

26 February 2004

Macedonia: fear prevents remaining IDPs from returning home

Macedonia has been regarded as a “success story” for having achieved the fastest returns of people displaced by conflict in the Balkans. Over 95 per cent of the people uprooted during the brief but intense conflict between ethnic Albanian armed groups and Macedonian security forces in 2001 have been able to return. But the achievement of large-scale return conceals the persistent division between the ethnic communities and the failure of returnees to reintegrate socially and economically. And while incidents of serious violence remain isolated, returnees continue to face underlying pressure to leave areas where they are a minority. In total the conflict, which ended with the signing of the Ohrid Peace Agreement in August 2001, displaced over 170,000 people, of which 74,000 were internally displaced. For the majority of the nearly 2,700 who remain internally displaced the fear of security threats is preventing them from going home. However, with the completion of the reconstruction of their homes, a number of internally displaced people (IDPs) are expected to return in 2004. To ensure the success of returns in the country, it is necessary that the national authorities and the international community continue to monitor the needs of the remaining displaced population, support their right to return or provide alternative durable solutions.

Background and main causes of displacement

Inter-ethnic tensions between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereinafter Macedonia) culminated in violent conflict in 2001. Amongst the Macedonian population, some 25 per cent are ethnic Albanian, while some 64 per cent are ethnic Macedonian (IFRC 5 February 2004). Relations between the two groups were marked by geographic, economic and social separation (IHF 8 June 2001). The conflict erupted when an ethnic Albanian armed opposition group, the National Albanian Liberation Army (NLA), took control of the village of Tanusevci on the Kosovo border. The NLA shared with ethnic Albanian political parties the goal of achieving equal political, social, economic and cultural rights for ethnic Albanians, including the recognition of Albanian as an official language and the revision of the Constitution which referred to Macedonia as the state of the Macedonian people (AI 30 May 2002).

Between February and August 2001 fighting between ethnic Albanian armed groups and Macedonian security forces resulted in the displacement of over 170,000 people of which approximately 74,000 were internally displaced (UNHCR 2003). Along with the fighting, widespread human rights abuses were reported (AI 1 September 2001). Peace was established with the Framework Agreement signed in Ohrid on 13 August 2001 which provided for increased rights to ethnic minority groups and set out the framework for the return of the displaced population (OCHA March 2002).

Estimates in early 2004 indicate that there are a total of 2,678 IDPs in the country of which approximately 42% are ethnic Albanian, 37% ethnic Macedonian, 17% Serb, and the remaining Roma and Bosniac (ICRC 11 February 2004; UNHCR 16 February 2004).

Large-scale return

Macedonia has been regarded as a “success story” for having achieved the fastest returns in the Balkans (ICG 23 October 2003; UNHCR 16 February 2004). Over 95 per cent of the people uprooted during the conflict have been able to return (OCHA 31 December 2002).

IDP figures between August 2001 and January 2004

August 2001	74,000
31 October 2001	50,000
15 January 2002	21,200
1 September 2002	16,351
1 January 2003	9,442
1 April 2003	9,442
1 July 2003	6,060
1 October 2003	3,154
1 December 2003	3,154
1 January 2004	2,678

(Sources: UNHCR/ICRC/IFRC)

A closer analysis of the situation, however, suggests that the achievement of large-scale return conceals the persistent polarisation of ethnic communities and the failure of returnees to reintegrate socially and economically. Although acts of serious violence remain isolated, returnees continue to face underlying pressure to leave areas where they are a minority. Numerous acts of inter-ethnic vandalism, harassment and violence were reported in 2003 (ICG 23 October

2003, EC Delegation FYROM/IMG 7 November 2003). For instance, in Opae, in the Kumanovo area, 46 reconstructed houses had been looted in 2003 (Reality Macedonia 28 May 2003). Unemployment, poverty and an insecure economy, particularly in rural areas, also serve to aggravate inter-ethnic relations as well as constitute barriers to return (OCHA 31 December 2002; ICRC January 2004).

For the small number of remaining IDPs it seems that their most immediate concern, when it comes to return, is personal security. According to ICRC statistics, 66 per cent of IDPs have expressed an inability or unwillingness to return to their homes of origin due to a perceived or real fear for their physical security (ICRC 11 February 2004). There have been cases of displaced people being afraid of staying in their homes overnight and only visiting their homes during the day (ICRC January 2004). The feeling of vulnerability is evident in the common practice amongst minorities of selling their property in former conflict areas rather than returning (ICG 23 October 2003; Southeast European Times 2 June 2003). ICRC statistics also suggest that return for approximately 34 per cent of IDPs has been hampered by high number of destroyed or damaged houses (ICRC 11 February 2004).

The total number of IDPs is expected to decrease in 2004 with the further rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged or destroyed houses. Based on planned reconstruction, it is anticipated that approximately 300 IDPs from Aracinovo and Skopska Crna Gora region (Brest) and 200 IDPs from central Macedonia will be able to return in 2004. However, there are indications that between 1,400-

1,700 IDPs from the villages of Aracinovo, Matejce and Opae (Skopje and Kumanovo region) and Radusha and Tetovo town may continue to refuse to return to their villages for reasons which include physical security and inadequate socio-economic infrastructure (ICRC 11 February 2004).

Of the total number of registered IDPs, 1640 are being sheltered by host families, and 1038 live in collective centres (ICRC 11 February 2004; UNHCR 16 February 2004). The national Ombudsman has expressed concern that living conditions for IDPs in collective centres are unsatisfactory. The Ombudsman's report highlights, in particular, difficulties IDPs have faced in accessing health-care as well as the inadequate hygiene in collective centres (Ombudsman of FYROM 13 October 2003).

National response

Under the Ohrid peace agreement the national authorities are responsible for implementing the right of the displaced to return to their homes within the shortest time-frame possible and to complete an action plan for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of areas affected by the hostilities. The Macedonian authorities have largely supported the right of IDPs to return and implemented most of the legal reforms required by the Framework Agreement (USIP 30 November 2002).

Some organisations, however, have expressed concern that national authorities have employed forcible policies to hasten the return process of the displaced populations to restore the pre-conflict ethnic composition of the communities (IHF 24 June 2003; HCHR 7 March

2003). The government has also been criticised for failing to satisfy minimal conditions for the return of IDPs, including ensuring physical safety in return areas (IHF 24 June 2003).

International response

The international community responded rapidly to the needs of the displaced in Macedonia during and immediately after the conflict in 2001. The UN continues to maintain a significant presence in the country, supporting the implementation of the peace agreement, and democratic and legal reforms. A strong international monitoring effort by NATO and EU peacekeeping and police forces has also improved the overall security situation in the country.

The main humanitarian actor during the conflict was the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which provided immediate relief and assistance to the displaced and resident populations. Until June 2003, the ICRC assisted IDPs with the regular delivery of food and non-food items. The ICRC continued to provide basic assistance to IDPs in collective centres until August 2003. Other international actors including UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, WHO, IOM, FAO, the European Commission and numerous NGOs have provided a range of services to IDPs including food and non-food items, health and psycho-social support, rehabilitation and reconstruction assistance. The European Commission and the International Management Group have been the primary actors involved in the implementation of housing reconstruction and rehabilitation. The UN strategy outlined continued support to IDPs in 2003, on the basis that the

displaced population was identified as a vulnerable group in need of protection, humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance (OCHA 31 December 2002).

The return process has largely been possible due to the presence of the international community, particularly in the maintenance of security and the disarmament process. Security measures initiated by NATO in September 2001 were largely shifted to EU police and peacekeeping forces in March and December 2003. In 2003, UNDP assisted local authorities in a 45-day weapons amnesty programme which resulted in the handing over of 7,500 weapons (DPA 16 December 2003). The OSCE and the EU, among others, have also undertaken programmes, as directed by the Framework Agreement, to ensure that the composition of the police forces reflect the make-up of Macedonia; to provide training and assistance to the police; and to support confidence-building measures.

With improved security and large-scale return, most organisations have, since the end of 2003, phased out assistance to IDPs. The focus of the international community in the country has shifted from relief aid to longer-term development. The ICRC plans to continue to support the most vulnerable among the remaining IDPs in 2004 with income-generating projects. The ICRC programme is designed to meet the current needs of the displaced population, by providing livelihood support, in the transition phase between humanitarian assistance and development (ICRC January 2004).

To ensure the success of returns in the country, it is necessary that the national authorities and the international commu-

nity continue to monitor the needs of the remaining displaced population, support their right to return or provide alternative durable solutions.

Note: The full country profile is available online at www.idpproject.org.

LIST OF SOURCES

(in alphabetical order)

Amnesty International (AI), September 2001, Amnesty International Concerns in Europe (January - June 2001) AI INDEX: EUR 01/003/2001

Amnesty International (AI), 30 May 2002, Amnesty International Concerns in Europe (July - December 2001) AI INDEX: EUR 01/002/2002

Balkantimes, 2 June 2003, Internally Displaced Persons in Macedonia reaches 5,548

Deutsche Presse Agentur (DPA), 16 December 2003, Macedonia collects 7,500 weapons during amnesty programme

EU Delegation of the European Commission to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/International Management Group (IMG), 7 November 2003, Reconstruction Coordination; Housing Sector Reports of Burned/Vandalized/Demolished/Looted Houses

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in the Republic of Macedonia (HCHR FYROM), 7 March 2003, Press Release on the Coercive Attitude towards the Displaced Persons, press release

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 11 February 2004, NRC Interview with ICRC, Geneva, Switzerland, 11 February 2004

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 2004, Livelihood support for the displaced, Income-generating projects (IGP) for 2004: The International Committee of the Red Cross helps vulnerable displaced civilians in Macedonia become more self-reliant, Fact sheet

International Crisis Group (ICG), 23 October 2003, Macedonia: No room for complacency

International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), 5 February 2004, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Annual Appeal No. 01.74/2003, Programme Update No. 3 September-December 2003

International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), 24 June 2003, Human Rights in the OSCE Region: Europe, Central Asia and North America, Report 2003 (Events of 2002), FYR of Macedonia

International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF), 8 June 2001, Report: Fact-finding missions regarding the ongoing crisis and human rights violations in the Republic of Macedonia

Ombudsman of the Republic of Macedonia, 13 October 2003, Report about the conditions of the dislocated persons and measures for improvement of their conditions

Reality Macedonia, 28 May 2003, 48 Renewed Macedonian Houses Looted and Demolished in Opae Village, AP World News via Reality Macedonia

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 16 February 2004, NRC Interview with UNHCR, Geneva 16 February 2004

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), December 2003, Global Appeal 2004

United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 30 November 2002, Special Report: Putting Peace into Practice - Can Macedonia's New Government Meet the Challenge (Pearson, Brenda)

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), March 2002, United Nations Humanitarian Update Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 31 December 2002, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Humanitarian Strategy - 2003

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA), 31 December 2002, Humanitarian Priorities for 2003 in FYROM, Annex

Note: All documents used in this summary are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

About the Global IDP Project

The Global IDP Project, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998 at the request of the United Nations, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Geneva-based Project contributes to protecting and assisting the 25 million people around the globe, who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

The Global IDP Project runs an online database providing comprehensive and frequently updated information and analysis on internal displacement in over 50 countries.

It also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In addition, the Project actively advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

For more information, visit the Global IDP Project website at www.idpproject.org.

Contacts

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer

Communication Coordinator

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch

Global IDP Project

Norwegian Refugee Council
Chemin Mo ðe-Duboule, 59
CH-1209 Geneva, Switzerland

www.idpproject.org

Tel: +41 (0) 22 799 0703

Fax: +41 (0) 22 799 0701