National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Kosovo*

Amir Haxhikadrija

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.
EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
Directorate C — Social Affairs
Unit C.2 — Modernisation of social protection systems
Contact: Giulia Pagliani
E-mail: Giulia.PAGLIANI@ec.europa.eu

European Commission
B-1049 Brussels
European Social Policy Network (ESPN)

ESPN Thematic Report on National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Kosovo

2019

Amir Haxhikadrija
The European Social Policy Network (ESPN) was established in July 2014 on the initiative of the European Commission to provide high-quality and timely independent information, advice, analysis and expertise on social policy issues in the European Union and neighbouring countries.

The ESPN brings together into a single network the work that used to be carried out by the European Network of Independent Experts on Social Inclusion, the Network for the Analytical Support on the Socio-Economic Impact of Social Protection Reforms (ASISP) and the MISSOC (Mutual Information Systems on Social Protection) secretariat.

The ESPN is managed by the Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research (LISER) and APPLICA, together with the European Social Observatory (OSE).

For more information on the ESPN, see: [http:ec.europa.eusocialmain.jsp?catId=1135&langId=en](http:ec.europa.eusocialmain.jsp?catId=1135&langId=en)
Contents

SUMMARY ................................................................. 4

1 THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION .......... 5

2 RELEVANT STRATEGIES AND POLICIES TACKLING HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION .............................................................. 8

   2.1 Social Housing .......................................................... 8
   2.2 Repatriated persons ...................................................... 10
   2.3 Returnees and displaced persons ..................................... 11
   2.4 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Community ............................ 12
   2.5 Victims of domestic violence ......................................... 13

3 ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT PATTERNS OF SERVICE PROVISION AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING KOSOVO’S RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS AND HOUSING EXCLUSION 13

   3.1 Key weaknesses in provision of housing assistance and key priorities for improvement ................................. 18

REFERENCES ........................................................................ 20

ANNEX .................................................................................. 21

   Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Kosovo .......................... 21
   Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless in Kosovo ...................... 22
Summary

The issue of homelessness in Kosovo is neither clearly defined nor fully measured and addressed, and the country does not have a national strategy on homelessness. Instead, there are several national strategies addressing housing needs as part of broader social inclusion measures for vulnerable populations. The responsibility for addressing housing needs and homelessness in Kosovo is thus split between different ministries and agencies at the central and local levels, each targeting wide-ranging needs of different vulnerable populations. Kosovo has a well-established institutional and policy framework to provide housing assistance for vulnerable groups; however, there is a gap between well-designed laws and policies and their effective implementation. In addition, people living in in-work poverty, persons with disabilities, and women and children facing domestic violence remain marginalised and invisible in the housing policy.

Housing assistance is currently provided as part of a broader policy approach that aims at improving the situation of different vulnerable groups, namely households receiving social assistance (including Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians), displaced persons, returnees and repatriated persons, and women who are victims of domestic violence (limited to provision of temporary shelter). Interventions, therefore, are fragmented and do not address the housing needs of all residents. The adoption of the Law on Financing Specific Housing Programmes in 2010 was an important step forward in enabling the government to fulfil its obligations to provide adequate housing for its citizens. However, only 51 residential buildings have been built across Kosovo to date, with a total of 1,178 social housing units – a number far below the needs of the population for adequate housing.

Data on housing needs are incomplete. While data on voluntary returnees, repatriated persons and victims of domestic violence in Kosovo are mostly accurate and available, data on social housing needs are largely absent. Municipalities are required to design a three-year housing programme based on a needs assessment; however, to date, only one municipality (Peja) has conducted a thorough assessment of housing needs. Meanwhile, 21 other municipalities that have also completed their three-year housing programmes have only kept track of housing requests received from individuals, instead of comprehensively evaluating municipality-wide housing needs. The remaining 16 municipalities have not yet prepared their three-year social housing programmes.

The recent armed conflict in Kosovo had a direct impact on the housing situation. The destruction of 120,000 houses, the forced displacement of the population, difficulties in property restitution afterwards, and the destruction, loss or removal of property registration from Kosovo had a direct negative impact on the housing situation.

Most housing support services in Kosovo are provided through an integrated approach. The Reintegration Fund for Repatriated Persons and projects for returnees offer comprehensive assistance, from temporary and long-term housing, to employment, income-generating activities, vocational training and linguistic training for children. These interventions follow the ‘do no harm’ approach, where the assistance to returnees is matched with similar assistance to host communities in need of support.

Housing interventions are designed to provide permanent accommodation solutions; they are largely funded by donors and implemented by local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Most returnees and repatriated persons who require housing assistance are provided with permanent accommodation solutions through reconstruction, renovation and furnishing of existing houses. The support of voluntary, charitable and faith-based organisations in providing housing assistance in Kosovo is significant, with funds coming mainly from donors and the Diaspora. Substantial funds are allocated by the European Union for the implementation of projects targeting displaced persons and returnees.
1 The nature and extent of homelessness and housing exclusion

There is no official definition of ‘homelessness’ in the country and no system in place to collect data systematically. Even though the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) included the definition of homelessness in the dwelling questionnaire of the 2011 Census, it was unable to collect representative data (Kastrati, 2019). The absence of data and assessments, coupled with problems of definition, has made it difficult to understand the magnitude of the problem in Kosovo, and has prevented the design of adequate national strategies and interventions. KAS plans to collect data on homelessness in the upcoming 2021 Census. It will follow the Eurostat guidelines and will collect data on primary and secondary homeless persons and on persons living in non-conventional shelters, disaggregated by sex, age and region.

Homelessness in Kosovo is currently addressed as part of the effort to improve the social status of certain vulnerable groups. The support targets families receiving social assistance, displaced persons, returnees and repatriated persons. Three different categories of returnees receive housing assistance in Kosovo: 1) refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who fled their homes during the conflict of 1999 and who intend to return voluntarily (mostly Kosovo Serbs and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities who live in settlements in Serbia, other neighbouring countries or within Kosovo); 2) refugees who left Kosovo during 1999 and settled in EU countries and whose temporary permits have expired (mainly the RAE community); and 3) Kosovo nationals who migrated irregularly to other countries, many of them recently (2015-2016) and are repatriated through fast procedures (mostly Kosovo Albanians and the RAE community). The first group is referred to in policy documents as ‘returnees’, while groups 2 and 3 are referred to as ‘repatriated persons’. A recent study (Mollers et al., 2017) highlighted the economic vulnerability of recently repatriated persons – their migration was costly and left many of them in debt and with problems covering even basic needs, including housing.

The housing conditions of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community remain particularly inadequate. There are still approximately 100 informal settlements, inadequate access to water, electricity, waste collection, public transport and roads in Kosovo (HRC, 2016). The Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in the Kosovo Society 2017-2021 has assessed the number of people experiencing housing vulnerability at around 6,000 persons (OGG, 2017).

Women and children facing domestic violence are also extremely vulnerable to homelessness and housing exclusion (HHE). The cumulative impact of lack of access to property rights, low income, high unemployment and social pressure, makes women and children facing domestic violence extremely vulnerable to HHE. Data from Kosovo Police on reported cases speak of approximately 1,000 victims of domestic violence who are assisted by Kosovo institutions yearly. In more than 80% of cases, victims are women, followed by children and elderly men (OSCE, 2019). Between January and November 2018, over 400 women with children found refuge in one of the seven operational shelters for victims of domestic violence in Kosovo (ibid.).

Most cases of homelessness in Kosovo hence fit into two ETHOS Light categories (see Table A1 in Annex), namely: a) category 3 (‘houselessness’) – many IDPs, refugees and victims of domestic violence live temporarily in institutions or shelters; and b) category 5 (‘living in inadequate housing’) – many potential beneficiaries of social housing programmes in Kosovo live in unfit housing or in extreme overcrowding. In addition, a

---

1 Dwelling questionnaires sought to collect information on residents’ ‘living in inadequate housing’, ‘sleeping rough on the streets’ and residents ‘living in institutions or shelters’.

2 In line with current legislation, most social housing programmes also target war veterans, war invalids and families of war martyrs; however, their inclusion among beneficiaries is a subject of debate and disagreement, hence it is not analysed in this report.

3 Although women are not legally excluded from land ownership, the predominance of informal land transfers and lack of a formal inheritance procedure in Kosovo allow women to be unfairly excluded from property ownership.
modest number of people experience ‘rooflessness’ (sleeping rough on the streets – category 1) in Kosovo. They are mainly seen in larger urban areas, and the problem seems to be confined to individuals with mental illness and street beggars, who are predominantly Roma from Albania or North Macedonia.

Many individuals facing homelessness and housing exclusion in Kosovo are in such a situation, due to the recent Kosovo armed conflict. The recent conflict had a direct negative impact on housing issues, namely through: the destruction of 120,000 houses or 25% of the housing stock (HRC, 2016); forced displacement of the population and difficulties in property restitution afterwards; and the destruction, loss or removal of property registration (including cadastres), which aggravated the prospects of return for IDPs and refugees. The post-conflict period was marked by the proliferation of illegal buildings and ongoing ethnic tensions that affected the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees. More than 350,000 buildings in Kosovo, mostly in urban areas, have been recorded in the national registry of unpermitted constructions (HRC, 2016) – some of them may not meet the criteria for legalisation.

Data on people who require housing assistance in Kosovo are incomplete (see Table A2 in Annex for the latest available data). According to the Law on Financing Specific Housing Programmes (Law No. 03/L-164), municipalities are required to conduct housing needs assessments and prepare three-year social housing programmes. To date, only 22 out of 38 municipalities in Kosovo have prepared these programmes, and only 11 programmes are still effective, since the three-year validity period for the remaining municipalities has passed (MESP, 2019). Table 1 shows the number of households requiring housing assistance in Kosovo, based on the available data from these 22 municipalities.

Table 1: Number of households requesting housing assistance in Kosovo, by category of applicant, 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of applicants</th>
<th>Number of requests*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Families receiving social assistance</td>
<td>4,264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian community</td>
<td>436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families of war martyrs, war veterans and war invalids</td>
<td>4,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returnees (refugees and IDPs)</td>
<td>1,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repatriated persons</td>
<td>2,054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>12,210</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Municipalities only keep track of housing requests received from individuals, rather than proactively and comprehensively evaluating the municipality-wide housing needs. This approach excludes all those who do not directly apply to the municipality for housing assistance and thus does not provide an accurate picture of the social housing needs for the municipality. To date, only one municipality (Peja) has conducted a thorough needs assessment of housing needs in the municipality (OSCE, 2016).

Source: MESP (2019) based on the three-year housing programmes of 22 municipalities (Ferizaj, Gračanica, Hani i Elezit, Kamenicë, Klinë, Obiliq, Podujevë, Rahovec, Shtërpce, Vushtri, Degan, Fushë Kosovë, Drenas, Istog, Kaçanik, Lipjan, Malishevë, Mitrovicë, Pejë, Prizren, Gjakovë and Shtimje). Author’s own compilation.

As data from the remaining 16 municipalities are absent, it is impossible to estimate the total number of households in need of housing assistance in Kosovo. More accurate data are expected to become available during 2019, as the European Commission (EC) has assisted the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) to develop a national database on social housing. The database will include precise information on current beneficiaries/tenants and the total number of households in need of social housing.

The number of refugees and IDPs who need support with housing in Kosovo has decreased considerably from 2009 to 2018. There are still nearly 90,000 individuals displaced by the conflict who need displacement-related assistance (UNHCR, 2019). Of this number, 16,486 are IDPs in Kosovo and the remaining are refugees in Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia. Among the refugees, 1,268 families or 4,184 individuals are interested in returning to Kosovo, and the majority of them (63%) need assistance with house reconstruction, while 12% need support with resolution of property issues (ibid.). Their current living conditions are mostly poor, especially in Montenegro (90% rate it as
very poor) and in North Macedonia (37% of refugees reported living in very poor conditions). More worryingly, 85% of those refugees in Montenegro who are willing to return to Kosovo and 70% of those in North Macedonia do not own any registered property in Kosovo. The majority of them (93%) belong to the RAE community. Data show that the number of refugees and IDPs who need assistance in returning to Kosovo decreased considerably between 2009 and 2018. In 2009, 2,052 households or 10,074 individuals required assistance with return, while this number nearly halved to 1,268 households or 4,184 individuals in 2018 (ibid.). This is primarily due to the increase in the number of refugees who prefer to rebuild their lives in the place of displacement. In the same way, over 80% of IDPs in Kosovo prefer to integrate in their place of displacement (UNHCR, 2018). A proportion of them (156 households) currently reside in inadequate conditions, namely makeshift shelters, informal settlements or collective centres. Particularly challenging housing conditions are observed for 54 dwellings that are not connected to the sewerage system (17% of Albanian IDPs, 34% of RAE IDPs and 27% of Serb IDPs in collective centres) or that lack access to running water (12% of RAE IDPs and 27% of Serb IDPs in collective centres) (UNHCR, 2018).

The number of repatriated persons who request and receive housing support also decreased between 2011 and 2018 (see Table 2). During the period 2011-2018, around 1,227 repatriated persons (mostly from the EU) received assistance with temporary accommodation (seven days in temporary shelter), 5,295 with apartment rent (housing benefit limited to 12 months); 399 received assistance with building a new house and 220 with renovation of an existing house (DRRP, 2019). The number of repatriated persons who received assistance with housing during this period decreased in part because the government stopped building new houses (unless really needed) for repatriated persons, and limited its assistance to refurbishment and small renovations of existing houses, in order to avoid discrimination against the host population (Ternava, 2019).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistance upon arrival</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary shelter in an accommodation centre (7 days) and provision of meals</td>
<td>persons</td>
<td>1,227</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>321</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency assistance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment renting up to 12 months</td>
<td>persons</td>
<td>5,295</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>723</td>
<td>969</td>
<td>842</td>
<td>639</td>
<td>737</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>families</td>
<td>1,667</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>277</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable reintegration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building/rebuilding of the house</td>
<td>persons</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>families</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House renovation and refurbishing</td>
<td>persons</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>families</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DRRP (2019), author’s own compilation.
2 Relevant strategies and policies tackling homelessness and housing exclusion

Kosovo does not have a designated homelessness strategy. Instead, there are several national strategies addressing the housing needs of targeted populations, in conjunction with other social inclusion measures, such as the National Strategy for Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo 2018-2022, the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo 2017-2021, the National Strategy for Communities and Returnees 2014-2018 and the National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence 2016-2020. In addition, municipalities develop their own strategic documents related to housing, i.e. the three-year municipal housing programmes that address the social housing needs of vulnerable populations or municipal returns strategies that set objectives and activities for the return and reintegration of displaced persons.

The responsibility for addressing housing issues and homelessness in Kosovo is thus split between different ministries and agencies at the central and local level. Each of them targets the wide-ranging needs of different vulnerable populations. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), through its Department for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons (DRRP), is in charge of the reintegration of repatriated persons, and the assistance they are offered includes the provision of temporary accommodation (up to 12 months), reconstruction and rebuilding houses, and refurbishment of existing houses. The Ministry for Communities and Return (MCR) coordinates assistance to refugees and IDPs who wish to return to their place of origin. The MRC works in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and local NGOs to ensure the sustainable return of refugees, through the provision of housing, legal assistance and income-generating activities. The MESP is responsible for coordination of social housing programmes that are provided to vulnerable groups, such as the RAE community and other families receiving social assistance in Kosovo. Finally, the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) is in charge of providing shelter for women and children who are victims of domestic violence. All these efforts are coordinated with municipalities, which ultimately play the key role in the implementation of activities.

Despite efforts, some population groups remain marginalised and invisible in housing policy and legislation. Although many vulnerable groups are currently targeted by housing assistance, there seems to be a lack of concern for certain groups, such as people living in in-work poverty, persons with disabilities, and women and children facing domestic violence (especially in terms of long-term housing solutions). The new law on social housing tries to correct some of the shortcomings, by introducing specific measures or quotas for these categories.

The remainder of this section evaluates the legislation and strategies related to: social housing; repatriation and return; the RAE community living in Kosovo (including informal settlements); and victims of domestic violence. This addresses the housing needs of different vulnerable groups in Kosovo.

2.1 Social housing

The legal framework in Kosovo reaffirms the obligations of government institutions to realise the right to adequate housing. The Law on Financing Specific Housing Programmes (Law No. 03/L-164) was adopted in 2010 to provide access to adequate housing for those in need and who are unable to afford it. According to the legislation, the provision of social housing is a municipality-level responsibility, while the MESP is responsible for supervising and monitoring implementation of the law and national strategies. The MLSW and the MRC also provide funding for social housing projects, while considerable financial support is provided by the donor community in Kosovo, including substantial funds from the EC.
There is a lack of progress with regard to the duties of municipalities and the MESP in carrying out housing needs assessments and developing housing strategies. Municipalities are required to design a three-year housing programme based on housing needs and the identification of available land for construction, and subsequently to request a financial contribution from the central government or donor community to implement it. The law also requires the MESP to draft a three-year Kosovo-wide strategy (including budget allocation) based on the information provided by municipalities, and to establish a Kosovo-wide database related to housing needs. However, until recently only 22 out of the 38 municipalities had conducted the mandatory needs assessment and drafted a three-year housing programme (MESP, 2019). Only one municipality has drafted a three-year municipal programme on housing in cooperation with representatives of the minority communities through direct dialogue. The lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data at the municipal level hence prevents local- and central-level institutions from establishing a clear and accurate picture of the scale of social housing needs. It also prevents the MESP from fulfilling its obligations to draft a three-year national strategy and establish a Kosovo-wide database. Furthermore, many municipalities do not have a designated housing officer – instead, the housing portfolio is covered by municipal officers from other municipal directorates with no adequate training on housing issues. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo, in its 2013 report, concluded that the failure of institutions to adequately determine and track social housing needs constitutes a violation of their obligations in relation to the right to adequate housing (OSCE, 2013).

The implementation of existing municipal three-year programmes is very low, as municipalities lack funding for social housing. In the absence of a national strategy, social housing interventions are fragmented through short-term and ad-hoc projects implemented by different municipalities and supported by different donors. Overall, the total number of social housing units in Kosovo remains very limited. According to incomplete records from the MESP, 51 residential buildings were built across Kosovo between 2003 and 2018, with a total of 1,178 social housing units (MESP, 2019). This number does not include social housing units funded by the Government of Serbia in predominantly Serb municipalities of Kosovo. It should be noted that certain social housing units are not of the required standard and are not maintained properly; for instance, housing units for the RAE community in Plimetina are criticised by many stakeholders for poor build quality and poor maintenance. To address shortages of social housing units in Kosovo, the MESP is planning to pilot the construction of 200 new social housing units in two municipalities (not yet selected), and then extend the project to other municipalities if the model proves successful. The MESP is negotiating with the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) and the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) to get a soft loan for the finalisation of the two pilot projects.

The European Commission funded a social housing project in the municipality of Shtërpe. The project cost nearly €3.6 million and benefited up to 119 families who were residents of five collective centres in Shtërpe. In addition, the European Commission, through the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) funded the development of a new online database system to improve social housing data collection and transparency. Other social housing units were funded by: Swiss Development and Cooperation (which supported projects in Deçan and Kaçanik), the MESP, MLSW, MRC and municipalities’ own sources.

A new (draft) law on social housing aims at addressing these shortcomings. According to the new draft law, families and individuals who do not own a housing unit, who were left without housing as a result of the recent armed conflict or whose residential buildings do not meet habitability standards will have the right to social housing. The law addresses specifically the needs of low- and middle-income families, by earmarking 30% of social housing for low-income families and 20% for middle-income families. The remaining 50% of the dwellings will be distributed among families that are part of social assistance schemes. Although the draft law passed all the formal procedures for adoption in parliament in 2018, the Ministry of Finance (MF) returned it for reassessment, due to
budgetary implications. A new working group consisting of 12 members from various ministries was established by the MESP in 2019, and the group is now reviewing and adjusting the law in close consultation with the MF, to avoid another refusal due to budgetary issues. The plan is to finalise all formal procedures and present the revised law to the Kosovo Parliament in September 2019. In addition, the MESP is working with the MF to create a separate budget line/code for social housing projects in MESP and municipal budgets. The approval of a designated budget line for social housing will enable adequate planning and implementation of social housing programmes by central and local authorities.

2.2 Repatriated persons

Substantial progress has been achieved since 2014 in both developing and implementing the legal and policy framework for the reintegration of repatriated persons in Kosovo. The OSCE reviews robustly the progress made by Kosovo institutions in the development and implementation of the legal and policy framework for the reintegration of repatriated persons, and has issued thus far four reports (2010, 2012, 2014 and 2016). While early reports pointed to worrying shortcomings in the implementation of the reintegration process, notable progress has been made by Kosovo institutions since 2014, through inter alia the adoption of a comprehensive regulatory and policy framework, as well as the allocation of funds to assist the reintegration of repatriated persons. Competences of various stakeholders have been set out, a centralised database established, and the scope of assistance for repatriated persons expanded to focus predominantly on long-term support, with the aim of making the return more sustainable.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and its Action Plan constitutes the main strategic document, and outlines policies for the reintegration of repatriated persons. The current National Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2022 guides the work of the reintegration process by applying a needs-based integrated approach and by ensuring a sustainable socio-economic reintegration, particularly for vulnerable groups. The strategy also aims at strengthening the capacities of institutions providing reintegration assistance, to improve their coordination and advance monitoring and evaluation. Non-governmental organisations will participate in monitoring and evaluating the strategy at joint roundtables to be organised by the DRRP, while external monitoring and evaluation will take place in the third (2020) and final years of the strategy’s implementation (2022).

Interventions are designed based on the information and knowledge of the target groups’ needs; however, more analysis of trends and patterns is needed. The introduction of the Case Management System (CMS) addressed one of the major shortcomings identified by most stakeholders, i.e. the absence of reliable and centralised data. The CMS fully manages the services and benefits of repatriated persons – from the moment of entry into Kosovo until the case closure – according to the procedures established by the legislation in force. While data are now largely available and accurate, there is little or no analysis of these data in terms of trends and patterns of interventions and the evaluation of the appropriateness of the interventions designed. More could be done in terms of CMS data usage and analysis (OSCE, 2016).

Assistance to repatriated persons through the Reintegration Fund seems to be adequate. In September 2010, the Government of Kosovo (GoK) established the Reintegration Fund to support the sustainable reintegration of repatriated citizens of Kosovo, and has allocated on average around €2.5 million per year. According to the MIA, government funding increased from €2.3 million in 2014 to €2.7 million in 2017. In addition, sizeable financial support is provided by international organisations that are active in the field of sustainable reintegration in Kosovo, namely the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Caritas and the OSCE. A considerable proportion of funds from the reintegration budget are used to cover rent, reconstruction and the renovation or furnishing of houses for repatriated persons (Ternava, 2019).
Outreach of assistance measures for reintegration should be improved. A recent survey of repatriated persons in Kosovo (Mollers et al., 2017) revealed that less than one third of respondents were aware of the reintegration measures. In addition, the Office of Good Governance (OGG) of the prime minister reported low levels of applications for reintegration packages among the RAE community, indicating a limited awareness of the existence of these packages among these populations, or their inability to apply given the lack of documentation.

Statistical information from the DRRP Case Management System displays some trends concerning the provision of support to different communities. Data available show that the Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities predominantly received assistance with accommodation (both temporary and permanent), language courses and catch-up classes to assist repatriated persons in catching up with their fellow pupils in different school subjects. By contrast, various forms of employment assistance were mainly provided to Kosovo Albanians (OSCE, 2016).

2.3 Returnees and displaced persons


The National Strategy for Communities and Returnees 2014-2018 focused on sustainable return, which includes the provision of adequate housing. The strategy aimed to achieve sustainable return, reintegration of returnees and displaced persons and stabilisation of communities. However, the strategy noted that the MCR budget allocated by the GoK for the period 2009-2013 decreased from €8.7 million in 2009 to €7.2 million in 2013. Municipal offices for communities and returns (MOCR) were active in providing enhanced assistance to returnees in certain areas; however, their actions tended to be focused more on donor-funded return programmes. Despite considerable progress, there is still a need for better cooperation between central and local-level administrations, improved action from relevant Kosovo ministries, and for municipalities to prioritise land allocation and provision of social housing for returnees. Social housing programmes should be better utilised to meet the needs of returnees and displaced persons through better planning, information campaigns and allocation of adequate funds.

Substantial funds were allocated by the EU for the implementation of returns projects. EU-funded projects focused on the closure of displaced-person camps in northern Kosovo, the return and reintegration of displaced persons and community stabilisation. The EU has been consistent with funding for returnees since 2008, namely through the EU Return and Reintegration in Kosovo (RRK) project, which consisted of five different phases (RRK I under IPA 2007, RRK II under IPA 2008, RRK III under IPA 2010 and RRK IV under IPA 2012), the EU-Mitrovica Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Support Initiative (EU-MRSI) (IPA 2007 and IPA 2013) and the Resettlement Support Programme for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Returnees from North Macedonia and Montenegro (IPA 2013), each lasting four years. The current RRK Phase V project (IPA 2016) provides €8 million in assistance, and focuses on sustainable return and reintegration of up to 260 displaced families (with up to 40% of the assistance addressing the return of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian displaced families) by 2021. This activity will include the building and/or repair of returnees’ houses in the communities of return, as well as the construction and rehabilitation of community infrastructure, in order to ensure that all returnees have access to basic infrastructure, including water, electricity and sewerage.

Establishing property rights remains a challenge for many displaced persons. The main issues affecting property rights include: the pending resolution of conflict-related property claims, accumulated immovable property tax, expropriation, failure to recognise the rights of those who lived in informal settlements prior to their displacement, non-
allocation of land for displaced persons who did not enjoy ownership or any other legal tenancy before displacement, and access to social housing (OSCE, 2016). Property issues impede progress on the sustainable return of displaced persons.

**Many displaced Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians are without property in Kosovo.** The RAE community that lived in informal settlements prior to its displacement faces problems in presenting any occupancy rights when planning to return to Kosovo. There has been little progress in legalisation of these settlements by the GoK, hence all displaced persons wanting to return to these settlements face issues of property title registration, building permits, legalisation of construction, etc.

**Sustainable return is further challenged by security concerns and opposition from the receiving community.** The recurrent looting of unoccupied returnee properties, damage of religious or cultural sites and sporadic low-level harassment of returnees has had a very negative impact on perceptions of security among returnee communities and potential returnees. This has stalled their return, especially in municipalities where there is active opposition from the receiving community (OSCE, 2016).

### 2.4 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community

**The Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo 2017-2021 places specific emphasis on housing issues.** Housing and access to basic services is one of the four main objectives of the strategy, which aims at reducing differences in housing and public utilities (water, electrical power, gas) between members of these communities and the rest of the population of Kosovo. The strategy envisages: i) the inclusion of members of the Roma and Ashkali communities in the database for financing of special housing programmes; ii) the setting of priorities for families in need for inclusion in the social housing programme; iii) the organisation of an awareness-raising campaign for inclusion of the RAE community in housing initiatives; iv) support for the Roma and Ashkali communities to get adequate property paperwork; v) design priority projects for renovation and reconstruction of community houses and building of houses on the parcels owned by community members; and vi) implementation of programmes to deal with informal settlements.

**The Action Plan is realistic and foresees a gradual improvement of housing issues among the RAE community until 2021.** The plan envisages the building of 100 houses in parcels owned by community members; the renovation of 150 houses whose owners are community members; ensuring that 80 social housing units are allocated to members of RAE communities who are in need; and the implementation of seven programmes by municipalities or the central government for dealing with informal settlements where RAE community members dwell. Nearly €3 million is budgeted for these interventions, and it is anticipated that the GoK and the municipalities will provide 35% of the funding, while the remaining 65% will be mobilised through the donor community.

**The EU has worked closely with the GoK in closing down hazardous RAE settlements and removing the RAE community to safer places.** The GoK, supported by the EU, developed special programmes targeting the housing needs of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community. As a result, the collective shelters (camps) of Çesmin Llugë, Osterode, and the camp in Leposaviq were closed down by simultaneously addressing the housing needs of families and persons internally displaced in these camps. Camps were closed with the financial support of the European Union through the EU-Mitrovica Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian Support Initiative Project (EU-MRSI).

**The strategy is still a long way from achieving its goals.** An absence of political engagement, insufficient financial and human resources for monitoring progress and lack of coordination of institutions at the central and local level, including inadequate use of expertise of civil society organisations working with the RAE community in Kosovo, are the main reasons for limited implementation of the strategy. The OGG within the Office of the Prime Minister, as the responsible institution for implementing and monitoring the strategy,
National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Kosovo

2.5 Victims of domestic violence

The National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence and Action Plan 2016-2020 sets four strategic objectives to be met by 2020. The four objectives focus on: i) prevention and awareness raising; ii) protection and coordination; iii) legislation, investigation and judicial proceeding; and iv) rehabilitation and reintegration. According to the Strategy’s Action Plan 2016-2020, the majority of planned activities involving shelters were incorporated under the fourth pillar on rehabilitation and reintegration, and include the provision of long-term shelters for victims through inter-municipal agreements; the establishment of new shelters that address the needs of minority communities; the opening of a shelter for male victims of domestic violence; the training of shelter personnel in order to provide quality services to all categories of victims of domestic violence (including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals, and members of non-majority communities) and ensuring support of shelters by local institutions on a regular basis.

The current housing assistance for victims of domestic violence is inadequate. This is due to financially unsustainable shelters and lack of residences to accommodate victims after the sheltering. There is an absence of social housing that can be used for a period of time by domestic violence victims after they leave shelters and before they become fully financially independent. As was shown in Table 1 earlier, municipalities have not collected data on victims of domestic violence and have not included victims of domestic violence among potential beneficiaries of their planned social housing programmes (municipal three-year housing programmes).

3 Analysis of the current patterns of service provision and challenges in implementing Kosovo’s responses to homelessness and housing exclusion

Most housing support services in Kosovo are part of an ‘active inclusion approach’. The approach combines provision of accommodation with employment assistance, income-generating activities and access to services such as education, health and social services. The Reintegration Fund for Repatriated Persons offers comprehensive support for returned migrants, through assistance with temporary and long-term housing, employment, establishment of small businesses, vocational training and linguistic training for children. Similarly, key services for displaced persons and returnees include housing reconstruction (full reconstruction or minor repairs), support with construction materials and basic furniture, income-generating activities and employment. In addition, returnees and host communities are assisted with improvement of public services, namely education, health and infrastructure. Finally, the vulnerable RAE community in Kosovo is also assisted through an integrated approach, where housing support is provided alongside assistance with education, employment, social welfare and health.

Interventions assisting the reintegration of repatriated persons and returnees follow the ‘do no harm’ approach. There is growing concern among the local population that the support is limited to repatriated persons and returnees, thus excluding local residents who require similar support. The concern has been acknowledged by the main stakeholders (DRRP, MCR) and concrete measures have been undertaken to prevent the harmful effects that return and reintegration interventions may have on host communities. When the DRRP assists returnees with housing, vocational education and training or business support schemes, international organisations and the Employment Agency of Kosovo simultaneously provide similar assistance to people most in need from the host community. To avoid discrimination against host communities, DRRP has now limited the
building of new houses for returnees to extremely vulnerable cases, and has shifted its assistance to refurbishment and minor renovation of existing houses (Ternava, 2019).

**Most services are designed to provide permanent accommodation solutions.** The Law on Financing Specific Housing Programmes (Law No. 03/L-164) requires municipalities to provide adequate and sustainable housing services for families on low income, by creating three rental schemes: i) houses newly built by municipalities, central authorities or donors; ii) existing dwellings rented to families benefiting from a housing bonus; iii) rental apartments owned by municipalities for specific housing programmes. In addition, most returnees and repatriated persons who require housing assistance are provided with permanent accommodation solutions as one of the key preconditions for their sustainable reintegration. Returnees are assisted with renovation or rebuilding of their houses and with property restitution. Similarly, repatriated persons receive assistance with reconstruction, renovation and furnishing of existing houses (much less with building of new houses) and with apartment renting for up to 12 months. Municipalities are then responsible for finding sustainable housing solutions for repatriated persons through their three-year social housing programmes when the housing support through rent schemes offered by the MIA/DRRP ends. Repatriated persons are largely satisfied with housing assistance provided by the Reintegration Fund. Interviews with repatriated persons who had benefited from housing assistance revealed that the vast majority (76.9%) were satisfied with the assistance with apartment rent and 88.9% of beneficiaries were happy with the assistance in the form of house renovation and house refurbishment (Mollers et al., 2017).

**Provision of temporary accommodation is limited to shelters for victims of domestic violence and to the Accommodation Centre for repatriated persons.** Survivors of domestic violence and their children (including male children up to the age of 12 years) can stay for up to six months in a shelter; though exceptions can be made, enabling a longer stay. Temporary shelter (up to seven days) in the Accommodation Centre, along with the provision of meals, is also provided to certain categories of repatriated persons until a more durable solution can be found for them.

**Kosovo has a well-established institutional framework to facilitate the provision of housing assistance to vulnerable groups.** The responsibility for addressing housing issues and homelessness in Kosovo is split between different ministries and agencies at the central and local levels. At the central level, the MIA, through its DRRP, is the institution responsible for handling repatriation cases throughout the process of readmission and reintegration. DRRP responsibilities are carried out by the department itself, by its staff at Pristina International Airport, at the Accommodation Centre and by regional coordinators. In addition, municipal coordinators for returnees are pivotal in coordinating, delivering and monitoring the assistance to returnees.

**The Ministry for Communities and Return is in charge of developing policies and implementing legislation for the promotion and protection of the rights of communities and their members, including the right to return.** The MCR develops and manages programmes and mechanisms to facilitate integration on equal terms of all communities and their members who currently reside in Kosovo, as well as to ensure the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons. The Central Commission for Reintegration (CCR) and the Commission for Appeals (CA) decide on housing requests. The CCR consists of representatives of the MIA, MLSW, MESP, Ministry of Health (MH), Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development, and is chaired by a DRRP representative. It reviews and decides on requests for financing of business plans, reconstruction of houses, renovation of houses, and assistance and support to vulnerable persons.
The OGG within the Office of the Prime Minister coordinates the implementation of the Roma and Ashkali Strategy. Assistance to the RAE community is diverse and therefore requires coordination of central and local-level institutions and between different sectors. Hence, the OGG is in charge of coordinating the implementation of the strategy through four working groups: 1) Working Group on Education; 2) Working Group on Employment and Social Welfare; 3) Working Group on Health; and 4) Working Group on Housing. The task of the groups is to monitor the implementation of activities in their respective sector, to issue recommendations for improvement and to refer relevant information to the OGG. Each working group is chaired by the secretary general of the respective ministry (MEST, MLSW, MH and MESP, respectively) and comprises ministry officials, agency officers, experts and representatives of civil society organisations.

The MLSW, through its Department of Social Welfare, is responsible for licensing NGOs that provide social and family services. The MLSW conducts inspections of service providers and approves the establishment of residential care facilities. The process of licensing NGOs is carried out by the General Social and Family Services Council, which consists of 21 social service professionals from municipalities, NGOs, academic groups and others nominated by the MLSW. The council is responsible for licensing and registering social and family services practitioners, and for their continued professional development. It also addresses cases of misconduct of these professionals, and decides on their sanctioning.

The legal framework firmly establishes that the provision of social housing is a municipal-level responsibility, while the role of municipalities in supporting sustainable return and reintegration has been constantly expanded. At the municipal level, there are three bodies responsible for assisting repatriated persons: the MOCRs, the municipal commissions for reintegration, and centres for social work (CSWs). The performance of local-level institutions was enhanced through the adoption of Local Action Plans for Reintegration. In addition, municipal offices for employment and centres for social work are mandated to conduct thorough needs assessments of repatriated families, while the introduction of a Case Management System (CMS) and the strengthened role given to regional coordinators ensures a functioning flow of information between central and local-level institutions.

Concerns with procedures have been identified in municipalities that implement social housing projects. The OSCE monitored and assessed the progress and shortcomings of institutions in Kosovo regarding the provision of social housing. In its report (2013), it noted several shortcomings in municipalities that implemented social housing programmes, namely: i) lack of public notification of housing projects; ii) domination of municipal selection commissions by municipal assembly members; iii) absence of representatives of minorities on the commission and the inclusion of war veterans, without the inclusion of representatives of vulnerable groups whom the law requires to be prioritised for social housing. Furthermore, it stressed that the lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data on applicants and beneficiaries of social housing prevented proper monitoring of the selection procedure (OSCE, 2013). The new online database system that was developed by the MESP aims at providing transparency and accountability during the selection procedure, by establishing a points-based system that will automatically show households that are most in need and that meet most criteria for being allocated a social housing unit.

A combination of funding approaches is used by municipalities to implement housing projects. As described earlier, municipalities largely implement short-term and ad-hoc projects based on the availability of government or donor funds. However, alternative approaches have been identified and implemented by some municipalities. The Pristina municipality has adopted a public/private partnership approach to developing its housing projects. The residential blocks are constructed on municipal property by a private developer, after which a certain number of units are placed under municipal ownership for use as social housing, while the remaining units are sold by the developer. The Pristina municipality has completed two projects using this approach: one for allocation of
National strategies to fight homelessness and housing exclusion

Kosovo

apartments for rental use for martyr’s families, invalids and veterans of war; and the other for families receiving social assistance. Other municipalities have contributed funding from their own budgets for the construction of social housing units or have provided construction materials and direct funds to households to improve their housing situation. Peja municipality provided assistance for the most severe cases in need of housing assistance through mayoral subventions funded from the municipal budget, while Viti municipality received funds from the MLSW for this purpose. Most municipalities, however, do not have funds available for constructing social housing, and therefore rely on international donors (OSCE, 2013).

MOCRs are the key actors responsible for planning return and reintegration policies at the local level. MOCRs coordinate the return process and promote the creation of conditions for sustainable return and reintegration of displaced and repatriated persons in their municipality. MOCRs advise and support relevant municipal institutions and public service providers on implementation of GoK policies targeting ethnic minorities, including return and reintegration. They are responsible for: i) assessing the needs of returnees and repatriated persons; ii) conducting outreach visits; iii) facilitating access to public services; and iv) developing, implementing and monitoring projects and activities for the protection of the rights of communities, as well as of returnees and repatriated persons (OSCE, 2016). They are also responsible for providing returnees with information about their rights and available support structures, and for referring them to other competent offices within the municipal administration. MOCRs have adequate budgetary resources for basic salaries and operational equipment, but lack significant funds for activities and projects, making it difficult to implement their mandate fully and effectively. In addition, many municipalities lack strategies or action plans to guide their work on repatriated persons and returnees (ibid.).

Municipal Commissions for Reintegration are the decision-making bodies at the local level. They consist of representatives of various municipal departments – education, health, social welfare, labour and employment, public services, planning and urbanism, geodesy, cadastre and property – plus the officer for European Integration and the MOCR representative. The commissions decide on applications for emergency benefits, i.e. apartment rent (housing benefit), social assistance, winter assistance packages, medical treatment, and furniture packages. The decisions are taken within seven days from submission of the application and are communicated to the applicant. Within three days, the assistance is delivered, if the application has been approved. After providing housing support to repatriated persons through rent schemes offered by the MIA/DRRP, municipalities are responsible for finding sustainable housing solutions for repatriated persons through their three-year social housing programmes described earlier.

Municipal Action Committees (MACs) monitor implementation of the Roma and Ashkali Strategy and Action Plan at the local level. MACs consist of municipal directors of line departments, representatives of the community offices, municipal human rights officers, officers for gender equality, and representatives of local and international NGOs active in every municipality in the promotion of the interests of the Roma and Ashkali communities. The MAC is chaired by the municipality mayor (or deputy mayor) while a municipal coordinator of the MAC is in charge of coordinating day-to-day activities.

Centres for Social Work are the main institutions at the municipal level in charge of protection and provision of services for victims of domestic violence. CSWs coordinate activities with other actors in the process of supporting and empowering the victims/survivors of domestic violence. They provide services based on the victims’ needs assessment and are obliged to coordinate social services for the victims until their complete reintegration into society. CSWs appoint a case manager to each domestic violence victim; that person then supervises the case and assesses the social and economic condition of the victim. The case manager conducts home visits in order to assess the overall conditions of the family, shelter, etc.
International organisations play a key role in the development, implementation and monitoring of key housing and non-housing services for vulnerable groups. As part of its mandate to monitor, promote and protect human rights, the OSCE monitors and assesses the progress and shortcomings of institutions in Kosovo in addressing the needs of all vulnerable groups analysed in this report: namely, the provision of social housing, reintegration of repatriated persons and returnees, assistance to the RAE community and provision of support to victims of domestic violence. The UNHCR regularly monitors the safety of minority voluntary returnees and internally displaced populations across Kosovo. In close coordination with Kosovo institutions and international actors, UNHCR supports durable solutions for internally displaced persons, in particular those in temporary collective centres. The EU Office in Kosovo supports all vulnerable groups either through direct financing or through technical assistance for central and local administration.

The support of voluntary, charitable and faith-based organisations in providing housing assistance in Kosovo is significant, with funds coming mainly from donors and the Diaspora. The inability of the government and the donor community to meet the high demand for housing from socially deprived groups is partially eased by interventions from dozens of charitable organisations, which assist these households in building new houses or renovating existing ones (including refurbishment of the house). Most initiatives come from individuals or associations of Kosovo Diaspora, who collaborate with communities and municipalities in identifying households most in need of housing. The media also play a significant role in identifying and showcasing the poor housing conditions of vulnerable households. In most cases, the support is offered to individual households through the building of individual dwellings, and not through social housing buildings. The Kosovo Diaspora has also played a crucial role in rebuilding the houses destroyed in the conflict, while remittances still play an important role for many households in Kosovo to cover housing-related costs, including rent and utilities.

The role of local NGOs extends to provision of legal assistance for persons in need of social housing and provision of technical assistance for central and local government in Kosovo. The NGO Social Housing and Property Rights in Kosovo identifies individuals or families that are in need of social housing and helps them acquire social accommodation. The NGO Developing Together, on the other hand, has supported the MESP in developing a database on social housing and has assisted municipalities in developing their three-year housing programmes. Similarly, most services for repatriated persons are provided by local NGOs or business support organisations (BSOs) and are co-funded by international donors. While the DRRP and municipalities design and coordinate reintegration activities, the majority of services are outsourced to local NGOs and BSOs, which ultimately implement most of the interventions that benefit repatriated persons. In many cases, interventions for ethnic minority groups are delivered by minority NGOs, such as Nevo Koncepti, which provides assistance to repatriated persons from the RAE community.

NGOs and shelters for victims of domestic violence play a primary role in the process of victims’ rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Shelters constitute an important link in the institutional chain responsible for addressing the negative phenomenon of domestic violence, and are essential in the provision of shelter, rehabilitation and reintegration services to victims of domestic violence. They have to be licensed by the MLSW and should comply with the regulations, instructions and procedures regarding their activity, as defined by the ministry. Funding from the MLSW is supplemented by funding from municipalities and donors. Referral to shelters can be made by the police, other institutions or victims themselves (self-referral). There are seven licensed shelters for victims of domestic violence in Kosovo: Gjilan (1999), Pristina (2000), Peja (2001), Gjakova (2002) and Prizren (2002) and the most recent ones in Mitrovica South (2007) and Ferizaj (2014). The shelter in Novobërdë was built in 2018, but is still pending a licence from MLSW. On average, shelters can accommodate 15 people (including children), although many provide additional beds during emergency situations. The maximum duration of stay is six months; however, if the security assessment is not
satisfactory, and if the victim has no other place to go, they can be transferred to another shelter or remain at the same shelter beyond the six-month period, by previous agreement with the MLSW (OSCE, 2019).

**The lack of sustainable funding is the main challenge for the daily operations of shelters.** The Department of Social Welfare within the MLSW is responsible for ensuring the quality and efficiency of shelter services; however, it only funds half of the required budget. Shelters acquire the remaining funds either from municipalities or from international donors. Shelters are supported on a yearly basis by the MLSW. Due to an extended delay in releasing the funds, as well as to the late publication of the call for MLSW grants in 2018, there was at least a three-month gap during which the shelters did not receive any funds. As a consequence, between January and February 2018, many shelters that had neither savings nor municipal or international donor support were forced to ask residents to leave. Other shelters, however, managed to survive thanks to their savings, and continued to provide all services to the victims (OSCE, 2019).

**Setting up social housing units through public/private partnerships and applying the ‘do no harm’ approach for repatriated persons and returnees is a positive development.** While the two interventions may not qualify as ‘innovative’, they represent a positive step in the right direction in Kosovo. Public/private partnerships address the key shortcoming for municipalities: the financial constraint. They also provide a better integration of beneficiaries of social housing with the rest of the population, given that only some apartments are delivered to municipalities, while the remainder are put up for sale. In terms of the sustainable reintegration of repatriated persons and returnees, matching the support provided to repatriated persons or returnees with a similar assistance provided to receiving communities ensures better acceptance of returnees by the host community and prevents deepening of inequalities between returnees and host communities.

### 3.1 Key weaknesses in the provision of housing assistance and key priorities for improvement

**Overall, central and local institutions in Kosovo consistently fail to comply with legal requirements to assess the housing needs of vulnerable populations and to deliver adequate assistance to them.** Inability to identify municipal land for the construction of social housing units, coupled with limited and inconsistent financial resources, results in inadequate social housing supply that is unable to meet the real housing needs of vulnerable groups. Even when limited social housing units are available for distribution, the selection process is systematically marked by weak and non-transparent procedures, benefiting mostly powerful groups such as war veterans or war invalids, and discouraging people who are most at risk of housing exclusion from claiming their right to housing.

**The lack of accurate and reliable data on housing needs in each municipality is the most pressing challenge and needs improvement.** While data on returnees, repatriated persons and victims of domestic violence in Kosovo are mostly available, assessment of housing needs at a municipal level is largely absent. To date, only one municipality (Peja) has conducted a thorough assessment of housing needs. Another 21 municipalities that prepared three-year housing programmes only kept track of housing requests received from individuals, instead of proactively and comprehensively evaluating the municipality-wide housing needs. The remaining 16 municipalities never prepared their three-year programmes. With an online database in place at the MESP, it is imperative for municipalities to conduct comprehensive assessments on the housing needs of their residents and to integrate data into the national system. This will enable proper planning and budgeting at the local and central levels.

**Ensure that invisible vulnerable groups are integrated in the new Law on Social Housing.** The timing is right to incorporate groups that were excluded from benefiting from social housing units under the previous law. The new (draft) law will specifically address the needs of low- and middle-income families, by earmarking 30% of social
housing for low-income families and 20% for middle-income families; but it does not make reference to the victims of domestic violence or disabled people. It is highly recommended that organisations representing the latter categories lobby with the working group that is drafting the law to ensure they too are incorporated as beneficiaries within the law.

**Improving weak and non-transparent procedures for selection of social housing beneficiaries should be a priority.** The main shortcomings identified during the distribution of social housing units – such as the lack of public notification, absence of representatives of minorities on the commission, lack of comprehensive and disaggregated data on applicants and beneficiaries – should be addressed urgently. In a situation where social housing units are scarce, and the prospects for building new units are slim, enforcing a more transparent and more equitable distribution of social housing units is essential.
References


Human Rights Council (HRC) (2016), Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context on her mission to Serbia and Kosovo, thirty-first session, 26 February, Human Rights Council.

Kastrati, Avni (2019), Personal communication regarding Census data, 30 April, Department of Social Statistics, Kosovo Agency of Statistics.


Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP) (2018), Draft Law on Social Housing.


Ternava, Fahrije (2019), Personal communication, 28 April, Department of Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, Ministry of Internal Affairs.

UNHCR (2018), Profiling of Internally Displaced Persons in Kosovo – Assessing the route to durable solutions for IDPs in Kosovo, January. Pristina: UNHCR.

**Annex**

**Table A1: ETHOS Light categories defined as homeless in Kosovo**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational category</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Defined as homeless in Kosovo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 People living rough</td>
<td>1 Public space/</td>
<td>Living in the streets or public spaces without a shelter that can be defined</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>external space</td>
<td>as living quarters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 People in emergency accommodation</td>
<td>2 Overnight</td>
<td>People with no place of usual residence who move frequently between various</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shelters</td>
<td>types of accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 People living in accommodation for the homeless</td>
<td>3 Homeless hostels</td>
<td>Where the period of stay is time limited and no long-term housing is provided</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 Temporary</td>
<td>to repatriated persons assisted with temporary/transitional accommodation</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accommodation</td>
<td>4 and 5); shelters for victims of domestic violence and IDPs (6)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Transitional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>supported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Women’s shelter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or refuge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>accommodation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 People living in institutions</td>
<td>7 Healthcare</td>
<td>Stay longer than needed due to lack of housing</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>institutions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 Penal institutions</td>
<td>No housing available prior to release</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack</td>
<td>9 Mobile homes</td>
<td>Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of housing</td>
<td>10 Non-conventional building</td>
<td>person’s usual place of residence Households whose dwellings do not meet</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 Temporary</td>
<td>standards (10) and IDPs living in makeshift shelters (11)</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>structures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Homeless people living temporarily in conventional</td>
<td>12 Conventional</td>
<td>Where the accommodation is used due to a lack of housing and is not the</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)</td>
<td>housing, but not</td>
<td>person’s usual place of residence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the person’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>usual place of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A2: Latest available data on the number of homeless in Kosovo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational category</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
<th>Most recent number</th>
<th>Period covered</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 People living rough</td>
<td>Public space/ external space</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 People in emergency accommodation</td>
<td>Overnight shelters</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 People living in accommodation for the homeless</td>
<td>Homeless hostels</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary accommodation</td>
<td>22,900 IDPs</td>
<td>As of 2018</td>
<td>Ministry of Internal Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transitional supported accommodation</td>
<td>1,227 repatriated persons</td>
<td>2011-2018</td>
<td>Ministry of Internal Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women’s shelter or refuge accommodation</td>
<td>5,295 repatriated persons</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>OSCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>400 women</td>
<td>As of 2018</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>156 IDP households</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 People living in institutions</td>
<td>Healthcare institutions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Penal institutions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 People living in non-conventional dwellings due to lack of housing</td>
<td>Mobile homes Non-conventional building</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>As of 2019</td>
<td>Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning (MESP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Temporary structures</td>
<td>12,210 (Incomplete data from 22 municipalities)</td>
<td>As of 2018</td>
<td>UNHCR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54 IDP households</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Homeless people living temporarily in conventional housing with family and friends (due to lack of housing)</td>
<td>Conventional housing, but not the person’s usual place of residence</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>