



Serbia and Kosovo

Quick facts

Number of IDPs	Serbia (excluding Kosovo): 226,000; Kosovo: 20,000
Percentage of total population	2.5% (of combined population)
Start of current displacement situation	1999
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	228,000 (2004) in Serbia
New displacement in 2008	0
Returns in 2008	533 in Kosovo, including 323 from Serbia
Causes of displacement	International and internal armed conflict, generalised violence
Human development index	65 (Serbia)

In 2008 Kosovo declared independence from Serbia. The UN General Assembly subsequently voted to refer the independence declaration to the International Court of Justice for an advisory opinion. At the end of the year, 53 countries had recognised Kosovo.

In 1999, bombardments by NATO forces and attacks by Kosovo Albanians, in response to attacks and arbitrary executions perpetrated by Kosovo Serb paramilitary groups and the Yugoslav army, forced Kosovo Serbs and Roma people to flee into Serbia proper or within Kosovo. In 2008, there were still around 225,000 IDPs in Serbia, including an estimated 20,000 displaced Roma. An additional 20,000 were displaced in Kosovo, mainly in majority-Serb enclaves.

Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008 created a new situation of uncertainty for displaced Serbs in Serbia proper and within Kosovo. Despite the non-recognition of independence by Serbia, the situation in Kosovo remained calm, with no major incidents directed at minority communities and no further displacement.

While new displacement was avoided, the rate of return decreased significantly in 2008 from an already low level, as most IDPs waited to evaluate the approach of Kosovo authorities towards Kosovo Serbs and other non-Albanian communities.

Prospects for durable solutions are limited. The political, security and economic situation is not conducive to return. Many IDPs also face difficulties in repossessing their property or obtaining legal documentation. Those who already returned to Kosovo struggle to find livelihood opportunities, notably because of widespread discrimination against Serbs and Roma. The Serbian government's position on local integration has evolved, and it has implemented projects supporting the development of social housing for IDPs in recent years, notably in favour of the 5,000 or so people still accommodated in collective centres.

Local integration opportunities for Kosovo Serb IDPs are scarce since they live in complete isolation from Kosovo institutions. Most of them reside in enclaves relying on a parallel system of education, policing, and health care supported by Serbia. Security concerns have prevented them from returning to their repossessed property. Because of their limited freedom

of movement and the discrimination they have faced, IDPs' access to land and employment has been very limited.

The most vulnerable IDPs are Roma people in both Serbia and Kosovo, who have specific protection needs because of their social marginalisation and lack of civil documentation, which prevents them from registering as IDPs and limits their access to housing assistance and other social benefits. As a result many were enduring extreme poverty and poor health in informal settlements without electricity, water or connection to the sewage system.

The lack of agreement over Kosovo's independence has complicated both national and international responses. The Serbian government has decided to stop its cooperation with the Kosovo Property Agency, the body responsible for processing restitution claims, which will limit further IDPs' hopes of durable solutions. Soon after independence, Serbia took control of Northern Kosovo, leading to a de facto partition of Kosovo. International organisations willing to operate in Northern Kosovo therefore need authorisation from Serbia.

In Kosovo, independence seriously limited UNMIK's role and capacity to operate. EULEX (the EU mission focusing on rule of law) has replaced UNMIK on the rule of law, while OSCE is set to increase its human rights monitoring activities. In addition, UNHCR and UNDP focus respectively on protection and return activities.

The Kosovo authorities have given positive signals by initiating in 2008 a \$7.6m project to facilitate return and reintegration of IDPs in cooperation with the European Commission and the UNDP office in Kosovo. But the success of such projects requires that the Kosovo authorities engage strongly and consistently with Kosovo Serbs and other minority communities to prevent further displacement and increase their confidence in the institutions of the new state.

Any improvement in the situation of Serbia's and Kosovo's IDPs requires the establishment of constructive dialogue between the two authorities, without necessarily implying political recognition. For instance, mutual acceptance of documents such as diplomas, driving licences or birth and death certificates would facilitate IDPs' access to pension and property rights and improve their daily lives.