



CARDS

Country
Croatia

Implementation period
2003-2004

Funding
€17.2 million

Results
Reconstruction of housing to enable the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons

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Partners
Ministry for Sea, Tourism, Transport and Development, and Croatian NGOs

Building a better future together

Reconstruction in Croatia

Since 1996, the European Union Programme for Reconstruction and Return (EUPOP) has made a concerted effort to support the return, reintegration and reconciliation of refugees and displaced persons in the Republic of Croatia. In 2003, there were an estimated 228,000 Croatian refugees in Serbia and Montenegro and a further 28,000 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing a major barrier to development across the region. Consequently, various actions are currently under way to support the sustainable return of refugees, including the reconstruction of property damaged or destroyed during the war in the early 1990s.

The reconstruction project, which is funded by the EU's CARDS programme, is based on a three-pronged approach. Initially, a full investigation is carried out to establish if the conditions are right for people to return to a certain area. After it is decided which dwelling to construct, the responsible ministry, which jointly supervises the operation, appoints a designer. The third component includes support to capacity building, with European Investment Bank loans of €50 million, and help with practicalities such as writing proposals, filing applications for homes, and administrative and legal procedures.

Going home

One of the most difficult challenges faced by the project is the identification and selection of the beneficiaries with over 23,000 requests waiting to be processed at the end of 2003. However, as one example from Novi Sad shows, asking the right questions can produce some very positive answers. During a visit from the EC Delegation in Zagreb to a collective centre in the town, a woman visitor was asked if she would return if her house was reconstructed. Within one week, interviews had been conducted, in one month the house had been designed, and the tender issued. The family were set to return to the village by the end of 2003, to start a new life with others already rehoused under the CARDS scheme.

So far the project has provided a budget for the reconstruction of 1,000 destroyed private properties in Croatia by mid 2004, thereby providing viable accommodation for approximately 3,500 refugees and displaced persons.



A firm foundation

If the housing project is to succeed, reconstruction of infrastructure must also be prioritised and carried out simultaneously. Consequently, the work is also covering the reactivation of water and power supplies to the houses, along with health care, education and community needs. In addition to various projects already under way, others are now being identified in a concerted effort to provide the returnees with medical centres, schools, nurseries, libraries, and sports and entertainment facilities.

In turn, rebuilding infrastructure has a knock-on effect on economic development and employment, both of which are critical to support the sustainability of the reconstruction and revitalisation of commercial activities. Grants of up to €3,000 have been given to stimulate the local economy and create jobs which has so far resulted in 293 new jobs and 564 incomes generated by September 2003.



Breaking down walls

However, the rebuilding of homes and community life is not without its obstacles. So, the project must also play a major role in encouraging co-operation between local and national government to ensure that the rebuilding of the social infrastructure is sufficient to cope with the needs of incoming residents. Similarly, significant efforts are required to revitalise local areas and to create and build on links between communities. In this way it is hoped that the people and the politicians will continue to work together in the future to rebuild both public and social infrastructure, and re-establish economic development to the benefit of the country as a whole.