

In 2021, North Macedonia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Labor Inspectorate received an increased budget to improve hiring capacity, and there was a marked increase in the number of worksite inspections over the course of the year. In addition, the government adopted the National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (2021–2025) and an accompanying operational plan for the 2021–2022 period, both addressing the unique needs of children and other populations considered to be most at risk for trafficking in persons. The government also adopted the Employment and Social Policy Reform Program with the goal of creating new initiatives focused on poverty reduction and social inclusion for the country's most vulnerable populations. However, children in North Macedonia are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced begging. 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 commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking, and in forced begging. (1-5) 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, 2022. (6)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. (7)

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, [†] including in production of tobacco (5,8)
Services	Street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, scavenging, and begging (3,5,9)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (5,10)
	Forced begging (5,9,11,12)
	Forced domestic work (3,5,13)
	Forced labor as wait staff and dancers in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs (4,5,10,14)

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

[†] Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

Most children involved in child labor in North Macedonia engage in street work, with the majority from the Roma, Balkan Egyptian, and Ashkali ethnicities. (3,5,9,12)

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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. (3,8,12,15) Roma girls, especially, are victims of trafficking for forced marriages in which they are subjected to sexual and labor exploitation. (5,10,11,16,17) Migrant children from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and other states continue to transit through the country and are vulnerable to trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (10,18-20)

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. (3,9) 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. (17,21)

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, 66, and 67 of the Labor Relations Act (22,23)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Article 265 and Sections 63, 66, and 67 of the Labor Relations Act (23)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Rulebook on the Minimum Occupational Safety and Health Requirements for Young Workers (24)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 11 of the Constitution; Articles 418(c) and 418(d) of the Criminal Code (22,25)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 418(c) and 418(d) of the Criminal Code (25)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 190–193b of the Criminal Code (25)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 12(3) of the Law on Child Protection (26)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 62 of the Law on Defense (27)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 62 of the Law on Defense (27)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 122, 322a, and 404 of the Criminal Code (25)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Articles 4, 5, 47, and 172 of the Law on Primary Education; Article 3 of the Law on Secondary Education (28,29)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 44 of the Constitution (22)

* Country has no conscription (27)

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. (3,21,23) 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. In addition, the legal framework does not prohibit the use of children in illicit activities, including the production and distribution of drugs. (25,26,30)

During the reporting period, the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling continued to draft a new law allowing for compensation payments to victims of crime and trafficking offenses, including children. (5)

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. (8,31) 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. (31,32)
State Labor Inspectorate	Enforces labor law, including child labor laws, by conducting at least 60 targeted and complaint-based inspections per month. Receives complaints of child labor and refers cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Public Prosecutor. (5) Responsible for labor law enforcement in all sectors of the formal economy and can assess fines at any point of the inspection. (5)
Ministry of the Interior (MOI)	Enforces laws related to hazardous child labor, child trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation through its special police unit for organized crime, corruption, and human trafficking. (3,4,8,15)
Public Prosecutor's Office	Prosecutes criminal law violations, including those involving the worst forms of child labor. (5) 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. (4)
National Unit for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking (also known as Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force)	Established by MOI in 2001 to promote efficiency in interagency and local-level efforts to address trafficking in human beings. Led by a public prosecutor. (3,4,33)

North Macedonia's National Referral Mechanism enables law enforcement authorities to refer children found to be involved in the worst forms of child labor to social services, including those related to the protection, care, rehabilitation, and eventual reintegration of minor victims. (3,5)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2021, labor law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to address child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the State Labor Inspectorate that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including the lack of a central database for tracking labor investigations.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2020	2021
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,300,000 (3)	\$2,430,000 (5)
Number of Labor Inspectors	114 (3)	130 (5)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (3)	Yes (23)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (3)	N/A (5)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	15,944 (3)	22,986 (5)
Number Conducted at Worksite	15,944 (3)	22,986 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (3)	0 (5)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (3)	N/A (5)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (3)	N/A (5)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (3)	Yes (23)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (5)

The Labor Inspectorate has an annual plan that determines the number of worksite inspections to be conducted during the calendar year. Unannounced inspections in all sectors are permitted, including on legally registered private farms. (8,34) Inspectors can also inspect private homes and farms with a valid warrant. (5) During the reporting period, the Labor Inspectorate received additional funding designated for hiring and retention of new inspectors. (5)

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 2021, criminal law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to address 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	2020	2021
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	No (3)	No (5)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (3)	N/A (5)
Refresher Courses Provided	No (3)	No (5)
Number of Investigations	37 (3)	15 (5)
Number of Violations Found	37 (3)	5 (5)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	29 (3)	5 (5)
Number of Convictions	25 (3)	1 (5)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (3)	Yes (5)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (5)

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) Criminal law enforcement authorities did not receive initial training or refresher courses during the reporting period. (5)

In 2021, the Public Prosecutor's Office found six violations pertaining to crimes involving children. Of those, four victims were trafficked for forced marriage, one for sexual exploitation, and one for forced begging. (35)

Since 2015, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) has operated the “Red Button” hotline, a 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 officials lacked knowledge on how to identify human trafficking victims and refer them to services. In addition, some members of the police were not aware of the specialized Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force, even though both are under the MOI. (5,8) Further, the lack of a digital case management system within the MOI limited interdepartmental awareness, 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)

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. (5)

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.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Coordination Body for the Prevention and Countering of 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. (3,5) During the reporting period, the Commission continued to implement activities related to the annual Action Plan for the Prevention and Countering of Abuse and Neglect of Children. (5)
National Commission for Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (National Trafficking in Persons Commission)	Coordinates the work of institutions involved in addressing human trafficking. Led by MOI and under the direction of the National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Coordinator, with 16 representatives from 11 government institutions. (5,31,35) 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. (5,8) In 2021, the Commission's working group dedicated to addressing child trafficking prepared a 2021–2022 operational plan designed to prevent human trafficking of at-risk minors, improve victim identification processes, and promote efforts to reduce forced child begging. (5)

Sources reported that the local committees overseen by the National Commission for Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration needed to build their capacity to adequately address human trafficking and hire more personnel to carry out activities. The Commission has continued to implement local action plans, however, and its annual report indicates that strengthening communication and coordination between the national and local bodies will continue to be a priority. (2,8,35)

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.

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Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan Against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (2021–2025)†	Focuses on preventing human trafficking by reducing the vulnerability of at-risk populations, improving the identification of victims, and increasing efforts to address human trafficking and forced child begging. (5,13) During the reporting period, the National Trafficking in Persons Commission collaborated with IOM and the Anti-TIP Secretariat to develop a victim-centered and gender-based approach to continue addressing trafficking in persons. (13)
National Action Plan for Education (2018–2025)	Aims in part 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. (17,37) In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) implemented a number of activities related to the Action Plan, including providing funding for new teachers and school renovations, adapting curriculum to be more inclusive of children who were identified as "returnees" to formal education and children with disabilities, and reforming vocational institutions to improve youth employment rates. (5,38)
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. (39) During the reporting period, representatives from MLSP and other ministries, the UNICEF Skopje office, and other civil society organizations participated in the implementation of the Action Plan. (5)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

North Macedonia maintains bilateral agreements to address human trafficking with all its neighboring countries. (4) During the reporting period, the MLSP developed a new Employment and Social Policy Reform Program to be implemented in 2022. The program will focus on initiatives to reduce poverty and promote social inclusion for the country's most vulnerable populations. (5)

Although the Government of North Macedonia has adopted policies aimed at addressing 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. (40)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2021, 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 the inadequacy 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. Additionally, MLSP provides extensive support for one day center to assist children participating in street work, and funds another center operated by an NGO to provide services, healthcare, and counseling to children working in the streets. (8,14,31) MLSP also funds the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking (operated by NGO Open Gate/ <i>La Strada</i>), a transit center for asylum seekers, and the MOI-operated Transit Center for Illegal Migrants. (5) During the reporting period, one of MLSP's mobile teams worked extensively with families of children who have requested the services of the day center. In addition, estimates indicate that approximately 100 children receive assistance from the NGO-operated center on an annual basis. (5)
UNICEF Projects	Include 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 include the Home for Every Child Program. (15,32,41,42) During the reporting period, UNICEF assisted MOES with implementing activities under the Law on Primary Education, which obliges schools to promote student well-being, protect children from abuse and neglect, and prevent discrimination. In addition, UNICEF assisted MLSP and the Skopje Intermunicipal Center for Social Work with locating street children in need of intervention and approaching their families to inform them of social assistance programs for qualifying families. (5)

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor (Cont.)

Program	Description
Employment and Social Policy Reform Program*†	Developed by MLSP in 2021 in part to alleviate poverty and promote social inclusion for vulnerable citizens. During the reporting period, MLSP provided counseling and guidance to groups vulnerable to exploitation including youth, Roma, and minimum income participants regarding their rights in the labor market. (5,43)
Child Allowance Program‡	Government-supported program providing monthly child allowance payments to low-income households and families receiving other forms of government assistance. During the reporting period, the government of North Macedonia approved an additional education allowance for children from low-income families. (5)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† 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. (5,44-47)

During the reporting period, the Ministry of Education and Science continued to employ educational mediators for Roma students from economically disadvantaged families and to provide mediation options for other students who have frequently spent time outside of the formal education system. Thirty-five mediators from 26 municipalities worked with Roma children to reduce attrition rates and further strengthen ties between educators and Roma parents. (5) In addition, mobile teams consisting of social workers, police officers, and civil sector representatives continued to visit the homes of at-risk children and met with their families to educate them on children's rights and state social benefit programs. (5) Additionally, the NGO Megjashi continued to support its SOS Helpline for Children and Youth, which received 151 reports of children needing assistance during the first half of the year. Several calls involved risk factors for child labor, including economic exploitation, harmful and dangerous work, and violence against children. (48)

However, 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 addressing child labor. (5,14)

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 – 2021
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2021
	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 – 2021
Enforcement	Ensure that criminal law enforcement authorities receive appropriate training on child labor and identification of victims/potential victims of human trafficking.	2021
	Provide labor inspectors and the Ministry of Interior with electronic systems to record and share data on inspections with the entity receiving the citation and publish the information.	2009 – 2021
	Provide sufficient funding for the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force to carry out its duties to address human trafficking.	2019 – 2021
	Ensure that law enforcement agencies proactively identify child trafficking victims.	2015 – 2021
Coordination	Build the capacity and resources of local committees to adequately address human trafficking.	2018 – 2021
Government Policies	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as a national action plan on child labor.	2018 – 2021
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor.	2013 – 2021
	Increase efficacy of programs dedicated to addressing child labor and ensure that child beggars receive the support needed to be removed from street work permanently.	2015 – 2021
	Reduce barriers to education by increasing the number of teachers who can provide education in the Romani language.	2021

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