

THE ISSUE OF
DISPLACED PERSONS IN THE
CONTEXT OF AN EVENTUAL 'GRAND FINALE'
BETWEEN
KOSOVO AND SERBIA

September 2019

Supported by:



Norwegian Embassy



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Abbreviations

CCTV	Closed-circuit television (Surveillance Cameras)
EU	European Union
IOM	International Organization for Migration
KFOR	Kosovo Force
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
RAE	Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian
UCPMB	Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa, and Bujanovac
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction and Context

1. The war of Kosovo ended on June 10 of 1999 with the signing of the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement, which ensured the international protectorate of Kosovo. Under the United Nations mandate, the Kosovo Forces (KFOR) entered in Kosovo two days later, on the June 12. KFOR was entrusted with establishing the peace in Kosovo and maintaining a secure environment for all the minorities and the community as a whole.¹ The conflict that took place in Kosovo during the 1999 but also the later episodes of violence (March 2004), which resulted in riots throughout Kosovo, caused a massive displacement of all the ethnicities of Kosovo within and outside the country. During the war, between 1.2 and 1.45 million Kosovo Albanians were displaced from Kosovo². Whereas after the war, as the Serbian security forces were retreating from Kosovo and the KFOR was moving in, the Kosovo Albanians were returning from the neighboring countries, whereas about 200,000 Serbians and other non-Albanian ethnic minorities fled from Kosovo.³
2. According to the UNHCR, as of 2017, the number of the displaced individuals who are awaiting solutions of their displacement status remains high with nearly 90,000 displaced individuals.⁴ The number of the displaced from Kosovo to Serbia is the highest with about 72,000, 16,486 displaced within Kosovo, while 879 and 610 displaced in Montenegro and Northern Macedonia, respectively. According to the same source, until 2016, the number of voluntary returns is 27,286 individuals to and within Kosovo. The number of returned individuals has been steadily

¹ UNHCR and Praxis (2007), 'Analysis of the Situation of Internally Displaced Persons from Kosovo in Serbia: Law and Practice'. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4704bff72.html> [Accessed on: August 1, 2019].

² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2018), 'Global Report on Internal Displacement for Kosovo'. Available at: <http://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/GRID%202018%20-%20Figure%20Analysis%20-%20KOSOVO.pdf> [Accessed on: August 4, 2019].

³ Ibid.

⁴ UNHCR (2017), 'Displaced persons from Kosovo in the region – a re-assessment of Interest to return'. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/see/10873-displaced-people-from-kosovo-in-the-region-a-re-assessment-of-interest-to-return.html> [Accessed on: August 10, 2019].

decreasing since 2011, where the lowest since 2000 was recorded in 2018 with only 327 returnees.⁵

3. The highest number of internally displaced persons is in the region of Mitrovica. An estimate by UNHCR suggests that there are 6,939 Albanians displaced in South Mitrovica. The number of displaced Serbs from this region is 6,859 (namely North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok, Leposaviq and Zveçan), who are mostly displaced in the municipality of Graçanica and surrounded villages, mainly populated by Serbs.⁶
4. Just after the end of the war in Kosovo, between January 2000 and May 2001, a conflict between Albanians Liberation Army of Presevo, Medvedja, and Bujanovac (UCPMB) and Serb police started in the Presevo Valley, an area in southern Serbia. The UCPMB sought to join Kosovo as about 80% of this region is populated by Albanians. Local Albanians feared the Serbian police because of the crimes they have committed in Kosovo, and consequently, 15,000 Albanians from this region were displaced to Kosovo. After the conflict ended with the peace agreement in May 2001, about 5,500 displaced persons returned back to their homes.⁷
5. The return of the displaced persons is a complex process because it entails a wide set of factors influencing it. These factors may include the security and freedom of movement, the facilitation of the personal documents, the construction and reconstruction of houses of the displaced, access to education in the mother language of the returnees, access to health services and also employment opportunities. The legal framework of the Government of Republic of Kosovo and the international rights ensure that the communities can return safely to their place of origin within Kosovo. The continuous work of the *Ministry of Communities and Return, Consultative Council for Communities, Office for Community Affairs, Municipal Offices for Communities and Return* and also the international organizations have ensured that the return of the displaced can be achievable

⁵UNHCR (2019), 'Fact Sheet, Kosovo*'. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/see/wp-content/uploads/sites/57/2019/04/Fact-sheet-Kosovo-4-April-2019.pdf> [Accessed on: August 10, 2019].

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Global IDP (2005), 'Profile of Internal Displacement: Serbia & Montenegro'. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4051dda14.html> [Accessed on: August 13, 2019].

through creating sustainable conditions for return and integration of the returnees.

6. This paper will provide an analysis of the factors influencing the displacement of persons inside and outside of Kosovo. It further presents the engagement of the Kosovo and international institutions in addressing this issue, the budget spent on projects regarding displaced persons by internal and international donors, as well as Kosovo's position in the negotiation process of dialogue regarding this issue.

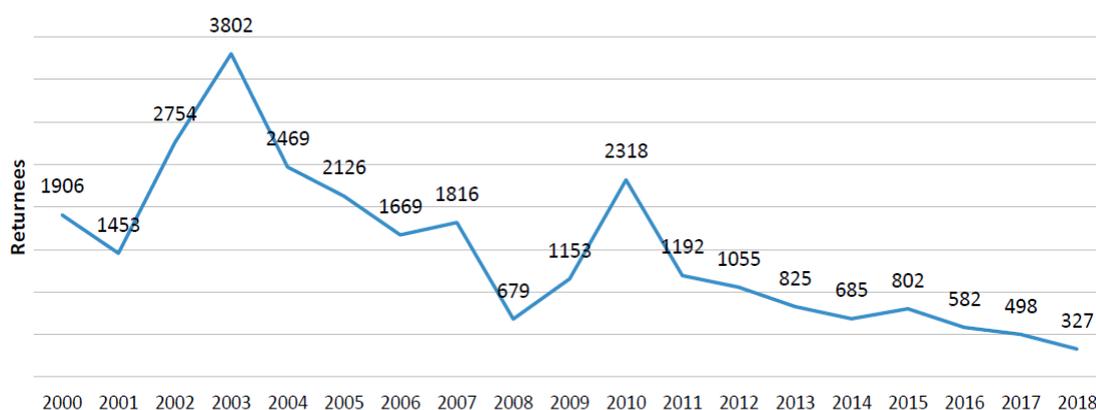
Problems Facing Displaced Persons in Kosovo and the actions of the institutions in addressing this issue

7. Many factors related to the living conditions, social and economic integration of the returnees, determine their decision to return. More specifically, these factors comprise the availability of public services, income-generating opportunities, access to property rights, housing and infrastructure, security and freedom of movement, and inter-ethnic relations. The availability of funds also determines the return dynamics, and the number of the returnees depend almost directly on their access to these funds. These factors are discussed in this section accordingly.
8. The analysis of the current situation of the displaced persons was complemented with a set of conducted field interviews. The interviewees were selected based on their current local and international institutional position concerning the issue of the displaced people within Kosovo and in the neighboring countries.
9. The interviewees were:
 - Interviewee 1, Senior Official in Minister of Communities and Return
 - Interviewee 2, Representative of UNHCR
 - Interviewee 3, Member of the Commission of the Rights and Interests of Minorities and Return
 - Interviewee 4, Member of the Commission of the Rights and Interests of Minorities and Return

- Interviewee 5, Member of the Commission of the Rights and Interests of Minorities and Return

10. There has been a range of activities and projects implemented by the Ministry of Communities and Return and International organizations, which are committed to address the issue of displacement and increase the number of returnees. This has resulted in a large number of volunteer returns in Kosovo. According to a report by the Ministry of Communities and Return, the number of returnees has been increasing after the independence of Kosovo. However, the figures show that the number of returnees started to drop after 2010.⁸

Table 1. The returnees for the period 2000-2018



Source: UNHCR (2018) Return Statistics 2013 – 2018

11. A determining factor in the decision-making process underlying voluntary returns is security and freedom of movement. There is a perception of the lack of security, which is based on the political situation in the north of Kosovo, namely in the Mitrovica region. In general, the displaced persons are safe to return in most locations in the whole region of Kosovo based on an investigation led by UNHCR and based on a report by the Ministry of Communities and Return. However, there

⁸ Government of Republic of Kosovo (2013), 'Strategy for Communities and Return 2014 – 2018'. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b4306654.html> [Accessed on: August 10, 2019].

are still certain locations within municipalities in Kosovo which have faced resistance when the displaced people visited these locations intending to return.⁹

12.A report by the Ministry of Communities and Return identified that the safety issues are more related to the locations in the North Mitrovica, where there has been a usurpation of properties of the communities.¹⁰ Nonetheless, security and freedom of movement are basic human rights; therefore, an improvement of this factors would ensure the return of the displaced individuals who have expressed interest to return, regardless of the current situation in these locations.

13.It has been acknowledged that there is a peaceful climate in Kosovo and a social and physical will to accept the displaced who are interested in returning to Kosovo. There has been a tremendous effort put by local and international institutions for this issue. All interviewees emphasized the importance of safety and freedom of movement for the returnees and that it is essential to increase the number of returnees.

14.For all the displaced people, one of the most striking needs is the support in the full reconstruction of their houses. The housing conditions among the displaced population differ. In Serbia, 63% live in good or excellent conditions, while 37% in poor conditions or very poor conditions. In Montenegro, 10% live in good conditions, while 90% live in poor or very poor conditions. There are different arrangements to property, some own property, whereas others rent. Four hundred sixty-five (465) families who own property will not be a priority for housing assistance regardless that they have expressed interest to return.¹¹

15.Poor housing is especially reported among the displaced in Montenegro. This further confirms the need for an urgent resolution to prioritize the return of the vulnerable displaced from Montenegro, Macedonia, and the most vulnerable

⁹ UNHCR (2017), 'Displaced persons from Kosovo in the region – a re-assessment of Interest to return'. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/see/10873-displaced-people-from-kosovo-in-the-region-a-re-assessment-of-interest-to-return.html> [Accessed on: August 5, 2019].

¹⁰ Government of Republic of Kosovo (2013), 'Strategy for Communities and Return 2014 – 2018'. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b4306654.html> [Accessed on: August 7, 2019].

¹¹ See footnote 7.

families displaced in Serbia. In total, 1003 families need housing construction/repair. Seven hundred forty-three (743) families displaced in Serbia are reported to need housing assistance to return.¹²

16. Up to 2013, there have been considerable initiatives addressing the issue of housing condition. A report presented by the Ministry of Communities and Return provides evidence that 972 houses were built between 2009 and 2013. Nonetheless, only 67% of these houses were inhabited during this period.¹³ Given that housing conditions are being addressed by various projects implemented by international and Kosovo organizations, while the number of returnees remains low, this evidence may suggest that *there is an unwillingness among the displaced to return on their location of origin.*

Table 2. Houses built and habitation status¹⁴

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Totali
Total houses built	229	238	265	247	120	972
Total residential houses	118	134	191	203	90	651
Percentage of homes currently inhabited	52%	56%	72%	91%	75%	67%

17. This is also supported by the interviewees who have also pointed out this issue. As evidenced, the institutions of Kosovo have created mechanisms, allocated a large number of funds, and built houses which today are not inhabited. There is a general belief that the displaced people have legally acquired these houses, but later on, they sold or abandoned them. There is evidence that Kosovo's institutions have put sufficient effort for the displaced people to return; however, it is suspected that certain minorities might have been *manipulated* into not returning.

18. Currently, there are *several assistance projects* from international organizations that continue to support the return in the construction of houses, but also on

¹² See footnote 7.

¹³ Government of Republic of Kosovo (2013), 'Strategy for Communities and Return 2014 – 2018'. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b4306654.html> [Accessed on: August 10, 2019].

¹⁴ Ibid.

addressing other issues of sustainable return. A project conducted by UNHCR will support 579 families displaced outside and within Kosovo in sustainable return. The fourth phase of the EU funded Return and Reintegration in Kosovo enabled 30 families to achieve their durable return and integration in 2017, while the fifth phase of this project intends to assist the return of 400 families by 2020.¹⁵ However, considering the high number of the displaced from and within Kosovo, *there should be more funds allocated to this issue by the European Union.*

19. The Government of Kosovo had dedicated a substantial budget to the Ministry of Communities and Return for the period 2009 – 2013. Additionally, this ministry has strengthened its cooperation with international partners such as the EU Office in Kosovo, the Embassy of Great Britain and USAID, among others, to provide additional funds for implementation of projects regarding the return and integration of communities.¹⁶ The table below presents the funds for the above mentioned period. As presented by the table below, in 2013 only, more than 7 million euros have been managed by Ministry of Communities and Return designated in building and reconstructing houses, increasing safety and security for the return of the displaced, improving their livelihood, etc. In previous years the amount allocated to this issue was even larger.

¹⁵ UNHCR (2017), 'Displaced persons from Kosovo in the region – a re-assessment of Interest to return', UNHCR Regional Office in South Eastern Europe. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/see/10873-displaced-people-from-kosovo-in-the-region-a-re-assessment-of-interest-to-return.html> [Accessed on: August 19, 2019].

¹⁶ Government of Republic of Kosovo (2013), 'Strategy for Communities and Return 2014 – 2018'. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b4306654.html> [Accessed on: August 12, 2019].

Table 3. Allocation of funds for the return process¹⁷

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
MCR	8,707,057.00€	8,652,046.00€	7,160,317.00€	7,179,045.00€	7,179,045.00€
EU	EU support to Mitrovica Initiative Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities The EU-MRSI - Closing the camp Qesmin Lug and Osterode February 2010 - December 2012 EU: € 5 million, MCR: € 0.1 million				2013-2015 Return of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians EU: 1.8 mil; MCR: 0.2 mil
EU - RRK	RRK I: - June 2008 - Oct. 2010 EU: 3.3 mil; MCR 1.1 mil; UNDP: 0.4 mil	RRK II: Aug. 2009 - July 2011; EU: 4 mil €; MCR 1.1 mil €; DRC: 0.2 mil €	RRK III: 1 Nov. 2011 - Apr. 2014; EU: 4 mil; MCR € 1.1 mil; IOM € 0.2 mil)		
EU Community Stabilization		CSP I: 2010 - 2012 EU: 2 mil €; MCR: 0.1 mil. €	CSP II: 2012 - ongoing EU 3 mil; MCR 1 mil		
US State Department BPRM	<u>2009-2010</u> 849,985.00 \$ 528,646.00 \$	<u>2010-2011</u> 467,999.00 \$	<u>2011-2013</u> 400,567.00 \$	<u>2012- 2013</u> 477,000.00 \$ 700,000.00\$	<u>2013-2014</u> 396,028.00 \$
British Embassy	2009-2010: 164,127 €	2010-2011: 353,000 €	2011-2012: 511,330 €	2012-2013: 563,922 €	2013-2014: 214,372€

20. Despite the high budget dedicated to the return of the displaced people, the number of returnees is not as high as the funds allocated. It has been evidenced from the interviews that the institutional will exists; nevertheless, to resolve the issue of the displaced, they should not be manipulated from parallel structures.

21. Regarding the role of international institutions (UNHCR, OSCE, etc.) in addressing the issue of the displaced, it was argued that without their support, return and integration would have been much more challenging processes. It has been evidenced that UNHCR, coordinates activities with other international institutions like UNMIK, the EU Office in Kosovo, OES, IOM, and so forth. It regularly monitors sustainable reintegration and ensures the protection of minorities, voluntary returnees, and internally displaced persons. Further, UNHCR imposes

¹⁷ Ibid.

coordination with Kosovo's institutions in the first place, and then with international actors to support a durable solution for displaced persons, especially for those in collective centers.

22. The crucial role of these institutions has been emphasized, yet there is a general perception that they are not as active as they should be. The argument is that the displaced might trust the international organizations more and as such, they should use this opportunity to increase the number of returnees in Kosovo.
23. There is also a contrasting belief among the ministry officials that international organizations should only have a mediating and facilitating role since, according to them, Kosovo institutions should conduct the core activities regarding the displacement issue. The international institutions should provide technical support or counseling based on their experience and also provide funds if necessary for the housing, security, providing legal assistance, and so on.
24. Access to personal documents - The lack of personal documentation without which they have difficulties accessing other civil rights seems to be a factor, yet not a determiner impeding the return process. The possession of birth certificates and other personal identity documentation is not a significant issue for Serbians, but it seems to be a more daunting issue for RAE community.
25. Based on a research conducted by UNHCR and UNDP, a large percentage of RAE community do not possess at least one of the personal identification documents, health insurance cards, property documents, and employment registration booklets.¹⁸ The Serbian community, on the other hand, are more likely to lack the education diplomas, employment registration booklets, and in few cases birth certificates and personal ID cards. According to UNHCR¹⁹, a certain number of RAE community have no personal document whatsoever to prove their place of birth

¹⁸ UNHCR and UNDP (2009), 'IDPs FROM AND WITHIN KOSOVO: Vulnerabilities and Resources'. Available at: <https://drc.ngo/media/1659347/idps-from-and-within-kosovo.pdf> [Accessed on: August 20, 2019].

¹⁹ UNHCR (2017), 'Displaced persons from Kosovo in the region - a re-assessment of Interest to return'. Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/see/10873-displaced-people-from-kosovo-in-the-region-a-re-assessment-of-interest-to-return.html> [Accessed on: August 2, 2019].

or parentage. However, there is a considerable effort put by UNHCR and the Ministry of Communities and Return to improve the situation by ensuring that responsible institutions address the lack of birth registration documents among the displaced population. *They have provided legal aid and pursued pragmatic approaches to the unregistered persons among.*

26. To expedite the access to documentation of the displaced, initially, there should be an accurate register of the displaced people with personal details and information of specific circumstances and reasons of their displacement but also whether they have the interest to return to Kosovo. In terms of managing the return of the displaced people, this information would have been crucial.

27. Also, it has been argued that the delay of acquiring citizenship and personal identification documents can create other potential problems; the returnees might engage in criminal activities in Kosovo, and it will not be possible to identify the person without personal identification documents. *In order to address these issues, UNHCR has reported that the creation of this register started in 2018 through the dialogue of the program 'Skopje Process' (described in more details in the next section) and information about the displaced persons is being gathered.*

28. Kosovo has the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Diaspora and Ministry of Communities and Return but also other sufficient instruments to directly tackle this issue. And thus, it should not depend entirely on third parties who intentionally put themselves between the institutions and displaced people to pursue their interests. The institutions of Kosovo should develop closer relations with their citizens regardless of their ethnicity or where they live.

29. According to UNHCR, 361 of the displaced individuals declared to be illiterate, among whom 50 of them are children.²⁰ Based on the study by UNHCR, access to education is a subsequent problem caused by a lack of documentation, 26% of the RAE community cannot access education due to this issue. This study also found

²⁰ Ibid.

evidence of a distinct inequality between Serbian and RAE community in school attendance. This inequality increases with the increase of the education level, where the RAE community is almost entirely excluded from university education.²¹ Access to education is a fundamental human right and as such, it requires immediate attention; *authorities should ensure effective literacy and school enrollment and also access to quality education for all the displaced and returnees. This should be an integral part of return and reintegration support activities.*

30. UNHCR reported that among those interviewed in their study, a total of 9% of the displaced suffer from medical conditions and a certain percentage belong to socially vulnerable groups such as single parents, elderly at risk, women or children at risk.²² There are some unmet special needs regarding medical care for both Serbians and RAE communities. To address the issue of displaced individuals with special needs and to ensure the effective inclusion and prioritization of these categories, *the vulnerability criteria should be effectively applied during the beneficiaries return.*

31. Livelihood - One of the most pressing needs for the displaced people to return is income-generating opportunities. Income is a precondition for sustainable economic integration of the returnees. *There have been a considerable amount of grants dedicated to income-generating opportunities supporting the creation of small-size businesses and entrepreneurship programs which would be expected to boost the local economy in the long-run. There has also been a set of other employment support for the returnees such as the apprenticeship, counseling in job centers, on the job training, subsidies employment with a private employer, etc.*^{23,24,25}

²¹ UNHCR and UNDP (2009), 'IDPs FROM AND WITHIN KOSOVO: Vulnerabilities and Resources'. Available at: <https://drc.ngo/media/1659347/idps-from-and-within-kosovo.pdf> [Accessed on: August 13, 2019].

²² See footnote 16.

²³ Corbanese, V., & Rosas, G. (2007). 'Young people's transition to decent work: Evidence from Kosovo'. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_policy/documents/publication/wcms_113895.pdf [Accessed on: August 11, 2019].

²⁴ UNHCR and UNDP (2009), 'IDPs FROM AND WITHIN KOSOVO: Vulnerabilities and Resources'. Available at: <https://drc.ngo/media/1659347/idps-from-and-within-kosovo.pdf> [Accessed on: August 3, 2019].

²⁵ UNDP (2010), 'Regional Project on IDP Associations Phase II Prevention of Further Displacements and Recovery on Behalf of Displaced persons in Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia'. Available at:

32. The wide range of active labor market programs in an attempt to economically integrate the returnees did not translate into sustainable development. This was due to the slack economic growth and the high unemployment rate among all the communities in Kosovo. There have been many cases where the displaced have returned in Kosovo but could not get integrated economically, therefore went back to their country of displacement. From the conversations with the interviewees, it was understood that this is mostly the case for the Egyptian community, while Serbians are generally not interested in returning most likely for political reasons. The unemployment rate in Kosovo in 2018 was about 30%²⁶, hence to create better employment opportunities, *more self-employment programs and entrepreneurship programs dedicated to the returnees should be funded.*

The role of regional initiatives and forums in addressing the issue of displaced persons

33. 'Skopje Process' has been a regional initiative started in 2014 by OSCE and UNHCR, and supported by Ministry of Communities and Return in order to launch a regional process committed to finding a solution for return, and social and economic integration of the displaced in Kosovo. The relevant institutions from Prishtina, Belgrade, Skopje, and Podgorica meet regularly on an annual basis committed to address the issue of displaced persons and provide solutions. *The leading institution of this process for Kosovo is the Ministry of Communities and Return which is responsible to develop policies, promote and implement legislation for the promotion and protection of the rights of communities and the return.*

34. The decision of the 'Skopje Process' includes increasing the community members in the Kosovo Police, while OSCE organized campaigns to inform and encourage communities to apply. Another project approved by this initiative is to increase the CCTV in villages with the highest number of returnees and a need for 40,000

https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/documents/projects/KOS/00046721_UNDP_Kosovo_Final_Project_Review_Report.pdf [Accessed on: August 1, 2019].

²⁶ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2019), 'Labour Force Survey'. Available at: <http://ask.rks-gov.net/en/kosovo-agency-of-statistics/add-news/labour-force-survey-in-kosovo-2018> [Accessed on: August 13, 2019].

additional euros was identified. This initiative also decided that the displaced persons are exempt from payment of accumulated tax during the period they were not habituating their properties.²⁷

35.In 2017, a compensation fund of 300,000 euros was set for the reconstruction of houses, while in 2018 there were another 300,000 euros allocated to this issue. A legal working group established by the Government is in the process of drafting an administrative instruction to guide this process.²⁸

36.Concerning the issue of personal documentation; the civil status registration, the issuance of the IDs, and travel documents are fully covered with legal norms. So, they are available for all the citizens in an equal manner. The issues of more convenient access to services and application with civil status offices will be completed with the Ministry of Communities and Return instructions within guidelines.

37.There has also been the initiative to create a database with the necessary information about the displaced persons which will be managed by the Ministry of Communities and Return. Until this project is finalized, UNHCR will keep leading the exchange of data between relevant institutions and will support the ministry in this regard.

38.There were also several activities and programs led by Nansen Dialogue Network: Returns program in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Mitrovica Program and Obiliq Municipality Program. Since 2010, these programs assisted in improving interethnic relations, provided support to institutionalize regular cooperation between Albanians and Serbs, motivated inhabitants of these municipalities (especially that of Mitrovica) not to leave, and strengthened integration in the educational system through creating a multi-ethnic library and learning courses (for English, Information Technology, etc.). These programs have increased

²⁷ Ministry of Communities and Return (2018), 'Inter-institutional Initiative on Durable Solutions for Displaced Persons from Kosovo'. Available at: <http://mzp-rks.org/en/images/dokumenta/ENG-Leaflet-SopjeProcess.pdf> [Accessed on: August 2, 2019].

²⁸ Ibid.

cooperation between education professionals, students, and parents from different ethnicities.

39. Nansen Dialogues Network helped to increase the motivation of the Serb community in regards to the participation in inter-ethnic dialogue in Kosovo as a crucial precondition for reconciliation. Furthermore, through these programs, the Nansen Dialogue Network increased confidence and trust between minority and majority communities in Kosovo.

Kosovo's position in the negotiation process of dialogue regarding the issue of displaced persons

40. The return of the displaced persons is a basic human right for all the communities; therefore, Kosovo institutions are fully committed to achieving all the objectives for their return. The issue of the displaced is important in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, yet not its' main challenging issue. It is highlighted that high-level agreements should include this issue since it would support the durable solution of the displaced.

41. There are technical issues about the return of the displaced which not necessarily need to be politicized and discussed in this dialogue such as civil registration, possession of personal documents and the easiness of the process for acquiring the citizenship or nationality. These issues need better management rather than high-level discussion within the Kosovo-Serbian dialogue.

42. An important issue for the return is emphasized to be the security of the returned in their location, which is a basic need for a normal life. As argued, most locations of return in Kosovo are already secure for return. However, the issue remains in specific locations such as that in North Mitrovica, so it should be discussed in more details in the Kosovo-Serbian dialogue. The issue of the displaced is active in the forum 'Skopje Process' where all the countries of interest for the displaced, Kosovo, Serbia, Montenegro and Northern Macedonia are included in the discussion. In this project, the preferable durable solutions for the return and

integration of the displaced are considered and discussed with all the involved countries.

43. Kosovo should make specific demands to Serbia concerning the issue of displaced persons: not to politicize the problem, not to impede the return, not to manipulate the displaced and to implement the funds dedicated to the displaced with full responsibility.

Conclusions

44. This paper provides evidence of the engagement of local and international institutions in addressing the issue of the displaced persons in Kosovo and the neighboring countries. As emphasized, the Ministry of Communities and Return has allocated more than 7 million euros in 2013 to the issue of displaced persons (reports for more recent years are not available). A considerable amount of funds has also been allocated by international organizations and donors such as the EU, the British Embassy, and the US State Department.
45. There are several projects by international organizations supporting the durable return of the displaced persons. UNHCR has an on-going project which intends to help 579 families displaced outside and within Kosovo in sustainable return to their location of origin. EU also has an on-going project for Return and Reintegration of the displaced in Kosovo enabling 30 families to integrate into their location of return in 2017 while the next phase ensures that 400 families achieve a durable return by 2020.
46. Project 'Skopje Process' which was initiated and supported by UNHCR and OSCE is committed to finding a solution for the return and integration of the displaced in their preferred location in Kosovo. The leading institution of this project is the Ministry of Communities and Return, which is also responsible for creating policies, promoting and implementing legislation for the protection of the rights of communities. The 'Skopje Process' has allocated 300,000 euros in 2017 and another 300,000 in 2018 to assist the displaced persons in their return.

- 47.** Additionally, this project has promoted the application of the communities in the Kosovo Police and organized informative campaigns to encourage them to apply. Also, this initiative decided that the displaced persons should be exempt from payment of accumulated tax during the period they were not habituating their properties. Further, there has been an initiative to collect a fund of 40,000 euros to increase the CCTV in villages with the highest number of returnees.
- 48.** Programs led by Nansen Dialogue Network which focused on three main municipalities of return in Fushë Kosovë, Mitrovica, and Obiliq, increased inter-ethnic dialogue, increased cooperation between them and incentivized them not to leave these municipalities (especially from Mitrovica).
- 49.** Another important aim of this initiative was to ensure that the communities are well integrated into the educational system. In an attempt to increase collaboration between education professional, students, and parent from different ethnicities, this program also created a multi-ethnic library and learning courses (for English, Information Technology, etc.). Given that it is the crucial precondition for reconciliation in Kosovo and neighboring countries, this program strengthened the dialogue between different communities more specifically that of the Serbian community with other communities through building trust between them.
- 50.** Institutions of Kosovo and international organizations are dedicated to improving the housing and the living conditions of the returned persons. Up to 2013, there were 972 houses built for the returnees. However, it was reported that only 651 out of the total number of the built houses had been inhabited during the period 2009 – 2013. It is a general belief that the displaced persons have legally acquired the houses, but afterward, they left while the houses were sold or abandoned.
- 51.** As the evidence above shows, there has been a large number of funds and several projects allocated towards addressing this issue by institutions of Kosovo and international organizations. Nonetheless, certain houses built for this purpose are not inhabited. This fact suggests that there is a *lack of will* among the displaced to

return or they may have been *manipulated* into not returning by a third party. There is also a general perception that this issue is intentionally politicized, which is contradictory considering the high institutional will from Kosovo for the displaced persons to return.

52. As reported by UNHCR and Ministry of Communities and Return there is generally an environment of security and freedom of movement for all the communities, and this is not a concern for most of the desired locations for return in Kosovo. There are only very few locations within certain municipalities which have lower security which might affect the return of the displaced persons, as in the case of North Mitrovica.

53. Ministry of Communities and Return, along with other local and international organizations, are committed to improving the security conditions in these locations, given that this is a basic human right. However, there is still a concern about the security and freedom of movement in the municipality of Mitrovica, and thus there are not many cases of return to this municipality.

54. Only 47 internally displaced persons returned to Mitrovica in 2018, while there has been no displaced person returned from the neighboring countries. The number of returnees for period 2000-2018 is the lowest in Mitrovica with only 3222 persons, compared other municipalities (the highest number being that in the municipality of Prishtina with 8352 persons).

55. The number of displaced persons from the Presevo Valley reached 15,000 between January 2000 and May 2001, after a conflict between UCPMB and Serb police erupted. Consequently, about 15,000 Albanians from this region fled to Kosovo seeking security. After the conflict ended with the peace agreement in May 2001, about 5,500 displaced persons returned to the valley in Southern Serbia.²⁹ The number of the displaced varied during the years depending on the tensions in the region and the increasing employment opportunities in Kosovo comparing to

²⁹ Global IDP (2005), 'Profile of Internal Displacement: Serbia & Montenegro'. Geneva, Switzerland.

the Presevo Valley.³⁰ There are no official figures as to what is the number of the displaced from Presevo Valley in more recent years.

Recommendations

56. The issue of displaced persons should be included in the Kosovo-Serbian dialogue, considering that many displaced are not unwilling to return. It should be made clear during the dialogue that the Serbian government should support this issue, and the displaced persons should not be manipulated for political reasons.
57. Accordingly, there should be an investigation to what are the factors influencing their unwillingness to return, and why the number of returnees increased just after the independence of Kosovo but soon after that, it started to decrease again.
58. An important issue to discuss in the dialogue is to provide solutions for displaced persons in the municipality of Mitrovica, given a large number of displaced persons from this municipality. There is a need to develop specific programs for this municipality to strengthen inter-ethnic relations and also to create better living opportunities.
59. The Kosovo-Serbia dialogue should also include a discussion of the return of displaced persons from the Presevo Valley to Kosovo or elsewhere. Similarly, the returnees to the Presevo Valley should be provided with safety and security, better living conditions, and earning opportunities. The return of displaced persons in the municipality of Mitrovica and the Presevo Valley is part of a comprehensive legal agreement between Kosovo and Serbia, which should be respected.
60. As argued in the paper, there has been a large number of funds dedicated to the issue of displaced persons. However, it has been acknowledged that still, they have not been sufficient enough to increase the number of returnees to the same proportion. In this context, there should be more funding allocated to the return

³⁰ Ibid.

by international donors and the European Union, along with their expertise and exchange of experiences.

- 61.**As mentioned, most of the funds were designated to construct and re-construct the housing of the displaced. While the projects of housing conditions should remain especially in the North of Mitrovica, where a significant number of houses are usurped, in other locations, there should be more projects to improve their employability skills through classroom and on-the-job training, increase the number of self-employment grants and also the inclusion of communities in initiatives for start-up firms.
- 62.**Given the slack economic growth in Kosovo, these projects will increase the probability of durable return; namely, this will ensure economic integration of the communities and will increase their probability for continues generation of income, thus not to become a burden to the welfare benefits system.
- 63.**Given the high level of illiteracy among the RAE community, an important recommendation regarding funding would be to increase funds from the EU. This would improve access to education and social inclusion of returnees of this community.

