



Bosnia and Herzegovina

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	125,000
Percentage of total population	3.2%
Start of current displacement situation	1992
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	1,000,000 (1993)
New displacement in 2008	0
Returns in 2008	1,500
Causes of displacement	International and internal armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations
Human development index	75

In the early 1990s generalised violence and armed conflict between Yugoslav, Croatian and Bosnian armed forces and militias, accompanied by massive human rights abuses and violations, led to the displacement of over a million people and the creation of ethnically homogeneous areas within the newly independent Bosnia and Herzegovina. By 2008, almost 600,000 people had returned to their places of origin, and the government reported that 124,600 people remained as IDPs.

Thus protection issues in Bosnia actually affect a larger number of returnees than IDPs. The vast majority of people moved to areas where they would be among the ethnic majority and therefore not subject to discrimination. However the discrimination returnees face as members of a local ethnic minority in return areas affects their livelihood opportunities and access to services. In addition, the fragmentation of the social welfare system in Bosnia results in lower pensions and other social benefits in certain areas, increasing the vulnerability of elderly people, while the lack of cooperation between the health insurance schemes in Bosnia's two political entities – the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Sprska – makes it harder for pensioners and returnees in general to access health care.

Those still displaced are in many cases among the most elderly or vulnerable, who require specific assistance to access adequate housing, livelihoods, psychiatric and social care and treatment for chronic diseases. These people are over-represented among the 8,000 people who continue to endure very difficult conditions in collective centres with no prospects of improving their situation.

During 2008 the situation changed little and only a few hundred people returned, reflecting the continuing dependency of remaining IDPs and the decrease in reconstruction funding available over the past few years. However, increased funding efforts from the government in 2008 might lead to a slight improvement in 2009. At this stage local integration is the most likely solution for the most vulnerable IDPs. However almost all expressed their intention to return when re-registering as IDPs, since this intention is a pre-condition to claim assistance for the reconstruction of their pre-war home.

Under Annex VII of the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement, support to durable solutions has focused almost exclusively on the return of displaced people to their places of origin to the exclusion of other durable solutions, as any support to local integration was perceived as cementing the effect of the war and the “ethnic cleansing” which motivated the displacement.

In 2003, the Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees took over from the international community the responsibility to implement Annex VII, and elaborated a National Strategy for Implementation of Annex VII which still focused mainly on return. In 2008 however, the Ministry revised this strategy, and from 2009, though the emphasis remains on return, it recognises the need to compensate people for lost property (instead of a sole focus on restitution) and to assist the most vulnerable who cannot or do not want to return, thereby providing de facto support to local integration.

The Ministry increased financial support to returns in 2008 and improved the scope of the assistance provided by adding income-generating activities and rehabilitation of infrastructure to reconstruction aid. These more comprehensive programmes combined with greater support to local integration are likely to lead to a more effective response.

Despite the impressive international humanitarian commitment which followed the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only a few organisations remain in support of IDPs, mainly OSCE, UNHCR and UNDP. The EU has also played a major role in influencing government policy in favour of IDPs through the accession process. The European Commission's progress reports on Bosnia also have a continuing role in promoting policy initiatives of benefit to IDPs, such as the harmonisation of social welfare benefits across the country. The Council of Europe Development Bank has provided significant loans to UNHCR and Bosnian authorities to facilitate the return and reintegration of IDPs and refugees still accommodated in collective centres.