



# The Overlooked Potential of Social Capital in Returnee Communities: A Way Forward to Sustainability of Return in BiH

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## ABSTRACT

The return of approximately 2.2 million forcibly displaced Bosnian and Herzegovinian citizens, and the subsequent sustainability of their return, are phenomena closely tied to the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), the provisions of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) which brought it to an end, and the wide-reaching consequences thereof in the post-conflict recovery period. While there is impressive statistical data indicating the success of return in total numbers, often referring to high rates of reclaimed pre-war property (around 99%), and an extensive body of research on the real obstacles to sustainable return, little attention has been given to positive practices and actual facilitators, i.e., the crucial resource factors, mechanisms and/or determinants of long-term sustainability for the affected population in the local (returnee) communities.

The Revised Strategy for Implementation of Annex VII of the DPA - the principal state document for resolving the question of war-displacement and return in BiH, does not provide concrete policy options nor does it recognize and make use of social or any other form of capital as a relevant element for integration of returnees into their home communities. By using the multiple case study approach focused on positive practices of reintegration in three returnee communities, this study offers an insight into the overlooked potential of social capital for the sustainability of return in BiH.

Findings from this study provide policy suggestions informed directly by the empirically grounded and evidence-based data on the crucial role that social capital can play in the further implementation of the Revised Strategy.





## Introduction

The 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was characterized by high level destruction, acts of hostility purposefully directed towards civilians and gross violation of human rights. It was especially devastating on a demographic level and left over 100,000 dead, around 20,000 missing and 2,2 million (60% of the country's population) expelled or forced to flee their homes.<sup>1</sup>

Since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA) in 1995, international and national efforts enabled a relatively high number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to return. While the official return figures indicate that over *one million* persons have returned to BiH, they reflect neither return to actual pre-war homes nor the overall *sustainability of their return*. Field reports and research by different actors<sup>2</sup> suggest that a significant percentage of registered returnees have not remained in their places of return i.e., their pre-war homes, but have rather moved to areas where their ethnic group is the majority, where they find better life opportunities; others have re-emigrated, permanently leaving the country. Around 38,5% of total pre-war population of BiH leaves today in a recipient/settlement countries where they have been offered asylum, integrated and founded new lives<sup>3</sup>. Thus, when compared to pre-war demographics, the return project has produced rather mixed results and failed to satisfy the ambitions of millions of war displaced persons who may have once wanted to return home (Blitz, 2006, Valenta, Ramet, 2012, Porobic 2012, Valenta& Strbac 2013).

Moreover, a substantial number of actual returnees still remain in a fragile situation, lacking dignified living conditions and are in need of multifaceted support in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> Minority returnees-- that is, returnees who live in areas in which their ethnic group is a numeric minority--are of particular concern as they frequently face structural discrimination in exercising their social and economic rights.<sup>5</sup>

Out of three durable solutions for refugees and IDPs--voluntary repatriation, local integration, or resettlement in a third location--reintegration is the solution preferred by the UNHCR and is set out in the 2008 UNHCR policy, defined as "the ability of returning refugees to secure the political, economic [legal] and social conditions needed to maintain life, livelihood and dignity".<sup>6</sup> Regarding the UNHCR's existing development programme design, the Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration Activities outlines the key attributes of returnees and their country of origin, which will help determine how to approach reintegration activities.

Although a clear definition of reintegration has been incorporated into the UNHCR literature, its propagation as a durable solution and its employment in the execution of the UNHCR's mandate occurred in conjunction with variegated perceptions of UNHCR's ideal role in relation to reintegration activities, which may be more efficiently tackled by development actors.<sup>7</sup> In the Foreword to the Global Appeal 2009 Update the High Commissioner comments that the UNHCR does not have the capacity and resources to make return and reintegration sustainable.<sup>8</sup> For this reason, the organization has been actively seeking partnerships with development actors in order that return and reintegration be incorporated into national recovery strategies, development frameworks and peacebuilding processes.<sup>9</sup>

Addressing the issue of sustainable return for the war-displaced in BiH is the Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the Implementation of Annex VII of the Dayton Peace Agreement

<sup>1</sup> For statistical overviews see: <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/>, <http://unhcr.ba/>, data on civilian victims of war (<http://rdc.ba/>)

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. CESI (2013): Proceedings of the International Round Table at: [www.cesi.unsa.ba/](http://www.cesi.unsa.ba/); Peter Lippman's field reports on return to BiH at <http://balkanwitness.glypx.com/journal.htm>, Jansen, Lofving (2008), Black, R., Gent, S. (2006), Blitz (2006), Stefansson, A.H. (2006), Haider, H. (2010), Jansen, S., Lofving, S. (2008), Fagan, P.W. (2011), Valenta& Strbac (2013)

<sup>3</sup> See reports of emigration sector by Ministry of Human Rights and

<sup>4</sup> See: <http://unhcr.ba/>

<sup>5</sup> Recent example of discrimination was related to access to primary school curricula for the minority returnees in the village Konjevic Polje, near Bratunac in Republic Srpska, when parents and children undertook 20 day-long protest in front of the Office of High Representative's building in Sarajevo. <http://www.balkanicaucaso.org/eng/Regions-and-countries/Bosnia-Herzegovina/Bosnia-the-Konjevic-Polje-protest-143741>

<sup>6</sup> UNHCR, Returnee Reintegration and the Relief/Development Debate (December 1999) in Handbook for Repatriation and Reintegration activities UNHCR (2004/One -4)

<sup>7</sup> Crisp, J. (2001) Mind the gap! UNHCR, Humanitarian Assistance and the Development Process. New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper No. 43

<sup>8</sup> Foreword by the High Commissioner to the Global Appeal 2009 Update, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/4922d43c0.pdf> (5/6/2014)

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice BiH (2010): Revidirana Strategija za implementaciju Aneksa VII Dejtonskog mirovnog sporazuma, Sarajevo

(Strategy). This framework document was first adopted in 2003 and principally focused on supporting return, reconstruction and property repossession. During the 5-year implementation of the Strategy (2003-2007), 618 million KMs have been invested in order to assist 130.000 persons, which amount to approximately 20.000 KM invested per returnee family.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, while the Strategy aimed to have the return process largely completed by 2006, it became apparent that many IDPs and returnees would remain without solutions after this date. Thus in 2007, the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR), in collaboration with the broader international community (UNHCR and partnering organizations), initiated a process of revision of this document. In 2010, after three years of drawn-out and contested political process the Revised Strategy was finally adopted by both Parliamentary houses.

Implementation of Annex VII is still highly important for promoting stability and ongoing inter-ethnic reconciliation, as well as the country's progress towards EU membership and overall growth and prosperity. Unfortunately, to date the competent authorities have taken no major steps to systematically implement the Revised Strategy's recommendations for achieving greater sustainability of return. Moreover, the issue of return appears even more challenging, when Revised Strategy's vision *to formally complete the process of return* by 2014 is taken into account<sup>11</sup>. Importantly, bearing in mind that significant funds<sup>12</sup> for the remaining issues of war displacement and sustainable return are currently available, there is a risk that overcoming the obstacles faced by the small number of most vulnerable beneficiaries, as envisioned by current programmes led and implemented by UNHCR, MHRR and other partnering organisations (UNICEF, UNDP) and NGOs, may leave far too many problems of returnee reintegration country wide still unaddressed.

<sup>11</sup> Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees BiH (2010), p.2

<sup>12</sup> The total amount of 8.1 million of Euros will be invested in supporting implementation of the Revised Strategy by eliminating existing obstacles to solutions for returnees and IDPs. This IPA sustainability project of 'Collaborative Partnership' is a 36-months-long project coordinated and implemented by UNHCR and MHRR with financial support of European Union and UNHCR, that was already initiated in 2012, but officially launched on 28th of April 2014. [http://europa.ba/News.aspx?newsid=6853&lang=EN\(4/28/2014\)](http://europa.ba/News.aspx?newsid=6853&lang=EN(4/28/2014))

<sup>13</sup> In 2005 the UNHCR, the European Union and the OSCE initiated a Regional Durable Solutions Process (Sarajevo Process) to facilitate access to durable solutions for the remaining refugees from Croatia and BiH. BiH, Croatia and Serbia and Montenegro committed to uphold the human rights of the displaced and to facilitate durable solutions for them. A 2010 International Conference on Durable Solutions re-launched the Regional Durable Solutions Process, placing it squarely within the context of EU accession negotiations for countries in the region. A "Joint Declaration on Ending Displacement and Ensuring Durable Solutions for Vulnerable Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons" was signed subsequently at a Ministerial Conference in Belgrade in 2011. The Joint Declaration reconfirmed governments' commitment to facilitating durable solutions and protecting human rights, and set out a framework for doing so.

## Policy problem

To date, the overall pattern of the internationally assisted long-lasting process of return in BiH has consisted of the three succeeding stages: 1) creation of safe conditions, 2) return of property and 3) reconstruction of property and reintegration. Reintegration of returnees is the last stage addressed in the strategic return programmes. Today, it is the key effort undertaken by the authorities and International Community in implementing the Revised Strategy for the Implementation of Annex VII of DPA.

The Revised Strategy gives priority to the provision of sustainability of return in four segments regarding recommendations for the betterment of access to and practice of returnees' rights: *health, education, labor and employment, and social and pension/disability insurance*. Actors involved in this process are above all government authorities on the state level (BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees - MHRR), refugees and displaced persons ministries on entity and cantonal levels, and municipality authorities. Furthermore, the international community led by the UNHCR is advocating for the full implementation of the Revised Strategy and alongside the European Union and the OSCE is overseeing the commitments made by Governments in the 2005 Sarajevo Declaration and the 2011 Joint Declaration of facilitating durable solution and protecting human rights<sup>13</sup>.

Following this commitment, there are currently three highly prioritized projects related to the Revised Strategy's implementation: RHP, *Regional housing program for remaining refugees*



in the region (Croatia, BiH, Montenegro, Serbia)<sup>14</sup>; CEB I/II country-wide project addressing the closure of collective centers and social housing projects for internally displaced persons (IDPs<sup>15</sup>); and IPA I (2012, 2013, 2014) sustainability project of collaborative partnership targeting 10 municipalities.<sup>16</sup>

However, apart from the betterment of access to basic human rights for the most vulnerable social categories of displaced and returnees, as focused by UNHCR and MHRP-led IPA sustainability project, there exist *no country-wide systematic policies or programmes* for the multifaceted and stratified returnee population (comprising not only vulnerable, incapacitated persons but also resourceful individuals who also need a 'push' to achieve sustainability and obtain their civil rights). Furthermore, there exists no country-wide identification and evaluation tool that addresses the access to and enjoyment of entitled returnee and civil socio-economic rights informed by the bottom-up perspective (returnee voices).<sup>17</sup> In order to assist the returnee population in BiH, all actors in the field need to adopt more efficient approaches, since enormous funds have already been spent without significant overall improvement of returnees' life conditions.

## Reintegration and social capital nexus

There are countless problems facing refugees and those aiding them when repatriating to their homes. Common to voluntary return is the notion of sustainability, which may be defined by the absence of re-migration, the realization of certain living standards, and in terms of access to public and social services. In its *Dialogue on Voluntary Repatriation and Sustainable Reintegration in Africa* the UNHCR declares "that experience shows that if the issue of sustainability or reintegration of refugee and displaced populations is not addressed properly, the countries concerned will almost inevitably slide back into conflict (in Black and Gent, 2006:24).

For this reason, Black and Gent (2006) recommend using a "sustainable livelihoods' framework, in which livelihoods are considered 'sustainable' if they can be maintained without external aid inputs and are sufficiently robust to withstand external shocks. Scholars such as Walpurga (2004) have further developed the notion of sustainable returns by focusing on three essential guarantees of safety and dignity: 1) the guarantee of physical safety, including the right to freedom of movement, protection from harassment and attack, and access to areas free of mines; 2) the guarantee of legal safety, including non-discriminatory access and exercise of civil, economic, social, political and cultural rights; 3) the guarantee of material safety, including access to food, potable water, shelter, health services and education.

In practice, however, sustainable return is a difficult objective to achieve and return programs tend to fall short of these theoretical ideals. By assessing four country cases (Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Burundi), Fagan (2011) provides arguments that programs to return refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their homes after conflict, implemented by national authorities with international support, frequently leave far too many without viable futures. She states that "the measures are often inadequate for three reasons: a widely shared but flawed

<sup>14</sup> The four countries governments identified the major obstacles to durable solutions and agreed that housing was the most urgent. They developed the RHP to respond to this need, with the support of UNHCR and its international partners. The RHP aims to provide housing to 27,000 refugee and IDP families. In 2012, an international donor conference in Sarajevo raised nearly 300 million Euros for the RHP. With an understanding that housing is necessary, but not sufficient for durable solutions, UNHCR and OSCE were asked (in line with its country-specific mandate) to monitor that the end-beneficiaries of the RHP will be those qualified as most vulnerable, such as defined by the Partner Countries jointly with the UNHCR. The four partner countries of the RHP (Croatia, BiH, Montenegro and Serbia) have started to establish the structures and mechanisms for implementation of the RHP, under the guidance of the Council of Europe Development Bank, as the RHP Fund manager with the support of UNHCR.

<sup>15</sup> Last year, in co-operation with the Government, the UNHCR developed a loan project which was submitted by the Government to the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) in the last quarter of 2012. CEB was approved in January 2013 and it involves a EUR 60 million grant given to the Government, to close down at least 75% of the remaining collective centres throughout the country and rehouse the vulnerable long-term residents in new social housing facilities. The CC closure is the first country-wide project to enable local integration as a durable solution choice for the most vulnerable IDPs living in CCs. It is also the first country-wide social housing project. <http://unhcr.ba/major-initiatives/ceb/>

<sup>16</sup> The project aims to assist around 2.400 displaced and returnee families, particularly targeting the most vulnerable ones in 10 municipalities in close cooperation with local and higher level authorities, CSOs, local communities and project partners. The project activities envision supporting durable solutions by addressing four segments: I) housing (125 units will be constructed or reconstructed including infrastructure connection); II) start up grants for livelihood (aim is to assist employment by securing funds for farming and similar) III) social protection and inclusion commissions (in cooperation with local authorities, social work services, MZs and CSOs provide access to basic rights and social welfare benefits to 300 vulnerable children and 200 vulnerable elderly); and 4) free legal aid (at least 500 returnees/IDPs will be provided with free legal aid and information regarding return, local reintegration, reconciliation, etc in order to provide access to justice). <http://europa.ba/News.aspx?newsid=6853&lang=EN>

<sup>17</sup> In the research, titled *Silent Majority Speaks* (2007), conducted by UNDP and Oxford Research International, it is pointed out that most of the policies and programmes regarding the reintegration of returnees, do not take into account the bottom-up approach that involves refugee voices, but are based on top-down theoretical concepts not corresponding with real life problems the returnees face while struggling to (re)build their homes.

assumption that the need to create a future for returnees is satisfied by restoring them to their prior lives; a lack of long-term engagement by implementing authorities; and a focus on rural reintegration when many refugees and IDPs are returning to urban areas” (2011:1). She found that the settlement of returnees in all four countries was conditioned by opportunity to recreate sustainable livelihoods, find peaceful living conditions, have access to health care, education, and employment opportunities and enjoy full rights of citizenship.

Generally, there are few empiric studies on positive indicators and mechanisms of reintegration of war displaced in post-conflict societies. More research is on the factors that contribute to integration of refugees in their (re)settlement countries. For instance, a comprehensive study on the indicators of integration of refugees in UK<sup>18</sup> has clearly shown that the *relationships within the communities* were perceived by refugees as of key relevance for securing their livelihoods and overall integration.<sup>19</sup> Consequently the indicators of refugee integration, developed by Ager and Strang (2008), are based on the Putnam’s concept of social bonding, bridging and linking.

Furthermore, in the UNHCR’s 2009 desk review, which compares the returnee contexts of Afghanistan, Liberia and Sudan, it is acknowledged that the social network in rural areas facilitates, even if temporarily, some form of relief for returnees. Difficulties regarding reintegration in urban areas, on the other hand, were also related to an absence of social networks which in the Afghan context affected women returning alone or as head of households in particular<sup>20</sup>.

Social networks and community support mechanisms are thus deemed important factors for the process of return and reintegration. Similarly, according to Colleta and Cullen (2000) interstate conflicts damage a nation’s social capital, involving norms, values and social relations that bond communities together, and harm bridges between communal groups (civil society) and the state. This affects the ability of both communal groups and the state to recover after a cessation of hostilities. Moreover, Colleta and Cullen (2000:4) argue that “even if other forms of capital are replenished, economic and social development will be hindered unless social capital stocks are restored.”

As a result of the war-induced displacement of the 1990s in BiH, the demography of the country has been severely altered, radically affecting the overall social fabric at the individual, household and societal level.<sup>21</sup> There is an extensive body of literature that focuses on the political and socio-economic realities faced by returnees in BiH, indicating that many fail to return to pre-war homes and rather choose to live or move to other areas for reasons of security, political and socio-economic prosperity (see e.g. Phuong, 2000, Ito, 2001, Andrade, Delaney, 2001, Philpott, 2005, Stefansson 2005, Jansen, 2011).

Since the cessation of hostilities in BiH, there have only been a few studies addressing the state of social capital<sup>22</sup> in the country<sup>23</sup>. The common insights from these are that the state of generalized trust in society is low<sup>24</sup>. On the other hand, they also demonstrate that BiH is a society of strong, locally-based ties with family members, friends and neighbors. Although three<sup>25</sup> out of four studies address the state of social capital within the returnee communities to some extent, there is no available data on social networks in areas with high rates of return. The exception is a local study conducted by Petrović (2007) which strongly supports the recovery of pre-war local ties and trust within the neighborhood as crucial to sustainable return of 3000 war-displaced persons in Janja, a small returnee community near Bijeljina. In addition, based

<sup>18</sup> Ager, A., Strang, A. (2004)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> UNHCR Desk Review on urban reintegration, OSTS/DOS, UNHCR, August, 2009

<sup>21</sup> Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995 divided the formally multi-ethnic republic of BiH into two entities separated along ethnic lines- a political division that directly undermined interpersonal and communal trust and consequently modified the norms and values that underlie cooperation and collective action for the common good (See Hakansson and Hargreaves 2004; Blitz 2006; Porobić, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Although social capital is a contested term, for the purposes of this research we have used one of Robert Putnam’s definitions from *Bowling Alone* (2001), where he argues that: “Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals - social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue.’ The difference is that ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital” (Putnam in UNDP, 2009:25)

<sup>23</sup> World Bank (2002), UNDP & ORI (2007), Šalaj (2009), UNDP

<sup>24</sup> UNDP, 2009, p.43

<sup>25</sup> World Bank (2002), UNDP & ORI (2007), UNDP (2009)



on her research of early return in Eastern Bosnia, Monika Kleck (2006:117) states that despite different post-war impediments in BiH “relations among neighbours appear to be functioning relatively well in many returnee enclaves (including the ethnically mixed communities).”

## Research questions, premises and indicators

This study sets out to answer the following research questions:

Q1 How does the use of social capital among returnees impact reintegration in returnee communities? *What types of social networks and social ties do returnees possess?*

Q2 How did former practices/ incentives of key actors in the field (government, international organizations, UN and partnering NGOs) *make use of the various forms of social capital in returnee communities and did the returnees benefit from these actions?*

Q3 Based on positive practices demonstrated by this research *how can policy makers and program implementers mainstream social capital into local integration and sustainability agendas?*

This study is based on the following research premises:

1. Sustainable return to post-Dayton BiH is not exclusively related to ensuring returnees’ rights-based foundation for reconstruction and reintegration, but home (re)making that involves *socio-cultural practices of relational relevance with people and space*.
2. Sustainable return is connected to the possibility of reintegrating in home society, which is inevitably affected by the state of social capital and its use among returnees.

In order to test our propositions we used the following indicators, drawing on Putnam’s and Woolcock’s (in Ager, 2008) types of social connections: social bonding<sup>26</sup>, social bridging<sup>27</sup> and social linking<sup>28</sup>. The detailed list of indicators is available in **Annex 1**.

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<sup>26</sup> horizontal relations between persons who share similarities (ethnic, religious, family connections and neighbours)

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<sup>27</sup> ties between different social groups

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<sup>28</sup> connections between individuals/groups in vertical line (e.g. state authority - citizens)

Accordingly, our study had following research objectives:

- A) To investigate the potential role of social capital in the reintegration of returnees at the local level (missing link in Revised Strategy for the implementation of sustainability projects)
- B) On the basis of this research, to provide information and identify elements for systematic employment of social capital in returnee communities that can be put to use by key actors working in the field.

## Research design

Our research rests on **three micro case studies of successful reintegration practices** in three selected communities across the country, where high percentages of long-term return have been registered and/or positive examples of social ties, networks and cooperation between returnees and locals have been reported. Each case study purposefully focuses on reintegration projects initiated by competent authorities, NGOs and international actors that contributed to livelihood (re)establishment, delivery of social services and the development of different communication networks and initiatives among and between returnees and other community members. The following data collection was undertaken:

### 1) Secondary data collection

We firstly undertook the desk-based analysis of current reintegration programs and instruments employed on behalf of the key stakeholders in BiH for the implementation of the Revised Strategy. The team also conducted comparative desk-based research on the subject of national governments' and UNHCR's integration policies and programmes in other countries affected by war displacement and investigated how these were conceptualised and to what extent (if any) these addressed social capital as an element of returnees' reintegration.

### 2) Primary data collection

Empiric data was then collected through intensive fieldwork in the following returnee communities: Prijedor, Zvornik and Goražde. In each selected returnee area, the research team conducted one focus group discussion comprised of the representatives from returnee associations with different backgrounds, municipality authorities, local community, primary schools, UNHCR and partnering NGO organisations, and a number of follow-up, in-depth, (semi-structured) interviews with returnees who have (in)formally organised social networks that benefit their socio-economic and cultural<sup>29</sup> reintegration interests. These interviewees provided information on their own efforts and engagement towards sustainability in their communities. The list of participants in all three focus groups is available in **Annex 2**. Prijedor and Zvornik, both municipalities situated in Republika Srpska (RS), are two well-known municipalities with the highest rates of return in BiH. Goražde, situated in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH), with its local community Kopači, situated in the *Republika Srpska*, has a long record of assistance by UNHCR and partnering organizations in building capacities for sustainable return thus providing valuable longitudinal insights into different phases of return (from 1997- up to today).

<sup>29</sup> We purposefully included cultural associations such as folk dance associations and other local cultural events initiators as well as sports associations and other of relevance to social life of inhabitants in the returnee communities. Many of these were pre-war associations revived in the course of return and reintegration process.

## THE THREE RETURNEE MUNICIPALITIES - CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS OF MICRO CASE STUDIES

### I) GORAŽDE

Goražde municipality stands for one of the first known municipalities with early return in 1996/7, especially in *mjesna zajednica* (hereinafter MZ)<sup>30</sup> Kopači/ Novo Goražde, where the first returnee tents were erected next to war-destroyed property and occupied homes. MZ Kopači has today a returnee population of 2215 persons, mainly elderly persons. Our focus group discussion involved six persons: three representatives from formal regional and local returnee associations, one representative from the municipality council for rights of refugees and displaced person in Čajniče, and the representative from UNHCR with long experience of socio-legal work with returnees in Goražde municipality. From among these participants the story of one man and his family, Mr. Edin, was presented to us as an outstanding example of sustainable return in this returnee area on behalf of all present participants including all returnee associations. During the follow-up phase of our field work in this area, we visited Mr. Edin's farm and spent a whole day talking to him and his wife in their home, focusing on their personal story of successful return and factors that contributed to it. At the same time we had a rare opportunity to conduct participatory field observations and document both *in-photo* and *verbatim* (via semi-structured interviews) different aspects of their returnee reality.

During our first encounter, in the course of the focus group discussion, Mr Edin vividly described his successful returnee story:

<sup>30</sup> Expression for 'local community' in local languages referring to the lowest form of the state apparatus' self-governance



We came back to the bare ground; we did not have a nail to start with. To start again, the first tent settlements were provided by UNHCR. Then secondly an important role was the desire and the will of the people to come back to their homes. In the third place it was important to find a donor able to provide for financial support. Imagine coming back to bare walls! Then in such a hostile environment, we had to create a positive economic ground and start from the scratch. We had no machines; we had no instruments, only ourselves ready for any kind of hard labor, without anyone's help, just in order to recreate the normal life environment. (...) Then there were these humanitarian organizations that provided the bad quality seeds, but it was not up to them, it was up to those who selected and delivered these. They cheated us. Notwithstanding, we were grateful and step by step we started.

Different foreign humanitarian organizations, like Swedish SIDA, World Vision and many other UNHCR partnering organizations, such as Hilfswerk, were important in channeling and distributing donations for rebuilding the destroyed property and providing for start-up grants in helping the returnees to rebuild their war-shattered lives and their livelihoods. These organisations are criticized by returnees in our discussion group for not having strict selection criteria and for giving donations to the less needy with no follow-up evaluations in the field on how these donations were used. Coordination between different donors and assessment of real needs of returnees were never in place. The returnees had to make the best of the pool of donations on their own. Similarly, according to Kleck (2006) the lack of coordination and criteria for selection has undermined the process of reestablishment of pre-war communities in Eastern Bosnia, since "in many places, it created inequalities, envy and ill-will" encouraging "corruption and discrimination in the distribution of reconstruction aid" (p.115). She also stresses that in this process many humanitarian organizations relied upon 'wrong kind of' *village leaders* who were, according to her, self-appointed or politically nominated, which enabled misuse of resources.

### **Social bonding**

According to Mr. Edin from Čajniče, Local Council for Refugees and Displaced Persons, without fellow returnees, good social relations and capacity in social skills to determine with whom to cooperate, the reconstruction work and projects targeting return would not have been possible in this municipality. Mr. Edin explains: "To implement any project we had to come together and then donors or the UNHCR carried out the selections. I already knew everyone well, and could distinguish between those who were reliable to cooperate with and those who were unreliable. It's important that the wheel starts spinning".

Within the obstructive economic and politic return context it is oftentimes underlined that returnee associations have an important role in facilitating organisation and action. This is how this role is justified:

All of the associations in Eastern Bosnia are local and cooperate very well. If it weren't for these, none of the return would have been possible. It is a well-known fact that the returnees undertook the return projects on their own and by self-initiative, deciding to fight for their municipality by the best means possible in order to return to their pre-war homes. Returnees are the strongest actors here, and the associations were self-financed or voluntary as no one financially supported them. Mustafa (Regional council for return to Eastern BiH/Regionalni odbor za povratak u istočnu BiH)

As evidenced by other researchers like D'Onofrio (2004), these returnee associations were already formed in exile, at the beginning through informal contacts among pre-war neighbors which were later on transformed into more formalized networks. Some persons who had official positions in the local community in pre-war times were still leaders within the association and took responsibility to politically organise the community in exile. Furthermore, D'Onofrio (2004) points out that due to their engagement in exile and upon the return, these associations were able to communicate closely with the international community and with other organisations working for the return.

Our fieldwork in Gorazde and surroundings shows that lack of formal support to these organisations has had a clear impact on the effects of their work, their outreach and overall achievements. All our informants affirmed that it is the resourcefulness of the people, returnees themselves, and their commitment that leads the way forward. Meho underlines "Not even today do we have the state taking part to support these associations in any way. We sit down amongst ourselves, decide upon our priorities and see how we can help each other by own means and resources, with our own capacities. Then we have meetings with UNHCR, Catholic Relief Service and other organisations".

### **Social bridging**

The greatest movement forward in the return process of this municipality was achieved when the multiethnic board of the returnee committee was formed and the return was stressed as a movement in two directions - when the occupiers of Bosniak houses, Serbs evicted from other parts of Bosnia, started reclaiming their own houses, leaving the Bosniak homes and enabling Bosniak returnees to reclaim their own.

### **Social linking**

Federation BiH and Bosnia-Podrinje Canton are only five minutes away but local politicians there show scarce interest in supporting the return to Kopači and Novo Goražde according to returnee representatives in the focus group.

The main problem is the presence of divisive ethnic politics that prevent and obstruct return in different ways. Another often mentioned problem is the non-transparent financial support to returnees through the municipality authorities in charge of donations and distribution. Lack of formal authority for the returnee associations is problematic in this regard but also in many other regards as explained by Meho:

When the official returnee association has no formal power to work for return in the municipality, then how can we expect anything positive to occur in the climate where only politically 'approved' persons are put in positions to lead the return projects and when the municipality politicians often install their own candidates, never those that the association suggests? Their representatives do not even reside in our municipality. Politicians have never done anything for the return... and moreover, there is no focus on positive examples such as Edin. He should be given a golden medal for what he achieved on his own, and then other people would be strengthened and follow his example! (Meho)



Aid from the UNHCR accounts for its important role in leading, supporting and promoting sustainable return, particularly in this municipality, but it only serves to “put the fire out,” and primary responsibility at the level of local authorities is still the desired solution. According to UNHCR local office so far the local authorities have worked in an ad hoc and unstructured manner when the implementation of the funded projects took place:

The main problem was the absence of a strategy. The cluster approach should have been taken in every municipality from the start ...but the UNHCR cannot do everything, we must animate authorities to do more... the UNHCR only puts out the fire by helping the most vulnerable.

Edin, a positive example of local entrepreneur, concludes with the following statement underlining the need to assess the real life situation including both achievements and needs of the returnees through extensive fieldwork and then create adequate programmes in support of sustainability:

We now need to hold to and keep those who have returned in each local community and municipality. We need to find means of forcing authorities to create one strategy in the field, not in the offices up there, and let it take three years in the field if that is needed. I already talk to many who have returned and everything is left solely to the individual. One needs to form an association that will take care of the production of organic food and the potential that we have in a food production here. All of these practices should then be put out there by media through different outlets in order to be offered to a wider market with solid prices to generate income. Without media coverage and information we remain in the dark. Information should illustrate and make clear the investments of certain donors and the resulting final products. When the public is informed from the field on the real life situations, much is achieved.

## III) ZVORNIK

Zvornik is one of the largest returnee municipalities in Eastern Bosnia. Although official statistics are not available<sup>31</sup>, unofficial population estimates show that Zvornik municipality has approximately 22 000 returnees today<sup>32</sup>. During the field work and data collection for the purpose of the research, six informants were engaged in a focus group discussion on the topic of sustainable return and the role of social capital: three representatives of MZs (these persons have also shared their personal stories as returnees able to (re)gain socio-economic sustainability), the representative of *Komisija za održivi povratak, razvoj i integraciju* (Commission for Return, Development and Integration), the adviser for sustainable return and restoration at the municipality office, and the president of Returnee Association in Zvornik (NGO). Additionally, two informants were consulted per telephone as a follow-up interview in the second phase of the field work.

### Social bonding

Due to a lack of coordination or strategic planning of the return in this municipality, the returnees became self-organised in order to survive the harsh circumstances of the first returnee years in Zvornik. One of the participants pointed out that: “People returned to empty fields (...) we were hungry, lacking even bread, and at the same time, there were some /international/

<sup>31</sup> Final results of the latest census conducted in October 2013 are currently in the phase of data processing.

<sup>32</sup> Around 50 000 persons and more have fled Zvornik due to ethnic cleansing and massive expulsions. (Dahlman, O Tuathail, 2005)

organizations donating construction material for ruined houses". Reliant on each other, the returnees initiated many joint activities in order to obtain the available funds for the reconstruction of their private houses, local schools and culture institutions. A high level of social cohesion was present in this returnee municipality and illustrated was of key relevance to sustainable return: "When there was a delivery of construction material, one didn't care if it's for Huso's or Dževad's house, everyone put their gloves on, men, women, children and all together handle the bricks. Believe me, an eight meter long and eight meters high house got built in a day. That was the spirit!" These efforts have significantly improved the overall infrastructure of the municipality even when compared to the prewar conditions.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>33</sup> It is estimated by the participants that infrastructure (roads, water system, sewer, street lights, even health centers) has improved by 85% compared to the prewar conditions.

The support and bonding in this municipality was expressed as mutual support by exchange of services and available resources as a compensation for low income in general and lack of employment, in this way sustaining the community. Cooperation between returnees was expressed as crucial also when individual or collective rights were jeopardized, such as in cases of discrimination and/or mistreatment of returnee children in schools and elsewhere. In MZ Sultanovići, returnees' joint efforts in pledging the funding for sustainable return resulted in a construction of the outdoor leisure facility where locals gather on regular basis to socialize.

### **Social bridging**

Although it is evident that social bonding is more salient than social bridging in this returnee municipality, there are several examples that demonstrate existence of positive practices in Zvornik when it comes to cooperation and exchange with persons of different ethnic background and experience<sup>34</sup>. All participants explicitly underlined that there are no tensions between them and the locally dominant ethnic group, the Bosnian Serbs: "We don't have problems with them; individual problems, quarrels, fights, these do not occur (...) we can work together as well". The former clearly indicates a growth of social bridging, especially bearing in mind numerous physical attacks and property demolition that returnees faced in the early phases of return (see e.g. Dahlman, Tuathail, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> experience in this context refers to non-refugee/displacement and returnee experience

The cooperation is most apparent on the level of MZ, where two neighboring ones (one is predominantly Bosniak, and other majority Serb) are jointly addressing communal issues such as the maintenance of local roads neglected by the municipality. Moreover, a representative of another MZ has affirmed that he had distributed funds for construction of the local road for predominantly non-returnee, Serb MZ, for the sake of future cooperation. Similarly there are positive initiatives in the NGO sector, where the Returnee Association of Zvornik is promoting youth activism in Bosniak returnee communities in cooperation with an NGO led by the young local Serb population.

### **Social linking**

All participants have expressed their disappointment in political authority at all levels, stating that "politicians have their fingers in all the spheres of life; the operative words here are politics and religion". As a result of this disillusionment, voting habits are poor and there is a lack of commitment and belief in achieving change by means of political engagement. Some positive examples of investments of cantonal, federal and state ministries were mentioned,



but were also accompanied with criticisms regarding low transparency, the lack of fair and transparent selection criteria in all donation areas and other irregularities in the distribution of public funds. Informants stated that current legal regulation of the return process is favorable and comprehensive, but at the same time, they emphasized the lack of sanctions in cases when implementation is failing. Furthermore, the legal status of MZ is abolished, which was perceived as unfavorable: "The legal status is lost, thus we are /politically/ dead". This issue was highlighted as one of the crucial problems since MZ appears to be the area where positive actions are possible: "Whatever good comes, it comes from activity of MZ".

### III) PRIJEDOR

Prijedor municipality, in general, and village Kozarac in particular, are by far the most well-known returnee sites in BiH. Kozarac is often referred to as an exceptional example of return in BiH, both by researchers and the members of wider community. The focus group conducted in Kozarac gathered seventeen informants who had a prominent role in the return process within the Prijedor municipality. Participants of the focus group came from a variety of backgrounds and represented a wide spectrum of social, cultural, economic, political, education, human rights and gender-focused organizations in the municipality. These included: members of NGOs active in Prijedor municipality, representatives of MZs, and representatives of Elementary School "Kozarac", a local returnee school.

Additionally, four more interviews were conducted in three different returnee MZs of this municipality to better understand the positive development of sustainable return.

#### **Social bonding**

The main impression obtained during a focus group discussion that lasted over three hours is that the returnee community in the Prijedor municipality is indeed an example of a community (re)built on strong interpersonal ties that secured the construction of the sound and necessary base for the re-establishment of post-war life in this municipality through means of initiating and developing the plethora of social activities. The former was emphasized by all informants, and illustrated by one in particular: "People are organized to a great extent, that is to say we are self-organized (...) we are leaning on each other and that is the only way to make progress, and that's the only way we make progress here". The first associations were already organized during the displacement period, when locals were still refugees in neighboring countries (mainly Croatia) or internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Bosnia (mainly Sanski Most). Upon the return to Prijedor returnee associations took over the role of community (re)constructors. Primarily they were engaged in the revival of educational and religious institutions in the community, and then focused on tackling specific returnee issues through their civil associations. Many informants were at some point simultaneously and consecutively leading or participating in multiple associations. The spirit of volunteerism is highly present in the community. As one informant stated: "I am volunteering in all the associations. I don't have any salary, on contrary I've only given donations."

In early stages of return in 1998, association *Srcem do Mira* had a critical influence in amassing and encouraging returnees by initiating social gatherings and debates; these encouraged people not only to face with their concerns, but also to find common solutions. (Sivac-Brayant, 2011).

One of the biggest accomplishments was the reopening of several elementary schools in returnee MZs, in which civil society associations in cooperation with the other members of the local community had the crucial role. This is an illustrative example of synergy in the community:

The parents and children were organized into sections. The council of parents and council of children were organized to lead the action of school reopening in Kozarac. Associations were behind them, keeping an eye on them, protecting their rights, informing them about legislation and their scope of action accordingly. Associations functioned as a bridge to important persons from the international community, OHR, OSCE, etc.

Other associations assisted in the process of re-establishing the local economy by creating employment opportunities or by capacity building and education. A member of a women's association indicated: "We had a project with an objective to educate women in sewing, hairdressing, cooking and similar activities. We even had registered the enterprise (...) with six women employed on a full-time basis, despite the fact that we had to pay the rent to the municipality". Furthermore, an important incentive for return and subsequent development of the local community in Kozarac was the establishment of networks and various kinds of contacts with war-displaced relatives and neighbors who had resettled abroad. By creating an internet platform and news portals the returnees managed to reconnect with relatives and friends across the world, thus linking the social community destroyed by the war. According to Sivic-Bryant (2010:85) launching of the web page and online forum *kozarac.ba* enabled reunion for "all those who are scattered around the world in their need to transcend physical distance and play an active role in the reconstruction of their community".

With respect to social bonding, all informants consider that *Medžlis Islamske zajednice* (Local Islamic Community Centre) had an important, if not vital role, in process of return. Due to lack of institutional support provided by the state, the Local Islamic Community Centre providing variety of social and cultural services was perceived as glue that could hold the returnee community together.

### **Social bridging**

There are several positive examples of social bridging between Bosniak returnees and the Bosnian Serbs in Prijedor. The most prominent one is a project implemented through joint activities of a youth returnee association in Kozarac and two predominantly Serb NGOs in Prijedor. Moreover, the first contact was made by the association *Srcem do Mira* in 1998, when they organized a conference inviting Serb NGOs in order to open debate on the return of refugees from both sides. As it was obvious that all IDPs are more than willing to return to their own homes, the conference ended with joint celebration (Sivic-Bryant, 2011).

In addition, youth camps have been organized every year during the last four years, gathering young people from whole country with the aim to promote reconciliation and the importance of remembrance. Important activities are sport tournaments, eco-friendly events and educational workshops on traffic safety for youth of different ethnic backgrounds: "We have gathered children from nine schools in one place. Children from Omarska, Trnopolje... were all in one place socializing with each other. By riding a bike together, by exchanging their Facebook accounts, by realizing that they cheer for the same football club, children learn about their similarities".



One informant also indicated that there is a wide cooperation between associations based on their similar activities regardless of different ethnic backgrounds: “When one football coach is talking with another, they are not a Serb and a Bosniak, they are coaches”.

One of the most vibrant examples of social bridging is related to the multiethnic MZ Raškovac. Already in 1999 the first Bosniaks were returning to this urban MZ, well-known for its football club, associations and vivid cultural life before the war. Selvira, a Bosniak returnee woman to Raškovac managed to achieve the reconstruction of the social life in this community.

She pointed out that cooperation within the MZ was very challenging at times, and cooperation with authorities was even more difficult. Yet she managed to secure funds for reconstruction of local roads, street lighting, cultural facilities and playgrounds. She explains: “By my own wisdom and prudence I’ve managed to bring them to their senses, both Serbs and Bosniaks. The Mayor wanted 300 votes and he won 380 votes. I accomplished that by lobbying, knocking on every door. That’s how I managed to wake up the Serbs and prove that I am a representative of all citizens equally. Before, Serbs didn’t want to engage, those who were elected as representatives in Council of MZ, were attending the meetings, but their engagement was rather poor”. Furthermore, upon Selvira’s request, the mayor supported the organization of a collective funeral for war victims, one of the most important religious gatherings for the returnees in Prijedor. She declares: “It is politics, you must give to gain!” The association that she later established for the women in her MZ was an important facilitator of economic reintegration for returnees and the wider MZ women’s community. Local entrepreneurs offered employment to the seamstresses that she trained.

### **Social linking**

Although the majority of the associations represented in the focus group were receiving some funding from the authorities at different levels, at some point in our conversation, all informants emphasized that they lacked systematic support in funding, legal/legislative support and counseling, and a strategic approach to issues of sustainable return that they tackle on a daily basis. Since all of them implement wide range of activities in a successful manner without systematic and firm support from the government, the following was pointed out: “Politics is constantly affecting our lives, the time has come that we influence politics. If you’re not a member of some political party, there is no assistance for anything.... No one is focusing on a local community and its real development needs”. Several informants were politically engaged, but they did not see a possibility to achieve prosperity in the existing political context individually since the turnout of Bosniaks in elections is generally low and “the current political situation is deceitful.”

Regarding the current local politics in Prijedor, there are many unfavorable circumstances for returnees; for example, the prohibition both to gather in public and commemorate the deaths of civilians in notorious concentration camps and to apply for local government funding to support their activities. On the other hand, there is an example of a former concentration camp prisoner and returnee, who obtained support from the mayor of Prijedor in developing his local business; the project was financed by the Norwegian government with the government of RS co-signing the loan. Local investments in the economic development of the returnee areas are welcomed by the municipality authorities.

One of our key informants, subject to extensive follow-up interview in Kozarac, points out that it is difficult for returnees today to differentiate between a friend and a rival in politics. According to him, the city of Prijedor is receiving funds in the name of return, but returnees obtain minimal benefits of those funds: "We are not included in those processes, and don't have political mechanisms to control those processes."

In order to maintain positive effects of their struggle for sustainable return, returnee NGOs and representatives of MZs close to Kozarac have recently moved a step forward in claiming authority and launched an initiative for establishing the municipality of Kozarac. The civil society associations with MZ members prepared elaborate for the entity government and will now apply for municipality status, thus transforming several MZs in Kozarac area into municipality, the only desirable legal self-governance option for returnees. Sead explains:

"We are all involved in the process of establishing the municipality: citizens, individuals, lobbyists, NGOs, religious communities, both Islamic and Catholic. It's a joint effort ... We have the working groups, tasks are assigned, and are almost completed (...) We will submit the request to legislative organs in the next two weeks, then we wait for the official response".

When asked what their expectations in terms of the outcomes of this transformation are, he replied: "We expect to go all the way to the court in Strasbourg." Sead told us that requests for formal status of new municipalities are becoming a trend in BiH: Stanari, for example (almost 100% populated by Serbs), a MZ near Dobojo, also applied for the status of municipality, as did some other local communities in RS.

## Discussion of Empiric Findings<sup>35</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Discussion of the gathered data is based on the research indicators of the social capital thoroughly presented in a table found in Annex 3 of the study with illustrative examples based on the informant's statements.

Most prevalent means of social bonding between the returnees occurred during the early return phases (1997-2000), which necessitated the establishment of returnee associations and NGOs in all three returnee communities, demanding the implementation of Annex VII, which in the first instance involved property restitution and reconstruction. In all three municipalities joint activities and social cohesion significantly benefited the returnees in their quests to reclaim and rebuild the destroyed property while simultaneously providing forum for exchange of information regarding the reconstruction of the livelihoods.

Furthermore, it is evident that organization of public events and civil activities initiated and headed by returnees or pro-returnee associations are the key promoters and facilitators of return in all its segments: information sharing and initiative taking and generally pushing for projects that could respond to reintegration on a micro level, in MZs, where real problems of sustainable return are tackled on a daily basis.

Within the unfeasible economic and political return context the returnee associations' play the key role in the process of socio-economic (re)normalization. However, deprived of the formal and systematic financial support, these organizations have had a limited impact on the overall results in the segment of reintegration. Clearly, what we have today in the returnee communities, referred to as positive practices (be it economic or social services), would not have been in place if it weren't for maximal efforts and voluntary work of returnees through the associations and individually for the common cause of reconstructing the local communities.



Initiatives on behalf of UNHCR and international non-governmental partnering organizations stand out as relevant in enabling the economic sustainability of the returnees in the three communities. However there is a negative criticism pointed towards unorganized manner and selection criteria without follow up evaluations in which the distribution of donations and economic incentives are conducted. On the other hand, criticism towards government projects in providing sustainable return is unanimously negative as being misdirected, politically biased and corrupted in different ways at different levels of governance. Returnees affirm that both entities (RS and Federation BiH) have different political agendas concerning the sustainable return and lack non-politicized strategic action.

Diasporic networks were mobilized and relevant to sustainable return in Prijedor municipality, especially in MZ Kozarac, while in other two communities these were not mentioned as important for benefitting reintegration process.

In each municipality positive social bridging was noted, involving trans-ethnic ties focused on generational exchange through youth initiatives and different public activities promoting local development. The cooperation and socialization was most tangible on the level of MZs where the neighboring ones (e.g. one being predominantly populated by Bosniaks, and other by Serbs) address maintenance and development issues in a joint manner. In the same way the free market economy brings the ethnic groups together in all three municipalities.

Furthermore, movement forward in the return process of all three municipalities was achieved when the multiethnic coalitions were formed and/or the return was stressed as a movement in two directions through trans- ethnic cooperation for property restitution and rebuilding.

Generally, on a grass root level and within MZs common everyday life brings returnees and non-returnees and different social groups together. In all three communities there are high interest in contributing to social life and socio-cultural development of the community. However, official politics oppose and/or do not promote these activities as they are in favor of official ethnic politics still based on divisive ethnic rhetoric.

Overall impression is that the obstructive ethnic politics in different ways de-motivate the returnees to politically engage and improve the government services. This, in turn is directly linked to voting habits in the local communities which are low or inadequate as to achieve real impact at level of municipality where returnees are mainly over-voted by dominant ethnic others. Constitutional makeup of the country complicates this dimension leaving little political space apart from the dominant ethnic one.

There is overall dissatisfaction with the entity and municipal government's management of the return process so far and all returnees demand more self-governance through means of greater legal empowerment of MZs.

Furthermore, many participants of the focus groups also stress that sustainable return requires field-based strategic planning and comprehensive evaluations by focusing on the most successful practices to counterpart overly negative climate in the country regarding the return process.

We conclude with the statement by committed returnee activist in Kozarac, with extensive experience in the projects driving forward sustainable return:

In 1999-2000 I said that we will have people returning for the next 2 or 3 years, and that's it. All the money spending since 2008 is a bare money laundering. ... To spend funds /for the return/, as they are spent nowadays and couple of years ago, is completely notorious ...The time has come to draw the line... The only constructive investments are the ones in young families with children. It is crucial to invest in couples with children, to provide employment and sustainability for them.

## Policy options and recommendations

As evidenced by findings of our policy study the problem regarding the sustainability of return in BiH is not related to the lack of action plans and programmes nor competent state authorities and international agencies for implementation of these, but primarily the absence of comprehensive country-wide implementation tool or mechanism that drawing on strategic framework (Revised Strategy) *systematically addresses* the real life issues of the *highly diverse returnee population*. These issues for returnees clearly relate to **adequate rule of (self)governance and delivery of social and economic services** at the level of local communities. Nonetheless, these matters are embedded in the unfavorable socioeconomic and administrative governance structure that BiH is currently faced with.

Drawing from our findings we would like to suggest to all key stakeholders that until the general socio-economic context in the country is significantly improved the positive practices of return should be used as a role-modeling of staying put. Accordingly, current UNHCR and MHRR led and coordinated IPA program, responding to the sustainability recommendations in the Revised Strategy should form the beneficiary identification/evaluation tools in accordance with social capital<sup>36</sup> i.e., available human resources and competencies as a crucial implementation component.

<sup>36</sup> See introductory chapters for the operational definition of social capital in this study.

### **Policy option 1: No need to act!**

*Keeping the status quo and holding the government and other international stakeholders off  
Consequence: Continuation of spontaneous grass root process generating the local reintegration through active civil society and engagement of resourceful returnees in the MZs*

Our empiric findings clearly show that even without the policies and country wide programmes systematically addressing the recommendations of the Revised Strategy, different levels of the returnee reintegration have occurred. The fact that positive examples in all three studied municipalities reveal the social capital's crucial role in all phases of the return process strongly indicates that there exists significant but overlooked grass root development in a positive direction regardless of the unfavorable political and economic context and other shortages and obstacles faced. This development took place when there was little political interference on behalf of authorities on the level of MZs and through strong local civil society involving both formal and informal returnee associations and resourceful returnees (strong leaders and social initiative takers) that led the reintegration actions and projects. The statement of Sead, one of such prominent returnee leaders in Kozarac illustrates this point well when he both criticized the lack of support from the formal authorities and welcomed it at once: "It is best for us when they don't interfere. It costs us a lot both when municipality level authorities interfere and when they don't. If they are not involved we are short of licenses and face problems, but when they are on board they charge their presence too much".



Therefore one of the possible policy options in our view is to recommend the *satus quo* and in that way avoid interfering in the grass root sustainability processes already under way. However, this policy option is random, lengthy, unreliable in terms of country-wide positive outcomes and inappropriate when it comes to municipalities with low rates of returnees due to lack of human resources and subsequently lower rates of social linking.

### **Policy option 2: Implement the Revised Strategy by adding the gap analysis**

*Implementation of the Revised Strategy by means of new sub annex added*

*Consequence: New revision by gap analysis based on existent good practices and systematic evaluations through regular field observations and in-depth assessment tool for sustainability progress country wide*

Full implementation of the Revised Strategy is essential in a country wide perspective. Therefore, we suggest the second policy option which involves the methodical empiric evaluation of returnee municipalities based on the best practices from the field taking into account the returnee voices and social resources in achieving the reintegration. Inevitably, this evaluation would involve the gap analysis and sub-annex incorporated into the Revised Strategy as a guiding principle for its implementation significant to current RHP, CEB and IPA programs and other future programs. We propose this sub-annex added to sustainability section for the purpose of adequate installation of the *vertical reporting and evaluation mechanism grounded in the field and based on social capital* as explained in our earlier discussion - resourceful returnee communities and competent individuals accommodating the reintegration process. Gap analysis would thus require the systematic evaluations based on regular field observations and in-depth studies of returnee communities focusing the existent good practices.

Adoption of Revised Strategy took two years, and even though it should be implemented till the end of 2014, new revision is plausible as to meet all its goals. However, despite considering this policy option as an important task, we don't find it viable due to the fact that new substantial alternations of the Revised Strategy may be overly time-consuming. Having in mind the political, social, economic and other constraints and the current position of returnees, we find this policy option less favorable.

### **Policy option 3: More power to returnees!**

*Shift in ownership of sustainability projects by direct partnering with beneficiaries/returnees*

*Consequence: institutionalization, authorization and formalization of existent capacities and know-how of returnees at level of MZ and civil returnee society*

This is the policy option that we find most desirable as our extensive field research and findings point to the fact that the positive examples in all three returnee sites are paralleled to resourceful returnees and/or returnee communities addressing the shortage of local social and economic services delivery by own capacity through civil society engagement. The most vivid examples of social bridging and bonding are developed through ties in MZs *where they fulfilled the important function of building the networks / associations and NGOs that could efficiently respond to and substitute the shortage of service delivery on behalf of formal authorities at municipality level.*

When returnees were social agents of change in their local communities they successfully addressed the identification of most urgent socio-economic matters, undertook initiatives of

spokespersons on behalf of community towards international donors and urged for more effective identification and beneficiary selection mechanisms for the implementation of the sustainability projects based on adequate (transparent and continuous) follow-up monitoring.

It is clear that the returnee associations and the returnee activism need to become formally and methodically supported, empowered and incorporated in current and future sustainability programs by the international actors in this field. Recognition of the informal capacities and skills that these withhold on the local community level is therefore a next step in the process that UNHCR and partnering organizations under IPA are advised to undertake. Efficient tool is to use the social competencies and the principle of relationships that the returnee associations and NGOs already poses in identifying the targeted IPA beneficiaries by means of outsourcing the competent authorities i.e., local/municipality service deliverers in the course of the implementation. Official and direct partnering with proactive returnee CSOs would enhance the implementation of IPA in all its segments.

<sup>37</sup> The BiH Beacon Scheme was launched in August 2005 by the OSCE and the Council of Europe as a means to identify, recognize, and promote innovation and excellence at the municipal level of government, including variety of themes and municipalities being invited to provide evidence of how they have achieved excellence in these areas. In 2010 for the fifth round of the scheme the position and role of local communities (MZs) in municipalities was focused and awarded.

Valuable tool to use in formalizing the resources and competencies of CSOs and MZs as social actors of change in local communities is the European Charter on Local Self-governance in BiH. OSCE supports this process by Beacon Scheme<sup>37</sup> open to all municipalities, which involves among other things overlooking the position and role of local communities and promoting the civil society organizations participation in this process throughout the municipalities. The returnees should be directly included as implementation partners to UNHCR and MHRR for the IPA projects of sustainability and encouraged to further build and strengthen the rule of democracy in their local communities.

### Recommendations

#### **For the UNHCR and MHRR, including UN and other partner organizations implementing the IPA program:**

- Use social competencies of resourceful returnees and returnee CSOs in creating an effective and field/based system of beneficiary selection, monitoring and evaluation 10 targeted municipalities as to prevent further misuse of the funds.
- Consult the resources and 'lessons learned' by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in implementation of the IPA 2012 and upcoming IPA programmes especially concerning the social inclusion and delivery of social services pertaining to socio/economic rights and needs of the returnee population and local community.

#### **For Local Governments/Municipalities:**

- Legally and financially empower and support *MZs* as to further promote spontaneous grass root social and economic development.
- In line with EU Charter of Local Democracy and UNDP local development programmes, embrace the ambitions and efforts of strong local communities and further support and invest in work of CSOs in returnee communities.
- Outsource the delivery of social services to efficient CSOs in returnee communities.

#### **For returnee associations and CSOs:**

- Make regular exchange between returnee associations and other civil society organizations to facilitate access to international donors and sustainability programs.
- Systematically and regularly disseminate positive results and outcomes of civil engagement acting as role model to other CSOs in returnee environments.



## ANNEX 1

### THE LIST OF INDICATORS

#### **1) Social bonding** - *horizontal relations between persons who share similarities (ethnic, religious, family connections and neighbours)*

- Number of returnee associations in the returnee community
- Number of public events, civil initiatives (political, cultural, religious) organised by the returnees
- Returnees' socialization and/or contact with family members living in immediate surrounding or abroad, and locals of same ethnic/religious background
- Examples of returnee associations/initiatives that enable/assist economic sustainability of community

#### **2) Social bridging** - *ties between different social groups*

- Number of returnees active in civic initiatives which are not focused on displacement/return related issues but have other local social and cultural focus
- Rate of informal socialising with people of other ethnicities in their returnee community
- Participation in any form of collective gathering significant for the entire community

#### **3) Social linking** - *connections between individuals/groups in vertical line (e.g. state authority - citizens)*

- Membership in political parties and political engagement in the returnee communities
- Usage of services designed for returnees (and joint projects involving locals) provided by government and/or other relevant actors (e.g. micro grants aimed for entrepreneurship and socio/economic sustainability)
- Participation in projects aimed to boost cooperation among returnees and/or returnees and locals
- Voting habits of returnees in the local communities
- The level of satisfaction with services/incentives provided by the government (and other relevant actors), that facilitate useful networking within and outside the returnee community.

## ANNEX 2

### List of participants in focus group discussions

#### 1) GORAŽDE

Focus group discussion involved five persons: two representatives from formal regional and local returnee associations (“Unija za održiv povratak BiH,” and “Regionalni odbor za povratak u istočnu BiH”), a representative from the Municipality Council for Rights of Refugees and Displaced Person in Čajniče, a representative from UNHCR with long experience of socio-legal work with returnees in Goražde municipality, and a returnee in Čajniče.

#### 2) ZVORNIK

Focus group discussion involved six persons: three representatives<sup>38</sup> of *MZs* (Križeviči, Kula Grad, Sultanovići), the representative of *Komisija za održivi povratak, razvoj i integraciju*, the adviser for sustainable return and restoration at the municipality office, and president of “Udruženje građana povratnika u Zvornik” (NGO).

#### 3) PRIJEDOR

Participants of the focus group came from variety of backgrounds and represented wide spectrum of social, cultural, economic, political, education, human rights and gender focused organizations in the municipality. These included:

- 1) Members of NGOs active in Prijedor municipality: Udruženje prijedorčanki “Izvor”, “Optimisti 2004”, associations of former concentration camps prisoners “Prijedor 92” and “Kozarac”, association of women “Donja Puharska”, “Srcem do mira”, “Berek”, charity “Merhamet”, Local Islamic Community Centre Kozarac, folklore ensemble “Osman Džafić”;
- 2) Representatives of *MZs*: Hambarine, Raškovac, Donja Puharska, Kevljani;
- 3) Representatives of Elementary School “Kozarac”, local returnee school.

<sup>38</sup> These persons have also shared their personal stories as returnees able to (re)gain socio-economic sustainability.



### ANNEX 3

Type of Social Capital	INDICATORS	GORAŽDE	ZVORNIK	PRIJEDOR
Social bonding horizontal relations between persons who share similarities	<b>Number of returnee and pro returnee associations in a returnee community<sup>39</sup></b>	3	3	14
	<b>Nature of public events and civil initiatives organised by the returnees<sup>40</sup></b>	<p>Preparing return phase: Joint actions of cleaning of property prior to reconstruction:</p> <p>„Back in those days I could gather around 1500 men for spontaneous action and things were done in a split second, like</p>	<p>Property Reconstruction:</p> <p>“When there was a delivery of construction material, one didn’t care if it’s for Huso’s or Dževad’s house, everyone put their gloves on, men, women, children and all together handle</p>	<p>Education/Reopening of the primary school:</p> <p>“The parents and children were organized into sections. The council of parents and council of children were organized to lead the action of school</p>

<sup>39</sup> Here we only indicate the number of associations that took part in our focus group and responded to our call for meeting. Exact number of returnee associations and pro-returnee associations is difficult to obtain especially because some came into being during early phase of return and ceased to exist when certain tasks were achieved while others have long withstanding history. Furthermore, associations listed here have formal status of returnee associations and are headed by returnees, work for certain returnee issues etc. but there are also many more composed by returnees and focused on culture, sports and other social activities which are involving and targeting returnees. Numbers here are therefore not proportional to general number of associations in these municipalities. Only for Kozarac, homogenous community can we maintain that the total number of 11 associations registered while only 5 were represented in our focus group are indeed the returnee association –formally, composed by returnees and/or headed by these working for the sustainability of return in all life segments, from culture to sports, human rights activism etc.

<sup>40</sup> Originally, this indicator was also quantitative and referred to number of public events not the nature as framed here but in the course of our research this quantitative data proved not to be able to obtain and even relevant as an indicator of civil initiatives. Generally, the indicators that we chose for our research are derived from both quantitative and qualitative studies on reintegration (Ager, 2008.) and hence respond to similar complementary data collection approach. As we opted for qualitative data collection from the very start, we discussed reshaping of the indicators as an option here above in that way making them informed by the empiric field work conducted for the purpose of our study. We did require documentation from UNHCR local offices, municipalities, NGOs in the three communities, through email correspondence, per telephone conversations and during the field visits.

		cleaning ruins and reoccupying houses. Together the returnees endured most of the hardships and were safer when physical attacks on us still happened and the security situation was poor". (Meho, the President of the Returnee Association)	the bricks. Believe me, an eight meter long and eight meters high house got built in a day. That was the spirit!" (Mesud, MZ Križevići)	reopening in Kozarac. Associations were behind them, keeping an eye on them, protecting their rights, informing about legislation and their scope of action accordingly. Associations functioned as a bridge to important persons from International Community, OHR, OSCE, etc." Maja, Association "Srcem do mira"
	<b>How often returnees socialize and/or have contact with family members living in immediate surrounding or abroad and locals of the same ethnic/religious background</b>	High rate of returnee socializing: "All of the associations in the Eastern Bosnia are local and cooperate very well. If there weren't for these, none of the return would have been possible."	High rate of socializing in MZs: "We have built a garden house where we gather every fifteen to twenty days and have a feast, singing and dancing with two flutes and a drum ...This is financed from the <i>black fund</i> <sup>41</sup> our friends and relatives from diaspora send us money". (Adnan, local entrepreneur, MZ Sultanovići)	High rate of everyday socializing: "We are leaning on each other and that is the only way to make progress, and that's the only way and how we made progress here". (Tarik, MZ Hambarine)
	<b>Examples of returnee associations/initiatives that enable/assist economic sustainability of community</b>	Private rural entrepreneurship: "We had no machines; we had no instruments, only ourselves ready for any kind of hard labor without anyone's help just in	Agricultural cooperative: Returnees have established agricultural cooperative "Voćar" thus enabling economic sustainability for both returnees	Employment of returnee women: "We had a project with an objective to educate women in sawing, hairdressing, cooking

<sup>41</sup> Local expression for the savings set aside for illness or other misfortunes.



		order to recreate the normal life environment. To be more concrete, with my brother we set a hundred of acres of arable land, about 80 of it was then possible to re-cultivate.” ( <i>Edin, local entrepreneur</i> )	and wider community.	and similar. We even had registered the enterprise (...) with six employed women on full time basis, despite the fact that we had to pay the rent” ( <i>Dinka, Association “Izvor”</i> )
Social bridging ties between different social groups	<b>Rate of returnee activism or civic initiatives which are not focused on displacement/return related issues but have other social and cultural focus</b>	Cultural and tourist activities such as rural tourism through country side visits and eco-food projects in MZ Cajnice.	Ecology initiatives in MZ and municipality: “MZ Križevići <sup>42</sup> borders with MZ Bajkovca and Kitovce <sup>43</sup> . We have excellent cooperation with them. Three and a half kilometers of local road Orahovac should be maintained by Municipality. However, bushes and holes are never removed by the municipality. When branches make a tunnel and start to damage our cars, we organise and clean the mess. This has brought us closer to each other”. ( <i>Mesud, MZ Križevci</i> )	High rates of reconciliation activism through education, training, school activities culture and sports events: “We have gathered children from nine schools in one place. Children from Omarska, Trnopolje were all in one place socializing with each other. By riding a bike together, by exchanging their Facebook accounts, by realizing that they cheer the same football club children learn about their similarities”  “When one football coach is talking with another, they are not a Serb and a Bosniak, they are coaches”. ( <i>Mahir, Association “Optimisti 2004”</i> )
	<b>Rate of informal socialising with</b>	High rate of everyday	Indications of high rate of	High rate of spontaneous

<sup>42</sup> Bosniak returnee MZ

<sup>43</sup> These two MZs are populated with Serbs dominantly.

	<b>people of other ethnicity in returnee community</b>	<p>socializing:</p> <p>According Sabira, returnee in Milijena (Novo Goražde) Bosniak returnees and Serbs have renewed their prewar relations. She has a close relationship with her pre-war friends, but other returnees as well are socialising with local Serbs, particularly when some important life events occur, such as: weddings, funerals, giving birth and similar.</p>	<p>spontaneous socializing about no examples given in the data</p>	<p>socializing:</p> <p>“We were about to move out from our apartment and the association, Čisto Srce<sup>44</sup> was to move in. Today, these new generations, the young people are living the idea of <i>peaceful coexistence</i>. We are Muslims, me, my child and my husband. When they came, they insisted on helping us with everything”. Esma, teacher in a local school.</p>
	<b>Participation in any form of collective gathering significant for the entire community</b>	<p>No evidence of such activity in the data collected</p>	<p>Youth projects:</p> <p>The Returnee Association of Zvornik is promoting the youth activism in Bosniak returnee communities in cooperation with NGO led by the young local Serbs. The initiative is aiming at establishing the network of youth committees in the municipality between youth of different ethnic backgrounds and to build their capacities for inter-ethnic cooperation and projects. “I personally think that inter-ethnic cooperation and</p>	<p>Mutual ecology projects in municipality:</p> <p>“We<sup>45</sup> cleaned up The Partisan cemetery together. It seems like a small step forward, but in a wider context we brought together the two different epochs, the two worlds” (Mahir, “Optimisti 2004”)</p>

<sup>44</sup> Association from Prijedor consisted of young activists, predominantly Serb nationality

<sup>45</sup> Activists of returnee association and „Čisto Srce“.



			<p>projects are vital for sustainable return". (<i>Mirsad from Returnee Association in Zvornik</i>)</p>	
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">Social/ linking connections between individuals/groups in vertical line (e.g. state authority - citizens)</p>	<p><b>Membership in political parties and political engagement in the returnee communities</b></p>	<p>Low level of activity and negative experiences:</p> <p>One informant shared the experience he had in politics. He said that others use political parties to gain personal financial and other benefits, thus compromising their own integrity. Therefore he decided to withdraw after two years of political engagement.</p>	<p>Informants did not have engagement in political parties.</p>	<p>Highly present:</p> <p>Several informants were politically engaged, but they did not see a possibility to make prosperity within the existing political context since the turnout of Bosniaks on elections in general is low and "current political situation is shameful". (Mahir, "Optimisti 2004")</p> <p>One informant in particular stands out as a positive example. Mrs. Selvira has managed to revive the association life in her MZ as well as to reconstruct the infrastructure, cultural activity and pre-war sports association by means of political engagement in Council of MZ.</p>
	<p><b>Usage of services designed for returnees (and joint projects involving locals) provided by government and/or other relevant actors (e.g. micro grants aimed for entrepreneurship and socio/economic sustainability)</b></p>	<p>High level of micro grant funds by foreign organizations:</p> <p>"I bought a cow and I started from there, it was hard to get a loan because I had no guarantees. How do I even return a loan!? And then thanks to some good people and those</p>	<p>High level of government funds:</p> <p>„Returnees don't have to pay paperwork when applying for housing fond or for funds devised for economic sustainability“. <i>Mario, adviser for sustainable return and</i></p>	<p>High level of NGO funds:</p> <p>We always created projects based on our needs, and international donors were supporting us. <i>Maja, Association"Srcem do mira"</i></p>

		organizations (especially thanks to World Vision) I got a microcredit. They did a huge job. They were the first to support us and the financial support is essential." ( <i>Edin, local entrepreneur</i> )	<i>restoration at the municipality office</i>	
	<b>Participation in projects initiated by government at all levels aimed to boost cooperation among returnees and/or returnees and locals</b>	Such projects were not initiated by authorities or informants were not familiar with their existence.	Such projects were not initiated by authorities or informants were not familiar with their existence.	Such projects were not initiated by authorities or informants were not familiar with their existence.
	<b>Voting habits of returnees in the local communities</b>	Low: During the pre-war elections there were 3680 Bosniaks and 760 Serbs in this local community <sup>46</sup> . Since Dayton we have never again won the elections. This community is supposed to have at least 70% of the elected candidates but we have only 30%. There are	Low: "We vote here, 5500 to 6000 Bosniaks vote. But generally people are disappointed and that's way more they don't vote". ( <i>Mirsad from Returnee Association in Zvornik</i> )	Low: „There 32 000 of Bosniaks in voter registration lists. Only 6600 of them voted". ( <i>Mirza, Udruženje logoraša "Prijedor 92"</i> )

<sup>46</sup> Novo Goražde.



		<p>returnees but they are all in Sarajevo, because of the politicians there who rather keep the ethnic voters there. <i>(Edin, local entrepreneur)</i></p>		
	<p><b>The level of satisfaction with services/incentives provided by the government (and other relevant actors), that facilitate useful networking within and outside the returnee community</b></p>	<p>Low: We need to find means of forcing authorities to create one strategy in the field, not in the offices up there and let it take three years in the field if that is needed. <i>(Edin, local entrepreneur)</i></p>	<p>Low: “We would be more that satisfied if laws were implemented. (...) Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees adopted the Law on local self-governance and its article 3. (...) Why don't they implement that law?”. <i>(Mirsad from Returnee Association in Zvornik)</i></p>	<p>Low: „Municipality's greatest investments were made in <i>my MZ</i>, but of what good is that, considering that neighboring <i>MZ</i> doesn't even have basic water supply“ <i>(Tarik, MZ Hambarine)</i></p>

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