

## FORMS OF INTERNAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

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### ABSTRACT

The crime whose object is people, who acquire the epithet „white slavery“, is not unknown, but it constantly manifests itself in new forms and shapes, through which it always finds ways to appear legal, most often hiding under legal professions and occupations. Internal human trafficking, which was invisible for a long period of time, gradually expanding the spectrum of trends of realization, today exists everywhere in the region. Human trafficking represents a serious violation of fundamental human rights and a strong affront to human dignity. The analysis of the developments in the area of human trafficking on the territory of the country and beyond confirms the facts of the Republic of North Macedonia increasingly being identified as a country of origin, and to a certain extent also a country of transit and destination for victims of human trafficking, where internal human trafficking dominates, which is carried out on the basis of certain methods of recruitment followed by an appropriate form of exploitation, as an achieved goal of previously organized and planned activities of human traffickers.

**Keywords:** human trafficking, phenomenology, etiology, human trafficker, trafficked victim.

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## **Introduction**

The phenomenon of human trafficking is as old as humans, but throughout history it has manifested different forms and different scope of implementation. This complex and multidimensional form of organized crime grossly violates the fundamental human rights and freedoms of trafficked victims, while also violating the constitutional and legal principles and standards of modern democratic society. As a global problem, it is present in all cultures and societies of modern life, regardless of differences in economic development, political order or religious affiliation of the population. While human trafficking is becoming increasingly diverse in its manifestations, governments of all countries need to take appropriate and strengthened measures to contribute to the joint efforts to reduce this threat to global security and humanity. The need for systematic and rapid action stems from the seriousness of this problem, evident from the statistics related to it, which show that the number of people living in slavery around the world today is more than 46 million. There is no country in the world that is immune to human trafficking; some are countries of origin, others of transit, and still others of destination. North Macedonia is a source, transit and destination country for men, women, and children - victims of human trafficking for sexual services, forced labor, organ trafficking, pornography, forced marriages, illegal adoption of children and begging. The age of the victims is getting younger, and more victims come from neighboring countries. Two - thirds of the identified victims in North Macedonia are between 12 and 18. Victims of sex trafficking in North Macedonia who are foreign nationals are most often from Albania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine, and Kosovo. North Macedonian citizens are often victims of sex trafficking and forced labor in Greece, Bulgaria, Croatia, and other countries in Southern, Central, and Western Europe. Traffickers use false promises of employment to lure young women and subject them to trafficking abroad. The harshness of the reality we live in today makes striking the indicators that many victims of human trafficking in North Macedonia are minors, i.e., children. This increases the responsibility and obligation of the state to mobilize its entire structure in the fight against this modern evil.

Internal trafficking in humans, unrecognizable and unrecognized for a long time, has slowly expanded the scope of forms of realization, not

bypassing any country, especially visible in the region's countries. Internal trafficking, today, is a form of human trafficking that currently dominates, and its etiology is explained differently. There seems to be a trend of continuous increase in the number of domestic victims who are internally trafficked, while the number of victims of trafficking from abroad is stagnating. Traffickers, faced with the new situation in the region, are turning to the local market and internal trafficking, exploiting the shortcomings in national strategies and legislation related to human trafficking, which are primarily aimed at combating transnational trafficking (Berman J., 2014). The number of victims of human trafficking, who in the process of trafficking remain within the borders of the state, i.e. do not cross them, but are transferred from one end of the state to another, based on statistical data at the national level (which show a larger number of minor victims of human trafficking - from 6 to 28 children - victims of human trafficking annually, compared to adult victims of human trafficking - from 1 to 9 annually), highlights the problem of internal human trafficking within the borders of the Republic of North Macedonia and encourages efforts to establish an appropriate framework of action to eradicate the causes of this phenomenon and effectively prevent and protect risk subjects from involvement in the stages of realization of the existence of this type of crime.

### **1. The incidence of internal human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia and it's criminal trends**

The undeniable fact of the change in the situation in the country, which from a country of transit and destination, has been added the designation of country of origin of victims of human trafficking, points to the conclusion of an increase in the number of domestic victims, i.e. victims of internal human trafficking that occurs within the borders of the state, followed by a decrease in the number of foreign victims who in a certain way crossed the border of the state and the act of trafficking ended on its territory.

The annual reports of institutions and government bodies that are already deeply involved in the issue of human trafficking and skillfully detect the basic urges of society which, in addition to other social anomalies, are the source of the problem of selling the basic values of man

for the purpose of his apparent enrichment and enrichment of the organizers of criminal activities who terrorize the human being, exploiting it in various ways, point to the conclusion that the Republic of North Macedonia is a source, transit area and final destination for men, women and children, who, through the processes of realization, become victims of human trafficking, driven by the aforementioned desire for „enrichment“. The statistics on human trafficking in recent years show a decline in the number of foreign persons trafficked in North Macedonia, while the number of North Macedonian victims of human trafficking is increasing (National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration., National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration in the Republic of North Macedonia (2021 - 2025), 2021). Namely, it is an expansion of internal human trafficking, which primarily targets North Macedonian citizens, minors, who are trafficked from one part of the country to another. The living conditions in certain parts of the country are favorable and enable the origin of victims of trafficking for the purposes of sexual, labor and double exploitation of these types, which is realized in other parts of the country where conditions for its realization are provided, already adapted to the needs of those who seek to earn income for survival in these ways. North Macedonian women and girls from less developed areas are recruited under the pretext of false employment in the hospitality industry and later become the subject of sexual exploitation and forced labor in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs in the northwestern part of the country. The territory is also a fertile ground for other forms of exploitation of people, increasingly children, and there is no denying the visible and frightening scale of street children (mostly Roma), who, under pressure from their families, are exposed to forced begging, and girls from this ethnicity to sexual exploitation through forced marriages.

In the last years, the media has presented the problem of the occurrence of disappearances of minor females reported to the regional units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs by the parents of the missing. The public is disturbed daily by reports of repeated cases of missing minors from homes in various parts of the country. It is notorious and shocking that there are many cases when a minor female leaves her parents' home, heading in an unknown direction to them. The uncertainty of the family about where their child is and why she ran away from home has been

resolved in only a few cases in which the girl either returned home on her own, or was found after police actions. Namely, during controls of catering facilities in the Tetovo - Gostivar region, the police discovered several North Macedonian citizens, including girls who had been listed as missing for a long time, working illegally as dancers together with girls from neighboring countries (Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania).

Constructed in this way, these cases point to the commission of acts of human trafficking, in which girls aged six to seventeen, and most often those aged fourteen to sixteen, become part of a chain of human trafficking within state borders, taken from their place of residence (Skopje, most often Gazi Baba, Saraj, but also from Kumanovo, Strumica, Shtip, Tetovo, Gostivar) to parts of the country where the illegal exploitation of their bodies and labor is flourishing (Tetovo and Gostivar). Such uncontrolled and repetitive incidence of cases in which children are involved in illegal businesses that generate huge profits for traffickers should not leave the entire public and the competent institutions, including the police, without a voice and a hearing, to highlight a real problem that is occurring at the national level, to confront the fact that the state is not immune to processes in which organized structures destroy young lives in order to enrich themselves, as well as to find appropriate and rigorous mechanisms to eradicate the causes of such a phenomenon, but also to make it more difficult for traffickers to easily reach their targeted prey. This implies a very deep penetration into the pores of organized crime, which undoubtedly has movement and continuity in the country and lives in all social spheres, especially where corruption and bribery can facilitate access to children and young people, girls and boys, who very often end up as victims of processes that involve their abuse and exploitation in the worst possible forms in which human trafficking exists.

This is compounded by the fact of the presence of corruption in the bodies with primary responsibility for detecting such forms of crime, which permeates from the lowest level to the highest circles of officials, whose influence on the unstoppable flow of trafficking and the transfer of potential victims from one part of the country to another is enormous, making it difficult to access criminal circles and activities to stop their illegal activities, the subjects of which are children, girls, women and men, who accidentally or driven by the intention to secure a more dignified life, become tied to the chain of trafficking forever, most often suffering the

consequences caused by its implementation. Namely, part of the income generated from the exploitation of victims, traffickers often use to bribe police officers and labor inspectors who are often part of investigations into such criminal acts, under the likelihood of complicity in acts of trafficking in human beings.

## **2. The most common forms of internal human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia**

### **2.1. Sexual exploitation**

The profiling of victims of this type of trafficking shows large numbers of trafficked women, who, driven by the desire to easily earn greater financial value by working in bars, restaurants and nightclubs, end up in the hands of unknown users of their sexual services, in which they have engaged consciously or unconsciously, under coercion and threat of violating their health, integrity and physical appearance. Recruitment occurs in many ways, from physical abduction to false promises of employment and marriage, and results in the exploitation of the victim in the sex industry at various levels, from the production of pornography to street prostitution, escort and call girl agencies, or as personal sex slaves. Many women primarily agree to engage in offering and providing sex services during or after work in clubs, where they face physical and psychological abuse, mutilation of the body, and rape, unaware that they have begun an agony from which the way out is difficult, as it is prevented by constant intimidation by traffickers, as well as by unknown users of their services, that they will endanger their lives and those of their closest surroundings.

The situation with internal human trafficking in the country, viewed from the current perspective, shows an increased percentage of minors, i.e. children - victims of trafficking who come from areas with a significant poverty index, as confirmation of the results of research on the phenomenon at the state level, indicating that the high poverty threshold is the greatest motivating factor for involving potential victims in the processes of human traffickers who operationalize their illegal activities through well - organized structures that exist in the country. The profile of victims of human trafficking on the territory of the Republic of North

Macedonia reflects minors (mostly girls) who come from economically weak families of divorced parents or dysfunctional and high - risk families where violence or some vice is present with which the minor victims have had continuous problems, have experienced traumas that have left severe consequences in their lives, supplemented by the exploitation from the committed criminal offense, most often in the form of sexual exploitation which is carried out in the northwestern part of the country (National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration., Annual Report - 2022, 2023). Their recruitment, which involves force, threats, and deception, takes place in eastern North Macedonia. The perpetrator - exploiter, using verbal and physical violence - brings the victim into a state of helplessness to offer and provide sexual services to clients to obtain illegal property gain. Refusal of such services for a certain low amount that will go directly into the pocket of the trafficker (the services are provided for an amount of 2500 - 6000 denars), results in physical abuse (beating, tying with adhesive tape) or holding under force while the client uses sexual services from the minor victim.

Women who want to prostitute themselves in their own country are also sold through pimps, first within the country and later outside it; whether they like it or not, eventually they become the subject of trafficking outside their own country. But even though they are aware of what is expected of them, they are deprived of their autonomy and are thus exposed to violence and victimization within the framework of human trafficking, like any other victim of this crime. In the Republic of North Macedonia, domestic prostitutes are recruited among drug addicts, students, and poor girls, and in orphanages. Pimps first give them drugs and then work to earn money for drugs. Some girls leave their homes and start living with their pimp.

## **2.2. Human trafficking for labor exploitation**

The typology of human trafficking that occurs within the country determines the most common occurrence of double exploitation, i.e. labor and sexual exploitation of women, girls and children, which calls for greater action by society and the competent institutions to eradicate the factor that causes the urge in the community that generates the offering of labor. When they realize the insufficient earnings from its exploitation, the victims, initially of labor exploitation, undoubtedly switch to offering their bodies for commercial purposes, in order to obtain the promised

higher earnings from their traffickers, unaware that they have entered into a vicious circle of abuse of their being, which will last a long time and will only bring a lot of torture and great dissatisfaction, and little money. However, labor exploitation also exists separately from sexual exploitation, turning its victims into modern slaves, by abusing their physical strength and psychological health, torturing them with excessive and undignified work, and disrespecting their labor and rights, guaranteed on a broad international and national basis.

There is a wide range of activities and occupations where the individual's labor is exploited, so victims of human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation can be found working in: livestock farms/dairies, agricultural or construction work, plantations, textile industry, factories, plants, mines, private homes/cleaning and maintenance services, massage parlors, nightclubs, catering facilities, etc., although in the Republic of North Macedonia labor exploitation prevails in the textile, tourism and catering sectors. And regarding this form of human exploitation, some specific signs indicate abuse of this type. Namely, victims of labor exploitation throughout the country can be recognized and identified as such based on several basic characteristics of their work and the ways in which it is performed, namely: they perform humiliating, dirty or dangerous work without appropriate protective equipment; they are monitored at the workplace through surveillance cameras, locked up, isolated in remote locations without available means of transportation; they are unable to move freely; they work for long hours or days without breaks, days off, sick leave, outside the conditions prescribed by national legislation, without the right to appeal; they are disciplined through punishments (physical and monetary); their personal documents are withheld by the employer; their employer does not possess the necessary employment documents; there is fraud regarding the legality of the work; the employer is unable to provide records of wages paid to workers; there are no health and safety notices at work; there are known violations of labor laws and occupational safety; chronic diseases are present as a result of forced labor; victims believe they have to work against their will; they work under fear of their unregulated status being discovered (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy., 2014).

Although, within the number of persons identified as victims of internal human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia, the



number of male persons is smaller, when it comes to human trafficking for the purpose of labor exploitation, the number of identified male victims is much higher compared to female persons. The differentiation of labor exploitation is the beginning of the continuous victimization of male victims of trafficking, both adults and minors, which over time and the ubiquity of this way of exploiting their labor, becomes a typical form of victimization of male persons and therefore, the phenomenon of male human trafficking is characterized by a much higher dark figure of migration in the modern world, primarily for the purpose of labor exploitation. These victims are difficult to recognize and detect for distinct reasons: due to the „secrecy“ of the victim's status in the institution/sector in which they „work“ or due to fear of threats from employers, because of ignorance of their rights or due to the lack of appropriate identification indicators.

The guidelines and recommendations of the National Rapporteur on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of North Macedonia state that they envisage an effective response to new trends in human trafficking with a focus on labor exploitation and begging as a type of forced labor aimed especially at children, as well as at the unaccompanied category of minors, and determine directions for action to strengthen public awareness of the forms of labor exploitation aimed at unemployed persons who accept work in the country or abroad through intermediaries, and are insufficiently informed about the working conditions.

According to the current situation, the Republic of North Macedonia is profiled as a country of origin, transit, and destination for human trafficking for labor exploitation in a small number of cases detected by the police. The first case is an identified minor male child - a victim of labor exploitation at the age of twelve. The same, for about 2 years, was labor exploited in a barn where he „worked“ as a shepherd (National Rapporteur of the Republic of North Macedonia for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration., 2021).

Profiling the victims of this type of exploitation indicates an increased statistical expression of victims - minor girls who come from poor, deficient families with insufficiently educated or illiterate parents and are most often misled or deceived into believing that they will be legally employed and reported by the traders (in their catering facilities in

Western North Macedonia), under the pretext that they want to help them succeed in life and thus establish control over them and labor exploit them in order to gain material benefit by abusing their position. They are mostly recruited by their relatives (parents, sisters, brothers) with the promise of getting a well - paid job.

### **3. Profiling the main participants in the human trafficking processes**

#### **3.1. Human traffickers**

Internal human trafficking, which was invisible for a long time, gradually expanding the spectrum of trends of implementation, today exists everywhere in the region. Namely, human traffickers, faced with the new situation in the region, turned to the local market and internal human trafficking, taking advantage of the shortcomings in national strategies and legislation related to the phenomenon in question, which were previously primarily aimed at suppressing transnational human trafficking.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the problem of human trafficking is reflected in various forms and levels of organization of criminal groups whose aim is, through multiple forms of exploitation, to exploit women and children for greater profits. Regarding the situation with human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia, with the passing of the years and the complication of the very process of carrying out human trafficking, certain changes have been noticeable in the ways of committing the crimes, especially in internal human trafficking, just like in the region of Southeast Europe. Namely, the country follows European criminal trends in relation to this form of crime and is increasingly becoming a country of origin, but to a certain extent also a country of transit and destination, which is because it is easier to reach richer European countries through it.

The human trafficking reporters, as the competent institutions for informing about the numbers and the situation with trafficking at the national level, by presenting specific data in the available reports that they publish annually, enable the identification of a general profile of a typical human trafficker and a profile of a human trafficking victim. The general

impression is that the perpetrators of the criminal offense of human trafficking are primarily male persons, whose age range is in a wide range of generations, i.e., ranges from 20 - 45 years (National Rapporteur of the Republic of North Macedonia for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration., 2021). Most of the traffickers are citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia of Macedonian, Albanian and Roma ethnicity. Their level of education indicates that they most often have an incomplete education, i.e., with primary or secondary school education, by profession they are owners of catering facilities (in the Tetovo - Gostivar area) or employees in them and owners of nurseries or unemployed persons. As perpetrators of the crimes, they are most often organized in criminal groups that number from three to five members and have strictly divided roles of recruiters, transporters and exploiters, and their criminal past indicates that they are recidivists, i.e. previous perpetrators of criminal acts against life and body, sexual freedom and sexual morality, marriage, family and youth, against property, public order, against humanity and international law. Part of the illegally acquired profits, the traffickers use corrupt civil servants to ensure the unhindered realization of their criminal activities.

From the aspect of the *modus operandi* of the crimes, they use almost all methods of recruiting potential victims, namely they begin their trafficking activities by using fraud and deception about legal employment, confiscating a travel document and providing a forged one, transportation to the place of exploitation with threats of forced prostitution, followed by limited movement and communication, which continue with longer forced labor, accompanying clients to the table, forcing them to consume cocktails, sharing the tips received, control over the victim, punishment (non-payment of daily allowance), etc. The place of commission of the crimes determines the criminal trend, and in this regard, catering facilities in the Polog region of North Macedonia are a den of criminal activities of human traffickers, where they achieve the goal of committing the crimes, i.e., acquiring dizzying criminal financial profits.

Testimonies from victims of human trafficking suggest that the control tactics used by traffickers, employers, and predators are like those used by perpetrators of bullying, domestic violence, or child abuse. The goal of various forms of violence (terrorizing, lying and deception,

maintaining unpredictable and uncontrollable conditions, eliminating all decision-making power, emotional manipulation), coercion, and psychological manipulation is to make the person dependent and submissive by destroying the person's sense of self and connection to others.

### **3.2. Trafficked victims**

The flows of human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia profile victims of human trafficking with specific characteristics of this area in terms of social and living conditions, so according to gender, victims of various forms of exploitation are female and male persons in the age range from 12 to 26 years, which confirms the fact that the country is facing attacks on its own youth, which, according to all principles of living, is its future and prosperity. The increased initiation and completion of human trafficking processes within its territory, involving its citizens who undoubtedly become victims of recruitment, transit and exploitation processes, territorially defined within the southeastern and western parts of the country. Once involved in internal human trafficking processes, these victims are very easily recruited into international human trafficking routes.

The flourishing of internal human trafficking and its unknowable flows determine the citizenship of trafficked persons and in the figures of total crime of this type, persons with North Macedonian citizenship (from the eastern parts of the country) of Macedonian, Roma and Albanian ethnicity dominate, while the number of foreign victims of trafficking is smaller (mostly from Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Given the age of the people that human trafficking tirelessly hunts and keeps in its well - established grip, the trafficked victims have low educational standards, i.e., with incomplete education, with completed primary, up to the highest secondary education, without a profession, so engaging in exploitation appears as the only way to gain financial gain. The family status of the identified victims of human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia is reduced to a state of socially insecure and poor, deficient, dysfunctional family in which there is the presence of evident violence, i.e., a certain socio - pathological phenomenon. Children and girls/women are most often victims of combined labor and sexual

exploitation who sell their labor, i.e., their bodies, in catering facilities and brothels in the Polog region of North Macedonia.

The fact of the status of child trafficking in North Macedonia, as the most vulnerable group, is worrying, as indicated by the non - negligible data for certain reporting periods about human trafficking in the country, when the most common type of trafficking is trafficking in a minor for the purpose of sexual exploitation. A high - risk group are children aged 13 to 18, who come from poor and dysfunctional families, unaccompanied minors, but also children who have been left without parental care (children whose parents work in EU member states and leave their children in their countries of origin). From the aspect of the etiology of this trend, there are socio - economic problems, domestic violence, the presence of several pathological phenomena in which the children themselves are involved (forced prostitution, begging as a type of forced labor, especially of children from the Roma ethnic community who live and work on the streets, coercion to commit criminal acts, vagrancy, antisocial behavior). In fact, the risk group is children with poor school performance or, more often, an interrupted educational process.

Of the registered children - victims of human trafficking within the Republic of North Macedonia, the largest number are citizens of the country, and a smaller number are foreign citizens, from which it is undeniable that the largest number of trafficked children - victims are female children aged 14 to 16 (Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia., 2010). Namely, in terms of ethnicity, the largest number of children - victims of sexual exploitation are from the Macedonian and Roma ethnic communities, with psychological, educational and upbringing neglect or without parental care, street children, as well as children who live in poor socio - economic conditions or come from dysfunctional families, or whose parents have a low educational level; children with previous sexual experience, i.e. children who have already been victims of sexual exploitation or have been exposed to domestic violence, also appear as victims (Center for Legal Research and Analysis., 2017). The identified minors - victims of human trafficking, come from rural areas around Skopje, Gostivar, Kumanovo, Kichevo, Bitola and Kriva Palanka.

Minors from the Roma community are also a high - risk group, who according to their traditional law „marry“ at an early age, leaving for Western European countries where they easily become victims of human trafficking through fraudulent or forced marriages. The category of people at risk of becoming victims of human trafficking also includes unemployed adults with low or no education, aged between 18 and 33, who accept work in the country or abroad through intermediaries, and are insufficiently informed about the working conditions and become victims of labor exploitation.

### **Conclusion**

Although the Republic of North Macedonia is assessed in reports on human trafficking as a country fully committed to reforms in the area of prevention and suppression of acts of human trafficking, as well as protection and support for trafficked persons, and meets the minimum prescribed standards for combating the incidence of this phenomenon within its borders, which confirms the functionality of the well - established institutional system and legislative response against human trafficking at the national level, this designation does not overshadow the problem of increased implementation of human trafficking processes within its territory, through which its citizens end up as victims of acts of recruitment, transit and exploitation, initiated in the southeast (as a recruit - destination), and completed in the western part of the country (as a final destination). The current numbers and trends of internal human trafficking in the Republic of North Macedonia point to a complete picture of the situation, which shows a large number of minors, i.e., children - victims of trafficking who come from poor parts of the country, which indicates the fact that the high poverty threshold in the country is the biggest push factor for drawing potential victims into the processes of human trafficking that take place within its borders.

Despite the stoic stance of the state regarding the challenge posed by the unstoppable surge of the most brutal attack on the integrity of a person, not neglecting the possibility of involving the youngest, as well as despite the positive results in the implementation of legislation and ensuring a proper institutional setting in the fight against human trafficking, the number of cases of human trafficking detected by the

police is truly modest compared to the estimate of the number of victims of human trafficking in Macedonia.

Based on the presented data on the situation with human trafficking on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia and the forms through which it is most often exploited, the policies of action that relate to improving and perfecting the efforts in the fight against human trafficking within the state borders through the implementation of laws, a functional and effective institutional response, should undergo a necessary revision, which will include a detailed analysis of the strategic goals through a review of the achievements of the plan to combat internal human trafficking in the country.

Deepening national policies, by identifying the gaps in the totality of the state's efforts, both on a legislative and institutional level, and ensuring respect for legally regulated behaviors, is a necessary prerequisite for determining the path, initially towards prevention, and then towards finding ways to mitigate the consequences caused by human trafficking within national frameworks.

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