

In 2020, North Macedonia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Ministry of Education and Science continued to hire additional educational mediators with the goal of removing barriers to education for the most vulnerable populations, including Roma children. Parliament also amended the Law on Labor Relations to increase fines on employers that fail to provide adequate protections to workers under age 18. In addition, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy developed Action Plan 2020–2022 in accordance with the National Strategy to Protect Children from All Forms of Abuse. However, children in North Macedonia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. The law’s minimum age protections do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships. Additionally, the government has not adopted a policy to address all worst forms of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in North Macedonia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1,2,3,4) Table 1 provides key indicators on children’s work and education in North Macedonia. Data on some of these indicators are not available from the sources used in this report.

Table 1. Statistics on Children’s Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	18.8 (Unavailable)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	97.6
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	20.6
Primary Completion Rate (%)		93.4

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2018, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021. (5)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization’s analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. (6)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children’s work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Farming, activities unknown (1,3,7)
Services	Street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, scavenging, and begging (3,7,8)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,7,9,10)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,8,10,11)
	Domestic work as a result of human trafficking (2,12,13)
	Forced labor as wait staff and dancers in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs (4,7,10)

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Most children involved in child labor in North Macedonia engage in street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, and begging. The majority of children involved in street work are of the Roma, Balkan Egyptian, and Ashkali ethnicities. (3,8,10)

North Macedonia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT




Child trafficking victims in North Macedonia are usually girls, between the ages of 12 to 18, who have been subjected to domestic trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. (3,7,14,15) Roma girls, especially, are victims of trafficking for forced marriages in which they are subject to sexual and labor exploitation. (3,10,11,16) Migrant children from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and other states continued to transit through the country and were vulnerable to trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (10,17-19)

The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP), schools, and civil society organizations offer assistance to Roma children who have difficulty accessing education due to a lack of birth registration and identity cards, which are required for attending school in North Macedonia. (3) However, the government was unable to fully meet the educational needs of Roma children due to an ongoing shortage of qualified teachers who can provide instruction in Romani. (20)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

North Macedonia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in North Macedonia's legal framework to adequately protect children from the worst forms of child labor, including the minimum age for work.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Article 42 of the Constitution; Sections 63 and 66–67 of the Labour Relations Act (21,22)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 63 and 66–67 of the Labour Relations Act (22)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Rulebook on the Minimum Occupational Safety and Health Requirements for Young Workers (23)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 11 of the Constitution; Article 418 (c-d) of the Criminal Code (21,24)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Article 418 (c-d) of the Criminal Code (24)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 190–193-b of the Criminal Code (24)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 12(3) of the Law on Child Protection (25)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 62 of the Law on Defense (26)

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor (Cont.)

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 62 of the Law on Defense (26)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 122, 322-a, and 404 of the Criminal Code (24)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Articles 4, 5, 47, 58 and 172 of the Law on Primary Education; Article 3 of the Law on Secondary Education (27,28)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 44 of the Constitution (21)

* No conscription (26)

During the reporting period, an amendment to Article 265 of the Law on Labor Relations increased fines on employers who signed contracts or otherwise enabled employment of young people against the stipulations of Section 63 of the Law, which indicates that minors should not perform strenuous physical labor (including underground or underwater work). (3,22) An amendment to the Labor Relations Act increased fines issued to employers who fail to provide proper protections to workers under age 18, in addition to those who employ minors under age 15 who are considered to be in ill health. (3) However, the minimum age for work does not comply with international standards because the law's minimum age protections do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships. (3,20,22) Because the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. Additionally, the legal framework does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities. (20)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate enforcement of their child labor laws.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP)	Collaborates with the police and the Ombudsman's Office to conduct investigations and identify children living and working on the streets, and monitors cases of forced child labor through the Department of Social Inclusion. (29,7) Refers children to 30 Centers for Social Work throughout the country, which serve to counsel, educate, shelter, and assist children in need and victims of trafficking in persons. (29,30)
State Labor Inspectorate	Enforces labor law, including child labor laws, by conducting at least 60 targeted and complaint-based cases per month. Receives complaints of child labor from MLSP and refers cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Public Prosecutor. (3) Responsible for enforcing all labor laws, including laws on child labor, in all sectors of the formal economy and can assess fines at any point of the inspection. (3)
Ministry of Interior (MOI)	Enforces laws related to hazardous child labor, child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and the use of children in illicit activities through its special police unit for organized crime, corruption, and human trafficking. (3,4,7,15)
Public Prosecutor's Office	Prosecutes criminal law violations, including those involving the worst forms of child labor. (3) Has an Organized Crime and Corruption Unit with four prosecutors dedicated to cases of child abuse and the worst forms of child labor. The Skopje Public Prosecutor's Office has eight prosecutors for child abuse cases. (13)
National Unit for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking (NUSMSHT; also known as Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force)	Established by MOI and led by a public prosecutor. (3,4)

North Macedonia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

North Macedonia's National Referral Mechanism enables law enforcement authorities and social services around the country to properly refer children found to be involved the worst forms of child labor, including forced child labor, child trafficking, and illicit activities. The National Referral Mechanism also allows civil society and government institutions to coordinate activities related to the protection, care, rehabilitation, and eventual reintegration of minor victims. (3)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2020, labor law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the State Labor Inspectorate that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including financial resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,900,000 (7)	\$2,300,000 (3)
Number of Labor Inspectors	78 (7)	114 (3)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (7)	Yes (22)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	No (7)	Yes (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	11,749 (7)	15,944 (3)
Number Conducted at Worksites	11,749 (7)	15,944 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	1 (7)	0 (3)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (7)	N/A (3)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (7)	N/A (3)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (3)

The Labor Inspectorate has an annual plan that determines the number of regular inspections to be conducted during the calendar year. (3) Unannounced inspections in all sectors are permitted, including on legally registered private farms. (7,31) Inspectors can also inspect private homes and farms with a valid warrant. (29)

In 2020, all labor inspectors received training on labor laws. The number of labor inspectors rose from 78 to 114, increasing the number of inspections conducted during the reporting period. (3) Although the Labor Inspectorate's funding also increased during the reporting period, some government officials indicated that it is an insufficient amount for training new labor inspectors. (3) In addition, a senior government official expressed concern that 60 percent of current inspectors will reach retirement age in the next 1 to 2 years. (3,7)

The MLSP lacks a central database to track labor investigations; however, inspection results are disseminated throughout relevant departments within the MLSP. (15)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2020, criminal law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to combat child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including investigation planning.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2019	2020
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (7)	No (3)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (7)	N/A (3)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (7)	Yes (3)
Number of Investigations	Unknown	37 (3)
Number of Violations Found	4 (7)	37 (3)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	4 (7)	29 (3)
Number of Convictions	Unknown	25 (3)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Unknown	Yes (3)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (7)	Yes (3)

In North Macedonia, legal requirements mandate that public prosecutors receive a 24-month general training, which includes the application of international legal standards. (15) Police investigators normally receive initial training, in addition to training when legislation changes. (1) In 2020, initial trainings on child labor were suspended for prosecutors, investigators, and expert associates from the Public Prosecutor's Office due to unfavorable conditions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. (3,4) During the reporting period, investigators and Public Prosecutor's Office representatives received specialized refresher training from the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force, which also provided training on migrant smuggling and human trafficking to social workers, labor inspectors, NGOs, and civil society members. (7)

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. (3) However, research indicates that some local police were not aware of the specialized Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force, nor did they possess knowledge on handling trafficking in persons cases. The lack of a digital case management system within the Ministry of the Interior contributed to this, as local police did not have the ability to quickly transfer suspected human trafficking cases from their jurisdiction to relevant national authorities in a timely fashion. (3,4)

In 2020, three reports related to trafficking in persons were received and referred to the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force for investigation, and government authorities identified six minor victims of trafficking. The Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force used Section 418-d of the Criminal Code to file criminal charges against two individuals suspected of child trafficking. (3,4) In addition, the Public Prosecutor's Office launched five investigations against individuals suspected of child trafficking for sexual exploitation. During the reporting period, sentences issued to those convicted of crimes related the worst forms of child labor ranged from suspended sentences to 9 years in prison depending on the severity of the violation. (3,4)

In 2020, criminal investigators operating in their home agencies had sufficient resources to carry out their duties. However, the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force does not have separate funding or assets and lacks adequate equipment, vehicles, and office space, which hinders its efforts to perform investigations and meet the needs of identified victims. (3)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8). However, gaps exist that hinder the effective coordination of efforts to address child labor, including a lack of human resources.

North Macedonia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Commission for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children	Led by MLSP in conjunction with the Ministries of Interior, Education and Science, Health, and Justice, UNICEF, and multiple NGOs around the country. (1,3) During the reporting period, the National Commission prepared the 2020–2022 Action Plan associated with the National Strategy for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children. (3)
National Commission for Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (National Trafficking in Persons Commission)	Coordinates the work of all institutions involved in combating human trafficking. Led by MOI and under the direction of the National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Coordinator, with 14 representatives from 9 government institutions. (2,29) Includes five local committees, which implement local action plans, and the Sub-Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking in Children, which serves as an advisory body to the National Trafficking in Persons Commission on all forms of child trafficking. (2,7,12) During the reporting period, the Commission's local committees met frequently and communicated daily. (3) In addition, the National Commission prepared the first draft of the new Strategy and Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling 2021–2026, which was expected to be submitted to the government for adoption in January 2021. (3)

North Macedonia maintains bilateral agreements to combat human trafficking with all of its neighboring countries. (4) Sources reported that the local committees overseen by the National Trafficking in Persons Commission needed to build their capacity to adequately combat human trafficking, including via better human resource allocation. (2,7)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies related to child labor (Table 9). However, policy gaps exist that hinder efforts to address child labor, including the lack of a policy that covers all worst forms of child labor.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010–2020)	Addressed social protection, social inclusion, health, education, and employment of children. (7) Aimed to increase birth registration for Roma and other minorities, expand patrol services to identify and support street children, and improve the provision of social services for children involved in street work and begging. Implemented by MLSP. (7,32) During the reporting period, the policy continued to be implemented through the promotion of birth registration, street mobile patrols, and government payments to vulnerable populations. (3)
National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (2017–2020)	Focused on preventing human trafficking by reducing the vulnerability of at-risk populations, improving the identification of victims, and increasing efforts to combat human trafficking and forced child begging. (9,29,33) During the reporting period, MLSP financed the expenses of the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking, and the government awarded an additional grant of \$56,600, to the NGO Open Gate La Strada that provides services to victims of trafficking. (3)
National Action Plan for Education (2018–2025)	Aims to expand inclusive education and improve education for the Roma community. Seeks to increase the number of Roma students in preschools and elementary schools and decrease the number of Roma students who, based on ethnicity, are enrolled in primary schools for children with special needs. (34) In 2020, increased inclusion of children from vulnerable groups in primary school by accommodating first-time and returnee students; also provided scholarships to vulnerable populations with a focus on Roma children who indicate interest in continuing their education in an underrepresented field. (3)
Action Plan for the National Strategy for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children (2020–2022)	Presents the vision, goals, and strategic approach of the government and the activities to be undertaken annually in the prevention and protection of children from all types of violence. Prepared by the National Coordination Body for Prevention and Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect. (35) Representatives from MLSP and other ministries, as well as the UNICEF Skopje office and other civil society organizations, participated in the creation of the Action Plan. (3)

Although the Government of North Macedonia has adopted policies aimed at combating child trafficking and assisting children begging and working on the streets, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor. (36)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2020, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
MLSP-Operated and Funded Centers and Shelters†	MLSP operates and funds several programs, sometimes in coordination with NGOs, which provide support and services to victims of human trafficking and vulnerable populations such as street children. Provides extensive support for one day center for street children and funds another operated by an NGO to provide services, healthcare, and counseling to children working in the streets. (29,7) MLSP also funds the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking, a transit center for asylum seekers, and the MOI-operated Transit Center for Illegal Migrants. (7) In 2020, MLSP funded two temporary centers at the northern and southern borders of the country (Kumanovo and Gevgelija, respectively) for illegal migrants and children at border crossings. (3)
UNICEF Projects	Includes UNICEF partnerships with the government and NGOs to provide projects for child protection, detection and referral of child victims of violence, and educational integration of vulnerable children, including Roma and migrant children. (15) Also includes the Program for the Protection of Children Against Violence (2016–2020), the UNICEF Country Program (2016–2020), and the Home for Every Child Program. (15,30,37,38) During the reporting period, MLSP and the Inter-municipal Center for Social Work of the City of Skopje, in cooperation with UNICEF, continued to support mobile teams established to track 41 newly-registered street children and work with their families to secure benefits from the government. (3)
Inclusion of Roma Children in Preschool Education‡	MLSP project implemented in cooperation with the Roma Education Fund and 19 government units. Part of the 2014–2020 Roma Strategy. (37,38) Aims to support the integration of Roma children by increasing the number of Roma children in preschool. (29,30) MLSP, MOI, and the Ministry of Justice are all part of the project work plan. (39) In 2020, the program continued to support Roma children by assisting their families with the school selection process, including ensuring access to schools with both Roma and Macedonian educators. (3)

† Program is funded by the Government of North Macedonia.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (1,2,40-42)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science continued to engage educational mediators for Roma students from economically disadvantaged families, along with those who have frequently spent time outside the formal education system. Thirty-five mediators from 28 municipalities worked with Roma children to reduce attrition rates and further strengthen ties between educators and Roma parents. (3) Day centers and other programs have not reduced child begging or the number of children on the streets, especially among Roma children, suggesting that existing programs were insufficient for combating child labor. (3,36,43)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in North Macedonia (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that labor law protections apply to all children, including self-employed children and children working outside formal employment relationships.	2015 – 2020
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2020
	Ensure that the law provides criminal penalties for the use, procuring, and offering of children for illicit activities, including in the production and trafficking of drugs.	2019 – 2020
Enforcement	Ensure that the Labor Inspectorate receives sufficient funding to train new inspectors.	2017 – 2020
	Provide labor inspectors with an electronic system to record and share data on inspections with the entity receiving the citation, and publish the information.	2009 – 2020
	Provide sufficient funding for the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force to carry out its duties to combat human trafficking.	2019 – 2020
	Ensure that law enforcement agencies proactively identify child trafficking victims.	2015 – 2020
Coordination	Build the capacity and resources of local committees to adequately combat human trafficking.	2018 – 2020
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as a national action plan on child labor.	2018 – 2020
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor, including those in farming.	2013 – 2020
	Increase funding dedicated to combating child labor, and ensure that child beggars receive the support needed to be removed from the streets permanently.	2015 – 2020

North Macedonia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

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