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The Effects of COVID-19 on the Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a new challenge that has not yet been sufficiently explored. There are thus limitations in controlling the effects this crisis has caused worldwide. The pandemic constitutes a public health emergency, so there is a need for it to be considered in the context of people trafficking. Although it is not possible to fully predict the pandemic's effects on trafficking in human beings, previous experiences in other crisis situations could provide valuable insights into changes related to the forms of exploitation and the specifics of victims of this crime. The aim of this paper is to establish what effects the COVID-19 crisis has had on trafficking in human beings in the Republic of Serbia by analysing data collected by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings. This paper will present relevant data from years before the pandemic and the year in which the pandemic occurred (2020). The primary aim is to determine what changes took place in the forms of exploitation, as well as in the gender and age of victims, to create adequate conditions for the trends in this area to be followed.

Keywords: COVID-19, forms of exploitation, Republic of Serbia, trafficking in human beings, victims

Die Auswirkungen von COVID-19 auf den Menschenhandel in der Republik Serbien

COVID-19 stellt eine neue, noch nicht ausreichend erforschte Herausforderung dar, sodass die weltweiten Auswirkungen der Krise nur begrenzt kontrolliert werden können. Da das Coronavirus einen Notstand für die öffentliche Gesundheit bedeutet, muss es im Zusammenhang mit Menschenhandel betrachtet werden. Obwohl es nicht möglich ist, die Auswirkungen der Pandemie auf den Menschenhandel vollständig vorherzusagen, können bereits gesammelte Erfahrungen in anderen Krisensituationen wertvolle Erkenntnisse über Veränderungen in Bezug auf die Formen der Ausbeutung und die Besonderheiten der Opfer liefern. Ziel des Beitrags ist es, die Auswirkungen der COVID-19-Krise auf den Menschenhandel in der Republik Serbien zu ermitteln, indem die gesammelten Daten des Center for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings analysiert werden. Es werden relevante Daten aus den Jahren vor der Pandemie und dem Pandemiejahr 2020 ausgewertet. Das primäre Ziel ist es, die Veränderungen bezüglich der Formen der Ausbeutung, des Geschlechts und des Alters der Opfer zu bestimmen, um mit den Entwicklungen in diesem Kriminalitätsbereich Schritt zu halten.

Schlagwörter: Ausbeutungsformen; COVID-19; Menschenhandel; Opfer; Republik Serbien

1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19), since its inception in 2019, has caused a crisis which affected all areas of our life. Because of this virus and the fact that the situation was changing rapidly, states had to respond by creating national measures in the justice area. These measures had affected not only the judiciary, national authorities, and legal practitioners but also and citizens. On the one side, response measures both have restricted and expanded opportunities for various types of crime, including the crime of trafficking in human beings, and on the other side, has created various challenges for the criminal justice system.

The World Health Organization recognized the pandemic potential of the COVID-19 and in January 2020 declared it as a public health emergency of international concern (World Health Organization, 2020). Considering that the Resolution 63/156 adopted by the United Nations General Assembly recognizes the trafficking of human beings as a direct consequence of the crisis situations, such as conflict and post-conflict, disaster, and other emergencies (General Assembly, Sixty-third Session, 2009), there is a need for analysing the effects of this pandemic to trafficking in human beings. Although it is not possible to predict fully those effects, previous experiences in other crisis situations could provide valuable insights into changes related to the forms of exploitation and the specifics of victims of this crime. In line with that, all states, including the Republic of Serbia, had to respond, in order to prevent further spreading of this aggressive disease with an enormous potential for transmitting through human contact. These measures resulted in establishing quarantine, stopping mass gatherings, closure of educational institutes or places of work where the infection has been identified, and isolation of households, towns, or cities (Anderson et al., 2020).

In order to prevent the spread of infection and the consequences caused by the COVID-19 virus, the Republic of Serbia declared a state of emergency (Decision on the declaration of the state of emergency, March 15, 2020). By adopting the Decree on Restriction and Prohibition of Movement of Persons on the Territory of the Republic of Serbia on March 18, 2020, the state declared the complete abolition of the freedom of movement for certain categories of persons and partially for all categories. The Decree completely prohibited the movement in public places, outside apartments, and residential buildings and outside the household for the persons over 65 years of age and above in populated areas with over 5,000 inhabitants, as well as persons at 70 and up in populated places up to 5 000 inhabitants; for others, the Decree banned the movement from 8 pm to 5 am (YUCOM, 2020). These prohibitions lasted for almost a month, with certain corrections and the state abolished the Decree on April 9, 2020. Besides these, the state obligated the citizens to respect other measures such as the use of face-masks in public transportation and indoor spaces, social distancing protocols of 1.5 metres, ban on holding sporting and entertainment events, limited hours of operations for restaurants and bars, and a nationwide ban on gatherings of over 30 people indoors and outdoors (OECD, 2020).

The aim of the paper is to establish the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the forms of exploitation of trafficking in human beings and the specifics of the victims. For this purpose, it is necessary to consider the forms of exploitation which are prescribed by the legal definition of trafficking in human beings in the Republic of Serbia and the data for the period before and during the COVID-19 crisis, which were collected by the Centre for the Protection of Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings.

2. Legal Definition of Trafficking in Human Beings in the Republic of Serbia

Trafficking in human beings is recognized as a specific criminal offense in Serbian legislation. By adopting the Law on Ratification of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the additional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children in 2001, Serbia has committed to changing the national legislation in order to comply with international standards and regulations provided by these acts.

The Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia (Official Gazette of RS, no. 85/2005, 88/2005, 107/2005, 72/2009, 111/2009, 121/2012, 104/2013, 108/2014, 94/2016 and 35/2019) prescribes this offense in article 388. The basic form of this article prescribes imprisonment of three to twelve years for anyone who by force or threat, deception or maintaining deception, abuse of authority, trust, dependency relationship, difficult circumstances of another, retaining identity papers or by giving or accepting money or other benefit, recruits, transports, transfers, sells, buys, acts as an intermediary in sale, hides or holds another person with the intent to exploit such person's labour, forced labour, a commission of offenses, prostitution, mendacity, pornography, removal of organs or body parts or service in armed conflicts (paragraph 1). When the offense referred to in paragraph 1 of this article is committed against a minor, the offender shall be punished by the penalty prescribed for that offense even if there was no use of force, threat, or any of the other mentioned methods of perpetration (paragraph 2). If the offender used some of the mentioned methods to commit the offense referred to in paragraph 1 of this article against the minor, shall be punished by imprisonment of a minimum of five years (paragraph 3).

More serious forms of this offense will be realized: a) if the offense specified in paragraphs 1 and 2 of this article resulted in grave bodily injury of a person and if a grave bodily injury of a minor had resulted from the offense referred to in paragraph 3 of this article (paragraph 4); b) if the offense specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of this article resulted in the death of one or more persons (paragraph 5); c) for anyone who habitually engages in offenses specified in paragraphs 1 and 3 of this article or if the offense is committed by a group (paragraph 6); d) if the offense specified in paragraphs 1 to 3 of this article, is committed by an organized group (paragraph 7).

Also, anyone who knows or should know that the person is a victim of trafficking and abuse its position or allow another to abuse its position for the exploitation envisaged in paragraph 1 of this article, shall be punished with imprisonment of six months to five years (paragraph 8). If this offense is committed against a person for whom an offender knew or could have known to be a minor, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of one to eight years (paragraph 9).

It should be noted that trafficking in minors for adoption is not envisaged as a form of exploitation in the criminal offense of trafficking in human beings but is prescribed as a separate criminal offense in article 389. The punishment with imprisonment of one to five years is prescribed for anyone who abducts a child under sixteen years of age for the purpose of adoption contrary to laws in force or whoever adopts such a child or mediates in such adoption or whoever for that purpose buys, sells or hands over another person under sixteen years of age or transports such a person, provides an accommodation or conceals such a person (paragraph 1). Also, whoever habitually engages in those activities or if the offense is committed by a group, shall be punished with imprisonment of a minimum of three years (paragraph 2). If the offense

is committed by an organized group, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment of a minimum of five years (paragraph 3).

In order to gain a general insight into the trends of forms of exploitation of trafficked victims in Serbia, this paper will present the data related to forms of exploitation that were documented in the pre-pandemic period (2017-2019). Special attention will be paid to the analysis of data from 2019 – the year preceding the pandemic and 2020, which is the pandemic year.

3. The Forms of Exploitation of Trafficked Victims in the Republic of Serbia in the Pre-Pandemic Period (2017-2019)

In 2020, the Centre received 130 applications of suspicion that a person was a victim of human trafficking. The work was going on in total 139 applications because 9 applications were transferred from the previous year.

Out of the total number of applications, the identification procedure was initiated in 109 cases (79 % of the total number of applications), 12 applications are pending, and 17 applications were rejected. The largest number of applications in 2020 came from the Ministry of the Interior (45 %), followed by applications from the social protection system (33 %) and applications from the NGO sector (12 %), while the minimum number of applications came from other sources (personal applications, international organizations, the education system, higher public prosecutor's office, and others).

The identification procedure was started for 96 persons, and 57 were formally identified as victims. Out of the total number of formally identified victims, 24 were minors (42 %), and 33 victims were adults. According to gender, the most represented were females – 37 victims (65 %), while 20 victims were males (35 %). Among female victims, 49 % were minor and 51 % were adult. According to the criterion of the form of exploitation, the largest numbers of victims were sexually exploited (37 %). It is interesting that the next predominant form was labour exploitation with 12 victims, while 9 victims were multiply exploited, and 8 victims were forced to marry. A smaller number of victims were forced to criminality (4) and begging (2), and one was exploited through illegal adoption (Table 1).

Table 1. Forms of exploitation, gender and age of formally identified victims in 2020

Forms of exploitation	Under 18		Over 18		Total
	F	M	F	M	
Sexual exploitation	7		13	1	21
Multiple exploitations	2	3	1	3	9
Labour exploitation	1	2	2	7	12
Forced marriage	6		2		8
Forced criminality			1	3	4
Illegal adoption	1				1
Forced begging	1	1			2
Subtotal	18	6	19	14	57
Total	24		33		

To draw conclusions on the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on trafficking in human beings in Serbia, the data from 2020 will be analysed in comparison with the data from 2019.

The number of received applications in pre-pandemic year and during the pandemic year is approximate if we consider that 11 applications in 2019 and 9 applications in 2020 were transferred from the previous year. The data show an increase in the number of formally identified victims in 2020 – 12 more victims were identified than in the year before the pandemic (Table 2).

Table 2. The number of received applications and formally identified victims (2019-2020)

Year	2019	2020
Received applications	135 *11 transferred	130 *9 transferred
Started identification procedures	101	101
Rejected applications	33	16
Formally identified victims	39	57
Work in progress	40	13

In terms of the form of exploitation (Table 3), sexual exploitation is still the predominant form of exploitation with an approximate number of identified victims in both years (23 v. 21). A significant increase can be observed in labour exploitation with 12 identified victims, regarding the pre-pandemic year with only 3 victims. The number of victims also increased in multiple exploitations (9 v. 5), forced marriage (8 v. 3), and forced criminality (4 v. 1). Every form of exploitation will be discussed below, both theoretically and based on data.

Table 3. Forms of exploitation, gender and age of victims (2019-2020)

Forms of exploitation	2019				Total	2020				Total
	Under 18		Over 18			Under 18		Over 18		
	F	M	F	M		F	M	F	M	
Sexual exploitation	15		8		23	7		13	1	21
Labor exploitation		2		1	3	1	2	2	7	12
Multiple exploitation	2	1	2		5	2	3	1	3	9
Forced marriage	1		2		3	6		2		8
Forced criminality		1			1			1	3	4
Forced begging	1	2	1		4	1	1			2
Illegal adoption					0	1				1

3.1 Sexual Exploitation

Sexual exploitation in the period of the pandemic stands out as the most common form of exploitation, which is in line with trends from previous years. Based on the data in the pre-pandemic year, victims were females only, mostly minors (15 out of 23 identified victims). It is interesting that the ratio of minor and adult female victims changed in 2020, in favour of adults—14 out of 21 victims, as well as that the Center identified one adult male victim. An explanation for the change in the age pattern of the victims could be related to the economic crisis caused by COVID-19, which made victims more vulnerable. As in other emergencies, women and adolescent girls are facing the particular risks of sexual and gender-based violence, especially those who are earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs, or living close to poverty (United Nations, 2020).

According to data, most victims of sexual exploitation in Serbia are exploited through forced prostitution, so it is necessary to emphasize the risks associated with this type of exploitation

during the pandemic. Victims of forced prostitution are at higher risk of abuse and COVID-19 infection because of multiple close contacts with clients that buying sex (Welsh Women's Aid, 2020). It is disputable if victims have concrete and correct information about personal protection measures for preventing the transmission of the virus. Also, traffickers may subject victims to more pressure and violence, forcing them to accept lower prices from clients. Although forced prostitution is the most prevalent type of sexual exploitation in Serbia, the COVID-19 crisis may change the manner of exploitation – from the streets to “indoors” or “online” (Save the Children, 2020).

Because of pandemic conditions, traffickers direct their activities via the Internet and social networks, so there is a favourable situation for recruiting children and adolescents. The data show minors as a significant category of victims of sexual exploitation in Serbia – in the pre-pandemic year, the share of minors was 65 %, while in the pandemic year was 34 %. School closures and lack of interaction with social workers, teachers, and school friends can negatively affect minors and make them more vulnerable (UN Human Rights, 2020), while restrictions of movement and fewer possibilities for leading a quality social life, increase the demand for pornography. The traffickers are using more perfidious methods for establishing a relationship with victims, building their special relationship based on misconceptions and trying to get explicit photos and videos, based on which they would later keep their victims in obedience and continue to exploit them and make money on them (ASTRA, 2020). In the coming years, it is necessary to collect data on online recruitment and trafficking of minors and adults, in order to define more precisely the extent and consequences of this manner of sexual exploitation.

3.2 Labour Exploitation

The emergency state caused by the pandemic produced significant disruptions in the economic area, producing a negative impact on labour demand and employment, which consequently affected the increased vulnerability of the population to labour exploitation. The most concrete trend in human trafficking in 2020 in Serbia observed based on the collected data is the increase in the number of victims of labour exploitation. In a pre-pandemic year, the total number of exploited victims was 3, while in the pandemic year, the Centre identified 12 victims, mostly males and adults (9) who were exploited in construction and agriculture.

Disruptions in the labour market in recent years in Serbia have led to a trend of importing labour from other countries, which has led to the emergence of another very specific model of labour exploitation of foreign nationals who come to work in the Republic of Serbia. The case of Indian workers who have been exploited in several construction sites in Serbia, shows that foreign nationals are even more vulnerable in the conditions of the pandemic because they do not speak the local language, their documents may be confiscated, and they live in an unconditional barracks, without salaries and money to return home (ASTRA, 2020). As with Indian workers, victims may be recruited with promises of decent, well-paid jobs, and when victims agree with the offered job face abusive conditions (International Labour Office, 2020). Also, employees who are working through fixed-term agencies may be more vulnerable because there is a lack of direct connection between the assigned employee and the employer, with whom the employee performs work, which enables the employer to act in an exploitative and immoral manner towards the employee (Reljanović, 2020, p. 24). Also, there is an additional risk of labour exploitation for workers who perform their work in agriculture. To support that

is the reporting from ASTRA about the case of two workers who have been exploited on rural farms in Serbia, to whom ASTRA recently provided help (ASTRA, 2020).

The data from 2020 showed that only 3 victims of labour exploitation were females—one was minor and 2 were adult. Although the share of males as victims of labour exploitation is about 75 %, we should also consider that women's labour exploitation often takes place indoors—in private/domestic residences, therefore is less visible. Also, in 80 % of cases of sexual exploitation, women and girls were also exploited through their work (ASTRA, 2020). The COVID-19 protection measures, such as limitation of movements, quarantine, and social distancing, may contribute to the inability to detect such work.

3.3 Forced Marriage

Modern society has brought many changes in different areas of public and private life, but some harmful practices, such as forced marriage, have not yet been eradicated. The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on forced marriage must be considered under the causes of this harmful practice, such as poverty, lack of education, gender-based violence, accepted culture, religious and social practices based on stereotypes about sexuality and the role of women in society and other (UNICEF Beograd, 2016, p. 6).

The statistics of the Centre in previous years show that forced marriage is registered as a form of exploitation of trafficked victims in Serbia. Manifested trends indicate the practice of child marriages, bearing in mind that in the period of 2017-2019 victims were primarily female minors (10 out of 14). It was expected that a pandemic such as COVID-19 will increase the number of child marriages, because of the following challenges such as losing household income, higher risk of violence in the household, and lack of access to schooling. This stand is supported by the collected data, which indicate that the Center has identified 3 female victims in the pre-pandemic year — 2 were adult and one was minor, while in the pandemic year, the number of total identified victims increased to 8 female victims. It is important to note that out of 8 victims, 6 were minors, which shows that conditions of the pandemic increase the vulnerability of young girls.

Early marriages, as traditional practice in Serbia, are represented among the Roma population and some other minorities, such as the Vlachs, ethnic minorities in eastern Serbia (Aleksić, 2015, p. 40). Faced with high discrimination and without the possibility for education, along with economic deprivation during and after the pandemic, those girls are at higher risk to be exploited through forced marriage. According to the data of the Roma Center for Women and Children Daje, about a 1/3 of Roma girls in Serbia are forced into marriage before the age of eighteen. A special problem is a fact that arranged marriages are interpreted as part of the Roma tradition, even though the victim's life in a forced marriage is filled with violence, and her position in the husband's family is completely subordinated and marginalized, because of fact that she is a paid "commodity" (Romski centar za zenu i decu Daje, 2020).

Ultimately, the forced marriage may be the introductory phase for other forms of exploitation. Data of the Centre also supported this stand, by showing that some victims of forced marriage were multiply exploited through other forms of exploitation.

3.4 Forced Criminality and Begging

Trafficking in human beings for *forced criminality* is an increasingly significant phenomenon that is related to a lack of awareness. This form of exploitation is often considered as a type of the forced labour, but there is the legitimacy that it should be considered as a separate form of exploitation of the victims of trafficking in human beings. The traffickers can force victims to carry out a range of illegal activities, including theft, drug cultivation, selling counterfeit goods, or forced begging. Because there are very few cases reported in official statistics, there is a lack of awareness of this form of exploitation, so it misidentified many victims as offenders (Anti-slavery, 2014, p. 5).

As opposed to other forms of exploitation, forced criminality was the least represented form of exploitation in Serbia in the pre-pandemic period (2017-2019) — only 3 cases were recorded. The question is whether this form is really less practiced by traffickers or there are difficulties with the identification of victims. While victims of other forms of exploitation are in most cases recognized, the victims of this type of exploitation are often punished and prosecuted for crimes that traffickers forced them to carry out, disregarding that committed criminal offenses are a direct consequence of their status of victims. Bearing in mind that 2 out of 3 victims of forced criminality were minors, it can be concluded that in the pre-pandemic period Serbia had a problem with minor's forced criminality and that a large scale of dark number is related to this form of exploitation.

The COVID-19 crisis will make the identification of victims even more difficult because traffickers exploited these victims by forcing them to conduct illegal activities, so there is a lack of willingness by the victims themselves to report their victimization. Even if victims report it, they could fear that formal institutions will not recognize them as victims, so they will face prosecution and punishment for their illegal activities. It is interesting that in the pandemic year, there is an increase of the identified victims of forced criminality compared to 2019, in which only one male minor was identified. In 2020, the Centre identified 4 adult victims, of whom 3 were males, which shows that males are still the most predominant category of victims of forced criminality, but that the ratio between adult and minor victims has changed in favour of adults.

When it comes to *forced begging* in Serbia, the trend from the period of 2017-2019 shows that most of the victims were minors (7 out of 10 victims), both males and females (3 v. 4) and that this form of exploitation has been detected in more cases than the forced criminality (10 cases v. 3 cases). The data from 2019 is supporting this stand, because 4 victims of forced begging were identified of whom 3 were minors, in comparison with only 1 victim of forced criminality. It is interesting to note that in the pandemic year, more victims of forced criminality were identified than victims of forced begging, which was not the case in the years before the pandemic — 2 minor victims of forced begging v. 4 adult victims of forced criminality. These statistics may be related to the effect of the pandemic, which decreased the possibilities for begging, because of the quarantine measures and recommendations to stay home and keep social distance. In those conditions, traffickers may change the way of exploitation of victims, from forced begging to forced criminal activities such as property crimes, drug trafficking, and selling counterfeit goods.

Ultimately, the pandemic year showed the change in the pattern of these forms of exploitation in Serbia, in favour of forced criminality whose victims are now mostly adults, and that minors are more vulnerable to the forced begging.

3.5 Multiple Exploitation

One effect observed in crisis situations is that certain forms of exploitation become more present, while others take on specific characteristics. There are difficulties in classifying them in strict categories because victims are almost always exploited multiple times (Žarković, Tasić & Ćurčić, 2019, p. 55).

Statistical data in Serbia showed that in the pandemic year, there was an increase in victims who were exploited multiple times. In 2020, the Center identified 9 victims of multiply exploitation, which are 4 more victims than in the year before the pandemic. In the terms of age, 5 were minors, while 4 were adult victims. It is important to note that the trend observed in previous years has shown that the victims of multiple exploitations are mostly women and that the number of adult and minor victims is approximately equal. If we know the fact that females were mostly sexually exploited, it could be concluded that they were also subjected to other forms of exploitation such as forced marriage, forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, forced criminality and begging.

On the other side, the pandemic year showed the change in the pattern regarding the gender of the victims — 6 out of 9 victims were males. This change could be related to the notable increase of the labour exploitation in which identified victims were mostly males, so we may presume that traffickers exploited those male victims in other manners, such as forced criminality. The emergency conditions make it more difficult to distinguish forced labour and the forced criminal activities, because traffickers may transfer victims from informal sectors in which their labour was exploited, to illegal activities.

4. Conclusion

Since its outbreak, the COVID-19 pandemic has created a range of effects on trafficking in human beings, influencing the prevention and ways of fighting this criminal activity. The analysis of statistics showed us the situation of trafficking in human beings during the pandemic in Serbia and gave us the possibility to use it in order to identify some crucial issues, such as changes in forms of exploitation and the characteristics of victims that make them more vulnerable to trafficking. It is clear that we have an increase in the number of formally identified victims in the pandemic year and that official institutions, such as the Ministry of the Interior and the social protection system, played a crucial role in identifying victims of trafficking. This information shows the need to empower other actors who could be potential sources of applications on suspicion that a person is a victim of human trafficking. Bearing in mind that victims of trafficking were primarily Serbian citizens who have been exploited through national exploitation, combating against trafficking in human beings, especially in the conditions of crisis, more than ever requires quality inter-sectorial cooperation and the involvement of the entire community in solving this problem.

Young girls and women still represent the most vulnerable category of victims in almost all forms of exploitation, except labour exploitation. The pandemic has affected the age structure of victims, so adults were more victimized with a share of 58 %. We may relate this finding to a dramatic increase in the unemployment rate and a decrease in income, which has made a significant number of people who were already in a vulnerable position now find themselves in even more uncertain circumstances. This stand is supported by the main finding of the data

analysis, which is the dramatic increase in labour exploitation in Serbia in the pandemic year, where low-paid workers and those working in the informal sector stood out as victims. Given that adult males have emerged as the most common victims of labour exploitation, especially in the areas of construction and agriculture, it is necessary to conduct more comprehensive control of work in these areas.

In terms of sexual exploitation, it is necessary to collect data on online recruitment and trafficking of minors and adults, in order to define more precisely the extent and consequences of this manner of sexual exploitation. Although forced prostitution is still the primary form of sexual exploitation in Serbia, we need to further analyse the online exploitation of minor victims, through the collection and distribution of explicit victims' photos and videos.

The pandemic shows us that minors were also more vulnerable to exploitation through forced marriage, so we must focus special attention on the girls among ethnic minorities, such as the Roma population. It is crucial to raise the level of awareness that child marriages should not be considered as a common cultural practice among some populations, but that the very act of concluding such marriage is child exploitation. If the public is aware that there is no need to examine the position of a person in such a marriage, we can expect more successful identification of victims exploited in this manner and a more efficient reaction aimed at eliminating such marriages.

Ultimately, the pandemic has reduced opportunities for begging on the streets, so traffickers changed the manner of exploitation of victims, by forcing them to commit a wide range of criminal activities. As with labour exploitation, adult males were the most vulnerable category, so the special focus must be on increasing their willingness to report their victimization, by making it clear to the victims that the rule of impunity is being respected in Serbia and that they will not face with criminal sanctions for committing such criminal activities.

Given the fact that 2021 is expecting to be also challenging, there is a need to further collect data on trafficking in human beings in Serbia, and to create adequate conditions for following the trends in this area, in order to timely eliminate or reduce deficiencies observed in the pandemic year.

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