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

ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR COMBATTING TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

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1. SUPPORT FRAMEWORK

1.1 COORDINATING STRUCTURES

The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration[1] (the Commission) is a body that unites and coordinates all stakeholders involved in the fight against human trafficking. The Commission is led by the National Coordinator[2], and includes two deputies, one responsible for activities in the area of combating human trafficking, and the other for activities related to illegal migration, as well as a secretary and other Commission members.[3]

Since 2003, the Commission has operated with working bodies: the Secretariat[4], which supports the implementation of the Commission's decisions, and the Subgroup for Combating Child Trafficking (the Subgroup), which monitors the specific needs of child victims, safeguarding their interests and rights.[5]

Throughout the year, the Commission and its bodies maintained regular contact with members and collaborators at the national[6] and regional levels, during which there were discussions and solutions and commitments were proposed for improving efforts in the areas of trafficking in human beings/children and illegal migration. At the same time, they continuously implemented activities foreseen in the National Strategy and National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration, as well as the National Action Plan for Combating Child Trafficking for the period 2021–2025 (NAP)).[7]

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[1] Decision published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 18/2001, 82/2015, 18/2019 and in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 240/2020 and 218/24.
the "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 240/24

[3] Members of the Commission are representatives from: the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade (MFAFT), Ministry of Social Affairs and Youth Demography (MSPDY), Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Ministry of Education and Science (MoES)/Bureau for Development of Education (BDE), Ministry of Health (MoH), the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption, the Basic Criminal Court Skopje, the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI), and the Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (EARNM). The latest amendments were made in 2024 and published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia", No. 240/24

[4] There are also members who are representatives of: international organisations, civil society organisations, and experts from governmental institutions: MoI-NUCTHBSM, MLSP-NRM, Public Health Institution – Institute of Public Health of RNM, U.S. Embassy, ICMPD, OSCE, IOM, UNODC, UNHCR, GIZ, RC-MARRI, Programme Office of the Council of Europe, MYLA, CSO against violence and trafficking in human beings "Open Gate – La Strada", Citizens' association "For a Happy Childhood", SOS "Detsko Selo" and Red Cross of RNM.

[5] The Commission is chaired by the Head of the Sector for Equal Opportunities within the MLSP-NRM, and the members are as follows: MoI-NUSSMTHB, BDE, Council of Europe Program Office, ICMPD, UNODC, OSCE, IOM, GIZ, UNICEF, Associations "Open Gate – La Strada", "For a Happy Childhood", SOS "Detsko Selo" and deputy Ombudsman as an external member/observer.

[6] A meeting was held during the previous year on 10 May 2024.

[7] The Strategy and the NAP were adopted on 20 April 2021 by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The **National Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling of Migrants** (NUCTHBSM) within the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) continuously carried out its core task in 2024, focused on detecting and prosecuting perpetrators of the criminal offences of trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling. It consistently acted in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for dealing with victims of trafficking in human beings, whereby all identified presumed victims of trafficking in human beings (PVTHB) were reported to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) for victims of trafficking, and it conducted security risk assessments of the victims and referred them to the Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (the Centre/CVTHB).

Police officers from the National Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Smuggling of Migrants (NUCTHBSM) are part of the Task Force and participate in information exchange through established channels such as Europol, Interpol, SELEC, Frontex, liaison officers, and related units from the Ministries of Interior of countries in the region, and they actively take part in the Western Balkan Task Force on Migrant Smuggling, contributing to the detection of international organised criminal groups.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, Demography and Youth (MSPDY), through its Sector for Equal Opportunities, as the coordinator of the National Referral Mechanism (NRM), continued its cooperation with the Commission in 2024, coordinating with members of the Subgroup, the Centres for Social Work (CSWs), the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI), the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO OCC), the MoIA/NUCTHBSM, the Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, and relevant civil society organisations (CSOs). The NRM monitors and coordinates the activities in 30 municipalities across the Republic of North Macedonia, where the CSWs play a crucial role in the entire process—from identification to resocialisation and reintegration of victims and child victims of trafficking in human beings. The Subgroup is chaired by a representative from the MSPDY/NRM, who during 2024 oversaw the implementation of activities in accordance with the Operational Plan for Combating Child Trafficking 2023–2025.

The Operational Team for Coordination, Monitoring, and Case Management of Trafficking in Human Beings, Formal Identification of Victims, and Their Status (Operational Team)[8] continued its work throughout 2024 and held three coordination meetings[9] aimed at identifying victims, during which decisions regarding their status were made and the Team also coordinated and monitored cases of trafficking in human beings/children whose formal identification had already been completed.

[8] Established in 2022 by decision of the Commission.
[9] On 10 May 2024, 16 September 2024, and 13 December 2024

The Commission maintains continuous coordination with the **National Rapporteur for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration,**[10] exchanging necessary information on implemented activities and providing data required for the preparation of the report by the National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings of the Republic of North Macedonia.

1.2 LEGAL AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

In June 2024, the Directive (EU) 2024/1712 amending Directive 2011/36/EU on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings and protecting its victims was adopted. The Directive was published in the Official Journal of the EU on 24 June 2024, following the proposal submitted by the European Commission in December 2022.

In 2024, the Rulebook on the manner, scope, norms, and standards for providing the social service of temporary accommodation, and on the premises, resources, staff, and necessary documentation for the Centre for Temporary Accommodation[11] entered into force, in accordance with the Law on Social Protection. This applies to the Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings and serves as the basis for adopting the Decision on Determining the Prices of Social Services in residential care, out-of-family protection, professional assistance and support, and temporary accommodation for the year 2024.[12] This Decision defines the cost of providing temporary accommodation services at the Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, in line with the Methodology for Calculating Service Prices based on the norms and standards for delivering social services.[13]

In efforts to regulate procedures for dealing with foreigners, in 2023, UNHCR provided support for the revision of the **Standard Operating Procedures for Dealing with Unaccompanied Foreign Children and Other Vulnerable Categories of Persons**, which were adopted by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia on 27 August 2024.

With the aim of regulating procedures for dealing with foreigners, in 2023 and 2024 UNHCR provided support for the development of **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for handling individuals travelling within mixed migration flows** and **SOPs for the accommodation of foreigners, asylum seekers, and migrants in the Reception Centre for Foreigners**. These two documents are expected to be adopted in the upcoming period. Additionally, in cooperation with the Basic Court in Gevgelija, UNHCR supported the development of **Procedures for Public Prosecutors and the Court in Cases**

[10] As of 1 December 2019, a representative from the Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia has been appointed as the National Rapporteur.
[11] Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 91/21.
[12] https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/pravilnici.nspx.
[13] Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No.264/19.

Involving Persons Travelling in Mixed Migration Flows, with the adoption process currently underway.

Amendments to the Law on Free Legal Aid are currently underway, with representatives from the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA) participating in the working group, who advocate for strengthening access to justice for victims of trafficking in human beings, particularly children.

On 13 May 2024, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration adopted a **Decision to establish the Advocacy Group of Survivors – Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings**[14]. With this Decision, an independent Group was established to support the Commission in creating an effective, inclusive, and comprehensive national response to trafficking in human beings. The Group aims to ensure the direct participation of survivors in the development of policies, mechanisms, and activities concerning their protection, assistance, and resocialisation. The Group is composed of three members—survivors of trafficking in human beings—nominated by the CSO "Open Gate – La Strada", as well as a coordinator who acts as a contact person and participates in the work of the Commission as needed.

Through this Group, the systematic inclusion of survivors' experiences and perspectives is enabled in:

- Identifying weaknesses in existing protection mechanisms;
- Defining recommendations and suggestions during the amendment or adoption of relevant legislation;
- Providing opinions on strategies, action plans, and other programme documents;
- Participating in the preparation of testimonial materials and other research tools;
- Developing informational and educational materials, campaigns, questionnaires, case studies, and petitions;
- Supporting activities related to advocacy, raising public awareness, and the prevention of trafficking in human beings.

The establishment of this Group represents a significant step toward adopting a human rights-based approach and ensuring the active participation of stakeholders, with a focus on victims and their needs. This initiative reinforces the Commission's commitment to an inclusive, transparent, and effective response to the challenges of trafficking in human beings in the Republic of North Macedonia.

1.3 INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING

The Western Balkan Task Force was established during the Ministerial Conference dedicated to addressing migration-related challenges in the region,

[14] In accordance with Conclusion No 2 of the meeting held on 30.06.2023,

held on 7 June 2018 in Sarajevo. It focuses on the current situation in the Western Balkans in the field of illegal migration, particularly regarding real-time exchange of intelligence with involved partners (EU Member States as well as third countries), the conduct of joint investigations and operations, and the implementation of the principle of visiting officers. The meetings of the Task Force are held on a continuous basis, and since 2018 it has been led by Austria. As an independent operational action, it forms part of the Operational Action Plan of EMPACT, under the priority area "Migrant Smuggling."

- **The Association "Open Gate / La Strada"** continued its active contribution in 2024 within the work of thematic networks alongside other civil society organisations, participating in the following events:
  - 15–19 April 2024, Skopje – The Association hosted the meeting of the Clean Clothes Campaign and the European Coalition. The event brought together over 70 professionals from more than 20 countries, including representatives of trade unions and civil society organisations from Asia and Africa. This meeting marked a significant moment for sharing experiences and developing strategies to advance workers' rights. The main topic was just transition in global supply chains in the textile and footwear industry. This initiative remains central to the campaign for fair wages and improved labour standards.
  - 24–26 June 2024, Paris – As a member of La Strada International (LSI)[15], the Association participated in an event discussing key challenges, including the integration of individuals with experience of human trafficking into the development of activities, policies, and project implementation; support for Ukrainian refugees; European referral mechanisms; victim protection in the context of new EU policies; and the role of civil society organisations in legal protection.
  - 3–4 September 2024, Hanover, Germany – The Association attended the meeting of the European Regional Coordination Body of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC). Discussions focused on activities aligned with the CCC strategy, particularly evaluating the role and effectiveness of the European coordinator.
  - 15–18 October 2024, Bangkok – The Association participated in the 30th anniversary of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW).[16] The event gathered experts, activists, and organisations addressing human trafficking, migrant rights, and labour exploitation. The Association contributed to discussions on survivor-centred approaches and emphasised the importance of legal reforms and systemic changes in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

[15] The Platform Against Trafficking in Human Beings, which operates from a human rights-based perspective to support trafficked persons.

[16] The conference celebrated three decades of GAATW's advocacy and provided a platform for knowledge exchange, reflection on current challenges, and the development of strategies for future global action in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

1.4 INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

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

In 2022, the third evaluation round for the Republic of North Macedonia was conducted in accordance with Article 38(4) of the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, by the **Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA).** The visit was of significant importance for RNM, as it resulted in the preparation of the third Country Report on the implementation of the Convention, which was **published on 24 March 2023**.[17] In 2023, an Action Plan for the Implementation of the GRETA Recommendations 2023–2025 was developed and is being continuously updated every six months.

On 21 June 2024, in Strasbourg, France, the 34th Meeting of the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was held. The meeting was attended by the designated contact point from the Ministry of Interior for cooperation with the Council of Europe on issues related to combating trafficking in human beings. At the meeting, GRETA's reports were presented and adopted for the countries evaluated during the reporting period.

On 29 November 2024, in Strasbourg, France, the 35th Meeting of the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings was held. The MoIA contact point with the Council of Europe on anti-trafficking issues took part in the meeting. During the session, new members of the group of experts on action against trafficking in human beings-GRETA - were elected, and the measures and activities undertaken as outlined in the conducted evaluations were presented.

- ***Network of Coordinators for combatting trafficking in human beings***

- On 17 May 2024, within the framework of the Training of Trainers held on the topic: “Digital Investigations and Victim-Centred Interviewing Techniques in Proceedings”, a meeting was held with National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and representatives of Task Forces from the Western Balkan region.
- On 7 June 2024, the National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings from Southeast Europe and their representatives held their 18th meeting in Zagreb, Croatia.[18] The meeting focused on presenting and discussing new policies, trends, and priorities in the fight against trafficking in human beings

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

[18] The meeting was attended by twenty (20) coordinators and designated representatives for combating trafficking in human beings from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, and Slovenia, as well as international experts.

that emerged over the past year, both at the national level and within the European Union (EU)).[19]

- On 17 May 2024, in Budva, Montenegro, the Annual Meeting of the Task Forces for Combating Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings from the Western Balkan region and the National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was held.[20] The regular meeting was attended by the National Coordinator, representatives from the Department for Organised Crime of the MoIA, as well as representatives from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO OCC) (5f).
- On 12–13 September 2024, in Vienna, Austria, representatives from North Macedonia participated in the Annual Meeting of National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Other Equivalent Mechanisms. The meeting was organised and held through joint cooperation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE.
- The Commission actively participated in the process of drafting the new **Strategic Document of the Network of National Coordinators for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in South-East Europe (NATC SEE).**[21] This process was initiated by the Network Chair, Slovenia, and ICMPD, as 2024 marks the final year of the current strategy. As a first step, NATC SEE members were invited to complete a questionnaire focusing on key aspects such as the added value of the Network, strategic priorities, implementation of the 2020–2024 Strategic Document, and the operationalisation of the new Strategy.

❖ ***Other international activities***

- On 2–3 October 2024 in Saraevo, through the **Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje**, support was provided for the participation of 15 participants (4 men and 11 women) from the Republic of North Macedonia at a Regional Conference on ICT and Trafficking in Human Beings (15 participants from MKD).
- **The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** organised five regional conferences and trainings on various thematic issues related to trafficking in human beings and migrant smuggling, as part of the Regional Trafficking in Persons Initiative in South-Eastern Europe. The following activities were supported by the Commission:
  - 5–6 March 2024, Chișinău, Moldova – Regional Meeting of the Expert Group titled: "Countering Labour Exploitation and Trafficking in Human Beings, Including Trafficking Triggered by Migration Due to Armed Conflicts in

[19] The meeting was organised by the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Republic of Croatia, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of Slovenia, as the chair of the Network, and the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), acting as the Network Secretariat.

[20] The meeting was held as part of the Training of Trainers, supported by the IOM project "Western Balkans Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants – WBJAST", funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

[21] *More information on the activities of the Network is available here: Network of Anti-Trafficking Coordinators of South-East Europe (NATC SEE) - ICMPD.

South-Eastern Europe." Participants included the National Coordinator and a Prosecutor from North Macedonia (2 women);

- 8–9 May 2024, Croatia – Regional Expert Conference (REC): "Addressing Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation in South-Eastern Europe – The Way Forward Toward a Whole-of-Society Response." Two representatives (2 women) from the Basic Criminal Court and a civil society organisation participated;
- 12–13 June 2024, Montenegro – Regional Workshop: "Addressing the Use of Modern Technologies to Facilitate Trafficking in Human Beings and the Challenges Related to the Use of Digital Evidence in Trafficking Investigations in South-Eastern Europe." Two male representatives from North Macedonia attended);
- On 3–4 October 2024, a Regional Workshop was held in the Republic of North Macedonia for public prosecutors from South-East Europe specialised in prosecuting migrant smuggling, trafficking in human beings, and related criminal offences. The workshop was titled: "Enhancing Investigations and Prosecutions within INTERPOL's Global Operation LIBERTERRA 2". The regional workshop was part of INTERPOL's global operation LIBERTERRA 2 and provided support to the Operational Coordination Unit established in Skopje during the operational days from 29 September to 4 October 2024. The workshop brought together countries of origin, transit, and destination from the broader South-East European region and the European Union (EU), with the aim of strengthening investigations initiated during the pre-operational and operational phases of LIBERTERRA 2 and prosecuting suspects involved in organised crime, including migrant smuggling and human trafficking, with a focus on sexual exploitation. Victim-centred investigative and prosecutorial approaches for enhanced protection were also discussed. Eight representatives (3 men / 5 women) from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption and the Ministry of Internal Affairs participated in the workshop.
- On 23–24 October 2024, a Regional Conference was held in Thessaloniki, Greece, titled: "The Nexus Between Trafficking in Human Beings and Migration Flows, with a Focus on Migrant Smuggling in South-East Europe". The conference brought together countries of origin, transit, and destination from the wider South-East European region (SEE) and the European Union (EU), with the aim of addressing current challenges in tackling the links between trafficking in human beings and migration flows, with a particular focus on migrant smuggling. Two representatives (1 man / 1 woman) from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia participated in the conference).

➢ **The International Organization for Migration (IOM)**, within its project activities during 2024, organised the following events:

- 13–17 May 2024, Budva, Montenegro – Regional Training of Trainers on the topic "Digital Investigations and Interview Techniques for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings."[22] Participants were awarded trainer certificates and will have the opportunity to share their knowledge with colleagues at a training to be held in 2025. The training was supported by IOM and attended by four representatives from the Department for Organised Crime of the MoIA (2 men / 2 women), as well as two representatives (2 women) from the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO OCC).
- 18 September 2024 – In cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden, IOM organised a two-day workshop on "Exchange of Good Practices and Knowledge in the Fight Against Trafficking in Human Beings", which brought together 25 key stakeholders in anti-trafficking efforts (17 women / 8 men). The workshop was attended by the Swedish National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings, Ms. Jana Davidson.
- 14 October 2024 – A regional conference was held on the topic: "Liberalisation of Labour Market Access: The Potential of Orderly Migration and Prevention of Human Trafficking Risks."[23] The conference focused on preventing human trafficking and labour exploitation, as well as strengthening the protection of foreign workers at risk of abuse and poor working conditions. Four female representatives from the Republic of North Macedonia participated in the event.
- On 10 December 2024, a one-day meeting was held on the topic: "Coordination Meeting of Mobile Teams for the Identification and Referral of Vulnerable Categories of Persons, Including Presumed and Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings."[24] A total of 25 participants (16 women / 9 men) took part in the meeting, including representatives from the five mobile teams and key institutions involved in combating trafficking in human beings, which aimed to coordinate field activities of mobile team practitioners and strengthen their cooperation.

➢ On 14 February 2024, a representative of **MYLA** participated in the pre-session of the fourth cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review (UPR) for the Republic of North Macedonia. MYLA presented its conclusions and findings concerning stateless persons, refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and persons serving prison sentences. The organisation also presented its recommendations to the permanent missions of UN Member States, aimed at improving the exercising of human rights through concrete actions taken by the national authorities.

[22] The training was conducted within the framework of the project "Western Balkans Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants – (WBJAST)," funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.
[23] Within the framework of the regional project "Western Balkans Joint Actions Against Smuggling of Migrants – (WBJAST)," funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, in Belgrade, Serbia.
[24] within the framework of the regional project "Western Balkans Integrated Border Management Capacity Building Instrument (WBIBM)," funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark.

- Throughout 2024, the **Association "Open Gate / La Strada"** participated in numerous international, regional, and national events that provided opportunities for exchanging experiences and good practices, building partnerships, and sharing expertise in the fields of human trafficking and migration:
  - 8–9 May 2024, Dubrovnik, Republic of Croatia – Regional conference **"Addressing Trafficking in Human Beings for Sexual Exploitation in South-Eastern Europe – The Way Forward Toward a Whole-of-Society Response", organised by UNODC**. The Association contributed with a presentation as part of Session 6: Effective Responses and Legal Remedies for Victims of Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation – Referral Mechanisms or Perspectives of Victim Support Services.
  - 14 May 2024 – The Association took part in the COPASAH webinar titled "**Stolen Childhood: Addressing the Impact of Early Marriage and Gender-Based Violence on Children."**[25] The webinar focused on the profound effects these issues have on children.
  - 19–21 June 2024, Vientiane, Laos – The Association participated as an expert speaker at the First ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Consultation for the development of guidelines on preventing and responding to transnational child and forced marriages. Participants included representatives from ASEAN Member State sectoral bodies, UN agencies, and civil society organisations with relevant expertise for addressing these issues.[26]
  - 16–18 September 2024 – The Association took part in the **Regional Workshop on Trafficking in Human Beings**, aimed at transferring knowledge and methodology for conducting legal analysis on the position of victims of trafficking in criminal proceedings. With a total of 12 participants[27], the workshop addressed key topics such as national referral mechanisms, legal qualifications, fair trial standards, and case studies.
  - On 30 October 2024, in Vienna, Austria, the Association participated in a conference organised by the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, on the topic **"Addressing Trafficking in Human Beings in Minority Communities through Enhanced Police–Public Partnership".**
  - On 22 November 2024, in Skopje, the Association—in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the UN Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery—organised a roundtable discussion on the topic: **"Combating Child Trafficking in North Macedonia: Ensuring the Rights and Protection of Child Victims of Trafficking".** The aim was to

[25] Together with representatives from civil society organisations from North Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Albania.

[26] The Association "Open Gate / La Strada" presented its successful practices during the session "First-Hand Experience – Listening to Those Who Have Gone Through Child and Forced Marriages."

[27] Civil society organisations from Serbia, Republic of North Macedonia, and Albania.

provide a platform for exchanging views and experiences to strengthen the rights and protection mechanisms for children who are victims of trafficking in human beings. The participation of multiple stakeholders was especially important for addressing this urgent issue, with over 40 representatives from national institutions taking part.[28]

- From 24–28 November 2024, the Association participated in the Regional Social Academy[29] **titled "Advancing Human Rights-Based Approaches, Social Inclusion, and Addressing Children and Youth at Risk in the Western Balkans,"** organised by the IRIS Network. The Regional Social Academy served as a platform for discussing and addressing key issues through a horizontal, interdisciplinary educational approach, promoting social inclusion, equality, and the protection of human rights, with a special focus on youth at risk.

The reporting year was particularly active in the area of international networking and the fight against trafficking in human beings. Representatives from the Republic of North Macedonia demonstrated continuous commitment to advancing both national and regional policies, with a focus on victim protection and intersectoral cooperation. Participation in more than 30 international and regional events significantly contributed to the exchange of good practices, strategic planning, and capacity-building at the national level.

2. PREVENTION

2.1 IDENTIFYING CAUSES OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND ILLEGAL MIGRATION

➢ **Mobile teams**

In Gevgelija, the mobile team organised two meetings attended by representatives of local communities, the Red Cross, civil society organisations, and youth organisations. The main goal was to raise public awareness and educate the local population on issues related to trafficking in human beings. A total of 24 participants (15 men / 9 women) attended the two meetings.

In Tetovo, in cooperation with the Red Cross, the mobile team carried out an awareness-raising and educational activity. On 1 November 2024, a lecture was held at "Kiril Pejchinovich" Secondary School in Tetovo, aimed at informing

[28] Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth (MSPDY), Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Justice, Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO OCC), the National Rapporteur, the Commission for Financial Compensation, as well as representatives of embassies and international organisations involved in the prevention of and fight against child trafficking.

[29] The academy gathered over 30 participants from civil society organisations, public institutions, and the academic community from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

students about the work of the Tetovo mobile team, how to report suspected trafficking cases, and where to seek help if they encounter a problem or suspect someone is a victim of trafficking in human beings. Additionally, informational meetings were held in two secondary schools with school pedagogues and psychologists. The total number of participants in the workshop and meetings was 39 (students, psychologists, and pedagogues).

- With the support of the **Council of Europe Programme Office** in Skopje[30], several materials were developed in 2024 to enhance prevention, identification, and support in the fight against trafficking in human beings:
  - A legislative assessment on access to free legal aid for victims of trafficking in human beings, including recommendations.
  - A research study on proactive investigation, prosecution, and adjudication of trafficking in human beings cases, with a focus on migrants.
  - Prevention of child trafficking for labour exploitation, forced marriage, and begging.
  - A translated and disseminated GRETA publication on reflection and recovery.
- **The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),** in 2024, in cooperation with the **Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors and the MoIA Training Centre** – Idrizovo, jointly with trainers/experts from both institutions, developed a *Methodology for the simulation of investigation and trial* titled: "Simulation of a Child Trafficking Case – From Victim Identification to Perpetrator Conviction".
- The Association **"For a Happy Childhood"** contributed to the development of the following documents.[31]
  - A research study: "Prevention of Child Trafficking for Labour Exploitation."
  - A trainer's manual developed by SOS "Detsko selo" (Children's Village) for the specialised training of foster carers caring for children who are victims of trafficking.
- **Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA)**
  - In the period January–June 2024, it implemented the campaign "Privacy is Priceless. Protect Your Digital World!" The main goal of the campaign was to raise awareness about digital security and the recognition of online risks, especially among youth as the most affected group. These activities directly contribute to the prevention of human trafficking by strengthening digital awareness and protection among young people. The campaign addressed risks of online exploitation and misuse of personal data – common methods of recruitment and manipulation by human traffickers. Key activities included: education through workshops for high school students (172

[30] As part of the EU and Council of Europe Project Horizontal Facility III "Strengthening the Anti-Trafficking Response"

[31] Supported by the Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje.

participants) and law students (14 participants), interactive social media posts, and guerrilla actions.

- On 18 October 2024, MYLA marked the European Anti-Trafficking Day through a social media post.[32]

On 29 November 2024, MYLA reported on a published verdict in a child trafficking case issued by the Basic Criminal Court in Skopje. In this case, 9 individuals were sentenced to a total of 47 years in prison. The victim was awarded a property claim—the highest granted in such cases in the country to date. However, the imposed sentences do not reflect the gravity of the crime, the risks to children, nor do they fulfil the preventive purpose. Prevention begins with strict sanctions and support for victims.[33]

- During 2024, the **association "Open Gate/La Strada"** developed the following analyses, manuals, studies, and other materials:
  - An **online survey** involving 149 young people, aimed at assessing public awareness of human trafficking among youth in the Republic of North Macedonia. The analysis presented the level of knowledge young people have about this issue, reporting and protection mechanisms, and served as the basis for key recommendations to strengthen awareness and the capacities of youth to recognise and prevent human trafficking.
  - **Monitoring Report**: Overview of Policies and Practices in the Fight against Human Trafficking, fifth edition, prepared for the 2022–2023 period. This report presents key findings from the analysis of collected data based on indicators divided into seven areas: changes in legislation and policy, victim identification, investigation and court proceedings, victim support, protection, compensation, and institutional framework and cooperation.
  - **Country Brief** prepared by the association in September 2024, highlighting persistent human trafficking issues in the Republic of North Macedonia, with emphasis on internal trafficking and increased vulnerability of children and marginalised groups.
  - **Needs Assessment Report: Reintegration of Victims of Human Trafficking**. The purpose of this assessment is to examine what reintegration services are currently available and what the needs of trafficking victims are. The assessment will help determine whether there are barriers to accessing these services and what those barriers are, and will also define what support is needed for service providers to effectively assist victims of human trafficking.

[32]Access link: https://shorturl.at/4EzSU
[33]Access link: https://shorturl.at/kLMBN

2.2 STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITIES OF PROFESSIONAL AND COMPETENT SERVICES

- In 2024, a total of **130 police officers** (28 women / 102 men)[34] from the **Ministry of Interior** / Public Security Bureau participated in 38 events, professional trainings, meetings, conferences, and workshops in the field of human trafficking and illegal migration.
  At the Training Centre of the Ministry of Interior, within the basic police training programme, 6 hours were allocated and delivered on the topic "Human Trafficking," with **497 candidates** (376 men and 121 women) completing the training.

- **State Labour Inspectors (SLI)** participated in several trainings, seminars, and workshops on the topic of human trafficking during the year:
  - 19–21 February, Strumica – Pilot training on trafficking in human beings for the purpose of labour exploitation[35]. The training was attended by 14 inspectors (11 women and 3 men) from the State Labour Inspectorate.
  - 27 May 2024, Skopje – Conference on the prevention of child trafficking for labour exploitation, begging, and forced child marriages, attended by 1 female participant.[36]
  - 16–17 September, Budva, Montenegro – Regional Conference on "Human Rights Due Diligence: Building Ethical Supply Chains to Combat Human Trafficking for Labour Exploitation," organised by the OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Skopje; 1 female participant attended.
  - 2–3 October, Saraevo – Regional Conference on ICT and its Use and Misuse in Human Trafficking Cases[37], attended online by 1 female participant.
  - 22 November, Skopje – Roundtable titled "Combating Child Trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia: Ensuring the Rights and Protection of Child Victims of Human Trafficking,"[38] attended by 1 female representative.
  - 27 November, Skopje – Working discussion on the topic "Initial Assessment and Analysis of Current Approaches to the Prevention of Human Trafficking with Proposals for New Prevention Methods," organised by the Ombudsman – National Rapporteur on Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration,

[34] NUCTHBSM, OGRC, and the Regional Border Affairs Centres, the Sectors for Internal Affairs, and the Sector for International Police Cooperation.
[35] Organised by the Council of Europe project "Strengthening the Anti-Trafficking Response in Republic of North Macedonia."
[36] Organised by the Council of Europe project "Strengthening the Anti-Trafficking Response in Republic of North Macedonia."
[37] Organised through the Horizontal Facility of the Council of Europe and the European Union III, specifically the projects aimed at strengthening anti-trafficking responses in Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
[38] This event was organised in partnership with the Governments of North Macedonia and Australia, the United Nations Voluntary Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, and the association "Open Gate/La Strada".

with the support of the OSCE Mission to Skopje; 1 female representative participated.

- **The Public Health Institute of the Republic of North Macedonia** actively engaged in strengthening the capacities of healthcare professionals in the fight against human/child trafficking, with the aim of timely informing and educating healthcare workers on how to recognise and appropriately refer presumed victims of human trafficking.

  During the reporting period, in cooperation with the Ministry of Health and the association "Open Gate/La Strada," three trainings were conducted:[39]
  - On 28 February in Strumica, a training was held with 9 participants (7 women / 2 men);
  - On 28 May in Skopje, 13 participants attended (12 women / 1 man);
  - On 19 September in Bitola, 16 participants took part (10 women / 6 men).

  The trainings focused on improving the ability to identify and effectively refer victims of human trafficking, the indicators of trafficking for healthcare workers, the legal framework on human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia, the different forms of trafficking, and the specific needs of victims.

- Through the **Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje**, and within the framework of the EU and Council of Europe Project Horizontal Facility III: Strengthening the Anti-Trafficking Response, several activities and trainings were organized:
  - On 25 January in Skopje, a specialised session on human trafficking and asylum was held for lawyers, within a training-of-trainers on free legal aid, attended by 29 participants (11 men / 18 women);
  - From 19 to 21 February in Strumica, an advanced training titled "Pilot Training on Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Labour Exploitation" was held for labour inspectors, police officers, social workers, and civil society organisations, attended by 30 participants (13 men / 17 women);
  - On 21–22 May in Strumica, a basic "Training on the Best Interests of the Child" was held for police, social workers, lawyers, and civil society representatives, with 37 participants in total (11 men / 26 women);
  - On 29 May in Strumica, a basic "Training on Gender-Sensitive and Targeted Communication and Reporting on Human Trafficking" was held for MoI communication officers, PPO PR units, and journalists, attended by 12 participants (2 men / 10 women);
  - On 8 October in Skopje, a specialised training on "Access to Free Legal Aid and State Compensation" was held for the Coordinating Body for Access to Free Legal Aid, with 42 participants (13 men / 29 women).[40]

[39] The trainings were attended by participants from various professional backgrounds, including medical doctors, dental medicine doctors, public health specialists, surgeons, gynaecologists, nurses, and visiting nurses employed in: health centres, general hospitals, a clinical hospital, Centres for Public Health (CPH), the Public Health Institute (PHI), and emergency medical services.

- On 21–22 May in Strumica, a basic "Training on the Best Interests of the Child" was held for police officers, social workers, lawyers, and civil society organisations, with a total of 37 participants (11 men / 26 women).[41]
- On 29 May in Strumica, a basic "Training on Gender-Sensitive and Targeted Communication and Reporting on Human Trafficking" was held for communication officers from the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime and Corruption, and journalists, with a total of 12 participants (2 men / 10 women).[42]
- On 8 October in Skopje, a specialised training on "Access to Free Legal Aid and State Compensation" was held for the Coordinating Body for Access to Free Legal Aid, attended by 42 participants (13 men / 29 women).[43]
- On 7 November in Skopje, a specialised training "Workshop on Quality Legal Aid for Lawyers and Civil Society Organisations" was held, with 18 participants (4 men / 14 women).[44]
- On 7 November in Skopje, a basic training "Workshop on Access and Trauma-Sensitive Interviewing of Victims of Human Trafficking" was held for lawyers and civil society organisations, with 9 participants (3 men / 6 women).[45]

➢ **The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC),** within the framework of the project "UN: Ending Impunity for Traffickers and Supporting Justice for Victims of Human Trafficking in South-Eastern Europe (SEE)," implemented several activities, including:

- From 6–8 February 2024, a three-day regional trial simulation of a human trafficking case was held in Belgrade, Serbia. The three-day workshop brought together representatives from the criminal justice sector from the project's participating countries.[46] Under the expert guidance of mentors from Belgium and France, and with thematic input from regional experts, participants used the mock trial exercise to strengthen and improve cross-border investigations, prosecutions, and convictions in human trafficking cases, as well as to enhance the status and rights of victims in criminal proceedings with cross-

[40] Operational and mid-management levels were included. Pre- and post-training knowledge testing showed an 80% improvement in knowledge. Participants included representatives from: MoI–NUCTHBSM, Sectors for Internal Affairs – Strumica and Kumanovo, MoI Department for Violent Crimes and Gender-Based Violence, Centres for Social Work (Skopje, Bitola, and Gevgelija), Border Police, MoI Department for Asylum, "Open Gate/La Strada," and MYLA.

[41] At the operational and mid-management level, self-evaluation showed a 67% improvement in knowledge. Participants came from: MoI–NUCTHBSM, MoI Department for Violent Crimes and Gender-Based Violence, Centres for Social Work (Skopje and Bitola), "Open Gate/La Strada," and MYLA.

[42] At the operational and mid-management level, self-evaluation showed an 87% increase in knowledge.

[43] Operational and mid-management level, regional units of the Ministry of Justice, MYLA, "Open Gate/La Strada," Margini, and the Bar Association.

[44] Operational level, high management level (Bar Association, MYLA, "Open Gate/La Strada").

[45] Operational level (Bar Association, MYLA).

[46] (Albania, Moldova, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia).

border elements. Three female participants from the Republic of North Macedonia took part in the simulation exercise.[47]

- On 28 and 29 March 2024, UNODC held two online sessions via the KNOWTS platform, as a follow-up to the national mock trial trainings conducted in June and October 2023. The purpose of the sessions was to gather insights and feedback from participants on the impact, outcomes, and remaining needs following the national simulated trials for the investigation and prosecution of human trafficking cases. Based on the meetings, a report was prepared identifying key challenges and recommendations. The online sessions were attended by 25 representatives from: NUCTHBSM, the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, MSPDY, the Ministry of Interior, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption, the Basic Criminal Court, the Court of Appeals, mobile teams, and civil society organisations (15 women / 10 men).
- From 7 to 10 October 2024, in Struga, and in cooperation with the **Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors** and the **Training Centre of the Ministry of Interior** – Idrizovo, a three-day "Simulation of a Human Trafficking Trial" was conducted, based on the developed Methodology.[48] The simulation aimed to improve the identification, prosecution, and adjudication of cases, to enhance the capacities of investigative bodies and courts, and to strengthen the position and rights of victims. By involving trainers from the mentioned institutions—who will serve as focal points for human trafficking and transfer knowledge to future candidates—the initiative ensures long-term sustainability of knowledge and resources in the Republic of North Macedonia. A total of 27 participants took part in the simulation (7 men / 20 women).

➢ **The association "Open Gate/La Strada"** implemented the following activities:

- A basic training on the use of artificial intelligence (2–3 September 2024, in Mavrovo). The training focused on the practical application of artificial intelligence (AI), data management, and cybersecurity, and it was intended for civil society organisations with expertise in areas such as rule of law, anti-discrimination, human rights, and gender issues, which are part of the National Platform for Prevention and Combating Human Trafficking. A total of 15 participants attended the training (10 women / 5 men).
- From 23 to 25 December 2024, the Annual Assembly of Open Gate was held, focusing on reviewing achievements and defining next steps in advocacy, prevention, and support for victims of human trafficking. A total of 15 participants attended (4 men / 11 women)[49]. During the event, the following outputs were presented: "Monitoring Report: Overview of Policies and Practices in the Fight Against Human Trafficking," fifth edition for the period

[47] Basic Criminal Court – Skopje, PPO for Organised Crime and Corruption, MoI--UTHBSM. A total of 40 participants attended the event.

[48] Judges, prosecutors, inspectors/police officers, social workers, and representatives of civil society organisations took part.

[49] Participants at the Annual Assembly included representatives from the Commission, relevant institutions, mobile identification teams, and the operational team for formal identification.

2022–2023, and the "Needs Assessment Report: Reintegration of Victims of Human Trafficking." All participants contributed with comments and recommendations.

- On 16 February 2024, in Skopje, a group supervision workshop was held for 11 female representatives of shelter staff. The workshop focused on improving professional skills, enhancing mental health support, and refining case management practices within the group.

- **ICMPD** is implementing the regional project "Support to the Western Balkans for Targeted Operationalisation of Returns of Third-Country Nationals"[50] – WBRM, in which our country also participated. As part of the project, on 22–23 May 2024, a study visit to the Netherlands was organised with delegations from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republic of North Macedonia (1 man / 2 women)[51]. The participants visited the Dutch Return and Departure Service, where they discussed roles, responsibilities, and best practices for cooperation with countries of origin. The visit focused on reviewing return mechanisms and gaining valuable experience that can be applied in the Western Balkans region.

- The association **"For a Happy Childhood"** contributed as a training facilitator in sessions supported by several organisations:
  - Trainings organised by IOM, where 55 individuals (50 men / 5 women) from the Ministry of Interior were trained. Basic trainings were conducted for border police officers on humanitarian border management with a gender-sensitive and rights-based approach.[52] On 9 and 12 April 2024, a Training on Human Trafficking and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for Responding to Migrants in Vulnerable Situations was held in Dojran.[53]
  - Trainings organised by the Council of Europe, attended by 18 participants (14 women / 4 men). The workshop targeted the network of lawyers and NGOs providing free legal aid to victims of human trafficking, and included practical case studies from domestic law and the European Court of Human Rights. Access to free legal aid and compensation for the injustices suffered by victims of trafficking. Trauma-informed communication with victims of trafficking, and conducting interviews. An exercise on how to interview a trafficking victim. Lawyers providing free legal aid, members of the Bar Association of the Republic of North Macedonia, and NGO.

[50] Funded by the Ministry of Justice and Security of the Netherlands, the project aims to strengthen the capacities of the Western Balkans to manage return and readmission operations of third-country nationals, with the ultimate goal of enabling full ownership of these activities. The project will run until 30 June 2025, with key partners including the European Commission, the Joint Coordination Platform (JCP), Frontex, and EU Member States.

[51] Three representatives from the Department for Border Affairs and Migration, who serve as contact points for the project.

[52] 41% correct answers were recorded before the training and 63% after the training, indicating a 22% increase in participants' knowledge).

[53] 48% correct answers were recorded before and 69% after the training (21% increase, respectively).

- Within the framework of the EU4FAST Project, **GIZ** supports investigations led by the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption (PPO for OCC) against organised criminal groups involved in migrant smuggling and human trafficking.[54]
  The support focuses primarily on providing advice and enhancing efforts for international cooperation in the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling. In this context, several activities have been carried out:
  - From 12 to 14 June 2024, a Workshop on Strengthening the Implementation of the Revised National Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for improved identification and referral of victims of human trafficking was held in Krushevo, organised in cooperation with the Commission and the association "Open Gate/La Strada." The workshop was attended by 29 participants (21 men / 8 women).[55]
  - On 19 November 2024, a Workshop on Frontline Identification of Victims of Human Trafficking and Follow-up Procedures was held in Skopje, in cooperation with NUCTHBSM/Task Force and "Open Gate/La Strada." The aim of the workshop was to facilitate an exchange between competent public prosecutors and police officers involved in combating human trafficking, and a total of 37 participants took part (27 men / 10 women).[56]

- The **Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev"**, in the course of 2024, organised events in the field of human trafficking and illegal migration in cooperation with several projects, covering the following topics:
  - "Simulation of a Human Trafficking Trial", attended by a total of 30 participants[57] (22 women / 8 men).
  - "International Protection of Refugees" – a workshop attended by 19 participants[58] (14 women / 5 men).

- In 2024, **UNHCR** supported MSPDY in implementing the following activities:
  - Development of an online training module for the revised Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for dealing with unaccompanied children and vulnerable foreigners, and uploading it to the distance learning platform of the Institute for Social Work.
  - Development of a digital pocket-sized version of the SOPs for handling unaccompanied children and vulnerable foreigners. This version was also prepared for print, for distribution among police officers and social workers, to

[54] To this end, the project has appointed resident experts within the Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption (PPO for OCC) – Prosecutorial Expert Alenka Ranziger from Slovenia, and within the Ministry of Interior – Police Expert Fabien Talaga from France).

[55] Representatives from the Office of the National Coordinator, Ministry of Interior, Public Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption, MSPDY, Institute of Public Health, State Labour Inspectorate, Bureau for Education Development, Mobile Teams, MYLA, and the association "Open Gate/La Strada".

[56] Representatives from all 8 Sectors for Internal Affairs (SVR), NUCTHBSM/Task Force, Centres for Social Work (CSWs), Skopje, and "Open Gate/La Strada".

[57] Participants included 4 judges, 3 public prosecutors, 2 legal associates, 5 from the Ministry of Interior, and 16 from other institutions.

[58] 16 judges and 3 legal associates.

facilitate quick access to specific information or procedural steps needed for fieldwork.

- Organisation of trainings for police officers and social workers on the new SOPs for unaccompanied children and vulnerable foreigners. This included preparation of the programme, agenda, and logistical support for events held in four cities—Skopje[59], Ohrid[60], Gevgelija[61], and Shtip[62]—where a total of 68 participants were trained.
- Trainings on Assessing and Determining the Best Interests of the Child. The objective of the training was to promote specific concepts and skills for evaluating the child's best interests, as well as to train the participants on child protection issues outlined in the Law on Juvenile Justice. The trainings were delivered by the Institute for Social Activities in cooperation with the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (ASJP). The first training was held on 12 November 2024, with 13 participants[63] (6 men / 7 women), the second training took place on 21 November 2024, with 17 participants[64] (7 men / 10 women), and the third training was held on 13 December 2024, with 25 participants (16 men / 9 women).[65]

As part of efforts to strengthen the capacities of professionals working in this field, trainings were conducted and the capacities of more than 1,203 individuals were enhanced, including 478 women and 725 men.

2.3 RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

❖ 30 July – World Day against Trafficking in Human Beings

To mark the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons – 30 July, the Commission joined the campaign[66] of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) under the slogan: "Leave no child behind in the fight against human trafficking."[67] The campaign calls for urgent and comprehensive action that is essential to

[59] 26 November, Skopje, total of 17 participants: 5 social workers from CSWs in Skopje, Kriva Palanka, Kratovo, Demir Hisar, and Krushevo; 2 social workers from the Public Institution for Accommodation of Asylum Seekers; and 10 representatives from the Ministry of Interior.

[60] 29 November, Ohrid, total of 14 participants: 5 social workers from CSWs in Ohrid, Struga, Kichevo, Makedonski Brod, and Resen; and 9 representatives from the Ministry of Interior.

[61] 4 December, Gevgelija, total of 19 participants: 7 social workers from CSWs in Gevgelija, Valandovo, Radovish, Kavadarci, and Negotino; 1 representative from PTC "Vinojug," 1 representative from UNHCR, and 10 from the Ministry of Interior.

[62] 11 December, Shtip – a total of 18 participants: 8 social workers from CSWs in Shtip, Probishtip, Delchevo, Kochani, Vinica, Sveti Nikole, and Kumanovo, and 10 representatives from the Ministry of Interior.

[63] Representatives from the Ministry of Interior (8), Reception Transit Centre Vinojug (2), MSPDY (1), and PI MCWS Skopje (2).

[64] Representatives from the Ombudsman's Office (8), UNHCR (2), MYLA (2), Red Cross (1), and MSPDY (1).

[65] Judges, prosecutors, and lawyers.

[66] The Republic of North Macedonia, through the Ministry of Interior and the Commission, joined the "Blue Heart" campaign for the first time in 2021, supporting the UNODC's global campaign against human trafficking.

[67] 30 July – European Day Against Trafficking in Human Beings –m the National Commission.

protect vulnerable groups from exploitation and to support children who are victims of trafficking.

As part of the campaign, a set of social media tools was prepared, including key messages, videos, and visual materials, which were shared with partners and through social media platforms to raise awareness about human trafficking. The message conveyed aims to strengthen efforts for the implementation of the Protocol on Trafficking in Human Beings, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, including through the enhancement of national frameworks for the identification and protection of trafficking victims, especially in times of crisis.

The Commission called on all partners—institutions, organisations, and civil society associations—to join and support the initiative, with the aim of strengthening efforts to prevent human trafficking and ensure better protection for victims.

- In anticipation of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons, MYLA undertook activities to highlight the importance of addressing the challenges and called for action to #EndHumanTrafficking[68], through a series of social media posts aimed at raising awareness about child victims of human trafficking and its various manifestations, such as: forced labour, begging, illegal adoption, recruitment into armed groups, and sexual exploitation.[69]

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

  On this occasion, and with the aim of strengthening and improving information exchange in the field of human trafficking and migrant smuggling, the Ministry of Interior, with financial support from the regional IPA project EU4FAST and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), organised a **Simulation Exercise on Real-Time Information Exchange regarding migrant smuggling and human trafficking along the Eastern Mediterranean route**.[70] The event took place in Ohrid from 14 to 17 October 2024, in the lead-up to the European Anti-Trafficking Day. As part of the exercise, the teams[71] exchanged information based on simulated scenarios that gradually increased in complexity. The main scenario was followed by a debriefing session attended by the directors of the police services from the participating countries, with the primary goal of identifying good practices and challenges, and outlining areas that require further work.

- On the occasion of the European Anti-Trafficking Day, the **Ministry of Interior**, through police officers from the **Prevention Departments at the Sectors for**

[68] Access link : https://shorturl.at/bQUU1
[69] Access link : https://shorturl.at/jdKZW
[70] 18 October is the EU Anti-Trafficking Day – National Commission.
[71] In addition to participants from the Republic of North Macedonia, the simulation exercise also included invited participants from Moldova, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with each country expected to be represented by a team of five participants..

Internal Affairs in Veles, Kumanovo, and Strumica, organised preventive activities aimed at raising awareness about human trafficking through education of youth and the general public, specifically:

- In Veles, the Sector for Internal Affairs (SIA Veles), in cooperation with the Red Cross of Kavadarci, held an educational workshop for students from primary and secondary schools in Kavadarci. Students were presented with the forms of human trafficking and the means of protection, and educational leaflets were distributed.
- In Kumanovo, the SIA Kumanovo and the Municipal Council for Juvenile Delinquency organised an art competition for students from Kumanovo and Staro Nagorichane under the slogan "A Free, Safe Child." In addition, a public forum was held for high school students, presenting potential dangers of human trafficking and mechanisms for early identification and victim protection.
- In Strumica, SIA Strumica, in cooperation with the Red Cross, organised an informational campaign at Goce Delchev Square, where citizens were informed—through conversations and leaflets—about indicators of human trafficking and available protection measures.

- In the lead-up to the European Anti-Trafficking Day, the **Ministry of Justice** promoted the Office of the Commission for Financial Compensation to Victims of Violent Crime.[72]
  The Minister of Justice, Igor Filkov, highlighted that this represents an important step toward ensuring better protection of human rights for victims of violent crimes. By making the Office of the Commission for Financial Compensation operational, conditions are created for the Commission to function as an independent body with the capacity of a legal entity.[73]
- **The Institute of Public Health** (IPH), through its Department for Health Prevention and Disease Monitoring, marked the European Anti-Trafficking Day by preparing a professional article, which was published on the Institute's website and on the social media so as to inform the citizens.[74]
- **The association "For a Happy Childhood"**, on the occasion of the European Anti-Trafficking Day, organised an advanced training on trafficking prevention for final-year students from the institutes of the Faculty of Philosophy.
- The **Red Cross of the Republic of the Republic of North Macedonia**, through its municipal branches, participated in the observance of the European Day by organising 22 prevention workshops with youth from primary and secondary schools, as well as volunteers from Red Cross Youth Clubs. The preventive lessons aimed to raise youth awareness, help them recognise how they could be

[72] pravda.gov.mk/vest/6762?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR3u5mxwQ0FHYVWw6lbWTx4pTJDngyThYs4ngd_kL0y0RbzcthB4N2cVsJs_aem_0sGfy2RYBtSBPyamv9m20A.

[73] https://sitel.com.mk/drzhavata-kje-isplakja-nadomestok-za-zhrtvi-od-nasilstvo

[74] https://www.iph.mk/mk/news/index/1370.

drawn into human trafficking, and promote self-protection. A total of 1,043 young people were reached.

- As part of the European Anti-Trafficking Day activities, the **Council of Europe Programme Office** supported the premiere of a theatre performance in Prilep on the theme of forced marriages, implemented with a grant awarded to Radio Pela. In addition, the Confederation of Employers carried out a poster and leaflet distribution campaign against labour exploitation and issued a public statement to raise awareness of this issue.
- **The association "Open Gate/La Strada"** marked this important day with a series of activities and a call to action. This year, in cooperation with other civil society organisations, it joined and supported the statement "States, not victims, are responsible for victim identification," which urges all European countries to improve early identification and support for victims of human trafficking, in close cooperation with relevant organisations. The statement emphasises that states—not victims—carry the responsibility for identifying victims of human trafficking, which was directed toward European countries, including the Republic of North Macedonia. The declaration highlights the obligation of governments to ensure the early and accurate identification of victims of trafficking. States have a clear responsibility to protect and support victims, and governments, together with law enforcement authorities, must take proactive steps to inform victims of their rights and raise awareness about the signs of human trafficking.

❖ **Anti-Trafficking Week**

- During Anti-Trafficking Week, the **Association "Open Gate/La Strada"** held an interactive workshop with 61 high school students (44 girls and 17 boys) from Prilep, representing four secondary schools[75], which focused on discussing the consequences of child and forced marriages, which negatively impact physical and mental health, limit educational and economic opportunities, and compromise young people's futures. Participants explored how to recognise and protect against human trafficking, which is often linked to forced marriages. The importance of education was emphasised as a key tool for personal growth, economic independence, and meaningful contribution to society. Through education, support, and joint action, we can put an end to child and forced marriages, thereby freeing women and girls from this cycle of violence and injustice.

  Furthermore, during this period, the Association "Open Gate/La Strada" promoted its new video entitled "For a World Where Children Are Not Objects", which serves as a reminder to both the public and state institutions not to remain indifferent to the exploitation of children, particularly from the Roma population,

[75] SOU "Gjorche Petrov", SOU "Orde Chopela", SOU "Riste Risteski Richko", and SOEPTU "Kuzman Josifovski Pitu"

who often live in harsh, exploitative conditions, including begging, forced marriages, and more.

- In December, the **association "For a Happy Childhood"** organised activities with student teams positioned at five key intersections in Skopje, with the aim of identifying street children who may be presumed victims of child trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation.
- As part of the activities of the **Council of Europe Programme Office**, Radio Pela, as a grant recipient, held a press conference to present a project dedicated to preventing and raising awareness of forced marriages. The project includes the release of a radio drama, which will be broadcast on air and will address issues related to this serious social topic. The radio drama, which will be publicly accessible, aims to educate listeners and prompt reflection on the dangers and consequences of forced marriages. The programme will also be available online and via other platforms, thanks to advanced Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), allowing for broader outreach, including to less accessible regions. The press conference also featured a discussion on the importance of media in combating this form of violence, as well as the role of new technologies and ICT in mobilising public awareness and engagement on such social issues.

❖ **Other preventive activities**

- The association **"Open Gate/La Strada",** as part of its work, also conducts direct outreach with at-risk children, through visits to schools and universities, as well as through the organisation of preventive workshops, forum theatre sessions, peer education activities, distribution of preventive educational materials, campaigns, and other educational and outreach efforts among vulnerable populations in schools and institutions—enhancing their knowledge, skills, and capacities. In this context, the association carried out the following:
  - **Seven workshops**[76] aimed at increasing awareness among children and their parents—particularly marginalised children and those living on the streets—about the dangers of human trafficking. By improving their knowledge and understanding, **182 participants** are now better equipped to protect themselves and others from exploitation, contributing to a safer and more informed community.
  - Four **interactive theatre forums** were organised in cooperation with the municipalities of Kisela Voda, Kumanovo, and Gazi Baba, focusing on online exploitation, cyber violence, and building community resilience. These events attracted more than 600 students, as well as teachers and local government representatives from primary schools in the participating municipalities.
  - **Youth activism** – 16 youth activists/interns (3 men and 13 women) were engaged and trained, gaining knowledge, education, and the opportunity to build their own capacities. Three of them were international interns—one from

[76] In Shtip, Kumanovo, Bitola, Kochani, Skopje, Prilep, Shtip, Gevgelija.

Hungary and two from the Czech Republic—who had the chance to learn about the organisation's work and participate in its programmes and activities. Through various educational activities, workshops, and discussions, the Youth Club aims to empower its members with the necessary skills and tools to raise awareness about human trafficking in their communities.

- A **New Year's Bazaar** was held at Skopje City Mall from 15 to 20 December, showcasing products made by asylum seekers during art therapy and creative workshops that had been continuously implemented throughout the year at the Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers in Vizbegovo. This important event attracted the participation of both national and international stakeholders, as well as the wider community. In addition to exhibiting and selling handmade items, the primary goal of the event was to raise public awareness and reduce stigma surrounding refugees and asylum seekers in the country, promoting a sense of unity and solidarity.
- **The World Refugee Day** was marked on 20 June 2024 with the organisation of a ping-pong tournament, attended by over 40 participants, including representatives from MSPDY, Centres for Social Work (CSWs), international organisations, civil society associations, and asylum seekers. The event highlighted solidarity with refugees and asylum seekers and contributed to strengthening cooperation among key stakeholders involved in supporting these individuals.
- **Humanitarian aid and support were provided to the Ukrainian community** that arrived in our country following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. In collaboration with a local NGO, the association distributed humanitarian packages containing food, clothing, and footwear to 25 families, and provided psychosocial support, including psychological counselling.
- A **campaign titled "Marking Two Years of Support for Ukrainian Refugees in North Macedonia"** was held on 26 March, featuring an event[77] in honour of two years of continuous support and solidarity with the Ukrainian community in the Republic of North Macedonia. The event was attended by around 40 guests, including representatives of various embassies, national and international stakeholders, UN agencies, national CSOs, government institutions, and members of the Ukrainian community. Two videos were premiered—one featuring testimonies of Ukrainian refugees, and the other presenting organisations that provided vital assistance and support. Attendees participated in an art workshop to express their solidarity and wrote messages of support to the Ukrainian community, which were jointly exhibited.
- A **training on communication and advocacy was conducted to amplify the voices of survivors in the policy-making process**. As part of the effort to form an informal advocacy group of survivors of human trafficking, two women survivors who had successfully completed the reintegration process

[77] Within the frames of a project financed by the US Embassy.

actively participated. In addition, two videos were produced with the active involvement of the survivors, reinforcing awareness-raising and advocacy efforts.

- The **Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia**, through the Red Cross of the City of Skopje and 28 municipal Red Cross organisations across the country, conducted peer education sessions with youth on the prevention of human trafficking. Over the course of the year, a total of 57 workshops were held, reaching 1,697 young people from primary and secondary schools.
- As part of the project activities of the **Council of Europe Programme Office**, a series of actions were implemented to raise public awareness on key societal issues such as forced marriages and labour exploitation.
  - **Raising awareness on forced marriages**: The grantee Radio Pela organised theatre performances in Prilep, Krushevo, the Centre for Children with Disabilities, Krivogashtani, and Dolneni (October–December), along with the broadcast of a radio drama focused on this topic.
  - **Raising awareness on labour exploitation**: The grantee Business Confederation of Employers conducted a campaign producing more than 7 posters, 3 guides, leaflets, and brochures explaining the consequences of labour exploitation. A notable highlight was the social media campaign and the creation of a leaflet in Turkish for workers.
  - **Session for high school students on the risks of labour exploitation**: Marking the International Human Rights Day, a session was held for high school students to raise awareness about the risks of labour exploitation.
  - **Illustrated comics for youth on labour exploitation risks**: Comics were created in both Macedonian and English, designed to inform young people in an engaging way about the dangers of labour exploitation.
  - **Informational materials for the Commission for State Compensation**: Materials were developed and distributed in Macedonian, Albanian, and English to support and strengthen citizens' awareness and access to the right to state compensation.

3. SUPPORT AND PROTECTION OF VICTIMS AND MIGRANTS

3.1 MECHANISMS FOR IDENTIFICATION AND REFERRAL OF VICTIMS

In order to strengthen national capacities and increase the effectiveness of the police and prosecution in combating organised forms of migrant smuggling and human trafficking, the past year saw the continued effective and efficient operation of NUCTHBSM, which was established in 2018[78] to improve the coordination and cooperation between the Ministry of Interior and the Public

[78] The most recent Decision on the appointment of assistant coordinator, deputy assistant coordinator, permanent members, and contact persons from the Ministry of Interior in the NUCTHBSM was issued on **15 August 2023,** with amendments and supplements made on 12 September 2024, 16 November 2024, and 20 December 2024. More information about NUCTHBSM can be found in the Commission's Annual Report for 2018.

Prosecutor's Office for Organised Crime and Corruption of the Republic of North Macedonia in combating criminal offences related to human trafficking and migrant smuggling.

With the support of IOM[79], the work of the **five mobile teams (MTs) continued, focusing on the identification of victims, presumed victims of human trafficking, and vulnerable groups** in Bitola, Gevgelija, Kumanovo, Skopje, and Tetovo.[80] The five mobile teams emained active in implementing programme activities, including regular meetings, field visits, contacts, referrals, and assistance to vulnerable groups, as well as the identification of victims and presumed victims of human trafficking.

In 2024, the toll-free **SOS helpline 0800 11 111 for assistance related to human trafficking**[81] continued operating 24/7, every day. During the reference period, a total of 237 calls were received (185 from women / 52 from men\).[82] Through the SOS line, the public can:

- Report a suspected case;
- Request assistance and protection;
- Obtain information on prevention and available support resources.

In 2024, seven calls were registered for support to victims after leaving the Shelter Centre for Victims of Human Trafficking, requesting conversation and emotional support. Seven reports of suspected trafficking cases were also registered and referred to the relevant institutions—Centres for Social Work (CSWs), NUCTHBSM, Mobile Teams, and/or organisations for further action and support.

As for the third category of calls (other calls), a significant number were related to domestic violence and other forms of violence., as these calls account for the major number of calls, which received the necessary advice and referrals to appropriate support services.

[79] Within the framework of the project "Support for Capacity Building in Prevention and Protection in the Republic of North Macedonia", supported by the Council of Europe Development Bank- CEB.

[80] The work of the Mobile Teams (MTs) is defined in a Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) and the Ministry of Interior (MoI) in January 2018. The teams continue to include representatives from the MoI, MLSP, and civil society organisations (*Open Gate/La Strada* is represented in the mobile team in Skopje, while MYLA has representatives in Tetovo, Kumanovo, Bitola, and Gevgelija, providing legal assistance and information to victims and potential victims of human trafficking (VoTs and PVoTs) as well as to vulnerable groups) who work in the field of FATHB and contribute to strengthening inter-institutional cooperation for the identification of vulnerable individuals, including victims of trafficking.

[81] Since 2002, the association "Open Gate/La Strada" has been operating the first national SOS helpline in North Macedonia, specialised in the issue of human trafficking, offering preventive support, assistance, and support to survivors of trafficking.

[82] All calls received are categorised into three types: Preventive-educational calls, Calls directly related to human trafficking, and other calls. The majority of the calls are informational and preventive in nature.

3.2 IDENTIFICATION, REFERRAL AND DIRECT ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS

In 2024, the Operational Team responsible for the formal identification of victims of human trafficking found that the situation concerning trafficking in human beings/child trafficking has significantly evolved in terms of the demographic structure of victims of human beings/child trafficking and the modus operandi of criminal groups.

Namely, a total of **40 victims of trafficking in human beings/children** were identified during the year, 38 of whom were female and 2 male. The majority of the identified individuals were adult women, including **37 adult females**, one adult male, and one male and one female child (aged 15 and 17 respectively). Regarding origin, there were 2 domestic and 38 foreign victims, recruited from the following countries: Russia (11), Serbia (7), Ukraine (6) – of whom only two held residence permits on humanitarian grounds, Colombia (6), Brazil (5), Albania (2), and Bangladesh (1).

Exploitation was most frequently carried out in hospitality venues or facilities secured by traffickers for the purpose of profit through sexual exploitation, exploitation at construction sites for labour purposes, while in the case of children, forced marriage was present. The majority of detected victims were women and girls, with one adult male and one boy identified. Of the cases identified during the past year, the dominant form was sexual exploitation, with 37 victims identified as such, 2 males (including one child) subjected to labour exploitation, and 1 child victim of forced marriage.

In cases of **child trafficking**, a decreasing trend in detected cases was recorded (two cases of child trafficking were identified, compared to six in the previous year). The victims of these criminal offences were two children aged 17 and 15, who most commonly belong to vulnerable groups and are targeted for labour exploitation and forced marriage.

Additionally, **eight presumed victims** were identified during the year (6 females / 2 males), of whom seven were children (1 male / 6 females) aged between 3 and 16, including one foreign child.

All victims and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings/children were treated by the competent institutions in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for dealing with victims of trafficking in human beings.

The Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings (the Centre)[83], during 2024, received and accommodated a total of **10 individuals**, including **4 new cases of presumed/victims of trafficking in human beings** and 6 presumed victims (girls) from previous years. A total of 7 individuals were female children (citizens of North Macedonia), and 3 were adult women (foreign nationals). Five of

[83] The operational costs for the functioning of the Centre are financed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP), while the service provision is funded by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia within the framework of the Programme for Support to Civil Society Organisations.

them were victims of sexual exploitation, and five were victims of exploitation for the purpose of forced marriage. The average length of stay in the Centre ranged from two weeks to one year, but there were residents who remained beyond the legally prescribed period. Victims who leave the Centre are accommodated at an appropriate location based on the assessment of the competent Centre for Social Work.

Among the residents accommodated in the Centre, two residents obtained the necessary identification documents, including ID cards and passports, and one was issued a bank account. Additionally, one resident exercised the right to one-time financial assistance on the grounds of having a child at social risk. Three residents were enrolled in regular education, successfully integrated into the labour market, and regularly fulfilled their work obligations. Four beneficiaries were granted the right to state health insurance and assigned a general physician. Two girls were taken for regular check-ups at the Institute for Mental Health of Children and Youth, one of whom was referred to a psychiatric clinic, where a functional assessment for categorisation was carried out. Four girls underwent regular medical examinations, including laboratory services, ear, nose, and throat examinations, and eye examinations. Two residents were included in the programme "Empowering Youth Through New Opportunities", as part of the Life Skills Resource Centre.

Regarding the specialised work, daily activities included psychosocial counselling, provided through individual and group sessions using techniques from various approaches to psychosocial therapy. In 2024, 220 individual psychosocial counselling sessions were conducted with the residents and 150 workshops were held on topics of interest to them.

In accordance with the best interests of the child, the association "Open Gate/La Strada" implements the programme for psychosocial assistance and support for victims of trafficking in human beings at the Centre, aiming to stabilise them, help them overcome trauma, and facilitate more effective inclusion in social life. The programme involves highly qualified specialised psychotherapists engaged to reduce stress and alleviate the consequences of trauma. For one of the residents, individualised therapeutic support was provided.

In 2024, "Open Gate/La Strada" continued to implement the Accompanied Social Work Programme, aimed at persons at high risk of trafficking and trafficked persons who are not accommodated in the shelter, and who, in addition to the direct assistance and support programme services, were also provided with: Individual and family counselling; Facilitated access to appropriate services at the local level; Long-term emotional support, and Humanitarian aid. As a key component of the reintegration process within the Accompanied Social Work Programme, the staff continued to support the beneficiaries after leaving the Centre, including those accommodated in other safe facilities or family environments. The programme covered 7 (girls) beneficiaries and 15 family

members (3 male and 12 female). In total, 22 people received individual and family counselling, 6 received support in accessing services, 1 person received legal assistance, and 7 received humanitarian aid.

The mobile teams[84] were actively engaged in the implementation of programme activities, including regular meetings, field visits, contacts, referrals, and assistance to vulnerable groups, victims, and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings. Specifically, in 2024, they contacted, informed, and referred a total of **469 individuals** (227 men and 242 women), of whom 400 were nationals and 69 were foreign nationals. According to the data from the mobile teams, out of 446 identified vulnerable individuals, 198 were adults (117 women and 81 men), and 248 were children (103 girls and 145 boys). Of the total number of contacted individuals, **5 were identified as presumed victims of trafficking in human beings by the Operational Team**.

In 2024, UNHCR, with the support of the Association "Open Gate/La Strada," provided direct assistance and support to a total of 194 asylum seekers (143 men, 24 women, and 27 children – 17 boys and 10 girls) through 841 sessions held under the Social Assistance Programme at the Vizbegovo Reception Centre for Asylum Seekers. The programme focused on building the capacities of asylum seekers and promoting local integration through various activities such as Macedonian language classes, educational and occupational workshops, social and cultural activities, and the provision of psychological support and art therapy to improve mental health and personal development. These initiatives enhanced the well-being of asylum seekers and helped them acquire the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources for successful integration into society.

Within the **Ministry of Interior – Sector for Information and Coordination** of Situations, the application "**Red Button**" enables citizens to electronically report knowledge of a specific criminal act or information related to child abuse, trafficking in human beings, and hate crimes. In 2024, a total of ten reports were received via the "Red Button" application, one of which concerned trafficking in human beings, and was processed by the National Unit in connection with the forced begging of children on the street.

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

The Law on Financial Compensation for Victims of Violent Criminal Offences[85] entered into force on 25 May 2023. The purpose of the law is to provide financial compensation to victims of violent crimes as a form of state support, in line with the principle of social solidarity, and to prevent secondary victimisation. In

[84] The functioning of the mobile teams in 2024 continued to be supported by IOM within the framework of the project "Support to the Capacities for Prevention and Protection in North Macedonia," funded by the Council of Europe Development Bank- CEB.
[85] Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 247/2022.

accordance with the law, the **State Commission for Compensation of Victims of Violent Criminal Offences** (the State Commission) was constituted and commenced its work in February 2024 with objective is to support victims of violent crimes, including victims of trafficking in human beings, by awarding state compensation of up to EUR 5,000 for the injustice suffered. This represents an important step forward in providing better protection of human rights for victims of violent crimes, as well as in combating trafficking in human beings. During the reporting period, the State Commission held 13 sessions, during which a total of 8 cases/requests for financial compensation for victims of violent criminal offences were reviewed and action was taken on all 8 cases. No requests for free legal aid were submitted to the State Commission by victims of trafficking in human beings.

- The association Open Gate/La Strada, in 2024, provided legal aid to one victim following previous psychosocial assistance, support, and preparation for the legal procedure., and legal representation by a lawyer was provided during the court proceedings. In ongoing cases, five victims of trafficking from previous years were also provided with legal aid at different stages of the proceedings to protect their rights.
- MYLA provides support for strengthening the free legal aid system for victims of trafficking in human beings. In RNM, legal counselling for victims is available through the primary free legal aid mechanism. Legal aid in criminal proceedings is guaranteed by the national legislation, and there is no legal barrier for victims to exercise this right when they engage a lawyer themselves. A positive practice was observed in the emergency **approval of three requests for free legal aid (FLA), with lawyers appointed by the Ministry of Justice to victims of trafficking in human beings**. This marked the first practical implementation of the victims' right to free legal aid. The Ministry of Justice acted in line with the latest GRETA recommendations, demonstrating that its department responsible for free legal assistance is sensitised to the importance of legal assistance for victims of trafficking and is taking steps to inform them about the appropriate procedures and ensure access to legal aid.

  In 2024, MYLA submitted one request to the Ministry of Justice for secondary legal aid, which was approved in accordance with the Law on Free Legal Aid in order to provide a lawyer for a victim of trafficking in human beings. Upon approval, the victim was assigned a lawyer to represent her throughout all stages of the proceedings – before the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office and the Basic Criminal Court.

  MYLA continued to provide legal aid in the Reception Transit Centres in Tabanovce and Vinojug, as well as in the Reception Centre for Foreigners in Vizbegovo. In 2024, a total of 1,662 legal consultations (1,429 men / 233 women) were provided to migrant individuals.

UNHCR provides continuous support to the Ministry of Interior and the MSPDY in implementing the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for the treatment of unaccompanied foreign children and the SOP for the treatment of vulnerable categories of foreign nationals, by ensuring access to legal assistance. Within the framework of a project supported by UNHCR, MYLA provided legal counselling/assistance to a total of 1,248 persons moving within mixed migration flows and legal aid to 328 individuals potentially in need of international protection, by the end of October.

4. INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS AND MIGRANT SMIGGLING

4.1 PRE-INVESTIGATION PROCEEDINGS

4.1.1 Trafficking in human beings/ child trafficking

- **Ministry of Interior**[86]

Following the cases identified by the Ministry of Interior/NUCTHBSM, six investigations were conducted related to Articles 418-a and 418-g. **Two criminal charges** were filed for the offence "**child trafficking**" under Article 418-g paragraph 2, committed by two adult male perpetrators who forced the victims into sexual exploitation.

In 2024, **two proactive investigations** were carried out regarding the criminal offence "Mediation in prostitution" under Article 191, where in the first case, **a four-member criminal group** involved in committing the offences "Mediation in prostitution" (Article 191 paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code) and "Money laundering and other proceeds of a punishable act" (Article 273) **was dismantled,** in the period from August to November 2024. A Brazilian national with a temporary residence permit in RNM, together with two citizens of RNM and two unidentified individuals from Portugal, organised the recruitment, reception, transportation, and accommodation of women from Brazil on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, where **criminal charges were filed against six persons**. The suspects arranged sexual services between Brazilian women and clients through WhatsApp. Upon arrival in RNM, the women were transported and accommodated in a previously rented apartment. During the same period, a Macedonian national created a cryptocurrency wallet for one of the Brazilian women and transferred money obtained through the criminal offence to Brazil, enabling her to make transactions and conceal the origin of the funds.

The second case, as part of a conducted criminal investigation, involved the dismantling of a **15-member organised criminal group** operating in the territory of Tetovo and Ohrid, with some of the individuals being owners of hospitality

[86] Data obtained from the Department for Criminal Intelligence and Analysis and the National Unit for Combating Migrant Smuggling and Trafficking in Human Beings.

establishments. This organised criminal group had, over a longer period, been involved in carrying out criminal activities in several areas, including: facilitation of prostitution, unauthorised production and trafficking of narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors, as well as money laundering and other proceeds from criminal offences. Acting as the organiser of the criminal group, the owner of a hospitality establishment coordinated the criminal activities of the other group members and incited foreign women—who were employed as dancers in strip clubs and hospitality venues—to engage in prostitution. Searches were conducted in three hospitality establishments in the area of Tetovo and Ohrid, as well as in one apartment in Tetovo, during which a total of **35 women** originating from Ukraine, Russia, Serbia, Moldova, Albania, Colombia, and Republic of North Macedonia were found. One criminal charge was filed against 15 male individuals.

We note that in relation to the registered criminal offences concerning illegal migration and trafficking in human beings, no police officers have been identified as perpetrators.

2024 40 VICTIMS OF TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS IDENTIFIED			
Children 2		Adults 38	
National 1	Foreign 1	National 1	Foreign 37
Type of exploitation		Type of exploitation	
Forced marriage 1	Labour 1	Sexual exploitation 37	Labour 1
Presumed victims of trafficking in human beings total 8 individuals (6 female / 2 male). One is an adult male, and one girl is a foreign national			
Six investigations were conducted in relation to Articles 418-a and 418-g. Two criminal charges were filed against two male individuals, both nationals of North Macedonia.			

Table 1 : Tabular overview of identified victims of trafficking in human beings

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

In 2024, based on reports submitted by the Ministry of the Interior to the PPO for POCC, a total of **four cases were filed and opened against 14 individuals**, and a **pre-investigation procedure** was conducted for the criminal offences of "Human

Trafficking" (Article 418-a), "Child Trafficking" (Article 418-g), and "Mediation in Engaging in Prostitution" (Article 191, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code). However, no indictments were filed for the aforementioned criminal offences. Specifically:

In the first case[87], an extensive **pre-investigation procedure** was conducted involving the use of special investigative measures[88] for the criminal offences: "Human Trafficking" (Article 418-a), "Mediation in Engaging in Prostitution" (Article 191), "Money Laundering and Other Proceeds of Crime" (Article 273), and "Criminal Association" (Article 394), involving 12 male citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia. Based on the gathered evidence, an **order was issued to initiate an investigation against 13 (thirteen) male nationals** of the Republic of North Macedonia for the criminal offences: "Mediation in Engaging in Prostitution" (Article 191), "Money Laundering and Other Proceeds of Crime" (Article 273), "Criminal Association" (Article 394), "Unauthorised Production and Trade of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors" (Article 215), and "Disclosure of Official Secrets" (Article 360) of the Criminal Code. During the investigation, the Basic Criminal Court Skopje issued **verdicts** for three of the accused **based on plea agreements with the public prosecutor**, as follows: Two individuals for the criminal offences "Criminal Association" (Article 394) and "Unauthorised Production and Trade of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors" (Article 215), and one authorised official was convicted based on a plea agreement for "Criminal Association" (Article 394) and "Disclosure of Official Secrets" (Article 360) of the Criminal Code. Furthermore, **indictments were filed against 10 individuals** for the criminal offences "Criminal Association" (Article 394), "Unauthorised Production and Trade of Narcotic Drugs, Psychotropic Substances and Precursors" (Article 215), "Mediation in Engaging in Prostitution" (Article 191), and "Money Laundering and Other Proceeds of Crime" (Article 273), and against one authorised official for "Criminal Association" (Article 394) and "Disclosure of Official Secrets" (Article 360) of the Criminal Code.

In the second case, following a preliminary investigation involving the use of special investigative measures[89], an Order to initiate an investigation was issued against **four individuals, as follows**:

- **Against two individuals** (nationals of Syria and Brazil, one female and one male) for committing the criminal offence of "Mediation in the commission of prostitution" under Article 191, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code and the

[87] Formed on the basis of a Report by the Ministry of the Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia, Bureau for Public Security, Department for the Suppression of Organised and Serious Crime, Criminal Intelligence Sector, and NUCTHBSM, with an attached Verbal Note from the Embassy of Ukraine regarding the criminal offence – Human Trafficking.

[88] Pursuant to Article 215, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

[89] Pursuant to Article 252, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Procedure Code, for the criminal offence of "Mediation in the commission of prostitution" under Article 191, paragraph 3 in conjunction with paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code, and the criminal offence of "Money laundering and other proceeds of crime" under Article 273, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code.

criminal offence of "Money laundering and other proceeds of crime" under Article 273 of the Criminal Code;

- **Against one person** (male national of the Republic of North Macedonia) for committing the criminal offence of "Mediation in the commission of prostitution" under Article 191, paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code and the criminal offence of "Money laundering and other proceeds of crime" under Article 273 of the Criminal Code;
- **Against one person** (male national of the Republic of North Macedonia) for committing the criminal offence of "Money laundering and other proceeds of crime" under Article 273, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code.

In the third case, following the investigative procedure against one (1) person (male national of the Republic of North Macedonia), a Decision for dismissal was issued.

In the fourth case, initiated in 2023 and continued with investigative proceedings in 2024, an indictment was filed against one male person for the criminal offence of "Human trafficking" under Article 418-g of the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Furthermore, in 2024, based on submitted reports from the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of North Macedonia – Public Security Bureau – Department for Suppression of Organised and Serious Crime – Criminal Intelligence and the National Unit for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling, a total of **three (3) cases** were opened at the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO for POCC). Following the preliminary investigation for the criminal offences of "Child trafficking" under Article 418-g of the Criminal Code, "Trafficking in human beings" under Article 418-a, and "Criminal association" under Article 394 of the Criminal Code, in **two (2) of the cases** a public prosecutorial decision (resolution) was adopted establishing that there were no elements of the criminal offences "Child trafficking" under Article 418-g of the Criminal Code, "Trafficking in human beings" under Article 418-a, and "Criminal association" under Article 394 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of North Macedonia, while **one** case remains in the preliminary investigation phase.

It should be noted that in all cases under Article 418-g "Child trafficking," the BPPO for POCC acted in accordance with the provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code and the Law on Justice for Children, which prescribe special procedural protection measures when handling children/witnesses who are victims of human trafficking.

4.1.2 Targeted controls and inspection oversight

In the course of 2024, the Ministry of Interior conducted **46 targeted operations** within the jurisdiction of the Tetovo Sector for Internal Affairs (SIA Tetovo), aimed at detecting foreign nationals illegally residing and working in hospitality establishments as dancers and singers. A total of 67 hospitality venues were

inspected, where **337 women** were found, including **130 citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia** and **207 foreign nationals**. A total of 98 foreign nationals were detained for illegal stay in the country (27 from the Republic of Albania, 21 from Ukraine, 18 from Russia, 17 from Serbia, 7 from Kosovo, 3 from Romania, 2 from Kazakhstan and Moldova each, and 1 from France).
In 2024, the **State Labour Inspectorate (SLI)**, in cooperation with the **Ministry of Interior**, carried out a total of **194 extraordinary inspections** across the entire territory of the country. These inspections targeted high-risk sectors in order to detect or identify the presence of victims of human trafficking. Specifically, 63 inspections were conducted in the construction sector, 85 in the hospitality industry, 19 in the gambling sector (including casinos and betting shops), 7 in manufacturing and production, 1 in the field of property and personal security, 2 in transport, 1 in electricity supply, 8 in wholesale and retail trade, 2 related to copyright infringement, 2 in the education sector, and 4 inspections were carried out in service industries.

4.1.3 Smuggling of Migrants

- **Ministry of Interior**[90]

In 2024, two investigations were conducted under Articles 418-b and 418-v, one of which was proactive and led to the dismantling of an international criminal group. **Two criminal charges were filed against 20 individuals** (one of whom is a citizen of Serbia), while all others are nationals of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Regarding the criminal offence of "**smuggling of migrants**" under Article 418-b of the Criminal Code of RNM, a total of **60 criminal offences** were recorded (including one for co-perpetration). Criminal prosecution measures were taken against **78 individuals, 23 of whom are foreign nationals**, including one woman and two children.

This year, 19 adult individuals (all male) were also reported for committing five criminal offences: **"organising a group and inciting the commission of human trafficking, child trafficking, and migrant smuggling" and "smuggling of migrants"** under Article 418-v of the Criminal Code of RNM.

It is noted that among the registered criminal offences related to illegal migration, none were committed by police officers.

❖ <u>Situation regarding illegal migration</u>

Illegal migration in North Macedonia remains an ongoing threat that significantly affects the security situation in the country. Pressure on the borders from new arrivals is continuously present. Although the pace of movement has slowed this year, the Ministry of Interior continues to actively implement

[90] Data obtained from the Department for Criminal Intelligence and Analysis.

measures to address the issue, treating it as a strategic priority and a threat shared by countries in the region and beyond.

❖ **Prevented attempts at illegal border crossings**

There has been a 52.2% decrease in the trend of prevented attempts at illegal border crossings, along with a decline in detected cases, criminal offences, and perpetrators of migrant smuggling. The southern border with the Republic of Greece remains a key entry point for migrants, where a 65% decrease has been observed, while the number of prevented attempts has increased at the borders with Serbia and Kosovo.

PREVENTED ATTEMPTS AT ILLEGAL BORDER CROSSINGS	2024	2023	CHANGE %
AT THE BORDER WITH REPUBLIC OF GREECE	**4.297**	12.477	-65,6%
AT THE BORDER WITH REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA	**41**	54	-24,1%
AT THE BORDER WITH REPUBLIC OF SERBIA	**2.328**	1.405	65,7%
AT THE BORDER WITH REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO	**108**	17	multiple increase
AT THE BORDER WITH REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA	**35**	1	multiple increase
TOTAL	6.809	13.954	-51,2%

Table 2: Comparative overview of prevented attempts at illegal border crossings 2023/2024

According to the composition of migrants, the most frequent attempts were made by individuals originating from Syria—3,156 in total—marking a declining trend compared to the previous year. The top five also include individuals from Morocco (582), Egypt (525), Iraq (370), and Afghanistan (309). Noteworthy is the increased number of attempts by individuals from Turkey (244) and Kuwait (99), whereas only two such attempts were recorded during the same period last year.

❖ **Dismantled organised criminal groups**

Two organised criminal groups were dismantled: one 13-member group that organised the smuggling of a large number of migrants, mostly from Nepal and Syria, who had stayed for some time on the territory of the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Greece; and a second, seven-member group involved in the smuggling of migrants, mostly individuals from Syria, Congo, and Iraq. These migrants were picked up in the areas surrounding Gevgelija and Dojran, hidden in concealed compartments in cargo vehicles, and transported to the Kumanovo-Lipkovo region. Some of the smuggled migrants were temporarily accommodated and sheltered in properties owned by members, collaborators, and facilitators of the group, before being smuggled onward toward the Republic of Serbia and EU countries.

❖ **Smuggling of migrants**

The risk of migrant smuggling remains high, as it continues to be a prevalent and dominant criminal activity, with increasing demand for the services of criminal networks operating actively across the region and beyond. North Macedonia is a transit country for migrant smuggling. In 2024, police officers uncovered a total of 69 cases of migrant smuggling involving 487 migrants, primarily from Syria, China, Iraq, and Nepal.

❖ **Modus operandi**

Migrants are picked up at pre-arranged locations in Athens, Greece, from where they are transported to areas near the border with North Macedonia, and they then cross the border illegally on foot. Upon entering North Macedonia, they are taken by motor vehicles—most commonly passenger vehicles—and transported to the northern part of the country (villages near the border with Serbia). When drivers spot police patrols, they typically abandon the vehicles with the migrants inside and flee the scene.

❖ **Routes of movement**

The main route used by criminal groups engaged in migrant smuggling follows the road corridor Gevgelija–Skopje–Kumanovo, particularly the main roads in the Southeastern Region (Gevgelija, Valandovo, Strumica), Vardar Region (Demir Kapija, Negotino, Gradsko), Skopje Region (Skopje and surrounding areas), and the Northeastern Region (Kumanovo, Tabanovce).

❖ **Number of persons accommodated in the reception centre for foreigners**

In the **Reception Centre for Foreigners in Skopje**, 309 individuals were accommodated in the reference year—287 male and 22 female. By country of origin, the largest number were from Syria (76), followed by Turkey (44), China (43), Nepal (26), Iraq (20), Kosovo (17), Iran (14), Pakistan (11), Albania (9), and a smaller number from other countries. By age group, the majority were between 18 and 35 years old (179), followed by 88 individuals aged 36 to 59, 22 aged 14 to 17, three over 60 years old, and 17 children aged 0 to 13.

- **The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPO for POCC)**

In 2024, the BPPO for POCC filed **61 indictments** for the criminal offence of "Migrant Smuggling" under Article 418-b **against 78 individuals.**[91] Additionally, for the criminal offence "Organising a group and inciting the commission of the offences of trafficking in human beings, trafficking in minors, and migrant smuggling" under Article 418-v, **one indictment was filed against 7 individuals**.

[91] For the criminal offence of Migrant Smuggling under Article 418-b paragraph 4 of the Criminal Code, 30 indictments were filed against 38 individuals, and one indictment was filed for the criminal offence "Organising a group and inciting the commission of the offences of trafficking in human beings, trafficking in minors and migrant smuggling" under Article 418-v against 7 individuals. For the criminal offence of Migrant Smuggling under Article 418-b paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code, 31 indictments were filed against 40 individuals.

Furthermore, an investigation order was issued against 12 individuals for the criminal offence "Organising a group and inciting the commission of the offences of trafficking in human beings, trafficking in minors, and migrant smuggling" under Article 418-v. Following the completion of the investigation and the collected evidence, the investigation was discontinued for 7 individuals, while for 3 individuals a judgment was rendered based on a plea agreement for the criminal offence "Migrant Smuggling" under Article 418-b of the Criminal Code, and for 1 individual a judgment was rendered based on a guilty plea under an indictment proposal for the offence "Migrant Smuggling" under Article 418-b.
In this context, it is noteworthy that out of the total of 78 individuals indicted by the BPPO for POCC under Article 418-b of the Criminal Code, 22 individuals (28.205% of the total number of indicted persons in 2024, compared to 22.95% in 2023) are foreign nationals (9 nationals of Turkey, 4 of Kosovo, 3 of Afghanistan, 2 of Syria, 2 of Pakistan, and one each from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania)– all of them male.

4.2 CRIMINAL PROCEDURE

In 2024, for criminal offences related to human trafficking and illegal migration, the Basic Criminal Court – Skopje received a total of **79 cases** involving **126 indicted individuals (3 women and 123 men)**.
During 2024, **79 cases** were finalised, in which **83 individuals (2 women and 81 men)** were **sentenced to imprisonment**, while 29 men received suspended sentences. The duration of the **final prison sentences** ranged from 3 months to 10 years.[92]
Of the five final judgments in 2024 concerning child trafficking, one judgment awarded compensation for non-material damages, while in the other four cases, based on requests by the legal representatives of the victims, the courts referred the claims for compensation to civil proceedings.
No judgments resulted in the closure of a business or organisation.
In 2024, no police officers were listed in the final judgments either for child trafficking or for migrant smuggling.

Confiscations related to the criminal offences were carried out in accordance with Article 418-v of the Criminal Code. Namely, during the year, in two proceedings, in the first case, in addition to the offence under Article 418-v, the defendant was also charged with the criminal offence of money laundering under Article 273(1) in conjunction with Article 45 of the Criminal Code. In this

[92] Duration of imposed prison sentences by criminal offence: Art. 418-b: up to 1 year for 14 individuals; 1-2 years for 8 individuals; 2 years for 6 individuals; 3 years for 5 individuals; 4-5 years for 21 individual; 5-6 years for 22 individuals; 6 years for 1 individual; 9 years for 1 individual.
Art.418-v: up to 1 year for 2 individuals; 1-2 years for 3 individuals; 2-3 years for 3 individuals; 3 years for 3 individuals; 4 years for 2 individuals; 5 years for 4 individuals; 7 years for 4 individuals; 8 years for one individual.
Art.418-g: 4 to 5 years for 3 individuals; 5 years for 4 individuals; 6-7 years for 4 individuals; and one person was sentenced with **10 years of prison.**

proceeding, illicit gains obtained through criminal activity were confiscated in the amount of EUR 15,027.00 or MKD 924,160.00. Whereas, in the second case, involving another defendant also charged with offences under Article 418-v and Article 273(1) in conjunction with Article 45 of the Criminal Code, the confiscated illicit gain amounted to EUR 31,788.59 or MKD 1,954,998.28. **Total confiscated assets: EUR 46,815.59** or **MKD 2,879,158.28**.

Article from the Criminal Code	Received			Completed			Final			Decision by individuals				Unsolved/ delayed
	cases	Defendants		cases	Defendants		cases	Defendants		Imprisonment sentence		Suspended sentence		
		m	f		m	f		m	f	m	f	m	f	
Art.418-a	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
Art.418-b	68	94	1	75	97	/	66	79	/	59	/	19	/	/
Art.418-v	7	24	/	7	14	/	8	26	/	12	/	10	/	/
Art.418-g	4	5	2	4	9	/	5	10	2	10	2	/	/	/
Total	79	123	3	86	120	/	79	115	3	81	2	29	/	/
		126			120			118		83		29		

Table 4: Overview of court cases and defendants[93]

[93]Submitted data through search in AKMIS – case management system in the Basic Criminal Court Skopje 01.01.2024-31.12.2024.

5. BUDGET

The implemented activities were carried out in partnership between the Commission, institutions, international organisations, and civil society organisations. Donors and partners contributed to the implementation of activities for combating trafficking in human beings and illegal migration, in accordance with the National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Trafficking in Children for the period 2021–2025.

Ministry of Interior	MKD 409.786,00
Reception Centre for Foreigners	MKD 4.294.606,00
MSPDY for VOTHT (Victims of trafficking in human beings and trafficking in children)[94]	MKD 3.804,408
Civil Society Organisations[95]	MKD 12.921.257,00
International organisations[96]	EUR 377.049,00

Table 5: Activities implemented through funds provided by institutions, international organisations and civil society associations

[94] The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MSPDY) has planned funds in the amount of MKD 3,804,408 for 2024 to finance the operation of the Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. An Administrative Agreement has been signed for the allocation of funds for the provision of social services for the Centre for Temporary Accommodation of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, between the MSPDY and the association "Open Gate/La Strada."

[95] Civil society associations: "Open Gate/La Strada" secured MKD 12,700,257 for activities related to human trafficking. "For a Happy Childhood" carried out the majority of its activities on a voluntary basis, with logistical support from the Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje, while for the preparation of documents it secured MKD 221,000.00;.

[96] **International organisations**: 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 amounting to approximately EUR 70,000. For its activities at the regional level, **UNODC** secured USD 199,000 or EUR 192,549. **UNHCR**, through its projects, provided MKD 440,000 or approximately EUR 7,155. The exact amount of the budget for activities implemented by **ICMPD** in North Macedonia in 2024 cannot be determined, since the activities are implemented as part of a larger regional project. The **Council of Europe Office** in Skopje, through the Horizontal Instrument of the EU and Council of Europe project "Strengthening Anti-Trafficking Action in North Macedonia," provided around EUR 90,000. Through the EU4FAST project by **GIZ**, approximately EUR 17,500 were secured;

6. PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR 2025

- Provision of a new facility/premises for the operation of the Centre for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings in line with international standards;
- Support for the continuous work of the five mobile teams for identification, referral and assistance of victims and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings, as well as the establishment of a fund for direct assistance to vulnerable categories, including victims and presumed victims of trafficking in human beings;
- Implementation of an evaluation of the National Strategy and National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings/Children and Illegal Migration 2021–2025, and the development of new documents valid for the period 2026–2030;
- Development of training methodology for proactive investigative techniques, including the use of information and communication technologies;
- Implementation of training on SOPs for trafficking in human beings and SOPs for dealing with unaccompanied children and other vulnerable categories of foreign nationals, intended for police officers and social workers;
- Implementation of multidisciplinary training at all levels to strengthen the capacities of professionals for the identification and appropriate referral of victims and presumed victims of trafficking, especially for inspectors from the Sectors for Internal Affairs working in the fields of domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, and begging, including prevention inspectors, in order to inform a wider number of officials who come into contact with presumed victims of trafficking and child victims;
- Monitoring and evaluation of policies for the prevention of trafficking in human beings;
- Strengthening the system of free legal aid for victims of trafficking at all stages of the judicial process, with particular emphasis on the protection of victims' rights and the provision of fair and just trials;
- Support to victims of trafficking in the process of exercising their right to compensation, in accordance with the Law on Financial Compensation of Victims of Violent Criminal Offences;
- Provision of legal assistance to persons moving within mixed migratory flows, and legal and psychosocial support for asylum seekers and persons in need of international protection;
- Implementation of awareness-raising campaigns on the risks and consequences of trafficking in human beings/children, targeting communities, youth, and vulnerable groups.