

In 2019, North Macedonia made a moderate advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The parliament implemented changes to the existing Labor Law, which provided additional protections for children under the age of 15, and those who have not completed compulsory education. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science implemented a new law that requires the hiring of educational mediators with the goal of removing barriers to education for Roma children. The government also increased the enrollment of children from vulnerable groups in primary school by accommodating first time and returnee students, and providing scholarships to vulnerable children.



However, children in North Macedonia engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in forced begging and commercial sexual exploitation, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. The law's minimum age protections do not apply to children who are self-employed or working outside formal employment relationships. Local police entities have also demonstrated a lack of knowledge on handling cases pertaining to trafficking in persons. Moreover, the government has not adopted a policy to address all worst forms of child labor, with the exception of child trafficking.

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, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1-8) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in North Macedonia.

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 (%)		91.1

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2017, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020. (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 (1,3,8)
Services	Street work, including vending small items, cleaning vehicle windshields, scavenging, and begging (4,5,8,11)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,2,7,8,12)
	Forced begging, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (1,7,8,12)
	Domestic work as a result of human trafficking (2,6,13,14)
	Forced labor as waitstaff and dancers in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs (2,14,15)

‡ 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. The majority of children involved in street work are of the Roma, Balkan Egyptian, and Ashkali ethnicities. (1,3-8)

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The majority of victims of child trafficking in North Macedonia are girls, between the ages of 12 and 18, who have been subjected to domestic trafficking for commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor in restaurants, bars, and nightclubs. (1,2,7,16) Roma girls, especially, are victims of trafficking for forced marriages in which they are subject to sexual and labor exploitation. (1,2,7,13,17)

Unaccompanied children from Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, and other states continued to transit through the country, and were vulnerable to trafficking for labor and commercial sexual exploitation. (7,12,18,19)

In August 2019, the updated Law on Primary Education came into effect permitting the Ministry of Education and Science (MOES) to hire educational mediators to assist Roma students in overcoming barriers to education. MOES hired 22 mediators, all of whom are Roma, with plans to hire 23 more. (8) In addition, the government has continued to grant scholarships for Roma students. (8) Despite these efforts, the government was unable to fully meet the educational needs of Roma children due to a shortage of qualified teachers who can provide instruction in Romani. (16,20,21) Birth certification is 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. (3,8,21) Also, there continues to be a lack of comprehensive data on child labor, including research on the activities of children in street work and those subjected to commercial sexual exploitation.

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; Section 18 of the Labour Relations Act (23,24)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Sections 18 and 173 of the Labour Relations Act (24)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Rulebook on the Minimum Occupational Safety and Health Requirements for Young Workers (25)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Article 11 of the Constitution; Articles 418, 418-c, and 418-d of the Criminal Code (23,26)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Articles 418-c and 418-d of the Criminal Code (26)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Articles 190–193-b of the Criminal Code (26)

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

Standard	Meets International Standards	Age	Legislation
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	No		Article 12(3) of the Law on Child Protection (27)
Minimum Age for Voluntary State Military Recruitment	Yes	18	Article 62 of the Law on Defense (28)
Prohibition of Compulsory Recruitment of Children by (State) Military	N/A*		Article 62 of the Law on Defense (28)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment by Non-state Armed Groups	Yes		Articles 122, 322-a, and 404 of the Criminal Code (26)
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Articles 8, 60, and 71 of the Law on Primary Education; Article 3 of the Law on Secondary Education (29,30)
Free Public Education	Yes		Article 44 of the Constitution (23)

* No conscription (28)

In 2019, the government of North Macedonia implemented changes to the existing Labour Relations Act, providing additional protections for working children. (8) In accordance with the Council of Europe’s Committee of Social Rights, Article 18 of the law now indicates that children under the age of 15 or who have not completed compulsory education may participate in legally sanctioned work activities for no longer than 2 hours per day and no more than 12 hours per week. In addition, during a school holiday, children may not work longer than 6 hours per day or 30 hours per week. (8) 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. (4,21,24) 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. (21)

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 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. (3,5,8) Refers children to 30 Centers for Social Work (CSWs) throughout the country, which serve to counsel, educate, shelter, and assist children in need and victims of trafficking in persons. (3,11)
State Labor Inspectorate (SLI)	Enforces labor law, including child labor laws, by conducting at least 60 targeted and complaint-based cases per month. Receives complaints of child labor from MLSP and refers cases of the worst forms of child labor to the Public Prosecutor. (31,32)
Ministry of Interior (MOI)	Enforces laws related to hazardous child labor, 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. (32) In 2019, mobile teams continued their operations in Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Bitola, and Gevgelija to identify street children and remove them from hazardous situations. (1,8,16,18,33)
Public Prosecutor’s Office	Prosecutes criminal law violations, including those involving the worst forms of child labor. (34) 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. (14)
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. (8)

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Labor Law Enforcement

In 2019, 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 financial resource allocation.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2018	2019
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$2,000,000 (1)	\$1,900,000 (8)
Number of Labor Inspectors	54 (1)	78 (8)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Initial Training for New Labor Inspectors	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (1)	No (8)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	11,324 (1)	11,749 (8)
Number Conducted at Worksite	11,324 (1)	11,749 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	0 (1)	1 (8)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties Were Imposed	0 (1)	0 (8)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that Were Collected	0 (1)	0 (8)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1)	Yes (8)

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) Although the SLI does not have a specific strategy for conducting inspections, unannounced inspections in all sectors are permitted, including on legally-registered private farms. (5,8,35) Inspectors can also inspect private homes and farms with a valid warrant. (3) In 2019, SLI found one child labor violation at a primary school, which was reported by a concerned parent and an NGO, in which a principal had agreed with a local business to have children harvest grapes for two days over a weekend. SLI did not assess a penalty for the violation and the NGO reported that the child labor ended because the work was completed. (8)

In 2019, all labor inspectors received training on labor laws. The number of labor inspectors increased from 54 to 78 and the number of inspections increased slightly due to new hires and a change in the law requiring heads of inspection departments to conduct regular inspections. (8) However, some government officials have indicated that funding is now insufficient due to the increase in inspectors. In addition, a senior government official expressed concern that 60 percent of current inspectors will reach retirement age in the next 2 to 3 years. (8) Sources also reported that labor inspectors did not consistently identify victims of human trafficking properly. (36)

The MLSP lacks a central database to track labor investigations; however, inspection results are disseminated throughout relevant departments within the MLSP. (16)

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2019, 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	2018	2019
Initial Training for New Criminal Investigators	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (1)	Yes (8)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (16)	Yes (8)
Number of Investigations	7 (2)	Unknown
Number of Violations Found	6 (1)	4 (8)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (1)	4 (8)
Number of Convictions	2 (2)	Unknown
Imposed Penalties for Violations Related to The Worst Forms of Child Labor	14 (20)	Unknown
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (1)	Yes (8)

In North Macedonia, legal requirements mandate that public prosecutors receive a 24-month training, which includes the application of international legal standards. (16) Police investigators receive initial training, yearly refresher courses, and training when legislation changes. (1) During the reporting period, investigators and Public Prosecutor’s Office representatives received specialized training from the National Unit for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking (NUSMSHT), which also provided training on migrant smuggling and human trafficking to social workers, labor inspectors, NGOs, and civil society members. (8) However, research indicates that some local police were not aware of the specialized task force, nor did they possess knowledge on handling trafficking in persons (TIP) cases. (36)

In 2019, NUSMSHT identified four child victims of human trafficking, including victims of sexual exploitation and labor exploitation. NUSMSHT used Section 418-d of the criminal code to file two criminal charges against four individuals suspected of committing crimes. (8) The “Red Button” Hotline is an MOI-operated 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. (2) In 2019, three reports related to trafficking in persons were received and referred to the Anti-TIP Task Force for investigation. (8)

In 2019, criminal investigators operating in their home agencies had sufficient resources to carry out their duties. However, NUSMSHT 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. (8)

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 efficacy in accomplishing mandates.

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	Led by MLSP. (1) Comprises representatives from other ministries, civil society, WHO, and UNICEF country offices. (1,3) In 2019, the National Coordination Body began drafting a new National Action Plan for Prevention and Countering Abuse and Neglect of Children. (8)
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 MOI and under the direction of the National Anti-Trafficking in Persons Coordinator, with 14 representatives from 9 government institutions. (2,3,32) 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. (2,6,8,32,37) During the reporting period, the Commission’s local committees met frequently and communicated daily. (8) In 2019, the National Commission also began drafting a new law to compensate victims of human trafficking, including children. (8) In addition, officials from the Commission’s Anti-Trafficking in Persons Task Force attended specialized OSCE trainings for its 32 permanent police members and 5 organized crime public prosecutors. (36)

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Sources reported that the local committees overseen by the National TIP Commission needed to build their capacity to adequately combat human trafficking, including via better human resource allocation. (2,8)

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
National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010–2020)	Addresses social protection, social inclusion, health, education, and employment of children. (8,32) 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 MLSP. (8,32,38) In 2019, the policy continued to be implemented via birth registration promotion and the continuation of street mobile patrols and government payments for vulnerable populations. (39)
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, improving the identification of victims, and increasing efforts to combat human trafficking and forced child begging. (3,12,40) In 2019, the government continued implementing the policy by assisting the Municipality of Kumanovo with establishing a new anti-TIP committee and 2020 Local Action Plan, bringing the total number of municipal-level anti-TIP committees in North Macedonia to seven. (36)
National Action Plan for Education (2018–2020)	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 who, based on ethnicity, are enrolled in primary schools for children with special needs. (41) Includes a Strategy for 2018–2025. (16,42) In 2019, increased inclusion of children from vulnerable groups in primary school by accommodating first time and returnee students; also provided scholarships to vulnerable populations with a focus on Roma children who indicate interest in continuing their education in an underrepresented field. (8)

Although the Government of North Macedonia has adopted policies aimed at combating child trafficking, research found no evidence of a policy on other worst forms of child labor. (20)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2019, 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 adequacy 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. MLSP runs one day center for street children and funds another operated by an NGO to provide services, healthcare, and counseling to children working in the streets. (3,8) MLSP also funds the Center for Victims of Human Trafficking, a transit center for asylum seekers, and the MOI-operated Transit Center for Illegal Migrants. (8) In 2019, MLSP funded 2 temporary centers for illegal migrants and children at the southern border and continued to operate 30 CSWs that provided services to street children and child victims of human trafficking. (8,13,32)
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. (16) In 2019, MLSP and the Inter-municipal Center for Social Work of the City of Skopje, in cooperation with UNICEF, established mobile teams to track street children and work with their families to secure benefits from the government. (8) Other 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. (11,16,44,45)
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. (33,46) Aims to support the integration of Roma children by increasing the number of Roma children in preschool. (3,11) MLSP, MOI, and the Ministry of Justice are all part of the project work plan. (47) In 2019, the program continued to support Roma children by assisting their families with the school selection process, including ensuring access to schools with both Roma and Macedonian educators. (39)

† 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. (1,2,48-50)

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 combating child labor. (3,11,18,20,47,51)

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 – 2019
	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
	Raise the minimum age for work to the age up to which education is compulsory.	2018 – 2019
Enforcement	Conduct training on new child labor laws for labor inspectors.	2019
	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 – 2019
	Provide sufficient funding for the National Unit for the Suppression of Migrant Smuggling and Human Trafficking to carry out its duties to combat human trafficking.	2019
	Ensure that the State Labor Inspectorate assesses adequate penalties for discovered child labor violations.	2019
	Ensure that local police receive proper training on handling cases related to trafficking in persons.	2018 – 2019
	Build the capacity of local commissions to adequately combat human trafficking.	2018 – 2019
Government Policies	Ensure that the National Strategy for the Fight Against Poverty and Social Exclusion is implemented.	2018 – 2019
	Adopt a policy that addresses all relevant worst forms of child labor, such as a national action plan on child labor.	2017 – 2019
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 – 2019
	Reduce barriers to education by increasing the number of teachers who can provide education in the Romani language, and make additional efforts to register Roma children at birth.	2014 – 2019
	Ensure that child beggars receive the support needed to be removed from the streets permanently.	2015 – 2019

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