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# Global Overview 2012: People internally displaced by conflict and violence - Serbia

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Number of IDPs	About 225,000
Percentage of total population	About 3.2%
Start of displacement situation	1999
Peak number of IDPs (year)	248,000 (2004)
New displacement in 2012	–
Causes of displacement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>x International armed conflict</li> <li>✓ <b>Internal armed conflict</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Deliberate policy or practice of arbitrary displacement</b></li> <li>✓ <b>Communal violence</b></li> <li>x Criminal violence</li> <li>x Political violence</li> </ul>
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Following the 1999 NATO intervention in response to serious abuses against civilians by Kosovo Serb paramilitary groups and the Yugoslav army, an estimated 245,000 Kosovo Serbs and Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian (RAE) people were internally displaced within Kosovo and Serbia proper. There were around 210,000 registered IDPs in Serbia as of the end of 2012, according to the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees (SCR). The figures do not include an estimated 15,000 unregistered RAE IDPs.

Only around 18,000 IDPs have returned to Kosovo, around half of whom are ethnic Serbs. Obstacles to return include insecurity, ethnic discrimination, difficulties in repossessing property and recovering lost documents, restricted freedom of movement, the lack of economic prospects in return areas and limited means to rebuild houses. In June 2012 several people were injured during border clashes, and attacks on ethnic Serb returnees became more frequent during the year. The situation remained tense as of the end of 2012, with only around 600 IDPs having returned during the year.

Thirteen years after their displacement, a significant number of IDPs still face considerable hardship. UNHCR and SCR conducted a needs assessment survey in 2011 and found that around

97,000 IDPs were still in need of assistance. More than 39 per cent were found to be unemployed, 74 per cent were living below the poverty line and 31 per cent of the most vulnerable IDPs were female heads of household. Around 80 per cent of internally displaced families said they still needed help to secure permanent housing.

Around 13,000 IDPs continued to reside in substandard housing, according to the 2011 survey. This includes makeshift housing, informal settlements and collective centres. As of November 2012 an estimated 1,725 IDPs were still living in 20 recognised collective centres excluding Kosovo and Metohija, many of which did not have adequate electricity, clean water or sewerage facilities. Eight collective centres were closed in 2012. Around 1,000 displaced RAE were thought to be living in informal settlements that lacked basic facilities.

The government and international organisations have provided IDPs with a range of housing assistance in recent years, including social housing, new housing, village dwellings and the distribution of construction materials. At the same time, between 2009 and mid-2012 there were 17 major evictions from informal settlements in Belgrade, which affected nearly 2,500 people, including IDPs. Safeguards required under international law were reportedly not fully upheld and it was not clear whether those evicted had secured adequate alternative housing.

Displaced RAE face deep-rooted discrimination and marginalisation, and they remain particularly disadvantaged as a result. They face complex procedures to prove their parentage, which they need to do when applying for personal documents, and the lack of such paperwork is a major obstacle to their registering as IDPs and accessing assistance, employment, education and social benefits. Almost 18 per cent of displaced RAE do not have identity cards or birth certificates, and widespread prejudice makes it difficult for Roma people in particular to obtain them without legal assistance.

The Serbian government initially promoted IDPs' return to their places of origin, but in recent years it has increasingly also supported local integration. It is conducting more projects to provide IDPs with permanent housing solutions, particularly for those still living in collective centres, and it has further developed its national policy on displacement. The National Strategy for Resolving the Situation of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons 2011 - 2014 was, however, still to be implemented as of the end of 2012.

Announcing Serbia's EU candidate status in March 2012, Brussels highlighted the need to further address the situation of IDPs. The EU, OSCE and UNHCR also lent considerable support to the launching of a regional housing programme under the Sarajevo Process, which will seek to assist in the provision of adequate housing for refugees and a small number of IDPs in Serbia and other countries in the region. In April 2012, international donors pledged €261 million in support of the programme.

Against a backdrop of increasing tension and violent incidents affecting returnees to Kosovo during the year, the EU also called upon the Serb and Kosovo authorities to ensure implementation of their agreements to date. In December 2012, Belgrade and Pristina began to implement their agreement on border control. They also placed contentious issues such as municipal structures in northern Kosovo on their bilateral dialogue agenda, and leaders on both sides appeared prepared to compromise.

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