



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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02 March 2005

SCG43392.E

Serbia and Montenegro: Information on the access to health services, education, employment and social services by Roma (January 2003-February 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

Access to Health Services

Country Reports 2004 indicated that "[l]iving conditions for Roma in Serbia were, on the whole, extremely poor" (28 Feb. 2005, Sec. 2d). A recent survey on the situation of Roma found that in Serbia, 60 per cent of the Roma did not have access to essential drugs, as opposed to 22 percent for the majority population (UNDP 2005). In Montenegro, the corresponding figures were 64 per cent and 9 per cent (*ibid.*). According to the survey, the situation of Roma was worse in Kosovo, where 86 per cent of Roma did not have access to essential drugs, compared to 47 per cent for the non-Roma (*ibid.*).

Sources reported that Roma were facing discrimination in their access to healthcare (AI 29 April 2003; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; *National Post* 26 May 2003; *Le Courrier des Balkans* Dec. 2003). Amnesty International (AI) reported on the story of a Roma woman in Kosovo who was unable to get treatment for her daughter in a hospital because neither she nor her daughter could speak Albanian (29 April 2003). In the same report, AI indicated that "primary healthcare for minorities failed to meet even basic standards" (*ibid.*).

Access to Education

Several sources mentioned Roma children's limited access to education, especially beyond the primary school level (BBC 6 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 27 Jan. 2004; *Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; *Le Courrier des Balkans* 12 May 2004; Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004; UNICEF Jan. 2004). A recent UNDP survey on the situation of Roma found that only 19 per cent of Roma aged 12 and above had completed grade 5, as opposed to 80 per cent of the majority population in Serbia (2005). According to the UNDP, the situation was worse in Montenegro, where the completion rate was 7 per cent, compared to 83 per cent for the majority population (*ibid.*).

Several sources also reported on Roma's limited access to secondary, college and university education (BBC 21 Dec. 2004; Inter Press Service 26 Feb. 2003; Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004). A BBC article reported that "only three Roma women in the whole of Montenegro (had) university degrees" (6 Jan. 2005).

Sources mentioned that cultural and linguistic barriers limited Roma children's access to education (BBC 6 Jan. 2005; *ibid.* 19 Dec. 2004; HLC 10 Dec. 2003, Sec. 3.1; Inter Press Service 26 Feb. 2003; *Montreal Gazette* 24 May 2004). *Country Reports 2004* indicated that Roma children "were placed mistakenly in schools for children with emotional disabilities because Roma language and cultural norms made it difficult for them to succeed on standardized tests in Serbian" (28 Feb 2005; see also Inter Press Service 26 Feb. 2003).

Sources also mentioned that poor living conditions and the fact that many Roma children had to start working at an early age partly explained the high number of children who were not going to school (*Country Reports 2004* 28 Feb. 2005; Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia Oct. 2004; Transitions Online 19 Aug 2004; UNICEF Jan. 2004b). In a report on the education situation in Kosovo, UNICEF stressed the need for a "comprehensive plan" to address the specific needs of minority communities, including Roma (Jan. 2004a).

For further information on Roma access to education in Kosovo, please refer to SCG 43305.E of 23 February 2005.

Access to Employment

According to the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, "[u]nemployment is among the most

dramatic problems faced by the entire Roma population" (Oct. 2004).

The unemployment rate among the Roma in Serbia and Montenegro was estimated by various sources as 60 per cent (*Le Courrier des Balkans* 11 Feb. 2005), 80 per cent (HLC 10 Dec. 2003; Inter Press Service 26 Feb 2003), 90 per cent (*National Post* 26 May 2003) and 95 per cent (Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004). Sources indicated that Roma were mainly relying on seasonal or informal employment (AI 29 April 2003; Inter Press Service 26 Feb 2003; Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004) and often agreed to be paid less than the minimum wage (*Le Courrier des Balkans* 11 Feb. 2005).

The BBC quoted a Roma leader as saying that "[o]nly 5 percent of the Roma [had] permanent jobs and [that] their average salary [did] not exceed 150 Euros [a month]." (6 Jan 2005). A recent survey conducted by the UNDP found that 61 per cent of the Romani population in Serbia, and 40 per cent in Montenegro, lived below the poverty line of \$4.30 a day (2005).

Sources reported that, in addition to their limited education, Roma also faced societal discrimination as a barrier to employment (BBC 6 Jan. 2005; *Le Courrier des Balkans* 12 May 2004). In a report on the situation of Roma in Serbia, the Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) indicated that "Roma are discriminated against by both private employers and institutions financed from the state budget" (10 Dec. 2003).

Access to Social Services

Sources reported that Roma were facing discrimination in their access to social welfare (*Le Courrier des Balkans* 20 Feb 2004; HLC 10 Dec. 2003, 3.4).

Country Reports 2004 indicated that 40 per cent of the Romani population in Montenegro did not have access to public utilities (28 Feb. 2005). Many displaced Roma were denied access to basic services because they did not have identity documents (ibid.).

Initiatives Undertaken

Sources mentioned that a Secretariat for Roma National Strategy had been created within the Union Ministry for Human and Minority Rights (UNDP 2005), and that initiatives were undertaken to combat discrimination against Roma (AI 29 April 2003; Transitions Online 19 Aug. 2004). For example, *Country Reports 2004* mentioned that the UNHCR had put in place catch-up and head-start programs to encourage the enrolment in school of Romani children (28 Feb. 2005).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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