The education system of

North Macedonia
described and compared with the Dutch system
This document contains information on the education system in North Macedonia. We explain the Dutch equivalent of the most common qualifications from North Macedonia for the purpose of admission to Dutch higher education.

Disclaimer
We assemble the information for these descriptions of education systems with the greatest care. However, we cannot be held responsible for the consequences of errors or incomplete information in this document.

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Background

- **Country:** Since February 2019, the country is called North Macedonia (Republic of North Macedonia, Република Северна Македонија). Before that it was Macedonia, but formally it was called the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), due to a dispute with Greece regarding the name.
- **History:** This Balkan country emerged in 1991, after the split of the former Yugoslavia.
- **Responsible for education:** The Ministry of Education and Science (Министерство за образование и наука/Ministria e Arsimit dhe Shkencës) is in charge of education. Separate legislation exists for all education types. The National 2016-2020 Education Development Programme contains action plans for making education more relevant to the labour market and society.
- **Member of the European Union:** North Macedonia has been a candidate for EU membership since 2005.
- **Bologna process:** In 2003, North Macedonia signed the Bologna Convention, marking the start of major education reforms. The country implemented the National 2005-2015 Programme, the bachelor’s-master’s structure, the diploma supplement and the ECTS. See also the page about North Macedonia on the EHEA website.
- **International treaties:** By 1997 North Macedonia had already signed the Lisbon Recognition Convention, which was ratified in 2002 and entered into force in 2003. Bilateral agreements exist with countries in the surrounding region: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia. Universities are obliged to conduct bilateral agreements with other (primarily European) universities.
- **Compulsory education:** Ages 6 to 17, 18 or 19 (depending on the type of education).
- **Language of instruction:** Macedonian, Albanian, Serbian or Turkish.
- **Academic year:** mid-September to mid-June.
Flow chart: education system North Macedonia

0  Duration of education

Basic education

Secondary and vocational education

Secondary general education

Diploma za položena državna matura (diploma of completed state matura)

Entrance examination (optional)

Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii (diploma of completed first cycle courses - integrated study programmes) (university education)

Diploma za završen vtor ciklus na studii - Magister (diploma of completed second cycle - Master) (university education)

Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii - Diplomirani studij (diploma of completed first cycle) (university education)

Diploma za položena učilišna matura (diploma of completed school matura) / Diploma za položen završen ispit (diploma of completed final exam)

Doktor na ... (Doctor of ...) + the name of the field (third cycle) (university education)
### Evaluation chart

The left-hand column in the table below lists the most common foreign qualifications. The other columns show the Dutch equivalent along with the comparable levels in the Dutch and European qualifications frameworks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foreign degree or qualification</th>
<th>Dutch equivalent and NLQF level</th>
<th>EQF level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за положен завршен испит/Diploma za položen završen ispit Diploma general and vocational secondary education (4 years)</td>
<td>HAVO diploma for the general education part</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за положена училишна мatura/Diploma za položena učilišna matura Diploma general secondary education (4 years)</td>
<td>HAVO diploma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за положена државна мatura/Diploma za položena državna matura Diploma general and vocational secondary education (4 years)</td>
<td>VWO diploma for the general education part</td>
<td>4+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за положена државна мatura/Diploma za položena državna matura Diploma general secondary education (4 years)</td>
<td>VWO diploma</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за завршен прв циклус на студии/Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii</td>
<td>HBO or WO bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за завршен втор циклус на студии – Магистар/Diploma za završen vtor ciklus na studii – Magister</td>
<td>HBO or WO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Диплома за завршен прв циклус на студии/Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii - integrani studii</td>
<td>WO master’s degree</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NB**
- The information provided in the table is a general recommendation from which no rights may be derived.
• NLQF = Dutch Qualifications Framework; EQF = European Qualifications Framework.
• The EQF/NLQF level is not so much a reflection of study load or content; rather, it is an indication of a person’s knowledge and skills after having completed a certain programme of study.
• Information about Dutch equivalent qualifications can be found on our website: [education and diplomas the Netherlands](#).
• The Cooperation Organisation for Vocational Education, Training and the Labour Market (SBB), evaluates foreign qualifications and vocational training at VMBO and MBO level. The evaluation may vary if SBB evaluates the diploma for admission to VET schools or the labour market in the Netherlands.
Primary and secondary education

Primary education
All primary schools in North Macedonia are public (free). Primary schools are supervised by municipal authorities, and are state-funded.

Children attend from the ages of 6-14/15. Primary schools are called основно училиште/основно училиште, and shkollë fillore in Albanian:
- Years 1-5: class teachers give instruction, but a subject teacher gives English.
- Years 6-9: class and subject teachers give instruction.
Note: In 2007 this 9-year curriculum replaced the 8-year curriculum.

Secondary education
Secondary education is compulsory, and as a rule is public and free. There are also 16 accredited private secondary schools.

North Macedonia has various types of secondary schools:
- schools that provide senior general secondary education > средно училиште – гимназија/sredno učilište – gimnazija (in Albanian: shkollë e mesme – gjimnaz), secondary school – grammar school;
- schools offering combined general and vocational education > средно стручно училиште/sredno stručno učilište (in Albanian: shkollë e mesme profesionale), secondary vocational education;
- performing arts colleges (for music and dance);
- schools offering special education.

General secondary education
Secondary general education at a grammar school (gimnazija) takes 4 years. The curriculum consists of:
- fixed units (80%);
- elective subjects (20%).

Students wanting to go on to higher education conclude their secondary schooling with a final exam: the state matura (државна матура/državna matura – matura shtetërore), organised by the National Examination Centre, usually in June.
- Content: Macedonian (or the local minority language), mathematics, a foreign language, an elective, a project.
- Diploma: Диплома за положена државна матура/Diploma za položena državna matura (Diploma of completed matura exam).
Note: Diploma names may also be in Albanian.

The state matura exam (final exam) has been in existence since the 2007-2008 academic year. This qualification grants students admission to higher education.
In terms of level, the general secondary education Diploma za položena državna matura is comparable to a VWO diploma.

Although uncommon, students who do not take the state matura exam complete the school matura exam (училишна матура/училишна matura), which is organised by the school itself.

The school matura exam covers fewer subjects:
- Content: Macedonian/local minority language, an elective, a project.
- Diploma: Диплома за положена училишна матура/Diploma za položena učilišna matura (Diploma of completed school matura exam).
  Note: This qualification does not grant students admission to higher education. However, they have completed the same programme as the students who complete the state matura exam.

In terms of level, the general secondary education Diploma za položena učilišna matura is comparable to a HAVO diploma.

General and vocational secondary education
Combined secondary and vocational secondary education takes 2, 3 or 4 years to complete:
- The 2-year programme is called ‘vocational training’ and gives the lowest vocational qualification.
- The 3-year programme trains students for professions in industry, trades or the service sector.
- The 4-year programme is for technical training. Almost half of the curriculum consists of general subjects.

Students of the 4-year programme take 1 of 2 exams:
- The state matura exam, which is the same as for secondary general education. Subjects: Macedonian (or the local minority language), mathematics, a foreign language, an elective and a project.
- The final exam (завршни испит/zvršni ispit) has the same structure as the school matura exam for secondary general education. Subjects: the student’s native language, an elective and a project.
- The state matura diploma: Диплома за положена државна матура/Diploma za položena državna matura (Diploma of completed state matura exam) grants access to higher education.
The school matura diploma: Диплома за положен завршен испит/Diploma za položen završen ispit (Diploma of completed final exam) grants access to the labour market.

In terms of level, the secondary and vocational education Diploma za položena državna matura is comparable to a VWO diploma for the general education part.

In terms of level, the 4-year secondary and vocational education Diploma za položen završen ispit is comparable to a HAVO diploma for the general education part.

Students who take the 3-year programme also complete a final exam (завршни испит/završni ispit). This means that several certificates can have završni ispit in the title, however students receive these after shorter study programmes. Art schools also follow the state/school matura system.
Admission to higher education

Although higher education is open to anyone who has completed the state matura exam, the number of available places is limited. Candidates are ranked according to their secondary school and state matura results, and possibly by means of an admission exam or aptitude test.

Higher education

North Macedonia started implementing the bachelor-master structure in 2002.

Types of institutions

There are various types of institutions:
- A universitet (university), public or private, is the most well-known and provides both academic and professional programmes at three levels: bachelor’s, master’s and PhD.
- Art academies and institutions for higher professional education only offer bachelor’s and master’s programmes.

Number of higher education institutions:
- 6 public
- 1 private-public (non-profit)
- 15 private

Higher professional education attracts 20% of students; the remainder study at universities. Around 60,000 students studied during the 2014-2015 academic year, only 12% of whom attended private institutions.

University education

Universities offer both academic and higher professional education. There are several programmes:
- First cycle
- Second cycle
- Integrated study programmes
- Third cycle

First cycle
- Duration: 3 or 4 years (180 or 240 ECTS), depending on the specialisation. Professional programmes often take 3 years, and academic programmes usually take 4 years. Note: Since 2019 all academic programmes last 4 years.
- Content: variable curriculum, sometimes includes a thesis.
- Diploma: Диплома за завршен прв циклус на студии/Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studiji (Diploma of completed first cycle). Diplomas in Albanian:
Diplomë per kryerjen e ciklit të parë të studimeve universitare (Diploma of completed first cycle).
Diplomë e ciklit të parë të studimeve universitare (Diploma of completed first cycle).
Note: Diplomas sometimes include the word ‘baccalaureus’ or ‘baccalaurea’ (feminine form).

In terms of level, the Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii is comparable to an HBO or WO bachelor’s degree, depending on the type of study programme.

Second cycle
- Duration: 1 or 2 years (60 or 120 ECTS), depending on the previous bachelor; combined, these programmes take 5 years (3+2 or 4+1).
- Content: variable curriculum, a thesis.
- Admission requirements: a completed bachelor’s programme; sometimes there are supplementary requirements, or students must complete a bridging programme.
- Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii – Magister (Certificate of completed second cycle – Master’s).

In terms of level, the Diploma za završen vtor ciklus na studii – Magister is comparable to a HBO or WO master’s degree, depending on the type of study programme.

Integrated study programmes
Some programmes combine a bachelor’s and master’s into one (integrated studies).
- Duration: 5, 5½ or 6 years (300, 330 or 360 ECTS), such as medicine (6 years), veterinary science (5½ years), dentistry, pharmacy and architecture (5 years).
- Content: variable curriculum, a thesis.
- Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii – integrirani studii (Diploma of completed first cycle – integrated study programmes).

In terms of level, a Diploma za završen prv ciklus na studii – integrirani studii is comparable to a WO master’s degree.
Third cycle
Only universities offer academic PhD programmes.
- Duration: 3 years, however in practice they take 3-5 years (180 ECTS).
- Content: lectures/tutorials, research project, international experience, publishing in international academic journals, writing and defending a dissertation.
- Admission requirements: master’s degree.
  - The diploma will state Доктор на …/Doktor na ...(Doctor of …) + the name of the field.

Pre-Bologna
Before the reforms, initial programmes took 4 years. Technical programmes took 5 years, and medicine 6 years. Graduates received the title of ‘Дипломиран/ diplomiran (graduated) + profession/specialisation’, e.g. ‘graduated economist’.

Diploma titles varied. Often the top of the diploma only said Диплома/Diploma or Универзитетска диплома/Univerzitetska diploma (University diploma), followed by variations on:
- Диплома за университетско образование/Diploma za univerzitetsko obrazovanie (Diploma of university education);
- Диплома за додипломски студии/Diploma za dodiplomski studii (Diploma of undergraduate studies);
- Диплома за завршено високо образование (VII-I степен)/Diploma za završeno visoko obrazovanje (VII-I stepen) (Diploma of completed higher education, level VII-I).

Note: These qualifications all count as bachelor’s degrees.

After these initial programmes, students could go on to complete master’s or specialist programmes:
- Master’s programme diploma: Магистер на …/Magister na ...(Master of …) + name of field.
- Specialist programme diploma: Специалист на…/Specialist na ...(Specialist in …) + name of field.

Higher professional education
Students can complete postgraduate higher professional education, a specialist programme.
- Duration: 1 or 2 years. 60 OR 120 ECTS.
- Content: specialist professional training, always includes a thesis.
- Objective: entry to the labour market.
  - Diploma: Диплома за заврšени специјалистички студии/Diploma za završeni specialistički studii (Diploma of completed specialist studies) confers the title ‘specialist in + name of field’.
Assessment systems

Primary and secondary education
Primary and secondary schools use a 1-5 grading system. Descriptions are only used during the first 3 years of (primary) school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 Одличен/Odličen</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Многу добар/Mnogu dobar</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Добар/Dobar</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Доволен/Dovolen</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Недоволен/Nedovolen</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Higher education
Higher education uses a 5-10 system. Descriptions can vary slightly; usually both 6 and 7 count as ‘satisfactory’, sometimes both 9 and 10 count as ‘excellent’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Одличен/Odličen</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Многу добар/Mnogu dobar</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Добар/Dobar</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Доволен/Dovolen</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Доволен/Dovolen</td>
<td>Satisfactory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Недоволен/Nedovolen</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All higher education institutions use the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS).
- 1 ECTS represents 30 hours of work (classes and preparation).
- Each year is made up of 60 credits.
North Macedonia started implementing the system in 2005.

More information on ECTS is available from the ECTS Users’ Guide by the European Commission.

Qualification frameworks

North Macedonia started developing a national qualification framework in 2012. It is structured according to the 8 levels of the European Qualifications Framework.

By 2017, referencing to the EQF had advanced but was not yet complete. The current status, the Law and all of the guiding principles can be found on the Macedonian Qualifications Framework (MQF) website.

Accreditation and quality assurance

The Higher Education Accreditation and Evaluation Board (HEAEB) is responsible for accreditation and quality assurance. North Macedonia only accredits at institutional level, and accreditations are valid for 5 years.

Checking documents

Secondary education

All files with a diploma from North Macedonia must consist of:

- a copy of the diploma and a sworn translation (unless the education institution has supplied its own English translation);
- the accompanying list of subjects and a sworn translation.

Secondary school diplomas often include a list of grades (Свједочанство/ Svjedočanstvo) from the final year or the final 4 years.

Higher education

Graduates of higher education programmes usually receive 2 documents:

- the diploma stating the bachelor’s or master’s degree;
- a diploma supplement.

Note: Older diplomas will not have a diploma supplement, however an overview of completed exams and results will be available.

Diploma supplement

Since 2009, institutions have been obliged to issue a Diploma Supplement to new students, which means that the supplement has been introduced gradually. It is usually in Macedonian (or a minority language) and in English.

More information about the Diploma Supplement (DS) is available on the Europass website.

Names on diplomas

Diplomas state the student’s given name and surname, with the father’s given name between parentheses or commas (without any special markings). The father’s name is not given in students’ passports.
Credential evaluation
Nuffic evaluates qualifications according to the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997). A practical implementation of these standards can be found in the European EAR manual.

Overview of higher education institutions

**ENIC-NARIC** offers an overview of recognised higher education institutions.

Public universities
The 4 largest public universities:
- St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
- St. Clement of Ohrid University of Bitola
- Tetova State University
- Goce Delčev University of Štip

Private institutions
Some of the more well-known accredited, private institutions:
- South East European University in Tetova
- FON University in Skopje
- European University of the Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje

**Shanghai Ranking** mentions 19 accredited institutions in North Macedonia.

Useful links

- **Ministry of Education and Science** (Republic of North Macedonia)
  The Ministry’s website offers general information, available only in Macedonian and Albanian, including all education legislation.
- **National Examination Centre**
  In principle this site can be used to verify all secondary school diplomas, however it is only available in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish. Another problem is the need to enter the father’s first name, which is certainly not always listed on the diploma. It is possible to verify the names of accredited secondary schools, however.
- **State Statistical Office** (Republic of North Macedonia)
  This is where the government collects statistical data on education; some of this information is available in English.
- **ENIC-NARIC** with extensive information about higher education in Northern Macedonia.
### Glossary

- **Bologna process**: The process that started after 29 European Ministers of Education signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999, with which they agreed, among other things, to create a European Area for Higher Education (EHEA): “An open space that allows students, graduates, and higher education staff to benefit from unhampered mobility and equitable access to high quality higher education”. This includes setting up a system based on 2 cycles, undergraduate and graduate, also known as the bachelor-master structure. In 2003 a [third cycle](#) was added for doctoral programmes. The EHEA currently has [48 members](#).

- **Duration**: The official length of the full-time programme (not part-time) without study delay.

- **Graduate programme**: A higher education programme after completion of a bachelor’s degree. See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: [graduate](#).

- **Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC)**: The Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, was drafted in 1997 by the Council of Europe and Unesco to facilitate and promote fair recognition among Parties of the Convention. Read more on the [website of the Council of Europe](#).

- **Undergraduate programme**: A programme for a bachelor’s degree. See also the description in the Nuffic Glossary: [undergraduate](#).