

INTRODUCTION

“Living in Post-war Communities” is a research project designed and conducted with the view of identifying and describing factors important for finding durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced people in the Balkans.

Within the framework of this project, the IAN research team has during 2004 conceptualised and conducted a complex regional research on the sample of 1502 respondents: refugees and internally displaced, returnees and local residents in Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This research is unique in its scope and regional character. It was conducted with initiative and collaboration of civil society actors, led by a group of non-governmental organisations from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, supported by FRESTA/NAB Programme of the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Following partner NGOs from the region have actively partaken in conducting the research:

- International Aid Network IAN, Belgrade;
- Human Rights Bureau, Tuzla;
- Dalmatian Solidarity Committee (DOS offices: Split, Knin, Benkovac);
- Centre for Development, Tolerance and Activism (CRTA), Karlovac and
- Youth Council Milići.

Since its foundation in 1997, IAN (www.ian.org.yu) has been actively working for the protection and promotion of mental health and human rights of refugees, internally displaced people and other vulnerable groups. A large portion of IAN activities is devoted to conceptualising and conducting research on various issues related to refugees and internally displaced. Results of these research projects provide guidelines for further planning of programmes that can respond to the needs of beneficiaries. This research is another step in this direction and represents not only an overview of the current situation, but is also a fruit of the eight-year experience that has largely affected the direction which this research would take.

The aims of the present research were the following:

1. look into the current living conditions and material status of returnees and refugees, in comparison with one another and with the local population;
2. explore their positions towards integration and return, potentials and conditions considered necessary for integration or return, as well as to what extent the expectations of returnees have been fulfilled;

3. explore the human rights status of returnees and refugees, in comparison with one another and with the local population;
4. look into the ethnic distance of returnees and refugees towards other nationalities, in comparison with one another and with the local population;
5. scrutinise current psychological state and mental health of returnees and refugees, in comparison with one another and with the local population;

Texts in this book have been arranged in a way that follows the sequence of research aims stated above.

The data collected give a complex overview of various aspects of refugee and returnee reality, including the issues of housing, employment and income, conditions and possibilities of return or integration, perception of their surroundings, general psychological status and mental health, infringement of basic human rights, war and post-war victimisation, as well as the social distance towards other ethnic groups.

Further intention of the project is to present results and recommendations of this research to organisations and agencies engaged in various types of aid activities for refugees and returnees in the region, as well as to policy and decision makers whose work affects refugees and returnees; on a larger scale – to present to the expert and wider public the phenomena accompanying forced migrations. We hope that this publication will find its readers among various groups of professionals and activists.