

In 2022, North Macedonia made minimal advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Parliament of North Macedonia adopted the new Law on Compensation of Victims of Violent Crime which provides financial, medical, and psychosocial support for victims of crimes, including children. Additionally, in 2022 investigators and prosecutors from the Ministry of the Interior received trainings related to child labor and juvenile justice from the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors. 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. Additionally, the law's minimum age protections do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

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. (1)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 6), 2019. (2)

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 (4)
Services	Street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, scavenging, and begging (4,7)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor [‡]	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (3,5-7)
	Forced begging (4,7,9,10)
	Forced domestic work (3,6,7)
	Forced labor as wait staff and dancers in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs (4,8,11)

[‡] 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. (3,4,6,9) Child trafficking victims in North Macedonia are usually girls, between the ages of 12 and 18, who have been subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. (6,10-12) Roma girls are also victims of trafficking for forced marriages in which they are subjected to sexual and labor exploitation. (5,8,9,13,14) Migrant children from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and other states continue to transit through the country and are vulnerable to human trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (8,15,16)

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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. (4,10) However, the government continues to face challenges in meeting the educational needs of Roma children due to an ongoing shortage of qualified teachers who can provide instruction in Romani. (14,17)

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 a lack of minimum age protections for children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships.

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 (18,19)
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	Yes		Article 201(4) of the Criminal Code; Article 12(3) of the Law on Child Protection (21,22)
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)
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)

In 2022, the Parliament of North Macedonia adopted the Law on Compensation of Victims of Violent Crime, which contains provisions to support child victims of trafficking. In addition to monetary compensation, individuals covered under the terms of the new law are also provided with access to medical support and additional counseling. (26,27) 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. (10,17,19) Because the minimum age for work is lower than the compulsory education age, children may also be encouraged to leave school before the completion of compulsory education. (21,22,28)

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 & Activities
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. (3) 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. (3,27)
State Labor Inspectorate	Enforces labor law in the formal sector, including child labor laws, by conducting at least 60 targeted and complaint-based inspections per month. Receives complaints of child labor, can assess fines at any point of the inspection, and refers cases to the Public Prosecutor. (3,19,30)
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. (3,22,27)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2022, 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	2021	2022
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,430,000 (5)	\$2,510,000 (34)
Number of Labor Inspectors	130 (5)	127 (34)
Mechanism to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes (23)	Yes (31-33)
Training for Labor Inspectors Provided	Yes (5)	Yes (34)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted at Worksite	22,986 (5)	21,032 (34)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (5)	0 (34)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A (5)	N/A (34)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	N/A (5)	N/A (34)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (34)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (5)	Yes (34)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (23)	Yes (32,33)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (5)	Yes (34)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (5)	Yes (34)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (34)

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. (11,28) Inspectors can also inspect private homes and farms with a valid warrant. (9) The MLSP

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lacks a central database to track labor investigations; however, inspection results are disseminated throughout relevant departments within the MLSP. (12)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2022, criminal law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to address child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including inadequate investigation planning.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2021	2022
Training for Criminal Investigators Provided	No (3)	Yes (4)
Number of Investigations	15 (5)	11 (4)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	5 (5)	13 (4)
Number of Convictions	1 (5)	17 (4)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (5)	Yes (4)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (5)	Yes (4)

In North Macedonia, legal requirements mandate that public prosecutors receive a 24-month general training, which includes the application of international legal standards. (12) Police investigators normally receive initial training, in addition to training when legislation changes. (34) 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. (9,10) In 2022, the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors hosted trainings for investigators and prosecutors on how to properly identify child victims of sexual exploitation, providing alternative justice for child victims of labor abuses, and working with children who have previously entered the criminal justice system. (3,35) During the reporting period, the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) also continued to operate the "Red Button" hotline, a website application to report child abuse, human trafficking, hate crimes, and violence during the reporting period. (10) 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 (Task Force), even though both bodies are under the MOI. (9,11) Further, the lack of a digital case management system within the MOI has limited the ability to refer suspected human trafficking cases from local police to the Task Force or Public Prosecutor's Office. (10,36)

In 2022, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the MOI discovered seven human trafficking violations that involved children. One case involved trafficking for participation in forced begging. (3) Additionally, authorities identified another eight potential victims of human trafficking. (3)

IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established a key mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Activities
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, as well as UNICEF and multiple NGOs around the country. (9,10) During the reporting period, the National Coordination Body continued to support programs to assist vulnerable children, including mobile team visits from social workers, law enforcement authorities, and civil society representatives. (3)

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 & Activities
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. (9,37) In 2022, the government prepared its annual operational plan, which included activities to improve victim identification. (3)
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. (16,34) In 2022, the government continued to implement activities associated with the Plan, including hiring more teachers, providing scholarships for vulnerable Roma children, and fostering inclusion of vulnerable children via adapted coursework for first-time and returnee students, as well as children with special needs. (4)
National Strategy (2020-2025) and Action Plan for the National Strategy for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children (2020–2022)	Presented 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, the government continued to implement activities as designated by the National Action Plan for 2020–2022. (3)

North Macedonia maintains bilateral agreements to address human trafficking with all its neighboring countries. (35,36)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2022, 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 & Activities
MLSP-Operated and Funded Centers and Shelters†	MLSP-operated and funded 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 a 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. (7,11,42) 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. (9) During the reporting period, the MLSP Day Care Centers in Skopje assisted 36 children by providing educational support, healthcare, and counseling to children working in hazardous street settings. Additionally, the government continued to provide financial support for both the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking and the Transit Center for Illegal Migrants, plus two new temporary centers in Kumanovo and Gevgelija that provided assistance to migrants who are transiting through the country without proper legal documents. (3)
UNICEF Projects	UNICEF programs that work with the government to provide support to vulnerable children, including Roma and migrant children. (12) In 2022, the government continued to work with UNICEF to implement the Home for Every Child Program and a strategic plan targeting school violence. (12,43,44) UNICEF also facilitated the Early Warning System for Missing Children project in conjunction with the Macedonian Association of Young Lawyers, the NGO Journalists for Human Rights, and EKPAT-Austria. (3)
Child Allowance Program‡	Government-supported program providing monthly child allowance payments to low-income households and families receiving other forms of government assistance. (9) In 2022, the government continued to provide monthly allowances. (3)

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/ilab-project-page-search>

† 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. (3,45-48)

Day centers and other programs continue to serve children forced into begging rings; however, research has determined that gaps remain between some existing social programs and their capacity to serve children considered to be most at-risk for economic exploitation. (7,9)

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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 – 2022
	Raise the minimum age for work from 15 to 16 to align with the compulsory education age.	2018 – 2022
Enforcement	Provide labor inspectors and the Ministry of Interior with electronic systems to record and share data on inspections.	2009 – 2022
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor in order to inform the development of social programs supporting children at highest risk for economic exploitation.	2013 – 2022
	Increase efficacy of programs dedicated to addressing child labor and ensure that child beggars, especially Roma children, receive the support needed to be removed from street work permanently.	2015 – 2022
	Reduce barriers to education by increasing the number of teachers who can provide education in the Romani language.	2021 – 2022

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