

North Macedonia

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2024, North Macedonia made moderate advancement in its efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government set up a free national helpline through which people can report children living on the streets. This helps connect children, especially those who are victims of trafficking or forced begging, with the support and protection they need. The government also appointed an advisor to assist the Prime Minister in implementing the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma 2022–2030 and to improve conditions for the Roma community, including their children. In addition, the government adopted amendments to the Law for Primary Education, which allows children from Bosniak, Turkish, Serbian, Roma, and Vlach communities to form classes to study the languages and cultures of their communities, helping ensure that these children remain in school and out of child labor. Finally, the government held several trainings to strengthen enforcement and inter-agency cooperation on combating the worst forms of child labor. Although the government made meaningful efforts in all relevant areas during the reporting period, North Macedonia does not meet the international standard for the minimum age for work as protections do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships. In addition, 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.

PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Statistics on Children’s Work and Education		
Children	Age	Percent and Population
Working	5 to 14	18.8% (Unavailable)
Hazardous Work by Children	15 to 17	Unavailable
Attending School	5 to 14	97.6%
Combining Work and School	7 to 14	20.6%

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.

Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity	
Agriculture	Farming.†
Industry	Construction and working in textile factories.
Services	Vending, begging, domestic work, street work, including cleaning vehicle windshields.
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced begging. Forced domestic work. Forced labor as waitstaff and dancers in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs.

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

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

SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

The suggested government actions below would close gaps USDOL has identified in North Macedonia's implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Area	Suggested Action
Legal Framework	Raise the minimum age for work from age 15 to age 16 to align with the compulsory education age.
	Criminalize the use of all children, including those over the age of 14 who are not victims of trafficking in persons, for prostitution.

Area	Suggested Action
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors to enhance the effectiveness of labor inspections and child labor identification.
	Allocate sufficient resources to the police and prosecutors to proactively investigate child trafficking, screen sectors that present a higher risk of child labor, including in bars and nightclubs, and establish mechanisms to monitor whether law enforcement officials are effectively screening for potential trafficking victimization.
	Investigate, prosecute, and, when appropriate, convict and sentence police officers and government employees complicit in trafficking or other worst forms of child labor with adequate penalties.
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor to inform the development of social programs supporting children at highest risk for economic exploitation.
	Allocate sufficient resources to protect child victims of trafficking and child labor, including both boys and girls, by expanding the accommodation capacities of shelters and the number of workers with specialized knowledge of working with child victims and providing funding and other support to NGOs to operate hotlines and shelters, provide services, and conduct research.
	Increase the 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.
	Reduce barriers to education for Roma children by helping Roma children register their birth and obtain identification, increasing the number of teachers who can provide education in the Romani language, and supporting programs aimed to reduce discrimination against Roma children.

CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Child trafficking victims in North Macedonia are usually girls who have been subjected to commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. Children aged 9 to 17, especially those with mental and physical disabilities, are increasingly vulnerable to trafficking. Teenage girls are especially vulnerable to online recruitment. Roma children are at risk of exploitation in street work. Roma girls are vulnerable to forced marriages, wherein they are subjected to sexual and labor exploitation. Some Roma children are not registered at birth, and their parents lack registration and identification documents to access health care, social protection, and education. Children from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Pakistan, and other countries continue to transit through North Macedonia and are vulnerable to labor and sex trafficking.

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION ACCESS

Many Roma children have difficulty accessing education due to a lack of birth registration and identity cards, which are required for attending school in North Macedonia. Also, the segregation of Roma children in the education system keeps hindering their educational opportunities. Roma NGOs have reported that non-Roma parents often protest if Roma children are placed in the same class with non-Roma children, putting pressure on schools to segregate students. Additionally, the government continues to face challenges in meeting the educational needs of Roma and other ethnic minority children due to an ongoing shortage of qualified teachers who can provide instruction in Romani, Turkish, and Bosnian.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

North Macedonia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. However, North Macedonia's laws do not meet international standards on minimum age for work.

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	15	X	Article 42 of the Constitution; Sections 63, 66, and 67 of the Labor Relations Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	18	✓	Article 265 and Sections 63, 66, and 67 of the Labor Relations Act

Laws and Regulations on Child Labor			
Standard	Age	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children		✓	Rulebook on the Minimum Occupational Safety and Health Requirements for Young Workers
Prohibition of Slavery, Debt Bondage, and Forced Labor		✓	Article 11 of the Constitution; Articles 418, 418(a), 418(c), and 418(d) of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Child Trafficking		✓	Articles 418(c) and 418(d) of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children		X	Articles 191, 193, 193(a), 193(b), 418(a), and 418(d) of the Criminal Code
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities		✓	Article 201(4) of the Criminal Code; Article 12(3) of the Law on Child Protection
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	18	✓	Article 62 of the Law on Defense
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military		✓	Article 62 of the Law on Defense
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups		✓	Articles 122, 322a, and 404 of the Criminal Code
Compulsory Education Age	16	✓	Articles 4, 5, 47, and 58 of the Law on Primary Education; Article 3 of the Law on Secondary Education
Free Public Education		✓	Article 44 of the Constitution; Article 4 of the Law on Primary Education; Article 3 of the Law on Secondary Education

North Macedonia has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor. In 2024, the government adopted amendments to the Law for Primary Education to improve the access of Roma, Bosniak, Turkish, Serbian, and other students of minority groups to education. Additionally, the government approved the new Law on Justice for Children, which introduces restorative justice through the right to compensation for a child victim and protections for children in contact with the justice system. However, North Macedonia's minimum age for work protections do not meet international standards because they do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships. In addition, 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. Also, law does not prohibit the use of children over 14 who are not victims of human trafficking in prostitution.

ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2024, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to address child labor. However, local police reportedly do not consistently screen for human trafficking indicators during law enforcement actions on nightclubs and bars.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement
Labor Law Enforcement Agencies: The Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth (MTSP) collaborates with the police and the Office of the Ombudsman 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. 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. The State Labor Inspectorate, under the Ministry of Economy, is responsible for labor relations, occupational safety and health, and conducting child labor inspections.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Criminal Law Enforcement Agencies: The Ministry of the Interior enforces laws related to hazardous child labor, child trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation through the Office of the Ombudsman's unit for organized crime, corruption, and human trafficking. The State Public Prosecution investigates crimes involving children, including child trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation, and illicit activities, and initiates prosecutions in the court.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

Has a Labor Inspectorate	Yes
Able to Assess Civil Penalties	Yes
Routinely Conducted Worksite Inspections	Yes
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes
Has a Complaint Mechanism	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Child Labor Violations	Yes
Conducted Criminal Investigations for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes
Imposed Penalties for Worst Forms of Child Labor Crimes	Yes

In 2024, **127** labor inspectors conducted **12,539** worksite inspections, finding **1** child labor violation. The government also conducted **19** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes, initiated **14** prosecutions, and convicted **24** perpetrators. However, there is also evidence that local police may be complicit in child trafficking, although the government did not report prosecuting any officials.

COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

North Macedonia established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.

Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling: Coordinates the work of all institutions involved in combating trafficking in persons. Led by the National Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Persons, 14 representatives from 9 governmental institutions participate in this Commission. Includes the Sub-Committee for the Fight Against Trafficking in Children, which serves as an advisory body to this Commission on all forms of child trafficking. In 2024, the commission continued to implement the 2021–2025 National Action Plan and started to draft the new 2026–2030 Trafficking in Persons National Strategy and National Action Plan.

North Macedonia established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Persons and Migrant Smuggling (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. In 2024, the National Commission held several trainings for government agencies on trafficking in persons. Also, the Subgroup for Combating Trafficking in Children carried out awareness and education activities related to child trafficking, including broadcasts on national and local radio. The government is preparing a new national strategy for 2026–2030 and a corresponding action plan.

National Action Plan for Education (2018–2025): Aims in part to expand inclusive education and improve education for the Roma community. Seek to increase the number of Roma students in preschools and elementary schools and decrease the number of Romani students who, based on ethnicity, are enrolled in primary schools for children with special needs. In 2024, the Ministry of Education and Science awarded 934 scholarships to Romani students for higher education. Also, the Ministry hired 47 educational mediators to provide additional support for Romani primary students with learning difficulties.

Key Policies Related to Child Labor

National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Abuse and Neglect of Children (2020–2025): Presents the vision, goals, and strategic approach of the government and the activities to be undertaken annually to further the prevention and protection of children from all types of violence. Prepared by the National Commission for the Prevention and Countering of Abuse and Neglect of Children. In 2024, the government established a free national helpline for citizens to report a child on the street, allowing the Centers for Social Work to take measures to protect the child. Also, Roma Information Centers continued to provide support in birth registration, obtaining identity documents, and exercising other rights.

North Macedonia funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. However, these social programs do not comprehensively address the full scope of the problem, including forced begging and a lack of accommodations for boy victims of trafficking.

Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

MTSP-Operated and -Funded Centers and Shelters:[‡] Provide support and services, sometimes in coordination with NGOs, to victims of human trafficking and vulnerable populations such as street children. MTSP also funds Centers for Social Work, the Shelter Center for Victims of Human Trafficking (operated by NGO Open Gate/*La Strada*), a transit center for asylum seekers, and the Ministry of the Interior-operated Transit Center for Illegal Migrants. During the reporting period, the government continued to provide financial support for daycare centers and shelters.

SOS Human Trafficking Hotline: Operated by NGO Open Gate/*La Strada* to provide expedient legal, psychosocial, and emotional support to victims of trafficking in multiple languages, in addition to shelter and family reunification assistance. However, the hotline relied on foreign donors and was not government-funded. In 2024, the hotline received 237 calls. Of the seven calls of suspected human trafficking that were referred to relevant institutions, two calls involved suspected human trafficking cases concerning child victims.

Child Allowance Program:[‡] Government-supported program providing monthly child allowance payments to low-income households and families receiving other forms of government assistance.

[‡] 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.

For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports