



WEEKLY REPORT ON COMMUNITIES AND RETURNS
24 February-2 March 2009

Highlights:

- **Return of Ten Families to Rudicë/Rudica village in Klinë/Klina Municipality**
- **Sixteen Community Development Projects Approved in four Municipalities**
- **Sixty K-RAE Students Targeted by MCR for scholarships**
- **Outreach to Minority Communities in Rahovec/Orahovac**
- **Dutch Foreign Ministry Official on Fact Finding Mission in Kosovo**

Return of Ten K-Serbs to Klinë/Klina Municipality

On 24 February, the Mayor of Klinë/Klina municipality, Sokol Bashota, reiterated his commitment to sustainable returns to Kosovo. Speaking at a returns project Collaboration Agreement signing ceremony between UNDP and British Embassy, Municipality of Klinë/Klina and Ministry of Communities and Returns (MCR), Bashota commended the Government of Kosovo (GoK), British Embassy and UNDP for their efforts in ensuring returns to Kosovo. He praised his municipality for its diversity and tolerance, noting that no inter-ethnic problems had occurred during his period in office. It may be recalled that, in addition to encouraging individual returns, Klinë/Klina municipality has been actively involved in facilitating organized returns to Berkovë/Berkovo, Dërsnik/Dršnik, Klinovc/Klinavac and Vidan/Vidanje villages.

Thanking all stakeholders for their support in the returns programme especially in Klinë/Klina municipality, the British Embassy Deputy Head of Mission, Anna Jackson, called it a tremendously powerful and positive experience to be involved in the returns process. Jackson expressed hope that other municipalities would learn from the Klinë/Klina experience to enhance a multi-ethnic Kosovo. The representative of MCR conveyed his Ministry's support for all displaced persons to return home.

Expressing gratitude to the British government for funding return projects, UNDP Resident Representative Frode Muring encouraged everyone to share successful returns stories with their neighbours as that would motivate others to come back. Endorsing the British Embassy Deputy Head of Mission's statement, Muring said that many displaced persons might return if all municipalities were as proactive as Klinë/Klina municipality.

Costing some 245,880 euros and with a timeline of six months, the Rudice/Rudica project will facilitate the return of ten K-Serb families to Rudicë/Rudica village. It will also assist a vulnerable K-Albanian family of the receiving community with housing facility as part of the balancing component as well as finance infrastructure rehabilitation, access to water and electrification, and income generating grant for the displaced beneficiaries. Representatives of Klinë/Klina municipality, MCR, Displaced Community, OSCE, British Embassy, UNDP and UNMIK/OPA, attended the Collaboration Agreement signing ceremony.

Sixteen RRK Community Development Projects Approved in Four Municipalities

The Municipality of Istog/Istok has approved seven community development and stabilization projects to be supported through the Return and Reintegration in Kosovo (RRK) project. Informing UNMIK/OPA on 27 February, the UNDP Programme Manager for Returns and Reintegration in Kosovo said that the newly established Local Action Group (LAG) in Istog/Istok approved seven of the ten project proposals. The projects include rehabilitation of the sewage systems in Banjë/Banja village and in Istog/k town, milk collection centre in Banja e Kërnjinës/Banja , infrastructure support in Srbobran village, reconstruction of three social houses, and support of youth activities. Worth some 160,000 euros, the Municipality of Istog/Istok is expected to co-finance the projects with 40,000 euros.

Furthermore, an additional nine projects have been approved by LAGs in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Pejë/Peć municipalities, closely correlated to the beneficiaries selected to be supported in the first phase of the return this spring. Based on the number of the families already approved to be supported through the RRK project, the overall value of the projects approved in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje, Gjilan/Gnjilane and Pejë/Peć municipalities is 225,000 euros, in addition to 102,000 euros provided by the three municipalities.

All approved projects were presented to respective Municipal Working Groups (MWGs), which recommended further approval by the central level. The LAG is therefore expected to forward the project documents to the Ministry for Communities and Returns (MCR) for review, before reaching the Project Steering Committee for final approval.

RRK is a joint initiative funded by the European Commission in partnership with the Ministry of Communities and Returns and UNDP aiming at supporting the sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) through the increased involvement of government and non-government actors at both central and municipal level. It will provide a comprehensive return package for at least 180 displaced families including assistance on return, housing reconstruction, necessary infrastructure connections, income generation and inter-ethnic dialogue activities.

Sixty K-RAE Students Targeted by MCR for Scholarship

The Ministry of Communities and Returns has targeted 60 Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (K-RAE) secondary and university students for scholarships to enhance their studies. Speaking to UNMIK/OPA on 27 February, the Minister of Communities and Returns, Sasa Rašić, informed that 128 applications have been received so far, including 12 from university students and 116 from secondary school pupils. Worth some 10,000 euros, the scholarship will be given to vulnerable students of the K-RAE community. According to Rašić, the Ministry of Education and UNDP are working with MCR to select beneficiaries to avoid duplication since UNDP and the Ministry of Education are already familiar with existing scholarship recipients.

Commenting on the the importance the scholarship scheme, Minister Rašić stressed that he would work hard to not only enhance the studies of the beneficiaries but also promote the welfare of all communities in Kosovo especially the K-RAE. He further informed that as a show of support by the Government of Kosovo (GoK), MCR and the Ministry of Finance and Economy (MFE) treated about 250 members of the K-RAE community to lunch on RAE Flag Day in Ferizaj/Uroševac.

It should be pointed out that this is the first time the Ministry of Communities and Returns has earmarked scholarships for members of the minority community since its inception in 2005.

Outreach to Minority Communities in Rahovec/Orahovac Municipality

The Youth Dialogue Programme (YDP), an indigenous non-governmental organization has stressed the importance of the rule of law in stabilizing communities in Kosovo. Speaking to representatives of minority communities at the Youth Center in Rahovec/Orahovac during the first public outreach on 24 February, the Director of YDP, Srdjan Vezmar, said that YDP's aim is to not only bring together minority NGOs and local representatives but also why they should accept the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX).

Informing UNMIK/OPA on 25 February, Vezmar noted that their aim is to impress on the minority communities that EULEX is in Kosovo to work in the interest of every citizen through the effective enhancement of the rule of law. According to Vezmar, further outreach programmes are planned for /Novobërdë/Novo Brdo and Osojane. It may be recalled that YDP informed UNMIK/OPA on 22 January about their intention to embark on a massive outreach sensitization campaign on the rule of law.

Based in Serbia, the YDP was formed in 2005 by a group of young local Serbs and Albanians from the University of Novi Sad in Serbia and University of Pristina in Kosovo with the aim of reviving the cooperation between young local Serbs and Albanians after the conflict in 1999. Over 500 young people from Serbia and Kosovo have participated in YDP programmes since 2005. The activities of YDP include interethnic dialogue within Kosovo and Serbia, dialogue among young Serbs, Albanians,

Roma, Gorani and Bosniaks, dialogue among youth from Serbia and Kosovo, lobbying and advocacy for minority rights, etc.

Dutch Foreign Ministry Official on Fact Finding Mission in Kosovo

On 2 March, an official from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs met with UNMIK/OPA to acquaint himself with the readmission issue in Kosovo. Calling it a fact finding mission, the official informed that he will be in Kosovo for five days, during which he will meet with various organizations to get detailed and independent information about the situation of forced returnees. He showed specific interest in the situation of vulnerable repatriated members of minority communities. However, he could not promise anything as decisions regarding forced returnees are taken by the Dutch Ministry of Justice.

UNMIK/OPA gave a brief overview of the readmission process in Kosovo since 1999, and expressed concerns at non-allocation of funding for reintegration. UNMIK/OPA also informed that repatriation related issues have been taken over by the Department for Border Management, Asylum and Migration (DBAM) of the Kosovo Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) since November 2008.

This is the second time in about three months that officials from the Dutch government have visited Kosovo on readmission issues even though the number of repatriated persons from the Netherlands is generally low (approximately 20 to 30 persons per year). It may be recalled that Officials from the Repatriation & Departure Service of the Dutch Ministry of Justice visited Kosovo in January to acquaint themselves with the Kosovo authorities dealing with readmission related issues, as well as to learn about post readmission process.
