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The Effectiveness of UN Human Rights Mechanisms at the National Level: The Case of Albania

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Abstract

How much difference do United Nations human rights mechanisms make once their recommendations reach the national level? This article examines that question in Albania, which has participated in UN monitoring since the 1990s and served on the Human Rights Council in 2024–2026, but continues to face concerns raised repeatedly by UN bodies. The analysis draws on nine UN documents, principally from 2023–2025: Albania's fourth-cycle Universal Periodic Review and response, concluding observations from five treaty bodies, and two Special Procedures country reports. Using doctrinal and qualitative document analysis, it distinguishes three aspects of effectiveness: normative change in domestic law; institutional capacity to carry out human rights commitments; and remedies available to people whose rights are violated. The evidence points to a clear difference between identifying problems and resolving them. UN scrutiny has helped keep reform priorities visible, supplied domestic actors with legal benchmarks, and addressed emerging questions, including those raised by the 2023 Albania–Italy migration protocol. Its influence is much less evident where progress requires independent investigations into state conduct, functioning courts, or sustained spending on services for Roma and Egyptian communities and survivors of gender-based violence. Several concerns

appear in the findings of four or five mechanisms, suggesting that repeated international attention has not yet translated into adequate domestic protection. The article argues that UN mechanisms are valuable contributors to reform, but their practical effect depends on credible national follow-up, independent institutions, and political willingness to act.

Keywords: Human Rights Council, Universal Periodic Review, Treaty Bodies, Special Procedures, Implementation

Introduction

Judging the effectiveness of United Nations (UN) human rights mechanisms is harder than it first appears. A procedure may help define a legal standard or bring a problem into public view without securing redress for anyone affected by it. Yet assessments sometimes treat standard-setting, monitoring, prevention, accountability and remedy as though they were interchangeable outcomes. Recent scholarship instead asks what a particular mechanism is designed to do, how it might influence state behaviour, and why that influence often falls short of enforceable protection.[1]

The distinction matters for Albania. This article examines the Human Rights Council (HRC), the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the treaty bodies and the Special Procedures before considering what their work has meant in domestic law and practice. Rather than equating Albania's participation in UN review with compliance, it asks whether that participation has strengthened rights protection in practice.

Albania illustrates the tension between international engagement and domestic implementation. It has been receptive, at least formally, to international scrutiny. In its 2025 response to the fourth-cycle UPR recommendations, the government described itself as "deeply committed" to the process and referred to its HRC membership for 2024–2026.[2] At the same time, independent UN bodies have repeatedly raised concerns about judicial capacity and effective remedies, discrimination affecting Roma and Egyptian communities, ill-treatment and detention, and the enforcement of protections against gender-based violence. The documentary record allows those concerns to be traced across separate mechanisms rather than treated as isolated findings.

The inquiry therefore has three parts: what UN mechanisms can contribute to domestic rights protection; how their recommendations and

[1] Etone, "Theoretical Challenges to Understanding the Potential Impact of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism" (2019); Yoshida, "Beyond Non-Bindingness" (2024); McNeilly, "Human Rights through the Kaleidoscope" (2026).
[2] Human Rights Council, UPR: Albania, Addendum, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/5/Add.1 (2025), para. 1.

assessments have influenced Albanian laws, institutions and remedies; and where that influence appears to encounter resistance. Bringing the 2023–2025 outputs together makes it possible to identify not only individual criticisms of Albania but patterns of recurrence. The article proposes that such recurrence, when read carefully alongside the substance of each recommendation, offers one indicator of persistent implementation problems.

A plural architecture

There is no single UN human rights court whose judgments bind states across the full range of rights. Instead, international scrutiny is distributed among bodies with different sources of authority and different working methods. Charter-based procedures include the HRC, the UPR and the Special Procedures; treaty bodies derive their mandates from the human rights conventions they supervise.[3] Their relationships are not always coherent. Indeed, Bernaz[4] suggests that calling these loosely connected arrangements a "system" risks implying a degree of integration that they do not possess.

Despite this fragmentation, the mechanisms can be useful domestically. They establish public accounts of alleged violations and longer-term risks; they interpret obligations in language that judges, legislators, oversight bodies and civil society organisations can draw upon; and they create occasions for governments to explain what they have done. None of these functions guarantees implementation, particularly where the resulting recommendations are not legally binding.

The Human Rights Council and the Universal Periodic Review

The HRC replaced the Commission on Human Rights under General Assembly resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006. The change followed sustained criticism that the Commission had lost credibility because of selectivity and political bias.[5] The UPR became one of the new Council's defining features: every UN Member State is reviewed by its peers at regular intervals, and the fourth cycle began in 2022. Tistounet,[6] drawing on extensive experience within the Council's secretariat, explains how the UPR operates alongside Council sessions and the Special Procedures.

The UPR is a political review, not a judicial process. Other states make recommendations, while the state under review decides which to

[3] Pak Güre, "United Nations Mechanisms for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights" (2021).
[4] Bernaz, "Reforming the UN Human Rights Protection Procedures" (2009).
[5] Bernaz, "Reforming the UN Human Rights Protection Procedures" (2009); Freedman, "New Mechanisms of the UN Human Rights Council" (2011).
[6] Tistounet, The UN Human Rights Council: A Practical Anatomy (2020).

support and which merely to note. Scholars initially disagreed about how much this arrangement could achieve. Freedman[7] drew attention to the influence of regional alliances and political blocs and argued that implementation, rather than participation alone, would be the decisive test. Etone[8] describes a similar divide between sceptical accounts, which emphasise the UPR's institutional limitations, and evolutionary accounts, which see scope for improvement within a cooperative model.

More recent studies give greater attention to the work the UPR can do even without enforcement powers. The collection edited by Etone et al.[9] brings together theoretical and empirical analyses of its effectiveness. Molloy[10] examines its use in monitoring commitments made through peace agreements, illustrating how international review can keep domestic undertakings in view. McNeilly[11] presents the UPR as a way of making state obligations visible, while insisting that the assumptions underlying that role must be made clear. These accounts do not settle the question of impact, but they help identify what should be measured.

Treaty bodies

Treaty bodies consist of independent experts who monitor implementation of the core UN human rights conventions. Their work includes reviewing state reports, issuing concluding observations and general comments, and, where a treaty permits, considering individual complaints. Country-specific concluding observations became a regular feature only in the early 1990s. As Stamatopoulou[12] recounts, the committees had previously been constrained, in part by Cold War politics, to a more general interpretive role. The move toward country-specific recommendations made it possible to identify failures in particular national settings.

The authority of concluding observations differs from that of a domestic judgment. Although they cannot ordinarily be enforced as court orders, they explain how a committee understands obligations already binding on the state and can provide legal arguments for domestic institutions. Evidence of their practical influence is mixed. Heyns and

[7] Freedman, "New Mechanisms of the UN Human Rights Council" (2011).
[8] Etone, "Theoretical Challenges to Understanding the Potential Impact of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism" (2019).
[9] Etone, Nazir and Storey (eds.), Human Rights and the UN Universal Periodic Review Mechanism: A Research Companion (2024).
[10] Molloy, "Universal Periodic Review and Peace Agreement Implementation" (2024).
[11] McNeilly, "Human Rights through the Kaleidoscope" (2026).
[12] Stamatopoulou, "The Development of United Nations Mechanisms for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights" (1998).

Viljoen[13] reported "a very limited demonstrable impact", while Alebeek and Nollkaemper[14] estimated compliance with Human Rights Committee views at roughly 12%. Yoshida[15] cautions against drawing too narrow a conclusion from such measures. The Japanese experience, Yoshida argues, shows how domestic mobilisation and dialogue with a committee can matter even when implementation is not immediate.

Special Procedures

The Special Procedures are independent mandate-holders—Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups—appointed to investigate thematic or country situations. Their origins reach back to an ad hoc working group on southern Africa established in 1967. Kofi Annan later referred to the arrangement as the "crown jewel" of the UN human rights machinery.[16] Through country visits, communications to governments and public reports, these experts can draw attention to developments that would otherwise wait for a scheduled treaty review.

The number of mandates has expanded considerably. Limon and Power[17] counted 51 in 2014, more than 25% above the total eight years earlier, but questioned whether institutional growth had improved protection on the ground. They identify six "determinants of influence":[18] independence and accountability; expertise and standing; flexibility, reach and accessibility; state cooperation; implementation and follow-up; and resources. Crucially, experts cannot secure two of these conditions—cooperation and domestic follow-up—by themselves.

How to judge effectiveness

Counts of accepted or implemented recommendations provide only a partial measure of effectiveness. A state may amend legislation without changing the treatment of people who invoke it. Conversely, a recommendation that is never implemented in full may still alter legal reasoning or public debate. Etone[19] reviews explanations of human rights

[13] Heyns and Viljoen (2002), p. 6, as cited in Etone, "Theoretical Challenges to Understanding the Potential Impact of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism" (2019).
[14] Alebeek and Nollkaemper (2012), as cited in Etone, "Theoretical Challenges to Understanding the Potential Impact of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism" (2019).
[15] Yoshida, "Beyond Non-Bindingness" (2024).
[16] Limon and Power, History of the United Nations Special Procedures Mechanism (2014), p. 3.
[17] Limon and Power, History of the United Nations Special Procedures Mechanism (2014).
[18] Limon and Power, History of the United Nations Special Procedures Mechanism (2014), p. 17.
[19] Etone, "Theoretical Challenges to Understanding the Potential Impact of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism" (2019).

compliance based on coercion, "naming and shaming", transnational legal process, the spiral model and acculturation. In Etone's assessment, the acculturation theory developed by Goodman and Jinks[20] is especially relevant to the UPR: participation in a reference group can encourage states to adopt its norms through social and cognitive pressure, even where there is no sanction for non-compliance.

For a domestic legal assessment, the question is whether international scrutiny contributes to protection in practice. The analysis uses three related but distinct dimensions:

1) Normative effectiveness concerns changes to constitutional, statutory and regulatory rules that bring domestic law closer to international human rights standards.
2) Institutional effectiveness concerns the ability of public bodies to apply those rules, including the independence of oversight and investigative institutions, the availability of reliable data, and arrangements for monitoring follow-up.
3) Remedial effectiveness concerns what happens after an alleged violation: whether there is an effective investigation, prosecution where warranted, reparation, enforcement of decisions and protection against repetition.

Remedial effectiveness presents a particular challenge. An instructive, if different, example is the UN's own response to claims arising from the 2010 cholera outbreak in Haiti, attributed to UN peacekeepers. The organisation considered the claims "not receivable", leaving the affected people without a judicial remedy against it.[21] That episode concerns the UN's accountability for its own conduct rather than its monitoring of states, but it underlines a broader distinction between recognising harm and providing an enforceable avenue for redress.

National follow-up arrangements are therefore central to the inquiry. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) describes national mechanisms for implementation, reporting and follow-up as "standing government structures" intended to help translate recommendations into "concrete actions on the ground".[22] Kothari[23] likewise examines emerging practices for following up on UPR recommendations. Albania's experience provides a way to test how much an extensive record of international engagement reveals about actual legal, institutional and remedial protection.

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[20] Goodman and Jinks, Socializing States (2013).
[21] Freedman, "UN Immunity or Impunity?" (2014), p. 240.
[22] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Universal Periodic Review" (n.d.; accessed 19 November 2026).
[23] Kothari, Study on Emerging Good Practices from the Universal Periodic Review (2021).

Methods

This study combines doctrinal legal analysis with qualitative analysis of UN documents. Its primary material comprises nine documents concerning Albania:

a) the report of the UPR Working Group on Albania's fourth-cycle review, held on 4 November 2024 (A/HRC/58/5), and Albania's addendum responding to the recommendations (A/HRC/58/5/Add.1, 12 February 2025);[24]
b) the concluding observations of five treaty bodies: the Human Rights Committee (CCPR; CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3, adopted 21 March 2025), the Committee against Torture (CAT; CAT/C/ALB/CO/3, adopted 27 November 2025), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW; CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5, published 14 November 2023), the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD; CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14, adopted April 2024) and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR; E/C.12/ALB/CO/4, adopted 27 September 2024);[25]
c) two Special Procedures country reports: the report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions on the 2010 mission to Albania (A/HRC/17/28/Add.3) and the report of the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity on the 2024 visit (A/HRC/59/43/Add.1).[26]

The documents were examined for the subjects they addressed, the precision of their recommendations, any issues selected for formal follow-up, and references to problems raised in earlier reviews. Precision was assessed according to whether a recommendation identified a legal provision, responsible institution, timeframe or observable result. Findings were then compared across mechanisms and considered in relation to normative, institutional and remedial effectiveness. This method captures patterns in the official record rather than attempting to quantify every possible domestic effect.

The interpretation is informed by scholarship on the origins and operation of UN mechanisms[27] and on compliance and the domestic reception of international recommendations.[28]

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[24] Human Rights Council, UN Docs. A/HRC/58/5 (2024) and A/HRC/58/5/Add.1 (2025).
[25] Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025); CAT, CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025); CEDAW, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5 (2023); CERD, CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024); CESCR, E/C.12/ALB/CO/4 (2024).
[26] Human Rights Council, UN Docs. A/HRC/17/28/Add.3 (2011) and A/HRC/59/43/Add.1 (2025).
[27] Stamatopoulou (1998); Bernaz (2009); Limon and Power (2014); Tistounet (2020); Pak Güre (2021).

The approach has important limits. Repeated criticism in UN documents is evidence that an issue remains salient to the reviewing bodies; it is not, by itself, proof that nothing has improved. Nor can a documentary analysis establish that a particular reform resulted from a UN recommendation. European Union accession requirements and Council of Europe monitoring operate alongside UN scrutiny and may pull in the same direction. For that reason, the discussion examines plausible contributions rather than claiming exclusive causation. Interviews with officials, independent institutions and civil society representatives would be needed to test how the recommendations are used in practice.

Results

Albania's engagement with the UN system

On paper, Albania's engagement with the UN monitoring framework is substantial. During the fourth UPR cycle it received 253 recommendations, supported 239 and noted 14.[29] In its response, Albania said it was "deeply committed" to the UPR, linked that commitment to its HRC membership in 2024–2026, and promised to seek "concrete results". It also stated that "all relevant institutions and independent authorities will be involved in this follow-up process".[30]

Those figures indicate willingness to engage with the review, but they say less about whether the institutions responsible for those commitments act on them. The more revealing question is why similar concerns continue to appear across different UN procedures. Table 1 sets out the principal treaty body findings and the matters singled out for follow-up.

[28] Goodman and Jinks (2013); Etone (2019); Freedman (2011, 2014); Kothari (2021); Molloy (2024); Yoshida (2024); Etone et al. (2024); McNeilly (2026).

[29] Human Rights Council, UPR: Albania, Addendum, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/5/Add.1 (2025), para. 4.

[30] Human Rights Council, UPR: Albania, Addendum, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/5/Add.1 (2025), para. 1.

Table 1: Recent treaty body concluding observations on Albania and the issues selected for follow-up

Mechanism and document	Date	Main concerns (paragraphs)	Issues selected for follow-up
CEDAW, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5	Published 14 Nov. 2023	Access to justice and legal aid (13); gender-based violence, protection orders and shelters (23); Roma and Balkan Egyptian women (31, 33)	Paras. 12(a), 24(b), 28(b), 36(d)
CERD, CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14	Adopted 24–25 Apr. 2024	Equality bodies (10); hate speech (12); structural discrimination against Roma and Egyptians (16); action plan for Roma and Egyptians (17); education (18); housing and forced evictions (20); civil registration (24); Albania–Italy protocol (34)	Paras. 19(b) (education) and 35 (migrants and asylum-seekers)
CESCR, E/C.12/ALB/CO/4	Adopted 27 Sep. 2024	Low budget allocations and tax revenue (16); informal economy (26, 32); adequate housing and forced evictions (42); health care (44)	Paras. 7(a) (free legal aid), 13(a) (climate change), 27 (right to work)
Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3	Adopted 21 Mar. 2025	Impunity for past violations (9, 10); non-discrimination, including Roma and Egyptians (11, 43); gender-based violence (15); ill-treatment and investigations (21, 22, 25); migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers (31, 32); fair trial and judicial independence (33, 34)	Paras. 10 (impunity), 32 (migrants and asylum-seekers), 34 (fair trial and judicial independence)
CAT, CAT/C/ALB/CO/3	Adopted 27 Nov. 2025	Conditions of detention (12, 13); national preventive mechanism (16, 17); excessive use of force (22, 23); lack of independent and effective investigations (28, 29); Albania–Italy protocol (40, 41)	Paras. 23(a) (use of force), 29(a) (investigations), 41(c) (immigration detention centres), requested by 28 Nov. 2026

Source: authors' compilation from the concluding observations listed.[31]

The UPR: setting the agenda

The fourth UPR record brings together 253 recommendations and makes Albania's response to each publicly available.[32] This shared reference point is useful to ministries, parliamentarians, oversight institutions and civil society organisations that may otherwise work from separate policy agendas. Albania's stated intention to involve relevant institutions and independent authorities in follow-up also creates a public commitment against which subsequent action can be assessed. The UPR's value here is less a matter of legal compulsion than of visibility and coordination.[33]

[31] CEDAW, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5 (2023); CERD, CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024); CESCR, E/C.12/ALB/CO/4 (2024); Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025); CAT, CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025).
[32] Human Rights Council, UN Docs. A/HRC/58/5 (2024) and A/HRC/58/5/Add.1 (2025).
[33] Etone, Nazir and Storey (2024); McNeilly (2026).

Yet supporting a recommendation is not the same as carrying it out. The UPR's non-binding character and the broad wording of many recommendations allow governments to endorse goals without identifying a budget, a deadline or an accountable institution. That limitation is not specific to Albania. The language of commitment in its addendum reflects a familiar diplomatic form; what remains uncertain is how it will be translated into work plans and measurable results. The UPR record alone cannot answer that question, so the more detailed observations of the treaty bodies are particularly valuable.

The Human Rights Committee: rule of law and remedies

The Human Rights Committee's observations on Albania's third periodic report[34] raise issues that affect the enforcement of other rights. The rights to a fair trial and an effective remedy depend on courts and investigative bodies capable of acting independently. Albania's 2016 constitutional amendments introduced far-reaching justice reforms, including the vetting of judges and prosecutors. Nevertheless, the Committee returned to fair-trial guarantees and judicial independence. It requested follow-up by 28 March 2028 on impunity for earlier human rights violations, the treatment of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, and fair trial and judicial independence.[35]

The timing is significant. Nearly a decade after the constitutional changes, the Committee is asking for evidence of how the justice system functions, not simply whether reform legislation exists. Vetting may improve integrity over time while also reducing court capacity during the transition. The central issue is therefore how judicial independence, adequate staffing and timely decisions are secured together. By selecting migration for follow-up, the Committee also joined CERD and CAT in scrutinising Albania's arrangements for migrants and asylum-seekers.

CAT: ill-treatment and investigative accountability

The Committee against Torture's 2025 observations focus on situations in which accountability depends on institutions investigating other state institutions. Concerns included detention conditions, the legal mandate of the national preventive mechanism exercised by the People's Advocate, excessive force and physical violence, and the "absence of independent and effective investigations". Albania was asked to provide follow-up

[34] Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025).

[35] Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 10, 32, 33–34 (including the recommendations selected for follow-up).

information by 28 November 2026 on excessive force, prompt and independent investigations, and immigration detention centres.[36]

The Committee also considered the 2023 Albania–Italy protocol, under which Italy operates centres on Albanian territory for the processing and detention of people intercepted at sea.[37] Such an arrangement complicates questions of jurisdiction, independent monitoring and the safeguards needed to prevent refoulement. Its inclusion in the CAT follow-up procedure illustrates a strength of treaty monitoring: a committee can bring established treaty obligations to bear on an unfamiliar cross-border practice, even when responsibility is divided between governments.

Identifying the deficiency is not the same as correcting it. CAT can specify why investigations are inadequate and what the Convention requires. It cannot conduct prosecutions, appoint investigators or restructure domestic agencies. Those steps require institutions with authority to act and a government prepared to support their independence, including when allegations concern public officials.

CEDAW: laws on paper and their enforcement

The observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women[38] reveal a related gap between legal safeguards and the conditions needed to use them. CEDAW noted "insufficient resources allocated to the implementation of Law No. 111/2017 on legal aid guaranteed by the State", delays in legal proceedings, and "persistent reluctance of women to file complaints owing to judicial gender bias". It also raised the lack of information on enforcement of domestic-violence protection orders, inadequate shelter provision, and the absence of a distinct criminal offence of femicide.[39]

These are not problems that a new law necessarily solves. Legal aid and domestic-violence protections exist in Albania, but a woman seeking help still depends on accessible services and on the decisions of police officers, prosecutors, judges and local authorities. CEDAW's contribution is to describe these practical barriers in terms of state obligations. Whether the protection becomes meaningful rests on funding, coordination and institutional conduct.

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[36] Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 12–13, 16–17, 22–23, 28–29 and 42.
[37] Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 40–41.
[38] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5 (2023).
[39] Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5 (2023), paras. 13 and 23.

CERD: Roma and Egyptians and substantive equality

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination[40] offers a particularly important perspective because concerns affecting Roma and Egyptian communities also appear in several other reviews. CERD addressed structural discrimination and social exclusion, the implementation and financing of the 2021–2025 national action plan on Roma and Egyptian equality and inclusion, education, housing and forced evictions, and civil registration. It chose the education recommendation in paragraph 19(b) for follow-up.[41]

The emphasis is on equality in lived conditions, not merely the existence of a general prohibition on discrimination. CERD's recommendations call for targeted measures, adequate resources and action at local level. In doing so, they provide domestic equality bodies and the People's Advocate with a legal basis for challenging shortcomings often described as discretionary social policy. CERD also examined the Albania–Italy protocol and selected the treatment of migrants and asylum-seekers for follow-up, preceding CAT's later attention to the same arrangement.[42]

CESCR: socio-economic rights and resources

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[43] directs attention to the resources available for realising rights. Its concerns included "persistently low budget allocations" for social rights, a low tax-revenue-to-GDP ratio and "inefficiencies in public spending". It also noted that many people working informally lack access to essential benefits, while adequate housing "remains a prevalent issue", with discrimination and forced evictions continuing. The matters selected for follow-up were free legal aid, climate change and the right to work.[44]

This review helps explain why some of the most persistent gaps are difficult to close. International bodies can require governments to justify fiscal and administrative choices, but they cannot allocate national budgets or build local service capacity. The distinction between adopting a protective rule and financing its operation is particularly pronounced in economic and social rights.

[40] Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024).
[41] Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024), paras. 16–20 and 24.
[42] Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024), paras. 34–35.
[43] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. E/C.12/ALB/CO/4 (2024).
[44] Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. E/C.12/ALB/CO/4 (2024), paras. 7(a), 13(a), 16, 26, 27, 32 and 42.

Special Procedures

Country visits by the Special Procedures add a different kind of evidence. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions examined killings associated with blood feuds during a 2010 mission.[45] In July 2024, the Independent Expert on sexual orientation and gender identity visited Albania to assess violence and discrimination affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and gender-diverse people, recording progress as well as continuing obstacles.[46] These visits allow a mandate-holder to examine a problem in depth and communicate findings that domestic actors can cite. Their recommendations nevertheless depend on government cooperation and sustained follow-up.[47]

Recurrence across mechanisms

To see where the separate reviews converge, Table 2 maps the principal concerns identified in the documents examined.

Table 2: Recurring concerns about Albania across UN mechanisms, 2023–2025

Issue	UPR	CCPR	CAT	CEDAW	CERD	CESCR
Discrimination against Roma and Egyptians	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Access to justice, fair trial, legal aid and remedies	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Gender-based and domestic violence	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Ill-treatment and independent investigations	✓	✓	✓			
Migrants, asylum-seekers and the Albania–Italy protocol	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Housing and forced evictions	✓				✓	✓

Source: authors' compilation from the UN review documents cited here.[48] A tick means the issue appears among the concerns of the concluding observations or, for the UPR, among the recommendations Albania received in the fourth cycle (for example, recommendations 124.36 and 124.226 on Roma and Egyptians, 124.147 on gender-based violence, 124.250 on migrants, and 124.115 on housing). A blank means the issue was not among the concerns identified in the coding.

The overlap warrants two interpretations. On one hand, it demonstrates that international scrutiny has kept particular problems in view; concerns do not disappear when one reporting process ends. On the other, their reappearance suggests that the institutions charged with addressing them have yet to provide an adequate response. Five mechanisms identified issues affecting Roma and Egyptian communities. This breadth makes it

[45] Human Rights Council, Mission to Albania, UN Doc. A/HRC/17/28/Add.3 (2011).
[46] Human Rights Council, Visit to Albania: Report of the Independent Expert on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, UN Doc. A/HRC/59/43/Add.1 (2025).
[47] Limon and Power, History of the United Nations Special Procedures Mechanism (2014).
[48] Human Rights Council, A/HRC/58/5 (2024); Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025); CAT, CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025); CEDAW, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5 (2023); CERD, CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024); CESCR, E/C.12/ALB/CO/4 (2024).

harder to dismiss the concern as an isolated reading by a single committee, although recurrence alone does not measure the scale of change. Migration presents a more recent pattern: CERD, the Human Rights Committee and CAT selected related questions for follow-up within about twenty months, while UPR recommendations also addressed the treatment of migrants and asylum-seekers.

Discussion

Three issue files

Three overlapping areas help illustrate what the UN record can—and cannot—tell us about domestic reform. They are not litigated cases with judicial findings of fact. Rather, they are clusters of recommendations and observations that identify the decisions Albania is expected to take next.

The UPR as a baseline. Albania's fourth-cycle UPR documents establish a public account of the commitments that the government accepted and those it did not. Their practical value lies in giving civil society and domestic institutions a record against which to check future decisions. But a recommendation can remain on the diplomatic record for years without being assigned to an implementing body. A national system that attaches responsibilities, indicators and resources to each commitment would make that record more useful.[49] *Recommendation 124.22 of the fourth-cycle review specifically addresses the need for a national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up.*[50]

CAT and cross-border detention. The 2025 CAT review is instructive for its treatment of the Albania–Italy migration arrangement. It identifies safeguards relevant to detention and investigation, and explains why independent oversight and access for monitors matter even where responsibility is dispersed across two states. Lawyers, the People's Advocate and domestic courts may draw on that interpretation when confronting jurisdictional uncertainty.[51] *CAT's intervention is therefore important even before any legislative or administrative response can be shown. The limitation is equally clear: the Committee cannot itself conduct an independent investigation, compel prosecution or redesign the agencies responsible for detention oversight.*

CERD and structural discrimination. The findings on Roma and Egyptian communities are reinforced by CEDAW, CESCR and the Human

[49] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Universal Periodic Review" (n.d.; accessed 19 November 2026).
[50] Human Rights Council, Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review: Albania, UN Doc. A/HRC/58/5 (2024), recommendation 124.22.
[51] Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 40–42.

Rights Committee.[52] *The combined record gives domestic advocates a stronger basis for arguing that exclusion is a question of legal rights rather than optional social assistance. Still, the obstacles identified—education, housing, registration and access to services—are closely tied to municipal administration and long-term expenditure. The continued appearance of these issues after the adoption of national strategies suggests that policy design has advanced further than consistent local delivery. CESCR's attention to public spending makes that implementation problem difficult to ignore.*

Effectiveness on the three dimensions

Normatively, there are signs of progress. The treaty bodies acknowledge legislation and policy frameworks concerning legal aid, domestic violence and Roma and Egyptian inclusion, while the 2016 justice reform significantly altered the constitutional structure of the judiciary. International recommendations have contributed to the environment in which these measures were adopted, but they cannot be treated as their sole cause; EU accession requirements and other forms of European scrutiny also matter.

Institutional results are less settled. UN observations give bodies such as the People's Advocate and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination authoritative standards to invoke in their work. CAT's focus on the national preventive mechanism[53] is a concrete example of scrutiny directed at an institution's mandate. Yet the same monitoring record points to inadequate investigative independence and inadequate resources for legal aid. Creating an institution, in other words, does not establish that it has the means or freedom to perform its task.

The weakest evidence concerns remedies. Allegations of ill-treatment must be investigated, protection orders must be enforced, and cases must reach an independent court within a reasonable time. Those are the points at which rights become meaningful to individuals. They also depend most heavily on the functioning of domestic institutions that UN mechanisms can scrutinise but cannot replace.

So how effective are UN mechanisms in Albania?

Albania does not support a simple verdict of success or failure. Its record shows that the UN mechanisms perform some tasks more effectively than others. The UPR keeps broad commitments in public view; treaty

[52] CERD, CERD/C/ALB/CO/13-14 (2024); CEDAW, CEDAW/C/ALB/CO/5 (2023); CESCR, E/C.12/ALB/CO/4 (2024); Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025).
[53] Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on Albania, UN Doc. CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 16–17.

bodies identify precise legal deficiencies and recurring priorities; and expert visits can bring neglected or sensitive issues to international attention. CERD's and CAT's engagement with migration detention is an example of scrutiny adapting to a new institutional arrangement. For domestic lawyers and civil society organisations, these findings provide material they can use to question government decisions.

The influence is less direct when a recommendation requires the state to investigate its own officials, confront entrenched interests, reorganise institutions or pay for services over many years. In these areas, international visibility does not supply the investigative authority, administrative competence or resources needed to change everyday practice.

This pattern is broadly consistent with the acculturation account discussed by Etone[54] and Goodman and Jinks.[55] Albania's participation in European and UN institutions, including its HRC membership, creates incentives to demonstrate commitment to shared standards. Those incentives are visible in legislation, strategies and official statements. They appear less capable of explaining change when implementation entails political or financial costs. At the same time, Yoshida's[56] warning against underestimating treaty body influence remains relevant: even before improvements can be documented, the committees may shape the questions domestic institutions and campaigners are able to ask. The analysis cannot establish that such agenda-setting has itself produced the reforms described here.

Three measures follow from these findings. First, a standing national mechanism for implementation, reporting and follow-up, supported by a legal mandate and a public tracking system, could show which agency is responsible for each recommendation and how progress is being assessed. Second, recurring commitments should be linked to identifiable budget allocations, especially for legal aid, shelters and Roma and Egyptian inclusion measures. Third, the concerns of CAT and the Human Rights Committee[57] call for an investigative arrangement genuinely independent of the law-enforcement bodies whose conduct it examines. These proposals do not remove the political choices involved, but they would make the gap between accepting a recommendation and acting on it more visible.

[54] Etone, "Theoretical Challenges to Understanding the Potential Impact of the Universal Periodic Review Mechanism" (2019).
[55] Goodman and Jinks, Socializing States (2013).
[56] Yoshida, "Beyond Non-Bindingness" (2024).
[57] CAT, CAT/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 28–29; Human Rights Committee, CCPR/C/ALB/CO/3 (2025), paras. 21–25.

Conclusions

UN human rights mechanisms make a difference chiefly through scrutiny: they document problems, interpret obligations and give domestic actors material with which to demand change. Their influence should not be mistaken for the enforcement power of a court. A useful assessment must distinguish improvements in law from improvements in institutional performance and, ultimately, from the remedies available to a person whose rights have been violated.

Albania illustrates why those distinctions matter. The UPR has maintained a visible record of reform commitments, while treaty bodies have identified more specific obligations and shortcomings. CERD's and CAT's examination of the Albania–Italy migration protocol demonstrates the ability of international monitoring to respond to new institutional arrangements. Yet repeated concerns about investigations, protection orders, judicial capacity and discrimination affecting Roma and Egyptian communities point to limits that the international procedures cannot overcome on their own. These are matters of domestic authority, budgets, administration and accountability.

The conclusion is therefore conditional rather than absolute: UN mechanisms can support domestic human rights protection, but they cannot deliver it without sustained action by national institutions. A stronger follow-up structure, independent oversight and resources directed to recurring problems would offer more convincing evidence of effectiveness than the number of recommendations supported. Future research could examine how officials, the People's Advocate and civil society use the UN findings in practice and assess whether the issues selected for follow-up in 2023–2025 persist in later reviews.

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