

Croatia

Main Objectives

- Facilitate sustainable repatriation to and from Croatia.
- Promote local integration of Bosnian refugees who are unable or unwilling to return.
- Provide adequate care to refugees pending identification of a durable solution.
- Develop national asylum structures, procedures and policies consistent with international standards.

Working Environment

Recent Developments

During 2002, UNHCR continued to work within a generally stable political context. It is expected that in 2003 refugees will return to Croatia at roughly the same rate as in previous years. Major legal obstacles to their return and integration will have been resolved. Changes in relevant laws have allowed the removal of some legal impediments related to reconstruction, repossession of property and to unconditional return. In particular, legislative changes will provide for more efficient property repossession and enable the sustainable return of Croatian Serb refugees.

The Draft Law on Asylum was presented to the Croatian Parliament on 17 September 2002. Over the years, UNHCR has provided comments on this law and it is hoped that it will come into force at the beginning of 2003. A legal framework for asylum would be a major step towards the establishment of a sound asylum system in Croatia.



Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2003	Dec. 2003
Refugees	9,000	7,000
Returnees	6,000	26,000
Asylum-Seekers	120	400
Total	15,120	33,400

Total Requirements: USD 7,789,183

This progress should also be viewed in the context of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), which Croatia signed with the European Union in 2001. In 2003 and 2004, the SAA will provide an additional platform for regional co-operation. As a direct consequence, Croatia will benefit from the Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation programme (CARDS), which in 2003 is likely to be the main channel for the European Union's financial and technical assistance.

Constraints

The limited extent of assistance available for reconstruction and alternative accommodation could

slow the return process from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) to Croatia. Lack of funds for reconstruction in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) could moreover influence the rate of repatriation of Bosnian refugees from Croatia. Socio-economic conditions in the areas of return have not improved. In addition, with pressure from international monetary institutions to reduce public expenditure, the State social welfare system cannot afford to support all vulnerable returnees.

Asylum-seekers are currently accommodated in a detention facility. The Government Reception Centre is not expected to be operational before the end of 2003.

Strategy

Protection and Solutions

The number of returnees in 2003 will be some 20,000 as in recent years. As the search for durable solutions for the Post Dayton caseload is a task of a regional nature, co-ordination between UNHCR offices in the region as well as co-operation with other international partners and respective governments will be further strengthened. UNHCR operations and programmes linked to the return of Croatian Serb refugees as well as repatriation or local integration of Bosnian refugees in Croatia will be implemented in co-ordination with the respective ministries, while most activities will be implemented by local NGOs.

Returnees

Together with representatives of the Government and International Community in Croatia, UNHCR will continue to work on removing the remaining legal and procedural obstacles to return. UNHCR will monitor implementation of Croatia's obligation to recognise the right to return of all former habitual residents and grant them the status of permanently residing foreigners and subsequently of Croatian citizenship. UNHCR will continue to follow-up legal reforms related to refugees and returnees.

Refugees

Following the 2002 de-registration exercise, there were 9,028 registered refugees in Croatia. It is

expected that during 2002 only some 1,800 will return to their country of origin. In 2003, UNHCR expects even lower repatriation figures to BiH based on the assumption that after more than 10 years elsewhere, the majority of refugees with the option of return will either already have done so or will have explored other options. The remaining refugees will be persons unable to return owing to property or security issues, or extremely vulnerable individuals in need of special care.

Asylum-seekers

In 2003, UNHCR expects the trend of an increasing number of asylum-seekers to continue, with the number reaching several hundreds. Though it is likely that many asylum-seekers will stay only temporarily, an increasing number will lodge their applications in Croatia.

Assistance

Returnees

UNHCR will co-ordinate the transportation of returnees and their household belongings in co-operation with relevant organisations and through its implementing partners. Non-food items will be distributed to vulnerable returnees. Limited shelter inputs for self-help repairs and small grants to achieve self-reliance will be provided to the most vulnerable. In addition, a "safety net" of social services and individual support will be maintained for extremely vulnerable individuals. Legal/administrative advice and assistance will be provided to returnees, including court representation, through the network of NGOs providing legal services and their mobile teams, in relation to property rights and restitution, pensions, social benefits, citizenship etc. UNHCR will provide training and financial support to implementing partners and NGOs providing legal services. This will enable them to be more effective in supporting the resolution of property issues, including former tenancy rights, following the amendments in the Law on Areas of Special State Concern and the planned acceleration of the reconstruction programme.

Refugees

Counselling and legal assistance will be available to refugees to assist them through the naturalisation process. Those in collective centres who cannot return to BiH or FRY will benefit from a

small shelter and income-generating programme, to be complemented by Government efforts to find housing.

Asylum-seekers

UNHCR will continue to advise the Government on the needs of asylum-seekers and recognised refugees, and on implementation regulations. UNHCR will continue training activities for the relevant staff in the Ministry of Interior, Administrative Court and other targeted groups, including NGOs. UNHCR will continue to monitor the situation for asylum-seekers and to identify durable solutions for individuals found to be in need of international protection.

Desired Impact

UNHCR programmes will create an environment in which the improved capacity of relevant Ministries and local NGOs will ensure that refugees and returnees, especially the most vulnerable, will continue to have access to assistance and services that help them to achieve their goal of a durable solution. The focus of assistance on legal services, limited self-help housing and self-reliance inputs will aim to anchor returnees, provide local durable solutions for eligible refugees and thereby reduce reliance on humanitarian assistance. UNHCR will

be in a position to further reduce its presence in 2004. The newly established legal and procedural asylum framework will meet international standards, and provide adequate reception facilities and a fair decision-making process.

Organisation and Implementation

Management Structure

Despite its reduced presence in 2003, UNHCR will remain the largest UN Agency in Croatia. In 2003, there will be four UNHCR offices. After further staff reductions during 2003, a total of 34 staff (four internationals and 30 nationals) will manage UNHCR country programme.

Co-ordination

UNHCR will work in close co-ordination with the Office for Displaced Persons, Returnees and Refugees (ODPR) which, in addition to return related issues, deals with repossession and other relevant matters. It is assumed that by the end of 2002, a complete legal aid framework will be fully in place to deal with returns to and from Croatia and property issues. UNHCR will continue to reduce its field presence in 2003 and plans to close field offices in 2004, nevertheless maintaining the same amount of assistance provided through fully qualified implementing partners, mostly local NGOs.

UNHCR will work closely with the OSCE mission to Croatia, particularly in safeguarding the rights of returning minorities and the refugee return framework. In view of the need for integration assistance and economic revitalisation programmes in the areas of return, UNHCR will continue its advocacy role and maintain regular contacts with development agencies and financial institutions.



Bosnian refugees and returnees receive medical care. UNHCR / A. Hollmann

Offices
Zagreb
Knin
Sisak
Osijek

Partners
Government Agencies
Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees
NGOs
Association MI
Centre for Peace
Centre for Disaster Management
Committee for Human Rights
Handicap
Legal Center
<i>Merhamet</i>
Serbian Democratic Forum
<i>Suncokret</i>
Others
Croatian Red Cross

Budget (USD)	
Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,346,377
Community Services	1,320,552
Domestic Needs	397,237
Health	230,000
Legal Assistance	2,138,235
Operational Support (to Agencies)	718,942
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	352,941
Transport / Logistics	364,593
Total Operations	6,868,877
Programme Support	920,306
Total	7,789,183