

COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN FOR 2002

ALBANIA

Executive Committee Summary

(a) Context and beneficiary population(s)

Political context

Albania is considered as a country with poor levels of social, political and economic development and high levels of crime. The limited capacity of the state to perform some of its vital functions is one of the most serious impediments to Albania's development and social stability during the post communist transition. The Gross Domestic Product of the country fell abruptly in 1997 to the level of 1992. Since then it has increased by 8 percent every year. In 1999, inflation was almost nil and for the first time, there was no increase in the budget deficit. Despite this economic growth, it has not had a substantial impact on the life of the average Albanian family.

Albania has undergone a sequence of major crisis since 1991, which have had significant and lasting after-effects. These include the collapse of the Pyramid Scheme in early 1997, which resulted in general and widespread civil disorder. A direct consequence of this is that arms and unexploded ordnance remain in evidence and in circulation. The 1999 refugee influx was the second major general crisis, when Albania hosted refugees numbering one sixth of its population. These developments are seen in the context of an underdeveloped nation that continues to lose thousands of young and educated people each year to emigration, a phenomenon that has occurred throughout Albania's history.

Albania is not only a source but also a transit country for thousands of migrants from the near and far East, who are in search of safety and economic opportunity in western Europe (some 35,000 persons in 2000). This migratory flow also includes persons trafficked against their will, mainly women and children.

Albania presently hosts a few hundred Kosovar Albanians remaining from the 1999 crisis and very few non-Kosovar refugees and asylum seekers. Since the Minister of Public Order officially endorsed pre-screening as a process in early 2001, increased numbers of asylum claims are expected for 2001 and 2002. Moreover, the eventual signature and implementation of readmission and transit agreements with western European countries could significantly alter the operational environment of UNHCR in Albania.

In response to this situation, UNHCR in 2002 will have a potential beneficiary population consisting of:

- Kosovar refugees, residual caseload from 1999, consisting mostly of extremely vulnerable persons (300)

- Asylum seekers of different nationalities, e.g. Iraqi Kurds, Turkish Kurds, Chinese, Bangladeshi, who are mostly young single males (1,000)
- New arrivals from FYROM, displaced as a result of continuing tensions (up to 10,000)

Security situation

The security situation remains volatile in the north and south of the country due to the continued prevalence of organized (national and international) crime. Armed robbery and traffic accidents are other serious hazards that affect the population at large, including humanitarian workers.

Protection issues

Albania is characterized by a commendable hospitality and an environment conducive for spontaneous local integration, mainly for refugees of Albanian ethnicity. On the other hand, the existing Law on Asylum is implemented only partially. Important features of the law (access to the RSD procedure and social services, freedom of movement) are *de facto* not implemented, which affects all asylum seekers and refugees in Albania.

Due to very limited state resources, UNHCR will provide livelihood assistance to both asylum seekers and refugees in the years to come. Should there be any new refugee influx from neighboring countries, UNHCR's preparedness and immediate response will be crucial.

Integration of refugees other than those of Albanian background has proven to be extremely difficult. UNHCR will continue to explore resettlement opportunities for such caseloads.

UNHCR's role

In ten years of continuous presence in Albania, UNHCR has changed from a low-key liaison office to that of lead agency in an unprecedented refugee emergency. With the near completion of the safe return of the Kosovar Albanians, UNHCR's predominant role will be that of technical advisor to the Government in developing Albania's asylum system, and to providing assistance to asylum seekers and refugees, in partnership with governmental and non-governmental actors.

The refugee crisis of 1999 also opened windows of opportunity for longer-term investment in capacity building of local authorities and organizations. UNHCR shall continue to foster early warning systems established by the Government, and collaborate with local and international NGOs in maintaining preparedness for any eventual new refugee crises.

A variety of European, international and UN organizations are mainstreaming their efforts to build civil society with the aim to establish peace and stability in the region.

UNHCR shall remain the point of reference for local and international actors in the field of asylum and migration related issues, a major concern within and outside the region.

Policy issues

In a context where issues of asylum are intrinsically entangled with issues of migration and trafficking, UNHCR is called upon to act as a catalyst in developing the ‘Three-pronged approach’ developed by UNHCR in 2000. The Office will collaborate with other UN agencies and international organizations to find solutions to all three population groups.

Linkages to other countries within a defined “situation”

The majority of the remaining Kosovar population is comprised of extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) for whom durable solutions are difficult to achieve. Collaboration with UNHCR Kosovo will be important in the context of voluntary repatriation and re-integration of this caseload.

In addition to its involvement with the residual Kosovar caseload, BO Tirana will also strengthen its co-ordination with the UNHCR offices in Rome, Athens, and Ankara to foster common understanding of asylum and migration issues affecting South Eastern Europe, and to develop and align relevant UNHCR policy.

Collaboration with UNHCR Regional Office in Brussels will continue on policy issues and project proposals regarding the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe (Working Table III) and the EU High Level Working Group Plan of Action for Albania.

Capacity and presence of implementing partners

Some of the large international NGOs that had arrived during the Kosovo crisis have re-oriented their activities towards rehabilitation and longer-term development, albeit reducing their scope of activities. These NGOs would likely be able to expand again and collaborate with UNHCR in the event of a new refugee crisis. A number of local NGOs have received training on capacity building from UNHCR and international NGOs, and are now able to deliver assistance to refugees and needy local populace.

Presence of other UN agencies and international organizations

- Common planning and reporting (CCA/UNDAF) with UN sister agencies (WHO, WFP, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank)
- Collaboration with IOM on pre-screening and shelter projects for refugees and trafficked persons, implemented by a common implementing partner, ICMC
- Collaboration with OSCE chairing the working table on asylum and migration of the donors forum “Friends of Albania”
- Co-ordination in contingency planning with WFP, UNICEF, IOM, and the Red Cross movement

(a) Main Programme Goals and Principal Objectives

Name of Theme: Development of the Asylum System	
Main Goal: Recognized refugees and asylum seekers benefit from national legislation conforming to international standards	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Law on Asylum is complemented with necessary implementation instruments • The implementation of the Law on Asylum is effective and efficient • Civil society / rule of law institutions support refugee protection regime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technical assistance in drafting of national legislation provided • RSD procedure of GoA supervised • Law enforcement and border police trained • Material support and know-how to human rights institutions provided • Media and general public are well informed of UNHCR and partner achievements

Name of Beneficiary Population: Kosovar and non-Kosovar refugees	
Main Goal: Durable solutions for refugees are identified and promoted	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All refugees, including those vulnerable, find a durable solution • National legislation for the local integration of refugees exist • GoA and local NGOs are delivering assistance to refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for durable solution established in collaboration with individual ICs • GoA assisted with drafting of relevant regulations • GoA and Local NGOs trained in international protection and project management

Name of Beneficiary Population: Asylum seekers	
Main Goal: Asylum seekers are identified, protected and assisted	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New arrivals are identified and registered speedily and systematically • New arrivals receive legal and material assistance • Emergency preparedness is maintained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border monitoring effected regularly • OFR hearings monitored by UNHCR • OFR lawyers trained and provided with updated country of origin information • OFR assisted in managing reception centre for asylum seekers • Contingency plan constantly updated • Stockpile of NFI is kept for 5,000 beneficiaries