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## **WHEN NUMBERS BECOME FACES**

**Durable solutions  
for IDPs and  
returnees through  
partnership**



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# Introduction

Conflicts and the collapse of the economic system triggered the migration flows on the territory of Serbia at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. These events also caused some of the biggest social transformations of modern times, especially in light of the EU integration process. According to the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration, 203.145 internally displaced persons live in Serbia. Although the main strategic orientation of the Republic of Serbia is to provide full support to everyone in gaining sustainable return to Kosovo\*, only every fifth household is ready to return, and only 5% of those who returned to Kosovo\* managed to achieve a sustainable return. On the other hand, signing the readmission agreement with the European Union in 2007, created the conditions for the return of our citizens residing in the countries of Western Europe, who do not have regulated status. Both of these social groups face the problem of unregulated status in the receiving communities, hence acquiring access to health and social protection, the housing issue, unemployment, and closely related lack of adequate knowledge and skills, lack of material resources and other problems.



The project "LSG 4 LAP – Durable solutions for internally displaced persons and returnees through partnership " is part of the program "Better Life for internally displaced persons and returnees ", funded by the European Union.

The main goal of the project is a provision of permanent housing solutions and economic empowerment of internally displaced persons and returnees under the readmission agreement in Serbia. The project is implemented in partnership with the City of Smederevo and municipalities of Smederevska Palanka, Velika Plana and Kovin, in the period from July 2018 until August 2020. The project was realized in cooperation with the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.

The project is based on a regional approach, which means that it strives to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable families at the level of all four partner municipalities, instead of being guided by the pre-defined quotas for each individual municipality. Special attention is paid to encourage cooperation between partner local self-governments, fostering exchange of knowledge and experience through joint project work.

**As part of the project, we managed to improve living conditions for a total of 100 families, or 385 persons. This publication presents the some of their personal stories.**





## RURAL HOUSEHOLDS

Through this project 13 families were provided with rural households and a package of building materials, furniture or appliances for the adaptation or equipping of the household. Funds for 2 additional households were provided by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.



# Turtledoves on the beam

Dejan Lalic

Kovin

Internally displaced person



My Vesna and I have been together for 18 years, it seems to me like it has been for a lifetime. We even started to look alike, some good people say. It seems to me that with a family, a person can put up with anything. With our three children, I am convinced of that. I had a quiet and settled life in Lipljan, I left my house, friends and work when I left. If someone had told me that you could live twice, I wouldn't have believed them. In February 2020, as displaced persons from Kosovo\*, we were provided with a household in the village Skorenovac, near Kovin. It seems like not much time has passed since then, but we are already reaping the first fruits from our garden - tomatoes, peppers, onions, the whole yard smells like heaven. With a little help and a lot of work, we arranged everything - where the kitchen was, now is the bathroom, we expanded the living room and repackaged the roof beams. But, we did not touch one beam - it has been a home for four generations, and while we are here - no one will displace them.

# Rivers know no borders

Stojan Pavlov

Kovin

Returnee under the readmission agreement



Do you see the Danube-Tisa-Danube canal? That is my salvation. Whenever I find the time, I bring a chair, set the bait and cast the hook. Rivers know no boundaries and it doesn't matter whether you are black or white. I was in Germany for almost two years, I worked in an asylum center - I helped people settle down, find some temporary solution for their lives. As returnees, my wife Zlata and I, with our three children, temporarily settled in the village of Bavaniste near Kovin, so that our daughters could enroll into school until we find a way to get settled somewhere for good. We were lucky to get a house in the village of Botos, near Zrenjanin, but also a package of building material, furniture and appliances to equip it. It is in the new house where we heard the most wonderful news that our eldest son, Aleksandar, got married and now I am a grandfather! Our family has grown by two members since we applied for the house. Life is ahead of us, together we will manage to get through everything.



# My children do not wander anymore

Mira and Ramadan Rusiti  
Smederevska Palanka  
Internally displaced persons



Ever since I am aware of myself, we have been struggling. More than 10 years of living as a subtenant - wherever you go you are not welcome. We often changed apartments, lived in all kinds of conditions, when I reminisce I pray it never happens again. I am happily married, my husband and I went through everything together - we lived in France for 6 months trying to start a different life. My eldest son was born there - Michelle, who is 8 years old now, and then we got Alan (6) and Filip (4). My oldest son and I were born without one kidney and we go to dialysis and therapy every day. All my life I say to myself: "Think positively and good things will come back to you". In February 2020, we moved into our house - our home sweet home. Now we also have a yard, I planted flowers and my children play football all day. What more could I wish for? We also got some furniture, beds, table with chairs, a refrigerator and a freezer, a washing machine, a wood stove, and the rest we will come! I am putting the wallpapers now, I am finally taking care of my own home. People tell me: "Miro, you are a happy woman" - and I tell them "You bet I am!".



## BUILDING MATERIAL

Within the project, **42 families received construction materials packages** for the adaptation of their unconditional housing facilities. Funds for 1 additional construction materials package were provided by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration.



# Questioning from the airport

Srdjan Nikolic

Velika Plana

Returnee under the readmission agreement



You are sitting at the airport in Frankfurt with four children and you wonder where you are going. In those moments you realize how unpredictable life is, everything happens in an instant change. In Serbia we moved god knows how many times, we changed cities in search for home and employment. The youngest daughter, Samantha, was born in Germany. All four children were going to kindergarten, we thought we were getting our lives in order. And then, in an hour everything changed. You're standing aimlessly, the plane is late. Children are asking a thousand and one questions adding to the bunch of questions you are asking yourself and don't know the answers to most of them. We came back to my wife's parents, and then we were subtenants and had to move all the time. We managed to buy a house in Markovac, for which we have now received a construction material. I know it's hard, sometimes it seems to me that we have needed superhuman strength to cope with all this. But I know that no one will displace us from here, that this yard is ours, that my plums are growing and next year they will be even more beautiful and fruitful.

# The yellow sunflowers

Sasa Savic

Velika Plana

Internally displaced person



My entire family, two brothers, my mother and father and me, all came from Gjlane to Veliko Orasje, near Velika Plana. We live from agriculture and we grow corn, wheat and sunflowers. Life goes on without a doubt. I got married and after some time, I decided to move to separate household with my wife and children. We managed to buy a house nearby in the village, but it was in poor condition. We received a construction material package and seized a moment when the whole world stopped, during the state of emergency due to Covid-19. We did most of the work on the renovation of the house by ourselves, because we know that work on the field cannot be postponed and is coming ahead. Together we managed to finalize the works, and get ready for the harvest that we depend on. My wife doesn't work - she takes care of our two children, which is, after all, the most important job. Every day you move an inch, and in the end when you turn around - you have made some progress. I sit on my tractor and drive - on one side the yellow sunflowers, on the other side the wheat is swaying, and right at the bottom - my house. That's where I found myself.



# The smell of the incense

Dejan Djokic

Smederevo

Internally displaced person



We lived a simple life, in the village of Sliovo near Pristina, like any other family. And then, that June 1999 everything changed. I was 22 when my father passed away, and just a few days later my mother and I fled Kosovo\*. We were accommodated in the Gracanica monastery for more than two weeks. I still see the picture in my head, people lying around me on the monastery floor and the silence around us that brought unexpected serenity. It seems to me that the serenity and the smell of incense saved me. From Gracanica we went to Kragujevac, then back to Sliovo, and finally came to Smederevo, to our family. When you have nowhere to return, you are not a dear guest. We managed to raise some money and buy a house in Smederevo. Now I have my family - a wife and two wonderful children. We received a construction material package, and finally, after many years, we managed to repair the roof, windows and do thermal isolation. The warmth of home makes my "previous" life slowly fade away and the new one is colored by new, happier memories.



## ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Within the project, 56 people attended the business start-up training, and 42 families received income generating grants in the form of machines, equipment and tools.



# Hands full of strawberries

Zivojin Simic

Smederevo

Internally displaced person



There has never been as many strawberries as this year. My Vrbovac, near Smederevo, is a famous fruit-growing area, they say here if you plant something upside down, it would sprout. It was not an easy road from Gjilane to Vrbovac. In so called Fica car, with the hood raised from breaking the cordon, we neither knew, nor saw, where we were going. First we were in Nis, with the in-laws, then in Vrbovac - subtenants for more than 10 years. These are overwhelming memories. You have three kids, you're trying to make a life - and you've already lost everything once. After 10 years as a subtenant, we managed to raise some money and buy this household. My wife got a job - she works in a tailor's shop. The eldest son and I work on construction sites but our goal is to expand agricultural production so that we can fully live from it. When we buy books for school and pay the bills, what little is left we invest in our future. Agricultural machinery is not cheap at all, but it is worth every cent. As part of the project, we got a rotary cultivator, a sprayer, a motor mower, a water pump and that means a lot to us - the mechanization takes off the load from one's back.

# I remember the feeling

Jelena Vujisic

Smederevska Palanka

Internally displaced person



I was 5 and a half years old when we left Pristina. I almost don't remember that part of my life. My family first settled in Lazarevac with my uncle, and then we went to Smederevska Palanka, where we had cousins. I was a child when it all happened, but I remember the feeling - the grief of my parents for the abandoned home and countless attempts to sort out their lives. I recently became a mom, I will remember this year as the most fulfilling year in my life. I will soon start doing the job I have always dreamed of. Thanks to this project, I got the equipment for a beauty salon and I can't wait to start working. I will do my best to succeed, because no child deserves to grow up surrounded with a feeling of uncertainty.



## Some other life

Milan Dumitrasko

Kovin

Returnee under the readmission agreement



When you are 23 years old and you sleep in the Red Cross premises in Germany, with 15 other people in the same room, life seems pretty hopeless. I left Serbia and tried to find a job. I completed welder training and started working in a welding department. For a moment, it seemed to me that I would succeed in that "big world". In the big world there is no time to rest, no room for an error. I lost my passport, and the bureaucracy doesn't care about the effort you put in and all the sacrifices you made. It took me 6 months until I managed to return to Serbia. Once again I was at the beginning. I had the opportunity to improve my welding skills in Germany. Through this project I passed business start-up training and got a welding machine, a mask and some tools. This really is the wind at my back. I feel like I can make life plans for myself and my family. I got married three months ago. Since I had a house in the village of Gaj near Kovin, I received a construction material package so that I could make decent life conditions for my family. We are slowly finishing the works on the house, the bathroom was done by repairmen and I am doing the gutters myself. Now that I think about what I've been through, it seems like another life.

# Smells like my Prizren

Stanoj Krstic

Smederevska Palanka

Internally displaced person



We were on our own, our vineyard and orchard around the house, and then we had to pack up by the next morning. I remember we only packed soft things - to fit as much as possible. Leaving in a hurry, we somehow arrived in Lazarevac. We felt weird, the air was different, Kolubara and all that smoke. My father used to spend days sitting behind the house. Although he did not let us see it, we knew he was suffering. Shortly afterwards, my uncle moved to Smederevska Palanka, we had never heard of that place before. When we went to visit him, we were overwhelmed by the warmth. It smelled like our Prizren. My brother and I once again planted a vineyard, together, when the grapes are ripe, the whole field smells. We set up beehives, now we have 60 of them. Through the project, we got a honey extractor and a dough mixer, it will help us achieve income. In the evening, I sit in front of the house, the bees are buzzing, getting ready to go to rest. In a few minutes everything goes silent, they fall asleep. Only the guards in front of the hives can be heard. They are guarding their home.

# The cut of destiny

Radojka Nestic

Velika Plana

Internally displaced person



When I was a little girl, I was raised by a grandma in the village. I loved watching her sew, making hems and small embroidery. By watching her, I was slowly learning to sew. I was 7 years old when I took some old rags from my mom and sewed an apron for the grandma. Fold on all four sides, underline and there's an apron pocket, just right for an important letter or recipe. When I was a little older, my parents bought me my first sewing machine and I started using it, first to sew cloths, dresses for dolls, and so on. In an hour your life can turn upside down. I was pregnant when I fled Pec and moved to Velika Plana. I raised two children owing to this old machine of mine, and now they have finished college. Thanks to this project I got sewing machines on which I can work on embroidery and complicated stitches. This is now a dream job! I taught both my son and daughter to sew, now in the times of Covid-19, we sewed more than 200 masks and distributed them to the people in need! Life is how you cut it, with or without a hem - it is important that it is stitched good and tailored to your needs.

# PROJECT PARTNERSHIP

## Initiative for Development and Cooperation

IDC is an association of citizens dedicated to the social and economic inclusion of vulnerable social groups and the protection of their human rights. IDC's activities are focused on building cohesive and resilient communities. Within its projects, IDC has contributed to the closure of two collective centers in Serbia by providing durable housing solutions. We have provided over 300 housing solutions, 1.200 people have received free legal aid and our team has trained and employed more than 2.000 people. Over the years, IDC has actively participated in the promotion of the concept of social economy, through establishment of social enterprises and activities aimed at creating favorable legal environment for social entrepreneurship. Through our projects, two social enterprises have been established, which are still active and sustainable today and provide a source of income for more than 30 individuals.

For more information, visit [www.idcserbia.org](http://www.idcserbia.org)

## City of Smederevo

The city of Smederevo is the administrative center of the Danube District with 102.288 inhabitants. Smederevo is the point of intersection of two priority zones of intensive development (Sava-Danube and Danube-Velika Morava), and it is planned to develop as a port city and traffic hub. The largest number of internally displaced persons live in the city of Smederevo, where the one of the largest collective centers in Serbia, ORA Sartid Radinac, existed. Despite the many initiatives taken there, the number of IDPs in poor living conditions remains very high. At the same time, this City, as well as the region, is facing an increase in the number of returnees in the readmission process. Only in the city of Smederevo in the last 5 years, 354 persons registered as returnees.

For more information, visit [www.smederevo.org.rs](http://www.smederevo.org.rs)



## Municipality of Smederevska Palanka

Smederevska Palanka is a municipality located in the Danube District. According to the official data, the municipality has 45.823 inhabitants. The city used to be mostly industrial, but with the transformation of the economy, agriculture is becoming more and more present in the occupation structure. According to the latest available data, 1.081 registered internally displaced persons live on the territory of Smederevska Palanka. Over the last 5 years, 57 returnees registered in Smederevska Palanka, but the local Trustee for Refugees and Migration believes that the number is much higher, given the legal invisibility, multiple returns to EU countries and lack of awareness of returnees on their status.

For more information, visit [www.smederevskapalanka.rs](http://www.smederevskapalanka.rs)

## Municipality of Velika Plana

Velika Plana is located in the Danube District and according to official data, the municipality has a total of 37.626 inhabitants. The A1 highway leading from Subotica to Nis passes by this municipality, which gives it a favorable strategic position. During the 1990s, in the officially underdeveloped municipality of Velika Plana, a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons could not integrate due to the unfavorable economic situation. Faced with a long-term economic crisis in the municipality, both domicile and displaced people often decided to leave the country and migrate to EU countries in search of a better life. According to available data, there are 1.084 internally displaced persons and over the last 5 years, 41 returnees registered in the municipality of Velika Plana.

For more information, visit [www.velikaplana.rs](http://www.velikaplana.rs)

## Municipality of Kovin

Kovin is a municipality located in the South Banat District of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Kovin is a neighboring municipality to the City of Smederevo and Danube region. According to the official data, the Municipality of Kovin has 31.194 inhabitants. The geographical position of the municipality is favorable considering that it is located in the immediate vicinity of developed centers of economic and social life: Belgrade 50 km, Pancevo 34 km and Smederevo 13 km away. According to the latest available data, 324 internally displaced persons live in the municipality of Kovin. Over the last 5 years, 31 returnees registered in the municipality of Kovin.

For more information, visit [www.kovin.org.rs](http://www.kovin.org.rs)

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