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"Equality for Women is Progress for All"

International Women's Day, 8th of March
The family Demiri house in Gracanica Mahalla is full of laughter and love. Mother is cooking dinner on her stone stove at the corner of the reception room and the children are running in and out of the house.

The family of ten, parents and eight children aged between 2 and 17, returned to their old town from Switzerland in February. The family had been living in several European countries since 2009, applying for an asylum. Finally they got rejection letter from Swiss authorities in December 2013, which makes the father of the family still frustrated: “I cannot understand why they did not let us stay!” he says “we had a good life in there, girls were going to school and there they would have had the future that they cannot have in here”.

Through acquaintances, the family heard of IOM’s voluntary return programme and decided to participate in order to avoid eviction. Even though the Demiri family would have wanted to stay in Switzerland, they were very happy with the IOM staff both in there and here in Kosovo.

Family Demiri returned from Switzerland on 20 February 2014. They benefited from the services of all three projects within the framework of Swiss returns, namely Return Information Fund (RIF), SIM and Reintegration Assistance for Returning Individuals from Switzerland (RAS). The return process was facilitated by providing the Swiss partners with accurate information’s like housing and furniture in Gracanica.

IOM Kosovo has implemented Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme since 1999.

Throughout the years, over 200 000 people have returned to Kosovo with the help of IOM.
IOM staff was able to contact and visit the landlord in Gracanica and make housing arrangements before the family arrived in Kosovo. The return was an IOM movement and the family received pre-departure assistance, reception and onward transportation upon arrival and reintegration assistance for a housing project – rent of a house and purchase of furniture.

Living in Kosovo is full of worries; father is the only one of the family who can work and there are not many jobs available in Gracanica, especially for RAE community members. The family has submitted their application for social assistance to local municipal authorities but no resolution is made this far. Even though they are worried, the family seems to be happy.

RAE minority, namely Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, make up to 2% of the population of Kosovo at the moment. The war drove a vast majority of these communities abroad to neighbouring countries and farer away to seek asylum from Central and Western European countries. Some have returned but due to social and economical exclusion, it is not the most wanted option for all.

RAE communities are marginalized and face discrimination in all levels of society. They lack access to education, employment and even health services. Also the access for justice is limited and therefore many RAE community members do not possess necessary ID cards or proofs of ownership.

Ever since 1999, the IOM Mission in Kosovo has assisted RAE communities in multiple different ways, from assisted voluntary returns to housing, income generation packages and employment creation.

In 2013 only, Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration provided help to 395 returnees of RAE origin from West European countries to Kosovo. The average share of RAE community members with AVRR returnees has been around 20-30% of all returnees which exceed the number of 200 000 people all together.
EU-Community Stabilization II supporting the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities of Kosovo

EU-Community Stabilization II is an EU-funded programme managed by the European Union Office in Kosovo. The programme aims to stabilize the non-majority communities of Kosovo by providing a means for income generation and thus improving their living conditions. The programme helps to reduce poverty, improve micro enterprise development and increase employment opportunities.

RAE communities are important beneficiaries across Kosovo. Since the members of these communities lack the access to employment opportunities, the families often live in poverty with the help of social assistance. Thus far within the framework of EU-CSP II, 53 out of 227 projects target RAE community members.

In spring 2014, the programme supported an Egyptian family in Istog/Istok municipality. The family of eight, including a grandmother, parents and five children, one of whom is physically challenged, are living on with social assistance and agriculture. The head of family already owns some farming equipment and decided to apply assistance from EU-CSP II in order to make his farming more efficient and productive.

The programme provided the beneficiary with rotary tiller, mower, plough, trailer and irrigation pump with pipes. With the received equipment, the beneficiary will be able to enlarge his crop and employ one seasonal worker who is a returnee living in the same village. He will also assist the other farmers with his new equipment and thus improve the income and living conditions of the community.
The Roma family in Prizren town was displaced to the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia in 1999. The family of four, with parents and 18 year old daughter and 16 year old son, returned back to Prizren in 2006 but due to lack of funding, were not approved to receive housing assistance.

The family was living in a rented house for several years before eventually they were referred to EU-Return and Reintegration III by the local authorities and their housing construction assistance was finally approved. Following the completion of the works the family have also benefited with harmonized return packages.

The father of the family has attended 7 days business startup training following which he has developed the business plan for the wood cutting services. His business plan has been approved and all procurement procedures finalized. He has received Wood Cutting Circular from the project in February 2014. In addition to his daily work, he is working alongside his son to be able to provide sustainable income to their family.

The family is a true success story in terms of integration back to Kosovo. After being displaced for a long time, it might be difficult to adjust back. The RAE community members also face many objections in their everyday lives. Despite these obstacles, the family is doing very well. As a matter of fact, the father is working for Kosovo Police as a police officer. Both of the children are going to school as well which is not very common for RAE minorities, especially for girls in that age.