

# THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

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## INITIAL OBJECTIVES

- Promote durable solutions for refugees through repatriation, local integration or resettlement (for selected eligible individuals).
- Continue to protect and assist refugees; provide targeted support to refugee women, children, adolescents, and the elderly and vulnerable persons.
- Promote the adoption and implementation of a national asylum law, as well as the amendment of the citizenship law, and strengthen the national protection system.
- Support the Government of The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) to forge links with European institutions and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe on issues such as human rights, statelessness, full implementation of refugee law in line with the 1951 Convention, and burden-sharing.
- Pursue training and capacity-building activities for national and local institutions; support longer-term rehabilitation and development co-ordination mechanisms to lay the ground for phasing out UNHCR's activities.
- Remain ready (through contingency planning and a stockpile of relief items) for a possible influx of 20,000 refugees.

## MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

The conflict between ethnic Albanian armed groups and the military of FYROM, which started in February in the northern and western areas of FYROM, has significantly changed the humanitarian context, giving rise to urgent humanitarian

needs. The conflict has led to a population displacement within FYROM of about 36,000 people and to neighbouring Kosovo and southern Serbia of approximately 73,000 people. This development has necessitated an adjustment of the overall humanitarian strategy for FYROM, which had been focusing on assisting Kosovar and small numbers of other refugees following the 1999 influx and building on a national protection system.

Both refugees and IDPs have been affected by the deterioration of the situation. Along with other agencies, UNHCR has been carrying out protection and assistance activities. It has been ensuring entry to and exit from the country or affected areas; helping with documentation and family tracing, offering humanitarian aid, shelter, health and other services required by those with specific needs. The presence of refugees under temporary protection in the conflict areas has led UNHCR to design contingency plans to ensure their continued protection in the event of further deterioration of the situation. Physical relocation of some refugees to safer areas has been undertaken in addition to the ongoing planned activities.

The number of refugees decreased from some 9,000 at the beginning of the year to approximately 7,500 in June, mainly as a result of voluntary repatriation. The remaining refugees are mostly members of minority groups from Kosovo and southern Serbia in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). Their status as Temporary Humanitarian Assisted Persons (THAP) has been extended to 28 September 2001, except for ethnic Albanians from Kosovo, whose THAP status ended in March 2000. Those among the latter who did not opt for voluntary repatriation had access to a refugee status determination procedure. As the situation in FYROM continued to deteriorate, the number of applications for voluntary repatriation increased, particularly by ethnic Roma from

Kosovo. This was mainly due to the adverse situation in FYROM rather than to an improvement in the conditions for ethnic minorities in their country of origin. Go-and-see visits by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian community representatives from Kosovo took place until March, when the situation at the border became too hazardous. The visits resumed in June. In addition, favourable developments in the Preshevo valley in southern Serbia contributed to the voluntary return of some 29 per cent of the ethnic Albanian refugees who had left during the 1999 crisis. Refugees wishing to return to southern Serbia or to other parts of FRY were also assisted to obtain the required documentation for their return.

The already slim prospect of local integration of refugees has diminished further as the Government has been fully occupied in finding a solution to the conflict and the refugees have expressed their fear of further displacement. The opportunities envisaged for the majority of the refugees at the beginning of the year have thus become less feasible. Those remaining outside of Skopje were not assessed due to the rapidly changing security situation in the country. UNHCR also surveyed the undocumented cases countrywide to assess their status and ways to regularise their stay in FYROM.

The resettlement strategy has been recently revitalised and a more systematic pre-screening has been ongoing to identify a limited number of eligible refugees. Forty-two individuals were resettled to third countries, while 76 are pending a decision.

The draft Law on Asylum, revised by the Ministry of Interior (MOI) in response to comments from the EU Directorate General for Justice and Home Affairs, was submitted to the Government and has been forwarded to the Governmental Commission on the Political System. Due to the recent political developments, however, the process has been stalled. Access to the refugee status determination

procedure established by the MOI in the absence of a Law on Asylum has been initiated for asylum-seekers originating from countries outside the former Yugoslavian republics. UNHCR has brought shortcomings of the second instance appeal to the attention of the drafters of the Law. Furthermore, the updated draft law for changing and amending the current Law on Citizenship has been commented on by UNHCR. At present, a new version of the draft is being elaborated by officials of the MOI. In response to UNHCR's expression of concern over the issue of unregulated citizenship and residency, the issue has been included in ongoing political talks.

In collaboration between EU and UNHCR, the so-called Odysseus Programme in support of institutional capacity-building has been implemented within the Department for Asylum and Immigration of the Ministry of Interior. In addition, it is expected that a Country Team for the development of asylum systems within the framework of the Stability Pact Asylum and Migration Initiative will be established during 2001. The Office has continued to support the local NGO legal network, which is providing free legal and other assistance to asylum-seekers, refugees and potential stateless persons with unregulated citizenship. Regular meetings and one formal training event for the lawyers of the NGO Legal Network took place in the first half of 2001. UNHCR co-sponsored a lecture series entitled, *Exodus within Borders: the Global Crisis of Internal Displacement*, from 31 May to 2 June 2001 in Skopje. Also in June, a study visit to Armenia was organised for the officials of the Section for Administrative and Supervisory Matters dealing with citizenship issues.

The case of two Roma families facing deportation to Kosovo, which was submitted to the European Court for Human Rights (ECHR) at the end of 2000, is still pending. The ECHR has accepted a request for interim measures and called on the FYROM authorities to suspend the deportation until the court's decision is rendered. Another case of a rejected Uzbek asylum-seeker was also

forwarded to the ECHR for interim measures to suspend the deportation order.

**Progress as measured against selected indicators**

INDICATORS	PROGRESS
Functioning fair and efficient national asylum and protection system in place.	Draft Law on Asylum was re-submitted to the Government. Temporary humanitarian protection (THAP) was extended to minorities from Kosovo and Albanians from Southern Serbia. Asylum-seekers and persons whose THAP status ceased had access to a refugee status determination procedure. A gap analysis of local legislation was carried out. A workshop on Interviewing Techniques in the Framework of RSD Procedure was carried out.
Number of refugees returned to their country of origin, receiving assistance.	Under the voluntary repatriation programme organised by UNHCR, 1,009 refugees have returned. All the returnees received cash grants. UNHCR in co-operation with IOM, provided transportation for returnees.
Refugees receive regular material assistance. Collective centres consolidated to increase efficiency and cost-effectiveness.	1,200 refugee families in host families received three cubic metres of firewood for heating. All refugees receive basic/complementary food and hygiene parcels monthly. Collective centres for refugees have been consolidated from six to two in the first half of 2001, allowing UNHCR better monitoring, easier logistic support and further reduction of management staff.
Recreational, educational and psychosocial activities offered for refugee women and children, and support rendered to vulnerable individuals through linkages with local structures.	Four community centres are operational in host communities: Tetovo, Kumanovo, Suto Orizari and Gjorce Petrov, benefiting approximately 3,000 refugees and 4,000 host and vulnerable families. Activities are also available in all collective centres. There has been an improvement of co-operation with the Government institution, Centre for Social Welfare that provides assistance to vulnerable cases through monthly visits by mobile teams and interventions in individual cases. Vocational training assessment was completed for refugees in collective centres in May (333 potential trainees of which 90 are female). 200 refugee women in collective centres engaged in the handcraft.
Plans for emergency preparedness and response maintained and undated.	Contingency plan was updated according to the evolving situation. Field and border monitoring was increased. Inter-agency co-ordination was strengthened. Sectoral task forces with NGOs have resumed. Contingency stocks have been upgraded.

**REVISED OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES FOR JULY – DECEMBER**

In the first half of the year, UNHCR's contingency plan has been developed into an emergency preparedness and response plan, following the recent conflict that has produced over 100,000 IDPs and refugees. While the rest of the objectives for 2001 will be maintained, new objectives have been identified in order to have an

adequate response to the evolving emergency. The Office is thus planning to:

- Enhance emergency preparedness and response.
- Continue and strengthen co-ordination among humanitarian actors.
- Establish regular presence at main border crossings particularly with Kosovo.
- Provide support to the Government and the local structures.
- Implement confidence-building measures to facilitate the return of refugees and IDPs.

## FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

	<b>Initial Budget</b>	<b>Revised Budget</b>	<b>Total Funds Available<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Total Funds Obligated</b>
<b>APB</b>	8,061,783	6,733,063	4,801,179	4,282,331
<b>SPB</b>	0	2,688,613	757,747	595,409
<b>Total</b>	8,061,783	9,421,676	5,558,926	4,877,740

<sup>1</sup>Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.