



Recommendation 1588 (2003)¹

Population displacement in South-Eastern Europe: trends, problems, solutions

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly refers to its [Recommendation 1569 \(2002\)](#) on the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; [Recommendation 1510 \(2001\)](#) on the humanitarian situation of returnees to Kosovo; [Recommendation 1424 \(1999\)](#) on the evaluation of the humanitarian situation in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, particularly in Kosovo and Montenegro; [Recommendation 1406 \(1999\)](#) on the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes in Croatia and [Recommendation 1357 \(1998\)](#) on Bosnia and Herzegovina: return of refugees and displaced persons.
2. The Assembly draws attention to the unresolved question of refugees and displaced persons in South-eastern Europe. To date, the number of displaced persons (internally displaced and refugees) still seeking durable solutions in the region amounts to a total of 1.2 million people. Some of them have been refugees for over ten years now.
3. The Assembly notes with satisfaction that the last two years have marked a significant improvement of the situation. During 2001 alone, more refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) were able to go home to areas controlled by opposing ethnic factions in Bosnia and Herzegovina than at any other time since the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed in 1995. This is seen as an indication that many of the legal, administrative and security obstacles have disappeared.
4. The process of returns has now entered a crucial moment. The recent breakthrough may result in real success in terms of increased minority returns, but it may also be slowed down or even stopped due to a number of existing obstacles.
5. The Assembly is aware that one of the main obstacles to returns is the poor economic situation in certain areas of return, and in particular the high unemployment rate. A lack of economic prospects is an extremely discouraging factor for the potential returnees.
6. However, other obstacles related to the housing, and in particular to the repossession of property or tenancy rights of returnees, and a lack of alternative accommodation for those who illegally occupy others' houses still exist.
7. Both short-term strategies like house reconstruction, property recovery, access to health care and education, food security, as well as long-term strategies, in particular sustainable inter-ethnic integration via economic growth and political stability, need to be assisted financially and socially by the international community.
8. Sustainable return requires revitalisation of the whole economy in the return area, and in particular creation of jobs and infrastructure. Increased international financial support should take the form of investment, loans and assistance.

1. Assembly debate on 27 January 2003 (1st Sitting) (see [Doc. 9519rev.](#), report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, rapporteur: Mrs Zwerver). Text adopted by the Assembly on 27 January 2003 (1st Sitting).



9. The link between the process of “relief” and “development” cannot be lost. This is particularly important now, when donors’ fatigue is visible and the slowing down of humanitarian assistance coincides with increased returns.

10. The Assembly stresses that the return process in the region should be very carefully managed and refugees should be given the choice between return and local integration. In this respect, the Serb National Strategy for Resolving the Problems of Refugees, Expellees and Internally Displaced Persons may be considered as a model solution.

11. Unresolved internal political questions concerning the future status of the different entities in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina should not impede the measures taken in order to improve the humanitarian situation of refugees and displaced persons.

12. Co-operation between the governments in the area of returns is an essential factor, and the Assembly notes with satisfaction that it has improved. However, it needs to be further strengthened, in particular in the field of exchange of information, registration of refugees, transfer of allowances and pensions.

13. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

13.1. urge the member states of the Council of Europe:

- a. to encourage economic involvement and investment in the countries of the region;
- b. to continue and develop a comprehensive economic strategy in the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe;
- c. to react positively by financing or granting loans to possible projects elaborated by the countries of the region and relating to return or integration of refugees and displaced persons;
- d. to promote and sponsor inter-ethnic reconciliation programmes and dialogue in the region;
- e. to promote and encourage increased co-operation between the countries in the region;

13.2. urge the authorities of Croatia, in order to implement the action plan on the repossession of property, which has already given significant results:

- a. to increase budgetary resources and actively seek other finances for the implementation of the law on reconstruction of damaged houses and construction of alternative accommodation;
- b. to review the law on repossession of property, with a view to ensuring that all former residents, including those who for reasons beyond their control do not possess Croatian citizenship, are entitled to benefit from it;
- c. to ensure the financing of the implementation of the law on repossession;
- d. to ensure alternative government-owned accommodation for those refugees whose tenancy rights have expired but who wish to return;
- e. to facilitate the procedures for confirmation of existing tenancy rights;
- f. to increase the budgetary resources for the economic revitalisation and infrastructure of the underdeveloped return areas;
- g. to promote projects for employment and social policies through domestic financing and international assistance, that would improve the economic and social conditions of all ethnic minorities;
- h. to ensure that there is no ethnic discrimination in the field of employment and other social policies;
- i. to promote inter-ethnic dialogue by encouraging and sponsoring reconciliation programmes;
- j. to encourage and promote the activities of non-governmental organisations active in the field of refugees and inter-ethnic reconciliation, and increase their involvement in the elaboration and implementation of integration and return policies;
- k. to increase co-operation with other countries in the region, in particular in the field of exchange of information, registration of refugees and transfer of pensions and allowances;

13.3. urge the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina:

- a. to increase budgetary resources and actively seek complementary financing for the implementation of recent laws on repossession of property;
- b. to ensure careful consideration of every appeal by internally displaced persons evicted from illegally occupied houses, and in justified cases provide them with alternative accommodation, even if their own houses have been reconstructed, instead of forcing them to return to their places of origin;
- c. to devote more budgetary resources to, and promote more actively economic revitalisation of, underdeveloped areas of return;
- d. to ensure the enforcement of the laws guaranteeing non-discriminatory employment and treatment;
- e. to promote inter-ethnic dialogue by encouraging and sponsoring reconciliation programmes;
- f. to promote reconciliation and tolerance in the field of education; in particular verification of school curricula;
- g. to encourage and promote the activities of non-governmental organisations active in the field of refugees and inter-ethnic reconciliation and increase their involvement in the elaboration and implementation of integration and return policies;
- h. to increase co-operation with other countries in the region, in particular in the field of exchange of information, registration of refugees and transfer of pensions and allowances;

13.4. urge the Serbian, Montenegrin and Kosovo authorities:

- a. to ensure the continuation of the elaboration and implementation of the National Strategy for Resolving the problems of Refugees, Expellees and Displaced Persons;
- b. to elaborate long-term strategies in the entities where they have not been elaborated so far;
- c. to actively seek financing for concrete projects relating to refugees and IDPs;
- d. to promote inter-ethnic dialogue by encouraging and sponsoring reconciliation programmes;
- e. to encourage and promote the activities of non-governmental organisations active in the field of refugees and inter-ethnic reconciliation and increase their involvement in the elaboration and implementation of integration and return policies;
- f. to increase co-operation with other countries in the region, in particular in the field of exchange of information, registration of refugees and transfer of pensions and allowances;

13.5. urge the authorities of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia":

- a. to actively seek international financing, investments and loans with a view to revitalising the economy in the areas of return;
- b. to elaborate concrete projects relating to the return of refugees and seek international funding;
- c. to promote inter-ethnic dialogue by encouraging and sponsoring reconciliation programmes;
- d. to encourage and promote the activities of non-governmental organisations active in the field of refugees and inter-ethnic reconciliation and increase their involvement in the elaboration and implementation of integration and return policies;
- e. to increase co-operation with other countries in the region, in particular in the field of exchange of information, registration of refugees and transfer of pensions and allowances.

14. The Assembly furthermore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

- a. ensure the continuation of the strong involvement and commitment of the Council of Europe in the process of the democratic reconstruction of a multi-ethnic society and confidence-building in the countries of the region;
- b. foster the idea of closer co-operation between the international community and local nongovernmental organisations, in order to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and protect the rights of IDPs and refugees;
- c. strengthen concrete reconciliation programmes in the field of culture and education, in particular relating to the verification of school curricula;

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- d. instruct its relevant committees to step up promotion of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- 15. The Assembly calls on the Council of Europe Development Bank to step up its co-operation with the countries in the region, with a view to financing projects regarding refugees and IDPs.
- 16. The Assembly invites the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to step up its programme for the twinning of municipalities in the regions which host refugees and IDPs, or in the areas of returns with municipalities in other Council of Europe member states.