

# MACEDONIA (*Makedonija*)



## QUICK FACTS

**Population:** 2,096,015

**Area:** 25,713 square km (slightly larger than Vermont)

**Capital:** Skopje (pop. 503,000)

**Languages:** Macedonian (official) 66.5%, Albanian (official) 25.1%, Turkish 3.5%, Roma 1.9%

## EDUCATION

Primary and secondary education in Macedonia are mandatory. Primary education consists of eight years of school (ages 7-15). For their secondary education, students may choose to enroll in either a traditional four-year high school, or to enter a two to four-year vocational school. Macedonia employs a five-tier grading scale, with 5 the highest possible score, and 1 the lowest. Nearly all schools are public, and education is free. The literacy rate is 97.8%.



Macedonians in traditional clothing

Macedonia is a landlocked country in the Balkans, with Bulgaria to the east, Albania to the west, Greece to the south, and Serbia and Kosovo to the north. It is just north of the ancient Kingdom of Macedonia, and was conquered by Alexander the Great in the 4th century BCE. Slavic populations first entered the region in the 6th century CE and had close ties to the Bulgarian kings to the west. Macedonia was a battleground for empires, changing hands several times between the Byzantines, Bulgarians, and Serbians, until the Ottoman conquest in the late 14th century. Resistance to Ottoman rule renewed in the 19th century, with the formation of revolutionary groups such as the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization. After the Balkan Wars, in which the Ottomans and Bulgarians were expelled, Macedonia became part of Yugoslavia. After World War II, the Socialist Republic of Macedonia was formed, one of the eight Yugoslav Republics. Macedonia gained independence in 1991.

## RELIGION

Religious affiliation is closely associated with ethnicity in Macedonia, as most of the ethnic Macedonians are Eastern Orthodox Christians (64.8%), while the substantial Albanian and Turkish minorities are predominantly Muslim (33.3%). Orthodoxy has been practiced in Macedonia since the 9th Century CE, and was largely undisputed in the region until the arrival of Islam under Ottoman rule.

## ETHNICITY

Stirrings of a distinctive Macedonian national identity first arose in the late 19th century, and crystalized in the 1930s, in the face of the assimilationist policies of the Yugoslav government. Macedonia is home to a large Albanian minority population, which increased after hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians fled to Macedonia from Kosovo in 1999. About 64% of the country identifies as ethnically Macedonian, 25% Albanian, 4% Turkish, 3% Roma, 2% Serbian.

## FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS & CUSTOMS

Traditionally, marriages were arranged by parents in Macedonia, but today romantic love is the norm. However, individuals from differing religious faiths seldom marry. It is common for children to live with their parents until marriage. When entering a room in Macedonia, it is polite to shake hands with all of the occupants.



## FAMILY, RELATIONSHIPS, CUSTOMS (CONTINUED)

Superstition is still widely believed in Macedonia (especially in rural areas), and rituals to guard against the evil eye and to prevent dead relatives from becoming vampires are still sometimes practiced. Popular holidays include New Year's Day, Easter, International Labor Day (May 1), Saint Elijah's Day (Aug. 2), Macedonian Independence Day (Sept. 8, from Yugoslavia), and Christmas.

## CONTEMPORARY MACEDONIA

After gaining independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, Macedonia became a parliamentary republic. After an initial economic decline in the early 1990s, the Macedonian economy has steadily grown. Macedonia remained neutral in the Yugoslav Wars, but received 360,000 Albanian refugees, which had a destabilizing effect. An insurrection of ethnic Albanians arose in 2001, which was only resolved with the instillation of NATO peacekeeping forces. In the resulting Ohrid Agreement, the Macedonian government agreed to give greater political power and cultural recognition to its minority groups.

Macedonia has maintained good relations with all of its neighbors, with the exception of Greece, which claims that the state of Macedonia is attempting to co-opt the historical heritage of ancient Macedonia. Greek protests have prevented Macedonia from joining the EU or NATO, and forced Macedonia to go by the name "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" at the UN. The issue remains unresolved.



(Lake Ohrid)

## MACEDONIANS IN THE USA

The first major wave of Macedonians to emigrate to the United States came in the period of 1903-1906, when around 50,000 arrived to seek better working opportunities (although, according to legend, the first Macedonian to make it to the Americas was Dragan of Ohrid, who may have sailed with Columbus!). The second wave came in the 1960s, due to the Yugoslav government easing restrictions on emigration. The number of Macedonians in the US today is unclear (perhaps because during the first migrations, many Macedonians were registered as Bulgarian), with estimates ranging from 50,000 to 200,000. The largest Macedonian communities today are in New York, New Jersey, and the Midwest, especially Detroit.



*A yellow sun with eight rays of light on a red background. The sun represents liberty in Macedonia.*



(Macedonia Square, Skopje)

## NAMES

Macedonian names consist of a first name and a surname. It is common for surnames to end in -ski. Common male names include Petar, Stefan, and Filip. Typical female names include Elena, Irena, and Sara.

## FAMOUS MACEDONIANS

Macedonian-American Entrepreneur Mike Ilitch, Macedonian-American baseball player Kevin Kouzmanoff, singer Toše Proeski, model Katarina Ivanovska, basketball player Pero Antić

## MACEDONIAN WORDS

Hello .....Zdravo  
How are you? .....Kako si?  
Welcome!.....Dobredojdovte!  
My name is... ..... Moeto ime e...  
Excuse me ..... Izvini me  
Yes ..... Da  
No..... Ne  
I understand..... ..Razbiram  
I don't understand..... Jas ne gi razbiram  
Thank you!.....Ti blagodaram!  
Goodbye .....Zbogum  
Cheers! ..... Na zdravje!

## USEFUL LINKS

- [bbc.com/news/world-europe-17550407](http://bbc.com/news/world-europe-17550407)
- [cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html](http://cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mk.html)
- [everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Macedonia.html](http://everyculture.com/Ja-Ma/Macedonia.html)