

(139)



## Bosnien- Herzegovina (79)

UNHCR, Sarajevo  
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## Returnee Monitoring Study

12/9-01

PROGRAMME DOCUMENTS

RETURN STATISTICS

DEMINE PROGRAMME

PROTECTION DOCUMENTS

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Refugees Repatriating to Tuzla Canton -  
Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Executive Summary

## 1. BACKGROUND

The purpose of conducting the Returnee Monitoring Framework (RMF) study in Tuzla Canton was to assess the national protection afforded to repatriates, as well as to gain a better understanding of their current living conditions in this particular canton given the large number of repatriates who had returned there. Many of those who have been repatriated are Bosniacs and Roma originally from the RS who are still unable to return to their homes of origin, thus they are currently displaced in the Federation. Interviewees answered questions relating to security, registration and documentation, employment, education, access to social services, pensions, war taxes, and access to public services. In the course of the study, a total of 226 interviews were conducted with Bosnian repatriates from abroad, including 23% of which were Roma. The study was carried out in two phases. Phase 1 of the RMF study took place in Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) 8 - 15 February 1999, and included 205 interviews. These interviews were conducted with families who had repatriated from Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Included in the study were 126 displaced families and 79 returnee families. Phase 2 of the RMF interviews took place at the Svatovac Transit Centre in Lukavac Municipality on 29-30 September 1999, and included 21 interviews with repatriates from abroad, all of whom originate from the RS and most of whom, with the exception of one Roma, were Bosniacs.

## 2. ISSUES

## a. Security

i. **Police:** 62% of interviewees stated they trusted the police, while 12% stated they did not trust the police, with police distrust especially expressed by the Roma. The usual reason given for police mistrust was as a result of police inaction.

ii. **Court confidence:** 53% of the interviewees expressed confidence in the court system, although very few had been involved in court proceedings. 34% said they were unsure if they trusted the court, and 7% stated they had no confidence in the court.

**b. Housing situation of repatriates who have been unable to return to their homes of origin**

i. **Area of Displacement:** 34% of DPs were renting accommodation (note: only a maximum of 13% of interviewees stated they were employed). 25% stated they had the owner or occupancy right holder's permission for their current accommodation. A total of 14% have a temporary occupancy right, as per the 13 April 1999 OHR decision. 9% admitted they had no permission for their current accommodation and were possibly illegal occupants. 10% of the DPs had been in a position to build or buy new homes. Potentially, 3% of interviewees could

return as they had given permission to the families currently occupying their pre-conflict homes.

ii. **Homes of origin:** The majority of interviewed DPs (60%), most of whose homes of origin are in the RS, stated that their homes of origin are currently occupied without their permission. 95% of the DPs interviewed stated their property was empty and uninhabitable, or occupied by someone else. Only 5% of the DPs had the possibility to return immediately as their property was empty and inhabitable.

**c. Documentation**

i. **ID Cards:** 85% of the interviewees had successfully obtained ID cards, although there were numerous cases reporting they paid up to 20 KM, as well as a few who paid as much as 200 KM (1.30 KM required by law, not including photos). Interviewees in Banovici and Zivinice reported that they were required to sign documents which stated that they would not request any assistance from the Municipality, including health care, employment or food assistance.

ii. **Citizenship Certificates (CCs):** 78% of interviewees had CCs. Many of those who did not have them stated that they had not needed them. An unexpected discovery was that DPs from RS were obtaining CCs from municipalities in the Federation, when by law the only authority competent to do such are the municipalities in which an individual's birth was registered, as a CC grants citizenship not only from the State, but also the Entity of origin or the Entity of permanent residence if an individual legally changed it after 1 January 1998. The vast majority of interviewed DPs were from RS, and 75% of the DP interviewees had obtained CCs from municipalities in the Federation, while only 9% had obtained them from RS.

iii. **BH Passports:** At the time of the initial phase of the study, in February 1999, the old BH passports were still valid which helps explain why only 26% of the interviewees had the new BH passports.

**d. War Taxes**

26% (53) of interviewees had been asked to pay a war tax either during their stay abroad or upon return. Interviewees reported being asked to pay war taxes as high as 24,000 KM, and 66% of those asked to pay the tax paid it.

**e. Employment**

3% of the interviewees and 10% of their spouses were employed at the time of the survey. Only one returnee Roma interviewee spouse was employed out of 53 families. 58% of interviewees felt that unemployment was due to the lack of available jobs, while 13% stated it was the result of discrimination. Another 3% stated their unemployment was due to their physical disabilities. When asked about chief concerns, 78% of the responses given by interviewees included employment and/or money.

**f. Pensions**

66% of those who believed they were entitled to receive pensions were receiving them. Besides the need to produce additional documents, interviewees gave little information on why 34% were not receiving pensions. Possible explanations are unawareness of the new Federation pensions law, as well as the lack of co-operation between the Banja Luka, Sarajevo and Mostar Pension Funds, which may especially affect DPs from the RS.

**g. Education**

For students in general, the most notable areas of concern, were harassment by teachers and/or students, the lack of recognition of school certificates earned abroad, language obstacles, and the requirement for verification of school certificates. A specific problem for Roma children, was the low level of participation in education. Almost all of the non-Roma school age children were in school, while only 9% of the Roma children were in school, most families citing financial difficulties preventing them from sending their children to school.

#### **h. Health Insurance**

63% of interviewees stated they had health insurance coverage; 36% paid full costs, 42% paid part costs, and 3% said they paid nothing for their health care. Many of the interviewees who believed they had health insurance stated they pay full costs for necessary medical treatment. 47% of the Roma interviewees stated they were paying full cost for health care treatment. Six of the uninsured interviewees, mostly Roma, stated they had gone to local hospitals for emergency treatment and been turned away, including one man who stated his mother died soon after being denied treatment.

#### **i. Public Services (access to electricity, water, and telephones)**

26% of interviewees stated they had had problems with access to electricity, telephones and/or water. 6% stated they had been obliged to pay the unpaid public services bills of previous occupants. Often the problems for public services would centre around reconnection fees, including one returnee Roma interviewee in Banovici who stated they were asked to pay 12,000 KM for reconnection to electricity. In contrast, other interviewees stated they simply were not able to afford these basic public services, even if they are charged the correct amount.

#### **j. Areas of Concern & Future Outlook**

As stated above, 78% of the responses given by interviewees included employment and/or money as chief concerns. 47% of the DPs said they were worried about return to their home of origin. 18% of interviewees said they were concerned about their property (95% of the DPs stated their property was empty and uninhabitable or occupied by someone else). 41% expressed an interest in emigrating, usually to the USA or Germany, and many others that they considered it, although the usual explanation given for wishing to leave concerned their present unemployment.

### **3. SVATOVAC TRANSIT CENTRE**

A Transit Centre (TC) is meant to temporarily accommodate repatriates who have just returned from abroad and have nowhere to stay immediately upon arrival. While the duration of a repatriate's stay at a TC is officially not supposed to exceed 3 months, in reality many of those interviewed have been at the TC between 1 and 2 years. The TC cases are also special in the sense that they represent those cases who were not able to find accommodation on their own and may be in especially difficult circumstances, vulnerable and/or without family support. All of the TC interviewees, except one Roma, were Bosniac DPs.

#### **a. Extremely Vulnerable Individuals**

11 out of the 21 cases interviewed were considered by UNHCR to be extremely vulnerable cases. Eight of the vulnerable cases were frail elderly and/or physically handicapped or ill, the rest included a single mother, an ex-detainee, and an alcoholic. Ten of them are single and without a family support network.

**b. Property**

12 of the interviewees are unable to return to their property because it is presently occupied or destroyed, while 6 did not know what condition their property was in and 3 of the interviewees, all single women, had no property/accommodation in their place of origin to which they could return. 12 of the interviewees had filed for repossession of their property, 6 had not, 4 of whom were vulnerable cases.

**c. Documentation**

5 of the interviewees stated they did not have ID cards. 2 stated they did not have them because they did not need them, while the other 3 stated they did not have the money to pay for IDs. IDs were often obtained through the assistance of UNHCR. The majority of interviewees, 11 out of 13, stated that they did not have their citizenship certificates because they did not need them. Most of the interviewees (14) did not have passports, citing the 40-50 KM cost of obtaining a passport or that they did not need one.

**d. Employment**

None of the interviewees were employed at the time of the interview. Nine had been employed before the war while another eight interviewees were retirees or housewives. Four of the interviewees cited physical disabilities or health as the greatest obstacle to finding employment, while a few felt they lacked necessary skills. Six of the interviewees felt there was a lack of available jobs and only one stated that he felt he was discriminated against based on his DP status.

**e. Health Care**

Seventeen of the interviewees stated that they were technically covered by health care, but many complained of the high cost of health care despite this. A few interviewees complained that they had been turned away for medical treatment until they could pay the required fee.

**f. Education**

There were a total of 3 families with 9 school age children at the TC. Two of the families had had problems with the school system in one way or another. One family had to pay 200 KM to have school documents from abroad for their children certified. The other family has a mentally handicapped child who needs to attend a school for children with special needs, but they are unable to pay for the dormitory the child would have to live in to attend the school.

**g. Pensions**

8 of the interviewees stated they thought they were entitled to receive pensions, but 3 were not receiving them at the time of the interview.

**h. Security**

About half of the interviewees stated they trusted the police and the court system. Interestingly, the three interviewees who stated they had required police assistance while they were living at the TC, all expressed their trust in the police.

**i. Future**

The greatest area of concern that the interviewees (11) expressed was return to their homes of origin. The other areas of concern were their future, employment

opportunities, accommodation, health care, and pension issues. Twelve of the residents expressed their desire to leave Bosnia again.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Despite the vast amounts contributed to Bosnia by the international community, many of the interviewees did not feel they had seen the benefits of this aid and were still waiting for the reconstruction assistance and employment they state they were promised by host countries to expect upon return.

It is important to appreciate that interviewees, especially those who are displaced, may not have difficulties with just one of the areas discussed in this paper, but quite often with several. Add to this the situation of TC residents, many of whom are already extremely vulnerable cases, and for one reason or another felt they had no choice but to request accommodation at the TC and who may lack necessary support and/or assistance or are afraid to leave due to past traumatic experiences.

Roma who were a marginalised group also before the conflict, face particular difficulties. They face the same problems as other repatriates, along with the tradition of discrimination against Roma.

In conclusion, Tuzla Canton has great potential for minority return, but this GFAP objective is hampered by the large number of repatriates returning to internal displacement and exacerbating an already severe housing shortage and scarce municipal resources, ensuring that minority returnees who may wish to return will face additional obstacles, in particular, the illegal occupation of their homes. This study has illustrated the consequences of returning refugees to situations of further displacement to compete for scarce employment, social resources and housing. For many, the situation seems grim and full of uncertainties. Interviewees repeatedly stated that they had no hope for the future in BH, neither for themselves, nor their children. Many expressed they felt their only hope was to leave BH again, while others expressed a determination to stay and rebuild their lives.

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7

7

