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## Gender: Kosova's Other Challenge

By Richard Beilock<sup>1</sup> and Ymer Havolli<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

The extent of differences in roles between the genders in Kosova is examined. Kosovar men, on average, devote 57 percent of their non-rest time to earned income activities (i.e., agriculture, other self-employed, and hired), and only 4 percent to housekeeping. In very sharp contrast, Kosovar women, on average, devote 14 percent of their time to earned income activities and a staggering 65 percent to housekeeping. There are considerable differences across Kosova's ethnic groups, with much less rigid gender roles among ethnic Serbians than is true for ethnic Albanians. It is argued that rigidly defined gender roles result in significant inefficiencies in the economy. Consistent with this view, ethnic Serbian Kosovars have significantly higher incomes and lower incidences of poverty than their ethnic Albanian counterparts.

*Keywords:* Kosova, gender and income, division of labor

### Introduction

Kosova,<sup>3</sup> about two thirds the size of Connecticut and with a population around two million (see Figure 1), is the poorest region in Europe, after Moldova. Without massive international assistance and remittances from those who have left this troubled land, Kosova undoubtedly would be the poorest. And that day may be coming. The people of Kosova consume at least a third more than they produce and for every \$3 worth of goods and services Kosova sells to the world, it buys \$100 worth. The gap is financed by assistance and remittances. Since 2000, assistance has fallen by 70 percent and remittances are also declining, see Lane et al. 2004. And Kosova's capacity to produce is increasing at a snail's pace, if at all. Much of the little savings Kosovars manage, including the government's pension funds, are invested abroad and foreign direct investment is negligible.

**FIGURE 1: KOSOVA AND THE CENTRAL BALKANS**



What brought Kosova to this sad state? After World War I, Kosova became a region of Serbia, the largest republic of the Former Yugoslavia. When Yugoslavia began breaking up, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Serbia reduced the status of Kosova and instituted repressive policies against its dominant ethnic group, Albanians. During the 1990s, low level insurgency began by ethnic Albanians seeking independence or, at least, removal of discriminatory policies. In 1999, Serbia moved virtually all of its military into Kosova. That military, with considerable participation by ethnic Serbian Kosovars, expelled tens of thousands of ethnic Albanians from Kosova; killed thousands, including women and children; and destroyed or appropriated property. While the balance of guilt certainly lies with the Serbians, the most horrific atrocities were perpetrated by both sides. Finally, with UN approval, NATO intervened with a 40 day bombing campaign which led to the liberation of Kosova from Serbian control, albeit at the cost of additional destruction and deaths.

Since 1999, Kosova has existed in a political and economic limbo. While there is a provisional Government of Kosova, the UN is the ultimate authority and guarantor of security. Kosova's final status— independent nation or reintegration with Serbia— remains undecided, a carrot or stick held out by the UN to encourage good behavior.<sup>4</sup> Due primarily to claims by Serbia and its appropriation of records, there is also uncertainty over the ownership of approximately a fifth of private land and many of the public enterprises. As might be expected, tensions remain high between ethnic Albanians and Serbians. Given these uncertainties, the economy's poor condition is understandable.

If the people of Kosova are to have a future free from impoverishment and violence, they must overcome a formidable list of challenges, including: resolution of inter-ethnic disputes sufficient to permit freedom of movement by all citizens throughout Kosova, reform and enforcement of commercial and tax codes, settlement of land and enterprise claim disputes with Serbia and among individuals, and privatization of public enterprises. There is another challenge Kosova must address to realize social justice and prosperity. Kosovars, particularly ethnic Albanians, must alter their views and practices regarding gender roles.

In this paper, the extent of differences in roles between the genders in Kosova will be presented. These differences are incompatible with a Kosova seeking to enter mainstream European society. Further, it will be argued that the rigidly defined gender roles result in significant inefficiencies in the economy. In other words, movements toward social equality will generate economic gains. The economic potential of less rigid gender roles should be viewed as an opportunity akin to an untapped resource. Further, it is an opportunity for positive inter-ethnic dialogue as Albanian Kosovars can learn in these regards from their ethnic Serbian countrymen.

## **Data**

The main data sources for this paper are two household surveys conducted throughout Kosova during the first half of 2004:

- |      |  |
|------|--|
| UNDP | A survey of 6,000 households for the United Nations Development Programme's <i>Human Development Report: Kosovo, 2004</i> , hereafter denoted as UNDP. |
|------|--|

RIINVEST A survey of 1,000 households conducted by the Riinvest Institute for USAID and reported in Beilock, R. *The 2004 Kosova Rural and Urban Household Survey*, hereafter denoted as RIINVEST.

### Education

The adult literacy rate in Kosova is estimated at 94.12 percent (UNDP), one of the lowest in Europe, low even by Balkan standards.<sup>5</sup> Compounding this low average rate is a significant gender gap. Among men, 97.3 percent are literate, versus 91.3 percent of women (UNDP). In other words, a Kosovar woman is three times more likely to be illiterate than her male counterpart. The average literacy rate is lower and the gender gap higher among ethnic Albanian Kosovars than ethnic Serbians:

	Adult Literacy Rate (percent)		
	All	Men	Women
All Kosova	94.12	97.30	91.30
Ethnic Albanians	94.12	97.14	91.23
Ethnic Serbians	97.47	98.95	96.00

Source: UNDP

In neighboring Albania, which, of course, was not dominated by Belgrade, the adult literacy rate approaches 99 percent, with virtually no differences across genders (World Bank, 2004). This strongly suggests that disparities in gender roles among ethnic Albanian Kosovars are, at least in part, due to the crucible they passed through under Serbia, rather than being innately or immutably part of Albanian culture.

As would be expected, literacy rate differences are reflected in years of schooling and participation in schooling. Among ethnic Albanian Kosovars, men average 10.38 years of schooling, two years more than women (8.32). In contrast, ethnic Serbian men average 11.14 years of schooling, with women only one year less (10.07), see UNDP.

The average ethnic Albanian adult<sup>6</sup> male devotes 11 percent of his time to schooling, versus 7 percent for women, see RIINVEST. Among ethnic Serbians the corresponding figures are 10 percent for men and 9 percent for women.<sup>7</sup> A similar picture is seen with respect to participation rates in schooling. Among ethnic Albanians, 13.6 percent devote at least some of their time to schooling, nearly half again the percent as for women (9.5 percent). For ethnic Serbians, schooling participation rates are nearly identical between men and women, 14.4 percent and 13.0 percent, respectively. There is some indication that the education gap will narrow. While the inter-gender disparity persists among ethnic Albanian young adults, age 16 through 24, it is proportionately smaller. Within this age group, 46.8 percent of ethnic Albanian men are taking some schooling, compared to 40.3 percent for women.

The greater value placed on male, versus female, education among ethnic Albanian Kosovars was starkly reflected in the response to a question in a 2001 survey by Krasniqi. When asked: "If your family is facing economic hardship, should a boy's or girl's education be favored," 97.3 percent indicated that a boy's education was more important.

## Work Activities<sup>8</sup>

Work is here divided into housekeeping and earned income activities. Housekeeping includes cleaning, cooking, laundering, and child rearing. Earned income activities are divided into three types: agriculture, both for home consumption and sale; other self-employment; and wage labor (also referred to as “hired”).

The average Kosovar man devotes 57 percent of his time to earned income activities (i.e., agriculture, other self-employed, and hired), 27 percent to the investment activities of schooling and job search, and only 4 percent to housekeeping, see Figure 2a. In very sharp contrast, the average Kosovar woman devotes 14 percent of her time to earned income activities, 11 percent to schooling and job search, and a staggering 65 percent to housekeeping, see Figure 2b. These results are not primarily due to the negative influence of ‘backward’ rural households. To be sure, differences between time allocations of men and women in urban households are not as large as for rural households, but for both urban and rural areas the overall pattern is the same and differences between time allocations of men and women extreme.

There is little evidence yet that women are increasing participation in earned income activities. Time devoted to job search by women is barely a fourth that of men and the percentage of time for schooling is smaller for women than for men (though the latter gap is narrower among younger, than older, adults). The disparity in work participation rates between men and women is nearly as great among young adults as for their older counterparts:

	Age group							
	16 - 24		25-39		40-64		All ages	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Earned income participation rate (percent)	47.7	26.2	79.1	39.2	76.3	37.3	71.4	35.6
Ratio of male to female participation rates	1.82		2.02		2.05		2.01	

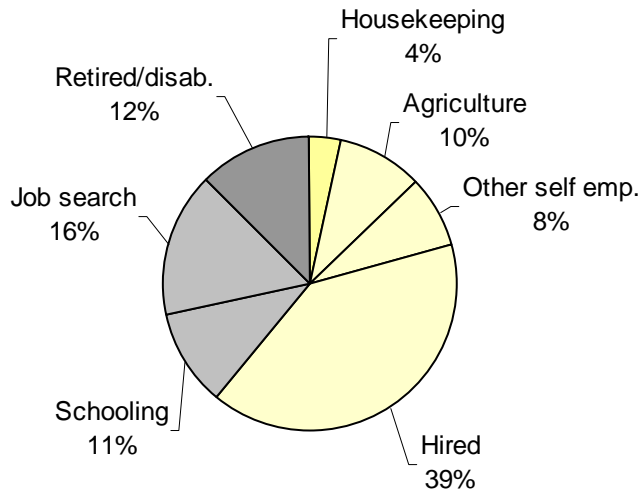
Source: RIINVEST

## Gender Roles and Ethnicity

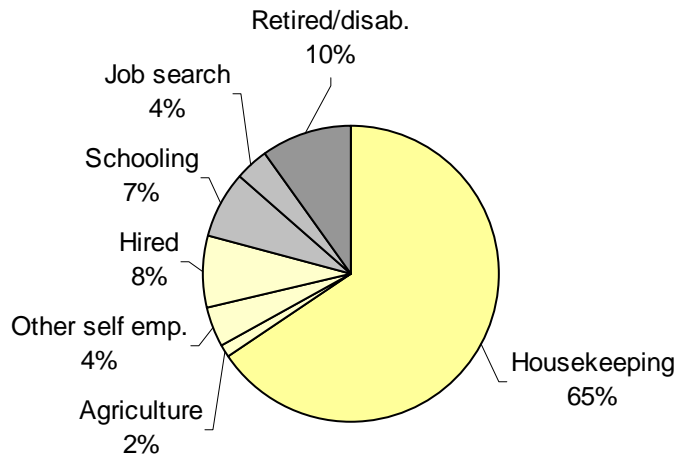
There are dramatic differences in gender roles between ethnic Albanians and ethnic Serbians. The average ethnic Serbian man devotes 14 percent of his time to housekeeping, seven times that of the average ethnic Albanian man, see Figure 3. Ethnic Serbian women devote very large amounts of their time to housekeeping, averaging 54 percent, but well below the 65 percent average for Albanian women, see Figure 4. Moreover, relative to ethnic Albanian women, ethnic Serbian women devote twice as great a share of their time to earned income activities. Participation rates in earned income activities are nearly identical for ethnic Albanian and Serbian males, 71.2 and 73.3 percent, respectively. However, while 59.7 percent of ethnic Serbian women engage in at least some form of earned income activity, only 33.1 percent of their ethnic Albanian counterparts do so. These differences hold for both urban and rural areas.<sup>9</sup>

**FIGURE 2: COMPARISON OF TIME ALLOCATIONS FOR KOSOVAR MEN AND WOMEN**

**FIGURE 2a: Men**



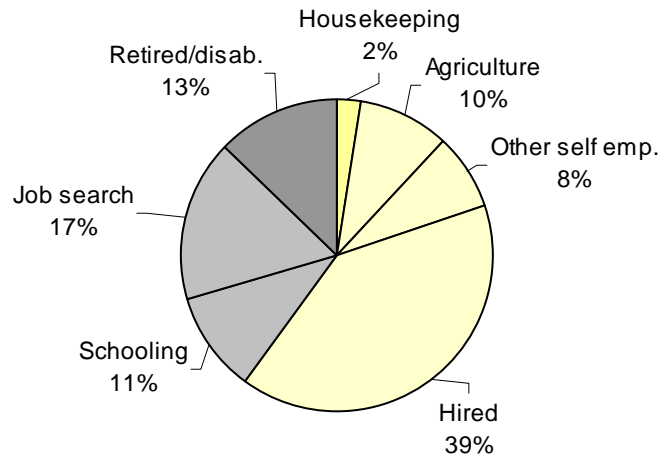
**FIGURE 2b: Women**



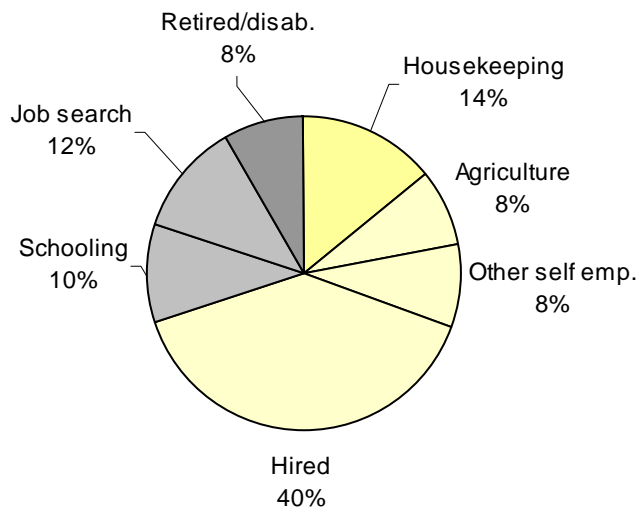
Source: RIINVEST

**FIGURE 3: COMPARISON OF TIME ALLOCATIONS FOR ETHNIC ALBANIAN AND SERBIAN MEN IN KOSOVA**

**FIGURE 3a: ALBANIAN**



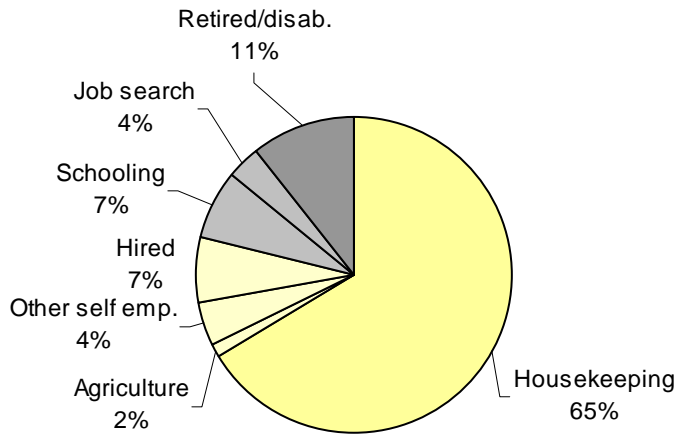
**FIGURE 3b: SERBIAN**



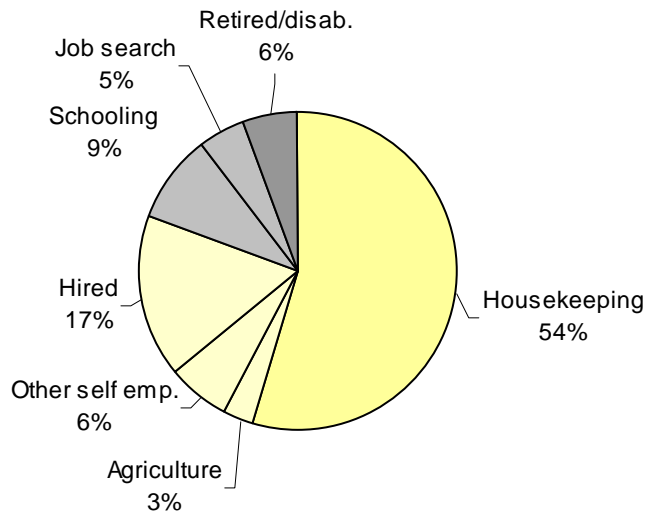
Source: RIINVEST

**FIGURE 4: COMPARISON OF TIME ALLOCATIONS FOR ETHNIC ALBANIAN AND SERBIAN WOMEN IN KOSOVA**

**FIGURE 4a: ALBANIAN**



**FIGURE 4b: SERBIAN**



Source: RIINVEST



## **Why Share Housekeeping Duties?**

The primary difference between the ethnic groups with regard to gender-related time allocations is that, on average, Albanian women devote appreciably more and Albanian men appreciably less of their time to housekeeping than their Serbian counterparts. However, each group devotes the same total share of effort to housekeeping. Across both sexes, the average ethnic Albanian works on housekeeping 33.7 percent of the time and the average ethnic Serbian for 33.4 percent of the time. So, it is not that ethnic Albanian women are unemployed in the home, but that they perform virtually all of that type of work for the household, while Serbian men and women share these tasks, albeit still with women doing the major portion.<sup>10</sup>

Ignoring equity considerations, why would there be any advantage from a more equal sharing of housekeeping tasks? Certainly the primary reason is that an individual of either gender may have considerable talents generating value outside the home. If women are, in effect, always assigned to housekeeping, potential gains are forgone when they [i.e., women] have capacities superior to men with regard to earned income activities. Moreover, there may be biological or other limits to the ability of half the adults in a household to take advantage of the potentially available earned income activities. For example, a household with two adults, a man and a woman, may have the opportunity to do 40 hours of wage labor per week. If that work is divided across two different jobs and if some of the work for each job is at the same time, one individual cannot perform both. If women are expected to work solely or almost solely in the home, then households will have to forgo part of the earned income. The household may not even be aware of the loss as women would not likely devote much time to job search.

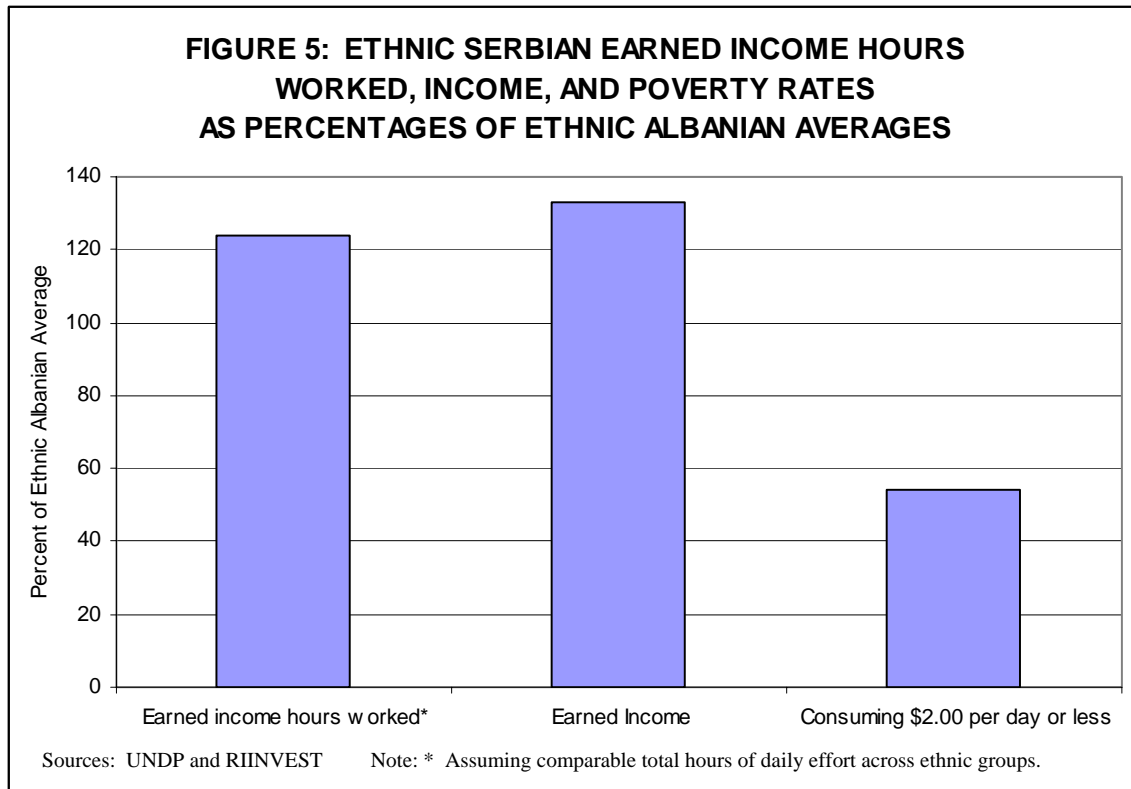
The practical result of these effects is that Serbian households are able to devote larger shares of their time to earned income activities than their Albanian counterparts. The average ethnic Serbian devotes 8 percent more of his/her total time to earned income activities than do ethnic Albanians. The overall differences between the ethnic groups is not due to the men, who have near identical earned income participation rates and average shares of time at these activities across the ethnicities. Rather it is due to the fact that ethnic Serbian women devote twice the share of their time, on average, to earned income activities and have nearly twice the earned income participation rate as do ethnic Albanian women.

## **Gender Roles and Income**

The bottom line is that, under similar conditions, ethnic Serbian households manage to devote larger shares of their time to generating value (i.e., housekeeping plus earned income activities). And the difference is large. Assuming, as seems likely, approximately the same total number of hours of effort daily across the two ethnic groups, then for every hour an ethnic Albanian is engaged in earned income activities, an ethnic Serbian works for nearly one and one quarter hours.

As would be expected, the difference in total time devoted to earned income activities is mirrored, almost perfectly, in differences in earned incomes, see Figure 5. Average monthly earned income among ethnic Serbians is €14.99, a third higher than the €8.36 monthly average for ethnic Albanians (UNDP).<sup>11</sup> In high income nations, such disparities would largely reflect differences in degrees of luxury and comfort. In an area as poor as Kosova, income differences translate into differentials in deprivation

rates. Among ethnic Albanian Kosovars, 48.7 percent exist on \$2.00 per day or less, see UNDP. The corresponding percentage for ethnic Serbians is nearly half that (26.5 percent), see Figure 5. In the middle of Europe, one in every eight ethnic Albanian Kosovars is below the most commonly used measure of absolute poverty, expenditures of \$1.00 or less per day. This is comparable with Pakistan and Mongolia. In sharp contrast, only one in every twenty-five ethnic Serbians endure this extreme of poverty, a rate comparable with Argentina.



### Concluding Comments

On the periphery of one of the richest areas of the globe, Kosovars endure the incomes and poverty rates of a third world nation. Almost unanimously, Kosovars are anxious to throw off the vestiges of the past and join the mainstream of European society and economy. To accomplish this, primary attention is on resolving inter-ethnic tensions and meeting the preconditions set by the international community before it will determine Kosova’s final legal status. Achieving these goals would be daunting for any society.

Though not as evident, Kosova must also transform its gender roles. Exposed to the full gamut of international media and entertainment, it seems inevitable that women will demand the freedoms and opportunities enjoyed elsewhere in Europe. This is not

simply a matter of interest for social liberals, but also a matter of economic necessity. By far Kosova's most significant underutilized resource is her women.

There is an economic miracle ongoing in the Balkans. The economies of the nations of the Balkans are growing faster than the world average, nearly twice as fast as the rest of Europe. Greece and Slovenia already are rich, peaceful members of the European Union, with Croatia, Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia FYR, Albania, and Turkey making dramatic strides. If and as relations improve among the ethnic groups and once the UN bestows final status, Kosova will have the opportunity to join this drive to prosperity. But to be competitive, it must unleash the talents and creativity of its women to generate value. Without that, Kosova almost surely will remain an economic backwater and, in the frustrations borne of absolute and relative poverty, the likelihood is high for continued, internal strife.

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<sup>3</sup> Kosova is the spelling preferred by that region's its dominant ethnic group, Albanians. Kosovo, is the spelling used by ethnic Serbians.

<sup>4</sup> For example, the UN has enumerated a list of "Standards" the Government of Kosova must achieve before deciding upon final status. Meeting those standards does not guarantee independence, but failure to do so will, almost surely, prevent it.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Albania, Bulgaria, and Romania each have adult literacy rates between 97 and 99 percent, World Bank, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Here defined as over 15 years of age.

<sup>7</sup> The slightly lower figure for ethnic Serbian men, relative to ethnic Albanian men, reflects the younger age profile among the latter group.

<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, data for this section is derived from RIINVEST.

<sup>9</sup> Participation rates derived from UNDP are nearly identical.

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, as the average ethnic Albanian household has two more children and is physically larger than ethnic Serbian households, the case could be made that ethnic Albanians skimp on housekeeping, relative to ethnic Serbians.

<sup>11</sup> As ethnic Albanians, on average, receive higher levels of assistance and remittances than do ethnic Serbians, total average incomes per capita differ by around 20 percent.