

Croatia

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

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 asylum-seekers, refugees, returnees and minorities; maintain essential humanitarian assistance for the most vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); rehabilitate national institutions, build up their skills and resources, and support community reconciliation initiatives.

Impact

- Over 42,000 refugees and IDPs returned to their pre-war homes, nearly 28,000 of them from abroad (mostly from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina), the remainder having been internally displaced within Croatia.
- A survey of the sustainability of returns revealed that 93 per cent of the returnees intended to stay in Croatia, 77 per cent believed that they were better off in Croatia than in their previous country of asylum, while 64 per cent felt that their situation had improved since their return.
- Some 36,000 returnees received legal advice, including 10,000 who received assistance with administrative and court procedures.
- By the end of 2000, the number of refugees in Croatia had fallen by 21 per cent. A significant part of this decrease can be attributed to UNHCR's promotion and facilitation of voluntary repatriation.



Main Refugee Origin/Type of Population	Persons of Concern			
	Total in Country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent Female	Per cent under 18
Croatia (IDPs)	34,100	-	53	23
Bosnia and Herzegovina (Refugees)	20,900	20,900	60	16
Croatia (Returnees)	20,700	6,200	55	21
Croatia (Returned IDPs)	15,500	-	53	23
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Refugees)	1,500	1,500	42	35

Income and Expenditure (USD)				
Annual Programme Budget				
Revised Budget	Income from Contributions ¹	Other Funds Available ²	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
13,997,322	12,488,739	1,102,639	13,591,378	13,578,727

¹Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

²Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

- A total of 2,620 families received agricultural grants, consisting of seeds, livestock and machinery, and roughly 22,000 other people benefited indirectly from the scheme.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

The year 2000 saw significant developments in Croatia's gradual transformation into a fully democratic society. Presidential and parliamentary elections held in January brought to power a new political coalition that invited Croatian refugees to repatriate from abroad. Security within the country improved to the extent that it is no longer a major concern, although landmines and unexploded ordnance are still a danger in certain areas. During the first half of the year, the Government removed most of the discriminatory elements of legislation adversely affecting the return of IDPs within the country and refugees from abroad, pertaining mainly to reconstruction assistance and property.

Despite a few remaining obstacles to sustainable return, UNHCR was able to work in a more positive political environment, and therefore to achieve its primary objective of facilitating the return and integration of refugees and IDPs. There were 56 per cent more minority returns than in 1999, and more young families came back, although 62 per cent of returnees were over 50 years old, with an average family size of 2.5 (compared to a pre-war average of 3.6).

At the beginning of 2000, Croatia hosted over 28,000 refugees: some 25,000 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and more than 3,000 from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Most refugees lived in private accommodation, often occupying the vacant houses of ethnic Serb Croatian refugees who were abroad. Some 4,000 vulnerable refugees remained in Government-run collective centres. Durable solutions were sought for them as a matter of urgency. More than 1,500 repatriations were recorded. Three times as many returns to Bosnia were registered in 2000 than in 1999 (although the absolute numbers remained modest) and UNHCR directly assisted the return of 638 Bosnians, including 274 from collective centres.

In 2000, there were still over 49,000 IDPs in Croatia; most of them were located in eastern Slavonia and included 4,012 ethnic Serbs. UNHCR actively sought solutions for this group. Some 1,600 of them received legal assistance, mainly in relation to property issues. In addition, 5,000 vulnerable IDPs received basic relief items and social support. By the end of the year, the overall number of IDPs had decreased by 21 per cent.

Constraints

A number of obstacles continued to hinder the return and the sustainable reintegration of returnees. The issue

of property restitution was still not addressed appropriately and legislative reform remained incomplete. Those who repossessed their homes did so mainly through mediation. To assess the scope of the problem of occupied property and to find other possible solutions, a survey into properties allocated under earlier legislation will be undertaken early in 2001. Although legislation related to reconstruction was changed during the year to remove discriminatory elements, its implementation has been hampered by limited funds, unclear procedures and other impediments at local government level, despite promising efforts to overcome them. As 57 per cent of minority returnees had their property destroyed or damaged and 9.5 per cent had their property occupied by others, property issues will remain one of the main obstacles to reintegration.

Funding

A reduced level of funding compelled UNHCR to focus its material assistance programme on meeting the needs of the most vulnerable among its beneficiaries. At the same time, UNHCR continued to advise and assist the Government of Croatia and donor countries interested in financing return and reintegration projects within the framework of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Donors have increasingly recognised the importance of an integrated approach to sustainable return. Projects were therefore developed to provide returnees with a comprehensive package that included shelter assistance, basic relief items and agricultural or other means of generating an income. Unfortunately, these projects covered only a small fraction of existing needs.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

UNHCR's legal assistance programme was implemented by a network of legal aid NGOs. These gave legal advice and information (frequently regarding property rights) to 36,000 returnees, of whom 10,000 also received assistance with administrative and judicial procedures. These services contributed to the protection of minority rights in general and to the integration of returnees in Croatia. In addition, UNHCR actively supported the drafting of the new national law on asylum and its comments were incorporated into the draft law, which is expected to be passed in late 2001.

UNHCR continued to monitor the situation of refugees, and to promote voluntary repatriation through its field offices and network of legal aid NGOs. In cooperation with IOM and with various NGOs operating

in Croatia, UNHCR facilitated the voluntary repatriation to Bosnia and Herzegovina of 638 individuals, including refugees from collective centres on the Dalmatian coast. Information campaigns were organised to disseminate information relating to conditions of return, as well as changes in relevant laws and their implementation. Go-and-see visits allowed refugees to see conditions first-hand inside Bosnia and Herzegovina. Other activities included: the provision of legal and other assistance to facilitate the issuance of documents and the lodging of claims to rights and entitlements, as well as housing assessments, to ascertain the availability of host families and reconstruction assistance. UNHCR also continued to promote the repatriation of Kosovo Albanian refugees, in close co-ordination with its office in Kosovo. A total of 970 refugees were proposed for resettlement in third countries and 627 refugees were actually resettled.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: Depending on an initial assessment of needs, community services staff provided assistance and referred cases to other agencies or colleagues (for shelter repair or reconstruction, health, income generation activities or legal assistance). Mobile teams and local volunteer networks undertook community services, such as providing information, counselling and facilitating the delivery of documents. Eighty per cent of assisted returnees were minority returnees, and 70 per cent were over 60 years old; 6,685 people were classified as extremely vulnerable cases - mainly isolated elderly and disabled persons in

poor health and with only limited support from the Government, family and community. Each beneficiary was visited 53 times on average.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: A total of 7,800 vulnerable returnees received basic relief items procured by UNHCR. Those who came in UNHCR convoys received the items upon arrival or within one week, while others received theirs within two weeks. UNHCR distributed 5,400 stoves, 3,333 kitchen sets, 3,848 beds, 9,933 mattresses, 18,443 blankets, 4,585 welcome home parcels, 9,930 hygiene and toiletry kits, 3,120 sanitary towels, 8,200 school sets, 2,916 tool sets and 11,950 vegetable seed kits. Distribution was mainly carried out by a local NGO, as well as other agencies implementing community services activities. This programme was complemented with food packages and additional relief items financed by other donors and distributed through the same network. As many returnees came back to damaged houses, household support also included clearing of rubble and minor and emergency repairs. Some 49,500 returnees (including 7,500 who did not benefit from any assistance in 1999) benefited from assistance in this sector, as did 18,050 vulnerable people in the host community.

Health/Nutrition: As the Government of Croatia offers health care only to recognised refugees, a programme implemented by an NGO provided support for people who did not fall into this category. Funds for relatively urgent medical care were made available for 1,842 patients. Requests for intervention were submitted by the Croatian Office for Displaced Persons and



Refugees and, within a week, a committee composed of three doctors and staff from UNHCR offices took decisions on the validity of the requests and the payment for health services.

Income Generation: UNHCR gave agricultural grants in kind to 2,620 families. The grants consisted of seeds, livestock and machinery. Between 50 and 70 per cent of their value had to be repaid by providing goods or services for vulnerable members of the community. In this way, 22,000 other people benefited indirectly from the scheme. In eastern Slavonia, 68 per cent of the direct beneficiaries were ethnic Croats, 10 per cent Serbs and 14 per cent Hungarians. In western Slavonia, where most of the minority returns took place, the majority of the direct beneficiaries belonged to minorities. An elected multi-ethnic working group (with women well represented) enabled the community to participate actively in the prioritisation of needs, the identification of beneficiaries and the design of the in-kind repayment mechanism.

Legal Assistance: Eight implementing partners were involved in providing legal assistance to returnees and potential returnees. Between five and ten per cent of cases concerned legal assistance to other members of the community. The legal assistance programme aimed at facilitating the return and integration of returnees and promoting the rights of minorities and the rule of law. Outreach workers and legal advisers provided information and advice to returnees, as well as help with administrative procedures and court representation. In all, 36,000 returnees received legal assistance through the programme (42,000 cases were dealt with, as some beneficiaries had multiple problems). Roughly half the cases were related to property rights and reconstruction. The remainder concerned, in diminishing order of prevalence: pensions, legal issues (citizenship and documentation) and, finally, a small handful of cases involving violence, threats or criminal proceedings against returnees.

Operational Support (to Agencies): In addition to supporting the activities of its implementing partners, UNHCR maintained and broadened its regular contacts with the national and international media in Croatia. Joint press briefings were organised periodically with the OSCE. UNHCR organised several visits to the areas of return for local and international journalists as part of its efforts to promote voluntary repatriation.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: More than 1,000 families (over 3,000 individuals) were helped to undertake emergency repairs to their homes in order to ensure that at least one room was weather-proofed for winter conditions and that they had electricity and water supplies. This pro-

gramme was implemented by an international NGO, which received applications, updated a database of potential beneficiaries and conducted house assessments. In eastern Slavonia, UNHCR supported a programme to clean and rehabilitate wells, which included biological and chemical quality tests. This improved living conditions for 2,380 returnee households. Elsewhere in Croatia, an additional 108 wells were cleaned or rehabilitated.

Transport/Logistics: Activities under this sector included the warehousing and distribution of basic relief items such as stoves, beds, mattresses and plastic sheeting. In addition, 6,233 repatriating refugees travelled in organised convoys under UNHCR auspices. UNHCR facilitated customs clearance of their belongings and transported them to their home or to their accommodation with a host family. The majority of those assisted with transport were elderly returnees. Regular vehicle maintenance and fuel costs for necessary activities were covered.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

In 2000, UNHCR maintained its main office in Zagreb, supported by offices in Daruvar, Knin, Osijek and Sisak. The programme was administered by a total of 105 staff, of whom 20 were international and 85 national staff.

Working with Others

UNHCR worked with 14 implementing partners in Croatia: one governmental body, four international NGOs, eight local NGOs and the Croatian Red Cross. In addition, UNHCR worked closely with the OSCE on legal issues, on issues affecting cross-border returns and on a range of monitoring and capacity-building activities. Bilateral funding also enabled UNHCR's implementing partners to carry out additional, complementary activities.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

Overall, UNHCR's objective of promoting and facilitating two-way returns was achieved, as many of the obstacles to return were removed and the pace of returns to and from Croatia increased. However, despite very good results across the board in terms of the sustainability of returns (93 per cent of returnees stated their intention to stay in Croatia), surveys revealed a less positive view of the sustainability of returns in some areas. One

survey found, for example, that 25 per cent of registered returnees in Sisak had already given up and gone back to their former country of asylum.

Returnees still face many obstacles, chiefly the lack of employment and economic opportunities. There were few medium-term economic revitalisation projects in return areas, or long-term development projects. Unless all parties make a major concerted effort, the gap between the provision of humanitarian assistance and development will widen.

In general, UNHCR's activities were relevant, effectively implemented and had a positive impact on recipients. UNHCR was, however, unable to reach all those in need, largely because of budget cuts to the assistance programme (and despite the mitigating effect of related activities implemented and funded by others). Reductions in UNHCR's programme mostly affected repairs to shelter and agricultural grants.

Offices

Zagreb – Daruvar – Knin – Osijek – Sisak

Partners

Government Agencies

Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees

NGOs

American Refugee Committee

Caritas

Catholic Relief Services

Centre for Disaster Management

Centre for Peace

Committee for Human Rights

Handicap International

International Rescue Committee

Merhamet

Association Mi

Serbian Democratic Forum

Suncokret

Other

Croatian Red Cross

Financial Report (USD)				
Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects		Prior Years' Projects	
		notes		notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	3,083,027		114,442	
Community Services	1,576,777		592,049	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	854,732		197,414	
Food	0		33,181	
Health / Nutrition	379,428		133,862	
Income Generation	1,669,018		614,697	
Legal Assistance	886,368		307,838	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	417,518		323,422	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	1,033,760		1,203,964	
Transport / Logistics	569,653		347,023	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	1,212,329		(3,660,093)	
Sub-total Operational	11,682,610		207,799	
Programme Support	1,642,634		51,398	
Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries	13,325,244	(3)	259,197	(6)
Unliquidated Obligations	253,483	(3)	0	
Total	13,578,727	(1) (3)	259,197	
Instalments with Implementing Partners				
Payments Made	7,634,977		68,260	
Reporting Received	6,422,648		3,728,353	
Balance	1,212,329		(3,660,093)	
Outstanding 1 January	0		3,830,750	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		154,382	
Currency Adjustment	0		0	
Outstanding 31 December	1,212,329		16,275	
Unliquidated Obligations				
Outstanding 1 January	0		371,045	(6)
New Obligations	13,578,727	(1)	0	
Disbursements	13,325,244	(3)	259,197	(6)
Cancellations	0		111,848	(6)
Outstanding 31 December	253,483	(3)	0	

Figures which cross reference to Accounts: (1) Annex to Statement 1 – (3) Schedule 3 – (6) Schedule 6