Forbundsrep. Jugoslavien (Kosovo) (31)

23/1-03

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Update on the Situation of Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptian, Bosniak and Gorani In Kosovo

UNHCR Kosovo
January 2003

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UNHCR
United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

Update on the situation of Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptian, Bosniak and Gorani and the potential impact of unplanned returns of these minority groups to Kosovo in 2003

UNHCR Kosovo, January 2003

INTRODUCTION

During November 2002, UNHCR Kosovo undertook an intensive review of the situation of Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptian, Bosniak and Gorani communities with the aim to update the UNHCR's *Position Paper on the Continued International Protection Needs of Individuals from Kosovo* issued in April 2002, ensuring that its position reflects the most current condition in the post-municipal election period. The review was prompted by indications from the main asylum countries that they perceived the security situation in Kosovo to be stabilised to such an extent that it would be possible to begin large-scale returns of ethnic minorities to Kosovo in spring 2003.

The paper is composed of an analytical review of the security situation of Roma, Egyptian, Ashkaelia, Bosniak, and Gorani communities covering the period of April – October 2002, i.e. after the UNHCR/OSCE Joint 9th Minorities Assessment, and the findings of a returnee monitoring exercise undertaken by UNHCR regional/field offices targeting returnees who returned to Kosovo between October 2001 and October 2002. The second part of the report paper looks into the likely impact on existing minority communities per region of a large and unplanned number of returns. It makes a particular emphasis on absorption capacity; possible impact on the current relations with the majority population; and areas where minorities would face serious security problems or restrictions on freedom of movement and access to services if they were to return suddenly.

Recognising that some improvements have taken place in the general situation in Kosovo, including relaxation in security measures in some regions, during the period in review, UNHCR's position, based on the assessment at hand, is that the situation of minority groups remains a major concern. Members of non-ethnic Albanian minorities originating from Kosovo continue to face security threats, which place their lives and fundamental freedoms at risk, and continue to compel some to leave Kosovo. The gravity of such threats depends on the minority concerned as well as location. Significantly, security threats can be severe (grenade attacks, arson attacks, physical assault) among the Roma, the Egyptians and, in many cases, the Ashkaelia throughout Kosovo. On the other hand, with the exception of Bosniaks in Mitrovica/e, the general security situation of both Bosniak and Gorani communities has stabilised.

The paper also identifies various areas and villages, which are no longer inhabited by Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians, or which have very few minority families left due to security reasons. At this stage, return has not been possible to these areas mainly due to prevailing security concerns. Hence unplanned, even small-scale returns to these areas would automatically result in secondary displacement to areas where large numbers of IDPs reside in overcrowded and overstretched communities.

PART 1: TRENDS IN SECURITY AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

A. Situation of Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptians, Bosniaks and Gorani since the UNHCR / OSCE Joint 9th Minorities Assessment (April 2002)

A.1. Introduction

The period between April and October 2002 saw a continued improvement in the security situation of minorities, particularly the Kosovo Roma, Ashkaelia, Egyptian, Bosniak and Gorani communities, evidenced by a decline in serious security incidents. It permitted a gradual improvement in freedom of movement compared to the previous six-month period. The Bosniaks and the Gorani enjoyed a period of relative stability, with no reported serious security incidents. Improved freedom of movement allowed increased access to services ranging from schools, health services and municipal administrations. In Mitrovica/e municipality, a substantial improvement in freedom of movement was reported amongst the Ashkaelia, who were still facing serious limitations in 2001. Some Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians reportedly travel to Prishtine/Pristina town to access services.

Despite these local and regional improvements, the overall security situation of minorities in Kosovo remains fragile. The level of stability/instability does not indicate a fundamental change in their situation. The following chronology illustrates the point:

An Ashkaelia family in Vushtrri/Vucitrn, where a group of Ashkaelia IDPs returned from Serbia on 16 April 2002, was targeted in a grenade attack, and reported persistent stone throwing against their children by Kosovo Albanian children. On 8 June, a Roma house in Opterushe/Opterusa (Rahovec/Orahovac) was set ablaze after the head of the family shot in self-defence a Kosovo Albanian, who under influence of alcohol threatened and wounded with a bayonet the eldest son of this Roma family. For fear of retribution, the family fled and their house was burned immediately after.[1] In August in Ferizaj/Urosevac, a group of Kacanik youths harassed Ashkaelia youths in the city market. The same month, a Roma house was set on fire following the departure of the Kosovo Albanian illegal occupant. On 1 September, an explosive device was thrown into a Roma house causing minor damage, but no one was hurt.[2] Ten days later, a grenade attack in Abdullah Presheva Street in Gjilan/Gnjilane caused minor damage to a house of a Roma returnee family, injuring one person. Another grenade was thrown into the house of a Roma resident, on 27 September. The same month, an Ashkaelia from Ferizaj/Urosevac was assaulted and seriously injured by a group of Albanian youths when travelling through Obiliq/c; allegedly in revenge for war actions. Also in Obiliq/c in September, one Kosovo Serb and three Ashkaelia from Plementina Temporary Community Shelter were beaten up near the KEK power plant by security guards for no apparent reasons. On 15 October, six Kosovo Serb men armed with a rifle assaulted two Roma and a juvenile in the Zitkovac camp, causing minor injuries to one of them. On 24 October, a masked man attacked a relative of an Egyptian returnee, sustaining serious injuries.

Some minority communities are reluctant to report incidents for fear of undermining the delicate balance they have struck with the majority community. Therefore, conclusions cannot be drawn solely from the rate of reported security incidents.

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[1] Subsequently, the incident was determined not to be ethnically motivated, but rather a blood feud. Despite the effort by the municipal authorities to calm the situation, several Roma families from the area faced problems after the incident.

[2] Following an investigation on site, where one piece of the explosive device was found, police suspected that the incident was 'self-staged' to boost the family's refugee claim.

A.2. Kosovo Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians

As noted, Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian communities experienced a gradual improvement in their security and freedom of movement throughout Kosovo. These improvements depend on the language, the locality, and the prevailing perceptions of the majority population. Against the backdrop of small-scale but persistent harassment, such as verbal abuse, endemic discrimination and marginalisation faced by these three communities, general statements remain difficult to make as the conditions are subject to so many factors. The sense of fear prevails. These communities continue to seek safety in larger groups.

In addition to the general discrimination against the Roma and Ashkaelia, former or current links to Kosovo Serbs or Kosovo Albanians and their language orientation continue to influence their security and freedom of movement, particularly in Prishtine/Pristina and Gjilan/Gnjilane regions.

In **Prishtinë/Pristina** region, the Roma continue to live in traditional close association with Kosovo Serbs, while the Ashkaelia tend to align themselves with Kosovo Albanians. Those links and knowledge of Serb or Albanian prevail over ethnicity in determining the security circumstances of these communities. There has been a decline in violent incidents against the Ashkaelia communities in Prishtine/Pristina, and an overall improvement in their situation. However, a sense of fear prevails despite the effort to integrate into the majority community. Most of the Ashkaelia are reluctant to go out to Prishtine/Pristina town. Many fear using public transportation and prefer to travel through private means.

The situation of Kosovo Roma in **Gjilan/Gnjilane** region in general corresponds to that of local Kosovo Serb communities. In areas where Kosovo Serbs enjoy relative security and improved freedom of movement, Roma enjoy it as well. In municipalities such as Ferizaj/Urosevac or Kacanik where Kosovo Serbs continue to face threats, the situation of the Roma remains precarious, and their freedom of movement and access to services are limited. In Strpce, negative perceptions held by both Kosovo Serbs and Albanians towards the Roma persist. Roma IDPs from Albanian majority villages complain about verbal harassment from Kosovo Serbs. In Kamenica/e, there were no significant security incidents affecting Roma communities during the reporting period. The community started to enjoy improved freedom of movement albeit limited to the region - except for in Urosevac/Ferizaj. The security situation of Roma in Gjilan/Gnjilane town remains fragile, evidenced by the above-mentioned two grenade attacks in Abdullah Presheva Street.

Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian communities in **Pejë/Pec and Prizren** regions experienced a steady improvement in overall security and freedom of movement. With the exception of Suva Reka/Suhareke, the Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians in Prizren and Rahovac/Orahovac municipalities saw a steady improvement in security and the freedom of movement within the region; some starting to move beyond the region. Contrary to Prishtine/Pristina and Gjilan/Gnjilane regions, ethnic alliance is less distinct in Peje/Pec and Prizren regions.

The overall situation of Ashkaelia, including returnees, remains fragile in **Mitrovica** region despite improvements made in Vushtrri/Vucitrn, a municipality to which four organised returns of Ashkaelia IDPs took place. In Vushtrri/Vucitrn, on 20 and 21 May, following the return of the second group of Ashkaelia IDPs, a group of Kosovo Albanians came to one of the houses trying to enter forcibly. A Kosovo Albanian, the former illegal occupant, threatened a returnee female head of household, trying to extort money for an addition he built on the property. Another Ashkaelia family returning immediately after an eviction ordered by the Housing Property Directorate (HPD) was interrogated by two members of the

Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), who requested money for protecting their property during their absence. Incidents of harassment and attack equally affect Ashkaelia residents. Towards the end of the reporting period, there were continuous small-scale incidents targeting Ashkaelia communities in Vushtrri/Vucitrn. While these incidents highlight the vulnerability of Ashkaelia communities, it must be recognised that they have gained a relative freedom of movement within the municipality, allowing access to services; Ashkaelia children attend school together with Albanian children. The Kosovo Police Service (KPS) patrols in Ashkaelia neighbourhoods contribute to the improvement in freedom of movement.

Confidence towards law enforcement and the judiciary system has remained low, particularly among minority communities. Many Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian families refrain from reporting small-scale incidents to law enforcement authorities for fear of tensions with the majority community and reprisals. They report - but not necessarily to the police - persistent verbal harassment, particularly when moving beyond their usual environs. In Zitkovac and Chesmin Lug camps in North Mitrovica/e, where approximately 400 Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian members are displaced, there are frequent unreported incidents ranging from beatings to thefts. In one case, a camp resident reported the theft of his vehicle to the police, but was afraid to identify the suspect even though he recognised him. In another instance, a deportee from Western Europe initially intending to return to his place of origin in the Roma Mahala, was beaten up by Kosovo Albanians in the South, therefore moved to the North to secondary displacement in Chesmin Lug camp, where he was beaten by Kosovo Serbs. The camp residents do not move around the camp because of insecurity.

Non-reporting occurs even in regions such as Peje/Pec, where the overall situation of Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian communities has improved. Kosovo Albanian IDPs in Budisalc/Budisavce threatened an IDP visiting from Serbia; due to his displacement to Belgrade, he was accused of being a Serb collaborator. A family in Kline/a municipality, for fear, did not report the known kidnappers of two family members missing since the conflict; the family is under pressure from the same group of Kosovo Albanians due to their property. A family in Kline/a remained silent when known perpetrators looted their house in September. Recently, a male member of the same family was severely beaten by the same persons.

Even when the minorities report security incidents to law enforcement authorities, the non response from the latter, failing to follow up, to identify and prosecute perpetrators or enforce appropriate legal measures perpetuates the sense of insecurity and helplessness. An illustrative case is the one mentioned above, where several residents of Plemetina TCS were assaulted by KEK workers. The incident was reported to the police, but inappropriately filed, ending up without proper investigation. The female returnee in Istog/k reported the incident to the police: received a note demanding she left the house. These incidents underscore the fundamental protection problems faced by minorities; lack of a credible function of the law enforcement authorities.

There is a growing complexity in motives for violence and intimidation against Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian communities; the incidents may be ethnically motivated, personal, opportunistic, or a mixture of all. Given their vulnerability, these communities are easily subjected to threats and intimidation, especially when competing for already limited resources in the larger community, or being involved in property disputes. Several incidents are reported in Peje/Pec; former Kosovo Albanian neighbours warned two IDP Roma/Ashkaelia/Egyptian families originally from Kristali not to return. In Kralan/Kraljane, a family is being pressured to leave because of their property. In Peje/Pec town and Lutogllav/Ljutoglava village, three families were robbed during October and November; possibly because they are old and isolated, in addition to their ethnicity. In Kline/a municipality, a known group of Kosovo Albanians targets Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians,

stealing their cattle. Kosovo Albanians working for a construction company threatened a village leader because of a tender for reconstruction of houses for Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians in Kline/a municipality. No one reported these incidents to the police for fear of reprisal and tension.

A.3. Kosovo Bosniaks and Gorani

The general security situation of **Kosovo Bosniaks** remained stable with no incidents of serious violence. However, Bosniaks have been taken to the police station for questioning after speaking their language in public. Bosniaks in Mitrovica/e, especially in the south, still risk harassment or assault when using their language. Their situation in Peje/Pec and Prizren region, where the vast majority of Bosniaks reside, remained calm. In contrast to Mitrovica/e, Bosniaks in urban areas in Prizren region increasingly speak their language and access public services. Their confidence in rule of law tends to be much higher than among other minority communities, notably due to the significant recruitment of Bosniaks into the Kosovo Police Service (KPS). The small remaining Bosniak community in Prishtine/Pristina region remains isolated, with slow improvements in freedom of movement and use of their language in Albanian shops. Children attend Bosniak schools and speak their language without being harassed.

The overall security situation of **Kosovo Gorani** has remained stable with no direct attacks during the reviewing period. Freedom of movement remained largely limited within Prizren region due to their inability to speak Albanian. The Gorani continue to depart Kosovo in large numbers, mainly due to the dire economic situation in Dragash, an isolated area where they live.

B. Comparative situation of ethnic Serbs in Kosovo during the same period

The overall security situation of Kosovo Serbs remains precarious and fragile. The Kosovo Serbs have remained the primary target of ethnically based violence, and continue to have greater difficulties with freedom of movement and access to services compared to other minority groups. However, Kosovo Serbs have benefited from a relative improvement in the security situation and the easing of security measures, i.e. 'unfixing' of KFOR checkpoints. Some Kosovo Serbs, encouraged by the decreasing incidents, have exercised a limited but improved freedom of movement. Some of them have encountered stoning or shooting targeting their vehicles.

Several serious incidents took place during the reporting period. A series of explosions shook the village of Klokot, Viti/na municipality, destroying four Kosovo Serb houses on 31 July. Two KFOR soldiers were injured from the explosions. Only one house was inhabited and the occupant, an elderly IDP from neighbouring Zitinje, escaped unharmed, but two KFOR soldiers were injured. Earlier, a Serb owned house exploded on 23 April, and three Kosovo Serb owned houses were marked as Albanian property on 8 June. On 29 August, a group of six Kosovo Serbs from Gorazdevac, Peje/Pec, came under fire from unknown gunmen while cutting trees in the village of Dobredo despite the presence of UNMIK police. The Police had to call KFOR for reinforcement. The exchange of fire between KFOR and assailants lasted up to three hours. On 10 October in Peje/Pec, UNMIK Police and KFOR fired tear gas at a crowd of some 600 Albanians attacking a group of elderly Serb returnees from Osojane, who travelled in an escorted bus to register for pensions at the municipality. The violent clash involving Molotov cocktails demanded reinforcements of the Spanish special police. None of the Serbs were injured, unlike some of the UNMIK Police, KFOR and KPS officers. On 15 October, a Kosovo Serb woman was killed by an anti-tank mine in a field in Klokot. In

Obiliq/c, a hand grenade was thrown into the house of a Kosovo Serb and the following week a car tried to run him over. The incidents clearly aimed at forcing the family to sell their house. Many violent attacks against Kosovo Serbs now include attacks against the international community, against the law enforcement and security agencies.

In addition to violent incidents, Kosovo Serbs continue to be subjected to harassment, intimidation and humiliation ranging from stone throwing targeting individuals, property or vehicles, unwillingness of officials and general public to understand their language, to provide services, and vandalism of religious sites. The KPS may come to the scene of stone throwing, but do often not take any effective measures to catch the perpetrators. Even when KFOR detains a perpetrator, and he/she is handed over to the police, the case will not be filed or followed up. The Serbs are frustrated with inadequate and ineffective measures by the law enforcement authorities in the investigation of crimes, regardless of their gravity.

PART 2: SITUATION OF MINORITY GROUPS BY REGION, WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON CONDUCIVENESS TO RETURN

A. Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians

PRISHTINË / PRISTINA REGION

The predominantly Serb-speaking Roma and Albanian-speaking Ashkaelia in Prishtina/Pristina region tend to live separately, the Roma in and around Serb majority areas, and the Ashkaelia side by side with Albanian communities. The Ashkaelia tend to enjoy some freedom of movement and access to public services, while the Roma depend on the Serb community structures, affected by the same limitations to mobility. Both Roma and Ashkaelia seek collective security, thus their tendency to congregate in compact settlements, villages or neighbourhoods.

There are many areas and villages with few or no remaining Roma or Ashkaelia. The Roma and/or Ashkaelia previously occupying these areas left for security reasons, many after direct attacks following June 1999. Their principal locations today are the Plemetina camp, the ghetto-like Ashkaelia settlement in Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje, Podujevo town, and Ferizaj/Urosevac in Gjilan/Gnjilane region. Most Roma or Ashkaelia from the deserted areas, who were prompted to return to Kosovo, returned to secondary displacement. In addition, a large number of villages have a current Roma or Ashkaelia population so small that return would be impossible.[3]

Ashkaelia

The security in the current Ashkaelia neighbourhoods has mostly stabilised; the Ashkaelia have found collective security by concentrating in specific areas, as opposed to living dispersed in their former residential areas. The Ashkaelia are now concentrated in 12 towns or settlements[4] where security incidents have largely subsided and they have access to services. The children attend school with Albanian children without major problems. Despite the increasing stability in Ashkaelia communities within their municipality, they rarely travel to Pristina, and avoid public transport.

Because of the Ashkaelia displacement to concentrated settlements, housing, infrastructure and sanitation in the remaining Ashkaelia communities are appalling, and the level of poverty is extremely high. UNHCR has made it a priority to assist in the return to place of origin of IDPs from these settlements. However, in many locations, the resentment towards all minorities is too high to consider return in the near future. There are five locations in Prishtina/Pristina region where UNHCR has worked on returns of Albanian-speaking Ashkaelia: the villages of Mala Dobraja and Magura (Lipljan), the village of Lismir (Fushe Kosove), the Azotiku neighbourhood (Obilic Town), and Vranjevac neighbourhood (Prishtina/Pristina city). The process of these small-scale returns to the Albanian majority areas, mostly from the Plemetina camp, has been energy and time consuming. The process

[3] These include: in Prishtine/Pristina municipality, the village of Caglavica; in Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje, the villages of Batuse, Bresje, Kuzin and Uglijare; in Lipjan/Lipljan municipality, the villages of Dobrotin, Donja Gusterica, Livadje, Radevo, Skulanevo, Lepina, and Slovinje; and in Obiliq/c municipality, in the village of Janina Voda.

[4] Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje (477 Ashkaelia families; 23% are IDPs); Podujevo town (113 families); Shtime/Shtimlje town (78 families); Lipjan/Lipljan town (60 families); Medvec (57 families/340 individuals); Gadime (56 families/312 individuals; 19% are IDPs); Hallac (29 families); Miloshevo (24 families); Givrkoc (24 families); Vrella (19 families; 61% are IDPs); Konjuh (12 families); and Batlava (10 families).

was based on balancing the return of minorities through infrastructure or reconstruction projects benefiting the majority community in the receiving villages. UNHCR and other actors have invested up to two years in inter-ethnic dialogue, and yet the numbers of returnees are: in Lismir, 6 families; in Mala Dobrana, only 8 families, in Magura 23 families, and in Vranjevac, 15 families - even these returns remain difficult to sustain. Intra-Albanian disputes over the balancing projects were also observed. In the current environment it is unlikely that further Ashkaelia, despite their affinity with Albanians, could safely return outside of a facilitated micro-managed process with a strong balancing component.

The absence of rule of law is a particular obstacle to larger-scale return. Despite efforts of the international community to facilitate Ashkaelia return to places of origin, some Albanians continue to actively obstruct return, and they do so with impunity. In the most recent example, the return process was stalled by one Albanian family threatening the IDPs with violence, and eventually assaulting an NGO staff. UNMIK chose to "negotiate" with the problematic family, rather than involving the police. This return process in Obeliq/c municipality, based on co-operation with the municipal officials, involved the return of 21 Ashkaelia families from the Plemetina camp to the Azotiku neighbourhood with no current resident Ashkaelia population. This example, one of many similar ones, highlights the fact that Albanian consent is needed to ensure safety for the return.

Roma

The situation of ethnic Roma in Pristina differs substantially from that of the Ashkaelia, due to Serbian being their principal language, and the historical co-existence with Serb communities. The return of Serb speaking Roma to Albanian areas is mostly prohibitive. In significant numbers, Roma live in Plemetina village in Obiliq/c municipality (91 families), Gracanica (61 families), Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje town (43 families), Janjevo (40 families), Lipjan/Lipljan town (28 families) and in Preoce (25 families). The only area in Prishtina region where Roma have returned is the Serb majority Gracanica, where the situation of the Roma mirrors the one of the Serbs, with limited income-generation prospects and rampant poverty as a result of severely restricted freedom of movement.

GJILAN / GNJILANE REGION

Roma

In **Gjilan/Gnjilane Region**, the situation of the Roma tends to correspond to the position of the Serb population in the same location. Therefore, levels of security, freedom of movement and access to services is higher in locations where Serbs enjoy a more stable situation – in Gjilan/Gnjilane, Novo Brdo, Kamenica, Strpce - and the Roma situation is more precarious where the Serbs are under more pressure, such as in Ferizaj/Urosevac, Kacanik, and Viti/Vitina. Even in areas where freedom of movement is enjoyed, it rarely extends beyond the municipality. Improvements in freedom of movement are better measured within urban areas and between villages, not cross-municipality or beyond the region. In areas with a significant Serb community, the Roma tend to access services used by the Serbs. This inherently impacts their integration in the majority Albanian society. The security risks to a Roma returnee would be similar to the risks faced by Serb returnees, albeit relatively less than in other areas in Kosovo, but still of concern.

Gjilan/Gnjilane municipality has a Roma population of 385 persons/ 119 families, and two families displaced from Ferizaj/Urosevac - a fraction of pre-war 4,670 persons/ 595 families. The Roma used to live dispersed both in urban and rural areas, now they remain concentrated

in specific urban neighbourhoods.[5] The humanitarian situation of the Roma is critical, the housing conditions abysmal and conditions overcrowded. A large number of houses are destroyed, and those standing are dilapidated with hardly any sanitation. Income is mostly non-existent outside of the social assistance. While freedom of movement has gradually improved, the Roma are limited to Gjilan/Gnjilane town, not travelling further, e.g. to Pristina as they used to for trade. Roma children in Gjilan/Gnjilane attend a special ad hoc school set up in the Roma mahala owing to their linguistic barrier and fear of Albanian schools. Roma returns to Gjilan/Gnjilane town has provoked security incidents, including two hand-grenade attacks in Abdullah Presheva Street.

The current Roma population in **Kamenica municipality** live in Kamenica town, Leshtar, Berivojce and Domorovce.[6] Only 414 Roma remain of the pre-conflict 1,200. The Kamenica Roma speak Romany, Albanian and Serbian, communicate with all populations, and face no serious security problems. They have the same level of freedom of movement as local Serbs, moving freely within the municipality and areas of the region where Serbs live or travel, but rarely beyond the region. Access to services in Kamenica is good. The Roma tend to use Serb services, including the local Serb school and secondary health care in Southern Serbia. Despite the calm situation in 2001, Roma IDPs trying to return to Ogoshte received a hostile reception by the Albanian population, and were eventually prevented from returning. This experience points to the likely reaction in the event of Roma trying to return to mostly Albanian areas.

The only location with a significant Roma presence in **Novo Brdo municipality** today is the village of Bostane, a mixed village the Roma share with Albanians, Serbs and Ashkaelia. The Bostane Roma are closer to the Serbs, use the same means of transportation, and enjoy the same freedom of movement, which both for Serbs and Roma is good due to the unique ethnic balance

In **Ferizaj/Urosevac**, the pre-war size strong Roma community of 1,150 has been reduced to 125 persons. The Roma tend to be perceived as allied with the Serbs, who were virtually cleansed out of the municipality.[7] The remaining Roma struggle with the Albanian language, with limited freedom of movement and limited access to services. They continue to face harassment, which still prompts some of them to depart. Roma children, however, attend Albanian schools

In **Viti/Vitina municipality**, there are few Roma left owing to the limited freedom of movement, lack of access to services, and harassment.[8] A few Roma families remain in Grmovo, Vrbovac and Klokot, three Roma families remain in Viti/na town. Roma from majority Albanian villages departed, and would face a hostile reception in case of return, as the Roma are put into the same category as Serbs. Some Roma have sold their properties at low prices and under duress.

The pre-conflict Roma population in **Strpce municipality** is estimated at 150 persons. The Roma families in Albanian areas - Firaja, Brod - were pressured out of these areas in 1999, and moved to Serb majority area. Roma families in Serb areas - Berevce, Gotovusa, Brezovica, and Strpce - faced problems as early as 1998; some homes were burned by Serbs. Caught in a lose-lose situation between the Serbs and the Albanian, many families sought asylum abroad. Only six families/33 Roma remain, including the IDPs. They do not have

[5] Abdullah Presheva (26 families), Ivo Lola Ribar (50 families), Marshall Tito (12 families), Boro Vukmirovic (10 families), Blagoje Maksimovic (16 families), Mumcilo Trumpic (2 families) and Imer Mola (3 families).
[6] Before the conflict, Roma also inhabited Ogoshte, Koretin, Bosce and Rogacica, but these are now deserted by the Roma except for one family in Rogacica
[7] There are 17 Serbs housebound under 24-hour KFOR guard
[8] Roma populations used to live in Viti/Vitina Town, Grmovo, Klokot, Mogila, Podgorce, Vrbovac and Zitinje.

freedom of movement beyond the Serb areas, and like the Serbs of Strpce travel outside in convoys. The families, especially the IDPs from Albanian villages, claim they face verbal harassment and discrimination from the Serb population. Return to the Albanian areas is not considered feasible at this point. Roma from Albanian areas would return into displacement to Serb areas and face hostile reception.

In the nearly mono-ethnic **Kacanik municipality**, both all Serbs and Roma left after June 1999. Before the conflict, there were over 200 Roma living in Hani i Elezit, and some 60 in Kacanik town. Today there is one Roma family in the municipality, living in destitute conditions.

Unplanned larger returns of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians to Gjilan/Gnjilane region would likely result in an increase of security incidents. In Gjilan/Gnjilane town especially returnees, whose properties are illegally occupied by Albanians would be particularly at risk, while all Roma returnees to villages with no Roma remainees in Gjilan/Gnjilane municipalities[9], or very few, like in Kacanik, Ferizj/Urosevac and Viti/Vitina municipalities (especially in Viti/Vitina town and Zitinje since in these two locations there was rampant violence between Serbs and Albanians) could lead to serious security incidents and therefore there are no prospects for safe return in the foreseeable future. Return of Roma originating from these locations would lead to secondary displacement to Gjilan/Gnjilane town, possibly Kamenica town, Berivojce or Serbia or fYROM in already overcrowded settlements. Any returns to the region require long-term facilitation of dialogue, careful planning and support of balancing projects.

Novo Brdo, with its ethnic balance is the exception. A facilitated return of a small number of Roma would not destabilise the inter-ethnic relations. There, the main obstacle to a sustainable return is the destruction of housing stock and total absence of income generation opportunities.

Ashkaelia

In Gjilan/Gnjilane region, the Ashkaelia population tend to be better integrated in the majority community than the Roma. Most of the children attend Albanian schools, the communities have access to public services, and a certain degree of political representation. Freedom of movement, however, remains limited to the region. Ashkaelia returnees are likely to face significantly less risk of harassment and have more possibilities for integration than Roma returnees.

The most significant Ashkaelia population in the region is in **Ferizaj/Urosevac** town, with three Ashkaelia neighbourhoods[10], and the Ashkaelia majority village of Dubrava. Estimated 3,190 Ashkaelia remain out of a 3,580 strong pre-conflict population. Many of them left in 1999 but returned shortly thereafter. All of the Ashkaelia neighbourhoods have seen a constant small number of returns since 2000. Ashkaelia children are integrated in Albanian schools. The communities do not feel safe to travel to Prishtina/Pristina and Shtime/Stimlje, as they used to before the conflict, and limit their movement of the region. The Ashkaelia communities in Ferizaj/ Urosevac host IDPs from Kacanik, Lipjan/Lipljan and Shtime/Stimlje - some of the IDPs still fear to even visit their former homes. The main impediment to further return of Ashkaelia to Ferizaj/Urosevac is the socio-economic situation and the lack of housing. The lack of freedom of movement beyond the region hampers income generation and a sustainable economic future.

[9] The villages of Perlepnica, Kmetovce and Doberqane were inhabited by around 60 Roma families, 400 persons before the conflict, and are homogeneously Albanian now.

[10] Sallahane, Halit Ibishi and Koxe Zoze

Outside of Ferizaj/Urosevac, there are small Ashkaelia communities in **Gjilan/Gnjilane town** (3 families), **Viti/Vitina** (4 families) and in **Novo Berde/Brdo**. In general, their security situation is better than the local Roma due to their predominant use of Albanian language and integration into the Albanian services.

PRIZREN REGION

Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian

Unlike in the Pristina and Gjilan/Gnjilane regions, in Prizren region there is no clear distinction in identity or security situation between those identifying themselves as Roma, Ashkaelia or Egyptian. The Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians have, in their attempt to adapt, usually adopted the language of the predominant population in their neighbourhood, whether Albanian or Serbian/Bosniak. In urban areas, they tend to identify themselves as "Roma", while in the rural areas they would be "Ashkaelia" or "Egyptian". The majority of all Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians in the region speak Albanian, while Roma in towns generally are fluent in Serbian. UNHCR is not aware of any Roma in the region who *only* speak Romany and Serbian. It should also be noted that Prizren town in particular is more linguistically diverse than other areas of Kosovo, and Bosniak, Gorani and Turkish languages are spoken in public. Due to these factors, the language is not an obstacle for Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian in the region.

In **Prizren municipality**, some 4 - 5,000 mostly Roma live in Prizren town, constituting 90% of the pre-conflict population. There are also 17 IDP families from Landovica, Ternje, Bellacerq and Peqan. The Roma in Prizren live either mingled with Albanians and other ethnicities, or in settlements or clusters alongside majority areas. There is a substantial interaction between all ethnic groups, and the Roma enjoy good mobility. A little less than 500 Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians - about 90% of the pre-conflict population - live in mixed villages.[11] Their children are integrated into Albanian schools both in Prizren town and the villages. Some Roma, Ashkalia, and Egyptians send their children to Turkish or Bosniak schools out of personal preference. They enjoy full freedom of movement within Prizren municipality, and seem also to travel to fYROM. Individual spontaneous returns from Serbia in particular continue to take place, although in a low profile. The principal problems of the Roma community in Prizren are lack of income generation opportunities and a critical housing situation.

In **Rahovec/Orahovac** municipality, around 300 - about 70% of the pre-conflict population - Roma Ashkaelia and Egyptians live in urban Rahovec/Orahovac, mostly in the upper quarter alongside the Serb population, and have remained rather isolated. Another 680 Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians - 80% of the pre-conflict population - live in the mixed Albanian majority villages of Krusha e Madhe, Ratkoc, Xerxe and Opterushe. During 2001, there were frequent reports of arson and hand-grenade attacks against the properties, occupied or non-occupied, in these three communities. However, over the last year the number of incidents has diminished. Only one incident in May 2002 has been reported; a neighbour accused one Roma returnee to be a Serb collaborator. The improvements in the security and freedom of movement situation of the Roma in upper Orahovac are linked with the improvements in the relations between the upper Orahovac Serbs and the Albanian community of lower Orahovac. During 2002, through dialogue with Albanian leaders, the Serbs began to join shuttles organised by the international community into the Albanian part of town to access the municipality and services. As inter-ethnic confidence improved, the security incidents

[11] Vlashnje, Landovica, Pirane and Medvec.

significantly dropped. The Roma children now share a classroom with the Albanian children, travel to Prizren town, and the Roma in Albanian majority villages are integrating.[12]

In **Suhareke/Suvareka** municipality, the main concentration of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians consists of roughly 400 persons - two thirds of the original population - in the mixed villages of Ternje, Gelance and Leshan, and in Suhareke/Suvareka town. In the urban area, many Roma fled only after June 1999, and tend to be viewed by the majority Albanian population as collaborators, while in the rural areas they tend to have better relations with the Albanian majority. Within the Prizren region, the largest scale of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian displacement occurred from this municipality. Similarly, their relations with the majority population are more problematic in general than in Prizren or Rahovec/Orahovac due to the violent history of Suhareke/Suvareka. Only one Ashkaelia return - to Gelance - has taken place, and it is unlikely that larger voluntary returns will commence in the near future. Safe return of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians to Suhareke/Suvareka, especially to the town, would be the greatest challenge within the region, requiring a cautious approach, engagement in serious process of inter-ethnic dialogue. The destruction of these minority communities and their properties would make return to Suhareke/Suvareka difficult, in addition to the lack of acceptance by the majority community. Also, Suhareke/Suvareka is not included in the reconstruction programme of the European Agency of Reconstruction (EAR) and forced returns of these minorities originating from Suhareke/Suvareka would result in their secondary displacement.

Despite the substantial displacement of Roma Ashkaelia and Egyptians from Suhareke/Suvareka, there are residual communities in all but one area, that being the village of Shiroke, now a mono-ethnic Albanian environment. It is expected that no Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian return could take place to Shiroke in the near future due to the hostile reception and absence of their ethnic community.

With regard to returns of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians to both urban and rural areas in **Prizren, Rahovec/Orahovac** and **Suhareke/Suvareka**, UNHCR is of the opinion that the Albanian community would mostly accept them, but balancing projects would need to be implemented to avoid resentments based on resource allocation. Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian returns to rural villages in Prizren are difficult due to lack of reconstruction aid, or - in the case of Peqan - the absence of a resident ethnic community. The situation is similar in Rahovec/Orahovac, where the main obstacle to return would be the lack of housing and economic reception capacity. Suhareke/Suvareka may constitute an exception in this regard, in that although municipal officials do not publicly object to return and are generally co-operative, inter-ethnic dialogue and tolerance activities would be required before return could reasonably and safely take place to Suhareke/Suvareka, especially to Shiroke.

PEJE / PEC REGION

Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian

In the Peje/Pec region, the distinction between minorities who identify themselves as Roma, Ashkaelia or Egyptian is not very relevant either, due to shared linguistic and social traits and

[12] In one incident in the mixed village of Opterushe, an Albanian was killed by a Roma on 8 June, in what was described as self-defence. Due to the two ethics involved, the incident sparked concern in the municipality, especially after it was later reported that the Roma's house was burned and the Roma family fled. However, it is believed that the incidents were not ethnically-motivated per se, but rather in the context of a blood feud. The President of the Municipality (an Albanian) was personally involved to ensure that the situation between Albanians and Romas did not escalate to the detriment of progress made in multi-ethnicity in the municipality. Significantly, no other Roma families faced problems or reprisals after this incident.

the mixing of these ethnicities throughout the region. However, there are political distinctions, primarily between Ashkaelia and Egyptian political parties, albeit would not influence daily life or security situation of these communities. Whether Roma, Ashkaelia or Egyptian, these communities in the region tend to face similar challenges, including physical security, access to basic services, and enjoyment of basic rights.

Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian families are spread throughout all towns and many villages in the region. With the exceptions of the urban Kristali (Peje/Pec municipality) and the village of Rudesh (Istog/k municipality), all of the former locations inhabited by these minority communities have resident populations, and are mostly shared with Albanians and/or Bosniak populations.[13] Many of the villages only have a small Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian residual population.[14]

The former Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian settlements in Rudesh (Istog/k) are now abandoned. The Kristali neighbourhood (Peje/Pec), which used to be inhabited by a large number of these minorities, has only 19 families left, a fraction of the former population. The lack of an anchor community makes return to these locations unfeasible. Return is also particularly problematic to 7 Shtatori (Peje/Pec), Brekoc (Gjakova/Djakovica) and Koloni neighbourhood (Gjakova/Djakovica) as these communities are stretched beyond their capacity, already hosting many IDPs and sharing limited resources. The exact number of IDPs there is not known, but a recent study in 7 Shtatori found that 51% of the families were renting, squatting or being hosted. Many IDPs are unable to return to smaller villages, due to a combination of security and infrastructure concerns, including massive reconstruction needs. The Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians have moved into secondary displacement in the larger settlements seeking safety in numbers.

Security for the Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian populations in Peje/Pec region has stabilised, and serious incidents are rare. However, minor harassment continues, but is rarely reported for fear of destabilising relations with the majority community. These minority communities in the region have generally seemed to restore their normal patterns of movement and travel, continuing the tradition of looking towards Montenegro to maintain family links, economic opportunities and trade. In general the Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian populations feel increasingly secure, and the majority of individuals exercise freedom of movement, access public and social services, including Albanian schools, local ambulances and the hospital in Peje/Pec. While the security is generally improving, UNHCR has recorded numerous unreported security incidents, which point to poor confidence in the rule of law. 13 security incidents were reported to UNHCR, out of which only two were reported to the police for fear

[13] Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian populations are present in **Peje/Pec municipality** in: Peje Town (Dardania, Kristali, Xhemajl Kada, 7 Shtatori and centre), Vitomirica, Cuska, Pavljane, Labljane, Zahac, Lozane, Rausiq, Ljubenic, Zlopek, Dubocak, Rashiq, Turjak, Celopek, Kosuriq, Gllogjan, Nepolje, Llugagji, Blagaje, Trstenik, Treboviq, Ljutoglava, Naklo, Barane, Gorazdevac, Dubove, Ozrim, Jabllanice, Vranoc, Novoselle, Ljesane, Klincina, Ruhot and Nabrdje. In **Gjakova/Djakovica municipality**: Gjakova town and Koloni neighbourhood, Vraniq, Rakovine, Pljancor, Janosh, Bitesh, Jahoc, Piskote, Hereq, Skijjane,Ujze, Rogova, Osek Hilje, Kodrali, Grgoc, Jabllanice, Bardhaniq, Brekoc and Shihmon I rafshit. In **Kline/a municipality**: Kline town, Bokshiq, Grabanice, Zajm, Drsnik, Klinavac, Malo Krusevo, Jagoda, Velika Krusevo, Budisallc, Dolovo, Rudice, Berkove, Leskovac, Shtupel, Resnik, Jahshanica and Vollujak. In **Istog/k municipality**: Istog town, Vrella, Prigoda, Prekalle, Lubova, Carralluke, Bajce, Dobrusha, Kashice, Staradoran, Tomoc, Djurakoc, Zallq, Drenje, Kovrage, Muzevine, Banja, Dragoc, Begov Lukava, Shallinovica, Gusare, Suvi Lukavac, Crnce, Lubozhd, and Dubrava. In **Decan/i municipality**: Decan town, Shaptej, Gramaqel, Pemishte, Baballoq, Prilep, Pozhare, Irzniq and Gllogjan. Most of these locations are ethnically mixed (with Albanians and/or Bosniaks primarily), and in many villages Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian presence only constitutes a few families, in some cases only one or two families.

[14] Some of their largest settlements today are in 7 Shtatori, Peje (43 families), Trebovic, Peje (57 families), Gjakova town (314 families), Koloni, Gjakova (86 families), Piskote, Gjakova (60 families), Brekoc, Gjakova (77 families), and Shtupel, Klina (35 families).

of reprisals.[15] These incidents ranged from threats and harassment, extortion, denial of return of an IDP family, death threat to an IDP family in case of return, two cases of pressure on families to depart, organised cattle theft, arson on a haystack, serious beating, and sexual abuse. These cases appear to be exceptions to the general rule of improved security and freedom of movement for the Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians in the region but they do highlight the vulnerability of these individuals to harassment. Individual families, whose past relations with Albanians were poor, who pose any threat to Albanian interest in land or property, or who test the tolerance of Albanian families not wishing to see the minority communities return, are at risk of assault with no effective remedy.

UNHCR has noted that inter-ethnic relations in Peje/Pec region depend largely on distribution of resources, particularly reconstruction assistance. In 2002, the majority population expressed increasing frustration, even anger, over perceived excess in focus on minority needs. Allocation of reconstruction aid to minorities - mainly to Serbs - provoked an outcry amongst Albanian officials and communities. Larger-scale returns of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians would require channelling of resources towards them, thus adversely impacting on their inter-ethnic relations. The majority population is unlikely to welcome any significant returns without a strong balancing component in material support.

The Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian in the region face particular property problems, these being one of the major obstacles to return. Large numbers of these families have inadequate property documentation, or never formally owned the property they historically occupied. In the case of Rudesh (Istog/k) and Kristali neighbourhood (Peje/Pec), the respective municipalities have claimed ownership, and deny Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians the right to return to their historic lands. In the case of Kristali, illegal majority construction is ongoing without regulation. Hence, in addition to the massive reconstruction needs in most potential return locations, the lack of recognition of property rights constitutes an insurmountable obstacle for return to these locations.

Due to the precarious social situation of the Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians in Peje/Pec region, exacerbated by IDP overcrowding in the larger abysmal ghetto-like communities, reception of returnees depend on solving first the problem of the IDPs within the region. While the security situation is generally stable, enormous social and demographic changes are needed to facilitate the return of IDPs from the overcrowded urban ghettos to their mixed villages. This will require a guided process, and attention to the massive reconstruction and income-generation needs of the Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian population without alienating the Albanian community. Inter-ethnic dialogue remains therefore a key component to successful returns for these minorities in the region. If the returns are not managed carefully, the precarious conditions in the current Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian communities will collapse and gains in inter-ethnic relations may be lost.

MITROVICA REGION

Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian

In the Mitrovica region, ethnic self-identification of Roma, Ashkaelia or Egyptians does not strictly correspond with linguistic identity. While they all use Albanian as their principal language, some identify themselves as Roma or Egyptian, while others clearly call themselves Ashkaelia. The majority of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian live in Mitrovica and Vushtrri/Vucitrn municipalities.

[15] A survey (separate to returnee monitoring) was conducted discreetly by UNHCR in Peje/Pec, Istog/k and Kline/a municipalities.

The situation of Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians in Mitrovica municipality is extraordinarily complex and difficult. The majority of these communities, mostly Roma, who lived in **Mitrovica South** were displaced. Many found safe haven in IDP camps in **Mitrovica North,** but continue to face rejection, ostracism and often harassment, from the Serbs in the north as well. The large majority of the Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians living in the camps in northern Kosovo are Roma, with the principal language in the camps being Albanian. Some individuals are also conversant in Serbian and use it outside the camp with the majority population in the North. The "Roma Mahala" in the Albanian-dominated south Mitrovica was the largest pre-conflict Roma settlement in the municipality. It was home to 6 -7,000 mostly Roma families, but is now abandoned and destroyed. Moreover, there the Albanian population and the municipal leadership resist the return of the Roma, Ashkaelia, and Egyptian population. There were also Ashkaelia populations in Stari Trg (22 families) and Prvi Tunel (30 families), all of who have fled. Roma and Ashkaelia in Serb majority North Mitrovica town were also mostly forced to leave.

The only location in Mitrovica South where Roma remain - apart from two families in town - is in 2 Korriku/Sitnicko Naselje. About 60-70 Roma families lived there before the conflict, at present 32 families remain. The settlement hosts IDPs from Stari Trg and Prvi Tunel. Over 20 families are believed to be in Western Europe, mostly Germany, and 11 families in the North. Despite the residual Roma population in 2 Korriku, the village has only seen three spontaneous returns due to the hostility and destruction. The security for resident families is stabilising, though Roma complain of stone throwing and verbal harassment, and are reluctant to report it to the police. While in 2000 and 2001 the Roma did not have access to urban South Mitrovica, today they go there freely. The children attend Albanian schools, and the Roma have access to other services too, including health. Around 25 Roma houses in 2 Korriku are illegally occupied by Albanians. As the return would pose a threat to present occupants, return of original owners and possible eviction of occupants could lead to threats to individual safety. Furthermore, there is a group of Roma families, who were financially well off before the war, and now are considered "personae non gratae" by the Albanians. The return of these families would put them at immediate risk due to perceptions of collaboration with Serbs.

Today, the vast majority of Roma from Mitrovica municipality have either fled abroad or live in three **IDP camps in the North**, namely the Cesmin Lug camp in north Mitrovica with 256 IDPs, the Warehouse in Leposavic with 200 IDPs, and Zitgovac camp in Zvecan with 186 IDPs. The few returnees originating from Mitrovica who have returned to Kosovo remain in secondary displacement in these camps, since the security at place of origin in Mitrovica municipality is prohibitive. The Roma in the Cesmin Lug and Zitgovac camps feel "under continuous pressure due to ethnicity" from the Serb majority, evidenced by incidents ranging from minor theft to beatings. IDPs in Cesmin Lug camp claim there are Serb gangs constantly harassing camp residents. In a separate recent incident, four Serb youths attacked a returnee family displaced into Zitkovac camp, destroyed their vehicle, and urinated on the mother. Such incidents of harassment go unreported for fear of worsening their tenuous situation with the domicile Serbs, who continue to dislike the idea of hosting Albanian-speaking Roma from the Albanian south. While camp residents in Leposavic Warehouse have not had as many security problems, they complain about being unable to practice their religion. When they attempt to publicly hold funerals or other religious ceremonies, the local Serbs would call the police and request intervention. Thus, the IDPs have retreated further into the camps, and maintain a low profile. IDPs in Leposavic exercise relatively good freedom of movement within the municipality, but IDPs in Mitrovica and Zvecan do not move as freely due to security concerns, particularly those with limited Serb language capacity. IDPs are careful not to be identified as Albanian speakers. There is no access to education in Albanian, so Roma children study in Serb schools, mostly segregated in separate classrooms, but with Serb teachers, despite their native tongue being Albanian. Some IDP

children have faced physical abuse by other children for using Albanian amongst themselves. On the other hand, IDPs are able to access the municipal health houses without problem.

While rule of law is very weak throughout Kosovo, the particular weakness of the UNMIK presence in the north exacerbates a situation of impunity, placing the Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptian IDP populations in the north in an extraordinarily vulnerable position, with no effective remedies in case of security incidents. This results in a general climate of fear, but there are no prospects for return to the Albanian-dominated south in the near future. Despite a wish of the IDPs to return and attempts made by the international community to initiate a return, the Albanian population resists. In fact, the Albanian administration wants to bulldoze the Roma Mahala and convert the land to municipal use. Return of Ashkaelia to Stari Trg and Prvi Tunel, inhabited by Albanians, also remains out of the question for security reasons. Therefore the IDPs in the North are stuck between two fires in a tense, unstable social and political environment with lack of an effective UNMIK presence, or protection of the authorities. The return of all communities in Mitrovica remains a prisoner of the political deadlock between the Albanians and the Serbs. Any forced return, whether to the south or the North, would result in secondary displacement. Any increase in the camp populations would exacerbate the abysmal shelter and sanitation conditions of the current IDP population, and heighten tensions between the IDPs and the Serb hosting communities.

In **Vushtrri/Vucitrn municipality**, there are 67 Albanian-speaking Ashkaelia families. This population compares to the pre-conflict population of over 300 Ashkaelia families. The Ashkaelia have seen gradual improvements to their security and freedom of movement, but still fear to travel to Pristina. Ashkaelia now are able to access services in Vushtrri/Vucitrn, though verbal insults by youths deter them from feeling confidant in the town centre. All children are integrated in Albanian schools. In 2002, 31 Ashkaelia families returned in four groups from Serbia to neighbourhoods in Vushtrri/Vucitrn town, and were welcomed by the Albanian municipal leadership. Despite this positive reception, in the first months after return, the returnees reported threats and harassment, an explosion in one family's backyard, and a grenade attack. The latter attack may have been the result of a family dispute. Two cases of extortion attempts were also reported. Although none of these incidents resulted in serious injury, no arrests were ever made. The low-level security threats and the impunity point to the weakness in rule of law. Remaining IDPs from Vushtrri in Serbia, are reluctant to return due to security concerns. While very small-scale voluntary return is likely to be sustainable for most IDPs, underlying risks prevail due to impunity, as elsewhere in Kosovo.

In addition to Vushtrri town, about 200 Roma live in Priluzje village, which is a Serb enclave. The situation of the Roma of Priluzje has remained stable. Roma children attend the Serb school, and access the same services. There used to be Ashkaelia presence in the mixed village of Novo Selo/Maxhunaj but the Ashkaelia and Serbs fled. All of the Ashkaelia houses were destroyed. Intensive inter-ethnic dialogue, confidence building work and "negotiation" with the Albanian population would be needed to create a safe environment for return.

In **Skenderaj/Srbica municipality**, most Ashkaelia fled after June 1999; of the pre-conflict 25 Ashkaelia families 9 remain. These families often declare themselves as Albanians, in an effort to assimilate, they even refuse contact with UNHCR. Ashkaelia used to inhabit Skenderaj/Srbica town and the villages of Dashevc, Lausa and Rudnik. These three locations are now completely abandoned by the minorities. A return attempt took place in October 2000, when four Ashkaelia were murdered in an execution-style killing the morning after the return. This had a lasting chilling effect on prospects for safe return of Ashkaelia to this hard line municipality. If Ashkaelia from Skenderaj were to be returned to Kosovo, they would face secondary displacement in northern IDP camps, in Serbia or in Montenegro, depending on family links.

B. Bosniaks

GENERAL SITUATION

The Kosovo Bosniaks were estimated to be between 80,000 - 100,000 in the pre-war period. Today, estimates oscillate around 36,000 - 38,000. The remaining Bosniak population has endured difficult times, due to a precarious security situation in 1999 and 2000, and the reversal in socio-economic position in the "new reality" of Kosovo. The post-conflict situation in Kosovo has isolated the Bosniak community, especially in areas where Bosniaks are in very small numbers. In Mitrovica region in particular, Bosniaks still remain vulnerable in terms of their immediate physical security.

The Bosniaks have fought for their survival through political engagement. Their situation began to improve after participation in the 2000 Municipal Elections, as the participation in municipal structures enhanced their status, and gave them some credibility in the eyes of the majority. This distinguished them from Serbs, who reserved their engagement to parallel structures. In the 2001 Kosovo parliamentary elections, Bosniak parties gained 5 seats in the Kosovo Assembly, and the Albanian-led coalition government allocated a ministerial post (Ministry of Health) to the Bosniak leadership. They also participated in the 2002 Municipal Elections; Bosniaks, in some regions held political rallies in public buildings. In some municipalities, Bosniak parties are forming coalitions with LDK.

Security and freedom of movement have improved dramatically, especially in Peje/Pec and Prizren regions. Bosniaks in general no longer fear attacks, direct threats to their safety, or impediments to their safe movement. However, the linguistic barrier continues to limits their movements and access to services and economic activities, which they undertake in micro-regions. Bosniak leaders interviewed in November 2002 unanimously cited unemployment as the principal problem. Bosniaks are concerned about discrimination in employment in the public sector, and lack of employment opportunities in the private sector due to linguistic barriers and marginalisation. Lack of higher education in Serbo-Croat in Kosovo is also a major impediment to their sustainability. Some progress was made in 2002 with the opening of a Business faculty in Bosniak language in Peje/Pec, linked to Pristina University. While primary and secondary education in Bosniak language is available, some express concern for their identity.

Increasingly, Bosniaks express a sense of abandonment and neglect. They perceive that their tenuous economic situation, their education, and their need for support in strengthening inter-ethnic relations have been for the most part overlooked. Although the Bosniak communities in Peje/Pec and Prizren have stabilised through gradual improvements in security, freedom of movement and political participation over the last two years, individual families continue to depart for Bosnia or Western Europe, using the resources from property sales.

PRISHTINË / PRISTINA REGION

Over 7,000 Bosniaks resided in **Pristina region** prior to the conflict, in urban Pristina, scattered and indistinctly integrated amongst the Kosovo Serb, with the exception of one group in the village of Mazgit (Obiliq/c), where they lived with Albanians. Unlike Bosniaks in Peje/Pec and Prizren, Bosniaks in Pristina were integrated with Serbs, adopting their language. Today, only 45 Bosniak families remain, some due to employment with international agencies, some due to marriage and integration in the Albanian community. Many Bosniak families sold their properties before departing, and many are believed to have moved to Bosnia. Fifteen Bosniak families, of the original 21, remain in Mazgit, maintaining

positive relations with the Albanians. Those who left did primarily due to the fundamental change in Kosovo, where they saw no future.

Bosniaks in urban Pristina and Mazgit have seen improvements in their security situation and no longer fear ethnically motivated attacks. They have begun to use their language, albeit cautiously, in public as the remaining 45 families in urban Pristina are known in the neighbourhoods. Bosniaks may still face hostility if unable to negotiate transactions due to linguistic barriers, but each family has developed its own coping mechanisms. The Bosniak children attend a Bosniak school in Pristina, and walk through the streets on their own, speaking their language, without incident. The children in Mazgit are transported privately by an Albanian entrepreneur.

Despite the relative stability achieved by the Bosniak families in the Pristina region, Bosniaks continue to depart due to the lack of future prospects. The small size of the residual population effectively prohibits normalisation of community life. All of the Bosniak leaders interviewed noted that while security has stabilised, "no progress" has been seen in terms of economic interaction or prospects for income generation. As Bosniaks did not gain any seats in the Pristina Municipal Assembly in the October 2002 elections, they will no longer be represented in municipal structures. It is unlikely that any Bosniaks would voluntarily return to Pristina in the foreseeable future, or that a forced return could be conducted in safety, unless hosted by family members with established safety nets amongst Albanian neighbours.

PRIZREN REGION

The vast majority of Bosniaks in the region live in **Prizren municipality**, with populations of approximately 13,000 in Prizren town, 6,600 in the **Podgor** area, and 12,700 in the **Zhupa Valley**. In Prizren town, the large Bosniak population lives mingled into the Albanian, Turkish and Roma communities. The Podgor area is predominantly Bosniak, although some of the Muslims in the Ljubizda and Skorobiste have a tendency to declare themselves as Albanian. The Bosniaks of Zhupa Valley live in mono-ethnic[16] as well as in mixed villages[17], which are also inhabited by Serbs and in some cases Albanians.

The situation of Bosniaks in Prizren region has improved as compared with 1999 and 2000. Bosniaks are now able to exercise freedom of movement within their micro-region consisting of Prizren town, Podgor and Zhupa Valley. Confidence to move beyond the municipality is contingent upon speaking Albanian. The language barrier and fear of encountering unexpected difficulties, if mistaken for an ethnic Serb when far from home, impedes Bosniaks from moving beyond the greater Prizren area. Fears of ethnically motivated violent attacks *per se* have largely dissipated. Bosniaks have improved their access to public services, including health. Interaction between Bosniaks and Albanians using Bosniak language are not uncommon. It is also not uncommon for Bosniaks, to ask an Albanian to accompany them to facilitate everyday interactions for reason of communication, rather than security. Furthermore, Bosniaks are increasingly able to openly speak Bosniak language in all public places, without fear of harassment or reprisal.

Therefore, Bosniak is easily heard throughout the Prizren micro-region, as is Turkish language. No ethnically motivated security incidents have been reported since March 2002, when a Bosniak man was stabbed in the village of Lubizde for allegedly singing a Bosnian song at a celebration. An increasing number of Bosniaks have returned to the region, and have not reported problems.

[16] Gornje and Donje Lubinje, Nebregoste, Manastirica, Reqane, Jablanica and Pousko
[17] Gornje Selo, Mushnikovo, Drajcici, Planjane and Lokvica

However, Bosniaks, mainly youths continue to depart due to lack of economic opportunities in Prizren and lack of higher education opportunities in Bosniak language in Kosovo. In October 2002, 50 Bosniaks reportedly departed Donje Lubinje for economic reasons. Their linguistic disadvantage makes it harder to compete in an already depressed economic environment. Security and freedom of movement are not in themselves causes for these departures. Large-scale return of Bosniaks to the region would exacerbate the lack of economic sustainability, with the lack of income generation potential and access to public sector jobs. As such, reintegration potential is low, and Bosniak returnees would be likely to leave again in search of economic opportunities. Competition for property is not believed to be a large risk factor for Bosniak returnees, since there is not a large-scale problem of illegal occupation of Bosniak properties.

PEJE / PEC REGION

The total number of Bosniaks in Peje/Pec Region is difficult to establish, but estimates range around 5,000. Bosniaks live scattered in villages in four of the five municipalities of the region, Kline/Klina excluded. In some locations, Bosniaks make up large numbers, whereas in other locations there are as few as two or three Bosniak families, together with Roma, Ashkaelia and Egyptians and/or Albanians. In Peje/Pec municipality, approximately 200 Bosniak families live in the centre of Peje/Pec town, while another 66 families live in the Dardania and Kristali neighbourhoods. The largest settlement of Bosniaks is in the semi-urban mixed settlement of Vitomirica, where more than of 3,500 Bosniaks live alongside Albanians, Roma and Egyptians. Smaller numbers of Bosniak families live in other villages.[18] A substantial number of Bosniaks remain in Istok/g municipality, with approximately 250 Bosniaks.[19] In Gjakova/Djakovica municipality, 48 Bosniak families live in the urban area, none in the villages. In Decan/I town and the villages of Prepaqan and Rashtavic, a handful of Bosniak families remain. There is a Bosniak presence in nearly all locations formerly inhabited, although many have only a few families.

Bosniaks in this region do not express concern about their physical safety, though some returnees have cited threats[20], verbal harassment, theft and stone throwing at their children. Most Bosniaks appear to have restored their pre-war range of movement. Few Bosniaks travel to Pristina or other towns of Kosovo, which may reflect their historically closer links, socially and economically, to Montenegro. Bosniaks increasingly enjoy freedom of movement within the micro-region of Peje/Pec and continue to travel to Montenegro to pursue economic activities and maintain family links. Movement within the region is easiest for those Bosniaks speaking Albanian. A few leaders interviewed optimistically described freedom of movement and use of Bosniak language in public places as "normal". Bosniaks generally have access to health and other services. Their children attend primary and secondary school in Bosniak language, sharing facilities with Albanian students although studying in different classrooms. The opening of a Business faculty in Peje/Pec town in Bosniak language has had a positive impact on the community. This was done in close co-operation with the PISG Department of Education. Another positive development has been the integration of Bosniaks into the Kosovo Police Service (KPS); in Peje/Pec municipality,

[18] Rausic, Ljubenic, Zlopek, Dubocak, Blagaje, Trebovic, Ljutoglava, Brolic, Gorazdevac, Jabllanica, Kotradic and Nabrdje.

[19] Prigoda, Lubova, Dobrusha, Kashice, Gjurakoc, Kovrage, Veric, Banja and Begov Lukava.

[20] In the first case, a Bosniak returnee family to Dardania, Peje/Pec was threatened by an Albanian neighbour illegally occupying a nearby house of a Kosovo Serb; even after the eviction, serious threats continued this time from other Albanian neighbours. As a result, the returnee sent her two daughters to Montenegro, fearing to send them to school in Dardania or elsewhere in Peje. In the second case, a Bosniak returnee to Vitomirica, Peje/Pec also experienced verbal abuse from an Albanian neighbour who is illegally using a piece of the Bosniak family's land.

there are 179 Albanian KPS officers and 46 Bosniak KPS officers. A significant number work in the Vitomirica police station. Additional 20 Bosniak are Border Police officers.

While the situation of Bosniaks has stabilised to a large extent, the level of genuine interaction between Bosniaks and the Albanians is low. Furthermore, inter-ethnic relations, while generally stable, tend to be adversely affected by resource-distribution, particularly reconstruction aid. While return of Bosniaks to areas with resident Bosniak population would not cause a backlash on purely ethnic grounds, the channelling of resources towards the Bosniak community, could generate resentments. The Albanian leadership has repeatedly challenged increases in minority allocations. Many Bosniaks, including those who went to Western European countries, sold their properties, therefore some returnees, if returned, would have no place to return to, and could exhaust the limited hosting capacity in existing communities.

MITROVICA REGION

In the **Mitrovica region**, a small residual Bosniak population of around 2,000 persons - 40% of the pre-conflict population - is found in Mitrovica municipality. Zabarare, in Mitrovica South with a significant pre-war Bosniak population of 40-50 families is nearly deserted, only two Bosniak families remain. Virtually all remaining Bosniaks live in urban Mitrovica, half in the Serb-dominated north and half in the Albanian-dominated south. Bosniaks are a minority in both locations, having the "right religion-wrong language" in the Albanian south and the "wrong religion-right language" in the Serb north. Many fled Mitrovica after being expelled from their apartments in 1999 and 2000. No returns of Bosniaks, voluntary or forced, are known to have taken place to the municipality or the region.

Bosniaks in both the north and the south do not live in separate neighbourhoods, but mixed into the majority population. Their security situation has stabilised in the last year. In general, Bosniaks on both sides of the river exercise freedom of movement on their "side", although in the south this entails refraining from openly using Bosniak or Serbian language. Even as recently as February 2002, a Bosniak man was beaten to death by an Albanian after being heard speaking Serbian language on the street, and more recently a Bosniak was taken to the police station for questioning after he was heard speaking his own language in south Mitrovica. Cases of beatings of Bosniaks in the south have been reported, although with decreasing frequency. In the north, the Bosniak mahala inside the "Confidence Zone" continues to suffer spates of grenade attacks, although not all of them clearly targeting Bosniaks. One Bosniak family has been the subject of about 8 grenade attacks over the last year, allegedly by Serb youths. There are still a few reports of mixed marriage couples who are not able to live comfortably together on either side; while most mixed marriage couples have departed; recently UNHCR assisted a mixed couple who received threats, the Bosniak husband in the south and the Serb wife in the north.

Bosniak children in the south attend primary and secondary schools, sharing facilities with Albanian students although in separate Bosniak classrooms, while in the north, Bosniaks have access to the Serb educational structures. Access to health services appears to not pose a problem either in the north or the south.

Despite some gradual improvements of the security situation for Bosniaks in Mitrovica, their position between two polarised groups continues to place them in a vulnerable position. In the south, the use of language is still a large risk factor that can result in harassment, intimidation and even physical assault. In the north, the tense and unstable situation makes Bosniaks vulnerable when the political situation deteriorates. It is unlikely that any voluntary Bosniak return would be seen in the foreseeable future, and unplanned returnees would be put

in a precarious situation; indeed. It would be expected that Bosniaks from Mitrovica would not return there, unless they had immediate family in a stable situation there, but would go into secondary displacement in Bosnia, Montenegro or Serbia.

C. Gorani

The vast majority of Kosovo's Gorani population is concentrated in the isolated, southernmost municipality of Dragash (Gora). There are also small numbers of Gorani from Dragash, who resided habitually in Prizren and other municipalities, such as Gjilan/Gnjilane and Ferizaj/Urosevac municipalities in the pre-conflict period.[21]

PRIZREN REGION (Dragash)

The current Gorani population in **Dragash municipality** is estimated at 11,000, located in 18 villages and Dragash town. The Gorani represent about 30% of the total population of the municipality, the Albanians 70%. The Gorani tend to enjoy freedom of movement within Dragash and up to Prizren town, although some prefer to travel in groups for safety reasons. A few Gorani live in Prizren town, and enjoy good relations with other communities there. The Gorani from Dragash may exercise more caution when travelling to Prizren and other towns in Kosovo, as they tend not to speak Albanian. The use of the Gorani Slavic language can constitute a threat where one is unknown. Gorani travel to Serbia using their own collective transport. No reports of harassment have been reported in relation with these shuttles, many of which operate with Serbian license plates. The Gorani shuttles are used by all ethnicities, as they travel through some of the less tolerant municipalities.

Within Dragash, inter-ethnic relations with Albanians are slowly relaxing. At this time, Gorani do not face security threats. The last ethnically-motivated violence against Gorani was on 10 July 2001 when four Kosovo Albanians attempted to stab a Gorani male, at which time there were also frequent explosions in or near Gorani properties. Gorani now enjoy access to public services in Dragash and secondary care at the Prizren hospital. Leaders do not indicate any instances of discrimination in public services. Gorani children study either in a variant of Serbo-Croatian, or in Gorani depending on the parents' inclination towards Serbia or Bosnia as their possible future. The Gorani have refused to participate in the Kosovo educational system since higher education in Gorani/ Serbo-Croat is only available in Serbia proper, North Mitrovica or fYROM.

The most serious threat to the survival of the Gorani is unemployment. There seems to be no progress on job-creation or income-generation. Gorani, previously employed in the public sector or military/police structures, have lost their jobs. Many others, who had businesses in and outside of Dragash, have not been able to continue especially in Albanian-dominated areas. The economy of Dragash is virtually non-existent. Occupation of Gorani owned commercial properties remains a fundamental obstacle. According to the Norwegian Refugee Council, almost 100 Gorani business premises are occupied. The reluctance of Gorani to linguistically assimilate further consolidates their isolation, and affects their economic sustainability.

There is still an uncomfortable relationship between the Albanians and Gorani in Dragash, the Gorani being marginalised by the majority Albanian municipal government. Discrimination in employment, particularly in an environment of gross unemployment, remains a principal source of inter-ethnic tension. The social and political relations between the two groups may

[21] The Bosniak/Gorani populations in Mitrovica (Kodra Minatoreve and Bosniak Mahala) are discussed in the Bosniak section of this report.

become volatile, more so if the Albanians fear losing their majority and political domination due to an increase in the Gorani population. It is thus likely that large-scale return would further aggravate the economic situation and generate political tensions. Many returnees would be expected to depart Kosovo again in search of employment.

All areas previously inhabited by the Gorani in the Prizren region remain inhabited. There is some capacity to absorb returnees, however, many of the existing houses are dilapidated.

GJILAN / GNJILANE REGION

An estimated 25 Gorani families live in **Ferizaj/Urosevac**, out of 50 families who lived there in the pre-war period, while ten Gorani families remain in **Gjilan/Gnjilane** town. Gorani from Ferizaj/Urosevac and Gjilan/Gnjilane tend to travel only between home and Prizren/Dragash, using private vehicles only. Gorani in these municipalities do not generally exercise freedom of movement towards other areas of Kosovo.

Serbian is their only language of communication with the surrounding majority population. The Gorani in Ferizaj/Urosevac tend to face more restrictions to their daily movements than the Gorani in Gjilan/Gnjilane, where they generally are able to access services and Gorani businesses are even frequented by Albanians. This difference is similar to the one for Serbs in the two municipalities. The situation may vary even within one location: in Gjilan/Gnjilane some of the Gorani children attend Albanian schools and others go to Serb schools. In Ferizaj/Urosevac, since there are no Serbian schools many Gorani children have not attended school in three years, and the Gorani are able to confidently use the services of only one Albanian doctor who treats patients in Serbian.

Due to lack of integration of the Gorani in Ferizaj/Urosevac, as a consequence of linguistic barriers, restricted freedom of movement and difficult access to basic services, it is unlikely that IDPs from there could return home. Gorani originating from these two municipalities, especially from Urosevac/Ferizaj, if returned, would go to the Gora region into secondary displacement.

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