

## MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Among ten countries in the world with the largest number of refugees per capita in 2004 there are two states from our region: Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro. Every sixth inhabitant of former SFR Yugoslavia has lived to become a refugee or an internally displaced person. This ratio is twice as high (33.54 %) if we take into account only the population of the region that refugees originate from.

The war in the region has led to significant changes in its ethnic structure. Changes in Croatia are primarily a consequence of the declining number of Serbs, given that in the period between two population census exercises it was left without 380 000 Serbs or around 65% of the pre-war Serbian population. It is still not possible to respond to issues of ethnic homogenization in the Federation BIH and Republika Srpska, since a post-war population census has not yet been held, but in all likelihood the situation in these entities of BIH is not much better. With regard to Serbia, ethnic homogenization has occurred primarily in Vojvodina, northern Serbian province, through the arrival of Serb refugees from Bosnia and Croatia as well as to a lesser extent through the declining number of national minority members, especially Croats and Hungarians. Ten years after, it is not very likely that the processes of repatriation and return of refugees and internally displaced would lead to any re-establishment of the pre-war ethnic mixture.

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2005 in Sarajevo, ministers of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro have signed a *Declaration on the Return of Refugees*. By this declaration the three states have confirmed their readiness to create adequate conditions for return, as well as provide support to those who have decided to remain in current countries of asylum. The international community, UNHCR, EU and OSCE were invited to assist the governments in seeking durable solutions for refugees in the region, through return or integration programmes until the end of 2006.

*The idea of return* finds different acceptance among refugees currently residing in different countries/entities. The largest proportion of those wishing to return to their pre-war homes is among Bosniaks presently living in Federation BIH. Far less respondents willing to return were registered in Republika Srpska and in Croatia. About 1/5 of respondents still do not have a clearly formed decision on return/integration; they probably represent the most vulnerable part of the refugee population and the target group towards which further programmes and strategies for resolving the refugee problem should be directed.

Potential returnees stress basic security, basic social care and economic prosperity as the key conditions that, if fulfilled, would to the greatest extent positively influence their decision to return to the country of origin. More or less the same conditions are cited in decision-making on potential integration.

Those who have returned point out that the key factor in making the decision had been the restitution of private property in the country of origin, which indicates that efforts should be enhanced with regard to reconstruction of damaged property as well as restitution of tenancy rights and illicitly occupied property. The next important factor is a satisfactory level of personal and economic security of the family.

*The economic situation* in the region is generally very poor. Regardless of certain limitations with respect to the sample, the fact that 57% of respondents are below the poverty line is cause enough for concern. As expected, the best situation is in Croatia and the worst in Republika Srpska, where the unbelievable 82% are below the poverty line. The “lead group” in poverty are returnees to Republika Srpska, of which 85% is poor. At a time when the general trend is that of decreasing classical humanitarian aid, these results show that the need for this type of assistance should not be disregarded.

Besides a continued and sufficient engagement of the international community, the return process requires a sincere commitment of local political authorities to the ideas of multiethnicity, civil society and respect for human rights. Hence the fact that an average number of *human rights violations* among the sample of our respondents is over 2.4 gives rise to increased concern. Main areas of human rights violations identified in this research correspond to the incidents already pointed out by international and local NGOs. Illicit possession and destruction of property, detention and arrest without a warrant, humiliation and torture have not circumvented any of the territories from which refugees originate, while the sense of being subjected to *discrimination on ethnic grounds* is still highly present in many spheres of public and social life. Rights of refugees and returnees are at much higher risk of violation than the rights of population that has not migrated. These tendencies are visible both during and after the war.

The trust of all categories of respondents in state structures that are supposed to ensure protection of human rights is very low, while the effectiveness of criminal law mechanisms is even lower. Moreover, state bodies are cited as some of the most frequent perpetrators of human rights violations. The topic of relations between citizens and state institutions in transition countries deserves additional attention and a special focused research.

Psychological factors constitute an important group of factors that should be taken into account very seriously. The results show grave inner psychological obstacles to return of refugees and reconciliation. There are clear and distinctive differences in the perception of the country of origin between returnees and those refugees who have not yet returned. Returnees perceive their country of origin as

their own, while refugees feel the same way about their host country. This leads to conclusion that *socio-psychological factors* are highly important in making the decision about return or integration.

*Social distance* among the region's nations is still very high and poses a serious psychological obstacle to reconciliation. Between 10% and 25% of respondents show extreme distance toward members of other ethnic groups, especially those they had been in conflict with. The distance is the highest among refugees and the lowest among returnees. However, there is a slow trend of decrease in this distance, either as a consequence of the applied method or due to real political changes. Research results show us the link between individual psychopathology and social distance, which leads to conclusion that by treating individual pathology we also partly treat the social one.

The *psychological status* of the population in the region is probably best described by the fact that up to 29% of respondents are currently taking tranquilizer medication. Based on most conservative estimates, between 35% and 36% of refugees and displaced meet the criteria for being diagnosed with the posttraumatic stress disorder. General psychopathology is much more present among forced migrants than among local population.

There are differences between returnees and those who have not decided to return, both with regard to the type of traumatic experience and to the general perception of own competence and control over one's life.

The value of data obtained is limited by the sample structure and these cannot be considered as representative of the general population; namely, the proportion of refugees, especially returnees in the overall sample is several times higher than their number within the general population.

It seems that the overview of results gives a clear picture of directions *that refugee programmes should take*.

Psychosocial programmes should prioritize the work on active dealing with posttraumatic sequelae, establishing the internal locus of control, resuming the responsibility for one's own life and fulfilling own potentials, as well as strengthening the feeling of global competence through creating and implementing a life plan made of small steps and clearly operationalised goals.

Economic empowerment programmes, education and re-qualification are important preconditions for enabling people to actively face life in a transformed post-war community and in times of rapid changes and transition.

The pilot-research on human rights status of refugees and returnees shows that such research is feasible and useful. By applying the human rights status questionnaire on a representative sample of respondents would allow collection and systematic follow-up of relevant data on violations of human rights of vulnerable groups in the region. Refugees and returnees are indubitably under particular risk

of this and still require special non-institutionalised aid in protection and exercising their rights both in the country of origin and the country of current residence.

All aforementioned data indicate that the issue of displacement, of repatriation in particular, represents a complex security-political, socio-economic, legal and psychological problem requiring a concerted action in several areas. As confirmed by the experience in the region, partial attempts can rarely yield significant results. Regrettably, at the time when local political resistance to return has begun to wane and possibility has opened for safe and sustainable return, the donors - without the help of which refugees and displaced could hardly resolve their status – have started pulling out from the region and winding down their assistance to return programmes. We hope that the results of this research would prompt them to reconsider some of their strategic decisions.

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