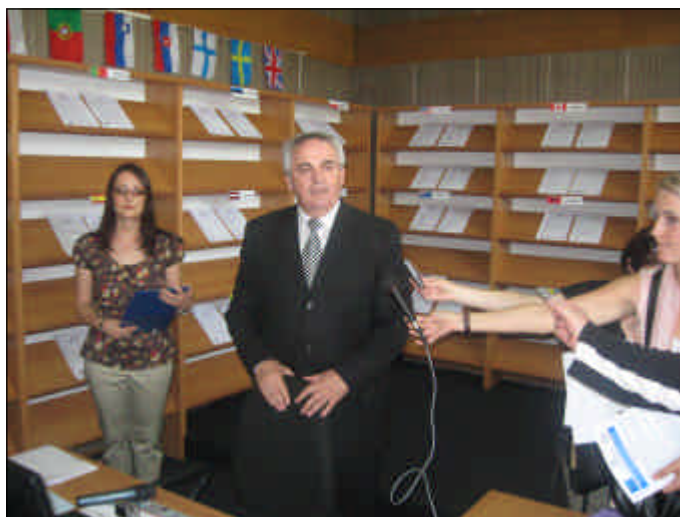


IOM and Kosovo Government Promotes Legal Migration through Information and Referral Services of Newly Opened Migration Service Centre in Prishtinë/Priština



Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Mr. Gjergj Dedaj inaugurating the Migrant Service Centre

Promoting orderly migration within and from the Western Balkans is a challenge that governments and migration agencies of the region and of Western Europe have faced for the last two decades. The wars and turmoil's in the Balkan during the 1990's created a huge refugee crisis in parts of former Yugoslavia that resulted in intensification of irregular migration towards Western Europe mostly consisting of refugees and asylum-seekers from a variety of backgrounds.

It is difficult to establish how many Kosovars currently live outside Kosovo but it is estimated that 550,000 people make up the Kosovo Diaspora.

Even these days, due to the poor national economies and social difficulties irregular migration is still present. In this line, many individuals seeking a better future for themselves and their families decide to migrate illegally, mainly to western European countries.

In order to reduce irregular migration and optimize the possibilities for legal migration, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in close partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo Government, in July have opened a Migrant Service Center (MSC) in Prishtinë/Priština as a part of regional network of MSCs (Tirana, Podgorica, Skopje, Belgrade, Sarajevo and Zagreb) in the region. The MSC aims to foster local capacity to develop migration policy and provide potential migrants with efficient information, advice and referral to appropriate services.

The MSC in Prishtinë/Priština was inaugurated by Kosovo government Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Mr. Gjergj Dedaj. In his address Mr. Dedaj presented the Government's policy on migration issues which is mainly focused on efforts to encourage the Kosovo Diaspora to return or to invest in Kosovo. He also emphasized the necessity of visa liberalization for Kosovo citizens that will create an opportunity for Kosovars to work abroad and this way alleviate a very high rate of unemployment in the country.

Referring to the previous IOM Kosovo experience in this field, Mr. Sheremet Kukaj, MSC Project Coordinator for Kosovo, specifically mentioned the former Migration Service Center project implemented from 2004 until the 2006."During this period IOM MSC visited almost 3 thousand persons which is about 45% percent of the total number of the peoples that visited all MSC in the region".

The MSCs its part of the Capacity Building, Information and Awareness Raising towards Orderly Migration in the Western Balkans project funded from European Community AENEAS 2006 Programme, Swiss Federal Office for Migration and German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees. Besides information, advice and referral services to migrants and potential migrants, this project will aim to build a capacities of local authorities. MSC is located within the structure of Prishtinë/Priština Regional Employment Centre who's staff will work together with IOM staff in the implementation of the project simultaneously receiving on the job training from IOM.