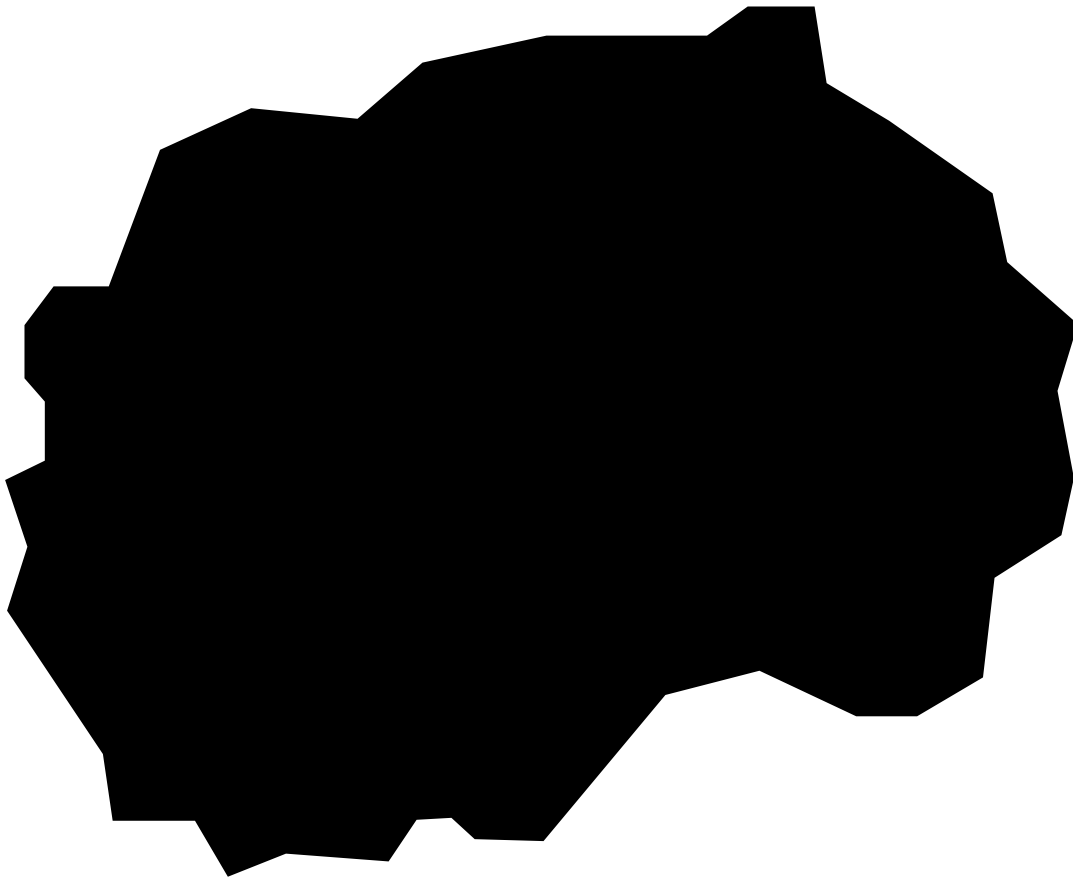


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# Social Rights Monitor 2025 - Country Report - North Macedonia



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## About SOLIDAR

SOLIDAR is a European network of progressive Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) working to advance social justice through a just transition in Europe and worldwide. We represent over 50 member organisations based in 26 countries (19 of which are EU countries), among which national CSOs in Europe, as well as some non-EU and EU-wide organisations, working in one or more of our fields of activity.

The network is brought together by its shared values of solidarity, equality and participation.

SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions by carrying out advocacy actions, project management and coordination, policy monitoring and awareness-raising across its different policy areas.

## What is the Social Rights Monitor (SRM)?

The Social Rights Monitor assesses the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) at national level from a civil society perspective. The EPSR – also known as the Social Pillar – is a set of 20 principles that guide the action of the European Union in the realm of social affairs and policies. In other words, it is intended to be a compass guiding the EU towards a more social Europe. For too many people, however, the implementation of these principles at national and EU level is not yet a reality.

Thanks to the contribution of our members and their networks on the ground (the National Strategy Groups), SOLIDAR monitors the extent to which social rights are respected, upheld and promoted for all people living in the EU. The Social Rights Monitor also investigates the health of civic space and social and civil dialogue in the EU, as well as the extent to which a just transition is being pursued. Therefore, the thematic areas covered by the Monitor are the following: Equal opportunities and access to the labour market; Fair working conditions; Social inclusion and protection; a Just transition; and Civic space. The first three correspond to the three chapters of the EPSR, while the last two have been added to give a fuller picture of social justice in Europe.

Thanks to first-hand data gathered by national civil society organisations, the Social Rights Monitor constitutes a direct channel of policy recommendations between the national level and EU policymakers. It thus amplifies the voices and needs of the most marginalised groups. The Monitor dedicates a section to “advocacy messages” which result from the national-level analyses in each thematic area and are addressed to EU policymakers.

Countries are assigned a score for each thematic area out of a maximum of 100 points. This makes immediately visible how each country is performing in each area and enables comparison with other countries. The numerical scores originate from the National Strategy Groups’ (NSGs) assessments of national developments related to social rights, civic space and just transition. Negative developments in an area result in lower scores. NSGs rate these developments for each country by replying to Likert-scale questions. This means that the score of a country’s thematic area is given by adding up all the rates given to the questions concerning that thematic area and expressing the score out of 100. The overall score of a country is the average of the thematic areas scores. Further details on the questionnaire and data gathering are provided in the section “About: What is the process?”

Since the SRM score reflects the NSG’s assessment of changes—either improvements or deteriorations—in each of the five areas over the past 12 months, it does not represent the overall status of these dimensions in absolute terms. Instead, it highlights recent trends. For example, a country with a historically strong welfare state might receive a low score if recent reforms have significantly weakened social rights or pose a risk of doing so. This does not imply that the overall situation is poor, but rather that recent developments are cause for concern and may undermine social standards over time.

Therefore, the SRM should not be used to compare the overall situation of social rights across countries—official statistics are more appropriate for that purpose. Instead, it serves as a tool to track short-term national trends and to understand the perspectives of civil society organizations (CSOs) on these developments.

## What is the process?

The Social Rights Monitor is a tool that amplifies the voice of progressive civil society at national level. Its content is based on the inputs provided by the National Strategy Groups (NSGs) set up by SOLIDAR's members and partners, which are active in the countries analysed. They consist of NGOs, associations, movements, trade unions, academia and thinktanks, ensuring that the perspective of civil society is mirrored in the Social Rights Monitor's analysis. The Monitor reflects the experiences of these organisations, which are active on the ground, and the experiences are complemented by scientific data gathered through desk research.

The data elaborated in the Social Rights Monitor are gathered by SOLIDAR's secretariat through a questionnaire distributed to the National Strategy Group Leaders (our national members) and completed with information produced by each group. From 2023, this questionnaire has been carried out online.

Based on the picture that emerges from the Monitor, SOLIDAR and the NSGs together devise policy recommendations for EU policymakers. These aim to make social rights, a healthy planet and an enabling, free, protected civic space a reality for all in Europe. The key recommendations stemming from the analysis are used as a basis for SOLIDAR's social affairs advocacy work.

The SRM is published every year, around the end of November/beginning of December and its findings cover the period going from June of the previous year to May of the year of the publication. This timeline is due to the fact that the NSGs submit their questionnaire by the end of May of the publication year.

## How do we use it?

SOLIDAR's main role as a European-level civil society network is as a bridge between EU institutions and their policies on the one hand and our progressive members working at the national level on the other. The Social Rights Monitor is a valuable tool to gather information from the ground and bring it to policymakers' attention. This ensures that the voices of the most neglected social groups are duly taken into account. For example, the SRM complements the European Semester, by providing a more-complete assessment of Member State policies. Regrettably, the Semester is still too focused on countries' economic and financial performances and does not provide sufficient guidance on upward social convergence in the European Union.

SOLIDAR disseminates the findings of the Social Rights Monitor in various ways, including through the Social Europe Conference, an annual event at which it is presented, and which also explores a topic of priority for social Europe. More generally, the Monitor is one of the main ways through which the SOLIDAR network presents its positions on social affairs, so its findings are mainstreamed throughout our advocacy work.

## Social Rights Monitor Overview

### SCORE: 48

North Macedonia has made progress in several areas, but the improvements are often hindered. Several measures have been introduced to deal with persistently high youth unemployment, yet its root causes remain insufficiently addressed. Formal structures for civil society participation have been established and are operational, but consultation is often only formal. Occupational health and safety continue to be subject to an outdated legal framework. Social dialogue has been formalized in recent years, but the impact of collective bargaining is decreasing. Rural and minority groups continue to be particularly affected by poverty, energy poverty and a lack of access to childcare. Positive developments in the country include consistent increases in the statutory minimum wage and a high potential to create quality green jobs.

The NSG for North Macedonia was led by SOLIDAR's member [CDI](#).



## Equal Opportunities and Access to the Labour Market

### SCORE: 50

#### Youth unemployment

Despite steady decreases in recent years, youth unemployment remains a persistent problem in North Macedonia. In the third quarter of 2024, the rate had declined by nearly 5 percentage points from the average rate in 2023 and almost 9 percentage points from 2022.<sup>[1]</sup> However, North Macedonia's youth unemployment rates have been significantly higher than the EU averages – almost 10 percentage points higher in 2023.<sup>[2]</sup>

The NSG has identified several causes. One of the biggest is a skills mismatch.<sup>[3]</sup> School curricula are not aligned with the needs of the labour market, so young people are inadequately prepared for the work environment. Getting work experience can also be a struggle, as many entry-level jobs paradoxically require prior work experience.<sup>[4]</sup> These challenges are compounded by nepotism and corruption in both education and employment, which hinder fair access to the labour market and lead to a perception that effort is not rewarded.

Long-term unemployment is a major issue in the country. In February 2023, about 73 % of all unemployed in North Macedonia had been jobless for more than one year, according to ILO.<sup>[5]</sup> Long-term unemployment concerns also many young people. First, the longer a person remains unemployed and unable to receive training, the more likely they are to suffer from skills erosion and from mental fatigue due to discouragement. In addition, a substantial portion of unemployed people in general engage in informal employment. Faced with these challenges, many young people decide to leave the country, leading to a brain drain.<sup>[6]</sup>

The government has introduced several measures over the past few years to reduce youth unemployment. One is the implementation of the European Youth Guarantee, which ensures that young people aged 15-29 get an offer of employment, education, training or internship within four months of registering as unemployed.<sup>[7]</sup> The programme also provides career counselling, professional guidance and subsidized employment opportunities. National internship and apprenticeship programmes facilitate the access of young people to the labour market, as do traineeship programmes for vulnerable groups. The Digital Skills Development Program provides young people with in-demand IT skills, whilst the Training and Retraining Initiatives upskill young people in professions aligned with market needs. To promote the employment of young people, the government introduced Subsidized Employment and Wage Support to provide financial incentives for businesses to hire young people.



## Fair Working Conditions

**SCORE: 50**

### Adequate wages

Since the major reform of September 2017, when the Law on Minimum Wage amendments eliminated sectoral differences (especially ending lower minimums in labour-intensive sectors like textile, leather, and footwear) and established a universal monthly minimum wage of MKD 17,130 gross (around €277 ) for all sectors, workers in North Macedonia have steadily gained from a more equal and predictable wage floor. Subsequent increases followed in 2018-2022<sup>[8]</sup>, and in March 2024 the minimum gross wage was raised to MKD 33,352 (around €540), with a corresponding net minimum of MKD 22,567 (around €265), under a methodology that ties the minimum wage to half the increase in average wages plus half the rise in the cost-of-living index, and mandates that it cannot fall below 57% of the average net wage.<sup>[9]</sup>

### Occupational health and safety

Occupational health and safety (OSH) are currently still governed by the Law on Safety and Health of the Republic of North Macedonia, which dates back to 2007. A new legislative framework on OSH has been announced in 2019 and an initial draft was prepared by end-2020 and consultations have been held with employers, workers, inspectorates, experts, and other stakeholders. Key features that have been announced include stronger enforcement powers and inspections, improved regulatory secondary legislation, clearer employer obligations and preventive rules, greater awareness-raising and capacity-building, and a reinforced culture of prevention in workplaces. However, as of mid-2024, the new law has not yet been formally adopted. As such, the OSH system of North Macedonia is in dire need of an updated framework, as the current framework has several problems.

One is a need for inter-institutional cooperation and oversight. Whilst the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is the national focal point and the official representative to EU-OSHA,<sup>[10]</sup> the Ministry of Economy and Labour has been in charge of the State Labour Inspectorate (SLI) since the 2024 state restructure. SLI inspections highlight a

need for increased enforcement. The reallocation brings potential benefits — notably closer alignment between labour-market and economic policy and short-term increases in attention and budgetary resources — but also raises governance risks, including possible conflicts between economic promotion and regulatory enforcement, transition-related capacity gaps, and a need for stronger oversight arrangements.[11] In 2023, 22 938 inspections were carried out, of which 5 543 led to judgements. Of these, 994 concerned payment orders, 112 were misdemeanours, and 35 were criminal offences.[12] The need for enforcement is also underscored by tragic incidents. A fire in a Kočani nightclub in 2025 led to 59 fatalities[13] due to a combination of several safety violations, including overcrowding, a lack of emergency exits and the absence of fire safety equipment. Investigations later revealed that the club's licensing was not in order, and bribery and corruption allegations were raised against safety oversight officials.

## Social dialogue

Social dialogue in North Macedonia takes place through the Economic and Social Council (ESC), which functions as a forum for bipartite and tripartite discussions.[14] Representative organizations include the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia, the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Macedonia and the Organization of Employers of Macedonia. But their influence and capacity remain limited, the NSG points out. Union membership is declining in North Macedonia, especially in the private sector and among informal workers, and unions are finding it hard to attract new members.[15] The declining membership weakens unions' representative force and the impact of collective bargaining. The NSG expresses concern over the influence political parties exercise on collective bargaining which jeopardises its impact. While official documents frequently signal reforms aimed at improving North Macedonia's bipartite and tripartite social dialogue structures in line with EU standards, many of these remain at the stage of proposal or drafting rather than fully implemented.[16]



## Social Inclusion and Protection

**SCORE: 47**

### Poverty eradication

Due to the difficulty of gathering data on poverty in North Macedonia, many of the most recent statistics reference past years. The at-risk-of-poverty rate was 22.2% in 2023, a 0.7 percentage point decrease from 2022, according to the World Bank.[17] This data is corroborated by the State Statistical Office of North Macedonia.[18] Certain demographics are particularly affected by poverty, notably households with children or in which the adults have lower levels of education. Ethnicity seems to play an important role, and the Roma population is overrepresented in the lowest income groups. In 2024, 55% of North Macedonia's non-Roma population lived in material deprivation, but the percentage was 87% for the Roma population, the World Bank pointed out.[19] Roma children are three times more likely to grow up in poverty. They often suffer from multidimensional poverty, meaning they are materially deprived and also have insufficient access to care and education. This form of poverty also affects children in rural areas and from economically disadvantaged households. Roma women have

a particularly low employment rate: Only 8% are formally employed.[20] North Macedonia has several measures to combat poverty. The general minimum assistance (GMA), a guaranteed minimum income scheme, had an important spike in beneficiaries in 2022, a 45% increase in beneficiaries from 2021. Beneficiaries represented 5.85% of the population, or 36 092 households. The number decreased slightly in 2023, to 35 380 households, but this was still high. [21] Beneficiaries of the one-off financial assistance schemes for first and second newborns decreased slightly to 5 071 households in 2023 from 5 916 in 2022.[22]

### **Good practice:**

North Macedonia has launched several initiatives that utilize market systems development,[23] an inclusive approach to integrating people in poverty into the labour market. It focuses on the causes that prevent people from entering the market[24] by employing a people-centred view to improve their situation. This provides people in poverty with opportunities rather than classic cash benefits.

One example is the Income Increase and Socio-Economic Empowerment (IISEE) programme, which focuses on rural and suburban areas, where it seeks to improve market linkages and create income opportunities for people in poverty. It invests in sectors such as agriculture, stimulating systemic changes that align the market better with the needs of people in poverty. These needs can include income (from produce, for example), goods (livestock or seeds) and services (veterinary). The IISEE has the potential to positively affect a lot of people, as a third of North Macedonia's workforce work in agriculture.

### **Access to childcare**

North Macedonia has enhanced its early childhood development facilities (kindergartens that focus on holistic development of children: physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) in recent years. The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is in charge of these facilities as well as public kindergartens, which are the main forms of childcare for children aged up to six years old. Both forms are heavily subsidized, but access to them is often affected by social, economic and institutional factors. Underprivileged groups – in particular Roma children, children with disabilities and children in poor households – face disproportionate difficulty in accessing early childhood services. Hidden costs, like school material, and a lack of transport are important barriers.[25]

The enrolment rates in these care services remain relatively low, also due to the lack of availability of these services and dedicated infrastructure. Childcare and pre-school capacity increased to 1 072 spaces by March 2024, reaching a coverage rate of 34.5% of all children aged up to six, according to the European Commission's North Macedonia Progress Report 2024.[26] However, coverage in rural areas is significantly lower than in cities, and rural and marginalized communities often have to contend with poor infrastructure too.[27] 21 rural municipalities have no public kindergarten at all, leaving some 17,000 children under age 6 with no local access to state preschool. Only about 37% of kindergarten/ECD facilities are located in rural municipalities, compared to 63% in urban ones, demonstrating a large infrastructure gap.[28] In general, insufficient places are available at the facilities. They already operate at maximum capacity and suffer from a lack of trained staff and a high child-to-staff ratio.



## Civic Space

**SCORE: 42**

### Civil dialogue

The CIVICUS Monitor classifies civic space in North Macedonia as “Narrowed”, a classification which has not changed since 2018.[29] This classification means that individuals and CSOs are able to exercise their civic rights, such as freedom of association and peaceful assembly, yet there are also restrictions and violations of these rights. People are free to form associations and participate in discussions on policy.

North Macedonia has a seemingly supportive environment for CSO participation. The government made the 2022-2024 Strategy for Civil Society Cooperation a priority.[30] [31] CSOs are able to take part in national discussions, through the Council for Open Government and the Council for Cooperation between Government and Civil Society. However, several factors mean that these mechanisms for civic engagement often only allow formal involvement, rather than meaningful participation. Consultations often have very short timeframes, preventing CSOs from providing meaningful and thorough input. In addition, there is a lack of government feedback on CSOs’ input. As a result, despite these formal frameworks, CSOs still report being excluded from crucial policy and legislative discussions.[32] Consistent, institutionalized dialogue remains an issue, and most positive collaboration takes place on an ad-hoc basis. The European Commission already pointed out in 2022 that the policymaking process needs to be more transparent and that the civil society consultation process needs to be more inclusive.[33]



## Just Transition

**SCORE: 44**

### Decent green jobs

The creation of decent green jobs is an important tool for North Macedonia to achieve alignment with its EU accession goals. Projections indicate that up to 10 000 green jobs could be created by 2035.[34] These are defined by UNEVOC as jobs that “contribute to social equality and the preservation, renewal, and improvement of the environment, while also being productive, providing solid income, job safety, social protection, and opportunities for personal development”. [35] The energy-efficiency and renewable-energy sectors are the main sectors with potential to help North Macedonia realize its commitment under the Paris Climate Agreement to lowering carbon emissions by 30% by 2030.

North Macedonia needs to overcome several challenges to realize this green job growth, the NSG points out. Firstly, vocational training profiles need to be expanded to include green skills training, so as to meet the demands of the evolving green job market. More generally, education and information are needed to improve the

public's understanding of the green economy and green jobs. Secondly, substantial investments, estimated at around \$6.4 billion over the next decade, are needed to achieve the country's climate adaptation goals. North Macedonia has historically been highly reliant on fossil fuels such as coal, so a dedicated just transition plan is also needed to detail the precise allocations and uses of this budget. The government is currently working on a smart specialization strategy to attract foreign direct investment and bolster green industries.[36] Lastly, as small and medium enterprises (SMEs) will play an important role in achieving the climate goals and in green job creation, the hurdles they face also need to be addressed. In particular, complex administrative processes and the lack of clear regulation can prove challenging. The Swiss Modernization Project seeks to do this by helping SMEs enhance their productivity and environmental performance. [37] The first phase of the project runs from 2024 until 2028 and seeks to support 190 SMEs. The UN's Green Finance Facility seeks to assist SMEs by providing them with affordable financing. [38] The facility also provides financing to underserved households, particularly those that are economically disadvantaged such as single parents, migrants and national minorities including Roma.

### Access to energy and energy poverty

Whilst North Macedonia has significantly upgraded its energy infrastructure, ensuring near universal access to electricity, energy poverty continues to be a major problem. The rate is between 30% and 40% depending on the definition of energy poverty, the NSG indicates. However, the European Environment Agency suggests that the energy poverty rate, defined as the number of households unable to keep their house adequately warm, is around 23.9%.[39]

Rural areas are particularly affected.[40] Many rural and low-income families still rely on solid fuels, such as wood and coal, to heat their homes, as access to natural gas is limited. These families often rely on low-efficiency stoves, and their homes are not adequately thermally isolated. Both these factors further push up their heating costs. Though electricity is available, it has become inaccessible for many families due to the sharp increase in prices that has followed regional energy crises and market liberalization. Furthermore, the quality and efficiency of the electric grid vary across North Macedonia, and the cost of energy is simply disproportionate for many vulnerable households, such as those consisting of Roma or the elderly, those headed by single parents and those living in informal housing. The burning of solid fuels is also an important cause of air pollution in North Macedonia.[41]

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