

Roma People Live for 10 Years in Contaminated Refugee Camp in Kosovo

By [Global Research](#)

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Roma people living in a temporary camp in Kosovo for 10 years now are suffering from the severe effects of lead poisoning, after being moved to live near a toxic slagheap.

The camp was set up a decade ago for them to escape violent Albanian persecution, but now they're refusing to leave, saying it's still too dangerous for them to return home.

A muddy slope as a playground, household rubbish as toys. A familiar sight in many Roma camps, but in a settlement in northern Kosovo, the danger is not what you see, but what you can't.

Now the blood of children here is so poisoned by lead it has impaired their development. And that's been the case for more than a decade.

When a few years ago the World Health Organization tested the camp residents' blood for lead, the readings for 90% of the children were off the scale - higher than medical equipment was capable of measuring.

Aggressive behavior, high temperatures and stunted growth - all these symptoms of lead poisoning are evident in camp resident Seidi Fetije's children. A mother of 10, she lost one of her sons to fever.

"In order to feed the children, we need to sell something. The kids are sick, sometimes they run a high fever. My husband and I are also sick, so that is our situation," Seidi told RT.

Before the 1999 NATO bombings, many of the families living here lived in southern Kosovo. When Albanians forced them out, the UN set up this camp, just miles away from a toxic slagheap.

"The problem is that when the wind blows, the fine dust that's contaminated flows through these two camps. The children are playing in the dust, usually they don't wash their hands, they eat outside... and all those factors are influences in the lead poisoning," said Igor Zlatkovic from the Kosovo Agency for Advancement and Development.

Serbian authorities do provide the Romas with medical care. Over the past few years, Dr. Zoran Savich has seen more than 300 Roma patients, yet he says any successful care is almost always undermined.

"They have been treated before, and the prescribed medication worked, but after the

treatment they would go back to places poisoned with lead, and the positive outcome of the treatment would decrease. I have the statistics – after two years living in the same place, all the improvements of the treatment are gone,” Savich told RT.

A few years ago, the UN tried to relocate several families back to the south, an area that after Kosovo’s self-proclaimed independence came under control of ethnic Albanians. But many soon returned, saying they just didn’t feel safe back in their pre-war home anymore.

“Here you can go outside at night, but there we couldn’t move around freely. At least here kids can go outside, make some money, buy milk and food,” said camp resident Abedin Packoli.

Most of the camp’s residents are Muslims. They may share the same religion with Kosovo’s Albanians, but they are still not allowed to share the same land.

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