

THE DILEMMA: RETURN OR INTEGRATION

Sandrina Špeh-Vujadinović

Branko Vujadinović

INTRODUCTION

Ten years after the war the problem of refugees on the territory of former Yugoslavia still remains unresolved. Although there has been progressively more talk over the past several years about the necessity to solve this issue and many strategies and programmes have been drafted for support to return or integration of refugees, it seems that the ultimate solution is still far ahead. There are still many people with refugee status who do not feel as if they belong either here or there and who keep on living in a kind of vacuum without real sense of continuity of their lives and without possibilities to carry on a meaningful existence.

Nevertheless, there are certain changes towards resolving the problem of refugees and stimulating the decision making on return or integration; we therefore hope there would be more positive steps in this field.

Consequently one of the aims of our research was to explore the position towards return and integration and help clarify important factors affecting the decision of refugees to either return to their pre-war residence or integrate locally in the communities of exile.

RETURN AND INTEGRATION – CURRENT STATE

Croatia

According to a report by the Government of Croatia³⁷ the overall number of registered returnees to Croatia since the beginning of the return process in 1995 amounts to 330.727; of this number 215.579 are Croatian refugees (65%) while 115.148 are Serbs (35%) - 83.162 returnees from Serbia and Montenegro, 8.232 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 23.754 internally displaced who had been residing in Croatian Podunavlje region. Based on the same source, during 2004 there were 12.478 returnees to Croatia, of which 7.295 Serbs (58%) and 5.183 Croatsians (42%).

The ultimate solution, either through return to their homes or integration in Croatia, still awaits a total of 34.621 registered exiles and refugees (this includes persons expelled/refugees from Croatia, internally displaced within Croatia as well as people from other areas of former Yugoslavia who sought refuge in Croatia). This number is much higher when we take into account all Croatian citizens of Serbian ethnicity currently residing in Serbia.

The overall number of properties restored to owners is 18.074, of which 3.256 empty housing units still not repossessed by their owners. During 2004 a total of 2.312 houses have been restored to their owners, after having been vacated by temporary settlers. The settlers were provided with housing or given building materials, while a smaller number was accommodated in apartments considered as state property. There are still 1.197 illegally occupied or non-restored housing units.

In Croatia, 131.634 houses and apartments destroyed or damaged during the war have been reconstructed. According to an ICG Balkan report dated December 2002³⁸, *"...the bulk of reconstruction funded from the Government budget went to Croats rather than Serbs"*. Different results are found in the report *Return of exiles and refugees in Croatia: progress until the end of 2004*, which states that since 2003, 70% of reconstruction beneficiaries have been returnees of Serbian ethnicity. There are 13.700 still unresolved requests for reconstruction. As concerns the accommodation of returnees who used to live in socially owned apartments (occupancy right holders) so far there have been 6.474 claims filed in the areas of special state care and 1641 requests outside this area of Croatia. This programme is expected to be finalised by the end of 2006.

Although these figures look promising, other sources are less optimistic concerning the issue of returnees to Croatia, primarily in case of Serbs. The ICG Balkan report No.138 states: *"less than one-third of the more than 300,000*

³⁷ *Return of exiles and refugees in Croatia: progress until the end of 2004* (Povratak prognanika i izbjeglica u Hrvatskoj: napredak do kraja 2004. godine), report by Government of Croatia.

³⁸ ICG (2002).

*Croatian Serbs displaced during the conflict have returned” while “according to one survey, as few as 6 per cent of Croatian Serb refugees in Serbia expressed a desire to return.”*³⁹. The same source quotes a research by the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees, which concluded that over 25% Serbs from Croatia residing in Serbia are still undecided with regard to return and that there were about 8.000 return cases registered from FRY and BIH in the first 9 months of 2002. Besides problems related to property repossession and possibilities of exercising various rights in Croatia, the significant factor in making a decision on return is the perception of the security situation. The aforementioned ICG report also quotes an information from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting dated March 2002, which says: *“While the security situation has improved, the perception of insecurity among potential Serb returnees appears still to be a real disincentive to return. Such a perception was fed by the appearance of an extensive list of alleged Serb war criminals that was published and placed on the internet by hard-line Croat nationalists.”*⁴⁰.

Regarding refugees in Croatia, by October 2002 there were 8500 people (mainly from BIH) still registered as refugees in the country. How many of these people would return to their homes remains to be seen, although *“indications from representatives of Bosnian Croat settlers in Croatia are that relatively few Bosnian Croats wish to return to Bosnia”*⁴¹.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

The ICG Balkan report states that, according to official data, about 900.000 people have returned to their homes in BIH, from which they had fled or been expelled during the war⁴². Until end September 2002, over 150.000 BIH citizens have been registered as having repossessed their properties, which is 62% of all filed claims for repossession of property. However, there are doubts with regard to accuracy of this information, since the municipal housing authorities in BIH only register in their reports the overall number of filed repossession claims and the number of implemented repossessions, while individual cases are not registered, which makes it impossible to ascertain the correctness of the data.

Apart from the repossession issue, there are other return related problems due to which the number of those who have not decided to return is still fairly high (in December 2002 there were about 127.000 registered refugees from BIH who were still living in Croatia and the then FRY, while close to 380.000 refugees were still internally displaced within BIH).

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² The Continuing Challenge of Refugee Return in Bosnia & Herzegovina - ICG Balkan report, No.137, 13th December 2002

One of the factors having an adverse effect on the return process is the gloomy economic situation and high unemployment rate affecting all people in BIH, although returnees still face the biggest problems, including illegal privatisation: “...with official unemployment rate of about 40%, return to urban areas, with very little or no arable land available, is more problematic”. Another significant problem in enhancing sustainable return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, mentioned in the ICG report, is the serious difficulty that returnees face when trying to repossess their former commercial premises and usurped land; the consequence of this is that even if the returnees resolve the issue of housing they still face the problem of earning a living.

Another important unfavourable factor in the return process is the persistent ethnic discrimination that “prevents the full realisation of potential returns, threatens the sustainability of achieved returns and encourages returnees who do stay to huddle in enclaves rather than to reintegrate”⁴³. The same source states that, although the BIH authorities have been coerced into recognising the right to repossession of pre-war property, this is not accompanied by their readiness to eradicate institutionalised discrimination that condemns many “minority”⁴⁴ returnees to the status of second-rate citizens.

The ICG report further states that the education system in BIH, with three separate and politically tinted curricula, represents another problem reported by families with children as a reason not to return, as well as discrimination in provision of communal and health services and pensions. With regard to security situation, although it is said to have significantly improved, there is still the problem of intimidation of “minority” returnees. In corroboration, it is stated that “in some parts of the RS a returnee is ten times more likely to be the victim of violent crime than is a local Serb”.

It is said that one of the positive steps in stimulating repatriation process in BIH is the passing of amendments pursuant to which local administrations are requested to employ returnees in accordance with ethnic quotas based on the last pre-war population census; it is believed that if implemented, these amendments would give a better chance to returnees to preserve their interests.

The overall conclusion is that as concerns the return of refugees to BIH and within BIH significant steps have been made and it seems that the positive trend will continue in the future, provided that the international community maintains its supervision until Bosnia and Herzegovina has established “those genuinely “normal” constraints that civilised societies impose upon themselves”.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Returnees whose ethnic group represents factual minority in communities of return.

REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

Table 1: *Proportion of responses to question: "Are you planning to go back to the place from which you were exiled?"*

	Federation BIH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Serbia	Total
I don't think about it at all	26.0%	55.6%	64.0%	68.5%	53.9%
In current circumstances I'm not planning to	23.6%	31.1%	27.2%	20.5%	25.0%
I'm planning but not in the next year	22.8%	10.0%	8.0%	8.2%	12.3%
I'm planning within a year	27.6%	3.3%	0.8%	2.7%	8.8%

The table shows that 53.9% of refugees covered by our research are not at all thinking about return to the place they had been expelled from, 25.0% of them are not planning to return under current circumstances but leave room for reconsidering if the situation changes, 12.3% are planning to return but not in a year's time, while 8.8% plan to go back to their homes during next year.

Somewhat different results are obtained by viewing this data with regard to country or entity where our respondents currently reside or have been displaced/exiled to. Refugees currently residing in Federation BH are by far the most numerous planning to return to their pre-war homes. By contrast, respondents from Republika Srpska and especially those from Croatia and Serbia, mostly do not think about return. Similar results were published by Brajdić-Vuković and Bagić in 2004. Such finding is not unexpected: it is a consequence of a variety of factors of which the most significant for us seems the constant mobilisation of all resources within Bosniak national community to promote return as the best solution to refugee problem.

In the overall sample as well as in sub-samples by country/entity there is a relatively high percentage (total of 25%) of those who are not planning to return under current circumstances. As already said, these respondents fall in the group that despite the current negative position towards return could potentially reconsider in case the political, economic and other circumstances should change; they are potential returnees. At the same time they are probably the most vulnerable group on account of their "neither here nor there" position, which prevents them from meaningfully continuing their lives.

Following lines attempt to analyse the conditions that might affect the decision of those who are still undecided and have not yet resolved the dilemma of "return or integration".

Table 2: *Overview of answers to the question: "Fulfilment of conditions that would influence return" (1 – not at all, 5 – very much)*

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Serbia	Total
Ensured health care by state	4,62	4,13	3,80	4,39	4,32
Security of family	4,11	4,60	4,12	4,37	4,23
Stable economic situation	4,18	4,52	3,84	4,20	4,15
Return of private property	4,19	4,48	3,98	4,00	4,14
Personal safety	4,00	4,19	3,88	4,44	4,08
Possibility of employment	3,96	4,53	4,00	3,82	4,02
Stable political situation	4,16	3,97	3,59	4,17	4,00
Possibility of normal education for children	4,10	4,22	3,44	3,65	3,87
Assistance of IO⁴⁵ to returnees in housing reconstruction	3,99	4,07	3,45	3,90	3,86
Real commitment of IO to ensure personal and property security	3,98	3,96	3,41	4,03	3,85
Possibility of loans	3,67	3,89	3,49	4,15	3,75
Other IO assistance for returnees	3,95	3,89	3,04	3,88	3,72
Assistance by IO to returnees in infrastructure rebuilding	3,99	3,93	3,08	3,56	3,69
State assistance in provision of social welfare	3,48	3,70	3,16	3,90	3,51

⁴⁵ IO – International organisations

THE DILEMMA: RETURN OR INTEGRATION

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Serbia	Total
Strong commitment of other ethnic groups not to compromise safety of returnees	3,65	3,40	3,15	3,39	3,45
Restitution of socially owned property	3,54	3,96	2,69	2,51	3,17
Public pledge by political leaders to guarantee security	3,07	3,10	2,24	3,10	2,88
Public appeal by highest functionaries to returnees	2,94	3,13	2,29	2,85	2,80

When looking at the overall sample of respondents, it is evident that these are the most important conditions that would influence return if fulfilled: ensured health care by state, security of family, stable economic situation, return of private property, personal safety, possibility of employment and stable political situation. The need for basic safety and security therefore dominates, which is quite logical and corresponds to the well known Maslow's theory on hierarchy of motives, according to which the motive of security immediately follows basic physiological motives. Concurrently, knowledge that the respondents still put basic security in the first place is a sad reminder of the fact that even today, ten years after the end of war, these people remain concerned about their safety in places they had lived in before the conflict.

Situation in respective entities is quite similar, although there are differences with regard to results from the overall sample. For refugees from Croatia residing in Serbia, most important are security, favourable economic situation and possibility of employment, the situation being similar among refugees from Federation BH currently in Republika Srpska. In contrast, respondents currently accommodated in the Federation BH who wish to return to Republika Srpska, state that exercise of basic social rights is most important. These differences should not surprise us. It has already been mentioned that refugees currently residing in Federation BH have the highest unemployment rate in our research. Employment is not high on their priority list simply because they do not have a job at present. The very fact that a large majority of these people would not have to live as sub-tenants upon return constitutes for them a serious financial improvement. If the country of return also ensures their basic health care, they would certainly not be worse off than they are now.

There is an evident lack of confidence in local authorities and their factual influence: their actions occupy the bottom of the list. Refugees find the reaction of international organisations much more important when contemplating return.

Table 3: *Overview of answers to the question: "Fulfilment of conditions that would influence integration"*

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Serbia	Total
Stable political situation	4,18	3,83	4,20	5,00	4,10
Security of family	3,69	3,85	4,04	3,88	3,87
Ensured health care by state	4,01	3,74	3,91	3,75	3,86
Possibility of employment	3,69	3,85	3,64	4,08	3,82
Public pledge by political leaders to support integration	4,02	3,39	3,93	4,40	3,82
State assistance in provision of social welfare	3,71	3,53	3,36	4,23	3,74
Personal safety	3,63	3,66	3,85	3,71	3,72
Possibility of normal education for children	3,83	3,84	3,31	3,82	3,68
Acceptance by neighbours and acquaintances	3,40	3,07	3,19	4,26	3,54
Possibility of loans	3,61	3,64	3,27	3,51	3,49
Other IO assistance	3,48	3,42	3,36	3,61	3,48
Return/sale of property in country of origin	2,94	3,73	3,41	3,38	3,35
Assistance by IO in building infrastructure in refugee settlements	3,46	3,65	2,93	3,32	3,31
Assistance by IO in infrastructure rebuilding	3,32	3,23	2,37	3,79	3,19

Five factors that the respondents with refugee status named as the most important for making the decision to integrate in communities of asylum are: stable political situation, security of family, ensured health care by the state, possibility of employment and public pledge by political leaders to support integration.

As is the case with conditions that would stimulate return, the dominant conditions here are also related to the sense of basic security, social welfare and economic prosperity. Noticeably, refugees currently residing in Serbia consider political stability as the most important factor for their decision to integrate (all respondents from the sub-sample of refugees in Serbia gave the highest mark to this condition). This clearly indicates the preoccupation with political stability factor, i.e. how much is this condition regarded as currently unfulfilled in Serbia. There is a similar (albeit less drastic) situation in other countries/entities. The exception is Republika Srpska, where political stability ranks only as tenth, which seems to be a circuitous confirmation of the general opinion that refugees residing in Republika Srpska largely represent a backbone of support for the present regime. Namely, the fact that political stability is not mentioned as a highly important condition reflects to a certain extent the satisfaction with current political situation.

RETURNEES

The next step in the analysis was to verify which conditions and to what extent had contributed to the decision making among respondents who have already returned.

Table 4: *Overview of answers to the question: "To what extent has the fulfilment of these conditions influenced your return" (1 – not at all, 5 – Very much)*

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Total
Return of private property	3,49	3,50	3,18	3,36
Ensured health care by state	2,89	2,87	3,86	3,30
Security of family	2,95	3,07	3,64	3,27
Personal safety	2,88	2,98	3,46	3,15
Stable political situation	2,45	2,41	3,13	2,73
Real commitment of IO to ensure personal and property security	2,97	3,09	2,22	2,67
Restitution of socially owned property	3,24	2,81	2,07	2,66
Possibility of normal education for children	2,45	3,03	2,57	2,63
Possibility of employment	2,42	2,84	2,55	2,57
Assistance by IO to returnees in housing reconstruction	2,26	2,86	2,59	2,54

LIVING IN POST-WAR COMMUNITIES

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Total
Strong commitment of other ethnic groups not to compromise safety of returnees	2,92	2,53	2,09	2,47
Other IO assistance for returnees	2,15	2,72	2,49	2,43
Stable economic situation	1,95	2,07	2,94	2,40
Assistance by IO to returnees in infrastructure rebuilding	2,06	2,76	2,44	2,38
State assistance in provision of social welfare	1,92	2,42	2,41	2,24
Possibility of loans	1,94	2,69	2,24	2,24
Public pledge by political leaders to guarantee security	2,01	2,04	2,42	2,19
Public appeal by highest functionaries	1,99	1,91	2,38	2,14

When we view the overall sample of returnees, the results show that following factors have had a decisive influence on their return to former places of residence: return of private property, ensured health care by the state, security of family, personal safety and stable political situation. It is of course the individual perception of respondents that these factors exist and have been fulfilled in the places from which they had been forced to flee during the war.

These are also more or less the same conditions mentioned by refugees as key incentives for return or integration. It is evident that the level of fulfilment of these conditions is much lower than the feeling of importance that refugees attribute to them. It appears that the act of return marks a transition from a phase where there is no decisions and everything seems so important into a phase where people tend to judge more realistically and with moderation; or maybe those who are returning have more modest expectations and demands than those who are still refugees, which facilitates their decision to go back.

There are significant differences between countries/entities. As concerns returnees into BIH Federation, the following factors had the most important impact on their decision-making: return of private property, return of socially-owned property (i.e. tenancy rights), real readiness of international forces to ensure personal security and security of property, as well as family, together with firm pledges by other ethnic groups not to compromise the security of returnees.

There is a similar estimation by returnees to Republika Srpska: here too the return of private property is the most important, followed by readiness of international forces to ensure security of person, family and property, as well as uninterrupted education for children and personal safety.

Returnees to Croatia view things differently: above all they state the state-ensured health care, followed by security of family, personal safety and only at fourth and fifth place the return of property and stable political situation.

These results are a good indicator of the real situation in each of the three countries/entities: the key incentive for return to Bosnia and Herzegovina is the progress in property rights, while returnees to Croatia have been motivated mainly by the improved security of returnees. It is striking that actions of local authorities again occupy the very bottom of the list.

Table 5: *Overview of answers to the question: "To what extent are respective conditions fulfilled in the community of return" (1 – not at all, 5 – very much)*

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Total
Personal safety	3,59	3,53	4,03	3,76
Security of family	3,57	3,51	3,93	3,71
Ensured health care by state	2,82	2,39	3,78	3,13
Return of private property	3,41	3,42	2,58	3,06
Strong commitment of other ethnic groups not to compromise safety of returnees	3,49	2,95	2,51	2,95
Stable political situation	2,41	2,38	3,09	2,70
Possibility of normal education for children	2,64	2,91	2,56	2,67
Restitution of socially owned property	3,48	2,90	1,60	2,57
Real commitment of IO to ensure personal and property security	2,80	2,72	2,08	2,47
Public pledge by political leaders to support integration	2,16	2,01	2,44	2,24
Public appeal by highest functionaries	1,92	1,80	2,32	2,06
Stable economic situation	1,73	1,64	2,46	2,02

LIVING IN POST-WAR COMMUNITIES

	Federation BH	Republika Srpska	Croatia	Total
Assistance of IO to returnees in housing reconstruction	1,65	2,24	2,13	1,99
Assistance by IO to returnees in infrastructure rebuilding	1,61	2,09	2,03	1,90
Other IO assistance for returnees	1,54	1,89	1,89	1,77
Possibility of employment	1,80	1,82	1,72	1,77
State assistance in provision of social welfare	1,31	1,59	2,07	1,70
Possibility of loans	1,58	1,81	1,48	1,59

Respondents who have returned to places of their former residence estimate that the following conditions for integration in the community of return have been fulfilled to a large extent: personal and family security, health care provided by the state, return/sale of private property and firm commitments by other ethnic groups not to compromise the safety of returnees.

Therefore it is evident that in all three entities where there are returnees (BIH Federation, Republika Srpska and Croatia) our respondents who have gone back consider that primarily the conditions of personal and family security have been fulfilled.

ONE FORM OF SWOT ANALYSIS

Relying on the well known model of analysing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the SWOT analysis, we have tried to look in yet another way at the perception of conditions in countries of origin and asylum, as well as the differences between refugees and returnees.

Table 6: *Proportion of respondents with “yes” answers to statements regarding conditions in countries of origin and asylum – difference between returnees and refugees*

	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN			COUNTRY OF ASYLUM			DIFFERENCE	
	Ret.	Ref.	Ret-Ref	Ret.	Ref.	Ret-Ref	Ret.	Ref.
I have resolved my housing issue	0.88	0.21	0.67	0.08	0.32	-0.24	0.80	-0.11
I have a stable income (shop, rent, job, pension)	0.54	0.13	0.41	0.23	0.50	-0.27	0.31	-0.38

THE DILEMMA: RETURN OR INTEGRATION

	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN			COUNTRY OF ASYLUM			DIFFERENCE	
	Ret.	Ref.	Ret-Ref	Ret.	Ref.	Ret-Ref	Ret.	Ref.
I have a wide circle of friends and acquaintances	0.82	0.35	0.47	0.67	0.76	-0.09	0.14	-0.41
Children have good possibility for education	0.63	0.19	0.44	0.64	0.68	-0.04	-0.01	-0.49
Economic situation is satisfactory	0.30	0.11	0.19	0.19	0.33	-0.14	0.11	-0.22
Political situation is satisfactory	0.47	0.13	0.34	0.38	0.47	-0.09	0.09	-0.33
International community helps people a lot	0.37	0.29	0.08	0.29	0.32	-0.03	0.07	-0.03
International community will ultimately force the authorities to resolve our problems in a just way	0.70	0.52	0.18	0.55	0.52	0.03	0.14	0.00
International community is unfair to people	0.44	0.46	-0.02	0.41	0.50	-0.09	0.03	-0.05
I simply belong ...	0.88	0.28	0.60	0.16	0.64	-0.48	0.72	-0.37
I speak the same language as other people	0.92	0.74	0.18	0.74	0.83	-0.09	0.19	-0.09
Our problems will ultimately be resolved	0.82	0.60	0.22	0.54	0.76	-0.22	0.29	-0.16
My property is destroyed or usurped	0.56	0.75	-0.19	0.07	0.13	-0.06	0.49	0.61
Our surroundings views us as second rate people	0.36	0.61	-0.25	0.43	0.41	0.02	-0.08	0.20
I have nobody who could help me here	0.41	0.60	-0.19	0.42	0.46	-0.04	-0.01	0.14
I am treated as an alien	0.26	0.63	-0.37	0.51	0.40	0.11	-0.25	0.23
I cannot exercise my basic human rights	0.37	0.57	-0.20	0.35	0.34	0.01	0.03	0.23
I'm afraid of being accused of war crimes	0.01	0.11	-0.10	0.00	0.02	-0.02	0.00	0.09
There could easily be another war	0.24	0.30	-0.06	0.24	0.26	-0.02	0.00	0.05
I'm afraid of losing my identity	0.13	0.34	-0.21	0.10	0.15	-0.05	0.03	0.19
My life is in danger	0.11	0.41	-0.30	0.09	0.16	-0.07	0.02	0.26
I cannot achieve anything due to my ethnic origin	0.25	0.50	-0.25	0.16	0.19	-0.03	0.08	0.30

Data in the table speak clearly about the differences between returnees and refugees in their perception of conditions in the country of origin and country of asylum. Returnees generally view and evaluate more positively the living conditions in the country of origin they had fled and then returned after a certain time in exile. It was probably the more positive perception of living conditions in the country of origin that has influenced returnees to make the decision to go back, while the more negative perception of these conditions among current refugees represents an important factor in their reluctance to opt for return at this time.

Concurrently, refugees perceive the conditions in the country of asylum as better. Following the logic of the above conclusions, we could say that the more positive perception of living conditions in the country of asylum among refugees has influenced them to opt for integration, while the more negative assessment of the same conditions by returnees has played a key role in their decision to go back.

It is justified to assume that every single respondent, while making the decision about his/her future, has undergone a process essentially similar to a SWOT analysis. Those who have decided to return found strengths and opportunities in the country of origin much higher than those in the country of asylum. Likewise, weaknesses and threats seemed to them lesser in the country of origin than in the country of asylum. The country of origin is for the returnee a place where he/she owns private property and has a stable income, as well as a large circle of friends and acquaintances, where he simply belongs and where his problems would ultimately be resolved. Refugees see the country of origin as a place where his/her property is destroyed or usurped, with no possibilities to earn a living and send children to school, where he is treated as an alien, a second rate citizen who cannot exercise his/her basic human rights.

On the contrary, the country of asylum is for a refugee the place where his/her problems will ultimately be resolved, where he has friends, can send children to school, where he/she truly belongs. It is worth noting that the difference in perception of conditions in the country of asylum is much lower between returnees and refugees than the perception of conditions in the country of origin. Key differences are probably main factors conducive to return: returnee is a person with a house or apartment where he can return, has a guaranteed income in the country of origin and simply feels he/she belongs there. We should therefore not be astonished that the bulk of returnees are elderly people and that the number of returnees would soon begin to decrease due to the inevitable process of integration.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There are significant differences in readiness among groups of refugees currently residing in various countries/entities to return to their pre-war homes. The idea of return is mostly favoured among Bosniaks currently accommodated in BIH Federation. Far less respondents willing to return have been registered in Republika Srpska and Croatia. About 1/5 of respondents still do not have a clearly formed final decision on return/integration; they represent probably the most vulnerable and sensitive part of the refugee population, as well as the target group on which further programmes and strategies for resolving the refugee issue should be focussed.
2. Potential returnees stress basic security, basic social welfare and economic prosperity as conditions the fulfilment of which would to the largest extent positively influence their decision to return to the country they had fled from. More or less the same conditions apply in decision-making on potential integration.
3. Those who have returned point out that in making this decision the most decisive factor for them was the return of private property in the country of origin, as well as their impression of a satisfactory level of personal and family security. Returnees also stress that their expectations in this regard have largely been fulfilled.
4. There are clear and substantial differences in the way the country of origin is perceived among returnees and refugees who still haven't returned. Returnees experience the country of origin as their own, while refugees feel the same about the country of asylum. It seems that the feeling of belonging, return on private property and a stable income have all played the key role in the decision of returnees to go back to their pre-war homes.

REFERENCES

Book

Brajdić-Vuković, M., Bagić, D.: Materijalni i emotivni čimbenici povratka izbjeglica u domovinu te prihvatanja njihovog povratka od strane lokalnog stanovništva - empirijsko istraživanje

Reports

A Half-Hearted Welcome – Refugee Return to Croatia – ICG Balkan Report No. 138, International Crisis Group, Zagreb/Brussels, 2002.

The Continuing Challenge Of Refugee Return In Bosnia & Herzegovina – ICG Balkan Report No. 137, International Crisis Group, Sarajevo/Brussels, 2002.