

**SEX TRAFFICKING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS BASED ON LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS' ACCOUNTS**

**Original scientific paper**

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**Summary**

The purpose of this research study is to provide a description of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation within Bosnia and Herzegovina based on accounts provided by law enforcement officers. The current study relies on self-reported survey data collected from 363 Bosnian Border Police officers in the summer of 2011. The majority of officers surveyed stated that sex trade in BiH has become an internal affair where the majority of individuals involved (i.e., traffickers, clients and victims) are Bosnian and Herzegovinian nationals. Findings presented have important implications for anti-trafficking programs and legislation.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

According to the 2012 Trafficking in Persons (TIPS) report prepared by the U.S. Department of State, "Bosnia and Herzegovina is a source, destination and transit country for men, women, and children who are subjected to sex trafficking and forced labor." Human trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation (herein sex trafficking) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has gotten quite a bit of media attention in the last decade, including a major motion picture based on events occurring in the mid-1990s, however, academic research related to the topic has been rather sparse (Hond, 2011). As a result, descriptive accounts of the sex industry in BiH are rare (see, for instance, Maljevic, 2005). The primary aim of the current study is to provide what is believed to be one of the first narratives of sex trafficking based on descriptions provided by Bosnian law enforcement officers<sup>3</sup>. The use of officers' statements with reference to sex trafficking is important for several reasons. First, law enforcement are often the first criminal justice officials to come into contact with individuals

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that in 2003 the United States Embassy funded a research project carried out by the Faculty of Criminal Justice Sciences at the University of Sarajevo that provided a descriptive analysis of sex trafficking of women in BiH based on the narratives of 691 trafficking victims (Maljevic, 2005).

involved in the sex trade. As such, they have a better feel for what is currently happening in the country based on their first-hand experience. Second, official data pertaining to the sex trade is not systematically collected in BiH and if it is collected it not made readily available. Finally, what data is collected is sparse, non-descriptive in nature, and subject to bias. In other words, beyond basic counts (e.g., number of traffickers apprehended), there really is not anything to base a profile on. Because most of the data that does exist comes from local nongovernmental organizations (NGO) it centers on women and girls who have been “rescued” from the sex trade (Maljevic, 2005). As such, the information provided by NGO reports can be highly skewed towards this population and not necessarily representative of trafficking victims as a whole. Thus, the use of police officers’ narratives pertaining to the sex trade is important in exploring the nature of the sex trade in BiH. Since law enforcement officials are usually the first who come in contact with potential and genuine victims of trafficking, it is also important to determine the level of knowledge officers have about the current situation regarding trafficking in human beings in BiH, their possession of interactive identification skills, and the impact of their possible prejudices related to sex trade. In order to do this, we first provide a brief history of sex trafficking in BiH.

## **2. HISTORY OF SEX TRAFFICKING IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

From 1992 through 1995 BiH experienced a brutal war that has adversely impacted the social and economic landscape for the estimated four million people who call BiH home. One such consequence is the presence of sex trafficking within the country. In the immediate aftermath of the war, BiH became a country of transit and destination for trafficked persons, primarily women and girls, fueled by the large presence of foreigners within the country (i.e., international peace keepers as well as civilians working for NGOs and the United Nations; Andreas, 2008; Mendelson, 2005) and abetted by BiH’s geographic position placing it on one of the main migration routes from Eastern to Western Europe (Klopčic, 2004). Eastern European women and girls, lured with false promises about well-paid jobs in Western Europe, found themselves in BiH as victims of sex trafficking (Limanowska & Rosga, 2004). It is estimated that thousands of women and girls “were taken to bars and nightclubs and forced to provide sexual services. [Their] attempts at refusal were often met with brutal physical violence, threats toward family members, or even murder by the trafficker or accomplices” (Burton, 2013, p. 1).

During the height of the sex trade in BiH, few traffickers found themselves in any type of legal trouble. This was primarily the result of a lack of proper legislation governing the issue of human trafficking within the country. Of the few traffickers that were prosecuted, the majority were charged with “enticing to prostitute” which is a minor offense in BiH (Fako, 2007). Furthermore, victims of sex trafficking were also arrested and prosecuted for a variety of offenses, including illegal entry in the country and disturbance of “peace and order” (Vandenberg, 2007). Very rarely would a trafficking victim testify against a trafficker; rather, most trafficking victims

refused assistance from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or the police and chose to remain silent in fear of being intimidated, blackmailed, and threatened should they speak out (Long, 2007). Complicating matters future, criminal justice officials were accused of aiding and abiding trafficking efforts within the country (HRW, 2009; Milisic, 2002).

In the last decade, BiH has witnessed an overall shift in how the sex trade<sup>4</sup> operates within the country. A number of key reports by watch groups in the early 2000s brought national and international attention to the issue of sex trafficking in BiH (HRW, 2002, 2009; IOM, 2001). With the United Nations threatening to sanction BiH, law enforcement cracked down on the sex trade by conducting a string of raids on night clubs and cafes where sex trafficking was believed to be taking place across the country (Fako, 2007; Longino, 2008). However, repeated raids, tighter border control and visa requirements, and increased prosecution of trafficking offenders have not resulted in elimination of the problem. Rather, the sex trade has moved underground; operating in private homes and hotels. Advertisements offering a “relaxing massage”, “pleasant company during business dinners”, and “escort services” can be found on web portals and in printed media. Taxi drivers are also reported to have photo albums of women and girls offering sexual services which are shown to tourists, as well as locals.

With the shift in the market, BiH has become a country of origin for trafficked persons with the majority of sex trafficking victims being Bosnian and Herzegovinian nationals (Burton, 2013). This has convoluted the human trafficking situation in BiH even further as the identification of internal trafficking victims is very difficult (Stolz, 2010). Similar to their foreign counterparts from Eastern Europe, Bosnian and Herzegovinian women and girls are being recruited by traffickers who promise them “well paid” positions as secretaries, babysitters, and waitresses. The majority of these women and girls end up providing commercial sexual acts in BiH and after some time, are “transported” to other destinations, mostly abroad, to continue making profits for their traffickers.

There is mounting evidence that the demand for sexual services by underage girls (and in some instances boys) is growing in BiH (US Department of State, 2012; Surtees, 2005; Wennerholm & Zillen, 2003). Most of these cases do not follow the typical trafficking pattern as young girls are lured by non-typical traffickers including social workers, school personnel, businessmen, and acquaintances and continue to live at home with their parents. They meet their “clients” at a location determined by their trafficker and communicated via a phone call. They are often blackmailed by photos and/or video clips that are recorded during one of these “events”. Being

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<sup>4</sup> Besides the sex trade, labor exploitation has becoming a serious issue as well in BiH. Unfortunately, almost no attention is paid to this problem even though hundreds of BiH men have been subjected to labor exploitation in many countries (US Department of State, 2012).

afraid of judgment and condemnation of their family and friends, they do not dare to ask for help, which further increases their vulnerability.

Among Bosnians and Herzegovinians, there is often no sympathy for trafficked persons or an understanding of the difficult position they are in. A low level of awareness about sex trafficking in general, as well as it causes, consequences, and remedies is present amongst groups vulnerable to trafficking, as well as professionals in charge of anti-trafficking initiatives in the country and in direct or indirect contact with trafficking victims. Many still have prejudices against trafficking victims and find them either guilty for getting themselves into such a situation, or think of them as sex workers (not trafficking victims) and refer to them as “prostitutes”. The media in BiH also contributes to this by judging women according to their respective physical appearance and conveying a message to men that it is acceptable to treat women as sexual objects.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this research study is to provide a description of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation based on accounts provided by law enforcement officers. The current study is believed to be one of the first to accomplish such a feat. While similar studies have been conducted in the United States among municipal police departments (Farrell, 2012), the border patrol is a neglected area of inquiry. It is important to focus specifically on the border patrol because of the differences that exist between different law enforcement agencies which may translate into different policies and responses to trafficking. For instance, it is plausible that border patrol agents are more likely to come into contact with individuals being transported into the country (i.e., foreign trafficking victims). Thus, because BiH has experienced a massive wave of trafficking into (and through) the country, the primary focus of this study is on the border police.

#### **Method**

The current study relies on self-reported survey data from Bosnian Border Police (BP) officers (N = 363) collected as part of a larger study to assess officers' attitudes about, knowledge of, and experience with the sex trade in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Pencil and paper surveys, which were translated from English into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, were distributed by border police administrators to all officers working over the course of seven days in the summer of 2011. A total of 400 surveys were distributed of which 363 surveys were returned (90.8% response rate). Data entry and analysis were conducted in the United States.

## Sample

Overall, the officers surveyed were primarily male (88.7%) and ranged in age from 21 to 58 years ( $M=37.7$ ;  $SD=6.51$ ). Respondents self-reported the number of years of education they had completed. The mean number of years of education completed was 13.4 years ( $SD = 1.86$ ; range 8–18 years). In terms of rank, 11.3% of surveyed officers self-reported their rank as “low”, 62.5% as “mid”, and 17.1% as “high”. On average, officers had 14.1 years ( $SD = 6.1$ ) of experience as a law enforcement officer.

Table 1:  
*Descriptive Statistics of Sample (N=363)*

Variable	n	%
Sex		
Male	322	88.7%
Female	25	6.9%
Missing	16	4.4%
Age in years (SD)	37.7(6.5)	
Highest grade completed in years (SD)	13.4(1.9)	
Rank		
Low	41	11.3%
Mid	227	62.5%
High	62	17.1%
Missing	33	9.1%
Length of time on force in years (SD)	14.1(6.1)	

## Measures

Participants were asked to respond to a variety of questions designed to capture participants' knowledge of the sex trade in BiH. Specifically, questions were asked pertaining to the overall sex industry (e.g., location, number of establishments, method of advertising) and characteristics pertaining to the individuals involved in the sex trade (i.e., trafficking victims, traffickers, and clients). Participants were also asked to reflect on what their opinions about the causes of sex trafficking and what would be necessary to stop sex trafficking in BiH. We now turn to the results of these inquiries.

### 4. DESCRIPTION OF THE SEX INDUSTRY IN BIH

Participants were asked to rate the sex trafficking problem in BiH on a five-point scale where one indicates “not a problem” and five indicates “a very serious problem”. The mean of this question was calculated to reflect the seriousness of the sex problem as reported by border patrol officers with a higher value indicating a greater

problem. Overall, officers reported that sex trafficking was not a very serious problem in their area ( $M = 2.67$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ). Relatedly, officers were asked to rate to what extent sex trafficking is a priority for the border patrol. Utilizing a similar five-point scale where one indicates “not a priority” and five indicates “a very high priority”, officers reported that sex trafficking was a moderately ranking priority within the border patrol ( $M = 3.43$ ,  $SD = 1.4$ ).

Officers were questioned about how the sex industry operates within their jurisdiction. First, offenders indicated whether the sex industry was located within specific localities (e.g., hotels, motels, bars, clubs, strip clubs and gas stations). Among the locations asked about, private apartments and houses was the most common response (55.4%), followed by hotels and motels (40.2%), bars and clubs (36.9%), strip clubs (15.4%) and gas stations (3.9%). Officers could also write in a location not provided on the survey instrument. Only 16 officers took advantage of this opportunity indicating that the sex industry was also located on the internet (4.4%).

Second, officers reported on methods of advertising used to promote the sex industry within their jurisdiction. The most common response was the internet (44.9%), followed by print media (37.7%), word of mouth (33.1%), clubs and bars (26.7%), brokers (3.0%) and the travel industry (3.0%).

Finally, officers were asked about specific practices associated with the sex industry. Officers were asked to indicate what percentage (where 0% is “none” and 100% is “all”) of the sex industry is controlled by organized crime. On average, officers reported that 65.2% of the industry is controlled by organized criminal networks. Officers were then asked to detail whether sex establishments screen clients for sexually transmitted diseases or control johns’ abuse of women in such establishments. While only a few officers chose to answer these questions, those who did indicated that very few establishments screen their clients for diseases (3.9%) or control violence that is inflicted upon the women working within such establishments (10.2%).

Table 2:  
*Descriptive Statistics of Sex Industry (N=363)*

Variable	n	Statistic
Seriousness of problem	344	M=2.67 (SD=1.2)
Organizational priority	341	M=3.43 (SD=1.4)
Location of sex industry		
Private Apartments/Houses	201	55.4%
Hotels/Motels	146	40.2%
Bars/Clubs	134	36.9%
Strip Clubs	56	15.4%
Gas Stations	14	3.9%
Method of advertising		
Internet	163	44.9%
Print Media	137	37.7%
Word of Mouth	120	33.1%
Clubs/Bars	97	26.7%
Brokers	11	3.0%
Travel Industry	11	3.0%
Extent controlled by organized crime	289	M=65.2 (SD=0.6)
Sex establishments screen clients for diseases/cleanliness	14	3.9%
Sex establishments control men's abuse of women	37	10.2%

## 5. DESCRIPTION OF KEY PLAYERS IN THE SEX INDUSTRY IN BIH

### Trafficking Victims

Respondents were questioned about trafficking indicators and the physical characteristics of trafficked women in BiH. As shown in Table 3, officers were asked to describe where victims first enter BiH, how victims enter BiH, and where trafficking victims are generally located within BiH.

Officers identified where they think trafficked women first enter BiH from. The most common response was Serbia (60.3%) followed by Montenegro (43.4%) and Croatia (22.9%). When asked how trafficked women first enter BiH, the most common response was automobiles (63.6%) followed by on foot (33.3%), train (16.5%), airplane

(16.3%) and boat (9.1%). In terms of where these women are located, officers indicated that the main destination point is urban localities (60.3%), near military bases (33.6%) and rural areas (8.8%).

Border officer were also asked to provide some basic characteristics of trafficking victims. Officers were asked what percentage of trafficked women is under the age of 18. Among the 143 officers who answered this question, the mean response was 77.5% indicating that in their opinion; the vast majority of trafficked women (i.e., three out of four) are underage. In terms of nationality, officers stated that roughly half ( $M = 50.9$ ,  $SD = 29.8$ ) of trafficked women were Bosnian and Herzegovinian nationals, thus it is not surprisingly that they described less than half ( $M=46.7$ ,  $SD=37.7$ ) of the trafficked women as being in the country illegally. Officers indicated that most trafficked women speak the local language fluently ( $M = 63.8$ ,  $SD = 34.7$ ). Finally, officers were asked to recall what extent trafficked women in their area of jurisdiction are victims of trafficking (and not prostitutes). In response to this question, officers stated, on average, that 64.3% of women within the sex industry are victims of trafficking ( $SD = 32.5$ ).

Table 3:  
Descriptive Statistics of Trafficking Victims (N=363)

Variable	n	Statistic
Enter BiH from		
Serbia	219	60.3%
Montenegro	105	43.4%
Croatia	83	22.9%
Method of transportation		
Automobile	231	63.6%
On Foot	121	33.3%
Train	60	16.5%
Airplane	59	16.3%
Boat	33	9.1%
Main destination points		
Urban	219	60.3%
Near Military Bases	122	33.6%
Rural	32	8.8%
Characteristics		
18 years of age or older	143	$M=77.5$ ( $SD=25.3$ )
From BiH	119	$M=50.9$ ( $SD=29.8$ )
In the country illegally	94	$M=46.7$ ( $SD=37.7$ )
Speak B/C/S fluently	107	$M=63.8$ ( $SD=34.7$ )
Victims of trafficking	105	$M=64.3$ ( $SD=32.5$ )
Control money that clients pay for sex acts	14	3.9%



## Traffickers and Clients

Similar to the questions asked about trafficked women, officers were asked to provide a description of sex traffickers and clients in BiH. Specifically, officers indicated to what extent (on a scale of 0% to 100%) traffickers and clients were 18 years of age or older, male, and from BiH. Officers stated if traffickers were in the country illegally, operating independently, and involved in other criminal activities. Last, officers estimated what percentages of clients were married. Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics related to this line of questioning. As described by the officers surveyed, the typical trafficker operating in BiH is 18 years of age or older ( $M = 88.7$ ,  $SD = 22.22$ ), male ( $M = 81.3$ ,  $SD = 22.2$ ) and from BiH ( $M = 76.1$ ,  $SD = 23.7$ ). Few traffickers are believed to be in the country illegally ( $M = 34.2$ ,  $SD = 34.5$ ) nor do they operate independently ( $M = 44.6$ ,  $SD = 31.3$ ). As would be expected, officers indicated that most traffickers are also involved in other criminal activities outside of sex trafficking ( $M = 71.2$ ,  $SD = 29.2$ ). The typical client who purchases sex in BiH, according to the officers surveyed, is at least 18 years of age ( $M = 78.0$ ,  $SD = 25.9$ ), is from BiH ( $M = 71.3$ ,  $SD = 27.1$ ), and is married ( $M = 63.9$ ,  $SD = 25.4$ ).

Table 4:  
*Descriptive Statistics of Traffickers and Clients (N=363)*

Variable	n	Statistic
Characteristics of traffickers		
18 years of age and older	200	$M=88.7$ ( $SD=22.2$ )
Male	171	$M=81.3$ ( $SD=22.2$ )
From BiH	162	$M=76.1$ ( $SD=23.7$ )
In the country illegally	97	$M=34.2$ ( $SD=34.5$ )
Operating independently	111	$M=44.6$ ( $SD=31.3$ )
Involved in other criminal activities	146	$M=71.2$ ( $SD=29.2$ )
Characteristics of clients		
18 years of age and older	190	$M=78.0$ ( $SD=25.9$ )
From BiH	176	$M=71.3$ ( $SD=27.1$ )
Married	186	$M=63.9$ ( $SD=25.4$ )

## 6. CAUSES & SOLUTIONS FOR THE SEX INDUSTRY IN BIH

Officers were asked to describe what factors they believe are responsible for the sex trafficking problem in BiH. While officers provided an assortment of responses traditionally associated with push and pull factors, the most common responses centered around economic causes (81.8%; e.g., unemployment, poverty, and high profits for traffickers) followed by lack of informal (18.8%) and formal (18.2%) social controls (e.g., weakened families, dysfunctional criminal justice system, and mild pun-

ishments for perpetrators), and limited education (11.3%). Interestingly, 3.1% of respondents pointed their finger at the 1992-1995 war and the subsequent infiltration of "foreigners" in the country as a key cause of the sex trafficking problem in the country.

In an effort to gauge officers' opinions about stopping sex trafficking in BiH, officers were provided with a series of possible "solutions" of which they asked to check "all that apply". Of the five solutions, stricter penalties for traffickers received the greatest number of checks (n=204, 56.2%) followed by service coordination and collaboration (n=202, 55.6%), education and informational campaigns (n=182, 50.1%), change in laws (n=145, 39.9%), and consistent and uniform enforcement of laws (n=138, 38.0%). Other suggestions that were written in by respondents included legalization and victim restitution.

## 7. CONCLUSION

As is characteristic of the trade in illicit goods, the trade in humans for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina has evolved over the last decade and a half; adapting itself to the ever changing demands of the market. Today "the typical victim of trafficking is a BiH national, a child under the age of eighteen years old, and forced into sexual exploitation within the country. The crime is increasingly carried out by single or small groups of individuals who abuse the trust of their victims, with victims frequently held in secluded locations, such as private apartments and holiday homes" (Burton, 2013, p. 1). This is in direct contrast to the flagrant and brazen nature of the commercial sex trade in the late 1990s that was designed, for the most part, to catch the attention of the growing number of foreigners in the country in the immediate post-war years (Longino, 2008).

The results from this study suggest that border patrol officers are aware of these changes and their accounts of the individuals involved in the trade appear to be accurate and up-to-date. For instance, the majority of officers surveyed are aware that the sex trade in BiH has become a local affair where the majority of individuals involved (i.e., traffickers, clients and victims) are Bosnian and Herzegovinian nationals. Most officers blame the current social and economic climate in the country for this. One officer wrote: *Often these girls are from [the] poorest regions. They are looking for a job. Of course, they become voluntary victims.* Another officer wrote that the main causes of sex trafficking in BiH include *[a] bad economy, underdevelopment of the state in economic terms, unemployment and individual and collective ignorance about this problem.*

Officers also realize the difficulty that an internal market provides to law enforcement efforts reflected in their request for further assistance and training opportunities. In fact, several officers surveyed appeared quite frustrated with an overall lack of training and assistance pertaining to sex trafficking. Illustrative of this are some of the comments provided by the officers:

- *You know more than we.*
- *We do what we can.*
- *We need more trainings and seminars in this domain because we are in contact with trafficking victims.*
- *I think we need education in hard reduction domain ... information police officers and sex workers about sexually transmitted diseases.*
- *It's a very important issue and it should be paid more attention to within our organization.*

## Recommendations

In order to combat the sex trade in BiH, policies and procedures need to be adapted that correspond with the three “p’s” of human trafficking: punishment, protection, and prevention (US Department of State, 2009). In other words, more work needs to be done to punish trafficking offenders, to protect victims of sex trafficking, and to prevent the trafficking of human beings for sexual exploitation. While BiH has legally prescribed penalties for trafficking which includes up to 10 years of imprisonment, imposed penalties in BiH for sex trafficking are quite rare (US Department of State, 2012). While the jurisdiction over trafficking in human beings falls within the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in most cases traffickers have been prosecuted before entity courts. As a result, traffickers are charged improperly for the crime of trafficking. One possible reason for this may be that prosecutors and courts at entity and local level lack adequate knowledge about the complexities of trafficking. Another possible reason is corruption and familiarity with the trafficking suspects (HRW, 2009). BiH prosecutors are quite reluctant to pursue trafficking charges or identify victims of trafficking. Thus it is no surprise that the head of the OSCE Mission to BiH, Ambassador Burton, suggests that BiH adjusts “legislation and policy to ensure a co-ordinated response to such an extreme and severe form of criminality” (2013, p. 2)

In order to protect victims adequately, training and education programs for law enforcement officers related to proactive identification of trafficking victims is essential. In the early 2000s such trainings did occur for some officers. However, many of the police officers who received the trainings either got promoted or redeployed and have since been replaced by young police officers who lack proper anti-trafficking skills. Since police officers are those who usually first come in contact with victims of trafficking, their identification and other related skills are essential for proper identification of a victim.

Life as a trafficking victims is often hard and brutal. Victims are subjected to psychological, physical and sexual abuse by their traffickers, their “owners”, and often by the men who purchase sexual services from them (Maljevic, 2005). Most victims are not given access to medical care, or if they do receive medical treatment it is only because of an emergency (IOM, 2004). They often live in tight cramped quarters

that are unsanitary and dangerous, where they are given little to eat (HRW 2002). Rehabilitation programs and safe shelters are essential in keeping rescued women from returning to the trafficking world. Unfortunately in BiH there are few of these and the ones that do exist are seriously underfunded and ill-equipped to deal with the growing number of trafficking victims who are underage.

Finally, there remains a dire need in BiH for training and education programs related to sex trafficking not only for the general public, but for clients of the sex trade. Novi Put (see [www.newroadbih.org](http://www.newroadbih.org) or [www.noviput.ba](http://www.noviput.ba)) is the first NGO in BiH that has started targeting public education efforts toward reducing the demand for commercial sexual services in the region of Herzegovina. This activity is part of an anti-trafficking project funded by the American Embassy in BiH and is a very important aspect in combating sex trafficking, as many clients and potential clients of commercial sex providers are actually not aware that many women and girls they view as “prostitutes” are genuine victims of trafficking. Further public education efforts are needed throughout the country to raise awareness among the general public about sex trafficking is also important due to prevailing prejudices and stereotypes. It is also extremely important to conduct public education programs given that many victims are underage girls who easily fall prey to traffickers as they are not aware of trafficking risks and threats. Prevention and education is a key to a successful fight against human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

In conclusion, this study provides a much needed description of human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It also provides some preliminary evidence that the commercial sex trade in BiH has become a local phenomenon with the majority of traffickers, clients, and victims comprised of Bosnian and Herzegovinian nationals. While the design employed here is limited and may not be generalizable to other areas, the analyses presented do provide at least some tentative support for the argument that trafficking has not disappeared in BiH, but rather has become an internal problem.

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