REEEC is pleased to welcome among its affiliates a new member of the faculty at the Department of Social Work, Assistant Professor Venera Bekteshi. Before her appointment at Illinois, she was a postdoctorate Research Associate at the Washington University in St. Louis Medical School-Siteman Cancer Center, having earned her Ph.D. and masters in social work (Boston College), and an M.P.A. as well as an M.A. from Columbia University and St. John’s University, respectively.

Venera Bekteshi
A native of Kosovo, Venera Bekteshi acquired extensive experience in health and mental health research over 9 years by practicing in non-profit and government sectors, among others, as an associate researcher at the United Nations’ Human Development Reports Office and as Deputy Director of the Albanian American Women’s Organization. Most of her research focuses on the health and mental needs of immigrants, the homeless and of adolescents, and on breast cancer prevention research. Yet, she also examines sex trafficking in such Eastern European countries as Albania, Kosovo, Romania, and Macedonia. Grounded in theory, her research addresses this significant issue by employing various methodological techniques, depending on data availability.

For her academic contributions and her involvement in community service and development, Professor Bekteshi received several prestigious awards and fellowships, among which the First Award for Community Building and Leadership by the International Leadership Class at the University of Oklahoma and the Mayor’s Recognition for Community Service, New York. Additionally, she won several competitive research grants from the National Institute of Health, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (co-authored) and a number of NGOs in New York such as the Van Ameringen Foundation and the New York Foundation. Her co-authored articles have appeared in The Journal of Long Term Home Health Care, the Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies, the Journal of Disability Studies and in the United Nations series of National Human Development Reports. Currently, Professor Bekteshi has several ongoing projects on topics such as discrimination and Polish immigrants (with Dr. Monika Stodolska), the emotional barriers and access to mammography among Latina immigrants, and the integration challenges they face in the United States.

When asked “Why Illinois?”, Bekteshi responded that some of the reasons why her choice fell on this university was “collegiality, innovative spirit, opportunities and support for interdisciplinary collaborations, eagerness to learn among students, and the school’s emphasis on health disparity topics.” “And let’s not forget the Midwestern values of hospitality and sense of community, which I found not only and especially in the school, but throughout campus and the Urbana-Champaign region,” she added.