



# Position of internally displaced women in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina

## A study in situational gaps and good practices related to access to employment

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## Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) - Comparative analysis on Access to Rights of Refugees and Displaced Persons, 2005

<sup>2</sup> According to last census in 1991 Bosnia and Herzegovina had 4 377 033 citizens. „REVIDIRANI OSNOVNI DOKUMENT KOJI PREDSTAVLJA DIO IZVJEŠTAJA DRŽAVE ČLANICE BOSNE I HERCEGOVINE“ pp. 13 available at: <http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/PDF/LjudskaPrava/Core.pdf>

In Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter BiH), during the war between 1992 and 1995, 2.2 million<sup>1</sup> people were forced to flee their homes. This number represents almost a half of the pre-war population of BiH.<sup>2</sup> Some of those forced to flee escaped to the internationally recognized state border and became refugees, whilst others, who are the focus of this study, did not cross internationally recognized border. They became internally displaced persons (hereafter displaced persons). In this study we deal only with displaced persons. According to available statistical data there are somewhere around 113 000 displaced persons and 37% of displaced population is facing poverty issues.

After four years of war, which is characterized as one of the bloodiest after World War II, the Dayton Peace Agreement (hereafter DPA) was signed in the military base Wright Paterson in Dayton, Ohio in 1995. DPA divided country in two entities Republika Srpska (RS) and Federation of BiH (FBiH). In order to address the issue of forced displacement creators of the DPA created Annex VII. This Annex VII is an integral part of the DPA and arguably it is one of the most important parts of the DPA because it was designed to deal with the consequences of ethnic cleansing.

This study deals only with internally displaced women (hereafter displaced women) due to their particular vulnerability. We examine the position of displaced women in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina and their access to the labor market. We argue that through effective employment policy the Government can improve access to incomes for displaced women, while employment can be seen as a good psychosocial therapy for displaced women. It is very important to provide an overview of existing policies related to displacement and to provide key stakeholders with good insight in what has been achieved so far.

## 1. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT AND POLICIES FOR RESOLVING DISPLACEMENT ISSUE IN BiH

Even eighteen years after the war, there still remain many problems related to displacement. It is not only the process of return that is a problem. Displaced persons face different challenges related to access to employment, public goods, education and infrastructure. (Christenses and Harild 2009 in Bery P.D.J, Petrini B. 2011). One of the problems that particularly affect displaced population is poverty. Holtzman and Nezam find that 32% of the displaced people are poor compared to 19% of the rest of general population (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004). Bery and Petrini argue that displaced persons are faced with significant challenges related to poverty which is directly related to high unemployment rate of displaced persons, livelihoods and lack of other factors which can be understood as factors of sustainable return (Bery P.D.J, Petrini B. 2011).

Displaced persons present particularly vulnerable population in BiH. They are particularly vulnerable due to their protracted displacement traumas. Bery and Petrini argue that displaced persons are due to their protracted displacement, unable to "envisage an end to their displacement" and they experience vulnerability but also uncertainty (Bery P.D. J., Petrini B. 2011).

To resolve some of forced displacement issues, the Government of BiH, in 2002, drafted the Strategy for Implementation of Annex VII, which was revised in 2010 in the Revised Strategy



for the Implementation of Annex VII (hereafter Revised Strategy). The latter document is the most important for the displacement issue, because it was created to evaluate the Government's policies of return and also to address some of problems that were not addressed properly in the first Strategy. For example, before drafting the Revised Strategy, the Government of BiH had allowed only integration in places of return. The Revised Strategy allows programs of integration in places of displacement. However, as we present in a part of this study that deals with employment issue, the Government has once again failed to address gender issues related to displacement.

### 1.1 Return of property

In the beginning, international donors and other internal and external subjects in charge of the implementation of Annex VII regarded the return of property as the top priority. Return of property is even today, eighteen years after the war, the priority policy related to resolving displacement issues. The Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MHRR) reported back in 2005, that financial donations at every governmental level in BiH are focused mainly on property reconstruction (Verheyden 2005). The rate of property return is more than 99% and that is one of the highest percentages in the world<sup>3</sup>.

The focus of the Government policies related to displacement has been on the property return and not on sustainable return. Lack of resources and other factors which are part of sustainable return influenced many of those who returned to their places of origin to decide to flee again. Ms. Sanela Imamović from the Catholic Relief Service (hereafter CRS) believes that the main problem is lack of initiatives for socio - economic integration of displaced persons.<sup>4</sup> This is confirmation of data that can be found in reports from different non-governmental organization (hereafter NGOs) and different scholars. During interviews conducted with women living in collective centers, many of them said that their decision not to return to places from which they fled during the war was the result of lack of resources.<sup>5</sup> When asked the question if they would consider returning if they could find the employment in their previous municipalities, they all gave a positive answer.

The recent donor conference for resolving displacement issues is clearly showing that even today the focus is on reconstruction of property. The donor conference was organized on 24 April 2012 to resolve regional issues of displacement. The plan was to collect the amount of 500.000.000 USD.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately this amount has not been collected. Furthermore, the amount of 150 000 000 USD, which was to be allocated to BiH, was intended for resolving housing issues of refugees and people outside collective centres.

### 1.2 Sustainable return

Displaced persons are very limited when it comes to restoring their livelihoods and their skills, since they erode through time and are being replaced by a dependency syndrome (Christensen and Harild, 2009). Many refugees and displaced persons suffer from feeling of uncertainty and anxiety about the future. This, coupled with dependency on external assistance, impedes many displaced persons from moving out of their unstable conditions (Berry P.D. J., Petrini B. 2011). As years pass by, their skills erode and they are no longer able to integrate into the labor market. Furthermore, according to a report made by a team of experts for the European Commission, there is no indication that a sustainable return, in terms of access to education,

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<sup>3</sup> Revised Strategy for the Implementation of Annex VII

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Sanela Imamović

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<sup>5</sup> Interview was conducted in collective centre Mihatovići

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<sup>6</sup> Availabel at: [http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/izbjeglice/Donatorska\\_konferencija/Presentation-Joint%20Regional%20Programme.pdf](http://www.mhrr.gov.ba/izbjeglice/Donatorska_konferencija/Presentation-Joint%20Regional%20Programme.pdf)

labor market and health care, has played significant role for the Government of BiH (Verheyden 2005). The Revised Strategy recognizes issues related to lack of educational activities for displaced population and provides a recommendation to address this issue. However, this recommendation is not specific and does not mention the way to achieve this goal. This study introduces an option of partnership among the Government, the NGO sector and international donors as one of options that has potential to yield the best results.

BiH has three ministries which deal with displacement issues, one on the state level and one for each entity. However, only the Ministry for Displaced Persons and Refugees of FBiH has a sector which deals with sustainable return. Unfortunately, projects implemented by this sector do not follow projects implemented by the Sector of Displaced Persons, Returnees and Refugees, even though both sectors are part of the same Ministry. Consequently, if this Ministry reconstructs a house of a displaced person, it does not necessarily mean that the Sector for Sustainable Return will follow with a project of socio-economic integration. Implementation of property reconstruction projects without cooperation with the Sector for Sustainable Return puts displaced persons in a very difficult situation. This issue is directly related to the focus of governmental return policies. Due to the lack of initiatives for sustainable return, displaced persons are very limited in finding jobs, or they experience difficulties in accessing education, health care, etc.

Ms. Sanela Imamović confirmed that a lack of coordination is a serious problem for sustainable return which needs to be addressed properly.<sup>7</sup> Coordination between sectors which are part of the same ministry is something that needs to exist in order to provide best solutions for displaced persons. If we consider that there is no coordination between initiatives within one ministry, then it is very questionable to discuss coordination between different governmental bodies or even between initiatives from governmental institutions and international and domestic NGO. This study shows advantages of cooperation and examines some of the good practices that the Government could implement.

Due to the existence of three different ministries and a complex political system in BiH there is a significant lack of coordination. This lack of coordination between different initiatives of governmental bodies for resolving property return issues is criticized in the report by the Audit Office of the Institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Audit Office) (Audit Office 2012). As we mentioned previously, return of property is the focus of governmental policies for resolving displacement issues. According to this report, the lack of coordination causes a large amount of funds to be scattered and implementation of projects related to property return and reconstruction to be far from being efficient. This report suggests that by improving coordination the Government would be able to save some funds. This saved money could be used for sustainable return policies related to employment.

According to data given in Table 1, the Government invested 119,6 million KM in resolving displacement issues, but only 15,8 million was spent on projects related to sustainable return. Also, data collected by the Union for Sustainable Return and Integration (UZOPI) in BiH show that projects of sustainable return include reconstruction of religious objects, social infrastructure, employment etc.<sup>8</sup> By considering the number of displaced persons it is obvious that this amount of money is far from the real needs of displaced persons. The situation is even worse if we consider the fact that funds available for sustainable return include projects related to reconstruction of religious objects, social infrastructure, etc.

<sup>7</sup> The author decided to conduct an interview with Sanela Imamović from CRS due to her long experience in working on employment projects. Also their focus of CRS is on displaced persons and their activities are discussed later in this study

<sup>8</sup> Available at: <http://uzopibih.com.ba/povratak/>



Table 1

Program <sup>9</sup>	Number of programs	Approved funds in KM (2004 – 2010)	Liquidate funds until 31.12.2010. (in millions) In KM
Reconstruction of individual housing units	6	76,1	42,5
Reconstruction of objects of collective housing units	4	13,7	10,4
Electrification of returnees communities and housing units	3	14	7,5
Sustainable return	3	27,3	15,8
Resolving issues related to collective centers/ alternative accommodation (CEB)	1	23,6	22,8
Resolving issues related to collective centers/ alternative accommodation (support to CEB)	3	16,2	8,3
Intervening needs of returnees	2	4,7	2,1
Project SUTRA – Permanent transfer of responsibilities for return on ministries	1	10	10
Support to projects of NGOs who are dealing with process of return	1	0,3	0
Return of mentally ill refugees from Hungary to BiH	1	0,2	0,2
TOTAL	25	186,1	119,6

<sup>9</sup> Table is available in the report Stambeno zbrinjavanje povratnika – Revizija učinka, 2012

\*Table 1 shows amount of money invested in programs which are part of the Joint project for reconstruction and return funded by Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees, Ministry of Displaced Persons and Refugees of FBiH and Ministry for Refugees and IDPs of RS.

According to data from UZOPI in 2012, the Government planned to spend only 180.852 KM for sustainable return, whilst at the same time the Government planned to spend 4.714.143,00 KM for reconstruction of individual housing units.<sup>10</sup> For example, for reconstruction and building of individual housing units in Brčko District the Government planned to spend 3.180.000 KM, while at the same time only 10.000 KM for sustainable return which also included reconstruction of religious and cultural objects, social infrastructure and employment. In 2011 the Government spent only 1.471.788 KM for sustainable return and 12.781.019 KM for reconstruction of individual housing units. From 78 projects related to sustainable return, only 9 of them were related to employments of displaced persons, while other 69 were mostly related to reconstruction of religious objects, etc.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the total budget of the Return Fund<sup>12</sup> for year 2012 was 458.120 KM. The total for brutto salaries was 337.886 KM, whilst only 38.459 KM was spent on projects related to return (Izveštaj o finansijskoj reviziji fonda za povratak za 2011 godinu, 2012). Data on projects related to sustainable return are showing a lack of interest for resolving employment issues due to the fact that only a small proportion of money intended for sustainable return was allocated for employment initiatives.

<sup>10</sup> UZOPI is conducting monitoring of sustainable return in BiH

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://uzopibih.com.ba/povratak/>

<sup>12</sup> The Return Fund was established in 2005 to support process of return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees

Everything mentioned so far is showing that the Government has invested a large amount of money in property reconstruction and that it has failed to recognize sustainable return as one of the key elements of successful return policies. Furthermore, the Government also failed to address employment as one of the key factors of sustainable return. Employment is indeed one of the key factors for sustainable return and this has also been confirmed during interviews with displaced women in collective centres and in the Revised Strategy.

It is also important to note that the Government initiatives for resolving employment issues are full of flaws. The Government is providing displaced persons who decide to return to rural areas with tractors, cultivators and greenhouses despite the fact that many of them were working as manual labor in industry before displacement. Yugoslavia was highly industrialized society, and therefore majority of people in rural communities were employed in different industries. This was also mentioned in the interview with Ms. Sanela Imamović from the CRS. According to Ms. Sanela Imamović the Government, by not recognizing the fact that people from rural areas were mainly working in industry and by focusing their activities in regards to employment on simply giving to those who decide to return tractors, cultivators, etc., is making sustainable return even harder than it already is.

Because the process of sustainable return had not been addressed properly, it should come as no surprise that it resulted in very poor situation for returnees. The conclusion is that the Government still has not recognized the sustainable return as the priority in their return policies. Instead of focusing on long term return, the Government is focused on return of the property.

## **2. GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN BiH**

It is important to address issues of displaced women since displaced women were affected by the war in many ways. We furthermore argue that a lack of understanding of gender issues after the Bosnian war has introduced gender inequality. This study shows that DPA (Annex VII) and the Revised Strategy have failed to address gender issues. The focus in this study is on employment issues and we demonstrate that employment problems are not only related to incomes, but also that high unemployment rate of displaced women results in vulnerability and psychosocial problems.

DPA has failed to address gender issues (Lithander 2000). DPA has even failed to meet Strategic Objective H.1 of the Beijing Platform for Action to “create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies” for strengthening of women (Lithander 2000). Ann Lithander has conducted analysis of DPA and gender issues in the publication “Engendering Peace Process - Dayton Approach to Gender”. She concluded that, due to the lack of interest for gender issues of those who were writing DPA, this agreement led to gender inequality (Lithander 2000).

It is reasonable to assume that a large number of displaced women were victims of rape since they were a part of population which was designated for policy of ethnic cleansing. Mertus argue that rape crimes were directly related to policies of ethnic cleansing and they were a part of the planned tactic of terror (Mertus 2000). One of the reasons why DPA failed to address gender issues is because it failed to provide women with satisfaction in terms of justice for the crimes of rape. Annex VI - Agreement on Human Rights has failed to address issues related to prosecution



of those who committed rape crimes during the war. "Annex 6 is not retroactive, which implies that rape crimes committed during the conflict are outside the jurisdiction" (Lithander 2000 : 23). Furthermore, Annex VII, as an integral part of the DPA dealing with displacement issues, does not even mention some of the most important documents in the area of gender equality like CEDAW.<sup>13</sup> CEDAW is quoted in Annex IV and VI as binding convention. Furthermore, because many displaced women were victims of rape during the war, and in order to properly address their problems, one could argue that the first step should have been a psychosocial help that would focus on war traumas. The Government and international donors should focus their policies to psychosocial help. We suggest that this can be achieved through employment initiatives. It seems reasonable to assume that in this way the position of displaced women would be improved.

<sup>13</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

This study will examine only the role of the employment in improving the position of displaced women. This study argues that dealing with employment issues has potential to improve the overall position of displaced women in terms of their psychosocial well being and incomes.

## 2.1 International donors and relief policies

Due to the consequences of the war in BiH and the war crimes against women, UNHCR made guidelines to address women issues. International donors established programs to resolve some of the recognized problems related to displaced persons. Regardless of the existence of the above-mentioned programs and the fact that UNHCR made guidelines to address women issues, numerous women's organizations reported the lack of gender sensitivity in relief efforts (Mertus 2000). Poor economy, poor basic conditions and the lack of funds made displaced women dependent on international aid.

The international community was delivering humanitarian aid in BiH to displaced persons without creating conditions for sustainable return. Consequently, displaced women were highly dependent on international aid and that resulted in lack of sustainable return. By not creating conditions for sustainable return or sustainable living in places where displaced women have fled, situation with displacement was being prolonged without any end in sight. Instead of focusing their activities on improving skills or on education activities, which could result in access to incomes through employment, international donors were focused on delivering humanitarian aid which only produced dependency of their beneficiaries. This kind of approach of international donors which was perceived as "need to be doing something", without taking into consideration situation in reality, has resulted in insensitivity on gender issues.

The second mistake related to the relief efforts is giving us a better picture of the lack of gender sensitivity. Relief efforts were focused on male population due to their role in the war (Lithander 2000). Therefore, international donors showed significant lack of gender sensitivity which resulted in gender inequality. Furthermore, programs failed to address psychosocial problems and work on education activities in order to improve position of displaced women.

## 2.2 Displacement and poverty issues

Displaced persons are facing a large number of problems like access to health-care, labor market, psycho-social well being, education, etc (Christensen and Harild, 2009). Difficult access results in the high rate of poverty among displaced population. This particularly affects displaced women. "There is a vicious circle at play: gender inequalities contribute to an in-

crease in poverty due to women's inability to participate in income-generating activities, while the state of being in poverty itself reinforces gender inequalities" (Somun-Krupalija 2011 : 17).

It is important to note that BiH is a very patriarchal society. This means that women are cloistered within a family. Disruption of displacement can potentially impose restrictions by male members on the mobility of women. Holtzman and Nezam reported that this is "particularly true when rural populations shift to urban areas, large collective centers, or camps, where a wide variety of displaced from different places are settled" (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004 : 96). Consequently, women suffer from lack of incomes. Taking this into consideration, international donors and the Government should have re-examined their policies and provided funding for strengthening and improving overall position of displaced women. Many of women during their displacement become sole providers for their families. Thus they were and they still are facing different obstacles and some new problems (Lithander 2000).

The war trauma, a new role in their families and displacement are all part of the problem. In order to improve position of displaced women in BiH society all of these issues need to be addressed. After the war displaced women found themselves in a completely new environment and in many families they have switched roles with their husbands. Displacement usually changes the position of women in regards to their roles as manager of households (Holtzman B.S., Nezam T. 2004). Many of them are living in female headed households.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup>MHRR, 2005

### **3. OVERVIEW OF LEGISLATIVE RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT OF DISPLACED PERSONS**

The problem of employment in BiH is related to overall situation in economy but also to a complicated administrative structure. Different laws exist on the state level and on entities level. Furthermore, the situation is even more complicated when it comes to Federation of BiH. Every canton has the right to regulate the labor market. "The system is complex due to the existence of several levels of competence. The system is fragmented with the functions assigned to different administrative levels and little coordination both at the horizontal and the vertical level. The functions of the labour administration that fall under the jurisdiction of the Entities and BiH BD include 178 institutions" (Employment Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2010 - 2014 2010 : 25). Furthermore the degree of harmonization of laws in cantons which are part of FBiH with labor laws on Federation level is still not known. This is directly related to the non-existence of system that would allow monitoring of compliance of different laws on Federal level and on canton level (Rosas, Corbanase, O'Higgins 2009).

When it comes to harmonization between regulation of the labor market and standards of gender equality the situation is generally good. Even though the situation with harmonization is generally positive, there are problems with the implementation of this law, especially related to employment in private sector (Somun-Krupalija 2011). The Agency for Gender Equality identified two main factors which have effect on practical application of laws: a) *inefficient inspections* b) *weak sentencing thus the payment of penalties is smaller that costs of regular compliance with legal obligations* (Agency for Gender Equality - CEDAW 2011).

The Bosnian Government has adopted legislation on income generation assistance for displaced persons. Firstly, there is Art. 18 of the *Law on Refugees from BiH and Displaced Per-*





sons in BiH. This law entitles returnees to credits to start their businesses. Secondly, there is 2005 Law on Displaced Persons and Returnees in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina that entitles displaced persons and returnees to income general assistance such as loans and grants.

During interview with Ms. Lejla Radončić, director of the Association BH Crafts, she said that women working for BH Crafts are not recognized by the state. According to Ms. Radončić the problem with legislation is that laws which regulate employment do not recognize work from home as a part of formal employment. BH Crafts do not have full time employees and they are hiring women on contract basis whilst they provide them with raw material, and after they get the final product they are paying women for their services. However, according to Ms. Radončić their biggest obstacle to achieve even bigger success in employing displaced women is legislation. Laws on the state level and in both entities which regulate the labor market do not recognize this kind of work. The result is that women working this kind of job do not enjoy equal right as those who are working in formal economy. In Ms. Radončić's opinion, by not recognizing this kind of work, the Government is also making it harder for women to start their own business, because this kind of work is usually the ground basis for establishing small and medium enterprises.

The problem with legislation exists also because governments in both entities have failed to implement decision of the Constitutional Court. According to BiH Constitutional Court's *Decision on Constitutionality of Peoples in BiH*, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska have to respect results of 1991 census regarding the proportion of constituent people in the public service.

## 4. DISPLACED PERSONS AND LABOR MARKET

### 4.1 General overview of access to employment

Bosnia and Herzegovina has somewhere around 113 000 displaced persons according to UNHCR.<sup>15</sup> It is estimated that for opening one vacancy it is needed 2000 € (Verheyden 2005).<sup>16</sup> By multiplying the number of displaced persons with estimated amount of money for opening one vacancy we get sum of 226 000 000 €. This amount of money demonstrates the magnitude of the problem related to employment of displaced persons. Even though unemployment is widely spread and affects every citizen of BiH, those who are facing excessive discrimination in employment are displaced persons, particularly displaced women.

The World Bank has conducted a research in five countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and Serbia and Montenegro) related to risk of unemployment among displaced persons. The conclusion of this research is that displaced persons are far more likely to be unemployed than members of general population (Holtzman B.S, Nezam T. 2004). "Unemployment rates of the displaced are higher, sometimes twice or even three times than those of local populations" (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004 : 21). The World Bank has conducted a post conflict assessment of BiH and of a poverty risk. The main finding is that the poverty risk among displaced population is 37%, much higher than 24% among the non-displaced (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004).

Access to employment in formal sector is very limited for displaced persons. The unemployment rate of displaced persons is higher than of other members of population within one

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR Statistical Yearbook 2010, 10th edition available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4ef9c7269.html>

<sup>16</sup> Only available find data on estimated cost for vacancy is from 2005, but nevertheless cost of one vacancy today could only be higher due the rise of prices and other factor

society, but it is also important to note that employment of displaced persons tend to depend on “ad hoc and fragile areas” like seasonal employment and day labour (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004). Consequently, even if a displaced person finds a job then, in most cases that is not the long term solution.

Due to a lack of the labor market in BiH and the high rate of unemployed persons, it is very hard to establish a model of the employment for displaced persons which would target employment in formal economy. This has very negative impact on process of return. Those who decide to return to their places of origin, due to discrimination in employment usually decide to flee again. The Revised Strategy recognizes high rate of unemployment and difficult access to labor market as a factor which has negative influence on dynamic of return (Revised Strategy 2010).

As for displaced persons, due to their low employment rate in legal economy, their employment pattern is concentrated in the grey economy. Many of displaced persons are self employed in grey economy due to the lack of opportunity for paid employment. “DP employment patterns tend to be concentrated in grey economy activities, such as small-scale trading, day labor, and seasonal labor” (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004 : 21).

Even though the BiH society is in the process of transition which affects the whole society and due to problems related to displacement, displaced persons and particularly displaced women are in worse situation than the rest of the society. To demonstrate why displaced women are particularly affected with displacement and are in the worse situation than male member of population, we are providing an overview of access of displaced women to the labor market.

In the following, we address the problem of employment of displaced women. It is necessary to provide a clear picture of the magnitude of the problem related to displacement issues, with particular focus on displaced women, in order to show that the problem is multi-dimensional.

#### **4.2 Displaced women – Access to employment**

After the war in BiH there was a significant discrimination of displaced women in the area of employment. This is recognized in the Employment Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The same situation is in private and public sector (FRMOI – Informacija o stanju raseljenih osoba i povratnika u Federaciji Bosne i Hercegovine, iskazanim potrebama i mjerama, 2011). Due to the lack of sensibility for specific gender issues, the priority in recruitment was given to demobilized soldiers or to families of deceased members of the army or disabled veterans. In this way displaced women had a very little chance to get access to the labor market. This was also reported in the OSCE Human Right Report in 1999 (Lithander 2000). Due to the traditional role of women in the BiH society, women are often unable to seek employment. Moreover, the services that can influence the balance between the family and a professional life are very poorly developed.

The situation with displaced women is even worse because BiH is an extremely patriarchal society and the gender inequality index for BiH is very high. BiH is on the 74<sup>th</sup> place and it is ranked as a country with lowest index in the region.<sup>17</sup> The Employment Strategy for BiH states that special attention needs to be given to the issues of gender inequality in the labor market since the employment rate are much higher for male than female member of population in BiH (Employment Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2010 - 2014 2010). From the comparison

<sup>17</sup> UNDP, Gender inequality index and related indicators, 2011 available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR\\_2011\\_EN\\_Table4.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/media/HDR_2011_EN_Table4.pdf)



of the data on gender inequality with the risk of poverty of displaced persons, it is clear that displaced women are particularly vulnerable population among population of displaced persons. Comparison of data on the risk of unemployment among displaced persons with the data on the employment rate for women 22,6% and 41,5%<sup>18</sup> for men, gives us a better picture on gender inequality but also allows us to see that displaced women are far less likely to find a job than any other group of population within the BiH society. The report from the International Labour Organisation, gives data on people who have searched the job for between 24 and 120 months. For men this data fluctuated through the years, while for women remained stable (ILO – Gender and Displacement in BiH – A Country Study 2011).

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<sup>18</sup> Labor Force Survey 2012 – Agency for Statistic of BiH, 2012

According to data from 2005, from 95.703 displaced women, 60.398 (64%) are between age 18 and 65, which means that these women are capable to work.<sup>19</sup> Even though the available data is from 2005, it is reasonable to assume that situation has not significantly changed. If we compare this data with statistical data on unemployment rate for women and poverty risk for displaced persons, we will be able to understand vulnerability of displaced women. Since a large number of displaced women are capable to work, it is very important to address the issues related to their access to labor market and to find possible solutions.

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<sup>19</sup> MHRR, 2005

A displaced women's opportunity to get a job and also to respond to demands of the labor market are limited and there are several contributing factors, for example, the patriarchal perception of women's role in the BiH society. They are usually, given the strict division between male and female jobs, working as unpaid family members (Employment Strategy in Bosnia and Herzegovina 2010 – 2014).

In order to foster changes in improving position of displaced person on the labor market, it is necessary to use full package of services. First, it is important to provide psychosocial help in order to strengthen displaced women to be more competitive on the labor market. Psychosocial help and projects that aim to improve skills of displaced women are identified by Ms. Sanela Imamović as one of the key steps for employment of displaced women. Lack of educational program that aim to improve skills of displaced persons is recognized in the Revised Strategy (Revised Strategy 2010). It follows that it is necessary to organize workshops to improve skills of displaced women due to the fact that they have been unemployed for a long time.

### **4.3 Revised Strategy and employment issues**

The Revised Strategy recognizes the problem of unemployment among displaced persons population, but there is no single word on addressing particular problems of displaced women. "Throughout BiH, returnees have difficulties to integrate as they are unable to ensure essential living conditions and are often deprived of the right to labor and employment under equal conditions" (Revised Strategy for the Implementation of Annex VII 2010 : 42). Ms. Sanela Imamović said that the problem is that the Government still did not recognize that reconstruction of housing units is just one step for successful return. In order to improve the process of return, the focus of the Government initiatives should be on sustainable return through employment initiatives.

The Government has invested almost 447 millions KM in a five year period of implementation of the Strategy for the Implementation of Annex VII, and yet, according to UNHCR data from 2007, only 17% of displaced persons are employed and 20% lack any source of income (UN-

HCR 2007 in Berry P.D. J., Petrini B. 2011). Since it is clearly evident that the situation with displaced women is very difficult due to different factors, like gender inequality index, higher unemployment rate than male population and lack of psychosocial help, it is reasonable to assume that displaced women are more affected by this situation.

The Revised Strategy has failed to address specific gender issue. Even though it recognizes the problem of unemployment of displaced persons, the Revised Strategy fails to be more gender specific and to provide specific recommendations for resolving the issue of high unemployment rate among displaced women. In the part of the Strategy that deals with labor and employment, there is an overview of the labor market in BiH. In this short overview, there is provision that states that "participation of women in labor force is among the lowest in the region" (Revised Strategy 2010 : 23). Also, the Revised Strategy recognizes that displaced persons face challenges related to their rights to labor and employment. However, not a single recommendation is gender sensitive. In addition, analysis of the Revised Strategy is showing that despite the fact that it addresses some of the major issues related to sustainable return, it fails to provide an explanation on how to resolve these issues. Every recommendation for resolving employment issues is general and is not showing how the Government plans to implement recommendations.

Even though the Revised Strategy states that women in general are exposed to discrimination in exercising their right to work, there is not a single recommendation on how to deal with this issue. Recommendations are dealing with whole displaced population and they are not gender specific. In order to improve position of displaced women, it is necessary to make the Revised Strategy gender sensitive.

#### **4.4 Collective centers and employment issues**

To provide a better picture of unemployment issues related to displaced women, we focus this analysis on collective centres. Berry and Petrini argue that the majority of people who were living in collective centres are most vulnerable in terms of income and housing (Berry P.D.J., Petrini B. 2011). According to data from 2011, somewhere around 8000 people live in collective centers.<sup>20</sup>

According to results of empirical research that was conducted in 2000 about the traumas and stress disorders to which the displaced persons and refugees were exposed "participants in collective centers are at a high level of everyday stresses such as unemployment, poor health and temporary accommodation" (Rosner, Powell, Buttolo 2000 : 44).

International organizations were not aware of specific problems that have affected displaced population, especially when it comes to gender issues. Displacement has potential to empower women, especially those living in collective centers (Holtzman B. S., Nezam T. 2004). Some of them are living in female headed households which are, according to UNDP findings, considered as the most vulnerable population in BiH (UNDP 2003). According to Comparative Analysis on Access to Rights of Refugees and Displaced Persons, almost 32% of displaced women are living in female headed households.<sup>21</sup> Collective centers are a good example of how the Government and international donors failed to deal with forced displacement issues. Firstly, the problem is that, even eighteen years after the war, there are many collective centers in BiH. Secondly, as we noted previously, international donors were and still are focused on delivering humanitarian aid to persons living in collective centers.

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<sup>20</sup> MHRR, 2011

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<sup>21</sup> MHRR, 2005



We conducted interviews with women living in collective center Mihatovići in order to get in-depth insight into this issue. Women living there, due their protracted displacement, see themselves as “living in the limbo”<sup>22</sup>. The second problem is related to the fact that the most of them lack any source of income. We discussed their access to the labor market with a focus on governmental and donators initiatives. According to their answers, only international donators and few NGOs were implementing projects related to improving skills in order to foster employment of displaced women, but these projects did not include any practical work. Consequently, they did not improve their skills which could help them to get access to the labor market.

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<sup>22</sup> MHRR, 2005

Some of the women who are living in collective center Mihatovići were attending a course for hairdressers. Organizers of this course provided the women with accessories for hairdressers and gave them certificates and diplomas after these women successfully finished the course.

Problems with organization of this kind of courses are following:

1. *Women did not have any practical work during the course*
2. *Bureau of Employment failed to recognize their certificates and diplomas*

All of the women who were interviewed said that due to the lack of practical work they did not improve their skills. Thus they were not able to open hairdressing salon or even to get a job as hairdressers. According to them, no women who attended the program managed to get a job as a hairdresser. The second problem is related to the fact that the Bureau for Employment failed to accept their certificates. Therefore, if an employer decides to employ women by using the Bureau’s services, the Bureau will not contact the women who attended the course for hairdressers, since it does not recognize their diplomas and certificate as valid.

Displaced women living in collective center Mihatovići also identified lack of information as one of the problems which is making it quite difficult to find a job. This was confirmation of data given in the Revised Strategy. The problem is that the Revised Strategy does not provide solutions for this issue but it is merely stating the problem. In practice, if the Government or donators, or even NGO decide to implement projects for employment, then they contact the head of the collective center, who then passes the information to women who are living there. During the time required to get the information and to enroll in the program, displaced women usually find themselves in situation in which they apply for the program after the deadline. Due to their previous experience with getting information too late, they are avoiding to apply for programs related to employment.

We also focus our research on the role of the Bureau for Employment. Every single displaced women that was interviewed said that the Bureau had never called them to offer them a job. Also, the problem is that Bureaus are not gender sensitive. According to one woman living in Mihatovići, she was denied access to the Bureau because she was unable to check on time because she gave birth. She was only three days late for checking and she needed to wait for six months to get access to the Bureau again.

#### **4.5 Displaced women and self-employment – pros and cons**

The only way to address employment issues of displaced women properly is to establish some alternative model of employment. In this part we examine the role of self-employment in im-

proving the overall position of displaced women. The goal of this study is also to examine examples of NGOs and donors which were giving grants to displaced persons as part of their employment initiatives and have long experience in working on projects related to employment of displaced persons. It is important to analyze how the Government can benefit from these models of employment and to resolve the employment issue of displaced women. Even though this issue is recognized in the Revised Strategy, according to findings from different reports, but mostly from World Banks, the Government has not found a way to address employment issues properly.

The problem with self-employment of displaced women exists because they are less motivated to venture into self-employment in order not to diminish their family influence. Access to the labor market is also difficult for displaced women because the labor market is favoring men in employment. This is mostly related to the fact that displaced persons are usually working as manual labor. Also, professions are divided into female and male, and there are a lot of stereotypes about desirable occupation for male and female members of population (Agency for Gender Equality - CEDAW 2011). Thus, to resolve some of issues related to unemployment of displaced women, attention should be given to promotion of self-employment of displaced women and educational activities. As mentioned above, unemployment is a general problem in BiH, which affects more females than males. Therefore, to make a real impact on improving the position of displaced women in the labor market, one ought to address issues of self-employment and try to identify possible solutions which could result in positive feedback.

In order to foster self-employment of displaced women, international donators, NGOs and governmental bodies should provide them with basic skills and knowledge and also provide them with information about the labor market and what kind of entrepreneurship activities would be suitable for them.

There are some examples of good practices that can be implemented on a larger scale and which can provide positive results. The Government, through the partnership with local and international NGOs and international donators who are implementing projects related to forced displacement, could implement projects related to self employment of displaced persons. By doing so, the Government would decrease the bureaucracy and achieve more important partnership with local NGOs which could result in better capacity building of NGOs (Lithander 2000). Finally, by doing so, the Government could make the program of employment more sustainable.

By dividing responsibilities with NGOs and donators initiatives and by improving coordination, the Government can significantly improve their policies and also focus their activities on sustainable return. Firstly, donators and NGOs are dealing with employment and are directly working with displaced women, and that is significantly decreasing amount of money needed for sustainable return. Donators and NGOs have established their networks and also have collected information from the field. The Revised Strategy suggests that more attention should be given "to work on promoting employment programs of returnees and displaced persons in order to ensure donations for funding micro-crediting projects, different forms of grants for starting a business as well as to evaluate professional and vocational trainings" (Revised Strategy 2010 : 42). This recommendation could be implemented in cooperation with international donators and NGOs. Secondly, since displaced women face challenges in regards to lack of skills, NGOs could provide them with psychosocial help, while at the same time international



donators could provide funds for self employment. Considering the fact that the Government is already implementing projects related to property return, this kind of approach that would include psychosocial help, self-employment and property return and reconstruction would result in improving overall position of displaced women.

Since the goal is to close the collective centers in the future, initiatives that would consider self employment of displaced women would have potential to achieve two major goals of the Government: 1) *to improve skills and knowledge of displaced women and to make displaced women concurrent on labor market*, and 2) *by doing so, while a person is in collective center, it would facilitate the person's decision to leave collective center*.

Also, if the Government decides to establish a cooperation with the NGO sector and organize their activities in the way that they work together and that their activities go hand in hand than is more likely to get the best results. In the following text we discuss two very positive examples of good practices.

#### **4.6 Good practices**

Since the costs of one vacancy are very expensive and the Government cannot afford these costs the solution that could bear some positive results could be self employment of displaced women.

This part of study examines good practices in employment of displaced women. We use examples of the CRS and Association BH Crafts. In order to understand how these organizations operate and function, we conducted interviews with Ms. Lejla Radončić, director of the Association BH Crafts and Ms. Sanela Imamović, project manager at the Catholic Relief Service. Both of them are working in organizations that go a long way when it comes to employment of displaced women. Ms. Lejla Radončić's previous post was in Norwegian People's Aid, the organisation which established one of the biggest collective centre in BiH – Mihatovići in 1995. Mihatovići is placed in the northern part of Bosnia, near the town of Tuzla.

##### **4.6.1 BH Crafts**

According to Ms. Lejla Radončić, the BH Crafts were established as a part of efforts from Norwegian People Aid to try to help mainly displaced women that fled from Srebrenica to Tuzla. They fled just before Srebrenica massacre happened. Since the Army of Republika Srpska took the male population and allowed only women and children to escape from Srebrenica, there was a large influx of refugees in Tuzla. Norwegian People Aid decided to establish Mihatovići as a temporary shelter. However, due the prolonged situation with displacement crisis Mihatovići became the long term solution for many displaced women. Between 1995 and 1999 BH Crafts were part of Norwegian People Aid, but in 1999 they decided to register as NGO. Since NGOs are not allowed to have profit, the management of the BH Crafts decided to establish company BH Crafts D.O.O. The NGO BH Crafts is working on fundraising activities and is functioning as a supervisory board of the company. NGO is the owner of the BH Crafts D.O.O

The BH Crafts provides raw materials to their employees. Employees process the materials and give back the final product. As mentioned before, many of the displaced women are exposed to stressors such as unemployment, poverty, etc., and that has an influence on their

overall psychological situation. Ms. Radončić sees BH Crafts not only as a source of income for women, but also as the part of what Ms. Radončić named as “working therapy”. But it is also important to mention that not only that BH Crafts are employing displaced women but also they are exporting their products and making profit. BH Crafts have ISO Standard and Fair Trade Certificate.

The Government could establish a network of NGOs dealing with employment issues. By doing so, they could improve capacity building of NGOs. In this way they would improve labor skills of displaced women and their access to employment, and at the same time they would promote entrepreneurship. According to Ms. Lejla Radončić and the study from the World Bank, this kind of work is increasing possibility of self-employment. Also, according to this study, those who were working in informal economy are far more likely to improve their overall position of those who decide to enter self-employment (Kunt, Klapper, Panos 2009).

### **4.6.2 Catholic Relief Service (CRS)**

The CRS is also working on projects related to employment of displaced persons. The CRS is working on projects related to the return of displaced persons with special focus on collective centers. Beside the reconstruction of houses, the CRS is also working on projects of socio-economic integration, and they identified employment as the key factor. According to Ms. Sanela Imamović, the CRS is focused on activities and projects which aim to sustainable return. Also, due to their experience in working with displaced persons, they are targeting displaced persons living in collective centers due to their protracted displacement.

The CRS is co-financing projects related to employment of displaced persons. They are providing between 50-70 percent of wages of every displaced persons who gets employed through their project. To achieve the best possible outcome, but also to evaluate their projects, the CRS is conducting monitoring through contacts with employer and displaced women. By doing this, they are able to overcome obstacles that could occur during the implementation of their projects related to employment. Thus results of monitoring can significantly improve employment policy because it allows us to see the problems that are happening and to overcome them. Ms. Imamović also sees lack of education as one of the problems in collective centers. Lack of education is significantly lowering the chance to get the job in formal employment and this is probably one of the reasons why displaced persons are working in informal economy. Somewhere around 52% of women and 48% of men are beneficiary of the CRS projects activities.

The CRS is making socio-economic cards of each family living in a collective center. Based on this card they are determining if the women is willing to work or not. For those who are according to the CRS finding willing to work, the following step is conducting analysis of local community in order to find which employer would be interested to employ displaced women. We consider the CRS as an example of good practices since they are working on solving housing issues of displaced people while, at the same time, they are working on sustainable return of displaced persons through employment initiatives. They are also working with displaced persons on the field and their policies toward displaced population are created based on their findings from the field. As already mentioned, they are making a socio-economic card of their beneficiaries and by doing so they are considering possible flaws in their initiatives.





## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As shown in this study, the Government has failed to address employment issues of displaced women. In order to resolve issues related to access to employment of displaced women, the following recommendations are provided to government institutions dealing with displacement:

1. *Make Revised Strategy more gender sensitive.*
2. *NGOs, international donators and ministries should include practical work in their employment initiatives.*
3. *Ministries on the state and entities levels should allocate funds for employment initiatives.*
4. *Promote self-employment of displaced women by using examples of CRS and BH Crafts practices.*
5. *Establish partnership with donators and NGOs in order to improve coordination and capacity building of NGOs.*
6. *Focus on vocational training activities to improve labor skills of displaced women.*
7. *Ensure implementation of Constitutional Court's Decision on Constitutionality of Peoples in BiH.*
8. *Improve access to information of displaced women related to employment.*

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A "Policy Development Fellowship Program" has been launched by the Open Society Fund BiH in early 2004 with the aim to improve BiH policy research and dialogue and to contribute to the development of a sound policy-making culture based on informative and empirically grounded policy options. The program provides an opportunity for selected fellows to collaborate with the Open Society Fund in conducting policy research and writing a policy study with the support of mentors and trainers during the whole process. Ninety fellowships have been granted since the starting of the Program.