

JUGOSLAVIEN (31)

Briefing Note on Kosovo

216



Estimates Displaced Persons/Refugees
in the immediate region
(14 July 1998)

Country/Region	Estimate
Yugoslavia - IDPs (total)	70,900
Kosovo	52,900*
Montenegro	18,000
Albania (refugees)	13,500**
FYROM (refugees)	0
Total	94,400

* UNHCR estimates based on observations. It should be noted that the complex pattern of displacement, limited human resources, as well as ongoing clashes complicate the consolidation of accurate information on IDPs. The number may therefore actually be higher.

** Of whom: 10,300 have been registered in Northern Albania and 3,200 have left Northern Albania to other locations in the country or to third countries.

Introduction

1. Since the 4 June 1998 Briefing Note on the situation in Kosovo issued by UNHCR Headquarters, major developments have been the continuation and intensification of fighting in South-western and especially Western areas of Kosovo, with the reported widespread destruction of personal and real property; an overall increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons; a drop in the number of refugee arrivals in Albania and an increase in the flow of internally displaced persons into Montenegro, as well as of refugees into third countries, such as Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland. Meeting in London on 12 June, the Contact Group "condemned Belgrade's massive and disproportionate use of force which has resulted in widespread destruction and the deliberate displacement of large numbers of people." (Joint Statement, para. 3) Humanitarian access within Kosovo has eased significantly, especially since the Joint Statement issued by Presidents Yeltsin and Milosevic in Moscow on 16 June 1998. In Albania, UNHCR now has offices in Tirana, Bajram Curri and Kukes. With United Nations, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners, UNHCR has worked to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need in Albania.

2. Despite the active diplomacy of the Contact Group (London, 12 June; Bonn, 8 July), there has been no progress in the long-urged talks between Serbian/FRY representatives and leaders of the Kosovo Albanian community, since a first round of talks on 22 May 1998. Amongst the demands of the Contact Group have been calls for free and unimpeded access of international humanitarian organizations such as ICRC and UNHCR inside Kosovo; effective and continuous monitoring in Kosovo and unimpeded access for monitors; and creating conditions for the early return of refugees and IDPs to their homes.

3. On 1 June, the United Nations Secretary-General recommended the extension of the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force (UNPREDEP) beyond 31 August 1998. Secretary-General Annan also offered to submit by 15 July a proposal to the Security Council to strengthen the UN contingent in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). On 15 June, NATO aircraft from 13 countries carried out the largest air exercise ever conducted over the Balkans.

4. On 16 June, six United Nations agencies (UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, UNDP, UNOCHA) appealed for a total of US\$ 18 million to help people forced from their homes by fighting in Kosovo. UNHCR is seeking US\$ 12.9 million in the appeal.

Continuation and Intensification of the Fighting in Kosovo

5. On 29 May, Serbian police forces, supported by the Yugoslav Army, launched an offensive in the border municipalities of Djakovica and Decane in an apparent attempt to stop the movement of arms smugglers and Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) sympathisers across the border from Albania. This massive operation triggered a large refugee movement into northern Albania, as towns and villages were being heavily shelled. There was both a significant displacement of population within Kosovo as well as into Montenegro and, to a lesser extent, into other parts of Serbia. UNHCR teams were able to observe signs of damage in Decane on 9 June, albeit less than had been reported in the press, but noted that damage along the road between Djakovica and Pec was widespread. At that time, little activity was seen in villages along this road.

6. In mid-June, Serbian security forces appeared to concentrate their efforts on securing the area bordering on Albania and launched operations in the vicinity of Djakovica. Towards the end of June, the security situation again deteriorated dramatically. The UCK apparently used the lull in fighting which had ensued after the Moscow meeting to consolidate positions and even make territorial advances. On 28 June, UCK forces surrounded the village of Kijevo, laying siege to the town's some 200 inhabitants. In one of its most daring attacks to date, the UCK also took the mining village of Balcevac, only 10 km west of Pristina. On 30 June, the Serbian police forces, supported by the Yugoslav Army, launched an operation to retake the village and break the siege of Kijevo. During the period covered by this report, NGOs have reported human rights violations by both Serbian forces and the UCK. Amongst these are the abduction of civilians by the

UCK in the Stimije-Suva Reka area, including the abduction of three refugees from Croatia on 29 June. During the first half of July, the Yugoslav authorities again focused activities in the area bordering Kosovo, most probably to prevent the continued entry of UCK supporters and materiel. By 12 July heavy military activity was reported in the village of Lodja, outside of Pec, reportedly leading many Pec residents to flee the town. On 13 July, the press reported clashes near Suva Reka, on the road between Pristina and the southern town of Prizren.

Rise in the Number of Displaced Persons and Refugees

7. During May and June, the number of persons uprooted by the conflict in Kosovo more than doubled. By 1 July, it had reached 76,300: 52,900 inside Kosovo, 13,400 IDPs from Kosovo in Montenegro and some 10,000 refugees from Kosovo in Albania. By 14 July, the number had risen to over 94,000. In addition, an undetermined number entered The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) as temporary guests or travelled to third countries. Most of the IDPs and refugees originated from Western Kosovo (Decane, Djakovica, Pec) and the Drenica triangle (Strbica, Glogovac, Kllina). Increasing tension and clashes in southwestern Kosovo (Stimlje, Suva Reka and Orahovac) caused population movements from the area as well. Heavy fighting in Obilic near Pristina, also led to some displacement into Central Serbia.

Kosovo

8. **Humanitarian Access:** Between 1 and 6 June, international agencies were denied access to villages in Djakovica, Decani, Pec and Istok municipalities. UNHCR, ICRC and WHO were regularly told by the police that these areas were unsafe for travel. This appeared to be combined with an unofficial embargo, which remained in force through mid-June, on trade vehicles entering Kosovo. Of particular concern was the confiscation of MSF, WHO and ICRC medical supplies for lack of waybills indicating the destination of the goods. On 12 June, UNHCR, WHO and UNICEF were able to make the first delivery of aid to Djakovica. By 15 June, UNHCR's own access to the IDP population improved, although the Office was still restricted to main roads and towns. UNHCR and several NGOs were able to visit IDPs along the main road from Pristina through Prizren, Djakovica, Decani and Pec. Following the Moscow Joint Statement of 16 June 1998, the Serbian Government launched a humanitarian programme on 17 June and appointed a civilian Coordinator for humanitarian issues, Minister Andreja Milosavljevic. The Government lifted the unofficial embargo allowing the entry of food and commercial supplies to reach markets in accessible areas of the province. On 19 June, the UNHCR spokesman in Geneva appealed to the Serbian authorities to provide access in line with the Moscow Joint Statement. Humanitarian access began to ease, permitting the delivery of relief items to some areas of displacement. On 25 June a convoy of humanitarian assistance was unloaded in Junik. This was the first time that such assistance had reached the area since the outbreak of fighting at the end of May 1998. A second delivery was made on 2 July. Given closer cooperation of the authorities, humanitarian access has eased significantly.

9. While the Yugoslav authorities have repeated the intention to return normal life to Kosovo and to facilitate the return of displaced persons and refugees to their homes, some areas are clearly under UCK control. The police and Army therefore remain widely present and active in the province. The security of humanitarian aid workers remains an important concern. Owing to the precarious security situation within many parts of central and western Kosovo, the following municipalities have been declared "Phase two" areas under the prevailing United Nations security regulations: Srbica, Glogovac, Istok, Pec, Decani, Djakovica, Klina, Oranovac and Suva Reka. Continued incidents or clashes between Serbian forces and the UCK have also led UNHCR to recommend that certain areas remain "no-go" areas for the time being, owing to security considerations. These are: Srbica municipality (Kostur, Vitak, Qubrel, Llausha, Kladernica, Izdica, Vojnik, Upper Kopiliq, Broja, Turqevc, Lower Kopiliq, Tushilla, Rezaia, Marina, Makramel, Likovc, Tica, Agareva, Pluzhina, Lower Obria; Glogovac municipality (Upper Obria); Decane municipality (All villages -- travel is allowed only to Decane town and Junik village using the main road); Djakovica municipality (all villages -- travel is only allowed to Djakovica town using the main road); Main road Pristina-Pec (the part of the road between Komoran and Kijevo).

10. Return movements: In March-April 1998, UNHCR noted that displaced persons were returning spontaneously to certain villages in the Drenica triangle where a police presence had diminished. The Government has indeed repeatedly invited all displaced persons to return to their homes (especially in the 16 June Moscow Joint Statement and later in a 1 July Non-Paper).

11. Since 18 June, UCK activity and Government response to it has spread to a wider geographical area. While some people have returned to areas where calm is restored, greater numbers have fled. Some Serbs and Roma who were displaced into towns within Serbia outside Kosovo have been persuaded to return to Kosovo. For example, 133 displaced persons from Obilic returned from Pozarovac with the assistance of the authorities. Police protection for their stay in Obilic is being provided. All refugee collective centres in or near conflict areas have a police presence. It is likely that Kosovo Albanian displaced persons and refugees will only be encouraged to return by the withdrawal of security forces and the perception that it is indeed safe to return to home areas.

12. Regarding the repatriation of refugees presently in Albania, UNHCR has been approached by the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia with a request to facilitate a visit of Serbian Refugee Commissioner Morina to Northern Albania. Whilst willing to provide logistical support for such a visit, it is first necessary for the authorities of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to seek approval bilaterally as well as official assurances of adequate security arrangements during such a visit.

Montenegro

13. **Influx:** The Ministry of the Interior of Montenegro reported that a total of 3,364 IDPs had arrived between 25 April and 4 June. Between 5 and 7 June, the influx began to accelerate, with a total of 1,877 persons reported by the Ministry during this period. In a reversal from the previous trend -- in which the majority of IDPs were Serbs and Montenegrins -- 63 per cent of new arrivals were ethnic Albanians. By mid-June, the Ministry of the Interior reported the influx of 10,426 IDPs from Kosovo, with arrivals of some 300 per day since 7 June. They also provided the following breakdown of all arrivals since April: ethnic Albanians (50%), Muslims (15%), Montenegrins (13%), Serbs (17%), others/Roma (5%). The flow of IDPs from Kosovo has remained high. During 13 and 14 June, 736 new arrivals were reported. On 26-28 June alone, 678 new arrivals were recorded. By 1 July, official sources estimated that 13,400 people had entered from Kosovo. While a sharp increase in the number of Montenegrins and Serbs from the Klina region was registered, Albanians from the area of Decane/Pec remained the majority of new arrivals. The increase in arrivals has been attributed to the perceived difficulty to cross the Albanian border, in view of the reportedly heavy Serb military presence. UNHCR has been monitoring entry/registration at border points and the Commissioner for Displaced Persons has also started to register IDPs at the municipality level.

14. **Reception:** As in Albania, many of the IDPs in border towns have been accommodated in local homes, benefiting from the generosity of the local population. Most are accommodated privately with relatives and friends, mainly in Plav and Rozaje (bordering Kosovo). Podgorica and Ulcinj. Only a few IDPs have been housed in collective centres. A large group of Roma arrived in Podgorica and shared barracks with the local community. In Ulcinj and other of the most affected towns, the Mayors have requested the Commissioner for Displaced Persons to identify alternative accommodation.

Albania

15. **Influx:** An influx of refugees from Kosovo into Albania began during the last weekend of May and intensified in earnest in the first two weeks of June. By 6 June, UNHCR estimated that 10,000 refugees had entered the country. Arrivals from Kosovo to northern Albania decreased to some 200 to 300 per day by 7 June and then tapered off significantly from 16 June onwards and even stopped completely for a few days towards the end of June and into July. Refugees arriving in the first week of June reported indiscriminate bombardments by Serb forces and the involvement of special forces which resulted in heavy casualties among the civilian populations. Continuous military activity in the border zone were reportedly making making cross-border movements more difficult.

16. The majority of the initial arrivals were fleeing from the towns of Decani, Junik, Povoac and Dujak. By mid-June, refugees were increasingly arriving from villages near the Decani-Djakovica area (Brovina, Dujak, Junik, Nivokaz, Morina,

Ponosthec, Popoc, Racej, Smolica Skivjani and Vokshi). The influx from Junik village also continued. Refugees crossing at the end of June reported that the journey was dangerous and arduous owing to shelling during the night, as well as gun battles between FRY soldiers and armed elements. The refugees moved in small groups, generally at night, for fear of being targeted. By 8 July, arrivals continued from Batusha village and Gjocaj villages, south and west of Junik respectively. UNHCR Bajram Curri office reported on 10 July that the latest new arrivals appeared come from Pec and surrounding villages, which had allegedly come under heavy shelling. Relief workers were bracing for a new influx, possibly with a higher percentage of wounded amongst the new arrivals. By 13 July, refugees were arriving at the rate of 0-12 per day, entering to the north of the Podesh entry point. Other, more dangerous entry routes are being used following the persistent shelling and sniping of the former arrival route by Serbian forces.

17. **Reception:** Almost all refugees in northern Albania are currently living with host families who have generously accommodated them in their own dwellings. A small number are living in abandoned houses or have made other arrangements. Relations between the refugees and the local population remain good although there are serious concerns regarding the security situation. There have been no reports of any serious incidents or tensions between the two. Most refugees in the north have concentrated in the communes of Bajram Curri, Tropoje, Bajan, Fierze, Luigai and Murgagay. Family groups are very large and often consist of as many as 30 people. Despite efforts to centre relief efforts in the north, movements are taking place to other locations in Albania and as well as to third countries. Kosovo Albanians began to move to Tirana and Durres as early as the first week of June. They continue to leave for the localities of Skodra, Durres, Lezha and Tirana. It is estimated that some 3,200 refugees have left northern Albania. Despite the assistance being provided in the north, there is little which can be done to stop these movements, given the precarious security situation in the north, the prevailing poor conditions and the natural desire of the refugee to improve their living conditions, particularly those who have access to remittances from family members.

18. **Security:** Security is a major concern in the north. Amongst the most important security-related concerns in the north is the open use of Tropoje village as a support-base by the UCK - endangering the purely humanitarian character of the refugee-hosting. In the long run, such activities are likely to cause security problems for the refugees or encourage armed incursions. Arms are also readily available and openly carried by many local inhabitants, creating an atmosphere of lawlessness and insecurity which weighs heavy on the minds and security of the refugees and humanitarian aid workers. Serious incidents have involved shootings, armed robbery, car and truck thefts, grenade explosions and pilferage and have affected the local population, aid agency staff, international monitors and refugees.

19. **Emergency response:** In an initial response to the movement of refugees into Northern Albania from Kosovo, UNHCR arranged to airlift non-food items from stocks in Sarajevo, Tuzla and Zagreb. During the period 13 June 1998 to 20 June 1998, a total of 16 C130 plane loads carrying a wide variety of items (clothing, blankets, mattresses, plastic sheeting, kitchen sets, soap, detergent, jerry

cans, tents, fork-lifts, etc.) totalling some 160 MT, were flown into Tirana for onward shipment by road to the northern areas. The aircraft were provided by the Governments of Belgium and Norway, under the auspices of NATO. To provide logistic support to the increasing number of UNHCR staff deployed in the region, two vehicles were redeployed from Croatia to Albania and eight new vehicles were procured under emergency procurement procedures. Two trucks with 10 MT capacity each are also being redeployed to Albania from Bosnia and Herzegovina.

20. WFP has prepositioned about 500 MT of food aid in Durres and IFRC has procured some 10,000 family food parcels for the refugee caseload in Albania. A warehouse with a capacity of up to 60 MT of food has been rented by WFP in Bajram Curri. The delivery of stocks using local trucks and police escort from Durres to Bajram Curri takes 10 to 12 hours. The ferries on the road are often congested and cause delays. The distribution of food aid is done jointly through the Albanian Red Cross. Each beneficiary receives a ration of about 16 kgs of food aid per month. UNHCR and WFP are in the process of signing a Framework Agreement with the Tropoje District Authorities of the Albanian Government with regard to the distribution of food items to refugees from Kosovo, initially for a three-month period, with possible extensions subject to future needs assessment.

21. Surveys in the shelter sector are still being carried out. As most of the refugees are accommodated with host families, so far very basic shelter materials like plastic sheeting, roofing materials, tents, etc., have been provided from UNHCR offices in Zagreb and Sarajevo. The availability of host-family accommodation is rapidly reaching the saturation point and alternatives will have to be found for any new influx of refugees who would need to be housed in collective accommodation, especially for the winter. Agencies like THW, SDR and IRC have expressed a strong interest in carrying out shelter rehabilitation for 1,000-1,500 persons. About 15 to 20 buildings could be identified and made available for this purpose but would require significant investments to be rehabilitated to acceptable living standards. Work has begun on rehabilitating accommodation in Bajram Curri and surveys are continuing elsewhere.

22. Although UNICEF has no formal presence in the northern region, it is providing drugs, hygiene items, baby kits, etc., and is rehabilitating public health services in the Kukes District. In addition, UNICEF is currently undertaking a survey of health services in northern Albania. MSF and IFRC are also conducting a similar survey in co-ordination with WHO. The Ministry of Health and local health officials. WHO delivered two health kits each to Tirana and Bajram Curri (each kit should cover the basic health needs for up to 10,000 persons for a three-month period).

23. Documentation: According to available estimates, some 59 per cent of the refugees have arrived without any form of documentation. Almost all have arrived with only limited personal belongings.

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The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

24. Although there have been no recorded refugee arrivals, Kosovo Albanians have been entering FYROM on normal three-month temporary stay permits since March 1998. They have been staying with relatives and friends. Given both the three-month time limit and the fact that their and their hosts' resources are limited, the Government has agreed in principle to register and assist them as refugees, with UNHCR's help. There may be several thousand, but an accurate idea of numbers will only be available after registration.

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