“My home, My rights” Project
The role of media in reporting interethnic issues
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Introduction

“My Home, My Rights”

Earlier this year, the Association of Journalists of Kosovo announced, through the Confidence Building Measures Project - CBMP - supported “My Home, My Rights” Project, a call on researching issues related to common problems and challenges faced by different ethnic groups in Kosovo and the options for solving these issues within the framework of Solutions-Focused Journalism.

The five themes selected under this project focused on covering what is being done to solve a particular issue/challenge, rather than simply reporting on the issue in question. Thus, the reporter’s goal, beyond addressing the issue, has been to conduct a critical research of what institutions, organizations and the community are doing in dealing with the issue.

The five selected reporters have addressed themes with different features

In the “Hope for Hader Center residents” report, its author Arjeta Dragaj unveiled the story of residents left without family care, and who have found a home in this center in Prizren. The report shows under the center’s care are also people with special needs. The reporter emphasizes the deficiencies faced by this center and the need for state intervention.
The second story, “Refugees in their own country” discloses the stories of three Kosovo citizens, one from the Albanian, one from the Serb, and the other from the Roma community, who have one thing in common, the loss of access to their properties. The author, Leonora Bërbatovci, through this investigation showed the situation in the courts and the delays in property cases, by disclosing accurate statistics on of these cases.

“Dropping out of school to scrap a living on the street” is the third story within this project, and its focuses on members of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minority communities. The author, Valon Gallopeni, provides official figures and statistics on children of these communities dropping out of schools, also letting the children, who have been forced to drop out of school because of their difficult economic situation, speak for themselves. The author has engaged in conversations and conducted interviews with local and central officials, to understand the situation and what these institutions are doing to prevent

In the “Athletes and investments in sports, hostages of politics” report, its author, Taulant Osmani, provides information on an initiative undertaken by Kosovo Serbs to establish a football federation of the so-called Kosovo and Metohija. The author also points to the difficulties and pressures members of the Serb community face to integrate into the sporting life in Kosovo.

“Eternal Victims”, the report by the author Dardane Neziri, reveals the lives of victims of domestic violence, of all communities, the shelters available to them, the disregard from their families, and what the state and society is doing so these victims are not left on their own and without solutions. The author has collected confessions stories and statements from many stakeholders to understand in more detail how this category is treated, how are they integrated back into the society, and what needs to be done in the future.
We believe that this project managed to achieve its main goals of providing insightful reporting on the issues faced by Kosovo citizens from all communities, and of promoting the strengthening of trust between these different ethnic groups, advancing their socio-economic status and rights human.

The AJK is grateful to the UN CBMP for the support provided throughout the duration of the project.

The five stories have been published on the AJK’s web site and social networks, as well as on other online media. They were also broadcast on national and local TV stations in Kosovo.
HOPE FOR “HADER” CENTER RESIDENTS

AUTHOR: ARJETA DRAGAJ
Arta just turned 22 years old. Her mother, father and her brother died.

She says that she doesn`t have a real house, so her house is “Hader” center in Prizren.

Arta, Resident of “Hader”:

“My mother, my father and one of my brothers died, now I have just one sister and one of my brothers here.”

She shares the room with other women, who have ended up at the center due to different circumstances. Almost all of them are without family care and different diagnoses related to mental health. They don`t speak too much, but they seem very friendly to each other, and inside these walls there are no differences.

These women don`t have the same nationality, but for them it`s not important. What`s important is the professional care this center can`t offer.

Director Resmije Krasniqi has been fighting for decades for the rights of these people, who she considers as her children, but these days she has no more opportunities.

Except women, the center also shelters men, who only had one place to go, “Hader”. Even their diagnoses are different, mostly serious. Albanians, Serbs, Roma, Bosniaks, Turkish people and Croats live under a roof, with daily absences.

One of them, a homeless former KLA soldier of KLA, who had previously had a breakdown and now says he has been healed, has often begun to behave like their guardian.

Beqir Lame, Resident of “Hader”:

“I do it like a volunteer, they tell me their problems, these friends, these girls, I don`t know how to say it, the government doesn`t help us.”
Those who have already became residents of this center have no nurses, doctors, or anyone who can stay with them in difficult moments. To hire them, this center has no long-term funding, so the burden is on its director.

The two women who stay during the day to take care of these people haven’t been paid for months. In fact, even the residents feel the absence of care. They tell in their own way that they don’t have anyone looking after them except the director of the center.

Turkish resident speaking:

“Nobody is looking after me, nobody, I’m staying alone.”

In fact, these people have never been left alone from the director of this center.

Having the experience with her daughter, who is also a member of the association, she opened the doors to anyone who needed, indiscriminately. And in this association where they stand, come in and out 81 Albanians, 30 Turks, 30 Roma, 3 Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks, they say that in this period almost all institutions closed the doors for them.

Donations that they take, go to the needs of those who stay there, and when it comes to the care they need, they have big difficulties.

Resmije Krasniqi, Director, “Hader,” Prizren:

“Only my soul knows how hard I worked; I am mother of a child with mental difficulties. She pushed me to do this work. I said if I die tomorrow, my daughter will be on the streets, that touched my heart and all the children I saw on the streets I took them inside this center.”

Resmije has requested several times an operations license from the institutions, which would allow access to the planned budget for this category.
Resmije Krasniqi, Director, “Hader,” Prizren:

“Hader” must be allowed to get a license, like the others, who just provide day care and take 20k euros. How they cannot remember about us, they stay here 24h, we clean them, we take care of them, these children belong to Kosovo, to Prizren.”

However, Resmija is hoping very much that institutions will begin to consider her plea, though they have been frequently disappointed.

And the importance of this center is great, as these people, if they were not there, would be on the streets facing great dangers. Some of the women in the center, Resmija says, were found them at the bus station and around the cafes, where she says they were also sexually harassed.

The Regional Police in Prizren also know about the activity of this center.

Vesel Gashi, Police, Prizren Station:

“In the past, Police met people of this category on the streets. We didn’t have where to send them and we sent them to “Hader”. But not in these five years, we haven’t met anyone who we can send there.”

The fact that this center has difficulties is also recognized in the Municipality of Prizren, in the Directorate for Social Welfare.

We tried to understand whether if a solution could be offered to them. During the realization of the interview, we realized that a government-funded project was launched to open doors for people with mental disabilities without family care.

But is there a possibility that residents of “Hader”; to be part of this new project?

“Indeed, it’s really a hard and difficult job to do. In the new center there are some conditions for those who can be accepted. For now, I can say that there will be people without family care and mental health difficulties.
Without religious, ethnic or other differences”, says the official of the Prizren Municipality Directorate for Social Welfare.

In fact, the realization of this project that is expected to be made within a year, can only be one of the solutions that can be offered to members of the “Hader” association.

A better solution would be if “Hader” would be licensed and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare would allow them professional and state care.

Qazim Gashi, from this department, shows that the new center being built in Prizren will accommodate persons in need, with problems of this nature, which may include the persons of the “Hader” center without any distinction.

“Part of those who meet the conditions under the AI 11/2014, apart from the center for social work, will be transferred in the new care center. They are Kosovo Citizens, Absolutely, we will not leave them without care. We will find a solution; foster families against compensation. These are the obligations of the Center, and together we have to find a solution for them, to offer them the services they deserve. If this Lady (Resmija) in the future can meet the conditions to take the license and to have a professional staff, of course she can apply to offer this kind of services”, says Gashi

Another solution is the licensing of the center, which the ministry can do if “Hader” center provides the necessary staff, because in the last application they didn’t have a psychologist. Even if the people at “Hader” have indispensable need for the presence of Resmije, the Ministry stands open for cooperation.

But the MPMS isn’t the only institution that have to take care of people in these conditions. The responsibilities related to their health are an obligation of Ministry of Health. In the relevant Department they tell that people with mental difficulties take the treatment in medical centers. But how can this be solved in “Hader”? The Ministry of Health isn’t obligated to send any doctor or nurse there, but arrangements can be made, so that “Hader” residents don’t miss health services.
“If any association wants to do provide shelter to this category of people, and finds the funding, because such work has its costs, there isn’t anything bad about it. But if there aren’t fully staffed, we can make arrangements through the professional mental health service in the Prizren Municipality, and the Psychiatric ward. I think it can be arranged with collaboration, so that this category get the proper care and doctors the proper means”, says the MoH official.

Buzhala says he will look into the situation of the residents and if they are treated well in health centers where they look for help.

“I will personally look into it, I will contact the director of the Hospital, of the and Psychiatric ward, to see how they deliver the services” he said.

Por kujdesi për një person të njëjtë si të anëtarëve të shoqatës “Hadër” do të duhej të jetë goxha i madh.

Psychiatrist Sami Rexhepi shows what people in Hader Center needs are.

“The doctor must keep them calm, because they sometimes are depressed. The nurse’s role must be to set up therapy groups and play groups, as part of therapy. Therapeutist choose the people and let them know which one of them can do any activity. They start to feel more valuable,” he says.

All this staff that is mentioned by Rexhepi is at the Special Institute in Shtime, which is under the care of the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. There, one day of a resident is filled with activities and schedules, set by the staff of the Institute. And this also helps in achieving progress and makes them feel better. They have a from for painting and handicraft.

They spend every afternoon together under the supervision of nursing staff. Depending on the diagnosis, residents take the medicines prescribed by the doctor.

But it is different in “Hader”. They miss such a thing.
However, it is love for one another that keeps them calm, as according to the director, they have long taken no medication for sedation.

During the time the television crew stayed at the center, they noticed the good mood of residents, but their conditions aren’t always the same. And if there is some irritation between themselves, and the director of the center or the volunteer women who care for them aren’t there, one of them has to intervene to overcome the problem.

The transfer of residents, or the urgent intervention of the MoH to grant the operations license, would put an end to their problems. This would also help their progress, since some of them are not in grave conditions. Over the years they have been there, they have made no improvements, like the two girls that are unbale to learn new verses.

“I was young, now I’m old, and I don’t want to go to school”, says one of them.

Once the new center is built, the professional staff will be hired and its doors will be open.

And if in the meantime, “Hader” Center is fully staffed, it could even be licensed. In both formats, residents of the center will no longer be in the same conditions...
REFUGEES IN THEIR OWN COUNTRY

AUTHOR: LEONORA BERBATOVCI
The apartment where Fadil Igrishta grew up is only a few meters away from here. But, for 20 years he is deprived of the right to use his property located in northern Mitrovica, like many Albanians on this side. Over the years, has lived in various rented locations, becoming a social assistance case.

Fadili Igrishta, an Albanian resident of Mitrovica:

“We paid a visit right after the war, and since then we’ve never been back. I feel just like a refugee, because my property is 300 meters from, but I have to live in a rented house...I was in Peja, I was in Skenderaj lately in the southern part... now in the northern part for four years...”

While for Fadil is still impossible even to visit his property, a Kosovo Serb, Milorad Djokovic from Vitomirica of Peja, who claims that the property is actually his, can go for a visit but cannot settle in. For more than five years he has been seeking in court the ownership of the property he says he bought in 1996.

Milorad Djokovic, Serb resident of Vitomirica:

“They have taken the house and argued that I have falsified the documentation. I couldn’t falsify from all the institutions... The first trial lasted for 3 and a half years I waited. It’s been two years since I’ve been waiting for the next trial. Many people are waiting. Not just my case. Indeed, the courts are delaying too much. It’s difficult. Everyone has to leave. You can walk by the house you’ve built but you cannot continue working on it. It’s a tough feeling”.

The situation isn’t better in the Roma community either. Velfik Kurteshi, who was born in Prishtina, was forced to rent in Gjilan because of the inability to use his property. He claims that someone has sold his house with false documents. He too, has been waiting for the court ruling for years.

Velfik Kurteshi, Roma from Prishtina:

“I pay court fees, but when it comes to a ruling, I don’t have anything.
This isn’t normal, waiting for three and a half years, so why live in Gjilan when I can live in Prishtina where I was born. I love my birthplace.”

All these cases have a common address. They complain that the courts aren’t doing their job and because of that many of them live as refugees in their own country. This finding is supported by the People’s Advocate, Hilmi Jashari, who considers that not delivering of justice in an optimal time-frame constitutes a violation of human rights. However, he says there is a solution to these cases.

Hilmi Jashari, People’s Advocate:

“One of the recent proposals we have made in the Judicial Council has been the initiative of a law that foresees citizens compensation for lengthy procedures. This standard means that the citizens, when the violation is found, should be compensated by the as remedy for the violation.”

The Kosovo Judicial Council has provided statistics that reflect the backlog of cases. Since early 2018 there were 524 unsolved cases in the KJC. While 263 other cases were received during this year, making a total of 787 cases pertaining to property issues throughout the year.

Through 2018, Courts in Kosovo have managed to dispose in 257 cases, thus, by the end of the year, leaving a backlog of 530 cases in the court files.

The Agency for Property Comparison and Verification discloses that there are 42,116 submitted cases out of which 40,447 have been processed for implementation.

Based on this data, this Agency discloses that it has so far executed 8,178 eviction orders throughout the territory of Kosovo, by expelling illegal occupants from the property of successful claimants. While 449 criminal charges were filed with the State Prosecution for re-occupying the property that are the subjects to the claims.
DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL TO SCRAP A LIVING ON THE STREET

AUTHOR: VALMIR GALLOPENI
“I dropped out in third grade. Although I had good grades, I couldn’t go to school, because we were a family of 12, and they needed my help. I started collecting cans and selling them, and I made 5 to 10 euros a day…”

This is how the 17-year-old Albert Gashi from Plemetin village of Obiliq Municipality begins his story of dropping out of the school, as he calculates how much he earned today and plans where to go the next day to find cans. Albert is one of many children of the Roma community that drop out of school every year. He says that despite his father’s insistence on pursuing an education, this was impossible because of poverty.

“The separation from school and my friends made me very sad. My father always used to tell me to go to school, but I realized the family had no means to provide for my education, and that they have a great need for my help,” Albert says.

Similar situations are also faced by children from the Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Obiliq, the municipality Albert comes from, annually records about 10 cases of pupils from these communities dropping out of school for many reasons.

“Every year we have school dropouts from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, about 5 to 10 pupils. But there are times when they return to school after 2-3 months, and they drop out again,” says Adem Haliti, Information Officer in the Obiliq Municipality.

Low awareness of parents about the importance of their children’s pre-school, compulsory elementary and upper secondary education; early marriages; child labor with parents (collection of cans and other jobs); economic and social hardships, are just some of the reasons for dropping out of school by the pupils of these communities, mentioned by the official from the Obiliq Municipality.

The municipality of Fushe Kosova also faces such a problem. Spokesperson of this municipality, Ali Topalli, points out that the largest number of pupils from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community interrupt their education without giving any reason.
“The pupils from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities who dropped out of school during the 2017/18 school year total a number of 26. The pupils who have dropped out of school don’t express any convincing reason for this phenomenon. They mostly make this step on voluntary basis and don’t express interest in attending classes,” Topalli says.

Gjakova is also one of the municipalities facing school dropouts by the pupils of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community, although this phenomenon is on the decline in this municipality. Unlike 2014-2015 when 88 cases were registered, in the 2018-2019 school year there are only 16 dropouts. Again, the main reason is the economic situation, but a large number of them return to school again.

“Many of the children in poor families don’t attend school because they lack proper clothing. We have directed them to go at the Red Cross, but they complain that the Red Cross provides them with old clothes, which don’t help make the children feel good in relation to the other children in the school. So here is the first obstacle that appears,” said Afijete Efendia, officer for statistics in the Gjakova Municipality.

The situation is better in the Prizren Municipality, where these communities are larger, whereas the number of those who have stopped attending school in recent years has marked a significant decline.

“The number of students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities who have dropped out of school in our municipality is five. Four cases are handled by the MED according to legal procedures, and currently the center for social work is dealing with this,” says the Director of Education in this municipality, Skender Susuri.

“The main factor of dropout is the socio-economic situation, and migration,” Susuri further emphasizes.
In the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, it is reported that the number of pupils of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities who have quit education in the 2017-2018 school year is 88. While in previous years, according to MEST statistics, this number has been significantly larger.


According to the Ahtisaari’s Package and the Constitution of Kosova, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are also represented in the Kosovo Assembly. The MPs of these communities claim that in recent years, however, there has been a decline in the phenomenon of school dropouts. The MP Albert Kinolli, says that the main factors that force the children of the Roma community to interrupt their education are related to the serious socio-economic situation, and according to Kinolli the main burden is borne by the parents and institutions. “In cooperation with civil society and institutions, we have ongoing trainings and activities with citizens to raise awareness of the issue of education, informing parents first of all that the key to our future lies precisely in education. We have managed to minimize or decrease the level of dropout rates in recent years,” Kinolli said.

MP Kinolli points out that the problem is also the impossibility for students to attend classes in their mother tongue, Roma language.

The representative of the Egyptian community in the Assembly of Kosovo, Veton Berisha, says that apart from the economic factor and the lack of prospects, the children of the Egyptian community are also discriminated.

“Egyptian children, during their time at school, are treated as inferiors treated by their mates and teachers, and at the same time they face problems, because they aren’t equally dressed, apparently because of this economic situation,
so the economic factor is also the main factor affecting the interruption of schooling. We have cases when they make them sit on last desks when pupils are mistreated by the teachers. And in such circumstances, as soon as they reach the age of 18 or 19, young people are looking out for opportunities to go abroad,” Berisha stated.

However, MP Berisha points out that progress has been made thanks to the laws that enabled the children of these communities to get educated, although he points out that law enforcement mechanisms are lacking.

The MP from the Ashkali community, Hetem Arifi, gives another reason why young people in this community quit schooling.

“Young people in our community leave the school because they don’t see a future, especially those who finish primary education are trying to find a job abroad; a large number of them look at opportunities to go to Europe for a better life for themselves and their families. The greatest responsibility for interruption of education is borne by parents, then teachers, as well as institutions that aren’t doing much to implement the law,” says Arifi.

The Ministry of Education states that through the implementation of laws and other activities, continuous efforts are made to ensure that the members of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities become aware of the importance of education.

“MEST, in coordination with partners, has established a solid basis against school dropouts, which is regulated and based on legal infrastructure; nowadays we have teams for prevention and response to dropout and non-enrollment in schools, which operate at school, municipality and at MEST level. There are also manuals and instruments for identification, reporting and referral of cases, as well as the possibility of reporting to the Early Warning System for Dropouts within the Education Management Information System (SMIA).
Regular use of this system helps us to properly identify and deal in real time with the cases at risk of dropping out,” spokesperson Gashi emphasized.

Municipalities also say that in recent years they have taken measures to prevent school dropouts.

“The Education Directorate has established within the schools the teams for prevention, response to drop out and non-enrollment of pupils, and has campaigned in these communities. It has organized free transportation for non-formal education for pupils in PLSE (I-IX) from Plemetin and Old Obiliq. It has organized free education for adults in HSPE (X-XII) for students whose families are social cases, under the Regulation on the allocation of scholarships and the compensation of travel expenses” emphasizes the information officer of the Obiliq Municipality, Adem Haliti.

In the Gjakova Municipality, also say that they always assist schools which cannot solve cases of school dropouts. While the Prizren Municipality, which has no significant problem of school dropouts, said that all their teams for prevention of school dropouts are operational.

The non-governmental organizations dealing with communities in Kosovo have played a major role in raising awareness on education. One of them is the organization “VoRAE”.

“According to the situation we are following with programs that we work on as an organization, in the last 3 years there is a slight decline in dropouts. The pupils are forced to engage in private to make a living for their relatives, as their parents are unemployed, sick or even retired. There are also some cases where 12th grade students are married,” the organization said.

But how can the school dropout rates by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian decline even more? Sociologist Ferdi Kamberi says that the institutions should focus more on implementing the laws they have adopted.
“The institutions of the country have created mechanisms to prevent this phenomenon. It is also worth mentioning the various strategies, then the local plans, as well as other instruments. However, the biggest problems are in their implementation and often these narratives remain on paper. We consider that this is one of the challenges of the institutions and of the Kosovar society itself and as a best possible way would be to have a greater monitoring of the implementation of drafted policies in practice,” Kamberi said.

In order for this problem to be a thing of the past, Kamberi says that in the first place there is a need for a greater awareness of the members of these communities on the importance of education.

“The focus should be on different projects from MEST, municipalities, NGOs, regarding the awareness of these communities about the importance of education, awareness of communities about the consequences of early marriages, their involvement in various socio-cultural projects, vocational training, complementary learning as well as other aspects in order to strengthen social cohesion and social integration,” sociologist Kamberi emphasized.

The 17-year-old Albert Gashi would like his family history and economic situation be different and that one day he could return to school desks. He promises that he will take care of his brothers and sisters to make them a better education and a better life.

“I will make efforts for my younger brothers and sisters to make possible for them to go to school and never drop out of their schooling,” Albert speaks with mixed emotions full of fondness and optimism.
ATHLETES AND INVESTMENTS IN SPORTS, HOSTAGES OF POLITICS

AUTHOR: TAULANT OSMANI
Today’s world-class athletes are a model for many other people. The successes of a well-known athlete can be a guide to many others.

Their stories on the path of success often have become ‘laws’ to be followed by young people.

An athlete’s success isn’t just his success. The successes and failures of an athlete are of all the people through which he has gained sympathy from. This is one of the biggest challenges of an athlete. His success isn’t entirely his. It is part of everyone.

Being an athlete means you have to compete, for the sake of the trophy, even with those you may have never thought that you could look them in the eye.

Just over a decade ago, in many countries around the world, social groups were divided into races. Today, athletes of all social groups are tied up together and have only one wish, success.

However, the challenges of ethnic and racial disparities in sport haven’t completely vanished. Although cases like this are very rare in the most democratic countries of the world, the same cases are still present in the Balkan countries.

The 2014 incident is still fresh in Belgrade, where Serbia and Albania played against each other for the 2016 European Cup. The fight (beating up) among players, the enthusiasm of fans at the stadium, was considered as a serious threat to people’s lives.

Besides the Albanians, there are five other communities in Kosovo that are constitutional part of the Republic of Kosovo, but other communities as well.

Some of these communities are well integrated into local institutions, and some have stalled.

However, in the field of sports, sports institutions in Kosovo say they have faced rejection by the Serb community on their
path to the integration. According to them, all this is done because of the political pressure.

Months ago, there was a news media report about the establishment of the Football Federation of Kosovo and Metohija.

However, UEFA and FIFA, the two leading European and world football organizations, recognize the Football Federation of Kosovo (FFK) only.

According to media, Milan Radojicic was elected as the chairman of the Football Federation of Kosovo and Metohija. The latter is wanted by Kosovo Police as a suspect of the murder of Serb politician in Kosovo, Oliver Ivanovic.

Eroll Salihu, secretary of the Kosovo Football Federation, in a conversation with BIRN, says that they have information on this initiative.

“A person who is wanted by law in Kosovo has recently been allegedly appointed as a head of the Federation for Kosovo. This is something absurd. We have notified FIFA and UEFA about this appointment,” says Salihu for BIRN, adding that the secretary of the Football Federation of Serbia had his say about this initiative too.

“Even the secretary general of the Serbian federation, who is now the third man in UEFA, says that this is pointless and is used solely for political purposes, thus, to destabilize the north. The FIFA and UEFA status stipulates that the only mechanism entitled to organize competitions is the FFK,” says Salihu.

According to him, this federation is “illegal and factually bizarre. There is no parallel federation, because there is no competition. All this is a political provocation,” he says.

The news that such a federation was established has “forced” the Olympic Committee of Kosovo (OCK) to investigate whether there are any tendencies in other sports as well.
OCK President, Besim Hasani, reveals to BIRN that he has asked the federations to see whether there are parallel arrangements in other sports. “As OCK, we have sent letters to every federation emphasizing that, in case they are in possession of any information on this matter, they should notify the international federations, because they recognize the federation of one country only,” says Hasani.

“We have no information whatsoever except those related to football” he says.

While the Olympic Committee of Serbia, in reply to BIRN, considers Kosovo as part of Serbia.

According to this committee, as they revealed to BIRN, the decisions are made by the federations and not by them as an institution, but it is still possible that the Football Federation of Serbia has a key role in establishing a parallel federation.

“In this regard, all National (National) Sports Federations of Olympic Sports have full competence and the right to make decisions for joining and organizing within their own Joint Sport, throughout the territory of the Republic of Serbia, by including Kosovo and Metohija,” reads the replies of the Olympic Committee of Serbia to BIRN.

BIRN has also written to the Football Federation of Serbia, but no reply has received from the same.

The Federation School Sports is also part of the Olympic Committee of Kosovo. This federation organizes various races with lower and upper secondary schools for some sports.

However, according to its Chairman, Adrian Telaku, this federation isn’t extended to the entire territory of the Republic of Kosovo.

In a conversation with BIRN, he says that some non-Albanian majority municipalities have already established the federation associations, yet a lot of work remains to be done.
“For Prizren region, with Turkish and Gorani community presence, as a federation, we organize the activities,” Telaku said to BIRN.

He further says that they will soon try to establish associations in other municipalities as well.

“We haven’t yet tried doing the same in other municipalities where the majority of communities are minorities, but we will soon try to establish the association in Mamusha Municipality and we will also try doing the same in Gracanica Municipality.”

“We expect to establish this association in the municipality of Gracanica, because it is in the interest of students / children,” Telaku told BIRN.

President of the Olympic Committee of Kosovo has talked about the 2016 year, recalling the Olympic Games in Rio. He recalls that during that time they invited an athlete/cyclist of the Serb community to represent Kosovo in the Olympic Games.

“A cyclist was keen to be part of the Olympic Games in Rio. He was from Strpce and he was a good athlete. I talked to him, and I talked to his mother for several times. I have told them that he will have the same treatment as any other athlete, that all athletes will be entitled to Olympic scholarship. There was a lot of enthusiasm from them and the interest was enormous but they said they should consult someone. Apparently, they consulted wrong people and were lack of courage,” Hasani told BIRN.

One of the biggest dreams of an athlete is to be part of the Olympic Games.

“Being part of the Olympic Games changes the lives of any athlete. Knowing the fact that even Rio was not attractive to him, this is an indication that they were a subject of a pressure,” says Hasani.
BIRN made several attempts to run in contact with this athlete, but never succeeded.

Of all this political mess in Kosovo and Serbia, the youth are those who are being harmed the most.

Because of Serbia's constant objections, until a few years, the Kosovo athletes didn’t manage to participate in international races.

While today, because of political pressure, many young people have their dreams lost in vain.
“ETERNAL” VICTIMS

AUTHOR: DARDANE NEZIRI
In the first month of the pregnancy, she appeared at the Women’s Shelter doors, swollen and bleeding. The doors were known to her. She had knocked for help and shelter two more times, after the constant violence she was experiencing from her husband.

She had taken two children with her. One was three years old and the other, one and a half years old. She gave birth to the third child at the shelter. Now, even after ten months of birth she continues to feed her baby at the shelter.

Over a year and a half, the 31-year-old from Gjakova is experiencing “double violence”. She doesn’t have where to go. She has decided not to return at her husband’s house, with whom she says she isn’t in wedlock. She doesn’t have any solution even from her family. She’s been left without a long-term solution even from the state.

“My family told me that you can come back home, but we cannot accept the kids’. And I will not leave my children for any price. Never,” confesses a frazzled N.N.

Recently, she has been offered a six-month lease from the Gjakova Municipality, with the condition she finds the apartment herself.

“What am I going to do after six months? I will be forced to go back to the shelter again. I have no other place to go,” she continues.

In a similar situation there are dozens of women throughout Kosovo, who have experienced and continue to experience domestic violence. They have remained in the mercy of “destiny”. Without housing, without employment. So far, state institutions have offered only short-term solutions. In most of the cases they have been victims of systematic violence, because they have returned to the abuser again, without finding a sustainable housing and employment solution.

“I’ve had enough of this life; I want to get out of the shelter”
It’s been six months since M.M. has sought shelter at the Shelter for Women and Children in Prishtina. This is the second time the 32-year-old has turned to the center for help after the physical and psychic violence exercised by her husband and mother-in-law. She was forced to leave her three children and now she rarely sees them.

She’s out of options because she couldn’t benefit anything from her ex-husband’s assets. As she confesses, the entire assets are in the name of his parent. On the other hand, her family doesn’t accept her. As for the sharing of the assets, “it’s not even considered”.

“Lately, I have concluded the trial for divorce. Nothing of his assets was given to me. Even my family refuses to help me,” says M.M.

Now, all she wants from the state is to provide her with housing and the opportunity to find a job.

“I want to start a new life. I miss my children. Every day I am insisting on getting out of the shelter, but even if I go out, I have no place to go. I appeal to the state to help me. At least, to find a job. I know how to cook and I’m a good at cooking,” pleads the 32-year-old woman, although she says she has already lost hopes that “someone will help”.

The two victims are among hundreds of women being sheltered in Kosovo. There are eight shelters throughout the country. Under their internal charter, a victim can be sheltered for up to six months, at several shelters for up to one year. Last year, 432 cases were registered.

Of these, 75 cases were received in the “Safe House” shelter in the Gjakova Municipality. Its director, Sakibe Doli says that besides women, there are also children up to the age of 13. Only in the three months of this year, 50 cases have been recorded, she says.
“This has happened, because some shelters didn’t have donations and were temporarily closed. Consequently, cases are referred to us,” she explains.

During the past year, she says they have sheltered 44 women and 31 children (17 girls and 14 boys), while during this period they have sheltered 24 women and 26 children (21 girls and boys).

RAE community with the largest number of recurrent cases in Gjakova

The age of female victims, according to statistics of this center ranges from 20 to 70 years. Over 90 percent have low educational attainment, and marital status differs from married, cohabiting, married without wedlock, widowed, and divorced.

Regarding victims from other communities, Doli says that for years they haven’t received any case from the Serb community.

In the past, there have been several cases of women who have been married to Albanians.

“In our municipality, by communities, the largest number of cases comes from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities. Based on the total population, I can say that up to 28 percent of the cases we have, come from this community,” adds Doli.

Meanwhile, based on the analysis they have done over the years, Doli says that in their municipality the recurrent cases (which experience systemic violence) belong to the RAE community.

“Our shelter has the largest number of recurrent cases from RAE community,” she points out.

The causes of violence, as she says, are among the most varied, ranging from loss of trust from their husbands; use of alcohol, drugs; low self-confidence and mentality;
difficult economic conditions, and so on.

Most of the victims, as Doli says, come from the Gjakova Municipality, but also from the municipality of Malisheva and Rahovec, not excluding other municipalities in smaller numbers.

“Statistics vary from year to year, from city to village, but I can say that 58 percent of the cases are from villages and 42 percent from the city,” she said.

In 90 percent of the cases, according to her, the abuser is the husband, and in 10 percent other family members.

According to Doli, the state has failed to prevent cases of violence, because it has established legal mechanisms and action plans without financial support.

The most problematic issue, as she says, remains the long-term housing solution. According to her, in the shelter she runs, a victim can stay for a minimum six months and a maximum 12 months. However, the director says that in the absence of state assistance there are women in the center who stay for 2-3 years.

Another problem remains the reintegration of victims – employment by state institutions. As a shelter, they work in this direction through external donations and memorandums of understanding, she says.

“Through professional training at the Vocational Training Center, we offer several months training courses for victims. Thus, for tailoring, hairdressing, office administration, accounting, and courses within the shelter, such as baking, beekeeping, knitting, embroidery, learning English language. As well, women can work in the city families for daily work, let them clean up, but also as guardians of children or elderly people and they take for themselves the money they earn,” continues Doli.
This shelter, according to her, has an annual budget of 60 thousand euros, which as she says, for direct assistance is sufficient.

However, according to Doli, the Law on Domestic Violence needs to be amended and coordination mechanisms should be established in municipalities.

“All, the National Strategy for Combating Domestic Violence should take legal character. Then, the financial support to the shelters should be foreseen by law, with a percentage set by the municipality and the central government. On the contrary, as it is happening, shelters are forced to shut down in the absence of financial matters,” she points out.

Regarding the increase of the number of shelters in the country, Doli says it may be sufficient compared to the trend of reported violence. However, under the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe Convention on Combating and Preventing Violence against Women and Children), that Kosovo claims to have signed, foresees that each state has 1 shelter per 100 thousand inhabitants.

“We don’t leave the victims in the street, even after six months”

Another shelter, which has been operating since the pre-war period, is also the one in the capital. Its director, Zana Hamiti-Asllani, says the center has been operating continuously, excluding an 18-month break due to a license problem and a lack of funding.

Since June last year, she says she has been charged with serving as head of the center. There are in total seven employees, including her.

In addition to social workers, an oncologist, a gynecologist, a psychosocial worker, and a psychologist were hired.

From the beginning of this year until March, she says they have received 28 victims in the center.
Meanwhile, since June, when they resumed their work, they received 55 cases.

Most of them are from the Prishtina Municipality, while the rest from other municipalities, such as: Fushe Kosova, Lipjan, Obiliq, Drenas and Podujeva.

She says that the victims usually come with bodily injuries as a result of physical violence, but there are also numerous cases of psychological violence.

A victim, according to the center’s regulation, is expected to stay from 24 hours up to six months in the shelter. However, Hamiti-Asllani says the victims “aren’t left in the street” until the problem is solved by the Center for Social Work.

“The reason that a victim continues to stay in the center for more than six months is that she has nowhere to go, family members don’t accept her and she cannot survive, as long as she doesn’t have any income. We have a case here now that isn’t domestic violence, but it was a few years ago. She’s still here, because she has nowhere to go, and social workers haven’t yet managed to find housing for her,” she confessed.

Usually, Hamiti-Asllani says the abusers are husbands, but there are also cases where victims are subjected to violence by their father, brother, brother-in-law, father-in-law or any other person.

Hamiti – Asllani says that many of the victims who are sheltered are recurrent cases, which means experiencing ongoing violence. According to her, this is happening because nothing is done to secure housing for the victims and “they are forced to return to the abuser”.

“There are few cases who return to their biological families, but the state should provide them with housing and this remains the biggest challenge. Then, also their reintegration is a challenge, as they have to advance for work,” adds the director.
From the total victims sheltered from other communities, she says that they had only from RAE community, but no Serb cases.

“Last year we received 1 victim from the Roma community, 6 from the Ashkali community and 1 foreign-Slovakian citizen,” she adds.

Based on statistics, Hamiti-Asllani says that cases of sheltering victims have increased by 10 percent, compared with the period of the first post-war years.

Meanwhile, the biggest challenge, even the foremost of this center, is to get sustainable funding. This problem, she says, has followed them consistently. The whole coalition of shelters, as well as the Kosovo Government itself, as she says, are interested in providing a budget of three years, as long as these centers are also licensed.

So far with the annual budget of 15,000 euros, she says they have come up with many difficulties to cover all the needs. However, she says they were lucky at the end of last year after a donation of 10,630 pounds from a London charity.

“This fund has brought us out of the crisis and we using it until we are awarded the project from the ministry,” adds Hamiti-Asllani.

**Serb community in the north without shelters for victims of violence**

Unlike the Albanian community, which has eight shelters available for victims of violence, the Serb community has only one, which isn’t operational yet. This is the shelter in the Novoberda Municipality, which was established last year.

This shelter is in the process of licensing professionals. It is financially supported by UNMIK, KFOR and OSCE.

The most problematic thing seems to be in the northern part of the country, where there are no registered shelters.
Regarding the situation there, Tijana Simic, manager of the Center for Prevention and Protection of Women from Gender Violence and Domestic Violence, which offers free legal and psychological assistance, as well as reintegration, says that last year there was an increase of the number of cases of domestic violence compared to 2017.

“Our center has been providing services to nearly 800 customers over the past two years. When we consider that we have clients whom we follow them from the period of abuse to their reintegration into society, it turns out that they are thousands. But the increasing percentage of cases doesn’t necessarily mean that there is an increase in domestic violence. Rather, the creation of a court in the north may have motivated women to report abuses,” she explains.

Victims of violence in the north, as Simic says, usually seek shelter at the South Mitrovica Shelter, which is headed by the Albanian community.

“We have a good cooperation with that center. However, the victims are reluctant to go there. There is another trauma for them. However, they receive the necessary care,” she adds.

Regarding the settlement of the housing issue for victims, Simic says there is no complete information on whether anybody has been offered long-term residency, but may say that no client has been offered this solution at the center.

Difficulties, according to her, were created at the moment the court in the north started under the patronage of the Republic of Kosovo at the end of 2017.

Previously, Simic says most marriages have been legalized in the Serbian court in north Mitrovica and children were born in the Serbian hospital. As the court was integrated into the Kosovo system, as she explains, the system didn’t recognize those marriages, nor the birth certificates of children issued by the Serbian system. The court also didn’t recognize the decisions of the Serbian court that were issued before judicial reintegration.
“We had a case where a woman couldn’t be divorced because she was married in a Serbian court, also she couldn’t ask for custody or a baby’s visit because the child didn’t have a birth certificate of Kosovo. So, it was not recognized by the system. This was happening for about a year before resolving the issue of where the documents were to be known. During the negotiations in Brussels, these problems were not foreseen. Negotiators didn’t really think about the practical changes that would occur during and after the transition. Another issue related to the solution is the complicated process. Some of the women we talked to were demotivated because of the complexed and long process,” she confessed.

To offer solutions in this regard, Simic says that the state must approve the Istanbul Convention and the convention should be implemented.

“It is recognized as the most comprehensive convention dealing with gender-based and family violence that defines the role of the state, institutions and NGO service providers. Also, the revision of relevant laws in accordance with the Istanbul Convention is imperative,” she adds.

As for NGOs, Simic says the state needs to ensure that service providers have adequate funding for services, and local governments should not interfere if they cannot support service providers.

“As a community, I don’t think we differ from other communities in Kosovo. We need awareness-raising, trainings for general service providers (police, medical staff, prosecutors, judges, social workers). We need the recognition of women-led organizations that provide specialized support services from local authorities and we need specialized support services,” she says in the end.

Police: In 2018 there were 17.65% more cases of violence than in 2017
Cases of domestic violence are on the rise. Based on Kosovo Police statistics, in 2017, 1269 cases have been denounced, whereas last year 1541 cases. Expressed in percentage, 17.65 percent more cases have been reported.

Two years ago, victims of these cases, by gender, were 818 women and 227 males.

“In 42 cases the victims’ housing was realized. The largest number of such cases were recorded in the Prishtina region with 298 cases, followed by the Prizren region with 242 cases, and the Peja region with 211 cases,” reads in the statement of the Police Information Office.

Violence, according to this institution, most commonly occurred among spouses. Thus, 553 violent cases were related to spouses, while in 142 cases the violence was manifested between sons and fathers.

The most exposed age to this violence was between 20-30 years (327 cases), as well as 30-40 (305 cases).

“By ethnic group, on cases of domestic violence we have the following data: 1045 Albanians, 107 RAE communities, followed by 87 cases of Serb community. As suspected of committing these cases, 400 people were arrested, police said.

**As a result of violence, in 2017, five victims died**

Last year, 1189 women and 308 males were registered as victims of violence

“In 29 cases the victim’s housing was realized. The largest number of such cases were recorded in the Prishtina region with 442 cases, in Prizren region with 251 cases, and in Gjilan region 211 cases. The most common cases are evidenced when violence occurs between spouses, in 727 cases, followed by 162 cases of father-son violence,” reads the response of police.
Violence registered by ethnic group includes: 1287 Albanians, 123 RAE communities, followed by 101 cases of the Serb community. As suspected of committing these cases, 499 people were arrested.

Meanwhile, as a result of the violence, six victims have died.

Information about domestic violence, especially about their treatment and final verdicts in the courts, was requested from the Kosovo Judicial Council.

However, in their response, these data were not provided. Some statistics on offenses related to marriage and family have been sent, most of which talk about child-related obligations as well as illegal marriages, excluding statistics on cases of violence.

**Ministry of Labor says long-term housing is a municipal responsibility**

The Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare has also been contacted to learn about the reintegration and settlement of the victim’s housing issue.

Regarding the long-term settlement of the housing issue, the head of the Public Communication Office, Musa Demiri, states that every case is unique and is treated as such.

“This social protection doesn’t start and doesn’t only end with casual housing. Housing is just one of the forms of protection. Social services address every case of domestic violence based on their mandate, including coordination and providing advice on cases without exit strategy, but it is the responsibility and mandate of municipalities to provide long-term housing for citizens when they are already victims of violence,” he points out.

Regarding the reintegration of the victim, Demiri stated that this ministry is drafting social policies covering vulnerable social groups.
“The reintegration of victims of domestic violence is a process that connects many actors in the national referral system for protection from domestic violence. It begins with their identification and ends when the former victim continues his / her life independently,” although the cases on the ground are evident in non-integration”, he says.

Shelters, according to him, are non-governmental entities and as such are autonomous organizations.

“The Ministry, for the purpose of carrying out its responsibilities under the National Strategy against Domestic Violence and Action Plan 2016-2020, continues to provide grants for housing, rehabilitation and reintegration services for victims of domestic violence by eight shelters sheltering victims of domestic violence, children and adults, domestic and foreign, “he adds.

Regarding the shortcomings in the legal basis, Demiri says these questions should be addressed to the Ministry of Justice.

**Gjakova Municipality denies receiving any long-term housing requests in 2018**

It was precisely for this matter that officials of the Ministry of Justice were contacted, but even after a month of waiting, they didn’t reply. Also, the office of the Prime Minister didn’t answer, who was asked about the agreements reached in Brussels, which doesn’t apply in practice, with emphasis on the recognition of documents, as well as mechanisms for the prevention of domestic violence.

Regarding this issue, officials from the Gjakova Municipality have denied any requests during 2018 on seeking long-term accommodation.

“All cases of violence are referred to the shelter from the police and the Center for Social Work at the Secure House in Gjakova. Regarding the municipal institution, we have no case in 2018.”
For 2019 there is a case that is in the process of being settled in an apartment which will be paid,” says Blerta Qela, official of this municipality.

Meanwhile, officials from the Prishtina Municipality, respectively the Directorate for Social Welfare, based on the statistics of 2018 and the first quarter of this year, stated that they didn’t provide any long-term shelter to any victims of domestic violence, because they didn’t receive any such request.

“In the cases of victims of domestic violence, in the territory of the Prishtina Municipality, mainly through the Centers for Social Work, we managed to treat the cases with the social workers, which resulted in agreement of the parties, and in cases of disagreement, but the victim has returned to the biological family. However, in the case of applications, we give the opportunity to all cases for long-term housing, through the subsidy of rent for housing, but also through donors for the construction of houses(for those who own their property),” said Prentim Fazliu, coordinator at the Directorate for Social Welfare in this municipality.

According to him, in Prishtina’s shelter there may be victims from other municipalities, for whose housing are responsible the respective municipalities.

Fazliu added that in the action plan for this year they envisioned a social housing project that would solve the housing problem for a long time.

“These are all homeless cases, including those who are victims of domestic violence. Meanwhile, in terms of short-term housing cases, there are still a few cases, in total 3, for which the rent was subsidized for 3 and 6 months,” he said.

In the end, Fazliu has stated that this directorate bases the statistics on requests filed by other instances.

**Women’s Network: There’s a lack of willingness to help victims**
Increasing domestic violence cases should be a “red flag” for the state, according to the Kosovo Women’s Network (KWN). They emphasize that recurrent cases remain disturbing.

“The most common reason why a man is a recidivist of violence is related to punitive policies for the perpetrators of violence and the culture of victim blaming. So, there is an attempt to minimize violence, and women's statements aren’t taken into account. When the abuser sees that the state doesn’t take any action, he continues to repeat violent behaviors against his family members. The deserved punishment for this category also significantly affects the minimization of recidivism,” reads the organization’s response.

Regarding the failure of the state to find long-term housing solutions, KWN estimates that this is happening in the absence of a willingness to allocate funds, as well as a lack of awareness to deal with these cases seriously.

“Municipalities are reluctant to provide a place of residence for victims; the courts have now started to undergo trainings, and are giving victims the right through a victim compensation fund; Employment Centers fail to give priority to women who have experienced violence,” reads the response.

As far as the legal framework is concerned, the KWN estimates that there are no shortcomings, but the deficiency lies in the fact it is enforced by the relevant institutions.

Also, this organization estimates that there is no need to increase the number of shelters for victims of violence. They say they are sufficient.

“The state should comply with the legal obligations of the Constitution and other relevant laws and financially support the shelters, which this year should happen, as KWN has influenced to create a sustainable support line of shelters in the amount of 60 thousand euros per year, in order to cover all the expenses for providing services to the victims,” said the organization.
Solution:

In order to minimize the recurrent cases of domestic violence, the research outlines and highlights the need for awareness of victims, in the first instance to seek property rights on family assets, or assistance from relevant institutions, when they have no other choice.

The main responsible are local institutions, followed by the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. Municipalities should allocate a special budget line to the victims seeking long-term accommodation.

The three actors: the municipality, the ministry and the shelter should make possible for the victim to reintegrate into society until its full independence.

In particular, the Ministry of Justice should propose a unified legal framework for shelters, as well as intervene in the legal framework, where there is a need to prevent domestic violence cases.

Also, from what has been said by civil society officials from the Serb community, it is necessary to open a shelter in the northern part of Mitrovica as well as to facilitate the procedures of property right of this category.