

Forced Migration and Refugee Flows in Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina: Early Warning, Beginning and Current State of Flows

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Europe is presently confronted with the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. By October 1992 2.5 million people from the former Yugoslavia were forced to leave their homes, thus constituting almost 20 percent of the total of twelve million refugees and displaced persons in the world. In August 1992 there were 1,979,476 refugees and displaced persons within the borders of the former Yugoslavia, which makes 8.4 percent of the total population of former Yugoslavia. (According to a census taken in April 1991, Yugoslavia had 23,473,000 inhabitants.) Most of the displaced persons are in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while Croatia took the highest number of refugees (Table 1).

In addition to these figures, in August 1992 the UNHCR estimated that there were 541,500 refugees from the former Yugoslavia in European countries: 275,000 or 51 percent in Germany; 60,000 or 11 percent in Hungary; 50,000 or 9.2 percent in Austria. Women and children make up the majority of refugees and displaced persons. In Croatia (partial records, August 1992) women of all ages make 58.8 percent of displaced persons; most of them (39.8 percent) are between eighteen and fifty years old. Children younger than fourteen years represent 23 percent of the total population. Most of them (13 percent) are at the elementary school level.¹

EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF FLIGHT

There is substantial evidence that current forced migratory and refugee flows in the former Yugoslavia were preceded by "ethnohomogenization" movements from ethnically mixed areas of particular republics towards main national territories.

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Demographic data from the 1981 and 1991 censuses about intra- and interregional (interstate) migration show considerable net immigration rates, mainly due to movements out of ethnically mixed areas in Bosnia, Vojvodina and Kosovo to the territories of Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia. There were three principal movements: movements of Serbs from Muslim areas in Bosnia towards Serbia, movements of Serbs from Albanian Kosovo towards main Serbia, movements of Croats from Serbian/Muslim parts of Bosnia towards Croatia, and movements of Muslims and Croats (from the areas where they have comprised the majority of the population) towards Croatia and Slovenia. Since the former Yugoslavia's internal borders were not significant until 1990, internal migrations were treated as normal movements of people from the undeveloped south towards the more developed

north; hence it was hard to disentangle economic from ethnically forced migrations.

FORCED MIGRATION AND RESETTLEMENT HAVE A HISTORY IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Forced migration and resettlement virtually preceded or followed almost every major conflict in the Balkans. World War I induced the migration and settlement of thousands of people in the former Yugoslavia. Then northern parts of Croatia and Vojvodina were colonized by 200,000 Serbs from poor southern areas. They were mainly soldiers who were promised lands as a reward for fighting in the war, but were never fully settled and accommodated. In the current Croatian/Serbian conflict, these colonized areas on Croatian territory were the prime Serbian targets.

Table 1: Refugees and Displaced Persons within the Former Yugoslavia (September 1992)

Present Location	From Croatia	From Bosnia & Herzegovina	Total	% of the Total Pop.
Croatia	271,798	335,985	638,109	13.4
UN-patrolled areas	87,000	0	87,000	—
Serbia	162,337	252,130	414,467	4.3
Bosnia & Herzegovina	93,000	588,000	681,000	15.6
Montenegro	6,743	50,857	57,600	9.3
Slovenia	1,000	69,000	70,000	4.3
Macedonia	2,500	28,800	31,300	3.5
Total	624,378	1,324,772	1,979,476*	

*Includes 30,326 refugees from Serbia (Vojvodina: 18,540; Kosovo: 11,786)

Sources: UNHCR, Public Information Unit, Zagreb, September 1992; Census 1991, Republic of Croatia, Doc. 810, Zagreb 1991.

After World War II, the government organized the resettlement of Serbs from Bosnia and Croatia to Vojvodina. About 460,000 people left southern mountainous areas and settled around large farmlands. Also, 200,000 Turks left for Turkey, thousands of Italians opted for Italy, and at least 50,000 Croats fled (mostly illegally) Yugoslavia. An estimated total of two million people of all ethnic backgrounds changed their residences between 1948 and 1960.

For decades following World War II, most of the emigrants from the former Yugoslavia were from Bosnia and Croatia. According to the 1981 census, emigrants from Bosnia made up 22 percent of the total population that emigrated from Yugoslavia to elsewhere in Europe. Bosnia also had the greatest number of municipalities (twenty-four) in the former Yugoslavia where more than 20 percent of households had at least one member working abroad in Germany or Austria. Certain areas were developed due to financial assistance and help from those who were abroad. It led also to the specific redistribution of population around medium-size towns so that between 1971 and 1981, the populations living in the municipal centres increased by approximately 35 percent. Such towns developed on an ethnically mixed basis in Bosnia and Herzegovina; today, they are the main targets of attacks (or defence) of all military groups. Those on Serbian expansion interest areas were the first targets for ethnic cleansing.²

ARMED CONFLICT AND VIOLENCE IN BOSNIA: ETHNIC CLEANSING AND REFUGEES

Coined by journalists as a catchword for forced migration that aims to ethnically homogenize previously mixed areas, "ethnic cleansing" is the main framework of Serbian aggression in Bosnia. It is estimated that 2,500,000 people fled their homes from threatened or occupied areas in Bosnia/Herzegovina. According to the Croatian Agency for Refugees, there were 670,000 refugees in Croatia (13.4 percent of the total population) and 75,000 in Slovenia (4.3 percent of the total

population) in October 1992. Most of them are Muslim women, children and men over fifty-five years old. Men of drafting age are not permitted to enter Croatian or Slovak territories.

According to unconfirmed data, ethnic cleansing is continuing in Serbian-dominated territories and municipalities. It usually starts as extrainstitutional violence and ends up as coerced displacement; people either flee or are moved to concentration camps. There are many similarities with the pre-Holocaust period in Germany, among them a law that requires the dispossession of forced migrants.³

REGULATION AND HELP

For devastated Croatia, such an influx of refugees already results in considerable foreign debts. The government paid about U.S. \$60 million each month for meeting the refugees' basic needs. This cost is now 30 percent higher. Before the massive aggression against Bosnia, the quality and scope of international humanitarian aid given to Croatia was adequate. However, the dramatic increase in the number of refugees from Bosnia within the last two months caught the UNHCR, UNICEF, International Committee of the Red Cross and the World Health Organization by surprise. They were not logistically or financially prepared for meeting the needs of such a large influx.

ADMISSION PROCEDURES IN CROATIA

By the beginning of 1992, the newly established Office for Refugees and Displaced Persons was responsible for refugee policy in Croatia. According to official definition, a displaced person is an individual who was forced to leave his or her home but remains within the borders of Croatia, while a refugee is a displaced person who fled his or her home and crossed the state's border. The status and rights of refugees are defined by the Act of Refugee and Displaced Persons. Croatia's Ministry of Internal Affairs issues permits for temporary stay and social welfare centres are responsible for the refugees' accommodation and food. Since June 13, 1992 Croatia is no

longer taking in refugees from Bosnia. Refugees in transit to other countries must have documentation verifying this. In July 1992 the governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia signed the agreement about joint efforts to return refugees (men between eighteen and sixty and women between eighteen and fifty-five) to those areas in Bosnia that were declared safe by legal authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mothers of young children are not included.

It is difficult to estimate the number of illegal entries from Bosnia to Croatia. The Office for Refugees states that they learn about refugee settlements often only after they have been set up on sites chosen by refugees' self-appointed leaders. The media mention some 100,000 unregistered refugees who are settled on derelict construction sites or sheltered by relatives. While the armed conflict persists, refugees have been gathering along the Croatian-Bosnian border even though Croatia denied further admissions. Many of those who left before the outbreak of war were granted refugee status, while those who fled when directly threatened by aggression cannot obtain such status.

SELF-ORGANIZATION OF REFUGEES

Many refugees started various self-help organizations using some existing networks and facilities in large cities nearby. Refugees organized health care, education and creative activities. In their most developed forms, self-organized activities were institutionalized as "homeland clubs," where refugees from administrative units in Bosnia or Croatia register themselves as local community agencies. According to our findings, they

- collect information about deceased and lost persons, document damages done and collect documentation on property that was left behind
- help to organize the distribution of humanitarian aid
- organize information and lectures for refugees
- establish the international network of refugees and emigrants abroad
- organize evidence and protection for orphaned children

THE ATTITUDES OF THE HOST POPULATIONS

Croatia and Slovenia are on the brink of new elections and the refugee issue is being debated by every party's electorate. It is evident that "refugee culture" is creating divisiveness. Some right-wing groups are arguing in favour of expulsion, while liberals are willing to discuss the open societies solution. It is quite likely that with the overwhelming pauperization of Croatia and Slovenia, prejudices—even violence—against refugees could gain momentum.

THE FUTURE?

Recent research findings show that the majority of refugees intend to return home once the war ends.⁴ The rebuilding of their homes and normalization of their lives will necessitate a massive joint effort. Those whose hometowns are destroyed may stay or move elsewhere. Even with the possibility of security zone settlements in Bosnia, thousands of refugees will still not be properly provided for. Moreover, security zones in Bosnia are very close to European migratory tracks. It is quite possible that the populations in these areas will be, in a generation or two, among the main pools of migrants in Europe. Therefore, the sound approach to the refugee crisis in the Balkans would be to avert mass flows by eliminating the conditions that cause flight. ■

NOTES

1. D.I. Ceppek and B. Salvari, *Analiticki odjel Ureda za izbjeglice*, Zagreb.
2. According to the former Yugoslavia's 1991 Census, Serbs made up 31.3 percent, Muslims 43.7 percent and Croats 17.3 percent of Bosnia and Herzegovina's population; Muslims were the majority in forty-four municipalities, Serbs in thirty-four and Croats in twenty municipalities.
3. Before being displaced or forced to move to camps, people are usually asked to sign the "depossession papers." By signing them, they "voluntarily" cede their property to Serbian local government. Such acquisitions will be used for "ethnic homogenization" of the area, for future settlers of Serbian nationality.
4. M. Mesic, *Osjetljivi i ljuti ljudi*, Zagreb 1992.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD* Convention Refugee Determination Division Statistical Summary Period: January 1, 1992 – December 31, 1992 Acceptance Rates** for Refugee Claims From Top Twenty-five Source Countries											
Credible Basis Processing					Full Hearing Processing					Overall Rate %	
Source Country	Claims Concluded	Acceptance Yes	No	%	Claims Processed	Wdn	Acceptance Yes	No	%		
1	Sri Lanka	5,742	5,729	11	99.8	5,297	113	4,831	297	94.2	94.0
2	Somalia	3,372	3,365	7	99.8	3,517	87	3,338	254	92.9	92.7
3	Pakistan	1,624	1,588	27	98.3	973	65	570	354	61.7	60.6
4	China	1,321	1,254	56	95.4	1,382	52	292	1,143	20.3	19.4
5	Iran	1,288	1,277	4	99.3	1,194	70	922	226	80.3	79.8
6	U.S.S.R.	1,245	1,206	34	97.3	1,244	123	721	540	57.2	55.6
7	El Salvador	946	900	34	95.8	1,102	112	337	693	32.7	31.4
8	Lebanon	908	895	4	99.0	964	63	435	442	49.6	49.1
9	India	884	823	44	93.9	598	57	137	377	26.7	25.0
10	Yugoslavia	793	765	17	97.6	380	43	240	117	67.2	65.6
11	Ghana	765	684	65	91.2	778	129	214	612	25.9	23.6
12	Israel	641	629	12	98.1	245	21	68	103	39.8	39.0
13	Romania	622	600	17	96.9	562	27	270	309	46.6	45.2
14	Bangladesh	612	601	10	98.2	498	19	234	250	48.3	47.5
15	Guatemala	581	569	9	97.9	559	44	342	183	65.1	63.8
16	Zaire	573	565	7	98.8	559	12	362	164	68.8	68.0
17	Haiti	515	498	5	97.3	498	32	275	218	55.8	54.3
18	Peru	483	469	12	97.5	417	18	299	108	73.5	71.6
19	Sudan	480	480	0	100.0	504	4	480	21	95.8	95.8
20	Nigeria	444	409	29	93.4	391	72	104	265	28.2	26.3
21	Ethiopia	431	420	5	98.6	602	21	370	280	56.9	56.1
22	Argentina	397	314	78	79.9	319	63	54	258	17.3	13.8
23	Iraq	389	387	1	99.7	384	8	369	16	95.8	95.6
24	Uruguay	356	322	25	92.5	300	27	107	144	42.6	39.4
25	Russia	341	333	6	97.9	207	19	121	39	75.6	74.1
	Subtotal	25,753	25,082	519	97.8	23,474	1,301	15,492	7,413	67.6	66.1
	All claims total	31,431	29,883	1,199	95.8	27,971	1,867	17,437	9,871	63.9	61.2
* Source: Immigration and Refugee Board news release dated February 12, 1993											
** Acceptance rates are computed on adjudicated claims only; withdrawn [wdn] claims are not included.											
Claims Processing By Regions											
Claims Concluded	Altantic	Quebec	Ontario	Prairies	B. C.	National					
Credible Basis	556	11,296	17,494	623	1,462	31,431					
Full Hearing	480	10,293	15,299	555	1,344	27,971					

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