



# *Reintegration and Community Stabilization in Kosovo*



*Final Project Overview  
September 2013 - September 2014*

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“ 26 vulnerable spontaneous/assisted returnee families provided with minor shelter repair and harmonized assistance packages ”

## RETURN

The BPRM-funded project supported 26 vulnerable families returning to Kosovo from Serbia.

Return locations were spread across Kosovo including 10 Municipalities; from Istog/Istok in the West, Novobrdë/Novo Brdo in the East to Dragash/Dragaš in the South.

In total, 102 individuals benefitted from a combination of assistance packages, income generation grants and minor shelter repair for their homes.

However, support for returnees was not limited to physical assistance. DRC focused equally on facilitating coordination between various stakeholders to address returnees' protection needs and civic rights and facilitate access to basic services, including personal and property documentation, health, education, legal and social services.

All activities were coordinated with relevant institutions in Kosovo, Serbia, displaced persons and their representative bodies, BPRM and its partners, UNHCR, and other stakeholders to ensure that adequate support was available to returnees in pursuit of durable solutions and community stabilization.

In the case of the Dimić family, a concerted effort by the relevant institutions in Kosovo, Serbia, displaced persons and their representative bodies and BPRM and its partners was essential in securing the family's personal documents that allowed them the access to social services in Kosovo.

*'Provision of personal documents (birth, citizenship, marriage and death certificates) is a key condition for obtaining identification documents (identity card, passport, labor card) and exercising right to employment, healthcare, welfare, education. It is a prerequisite for all types of assistance.'* says Goran Basta from the Balkan Center for Migration and Humanitarian Activities (BCM).

According to BCM, the process of obtaining documents in Serbia for displaced persons from Kosovo can be time-consuming, costly and complex. Registry offices from Kosovo are located all over Serbia, struggling with backlogs and a lack of resources.

For families like Dimić, who lack resources and information, the process of obtaining personal documents from Serbia can be daunting, without NGO support. As Basta explains: *'Four members of the Dimić family were entered in the registry books of Niš and one in Vranje. The procedure for obtaining documents lasted from February to May and required several trips to Niš due to technical errors in the registry book for the youngest family member.'*

## Coordination

The Dimić family returned to Kosovo in June 2013. Upon return the family's circumstances were dire. With 5 young children, a dilapidated house and no prospects for finding employment for the parents Zorica and Dalibor, the family's future was uncertain. While assistance packages and shelter repair provided through the BPRM project addressed some of their immediate needs, lack of personal documentation prevented the family, including small children, from accessing essential social services in Kosovo.

Today, the Dimić family is finally in possession of all necessary personal documents, made possible by the close cooperation between BPRM partners, DRC in Kosovo and Catholic Relief Service (USCCB) in Serbia with their local NGO partner in Serbia, Balkan Center for Migration and Humanitarian Activities (BCM).



## Miloš, 28, Returnee

Miloš and his family returned to Kosovo in September 2012. 'After we had to leave Kosovo, we went to Nis. The first night we spent in a collective center. I was 14 at the time and I remember being afraid that we would have to stay in the center. But we had family in the area that we could move in with, so we were lucky.'

After many years in displacement, the family finally moved back to Miloš' childhood home in Štrpce/Shtërpçë. 'I was glad to move back and so were my parents. But I think my grandmother was the happiest. She is 73 now and before we left, Shtërpce/Štrpce was all she had ever known.'

However, after years of neglect, the family home was barely habitable. 'Our house was old and in need of repair even before we left. When we came back we did what we could to fix things up, but all of us were unemployed. Without the help we received through this project, we wouldn't have been able to fix the roof on our own,' says Miloš.

After an assessment of the family's home and circumstances, the family was approved for minor shelter repair, assistance packages and an income generation grant. 'We had already decided that we would request a camera for our income generation grant, but then unexpectedly, I got a job as an IT administrator with the Ministry for Communities and Return (MCR), which is much better than a grant,' he beams. 'Computers and technology are my passion really. I like trouble-shooting and being able to help the other staff here. Although some of the IT problems people have are quite easy to fix,' he smiles, 'but then I try to explain things in such a way that they know how to solve the problem themselves in the



future. That is one way I can be creative in my work here.' Since Miloš managed to find employment, the family ended up with only housing repair support.

'Everyone in my family was happy for me when I got the job, my grandmother most of all of course. I think the only thing that would have made her even happier, was if I got married,' he laughs.

“BPRM partners, USCCB in Serbia (working with its local NGO partner providing free legal aid Balkan Center for Migration and Humanitarian Activities) and Danish Refugee Council in Kosovo worked closely across the border to address and resolve the Dimić family's issues in a synchronized manner. DRC provided assistance to support the family's integration, while USCCB's partner, Balkan Center for Migration and Humanitarian Activities procured all the necessary personal documents for the family, enabling them to exercise their legal rights in Kosovo and secure health protection. ”

Dino Mujanović,  
Catholic Relief Services USCCB

## INVOLVEMENT WITH CENTRAL AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Sustainable reintegration cannot be achieved without enhanced involvement of central and municipal authorities, and other local stakeholders.

Therefore, Danish Refugee Council, in partnership with the local NGO Center for Peace and Tolerance (CPT), employed an integrated response to returns and reintegration.

CPT visited and assessed all BPRM families for additional reintegration support. In order to link returnees to central and local authorities, CPT organized information sessions in collaboration with Municipal Offices for Communities and Return (MOCR) to discuss issues faced by returnees.

In addition, CPT linked returnees to local NGOs, focusing in particular on the needs of youth and women returnees. Trainings enabling returnees to advocate for their rights and plan reconciliation initiatives and organize cultural events served to create ties between the returnee and receiving communities.

## Sonja, 24, Returnee

Sonja is one of the beneficiaries of the small-scale economic grant implemented in Novobrdë/Novo Brdo Municipality. The Association of Returnee Women 'Our Home' successfully applied for a grant to start honey production. This project is now supporting 12 local women with two beehives each as well as trainings on beekeeping.

Through the Association of Returnee Women, Sonja will engage in honey production together with her family. 'My husband's family has experience keeping bees and producing honey. The area where we live is ideal for bees. My husband is also teaching me all about bees and how to care for them' she says. 'Bees are very intelligent. They have their own family relationships in a beehive and they are very sensitive to the weather. They need a lot of care.' Sonja's husband is sure his wife will make an excellent beekeeper, with his help of course. 'Sonja works very hard. She takes care of the vegetable garden and she grows flowers all over our yard. She is crazy about flowers.' Looking at the families yard, Sonja's love for flowers is impossible to miss. Every windowsill holds different kinds of potted flowers and plants and flowerbeds are dotted all around the lawn around their house.

Her husband, however, is somewhat less enthusiastic about the growing number of flowerbeds and pots. 'Don't get me wrong, I like flowers, but sometimes we have water cuts here that last a few days, so we have to collect and store water in bottles. So when Sonja chooses to water her flowers over my having a shower, I tend to wish we had fewer flowers,' he laughs and adds: 'One thing I know though is that if Sonja will be as good with the bees as she is with her plants, we will be very successful.'

Sonja met her husband while in displacement in Serbia. 'Actually, we met for the first time when I was 10. ...and just 9 years later we were married,' she smiles. Sonja her husband and their 2 small children live in a house in the countryside together with Sonja's husband's parents.

The young family has big plans. 'In Serbia, I worked in a market for a while. I think I can use what I learned there as a sales assistant in my work with the association. We will sell the honey we produce and the vegetables that I am growing as well.' By being part of the association, the women working with honey production in the area will be able to pool their resources and learn from each other's experiences. 'Being part



of such an association will definitely make things easier. We will be able to communicate with each other, maybe making agreements to sell on behalf of each other when there are shortages in one area. Also, I look forward to meeting other women and making new friends.' Sonja's husband agrees: 'Without the association we would not have easy access to training and knowledge. Sometimes information is much more valuable than money.'

## SOCIO-ECONOMIC SUPPORT

To enable a sustainable return, the project also assisted minority and remainee communities with income generation initiatives by delivering joint grants together with field-focused technical advice to 4 joint economic initiatives/businesses, creating vital livelihood linkages between minority communities and surrounding centers of trade and the wider economy.

In addition, the project supported small-scale community projects/initiatives and inter-ethnic dialogue events in cooperation with the Centre for Peace and Tolerance,

that promote inter-ethnic cooperation and help reduce the social isolation of minority returnee and remainee families.

### Inter-ethnic dialogue

In an effort to link returnees with the community, DRC and CPT organized 8 inter-ethnic dialogue meetings with a total of 60 participants. Such meetings play a vital role in supporting the reconciliation process between the receiving community and returnees, as they create a forum for dialogue involving displaced minorities, receiving communities and municipal authorities. Beside supporting the strengthening of inter-ethnic linkages between communities, they allow the authorities to show their commitment to promoting a sustainable multi-ethnic society in their municipality.

In addition, another 27 informal inter-ethnic meetings were facilitated between returnees and their neighbors. The informal meetings were supported by the municipalities to rekindle contacts with former neighbors and the surrounding receiving communities, as well as to reduce social isolation.

### **Small-scale economic grants**

4 returnee small economic projects were selected and received a grant by the end of the project. The projects that received support were selected on the basis of providing increased employment opportunities for returnees in particular, minority community members and the wider community.

Given the rural nature of many return locations, most of the projects support agricultural ventures; raspberry production in Štrpce/Shtërpçë, honey production in Novobrdë/Novo Brdo and support to an agriculture association in Istog/Istok. The one exception is the project selected in Ranilug/Ranillug which is engaged in the production of concrete cubes.

In all instances, a critical factor for the selection of projects was the potential to create employment and the willingness to support returnees and minority communities.

### **Community projects**

Projects that provide support to communities at large were another important aspect of the project. Three community projects were implemented through close coordination with the Ministry of Communities and Return (MCR) and selected municipalities. Communities were selected by central authorities in cooperation with the international return stakeholders.

Around 1000 community members in Istog/Istok will benefit from the rehabilitation of a park. In Novobrdë/Novo Brdo, 40 kindergarten children received school equipment, while Shtërpce/štrpce municipality selected a local school for rehabilitation of the school roof.

All community projects were co-funded by the MCR and the respective municipalities.

## **Sustained commitment by the Ministry of Communities and Return**

During the implementation of this project the Ministry of Communities and Return proved a valuable partner, not only in terms of its financial contribution in the form of co-funding, but also in its capacity as a facilitator of returns and reintegration.

Strengthening and stabilization of all communities in Kosovo is one of the priorities and one of the strategic objectives of the Ministry for Communities and Return. The aim is to support the stabilization, reintegration and sustainable developments of communities.

According to the Minister of Communities and Return, Dalibor Jevtić, the Ministry will continue with various activities supporting the sustainable development of communities, including support of projects aimed at creating income generation and employment opportunities, community reintegration and stabilization through the support of civil society.

This process is complex and requires cooperation with other relevant institutions in order to facilitate the approach to non-majority community, education, health care and other public services.

The Ministry for Communities and Return is dedicated to support and co-fund all the projects which have as an aim the promotion and development of a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo, and the stabilization and empowerment of all communities in Kosovo.

One of the concrete successful projects is the rehabilitation of the school roof in Štrpce/Shtërpce municipality. This school has 337 students and it is the largest school in the municipality.

By co-funding this project the Ministry showed its commitment to invest in the future of all communities in Kosovo. Working together with the Municipality of Štrpce/Shtërpçë, DRC and BPRM, the Ministry for Communities and Return ensured that 337 school children learn in a healthy and safe environment.



**“The Ministry for Communities and Return is committed to continue, according to its mandate, to support initiatives and projects from which all communities in Kosovo can benefit.”**

*Dalibor Jevtić,  
Minister for Communities and Return*





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