

COUNTRY OPERATION

CROATIA

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Promote and facilitate sustainable voluntary returns to and from the country, by encouraging local authorities to ease administrative procedures to acquire personal identity and other documents, providing legal and logistical support, as well as short-term community-based assistance to vulnerable returnees during the period of their initial reintegration; and continue to assist needy refugees and IDPs. UNHCR's operational strategy focused on maximising engagement with the Government at all levels and encouraging it to participate fully in the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.



Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Bosnia and Herzegovina (Refugees)	24,960	24,960	60	19
Yugoslavia FR (Refugees)	3,414	3,414	48	35
Asylum-Seekers	38	38	35	-
IDPs *	50,273	4,500	40	-
Returned in 1999**	10,578	20,000***	-	-

* A total of 26,372 IDPs returned to their places of origin and 1,130 IDPs were resettled within the country during 1999.

** In total, 71,300 Croatian refugees returned since the start of the return operation.

*** The number includes those who benefited from UNHCR's reintegration assistance including returnees from prior years who, due to unresolved legal and property issues, remained dependent on UNHCR assistance. Of these, 5,120 were assisted to process their return applications and with their actual return movement.

Impact

- A total of 10,578 refugees repatriated to Croatia under the Government's Programme for Return from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (9,500) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1,078). The repatriation application referral system was streamlined with regard to specific returnee categories, which facilitated actual return.
- A total of 314 refugees were resettled in third countries during the year. Some 200 refugees repatriated to Bosnia and Herzegovina with UNHCR's assistance.
- A total of 4,259 refugees from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were granted Temporary Protected Status, out of which 845 returned to Kosovo with the assistance of UNHCR, ODPD and IOM; leaving 3,414 in the country by the end of the year.
- Through inter-agency mechanisms, negotiations with the Government continued regarding the amendment of rel-

- evant discriminatory legislation and administrative regulations, so as to facilitate the reintegration of returnees and care for asylum-seekers. In addition, negotiations with relevant Ministries and Governmental Offices continued in order to resolve several specific return-related issues, such as customs exemptions for returning refugees and timely recognition of their legal status.
- UNHCR made a major contribution to the Croatian Government's proposal for funding under the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe.

Income and Expenditure - SP Activities (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
17,635,645	589,030	17,248,977	17,838,007	17,632,799

* Includes contributions earmarked for the Special Operation in South-Eastern Europe.

** Includes opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

The Government continued to take a cautious and selective approach to returns and asylum throughout the year, although elections in December raised hopes for the reform of such policies in 2000. There were no major economic developments in the areas of return and the lack of employment opportunities was an additional constraint on the return process, especially for the younger population. The majority of returnees continued to be elderly persons of rural background, in effect limiting broader community-development potential. Traditional coping mechanisms have slowly eroded, and returnees lean heavily on State and international humanitarian structures. Limited progress was made in terms of maintaining good working relations with other Ministries such as those of the Interior, Foreign Affairs and Justice. UNHCR continued to face obstruction and delays on issues such as the Host Country Agreement, clearance of returnees with criminal records, and negotiations on property issues.

Constraints

The context was not conducive to large-scale international economic investment in the local economy, nor other demonstrations of support for Croatia's wider social and political development. Key multilateral donors, such as the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), significantly reduced their own directly funded activities well before the end of the year. With the onset of the Kosovo emergency, political and financial support to meet Croatia's broader development needs was further compromised. Despite efforts to encourage amendments, discriminatory legislation remained one of the main impediments for larger-scale returns, particularly laws relating to property restitution and reconstruction.

No solution was found for the situation of returnees whose homes are occupied by ethnic-Croat refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, since the situation of the latter remained unresolved with no durable solution in sight. The presence of mines in the mainly rural areas of return continued to pose a threat.

Funding

UNHCR focused its material assistance programme on meeting the needs of the vulnerable as a result of limited progress in actual returns, combined with donor fatigue and increased demands generated by the Kosovo emergency.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

Through the work of the Ad Hoc Legal Expert Group (involving UNHCR, OSCE, UNLO, Article 11 Commission Members and the EU), UNHCR actively participated in lobbying efforts aimed at eliminating discriminatory provisions in laws that, in practice, impede return and reintegration, such as the Law on the Status of Displaced Persons and Refugees. Amendments were also drafted and tabled regarding the Law on Reconstruction and the Law on Areas of Special State Concern. The Decree on Mediation of Real Estate was exhaustively reviewed, as was the work of the local Housing Commissions.

UNHCR, OSCE and NGOs continued to monitor returns using a database monitoring system to record and track the situation of refugees and displaced persons upon their return.

UNHCR worked closely with members of the Governmental Working Group on the draft Law on Asylum, and two seminars and two study-trips were sponsored for government representatives of the working group. A seminar for border police was also organised, aimed at highlighting the importance of the role played by border authorities in the asylum process.

Like other countries in the region, Croatia began to receive refugees from Kosovo in March 1999. During the initial stages of the influx, UNHCR field monitors reported isolated incidents of *refoulement* and non-admission. UNHCR intensified discussions with the Government, which agreed to receive up to 5,000 refugees under the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP). Of the 4,259 granted Temporary Protected Status, some 665 people were accommodated in collective centres, while the rest enjoyed private support. By the end of 1999, 3,414 of these refugees remained in the country.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: UNHCR and its partners concentrated on identifying vulnerable returnees and refugees, and developed a safety net of community volunteers, who formed out-reach mobile teams and provided assistance at home, social counselling, and referral to and inclusion in the relevant State services. Thanks to a community-based approach, other vulnerable community members, including IDPs, benefited as well. A total of 12,200 persons received support.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: Essential non-food items such as stoves (5,000), beds (10,000), blankets (10,000), and agricultural tool kits (5,000) were distributed to returnees who met UNHCR's vulnerability criteria. This assistance targeted not only recent arrivals (organised or spontaneous returnees) but also those who returned during 1998 and were only able to recover their properties (mostly private houses) during 1999.

Food: Almost one third of returnees were found to require immediate food assistance. UNHCR provided a one-off welcome-home parcel of food plus non-food items to 4,600 vulnerable returnees.

Health/Nutrition: The amount of medical assistance provided to refugees was minimal. Assistance was given to 200 handicapped and bed-ridden elderly refugees unable to receive treatment under the State health care system. In addition, some 2,000 refugees received secondary health care.

Income Generation: To improve the initial living conditions of the most vulnerable returnees, small-scale self-reliance activities were supported. Some assistance was delivered in the form of a cash grant (for 309 persons) and some in-kind (for 7,700 families). Those receiving cash payments and in-kind assistance were asked to make a re-payment "in kind" to secondary beneficiaries, who were usually other vulnerable members of the same communities, thus contributing to the reconciliation process.

Legal Assistance: UNHCR formed a partnership with national NGOs to improve legal advice and representation, as well as human and civil rights monitoring, and advocacy. A country-wide network of five legal advice and assistance centres operated through mobile teams in areas of return, facilitating the acquisition of personal documents, enrolling returnees to benefit from State services, and guiding their efforts to repossess property. Through in-service training and the services of specialist lawyers qualified to lodge suits before courts and administrative tribunals in selected cases, returnees had access to free legal advice. The NGO network developed closer collaboration with sister organisations and offices across the border in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, while ensuring the timely provision of unbiased and accurate information on conditions and entitlements upon return. Some 12,000 returnees and refugees benefited from these services.

Operational Support (to Agencies): UNHCR continued capacity-building activities based on key criteria and indicators selected with relevant partners. It also covered a portion of the operational costs of its implementing partners.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: Shelter assistance consisted in providing building materials for basic self-help repairs or reconstruction. Returnees who were unable to carry out such labour-intensive work were eligible for direct assistance from community teams or local contractors employed through UNHCR's NGO partners. A total of 419 houses were re-built (benefiting 419 families); minor repairs were carried out on 52 houses (windows were re-glazed in 1,047 houses); 217 received building materials with which they repaired their own homes; and 959 families received tool kits. A total of 2,694 families benefited from these activities. In addition, six collective centres hosting refugees were rehabilitated.

Transport/Logistics: Transportation and related services were provided to refugees and returnees in support of 120 go-and-see visits (benefiting over 3,000 people) and organised voluntary repatriation. The transport of essential non-food items (for distribution by UNHCR's NGO implementing partners) was also financed, benefiting some 35,000 returnees and refugees.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

UNHCR's presence included a country office in Zagreb, supported by offices in Knin, Sisak, Osijek and Daruvar. The offices in Karlovac and Sisak were merged in March 1999. The programme was managed by 115 staff, including 15 international and 100 national staff.

Working with Others

UNHCR concluded agreements with 15 implementing partners, including international agencies, local NGOs and ODPR. It continued to work and coordinate with relevant ministries. It simultaneously reinforced co-ordination mechanisms with the resident international community, and further consolidated its implementation capacity through the local NGO network, with a view to ensuring long-term sustainability. Co-operation was strengthened with OHCHR, UNDP, UNICEF, the UN Mine Action Centre (known as UNMAAP in Croatia) and UNESCO especially

through the Consolidated Appeal Process. Similarly, UNHCR maintained close co-operation with the European Union, the OSCE, the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) of the US State Department, USAID, the European Community Monitoring Mission (ECMM), IOM, Council of Europe and national and international NGOs. Many of these organisations complemented UNHCR's assistance by providing legal advice, distributing food and non-food assistance, establishing and backing economic reconstruction programmes, monitoring the human rights situation, conducting mine surveys, and assisting local communities by encouraging returns and community reconciliation.

UNHCR and OSCE co-chaired Return Facilitation Groups (RFGs), which remained the main body charged with facilitating voluntary repatriation and related objectives. Regional meetings involving UNHCR, OSCE and the Office of the High Representative were formalised. UNHCR offices on each side of the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Yugoslavia, as well as the RFGs and Return and Reconstruction Task Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (RRTF) to facilitate cross-border linkages and complementary strategies.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

During 1999, UNHCR maintained its lead role in promoting and facilitating durable solutions for persons of its concern. The Office's strategy of establishing synergy with organisations whose programmes also include UNHCR's beneficiaries strengthened a sense of partnership, not only among international agencies and local NGOs, but also with the Government.

Offices

Zagreb
Daruvar
Karlovac (closed in March 1999)
Knin
Osijek
Sisak

Partners

Government Agencies

Croatian Government Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees

NGOs

American Refugee Committee
Association Mi
Caritas
Catholic Relief Services
Centre for Disaster Management
Centre for Peace-Osijek
Committee for Human Rights-Karlovac
Croatian Red Cross
Handicap
International Rescue Committee
Merhamet
Suncokret
The Serbian Democratic Forum

Other

Town of Pula



Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects*		Prior Years' Projects*	
	Special Programmes	Total	Special Programmes	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	4,283,853	4,283,853	56,228	56,228
Community Services	1,098,362	1,098,362	537,973	537,973
Domestic Needs / Household Support	1,461,320	1,461,320	321,179	321,179
Education	0	0	42,833	42,833
Food	1,833	1,833	0	0
Health / Nutrition	312,021	312,021	141,977	141,977
Income Generation	2,546,337	2,546,337	288,035	288,035
Legal Assistance	492,579	492,579	140,774	140,774
Operational Support (to Agencies)	845,355	845,355	171,050	171,050
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	1,940,761	1,940,761	353,946	353,946
Transport / Logistics	607,287	607,287	109,027	109,027
Transit	0	0	(7,042)	(7,042)
Instalments with Implementing Partners	2,270,924	2,270,924	(1,767,400)	(1,767,400)
Sub - total Operational	15,860,631	15,860,631	388,579	388,579
Administrative Support	1,401,123	1,401,123	5,242	5,242
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	17,261,754	17,261,754	393,821	393,821
Unliquidated Obligations	371,045	371,045	0	0
TOTAL	17,632,799	17,632,799	393,821	393,821
Instalments with Implementing Partners				
Payments Made	9,995,271	9,995,271	101,835	101,835
Reporting Received	7,724,347	7,724,347	1,869,235	1,869,235
Balance	2,270,924	2,270,924	(1,767,400)	(1,767,400)
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	3,371,271	3,371,271
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	44,045	44,045
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0	0
Outstanding 31 December	2,270,924	2,270,924	1,559,826	1,559,826
Unliquidated Obligations				
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	503,966	503,966
New Obligations	17,632,799	17,632,799	0	0
Disbursements	17,261,754	17,261,754	393,821	393,821
Cancellations	0	0	110,145	110,145
Outstanding 31 December	371,045	371,045	0	0

* There was no General Programme expenditure in Croatia.

