

In 2018, North Macedonia made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government amended the Labor Relations Act to prohibit children under the age of 15 or those who have not completed compulsory education from working, except under limited circumstances. Additionally, funding was sufficient for both labor and criminal law enforcement to combat child labor, and the National Coordination Body for Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect was reconstituted. However, children in North Macedonia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation. The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships. In addition, labor inspectors are unevenly distributed across the country, causing some businesses to be inspected more than others.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in North Macedonia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation. (1,2-7,8) 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	18.3 (44,161)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	86.8
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	19.5
Primary Completion Rate (%)		91.3

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019. (9)

Source for all other data: International Labor Organization's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 4 (MICS 4), 2011. (10)

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)
Services	Street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, scavenging, and begging (4-6,11)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,8,12)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,8,12)
	Domestic work as a result of human trafficking (2,7,13-15)
	Forced labor as wait staff and dancers in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs (16,2,15)

‡ 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. (1,16,5,6) Some children engage in begging to help support their families, while others are forced to beg. The majority of children involved in street work are of the Roma, Balkan Egyptian, and Ashkali ethnicities. (1,3,5-8) Although North Macedonia has data on child labor from 2011, it does not include information on children's work by sector. (1,6)

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The majority of victims of child trafficking in North Macedonia are girls, between the ages of 12 to 18, who have been trafficked domestically for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. (1,2,8,13,17) Roma girls, especially, are also trafficked for forced marriages in which they are subject to sexual and labor exploitation. (1,2,8,13,14,18)




Unaccompanied children from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and other states continued to transit through the country, either legally or illegally, and were vulnerable to trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (8,12,19,20) In 2018, the IOM identified 3,132 migrants transiting the country illegally, of which 20 percent were children and 8 percent unaccompanied. (2,20)

Increased government funding for textbooks and programs to eliminate barriers to education has increased school attendance rates among Roma children. (21-23) However, the government was unable to fully meet Roma children's need for teaching in Romani due to a shortage of qualified teachers, and the number of Romani children who complete school is still low. (17,23,24) Birth certification is sometimes required for attending school in North Macedonia, and some Roma children had difficulty accessing education due to a lack of birth registration and identity cards. (3,25,24) Classes for children with intellectual disabilities have disproportionately high numbers of Roma children due to discrimination, based in part on faulty screening procedures for assessing intellectual disabilities. (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 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; Section 18 of the Labor Relations Act (26,27)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Section 18 of the Labor Relations Act (27)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Rulebook on the Minimum Occupational Safety and Health Requirements for Young Workers (28)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 11 of the Constitution; Articles 418, 418-c, and 418-d of the Criminal Code (26,29)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 418-c and 418-d of the Criminal Code (29)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 190–193b of the Criminal Code (29)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 12 of the Law on Child Protection (30)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 62 of the Law on Defense (31)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 62 of the Law on Defense (31)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 122, 322-a, and 404 of the Criminal Code (29)
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 (32,33)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 44 of the Constitution (26)

* No conscription (31)

In 2018, Parliament expanded protections for children in the Labor Relations Act. Now children under age 15 or children who have not completed compulsory education cannot work, except in activities that are legal, do not harm their education, health and safety, and for a specific number of hours. (27) During the reporting period, the government also passed amendments to the Law on Social Protection which, during 2018 and 2019, aims to facilitate access to allowances for children, including children with disabilities, establish preschools at the municipal levels, and promote inclusive education. (34-36)

The Criminal Code was amended to ensure children who committed crimes under duress while being trafficked will not be punished for such acts. (2,29,37)

However, the minimum age for work is not in compliance 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. (5,27) 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.

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 the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy (MLSP) 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)	Works with the police to seek out street children in need of assistance and tracks cases of forced child labor through the Department of Social Inclusion. (38,39) Registers complaints about hazardous child labor and investigates children's participation in street work through 30 Centers for Social Work (CSWs) and the Ombudsman's Office, which includes a special unit for the investigation of violations of child rights and refers complaints to the State Labor Inspectorate. (3,5,11,40) When child labor is detected, the child is removed, put under the care of a CSW, and interviewed by a social worker. The child is then either returned to their family or taken to a safe house. (11) CSWs serve to counsel, educate, and assist victims of trafficking in persons. (3)
State Labor Inspectorate (SLI)	Enforces child labor laws and transmits cases of suspected criminal law violations to the Public Prosecutor. Inspectors conduct a minimum of 60 target and compliant-based cases per month. (39,40)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (Cont.)

Organization/Agency	Role
Ministry of Interior (MOI)	Enforces laws related to hazardous child labor. Investigates cases of 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. (40) Mobile teams continued their operations throughout 2018 in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Bitola, and Gevgelija to identify street children and remove them from hazardous situations. (1,17,19,41) In April 2018, an anti-human trafficking task force, established by the National Commission for Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration, was established and operational with 53 members. (2)
Public Prosecutor's Office	Prosecutes criminal law violations, including those involving the worst forms of child labor. (42) 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 Basic Prosecutor's Office has eight prosecutors for child abuse cases. (15,43)
Office of the National Referral Mechanism	Refers potential cases of child victims of human trafficking to law enforcement authorities for investigation and refers potential victims to social services. (38,43)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2018, labor law enforcement agencies in North Macedonia took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MLSP that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including human resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2017	2018
Labor Inspectorate Funding	Unknown (3)	\$2,000,000 (1)
Number of Labor Inspectors	74 (3)	54 (1)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	16,459 (41)	11,324 (1)
Number Conducted at Worksites	16,459 (41)	11,324 (1)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (3)	0 (1)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	N/A	0 (1)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	Unknown (3)	0 (1)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (1)

North Macedonia's State Labor Inspectorate (SLI) is 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) While the SLI does not have a specific strategy for conducting inspections, unannounced inspections in all sectors are permitted, including on legally-registered private farms. (6,44) Inspectors can also inspect private homes and farms with a valid warrant. (3)

All labor inspectors received trainings on labor laws, including on child labor. The Council of Europe trained 44 labor inspectors, Ministry of Interior officials, mobile teams, and social workers on building the capacity for identification, assistance, and referrals of victims of human trafficking. (2,17) In addition, the National Commission for Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (National Trafficking in Persons Commission) trained labor inspectors and social workers from 30 Centers for Social Work (CSWs) on human trafficking for the purposes of labor exploitation. (2,17)

During the reporting period, the number of labor inspectors decreased from 74 to 54 due to a large number of retirements. (1) While funding was considered sufficient for inspectors to perform their regular duties, government officials reported that the number of labor inspectors is insufficient to cover all of the formal businesses in the country, and some businesses are inspected more often than others because of the uneven distribution of inspectors throughout the country. (1) In addition, sources reported that labor inspectors did not consistently identify victims of human trafficking properly. (2,17)

As in previous years, the MLSP lacks a central database; however, inspection results are disseminated throughout relevant departments within the MLSP. (17)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2018, 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	2017	2018
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (3)	Yes (1)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	N/A (22)	Yes (1)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (3)	Yes (17)
Number of Investigations	Unknown (22)	7 (2)
Number of Violations Found	2 (3)	6 (1)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	3 (12)	Unknown (1)
Number of Convictions	0 (3)	2 (2)
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	0 (23)	14 (23)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (3)	Yes (1)

In North Macedonia, legal requirements mandate that public prosecutors receive a 24-month training on child labor, including on forced child labor, child trafficking, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and the use of children in illicit activities. (17) Police investigators receive trainings yearly, when new legislation is passed, and refresher trainings. (1) During the reporting period, judges and prosecutors received trainings on various forms of human trafficking, including for labor exploitation. In addition, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe provided a training on human trafficking guidelines for police officers, prosecutors, and judges. (17) Police officers also received specialized trainings on human trafficking along migrant routes and identification of vulnerable populations. (2)

Investigators and prosecutors worked together to convict four separate individuals in two different cases in 2018 for trafficking of children for sexual and labor exploitation. (2)

In 2018, criminal investigators reported sufficient resources to adequately perform their investigations. (1) However, sources reported that border agents were unable to properly identify victims of human trafficking and proper coordination was lacking at the local municipal levels. (2,17) In addition, referral of cases between the National Referral Mechanism, CSWs, and police lacked coordination. (2)

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 adequate coordination of efforts to address child labor, including efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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

Coordinating Body	Role & Description
National Coordination Body for Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect	Oversees implementation of the National Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children. Led by MLSP. (1) Comprises representatives from other ministries, civil society, WHO, and UNICEF country offices. (1,3,45) Reconstituted and met in 2018 with an increased focus on child labor abuse and coordination among government agencies. Completed a report. (1,17,23)
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 the National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Coordinator with 14 representatives from 9 governmental institutions under the MOI. (2,3,40) Includes 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. (2,7,40,46)

In 2018, the National Commission for the Protection of the Rights of Children was disbanded due to inactivity. (1,17)

In 2018, the National Trafficking in Persons Commission held quarterly meetings and provided guidance to local anti-human trafficking commissions to implement their local action plans, among other activities. However, sources reported that the local commissions needed to build their capacity to adequately combat human trafficking. (2)

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 implementing a new national child labor action plan.

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor

Policy	Description
National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (2017–2020)	Focuses on preventing human trafficking by reducing the vulnerability of at-risk populations, improves identification of victims, and increases efforts to combat human trafficking for forced labor, including forced child begging. (3,12,47) Active in 2018. (1,17)
National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010–2020)	Addresses social protection, social inclusion, health, education, and employment of children. (40) Aims 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 the MLSP. (40,48)
National Action Plan for Education (2016–2020)†	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 in primary schools for children with special needs. (49) Includes a Strategy for 2018–2025. (17,50) In 2018, enrolled approximately 510 Roma children in schools and introduced a system to monitor the development of children with disabilities. (51-53)

† Policy was approved during the reporting period.

During the reporting period, the government added funding specifications to the goals in the National Strategy and National Action Plan against Trafficking in Persons and Illegal Migration (2017–2020). (1) The funding allocations will help hold the responsible ministries accountable for combating child trafficking. (1) The government also passed the National Action Plan for Coordination of Children from Abuse and Neglect (2019-2021) in 2019. (23)

Research was unable to determine whether activities were undertaken to implement the National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010–2020). (17)

Although the Government of North Macedonia has adopted policies aimed to combat child trafficking, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor. The National Coordination of Children from Abuse and Neglect is preparing a 5-year strategy to protect children from violence. (23)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2018, 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 funding and adequacy of programs to address the full scope of the problem.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor

Program	Description
MLSP Day Centers, Shelter, and Social Worker Trainings†	Operates 2 day centers that can accommodate 60 children and partially funds 2 other centers, operated by NGOs, that can accommodate 80 children. (3,11,54) Supports a transit center for street children. (54) Runs an ongoing program to instruct foster families on how to accommodate child trafficking victims. (11) In 2018, increased the number of foster families. (1) Provides counseling, education, and assistance with registration documents to street children and child human trafficking victims at 30 CSW facilities. (14,40)
“Red Button” Hotline	MOI-operated website application to report child abuse, human trafficking, hate crimes, or violence. Created to improve identification and timely referral of human trafficking cases, especially among migrants. (2) Active in 2018. (17)
Center for Victims of Human Trafficking and Transit Center for Foreign Victims of Trafficking†	MLSP funds and NGO Open Gate/La Strada operates the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking shelter that provides housing, basic services, and reintegration services to victims. (17) The MOI supports the Transit Center for Foreign Victims of Trafficking, operated by NGOs. (1,3,55) In 2018, MLSP increased funding to the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking and 31 individuals were provided with assistance. (17)
UNICEF Projects	UNICEF partners 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. (17) These projects include the Program for the Protection of Children Against Violence (2016–2020), the UNICEF Country Program (2016–2020), and the Home for Every Child Program. (11,17,56,57) Active in 2018. (17)
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. (41,58) Aims to support the integration of Roma children by increasing the number of Roma children in preschool. (3,11) MLSP, MOI, and Ministry of Justice are all part of the project work plan. (59) Held workshops for teachers in 2018. (1,23)
Educational Seminars for Roma Students and Teachers	Provides educational seminars to Roma students, teachers, and NGOs on the associated risks of forced marriages between minors. (1) The program continued its activities in 2018. (1)

† 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. (1,2,60-62)

Programs funded by donors typically were not continued by the government after funding expired. (11,7,19,23) Also, 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 in combating child labor. (3,11,19,22,23,59)

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 – 2018
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018
Enforcement	Ensure that labor inspections are conducted equally throughout the country to promote compliance with child labor laws in all geographical regions through a specific strategy.	2017 – 2018
	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 – 2018
	Ensure law enforcement agencies proactively identify child trafficking victims and border agents coordinate to properly identify victims of human trafficking.	2015 – 2018
	Publish information on the total number of prosecutions initiated for criminal law enforcement.	2018

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Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (Cont.)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Coordination	Ensure that police, social workers from the Centers for Social Work, and National Referral Mechanism coordinate properly when referring cases of child labor.	2018
	Build the capacity of local commissions to adequately combat human trafficking.	2018
Government Policies	Ensure that the National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion is active.	2018
	Create and implement a National Action Plan on Child Labor.	2017 – 2018
Social Programs	Conduct research to determine the activities carried out by children engaged in child labor, including those in street work and those subjected to commercial sexual exploitation	2013 – 2018
	Reduce barriers to education by increasing the number of teachers who can provide education in the Romani language and eliminate the practice of placing Romani children in schools for children with intellectual disabilities based on ethnicity. Make additional efforts to register Roma children at birth.	2014 – 2018
	Increase funding dedicated to combating child labor, and ensure that child beggars are taken off the streets permanently.	2015 – 2018

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