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Dear readers,



Thanks to the partnering in activities of all members of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage and the determined approach of our country to ensure all the preconditions for the full realization of the rights of every child, this year, Serbia is once again among the countries with a low child marriage rate compared to the global level. Despite that, we continue to advocate for every girl and boy to grow up and live in a safe environment and be protected from this harmful practice.

Early marriage represents an unnatural course of interrupted childhood, and its consequences for proper and complete physical and psychological development are multiple and complex. Girls were predominant among the victims of child marriage in Serbia in the previous three-year period, with an average share of 94.7%, with most of them being 16 and 17 years old. Girls are also additionally affected by immediate health-related consequences due to premature births, but also domestic violence that accompanies their overall unfavourable position. Data on nationality indicate that child marriage exists among many national minorities, but it is also obvious that this phenomenon is most prevalent among children of the Roma nationality, who make up 55.5% of the total number of children victims of early marriages. A worrying trend recorded in previous years is the increase in the share of children who do not attend secondary school among those entering into child marriages, and thus, it can be concluded that children of secondary school age who are excluded from the education system are at greater risk. Poverty and education are among the leading causes of child marriages, but there is certainly the factor of parents' education, especially the education of mothers, which makes them economically dependent.

The year behind us is of particular importance for child rights and the fight against all threats to them, because the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Resolution on ending child, early and forced marriage. In accordance with its recommendations, it is necessary to strengthen the support to particularly vulnerable groups of girls and young women who are on the margins of society and bear the greatest burden of unfavourable circumstances and emergencies around the world. That is why it is necessary to pay special attention to the root causes of gender inequality and to raise awareness of negative patterns influencing the perpetuation of phenomena and practices that violate human and child rights.

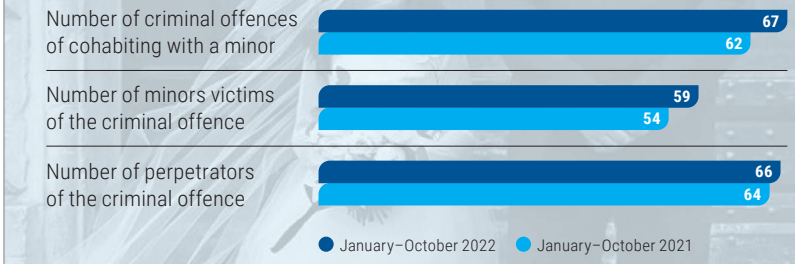
The Coordination Body for Gender Equality and the National Coalition to End Child Marriage will continue their journey towards a shared vision and creating an environment for the full realization of the human rights of every child in the best possible conditions for growth and development.

Maja Gojković
Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Culture and Chair of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality

What is the statistics on the state of child marriage in Serbia showing, according to the data provided to the National Coalition by the Ministry of the Interior?

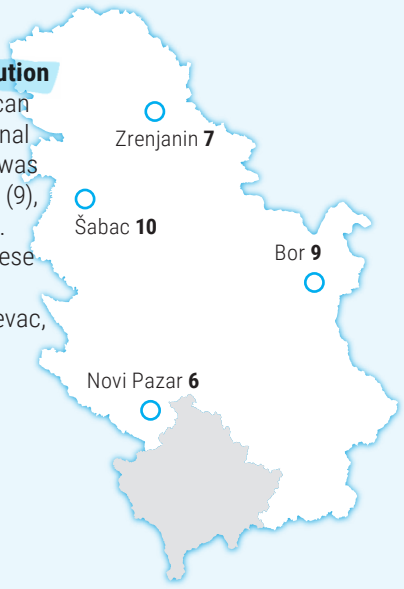
From January to October 2022, there was a **total of 67 criminal offences** of cohabiting with a minor recorded in the Republic of Serbia, which is **five criminal offences more** compared to the same period in 2021.

Cohabiting with a Minor from Article 190 of the Criminal Code



Data from the Ministry of the Interior (MoI) show that out of the total number of minors who were victims of this criminal offence during the last five years, 98% are girls, while this percentage is slightly lower in 2022 **(96.6%)**.

Looking at the **geographical distribution** of this criminal offence in 2022, we can see that the highest number of criminal offences of cohabiting with a minor was committed in Šabac (10), then in Bor (9), in Zrenjanin (7) and in Novi Pazar (6). Compared to 2021, the number of these offences has decreased in Belgrade, Kragujevac, Prokuplje, Valjevo, Kruševac, Čačak, Novi Sad and Pančevo.



НАЦИОНАЛНА КОАЛИЦИЈА ЗА ОКОНЧАЊЕ ДЕЧЈИХ БРАКОВА

Шведска Sverige

unicef za svako dete

UN WOMEN

UNFPA

UNDP

Seven charges have been dismissed so far in 2022, while 22 charges were dismissed in 2021. According to the MoI representatives, there is a significantly **high percentage of dismissed criminal charges** (almost one in three).

The most common reasons for the dismissal of criminal charges are:

- the defendant has fulfilled the accepted obligation under Article 283, paragraph 1 of the Criminal Procedure Code (rectifying the detrimental consequence or indemnifying the damage caused by the criminal offence);
- the criminal offence is not prosecuted ex officio;
- there is no evidence that the defendant has committed a criminal offence;
- lack of approval for criminal prosecution;
- in accordance with Article 18 of the Criminal Code (an offence of minor significance).

The MoI is regularly participating in activities that indirectly aim to prevent child marriage, through projects aiming to prevent and combat human trafficking as well as to improve the rights of children victims and witnesses of criminal offences.

The issue of child marriage requires a multisectoral approach and the continuous cooperation of all important stakeholders. Regular monitoring and sanctioning of this criminal offence sends a strong message of zero tolerance for this harmful practice. The data available to the Ministry of the Interior are an important guide for institutions and organizations when determining in which local self-government units (LSGs) it is necessary to invest additional efforts in combating child marriage. The decreasing trend of the criminal offence of cohabiting with a minor in certain LSGs can, among other things, be the result of continued activities in the field of prevention and awareness-raising of this harmful practice.

The members of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage are continuously making efforts to end the practice of child marriage through various activities within their mandate.

The Office of the Protector of Citizens organized the **Summer School** in September 2022, which was attended by 20 students of primary and secondary schools from 14 cities. During the Summer School, four members of the Protector of Citizens' Youth Advisory Panel presented the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to the attendees, while one of the workshops was specifically dedicated to the topic of violence against children, i.e. to different forms of violence and methods of protection. As part of the workshop on the position of children from national minorities and children living and working on the street, it was particularly highlighted to the attendees that **child and early marriages** in the Republic of Serbia, despite the numerous strategic documents, are **still present and represent a particular threat to girls**. The workshop highlighted that the position of Roma women is primarily the result of gender-based and other stereotypes, and particularly the lack of a systemic response to this phenomenon.



On 11 October, on the International Day of the Girl Child, **the Roma Women's Centre Bibija presented the Model of the economic reintegration of Roma women victims of violence**, as well as results achieved within the project Ending Violence against Women in the Western Balkans and Turkey: Implementing Norms, Changing Minds, supported by UN Women in Serbia and the European Union.

It was pointed out at the conference that there is no universal model of economic empowerment and integration of vulnerable women and men, and that a universal solution cannot be expected even within one group, due to numerous individual and environmental differences.



Models of the economic integration of Roma women in European countries as well as models of the economic integration of vulnerable women in Serbia were used as the basis for developing this model. The model itself proposes a broad approach based on a series of principles explained in detail, which must be further contextualized in relation to the specific local self-government unit where it will be implemented.

Some of the results of the project, in addition to the development of the model, are the increased awareness of Roma women about human, minority and women's rights, about the right to a life without violence, as well as about the opportunities provided by labour law (100 workshops for 100 women), improved employability of 50 Roma women survivors of violence in the labour market in targeted local self-government units in the Republic of Serbia through vocational training.

Through the "Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage Project",* the **NGO Praxis has implemented a series of activities aimed at the social inclusion of Roma girls**. The girls had the opportunity to go sightseeing in Jagodina, Zlatibor, Subotica, Palić and Vranje.

In addition to their main purpose, these activities also contribute to enriching the experience of girls, and therefore to their empowerment. Some of the girls had the opportunity to visit the zoo for the first time, to socialize with each other outside of their communities and school, to ride a bus for the first time in their lives, to learn about the lives of famous Serbian people and to participate in planning the trip and present the plan to their parents at a joint meeting.

NGO Praxis says: "We believe that workshops and activities like this, where you work directly with children and listen to their problems, needs and wishes, are the best way to approach children and influence their behaviour. Most of the girls from this group cannot expect their families to organize a day like this for them. That is why it is necessary for society and organizations that are interested and have the resources to take action and use their means and resources to include these girls in all the opportunities that society offers."

* The Project is financed by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Serbia and the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of the Federal Republic of Germany (BMZ) within the German development cooperation programme Inclusion of Roma and other Marginalized Groups in Serbia.



Adoption of the United Nations Assembly Resolution on child, early and forced marriage on 15 November 2022.

The Resolution highlights the urgent need to reach the poorest and most marginalized girls and women — the hardest to reach – while calling on the international community to intensify efforts to accelerate progress in ending child, early and forced marriage, including girls and women in vulnerable situations.

"Ending child, early and forced marriage and protecting the rights of girls and women means a more just, safer and more prosperous future for all of us. We cannot afford to see the hard-achieved progress slow down or roll back", pointed out the representatives of Canada who, together with members of the Zambian delegation, led the initiative for the adoption of the Resolution. (full text of the Resolution)

The **SEE Roma Child Rights and Inclusion Consultation** was organized in Athens by UNICEF Greece, and the delegation of the Republic of Serbia participated in the Conference on 10 and 11 October 2022.

It gathered representatives of the governments of Southeast Europe countries, representatives of the Roma community and UNICEF with the aim of exchanging experiences and promoting cooperation in the process of building an effective support network and improving the integration of Roma children.

As a member of the delegation, Mrs Radmila Nešić, on behalf of the co-chair of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage, presented, among other things, the efforts and results so far in the field of supporting girls, mothers and men to abandon the practice of child marriage in the Republic of Serbia. In her address, she highlighted the importance of the consensus reached among Roma leaders, which resulted in the adoption of the Declaration on Ending Child Marriage by the National Council of the Roma National Minority in March of this year.



Fight against all forms of violence against women is an everyday battle, and the global campaign "16 days of activism against gender-based violence" is an opportunity to draw attention to this structural problem. Child and early marriage is one of the most severe forms of violence against women and girls and we need a multi-sectoral approach involving all key actors to eradicate this phenomenon.

Child marriage is not a tradition, but an extremely harmful practice that results in lasting consequences on the psychological and physical health of children, especially girls, as well as on their education, exposing them to higher risks of poverty and isolation. According to Multiple Indicator Cluster survey on the position of women and children in Serbia in 2019 (MICS 6), as many as 55.7% of Roma women from substandard settlements got married before the age of 18, and 15.8% of them were married by the age of 15.

Through a coordinated approach and advocacy activities, National Coalition to End Child Marriage works to eliminate all risks that lead to child marriage and thus strives to ensure the right of all girls to carefree childhood and education, as well as a brighter and safer future.