

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Help the national authorities develop and implement an adequate system of asylum.
- Consolidate durable solutions for current refugees.
- Continue humanitarian assistance based on the needs of the remaining refugee population.
- Rehabilitate and develop areas previously occupied by refugee camps.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, PROGRESS ACHIEVED AND CONSTRAINTS

Development of an Adequate Asylum System

UNHCR's advisory efforts led the Government to propose to Parliament a new draft asylum law on 27 June. The text, which was drafted by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) with advice from UNHCR, is largely in line with the 1951 Convention. The draft asylum law provides for the establishment of an Asylum Bureau within the Section for Immigration of MIA's Department for Foreigners and Immigration Issues. The Asylum Bureau is charged with carrying out refugee status determination and focusing on refugee-related issues. UNHCR provided both technical and material assistance to the Section for Immigration and the Asylum Bureau, which included training, as well as financial support for the purchase of furniture and equipment, staff and travel costs, printing costs and other requirements. UNHCR is also providing assistance to refurbish a facility that will serve as a reception centre for asylum-seekers.

To promote more objective reporting on refugees and asylum issues and build local support for refugees, UNHCR co-operated with the OSCE, UNICEF, OHCHR and other UN

agencies to organise three seminars for Macedonian journalists and editors. UNHCR and the OSCE also sponsored a visit to their Vienna offices by ten leading editors. To build local capacity to deal refugees, UNHCR supported the launch in April of a pilot network of five local NGOs able to provide legal and social counselling to refugees. The network was launched for an initial period of six months. Capacity building and refugee-law dissemination efforts included lectures on international refugee law and legal aspects of the Kosovo emergency at the Faculty of Law. The Office also strengthened links with the Association of Lawyers.

UNHCR continued to advise the Government on amendments to the Citizenship Act. The Office participated actively in an expert group convened by the MIA and furnished comments on the proposed amendments. In June, MIA, the Council of Europe and UNHCR co-sponsored a workshop on "Reforms in the Domain of Citizenship in Europe," which sought to mobilise support for proposed amendments to the Citizenship Act and raise awareness of the problem of statelessness. The Office also continued to co-operate closely with the Office of the Ombudsman on citizenship issues and is in the process of defining a joint plan of action for future co-operation in this field.

UNHCR concluded an agreement with the Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research to support its Centre for Refugees and Forced Migration Studies. The aim of the agreement is to transform the Centre into a regional research and resource centre in the field of refugees and forced migration. The Centre has already established links with a network of analogous research institutes and organised its first summer session focusing on refugees and forced migration in June. One donor has provided funds to strengthen the centre's Documentation Centre, which will play an impor-

tant role in disseminating information on refugee and forced migration issues in the region.

Consolidating Durable Solutions

Following the repatriation of most of the 344,500 refugees from Kosovo in the second half of 1999, the number of refugees in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYR Macedonia) had decreased further to some 9,500 by the end of June. Of this total, about 2,300 continued to be housed in collective centres, and some 7,200 in private accommodation. The number of Kosovo Albanians decreased to less than 1,000, owing to repatriation. Ethnic Roma account for well over half of all refugees. Others include ethnic Albanians from southern Serbia, as well as ethnic Serbs and other non-Albanian minority groups from Kosovo, such as Gorans and Zubas. The continuing poor security situation of non-Albanians in Kosovo rules out the organised repatriation of non-Albanian groups for the time being. While not promoting organised repatriation of Roma, UNHCR organised one “go-and-see” visit to Kosovo. UNHCR is exploring resettlement opportunities for minority groups from Kosovo with limited prospects for return or local integration.

During the first six months of the year, 153 refugees repatriated to Kosovo with UNHCR assistance, which included cash and food. The principal destinations were Glogovac, Kosovo Polje, Lipjan, Obilic and Skenderaj. Sixty-eight refugees, including a small number evacuated from Kosovo for security reasons, departed on resettlement during the same period.

The Government has granted “Temporary Humanitarian Assisted Persons” (THAP) status to the refugees, for duration varying from three to six months. THAP status is scheduled to end on 28 September. The limited duration and successive extensions of THAP status have placed constraints on protection and the search for durable solutions. Faced with uncertainty regarding their ability to remain in FYR Macedonia, refugees continue to depend on international humanitarian assistance. Local inte-

gration has not been pursued owing to ethnic tensions and related political sensitivities.

Continuing Humanitarian Assistance for the Remaining Refugee Population

Three collective centres were closed in the first week of July, thanks to the relocation of a total of 1,248 refugees to the new Suto Orizari refugee site near Skopje. Phase One of the site was completed and consists of 16 barracks (with 236 rooms) five communal kitchens, showers and sanitary facilities. Phase Two of the site will be completed by the end of the year.

During the first six months of the year, refugees in the collective centres were provided with cooked meals. They also received hygiene parcels on a regular basis, and kitchen sets when needed. Vulnerable refugees living with host families received cooking stoves, firewood and kitchen sets. Extremely vulnerable host families received support for shelter repair. Refugees also received basic food from WFP and complementary fresh food from NGOs funded by ECHO and other bilateral donors. A local NGO continued to ensure the distribution of basic food and some complementary food items to refugees in host families. With the phase-out of ECHO funding for complementary food to refugees, UNHCR will have to cover these needs, despite funding constraints. Co-ordination amongst local organisations involved in community services activities was reinforced to support the phase-out of international NGOs. Host-family fatigue is increasing, however, despite the continued provision of assistance packages. Refugees are also facing growing hostility from local communities.

Rehabilitation and Development of Areas Previously Occupied by Refugee Camps

To rehabilitate former refugee-hosting areas and address specific community needs, a total of 60 Quick Impact Projects (QIPs) were implemented in 33 municipalities during the first half of the year. Macedonian organisations implemented almost half of the projects. One umbrella agency implemented the public-works

related QIPs. These included shelter and general infrastructure repair such as the rehabilitation of former campsites, water projects such as the installation of small water-supply systems and reservoirs, and sanitation projects to repair and maintain latrines, as well as sewage- and waste-disposal systems. Another umbrella agency was responsible for community services projects focusing on women, children and vulnerable groups, particularly the Roma community. These included income-generation projects, educational support and counselling, reproductive health education and recreational activities. The use of local contractors and labour in many projects had a multiplier effect on the local economy and provided economic benefits to local communities. Local NGOs and organisations implementing QIPs also benefited from capacity building in the form of training and technical support, which led to improve project-design and proposal-writing skills.

REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITY ACTIVITIES FOR JULY – DECEMBER

UNHCR's initial objectives remain unchanged. Priority activities for the remainder of the year include the following:

- Continue to promote the adoption of the new asylum law. In parallel, the Office will continue building local capacity on refugee and asylum issues through “on the job” training for staff of MIA's Department for Foreigners and Immigration Issues, particularly the Section for Immigration and the Asylum Bureau. Workshops will focus on international refugee law and refugees status determination and will include representatives of the border police.
- In co-operation with the Council of Europe and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Office will conduct a workshop on the situation of Roma refugees, returnees and IDPs. The workshop will target NGOs, representatives of the Roma com-

munity in the region (Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and FYR Macedonia) and relevant international organisations. This will be followed by a round-table on “Roma and Sinti Asylum and Refugee Issues” that will be organised by ODIHR in Warsaw as a side event during the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in October. Under the European Commission's Odysseus project, UNHCR will support exchange visits of key government officials and NGO representatives to Denmark and the United Kingdom. Other activities will include regional workshops in the fields of asylum legislation and refugee status determination, as well as country of origin information. In addition, a Council of Europe/UNHCR/Ministry for Foreign Affairs workshop will focus on the impact of the European Convention on Human Rights on the protection of asylum-seekers, refugees and IDPs, targeting relevant ministries, the Human Rights Ombudsman and NGOs.

- Other training events will include: a “train-the-trainers” workshop for key implementing partners; training on international refugee law and refugee status determination for the five local NGOs participating in the newly launched legal and social counselling network; and one workshop on EU trends in asylum and migration for Macedonian officials involved in negotiations with the EU. Within the framework of preparations for an EU-FYR Macedonia Stabilisation and Association Agreement, the country was asked to address asylum, immigration, and control of external borders and visa issues, in negotiation with the competent EU institutions. UNHCR will co-operate closely with the authorities in this effort.
- Promote the amendment of the Citizenship Act. The Council of Europe and UNHCR will continue to provide proposals on amendments needed to bring the Citizenship and other legislation in line

with the European Convention on Nationality. The Office will also work with NGOs active in this field to secure more accurate estimates of the number of potentially stateless persons. While the number of potentially stateless persons of concern to UNHCR is unknown, government estimates put the figure at between 15,000 to 60,000.

- Continue to provide protection and hu-

manitarian assistance to refugees in FYR Macedonia, while pursuing durable solutions. The Office will strengthen its cooperation with and support to national service-providing institutions that should ultimately take the lead in providing assistance to refugees. UNHCR will also continue to move refugees out of collective centres to the Suto Orizari refugee site. Close monitoring of host family accommodation will also continue.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available*	Total Funds Obligated
AB and TF	15,100,891	12,951,260	6,753,430	6,042,100

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

