

America’s Development Foundation
Return and Reintegration of Refugees from Serbia to Croatia

Final Program Report for Cooperative Agreement
PRM 21004

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ANNEX

Financial Final Report for Cooperative Agreement PRM 21004

1. INTRODUCTION

Under the authority of the Migration and Refugees Assistance Act of 1962, as amended, the United States Department of State through the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), signed a Cooperative Agreement (PRM 21004) with America's Development Foundation (ADF) effective October 1, 2001 through April 30, 2002. Under this Cooperative Agreement (CA), ADF continued its lead role as primary implementing partner for the Return and Reintegration of Refugees from Serbia to Croatia Project (RRP), a six-month follow-on to the original 18-month Cooperative Agreement (PRM 01068) ending on September 30, 2001.

The purpose of the RRP, within the conceptual framework of CA 21004, was to encourage and facilitate the sustainable return of Croatian Serb refugees from Serbia to Croatia. More specifically, its objectives were:

- i) To increase access to information and legal assistance for Croatian Serb refugees currently in Serbia; and
- ii) To further develop and support an existing, functional network of local NGOs in Serbia providing legal assistance services for the return and reintegration of refugees to Croatia.

This final report summarizes achievements and results accomplished during Cooperative Agreement (PRM 21004).

2. SUMMARY OF ACHIEVEMENTS

ADF designed the Return and Reintegration of Refugees from Serbia to Croatia Project (referred to as the Return of Refugees Project, or RRP) to effectively respond to the needs of refugee populations that wish to return to their homes of origin. Activities under Cooperative Agreement PRM 21004 (the final 6-month period of the project) built upon ADF's substantial achievements during earlier phases of the program carried out in Serbia and incorporated lessons learned from ADF's many years of field experience in the area of refugee return and reintegration in Croatia.

ADF's approach to the RRP was primarily to:

- support a network of local NGOs affiliated with ADF that offer legal services to refugees in Serbia;
- assist the network to improve return and reintegration services and information;
- link these NGOs with their Croatian counterparts;
- assist in the resolution of issues across borders; and
- build the institutional capacity and sustainability of the NGO network.

Under this Cooperative Agreement (CA), the RRP successfully promoted and facilitated the dissemination of a wide range of information and other legal services that made it possible for refugees to address or resolve issues related to their return and reintegration in Croatia. This was accomplished in large part, through increased support of the NGO legal service network, whereby local partner agencies (the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and the Humanitarian Law Center) worked collaboratively to assist over **21,000** refugees in Serbia during the six month period of the CA.

By providing a combination of training, technical assistance, and sub-grant support, ADF has enabled Serbian NGOs to undertake activities that facilitate the return of refugees to their homes of origin in Croatia and increase the probability that they will remain. Throughout the Cooperative Agreement, ADF strengthened the capacity of its partner Serbian NGOs to play an increasingly constructive role in refugee return and effective policy making.

The following is a detailed breakdown of the results and respective performance indicators achieved by the Project.

Result 1: *Croatian Serbs will receive sufficient information to make informed decisions about returning to Croatia through increased access to legal assistance related to their return.*

Indicator	Target	Actual
Number of persons who received reliable information related to return and their communities in Croatia	approx. 10,000 persons	21,026 persons
Number of persons who received legal or administrative assistance from RRP	approx. 12,500 persons	9,767 persons
Number of persons assisted who returned to their homes in Croatia with the support of RRP and related programs	approx. 3,000 persons registered by Croatian authorities Oct 01- Mar 02	4,884 persons registered by Croatian authorities Oct 01-Mar 02

Legal assistance was provided in the following key areas:

- Citizenship and passport documentation: 2,334 persons
- Travel and visa documentation: 1,479 persons
- Ownership rights to private houses: 665 persons
- Tenancy rights in apartments: 454 persons
- Reconstruction requests: 1,001 persons
- Pension requests: 424 persons
- Social and health insurance issues: 164 persons
- Employment issues: 248 persons
- Military status: 356 persons
- Law suits or legal proceedings: 452 persons
- Other: 2,190 persons

Result 2: *A network of sustainable local Serbian NGO legal assistance offices will be effectively supported.*

Indicator	Target	Actual
NGO partners exhibit increased skills in program planning, project development and fundraising.	2 NGOs	2 NGOs exhibited these skills, developing proposals that were submitted, approved and financed by international donors.
Financial management practices of NGOs are improved and more consistent with internationally recognized standards	2 NGOs are 100% in compliance	2 NGOs, including 6 field offices, submitted monthly narrative and financial reports that were evaluated as being consistent with international recognized standards.
Programs are regularly monitored and improved in terms of implementation, impact and client satisfaction	2 subgrants	Project services were monitored by NGOs and ADF staff on a monthly basis. Recommended improvements in implementation that resulted in increased project impact were achieved.
Increase in collaboration and cooperation between NGOs in Croatia and Serbia	Increase	An effective flow of information was established between Croatian and Serbian NGOs as evidenced through bi-monthly coordination meetings that were rotated between locations in Serbia and Croatia. Official documentation pertaining to refugee return was forwarded to Osijek and Knin, Croatia on a weekly basis.

3. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 SUMMARY OF SUBGRANT ACTIVITIES: PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

Subgrants were awarded to two local NGOs working on cross-border refugee issues and based in Serbia: the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and the Humanitarian Law Center. These subgrants and the work that resulted from them represent ADF's core strategy to achieving and sustaining project results by developing the capacity of these NGOs to offer more effective services to refugees. Each NGO was required to maintain statistics of client matters per subject area and to report on the status of individual cases.

ADF additionally provided technical assistance and training to sub-grantees whereby institutional capacities to develop long-term prospects for sustainable program management were strengthened and reinforced. ADF invested significant time and resources to improve local NGO skills in financial management, computerization, electronic communication, public relations, government policy, report writing, and coalition building. These core competencies in turn increased the effectiveness of RRP implementation and success.

Each subgrant had the similar purpose of providing adequate information and legal assistance and counsel to Croatian Serb refugees wishing to return to their original homes. In light of current developments related to refugee policy issues in both Croatia and Yugoslavia, it was

important to inform refugees about the regulations and procedures in effect related to the return of refugees as well as changes in relevant legislation in both countries. Moreover, assistance was also needed to pursue claims related to specific issues such as the return of property, citizenship documents, health care and social benefits. Many of these rights were relevant even if the refugee ultimately decided not to return to his or her original home in Croatia because of economic or security reasons. The two subgrantees worked in locations with high concentration of refugees in Serbia, primarily in Vojvodina. Their work is summarized below.

3.1.1 Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, Hoću Kući Project

Subgrant Period:	October 1, 2001 – March 31, 2002
Funding Support:	\$22,920
Locations of Assistance:	Belgrade, Novi Sad, Subotica, and Zrenjanin (a regional office in Knin, Croatia was also directly supervised by Belgrade)
Number of Clients Assisted:	17,832 refugees and their families

The Helsinki Committee performed excellent work under the subgrant they received. On numerous occasions during the Cooperative Agreement, ADF was informed by high-ranking representatives of both public and private institutions, that the serious work and excellent reputation of the Helsinki Committee in Serbia should be considered as second to none.

With the assistance of the ADF subgrant, the Helsinki Committee (HC) continued to provide essential legal services to refugees through its operation of 3 field offices in Vojvodina and a busy headquarters office in Belgrade. A total of 9 legal and administrative professionals comprised the Hoću Kući Project team in Serbia, fully funded under the Cooperative Agreement. In addition, the Knin regional field office assumed a critical role in implementing specific aspects of the project once refugees returned to Croatia. 3 professionals were employed by Helsinki Committee at this location, although they were not directly funded by the ADF subgrant.

The primary objective of the ADF subgrant with the HC in Serbia, was to ensure that Croatian Serbs in Serbia have access to legal assistance and are thereby able to make more informed decisions about returning to their homes of origin in Croatia. Legal assistance and information were offered to clients in all locations at no charge. Field assistants frequently visited and provided information to Croatian refugees in private accommodations and collective centers, although legal assistance was primarily offered at one of the Hocu Kuci field offices.

HC placed special emphasis on the need to compile detailed monthly narrative and financial reports from each of the field offices. As can be determined from information outlined in table 1, HC offered legal assistance services to 7,815 refugees and information services to 10,000 during the 6-month timeframe. A summary of services related to return to Croatia provided by HC includes:

Table 1: Services provided by Hoću Kući Project

Number of interviews conducted by 4 field offices:	7,815
Number of phone requests received at 4 field offices:	10,017
Citizenship documents processed:	2,060
Travel documents issued:	1,433
Property claims submitted to Croatian Authorities:	710
Reconstruction applications submitted to Croatian Authorities:	734
Pension requests submitted to Croatian Authorities:	226
Insurance requests submitted to Croatian Authorities:	96
Employment requests:	117
Military status requests:	204
Legal proceedings undertaken:	48
Other issues processed:	2,187

The following are representative cases reported by Helsinki Committee that highlight specific services provided to refugee families seeking assistance.

The Case of N-T-: Citizenship and Travel Documents

N-T- is a 54 year old male, born in Karlovac Croatia. He lived his whole adult life in Petrinja, with wife and two sons. N-T- worked for 27 years as a driver and his wife worked for 20 years at the food factory "Gavrilovic". When the war started, N-T- and his family stayed on in the house that they built together. They kept in touch with few good friends, but they were also afraid to be friends with Serbs.

In the beginning of 1995, N-T- 's house was seriously damaged by a hand grenade and the family was forced to escape to Serbia. They now live in a small village near Zrenjanin. N-T- works for a private person, has no medical or any other insurance. His wife doesn't work, but takes care of the house and a small part of cultivable soil which local farmers gave them to survive. The older son graduated in theology and now is the monk at the monastery Decane, Kosovo. The other son is a student in Belgrade.

The HC Zrenjanin office assumed power of attorney for N-T- and his wife. With HC assistance, friends from Croatia obtained citizenship documentation for both of them. In December, HC assisted N-T- to complete specific forms for travel documents that were forwarded to the Croatian Consulate in Subotica. HC received the travel document one week later. N-T- and his wife are ready to visit Croatia for the first time since they left several years ago. For now, they just want to see their house and assess the atmosphere. They would like to return, but they have no where to live, and have no jobs. Their house was occupied by Bosnian Croats. It is now empty despite being damaged. N-T- and his wife will depart for Croatia at the beginning of January.

The Case of M-M-: Property Claims

M-M- is from Sonković, the municipality of Skradin. He is a Croatian citizen, possesses all necessary Croatian documents, and in Yugoslavia has an identification of an expelled person. M-M- is a sub-tenant in Novi Sad. In December of last year he contacted the HC office to request legal advice regarding the return of his property.

Speaking with M-M- it was concluded that he owns a house that is damaged, but negligibly, and that a person from Banja Luka has moved into it. He was advised to submit a request for the repair of the house, as well as to submit a request for the return of property, to certify his signatures on these requests at the authorized court and to bring them back to the HC office. Through the HC Novi Sad office, M-M-'s request for the return and repair of his property was presented to the Consulate General of the Republic of Croatia in Subotica, and proof of this has been forwarded to M-M-. Since, M-M- possessed a citizenship certificate, he was advised to go to Croatia without delay and obtain an identity card and passport. For this purpose, he acquired a travel certificate through the HC office.

M-M- contact the HC office again in April and requested legal advice concerning his permanent return to his place of residence. He was advised to address the UNHCR in Novi Sad, where he must sign a Form on voluntary return, on the basis of which he will be relieved of customs duties on the import of his belonging into Croatia. M-M- addressed this office a third time, to inform us about the date of his return to his place of residence in the Republic of Croatia, which will be carried out with the assistance of the UNHCR.

Reconstruction

Z-P- is from Veliki Budići, the municipality of Pakrac, and considers herself a citizen of the Republic of Croatia. Her documentation consists of an old, invalid identity card of the SFRY – the Republic of Croatia, and in FRY she has the status an expelled person with residence in Subotica.

Z-P- contact the HC Subotica office to present her problem in realizing her rights of property ownership and repair of this property. Z-P- is registered as the owner of a family house, which was totally destroyed in wartime activities and whose categorization is yet to be carried out by the responsible Commission. Since she is familiar with the deadline for submitting a request for repair and reconstruction, Z-P- submitted this documentation through the HC office, which forwarded it through the Croatian consulate in Subotica to the responsible Ministry of Reconstruction. Z-P- received from the Croatian Consulate a certificate confirming that the request was filed within the established deadline, and awaits a decision concerning her property to be announced.

The case of S-P-: Pensions

S-P- is from Gospić, possesses documents of the Republic of Croatia, and in FR Yugoslavia she has the ID of an expelled person with residence in Subotica. She is the beneficiary of a disability pension in the Republic of Croatia.

S-P-'s right to a disability pension was recognized by a decision of the district service in Gospić on July 9, 1972. She regularly received her pension until July 31, 1991, when payments were terminated due to the war. S-P- fled to the territory of FR Yugoslavia. After conditions were created for her to obtain personal documents of the Republic of Croatia, S-P- submitted a request to the Croatian Pension Insurance Bureau (on March 2, 1998) for the renewal of pension payments. She has been regularly receiving her pension since November 1, 1999.

In August 2001, S-P- submitted a request for the payment of the pensions that were not paid out to her due between July 31, 1991 and November 1, 1999, due to the suspension of payment operations caused by wartime circumstances. She recently received a decision rejecting her request with the explanation that the Bureau's research showed that the S-P- had been receiving pensions from a "para-fund" in the period between August 1, 1991 and March 31, 1998. According to article 1 of the Law on Convalidation, and articles 4 and 5 of the decree on the implementation of the Law on Convalidation, the payments of pensions by the "para-fund" are to be convalidated. While it is true that the S-P- received her pensions from the fund of RS Krajina in the period between August 1991 and August 1995, she did not receive a pension during the period between August 1995 and March 1998.

HC Subotica has advised S-P- to appeal this decision within the set deadline, and if the body of the second instance rules in the same manner as the first-instance body, to file a lawsuit before the Administrative Court of the Republic of Croatia.

The case of P-K-: Other documentation ; Employment

P-K-, a male refugee from Croatia, came to HC Belgrade office on 12 December 2001. P-K- finished secondary school in Petrinja Croatia in 1989. He has an opportunity to get job in Belgrade, but must first present his secondary school degree from Petrinja. To this end, P-K- gave power of attorney to his sister, who lives in Petrinja, to obtain his degree from school authorities. However, his sister was informed by the authorities that P-K- could not obtain the document since they believed he does not have Croatian citizenship.

On 13 December 2001 HC phoned principal of secondary school in Petrinja to ask about the problem with P-K-'s degree. The Principal informed us that he received instruction from the Croatian Ministry of Education that persons must have Croatian citizenship to obtain school degrees. Our conclusion, based on the fact that P-K- had completed all requirements at the school in 1989, was that this was an obvious form of human rights violation. On the same day HC wrote a letter to the Croatian Ambassador in FRY, Mr. B., to protest this decision, raising the issue that the decision represents a human rights violation. We addressed the same letter to the Croatian Ministry of Education, and international organizations as well. After two days we got answer from Mr. B. that P-K-'s sister can go immediately to Petrinja's secondary school to get the requested degree.

The Case of B-R-: Other Legal Assistance

B-R-, who comes from Donji Lapac in Croatia, considers herself a citizen of the Republic of Croatia, does not possess Croatian documents and has a refugee ID from the FRY with residence in Subotica. B-R- approached the Helsinki Committee Subotica and presented two problems. Since 1985, she has been the owner of a foreign currency savings account at Privredna Bank

Zagreb d.d. and possesses a passbook to prove it. There is a time deposit, in line with the Law on the conversion of the citizens' foreign currency deposits into the Republic of Croatia's public debt. The mentioned bank opened a branch office Gospić, and B-R- has a relative in this town whom she wishes to give power-of-attorney to in order to be able to withdraw the funds from the account and close it.

HC wrote out the power-of-attorney on the basis of which her relative can perform certain transactions, i.e. to provide to the Republic of Croatia the entire time deposit in exchange for bonds of the Republic of Croatia as a bank claim, then to sell the bonds and cede them to Bank Zagreb d.d. at the Kuna value of the bonds. The bonds can be used to purchase this amount in foreign currency from the same bank and deposit it into the savings account of B-R-. Also, this power-of-attorney gives authorization for the further unlimited disposition of the funds in the mentioned savings account, in line with the law, as well as authorization to close the savings account.

3.1.2 Humanitarian Law Center

Subgrant Period:	October 1, 2001 –March 31, 2002
Funding Support:	\$18,871
Locations of Assistance:	Belgrade, Novi Sad, major refugee camps in North and Central Serbia
Number of Clients Assisted:	1,952 refugees and their families

The mandate for Humanitarian Law Center (HLC) under the subgrant it received from ADF was similar to that of the Helsinki Committee: to provide adequate legal assistance and counsel to Croatian Serb refugees wishing to return to their original homes. However HLC's approach differed somewhat from HC by engaging researchers to visit refugees in collective centers within Vojvodina and Belgrade regions. Services were consequently tailored to advise those refugees who are either undecided about return, or may choose to integrate into the host society -- since this profile is greatly characteristic of families residing in collective centers.

The HLC offices in Belgrade and Novi Sad were staffed by 3 legal professionals and 1 support staff member. The legal professionals visited refugees in the field and provided them with legal counseling as well as information about the activities of other NGOs engaged in similar activities. HLC was also responsive in providing monthly narrative and financial reports from each of the field offices. The overall performance of HLC under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement was effective, highly professional, and consistent with internationally recognized standards.

In all, HLC provided legal assistance services to 3,400 refugees and information services to 2,500 more – mainly those in refugee camps during the 6-month time period. A summary of services related to return to Croatia provided by HLC includes:

Table 2: Services provided by Humanitarian Law Center

Number of interviews conducted by 2 field offices:	2,382
Number of phone requests received at 2 field offices:	812
Citizenship documents processed:	274
Travel documents issued:	46
Property claims submitted to Croatian Authorities:	409
Reconstruction applications submitted to Croatian Authorities:	267
Pension requests submitted to Croatian Authorities:	198
Insurance requests submitted to Croatian Authorities:	68
Employment requests:	131
Military status requests:	152
Legal proceedings undertaken:	404
Other issues processed:	3

The following examples illustrate the type of cases reported by Humanitarian Law Center and the services provided to refugee families seeking assistance.

The Case of J-N-: Citizenship and Return

J-N- was born in Croatia in 1936. She, her husband (b. 1927), their daughter (b. 1964), and her grandchildren fled Doljani village, Otocac municipality, in 1995 and were settled in Kosovo. Their house in the village was burned down. The family had no personal identification documents when they contacted the Humanitarian Law Center. HLC assisted J-N- and her family to fill out forms for Croatian citizenship. In June they applied to return but have had no word from the authorities yet. They plan to return as soon as possible and are looking for an organization to help them to do so.

The case of V-B: Citizenship and Travel Documents

V-B- (b.1949), his wife V-M- (b.1951) and daughter V-R- (b.1981) come from Gospic, Croatia. Their house, owned by V-B-'s late father, was damaged. When they contacted HLC they had no Croatian documents, nor had they been back to Croatia. HLC assisted the family to fill out the appropriate documents. V-B- was self-employed and paid no contributions whatsoever so he cannot apply for pension. The family is interested in the UNHCR "Go-and-see" program, but V-B- would also like to go to Zagreb to visit his twin brother who lives there. They seemed rather undecided whether to return to Croatia or stay in Serbia.

The Case of R-S: Property Claims

R-S- (b.1936), his wife R-J- (b.1937) and son R-M- (b.1968) come from Kovacic village, Knin municipality. Their house has long been occupied by a Croatian refugee from Prijedor (BiH).

HLC assisted R-S- to apply for repossession of the house but have received no reply so far. R-S- and his wife have visited Croatia several times, they have all the documents and receive pensions. They seem undecided about their returning to Croatia. They say they are old, in poor health, their son doesn't want to go back. They will wait a bit more before making a final decision to return if their property is returned.

The Case of D-D-: Reconstruction

D-D- (b.1944) is from the village of Ostrovica in the Osijek municipality of Croatia. His house was looted and burned. His sister and her husband (of Croatian ethnicity) looked after the house but when faced with constant threats they were forced to abandon it. HLC assisted D-D- to apply for reconstruction assistance. D-D- hasn't been to Croatia since the war and has no Croatian documents. He hopes he will be able to obtain pension as he has 30 years of service although he hasn't reach the required age limit. In his village there are only 3-4 elderly returnees who are exposed to harassment. D-D- was captured during the war, together with a few fellow-fighters, convicted of armed rebellion and sentenced to a long prison term. After spending 152 days in Gospic prison, he was exchanged through ICRC and transferred to Serbia in January 1996. In spite of that, he is thinking of going back to Croatia, but has decided to wait until more people return.

3.5 TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

ADF continued its ongoing support toward the development and improvement of capacities of its implementing partners through operational support and extensive training and technical assistance. ADF carefully monitored project results to ensure internationally recognized standards were clearly understood and met, and established a core of local NGOs providing services and assistance related to cross-border refugee return and reintegration. Training and technical assistance were provided on-site and tailored to the needs of each NGO.

Training and technical assistance was also provided to increase the capacity of the NGOs in program planning, project development, and fundraising. The NGOs exhibited these skills by developing project proposals that were submitted, approved and financed by various international donors that included the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Rescue Committee, Catholic Relief Service, Danish Relief Council, Mott Foundation, the Open Society Institute and NOVID Holland.

Furthermore, the NGOs learned how to monitor the provision of services in terms of implementation, impact, and client satisfaction through ADF's overall management support.

In the area of improving NGO financial management systems, ADF's Finance Manager continued to provided regular technical assistance to accounting staff for each of the two implementing partners. The training provided to accounting personnel on basic computer processing of financial records resulted in the capacity to adapt to a specialized multi-currency accounting program. In addition, ADF assisted its partners to prepare accurate accounting information on computerized spreadsheets that helped to establish cross-border cash flow arrangements between field offices Croatia and main office in Belgrade. The NGOs including 6

field offices, submitted monthly narrative and financial reports that were evaluated as being consistent with internationally recognized standards.

3.2 PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

In the initial weeks of the new Cooperative Agreement, the ADF Project Director briefed the newly arrived PRM Refugee Coordinator in Belgrade concerning progress toward meeting project objectives, implementation, reporting, monitoring activities and overall financial considerations. ADF extended an invitation to PRM to further discuss any aspect of project implementation that might be considered necessary, including field visits, program evaluations, or financial auditing. PRM expressed general satisfaction with the management of RRP at this time, and later conducted a general field evaluation of activities carried out by each of the national partner agencies. Throughout the period of the Cooperative Agreement, ADF maintained close contact with PRM representatives to identify and ensure adequate program monitoring and compliance. ADF also had the opportunity to meet PRM delegation from Washington, which included among other activities, a briefing for the Director for Newly Independent States and the Americas.

Key local authorities, including the Commissioner for Refugees and the Advisor for Refugees and Humanitarian Issues, were regularly briefed on RRP activities and potential areas for improved capacity building. Several important policies concerning support for the *National Strategy for Resolving the Problems of Refugees, Expellees, and Displaced Persons* were discussed, resulting in the development of an action plan for increased collaboration with ADF. RRP activities were moreover, closely coordinated with international agencies serving refugees in Yugoslavia and returnees in Croatia, including UNHCR, ARC, IOCC, ICMC, IRC, CRS and ASB, to name but a few.

ADF closely supervised and monitored the activities of its national partners through a series of regular meetings and field visits in Serbia and Croatia. Before subgrants were signed, ADF held several discussions with executive officers to carefully explain specific responsibilities, program management and reporting requirements. Thereafter, ADF facilitated a 1-day seminar that brought together headquarters and field staff from each of the offices involved in project implementation. The seminar not only reviewed previous experiences and achievements of the project, but also focused on a number of measures project staff could exercise to improve the quality of information provided to refugees, and to increase the ability of refugees to return to Croatia. These recommendations were thoroughly incorporated at each of the respective program offices.

ADF staff also regularly conducted field visits with their counterparts at Helsinki Committee and Humanitarian Law Center, both in Serbia and Croatia. ADF directly interviewed numerous families in collective centers, branch offices, or in their place of residence upon returning to their community in Croatia. In several instances, ADF was able to provide additional services or program referrals after making contact with these families. More specifically, ADF devoted a tremendous amount of time and effort to link refugee families in Serbia to various programs and support mechanisms in the Knin and Osijek regions. The Project Director consulted several agencies in both locations, including UNHCR Repatriation Officers, not only as a matter of

coordination, but also to determine specific solutions for individual families. For example, ADF directly assisted two elderly refugee women living in Belgrade, to return to Knin by providing temporary accommodation for a period of 6 months. This in turn allowed for the reconstruction of the destroyed family house, for which they shared partial ownership. Similarly, ADF assisted a family living in a village near Knin to obtain official technical documents so their house could be included in a reconstruction program financed by the European Union.

As noted, ADF consistently reviewed the management and reporting practices of its national partners, resulting in improved policies and procedures. Non-confidential information collected by an agency concerning specific cases was freely shared with the other implementing partner, and vice versa. An increased level of internal coordination was therefore achieved by project officers. Families served by HLC, for example, were regularly provided updated information by Hocu Kuci staff with respect to conditions in communities in Croatia. ADF standardized monthly narrative, statistical and financial reporting to a much greater degree than during previous phases. Throughout the Cooperative Agreement, ADF continued to provide a significant level of technical support to both partner agencies in accounting, computerization skills, development and use of databases, and email systems.

Another significant contribution ADF made to the overall impact of RRP was to further define and strengthen the work of the Center for Information and Refugee Return (CIRR). The mandate of CIRR was initiated by ADF in February 2001 in response to many requests from organizations to be better informed about regional developments related to legislation and legal policies governing return related issues in Croatia as well as Yugoslavia. The CIRR bridged this gap by coordinating and distributing information on events, policy papers, political developments, minutes of significant meetings, and other relevant news important to the return of refugees.

In April 2001, the first cross-border meeting for refugee issues was sponsored by CIRR in Osijek, Croatia. Representatives from 8 NGO's in Croatia and 12 NGOs from FRY attended. After the initial workshop, monthly meetings that rotated between locations in Croatia and FRY were (and continue to be) facilitated by CIRR. The cross-border meetings generally focused on areas of legal concern, and were normally attended by lawyers or legal counselors. Eventually, representatives from Bosnia and Herzegovina also participated in the monthly workshops.

During the Cooperative Agreement, ADF expanded the mandate of CIRR to serve, among its other tasks, as power of attorney for the processing of legal documentation in Croatia. As a result, CIRR received a significant number of legal documents from the partner agencies in FRY on a weekly basis, that were in turn, individually presented and closely followed by the respective Croatian Government office. This procedure allowed partner agencies to resolve the legal problems of refugees more effectively and in a much more timely manner.

It is noteworthy to mention that CIRR represented RRP at a national conference on the rights of refugees and displaced persons in Croatian legislature and practice, sponsored by the South East European Refugee Assistance Network, held in Zagreb, February 2002. The prospects for future coordination of refugee issues to be facilitated by CIRR throughout the region remains great.

4. CONCLUSION

The assistance that the international community brings to developing NGO capacities plays an important role in helping to promote sustainable return and integration in Croatia and throughout the Balkans. As a result of project initiatives like RRP, an increasing number of ethnic Serbs from Croatia have been able to return home. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported 11,867 returns from abroad occurred in Croatia during year 2001, with another 2,428 successful returns taking place during the first 3 months of the this year.

Services provided by ADF and its local partner agencies increased the possibility for many of these families to return to Croatia. Furthermore, the project provided critically needed services to refugees while they were in Serbia as well as after their return to Croatia.

Although RRP activities will no longer be implemented under in the same management system, both the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia and the Humanitarian Law Center shall continue to provide essential services, as well as dynamic leadership in the area of refugee return and reintegration this year and in the future. ADF is proud to have the opportunity to work with both agencies and to assist them in meeting the needs of so many families in Serbia and Croatia.