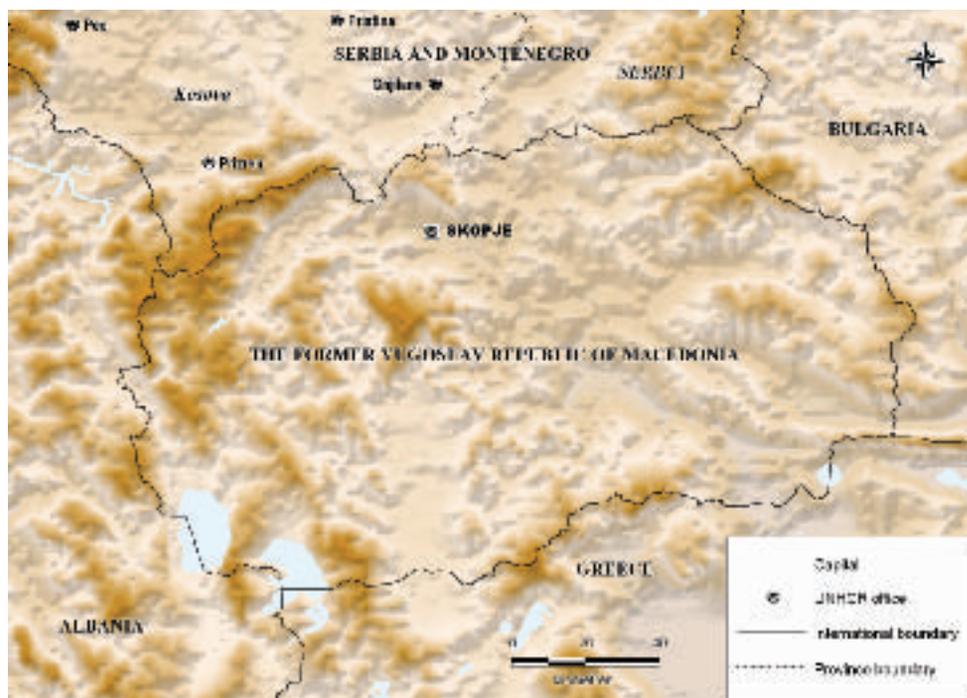


# The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

## Main objectives

Give asylum-seekers and refugees access to a fair and efficient asylum system backed up by procedures to support those newly integrating in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR Macedonia); ensure protection and assistance for the residual Kosovo minority refugee population with THAP status (Temporary Humanitarian Assisted Persons Status), with special support for refugee women, children, adolescents, and elderly and vulnerable individuals; remove the remaining obstacles to the return of refugees and IDPs uprooted during the 2001 conflict in FYR Macedonia, and help them to reintegrate permanently; establish a comprehensive legal and administrative framework in line with international standards to prevent statelessness and facilitate the acquisition of citizenship for long-term residents.



## Impact

- Persistent lobbying by UNHCR resulted in the adoption in July of a new Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection (LATP) which was enacted in August. The Ministry of the Interior, UNHCR, and its implementing partners worked together on its implementation, which entailed joint meetings, information campaigns, detailed technical review and training programmes on the EU *acquis*, the status determination procedures and the drafting of regulations and procedures. By the end of the year, 93 per cent of the THAP group had applied for asylum, a right conferred on them by the new law.
- Refugees in collective centres and host families were provided with basic food and non-food items, hygiene parcels as well as access to health services and education, in close cooperation with national authorities, international organizations and implementing partners. UNHCR met refugees on a regular basis to provide counselling and information on recent developments regarding their status and stay.
- Cross-border cooperation with Kosovo was strengthened further and led to nine "go and see" visits to Kosovo. These provided the refugee representatives with first-hand knowledge of security, current inter-ethnic relations, the job market, the current state of repair of their houses, questions of documentation, NGO activity on reconstruction and income generation, and assistance upon return. Conversely, five "come and inform" visits to Skopje were also organized.
- The number of IDPs fell from 8,456 in January to 3,739 at the end of June when responsibility for the IDPs was transferred to the Government of FYR Macedonia. By the end of December, only 2,678 IDPs had yet to return home.

- Coordinated activities by UNHCR resulted in the adoption by the FYR Macedonian Parliament in December of amendments to the Citizenship Law. The amendments, which generally meet international standards, reduce the criteria for naturalization, including the qualifying period of residence.

## Working environment

### The context

The current coalition Government has been in office for a year. During that time, it has steered a cautious but relatively steady course, although there is a common public perception that it has not been moving quickly enough on certain issues. There is still a risk of destabilization and renewed conflict. Inter-ethnic resentments could easily flare up against a background of high unemployment, economic uncertainty, and doubts about the workings of democracy and some of its fledgling institutions (particularly the judiciary). As a result, the implementation of the Framework Agreement has been slow. Nevertheless, the Government adopted a series of amendments to a draft of legislation covering local elections, customs tariffs, travel documents (stipulating the issuance of passports in the national language, English and, optionally, the Albanian language), police training, asylum, citizenship, and the ombudsman.

Returns were lower than expected owing to outbreaks of violence and fighting (between criminal gangs and security forces) in various parts of the country in spring/summer, and particularly in early September. Nevertheless, 2,014 refugees returned to FYR Macedonia during the year; and by year's end, 68 per cent of IDPs had returned, leaving some 2,678.

The NATO mission was replaced, in March, by the European force dubbed "Concordia". In mid-December a new European police mission known as "Proxima" began to work with the Ministry of the Interior in an advisory capacity on reforms and implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement for the return of persons displaced during the 2001 ethnic conflict. The continuing presence of the international community – the EU Special Representative, the EU Monitoring Mission, NATO (to March 2003) and the OSCE – has been a vital cornerstone of the country's stability. In a gesture of confidence in its increasing stability, the Government declared its intention to submit an application for EU membership in early 2004.

### Constraints

The strong resistance offered by some 600 refugees from the Suto Orizari collective centre to plans to close the centre in May resulted in a costly three-month protest at Medzitlija, on the border with Kosovo. The refugees insisted on living there in

Persons of concern				
Main origin/Type of population	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Asylum-seekers (from Serbia and Montenegro)	2,300	2,300	50	50
Returnees (from Serbia and Montenegro)	2,200	2,000	49	-

Income and expenditure (USD) Annual programme budget				
Revised budget	Income from contributions <sup>1</sup>	Other funds available <sup>2</sup>	Total funds available	Total expenditure
4,951,183	0	4,948,623	4,948,623	4,948,623

<sup>1</sup> Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

<sup>2</sup> Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments. The above figures do not include costs at headquarters.

sub-standard conditions in an effort to draw attention to their demand for group resettlement to EU countries and the USA. The protest finally drew to a peaceful conclusion following joint efforts by the Government, the international community and UNHCR.

In 2003 poor school attendance among refugee children persisted, due to constraints such as the complexity of the integration process in local schools, lack of local language skills, lack of parental support, premature marriages for girls and the protest in Medzitlija.

A difficult security environment, lack of prospects, unresolved property issues and other fears, all proved to be powerful inhibitors of minority returns to Kosovo, and, equally regrettably, the return of refugees in Kosovo to FYR Macedonia.

## Funding

In the context of the projected global funding shortfall and the subsequent reduction of the allocation for operations in FYR Macedonia, the Office successfully raised roughly USD 140,000 locally, mainly to mobilize basic assistance for the Medzitlija group. This was made possible by the media coverage and sympathy generated. Contributions were also channelled to a Roma NGO for community services as well as the Legal Network, which faced an increased workload relating to the asylum applications.

The reduced budgetary allocation precluded the provision of vocational training to prospective returnees or the promotion of self-sufficiency. Educational programmes were curtailed and fewer secondary students than originally foreseen could continue their studies, as scholarships for secondary students had to be stopped during the second half of the year. Fortunately a certain number were covered by a local donor. Night school for adults had to be abandoned.

## Achievements and impact

### Protection and solutions

The enactment of the new Law on Asylum in August and the adoption of amendments to the Citizenship

Law at the end of the year were legislative milestones on the road to a robust national institutional framework. UNHCR made significant progress in 2003 on the implementation of the National Action Plan, the Stabilization and Association Process and European Migration and Asylum Initiatives. Vigorous follow-up with the European Agency for Reconstruction on funding under the European Community Assistance for Reconstruction and Development and Stabilization (CARDS) programme, resulted in funding for the Government of FYR Macedonia for the construction of a reception centre as well as technical assistance in revising existing legislation and in developing and taking forward a new National Action Plan for Asylum and Migration.

A total of 194 persons returned from FYR Macedonia to Serbia and Montenegro with UNHCR's assistance, of whom 132 went back to Serbia proper and the other 62 to Kosovo. Meanwhile, nearly 2,014 refugees returned to FYR Macedonia from Kosovo, and 18 Kosovo Gorani refugees were assisted to integrate locally. The resettlement to third countries of 127 individuals (selected in 2002) provoked demands by others for resettlement, and led to their desperate protests at Medzitlija. NGOs from the Legal Network provided free legal advice to asylum-seekers and refugees (this involved 1,150 cases or 2,230 persons). Of the 432 applications for naturalization, 158 were successful.

## Activities and assistance

**Community services:** UNHCR distributed hygiene parcels and sanitary materials to refugee women through an international agency and ensured the participation of women in the Refugee Committees for the first time. A Roma NGO helped some 500 women, children and youth through its activities on mental health, literacy, social care, sports and vocational training. Two small-scale projects were also implemented, relating to vocational and counselling services for women and children, including victims of domestic violence. Baby diapers and infant starter kits were supplied to children and incontinence wear, hearing aids and prescription glasses to older refugees.

**Domestic needs/Household support:** UNHCR procured basic non-food items including bed sheets, blankets, cooking stoves, kitchen sets, mattresses, pillows and plastic tarpaulins. Firewood was



Returnees helping to unload supplies in Jazhince on the northern border. UNHCR/B. Betzelt

distributed for the winter period during the first quarter of the year and a heating allowance was provided in December. Cash allowances were disbursed to refugees in private accommodation to cover rent and utility charges as well as personal expenses.

**Food:** Basic food parcels were provided to all refugees. Complementary food was distributed to refugees in collective centres (with monthly cash grants in lieu, for those in private accommodation). The food supplies were contracted out by an international partner through competitive tendering. ICRC/IFRC and ECHO ensured the distribution of basic food parcels to the IDPs.

**Health/Nutrition:** Regular health care services were provided during the year. Mortality and morbidity rates remained at acceptable levels, with no outbreaks of contagious disease. The NGO partner also referred patients to local hospitals and clinics for specialized treatment. Child vaccinations were facilitated through the public health institutions and in schools. Testing for tuberculosis did not reveal any new cases.

**Legal assistance:** Lawyers of the Legal Network initiated procedures related to the issuance of documents such as birth registration, alien residence permits, and citizenship certificates for over 1,500 long-term residents who lacked effective citizenship. The Ministry of the Interior accepted expired identity documents or sworn statements. Eight elderly females who had been rejected on national security grounds succeeded in mounting appeals

and having the decisions overturned. A joint board paid citizenship application fees on behalf of over 300 vulnerable applicants.

**Operational support (to agencies):** The operational costs of implementing partners covered by UNHCR included office rental and supplies, utilities, and transport and communications.

**Shelter/Other infrastructure:** Two collective centres were managed until May when the Suto Orizari Centre was closed (faulty drainage had become irreparable). The implementation of three small infrastructure projects resulted in environmental improvements in the municipality hosting refugees.

**Transport/Logistics:** A warehouse, non-food items and project supplies were managed by a partner agency which guaranteed regular transportation of supplies to refugees, returnees and IDPs. Passenger transport services were sourced on the open market.

## Organization and implementation

### Management

In 2003, UNHCR maintained one office in the capital, Skopje. On 1 January 2003, there were 50 staff, comprising 11 international, four UNVs and 35 national. By December 31, there were 24 staff in total,

comprising three international, one JPO and 19 national. Throughout 2003, the UNHCR Representation also hosted the UNSECOORD Office, the UN Telecommunications Centre, the Norwegian Refugee Council Office in Skopje and the Malteser Office in Skopje (last three months of the year), as well as a consultant seconded by IFRC.

## Working with others

In 2003, the UNHCR programme was implemented by three international and five local partners.

Established linkages were maintained with regional European institutions, international organizations and Government bodies on issues such as asylum, statelessness, repatriation, IDPs, human rights, Roma initiatives, housing and the enhancement of relevant national academic research institutions. These linkages entailed close cooperation with the EU Special Representative, the Delegation of the European Commission, the European Agency for Development on the CARDS programme, the EU Presidency, EU Monitoring Mission, NATO, Concordia, Proxima, Council of Europe, OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, UN Resident Coordinator, UNICEF, OHCHR, UNMIK, IOM, and the Stability Pact, especially the Migration, Asylum, Refugee Regional Initiative. UNHCR also cooperated with journalists and the media through workshops, briefings and interviews.

## Overall assessment

By and large, UNHCR's objectives were met, the two highlights being: the adoption of the Law on Asylum and Temporary Protection, which, for the first time in four years, gave persons with THAP status the right to apply for asylum; and the adoption of the amendments to the Citizenship Law, which significantly facilitate access to citizenship. The many cross-border visits, workshops and training programmes contributed to the effective implementation of UNHCR's protection mandate. Other notable achievements in 2003 included: asylum applications presented by 93 per cent of the Kosovar refugees, the systematic organization of refugee status determination interviews, the closure of the Suto Orizari collective centre, the successful return of the protesters from Medzitlija, and mobilization of substantial financial resources for

additional interventions outside UNHCR's budget. Regular meetings and follow-ups were also responsible for substantial funding to the host Government through the CARDS programme. The steady decrease in resources, coupled with the fall of the US dollar, forced the office to constantly reprioritize its activities, some of which had to be abandoned altogether.

The 2003 strategy foresaw the return of all refugees from Kosovo to FYR Macedonia during the year. By year's end however, some 1,486 refugees still remained in Kosovo, of whom 1,220 had expressed the desire to return, necessitating a review of the 2004 programme of return. Durable solutions for refugees of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian minorities in FYR Macedonia still depend to a large extent on political agreement at a regional level between Pristina and Belgrade and hence could not be expected in 2003. With the enactment of the LATP in August and the adoption by Parliament of the amendments to the citizenship law in December, good progress was made in approximating FYR Macedonia's legislation to the EU acquis. This represents a further step towards FYR Macedonia's eventual accession to the European Union.

### Offices

Skopje

### Partners

#### Government agencies

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy  
Ministry of the Interior

#### NGOs

American Refugee Committee  
Civil Society Resource Centre  
Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research  
International Educational Centre  
International Federation of the Red Cross  
*Malteser Hilfsdienst*

#### Others

UNVs

## Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects		Prior years' projects	
	Annual programme budget	notes	Annual and Supplementary programme budgets	notes
Protection, Monitoring and Coordination	623,251		32	
Community Services	95,555		567,176	
Domestic Needs/Household Support	78,765		4,720	
Food	564,722		33,523	
Health/Nutrition	179,316		21,532	
Legal Assistance	940,068		183,217	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	180,687		76,249	
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	495,285		527,092	
Transport/Logistics	191,819		36,630	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	156,946		(1,245,894)	
<b>Sub - total Operational</b>	<b>3,506,414</b>		<b>204,277</b>	
Programme Support	1,182,546		46,820	
<b>Sub - total Disbursements / Deliveries</b>	<b>4,688,960</b>	(3)	<b>251,097</b>	(5)
Unliquidated Obligations	259,663	(3)	0	(5)
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,948,623</b>	(1) (3)	<b>251,097</b>	
<b>Instalments with Implementing Partners</b>				
Payments Made	1,577,137		342,970	
Reporting Received	1,420,191		1,588,864	
<b>Balance</b>	<b>156,946</b>		<b>(1,245,894)</b>	
Outstanding 1st January	0		1,351,707	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		65,226	
Currency Adjustment	0		(40,588)	
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>156,946</b>		<b>0</b>	
<b>Unliquidated Obligations</b>				
Outstanding 1st January	0		319,282	(5)
New Obligations	4,948,623	(1)	0	
Disbursements	4,688,960	(3)	251,097	(5)
Cancellations	0		68,185	(5)
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>259,663</b>	(3)	<b>0</b>	(5)

Figures which can be cross-referenced to the Accounts:

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