Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the Introduction section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into 2 parts: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note - that is information in the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw - by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- a person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- that the general humanitarian situation is so severe that there are substantial grounds for believing that there is a real risk of serious harm because conditions amount to inhuman or degrading treatment as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- that the security situation is such that there are substantial grounds for believing there is a real risk of serious harm because there exists a serious and individual threat to a civilian’s life or person by reason of indiscriminate violence in a situation of international or internal armed conflict as within paragraphs 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- a person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- a person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- a claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- if a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers must, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case’s specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the Common EU [European Union] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information (COI), April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation’s (ACCORD), Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013. Namely, taking into account the COI’s relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a terms of reference which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.
All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the ‘cut-off’ date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, and to provide a range of views and opinions which are compared and contrasted where possible, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a footnote. Full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the bibliography.

Feedback

Our goal is to provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date COI and clear guidance and welcome feedback on how to improve our products. If you would like to comment on this note, please email the Country Policy and Information Team.

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office’s COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

**Independent Advisory Group on Country Information**  
Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration  
5th Floor  
Globe House  
89 Eccleston Square  
London, SW1V 1PN  
Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI’s work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector’s pages of the [gov.uk website](http://www.gov.uk).
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1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the state and/or by non-state actors because the person is Roma or Balkan Egyptian.

1.2 Points to note

1.2.1 For the purposes of this CPIN, the terms ‘Egyptian’ and ‘Balkan Egyptian’ are used interchangeably.

1.2.2 Where a claim is refused, it must be considered for certification under section 94(3) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 as Albania is listed as a designated state. Such a claim must be certified under section 94(3) if you are satisfied it is clearly unfounded, in line with the Home Office Guidance on Certification of protection and human rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (clearly unfounded claims).

2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants).

2.1.2 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis).

Official – sensitive: Start of section

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2.2 Exclusion

2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.

2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection (which has a wider range of exclusions than refugee status).

2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33(2) of the Refugee Convention, Humanitarian Protection and instruction on Restricted Leave.

2.3 Convention reason(s)

2.3.1 Actual or imputed race.

2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of an actual or imputed Refugee Convention reason.

2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.
2.4 Risk

a. Introductory information

2.4.1 The census of 2011 indicated that the Roma population numbered 8,301 persons, or 0.3% of the population. However, according to the Roma Population and Housing Census carried out by Open Society Foundation in 2014, there were 18,276 Roma living in Albania. Judging by reports from unofficial sources, primarily Roma civil society or Roma leaders, the Roma Integration Regional Co-operation Council estimated the Roma population to be 115,000 persons (the date of this estimation was not clear). It should be noted that the national census of 2011 documented 7,443 'unregistered' persons in Albania (see Demography and Birth registration and civil registration).

2.4.2 The census of 2011 found that the Egyptian population was 3,368 persons, or 0.12% of the population. However, other studies and surveys have estimated the Egyptian population in Albania to be over 200,000 (see Demography).

2.4.3 Most national minorities in Albania speak the Albanian language fluently. The Egyptian community is Albanian-speaking and 62% of the Roma community reports Albanian to be their mother tongue. Both Roma and Egyptian communities follow Islam, which is the religion followed by 56.7% of the population as a whole (see Languages and Religions).

2.4.4 In 2021, the European Roma Rights Centre noted that 69% of Roma families live on the equivalent of £3.30 a day, with 23% living on £1.10 a day. The unemployment rate among Roma is 74%, while the national rate is 15%. The Roma Census 2014 found that 80% of Roma families do not have access to warm water, while 16% do not have access to water at all, and 11% do not have access to electricity. By comparison, the average Albanian lives on approximately £11.40 per day and 96.2% of the population has access to drinking water. Whilst the electricity supply is considered ‘uneven,’ it is also thought that everyone has access to it (see Overview).

b. State treatment

2.4.5 The government introduced a law on official minorities in 2017 which provided official minority status for 9 groups, including Roma and Balkan Egyptians. The legislation provided for minority language education and dual official language use for the local administrative units in which minorities traditionally reside, or in which a minority makes up 20% of the total population. However, the government has not yet passed all the regulations required for full implementation of the law (see Official minority status).

2.4.6 The Albanian Constitution provides for ‘full equality’ for persons of national minorities and discrimination based on race is against the law. The Constitution provides for freedom of religion. The law guarantees political, civil and social rights for all citizens (see Official minority status, Discrimination, Religion, Political rights).

2.4.7 Due to a lack of education, a lack of permanent housing and a lack of parental documentation, people from Roma and Egyptian communities are
less likely to register the births of children, and this consequently makes it
deeper for the child to acquire identity documents and nationality as an adult,
leading to a risk of statelessness. Those born abroad are particularly likely to
face these difficulties. A mapping exercise carried out in 2017 identified
1,031 persons at risk of statelessness. The Roma and Egyptian communities
and those born abroad are those most likely to be unregistered and at risk of
statelessness. The size of these communities is therefore not clear.
However, in order to receive government services, citizens must complete
civil registration, which involves being able to produce papers to prove
property ownership or a rental agreement or utility bills. Again,
Roma/Egyptian communities are more likely to lack the documentation
required to complete registration, and are therefore not registered. The
authorities are aware of the difficulties faced by Roma/Egyptian communities
in accessing civil registration and have taken initiatives to address the
problem; this has resulted in notable progress in recent years. For example,
the 2020 Law on Nationality now includes provisions to ensure that a child
born in Albania, who would otherwise remain stateless, acquires Albanian
citizenship at birth. The legal framework now prevents statelessness in most
cases, although some gaps remain. In the year 2020, steps were taken to
assist Roma and Egyptians with obtaining documents for children and 19
new providers of free legal aid services were set up, with many beneficiaries
belonging to the Roma/Egyptian communities (see Birth registration and civil
registration).

2.4.8 Many Roma and Egyptians live in poor housing conditions. Roma and
Egyptian communities are benefitting from the quota provided for them under
the Law on Social Housing, although most of the secondary legislation
required to implement the law fully is yet to be adopted. According to
research carried out in 2016-2017, Roma/Egyptians who have not carried
out civil registration procedures may be outside the scope of government
projects to improve housing. However, projects were carried out in 2019 to
improve housing, water supply and sanitation and about 30% of the
beneficiaries were Roma and Egyptians. Rent subsidy programmes were
also implemented, with 19% of beneficiaries from Roma and Egyptian
communities. In the 5-year period from 2015 to 2020, 2,933 Roma and
Egyptian families were included in housing programmes and assistance was
provided to these communities to complete documentation on home
legalisation (see Social housing and Housing).

2.4.9 Under the 2016-2020 National Action Plan for the integration of Roma and
Egyptians, the authorities worked to improve school attendance for these
communities. In 2015, there were 4,437 children of Roma/Egyptian
background in compulsory, pre-university education; by 2018, the figure was
13,310; and by 2020, there were 14,515 pupils in compulsory, pre-university
education, plus 2,996 in kindergarten. By the end of 2020, 70% more
Roma/Egyptian children had completed all levels of education, and 100%
more had completed pre-school education compared to 2016. In 2020, there
were twice as many educational institutions attended by Roma/Egyptian
children compared with 2016. Roma children are provided with free
textbooks and transport to remote schools (see Education, training and
employment and Overview).
2.4.10 The Roma/Egyptian community has very low employment levels due to a lack of education and discrimination. Many do not benefit from vocational training and employment programmes as they may not be registered as unemployed jobseekers, or they may not meet the minimum educational requirements. However, by the end of 2020, 130% more Roma/Egyptian men and women who had participated in active employment programmes had found employment than in 2016 (see Education, training and employment).

2.4.11 The Roma/Egyptian population are at a disadvantage in terms of accessing healthcare, and may experience discrimination on the part of healthcare providers. They are less likely to have health insurance cards, particularly if they are unemployed, working without a contract or undocumented. However, by the end of 2020, all members of these communities had access to basic health services. In addition, health centres have been established in Roma neighbourhoods or are easily accessible, and in the year 2020, over 4,400 visits had been made by doctors to informal Roma settlements, over 10,200 Roma/Egyptian mothers had received childcare packages, and over 30,500 persons from these communities had received information on healthcare (see Healthcare).

2.4.12 Those in the Roma community were particularly impacted by the coronavirus pandemic as many are informal workers, and have been prevented from carrying out their usual work by curfews. Following protests by the Roma in April 2020, the government consulted with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and Romani civil society organisations. This resulted in the inclusion of informal workers in the emergency payments policy, with informal self-employed workers invited to register as unemployed jobseekers so that they could receive those payments (see Impact of Coronavirus).

2.4.13 Steps have been taken to integrate persons from the Roma/Egyptian communities into wider society; for example, 13 municipalities reported having Roma/Egyptian representatives on their municipal council and over 4,500 person from these communities used the 62 community centres which have been established. Over 4,500 Roma/Egyptian families had been included in reintegration programmes by the end of 2020 (see Community integration).

2.4.14 When the parliamentary elections took place in April 2021, campaigning in minority languages was allowed and the Central Election Commission provided information in the languages of national minorities. Most national minorities reported a good relationship with the authorities and found that their communities did not face discrimination when participating in the elections. However, many Roma reported that they did not have ID cards or a permanent address, which made it difficult for them to participate (see Political rights and Birth registration and civil registration).

2.4.15 Hate speech against those of Roma ethnicity tends to be seen as acceptable and those in authority are unlikely to challenge it. In April 2020, 13 human rights organisations signed a declaration calling on Prime Minister Edi Rama to stop using ‘denigrating and discriminatory language’ against the Roma community; this followed a Twitter post by Rama concerning protests made
by Roma/Egyptians about the coronavirus curfews which were preventing them from carrying out their usual informal work (see Hate speech).

2.4.16 The government’s National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians, 2016-2020, was concluded and a National Action Plan for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Egyptians, 2021-2025, is now in place; the measures it contains are in line with the 10-year Strategy (2020-2030) of the European Union for the integration of the Roma community. The Action Plan addresses justice, housing, healthcare, education, employment, social protection programmes and hate speech against Roma/Egyptians. In addition, the Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process (Poznan Declaration) was endorsed by the government in July 2019; this Declaration includes targets to be achieved for improving education, employment, housing and health for Roma. Furthermore, the Roma Integration 2020 project, which is implemented by the Roma Integration Regional Co-operation Council with the support of the EU and Open Society Foundation, aims to reduce the socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma populations in the Western Balkans, including Albania (see Action plans).

2.4.17 Even when taken cumulatively, discrimination faced by the Roma and Egyptian communities does not in general, by its nature or repetition, amount to a well-founded fear of persecution and/or serious harm. However, decision makers must consider whether there are factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that the levels of discrimination they may face would amount to a well-founded fear of persecution and/or serious harm.

2.4.18 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

c. Societal treatment

2.4.19 There were allegations of discrimination against those from Roma and Balkan-Egyptian communities in the areas of housing, employment, healthcare and education. Some schools refused to accept children of Roma/Egyptian background, or marginalised or segregated them in the school system. There is a tendency to view hate speech concerning the Roma/Egyptian communities as acceptable (see Overview, Education, training and employment and Hate speech).

2.4.20 When the parliamentary elections took place in April 2021, several parties had persons from national minorities among their members and candidates (see Political rights and Birth registration and civil registration).

2.4.21 It is unlikely that the level of societal discrimination would be sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, as to amount to serious harm or persecution, but each case must be assessed on its individual facts, with the onus on the person to demonstrate that they are at risk.

2.4.22 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.
2.5 Protection

2.5.1 The Albanian Constitution provides for ‘full equality’ for persons of national minorities and discrimination based on race is against the law. Legislation passed in 2017 recognised Roma and Balkan Egyptians as 2 of the 9 minority groups given official minority status. The government has not yet passed all the regulations required for full implementation of the law (see Legislation and policy).

2.5.2 There have been reports that the police use violence or heavy-handedness when dealing with informal workers, such as Roma/Egyptians, who collect items which can be recycled and sold or who sell fruit and vegetables at street stalls. In March 2020, an individual from the Egyptian community, Agron Cura, was stopped by the police, who ‘violently seized’ his bike and other items when Cura had been collecting items to sell. Cura approached the Commissioner Against Discrimination with the assistance of a pro bono lawyer from the NGO ‘Social Justice.’ They filed a complaint against the police, and the Commissioner found that there had been ‘outrageous discrimination’ against Cura on the basis of his protected characteristics. This led to a court case, in which discrimination was acknowledged and compensation was ordered for Cura (see Police).

2.5.3 Although the police may discriminate in their dealings with Roma/Egyptians, there are avenues of redress, as mentioned above, which are able to provide effective remedies. Avenues of redress include the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination, which is the independent equality body in Albania, and the People’s Advocate (Ombudsman), who assists individuals with unlawful/incorrect acts by public administration bodies. These two bodies have a very effective working relationship. There is also a system of legal aid (see Avenues of redress).

2.5.4 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, they are unlikely to be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.

2.5.5 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including ‘rogue’ state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection. Decision makers need to consider each case on its facts, taking full account of the particular circumstances and profile of the person and any past persecution. Effective state protection is likely to be available, in general. The onus is on the person to demonstrate why they would not be able to seek and obtain state protection.

2.5.6 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

2.6 Internal relocation

2.6.1 The case of EH (blood feuds) Albania CG [2012] UKUT 00348 (IAC) also states:

‘The constitution and law provide for freedom of movement within the country, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation and the government generally respected these rights in practice. Internal migrants must transfer their civil registration to their new community of residence to receive
government services and must prove they are legally domiciled through property ownership, a property rental agreement, or utility bills. Many persons could not provide this proof and therefore lacked access to essential services. Other citizens lacked formal registration in the communities in which they resided, particularly Roma and Balkan Egyptians. The law did not prohibit their registration but it was often difficult in practice to complete.’ (paragraph 2.4.4).

2.6.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution or serious harm from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.

2.6.3 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, they are likely, in general, to be able to relocate to escape that risk. Decision makers must give careful consideration to the reasonableness of internal relocation, taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person. While the onus is on the person to establish a well-founded fear of persecution or real risk of serious harm, decision makers must demonstrate that internal relocation is reasonable, having regard to the individual circumstances of the person.

2.6.4 There are communities of Roma and Balkan Egyptians throughout Albania. It should be noted that each person is required to register in their community of residence, and this may be more challenging for a person from one of these communities due to a possible lack of documentation. If a person is unable to register, they will face difficulties in accessing public services. However, steps are being taken by the state to address this issue and provide assistance with registration (see Demography and Birth registration and civil registration).

2.6.5 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status.

2.7 Certification

2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is likely to be certifiable as ‘clearly unfounded’ under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (clearly unfounded claims).
3. **Legislation and policy**

3.1 **Official minority status**


‘The government adopted legislation on official minorities in 2017 but has not passed all the regulations needed for its implementation. The law provides official minority status for nine national minorities without distinguishing between national and ethno-linguistic groups. The government defined Greeks, Macedonians, Aromanians (Vlachs), Roma, Balkan-Egyptians, Montenegrins, Bosnians, Serbs, and Bulgarians as national minorities. The legislation provides for minority language education and dual official language use for the local administrative units in which minorities traditionally reside or in which a minority makes up 20 percent of the total population.’

3.1.1 According to the Law on Protection of National Minorities, ‘A national minority is a group of Albanian citizens residing in the territory of the Republic of Albania, having early and lasting links with the Albanian state, display distinctive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or traditional characteristics and who are willing to express, preserved and developed together their distinctive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or traditional identity.’

3.1.2 In the Albania 2020 Report, dated October 2020, the European Commission noted:

‘Following the adoption of the framework Law on the Protection of National Minorities, Albania has adopted seven by-laws related to its implementation. Four of those were adopted in 2019. The remaining five by-laws, including on self-identification, use of minority languages and education in minority languages remain to be adopted. The government’s Action Plan on European Integration outlines the measures and next steps to be taken to adopt the remaining five by laws in 2020. Two of them are currently in public consultation. These steps are necessary to ensure implementation of all the principles and rights enshrined in the framework law, including the right to free self-identification, the use of minority languages, and the right to education in minority languages. The implementation of all the secondary legislation will require strengthening the capacity of the State Committee on National Minorities and providing sufficient financial resources. The Census Law covering the Population and Housing Census of 2020, should be adopted.’

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1 USSD, *HR Report 2020, Albania* (Section 6), 30 March 2021
2 *Law Nr. 96/2017 On the Protection of National Minorities...* (Article 3(1)), 2017
3 European Commission, *Albania 2020 Report* (p.36), 6 October 2020
3.3.3 Article 20 of the Constitution of Albania states:

1. Persons who belong to national minorities exercise the human rights and freedoms in full equality before the law.

2. They have the right freely to express, without prohibition or compulsion, their ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic belonging. They have the right to preserve and develop them, to study and to be taught in their mother tongue, and to unite in organizations and associations for the protection of their interests and identity.4

3.2 Discrimination

3.2.1 In their report, ‘Freedom in the World 2021,’ which covered the year 2020, Freedom House noted that, in Albania, ‘A 2010 law bars discrimination based on race and several other categories…’5

3.2.2 For further information, see the Constitution of Albania (Article 18)6.

3.3 Education and language

3.3.1 The United Nations Human Rights Council published a National Report of the Republic of Albania under the third cycle of the UN’s Universal Periodic Review in February 2019 (UN HRC Albania Report of February 2019); it stated:

‘In relation with the right of education, Persons belonging to a national minority shall enjoy the right to learn the language of the minority. These persons in the local self-governing units where they have been living traditionally, or in a substantial number, provided there are adequate requests, shall be provided the possibility to learn or to take lessons in the minority language, in conformity with the relevant legislation in the field of education. They have the right to set up and to manage private institutions in the educational system and vocational education institutions.

‘On September 2018 are adopted [sic] two project decisions on the field of education: Decision of the Council of Ministers (DCM) “On equipment of students with school texts, continuous professional development of teachers, and creation and functioning of school classes in the language of the national minorities”; DCM “On adequate measures for the promotion of culture, history, language and religion of national minorities in the educational and scientific activity of the institutions of higher education”.7

3.3.2 See Languages for information about the languages spoken in Albania.

4 Constitution of Albania, initially approved in 1998 and subsequently amended
5 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021, Albania (F4), 3 March 2021
6 Constitution of Albania, initially approved in 1998 and subsequently amended
7 UN HRC, Albania report (p.15), 22 February 2019
3.4 Religion

3.4.1 In their report, ‘Freedom in the World 2021,’ which covered the year 2020, Freedom House stated that ‘The constitution provides for freedom of religion, which is generally upheld in practice.’

3.4.2 For further information, see the Constitution of Albania (Articles 10, 18, 24).

3.5 Political rights

3.5.1 In their report ‘Freedom in the World 2021,’ which covered the year 2020, Freedom House noted that:

‘Albanian law guarantees political rights for citizens regardless of their ethnic, racial, lingual, or religious identity. Electoral officials provided voter education materials in minority languages for the 2017 parliamentary poll, though not for the June 2019 local elections. Roma and other marginalized people remain vulnerable to political exploitation. OSCE monitors noted that Romany individuals faced difficulty registering to vote in 2019 due to a lack of a permanent address.’

3.5.2 In a report on the parliamentary elections of 25 April 2021, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) stated:

‘The Constitution provides for full political, civil, and social rights for persons belonging to national minorities, in line with OSCE commitments. ... Several parties reported having persons belonging to national minorities among their members and candidates. Campaigning in national minority languages is permitted.

‘The CEC [Central Election Commission], with the support of international organizations, translated and published on its website information about voting procedures into the languages of all national minorities. In addition, the CEC website contains posters dealing with voter identification and specifying electoral crimes in the languages of national minorities. ... ODIHR LEOM [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Limited Election Observation Mission] interlocutors from the Roma community noted that for these elections, no community leaders were trained on voting procedures, information which they would then normally pass on. Roma NGOs reported to the ODIHR LEOM that many Roma have no ID cards thus limiting their ability to participate in elections.

‘In general, no direct discrimination was observed against national minorities in relation to the electoral process. Most national minority interlocutors reported a good relationship with the authorities and indicated that there was no discrimination faced by their communities in relation to participation in the elections.’

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8 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021, Albania (D2), 3 March 2021
9 Constitution of Albania, initially approved in 1998 and subsequently amended
10 Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2021, Albania (B4), 3 March 2021
11 OSCE, Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021: Preliminary statement (p.16), 26 April 2021
3.5.3 For further information about political rights, see the Constitution of Albania (Article 45). For further information about registration of Roma and Egyptians, see Birth registration and civil registration.

3.6 Social housing

3.6.1 In March 2020, the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) published a report covering 2019 which stated that, ‘In spite of changes in legislation, many Roma and Egyptian families, as well as other families in need, are those that do not have adequate housing and continue to not get effective benefits from social housing programs.’

3.6.2 In the Albania 2020 Report, published in October 2020, the European Commission stated, ‘Regarding the implementation of the Law on Social Housing, Roma and Egyptians are already benefitting from the 5% quota foreseen by the law. However, most of the secondary legislation still remains to be adopted. Out of the 40 sub-legal acts required to ensure full implementation of the law, 23 Council of Minister’s Decisions were developed, out of which nine were approved following a wide consultation process.’

3.6.3 See Housing for information about housing for the Roma and Egyptian population.

4. Population of Albania

4.1 Demography

4.1.1 The US Central Intelligence Agency’s (CIA’s) World Factbook stated that the population of Albania was 3,088,385 (estimate of July 2021).

4.1.2 The same source noted that the population was composed of the following ethnic groups: ‘Albanian 82.6%, Greek 0.9%, other 1% (including Vlach, Romani, Macedonian, Montenegrin, and Egyptian), unspecified 15.5% (2011 est. [estimate]).’

4.1.3 According to the census of 2011, the Roma population was 8,301 persons, or 0.3% of the population.

4.1.4 European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), a Roma-led law organisation with consultative status with the Council of Europe and the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (UN), published a submission for consideration by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) at their working group held in June 2021; the submission stated:

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12 Constitution of Albania, initially approved in 1998 and subsequently amended
13 AHC, Report on the Situation of Respect for Human Rights and Freedoms... (p.10), March 2020
14 European Commission, Albania 2020 Report (p.36), 6 October 2020
15 US CIA, The World Factbook, Albania (People and Society), last updated: 22 September 2021
16 US CIA, The World Factbook, Albania (People and Society), last updated: 22 September 2021
17 Instat, Main results of population and housing census 2011
According to the Open Society Foundation in Albania, 18,276 Roma were living in Albania, including 6,779 children below the age of 17; concentrated mainly in homogenous settlements across 12 regions of Albania and 61 new municipalities. Roma inhabit urban areas at a higher rate (68%) compared to the general population (53.5%) and are mostly concentrated in or around Tirana and Korca.\(^\text{18}\)

4.1.5 The Roma Integration Regional Cooperation Council (Roma Integration RCC) stated that in 2011, the best official estimate of the Roma population was 11,669 people, or 0.42% of the population. However, the ‘average’ estimate is 115,000 people. The source explained that:

‘The average estimation on the number of Roma comes from unofficial sources, mainly claims by Roma civil society or Roma leaders collected by the Council of Europe as minimum and maximum estimates from which the median is derived. By these average estimations, the Roma community in the region is 4 times bigger than officially reported. Only in Albania the claims are that the Roma community is 10 times bigger than the official numbers provided…’\(^\text{19}\)

4.1.6 The report commissioned by the UN Development Programme on the Roma and Egyptians in Albania, based on the census of 2011, and published in April 2015, noted:

‘The Roma population tends to live in specific areas in Albania. Predominantly in Urban areas (76.5%, to be compared with 53.5% for the general population in Albania), Roma families are highly concentrated. Simple figures reflect the level of concentration: on the 11,698 enumeration areas (EA) in the census, only 348 count at least one Roma person. Moreover, the 25 most concentrated enumeration areas group 50% of the Roma population. In these EA, the Roma population make up at least 32% of the total population,… In some EA in Shkoder, Levan, Tirana or Fier, to name examples, Roma people make more than 60% of the population.’\(^\text{20}\)

4.1.7 According to the census of 2011, the Egyptian population numbered 3,368 persons, or 0.12% of the population\(^\text{21}\). However, other studies and surveys have estimated the Egyptian population in Albania to be over 200,000\(^\text{22}\). On 12 March 2018, Daily News Egypt published an article in which Ina Veizaj, a Balkan Egyptian in Albania, claimed, “We are spread all over Albania, even in the deepest villages,” …’\(^\text{23}\)

4.2 Languages

4.2.1 The United States Central Intelligence Agency (US CIA) World Factbook noted the languages spoken: ‘Albanian 98.8% (official - derived from Tosk dialect), Greek 0.5%, other 0.6% (including Macedonian, Romani, Vlach,

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\(^{18}\) ERRC, Submission for the working group of the UN CRC, June 2021 (p.3), no date
\(^{19}\) Roma Integration RCC, Roma in the Region, no date
\(^{20}\) UNDP/Instat, Census 2011 Profile of Roma and Egyptians (p.13), April 2015
\(^{21}\) Instat, Main results of population and housing census 2011
\(^{22}\) ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination..., February 2018
\(^{23}\) Daily News Egypt, Balkan Egyptians to homeland: We belong to you, 12 March 2018
Turkish, Italian, and Serbo-Croatian), unspecified 0.1% (2011 est. estimate)\textsuperscript{24}

4.2.2 The OSCE published a preliminary statement on the parliamentary elections of 25 April 2021 in which it noted, ‘All ODIHR LEOM [Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights Limited Election Observation Mission] interlocutors indicated that most national minorities in Albania speak and understand Albanian fluently.’\textsuperscript{25}

4.2.3 A report commissioned by the UN Development Programme on the Roma and Egyptians in Albania, based on the census of 2011, and published in April 2015, noted:

‘It is well known that the Egyptians speak Albanian and that there [sic] distinctiveness does not lie in their language. A small number (1.5%) of the self-identified Egyptians declare another language than Albanian. ... The majority of the self-identified Roma are surprisingly reporting Albanian as mother tongue (62%) and only 36% of them have spoken a Romani language at home when they were a child.’\textsuperscript{26}

4.2.4 See Education and language for information about education in minority languages.

4.3 Religions

4.3.1 The US CIA World Factbook noted the religions followed: ‘Muslim 56.7%, Roman Catholic 10%, Orthodox 6.8%, atheist 2.5%, Bektashi (a Sufi order) 2.1%, other 5.7%, unspecified 16.2% (2011 est. estimate)’

‘note: all mosques and churches were closed in 1967 and religious observances prohibited; in November 1990, Albania began allowing private religious practice’\textsuperscript{27}

4.3.2 The report commissioned by the UN Development Programme on the Roma and Egyptians in Albania, based on the census of 2011, and published in April 2015, noted, ‘Unlike Roma populations in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe who are Christians, Roma and Egyptians in Albania have converted to Islam during the Ottoman Empire and have kept this affiliation since then.’\textsuperscript{28}

5. Roma and Balkan Egyptians

5.1 History

5.1.1 On 12 March 2018, Daily News Egypt published an article which suggested the background of people of Egyptian descent in Albania:

\textsuperscript{24} US CIA, The World Factbook, Albania (People and Society), last updated: 22 September 2021
\textsuperscript{25} OSCE, Parliamentary Elections, 25 April 2021: Preliminary statement (p.16), 26 April 2021
\textsuperscript{26} UNDP/Instat, Census 2011 Profile of Roma and Egyptians (p. 27), April 2015
\textsuperscript{27} US CIA, The World Factbook, Albania (People and Society), last updated: 22 September 2021
\textsuperscript{28} UNDP/Instat, Census 2011 Profile of Roma and Egyptians (p.28), April 2015
‘About 3,000 years ago, Egyptians travelled to the Balkan Peninsula…

‘Descendants of some of those Egyptian migrants are still there, distributed across the states of the Balkan Peninsula… They are dispersed across Serbia, Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro. They stopped using their ancestral language when they adopted the languages of the majority populations of their local regions. They now speak different tongues: Albanian, Greek, Serbian, Turkish, and Macedonian…’

5.1.2 Minority Rights Group International (MRGI) noted that ‘Many Egyptians consider themselves to be a national minority distinct from both the Roma community and the Albanian community, defining themselves by their ethnic background, their stated historical roots as descendants of persons from Egypt, their traditions and their cultural heritage.’

5.1.3 In information updated in June 2015, MRGI referred to the history of the Roma in Albania, stating, ‘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.’

5.1.4 MRGI further noted, ‘According to a 2003 World Bank report, the end of communism [in 1992] 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.’

5.2 Overview

5.2.1 The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Institute on Statelessness and Inclusion (ISI) and European Network on Statelessness (ENS) worked on a research and advocacy project, in collaboration with partner organisations, which resulted in a report entitled ‘Roma Belong; Statelessness, discrimination and marginalisation of Roma in Albania,’ published in February 2018 (ERRC ISI ENS Report 2018). The report is based on research carried out in 2016-2017. This report stated: ‘In principle, Roma should have equal rights to the Albanian social security system, being eligible to receive social housing, economic assistance, free education, employment, vocational training, healthcare, documentation and any entitlements that the Albanian social security system provides to its citizens. In reality however, they are largely excluded from such protections, and do not enjoy equality in real terms.’

5.2.2 The USSD HR Report 2020 stated: ‘There were allegations of discrimination against members of the Romani and Balkan-Egyptian communities, including in housing, employment, health care, and education. Some schools resisted accepting Romani and Balkan-Egyptian students, particularly if the...

29 Daily News Egypt, Balkan Egyptians to homeland: We belong to you, 12 March 2018
30 MRGI, Albania, no date
31 MRGI, Albania, updated June 2015
32 MRGI, Albania, updated June 2015
33 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination... (p.15), February 2018
students appeared to be poor. Many schools that accepted Romani students marginalized them in the classroom, sometimes by physically setting them apart from other students.\textsuperscript{34}

5.2.3 In their report ‘Freedom in the World 2021,’ which covered the year 2020, Freedom House noted that ‘Roma and other marginalized people remain vulnerable to political exploitation. OSCE monitors noted that Romany individuals faced difficulty registering to vote in 2019 due to a lack of a permanent address.’\textsuperscript{35} In the same report, Freedom House noted, ‘Roma face significant discrimination in education, health care, employment, and housing.’\textsuperscript{36}

5.2.1 The ERC ISI ENS Report 2018, which was based on research carried out in 2016 to 2017, stated that 15% of Roma lived in shacks, tents or other non-brick housing units; 60% did not have running water within their homes; and 12% lacked toilet facilities.\textsuperscript{37} The ERC submission for the working group of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child of June 2021 noted, ‘According to the data, at least 69% of Roma families live on the equivalent of $4.50 (£3.30) a day, while 23% of them live on as little as $1.50 USD (£1.10) a day. The unemployment rate among Roma is 74% compared to the national rate of 15%. The Roma Census 2014 also found that 80% of Roma families don’t have access to warm water, while 16% of them do not have access to water at all; and 11% don’t have access to electricity.’\textsuperscript{38}

5.2.2 For the purposes of comparison:

- the average gross monthly wage in the first quarter of 2021 was 56,019 ALL\textsuperscript{39} (£393) or 48,737 ALL net (£342) (income tax is 13%\textsuperscript{40}). This equates to an average amount of approximately £11.40 per day.
- 96.2% of the population has access to an ‘improved’ drinking water source\textsuperscript{41}
- CIA World Factbook stated that ‘Albania’s electricity supply is uneven’ but later added that, as of 2020, 100% of the population have access to electricity\textsuperscript{42}

5.3 Birth registration and civil registration

5.3.1 In a report entitled, ‘Mapping of the population at risk of statelessness in Albania,’ published in May 2018 (UNHCR Report 2018), UNHCR stated, ‘According to the most recent population data gathered through the 2011 national census, and compiled by the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), there were 7,443 “unregistered” persons in Albania. Of this total, 3,874 were men and 3,569 were women. Statelessness can lead to the

\textsuperscript{34} USSD, \textit{HR Report 2020, Albania} (Section 6), 30 March 2021
\textsuperscript{35} Freedom House, \textit{Freedom in the World 2021, Albania} (B4), 3 March 2021
\textsuperscript{36} Freedom House, \textit{Freedom in the World 2021, Albania} (F4), 3 March 2021
\textsuperscript{37} ERRC, ISI, ENS, \textit{Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination...} (p.38), February 2018
\textsuperscript{38} ERRC, \textit{Submission for the working group of the UN CRC, June 2021} (p.3), no date
\textsuperscript{39} Instat, \textit{Key Figures}, no date
\textsuperscript{40} Price Waterhouse Cooper, \textit{Albania - Individual - Taxes on personal income}, 29 June 2021
\textsuperscript{41} CIA World Factbook, \textit{Albania} (People & Society), last updated 22 September 2021
\textsuperscript{42} CIA World Factbook, \textit{Albania} (Economy, Energy), last updated 22 September 2021
denial of rights or be an obstacle to accessing rights, as individuals become “legally invisible”.

5.3.2 In 2017, a demographic study was carried out by the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Education, local authorities, INSTAT [Albanian Institute of Statistics], TLAS [Tirana Legal Aid Society], and UNHCR. This mapping exercise identified 1031 persons at risk of statelessness; 49% were men and boys and 51% women and girls.

5.3.3 The ERRC ISI ENS Report 2018, based on research carried out in 2016-2017, explained:

‘…while the acquisition of Albanian nationality should be automatic, in practice according to the law “On Civil Status” birth registration is required to be carried out as a necessary precondition for the acquisition of Albanian nationality. This is a requirement that many Roma are unable to fulfil, exposing them to (the risk of) statelessness. Indeed, … the main cause of (risk of) statelessness of Roma relates to the challenges they face accessing civil registration in general, and birth registration in particular. Children who have a clear right to Albanian nationality are denied this because their births cannot be registered.’ The UNHCR Report 2018 noted that the Egyptian community is also at increased risk of statelessness and stated that ‘the most pervasive cause of statelessness in Albania is being born outside of Albania.’

5.3.4 The ERRC ISI ENS Report 2018, based on research carried out in 2016-2017, noted that, ‘The birth registration process in Albania can be complex and difficult to access. Those who are most likely to be unable to access documentation and registration are the children of parents who already lack the documentation needed to fulfil the legal requirements for civil registration in general, including registration of births, deaths, marriages, legal residency transfers, divorces, and child custody.’

5.3.5 The report continued:

‘While the challenges identified [in registering a birth]… are not exclusive to Roma, they disproportionately affect Roma. Lack of resources, economic migration, life in informal housing, and marginalisation more generally, are all factors impacting significantly on their ability to register the births of their children. This problem is further exacerbated by the law and policy framework, which makes it extremely difficult for undocumented parents with no permanent residence to acquire nationality for their children. Hence, there is an intergenerational aspect to the risk of statelessness.’

5.3.6 The report further noted, ‘Without birth registration, Roma face barriers in obtaining other documents from the civil registry office and identity documents when they become adults. Furthermore, as Roma are less likely to have property ownership records or housing lease agreements, they face

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43 UNHCR, Mapping of the population at risk of statelessness in Albania (p.13), May 2018
44 UNHCR, Mapping of the population at risk of statelessness in Albania (p.45), May 2018
45 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination... (p.27), February 2018
46 UNHCR, Mapping of the population at risk of statelessness in Albania (p.50), May 2018
47 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination... (p.27), February 2018
48 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination... (p.29), February 2018
many barriers at the civil registry office when changing or registering their residence.49

5.3.7 The report also noted efforts made to assist Roma with registration:

‘Albanian authorities are generally conscious of the challenges faced by Roma related to accessing civil registration. There have been initiatives to address the problem, such as encouraging early registration through the provision of financial support. However, despite this, access to civil registration in Albania is still unsatisfactory and there are still many cases of late registration of births among Roma in Albania. According to the Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with civil society organisations, 148 Romani children had their births registered as late registrations and 500 Roma individuals were provided with civil registration assistance in 2014. As stated by a Ministry official: “We face difficulties especially in having data on Roma and Egyptians who are unregistered. We can only have data for the registered population. But we have had good collaboration with civil society organisations to have a view on the incidence of this problem.”

‘TLAS’ [Tirana Legal Aid Society’s] own statistics for 2015 showed 515 unregistered children, of which 60% were Roma. In the first six months of 2016, 274 unregistered children were identified by TLAS, of which, again 60% were Roma. In the second half of 2016, the organisation helped 408 unregistered children of which 270 were Roma.50

5.3.8 The report also noted issues for children born abroad:

‘Complexity and challenges related to birth registration are exacerbated in cases of children born abroad, especially for children whose parents live abroad irregularly. Such children are likely to not have their births registered, or only receive a birth notification which does not include the basic information (including name) required by the Albanian authorities to register their birth. In 2014, the Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with civil society organisations, identified more than 200 such cases.’51

5.3.9 The USSD HR Report 2020 stated:

‘To receive government services, citizens changing place of residence within the country must transfer their civil registration to their new community and prove the legality of their new domicile through property ownership, a property rental agreement, or utility bills. Many individuals could not provide documentation and thus lacked access to public services. Other citizens, particularly Roma and Balkan-Egyptians, lacked formal registration in the communities where they resided. The law does not prohibit their registration, but it was often difficult to complete. Many Roma and Balkan-Egyptians lacked the financial means to register.’52

5.3.10 The Albanian MHSP ‘Report on monitoring public policies for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2020’ stated that in the year 2020:

49 ERRC, ISI, ENS, *Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination...* (p.29), February 2018
50 ERRC, ISI, ENS, *Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination...* (p.30), February 2018
51 ERRC, ISI, ENS, *Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination...* (p.32), February 2018
52 USSD, *HR Report 2020, Albania* (Section 2), 30 March 2021
• 182 Roma and Egyptians were supported with assistance in obtaining documents for children born abroad (in the appropriate form and content);

• 650 Roma and Egyptian born children were identified as unregistered;

• 2,308 Roma and Egyptians were identified, whose residence according to the civil registry did not match the real one. During 2019, 730 Roma and Egyptians were reported;

• 19 new legal clinics and other providers of free legal aid services were established and are operating in Albania. 7 Primary Legal Aid Service Centres in Tirana; Durrës; Fier; Lezhë; Lushnjë; Pogradec; Gjirokastra and 12 authorized non-profit organizations operating in Tirana; Durrës; Elbasan; Berat; Shkodër53

5.3.11 The same document noted that ‘There is a growing reporting of primary legal aid beneficiaries belonging to Roma and Egyptian minorities.’54

5.3.12 In the Statelessness Index Survey 2020, European Network on Statelessness (ENS) stated:

‘The Government implemented a number of reforms through recent amendments to the Civil Status Law and the Law on Nationality. The Albanian Government also made three pledges at the UNHCR High Level Segment on Statelessness in October 2019, including to implement a dedicated SDP [statelessness determination procedure]; to fully implement 2018 legislative amendments that improve access to birth registration for children of Roma and Egyptian communities, and children born abroad to Albanian nationals; and to align its Law on Nationality with the key provisions of the 1961 and 1954 Conventions. Provisions introduced through amendments to the Law on Nationality in 2020 established a full safeguard in law for otherwise stateless children born on the territory (although implementation is not yet clear).’55

5.3.13 The Statelessness Index Survey noted that the relevant laws include:

Law no.10129 of 11.05.2009 On Civil Status, as amended by Decision no. 52 of 1.12.2011 of the Constitutional Court, with Law no. 135/2013 and Law no. 134/2016 and Law no. 69/2018 (ALB)

Law no.10129 of 11.05.2009 On Civil Status, as amended by Decision no. 52 of 1.12.2011 of the Constitutional Court, with Law no. 135/2013 and Law no. 134/2016 and Law no. 69/2018 (ALB)56

5.3.14 In April 2021 ENS made a submission to inform the European Commission’s 2021 Enlargement Package and noted the following in relation to Albania’s progress to address statelessness:

‘The last few years have seen notable progress and commitment on the part of the Government of Albania to addressing statelessness. Pledges Albania made at UNHCR’s High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019 are on the

53 Albanian MHSP, *Report on monitoring public policies ....*, no date
54 Albanian MHSP, *Report on monitoring public policies ....*, no date
55 ENS, *ENS Statelessness Index Survey 2020: Albania* (p.18), 2020
56 ENS, *ENS Statelessness Index Survey 2020: Albania* (p.18), 2020
way to being implemented and further progress has been made in 2020-21. Nevertheless, it remains the case that to fully implement welcome reforms, the Government and other actors will need to invest in training and capacity building for its institutions and public services and continue to work closely with key stakeholders including affected communities.

‘In terms of prevention of statelessness, it is very welcome that the new Law on Nationality (2020) now includes a full, automatic safeguard to ensure that a child born in Albania who would otherwise remain stateless acquires Albanian citizenship at birth (Article 7(1)). It remains to be seen how this provision will be implemented in practice, so it will be important for the Albanian authorities to work with national experts and draw on good practice to ensure effective implementation as intended. The Albanian legal framework now prevents statelessness in most cases, but there are some remaining gaps…

‘Despite positive amendments to the Law on Civil Status in 2018, in practice, children still face difficulties accessing birth registration and acquiring a birth certificate if parents are undocumented or have irregularities in their documentation.’

5.3.15 See Housing, Education, training and employment and Healthcare for information about the impact of a lack of registration on these issues. For information about legal aid, see Avenues of redress.

5.4 Housing

5.4.1 The ERC ISI ENS Report 2018, which was based on research carried out in 2016 to 2017, stated:

‘… according to data currently available, 15% of Roma live in shacks, tents or other non-brick housing units; 60% do not have running water within their homes; and 12% lack toilet facilities. As concerns infrastructure, the majority of Roma report living in areas that have unpaved roads (52.2%) or have roads which are in a very bad condition (22.5%). Many undocumented Roma also have been unable to regularise their homes under the Law on the Legalisation, Urbanisation and Integration of Informal Areas/Buildings, because they were unable to provide the required property documentation or because they lived on publicly owned land or in non-permanent structures, which are not covered by the law. They consequently risk forced evictions as well as demolition of their houses.

‘Roma - particularly those who lack documents - are almost always excluded from social housing programmes. Many of them cannot benefit from low-cost social housing because they lack regular sources of income, because of the very onerous bureaucratic requirements (ECRI reports that about 17 conditions need to be fulfilled to become eligible for social housing) and because they are not registered as residents. In addition, the documents required to be able to benefit from programmes are not specified by law, leaving the authorities considerable discretion and resulting in great

57 ENS, European Network on Statelessness submission to inform... (p. 2), April 2021
discrepancies in the way that social housing programmes are implemented at local level.

‘Also, … lack of tenure and life in informal housing also play a critical role in the birth registration procedure. Many Roma, due to their lack of documentation and because they often live in informal housing, face problems registering their permanent residence and, as a consequence, the birth of their children.’\(^{58}\)

5.4.2 The CoE ECRI \(^{6}\)th Report on Albania, covering the period December 2014 to December 2019, noted:

‘Many Roma and Egyptians … suffer from living in inadequate housing conditions and from evictions carried out without the necessary safeguards. The authorities still have not found a solution to the long-running housing crises affecting the Roma and Egyptian communities in the Kabash and Guri i Kuq areas of the Pogradec municipality. The relevant bylaws for the new Law on Legal Aid and for the Law on Social Housing have not yet been issued, although the statutory timeline of six months has passed.’\(^{59}\)

5.4.3 In the Albania 2020 Report, the European Commission noted:

‘Regarding the implementation of the Law on Social Housing, Roma and Egyptians are already benefitting from the 5% quota foreseen by the law. However, most of the secondary legislation still remains to be adopted. Out of the 40 sub-legal acts required to ensure full implementation of the law, 23 Council of Minister’s Decisions were developed, out of which nine were approved following a wide consultation process.

‘Regarding the implementation of investment projects (to improve housing, infrastructure, water supply and sanitation), about 30% of beneficiaries of the projects put in place in 2019 were for Roma and Egyptian families, while concerning the rent subsidy and lump sum subsidy programmes, 19% of them addressed members of the Roma and Egyptian communities.

‘...

‘The mapping of Roma houses has started; preparations have also started for a Ministerial meeting in Tirana on achievements and deliverables for the next Prime Ministers Summit in October 2020. The Roma Seminar conclusions are yet to be implemented.’\(^{60}\)

5.4.4 The Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection (Albanian MHSP) produced a PDF entitled ‘Report on monitoring public policies for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2020,’ which reported on progress in housing in the year 2020:

- 171 Roma and Egyptian families benefited from additional services in case of inability to pay financial obligations within a housing programme;

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\(^{58}\) ERRC, ISI, ENS, *Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination...* (p.38), February 2018

\(^{59}\) CoE/ECRI, *6th report on Albania* (Summary, p.7), 2 June 2020

\(^{60}\) European Commission, *Albania 2020 Report* (p.36), 6 October 2020
• 278 Roma and Egyptian families benefited through small grants for new infrastructure, water supply and sewerage, sanitation equipment or new construction;
• 171 Roma and Egyptian families benefited from social rental housing throughout the country;
• 171 Roma and Egyptian families benefited from the rent bonus;
• 18 municipalities benefited from projects to improve the lives of Roma and Egyptian minorities\(^\text{61}\)

5.4.5 The same document reported on progress made over the previous 5 years, stating:
• 2,933 Roma and Egyptian families are included in direct and indirect housing programs by the end of 2020 versus 1500 targeted families.
• The Law ‘On Social Housing’ was adopted in May 2018 and 20 decrees were adopted.
• Technical assistance was provided to Roma and Egyptian families to complete documentation on home legalization and to facilitate and expedite procedures. But there is no data from the National Cadastre Agency regarding the number of Roma and Egyptian families who have initiated legalization procedures and completed them successfully by the end of 2020\(^\text{62}\)

5.4.6 See Social housing for information about the Law on Social Housing. See Birth registration and civil registration for further information about this subject.

5.5 Education, training and employment

5.5.1 The ERRC ISI ENS Report 2018, based on research carried out in 2016-2017, provided the following information about Roma engagement in the labour market:

'Roma, especially Romani women, are significantly underrepresented in the labour market, and long-term unemployment mostly affects Roma. Many Roma are unable to access employment in Albania due to low educational qualifications and the discrimination they face. Being Romani is in itself a disadvantage when looking for a job. Roma with the same level of education, age and sex as an Albanian person are significantly less likely to be employed. The lack of documentation and statelessness further exacerbate this problem.

'Most Roma earn a living from occasional informal work in agriculture, public service and construction with very low wages. In addition, the prospects of undocumented Roma in accessing formal employment are made worse by the fact that they are not registered in local employment offices due to their

\(^{61}\) Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
\(^{62}\) Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
lack of documentation, and as a result they cannot benefit from employment promotion policies.

‘Being confined to the informal employment market, Roma are more exposed to health hazards and excluded from participation in social security and housing schemes.’

5.5.2 The same report provided the following information about education:

‘Poor education outcomes and low rates of literacy often result in limited access to employment for Roma and have a direct impact on their ability to understand and navigate bureaucratic procedures in all areas of life, including civil registration, or know from whom and where to seek help. Moreover, despite documentation in theory not being a barrier to undocumented children being able to attend school, in practice it prevents them from obtaining school and university degrees attesting their education.

‘Access to education for Roma in the country has made some progress in recent years. This is attributed, inter alia, to a number of targeted measures intended to facilitate the integration of Roma children in the national school system such as the possibility to enrol Roma children in school without birth and vaccination certificates, the distribution of free textbooks as well as free meals under the project “meal-providing schools”, or the exemption for Roma parents from paying costs associated with their children’s school attendance. Notwithstanding all these measures, there is still a gap in school attendance between Roma children and the rest of the population. This especially affects Romani girls…

‘… Mistrust in education, discriminatory treatment, large distances between their homes and schools, as well as poverty pushing Romani children to work to contribute to the family income may explain lower school attendance among Roma. Segregation in education also represents a barrier to full access to quality integrated education for Roma children in the country.’

5.5.3 The Council of Europe / European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance published their 6th Report on Albania (CoE/ECRI 6th Report on Albania), which covered events from December 2014 to 11 December 2019, and which was adopted on 7 April 2020 and published on 2 June 2020, noted:

‘The authorities … included [in the 2016-2020 national action plan for the integration of Roma and Egyptians] comprehensive measures in the education sector striving to enrol more Roma and Egyptian children in preschool and compulsory education. Against the 2015 baseline of 4,437 children, the figure in 2018 was already 13,310. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that these efforts have not only been confined to a small number of selected cities but cover a very broad geographical area.

‘…

‘ECRI welcomes these positive developments in Albania. However, despite the progress achieved, some issues give rise to concern…

63 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination… (p.37), February 2018
64 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination… (p.40), February 2018
'De facto structural segregation of Roma and Egyptian pupils in schools still occurs in some locations. Furthermore, many Roma and Egyptians remain outside of the reach of vocational training and active employment programmes provided to registered unemployed jobseekers, as they are often not registered and the minimum educational requirements for such activities might be too high, given the low educational results of many persons concerned.'

5.5.4 The ERRC provided details of X and others v Albania, a case currently pending at the European Court of Human Rights, concerning alleged segregation at the Naim Frasheri School in Korca.

5.5.5 In the Albania 2020 Report, published in October 2020, the European Commission stated:

‘The overall trend regarding the participation of Roma and Egyptians [sic] children in the education system has remained positive, with 14 515 students in the pre-university education system and 2 996 children in kindergartens. However, the gap between Roma/Egyptians and other non-Roma children living in the same areas remains significant. Roma children continue to benefit from free textbooks and transportation to remote schools. Segregation in schools remains an issue that should be systematically addressed.

‘The overall employment and labour force participation of Roma remains very low. Albania faces difficulties to ensure sustainable employment for Roma and Egyptians. One of the reasons for low employment levels is the fact that 94% of registered Roma with the labour offices have only compulsory education or less which causes that not many of those completing different employment promotion programmes become employed. This indicates that the employment programmes do not sufficiently increase capacities of the participating individuals. There is a need to review the national employment approach since it has not been producing the expected results.’

5.5.6 The Albanian MHSP ‘Report on monitoring public policies for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2020’ noted progress in education in the year 2020:

- 13,086 Roma and Egyptian boys and girls enrolled and attended preschool and compulsory education;
- 179 Roma and Egyptian girls and boys who did not participate in the preschool and compulsory education system were identified;
- 6,718 Roma and Egyptian boys and girls enrolled in primary education;
- 85 Roma and Egyptians are reported as educators in the preschool system or teachers in compulsory education versus 79 reported for 2019;
- Free textbooks were provided for 10,047 Roma and Egyptian children;

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65 CoE/ECRI, 6th report on Albania (Summary, p.7), 2 June 2020
66 European Commission, Albania 2020 Report (p.36), 6 October 2020
• 446 households referred to social protection services or other sources of support for school dropouts versus 221 reported during 2019\textsuperscript{67}

5.5.7 The same document noted:

• At the end of 2020, 70% more Roma and Egyptian minority boys and girls manage to complete all levels of education and 100% more have completed pre-school education compared to 2016.

• In 2020 there are twice as many educational institutions which are attended by Roma and Egyptian boys and girls and promote intercultural dialogue compared to 2016\textsuperscript{68}

5.5.8 The Albanian MHSP document also reported on progress in employment and vocational training during the year 2020, stating:

• 738 young Roma and Egyptians were employed by regional employment offices, including individuals who participated in employment promotion programmes and those who were employed through mediation by the Regional Employment Directorates. Of this total 357 are women and girls;

• 81 Roma and Egyptians have successfully completed a Vocational Training or Employment Promotion programmes, but of this total no Roma or Egyptians have managed to be employed;

• 603 Roma and Egyptians are pursuing vocational education.

• 86 markets in 19 municipalities of the country were used by Roma and Egyptians to sell various products;

• 262 Roma or Egyptian-run businesses have benefited from local tax cuts;

• 933 Roma and Egyptians are employed in 25 Local Self-Government Units or their subordinate institutions\textsuperscript{69}

5.5.9 The same document reported on progress over the previous 5 years, stating:

• 130% more Roma and Egyptian women and men who have participated in … active employment programs are integrated in the labour market by the end of 2020 compared to 2016.

• The performance of the … vocational education and training system for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in the labour market has significantly improved by the end of 2020.\textsuperscript{70}

5.5.10 See Education and language for information about the right to learn in a minority language. See Birth registration and civil registration for further information about this subject.

\textsuperscript{67} Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
\textsuperscript{68} Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
\textsuperscript{69} Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
\textsuperscript{70} Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
5.6 Healthcare

5.6.1 The ERRC ISI ENS Report 2018, based on research carried out in 2016-2017, stated:

‘Roma face discrimination in accessing healthcare. 76% of Roma, compared to 93% of non-Roma, have been immunised against polio, diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough. There are reports that Roma are sometimes forced to pay bribes to receive proper medical treatment. Many children in large Romani families suffer from malnutrition, which affects their overall health and ability to study. Moreover, discrimination against Roma in healthcare is not only related to the common concerns of Albanian society about bribing doctors and nurses, but also takes into account many examples of direct or indirect discrimination regarding inappropriate treatment by healthcare providers, communication barriers and violation of healthcare rights that, together, make the health system and healthcare facilities hostile places for Roma.

‘One of the main concerns of Roma is lack of health insurance cards. Many Roma are either unemployed or they work without a valid employment contract. Undocumented Roma are disproportionately impacted in this regard. In either case they do not pay social security contributions and are thus ineligible for benefits. Roma living on a low income are usually unable to afford health insurance contributions. In addition, they might not be aware of the procedures that must be followed to obtain a health insurance card. Discrimination discourages Roma communities from immediately addressing their health concerns or to give birth in hospitals. Romani and Egyptian women continue to have limited access to primary health care and sexual and reproductive health-care services, and are often unaware of the availability of such services.’

5.6.2 In the Albania 2020 Report, the European Commission stated that ‘Health insurance coverage for Roma in Albania remains low and gaps persist between Roma and the majority population.’

5.6.3 The same report stated:

‘On health inequalities, the national community health care programme continues to provide residential health care mainly for marginalised Roma and Egyptian minorities. The number of Roma and Egyptians provided with free health cards increased substantially as did the number of people in informal settlements benefiting from health services delivered by mobile teams. However, Roma people and Egyptians continue to face barriers and no decision has been taken on appointing health mediators in public hospitals. HIV awareness activities have been conducted for those communities but further efforts are needed to improve access to services for them and other vulnerable groups, including women, people with disabilities and populations in rural or remote areas.’

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71 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination... (p.39), February 2018
72 European Commission, Albania 2020 Report (p.36), 6 October 2020
73 European Commission, Albania 2020 Report (p.109), 6 October 2020
5.6.4 The Albanian MHSP ‘Report on monitoring public policies for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2020’ stated that in the year 2020:

- 66,330 Roma and Egyptians have full access to primary health services;
- Health centers are present in Roma neighborhoods, or are easily accessible from them;
- 4,404 visits were made by doctors to informal Roma settlements;
- 10,211 Roma and Egyptian mothers have received childcare package …;
- 30,529 Roma and Egyptians received information (including issues of physical, mental and reproductive health, SST, immunization of children 0-14, drug use, etc.)

5.6.5 The same document noted progress over the previous 5 years, stating:

- 100% of members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities have had access to basic health services by the end of 2020.
- Most members of the Roma and Egyptian minorities have received comprehensive information on issues affecting their health as well as available health care services.
- The role of health mediators has not been promoted.

5.6.6 See Birth registration and civil registration for further information about this subject. See Impact of Coronavirus for information about the impact of coronavirus on healthcare provision for Roma and Egyptian communities.

5.7 Community integration

5.7.1 The Albanian MHSP ‘Report on monitoring public policies for the integration of Roma and Egyptians in Albania 2020’ stated that in the year 2020:

- 1,537 Roma and Egyptian families (7,685 individuals) who are included in the economic assistance scheme also benefited from other services referred by the social administrator;
- 151 cooperation agreements between local government units and NGOs were signed in order to provide community services;
- 986 Roma and Egyptians benefited from public and non-public residential centers;
- 196 Roma and Egyptian children regularly attended kindergarten;
- 13 municipalities reported having representatives from the Roma / Egyptian minority in their municipal council. These municipalities are: Korce, Librazhd, Gjirokaaster, Belsh, Permet, Fier, Roskovec, Peqin, Pogradec, Rrogozhine, Elbasan, Vlora and Berat;

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74 Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
75 Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
• 62 community centers were established and continue to be operational and 4,563 Roma and Egyptians benefited from them.\textsuperscript{76}

5.7.2 The same report noted progress over the previous 5 years, stating, ‘100\% more members of the Roma and Egyptian minority are included in social protection programs by the end of 2020 compared to 2016; 4,569 Roma and Egyptian families are included in the reintegration programs by the end of 2020 against 4,000 target families.’\textsuperscript{77}

5.8 Impact of Coronavirus

5.8.1 In the human rights report covering 2020, Amnesty International stated, ‘In April [2020], Roma activists protested discrimination in the government’s allocation of financial emergency assistance that did not cover those working in the informal sector.’\textsuperscript{78}

5.8.2 In April 2020, Exit News reported on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on Roma people living in Albania:

‘Not only are the Roma and Egyptian communities widely discriminated against and largely ignored by the Albanian government but they are suffering even more so during the Coronavirus lockdown. As they are mainly informal workers, the curfews have prevented them from any source of income and they are not able to access state aid in a majority of cases.

‘Rama [Edi Rama, Prime Minister] accused them of faking protests asking for food and criticising the inaction of the Municipality in Fier. On 14 April [2020], members of the Roma community had gathered to complain about the lack of assistance from the government and a lack of food distribution.

‘The Prime Minister accused them of having no basis for their complaints…

‘Since lockdown started, members of these communities have been protesting throughout the country about the lack of assistance from the government. Unable to work either litter picking or in informal, casual work, they are struggling to provide food for their families.

‘Other issues include a lack of proper hygiene and sanitation facilities including running water in some Roma settlements. The Municipality claims they have been distributing food to people, but others have dismissed this as propaganda.’\textsuperscript{79}

5.8.3 In September 2020, the ERRC published a report entitled ‘Roma rights in the time of Covid,’ which noted:

‘In response to the lack of consideration for Roma working in the informal sector, protests against government institutions for the lack of support and emergency payments to Romani families took place ...

‘The Albanian Government responded by implementing support for workers engaged in informal employment, announcing they will be included in the

\textsuperscript{76} Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
\textsuperscript{77} Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
\textsuperscript{78} Amnesty International, Human Rights Report 2020, Albania, 7 April 2021
\textsuperscript{79} Exit News, Albanian Prime Minister Criticised for Derogatory Language, 16 April 2020
emergency payments policy. Following consultation with the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination and Romani civil society organizations, the government invited informal self-employed workers to register as unemployed jobseekers so that they could receive emergency payments.  

5.8.4 In April 2021 the ENS made a submission to inform the European Commission’s 2021 Enlargement Package, in which it noted:

‘As part of our research on health rights and statelessness in the context of COVID-19, Roma Active Albania carried out a focus group with representatives of communities affected by statelessness in Albania. Focus group participants highlighted how the health system had been impacted by the pandemic, with access to non-COVID-19 related healthcare being reduced and appointments being provided online or by telephone. Roma participants reported delays in COVID-19 test results being returned, issues with contact tracing, and financial barriers to purchasing medicines as well as personal protective equipment, which was not available for free. They also reported difficulties following social distancing guidance due to overcrowded housing conditions. Participants said NGOs and neighbours had stepped in to assist to some extent, but that this was not enough, and several had been unable to access government aid due to problems with the system. Overall, they felt insecure about their future. Participants who had had COVID-19 said they tried to hide it from their neighbours and others due to stigma. Almost all had experienced a rise in hate speech, stigma, and discrimination during the pandemic with people visibly seeking to avoid them on the street or on public transport due to prejudices and misconceptions about Roma “spreading COVID-19”, as well as experiencing explicit hate speech on social media.’

5.8.5 See Hate speech for information about hate speech directed at Roma. See Healthcare for further information on this subject.

6. Hate speech

6.1.1 The CoE/ECRI 6th Report on Albania, covering the period December 2014 to December 2019, noted that ‘The People’s Advocate and the CPD [Commissioner for Protection against Discrimination] have made racist and homo-transphobic hate speech a prominent topic in their work, acknowledging that this problem must be tackled effectively.’ Nevertheless, the report continued, ‘Public condemnation and active counter speech from high-ranking political or other public figures in response to hate speech is extremely rare. Hate speech, especially against members of the Roma and LGBTI communities, is still far too often considered to be an acceptable feature of public debates.’

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80 ERRC, Roma rights in the time of covid, September 2020
81 ENS, European Network on Statelessness submission to inform the European Commission 2021 Enlargement Package, progress towards addressing statelessness in Enlargement countries (p. 3), April 2021
82 CoE/ECRI, 6th report on Albania (Summary, p.7), 2 June 2020
83 CoE/ECRI, 6th report on Albania (Summary, p.7), 2 June 2020
6.1.2 In the Albania 2020 Report, the European Commission noted that ‘Antigypsyism and hate speech remain issues that should be systematically addressed in Albania within the wider society, equality bodies and government structures and systems... ’\(^{84}\)

6.1.3 On 16 April 2020, Exit News reported:

‘A group of human rights organisations in Albania have criticised Prime Minister Edi Rama for comments he made on social media regarding the Roma and Egyptian communities in the country.

‘In a Twitter post, Rama said:

‘“Shameful inciting by certain former MPs of the Roma community to stage dangerous life-threatening performances, [MPs] who shamelessly lie to the public, using Roma as cannon fodder to say that this is how the aid was distributed in Fier and elsewhere.”

‘…As [Roma people] are mainly informal workers, the curfews [related to coronavirus] have prevented them from any source of income ...

‘Rama accused them of faking protests asking for food and criticising the inaction of the Municipality in Fier. …The Prime Minister accused them of having no basis for their complaints and being used for political games by other political parties. He also used the hashtag “Inhuman” to describe the situation.

‘…

‘Rama’s language against the community was deemed “unacceptable” as was his use of other phrases that they said were derogatory. His poor choice of language shows discriminatory stereotyping towards Roma and suggests that they are easily used by others.

‘Rama’s Twitter account which has a considerable amount of followers and as such, he should choose his words carefully so as not to incite discrimination and further negative stereotyping.

‘The organisations call on Rama to stop his use of denigrating and discriminatory language against the Roma community and to recognise the seriousness of the situation facing Albania’s ethnic minority communities.

‘The declaration was signed by 13 organisations including Civil Rights Defenders, the Egyptian and Roma Youth Movement, Community Action Centre, and the Women’s Empowerment Network in Albania.’\(^{85}\)

6.1.4 See Impact of Coronavirus for information to assist the Roma and Egyptian communities during the pandemic and for further examples of hate speech.

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\(^{84}\) European Commission, Albania 2020 Report (p.36), 6 October 2020

\(^{85}\) Exit News, Albanian Prime Minister Criticised for Derogatory Language ..., 16 April 2020
7. Government action

7.1 Action plans

7.1.1 The UN HRC Albania Report of February 2019 stated:

‘National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma and Egyptians for 2016-2020 reflecting a scale up of measures being implemented and also initiates new activities for promoting the integration of Roma and Egyptians, with committed funding from the State budget and finding the financial means through coordination with international donations. The main principles are: Promoting social inclusion; Using a targeted approach to address specific exclusion issues; Respecting differences between Roma and Egyptian communities; Involvement of Roma and Egyptians, in the design, implementation and monitoring of public policies.

‘The National Action Plan for integration provides measures to comprehensively address the situation of Roma and Egyptians in Albania in the field of education and inter-cultural dialogue, civil registry and justice, social protection, employment, education and vocational training, urban housing, and health care, as well as coordination and monitoring policies. Sufficient resources are allocated for its implementation, and its progress tracking is done by MHSP [Ministry of Health and Social Protection].

‘In order to improve coordination in the field of Roma and Egyptian integration, a network of seven focal points has been created among the key ministries responsible for education, civil registration, health, employment, social housing and vocational trainings. A database of 57 focal points at the municipal level that coordinate policies for Roma and Egyptians has been established. The electronic system RomAlb was developed, serving as a centralised web application allowing for collection and management of information on Roma and Egyptian minorities.”

7.1.2 In the Albania 2020 Report, published in October 2020, the European Commission stated:

‘The implementation of the 2016-2020 national action plan for the integration of Roma and Egyptians reached its final year of implementation, however with limited progress. Preparation of the next one, in an inclusive manner, should start well on time to be adopted before the end of the year. The Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process (Poznan Declaration) was endorsed by the government. The structure of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, in charge of the coordination of Roma-related policies, needs to be strengthened.”

7.1.3 The Roma Integration RCC published the following (undated) information on the website:

‘The Roma Integration 2020 project, implemented by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) with the financial support of the European Union and the Open Society Foundations, aims to contribute to reducing the socio-economic gap between the Roma and non-Roma population in the

86 UN HRC, Albania report (p.17), 22 February 2019
87 European Commission, Albania 2020 Report (p.37), 6 October 2020
Western Balkans and Turkey and to **strengthen the institutional obligations** of governments to incorporate and deliver specific Roma integration goals in mainstream policy developments.

'…

'The action strives to support tangible results for Roma by assisting the [EU] enlargement region governments to define and implement specific targets in education, employment, housing and health. These targets are also enclosed in the **Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process** that was endorsed at a high level ministerial event held in Poznan in July 2019.

'In addition to working with the governments and central institutions to improve their delivery on Roma integration, the action supports dialogue on Roma integration among local institutions, civil society, and relevant international organizations.

'Roma Integration 2020 beneficiaries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey.'


- ‘The Action Plan was drafted in close consultation with the responsible line ministries, representatives from the Roma and Egyptian communities, local government units, civil society organizations and other actors.

- ‘It was drafted following the declaration of the Western Balkan partners on Roma integration in the European Union Enlargement process held in Poznan and based on the recommendations of the Fourth Policy Dialogue Seminar on Roma and Egyptian Inclusion; as well as the new EU Strategy for Roma.

- ‘Includes budget lines for each measure related to each line ministry and reflects an increase in the level of measures implemented by the previous plan;

- ‘…

- ‘It is based on the recommendations of the 4th EU-Albania policy dialogue seminar on the inclusion of Roma and Egyptian communities in Albania. This plan has a new additional field which has to do with Antigypsism.

- ‘It is based on the lessons learned from the implementation and monitoring of the Roma strategy for the decade of Roma and Egyptian

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88 Roma Integration RCC, [Project Overview](#), no date
inclusion and the national action plan 2016-2020 as well as its unimplemented measures;

- ‘…
- ‘The measures of the Plan are in line with the 10-year Strategy (2020-2030) of the European Union for the integration of the Roma community;
- ‘Provides measures in line with urgent needs created by Pandemia-COVID 19’

7.1.5 The same document noted that the Action Plan for 2021-2025 had the following objectives:

- ‘Equal access to justice and civil status services for Roma and Egyptians.
- ‘Improving housing conditions for members of the Roma and Egyptian Minorities and legalizing all informal settlements.
- ‘Reducing the health quality gap between Roma and Egyptians and the rest of the population.
- ‘Increase equal access to quality and inclusive education for Roma and Egyptians at all levels of education.
- ‘Creating equal opportunities for quality and sustainable employment for Roma and Egyptians.
- ‘Improving access and increasing the access of Roma and Egyptians to social protection programs.
- ‘Recognize and address Antigypsism in public policy through both systemic and structural change, to ensure a society free from discrimination against R&E [Roma and Egyptians]’

7.1.6 On 28 October 2020, Exit News reported:

‘The Council of Europe’s European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in co-operation with the People’s Advocate and the Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination of Albania, met in Tirana today to discuss “Combating racial discrimination and intolerance in Albania”.

‘The meeting was organised in the framework of the European Union and Council of Europe Joint Programmes: “ROMACTED: Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at a local level” and Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019-2022” – Action on Promoting Diversity and Equality in Albania.

‘The event was opened by Christian Ahlund, Former Chair of ECRI and rapporteur on Albania said that while there has been progressing, there is still work to do;

“I was positively struck last year by the great achievements Albania has accomplished over two decades and I congratulate all of you on this. Nevertheless, as in all Council of Europe member states, there are

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89 Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
90 Albanian MHSP, Report on monitoring public policies ..., no date
problems and challenges in the area of racism, racial discrimination and intolerance that remain and which need to be addressed.”, stressed Ahlund.

‘Erinda Ballanca, the Ombudsman said that funds needed to be provided by the state to implement recommendations from the ECRI Reports.

‘...

‘Agron Tare, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs said that the authorities are committed to fighting discrimination and ensuring equality.

‘Issues discussed in the roundtable included legal frameworks to combat racism and racial discrimination as well as the housing crisis facing Albanian Roma and Egyptian communities.

‘Since the adoption of ECRI’s fifth report on Albania on 19 March 2015, progress has been made in several areas, however, ECRI expressed its concern about key issues, such as additional measures to fight hate speech and discrimination especially against … Roma, proper implementation of the … National Action Plan for the integration of Roma and Egyptians 2016-2020 as well as further actions in the fight against bullying and extremism in schools, especially for the most vulnerable groups.

‘In Albania, the European Union and Council of Europe joint initiatives “Promoting diversity and equality in Albania” and ROMACTED are working with the authorities to address national minority protection, … and combating hate speech in line with the standards and recommendations set by the Council of Europe.”

7.2 Police

7.2.1 On 30 May 2020, Exit News, a news agency which reports on eastern Europe, published the following:

‘Members of the Roma and Egyptian communities gathered in front of the Municipality of Tirana yesterday to condemn police violence against them. … they held placards calling out the violence against a young man who was beaten by police after collecting rubbish from the side of the road. The brutal attack was caught on film and quickly went viral on social media.

‘The protestor demanded that the police officers who committed the assault be suspended. They also said that Mayor of Tirana Erion Veliaj should publicly apologise and distance himself from the incident. They added that the incident caught on film is one of many attacks and something that is normal for those that maintain their income by gathering recyclable materials.

‘They asked that their community be allowed to continue gathering items until a dignified solution is found that will guarantee their livelihood.”

7.2.2 In June 2021, Exit News noted:

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91 Exit News, CoE Holds Anti-Racism and Discrimination Roundtable in Tirana, 28 October 2020
92 Exit News, Albanian Roma and Egyptians Protest Against Municipal Violence..., 30 May 2020
The Tirana Municipal Police have been found guilty of discrimination due to race, ethnicity, and economic status against Agron Cura, a member of the Egyptian Albanian community. On March 3, 2020, Cura was stopped by the Municipal Police, who "violently seized" his three-wheeled bike and the items inside it. Cura had been collecting items such as gypsum and other recyclables to sell to support himself and his family.

Two days later, accompanied by a pro bono lawyer, Gentian Serjani, from the NGO “Social Justice”, Cura went to the Commissioner Against Discrimination. They filed a complaint and claimed the police had targeted and discriminated against him due to his race, ethnicity, and economic status. After reviewing the complaint, the Commissioner found on October 8 [2020] that there had been “outrageous discrimination” against Cura, based on his protected characteristics.

Following the decision of the Commissioner, Social Justice proceeded to open a case in Tirana’s Administrative Court. They asked that the Municipality pay damages incurred by Cura because of discrimination, and that both the Municipality and Municipal police no longer stop members of the Roma and Egyptian community from collecting recyclable materials.

They also claimed 2.5 million lek (EUR 20,300) [approximately £17,458] in damages.

The court decided to partially accept the request, acknowledging that there was discrimination and that compensation should be paid in full to Cura.

Social Justice stated that the case is an important precedent against repeated similar acts by the Municipal Police. “We hope that after this decision, Tirana Municipal Police will change their behavior towards Roma and Egyptian citizens, and others.”

There have been many instances of Municipal Police using violence or heavy-handed tactics when dealing with those who collect recyclable items to support themselves. Instances where they have targeted those who sell vegetables and fruit on the streets, trashing their stalls, and throwing away products, have also been documented.

This latest ruling means that the Police will have to adapt the way they handle such situations or risk similar legal action and consequences.93

7.2.3 See Avenues of redress for further information on this subject.

7.3 Avenues of redress

7.3.1 The website of the Avokati I Popullit, or Ombudsman, provided the following (undated) information about the role of the Ombudsman:

The People’s Advocate (Ombudsman) Institution is provided for the first time in the Albanian Constitution adopted in November 1998, while the Law No. 8454 “On the People’s Advocate Institution” (amended later on) was firstly adopted by the Albanian Parliament in February, 4. 1999. This law is

93 Exit News, Tirana Municipal Police Found Guilty …, 15 June 2021
designed to take into consideration the legislation of other countries of Europe, which have previously created such an institution. …. ‘People’s Advocate (Ombudsman) defends the rights, freedoms and lawful interests of individuals from unlawful and incorrect acts or omissions of public administration bodies as well as third parties acting on its behalf. It has as its mission the prevention of potential conflicts between public administration and the individual. Ombudsman acts on the basis of the complaint or request submitted to his office....’

7.3.2 Equinet, the European Network of Equality Bodies, provided the following (undated) information about the Albanian Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination:

‘The Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination (CPD) is the equality body in Albania, established since 2010, upon the Law 10221/2010 “For Protection from Discrimination”, that is aligned/approximated with four European Directives in the field of non-discrimination. The CPD is a public legal person, responsible to assure effective protection from discrimination. The CPD is independent in the exercise of duty and is subject only to the Constitution and law.’

7.3.3 Further information about the CPD is available on the Equinet website.

7.3.4 The CoE/ECRI 6th report on Albania, which covered events from December 2014 to December 2019, noted that, ‘The People’s Advocate (Ombudsman) and the Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination (CPD) have established a very effective and collegial relationship in which both institutions have built on each other’s mandate, capacities and expertise. Staffing levels at the CPD have been increased, including for monitoring, reporting and the regional offices.’

7.3.5 The ERRC ISI ENS Report 2018, based on research carried out in 2016-2017, noted the position regarding legal aid, stating, ‘Although Albania adopted a law “On Legal Aid” in 2008 that theoretically guarantees free legal aid to persons who cannot afford it, access to justice remains a real challenge for vulnerable groups. Populations in vulnerable circumstances, including Roma in particular, continue to be excluded from legal aid due to restrictions on access, few lawyers providing the service, and high court fees.’

7.3.6 The CoE/ECRI 6th report on Albania, which covered events from December 2014 to December 2019, stated: ‘In follow-up to a recommendation made in ECRI’s previous report, namely to ensure effective access to justice for victims of discrimination through the development of a functioning and properly funded legal aid system, the Albanian authorities initiated legislation on the provision of legal aid which was adopted in 2017.’

7.3.7 The USSD HR Report 2020 stated:

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94 Avokati I Popullit, About Us, no date
95 Equinet, Commissioner for the Protection from Discrimination, no date
96 CoE/ECRI, 6th report on Albania (Summary, p.7), 2 June 2020
97 ERRC, ISI, ENS, Roma belong. Statelessness, discrimination... (p.33), February 2018
98 CoE/ECRI, 6th report on Albania (Summary, p.7), 2 June 2020
‘As of August, the commissioner for protection from discrimination had received 12 complaints of discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity, ruling in favor of the complainant in two cases. In one case the commissioner ruled against Fier municipality and its water and sewage utility for discriminating against Romani households. The commissioner ordered the municipality and utility to supply running water to the families. When the municipality and utility did not respond, the commissioner imposed fines.’

99 USSD, HR Report 2020, Albania (Section 6), 30 March 2021
Terms of Reference

A ‘Terms of Reference’ (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the country information section. The Home Office’s Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- **Law**
  - Officially recognised minority groups
  - Discrimination

- **Minority ethnic groups**
  - Minority groups in the country, including language and religion
  - Access to education
  - Access to employment
  - Access to housing
  - Access to healthcare
  - Impact of coronavirus

- **Treatment by the police**

- **Hate speech**

- **Action to address discrimination or inequality**
  - Governmental action
  - NGO assistance
  - Avenues of redress

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Project Overview, no date


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Bertelsmann Foundation. Last accessed: 15 July 2021


The European Centre for Minority Issues. Last accessed: 15 July 2021
Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version 4.0
- valid from 4 October 2021

Official – sensitive: Start of section

The information on this page has been removed as it is restricted for internal Home Office use.

Official – sensitive: End of section

Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and Assessment.

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