



## **Social integration of Human Trafficking victims:**

*Evaluating institutional capacities in Macedonia for the protection of the victims of human trafficking*

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The reintegration of the victims of human trafficking represents one of the key elements in the anti - trafficking policy. Since it is difficult to define what successful reintegration means in this case, there are no defined benchmarks that a person needs to fulfill in order to be considered reintegrated. Therefore this brief gives an overview of the capacities and resources available for reintegration of the victims of human trafficking in Macedonia. It displays the main stakeholders of the reintegration process pointing out possible models for reintegration and things that can be improved and deserve greater attention.

### ***Institutional mechanisms for reintegration - how it works***

Reintegration programs usually cover a set of activities where the victims of human trafficking can feel that they are getting the support needed and that they have been equipped with certain skills in order for them to be able to continue pursuing their life objectives. “It is an individual process, where the victim feels accepted in the society and continues to interact within the communities<sup>1</sup>.”

These programs can be delivered through state mechanisms as well as through specialized non – governmental organizations (NGOs). Accordingly, areas that reintegration programs are mostly focused on are: education, vocational training, family reunification, access to labor market, employment and social benefits.

Macedonian authorities have adopted several key documents and ratified several international conventions that include and refer to the reintegration of the human trafficking victims, thus complying with most of the international legal standards. These documents include: National Strategy in Combating Human Trafficking, Standard Operating Procedures for Treatment of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress & Punish Trafficking in Persons, ILO Convention 182, Elimination of Worst Forms of Child Labor, Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography<sup>2</sup>.

In this regards the state has developed several institutional mechanisms that address the reintegration process of human trafficking victims. The "Standard Operating Procedures for Treatment of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings<sup>3</sup> " document clearly outlines the main stakeholders in the process of reintegration, on state and on civil level too.

Namely, regarding this issue, this document recognizes the following key stakeholders: the victim itself, the person in charge for that particular case, the legal guardian (in case of a minor), the Ministry for Labor and Centers for Social Work (National Referral Mechanism), non – governmental organizations, the representative of the local self government and the Ministry of Interior (Sector for Human Trafficking).

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Ms. Maja Varoslija, Programme Manager for Direct Support at “Open Gate La Strada” NGO in Skopje (20 August 2009)

<sup>2</sup> (U.S. Department of State 2009)

<sup>3</sup> (National Commission that deals with human trafficking and illegal migration n.d.)

The following table gives an overview of the mechanisms through which the victims of human trafficking have been sheltered at the “Open Gate La Strada” shelter.

Classification of the sheltered victims according to the referral method	
Organization/ method	Human Trafficking victims
National Referral Mechanism	17
Ministry of Interior	33
Centre for Social Work	4
SOS Line	1
Local NGO	1
International organizations	3

*Source: “Open Gate - La Strada”*

The process of reintegration according to the "Standard Operating Procedures for Treatment of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings" document identifies the following methods of reintegration:

- Psychological counseling
- Legal advice
- Language learning
- Vocational training
- Support for finding employment

The reintegration programs in Macedonia are based on the following three documents:

- Program for resocialization and reintegration of the human trafficking victims
- Program for resocialization and reintegration of children victims of human trafficking
- Program for resocialization and reintegration of persons (adult or children) with special needs also victims of human trafficking

Every victim gets an individual plan for reintegration. If the victim agrees, he/she can be included in the preparation of the plan as well. If the local victim is not accommodated in a shelter, the reintegration plan will be made immediately after the needs assessment is finished by the Centre for Social Work. The support for foreign victims is available until the end of their temporary stay when all necessary information is sent to the authorities from the country of origin. The reintegration plan is made only if the victim wants to get additional help. However, if the victim is a child, the reintegration plan is mandatory.

## **Capacities**

Civil society can play very important role in combating human trafficking. Many civic organizations possess the knowledge and the capacities to directly tackle the issue of human trafficking. Their most visible role can be identified in the raise of awareness among the wider public on the topic of human trafficking, as well as in the creation and delivery of reintegration programs.

Currently, in Macedonia, there are only two shelters that provide accommodation for the human trafficking victims. One is governed by the Ministry of Interior and the other by a local NGO called "Open Gate La Strada." The state-governed shelter (Transit Centre for Foreigners) is not exclusively aimed at human trafficking victims. It accommodates migrants too. This is the place where all foreign human trafficking victims are accommodated. Consequently, there have been some concerns over the freedom of movement and the living conditions in this transit centre. "Happy Childhood", another local NGO, with its expertise serves as a service provider at the Transit centre for foreigners, offering reintegration programs for the foreign victims of human trafficking.

"Open Gate La Strada" operates their own shelter that has a capacity of 7 + 3 places. The shelter has been functioning since 2005 and it represents the only operated non-governmental shelter for women - victims of human trafficking. The victims can stay in the shelter up to 1 year. Since 2005, the organization has assisted 59 victims, all Macedonian.

In this context, the "Open Gate – La Strada" provides reintegration programs for the victims, focusing on psychological counseling, education, vocational training, languages, IT training and support for finding employment. One of the success stories of "Open Gate La Strada" is its employment program. The organization offers victims who are staying in the shelter grants of 3000 Euros which they can use as a contribution for the opening and development of small businesses. A practice "Open Gate La Strada" uses in the area of employment is that it cooperates with the local owners of small businesses. Some of the victims enrolled in this program start to work in some of these SMEs and all the expenses for salaries, social and health insurance are covered by "Open Gate La Strada" for the first 6 months.

Currently, the government is working on the implementation of the recommendations of one specific state shelter where only human trafficking victims will be accommodated. The projection is that this specific unit should be ready until the end of this year, but by the time of the writing of this report nothing has been done.

Overall, there is an existing platform for cooperation between the civil society and the government on this topic. For instance, with the Ministry for Education and Science, "Open Gate La Strada" has signed a memorandum where the Ministry gives approval to the organization to visit schools and conduct workshops and other awareness-raising campaigns on the problem of human trafficking.

Both the government and NGO representatives agree that the lack of funding puts the whole cooperation on a minimum scale since the state funds available as a support for the work of the non-governmental organizations are limited<sup>4</sup>. All the work that has been done until now has been mainly a result of foreign donations. The most alarming fact is that there are no funds available for the implementation of the reintegration programs on a state level. There have been some promises that with the opening of the new state-run shelter the level of state support will significantly increase. Whether that will be the case it remains to be seen.

### ***Foreign victims***

Until now there have been no requests for temporary stay in Macedonia by the foreign victims of human trafficking. Though there is a legal framework set up, no requests have been filed. Having in mind that one of the main reasons why someone would get engaged in the channels of prostitution are the devastating economic performances and the poverty in one's home country, we can understand why there are no requests for a temporary stay. The extremely high level of unemployment in Macedonia (33.5%) is not an encouraging condition for economic stability of trafficking victims after the reintegration programs are over.

"Open Gate La Strada" has assisted one Macedonian victim in cooperation with the Department for Witnesses' Protection at the Ministry of Interior. The victim was moved to a third country, where he/she was afterwards assisted by the local "La Strada organization" and continued with the reintegration plan.

The Repartition process is organized and financed mainly by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with an office in Skopje.

### ***Local self government***

One of the identified stakeholders in the process of reintegration are the local authorities. Apart from the 27 Centers for Social Work, which are in fact centralized, the local self government has not yet developed a strategy or built up any institutional capacities to integrate the victims more easily in the local communities. Nevertheless, there have been some steps taken forward in terms of getting visibility about this problem among the people in their respective communities. For instance, "Open Gate La Strada" initiated a network of NGOs across Macedonia that are dealing with human trafficking, human rights and women's rights. The outcomes are several campaigns, workshops and public debates so that the general public can take ownership of the problem and recognize the need for reintegration of the often stigmatized human trafficking victims.

### ***Conclusion***

The capacities of the country to ensure proper reintegration policies and resources for the human trafficking victims have been addressed several times by different national and international

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<sup>4</sup>Interview with Ms. Svetlana Cvetkovska, National Referral Mechanism, Ministry for Labour and Social Affairs (20 October 2009)

stakeholders in the process. Although Macedonia fully complies with the minimum requirements for eliminating human trafficking, further steps should be made in terms of strengthening national capacities, in order to provide reintegration assistance to the victims. Though the level of cooperation between the civil society and the state actors is generally satisfactory, there is a need for greater recognition of local NGOs that deal with this problem as real stakeholders in the process of reintegration. The government needs to act more proactively when it comes to ensuring more funds for the implementation of reintegration programs. It should not only consider the support of international donors but it should also focus on its internal resources.

In regards to the capacities of the state to accommodate human trafficking victims, even though there is a decision on creating a new shelter exclusively for the victims of human trafficking, both Macedonian and foreign, very little has been done in this regard. Still, foreign citizens are accommodated together with other groups of people in the Transit Centre for Foreigners and the Macedonian citizens are taken to the “Open Gate La Strada” shelter. This shows the urgent need for a new all-inclusive shelter.

On a local level there is a need for initial steps to be taken in order to raise awareness among local administration about the necessity of reintegration programs so that the victims can feel more welcomed in their own communities.

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## Foreign and Security Policy Program

**“Social integration of Human Trafficking victims:  
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victims of human trafficking”**

Andreja Bogdanovski, *Research Fellow of the Program*  
[abogdanovski@analyticamk.org](mailto:abogdanovski@analyticamk.org)

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### Analytica

Web: [www.analyticamk.org](http://www.analyticamk.org)

Email: [info@analyticamk.org](mailto:info@analyticamk.org)

Dame Gruev No: 7-8/3

1000 Skopje, Macedonia

Phone: 00 389 (0)2 3121 948

Fax: 00 389 (0)2 3121 948