

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Promote the sustainable return of minorities, and seek the removal of obstacles hindering the voluntary return of Bosnia and Herzegovina refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their places of origin.
- Identify the local integration needs of refugees and IDPs who repatriate or who decide to settle in other locations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Assist Croatian Serb refugees in the Republika Srpska who choose to repatriate voluntarily to Croatia.
- Support the voluntary repatriation of refugees from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and continue to provide assistance as well as protection for those who cannot return in the foreseeable future.
- Support capacity building of local authorities, seek to establish a Bosnia and Herzegovina Refugee Council, and pursue legal reforms.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Post-Dayton Returnees, IDPs and Croatian Serb Refugees

The year 2000 marks the fifth year since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. Bosnia and Herzegovina still has over 809,000 IDPs and hosts 39,500 Croatian Serb refugees. Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia continue host some 226,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

UNHCR believes that return movements to “majority” areas have largely been completed. But the return of ethnic minorities to their pre-war residences is taking longer than initially hoped. Since the beginning of the year, how-

ever, there have been clear indications of growing interest among IDPs and refugees to return to their homes, even to areas where return of minority groups was unthinkable only a year ago. By the end of June, a total of 19,751 minority returns had been registered, amounting to a significant increase compared to the same period in 1999. This is a consequence of the improved security situation, the implementation of harmonised property legislation, and the fact that IDPs and former refugees are increasingly making their own choices to return home.

These new and encouraging developments pose major challenges to the international humanitarian community, since available resources are on the decline and can only cover limited support whenever authorities cannot meet the needs of returnees. The sustainability of return is conditioned more than ever by reconstruction projects and job opportunities, rather than by security. Through the Reconstruction and Return Task Force (RRTF) mechanism, the international humanitarian community is trying to ensure that available funds are used effectively. As the rate of minority returns continues to rise, however, the situation of returnees will become critical if immediate assistance and support for reconstruction are not made available.

UNHCR co-operated closely with the Office of the High Representative (OHR), OSCE and the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) to pursue the property law implementation plan. The plan was devised following the entry into force of new property legislation in October 1999, to assist persons with claims to property to repossess their dwellings. The implementation of non-discriminatory property legislation by the authorities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Republika Srpska will facilitate the eviction of temporary occupants and enable pre-war rights-holders to repossess their property. As required by the laws of both Entities, the re-registration of all IDPs and Croatian Serb refugees com-

menced on 20 July and should be completed by September. UNHCR is providing financial support to the competent entity ministries for this activity. The re-registration exercise is intended to review the validity of status of all registered IDPs and to renew such status, where applicable. It will also shed light on the number of IDPs and refugees opting for local integration in areas of displacement (i.e. those who prefer not to return to pre-war home areas for the time being).

During the first six months of the year, 4,832 refugees repatriated voluntarily to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 4,265 of whom in organised movements. An agreement to simplify return procedures was signed on 5 June by the competent central and Entity ministries, which should enable some 6,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina to repatriate from abroad without travel documents and also facilitate “go-and-see” visits.

At the end of 1999, UNHCR withdrew from large-scale shelter and demining activities, as well as from broad community services and micro-credit schemes, to focus on its traditional protection role and advocacy of safe and sustainable minority return. UNHCR continued to support 98 collective centres, which hosted some 9,980 residents as of June. Thanks to its field presence, UNHCR is implementing a large range of protection-related activities, including monitoring the safety of returns, and ensures co-ordination with donors and other humanitarian organisations. UNHCR supports 53 Legal Aid Centres (formerly known as Legal Aid and Information Centres) throughout the country. This network provides legal counselling to IDPs, returnees, and others of concern to UNHCR, and represents them in courts of law when necessary. Activities during the first half the year focused on improving links between the centres, standardising reporting formats, as well as training and capacity-building.

Twenty UNHCR-sponsored inter-entity bus lines continued to run, carrying a total of 32,921 passengers from January to June. The

bus lines will be discontinued this year, except in selected areas where they still guarantee safe freedom of movement. UNHCR made no progress in launching a planned cross-border bus line between Banja Luka and Croatia, which is intended to facilitate “go-and-see” visits and the repatriation of Croatian Serb refugees. It is unlikely that the bus line can be launched by the end of the year.

To meet the needs of returning IDPs, UNHCR distributed tents to serve as temporary shelter in villages receiving returnee families who are rebuilding their houses, as well as cooking stoves, beds, blankets, mattresses and kitchen sets. By the end of June, the following quantities had been distributed: 116 tents, 47,810 m² of plastic sheeting, 2,627 cooking stoves, 6,362 beds, 18,186 blankets, 8,171 mattresses and 3,363 kitchen sets. UNHCR’s funding and its stock of food and non-food items are increasingly insufficient to cover the needs of all returnees. The Office is therefore encouraging donors and agencies participating in shelter rehabilitation to cover such basic needs.

To address community service needs, UNHCR introduced Quick Support Grants (QSGs) that provide individual assistance to minority returnees and also benefit the receiving community in a more flexible and cost-effective way. The QSGs cover such immediate needs as minor repairs to family homes and communal facilities, as well as the procurement of agricultural tools and seeds. By the end of June, 44 grants had been approved covering an estimated 5,350 beneficiaries.

UNHCR also continued to support the Bosnian Women’s Initiative (BWI). By 30 June, 62 projects focusing on income-generation had been approved, benefiting over 2,150 women. Implementation of 50 of these projects had begun by the end of June. UNHCR is seeking to conclude a technical co-operation agreement with UNDP, to obtain its support to revamp BWI with a longer-term development perspective. In addition to BWI activities, other income-generation projects are being implemented in key returnee areas. As of 30 June,

12 such projects benefiting 572 returnee households were being implemented.

Financial constraints have obliged UNHCR to reduce assistance benefiting IDPs and returnees (the Dayton group). With the exception of protection and legal assistance activities, all sectors have been reduced, including transport/logistics, community services, income-generation and operational support to agencies.

Refugees from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The vast majority of the 75,000 refugees from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (principally Kosovo and Sandzak provinces), who sought refuge in Bosnia and Herzegovina during 1999, repatriated before the end of the year. By the end of June, some 1,960 refugees remained in five Reception Asylum Centres (RAC) located in Rakovica, Bosanski Petrovac, Breza, Kakanj and Salakovac. Of these, 1,097 are from Kosovo, 648 from Serbia and 132 from Montenegro, and smaller numbers from other countries. The three largest groups are Roma (53 per cent), Sandzak Muslims (19 per cent), Kosovo Albanians (14 per cent). Bosnia and Herze-

govina also received 81 new asylum-seekers from other countries.

During the first six months of the year, some 5,000 refugees repatriated from Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 240 of whom were assisted by UNHCR.

Capacity Building

With the entry into force of the State Law on Immigration and Asylum on 31 December 1999 and the subsequent creation of the new Ministry for Refugees and Human Rights on 23 June, UNHCR continues to be actively involved in assisting the Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina to establish a well-functioning asylum system. Financial constraints, however, obliged UNHCR to reduce funding for capacity-building activities. No progress was made in the planned creation of a Bosnia and Herzegovina Refugee Council.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

UNHCR's initial objectives and priorities remain unchanged.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	43,852,300	37,698,767	18,352,443	17,675,200

*Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the region/country, opening balance and adjustments.