conclusions and recommendations.
- **PHI Institute for Public Health of RNM** was actively involved in the implementation of preventive activities and in that direction, educational materials were prepared in the form of Triplet in Macedonian and Albanian language, printed in 300 copies, and placed on the website of the Institute[50].
- With the support of the **Council of Europe Program Office in Skopje**,[51] several materials were produced in the direction of improving prevention, identification and support in the fight against trafficking in human beings:
  - Feasibility study for the Center for victims of trafficking in human beings,
  - Manual on child trafficking for foster families,
  - Trafficking in human beings and information and computer technologies,
  - Contribution to the annual report of the National Rapporteur,
  - Report of the Subgroup on Combating Child Trafficking,
  - Informative material for compensation from the state.

- The association **"For a happy childhood"** participated in the production of several documents in the area:
  - Manual - Intended for trainers from SOS children's village for the training of caregivers of children victims of trafficking in human beings,[52]
  - Editor of the Handbook for Professionals in Education on the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings, to ensure compliance of the handbook with the Council of Europe Convention, [53] and
  - In September 2023, a "Research in child trafficking for: labor exploitation, child marriage, begging" was started and it is expected to be finalized in May 2024.[54]

- ICMPD, within the framework of the regional project ***"Developing approaches to improve the functionality of national referral mechanisms (NRM) among MARRI participants"*** developed **practical approaches** in order to improve the functionality of national referral mechanisms for victims of

[50] https://www.iph.mk/mk/news/index/1194
[51] Within the EU and Council of Europe Project Horizontal Instrument 3 "Strengthening the activities against trafficking in human beings".
[52] Supported by the Council of Europe Program Office in Skopje.
[53] The manual was prepared by the Bureau of Education from Kosovo, supported by the Office of the Council of Europe in Pristina.
[54] Within the framework of the Project "Strengthening the activities against trafficking in human beings in RNM" and is implemented within the framework of the joint program of the European Union and the Council of Europe "Horizontal Instrument for the Western Balkans and Turkey".

trafficking in human beings.[55] The approaches were presented in Skopje, on May 31, 2023, during the final conference of the project.[56] The approaches contain methods, instructions, tools and good practices for:

- 1 – approach - Inclusion of survivors of trafficking in human beings as advisors in the policy development process and in the operational response;[57]
- 2 – approach - Improvement of the communication and coordination channels between the relevant stakeholders in NRM;[58] and
- 3 – approach - Developing criteria for reaffirming the participation of civil society organizations within the NRM in the MARRI region.[59]

The National Commission at the regional meetings decided to support the first approach, from where with the support of GIZ,[60] a roadmap was developed on "Participation of survivors of trafficking in human beings as advisors in the strategic response against trafficking in human beings in MARRI participants - guidelines for RNM." According to the Roadmap, the National Commission at the meeting held on 30.06.2023 made a **Decision to form a group for the representation of survivors of trafficking in human beings**. In the upcoming period, the Commission will formalize the work of the body, by determining the criteria for the selection of a citizens' association that will manage the group, the criteria for the selection of survivors, the preparation of rules of procedure and work program, as well as ways of financing the same and similar.

- A research study [61]"Trends of trafficking in human beings in the Western Balkans" (2018-2022) was prepared by MARRI.[62] The reference period for this research is 2018 - 2022. All six MARRI participants were asked for data on trafficking in human beings based on a previously prepared form.

- During 2023, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" prepared and published the following analyses, manuals and researches:
  - Shadow report on chapters 19, 23 and 24 regarding trafficking in women and girls and other related issues for 2022.[63]
  - Supervision policy, a document for internal use that was developed in the direction of professional advancement and prevention of burnout of employees in the shelter. In addition, a Rulebook for professional supervision of employees was drawn up, which regulates the way of organizing and performing professional supervision of employees working in the association.

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[55] In Albania, B&H, Kosovo*, Montenegro, RSM and Serbia.

[56] "*Prevention and combating of human trafficking in the Western Balkan*" (PaCT), implemented by MARRI and funded by the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ).

[57] EN MK AL BS/MN/SR

[58] EN MK AL BS/MN/SR

[59] EN MK AL BS/MN/SR

[60] Within the framework of the Thematic Package NRM within the framework of the regional project PaCT.

[61] The data provided in this research were collected by the Ministry of the Interior as well as the MARRI Network of Coordinators for Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings providing a harmonized approach to data collection.

[62] https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oMyKu2g5aRBJqJlwb3J9dBCpnfF0FYyi/view

[63] This report presents the situation in terms of trafficking in women and girls for 2022 and the readiness in terms of fulfilling the rights and obligations to be undertaken with EU membership in terms of chapters 19, 23 and 24. The report is prepared on the basis of the monitoring and evaluation indicators contained in the manual that are relevant for reporting on situations under Chapters 19, 23 and 24.

- Guidelines for dealing with traumatized child victims of trafficking housed in the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.[64]
- Information leaflets with QR codes, which provide access to information on the rights of victims of trafficking in human beings.
- 200 pieces of backpacks and bottles with printed SOS line 080011111 against trafficking in human beings.

- **The Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)** as part of a project supported by GIZ[65] produced a public policy document entitled "IDENTIFICATION OF VICTIMS OF LABOR EXPLOITATION WITHIN THE WESTERN BALKANS."[66] The document aims to present the current situation in the Western Balkans related to trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labor exploitation, as well as to give conclusions and recommendations. The proposed recommendations aim to contribute to the creation of measures and activities that will lead to a reduction in the degree of vulnerability of workers, improved regional cooperation and a reduction in the risks of trafficking in human beings, especially labor exploitation. The document was duly forwarded to all relevant institutions from the countries of the Western Balkans.

2.2 STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF THE PROFESSIONAL AND COMPETENT SERVICES

- In the current year 2023, 71 police officers (22 women / 49 men)[67] from the **Ministry of Interior**/ Bureau for Public Security under the MoI participated in 38 events, professional development activities, meetings, conferences, workshops in the field of trafficking in human beings and illegal migration. Out of these, 33 police officers from NUSMSTHB (25 men and 8 women) participated in 15 professional development activities, training for trainers, trainings, meetings in the field of trafficking in human beings and illegal migration.

- Within the EU and Council of Europe Project Horizontal Instrument 3 "Strengthening activities against trafficking in human beings", through the **Council of Europe Program Office in Skopje** several activities and trainings were organized in which knowledge was measured by a test before and after the training and conclusions and recommendations were drawn:
  - PHI Institute for Public Health of the RNM was actively involved in strengthening the capacities of health workers in the fight against human/child trafficking, where in cooperation with the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" they conducted three trainings, on May 31st in Skopje, [68] on October 3rd in Kočani and October 5th in Kumanovo to 50 health workers (10 men / 40 women)

[64]This guideline is for internal use intended for professionals, and with the aim of promoting mental health and providing psychosocial care and handling of highly traumatized child victims housed in the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.
[65]Thematic package Raising public awareness within the framework of the PaCT regional project.
[66]HTTPS://MYLA.ORG.MK/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2023/07/IDENTIFICATION-OF-VICTIMS-OF-LABOUR-EXPLOITATION-IN-THE-WESTERN-BALKANS-MK.PDF.
[67]NUSMSTHB, DBAM (Department for Border Affairs and Migration) and Regional Centers for Border Affairs, Sector for Internal Affairs, Sector for International Police Cooperation.
[68] The training included measurement of knowledge before and after the training.

in the direction of early detection, identification, protection and referral of presumed victims of human /children trafficking by health workers.

- July 3-6 in Ohrid, training was organized for trainers[69] on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labor exploitation, which was attended by 11 men and 23 women;
- On September 25, two focus groups intended for Victim Centers were held in Skopje with the aim of preparing a study, in which 6 men and 13 women participated;
- On June 21 and October 31, two focus groups and one round table on trafficking in human beings and information-computer technologies were held, in which 8 men and 11 women took part;
- on November 29 in Skopje, in cooperation with the MYLA and the Lawyer Chamber of the RNM, a meeting was held on the establishment of the network of legal representatives and associations of citizens for the representation of victims of trafficking in human beings, in which 5 men and 12 women took part;
- From 20 to 22 November, a delegation of RNM realized a Study Visit to the Centers for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in Belgium, in which 1 men and 7 women from the MLSP, MoI and CSA;
- From October 1st to December 31st, a Help Course on child trafficking was held, in cooperation with the Lawyer Chamber, for which 14 men and 16 women lawyers were awarded with a certificate of completed training;
- From October 10 to December 31, a Help Course for justice for children was held, in cooperation with the Lawyer Chamber, where 13 men and 15 women were awarded with a certificate of completed training;
- On December 20, two focus groups were held in Skopje on child trafficking for the purpose of begging, forced marriages and labor exploitation in order to prepare research. 2 men and 18 women took part in the focus groups.

- The **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime** (UNODC) within the project "UN Ending Impunity for Traffickers and Supporting Justice for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in South East Europe (SEE)" in cooperation with the National Commission and the Academy of judges and public prosecutors carry out activities that contribute to strengthening the capacity of national law enforcement authorities:

  - January 31 – February 2, 2023, the three-day regional multidisciplinary thematic workshop "UN Ending the impunity of human traffickers and supporting justice for victims of human trafficking in SEE" was held in Skopje, in which participants from the RSM were 6 people from the BPPO, MoI, MLSP (5 men / 1 women).[70]

[69] The training was attended by representatives from SLI, NUSMSTHB, Border Police, Asylum Sector, Social Workers and CA and it included measurement of knowledge before and after the training.

[70] Practitioners from all countries participating in the project: Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, RNM and Serbia, under the expert guidance of mentors from Belgium and France, as well as through the contribution of regional experts.

- Three online multidisciplinary national workshops[71] for sharing experiences and challenges when working on a case of trafficking in human beings, in which 20 people participated. (7 men / 13 women).
- Two three-day National simulations of trial of a case of trafficking in human beings, in which 14 men / 28 women[72] participated as representatives from the BPPO, MoI, MLSP and CSA. The purpose of the trial simulations was to strengthen the capacity of investigative authorities and courts in the RNM to conduct investigations that will result in legally binding verdicts and also to contribute to improving the position and rights of victims in criminal proceedings.
- In the period October 3-5, 2023, a Regional Trial Simulation of a human trafficking case was held in Moldova, with the aim of strengthening international cooperation, improving and contributing to successful investigations that will result in legally binding verdicts. 3 women from BPPO, MoI, MLSP, CSA took part in the simulation.[73]

- With the support of the **IOM office in Skopje** within the framework of various projects in partnership with the Commission, during 2023, the following trainings were conducted:
  - From 4 to 7 September, 2023, a four-day specialized training was held in Struga - a regional simulation on the topic "Conducting parallel investigations in cases of migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings". The training was attended by 32 representatives from the ministries of Interior, the public prosecutor's offices and social workers from Albania, Kosovo and RNM (teher were 10 participants from RNM, 4 women and 6 men).
  - On November 23 and 24 in Skopje, with the support of IOM, a two-day coordination workshop was held between the Mobile Identification Teams and the Operational Team, which was attended by 25 participants, (18 women and 7 men).

- Within the regional project PACT, [74] the **"Open Gate/La Strada" Association** conducted two trainings:
  - April 24 – 25, 2023, in Dojran, "Workshop for professional development and prevention of burnout of employees in the shelter", which was attended by 14 women;

[71]The workshops were conducted on March 17 and 24, 2023 "Procedure of the competent authorities in case of suspicion of a potential victim of human and child trafficking", June 22-24, 2022 "Investigation, prosecution and trial of cases of trafficking in human beings through a targeted approach towards the victim" and November 23-25, 2022, the impact and the achieved results and effects of the participation.

[72]They were held on June 6 - 9, 2023 and October 17 to 20, 2023 in RNM.

The association "Open Gate/La Strada" with its representative contributed through its experiences in dealing with specific cases, as well as experience was shared about the position of the victim in the criminal procedure - protection and support of victims of trafficking in human beings.

[73]In addition, the participants from Albania, Moldova, Serbia, RNM and Montenegro prepared "Standard operating procedures for the investigation of national and international cases of trafficking in human beings between the project countries - Albania, Moldova, Serbia, RNM and Montenegro" and "Regional operational roadmap for investigation of national and international cases of trafficking in human beings between project countries."

[74] Thematic package for mental health and psychosocial support in shelters for victims of trafficking in human beings.

- - May 29, 2023, the Workshop "Handling severely traumatized children victims of trafficking in human beings located in the Center for victims of trafficking in human beings" was held, in which 14 women participated. The "Guidelines for Dealing with Traumatized Children Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings," which provide guidelines for promoting mental health, providing psychosocial care and dealing with child victims placed in the Center for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings as well as key techniques for conducting a conversation with children were shared during the workshop.
In addition, within the framework of other projects the following were implemented :
- Research and analysis training intended for civil society organizations in Veles. The training was held on November 28 and 29, 2023, in which 18 people (15 women / 3 men) participated, representatives of civil society organizations that are members of the Platform for the Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings.
- In October 2023, 3 meetings were held with some of the members of the Local Commissions for the fight against trafficking in human beings from Shtip and Kumanovo. The goal was their activation, following the formation in 2019. From the mentioned meetings, it was concluded that the municipalities will undertake activities for their functionality and will audit the membership.

- **The Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev"**, in the current year 2023, in cooperation with UNODC, has participated in two events in the field of human trafficking and illegal migration on the topic "Simulation of a trial in the case of human trafficking" attended by 9 judges and 8 public prosecutors.

In order to strengthen the capacities of the professionals working in this area, trainings were conducted and capacities strengthened for more than 448 people, of which 287 were women and 161 were men.

2.3 RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

- **30 th July – Wolrd Day for fight against trafficking in human beings**

The National Commission joined the UNODC campaign under the motto "Reach every victim of human trafficking, leave no one behind". UNODC has prepared a set of social media materials to raise awareness of human trafficking, disturbing developments and trends, calling on governments, law enforcement agencies, institutions and civil society to enhance their efforts to strengthen thde prevention, identifying and supporting victims and ending the impunity of human traffickers. The message that UNODC sends through this campaign is to improve efforts to implement the Trafficking in Persons Protocol to the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, including by strengthening national frameworks for the identification and protection of victims of trafficking in persons, especially during crises.

On the eve of the World Day Against Human Trafficking on July 30, the Chairman of the OSCE for 2023, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the the

Republic of North Macedonia Bujar Osmani[75], OSCE Secretary General Helga Maria Schmid and the Director of the OSCE Office[76] for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Matteo Maccachi, called for renewed efforts across the OSCE region to combat human trafficking and prevent exploitation.

- MARRI on its website and social media promoted tools and manuals for mental and psychological-social help and support for victims of human trafficking.[77]
- The "Open Gate/La Strada" association, on the occasion of the World Day against Human Trafficking in partnership with the "La Strada" network, called to pay attention to Citizens' Associations working to prevent human trafficking and called on governments to support the civil sector.

Additionally, on the occasion of World Day, it joined the Blue Heart campaign at www.unodc.org/blueheart #EndHumanTrafficking. The message for this World Day Against Human Trafficking is to increase our efforts to identify, protect and support survivors and to leave no victim of human trafficking behind. Together, let's build a World where no one can ever buy, sell or exploit anyone.

❖ Europen day for fight against trafficking in human beings (18th October)

- On the occasion of the European Day against Human Trafficking on October 18, the National Commission supported the campaign launched by the "Open Gate/La Strada" Association entitled "**Art for Awareness**." [78] The central event was held in Skopje, and subsequent events were also held in Kumanovo and Shtip in cooperation with the municipalities and the Local Commissions for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, where the documentary film "**Exit**" was projected. The purpose of the Campaign was to raise awareness of human trafficking and to hear the life experiences of survivors, as well as to encourage empathy, community education and collective action for positive change and increased accountability, thereby ensuring rights of the victims. In addition to the screening of the film, participants engaged in a public conversation, followed by a panel discussion where the audience actively participated, asking questions and sharing their perspectives. It is particularly important that within the framework of the campaign the documentary film was officially broadcast on the Macedonian National Television on October 17, reinforcing the impact of the campaign on the general public. In order to mark the European Day for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings/Children, in cooperation with the Department for Prevention in Kumanovo, educational flyers were distributed to a group of students in primary and secondary schools with preventive directions where to contact and inform about human trafficking, pendants with the motto

[75] https://mfa.gov.mk/mk/page/8/post/3376/osmani-povika-na-liderstvo-vo-regionot-na-obse-vo-borbata-protiv-trgovijata-so-lugje
[76] https://www.osce.org/secretariat/549268
[77] https://mhpss.marri-rc.org.mk/
[78] A series of activities and events within the campaign took place in Skopje, followed by events in Kumanovo and Shtip. The central event was held in Skopje and attracted the participation of decision-makers, the diplomatic corps, representatives of state institutions, public figures and artists, providing them with a platform to articulate their ideas, and messages about human trafficking through various artistic media. As part of the campaign, three short videos appeared, which were shared through social media during December 2023 and the web platform of the "Open Gate/La Strada" Association and its partners.

"prevent trafficking" were distributed and posters were placed in visible places around the city under the motto "prevent child trafficking".“

- On the occasion of the European Day against Human Trafficking, the Association "For a Happy Childhood" organized a presentation of the film "**Observers**" for students from the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje. 44 students (29 h and 15 m) were present at the screening of the film.
- The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia, through its municipal organizations, participated in the commemoration of the European Day of Combating Human Trafficking by organizing 23 prevention workshops with youth from primary and secondary schools, as well as with volunteers from Red Cross Youth Clubs. The preventive lessons aimed at raising the awareness of young people, recognizing the ways in which they can be involved in human trafficking and their self-protection, which included 546 young people..
- On November 20, World Children's Day, the Secrtors for Prevention implemented a campaign for the prevention of all types of abuse of children, exploitation of child labor, acceptance of work through dubious advertisements, working meeting and prevention of child trafficking, trafficking authorities and other threats of this type of crimes.

❖ **Week for fighting against trafficking in human beings**

On that occasion, in December 2023, the National Coordinator together with the Head of the Unit for Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling gave a lecture to the students from the Faculty of Security at the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University. The students were presented with the role of the National Commission, the international and national legal framework of the crime of human trafficking, institutional and inter-institutional cooperation and strategic documents. Also highlighted were the elements of the crime, national trends in human trafficking and illegal migration, and modus and functionalities of the National Unit for Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human/Child Trafficking.

Within the the Week, as well as within the framework of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence, within the framework of the project "Roma Acted" in cooperation with the municipalities, and with the support of the Program Office of the Council of Europe in Skopje through the EU Project and the Council of Europe,[79] in Skopje, Kočani and Tetovo,[80] there were information sessions held on child trafficking and gender-based violence (attended 36 females and 31 males) aimed at predominantly Roma children and their teachers.

- During the anti-trafficking week, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" carried out:

[79]Horizontal instrument 3 "Strengthening anti-trafficking activities"
[80] On November 29; December 1 and 5.

- A social media campaign targeting labor exploitation,[81] which aimed to raise awareness of decent work and the concept of a living wage, with videos and designs focusing on the importance of minimum and daily wages in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.
- 2 workshops with 48 high school students (32 females and 16 males) in Kumanovo and Skopje, where a short film was shown, after which a discussion was held on what the phenomenon of human trafficking actually means, the recruitment process, in what forms it can take place and the types of exploitation, focusing on online exploitation through social media.

➢ During the week in December, the Association "For a Happy Childhood" held two focus groups on the prevention of human trafficking for students who are potential beneficiaries of the "Travel and Work" program, in which 14 students from different faculties at the University of St. "Kiril and Metodi" - Skopje (11males and 4 females).

❖ **Other preventive activities**

➢ The Ministry of the Interior, through the Unit for Strategic Planning, Standards and Quality Control, coordinated the Sections for Prevention in the Ministry of Interior in order to implement preventive activities and suppress begging as one of the forms of child neglect and abuse, as well as labor exploitation. In that direction, plans were developed in all Sectors for internal affairs for joint actions with the Centers for social work to view of suppressing the phenomenon. The Protocol for inter-sectoral cooperation to address the issue of street children from 2022 has been shared in all Sectors for internal affairs.

➢ Preventive activites in Sectors for Internal Affairs:
- The section for prevention in **Kumanovo** held 2 (two) working meetings and meetings with the Association of Citizens "National Roma Center" in order to inform the employees of the association about the rights, obligations and risks of the persons to whom they provide legal assistance seeking asylum and work in European countries,who are susceptible to accepting unverified job offers, such as babysitters, waitresses, work on a ship, thus being prone to be drawn into a network of child trafficking and labor exploitation. At the same time, the Section for Prevention in the Sector for Internal Affairs Kumanovo held Tribunes on the topic: "Trafficking in children, risks, dangers and prevention measures" in which students from secondary schools were involved.
- In the Sector for Internal Affairs **Veles**, 8 educational workshops were held with students from 6 secondary schools and 2 primary schools with the aim of preventing trafficking in people/children and illegal migration, including cyber bullying;
- In the Sector for Internal Affairs **Shtip**, 7 educational lectures were held with students from secondary schools;

[81]The association "Open Gate/La Strada" shared 9 posts on both Instagram and Facebook, of which 5 were videos and 4 were designs. Each post was shared with the following hashtags: #LivingWage #LivingWage #europefloorwage

- In the Sector for Internal Affairs **Strumica,** an educational lecture was conducted with students from the 9th grade;
- In the Sector for Internal Affairs **Skopje**, the Sector for Prevention during 2023 implemented a total of 32 preventive activities on the topic of "Trafficking in children" through the implementation of educational workshops[82] , specifically:
  - Together with the prevention clubs, 24 educational workshops were held, according to the plan for "Safety in schools" with students from the 7th, 8th and 9th grades from all primary schools;
  - Two (2) educational workshops have been implemented in SOS Detsko Selo and 4 workshops in youth houses located in Vlae, Bardovci, Radishani and Zhelezara;
  - Two (2) educational workshops were held in the "Children's Home 11Oktomvri" in the O.E. Dva elena and in the O.E. Vodno;

- In the Sector for Internal Affairs **Tetovo**, within the framework of the project "Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings/Children", educational workshops were held with students from the 8th grade in all primary schools in the area of the Sector for Internal Affairs-Tetovo. Namely, in the municipalities of the station area, lecture was held in 62 primary schools with 99 classes (79 Albanian and 20 Macedonian), with a total of 1531 students (1289 Albanians and 242 Macedonians).
- In the municipalities of the station area of **Gostivar**, lecture was held in 28 primary schools with 64 classes (35 Albanian and 22 Macedonian and 7 Turkish), with a total of 938 students (622 Albanians, 206 Macedonians and 110 Turks).
- Namely, the project was carried out in 90 primary schools located in the area of the Sector for Internal Affairs-Tetovo, in 160 classes, and 2469 students were involved with language of instruction both Macedonian and Albanian..

➢ During 2023, the Association **"Open Gate/La Strada"** carried out:
- 9 workshops with the aim of awareness raising about the negative effects of begging, child labor, forced/child marriages and the dangers of human trafficking. The workshops were held in Skopje, Kavadarci, Bitola and Tetovo and included 170 participants, out of whom 145 children (50 boys, 95 girls) and 25 parents (20 females and 5 males).
- On November 1, 2 and 3, 2023, three working meetings were held for the promotion and review of the indicators and the tool for "Monitoring and evaluation of policies for prevention of human trafficking with active participation of 40 people (32 females and 8 males).[83]
- On December 26, 2023, a panel discussion was held on the topic "Improving the accessibility and quality of services for presumed victims of human

[82]During the realization of the educational workshops, PP presentation and educational material in the form of leaflets (flyers) and brochures provided by the Bureau for Public Security. The lectures were conducted in all primary schools in accordance with the planned in the mentioned project, i.e. in accordance with previously prepared special lecture material in Power point – presentation.

[83] From mobile identification teams, social workers, inspectors and CA, judges, National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, NC and NRM.

trafficking and exploitation, with a focus on street children"[84] with participation of 21 individuals(4 males and 17 females), financially supported by the OSCE Mission in Skopje. It emerged from the discussion that campaigns are needed to raise public awareness of this problem, as well as that child trafficking, especially for forced begging of children, is a multifaceted problem that requires cooperation between institutions and organizations in order to prevent and suppress the exploitation of children i.e. child trafficking.

- On December 15, 2023, a training on prevention of human trafficking was conducted, with third and fourth year students from the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy. 23 students (1 male and 22 females), future potential interns of the organization, who had the opportunity to learn about the problem of human trafficking and early identification of trafficking victims through practical exercises, participated in the training.
- From November 20-25, 2023, a series of 5 workshops[85] were held in which a total of 21 people participated, including (19 females and 2 males) on the topic: Human rights and labor rights for Ukrainians in the Republic of North Macedonia, in cooperation with the Association Common Home for Mothers and Children from Ukraine.
- On December 14, 2023, as part of the project "Social partners support the authorities in helping people with specific needs" in partnership with UNHCR, a New Year's bazaar was organized in the coffee bar "Literatura", City mall. At the event, products made by asylum seekers during the art therapies and creative workshops that were continuously implemented throughout the year in the Reception Center for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo were exhibited. In addition, the event provided financial resources to directly support individuals seeking asylum by strengthening their economic stability.
- On December 25, 2023, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada", in cooperation with the Rotaract Club Skopje - Center, organized a Humanitarian New Year's party - a bazaar, where handcrafted items, skillfully made by individuals located in the Center for victims of human trafficking were displayed. The aim behind this initiative was not only to provide a platform for the public to purchase these distinctive handicrafts, but also to raise awareness about the current issues of social injustice and human trafficking. By participating in this event, the attendees directly contributed to the direct support of the victims of human trafficking, as well as in the battle against these social challenges.

- **The association "For a happy childhood"** provided support to the Faculty of Philosophy and with joint activities they realized several trainings:

[84]The panel discussion was attended by representatives of institutions, MLSP, MoI, NRM, mobile teams for the identification of victims, CA and international organizations and others.

[85]The trainings aimed to inform Ukrainians about the rights arising from an employment relationship, such as the right to safe working conditions, regular working hours, time for breaks and rest, adequate payment for the labor invested, prohibition of any form of harassment in the workplace, etc.

- Basic training for first year students at the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy-Faculty of Philosophy Skopje on the topic: "Trafficking in people: risks, causes, consequences" training 23 students (16 female and 7 male). [86]
- Advanced training for students from the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy - Faculty of Philosophy, Skopje: on the topic "Training of teams to work with street children," during which 15 students (9 female and 6 males) from different study years were trained.
- Basic training of students from the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy-Faculty of Philosophy Skopje: on the topic "Peer Education for Human Trafficking," during which 8 students were trained, two from each study year (4 female and 4 male).
- Training on the topic: "Psychological aspects of working with vulnerable migrants in the centers, potential victims of human trafficking and forms of violence and stress management" intended for the personnel from the Gevgelija and Tabanovce border crossing points. The training presented psychological aspects of working with vulnerable groups, migrants, the application of indicators for recognizing victims of human trafficking, interviews with victims of human trafficking, for which 17 participants were trained (14 female and 3 male).[87]

- **The Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia**, through the Red Cross of the city of Skopje and 22 municipal organizations of the Red Cross in the country, conducted peer education sessions with young people on the topic of prevention of human trafficking. During the year, a total of 61 workshops were held, which included 1,477 young people from primary and secondary schools.

- On 24 and 25.10.2023. The municipal organization of the **Red Cross Kumanovo** in Zanaetchiski dom-Kumanovo organized events for the promotion of a short film "Trgovija"[88], the script of which exactly addresses human trafficking, having the aim of sending a message, as well as to raise the awareness in young people about this grievious criminal act, directly violating basic human rights. The film is educational and motivational and expresses the themes of resilience, family and the indomitable human spirit. Through the lens of this film, a contribution is made to raising the awareness of young people about human trafficking.
- In cooperation with the Youth Club of the Municipal Organization of the **Red Cross Probishtip**, on 21.12.2023, a humanitarian film evening was held in the "Rudar" cinema hall, where the short film "Trgovija" was shown. 90 young people were present, who had the opportunity to get acquainted with what human

[86]31% of the participants had incomplete knowledge about the phenomenon, especially about the risks. After the training, the level of knowledge increased significantly, 67% of the participants answered the questions to which they did not have an answer before the test or had the wrong answer.

[87]The project was realized with the support of IOM. On the pretest, the results for the topics, especially for the interview with victims, amounted to 31%, after the training they increased significantly and amounted to 69%.

[88] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuuwL1_BpbE "Trgovija" is a short film by a group of Kumanovo residents, filmed with a team of actors, volunteers of the Kumanovo Red Cross Municipal Organization, filmed with collected donations from the volunteers, a donation from the Municipality of Kumanovo and support from the Municipal Organization of Kumanovo, and directed by Marko Jovanovski. 200 people attended the promotion of both events.

trafficking is, how young people become victims of human trafficking, as well as the types and ways of functioning of the human trafficking chain. The funds collected from ticket sales were used to make New Year's packages intended for children from families at social risk.

3. SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF VICTIMS AND MIGRANTS

3.1 MECHANISMS FOR IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL OF VICTIMS

In order to strengthen the national capacities and increase the efficiency of the police and the prosecution in suppressing organized forms of migrant smuggling and human trafficking, the effective and efficient functioning of (NESKMTL), which was established in 2018, continued in the past year[89] with the aim of better coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of the Interior and the Public Prosecutor's Office for the prosecution of organized crime and corruption of the the Republic of North Macedonia for the suppression of crimes related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

With the support of IOM[90], the work continued of **the 5 mobile teams (MT) for the identification of victims, presumed victims of human trafficking and vulnerable categories** in Bitola, Gevgelija, Kumanovo, Skopje and Tetovo[91]. The five mobile teams were active in implementing program activities including regular meetings, field visits, contacts, referrals and assistance to vulnerable groups, identification of victims and presumed victims of human trafficking.

During 2023, the free **SOS line**[92] for help from human trafficking (0800 11111 and 02 2 777 070), continued to work 24/7 with five SOS operators. During the reference period, a total of **326 calls were received** [93] for assistance for human trafficking/children, providing general information on the phenomenon of human trafficking, safety tips for working abroad, crisis intervention, emotional and psychological assistance, legal counseling (for presumed victims and their parents, relatives, etc.) . During the year, the SOS information line regarding cases of victims of human trafficking referred 4 cases to the Center for Social Work, NESKMTL and the Mobile Teams.

3.2 IDENTIFICATION, REFERRAL AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

During 2023, the Operational Team in charge of formal identification of victims and presumed victims of human **trafficking identified 7 victims of human**

[89]The last revision of NESKMTL was done on August 15, 2023, more about NESKMTL in the Commission's Annual Report for 2018.

[90]Within the framework of the project "Support of the capacities for the prevention and protection in North Macedonia" supported by the Development Bank of the Council of Europe - CEB.

[91]The work of the MT is determined in the Memorandum of Cooperation concluded between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Ministry of Interior in January 2018. They continue to include representatives from the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Interior and from the Citizens' Associations (the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" participates with its representative in the mobile team in Skopje, while the Ministry of Justice has representatives in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Bitola and Gevgelija and provides legal assistance and information for victims of trafficking in human beings, potential victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as vulnerable categories of persons) active in the area of fight against trafficking in human beings and contribute to the deepening of cooperation between institutions in order to identify vulnerable categories of persons, including victims of human trafficking.

[92]Since 2002, the association "Open Gate/La Strada" has been running the first national SOS line in North Macedonia, which specializes in the issue of human trafficking, i.e. preventive support and assistance and support for people who have survived human trafficking.

[93]Out of a total of 326 calls, 221 were from women and 105 from men.

trafficking, 5 females and two boys. The largest number of identified persons are children (6), aged 9-17 and one adult female aged 51 (who, according to an expert, is a person with developmental disabilities and at the age of 8), all citizens of the Republic of North Macedoni. In terms of nationality, the largest number are of Roma (4), Macedonian (2) and Albanian (1) nationality.

Out of the cases discovered and identified in the past year, the dominant form is sexual exploitation, with 5 victims of sexual exploitation (4 girls and 1 adult with a disability) and 2 boys, one of whom was identified as beggar and the other was a combination of begging and labor exploitation. The place of exploitation of the victims is usually the central, western and southern part of the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.

At the same time, during the year**, 9 presumed victims** were identified, (8 female and 1male), all children between the ages of 8 and 16, while one foreign presumed victim was issued a temporary residence permit, in accordance with the SOP and the Law on foreigners.

All victims and presumed victims of human trafficking/children are treated by all competent institutions in accordance with the SOP for treating victims of human trafficking.

The Center for Victims of Human Trafficking (the Center)[94] during 2023 functioned at full capacity and accomodated presumed and identified child victims of human trafficking. During the year, **11 beneficiaries/children** were accommodated in the Center, all of whom female, who were provided psycho-social assistance services, **6 were newly accommodated** (3 were sexually exploited, and for the remaining 3, the type of exploitation was forced marriage). From previous years (5) all children were female. The most represented are (10) domestic citizens, (1) foreign citizen, (7) are presumed victims and 4 are identified victims of human trafficking.

In addition to the provided accommodation facilities in the Center for victims of human trafficking, alternative forms of accommodation for victims were also provided, and during the year three (3) children were identified as victims of human trafficking, who were placed in a small group home, (1) one child identified as a victim of human trafficking was placed in the Center for Victims of Domestic Violence, (1) one adult identified victim of human trafficking was placed in the Center for Support of Persons with intellectual disability in Negotino.

Within the framework of the Center, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" regularly implements the program for psycho-social assistance and support for victims of human trafficking, for the purpose of their stabilization, overcoming trauma, easier and more successful inclusion in the current processes of social life. The program includes presumed victims and victims of human trafficking who are not accommodated in the Center, a total of 11 (of which 3 from the

[94]The overhead costs for the operation of the Center are financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, while the service is financed by the Government of North Macedonia within the framework of the Program for the Support of the Civil Sector.

current year and 8 from previous years). In cooperation with the Center for Social Work, work is being done on their stabilization and resocialization, reintegration and professional activities that are applied in accordance with the prepared individual plans. Part of the activities undertaken relate to strengthening the personal potential of the victims through counseling and support, provision of alternative education, occupational and creative workshops to improve the intellectual capacities and psychophysical health of the individual. Psychosocial counseling is included in daily activities, provided through individual and group sessions using techniques and interventions from different directions of psychosocial therapy. In 2023, 230 psycho-social counseling sessions were conducted, of which 32 were group and 198 were individual with each individual separately considered by the expert team of the "Open Gate/La Strada" Association. Two of the individuals accommodated at the Center during 2023 attended a course on decorative nail care at the Kocho Racin Workers' University. Five (5) of the protégés who had not started the educational process were enrolled in the Primary School for Adults "Makarenko" and continued their attendance in subsequent grades, one protégé was enrolled in the first grade in the same school, one attended regular classes in secondary education, one the protégé attended a regular educational process in a primary school, but at the moment the visit to the same has been interrupted due to security reasons and she will finish the school year by taking a class exam at the end of the school year. One protégé completed the 9th grade.

In the current year, **the mobile teams** contacted, informed and referred a total of **562 users** (302 male and 260 female), of which 434 were domestic citizens and 128 foreign citizens. Out of the total number of contacted persons, **4 victims of human trafficking were identified by the Operational Team** (4 domestic citizens, female children), 39 persons from vulnerable categories, 17 domestic and 22 foreign citizens (23 male and 16 female) and 519 vulnerable without risk of human trafficking, 413 domestic citizens and 106 foreign citizens (279 male and 240 female).

MZMP conducted regular field visits that covered 479 vulnerable people. During the visits, a screening of the vulnerability and possible risk of human trafficking was done, and according to the needs of the vulnerable categories, adequate support and legal assistance was given.

Through the IOM Fund for Direct Assistance to Vulnerable Categories of Migrants, a total of 164 migrants were assisted with direct medical assistance.

During 2023, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" implemented the social assistance program within the "Vizbegovo" Reception Center for Asylum Seekers, where it provided direct assistance and support to a total of 175 asylum seekers, of which 75 were men, 45 were women and 55 children (6 unaccompanied). In addition, the team of the association provided continuous psychosocial assistance, emotional support, psychological counseling as well as education on prevention and protection from human trafficking..

3.3 LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND MIGRANTS

In 2023, the association "Open Gate/La Strada" provided legal assistance for **nine (9) victims of human trafficking, two (2) of which were identified in the current year**, represented in the proceedings before the public prosecutor. In the current seven (7) cases from the previous years, legal assistance and representation at the court hearing was provided, for three (3) victims a procedure for compensation of damage was initiated, and for one (1) case there is active communication with another country (from where the offender is) to provide additional evidence.

By **agreement, damages were collected for one (1) victim** (the proceedings against other defendants are ongoing), one person was awarded damages with a judgment, for two persons a procedure was initiated for the execution of compensations, and two victims were not awarded non-material damage during the criminal proceedings, for which they are directed to exercise this right in civil proceedings.

- **The Macedonian Young Lawyers Association** provided legal counseling and representation before competent authorities 12 times in the criminal proceedings of 4 identified victims of human trafficking. Additionally, they submitted 3 requests for free secondary legal assistance to the Ministry of Justice for 3 victims. Within the framework of the project supported by UNHCR, MZMP provided legal information to 717 migrants.
- **UNHCR** provides continuous support to the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of labour and social policy in the implementation of the SOP for dealing with unaccompanied foreign children and the SOP for dealing with vulnerable categories of foreign persons by providing access to legal aid.

4. INVESTIGATION AND CRIMINAL PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND SMUGGLING OF MIGRANTS

4.1 PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

4.1.1 Trafficking in human beings/child

- **Ministry of Interior**[95]

In 2023, an increase in the number of conducted investigations was observed, as well as a positive result in the detection of cases of the crimes of human trafficking and child trafficking.

After the identified cases by the Ministry of Interior/NESKMTL, 11 investigations were conducted against 50 perpetrators, (41 males and 9 female), while 5 **criminal charges** were filed under Article 418-d, against 37 persons (31 male and 6 female). Two foreign citizens (1 male and 1 female citizens of the Republic of Serbia) have been identified among the perpetrators. Out of the total number of perpetrators, 23 people are users of sexual services.

In addition, in one (1) of the investigations, two people were reported for the crimes of "Production and distribution of child pornography" (Article 193 paragraph 3) and "Sexual abuse of a weak person" (Article 187 paragraph 2 paragraph 1) from the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia. According to the type of exploitation, in one (1) of the criminal charges the victim was forced into a forced marriage, while in the other three (3) cases the victims were forced into sexual exploitation.

The "Red Button" application, which enables citizens to electronically report information of a specific crime, or information related to child abuse, child trafficking and hate crime, operates within the Ministry of the Interior - Department for Reporting and Coordination of Situation. During 2023, two reports of human trafficking were received through the "Red Button" application.

- **The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption** (PPO for GOKK)

In 2023 on the basis of notification submitted by the Ministry of the Interior to the PPO for GOKK, a total of **eight (8) cases** that are in **the pre-investigation procedure**, of which **seven (7) cases** are for the crime of Trafficking in a child 418-g and **one (1) case** for the crime of Human Trafficking under Article 418-a of the Criminal Code of the the Republic of North Macedonia.

In these eight (8) cases, in one (1) case, a public prosecutor's decision-resolution was made, and the same was submitted for competent action before the Bitola Public Prosecutor's Office, in two (2) cases, a public prosecutor's decision-resolution was made, which established that there is no elements of the crime

[95]Data obtained from the Department of Criminal Intelligence and Analysis.

Trafficking in a child 418-d and the crime Trafficking in people according to art. 418-a of the Criminal Code of the the Republic of North Macedonia, while the remaining five (5) cases are being investigated.

In the area of human trafficking in 2023, 5 cases were filed against 37 persons, of which:

- In one case, an order was passed for an investigation against one (1) person for the crime of "Trafficking with a child" from Art. 418 of the CC of the Republic of North Macedonia, which has **not yet been completed**.
- In another case, after an investigative procedure was carried out against four (4) persons for the crime of "Trafficking with a child" under Art. 418-d, the case has been **transferred** to the competent action of the PPO Skopje.
- In the third case, for one (1) person for the crime of "Trafficking with a child" according to Art. 418-d paragraph 3 vv art. 45 of the Criminal Code due to the unavailability of the authorities, an Order **was passed to stop the investigation**.

In three cases, after an investigative procedure, **3 indictments were filed against 27 persons** (3 female and 24 male, all citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia) for the following crimes: "Trafficking in a child" from Art. 418-d of the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia, "Sexual abuse of a weak person" according to Art. 187 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia and the criminal offense "Production and distribution of child pornography" from Art. 193 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia.

- In one case, one indictment was filed against one (1) person for the crime of "Production and distribution of child pornography" under Article 193 paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code of the the Republic of North Macedonia,
- In the second case for one person (1) for the crime "Trafficking with a child" from art. 418-d, an Order was passed to stop the investigative procedure and for one person (1) for the crime of "Trafficking with a child" from Article 193, paragraph 3, a Decision was passed to dismiss the criminal complaint.

We note that in all cases from Article 418 d "Trafficking in a child", the PPO for GOKK acted in accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Law and the Law on Justice for Children which provide for special measures for procedural protection when dealing with child/witness victims of human trafficking.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">2023
IDENTIFIED 7 VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Children
6</td><td>Adults
1</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Domestic
6</td><td>Foreign
/</td><td>Domestic
1</td><td>Foreign
/</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Type of exploitation</td><td colspan="2">Type of exploitation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sexual exploitation
4</td><td>Begging
1</td><td>Labour exploitation and begging
1</td><td colspan="2">Sexual exploitation
1</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Presumed victims of human trafficking are 9 children, one of whom is male and 8 are girls, of which one female child is a citizen of the Republic of Serbia with a temporary residence permit.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">During 2023, 11 investigations under Article 418-a and 418-d were conducted and 5 criminal charges were filed against 37 perpetrators (31 male and 6 female).</td></tr>
</table>

Table 1: Charted presentation of identified victims of human trafficking

4.1.2 Action controls in catering facilities

During 2023, the Ministry of Interior conducted 38 action controls in catering facilities with the aim of detecting foreign nationals who are illegally working and staying in our country. Relevant to the location, 26 controls were carried out in the area of Tetovo, and 12 in Gostivar. A total of 185 foreign nationals were found in the facilities, of which 29 foreign nationals (11 from Albania, nine from Ukraine, four from Kosovo and four from Serbia and one from Slovakia) were found to have committed offenses in accordance with the Law on Foreigners (unreported stay and illegal work). The competent courts in Tetovo and Gostivar imposed fines and measures "expulsion of a foreigner from the territory of the the Republic of North Macedonia" with a ban on entry for a period of six months to one year, while the rest of the foreign nationals were subject to a regulated residence and work permits.

4.1.3 Smuggling of migrants

- **Ministry of Interior**[96]

As for the crime of "**smuggling of migrants**" under Article 418-b of the Criminal Code of the the Republic of North Macedonia, **96 crimes** were registered (of which nine were for "complicity" and four for "assisting").

[96] Data obtained from the Department of Criminal Intelligence and Analysis.

Criminal prosecution measures have been taken against **119 persons (24 are foreign nationals)**, all male and of legal age. In the current year, 29 people were also reported for "organizing a group and encouraging the commissioning of acts of human trafficking, child trafficking and smuggling of migrants" and "smuggling of migrants."

During 2023, NESKMTL conducted 6 investigations under Article 418-b and 418-c, of which an organized international criminal group was suppressed. 5 criminal charges have been filed against 27 people (among them one person from Iraq with a travel document from Germany). The remaning are all citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia.

❖ **State of affairs in illegal migration**

Migration flows and illegal movements along the Western-Balkan route, which for a long time has been under direct pressure from the movement of migrants from the Middle East, represent a continuous security challenge for the region that surrounds us, including our country.

North Macedonia is part of the route that migrants use to reach the EU. The intensified controls last year resulted in the prevention **of almost 14,000 attempts for illegal crossing** through the country, and the activities and the need to address them remain the top challenge and priority in the work of the police, despite the fact that **they have a reduced trend by 49%** compared to 2023.

At the border with:	2023	2022	+/-
HELLENIC REPUBLIC	12.477	24.968	-50%
REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA	54	111	-51,3%
REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	1.405	2.270	-38,1%
REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO	17	41	-58,5%
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA	1	4	-75%
TOTAL	13.954	27.391	-49%

Table 2: Comparative view of prevented attempts for illegal crossings 2023/2022

The border with Greece is an entry point into the country **with more than 12,000 entry attempts** prevented, while the border with Serbia is still used for

exit. In this part, over 1,400 entry attempts were prevented, while a small part of the attempts were prevented at the borders with Albania, Kosovo and Bulgaria, which are mostly used by the local population. As per the country of origin, the most numerous attempts are made by persons originating from: Syria – 5,500; Morocco – 2,865; Afghanistan – 1,022 and from Pakistan – 740 attempts. The past three months have seen an increased movement of migrants from Nepal, Palestine, and Sierra Leone.

The mode used by migrants coming from countries in the Eastern and Southern Asia region remains the same, without significant changes. They arrive in Turkey by using public transportation or private vehicles (cars or minivans), where they are supported by criminal smuggling networks that organize transportation for them from Istanbul to the land border with Greece, from where they head to Thessaloniki, and with cargo trains or buses they disembark near the Republic of North Macedonia border. After crossing our territory, migrants settle in improvised camps near the border with Greece or near the roads where they are picked up by smugglers, from where they continue their journey to other countries of the Western Balkans (mostly to Serbia or Croatia).

❖ **Smuggling of migrants**

Illegal migration and the activities of criminal groups are very dynamic and widespread. Smuggling of migrants is carried out on the territory of several countries, with the Western Balkan route largely used by migrants to reach Western Europe. Smugglers use the flexibility of the Balkan route and create new modes of smuggling using sophisticated technological means.

In the current year, **the smuggling of 1,334 migrants** was prevented in **111 cases detected**, the majority of which are migrants originating from Syria-915, from Pakistan-89, Congo-81 and from Nepal-73.

A **24-member organized criminal group** was also suppressed - part of an international channel through which the smuggling of migrants from Greece to Hungary and from Bulgaria to Serbia was organized for a long period of time.

❖ **Modus operandi**

Criminal groups that smuggle migrants operate in a certain geographical area of the country, mostly in the Gevgelija-Valandovo, Strumica and Kumanovo-Lipkovo regions. The groups involved in this criminal area are often polycriminal (involved in criminal activities related to illegal drug trade, smuggling of excise goods, falsification of documents). Apart from Macedonian citizens, foreign nationals also appear as leaders, or so called "catchaci" established at a higher scale in the hierarchy, originating from the Middle East, residing in the territory of the Republic of Greece and the Republic of Serbia.

Persons involved in migrant smuggling who are part of organized criminal groups cooperate with each other in carrying out criminal activities. When transporting migrants, criminal groups use passenger and cargo vehicles, some of which have foreign license plates, inscriptions with advertising material of

companies. They also use freight vehicles to transport people, in which they have made improvised bunkers.

Digital mobile applications are used for online communication between migrants and criminal networks, with migrants deleting contact information and details from their mobile devices in order not to reveal their connection to criminal networks, fearing from criminal structures or beacause of the use of the web network on the part of their friends or relatives for their future travels.

❖ **Routes of movement**

Active migrant smuggling routes in the southern part of the country are the traffic route Gevgelija-Demir Kapija, the regional road Demir Kapija-Negotino, the old road Demir Kapija-Gradsko), the traffic route Valandovo-Strumica-Radoviš-Kumanovo. Places where migrants are left in the northern part of the country are mostly parking spaces at gas stations along the highway Kumanovo-Tabanovce border crossing point, the villages of Recica, Tabanovce, Kosturnik, Nato junction, etc.

❖ **Number of individuals accommodated in the Reception Centre for foreigners**

In the current year, 558 people were accommodated in the Reception Center for Foreigners in Skopje, of which 514 were male and 44 were female. According to the country of origin, most of the people are from Syria-309, Congo-50, Pakistan-36, 24 each from Nepal and Turkey, 21 from Afghanistan, 16 from Iraq, 13 from Kosovo, 12 from India and a smaller number from other countries. In terms of age, the most numerous are people aged 18 to 35 years - 342, followed by 97 people aged 36 to 59 years, 46 aged 14 to 17 years, two aged over 60 and 71 people aged from 0 to 13 years.

- **The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption (OJO GOKK)**

In 2023, OJO for GOKK for the crime "Smuggling of migrants" according to Art. **418-b** paragraph 2 and 4 of the riminal Code has submitted a total of **91 indictments** against a total of **122 persons**.

While for the crime of "Organizing a group and inciting the commissioning of the acts of human trafficking, trafficking of minors and smuggling of migrants" under Art. 418-c from the Criminal Code, there **was 1 indictment** submitted **against 24 persons**.

During 2023, **court verdicts** judgments were passed for **114 persons in 82 cases** for the crime of Smuggling migrants under Art. 418-b paragraph 2 and paragraph 4 and "Organizing a group and encouraging the commissioning of the acts of trafficking in human beings, trafficking in minors and smuggling of migrants" under Article 418-c of the Criminal Code.

4.2 CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

For crimes related to human trafficking and illegal migration during 2023, the Basic Court Skopje 1- Skopje received a total of **101 cases**, in which **168 persons** were indicted.

In 2023, 95 cases were enforceable in which a **prison sentence was imposed on 97 persons**, while a suspended sentence was imposed on 38 persons, are valid. The duration of **enforceable prison sentences** ranged from 1 to 15 years in prison.[97]

In one case, a police officer was convicted under Article 418-b with a prison sentence of 4 years.

Six persons who claim to be subject to damage have requested compensation, for which two persons have been awarded damages, and four persons have been referred to a civil dispute.

There are no verdicts that result in the closure of a business or organization.

In six cases handled by the Court during 2023, confiscation was awarded in the amount of 248,555.00 euros and 31,500.00 MKD.

Article from the Criminal Code	Received			Closed			Effective			Decision per person		Open/ postponed
	Cases	Indicted individuals		Cases	Indicted individuals		Cases	Indicted individuals		Imprisonment	Conditional sentence	
		m	f		m	f		m	f			
Article 418-a	0	0	0	3	6	2	1	4	2	6	0	0
Article 418-b	90	110	0	85	107	0	77	97	0	65	32	23
Article 418-c	4	20	1	12	51	0	10	20	2	16	6	2
Article 418-d	7	33	4	6	7	3	7	6	4	10	0	3
Total	**101**	163	5	**106**	171	5	**95**	127	8	**97**	**38**	**28**
		168			**176**			**135**				

Table 4: Overview of court cases and indicted individuals[98]

[97]Amount of imposed prison sentences for criminal offences:
Art. 418-b: up to 1 year for 6 persons; from 1-2 years for 11 people; from 2-3 years for 8 people; from 3-4 years for 18 people; from 4-5 years for 11 people; from 5-6 years for 6 people; from 6-7 years for 3 persons; 8 years for 1 person; 10 years for 1 person.
Art. 418-c: up to 1 year for 2 persons; from 2-3 years for 2 people; from 3-4 years for 4 people; from 4-5 years for 4 people; from 8-9 years for 4 people.
Art. 418-d: 2 years imprisonment; from 3-4 years for 3 persons; from 5-6 years for 2 persons; from 7-8 years for 3 persons; and **one person was sentenced to 15 years in prison**.
Art. 418-a: 5-6 years of imprisonment for 3 persons.
[98]Data submitted through a search in AKMIS - the system for managing court cases in the Basic Criminal Court Skopje 01.01.2023-31.12.2023.

5. BUDGET

The implemented activities were realized in partnership between the Commission, institutions, international organizations and citizens' associations. Donors and partners have contributed to the implementation of activities to combat human trafficking and illegal migration in accordance with the National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Child Trafficking for 2021-2025.

Ministry of Interior	473.368,00 MKD
Reception centre for foreigners	2.577.500,00 MKD
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for Centre for victims of trafficking in human beings [99]	2.655.072,00 MKD
Citizen association[100]	27.385.750,00 MKD
International organizations[101]	1.676.645,00 EUR

Table 5: Implemented activities through funds provided by institutions, international organizations and citizens' associations

[99]The Ministry of Labbour and Social Policy for the operation of the Center for victims of human trafficking has provided funds in the amount of 2,655,072 denars for 2023 to finance the service and an Administrative Agreement has been concluded for the realization of the allocation of funds for the provision of social services for the Center for temporary residence victims of human trafficking between the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and the Association of Citizens Against Violence and Human Trafficking "Open Gate/La Strada ".

[100]Citizens' Associations: "Open Gate/La Strada" provided funds of 26,568,000.00 mkd for activities intended for human trafficking. "For a happy childhood" carried out the largest number of activities on a volunteer basis, with the logistical support of the Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje, while funds of 209,763.00 were realized for the prepared documents; the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association or the implementation of the project activities supported by the regional project PAKT, a total of 607,987.00 mkd was spent.

[101] International Organizations: The International Organization for Migration IOM Skopje within the framework of regional and national projects/activities financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the European Commission provided project budgets of around EUR 150,000.00, for the activities carried out at the regional level by UNODC, USD 211,000.00 was provided or EUR 194,955.00. Considering that the activities are implemented within the framework of larger regional projects, the orientation amount of ICMPD for the budget and the implemented activities is EUR 230,000.00. The office of the Council of Europe in Skopje provided EUR 120,000.00 through the project of the Horizontal Instrument for the Western Balkans, through the Regional Project PaKT of GIZ amounts to around EUR 928,240.00 with which activities are realized for the representatives of all 6 countries of the Western Balkans, including from the Republic of North Macedonia, in addition to these funds, the GIZ project allocated around 23,250.00 EUR, which refer exclusively to activities related to the Republic of North Macedonia, that is, they are outside the thematic packages of the project; Within its regional activities, MARRI spent a total of EUR 30,200.00, i.e. 1,844,476.00 MKD.

6. PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR 2024

- Provisioning of a new facility/premises for the operation of a center for victims of human trafficking according to international standards;
- Support for the continuous work of the 5 mobile teams for the identification, referral and assistance of victims and presumed victims of human trafficking and establishing additional 3 mobile teams;
- Adoption of the Standard Operative Procedures (SOP) for dealing with unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of foreigners;
- Development of an online training module for dealing with unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of foreigners, which training will be conducted through the e-platform for training of the Institute for Social Affair;
- Developing a pocket version of the amended SOPs for dealing with unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of foreigners, for which a preparation for printing will be made and shared with police officers and social workers;
- Development of an Analysis on child trafficking for the purpose of begging, labor exploitation and forced marriages and an Analysis on the application of free legal assistance to victims of human trafficking;
- Capacity building and cooperation for the functionality of the Operational Team for coordination and management of human trafficking cases;
- Implementation of multidisciplinary trainings at all levels in order to strengthen the capacities of professionals in order to recognize and improve the identification of victims and presumed victims of human trafficking;
- Capacity building for stakeholders involved in the National Referral Mechanism;
- Implementation of training on SOP for human trafficking and SOP for dealing with unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of foreigners intended for police officers and social workers;
- Implementation of trainings intended for lawyers, judges and public prosecutors, police officers and social workers.