

Albania

Country in the Balkans. On the eve of World War II, there were about 600 Jews in Albania, of whom 400 were refugees. The largest community was in Kavaje. Most of the refugees were German and Austrian Jews who had reached Albania in the hope of making their way to the United States or South American countries. Traditionally there was no discrimination of Jews in Albania.

On April 7 1939, Italian troops entered Albania beginning their occupation of the country. Soon thereafter Jews were forbidden from leaving Albania for their studies in Italy, and Jews were removed from the coastal port cities to the country's interior. But on the whole the Italian regime did not persecute the Jews harshly.

Following the fall of Yugoslavia in spring 1941, the Kosovo province was annexed to Italian controlled Albania. The Germans demanded that the Jews of Pristina be handed over to them. The Italians refused, but eventually agreed to hand over prisoners from the jails to them. Among the prisoners were 60 Jews, who were then murdered. Jewish refugees from other parts of Yugoslavia who had reached Pristina were transported to the older areas of Albania, where they were housed in a camp at Kavaje. Eventually some 200 refugees were in this camp. The conditions there were poor, but the inmates could leave the camp during the day. About 100 Jewish men from Pristina, later joined by their families were taken to Berat. In Berat, many were aided and protected by local Albanians. Smaller numbers of Jewish refugees could also be found in other localities, including the capital Tirana.

In September 1943, after the change in Italy's government, Albania came under German control. The situation of the Jews became worse. Albanian clerks gave identity papers to many of the Jews of Kavaje, so they could go to Tirana as part of an Italian convoy and hide there.

Early in 1944 the Gestapo ordered Jews in Tirana to register. Many Jews took this as a signal to flee to the Partisans outside the capital. Other Jews obtained false papers from Albanian friends, and thus avoided attempts by the Gestapo to round up Jews. The Germans also demanded that Albanian

officials give them lists of Jews living in Albania, but the officials did not comply. Rather they warned the Jews. Christian and Muslim Albanians alike regarded it as a matter of national pride to help Jews, both native Albanian and refugees. Thus no Jews were turned over to the Germans and the community survived the war, except for one family of six who were discovered by the Germans and sent to Pristina. Only one member of that family survived.