



Supplementary Appeal

Comprehensive Solutions for the Protracted Refugee Situation in Serbia

May 2009

Executive summary

Serbia hosts one of the largest refugee populations in Europe. By the end of January 2009, there were 96,490 registered refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) living in Serbia. Most of the refugees live in private accommodation, while a small percentage remains in 56 official collective centres (CCs). UNHCR programmes focus primarily on achieving durable solutions for these vulnerable groups. Out of the total 96,490 refugees – 69,298 are from Croatia and 27,114 are from Bosnia Herzegovina.

Between 1996 and 2009 the refugee population in Serbia decreased by more than 80 per cent, as a result of returns to BiH and Croatia, local integration in Serbia as well as of resettlement programmes. UNHCR activities increasingly focused on assisting and achieving durable solutions for the most vulnerable groups among remaining refugees.

This project is designed to support the implementation of the High Commissioner's Special Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations, which focuses on five situations in different parts of the world where refugees have been living in exile for long periods of time. Bosnian and Croatian refugees in Serbia have been identified as in particular need of support.

This Special Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations pays particular attention to the promotion of livelihoods and self-reliance. The ultimate objective is to phase out the longstanding assistance programme for that population.

In December 2008 UNHCR and Serbian authorities agreed to make a last effort towards ensuring that the remaining refugees in Serbia would find a durable solution, either through return or local integration, so that within a two year period this situation would finally be resolved.

To expedite solutions for this protracted situation, UNHCR also strengthened its cooperation with the Croatian authorities in the sphere of housing assistance programmes. These programmes are instrumental for sustaining returns of refugees from Serbia. Cooperation extends to the timely review and processing of individual refugee applications for either reconstruction of destroyed properties or for alternative housing assistance.

The main objectives of UNHCR's operation addressing comprehensive solutions for protracted refugee situation in Serbia in 2009 are:

In Serbia:

- To improve shelter / housing
- To improve self-reliance and livelihoods
- To increase level of individual civil documentation
- To strengthen international and regional instruments related to rights in a country of origin

In Croatia:

- To contribute to the transparency and fairness of administrative proceedings related to housing assistance programmes
- To accelerate the processing of individual refugee applications by Croatian authorities
- To share best practices for the review of applications/appeals by the newly established appellate body in Croatia

Expected results:

The most vulnerable refugees living in collective accommodation or in unsuitable private homes in Serbia will find durable solutions either through local integration or by returning to their country of origin. An estimated 5,000 refugees are expected to benefit directly from this project. An additional 20,000 people will benefit from the naturalization campaign and will take citizenship in Serbia. Additionally, the project will accelerate the processing as well as the review of some 12, 500 appeal cases by returnees in Croatia.

Programme at a glance

Title	Comprehensive solutions for the protracted refugee situation in Serbia
Beneficiaries	17,500 refugees directly and additional 50,000 indirectly
Time frame	12 months
Total requirements	USD 7,863,489



Elderly woman living in a collective centre, Petrovac, Eastern Serbia

Working environment

The context

Following the collapse of the Yugoslav Federation in 1991, a decade of armed conflict followed, causing the displacement of thousands of people in the region. UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia until the signing of Dayton peace agreement at the end of 1995. The effect on the economy and the life of people was drastic, especially for the more than 500,000 refugees from Croatia and BiH who had found shelter in Serbia. The Kosovo crisis in 1999 brought a new period of economic sanctions as well a new influx of 220,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) to Serbia.

Serbia is now in the midst of economic transition and European integration. These processes are clearly interlinked. Economic restructuring, however poses considerable challenges for the Government which needs to promote economic growth and prevent poverty, while continuing to care for the traditionally vulnerable groups such as refugees, IDPs, Roma population, single parents, etc. The Government of Serbia adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for the country in October 2003. The Poverty Reduction Strategy is linked to the European integration process and to realization of the Millennium Development Goals.

Recently, significant efforts have been undertaken by the Government of Serbia, local authorities, NGOs as well as the international community in order to facilitate integration of refugees in Serbia. The National Strategy for Resolving the Problems of Refugees (2002) and PRSP focus on promoting repatriation by creating conditions for return to Croatia, BiH and to Kosovo, and by promoting local integration, addressing the issues of housing, closure of CCs, as well as facilitating employment opportunities and addressing the legal and property aspects of both local integration and repatriation. Nevertheless, further steps in addressing the most vulnerable of refugees are necessary.

The refugee problem can only be successfully tackled with collective action by the Government, local authorities and the international community. Municipalities, who are the main support for the refugee population, will be encouraged to provide opportunities for self-reliance to refugees. This support can be provided to any activity at the local level that contributes to the independence and empowerment of the refugees in terms of housing, employment, education, social support, etc. Therefore adequate support will be given to these municipalities in their efforts to locally integrate the remaining refugee population. Municipal action plans prepared by a number of municipalities in Serbia that address the needs of refugees, especially those residing in CCs, will be supported by UNHCR through projects leading to durable solutions for the most vulnerable refugees.

The return of refugees from Serbia largely depends on the realization of the housing assistance programmes in Croatia. Despite recent acceleration of the housing reconstruction, a large number of refugee/ returnee claims to reconstruct their pre-war housing are still pending due to various administrative reasons. Some of them await housing solutions almost five years and cannot avail themselves of the repatriation as durable solution since they are unable to settle in Croatia. UNHCR advocated for the inclusion of all affected persons into other existing housing assistance schemes that was accepted by the Government of Croatia. In April 2008, the competent government body decided to introduce concrete measures to establish an accelerated review of claims and a flexible assistance provision mechanism. This decision opens new perspective for the return of those who opted to repatriate from Serbia.

The needs

To best assess refugee needs, the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees (SCR) together with UNHCR carried out a survey in December 2008. The research included refugees in collective centers (CCs) and a sample of 2,467 refugees (800 households) in private accommodation. The results highlighted that:

- Unemployment among refugees is 33 per cent, significantly higher than among the local population;
- 29 per cent of refugees have monthly income less than EUR 48, which is a threshold for social welfare benefits;
- 61 per cent of refugees do not have permanent housing;
- Only 5 per cent of refugees desire repatriation to their country of origin.

Housing is a pressing problem for many citizens of Serbia. This is why the PRSP focuses comprehensively on all aspects of poverty, including housing poverty and poverty-affected city districts (quarters, localities) where the poor are concentrated. Housing problems are closely connected to poverty since the most of the poor people in urban areas have to pay expensive rented accommodation. However, the socially vulnerable groups, including refugees, are in the most critical situation.

Of the total number of households which own a house, 73 per cent need construction materials to complete its construction or rehabilitation. Some 7 per cent of households live in unsuitable housing, and 48.5 per cent have less than 15m² per person. Some 8.13 per cent of households live without running water and 13.8 per cent without a toilet. The key indicator of refugee vulnerability is the high unemployment rate, which remains at 33 per cent compared to a rate of 20 per cent among the Serbian population. Almost 66 per cent of refugees in CCs are not employed.

To ensure durable solutions through local integration for the most vulnerable refugees the Serbian Government estimates that EUR 188 million in assistance is required. Serbia has allocated EUR 4.2 million for this purpose in its budgets for 2009 and 2010. It is expected that an additional EUR 5.2 million will be available from EU (IPA) funds. Approximately EUR 30 million will be provided by municipalities/regional governments for infrastructure in the housing projects.

The lack of access to adequate housing for some 16,000 returnee/refugee families in Croatia represents the main problem in the return process. Most of the returnee families need counselling and assistance to realize their basic rights in view of often cumbersome administrative procedures that need improvement. Moreover, the capacity of the competent bodies to deal with these issues needs to be improved. In concrete terms, the capacity to quickly process housing assistance applications/ claims should be boosted.

Main activities / outputs

- Refugees assisted to repatriate and transport their tractors and household belongings.
- Improved living conditions for refugees from CCs and poor private accommodation.
- Refugees living in CCs and private accommodations are supported to merge with domicile elderly households or relatives/friends and are provided with in-kind support.
- Through the purchasing of Village Houses and provision of Dependency Reduction Grant, refugees living in CCs recommended for closure and private accommodation, live in adequate accommodation and dignified conditions.
- Alternative housing capacity provided for extremely vulnerable elderly refugee families living in CCs (priority given to CCs recommended for closure) through merging with relatives/close friends refugees living in private accommodation.
- Refugees from CC and private accommodation have reached permanent solutions through Partial Self Help programme.
- Through the construction of Social Housing in Supportive Environment, refugees live in adequate accommodation and dignified conditions.
- To provide refugees with inexpensive housing loans.
- Refugees living in private accommodation are supported to increase their economic independence through the agricultural component of the program.
- The hosting families, merged with extremely vulnerable elderly refugee families living in CCs, improve household income and able to cover the needs of both groups.
- Selected refugees are involved in courses linked to the job market to increase their vocational skills and to strengthen the link between the vocational training program and income generating.
- Self-reliance opportunities for refugees are enhanced through income generation grants and training.
- Refugees are assisted in exercising their rights related to property, pension, education, social welfare, health care, labour rights, personal documents and acquiring Serbian citizenship etc.
- Implementing partners' activities performed in transparent manner and according to UNHCR rules and regulations.
- Information on programmes provided to refugees.
- Lawyers for housing appeals' review in Croatia are recruited and trained.



Income Generation Project Beneficiary– Vegetable Production, Vojvodina

Planning figures

Planning figures for refugees in Serbia					
Type of population	Origin	Feb 2009		Dec 2009	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	BiH	27,125	27,125	12,500	12,500
Refugees	Croatia	69,339	69,339	32,500	32,500

Strategy and Activities

The potential for durable solutions for refugees from the former Yugoslavia depends on the ability of the international community and countries in the region to find solution for the most difficult issues that affects refugees.

Legal assistance activities should enable easier and faster naturalization of the remaining refugees who opted for local integration. However, this can be achieved only with the full commitment of the SCR and the Ministry of Interior to that process. This should include regular exchange of data with UNCHR and regular update of databases concerning refugees.

Access to rights in Croatia depends on political will to create more favourable protection environment for refugees from that country, regardless of which durable solution is chosen – repatriation or local integration.

UNHCR will assist in the review of housing applications as well as in comparing the applicants' lists with the refugee database in Serbia in order to expedite durable solutions for refugees and returnees. At the same time, the Office will assist in communicating between authorities in Croatia and applicants in Serbia.

UNHCR will provide assistance to refugees with specific needs, especially those residing in the remaining collective centres and remote private accommodation. UNHCR will continue with its activities for children and youth in remote collective centres.

TRANSPORT / LOGISTICS: Transport of returnee families with their personal belongings to Croatia and provision fuel for implementing partners' activities.

DOMESTIC NEEDS / HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT: Cash and in-kind assistance for refugees moving out of CCs and provision of dignified living conditions for extremely vulnerable elderly refugees (within host family's dwelling).

SHELTER / OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE: Various construction projects, housing micro-loans for purchase of building materials, hiring of qualified labor, or buying of already existing property, as well as households merging initiative and village houses (purchase and rehabilitation of abandoned village houses, often in rural settings).

COMMUNITY SERVICES: Support to the municipal action plans that will address the needs of refugees in selected municipalities.

SELF RELIANCE / LIVELIHOOD: Agricultural inputs (assistance to refugees with an agricultural background, living in private accommodation in rural areas); small business establishment grant; and vocational trainings.

LEGAL ASSISTANCE / PROTECTION: Provision of free legal assistance and counselling for refugees and promotion of the naturalization / integration. Assistance to the Croatian authorities in the review of refugees/returnees' applications, in particular with legal analysis and advice to expedite durable solutions.

AGENCY OPERATIONAL SUPPORT: Public information activities and UNOPS staff costs.

Performance Indicators

Serbia

It is estimated that some 241 refugees will be supported with assistance kits or cash grants for initial settling-in. Families in need of transport assistance when moving out from CCs to new accommodation will be supported. In addition to the PIKAP programme agricultural inputs will be provided to 100 refugee families, while 50 refugee families will get income generation grants. It is estimated that 400 refugees will benefit from the projected construction of 100 housing units through partial self help program, while 80 social housing units will be built for 160 vulnerable refugees. In addition, 100 refugee families (some 400 individuals) will be supported in entering village houses and provided with dependency reduction grant.

Ten refugees will be provided with dignified housing solution. The newly established housing revolving fund will provide loans for 50 refugee families for construction purposes. Some 200 refugees will benefit from the vocational and skill training. Some 2,100 refugees will be provided with free legal assistance, information and counselling to enable them finding durable solutions, predominantly local integration. In addition, it is expected that 20,000 people will opt for naturalization, following the campaign.

Croatia

It is envisaged that some 12,500 housing assistance applications and appeals will be reviewed and decisions formulated.

Challenges

The most important assumptions for implementation of the programme is:

- Political stability in the Republic of Serbia and in the region continues.
- The Government of Serbia remains committed in supporting activities for local integration of refugees.
- Other local integration programmes and projects, at the national, regional and local level are functioning in coordination with UNHCR activities.
- Croatia's programmes designed to provide adequate and durable housing solutions to returnees and refugees continue to accelerate.
- Exchange rate fluctuations are manageable.
- The global economic downturn does not adversely affect project implementation.

Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence

Number of offices	3
Total staff	75
International	6
National	57
UNVs	5
UNOPS	6
Surge deployment	1

Coordination

The planning and implementation of this project requires a coordinated approach among all stakeholders. The project will be implemented in close coordination with SCR, the Ministry for Social Affairs, Municipal Authorities, local trustees and local Centres for Social Welfare (CSW). Partnership with the European Union will be particularly important given the EU's political and developmental goals for Serbia. Cooperation with a wide range of other actors, such as the OSCE, NGOs, refugee associations and UN Country Team is also critical due to the complexity of the operation.

Partners

All UNHCR's programmes for local integration are developed in cooperation with the main partner – the SCR. A number of local and international implementing partners have been performing these programmes:

- InterSOS – Domestic Needs / Household Support, Self Reliance / Livelihood and Shelter / Other Infrastructure.
- Danish Refugee Council - Domestic Needs / Household Support, Self Reliance / Livelihood and Shelter / Other Infrastructure.
- Housing Center - Shelter / Other Infrastructure.
- VIZIJA - Self Reliance / Livelihood and Shelter / Other Infrastructure.
- Micro Development Fund - Self Reliance / Livelihood and Shelter / Other Infrastructure.
- MicroFinS - Self Reliance / Livelihood and Shelter / Other Infrastructure.
- Humanitarian Center for Integration and Tolerance – Legal Assistance / Protection
- PRAXIS – Legal Assistance / Protection
- Croatian Ministry for Regional Development, Forestry and Water Management – Directorate for areas of Special State Concern and Directorate for Reconstruction - Legal Assistance/Protection

UNHCR will rely on cooperation with the other UN agencies, especially with UNDP, and with the OSCE.

The most important partnership for refugees from former Yugoslavia is a tri-partite partnership between the European Commission, OSCE and UNHCR, formally established to support the Sarajevo process and to help the Governments in the region to achieve durable solutions for displacement in the region. UNHCR will continue to work closely with the EC and OSCE to reach that goal.

Total requirements

Budget - 2009	
Sector	(USD)
Protection Coordination and Monitoring	60,800
Transport/Logistics	200,000
Domestic Needs/ Household Support	206,571
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	4,469,829
Community Services	700,000
Self Reliance / Livelihood	492,000
Legal Assistance/Protection	692,155
Operational Support (to agencies)	527,700
Total Operations	7,349,055
Support costs (7 per cent)*	514,434
Total	7,863,489

* 7 per cent has been added to the total operational requirements to meet UNHCR's indirect support costs.

MAP

