

Information on child labour abuse in the Republic of Macedonia (2012)

Via the previous Information on child labour abuse in the Republic of Macedonia submitted to the Department of Labour in 2012, we informed you that a Rulebook on the minimum occupational safety and health requirements for young workers had been developed. The Rulebook was adopted by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy with the consent of the Minister of Health, and was published in the "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 127/12 of 15 October 2012.

This Rulebook prescribes the minimum occupational safety and health requirements for employees younger than 18 years of age, to be precise, for young workers. Moreover, it defines the obligations of the employers with the aim of ensuring working conditions that will not have an aversive effect on the health and safety of the young workers, as well as the workplace risk assessment, the preventive and corrective measures that should be taken (the preventive measures being health examinations—previous, periodic, and targeted) prior to the assigning to a job position, as well as when any substantial change in the working conditions takes place, the informing of the young workers and their representatives of the findings of the conducted risk assessment, etc.

In addition to the general provisions for the protection of the workers, the Rulebook also prescribes the limit values of exposure to the harmful effects of physical, chemical and biological agents in the workplace, the list of harmful factors and working conditions to which young workers should not be exposed.

According to the data available to the Office of the National Referral Mechanism, eight victims of human trafficking were identified in the year of 2012, specifically:

- by age: four minors and four adults;
- by gender: six females and two males (one of which was a child at the age of 12);
- by citizenship: four citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, three of the Republic of Albania, and one of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the year of 2012, the number of identified adult victims was identical to the number of identified under-aged victims. The social insecurity i.e. the poverty of the families which the victims came from was evident, which is one of the reasons they became victims of human trafficking. The minors came from dysfunctional families from Veles, Kumanovo and the rural areas near Skopje, and were identified in Gostivar and Tetovo.

In addition to the sexual and labour exploitation of the female victims, human trafficking for the purpose of labour exploitation of male persons was also noted.

In accordance with the Law on Social Protection, a national shelter i.e. Centre for victims of human trafficking was opened in 2011.

From the opening of the Centre for victims of human trafficking to December of 2012, a total of 12 persons were accommodated in the Centre (two adults and ten minors). Two of them were foreigners with temporary residence permit.

The victims were provided with emotional, medical, and legal aid and support; what is more, efforts for their social inclusion were made in cooperation with non-governmental organisations and the social workers from the Centre for Social Work.

During their stay in the Centre for victims of human trafficking:

- the victims were included in the educational process;
- the victims were enrolled in courses for additional training;
- the victims were enrolled in foreign language courses;
- individual reintegration programmes were developed for each of the victims, and they were returned to their families or to other safe environment, whereas the foreign citizens were returned in cooperation with the competent institutions and organizations for transnational referral of victims of human trafficking.

In order to improve the identification process in three towns, namely, Gostivar, Bitola and Kumanovo, the social workers from the Centres for Social Work were included as part of the mobile teams together with representatives of non-governmental organizations. The project is being realized by the Association for Equal Opportunities "Equal Access" from Skopje, is implemented with the support of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and is financed by the King Baudouin Foundation and the German Agency for International Cooperation (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit – GIZ*). Six mobile teams composed of social workers from the Centres for Social Work and representatives of non-governmental organizations (i.e. 12 persons from the three aforementioned municipalities) were established, and are now involved in the field work of the local communities. The purpose of the mobile teams' activity is: to detect human trafficking victims/vulnerable groups in the local community, to find and propose possible solutions for overcoming the problems, to provide help and support to the identified human trafficking victims and their families, and to implement programmes for reintegration.

The direct help and assistance to the victims, their families, as well as to the vulnerable groups consists of:

- Counselling, psychosocial help and support with the purpose of gaining confidence in their personal capacities and abilities (individual strengthening of the victims, individual conflict resolution and building interpersonal relations based on respect between family members);
- Reintegration – assistance and support in the process of inclusion in the social environment, and training for independent living (economic strengthening, vocational training courses, etc.);
- Returning to the educational process, providing textbooks and other educational services/needs;
- Medical assistance to persons without health insurance, medical services – laboratory, dental services, provision of medications, gynaecological examinations and similar needs;
- Legal advice and assistance in providing necessary documentation (personal identification card, medical documentation, citizenship, etc.);
- Animation in terms of leisure is conducted in accordance with the interests and affinities of the victims/vulnerable groups (sports clubs, youth clubs, libraries, etc.);
- Satisfying other identified needs that are based on the assessment done and the priorities set by the mobile teams (providing warm footwear and clothing, linens, blankets, firewood, etc.), as well conducting activities for acquiring cultural, hygienic and other habits.

Sexual abuse of children is a global and serious problem with a wide range of consequences, both medical and social, that have immediate and far-reaching effect on children.

The awareness of the severity of this problem in the Republic of Macedonia imposed the need for initiating a process for undertaking measures and activities for a coordinated and comprehensive response to this problem.

For that purpose, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Sexual Abuse of Children and Paedophilia 2009–2012. In order for the Action Plan to be effectively implemented, a National Coordination Body was established consisting of representatives from all relevant ministries and non-governmental organizations, the presiding member being the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. The activities envisioned within the Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Sexual Abuse of Children and Paedophilia 2009–2012 which were carried out in the past period include:

In the year of 2009, research and an analysis of the situation regarding child abuse and paedophilia were conducted; this was realized with the help of the UNICEF Office in Macedonia. The findings of the research were officially announced on 3 February 2011.

During the years of 2009 and 2012, trainings for journalists were conducted which were attended by about 50 journalists from various printed and electronic media on the topic of “Appropriate media informing on cases of children victims of abuse, incest and paedophilia”.

The main objectives of the training included: developing sensibility for children’s rights and the various types of violence perpetrated on children, with special emphasis on sexual abuse of children; encouraging forms of constructive action in order to prevent violence against children and appropriate media informing on cases of sexual abuse of children and paedophilia; familiarization with the system/mechanisms of monitoring of children’s rights in the Republic of Macedonia; contributing to the improvement of the mutual cooperation and communication between the media, the governmental and the civil sector; providing impetus for joint engagement in the process of protection and promotion of children’s rights; initiating better interconnection between all participants via joint action in the process of realization of children’s rights and the democratization of society.

In the year of 2010, the National Coordination Body for implementation of the Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Sexual Abuse of Children and Paedophilia developed a Protocol for institutional action in case of reporting sexual abuse of children and paedophilia which was printed in 2,000 copies with the financial support of the World Health Organisation Office, and was distributed to all competent institutions.

In the beginning of 2012, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy promoted the www.stop-pedofilija.org.mk webpage for reporting cases of sexual abuse of children and paedophilia, with the purpose of raising the public awareness concerning the problem of sexual abuse of children and paedophilia, as well as with the purpose of motivating the children that have been exposed to sexual abuse and paedophilia to report it to the relevant institutions. This webpage provides information about who may become a victim of sexual abuse, the profile of the perpetrators, the ways in which one can determine if a child has been exposed to sexual abuse, and, more importantly, where to turn to for help. In addition, the webpage has a blog via which all visitors can ask questions that will be answered by the expert team from the Public Institution – Institute for Social Affairs.

In the period from 1 January 2012 to 20 December 2012, the webpage for paedophilia was visited 9,994 times in total. In the month of June, information regarding the campaign realized by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the

Red Cross was presented on the webpage; the number of the SOS phone line, to be precise 15 505, was placed on the home page, as was the link to the Registry of paedophiles. The Facebook profile is also active, and currently has a total of 437 friends. Contents that refer to the activities that the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy undertakes in the field of prevention and countering sexual abuse of children and paedophilia are posted on this Facebook profile, in addition to the information regarding other activities related to the protection of children in the Republic of Macedonia.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Public Institution – Institute for Social Affairs in Skopje, in cooperation with the Centres for Social Work and the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia, realized the campaign entitled “With education and knowledge to prevention of sexual abuse/paedophilia” in the period from 15 November 2011 to 15 November 2012. For the purpose of the campaign, with the aim of informing of the problem of sexual abuse of children and paedophilia and the ways of dealing with it, the Public Institution – Institute for Social Affairs in Skopje, in cooperation with the Red Cross of the Republic of Macedonia, prepared educational material in the form of a leaflet which was distributed in the primary and secondary schools.

A total of 156 schools (specifically, 125 primary and 31 secondary schools) were covered with the preventive activities; 59 of the schools (45 primary and 14 secondary schools) were located in Skopje. Moreover, a total of 187 informative workshops were organized at the scope of which were a total of 4,941 persons (professional staff from the schools, the students and the parents).

With the aim of protecting children from sexual abuse and paedophilia in the Republic of Macedonia, the Law on the Special Registry of Persons Convicted of Criminal Offences of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Paedophilia (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 11/12.) and the Rulebook for the manner of entering data on persons convicted of criminal offences for sexual abuse of minors and paedophilia, as well as for the manner of mutual informing and cooperation (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia” No. 62/12) were adopted.

Pursuant to the Law on the Special Registry of Persons Convicted of Criminal Offences of Sexual Abuse of Minors and Paedophilia with an Effective Court Decision, the Rulebook for the manner of entering data on convicted persons in the special registry of persons convicted of criminal offences of sexual abuse of minors and paedophilia with an effective court decision and the manner of mutual informing and cooperation, the Public Institution – Institute for Social Affairs in Skopje maintains the Registry on convicted persons and publishes the data on the Internet. A special webpage was designed for this purpose: www.registarnapedofili.mk. The special registry and the webpage contain information on convicted persons (to be exact, name, surname, nickname, place of residence, age, crime for which that particular person was convicted, and starting and final day of the prison sentence). The special registry has been active since 1 June 2012; by 19 November 2012, data on 113 persons were entered, five of which have served their prison sentences and have been released.

Furthermore, in the month of June of 2012, a National Coordination Body for protection of children from abuse and neglect was established. Moreover, a National Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children 2013–2015, with an Operational Plan for the implementation of the Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children 2013 adopted by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in December of 2012.

In order to provide a systemic and holistic response to the issue of children on streets, an Action Plan for Children on Streets 2013–2015 is currently being developed, with a strong emphasis on the social and health care for these children and their inclusion, via various forms, in the educational system of the Republic of

Macedonia. It is anticipated that the Action Plan will be adopted in the first quarter of 2013.

Promotional material for reducing the incidence of children on streets was prepared, with the intention of raising the public awareness of the causes and the consequences of this negative phenomenon, as well as of the rights and obligations of the public regarding the provision of help in the protection of this vulnerable category of children.

With the purpose of expanding the network of institutions for social protection of children on streets, a Day-care Centre for children on streets will be opened in the municipality of Prilep in the year of 2013.

A new form of social work, the so-called patrol (field) social work, was introduced. With the introduction of this new type of social worker, namely the patrol social worker, the preventive social protection is strengthened, aiming at increasing the degree of access to the social services, enhancing thus the social security of the citizens. The power of this profile lies in the direct contact with the persons at risk, the possibility of finding alternative techniques and forms for problem solving, and respecting the fundamental principles of social work, "from help to self-help".

A free-of-charge SOS phone line 15 505 was opened, via which a child on street or a child victim of sexual abuse can be reported.

A service for free summer and winter vacation for children from socially vulnerable families was introduced.

A new street newspaper entitled "Face to Face" was promoted by an Association of Citizens; the newspaper is sold by children on streets over the age of 16 that are accommodated in the Day-care Centre for Children on Streets "Shuto Orizari". The newspaper sellers stimulate the social responsibility among companies and citizens, whereas the topics that are found in the newspapers seek to create a better future for the marginalized groups in the society. Half of the funds gathered from each sold newspaper are for the seller (the child on street), whereas the other half is used for the printing of the newspaper.