



Migration Profile

NORTH MACEDONIA

A. Executive Summary

The Republic of North Macedonia is located in Southeast Europe and is the main migrant corridor between Greece and Serbiaⁱ.

Since its independence in 1991, North Macedonia experienced a considerable economic growthⁱⁱ, especially in the sectors of domestic trade, industry, public administration, and agricultureⁱⁱⁱ. However, the economy plunged into a recession in 2020, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine have brought in new challenges^{iv}.

North Macedonia has many emigrants, and most of them moved to Turkey, Germany, and Italy^v. However, the country also hosts many immigrants coming from Albania, Turkey and Serbia,^{vi} and refugees mostly arriving from Serbia and Kosovo^{vii}. Many migrants come in from the Greek border through Gevgelija and travel north through Tabanovce and Miratovac to reach Serbia, and then continue their migratory journey to Europe^{viii}. Internal migration usually happens from rural into urban areas^{ix}, and internal forced displacements are mainly caused by violence and floods^x.

In 2020, the North Macedonian GDP amounted to 12,263,710,000^{xi}, experiencing an annual decrease of 5.2% if compared to 2019^{xii}, and this was caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Foreign direct investment increased by 88.7 million euros in December 2021^{xiii}. However, the inflation rate has also severely grown, being 11.9% in May 2022, compared to 2.7% in June 2021^{xiv}.

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

The Republic of North Macedonia is located south of the Balcan Peninsula and is bordered by Serbia and Kosovo to the north, Bulgaria to the east, Albania to the west and Greece to the south^{xv}. It is a continental country with no seacoast and has a high risk of earthquakes^{xvi}. It has a total surface area of 25.710 sq. km and includes 85 municipalities^{xvii}.

The capital is Skopje, and the official language is Macedonian^{xviii}. In addition, Albanian is the second most spoken language in the country^{xix}. According to the 2021 census, its population

is 2,097,319 inhabitants^{xx}. Regarding the ethnic distribution, 58.44% are Macedonians, 24.3% Albanians, 3.86% Turks, 2.53% Roma, 1.3% Serbs, 0.87% Bosniaks and 0.47% Vlachs^{xxi}.

As far as their religious affiliation, 46.14% are Orthodox, 32.17% Muslim, and 0.37% Catholic. Several other religious communities were not present in the previous censuses, such as Evangelical Protestant Christians, Agnostics, Buddhists, and others^{xxii}.

II. International and Internal Migrants

Due to its geographic location, North Macedonia is mainly considered a transit country^{xxiii}, used as a corridor between Greece and Serbia^{xxiv}. In 2019, according to the United Nations, there were 131,175 immigrants in North Macedonia^{xxv}, mostly coming from Albania (68,029), Turkey (19,991), Serbia (17,991), Montenegro (9,269), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (8,742)^{xxvi}. In 2019, most immigrants (56.8%) were between 20 and 64 years old, and 58.3% of them were women^{xxvii}.

Regarding internal migration, in 2020 there were 2,920 displacements from one region to another^{xxviii} due to financial reasons, but also because of education, marriage, and other family matters^{xxix xxx}. This migration was especially a rural-to-urban phenomenon, and the net migration in urban areas was 150 people.

In 2020, Skopje was the region with more internal immigrants (1,457), and Skopje, Vardar, Pelagonia and the East regions were areas affected by migration. In the last decade, most of the internal migrants were female (70%) and young people (15 to 29 years old)^{xxxi}.

As far as international migrants, they come in through Greece at the city of Idomeni, and then try to enter the Vinojug camp, at Gevgelija. Afterwards, they travel north up to the centre of Tabanovce, either by train (4-5 hours), bus (3 hours) or taxi (2.5 hours)^{xxxii}. These centres provide information, protection and medical services, material assistance and hygienic facilities^{xxxiii}. At Tabanovce, they either wait for a few hours or up to 2-3 days, (depending on their nationality)^{xxxiv}, and then continue on by crossing the Serbian border through the town of Miratovac^{xxxv}. Others decide to move west, using the Albanian or Kosovo routes^{xxxvi}. However, the reverse situation is also occurring, with different migrants returning from Serbia and heading South towards Greece^{xxxvii}.

Migrants face many challenges during their journey and arrival at the border: arbitrary detentions and expulsions, abuse and ill-treatment^{xxxviii}, and even death - like being killed by trains while crossing the railways^{xxxix}. Furthermore, smugglers traffick migrants in the country (mostly hiding them in cars, buses, or trains^{xl}) and are able to get large amounts of illegal profits (between 500 to 1,500 euros per person, bringing them from Greece to Serbia). Human trafficking usually takes place in the village of Vaksince, at the border with Serbia^{xli}, and the region of Gevgelija-Demir Kapija is the preferred route used for migrant smuggling^{xlii}.

In 2018, 14,943 irregular immigrants were detected in the country, most of them originally from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and India^{xliii}; and many of the irregular crossings (88.4%) came about at the border with Greece. Likewise, in 2018, smuggling charges were brought against 66 persons, and 20 people, involved in 10 cases, received prison sentences^{xliiv}.

When integrating into the North Macedonian labour market, immigrants also face regularisation problems^{xlv}. Work permits cannot be issued to migrants that do not hold a residence permit, or depending on the type of residence permits, they can only have access to some specific jobs. Permanent residence permits have stringent requirements mostly related to time spent in the country (5 years before the application), or housing and regular sources of income. These issues greatly prevent immigrants' regularisation and integration in the labour market^{xlvi}.

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

According to UN data, in 2019 North Macedonia had 658,264 emigrants, representing 31.7% of the total population^{xlvii}. On average, in emigration there are more men (53.09%) than women (46.90%)^{xlviii}. Emigrants from North Macedonia mainly move to Turkey (29.69%), Germany (13.75%), Italy (11.14%), Switzerland (10.16%), and Australia (7.84%). Other destination countries include the United States, Austria, Croatia, Slovenia, and Canada^{xlix}.

In 2019, Macedonian emigrants were mainly young, in the 25-49 age group, coinciding with their working age^l. The general migration pattern followed by households sees men going away first, usually when they find job opportunities related to their level of education, and then later women and children follow, once they receive enough money to cover their travel expenses^{li lli}.

Regarding their education, many North Macedonian migrants (43%) are low-skilled, and 30.7% are in the medium bracket^{liii}. However, the picture varies according to the destination country. High-skilled Macedonians usually migrate to continental countries, such as the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, while low-skilled migrants mainly move to Europe, especially Germany and Switzerland^{liv}. Another interesting aspect to be taken into consideration is that these migration flows are mainly from Southeast, Southwest, Polog, Vardar and the East regions^{lv}.

This phenomenon is usually caused by push factors like unemployment, low wages, job insecurity, long waiting times for jobs in the public sector, and pull factors like the high wage and sectoral bonuses offered by positions in destination countries, as well as the good governance of these jobs^{lvi}.

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

According to the UNHCR, in 2020 303 refugees and 21 asylum seekers were registered in North Macedonia^{lvii}. Most refugees came from Serbia and Kosovo (270 persons), Syria (17), Congo (5), and Pakistan (5)^{lviii}, and there were more males (168 persons) than females (104 persons), and their main age group was between 18 and 59 years old^{lix}.

Gevgelija is the central place where refugees seeking protection from crisis regions in the Middle East arrive^{lx}. Asylum seekers are immediately transferred to the Skopje, Vizbegovo and Gazi Baba reception centres^{lxi}.

It is also important to know that Macedonia is a transit point for many people from the Middle East, trying to reach Europe. In 2015, many migrants tried crossing through several countries, including North Macedonia, where they faced hazardous conditions, and smugglers tried to take advantage of their vulnerability^{lxii} ^{lxiii}. For this reason, the government issued temporary residence permits while on transit through North Macedonia - such permits granted free medical care in any health facility^{lxiv}-, and because of that, this route to get to the European Union became increasingly popular.

As of November 2015, only Afghan, Iraqi and Syrian nationals were allowed to enter the country due to EU policies in other member states ^{lxv}. To solve this matter, North Macedonia has been developing new amendments in its asylum regulation, until it enacted the 2018 law on refugee status.

In North Macedonia, asylum seekers enjoy basic health rights, free legal assistance and interpreter, work within the welcome centre, accommodation, education, and freedom of movement^{lxvi}. Once refugee status has been granted, they have the right to reside in the country for at least three years, the right to housing for two years, and the right to social and health protection^{lxvii}.

In 2020, in Northern Macedonia 558 stateless persons were also registered^{lxviii}, and their condition was closely linked to the 1990 dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia^{lxix}. People living in this condition are trapped, and the parents' lack of documentation to prove their citizenship makes it also difficult to register their children. In many instances, this results in a combination of poverty and poor education, a lack of knowledge about procedures and requirements to obtain legal documents, and ongoing discrimination^{lxx}.

Internal displacements are also an important phenomenon in North Macedonia. In 2020, 108 people were displaced within the country due to conflict and violence^{lxxi}. In addition, 80 more people were displaced because of natural disasters, mainly floods^{lxxii}.

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

In the 2021 US Trafficking in Persons Report, North Macedonia ranked tier 2, since it did not meet the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, but it was making significant efforts to do so^{lxxiii}. North Macedonian citizens are usually exploited for sex trafficking and forced labour in construction and in agricultural sectors in Southern, Central and Western Europe^{lxxiv}.

The country's irregular migrants and refugees are vulnerable to trafficking, particularly women and unaccompanied minors. Sex traffickers recruit foreign victims typically from Eastern Europe and the Balkans, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine. They also exploit Roma children by forcing them to begging and sex trafficking in forced marriages^{lxxv}.

In 2020, the state investigated 5 suspects and 1 criminal group for child trafficking. However, it did not carry out any prosecutions, with only 17% of court hearings being held because of the pandemic. Courts convicted 9 traffickers for child sex trafficking and 2 more for child sex trafficking and forced labour.

The state kept its commitment regarding victims' protection, identifying 7 victims (5 related to sex trafficking and 2 to forced labour). Of those, 6 were girls, and there were no foreign victims, presenting a great concern because of the lack of victim identification. In cooperation with NGOs, the government also identified 6 potential victims compared to the 124 potential victims in 2019^{lxxvi}.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) established mobile teams of social workers, law enforcement officers, NGO workers, and psychologists in five regions to look after vulnerable people. However, in addition to funding constraints, the pandemic mitigation efforts limited their ability to identify potential victims. In comparison with the 89 victims being assisted in 2019, in 2020 the state only assisted 14 official and potential victims^{lxxvii}.

Furthermore, the North Macedonian state made efforts to prevent human trafficking, through antitrafficking awareness campaigns, workshops and lectures, and new regulations and plans. The law prohibited illegal and unreported employment and set out criteria for labour recruitment, employer obligations and rights. It also maintained a "Codex of Cooperation" with hotels to prevent forced labour in the tourism industry and conducted labour inspections (in total 16,892 in the first six months of 2020)^{lxxviii}.

Despite the efforts made so far, crucial problems in combating human trafficking in North Macedonia are still happening. The lack of adequate funding and equipment hinders the development of proactive investigations and victim protection. Moreover, the low-ranking police officers may be involved in trafficking, including hiding evidence, bribery, changing patrol routes to help perpetrators, tipping them off before raids, and/or direct involvement in organised crime^{lxxix}.

VI. National Legal Framework

The primary law on migration in North Macedonia is the 2006 Law on Foreigners, amended in 2018^{lxxx}. The norm includes general EU legislative acquis regarding entrance into the country, residence permits, travel documents, identification and detention. The Law on Border^{lxxxi} and the Law on Movement and Residence of Foreigners regulate all the movements and stays of foreigners in North Macedonia^{lxxxii}.

In June 2021, a new Resolution on Migration Policy (2021–2025) was developed^{lxxxiii} for a sustainable and comprehensive framework for migration management^{lxxxiv}.

The Law on Employment and Work of Foreigners outlines conditions and procedures for the employment of foreigners and some other provisions for the protection of migrant workers^{lxxxv}.

Regarding refugees, the 2018 Law on International and Temporary Protection regulates conditions and procedures for granting international protection, and the rights and obligations of asylum seekers and refugees in the country^{lxxxvi}.

As far as human trafficking, articles 418 (a) and (d) of the criminal code criminalise sex and labour trafficking and prescribe a minimum penalty of four years' imprisonment^{lxxxvii}.

At the international level, the country has been part of the 1949 ILO Migration for Employment Convention since its ratification in 1991, and of the 1975 Migrant Workers Convention in the same year^{lxxxviii}. However, North Macedonia has not ratified the 1990 UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrants Workers and Members of their Families^{lxxxix}.

Furthermore, the state ratified in 1994 the 1951 UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees^{xc}, in 1994 and 2020, the 1954^{xc} and the 1961^{xcii} UN Conventions on Stateless, and in 2005 the Protocol to Prevent Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children^{xciii}, and the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air^{xciv}.

VII. Main Actors

The State

In North Macedonia, the Ministry of Interior is responsible for matters related to the control of movement and stay of foreigners in the state. It also issues travel documents for refugees^{xcv}. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs decides on visa applications^{xcvi}. Moreover, the Emigration Agency provides citizens abroad information on citizenship, personal documentation, rights and responsibilities, pension and invalidity insurances in the countries of residence, as well as promotes integration and return from the diaspora^{xcvii}.

The National Integrated Border Management Coordination Centre looks after the exchange of data and information among border management agencies^{xcviii}. The National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration is responsible for developing and implementing the National Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration^{xcix}.

Regarding human trafficking, the Combatting Trafficking in Human Beings and Migrant Smuggling Unit's Anti-Trafficking Task Force within the Ministry of Interior carries out specialised investigations^c. The National Commission, composed of 12 government agencies, meets regularly to publish reports on anti-trafficking efforts and to develop the National Action Plans to combat human trafficking^{ci}.

International organisations

Since 2005, the Republic of North Macedonia has been trying to join the European Union^{cii}. This organisation has provided regular training and courses to the Macedonian border staff since 2018, through the border agency Frontex^{ciii}. It provides logistic, operational and staff support to help border police manage migration and supplies equipment for surveillance and control systems^{civ}. In 2020, EASO developed a road map for cooperation with the state to strengthen asylum and reception systems, enhance legislation and asylum procedures and carry out translations and training services^{cv}.

From 2015, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNWOMEN, and IOM worked in the so-called Refugee Crisis in the Balkan region, by supporting the transit centres of Tabanovce and Guevguelja^{cvi}. UNHCR cooperates with North Macedonia to protect refugees under its mandate^{cvii}. It helped develop the new 2021-2025 migration policy in the state, along with IOM and the UNFPA, by

providing assistance in managing migration flows^{cviii}. Regarding statelessness, it leads awareness campaigns to establish a durable solution for the more than 200 displaced persons from Kosovo that have been without any legal status for over 20 years^{cix}.

In 2020, UNODC launched an EU-UNODC joint action on promoting the rule of law and good governance, as well as control measures at ports and airports to fight against organised crime and counter illicit trafficking^{cx}. Furthermore, UNODC, together with the Permanent Mission of France to the UN, created a regional expert group meeting on human trafficking and migrant smuggling in 2021^{cxii}.

IOM, in turn, has trained 300 border officers in combating human trafficking and the smuggling of migrants^{cxiii}. It develops medical assessments for the migrant population (11,000 since 2000) and provides airport reception assistance, transportation, counselling, housing, education reinsertion and job opportunities to the migrant community^{cxiiii}. Furthermore, North Macedonia is a Member State of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), which aims to promote regional labour mobility among member States of South-East Europe^{cxv}.

NGOs and Other organisations

Oxfam is one NGO whose work focuses on providing water, shelter and other basic services to thousands of refugees^{cxvi}. Furthermore, it promotes respect for human rights and calls for measures to create safe and legal refugee channels. They are present in the Epirus region, at the border between Greece, Albania and Macedonia. They offer protection and integration, free legal assistance and access to information and services to those seeking refuge.

Moreover, the “Doctors without Borders” NGO at the Northern border with Serbia provided medical and psychological care to asylum seekers and refugees during the 2015 Refugee Crisis^{cxvii}. The Work of *La Strada* is also noteworthy. This European platform of NGOs aims to directly improve the capacity of civil society organisations to become active agents in improving the development of human rights policies and the rule of law with a focus on human trafficking, exploitation and migration^{cxviii}.

Finally, civil society organisations have been actively involved due to the importance of migration and refugee movements in North Macedonia, especially since mid-2015. A clear example is the “Help refugees in Macedonia” group, which created a Facebook page to share and disseminate information about the location of individuals in migration and promoted food, clothes and shoes distribution campaigns^{cxix}. They also set up some transport services and provided information on the most convenient routes^{cxix}.

The Catholic Church

A Catholic organisation in the country is Caritas Macedonia. It was founded in 1991 in Skopje to help those most in need^{cx}. Caritas Macedonia’s humanitarian aid has focused on providing essential items such as food, clothing, and medical assistance to the most vulnerable groups, especially after the war in Kosovo in 1999 and the conflict in Macedonia in 2001^{cxii}. Special emphasis has been placed on the elderly and the most vulnerable citizens, such as refugees in Macedonia and Roma people, providing them with assistance, helping them to obtain documents, citizenship, and several education courses^{cxiii}. Since the summer of 2015, Caritas

Macedonia has been present in two critical points of the Balkan route in Macedonia, supporting migrants/refugees by distributing food to them^{cxiii}.

Among the Catholic organisations present in North Macedonia, the work of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) stands out, which focuses on protecting hundreds of refugees and asylum seekers^{cxiv}. This organisation offers shelter to the most vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly, and helps women recovering from childbirth or convalescing from illness or injury. As the North Macedonian school system does not allow migrant children to enrol in school, JRS offers informal maths and language classes to them. JRS also organises activities and excursions for children. Apart from the Safe House, JRS in North Macedonia accompanies and supports migrants in the Vizbegovo reception centre and Gazibaba detention centre^{cxv}.

July 2022

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