

## Forced Begging as Worst Form of Child Labor in the Republic of North Macedonia

In the Republic of North Macedonia, forced begging as a form of human trafficking is not officially recognized. Even though the same children are sometimes observed begging at different locations, often under the supervision of other individuals, there are no identified cases of forced begging as a form of forced labor in practice.

In situations where a child is begging near a parent, some parents are prosecuted for the criminal offense of neglect and abuse of a child (Article 201 of the Criminal Code), which also includes the act of inducing a child to beg. Judicial authorities state that in most cases, children beg to support their families, which is not considered exploitation of minors. Prosecutors are reluctant to prosecute parents for forced begging.

Forced begging is often disguised as selling small items, washing car windows, or collecting aid for the sick. The most common practice is that children are recruited and coerced into begging by their parents, guardians, or other community members, and in some cases, by organized criminal groups. Victims of this form of human trafficking can be simultaneously exploited through multiple activities, which is becoming an increasing trend. This includes forced begging combined with coercion to commit (minor) criminal offenses, sexual exploitation, forced marriage, and labor exploitation. Organized and forced begging is a complex model of exploitation that keeps trafficked children trapped in cycles of abuse, forced to beg either for their families or criminal groups.

Undoubtedly, the largest number of children in street situations has been recorded in the main capital of Skopje, although even the figures provided by the Centers for Social Work should be taken with caution, considering that civil society organizations working to protect children's rights report significantly higher numbers of children engaged in begging.<sup>1</sup>

Children in street situations and children who beg continue to be predominantly from the Roma community, whose families live in extremely poor conditions. Their parents are unemployed and either have a low level of education or no education at all. These children live in long-term poverty and substandard conditions. The illiteracy of their parents results in a lack of authority, which, combined with insufficient parenting skills, an inability to keep their children off the streets, and in some cases, criminal behavior within the family, leads to younger generations adopting street life and begging as a way of living and earning income. According to MYLA's data most statelessness children are Roma and survive fully or partly by begging. Latest news discovered that children in street situations are extremely vulnerable and exposed to constant violence that often ends with serious physical injuries or death.

Daycare centers as community services exist only in Skopje, despite the presence of street children or children at risk in other cities, especially larger ones such as Kumanovo, Bitola, Prilep, Ohrid, and Struga. This issue becomes particularly visible during the summer months.<sup>2</sup>

## Differences Between Child Trafficking and Neglect & Abuse of a Minor

Both offenses aim to protect children, but the protection granted to a victim of **child trafficking** is broader.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ombudsman of Republic of North Macedonia, Special report on the research and analysis conducted on the situation of street children in the Republic of North Macedonia, 2023, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24

- **Child Trafficking** criminalizes various actions leading to forced begging, including recruitment, transportation, transfer, purchase, sale, offering for sale, procurement, provision, sheltering, or accepting a child for exploitation through begging.
- **Neglect and Abuse of a Minor** only incriminates inducing a child to beg.

Despite efforts from mobile teams, day centers, and programs to reduce school dropout rates and increase school enrollments, child begging has not significantly decreased, especially among Roma children. Civil society actors believe that the authorities make minimal efforts to improve the situation, and existing programs by civil society and international organizations are insufficient to remove children from the streets, where they are exposed to violence, abuse, and child trafficking.<sup>3</sup>

Although both offenses carry significant penalties (1–10 years in prison), punishment alone does not guarantee child protection. In cases of child trafficking, parental actions exceed neglect and reach the level of **exploitation**, causing more severe harm to the child. Daily exploitation through forced begging, combined with threats and abuse, has lasting consequences for the child's health and well-being.

The "Red Button" Hotline is a Ministry of the Interior-operated website application to report child abuse, human trafficking, hate crimes, and violence. The hotline was created to improve identification and timely referral of human trafficking cases, especially among migrants. However, MYLA's research finds that hotline is not functional.

### Positive Developments

- Expansion of mobile teams nationwide and training to identify trafficking through begging.
- Continuous training for Task Force members to improve evidence collection related to human trafficking for forced begging.<sup>4</sup>
- Changes in the Law on Identification Card which provide the opportunity for homeless persons to register the addresses of the Centers for Social Work as their home address, to receive ID. The changes of the law also provide the opportunity to register a home address at an illegal house. These amendments were first made as a preventive mechanism for statelessness and people without documents. Most of statelessness persons in the country are Roma, and large amount of them survive by begging.

---

<sup>3</sup> GRETA Third Evaluation Round, Access to Justice and Effective Remedies for Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings, published on 24 March 2023 (173)

<sup>4</sup> Action plan for implementing GRETA recommendations, time covered by the report: 1.1.2023-31.12.2025

---