



CARDS

Country

Croatia

Implementation period

2003-2004

Funding

€2.2 million

Results

Helping Croatia adapt its asylum laws and institutions in line with EU requirements, includes training, building, reorganising

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Partners

German Federal Office

for Refugees

Slovenian Ministry of Interior

Twinning experience helps Croatian asylum institutions

Asylum reform

The subject of asylum and asylum-seekers is a sensitive issue in the western Balkans, particularly in light of the EU's enlargement in 2004 and Croatia's application for EU membership.

The CARDS-financed twinning and institution-building project is a sign that the Union and its Member States – in this case German and Slovenian partners – place great importance on the provision of high-standard asylum facilities and procedures in Croatia.

The main aims of the project are to help the Croatian government in adapting its asylum law, procedures and administrative capacity in accordance with the *acquis communautaire*. The new law and procedures entered into force on 1 July 2004, while the Asylum Reception Centre and the Country of Origin Documentation Centre will be operational from 2005.

The parts make a whole

Despite some setbacks with the investment component of the project – related to the refurbishment of the Reception Centre – it has made progress on the legal harmonisation side since its launch in March 2003. The twinning team has carried out a full review of the legislation on asylum, and helped the Ministry of Interior draft new regulations in line with EU requirements.

Progress is being made in the institution-building exercise, but still more needs to be done before the project ends in December 2004. Training of decision-makers and border police is an important part of the twinning exercise, teaching them how to deal with asylum-seekers – especially vulnerable groups – how to proceed with the applications, and carry out interviews and process cases effectively and legally.



Why Croatia?

Since enlargement took place, Croatia has become one of the EU's strategically important border countries. Most asylum-seekers view it as a transit country – not a final destination.

The Croatian government's efforts to align its laws closer to those in the Union will help in clarifying the asylum-seekers situation. It will also improve the detection of illegal immigrants through better border controls and quicker processing of asylum-seekers.

Slovenia lent its expertise to the project – skills acquired as a former buffer country between the western Balkans and the EU. Before joining the Union, Slovenia was receiving up to 2,000 requests for asylum per year.

Future challenges

The co-operation between the Croatian government, NGOs and international organisations working with refugees – mostly the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Red Cross – is positive but not always consistent.

A temporary asylum reception centre exists in Šašna Greda, which is financed by UNHCR and run by the Red Cross. From 1 July 2004, the Ministry of the Interior will cover the costs and manage this temporary centre. It is expected that works to establish the permanent reception centre in Stubica-Slatina should be finished by the end of 2005.

The European Union is supporting the refurbishment of the permanent reception centre with a contribution of €0.8 million, while the Ministry of the Interior is contributing about €0.7 million.

A follow-up CARDS project is planned for 2005 that will continue the work of bringing Croatia into line with the EU *acquis*.