

Croatia in short

Main Objectives

- Promote and facilitate the voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their former homes in Croatia, and support the reintegration of vulnerable returnees into their communities.
- Help Bosnian refugees repatriate voluntarily to their homes.
- Provide essential humanitarian aid for the most vulnerable refugees and IDPs.
- Safeguard the rights of refugees, returnees and minorities through monitoring and interventions with the authorities.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

The year 2000 saw significant developments in Croatia's gradual transformation into a fully democratic society and free market economy. Presidential and parliamentary elections held in January brought to power a new political coalition that invited Croatian refugees to repatriate from abroad. Security within the country has improved to the extent that it is no longer a major concern, although landmines and unexploded ordnance are still a danger in certain areas. During the first half of the year, most of the discriminatory elements of legislation adversely affecting the return of IDPs within the country and refugees from abroad (pertaining mainly to reconstruction assistance and property) were removed.

Despite a difficult social and economic environment, a combination of political developments and improved security appear to have boosted the number of refugees returning from abroad

PLANNING FIGURES

Population	Jan. 2001	Dec. 2001
Refugees ¹	22,500	17,500
Returnees ²	112,000	142,000
IDPs ³	37,310	22,500
Total	171,810	182,000

¹ Includes 7,000 who receive UNHCR's assistance.

² Returnees from abroad (mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia). Does not include some 210,000 former IDPs who have returned since the end of 1995. A total of 20,000 returnees will benefit from UNHCR's assistance.

³ Includes 29,600 IDPs plus 7,710 others who are listed by the authorities in the "house reconstruction in progress" category. Of the total, 3,000 IDPs will receive UNHCR's assistance.

TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 13,119,013

and altered the overall pattern of returns. In the first ten months of 2000, over 12,000 refugees had returned to Croatia from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina with UNHCR's assistance, and as many as twice this number may have returned spontaneously. The Government estimates that 108,000 refugees have returned from abroad since the end of 1995. While the rural elderly still account for the majority of returns from abroad, more families with young children have finally begun to return. Within Croatia, it is estimated that 89,400 IDPs returned to their homes or home areas in 2000; of these, 66,700 went to the

Croatian Danube region and 22,700 from this region to other parts of the country.

Constraints

A number of factors nonetheless continue to limit returns. These include minority returnees' limited access to reconstruction assistance owing to lack of funds, and persistent problems surrounding the repossession or restitution of property.

The constraints stemming from flawed legislation – and its uneven or discriminatory application – have been compounded by the sluggish pace of post-war economic recovery. Croatia's limited growth is marked by high public debt, high unemployment and little foreign investment. In returnee areas, the already weak pre-war economy has collapsed, with unemployment as high as 90 per cent and little hope for rapid economic recovery. An estimated 400,000 to one million landmines litter some 4,500 square kilometres of the country. The Government is barely able to finance the health and social welfare system, leaving many people without access to health care or social support. As a result, the most vulnerable segments of society are increasingly marginalised. UNHCR's own resources in Croatia are dwindling, obliging it to focus only on the most vulnerable groups. Since traditional coping mechanisms have slowly been eroded, refugees, IDPs and returnees tend to become dependent on State and international humanitarian assistance programmes. At the same time, the homes of those returning are often already occupied (by either refugees or displaced persons) and little progress has been made in addressing the resulting housing crisis.

STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

In 2001, UNHCR will continue to search for durable solutions for all persons of concern, notably refugees, IDPs and returnees (comprising former refugees and IDPs). UNHCR will promote and facilitate voluntary returns to and within Croatia as the best durable solution, but will also pursue local integration or resettlement when these appear to be the most appropriate solutions for the individuals concerned. To establish an adequate asylum framework which meets international standards, UNHCR will continue to encourage the Government to adopt and implement national refugee legislation, establish a refugee status determination procedure and repeal conflicting or inadequate legislation on the movement and stay of aliens. To support these efforts, UNHCR will organise training on refugee law and refugee status determination for judges, immigration officials, NGOs and other partners. UNHCR will actively monitor Government compliance with its international commitments to create conditions conducive to return and facilitate the full reintegration of former refugees and IDPs, in collaboration with the OSCE, donors and a network of national NGOs.

Refugees

UNHCR will continue to protect and assist extremely vulnerable asylum-seekers and individual refugees who are awaiting durable solutions. In view of greater openness in Bosnia and Herzegovina to the return of refugees and potentially far-reaching changes in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, UNHCR will focus on voluntary repatriation. The Office will provide information on the situation in the country of origin, facilitate go-and-see visits, and maintain cross-border links between UNHCR offices, as well as intergovernmental and NGO partners involved in providing reintegration assistance or support to repossess property. When repatriation does not appear feasible, legal counselling will be provided to identify other durable solutions. As in previous years, resettlement may remain the only option for a limited number of persons.

IDPs

IDPs often live close to their places of origin (i.e. in and around the provincial towns of Osijek and Vinkovci). Significant numbers have found accommodation with relatives and friends in Zagreb. The majority of those who returned to their homes have gone back to rural areas, mostly to small village communities near Sisak and Karlovac, and further south to Gospić, Knin, Drnis and Donji Lapac. UNHCR's strategy is to encourage the Croatian authorities to give IDPs access to legal, civil, educational and social welfare services on an equal footing with other citizens, and to encourage IDPs to return by providing reconstruction assistance and facilitating the restitution of property. A small number will be assisted to integrate locally in their present locations.

Returnees

UNHCR's aim is to ensure that the return of refugees and IDPs is sustainable, meaning that they have the basic means of subsistence, combined with favourable longer-term economic prospects. To achieve this goal, the Office will continue to work with the authorities to improve the legal framework and procedures for access to assistance for reconstruction and the repossession of property. It will also continue to encourage the international community to support reintegration. UNHCR will help returnees claim their rights and obtain necessary documentation and monitor their situation.

Assistance

Refugees

The vast majority of refugees have found some form of private accommodation (with Government assistance) within major urban centres of the country, but many are occupying the homes of Croatian refugees (who are now living abroad) or those belonging to IDPs. Many also hold dual citizenship and

are well integrated. A small number is still housed in collective centres. Some 7,000 vulnerable refugees will receive various types of assistance, ranging from legal counselling, health care and psychosocial support, to accommodation in collective centres. UNHCR will support national NGOs providing assistance to asylum-seekers and the most vulnerable urban refugees, and will help the Government assist elderly and chronically ill refugees housed in specialised institutions. Recreational and vocational activities for children and adolescents will be implemented in large collective centres. To combat the problem of domestic and sexual violence against women, UNHCR will continue to mobilise national NGOs to provide counselling and other services in collective centres.

IDPs

As the most vulnerable individuals are largely deprived of State assistance, UNHCR will implement a limited programme of social services (counselling, home visits, distribution of non-food items), for some 3,000 of the most vulnerable IDPs. Those who choose to integrate locally will receive community-based assistance in the form of in-kind loans of agricultural tools, equipment and livestock to improve their economic self-reliance.

Returnees

The programme for returnees has two main components: (i) the distribution of relief items and social support (home visits and eliciting community support for the extremely vulnerable, particularly the elderly and infirm); and (ii) support for reintegration through the repair of houses and support for agriculture. UNHCR will transport vulnerable returnees to their destinations in Croatia and provide an assistance package consisting of stoves, beds, mattresses and blankets, complemented by food provided by a partner. UNHCR will continue to provide legal assistance to returnees so as to resolve their legal and social status and ensure access to national health care and insurance, as well as pensions and other entitlements. This will include legal counselling, home visits by mobile legal teams, legal representation before judicial bodies, and direct intervention with the authorities. The Office will provide assistance for emergency repairs to housing, particularly to weatherproof or winterise one room for immediate use, and connect up the electricity and water supply. UNHCR will continue to build local capacity to provide community-based support for extremely vulnerable returnees, such as the elderly and infirm.



To boost economic self-reliance, UNHCR will offer vulnerable returnees a combination of agricultural in-kind grants and loans (seeds, tools, livestock, machinery) through community working groups. The Office will continue non-monetary in-kind repayment schemes, allowing returnees to provide goods and services to the most vulnerable members of the community. This arrangement also encourages reconciliation in communities housing returnees. Another measure to encourage reconciliation is support for recreational activities and vocational training for school children and adolescents in returnee communities.

UNHCR will continue to encourage the international community, especially development specialists, to do more in demining, reconstruction of housing, infrastructure development, economic revitalisation and support for the social welfare system, so as to encourage more refugees and IDPs to return to their homes in Croatia.

Desired Impact

UNHCR hopes that by the end of 2001 all legal and procedural impediments to the return of refugees and displaced persons will have been overcome. More international assistance to Croatia will be directly targeted to sustain returnees and their communities by improving housing, basic infrastructure and economic opportunities. At the same time, returnees and IDPs will enjoy all their legal rights and entitlements without discrimination. As a result, greater numbers of refugees will be encouraged to return from abroad and IDPs from elsewhere within the country. At the same time, more refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and elsewhere in the region will have found durable solutions, notably through voluntary repatriation.



ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management

A Chief of Mission, based in Zagreb, heads UNHCR's operation in Croatia and is supported by staff in field offices located in Knin, Osijek and Sisak. In 2001, UNHCR's country programme will be managed by a total of 102 staff (12 international, six Junior Professional Officers and 84 national).

OFFICES

Zagreb	Knin
Sisak	Osijek

Co-ordination

UNHCR plans to work with 14 implementing partners (including three international and eleven national). UNHCR's principal partner is the Croatian Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees (ODPR). UNHCR will continue to co-ordinate and monitor the refugee and returnee programmes, in close co-operation with the donor community. In this effort, UNHCR will co-operate closely with ODPR and other Government bodies, such as the Ministries of Justice, the Interior and Labour and Social Welfare. The Government has set up a co-ordination mechanism bringing together all relevant ministries under the chairmanship of the Deputy Prime Minister for which the international community, including UNHCR, provides advice and support. UNHCR also jointly chairs Area Return Facilitation Groups (ARFG) with the OSCE, to exchange information on operational issues affecting cross-border returns and a range of monitoring and capacity-building activities. The ARFGs include participants from various UN agencies, international organisations and NGOs in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina so as to join efforts to accelerate returns and sustain reintegration.

UNHCR co-operates closely with a large number of NGOs and facilitates forums and training sessions on such issues as protection, returnee monitoring, planning, advocacy, fund-raising and public relations.

UNHCR also co-chairs Working Table 1 (Democratisation and Human Rights) of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. This entails co-ordinating the efforts of the Government, donors, implementing partners and returnees to ensure that projects benefit returnees and surrounding communities. In the Stability Pact framework, UNHCR assists in developing projects, provides guidance to key players, monitors project implementation and ensures that funds are effectively used to sustain return and revitalise the economy in returnee areas. By acting as a catalyst to encourage longer-term development investments and creating conditions conducive to sustainable returns, UNHCR hopes to be able to scale down its activities and focus on its core protection mandate.

PARTNERS

Government Agencies

Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees

NGOs

American Refugee Committee

Association Mi

Caritas

Catholic Relief Services

Centre for Peace

Centre for Disaster Management

Committee for Human Rights

Handicap International

International Rescue Committee

Merhamet

Mi

Serbian Democratic Forum

Suncokret

Other

Croatian Red Cross

United Nations Volunteers

BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	3,024,669
Community Services	2,955,000
Domestic Needs/Household Support	2,930,000
Health/Nutrition	525,000
Legal Assistance	760,000
Operational Support (to Agencies)	530,000
Transport/Logistics	925,000
Total Operations	11,649,669
Programme Support	1,469,344
Total	13,119,013