

Croatia

Main objectives

- Promote and facilitate the return and integration of Croatian refugees currently in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) or Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH).
- Provide protection and facilitate durable solutions for refugees in Croatia who originate from FRY and from BiH.
- Support the Government in the establishment – and implementation – of a legislative framework for asylum-seekers and refugees.



WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Recent Developments

There was a sweeping political change in Croatia in January 2000. The new Government expressed unequivocal support for the return of minority groups. Perceptions and attitudes have changed and the Government has taken a more positive, solution-oriented approach to the issues involved in the return of refugees. As a result, many legal impediments to return were removed during the course of 2001. However, Croatia still requires a functioning legislative framework for asylum-seekers and refugees. Adoption of the new Asylum Law (prepared with UNHCR's assistance, currently pending submission to Parliament) would be a first step in that direction.

Croatia's economy is showing signs of a slow recovery, despite rising unemployment. Political and economic stabilisation and prospects of EU integration following the signature of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) between Croatia and the European Union (EU) in October, should engender more investment and increasing governmental and bilateral support for further economic reconstruction. Equally important, this should bring social reform in its wake.

PLANNING FIGURES

Population	Jan. 2002	Dec. 2002
Refugees	21,900	16,900
Returnees	23,300	46,300
IDPs	31,800	28,800
Total	77,000	92,000

TOTAL REQUIREMENTS • USD 10,146,958

The return of refugees is still slowed down by housing questions: how to accelerate the restitution of property to its dispossessed owners, and how to finance the reconstruction of property. Progress with respect to restitution of property/tenancy rights for returnees has been slow. Nonetheless, positive developments are expected within the next two years. In March 2001, the Government announced that issues relating to repossession of property would be resolved by the end of 2002 and that reconstruction of housing would be completed by 2003.

Constraints

Housing should probably still top the list here, despite positive changes in the relevant legislation in 2000 and 2001. Greater

progress continues to be required in the area of restitution of property/tenancy rights of returnees, particularly minorities.

The lack of economic opportunity has been most devastating in those areas where the conflict shattered an already frail pre-war economic structure, with unemployment now sometimes as high as 90 per cent. This significantly affects the sustainability of returns and the prospects for local integration for Bosnian refugees.

Although security and the rule of law continue to improve in areas of return, local political resistance to minority returns is still clearly and widely in evidence.

STRATEGY

Protection and Solutions

It is expected that in 2002 returns will continue at the same pace as in 2001, with a higher proportion of young families returning. By the end of 2002, most of those who wish to return will probably have done so. The UNHCR legal assistance programme will continue to support returnee integration and the search for durable solutions for refugees and displaced persons. The number of persons seeking legal assistance is expected to rise as the total number of returns mounts, and as awareness grows of the availability of such services. More than 12,500 persons received legal assistance in the first six months of 2001: subsequently, roughly half of these cases were successfully resolved.

Returnees

It is expected that by the end of 2001 a total of 152,000 refugees will have returned to Croatia. Major returnee locations are Eastern and Western Slavonia, Banovina-Kordun and Lika Dalmatia regions. In 2002, a drop in returns is expected (23,300 minority returns are predicted) with most of the remaining refugees opting for local integration. Nevertheless, any social and economic progress (the only ultimate guarantors of sustainable return) can be expected to herald further returns, especially amongst the younger population.

In order to promote and facilitate the voluntary return of these 23,300 Croatian Serb refugees, UNHCR will continue to advise the authorities on changes required in the legislation, provide legal assistance through a network of legal NGOs and investigate individual cases with specific problems. UNHCR also intends to maintain cross-border activities through the organisation of information campaigns in BiH and FRY, including go-and-see visits to Croatia, in order to provide first-hand and up-to-date information for refugees contemplating return.

Refugees

At the end of 2001, Croatia hosted some 22,000 refugees from BiH and the FRY. While most of the refugees live in private

accommodation, 3,500 are accommodated in collective centres. Most of the refugees in private accommodation are more proactive in seeking durable solutions for themselves and can be expected to have chosen either to return to their country of origin or to take advantage of local settlement. Whilst return to BiH remains a possibility, refugees are still concerned about insecurity in Republika Srpska as well as lack of assistance, poor economic prospects and problems with schooling. UNHCR will attempt to dispel these worries through the organisation of information campaigns and go-and-see visits to BiH and facilitate return through cross-border liaison and legal assistance.

Refugees in collective accommodation risk becoming a residual group with limited prospects for voluntary repatriation. In its discussions with the Croatian authorities, UNHCR will continue to advocate the option of local integration for this particular group.

Assistance

Returnees

UNHCR will continue to assist vulnerable returnees with transport and customs clearance for their belongings. A community-based social support programme will be maintained. This will continue to complement a national social welfare system that lacks the capacity to meet demand and inevitably leaves a large number of vulnerable people without support. A network of mobile teams and volunteers will assess the needs of the returnees and provide various services and in-house help, including distribution of food and non-food items, small shelter repairs, delivery of water and firewood and assistance in obtaining health care. They will also refer those in need of other assistance to relevant NGOs, international organisations or government institutions. International NGOs will scale back their current substantial provision of important services, but this should be balanced by increased local capacity, allowing UNHCR's assistance to be fully implemented through local NGOs.

It is expected that, with an increased number of younger families returning, the percentage of children and adolescents will rise. They are recognised as important actors in the promotion of inter-ethnic reconciliation. Volunteer networks within returning communities will be encouraged to organise a variety of educational, recreational and social activities for children and adolescents in order to provide a safe and stimulating multi-ethnic environment.

Refugees

UNHCR encourages the Croatian authorities to continue with the assistance programmes for refugees in Croatia, with special attention to the most vulnerable individuals residing in collective centres (and a limited level of social support to the most vulnerable cases living in private accommodation).



Returnees at their new house. UNHCR/L. Drazenovic (both).

Desired Impact

UNHCR's phase-out strategy depends on the success of both the return of Croatian-Serb refugees and the voluntary repatriation of Bosnian refugees as well as other durable solutions, i.e. local integration or resettlement. By the end of 2002, the majority of remaining Croatian refugees in countries of asylum should have opted for local settlement and it is expected that most of the Bosnian refugees in the country will have achieved a durable solution related to their status. Therefore, 2002 will probably be the last year of UNHCR's active involvement in and facilitation of returns from the BiH and from FRY.

ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Management Structure

UNHCR is the largest UN agency in Croatia and the only one with a significant field presence. There are five UNHCR offices in Croatia, located in former conflict zones where beneficiaries are located and where return activities take place. The Office of the Chief of Mission in Zagreb is the primary link with the Government of Croatia, other UN agencies, the diplomatic community and UNHCR Headquarters. At the end of 2002, UNHCR's country programme will be managed by a total of 57 staff (five internationals, two JPOs and 50 nationals).

Co-ordination

UNHCR plans to work with 13 implementing partners (three international and ten national). UNHCR's principal partner is the Croatian Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees (ODPR). National NGO capacity building is achieved by gradually expanding their activities while providing technical support and training on protection, returnee monitoring, planning, advocacy, fund-raising or public relations. All NGOs

operating in areas of interest to UNHCR participate in co-ordination structures.

UNHCR also enjoys close co-operation with OSCE with respect to the rights of returning minorities and the practical return framework. In view of the need for integration assistance and economic revitalisation programmes in areas of return, UNHCR is in regular contact with development-oriented agencies and financial institutions such as the World Bank, UNDP, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and USAID. In addition, UNHCR will continue to play an important co-ordination role for projects financed bilaterally and under the Stability Pact Initiative.

OFFICES

Zagreb	Daruvar (to be closed in 2002)
Knin	Osijek
Sisak	

PARTNERS

Government Agency
Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees
NGOs
American Refugee Committee
Association Mi
Caritas
Centre for Peace
Centre for Disaster Management
Committee for Human Rights
Handicap
International Rescue Committee
<i>Merhamet</i>
Serbian Democratic Forum
<i>Suncokret</i>
Other
Croatian Red Cross

BUDGET (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	2,863,757
Community Services	1,065,000
Domestic Needs	740,000
Health	220,000
Income Generation	350,000
Legal Assistance	1,672,000
Operational Support (to Agencies)	1,040,000
Shelter/Other Infrastructure	350,000
Transport/Logistics	513,000
Total Operations	8,813,757
Programme Support	1,333,201
Total	10,146,958