

COUNTRY OPERATION

ALBANIA

AT A GLANCE

Main Objectives and Activities

Protect and assist the almost 435,000 refugees who arrived from Kosovo between late March and June (in addition to the 20,000 already in the country since 1998) by providing food, water, transport, logistics, shelter and sanitation; facilitate voluntary repatriation of refugees to their homes in Kosovo; and help the Government develop structures and procedures to implement the asylum law passed in December 1998.

Impact

- The basic needs of the refugees were met thanks to the co-ordinated efforts of UNHCR and numerous other bodies, including bilateral actors and initiatives, as well as the activities of NATO's Albania Force (AFOR). Morbidity and mortality rates were far lower than could have been anticipated.
- The overall security of the refugees was assured, despite the notoriously difficult security situation.
- The rehabilitation of former refugee sites and host communities during the last five months of the year restored stability to many local communities.
- For the Albanian authorities, and the general population, hosting the refugees turned out to be a positive experience. One result - a stronger commitment to the application of international protection instruments and human rights standards - also served to improve the country's image on the world stage.

Persons of Concern

MAIN REFUGEE ORIGIN/ TYPE OF POPULATION	TOTAL IN COUNTRY	OF WHICH: UNHCR-ASSISTED	PER CENT FEMALE	PER CENT < 18
Yugoslavia, FR*	3,900	3,900	50.8	42.6
Asylum-seekers	20	20	10	20

* During 1999, Albania received 435,000 refugees, mainly from Kosovo, almost all of whom returned before the end of the year.



Income and Expenditure - SP Activities (USD)

WORKING BUDGET	INCOME FROM CONTRIBUTIONS*	OTHER FUNDS AVAILABLE**	TOTAL FUNDS AVAILABLE	TOTAL EXPENDITURE
70,025,728	18,787,721	45,654,914	64,442,635	63,741,388

* Includes contributions earmarked for the Special Operation in South-Eastern Europe.

** Includes opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

The Context

In June 1998, Albania received a first wave of refugees from Kosovo into its northern border area with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Yugoslavia). The area was not safe: it served as a support base for the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) and was rife with banditry. During the weekend of 27-28 March 1999, tens of thousands of refugees from Kosovo entered northern Albania. Then within the next two weeks two-thirds of this new wave of almost 435,000 flooded across the border. Few of the refugees carried even the most basic necessities for survival; many clung desperately to tractors and vehicles, hoping they would soon be able to turn back and drive home. An additional 1,382 refugees were transferred to camps in Albania from FYR Macedonia under the Humanitarian Evacuation Programme (HEP).

Albania maintained an open-door policy towards the refugees and appealed for urgent international assistance. The country soon witnessed a huge collaborative relief effort by UN agencies, various national and intergovernmental agencies, nearly 200 international NGOs and thousands of NATO troops. With UNHCR funding, the authorities were able to mobilise people, transport and resources to provide food during the early weeks of the emergency, using public buildings for shelter and as distribution points. Under the AFOR umbrella, NATO troops built camps and provided facilities for over 50,000 refugees. Bilateral efforts also greatly augmented shelter capacity. By 5 April, refugees were present in all 12 of Albania's prefectures. Local families hosted the vast majority of the refugee population, while the remainder was put up in camps, communal facilities and other accommodation. Just prior to large-scale repatriation in June 1999, the number of occupied shelter sites rose to 278, with a further 54 under construction.

Constraints

Key constraints included the relative inexperience of government authorities in refugee matters, and limited resources. Fragmented government control resulted in non-implementation in the prefectures of centrally agreed policies. UNHCR was slow to increase its staffing levels rapidly enough to play an effective co-ordination role throughout the country from the very outset of the emergency. But it was an effective co-ordinator in the north, and its performance elsewhere soon improved. In an unusually direct opera-

tional approach, donors often had camps established by national military or civil defence units, before handing them over to international NGOs for day-to-day management. The dispersal of refugees in close to 300 sites complicated co-ordination with all those involved in the relief effort. Standards of assistance varied considerably. Complicating matters, early chaos and congestion at the airport resulted in many civilian humanitarian aid flights being physically unable to land. Bottlenecks at the ports led to large quantities of relief items being held up for days or even weeks. Security was a significant problem, particularly in the north.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

Protection and Solutions

UNHCR worked closely with the authorities and partners to protect the refugees. A pressing concern was to have refugees move from the northern prefectures to safer locations away from the border. Equally important was to ensure the safety of camps and collective centres, especially for women. The Government conducted a registration of the refugees and the results were verified at the field level by UNHCR teams. Through the Kosovar Refugee Registration Project, 7,400 refugees received identity cards and a database of 70,000 refugees was compiled, just as refugees began to repatriate in large numbers. Following the signing on 9 June of the Military Technical Agreement (which ended the NATO bombing) refugees began to flood back to Kosovo. A total of 430,000 refugees repatriated either spontaneously or with help from UNHCR, the Albanian Government, implementing partners and AFOR. A cross-border programme was also launched to support the returnee-assistance operation in Kosovo. The repatriation operation involved the establishment of seven way stations and two transit centres along the main return routes, for the distribution of food, water, and basic household supplies for the return and reintegration in Kosovo of roughly 260,000 people. Following the repatriation of most of the refugees, UNHCR intensified its efforts in July and August to develop a comprehensive plan for tackling all issues relating to asylum in Albania, within the broader context of migration in Southern Europe.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: Social services were provided in over 30 camps for more than 30,000 refugees. Services included individual help (counselling, tracing, spe-

cial services for the disabled) and community activities such as hygiene and family health discussions, formal lessons, informal learning groups, and play groups for children. Some 75 per cent of the participants were women and children. After repatriation, the focus shifted to those categorised as extremely vulnerable individuals (EVIs) who needed more individualised treatment and protection. Several EVI shelters were opened in Tirana. Thirty-eight small-scale quick impact projects (QIPs) were implemented.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: UNHCR worked with the Government to assist 29,855 Albanian host families with cash grants. The cash grant allowed host families to cover the additional living expenses related to their refugee guests (food, fuel and utilities). The project lasted until September, when an NGO took over with a cash-for-shelter project. The Albanian Government Office for Refugees conducted a monthly registration of refugees living with local host families (nine refugees per family on average).

Education: The Ministry of Education organised summer schools for refugee children to make up for schooling lost in the winter and spring 1998/99. UNHCR assisted by contributing to the cost of printing school books for 46,350 refugee children of primary school age. In the post-rehabilitation phase, 30 educational facilities which had served as collective centres were rehabilitated with UNHCR funds. Many also received new furniture and supplies. One QIP produced a children's book about a refugee from Kosovo, which was written in collaboration with a well-known Albanian artist and the Albanian Centre for Human Rights. Twenty thousand books were distributed in schools all over the country.

Food: By the end of March, UNHCR had assisted 18,500 refugees from Kosovo with complementary food (while WFP provided basic food). In May, UNHCR signed an MOU with WFP and the IFRC whereby the Office would give extra complementary food to refugees in collective accommodation – some 178,000 beneficiaries at the height of the crisis. UNHCR entered into agreements with seven NGOs to distribute complementary food in all 12 prefectures. Ready-to-eat food was purchased and distributed whenever warranted by the emergency situation. After the mass repatriation, and WFP's withdrawal from the refugee operation, UNHCR distributed food to close to 4,000 of the remaining refugees, in collaboration with one international and one local partner.

Health/Nutrition: Medical assistance was provided for refugees living with host families (280,000) and to local families through mobile health teams that dispensed emergency medical care and made referrals to Albanian institutions for further treatment. Health facilities provided medical care in all the main camps, including Camp Hope. Some 200 severely traumatised refugees were admitted for psychiatric treatment. Several thousand more received counselling and psychiatric treatment on an outpatient basis. During the rehabilitation phase, a total of 11 QIPs were implemented including the rehabilitation of hospitals and clinics, the donation of medical equipment, safe water supply, and the training of border police in the rescue of landmine victims.

Legal Assistance: The Kosovar Refugee Registration Project lasted for two months. It was an effort involving the Government of Albania (Ministry of Local Government, Office for Refugees), IOM, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and a consortium of private companies co-ordinated by Microsoft Corporation. Mass information campaigns on security, rights and duties, and repatriation, were carried out during the emergency period.

Operational Support (to Agencies): UNHCR covered some of its implementing partners' operational costs. It also funded local organisations such as the Office for Refugees and the Emergency Management Group (EMG). The longer-term objective of this support was to build national capacity for the care of refugees. The costs of the NGO co-ordinating body were also covered under this sector.

Sanitation: Sanitation systems were installed in refugee camps according to UNHCR standards. These included the construction and maintenance of latrines as well as waste disposal. In collective centres, 13 implementing partners upgraded and maintained sanitary systems. During the rehabilitation phase, 14 QIPs were implemented, four of which covered the clean-up of former refugee sites, two the clean-up of towns (Kukes, Dures, Bulqize), and eight the donation of garbage-removal trucks to local authorities.

Shelter/Other Infrastructure: Activities covered site development for tented camps, the upgrading of communal buildings to serve as collective centres for refugees, and the management of camps and centres, including the provision of security services. Following

repatriation, 15 QIPs were implemented: ten involving the repair of public infrastructure; three the donation of equipment; and two the rehabilitation of former camp sites.

Transport/Logistics: Secondary transport, warehousing and distribution of food and non-food items were implemented through a variety of NGOs responsible for logistics, camp management, and relief distribution. In the port of Durrës, the main entry point for goods, UNHCR managed warehouses with a total capacity of 12,800 m²; in Tirana, an additional warehouse (2,500 m²) was rented and managed from May to October. Transport assistance was provided to hundreds of refugee families who had arrived on tractors and other vehicles. The vehicles were repaired and fueled so that the refugees could continue their journeys to safe reception sites. The same assistance was provided when refugees started to return to Kosovo in June.

Water: Activities included using cistern trucks to transport drinking water to refugee camps, installing water supply systems in camps and sites, and repairing/upgrading water supply systems in communities receiving large numbers of refugees, such as Kukes. In the post-repatriation phase, a number of QIPs were completed: these are expected to have a long-term impact on the local population. They included the laying of an 18 km pipeline for Camp Hope, which today serves four local villages with potable water; the contribution of six water trucks to the prefectures of Durrës, Fier, and Vlora; and the donation of two reverse osmosis purification plants to the Albanian Civil Protection organisation.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

UNHCR in Albania grew from a small structure of seven international and 21 national staff before the emergency, to a total presence of 120 international staff and over 150 national staff. This included several international staff from UNHCR's Emergency Response Team, UNVs, staff seconded from the Danish Refugee Council, the Norwegian Refugee Council, the UN Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and a number of consultants. The number of locally recruited staff peaked at 150 in June, and then steadily declined as refugees left Albania. By the end of 1999, the country operation had stabilised at 14 international, and 52 national staff (seven internationals were still in Albania on short-term or mission status).

An internal audit took place in the last quarter of the year. Recommendations were discussed with senior management and staff involved, and immediately implemented.

Working with Others

During the emergency UNHCR worked very closely with the authorities (EMG, Office for Refugees, Ministry of Local Government and others), several UN agencies, particularly UNDP and the UN Resident Coordinator system, as well as WFP. The EMG played an important overall co-ordination role in managing the initial relief effort, bringing together Government authorities, AFOR, UNHCR, other major international agencies and donor countries. The EMG later helped to develop the framework for a wider rehabilitation programme to repair damage to public buildings which had been used to house refugees, such as schools and clinics. UNHCR also had a total of 46 implementing partners, of whom 40 were international and six were national NGOs.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

The Kosovo emergency severely tested the humanitarian community, but the refugees' needs were met. The Office has now engaged the Albanian authorities in a fruitful dialogue on how to develop national asylum-related procedures.

Offices

Tirana

- Durrës (opened in May)
- Elbasan (opened in June and closed in August)
- Fier (opened in May and closed in September)
- Korçë (opened in May and closed in August)
- Kukes (opened in July)
- Shkodër (opened in April and closed in August)



Partners

Government Agencies

Government of Albania
Ministry of Education and Science
Ministry of Public Order
Office for Refugees of the Albanian Government

NGOs

Action Against Hunger
Adventist Development and Relief Agency
Agency for Technical Co-operation and Development
Albanian Center for Human Rights
Albanian Education Development Project
Albanian Encouragement Project
Albanian Public Health Association
Associazione Volontari Dokita
Care International
Caritas
Catholic Relief Services
Children's Aid Direct
Comunita Internazionale Capodarco
Concern World Wide
Crystal Club Social Action
Danish Refugee Council
DE'IGNIS
GOAL Ireland

Handicap International (Belgium)
Handicap International
Humanitarian Cargo Carries
Independent Forum of the Albanian Woman
International Catholic Migration Commission
International Center for Migration Policy Development
International Christian Association
International Medical Corps
International Rescue Committee
INTERSOS
Italian Consortium of Solidarity
Malteser
MEDAIR
Mercy Corps International
Mercy International
MERLIN
MISSION OST
Norwegian People's Aid
People in Need Foundation
Relief International
Samaritan's Purse
Save the Children Federation

Other

International Organisation for Migration
United Nations Volunteers

Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects			Prior Years' Projects		
	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total	General Programmes	Special Programmes	Total
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	212,040	5,342,679	5,554,719	6,802	93,146	99,947
Community Services	0	1,302,392	1,302,392	0	83,443	83,443
Domestic Needs / Household Support	0	5,776,656	5,776,656	0	348,188	348,188
Education	0	188,698	188,698	0	0	0
Food	4,034	5,396,850	5,400,884	18,532	37,687	56,219
Health / Nutrition	49	675,766	675,814	319	61,312	61,632
Legal Assistance	11,122	1,856,505	1,867,627	15,163	(7,402)	7,760
Operational Support (to Agencies)	8	4,263,015	4,263,023	1,912	47,172	49,084
Sanitation	0	4,094,227	4,094,227	0	8,124	8,124
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	1,893	6,349,995	6,351,888	8,620	497,204	505,825
Transport / Logistics	0	4,668,973	4,668,973	115	73,180	73,295
Water	0	5,102,506	5,102,506	0	2,355	2,355
Instalments with Implementing Partners	32,135	13,957,025	13,989,160	(44,662)	(578,784)	(623,446)
Sub - total Operational	261,281	58,975,286	59,236,567	6,802	665,626	672,427
Administrative Support	30,424	712,787	0	0	0	0
Sub - total Disbursements/Deliveries	291,704	59,688,073	59,236,567	6,802	665,626	672,427
Unliquidated Obligations	36,568	4,053,315	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	328,272	63,741,388	59,236,567	6,802	665,626	672,427
Instalments with Implementing Partners						
Payments Made	134,069	42,474,584	42,608,654	0	193,463	193,463
Reporting Received	101,934	28,517,559	28,619,494	44,662	772,247	816,909
Balance	32,135	13,957,025	13,989,160	(44,662)	(578,784)	(623,446)
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	65,819	789,153	854,973
Refunded to UNHCR	0	0	0	21,978	212,585	234,564
Currency Adjustment	0	0	0	820	0	820
Outstanding 31 December	32,135	13,957,025	13,989,160	0	(2,216)	(2,216)
Unliquidated Obligations						
Outstanding 1 January	0	0	0	23,659	2,399,854	2,423,513
New Obligations	328,272	63,741,388	64,069,660	0	0	0
Disbursements	291,704	59,688,073	59,979,777	6,802	665,626	672,427
Cancellations	0	0	0	16,857	1,734,228	1,751,085
Outstanding 31 December	36,568	4,053,315	4,089,883	0	0	0