

Bakery project for IDP Roma women
in New Belgrade, Serbia



Albania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Croatia
Montenegro
Serbia
**The former Yugoslav Republic of
Macedonia**



South-Eastern Europe

| OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS |

- UNHCR is implementing a regional project entitled *Social Inclusion and access to Human Rights for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Western Balkans*. Begun in February 2008, the project aims to reduce the number of minorities at risk of statelessness in the region. It will facilitate their access to citizenship through free legal aid and the provision of personal documents. UNHCR assisted some 3,700 persons in the region in 2008.
- To meet EU membership requirements, countries in the region further developed their asylum and migration systems. New asylum laws, in line with the EU asylum *acquis* and relevant international standards and practices, entered into force in January 2008 in Croatia and in April 2008 in Serbia. UNHCR provided substantial comments which are largely reflected in the new legislation.
- UNHCR continued the Regional Refugee Return in the Western Balkans project, which supports returns to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.
- As part of the High Commissioner's Initiative on Protracted Refugee situations in 2008, UNHCR reoriented its programmes in Serbia and Croatia to focus on ending the displacement of some 80,000 refugees from Croatia in the next two years. The most viable durable solutions would be local integration in Serbia or return to Croatia.
- The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia amended its Law on Citizenship and adopted the National Integration Strategy for Refugees and Foreigners to allow persons of concern, including recognized refugees and stateless persons, to find durable solutions through local integration. By the end 2008, some 5,000 people had acquired citizenship of the country. UNHCR supported the Government's move with technical advice.



Working environment

In 2008, UNHCR protected and assisted some 133,000 refugees and almost 354,000 IDPs in the complex political and socio-economic environment of the Western Balkans. Some countries, such as Serbia and Croatia, saw internal divisions linked to elections. In February 2008, the unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo affected regional relations. By the end of 2008, some 53 countries had recognized Kosovo's independence.

In the first half of 2008 these developments delayed legislative processes affecting populations of concern to UNHCR. However, later in the year a number of new laws were adopted, amendments to existing laws introduced and some previously adopted legislation made effective in Croatia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo. Country-specific strategies to find durable solutions for displaced populations, including some of the most disadvantaged Roma, were either reviewed or designed in BiH, Serbia, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro.

Refugee repatriation and IDP returns stagnated in the region in 2008, and the Sarajevo Declaration, with its focus on regional returns, had yet to be fully implemented. In December, the High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protracted Refugee Situations brought the issue of durable solutions for protracted refugee situations, including in the western Balkans, to the fore. It gave new momentum to efforts to resolve long-standing issues affecting repatriation to Croatia and the local integration of refugees in Serbia.

Achievements and impact

- *Main objectives*
- Ensure protection for all people of concern to UNHCR.
- Promote voluntary repatriation of refugees and support resettlement wherever applicable.

- Find sustainable durable solutions for all refugees, IDPs and returnees.
- Affirm and develop an international protection regime and strengthen national asylum systems.
- Develop dynamic partnerships with all international and national stakeholders.

UNHCR's efforts to find durable solutions for persons of concern resulted in a decline in the total number of refugees and IDPs in the region to some 486,000 by the end of 2008.

After more than a decade of regional displacement, local integration has become the most viable and preferred durable solution for the overwhelming majority of refugees. This was confirmed by the adoption or revision of national local integration strategies and their practical implementation in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and BiH.

UNHCR supported the most vulnerable refugee groups by providing them with legal services and dignified housing and supporting their self-reliance to help sustainable integration in Serbia, BiH and Montenegro and reintegration of returnees in Croatia. UNHCR identified and referred 166 refugees in BiH, mainly Roma from Kosovo, for resettlement.

Political developments in Serbia and Kosovo cut IDP returns to Kosovo drastically in 2008. UNHCR concentrated on protecting and assisting IDPs with specific needs and reinvigorated its programmes covering advocacy and public awareness, basic rights, social outreach, social services and personal documentation. These issues have a regional dimension, especially with regard to displaced Roma and other minority groups.

UNHCR surveys and participatory assessments highlighted such problems as ethnic and social discrimination and the lack of access to employment and education. The lack of personal civil documentation for

Roma, which places individuals at risk of *de facto* statelessness and hinders the enjoyment of citizenship and other fundamental human rights, was another problem. UNHCR succeeded in reducing the risk of statelessness in Serbia and Kosovo, BiH, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro through its *Social Inclusion of and Access to Human Rights for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Western Balkans* project.

The Office worked with the States of the region to meet the basic needs of asylum-seekers, and helped build the asylum capacity of governments. In Serbia, the asylum law entered into force in April 2008 and the appropriate authorities took over RSD as well as the management of the Asylum Centre. In The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the competent ministry assumed full responsibility for the management of a new reception centre and improved conditions for resident asylum-seekers. UNHCR did not observe any *refoulement* in the region in 2008.

| Constraints |

Regional and domestic political developments blocked IDP returns to Kosovo. Some refugees in Serbia hesitated to opt for local integration and linked their eventual decision to a resolution of the occupancy/tenancy rights issue still pending in Croatia. This issue also affected the naturalization process in Serbia.

The unfavourable socio-economic context as well as limited livelihood opportunities had an adverse impact on local integration and the sustainability of returns.

Certain minority IDP groups faced additional difficulties on returning to their places of origin. They were subject to discrimination and found it difficult to avail of their social and economic rights and services. In some areas of potential return, security remains of concern. The Roma, Ashkali and so-called Egyptian communities are the most disadvantaged in this respect.

| Operations |

UNHCR's operations in **BiH, Serbia** and **Kosovo** are described in separate chapters.

In **Albania**, the Office focused on consolidation of the Government's migration and asylum policy, border monitoring, and the promotion of cross-border initiatives. The Office provided direct assistance to asylum-seekers and people of concern, disbursing funds for the maintenance of the Babrru Reception Centre and providing relief items to 14 individuals, sanitary materials to 25 women, medical services to 306 people, and subsistence allowances for 46 extremely vulnerable people.

UNHCR also gave training on HIV and AIDS prevention and response measures to 37 people, helped 22 children with school enrolment and built the knowledge base of government staff responsible for asylum and refugee issues. Furthermore, it sponsored a workshop in preparation for the revision of the Law on Local Integration. UNHCR participated in the UN Delivering as One pilot project.

In **Croatia**, the Office sought sustainable solutions for returnees and helped the authorities to establish a fair and efficient asylum and migration system. It monitored the implementation of the Housing Care programme aiming to provide accommodation to returnees, and developments in

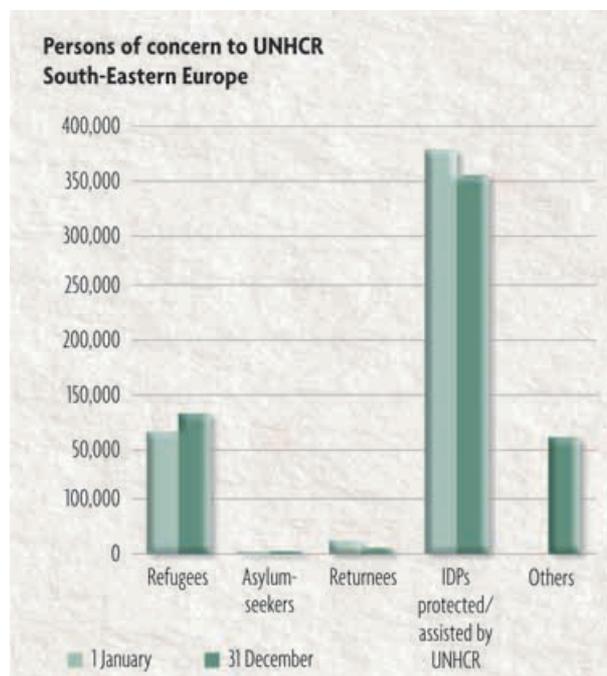
private property repossession. Finally, it cooperated with the Government and NGOs in setting up a border monitoring project.

The High Commissioner's Initiative on Protracted Refugee Situations opened new avenues to durable solutions for Croatian refugees. UNHCR provided transportation to 155 returnee families, while 19 mobile teams assisted some 9,500 vulnerable returnees and supported their integration. Some 3,300 persons were counselled on housing care programmes. UNHCR provided inputs for a draft law on foreigners to be discussed by Parliament, and provided training on border monitoring.

In **Montenegro**, four new laws were passed that have a direct bearing on populations of concern to UNHCR. Prior to their adoption, the Office gave its opinion on draft legislation to the competent authorities. UNHCR continued to pursue durable solutions, facilitating returns to Serbia and Kosovo. It organized 'go and see' visits for 214 refugees and 'go and inform' visits for 427 refugees. Ninety-four people found durable solutions through return to Kosovo in 2008, but only seven repatriated to BiH.

Legal assistance is a major component of the country operation, especially for minority groups at risk of statelessness. The Office extended legal assistance to 2,264 people and obtained 2,180 personal documents in neighbouring countries. UNHCR reinvigorated its efforts to provide adequate housing for vulnerable groups. This resulted in the closure of the last collective centre in Montenegro. In 2008, more than 1,000 people found housing solutions. The Office managed the Konik camp where Roma and other minorities reside. Through awareness-raising, UNHCR succeeded in stopping the practice of childbirths in the camp and promoted referrals to proper hospital facilities.

In **The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** there were 1,772 persons of concern to UNHCR, mostly Roma from Kosovo. The Office sought durable solutions by facilitating returns to Kosovo. During the year some 122 individuals repatriated to Serbia and Kosovo, either with UNHCR's assistance or spontaneously. In parallel, UNHCR advocated for local integration. Participatory assessments showed that many refugees prefer this option to repatriation.



In December 2008, UNHCR's advocacy activities translated into the adoption by the Government of a strategy for integration of refugees and foreigners in the country, which provided a policy framework for the integration process. UNHCR continued its care and maintenance programme, as most refugees are dependent on humanitarian aid. The assistance included subsistence allowances for people with specific needs, health care services, and some vocational training and income-generation projects for victims of sexual and gender-based violence.

UNHCR also implemented its country component under the regional project for social inclusion and access to human rights for Roma and other minority communities. Some 800 Roma benefited from this project, obtaining 556 identity and civil registration documents. UNHCR also supported an asylum centre in Vizbegovo.

Financial information

Though operations in the region were fully funded in 2008, the programme covered only the most pressing needs. The drastic appreciation of local currencies during the year against the US dollar created an additional strain on the budget, and additional allocations were required to compensate for exchange rate losses. However, some activities, especially in smaller operations, suffered from a disproportionate loss. These activities were reviewed and scaled down. All Offices increased their fund raising at the local level. Such efforts were particularly successful in Croatia, Serbia and BiH, attracting additional funds for some targeted activities.

Budget and expenditure in South-Eastern Europe (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Albania	756,937	728,305
Bosnia and Herzegovina	6,202,741	6,129,860
Croatia	3,752,898	3,513,279
Montenegro	2,859,094	2,642,455
Serbia	24,661,546	23,393,310
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	3,188,783	3,064,337
Total	41,421,999	39,471,546

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities – mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.

Voluntary contributions to South-Eastern Europe (USD)		
Country	Donor	Annual Budget
Bosnia and Herzegovina	European Commission	472,592
	Japan Association for UNHCR	6,359
	Council of Europe Development Bank	200,000
	United States of America	200,000
Bosnia and Herzegovina Subtotal		878,951
Croatia	European Commission	371,143
	Croatia Subtotal	
Montenegro	European Commission	222,455
	United States of America	400,000
Montenegro Subtotal		622,455
Serbia	Denmark	27,620
	European Commission	1,134,674
	Japan	300,000
	Divac Foundation (Serbia)	1,018,474
	HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein (United Arab Emirates)	55,000
	Romania	124,417
	Russian Federation	900,000
	Council of Europe Development Bank	64,366
	United States of America	2,700,000
Serbia Subtotal		6,324,551
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia	European Commission	147,929
	Japan Association for UNHCR	11,558
	United States of America	400,000
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Subtotal		559,487
South-Eastern Europe Subregion	Sweden	4,468,413
	United States of America	4,282,592
South-Eastern Europe Subtotal		8,751,005
Total		17,507,592

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities - mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.