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Conference on

Education of returnees and Roma,
Ashkali and Egyptian communities.
Challenges and solutions

General Report

By Klemen Miklavič

Pristina, 2 - 3 April 2014

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Background of the conference

“Education of returnees and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities: Challenges and solutions” conference was an integral part of a larger project and represented an important corner stone on the course of project implementation. The principal objective of the project is to ensure higher social cohesion and confidence among communities and to promote socio-economic development of disadvantaged returnees and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo*. The project aims at supporting active measures undertaken towards the integration and inclusion of these communities in educational system, schooling in particular. This project is supported by the professional expertise, funding and policy instruments of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the European Commission. The efforts are targeting one of the highest political priorities in the ongoing process of socio-economic reconstruction and institution building in the post-conflict Kosovo.

The current project supports and addresses the educational needs of three categories of direct beneficiaries:

- 1) Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities
- 2) Forced returnees from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities
- 3) Forced returnees from other communities

The project focuses on quality education, social integration, and personal development of the above mentioned beneficiaries. It aims to build local institutional capacity through direct involvement of Kosovo authorities in its activities, aiming at:

- Access to formal education and regular school attendance of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and forced returnees
- Integration of principles of inclusive and intercultural education in school policies
- Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and forced returnees in local community and effective local social support network
- For Roma children: recognition of Romani language in school and its promotion as a right and as a tool for building a positive cultural identity for Roma children

Conference: program and participation

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

The conference took place on 2-3 April 2014 in Pristina. On the first day, an average of 220 participants attended the event, while on the second day more than 120 participants were present. Both central and local governments were well represented. Roughly 25 civil servants and political officers came from the central government, mainly representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) and Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Also, 20 representatives from the Education Department and Community Offices from various municipalities were present. High participation from the side of responsible public authorities from all levels and inclusiveness assured the basic requirement for a successful event.

Significant level of interest and dedication to the matter was demonstrated also by the civil society. The local and international NGOs based in Kosovo were well represented at the event. Although not all organizations and initiatives had a representative giving a speech, they took active part in plenary discussions and workshops, often expressing their concerns fairly straightforward and thereby considerably enriching the discussions. Particularly interesting was the group of so called *mediators*, members of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians communities, who themselves attend school or have recently graduated and are currently helping children from their communities to integrate into the school system. The diversity of the plenum was enhanced also by a number of participants from other institutions such as Embassies and academia.

The conference echoed also in the media. TV stations and a number of general and specialized journalists covered the event. Media coverage extended the outreach of the conference beyond the interest groups, out to the wider public of Kosovo.

The program of the conference consisted of introductory speeches by high ranking political representatives, followed by key note addresses of various distinctive experts in the area of minorities, Roma community, inter-cultural policies and education. Speeches were also given by representatives of central and local authorities responsible for returnees, communities and integration policies. Following the speeches, the floor was open to all the participants for a general discussion. On the second day, discussions were organized in three parallel sessions, focusing each on a specific topic. Three separate reports were prepared at the end of each session, to be presented and discussed in the following plenary session. Another session was dedicated to a documentary film about the life in Kosovo of two Roma returnees. The movie was introduced by the author himself, Mr. **Sami Mustafa**. The conference was officially wrapped up by the General Rapporteur at the end of the plenary discussion. Both days were enriched by artistic program, with a strong local folkloristic note.

Opening remarks and welcome speeches

The conference was honored by the presence of high representatives of government and the international community. Two ministers, a vice minister and two heads of the international institutions involved in the project honored with their presence and speech the opening of the conference. Minister of Education, Science and Technology **Mr Ramë Buja** stressed the importance of the values of equality and diversity for the Kosovo policies and the importance of the inclusive education, especially for the groups who have not been fully included in the past. The Minister for Internal Affairs **Mr Bajram Rexhepi** outlined the obligation of the government to take care of the returnees and the importance of coordination of ministers in this

effort. He mentioned also the problem of economic motives for emigration and the high rates of unemployment in Kosovo which is a challenge for all people living in Kosovo and not only returnees. Mr Rexhepi also tackled the challenge for integration related to the fact that the three communities' members usually do not speak Albanian language. Mr **Husnija Beskovic**, Deputy Minister for Communities and Returns underlined the necessity to provide access to the basic rights, above all "*home, education, health and access to the labor market*". Mr **Gezim Kasapolli**, Deputy Minister for European Integration, outlined the work of his team in assessing the level of implementation of the integration strategy. He also pointed out to a particular problem of school dropout for girls, due to early marriages. The head of EU office in Kosovo*, Mr **Samuel Zbogar** reminded about the tragic destinies of families and individuals, some of them being integrated, but also re-integrated. He also foresaw that "[...] *there will be ever more returnees because Kosovo is progressively normalizing*". Mr **Tim Cartwright**, the head of the Council of Europe office in Pristina referred to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian cultures and the need to build respect for these cultures.

Education as the pivotal institution of modern European societies

The key note of the conference was indeed the central position of education in European societies and its role in furthering democracy, human rights and intercultural dialogue. This ideation of higher education was synthesized by Mr **Sjur Bergan** in his reference to the quotation from the book '*El sueno chileno*' – the Chilean dream- by the sociologist Eugenio Tironi: *The answer to the question 'what kind of education do we need?' lies in the answer to the question 'what kind of society do we want?'* Besides representing a central value to our civilization and being regarded as a human right, education is also fundamental to the prosperity of modern societies. In modern public discourses across Europe we often hear about the economic potential of educated and skilled people. However, it is precisely in post-conflict settings where the broad range of functioning institutions is crucial for normalization of the situation. The progress and institutional stabilization is especially important in the areas where the tensions and resentments have not yet been completely overcome. Thus education is intertwined with the societal dynamics throughout the public sphere and not only in terms of economic growth. In the light of such broad perspective, Mr Sjur Bergan reminded the plenum that education has several purposes in society, listing four main ones as contained in the Council of Europe Recommendation on the public responsibility for higher education and research: preparation for sustainable employment; preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies; personal development; development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base¹.

Ms Zoga Çeta from the ministry of European Integration placed education at the centre of the integration endeavor. Her speech invoked education as a value end most important institution in advancing the society. Mr **Alush Istogu** from the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology followed with similar education-oriented discourse, addressing also administrative procedures after return and

¹ Recommendation CM/Rec (2007)6 on the public responsibility for higher education and research

importance of language in the transition to local education. Education and language were the main focuses of most of representatives of Kosovo Ministries.

The discussion in the plenum focused on education as a core institution of Kosovo society, and human rights and minority protection as the priority of the political and societal endeavor at all levels of governance and public life. Such underlying idea was clearly put forward throughout the conference by speakers and discussions in the plenum.

Minority communities as issues without borders

Several speakers introduced the issue of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians in Kosovo as integral to a continuous endeavor across Europe to acknowledge the (former) mobile nature of Roma and other minority communities as part of their culture. The more critical speakers mentioned serious challenges that European countries and societies are facing when addressing the Roma community:

Discrimination prevails in most spheres of public life: education, labor market, health service, and housing. With regard to education, segregated schooling and in particular the shameful practice of sending children to special schools for the disabled are still prevalent. [...] Violence against Roma still occurs and hate speech against Roma seems to be increasing, in particular in Western Europe where societies and politics seem to be unable to deal with the fact that Roma make use of their freedom of movement (from the speech of Mr Stephan Mueller).

Thus, the ongoing efforts of the Kosovo authorities and civil society are only one piece of the mosaic among similar initiatives across Europe. Addressing the issues of Roma and other minority communities in Kosovo is not more or less necessary than elsewhere. While such concerns, issues and challenges are very similar elsewhere in Europe, the specifics of post-conflict societies like Kosovo make the issues of returnees primarily comparable to other countries in the region of Western Balkans.

Regarding the region of Western Balkans it is possible to say that the intensity of work on integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians communities was among the most advanced and successful. The effort is reflected in many achievements, such as for example the *learning centers*, additional classes, etc. Mr **Muhamet Arifi** opened his speech with a positive note about the situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo compared to 8 years ago. He highlighted the main achievements and briefed the plenum about the ongoing projects in the field. He outlined the important role of the civil society and stressed the need for further financial commitment in the projects related to the three communities.

Post conflict heritage and re-conciliation

Mr Stephan Mueller referred to the post-conflict tensions between majority and the three communities as one of the fundamental challenges. The allegiances and resentments are still embedded in both majority and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian

communities. The tensions germinating from the suppressed and/or unresolved issues in the near past result in negative public discourses endured throughout the post-conflict period. In his speech, Mr Mueller stressed that every crime should be rightly investigated. However, the involvement of individuals from these communities in war crimes cannot be considered as grounds for collective guilt.

In the early conflict aftermaths there was a high risk for the returnees to experience hostilities due to the resentments still alive among the majority population. Therefore a large part of returns were delayed, which eventually brought additional difficulties for the returning individuals and families. Mr Mueller listed the following difficulties caused by the prolonged period in emigration:

- Immediately after the conflict more financial resources for reconstruction were available for returnees than there has been in the last couple of years.
- In many places their property or the locations they lived prior to their expulsion were occupied and return to their homes has been made impossible or difficult.
- In the last years stricter rules are applied to the late returnees, such as for example claiming the real estate ownership became more complicated than directly after the conflict.
- The three communities are underrepresented at governmental level and civil service.

In addition, in the opinion of some participants the fact that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (notably Roma) children enrolled into Serbian parallel school system represents an element that obstructs the process of re-conciliation and brings this community out of reach for the Kosovo institutions and thereby perpetuating mutual mistrust between majority and the members of minority communities.

The motives behind the emigration and the controversy of forced returns

The issue of emigration of the three communities is strongly associated with the general trend of emigration from Kosovo, which is in turn highly correlated with the reportedly unfavorable economic perspective at home. Representatives of Kosovo authorities reminded the plenum about the economic reasons as often the primary cause of the members of the three communities to flee Kosovo. The same interpretation repeatedly appeared throughout the discussions, both from the speakers and the plenum.

The return is closely related to economic conditions and socio-economic position of repatriated individuals. Some participants and speakers argued that the assessment of the Kosovo situation as stable should not be considered as sufficient to move people back into the country. The economic perspective of returnees is crucial for their successful re-integration. Also, the initial period after return is particularly vulnerable. According to some speakers and discussants the public authorities' support should be prompt and de-bureaucratized. Employment difficulties were often a euphemism for the economic challenges of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians. Perhaps education and employment opportunities should be addressed as an intertwined challenge.

Not least, the migration of any kind is a traumatic experience in terms of individual's social life. **Dr. Călin Rus** reminded the plenum that moving from one environment to another is a traumatic experience even for children from wealthy families who move for business, let alone for people with economic challenges moving into destinations of more difficult environments. Migration experiences are usually characterized by sad stories, anxieties and challenging conditions. The return to less favorable conditions inevitably triggers the tendency to re-emigrate. **Mr Stephan Mueller** noted that often the returnees are leaving Kosovo again, either to Serbia (Roma community) or to Western Europe, as they do not see a chance to have the same quality of life in Kosovo. The Kosovo government and society, on the other hand, should not give up doing the utmost to give them equal opportunities within the limits of the possibilities and available resources.

According to Dr. Rus, forced repatriations are an extremely sensitive and doubtful exercise. He stated that: "*One should strongly encourage people to go back and conditions in Kosovo should make this possible but forced repatriation is unlikely to succeed*". This view also taps into the salient dilemmas of the countries hosting large refugee communities. Such measures and actions of authorities in the hosting countries are often politically unavoidable, but the remark presents an argument that calls for more caution when forced repatriation is enacted. Thus, better understanding of the effects of repatriation on the affected social groups is necessary in the repatriating countries.

Social integration, economic subsistence and unemployment

Although the discussions during the conference focused mainly on education as a crucial institution for shaping society, several speakers and many participants continuously brought up the economic situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in general and of all returnees upon return. According to many discussants, the theory related to Roma, Ashkali, Egyptians and returnees' integration in the domestic social and economic life is different from everyday reality. Even when people try hard to find a job and to subsist on their own efforts, they are faced with lack of opportunities and support, which in turn makes impossible their integration. In addition, some members from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities pointed out that they are not proportionally represented in the civil service either.

The discussion about economic opportunities revealed a sort of tension. The claim of missing employment opportunities for the three communities and returnees triggered responses. A part of the audience explained that these social groups are not the only ones suffering unemployment. The whole Kosovo society, they stated, is facing difficulties such as lack of jobs and weak economic recovery. According to them, often times the demand for economic opportunities on behalf of minority communities unjustly ignores the overall situation in the country, where all the social groups feel helpless in regard to employment opportunities and economic prosperity.

Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian cultures

The Roma experts emphasized the importance of the *Roma Ashkali and Egyptian culture*. **Prof. Ljatif Demir** noted that the common public perceptions in many places across Europe portray Roma community as a challenge, a long neglected problem, a social issue, and sometimes as people with “special needs”. According to Prof. Demir the three communities should instead be recognized and understood as communities with a living and breathing culture. He underlined that “*Romani language and culture and Ashkali and Egyptian cultures live as any other language and culture in Europe. They belong to European cultural heritage and therefore also cultural heritage of Kosovo*”. Bringing Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian cultures to the front is seen as a means to overcome the stereotypes and the consequent marginalization. The way these cultures are represented is significantly important. At present, the representation often mystifies these communities, thus empowering rather than diminishing the stereotypes and prejudices against their members.

Prof. Demir also advocated the idea of expanding further the Roma language as standardized language in the schools of the region. In his opinion, the language does not differ substantially across Balkans. According to Prof. Demir a consistent policy is essential in introducing both language and culture in the curricula. In addition, a strategic and long term oriented development of professional capacities in the communities is necessary to implement the proposed policy.

Addressing language is also pivotal in bringing forward the integration. **Mr Alush Istogu** from the Ministry of Education considered the challenge of language as a functional obstacle to effective integration practices. According to him, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children enroll in school without any previous knowledge of the majority language which puts them in disadvantageous position.

In his presentation, **Dr. Adrian Marsh** focused on the conceptual level. He spoke about plurality of identities and narratives of origin. Both Dr. Marsh and Prof. Demir emphasized the necessity of shifting to the promotion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian cultures in the content education by making them an integral part of the mainstream school curricula, mandatory for all communities, including majority. Prof. Demir urged: “*do not be afraid of Romani language in primary school, do not burden children with Albanian language. They will learn it gradually as progressing through school*”. In support to his argument, another participant stated that “*Education is not there to indoctrinate children but to stimulate them*”.

Such a statement is particularly relevant to the case of Kosovo society, where the diversity of ethnic structure and identities is exceptionally heterogeneous. Dr. Marsh considered the acknowledgement of various identities and linguistic difference as highly important, together with promotion of diversity also in formal arrangements, such as school system and curricula. His speech brought to attention the differences between the three major groups discussed at the conference:

[...] “*three major communities would choose differing aspects of history, tradition, belief, marriage patterns, rituals surrounding birth, death and mourning, to emphasize their distinctiveness from each other. These cultural ‘boundary markers’ are important and must be respected in order to recognize the rights of groups and individuals to self-ascription, to decide for themselves upon fundamental questions of belonging.*”

In a note sent to the organizers in the conference aftermath, Dr. Marsh restated the necessity to use the minority language in school as distinctive from majority languages grounding it in his research projects and scholarly experience. Thereby he

approximated his opinion to Prof. Demir, who called for the standardized Roma language in the larger area of the Balkan Peninsula. Dr. Marsh's recommended:

“Acknowledging the ‘mother tongue’ of children as a means of latterly introducing standard versions of both this and the majority language (Albanian or Serbian) offers educators and communities opportunities, in the early years, to better prepare for primary education and build the essential skills necessary for learning in the future.”

Integration is not assimilation

The eagerness to integrate the minority population into mainstream schooling and other institutional mechanisms brings up the issue of danger to lapse from integration to assimilation. The assimilation has long been seen as a threat to the survival of small cultural formations and minority languages and has been part of the dilemma in introducing measures for integration of Roma community across Europe. In other words, the central question in this context would be about how to ensure prosperity of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities without assimilating them to the majority. The latter would jeopardize their language and culture in general.

However, when dealing with education, the issue becomes particularly sensitive. Education is largely considered as the institution that tends to reproduce the dominant culture and thereby threatens the idiosyncrasies of weaker and marginal groups. Two experts on Romani language suggested to conceptualize Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as cultural entity on a full scale, including changing curricula of mainstream schools. As noted above, their solution would be to introduce the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian culture into the school curricula as part of the cultural heritage. As previously discussed, in the countries of South Eastern Europe standardized Romani language can be introduced as teaching language during pre and primary education. *“The main challenge for the future is managing to promote Romani language and Romani culture in the mainstream schools”*, stated the experts supporting the integration of Roma language and culture in school curricula.

The opposite process to assimilation, equally feared by the panelists, speakers and plenum was the “ghettoisation”. The discussions highlighted a clear and uttered opinion that segregating the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians is not the right solution. Segregation and handling minority communities as “people with special needs” only deepens the division between minority and majority. The members of three communities are often associated with social problems, delinquent behavior, and other practices often found in less well-off social groups. This, according to Dr Demir, might project into public discourses and perceptions. Nevertheless, representatives of Kosovo local authorities were especially vocal in rejecting the policy of treating minority communities as group with special needs.

Returnees' clash of values

Mr Stephan Mueller brought to the attention of the conference participants the clash of values upon the return of emigrants, particularly the youth, who might have

emigrated in their early childhood or youth. He pointed out the challenges these youngsters might face:

“Returnees from Western Europe often come with a value system, attitudes, and cultural understanding that is different from the one prevailing in the place of their return. Young people, in particular girls who grew up in Western Europe, are suddenly confronted with a culture and life style characterized by expectations they are not used to and cannot meet. They have different expectations from authorities and society and they have different expectations on how public life functions.”

The documentary movie presented on the second day of the conference was about the anxieties and hardship upon return. The author followed two randomly chosen forced returnees and described their experience. He highlighted the observed difficulties these people face upon return. The discussions pointed out to the necessity of awareness rising among the authorities of the European countries that sent these people back to the country of origin regardless of potential risks and difficulties they will encounter upon return. Thus, consideration of return cases at individual level could be an advisable solution to the problem of returnees' clash of values.

Parents, teachers, learning centers and local authorities

Interface between school and home was addressed on several occasions from different points of view. The discussants pointed out the numerous efforts dedicated so far to bridge the gap between these two worlds. The cooperation and coordination among stakeholders was emphasized as the basic condition for further action, especially in one of the parallel sessions focused on this topic. The *mediators* and *learning centers* (projects dedicated to assisting Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children) were recognized as positive contribution to strengthening the bridges between schools and the three communities.

According to **Dr. Calin Rus**, it is extremely important to address the **teachers** and school directors, who have the central role in the process of integration. The key question regarding the system actors is how to motivate and support them to take action. Dr. Rus suggested that an explicit, coherent and transparent school policy must be developed, supported by the local authorities and the Ministry of Education. Teachers must be trained in teams in order to properly raise their awareness regarding the impact they can make. Also, pedagogical resources must be provided and innovative approaches must be introduced to facilitate and upgrade their work. Such trainings must be considered as opportunities for reflection, exchange and networking.

The **learning centers** came up in the discussion several times. They seemed to be accepted as a good idea. However, they need to be further developed. Several participants questioned the sustainability of the learning centers and the continuity of their work. It was also recommended to place learning centers within the premises of the schools themselves instead of placing them elsewhere in town. During the workshops the participants recognized the necessity to increase the capacity of the

centers and encourage their mediation between school and home, monitoring students' attendance and fighting the dropout rate.

The **mediators** proved to be the hands-on activists, holding a unique insight into both the school world and the three communities' homes. Belonging themselves to Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian communities they could easily approach and enjoy trust by the families and children. On the other hand, the mediators attend upper level of education or have recently graduated. Besides having tremendous potential to act on the micro level and improve things there, they also have the most accurate insight on the everyday issues and challenges of the three communities. Therefore they might be engaged as feedback channels providing input for policies, programs and other activities in support of integration. Needless to say, a high level of understanding of the reality among people from these communities, their problems, fears, practices, convictions, worries, norms, values, traditions, etc., is essential for developing sound and effective policies. **Mr Muhamet Arifi** mentioned in his speech that a significant number of moderators and representatives of the organization the NGO *Balkan Sunflowers Kosova*, the initiator of this program, attended the conference. The mediators were particularly active during the plenum discussions.

Integration of girls and women

On a few occasions the plenum discussants raised the issue of disadvantaged Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian girls. They claimed that families are sometimes reluctant to send girls to schools, especially to further levels of education. The gender issues were identified also in regard to other issues, not necessarily linked to education. In order to challenges faced by girls and young women from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, it was recommended that additional support can be offered to them through building self-confidence and assertiveness, which will in turn facilitate their enrollment and continuation of their studies. The suggestions from workshop no. three ("role of culture and language to further include returnees in Kosovo education system"), where this idea was tackled, were that improvements could be achieved through extra-curricular activities using the proven experience of women from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and their networks. These activities need to be further developed where they exist and introduced where they are missing.

Newcomers (returnees) as protagonists

The view on minority communities' culture in regard to curricula and educational experience for all pupils and students is also related to the idea of immigrant (returnees) children as the protagonists of the education process. The well received case study from Germany illustrated the shifting of paradigm towards integration approaches. **Dr. Ulrike Wolff-Jontofsohn** presented the experience in integration of immigrant children in Berlin. In Inner urban schools in Berlin, where the majority of children have a migration background, including a high percentage of Roma children from South Eastern Europe, attempts have been made to consider the needs of Roma refugee children in German schools. The project of *Welcome classes* for newly arrived immigrant children without any command of the German language has been implemented in schools. The project activities take into account the need for

classroom development and social learning and also consider the necessity to bridge the gap between parents and school. Their ongoing and close cooperation with Roma mediators and members of the Roma community seem to improve school attendance rates and performances. The first analyses of the project revealed that teachers and school management are inclined to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges for Roma education and also try to overcome organizational and psychological obstacles that might hinder the integration process of these minority children. The project triggered some attention and interest from the plenum, especially among the civil servants.

Experience from the neighborhood

Cases of good practices from Western Europe can be a good starting point for discussion and search of creative solutions. However, it is important to keep in mind the local setting, the cultural and institutional context and the historic developments. Not least, the region of Western Balkans has had an intensive experience in dealing with minority communities, especially in the last decade, under intense funding and monitoring of the international community. Therefore one should look for the practices that could inspire or serve as model solutions also within the region.

Mr Dashmir Osmani from the Municipality of Gostivar presented some valuable input regarding the integration of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities. *Roma Information Center (RIC)* in cooperation with the Department for Education and Culture of the Municipality of Gostivar has organized several activities to increase awareness on attendance of Roma children in schools. RIC is a core player in supporting Roma parents and children to access primary and secondary education. Due to successful cooperation between parents and school directors the following actions have been undertaken:

- A large number of Roma education interventions, projects and policies designed to increase the access of Roma children to quality education have been piloted and implemented.
- There are efforts to better prepare children's enrollment into primary school. At this level, the pre-school education services are focused on improving language skills, basic knowledge in mathematics, social skills, motivation to learn and personal hygiene.
- Municipality of Gostivar allocated specific budget items for specific interventions at local level, aiming to fostering and increasing the attendance of Roma children in schools, such as covering fees in the kindergarten, equipping children with books, notebooks, necessary equipment and supporting other related needs of Roma pupils.
- Cooperation with Ministry of Education was established to support Roma students with scholarships.
- Workshops aiming at enhancing and promoting parent involvement in school activities have been implemented.
- Meetings, workshops and seminars aiming to increase the capacities of Roma Parent Council have been implemented.

Concluding highlights

The experts and key note speakers called upon action at three main levels: local, governmental and international. Only if addressed simultaneously at the three levels, the educational challenges of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, including respective returnees, can be successfully solved. On the local and governmental levels, both the communities themselves, civil society and authorities must continue their endeavors to integrate the members of the three communities and returnees. On the international level, the forced repatriation requires more caution, including a better understanding of the impact of repatriation on the returnees at individual and group level. One suggestion would be to encourage rather than force their repatriation.

In order to overcome the stereotypes, prejudices, and the consequent marginalization of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, a largely agreed upon conclusion was to make their cultures visible and start considering them as a resource. Introducing a standardized Romani language in primary schools would bring the education process closer to Roma children, while presenting Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian culture to pupils from majority community. Increasing the offer of Romani language in school curricula would contribute to awareness rising among majority community about minority cultures as an integral part to the Kosovo and European cultural heritage.

On a micro level, the discussion often orbited around the “real life problems” of returnees and minority communities. Often the remarks were related to bureaucratic obstacles when applying for recognition of qualifications, property documents, social aid and other benefits. Participants suggested that public authorities’ support should be prompt and de-bureaucratized. Similarly, the participants seemed to agree on the need to improve the access to information and coordination between various level of governance and international organizations dealing with the matter.

The difficulties in employment sector were often a euphemism for the economic hardship of member of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The discussion indicated the need to address education and employment opportunities as an intertwined challenge. However, this problem must be taken into consideration within the proper context, being the economic and social hardship the whole Kosovo society is going through on its way to recovery and more prosperity.

The communities’ civil society representatives were recognized as very important agents in a variety of efforts to support the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Learning centers and mediators’ initiatives represented creative approaches to the integration of the three communities, especially in education sector. Teachers were suggested by many as equally important contributors, to be trained and involved in the future. Strategic and long term oriented development of professional capacities in the communities is necessary to implement the proposed policy. The members of communities themselves in the vest of professionals can do much more than external intervention.

In regard to gender inequality and double discrimination faced by girls of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, the plenum discussions pointed out the need for project that tackle the reluctance of families to permit full participation of girls and women in education and social life. Successful examples of extra-curricular

activities which promote participation of girls and women from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities can be used as models for further initiatives on the matter.

Overall, the high level of participation, including the variety of local and international organizations, as well as representativeness from both central and local level authorities and social groups, contributed to a very successful conference. In particular, the eagerness of the plenum to engage in discussion yielded valuable feedback to the project management team, showing that the project reached a very good momentum. This would not be possible without the outstanding organizational support and choice of speakers by the host. The conference reflected the positive impact and high relevance of the ongoing project.

Annex: Programme of the Conference

Wednesday, 2 April 2014

08:45-09:15	Registration of participants
PLENARY SESSION Chair: Mr Azem Guri, Political Advisor (MEST)	
09:15-09:30	Introductory video
09:30-10:15	Opening remarks and welcome speeches: Mr Ramë Buja, Minister of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) Mr Bajram Rexhepi, Minister of Internal Affairs (MIA) Mr Gëzim Kasapolli, Deputy Minister of European Integration (MEI) Mr Husnija Bešković, Deputy Minister of Communities and Returns (MCR) Mr Samuel Žbogar, Head of the EU Office in Kosovo/EUSR Mr Tim Cartwright, Head of the Council of Europe office in Pristina Mr Sjur Bergan, Head of the Education Department, Council of Europe
10:15-11:00	Setting the scene: What are the main challenges faced by the returnees and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in modern society in general and in education, in particular? - Presentations and exchange of views by Mr Calin Rus, Director of the Intercultural Institute in Timisoara and Mr Stephan Mueller, Programmes Director, European Roma Rights Centre Discussion moderated by Mr Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe
11:00-11:15	Coffee break
11:00-11:15	Press statement
SESSION 1 Education of returnees and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities: “Policy framework and the role of different actors” Chair: Mr Sjur Bergan, Council of Europe (CoE)	
11 :15- 11:20	Artistic programme
11:20- 11:40	Presentation of the Council of Europe policy instruments in the field of education of minorities. - Ms Aurora Ailincăi, Advisor on Education Policies for Roma, Council of Europe
11:40-11:55	How can local and regional authorities respond to the challenges in the education of minorities and returnees? - Mr Dashmir Osmani, representative of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion
11:55-12:10	The Strategy on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, integration and its effect on education. What plans beyond 2015? - Ms Zoga Çeta, Adviser to Minister of European Integration
12:10- 12:25	The role of public authorities in the education of returnees and minorities: Current situation in Kosovo. - Mr Alush Istogu, Director of Policies at MEST

12:25- 12:55	How can civil society promote and assist in the education of returnees and minority groups? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Valeriu Nicolae, regional Director for Advocacy, World Vision - Mr Muhamet Arifi, member of the Platform of NGO-s working with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities
12:55-13:20	Discussion
13:20-14:30	Lunch
SESSION 2	
“Education of returnees and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in practice” Chair: Mrs Enesa Kadic, Head of the division for communities (MEST)	
14:30-14:35	Artistic programme
14:35-15:00	Promoting Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian culture and Romani language. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Adrian Marsh, Senior Programme Manager at Open Society - Mr Ljatif Demir, Professor at the University of Zagreb
15:00-15:30	Teaching methods and pedagogical resources for intercultural inclusive education. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms Ulrike Wolff-Jontofsohn, professor at the Pedagogical University of Freiburg - Mr Calin Rus, Intercultural Institute in Timisoara
15:30-16:30	The project of language classes for returnees: Language and additional classes for returnees – precondition for a sustainable integration. Taking stock and moving forward. a round -table discussion with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mr Fetah Kazumi, Desk Officer for low secondary education, MEST - Ms Flutra Sinani, Senior Officer for Education and Health, MIA - Ms Aferdita Spahiu, Education Specialist, UNICEF - Ms Sara Bagnato, Community Policy Officer/Return, OSCE <p>Discussion moderated by Mr Giovanni Mozzarelli, Project Manager, CoE</p>
16:30-17:00	Discussion and wrap-up of the first day
17:30 – 18:00	Artistic programme
18:00 – 20:00	Dinner

Thursday, 3 April 2014

SESSION 3	
“From reality to policy and measures: parallel discussion groups” Chair: Ms Katia Dolgova-Dreyer, Project Coordinator, Council of Europe	
09:00-09:10	Opening of the second day
09:10-10:40	Parallel sessions:
	Parallel session 1: “Which capacity do the central and regional authorities have to respond to challenges?” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderator: Mr Calin Rus
	Parallel session 2: “What additional services can be provided to increase access to education for returnee children (the role of Learning Centers and Mediators)” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderator: Ms Juliana Oildashi-Berisha, Senior Project Officer, CoE

	Parallel session 3: “Role of culture and language to further include returnees in the Kosovo education system” - Moderators: Mr Adrian Marsh and Mr Ljatif Demir
10:40-11:00	Coffee break
11:00-11:30	Report from the parallel sessions
11:30-12:00	Projection of a documentary film (15 minutes extract) and a discussion with the director Mr Sami Mustafa