



Albania

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Croatia

Montenegro

Serbia

The former Yugoslav Republic of
Macedonia

South-Eastern Europe

Working environment

Though the conflicts in the Balkans ended many years ago, South-Eastern Europe still hosts a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). These populations are comprised primarily of vulnerable groups such as elderly people without family support, sick and disabled people, single mothers and minorities.



Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) host the majority of refugees and IDPs in the region. Many of these displaced people live in very poor conditions and have difficulty exercising their basic rights. Solutions to their problems will come only as fast as the pace of the political, judicial and economic reforms now underway in their host countries and countries of origin. While the region has enjoyed some economic progress, numerous social and economic problems persist.

Regional cooperation on the Sarajevo Declaration stalled in 2008. The Declaration's objectives of addressing displacement in the region and easing the return or integration of refugees and IDPs could not be met. The problem of compensation for refugees who lost property remains. Furthermore, the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo and diverging views on its status have increased political tensions among countries in the region.

Croatian refugees in Serbia constitute one of the five long-standing refugee populations to whom UNHCR will pay special attention in 2009. The Office aims to re-invigorate the search for durable solutions, in particular for the most destitute refugee groups. Success, however, will depend on countries in the region enacting coordinated national plans within clear legal and institutional frameworks. The main actors at the country and regional level need the political will to improve bilateral and regional co-operation to resolve outstanding issues related to refugees and IDPs.

The overall security situation in the region remains stable. However, there are reports of sporadic violence in Kosovo, especially in its predominantly Serb north. In some countries, there have been incidents of harassment, abuse and violence targeting refugees and IDPs from minorities, especially the Roma. This emphasizes the need to address deep-rooted patterns of discrimination against ethnic minorities and to enhance international protection.

Strategy

UNHCR's objectives in South-Eastern Europe focus on refugees and others displaced by the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH); refugees and IDPs displaced from and within Kosovo; asylum-seekers from third countries; and the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In this sub-region, UNHCR seeks to:

- Ensure protection for all people of concern.
- Find sustainable durable solutions for all refugees, IDPs and returnees.
- Assist people at risk of statelessness to register and obtain documentation.
- Promote the voluntary repatriation of refugees and support resettlement.
- Affirm and develop an international protection regime and strengthen national asylum systems.

- Develop dynamic partnership with international and national actors and stakeholders.

UNHCR will promote and pursue the voluntary repatriation, naturalization and local integration of refugees. The Office will continue to seek durable solutions for IDPs, focusing on victims of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence; human trafficking; and assaults on minorities. UNHCR will seek to ensure unhindered access to basic civil rights, such as housing, education, health, documentation, employment and social services, among both refugees and IDPs.

Similarly, UNHCR will assist stateless individuals and people at risk of statelessness, particularly Roma and affiliated ethnic groups. To reduce its operational involvement in the region, the Office will increase its interaction with international organizations and governments engaged in development activities. UNHCR will help State authorities to develop national legal frameworks and asylum systems in order to enhance their capacity to respond more effectively to refugee and IDP needs.

Constraints

UNHCR's support for efforts of the States in the region to embark on the administrative, judicial and other reforms

that will facilitate the search for durable solutions for refugees and IDPs will extend beyond 2009. However, the lack of political will to strengthen the reconciliation process in areas of return, as well as insufficient attention and financial support for sustainable durable solutions for refugees and IDPs, are slowing progress. Success in finding sustainable durable solutions for persons displaced from and within Kosovo will depend on improvements in the socio-economic situation there as well as the attitude of local authorities.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia** (including Kosovo) are outlined in separate chapters.

In 2009 UNHCR will continue its close cooperation with the Government of **Albania**. The Office will provide training and technical support to the staff of relevant ministries. It will work to ensure that national asylum legislation meets international standards and is in line with EU laws on asylum. Local integration will remain the preferred durable solution for refugees and asylum-seekers in Albania, though UNHCR will assist in voluntary repatriation as needed. Resettlement may also be considered for some individuals. UNHCR will provide assistance to people of concern, and will strengthen



Children of a Serbian returnee family are helping to harvest tomatoes.

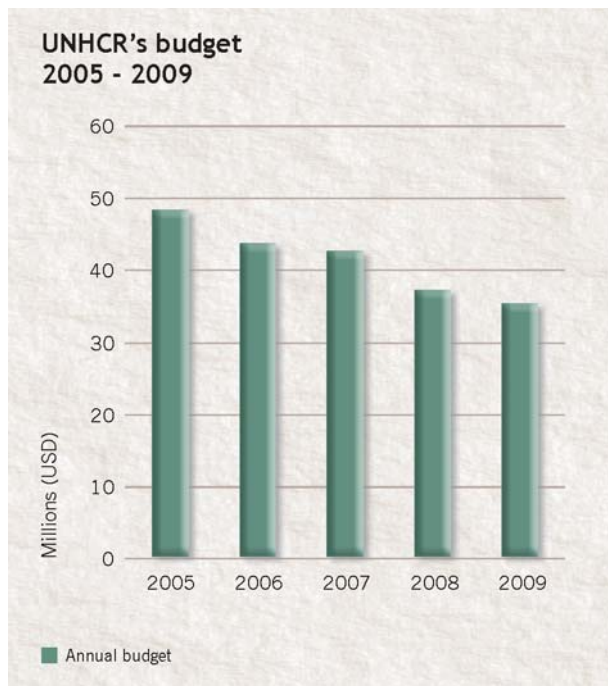
collaboration with the UN Country Team under the Delivering as One initiative.

In 2009, UNHCR's programme in **Croatia** will focus on the facilitation of durable solutions for refugees and IDPs as well as on strengthening the asylum system. In view of Croatia's candidacy for the EU, the international community and UNHCR stand ready to assist it to solve any political, legal, social and technical problems regarding return and re-integration.

UNHCR will continue to provide legal advice and assistance to returnees to secure non-discriminatory access to property, housing rights, as well as to pursue sustainable reintegration. The Office will work with the Government of Croatia to prevent statelessness, and to ensure that the legislative framework and systems in the areas of asylum and migration reflect international and European standards and practices. UNHCR will closely monitor the implementation of the new laws on asylum and foreigners which entered into force at the beginning of 2008.

In **Montenegro**, the Office will pursue durable solutions for refugees from Croatia and BiH, mainly through the regularization of their legal status in Montenegro. UNHCR will advocate for the legal, economic and socio-cultural integration of those refugees from Croatia and BiH who remain in Montenegro. It will urge the Government to permit those displaced from Kosovo to benefit from enhanced access to economic and social rights. Special efforts will be made to seek durable solutions for minority groups such as Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians (RAE) who constitute 25 per cent of the people from Kosovo in Montenegro.

Populations of concern to UNHCR in **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** include refugees from Kosovo—most of whom are Roma, Ashkalia and Egyptians. Durable solutions for these refugees are inseparably linked to the evolution of Kosovo's political and socio-economic scene. Possibilities for local integration remain limited, and the Office will continue to support these groups while reorienting assistance to promote self-reliance. UNHCR will assist asylum-seekers



and refugees who wish to repatriate voluntarily. The Office will also monitor and support the strengthening of the asylum system. At the regional level, UNHCR will address the lack of documentation for Roma as part of its efforts to encourage their social integration.

Financial information

UNHCR's budgets in South-Eastern Europe have declined over the past five years, reflecting a decrease in number of beneficiaries as refugees and IDPs found durable solutions. However, tailor-made solutions and continued assistance are needed for the vulnerable groups that remain. Current levels of funding cannot meet the needs of these vulnerable groups. UNHCR has increased its fundraising efforts at the field level, particularly to pay for legal aid, the provision of documents to prevent statelessness, sustainable returns and assistance with reintegration. Exchange rate fluctuations and a significant rise in prices of basic commodities and services have imposed additional constraints on operational budgets.

Budget (USD)		
Countries	Annual budget	
	2008	2009
Albania	758,726	673,441
Bosnia and Herzegovina	5,615,204	5,688,204
Croatia	2,821,722	2,930,972
Serbia	19,054,388	20,897,195
Montenegro	2,312,508	2,390,475
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	2,685,404	2,757,133
Total	33,247,952	35,337,420