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ANALYTICAL REPORT ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



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BACKGROUND

The rights of the child are a central component of North Macedonia's international human rights obligations and are increasingly positioned as a benchmark for democratic governance and institutional reform within the country's EU accession process. As a candidate country, North Macedonia is expected to ensure full compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its Optional Protocols, as well as to demonstrate measurable progress in this area under Chapter 23—Judiciary and Fundamental Rights of the EU acquis. Simultaneously, during the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the country received several detailed recommendations to strengthen legal protections, ensure implementation, and address systemic gaps in child rights.



This paper examines the extent to which the country has aligned its child rights framework with the UPR recommendations¹ and the European Commission's 2024 Progress Report,² with particular focus on the progress in strengthening its legal, policy, and institutional systems. The analysis pays specific attention to issues of access, equity, and protection—particularly for children from marginalised and vulnerable groups—while identifying key areas where implementation remains partial, fragmented, or delayed.

The analysis follows the thematic clusters outlined in the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child's reporting guidelines,³ offering a structured and comparative assessment. Each section begins with a summary of relevant recommendations from the UPR and the EU Progress Report, which serve as reference points for evaluating the current state of implementation. The key thematic areas covered include the following:

- » General Measures of Implementation, focusing on the ratification of international instruments, national strategies, coordination mechanisms, and the role of independent institutions;
- » Civil Rights and Freedoms, with an emphasis on birth registration;
- » Violence Against Children, including strategic frameworks, harmful practices, and institutional protection mechanisms;
- » Education, covering inclusivity, desegregation, legal reforms, and the development of vocational education and training; and
- » Special Protection Measures, addressing trafficking and justice for children.

The paper aims to provide both a factual account and a critical analysis of national developments in these areas. It highlights progress, identifies structural and operational challenges, and proposes practical recommendations to support stronger alignment with the UPR and EU requirements.

¹ UPR of North Macedonia (4th Cycle—46th Session), thematic list of recommendations.

² European Commission. (2024). North Macedonia 2024 report. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/5f0c9185-ce46-46fc-bf44-82318ab47e88_en?filename=North%20Macedonia%20Report%202024.pdf (Accessed: 31 May 2025).

³ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2015). Treaty-specific guidelines regarding the form and content of periodic reports to be submitted by States parties under article 44, paragraph 1 (b), of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. <https://docs.un.org/en/CRC/C/58/Rev.3> (Accessed: 31 May 2025).

KEY FINDINGS



1. GENERAL MEASURES OF IMPLEMENTATION

Ratification of international human rights instruments

EC Progress Report

- » North Macedonia should still ratify the 1996 Hague Child Protection Convention, the 2007 Hague Child Support Convention, and its Protocol on Applicable law, which have been already signed.

UPR recommendations

- » Finalize or accelerate the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure (Slovakia, Togo, Ukraine, Paraguay).
- » Ratify other pending international human rights instruments, including the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Paraguay, Czechia).

The *1996 Hague Child Protection Convention* aims to ensure international cooperation in protecting children across borders, especially in cases involving parental responsibility, custody, and child placement. However, it was signed in 2019, but it has not yet been ratified.⁴ Likewise, the *2007 Hague Child Support Convention and its Protocol on Applicable Law*, which establish cross-border procedures for securing child maintenance, were also signed in 2019 but remain unratified.⁵

⁴ Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH). (2025). Status table: Convention of 19 October 1996 on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in Respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children. <https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/status-table/?cid=70> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

⁵ Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH). (2025). Status table: Convention of 23 November 2007 on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance. <https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/status-table/?cid=131> (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

The *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure (OPIC)* was signed in 2012; however, it has not yet been ratified.⁶ The OPIC provides children the right to submit complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child when their rights have been violated and no effective remedy exists nationally. It strengthens state accountability and promotes access to justice by encouraging child-sensitive legal reforms and reinforcing children's status as rights-holders.

The *International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW)* establishes comprehensive protections for migrant workers and their families, including the right to equal treatment, access to justice, and safeguards against exploitation; however, it has neither been signed nor ratified, despite repeated recommendations to do so.⁷

The *International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (ICPPED)*, which obliges states to prevent, investigate, and prosecute enforced disappearances and guarantee victims' rights to truth and reparation, was signed in 2007 but remains unratified.⁸

Comprehensive policy and strategy

UPR recommendations

- » Continue implementing national human rights strategies to protect vulnerable groups, including children, women and people with disabilities (Oman)

A National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child (NPAPD) was initially adopted in 2005 and revised in 2012.⁹ However, no dedicated funding was allocated for its implementation, and no reports on its implementation or evaluation have been made publicly available. The NPAPD was in effect until 2015.

In September 2023, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy announced the commencement of a new National Action Plan for the Rights of the Child, to be developed within the framework of the "EU Support for Rule of Law" project, funded by the European Union.¹⁰ The initial preparatory meeting brought together representatives from the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Health, the Ombudsperson, the Institute for Social Affairs, UNICEF, and the First Children's Embassy in the World—Megjashi.

In November 2024, the project's official social media channels announced that the Draft National Action Plan for Children's Rights (2024–2028) was presented to the Government during a Sectoral Working Group plenary meeting on education, employment, and social policy.¹¹ As of now, there is no available information on whether there are plans in place for the formal adoption of the new Action Plan.

6 United Nations Treaty Collection. (2025). 11.d Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure. https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11-d&chapter=4&clang=_en (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

7 United Nations Treaty Collection. (2025). International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=_en&mtdsg_no=iv-13&src=treaty (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

8 United Nations Treaty Collection. (n.d.). International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. https://treaties.un.org/pages/viewdetails.aspx?chapter=4&clang=_en&mtdsg_no=iv-16&src=treaty (Accessed: 22 April 2025).

9 UNICEF (2013). Analysis of the situation of girls and boys in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. <https://uni.cf/3jV4gib> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

10 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. (2023, September 19). Започна подготовката на Национален акциски план за правата на децата [Preparation of the National Action Plan for Children's Rights has begun]. <https://shorturl.at/MgkI9> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

11 LinkedIn, EU Support for Rule of Law—North Macedonia (2024, November 22). Презентиран нацрт Национален акциски план за правата на децата (НАП) 2024–2028! [Draft National Action Plan for Children's Rights (NAP) 2024–2028 presented!]. Available at: <https://shorturl.at/RVkza> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

Coordination

EC Progress Report

- » A national body responsible for coordinating all policies relating to implementation of the UN Convention on Child Rights and the Optional Protocols is yet to be set up (p. 38)

A dedicated national body responsible for coordinating all policies related to the implementation of the UNCRC and its Optional Protocols has yet to be established. According to the announcement accompanying the presentation of the Draft National Action Plan for Children's Rights (2024–2028), one of the proposed activities includes the establishment of a National Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights.¹² This Commission is envisioned as a mechanism for coordinating the implementation of the Action Plan and overseeing the enforcement of the rights guaranteed by the UNCRC. However, no additional information has been provided regarding the Commission's composition, mandate, or the resources that will be allocated to support its work.

This would not be the first attempt to establish such a mechanism. A National Commission for the Rights of the Child was initially formed in 2007.^{13,14} After several years of inactivity, its members were officially dismissed in 2017, effectively dissolving the body.¹⁵ The Commission was originally established as the central coordinating and monitoring body for the implementation of the UNCRC and national child rights policies. It comprised representatives from various ministries and government agencies, the Ombudsperson's Office, UNICEF's country office, and civil society organisations. Initially chaired by the Secretary General of the Government and later by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy,¹⁶ the Commission faced numerous challenges, including an insufficient budget, frequent changes in membership, and limited engagement in policy planning and priority-setting. The Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern over the Commission's lack of activity and the minimal opportunities it provided for participation by local governments, civil society, and children.¹⁷

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Decision on establishing the National Commission for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Macedonia no. 51-6893 / 1 of 7 December 2010 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no.126/2007).

¹⁴ Decision on supplementing the Decision on establishing a National Commission for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Macedonia No. 51-6893 / 1 of 7 December 2010 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no.164/2010).

¹⁵ Decision on dismissal of the President and members of the National Commission for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Macedonia no. 24-3391 / 1 of 11 July 2017 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no.89/2017).

¹⁶ Decision on amending the Decision on establishing a National Commission for the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Macedonia no. 23-4892 / 1 of 29 May 2012 ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no.77/2012).

¹⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations: The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia CRC/C/MKD/CO/2 (2010).

Independent monitoring

EC Progress Report

- » Allocate the necessary resources to the Ombudsman's Office and the Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination to enable them to fulfil their mandate (p.7).

UPR recommendations

- » Bring the Office of the Ombudsman fully into compliance with the Paris Principles, including strengthening its independence, mandate, and promotion of human rights (Montenegro, Ukraine, Luxembourg, Costa Rica, Czechia).
- » Ensure sufficient financial and human resources for the Office of the Ombudsman to effectively fulfil its mandate (Luxembourg, Chile, Costa Rica, Czechia, Germany).
- » Strengthen the Commission for Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination by addressing legal and policy obstacles, ensuring impartial selection of personnel, and allocating adequate funding (Germany, Greece).

Ombudsperson

The Ombudsperson holds a broad mandate to safeguard citizens' constitutional and legal rights when those rights are violated by bodies of state administration or other institutions with public authority. The central office is in Skopje, with regional offices in Bitola, Kichevo, Kumanovo, Strumica, Tetovo, and Shtip.

An amendment to the Law on the Ombudsperson in 2009 formally established the Department for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter "the Department") within the central office.¹⁸ In addition to receiving and investigating individual complaints related to alleged violations of children's rights, the Department also undertakes thematic research on critical issues affecting children. The Ombudsperson's Annual Reports include a dedicated section on children's rights, detailing data on complaints received and summarising the Department's activities. Thematic research findings are also published as *special reports*.

The regional offices play a supporting role in investigating complaints involving children's rights. Complaints received at the regional level are forwarded to the Department, which may delegate certain tasks—such as gathering documentation or requesting information from relevant institutions—to the regional offices for cost-efficiency. The Department also exercises the Ombudsperson's statutory power to request expert opinions from scientific or professional institutions or individual experts during complaint investigations.

Since 2021, the Department has been directly headed by the Ombudsperson; previously, it was overseen by a Deputy Ombudsperson.¹⁹ According to the most recent organisational structure, the Department consists of six staff members, three working exclusively on monitoring and implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.²⁰ The remaining staff are responsible for issues related to both children and persons with disabilities, including adults. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has consistently raised concerns regarding the Department's limited human and financial resources.²²

¹⁸ Article 30, paragraph 5, Law on the Ombudsperson (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia nos. 60/2003, 114/2009, 181/2016, 189/2016 and 35/2018).

¹⁹ Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2021, May 4). Правилник за организација и делокруг на работата на Стручната служба, Тимот на Националниот превентивен механизам, Посебните одделенија и Канцелариите на Народниот правобранител [Rulebook on the organization and scope of work of the Expert Service, the National Preventive Mechanism Team, Special Departments, and the Offices of the Ombudsman]. <https://shorturl.at/foHrB> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

²⁰ Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2022, April 5). Правилник за измена и дополнување на Правилникот за систематизација на работните места во Стручната служба, Тимот на Националниот превентивен механизам, Посебните одделенија и Канцелариите на Народниот правобранител [Rulebook on amendments and additions to the Rulebook on the systematization of job positions in the Expert Service, the National Preventive Mechanism Team, Special Departments, and the Offices of the Ombudsman]. <https://shorturl.at/OFxUL> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

²¹ These include: 1 State Advisor for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities; 1 State Advisor for Monitoring and Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention; 1 Advisor for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities; 2 Advisors for Monitoring and Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention; 1 Junior Associate for the Protection of the Rights of Children and Persons with Disabilities.

²² Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2022). Concluding observations on the combined third to sixth periodic reports of North Macedonia. CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6.

The Ombudsperson typically submits the Annual Report to the Assembly in March of the current year, covering the situation in the previous year. By law, the Assembly is required to review the report, adopt measures to implement the Ombudsperson's recommendations, and forward them to the Government.²³ The Government, in turn, is obligated to report back to the Assembly every six months on the implementation of those measures.²⁴

However, the Ombudsperson has expressed concern about delays in this process.²⁵ While the responsible parliamentary committee usually reviews the Annual Report promptly, the Assembly often adopts the corresponding measures only at the end of the year. This practice effectively undermines the Government's obligation to report biannually on actions taken to address the issues flagged by the Ombudsperson, many of which are critical to the protection and realisation of children's rights.

With regard to compliance with the Paris Principles, the Ombudsperson stated in the most recent Annual Report that no progress had been made toward meeting the criteria required for obtaining "A status" as a National Human Rights Institution—a key international obligation for ensuring full independence.²⁶ Nonetheless, the Ombudsperson has committed to achieving full compliance with the Paris Principles by 2027, within the OHCHR's *Human Rights 75 Initiative*.²⁷ New legislative amendments to the Law on the Ombudsperson have entered parliamentary procedure to support this goal.²⁸

Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination

The Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) was established in 2020 under the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination,²⁹ replacing the former Commission for Protection against Discrimination. Under the revised legal framework, Commission members are appointed public officials who perform their duties professionally and full-time. Their role is incompatible with holding another public office, professional activity, or position in a political party. The Commission's mandate has been significantly expanded to include promoting and protecting equality, human rights and non-discrimination, as well as preventing discrimination. It also leads public awareness campaigns, provides education and information, issues opinions on educational programs and materials (both formal and non-formal), publishes thematic reports, proposes legal harmonisation, recommends the ratification of multilateral and bilateral agreements, and issues general recommendations on equality and non-discrimination while monitoring their implementation. Furthermore, the Commission can initiate measures and actions to improve protection against discrimination.

²³ Article 36, paragraphs 2 and 3, Law on the Ombudsperson (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia nos. 60/2003, 114/2009, 181/2016, 189/2016 and 35/2018).

²⁴ Article 36, paragraph 4, Law on the Ombudsperson (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia nos. 60/2003, 114/2009, 181/2016, 189/2016 and 35/2018).

²⁵ Bojarovski, Z. (2025, February 2). Зибери: Владата никогаш не поднела извештај како ги спроведува мерките донесени по препораките на Народниот правобранител [Ziberi: The government has never submitted a report on how it implements the measures adopted based on the Ombudsman's recommendations]. *Racin.mk*. <https://racin.mk/intervju/ziberi-vladata-nikogash-ne-podnela-izveshtaj-kako-gi-sprovedu-va-merkite-doneseni-po-preporakite-na-narodniot-pravobranitel/> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

²⁶ Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2025). Годишен извештај за степенот на обезбедувањето почитување, унапредување и заштита на човековите слободи и права: 2024 [Annual report on the level of ensuring respect, promotion, and protection of human rights and freedoms: 2024]. <https://ombudsman.mk/CMS/Upload/NarodenPravobranitel/upload/Godisni%20izvestai/GI-2024/GI-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

²⁷ Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia (2023). Pledge submitted by the Ombudsman of the Republic of North Macedonia to the Human Rights 75 Secretariat. <https://shorturl.at/Y9YoO> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

²⁸ Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (2025, February 7). Предлог на закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за Народниот правобранител, по скратена постапка [Draft Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Ombudsperson, under a shortened procedure]. <https://shorturl.at/Amair> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

²⁹ Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no.258/2020).

In addition to its eight appointed members, the Commission has a professional administrative service. However, the Annual Report for 2024 highlights that two-thirds of the positions in this service remain unfilled due to the lack of the Ministry of Finance's approval of new employment.³⁰ The report emphasises that the shortage of human resources and the high number of vacant positions seriously undermine the Commission's capacity to operate efficiently, carry out its tasks, and fulfil its legal mandate. Strengthening the Commission's institutional and human resources and establishing a professional, independent administrative service remains a key challenge in 2025.

Regarding discrimination cases involving children, the Commission accepts complaints filed directly by children or on their behalf by others, such as parents, legal guardians (including in cases involving children with disabilities), lawyers, civil society organisations or foundations—provided prior consent is given.³¹ Civil society organisations and foundations with a legitimate interest in protecting children's rights may submit complaints if they can reasonably demonstrate that a group of children has been subject to discriminatory treatment by an individual or legal entity.

The Commission's annual reports include demographic data on complainants, with age groupings including 1–10 and 11–20 years. However, it is unclear how many complaints were submitted by children under 18, and no data is provided on how many complaints relate specifically to children, regardless of whether submitted by a child, an adult, or an organisation.

Nonetheless, it should be emphasised that the Commission actively identifies and responds to both potential and actual cases of discrimination against children, based on submitted complaints as well as on its own initiative. For example, two *ex officio* cases initiated in the past year concerned child protection: one related to the delayed provision of educational assistants, and the other to the segregation of Roma students in schools.

Moreover, the Commission regularly provides expert opinions on draft legislation relevant to anti-discrimination, including laws that affect children. In 2024, for instance, it submitted its comments and specific recommendations on the draft laws for primary and secondary education.³²

30 Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. (2025). Annual Report for 2024. <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Годишен-извештај-2024-КСЗД.pdf> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

2. CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS



Birth registration

UPR recommendations

- » Ensure that all births are registered immediately, regardless of the immigration status of the parents, and thus reduce statelessness (Costa Rica)
- » Strengthen mechanisms to facilitate the birth registration of all, including those belonging to the Roma community, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, in order for them to enjoy their rights, particularly the right to health, social protection and education (Philippines)

The lack of a systemic solution for registering children whose parents do not possess personal identification documents has been a long-standing issue in the country.

In 2020, the Law on Unregistered Persons in the Birth Registry was adopted to address this gap.³³ It aimed to register around 700 individuals, identified through a 2018 public call—though it was unclear how many were children—by creating a special birth registry.³⁴ Registered individuals would receive temporary identification documents and gain access to four basic rights: healthcare, education, social protection, and employment with mandatory insurance, until their identity was formally established.

³³ Law on Unregistered Persons in the Birth Registry ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 42/20, dated 15 February 2020).

³⁴ Draft Law on Unregistered Persons in the Birth Registry. November 2019. <https://bit.ly/36qTZWv> (Accessed: 16 April 2025).

Despite its good intentions, the law failed to achieve its objectives. The Ombudsperson and civil society organisations repeatedly raised concerns that affected individuals were neither granted the basic rights nor registered in the regular birth registry.³⁵

In response, amendments to the Law on Civil Registry were adopted in June 2023.³⁶ These required all identified individuals to be registered in the regular birth registry by 31 December 2023. The amendments also allow children to be registered through a notarised statement from two witnesses if the parents lack ID, and empower Social Work Centres to assign a name to the child when necessary. A major advancement came with the introduction of Article 4a, which mandates that every child born in the country must be registered within 45 days of birth, regardless of the parents' citizenship or legal status. The consistent application of this provision is seen as key to preventing future cases of unregistered children.

However, the 2025 report of the Ombudsperson highlights ongoing challenges.³⁷ Based on data from the Directorate for Civil Registries, as of September 2024, Centres for Social Work had submitted 441 registration requests for children born in medical facilities but not registered within the legal timeframe. Only 59 cases had been completed, while the majority remained pending, incomplete, or discontinued. The most common obstacles include: failure of parents to appear for registration, lack of naming decisions from Social Work Centres, pending responses on parental citizenship status, and missing documentation. These issues persist despite the Directorate's collaboration with civil society to identify and register unregistered children.

The Ombudsperson concluded that, despite the legal amendments, authorities continue to face barriers in registering children and recommended the full implementation of the legal provision requiring the registration of every child born in the country, regardless of the parents' citizenship or legal status.

35 E.g., Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (2021). 2021 Annual Report. <https://rb.gy/or0fqf> (Accessed: 30 May 2025); Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia (2022). Посебен извештај од последното истражување за согледување на состојбата со имплементација на Законот за неевидентирани лица во матична книга на родени [Special report from the latest research on the state of implementation of the Law on Unregistered Persons in the Civil Registry of Births]. <https://ombudsman.mk/CMS/Upload/NarodenPravobranitel/upload/Posebni%20izvestai/2022/Posebni%20izvestaj-Neevidentirani%20lica-2022.pdf> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

36 Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on Civil Registry ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 129/2023).

37 Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia (2024). Annual Report on the Promotion, Protection and Advancement of Human Rights and Freedoms. Skopje: Ombudsperson Institution. <https://shorturl.at/yYMW5> (Accessed: 16 April 2025).

3. VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



National strategic framework

EC Progress Report

- » More support for mechanisms to combat violence and sufficient funding for the national strategy to end violence against children (2020-2025) are needed (p.38).
- » Provide adequate support to vulnerable categories of children, especially children victims of violence, Roma children and children with disabilities (p.7).

UPR recommendations

- » Step up efforts to implement the national action plan for the prevention of and protection of children against abuse and neglect, ensuring adequate financial resources for its implementation (Armenia, Georgia).
- » Strengthen measures to combat peer violence, online bullying, and violence against children, including through public policies, awareness campaigns, and other targeted activities (Brazil, Israel).

The National Strategy (2020–2025) and Action Plan (2020–2022) for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence were adopted in December 2019.³⁸ The Strategy outlines a comprehensive and coordinated approach to preventing and addressing violence against children, aiming to create a safe and supportive environment through the development of a strengthened national system for prevention, protection, and the provision of child support services. Its overall goal is to prevent all forms of violence and other adverse childhood experiences by promoting cross-sectoral cooperation and improving institutional responses. The Strategy identifies six strategic areas: the national legal and strategic framework for prevention and protection; the advancement of knowledge, practice, and values that promote zero tolerance for violence; the implementation of preventive programs and strengthening of family resilience; the enhancement of institutional capacities for protection, treatment, and child support; the protection of children within the juvenile justice system; and the establishment of systems for data collection, evidence, and monitoring related to violence against children.

The Action Plan includes a series of measures aligned with each of these strategic areas and outlines timelines and responsibilities for implementation. It also foresees the monitoring of implementation by the National Coordinating Body for the Protection of Children against Abuse and Neglect (NCBPCAN), which is expected to publish both annual and triennial reports. Additionally, the document foresees the conduct of an evaluation and audit of implemented activities by 2022, as well as the development and adoption of a new Action Plan for the period 2023–2025 by the end of 2022.

³⁸ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2019). Национална стратегија (2020-2025) и Акциски план (2020–2022) за превенција и заштита на децата од насилство [National Strategy (2020–2025) and Action Plan (2020–2022) for the Prevention and Protection of Children from Violence]. <https://rb.gy/cme0sw> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

To date, however, no reports have been published on the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan. There is no available evaluation report, nor has an updated Action Plan been made public. It is also unclear whether the NCBPCAN has remained active and continued to monitor implementation. The last report from this body dates back to 2019 and contains data on violence against children collected in 2017.³⁹

The National Coordinating Body for the Protection of Children against Abuse and Neglect was initially established by government decision in 2012 and re-established in 2017. It is chaired by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy.

Harmful practices

UPR recommendations

» Prohibit child marriage under all circumstances (Iceland).

According to the Criminal Code, child marriage is prohibited, and living in an extramarital union with or between minors is criminalised.⁴⁰ Amendments to the Criminal Code in 2018 raised the age threshold for sanctioning extramarital cohabitation with a minor from 16 to 18 years.⁴¹

The Law on Family stipulates that a child under 18 years of age cannot contract a marriage.⁴² However, it provides for an exception whereby a court may permit a child who has reached the age of 16 to marry. This permission is subject to the condition that a prior medical opinion from a health institution certifies the physical and mental capacity necessary to fulfil the rights and duties of matrimonial life.⁴³

In line with Iceland's recommendation under the UPR, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its most recent concluding observations, has recommended that the Law on Family be amended to remove all exceptions permitting marriage under the age of 18.⁴⁴

Despite existing legal prohibitions, early marriage and extramarital cohabitation from an early age remain persistent issues, particularly within the Roma community. According to MICS data, in Roma settlements, 45.1% of women aged 20 to 24 were married before the age of 18, compared to 7.5% in the general population.⁴⁵ The lack of operational protocols, insufficient public attention to this issue, and its acceptance as part of traditional practices within certain communities are among the main obstacles to addressing it.⁴⁶

There is also a lack of data on refugee and migrant children who are affected by or at increased risk of harmful traditional practices, as well as a shortage of appropriate preventive measures.

39 Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (2019). Извештај за состојбата во однос на заштитата на децата од злоупотреба и занемарување согласно креираните индикатори за 2017 година [Report on the Situation in Relation to the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect against the Created indicators for the Year of 2017].

40 Criminal Code ("Official of Republic of Macedonia" No. 37/1996, 80/1999, 4/2002, 43/2003, 19/2004, 81/2005, 60/2006, 73/2006, 7/2008, 139/2008, 114/2009, 51/2011, 135/2011, 185/2011, 142/2012, 166/2012, 55/2013, 82/2013, 14/2014, 27/2014, 28/2014, 115/2014, 132/2014, 160/2014, 199/2014, 196/2015, 226/2015, 97/2017, 248/2018, and "Official Gazette of Republic of North Macedonia" No. 35/2023).

41 Law on Amending and Supplementing the Criminal Code ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 248/2018).

42 Law on the Family ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 80/1992, 9/1996, 38/2004, 33/2006, 84/2008, 67/10, 156/10, 39/12, 44/12, 38/14, 115/14, 104/15, and 150/15, and "Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" No. 53/21 and No. 199/23), Art 16.

43 Ibid, Art 16(3).

44 Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2022). Concluding observations on the combined third to sixth periodic reports of North Macedonia. CRC/C/MKD/CO/3-6.

45 State Statistical Office and UNICEF (2020). Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018–2019. http://www.stat.gov.mk/Dokumenti/MICS_18-19.pdf, Table PR.4.1W: Child marriage (women) [Accessed on 16.04.2025].

46 Salioska, N. (2016). "The Grey Zone" Between Tradition and Children's Rights! https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/sites/unicef.org.north-macedonia/files/2019-01/MK_CRM_Roma_ChildMarriage_MK.PDF (Accessed: 16 April 2025).

4. EDUCATION

EC Progress Report

- » Adopt the Laws on secondary education, on adult education and on VET, as well as the related implementing legislation, and continue to set up and operationalise the regional VET centres (pp.15-16);
- » Improve access to quality education for all, in particular for children with disabilities and children from Roma communities; further develop teachers' skills and invest in their continuous professional development (p.16);
- » Optimise the school network; adopt and apply the new formulas for financing primary education; complete and apply similar formulas for secondary, VET and higher education (p.16).

UPR recommendations

- » Adopt and strengthen measures to ensure inclusive, free, and quality education for all children, with particular attention to those in rural areas, vulnerable environments, and marginalized communities, including Roma children, children with disabilities, and children from poor families (Paraguay, Slovakia, Cyprus, Austria).
- » Guarantee access to education for all minors, including refugees, stateless persons, and those under temporary protection, and promote inclusive preschool education (Costa Rica, Austria).
- » Ensure the right to education in the mother tongue for all ethnic minority groups, including through full implementation of the Law on the Use of Languages (Viet Nam, Türkiye).
- » Combat school dropout through targeted measures, with special focus on retaining girls in education (Paraguay, Estonia, Pakistan).
- » Continue implementing actions under the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, particularly in the field of education (Cuba).



Primary Education

In December 2024, the Assembly adopted amendments to the Law on Primary Education, introducing changes across several key areas.⁴⁷ Among other things, the amendments included provisions aimed at implementing the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia*, which confirmed the segregation of Roma students in primary schools, adjustments related to inclusive education, and alterations to the list of protected grounds against discrimination.⁴⁸ However, these changes have raised serious concerns about whether they achieve the intended aims and comply with international human rights standards.

School Desegregation Measures

The amended Article 63 reaffirms that parents or guardians have both the right and obligation to enrol their child in the primary school located in their area of residence. Primary schools, in turn, are obligated to enrol students from their designated catchment area. The law provides exceptions to this rule: first, when the local school does not offer instruction in the child's mother tongue; and second, when a transfer is justified by medical or psychosocial documentation, provided that the receiving school has available capacity and the transfer is confirmed to be in the child's best interest by a mental health centre.

The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination has raised concerns that these exceptions leave room for continued or deepened segregation of Roma students.⁴⁹ The Commission also criticised the fact that the law does not explicitly define or name segregation, arguing that this reflects a symbolic lack of political will to adopt effective and targeted desegregation measures.

In its latest report, the Ombudsperson reported on its monitoring of the implementation of the *Elmazova* judgment.⁵⁰ It requested information from the Ministry of Education on whether the government-mandated analysis of ethnic segregation in schools—and corresponding proposed measures—had been completed, as required by 2023. Although the Ministry reported taking actions between April 2023 and November 2024, it did not confirm whether the analysis or measures were finalised. The Ministry noted that, prior to the 2024/2025 school year, it had sent a desegregation plan—developed by Council of Europe experts—to affected municipalities (Bitola, Shtip, and Prilep), which in turn reported back on actions taken in line with the judgment.

Inclusive Education and Enrolment in Primary Schools with Resource Centres

The amendments revised both Article 60 and Article 17 of the Law on Primary Education, introducing changes concerning the placement of children with disabilities. These provisions relate to “primary schools with resource centres”—specialised institutions that were previously expected to stop enrolling new students and transition into support hubs for inclusive education within mainstream schools. Under the amended Article 60(3)–(5), parents or guardians of children with complex needs or with visual and/or hearing

47 Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2024). Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Primary Education [Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за основното образование]. Official Gazette draft document. <https://www.sobranie.mk/preview?id=d69ddf01-9dc3-44fe-b58d-876403404a18&url=https://sp.sobranie.mk/sites/2023/materials/638670565014971655/Documents/638719451277706263.doc&method=GetDocumentContent> (Accessed: 30 March 2025).

48 European Court of Human Rights. (2022). *Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia* (Applications nos. 11811/20 and 13550/20) [Judgment]. Strasbourg, 13 December 2022. <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/fre?i=001-221503> (Accessed: 30 May 2025).

49 Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. (2024, December 13). Reaction to the amendments to the Law on Primary Education. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/kszd.mk/posts/pfbid0xBsvntBVoXZdpR5ZpxHM1C1rQFFULBzuqMm8AyfXiLhpup5y5fK-w1nCeLBnb122nI> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

50 Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2025). Годишен извештај за степенот на обезбедувањето почитување, унапредување и заштита на човековите слободи и права: 2024 [Annual report on the level of ensuring respect, promotion, and protection of human rights and freedoms: 2024]. <https://ombudsman.mk/CMS/Upload/NarodenPravobranitel/upload/Godisni%20izvestai/GI-2024/GI-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

impairments may now choose whether to enrol their child in a regular primary school or in a primary school with a resource centre, based on a formal disability assessment. They may also transfer a child who follows a modified educational program from a regular primary school to a school with a resource centre. Additionally, Article 17(3) states that enrolment in a primary school with a resource centre may take place based on the choice of the student, the parent or guardian, in cooperation with the professional associates and the inclusive education team of the primary school, and following a disability assessment.

While the law presents this as an expansion of parental choice, civil society organisations have expressed concern that this change may reintroduce segregated education, as mainstream schools could use this flexibility to refuse enrolment by citing a lack of capacity or trained staff. Critics argue that this effectively shifts the burden of inclusion onto parents, rather than strengthening the obligation of schools to adapt.⁵¹

Furthermore, civil society groups—including the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association—have long pointed out that inclusive education is not being adequately implemented, due to a lack of sufficiently trained and qualified staff to work with students with disabilities; inadequate teaching resources and support tools tailored to students' individual needs and abilities; and insufficient awareness among parents and school staff about inclusive practices and the diverse needs of children with disabilities.⁵²

Persistent challenges also remain regarding the availability and timely deployment of educational assistants, which further undermines inclusive education in practice.

Removal of Anti-Discrimination Grounds

Another amendment involves the removal of specific anti-discrimination protections. The revised law deletes "gender," "gender identity," and "sexual orientation" from the list of explicitly protected grounds in the education context. While the law retains a general clause that prohibits discrimination on any grounds recognised by other laws, the Constitution, or international treaties, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and civil society organisations have strongly condemned this removal.^{53 54}

They argue that this change undermines harmonisation with the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, which explicitly includes these grounds and requires alignment across all legal frameworks. Critics warn that the removal increases the risk that schools may not recognise their obligations to prevent discrimination based on these characteristics, thereby weakening protections for students.⁵⁵

51 Peshev, A. (2024, December 12). Нов предлог – нова можност за исклучување, наместо инклузија во училиштата [New proposal—a new opportunity for exclusion instead of inclusion in schools]. Prizma. <https://prizma.mk/nov-predlog-nova-mozhnost-za-iskluchuvane-namesto-in-kluzija-vo-uchilishtata/> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

52 Macedonian Young Lawyers Association (MYLA). (2025). Annual Report on Human Rights—2024 [Годишен извештај за човекови права – 2024]. <https://myla.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/GODISEN-IZVESTAJ-ZA-COVEKOVI-PRAVA-MZMP-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

53 Rodova Platforma. (2024, November 1). Реакција за Предлог-законот за изменување и дополнување на Законот за основното образование [Reaction to the Draft Law amending the Law on Primary Education]. <https://rodovaplatforma.mk/blog/2024/11/01/reakcija-za-predlog-zakonot-za-izmenu/#more-64702>

54 Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. (2024, December 13). Reaction to the amendments to the Law on Primary Education. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/kszd.mk/posts/pfbid0xBsvntBV0XZdpR5ZpxHM1C1rQFFULBzuqMm8AyfXiLhpup5y5fKw1nCeLBnb122nl> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

55 Meta.mk. (2024, December 14). Законските измени за основно и средно оставаат простор за дискриминација, предупредуваат експертите [Legal amendments to primary and secondary education leave room for discrimination, experts warn]. Retrieved from <https://meta.mk/zakonskite-izmeni-za-osnovno-i-sredno-ostavaat-prostor-za-diskriminacija-predupreduvat-ekspertite/> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

Secondary Education

In April 2025, the Assembly adopted amendments to the Law on Secondary Education, introducing a number of significant reforms aimed at strengthening inclusivity, student participation, and alignment with contemporary educational needs.⁵⁶ The amendments define secondary education as institutionally, professionally, and substantively organised in a way that ensures access for all students, including those with disabilities. For the first time, the law foresees the systematic provision of educational assistants for students with disabilities, covered by the state budget. This marks a structural shift, replacing the previous temporary arrangement in which assistants were engaged through the Municipal-Useful Work Programme, implemented via a cooperation agreement between the Employment Agency of North Macedonia, UNDP, and municipalities.

Additional changes include the formal recognition of student self-organisation and participation in school governance, as well as the introduction of new professional roles such as career counsellors and practical education coordinators, intended to guide students more effectively in their educational and career paths. The amendments also establish a new framework for final secondary school examinations, designed to standardise assessments and better prepare students for further education or the labour market.

Vocational Education and Training

The new Law on Vocational Education and Training was adopted by the Assembly in December 2024, as part of a broader package of education reforms aimed at aligning the national vocational education system with contemporary labour market needs, international standards, and principles of lifelong learning.⁵⁷ The law defines the organisation, content, governance, and financing of vocational education and training (VET) at secondary and post-secondary levels, as well as the provision of adult vocational training. It regulates the structure of vocational qualifications in accordance with the National Qualifications Framework and introduces mechanisms to ensure the quality, inclusiveness, and relevance of VET in a changing economic and social context.

One of the most significant reforms introduced by the law is the formal recognition of dual education as an integral part of the VET system. This model allows students to gain practical experience through structured cooperation between vocational schools and employers, combining classroom learning with real-world work placements. Another transformative provision is the establishment of Regional Centres for Vocational Education and Training, envisioned as multifunctional institutions that provide vocational education, lifelong learning opportunities, and demand-driven skills development. These centres are designed to act as regional hubs of excellence, fostering close collaboration between educational institutions, businesses, and local authorities. Together, these reforms mark a strategic shift towards a more inclusive, modern, and labour-market-responsive VET system in North Macedonia.

⁵⁶ Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2025). Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за средното образование [Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Secondary Education]. <https://www.mchamber.mk/Upload/Documents/Законот%20за%20изменување%20и%20дополнување%20на%20законот%20за%20средното%20образование.pdf> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

⁵⁷ Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2024). Закон за стручно образование и обука [Law on Vocational Education and Training]. <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Zakon%20za%20soo%20mk.pdf> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

5. SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES



Combating Trafficking

EC Progress Report

- » The strategy for the fight against trafficking of children (2021-2025) should be aligned with the Lanzarote Convention and the EU legislation on child sexual abuse (Directive 2011/93) (p.38).

UPR recommendations

- » Take specific, implementable, and intensified measures to effectively combat human trafficking, with a particular focus on women and children, by strengthening prevention, detection, and victim support mechanisms (Islamic Republic of Iran, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)

The National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking of Children (2021–2025) is a dedicated strategic document adopted by the Government in April 2021. It was developed as a component of the broader National Strategy and National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration (2021–2025),⁵⁸ under the coordination of the National Commission for the Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration. This Commission was established in 2018 to lead and coordinate the country's anti-trafficking efforts. The Action Plan for Combating Trafficking of Children complements the general action plan on trafficking by focusing specifically on child victims and prevention measures.

⁵⁸ National Strategy and National Action Plan for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration (2021–2025). <https://nacionalna-komisija.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/NACIONALNA-STRATEGIJA-MKD-ALB-ANG-25.10.2021.pdf> (Accessed on 16.04.2025).

The child-focused Action Plan includes eight strategic goals, seventeen objectives, and thirty-three activities that address prevention, identification, assistance, protection, reintegration, and institutional strengthening. It also incorporates indicators for monitoring implementation and assigns responsibilities to relevant institutions. While implementation is expected to be funded through institutional budgets, municipal contributions, and donor support, only the Ministry of Interior has a clearly earmarked budget line for anti-trafficking activities.

To ensure operational follow-up, the Sub-group on Child Trafficking, which operates under the National Commission, has adopted two operational plans—the first for 2021–2022 and the second for 2023–2025. The Sub-group comprises representatives from state institutions, international organisations and civil society organisations.⁵⁹ The Sub-group also prepared its first report outlining the implementation of its planned activities, contributing to internal monitoring and evaluation processes.⁶⁰

The European Commission, in its 2024 Progress Report, recommended further alignment of the national anti-trafficking strategy with the Council of Europe Lanzarote Convention and the EU Directive 2011/93/EU on combating child sexual abuse and exploitation. The current Action Plan is considered insufficient in scope, as it focuses primarily on trafficking and does not adequately address other forms of sexual abuse, such as grooming, online exploitation, and intrafamilial abuse.

Additionally, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA), in its third evaluation report published in March 2023, acknowledged progress made in the legal and institutional framework, including improved identification of child victims and stronger inter-institutional cooperation.⁶¹ However, GRETA called for further efforts in several key areas. These include ensuring access to specialised accommodation for child victims, strengthening the role and capacity of local anti-trafficking commissions, improving access to legal aid and compensation, enhancing the role of Centres for Social Work in prevention and assistance, and developing rehabilitation programmes for children in street situations. GRETA also emphasised the importance of increasing the resources and mandate of the Office of the National Coordinator and the Ombudsperson, particularly in its function as the National Rapporteur.

In light of these findings, it is evident that while a formal structure and planning framework to combat child trafficking has been established, additional steps are needed to ensure that its strategic and operational responses are fully in line with international standards and obligations under the Lanzarote Convention.

59 Council of Europe. (2023). The National Commission on the fight against trafficking in North Macedonia and its Sub-group on child protection enhance their strategic planning. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/skopje/-/the-national-commission-on-the-fight-against-trafficking-in-north-macedonia-and-its-sub-group-on-child-protection-enhance-their-strategic-planning> (Accessed on 20.04.2025).

60 Sub-group on Child Trafficking. (2023). Annual report of the Sub-group on Child Trafficking—North Macedonia. National Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration. https://nacionalnakomisija.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Annual-report_Sub-group-against-child-trafficking-North-Macedonia.pdf (Accessed on 20.04.2025).

61 Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2023). GRETA (2023)02: Evaluation report on North Macedonia – Third evaluation round: Access to justice and effective remedies for victims of trafficking in human beings. <https://rm.coe.int/greta-evaluation-report-on-north-macedonia-third-evaluation-round/1680aaa573> (Accessed on 20.04.2025).

Justice for Children

UPR recommendations

- » Finalize and further harmonize the Criminal Code, Criminal Procedure Code, and the Law on Justice for Children with European directives and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights (Senegal, Georgia).

In March 2024, North Macedonia enacted a new Law on Justice for Children, marking a significant advancement in aligning the country's juvenile justice system with European Union standards.⁶² This legislation emphasises the best interests of the child in all judicial proceedings involving minors and introduces a restorative justice approach. This approach focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration, ensuring that children are treated primarily as children, regardless of their involvement with the justice system.

The law incorporates procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused in criminal proceedings, aligning with EU Directive 2016/800.⁶³ It also establishes minimum standards on the rights, support, and protection of child victims of crime, in line with Directive 2012/29/EU.⁶⁴ These provisions aim to create a more child-friendly and gender-sensitive justice system, equipped with the necessary resources and inter-sectoral cooperation, including with the health and education sectors.

UNICEF has commended this legislative milestone, highlighting the cross-party commitment to ensuring equitable access to a fair justice system for every child at risk, in contact, or in conflict with the law.⁶⁵ The organisation emphasises that the law's effective implementation will require full engagement from institutions and professionals to ensure that the justice system becomes more responsive to the needs of children.

Another important development was the 2024 amendment to the Law on the Execution of Sanctions, which designates the Educational-Correctional Facility Tetovo as an institution for both male and female juveniles.⁶⁶ This change is set to be implemented within three years of the law's entry into force. The Ombudsperson had long criticised the previous practice of placing girls in the Idrizovo Penitentiary, arguing that it was inappropriate and failed to meet the needs of their rehabilitation. The Ombudsperson had called for legal amendments and the establishment of a dedicated facility that provides suitable conditions for re-education, including access to education, psychosocial support, and activities that foster personal development.⁶⁷

Despite the positive steps, key systemic challenges persist. Most notably, children placed in the Educational-Correctional Facility Tetovo still do not have access to formal education, despite the fact that primary and secondary education are compulsory and free under national law.⁶⁸ The lack of access to structured learning opportunities severely hampers their chances for rehabilitation, resocialisation, and reintegration into society, undermining the very purpose of correctional measures for children in conflict with the law.

62 Law on Justice for Children ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no.66/2024)

63 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2024). Access to Justice for All: Republic of North Macedonia – Justice for Children Reform Overview. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/res/justice-and-prison-reform/access-to-justice-for-all_html/Republic_of_North_Macedonia.pdf (Accessed on 20.04.2025).

64 Ibid.

65 UNICEF North Macedonia. (2024, March 27). Новиот Закон за правда за деца ветува дополнително унапредување на детските права на правда и еднаквост [The new Law on Justice for Children promises further advancement of children's rights to justice and equality]. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/mk/soopstenija/noviot-zakon-za-pravda-za-deca-vetuva-dopolnitelno-unapreduvanje-na-detskite-prava-na> (Accessed on 20.04.2025).

66 Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Execution of Sanctions ("Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia" no.74/2024).

67 Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia. (2025). Годишен извештај за степенот на обезбедувањето почитување, унапредување и заштита на човековите слободи и права: 2024 [Annual report on the level of ensuring respect, promotion, and protection of human rights and freedoms: 2024]. <https://ombudsman.mk/CMS/Upload/NarodenPravobranitel/upload/Godisni%20izvestai/GI-2024/GI-2024.pdf> (Accessed: 20 April 2025).

68 Ibid.

CONCLUSION

The country has taken meaningful steps toward strengthening the protection and promotion of children's rights, particularly through recent legislative, policy, and institutional reforms. These efforts signal a growing commitment to aligning with international human rights standards and meeting the requirements of the EU accession process.

Nevertheless, progress remains uneven and fragmented, most notably due to the absence of an overarching, formally adopted strategic framework on children's rights, and the continued lack of a functional national coordination body tasked with overseeing implementation and fostering intersectoral collaboration. This strategic vacuum undermines the coherence, continuity, and long-term sustainability of child-focused reforms. In its absence, child-specific policies are often developed in isolation and implemented without adequate funding, comprehensive data collection, or effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

Independent monitoring institutions remain significantly under-resourced, limiting their ability to fulfil their mandates effectively. Of particular concern is the Assembly's ongoing failure to act promptly on the Ombudsperson's annual reports, which weakens institutional accountability and delays responsive action from the government.

North Macedonia has yet to ratify several key international instruments—including the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a Communications Procedure—despite longstanding recommendations. In parallel, recent legislative changes, particularly in the education sector, have raised concerns about their compliance with international standards and their impact on vulnerable groups.

Marginalised children—especially Roma children, children with disabilities, and those without legal identity documents—remain at heightened risk of exclusion and discrimination. Despite legal commitments to equality and inclusion, the persistence of systemic barriers continues to restrict their access to rights and services.

In conclusion, while the legal and policy architecture for child rights has evolved, its full impact depends on effective, inclusive, and well-resourced implementation. Closing the gap between legal reforms and lived realities requires a renewed focus on strategic coordination, stronger political will, and sustained investment in child-centred governance. Only then can North Macedonia ensure the meaningful realisation of children's rights in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, UPR recommendations, and EU benchmarks.

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UPR of North Macedonia (4th Cycle—46th Session), Thematic list of recommendations.

APPENDIX—

List of UPR recommendations

UPR Para.	Recommendation	See report chapter
117.11	Finalize the process of ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure (Slovakia)	General measures of implementation
117.12	Accelerate the ongoing process leading to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure, signed in 2012 (Togo)	General measures of implementation
117.13	Ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on a communications procedure (Ukraine)	General measures of implementation
117.3	Ratify pending international human rights instruments, particularly the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Paraguay)	General measures of implementation
117.14	Continue the process of ratifying important human rights instruments and their optional protocols, especially the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (Czechia)	General measures of implementation
117.161	Continue implementing national human rights strategies to protect vulnerable groups, including children, women and people with disabilities (Oman)	General measures of implementation
117.20	Bring the Office of the Ombudsman fully into compliance with the Paris Principles, taking into consideration the recommendations of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (Montenegro);	General measures of implementation
117.21	Bring the Office of the Ombudsman fully into compliance with the Paris Principles (Ukraine);	General measures of implementation
117.22	Strengthen the independence and mandate of the Ombudsman, as well as the capacities and human and financial resources of its services, and take the necessary measures to ensure that the Office of the Ombudsman fully respects the Paris Principles (Luxembourg);	General measures of implementation
117.23	Take measures to ensure that the national human rights institution has sufficient financial and human resources to carry out its mandate (Chile);	General measures of implementation
117.24	Ensure that the national human rights institution has adequate resources to carry out its functions, in accordance with the Paris Principles (Costa Rica);	General measures of implementation
117.25	Ensure sufficient funding of the Office of the Ombudsman, thus increasing its independence, and include the mandate for the promotion of human rights, positioning it in line with the Paris Principles, as previously recommended (Czechia);	General measures of implementation
117.26	Further strengthen the Office of the Ombudsperson (e.g. by filling the vacant positions of deputy Ombudsman) and the Commission for Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination (e.g. through an in-depth review of obstacles in the current legal and policy frameworks and their implementation) and ensure the impartial, independent and solely merit-based selection of personnel and the allocation of adequate funding (Germany);	General measures of implementation
117.27	Ensure the allocation of the necessary resources to the Commission for Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination, enabling it to fulfil its mandate (Greece);	General measures of implementation
117.199	Strengthen mechanisms to facilitate the birth registration of all, including those belonging to the Roma community, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, in order for them to enjoy their rights, particularly the right to health social protection and education (Philippines)	Civil rights and freedoms

117.205	Ensure that all births are registered immediately, regardless of the immigration status of the parents, and thus reduce statelessness (Costa Rica)	Civil rights and freedoms
117.114	Adopt measures to guarantee free education, especially for children in rural areas and vulnerable environments, as well as specific measures to combat school drop-out (Paraguay)	Education
117.115	Take necessary measures to ensure that every child has a chance to enjoy the right to education, with a special focus on children with disabilities and children from vulnerable backgrounds and marginalized communities (Slovakia)	Education
117.116	Continue its efforts in ensuring the right to education for all children, as well as the right to education in their mother tongue for all ethnic minority groups (Viet Nam);	Education
117.117	Grant access to education to all minors, including refugees, stateless persons and those under temporary protection (Costa Rica)	Education
117.118	Improve access to quality education for all, in particular for children with disabilities and children from Roma communities, and provide financial and technical assistance to poor families (Cyprus)	Education
117.119	Further reinforce measures taken to enhance Roma girls' participation in the educational system (Pakistan);	Education
117.120	Continue to implement the actions foreseen in the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion in the field of education (Cuba)	Education
117.121	Promote inclusive education, inter alia, by ensuring access to education, including preschool, for all children, especially minorities (Austria)	Education
117.124	Adopt targeted measures to combat school dropout, focusing in particular on measures to retain girls in school (Estonia)	Education
117.186	Implement policies that enable all ethnic communities, including Turks, to benefit from the provisions of the Law on the Use of Languages and the right to education in their mother tongue without any difficulties (Türkiye)	Education
117.83	Prohibit child marriage under all circumstances (Iceland)	Violence against children
117.162	Step up efforts to implement the national action plan for the prevention of and protection of children against abuse and neglect (Armenia)	Violence against children
117.163	Redouble efforts and implement public policies to combat peer violence in schools, online bullying and violence against children, including children belonging to ethnic, religious and other minority groups (Brazil)	Violence against children
117.168	Continue allocating financial resources for the implementation of the national action plan against violence against children (Georgia)	Violence against children
117.191	Implement activities, including awareness campaigns, to address peer violence in schools, cyberbullying and discrimination against LGBTI children (Israel)	Violence against children
117.87	Take specific and implementable measures to effectively combat human trafficking and to support the victims, in particular women and children (Islamic Republic of Iran)	Special protection measures
117.94	Continue increasing actions to combat trafficking in persons – especially women and children – and strengthen measures to detect and prevent such cases (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela)	Special protection measures
117.15	Consider finalizing the Criminal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Law on Justice for Children (Senegal)	Special protection measures
117.71	Further pursue the harmonization of its new Criminal Code, Law on Criminal Procedure and Law on Justice for Children with European directives and the practice of the European Court of Human Rights (Georgia)	Special protection measures

