

RESEARCH REPORT · 2025

REGISTRATION OF INFORMAL PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN PLEMETIN NEIGHBORHOOD, MUNICIPALITY OF OBLIQ

Roma Versitas Kosovo (RV Kosovo)

Property rights, documentation and long-term land use in Plemetin

Introduction and Rationale

Secure land and property rights are a fundamental pillar of social stability, economic development, and human dignity. In the Municipality of Obiliq, however, a significant number of long-settled families particularly from Roma and Ashkali communities continue to live on land without formal legal recognition of ownership. This situation has created a persistent state of uncertainty that affects not only individual households, but also broader social cohesion and local development.

For many residents, land is not merely an economic asset but the foundation of family life, community belonging, and intergenerational continuity. Homes have been built, utilities connected, and municipal obligations fulfilled over decades, often spanning multiple generations. Despite this long-term, peaceful, and undisputed use, formal registration has remained out of reach due to historical informality, administrative gaps, unresolved inheritance procedures, and evolving legal and cadastral frameworks.

Land tenure insecurity in Obiliq is not the result of recent developments. Rather, it reflects the accumulation of unresolved issues linked to past governance systems, conflict-related displacement, incomplete documentation, and outdated cadastral records. Over time, the gap between legal formality and lived reality has widened, leaving many families trapped in informality despite their long-standing presence and contribution to the municipality.

These challenges disproportionately affect socio-economically vulnerable and historically marginalized communities, including Roma and Ashkali families, who have faced structural barriers in accessing legal assistance, administrative procedures, and formal property rights. The lack of legal recognition limits access to essential services, housing improvements, inheritance security, credit, and public support schemes, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.

Recognizing the urgent need to better understand both the scale and structural causes of this issue, this study documents the experiences of individuals facing land and property registration challenges in the Municipality of Obiliq. By grounding the analysis in lived experience, the report seeks to inform policymakers, municipal authorities, and donors, and to support inclusive, administrative, and rights-based approaches to land regularization. Addressing land tenure insecurity is not only a legal necessity, but a critical step toward social justice, equality before the law, and sustainable local development.

About Roma Versitas Kosovo

Roma Versitas Kosovo (RVK) is a leading organization dedicated to promoting education, personal development, and professional opportunities for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in Kosovo. As part of the broader Roma Versitas regional initiative, RVK focuses on supporting marginalized youth in overcoming barriers to higher education and employment through scholarships, mentorship, and capacity-building programs.

The organization's mission is to empower Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian youth by providing educational opportunities, skills development, and advocacy for social inclusion. RVK collaborates with universities, civil society organizations, and governmental institutions to foster equity, inclusion, and systemic change. Its key activities include scholarship programs, capacity-building workshops, community development projects, and policy advocacy to combat discrimination and improve access to social services.

Over the years, RVK has positively impacted hundreds of students and communities by creating pathways to education, strengthening youth skills, and promoting participation in social, economic, and political life. Guided by values of equity, empowerment, collaboration, and integrity, Roma Versitas Kosovo continues to work towards a society where marginalized communities have equal opportunities to thrive.

Methodology

This analysis is based on qualitative field research conducted in the Municipality of Obiliq over a period of five months. The research aimed to document and better understand the nature, causes, and consequences of land and property registration challenges faced by residents, with particular attention to long-settled families experiencing long-term tenure insecurity.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth, and structured interviews with a total of 63 individuals who were directly affected by property and land registration problems.

The interviews were conducted in person, allowing researcher to observe the physical conditions of the properties and better contextualize the information provided by participants. Each interview focused on the history of land use, the manner in which the property was acquired or inherited, the presence or absence of formal documentation, interactions with municipal or cadastral authorities, and the social and economic consequences of unresolved legal status. Where available, interviewees were invited to share supporting documents such as utility bills, old land certificates, or inheritance-related records, which helped corroborate their statements.

The five-month research period allowed sufficient time to build trust with participants, verify information, and identify recurring patterns across cases. Rather than treating each interview as an isolated incident, the analysis focused on identifying common structural barriers and systemic trends affecting land registration. This approach made it possible to move beyond individual stories and develop a broader understanding of the institutional and historical factors contributing to land tenure insecurity in Obiliq.

All information collected was analyzed thematically, with particular attention to recurring issues such as informal land transactions, delayed inheritance procedures, outdated cadastral records, missing boundary definitions, and the loss of documentation due to past conflict or administrative transitions. The findings presented in this report are grounded in these recurring themes and reflect the shared experiences of the interviewed households.

This methodology provides a solid, qualitative evidence base that supports the conclusions and recommendations presented in the report. By centering the experiences of affected residents and combining them with observed administrative patterns, the research offers a reliable and grounded assessment of land tenure challenges in the Municipality of Obiliq.

General Contest

For decades, families in Plemetina and surrounding areas of the Municipality of Obiliq have lived on land that is central to their identity, security, and survival, yet remains legally unrecognized. Individual declarations collected through this research reveal a systemic issue affecting households whose land use spans 40, 60, and in some cases over 100 years.

Land was commonly acquired through informal purchases, oral agreements, or early administrative allocations during periods when cadastral systems were incomplete or disrupted. Over time, these lands were cultivated, subdivided within families, and built upon, forming stable residential communities long before formal documentation became a prerequisite for legal recognition.

Many properties remain registered under the names of deceased relatives, former owners, third parties, or classified as public or municipal land, despite decades of exclusive private use. Families have built permanent homes, often housing multiple generations on the same plot, and maintain regular payment of electricity, water, and municipal services. These indicators demonstrate permanent settlement and factual ownership, yet they do not translate into legal security.

A recurring issue concerns unresolved inheritance procedures. Land that should have been transferred years ago remains registered in the names of deceased parents or grandparents. Although families often reach internal agreements on land division, the absence of formal registration leaves these arrangements legally vulnerable. Another frequent challenge involves outdated cadastral records, missing coordinates, or undefined parcel boundaries, which prevent registration even when families possess old certificates or supporting documentation.

Roma and Ashkali Communities in Obiliq: Demographic Context

According to the 2024 census, approximately 1,214 residents of the Municipality of Obiliq identify as Roma and around 638 as Ashkali, making these communities a visible and integral part of the local population. Nationally, Roma and Ashkali communities represent small but significant minorities whose social inclusion remains a policy priority.

Historical settlement patterns and administrative disruptions have disproportionately affected Roma and Ashkali families, many of whom reside in areas where cadastral records were incomplete or damaged during political transitions and conflict. Limited access to legal services and administrative support has further compounded these challenges, deepening social and economic exclusion.

The declarations show a consistent pattern: land acquired by fathers, grandfathers, or great-grandfathers through informal purchases, oral agreements, or early municipal allocations, often before modern cadastral systems were established. These lands were cultivated, divided within families, and built upon, forming stable residential communities long before legal documentation became a prerequisite for recognition. Today, many of these properties remain registered in the names of deceased relatives, former owners, third parties, or are still categorized as public or municipal land, despite clear evidence of private and uninterrupted use.

Most families have built one or more houses on these plots, some as early as the 1970s and others more recently, investing their savings and labor into permanent structures. In many cases, multiple generations now live on the same parcel, with separate houses for parents, sons, and extended family members. Electricity, water, and waste collection services are active and paid regularly. These indicators confirm permanent settlement and factual ownership, yet they do not translate into legal security.

The lack of formal registration is rarely due to neglect. Instead, it reflects a legacy of disrupted governance systems, loss of documentation during conflict and displacement, and limited access to legal assistance. Many families possess old Yugoslav or Serbian-era land certificates, informal contracts, invoices, or

notarized declarations, while others rely on utility bills and long-standing community recognition. What is missing, in most cases, is a clear administrative pathway to convert this evidence into legally recognized ownership.

A significant number of declarations highlight inheritance-related challenges. Land that should have been transferred decades ago remains in the name of deceased parents or grandparents because inheritance procedures were never completed. Family members often agree internally on how land should be divided among siblings or children, but without formal registration, these agreements remain vulnerable. The result is a growing gap between lived reality and legal status, affecting housing security, access to credit, eligibility for public programs, and long-term development prospects.

Another recurring issue concerns land classified as public or municipal property, despite being used privately for generations. Families describe building homes, walls, and infrastructure on these plots more than 40 years ago, with full knowledge of neighbors and local authorities. These cases point to a need for administrative regularization rather than legal disputes, as there are no competing private claims, only outdated records.

What emerges from these declarations is not a collection of isolated problems, but a structural issue that disproportionately affects marginalized communities. The inability to formalize land ownership perpetuates vulnerability, limits economic opportunities, and reinforces cycles of exclusion. At the same time, the declarations demonstrate strong social cohesion, with families expressing willingness to cooperate, divide land fairly, and complete registration processes if supported appropriately. In other words, this situation represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Addressing land tenure insecurity through targeted legal aid, cadastral correction, and administrative legalization would have immediate and long-term impact. Secure land rights strengthen housing stability, reduce the risk of disputes, enable access to services and financing, and contribute to social inclusion and local development. Importantly, these interventions are preventative in nature, reducing future legal conflicts and institutional burdens.

One of the strongest common themes in the individual declarations submitted is multi-generational land use and inheritance. Many households trace their connection to land back more than 40 years, some 60 years, and in multiple cases over 100 years. Land was often acquired through informal purchases, oral agreements, or old contracts at times when cadastral systems were incomplete or interrupted by political upheavals. Inherited land, passed from grandfather to father and often to grandchildren, has been the basis for family farming, housing, and community life, even though the formal legal title has not been updated to reflect current ownership.

Housing structures across these lands range from older homes built in the 1970s to modern residences constructed in the 2000s and 2010s, all of which demonstrate continued, stable use of property. Electricity, water, garbage service bills, and municipal house numbers are common tangible evidence that families reside permanently on these lands. In many declarations, multiple houses exist on a single plot, occupied by siblings, cousins, or extended family, highlighting the collective and long-term family investment in these properties.

Nationally, the Roma community constitutes around 0.54–0.57% of Kosovo's population and the Ashkali around 1.01–1.02%, indicating small but significant minority communities whose social inclusion remains a priority for national and local policy. For Roma and Ashkali communities specifically, longstanding issues with access to education, employment, housing, and legal recognition have been documented, with

significant numbers of children outside the formal education system and persistent barriers to full socio-economic participation.

These demographic realities intersect with the land documentation challenges in Obiliq. Roma and Ashkali families are often among those with long-standing settlement histories in areas where cadastral records were incomplete or disrupted during political transitions, including war periods and shifts in administrative control. The lack of formal land documents disproportionately affects households with limited access to legal services and resources, compounding social exclusion.

Duration of Land Use

Duration of Use	Characteristics
16-25 years	Recent subdivision or post-war construction
26-40 years	Post-1980s settlement, multiple houses
41-60 years	Pre-war family settlement, inherited use
61-80 years	Multi-generational continuity
80-100+ years	Ancestral land, oral transactions

Type of Claim

Type of Claim	Description	Estimated Share (%)
Inherited land	Passed through generations without registration	65
Long-term possession	40–100+ years continuous use	75
Third-party registration	Registered under deceased or others	55
Public land use	Used privately but listed as public	30
Informal purchase	Oral or old contracts	50

Document Type

Document Type	Availability (%)
Kosovo ID	98

Document Type	Availability (%)
Electricity bill	85
Water/Waste bill	70
Old land certificate	60
Updated Kosovo certificate	15
Cadastral coordinates	10

Key Structural Problems Identified

Inheritance procedures further compounded this problem. In many cases, inheritance was never formally completed, sometimes remaining unresolved across multiple generations. As properties passed from parents to children without legal registration, ownership became fragmented or unclear, making later attempts at formalization increasingly complex. This has left many families living on land they have inherited and maintained for decades without any official proof of ownership.

The widespread land tenure insecurity in Obiliq stems from several interconnected structural problems:

- **Historical Informality of Land Transactions** - Many transactions occurred outside formal legal frameworks.
- **Delayed Inheritance Procedures** - Inheritance processes were frequently left incomplete for generations.
- **Outdated or Inaccurate Cadastral Records** - Cadastral data often does not reflect current realities of ownership and use.
- **Lack of Cadastral Points and Boundary Definitions** - Missing precise geospatial data hinders formal registration.
- **Public Land Misclassification Despite Private Use** - Land used privately for decades is still officially designated as public.
- **Intergenerational Documentation Loss** - Critical documents were lost due to conflict, displacement, and administrative transitions.

These issues disproportionately affect long-settled families and communities, particularly those with limited access to formal legal services.

Recommendations

To address the systemic issues identified and ensure equitable land tenure security, the following recommendations are put forth:

- **Establish simplified, expedited municipal procedures** for registering long-used land, supported by evidence such as utility bills, witness statements, and housing records.

- Conduct systematic on-site measurements and field verification to correct boundaries, define missing coordinates, and update cadastral records to reflect current realities.
- Provide accessible legal aid for the formal registration of inheritance and the codification of family subdivision agreements.
- Consistently apply principles of adverse possession or long-term legitimate use within the legal framework, ensuring that sustained occupation leads to formal rights.

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