



NORTH MACEDONIA

MODERATE ADVANCEMENT

In 2023, North Macedonia made moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The Labor Inspectorate implemented a new digital recordkeeping system, improving inspectors' ability to monitor the progress of ongoing cases. The Ministry of Labor and Social Policy also expanded its outreach to vulnerable migrant populations by opening two new migrant assistance centers along the northern and southern borders of the country. In addition, the government increased the monthly child allowance amount paid to eligible families and introduced a new education allowance to offset the costs of attending school for children in low-income households. However, North Macedonia's minimum age for work does not meet international standards because 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 of 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.†



Services

Street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, scavenging, and begging.



Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡

Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Forced begging. Forced domestic work. Forced labor as wait staff 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.

Legal Framework

Ensure that minimum age for work protections apply to all children, including self-employed children and children working outside formal employment relationships.

Raise the minimum age for work from age 15 to age 16 to align with the compulsory education age.

Enforcement

Ensure that the State Labor Inspectorate conducts inspections in sectors at higher risk of child labor, including in agriculture and street work.

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.

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 by increasing the number of teachers who can provide education in the Romani language.



CHILDREN AT HIGHER RISK

Roma, Balkan Egyptian, and Ashkali children are at risk to be exploited in street work. 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. Roma girls are vulnerable to trafficking for forced marriages, as a result of which they are subjected to sexual and labor exploitation. 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.



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. 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.

Child Labor Laws and Regulations	Meets International Standards	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work, 15 Years		Article 42 of the Constitution; Sections 63, 66, and 67 of the Labor Relations Act
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work, 18 Years		Article 265 and Sections 63, 66, and 67 of the Labor Relations Act
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		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 Years		Article 62 of the Law on Defense
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*	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 Years		Articles 4, 5, 47, and 172 of the Law on Primary Education; Article 3 of the Law on Secondary Education
Free Public Education		Article 44 of the Constitution; Articles 4,5, and 47 of the Law on Primary Education

* Country has no conscription

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.



ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

In 2023, labor and criminal law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to address child labor. However, the lack of inspections in sectors at higher risk of child labor may hinder enforcement efforts.

Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP): 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.

Ministry of the Interior (MOI): 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.

Enforcement Mechanisms and Efforts

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

In 2023, **115** labor inspectors conducted **20,831** worksite inspections, finding **5** child labor violations. The government also conducted **63** investigations into suspected worst forms of child labor crimes, initiated **41** prosecutions, and convicted **24** perpetrators.



COORDINATION, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

<p>Key Mechanism to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor</p> <p>North Macedonia established a mechanism to coordinate its efforts to address child labor.</p>	<p>National Coordination Body for Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect: Tasked with implementation of the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Countering of Abuse and Neglect of Children. Comprises representatives from government agencies, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, and civil society organizations. During the reporting period, the Coordination Body collaborated with UNICEF to develop and implement child protection programming for caregivers and social workers.</p>
<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p> <p>North Macedonia established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor.</p>	<p>National Action Plan Against 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 2023, the government collaborated with the Council of Europe to establish its first national legal aid program to specifically address the needs of survivors of trafficking, and a number of activities to raise children's awareness about the risks of trafficking in persons, including trafficking for the purpose of forced begging, were undertaken at schools around the country.</p> <p>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. In 2023, the Ministry of Education and Science initiated reforms to the primary education system.</p>

Coordination, Policies, and Programs (Cont.)

<p>Key Policies Related to Child Labor</p>	<p>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 2023, the Coordination Body met to both evaluate the efficacy of activities completed under the policy through the end of 2022 and to develop a new action plan.</p>
<p>Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor</p> <p>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.</p> <p><i>† Program is funded by the Government of North Macedonia.</i> <i>‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor.</i></p>	<p>MLSP-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. 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. During the reporting period, the government continued to provide financial support for daycare centers and shelters for vulnerable children and also opened two temporary centers for migrants in Kumanovo and Gevgelija.</p> <p>SOS Human Trafficking Hotline: Operated by NGO Open Gate/<i>La Strada</i> to provide expedient legal, psychosocial, and emotional support to victims of trafficking, in addition to shelter and family reunification assistance. During the reporting period, the hotline received two human trafficking calls regarding child victims.</p> <p>Child Allowance Program:[†] Government-supported program providing monthly child allowance payments to low-income households and families receiving other forms of government assistance. In 2023, the government increased the monthly child allowance amount and introduced a new education allowance for children in low-income households attending a primary or secondary school.</p>

For information about USDOL's projects to address child labor around the world, visit dol.gov/ILABprojects
 For references, please visit dol.gov/ChildLaborReports