

Access to Housing and Public Services
for Repatriated Communities
in Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje



BEST PRACTICES
for
ROMA INTEGRATION
in the Western Balkans

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Adrian Zeqiri is the Executive Director of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) Kosovo. He started working with ECMI in 2002, and was engaged in the development and inclusion of minority rights in Kosovo's status negotiations process. Before joining ECMI in Kosovo, Adrian served at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. He holds an MBA degree from the University of Sheffield, and graduated in English philology at the University of Pristina. Through cooperation with local Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian civil society organisations, Adrian developed in-depth understanding of the situation and needs of these communities. As a result of work with these communities, particularly on the national Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities (which has faced serious challenges in implementation), he identified the need to assess the implementation of policies on housing and public services for repatriated persons from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. He believed that research was needed to improve understanding of the level of integration of repatriated persons from these communities and their needs.



Muhamet Arifi is one of the founders and Executive Director of the NGO Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo (BSFK). Since starting to work with BSKF in 2005, Muhamet helped implement over 100 projects, most of which directly benefited Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Being Ashkali himself, Muhamet experienced first-hand problems faced by these communities. Muhamet is keen to address these issues through different projects, advocacy at the central and local level, and other local and international mechanisms. From 2009 until 2012, Muhamet represented the Ashkali community in the Community Consultative Council (CCC), a mechanism under the umbrella of the President of Kosovo. During this period, Muhamet led the working group for the issues of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and was a member of the Technical Working Group for the Implementation of the Strategy. Muhamet was also actively involved as an expert in drafting the national Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities.



Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje

The research was carried out in the municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, which borders Prishtinë/Priština, the capital city in the centre of Kosovo, located to the South West of Pristina. Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje has 11% of the national Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population (approximately 1% (436) Roma, 9% (3,230) Ashkali, and 1% (282) Egyptian). The 2011 Kosovo Population and Housing Census estimates Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje's total population at 34,827. Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje was the first municipality in Kosovo to endorse the Municipal Action Plan for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities as a result of engagement of local civil society organisations.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary		9
1. Introduction		11
1.1. Research objectives		12
2. Methodology		13
2.1. Preliminary research and data collection		13
2.2. Research sample		14
2.3. Legislative and policy framework		16
2.4. Background		19
3. Analysis of Data Collected in the Field		23
3.1. Repatriation process		23
3.2. Housing		24
3.3. Assistance programmes		27
3.4. Education		31
3.5. Health		32
3.6. Registration		33
3.7. Employment		33
4. Conclusions		35
5. Recommendations		37
6. References		39
Annex 1 – Questionnaire		41

Acronyms

CCC	Consultative Council for Communities
ECMI Kosovo	European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo*
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
MCR	Municipal Committee on Reintegration
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MOCR	Municipal Office for Communities and Return
RO	Reintegration Office
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNMIK	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
URA 2	A return project ('ura' means bridge in Albanian)

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Repatriation dates of surveyed repatriated households – 14
Figure 2:	Number of repatriated family members in each surveyed household – 15
Figure 3:	Country returned from and means of repatriation – 15
Figure 4:	Percentage of repatriated families met by institutions at the airport – 24
Figure 5:	Reason for not owning home on return – 25
Figure 6:	Repatriated households offered temporary housing – 26
Figure 7:	Duration of offered temporary housing – 27
Figure 8:	Number of repatriated persons to benefit from assistance – 28
Figure 9:	Duration of food and hygiene assistance – 28
Figure 10:	Satisfaction level with assistance – 29
Figure 11:	Institution/organisation that registered the repatriated family – 30
Figure 12:	Satisfaction with the Municipal Office for Communities and Return – 31
Figure 13:	Participation of repatriated families' children in language programmes – 32
Figure 14:	Employment status – 33

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Executive Summary

Housing and public services remain key challenges facing returned persons in Kosovo. The challenges of reintegration are exacerbated for returnees from minority communities. This report focuses on the situation of returned persons from Roma and Ashkali communities in the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje Municipality in central Kosovo. This study is based on a household survey conducted between March and April 2013 with 18 households from these minority communities, and interviews with municipal officials.

The research found that many repatriated persons from Roma and Ashkali communities have been unable to return to their places of origin, many live with relatives or in rented accommodation with Government support. Whilst most repatriated families surveyed have received firewood, food and hygiene items, they consider current assistance programmes inadequate for their needs.

Despite efforts to integrate returned children in schools with language programmes, challenges remain, particularly regarding resistance by parents. Unemployment remains an issue of serious concern, yet this research found insufficient efforts by the municipality to address the issue and no training has been organised as envisaged by the relevant strategy and legislation. Documentation also remains a significant challenge for repatriated persons, particularly for registration. The research indicates the lack of knowledge among repatriated persons of different rights, assistance and programmes that they are entitled to.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, Kosovo has seen a significant number of repatriations, affecting thousands of returning families and their children every year.¹ This is the legacy of a conflict that displaced close to half of the local population,² and the direct result of a number of readmission agreements signed by Kosovo since 2008. Alarming, UNHCR statistics have shown a steady increase in the number of forced repatriations of persons with Kosovo Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and Serbian backgrounds. Their minority status further exacerbates the challenges of reintegration.

To ensure a proper legislative framework for reintegrating these communities, the Government of Kosovo adopted the *Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons*, a plan drafted in 2008 by a panel of experts led by UNMIK. The *Strategy for Reintegration* was further revised in May 2010, after the efficiency of its implementation was challenged, but nevertheless paid specific attention to minority communities. In addition, the *Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo* was developed in December 2008, outlining integration efforts for the coming seven years. This and other legal provisions

- 1 UNHCR, 2012. *Statistical Overview: Update at the end of September 2012*. [pdf] Pristina: UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission. Available at: <[http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/D108F6188A98652EC1257A9200494DE2/\\$file/Statistical+overview+September+2012.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/D108F6188A98652EC1257A9200494DE2/$file/Statistical+overview+September+2012.pdf)> [Accessed May 2013].
- 2 "By the end of April 1999, about 600,000 residents of Kosovo had become refugees; another 400,000 were displaced inside Kosovo", Migration News, 1999. *Kosovar Refugees*. [online] Available at: <http://migration.ucdavis.edu/mn/more.php?id=1801_0_4_0> [Accessed May 2013].

such as the Constitution of Kosovo, the *Law on the Use of Languages*, and the work of the Consultative Council for Communities (CCC), stress the importance of protecting human rights of all citizens regardless of ethnicity or origin.

A key challenge for the reintegration of repatriated persons remains in the sphere of housing and the availability of related public services. In June 2012, the Regulation 10/2012 entered into effect to ensure proper implementation of government strategies for the reintegration of repatriated persons. Among other provisions, it outlines the responsibilities of the Municipal Committee on Reintegration (MCR) and Reintegration Office (RO).³ Importantly, the Regulation provides for effective access to public services and various benefits for repatriated persons to ensure their sustainable reintegration.

The lack of housing and access to public services has a serious negative impact on the integration of repatriated communities. This study focuses on the challenges of reintegration, addressing the discrepancy between the policy framework and current situation. Sustainable reintegration is a top priority for institutions in Kosovo, and municipalities should encourage a long-term positive change and stability that would come with support in the field of housing and access to public services.

This report is structured into five chapters. The introduction sets out the research methodology, the relevant legislative and policy framework, and background issues. The next section presents data collected in the field regarding housing, the repatriation process, health, registration and employment. The final two chapters present conclusions and recommendations resulting from the research.

1.1. Research objectives

This research aims to assess the level of integration of repatriated communities in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje by examining the implementation of repatriation policies in the area of housing and access to related public services. The research aims to use quantitative and qualitative methods to identify gaps between legal standards and the current situation for repatriated communities, and also analyse obstacles to receiving housing and public services for repatriated persons in Kosovo. The results of this research have been used to produce recommendations on how to address these obstacles and the existing gaps between policy and local implementation. This report further aims to raise awareness of the research findings among relevant stakeholders.

3 “MOCR, Reintegration Office and other institutions involved in the reintegration process are responsible for implementation of decisions.” Regulation No.10/2012 on Management of the Programme, Competent Bodies, Procedures and Criteria for Benefit for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, May 2012.

2. Methodology

The research employed a quantitative and qualitative approach. The questionnaire in particular contributed both quantitative and qualitative data to address questions about the relationship between repatriation or minority status and limited access to public services and housing. Interviews with Kosovo institutions provided additional quantitative and qualitative data.

2.1. Preliminary research and data collection

The first stage was based on desk research and literary review aiming to develop further understanding of relevant local and international law and policies, develop a hypothetical framework regarding repatriation and access to services, identify relevant stakeholders including ministries and institutions, and identify sources of statistical data necessary for quantitative research and potential questions for qualitative research. After preliminary research, repatriated persons from Roma and Ashkali communities in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje were interviewed. The researcher filled out the questionnaire during the interviews. Interviews were conducted between March and April 2013 with relevant Kosovo institutions and representatives of the Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje Municipality.⁴

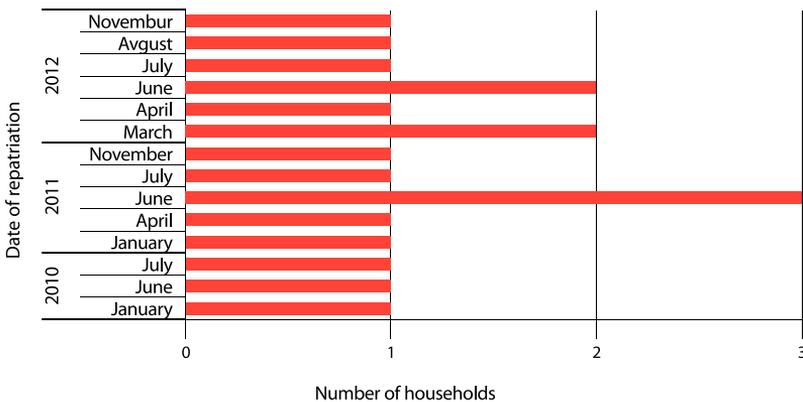
4 Interviews were held in the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje with: Halil Qerimi (MOCR education official), Muharrem Berisha (MOCR development official), and Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

2.2. Research sample

Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje was chosen as the focus of the research, since it contains approximately 11% of Kosovo's Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population.⁵ These ethnic groups are considered at risk by the UNHCR.⁶ It is also worth noting that Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje was the first municipality in Kosovo to endorse the *Municipal Action Plan for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities* as a result of engagement of local civil society organisations.

A convenience research sample was used due to limited resources. The local researcher targeted those households of repatriated persons in the municipality that were easy to reach, and information gathered from NGOs, CSOs and municipality officials determined the selection of research participants. The research targeted repatriated persons who returned to Kosovo between 2010 and 2012 (see Figure 1), and none of the research participants left Kosovo a second time.

Figure 1: Repatriation dates of surveyed repatriated households

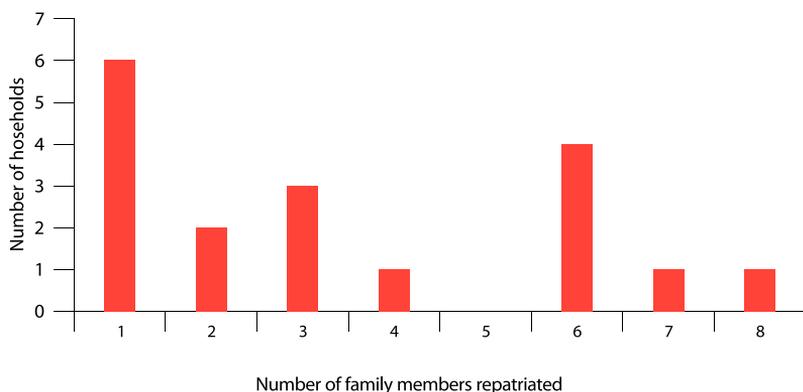


5 Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2012. *Kosovo Population and Housing Census 2011, Final Results*. [pdf] Pristina: Kosovo Agency of Statistics. Available at: <http://esk.rks-gov.net/rekos2011/repository/docs/QA_Raporti_ENG.pdf> [Accessed May 2013].

6 See UNHCR, 2009. *Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Individuals from Kosovo*. [pdf] Pristina: UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission. Available at: <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4af842462.pdf> [Accessed May 2013]; and UNHCR, 2012. *Statistical Overview: Update at the end of September 2012*. [pdf] Pristina: UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission. Available at: <[http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/D108F6188A98652EC1257A9200494DE2/\\$file/Statistical+overview+September+2012.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/D108F6188A98652EC1257A9200494DE2/$file/Statistical+overview+September+2012.pdf)> [Accessed May 2013].

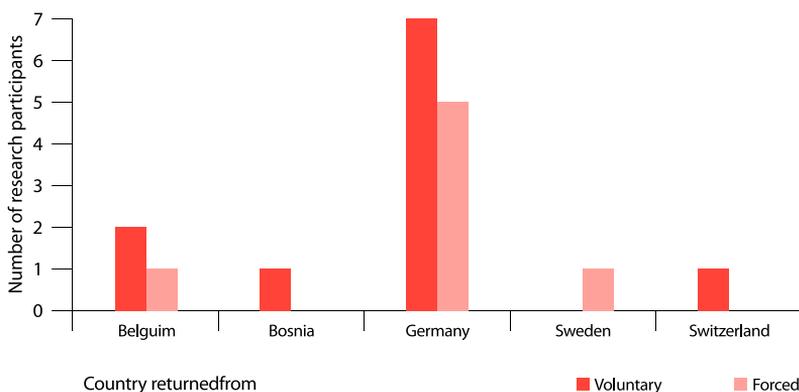
The research sample included a total of 18 households of repatriated persons, including 14 households from the Ashkali community and four Roma community households. The average number of repatriated family members per surveyed household was 3.4 and ranged from one to eight persons (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of repatriated family members in each surveyed household



All of the surveyed repatriated persons from Roma and Ashkali communities came from Western European countries, except one family that returned from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Almost half of these returns (seven) were forced repatriations (see Figure 3).

Grafikon 3: Zemlja iz koje su se vratili i način povratka



2.3. Legislative and policy framework

The rights and protection afforded to repatriated persons are guided by international principles of equality and non-discrimination – returnees should be afforded the same rights as other citizens. Moreover, the Constitution of Kosovo, the *Law on the Use of Languages*, and the *Law on the Protection and Promotion of Communities and their Members in Kosovo*, stress the importance of protecting human rights of all citizens regardless of ethnicity or origin. The rights of all displaced persons to return to their homes in safety and dignity, the right to adequate housing conditions, and property restitution are recognised by international human rights standards and instruments.⁷ These standards form the basis for Kosovo's policies on returns and reintegration. Kosovo institutions are therefore required to facilitate safe and sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons to Kosovo.

The *Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo* foresees specific assistance measures targeting these three communities, including catch-up courses for returned children and language classes.⁸

The *Strategy for Communities and Returns (2009–2013)* puts a strong emphasis on the economic development and stabilisation of non-majority communities, aiming to enable and encourage sustainable return of displaced populations.

The *Revised Strategy for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons* adopted by the Republic of Kosovo in May 2010 sets out the policies and measures to be taken in ensuring sustainable solutions for repatriated persons in all aspects of reintegration: initial reception assistance, civil registration, health, education, employment, social welfare, housing and property-related issues. It provides an institutional framework for managing the reception and reintegration of repatriated persons and defines the roles and responsibilities of central and municipal institutions throughout the reintegration process. Special attention is paid to the needs of non-majority communities and vulnerable groups. The main goal of the Revised Strategy is to support the socio-economic reintegration of repatriated persons by facilitating access to employment opportunities and available social schemes. Moreover, the Revised Strategy envisages the registration at health institutions of repatriated persons and the receipt of health cards. Crucially, the Strategy envisages exemption from payment for health services until full integration (dependent on social status).⁹

7 See for example ECHR Article 8 (Right to Respect for Private and Family Life), Article 14 (Prohibition of Discrimination), Article 1, Protocol 1 (Right to Property) and Article 2, Protocol 4 (Freedom of Movement); and also the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) Article 12(4) (Right to return to one's own country). See also, 'Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons' endorsed by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on 11 August 2005, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2005/17.

8 *Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo (2009–2015)*, December 2008.

9 *Revised Strategy for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons*, May 2010, p. 16.

The *Regulation on Management of the Programme, Competent Bodies, Procedures and Criteria for Benefit for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons* (the Regulation) sets out the eligibility criteria for the reintegration programme and benefits for repatriated persons and is of crucial importance to safeguarding repatriated persons' rights.

The Regulation sets out the responsibilities of competent bodies, as well as rights and available opportunities for repatriated persons regarding arrival, housing, health, assistance and employment.

Arrival in Kosovo

According to the Regulation, repatriated persons should benefit from organised transport from the point of arrival to the site of destination.¹⁰ The Reintegration Office alongside the Reception Office at the Pristina International Airport is responsible for organising the reception of repatriated persons at the airport and other border crossings. Upon arrival in Kosovo, the Reintegration Office is responsible for informing repatriated persons of their rights to participate in reintegration programmes, and for providing transport to destination sites.¹¹

Housing

The Regulation provides repatriated persons with the right (on arrival) to temporary shelter for up to seven days.¹² Moreover, repatriated persons may be eligible for housing through a market rental bonus scheme for the period of six months, with the possibility of extension for additional six months.¹³ This is available to repatriated families that have no dwelling or individually owned home, or remain without a house or dwelling as the result of damages to houses caused by the recent war in Kosovo. Any repatriated family that is eligible for temporary shelter is automatically eligible for the housing scheme for the period of six months, with the possibility of extension for additional six months.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Regulation provides for the possibility of renovation or reconstruction of houses.¹⁵

10 *Regulation Nr. 10/2012 on Management of the Programme, Competent Bodies, Procedures and Criteria for Benefit for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons*, Article 15 (1.1).

11 *Ibid.*, Article 7.

12 *Ibid.*, Article 15 (1.2).

13 *Ibid.*, Article 15 (2.3).

14 *Ibid.*, Article 16 (1.3).

15 *Ibid.*, Article 15 (2.5).

Health

Repatriated persons have the right to emergency medical assistance if needed upon arrival.¹⁶ On the basis of the criteria for emergency benefit, repatriated persons may also access medical treatment and medication upon arrival.¹⁷ Medical assistance could be provided for the period of six months with the possibility of extension for further six months.¹⁸ Nevertheless, medical assistance is subject to eligibility criteria and is not widely guaranteed.

Assistance packages

The Municipal Committee for Reintegration (MCR) is responsible for identifying the needs of repatriated persons within the relevant municipality, and for reviewing and taking decisions on applications of repatriated persons for food and hygiene items, shelter/housing, medical assistance, material assistance, furniture assistance, and winter assistance.¹⁹

The Regulation guarantees the right to an assistance package with food and hygiene items for up to six months²⁰ for repatriated persons with families in difficult socio-economic conditions needing this help, and those families that gain the right to temporary shelter of up to seven days are automatically entitled to benefit.²¹ Food assistance is awarded per person, and there is flexibility if requested on health grounds.

A one-time opportunity for furniture assistance up to €2,000 (€1,000 for individuals) is provided to repatriated persons that lack sufficient furniture. The harmonised furniture assistance package provides, for instance, one refrigerator, up to four multipurpose beds and one kitchen sink per family.²² Similarly, material assistance packages include, for instance, a blanket for each person, and depend on the family size and particular needs of women and young children (i.e. sanitary towels or baby nappies).²³ Winter assistance is guaranteed to repatriated families on the basis of difficult socio-economic conditions and consists of 5m² of firewood per family.²⁴

16 Ibid., Article 15 (1.3) and (2.1).

17 Ibid., Article 15 (2.1).

18 Ibid., Article 16 (1.2.4).

19 Ibid., Article 6.

20 Ibid., Article 15 (2.1).

21 Ibid., Article 16 (1.1.1) and (1.1.2).

22 Ibid., Article 16 (1.7).

23 Ibid., Annex 3.

24 Ibid., Article 16 (1.6.1).

There is also an opportunity for occasional ad hoc assistance to be provided when needed, upon assessment by relevant municipal authorities, and through interaction with relevant stakeholders.²⁵

Education

All repatriated children are entitled to education and equal rights as other students in the Republic of Kosovo's education system.²⁶ The Regulation stipulates that language courses should be provided for repatriated children "in order for these children to learn their mother tongue and achieve the same level with the children of schools where they will continue learning."²⁷ The MCR is responsible for assessing the need in the respective municipality for additional language courses and facilitating access to education. In the absence of documents, repatriated students are permitted to attend school under the condition to provide documents as soon as possible.²⁸

Employment

The Regulation provides for vocational training, assistance for employment and assistance in developing projects for income generation.²⁹ It also envisages vocational training for repatriated persons that meet basic eligibility criteria, and those assessed as being able to increase chances for sustainable employment by competent bodies through such training.³⁰ The Regulation stipulates that the MCR is responsible for identifying opportunities for the provision of vocational training and access to the labour market. All repatriated persons meeting basic criteria who have not benefited from other income generation projects have the right to access these projects. Applicants must submit a business plan alongside an application form and other relevant documents.³¹

2.4. Background

According to UNHCR statistics, there were 18,455 returns between January 2010 and September 2012 of persons originating from Kosovo from all countries (including induced voluntary, assisted voluntary and forced returnees) of majority

25 Ibid., Article 16 (1.4).
26 Ibid., Article 16 (2).
27 Ibid., Article 15 (3.1).
28 Ibid., Article 16 (2).
29 Ibid., Article 15 (3.2)(3.3)(3.4).
30 Ibid., Article 16 (3.2).
31 Ibid., Article 16 (5).

and minority populations. There were a total of 3,796 returns in 2012 according to UNHCR, and the statistics point to a downward trend (8,507 in 2010 and 6,152 in 2011). In recent years, countries that accommodated large numbers of displaced persons from Kosovo have increasingly sought for their return to Kosovo, and forced returns have increasingly included persons belonging to non-majority communities, including Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. There were 434 forced and 311 voluntary repatriations from third countries (mainly Western European) in 2012 of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community members.³²

Despite long-term engagement by Kosovo institutions and international actors, repatriated persons, particularly those belonging to non-majority communities, continue to face major obstacles to their sustainable reintegration because of housing and property rights issues and difficulties in accessing basic services such as education, health care, social assistance, employment and economic opportunities.

The lack of access to housing and accommodation for repatriated persons remains a major obstacle to sustainable return and reintegration. In many cases, properties have been destroyed during the conflict or are found uninhabitable after long periods of absence. The conflict forced many people to abandon their homes, and in their absence, the homes were claimed and occupied by others. Many Roma, Ashkalis and Egyptians lack adequate property documentation.³³ In addition, a major problem for many returned persons belonging to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities is their uncertain or unregulated legal status as regards housing, including issues related to land ownership and the lack of registered titles over their property.³⁴

The reintegration of returned children into the Kosovo system constitutes another difficult challenge, particularly as regards language. Many returned children lack sufficient knowledge of the Albanian or Serbian language as a result of many years abroad or may never have attended school, and consequently face difficulties following classes.³⁵ Whilst the native language of the Roma community is Romani, returned Roma families in particular, prefer schooling in Serbian to Albanian, which creates another challenge for accessing education.³⁶ The situation of education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo is characterised

32 UNHCR, 2012. *Statistical Overview: Update at the end of September 2012*. [pdf] Pristina: UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission. Available at: <[http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/\(httpDocuments\)/D108F6188A98652EC1257A9200494DE2/\\$file/Statistical+overview+September+2012.pdf](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004CE90B/(httpDocuments)/D108F6188A98652EC1257A9200494DE2/$file/Statistical+overview+September+2012.pdf)> [Accessed May 2013].

33 OSCE, 2011. *Implementation of the Action Plan on the Strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, May 2011*. [pdf] Pristina: OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Available at: <<http://www.osce.org/kosovo/77413>> [Accessed May 2013]. p. 9.

34 Ibid., p. 11.

35 ECMi Kosovo, 2012. *Baseline Study: Delivery of Education to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje Municipality*. [pdf] Available at: <http://www.ecmikosovo.org/images/pdf/Baseline_Study_ENG_for_print.pdf> [Accessed May 2013]. p. 11.

36 Ibid., p. 11.

by low attendance and high dropout rates, particularly of girls. Research by ECMI Kosovo in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje found inadequate monitoring of statistics on returnee children and the lack of specific municipal budget targeting the education of returnees.³⁷ Other problems include adaptation to the school system in Kosovo and different academic levels,³⁸ as well as problems with making friends and fitting in. There are also further problems in acquiring the documents required for enrolment (e.g. birth certificates and recognition of diplomas or certificates issued in other countries).³⁹

Challenges facing repatriated persons in accessing healthcare mainly relate to the lack of personal documents for registration in healthcare institutions, incomplete medical records, a relatively high cost of treatment and medication, and poor access to healthcare in rural areas.⁴⁰

Civil documents are essential for the enjoyment and exercise of basic rights in Kosovo, including rights to education, healthcare and social benefits. Returnees may have lost certificates or documents abroad and may face difficulties obtaining a certified copy on return. The lack of civil registration can have serious consequences for repatriated persons. Without proper civil registration, individuals face significant reintegration obstacles and have no or only limited access to municipal services, health care, education, social services, employment and other opportunities. The situation is of particular concern for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, since they face additional challenges in civil registration due to the lack of documents.⁴¹

Repatriated persons in Kosovo confront poor employment prospects and difficult socio-economic conditions. Unemployment is of particular concern for repatriated persons, and persons from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are among those most disadvantaged and discriminated against.⁴² Nevertheless, in spite of high levels of unemployment, these community members often find low paid or/and informal work.

37 Ibid., p. 27.

38 Danish Refugee Council, 2008. *Recommendations for the Return and Reintegration of Rejected Asylum Seekers: Lessons Learned from Returns to Kosovo*. [pdf] Available at: <<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/484022172.pdf>> [Accessed May 2013]. p. 32.

39 OSCE, 2009. *Implementation of the Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo's Municipalities*, November 2009. [pdf] Pristina: OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Available at: <<http://www.osce.org/kosovo/40180>> [Accessed May 2013]. p. 8.

40 Ibid., p. 8.

41 Ibid., p. 9.

42 Ibid., p. 10.

3. Analysis of Data Collected in the Field

The Municipal Office for Communities and Return (MOCR) of Fushë Kosovë/ Kosovo Polje confirmed that there have been 168 verified repatriated persons since 2010 (all communities),⁴³ of which 90 persons were from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.⁴⁴ The MOCR noted that there was no exact database for the number of repatriated families or households; instead the information held by the MOCR is on individual repatriated persons.

3.1. Repatriation process

Arrival in Kosovo

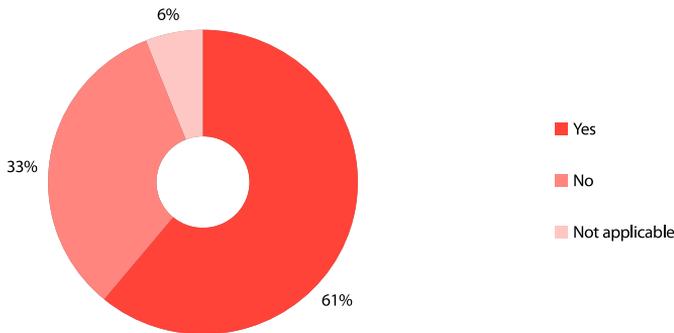
The majority of the repatriated households surveyed for this research (61%) were met by Kosovo institutions at the airport, but 33 per cent were not (Figure 4). One research participant arrived by car from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Forty-four per cent (8 of 18) of repatriated persons were assisted with transport upon arrival in Kosovo; two of them were collected by family at the airport; and another

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

arrived by car. According to the MOCR, the rights of repatriated persons are advertised solely through brochures and information received upon arrival at the airport.⁴⁵ The MOCR also usually conducts house visits.⁴⁶ Information on assistance and rights for repatriated persons should be provided at the airport and completed forms are sent to the MOCR on a weekly or fortnightly basis.⁴⁷ The MOCR also conducts house-to-house outreach visits to repatriated persons.

Figure 4: Percentage of repatriated persons met by institutions at the airport



3.2. Housing

Housing situation on return

Fifty per cent (50%) of the surveyed repatriated households did not return to their place of origin in Kosovo, and notably, none of the Roma participants. Although one family returned to their place of origin in Shtime/Štimlje, the family moved to Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje just one month later.

Only one of the repatriated persons surveyed owned an apartment or house upon return to Kosovo. Most of the repatriated persons never owned property, although in one case the family sold the property. Twenty per cent (20%) of

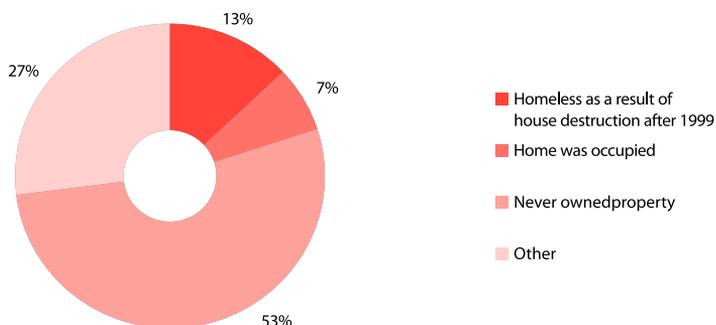
45 Interview: Halil Qerimi (MOCR education official), Muharrem Berisha (MOCR development official), and Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

repatriated persons lost their home as a result of war, either through destruction post-1999 or occupation (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Reason for not owning home on return



Current accommodation and support

The majority of repatriated persons were found to be currently living in rented accommodation (Figure 6), yet they all⁴⁸ responded that their family could not afford to pay rent. Nevertheless, this study found that the Government of Kosovo was subsidising 100 per cent of rent for 56 per cent of the interviewed repatriated persons.⁴⁹ All of the repatriated families surveyed who lived in rented accommodation received financial support, but those living with relatives did not receive this support, even if they were required to pay rent and despite apparent financial difficulty. The MOCR confirmed that if a repatriated person lived with family, no support is provided for rent.⁵⁰ According to the MOCR for Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, housing is provided for 16 returned families. Since 2010, 21 cases received housing (shelter), and financial assistance to cover the rent ranged between €70 and €200 (dependent on the family size, location, comfort).⁵¹

48 100 per cent including those living at a relative's house.

49 Furthermore, in case of two of the repatriated persons, the rent was subsidised in the past, also 100 per cent.

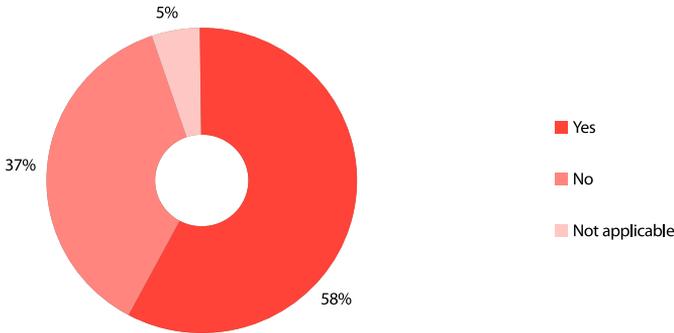
50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

Temporary housing programme

Fifty-eight per cent (58%) of the repatriated families responded that they benefited from Kosovo's temporary housing programme (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Repatriated households offered temporary housing

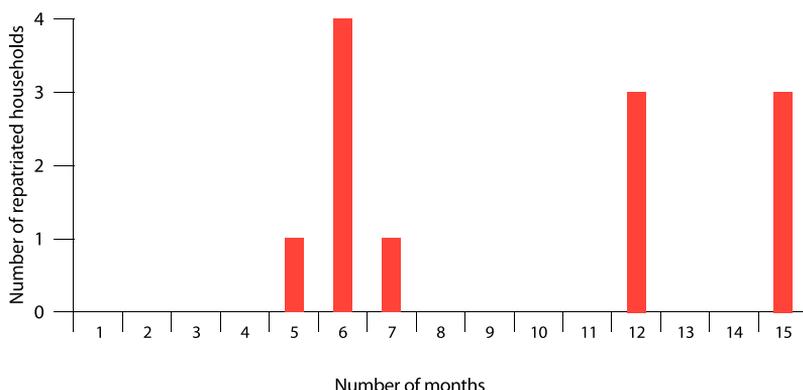


Except for one case, temporary housing was offered for at least six months. Fifty per cent (50%) of the repatriated persons were offered temporary accommodation for at least a year, well above the minimum six months required by law (Figure 7). According to the MOCR, if the house of a repatriated person is destroyed, and the building of a house is approved, temporary housing would be provided until the new house is finished.⁵²

The level of awareness about the temporary housing programme is very low. Only three of the repatriated families (16.6%) who benefited, previously heard of the programme. In contrast, none of those who did not benefit from the programme knew of its existence.

52 Ibid.

Figure 7: Duration of offered temporary housing



House building and renovation

The Ministry of Internal Affairs is responsible for the approval of house building and renovation. A case for house building or renovation is assessed on the basis of evidence of damage. Criteria include that the family must have documentation for the property/land registered in their name, or the name of close family.⁵³ This assistance is prioritised for families rather than individual repatriated persons who do not qualify for this assistance⁵⁴. According to the MOCR, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has approved the construction of houses for eight families, whilst six applications were rejected. Two of the approved houses are finished and six will be built this year. Furthermore, the MOCR approved the renovation of two other houses, which will commence this year.⁵⁵

3.3. Assistance programmes

The Municipal Committee for Reintegration decides on assistance in terms of food, hygiene, temporary housing, medicaments, furniture and firewood, and makes decisions based on Regulation Nr. 10/2012, Article 14.⁵⁶

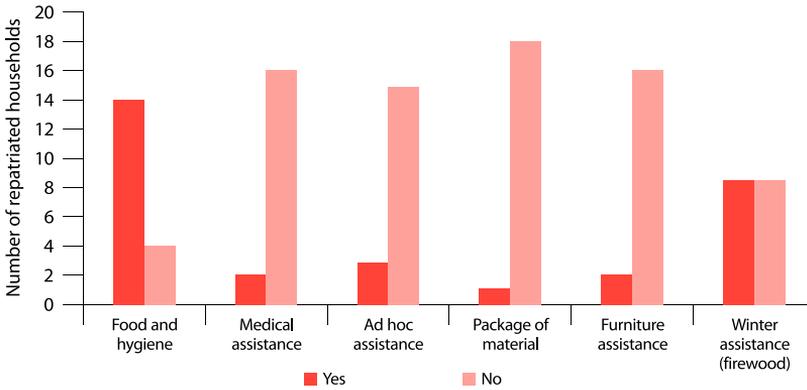
53 Interview: Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

54 To date no such assistance has been approved in the case of an individual repatriated person.

55 Interview: Halil Qerimi (MOCR education official), Muharrem Berisha (MOCR development official), and Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

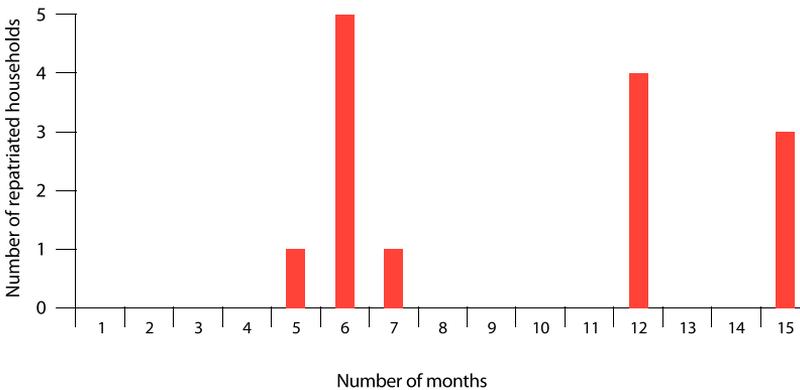
56 Ibid.

Figure 8: Number of repatriated households to benefit from assistance



Almost all households in this study reported that they received food and hygiene items (see Figure 8), and according to the MOCR, 168 repatriated persons in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje received food and hygiene items. Among the assistance programmes, food and hygiene assistance received the highest levels of satisfaction in the survey. In only one case was the duration of this assistance less than six months, and 39 per cent received assistance of over a year (see Figure 9). Almost all research participants commented that they would like to see improvements to the food and hygiene assistance and that it should be awarded for a much longer period.

Figure 9: Duration of food and hygiene assistance

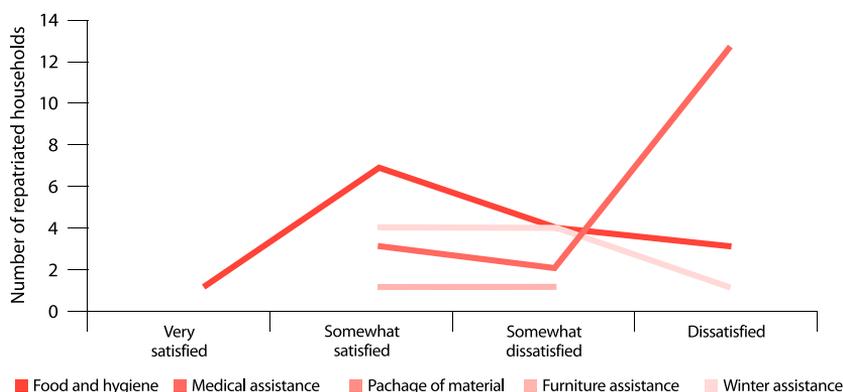


Fifty per cent (50%) of those interviewed received winter assistance. The MOCR clarified that eligible repatriated families received firewood assistance of up to €200, only once.⁵⁷ The winter assistance received poor satisfaction levels ranging between 'somewhat dissatisfied' and 'dissatisfied'. This could be due to the fact that 5m² of wood per family is not a large quantity considering that the wood will be used for both heating and cooking purposes.

The study found that only two of those interviewed received furniture assistance, and the MOCR confirmed that 16 applications were approved but assistance is yet to be distributed.⁵⁸

Among those surveyed, a few repatriated persons noted that they received vacuum cleaners and washing machines as ad hoc assistance. This study indicates a lack of understanding of the different assistance programmes available, i.e. ad hoc, material, winter, and food. When asked about ad hoc assistance, two repatriated households from the Roma community noted that they were visited by the German television channel ZDF (Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen) and the Kosovo RTK (Radiotelevizioni i Kosovës) Roma programme, rather than explaining the assistance they received. According to the MOCR, repatriated families mainly ask for small tractors, and a few people asked for tools i.e. woodcutting saws.⁵⁹

Figure 10: Satisfaction level with assistance



57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.

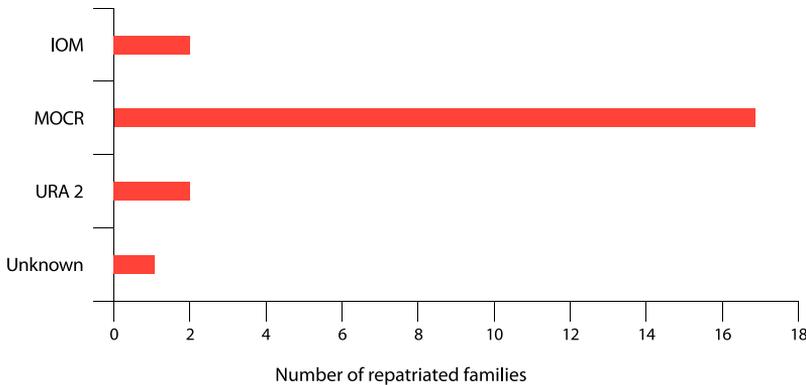
Request for assistance

Total 77.8 per cent (14 of 18) of repatriated households made a request to a Kosovo institution for assistance – for house renovation, building a new house, income generation process, or civil registration. Four (4) repatriated families received an answer within three months, two (2) families within six months, and one (1) family within seven months. Nevertheless, 38.9 per cent of those who made a request never received an answer from institutions.

Institutional assistance

All repatriated persons surveyed (100%) were registered with an institution or organisation as repatriated persons, in addition to the registration at the airport. All repatriated persons appear to have been registered by the MOCR. The IOM and URA 2 are also active in this field. The MOCR is responsible for monitoring repatriated families until their full reintegration.⁶⁰ However, there is no clear definition as to what “full integration” means. The MOCR stated that in the absence of a clear definition it just referred to the Regulation.⁶¹ The MOCR representative also noted that for those who do not have property, provision of assistance and monitoring end after one year.⁶²

Figure 11: Institution/organisation that registered the repatriated family



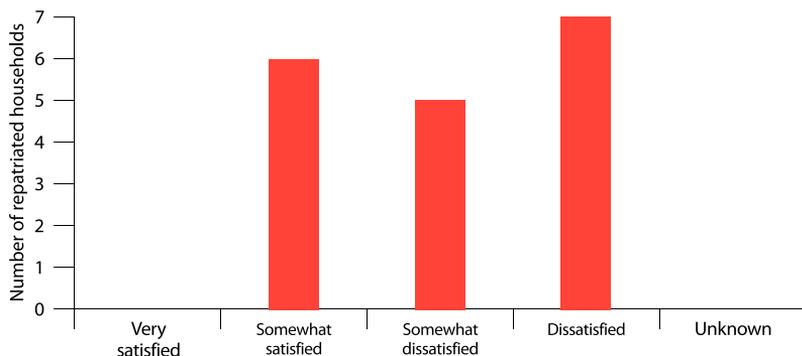
60 Regulation Nr. 10/2012, Article 5 (1.7).

61 Interview: Halil Qerimi (MOCR education official), Muharrem Berisha (MOCR development official), and Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

62 Ibid.

Despite the MOCR's recognition among repatriated persons, the satisfaction level is quite low; 27.8 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied and 38.9 per cent are dissatisfied. Worryingly, the Municipal Committee for Reintegration (MCR) was unknown to all research participants, despite its crucial role in delivering assistance to repatriated persons.⁶³ However, it is worth noting that the MCR has only been functional since June 2012.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with the Municipal Office for Communities Return



3.4. Education

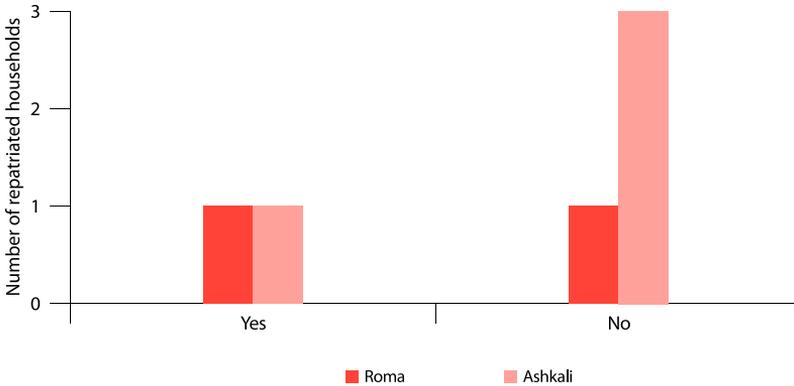
Seven of the repatriated families surveyed had children of primary school age, yet only four families registered their children in school when they returned. In three of these cases, children were registered immediately, whilst the other repatriated family, which arrived in March 2012, registered only in September – six months after the arrival. Two of the repatriated families from the Ashkali community stated that their children were not registered for school since they did not speak Albanian, whilst another family from the Roma community stated that their children did not want to go to school.

Whilst one repatriated family stated that they registered with the school without any assistance or problems, the other families received help in registration from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, MOCR, MEST, in terms of recognition of school documents and co-operation with the school. URA 2 tried to help a repatriated Roma family register their children; however, the children did not want to go to school.

63 Regulation Nr. 10/2012, Article 6.

One repatriated family's children attended a language programme to learn Albanian in the Selman Riza School once a week. Another repatriated Roma family did not attend any language programme, despite being offered language support by URA 2.

Figure 13: Participation of repatriated families' children in language programmes



3.5. Health

Although three repatriated households reported serious health problems in the family, they did not receive any help from institutions. Again, four repatriated persons noted special needs in the family, however, only one person received help from Kosovo institutions. Only five repatriated persons from the Ashkali community received social assistance. One repatriated person did not receive social assistance, despite having health problems and a family member with disability. Social assistance was received in these five cases due to children under the age of five, and also in two cases due to inability to work. There are high levels of dissatisfaction with the medical assistance available for repatriated persons (see Figure 10). It is likely that this results from the low numbers of repatriated persons who were able to access medical assistance. Six repatriated families surveyed commented that healthcare and medical assistance needed to be expanded.

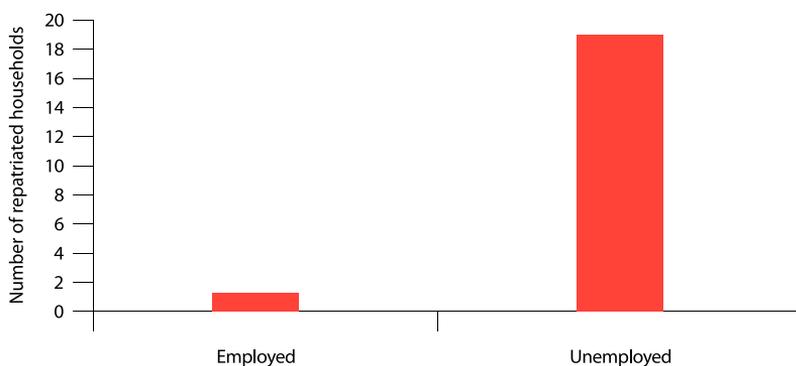
3.6. Registration

In all but two cases, all family members of the repatriated households surveyed were registered. In one Roma family, four children could not be registered in the absence of birth certificates. In another case, the repatriated person's wife could not be registered in the absence of birth and citizenship certificates. The survey only found one repatriated person who received assistance in the registration process (by the MOCR).

3.7. Employment

Just one repatriated person surveyed, from the Ashkali community, was employed (self-employed – selling chickens in the market), while all others were unemployed. The majority of research participants highlighted that they would like to see income generation projects and professional job training. Despite provisions in the relevant strategy and regulation, the Municipality did not organise any specific training to assist repatriated persons looking for employment.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, according to the MOCR, a relatively high number of income generation projects (up to €2,000) were approved between 2010 and 2012 and only four were rejected.⁶⁵

Figure 14: Employment status



64 Interview: Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

65 Interview: Halil Qerimi (MOCR education official), Muharrem Berisha (MOCR development official), and Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

4. Conclusions

Half of the repatriated Roma and Ashkali community members interviewed were unable to return to their place of origin, or subsequently moved elsewhere after a short period of time. Nevertheless, the report concludes positively that returnees are met upon arrival and registered with institutions. Many repatriated persons found temporary solutions through relatives when returning to Kosovo or live in rented accommodation where they are supported financially by the Government. Over half of those interviewed benefited from temporary housing of up to seven days, and longer in some cases. However, there was a clear lack of awareness of this scheme.

There appears to be a need for improvement in all areas of assistance for repatriated persons, as evidenced by comments of interview participants. There is quite high dissatisfaction with the assistance programmes provided to repatriated persons, particularly in relation to medical assistance. Repatriated persons reported that there was insufficient assistance provided by different programmes and that assistance was required for a longer period. Nevertheless, high numbers of those interviewed received winter assistance (firewood) and almost all received food and hygiene items. Since approximately 75 per cent of those surveyed requested assistance, there appears to be a relatively high level of awareness of the available assistance programmes and the application process. Nevertheless, many cases failed to receive any reply or the reply took a long time, which is unacceptable since this assistance affects basic rights.



A range of actors, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, MOCR and MEST are providing repatriated families with assistance in registering children for school upon return and liaising with schools. Language is a particular problem for returned children, but support is available in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. Nonetheless, there can be resistance to school attendance on the part of families from these communities.

The survey found wide dissatisfaction among the repatriated persons regarding healthcare and medical assistance, particularly since most participants did not benefit. The eligibility criteria limit the possibilities for accessing the assistance, and Kosovo struggles in general with limited resources in healthcare.

The research found that the lack of documentation remains an obstacle for repatriated persons. Although most people were able to register without a problem, the MOCR provided assistance only in one case.

Unemployment clearly remains a critical challenge for repatriated persons, particularly for Roma and Ashkali communities, since all research participants were unemployed except one. There have been insufficient efforts to address the situation through the provision of training to repatriated persons, despite provisions in the *Strategy for Communities and Returns* and *Regulation Nr. 10/2012 on Management of the Programme, Competent Bodies, Procedures and Criteria for Benefit for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons*.

There is a serious lack of knowledge by repatriated persons of the rights and assistance they are entitled to, which needs to be addressed. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness of the existence of the Municipal Committee for Reintegration, despite its critical role in providing assistance to repatriated persons.

5. Recommendations

The current packages of assistance should be revised and reviewed to assess whether they meet the needs of repatriated persons from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. They should also be assessed in terms of adequacy for women and children.

The current informational materials provided to returned persons need to be revised. A multilingual easy-to-use information brochure should be drafted in a clear, simple language, and should contain information on institutions, rights and administrative procedures. The brochure should be available to returnees either before or as soon as possible after their return to Kosovo.

Legal provisions regarding the rights of repatriated persons need to be clarified in a holistic way to avoid uncertainty and ensure that repatriated persons know their rights. There is a need to clarify, for instance, how “full integration” should be defined.

The Municipal Committee for Reintegration needs to provide more outreach to ensure that repatriated persons, in particular from non-majority communities, are aware of their role in the return process.

The municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje should organise vocational education and training (VET) as a priority for repatriated persons. Such training would help them increase their employment opportunities.



Income generation project opportunities require improved advertising, and information particularly about the application process and criteria, should be clear and easily accessible for persons from Roma and Ashkali communities.

The municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje should ensure that returnees' requests for assistance are dealt with in a timely fashion, and always replied to.

Roma and Ashkali communities should seek to engage more closely with the municipality to ensure that assistance is acceptable and adequate for the needs of repatriated persons from their communities.

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Legislation and policy

Regulation Nr. 10/2012 on Management of the Programme, Competent Bodies, Procedures and Criteria for Benefit for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, Article 15 (1.1).

Revised Strategy for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, May 2010.

Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo (2009–2015), December 2008.

Interviews with municipal officials

Interviews were held in the Municipality of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje with:

- Halil Qerimi (MOCR education official)
- Muharrem Berisha (MOCR development official)
- Hysen Sllamniku (MOCR official for return and member of the Municipal Committee for Repatriation in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje).

Annex 1 – Questionnaire

Questionnaire: (Name)_____ **Returned from: (Country)**_____

This questionnaire will help measure gaps between legislative standards and current reality in terms of access housing and public services for repatriated families.

1. General information

1.1 Ethnicity: _____

1.2 Date of repatriation: _____

1.3 Repatriated family members?

1.3.1 Mother	Yes/No
1.3.2 Father	Yes/No
1.3.3 Children	Yes/No
1.3.4 Other members of the family	Yes/No
Age of family members: _____	

1.4 Means of repatriation?

1.4.1 Voluntary	Yes/No
1.4.2 Forced	Yes/No
1.5.1 Left Kosovo for second time?	Yes/No
1.5.2 If yes, year of first return: _____	

2. Housing

2.1 Did you return at your place of origin? Yes/No

2.2 When you returned, did you own your apartment or house? Yes/No

2.3 If no, are you homeless because your house was destroyed after 1999, it is occupied, or for any other reason? Yes/No

2.4 Where are you living nowadays?

2.4.1 At your property
2.4.2 At a relatives' house
2.4.3 In rented accommodation

2.5 If you live in rented accommodation, do you have financial means to pay the rent? Yes/No

2.6 Does the state subsidise part of the rent payment? Yes/No

2.7 If yes, what percentage of the payment does the state subsidise? _____

2.8 When you returned, were you offered temporary housing? Yes/No

2.9 If yes, for how long? _____

2.10 Were you aware that such temporary housing could be granted? Yes/No

2.11 If you qualified for temporary housing, were you offered to participate in a housing scheme afterwards? Yes/No

2.12 If yes, for what period? _____

2.13 If yes, were you offered an extension period to participate in this housing scheme? Yes/No

3. Repatriation process

3.1 Do you feel that you have received enough support from the state throughout the repatriation process in terms of.

3.2 Did anyone from institutions wait for you at the airport? Yes/No

3.3 If yes, did they assist you with transport to the location where you were going? Yes/No

3.4 Are you supplied with food and hygiene items: Yes/No

3.5 If yes, for how long? _____

3.6 How satisfied are you with sheltering/housing:

Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied

3.7 How satisfied are you with supplied food and hygiene items:

Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied

3.8 Are you provided with medical assistance: Yes/No

3.9 How satisfied are you with the provision of medical assistance:

Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied

3.10 Did you have additional (ad hoc) assistance as needed? If yes, what?

- (Other organisations and what assistance?) Yes/No
- 3.10.1 How satisfied are you with the package of material?
Very satisfied/ somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied
- 3.10.2 How satisfied are you with the package of assistance in furniture?
Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied
- 3.10.3 How satisfied are you with the package of winter assistance (fire woods)?
Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied
- 3.10.4 Other? What?:
Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied

3.11 Have you been registered with any institution or organisation as a repatriated person, apart from registration at the airport? Yes /No

3.12 If yes, do you know by whom? _____

3.13 Have you filed any request with Kosovo institutions (assistance for renovation or building a house, income generation process, civil registration)? Yes /No

3.14 If yes, how long did you wait for the answer from institutions

1 week/1 month/2months/3months/6months/other/never got an answer

3.15 Please rate your level of satisfaction with the following institutions:

- 3.15.1 Municipal Office for Communities and Return
- 3.15.2 Municipal Committee for Reintegration
Very satisfied/somewhat satisfied/somewhat dissatisfied/dissatisfied

4. Education

4.1 Do you have children of primary school age? Yes /No

4.2 Are they registered in the school when they returned? Yes /No

4.3 If yes, when? _____

4.4 If not, why? _____

4.5 Did anyone assist you in registration? _____

4.6 If yes, who and how? _____

4.7 If not, why? _____

Did your children receive any language support programme? Yes /No

5. Health

5.1 Does someone from your family have serious health problems: Yes /No

5.2 If yes, did institutions provide you any help? Yes /No

5.3 Do you have in your family people with special needs? Yes /No

5.4 If yes, did institutions provide you any help? Yes /No

5.5 Do you receive social assistance? Yes /No

5.6 If yes, why? _____

6. Registration

6.1 Are you registered (civil registration)? (All members) Yes /No

6.2 If yes, did you receive support in registration? Yes /No

6.3 If not registered, why? _____

7. Employment

7.1 Are you employed? Yes /No

7.2 If yes, what, where?

Private/public sector/self-employed/other...

8. Closing questions

8.1 What areas of assistance should be improved and expanded? _____

8.2 What other type of assistance should be provided by state institutions? _____

8.3 What other areas should be covered? _____

