

Croatia



Main Objectives

Promote and facilitate the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their former homes in Croatia and support the integration of vulnerable returnees into their communities; assist refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) to repatriate voluntarily to their homes; provide essential humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs and safeguard the rights of refugees, returnees and minorities through monitoring and intervention with the authorities.

Impact

- In 2001, 11,867 registered refugees returned to Croatia, mainly from the Federal Republic of

Yugoslavia (FRY), bringing to 68,891 the total for minority returns to Croatia since 1996. In 2001, the number of refugees and IDPs in Croatia fell by 25 per cent to 20,976 refugees and 23,402 IDPs.

- The number of asylum-seekers from outside the region rose from 23 in 2000 to 85 in 2001. All asylum applications and appeals rejected by the Government have been on procedural grounds, not on the merits of the case.
- Following a mass information campaign on the repossession of damaged houses, 17,000 new reconstruction applications were received from refugees and returnees in FRY alone by the 31 December 2001 deadline.
- UNHCR financed a Governmental survey of occupied property allocated under previous

legislation. It found that of approximately 18,000 temporarily allocated properties, some 9,000 have yet to be returned to their owners. Other properties need substantial improvements before their rightful owners can repossess them.

Working Environment

The Context

As a result of political changes in early 2000, UNHCR enjoyed a constructive co-operation and partnership with the Croatian Government in 2001. Increased attention was paid to the issue of refugee returns to and from Croatia. Although the majority of refugees would like to integrate in Croatia, a substantial minority wish to return to their original homes but face problems of occupied property, lack of reconstruction assistance, poor economic prospects, and, in certain areas, poor security and harassment. A positive development in 2001 was the Government's commitment to return all private properties allocated for temporary use to their original owners by the end of 2002.

Local elections held in May further strengthened the position of the Government coalition, despite significant overall gains by the opposition. These elections enabled minorities to be represented in municipal and county governments.

A housing development study in Croatia, FRY and BiH was commissioned by the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe to help sensitise donors to this particular need. The mandate of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was extended for another year, but with a reduced presence.

Constraints

One of the main obstacles to return to Croatia remains the slow process of property restitution. Despite an increased commitment at the state level, implementation remains the responsibility of municipal housing committees. These committees have often proven to be ill-equipped and/or unwilling to deal with restitution claims and the enforcement of eviction orders.

Following recommendations by the international community, policies and legislation on pensions, welfare, and the civil service were further aligned with comparable European and international practices. Nevertheless, many returnees still experienced problems with access to public services.

Macro-economic indicators showed a positive trend with an estimated year end growth rate of 4.2 per cent. However, unemployment continued to rise due to restructuring and is particularly high in return areas.

Persons of Concern				
Main Origin/ Type of Population	Total in Country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent Female	Per cent under 18
Croatia (IDPs)	23,400	-	53	20
Bosnia and Herzegovina (Refugees)	20,400	20,400	60	17
Returnees (from FRY)	10,600	8,200	50	-
FRY (Refugees)	1,400	1,400	41	33
Returnees (from Bosnia and Herzegovina)	1,300	920	43	-

Income and Expenditure (USD) Annual Programme Budget				
Revised Budget	Income from Contributions ¹	Other Funds Available ²	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
11,365,320	1,467,162	9,638,915	11,106,077	11,100,566

¹ Includes income from contributions restricted at the country level.

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

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

Funding

Reduced overall funding compelled UNHCR to target those most in need. During 2001, UNHCR operations in Croatia were reduced by some 15 per cent. UNHCR assisted the Government in its efforts to secure funding through the Stability Pact.

Achievements and Impact

Protection and Solutions

There were several important developments in the area of

asylum. One of them was the allocation by the European Commission of substantial resources from the European Community Assistance for Reconstruction and Development in South-Eastern Europe (CARDS) for the development of asylum and migration systems. These resources were for Justice and Home Affairs as defined within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement concluded between the EU and Croatia in December 2001. UNHCR assisted the EU in

refugees opted for repatriation, i.e. a 40 per cent increase on 2000. In 2001, the refugee caseload decreased by 11 per cent, or approximately 2,400 persons, through de-registration, return and local integration.

The procedure for the return of persons without travel documents was streamlined, with clearance issued fairly rapidly. Following an initiative by UNHCR and Croatian NGOs, the obligatory property check was de-linked from the return clearance process. One group of people still in difficulty was the so-called "No MOI record" cases, former habitual residents left in an invidious situation by the Croatian Ministry of Interior, which refused them entry on the grounds that they lacked a current residence permit. After discussions with the Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees (ODPR) and the MOI, return clearance was issued for a large number of cases, facilitating actual return. However, many "No-MOI" returnees still encounter serious difficulties regaining their status of "former habitual residence" upon return to Croatia. The Croatian Government also increased the 2001



Ethnic Serb returnees in front of their reconstructed house in Knin region.
UNHCR / V. Petkovic

drafting the programme for asylum and aims to maintain close co-operation in its implementation. Another development was the launching of the Stability Pact Initiative on Asylum and Migration. The Country Team for Croatia, composed of Germany, Austria and Slovenia, in co-operation with UNHCR, is now finalising the National Action Plan (NAP). A third important development in the area of asylum was UNHCR's increased activities in capacity and institution-building, with a special training programme for future adjudicators in the asylum branch of the Ministry of Interior.

UNHCR continued to resettle mainly Bosnian refugees. In 2001, some 1,330 Bosnian refugees approached UNHCR to apply for resettlement. Of these applications 568 cases were retained for further consideration. During the reporting period, 642 persons departed from Croatia. In total, 1,514

state budget for reconstruction to ensure that all decisions issued before 31 May 2001 be included in the 2001/2002 programme. However, this move affected only those few Croatian Serb returnees who received decisions before the specified date.

UNHCR facilitated bilateral negotiations between Croatia and FRY as well as Croatia and BiH on refugee return issues. One unresolved issue between Croatia and FRY is the de-registration in FRY of refugees returning to Croatia. Currently there are approximately 30,000 persons who are registered in both countries.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: In addition to assessing needs of vulnerable families and distributing relief, the network of 18 mobile teams and 110 volunteers

provided various services and referred cases to income generation and reconstruction programmes or governmental services. Community workers collected information and helped beneficiaries access social services and obtain vital documents such as identity cards or citizenship certificates.

Domestic Need/Household Support: The rationale behind UNHCR's material assistance was the achievement of sustainable return. A total of 3,444 stoves, 11,488 beds, 9,987 mattresses, 18,288 blankets, 2,483 kitchen sets and 8,555 hygiene parcels were distributed to some 12,000 beneficiaries.

Health/Nutrition: Since recognised refugees are entitled only to primary care or, in emergencies, secondary care, a health fund was established to help refugees access a broader range of non-emergency healthcare, and to assist asylum-seekers. The fund was managed by the Centre for Disaster Management (CDM). In 2001, 1,860 applications for assistance were reviewed by a panel of CDM doctors.

Income Generation: Self-reliance inputs such as seed and fertiliser were distributed to vulnerable families. Poultry and vegetable seeds were donated to those unable to engage in agricultural activity on a larger scale. Returning families received tractor attachments, grain mills and livestock. The primary beneficiary family was obliged to repay 50 to 75 per cent of the purchase value of the grant through services to the most vulnerable in the community. Agricultural grants of seed, livestock and machinery were given to 2,606 needy families.

Legal Assistance: Legal assistance was provided through a network of eight NGOs. In 2001, approximately 44,000 persons received legal advice and assistance on administrative procedures, documents, rights and benefits. Overall, 46 per cent of cases related to property, 27 per cent to benefits and employment rights, 25 per cent to status rights, and only 0.2 per cent to intimidation and harassment.

Operational Support: UNHCR continued to build local NGO capacity through direct training, technical and logistical support. Donors and organisations were successfully encouraged to develop partnerships with local NGOs for the implementation of their activities.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: The shelter programme implemented by NGOs benefited 872 families in the Knin and Sisak areas. In addition, UNHCR supported major repairs in four collective centres through the Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees. Cleaning of wells continued throughout 2001, with 2,619 wells rehabilitated.

Transport Logistics: During 2001, 2,353 refugees were provided with transport assistance to return to Croatia. Convoys were regularly organised from FRY to transport refugees and their belongings to transit hubs in Sisak and Knin from where refugees were taken to their homes or host families with the assistance of NGO partners.

Organisation and Implementation

Management

At the end of 2001, staffing included 83 posts (11 international and 72 national). UNHCR maintained four offices in Croatia. Half of the posts in Croatia were based in the Field Offices. The structure of each office was similar and included an executive or head of office as well as protection, durable solutions, programme and administration functions. The reduction in staffing levels continued.

Working with Others

UNHCR worked with 14 Implementing Partners in 2001: one governmental body, ten local NGOs and three international NGOs. UNHCR worked closely with the OSCE, the Government, Embassies and donors on return issues. Close co-operation was maintained with IOM on organised return to BiH and resettlement to third countries. NGOs were funded to enable them to deliver complementary assistance programmes.

Overall Assessment

To a large extent, UNHCR achieved its objectives in 2001, although progress on property repossession and reconstruction was slower than anticipated. Little progress was achieved on asylum issues.

Although fewer refugees are known to have returned to Croatia during the year than in previous years, many refugees seemed to be in the process of returning, in view of the large number who are commuting and the high number of applications for reconstruction assistance. By contrast, there was a significant increase in return to BiH, including refugees living in collective centres.

There was increased awareness within the Croatian Government and among the international community of the need for activities to support the socio-economic integration of returnees and the development of return areas. However, projects to revitalise the economy remained limited.

UNHCR continued to be the main source of information and advice on refugee and returnee issues and was able to influence bilateral assistance programming and implementation. Various groups, individuals and the media regularly contacted UNHCR for information and opinions. Media coverage of returnee and refugee issues increased and was generally more sympathetic to the cause of refugees and returnees.

In 2002 and 2003, UNHCR will continue to reduce its field presence as a consequence of the improved security situation, improved procedures for return, progress in addressing property issues and the increased capacity of NGOs. During these two years, UNHCR will continue to develop implementing partners' capacity to monitor the situation and address individual cases. Social and legal assistance for returnees and refugees in return areas will continue to be required beyond 2002 to anchor the return and local integration processes. While post-Dayton activities will decrease, the establishment of an asylum framework will require increased attention and resources.

Offices

Zagreb

Knin

Osijek

Sisak

Partners

Government Agency

Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees

NGOs

American Refugee Committee

Association Mi

Caritas

Catholic Relief Services

Center for Peace

Committee for Human Rights Karlovac

Handicap

International Rescue Committee

Merhamet

Serbian Democratic Forum

Suncokret

Other

Croatian Red Cross

UNVs

Financial Report (USD)				
Expenditure Breakdown	Annual Programme Budget		Annual Programme Budget	
	Current Year's Projects	notes	Prior Years' Projects	notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	2,904,447		85,740	
Community Services	579,576		328,806	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	747,245		109,722	
Food	0		7,658	
Health / Nutrition	128,639		46,827	
Income Generation	582,667		332,478	
Legal Assistance	501,719		135,363	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	777,841		83,987	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	410,440		181,309	
Transport / Logistics	272,600		96,891	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	2,805,342		(1,210,170)	
Sub-total Operational	9,710,516		198,611	
Programme Support	1,320,617		7,571	
Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries	11,031,133	(3)	206,182	(5)
Unliquidated Obligations	69,433	(3)	0	
TOTAL	11,100,566	(1) (3)	206,182	

Instalments with Implementing Partners

Payments Made	5,799,208		15,936	
Reporting Received	2,993,866		1,226,106	
Balance	2,805,342		(1,210,170)	
Outstanding 1st January	0		1,228,605	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		14,117	
Currency Adjustment	0		0	
Outstanding 31 December	2,805,342		4,318	

Unliquidated Obligations

Outstanding 1st January	0		253,483	(5)
New Obligations	11,100,566	(1)	0	
Disbursements	11,031,133	(3)	206,182	(5)
Cancellations	0		47,301	(5)
Outstanding 31 December	69,433	(3)	0	(5)

Figures which cross reference to Accounts:

- (1) Annex to Statement 1
- (3) Schedule 3
- (5) Schedule 5