PRAGUE PROCESS
ПРАЖСКИЙ ПРОЦЕСС



North Macedonia

General Information

Population

1 820 909 (World Bank 2025)

1 822 612 (STAT NMK 2024)

Immigration

150 831 (UN Immigration Stock 2024)

7 458 (STAT NMK 2024)

Emigration

534 616 (UN Emigration Stock 2024)

1 711 (STAT NMK 2024)

Working-age population

1 182 617 (World Bank 2025)

1 515 306 (STAT NMK 2024)

Unemployment rate

11.5 % (World Bank 2025)

12.4 % (STAT NMK 2024)

GDP

19 101 199 817 current prices USD (World Bank 2025)

964 086 730 000 current prices MKD (STAT NMK 2024)

Refugees, Asylum seekers, IDPs

Refugees

20 822 (UNHCR 2025)

Asylum Seekers

38 (UNHCR 2025)

IDPs

0 (UNHCR 2025)

Citizenship

By Birth

No (GLOBALCIT 2024)

By Descent

Yes (conditional) (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Years of Residency

7 years of residence required (GLOBALCIT 2024)

Territory

25 713 km^2 (CIA World Factbook)

Data from international sources is updated automatically as it becomes available.

Migration Authorities

Responsible Body

Ministry of Interior

Line Ministries

Ministry of Defence

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade

Ministry of Finance

Ministry of Health

Ministry of Justice

Ministry of Economy and Labour

Ministry of Social Policy, demography and Youth

Ministry of Education and Science

Ministry of Inter-Community Relations

Agencies

Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia

Immigration Agency of the Republic of Northern Macedonia

Sector for Border Affairs and Migration

Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative

Key Policy Documents

Law on Foreigners

Law on International and Temporary Protection

Law on Citizenship

Law on Border Control

Law on Police

Law on Employment and Insurance in Case of Unemployment

Law on Social Protection (104/19)

Resolution on Migration Policy (2021-2025)

National Strategy for Integrated Border Management (2021-2025)

National Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration (2021-2025)

Relevant Publications

Western Balkans 2035: Demographic Resilience and Strategic Migration Planning under EU Integration and Isolation Scenarios

The Western Balkan Migration Route (2015-2019)

Lessons learned from the 2015-2016 migration situation in the Western Balkan region

ICMPD, Germany’s Western Balkans Regulation: Inspiration for facilitating refugee labour mobility?

The Republic of North Macedonia remains prone to emigration. Persistent outward mobility, combined with negative natural population change, has led to a continuous decline in the resident population, estimated at 1,822,612 in 2024 – 5% fewer than in 2014.

Decades of emigration have also produced a large diaspora. According to the UNDESA, in 2024, 534,616 North Macedonians lived abroad, mainly in Germany (28%), Switzerland (16%), Italy (13%), Australia (9%), Türkiye (7%), and Serbia (7%). Between 2023 and 2024, about 4,122 Macedonian citizens obtained Bulgarian passports, which facilitates mobility within the EU. It remains unclear whether those emigrating under a Bulgarian identity are registered as Bulgarians abroad, potentially leading to an underestimation of the Macedonian migrant stock.

Economically, North Macedonia has performed relatively well over the past two decades. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a 4.7% GDP contraction in 2020, but the economy has since been resumed its growth trajectory, with GDP expanding by 2.8% in 2024 compared with the previous year. The unemployment rate has also been declining since 2020, though it remains high at around 14.2%. Remittance inflows have decreased as well, falling from 3.5% of GDP in 2021 to 2.7% in 2024.

Despite these gradual improvements, emigration pressures persist. Many North Macedonians continue to leave due unstable economic prospects, political tensions, and ethnopolitical issues that fuel a broader sense of insecurity. These circumstances continue to push many citizens to seek opportunities abroad, primarily in Western European countries. The prolonged and uncertain EU accession process further shaped mobility intentions, particularly among young people, many of whom perceive better long-term opportunities abroad, especially in Western Europe.

In 2024, 1,711 residents emigrated from North Macedonia, including 86% (1,476) citizens. The main destinations were Germany (32%), Switzerland (13%), and Austria (7%). The same year, 26,727 Macedonian citizens received first-time residence permits in the EU – 16% fewer than in 2023 (31,876), marking the first decline since post-COVID-19 period. Germany issued 49% of all first-time permits, largely due to the Western Balkan Regulation, which continues to expand formal labour migration pathways. Other major destination countries included Croatia (16%), Slovenia (9%), Italy (8%), and Austria (6%). All saw decreases in permits issued to Macedonian citizens, with the exception of Austria, which recorded a modest 3% increase. Nearly 87% of first permits were issued for family reasons and employment. Germany granted most permits for family reunification and Croatia issued most for work. Meanwhile, the number of all valid residence permits held by Macedonian citizens in the EU remained relatively stable between 2022 and 2024, with only marginal annual changes. By the end of 2024, the total reached 257,054, most of them issued for family, employment or other reasons (46%, 44% and 42% respectively).

Asylum-related mobility also declined. The number of asylum seekers from North Macedonia decreased by 47% from 4,689 in 2023 to 2,468 in 2024. Within the EU – primarily, in Germany, Belgium and France – North Macedonians submitted 3,375 applications in 2024. The same year, the stock of recognised refugees from North Macedonia reached 2,013 with more than 71% residing in France and Germany.

Irregular migration indicators show a mixed picture. Over the past decade, an average, 2,500-3,000 North Macedonian citizens were refused entry to the EU annually. In 2024, refusals reached 2,765, most of them issued at the Croatian (25.7%) and Greek (20.3%) land borders. The same year, 6,525 North Macedonians were found to be illegally present in the EU, an 8.2% decrease from the 2023 peak of 7,105. Most cases were recorded in Germany (2,850), which saw a 23.8% drop compared with 2023, and in Hungary (2,055), which recorded a 15.5% increase.

Return trends show a notable rise in enforcement. In 2024, a total of 2,505 North Macedonian citizens were ordered to leave the EU, mainly from Germany (1,145), Croatia (245) and France (230). That same year, 2,405 North Macedonian citizens were returned, with the highest numbers recorded in Germany (1,560), Croatia (190) and Austria (145). Returns from Croatia more than doubled, rising by 153% compared with 2023. Overall, the return rate rose from around 63% in 2023 to approximately 96% in 2024.

According to UNDESA, in 2024 North Macedonia hosted 150,902 immigrants, most of whom were nationals of Albania (45%), Türkiye (13%), Ukraine (13%) and Serbia (12%). Meanwhile, the flow of immigrants in 2024 reached its peak and amounted to 7,458 persons, 134% increase compared with 2023 (3,176). 98% of immigrants were foreign nationals and arrived from Türkiye (54%). Immigration from Asian countries also increased notably, reaching 1,121 persons (around 15% of all arrivals), primarily from India, Nepal and Bangladesh.

Located along one of the key routes of mixed migration towards Europe, North Macedonia recorded over 6,809 irregular border crossings in 2024, a 51.2% decrease compared with 2023 (13,954). The decline was particularly notable among nationals of Syria (-50.1%), Afghanistan (-69.8%) and Pakistan (-86.5%).

Asylum applications in the country remain low. In 2024, 334 applications were submitted, down from 604 in 2023, largely due to restricted access to the asylum procedure, irregular returns to Greece following inadequate screening and generally weak integration prospects. While applications from Egyptian nationals increased to 23, the largest groups continued to be Syrians (102) and by Moroccans (48). In 2024, no subsidiary protection was granted. However, six individuals previously holding subsidiary protection were granted refugee status, marking the first refugee recognitions since 2016.

Since March 2022, North Macedonia has been hosting refugees from Ukraine and introduced temporary protection for humanitarian reasons, subsequently renewing it several times. It is currently valid until March 2027. As of September 2024, 45 persons from Ukraine have been granted temporary protection and residence on humanitarian grounds. According to UNHCR, for the same period 19,371 [IL1] Ukrainian refugees were recorded in the country.

In 2024, North Macedonia intensified its efforts to combat trafficking, particularly in victim identification and protection. Authorities investigated six trafficking cases involving 22 suspects, prosecuted 20 defendants, and identified 39 victims, up from just seven in 2023, with most exploited in sex trafficking and 37 being foreign nationals. Mobile identification teams continued to support most victims and assisted 469 vulnerable individuals, though they still lacked dedicated government funding. Protection measures expanded through increased support for the NGO-run shelter, updated SOPs for mobile teams, and stronger coordination through the Operational Team for Identification of Trafficking Victims.

In September 2025, North Macedonia introduced amendments to the Law on Foreigners aimed at simplifying and clarifying procedures for temporary residence and employment. The revisions ease documentation requirements for several categories of applicants, including reduced obligations for proof of criminal records, financial means, and health insurance in specific cases. They also introduce clearer rules for extending residence, additional employer responsibilities, and a special regime for foreigners engaged in strategic projects. The amendments represent a shift toward more flexible and streamlined legal-migration pathways, particularly for labour migrants.

North Macedonia has ratified all main international conventions related to the status of refugees, migrant workers, the rights of the child, and UN protocols against smuggling and trafficking. In 2021, its Parliament adopted the resolution on migration policy aimed at strengthening migration governance, migration data management, integrating development considerations, and enhancing international cooperation. The same year, the country endorsed the National Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and illegal Migration (2021-2025).

In 2022, the EU formally opened accession negotiations with North Macedonia, which has been an EU candidate country since 2005. According to a November 2025 assessment of progress towards EU accession, North Macedonia made no further alignment with the EU acquis in the field of migration and asylum since the last review.

North Macedonia actively participates in regional migration dialogues, being the party to the Brdo-Brijuni Process, the Prague Process, and the Regional Initiative for Migration and Asylum, among others. It also cooperates with various UN and EU agencies, as well as OSCE. Following the 2022 Status Agreement with the EU and North Macedonia, implementation has proceeded smoothly through the Frontex 'Joint Operation North Macedonia'. In October 2024, North Macedonia joined the EMN of an observer.

latest update: 2 January 2026