

# Notes made from the Ashkali and Egyptian communities for the shadow report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Kosovo

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In the previous shadow report, it is mentioned that the international community is recognizing the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as one community, as Roma community. The most important issue for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo is their personal identity. Expression and acceptance of the identity is the first and the most important thing for a person to feel comfortable and included in the society.

The international community is not the only community that is still putting these three communities in one community. The other communities living in Kosovo are doing that too. The Roma community is for long time widely recognized like a community. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are new communities in Kosovo. These two communities were declaring them self as Albanians until 1999. Albanian language is the mother language for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Albanians, Ashkali and Egyptian communities have same religion, tradition, culture, food, clothes etc.

There are no enough informations for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. That why the different communities in Kosovo don't know the differences between the Roma community in one side and the Ashkali and Egyptian communities in another side.

Many members of the Ashkali and Egyptian communities do not know so much for them self too. The reason for that is lack of informations. The level of the education between the Ashkali and Egyptian community is very low. There are no so many informations available in albanian language about the identity of these two communities (it is difficult to find informations in other languages too).

The Kosovo Government, UNMIK, ULEX or other institutions in Kosovo didn't take any steps to preserve or develop the identity, culture, tradition of the Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Often, because of lack of interest of the donors (the donors are mainly interested to support "RAE" activities), the Ashkali and Egyptian communities can't organize them self activities to promote identity, tradition and culture. There is also no proper support from the Kosovo Government in central and local level in supporting such activities.

By the constitution of Kosova, the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are recognized as three different communities. There are three political parties that are representing Ashkali and Egyptian communities (two Ashkali political parties and one Egyptian political party).

The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are facing with many difficulties, many of them are similar to the Roma community but there are many of them that are different that the Roma community has.

The international and local community is sometimes still using the term "RAE" in their documents. The members of the Ashkali and Egyptian communities are getting frustrated and losing the will to work and cooperate with those institutions and organizations that are not respecting the identity of Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The Ashkali and Egyptian parliamentarians do not have the strength and capacity to represent the needs of the communities in parliament.

There is no good representation of the Ashkali and Egyptian community in local level too. The Ashkali community has one representative in only three municipalities of Kosova: Ferizaj/urosevac, Fushe Kosove/Kosovo Polje and Lipjan/Lipjan. The Egyptian community is in same situation too. They are represented in three municipalities only: Peja/Pec, Istog/Istog and Gjakove/Gjakovo.

In some municipalities in Kosova, where is a bit bigger percentage of the Ashkali and Egyptians are living, Local Communities Offices (LCO) are existing. Each LCO should have representatives of all communities. Often, the Ashkali and Egyptian communities are not represented in LCO. LCO are mainly led by the Serbian community and the majority of the decisions are made by the Serbian representatives. The LCO have a budget and many times the budget is not spent in percentage for each community. The majority of the budget goes to the Serbian community. Since Kosova became independent, many LCO are not fully working. The main reason is that the Serbian representatives are protesting Kosovo independent. That is affecting the work of the other representatives of other communities in LCO because they are not working in full capacity and also many time the LCO is closed. The members of the Ashkali and Egyptian communities don't have where to stress their problems and concerns.

The worst thing is that in many municipalities in Kosovo where the number of inhabitants of Ashkali and Egyptians is small, there are no LCO at all.

Ashkali and Egyptians are still facing with the problems of discrimination and exclusion from the public life. Many of them do not report problems because of many reasons:

- They are scared that they may have more problems
- They are under the pressure to not report the problems
- There are no actions made till now and they lost their faith in the institutions
- They don't know where to report the problems
- They don't know the procedures how to report the problems

There are many laws and strategies made in Kosovo since 2005. One of them is the strategy for the integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosova. The only problem is that those

strategies are not implemented in Kosovo. They are made just to fulfill the international standards or to get the donors.

The Communities Council for Consultation (CCC) is founded inside the office of President of Kosova. There are representatives of all communities of Kosova. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities have 4 representatives in this council. 2 are representing the civil society and two of them political parties. The CCC is functioning very slowly and its role is consultations only.

The Ashkali and Egyptian community freedom of movement is generally good. But many of the members of the community do not feel free to go out and socialize during the night. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities is not fully integrated in Kosovo society. The Kosovo Government approved the strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. The strategy has many components. The members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities were involved in drafting the strategy. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are not totally happy with the content of the strategy, the communities gave many comments but many of them were not accepted. The strategy was published in hurry, without final and proper review of the participants from the communities that were involved in drafting the strategy.

The forced return of members of Ashkali and Egyptian from western countries is the biggest problem for the moment. There are still IDP camps in Kosovo. The Kosovo Government is working and trying to close the IDP camps but that is difficult because more and more people are returning by force from Western Europe. Those people do not have where to live so the only solution is to go and live in existing camps. Ashkali and Egyptian forced returnees are having problems to get personal documents, their children can't go to the school because they don't speak Albanian, they are facing with many health and economical problems etc. No one is assisting those forced returnees. The Kosovo Government is telling them to go to UNHCR, and vice versa.

Because of the bad economic situation, many people from the Ashkali and Egyptian communities are also leaving Kosovo. They are sealing whatever they have and illegally going to western countries. Usually many of them are having success and arriving to the destinations but after some time the countries are returning them by force back to Kosova. When they return back, their only choices are IDP camps.

The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are still facing with education, employment, health, property documents, civil registration and many other problems. Because of low education the unemployment percentage is still around 98 %. There is no policy made from the government of Kosova or international community for finding long term solution for employment for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

The members Ashkali and Egyptian communities are directly discriminated regarding the social policy in Kosovo. One of the conditions to receive social assistance applicant have to have a child younger than 5 years. That why the members of the Ashkali and Egyptian community are somehow forced to make more children in order to get a chance to receive social assistance. Usually the amount that they are receiving is around 65 Euro and that amount is small to support the needs of the family.

Since the Ashkali and Egyptian communities are speaking Albanian, many people in Kosovo think that these communities don't need their own programs on TV or radio. There is still no any single program in Radio Television of Kosova (RTK) regarding the issues important for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities are paying the fee to the national television but they cannot have a single minute to present different issues regarding their communities such: information what is happening in communities, tradition, culture, sport, music etc. RTK have a board and that board should have in board all members of the communities. The Ashkali and Egyptian communities do not have representatives in the board of RTK. There is no person from the Ashkali and Egyptian communities working in RTK. There is still no radio program for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities. There were initiatives from the Ashkali and Egyptian communities to open the radio station. They couldn't find a donor to support the project and also there is no frequency available. There is no any newspaper company offered to publish any article or info written by Ashkali or Egyptian communities. The Kosovo Government is not taking serious steps in supporting the initiatives taken by Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Regarding the education of the Ashkali and Egyptian communities, the situation didn't change so much. The number of the children attending the preschool facilities is very low. Many children can't start their first grade in the same level like their peers from the Albanian community. Because of the low education, the parents can't help their children to succeed in their education. By the Kosovo law, the children cannot repeat the year. The children from the Ashkali and communities are passing from the grade to the grade and their level (quality) of education is very low. Many of those children (even the children from the 5<sup>th</sup> grade) cannot read and write. Those children are somehow finishing the primary school but majority of them are not continuing at all with secondary school. That is happening because of many reasons:

- When they finish the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, students have to pass the national test. Many of them are getting low grade.\
- To register in the secondary school, you have to have good school grades and also good grade from the national test.
- Bad economical situation
- Lack of support from the family
- Lack of support from institutions, etc

There are no reserved places in secondary school for the Ashkali and Egyptian communities

There are reserved places in university for the students from the Ashkali and Egyptian communities, but to come to the university they have to finish secondary school

Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) gave the books to all students from 1-4 school grades all over Kosovo. Many students from the higher grades didn't have school books at all during the school year 2008-2009.

There are some NGO working education programs with the children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. One of them is NGO Balkan Sunflowers. This NGO is implementing the project called Learning Centers Network. The project is community based. Around 20 people from the communities work in this NGO. Approximately 45 tutors from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are involved. Balkan Sunflowers has 4 learning centers in different places: Fushe Kosova/Kosovo Polje, Plemetine/Plemetina, Graçanic/Graçanica, and Shtime/Shtime. They have approximately 600 children involved in the project that are coming every day in their centers. The Learning Centers Network project has 5 programs:

1. Preschool program
2. Language club
3. Homework assistance
4. Peer tutoring
5. Community outreach

Government of Kosovo approved the strategy for the Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. One of the components of the strategy is education component. MEST didn't provide so much assistance regarding the implementation of the strategy. Reason for that is low budget.

Ministry for the returns and communities gave 10 000 Euro for the scholarships to the Roma Ashkali and Egyptian students. This amount is not enough to support the students from the secondary school and universities.

The number of employed members of the Ashkali and Egyptian community in Kosovo Police Service (KPS) and Kosovo Security Forces (KSF) is still low. Many employed members of these communities in that were employed in Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) are not accepted in KSF.

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