



South-Eastern Europe

Recent developments

For UNHCR, the events of 2004 have occasioned both optimism and concern, leaving many ongoing complexities in the Balkan countries and highlighting the need to continue to reflect on relations within the region. UNHCR's role is firstly to maintain and adapt its post-Dayton activities and secondly to fulfil its mandate in an evolving political environment.

In March 2004 hopes of lasting peace were severely shaken and the process of minority returns to the province of Kosovo (Serbia and Montenegro) was significantly compromised – when inter-ethnic clashes resulted in the death of 20 persons, injury to hundreds, the further displacement of over 4,000 members of ethnic minorities and the destruction of property and places of worship. The aftershock of the loss of trust in civilian security structures will most probably be very damaging as well. In the rest of Serbia and Montenegro (SCG), over a year after the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Djindjic in March 2003 and persistent economic difficulties underlay the political climate that produced a new minority Government.

Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Croatia

Serbia and Montenegro

The former Yugoslav Republic of
Macedonia



In The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the untimely death of President Trajkovski in February 2004 resulted in new presidential elections which led indirectly to a delay in the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. With regard to minority populations in the region, UNHCR is keenly observing discussion of the law on decentralization on which a referendum is scheduled for November 2004.

On a more positive note, in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), returns of IDPs and refugees reached the landmark figure of one million in July 2004 (out of a total of approximately 2.2 million displaced by the war) demonstrating that sustained and focused efforts by the international community can significantly affect the environment to make it conducive for return. One of the keys to this success has been the Property Restitution Implementation Programme which is almost complete. The challenge is now to take the process forward, to consolidate the returns and render them sustainable.

In Croatia, a positive development was the adoption by the new Government of measures for housing reconstruction and alternative housing for

former holders of tenancy rights. These moves are cause for cautious optimism regarding the repatriation of Croatian refugees from SCG and BiH. Moreover, Croatia was granted candidate status for EU membership following a positive *avis* by the EC and endorsement by the EU Council of Ministers on 18 June 2004, demonstrating to other Balkan countries that EU accession is a possibility.

Strategic objectives

For the remaining post-Dayton caseload (some 312,000 refugees mainly from Croatia and BiH; and 310,000 IDPs in BiH), UNHCR is continuing a strategy of "responsible phase-down". However, following a mission to the region by the Assistant High Commissioner in March 2004, UNHCR has decided to maintain the support needed to pursue durable solutions for this group through voluntary repatriation and returns and local integration where feasible, as for example, in Serbia. This adjustment amounts to a slowing down of the pace of the phase-down, and it acknowledges the need for more "breathing space" for potential solutions. At the same time UNHCR is pursuing a

policy of inclusion of vulnerable people of concern in the programmes of development agencies and financial institutions such as the Council of Europe Development Bank and the EC/CARDS (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization in the Western Balkans) programme.

Regarding the Kosovo situation, the March riots left minority communities with a heightened sense of fear and isolation and dealt a serious blow to the prospects of continued minority returns which, by 31 August, had reached a total of 11,400 out of an estimated 226,000 displaced people in Serbia and Montenegro (excluding Kosovo). Minority returns decreased by 46 per cent in the first eight months of 2004 compared with the same period in 2003. Further turbulence is possible in the run-up to final

status talks in 2005 (including review of the implementation of the standards for Kosovo). Against this backdrop, UNHCR is continuing its efforts to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and to create conditions conducive to return. At the same time, the Office is increasing its cross-border early warning activities and capacity to provide a rapid and flexible emergency response to pockets of displacement. In March 2004 this sort of flexibility was demonstrated in Kosovo, where UNHCR was tasked by UNMIK/UNCT to coordinate the humanitarian assistance effort for the over 4,000 newly displaced.

A final strategic objective is to continue efforts to develop asylum systems in line with international standards, as the region moves closer to European integration. All countries in the region have new



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Croatia: A returnee visiting a doctor and receiving medical care sponsored by UNHCR. *UNHCR*

asylum laws, with the exception of SCG (mainly because of the constitutional uncertainty over the future of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro). The challenge is now to adopt by-laws and procedures to ensure effective implementation. In this respect, UNHCR is continuing its work on capacity building and EC-led processes such as regional and national EC/CARDS programmes, which should also help SCG in the adoption of asylum legislation. An overarching theme is the integration into UNHCR's assistance and protection activities of the Five Commitments to refugee women, with a focus on SGBV prevention.

Operations

In **Albania**, UNHCR Tirana's activities in 2005 will consolidate the work of the asylum institutions with a view to putting in place a fully functional asylum system which meets internationally recognized standards. The Office will also continue to implement pre-screening activities under the CARDS programme. In doing so, it will endeavour to balance legitimate public order concerns and its commitment to the protection of human rights when dealing with irregular population flows to and through Albania.

In **Croatia**, UNHCR will continue to facilitate and promote the repatriation of Croatian refugees (mainly ethnic Serbs) from SCG and BiH by providing transport, legal assistance and information services, particularly regarding access to housing. UNHCR will also continue to monitor and facilitate the implementation of Croatia's asylum law

by providing technical advice to government counterparts on the harmonization of legislation and regulations with international standards and the EU *acquis*.

In **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, UNHCR will focus on protection and the search for durable solutions for a group of 2,300 (mainly Roma) refugees from Kosovo as well as facilitating the voluntary repatriation and reintegration of a residual caseload of approximately 1,000 Macedonian refugees in Kosovo. UNHCR will continue to advise the Government on the implementation of the 2003 Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (LATP) under which the 2,300 Kosovo refugees are having their refugee status reassessed under individual procedures, as well as the amended Citizenship Law of December 2003 with the aim of reducing statelessness.

UNHCR operations in **BiH** and **SCG** (including **Kosovo**) are described in more detail in the following pages.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Albania	1,013,818
Bosnia and Herzegovina	11,224,393
Croatia	4,713,133
Serbia and Montenegro	25,507,365
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	3,917,263
Total	46,375,971