

Four Kosovo Roma and Two Egyptian Families Voluntarily Return to Brekoc/Brekovac



From the left: UNHCR Peja/Pec Head of Office and Mayor of Gjakovë/Đakovica

Mohamed, 22 years old, welcomes us smiling and surrounded by his friends when we arrived in the small village of Brekoc/Brekovac to attend a ceremony marking the handover of the keys to their property for Kosovo Roma and Egyptian returnees.

Mohamed is happy because, after many years of displacement in Konik Camp in Montenegro, he has finally come back home to Kosovo. He, together with his wife, two children and his parents are beneficiaries of the UNDP-funded SPARK return project.

Contents

2 Voluntary Return

4 Go and See Visits

Today, 12 February, he is celebrating the end of the reconstruction work on six houses together with five other returnee families.

Brekoc/Brekovac is a return site in the Gjakovë/Đakovica municipality, that, thanks in part to a Community Center funded by the World Bank, the Community Development Fund, and the local community, is now a lively village inhabited primarily by minority communities.

From 2009 until now, 37 individuals have returned, mainly from Montenegro.

The new houses have been built on land allocated by the Municipality and the returnees greeted the Mayor of Gjakovë/Đakovica, Pal Lekaj, and his staff with real happiness. 'I welcome all of you, the returnees, and I'm proud of representing Gjakovë/Đakovica's engagement in the return process', he said. 'Now the challenge is reintegration, but I want to reiterate the municipality's support for this important issue. Who has any willingness to return will be guaranteed to receive our full support', he concluded and went on thanking UNHCR, the donors and all stakeholders who contributed to the implementation of the project.

The commitment of the Municipality was underlined by the Municipal Community Officer, Kapllan Kershii. 'We are ready to provide returnees with some land if they are interested to return and in being integrated here. Until now those who have returned have the opportunity to get a house, enjoy freedom of movement, and the full engagement of the municipality toward their social inclusion', he said.

The Mayor and the UNHCR Peja/Pec Head of Office, Wata Aime, cut a symbolic red ribbon in front of the new houses while giving the keys to the new owners. After the official ceremony, the celebration continued with music. Two children pick up the cut red ribbon and used it to decorate a little dog. Although the children probably did not stop playing in displacement, following their return to Brekoc/Brekovac they can continue to play, but now with a dignified and positive future in front of them.



Returnee children in Brekoc/Brekovac

Voluntary Return

Returnees to Kllokot/Klokot Hope for New Opportunities after Decentralization

Zoran's home is very close to an old building that was transformed into the new Kllokot/Klokot health center. Zoran was born here and later he returned to live here with his family.

Zoran and his family have been in displacement, initially in Bujanovac and then in Nis, Serbia, since 1999. While he returned to his home on 19 January 2010, his wife and daughter remained behind hoping to join him soon after.

Zoran is waiting to receive minor shelter repairs to his house. However, there are procedures that need to be followed before the needed reconstruction assistance can be allocated.

In any case he has begun to familiarise himself with his old neighbourhood and, in the meantime, he has started doing some minor repairs to his house himself. Zoran does not feel alone. He appreciates the assistance that he has so far received from the newly established municipality of Kllokot/Klokot, UNHCR and other people and agencies that have visited him. UNHCR office in Gjilan/Gnjilane have provided Zoran with furniture, food, material supplies and firewood for the winter season.

Zoran said that he had no problem since he returned and he has received a warm welcome from his neighbours. 'I came to visit my home on many oc-

casions and I was always received well by my neighbours', he said. At the same time Zoran also hoped that the situation could improve, particularly after decentralization and the creation of the Kllokot/Klokot municipality. Other inhabitants of Kllokot/Klokot also see this change as positive in a sense that it might bring greater employment opportunities and attract possible outside investment in the municipality.

'I'm satisfied in my decision to return home and, even if I'm not yet employed, as I own some one and a half hectares of land I'm confident of being able to generate some income from my farm,' he said. But his strongest wish remains the renovation of his house so that he can bring his wife and daughter back with him as soon as possible.



Zoran in front of his house in Kllokot/Klokot

Voluntary Return

A Mother Voluntarily Returned to her Parents' House Janjina Vodica with her Children

Daliborka is a mother of four children, two boys and two girls, and she has spent her entire childhood and youth in Janjina Vodica, a village not very far from the Kosovo power plant in Obiliq/c. Later she was married in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje where she has been living for several years. Since 1999 she has been displaced with her family in Serbia and two of her children were born in Cuprija, a Serbian town.

Daliborka returned to her parents' house in Janjina Vodica just few weeks ago. She's now staying in the home of her mother and brother, where she lives together with his family. Although they have given a room to Daliborka so that she can take care of her children, as the home of her parents is too small for the whole family and Daliborka owns a plot of land in the same area she hopes to have a new house built for her and her

children. In the meantime, UNHCR delivered an initial package of assistance to her upon her return, including food, material assistance and firewood.

'While in displacement we lived just anyhow and there were many reasons why I decided to return', said Daliborka. 'We need a space to live and I hope that there are chances for my family to have a house built in order to live here', she said. The room where the children and Daliborka are now living is very modest. There is just a bed and a few chairs. However, the place is warm thanks to a stove - even if the children prefer to play outside in the snow. Daliborka's eldest daughter is now in eighth year, and, with her sister and brothers, enrolled in a school in the village of Janjina Vodica.

Daliborka tells us that, when they were living in Serbia they used to

come here during the school holidays and so they are very familiar with the place. 'The kids are happy to live close to their grandmother and they like to play in a small forest near the house', she said. 'Every single day of my displacement I was thinking of the possibility to return home', Daliborka said. 'Many years have passed since 1999. Now I am back and what I hope is just to have a proper home where I can live with my children.'



Daliborka's children playing in the snow

Laplja Selle/Laplje Selo: A Successful Case History of Voluntary Return

Stanimir Cvetkovic was one of the first voluntary returnees to Laplja Selle/Laplje Selo on 15 January of this year. He returned together with his four member family: his parents, brother and himself – and on the same day eight other families also returned. On 5 February nine other families voluntarily returned from Serbia to enter new apartments funded by the Ministry of Communities and Returns. The new building currently houses some 40 individuals. All of them are families who were displaced in Serbia and have returned from several different locations. They were all welcomed by the Minister of Communities and Returns, Saša Rašić, and by the UNHCR

Kosovo Chief of Mission, Herman Stuurwold. The returnees were also welcomed by the Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and the newly elected Mayor of Gracanica/a.

Stanimir comes from Suhareke/Suva reka municipality and he still has property there. Since 1999 he has been displaced with his family in Vrnjacka Banja and later in Kraljevo town. Now he says he is happy: 'I'm very satisfied with the conditions here. We like the place and we have received some of the furniture for the kitchen', he said. The flat is 64 square meters and for the time being they have enough room. 'I am happy to live in Kosovo', Stanimir comments, while explaining

how he decided to come back. 'I saw the advertisement and we applied – I did not expect to receive a flat, but now here we are' he said, expressing gratitude to all the people that are working in the return process. 'In particular I am grateful to UNHCR and the Ministry for Communities and Return, because they came and showed an interest in us', he said.

Stanimir is an economist by profession but the family income is currently solely comprised of the pensions of the parents. 'However, as I possess some skills I will look for a job, as I want to stay here. Because here is really beautiful,' he said with emotion.

Voluntary Return

Making Urban Return Possible: a Joint MCR and UNHCR Effort for Displaced Families Willing to Return to Gjilan/Gnjilane Town

Gjilan/Gnjilane town is an active return location where, in March 2010, the first six Kosovo Roma families currently displaced in Skopje are expected to return following the returnee registration survey in 2009.

The municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane has allocated the land where, thanks to the joint efforts of Ministry of Communities and Return and UNHCR, six

houses will be reconstructed to house the six Roma families who, prior to the conflict, lived in social-owned barracks.

Beside this planned project, as part of the Return and Reintegration to Kosovo (RRK) I/phase 2 project, 11 Kosovo Serb IDP families will benefit from shelter assistance to facilitate their local integration in their places of

displacement until conditions are conducive for return to their places of origin. The municipal Assembly of Gjilan/Gnjilane, based on the recommendation of the Mayor, has allocated the land where shelter will be provided for these 11 families. The tender is already open and the construction is expected to start soon.

Go and See Visits

A Group of Kosovo Ashkalia Visits Homes in Obiliq/c

The house of Mufail Shabani in Obiliq/c is now fully equipped with material and furniture. This is thanks to the Harmonized Return Package provided to the family by UNHCR on 11 February as part of the standard assistance package for voluntary returnees to Kosovo.

The Shabani family returned to their property some six months ago. Although the family is living in difficult conditions and Mufail is not yet working, a neighbour that was present when the family returned said that now the situation is much better as compared with the living conditions of the family while displaced in a refugee camp in Konik, near Podgorica, Montenegro.

The Civil Rights Program/Kosovo (CRP/K), UNHCR's implementing partner, visited the family to assist them in obtaining documentation needed for their identification and civil registration. This will allow the family to apply for social assistance and in this way access to public services. Two of the Shabani children were there and be-

came very curious seeing so many people in their yard. Indeed, some other people were in the neighbourhood at the same time for a Go and See Visit (GSV) organized by DRC and UNHCR. Internally Displaced Persons originating from this place came from Subotica to see their properties and meet with Obiliq/c municipal authorities to get information in regards to the current situation and possibilities for return.

Fehmi Gjukatani was 12 years old in 1999 when he, his parents, and other family members had to leave their home. Currently, they live in Subotica, Serbia where they are paying rent for private accommodation. He said that not only his family but also their cousins left together and went to Serbia. Fehmi is a father of a girl and he's visiting the place for the first time.

Among the group of 15 that visits Obliq/c there are also others that came to the place for the first time after more than ten years in displacement. While Fehmi is 22 and is more relaxed, Daut who is older than 60, was crying while

he saw his place. 'It is not so bad', he comments, even though his house is heavily damaged and he will be able to come back home only after reconstruction is completed: a goal for which the international and local community continues to work pursue.



A moment of the GSV in Obiliq/c