

CROATIA

IN SHORT



Main Objectives

- Promote and facilitate the voluntary return to and within Croatia of all those who may require UNHCR's assistance, and support their long-term reintegration.
- Promote lasting solutions and safeguard the rights of refugees, returnees and minorities.
- Maintain essential humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons.
- Rehabilitate national institutions, build up their skills and resources, and support community-reconciliation initiatives.

Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2000	Dec. 2000
Refugees*	24,000	20,000
Returnees**	30,000	30,000
IDPs***	60,910	55,000
Total	114,910	105,000

* Includes 13,000 persons who receive UNHCR's assistance.

** Includes 15,000 returnees from within Croatia and 15,000 from abroad (mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia), who receive UNHCR's assistance.

*** Includes 4,000 persons who receive UNHCR's assistance.

Total Requirements
USD 16,880,347





WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

Since the signature of the Dayton Peace Agreement, over 100,000 people are recorded to have returned to and within Croatia. Of this figure, some 68,000 internally displaced persons have returned to and from the Danubian region in Eastern Slavonia. Another 33,000 persons returned to Croatia from abroad, almost 7,000 of them during the first quarter of 1999. However, the vast majority of Croatian Serbs who fled the country have still not returned.

Against a background of continued displacement within the region and Croatia itself, the Government has approved the provision of non-discriminatory civil and social welfare assistance for refugees and internally displaced persons. Through the Programme for the Return and Accommodation of Displaced Persons, Refugees and Resettled Persons, the Government "recognises the inalienable right to return of all Croatian citizens and all categories of persons that can be regarded as refugees in accordance with the definitions of the 1951 Convention". The Government has also enacted its Continuing Programme for the Reconstruction of War-Affected Settlements.

Although hindered by events in Kosovo, the process of organised voluntary return has continued, with on average 30-50 people arriving from Belgrade every week. During the Kosovo crisis the Government of Croatia offered places for 5,000 refugees under the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme. Most of them (those without local family ties) were accommodated in the Gasinci collective centre and have since gone back to Kosovo.

Constraints

The main obstacles to returns to and within Croatia are economic and social problems such as unemployment and gaps in basic infrastructure. Economic development and job creation are key preconditions for larger-scale returns, sustainable reintegration, community reconciliation and general security in the country. In addition, relatively few young persons have returned. More than 60 per cent of the overall returnee population are over 60 years of age and depend largely on national and international humanitarian organisations and assistance programmes.

Another obstacle to return involves the restitution and repair (or complete reconstruction) of private

property. The demand for such assistance is massive. There are worrying practical obstacles, like the need to physically repossess occupied properties and a lack of alternative accommodation. Returnees often face a mass of red tape when seeking documentation on issues such as property claims, health and social welfare benefits and pension rights.

General security is still a concern, albeit on a much reduced scale. Isolated incidents include ethnic harassment, usually related to property, land or employment.



STRATEGY

Refugees

Refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina have for the most part found some form of private accommodation (with Government assistance) within the major urban areas of the country. Others are housed in collective centres often located far from border areas and hence far from their places of origin.

UNHCR will continue to monitor respect for the human rights of the Bosnian refugee population. A priority will be to disseminate information on new legislation related to refugee returns, and at the same time forge ahead with the ongoing information campaign in support of returns to Bosnia. UNHCR will advocate and help facilitate durable solutions for both internally displaced persons and refugees provided the choice is freely expressed by the person concerned. As in previous years, resettlement may remain the only option for a limited number of refugees.

UNHCR will continue to ensure that the Government provides all necessary assistance for the substantial remaining refugee group. Of particular concern to UNHCR are some 500 vulnerable refugees, most of whom need intensive nursing care. They live in specially adapted collective centres. Other refugees continue to benefit from UNHCR's assistance with social services.

UNHCR aims to significantly decrease the provision of material assistance to all refugees by the end of 2000 as it is expected that the Government will have assumed fuller responsibilities by then. However, UNHCR will remain thoroughly engaged in the search for lasting solutions, mainly for those who will stay in the country.



Internally Displaced Persons

These people often live close to their places of origin (i.e. in and around the provincial towns of Osijek and Vinkovci), while a significant number have found temporary accommodation with relatives and friends in Zagreb. The majority of those who returned to Croatia went back to rural areas, mostly to small village communities near Sisak and Karlovac, and further south: to Gospic, Knin, Drnis and Donji Lapac.

The real answer for the remaining displaced persons in Croatia is equal access to legal, civil, educational and social welfare services. So UNHCR's main focus, in the provision of protection and humanitarian assistance, will be the monitoring and advocacy of civil rights. At the same time, information concerning return procedures will continue to be made available.

The most vulnerable individuals are often those largely deprived of state assistance. UNHCR will therefore focus its attention on this particular group by developing a limited programme of social services and activities conducive to greater self-reliance.

It is anticipated that several thousand Croat internally displaced persons will choose to return to the Danubian region during 2000. At the same time, UNHCR hopes that up to 2,500 ethnic Serb displaced persons will return to their places of origin in other parts of the country or choose to locally integrate within the Danubian region. The most vulnerable among this group will receive UNHCR's assistance. At the same time UNHCR is also helping the Government to take over complete responsibility for the remaining IDPs.

Returnees

UNHCR will provide vulnerable returnees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with direct humanitarian assistance upon their return and advocate the issuance of returnee status, which greatly facilitates the process of securing ordinary citizens' entitlements. UNHCR and NGOs will assist them in obtaining documentation (residency, property, pensions, etc.) and promote full access to state services (e.g. social welfare, health and education). UNHCR will continue to urge the Croatian Government not to delay the issuance of returnee status.

In an effort to bridge the gap between the returnees' initial arrival and their medium-term

reintegration, UNHCR will promote community-based income-generating activities so as to make those in need more self-sufficient. Assistance with shelter will usually mean providing self-help building materials. Returnees who are not able to carry out such labour intensive tasks themselves may be eligible to receive direct assistance provided by community teams or local contractors. In order to help re-establish trust and reconciliation within the community, rehabilitation of public infrastructure will in exceptional circumstances be undertaken. Essential non-food items such as stoves, beds, blankets, candles, water containers, kitchen utensils and agricultural tools will be distributed to vulnerable returnees.

Assistance will be delivered in a community-sensitive manner, which means that, apart from addressing immediate needs, UNHCR will support reconciliation by taking care to include vulnerable members of all social groups in its activities. This community-based approach has proven to increase the number of returns, as it helps foster reconciliation and trust at the local level.

All vulnerable returnees will have received humanitarian assistance upon return and will have achieved a minimum level of self-reliance. Without exception, all returnees (organised or spontaneous) will have the option to receive returnee status documentation within two weeks of their return, if they ask for it. On expiration of their returnee status they will enjoy full access to state social welfare services, like any other citizen.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

The Office of the Chief of Mission in Croatia consists of the main office in Zagreb and three field offices, Osijek, Knin and Sisak. Sisak also has a satellite office in Daruvar. The total number of UNHCR staff working in Croatia will be 113 (15 internationals, six Junior Professional Officers and 92 nationals). Efforts have been made to limit the number of staff in the main office in Zagreb while increasing the presence in the field offices.

Coordination

UNHCR will continue to take the lead for the coordination and monitoring of the refugee and returnee programmes, in close cooperation with



the donor community. UNHCR will continue to support, attend and convene coalition forums on returnee monitoring and protection, shelter reconstruction and humanitarian relief aid. UNHCR and the Government jointly chair a Return Coordination Committee that brings together various ministries and international representatives to discuss progress under the Programme for Returns. The Committee submits its findings to the Government Return Commission. These two bodies have to see that the process of return and initial reintegration proceeds effectively. UNHCR also jointly chairs the Return Facilitation Groups (RFG) with the OSCE. These RFGs include participants from various UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs. The RFGs also serve as a conduit to relevant bodies in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to facilitate the strategy for return of refugees.



Offices	
Zagreb	
Daruvar	
Knin	
Osijek	
Sisak	
Partners	
Government Agencies	
Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees	
NGOs	
American Refugee Committee	
Association Mi	
International Rescue Committee	
Centre for Disaster Management	
Centre for Peace	
Committee for Human Rights Karlovac	
Handicap International	
Merhamet	
Suncokret	
Serbian Democratic Forum Karlovac	
Serbian Democratic Forum Daruvar	

Budget (USD)	
Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	3,494,488
Community Services	1,310,000
Domestic Needs/ Household Support	2,210,000
Health/Nutrition	100,000
Income Generation	2,910,000
Legal Assistance	1,140,000
Operational Support (to Agencies)	1,130,000
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	1,780,000
Transport/Logistics	820,000
Total Operations	14,894,488
Programme Support	1,985,859
Total	16,880,347

