

Trapped in a vicious circle: Repatriation and Re-Migration of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians from Kosovo

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The article focuses on the forced migration of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians from Kosovo and other countries in the Western Balkans, discussing the impact of the structural and cumulative discrimination on their motivation to leave the country. The article argues that their vulnerable socio-economic situation is determined by their systematic and cumulative discrimination. Recent research demonstrated that the majority of the forced returnees cannot stay in Kosovo and leave the country again which creates the vicious circle of forced migration.

Key words: Roma, Ashkali, Balkan-Egyptians, Kosovo, discrimination

Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians in and from Kosovo

General Information

According to the 2011 population census, 35,784 Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians (8,824 Roma, 15,436 Ashkali and 11,524 Balkan-Egyptians) reside in Kosovo (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2011).¹ How-

¹ Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians claim to be distinct ethnic groups who are not related to Roma. Roma contest this division and see Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians as Roma who lost their Romani tradition and culture. While the Balkan-Egyptians claim that their ancestors came from Egypt, exist several explanations of the origin of the Ashkali with the Iranian origin being the most common. Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians are as a rule closer to the Albanian culture and speak in general, Albanian as the first language.

ever, this number can only be an indication of their actual numbers. On the one hand, many Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians tend not to disclose their identity in census taking. On the other hand, several thousand Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians have left Kosovo since the census taking. Their actual number in Kosovo might therefore be, between 40,000 and 50,000, reflecting less than one-third of its pre-war population size.

Serbia hosted in 2002, after the war, more than 40,000 Roma from Kosovo (Jaksic, Basic, 2002). Currently, more than 20,000 are still officially registered as IDP (United Nations, Human Rights Council, 2014). Several thousands have left the IDP status while others moved to Western Europe or were never registered as IDP in Serbia. A couple of thousand persons from the three communities are registered as Displaced Persons or refugees in Montenegro or Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina respectively.

Prior, during and immediately after the war, several ten thousands found temporary protection in Western Europe, primarily in Germany, Switzerland and Scandinavian countries. In Western Europe, only few Roma from Kosovo were granted the asylum status. While a couple of thousand persons might have received a permanent residence status in their host countries, e.g., in Switzerland and Germany, ten thousands were forced to leave their host countries.

However, as research demonstrates only a small part of the Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians who were sent back to Kosovo, could actually stay in Kosovo. The situation upon return forces them to leave the country again – either back to Western Europe or into one of the slums in Serbia (Society for Threatened Peoples, 2015).

Kosovo is the poorest country in the Balkans and one of the poorest in Europe in terms of GDP per capita. The GDP per capita of Kosovo is USD 3,553 while the GDP per capita of Serbia is USD 5,143 and the GDP of Germany is USD 41,129 (World Bank Data, n.d.).

According to the 2015 Labour Force Survey, the unemployment rate in 2015 was 32.9% and youth unemployment (15–24 year olds) is around 57.7% (Kosovo 2015 Labour Force Survey).

Exact and reliable data on the unemployment rate among the three communities do not exist. The government estimates that the unemployment rate among Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians is between 95% and 100% in certain areas. Among Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptian youth, the unemployment rate according to UNDP is about 75%. (United Nations Development Programme, n.d.). Limited access to the labour market for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians cannot be compensated with

an adequate social welfare system. The social welfare system in Kosovo provides for a monthly maximum of EUR 85 for a family with three children (but only if one child is younger than five years old), which is by far not enough to make a living (Law No.04/L096).

Expulsion after the war

According to estimations, prior to the war in 1998/1999 at least 150,000 Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians lived in Kosovo, making up around 7–8% of the overall population. During the wartime, the three communities were trapped between the frontlines and got caught in a conflict, which was not theirs. Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians were forced to take sides between the Serb regime and community on one side and the Albanian community on the other. The only remaining possibility for the three communities to keep out of the conflict was to leave Kosovo (European Roma Rights Centre, 2011; Müller, 1999).

Thus, many fled already prior to and during the war, but majority had to leave the country in the aftermath of the war. From early summer 1999 onward tens of thousands of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians were expelled from Kosovo by members of the Albanian majority population under the eyes of the international military forces.

More than 80 settlements were destroyed while other neighborhoods or individual houses were illegally occupied. The inhabitants were expelled and remain so to this day (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 1999; Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, 2001).

The mob violence in March 2004 also directly targeted Roma and Ashkali communities and led to more Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians fleeing Kosovo. In the town of Vushtrri/Vucitrn alone, 69 houses belonging to Ashkali, among them returnees were ransacked or burned down (Human Rights Watch, 2004; Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, 2004).

Specific Challenges to the Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptian communities

Beside policies such as the Strategy for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians or the Strategy for the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, the government of Kosovo has adopted a legal framework, which should have direct or indirect impact on the integration of members of the three communities, including returnees from Western Europe.

In general, these laws and policies are hardly implemented, leading to a situation that Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians are forced to leave Kosovo (Society for Threatened Peoples, 2015). The non-appli-

cation of these specific laws is aggravating the structural and cumulative discrimination Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians are exposed to (Muiznieks, 2015; Guild, Zwaan, 2014; O'Higgins, Brüggemann, 2013). Though it is difficult to determine, if the authorities follow a deliberate policy, it obviously contributes directly to the forced migration of members of the three communities.

In particular, with regard to employment and housing, laws and policies are not implemented, e.g. the Law on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities (Law No. 03/L-047), the Law amending the Law on Spatial Planning (Law No.03/L-106), the Civil Service Law ((No.03/L-149) and National Strategy for the Integration for Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians (Strategy 2008).

Discrimination on the labour market

The lack of income-generating perspectives due to structural discrimination is one of the main reasons for the three communities to leave Kosovo. The private sector is dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises whose employment policy is often determined by kinship relations and nepotism. Due to their exclusion from the overall society members of the three communities are not included in informal networks allowing for participation in economy.

Similar is the situation in the public sector where nepotism and political affiliations determine the chances for an employment. The public sector in addition faces since years the challenge to reduce its work forces, which makes the employment of members of the three communities even more difficult, taking into account this reduction of work forces can easily be used as a justification not to employ members of the three communities.

However, the Constitution (Art. 61) and several specific laws in Kosovo stipulate the special consideration of members of ethnic communities and even of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians, in particular in the public sector or in publically owned enterprises. The Law on Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Communities (Art. 9.2) even advocates for "special consideration" for Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians.

The authorities do not adhere to their obligations deriving from the laws. The Office for Community Affairs (OCA), within the Prime Minister's Office, conducts regularly assessments on the employment situation of members of non-majority communities (Serbs, Roma, Ashkali, Balkan-Egyptians, Bosniaks, Gorani, Turks, Croats, Montenegrins) in the Kosovo civil service and publicly owned enterprises (Government of Kosovo, 2013, May).

In fact, the Civil Service Law (Law (No.03/L-149) binds all public institutions in Kosovo to quotas for employment of non-majority civil servants, as well as to meet its positive obligation to implement certain active recruitment measures (Art. 4-11). According to the law, a minimum of 10% of positions at central level are reserved for «persons belonging to communities that are not majority in Kosovo» and at the municipal level, representation must be proportional to the demographic composition of the given municipality (Art.11.3).

The main findings of the assessment demonstrate that only 7.7% of civil servants in central and local level institutions are from non-majority communities. Independent agencies and municipalities have the highest average rate of non-majority representation (8.9% and 8.8% respectively). Publically-owned enterprises have the lowest rate (2%). Government institutions (ministries and representative institutions) and executive agencies have a relatively low rate of non-majority integration (Government of Kosovo, 2013, May).

Among the non-majority population in civil service, Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians are highly underrepresented compared to their share of population. Out of 5000 civil servants at central level, only three Ashkali, two Egyptian, and five Roma are employed (Government of Kosovo, 2013, May). Furthermore, nearly all Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians have administrative level positions and are absent in the managerial level of public institutions. These communities are mostly employed at local government level, the independent agencies and then the central government institutions.

According to Human resources managers and head of institutions explaining the underrepresentation of non-majority communities with a lack of interest among the community members, related to the fact that institutions are not reaching out to these communities in the recruitment processes, and political obstacles and pressures hindering greater non-majority community employment (Government of Kosovo, 2013, May).

Discrimination in housing

Besides unemployment, the housing situation remains a big obstacle to social inclusion for many Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians and constitutes another element of the systematic and cumulative discrimination. Difficulties to get destroyed or occupied former houses reconstructed or rebuilt, the non-formalising of the informal settlements and the lack of social housing determine their situation.

The issue of informal settlements

Although the Kosovo authorities dispose the possibilities to legalise informal settlements, they are not applying them when it comes to the three communities. Despite the fact that the required policies and laws have been already adopted in 2008, the current status of their implementation is non-satisfying (Law No.03/L-106; Government of Kosovo 2008). In November 2014, OSCE Mission in Kosovo indicated inadequate notifications on expropriation processes and slow progress in the regularisation of informal settlements (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2013).

Furthermore, the UN Special Rapporteur Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing stated in her recent report on Kosovo that the housing conditions of the three communities are particularly inadequate. Currently, there are approximately 100 informal minority settlements with overcrowded conditions, inadequate access to water, electricity, waste collection, public transport and roads (United Nations, Human Rights Council, 2016).

Additionally, returnees of these three communities are facing obstacles in securing their right to housing. Although many Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians owned their own homes and land, their occupancy had never been registered, and they continue to face insurmountable obstacles in securing formal ownership of their property (United Nations, Human Rights Council, 2016).

Lack of housing opportunities

The tense security situation prevented large-scale returns Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians just after the war. It was from early 2003 onwards, when Western European countries started to return more Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians and from 2009, Roma were also deported back to Kosovo (Society for Threatened Peoples, 2015). Those relatively late returns comprised a negative impact: The former dwellings of the refugees in many cases had been illegally occupied for years or even destroyed in the meantime, depriving them of accommodation upon return. Furthermore, during the first years after the conflict the rules for accessing reconstruction assistance were less strict and more financial resources were available, but Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians could hardly profit from it (UNMIK, 2003; ERRC 2011).

According to an assessment of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internal Displaced Persons, the vast majority of property-less returnees belong to the Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians and they find it increasingly difficult to be included in house reconstruction projects.

About 30 per cent of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian returnees end up in secondary displacement (United Nations, Human Rights Council, 2014).

According to the OSCE, the issue of provision of social housing remains unsatisfied. Many families, even those living in extreme poverty and in need to access social housing, were neglected (OSCE Mission in Kosovo, 2013). One of the reasons identified by OSCE are found in the lack of public notification and non-adherence to linguistic requirements. As a consequence, non-majority communities are left uninformed about the possibilities and requirements to apply for social housing. Furthermore, many municipal selection commissions are dominated by municipal assembly members and do not include non-majority community representatives and/or representatives of vulnerable groups to whom the Law requires to be prioritized for social housing. Such compositions may favour some over other applicants for social housing.

Specific challenges for forced returnees – results from a survey

To obtain more detailed information about the on-going circle of remigration of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians, the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP) conducted in winter 2014/2015 a survey among Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptian returnees in Kosovo (40 households) and among returnees who moved further to Serbia after their repatriations to Kosovo (30 households) (Society For Threatened Peoples, 2015). More than half of the households in Serbia had in the meantime a permanent address in Serbia and the respective travel documents that they can make use of for visa-free travel to Western Europe.

When the STP contacted the households again in July/August 2015, only 17.5% of the households were still in Kosovo. In Serbia, 50% had in the meantime left again for Western Europe.

The survey results indicate that the lack of reconstruction of destroyed houses and the lack of sustainable housing options force the people to leave Kosovo again and that restricted access to labour market and to social welfare force people out of Kosovo if they do not receive remittances. The results demonstrate that preconditions for a sustainable return – first and foremost providing accommodation and basic means to make a living – are not met. This again raises the question, if the authorities follow this policy deliberately or if they are just overwhelmed.

Among the returnees staying in Kosovo, not a single household participating in the STP survey had a family member in formal employment, while 16 of the households (40%) were able to earn some income from informal work. Among the returnees who moved further

to Serbia more than half had informal employment (60%), primarily collecting waste for recycling and one person was formally employed. While staying in Western Europe, in many families at least one member had formal or informal employment.

The survey revealed interesting differences with regard to remittances and social welfare. Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptian returnees staying in Kosovo depend much more on remittances from relatives in Western Europe than returnees who moved further to Serbia. Only 23.3% in Serbia received remittances while 77.5% of the 40 families in Kosovo mentioned remittances as a source of income.

On the other hand, only 15% of the families in Kosovo, but 50% of the families in Serbia mentioned social welfare as a source of income. The STP survey indicates that Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians who have support from relatives in Western Europe try to stay in Kosovo, whereas those returnees who do not have this support and would need social welfare benefits in order to survive move to Serbia. Easier access to the social protection system of Serbia thus seems to constitute one of the main reasons for leaving Kosovo for Serbia.

Although the housing conditions of the interviewed persons in Serbia are worse than among the interviewees in Kosovo, these returnees preferred to move to Serbia. It seems that lack of access to housing in Kosovo played an important role for moving to Serbia, since 50% of the interviewees who migrated to Serbia stated that their houses in Kosovo were either destroyed or occupied by Kosovo Albanians (or a combination thereof).

Issues such as discrimination and exclusion, impunity for crimes against Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians in Kosovo, and a lack of Albanian language skills etc. are further reasons for leaving Kosovo. While all of the households interviewed in Kosovo stated that they felt safe in Kosovo, 70% of the households that had moved to Serbia stated that they feel or felt unsafe in Kosovo.

Asylum Applications from the Western Balkans in the European Union

In particular, after lifting the visa obligation for Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro in 2009 and for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2010, relatively large numbers of persons left these countries to ask for asylum in Western Europe.

Between 2008 and 2015 in total 375.790 persons from these five countries (Kosovo is still under a visa regime) applied for asylum in the European Union (EUROSTAT, 2015; Romalítico, 2016).

In general, it is assessed that a large number of these persons are of Romani origin. The European Stability Initiative (ESI) claims that 85-90% of the Serbian applicants and 50-70% of the Macedonian applicants are Roma. For the year 2014, the German Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that 92% of the asylum seekers from Serbia were Roma (German Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2015). However, in general it is assumed that in Germany, the main recipient country, one-third of the applicants from the Western Balkans are Roma (European Stability Initiative (2013; 2015); Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (2015).

If the ESI claim is correct, only from Serbia 130.000-138,000 Roma would have applied for asylum in Western Europe in the years 2008 – 2015 (153.335 applicants from Serbia in total). With 61.690 applicants from Macedonia, between 31.000 and 43.000 Roma from Macedonia would have applied for asylum in the European Union. In total, only from these two countries between 160.000 and 180.000 Roma would have asked for asylum.

39.590 persons from Bosnia and Herzegovina claimed asylum in this period. According to sources such as the European Asylum Support Office (EASO), the majority of the applicants were Roma (European Asylum Support Office (2013).

111.460 persons from Albania and 9.715 persons from Montenegro applied for asylum in these years. In both cases, it is assessed that the percentage of Roma is relatively low.

Overall and if the assumptions of ESI are correct, this would mean that in the years 2008 – 2013 more than 200.000 Roma fled these five countries and applied for asylum or were in the asylum procedure in a European Union Member State (assuming only a 30% average, around 125.000 Roma from Western Balkan countries (without Kosovo) would have applied for asylum in an EU Member State between 2008 and 2015.

Only in the period 2012-2015 more than 130.000 persons from Kosovo applied for asylum. In 2013, 20.215 persons applied for asylum doubling the number of applications in 2012 (European Commission, 2014, October). In 2014, the number rose to 37.875 persons and in 2015, 66.885 persons from Kosovo applied for asylum in the European Union (EUROSTAT 2015; EUROSTAT 2016).

How many of these applicants were Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians is difficult to assess, but we can safely assume that a couple of thousands were belonging to the three communities. According to reports and confirmations made by local NGO's, only between summer 2014 and spring 2015 between 7,500 and 10,000 Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians left Kosovo (Terre des Hommes, 2016, April). Ac-

cording to official data from the German government, only in the three months between January and March 2015, 1.827 Roma from Kosovo submitted new asylum applications (with follow-up applications from 2.101 persons) (Deutscher Bundestag 2015).²

Based on the official census results of 2011, this would mean that only in these few months more than 20% of the Roma, Ashkali and Balkan Egyptians have left Kosovo.

The European Union and the forced migration of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians

Irrespective of the different kind of data, it can be concluded that a relatively large number of Roma from the Western Balkans fled their home countries in the last few years, comprising probably up to 15% - 20% of the Romani population in the Western Balkans. There are further ten thousands of Roma who fled in the course of the wars in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo and live since up to 20 years either under temporary protection regimes, informally or with residence permits in Western European countries such as Italy, Switzerland or Germany. In addition, we can assume that more members of the three communities have left Western Balkans without applying for asylum in Western Europe.

Despite the considerable number of Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians fleeing the Western Balkans, the European Union and its Member States do not identify the high number of persons fleeing to Western Europe as an indicator that Anti-Gypsism and discrimination force them to leave their home countries.

In general, the reasons for leaving their home countries are attributed to poverty, to the attraction of the social system in Western Europe and sometimes even to the “specific life style” of the Roma, ignoring that the deep poverty of many Roma is caused by the discrimination, the exclusion and the Anti-Gypsism they currently face and had to face over centuries.

A recent reply of the German Government to an inquiry of the political party in the German Bundestag Die Linke illustrates this approach (Deutscher Bundestag 2016). The statement of the German Government totally ignores the discrimination of Roma in Kosovo (and Serbia). With regard to the employment situation, the German

² Asylum applicants who have been rejected but still are in Germany and who can bring forward new facts or new documents supporting the application, can submit a “Asylfolgeantrag” (follow-up application)

Government states that high unemployment is still a major problem in Kosovo and Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians are particular affected due to their low level of education. A statement which fully ignores even the findings of the Kosovo Government that these communities are deliberately underrepresented in the public work force – which is not related to their education level.

The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (EU Framework) from 2011, which is also valid for the countries in the accession process, remains silent when it comes to phenomenon of forced migration of Roma from the Western Balkans (European Commission, 2011, April). One could argue that the proposed focus of the EU Framework in the fields education, employment, housing and health would lead to a reduction of the pressure to leave the country. However, such an assumption neglects the Anti-Gypsism, the systematic and cumulative discrimination, and the exclusion of Roma prevailing in these countries that very much determine their socio-economic situation and in consequence decisions to leave their home countries.

Even when referring to phenomena such as discrimination and exclusion in analysing the situation of the Roma in the Western Balkans, the European Commission does not come to the conclusion that these phenomena prevail to such an extent that Roma are forced to leave the country. On the other hand, deplorable phenomena such as child labour and early marriages are highlighted in relation only to the three communities, assuming that they are only prevalent among these communities.

The following quote to the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians from the 2015 European Commission Progress Report on Kosovo illustrates the approach: «Members of these communities continue to face difficult living conditions, social exclusion and frequent discrimination, while child labour and early marriages continue to be prevalent. Access to labour market is difficult and informal employment prevails» (European Commission, 2016: 26).

Furthermore, the criticism or requests with regard to the inclusion of Roma brought forward by the Commission remain without any consequences, if the governments in Western Balkans bluntly ignore them. The issue of informal settlements in Kosovo might illustrate this (Müller, Jovanovic, 2011).

Already the 2006 European Partnership with Kosovo contains the short-term priority: «Regularise informal settlements. Find sustainable repatriation solutions for the integration of Roma minority communities that are living in hazardous living conditions in camps

and for internally displaced persons groups living in informal centres» (Council of the European Union, 2006).³

A short-term priority should be accomplished within one to two years. However, despite this request from 2006 and several other concluded agreements between the European Union and the Government of Kosovo and several laws and policies adopted in Kosovo, in 2016, ten years later, the situation on the ground remained unchanged – the informal settlements are not regularised and houses that were destroyed were not rebuilt.

Though the European Union has to assume a co-responsibility for the difficult housing situation of the Roma in Kosovo, it still does not object that its Member States return Roma by force to Kosovo.

Conclusion

In general, the measures financed by the European Union and targeting the Roma focus on the (short-term) alleviation of their deplorable economic situation or on improving the access to education, but do not address the root causes – the Anti-Gypsism the systematic and cumulative discrimination and their overall exclusion.⁴

Cumulative discrimination «expands the potential impact of racial discrimination to include cumulative effects over time, as well as the interaction between effects of discrimination experienced in one domain and at one point in time and events that occur in other domains and at other points in time».⁵

Though the concept applies very much to the situation of Roma in Europe, yet, only a few scholars discussed and applied the concept

³ Already the 2004 “Standards for Kosovo” – a roadmap on the way to independence already contained “standards” to be fulfilled by the then provisional local government and the UN Administration (UNMIK) referring to informal settlements: (i) Municipal authorities cease unlawful or unjustified attempts to develop public lands that have long-established informal settlements by minority communities or other vulnerable groups; (ii) Informal settlements of vulnerable minority groups have been legalised and regularised.

⁴ Measures targeting the social inclusion of the Roma in the Western Balkans are primarily financed by the European Union. With the Instruments for Pre-Accession IPA I and IPA II, the EU provides financial and technical assistance to countries in the accession process. IPA I (2007 – 2013) had a volume of €11.5 billion; IPAI (2014–2020) of €11.7 billion. See website of DG Enlargement. In December 2014, the European Commission approved the IPA Programme “Roma Integration 2020” that includes all countries in the Western Balkans and Turkey. See European Commission (2015, June). In June 2016, the programme was officially launched in cooperation with the Open Society Foundation. For a discussion of Antiziganism or Antigypsyism, see Alliance against Antigypsyism (2016).

⁵ Blank, Dabady and Citro (2004): 223.

of cumulative discrimination with regard to the situation of Roma in general or even specifically with regard to possible asylum applications (Muiznieks, 2015; Guild, Zwaan, 2014; O'Higgins, Brüggemann, 2013).

The European Union and its individual Member States do not take the prevalence of cumulative discrimination into account when addressing the migration of Roma, but instead work with the countries in the Western Balkans on tightening the border control. It seems to be obvious that the EU does not object questionable measures implemented e.g., in Macedonia where border guards conducted ethnic profiling at the border to prevent (illegally) Roma from leaving legally the country or Roma did not receive passports to leave the country (ERRC, 2014; Schweizer Flüchtlingshilfe, 2013). Furthermore, rejected asylum seekers who were forcefully returned to Macedonia remained excluded from accessing social insurance for a period of two years (ERRC, 2014; Schweizer Flüchtlingshilfe, 2013).

At home, the Western European countries focus their activities on forcibly returning Roma back to their country of origin – being aware that the majority has no chance to survive in their home country and that they will be forced to flee again to Western Europe. While the European Union and its Member States followed at home the policy of forcefully returning Roma to Kosovo, it calls upon the countries in the region, in particular Serbia and Montenegro to integrate those persons «who choose not to return» (Council of the European Union, 2006).

The European Union and its Member States seem to be caught in a trap: if they would admit that systematic and cumulative discrimination prevails and criticise the governments in the Western Balkans for the discrimination, they cannot send all Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians back. Therefore, they prefer to deny the systematic and cumulative discrimination that Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians face and send them back to Western Balkans without promoting measures combating the systematic and cumulative discrimination and without exercising sufficient pressure on the governments in the Western Balkans to work more on the social inclusion of the three communities.

The European Union and its Member States should have learnt in the last decades that these migrations can only be stopped if the situation in the countries of origin is improved and the root causes of migration are tackled. Tighter border control – including unlawful procedures – will only slow down, but not stop the migration and increase human trafficking with all its consequences.

Finally, the European Union and its Member States should be aware that only a policy built on evidence and on facts can lead to

substantial improvement. Ignoring the actual situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Balkan-Egyptians and the lack of commitment of politics and the authorities of their countries of origin will never lead to a sustainable social and economic inclusion.

In addition to an evidence-based, comprehensive and long-term policy addressing education, employment, housing, Anti-Ziganism and discrimination in the countries in the Western Balkans, the European Union and its Member States should introduce additional measures. In addition to directly working with the governments in the Western Balkans and increasing and improving their investments, the European Union and its Member States could include members of the three communities in legal labour migration and training possibilities that could alleviate their overall situation, in particular taking into account the importance of remittances.

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