

# ALBANIA

## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Provide protection for refugees and asylum-seekers.
- Assist the Government of Albania and non-governmental institutions to build the necessary capacity to implement the Albanian asylum law according to international standards.
- Provide assistance to the remaining refugees from Kosovo, including a number of extremely vulnerable individuals.
- Seek durable solutions for Kosovar and other refugees through repatriation, local integration or resettlement.
- Facilitate the transition from post-emergency rehabilitation activities to development and governance by the rule of law.
- Monitor potential refugee movements in the region.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Following the repatriation to Kosovo of some 430,000 refugees during 1999, the number of refugees in Albania remained stable at around 4,200, with Kosovo Albanians accounting for the overwhelming majority. Of this number, 200 refugees live in collective centres and the remainder with host families. By August, the number of collective centres had been reduced from five to one. An average of 2,000 host families received food rations each month. UNHCR and the Albanian Office for Refugees (OFR) verify food-ration cardholders regularly to prevent fraud.

A total of 1,511 extremely vulnerable refugees received assistance in the form of medical or psychiatric care, and counselling either directly from UNHCR or through implementing part-

ners. UNHCR maintains a centre for mentally ill and traumatised refugees (50 places), and shelters for vulnerable persons/families (40 places) who need special protection and care. The repatriation of extremely vulnerable refugees remains difficult due to the lack of suitable arrangements for care inside Kosovo. Durable solutions are being identified for these refugees on the basis of a case-by-case assessment.

Eighty-nine refugees repatriated voluntarily to Kosovo during the first six months of the year. Another 79 refugees departed on resettlement to third countries. UNHCR registered 25 new asylum-seekers during the first half of the year, mainly from Iraq, Turkey and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

UNHCR implemented Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) to rehabilitate refugee-affected infrastructure and build local capacity, which also benefit the local population who generously hosted close to half a million refugees last year. Thirty-seven QIPs have been approved (14 of which had commenced by 30 June) to repair and rehabilitate communal infrastructure, such as schools, cultural centres and community buildings, benefiting some 80,000 people. Eight capacity-building QIPs are being implemented to support teacher training, emergency preparedness training and the launch of a Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies at the University of Tirana. All QIPs are selected in close collaboration with the local authorities and approved by the relevant line ministries. Continuing poor security in north-eastern Albania (Tropoje District) impeded UNHCR from implementing QIPs there, since no international agencies are operating in the area and efforts to work with local partners have not succeeded. Another constraint is the lack of an effective governmental or other co-ordination mechanism for rehabilitation and development programmes, which obliged UNHCR to engage in protracted discussions with other donors and implementing agencies, to avoid du-

plication and maximise impact.

To support the development of an effective asylum system in Albania, two multilateral task

forces and a secretariat have been set up. Task Force I focuses on legislation and is charged with proposing legislative amendments to fill gaps in the current Law on Asylum. Task Force II focuses on training and is charged with selecting target groups that deal with refugee-related matters, with the aim of establishing a core group of Albanian trainers who can, in turn, train others and maximise outreach. The task forces work under the leadership of the Minister of Local Government and include representatives from the Albanian Government, UNHCR, other international organisations and NGOs (both local and international). To build national capacity, UNHCR continued on-the-job and formal training for OFR officials, particularly on refugee status determination procedures. The Office is also training border police officers.

Albania continues to be a country of transit for asylum-seekers, refugees, irregular migrants and persons who are victims of trafficking. To improve the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, UNHCR spearheaded an effort to articulate issues relating to asylum, irregular migration and trafficking in human beings, in cooperation with the Government, the OSCE, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Council of Europe, and the International Catholic Migration Commission (ICMC). It is hoped that this issues-based approach to the phenomenon of irregular movements through Albania will contribute to the effective protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, while addressing the situation of migrants and victims of human trafficking, especially women.

In this context, UNHCR proposed in June that a permanent Asylum-Migration Group be set up within the Friends of Albania (FoA) framework, with the objectives of creating a forum for dialogue on asylum and migration issues, deepening common understanding of

them and co-ordinating initiatives in this area. Both the Government and the FoA Chair (OSCE and EU) endorsed the proposal. The Asylum-Migration Group held its first meeting at the technical level on 28 July. In line with the FoA framework, the group will include representatives of the Albanian government at ministerial level, embassies of neighbouring and other interested countries, UNHCR and relevant intergovernmental organisations.

UNHCR continued contingency planning for possible influxes of refugees. The contingency plan is regularly updated with inputs from sister UN agencies, the Government and NGOs. Monthly missions to the north and other sensitive areas enable UNHCR to keep abreast of developments, while maintaining contacts with local authorities and partners on the ground. Several QIPs supporting emergency preparedness were implemented, including the refurbishing of three public buildings to serve as refugee shelters or service centres. UNHCR also organised emergency preparedness training for local officials, NGOs, and health staff. Despite the efforts of UNHCR and donor-country representatives, the creation of a governmental Emergency Management Unit remains pending due to shifting government priorities.

### REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY - DECEMBER

UNHCR's overall objectives remain unchanged. Priority activities include the following:

- Continue to promote the development of an effective asylum system.
- Continue to encourage the relevant Ministries to give refugees access to local social services (including health and education) and the right to work.
- Continue to rehabilitate refugee-affected infrastructure and build local capacity through UNHCR's QIPs programme, which should be completed by the end of

the year. Infrastructure rehabilitation should be completed in the autumn, whereas training and awareness-building activities will continue until the end of the year.

- Since the Albanian Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) plan to phase out food distribution at the end of July, UNHCR will distribute cash in lieu of food beginning in September, working through an implementing partner that is being identified.

- Owing to financial constraints and updated regional contingency arrangements, UNHCR plans to reduce the size of contingency stocks in Albania. Stocks based on the needs of 30,000 beneficiaries will be lowered to meet the needs of 15,000 by October. The stockpile has already been reduced substantially through redeployment to the Eritrea emergency operation. Contingency plans and early-warning mechanisms will be maintained. Training offered to OFR officials, local NGOs and the police will include an emergency preparedness component.

### FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	12,046,446	7,951,485	4,049,315	3,921,500

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

