



Short Profile

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North Macedonia

Short Cultural Policy Profile

Author: Zlatko Teodosievski

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1. Fact and figures

Political system: Parliamentary democracy with a single-chamber parliament

Official language(s): The Macedonian language, written using its Cyrillic alphabet, is the official language on the whole territory of the Republic of Macedonia and in its international relations. Any other language spoken by at least 20 per cent of the citizens is also an official language, written using its alphabet.

	<i>Latest available data</i>	<i>Latest available data minus 5 years</i>
<i>Population on January 1st</i>	1,822,612 (2025)	2.068.808 (2020)
<i>GDP in million EUR</i>	108.717	121.043 (2023-Q4)
<i>GDP per capita in PPS Index (EU27_2020 = 100)</i>	42 (2024)	42
<i>General government expenditure (in % of GDP)</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Public cultural expenditure</i>	Not available	2.6% (2017)
<i>Public cultural expenditure as % of GDP</i>	Not available	2.9% (2019)
<i>Public cultural expenditure per Capita</i>	Not available	Not available
<i>Share of cultural employment of total employment</i>	Not available	3.3 (2020)

Sources: Population on January 1st, latest data available / <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data-browser/view/tps00001/default/table?lang=en>

GDP in million EUR, latest data available /

https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/namq_10_gdp/default/table?lang=en

GDP per capita in PPS Index (EU27_2020 = 100), latest data available /

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00114/default/table?lang=en>

General government expenditure (in % of GDP), latest data available /

<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00023/default/table?lang=en>

2. Cultural policy system

2.1 Objectives

The general objectives of cultural policy in North Macedonia are provided via the Constitution: civil rights and freedoms, creative autonomy, the obligation to support and develop culture, the right of the different ethnic or national groups to establish institutions for culture and art, the protection of the cultural and historical heritage, etc.

Main objectives, as proclaimed by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in its Mission and Vision are: promoting culture, especially through favorable conditions for realisation of the cultural values and artistic creation, equal conditions for expression, nurturing and affirmation of the cultural identity of the communities in the country, providing the right to free creativity, regardless of age, education, religious, ethnic or other affiliation, either professional or amateur, as well as the right to education in the field of culture etc. Publishing works in the field of artistic creation and protecting the tangible and spiritual heritage of all citizens and investing in the development of cultural infrastructure, supporting art and promoting the rich heritage of Macedonia both domestically and internationally are also among the main objectives. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism sees its role in high-quality, diverse, cohesive, creative culture, which creates socio-cultural and economic development both at national and local levels, dedicated to the development of artistic creation, production and distribution of cultural properties, cultural and creative industries and protection of cultural heritage, with values recognisable in international frameworks. Culture related to tourism enables economic prosperity and affirmation of all the riches and beauty of North Macedonia, thus strengthening the cultural integrity and its promotion on the global stage.

The main objectives haven't changed in recent years.

2.2 Main features

The policies of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (as proclaimed on its website) are based on the following fundamental principles:

- Creating a climate that encourages creative and economically viable realisation of cultural projects that are of priceless importance for the cultural identity of the Republic of North Macedonia and all its individuals in the multicultural society;
- Appropriate management and revitalisation of certain types of cultural heritage for socioeconomic development at the national and local levels;
- Affirmation of national culture in the countries of the region, the EU, and the world;
- Monitoring, analysis, and creation of tourism policies;
- Compliance with applicable legal regulations and requirements;
- Quality, timely, and responsible services to users of the Ministry of Culture

- and Tourism's services, including individuals, legal entities, and institutions;
- Continuous education of staff, strengthening employee responsibility, and developing partnerships with all interested parties;
- Providing a healthy working environment and training to raise employees' awareness of environmental protection.

The Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism for 2026-2028 underlines several strategic priorities and goals, such as:

- Development of efficient cultural policies;
- Building a unitary, multicultural and tolerant society;
- Protection of cultural heritage;
- Improvement of international cultural cooperation;
- Strengthening of European integration;
- Promotion, support and development of tourism, etc.

One of the strategic goals is the preparation of the new National Strategy for cultural development 2026-2030 (the last was for 2018-2022), a National Strategy for Cultural Heritage and a National Strategy for the Development of Tourism.

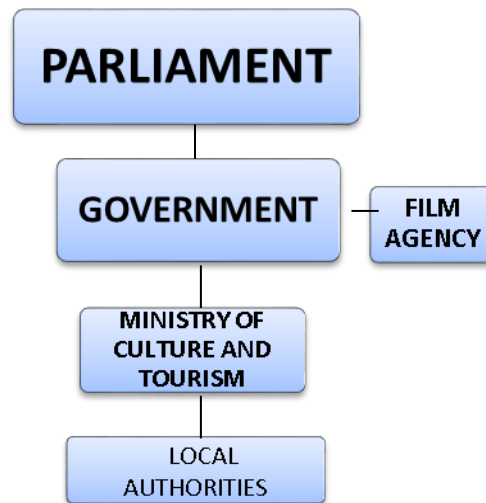
The Strategic Plan 2026-2028 also identifies 7 strategic programmes: 1. Art creativity and activities in the field of culture; 2. Stimulating creativity through new technological infrastructure conditions; 3. Protection of cultural heritage; 4. International cultural cooperation; 5. Integration in the EU; 6. Gender responsible financing; 7. Promotion and support of tourism.

The main national actors in cultural policy are the Government and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. Non-governmental organisations, cultural syndicates or any other "actors" have no real influence on cultural development or governmental policies.

There have been no positive changes of the centralised cultural policy system in recent years, nor in the (anachronistic) model of financing culture. Certain development has occurred by introducing the so-called "delegated budget" for 28 national institutions (see also 5.1).

It should also be mentioned that after seven years, there is a public announcement for financing cultural industries. In the past two years, financial support was given to 108 projects, and the process of mapping the creative industries has begun as a starting point for the first national strategy in this field.

2.3 Governance system: Organisational Organigram



2.4 Background

After the Second World War, the Republic of Macedonia became part of the Yugoslav Federation; therefore, its cultural policy was subject to the state ideology of building up a socialist culture. During that period (1945-1990), cultural policy went through three main development stages:

- a centralist and state-run period (1946 until the mid-1950s) and the establishment of the first Macedonian cultural institutions;
- a transitional period that lasted until 1974 and contained some elements of decentralisation; and
- from 1975 onwards, a phase of self-management began which defined national and municipal responsibilities for culture, including decision-making and funding.

Starting in 1945, Macedonia has been organised as a multicultural country. The Ministry of Culture financed institutions of the so-called nationalities (minorities), such as the Theatre of Nationalities (Turkish and Albanian Drama, established in 1947), as well as several cultural associations (amateur and professional), vocal and dance folk groups, etc. Daily newspapers and weekly magazines, monthly children's magazines and radio and TV programmes were available in the respective languages of different cultural communities. Writers, artists, actors, musicians etc., of all nationalities (Albanians, Turks, Serbs, Roma, etc.) were members of the same Macedonian professional associations.

After gaining independence in the 1990s, the cultural policy once again became politically and administratively centralised. The municipalities lost all the

competencies they had decades before in the field of culture. There was no explicit cultural policy document which outlined a specific strategy and goals of cultural development. The Constitution and the 1998 Law on Culture provided a certain global orientation toward culture, including provisions for civil rights and freedoms, minority rights, the obligation of the government to support and develop culture, etc. However, in practice, there was still a combination of old and new pragmatism and ad hoc temporary solutions.

The first strategic documents were: The National Programme 2004-2008, The National Strategy for Cultural Development 2013-2017 and The National Strategy for Cultural Development 2018-2022. However, very little of these documents was put into practice.

3. Current cultural affairs

3.1 Key developments

Actually, there are no major or key developments, except that the Ministry of Culture changed its name to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2024.

Most of the issues that were elaborated in the National Strategy for Cultural Development 2018-2022 (accessibility, inclusiveness, cultural democracy, new models of financing culture, decentralisation, new laws in the field of culture, transformation of the Ministry of Culture, etc.) are still the main cultural policy issues, although it is not publicly discussed. Since 2018, the term “reforms in culture” is barely in use in everyday communications of the public actors in the cultural field.

In December 2020, an online Peer Review of the cultural policy of North Macedonia was conducted by the Council of Europe expert group. The following main challenges were identified:

- the need to reform public administration to improve transparency on management and spending,
- to improve data collection on the culture and creative sectors,
- to digitize procedure,
- to operationalise policy vision,
- to reward merit,
- to value professional expertise over political appointments.

However, none of this Peer Review gained broader public or media attention: not a word or comment, from the Ministry or the Government, nor from the other cultural actors.

The only issue in the (very few) public debates among the syndicate of the cultural workers and the Ministry was – and still is – the interpretation of the Collective Agreement for Culture about the possible percentage of a salary increase. Even the Constitutional Court was involved in the case.

3.2 Key themes

None of the normal and relevant potential themes (cultural rights and ethics, role of artists and cultural professionals, digital policy and developments, cultural diversity etc.) – or very few of them – occupy the cultural or broader public attention. Nobody raises even the obvious questions, for example: what happened to the reforms in culture? Why does the country not have a new national strategy for cultural development?; what is the excuse for still having the anachronistic *Law on Culture* (1998)?; what happened with the draft of the *Law on Exercising the Public Interest in Culture* that was prepared in 2018? etc.

It is strange that nobody seems to be interested – or to care, for that matter – about

culture and social inclusion, societal impact of the arts, cultural sustainability, cultural and creative sectors/industries, arts and cultural education, cultural participation and consumption etc., or even about changing the very old-fashioned and centralised form of financing culture!

3.2 International Cultural Cooperation

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism (in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) is the main body responsible for international (bilateral and multilateral cultural) cooperation, which is realised through international conventions, other international agreements, bilateral agreements and programmes for cooperation. Bilateral cultural co-operation agreements include educational and scientific programmes as part of framework agreements that are signed for 1-3 years. Therefore, these agreements are the major instrument in international cooperation. Other instruments such as cooperation treaties, co-production agreements or state guarantees are also in use.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism (with UNESCO National Commission) and the Ministry of Foreign Relations, depending on the field of interest, are responsible for implementing and monitoring the conventions in the field of culture, such as the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The National Strategy for Cultural Development 2018-2022 demanded that international cultural cooperation should be the subject of a certain strategy and not by ad-hoc initiatives, but nothing has been done so far. Most of the international cooperation programmes are executed through the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Macedonian cultural centres abroad (Sofia, Tirana, Istanbul, Belgrade, Zagreb and New York).

4. Cultural Institutions

4.1 Overview

One of the recent good examples of cross-border cultural cooperation was the joint concert of three philharmonics (Skopje, Sofia, Thessaloniki) in Skopje (June 2026), after similar concerts in Sofia and Thessaloniki.

According to the government's Decision on the Network of National Institutions in the Field of Culture (2003), a division of jurisdiction was made and 63 of 115 cultural institutions gained the status of local institutions. It meant that local authorities were responsible for providing financing of basic costs (salaries, running costs etc.) of these institutions. However, it was never put into practice since the Ministry continued to finance these local institutions through a mechanism called monthly block-subsidies. This was justified due to the very unstable financial situation in most of the municipalities. This "system" is still in power.

This kind of financial dependence of the cultural institutions is one of the weakest points in the Macedonian cultural system. Combined with other modes of legal interventions (appointing directors of the national institutions, the governing boards, etc.), it gives the Ministry almost complete control over the cultural institutions, which usually means that "political" decision-making prevails over the real cultural interest and/or professional competence.

On the other hand, the Government itself in the past 15 years has established a number of new national cultural institutions without having any analysis and/or expert opinion (demanded by law) or real cultural necessity but to fulfill the aspirations and needs of the coalition partners in the government.

Today there are 72 national institutions (22 in the capital Skopje) and 25 local cultural institutions financed by the Ministry.

There has been no major restructuring in the cultural institutions in recent years due to budget cuts or other measures, except of a kind of systematic tacit trend to decrease the number of employees in the institutions. Although the Ministry announced that there have been 325 new employees in the past two years, the institutions say that there is an evident insufficiency of necessary experts.

There is no data available on the number of private cultural institutions.

4.2 Data on selected public and private cultural institutions

Table 1: Cultural institutions, by sector and domain

Domain	Cultural Institution (Subdomain)	Public Sector		Private Sector	
		Number (YEAR, latest data)	Number (YEAR, data minus 5 years)	Number (YEAR, latest data)	Number (YEAR, data minus 5 years)
Cultural Heritage	Cultural heritage sites (recognised)	1 336 (2024)	/	/	/
	Archaeological sites	4 700	4 260 (2003)	/	/
Museums	Museum institutions	33 (2024)	33 (2018)	1	1
Archives	Archive institutions	9	9 (2018)	/	/
Visual arts	Public art galleries / exhibition halls	Not available	69 (2017)	/	/
Performing arts	Scenic and stable spaces for theatre	/	/	/	/
	Concert houses	6	7 (2018)	/	/
	Theatre companies	21 (2024)	17 (2021)	/	/
	Dance and ballet companies	1	1 (2020)	/	/
	Symphonic orchestras	3	1 (2020)	/	/
Libraries	Libraries	160 (2022) (39 open for general public)	175 (2019)	/	/
Audiovisual	Cinemas	17 (2026)	15 (2019)	/	/
	Broadcasting organisations	Not available	107 (2019)	/	/
Interdisciplinary	Socio-cultural centers/cultural houses	15	15 (2021)	/	/

Sources: State Statistical Office (various years)

5. Cultural Funding

5.1 Overview

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism is responsible for distributing public funds for culture on the basis of an annual plan, which is developed by the Ministry at the end of the year for the following year. The allocation of the overall state budget to different sectors is prescribed by law (the annual Law on the National Budget).

The budget of the Ministry in 2025 was 4 837 749 000 MKD (79 307 360 EUR), and it was 2.51% higher than the budget in 2024 and 13.56% higher than in 2023. Culture's share of the state budget in 2025 was 1.35%.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism provides annual funding to the national cultural (and local) institutions (salaries, investments, running costs, insurance of equipment, buildings, exhibits, etc.) and for specific programmes/projects based on annual competition. The amount of money reserved for the salaries of those employed on a full-time basis in cultural institutions represented a share of 62% of the total budget for culture in 1992. This figure decreased to 59% in 1995, 39% in 2000, 35% in 2002 and 45.12% in 2005. In the 2025 budget, this share for salaries of the cultural institutions was 58.16%.

The cultural budget also finances projects of so-called national interest (through annual competition) and capital (infrastructural) investment projects. The funds allocated to financing projects of national interest in 2025 were 916 130 000 MKD (approximately 15 million EUR), and the funds for financing capital projects were 451 000 000 MKD (approximately 7.4 million EUR). In 2026, there is a considerable increase in the budget for projects of national interest to 1 billion 71 million MKD (17 557 377 EUR).

There are no major changes in cultural funding. A major reform was foreseen by the draft *Law on Exercising the Public Interest in Culture* prepared in 2018, but it was never put on the Parliamentary agenda. It foresaw additional reforms and a completely new approach to annual funding in the field of culture. A new development was made in 2025 by introducing the so-called “delegated budget” for 28 national institutions. It means that this budget is not allocated for precise projects but is a kind of yearly advance payment. It certainly guarantees more relaxed programming and financial autonomy for the institutions.

There is no data available on the local (municipal) expenditure on culture that complements state funding.

There are no non-public funding bodies for culture and creativity, and there are no studies or surveys regarding private funding for culture.

5.2 Public cultural expenditure by level of government

Table 2: Public cultural expenditure by level of government, in national currency and in EUR, 2025

Level of government	Total cultural expenditure, 2025			Total cultural expenditure, 2020		
	in MKD*	in EUR	%share of total	Total expenditure in national currency*	Total expenditure in EUR*	% share of total
State (central, federal)	4.837.749.000	79.3 mil.	1.35	3 568 853 000	58.5 mil.	1.43
Regional (provincial, Länder, etc.)	/	/	/	/	/	/
Local (municipal, incl. counties)	/	/	/	/	/	/
TOTAL						100%

Source: (Report of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2025)

Note: * At the date of expenditure

5.3. Public cultural expenditure per sector

Table 3: Public cultural expenditure*: by sector, in national currency and in EUR, 2025

Field / Domain	Total cultural expenditure, 2025			Total cultural expenditure, 2020		
	In MKD	In EUR	% share of total	In MKD	In EUR	% share of total
Cultural Heritage	44 512 591	729 714	0.92	105 110 58	1.7 mio.	3.15
Museums	59 294 596	972 042	1.22	113 764 402	1.8 mio.	3.41
Archives*	/	/	/	/	/	/
Visual Arts	33 702 800	552 504	0.69	27 436 105	449 772	0.82
Performing Arts	273 149 255	4.5 mil.	5.53	268 743 918	4.4 mil.	8.06
Audiovisual and Multimedia	/	/	/	/	/	/
Interdisciplinary, Socioculture, Cultural Rel. Abroad Administration Cultural Education	150 436 095	2.46 mil.	3.1	14 893 050	244 148	0.44
Not covered by the above domains	4 276 653 663	70 mil.	88.4	2 802 950 938	45 950 015	84.12
TOTAL	4 837 749 000	79.3 mil.	99.86	3 332 899 000	54 637 688	100%

Source: Report of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2025

* Archives are not funded from the Ministry's budget

6. Legislation on Culture

6.1 Overview national cultural legislation

The legal framework in the Republic of North Macedonia that regulates the cultural processes and work of its institutions consists in a set of laws, by-laws, strategies and yearly strategic operating plans of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The main law in the field of culture is still the Law on Culture (1998) which was meant to be a unified law for the cultural field. When it was passed in 1998, partial coordination was achieved between the existing constitutional system and the new social, political and economic conditions in the country. It also guaranteed the freedom of creative work and related rights; made possible the introduction of a civil concept of culture; an equal status for public and private entities that work in the field of culture; introduction of a decentralised system for culture; financing activities in the "national interest" through an open competition, etc. However, it is important to note that past experience with the Law on Culture revealed many weaknesses and pointed out the necessity for amendments. It became clear that a reevaluation of the Law on Culture was necessary. Subsequently, the Law on Culture was amended more than 20 times.

The National Strategy for Cultural Development 2018-2022 has stated that the Law on Culture has become old-fashioned, rigid and anachronistic. According to this Strategy, a new Law on exercising the public interest in culture was prepared (2019), but it never entered Parliamentary procedure.

A total of 16 laws are operational in the field of culture:

1. Law on Culture, with seven (7) active by-laws within this Law,
2. Law on Libraries, with five (5) active by-laws within this Law ,
3. Law on Museums, with eight (8) active by-laws within this Law,
4. Law on Audiovisual Goods, with six (6) active by-laws within this Law,
5. Law on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, with thirty (30) active by-laws,
6. Law on Copyright and Related Rights, with two (2) active by-laws
7. Law on Publishing, with five (5) active by-laws,
8. Law on Cinematography, with three (3) active by-laws within this Law,
9. Law on Memorials and Memorial Monuments, with two (2) active by-laws,
10. Law on the use of Macedonian Language, with seven(7) active by-laws,
11. Law on the proclamation of the Old Skopje Bazaar for cultural heritage of special importance,
12. Law on the proclamation of the Old City Core of Ohrid for cultural heritage of special importance,
13. Law on the management of the World Natural and Cultural Heritage Site of the Ohrid Region, with one active by-law within this Law: A plan for the management of the world natural and cultural heritage site of the Ohrid region with an action plan (2020-2029),

14. Law on the proclamation of the Monumental whole Krushevo for cultural heritage of special importance,
15. Law on the proclamation of the Old City Core of Kratovo for cultural heritage of special importance,
16. Law on the proclamation of the Old City Core of Bitola for cultural heritage of special importance,

A number of other general laws and regulations also influence culture and cultural policy: Labour Law, Tax and Custom Regulations, Law on NGO's and Foundations, Anti-trust Laws, Law on the Implementation of the State Budget, etc.

6.2 Overview international cultural legislation

The Republic of North Macedonia has ratified the following UN conventions which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture: Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict with Regulations for the Execution of the Convention; Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Properties; Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; Universal Copyright Convention, with Appendix Declaration relating to Articles XVII and Resolution concerning Article XI and Universal Copyright Convention as revised in Paris on July 24, 1971, with Appendix Declaration relating to Article XVII and the Resolution concerning Article XI; Convention for the Protection of Producers of Phonograms against Unauthorized Duplication of their Phonograms; Convention Establishing the World Intellectual Property Organization.

The Republic of North Macedonia has been a member of UNESCO since 28 June 1993. It ratified various conventions, including the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2007) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2006). Between 2016 and 2017, UNESCO's Participation Programme approved 5 projects that MK participated in, including 1 regional project. Lake Ohrid region is a World Heritage Site since 1979. Bitola became a UNESCO Creative City of Film in 2015 (part of UNESCO Creative Cities Network). The country is included in the UNESCO/EU action to Fight Illicit Trafficking of Cultural Property.