



# World Directory of Minorities

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## Roma

Roma live all across Turkey and, in terms of absolute numbers, are not concentrated in any particular region. Various groups are included under the general heading of Roma/Gypsy, such as ‘Roma’ who live predominantly in Eastern Thrace, ‘Teber/Abdal’ who live across Anatolia and ‘Posa’ who live in north-east Anatolia, Çankırı, Kastamonu and Sinop. While there are various Roma languages such as ‘Romani’ (an Indo-European language spoken by the Roma) and ‘Abdilti’ (an Altaic language spoken by the Teber), the mother tongue for the majority of Roma has become Turkish. A recent study shows that there are around 2 million Roma in Turkey. According to one researcher, who has identified 70 Roma neighbourhoods in Istanbul alone, the real number may be as high as 5 million, as most Roma live in overcrowded households and many do not have identity cards. The vast majority of Roma are Muslim (nearly half Sunni and half Alevi), while there are a small number of Rum Orthodox Roma, as well as a small but increasing number of Protestants who have converted from Islam in the last decade.

In 2005, a report from The International Romani Studies Network (IRSN), stated that Roma in Turkey faced significant discrimination, and the national media consistently portrayed them in ways that supported negative stereotypes. IRSN reported that Roma were more consistently undereducated and underemployed, suffered much higher levels of ill-health, higher incidences of discrimination based on ethnicity, and had poorer housing than any other group in the country. The report maintained that there were virtually no positive role models for Romani youth other than musicians and that Roma who achieved success generally felt the need to hide their ethnic identity.

Roma have suffered displacement and homelessness as a result of forced eviction and expropriation of property by the state. The Accessible Life Association (Ulasılabilir Yasam Derneği, UYD) In some areas, Roma houses have been targeted while homes belonging to Turkish neighbours remain untouched. Poverty and homelessness has dire implications for Roma children. In Küçükbakkalköy and Kağıthane, UYD reported that Roma children whose homes had been destroyed cannot attend school because the local authority refuses to issue certifications of residence required for enrolment.

Other abuses continue to occur and go unchecked by the state. In Afyon province in April 2006, a non Roma-mob attacked a Roma family following the alleged abuse of a non Roma woman by two Roma students. The mob burned down several Roma houses. The police made no arrests.

In 2007, abuses including forced evictions and the risk that Roma are not being correctly compensated and therefore marginalised, continue to be reported in the Turkish press. In March 2010 Turkey’s Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, initiated an historic meeting with Roma community groups in Istanbul in an attempt to address some of the huge problems facing the minority. 12,000 Roma were bused in from across the country to hear the Prime Minister’s address which included plans for improved Roma housing in 40 provinces. Community leaders praised the event as the first time a leader had ever spoken directly to the Roma community and the Council of Europe expressed their support for the Turkish government’s commitment to Roma people.

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