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**MISSION IN KOSOVO**

**Department of Human Rights and Communities**

**Municipal responses to displacement and returns in**  
**Kosovo**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reviews the progress made by Kosovo's municipalities to develop and effectively implement strategies, policies and programmes for displaced persons and returnees in compliance with the normative and policy framework for returns and the protection and promotion of community rights. It also identifies and analyzes the key challenges currently preventing municipal institutions from providing more effective protection and assistance to displaced persons and returnees.<sup>1</sup> The report covers the period from January 2009 to June 2010. Findings presented are based on regular monitoring activities by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Mission in Kosovo (OSCE) in the field of promotion and protection of community rights and participation of non-majority communities in public life.<sup>2</sup>

The report finds that, although municipalities are required to develop and implement annual policies and strategies enabling them to take responsibility for returns and reintegration activities, the progress made in fulfilling their obligations has been limited and uneven. Just over half of the municipalities in Kosovo developed and approved a municipal returns strategy in 2009. In the first six months of 2010, only nine municipalities have approved strategies to guide their work on returns and reintegration. Where municipal returns strategies have been adopted, they are often only partially implemented. Some municipalities have made considerable efforts to support returns and durable solutions for displaced persons. Where there are successful projects for returns and reintegration in the municipalities, they are mainly led and funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and international organizations, although municipalities are instrumental in ensuring the success of the projects by supporting and complementing the activity in their area of responsibility.

The challenges observed by the OSCE in developing and effectively implementing policies, strategies and programmes for displaced persons and returnees at the local level are numerous. They include weak political commitment to returns by relevant officials, insufficient planning and allocation of financial resources, a lack of co-ordination and co-operation between the central and local level institutions, and limited capacity for policy-making, project planning and project implementation at the municipal level. Other obstacles, such as limited access to property, lack of economic opportunities, and difficulties in accessing health services, social assistance and education opportunities are also relevant to those persons considering return or local integration, and, as such, must be effectively addressed by municipalities in co-operation with relevant stakeholders at the central and local level.

This report reaffirms the crucial role of municipalities in creating conditions conducive to returns and community stability at the local level and makes recommendations to municipalities, central institutions and the international community to encourage such conditions. There is a need for effective participation,

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<sup>1</sup> This report focuses on voluntary returns and reintegration and does not assess the challenges resulting from an increasing number of persons forcibly repatriated to Kosovo from third countries (mainly Western European countries). However, challenges faced by municipalities in responding to the needs of voluntary returnees are also relevant for the reintegration of forcibly repatriated persons.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this report, non-majority communities are all those communities who constitute a numerical minority at the municipal level in Kosovo.

co-ordination and information sharing between relevant stakeholders at central and local level in all stages of planning and implementation of municipal policies, strategies and projects for displaced persons and returnees; for strengthening institutional mechanisms and capacities to address the needs of displaced persons/returnees; and for allocating sufficient financial resources for the implementation of strategies and programmes to support returns or other durable solutions for displaced persons/returnees.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

More than ten years after the conflict in Kosovo the absence of a sustainable solution for a significant portion of the approximately 220,000 refugees and displaced persons<sup>3</sup> from Kosovo continues to pose a major challenge for all concerned.<sup>4</sup> According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only around 21,000 persons belonging to non-majority communities have voluntarily returned from internal and external displacement within the region since 2000.<sup>5</sup> While the year 2008 saw a significant decline in voluntary returns, the returns process has since picked up with an increasing number of displaced persons returning in 2009 and during the first months of 2010.<sup>6</sup> However, despite the strong public declarations by Kosovo's institutions in support of returns and renewed efforts to identify and register displaced persons interested in returning to Kosovo, the sustainable return and reintegration of non-majority communities, particularly Kosovo Serb, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, remains problematic. The main obstacles to sustainable return and reintegration include: lack of employment and socio-economic opportunities, limited access to public services, unresolved housing and property rights issues and, to some extent, security concerns and limited freedom of movement.

Kosovo's central and local level institutions are increasingly responsible for managing the process of return and reintegration of refugees and displaced persons and ensuring their protection and assistance. Since 2006, many of the functions previously carried out by international bodies, including policy-making, standard-setting, co-ordination and implementation of assistance projects, have been gradually handed over to local institutions.<sup>7</sup> The Kosovo government, in close co-operation with the international

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<sup>3</sup> Mostly Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanian communities' members.

<sup>4</sup> According to UNHCR estimates, approximately 205,000 persons originating from Kosovo are displaced in central Serbia, while around 11,000 remain displaced in Montenegro and 1,500 in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (UNHCR Estimate of Refugees and Displaced Persons still seeking solutions in South-Eastern Europe – As at 30th September 2010). In addition, the number of displaced persons within Kosovo is estimated at 19,000 (UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission Prishtinë/Priština Statistical Overview – Update as of end of October 2010).

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission Prishtinë/Priština Statistical Overview – Update as of end of June 2010.

<sup>6</sup> The year 2009 saw the return of 1,153 non-majority communities members (including 439 Kosovo Serbs, 214 Kosovo Roma, 281 Kosovo Ashkali and Egyptians, 43 Bosniak, 90 Gorani and 86 Albanians in a minority situation at the municipal level) as compared to 679 in 2008 and 1,816 in 2007. An estimated 1,757, displaced persons voluntary returned to their homes between January and October 2010 (UNHCR Office of the Chief of Mission Prishtinë/Priština Statistical Overview – Update as of end of October 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Since its inception in 1999, UNMIK has been carrying out its mandate on returns-related matters to ensure a safe and unimpeded return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes in Kosovo, as outlined in the United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999). As part of the transfer of competencies from UNMIK to the Kosovo institutions, the returns-related administrative

community, has responded to this challenge by strengthening its policies and strategies towards displaced persons and returnees by, for example, simplifying steps for returns and the delivery of assistance to returnees, strengthening participation mechanisms for non-majority communities, and placing a greater focus on development and stabilization of communities in order to create conditions conducive to sustainable returns and reintegration.

While the central government is responsible for providing the overall policy framework for the protection of refugees and displaced persons' rights, as well as the necessary resources for its implementation, municipalities have to ensure proper and timely implementation of these policies and the operational framework for returns on the ground.<sup>8</sup> Municipalities are not only key service providers to all residents but are also responsible for supporting the development of all communities living within their territory, including displaced persons and returnees.<sup>9</sup> They play a fundamental role in shaping successful returns and reintegration policies at the local level and in implementing local reintegration and development activities to create conditions for sustainable returns and reintegration. In many cases, however, the implementation of existing policies and strategies at the local level is poor with municipalities assuming only limited responsibilities in the returns and reintegration process.

This report reviews the progress made by municipal institutions to develop and effectively implement strategies, policies and programmes for displaced persons and returnees, in compliance with the normative and policy framework for returns and the protection and promotion of the rights and interests of communities. It also identifies and analyzes the key challenges currently preventing local institutions from providing more effective protection and assistance. A brief examination of the existing legal and policy framework for displaced persons and returns, highlighting the roles and responsibilities of municipalities in the returns process is included, and recommendations are set out to overcome challenges identified.

## **2. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

The legal framework in Kosovo reaffirms the right of all refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes in safety and dignity and recover their properties and possessions in line with international human rights standards and instruments. The institutions in Kosovo have to take all measures necessary to facilitate the safe return of refugees and displaced persons to Kosovo, and to fully co-operate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other international and non-governmental organizations concerning their return.

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responsibilities and competences have gradually been handed over to Kosovo's central and local institutions. In addition, within the context of the UNHCR-led "localization process", the government and UNHCR since 2007 have strengthen their co-operation to improve capacities relevant for returns and durable solutions, stabilization and support to communities in Kosovo, particularly at the municipal level. Furthermore, in an effort to improve the co-ordination of return activities between the central authorities and the municipalities, UNHCR in co-operation with the government established a Returns Support Co-ordination Unit within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in November 2008.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter 2, Policy framework for displaced persons and returns.

<sup>9</sup> See UNMIK Regulation 2007/30 on Self-Government of Municipalities in Kosovo, 16 October 2007, amending UNMIK Regulation 2000/45 on Self-Government of Municipalities in Kosovo, 11 August 2000, and Law on Local Self Government, No. 03/L-040, 15 June 2008.

These standards form the basis of the government's framework for the protection of non-majority communities as well as its policies on returns and reintegration or other durable solutions for displaced persons. At the central level, the Ministry of Communities and Returns is mandated to coordinate with municipalities, ministries and international institutions to ensure the proper and timely implementation of policies and the operational framework for returns. The municipal working groups on returns and municipal returns and community officers are the primary co-ordination mechanisms and contact points for all return related projects and activities at the local level.

Several strategies and policy documents related to the sustainable return of displaced persons have been adopted in Kosovo. They set out the policies to protect and assist displaced persons and provide an institutional framework for managing voluntary returns or other sustainable solutions. The 2006 Revised Manual on Sustainable Return (the Manual)<sup>10</sup> defines the roles and responsibilities of central and local institutions in each stage of the returns process and outlines procedures and co-ordination mechanisms to address the needs and promote the rights of displaced persons and returnees.<sup>11</sup> It includes the main objectives of the updated returns policies adopted by the Kosovo government on 24 May 2006 as well as the 2006 Protocol on Voluntary and Sustainable Return.<sup>12</sup> The Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo<sup>13</sup> provides for the return of displaced persons belonging to these communities to either their place of origin or to a freely chosen alternative place. It also foresees specific assistance measures targeting these three communities. Finally, in October 2009, the Ministry of Communities and Returns adopted the Strategy for Communities and Returns (2009-2013), which puts a greater emphasis on economic development and the stabilization of non-majority communities to indirectly encourage and enable the sustainable return of displaced populations.<sup>14</sup>

Within this framework, municipalities are required to develop and implement annual policies and strategies enabling them to assume overall responsibility for returns and reintegration.<sup>15</sup> The purpose of the municipal returns strategies is to provide municipal officials with a framework for all returns-related activities, including both broad municipal objectives and specific activities aimed at creating conditions on the ground for returns and reintegration. The strategies are also meant to facilitate transparency

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<sup>10</sup> UNMIK/Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) Revised Manual on Sustainable Return, July 2006. The policy framework endorsed in 2006 is based on international human rights standards, including the 1998 UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Communities and Returns has initiated a revision of the Manual in late 2008 with the aim to simplify and streamline procedures required to finalize and implement returns programmes and projects. Although the new mechanisms for return assistance have not yet been approved, they are being implemented along with the Ministry's Strategy for Communities and Returns (2009 – 2013) since spring 2010. They place a stronger focus on municipal engagement and preparation of returns support, as well as direct co-operation with the Ministry of Communities and Returns on return-related issues.

<sup>12</sup> The protocol was signed on 6 June 2006 by UNMIK, the PISG and the Government of Serbia.

<sup>13</sup> Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo (2009 – 2015), December 2008.

<sup>14</sup> The Strategy for Communities and Returns (2009 – 2013) was approved by the Kosovo government in February 2010.

<sup>15</sup> UNMIK/PISG Revised Manual on Sustainable Return, July 2006.

and consistency in returns-related work and enhance co-ordination between all actors, while displaced communities are particularly encouraged to engage directly in the identification of obstacles and strategies to overcome them.<sup>16</sup> Municipalities have primary responsibility for the implementation of returns initiatives and projects at the local level, such as specific activities aimed at promoting dialogue and encouraging tolerance and support for socio-economic reintegration and community development. They have a duty to engage in information and outreach activities and to inform displaced persons about the situation in their places of origin and on the assistance available to them upon return.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. MUNICIPAL RESPONSES TO DISPLACEMENT AND RETURNS

#### 3.1 Municipal strategies for displaced persons and returnees

Progress made by municipalities to develop municipal strategies aimed at assisting displaced persons and returnees has been limited and varies greatly from municipality to municipality.<sup>18</sup> Nineteen municipalities<sup>19</sup> adopted a returns strategy in 2009, while 14 municipalities<sup>20</sup> failed to develop a strategy to guide their work in the field of returns and reintegration. As of July 2010, nine out of 33 municipalities<sup>21</sup> in Kosovo finalized and adopted their 2010 municipal returns strategies.<sup>22</sup> A number of other municipalities have engaged in a formal review of their 2009 strategies and have started developing their 2010 municipal returns strategies.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region*

In the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region, only two out of six municipalities have adopted a returns strategy or action plan for 2009 and 2010, namely Vushtrri/Vučitrn and Skenderaj/Srbica municipalities. In the case of Vushtrri/Vučitrn, the 2010 strategy

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<sup>16</sup> In July 2004, UNMIK and the PISG issued a joint Municipal Returns Strategy Policy Paper, including a proposed template and procedural recommendations regarding the development and drafting of municipal returns strategies.

<sup>17</sup> In late 2009, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in co-operation with the Ministry of Communities and Return and the Ministry of Local Government Administration initiated the development of a government regulation on municipal offices for communities and return. The regulation guides municipalities in establishing administrative structures – the Municipal Offices for Communities and Return – for the protection and promotion of the rights of persons belonging to non-majority communities, the equal access of all communities to public services and the creation of conditions for sustainable return of refugees, displaced persons and repatriated person. The regulation entered into force on 27 August 2010 (Regulation No. 2/2010 for the Municipal Offices for Communities and Return).

<sup>18</sup> See Annex I - Development and adoption of Municipal Returns Strategies.

<sup>19</sup> Ferizaj/Uroševac, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Kamenicë/Kamenica, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Viti/Vitina, Skenderaj/Srbica and Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Istog/Istok, Klinë/Klina, Pejë/Peć, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Lipjan/Lipljan, Obiliq/Obilić, Podujevë/Podujevo, Dragash/Dragaš, Malishevë/Mališevo, Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac, and Suharekë/Suva Reka.

<sup>20</sup> Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković, Kačanik/Kaçanik, Štrpce/Shtërpçë, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Leposavić/Leposaviq, Zubin Potok, Zvečan/Zvečan, Deçan/Deçane, Gjakovë/Đakovica, Junik, Glllogoc/Glogovac, Prishtinë/Priština and Shtime/Štimlje, and Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša.

<sup>21</sup> The newly established municipalities of Gračanica/Gračanicë, Ranilug/Ranillug, Klokot-Vrbovac/Klllokot-Vërboc and Partesh/Partesh have not been included in this assessment due to the fact that they have yet to develop substantive returns and reintegration policies to integrate their displaced populations.

<sup>22</sup> Dragash/Dragaš, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Lipjan/Lipljan, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Podujevë/Podujevo, Shtime/Štimlje, Prishtinë/Priština, Suharekë/Suva Reka and Vushtrri/Vučitrn.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Viti/Vitina, Istog/Istok, Klinë/Klina and Pejë/Peć.

includes the continuation of municipal support for returns to Dalak/Doljak and Shitaricë/Štitarica, including activities such as road reconstruction. A similar project is planned for the Kosovo Serb inhabited village of Priluzhje/Prelluzhë and the settlement of Banjskë/Banjska. The returns strategy also foresees support to the Ashkali inhabited area of Vushtrri/Vučitrn town. Skenderaj/Srbica municipality has not yet formally reviewed its 2009 municipal returns strategy or drafted a new strategy for 2010. Instead, the municipality adopted a municipal returns action plan focused on returns to Runik/Rudnik and infrastructure projects in the Kosovo Serb-inhabited villages of Banja/Bajë and Suvo Grlo/Syrganë.

In Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, as well as in the three northern municipalities of Leposavić/Leposaviq, Zubin Potok and Zvečan/Zveçan, no municipal returns strategies are currently in place. The Mitrovicë/Mitrovica municipality has never had a written policy or strategy on returns, but instead focuses through the municipal working group on activities to encourage returns to Brdjani/Kroi i Vitakut, Roma Mahalla, Bosniak Mahalla, Suhodoll/Suvi Do, and Doctor's Valley.<sup>24</sup> In northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, the UNMIK Administration Mitrovica (UAM) has never written a returns strategy, although it does work on returns-related projects, e.g. drafting an infrastructure project proposal for Brdjani/Kroi i Vitakut for 2010. In the three northern municipalities, the last municipal returns strategies were written in 2006 and 2007. Since 2008, communication between the Kosovo institutions and the municipalities of Leposavić/Leposaviq, Zubin Potok, and Zvečan/Zveçan halted entirely. However, before that time, the three municipalities engaged in returns processes and applied returns standards similar to other municipalities in Kosovo.

#### *Gjilan/Gnjilane region*

In the Gjilan/Gnjilane region, five out of eight municipalities adopted a returns strategy in 2009,<sup>25</sup> while as of June 2010 only Novo Brdo/Novobërdë has reviewed its strategy and endorsed a new one covering the period 2010-2013. The Novo Brdo/Novobërdë strategy for 2010 includes the continuation of inter-ethnic dialogue activities in potential return sites in the municipality, such as the villages of Bostane/Bostan, Prekovce/Prekoc, Trniçevce/Tërniqec, and Izvor, as well as a second phase of returns to the village of Klobukar/Kllobukar. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for outreach, registration and monitoring activities in support of returns in co-ordination with international stakeholders active in the field.

The 2009 Gjilan/Gnjilane returns strategy focused on support to various returns initiatives targeting Kosovo Serb and Roma displaced persons, including the Gjilan/Gnjilane town and different villages in the municipality.<sup>26</sup> It also foresaw support for Kosovo Serbs displaced from the village of Zhegër/Žegra to locally integrate in their places of displacement, including the villages of Donja Budriga/Budrikë e Poshtme, Parteš/Partesh, Pasjane/Pasjan and Gornje Kusce/Kufcë e

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<sup>24</sup> All but Roma Mahalla are located in northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë.

<sup>25</sup> Namely Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Novo Brdo/Novobërdë, Viti/Vitina, and Kamenicë/Kamenica.

<sup>26</sup> Planned activities included support for Kosovo Roma returnees to the Abdullah Presheva/Abdula Preševo neighbourhood; returns assistance to persons displaced from the Gjilan/Gnjilane town during the March 2004 riots; provision of in-kind assistance through the municipal community office to all displaced persons; and, facilitation of returns to the Štrbići/Shtربیçi mahalla in the village of Parallovë/Paralovo.

Epërme.<sup>27</sup> In Ferizaj/Uroševac, the 2009 returns strategy foresaw the development and implementation of several organized returns projects targeting Kosovo Serb displaced persons, including the village of Softaj/Softović, as well as the continuation of support to individual and spontaneous returns.<sup>28</sup> In Viti/Vitina, the 2009 returns strategies did not foresee any significant returns initiatives apart from a number of go-and-see visits<sup>29</sup> in the villages of Drobesh/Drobeš, Gërmovë/Grmovo, Pozharan/Požaranje and Viti/Vitina town.<sup>30</sup> Finally, the Kamenicë/Kamenica 2009 returns strategy included several return-related activities targeting Kosovo Serbs and Roma, including assessing conditions for returns and delivery of assistance to displaced persons in the villages of Berivojce/Berivojcë, Gragjenik/Gradenik, Hogosht/Ogošte, Kosovica, Rahovicë/Oraovica and Kamenicë/Kamenica town.<sup>31</sup>

In Štrpce/Shtërpçë, Kaçanik/Kaçanik and Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković, no strategies have been developed to assist displaced persons or returnees in 2009 or 2010. In Štrpce/Shtërpçë municipality, the last municipal returns strategy was written and approved for 2008. The municipality now focuses on achieving a durable solution for the approximately 700 Kosovo Serb displaced persons and Serb refugees from Croatia living in several collective centres in the municipality.<sup>32</sup> In Kaçanik/Kaçanik, the last returns strategy was written in 2006 and municipal officials have shown no willingness to engage in returns-related activities. Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković has not yet engaged in drafting a returns strategy since its conversion from a pilot municipal unit into a fully fledged municipality in August 2008.

#### *Pejë/Peć region*

In the Pejë/Peć region, municipal returns strategies were in place in three out of six municipalities in 2009, the Pejë/Peć, Istog/Istok and Kline/Klina municipalities. All

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<sup>27</sup> The recently appointed municipal returns officer has prepared a first draft of the 2010 municipal returns strategy. The draft does not present substantial changes in the objectives and activities compared to the 2009 version. Many activities are still ongoing or have not been implemented in 2009. The fact that the municipal working group on returns has not met since April 2009 has hampered the approval process of the strategy.

<sup>28</sup> The municipal returns officer has prepared a first draft of the 2010 strategy and shared it with relevant stakeholders, including municipal officials, displaced persons' representatives, and representatives from international organizations and civil society. The draft strategy foresees the continuation of the 2009 activities.

<sup>29</sup> Go-and-see visits provide displaced persons with the opportunity to gather first-hand information on the conditions in their place of origin and to directly interact and engage with the receiving community to make an informed decision about returns or other durable solutions. They are invited to visit their former homes and meet with neighbours, community members and local institutions as part of an organized visit to discuss issues of particular interest, such as housing reconstruction assistance, employment and income generation opportunities, security and freedom of movement, social welfare and pensions, education and other public services. (See UNMIK/PISG Revised Manual on Sustainable Return, July 2006).

<sup>30</sup> The 2010 strategy is currently in the drafting phase. Among others, it envisages inter-ethnic dialogue activities and returns activities in the villages of Tërpezë/Trpeza, Pozharan/Požaranje, Sadovinë e Çerkezve/Čerkez Sadovina.

<sup>31</sup> Kamenicë/Kamenica municipality has yet to formally review its 2009 returns strategy and decide on the municipality's areas of focus for 2010. According to the municipal returns officer, municipal working group meetings have been cancelled for the time being due to the fact that no funds have been made available from the central level to support the planned returns project to Rahovicë/Oraovica.

<sup>32</sup> See the OSCE Mission in Kosovo report *In Pursuit of Durable Solutions for those Displaced in the Collective Centres in Štrpce/Shtërpçë Municipality*, March 2010, available at [http://www.osce.org/documents/mik/2010/04/43384\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/mik/2010/04/43384_en.pdf).

municipalities in the region have yet to adopt new returns strategies for 2010. In Pejë/Peć, priority areas under the 2009 strategy included the organization of go-and-see and go-and-inform visits<sup>33</sup> primarily targeting persons currently displaced in Montenegro, the provision of municipal support to individual returns including infrastructure projects,<sup>34</sup> the continuation of inter-ethnic dialogue activities between receiving communities and returnees as well as the establishment of a database on displaced persons. In 2009, initiatives mainly focused on rural areas and villages.<sup>35</sup> In Istog/Istok municipality, planned activities under the 2009 strategy focused on outreach and dialogue activities, registration of displaced persons, and support to individual returns through the municipal working group and task forces.<sup>36</sup> Another project foresaw the renovation of six ethnically-mixed schools in the municipality. In the Klinë/Klina municipality, focus areas in 2009 included the support to individual and organized returns, the organization of outreach and dialogue initiatives, and the improvement of the security situation, access to public services and co-operation with courts and the Kosovo Property Agency on property related issues.<sup>37</sup>

The Deçan/Deçane and Gjakovë/Đakovica municipalities did not adopt a returns strategy for 2009. Since 2008, a deadlock in the Deçan/Deçane municipal working group on returns over failed attempts to appoint displaced persons' representatives to the forum has prevented the adoption of a returns strategy. The main activities planned in 2009 included the development of returns and infrastructure projects, the organization of outreach and dialogue activities, capacity-building activities for municipal officials, and the creation of a database on displaced persons and improved access of returnees to municipal services.<sup>38</sup> In the Gjakovë/Đakovica municipality, neither the post of municipal returns officer nor the municipal working group on returns were instituted in 2009,<sup>39</sup> and the municipality has shown little will towards supporting returns in recent years. The last municipal returns strategy was written in

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<sup>33</sup> Go-and-inform visits are conducted in the location of displacement, during which the displaced communities receive information about the situation in their places of origin and potential return sites, including socio-economic conditions, security, freedom of movement, as well as on the returns procedures and support mechanisms available to them (See UNMIK/PISG Revised Manual on Sustainable Return, July 2006).

<sup>34</sup> For instance, water supply system and asphaltting of the road in 7 Shtatori/7 Septembar settlement and water irrigation system in Vitomiricë/Vitomirica.

<sup>35</sup> Priority return sites for Kosovo Serbs, Roma and Egyptians included the 7 Shtatori/7 Septembar neighbourhood and the villages of Treboviq/Trebović, Nakëll/Naklo, Belo Polje/Bellopojë and Maja e Zezë/Crni Vrh. The municipality has engaged in a formal review of its 2009 strategy, including consultations with all members of the municipal working group on returns and other relevant municipal bodies. The draft strategy for 2010 foresees the continuation of support in the priority areas identified in 2009, including the, yet to be established, database on displaced persons.

<sup>36</sup> Priority returns sites included Belo Polje/Bellopojë, Dragolevc i Eprn/Gornji Dragoljevac, Rudesh/Rudeš settlement in Serbobran/Srbobrane, Zallq/Žaç, Kovragë/Kovrage, Grab/Shkozë and Sinajë/Sinaje. The 2009 returns strategy has been formally reviewed by the municipal returns and community officers, with the active involvement of senior officials, displaced persons representatives and associations and other key stakeholders. The draft strategy for 2010 foresees the continuation and/or finalization of projects identified in 2009.

<sup>37</sup> The municipality in 2010 plans to finalize projects identified in 2009 and continue its support in the areas identified.

<sup>38</sup> The municipal returns officer has prepared a first draft of the 2010 municipal returns strategy to be approved by the municipal working group on returns.

<sup>39</sup> The new municipal government, elected in November 2009, appears to be more supportive to returns. In May 2010, the position of municipal returns officer was finally filled. However, the municipality has yet to establish a municipal working group on returns.

2008. Finally, Junik municipality has not yet drafted a returns strategy since its conversion from a pilot municipal unit into a fully fledged municipality in August 2008.

### *Prizren region*

In the Prizren region, all municipalities but Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša adopted a returns strategy in 2009. As of June 2010, only Suharekë/Suva Reka and Dragash/Dragaš had reviewed their strategies and endorsed a new policy document for 2010.<sup>40</sup> In Suharekë/Suva Reka, the strategy for 2010 does not foresee major changes compared to the previous strategy, focusing mainly on issues of security, freedom of movement, the overall climate for returns, access to public services, infrastructure, and utilisation of human capacities. A section on capital investments related to infrastructural projects in mixed neighbourhoods and villages has also been integrated into the municipal development plan, such as the construction of houses for returnees, a primary school in Mohlan/Movljane, and several road constructions for the benefit of (formerly) multi-ethnic villages. In Dragash/Dragaš, the 2010 strategy does not differ much from its predecessor, focussing mainly on the greater involvement of municipal structures and actors in returns issues, particularly in the field of infrastructure, health, education, and security, as well as on the active involvement of displaced persons in the overall process.<sup>41</sup>

In Prizren, the 2009 strategy established very generic priority areas, such as the promotion of the returns process, security and freedom of movement, organization of go-and-see and go-and-inform visits and inter-ethnic dialogue activities, support and assistance to and reintegration of returnees.<sup>42</sup> In the Rahovec/Orahovac municipality, main areas of focus in 2009 included the start of a returns project to the Zoqishtë/Zocište village, the identification of new possible returns locations, and the gradual integration process of non-majority returnees.<sup>43</sup> In Malishevë/Mališevo, returns-related activities under the 2009 strategy focused on the initiation of inter-ethnic dialogue between displaced persons and the receiving majority community, the organization of go-and-see visits to Kijevë/Kijevo, and the identification of donors for possible assistance.<sup>44</sup> The Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša municipality has not yet developed a returns strategy since its conversion from a pilot municipal unit into a fully fledged municipality in August 2008.

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<sup>40</sup> In Malishevë/Mališevo, the 2010 strategy (which is almost identical to the 2008 and 2009 strategies) has been developed, but has yet to be endorsed by the municipal working group on returns.

<sup>41</sup> Five road construction projects, as well as projects related to water tanks and a sport stadium were implemented in 2009 by the government of Kosovo and the municipality, while a variety of small-scale assistance projects were implemented by international partner organisations.

<sup>42</sup> No substantial review of the 2009 returns strategy was carried out and there is still no draft 2010 strategy.

<sup>43</sup> In the Rahovec/Orahovac municipality, which did not yet organize a municipal working group on returns in 2010, the drafting process of the 2010 municipal returns strategy has not yet been initiated.

<sup>44</sup> However, none of the above activities have been carried out so far. The municipality has finalized the first draft of the strategy for 2010. The draft was approved by the municipal assembly, but was not discussed or endorsed by the municipal working group on returns. The draft strategy, basically a copy of the 2008 and 2009 strategies, focuses on similar issues and contains a number of project proposals, such as the reconstruction of the water and electricity networks in the village of Kijevë/Kijevo for possible donor funding.

### *Prishtinë/Priština region*

In the Prishtinë/Priština region, four out of seven municipalities adopted a returns strategy in 2009.<sup>45</sup> Five municipalities, namely Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Lipjan/Lipljan, Podujevë/Podujevo, Prishtinë/Priština, and Shtime/Štimlje have endorsed a new strategy for 2010. In Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, the 2010 municipal strategy includes the continuation of support to ongoing returns projects implemented by different donors as well as the facilitation of individual and group returns of Kosovo Serb displaced persons for instance to the village of Miradi e Eperme/Gornje Dobrevo. The Lipjan/Lipljan municipal returns strategy for 2010 focuses on support to individual and group returns to Lipjan/Lipljan town and different villages in the municipality, such as Hallaq I Vogël/Mali Alaš, Magurë/Magura, Vershevc/Vrsevce, and Vrelle/Vrelo, as well as infrastructure improvements in returns sites in general. In Podujevë/Podujevo, the 2010 strategy foresees reintegration support for Kosovo Roma and Ashkali returnees, the organization of inter-ethnic dialogue activities and identification of communities' needs, in particular in the fields of education and infrastructure. The Prishtinë/Priština municipality has identified as priority areas the greater involvement of local level participation mechanisms, improved co-ordination with associations of displaced persons, organization of dialogue and public awareness activities to promote security and tolerance among communities<sup>46</sup>, as well as support to individual returns. The Shtime/Štimlje strategy foresees the provision of municipal support to individual returns, including urban areas, the organization of dialogue activities, strengthening of civil society organizations and improving conditions for returns, including the areas of economic development, employment and housing.

The Obiliq/Obilić municipality has not yet endorsed a strategy for 2010 due to lack of support from the municipal leadership. The 2009 returns strategy focused on returns activities in the Sharagan/Saragan mahalla (Obiliq/Obilić town), Plementin/Plementina, Milloshevë/Miloševo, Obiliq/Obilić town, and Babin Most/Babimoc. The main areas of engagement included civil registration, access to education, health and social assistance for returnees, co-operation with the Kosovo Property Agency in cases of illegal occupation of properties, involvement of other municipal departments in the returns process, and identification of available funds for income generation projects. Finally, the Glllogoc/Glogovac municipality has never written a municipal returns strategy allegedly due to the low number of non-majority communities living in the municipality prior to the 1999 conflict and the low number of displaced persons.

With only very few exceptions, municipalities have not allocated specific budgetary resources for the implementation of proposed activities in the identified areas of focus of their municipal returns strategies. Instead, local institutions usually rely on funds provided by the central level or international organizations to implement returns-related activities. In many cases this has prevented the effective implementation of proposed projects and activities designed to assist displaced persons and returnees. Generally, municipalities have taken no steps to integrate the municipal returns strategies into their municipal development planning or to consider the budgetary implications of the strategies. In general, municipal returns strategies remain vague,

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<sup>45</sup> Namely Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Lipjan/Lipljan, Obiliq/Obilić, and Podujevë/Podujevo.

<sup>46</sup> For instance in Nëntë Jugoviq/Devet Jugovic, Lëbanë/Lebane, Bërmicë e Epërme/Gornja Brmjica, and in specific locations of the Prishtinë/Priština town.

are often poorly developed or not updated according to the needs and concerns identified.

### **3.2 Municipal assistance activities for displaced persons and returnees**

The municipal returns strategies, if adopted, are often only partially implemented. In many cases, there is a considerable gap between planned and realized activities, and proposed budgets often exceed the resources available both at the local and at the central level. Nevertheless, some municipalities have made considerable efforts to support sustainable returns projects. A number of activities, mainly funded by the central level and international donors, have been successful, notably in assisting displaced persons and returnees with reconstruction and income-generation projects and other basic return assistance (e.g., food and non-food items) as well as ensuring that public services are available to facilitate their reintegration. In addition, officials in several municipalities actively participated in outreach visits to displaced persons to inform them about the situation in their place of origin and the returns assistance available.<sup>47</sup>

#### *Mitrovicë/Mitrovica region*

The municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica has been generally supportive of returns to the Roma Mahalla and most recently of the relocation of displaced persons living in the lead contaminated camps in the northern part of the municipality.<sup>48</sup> However, much of this support has come as a result of pressure from the international community. Ongoing for the past year have been the European Union Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Support Initiative (EU-MRSI), and the RAE Economic, Social, Transition, Advocacy and Resettlement/Reintegration Program (RESTART), funded by the European Commission and USAID and implemented by Mercy Corps, which aim to close the lead contaminated camps, Osterode and Česmin Lug in northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë, and move most residents to row houses in the Roma Mahalla.<sup>49</sup> In May 2009, the municipality approved a document detailing the row houses to be constructed under the ongoing relocation programmes. However, the municipal assembly has yet to issue a decision formally allocating municipal land for a period of 99 years to the beneficiaries of the EU-MRSI and RESTART programmes. The deputy mayor for communities and the municipal returns officer organize and lead the Local Steering Committee established to co-ordinate the activities of the various stakeholders involved in the programme implementation. Among the main challenges to be addressed are the effective

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<sup>47</sup> Outreach visits, including go-and-see and go-and-inform visits, are mainly organized by the UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council in co-operation with the US Government's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration.

<sup>48</sup> A total of 124 families displaced throughout Serbia, Montenegro and the lead-contaminated Osterode, Česmin Lug, and Leposavić/Leposaviq camps had returned to the Roma Mahalla under the framework of organized programmes initiated by UNMIK and the municipality of Mitrovicë/Mitrovica and implemented by the Danish Refugee Council and the Norwegian Church Aid between 2007 and 2009.

<sup>49</sup> The main purpose of the RESTART project is to ensure safer and improved living conditions and livelihoods for up to 50 Roma and Ashkali displaced families from the lead contaminated camps of Osterode and Česmin Lug. Apart from housing, the project aims to support access to social and health services, education, employment and secure livelihoods. The EU-MRSI initiative aims to facilitate the resettlement of an additional 90 Roma and Ashkali families from the Osterode and Česmin Lug camps to the Roma Mahalla and to ensure their economically productive, secure and healthy reintegration.

involvement of communities in all stages of project implementation and decision-making as well as ensuring adequate access to public services, including proper medical care for camp residents suffering from lead poisoning, and to education, employment and income-generation opportunities.

In addition, municipal institutions participated in a number of go-and-see visits for Kosovo Serbs and Roma to Mitrovicë/Mitrovica town and the villages of Staritërg/Stari Trg and Tunel i Parë/Prvi Tunel. Finally, in spring 2009, the prospect of Kosovo Albanian returns to Brdjani/Kroi i Vitakut in northern Mitrovica/Mitrovicë brought some attention to the neglected returns project of Svinjarë/Svinjare in the south.<sup>50</sup> In June 2009, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica municipality began temporarily funding a daily bus line between Mali Zvečan/Zveçani Vogël in Zvečan/Zveçan municipality and Svinjarë/Svinjare in southern Mitrovicë/Mitrovica to enable the displaced to visit their properties, which had previously been reconstructed in 2006, but since then have largely remained uninhabited.

In the municipalities of Vushtrri/Vučitrn and Skenderaj/Srbica, only a few initiatives targeting displaced persons were implemented in 2009 and 2010. For instance, a returns project funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns was implemented in the villages of Dalak/Doljak and Shitaricë/Stitarica in partnership with the Vushtrri/Vučitrn municipality. The project included the reconstruction of 15 houses, 13 houses for Kosovo Serb families and two for Kosovo Albanian vulnerable cases, as well as the rehabilitation of the sewage system and installation of a water pump by the municipality. In 2009, the municipality also facilitated access to municipal services for a number of Kosovo Serb individual returns to different villages in the municipality, and in 2009 and 2010 participated in go-and-see visits targeting Kosovo Serb and Ashkali displaced persons in different locations in the municipality, including Pantinë/Pantina and Samadrexhë/Samodreža.<sup>51</sup> In Skenderaj/Srbica, the implementation of a proposed returns project to the village of Runik/Rudnik is still pending due to lack of financial resources. In 2009, municipal officials participated in a go-and-inform visit for the Runik/Rudnik displaced persons to inform them about the progress of the project.

Little and irregular assistance comes from municipal institutions or international organizations to support displaced persons in the northern municipalities of Zvečan/Zveçan, Zubin Potok and Leposavić/Leposaviq. In Zubin Potok, UNHCR is seeking funding to support Croatian Serb and Kosovo Serb displaced persons. A housing rehabilitation project foresees the construction of twenty houses in Zupce/Zupç and Jagnjenica/Jagnjenicë villages. Another project aims to support the development of local business activities by constructing a cooling system for agricultural products. In Zvečan/Zveçan and Leposavić/Leposaviq,<sup>52</sup> no significant

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<sup>50</sup> When Brdjani/Kroi i Vitakut reconstruction began, Kosovo Serb representatives insisted that any return to the north be reciprocated in the south.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, seven Kosovo Serb returnee houses were reconstructed in the villages of Grace/Gracë and Priluzhje/Prelluzhë within the framework of the UNDP-managed SPARK project funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns, in co-operation with the municipality.

<sup>52</sup> Since June 1999 the municipality of Leposavić/Leposaviq started receiving displaced persons from all over Kosovo and now hosts approximately 2,500 persons. The majority of Kosovo Serb displaced persons live in private accommodation, with relatives, or in collective centers in the town of Leposavić/Leposaviq and the settlements of Lešak/Leshak and Sočanica/Soçanicë.

assistance was provided by municipal institutions or international organizations to the displaced persons.<sup>53</sup>

### *Gjilan/Gnjilane region*

The municipalities of Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Uroševac and Novo Brdo/Novobërdë have been generally supportive of returns by Kosovo Serb, Roma and Ashkali displaced persons to different villages and urban neighbourhoods. For instance, within the Return and Reintegration to Kosovo I project (RRKI),<sup>54</sup> 15 houses were reconstructed for Kosovo Serb families in the villages of Gornje Kusce/Kufcë e Epërme, Pasjane/Pasjan and Parteš/Partesh, in close co-operation with the municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, in 2009, the municipality allocated municipal land in the Gllama/Glama neighbourhood for six Roma displaced families,<sup>56</sup> while UNHCR and the Ministry of Communities and Returns financially supported the construction of houses. Another six families were approved by the municipality, UNHCR and the Ministry of Communities and Returns for return assistance in 2010 funded jointly by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and UNHCR. Municipal officials participated in a number of go-and-see and go-and-inform visits for Kosovo Serb and Roma displaced persons, including the Gjilan/Gnjilane town and several villages in the municipality,<sup>57</sup> as well as different locations within the region. In Ferizaj/Uroševac, within the framework of the UNDP-managed SPARK project,<sup>58</sup> nine houses were constructed for Kosovo Serb families in the village of Softaj/Softović by April 2010, however although members of these families have taken possession of these houses their actual return is still pending. The municipality, upon the request of the Kosovo Albanian receiving community, had previously agreed to repair the roads leading to the return site, and in March the reconstruction process was completed. The Return and Reintegration to Kosovo II

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<sup>53</sup> Some requests for assistance to Kosovo Albanian returnees were received and approved by the Ministry of Communities and Return via UNHCR in co-operation with the municipal returns officers of these municipalities.

<sup>54</sup> The Return and Reintegration in Kosovo I (RRKI) project is a joint initiative funded by the European Commission and the Ministry of Communities and Returns in partnership with UNDP, aimed at supporting the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons through the increased involvement of government and non-government actors at both central and municipal level. The project is being implemented in four municipalities: Istog/Istok, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Pejë/Peć, and Gjilan/Gnjilane over a period of 21 months.

<sup>55</sup> The ongoing second phase of the RRKI project targets Kosovo Serb families originating from the village of Zhegër/Žegra who opted for integration in their places of displacement. The municipal assembly approved the allocation of municipal land in the village of Donja Budriga/Budrigë e Poshtme for the construction of houses for six Kosovo Serb families, while two other requests for municipal land in the villages of Donja Budriga/Budrigë e Poshtme and Pasjane/Pasjan are still pending approval. Three houses for displaced families from Zhegër/Žegra will be reconstructed on the land already belonging to beneficiaries in the villages of Gornje Kusce/Kufcë e Epërme, Parteš/Partesh, and Pasjane/Pasjan.

<sup>56</sup> The families used to live in socially owned properties in the Qener qeshme/Čener česma neighborhood in the Gjilan/Gnjilane town and were displaced to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

<sup>57</sup> For instance to the villages of Përlepnice/Prilepnica and Zhegër/Žegra, and the Abdullah Presheva/Abdula Preševo neighbourhood in the Gjilan/Gnjilane town.

<sup>58</sup> The Sustainable Partnerships for Assistance to Minority Returns to Kosovo (SPARK) was developed in 2005 to provide an integrated umbrella mechanism for delivering the full spectrum of multi-sectoral assistance for both individual and group returns. The project, which closed in early 2010, was implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in close co-operation with Kosovo institutions, specifically the Ministry of Communities and Returns, municipalities, and local NGOs.

project (RRKII)<sup>59</sup> aims to provide (re-)construction assistance and reintegration support to a number of Ashkali and Kosovo Serb displaced families.<sup>60</sup> The process of allocating land for the housing project is moving only slowly. Municipal institutions actively participated in various go-and-inform and go-and-see visits for displaced persons, including Ferizaj/Uroševac town and different villages in the municipality<sup>61</sup> as well as various locations in the region. In the Novo Brdo/Novobërdë municipality, returns-related activities have focused mainly on the implementation of the organized returns project to the village of Klobukar/Kllobukar, funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and the municipality. In July 2009, 22 Kosovo Serb families returned to their newly reconstructed houses in the village. Municipal institutions, in particular officials of the newly established municipal department for communities and returns, are actively engaged in assisting the returnees with civil registration procedures as well as other outstanding issues related to the returns project.<sup>62</sup>

In the municipalities of Viti/Vitina and Kamenicë/Kamenica, only a few returns-related initiatives were implemented during 2009 or 2010. After a month of dialogue between the Kosovo Albanian receiving community and UNHCR, the municipal assembly of Viti/Vitina approved the allocation of municipal land for the construction of houses by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and UNHCR for two Roma returnee families in the village of Radivojc/Radivojce.<sup>63</sup> Municipal officials participated in a number of go-and-see visits targeting Kosovo Serbs currently displaced in different locations in southern Serbia as well as Roma displaced in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.<sup>64</sup> In Kamenicë/Kamenica, despite the expression of interest by several Roma displaced families to return to their places of origin or relocate to other villages, the municipality has not taken any steps to facilitate their return and reintegration. In 2009, municipal institutions participated in a go-and-see visit for ten Kosovo Serb displaced persons to the village of Rahovicë/Oraovica, and another follow-up visit was conducted at the end of July 2010. The municipal working group on returns is currently reviewing a concept paper aimed at facilitating their return.

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<sup>59</sup> The Return and Reintegration to Kosovo II (RRKII) project is an initiative jointly funded by the European Commission and the Ministry of Communities and Returns and implemented by the Danish Refugee Council. The project aims at supporting the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons over a 24 month implementation period. It is implemented in four municipalities: Klinë/Klina, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Obiliq/Obilić, and Rahovec/Orahovac.

<sup>60</sup> Four Ashkali families currently displaced in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and nine Kosovo Serb families displaced in Leskovac, Niš, Kragujevac, and Kraljevo have been included in the beneficiary list of the project. Seven Kosovo Serb families have decided not to return for various reasons and the Danish Refugee Council, as the implementing agency, is currently in the process of selecting other beneficiaries among displaced Kosovo Serb.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, Talinoci Muhaxherëve/Muhadžer Talinovac, Bablak/Babljak, Softaj/Softović, Nakodim/Nekodin, Balaj/Stojković, Sazli/Sazlija, Neredime/Nerodimlje, Gërlaçë/Grlica, and Doganaj/Doganović.

<sup>62</sup> The municipality has requested additional support from the Ministry of Communities and Returns to tackle problems related to the lack of potable water, electricity shortages in some properties, delays in launching income generation activities, and ensuring security of tenure for beneficiaries.

<sup>63</sup> The process was delayed because village representatives had previously sent a letter to the policy and finance committee chairperson opposing the return and claiming that these two families were involved in the looting of abandoned houses during the 1999 conflict.

<sup>64</sup> For instance, to the villages of Tërpezë/Trpeza, Pozharan/Požaranje, and Radivojc/Radivojce.

In Štrpce/Shtërpçë, Kaçanik/Kaçanik, and Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković, there have been no significant returns-related activities in 2009 and 2010. In Štrpce/Shtërpçë, activities have been focused on finding a solution for displaced persons living in the Brezovica/Brezovicë collective centres. In June 2010, the municipality allocated municipal land and issued a tender for the construction of three apartment buildings to accommodate displaced persons currently living in the collective centres and other socially vulnerable persons. The initiative is funded by the Kosovo government. Despite the occasional expression of interest by Roma displaced persons to return to Kaçanik/Kaçanik, the municipality has taken no concrete steps or measures to support their return. Similarly, the return of Kosovo Serbs and Roma has not figured high on the agenda of Hani i Elezit/Đeneral Janković municipality.

### *Pejë/Peć region*

The municipalities of Pejë/Peć, Istog/Istok and Kline/Klina have been generally supportive of the return of displaced persons belonging to the Kosovo Serb, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. For instance, within the framework of the RRKI project, a number of Kosovo Serb displaced families have been assisted with their return to several locations in the Pejë/Peć municipality.<sup>65</sup> In addition, the municipality supported the return of 27 Kosovo Egyptians to the Pejë/Peć town, Ljesane/Leshan, Vitimirica/Vitomiricë and Vragovac/Vragoc, as well as five Roma families to the Pejë/Peć town. Municipal officials, including the deputy mayor for communities, actively participated in a series of go-and-see visits for Kosovo Serb, Roma and Egyptian families in the Pejë/Peć town and several villages in the municipality,<sup>66</sup> as well as go-and-inform visits in Podgorica and Berane, Montenegro. The Istog/Istok municipality, within the framework of the RRKI project, supported the return of Kosovo Serb displaced persons to the villages of Gurakoc/Đurakovac, Osojane/Osojan, Čërkolez/Crkolez and other villages. Furthermore, the municipality co-operated directly with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and a local non-governmental organization to support the return of 20 Kosovo Serb families to the village of Sinajë/Sinaje in 2009. In addition, 16 Kosovo Egyptian families from Rudesh/Rudeš and two Roma families were relocated to the village of Serbobran/Srbobran in 2009 within the same project. The land for the relocation alternative was allocated by the municipality.<sup>67</sup> In 2010, the municipality further co-operated directly with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and other stakeholders in assisting Kosovo Serb families spontaneously returning to different locations within the municipality, including to Zallq/Žac, Dragoljevac/Dragolevc and Muževine/ Muzhevinë.<sup>68</sup> Finally, 13 go-and-see and three go-and-inform visits were

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<sup>65</sup> For instance, Vitomiricë/Vitomirica, the informal settlement of Llazoviq/Lazović, Belo Polje/Bellopojë, Pejë/Peć town, as well as Nakëll/Naklo and Maja e Zezë/Crni Vrh villages.

<sup>66</sup> For instance, the villages of Zahaq/Zahać, Vitomiricë/Vitomirica, Ozdrim/Ozrim, Bllagajë/Blagaje, Berzhnik/Brežanik, Bllagajë/Blagaje, Turjakë/Turjak and Treboviq/Trebovic as well as the 7 Shtatori/7 Septembar settlement, Kristali settlement and Pejë/Peć town.

<sup>67</sup> Further assistance is needed to tackle problems related to the repeated flooding of the return site and the water and electricity supply to households, as well as to ensure security of tenure and access to documentation, education and income generating opportunities for returnees.

<sup>68</sup> In the village of Zallq/Žac, between 20 and 30 Kosovo Serb heads of households spontaneously returned in March 2010 and are currently living in tents provided by UNHCR. At the end of May 2010, over 120 requests for assistance to return to Zallq/Žac and other locations had been made to the municipality, according to the municipal returns officer. The construction of 35 new houses for Kosovo Serb returnees and receiving community in Zallq/Žac and Dragoljevac/Dragolevc funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns has started in July 2010.

conducted by the Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR in co-operation with municipal officials, including to Serbobran/Srbobran and several Kosovo Serb return sites as well as to places of displacement in Montenegro.<sup>69</sup> In Klinë/Klina, 17 Kosovo Serb families have recently returned within the framework of the RKKII project implemented in partnership with the municipality, while a number of other families have been approved for return assistance.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, the municipality has supported the return of Kosovo Serb displaced persons to Pogragje/Pograde, Rudice/Rudice and Pjetric/Potrc as well as Berkovë/Berkovo villages. A number of Ashkali families who spontaneously returned to the municipality received humanitarian assistance packages from UNHCR, but have yet to be supported with other reintegration measures by the municipality. Municipal officials participated in 13 go-and-see and four go-and-inform visits, including the Klinë/Klina town and several villages in the municipality as well as different locations of displacement throughout the region.<sup>71</sup>

In Deçan/Deçane and Gjakovë/Đakovica, only a few activities have been implemented to support the return of displaced persons. Municipal officials in Deçan/Deçane have participated in go-and-see visits for potential Kosovo Serb returnees, and in 2009, the municipal returns officer led a go-and-inform visit to Montenegro to discuss returns-related matters with Kosovo Serb and Kosovo Montenegrin displaced persons.<sup>72</sup> No significant initiatives were undertaken to facilitate the return of Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian displaced families. In Gjakovë/Đakovica, no significant projects were implemented to support returns. During 2009 and 2010, a UNDP-managed SPARK project was implemented to support the return of six Egyptian families to Brekoc/Brekovac neighbourhood and Dujakë/Dujak village. Furthermore, the municipality in co-operation with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and UNHCR approved another eight Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families for return assistance. Municipal officials participated in three go-and-see visits for Egyptian and Roma communities currently displaced in Montenegro. The municipality was also represented in go-and-inform visits to Egyptian and Roma displaced persons in Montenegro. A go-and-see visit for 15 Kosovo Serb displaced persons has been repeatedly postponed for the last five months allegedly due to lack of agreement between relevant stakeholders on the participants list.

#### *Prizren region*

Prizren municipality has been actively engaged in providing returns assistance during 2009 and 2010. Amongst the main initiatives is the return project to the village of Sërbica e Poshtme/Donja Srbica, for which the municipality has held several meetings with international stakeholders and the receiving community, and organized a go-and-inform visit and a go-and-see visit of displaced Kosovo Serbs to the village.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Displaced persons visited the villages of Muzhevinë/Muževina, Grab/Shkoza, Dubravë/Dubrava, Belicë/Belica, Banjë/Banja, Polan/Polane, and Serbobran/Srbobran.

<sup>70</sup> Return locations include the villages of Dollc/Dolac, Grebnik/Grebnik, and Klinë/Klina town.

<sup>71</sup> Go-and-see visits were conducted in the Klinë/Klina town and in the villages of Dollcë/Dolac, Drsnik/Dresnik, Pogragjë/Pograde, Drenoc/Drenovac, Budisalc/Budisavci, and Dollc/Dolac. Go-and-inform visits included Kraljevo, Kragujevac, and Čačak.

<sup>72</sup> As a result, 13 new requests for returns assistance from Kosovo Serbs currently displaced in Montenegro have been submitted to the municipality in 2010.

<sup>73</sup> The municipality has allocated €90,000 for the restoration of the village's water supply system, while the Ministry of Communities and Returns has invested approximately €340,000 for the

Furthermore, preparations for the reconstruction of ten Kosovo Serb houses in the centre of Prizren town initiated and funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and international donors are underway. Municipal officials have participated in several go-and-see visits.<sup>74</sup> The Prizren municipality is also demonstrating a new commitment to reaching out to possible returnees displaced within Kosovo. For instance, in October 2009, the municipal returns officer visited, for the first time since the 1999 conflict, approximately 25 (out of an estimated 200) Kosovo Serbs displaced in Štrpce/Shtërpçë municipality.

Suharekë/Suva Reka and Rahovec/Orahovac are generally supportive of returns and take ownership of the process. For instance, in Suharekë/Suva Reka, the first ever go-and-inform visit since the 1999 conflict was carried out successfully in June 2010. The Suharekë/Suva Reka municipal returns officer, with logistical support from UNHCR, participated in a two-day visit to Belgrade, where he and Ministry of Communities and Returns representatives met with displaced Kosovo Serbs from the villages of Mushutishtë/Mušutište, Reçan/Reçane, Leshan/Lešane, and Mohlan/Movljane to encourage their return and to inform them about the current situation in the municipality. In addition, municipal officials participated in a number of go-and-see visits.<sup>75</sup> All visits were characterized by the active involvement of either the mayor or the deputy mayor. In Rahovec/Orahovac, RRKII is the main assistance project. In March 2010, the municipal returns officer, representatives of the Ministry of Communities and Returns, the Danish Refugee Council and UNHCR took part in an assessment visit, where they met 50 potential Kosovo Serb beneficiaries. In addition, during 2009 and 2010, one go-and-see visit to Rahovec/Orahovac town for 12 displaced Kosovo Serbs and one extended go-and-see visit to Zočiste/Zoqishtë village for 30 displaced Kosovo Serbs were organized with the active involvement of municipal officials, including the mayor and other senior officials. The visit to Zočiste/Zoqishtë village was preceded by a go-and-inform visit to Belgrade by municipal officials, along with representatives of the Ministry of Communities and Returns and UNHCR. Land allocation has been promised several times by the mayor and other senior municipal officials, but has not yet been achieved.

The Dragash/Dragaš municipality continues to encourage the return of displaced persons to the municipality, and regularly provides potential returnees with advice and guidance on assistance available upon return. However, the municipality, lacking a budget for the municipal returns officer, is not able to play a proactive role when it comes to returns-related activities.<sup>76</sup> In 2009 the municipal returns officer, along with the municipal community officer and senior municipal officials, participated in a UNHCR-organized go-and-inform visit to displaced Gorani in Belgrade. Finally, in Malishevë/Mališevo and Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša, no assistance projects for displaced persons have recently been undertaken. The last activities in Malishevë/Mališevo took place in 2002 and 2003, when the German KFOR and the

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construction of 13 houses for displaced Kosovo Serbs and four houses for beneficiaries from the receiving community.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, to Prizren town, one to Vrbiçane/Vërbicanë, and one to Lubizhdë/Ljubizda.

<sup>75</sup> For instance, to the villages of Mushtishtë/Mušutište, Mohlanë/Movljane, and Reçan/Reçane.

<sup>76</sup> In the absence of financial contributions, the municipality has not been able to take full ownership of the returns process. Despite the municipal returns officer's concerns, no specific budget has been allocated for returns-related activities in the recent years. The Ministry of Communities and Returns in co-operation with the municipality and UNHCR has approved a number of families for return assistance.

Kosovo police organized visits of Kosovo Serb displaced persons to the municipality. The Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša municipality has so far not engaged in returns-related activities since its conversion from a pilot municipal unit into a fully fledged municipality in August 2008.

*Prishtinë/Priština region*

In Prishtinë/Priština, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Obiliq/Obilić, and Shtime/Štimlje several initiatives aimed at supporting the return of Kosovo Serb, Roma and Ashkali displaced persons have been implemented in 2009 and 2010. In Prishtinë/Priština, the main returns initiative targeting Kosovo Serb families, displaced in Kosovo and within the region, is currently being implemented in the village of Laplje Selo/Llapjeselle by the Ministry of Communities and Returns in co-operation with the municipality. In 2010, 33 apartments were handed over to project beneficiaries, including 19 families displaced outside Kosovo and 14 in different locations in Kosovo.<sup>77</sup> The construction of apartments for an additional 88 displaced families is underway. In addition, some Roma and Ashkali families in the Divanjoll neighbourhood, Besi/Besinja and Vranjevc/Vranievac benefitted from housing reconstruction assistance provided by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and UNHCR in co-operation with the municipality. Municipal officials have participated in various outreach and information activities organized by UNHCR and the Danish Refugee Council in 2009 and 2010.<sup>78</sup> In Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, municipal institutions supported activities within the framework of the RRKI project. Twenty-three displaced families, including 14 Ashkali, two Roma, six Kosovo Serbs and one Kosovo Montenegrin, benefitted from housing reconstruction assistance and income generation measures in 2009.<sup>79</sup> The municipal returns and municipal community officers participated in several go-and-inform visits to different locations in the region.

In the Obiliq/Obilić municipality, municipal officials were involved in the selection process of beneficiaries under the RRKII project and in facilitating pre-returns meetings and outreach activities to identify displaced persons interested to return to the municipality.<sup>80</sup> In addition, the municipality supported the return of several Roma and Egyptian families to the villages of Plemetin/Plemetina and Obiliq i Vjeter/Stari Obilić, who benefitted from housing construction assistance under the UNDP-managed SPARK project. The municipal returns and community officers and the deputy mayor for communities participated in several go-and-see visits, involving Kosovo Serb, Roma and Ashkali displaced persons, as well as in a series of go-and-

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<sup>77</sup> Responsibilities for the project, which foresees housing and socio-economic assistance for a total of 60 families (including 24 displaced outside Kosovo, 30 displaced within Kosovo and six social cases), have since been handed over to the newly established municipality of Gračanica/Gračanicë.

<sup>78</sup> For instance, the municipal returns officer took part in two go-and-inform visits to the collective centre “Konik I and II” and one to Berane (Montenegro), as well as one go-and-inform visit to the Serbian towns of Novi Sad and Zrenjanin, where several Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families are displaced.

<sup>79</sup> Returns sites in the municipality include the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian inhabited 02, 07, 028, 029 neighbourhoods in the town and the village of Nakaradë/Nakarade.

<sup>80</sup> Overall, 22 families, including 12 Kosovo Serb, six Kosovo Roma and four Kosovo Ashkali, will benefit from housing reconstruction and socio-economic assistance under the project.

inform visit to several locations in the region.<sup>81</sup> In Shtime/Štimlje, during 2009 and 2010, eight Ashkali families, comprising of 21 members, have returned voluntarily to their place of origin in the Shtime/Štimlje town. They all received housing and income generation assistance under the UNDP-managed SPARK project as well as humanitarian aid (food and non-food items) from UNHCR. Municipal institutions, including the deputy mayor, returns officer and community officer, participated in two go-and-see visits for displaced Kosovo Serbs to the village of Muzičane/Muzeqinë and for Ashkali families to the Shtime/Štimlje town organized by the Danish Refugee Council.

In Lipjan/Lipljan, Podujevë/Podujevo, and Glllogoc/Glogovac municipalities, few if any returns-related activities were carried out during 2009 and 2010. In Lipjan/Lipljan, the municipality supported the return of several Roma and Ashkali displaced families in 2009 and 2010. In Podujevë/Podujevo and Glllogoc/Glogovac, no specific projects were implemented to assist displaced persons in achieving a durable solution.

#### **4. CHALLENGES FACED BY MUNICIPALITIES IN RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF DISPLACED PERSONS AND RETURNEES**

While some municipalities have made considerable efforts to support displaced persons and returnees, mainly within the framework of projects funded by the central level and various international donors, the return and reintegration of displaced persons continues to pose major challenges to municipalities throughout Kosovo. The challenges in developing and effectively implementing policies, strategies and projects for displaced persons and returnees at the local level are numerous. They include lack of political will on the part of local institutions to support returns, lack of financial resources at the municipal level, and limited capacity for policy-making, project planning and project implementation by municipal institutions. In addition, insufficient co-ordination between relevant stakeholders at the municipal level and between the central and local levels as well as the poor functioning of institutional and co-ordination mechanisms in some municipalities, represent challenges preventing local institutions from providing more effective assistance to displaced persons and returnees.

##### *Lack of political will or commitment to returns*

The limited political will or commitment by some municipalities to support returns is one of the main obstacles to the adoption and effective implementation of policies, strategies and projects aimed at assisting displaced persons and returnees. The development of municipal returns strategies should be driven by senior officials, including the mayor, deputy mayor and directors of departments, assuming the leading role and taking direct responsibility for the process. However, in the majority of cases, the process is led by the municipal returns and community officers with little involvement or support by the municipal leadership. In the past, this has led to considerable delays in the adoption of returns strategies as well as to the failure to integrate returns strategies into municipal development plans that take into consideration the budgetary implications of the strategies.

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<sup>81</sup> For instance, the Serbian towns of Kruševac, Niš, Kraljevo, Beograd, Novi Sad, Subotica, Požarevac, Vrnjačka Banja, Mataruška Banja, Obrenovac, Kragujevac and Svilajnac, as well as Podgorica and Berane (Montenegro), and Skopje (former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

Where municipal returns strategies have been adopted, the timely implementation of planned activities or projects is often hampered for want of commitment by the municipal leadership to actively engage in returns-related activities and to provide the necessary administrative, financial, and logistical support to municipal returns and community officers to assist displaced persons and returnees. In addition, the lack of political will often manifests itself crucially over the issue of land allocation for planned return initiatives. While municipal community and returns officers in most municipalities regularly engage in outreach activities, including go-and-see and go-and-inform visits, the involvement or active participation of senior officials in these visits is often lacking. Similarly, the participation of senior officials in returns bodies and task forces at the municipal level is often weak, and at times prevents these bodies from properly executing their functions, such as facilitating co-ordination among the stakeholders involved in the returns process. Often the responsibility to assist displaced persons and returnees is left entirely to the municipal returns officers and/or the municipal community offices. Whilst these individuals may be committed to working for sustainable returns, the lack of interest and support by the municipal leadership often has a detrimental effect.

#### *Lack of financial resources*

The effective implementation of existing government policies and projects on returns and reintegration is often hampered by the lack of financial resources at the municipal level to adequately assist displaced persons and returnees. Municipal returns strategies, if adopted, are generally not accompanied by adequate funds to implement them. Often, the specific resource requirements associated with proposed activities or projects are not clearly identified. It is not clearly indicated whether municipalities plan to use their own budgets or to pursue other sources of funding to undertake the proposed activities or projects. This means that in many cases municipal returns strategies are lists of good intentions without an appropriate budget allocated for their implementation. Although municipalities are obliged to provide adequate funding to assist displaced persons and returnees with their reintegration, in reality, they mainly rely on funding available from the central level for the implementation of proposed municipal activities or projects aimed at assisting displaced persons or returnees.

In most municipalities there is no separate budget line to support returns and reintegration activities or to ensure the effective functioning of municipal bodies mandated with the protection and promotion of the rights of communities, including displaced persons and returnees. With very few exceptions, municipal community and returns officers are not provided with adequate financial resources to fulfil their day-to-day responsibilities to support displaced persons and returnees. As an example, many are lacking basic operational equipment such as computers, telephones or vehicles. Without access to a vehicle, municipal returns and community officers cannot conduct much-needed outreach activities. Furthermore, there is often a scarcity of funds to address requests for assistance, or to supplement activities occurring at return sites. This lack of adequate budget support means that those municipal officials who are responsible for responding to the needs of displaced persons and returnees are often unable to do so in an effective manner.

*Lack of capacity for policy-making, project planning and project implementation*

The deficiency of administrative and technical capacity of municipal institutions continues to present challenges to the development and effective implementation of policies and projects aimed at assisting displaced persons and returnees. Municipal community and returns officers throughout Kosovo have received numerous trainings by the Ministry of Communities and Returns and various international organizations and are well aware of their roles and responsibilities. However, the administrative and technical capacity of relevant officials including mayors, deputy mayors and directors of departments to deal with issues of displacements and returns remains low. In many cases, officials lack knowledge of the particular needs of displaced persons and returnees as well as the capacity to design and implement comprehensive returns strategies, policies and projects through a participatory process involving all relevant actors in the field of returns. As a consequence, the quality of strategies and assistance projects is often low. However, where municipalities have received intensive support to assist them in implementing return and reintegration projects – for example through the two RRK projects – capacities are improving gradually. Although these projects currently only assist eight Kosovo municipalities, it is expected that similar projects will be launched in the future.

*Lack of co-ordination at the municipal level and between the central and local levels*

The lack of co-ordination and co-operation between stakeholders involved in the returns process has been repeatedly cited as one of the main challenges to the effective planning and implementation of strategies, policies and projects on returns and reintegration by municipal officials. In many cases, municipal returns strategies are written primarily by the municipal returns and community officers rather than developed through a participatory approach involving municipal officials from different departments, local-level participation mechanisms, representatives from civil society and international organizations, as well as displaced persons and their associations. Where there are functioning municipal working groups on returns, co-operation between this body and others who are responsible for non-majority communities issues is often lacking.<sup>82</sup> Senior municipal officials, the receiving community and displaced persons' representatives often do not actively participate in working group meetings and task forces set up to develop municipal strategies and coordinate project activities. The absence of co-ordination and co-operation among municipal stakeholders, as well as between the municipality, the receiving community and potential returnees during the development and implementation of policies and projects makes it difficult to respond adequately to the needs of displaced persons and returnees.

Such challenges can be further exacerbated by the weak flow of information between the central level, mainly the Ministry of Communities and Returns, and the municipal level. In the past, municipalities have repeatedly complained about the lack of information and guidance from the central level related to the development process of municipal returns strategies. Similarly, municipalities are often uninformed about ongoing programmes and projects managed by the central level and in some instances about application procedures for funds available at the central level to implement

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<sup>82</sup> Local level mechanisms for the protection and promotion of communities rights and interests include: communities committee, deputy chairperson of the municipal assembly for communities, deputy mayor for communities, municipal community safety council, municipal community officer, and municipal returns officers.

returns and community stabilization projects. The Ministry of Communities and Returns since early 2009 has responded to this challenge by holding regular outreach and information sharing meetings with municipal communities and returns officers from all municipalities, including technical and quarterly meetings with municipal officials from the different regions, in order to improve communication and co-ordination.

*Lack of adequate participation in, and functionality of, municipal co-ordination mechanisms*

The lack of participation of relevant municipal actors, including senior municipal officials, community representatives and displaced persons and their associations in municipal co-ordination mechanisms for return represents another important challenge to the development and effective implementation of strategies and projects at the local level. In many cases, the municipal returns strategies' development process is significantly delayed or hampered due to the fact that displaced persons are not adequately represented or do not regularly participate in meetings of the municipal working groups on returns or specific task forces established to monitor the progress of return activities. Similarly, senior officials are often not adequately represented in these forums. Often the municipal working groups on returns or task forces meet irregularly or not at all. Other community participation mechanisms in the municipalities are rarely consulted to ensure that returns activities are compatible with other measures targeting non-majority communities. Moreover, there are numerous situations in which the municipality has not filled the post of municipal returns officer, where the post-holder is fulfilling the functions of more than one job and is therefore overstretched or where the post-holder is not sufficiently committed to his/her role. This lack of commitment or interest not only affects the outreach and care that is provided to displaced persons and returns but also manifests itself in the poorly drafted returns policies and strategies that are produced in some municipalities.

Overall, the returns and reintegration process remains a major challenge for Kosovo's municipalities. The socio-economic situation and the lack of opportunities for gainful employment are a serious concern for many returnees, particularly for the Kosovo Serb, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Furthermore, a pressing concern is that of limited access to property, blocked or delayed property restitution proceedings and the illegal occupation of property, including private, commercial and agricultural land. This obstructs returns and provides a serious challenge to municipalities, the Kosovo Property Agency, and the courts, the latter two being responsible for ruling on property claims, as well as for the police, which is responsible for evicting illegal occupiers. For some communities, namely the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, the lack of property is a serious impediment to their return. In order to address this concern, municipalities must show willingness to allocate municipal land for returns projects to these communities. Furthermore, they should ensure to deliver basic municipal services to displaced persons and returnees, such as access to health, social assistance, and education.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Kosovo's municipalities are indispensable for shaping successful returns and reintegration policies and for implementing local reintegration and development

initiatives that create conditions conducive to returns and community stabilization. However, the degree to which municipalities actively engage in returns and reintegration activities, and take ownership of the process, varies greatly from municipality to municipality. Approximately half of the municipalities have devised specific strategies to address the needs of returnees and displaced persons, while efforts to implement planned actions and activities have mainly been effective where they were underpinned by sufficient political commitment and supported by sustained interventions in co-operation with the Ministry of Communities and Returns, UNHCR, UNDP and other international actors. In municipalities where such support is not forthcoming or less significant, efforts to achieve durable solutions for displaced persons continue to be undermined.

The main difficulties and obstacles faced by municipalities during the implementation of policies, strategies and projects for displaced persons and returnees include budgetary constraints, lack of political will or commitment by the municipal leadership, lack of capacity among relevant municipal officials, and problems of co-ordination and information sharing among stakeholders involved at both the central and local level. Furthermore, limited access to property, blocked or delayed property restitution proceedings, limited access to public services, lack of economic opportunities and a general feeling of insecurity among displaced persons continue to be major obstacles to sustainable returns that need to be more vigorously addressed in co-operation with all relevant stakeholders.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **To the Kosovo government**

- Conduct outreach, information and public awareness activities related to the promotion and protection of non-majority communities, including the right to return, and support the development and implementation of outreach strategies and activities in all municipalities;
- Ensure effective co-operation and co-ordination between relevant ministries responsible for health, education, employment, social care, housing and those dealing with communities and returns-related issues, as well as between the central and local levels, including through regular meetings, information exchange, and joint assessments/reporting;
- Provide meaningful guidance and advice to municipalities in relation to policy development, returns strategies and projects, and ensure effective communication between central and municipal structures to enable all actors to contribute to the process;
- Facilitate exchange of information and best practices related to sustainable returns and reintegration as well as sustainable community development among municipalities, and build the capacity of local institutions and support civil society to address needs and gaps identified;
- Strengthen the role of municipal returns officers and municipal community offices, and ensure the proper administrative and financial support to enable them to perform their functions effectively;
- Provide municipalities with adequate funding for the effective implementation of existing policies, strategies and projects aimed at assisting displaced persons and returnees.

**To the municipalities**

- Effectively reach out to displaced persons, including through go-and-see and go-and-inform visits, and facilitate contacts, dialogue and information-sharing between the municipality, the receiving community and the displaced persons/returnees;
- Ensure active participation of senior municipal officials, communities participation mechanisms, civil society, receiving community and, in particular, displaced persons/returnees and their associations, in all stages of planning and implementation of municipal policies, strategies and projects for displaced persons and returnees;
- Ensure that the municipality's approach to returns and reintegration is consistent with and part of the overall approach towards the integration and stabilization of communities and community development in general;
- Encourage the exchange of information and best practices related to sustainable returns and reintegration as well as sustainable community development among municipalities;
- Allocate adequate municipal resources for the implementation of municipal strategies and programmes to support returns or other durable solutions for displaced persons/returnees;
- Provide adequate financial, administrative and political support for municipal community offices and municipal returns officers to strengthen their roles and enable them to effectively fulfil their day-to-day tasks and responsibilities;
- Promote and facilitate the safe and dignified return of displaced persons, including the allocation of municipal land for 99 years for returns projects in order to guarantee the sustainability of the returns process;
- Prepare and implement plans to assist those displaced persons that wish to integrate locally.

**To the international community**

- Continue to provide financial support to returns and reintegration initiatives, and promote government ownership at prime ministerial and mayoral level as well as capacity development, particularly at the municipal level, in the implementation of returns activities;
- Prioritize the social and economic integration of displaced persons and returnees when planning and implementing returns projects.

**Annex I: Development and adoption of municipal returns strategies (MRS)**

	Municipality	2008 MRS	2009 MRS	2010 MRS
<b>Gjilan/Gnjilane</b>	Ferizaj/Uroševac	✓	✓	-
	Gjilan/Gnjilane	✓	✓	-
	Han i Elezit/Đeneral Janković*	n/a	-	-
	Kaçanik/Kaçanik	-	-	-
	Kamenicë/Kamenica	✓	✓	-
	Novo Brdo/Novobërdë	✓	✓	✓ (08/05/2010)
	Štrpce/Shtërpçë	-	-	-
	Viti/Vitina	✓	✓	-
<b>Mitrovicë/Mitrovica</b>	Leposavić/Leposaviq	-	-	-
	Mitrovicë/Mitrovica	-	-	-
	Skenderaj/Srbica	✓	✓	-
	Vushtrri/Vuçitrn	✓	✓	✓ (04/03/2010)
	Zubin Potok	-	-	-
	Zvečan/Zveçan	-	-	-
<b>Pejë/Peć</b>	Deçan/Deçane	-	-	-
	Gjakovë/Đakovica	✓	-	-
	Istog/Istok	✓	✓	-
	Junik*	n/a	-	-
	Klinë/Klina	✓	✓	-
	Pejë/Peć	✓	✓	-
<b>Prishtinë/Priština</b>	Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje	✓	✓	✓ (12/07/2010)
	Gllgoc/Glogovac	-	-	-
	Lipjan/Lipljan	✓	✓	✓ (25/05/2010)
	Obiliq/Obilić	✓	✓	-
	Podujevë/Podujevo	✓	✓	✓ (28/04/2010)
	Prishtinë/Priština	✓	-	✓ (08/07/2010)
	Shtime/Štimlje	✓	-	✓ (24/06/2010)
<b>Prizren</b>	Dragash/Dragaš	✓	✓	✓ (22/04/2010)
	Malishevë/Mališevo	✓	✓	-
	Mamuša/Mamushë/Mamuša*	n/a	-	-
	Prizren	✓	✓	-
	Rahovec/Orahovac	-	✓	-
	Suharekë/Suva Reka	✓	✓	✓ (14/05/2010)

\* Pilot Municipal Units (PMUs) until August 2008