Croatia

Croatian Serb refugees continued to return from exile to Croatia over the summer. Those going back are facing many of the same difficulties as those returning to Bosnia and Herzegovina. A lack of housing reconstruction assistance and employment opportunities are key problems. Many are also prevented from going home as they are unable to reclaim their pre-war properties.

During September, the Croatian government announced that it would review property restitution procedures for returning refugees in an effort to remedy this problem. Key to this review will be the identification of solutions for the Bosnian Croats who are occupying the properties of displaced people. Possible options include the provision of alternative accommodation, local integration, or repatriation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the number of displaced people who returned to their pre-conflict homes continued to steadily increase over the summer months. At the end of August almost 30,000 returnees had registered with their pre-conflict municipalities in areas where they are now an ethnic minority. Many more minorities are in the process of returning.

If more people are to be able to go home, greater efforts will be needed to rebuild houses destroyed during the war, and to create jobs in the shattered economy. Despite the enormous international investment which has been made in Bosnia and Herzegovina, housing reconstruction has unfortunately not kept pace with the numbers returning. With winter around the corner, many minority returnees are living in tents and other makeshift accommodation across Bosnia and Herzegovina. More than 1,000 heads of household are living in tents provided by UNHCR in Eastern Republika Srpska while they clear their properties for reconstruction. They may be forced to return to displacement if they do not receive assistance to rebuild their houses this year. This will be a major setback to almost five years of effort to return refugees and the displaced since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed at the end of 1995.

UNHCR estimates that some 18,000 houses need to be rebuilt just to accommodate those who have returned during 1999 and 2000 (see map on page 4). The Office has appealed to donors and governments of the region to develop a more effective strategy to ensure that reconstruction activities keep pace with the rate of return.

In addition to the lack of housing reconstruction, return is taking place to areas where the economy barely functions. Unemployment affects a disproportionately high percentage of returnees, making job creation an urgent priority in efforts to make returns sustainable. Young people are unlikely to return to areas where there is no employment and no opportunity to raise families. UNHCR has urged the international community to see economic revival and the creation of jobs as a key regional priority.
Kosovo

In Kosovo, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is coordinating a humanitarian accounting exercise by all humanitarian agencies, including UNHCR, WFP, UNICEF, and NGOs. This effort is aiming to ensure that humanitarian needs are met during the coming winter, and that there are no gaps. The main needs which have been identified for the coming winter so far are shelter and firewood.

Non-Albanian communities, especially the Serbs and Roma, have continued to face harassment and violence over the summer months. As a result, they continue to leave areas such as Gnjilane, in a slow but steady exodus to other parts of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (at a rate of some six families a week during August). International efforts to create the necessary conditions for displaced minorities to be able to return to their homes are continuing across Kosovo.

Just as some minorities are leaving the province, others have been returning, often to the same municipalities, such as Gnjilane. Those who return are supplied with humanitarian assistance by UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, although security and freedom of movement are their overriding preoccupations. Early in September, UNHCR arranged for the main Kosovar Albanian political leaders to visit Roma communities in Peć as a confidence-building measure. This visit was part of the Platform for Joint Action for Roma communities in Kosovo, which has been initiated by UNHCR to promote the conditions under which Roma communities can remain in, and return to, Kosovo.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

In order to have a better picture of the refugee situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), UNHCR and the government will conduct a re-registration of refugees in Montenegro and Serbia this year. The registration will run from 9 – 21 October in Montenegro. The dates for the re-registration exercise in Serbia have not yet been set. According to current figures, Serbia and Montenegro host some 500,000 refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing the largest refugee population in Europe. In addition to providing a reassessment of the number of refugees for assistance purposes, the re-registration will also provide information on the refugees’ aspirations for the future. This will allow UNHCR and the government to be in a better position to identify the most appropriate solution for them.
New population movements in the region

While all of the countries in the former Yugoslavia have experienced refugee movements, they are now being confronted with a new and difficult challenge. A phenomenon which has recently emerged in the region is the transit or arrival of significant numbers of asylum seekers or migrants from other regions. Many of these have fallen prey to human traffickers, or are using other dangerous modes of travel.

UNHCR is actively working with governments in the region, including Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, to develop asylum systems to assist in dealing with this complex issue.

UNHCR will present a plan for a region-wide coordinated approach to promote the development of consistent asylum systems in all the countries concerned at a meeting of Table III of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in Sofia on 4 – 5 October 2000.

Contingency Plans

As part of its regular program, UNHCR has contingency plans in place to deal with the possibility of instability and population displacement in the region. Operational plans have been developed by UNHCR in consultation with other humanitarian agencies, and regional stockpiles have been increased to deal with population movements which may arise. Humanitarian agencies are watching the situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the wake of the recent Federal elections very closely, and are sharing information regularly to ensure a coordinated assessment and response.

Humanitarian Issues Working Group

The Humanitarian Issues Working Group (HIWG) met in Geneva on 11 September 2000. The HIWG was first established in 1992 under the auspices of the International Conference on Yugoslavia. It was later subsumed under the umbrella of the Peace Implementation Council of the Dayton Peace Accords. Most recently, the Working Group has also become a forum for discussion of refugee return under Table I of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. It is the only international forum which brings together states directly involved in or affected by the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, neighbouring States and donor governments.

The meeting was chaired by the High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata. Special guest speakers were Mrs. Mary Robinson, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. Carl Bildt, the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General for the Balkans, Dr. Bernard Kouchner, the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Kosovo, and Mr. Hans Koschnick, the Chair of the Steering Committee for Refugee Matters of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

Mrs. Ogata called for adequate financial resources and political support to support the process of refugee return in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had reached a critical turning point. She cautioned that if resources were not provided to rebuild houses and create jobs, displaced people who had already return may be forced to go back to displacement. Mrs. Ogata also highlighted UNHCR’s concern for non-Albanian communities in Kosovo, and called for an end to the ethnic violence.
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Housing requirements by municipality for past and on-going minority returns for the year 2000

**Housing reconstruction needs**

**Completed/on-going reconstruction**

**TOTAL reconstruction needs**: 23,047
**TOTAL On-going reconstruction**: 4,793
**TOTAL Gap**: 18,254

Explanation notes:
(1) The figures for the on-going reconstruction are a compilation of reports from UNHCR and UNHCR Field offices. They include housing completed since January 2000 and on-going housing reconstruction and repairs.
(Major donors: Denmark, EC, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, USA)

(2) The housing needs for each municipality include newly destroyed housing units (requiring complete reconstruction) and damaged housing with enabling major repair.

(3) The Total Housing Reconstruction needs (23,047) is comprised of those who have returned and registered by 1999 and the first 7 months of 2000, those who have returned but have not yet registered and those who are in the return process (home cleaning and overhauling).

The locations displayed on this map do not imply official recognition by the United Nations.

August, 2000