

## **New Role for Kosovo Women**

**Author:** [Albana Kasapi](#)

Albanian women widowed by the Kosovo war are learning to do what was once considered men's work.

"I can hardly believe how we have managed these past ten months," said Shpresa Shehu, who teaches at the Mala Krusa village school. "Maybe we have survived by sticking together and thinking of our children."

She lost 39 male relatives and half of her pupils during last spring's Serbian offensive. Over a hundred men between the ages of the 13 and 80 were executed. Women and children were expelled - and ten months later, they have returned to try to rebuild their lives.

"At first, all the women were depressed," said Shpresa. "The first two months back were especially difficult mentally, but last August we gathered together for the first time and since then we have tried to support one another."

Shpresa, 29 and her sisters Lumnije, 28, and Suzana, 22, are being taught how to drive tractors. Elsewhere, women chop wood for the fire, mix concrete to repair their shattered houses.

Shpresa belongs to the Pristina-based women's self-help group, the Qirazi Sisters, and is busy finding ways to help other women of her village. Together with a friend, she organises courses teaching the women of Mala Krusa how to survive.

"Some 25 women are currently learning to drive tractors," she said. "These are all women who do not have a single man around. Another 60 women are following a sewing course. Others are being taught first-aid."

To bring money to the village, the four most talented seamstresses have sold curtains and sheets to KFOR's regional offices and a nearby hospital. Older women knit socks and blouses which the Qirazi Sisters attempt to sell.

At present, most of the women manage to get by, but Shpresa is worried because the village is short of the agricultural tools necessary to work the land in spring.

Only 20 men remain in Mala Krusa. Most of them are members of the one family, which managed to survive the killing. "The remaining men help us when they can and sometimes our cousins come from the nearby villages," said Lumnije Shehu. "But they cannot come every time we need them."

Once she finishes her driving course in the spring, Lumnije plans to help her cousin, Gazmend Shehu, the only male left in the Shehu family. He survived because he was abroad at the time of the Serbian offensive.

"Before the war, they used to cook and clean," Gazmend said. "Life has been tough on them. But now I see they are strong women and are managing in a way their husbands would never have believed."

Albana Kasapi is a journalist from Pristina.

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