

CROATIA

COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN FOR 2002

Executive Committee Summary

(a) Context and Beneficiary Population(s)

As of 31 March 2001, Croatia hosts 21,910 refugees and cares for 31,862 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). A durable solution still needs to be found for the remaining refugees currently living in FRY and BiH, who fled the country following Operations Flash and Storm in 1995.

The political change in Croatia in January 2000 brought a new government that expressed unequivocal support for minority return. Perceptions and attitudes towards the return issues have changed and have a more positive, solution-oriented approach and higher profile and priority. As a result, at the macro-level the majority of legal obstacles and impediments to return were removed in the course of 2000 and 2001. At the same time, security and rule of law in areas of return continued to improve and are no longer a major concern. However, local political resistance to minority return is still being witnessed in many parts of the country.

On the economic front, the situation remains the same. Although Croatia's economy is showing signs of recovery, unemployment is expected to continue to grow in 2001. Major reforms are expected to be passed (fiscal, labour law, social security, pension, decentralisation etc.) but are unlikely to improve the situation in the short to medium-term. The lack of economic opportunities is particularly affecting return areas where the already poor pre-war economic structure collapsed, leaving some areas with an unemployment rate as high as 90%. The occurrence of poverty will continue to be particularly high among the elderly as "25% do not receive a pension while 50% receive benefits lower than poverty line" (World Bank Poverty Report). This significantly influences the sustainability of returns as well as prospect for local integration for Bosnian refugees

While positive changes were made in the legislation and procedures in 2000, property repossession, the situation of former tenancy right holders and former residents with no records with the Ministry of Interior, as well as fairly complicated procedures and the lack of funds for housing reconstruction, continue to affect the return of refugees from FRY and BiH. The increasing number of arrests of returnees on war-crimes charges, although low in relation to total returns, has had a significant negative impact on the decision to return of those refugees remaining in FRY and BiH. Most of these issues are expected to be resolved in the next two years.

Despite the constraints, positive developments have led to increased refugee returns in 2000 and early 2001. It is expected that returns will continue at the same pace throughout 2001 and in most of 2002, with a higher proportion of young families returning. Most of those who wish to return will likely have done so by the end of 2002.

Regarding asylum seekers and refugees, the country lacks an operational legislative framework. However, a law is currently pending submission to Parliament and is expected to be voted on in 2001. With the new Law, training of government authorities and close monitoring of the application of the procedures will be required to ensure effective implementation. In addition, there are currently no opportunities for refugees to locally integrate under the current legislation, as their economic, health and education rights are restricted. Mechanisms to facilitate the local integration of refugees who wish to do so still need to be found.

In 2002, the main goals of UNHCR will be to ensure that the legislative framework for asylum seekers and refugees is fully and effectively implemented, promote and facilitate sustainable voluntary returns from FRY and BiH and identify and facilitate durable solutions for the remaining refugees. The care for the IDPs will continue to be coordinated by the Croatian government. 2002 will likely be the last year of UNHCR active involvement and facilitation of returns from FRY and BiH, as a fully effective framework for return is expected to be in place at year-end. The majority of remaining Croatian refugees in countries of asylum are expected to opt for local settlement. Similarly, it is foreseen, even though harsh economic conditions are expected to remain, that most of the Bosnian refugees in the country will have achieved a durable solution related to their status by the end of 2002.

To achieve these goals, UNHCR will advocate for and advise the government on changes needed to the legislation and/or procedures pertaining to minority return and asylum seekers/refugees and will closely monitor the situation of returnees and refugees. With the prioritisation of resources and the growing capacity of local actors and other donors, the UNHCR assistance programme will focus on ensuring that the rights of refugees and returnees are respected through legal assistance and advocacy activities. The basic material requirements of the most vulnerable returnees and refugees will also be met. Limited support will continue to be extended to other vulnerable persons in returnee areas, with a view to contribute to reconciliation. These activities will be implemented by local NGOs, whose capacity has been strengthened over the years. In relation to asylum seekers and refugees' advocacy and legal assistance, a local NGO will be identified and provided with capacity building and technical assistance.

In addition, UNHCR will continue to play an important co-ordination role for all aspects of returnee and refugees assistance, including projects financed bilaterally and under the Stability Pact Initiative. UNHCR will continue to advocate for targeted development and reconstruction assistance with institutions such as World Bank and Council of Europe.

(b) Selected Programme Goals and Objectives

During the year 2002, UNHCR will continue with the project implementation that will target the following beneficiary populations:

- Asylum seekers;
- Returnees from FRY and BiH;
- Refugees from Bosnia and FRY.

Name of beneficiary Population/Theme: Asylum-seekers	
Main Goal(s): Asylum seekers and refugees enjoy a level of protection in Croatia conforming to international standards	
Principal Objectives	Related Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asylum seekers have access and benefit from fair RSD procedures • Asylum seekers and refugees benefit from enhanced capacity of NGOs in protection • Public and civil society understand and show compassion for refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RSD framework and procedures in place including second instance appeal; • Training for Government officials responsible for RSD; • Members of the NGO network are trained on asylum and refugee issues • NGO trained in RSD monitoring, legal assistance to refugees • Legal representation of asylum seekers provided through NGO • Public awareness through media • Link with civil society institutions, university reinforced

Name of beneficiary Population/Theme : Returnees	
Goal(s): Promote and facilitate the return and integration of Croatian refugees currently in FRY and BiH	
Objectives	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation and procedures pertaining to return fully conducive to return and returnee rights and entitlements timely realised allowing UNHCR to withdraw its involvement by end 2002; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy and advice to Government on changes required in legislation and procedures provided • implementation of procedures/ legislation monitored particularly arrests on war-crime charges • Legal/administrative assistance provided including court representation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Croatian refugees in FRY and BiH are sufficiently informed of situation in Croatia and of their rights to take informed decision; • Vulnerable returnees return in safety and dignity and receive immediate assistance and social support allowing reintegration. • Refugees return made sustainable through donors support to economic revitalisation and reconstruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information campaigns in asylum country and Go-and-see visits to Croatia organised • Domestic items, tools and seed kits distributed to vulnerable • Isolated extremely vulnerable cases, regularly visited and supported • Small grants given to vulnerable cases to achieve self-reliance in meeting basic needs • Stability Pact initiative supported through co-ordination • Donors briefed and sensitised to returnee needs
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Beneficiary Population / Theme: Refugees	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal(s): To provide protection and promote/facilitate durable solutions for refugees originating from FRY and BiH 	
Objectives	Outputs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring access to protection and assistance pending durable solution for the most vulnerable refugees • Repatriation is promoted and facilitated as preferred solution • Government adopts policies for the local integration of refugees and vulnerable refugees are assisted with self-reliance activities • Resettlement is implemented as durable solution when neither 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugees are provided access to legal assistance and basic social services • Public information and awareness campaigns; go and see visits. • Liaison and legal advice provided regarding reconstruction/property repossession issues and other • Negotiations for the naturalisation of refugees • Refugees are assisted to acquire rights as per result of negotiations through legal assistance and court representation • vulnerable cases are identified and strategy for self-reliance adopted through case management approach • Very vulnerable refugees and those with special protection needs who may be in

repatriation nor local integration possible	need of resettlement are identified and submitted for resettlement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liaison is maintained with HQs, FRY and BiH offices to ensure harmonisation of policies and criteria at regional level
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