

OHR Reconstruction and Return, March 1998

RRTF: Report March 1998

An Action Plan in support of the return of refugees and displaced persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina

March 1998

Introduction

1. Two years into the implementation of the Dayton Peace Agreement, a large number of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are still internally displaced or refugees in host countries⁽¹⁾. Although population figures should be taken with a degree of caution, several hundreds of thousands people are expected to move in the years to come. Success in reintegrating harmoniously refugees and displaced persons into Bosnia and Herzegovina's society is essential not only from a humanitarian perspective, but also to ensure sustained economic growth, overall political stability and reconciliation in the medium-term.
2. The return and reintegration challenge is extraordinarily complex. It goes beyond organizing population movements, and requires creating appropriate and sustainable conditions to enable refugees and displaced persons to resume normal lives. A broad range of closely linked political, economic and social issues have to be addressed. Information currently available on refugees and displaced persons (e.g., population structure or intents) is very limited, and movement patterns are unpredictable. Hence, responses have to be kept flexible and continuously adjusted to changing needs. Furthermore, countrywide strategies have to reflect highly variable local or regional patterns. To achieve harmonious reintegration, in accordance with Annex 7 of the Dayton Peace Agreement, international assistance is needed – or population movements will result only in chaos and long-lasting uncertainty for many.
3. Much has already been done for the reintegration of refugees and displaced persons, in particular under the guidance and leadership of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many people have succeeded in resuming a normal life. Much has also been achieved in the field of reconstruction and economic revival, and many areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina have come back to life. But much remains to be done in order for a new wave of returnees and displaced persons to be re-integrated into Bosnia and Herzegovina's society. 1998 is a crucial year in this respect. The Sarajevo Return Conference, held on February 3, 1998 under the joint chairmanship of the European Union (EU), United States (US) and Office of the High Representative (OHR) was one milestone which is being pursued with the support of the entire donor community, under the coordination of the Reconstruction and Return Task Force (RRTF). Another conference, focusing on regional issues, is planned to take place in Banja Luka in late April, 1998.
4. This paper aims to outline the main features of a strategy for the international community to assist in reintegrating refugees and displaced persons. It consists of three parts: an analysis of the current situation including demographic data, trends, and identified obstacles to successful reintegration (Part A); a description of the proposed strategy, including its goals and its main pillars (Part B); and a final section (Part C) which describes necessary action to be undertaken in four critical sectors: political environment and security, economic revival and employment, housing, and local infrastructure⁽²⁾.

1. See Annex 1 for definition (e.g. refugee, displaced person, minority area, majority area, return,

relocation, etc.).

2. This paper draws extensively on “Repatriation and Return, Operation 1998”, UNHCR December 1997, and “[Resources, Repatriation and Minority Return](#)”, RRTF, December 1997, and “Bosnia and Herzegovina – The Priority Reconstruction Program: Achievements and 1998 Needs”, prepared by the EC and the Europe and Central Asia Region of the World Bank, April 1998.

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