

WRITTEN QUESTION E-6299/08
by Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne (ALDE)
to the Commission

Subject: Lead poisoning in refugee camps in Kosovo

Since November 1999 150 Roma families from Mitrovica have been living as refugees in camps at Cesmin Lug and Osterode, placed there by the UN. The siting of these camps has exposed the families to acute lead poisoning, since they are close to the tailing stands of the Trepca lead mines.

Blood tests carried out at different times on these internally displaced persons have identified that very high lead levels are present, in some case up to 65 micrograms/decilitre. Irreversible brain damage normally starts at 10 micrograms/decilitre, particularly in children under the age of six. Many if not most of the children and their family members show signs and symptoms of lead poisoning, including regular vomiting, attention deficit disorder, unsteady walking, colouration of the gums, learning difficulties and in some cases coma.

In consequence, the World Health Organisation earlier advised the UN to evacuate these families immediately. Indeed, the damaging environment was implicitly recognised at the start by UNMIK in its assurance to the families that their stay on this dangerous site would be limited to 45 days. Since nine years has now passed, and the EU has overwhelming responsibility, will the Commission take urgent action to have these families rehoused?