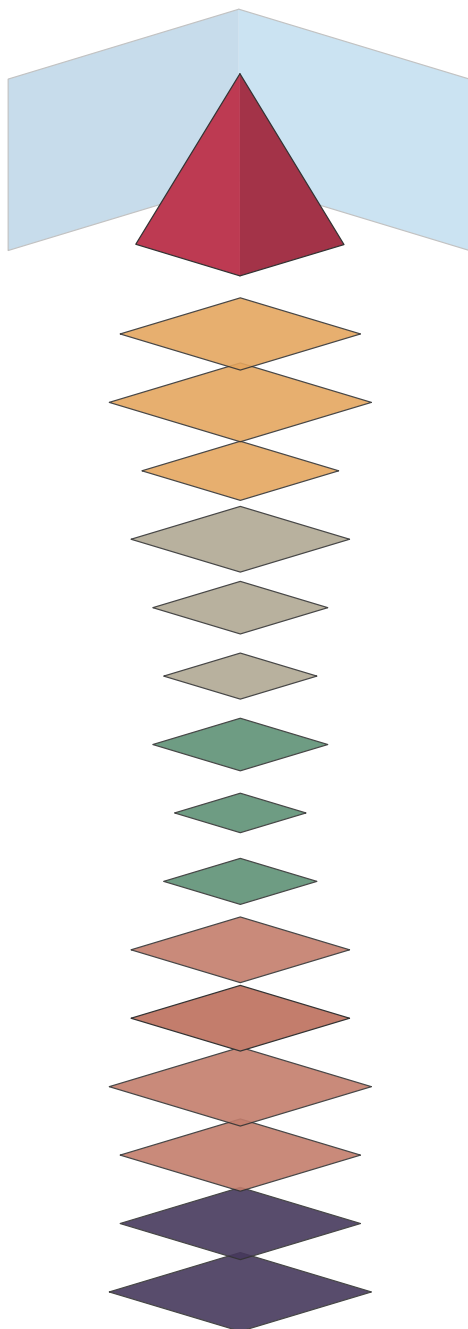




NORTH MACEDONIA



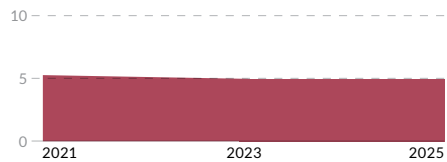
5.00 $\searrow 0.03$

CRIMINALITY SCORE

102nd of 193 countries $\searrow 9$

18th of 44 European countries -

11th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries -



CRIMINAL MARKETS

4.80 $\searrow 0.07$

HUMAN TRAFFICKING 5.50 $\nearrow 0.50$

HUMAN SMUGGLING 6.00 $\searrow 0.50$

EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING 4.50 $\searrow 0.50$

ARMS TRAFFICKING 5.00 $\nearrow 0.50$

TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS 4.00 0.00

ILLCIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS 3.50 0.00

FLORA CRIMES 4.00 0.00

FAUNA CRIMES 3.00 $\searrow 0.50$

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES 3.50 $\nearrow 0.50$

HEROIN TRADE 5.00 $\searrow 1.00$

COCAINE TRADE 5.00 0.00

CANNABIS TRADE 6.00 0.00

SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE 5.50 0.00

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES 5.50 0.00

FINANCIAL CRIMES 6.00 0.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

5.20 0.00

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS 3.50 $\nearrow 0.50$

CRIMINAL NETWORKS 6.00 0.00

STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS 6.50 0.00

FOREIGN ACTORS 5.00 $\searrow 0.50$

PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS 5.00 0.00



This project was funded in part
by a grant from the United
States Department of State.

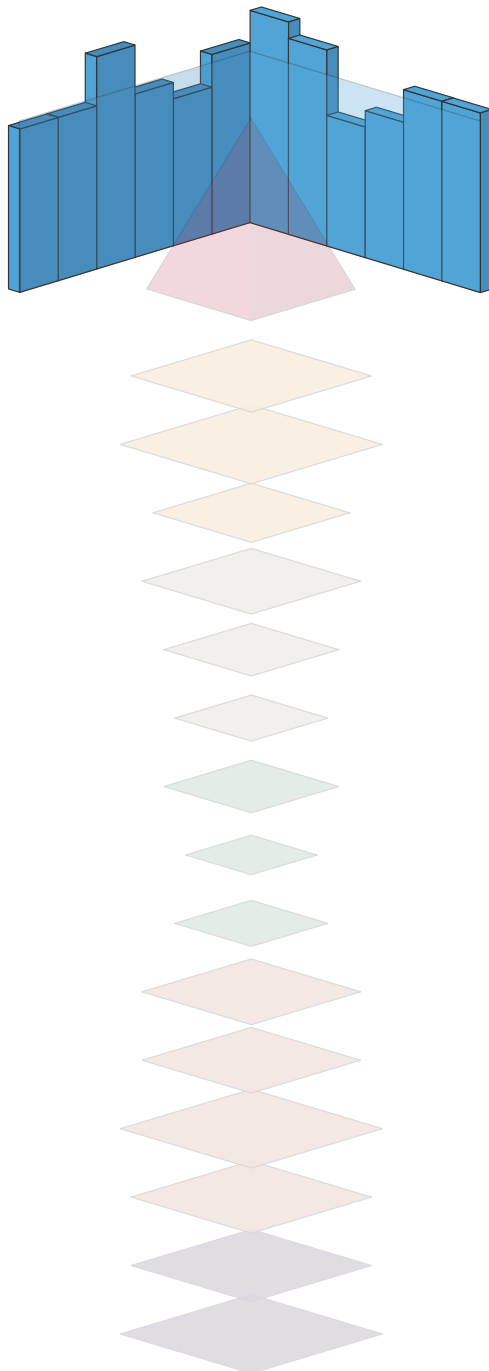


Funded by
the European Union

ENACT is funded by the European Union
and implemented by the Institute for
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affiliation with the Global Initiative Against
Transnational Organized Crime.



NORTH MACEDONIA



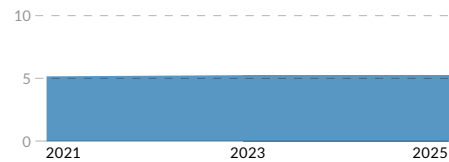
5.29 $\nearrow 0.00$

RESILIENCE SCORE

71st of 193 countries $\nearrow 2$

30th of 44 European countries -

7th of 17 Central and Eastern European countries -



POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	5.00	0.00
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	5.00	$\searrow 0.50$
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	6.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	5.00	0.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	4.50	0.00
LAW ENFORCEMENT	5.50	$\searrow 0.50$
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	6.50	$\nearrow 0.50$
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	6.00	$\nearrow 0.50$
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	4.00	0.00
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.50	0.00
PREVENTION	5.50	0.00
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.50	$\searrow 0.50$



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CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

North Macedonia is a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking, with victims subjected to labour and sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced marriages. The western part of the country is particularly affected, with restaurants, bars, nightclubs, agriculture and construction industries frequently implicated. Children represent a disproportionately high number of trafficking victims, with a significant portion subjected to online sexual exploitation. Victims primarily originate from neighbouring Balkan countries, Eastern Europe and Türkiye, with particularly vulnerable groups including women, children, migrants and the Roma population. Criminal networks, foreign actors and state-embedded actors are involved in these crimes, with some cases indicating the complicity of law enforcement officials. Although the government has intensified efforts to combat trafficking, challenges remain in victim identification, prosecution and resource allocation for victim support services.

Human smuggling remains a well-organized and transnational enterprise, with North Macedonia serving as a crucial link on the Western Balkan route to Western Europe. Smugglers primarily facilitate movement through the border with Greece, utilizing key transit points such as Gevgelija and Kumanovo. Migrants are often transported in passenger vehicles with falsified registration plates, frequently originating from other countries. Criminal networks operating in this area maintain strong regional ties, particularly with actors in Türkiye, Greece and Hungary. There are also reports of state-embedded actors participating in smuggling operations, with recent cases involving police officers facilitating illicit crossings. Nevertheless, increased border enforcement and cooperation with FRONTEX have reduced the number of migrants who were smuggled through the country.

Extortion and protection racketeering are growing concerns in North Macedonia, involving criminal networks that occasionally have ties to political entities. These crimes often target individuals through blackmail, threats and intimidation. Some cases have been linked to arms trafficking, and instances of extortion-related violence have been reported. Although authorities have shown responsiveness in high-profile cases, the overall situation remains a concern for law enforcement due to its detrimental impact on the lives of victims and the broader community.

TRADE

Arms trafficking is a well-established yet secondary criminal market, often linked to drug trafficking, extortion and human smuggling. North Macedonia primarily functions as a transit country for weapons being transported through the Balkans to Western Europe. In recent years, this criminal market has expanded, partly due to increased demand from conflict zones. Converted firearms have also become a growing issue, with weapons being modified and sold on the black market. The high availability of firearms, both legally and illegally, contributes to violent crimes, including turf wars between rival criminal groups.

The trade in counterfeit goods in North Macedonia remains relatively small compared to other illicit markets. The primary counterfeit products include clothing, accessories, cosmetics and medicines, with most originating from China and Türkiye. While the country serves as both a transit and destination market, the impact on the legal trade remains moderate. Authorities have implemented measures to combat intellectual property violations; however, enforcement challenges persist, and the counterfeit trade is still socially tolerated to some extent.

The illicit trade in excise goods, particularly tobacco, continues to be a significant issue. North Macedonia serves as both a transit and destination country for smuggled cigarettes, with supply chains involving regional actors. Lower domestic tobacco prices contribute to ant trade operations – small-scale but continuous smuggling activities – while corruption at border points facilitates large-scale smuggling activities. Although authorities have introduced measures such as track-and-trace systems to monitor cigarette production and sales, enforcement remains inconsistent.

ENVIRONMENT

Illegal logging and timber smuggling are the most prevalent flora crimes, driven by financial gain and social acceptance in certain communities. Criminal networks, state-embedded actors and private-sector entities are involved in these illicit activities, often operating with limited oversight. Corruption plays a significant role, with reports indicating that bribes are paid to officials to facilitate illegal logging operations. The most affected regions include Skopje, Tetovo, Gostivar and Kumanovo, where organized networks reportedly use arson as a tactic to gain access to forests. Although law enforcement efforts have intensified in recent years, significant gaps remain in both enforcement and resource allocation.

Fauna crimes in North Macedonia include poaching and illegal fishing, although these markets are relatively smaller compared to other illicit activities. The country functions as both a transit and destination market for wildlife trafficking, with protected species such as the Balkan lynx and brown bear being targeted. The illegal wildlife trade is primarily motivated by financial gain, with some cases involving transnational networks. Despite recent conservation efforts, enforcement remains weak due to limited institutional capacity and regulatory ambiguities.

Non-renewable resource crimes, particularly illicit mineral extraction and fuel smuggling, involve criminal networks, foreign companies and state-embedded actors. The country is both an origin and a transit point for illegally extracted resources. Corruption in the mining sector enables unauthorized excavation projects, while foreign entities have been linked to controversial mining operations. Fuel smuggling is driven by price disparities between North Macedonia and neighbouring countries, with illicit supply chains extending into Albania and Serbia. Government efforts to regulate mining operations and enforce environmental protection measures have faced resistance from local communities and activists. Lastly, recent incidents highlight the existence of illegal gold smuggling in the country, albeit to a limited extent.

DRUGS

North Macedonia is predominantly a transit country for heroin, with trafficking routes linking Afghanistan to Western Europe through Türkiye and the Balkans. Although the domestic heroin market is relatively small, the country's strategic location positions it as an integral part of the regional supply chain. While authorities have intercepted heroin shipments, the volume of seizures has varied, indicating shifts in trafficking patterns and competition with other drug markets.

The cocaine trade is relatively consolidated, involving criminal networks and foreign actors with direct connections to South American suppliers. North Macedonia serves as both a transit and destination market, although consumption levels remain lower than in neighbouring countries. Recent law enforcement operations have dismantled significant smuggling networks; however, organized crime groups continue to exploit the country's strategic transit position. Turf wars between rival groups have led to violent incidents, particularly in Skopje and its surrounding areas.

Cannabis trafficking involves both legal and illegal cultivation, with criminal networks taking advantage of regulatory gaps in the medical cannabis industry. Although the government has issued cultivation licences, reports indicate that some licensed entities have engaged in illicit distribution of cannabis. Corruption has further complicated oversight efforts, and North Macedonia remains a key transit country for cannabis shipments from Albania to European markets.

Despite heightened enforcement actions, the cannabis market continues to grow, benefiting both domestic and foreign actors.

The synthetic drug trade in North Macedonia is linked to regional production hubs, with synthetic drugs being trafficked from Western Europe and Serbia. While local demand is relatively low, the country functions as a transit route for substances such as amphetamines and ecstasy. Recent law enforcement operations have uncovered clandestine laboratories, indicating an emerging domestic market for illicit production.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

In North Macedonia, cyber-dependent crimes have become increasingly prevalent, primarily conducted by organized criminal networks. These criminal networks engage in a variety of activities, including cyberattacks such as Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS), ransomware and the deployment of malicious software. This criminal market in North Macedonia is consolidated, involving both domestic criminal networks and foreign actors, particularly from countries like Russia and Iran. These networks exploit vulnerabilities in cybersecurity infrastructure, such as mail servers, to send phishing emails from compromised official government accounts to government employees and citizens.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes in North Macedonia encompass a broad spectrum of offences, including tax evasion schemes such as VAT fraud, financial fraud, embezzlement and misappropriation of funds. VAT fraud remains the primary issue, driven by fictitious invoices that lack genuine debt-creditor relationships between legal entities. Furthermore, tax evasion remains prevalent through the use of cash sales of traded goods that are not properly documented or deposited into corporate accounts. These crimes involve various actors, including organized criminal networks, individuals with ties to the state and private-sector entities, all of which contribute to systemic corruption and economic instability.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

Mafia-style groups in North Macedonia operate with hierarchical structures and maintain a presence in organized crime. Their primary activities include drug trafficking and various other illicit enterprises. These groups tend to avoid direct territorial control, opting instead for discreet operations that enable them to evade detection by law enforcement. Recent reports have indicated that increased violent incidents are linked to these groups, including targeted attacks in public spaces. Their operations are further facilitated by political connections that provide protection and enable them to exert influence over public processes.

This relationship contributes to systemic corruption, hindering effective efforts to combat organized crime.

North Macedonia is home to several organized crime networks, with law enforcement identifying multiple active groups. Many of these networks are involved in drug trafficking, with operations concentrated in urban centres such as Skopje, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Veles and Štip. These networks exhibit varying degrees of violence, with some groups engaged in high-profile attacks and intimidation tactics. Criminal networks in North Macedonia maintain extensive transnational connections, particularly with groups in Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, Kosovo and Hungary. Cocaine smuggling networks collaborate with criminal actors in Western Europe, North America and South America. While these groups engage in various forms of organized crime, drug trafficking remains their predominant activity. Some networks have gained notoriety for their influence and reach across the country. The use of violence as a means of intimidation is evident in their operations. In a notable case, acts of arson were employed as a form of coercion, demonstrating the level of threat posed by these networks.

Corruption within state institutions continues to be a major enabler of organized crime in North Macedonia. High-ranking officials have been implicated in protecting criminal actors, facilitating illicit activities and obstructing legal proceedings. State-embedded actors have engaged in procurement fraud, particularly in the acquisition of services and contracts, where public resources have been misused for personal or criminal gain. Such developments have fuelled public distrust in governance and the judiciary. A recent police operation uncovered corruption within customs, where officials accepted bribes to allow goods

to bypass duties, resulting in financial losses for the state. Despite enforcement actions, state-embedded actors that serve as agents in fostering corruption continue to pose a significant challenge, affecting key sectors and hindering efforts to combat organized crime effectively. North Macedonia's organized crime landscape is influenced by international criminal actors, although their influence is relatively moderate. Some foreign actors are involved in migrant smuggling operations, exploiting regional transit routes. Foreign criminal networks, particularly from Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Bulgaria, Greece and Türkiye, collaborate with local organized crime groups, facilitating smuggling operations, drug trafficking and other cross-border illicit activities. However, there is no evidence to suggest that foreign groups dominate any specific criminal market in North Macedonia. Their economic and financial influence remains limited, and there have been no documented attempts to interfere with political or democratic processes.

Private-sector actors in North Macedonia play a notable role in money laundering and financial crimes, particularly through real estate and construction projects. Corruption within the private sector enables criminal networks to exploit business opportunities and launder illicit proceeds. Recent trends suggest an increase in businesses associated with political elites that benefit from state contracts and financial mismanagement. The close relationships between business figures and political actors raise concerns about the misuse of public funds. However, there is currently no concrete evidence linking North Macedonian private-sector actors to international criminal enterprises, as their operations primarily remain domestic.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

North Macedonia has made efforts to strengthen its governance structures; however, political instability and corruption persist as ongoing challenges. The government has prioritized EU integration, resulting in legislative reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability. Nevertheless, political polarization and frequent changes in government have impeded the consistent implementation of anti-corruption measures. Although authorities have taken steps to combat organized crime, enforcement remains inconsistent and political interference continues to undermine governance efforts.

Government transparency in North Macedonia has declined in recent years, accompanied by a weakening of anti-corruption efforts. While some initiatives have

been introduced – such as improving access to public information and increasing oversight of public officials – enforcement remains inconsistent, and political influence over key institutions persists. Corruption is reportedly widespread, particularly in public procurement and law enforcement. Additionally, recent changes to sentencing laws have drawn criticism for potentially lowering penalties for convicted officials, reinforcing perceptions of impunity and eroding public trust in both governance and the judiciary. Regarding the right to information, North Macedonia's Right to Information law is broadly framed and includes a solid request procedure. However, the legislation still faces notable gaps. North Macedonia actively engages in international cooperation to combat organized crime. The country collaborates with Europol, INTERPOL and regional partners to tackle cross-border criminal activities.

Agreements with neighbouring countries facilitate intelligence sharing and enable joint operations aimed at addressing drug trafficking, human trafficking and financial crimes. Despite these initiatives, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of international cooperation, primarily due to bureaucratic delays and insufficient resources allocated to enforcement agencies.

In recent years, North Macedonia has implemented legal reforms to align its national policies with EU standards. Amendments to laws concerning money laundering, corruption and organized crime are designed to enhance law enforcement capabilities and improve judicial efficiency. For example, in late 2024, North Macedonia introduced a legal mechanism to confiscate property suspected of being illegally acquired without requiring a criminal conviction, underscoring the country's commitment to tackling unexplained wealth as part of its anti-corruption strategy. However, challenges in implementation remain, including limited institutional capacity and insufficient training for law enforcement officers and prosecutors.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system in North Macedonia faces significant challenges, including delays in case resolution, corruption and political influence. While judicial reforms have aimed to enhance independence and efficiency, the practical enforcement of these reforms remains weak. Cases involving organized crime and corruption often endure prolonged trials, with some high-profile cases dismissed due to procedural flaws. Public confidence in the judiciary remains low, as convictions for financial crimes and organized criminal activities are infrequent. In terms of detention, North Macedonia's prison system grapples with issues such as poor working conditions for staff, inadequate healthcare and harsh conditions in facilities like Idrizovo Prison. Despite some improvements, problems such as overcrowding and inconsistent management practices persist. Corruption remains an issue, despite ongoing efforts to combat it, and concerns persist regarding healthcare and drug treatment services.

Law enforcement agencies have made strides in combating organized crime, particularly in the areas of drug trafficking and human smuggling. Specialized police units have been established to address complex criminal networks, and cooperation between law enforcement and prosecutorial bodies has improved. However, resource constraints, a lack of specialized training and political interference continue to limit the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. Additionally, corruption within law enforcement agencies further complicates the fight against organized crime.

North Macedonia's strategic location positions it as a key transit hub for illicit activities such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling and human smuggling. Border security has been bolstered through cooperation with EU agencies – particularly

Frontex – and the adoption of advanced technology has enhanced monitoring capabilities, contributing to several successful operations in recent years. Nevertheless, infrastructural deficiencies and persistent corruption among border officials continue to enable illicit flows. While steps have been taken to hold corrupt officials accountable, including through disciplinary measures, challenges remain.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The country has made progress in aligning its anti-money laundering framework with international standards. Regulatory measures have been implemented to enhance financial transparency and prevent illicit financial flows. However, enforcement remains inconsistent, and financial institutions have faced criticism for inadequate reporting of suspicious transactions. A major challenge in identifying money laundering in North Macedonia is the prevalence of cash transactions, largely due to the country's reliance on the informal economy. Additionally, the influx of cryptocurrencies into the North Macedonian market poses another challenge. Citizens are increasingly trading on global exchanges, making it difficult for authorities to detect suspicious activities. Key sectors vulnerable to money laundering include construction, restaurants, bars, organized gambling and the energy market. While financial intelligence units have improved their capabilities, the prosecution of money laundering cases remains limited, undermining deterrence efforts.

The economic regulatory environment in North Macedonia presents both opportunities and challenges in combatting organized crime. Efforts to modernize economic policies and enhance business transparency have yielded mixed results. Corruption in the private sector, particularly in public procurement and infrastructure projects, remains a significant concern. Weak regulatory oversight enables illicit financial activities to persist, and efforts to strengthen financial compliance have encountered resistance from powerful business and political figures.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Support services for victims and witnesses of organized crime in North Macedonia are still underdeveloped. Although some government initiatives provide legal assistance and shelter services for trafficking victims, funding constraints and limited coordination among agencies impede their effectiveness. NGOs play a vital role in supporting victims, yet financial challenges often hinder their operations. Additionally, the lack of a comprehensive witness protection programme impedes the ability of victims and witnesses to testify against organized crime perpetrators freely.

Preventive measures against organized crime as well as corruption are established, but their implementation is inconsistent. Public awareness campaigns focused on corruption and crime prevention have been initiated;

however, their impact remains limited due to inadequate funding and a lack of sustained political commitment. Educational programs addressing organized crime and corruption are not systematically integrated into public institutions, which further reduces their effectiveness.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are vital for holding authorities accountable and providing support to victims of organized crime. However, their impact is limited by insufficient funding and a lack of transparency in collaboration with government institutions. Moreover, CSOs remain largely excluded from policymaking processes, restricting their ability to influence governance reforms. Press freedom has also declined slightly, with increasing media polarization eroding public trust. Journalists face growing legal and political pressure, including the use of strategic lawsuits against public participation to silence critical voices. A recently adopted law allowing national and local authorities to place advertisements in privately owned media outlets has raised concerns about potential political influence and favouritism. While some progress has been made, ongoing government influence over the media landscape and a lack of robust investigative journalism continue to undermine the independence and effectiveness of the press.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.