

Roma

See also [Serbia](#), [Macedonia](#) and [Greece](#).

Profile

The Roma communities are among the most politically, economically and socially neglected groups in the country. In addition to widespread societal discrimination, these groups generally suffered from high illiteracy, particularly among children; poor health conditions; lack of education; and marked economic disadvantages. The government has not implemented its national strategy for the improvement of living conditions of the Roma minority. There are no official figures for the size of the community, but estimates range from 80,000 to 150,000.

Historical context

According to some historical accounts, the Roma arrived in Albania around the fifteenth century – coming originally from India. During the Ottoman era, many Roma converted to Islam. With the establishment of an Albanian independent republic in 1912, Roma received better treatment than the [Egyptians](#) – but still faced discrimination and deeper poverty than the rest of the population.

During the Second World War, Albania was under Italian rule. This meant that, unlike countries under German occupation, the Albanian Roma were not deported to death camps. Under the Stalinist regime of Enver Hoxha, cultural differences were suppressed and religious practices banned. Roma employment was guaranteed. However, even under this policy of homogenization, the Roma were not treated equally and faced deep prejudice.

According to a 2003 World Bank report, the end of communism in Albania marked the beginning of the Roma's steep decline into extreme poverty. Low skills, the collapse of state-run industries and agricultural enterprises impacted harshly on Roma and [Egyptians](#). They have fewer opportunities for formal employment, and this has had consequences for health care and education, as families struggle to make ends meet. A survey of Albanian households in 2000 found that only 25 per cent of Roma had enough money to buy medicine.

Current issues

The Albanian government has signed up to the Decade of Roma Improvement – a World Bank-sponsored initiative which is set to run from 2005 to 2015. It has four priority areas: education, employment, health and housing, and two cross-cutting areas, gender and non-discrimination. At the national level, the Albanian government also adopted a national action plan for Roma in 2003. Among its aims are: the mitigation of poverty, the promotion of Roma involvement in public life, and support for the preservation of Roma identity.

To date, however, the record has not been encouraging. The European Commission in November 2006

noted that the disparity between the social and economic situation of Roma and that of the rest of the Albanian population was increasing, with 78 per cent of the Roma living in poverty and 39 per cent in extreme poverty. The situation of the Roma community in Tirana notably worsened in 2006 with some 40,000 Roma in need of social and economic support by November 2006. Only 12 per cent of the Roma are enrolled in secondary school, compared to a national average of 81 per cent. Social factors and the mobility of certain groups make lack of access to education and health services, especially vaccination, a particular problem. Weak or non-existent birth registration of Roma children in Albania, as well as lack of personal documents, makes them particularly vulnerable to human trafficking

Migration, usually to neighbouring Greece and Italy, has become a crucial source of income for many Roma families' survival. However, illegal migration has also facilitated human trafficking, and Roma women and children are among those most affected. International organizations are concerned about the rates of child trafficking from Albania, noting that a disproportionate number come from Roma and Egyptian communities. Albanian Roma who migrated to Greece in the hope of finding jobs and better lives say their living conditions were better in Albania. The income Roma earn as casual workers is insufficient, especially in the more expensive Greece. Roma women are rarely able to obtain work.

Set against this fairly bleak picture, there has been greater mobilization of Roma communities through the work of NGOs. Community-based projects to improve access to, among other things, better sanitation and schools have had some successes. However, discrimination is still widespread. In January 2005, the Tirana municipality demolished the homes of 18 Roma families comprising 150 persons, reportedly without warning, leaving them homeless in the middle of winter. The municipality demolished the homes, located in a settlement close to the Lana river, because they blocked its territory regulation plan and were illegal. A similar case resulted in the eviction of 51 Roma families in June 2004.

[top](#)