



# South-Eastern Europe

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## Recent developments

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Ten years after the Dayton Agreement, durable solutions have been achieved for large numbers of refugees and displaced people in the Balkans. This is illustrated by the substantial decrease in persons of concern to UNHCR from 1.7 million in 1999 in the aftermath of the Kosovo crisis, to some 608,000 in mid-2005. However, the prospects of further solutions for the remaining groups of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are varied. Given the ongoing tensions and the uncertainties surrounding the province's final status, prospects of voluntary repatriation or return remain gloomy for the 248,000 people displaced within the province, or living elsewhere in Serbia and Montenegro (SCG - *Serbia i Crna Gora*) and for some 5,700 refugees originating from the province and living elsewhere in the Balkans region.

Prospects are somewhat better for refugees from Croatia living in SCG and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), refugees from BiH living in SCG and Croatia and IDPs in BiH, all of whom account for the bulk of the so-called "post-Dayton" refugees and IDPs. Totalling roughly 346,000, these people have a real opportunity to repatriate or to integrate locally (at least in SCG where there is a policy to

Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)

Croatia

Serbia and Montenegro (SCG)

The former Yugoslav Republic of  
Macedonia (FYR Macedonia)



this effect) within a more stable political framework. Nonetheless, there are some legal and socio-economic obstacles for some, especially for refugees from Croatia who used to hold long-term leases in socially-owned flats. However, they now do not have the right to return to nor to dispose of their original apartments (unlike their counterparts from BiH) but only to apply for compensation, none of which has been granted to date. The "3x3" Initiative (see below) provides a framework to map out these obstacles and solve them through political commitment and appropriate policies across the three respective countries, SCG, BiH and Croatia.

The "3x3" Initiative was launched in January 2005, when the three Governments met in Sarajevo and declared their common desire to ensure a just and durable solution to refugee and internal displacement situations in their countries. Supported by the European Union, UNHCR and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), they expressed their commitment to "solving the remaining population displacement by the end of 2006, and facilitating returns or local integration of refugees and internally displaced persons depending on their individual decisions, without any discrimination". On the basis of the principles

expressed in the "Sarajevo Declaration", each Government agreed to prepare an action plan, including a comprehensive list of tasks to be undertaken, and subsequently unified in a "joint implementation matrix". By September 2005, Croatia adopted its national road map. SCG and BiH also issued draft road maps but work is still required to make the formats of the three road maps compatible.

In the Kosovo province of SCG, the situation since the violent events of March 2004 has improved to some extent but remains tense and unpredictable. While the rate and intensity of violent ethnically-motivated crimes has diminished and freedom of movement has to some extent increased, low level harassment and at times violent attacks, particularly against Serb and Roma minorities, persist. Within this context, the rate of minority voluntary returns is still decreasing (following a peak of 2,380 from January to August 2003). UNHCR does not expect returns on a large scale during a period of continued uncertainty from late 2005 to the end of 2006, when it is expected that the future status of the province currently under UN administration will be discussed. The Office therefore maintains the view that ethnic minorities, particularly Serbs and Roma, should continue to

benefit from international protection and should not be returned against their will.

UNHCR has accepted the chairmanship of the Belgrade-Pristina Direct Dialogue Working Group (DDWG) on Returns with the aim of working to jointly identify and solve obstacles to return. The DDWG on Returns is part of the so-called "Vienna Process" of direct dialogue between the two parties which includes three other DDWGs, including the one on missing persons, chaired by ICRC.

Regarding asylum, the main development was the adoption of the Framework Asylum Law in March 2005 by the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro.

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## Strategic objectives

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UNHCR's strategic objectives in the Balkans are centred on three themes: 1) the above-mentioned "post-Dayton" situation; 2) the future of Kosovo, which also directly affects The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; and 3) asylum system development.

With regard to "Post-Dayton" refugees and IDPs, UNHCR's main objective will be to reinvigorate the search for durable solutions (voluntary repatriation/reintegration and, where feasible, local integration) within the framework of the "3x3" process and in partnership with other international players. These include bilateral arrangements, the European Union and the OSCE, but also the Council of Europe Development Bank (which in 2004/2005 became progressively more involved with refugees and IDPs in SCG and BiH), the World Bank and UN sister agencies. It is only through partnerships and a collaborative approach that UNHCR will be able to contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Other objectives on behalf of "post-Dayton" refugees include to continue to close collective centres in SCG and BiH (currently 128 centres hosting some 12,000 refugees and IDPs) and to provide protection and basic humanitarian assistance to the remaining refugees and internally displaced people. These include a high percentage of very vulnerable individuals (such as elderly and handicapped persons) who find it

difficult to achieve self-reliance. UNHCR will continue to implement its strategy of "responsible phase-down".

With regard to the Kosovo province of SCG, UNHCR's objectives include helping to create conditions conducive to the return of refugees and internally displaced people, monitoring and reporting on the situation of IDPs and returnees (including issuing advocacy/position papers), continuing to chair and contributing to the DDWG on Returns, and strengthening emergency preparedness and response capacity in view of the still volatile situation. In sum, UNHCR will have to adopt a flexible strategy for Kosovo that can adapt to a rapidly evolving operational environment.

Finally, concerning the theme of asylum and protection, the overall objective is to support the Governments and other national actors to develop an asylum system capable of providing international protection to refugees and asylum-seekers in accordance with international standards. A prominent objective is for asylum laws to be adopted in the constituent republics of SCG, namely in Serbia and Montenegro, in accordance with the framework law already adopted by the State Union. An overarching objective linked to this theme is for activities aiming to combat sexual and gender-based violence, and address broader gender issues, to become integral components of UNHCR's assistance programmes and protection strategies. Another objective, applicable in particular to The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, is to reduce and prevent situations of statelessness.

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## Operations

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In **Albania**, UNHCR will continue to work with the asylum institutions with a view to putting in place a fully functional system compliant with international standards. There will be increased coordination with other UNHCR offices in the region as well as with local actors in the relevant government and state structures, and with international stakeholders.

In **Croatia**, UNHCR and its partners will continue to support the voluntary repatriation, including transport, of the remaining Croatian refugees living in SCG and BiH and provide free legal advice to returnees, particularly on housing and property-related issues. UNHCR will continue to monitor the implementation of the Asylum Law, particularly regarding the quality of decisions, and will address any shortcomings in order to ensure that the rights of refugees are respected.

In **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, UNHCR will continue to support the Government and other national actors to provide international protection to refugees and asylum-seekers and thereby ensure that asylum-seekers have access to efficient and fair asylum procedures compliant with international standards. For the group of approximately 2,500 mainly Roma refugees and asylum-seekers from Kosovo who moved out of a collective centre and into private accommodation, UNHCR will continue to provide basic humanitarian assistance, as neither local integration

nor voluntary repatriation are likely prospects at present. Meanwhile, UNHCR will continue to assist any refugees wishing to repatriate to Kosovo.

UNHCR's operations in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia and Montenegro** (including **Kosovo**) are described in more detail in the following pages.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Albania	1,119,392
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10,688,257
Croatia	4,513,641
Serbia and Montenegro	24,918,958
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	3,901,288
<b>Total</b>	<b>45,141,536</b>



Croatia: A Croat family which had fled Knin in 1991 began a successful small-scale vegetable business after their return home. UNHCR / V. Winter