



MINORITY RETURN
TO CROATIA



- STUDY
OF AN OPEN PROCESS

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AUTHORS

Milan Mesić
Dragan Bagić

REVIEWERS

Professor Brad Blitz, Ph.D., the Kingston University in London
and Mr. Marko Valenta, Ph.D., senior researcher in the Centre for Migration and
Refugee Studies, University of Trondheim

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Vinka Komesar Rajković

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Milan Mešić
Dragan Bačić

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I

FOREWORD BY THE PUBLISHER

Minority return in Croatia – Study of an Open Process is the second and extended study on sustainability of return commissioned by UNHCR and conducted by Dr. Milan Mesic and Dr. Dragan Bagic, distinguished scholars in the field of migration and social research and lecturers at the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities.

The first study from 2006-2007, *Sustainability of Minority Return in Croatia*, focused principally on individual quantitative indicators of the living conditions of returnees, with an aim to gain reliable information on the numbers and demographics of the returnee population, and socio-economic factors that influence sustainability of their return. In addition to factual information, the study also provided an insight into returnees' opinions about their safety, tolerance, coexistence and plans for the future. These findings, including social, political and economic considerations, were presented to government officials, civil society and the diplomatic community, and formed part of the discussions underlying the different programmes, projects and legislative changes, targeting the returnee population.

A discussion on commissioning a second study was initiated following the Ministerial Conference on Durable Solutions for Refugees in the Region, which took place in Belgrade in March 2010. The conference convened the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia as well as representatives of the four international organizations – UNHCR, European Union, OSCE and Council of Europe and marked the beginning of an intensified regional process on durable solution for displaced population from the conflicts 1991-1995, either through return and reintegration in the place of origin, or integration in the place of displacement. UNHCR High Commissioner, Mr.

Antonio Guterres appointed his Personal Envoy to support the renewed efforts by the governments in the region, in co-operation with the international community. The process culminated in the signing of a Joint Ministerial Declaration and the formulation of a Regional Housing Programme, which will be presented to the international donor community in April 2012. The Programme will be implemented in the four partner countries during the period 2012-2016 and will provide housing to 73,500 of the most vulnerable among the displaced, of which 8,500 is expected in Croatia.

The process also contributed to the resolution of other outstanding issues hampering relations between states in the region and has enabled the closure of the refugee chapter in the near future. It should be noted that the implementation of the Croatian Government Housing Care Programme for former tenancy rights holders is of relevance for Chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights) in the Croatia European Union negotiation and accession process.

Through the process of data exchange, it was established that there are still some 57,000 refugees from Croatia in neighboring countries. Although it is believed that only a small proportion of is still interested in return, it is assumed that more returns take place in the next two-three years due to the implementation of the Regional Housing Programme, resolution of outstanding issues, and Croatia's accession to EU.

Within the changed political and economic environment, and on the eve of Croatia completing the EU accession process, UNHCR decided to undertake a new, more extensive study of returnee population with a view to the following:

- evaluate and update findings of the first study conducted in 2006;
- investigate the impact of implementation of the Government of Croatia Housing Care Programme for former tenancy-right holders on the dynamics and sustainability of return;
- establish typology of return and sustainability;

In addition to demographic information the Study repeatedly showed that social inclusion and access to employment remained challenges for Croatian Serb returnees. The financial crisis that has gripped the global economy in the past few years has also affected all segments of the Croatian society threatening livelihoods, well-being and opportunities of many, but particularly of those already at risk of social exclusion by multiple factors. Returnees for the most part, reside

in the underdeveloped, war-affected areas, which remain isolated and lag behind more developed and prosperous parts of the country. All activities supporting sustainable return and coexistence aiming to bring development to the areas of return for the benefit of the whole population, cannot be isolated from the historical, political, economic and social context, both local and regional. The challenge is to ensure that actions and responses are adequate and sensitive to the specific needs of these areas and population living there, including returnees. This includes adequate social services, capacity-building, strengthened support for sustainable community development, financial and technical assistance, infrastructure development, access to adequate financing, access to markets, and clear and more effective implementation measures.

The study *Minority return in Croatia – Study of an Open Process* is an excellent reference material suited to professionals with an interest in the refugee return in Croatia; from members of international community, international organizations, UNHCR, to policymakers both on local or national level in Croatia. It is also a significant academic contribution to migration and refugee studies. The research includes a rich collection of facts and information about the returnee population in addition to providing a clear and concise understanding of the complexities of the return process. The study will enhance planning and implementation of return and effective reintegration policies that will contribute to durable peace and stability for all Croatian citizens.

Terence Pike
UNHCR Representative to Croatia

FOREWORD BY THE RESEARCHERS

The book that you have in front of you is actually a report by the researchers – Milan Mesić and Dragan Bagić – on the findings and conclusions of the empirical research conducted for the UNHCR office in Zagreb, under the working title *Study on sustainability of minority return in Croatia – Phase II*. This is, namely, a continuation of the research of the same type what was conducted in autumn 2006 (Phase I), which was also published as a book in Croatian and English.¹ With the consent of the organisation that commissioned the research, we published partial results with the accompanying discussion in several Croatian and international publications in Croatian and English.² The book and the articles based on our first project have attracted a lot of attention of the domestic and international scholars, the public, and the institutions that are active in the field of refugee studies and refugees issues in general.³

In the following chapters, we described in great detail the objectives, methodology, results and conclusions of this new research.⁴ Here, we only wish to emphasize that on the one hand, this new research follows the same basic tasks at the previous one, which makes it possible to compare the major findings and trends, so that

1 Mesić, Milan i Bagić, Dragan (2007) *Održivost manjinskog povratka u Hrvatsku*. Zagreb: UNHCR.

Mesić, Milan and Bagić, Dragan (2007) *Sustainability of Minority Return in Croatia*. Zagreb: UNHCR.2 Mesić, Milan;

2 Bagić, Dragan (2010) "Serb Returnees in Croatia – the Question of Return Sustainability", *International migration*, (48)2:133-160.

Mesić, Milan; Bagić, Dragan (2009) „Selectivity versus Sustainability of Refugee Return”, in: Neergaard, Anders (ed.) *European Perspectives on Exclusion and Subordination: The Political Economy of Migration*. Maastricht: Shaker Publishing, 75-89.

Mesić, Milan; Bagić, Dragan (2008) „Društveno-ekonomski uvjeti održivosti povratka – primjer srpskih povratnika u Hrvatsku“, *Revija za socijalnu politiku*, (15):23-38.

Mesić, Milan; Bagić, Dragan (2008) „Trajnost povratka kao fizički i sintetički indikator održivosti, primjer srpskih povratnika u Hrvatsku“, *Dve domovini – Two homelands*, (27):109-124.

these two stages of the project partly get a character of a longitudinal study. In summary, we have first of all attempted to establish the share of Serb⁵ returnees, who stayed permanently in Croatia, after officially registering as returnees. Secondly, to analyse the social and demographic structure of returnees, and thirdly to elaborate the complex factors that contribute to the sustainability of minority return. To this end, we conducted another national representative survey of Serb returnees.

On the other hand, the new project has been expanded and deepened from several aspects in comparison to its first stage, and this will be discussed in greater detail in the book. First of all, along with the representative sample of returnees who mostly return in connection to their applications for the restitution of their private homes and land (which is the same kind of sample we had last time), the new survey included a (sub)sample of returnees who were compensated for the ‘social flats’: the former ‘occupancy and tenancy right holders’. And this is what we refer to when we speak of expanding our research, whereas the deepening of the research relates to – on the one hand – introducing qualitative methods of data collection or rather to collecting qualitative insights on minority return, and on the other hand to the theoretic discussion and re-conceptualization of the very

3 Let us add here a personal note regarding our refugee research. Namely, professor Mesić happened to be the first Croatian scholar who, with the assistance of his students from his Sociology of Migration class, conducted a scientific research of Croatian displaced persons and refugees, as early as the end of 1991. At that time the first contingents of Croatian displaced persons appeared in Zagreb, coming from the destroyed city of Vukovar, occupied by what was still called the ‘Yugoslav Army’ and the paramilitary Serb forces and from other parts of Croatia under the Serb rebels’ control. The integral report was published as a book (1992). *Hrvatske izbjeglice i raseljene osobe, osjetljivi i ljuti ljudi* (Croatian Refugees and Displacees – Sensitive and Angry People), owing to financial support of Ane Convery, a Special coordinator of International Organization for Migration in Zagreb.

Two years later (1993/94), prof. Mesić extended his research to Bosnian-Herzegovinian refugees in Croatia, Hungary and Germany, sponsored by the Soros’ Research Support Scheme, the Open Society Institute. The second book was published in 1996, under the title *Ljudi na čekanju, pogledi na povratak – hrvatske i bosansko-hercegovačke izbjeglice i raseljenici* (People who wait, Views on Return – Croatian and Bosnian-Herzegovinian Refugees and Displacees). The main results of the second survey (with the emphasis on the typology of refugees) were presented at the XIII World Congress of Sociology in Bielefeld 1994, and at the Refugee Studies Centre, in Oxford, where prof. Mesić was invited by Barbara Harell-Bond.

More than a decade later he turned his scientific attention back to refugee issues in Croatia, now specifically to the return of the Serb refugees from Croatia, in a way closing a circle: from ethnic Croatian displacees, over Bosnian and Herzegovian refugees, to ethnic Serb returnees in Croatia.

This note primarily serves to emphasize that already these early investigations clearly indicated that refugees and displacees would strongly tend not to return to their homes (and to their homeland) ruled by another ethnic/national group, in particular younger and educated ones.

4 Although we are the co-authors of the project, Dr. Bagić took more responsibility for conceptualizing and writing the chapter „Quantitative research“ and professor Mesić for all other chapters, and for the most of technical terms as well.

5 We propose to differentiate the broader term Serbs (Croatian: *Srbi*) that relates to all ethnic Serbs on the territories of the former Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and elsewhere in the world from the term Serbians (Croatian: *Srbijanci*), which only relates to Serbs (originating from) Serbia. The same applies to adjectives, for instance ‘Serb refugees’ in the sense of all refugees of Serb nationality from Serbian refugees, which can only apply to Serb refugees from Serbia. Long time ago, Serbs in Croatia (that is all Serbs outside of Serbia) were referred to as ‘Serbs from the other side’ (Croatian: *prečanski Srbi*) in order to differentiate them from the Serbians in Serbia.

understanding of refugee return.

Along with the survey that was conducted by professional poll takers, for this kind of ethnographic research, the authors of this report have themselves conducted an unusually large number of interviews (about 80) with the returnees in the field, and the interviews mostly took place in their homes and flats. Moreover, we have interviewed ten Serb refugees from Croatia in Serbia in order to better understand their reasons and motives for not returning to their homeland. Such a qualitative approach to minority refugee return issues has made it possible to systematize return experiences and strategies as ideal types. Finally, relying mostly on our interviews with the returnees, and on the recent critical literature on refugee return issues (primarily to Bosnia and Herzegovina and then also Croatia), we arrived at new insights on return as a complex, dynamic and reversible process, related to other two 'best solutions' for the refugees.

Actually, we consider even the discussion on the theory, which is based on the relevant literature on the key conceptual issues related to return to be an integral part of our research project. A careful reader of our findings and conclusions (familiar with this field of expertise) will, hopefully, not see this as an attempt to 'reinvent the wheel', but as an attempt to critically position ourselves in relation to recent literature in the sphere of refugee return. One should perceive our interpretation of the findings of both the new and the former survey in this spirit, and this is why we expect that this research will attract attention of the stakeholders (institutions) and the professionals working in this field. However, in our attempt to be as fair as possible towards the organisation that commissioned the research, and to our readers, all empirical results have been presented in their 'crude' form, which makes it possible to everybody to take a different approach to the 'data' than we had.

Professor Mesić had the opportunity to present and discuss some initial results and concepts of the new research in a public lecture (on 21 March 2011) entitled „Property Restitution and the Return of Serb Refugees to Croatia“, given at the LSEE forum at the London School of Economics and Political Science. We thank Mr. James Ker-Lindsay, Ph.D. (LSE) for the invitation and for moderating the event, and to Brad Blitz (Kingston University), for his participation as a discussant.

Many social researchers (of sensitive social issues) are not aware of or they do not wish to admit possible influences on the construction of their research concepts and apparatus, or on the description and interpretation of obtained

‘data’, which makes them fall more easily into a ‘clientelistic trap’. We believe that it is (scientifically and socially) legitimate to expect from the researchers to accept their responsibility for their findings. In the attempt to be as fair as possible to the UNHCR, and to our readers, we have tried to view problematic findings from various perspectives and to clearly emphasize our view on their meaning in the context of minority return to Croatia. When it comes to ‘problems’ related to refugees and returnees, there are several legitimate standpoints that often do not necessarily overlap. By this we mean the UNHCR and other international organisations that are engaged in resolving refugee issues, the international community, countries of origin and host countries, and the refugees themselves.

We can also be reproached for our lack of objectivity, because when we deliberately ‘had to’ choose one of the mentioned standpoints in our interpretations of our ‘findings’, we tried to get closer to the viewpoints and interests of returnees and refugees. However, not even this perspective is as uncontroversial as it may seem. First of all, refugees and returnees differ amongst themselves according to their socio-demographic characteristics, social capital, actual situation, views on return and opportunities for the future. In addition, some refugees are not always exclusively victims of persecution (due to their race, ethnicity, religion, political belief), but they were also active participants in ethnic and other conflicts, in which they committed evil and injustice against members of other groups. In summary, despite their uniform designation as refugees or returnees that they have in the formal and legal sense, these people differ in their interests even more than the non-refugees, because they are more vulnerable, and exposed to various manipulations of their own interests. Neither the scholars nor science in general may claim the position of absolute objectivity and impartiality when they interpret the interests of refugees and returnees, even if they do it in good faith. Therefore, we strove to point out various options for sustainable (permanent) solutions, and the right of the refugees and returnees to choose their future themselves to the extent possible, and by this to keep their human agency in defining their own future.

Finally, it has to be said that neither the first nor the second research, and consequently also this book, would not have been possible, if the representatives of the UNHCR office in Zagreb did not arrive at the conclusion that they could use a systematic empirical scientific research conducted in the area of return in order to better understand the issues of minority return to Croatia and achieve a more efficient conclusion of the refugee crisis in the entire affected region. The initiative

was provided by the then-Representative, Mr. Jean-Claude Concolato, and it was his successor in office, Mr. Wilfried Buchhorn, who promoted the report (the book) with the then-President of the Republic of Croatia, Mr. Stjepan Mesić, in front of the diplomatic corps in Croatia. In agreement with us, the same Representative consequently launched the second, expanded and deepened series of surveys and interviews with Serb returnees. Finally, the current Representative, Mr. Terence Pike, also supported the work on the project and the finalization of the report. We appreciate their trust and in particular their respect for our professional autonomy in our work, which on the other hand increases our personal responsibility, both for the conceptualization of the research, and for its results and conclusions.

Also, we would like to emphasize that in our work in the field we were actively supported by some staff members of the UNHCR office in Zagreb, who provided us with their generous and irreplaceable assistance. Above all, during our entire work on the project, we had constant, constructive and productive communication with Ms. Lada Blagaić, who is a truly inspiring person and an efficient liaison officer between the UNHCR and us, the researchers. Judicial expertise into the minority returnees' rights was kindly offered by Mario Pavlović. We owe a lot to the staff members of the UNHCR branch offices in Sisak and Knin, the non-governmental organisation MI from Split, and the SDF branch office in Okučani. Not only that they have assisted us in finding the returnees with different characteristics and experience, but they also contacted them before the interviews and guided us in the field. If it hadn't been for the intermediation by Predrag Milunić, Kristina Benić, Zlatko Franković, Tanja Kale, Milan Bijelić, and Obrad Ivanković, it would have been difficult to reach many of our collocutors and to gain their trust.

Finally, we thank the reviewers, prof. Brad Blitz, Ph.D., from the Kingston University in London, and Mr. Marko Valenta, Ph.D., senior researcher in the Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies, University of Trondheim, for their readiness to read our report in extremely short time and to provide us with their valuable remarks.

Prof. Milan Mesić, Ph.D. and Dragan Bagić, Ph.D.

SHORT INTRODUCTION INTO THE REFUGEE GENESIS IN CROATIA

All the refugee crises, and the resulting refugee flows and processes have a history that – regardless if it is shorter or longer – stems from their socio-political causes. In each further stage of a refugee crisis, the prospects of it being sustained or resolved depend on changing the socio-political circumstances, both in the countries of origin of the refugees, and in the countries of refuge or settlement, and on the political strategies and interests of dominant political forces in the ‘international community’. This, naturally, applies also to the refugee flows that took place in Croatia, and which today mostly (when it comes to the refugees from Croatia alone) boil down to the issue of return or another durable solution for the remaining Serb refugee and returnee contingents. Here, we are not trying to give (our) assessment of the extent of human rights violations and the extent of crimes committed either on one or the other side in the ethnic conflicts that resulted in refugee movements in Croatia, and we neither wish to relativize them or say that they were equal. We shall leave that to a serious and documented social and historical studies. We only would like to highlight that our research, which focuses on one aspect of the refugee-displacee crisis in Croatia, has its deep historic, social and political causes or genesis. Therefore, scientific and political correctness obliges us to bear in mind this broader and more long-term social context, if we wish to interpret our findings as objectively as possible, and understand the contemporary return processes.

There are three main reasons why we are trying to restrict ourselves in this report to elementary and relatively neutral description of the problems

that are dealt with here. First of all, this study is very clear in terms of the subject matter of the research: current problems and issues of Serb returnees to Croatia. Secondly, many publications (ranging from political pamphlets to serious scientific publications) have already been issued regarding the topic of the causes for the disintegration of the SFRY. However, not even the scientific publications provide us with a broader, let alone trans-nationally accepted conclusions about the causes and the consequences of the war on the territory of Croatia (and Bosnia and Herzegovina), which is understandable in view of the harshness of the inter-ethnic conflicts and the political sensitivity of all who were involved in these historically recent events. So, despite the fact that some of this research and analyses are truly valuable and thorough, we still cannot rely on them without provoking further disputes that would not lead us anywhere, but would at the same time avert the attention from the central task of our research and empirical analyses, and from our analysis and the view of the contemporary processes of minority refugee return to Croatia. Thirdly, we do not wish to lightly point to either the exclusive culprits (on one or the other conflicted side), nor to the exclusive victims (even if they are refugees), nor do we have intention to relativize and equate the guilt and the culprits at the level of the opposed ethnic collectivities, because then we would not be able to distance ourselves from their collective responsibility.

We only wish to mention that we are aware of the unbreakable ties between the refugee genesis, their contemporary drama and the current issues. In the unclear political context of guilt and responsibility, each non-resolving or resolving of the refugee position of the remaining Serb refugee or return contingents can (politically) be 'assessed' as unjust or inequitable, or simply as unsatisfactory 'policy', either towards the refugees or towards the majority Croatian population. It is to be expected that this type of criticism will primarily stem from the spokespersons of the extreme nationalist, ethnic and in religious terms exclusive political forces both within the Serb and Croatian political corpus. We do not, however, perceive the possibility of an ideal and uniform solution (a single option for all refugees) to any of the refugee problems, including the refugees from Croatia. In simplified terms, this is unimaginable even from the theoretical standpoint, because after a refugee crisis, it is not possible to return to the previous social and political situation, neither in their entire homeland nor in the local environment of their (former) homes.

We are, however, convinced that this is no justification to all the stakeholders and responsible political actors not to try and reach relatively satisfactory solutions for return or other acceptable options, because this is undoubtedly in the existential interest of the refugees (returnees) themselves. In our desire to depict – as briefly and objectively as possible – the genesis of the Serb refugee corpus from Croatia and its remaining refugee and returnee contingents (to Croatia), we shall rely on the authors, whose work seems relatively less polemic than others, both in terms of their intention and their approach.

Brad Blitz (2003:182), in his very critical article on the Croatian ‘return policy’ towards the minority Serb refugees, sees the genesis of the refugees in the Serb minority’s non-acceptance of the legitimate decision made by the majority of the Croatian population after the multiparty elections regarding the independence from the ‘SFRY under Serb dominance’. Ethnic Serbs, in areas where they had absolute or relative majority (in the area called ‘Krajina’, and in Eastern and Western Slavonia) openly rebelled against the new Croatian government and its authorities, which was facilitated by the military support of the Yugoslav People’s Army (YPA), which soon became a Greater-Serbian army in the hands of Milošević, and they declared these parts of Croatia ‘autonomous Serb areas’. The movement for a Greater Serbia under Milošević’s leadership (who tried to present himself abroad as a defender of Yugoslavia), which relied on the transformed YPA, was actually aimed at creating a Greater Serbia as a country inhabited and ruled by ethnic Serbs from the territory of the entire former Yugoslavia. By this, we do not wish to say that all Serbs who lived in the self-declared autonomous areas and particularly those who lived outside of those areas actively supported such a policy, and there are also well-known cases of individuals who openly opposed this and suffered for it.

One ought to admit that their dissatisfaction, and even fear of the Tuđman nationalist regime was not entirely unfounded, because for many Serbs this meant a continuation of the Ustasha pro-fascist Independent State of Croatia from the Second World War, which conducted mass ethnic cleansing of Jews, Serbs and the Roma. But this fear was additionally instigated and over-emphasized in the Greater Serbian media, with the aim of facilitating the drafting of Serbs from these areas against Croats and Croatian independence. Serb exodus from Croatia, particularly from the cities under Croatian authorities, started gradually with the disintegration of Yugoslavia (and not

exclusively after the Operation Storm!). To Croatian nationalist extremists, Serbs' open rebellion came in handy from the political perspective, in order to re-affirm the thesis on Serbs as an element of disturbance on the Croatian national territory.¹

One ought to bear in mind that already in the very beginning of state-related and political changes, Croatia experienced two main refugee flows (Blitz, 2003:182).² The first started in 1991, and it was continued due to armed attacks and the occupation of areas called SAO (Serb Autonomous Region) Krajina and Eastern Slavonia by the rebel Serb paramilitary formations assisted by the YPA troops. Some 84,000 of ethnic Croats (and other non-Serbs) were either banished or they deserted the occupied areas under pressure. What followed was a re-settlement of about 70,000 Serbs to Eastern Slavonia, where Serb autonomy had also been declared. Forced displacements continued until mid 1990-ties. Whereas one should show understanding for the fear of ethnic Serbs in the independent Croatian state, and understanding for their dissatisfaction over the loss of their privileged position³, the policy of banishing and annulling the rights of Croats and other non-Serb community members, which was implemented by the Serb para-authorities on Croatian territories under their control, made their demand for autonomy devoid of any legitimacy, both in the moral and in the liberal and democratic sense. Thus, various ethnic cleansing policies mutually supported one another, deepening ethnic conflicts, involving many people on both sides, either as perpetrators of crimes and injustice or as victims.

During and after the Croatian military and police operation 'Storm' in August 1995, around 250,000 Serbs left the area of SAO Krajina and became refugees, mostly in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though the Croatian authorities invited Serb population to remain in their homes and towns, their departure had already been prepared and organised, and later it was additionally encouraged by major violations of their human rights and

1 Also in other places in Eastern Europe, some minorities were perceived (or still are) as a kind of 'imperial minorities' – agents of former oppressor and imperialist policies, particularly of Austro-Hungary, which made it more difficult to achieve national aspirations of contemporary independent nations (Tsilevich, 2001:161).

2 Further research of displacee and refugee flows generated in Croatia would show that numerous Serb refugees and displacees were in fact displaced in several stages in and outside of Croatia (Harvey, 2006:95).

3 Serbs in Croatia rightly claimed that they did not have the status of a national minority in the Socialist Republic of Croatia (to an extent, this is true also for other minority groups that were at that time constitutionally defined as 'nationalities', and not minorities). But this does not mean that they were equal to Croats in the sense of state constitutiveness (otherwise, Croatia would have been constituted as a Federal Republic with an autonomous unit).

murders of civilian population (HHO 2001:20), so that their number grew to some 300,000 (OSCE, 2005).⁴

In summary, ethnic conflicts and hostilities in the period 1991-1997 caused displacement of about 950,000 Croatian inhabitants (out of about 4.5 million total population). According to Mikić (2008:2),⁵ there were about 550,000 Croatian citizens of mostly Croatian nationality and some 400,000 of Serb nationality among the displaced in that period. These are probably high estimates for both one and the other group, and they probably include multiple displacements. Recent data integration conducted by the UNHCR in late 2010 mentions 550,000 displaced persons in Croatia for the period 1991/1992, and 250,000 Serb refugees from Croatia after 1995 (UNHCR (2010:3-4). In addition, one ought to bear in mind some 400,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina who sought refuge in Croatia in 1991/1992 (IOM, 2007). We wish to emphasize that there are other estimates as well, while the exact 'data' are lacking. We do not wish to launch a discussion here concerning various estimates, nor do we insist on the ones presented here. For our research and analysis, it is important to bear in mind that the extent of the refugee and displacee crisis in Croatia (and around Croatia) was great and dramatic, and that it affected both ethnic Serbs and ethnic Croats (and Muslims, that is Bosniaks as refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina in Croatia). Although our research is focused on the current flows and return processes of ethnic Serb refugees to Croatia, they do not take place and they cannot be understood outside of this broader social and historic context, that is independent of their genesis.

Here, it is important to emphasize active, mostly manipulative role of the Serbian ruling forces (and on the other hand also the Croatian ones) in the genesis of the Serb refugee issues,⁶ and in the subsequent refugee processes.⁷ Later on, during their years as refugees, Serb refugees in Serbia have primarily

4 Here, we do not insist on the mentioned numbers at all. We are well aware that there are other estimates (with smaller or bigger numbers) of the Serb refugee corpus, and we allow that they might even be more realistic. We only wish to provide a sense of the extent and character of the refugee crisis in Croatia, and particularly of the Serb refugee contingent in order to demonstrate the extent and the complexity of the resolution of refugee issues that followed, particularly concerning the Serb refugees from Croatia.

5 The author wrote the mentioned publication within the programme entitled *Minority Rights in Practice in South-Eastern Europe - National Strategy for Croatia*, which is implemented by the Coalition for Promotion and Protection of Human Rights with the support of the Baudoin Foundation.

6 Blitz claims that "there is evidence that the plight of the Krajina Serbs was manipulated to serve as a rationale for Milošević's unionist policies which aimed to keep all Serbs together in one ethnically homogenous state". The pamphlets - that could be seen already at the first anti-government Serb gatherings, that said "This is Serbia!", and "All Serbs in a Single State!" - are a good testimony of this.

relied on the authorities in Belgrade in terms of their political orientation and with respect to the issue of returning to Croatia, and the refugees in Republika Srpska likewise relied on the Serb Democratic Party. “The relationship, then, between the interests of political elites in areas of refuge and the actions and decisions of refugees has been one of the key factors in the organization of different groups, and in questions surrounding their possible return to their areas of origin.” (Harvey, 2005: 96; 98). After the military and police operation *Flash* (May, 1995), when parts of Western Slavonia were liberated, and particularly after the operation *Storm* (in August 1995), when the area of ‘Krajina’ was liberated, Serb refugees from these areas were encouraged to settle in Eastern Slavonia, which remained under the control of the local Serb rebel authorities and the YPA with the aim of strengthening the Serb ethnic corpus in that sub-region. In these cases, they were displaced persons, because they involuntarily resettled within the same state. A major share of them became refugees (temporarily or permanently) only at a later stage, after this part of Croatia was peacefully reintegrated, based on the international treaty (in 1998). During their time as refugees, many Serb refugees were mostly faced with the hardship of life: bad accommodation, poverty, lack of job, insecure future, being refused citizenship, even hostility by native Serbs in the environment where they settled, although there were also some positive experiences and cases of successful integration in the receiving country. What followed were days of even greater hardship for early Serb returnees who were mostly faced with open hostility by the local, and particularly re-settled) Croatian population (mostly refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina), where they were insufficiently protected from the legal standpoint, but also from the perspective of their pure physical safety.

For the fact of having been refugees or displacees, the returnees should be – as a rule – considered as losers. They mostly suffered greater or smaller material losses, such as devastated, damaged or plundered homes and other property. Even more important is the spiritual sense of loss caused by losing

7 Concerning the policy of the Serbian government towards Serb refugees, V. Koska (2008:203) noted that it “perpetuated their agony by first holding them on the borders and later directing them to Kosovo”. Not only that, but the military and police authorities forcefully drafted military-able refugee men and sent them to the front, if they did not wish to do so willingly. Koska based his work on a qualitative empirical research of Serb refugee return to a small town in Banovina called Glina, on the territory of ‘Krajina’, which was the basis for his Masters thesis he defended at the Refugee Studies Centre, Oxford University (2007).

family members and personal belongings that help keep one's memory of some important events and ancestors. In summary, the course of life they enjoyed previously was abruptly interrupted, for a longer or shorter time period, more or less brutally. "But a particular burden was often imposed on people seeking to return to areas where they would be in the minority, where they would be confronted with all the diverse forms of discrimination that go along with being seen as 'the other' in political environment still driven by virulent nationalism – for example, beatings of the newly arrived, the voluntary destruction of re-built houses just before the owners returned, a lack of work or schooling opportunities, administrative harassment, problems accessing social services, obtaining valid identity papers, or the provision of water and power utilities." (Heimerl, 2005:380-381). Along with the violence and harassment, minority returnees often fall victims of social and economic discrimination at practically all levels.

According to the conclusions made by respectable scholars, reconciliation, and consequently also more successful return of Serb refugees to Croatia (just like the return of all refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina) is made difficult (Žunec, 1998; Banac, 2006; Harvey, 2006:92-93) due to the character of the inter-ethnic conflicts. They argue that 'ethnic cleansing' is not just an unfortunate consequence of the war, but that the political powers pursued the aim of creating nationally homogenous areas in their new countries, both during and after the war. The true goals of the war were not the reflection of a military strategy, but of a desire to completely destroy the infrastructure and primary social relations in previously ethnically mixed areas, in order to make future co-existence impossible or at least to discourage it (Žunec, 1999).⁸ However, it needs to be emphasized that physical safety is no longer considered a difficulty for the returnees, although there have been cases of acts of hate or violence against the returnees that were recorded also in recent years (UNHCR, 2010b:2).

Until the end of March 2010, according to the UNHCR (2010b), 70,421 Serb refugees from Croatia were still registered in the region, of which 61,215 in Serbia alone. However, "the real number is assumed to be considerably lower

8 This will be discussed further in the context of the discussion on the concept of 'home' for the refugees and returnees.

as many refugees have already found a durable solution or acquired a new citizenship.” The UNHCR offices in Belgrade and in Zagreb have identified certain inconsistencies in the official refugee and returnee statistics. They include 10,663 persons, who are at the same time registered as returnees in Croatia and as refugees in Serbia. At the same time, a total of 3,033 displaced persons and refugees remained in Croatia, of which 651 are refugees from Serbia, and 236 from Kosovo.

Our empirical research relates to minority Serb returnees, whose number amounted to 132,707 persons (UNHCR, 2010a) at the time of the random selection we did for our statistically representative sample. Of that number, 23,231 are Serb returnees, who had the status of internally displaced persons (mostly from other parts of Croatia to Eastern Slavonia). The qualitative part of the study (interviews) included a smaller number of Serb refugees who (still) live in Serbia. The number of Serb refugees from Croatia in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Monte Negro, according to the official data of these states dropped from 199,066 in 2004 to 69,440 in 2010.⁹ A significant number of Serb returnees from Serbia, Monte Negro and Bosnia and Herzegovina was recorded in 1998 (3,121), and it reached its peak two years after that (20,716), and ever since then it has been continuously dropping until 2009, when only 710 returnees were registered.

A new aspect of this empirical research in comparison to our previous report for the UNHCR (Mesić; Bagić, 2007) relates to ‘former occupancy and tenancy right holders’. One ought to say that ‘occupancy and tenancy rights’ certainly do not belong to the field of international refugee law, but they may be considered humanitarian law for reasons of obvious discrimination against Serb refugees at the time of their abolishment.¹⁰ According to the UNHCR’s presentation (2010a: 9), which relies on official data issued by the Ministry of Regional Development, Forestry and Water Management, a total of 14,006 family applications for housing care of former OTR holders were submitted. Of that number, 4,590 relate to urban areas, outside of areas affected by the war. The number of positively resolved applications amounts to 7,853, of which 1,559 relate to urban areas. The first instance pending cases amount to 2,918,

⁹ According to a field research that was conducted jointly by the UNHCR and the Serbian Commissioner for Refugees in 2008, only 5% of the remaining refugees in Serbia thought about the return option (OSCE, 2010:9) (Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia (2008: 2).

and 3,235 cases were resolved with a negative decision in the first instance. This is, actually, the second subgroup of minority returnees that is also represented in our representative sample of surveyed persons.

Finally, we have to emphasize that the Croatian government fulfilled the demands of former OTR holders, who were also supported by international actors, and it made it possible to legally purchase those apartments under much favourable conditions than the market prices. In addition, the deadline for filing new housing care applications has been extended.

10 Former occupancy and tenancy right holders (OTR or ex-OTR) is a term used within the Housing Care Programme, which in principle refers to all former OTR holders who wish to live in Croatia, but in practice, it was introduced because of Serb refugees, mostly from parts of Croatia that were not under the control of the rebel Serbs, who had 'occupancy and tenancy rights' of apartments, in which they lived, but did not manage to exercise this right before it was abolished. Occupancy and tenancy right was a socialist legal category, according to which the apartment 'owners' were public institutions or companies, but this right was inalienable from its holder, and it was transferrable to his/her family members, although such apartments could not be sold legally (Philpott (2005:3)). As this right was quickly abolished in the Republic of Croatia, there can no longer be any occupancy and tenancy right holders, and that is why they are referred to as ex-OTR holders and their former OTR is an acquired right. Generally, former OTR holders had a legal possibility to purchase the apartment and transform it to private property. However, due to obviously intentionally short period for filing such applications, Serb refugees were in practice discriminated against when it comes to this possibility, and they thus lost their apartments. In summary, the term 'former OTR holders' refers to persons who enjoyed occupancy and tenancy rights of 'socially-owned' apartments prior to 1991, and who lived in those apartments alone or together with their family members and who – due to various reasons – had to leave their apartments during the war in the Republic of Croatia, so that they no longer stay in them nor do they have a valid legal basis for their use (Mikić, 2008: 10, note 2)

IV

POLITICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE RETURN OF THE MINORITY REFUGEES IN CROATIA

In this chapter, we intend to provide a brief overview of the legal framework for the return of Serb refugees back to Croatia. Naturally, return-related legislation depended and it still depends on the political will and the interests of the ruling political parties in Croatia, but also on the powerful international political actors and on political relations in the region (primarily between the directly involved states, former republics of the ex-SFRoY: Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Monte Negro). It is therefore not possible, not even in analytical terms, to fully separate the changes in the legal framework from the political context, which we have to bear in mind, at least in general terms.

All serious scholars and observers probably agree that the Tuđman's government adopted legislation and other regulations during and after the war, which were aimed at preventing and deterring the return of Serb (and also Bosniak – or at that time Muslim and Roma) refugees to Croatia (Blitz, 2003:184; Blitz, 2005: 367; Koska, 2008:199).¹ Legal and political position of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia, and also the conditions for return of minority (Serb) refugees to their homeland began to improve with the arrival of the coalition government of the left centre headed by the Prime Minister Ivica Račan (2000) and with the election of the new President of the Republic, Mr. Stjepan Mesić. The Prime Minister and the President publically

¹ See: The Law on Citizenship (1991); the Law on Temporary Use of Apartments (1991); The Law on Housing Relations (1992) (including its amendments); the Law on Lease of Flats in Liberated Territories (1995); the Law on Areas of Special State Concern (LASSC) (1996).

announced that refugee return and reintegration are some of the priorities of the Croatian government.

Despite this declaratory commitment to enable minority return, and the corresponding changes in the legislation and the bylaws, return and reintegration of minority returnees stumbled across numerous problems and difficulties in practice. In addition, the issue of compensation for acquired occupancy and tenancy rights of minority refugees remained open.

To the amazement of numerous domestic and foreign observers, the new right-wing government of the Prime Minister Ivo Sanader continued in this direction of institutional and legal development towards a more equitable and efficient return programme. We shall not now be discussing the issue to what extent such orientation with respect to minority return was an expression of a genuine desire to advance human and in particular minority and refugee rights, and to what extent it only reflected pragmatic concessions made under the pressure of the 'international community'. The fact remains that – although rather slow – the restitution of ownership of homes, land and other real estate to their legal owners (minority refugees) was for the most part accomplished by 2005. Of 19,280 private homes that were taken, 19,256 were returned, and 24 cases are still pending, currently in the appellate proceedings before the Croatian courts. One ought to bear in mind that since 1995, Croatia rebuilt or repaired 146,520 family houses, of which 35 percent belonged to Serb returnees. About 6,700 applications by families remained unresolved in the appellate proceedings, and in 2,423 cases, the decision on renewal is yet to be implemented (UNHCR, 2010b: 2).

Here, we shall pay particular attention to the housing care legislation that affects former occupancy and tenancy right holders, as this was the focus of the new return programme, and these returnees as a subgroup were involved in this new research. A conviction prevailed that one of the main obstacles to the return of Serb refugees to Croatia was the non-acknowledgement of their occupancy and tenancy rights, as this was the predominant form of possession of flats in urban environments of the former socialist state (ICG, 2002; Harvey, 2006:93). Namely, ever since the year 2000, due to the strong and focused interventions by the international community on the property rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the new property legislation adopted in that country, there was a dramatic change in the rates of property return, both when it comes

to private property, and the exercise of the occupancy and tenancy rights of the 'socially owned' property. In Croatia, on the other hand, although some private owners were able to repossess their properties, occupancy and tenancy rights of 'socially-owned' flats were abolished by the adoption of the Law on Lease of Flats in 1996. Even when the new left-wing government adopted a law that was supposed to ensure replacement accommodation for these persons, this law was not implemented in practice.

There were two ways how these rights were abolished for the refugees and displaces who were former occupancy and tenancy right holders (Mikić, 2008:3). First, in areas of the Republic of Croatia, which remained under the control of the Croatian authorities during the war, the courts issued decisions (often without the former occupancy and tenancy right holder even being present or even without their knowledge or by the force of act) on annulling occupancy and tenancy rights for persons who have not used their apartments for longer than 6 months. Secondly, in areas, which have been under the control of rebel Serbs until mid 1995, occupancy and tenancy rights were abolished for the former users of flats who have not returned within 90 days of the coming into force of the Law on Lease of Flats on Liberated Territories. It is estimated that this lead to annulling occupancy and tenancy rights for about 29,800 housing units, of which the majority was located outside of the Areas of Special State Concern.²

The Government of the Republic of Croatia hesitated with adopting a compensation programme for former occupancy and tenancy right holders.³ However, in June 2003, the government under Iвица Račan adopted the Housing Care Programme for Former Occupancy and Tenancy Right Holders, which started to be applied with respect to minority returnees only when the government under Ivo Sanader adopted the Conclusion on the implementation of the housing care programme for returnees – former occupancy and tenancy

2 This relates to the areas of the Republic of Croatia that were outside of the control of the Croatian authorities during the war 1991-1995 (UNHCR, 2008).

3 It would be difficult to dispute the injustice committed in case of former occupancy and tenancy right holders. One should, however, bear in mind that restitution or the compensation for one's occupancy and tenancy right (which is a specific form of right as it is) is not a subject matter of the conventional international refugee law, but that it is a new concept introduced by the international community as an element, or indeed the (pre)condition for the return of refugees and displaces, especially the minority members, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and in Kosovo. The discussion on property restitution and compensation for the occupancy and tenancy rights is presented in the chapter on theory.

right holders outside of Areas of Special State Concern in August 2006. The plan was to build about 3,600 flats until 2011, whereas 400 flats were to be purchased at the market. This programme did not, however, satisfy the spokespersons of the Serb community in Croatia. The main criticism referred to the fact that they were to obtain the status of protected leaseholders of these flats, and this right did not include the right to purchase the compensatory apartments, to inherit them (after the death of the right holder, it would be returned to the state), nor to rent it out. In addition, there was a threat of concentration of these apartments in designated areas and thus the risk of ghettoization of the Serb returnees. However, according to the assessment of key international organisations, the housing care process still did not evolve in a satisfactory way for minority returnees. Therefore, the Government adopted the Action Plan for the accelerated implementation of the Housing Care Programme in and outside of Areas of Special State Concern (in June 2008).

The trilateral ministerial conference that took place in Sarajevo in January 2005 contributed to the progress achieved in terms of the improvement of the legislative framework and the secondary legislation regulating return conditions for minority refugees and displacees, particularly with respect to the housing care of former occupancy and tenancy right holders. The conference was initiated by four international organisations – the UNHCR, the EU, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and it was attended by foreign ministers of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia and Monte Negro, and they adopted the Sarajevo Declaration, by which the signatories committed to resolve mutual refugee problems until the end of 2006. It was concluded that one ought to find suitable solutions, both for refugees who wish to integrate in the places of their displacement, and for those who returned to their homelands or who still wish to return. Since there was still a significant number of refugees without a durable solution by early 2010, another ministerial conference was organised in Belgrade on the 25th March, dedicated to durable solutions for the refugees in the region. The foreign ministers of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Monte Negro adopted a joint *Communique*, which describes the concrete steps for resolving the remaining refugee issues in the region. In addition, another international donors' conference was announced for the beginning of 2011.

Two housing care models were developed for former occupancy and tenancy right holders in and outside of Areas of Special State Concern (ASSC), which are based on two different pieces of legislation. Housing care in the ASSCs is regulated by the new Law on Areas of Special State Concern (July 2008), which replaced the Law on Areas of Special State Concern adopted in 1996. One ought to mention that this Law did not exclusively relate to displaced former occupancy and tenancy right holders, but also to other groups of citizens, who fulfil the envisaged criteria. Depending on their housing situation, applicants could apply for one out of 5 housing care models: A) lease of a state-owned house, B) lease of a damaged state-owned house, C) lease of a state-owned flat; D) receiving land and construction material from the state as a donation; E) receiving basic construction material for renewing one's own damaged house or for building a house on one's own land as a donation from the state.

Unlike the ASSCs, the right to housing care outside of these areas has not been regulated by a law, but by a government Decision on the implementation of provision of housing for returnees - former holders of occupancy rights on flats outside of the ASSC areas (May 2008). This Decision put out of force the Conclusion of the Government of the RoC on the implementation of the housing care programme for the returnees - former holders of occupancy and tenancy rights of apartments outside the ASSC, which had been adopted in 2006. The deadline for submitting an application for housing care outside of the ASSCs expired on the 30th September 2005, whereas no final deadline has yet been set for applications relating to the ASSCs. By its Decision on the purchase of state-owned apartments adopted on the 2nd September 2010, the Government opened the possibility for former occupancy and tenancy right holders who were awarded apartments to purchase them, which means that their former occupancy and tenancy rights were effectively treated as real property rights. Finally, by the government decision issued in March 2011, a new deadline was opened for submitting the housing care applications outside of Areas of Special State Concern (which expires on 9th December 2011). Moreover, the applications for housing care within the ASSCs are still relevant, because no final deadline for their submission has yet been set.

Another important demand made by the minority returnees and their advocates, besides the housing care issue, relates to taking into account the years of employment relevant for pension calculations in case of Serb refugees

and displacees who worked outside of areas under the control of the Croatian authorities during the war. As early as 1997, the Government adopted the Law on Convalidation. However, as many of the interested minority refugees and displaced persons could not submit their applications and the requested documentation in time, a new deadline was requested, and approved by the adoption of the Rules of Procedure of convalidating decisions and acts in the field of pension insurance, which came into force on 17th May 2008. According to the records of the Croatian Pension Insurance Institute, 7796 applications for the convalidation of the years of employment were received since the adoption of this Regulation: 861 cases were resolved, of which 425 with a positive decision.

A part of the commitments from the 2009 Action Plan has still not been fulfilled, which can be justified in the light of the economic downturn and a slower pace of housing construction. For this reason, the Government adopted a Revised Action Plan for accelerated implementation of the Housing Care Programme in and outside of Areas of Special State Concern on 24 June 2010, which relates to refugees – former occupancy and tenancy right holders who wish to return to the Republic of Croatia. It outlines a plan for providing housing care for 1,265 families of former OTR holders by the end of 2010. In ASSCs, apartments are being constructed or renewed for another 709 families, and they should be completed by mid 2011. In the same period, there is a plan to purchase another 143 apartments. By all these measures, housing care would be provided to a total of 2,117 families – former OTR holders – within the above mentioned period (Government of the RoC, 2010:3).

v

RETURN OF REFUGEES – CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

Return of persons to a country they abandoned (voluntarily or involuntarily), in addition to the right to exit any country is one of the fundamental human rights stipulated by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951) regulates which involuntary migrants are entitled to international legal protection of refugees. It was for this purpose that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established as a central agency for the promotion of refugees' rights and for dealing with their problems. Its mandate relates to refugees until the moment of finding one of the *durable* solutions for them: *repatriation* or return¹, asylum in the country of refuge or their resettlement in a third country. Although return is on principle accepted as the first best solution for refugees, the Western world has practically given up on the policy of return for refugees from the communist countries for reasons of its own strategic political and economic interests during the Cold War (Chimni, 1992: 57-58), and this seems to have largely suited these refugees, who mostly for political reasons did not want to return to their countries of origin. B.S. Chimni (1999:1) differentiates two periods in the post-war history

¹ The term 'repatriation' is common in the international refugee law, and it is often used by the UN agencies and politicians in referring to the physical act of returning to the country of origin. The term 'return' can be found in the discourse on international human rights, and it is generally accepted by scholars and by refugees to describe individual and socio-cultural experiences of refugees (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006:430, note 1; Ballard, 2010:467, note 23). We shall be using both terms alternately, depending on what we want to emphasize.

of resolving refugee crises in the world. Until mid 1980-ties, both for the international community and the UNHCR as the key agency in this field, a durable solution for the refugees of that time really boiled down to two versions of integration (in the first or new receiving country). Since mid 1980-ties, due to a steep rise in the number of refugees and other migrants from the poor South in the developed countries of the West, and particularly after the mass refugee waves resulting from the ethnic wars waged around the establishment of new national states on the territory of the disintegrating socialist Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo), the issue of refugee return has suddenly sprung to the foreground of the international refugee policy.² In summary, there are several main reasons why international organisations responsible for refugee issues have become increasingly engaged with refugee return. Firstly, there is the establishment of the 'new world order' that has made it possible to implement large return projects. Secondly, it is in the interest of the most powerful actors in international relations to ensure sustainable peace in the post-conflict countries, and in this context return has become the key stabilising factor for the democratisation and reconciliation processes in those societies. Through the return process, one attempts to – at least partially – alleviate the consequences of 'ethnic cleansing', particularly through the return of members of 'minorities'³, not only to their homelands, but in particular to their home places and their homes. It is by way of this ethnic 'remixing' that the 'international community'⁴ strives to redeem itself for its sins of not acting efficiently and in time to prevent or stop ethnic cleansing because of the particular and opposed interests of the big 'players'. Thirdly, this is the test of sustainability of multi-national communities in contemporary

2 Chimni (1999:1) subdivided the second period into three stages. In the first stage, until 1993, one promoted voluntary repatriation as a durable solution. This was followed by a short stage until 1996, when the concept of safe return was introduced, in the context of the regime of temporarily receiving refugee contingents in the countries of Western Europe. In this context, the model of safe return, says Chimni, occupied a central position in an imagined continuum between involuntary and voluntary repatriation. As of 1996, it has become possible for the UNHCR to support return projects even in cases when it was not (fully) certain that the standards of voluntary return that were valid until then were fulfilled (from the rich countries that temporarily received the refugees). Naturally, this does not affect the fact that voluntary return is still the ideal and the most desired objective of the UNHCR refugee policy.

3 Here, we use the term minority or national minority under quotation marks because – as it was well noticed by Joanna Harvey (2006:108), it is not used in its common meaning in the reports on refugee movements in this Region, but it relates to the groups that return (or stay) on the territory under the effective control of another ethnic group (even if the returnee groups locally account for the majority of the population).

4 We agree with J. Harvey (2006: 98) also with respect to the interpretation of the term 'international community', which we therefore use under quotation marks. "Some kind of unified sense of purpose is often ascribed to the diverse collection of states, institutions, actors, and structures that make up what is termed the 'international community'. In fact there were many interests at stake among the different actors, and these impacted on the return process in various ways."

times. Fourthly, refugees (as well as unwanted migrants) have become too large a burden (in economic and social terms) for individual states that (temporarily) received them.⁵ The fact that the UNHCR declared the 1990-ties the ‘decade of voluntary repatriation’ speaks sufficiently of the significance that international players attribute to repatriation (Duffy Toft, 2007:139).⁶ Scholars such as Hathaway and Alexander (1997), Bascom (1994), Sepulveda (1996), Douzinas and Warrington (1995), and others opposed the ‘voluntary return’ actions of the UNHCR Executive Committee Branch (MacDonald, 2006:86). In their work, social researchers closely followed these changes in interests and policies in the field of Refugee Studies. Thus, in 1970-ties, they mostly researched the phenomenon of refugee flight, in the 1980-ties they focused on asylum and re-settlement, whereas in the 1990-ties their attention was focused on repatriation (Preston, 1999). Finally, as this discussion shows, ever since the beginning of the 21st century, scholars have become increasingly critical towards a simplified perspective on return, pointing to its complexity and contradictions, and discussing the issue of its sustainability (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006: 416). Monica Duffy Toft (2007:140-141) believes that the concept of repatriation has remained under-theoretized, which reflects on the resolution of specific practical and political issues. Is there just a single type of repatriation or are there several types? Under which conditions are the refugees most inclined to return in one way or another? Which factors contribute to repatriation or different types of repatriation, and which are the ones that hinder it? When should one advocate alternative solutions instead of repatriation? Each repatriation project does not only relate to refugees themselves, but it also includes more or less different interests of different stakeholders: the country of origin and the country of (temporary) asylum, in addition to the ‘international community’. As the author sees the refugee issue as a prominent political issue, she identified three types of challenges in repatriation policy. The first relates to protecting

5 All four reasons for encouraging return of refugees and displaced persons can be clearly identified in the policy of the international community with respect to resolving refugee issues in case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. It was the Federal Republic of Germany that was most interested in the return of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, as it received the largest number of such refugees. When it comes to Croatia, the third reason had only indirect significance, because the vast majority of refugees resettled in Serbia and the Bosnian-Herzegovinian entity of Republika Srpska.

6 Unfortunately, international policy of refugee return since the beginning of the 1990-ties has not by far yielded the expected results. The total number of refugees did not significantly decrease since 1990 (Duffy Toft, 2007: 150; 153). Global refugee perspective today is perhaps even less encouraging because re-settlement as an alternative durable solution is available only to a small share (about 5 percent) of refugees in the world (World Refugee Survey, 2004: 11).

the rights and safety of refugees-returnees as individuals. The second relates to the threat of refugee return undermining peace and stability that was barely achieved in the country of origin. And the third challenge is the challenge that the refugee crisis poses to regional stability in broad terms. “Indeed, each return operation presents unique challenges and conflicts of interest which must be negotiated if the right of return is to be realized“ (Bradley, 2008:289).

One can ask two crucial questions regarding any repatriation: first, if it is voluntary or involuntary (forced), and second, if it is organised or spontaneous. By crossing these two axes, one can arrive at four ideal-type variations of repatriation (Duffy Toft, 2007:147-148). The UNHCR’s mandate relates only to voluntary repatriation⁷, with the emphasis on organized repatriation. Basic prerequisites for organized repatriation are – on the one hand – the wish of refugees to return to their country of origin, and on the other hand that the interested countries and then also the UN are ready to cover the necessary organisational costs of the return. The vast majority of literature that we are tackling here relates to the problems of return of mostly Bosniak population to Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are three main reasons for that. The first one is quite prosaic, and it relates to the fact that most research and discussions are related to this particular country. The second reason is that for the international community, the problems of return to this complex and actually divided multi-ethnic and multi-religious state represented crucial problems – both in practical terms (due to the large number of refugees from this country in the developed countries), and in conceptual terms. And the third reason is that there are – despite certain differences – important similarities with respect to problems of minority return between Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since the rich countries are willing to provide asylum and home to an increasingly smaller number of (selected) refugees, UN institutions and organisations, or more generally speaking the international community, are striving to use this fact to provide incentives (material and other incentives) to the return of refugees to their countries of origin (or for their settlement in the surrounding countries of the refugee region). This was well noticed by David

7 There are four types of UNHCR assistance: emergency relief operations, long-term assistance and maintenance, local settlement, and repatriation and reintegration operations.

Chandler (1999:107) who said that “return for international community has become less a matter of a choice, to be decided by individuals or negotiated between community representatives and more a matter of international policy-making”. However, pressure of this kind can only be exerted upon ‘weaker states’ (Duffy Toft, 2007:147), which have still not asserted their international standing (such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo). However, it is difficult to draw the thin and sensitive line that would separate the efficiency and justifiability of such policy from the standpoint of international refugee law from its possible counterproductive consequences in the sense of blocking the internal processes of democratization in these societies. If return of minority refugees is (publicly) depicted and understood as something imposed from the outside, this deprives the return policy of its legitimacy in the eyes of a (large) share of domestic majority population (who perceive it as servile policy), and this leads to a collapse of fragile institutions of democratic transition⁸. Even if the imposed return policy should ‘succeed’ (temporarily and partially), after the international organizations leave and their influence weakens, the renewal of the policy of exclusion of returnees and minorities can generally more easily be presented as something that is genuinely in the national interest.

VOLUNTARINESS OF RETURN

According to the international refugee law, repatriation has to be voluntary. In the Handbook on Voluntary Repatriation: International Protection (1996) and the accompanying documents, the UNHCR elaborated the principles of voluntary return of refugees, focusing on their physical safety, legal and material security, whereas the criterion of ‘dignity’ remained vague (Bradley, 2008: 295-296). Physical safety primarily relates to a safe return environment, which includes protection against attack or intimidation, freedom of movement in the

⁸ The double-edged sword of international intervention into the legal order (and particularly into the judiciary) of a country on which pressure is exerted to ensure conditions for minority return of refugees, was well noticed by some researchers and observers of the return policy to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a ‘weak state’. Once that it had become obvious that not even the newly imposed legislation on the restitution of refugee property was efficient, because it was obstructed by the (local) government, what was introduced was unlimited authority of international representatives in supervising the enforcement of laws, and this – despite benevolent and equitable intentions – reminded of “some imperial power over its colonized subject”. While it had supposedly worked towards strengthening the rule of law in Bosnia, the international community might have thus undermined the development of democracy (Ballard, 2010:492).

surroundings and in the country of return, and access to mine-free land. Legal security is achieved by the rule of law, and in this case this means equality of the returnees before the law, non-discrimination in the exercise of civil, economic, social, political and cultural rights (Englbrecht 2004:101-102). Finally, material security is achieved by means of providing humanitarian assistance and basic social services in the early stage of the return process. Across a longer period, material security is the prerequisite for sustainable re-integration, and for the chances of economic development. It can have (for some categories of refugees) a decisive effect on the decision on repatriation, and on the reconciliation process. And vice versa, (local) conflict between the current majority national community, which is socially and politically dominant, and the returnees about scarce resources makes (full) integration of the latter group more difficult. 'In the broadest sense', as it proposed by Richard Black and collaborators (2004:6), voluntary return can be defined negatively, by simple 'absence of force in return'. The question remains: what is considered 'force' or the 'absence of force'? Can one, for instance, truly talk about voluntariness when the refugees have to decide between the return – to which they are encouraged by the receiving countries or by international organisations, offering them assistance in the process – and uncertain existence in the atmosphere of an unwanted guest (especially in case of factual refugees without formal status as guaranteed by the Convention). Critical observers of the international refugee policy noticed that the UNHCR has lately been exposed to certain pressures of the interested powerful states and that it is getting actively engaged in the repatriation of refugee groups even in cases when it was questionable whether the refugees were given the opportunity for a truly free choice of return under the "conditions of security and dignity" (Zieck, 2004: 37-40). However, it can be claimed that return can never be (fully) voluntary if the refugees are not provided with the opportunity to choose freely: whether to stay and integrate in the host country or to return to their homeland. In this process, no pressure may be exerted on the refugees to decide to return before they have reflected upon the real state of play in their country of origin. Return is voluntary when "after reviewing all available information about the conditions in their country of origin, refugees decide freely to return home. Thus, the decision to repatriate is based on a free and informed choice" (Dimitrijevic et al., 2004:29).

Since refugee return is anchored primarily in human rights and

refugee law, Megan Bradley (2008:286) believes that it should be just, although she immediately admits that “there is no standard mould for just return“. In the simplified ideal-type perspective, the conditions “of just return match the core duties a legitimate state must provide for its citizens: equal, effective protection for their security and basic human rights, including accountability for any violations of these rights“.

CRITICAL VERSUS CONVENTIONAL UNDERSTANDING OF REFUGEE RETURN TO THEIR HOMES

Studying small and (relatively) closed communities, traditional anthropology and ethnology have contributed to conceptualizing an essentialized connection between the man and the space. From this perspective, human beings, that is human groups are ‘naturally’ connected to a place (in the territorial sense) where they abide, and this primarily relates to their birth place, their native region and/or their homeland. Understanding that human beings are ‘beings of place’ (Eliade, 2002) is often reflected in botanical metaphors, so that it is often mentioned that someone is ‘rooted’ in a place, or ‘uprooted’ if this place is abandoned (Handlin 2002; Malkki 2002). According to this understanding, (every) long-term traveller, even every emigrant strives to return to his or her place of origin (in narrow or broader terms) where he or she (still) belongs. G. Gmelch (1980:135) generally defined such return migrations as “the movement of emigrants back to their homeland to resettle“, depicting it as the (final) ending to the migration movement. At least for voluntary migrants, re-integration of returnees to the environment they originated from should be an easy and conflict-free process, but this proved to be a wrong assumption (Čapo, 2010:12).⁹ Although it is reasonable to assume that return of refugees is largely different than the return of the voluntary emigrants, advocates of repatriation basically developed a theory that all refugees prefer repatriation (MacDonald, 2006:86). Both politicians and scholars have initially perceived

⁹ Researching the return of Croatian emigrants of various generations and demographic profiles, the author concluded that return migrations can better be researched as a type of immigration, as it seems that there is no justification for the traditional conceptual differentiation between immigration and return. „Both are parts of a permanent and reversible migration movement and they display similarities in the complex process of incorporation of migrants (returnees) in the society of their (re)settlement “ (Čapo, 2010:31).

this as an ending of the refugee cycle, as a permanent condition and a preferred permanent solution to the refugee crises (Allen and Morsink 1994). In summary, refugee return is traditionally perceived as a one-off and unique act. In addition, it is perceived to be a happy ending to the refugee exodus, and a permanent solution that releases the international community from further care about ex-refugees. Whereas the status of a refugee is associated with negative connotations of a victim, suffering, 'uprooting', loss of 'home' or in other words with social pathology, return is perceived as the opposite of it all. It is in itself something good that is finally happening (again) to the refugees, a kind of a 'natural' renewal of their original life. The right of displaced persons to return to their 'homes of origin' (which are understood as a physical structure, occupied before forced displacement took place), received huge support from the international community. If home is the 'centre of the world', then the loss of home is the 'undoing of the meaning of the world' (Smith, 2006:63-64). Just like it used to be 'normal' to believe that the refugees from the 'communist lager' do no longer wish to return there (not asking themselves about their homelands and homes), it has now become 'normal' to expect that (all) refugees can hardly wait to return to their homelands and their homes. Namely, if the basic prerequisites for return are fulfilled, and if such return becomes desirable from the perspective of the international community, then the option of non-return chosen by the refugees themselves appears as 'not normal', and their status of 'non-returnees' seems pathological (Malkki, 1992:31). This is based on the standpoint that by returning refugees lose their refugee label and again become 'normal' people who – as anybody else – again belong to their 'home' and 'homeland' (Hammond, 1999:227). It is only by means of return that the 'natural' and 'national' order that is assumed to have existed before the displacement can be re-established (Black and Gent, 2006:19). In other words, are all those refugees who do not return, who do not even wish to return despite the provided opportunities 'normal'? This is the question that we will try to answer in the discussion related to the concept of 'home'. The international repatriation discourse often depicted the return of refugees within an essentialized concept of identity as something rooted – as the people's return to their "natural" homes (Malkki 1995), which was based on an idealized picture of pre-war life in local surroundings. This does not mean that returnees cannot be moved by a strong feeling of attachment to the place they

originated from. But, we would like to emphasize that feelings of belonging and attachment to a certain place (home) should be perceived in connection to broader social and historic processes which provide the basis for people to have demands from a certain place and to call it their home (Gupta and Ferguson 2001; Malkki 1995). Studies of return show that this does not always ensure “natural” re-incorporation of refugees-returnees, but that they who return to their previous homes often find them greatly different and changed, both physically and socially, and that they need to negotiate their re-settlement in a very different context of power and inequality (Ranger 1994). Jansen and Löfving (2007:) have tried to prove that after violence and destruction, re-emplacment has to be understood in the context of economic and political changes. Such changes of vast proportions intersect with the changes in the individual and social trajectories (Eastmond, 2010:9). In other words, return process affects all dimensions of life, and it is influenced by a broad range of individual, contextual and psycho-social factors (Ruben, Houte and Davids, 2009: 932). Unfortunately, it turned out that the international community has rashly assumed that most refugees and internally displaced persons would want to return to their pre-war homes (primarily in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then also in Croatia and Kosovo). However, a vast majority of refugees and displaced persons were not willing to return to their homes – at least not in the short-term and medium-term perspective – because of the fact that the circumstances in their narrow and broad social environment have changed completely. Hundreds thousands of persons with permanent refugee status chose to remain living in the western host countries, and many of the younger ones who had to return tried to get to third countries. Many of the houses they requested back and that were returned to them are put up for sale, replaced, rented or they remain empty. Thus, a vast majority of minority returnees are actually elderly persons who return to peripheral, rural places they originated from, where they can rely on a small state pension and agriculture for their own needs (Stefansson, 2006:120). There were attempts to explain the slow progress in increasing the number of minority returnees as evidence (in the narrow sense) that the conditions related to security and respect of human rights for these people were not fulfilled. Unfortunately, this was more or less true, but the causes of minority non-return were, as it was shown by more comprehensive analyses, much deeper and broader, and they included social and economic conditions, not to mention

irreversible political and state-related changes that actually effected a division of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Namely, “patterns of social inclusion – family and kinship support, neighbourhood and local community links, circles of friends and other social networks, such as those of the work-place – were disrupted. New patterns of exclusion emerged – with problems of unemployment, poverty and homelessness and with new status hierarchies, based on ethnicity, religion, war-time standing in the community and new socio-economic factors. Thus the decision whether to return was not a simple matter. Each individual’s decision was, and is, made for a different balance of reasons“ (Heimerl, 2005:380). It is, however, beyond doubt that sometimes a larger and sometimes a smaller share of a particular refugee corpus (depending on the reasons for their refugee status) truly felt homesick. However, as it is confirmed by our empirical findings, such refugees are ready to return, even under conditions that are far from optimal.¹⁰ But these are predominantly elderly, less educated people from rural areas. It is well known that educated and qualified people, younger working age people – in short people with greater social capital, who find themselves in a refugee situation, by far more frequently choose the option of becoming integrated in the host country or in a third country rather than returning to their country of origin. The consequence of this tendency to split the refugee corpus with respect to their perception of return is being partially compensated by transnational family and group strategies of durable or sustainable refugee solutions. Advocates of refugees and scholars have to dedicate due attention to these complex return processes (Bradley, 2008:287). Traditional understanding of return and home has lately been exposed to severe criticism of theoreticians and scholars who engage in research of migrations and refugees. Observing the returnees soon ‘unveiled’ a concerning tendency that many of them sooner or later and for different reasons opt for new migrations. It seems that it did not take long for the opinion to prevail that return is a complex, long-term process that goes in multiple directions, so that the care provided by responsible international and other organisations should not boil down to simple logistics for the returnees in assisting them in crossing the border back to their home country or even to re-settle in their homes.

10 A relatively larger number of Serb refugees returned to Croatia in earlier years when security, political, legal and social conditions were less favourable than they have been recently.

Barbara Harell-Bond (1989) was among the first to question the wish of the refugees to return home. Also, even if they do return, for some of them this need not signify the end of their refugee experience (Chimni, 2002). In many cases, return does not improve living conditions of persons who used to be refugees, so that the returnees feel compelled to move again, for various reasons. A deeper insight into their motives would disclose that a share of them (sometimes a larger and sometimes a smaller share) is not inclined towards repatriation (particularly if they fled to a developed country or the home country of their ethnic group), for various reasons (time spent as refugees, security, economic and political conditions in their homeland). They only opt for return if other permanent solutions are less feasible. It is especially the politicized groups of refugees that are prone to refuse return as a solution to their refugee status. Namely, the refugees “may be associated with previous regimes and attached to former ethnic and political elite structures, and thus be subject of hostility and jealousy” once they return (Blitz (2006:242)).¹¹ Return migration is often not a simple movement and not a final act.¹² Recent research has shown that return is ambivalent in the first as well as in later generations of both voluntary and involuntary migrants (Čapo, 2010:14). It is therefore now conceptualized in much broader terms – as a stage within a fluid migration cycle of spatial mobility (Eastmond 2006; Ruben; Houte and Davids, 2009:911). Scholars have pointed to various circumstances in which the refugees refuse return to their country of origin, among which the course of time is critical when it comes to the decision on refugee self-return. Experiences of past return operations have shown that in reality, return and re-integration do not happen as a “natural” act and that they do not take place in a continuity and without problems, and this is particularly true for post-conflict situations, but that these are complex processes prone to change in line with local circumstances (Eastmond, 2006:142-143). In case of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina or actually more or less in all post-conflict societies, return and reintegration take place in the circumstances of deep changes that involve transition into new economic and political systems. “From a

11 In Croatia, there is a prevalent opinion that in the socialist Yugoslavia, and even in Croatia, Serbs belonged to a privileged group of citizens (particularly within the police, the army and the Communist Party).

12 Can we say with certainty that an act of return is final, and not temporary? Not even refugees-returnees break up the connections with the country that hosted them during their time as refugees (Čapo, 2012:23).

perspective of the returnees, therefore, return and reintegration is a dynamic and contested process which means having to negotiate one's position in new context of power and inequality" (Eastmond, 2006:143). Studies have also revealed that the terms "home" and return to home, on which such endeavours are based do not always have the same meaning for the refugees themselves. Homeland communities and the returnees no longer share many of the basic concepts, on which their traditional culture was based. In addition, in the (post-)conflict countries there are more practical problems such as the loss of property, houses or land or weak economy that provides only a limited access to employment, social infrastructure and natural resources. In practice, most (Bosniak) returnees experience the return with a basic feeling of ambivalence. On the one hand, they have re-possessed their "small" home, and on the other hand their "large home" seems to be forever lost (Stefansson, 2006:125). T. Ghanem (2003:21) perceived the paradox of refugee return: "How can it be assumed that refugees are returning 'home' when the very reasons they left were that they did not feel 'at home' anymore?" In late 1990-ties, one began to question the idea that return would provide fulfilment, an ending to a cycle, a re-establishment of the pre-exile circumstances of the refugee's 'home'. Surveys of refugees who went 'home' shed light on the complexity of their experiences marked with economic, psychological and social difficulties (Muggeridge and Dona, 2006:415). One started to re-examine what was previously a basic assumption made by international and other actors interested in the return of involuntary migrants – the assumption that the returnees simply 'return home'. „The reality is much more complex, and is often related to the changed identity of the migrant and the changed context in the home country. Returning to a changed country, where social relations, political structures and economic conditions are not what they used to be may be equivalent to arriving in a new place" (Houte and Davids, 2008:1412). Based on this new understanding, 'home' is not a physical place, but it is a collection of social relations and cultural meanings (Bradley, 2008:158). Moreover, the very concept of 'home' is changed in a war. Returnees are often faced with a 'home' that has changed in its essence during the time they were absent, and it now requires a difficult process of integration into some new society. "Because the ideal of home is as much about the memory of customs, traditions or beliefs as it is about a physical place, it may be impossible to return 'home'.

Concern related to restoring a particular physical 'home' has been criticized as representing a "white"/First World take on things" (Ballard, 2010:491-92). In order to fully understand the complex reality of opportunities and obstacles to sustainable return, one needs to take a holistic approach. Obstacles and difficulties that the returnees are faced with are related to the causes of their becoming refugees in the first place. Instead of considering return migration as simple 'going home', it needs to be seen as an intrinsically transnational phenomenon because it takes place across national state borders (Houte and Davids, 2008:1425). "A growing number of studies show that return is not necessarily a single and definitive event and that returnees may need to secure options on different places. For those who return to post-conflicting situations, in particular, maintaining links with the outside world may act as an important safeguard." The author tries to prove that return can be better conceptualized as an open-ended process, which often takes place over a longer time period and may include periods where a person has two places of residence and moves a lot between the first and the second place of residence (Eastmond, 2006: 144).

War For The House

Criticism of the conventional repatriation policy was facilitated by the general atmosphere among scholars marked with the strengthening of post-modern thought that decentralizes and pluralizes perspectives, deconstructing all fixed concepts of identity, belonging and territorialisation. Thus the concepts of 'home' and 'homeland' in the context of refugees were attacked from the socio-constructionist (or deconstructionist) perspective, and the same attack was targeted at the non-differentiated concept of 'returnees' (Allen and Morsnik, 1994:7; Black, 2002), and finally at the very assumption that returning to a 'home', burdened by politics and various problems, would be devoid of all problems (Black and Gent, 2004:4). H. Malkki (1992:37) cannot accept that refugees are qualified as being 'uprooted' in the sense of not having the possibility to become 'rooted' somewhere else. However, it seems that numerous Western, and especially post-modern scholars forget that their concepts of fluid social-spatial relations cannot be automatically applied to (pre)modern societies and their way of life and experience of the

world, and even the experience of 'home'. Even in our case, we conceptually agree with their criticism of the traditional concepts of return and home with respect to some refugee groups or sections within those groups. There are, however, refugees or returnees whose socio-economic characteristics are indeed traditional. According to the insights we gained, their returnee 'behaviour' is closer to the traditional concepts of return to refugee homes. Andres Stefansson did, however, partly try to understand the traditional system of values of conflicted ethnic groups, particularly in relation to the house and home. In order for the readers to better understand the loss of home for the group he surveyed – the minority Bosniak returnees to Bosnia and Herzegovina – the author first gave a brief overview of the socio-cultural meaning of house and home (and this is more or less applicable also to other ethnic communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo). Without any exaggeration, one can say that house and household had a central place in the lives of people in pre-war Yugoslavia. People invested significant financial resources into their homes, and a great part of their lives to this endeavour. The home was a status symbol and a cultural value. Building a home was usually a long-term project that required large investment and huge engagement, often with a lot of personal work being dedicated to it. For many of these houses it can be said that they were built "with one's own hands". This is the source of such intense attachment to the home, which may be lacking in some other cultures (in relation to housing), where people are prone to easily and frequently change the place where they reside. The author points out the differentiation between the 'house' and the 'home'. The meaning certainly does not only boil down to a physical building, but it covers its position in a broader political and social context. „While in times of peace there usually, though not always, exists a positive connection between the house and its social surroundings which leads to a sense of „home“, in post-war settings radical transformations in the community and society beyond the confines of the house frequently cause a disconnect between house and home“ (Stefansson, 2006:123). In other words, for many returnees, repossession of their houses has not in itself given them back their 'homes' in this latter social sense. It is therefore no surprise that some refugees would more easily (re)construct their homes at new locations rather than in the place they originated from. In our opinion, Stefansson's conclusion is not quite founded. It helps to answer the question why (many) returnees decide to re-emigrate, but it neglects those

who – regardless of all obstacles – stay in their (partially) renewed ‘houses’, often despite the fact that they suffer social isolation. They are able to reconstruct ‘their home’, if in no other way than by living in their memories. After all, if his Bosniak returnees from Sweden, upon returning to their places of origin only perceived “houses” (and not their homes too), would they then come to die at their thresholds? And indeed, the most important motive for the return of old Bosniaks from their refugee life in Sweden was their desire to spend the final part of their life in places of their origin, and indeed to die and be buried there. This is a matter of their nostalgia for all the most important events in life related to their place of origin and their home (Stefansson, 2006:122-24). We do, however, agree with Stefansson that conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Kosovo can largely be characterized as the “war for the house”. We would rather say “war for the home though. One refers to the “war” that was waged by less violent means, for several years after the signing of the peace accords. Hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed or severely damaged during combats, but more or less also as a consequence of systematic mining or burning of homes that belonged to members of a different ethnic group. Abandoned homes that were not destroyed were occupied by the members of the majority ethnic group, mostly settlers who themselves were forced to leave their own homes (Stefansson, 2006:118). As it was noted by G. Tuathail and C. Dalman (2006:242) with respect to the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (and similar applies to Croatia): this was a war against homes on behalf of their idealized homelands. Therefore, they proposed that the term ‘domicide’ should be used for such destructions rather than ‘urbicide’. The prevailing logics of the domicide is deliberate destruction of a home, and its consequence is the plundering of multi-ethnic residential areas.

The term domicide was introduced by D. Porteous and S. Smith in order to describe „deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specific goals, which causes suffering to the victims“ (quote according to Tuathail and Dahlman, 2006:244). It is „intentional exercise of violence to destroy a particular type of spatiality: homes“. It is the “deliberate killing of home”. “This act is justified in the name of a greater good, a transcendent ideal or collective identity. It is an attack on human spatiality – the embedded social meaning and personal identity of place – and not simply on buildings, landscapes, ecologies and infrastructure.“ Destruction of the ‘home’ signifies

more than just damaged and destroyed residential buildings. It also relates to changes in the names of places, building of religious shrines of the new religious majority, and thus to changing the whole landscape of the home. Home and environment have personal meanings for people. Whereas the genocide negates life as the national, ethnic, racial and religious identity, the domicide negates life in its social and spatial context (Tuathail and Dahlman, 2006:244-46). Recently, scholars that conduct critical research of return issues are striving to overcome the traditional gap between refugee flight and their return as two completely separate migration stages. Therefore, the studies focus on the effect of exile on return (Farwell 2001; Rousseau et al. 2001); on return from the perspective of trans-national practices (Al Ali and Koser 2002; Moran-Taylor and Menjivar 2005; Sorensen 2003; Van Hear 2003); on return as a separate period in a migration series (Ossman 2004), and on the experience of visiting home (Barnes 2001; Israel 2000), that is on 'provisional return' (Oxfeld and Long 2004:9). Return is increasingly being perceived as a (long-term), open, complex and controversial process (Muggerdge and Dona, 2006:416).

EXILE

The conditions of living as refugees are rarely discussed, just like the reasons for and against return, and research in this field mostly relates to the western host countries that received the refugees. When it comes to Serb refugees from Croatia, they have for the major part fled to Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – to the territory of the Republika Srpska, although a significant share, particularly younger and more educated refugees later emigrated to more developed countries. It would be fully illogical to expect that their economic situation and perhaps even more the political situation in which they lived have not exerted an influence on their willingness and readiness to return. „The political rhetoric of the ruling Serb Democratic Party (SDS) in Republika Srpska around return process in Bosnia centred on the claim that Serbs did not wish to return to the Bosniak/Croat Federation, and the implication that all Serbs should live in one state“. Serb refugees from Croatia were faced with a similar pressure. First of all, „they were encouraged to move to the area of eastern Slavonia to bolster the Serb population there, and some were

also accommodated in Kosovo, where a similar logic of trying to legitimize control by populating the territory was also employed“ (Harvey, 2006:96). As a contrast to those who described exile as being in a state of limbo, Hammond (1989: 233) argues that refugees do not live in de-culturized liminal space, but that they are rather „people who maximize the social, cultural and economic opportunities available to them while in exile“ (Hammond, 1999, according to Muggeridge and Dona, 2006:427).

RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS

The international community expects that the return of refugees (at least to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia) would contribute to the process of reconciliation among ethnic communities, which were at war. It is believed that reconciliation will result in the healing of wounds, both in conflicted individuals and groups that mutually hate and distrust each other. Scholars have proposed a differentiation between the ‘thick’ and the ‘thin’ concept of reconciliation. The former assumes a full qualitative renewal of relations, mutual understanding and unity with respect to mutual past and future. Vital components of such a goal are the readiness to tell the truth and to forgive. The thin concept is naturally a less idealistic form of reconciliation, which relates to the open and fragmented process (rather than linear movement towards a harmonious goal). This concept boils down to “refraining from violence”, primarily by using legal accountability and settling of accounts. Many scholars and observers take the pragmatic stand of “peaceful co-existence”, by which they mean a certain realistic level of social interaction and cooperation between previous enemies (Eastmond, 2000: 4-5). For Marita Eastmond „social reconstruction (...) refers to these processes of (re)creating, in new circumstances, the social relations, identities and cultural meanings through which people in a post-war setting (re) connect to a particular place and community as ‘home’” (Eastmond, 2006:143). Although Bosniak repatriants mutually socialize and help each other as much as possible, a small number of permanent returnees and their relatively superficial interactions with local Serbs point to their largely lonely way of life in their houses. Isolation affects these people even more intensely due to the fact that

neighbourly relations (referred to as “komšilik” – a Turk loanword) traditionally used to be very intense and did not depend on ethnic or religious affiliation. It is becoming increasingly clear that the reconstruction of ethnically and politically fragmented societies disintegrated by the war is by far more complex and long-term process than it had seemed to international players (Stefansson, 2006:130). Even when a significant number of people return and manage to regain their property, the effect on ethnic mixing will at best remain limited. The evaluation of the support project for minority return (2004) to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as implemented by a Swedish agency, has shown that – despite the fact that financial assistance significantly improved the material conditions of return, it had not resulted in serious chances of a better future or in renewing the social trust among ethnic groups. In the conclusion, it is stated that “since interaction is so rare, it is even difficult to speak of integration, let alone of reconciliation” (Čukur et al. 2005:126). Except in rare cases, many minority returnees apply the strategy of giving up on returning to their homes, they sell their property and relocate to some other area where the members of their ethnicity make the majority, or they get involved in trans-local patterns of living, which provide them with most opportunities and keep their options open at different places (Eastmond 2006; Jansen 2007). However, not all researchers share the depressive pessimism regarding the renewal of inter-ethnic relations, at least in some return environments, although such renewal can be very gradual. Jansen (2007) discusses the issue of over-emphasizing some inter-ethnic relationships in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which actually leads to reproducing the very categories one strives to overcome, and to neglecting other relations of inequality such as class or gender inequality. He points to the fact of setting up forms of everyday relations where former enemies gather around common interests, without being necessarily motivated by moral issues around reconciliation. For practitioners and scholars who research reconciliation, it is more difficult to foresee such inter-relations, where no third parties or intervening incentives are involved (Eastmond, 2010:6). Bypassing ethnic hostility simply happens when people work together, particularly in large (urban) companies, as it was also highlighted by Paula Pickering (2006). In everyday life, people are more concerned with their existential struggles and with starting a new life than with (abstract) inter-ethnic reconciliation. Ethnographic research continues to point to the

fact that people, for instance in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina, primarily wish to restore “normal life” (Jansen 2007; Stefansson 2004). Paula Pickering (2006) analysed the role of mixed (urban) workplaces in the development of inter-ethnic social relations in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina.

V. Koska (2008:207) rightly emphasized that refugees are (implicitly) perceived as a “homogenous mass of needy and passive victims”. In his discussions with the Serb returnees as informants, the author arrived at interesting insights, which contest such a simplified and distorted perception of superficial observers. Despite the fact that at the first glance, it seems that these people are in a similar position and that they display similar inter-ethnic distrust, they have nevertheless developed various strategies to survive in a hostile environment, and the results of our qualitative research also confirm such a conclusion. On the one hand, a significant share of Serb returnees still has not managed to re-establish trust towards their local compatriot Croats, and this presents a great source of discomfort in their everyday life (Koska, 2008:205).¹³ On the other hand, „the younger generation seems to be more concerned with issues of economic insecurity and the poor material conditions found in Glina rather than ethnicity“ (Koska, 2008:204). People are connected by hard labour that they need to do together. Over time, other situations occur in which the relations are structured regardless of the ethnicity. Moreover, for young people, ethnicity is no (longer) an insurmountable obstacle to cooperation. „Rather, again, the underdevelopment of Glina and the lack of entertainment produce additional settings for cooperative actions, such as organisation of private parties. Ethnicity thus becomes a less relevant category, and does not perpetuate a feeling of exclusion from society“ (Koska, 2008:210). Koska concluded that his findings question the „often obvious reconciliation-reintegration nexus“. Namely, Chimni (2002:168) established that reconciliation has to precede reintegration. For him, reconciliation is a „consolidation of social relations between different population groups“, and reintegration „a process which enables formerly displaced people...to enjoy a progressively greater degree of physical, social, legal and material security“. Koska (2008:210) reached a different conclusion (but based on a smaller locality and a small

13 For refugees who still experience social exclusion and ethnic distrust “ethnicity remains an interpretative frame for perceiving social relationships in Glina” (Koska „ 208:213).

number of surveyed persons) that „it is possible to assume that for a significant number of Serb returnees in Glina things developed the other way around. The consolidation of social relations slowly evolved once the physical threat had been removed.” So, it seems realistic to expect that the renewal of functional social relations in everyday life of ordinary people would be an efficient way of bridging the differences and renewing trust (Eastmond, 2010:12).

SUSTAINABLE RETURN

When the international community finally understood that repatriation campaigns present no guarantee of durable return for many refugees, who often in reality do not stay and live in their home country and in their homes, one started speaking of ‘sustainable return’.¹⁴ An understanding was developed that ‘formal’ return is not enough: return had to be efficient or successful. Since the whole ‘sustainability’ discourse that originated from the field of environmental protection already became broadly used as a term that was close at hand, it was also applied to the return of the refugees and it resulted in a demand for ‘sustainable return’. As all other fashionable terms, this became the new orthodoxy in refugee (and migration) studies, but also in the refugee policy of the UNHCR and other international and civil society organizations, and this practically happened ‘over night’. But naturally, neither the term itself not the return policy have consequently become less controversial: the term only opened new issues and controversies, and it remained a slippery concept to this very day (Ballard, 2010:484, note 133). In simple terms, ‘sustainability’ is determined by the fact that (for some time) after the return, there is no repeated migration (Migration DRC, 2005:2). For the UNHCR ‘sustainability’ involves “a situation where – ideally – returnees’ physical and material security are assured, and when a constructive relationship between returnees, civil society, and the state is consolidated” (UNHCR, 1998). Even more complex approaches to the sustainability of return have been elaborated. First of all, they point to social and economic

14 On principle, the conventional term ‘durable’ return also assumed sustainability of this refugee solution, but it did not even try to examine or determine the conditions of this sustainability because, as we previously stated, return was perceived as a final act.

problems that the returnees are faced with or to their living conditions. This includes: safety, accommodation, employment, infrastructure and availability of state institutions and social services (schools, health system) (UNMIK and UNHCR, 2003:3). Black and Gent (2006) systematized three elements of sustainability: subjective perspective of returnees; objective conditions of return, and aggregate conditions in their home country. Western politicians wish to justify their repatriation policy with the claim that returnees may contribute to economic development of their area and their home country. Others argue that it can hardly be expected from returnees to contribute to economic development. „Rather, the opposite is true; returnees often form a burden on the household budget and put a higher pressure on already limited employment, health care and education facilities in the country of origin“ (Houte and Davids, 2008:1425). In one of its recent reports on return to South-Eastern Europe, the UNHCR (2004) warned that the returnees compete with local population to get hold of the often scarce resources. Sustainability of return may also be viewed from the standpoint of ensuring important rights for returnees. All people, including migrants and refugees, are entitled to return to their country of origin (simultaneously with the right to leave it), and this has been established already by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 13). However, this is ‘soft’ law that cannot be imposed to states without their consent. After the experience with ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, international organisations have strengthened this law through Dayton Accords, explicating it as the ‘right to return to one’s home’. Somewhat later, in Kosovo, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) formulated the ‘right to sustainable return’. It has been elaborated in the Manual for Sustainable Return from four aspects: a) security and freedom of movement, b) access to public services (public services, education, health care), c) access to a shelter (by means of efficient restitution of property or assistance in the reconstruction of houses), and d) economic options, by means of an equitable and equal access to employment opportunities (Black and Gent, 2006: 22-24). Within this model, even integration of returnees is primarily understood as their right. At least, this is how one can understand the claim that “there can be no hope of normalcy until the majority of displaced persons are able to reintegrate themselves into their respective societies” (UNHCR, 1997:162). However, integration is at

least a two-sided (or actually rather a multi-sided) process and it cannot be imposed to another (majority) ethnic community. Moreover, if it is imposed from the 'outside' as a unilateral right, it will not only remain formal, but it will cause resistance rather than reconciliation. Secondly, this requirement of "new orthodoxy" posed by the responsible authorities of the international community can unintentionally – although in good faith – inflict a different kind of injustice upon the refugees-returnees – denying them their right to permanent emigration (or to different forms of transnational semi-return) (Black and Gent, 2006:20). Dimitrijevic and collaborators believe that the UNHCR applies a (too) broad understanding of sustainable return, considering it synonymous with reintegration. Reintegration, on the other hand, is defined as "re-entry" of former refugees into social, economic and cultural structures of their community of origin (Dimitrijevic, et al, 2004:38). This definition of reintegration has become almost equal to adaptation to a dominant society, and little room was left for negotiations about the changed identity, position and interests of returnees in their home country.

Ruben and collaborators have probably developed the most comprehensive concept of sustainable return, and consequently we shall dedicate more attention to it. „In analytical terms we conceive return migration as a complex multidimensional process, and sustainable return migration is thus labelled as a process of mixed embeddedness, rather than reintegration. Embeddedness refers to the ways how individuals find and define their position in society, feel a sense of belonging and possibilities for participation in society. It consists of three interrelated dimensions: 1) economic embeddedness, referring to the material conditions for building sustainable livelihoods, 2) social network embeddedness, which supports access to and information on social contacts and relations, and 3) psychosocial embeddedness, which is important to construct one's identity, to feel at home, safe, and psychologically well“ (Ruben; Houte and Davids, 2009:910). Successful re-embeddedness in economic terms requires access to resources, opportunities and basic services in order to establish self-sustainable livelihood under the conditions of equal rights with other citizens. To be able to sustain one's livelihood is an important aspect of sustainable return. In practice, livelihood is gained by access to resources and services, such as income, work, housing, land, investments, transportation,

education and health care (Ruben, Houte and Davids, 2009:915). Social networks provide migrants with the sense of acceptance as the essential factor of embeddedness (Boekestijn). They are an addition to social capital, and crucial for obtaining information, sharing personal and intimate relationships with one's equals, and for discussing common beliefs and values. They help to reinforce psychosocial well-being as a part of maintaining one's identity. It is not only the quantity and frequency of individual relations that matter, but also their quality. Social contacts are becoming more valuable in terms of material and emotional support when they provide a kind of closeness, a sense of being able to rely on someone. In summary, social networks are crucial for understanding the way how returnees mobilize their resources, often across borders (Ruben, Houte and Davids, 2009:915). Psycho-social well-being refers to a possibility to express one's identity, to ensuring an individual's place in society and to setting up links to this society. Changes in the geographical and cultural environment may lead to dramatic changes of identity, in the sense of a series of new hybrid cultural forms combined from different cultures or rather the construction of a kind of a transnational identity. Loss of social structures, cultural values and self-identity may result in serious psychological disorders. Psycho-social well-being also depends on the security situation, particularly in the (post-)conflict countries. Finally, the differences in individual characteristics (excluding ethnic affiliation that – in our case – is common to all returnees) – such as age, social-economic background, marital status and refugee experience – influence how individual returnees experience return (Ruben, Houte and Davids, 2009:916-917). On the basis of two empirical studies, the authors conclude that return migration should be conceived as a continuous process that surpasses simple reintegration. Return process affects all dimensions of life, and it is influenced by a broad range of individual, contextual and psycho-social factors. The concept of embeddedness offers a suitable frame for covering these multi-dimensional aspects. If we neglect major individual and contextual differences, some common elements emerge. In the economic sense, most returnees manage to survive, but only a minority are able to build a sustainable livelihood. Many returnees are still very vulnerable and their chances of a better future are low. Access to expanded social networks has proven to be of immense importance for the returnees, as such social networks contribute to the feeling of belonging and strengthen the engagement

of returnees in their countries of origin. However, returnee's relations often do not surpass the network and the framework of family and friends. In the psycho-social sense, embeddedness of return migrants greatly depends on personal and contextual factors. Problems that relate to traumatic experience during the pre-migration period, the feeling of insecurity after the return and frustrating migration experience as refugees are prone to limit the feelings of belonging to the society of return (Ruben, Houte and Davids, 2009:932). Discussions about sustainable return are mostly reduced to individuals or their families. However, it is increasingly understood that return sustainability cannot be lowered to the level of an individual and to returnees themselves, but that it has to be conceptualized in an aggregate way, taking into account the dynamic consequences of return to economic and social trends in return areas and in the society as a whole. "Not only is it difficult for refugees and other migrants as individuals to simply go 'home', but return to countries of origin can contribute to a spiral of decline, whether through re-igniting conflict, through perpetuating inequality or abuses of rights or through economic hardship, which could stimulate greater levels of forced displacement in the future. In this sense, it is not only a question of how to make return sustainable, but how to make it sustainable on a community-wide basis and not just *for individuals*" (Black and Gent, 2006:32).

We agree with those who believe that sustainability of return can be strengthened by enabling the refugees to have the freedom of movement between the receiving country and the country of origin (Ballard, 2010:488-9). Moreover, there is the opinion that the maintenance of social networks between the country of refuge and the country of origin is a better incentive for return than any 'economic return package'.

Mesuring The Sustainability Of Return

It is easy to agree about the principle that return needs to be 'sustainable', but how to define and then 'measure' such sustainability is a much more difficult issue. In the Sussex pilot study for the Ministry of Interior of the United Kingdom on the voluntary return of refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, Black and collaborators (2004:39)¹⁵ defined individual sustainability

as follows: „Return migration is sustainable for individuals if returnees’ socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse, relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return”. Simpler approaches to ‘measuring’ return are conceptualized at the individual level of counting those who stayed (permanently), without re-emigrating. Even socio-economic indicators that describe the status of population are generally clear and mostly easily operationalized. But, when it comes to sustainability of refugee return, there is the issue of what it is compared to, or how it is measured. For instance, should returnees’ (un)employment be observed according to some absolute or relative standards? We will probably easily agree with the second proposal, but this opens a new question: Should the level of returnees’ (un)employment be compared to the situation in their country of refuge or in their ‘home country’, to which they returned. In the latter case – should it be compared to the national average, the average of a specific region or the very place of their return? Statistical data for the national level are usually well known, but data for other levels can rarely be established. Even if they are known, they relate to general population, whose demographic structure (according to age, education etc.) is often significantly different to the demographic structure of returnees (in terms of age, education etc.), which is more or less characterized by negative selection in this respect. How much time should pass after the return in order to be able to compare (un)employment between the returnees and the resident population? Should unemployed returnees be registered by the employment service? If this is the case – (and how else can they demand work, unless it is ensured in advance through return programmes) – is the average ‘waiting time’ for a job between comparable categories with respect to age and qualification at the employment service indeed the right reference indicator for returnee (un)employment? When it comes to Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, let alone less developed countries of origin, it can mean years of waiting with an uncertain outcome. How to ensure a ‘livelihood’ for the returnees throughout this time? One version of this socio-economic approach to return sustainability places an emphasis on the ‘livelihoods’. International organisations and sponsors define the ‘sustainability of livelihoods’ from their own perspective primarily as the ability of returnees to ensure sufficiently ‘robust’ livelihoods so that they can

15 This was, however, a very small sample of surveyed persons – only 30 for each country.

survive without help from the outside and overcome external shocks. Here, a question is opened whether one should consider remittances (made by family members or relatives) from the country of refuge or country of migration also as a form of ‘external’ assistance, or should they better be perceived as a matter of diversification (and trans-nationalization) in ensuring a sustainable ‘livelihood’? In addition, the issue of ‘measuring’ ‘return sustainability’ and its indicators pose another problem (that new approaches are trying to cope with). First of all, should one bear in mind the aggregate minority refugee corpus or just a share of them who wish to return voluntarily?¹⁶ Secondly, how should we know whether return was more successful if organised by international organisations as mass group repatriation or if it was left to individual refugees and their families who then have a greater role in deciding, but the return process can take longer? Thirdly, should one ‘measure’ return success for (a collection of) individual refugees (methodological individualism) or for returnee communities? How, in the latter case, should one determine the returnee (minority) community – at the level of a settlement, region or the entire ethnic corpus? Does not (permanent) sustainability of refugee return depend primarily on the relations to the other ethnic (majority) community (at the local and national levels)? If this is the case

16 All these are important conceptual and methodological issues, even more so because research ‘results’ may be deliberately or unintentionally manipulated, and this can be done either by researchers themselves or by those who ‘use’ their ‘data’. This is exactly what happened to empirical findings of our former research on the return of Serb refugees to Croatia. Namely, in the study entitled *Status and position of Serbs in Croatia, an indicator of the real state of play of human rights protection and the rights of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia*, its authors have ‘interpreted’ the results of our survey in a way that is obviously aimed to be used for political purposes. The ‘data’ that there are “about 60,000 Serb returnees who permanently live in Croatia (at the time of the research)” was stated relatively correctly. “When we compare this to 400,000 of Serb refugees who have abandoned Croatia, one arrives at devastating results” – conclude the authors (Džakula, V. *et al* (2008:6).

If we leave the ‘data’ on 400,000 Serb refugees aside, important issues are opened that point to the manipulation of ‘data’. In other words, such an ‘interpretation’ relies on a series of explicit or implicit (distorted) assumptions or claims:

- a) that there were indeed 400,000 Serb refugees from Croatia, but it is not said at which point in time;
- b) that they all sought refuge for the same reason;
- c) that they all have the same sentiments and the same relation to home and Croatia as their homeland;
- d) that there are no other (better) solutions for any Serb refugee from Croatia besides returning to Croatia;
- e) that all Serb refugees from Croatia have wanted to return to Croatia throughout the whole time they spent as refugees;

f) that until practically all 400,000 refugees returned (not counting the ones who passed away), the return process and Croatian government policy would be a (total) failure.

Finally, the fact that the copyright and the reference to the authors were severely violated shows that this was a deliberate manipulation. Namely, the above mentioned data on 60,000 Serb returnees who have permanently settled in Croatia is mentioned with reference to the “research conducted by the UNHCR, SDF and the Faculty of Philosophy in Zagreb”. On both editions of our report, which was published as a book in Croatian and in English, our names are mentioned as authors, both on the cover pages and on the internal title page. In the foreword by the representative of the UNHCR in Zagreb and in our Introduction, it is clearly stated that it is us – the authors – who are responsible for the concept and the results of research. The UNHCR commissioned and published the research. Under our names, we have published several publications on these same results, including in a renowned international scientific journal. The role of the SDF here consisted solely in the work of their volunteers, who – along with the volunteers from the Croatian Red Cross participated in conducting the surveys of the returnees (which is also stated in our acknowledgements).

	Physical	Socio-economic	Political security
Subjective perception of returnees	(Lack of) desire to re-emigrate	Perceived socioeconomic status	Perception of safety, security threats
Objective conditions of returnees	Proportion of returnees who (do not) re-emigrate	Actual socio-economic status of returnees	Actual persecution or violence against returnees
Aggregate conditions of home country	who (do not) re-emigrate	Trends in levels of emigration and asylum-seeking abroad	Trends in levels of persecution, conflict and violence

(this being just a rhetorical question), do we then have to ‘measure’ the social reconstruction of local and broader communities in return areas? How can one, however, ‘measure’ co-existence, and in relation to what: the state before the war, the state during the war or according to some arbitrary ‘standard’? R. Black and S. Gent propose to differentiate between narrow and wider indicators of sustainability. The former set of indicators answer a simple question – whether the returnees have re-emigrated after their return. The latter involves “both reintegration of individual returnees in their home societies, and the wider impact of return on macroeconomic and political indicators” (Black and Gent, 2006:15). Developing the methodology of measuring refugee return, Richard Black and collaborators (2004:25-27) established three types of sustainability in their pilot study on the problems of refugee return from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in the United Kingdom: physical, socio-economic and political security of returnees. Each of them may be viewed from three perspectives: a) subjective perception of returnees, b) objective conditions of returnees, and c) aggregate conditions of home country. By crossing the elements of these two dimensions, we arrive at the table of elements and potential measures of the sustainability of return.

However, scholars have themselves been faced with numerous difficulties in measuring such a complex concept of sustainability of refugee return. Over time, it is difficult to obtain a large number of different indicators for various dimensions. In order to operationalize the measurement of sustainability so that it becomes feasible, it is necessary to simplify the definition. Black and collaborators (2004:38-39) propose two definitions in this respect: one aimed at ‘individual sustainability’ and the other at ‘aggregate sustainability’.”Return migration is sustainable for individuals if returnees’ socio-economic status and fear of violence or persecution is no worse,

relative to the population in the place of origin, one year after their return“.

As opposed to that, “return migration is sustainable *for the home country or region* if socio-economic conditions and levels of violence and persecution are not significantly worsened by return, as measured one year after the return process is complete.“ In both cases re-emigration or the very desire to re-emigrate are just a useful *approximate* indicator for the sustainability of return.

TRANSNATIONALISM – TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL SPACE

Transnationalism or transnational social space is a new concept in social research. There is already a significant amount of literature and different conceptual versions of transnational approach to various social phenomena. It is not possible to open this discussion here, but we certainly want to point out that transnationalism as an approach or a perspective is also applied in the understanding of the process of refugee return, and at the same time it represents criticism of the traditional approach, which limited return to a simple relation between the receiving country and the country of origin. Regardless of big differences between various concepts of transnationalism, all of its versions have developed from the perception of socio-spatial relations that surpasses national social spaces as closed ‘container’ systems. From the traditional perspective, a (forced) migrant may be *either* in the country of refuge *or* in the country of origin. For our analytical needs, transnationalism in the broad sense is related to “the cultural, economic, and political linking of people and institutions [that] de-emphasizes the role of geography in the formation of identity and collectivity and creates new possibilities for membership across boundaries“ (Pries, 2005:169).

Often, we are not even aware that the concept of space is used across all fields of science, both in geographical and the societal sense. “Both terms, ‘social’ and ‘spatial’, refer to concepts people have of the world, which are employed in everyday and scientific practices, to orient, demarcate, differentiate and reduce complexity by giving meaning to various phenomena”. Therefore, “nothing societal can exist without the spatial dimension, and nothing that is spatial can lack the societal dimension(...). All forms of spatiality are societal, because they are constructed by human beings, either physically or mentally”. (Pries, 2005:170; 171) Also, all societal elements have the spatial

dimension and vice versa: all spatial concepts are societal constructions. Furthermore, the same author,) differentiates, among other things, between two opposed concepts of space: between the relativist and the absolutist approach. The combination of relativist societal space and relativist geographic space leads to what the author signifies as transnational societal space. In summary, the national society, embedded in the national state, is no longer a satisfactory concept for understanding social relations and particularly for understanding migration movements and processes. On the other hand, the author rightly pointed to the post-modern exaggerations when he emphasized that although societal relations, configurations and spaces have probably become more fluid, they cannot be simply disintegrated and vanish in 'global air' or simply become limited to cyber-space (Pries, 2005:173; 185.

In that sense, Stefansson (2006:126-128) speaks of 'transnational summer space' (and the stories of persons we surveyed, Serb returnees, provide a testimony of this phenomenon), with visually perceivable 'summer traffic' consisting of a large number of cars of prestigious brands and with foreign licence plates in places of return of minority Bosniaks, which for the most part remain practically vacant during the winter. There are various reasons why Bosniak refugees nevertheless hold on to their houses and their land in the place of their origin, despite the fact that they live somewhere else and are mostly not planning to return, at least not any time soon. The first reason is their emotional attachment to their houses that many of them have built "with their own hands". A share of them wanted or still wants to return, but the economic or social conditions have not been provided. Others wish to leave the option to return for some later and better times after they retire. In the meantime, the houses are used during the summer as suitable places of gathering for all the dispersed family members. Finally, there are both ideological and symbolic reasons for holding on to their houses. These houses represent powerful symbols of moral spite, ethnic pride and economic success abroad.

It seems that Marita Estmond (2006:141-42) insists the most on transnationalism as on the perspective for understanding the complexity, dynamics and openness or return processes. This author examines return strategies that the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina apply with a view to uncertainty that they are faced with, and she points to the transnational space, in which these strategies take place. "The return strategies described

are of different duration, often take place outside established policies and programmes, and are based on the need to keep options open in different places. While policies have tended to define refugee return as a single and definitive move to the country or place of origin, the transnational perspective suggests that return is better conceptualised as a dynamic and open-ended process, one which may be extended over long periods of time, involving mobility between places and active links to people and resources in the country of asylum. Transnational strategies also include the many refugees abroad who hold onto their repossessed houses in Bosnia and visit regularly, some of them for longer periods and in preparation for returning permanently at a later date. In such a transnational dynamic, refugees and returnees are not always clear-cut categories, as both may move between and combine resources at both ends. The transnational perspective also throws into question notions of 'home' as something bound to one particular locality or national community. If home is not just a place or physical structure, but also a site of social relations and cultural meanings, it may well extend to several places, each one of which may hold its own particular sets of relations and meanings to those concerned. This transnational dimension of home is thus a challenge to notions of 'repatriation' or 'return' in the simplistic mode. Instead, the reconstructed home may be translocal, where each locality becomes part of a new home. Rethinking the return of refugees in terms of transnational mobility and belonging also suggests new ways of conceptualising the potential for the reconstruction of a large refugee population abroad" (Eastmond (2006:141-2).

The traditional refugee policy perceives return as a durable solution in the sense of a non-recurring ultimate goal. In practice, however, the refugees themselves, tend to find more flexible and at the same time more sustainable solutions, trying to use resources at various places, which sometimes requires (occasional) movement between those places. Eastmond (2006:147-48) differentiates between two types of return strategies, which are not mutually exclusive. Both suggest that return can be extended over a longer time period, with family members dispersing to various places, and with individual members moving back and forth. Within the first category, individuals and households are trying to establish a "base" in their country of origin, which is as permanent as possible, and after returning they keep up active connections and remain mobile in the sense of going abroad, particularly to the country of refuge. In

this way, these returnees become “transnationals at home”. The second category includes persons whose return is more temporary-based, through regular visits or longer stays, who at the same time keep their main residence in the country of asylum. There, as residents abroad, they remain connected to family members and relatives in the country of return. Such occasional visits may also imply an option of permanent return in future. Both categories of open return rely on the guaranteed possibility to continue to reside in the country of asylum. Paradoxically, gaining citizenship in the country of asylum makes return (to Bosnia) a more promising option, because there is this possibility to withdraw in case of failure. In return, relatives at home help family members who live abroad by supervising their property and taking care of their interests in the homeland, by assisting them in maintaining contacts to the authorities etc. Such mutual support fortifies extended family relations, and it has not only material, but also symbolic implications. Finally, occasional visits and maintenance of transnational social ties are a good pledge for an easier return in future, if other conditions for such return are fulfilled (Eastmond, 2006:155). We quoted this author extensively because she elaborated the transnational approach to return sustainability concisely and systematically. Moreover, we agree with her with respect to most her conclusions, except with a view to one possible implication that can be derived from them. We have no objections to her criticism of the conventional approaches in the sense of their limitations and insufficiency. In the conventional approaches, return is exclusively understood as a definitive act of re-settling in the ‘original’ socio-spatial location. This approach, however, emphasizes the dynamics, the incompleteness, trans-territoriality or the transnationality of returnee networks. We disagree, however, with Eastmond and similar opinions, if they reject any applicability of the conventional approaches in general, and if they negate (or at least neglect) the symbolic meaning of ‘home’ as a unique place for many refugees-returnees, and by that also the importance of repatriation or return. So, we propose that the transnationalism as a framework for understanding (a part) of returnee processes is accepted as an extension of the conventional approach to refugee return, but not as its exclusive alternative. This possibility of mutually complementing approaches is what we are trying to demonstrate in the analysis of our research results. Many of our examinees, Serb returnees to Croatia, have mentioned numerous examples of transnational connections to the members

of their narrow and extended families. It has been confirmed beyond doubt that a certain type of refugees-returnees (the elderly, uneducated, rural persons) is oriented towards return in the traditional sense, and a significantly smaller share of permanent returnees among young, educated and active people points to their different strategies in resolving their refugee status (Eastmond, 2006:143).

RESTITUTION AND RETURN

Any discussion on the issues of refugee return from the standpoint of international refugee law should bear in mind that, traditionally speaking, the right to return was not applied to the demands of a larger number of persons who were displaced *en masse*. In the face of such forced mass displacement, one sought for a political solution. For this discussion, this is relevant from both legal and political perspective, since Serb refugees from Croatia are not refugees as defined by the Convention, whose asylum status (except maybe in rare cases) is based on the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees in the sense of them being personally persecuted on the basis of (in this case) their ethnic or religious affiliation. In that sense, they are refugees *en mass*. This does not contest the forced character of their displacement from their homes and their homeland or the injustice that was inflicted upon them, but we only refer to their international legal status, which is – on the other hand – the basis for their rights, as guaranteed by the Convention. This does not, on the other hand, mean that the refugees do not deserve protection from the humanitarian standpoint and that the international community should not support them in their right to return, because this is a guaranteed right in the context of the right to free movement of persons across borders in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

In addition, the right to return has – up until recently – been understood in the sense of returning the refugees to their countries of origin, and not necessarily to their (specific) homes. The weakness of the international refugee law (as soft law), the interest of developed European states that received large contingents of mass refugees, primarily from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and efforts of the international community to reconstruct and stabilize the post-conflict multiethnic societies (in Bosnia and Herzegovina,¹⁷ Croatia and Kosovo), presented important reasons for ‘upgrading’ the international refugee law. The right of all returnees

and internally displaced persons to return was reinforced already by the Dayton Accords, where it was specified as the right to return to their homes. In addition, it was necessary to create an adequate international legal framework that would explicitly support return to home. The UNHCR's Sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities adopted (in 1998) a resolution entitled „Housing and property restitution in the context of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons”. This served as the basis for numerous resolutions and reports, which followed, endorsing the right to return to the home of origin and providing an incentive for setting up efficient mechanisms for the restitution of homes and property (UNHCR, 2002, 2004).¹⁷ The key document for the new understanding of the right to refugee return was formally (in 2005) adopted by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, after two years of difficult discussions, and it was entitled *Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons*. It elaborated legal and technical issues related to the restitution for persons who were forcefully and illegally displaced from their properties. This document is usually referred to as the Principles or the Pinheiro Principles, entitled after their Brazilian author Sérgio Pinheiro, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.¹⁸ Since then, the United Nations officials and other political actors in the field of refugees have been linking the right to return with the right to property restitution. Scholars and humanitarian workers perceive this recent focus on property restitution as the means for depoliticizing voluntary return (Philipott, 2005:10; Ballard, 2010:466). The Pinheiro Principles stipulate that the „states shall demonstrably prioritize the right to restitution as the preferred remedy for displacement and as a key element of restorative justice”. Moreover, the right to property restitution to the refugees is asserted regardless of their return. “The right to restitution

17 On the one hand, the authors of the Dayton Peace Accords approved a factual division of the country, and on the other they tried to remedy the results of ethnic cleansing by wanting to make it possible to refugees and displaced persons not only to exercise their Conventional right to return to their home country, but to make it possible to return to their particular homes (Heimerl, 2005:378).

18 See the Guiding Principles on International Displacement (1999), which were issued by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General.

19 Experiences, particularly of minority returnees to Bosnia and Herzegovina have double significance for the creation of the Principles. On the one hand, it was the very problems and initial failures of minority return that have encouraged the international community to conceive and adopt the Principles, and on the other hand, most of its energy and resources were invested into the application of the Principles and in the return process that ensued (Ballard, 2010:468). However, this role of the new 'return model' was not devoid of political and theoretical controversies.

exists as a distinctive right, and is prejudiced neither by actual return nor non-return of refugees and displaced persons entitled to housing, land and property restitution.“ (Pinheiro Principles, 2005:9). The Pinheiro Principles on the right to property restitution invoke international law. They definitely rely on the previously existing right to return to the country of origin for all persons who abandoned it, and which is defined by the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, but one should bear in mind that the Declaration is non-binding law for its signatories. Later, the UN resolutions only re-asserted this right. However, although this right has been firmly established, it does not necessarily result in the right to restitution. Also, the „human rights principles do protect housing; however, this right to housing is not expressly related to ownership interests in any particular housing“ (Ballard, 2010:479; 482).²⁰

Advocates of the Principles claim that property restitution strengthens the rule of law in post-conflict societies, which in return creates conditions for economic and social stability (Ballard, 2010:483-84).²¹ Housing care and property restitution are understood as a prerequisite for success and sustainability of mass return movements (Stefansson, 2006:116-117), for the building of peace and deterring from revenge. The application of the Principles as the rule of law strategy was also aimed at depoliticizing the return issue.²² Namely, it turned out, that politicization of return was one of the key obstacles to a more successful minority return of refugees to Bosnia and Herzegovina.²³ Instead of the political discussion on the causes of refugee processes and their culprits, one simply started to insist on the right of every individual to legally and legitimately demand the restitution of own property by using an impartial and routine procedure, which is available to everybody, and no country that calls itself democratic may (publicly) contest this, but it has to assume responsibility for ensuring equality of all its citizens before the law (Williams, 2006:47). Thus, ethnic affiliation of returnees ceased to be

20 In the mentioned publication, the author Megan Ballard thoroughly and critically discussed other possible foundations for the Principles from the perspective of the international law.

21 This claim has its rationale in the fact that the insecurity of property rights in various parts of the developed world prevents people from turning resources into capital.

22 In Bosnia and Herzegovina, implementation and supervision of the property restitution as guaranteed by the law was conducted by the international agencies that gathered around the project entitled Property Law Implementation Plan (Williams, 2006:45-48).

23 Still, even Ballard (2010:481) agrees that the initial restitution programme in Bosnia and Herzegovina did not succeed because it was overly politicized. The return process is by far more productive due to the change of the focus of the international community on the rule of law.

a matter of primary focus. It is important to emphasize that the refugees to whom their property was restituted are left with a choice of whether to return or not. In addition, here we agree with the Williams's opinion (2006:40) that it was precisely this possibility that contributed to the success of the restitution process at least as much as the public acceptance of the rule of law, if not more.

Some theoreticians cannot accept the interpretation, according to which the international law ensures the right to property restitution. "There are a number of flaws in the legal and theoretical bases underlying restitution as a remedy for mass forced displacement" (Ballard, 2010:478). Others emphasize that the right to 'domicile return' is a precedent in the international refugee law (Heimerl, 2005:378). Moreover, they believe that the justification of ownership restitution by invoking the right to return blurs other means of assistance that victims of forced displacement might actually prefer, such as compensation, instead of return to 'home'. They openly criticize the international community and local players that they – by emphasizing property restitution – actually avoid being confronted with more complex political issues. It is now the 'home', instead of real living conditions of displaced persons, that has become the measure of success of return (Ballard, 2010:482-93). Nevertheless, the critics do not openly claim that the Pinheiro Principles directly violate international norms. "However, the right to property restitution following displacement caused by armed conflict should be viewed as a new right based on the evolution of international law, rather than one firmly grounded in international law" (Ballard, 2010:483).

For our discussion and research, it is of crucial importance whether and to which extent the restitution of property to refugees has encouraged their return. At least when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, scholars mostly agree that the results are at best partial.²⁴ It turned out that the access to property was not the only or – in many cases – not the main obstacle to return. Problems with respect to safety and discrimination, lack of educational and employment opportunities and the passage of time: all this had a negative impact on the desire and readiness of displaced persons and refugees to return (Philpott, 2005:17). M. Čukur (2005), after conducting his field

²⁴ One ought to say that there are authors that assess property restitution in itself as a positive factor for minority return (Williams, 2006).²⁵ The author even claims that the restitution rates have become goals in themselves. Moreover, various stakeholders did exert pressure for the statistics to show a continuous trend of increase, and they displayed their dissatisfaction when it was necessary to revise the rates downwards in order to correct the inaccuracies (Philpott, 2005:18).

research, drew a radical conclusion: that for most minority refugees, the issue of their property alone had only a minor influence on their decision to return, because the house loses much of its significance without the broader context of social relations that make it a 'home'. In other words, return cannot be sustainable without an acceptable economic and social base. According to the data collected by the International Crisis Group, around three quarters of pre-war owners returned to their renewed houses in Bosnia and Herzegovina. But in every third case, it was only some family members who did that. Each fifth renewed house was found empty. It is obvious that only older family members return to their homes permanently, and this is mostly in villages where they can live off agriculture for their own needs, and the poorest and socially vulnerable persons who have no other options but to return. School children remain in the country of resettlement or they are sent back to the areas populated by their ethnic majority (Heimerl, 2005:386). It should be admitted that the international community invested large efforts to promote return, but bringing uprooted persons physically back to their homes is only half of the task of re-creating a functional multi-ethnic society. The second half includes providing incentives for creating conditions, in which returnees, and particularly minority returnees may survive and become reintegrated in their old/new communities. With restituted homes, potential returnees base their decisions to return on employment opportunities, on their assessment of the security situation, on the opportunities for their children to receive decent education, on the provision of basic public services, receiving a pension, health care and other social benefits. The international community that engaged in a multi-sided political offensive to support minority return in the physical sense, now seems to lack the attachment to the objective of ensuring its sustainability. Economic fragility of a country (in this case Bosnia and Herzegovina) limited the success of such a policy. In the opinion of Daniele Heimerl (2005:384-85), it is wrong to force minority return to areas where these returnees remain socially and economically isolated. It makes more sense for people to move freely in areas where there are economic opportunities, irrespective of their domicile return. In the context of everything mentioned above, there are reasons for concern about the sustainability of the return process in the sense of reviving the genuine multi-ethnic communities. Besides, the restitution does not annul ethnic cleansing. Therefore, return

and property rights may be components in the reconstruction of the post-war economic and social stability, but restitution in itself does not seem to be sufficient (Ballard, 2006:476; 491). A lot of this speaks in favour of the conclusion that the return of pre-war property does not equal the restitution of the pre-war situation, particularly with respect to the lack of equal opportunities for the returnees and a genuine reintegration of returnee communities. If the overall objective of return is not only to reverse ethnic cleansing, but also to help renew a genuine multiethnic society, then it is necessary to re-examine the quality of return. It depends on the creation of conditions that would provide minority returnees with a possibility to survive and prosper within their previous communities (Heimerl, 2005:384; 386). It should be also taking into account that a considerable part of the returned land remains uncultivated and therefore is not in function of economic development of the returning country. Here we should emphasize that former tenancy rights used to be a kind of a socialist semi-legal institution, but even then they were not identical with private ownership. In any case these former rights have got no support in the new revision of the international refugee law. At the same time minority refugees from Croatia did suffer injustice in relation to majority population, what we discussed in the chapter dealing with political and legal framework for minority return. Yet, the state of return can recognize former tenancy rights to returnees as humanitarian (compensatory) right. Ever since the beginning, the international community admitted that other measures would be necessary as well in order to ensure sustainable return. But, this is, naturally, a more difficult and complex challenge. It has certainly been simpler to rely on the physical property restitution, which is undoubtedly crucial for return, and where it is easy to identify the pressure points (that is the state institutions), and where it is easy to measure progress. “Real or sustainable return was much harder to plan for and achieve, almost impossible to measure, and would, inevitably be significantly lower in absolute numbers“ (Philpott, 2005:18)²⁵.

Ballard (2010:495) emphasizes that nobody disputes that repatriation and restitution signify the beginning of a long process of re-building social ties in the homeland communities in order to encourage reconciliation and re-

25 The author even claims that the restitution rates have become goals in themselves. Moreover, various stakeholders did exert pressure for the statistics to show a continuous trend of increase, and they displayed their dissatisfaction when it was necessary to revise the rates downwards in order to correct the inaccuracies (Philpott, 2005:18).

establishment of a multi-ethnic society. But the very strategy that focuses on the restitution process with the aim of depoliticizing the return may undermine the efforts to develop broader programmes to support reintegration. Without a more integral infrastructural and reintegration programme, the level to which the restitution may contribute to post-war rule of law, reconciliation, national reconstruction and sustainable social and economic stability is limited.

Many things can be said in favour of property restitution as the means for healing the wounds of mass displacement caused by wars. There is, however, the apprehension that its benefits might blind the international community so that it no longer perceives its limitations and the unwanted consequences. Besides, the Pinheiro Principles regulate a uniform restitution process, which was primarily conceived by the Westerners, starting from the western understanding of ownership, legal procedures and law enforcement (Ballard, 2010:495).

Our findings and interviews with minority returnees to Croatia undoubtedly speak in favour of the importance of the right to property restitution and of the efficient enforcement of this right as the key prerequisite for their physical return. For them (as potential returnees), the formal status of property restitution within international refugee law is less important. On the other hand, it was confirmed that the restitution is not sufficient even for the real physical return of a significant share of mostly younger, urban and more educated Serb refugees from Croatia. For them there is still the issue of return sustainability if this is not accompanied by the prospects of economic development and social integration.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

– PRESENCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To meet the specific research goals, field research was carried out on a stratified random sample of returnees registered in the registry at the competent ministry and on the sample of former occupancy rights holders provided with housing care within the housing care program.

The registry of returnees comprises altogether 130.220 returnees¹, 1402 of which were selected on the sample through a random sampling method. The subsample of registered returnees was further stratified into two subsamples according to the time of return – earlier returnees (those who have returned before the end of 2004) and later returnees (those who have returned from the beginning of 2005 onwards). The sample comprised 1000 earlier returnees and 402 later returnees. This ratio is not representative of the actual ratio in the returnee population (the percentage of later returnees in the actual population is only around 8%), however, overrepresentation of later returnees was necessary for the comparison of results of this subsample with the results of the earlier returnee subsample. During the evaluation of overall results with regard to presence, adequate weighting factors (ponders) were applied to achieve the actual ratio between the earlier and later returnees in the overall population.

In addition to the time of return, the returnee sample was stratified also by

¹ It is possible that some returnees are registered more than once in the database, however, the percentage of such cases is not bigger than 1%.

region and size of settlement. The sample was stratified in two stages:

– In the first stage, the sample was stratified by the region of return. In total, eight regions were defined using the combination of two criteria: division of the country into six traditional regions and whether the area was occupied or unoccupied during the war. The division into six traditional regions was chosen as it corresponds quite well with the level of involvement in war conflicts and specific political differences, all of which represent elements significantly influencing the conditions for the return of Serb refugees. The second criterion was chosen because it correlates largely with the ethnic composition of settlements before the war and overall consequences of the war (material, social and political). Thus, eight regions were formed in total: occupied parts of Slavonia; unoccupied parts of Slavonia; occupied parts of Lika and Banovina; unoccupied parts of Lika and Banovina; occupied parts of Dalmatia; unoccupied parts of Dalmatia; Central and Northern Croatia; Primorje and Istria.

– In the second stage, the sample was stratified by the size of the settlement of return. Settlements were classified, according to the 2001 census, into four categories: up to 500 inhabitants, from 501 to 2000 inhabitants, from 2001 to 10,000 inhabitants and above 10,000 inhabitants. Further stratification of urban settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants was not relevant since the percentage of returnees in such settlements is relatively small (around 5%).

Thus, 32 strata were formed. From each stratum a sample was selected, proportional to the percentage of the stratum in the overall returnee population, using the random sampling method administered by computer software.

The registry of former occupancy rights holders who have applied for housing care comprises 34,599 persons, out of which 16,288 with positively resolved applications: 14,704 of them have been provided with housing care while the remaining 1,584 were still waiting for a suitable housing facility at the time the research was launched. Only persons with positively resolved applications and persons provided with adequate housing care were considered for the sampling frame. Since the registry included all members of a household (the number of household members was used as the basis for determining the size of the substitute housing facility), only the heads of households - 6,323 of them - were selected to the sampling frame (based on specific markings in the registry). From such a selective database, the sample of 400 respondents was drawn.

Data collection process was divided into two phases given two relatively independent research goals (life conditions of returnees and number of registered returnees permanently living in the place of return). Firstly, the current location, or at least the country, of the permanent residence was established for each selected returnee. After that an elaborated structured interview was conducted with returnees who were confirmed as permanently living in the place of return. In the event that the selected respondent was not present at the given address (permanently or temporarily absent or deceased), a detailed interview was conducted with other members of the same household if there were any household members living at the given address.

Research instruments were constructed taking into account these factors. Research instruments comprised two basic documents:

- Form for absent returnees, where interviewers recorded the outcome of the contact with each respondent and the information collected from informants on a returnee's place of residence in situations when returnee was not found in place of registration, the frequency of visits, the condition of the house etc.

- Main questionnaire for collecting information on the conditions of life and satisfaction with life after the return from returnees who were found at the address given during registration.

Arriving at the address the selected returnee has announced during registration, the interviewer was first to establish whether the person lived at that address or at least in the same settlement. In the event that, based on information provided by other household members, neighbours or other informants, it was established that the selected respondent did not live permanently in the given settlement, the interviewer filled out the form for absent returnees with the help of an informant. In the event that the selected respondent did not live permanently at the given address, but other members of his/her immediate family did, one of the members of the immediate family was interviewed and a form for absent respondents was filled out for the person selected in the sample.

If the interviewer found the respondent at the given address, a structured interview was carried out with him/her based on the main questionnaire. On average, an interview took 40 minutes. Interviewers were instructed, whenever possible, to carry out the interview without the presence of a third person. This rule could be overlooked only with questions relating to the whole household as

the randomly selected respondent did not necessarily have to be fully informed about all data relating to the whole household.

In the event the selected respondent refused to participate in an interview, the interviewer also recorded that in the interviewer's diary. Should another member of the same household also refuse to participate, the interviewer was to check with that member or with neighbours whether the selected respondent lived at the given address permanently. If the address was confirmed, a final refusal was recorded in the diary, while in the opposite case such a returnee was entered into the form for absent returnees. In the event the interviewer failed to find the respondent confirmed by neighbours or members of the household as living at the given address after three visits, the interviewer was to abandon further attempts at finding him/her, which was also recorded in the interviewer's diary.

The main questionnaire was answered by 638 respondents, 500 of which were selected from the registry of registered returnees and 138 were former occupancy rights holders provided with housing care.

The margin of error in the realized subsample of 1402 registered returnees is +/-2.6%, and in the subsample of former occupancy rights holders of 399 persons +/-4.8%. The sample error for the results obtained in the main questionnaire is around +/-3.8%.

Interviewing and data entry was done by the Ipsos Puls agency in accordance with ISO standards to which this agency conforms.

The research methodology and instruments were approved by the Ethics Commission of the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb.

FORMAL AND REAL RETURN

As we have mentioned in the introductory chapters, one of the basic motives for this study was the need expressed by the UNHCR to establish the trend of physical presence of formally registered returnees, starting from the initial indicators established in the first study conducted in late 2006. Since then, a new contingent of a relatively small number of returnees arrived, and earlier returnees experienced some political, economic and social changes during the four years between two pieces of research. The first research established the situation at a given moment, and only by means of repeated research was it possible to outline a specific tendency with respect to the permanency of the stay of minority returnees in Croatia. However, we will immediately discard as unacceptable any attempt to extract any long-term projections out of this established trend based on two phases of research. As we have outlined in our theoretical introduction, our basic starting point was that return is a dynamic process, and as such it can change the paths of development.

Data collected in this new research show that every third returnee selected from the data base of registered returnees lives in Croatia, more or less on permanent basis² (real or permanent returnees), of which around 83 percent reside in the place where they registered their return, and the remaining 17 percent live elsewhere in Croatia³. Around 15 percent of registered returnees passed away before the time of conducting the research⁴, whereas for about 39 percent, it was established that they live outside of Croatia⁵ (formal returnees), of which the majority (70%) lives in Serbia (Table 1). Among those for whom we collected information that they live outside of Croatia, there are certainly some who have passed away (but our informants have no information on that), so that the real number of registered returnees who passed away is certainly larger, and the number of those who live outside of Croatia is smaller than the established number. For about 13 percent of the selected sample of returnees,

2 Between 30.6% and 35.4%, taking into account the sampling error of 2.4%.

3 In this research, we decided to change the way of presenting the data on the presence in comparison to the presentation we used in the previous research. This time, we counted any returnees that live anywhere on the territory of the Republic of Croatia as being present, whereas in the previous report, their presence was based on the fact that they lived in the place where they were registered upon return. In order for the data to be comparable in this report, we are presenting the data from the former research in a way that is comparable.

4 Between 13.0% and 16.6%, taking into account sampling error of 1.8%.

5 Between 36.2% and 41.2%, taking into account sampling error of 2.5%.

it was not possible to collect reliable data on the place of their stay. It is that group that makes it difficult to make precise estimates of the proportion of real returnees, and on the other hand the number of formal returnees who more or less do not continuously live on the territory of the Republic of Croatia.

The vast majority (60%) of all respondents, for whom we did not manage to gather reliable information are returnees to urban areas. This relates to one third of all respondents from middle-sized towns (between 10,000 and 100,000 inhabitants), and to some 45 percent of returnees from larger towns (more than 100,000 inhabitants). In rural settlements with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants, a share of those, for whom no reliable information could be gathered is significantly smaller, below 10 percent. Such a result is understandable in view of the larger (internal) migrations of the population and weaker links to one's neighbourhood in bigger urban areas. Along with everything mentioned above, refugees from urban areas were mostly former occupancy and tenancy right holders or tenants, which means that at the moment of their return, they did not own any property, at which address they could have registered their return. Therefore, they were forced – at the moment of registration – to register either at the address where they resided before the war, although this property was no longer available to them, or they could list someone else's address. This is confirmed by subsequent comparison of data for this group with the data base of former occupancy and tenancy right holders who were provided with accommodation. It was found out that around 10% of these returnees resolved their housing issue, but obviously at a different address than the one they registered upon return. All this led to the mentioned result, which means that the level of reliability of the results of this research is lower for larger urban areas.

Assuming that the status of returnees, for whom we did not manage to collect reliable data on the place of their (more or less permanent) residence, shows a similar distribution as the status of those for whom we managed to collect data one could conclude that about 38 percent of registered returnees lived on the territory of Croatia at the time of conducting the research, that

6 The estimation that the share of returnees who passed away amounts to 17% is their minimum estimated percentage, because surely some of those persons, for whom our informants claimed that they lived abroad and that they rarely visit, have surely passed away, and therefore the estimate of 45% of absentees represents the upper limit of this estimate.

at least 17 percent passed away in the meantime, and that no more than 45 percent lived outside of Croatia⁶. Real ratios are probably between those that were established for the whole sample and the ones that were calculated by excluding from the analysis those returnees for whom no reliable data were found⁷.

When the data are compared to the data obtained in the last research, one notices that the share of registered returnees who (more or less) permanently reside in Croatia reduced by about five percentage points⁸. This reduction is, on the one hand, the consequence of the portion of older returnees who passed away, and on the other hand of re-emigration of a number of returnees. The share of returnees who passed away increased from about 11 percent to about 15 percent⁹. Such a result could have been expected given the unfavourable age structure of returnee population that was established both in the previous and in this research (see the next chapter). Due to such age structure, and the slowing down of returnee flows, this trend is expected to continue in future. The number of registered returnees who reside outside of Croatia has also increased by 3.5 percentage points¹⁰. One ought to, however, note that the share of those who permanently reside in Serbia reduced (from about 82% of absentees to about 70%), and the number of those who live outside of the territory of the former Yugoslavia increased. This leads to a conclusion that the reduction in the number of real returnees is not (primarily) a consequence of return to the receiving country, but of their renewed migration.

A comparison of the results from these two pieces of research points to other migration flows among the returnee population, which confirm our assumption on return being characterized as a process. Among real returnees in the period of four years, the number of those who reside in the place where they registered their return (which is mostly the same place that they originally fled from) reduced, whereas the share of those who live in other towns (areas) of Croatia increased. This points to spontaneous internal migrations of the returnee population, mostly in pursuit of employment. A similar process can be noticed among those who live outside of Croatia. Namely, among the absent (formal)

7 This means that the number of returnees who live in Croatia ranges between 33% and 38%, the number of dead between 15% and 17%, and the number of those who live outside of Croatia between 39% and 45%.

8 The change is statistically significant: $t=2.79$; $df=2850$; $p<0.01$.

9 The change is statistically significant: $t=2.86$; $df=2850$; $p<0.01$.

10 The change is statistically significant: $t=1.99$; $df=2850$; $p<0.05$.

returnees, the number of persons who live in developed western countries increased significantly (from about 10% to 23% of formal returnees), and the number of persons who live on the territory of former Yugoslavia decreased. This means that in the meantime, some of the formal returnees have emigrated to more developed countries. Inclination towards migration is probably higher among the (former) refugees than in the remaining population, given the well-known fact that persons who were once moved from their place of residence more easily make the decision to migrate again.

Table 1 – Presence of the returnees – comparison of results of previous and new research, and analysis of data for 2010 by regions

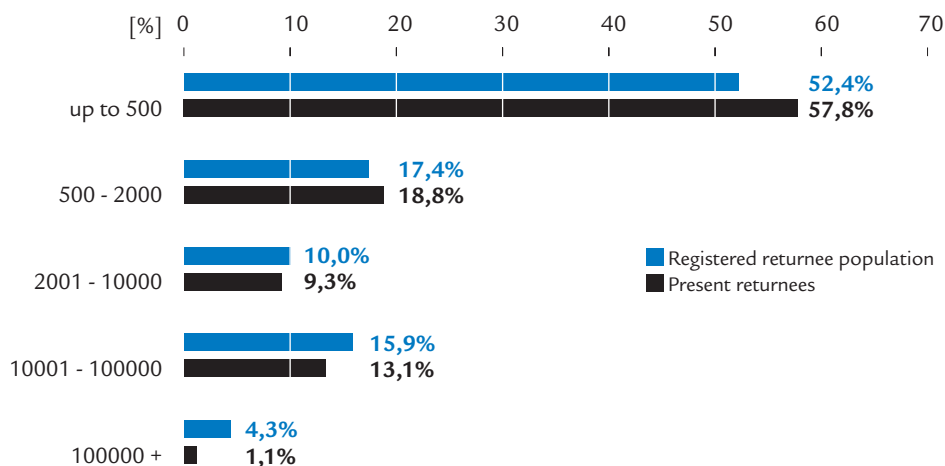
	Comparison between two pieces of research		Results for 2010 by regions			
	2006	2010	Slavonia	Lika, Kordun and Banovina	Dalmatia	Other parts
n	1450	1402	172	596	520	114
Living in Croatia	38,3%	33,2%	39,3%	37,2%	28,0%	19,9%
a) At the registered address	90,8%	82,8%	72,5%	85,8%	84,6%	70,9%
b) Elsewhere in Croatia	9,2%	17,2%	27,5%	14,2%	15,4%	29,1%
Dead	11,2%	14,8%	11,3%	18,7%	10,5%	15,7%
Living outside of Croatia	35,1%	38,7%	40,1%	32,9%	48,1%	29,8%
a) Serbia	82,3%	70,0%	48,6%	75,4%	74,2%	52,7%
b) Elsewhere on the territory of former Yugoslavia	7,3%	7,5%	12,2%	9,1%	2,5%	19,5%
c) Other countries	10,4%	22,5%	39,2%	15,5%	23,3%	27,9%
No reliable information	15,4%	13,3%	9,3%	11,2%	13,4%	34,7%

The inclination towards permanent stay is not the same among the registered returnees from various regions. A greater proportion of real returnees can be found among the registered returnees to Slavonia, and Lika, Kordun and Banovina. In Slavonia, the ratio of formal versus real returnees is 1:1, whereas in Lika, Kordun and Banovina, this ratio is even more favourable on the side of real returnees, which is particularly significant given the fact that almost a half of all registered returnees are from this region. On the other hand, in Dalmatia,

which has about a third of all registered returnees, the ratio of real versus formal returnees is 1:1.7. A similar ratio was recorded in the remaining parts of the country, but it's by far less significant as they all account for only seven percent of all registered returnees.

A comparison of the distribution of present returnees according to the size settlements where they live with the distribution of all registered returnees shows that returnees to small rural settlements more often remain to live in their homes for a long period after their return, whereas those from larger settlements (towns) more frequently opt for renewed migration or they return to places where they resided as refugees (Figure 1)¹¹. Such a difference can be explained with several factors: persons who lived in larger urban areas often did not own real estate, but were former occupancy and tenancy right holders, and the abolishment of this right deprived them of the main resource necessary for return – a housing unit. Urban population depends much more significantly on the labour market than rural population, and the situation on the labour market changed drastically (for the worse) in comparison to the situation before the war. Furthermore, persons who lived in larger urban areas before the war are more educated and younger, which surely contributed to their quicker integration in the receiving area.

Figure 1 – Distribution of present returnees and the total population of registered returnees according to the size of the settlements¹²



11 In interpreting these data, one ought to bear in mind that the share of those persons, for whom no reliable data on the place of their permanent residence could be collected, is much higher among the returnees to large urban areas.

12 This analysis only took into account the returnees who live in the place where they registered their return (according to their records in the data base), because there were no reliable data on the size of settlement where they reside for persons who live elsewhere in Croatia (n=289).

Return period also has significant influence on the inclination to stay permanently. Namely, as many as 40 percent of persons who registered their return prior to the year 2000 still live in Croatia, whereas this number is by more than ten percentage points lower among those who registered between 2000 and 2005, and it is still lower among those who registered only after 2005 (Table 2). Although the number of persons who registered as returnees in the period between 2000 and 2005 is somewhat higher than in the second half of the 1990-ties (48% versus 45% of the total number of registered returnees by the end of 2010), earlier returnees today account for the majority (57%) of permanent returnees, despite the fact that the share of persons who passed away is much higher among them. These findings impose a conclusion that early returnees were by far more motivated to return than those who returned at a later stage. They decided to return at the time when political circumstances were much less favourable, and inter-ethnic tensions at the local level much more pronounced. The infrastructure in the war-affected areas was mostly destroyed, and economic circumstances were significantly less favourable. Their only comparative advantage was that – to an extent – they received more international humanitarian assistance than the ones who returned at a later stage. But this could have surely not neutralized the other, less favourable factors. Despite this, these early returnees did not give up on their return so easily. Besides their motivation, the explanation of this phenomenon may be found in the shorter period that these early returnees had at their disposal to integrate in the receiving area, which weakened their resources for their renewed migration back to these areas at a later stage.

Table 2 – Returnee presence according to the year of return

	Total	Year of return		
		Before 2000	2000 to 2005	2006 to 2010
n	1402	534	623	245
Living in Croatia	33,2%	39,9%	27,7%	24,5%
Living outside of Croatia	38,7%	27,7%	48,3%	49,4%
Dead	14,8%	22,1%	8,9%	3,7%
No reliable information	13,3%	10,3%	15,0%	22,4%

The noticed difference might have also resulted from different structures of returnee contingents with respect to their age. Data confirm that earlier returnees were more frequently elderly persons. Namely, the average age at the moment of registration of returnees who registered before the end of 1999 ranged around 52, whereas the average age at the time of registration of groups that arrived later was lower: those who registered for return in the period between the year 2000 and 2005 were on average 41.8 years old, and those who registered after 2005 were 37.7 years old¹³. Recorded age difference between returnee contingents speaks in favour of the fact that return of some families happened gradually, in stages. It is obvious that the oldest family members were the first to return, and once adequate conditions were ensured, either with respect to one's life cycle (end of education, loss of job, retirement etc.), or with respect to one's standard of living (restitution of property, renewal of the house etc.), they were joined by their younger family members.

Data, however, show that younger returnees more frequently give up on return or register only formally as returnees. Average age of permanent returnees and formal returnees differs significantly, with the latter group being on average younger (Table 3). The phenomenon that older registered returnees more often remain as permanent returnees, whereas the younger ones more frequently opt for repeated migrations applies to all waves of returnees, but it is particularly expressed in the waves that came later.

Table 3 – Average age at the time of return for permanent returnees and formal returnees according to the period when they registered their return

	Living in Croatia		Living somewhere else		t - test
	n	Average	n	Average	
Total	439	45,0	573	37,5	t=5,91; p<0,01
Before 1999	211	46,5	147	44,3	t=1,47; p=0,30
2000 to 2005	168	42,3	307	35,1	t=3,80; p<0,01
2006 to 2010	60	47,6	119	35,5	t=3,77; p<0,01

13 Data were calculated for the entire population (base) of registered returnees.

As we mentioned in the introductory chapters, no definite conclusions about the success of the return process can be drawn on the basis of the presented data on the number of returnees that were located at the registered address or elsewhere in the Republic of Croatia at the time of conducting this research. Data on the contacts that the absent returnees have to the place of their origin suggest the same: they also confirm that 'return' is a dynamic and gradual process.

In as many as one fifth of all households of absent (formal) returnees, other members of their household reside (more or less permanently) in the family home or apartment (Table 4). If the decision to return is observed at the level of the family, which is where the decision is made, and not at the individual level, then the data show that the success of return is significantly greater than when analysed at the level of individual returnees (see Table 1). Namely, in that case a share of returnee families, in which at least one family member (more or less) permanently resides in the place of return, rises from about one third to 41 percent. To this number one should also add family members of deceased registered returnees. In as much as 29 percent of households of deceased returnees, at least one other family member permanently lives in that household. When these households are added to the previously established share of real returnee households, we reach the estimate that in about 45 percent of households whose members registered as returnees, at least one household member permanently lives in the Republic of Croatia.

There is also a significant share – around 6 percent – of absent returnees who often visit their place of origin or stay there for one part of the year. Based on the information provided by our informants, more than a half of them stayed for longer than a month during their last visit, and about 1/5 visit once a month or more often. Approximately 30 percent of absent returnees maintain less frequent contacts with the place of their return, through occasional visits, visits by other household members etc. Another proof of this is the fact that in most cases (76%), their front and back yards appear maintained, and the properties are adequate for living (at least judging from their external appearance). For 44 percent of absent returnees, the informants could not provide any information that would confirm their regular or occasional visits. But, also in such cases, the state of the properties suggests that they are maintained at least to some level. Namely, in only 27 percent of such cases, the interviewers noted that the yards

of the houses appear neglected, and in only 19 percent of cases it was established that the houses do not appear adequate for living. As expected, the share of those who maintain very weak contacts with the place of their return is bigger among the returnees, for whom it was established that they live outside of the territory of the former SFRY. It is obvious that the physical distance from their (current) place of residence prevents them from maintaining more regular contacts with the area from which they fled and to which they are linked (for now) at least through their formal registration of return. Above stated data clearly suggest that even most of those formal returnees who currently live outside of Croatia maintain more or less frequent relations with the place of their origin, which leads us to the conclusion that they are trying to keep all their options open.

Table 4 – Contacts of absent returnees to their place of origin

	Total	Living in Serbia	Living elsewhere on the territory of former SFRY	Living elsewhere
n	578	407	52	119
Other household members reside there permanently	19,6%	21,4%	18,4%	14,5%
The respondent resides there for a part of the year	6,3%	7,8%	5,1%	2,0%
Occasional visits	30,2%	34,4%	32,6%	16,1%
No information on visits	43,9%	36,4%	43,9%	67,4%

CHARACTERISTICS OF RETURNEES AND NON-RETURNEES

The first study on the sustainability of minority return (Mesić and Bagić, 2007:33-35) clearly showed negative selection among real returnees in view of their age and educational level. Given that socio-demographic selectivity is typical of any migration, such results were not surprising. In view of the fact that there was no significant inflow of new (officially recorded) returnees in the past four years since the last research (only about 12,000), nor are there any visible signs of mass outflow of those who returned earlier, it does not surprise that the results of this new research do not differ greatly in comparison to the previous one.

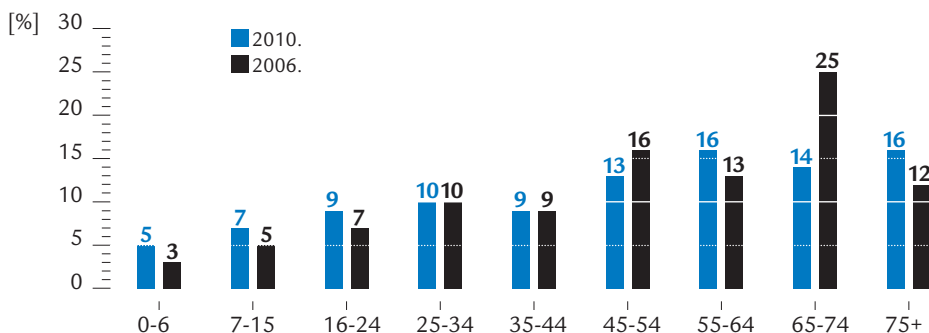
The average age of all household members in surveyed returnee households is about 49, which is somewhat less than 51 years of age that was the result of the 2006 research. However, taking into account that late returnees are overrepresented in the sample, and given that their average age is lower than the age of earlier returnees¹⁴, it can be concluded that the average age of returnee population has not changed significantly, although this was expected because of the natural aging process for most returnees who were covered already by the first research¹⁵. Naturally, all those who returned prior to 2006 were four years older at the time of conducting the second research, but this was obviously compensated for with the age of new returnees (who were on average younger) and the offspring (newly born children) in the households of earlier returnees. The fact that returnee population did not age additionally in the four-year period can only be considered good news from the perspective of a biologically sustainable community. Yet, the fact still remains that this is the population of elderly persons, whose overall vitality is not high. Namely, as much as 30 percent of the returnee population are older than 65, and more than 45 percent are older than 55 (Figure 2). On the other hand, almost 1/3 of all returnees are younger than 34. In comparison, the share of persons who are older than 65 in the overall

14 Average age of surveyed earlier returnees is 59.6, and average age of surveyed late returnees is 54.06 ($t=2.307$; $p<0.05$).

15 Due to the improved quality of data collection in terms of a more comprehensive overview of all family members and a more precise definition of a household in this research when compared to the one from 2006, the data on the socio-demographic characteristics of households are now more reliable. There is a possibility that returnee population aged mildly in the meantime, although the data do not show that (on the contrary, they show the opposite), but in any case, this is not a significant change.

population in Croatia amounts to approximately 17 percent (so it is twice as low), and average age of the population is around 41 years (Central Bureau of Statistics - CBS, 2010). Naturally, population of the areas where most returnees live are generally older than the national average, but the fact still remains that returnee population is older than general population¹⁶.

Figure 2 — Returnee age structure (comparison to 2006)¹⁷



New research also shows somewhat more optimistic results with respect to the size and structure of returnee households. New findings show that an average returnee household is somewhat larger than it was recorded in 2006 (2.9 in comparison to 2.6)¹⁸. Increase in the number of household members is also visible from the changes in their structure. In comparison to the 2006 research, the share of nuclear families and extended families now increased, and the share of families consisting of a couple without any children decreased¹⁹. The share of single-person households remained more or less the same (Figure 3). In line with the increase in the size of the households, the number of households with at least one child or a young person increased as well. In comparison to 2006, there is a mild increase in the share of households with children of pre-school and elementary-school age, and the share of households with young persons aged between 15 and 24 increased significantly (Image 4). The percentage of households with family members across all age categories has not changed significantly. So,

16 Share of population older than 65 in five counties (Sisačko-moslavačka, Karlovačka, Ličko-senjska, Šibensko-kninska and Zadarska), which have the largest number of returnees, is approximately 19%, and the share of persons younger than 35 is around 42%.

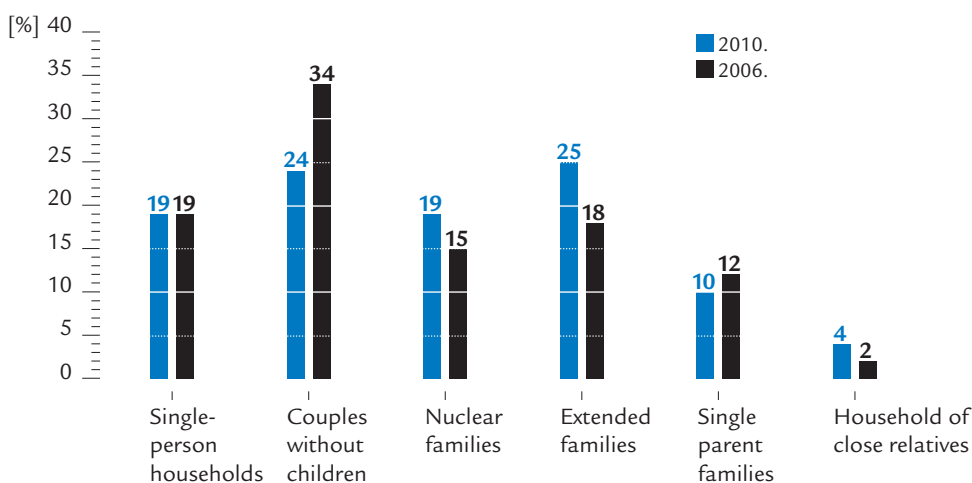
17 The structure is based on the data for all members of surveyed households. The size of the sample for 2010 is 1466 persons, and for 2006, it was 993 persons.

18 $t=4.326$; $df=499$; $p<0.01$

19 $\chi^2=46.9$; $df=5$; $p<0.01$

the results of this research show a positive trend of improved age structure of the returnee population, and correspondingly also of the household structure. On the one hand, such a change is probably the result of increased control of the data collection process²⁰, and on the other hand it reflects that younger members of returnee families arrived later to join other family members, after completing a certain stage in their education (elementary or secondary school).

Figure 3 — Structure of returnee households (comparison 2010 and 2006)



When it comes to long-term sustainability and quality of life, single-person households are particularly threatened. As it was shown by the previous research as well, these are mostly single-person households inhabited by old people. On average, returnees who live alone are 70 years old, and in the last research their average age was 67 years²¹. More than 80 percent of all single-person households consist of persons older than 60 years of age, and 60 percent are older than 70. Old people's single-person households are typical for small rural settlements, which are often isolated in terms of transportation, and they often consist of scattered houses, which means that their inhabitants live in isolation, without any close-by neighbours. In view of this fact, the type of assistance they need

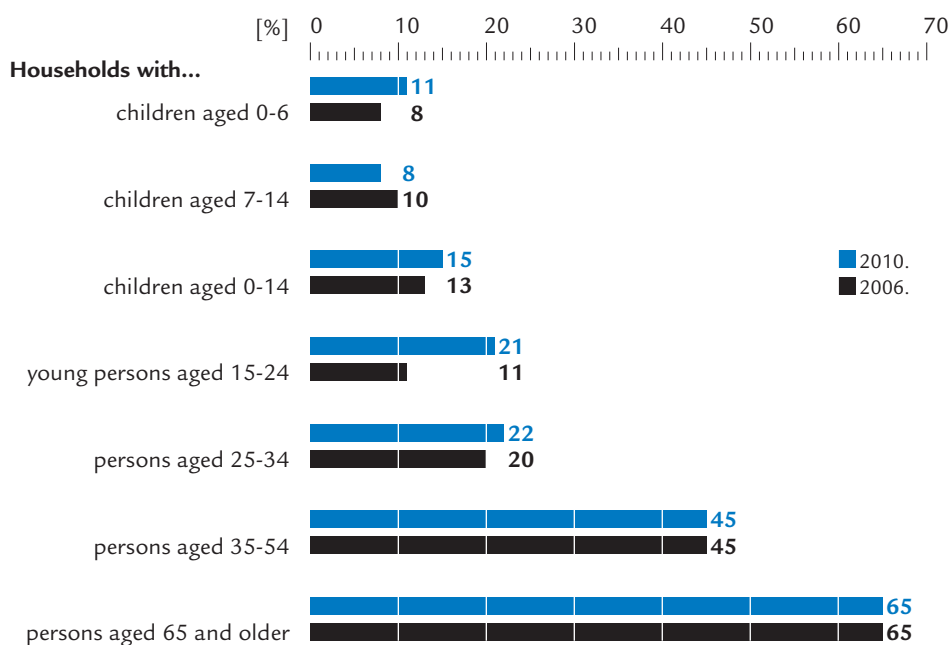
²⁰ In the previous research, in a relatively large number of cases no data were collected on the socio-demographic characteristics of all household members. For this reason, data collection was this time entrusted to a professional agency that conducts market research and public opinion polls.

²¹ $t=2.12$; $df=92$; $p<0.05$.

differs significantly from the assistance that is adjusted to the needs of other returnee groups. They, as well as their Croatian neighbours, need assistance in getting basic supplies, access to medical services, assistance in doing more difficult housework etc. Households that consist of couples without children are in a similar situation, as these are also mostly elderly persons who live in small rural settlements. Namely, the average age of household members inhabited by couples without children is 68. Projects implemented by the international organisations and the Croatian authorities that are focused on attracting new returnees and ensuring the sustainability of the ‘vital’ part of returnee population should not result in neglecting the projects that are focused on this threatened group.

As expected, single-person (old people’s) households more frequently consist of women (70%) than men (30%). The overall ratio between men (47%) and women (53%) corresponds to the one in the general population in Croatia (particularly after the correction with respect to age), and it has not changed significantly since 2006.

Figure 4 – Share of households with members in individual age categories (comparison 2010 and 2006)



The new research also undoubtedly confirms the unfavourable educational structure of the returnee population, which is naturally directly related to their age structure, but also to their origin with respect to the size and type of settlements. Almost every second returnee, older than 15, did not accomplish secondary school. Of that number, close to one half did not even complete the elementary school, and half completed elementary school only. Around 44 percent of returnee population completed secondary school, and only every 20th returnee has college or higher school degree. Comparison with the results of the previous research suggests a mild improvement of the returnee educational structure, which is primarily reflected in the reduced share of returnees without completed secondary school and increase of those who have secondary school-level qualifications²². Such a change reflects the changes noticed with respect to age structure of returnee population.

Unfavourable socio-demographic structure of permanent returnee population is the consequence of unequal readiness of individual age and educational categories within refugee families to return. On average, returnee households are now smaller – by 1.5 persons in comparison to the situation prior to 1990, that is the time before the war. Around 2/3 of this reduction can be attributed to partial return, that is non-return of some pre-war household members. In about 57 percent of returnee families, at least one family member did not return, and in many families only few family members returned to their pre-war place of residence. Around 70 percent of returnee family members who had not returned now live in Serbia, and around 16 percent live in some other country outside of the territory of former Yugoslavia. It is important to mention that about five percent of returnee families who had not returned to their pre-war place of residence together with the others now live elsewhere in Croatia.

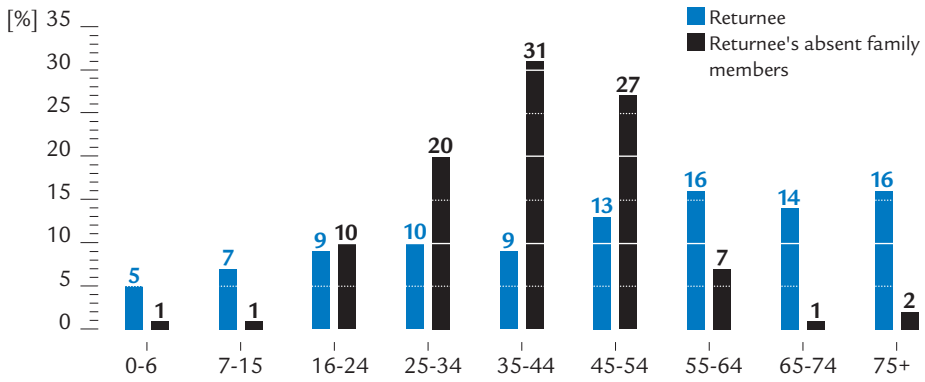
Data collected on household members who had not returned confirm negative age selection of real returnees. Namely, the average age (41) of family members who had not returned is lower than the average age of the members who did return (around 49 years old), and the comparison of the age structure of these two groups (Figure 5) shows this difference even more clearly. The vast majority,

22 In the publication based on the research of 2006, on page 37, there is a Figure showing the educational structure of the respondents to the questionnaire, and not all members of returnee households. In this report, due to the greater clarity of the data base, we shall provide an overview of the entire returnee population older than 15, and not only persons who directly responded to the questionnaire. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare results shown in the previous report with the data presented here.

as much as 78 percent of absent returnee family members are aged between 25 and 54, whereas the share of this same cohort among the real returnees amounts to only 33 percent. This undoubtedly shows that the most vital part of (ex)refugee population did not return. Naturally, such an outcome was fully to be expected for several reasons. First of all, younger persons become more quickly integrated into the new environment, because they adapt more easily and because of the stage of the life cycle they are in (schooling, employment, conclusion of marriage). In addition, younger refugees have higher demands regarding the conditions of their return, primarily in view of the employment opportunities, but also quality of life and safety (particularly for children). Given that a large number of refugees left small rural settlements to go to larger urban areas (Brajdić-Vuković and Bagić, 2004), for many of them return would only mean a step back, at least in those aspects of quality of life, which are related to the type and size of the settlement where they live (urbanization). Finally, age categories that are predominant among the absent members of returnee families have participated in the rebellion against the Republic of Croatia in a relatively higher percentage, and among them, there is the largest share of those who are not (yet) ready to return for political reasons.

Naturally, the presented difference in age structure reflects upon the educational structure as well, which is much more favourable among the absent returnee family members. Namely, only 15 percent of them did not complete secondary school, whereas as many as three out of four have secondary school level qualifications. Almost every tenth absent member of refugee families has the completed the highest educational level.

The fact that the younger and better educated part of the refugee population had not returned can be observed also from the perspective of potential future return. As we mentioned earlier, the property that other family members kept and renewed remains as a permanent resource to those family members who had not returned. The way how they manage this resource in the long run, which includes the possibility to return, depends on their private preferences, their character and life path.

Figure 5 — Comparison of the age structure of permanent returnees and their absent family members²³

²³ Size of the sample of real returnees is 1466, and absent family members 176.

QUALITY OF LIFE INDICATORS FOR THE RETURNEES

Living Conditions

In the first study on the sustainability of minority return, significant attention was paid to returnees' housing conditions and the difficulties that they were faced with in this area (restitution of taken property, slow pace and difficulties in the renewal of homes etc.). Given that the process of restitution of illegally taken houses is mostly completed and that the vast majority of houses have been renewed, this time we dedicated less attention to this topic. What remained is the topical issue of housing care for former occupancy and tenancy right holders, to which we dedicated a special chapter. Therefore, we tried to establish the subjective indicators for the quality of housing, and infrastructural problems that the returnees are faced with.

As it was shown by the previous research, around 88 percent of the returnees present live in apartments/houses owned by them or by other members of their families. Of the remainder, a little less than one half (about 4.5%) are former occupancy and tenancy right holders, and the bigger share are persons who do not have their housing issue resolved permanently due to some other reason (they did not own any property before the war, their properties have not yet been renewed etc.).

Around three fourth of all returnees (78%) are more or less satisfied with their current living conditions, of which one half are satisfied to a certain extent (57%), and about one fifth are completely satisfied. The share of those who are dissatisfied with their current living conditions is the same (21%). As expected, the number of persons who are dissatisfied is reducing, and the share of those who are very satisfied is increasing with the increase in the total amount of household income. The difference is especially evident between the households without any (regular) income and those whose total income exceeds 4000 HRK (Table 5).

Around 72 percent of the permanent returnees assess their present living conditions as improved in comparison to the conditions that they had during their time as refugees, immediately before returning, whereas additional 16 percent estimate that there is no significant difference in the living conditions prior to return and now. Approximately every tenth returnee believes that he/

she has worse living conditions compared to when they were refugees. More frequently than with other groups (23%), this is stated by those returnees who do not have their housing issue resolved permanently nor can they hope to resolve it through the housing care programme for former OTR holders. The respondents who are completely satisfied with their current living conditions mention more frequently than others that those conditions are better than the ones they had as refugees (87%), whereas persons who are expressly dissatisfied with their current living conditions more frequently mention that they enjoyed better conditions while in exile (26%). But, also among those who are dissatisfied more than one half (54%) claim that their living conditions improved upon return. The returnees who stayed in a refugee camp prior to return mention the positive change in living conditions more frequently than other groups (82%).

Table 5 – Satisfaction with living conditions based on the amount of household income

	n	Very dissatisfied	Satisfied to an extent	Very satisfied	Does not know
Whole sample	638	22%	57%	21%	1%
Had no income	39	33%	54%	8%	5%
Up to 1000 HRK	96	22%	63%	16%	
1001 to 2000 HRK	203	24%	59%	17%	1%
2001 to 3000 HRK	116	22%	54%	22%	2%
3001 to 4000 HRK	62	27%	58%	15%	
More than 4000 HRK	87	9%	51%	39%	1%
No reply	35	11%	51%	37%	

By bringing the process of renewal of houses to an end, the key ‘hard’ factor of the quality of life remains the accessibility of standard modern infrastructure. Naturally, its (un)availability more or less equally affects all who live in a certain area, and it is not a problem that is specific to refugees alone. The issue of return sustainability is thus greatly connected to general economic and urban development of an area.

Collected data show that there are still returnee households that do not have access to electricity (Figure 6). Their number has reduced in comparison to the research conducted four years ago, but it is obvious that this problem has not been resolved entirely. About 15 percent of households do not have access to

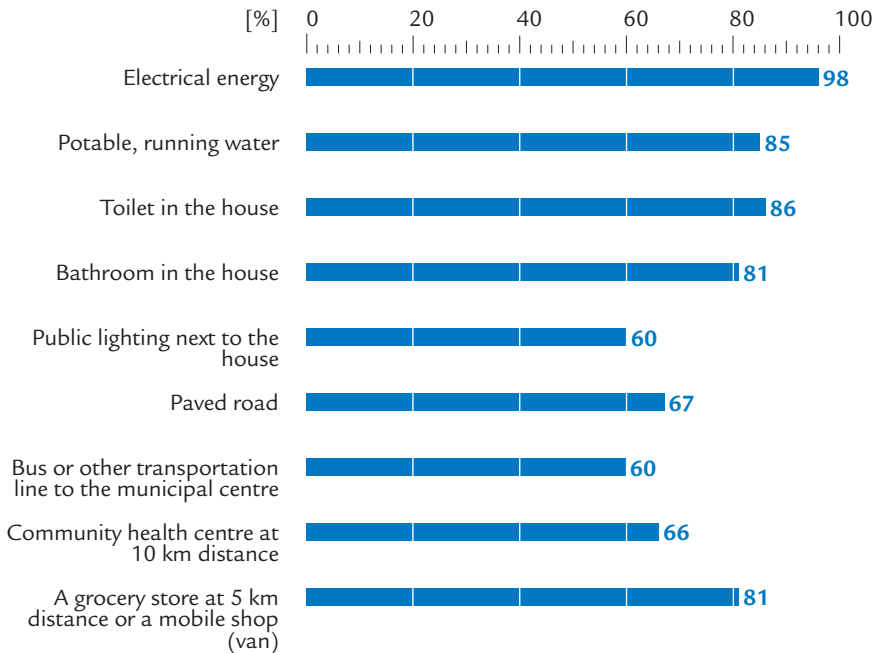
potable running water, and this is actually quite a progress in comparison to the research from four years ago when their number was twice as high. 14 percent of households have no toilet in the house, and about 19 percent have no bathroom. In summary, there are still things to be done with respect to improving the basic urban infrastructure in the returnee areas of Croatia.

Around 40 percent of returnee households have no public lighting in front of their house, and as many as 1/3 have no access to a paved road. If one considers this together with the finding that about 49 percent of all households have no regular public transportation connections with the municipal centre, which leads to every third person having difficult access to health services, one can gain a clearer picture about infrastructural deficiencies in the significant part of returnee settlements. It is obvious that these are small settlements that are isolated in terms of transport connections that often have no paved roads or public lighting, let alone a store, doctor's office, school and other social infrastructure. In such settlements, there is a negative accumulation of factors that contribute to the quality of life, because many of these things are mutually connected (lighting usually goes with the paved road, without a paved road there is no public transport etc.). Thus, persons living in settlements with less than 500 inhabitants are on average faced with three different infrastructural problems (most frequently the lack of public lighting, bus lines to the municipal centre and community health centre that is no further than 10 km away). One ought to bear in mind that more than one half of permanent returnees live in settlements of this size! The inhabitants of towns whose population is between 500 and 10,000 inhabitants are on average faced with one infrastructural problem, whereas the inhabitants of larger urban areas (more than 10,000 inhabitants) rarely face any infrastructural problems. At the regional level, lack of infrastructural development is primarily noticeable in Areas of Special State Concern (in Lika, Banovina and Kordun, and Dalmatia). Infrastructural shortages are closely connected to bad socio-economic conditions (see the following chapter), which cumulatively results in very low quality of life.

Living conditions in small places that are isolated from the transportation perspective are certainly not attractive to younger generations of refugees, but not even to the elderly who have become used to a different, higher living standard during their time as refugees. It should therefore be no surprise that some, particularly younger returnees give up on returning to such conditions or

they do make the decision to not to return at all. Their decisions do not depend very much on political circumstances, inter-ethnic relations or other topics that are frequently discussed in the context of refugee return and stay. Many of them would have probably left their places of birth even if there had not been for the war, in pursuit of better living conditions and better opportunities. Creating better living conditions in such areas and regions is the issue of general economic and urban development of underdeveloped parts of Croatia, and it cannot be resolved with special measures or policies focused solely on issues of return and returnees. For this same reason, one cannot use the pure number of permanent returnees as an indicator of government's efforts in this field. Some obstacles to return and stay of people in the refugee areas simply cannot be removed that easily and quickly.

Figure 6 — Percentage of households that have access to a particular type of infrastructure



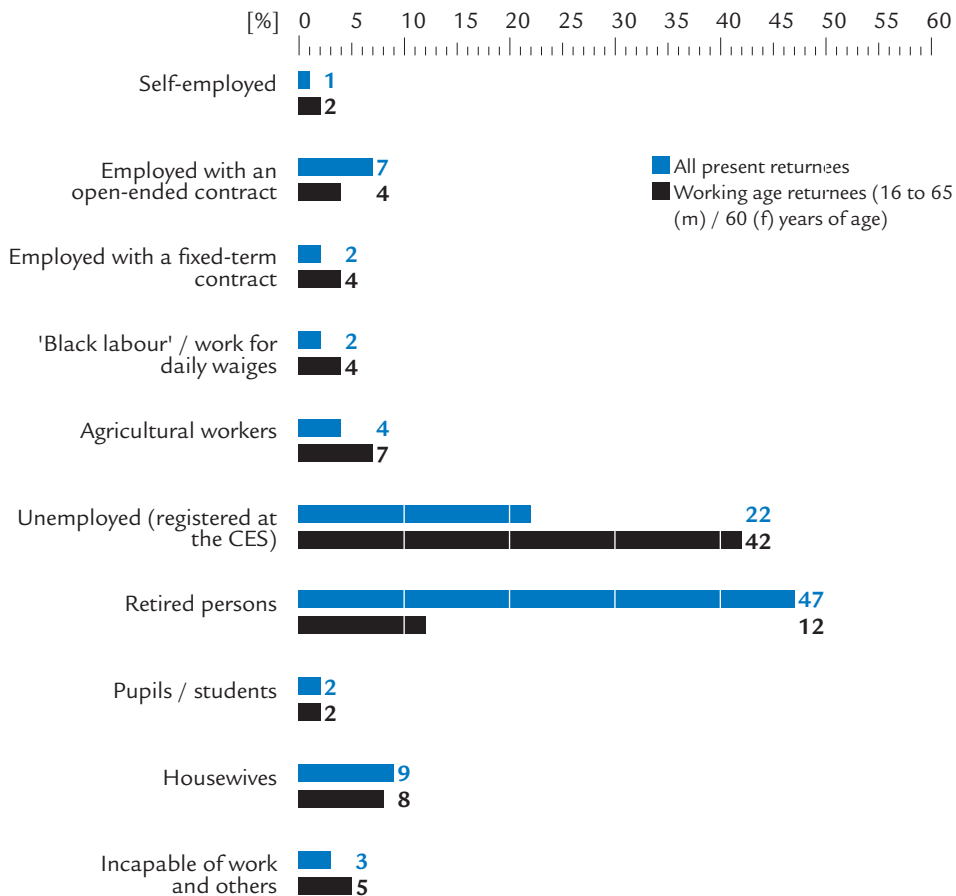
Socio-Economic Conditions

Given the size of the settlement, and based on the structure of permanent returnee population (their age and educational level) one can draw conclusions about their socio-professional characteristics, and about the socio-economic circumstances, in which they live. Given that about one third of all present returnees are persons older than 65, and that their share is even higher among the persons who responded to the questionnaire, it does not surprise us that there is a big share of retired persons. Almost one half of all randomly selected returnees that were located and who agreed to participate in the research are retired persons (Figure 7). The share of retired persons is, naturally, significantly smaller among working-age population (between 15 and 65 years of age for men, or 60 for women). Only about 19 percent of permanent returnees of working age have legal employment, either with fixed-term (including seasonal work) or permanent employment contracts. The share of returnees employed legally did not change significantly since 2006, but the ratio between fixed-term and permanent contracts has changed in favour of the latter, which can be considered a positive development. To the number of legally employed persons, one should add about 4 percent of returnees working on the black market (or those who engage in wage labour), and about 7 percent of those who work on family land (agricultural activities). This means that a total of 30 percent of returnee working-age population work – either formally or informally. It is concerning that the share of the unemployed (42%) is bigger than the number of the officially or informally employed persons, and twice as big as the number of officially employed. Thus, the rate of administrative unemployment among returnee population amounts to 68 percent²⁴, which is by 3.6 times higher than the national average (around 19% at the beginning of 2011), and approximately at the same level that was registered in 2006. This ratio is the consequence of the fact that most returnees live in less developed counties (Sisačko-moslavačka, Ličko-senjska, Šibensko-kninska and Karlovačka) where the total unemployment rate is higher than the national average. However, the rate of administrative unemployment among the

24 Administrative unemployment rate is calculated as a share in the number of registered unemployed persons in total active population. Active population consists of officially employed and officially unemployed persons. In calculating the administrative unemployment rate, we assumed that most of those who live off agriculture are not insured on that basis. The rate would amount to 61% if we were to assume the opposite – that all those who stated that they worked in agriculture have pension and health insurance on that basis.

returnees is about 2.6 times higher even than the average rate of administrative unemployment in the four mentioned counties²⁵. Unemployment is a problem that particularly the elderly persons and returnees with lower educational levels who live in small rural settlements and returnees to Lika, Kordun and Banovina are faced with.

Figure 7 – Employment status of present returnees



²⁵ Calculation is based on the estimation that the average administrative unemployment rate in the mentioned counties amounts to 27%.

The above stated data clearly show the unfavourable position of the returnees on the labour market. However, it does not have to necessarily result from discrimination on ethnic grounds. This assumption is confirmed by the data that more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of interviewed returnees of working age have not been confronted with (open) discrimination on ethnic grounds when they searched for work. Every tenth returnee had some experience with discrimination, and such experiences are more frequently related to private employers than the public sector. Most of the unemployed persons are concentrated in small, isolated rural settlements, which are usually the least developed parts of these counties, where it is even more difficult to find work. Living in more distant isolated settlements makes it difficult to go to work, even if one could find one, given the isolation in terms of lacking any means of public transport (see the previous section). Furthermore, most jobs in the mentioned counties are jobs in state or local authorities and public companies, and a significant share of these vacancies was filled (with Croatian returnees and settlers) before the return of a large number of Serb refugees. Given the legal and political obstacles for aligning the ethnic structure of persons employed in the public sector with the ethnic structure of general population²⁶, one cannot expect a significant number of new jobs in the public sector in the foreseeable time, despite the fact that this issue has been addressed both by the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities and in the National Employment Promotion Plan. If one adds to this weak economic prospects of these areas given the extended duration of the economic crisis, it is difficult to be optimistic about the opportunities of finding jobs for the returnees that are currently unemployed.

Given that around 80 percent of unemployed returnees live in settlements with up to 2000 inhabitants, which are mostly rural settlements, the only reliable prospects for them is to develop agricultural production. The vast majority of returnees (81%) have the basic resource for such activities – the land. A half of them own more than one hectare of arable land, and based on the previous research about the sustainability of return we know that the returnees in the

26 The Labour Law protects those who are currently employed in these positions so that the employer cannot dismiss them only to employ minority members at those jobs. Even if there were a law that would make it possible to dismiss the employed persons of Croatian ethnicity in order to employ minority members, this would have unfavourable political consequences. Aligning the structure of persons employed in public services with the structure of local population would be possible only if there were a significant increase in the number of persons employed in these local government units, but even as it is they can barely finance the salaries for their existing staff members. For this reason, the process of alignment will depend on the natural outflow of the workforce (through retirements, change of job), but also on an adequate 'supply' of minority workforce for vacant jobs.

Croatian context own large surface areas of agricultural land, the size of which is above the average (Mesić and Bagić, 2007: 58).

Almost 90 percent of rural returnee households²⁷ with at least one person of working age cultivate a part or all the land available to them. However, among those who own larger surface areas (more than 1 hectare), only 43 percent cultivate a larger part of this available land. Somewhat more than 1/3 of returnee households have cattle, and the majority of them have a small number of heads of cattle (up to 10). Only about 8 percent of rural returnee households are professionally engaged in animal husbandry, which means that they own more than 10 heads of cattle. If we take into account all those who cultivate larger surface areas of agricultural land (more than 0.5 hectare), and persons who have more than 10 heads of cattle, we arrive at the estimate that about 1/5 of the returnee households are relatively professionally engaged in agriculture. This means that the vast majority of rural returnee population are not using agricultural resources available to them to the maximum extent. The reasons stated by the returnees who do not cultivate the land available to them (11%) can probably be extended as a general assumption also for the persons who use only a small share of their agricultural resources (for their own needs): lack of machinery, old age and physical weakness, low profitability of agricultural production and other market-related difficulties (difficult selling).

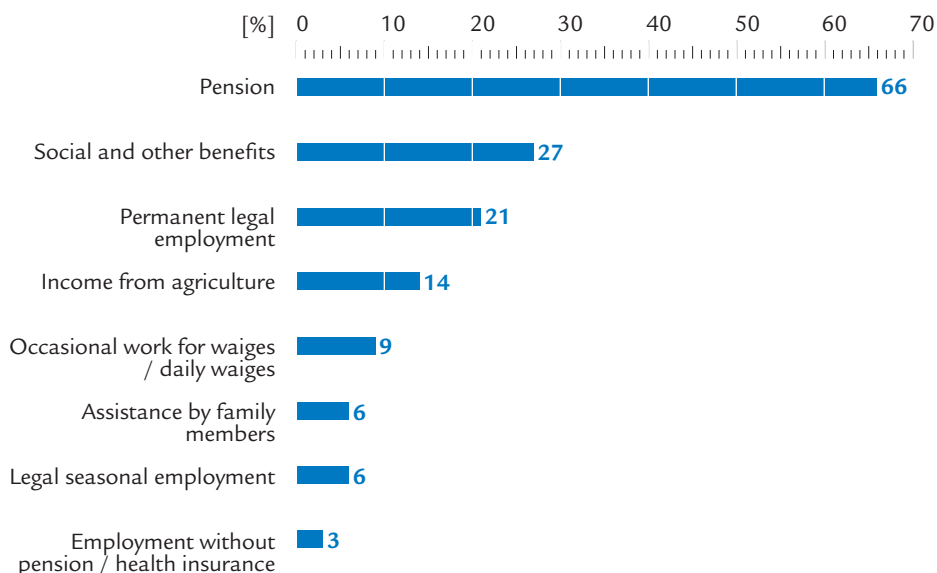
Therefore, it does not surprise that less than 1/5 of rural returnee households (14% of the total population) has a certain share of income from agriculture, but their percentage is not much bigger even when one considers the households inhabited by working-age persons. For most households that have income from agriculture, this is only an additional source of income, and not the main source of their livelihood. Only about five percent of the total returnee population primarily live off the income from agriculture.

Given the structure of returnee population according to their work status and relatively rare cases of persons who professionally engage in agriculture, the structure of income for returnee households comes as no surprise. As much as 2/3 of returnee households have income from the pension of one or several household members (Figure 8). On the other hand, only 1/5 of households have income

27 The term 'rural returnee households' relates to returnee households, who own arable land, regardless of the type of settlement in which they live.

from legal employment. It is concerning that a bigger percentage of households (1/4) have income from various forms of social transfers (social benefits, benefits paid by local government units or international organisations, allowance for care rendered by another person, child allowance etc.) rather than from legal employment or agriculture. A somewhat smaller number of households (19%) have income from regular social benefits in the narrow sense²⁸. One should add to this group another 6 percent of households that regularly or occasionally receive financial assistance from children or other family members who do not live with them in the same household. As much as 1/5 of returnee households do not have a regular source of income (salary, pension or regular income from agriculture). Around one half of these households depend on various forms of social benefits, whereas the others depend on irregular income from agriculture, help by their relatives, occasional unregistered labour or working for daily wages etc. These data are a clear indicator of the low social status of a significant proportion of returnee households.

Figure 8 – The share of households, in which at least one family member has one of the following sources of income



²⁸ We have to treat this data with some caution given the possibility that a share of (elderly) beneficiaries does not differentiate between various forms of social benefits.

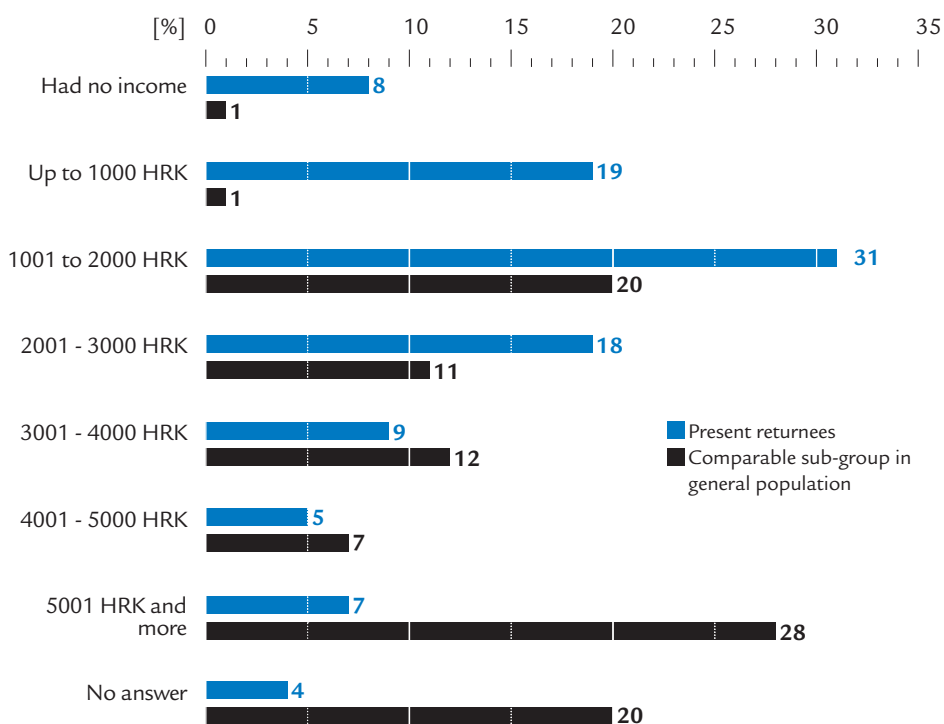
Although about 1/5 of returnee households has no regular source of income, in the month preceding the research, about 8% of households had no income (besides social benefits and assistance by relatives). Every fifth household had income below 1,000 HRK (Figure 9). Relatively the largest number of households, 31%, had income between 1,000 and 2,000 HRK, which is understandable if we know that most households receive pensions that mostly range between these two amounts. A little less than 1/5 of households had income between 2,000 and 3,000 HRK, and a bit more than 1/5 had more than 3,000 HRK. Still, one ought to bear in mind that this research was conducted in the winter months when the income from agriculture is lower than in other parts of the year (summer, autumn), and when the supply of seasonal work and wage labour is lower. About 30 percent of returnee households have income from these seasonal sources, which means that in other parts of the year they probably have higher income than the level recorded during the survey. To an extent, this fact makes the assessment of the socio-economic circumstances in the returnee households a little less negative, but it does not change it significantly.

The assessment of the socio-economic circumstances in these households becomes clearer when the data on their income are compared with the data for more or less comparable segments of Croatia's general population. Although it is impossible to isolate a sub-population in Croatia, which according to its socio-demographic characteristics (age, structure of households etc.) is close to the returnee population (which means that any comparison can only be used for illustration purposes), for the needs of this analysis we isolated the households located in settlements with less than 10,000 inhabitants from five counties (Karlovačka, Sisačko-moslavačka, Ličko-senjska, Šibensko-kninska and Zadarska) that also registered the largest number of returnees. The share of households within the reference group defined in that way, which had no income or whose income was less than 1,000 HRK, is 13 times lower in comparison to the returnee population! On the other hand, almost every second household from the reference group has income exceeding 3,000 HRK, whereas the share of such households in the returnee population is more than twice as low²⁹. The difference

29 Here, one ought to bear in mind that the share of those who had not stated anything in reply to this question is 20 percent in the reference group, and only about 4 percent in the returnee population. If both populations were to be reduced to comparable sizes, so that the ones who provided no reply are excluded, then these ratios would be even higher to the detriment of the returnee population.

can be noticed particularly in the group of households whose revenues exceed 5,000 HRK, which is four times bigger in the reference group. So, the greatest differences between the reference group and the returnee population are visible on the margins of this distribution. There are about 10 times more returnees with very low revenues, whereas in the reference group there are several times more households with a relatively solid amount of income.

Figure 9 – Total amount of household income in the month prior to the survey³⁰



The extent of the socio-economic deprivation of the returnee population becomes even clearer when the monthly income is expressed per household member³¹. Almost every second household (45%) had income per household member lower than 500 HRK in the reference month! One fourth had income per member ranging between 500 and 1000 HRK, and one fourth between 1000 and

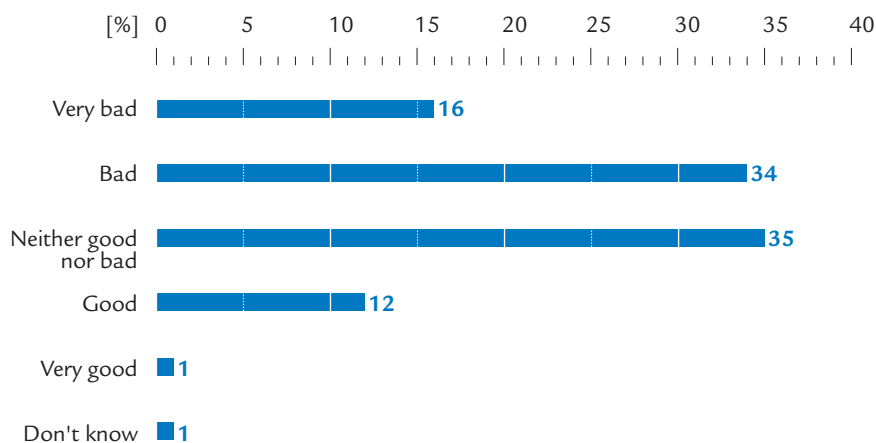
³⁰ The source of data for reference subpopulation is the omnibus research conducted by the Ipsos Puls agency from October 2010 to January 2011.

³¹ Given the way the question on the amount of income was formulated (it was based on ranges, and not on exact amounts), this calculation can only be done by dividing the class interval mean of the stated classes with the number of household members.

1500 HRK. Only about seven percent of households had income exceeding 1500 HRK per member. As expected, the most deprived are rural returnee households and returnees to Slavonija and Lika, Kordun and Banovina. The least threatened are two-person households inhabited by the elderly where at least one or in many cases both household members have pensions, whereas the more numerous households with children or where several generations live together (nuclear and extended families) are the most threatened.

Such objective indicators of the material and financial circumstances in the returnee households result in a similar subjective assessment of the material circumstances. Namely, 16 percent of the returnees assess their material circumstances as very bad, and additional 1/3 as bad (Figure 10), which means that every second returnee is not satisfied with his/her material and financial circumstances. A little more than 1/3 of the returnees evaluate their financial situation as mediocre (neither good nor bad), and only a little more than one tenth are to some extent satisfied with the material circumstances in their households.

Figure 10 – Subjective assessment of the material circumstances of the households



As expected, there is significant correlation ($r=0.47$ $p<0.01$) between the subjective assessment of the material situation of a household and the recorded amount of the total income. About 70 percent of the households whose income is less than 1,000 HRK assess their material circumstances as bad, whereas only 1/5 of the households whose total income exceeds 3,000 HRK stated the

same. Important predictors of the subjective satisfaction with the material circumstances include – besides the total amount of income per household (member) – the evaluation of one’s current material situation in comparison to the one during the period of refuge, and the availability of a steady source of income such as a salary or pension.

Subjective Indicators Of The Quality Of Life

Satisfaction with living conditions does not depend solely on the ‘hard’ factors such as the availability of infrastructure, transport connections/isolation, the amount of revenues and the possibility to fulfil one’s professional ambitions. An important factor of one’s satisfaction with life circumstances are also comparisons with the relevant reference groups and aspirations. For the minority returnee population, the relevant reference framework for the subjective assessment of their satisfaction with life are life circumstances before they became refugees, the circumstances in which they lived during the period of refuge, and living conditions of the national majority who lives in that same area. Since the living conditions before the war have become relatively distant past, and since that period differs greatly from the contemporary reality according to its economic, political and social characteristics, we have not examined this dimension of the reference framework to any great detail in this research.

Asking questions regarding the comparison between the current quality of life with the quality of life during their time as refugees may seem superfluous at first glance, but only if one imagines that living circumstances of the refugees consist of typical refugee camps protected by the UNHCR, where the refugees live in improvised and isolated settlements, without any source of own revenues or assistance by friends or relatives. However, most refugees from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina did not stay in such circumstances, and if they had, it was only for a short period. And even when they stayed in collective camps, these camps were not isolated from the remaining society, so that the refugees had an opportunity for a certain level of integration. About 1/5 of the surveyed persons who participated in this research stayed in a refugee camp prior to their return, 40 percent stayed in a rented apartment or

house, which means that they had a certain source of revenues, and additional 1/5 stayed with friends and relatives. A small share, about 2 percent, even owned their own property. So, a significant share had the opportunity to integrate socially and economically in the host country (especially in Serbia or Republika Srpska where Serbs account for the majority of the population). Therefore, any comparison of the current living conditions with the living conditions as refugees is indeed relevant and it influences the general feeling of satisfaction, and their evaluation if their decision to return was the right decision to make.

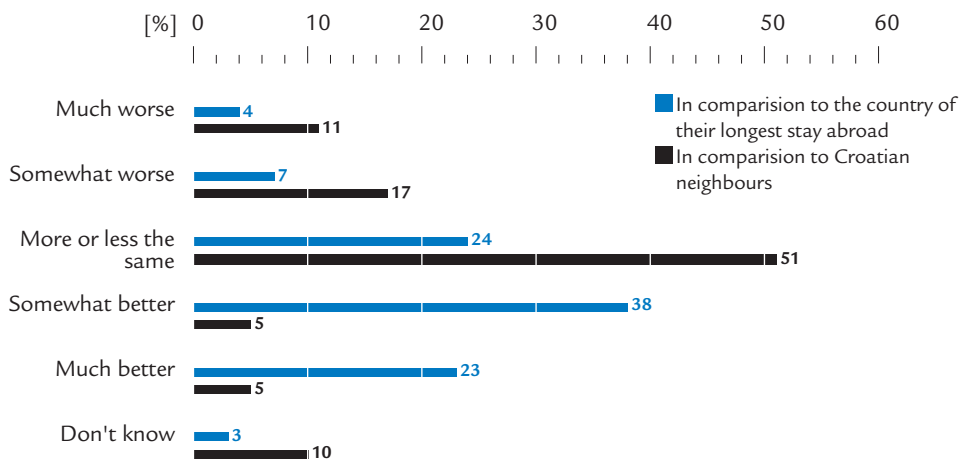
More than 60 percent of the returnees stated that their current living conditions are in overall terms better than the ones they had as refugees, whereas about ¼ believe that their current living conditions are similar to those they had as refugees (Figure 11). Every tenth returnee has the feeling that now they have worse living conditions than as refugees. Such results may appear relatively optimistic, but their comparison with the results of the former research gives us certain reasons for concern. Namely, in the past four years, the number of persons who evaluate their current living conditions as improved in comparison to the conditions they had as refugees reduced by about 15 percentage points. The number of persons who believe that their living conditions deteriorated has not increased significantly (from about 8% to about 11%), but there was an increase in the number of persons who believe that their living conditions today are similar to those they had as refugees (from 13% to 24%)³². It is the group of returnees who returned after 2005 that have influenced this change to some extent. On average,, this group evaluates that their current living conditions improved in comparison to their time as refugees less frequently than the returnees who came back earlier, and particularly less frequently in comparison to the persons who returned before 1999³³. Naturally, this is a consequence of a higher level of their integration into the environment of their temporary stay. However, a significant change can be noted if only those persons who resided in Croatia during the time of the last research are considered. A comparison of material and financial

32 Consequently, the average rating of this question was reduced from 4.1 to 3.7, which is a significant change in statistical terms: $t=-7.6$; $df=485$; $p<0.01$.

33 The average evaluation on this scale among the group of late returnees (persons who returned after 2005) amounts to 3.8, and among early returnees (prior to 1999) it amounts to 3.8. This is a statistically significant difference: $F=3.89$; $df=2$; $p<0.05$.

circumstances has a crucial impact on the evaluation of their overall living conditions as better or worse in comparison to their time as refugees³⁴.

Figure 11 – Assessment of the current living conditions in comparison to the conditions in the place of their longest stay as refugees and in comparison to their Croatian neighbours



Every second surveyed returnee believes that his/her living conditions are more or less equal to those of their Croatian neighbours. About 28 percent of the returnees feel that they live worse than their Croatian neighbours, whereas every tenth persons believes that they live better. In comparison to the 2006 research, positive progress can be noticed. The number of persons who believe that their living conditions are worse has namely reduced a little, but the number of persons who believe that the conditions are unchanged has increased significantly, mostly on account of a reduced number of those who did not state anything concerning this question (from about 18% to 10%).

On average, returnees from Dalmatia evaluate their living conditions as worse in comparison to their Croatian neighbours in greater proportion than the returnees to Lika, Kordun and Banovina³⁵. As expected, surveyed persons from households with revenues under 2,000 HRK evaluate their living conditions as being relatively worse in comparison to Croats, whereas this evaluation is not so frequent for the group whose revenues exceed 3,000 HRK³⁶. Late returnees who

34 In the regression analysis, the satisfaction with current material and financial circumstances and their comparison to the time spent as refugees accounts for 45% of the variance in the comparison of the overall current living conditions with the ones from the period of refuge.

35 $F=8.6$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$.

36 $F=3.77$; $df=4$; $p<0.01$.

returned after 2005 on average feel relatively more deprived on the grounds of their ethnicity in comparison to the early returnees who returned prior to the end of 1999³⁷.

The issue of the direction, in which the quality of life is developing, is also important for the subjective feeling of satisfaction with life. If the quality of life is improving, a person may be relatively satisfied, even if the starting position was objectively bad, and vice versa. Replies to this question show quite pessimistic results. Namely, every third returnee assesses his/her living quality as having worsened in the past five years, an equal number believe that there were no significant changes, and only a bit more than ¼ believe that their living circumstances have improved (Figure 12). Worsening of living conditions is more often perceived by unemployed persons rather than the employed or retired persons³⁸, which points to the fact that this feeling is the consequence of objective processes on the labour market, which among other things have been affected by the economic crisis. This explanation is also supported by the fact that persons from households with lower income more often feel the worsening of living conditions than the respondents who live in households with higher income (more than 3,000 HRK)³⁹. On the other hand, the feeling of worsened living conditions is not related to the age of the respondents⁴⁰, so that it cannot be explained with more difficult circumstances for older returnees. The assessment of the trend with respect to the quality of life does not correlate much to the evaluation of one's current state of health ($r=-0.20$; $p<0.01$), which suggests that health difficulties have a certain impact on the feeling of the degradation in the quality of life, but this is not a predominant factor. There are no significant differences in assessing the quality of life trend with respect to the region, time of return, type of settlement or other characteristics either, which confirms that the mentioned results are primarily the result of worsened general economic circumstances that affect the returnees, among others.

In the 2006 research, the respondents were asked a similar question, in which they were asked to assess the change in living conditions from the moment of return. Responses to this question provided results that were quite opposite to

37 $F=4.28$; $df=2$; $p<0.05$.

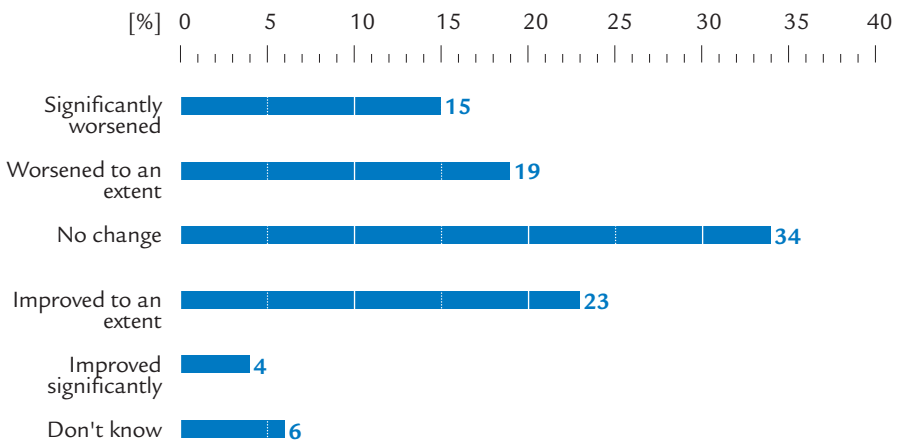
38 $F=4.1$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$.

39 $F=5.93$; $df=4$; $p<0.01$.

40 $F=0.76$; $df=6$; $p=0.60$.

what was presented. Such a difference in the responses to these two questions can be explained easily. Namely, most (earlier) returnees arrived to relatively bad circumstances, both with respect to housing (torn down or damaged houses, often with parts of one's properties being taken, furniture stolen etc.), infrastructure (electrical and other networks have not been renewed), and the possibility to find employment and earn an income. The persons who returned before the year 2000 were frequently faced with the hostility of their former neighbours, the new settlers and even the local authorities. Once these basic problems were resolved, there were no major improvements in the quality of life. What we wanted to find out in the new research is how the quality of life developed after the basic preconditions for return were ensured.

Figure 12 — Assessment of change in living conditions in the past five years (or since return)



Such an explanation is also corroborated by the replies of the respondents to the direct question of what has worsened in the past five years. In some of their replies, all the respondents who felt that their living conditions worsened mentioned reasons that were related to socio-economic circumstances: lower income (73%), loss of work (25%), lower income from agriculture (9%), less assistance and fewer donations (17%). On the other hand, among the persons who evaluated their quality of life as unchanged or improved, such replies appeared much more rarely. Health reasons are also mentioned relatively frequently as a factor of worsened quality of life. At the level of the whole sample, this is the response mentioned by the largest number of the respondents (55%). Returnees who assessed that their quality of life is worsening mentioned health reasons somewhat more frequently than persons who evaluated their quality of life as stagnating or the ones who thought it was progressing, but this difference is smaller than in the case of financial difficulties. Almost every second returnee assesses his/her state of health as bad, and every fourth one said that it's neither good nor bad. Such an assessment of one's state of health is directly related to returnee age structure.

Along with the financial and health difficulties, a relatively large number of the respondents mentioned deteriorated housing conditions, loneliness and death of close persons as aspects of deteriorated quality of life in the past five years.

Two thirds of persons whose quality of life has improved in the past five years experienced a positive change with respect to their sources of income: they became entitled to a pension, they received social benefits or some other form of regular benefits, they got a job, higher income from agriculture, higher income in general. The same type of positive changes is mentioned by a much smaller proportion (only 1/5) of persons who feel that their quality of life worsened. Another important group of positive changes that resulted in increased satisfaction with the quality of life is related to the improved housing conditions. About 45 percent of all the respondents, and 60 percent of persons who feel that their quality of life has improved, experienced an improvement in the housing conditions over the past five years, regardless if this had to do with the renewal of the house, housing care or improvement of infrastructure. A relatively negligible number of returnees (about 10%) noticed positive changes with respect to an increased number of people, improved quality of co-existence, and consequently the feeling of greater security.

Positive and negative changes that the returnees were faced with in the past five years mostly reflect the main types of problems they are faced with in life.

Table 6 – What has worsened in the living conditions in the past five years? – According to the general evaluation of the changes in the quality of life

n	Evaluation of the change in living conditions over five years				
	Total	Worsened	No change	Improved	Don't know
	500	170	170	131	29
Lower income/worsened financial situation	51%	73%	49%	34%	14%
Loss of job/unemployed	18%	25%	18%	14%	3%
Less assistance/fewer donations	12%	17%	9%	10%	14%
Lower income from agriculture	9%	9%	9%	8%	7%
Worsened housing conditions	13%	18%	13%	8%	10%
Sickness, worsened state of health	55%	64%	55%	44%	59%
Death of close persons/household members	17%	19%	16%	17%	10%
No neighbours/relatives/loneliness	14%	19%	11%	12%	7%
Worse co-existence	2%	3%	1%	2%	3%
Feel less secure	2%	1%	1%	4%	3%
Nothing	4%		2%	4%	
Something else	7%	4%	3%	2%	10%
Don't know			8%	13%	14%

About 80 percent of the returnees mentioned something related to material and financial circumstances among the three main problems that they were faced with. Individual issues they mentioned from that group include unemployment (mentioned most frequently – 34%), followed by other indicators of low living standards (low income, high prices etc.). Problems related to living standards, and particularly unemployment, are mentioned more frequently by younger returnees. Almost every seventh returnee younger than 55 mentioned unemployment, as one of the main problems, that they are faced with. Returnees who reached the retirement age complained about the amount of pension. All

other types of problems that the returnees are faced with were mentioned much more rarely, which confirms that it is the living standard that is the key problem of the returnee population, and consequently also one of the key factors that contribute to their long-term stay, and to return of other family members.

Among other groups of problems, difficulties related to the state of health and the housing quality and infrastructure were mentioned more frequently. Problems related to the housing quality and infrastructure were mentioned by 40 percent of the returnees. In that group, the predominant problems relate to the isolated character of their settlements, unavailability of infrastructure and various social services, and not so frequently the problems related to the housing units themselves. This fact shows once again that the issues of long-term sustainability of return cannot easily be resolved at the level of every individual, they are more the matter of development programmes at the level of towns or regions.

The number of persons complaining about loneliness and separation from family is not negligible either. This type of problems is particularly present among the oldest returnees who often live alone, in settlements with few inhabitants. Loneliness and separation from one's family is the problem that the aging Croatian population is faced with more and more frequently due to migrations of younger generations, and it particularly affects the returnees given the selective return and depopulation of certain settlements and regions caused by the war.

Besides everything mentioned above, individual groups of returnees mention some specific types of problems. Persons working in agriculture mention the lack of machinery and other agriculture-related problems. Young people mention lack of adequate entertainment. Parents mention problems related to the availability and quality of schools. Respondents who are sick complain about the health system and the medical costs. However, all the mentioned problems are not specific to returnees, but they are common to all inhabitants of rural and isolated settlements and in underdeveloped regions that still suffer under the consequences of the war. As specific returnee problems, one can only mention issues related to the housing quality in the narrow sense (renewal, quality of renewal, consequences of abolishing the occupancy and tenancy rights etc.), and the problems with co-existence and discrimination. Negative experiences with discrimination were mentioned by about 2 percent of returnees. In general, the type of problems that the returnees are faced with, and the frequency of their

occurrence among the returnees have not changed greatly in comparison to the 2006 research.

Specific problems that plague the returnee population include those related to obtaining different documents and being entitled to their rights. According to the results of our research, there are still two percent of returnees who have problems with regulating their Croatian citizenship and consequently problems with obtaining their personal identity cards, passports and all other documents based on their citizenship. In the qualitative part of this research, we found out that these cases were mostly related to persons who were born in some other republic of the ex-SFRY (most frequently Bosnia and Herzegovina), and upon marrying, they came to live in border areas of Croatia directly before the beginning of the war. It is not rare that in such cases one part of the family has regulated citizenship status, whereas the other does not. About three percent of returnees do not have a health insurance card nor any regulated entitlement to health insurance. Since one of the prerequisites for that is to have the status of a Croatian citizen, these two problems are closely connected. About five percent of the returnees mention problems related to the acknowledgement of their years of employment relevant for pension calculations (convalidation issues) or problems with obtaining a valid proof of their years of employment. The vast majority (90%) of the returnees had no major difficulties with obtaining basic documents and with the exercise of their returnee rights.

Table 8 – Three greatest problems that the returnees are currently faced with – By age

n	Whole sample	Age				
		Up to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 plus
	500	66	47	63	100	224
Unemployment (personal or some family member)	34%	62%	64%	70%	41%	5%
Financial problems/bad material conditions	26%	33%	19%	32%	41%	17%
Small pension	7%			2%	3%	14%
Low living standards	4%	3%	2%	8%	6%	4%
Low income	4%	3%	4%	2%	6%	3%
High prices, expensiveness	3%	5%	4%	5%	2%	3%
Expensive food	1%	3%	2%	2%	1%	0%
Not enough assistance – lack of social benefits	1%			2%	1%	2%
Works but does not receive salary	1%	3%		2%	1%	0%
High utility costs	1%	2%		2%	2%	0%
Bad health (personal or some family member)	29%	6%	4%	8%	16%	52%
Old age and frailty	8%				1%	17%
Housing issue/bad housing conditions	14%	14%	28%	8%	13%	14%
Roads (unpaved, bad, public lighting)	6%	5%	2%	14%	7%	5%
Distance from doctor	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	8%
Bus/no bus stop	3%	5%	2%	2%	6%	3%
Distance from the store	2%		2%	2%	2%	3%
Distance from municipal centres, cities	2%	5%	2%	2%	2%	1%
Water supply	3%	3%		5%	3%	4%
Infrastructure	2%	3%	6%			2%
Purchase of apartment (needs to be resolved, bad conditions...)	1%			2%	3%	1%

Table 8 – continued

		Up to 34	35 to 44	45 to 54	55 to 64	65 plus
Loneliness	7%	5%	2%	5%	5%	11%
Separation from children/family	3%	2%	2%	2%	3%	4%
Death of close persons	1%					2%
Lack of machinery for agriculture	2%		2%	5%	3%	2%
Agriculture	2%		6%	5%	1%	2%
Hard life in the country	0%		2%			
Rural environment	1%	2%		2%		0%
Expensive health system	2%	2%			1%	3%
Bad health system	1%	2%			2%	2%
No health insurance	1%		2%	2%	2%	0%
Schools (expensive, remote...)	1%	3%	9%			0%
Bad co-existence/alienation between people	1%		2%		2%	2%
Discrimination/bad relationship to returnees	1%	2%		3%		1%
No cultural offer / entertainment for young people	1%	5%	2%		1%	
Other	8%	6%	8%	8%	8%	8%
No problems	3%	2%	4%		5%	4%
Don't know	3%	8%	2%	3%	2%	3%

OCCUPANCY AND TENANCY RIGHTS AND RETURN

Presence And Characteristics Of Former OTR Holders Who Were Provided With Housing

As it was mentioned in the introductory chapters, one of the objectives of this study was to establish the influence of the housing care programme for former OTR holders on their return and the sustainability of the return process. In order to achieve this goal, a sample of former OTR holders was covered by the quantitative research (see the chapter on research methodology): persons who received housing units within the corresponding government programme (on the programme itself, see the chapter on “Political and legal framework for the return of the minority refugees”).

Data on the presence of former OTR holders at the address of the housing unit they were awarded point to the conclusion that the housing care programme provided excellent results with respect to (relative) permanency of return in this group of returnees. Namely, according to the information gathered, as many as 70 percent of the former OTR holders who benefited from the housing care programme permanently live in Croatia, of which the vast majority (89%) live at the address of the housing unit awarded to them (Table 9). So, the share of former OTR holders that received housing care, and who permanently live in the Republic of Croatia is twice as big in comparison to the share of persons living here permanently in the total returnee population. Accordingly, the share of persons for whom it was established that they live outside of the Republic of Croatia is much smaller in the former group (17% in relation to 39%), and the same relates to the number of persons who passed away (5% in relation to 15%), and the share of persons for whom no reliable information could be gathered. So, for a total of ¼ of all respondents from this group, it was established that they do not reside permanently at the address of the housing unit awarded to them through the housing care programme (they either live elsewhere in Croatia or outside of Croatia).

Based on these results, one could lightly conclude that housing care is the key precondition to mass return of former OTR holders or that if they are all covered by the housing care programme, they would all return en masse and

stay permanently in Croatia. However, a more thorough analysis of gathered data and characteristics of former OTR holders who received housing care relativizes such a conclusion. First of all, one has to bear in mind the regional

Table 9 – Comparison of the presence of former OTR holders with the total returnee population

	Total returnee population	Former OTR holders
n	1402	399
Living in Croatia	33,2%	69,4%
a) At the registered address	82,8%	88,8%
b) Elsewhere in Croatia	17,2%	11,2%
Dead	14,8%	5,3%
Living outside of Croatia	38,7%	16,6%
a) Serbia	70,0%	39,2%
b) Elsewhere on the territory of former Yugoslavia	7,5%	4,8%
c) Other countries	22,5%	56,0%
No reliable information	13,3%	8,8%

distribution of former OTR holders covered by this research and their related destinies shaped by the war and their period of refuge. Namely more than 60 percent of former OTR holders who received housing care are in the Eastern Slavonia and Baranja region, which was peacefully reintegrated after the war.⁴¹ Only about 1/3 of other units awarded through the housing care programme are located elsewhere in Croatia. Such a distribution of resolved housing care requests shows that most OTR holders who received housing care were actually not refugees (at least not during the period of peaceful reintegration), and in turn they were not ‘real’ returnees⁴². This assumption is confirmed by the replies of the respondents who are former OTR holders, of whom 60 percent stayed on the territory of the Republic of Croatia during the entire war, either

41 In the data base of requests for housing care, which was used for selecting the sample, there are 6,323 households, whose requests were resolved positively, and who received housing care. Of that number, as many as 54% (3429) are in Vukovarsko-srijemska County, and additional 14% (889) in Osječko-baranjska county. But a share of persons who received housing care from Osječko-baranjska County was taken care of in areas that were not peacefully reintegrated (primarily Osijek, Đakovo, Našice, Valpovo). If cases of persons who received housing care in these areas are excluded (about 337 cases), we arrive at the data that about 63% of former OTR holders were taken care of in the areas that were peacefully reintegrated after the war.

42 It is possible that they were internally displaced persons, either in the area under the control of the Croatian authorities or in the occupied areas.

in the occupied or the unoccupied part. This percentage is even higher for surveyed persons from the region of Eastern Slavonia and Baranja.

Furthermore, former OTR holders who received housing care before conducting this research are certainly not average former OTR holders. Among them, there is certainly a higher share of unconditional permanent returnees, which was the description used in the previous research for the returnees who are most motivated to return and who were ready to sacrifice a lot only to realize their intention to spend the rest of their lives in the place where they resided before the war (Mesić and Bagić, 2007:100-1). Unconditional returnees were probably ready to invest even greater efforts in order to break through the 'administrative barriers'⁴³ and exercise their right to housing care, and they were ready to make a compromise that the current housing care programme imposed. This is the reason why it is not surprising that there is such a large number of persons who permanently live in Croatia among the former OTR holders who received housing care.

Furthermore, at the time of conducting our survey, compensatory (replacement) apartments were still quite a sensitive issue. They were awarded in order for people to return, and it was not yet known that there would be a possibility to purchase them. Therefore, for the beneficiaries, it was important to ensure presence in these apartments in order to maintain their right. Only when the replacement apartments are transferred to full ownership with all the disposition rights, it will become evident how many of these people really want and can permanently reside in them. In the apartments in urban areas life is even more difficult for the returnees without a steady source of income than in the country where people usually have some land available for agriculture. In several of our interviews with the returnees, we found out about concrete cases of former occupancy and tenancy right holders who indeed want to live in these apartments, but they are waiting for their retirement or to get a job in order to be able to really move in and occupy them permanently. It can be expected that in case of replacement flats, just as with restitution of land and

43 Here, we do not wish to say that there are any special administrative barriers that were established in order to make the process of providing housing care to former OTR holders more difficult, and that is why this term is mentioned under the quotation marks. Every administrative procedure is more or less demanding for regular citizens, particularly for persons with lower educational levels and the elderly, and in that sense any proceedings represent a kind of a barrier that the citizens have to overcome, and for this they need a certain degree of motivation, abilities and enthusiasm.

other property, solutions have to be sought at the level of the family, so that a part of the family lives in the replacement flat, and others live elsewhere where they have income. After all, some of them will replace these apartments (as we heard from some of the people who use them) for other apartments in the country, and again others will use them as capital for some other permanent solution to their refugee status. From the standpoint of the international community, the refugee issue these people had was provided with a durable solution in every single one of these cases, and from the standpoint of the people themselves, the freedom to choose among various options and to combine them opens broader prospects and gives them back the agency in making a decision on what for them is good life after their time as refugees (in the spirit of original liberalism). It is for this reason that their freedom of movement between their homeland and other destinations is important, as well as the rule of law. In that sense we believe that the (current) percentage of the beneficiaries who actually live in their compensatory apartments is less important, it is more important that this is a way to remedy (from the humanitarian perspective) an injustice inflicted upon the members of this national minority and to make it possible for them to really return and stay in their homeland, but it also facilitates their choice of a different prospect. All this can be a better guarantee for durable or sustainable solutions for minority refugees and displaced persons than if the replacement apartments were exclusively tied to their return. Besides, once they are transferred into full ownership of these beneficiaries, they will be able to legally dispose of them as any other owners.

For the above stated reasons, it can be assumed that the rate of permanent presence among the former OTR holders would not be the same once the housing care project assumes mass proportions, covering an even bigger number of 'real' refugees and/or returnees, or the less enthusiastic returnees, and when these apartments are treated as returnees' ownership from the very beginning. But this certainly does not diminish the importance of the housing care project for former OTR holders from the perspective of leaving the possibility to return as a permanent option for (former) refugees.

It was noticed that the returnees in the households belonging to former OTR holders who received housing care are on average somewhat older than the overall returnee population (their average age being 51 in comparison to

48.4). A comparison of the age structures of these two populations shows that there are fewer children of pre-school and school age living in the households of former OTR holders who received housing care, but there are more persons of upper middle age (between 45 and 64) (Figure 13). At the same time, these households have a smaller average number of household members in comparison to the overall population of returnee households (2.3 in comparison to 2.9)⁴⁴. But this difference does not result from the fact that more pre-war household members returned to these households belonging to former OTR holders, but from the fact that their pre-war households were on average smaller (2.9 in comparison to 4.4 members)⁴⁵, which is understandable given the differences in urban versus rural structure of these populations. At the same time, this means that a relatively higher number (about 80%) of pre-war household members of former OTR holders permanently reside in Croatia in comparison to the total returnee population (65%). The mentioned difference is the consequence of the fact that most of the former OTR holders who received housing care thus far were not real refugees, so that number of families where family members separated in the return process is smaller.

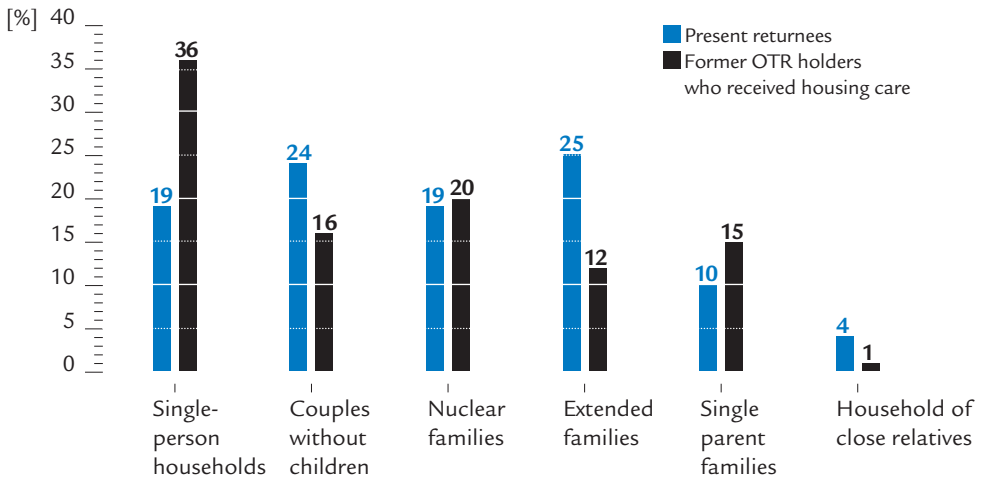
A smaller number of household members and older age structure of former OTR holders who received housing care is reflected in the household structure as well. In this subgroup of returnees, there is a higher share of single-person households (36% in comparison to 19%), and a smaller share of couples without children (16% in comparison to 24%) and extended families (12% in comparison to 25%) (Figure 14). The population of former OTR holders who received housing care is slightly more educated than the total population of present returnees. The share of persons who have not completed secondary school in this group amounts to 36%, in comparison to about 50 percent in the total population of present returnees. In accordance with that, the share of persons who completed secondary school (54% in comparison to 44%) and university (11% in comparison to 6%) is higher in the population of former OTR holders who received housing care. The mentioned difference can be explained with the fact that this is mostly urban population who used to work in the industrial plants or in the public authorities during the socialist times

44 $t=4.96$; $df=280$; $p<0.01$.

45 $t=10.60$; $df=285$; $p<0.01$.

(on which basis they received their apartments and their OTRs), and it was usually at least the secondary school level that was required for these jobs. On the other hand, in the total returnee (and refugee) population, it is the rural population with lower qualification levels that is predominant, particularly with respect to the older generation.

Figure 14 – Comparison between the household structure of the general population of present returnees and former OTR holders who received housing care⁴⁶



Satisfaction With Housing Care And Quality Of Life

The surveyed former OTR holders who received housing care within the corresponding programme of the Croatian government most frequently live in the compensatory property/apartment (around 2/3), whereas a smaller share (around 1/3) are accommodated in the same apartment where they originally had their occupancy and tenancy right⁴⁷. Of those who were provided with housing care in another property, a smaller number (about one fifth) chose the option of building or renewing the house on their own land or on the land owned by other family members, whereas others received housing units owned by the Republic of Croatia or by local government units that they could use.

About 70 percent of users of replacement apartments expressed the intention to purchase the apartment they received for use, if they are offered to do so under privileged conditions, and the majority of them (56%) are quite certain that they would do so, whereas a smaller share (14%) still has not made a definite decision⁴⁸. About 1/5 of the households do not intend to purchase the properties placed at their disposal, whereas one tenth have not yet defined their attitude to this question. Respondents from Eastern Slavonia and Baranja display a somewhat higher degree of certainty with respect to their intention to purchase the apartments in comparison to the respondents from other parts of Croatia. The older respondents state more frequently that they would not purchase the apartments. Naturally, concrete behaviour of former OTR holders who received housing care will significantly depend on the conditions for such purchase, given that it has not yet been specifically defined what the 'privileged conditions' should mean, and this is a relatively subjective category that might have different meanings for different people.

Former OTR holders who received housing care are mostly satisfied with the living conditions in the apartments placed at their disposal. Namely, 9 out of 10 claim that the apartment made available to them is fully (56%) or mostly (32%) adequate for the needs of their households. Every tenth person, on the other

46 Structure based on the data for all members of surveyed households. The structure for the subsample of persons recruited from the base of returnees is based on data for 1466 persons, and for the subsample of former OTR holders is based on data for 312 persons.

47 The data are based on the responses by 111 former OTR holders.

48 The field research was conducted before the Government of the Republic of Croatia issued the decision on the terms and conditions for the purchase of properties awarded within the housing care programme.

hand, believes that the property made available to them does not correspond to the needs of their household. The main source of dissatisfaction is the size of the apartment in view of the number of household members and the construction quality (and the age of the building). The level of satisfaction with the property they received within the housing care programme is also evident from the comparison of their satisfaction with their current living conditions with the level of satisfaction expressed by other respondents. Former OTR holders who received housing care are on average more satisfied with their current living conditions in comparison to other respondents. Namely, about one third of former OTR holders mentioned that they are very satisfied with their current living conditions, whereas only 1/5 of other returnees stated the same (Table 10). About 70 percent of former OTR holders who received housing care mentioned that their current living conditions are better than they were prior to moving into their current property. It needs to be mentioned that former OTR holders are much more rarely faced with the issue of lacking infrastructure in comparison to the overall returnee population, which is naturally the consequence of living in urban areas.

Table 10 – Satisfaction with the current living conditions among former OTR holders who received housing care and other returnees

	Former OTR holders who received housing care	Other returnees
n	82	556
Very dissatisfied	20%	22%
Satisfied to some extent	46%	58%
Very satisfied	34%	19%
Don't know	0%	1%

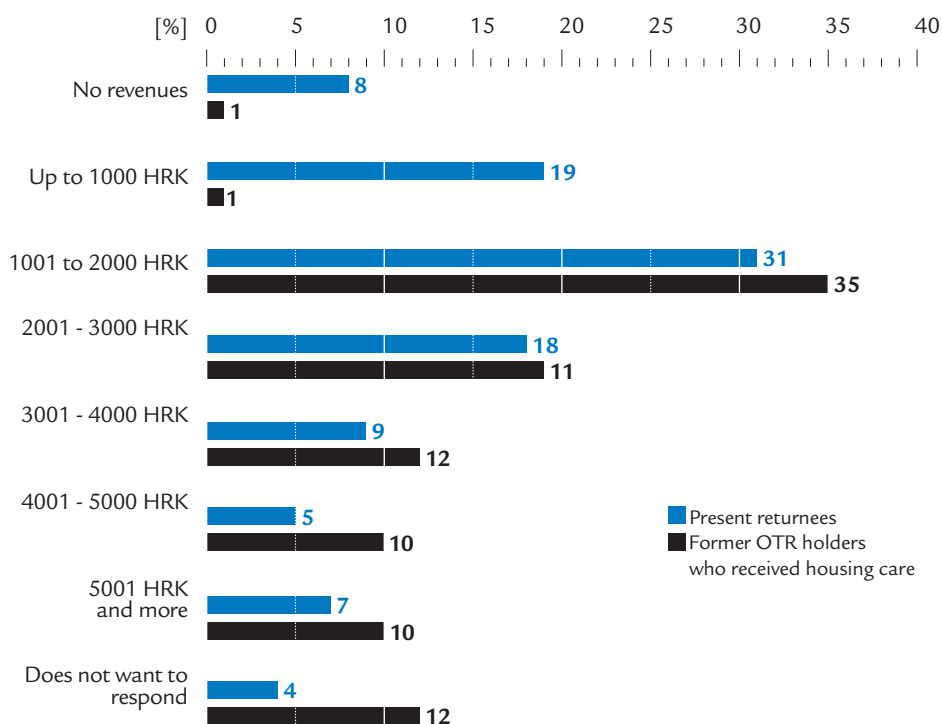
Former OTR holders who received housing care are more satisfied also with the material and financial circumstances of their households. More than one third of all surveyed OTR holders (36%) assess the conditions in their households as good, whereas this number in the total returnee population is three times lower (13%). On the other hand, every second returnee from the total returnee population assesses his/her material conditions as bad, whereas the number of former OTR holders who expressed the same is twice as low (27%). The mentioned differences in the subjective assessments of the living standard are

based on the objective indicators related to the amount and sources of income. Only two percent of former OTR holders who received housing care mentioned that their income was lower than 1,000 HRK in the month that preceded the survey, or that they had no income, which is 14 times lower in comparison to the total population of present returnees (Figure 15). Every third returnee who received housing care claims that his/her household had income exceeding 3,000 HRK, which is by 1/3 higher than in the overall returnee population. Taking into account the fact that the households of former OTR holders who received housing care are on average smaller, then the mentioned differences in the subjective assessment of material and financial circumstances of the household become even more understandable. The main reason why the households belonging to former OTR holders who received housing care have higher income in comparison to the total returnee population is the fact that the majority of these household members have regular income, primarily from pensions⁴⁹. All OTR holders were employed before the war (it is on the basis of their employment that they acquired their OTRs), so that it is quite understandable that they still have income from the pensions. Although this income is not high, it is regular, and it guarantees a minimum of certainty and predictability.

A higher level of optimism and satisfaction of former OTR holders is evident in the responses to the question, which asked about their assessment of the quality of life in the past five years. They stated more rarely that their quality of life worsened (22% in comparison to 34%), and a significantly higher proportion (48% in comparison to 34%) stated that there were no significant changes. It is somewhat surprising that a higher proportion of former OTR holders had not noted any improvement of living conditions, given that it was in that very period that they were provided with housing care. It is surprising that only 1/5 of these respondents mentioned housing care among the positive changes in the past five years. With respect to the problems they face, former OTR holders mention financial problems and unemployment less frequently than other

49 On average, 1.4 household members within the total returnee population have income from work or pension, whereas with former OTR holders, this number is 1.6. The difference is statistically significant: $t=-2.56$; $df=209$; $p<0.05$. When it comes to the number of household members who receive pension, the difference is statistically significant, whereas for other sources of revenues, it is not. In the households of former OTR holders, at least one household member (on average) receives pension, whereas this number is about 0.8 in the remaining returnee population: $t=-3.12$; $df=236$; $p<0.05$.

Figure 15 – Comparison of total income per household of former OTR holders who received housing care and the population of present returnees



returnees, but they complain about high prices and high utility costs, medical costs and the issues of apartment purchase more frequently than others.

Finally, we can conclude that living conditions of former OTR holders who received housing care are somewhat more favourable in comparison to average returnees, particularly those who live in small isolated rural settlements without any regular income. The background for their better quality of life is the fact that they live in urban areas, and most of them work or have pensions. The living conditions are also mostly satisfactory. To an extent, these data explain the fact that there is a higher proportion of permanent returnees in this group. They, however, also suggest that the rate of permanent stay of former OTR holders will not be equally high once this project is implemented en masse, and when it covers those OTR holders who do not have a steady source of income, such as pensions. Namely, in view of the fact that housing care is mostly implemented in urban areas, this group of returnees does not have any spare resources, like agricultural areas that they can use for producing food for their own needs.

Former OTR holders who are still living as refugees and those of working age that only now wish to return to Croatia (after receiving housing care) would probably not be able to find permanent employment for a relatively long time, and the unemployment rate among the returnees confirms this assumption, so that this would definitely jeopardize long-term sustainability of their return.

Interethnic Relations

Political circumstances for receiving Serb returnees and achieving their equality are much more favourable today than they were ten years ago by when most returnees returned. However, political processes at the national level need not necessarily result in reduced discrimination at the local level, and particularly not in changed relations among groups and individuals or the subjective feeling of being accepted. It is for this reason that the monitoring of interethnic relations, the feeling of being accepted or discriminated against remains an important aspect of an integral picture of the sustainability of minority return.

Responses of minority returnees to the set of questions that serve to examine the scale of their feelings of acceptance and security show that the vast majority of returnees feel relatively well accepted by the majority ethnic group, and that they feel relatively free in expressing their own identity⁵⁰. About 90 percent of the returnees feel secure in the place where they live, about $\frac{3}{4}$ have the feeling that they can freely express their national identity, more than 80 percent feel that they can freely attend religious festivities, and seven out of ten do not feel any obstacles in using their own language⁵¹ (Table 11). About two third of the respondents feel that they are accepted by the ethnic majority. A relatively small number of the respondents express certain elements of insecurity and fear: about three percent express a general feeling of insecurity, about five percent the feeling of not being accepted, almost every tenth person feels certain fear in expressing their national identity and in using their language.

50 The scale is one-dimensional, and internal consistency measured by Cronbach's alpha amounts to 0.79.

51 Possible language differences between Serb returnees and Croats who live in the same areas are the consequence of linguistic policies of newly established national states on the one hand, and of changes in linguistic habits caused by a longer stay in another linguistic environment on the other. So, the differences are not traditional, but newly produced. And this is what gives them even more emotional and political weight.

It seems that the highest percentage of minority returnees feel that they are not treated as equals by the staff working in public institutions (about 15%). These results lead to a conclusion that in most environments there is no open hostility between Serb returnees and the majority Croatian population, and that negative experiences are relatively rare. It is, naturally, possible that a certain number of respondents did not want to publically express their fears under the influence of the public opinion that Serbs are increasingly accepted, which was formed under the influence of Serb political representatives who have become a part of the mainstream Croatian national politics.

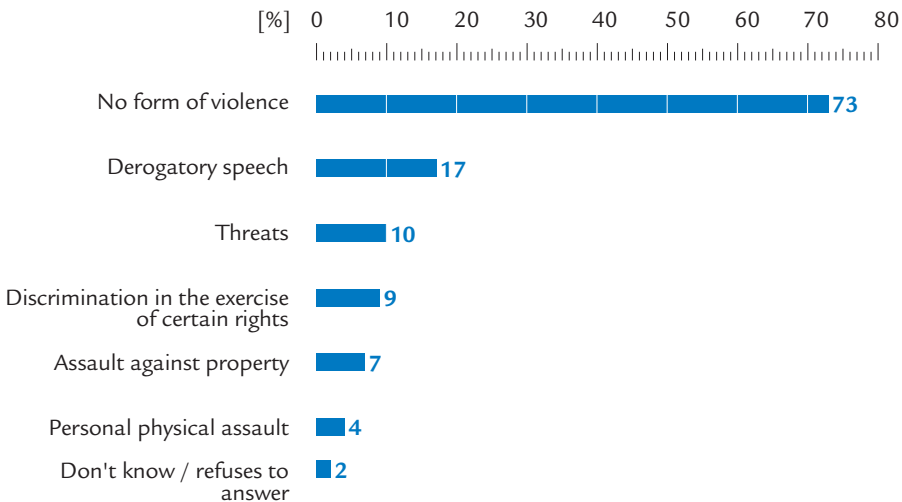
Table 11 – Scale of feelings of acceptance and security – frequency and average value

	Completely untrue	Mostly untrue	Equally true and untrue	Mostly true	Completely true	Don't know	Average value
I feel secure in the place of my residence	1,2%	2,0%	6,2%	25,4%	64,4%	0,8%	4,5
I feel accepted by the Croats	2,2%	2,8%	19,0%	39,0%	25,2%	11,8%	3,9
Relations between Serbs and Croats in the place where I live are the same as before the war	7,4%	9,2%	20,2%	30,2%	13,8%	19,2%	3,4
Staff members of public institutions treat Serbs and Croats equally	5,0%	9,6%	18,4%	28,6%	21,4%	17,0%	3,6
I feel able to freely express my national identity	2,6%	5,8%	13,0%	28,2%	44,4%	6,0%	4,1
I feel free to participate in my religious festivities (ceremonies, services etc.)	1,8%	1,2%	8,4%	26,2%	56,4%	6,0%	4,4
I feel that I am viewed strangely when I use my own language	55,8%	13,6%	10,2%	5,4%	4,0%	11,0%	1,7

In comparison to the 2006 research, progress was recorded with respect to feeling free to express one's own identity. This is particularly evident in terms of using one's language. The 2006 research recorded $\frac{1}{4}$ of returnees who felt that their surroundings did not react positively to using Serb words, whereas this number is twice as low today. On average, the feeling of freedom to express one's national identity⁵² and participation in religious services increased⁵³.

The results of responses to questions about experiences of various forms of ethnicity-based violence show that returnees' relationships and experiences were not the same in the beginning and today. About $\frac{1}{4}$ of the respondents stated that they personally or their other family members experienced some form of violence. Fortunately, most have experienced only milder forms of violence, such as derogatory speech (17%) or threats (10%) (Figure 16). A smaller number of the returnees (4%, i.e. 7%) experienced more serious forms of violence, such as physical assault or assault against one's property. Every tenth returnee feels to be discriminated against in the exercise of certain rights. Returnees to smaller settlements up to 500 inhabitants less frequently had unpleasant experiences, probably partly because these settlements are not ethnically mixed, and they are inhabited by people who have known one other long and well. Returnees to Dalmatia have more frequently experienced certain forms of violence in comparison to the returnees to Lika and Banovina, and particularly in comparison to persons who returned to Slavonia.

Figure 16 — Have you or any of your household members been exposed to any of the following forms of violence due to your ethnic affiliation?



Returnees confirm positive changes in inter-ethnic relations also by responding directly to this question. Namely, 58 percent stated that inter-ethnic relations are improving as time since return goes by, and only one percent perceives an opposite trend. The remaining persons feel that there have been no changes in this respect.

The feelings of improved interethnic relations and increased freedom of expressing one's identity do not necessarily signify improvement of interethnic relations. About five percent of the returnees stated that they rarely have contacts to Croats, even at the level of greeting them on the street, and additional 28 percent stated that they only exchange courtesies with the Croats. About 38 percent stated that they pay visits to Croats, or indeed that they mutually visit each other. It seems that relations in Dalmatia are more distanced than in other regions, particularly Lika, Kordun and Banovina. Namely, every fifth returnee to Dalmatia stated that they pay visits to Croats and vice versa, whereas in Lika, Kordun and Banovina the same was stated by every second returnee. And vice versa, every second respondent from Dalmatia stated that they have no contacts or just exchange courtesies with the Croats, whereas this kind of a relationship is more than twice as rare in Lika, Kordun and Banovina. There are several different indicators presented in this report that speak of worse interethnic relations in Dalmatia, which suggests the need to have special projects and activities in that region.

The issue of political equality of Serbs in Croatia presents a whole different dimension of interethnic relations. This has no significant influence on the daily lives of most returnees nor can it any longer be a part of any activities implemented by the international community in the context of ensuring the prerequisites for sustainable return. At the formal level, Serbs as a national minority enjoy a high level of rights judging by the European standards (Mesić, 2003). This level of rights has evolved gradually, and it culminated in the adoption of the Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities and other by-laws, which partly resulted from the participation of Serb political representatives in shaping the parliamentary majority. It is a different issue to

52 For this same question, the average rating recorded in 2006 amounted to 3.85, which is statistically significantly less than 4.13, which was recorded in the new research: $t=5.76$; $df=469$; $p<0.01$.

53 $t=3.99$; $df=469$; $p<0.01$.

which extent and how fast these rights are implemented in practice.

More than 40 percent of the returnees believe that Serbs in Croatia do not have sufficient political rights, and somewhat more than 1/3 of the returnees feel that Serbs are second-rate citizens, and as many as two thirds believe that Serbs should not have the status of a national minority but the status of an equal constitutive nation (Table 12). It is precisely this last statement that shows that the background for the feelings of political inequality is rather symbolic than practical from the perspective of legal interests. Namely, for Serbs (and for other national minorities), the status of a national minority provides the necessary mechanisms for the protection of their special rights and interests, including the proportionate representation in the public and local government bodies, special political representation at all levels of government, prohibition of any discrimination on ethnic or religious grounds, the right to receive education in one's own language etc. So, it seems that the returnees would be ready to give up on the special protection mechanisms provided to them by their minority status for some symbolic reasons (negative experience of the minority status with respect to the issue of national constitutiveness). In practice, there are probably numerous difficulties with respect to the exercise of guaranteed minority rights, but this should still not be the reason for this level of dissatisfaction with the political position of Serbs. Serb political representatives in Croatia, whose main political platform is focused on formalising the minority rights as firmly as possible, obviously did not manage to convince their voters to embrace this political strategy.

In comparison to the previous research, today a smaller number of returnees feel that Serbs are second-rate citizens (36% in comparison to 51%), but an almost equal number believe that Serbs do not have sufficient political rights and that they should not have the status of a national minority. These are obviously deeply rooted political attitudes that are not related to the perception of improved interethnic relations, and increased feelings of acceptance and security. The mentioned political attitudes, which were the basis for Serb rebellion in early 1990-ties certainly present an obstacle to return for a part of refugees (hard-core non-returnees), and an obstacle for a part of formal returnees not to stay permanently in Croatia.

To an extent, persistency of mentioned attitudes is supported by some cases of discrimination with respect to employment in the public and private sectors.

Namely, about a half of the returnees rightly feel that Serbs are underrepresented in the public services and public administration in areas where they account for a significant share of the population, and about 40 percent feel that private employers discriminate against them on ethnic grounds. The perception of discrimination on ethnic grounds with respect to employment in the public and private sectors shows significant correlation to the attitudes on the political position of Serbs in Croatia, which suggests that this is a kind of ‘justification’ for the lack of acceptance of the existing legal and political position of Serbs⁵⁴.

Table 12 – Scale of political (in)equality – frequencies and average value

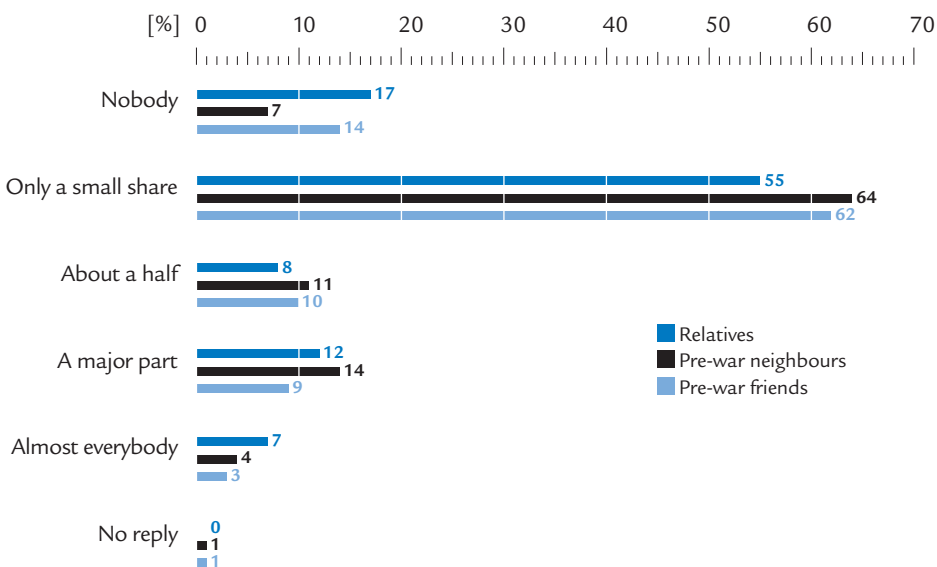
	Completely untrue	Mostly untrue	Equally true and untrue	Mostly true	Completely true	Don't know	Average value
Serbs are underrepresented in public services in places to which a significant number of Serbs returned.	3,2%	5,8%	17,8%	26,2%	25,8%	21,2%	3,8
Croatian company owners prefer to employ Croats over Serbs.	4,8%	6,0%	20,0%	19,4%	22,2%	27,6%	3,7
Serbs in Croatia are second-rate citizens.	11,4%	12,4%	21,0%	16,0%	20,0%	19,2%	3,3
Serbs do not have sufficient political rights in Croatia.	6,4%	7,2%	24,6%	20,0%	21,8%	20,0%	3,5
Serbs should not have the status of a national minority but they should be a constitutive nation together with the Croats.	3,8%	2,6%	13,6%	16,0%	49,6%	14,4%	4,2

⁵⁴ Two above mentioned statements are a part of the scale that measures political (in)equality, which shows high internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha amounts to 0.847.

SOCIAL NETWORKS, LONELINESS AND RETURN

The results of our research confirm the assumptions presented in the theoretical introduction on the significant changes in the social context and in the structure of social networks to which returnees return and in which they live. As we have already mentioned in previous chapters, in more than a half of all households, at least one pre-war family member has not returned to Croatia. Changes are even bigger if one looks at the broader social network, outside of the family. Namely, more than 70 percent of the returnees stated that nobody returned to Croatia or that only a small part of their extended family, their pre-war neighbours and friends returned (Figure 17). Less than 1/5 of returnees stated the opposite: that most persons or all members of various circles of their social network returned. A high level of correlation of responses to three questions on return of different social circles show that these changes are deep and comprehensive or that they equally cover all types of social relations⁵⁵. Taking into account the cumulative effect of the renewal of all three types of social relations, about 57 percent of returnees stated that only a small number or even nobody from all three circles of social relations returned, and as many as $\frac{3}{4}$ of the returnees stated that only a half or less than

Figure 17 – What proportion of your relatives, pre-war neighbours and friends has returned to Croatia?



a half of persons from all three circles returned. Only every fifth returnee is fortunate enough to be able to state that his/her social network today is more or less the same as before the war. Returnees' social networks in larger urban areas (towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants) have renewed to a greater extent in comparison to small rural settlements (up to 2,000 inhabitants)⁵⁶. Although most returnees live in smaller settlements, and although the return rate and the rate of permanent stay in this type of settlements is bigger, it seems that the process of renewal of old social networks and relations is weaker. There are significant differences with respect to this issue among individual regions. It seems that social networks were renewed to a greater extent in Slavonia and Lika, Kordun and Banovina in comparison to Dalmatia and other parts of Croatia⁵⁷.

Weaker renewal of pre-war social networks has an impact on the intensity of the current relations. Almost a half of all returnees stated that they have day-to-day contacts with three or fewer persons, outside of their households. The other half of all returnees stated that they have day-to-day contacts with a bigger number of persons. The number of persons, to whom the returnees currently have contacts correlates to the intensity of renewal of their pre-war networks⁵⁸.

Weak renewal of pre-war social networks often results in the feelings of loneliness among the returnees. Almost every second returnee stated that they sometimes felt lonely. The feelings of loneliness occur much more often among those returnees whose pre-war social networks have mostly not been renewed⁵⁹. Given that the feeling of loneliness is not rare among the permanent returnees, it probably influences return sustainability and the very decision whether to return or not for a significant number of refugees. Returnees who return to small settlements, with up to 500 inhabitants⁶⁰, and persons who live alone or

55 Correlations between the three variables range between 0.61 and 0.73 measured by the Spearman's rho coefficient of correlation for ordinal variables. Naturally, all three correlations are statistically significant with 1% risk.

56 Average value on the composite scale of renewal of pre-war social networks for the inhabitants of settlements with fewer than 2,000 inhabitants is about 2.3, and for the inhabitants of towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants, it is about 3.0. The difference is statistically significant: $F=18.86$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$.

57 The average value on the composite scale of renewal of social networks for Slavonia and Lika, Kordun and Banovina amounts to approximately 2.5, and for Dalmatia and other parts of Croatia to approximately 2.0. The difference is statistically significant: $F=10.23$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$. $F=6.05$; $df=4$; $p<0.01$.

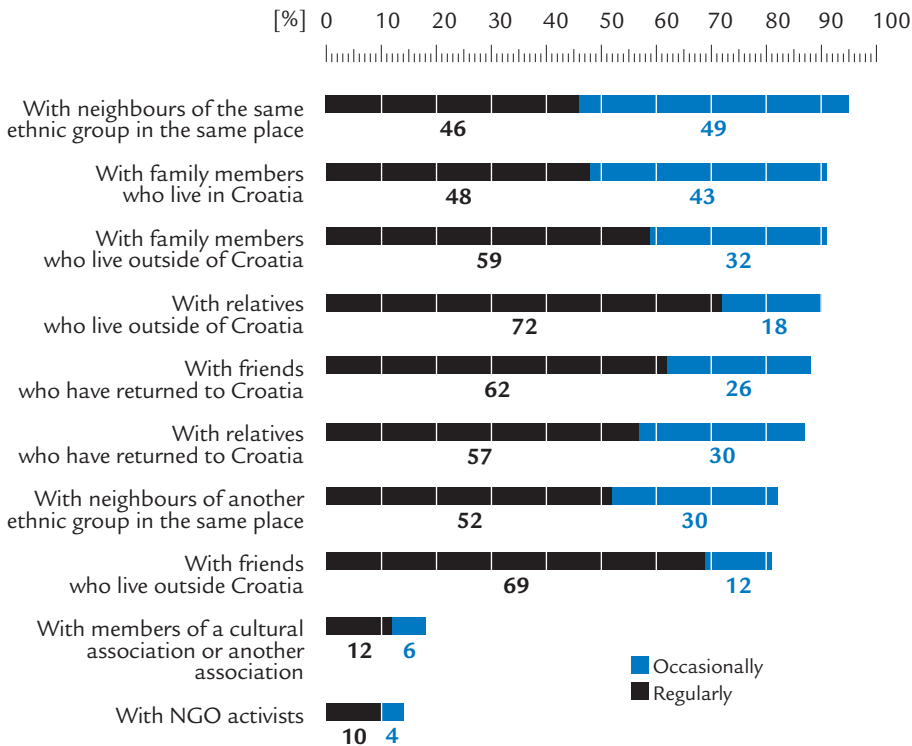
59 Average rating given to the statement 'I feel lonely' among the persons whose pre-war social networks have mostly not been renewed is 3.4, and among the persons for whom they were partly (2.7) or fully renewed (1.9), it is much lower: $F=23$; $df=2$; $p<0.01$.

60 $F=8.14$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$.

as a couple (with their spouses) more frequently feel lonely⁶¹.

The importance of pre-war social networks for the returnees is evident also from the analysis of the intensity of relations that the returnees have with individual groups. Almost all returnees maintain relations to their neighbours of the same ethnic group who live in the same place. This is the group with whom the largest number of returnees (a half) maintains regular relations.

Figure 18 — Intensity of relations with a certain group



Following the neighbours of the same ethnic group there are family members who also live in Croatia, and then the family members and relatives who live outside of Croatia. Only a small number of returnees have occasional or regular contacts with members of culture and art associations or the NGOs. This comes as no surprise knowing that about five percent of returnees are members of any kind of an NGO.

61 $F=12.38$; $df=5$; $p<0.01$.

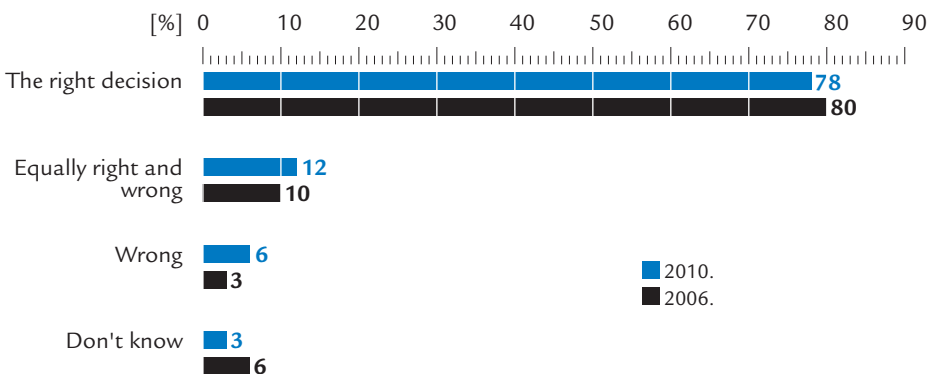
From a more thorough analysis of the intensity of contacts that the returnees maintain with individual groups, at least two important conclusions can be drawn. First of all, they confirm that the interaction is more intense within ethnic communities than across their boundaries. Clearly, this is partly influenced by the relative ethnic homogeneity of small settlements where most returnees live. The second conclusion is that the transnational networks and relations are of high intensity and significance. More than 80 percent of the returnees have at least occasional relations to family members, their extended families and friends who currently live outside of Croatia. As many as 1/3 of all returnees maintain regular relations with family members who currently live outside of Croatia, and about 1/5 also with other relatives who have not returned. When it comes to the members of the close family who live outside of Croatia, they usually visit the returnees once or twice a year. About five percent of the respondents stay elsewhere for one part of the year, often with family members who live outside of Croatia. These transnational relations now make a significant part of returnees' social lives and they serve as a channel to transfer information on the living conditions and difficulties to those persons who have not (yet) returned. They are a resource for those who have not yet returned when they make their decision on possible return, but they are also a resource for the returnees when they make a decision on renewed migration. These transnational links are indeed the backbone of the procedural character of return.

VIEWS OF THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

When it comes to returnees, their view of the future is primarily related to how they evaluate a decision they made relatively recently – the decision on return. The decision to return presents an important point in their lives, a point at which they make an important and far-reaching choice with respect to their future (at least those persons who have at least some options to choose from). After that point, their subsequent views of the future inevitably imply questioning of this decision.

The vast majority, eight out of ten present returnees believe that the decision to return was the right decision. The remaining 1/5 either have doubts whether it was the right decision or they are certain (about 6% of the present returnees) that it was a wrong decision. In comparison to the previous research implemented in 2006, the number of persons who have doubts about whether they made the right decision remained more or less the same, but among them, the number of persons who are certain that they made the wrong decision increased (Figure 19)⁶². This change implies that dissatisfaction with the decision to return became more clear for those persons who have probably questioned if this was the right decision to make from the very beginning.

Figure 19 – Evaluation of the decision to return – comparison of the results of 2010 and 2006



62 $\chi^2=24.56$; $df=3$; $p<0.01$.

Late returnees (those who returned after 2005) more frequently doubt whether they made the right decision, particularly in comparison to those who returned by the end of 1999 (Table 13)⁶³. As many as 1/3 of late returnees doubt whether they made the right decision, and the largest number of persons from this group believe that the decision to return was equally right and wrong. Such a result may be the consequence of the fact that this group of returnees made their decision to return relatively recently. Important decisions in life, and this is certainly an important decision, are usually followed by a period of questioning whether this was the right decision to make, and one still finds arguments for and against. Furthermore, late returnees are still adapting to living in ‘new conditions’, which is why they have not fully qualified their impressions.

Table 13 – Evaluation of the decision to return – by year of return

	Total	Year of return		
		Until 2000	2000 to 2005	After 2005
n	500	239	194	65
The right decision	78%	81%	80%	66%
Equally right and wrong	12%	9%	13%	22%
Wrong	6%	5%	6%	9%
Don't know	3%	5%	2%	3%

It comes as no surprise that older respondents (65 plus)⁶⁴, and those with a higher income⁶⁵ and persons with a steady source of income such as salaries or pensions⁶⁶ more rarely express doubts whether this was a right decision. The above mentioned differences suggest that the general attitude towards the decision to return is related to the quality of life indicators, which was not the conclusion of the previous research that showed the predominance of political attitudes as the predictor of people’s dissatisfaction with return.

Regression analysis shows, however, that attitudes still play an important role in the general evaluation of whether the decision to return was the right decision.

63 $\chi^2=12.00$; $df=6$; $p<0.05$.

64 $\chi^2=28.93$; $df=9$; $p<0.01$.

65 $\chi^2=30.92$; $df=15$; $p<0.01$.

66 $\chi^2=23.46$; $df=9$; $p<0.01$.

Namely, from a series of quality of life indicators and their subjective and relative evaluation, only five predictors contribute significantly to the explanation of the evaluation of one's decision to return. Of these five predictors, only one relates to the 'hard' factors of the quality of life: it is the number of infrastructural deficiencies that the returnees are faced with. So, the hard indicators related to material circumstances (household income, existence or non-existence of

Table 14 – Predictors for the assessment of the decision to return (regression analysis)

	Standardized beta coefficient	t	Sig.
Constant		Sig.	0,00
Does the respondent live alone?	0,07	0,86	0,39
Does (s)he have a permanent solution to the housing issue?	-0,01	-0,19	0,85
Does the household have a regular source of income?	0,05	0,50	0,62
Is the respondent unemployed?	0,01	0,13	0,90
Political (in)equality scale	0,16	1,91	0,06
Scale of acceptance and fear	-0,05	-0,62	0,54
Scale of renewal of pre-war social networks	-0,20	-2,57	0,01
Number of infrastructural handicaps	-0,16	-2,06	0,04
Age	-0,14	-1,42	0,16
Household income	-0,05	-0,61	0,54
How would you assess the overall material circumstances of your household?	-0,13	-1,38	0,17
Are the current living standards in your household better, equal or worse in comparison to the refugee situation, directly prior to return?	-0,04	-0,36	0,72
How would you compare your life here with your life in the country where you stayed longest as the refugee?	-0,20	-1,90	0,06
How would you compare your life here with the life of your Croatian neighbours?	-0,07	-0,93	0,35
Have your living conditions changed for better or for worse in the past five years?	-0,18	-2,03	0,04
How would you evaluate your general state of health?	0,15	1,66	0,10
R2		0,30	
Corrected R2		0,23	

a regular source of income, respondent's employment) are not significant predictors of the general evaluation of the decision to return once that other factors are included in the equation. It seems that the indicators that point to a trend in the quality of life are much more significant. Consequently, significant predictors include the comparison of the current living conditions with the living conditions during the period of refuge and the evaluation whether the current living conditions are worsening or improving. The respondents who feel that their living conditions have worsened more frequently tend to question their decision to return. This finding shows once again that the decision to return is never final, and that it can be re-examined at any moment if there is a significant deterioration in life's circumstances. The level of renewal of pre-war social networks is also one of the factors that have a crucial influence on the evaluation of one's decision to return. This confirms our assumption that the number of returnees in some community and the resulting possibility of renewing social relations is an important factor of making the decision on real return for other refugees. This means that a decision made by one refugee whether to return or not significantly influences the decision of another refugee related to the first one. The fifth important factor that influences the evaluation of the decision to return are political attitudes of the returnees, particularly those that have to do with the issue of political (in)equality of Serbs in Croatia. This confirms the finding from the previous research: political attitudes are still one of the factors that influence both the decision to return and the decision to stay permanently.

However, there is a significant number of persons who doubt whether their decision to return was the right decision, but who currently have no intention to re-emigrate. About 60 percent intend to continue to live in the same place where they currently live (Table 15). The remaining part is considering migration, but only a small proportion are considering to return to the country where they stayed as refugees, whereas the majority are considering going to third countries (mostly those persons who believe that the decision on return was a wrong decision) or moving to some other place within Croatia (those persons who believe that their decision to return was equally right and wrong). In total, about four percent of the currently present returnees are considering renewed migration outside of Croatian borders, whereas another three percent are considering to migrate within Croatia. Nine out of ten returnees have no

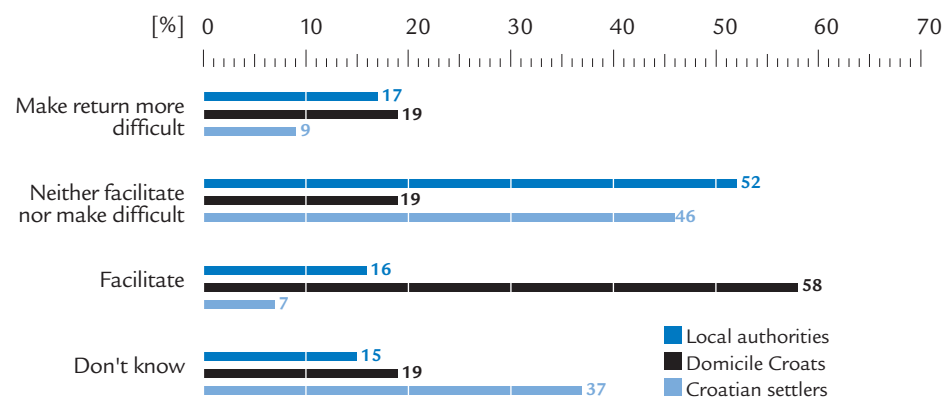
intention to change their current place of residence in the foreseeable future. Similar results were recorded in 2006, which indicates the existence of a permanent migration dynamics within the refugee population, which exists in any other population as well.

Plans to leave are naturally linked to the evaluation of one's opportunities to establish normal living conditions in the current place of residence. As many as ¼ of the returnees believe that it is not possible to accomplish normal

Table 15 – Plans for the future – according to the evaluation of one's decision to return

	Total	The evaluation of one's decision to return			
		Right decision	Equally right and wrong	Wrong	Don't know
n	500	392	60	31	17
Stay where you currently reside	88%	95%	65%	58%	82%
Move to another place within Croatia	3%	2%	10%		
Return to the country of refuge	1%	0%	2%	3%	
Move to a third country	3%	1%	8%	19%	6%
Don't know	6%	3%	15%	19%	12%

Figure 20 – Evaluation of the relationship of individual stakeholders and groups towards Serb refugees' return



living conditions in the place where they currently reside. Naturally, persons who believe this much more frequently express their scepticism with respect to whether their decision to return was the right decision and their intention

to leave. Respondents from smaller settlements more frequently believe that it is not possible to accomplish normal living conditions in their settlements. Returnees to Dalmatia express this attitude more often than returnees to Slavonia, and Lika, Kordun and Banovina. As main obstacles for accomplishing improved living conditions, the respondents state economic factors, and to a smaller extent factors related to the conditions and quality of housing, or factors related to the political position or relations to Serb returnees.

Various groups and stakeholders may contribute to the improvement of living conditions for the returnees, but they can equally exert negative influence. Most returnees believe that the local authorities in the cities and municipalities where they live are indifferent to return and the returnees. Almost the same number of respondents (about 17% respectively), obviously persons with experiences from different local communities, stated that the local authorities make the return of Serb refugees more difficult or that they facilitate it. The returnees similarly evaluate the contribution of Croatian settlers. It was only the contribution of indigenous Croatian population that was evaluated as much more positive. Almost 60 percent of the returnees believe that domicile Croats facilitate the return of Serb refugees. However, it has to be emphasized that about 1/5 of returnees believe the opposite, that it is the domicile Croats that make return more difficult.

The returnees almost unanimously (78%) agree that improved political relations between Serbia and Croatia may facilitate refugee return, and every second returnee believes that Croatia's joining the European Union would improve the position of Serbs in Croatia. These findings once again confirm that the returnees pay significant attention to the political environment and political relations.

Returnees are relatively critical towards the UNHCR's contribution in facilitating the conditions for the return of Serb refugees. Namely, 70 percent of returnees believe that the UNHCR could have done much more in this respect, and almost half the respondents from that group (31%) feel that the UNHCR has almost done anything! Only 1/5 of respondents believe that the UNHCR did everything in its power in order to ensure better conditions for return. Criticism against the UNHCR probably primarily refers to the absence of direct material assistance during the past years, because a certain number of returnees have mentioned precisely this as one of the factors of deteriorated quality

of life. A part of the returnees, especially the earlier ones who received much ampler direct material assistance, probably developed a certain dependence on that international assistance. Returnees probably do not perceive the activities conducted by the UNHCR at the political and institutional level, which can in turn have much more far reaching effects on ensuring the prerequisites for return and return sustainability.

VII

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH – TYPOLOGIES OF RETURNEES AND RETURN

INTRODUCTION

This part of the report is based on our qualitative research, by which we mean in-depth interviews conducted with more than 80 minority returnees in Croatia and a dozen refugees and formal returnees living in Belgrade and the surrounding area. As a rule interviews took place in the homes and apartments of our respondents. The returnees we interviewed were located with the help of staff from UNHCR branch offices in Sisak and Knin, and the office of the Serb Democratic Forum in Pakrac. We looked for them in the refugee areas of Banovina and Kordun, Dalmatia and Western Slavonia, and in settlements varying in size and geographical location, from isolated hamlets to municipal centres.¹ We accounted for the fact that these settlements represented both isolated and mass returns, and contained small proportions, or relative or absolute majorities of returnees in the present population. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we selected interviewees with different social demographic characteristics, according to age, gender, education, economic status, family circumstances, etc. However, these respondents and their statements

¹ These comprise the former UNPA sectors North, South and West. After the signing of the Vance Peace Plan in January 1992, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 743 on Yugoslavia, establishing an UN unit and deploying it in the crises areas. In accordance with the peace plan, the deployment of international forces was envisaged in three areas "in which Serbs form the majority or significant minority of the population and where tension between communities has led to armed conflict in the recent past": Eastern Slavonia, Western Slavonia and the Krajina. For operative reasons, four UNPA sectors were set up in these three regions: Sector East (Eastern Slavonia and Baranja with Western Srijem), Sector West (Central or Western Slavonia), and in the Krajina, Sector South (southern Krajina) and Sector North (Banija and Kordun).

should not be understood as representative in the statistical, but only in the typological sense. Regardless of the relatively large size of their numbers, we cannot conclude from our conversations with them the proportion of the total returnee population formed by individual types, which is the task of representative survey taking. This qualitative research helps us gain a better understanding of the complexity, diversity and dynamics of the process of return.

As a rule, UNHCR staff contacted potential interviewees before one of our two researchers approached them for an interview. There was only one multigenerational returnee family who cancelled the appointment just before our arrival, with the excuse that that they had urgent work to do in the fields. Although the UNHCR local staff told us beforehand that “it is now easier to get into the refugee community, as the cloak of fear and isolation is slowly lifting”, we must emphasise that we were still surprised by the unexpected readiness of the great majority of those we interviewed to engage in conversations with us, and their relative openness during these conversations. It should be mentioned that they were told, and we ourselves repeated before beginning interviews, that the purpose of our visits and conversations was scientific, with the aim of discovering and reporting on the problems they had encountered as returnees. Most of the people we met live very modestly, some in poor conditions. Therefore we were moved by their hospitality, which was reflected in their offers of food, drink or home-grown fruit, preserved for the winter.

As we set off into the field, we had prepared headings for a semi-structured, uniform interview. However, it quickly became clear that the outline was more a hindrance than a help. The interviewees often took over the conversation, after the initial introductions and questions, skipping from topic to topic, depending on what they thought it was important to say at the time. It was up to us to “join in” their trains of thought, occasionally guiding them to the topics which we considered central to our research. To be honest, we believe that those we interviewed felt themselves to be less the “objects” of our research as a result, and we felt less like “researchers”. We all became participants in the conversations. However, it was not our intention to create a “pleasant atmosphere”, which might affect the readiness of our respondents to be critical of the problems they had faced upon returning. In fact, the opposite may have been true – without their trust, many would not have been prepared to talk about

negative, sensitive experiences in relation to Croats, both natives (domiciles) and post-war Croatian settlers (mostly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who lost their properties there and/or did not want to return to their places of origin). The result was that, on the whole, we got answers to our “prepared” questions, but often much more than that, and more extensively, which we noted by hand. This was because we had deliberately decided not to record interviews, as we assumed this would limit the spontaneity of conversations.

The typologies of returns and returnees enable us to systematise different individual and family strategies for return among refugees (or another durable solution to refugee status), as well as a variety of refugee and returnee experiences. Any typology is a sort of construction of a complex social phenomenon, and should be understood as an approximate description of typical cases, among which there may be certain important differences. In reality, individual people and their return stories do not neatly fit into the boxes of given types, i.e. may fall partially within one and partially within another type.

The information we gathered from the survey, and particularly from conversations with minority returnees, provided us with the opportunity of constructing different typologies of return and returnees, depending on the key criterion on which each type was based, since we were dealing with one-dimensional typology models. Thus, the same individual returnees can be found under different types, depending on which aspect of their refugee or returnee experiences and strategies we took into account. In this report, we have restricted ourselves to several types, which are linked to a theoretical discussion, and which, in our judgment, are essential to an understanding of the complexity, dynamics and openness of the process of return of Serb refugees to Croatia.

As a rule, we attempted to illustrate each type of return or returnee using their original life stories, i.e. the testimonies of those interviewed. However, as we have already said, they did not answer our set questions in a systematic way, but often linked different aspects of their “refugee/returnee stories”, which in their eyes were vitally interwoven, and only made sense when integrated. It is now therefore difficult to separate mechanically the parts of their testimonies which only illustrate some typologies. Perhaps it would actually be more useful, in terms of our approach to the issues of return, to include other parts of their stories along with the characteristics of the types illustrated,

even though these parts refer to other types of return and returnees. For each of our interviewees, to a greater or lesser extent, belongs simultaneously to different types of return and returnees – according to their personal socio-demographic characteristics, their (or their families’) return strategies, or their (or their families) returnee experiences. We have pointed this out in brackets occasionally in certain parts of individual interviews when we came across information constitutive of other types.

Each reader, particular if he or she is an analyst, is free to analyse and draw his own conclusions from these stories, and this may be aided by the theoretical discussion on conceptual issues related to refugee return. We have tried to communicate as faithfully as possible the statements and opinions of those we interviewed, which has sometimes required linguistic intervention and the organisation of thoughts into topical units, and finally, we have had to shorten contributions, due to the limitations of space in this report. Whatever the case, we have not “adjusted” their contributions to make them conform to our typological schemes, as we preferred for this very reason to move consciously beyond the bounds of predetermined types, following their trains of thought.

CONTROVERSIES SURROUNDING THE CONCEPT OF RETURN

In our research, the central issue is the return of minority refugees, along with a series of accompanying problems. We have paid due attention to some of these. According to the Convention, a refugee is determined to be a person exposed to persecution as an individual due to his or her race, ethnicity, religion or political standing. Yet at the same time, refugees are not usually isolated individuals, but have families or belong to extended family networks. In the various phases of their refugee trajectories, family ties and the wider social network, which are often transnational, are of great importance to refugees, perhaps more than to other people. When mass movements of refugees occur, they are depicted in the media using a “wide screen”, as a “faceless masses” in which individuality is lost and their common characteristic – forced migration – emphasised. Through our “qualitative” research, we tried in several ways to overcome these reductionist perspectives on refugees. We talked to each

one individually, but we also tried to discover from each, in as much detail as possible, their wider family story, and to encourage other members of the household to express their views on the returnee situation.

We encountered other limitations in our (scientific) approach and understanding of refugee return. Traditionalists expect refugees to be vitally connected with their “homes”, hardly waiting to return. From the traditionalist’s point of view, it is “abnormal” for refugees not to return “home”, if the basic conditions for them to do so are met. For social constructionists, “home” is less “a house” in the physical sense, and has more to do with social networks in the narrower and wider community around the place of residence, which together forming an atmosphere of “home”. Since it was exactly these relationships (primarily interethnic) which were broken off at a deep level, and the country of origin underwent essential changes in the social and political sense, all that was left of their “homes” were physical shells. Therefore it is “normal” for these people to endeavour to build a home elsewhere, particularly in a place where the actual power and most of the population belong to the same ethnic group. Finally, postmodernists, who hold up the experiences of postmodern societies, no longer see any firm, relatively stable (essentialist) links between people, but only fluid social processes and (re)constructions of social relations. Therefore “home”, if it any longer has any deeper meaning, moves according to where the members of a household live, and may even exist concurrently in two or more physical locations. The scholars who point to the construction of (family) transnational social spaces in the processes of voluntary and non-voluntary migration are close to the postmodernists. Therefore they cannot explain or understand traditionalist refugees, who returned to their houses in Croatia because they continued to be connected to them as “home”, even when their “homes” had been (deliberately) destroyed, whether in the physical or social sense of the word.

We have come to the firm conclusion that none of these competing perspectives can explain or understand all the complexities of the process of minority return to Croatia, but they should all be taken into account and may complement each other. Even transnational family strategies (the bilocation or multilocation of family members in two or more countries) are not simply (post)modern social constructions. This is because, firstly, for many Serb refugees (the same is more or less true for other ethnic groups in this part of

the world), strong family obligations are not limited to the nuclear family (a married couple and their minor children) as in the West. Secondly, extended families, particularly in generational terms, often combine traditional components with (post)modern ones. In other words, when they grow up, the children (and then their children) live in towns, where socialisation includes new, modern views on the world, while their ageing parents in the village maintain their traditional values. In addition, the longer children and younger members of the family have spent as refugees, particularly if they have integrated in their new environment, the harder it is for them to “return home”, which is understandable. The question, “Where is home?” is for them a legitimate one.

The behaviour of refugees, whether they return “home” or not, may appear “irrational” if viewed exclusively from one of the perspectives mentioned above. It may seem strange that some return and some do not, in apparently similar circumstances. The problem, however, is not in the refugees, because these people, no less than any others, including politicians and researchers, are able to make “rational” choices about their lives, within the framework of options presented to them. Therefore we would encourage their freedom to choose to return, or to choose not to return. In doing so, they do what people do in general in other circumstances, i.e. they take into account various elements of their personal and family situations and perspectives. Thus, for example, we discovered from our interviewees that many of them had returned, not only because of their own links to their homes, but in order to rebuild their houses as a fixed point for the wider family to gather, or as a future permanent or temporary home for their children or grandchildren, scattered throughout the world.

In the strictly formal, legal sense, a person can be either a returnee or a refugee, but cannot be both at the same time or both to some extent. What is a returnee? The most simple definition is that a returnee is a former refugee, who has returned to his or her country of origin. What determines a return to one’s country of origin? Is it enough to be formally registered as a returnee in one’s country of origin? No, it is not, for two different reasons. Firstly, the

2 The answer is yes, and is well known. Just as we were beginning our research, the offices of the UNHCR in Belgrade and Zagreb identified certain inconsistencies in the official statistics regarding refugees and returnees. These included 10,663 persons who were simultaneously registered as returnees in Croatia and refugees in Serbia (UNHCR, 2010).

fact is that there are a number of refugees, who have returned to live to all intents and purposes permanently in Croatia, who for various reasons have not been registered as returnees. Secondly, formal registration does not oblige a registered returnee to actually stay and live in Croatia. However, we could turn the question around and ask if formal returnees (i.e. those who are registered officially and therefore exercise returnee rights), but who live permanently outside Croatia, are in fact still (real) refugees? Can the same person be a formal refugee and a formal returnee at the same time? Should we differentiate therefore between “real” refugees and “formal” refugees? Leaving aside the question of how to count the numbers of unregistered returnees, two more questions arise. Can real, unregistered returnees (continue to) be “formally” registered as refugees?² Or, when do they stop being refugees, if they have not been formally removed from the refugee register? Finally, there is a general issue regarding refugees who do not fall within the terms of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees (Refugee Convention), for whom asylum status has not been granted pursuant to proof of individual persecution, as defined in the Convention). In general Serb refugees from Croatia fall into that category. Then, how long must a person spend as a migrant, against his will, in order for him to become a refugee, in the substantial, sociological sense of the word? At the same time, after how long back in his own country can a refugee be considered a real returnee?

In our previous research, we established that “real” or “actual” returnees were persons whose permanent residence is in Croatia. We also found, on the other hand, that Serb refugees, who registered as returnees without taking up permanent residence in Croatia (not counting occasional residence and visits to their houses), are only “formal” returnees, i.e. regarded implicitly as *non-returnees*. In addition, the very concept *formal returnees* and its meaning have extremely negative connotations, almost in the sense of “false returnees”, although this does not cast a slur upon formal returnees themselves (who registered formally as returnees out of necessity), but on the Croatian authorities. The latter might be, in this context, perceived to be manipulating false (exaggerated) data on minority returnees in order to make the returnee situation look better than it really is.

The Croatian authorities can, of course, be accused of all kinds of things in relation to minority return – from open discrimination in the earlier phases

of the return process, to structural discrimination in the latter stages. Yet the procedure for registering returnees, procedurally and essentially, is valid and correct, to the extent of not adding false registrations intentionally. We should consider separately the question of why about half the registered returnees have not stayed permanently in Croatia. We have investigated this issue in both our research projects within the concept of return sustainability. Could Croatia have done more to encourage the returnees? Yes, it could. Could the international community have done more, particularly in financial terms? Yes, it could. Could Serbian political factors have invested less efforts directing Serb refugees from Croatia to settle in “their” (Serb) strategic territories, and hindering their (early) return to Croatia? Yes, they could. However, even if these and all other actors had done everything in their power to encourage return, it would still have been a selective process, subject to the social and demographic characteristics of minority refugees. Our theoretical discussion and empirical findings clearly indicate that some types of (minority) refugees are inclined to return while others are not. By all accounts, some refugees would never return.

The division of minority returnees to Croatia into “real” and “formal” has two sides to it. The first is negative and, correctly, has been quickly identified and highlighted. It is perfectly obvious that some “formal” refugees really want to live in Croatia, in their renovated houses or compensatory apartments, but many younger people of working age, perhaps with children, cannot (at the moment) make a livelihood if they return. It would be good, for them and for the country as a whole, if development programmes were launched for returnee areas, which are in any case economically backward. The second, quite positive side has been overlooked, as it can only be seen from the new conceptual perspective of open return. That is to say, for many refugees and returnees (mostly “formal”), the situation would be much more difficult if their returnee status, i.e. the right to citizenship and other necessary documents, were linked to (permanent) residence in Croatia. In other words, if their (returnee and other rights) were to depend on real return. In that case, only those who could stay would return, and this more or less approximates to the size and socio-demographic structure of the present permanent returnee contingents. The open option - which allows refugees and returnees a degree of subjectivity in choosing a durable refugee solution, depending on their personal and family situations, and the overall social and economic circumstances, in both their

host country and country of origin - is in principle suitable for all types of refugees and returnees.

In our earlier research, the issue of “formal” returnees was conceptually left hanging. Therefore, we should address a further question – who are these people? In other words, are “formal” returnees refugees? What kind of refugees – formal or real ones? Formal refugees, of course, are all those who are still registered somewhere as refugees. But are they “real” refugees, if they have the option of returning, in secure conditions, with the guarantee that their homes will be returned to them or they will be given replacement accommodation? Or in other words, if they have chosen or are free to choose another durable refugee solution – integration into the host country? Can such persons, by registering, regaining possession of their houses and land and carrying out renovations of one kind or another, retain the right to have refugee status elsewhere? Not according to international refugee law. If they are neither returnees nor refugees, what then are they? Indeed, returnee registration (along with guaranteeing them returnee rights) allows refugees the free choice whether to return or stay in their host country, or even resettle in a third country, but it does not allow the continuation of their refugee status. Registration, even if only formal, is a constituent part of finding a durable solution to the refugee problem, regardless of whether some “formal returnees” ever actually return permanently to their homeland. In addition, along with exercising returnee rights, they are thus given the opportunity to choose and make their own decisions regarding durable solutions. These people may then resolve their refugee situation in a durable manner, without being forced exclusively to adopt one of three durable refugee solutions. They may even combine two or three options at the family level. In fact significant numbers of “formal” returnees already live in Croatia on a temporary basis, while other members of their families have returned permanently.

TYOLOGIES

Here we will present just some of the many possible typologies for returnees and return. The names of those interviewed and names of smaller villages have been changed.

- **i) Types Of Returnees – In Terms Of Residence Status**
- **ii) Types Of Returnees’ Use Of (Compensatory) Flats**
- **iii) Types Of Return In Relation To Success
(Economic And Social)**
- **iv) Family Strategies For Return**

i) Types Of Returnees – In Terms Of Residence Status

a) Permanent (Real) Returnees (Stayees)

b) Formal Returnees

c) Potential Returnees

d) Unsuccessful Returnees – Re-Emigrants

e) Non-Returnees

a) Permanent (Real) Returnees (Stayees)

By permanent returnees, we mean (Serb) refugees from Croatia who have returned from refuge to their country of origin and have lived here more or less permanently, often since the date of their return. Some of these refugees paid shorter or longer visits before their houses were rebuilt or reconstructed. Usually, individual members of the returnee households made such visits, often the older men, while other members only returned on a permanent basis when their basic housing needs had been provided for. As far as we know, the vast majority of real and formal Serb returnees registered as returnees, since this allowed them to exercise rights regarding the renovation of property and other matters. In fact, almost all the 80 or so people with whom we carried out in-depth interviews belong to the category of registered, real returnees. Based on

their testimonies, we have been able to construct other types of returnees and return. However, a certain number returned permanently without registering, and they are not represented in the survey sample. All these real returnees can be also called “stayees”.

In order for refugees to return, elementary legal and safety conditions have to be met, on the one hand, along with the basic prerequisites for earning a living on the other. The former relate to the willingness of the country of origin to take them back and grant them legal rights, primarily the right to return and renovate their houses, and secondarily, the right to a livelihood. Enjoying the status of permanent returnees, even if this continues for years, is no guarantee that some of them, particularly the younger ones, may not decide, for one reason or another, to resettle elsewhere, at some point in their lives. Re-migration is well known among labour migrants-returnees to their homeland, while the reasons of labour returnees and refugees-returnees for doing it may be similar, or different.

Permanent returnees, therefore, share in common the fact that after their return, they continue to reside in Croatia in the real sense. In other ways, they exhibit greater or lesser differentiating characteristics. In the rest of this chapter on typologies, we will point out some of the differences between them as individuals and their returnee experiences, on the basis of which further typologies have been constructed, and will illustrate the relevant typologies with authentic stories provided by our interviewees.

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** A town in Banovina. Interviewee: Nada (56). Lives with her husband, daughter and son. Her parents-in-law have died in the meantime. She returned for the first time in 1997, in order to get Croatian documents. “When my friends and acquaintances in our country of refuge (Serbia) found that out, they did not approve our readiness to return, and some of them judged us.” Her parents were in Eastern Slavonia, while her family lived in a town in Serbia in a rented apartment, where her husband worked as a stonemason. “There were good people, who helped us”. The entire family returned permanently in the summer of 1999. The son then went to the seventh grade of elementary school, and the daughter to the second grade of high school. “For a family returning, the children’s opinions and feelings are very important – whether they want to stay in the host country or go back to the parental home. Both our children wished to return to their birthplace. They knew*

they would return because they were homesick for their birthplace.” (← essentialist link with home and homeland). They waited a year before they could move back into their house and lived in the meantime in the empty house of some friends. Their house was partially damaged during the war, but was also wrecked after the people who had moved into it left. In the meantime, their daughter graduated from the Teacher Training Academy in Petrinja and their son is studying Computer Studies and also working. On their return, the husband set up a stonemasonry craft business, but had to close it by the spring, as there was not enough work during the winter. A small proportion of their former neighbours also returned.

Nada’s brother, who was also a refugee, has never returned since 1991 and continues to reside in Belgrade. His daughters sometimes visit them from Belgrade. Her sister, who is married to a Croat, continued to live after Operation Storm in Sisak and Zagreb (← mixed marriage). She inherited the family house in the town and also lives here. Nada’s husband has an uncle in Zagreb, married to a Croat (← international social network).

Before the war, Nada was an active member of the local cultural society, particularly in the folklore section. On her return, she immediately began to help with the work of humanitarian organisations and cultural societies. She is a member of the Subcommittee of the Serbian Cultural Society Prosvjeta, and civil association X, which mostly gathers young people, along with some older ones, regardless of nationality, and is engaged in various forms of education, particularly computer literacy. Her children are also members of this society. She is not a member of the local Croatian cultural society, due to some unpleasant experiences after their return, although in more recent times, some young Serbs have joined the society. She was told plainly to her face that she was not welcome due to her nationality. The Orthodox church was destroyed and the church property has not been returned, but the Orthodox community receives a certain amount of material assistance for its work. The inns and other public places are not ethnically separate, as in Vukovar, but Serbs are still not welcome in one coffee-bar in the centre of town. “It just so happens that this coffee-bar is in the nationalised building of the Serb Orthodox Church, which is demanding its return, so that the real interests are of a material kind”. Nonetheless, relationships between the nationalities have improved recently. There are no more open assaults, such as she herself experienced after she returned, from the person who had occupied their house, but there are veiled provocations.

“Serbs still have quite a lot of problems – for example, the children at school”. When other children and even teachers discover they are Serbs, they provoke, harass and isolate them. Because of this, some children have had to change school, and some have even

paid to continue their education in Bosnia. Discrimination is still present in employment, although she stresses, "Our son has not had any problems and is employed by a private Croatian entrepreneur as a web designer, where he is highly thought of. But if he replied to an advertisement for a job in a state company or service, he would not stand a chance." Young people in the villages do not have any qualifications, or need to be retrained. There is a lot of misunderstanding and resistance among teachers and the general public regarding the nurture of the Serb language and culture. Pressure is put on parents so that they do not ask for extra lessons in Serb language and Serb culture for their children, although they have a legal right to do so. In one village elementary school, 80% of the children are Serb nationals, but only five of them have taken Serb language and Serb culture as a subject. We asked her what was the real meaning of this extra subject for Serb minority pupils. She said it would be useful for Serb children at least to learn Cyrillic script, since it is no longer part of the standard curriculum, so they could continue their education in Serbia, if they wished, and they should learn about Serb writers, artists and scientists, particularly those who have played an important part in Croatian culture, art and science. By the Serb language, Nada does not mean ekavica, but ijekavica, which is the dialect spoken also by Serbs in Croatia, and which Croats call standard literary Croatian. She admits that some Serb children avoid joining Serb societies and activities when they reach high school, as they do not want to be perceived as different from others.

b) Formal Returnees

In our new research and typologies, we have continued to use the concept of "formal returnee", but we have attributed to it a more complex meaning. Formal returnees, in the wider sense of the phrase, are in fact all minority refugees who have been formally registered as returnees. In our typology, however, we use this phrase in the narrower sense, for officially registered returnees who do not really, or permanently, reside in Croatia. These people are no longer refugees, since they have exercised the right to return, even though some of them will never really return. Others are trying to return to Croatia, but (at the moment) are unable to do so because of inadequate or unsatisfactory conditions for their own or their family's livelihood. They definitely cannot be classified as non-returnees, but should be considered as potential returnees, even if they have no plans to return at present. These people occasionally visit their houses, if they

have been renovated, and maintain close links with the members of their wider and narrower families living permanently in Croatia. Therefore, we are talking here about families practising bi-location or multi-location. Since the members of these families live in two or more countries, they form transnational social networks. In other words, in their family (as opposed to their individual) strategies for resolving their refugee status, these people institute transnational social spaces. Permanent and formal returnees depend on each other to a great extent. The former take care of the latter's property, making occasional visits, and indeed potential returns, possible. Formal returnees, particularly if they have successfully integrated into the receiving new social environment, help the former group financially, by maintaining contacts with the host country, and finally, facilitate the re-migration of returnees, if that becomes necessary. Thus, instead of starkly separating permanent and formal returnees when assessing the process of return, we need to understand how they are linked dynamically. At least some formal returnees are potential permanent returnees. The proportion will vary, depending on the conditions for their return, on the one hand, and their lives elsewhere, on the other.

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** A village near Drniš. During a visit to a returnee family, they show us a beautiful stone house in the village centre, at the crossroads. We discover that the owner was granted the right to renovate this house in exchange for relinquishing tenancy rights in Knin. It is an old, stone house, which has been in the family for generations. In its present condition, completely renovated, it is worth much more than any apartment in Knin. The owner lives with his wife in Austria, their son, a scientist, works in Germany, and their daughter has remained in Belgrade, where she was a refugee (← transnationalism – return gainers).*

c) Potential Returnees

We should bear in mind that potential returnees are recruited from the ranks of (former) minority refugees who have not registered at all as returnees, whether because they did not intend to return, or because they did not anticipate gaining any property or other returnee rights. In the meantime, for some of them, the option of returning may have become attractive. We also

heard about such cases from those we interviewed, and this is why we have identified them as a special type. Potential returnees were mentioned by some of our interviewees in the context of their own return stories, so we present them as such.

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** A large village in Banovina. We visit the house of a Serb returnee (75), a member of the local committee, and his wife. They are both retired. They live off their pensions and a little income from what they grow in their garden. Stanislav worked for the railway company and lived in a flat in Zagreb. When Operation Storm took place, he was away on holiday, and so ended up as a refugee in Serbia (← indirect refugee). They returned for the first time in 1997 and lived with his sister-in-law in this village. In fact, they wanted to return earlier, but had to wait for “the paperwork” while living with relatives in Mirkovci (Eastern Slavonia). The house in which they now live was built on the site of his ruined weekend house. He relinquished his tenancy rights to the flat in Zagreb (“which I did not get back, anyway”) in order to rebuild the weekend house, because the paperwork for it was “all above board”. There were several problems regarding the renovation. He did not have residence status here in 1991, as he was then registered as living in the Zagreb flat, with tenancy rights, yet he could not claim the return of the flat, or a replacement, as he owned property (the ruined weekend house). If the weekend house had still been his father’s property, he could have claimed a compensation flat (← losers of restitution and housing care programme). He emphasised that President Mesić once paid them a visit in their rebuilt home. The village used to be ethnically Serb, with a few mixed marriages. “My family is a mixed bunch, like apples and oranges.” When property was returned to the Serbs, the Croats who had settled here left. A few settler families stayed in the houses of Serbs who would not return, or whose property had been purchased. They have good relationships with them now. “The problem is that some of the settlers won’t pay their bills.”*

Their daughter lives in Canada, but their son-in-law has lost his job, and now they want to come here, if at least one of them can find employment. “It doesn’t need to be in the courts, where she used to work”. His son-in-law also used to work in Zagreb, in the Končar factory, and he would also like to find a job here.

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** An older, middle-aged couple, let's call them Nenad and Stevka, live as tenants in a flat in Belgrade. They were both teachers in Vojnić, and when they arrived in Belgrade, they quickly found jobs in their own profession. After a few years, Stevka fell ill and took invalid retirement, while Nenad continues to work as a teacher. He has only a few years to go before retiring. Their two children, who were educated in Zagreb and Belgrade, now live in Canada (← transnationalism). When he retires, they will make a final decision about where to live, i.e. whether or not to return permanently (← example of the life cycle affecting decisions). They are generally satisfied with their quality of life, particularly in comparison to the time they spent in collective centres, as "those people are totally lost". In return for their former tenancy rights to a flat in Vojnić, they asked to be accommodated in Vojnić, Glina or Dvor. It turned to be in Glina, close to where Nenad's sister lives. They are basically happy with the flat, apart from the fact that it does not have adequate heating, and using electricity for heating is too expensive. In the meantime the flat has been equipped and furnished. Now, they are thinking about purchasing it, depending on the conditions offered. In general, their impression is that people in Glina live badly and the standard is lower than in Belgrade (prices are higher and people are out of work). One limiting factor regarding their final return is that Glina does not provide adequate health care for Stevka, particularly in comparison with Belgrade (← example of adapting to new, higher standards while refugees). "Glina used to have a proper hospital, but today there is nothing. Doctors only come here to work as a punishment." A further problem is that these interviewees no longer know anyone in Glina, as many people have left and new ones have arrived. They are stared at if they say something in the ekavica dialect or use a Serbian expression, and that makes them feel uncomfortable. They hope to be able to spend at least part of the year in Croatia, some of it in their parental home in the village, and some in the flat in Glina, when Nenad retires.*

d) Re-Emigrants

Some returnees, after spending a certain amount of time in Croatia, decide to return to their refugee host country, or to resettle in a third country. We assume that the main, most frequent cause of re-emigration is the un-sustainability of return, for individuals or families. However, other reasons are possible, such as better living prospects opening up elsewhere, reuniting families, etc. So we should not simply label such cases as failed returns, but rather re-emigration (in this case, undertaken voluntarily).

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** A family of four, father, mother and two sons, returned to the Knin area at the end of 1990 from Belgrade. They had two houses, one of which was occupied by a settler family from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since they failed to evict them, they sold this house to the Agency for Transactions and Mediation in Immovable Properties, which then succeeded in evicting the settler family and resold the house to another family. Soon after their return, our interviewee family found their feet. They started a small family business, in which the father and both sons were employed. They had plenty of work and even worked throughout Dalmatia. The sons did their military service in the Croatian Army, but experienced unpleasant occurrences during it based on their nationality. They suspected they had been deliberately stationed in “nationalist areas such as Sinj, Gospić, etc”. The older son got married and had children. They had friends, and reconnected with their former circle. Some of their best friends were native Croats. (← social, transethnic networks). But they had problems with the many settlers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The younger son was beaten up several times. The whole family was subject to various kinds of provocation. On these occasions, the police behaved correctly and tried to provide them with protection. However, in 2004, their oldest son and his family decided to return to Belgrade. Two years later, the younger son followed them. With the money they realised from the sale of a house in their birthplace, they bought a plot of land and built a house in the suburbs of Belgrade, which they still share today. They work in the same trade as they did with their father in Knin. The main reasons they cite for giving up on their return relate to a hostile social environment. The older brother felt that Knin and the surrounding area would not be a suitable environment for his children, particularly as Knin is quite backwards in social and economic terms. “Before the war, rock bands used to have concerts there, but now*

all they get is Ceca (a well-known Serbian folk singer). Before, everyone used to go to university, now nobody does. Children take care of the cows, and I don't want my children to be cowherds. There are only two curricula on offer in the high schools. Everyone there is a loser. I don't want my children to end up like that. The other children would not play with mine. In Knin, the only doctors are those who are sent there as punishment. If I had lived in Zagreb, I might never have returned to Belgrade.” The sons both still enjoy visiting their birthplace. Their parents' plans are still undefined. They expect their mother to join them one day, but their father does not want to leave his birthplace (← family bi-location; constructionist vs. essentialist relationship to home).

e) Non-Returnees

By *non-returnees*, we mean refugees who will seek one of two other solutions for their refugee status, rather than return. It is recognised that younger people, with social capital, whether migrant workers or refugees, find it relatively easy to integrate into new surroundings. In addition, some quickly succeed in creating upward social mobility. This undoubtedly applies to some Serb refugees from Croatia. They are not essentially tied to their homes or country of origin, and it is hard to motivate them to return to face a new, unknown start in terms of social integration. In speaking of refugees linked to ethnic conflict, some of them participated in, and some perhaps perpetrated crimes against members of other ethnic group. It is quite legitimate for some minority refugees to remain politically (ideologically) loyal to the former state-political regime, and therefore it is understandable that these refugees may have great (political and ideological) difficulties in accepting state-political changes in their “country of origin”. Finally, we think that younger people, who have settled in a third, more developed Western country and succeeded in integrating, form a special subgroup of non-returnees. They have little interest in the social and political changes in their country of origin or host country. To be specific, some Serb refugees from Croatia fled not only from Tuđman's, but also from Milošević's regime (they particularly wanted to avoid military conscription or forced resettlement in Kosovo).

Why should we include non-returnees in the typology of returnees? Firstly, because they form a lesser or greater part of the refugee corpus. Secondly, because

non-returnees are also involved, through transnational social networks, with real and formal returnees, and exert certain influence on the overall dynamics involved in resolving minority refugee issues.

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** We talk to an older, middle-aged woman who lives in a dilapidated rented apartment with her two sons. After Operation Storm, she lived in Eastern Slavonia until peaceful reintegration into Croatia was completed, whereupon she moved to Serbia, and took up permanent residence in Zemun, after several moves in quick succession. While she was living in Eastern Slavonia, she was divorced from her alcoholic husband. When she arrived in Zemun, she found a job and managed to rent a flat and educate her sons. Their living conditions were difficult. She complains that they did not receive any kind of institutional aid, in particular from the Commissariat for Refugees of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, while other people received various kinds of aid, from stoves and fuel to building sites and materials. "They distributed aid to their own people and sidelined me, because I was a woman. If my husband had been around, it would have been a different story." (← ignored gender aspect of refugee return!). She received assistance from ordinary folk. "These people saved me. They gave me food and clothes, and lent me money for the rent when I wasn't working." For the past few years, she has been registered at the unemployment office and has not been able to find work because she is "old and sick". Fortunately, however, her sons have graduated from high school and have been working for several years, although they do not receive wages regularly. Sometimes she does cleaning and other jobs to earn a little money. She can hardly make ends meet. Each month, she worries about being able to pay the rent. She still has refugee status. She has not been given Serbian citizenship because she does not have all the necessary papers, and she cannot afford to go to Croatia to get them. She is worried that her refugee status will not be extended, and that this will affect her right to healthcare; since she has a serious illness, this would affect her greatly. She had tenancy rights to a flat in Dvor, and was offered a decent-sized compensatory flat. However, she did not take possession of it because she could not afford the journey (← non-occupied type of apartment). She has no money to pay for the overheads or interior decoration of the apartment, and no funds with which to purchase it. She does not intend to return, because she would be alone, since her sons do not want to return. Her brother lives near Dvor, but lives his own life. "When I arrived in Dvor, I felt fine, but I no longer knew anyone. None of the people I knew are there now, neither Serbs nor Croats." (← example of how social changes in the environment affect the decision to return). She would like*

to settle down in the suburbs of Belgrade. She and her sons borrowed some money a few years ago and bought a building plot in Zemun. Now, they have no money with which to build a house. Ideally, they would like to exchange their tenancy rights to the flat in Dvor for assistance in building a house in Zemun.

ii) Types Of Returnees' Use Of (Compensatory) Flats

We have envisaged the typology of returnees' use of flats allotted through the Housing Care Programme, i.e. compensatory flats or formerly possessed flats, rather differently from the general typology of return (linked to the restoration of ownership), in order to emphasise its peculiarities. This typology illustrates the different ways in which returnees returned, in order to highlight our finding that compensation is a complex process rather than a one-off event.

a) Permanently Occupied Flats

b) Semi Occupied Flats

c) Temporarily Non-Occupied – Formally Occupied Flats

d) Non-Occupied Flats

a) Permanently Occupied Flats

Compensatory or returned flats (hereinafter: compensatory flats) in which our interviewees live, or for which we have information about their being permanently occupied, we have called *permanently occupied*. This is in fact the ideal model for compensatory flats, which are formally allocated for the purpose of (permanent) return. However, we need to consider two limitations, which is why we differentiate them from other types of (non) occupied compensatory flats. In the first place, some have been allocated only recently, so it is difficult to regard them as permanently occupied by returnees. In the second place, it would be unrealistic to expect that all minority refugees who gain the right to submit applications for the allocation of compensatory flats can simply move into such flats immediately (if they do not have the prerequisites for making a livelihood in Croatia). And in the third place, as soon as the legal purchase of such flats is made available, it is up to the owners how to dispose of them.

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* *Sisak. A compensatory flat, in a partially occupied new building. Our interviewee is a quiet, shy person, Dragica (60), a Serb returnee, divorced in 1981, with high school qualifications. She seems happy with her flat. Before the war, she lived in a flat near the Sisak Ironworks (← a gainer, relatively speaking, in the Housing Care Programme, i.e. a person who has gained a better, new flat). “I have years of service in three countries”. For the last six months, she has been receiving social benefits and, as she has just turned 60, expects to start drawing a pension. She returned at Christmas and moved in gradually.*

Her cousin lives here and she meets up with her former colleagues from work (← limited social network). She has two children. “Both are university graduates, and each of them has found their way in life.” Her son lives in Belgrade, and her daughter in Ljubljana. Her daughter visits frequently, and she visits her daughter and her son too. She stays with them for about ten days at a time, helping in the household, and this eases her financial situation, at least until she starts drawing her pension (← transnational family strategy). Her son-in-law’s parents live in Međimurje, and her daughter and son-in-law visit them frequently. She would dearly love to purchase her flat (when we talked, this was not yet a legal possibility) and perhaps exchange it for a flat in Međimurje, as this would be more

practical for them all (← an apartment as a means of securing a better solution). *One of the officials involved in her application for a compensatory apartment told her that she was only waiting to get a flat so she could return to Serbia. “If I had wanted to stay in Serbia, I would never have returned.”*

b) Semi-Occupied Flats

By this we mean compensatory flats whose tenants already live permanently in Croatia as returnees, mostly in the villages, where they are engaged in agricultural work, in order to provide a livelihood, and only use their replacement flats (for the time being) on an occasional basis.

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** A village in the Šibenik hinterland. Our interviewee, Ognjen (59), lives with his wife in his birthplace, using his sister’s house. Reconstruction of this house was financed (in 2001) by a Norwegian foundation. He is engaged in agriculture on his family’s property. His sister spends several months a year here. He was allocated a compensatory flat in Zadar. “It is not very large or as nice as here, nor as my former apartment (which he was given while working for a well-known, successful metalwork company in Zadar), but I am satisfied.” He only uses the flat when there is no work to do in the village (← our researchers would have found it difficult to locate him in the apartment). His wife is a nurse, who used to work in the Zadar hospital, but is now unemployed and receives no social benefits. They have two sons (27 and 25). One lives in Belgrade and works on the fleamarket selling all kinds of cheap goods, and the other has played basketball for the last two seasons in a second league Italian club, and is now playing in Indija (Serbia, also second league) (← transnationalism). Our respondent returned for the first time in 1998. “I lived here and there until 2006, when I returned properly” (← long-term semi-returnee). In Belgrade, he made a living by selling mostly jeans. He has 19 years of service and another seven years to go before retirement. He says he had no problems gathering the paperwork he needed for his compensatory flat. In fact, the Zadar Office of State Concern speeded the process up, in order to beat the deadline (← different returnee experiences in relation to people and authorities). Now he lives from his agricultural work. He hopes for better days, when his 500 newly planted olive trees will start to bear fruit, for which he was given state incentive assistance. We walked around his well-kept olive grove,*

where some olives were already ripening. Ognjen dreams of having an olive oil production plant, for himself and other villagers, where he would press virgin olive oil. We tried his olive oil and it was excellent. He says that the micro-climate here is particularly favourable for olives and grapevines. His land is on a plateau, exposed to changeable and mixed air currents. His village has been almost fully rebuilt (50-60 houses). Only two houses are not yet reconstructed. About 20 houses are permanently occupied by elderly people. Other refugees live here occasionally. They come to harvest the olives or grapes, or just for a holiday.

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* A village in the hills near Benkovac. A three-generational household of Serb returnees. The head of the household and chief organiser of the family farm is Sonja (32). Her parents live with her, as do her father's mother (83), her daughter (3) and her husband, who was not present for the interview, and who in any case spends more time on his father's property, and in his reconstructed house, a few kilometres away. The father's house was rebuilt at his request, but he and his wife do not yet intend to return from Pančevo, where they manage greenhouse cultures. His brother, with his family, lives and works in Germany (← family multilocation – transnationalism – family strategy of using different resources in different places).

Sonja's household is engaged in agriculture (viticulture and olive-growing) and keep livestock (goats and sheep). They returned five years ago. The first ones to return were the grandmother and Sonja, followed by her parents. Sonja's brother is married and lives in Belgium, but is helping them extend their agricultural production. He is still working illegally (on the black market) and intends to stay there for the time being. However, "he is sorting out his papers, because he thinks he might also return one day" (← open options for return). Her two married sisters live in Belgrade and have families and their own houses there and, at the moment, do not intend to return. The third, unmarried, sister lives partly here and partly there, where she works on the black market (← transnationalism – multi-location).

The father, mother, grandmother and two sisters, who form the household, were given a compensatory flat in Zadar, with which they are satisfied, because it is in a new building and is large enough. They have not yet furnished it fully. "We go to the flat from time to time, but mostly we live here, because of our work in the fields and with the livestock, which is what we live from, and that means someone always has to be here". They are considering purchasing the flat. She emphasises, "We have returned, and we are going to live here, but

without the farm, we would have nothing". The land is registered in the grandmother's name. Her father is an invalid as a result of a traffic accident and has also had a heart attack, so he has applied for an invalid pension.

As refugees, they lived in Belgrade. Our interviewee worked in a shop, registered as a part-time worker. The village they returned to has electricity but no water, so they use a cistern. Fortunately, mains water is planned for next year. They use a lot of water for the farm (each goat requires 8-10 litres per day) and have to buy water which is delivered by tanker. They sell their milk through purchase agents, who collect it by van and take it to Pag. They have modernised their milk production by acquiring dairy refrigeration and automatic milking machines. Running water would make their lives easier and enable them to extend their agricultural production.

About 30 households live in the village. Most of them have at least one or two younger members. However, one younger returnee family found things difficult and re-migrated (← failed returnees – re-emigrants).

c) Temporarily Non-Occupied – Formally Occupied Flats

It is well-known that some compensatory flats have owners who do not live in them. They visit their flats occasionally, but do not live in them permanently, for various reasons. Even the neighbours do not know where these people are (our researchers were unable to locate them) and the postal workers are uncertain whether or not to deliver the post. Some people do not put nameplates on the doors, even if they live in the flats (probably because they do not want their names and surnames to be recognised as Serb ones), so it was difficult to trace them. Most of these former tenancy rights holders were in active employment before becoming refugees, and are now elderly people, while others have retired or are about to retire in the next few years. Some flats are occupied occasionally by “caretakers”, to prove occupancy, while new beneficiaries are unable to take possession of them for the time being, although they may wish to and plan to do so as soon as they secure the means for a livelihood.

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**Zadar, a compensatory flat where we tried to find a Serb returnee, a female physician. We discovered she needed to work another year before retiring in Belgrade, after which she intends to return and live here permanently.*

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** We stopped outside a new building in Šibenik to visit an apartment on the ground floor, with a small garden, where a Serb returnee family (from refugee in Bosnia and Herzegovina) is supposed to live. The beneficiary of the Housing Care Programme in the case of this apartment is a former Yugoslav Army employee engaged in civilian work. As far as the neighbours know, he lives with his wife in Banja Luka, where he survives working illegally (without official permission and taxation) as a household repairman. Their two daughters also live in Banja Luka; one is married and has two children. They help their daughter out and come to Šibenik from time to time, to resolve returnee status issues and look for work.*

**A mother, let's call her Sava (over 70) and her daughter, let's call her Dragana (around 45), live in a nicely appointed rented flat in New Belgrade. Dragana was divorced a few years ago. Sava's husband, Dragana's father, died a few years after they became refugees. They left Sisak in 1991 because they were afraid of persecution, on the advice of a friend who said it would be "good for you to get out of here", and since then have lived as tenants in Belgrade. They have been there for almost 20 years now. Soon after they arrived, Dragana found work with a private entrepreneur, quickly became his business partner, and when he decided to emigrate, took over the business and became the proprietor. Everything went well until a few years ago, when she made some bad decisions and lost it all. At the same time, she fell ill. Since then, she has been mostly unemployed. Both women have had problems regulating their citizenship status, as Sava and her husband were born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dragana has succeeded in getting Croatian documents, but Sava has not yet done so.*

They live from Sava's pension, which she applied for just before the war, but which was not granted for another eleven years. Her case was not dealt with because she had left as a refugee. They had tenancy rights to an apartment in Sisak, and in 1996 applied for its return, since at the time it was still registered in Sava's name and had not been bought out. However, they were unsuccessful and have recently submitted an application for housing care. They were given a nice, new-build apartment, 45 m² in size. They are happy with the apartment building ("there is a lift") and the apartment ("new", "central heating") and its location ("only one kilometre from our previous apartment"). But they do not have the means to furnish it and pay the overheads. Dragana has been to see it several times, but they have never occupied it for any length of time. A friend goes to check on it regularly, airs it and picks up the post. If they were able to purchase the apartment, they would think about what to do with it. They do not think they will return. Sava is too old and Dragana does not know if she would find a job in Sisak, nor how they would make a living. "I am not bound by happy memories of Sisak from the pre-war period. The first time I went back, I felt awful. Later, I got used to it. The same people are not living there now. New people have moved in and I don't know anyone. The people I used to know no longer know me, or no longer want to know me. When I visit Sisak, I am careful not to say anything the wrong way, so that people won't look at me strangely. My language has changed. I speak ekavica now. If I say something wrong, people correct me. I am afraid I might lose my temper and say something, which would only lead to problems. No one would employ me there, as I can't find work here either. After 20 years, I am used to this life. I am more relaxed about

everyday routines. There, I would have to start all over again, like a child learning to walk. If I had the means, I would rather move to the coast and live somewhere by the sea.”

**iii) Types Of Return In Relation To Success
(Economic And Social)**

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- a) Failed Return – Non-Durable Return
-
- b) Return At The Level Of Subsistence And Elementary
Integration
-
- c) Satisfactory Return – Satisfactory Integration And Living
Standard In Comparison With The Majority Population
-
- d) Successful Return

It is hard to find a single, object criterion for judging the “success” of a return or a returnee. Most returnees undoubtedly live in worse living conditions than before the war, but this is also true of many Croatian citizens, even those who were not directly affected by war operations and forced migration. Another criterion is comparison with life as a refugee. It seems that most refugees, at least those who have returned, lived badly, in incomparably worse conditions than before the war in their own homes, and some of them lived in worse conditions than now, after their return. Of course, we also need to take into account their subjective (relative) feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their return and their quality of life following return. Refugees are, on the whole, in a position of loss (life’s losers), at least in terms of living standards and the various difficulties they encountered as refugees. Even when they return and regain their reconstructed houses or compensatory apartments, their living conditions are far from what they knew before. In all this, as our interviewees testified, some have fared better, some worse. So we can only speak conditionally about relative gains and losses upon return. Subjectively, some of our interviewees are relatively satisfied, while other are dissatisfied, given what they have recently been through.

As a rule, the great majority of refugees and returnees experience losses, whether economic or social, in comparison to their earlier circumstances, although we should bear in mind that some (formal) refugees experienced political and material gain as a direct result of ethnic conflict and its social consequences. Nonetheless, we would like to point out some significant differences in the relative success of return for individual (types) of returnees and their families. At the same time, this indicates that the sustainability of return cannot be generalised for all types of returnees, while it is even harder to “measure” the general conditions for sustainability. In other words, some people, in objectively more difficult material and social conditions than others, succeed in staying permanently after return. In any case, relatively greater numbers of Serb refugees returned to Croatia in the earlier stages of return, when the conditions for return were undoubtedly worse than in the later stages.

a) Failed Return

Failed return refers to cases in which returnees wanted and tried to remain permanently in Croatia, but the conditions in which they were living were below the level of durability, either for individuals or families. In this group, we do not include returnees who opted for re-migration when presented with better opportunities (in a host or receiving country).

b) Return At The Level Of Subsistence And Elementary Integration

Without determining exactly, if that is at all possible, what constitutes subsistence level for individuals, our (superficial) insight into the living conditions of many returnees permits us to conclude that many of them belong to this type. In doing so, we have not only considered their material living standards, but their lack of social integration, which makes their lives in isolation more difficult. According to the results of our survey, 16% of returnees subjectively assessed the material situation of their families as *very poor*, and a further 34% thought it was *poor*.

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**A small hamlet near Mt. Svilaja. A household composed of elderly people: the husband, Uroš (76) a former medical technician, and his wife (73). They live off the husband's pension (his wife was never employed) and work the fields a little for their own consumption. They returned at the end of 1997. Their house was not destroyed, but it had been looted. One of their sons lives with his wife in Split, and the other stayed in Serbia with his two children. A third "died in Serbia". The first lost his job in Split and now works only occasionally, without receiving regular wages. He would like to move to the countryside and keep livestock, "but our daughter-in-law does not want to", and perhaps their son in Serbia would also like to return. This used to be a Serb village of about 200 inhabitants, but there are only 9 permanent returnees here now. Nobody stayed in the neighbouring hamlet. "The last returnee was resettled in Serbia by the UNHCR, due to family reunion". However, in the summer months, several former inhabitants get together with their descendants and friends. "There are people whose houses have been rebuilt or who have been given compensatory apartments, but they cannot return until they retire. Several villagers live now in Split, and intend to return to the village when they retire (← this illustrates the difficulties in tracing our selected returnee respondents at the addresses they gave at the time of registration).*

c) Satisfactory Return - Satisfactory Integration And Standard In Comparison With The Majority Population

Bearing in mind refugee status, on the one hand, and the difficult economic situation in Croatia on the other, we should expect a clear majority of returnees to be classified as this or the previous type of returnee. More than one in three of our interviewees assessed their financial circumstances as average (*neither bad, nor good*). They belong, in that sense, to the type of satisfactory return. Our interviewees, as expected, were not statistically consistent in their subjective assessments, as almost half of them thought their living conditions were on a par with their Croat neighbours, according to which about half the minority returnees would approximately conform to our characterisation of this type. As we have already emphasized, the qualitative construction of types does not rest on statistical representation, but its analytical usefulness increases according to the degree to which we can rely on statistically representative findings.

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**A town near Drniš. Our interviewee, Dragan (72), with two-year post-secondary qualifications, a Serb returnee and single, with a pension of HRK 1,450, lives in a reconstructed house. He fled to Belgrade, but returned because of his parents. His older son lives in Varaždin. He was in the Croatian Army (the Pumas), suffers from PTSS (post-traumatic stress disorder) and is a bachelor, with a pension of around HRK 5,500. His younger son is at sea. An uncle lives in Canada and an aunt in London. They sometimes send him money (← transnationalism). He says that he worked for the UNHCR during the period of the Krajina, but that this does not count towards his years of service. “People with the same surname as me were Chetniks, but not my family”. His mother was Croatian, as was his ex-wife. He claims to have helped Croats during the Krajina period “and everyone knows that”. He mentions a Croat named Božo, who he saved “from those idiots who came from Serbia. I used to spend the night in his house, to protect him. When I returned, people called me a Chetnik, but now my relationships with the local Croats are better, they greet me and have a drink with me. It’s the new ones, the settlers, who I don’t know and have no contact with. They are pretty fired up. Their young people are wild and spend all night partying, singing and firing off rounds.” Today, there are only a few Serbs living permanently in the town. Some have rebuilt their houses but nobody lives permanently in them. “I know of several families who fled to Serbia and integrated there. They have found jobs, their children go to school there, but they say they will return when they retire, so they can at least die here.” He owns land in Drniš and some land and woods in the next village. Other people (Croats) cut down his trees and take away the timber. “I cannot get a logging permit, and I cannot lease out my woodland. They say it is mined, yet other people are logging there. I cannot get any fuel allowance either, as my income is above the limit.” He emphasises, “I do not have another country. My country is Croatia. I was driven out by the Krajina authorities, because I did not want to fight on their side. The whole town knows that”. He describes himself as Orthodox “in the cultural sense, rather than the religious sense” (← overcoming ethnicity).*

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** A village near Drniš. This elderly returnee household comprises Rade (78) and his wife Olivera, both pensioners (including €50 pension from Germany). Before the war, they ran a tavern in Serbia and worked for a time in Germany. “My wife would have died by now if we had not returned home”. His wife adds, “I wasn’t allowed to even mention returning, but when my husband told me to pack our things, I was delighted.” (← essentialist*

relation to home). They have two married sons and four grandchildren, who live in Serbia, where they have houses. They visit their parents in the summer, as do many others, when the village fills up (← transnationalism). They believe their sons will return one day (they both have dual Croatian/Serbian citizenship), perhaps when the children leave school, or at least when they retire. “That is why I have renewed the entire house, so they can each have their own accommodation when they return. If they could find work here, they would return immediately.” (← open long-term option for second-generation return).

Rade thinks that the real losers of return programmes are returnees whose houses were assessed as slightly damaged, because they received inadequate compensation for them. In fact, their houses were often newer and worth more than old, dilapidated houses which were completely destroyed, whose owners were entitled to build new houses (regardless of how old or valuable their former houses had been). Some of the latter may be considered gainers through reconstruction. “One neighbour’s house was rebuilt, but he didn’t live in it until he retired, and now he has returned for good”. (← waiting to return – semi-return). In the neighbouring village, where there are about 100 households, only about 60 houses have been reoccupied. The inhabitants of 45 of them are retired. Quite a number of people have died since returning. “But even those who returned permanently here, more or less spend time with their children and relatives elsewhere”.

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* A village near Drniš. Our interviewee is Dragica (72), a Serb returnee. Her husband died eighteen months ago, so they “had to change the reconstruction paperwork” (due to a reduction in the number of the household members). She continues to receive his family pension. The household includes two sons and the wife of the third son, who gained Croatian citizenship, unlike her husband, so she can be counted as a member of this returnee household. In the meantime, the third son has also received citizenship, but he is still living in Šid (Serbia), where he has taken out a loan and is building a house. Before the war, they had a large apartment in Drniš, in exchange for which they were given financial assistance to build this house. She shows us around the house with pride. “Foreign journalists have taken pictures of it”. The photos are on the Internet. It is in a good location, has one storey, a basement and a balcony, and the construction work is complete. However, she, her husband and two sons lived for five years in a damp hovel, waiting for housing care. She says she prefers living here rather than in Drniš, because she no longer knows anyone there, “but there are lots of new people, who sit around in the bars

drinking, spending their fat pensions”. She has a married daughter to a Croat who lives in Šibenik and works in the tourist industry. (← mixed marriage) They have two sons and a daughter. Her daughter has helped them furnish their previous dwelling and will help them equip this house too. The younger son has seasonal employment in Hotel Solaris, where his brother also works on a seasonal basis (← family social network).

“My brother and I had problems when we came back. Some of our old acquaintances provoked us, but now they are embarrassed about it.” The brother was employed by the army as a civilian. He lived with his wife as a refugee in Serbia, near Požarevac. He submitted an application for reconstruction funds, but then people tried to scare him off returning to an “Ustasha state”. “When you are a refugee, you listen to all kinds of advice and leaders and they tell you all sorts of things, to frighten you and put you off returning”. (← influence of political and other factors on refugees affecting non-return). In addition, he was expecting to be given a flat in Serbia through the integration programme, but was unsuccessful, because he asked for a flat in Belgrade and was offered one in Požarevac, which he turned down. He lost his housing rights and lives in someone else’s old, dilapidated house. “Many people did not submit applications for compensatory flats, because they did not believe they would be granted. Now, when they see others have been given new apartments in towns like Zadar and Šibenik, they want to apply, but the deadline has passed.”

c) Successful Return

Around 13 per cent of the returnees we surveyed could be classified as successful, as they expressed relative satisfaction with the material standards of their households. Even though there are only a few successful return stories, we would like to highlight them here.

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** A village in Bukovica, a little over a kilometre off a major paved road. Nearby are the remains of a Roman viaduct, but when we visited, the village had not yet been connected to mains water. We arrive in the early evening to visit a three-generational returnee family. They welcome us into their nicely furnished, spacious living-room, with a solid wooden table where they have just eaten dinner. They are a husband, wife, grandmother, son and younger daughter (the older daughter is studying Economics in Belgrade). The younger daughter*

studies in Zadar, the son has graduated from technical high school and is about to enrol in the Police Academy. They all join openly in the conversation. The whole family seems self-assured, a sharp contrast to the depressing atmosphere in many returnee homes, and everybody easily take part in conversation. We had already been told by our UNHCR colleagues, and notice ourselves immediately, that the “heart and soul” of this successful return is Vera (in her fifties). She also founded and directs a civil society for returnees called “Hoću kući” (I want to go home).

They returned in stages (between May and August 1998). The house had been partially damaged, but fortunately the outbuildings were intact. Of course, their possessions had been looted. They did not have security problems, and after their return, quite a lot of other people followed them, about a third of the village population from before the war. It should be emphasised that only about five houses were burnt down here, which made returning quicker and easier. One Croat from the Bosnian town of Derventa (married to a Serb) bought a house in the village and turned it into the first pub, and later a proper restaurant, employing three people. On special occasions, he takes on extra staff. He also buys lambs from the villagers and roasts them on the spit. In summer, he employs two men to prevent fires.

They had an apartment in Knin, but it was occupied by a Croatian settler from Banja Luka. Later, it was returned to them. In 1997, they contacted the occupier (“a proper, older gentleman”), who had succeeded in getting his apartment in Banja Luka back. “He kept everything nice for us in the apartment” (this seems to have been a rare occurrence, not the usual behaviour of the occupiers of Serb houses upon leaving them). Vera went to Banja Luka and helped him to evict the Serb occupier (from Sanski Most). The occupier in Knin offered to exchange his nice flat with a garden in Banja Luka for their smaller, less attractive flat in Knin, but they were not interested in moving to Banja Luka.

The husband has about 20 years of service. As a refugee, he worked for a Sandžak Muslim, who employed other refugees from Krajina. Those years of service are also recognised, as their employer registered them. “When we came back, only grandpa had a pension. But we were lucky to return at the right time, because international humanitarian organisations were active in offering various aid programmes to minority returnees.” They started with chickens, donated by such an association, then were given cows by another organisation. Step by step, they built up a small farm, until the price of milk plummeted. Vera wanted to start a small cheese-making business, but the local authorities were not interested. She sought the advice of experts, but was unwilling to take out a loan. One of their relatives gave them an old Renault 4, which was a great help, particularly for getting their son to school. Finally, their daughter, who was studying Economics, helped them write a project elaboration for the

Ministry of Agriculture, for which they received a non-refundable grant of HRK 186,000 for technical agricultural equipment, on condition that they contributed 25 per cent of the investment themselves. (This was not a special programme for returnees, but a general programme aimed at stimulating agricultural production). They were granted another non-refundable loan from the Ministry of Tourism to renovate their old stone house, i.e. preserve its original architectural style, and later, incentive funds for breeding sheep. They began by breeding a protected indigenous breed – Dalmatian Pramenka – for which they were given a larger incentive, but the way in which the designated funds were spent was strictly controlled.

They admit that they have received large amounts of state incentives, not through political or other connections, but by implementing each project fully and conscientiously. In addition, they have become a kind of role-model for showing how state incentive funds for private family agricultural businesses can be used successfully and productively – funds which are available to all under the same conditions. They complain, however, that a lot of damage has been caused by boars and wolves. They have about 12 hectares of their own land, including grazing pastures, and lease a further 3-4 hectares. They would like to acquire more land and extend production, but since the proprietors do not have the proper paperwork for their land possessions, the land cannot be included in incentive programmes. “We cover the entire cycle of agricultural production, from organic soil preparation and organic vegetable growing to processing milk and producing cheese, all using high-tech equipment.” They show us their cowsheds with pride, along with the automatic milking machines and the cheese-making facilities. Everything is immaculately clean and tidy, even though there is no running mains water, but only a cistern, which has become a limiting factor in extending production. They are probably the only people in the Šibensko-kninska County to have European quality certification for all their products – for the organic products, cow’s cheese, lucerne, hay, carrots and potatoes. They show us their certificates. Five other producers in the area have been given non-refundable loans for projects and have come to Vera for advice. They are monitored constantly, but do not complain. They think it is justified. Up to now, the Ministry has monitored their development, but this should now be taken over by the County, providing half the incentive, but they talk about this a little sceptically. For the coming year, they count on European pre-accession funds. “We will seek and get incentive funds directly from Brussels, and we are ready to do so. We want to create a comprehensive cycle of organic production and a range of products. Finally, we want to build accommodation facilities on our organic farm.”

Our interviewee believes that more Serb refugees will return, if for no other reason, than the economic situation in Serbia and elsewhere. Some of them have houses and land waiting

for them here, whereas in Serbia, they do not. If they lose their jobs, they will have something here with which to start again. It is true that things are more difficult for later returnees, as humanitarian organisations have now withdrawn their aid programmes, partially or completely, so everything depends on circumstances in Croatia. "Here, many Serb refugees have 'something to fall back on' ". It is common for older people, who have meagre pensions, but are still able to work their land, to send money to their children and grandchildren in Serbia and other countries. Young people have always gone from here to Zagreb to study, or to Belgrade, which was cheaper.

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* A Serb returnee, mayor of a municipality in Banovina, Borislav (about 50) is a forestry engineer who fled with his family to a town in Vojvodina. He returned in 1999, but his house had been occupied, so he lived with a friend who was himself a tenant. "That was the worst time of my life, when I walked past my own house and could not go in". Although he found work in a local timber firm, he decided to re-migrate, this time to Canada, where he lived until 2001, when he returned for the second time (← return in stages, two-part or two-ways return, rather than one-way). There, he witnessed multiculturalism in practice: people of widely differing ethnic and religious backgrounds, living and working in the same place, "and all of them were Canadians". This experience convinced him that it was possible and worthwhile going home and trying again. When he returned, he got involved in politics and was elected as an independent member to the town council. Then he joined the ethnic Serb party, the SDSS (Serb Democratic Independent Party), which gained the majority on the town council under his leadership. However, he realized that the Croatian settlers were also a vulnerable group, along with the Serb returnees, and that excluding their representatives from government would lead to further conflict and misunderstanding, so he advocated a coalition with the local HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) and their local political representatives.

Borislav noted that before the war, Serbs in this area (in fact in the whole region of Banovina and Kordun), were not very religious people, and were even less connected to the Serb Orthodox Church. They relied heavily on the Communist order and governing Communist Party. That is why they found themselves in a sort of political vacuum, quite disoriented, after 1991. Serb returnees organised themselves initially in political terms in the SDP (Social Democratic Party), which had 8 councillors (as opposed to 3 SDSS members at the time), but as the SDP was no longer prepared to advocate their rights and interests, they turned more and more to their own ethnic party, the SDSS. The current composition of the

municipal council is SDSS (7), SDP (3), HDZ (2) and 1 independent member. The SDSS today tends to attract a working generation of people aged between 35 and 45. "Before, we had a kind of mutual double opposition between the political representatives in the municipal council. The SPD against the HDZ, and SDSS against the HSP (Croatian Party of Rights). We have overcome this situation by a coalition between the SDSS and HDZ." As mayor, he tries to ensure that decisions are unanimous, including HSP councillors. He openly drinks beer in a local pub with HSP councillors "to help people relax and see that we can talk to each other, regardless of our differences in the past and political orientations now". Borislav is a good example of an integrated, politically active, self-reliant returnee.

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* We talk to the head of a multigenerational family of six members in a village on the slopes of Papuk. This is a typical village household. There are three generations: our interviewee, let's call him Savo, his wife, their 34 year-old son, his wife and two children. They all live in the same house and work on their farm. They have a flock of 60 sheep, a few cows and farm the land. They are satisfied with their income. They sell about 80 lambs a year, along with milk and wool. They have dairy refrigeration, which ensures the quality of the milk and own other agricultural machinery. The family is proud because they have managed to build up some savings.

Their son was thinking of buying a neighbouring house and land and going independent, but the family decided it was better to stay together and reinvest. They plan to increase the flock and make further agricultural investments. The son has never even tried to find another job, and the daughter-in-law went out to work until it became clear it was not worthwhile, and it was better for her to stay at home and help out in the household. They all have health and pension insurance as members of a Family Agricultural Farm (OPG). Savo and his family were among the early returnees. They came back in 1996, organised the clearance of their property and brought back the cows which had been kept in a neighbouring village while they were away. They lived in Serbia from 1991 until their return, but they were always close to home, in the Krajina. During the war, they even managed to visit their property stealthily and picked the plums and other crops, for example. Their older son is a police officer and fought in the Homeland War on the Croatian side. He does not live with them. The younger son, on the other hand, was mobilised for a short time in the Krajina Army.

iv) Family Strategies For Return

a) Single People

b) Returnee Families

- b1) Elderly Families
- b2) Active Working Families
- b3) Multigenerational Families

c) Family Bilocation And Multilocation – Transnationalism

a) Single People

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** A village in Banovina, where we meet Milorad (52). Before the war, he worked in the timber industry, with only elementary school qualifications. After his return (in May 2000), he started breeding sheep. His brother stayed in Serbia. Their house was reconstructed using aid from an international humanitarian organization, but the windows were covered in plastic sheeting until the first winter. He complains that his livestock is no longer bought up by Gavrilović (the famous regional agricultural meat processing company). “Now it is cheaper for them to import frozen meat”. His main problem is selling his sheep and lambs in order to cover his overheads and basic living costs.*

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** A returnee in his mid-fifties, let's call him Mirko, came back a few months before we visited him. The rest of his family still lives in Teslić (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where they all spent most of their time as refugees, firstly with his wife's relatives, and later in a rented apartment. During the economic crisis, Mirko lost his job. Since it was difficult to find another, he decided to try returning (← example of a change in circumstances or life cycle prompting return) as the pioneer for the rest of the family (← example of*

the gradual nature of return and family strategies for return). *His wife, who does not have Croatian documents, as she was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and was never registered in Croatia, and their two children, continue to live in Teslić and are waiting to see whether Mirko will be able to provide them with the means of subsistence. He submitted an application for house reconstruction in 2000, but it was not implemented until 2010, just before he returned. The reconstruction work dragged on because the legal proprietorship documents were not in order (← example of how legal proprietorship documents, which used to be a general problem until recently, can affect return). The house is only minimally reconstructed and still does not have basic living facilities – electricity, flooring, furniture, etc. He was given a stove, thanks to the SDF (Serb Democratic Forum), the day before we visited him. Before that, he used a stove lent by a neighbour. His small plot of land is completely overgrown and he needs to clear the garden of weeds, for which he has no suitable tools. As everything is overgrown, he frequently finds snakes in the garden. When we talked, Mirko had no idea how he was going to live. He has no livestock, the land has gone wild, and since he arrived in mid-summer, it was too late to plant vegetables. The only financial means at his disposal are social benefits amounting to HRK 550. The village is a long way out, isolated from the municipal centre, with only 50 or so elderly inhabitants, compared to the 500-600 pre-war population. Mirko's example shows that returning is often a brave move, an adventure whose outcome is unknown.*

b) Returnee Families

b1) Elderly Families

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** A larger Banovina village. Our interviewee is Kata (72), who is an energetic, vital woman. Before the war she worked in a village school, and later in the Jasenovac Memorial Centre. She lives in a partially reconstructed property with her husband, who suffered a stroke and is no longer able to carry out physical work. Only Kata has a pension. They have partially renewed her mother's property, which was not completely destroyed, as her mother remained there after Operation Storm. They received state assistance for reconstruction in exchange for the tenancy rights on an apartment in Jasenovac. They own land, but are only able to use a small part of it, on which they breed pigs. Her house was torched, including most of the outbuildings - "and two fine stud horses". We sit in the courtyard, on a wooden*

bench, and look at the remains of what was clearly a large, developed farm, with a nice house, stables and other farm premises.

Just before Operation Storm, she travelled with her husband to Belgrade, to the Military Medical Academy, as her husband had an appointment there. However, when they set off to return home, they were unable to get through to their village and so returned to Serbia (← indirect refugees). “At the border, they tried to send us to Kosovo, but we managed to get back to Belgrade”. There, they tried to register with the Serbian Commissariat for Refugees, but there were soldiers guarding the entrance and sending people to the railway station “to organised transports to Kosovo”. Her step-brother (her father’s son from his second marriage) took them in Indija. Their son was studying at the Veterinary Faculty in Zagreb (2nd year), but his girlfriend asked him to join her in Belgrade. He enrolled in the Military Academy there, in order to “defend his fatherland” (in his own words). His mother asked him to leave the Academy, but he refused. “Fortunately, by the time he graduated, the war was over”. He got a job with the Army, but no housing, so lives with his wife and two children in a rented apartment. They visit his parents here.

Kata talks nostalgically about the time before the war, when their village was prosperous and developed, mostly thanks to cooperation with the Gavrilović meat processing industry in Petrinja. “One man in this village had 100 horses and 500 pigs. This is a fertile area with good soil, pastures for cattle and forests with acorns for pigs.” The local cooperative has been revitalised, “but the wrong people are in charge” and it is not going well. She has bought a mare, just for her own use, because she has always loved horses. She and her husband go into the house and bring out a medal for the “third best in show” at a regional horse show.

Quite a number of the villagers have returned, mostly older people, while others never deserted the village. Returns began in 1996. By 2000, there was a returnee in almost every household. Quite a few of them have died since then. “The few young people who tried to return have moved on, to other countries (Canada, Switzerland).” Some older people have followed them. The young people help their elderly parents, although most of them need to make a living to survive (← reversible return – transnationalism). There are about 30 relatively young families in the village today, and there are seven Croatian settler families from another part of Croatia (by the river Lonja), who have stayed. “Our relationships have improved, but the settlers do not want to work, although they have been given the best land. They live off social benefits and don’t even keep chickens. We have accepted them, but they have not really adapted to our way of life and work”. Her husband adds, “They are not supposed to have jobs if they receive benefits, yet they receive benefits

because they don't have jobs. Agricultural incentive funds are allocated along party lines and according to other non-productive criteria, rather than in terms of actual production, and there is hardly any monitoring." He emphasises, "We have here a branch of the Social Democratic Party and two surviving Second World War Anti-Fascist Partisans". (← links with Anti-Fascism).

b2) Active Working Families

** In one village, let's call it Klanac, on a hill in Banovina, we talk to a two-generational family of Serb returnees, who are an illustration of the active working family type. It is interesting that the father has stayed for some reason in Bosnia (← family bilocation), although he is not divorced from his wife Jelka (53), who has returned with her two adult sons (30 and 27). They live off the land, which is registered in the name of the absent father, so they are entitled to social benefits (HRK 550 per family member), and they also work their relatives' land. The two young men sometimes take casual labour if someone needs extra help, and so they earn some extra money for the household budget. These three people returned in 2001, when they rebuilt their house and barn, which had been completely destroyed, with funds from a foreign government.*

The road had been heavily damaged by logging, but gravel was strewn "because of a visit by a UNHCR, UNDP and OSCE delegation, along with 10 EU ambassadors". The village was connected to the electricity grid and has had street lighting since 2003, while the water mains are being repaired. "When we returned, 33 people came back, of whom 10 have since died, so there are about twenty of us now. There is one young family with one child, who is in the first grade of elementary school; the rest are older people, mostly living on their own. Their children live in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or in western countries". One of Jelka's nephew's sisters lives in Australia and sends money back to her family. She and some other relatives have visited Jelka occasionally (← transnationalism).

The young men are interested in the economic perspective of their village and region, but are very critical of the forestry administration "which allowed merciless logging in the woods around here between 2003 and 2008. It was real devastation, as nobody controlled the number of trees felled nor how the timber was transported". The heavy machinery caused damage to the roads and private property of the local Serbs (fences, etc.), for which there has been no compensation nor repair carried out. "They transported the timber in trucks with Slovenian registration plates, and they behaved as though this was their colony. They

also created illegal dumps for timber waste. The Croats would not let them use their roads or enter the woods near their houses, but in our village, nobody could stop them.”

b3) Multigenerational Families

** A small town in Banovina, to which a large proportion of Serb refugees have returned. We visit a two-generational family with school-age children. Our interviewee, Milenko (49), is a former employee of the Sisak Railway Company, but is now registered as unemployed and has no pension. He is a very active man, determined to make a living for himself and his family with his own hands. He is well informed about local circumstances and is socially active. He is a member of the local branch of the Serb cultural society, Prosvjeta, and says proudly that “our branch probably has the highest number of young people”. The socially active returnees managed to renovate the Social Home (a building where local people meet and organize various social and cultural activities). Returnees to the town are also active members of an artists’ colony organised every year by Prosvjeta. Our interviewee talked enthusiastically about the interest displayed by his fellow villagers, particularly the young people, in economic development, but also in cultural, musical and folklore activities, IT (particularly the younger ones) and agricultural training.*

He lives with his wife, son and daughter-in-law, who have two school-age children. His granddaughter is in the second and his grandson is in the eighth grade of elementary school. During the first few years, their children met with open hostilities at school, mostly provocation by settler children. “But the teachers are OK.” In recent years, inter-ethnic relationships between pupils have improved.

Milenko’s family came back in 2000; he and his wife in March, and his daughter-in-law and granddaughter in July. In the meantime, they adapted the house, which had been occupied until then by settlers and trashed when they left. Everything had been removed or destroyed – the furniture, installations, etc. “which was the regular behaviour of those who occupied someone else’s house”. Our interviewee’s parents also returned to their village, but they died in 2007 and 2009. They have another son and daughter-in-law who live in Ruma (Serbia), “as her mother is ill” (← transnationalism).

They have about 6 hectares of land, some their own, some leased, “but it is not enough to make production worthwhile. The configuration of the land means we have to do different things, and that is not productive”. They do not receive any benefits, but have social insurance through the unemployment office. They have registered a family agricultural

business (Croatian – OPG), which means they have the right to claim state incentives. Our interviewee's mother and some other older people stayed in the village, while two elderly women moved to Zagreb and Sisak after Operation Storm.

According to Milenko, about 85 Serb refugees have returned to the town, and only few other towns in Banovina have a similar high percentage of minority returnees. Even those who have not returned pay occasional visits to their parents or relatives. One returnee came back to the village in which he owns a house, but he works and lives in Italy, as a truck driver, where his two daughters also live and work. His father and mother live in the village permanently (← family bi-location, transnationalism). Some young men from the village work for security companies in Zagreb, and other are construction workers (← our researchers would not be able to find them if they were registered at their parents' addresses!). Some of the women are employed in the textile factory close by.

c) Family Bilocation And Multilocation – Transnationalism

Social networks are important to all returnees (and non-returnees), during their time as refugees, in preparing to return and, of course, following return. It is rightly expected that returnees, unless they are exceptionally isolated, will gradually renew and rebuild their social connections, firstly at the family and local level, then with the wider, inter-ethnic community. It should be remembered, firstly, that a significant number of ethnic Serbs stayed in the parts of Croatia under Croatian control, before and after Operation Storm. At least some of them were able to help their relatives and friends, in various ways, upon their return. Secondly, and this can be even more effective for minority return, although it is mostly overlooked in pure numerical counting of the returnees, these are inter-ethnic connections and networks. It tends to be forgotten, in fact, that in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and indeed throughout former Yugoslavia, there was a relatively high rate of inter-ethnic marriages, and a significant portion of the population identified itself as Yugoslav, both in the sense of nationality or as nationally undecided people. There were established strong ties of kinship and neighbourly and interethnic connections and social networks.

The fact is that many of these connections, including marriages, were destroyed due to mounting inter-ethnic tensions and war. In addition, we might

claim that the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina was directed against the homes of undesirable national or ethnic groups, as has been noted in the literature, but also against mixed marriages and inter-national connections. Research into this should have begun, as most people today are ready to talk about it. However, in spite of everything, and as our interviewees have indicated, many inter-national networks (by these we mean primarily relationships between Serbs and Croats) have survived, wholly or partially, whether familial or otherwise. Sometimes they have been temporarily suppressed (low public profile), but some of them have been active in terms of vital infrastructural support in the process of minority return to Croatia. In our judgment, along with the social and demographic profile of the (earlier) returnees (older people, from rural areas, uneducated), this may partially explain why a relatively large number of Serb returnees have succeeded in returning and staying, particularly during the early years, when the security, legal, political and social conditions for doing so were considerably less favourable than in later years. The bi-location and multi-location (transnationalism) of refugee-returnee families clearly demonstrates our theory that return is, to a large extent, a family affair, rather than an individual strategy.

What follows are three interconnected stories related to the role of extended family ties and social networks in the return process.

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** In a village near Benkovac, we met an elderly woman (78) whom we will call Milka, a Serb returnee, who lives with her disabled son. Her only income is her deceased husband's pension and her vegetable garden. Her daughter in Zagreb sends her money. Her husband, Marko, a Serb returnee, died a few years ago. They fled to Serbia, where they lived with their daughter's family. Their other daughter continued to live in Zagreb with her husband, who is also an ethnic Serb. Recently, this daughter won a lawsuit against the company she used to work for, which fired her illegally, and has got her job back. Meanwhile, her husband kept his university job the whole time. Marko returned to Croatia immediately after Operation Storm, and his wife joined him at the end of the year. Their son-in-law, Milan, drove them in via Hungary and guaranteed them financial support, at his family's expense. Their house had not been destroyed (local Croats had occupied it), but it had been damaged and looted, and there was no electricity, although there was an electric post and light right in front of their home. They waited to be connected to mains electricity for over a*

year. It was only when an influential Croatian friend and Croatian acquaintance intervened personally that they succeeded in getting connected. Then (the end of 1996), they returned to the outbuildings near their house, which they reconstructed first. Fortunately, their daughter had managed to save some of their belongings from the house, immediately after Operation Storm, with the help of some powerful people in the Croatian Army and wartime authorities. She stored them in her flat in Šibenik, where Marko's brother (married to a Croatian woman), also lived (← mixed marriage).

This summer, Milka's granddaughter, Marija, organised her engagement party in her grandmother's house. Milka's nephew, who fled from the neighbouring village to Serbia, then emigrated to Australia, where he lives with his wife and children, came to the party. Other guests included: a niece, who married and settled in Belgrade before the war, and her other daughter, who fled to Serbia (where Milka lived with her) and then after 5 or 6 years moved with her husband and children to Switzerland (they visit Aunt Milka and other Croatian friends every summer in Vodice, on holiday). (← transnationalism).

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* (Son-in-law) Milan's uncle Stanko, from a neighbouring village near Benkovac, was the village teacher and lived in the schoolteacher's apartment. He returned, with his wife, after six or seven years as a refugee. He lost his tenancy rights, but he rebuilt an old family house in the same village. In Zadar, their house remained intact (one of the rare Serb houses to be saved), thanks to his sister and their Croatian friends. Now, they live mostly in Zadar, and the rest of the year here in his birthplace. They both have pensions. Serb and Croat friends and relatives gather at their house. Their son is still living in Zagreb, married to a Croatian woman. Their daughter lives in Dubrovnik.

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* Milan's brother, Jakov, from a village near Benkovac, where he was the village schoolteacher and founded the village library, fled to Vojvodina with his wife. The Serbian authorities tried to transport him to Kosovo, but he escaped from the train. He returned to his village in 2003, when his new house was rebuilt, while an old, stone, family house remained in ruins. He was only connected to the electricity supply in 2007. He lives from his invalid pension. One of his sons, who left before Operation Storm (economic migrant), went to live with his aunt in Serbia, and later emigrated to Italy, where he still lives. His

daughter from his first marriage (who also was not a refugee) lives in Switzerland and is married to an Italian. She visits her father every summer, with her children. The son comes from time to time, with his family, and helps work on his father's house. Only a few other older people have returned to the village.

The fundamental thrust of our typologies is to point out on huge differences amongst returnees and returnee households with regard to their socio-demographic characteristics, social capital, social networks, refugee and returnee experiences, economic status, attachment to their “home” and the prospects for sustainable return. They “reveal” minority return as a dynamic, open, socially networked and reversible process.

VIII

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Here we summarize the basic research findings and conclusions on the return of Serb refugees to Croatia, which we conducted for UNHCR Zagreb in late 2010. It is a continuation of a similar research project from 2006, of which the public was informed in the form of a book, in both Croatian and English – *Sustainability of Minority return in Croatia*.

On the one hand, the new research project was developed on the same basic tasks as the previous one, in order to compare the main findings and establish trends. In short, we investigated the number of Serb returnees who permanently reside in Republic of Croatia after their official returnee registration. Secondly, we analysed the socio-demographic structure of the returnees, and thirdly, we systematised the complex factors of the sustainable minority¹ return. With that goal in mind, we once again conducted a survey on a representative number of

¹ When we talk about return to ethnic mixed countries (like Bosnia and Herzegovina primarily and then Croatia) the term 'minority' is being used with specific meaning (Harvey, 2006) In the reports about return flows from these countries 'minority return' refers to groups of returnees coming back to areas of their origin, but under effective power control in the hands of the other, now dominating ethnic (national) group. Therefore, even if those returnees succeed to make (again) absolute or relative majority population on an area, they are still considered 'minority' returnees due to new constellation of power relations between concerning groups.

returnees. We formed a sample by randomly choosing 1,400 people over the age of 15 from the database of registered returnees (130,220).

On the other hand, the new project has been expanded and deepened in comparison to its first phase in several aspects. In the new survey, we included a (sub)sample of returnees, ex-occupancy/tenancy right holders (OTR), who applied for housing care within the Government's Housing Care Programme. At the time of the survey, this database consisted of 34,599 people (including family members). However, for our (sub)sample, we took into consideration only 6,323 adult individuals who already obtained old or new compensatory apartments and houses, and were supposed to move into them. From this number we randomly selected 400 respondents. The researchers conducted a qualitative survey as well involving more than 80 minority returnees, of various socio-demographic profiles.

We tried to bring our empirical research, both quantitative and qualitative, into a conceptual relationship with current relevant theoretical discussions regarding the return of (minority) refugees and other research on return flows, mainly in the post-conflict states in the area of the former Yugoslavia: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo. Recent theoretical insights and our own research results and observations, based especially on interviews with the returnees, have led us to reconceptualise the notion of (minority) return. In that sense, our interpretation of the findings, both from the new and of the previous research project, are somewhat different, which is the reason we expect increased attention from interested institutions and the professional public.

RECONCEPTUALISATION OF THE RETURN OF MINORITY REFUGEES

Traditionally, return has been viewed as a one-time and definite act. At the same time it has implied a happy ending to the refugee exodus, with no further necessary commitment to returnees. While exile is connected with the negative connotations of victimisation, suffering, "uprooting", and loss of "home", in short, social pathology, return is perceived as the opposite to all of that. The right of displaced persons to return to their "original homes", understood as physical structures (houses), received great support from the international

community (Smith, 2006). There is little doubt that, depending on the reasons for exile, sometimes greater and sometimes smaller part of an exiled group is really homesick. Furthermore, as our empirical data confirms, such refugees are ready to return even under conditions that are far from optimal. The annual return statistics clearly demonstrate that a relatively larger number of Serb refugees returned to Croatia in earlier years after the war, when security, political, legal, and social conditions were far worse, than in recent times. Yet, they are predominantly elderly, retired, less educated, rural people. It appears the international community took it for granted that the majority of refugees or internally displaced persons would want to return to their pre-war homes (in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and then in Croatia and Kosovo).

In recent times, the traditional notion of return, as well as home, has attracted serious criticism from migration and refugee theorists and researchers. They argue that return migration often is not a one-way move and a definite act, but a reversible process. According to the new vision, “home” is not only a physical place, but a combination of social relations and cultural meanings (Bradley, 2008). Unfortunately, experiences from return operations indicate that return and reintegration are far from a “natural” and unproblematic continuity, especially in post-conflict situations (Eastmond, 2006). Return studies have revealed that returnees often find their “homes” greatly transformed, both physically and socially, and that they need to negotiate their return in a very different context of power and inequality. The monitoring of the returnees quickly “uncovered” disturbing tendencies. First, that many minority returnees sooner or later migrate elsewhere. Second, that educated, qualified, and young refugees, the active workforce, in short people with greater social capital, and hence with higher socio-economic demands as a prerequisite for a sustainable return, significantly more often choose the option to integrate into the country of asylum or a third country, than to return to the country of origin.

It seems that within a short time, at least in the scientific community, the understanding of return as a complex, long-term, and even a multi-directional process prevailed. This new approach to return may entail additional responsibility of the international community and the NGO’s beyond the pure logistics of returnees’ crossing the border on their way back to their homeland and resettling into their houses. Furthermore, radical critics started questioning the current basic (pre)assumption that the returnees “are coming

home”. “Because the ideal of home is as much about the memory of customs, traditions or beliefs as it is about a physical place, it may be impossible to return ‘home’” (Ballard, 2010). Ghanem noted a paradox: “How can it be assumed that refugees are returning ‘home’ when the very reasons they left were that they did not feel ‘at home’ anymore?”

The newer researchers, especially of post-modern provenance of labour as well as political migration, warn that, in the globalisation era, migration flows, including refugee return, cannot (entirely) be comprehended outside the perspective of “transnationalism” or “transnational social space”. “A growing number of studies show that return is not necessarily a single and definitive event and that the returnees may need to secure options to the post-conflicting situations, in particular, maintaining links with the outside world which may act as an important safeguard.” (Eastmond, 2006). From that perspective return may be better conceptualised as an open, often a long-term process, which can include a period of dual residence and significant movement between one and the other residence. In other words, this approach emphasises the dynamics, incompleteness, trans-territoriality, in other words - trans-nationality of returnee social networks. We agree with those who believe that sustainable return can be strengthened by allowing the returnees to move freely back and forth between the country of origin and the country of refuge (Ballard, 2010). Moreover, there is an opinion that maintaining transnational social networks between those countries is a better return incentive than any “economic returnee package”.

Many of our respondents presented various examples of transnational (more or less regular) contacts with members of their nuclear or extended families, mainly with their children and grandchildren, but also with brothers, sisters, and other relatives, who live in the country of exile or in some third western country. We agree with the criticism of the traditional notion of return and home in relation to some sections (young, urban) of refugee groups. Some of those young people already lived in the towns in their homeland, and some of them would have lived there even if they were not exiled, and therefore their life experiences, and their relation to home, are relatively modern. However, it seems that post-modern theorists do not take into consideration that permanent returnees (in Croatia) come from and return to mainly pre-modern communities, and that they predominantly maintain a traditional commitment to their houses (as homes).

This is easier to understand if we know that the house (as a home) had a central position in the lives of people in former Yugoslavia. Many of them invested considerable economic resources and a great deal of their life-time in building and completing their housing. A house gained cultural value and became an important status symbol. This explains the particular devotion of people to their houses that can probably not be found in such a degree in (post) modern western societies. Unfortunately, the importance of home was well understood by the architects of the inter-ethnic wars in the region, who initiated “wars for houses” (Stefansson, 2006; Tuathail and C. Dalman, 2006). Thanks to such sentiments, and leaning on their memories, traditional returnees are able to reconstruct their homes in demolished or partially reconstructed houses, not only physically, but symbolically too. However, for their children and grandchildren, urban life patterns with wider social perspectives may be more attractive than a house or an apartment they inherited. At the same time, children and even grandchildren, retained some of the traditional values in their relations to their parents and grandparents. The remains of their traditionalism are actually one of the motives for maintaining (transnational) family networks. Here we have, therefore, transnational relationships or a transnational social space, which not only connect family members across state borders, but also their different world-views.

The international community expects that the return of minority refugees to Croatia (as well as to Bosnia and Herzegovina) would contribute to the reconciliation process between the ethnic communities that were involved in the conflict. There is also a belief that reconciliation leads to the integration of minority returnees into the new mainstream society (Chimni, 2002). Our conversations with the returnees indicate just the opposite process, already observed by Koska (2008) that “the consolidation of social relations slowly evolved once the physical threat had been removed”. People firstly seek to restore “normal life”, and when members of conflicting ethnic communities find themselves in situation where they have mutual problems they begin (spontaneously) to cooperate.

At the end of the theoretical and conceptual chapter of our Study, we drew reader’s attention also to the controversies regarding the new interpretation and implementation of the international refugee law. The critics first point out that the traditional refugees’ right to return has not been applied (*en masse*) to a

large number of war refugees (the Serb refugees from Croatia alike). In addition, until recently the right to return referred to the refugees returning to the country of their origin, not necessarily to their homes. The key document for the new concept of refugee right to return is the *Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons*, popularly known as the *Pinheiro Principles* or just *the Principles*. This document has outlined the legal and technical problems regarding the restitution for persons who were unvoluntarily and illegally displaced from their properties. After its adoption (2005), the United Nations and other political stakeholders in the refugee field, have associated the right to return with the right to property restitution.

Researchers and humanitarian workers perceive the recent focus of international refugee policies on ownership restitution also as way to depoliticize the return process, turning it into legal procedure ('rule of law'). It should be noticed, yet, that this worthwhile human rights aim has greatly been imposed on the new 'weak states' by the international political pressure, which can be seen as a double-edged sword. Namely, to a certain degree international involvement in post-conflict societies seems almost unavoidable and effective, if it is sensitive enough not to provoke severe widespread anti-reconciliation reaction within the majority population. Otherwise it may become counter-productive for minority return too.

From the beginning, the international community admitted that in order to support sustainable return the other measures would be necessary along with property restitution. Of course, such an approach is more demanding and challenging. It is certainly easier to focus on the physical restitution of property, which can easily be quantified, than to deal with more complex and far-reaching aspects of reconciliation and (re)construction of functioning multiethnic society. "The 'real' or sustainable return was much more difficult to plan for and achieve, it is almost impossible to measure, and it would be inevitably significantly lower in absolute numbers" (Philpott, 2005).

Our research findings support with little doubt the opinion about the importance of rightful property restitution as a crucial prerequisite for return (immediate or prospective ones), and even for non-returnees who can use their houses and lands as assets in order to more easily find another durable solution for themselves. The formal legal status of property restitution within the international refugee law is of a less or no practical importance for concerned

refugees, so long as they are entitled to use this right effectively. The Croatian Government may be rightfully criticized for various sorts of wrongdoings inflicted upon Serb refugees and returnees, but it should be credited for gradually adopting quite liberal return incentives beyond the established international refugee law standards.

At the same time, our study confirms the relevant findings about minority return. Namely, property restitution (as well as compensatory apartments) is not sufficient for real return of a large number of mainly younger, urban, better educated minority refugees. The sustainability issue remains open, even for a portion of permanent returnees, if perspectives for economic development and social integration are not secured.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Presence Of Registered Returnees

According to the results of our new survey, one third (33%) of registered minority returnees currently live in Croatia, of which 83 percent reside in the community where they were registered at the moment of their return, while the others reside elsewhere in Croatia. Our respondents informed us that about some 39 percent of registered returnees, who our interviewers could not find at the addresses, actually live outside of Croatia, of which a great majority (70%) live in Serbia. Since their return to Croatia, some 15 percent of returnees have passed away. There are a remaining 13 percent of persons from our sample for whose permanent residence we were not able to collect any information about. This last group of the returnee contingent causes the most problems in estimating the relative percentage of those permanently residing in Croatia (stayees) compared to “formal” returnees. With the assumption that the unknown ones are proportionally distributed among the above detected categories, it can be concluded that at the moment of the survey, about 38 percent of the registered returnees were permanently residing in Croatia, approximately 45 percent were outside of the country, and close to 17 percent of the people from the sample had passed away. The elderly (retired) people are more likely to stay permanently, as well as persons from smaller places (farmers), who returned earlier (by 2000).

Returnees to different regions in Croatia are not equally inclined to permanent stay. Registered returnees in the areas of the country which were not affected by the war operations and which are therefore not included in the Areas of Special State Concern (Northern Croatia with Zagreb, Istria and the Croatian Littoral) demonstrate the least tendency towards living in Croatia. On the contrary, the strongest inclination towards permanent return is shown by returnees to Slavonia, then Lika and Kordun and Banovina. In view of its considerable share in the total refugee and returnee populations, the corresponding data for Dalmatia should be considered worrying, where there are 1.7 formal returnees on one permanent returnee.

The comparison with the same type of results from the previous survey indicates a certain drop (of 5%) in the number of permanent returnees. That drop is on the one hand a consequence of the death of the elderly (15% compared to previously 11%), and on the other of the re-emigration of some returnees. The relatively high percentage of those that passed away can be explained with the unfavourable age structure of the returnees. In accordance with the above mentioned, the increase in the percentage of registered returnees that reside outside of Croatia was slightly less (about 3.5%) than the decrease in the percentage of permanent returnees. Now, a smaller portion of registered (formal) returnees to Croatia reside in Serbia than several years ago (70% compared to 82%). As opposed to that, a relatively larger number of such persons, according to our information, can be found outside the areas of the former Yugoslavia, which indicates new migration to third countries.

It is important to emphasise that at the address of every fifth absent returnee, we found another family member permanently residing there, which proves that in these cases, 'the home' has not actually been abandoned by the whole family. Instead, here we have good examples of a family strategy to bi-locate or multi-locate (transnationalism) their members, as a more flexible sustainable refugee solution. Moreover, at least one family member permanently lives in approximately 29 percent of households of the returnees who passed away. If we add those households to the established percentage of permanent individual returnees from the sample, we come to the corrected estimate at the household level, according to which in 45 percent of households, at least one member permanently lives in Croatia.

Table 1 – Presence of the returnees – comparison of results of previous and new research, and analysis of data for 2010 by regions

	Comparison between two pieces of research		Results for 2010 by regions			
	2006	2010	Slavonia	Lika, Kordun and Banovina	Dalmatia	Other parts
n	1450	1402	172	596	520	114
Living in Croatia	38,3%	33,2%	39,3%	37,2%	28,0%	19,9%
a) At the registered address	90,8%	82,8%	72,5%	85,8%	84,6%	70,9%
b) Elsewhere in Croatia	9,2%	17,2%	27,5%	14,2%	15,4%	29,1%
Dead	11,2%	14,8%	11,3%	18,7%	10,5%	15,7%
Living outside of Croatia	35,1%	38,7%	40,1%	32,9%	48,1%	29,8%
a) Serbia	82,3%	70,0%	48,6%	75,4%	74,2%	52,7%
b) Elsewhere on the territory of former Yugoslavia	7,3%	7,5%	12,2%	9,1%	2,5%	19,5%
c) Other countries	10,4%	22,5%	39,2%	15,5%	23,3%	27,9%
No reliable information	15,4%	13,3%	9,3%	11,2%	13,4%	34,7%

Tenancy Rights And Return

Data relating to the presence of the ex-occupancy/tenancy right holders (OTRHs) at the time of the survey seem relatively encouraging, if the success of the return is primarily measured by the percentage of OTRHs who permanently reside in their compensatory flats or houses. About 70 percent of the people from our (sub)sample permanently reside in those apartments/houses, of which 89 percent of them were found in the very apartments, which is more than double the number of returnees present in their privately-owned and rebuilt houses. In accordance with the above figures, for only 17 percent of these respondents it was confirmed that they permanently live outside of Croatia. About 5 percent of these latter respondents died in the meantime.

A closer analysis indicates some particularities of the Housing Care Programme, which at least partially explain the huge difference in the percent of

permanent returnees between the first and the second group. The respondents from these two returnee contingents are significantly (statistically) different in terms of the region they came from and their refuge or displacement routes. Namely, more than 60 percent of the HCP beneficiaries are found in the Eastern Slavonia and Baranja. That region was not affected by the Croatian operation Storm, but was under international protection for several years after the war ended (UNTAES) – to be peacefully reintegrated into the Republic of Croatia in 1998. A considerable part of the HCP beneficiaries were displaced persons within Croatia, although a portion of them left the country after the reintegration. According to our respondents from the (sub)sample, about 60 percent of the OTRHs were living in Croatia over the course of the entire war, either in places controlled by the Croatian Government or the rebel Serb para-government.

Internally (en masse) displaced persons are not protected by the international refugee law, and in that sense it is difficult to designate them as returnees. From the humanitarian and sociological points of view it is evident that these people, along with the minority refugees, were intentionally discriminated against by the Croatian authorities while absent from their apartments. The Croatian government provided for compensatory housing as a means and a policy aimed at enabling former OTRHs to return and stay permanently in their homeland. It was not known at the time that it would be possible to purchase the apartments awarded to them. So for the beneficiaries, it was important to secure presence in the allocated apartments and houses. Once they become rightful owners who could freely dispose of them, it remains to be seen how many of the former OTRHs really want to and/or are capable reside permanently in these apartments or houses.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics Of The Returnees And Households

Our new findings, as expected, essentially confirmed the main characteristics of the returnee population from our previous study (2006), as well as from the relevant empirical investigations of the return flows, especially in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The average age of all members in the surveyed returnee households decreased slightly (from 51 to 49). The fact remains that it is old

population of limited vitality. Actually, almost one third (30%) of the returnees are older than 65, and close to a half (45%) are older than 55. On the other hand, there is less than a third (31%) of the returnees younger than 34 years of age.

The average number and structure of the returnee households has somewhat improved (2.9 compared to 2.6 members). The increase in the number of household members is also evident in the changed structure. In comparison to the first study, the number of nuclear and extended families has increased and the percentage of family households consisting of couples without children has decreased. The share of single-person households stayed about the same (20%). Data collected on former household members who have not returned (41 years) confirm the negative age selection of permanent returnees (49). Over three quarters (78%) of family members of 'formal' returnees (permanently living elsewhere, and not in Croatia) are aged between 25 and 54, while at the same time, only one third of the permanent returnees are in the same age category. Such differences in age structure are reflected in the more favourable education level of the absent returnees. Three out of four in the latter group have secondary school education, and one out of ten has a college or university education.

The structure of the returnee households is significantly different from the pre-war ones. In over one half of the households at least one family member did not return. According to the testimony of 57 percent of our respondents, only a small percentage of their extended families, friends and neighbours returned to Croatia and additional 13 percent stated that no one in the three mentioned social circles returned. Only every fifth returnee is fortunate enough to have his or her social network restored to its pre-war proportion. Underdeveloped social networks often lead to a feeling of loneliness among the returnees. Almost every second returnee admits to feeling lonely on occasion, while approximately 40 percent of the returnees have no such feelings.

Socio-Economic Conditions For Sustainable Return

In eighty-eight percent of the cases, permanent returnees live in an apartment/house that is in their ownership or owned by family members. Of the remaining 12 percent, a small share (about 4.5%) belong to the former tenancy rights holders, while a larger portion has no permanent housing (they did not own

any property before the war, their properties are not yet reconstructed, etc.). More than three quarters (78%) of our respondents are relatively satisfied with their current living conditions, of which one fifth are completely satisfied and the rest are mostly satisfied. Some of the returnee households do not have access to housing infrastructure. A few households do not have electricity and approximately 15 percent do not have running drinking water, which is almost half the number compared to four years ago (28%). Almost the same percentage (14%) of the households do not have a toilet, and a little more (19%) do not have a bathroom. Furthermore, about 40 percent of the returnee households have no streetlights in front of their homes, and one third do not have a paved road leading to their houses. Poor public transportation also affects the quality of life. About 40 percent of the respondents live in places with no regular public transportation (bus or train) to the municipal centre, while one in three has no “easy access” to health services. There are three major reasons behind this relatively poor state of housing infrastructure: 1) the war and intentional devastations in the areas affected by the conflicts; 2) general underdevelopment of Croatian regions to which the returnees have mostly returned; 3) the open or concealed obstruction to return of Serb refugees by the majority-governed local authorities.

Employment rates are low due to the qualification structure of the returnees and the overall economic crisis in the country. Only one in five (19%) working active returnees is legally employed, including seasonal jobs. The total percentage of employed persons has not significantly changed compared to 2006, but the relative amount of workers hired for an indefinite period is slightly higher, which is a small but encouraging shift. According to their own statements, about 4 percent of the returnees work illegally (on a grey labour market) and about 7 percent work on their farms. All in all, almost every third (30%) minority returnee of active working age is formally or informally employed, while 42 percent are unemployed. This certainly presents a great challenge for the returnees and it's a major reason for potential returnees to wait with return. The official unemployment rate in the returnee population reaches up to 68 percent, which is 3.6 times higher than the national average (about 19 percent in early 2011) or about 2.6 times higher than the average official unemployment rate in the four counties where the majority of the returnees live.

While 5 percent of the households have no regular source of income, about

8 percent did not receive any income (excluding welfare support and financial assistance from the members of extended family) in the month preceding the survey. Further one fifth of the households earned an income of up to 1000 Kunas (HRK) per month. The income earned by the following one third of households ranged between 1000 and 2000 HRK, which largely corresponds to the pensions received by returnees (the main source of income for most returnees). Less than one fifth of the returnee households received over 3000 HRK.

When the income of the returnee households, obtained in the month preceding the survey is divided among all the household members, the true extent of the low living standard and material uncertainty for a significant number of returnees and their households is revealed. Almost a half (45%) of the households had an income of less than 500 HRK per family member, nearly one fourth between 500 and 1000 HRK. For the same portion as the last group (25%) individual income varied between 1000 and 1500 HRK. Finally, for only about 7 percent, income per family member amounted to more than 1500 HRK.

Every second surveyed returnee considers his or her living conditions to be approximately equal to those of their Croat neighbours, more than every fourth person (28%) believe that they are worse, and least (10%) evaluate them as comparatively better. In this aspect of our study, we also established a positive shift in the last four years. Specifically, every third respondent in 2006 saw himself or herself living comparatively worse than Croats, while 39 percent noticed no considerable difference. A relatively larger number of respondents (one third) consider their living conditions to have worsened in the last five years (or since their return, if they have lived in Croatia for less than five years), than those that assess the opposite (one fourth): that they live better. The remaining one third did not feel any significant change to better or worse. It should be noted that the returnees, along with the dominant economic factors that contributed to the worsening of their quality of life, relatively frequently (55%) mention deteriorating health conditions. Almost half (45%) of all respondents and 60 percent of those who have a sense that their quality of life has improved, have experienced an improvement in housing conditions in the last five years, whether it pertained to the reconstruction of houses, the housing care programme or the improvement of infrastructure.

It seems, and it is confirmed in our interviews with the returnees, that physical

security is no longer a serious problem (of sustainability) for the minority return. Close to 90 percent of our respondents feel safe in the area they live in. Slightly less (80%) feel that they enjoy the freedom to participate in their religious celebrations, and three out of four see no obstacles in expressing their national identity. Finally, seven out of ten Serb returnees feel free in speaking their language. Still, certain elements of insecurity and fear are felt by a small portion of the returnees. Relatively most of them (one in ten) do not feel safe in expressing their national identity and in using their language. About 5 percent of the respondents have a sense of rejection by the national majority, and only 3 percent still fear for their physical safety.

Review Of The Accuracy Of The Decision To Return

The vast majority (eight out of ten present returnees) believe that the decision to return was the right one to make. One in five now doubt whether they made the right decision, of which a small percentage (6%) is certain that they made a mistake in permanently returning. However, 60 percent of those who are not sure that their return was a good solution for them have no intention of moving away from where they live now. The rest are thinking of relocating. While only a small portion of them are considering returning to the country where they lived in exile, the majority is thinking of moving to a third country or to another location in Croatia. While about four percent of respondents are considering a new migration outside of Croatia, slightly less (3%) prefer the possibility of relocation within Croatia. Nine out of ten returnees have no intention of changing their present residence in the foreseeable future. The responses to this question were similar in 2006, which indicate potential, though very small, return reversibility among the permanent returnees.

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MINORITY RETURN

This part of the report is based on our qualitative research, by which we mean in-depth interviews conducted with more than 80 minority returnees in Croatia and a dozen refugees and formal returnees living in Belgrade and the surrounding area. The typologies of returns and returnees enable us to systematise different individual and family strategies for return among the refugees (or another durable solution to the refugee status), as well as a variety of refugee and returnee experiences. Any typology is a sort of construction of a complex social phenomenon, and should be understood as an approximate description of typical cases, among which there may be certain important differences. In reality, individual people and their return stories do not neatly fit into the boxes of given types, i.e. may fall partially within one and partially within another type.

In our previous research, we established the division between the 'real' or 'permanent' and 'formal' returnees. The latter were implicitly seen as 'non-returnees'. This division, however, has two sides. The first is negative and, correctly, has been quickly identified and highlighted. It is perfectly obvious that some "formal" refugees really want to live in Croatia, in their renovated houses or compensatory apartments, but many younger people of working age, perhaps with children, cannot (at the moment) make a livelihood if they return. The second, quite positive side has been overlooked, as it can only be seen from the new conceptual perspective of open return. That is to say, for many refugees and returnees (mostly "formal"), the situation would be much more difficult if their returnee status, i.e. the right to citizenship and other necessary documents, were linked to (permanent) residence in Croatia. In other words, if their (returnee and other rights) were to depend on real return. In that case, only those who could stay would return, and this more or less approximates to the size and socio-demographic structure of the present permanent returnee contingents. In short, we realized that we have to expend our typology of returnees in relation to their actual residence.

The information we gathered from the survey, and particularly from conversations with minority returnees, provided us with the opportunity of constructing different typologies of return and returnees, depending on the

key criterion on which each type was based, since we were dealing with one-dimensional typology models. Thus, the same individual returnees can be found under different types, depending on which aspect of their refugee or returnee experiences and strategies we took into account. In our integral report, we introduced several types, which are linked to a theoretical discussion, and which, in our judgment, are essential to an understanding of the complexity, dynamics and openness of the process of return of Serb refugees to Croatia. Here we are restricting the presentation to types of returnees in relation to actual residence.

i) Types Of Returnees – In Terms Of Residence Status

a) Permanent (Real) Returnees (Stayees)

b) Formal Returnees

c) Potential Returnees

d) Unsuccessful Returnees – Re-Emigrants

e) Non-Returnees

Permanent or real returnees (stayees) are all minority persons who, upon return, have stayed to live in Croatia (permanently). We did not define the time period for permanency, unlike other researchers - (at least one year upon return). A large number of surveyed respondents, and others we spoke to, have lived in Croatia for many years, majority of them since their (final) return. However, even after many years of residence in Croatia since their return, relocation for some of permanent returnees is not excluded, for various reasons. Of course, all of our respondents, who at the same time served as informants, fall into this category since we could reach them. While talking to them, we also learned about other minority refugees, their refugee and returnee routes, present

residencies and possible plans for return. Based on their testimonies, we have been able to construct other types of returnees and return.

In our new research and typologies, we have continued to use the concept of formal returnees, but we have attributed to it a more complex meaning. These people have been officially registered as returnees, but do not really, or permanently, reside in Croatia (at the moment of investigation). Some of them may never really return, while others want to and will return sooner or later. The latter have been unable so far to return because of inadequate or unsatisfactory conditions for their own or their family's livelihood. Therefore, they cannot be classified as non-returnees, but should be considered as potential returnees, even if they have no plans to return at present. These people occasionally visit their houses, if they have been renovated, and maintain close links with the members of their wider and narrower families living permanently in Croatia. We are talking here about families practicing bilocation or multilocation.

As we have presented above, formal returnees are in fact potential or conditional returnees at the same time. However, we have introduced this type as a separate one, when we realized that there are cases of especially younger refugees, who initially preferred local integration into a receiving society as their durable solution, and did not consider return to Croatia and therefore did not register as (formal) returnees. However, they can experience failure in their life strategy, particularly when taking into consideration the difficult economic and employment situation, not only in Serbia where great majority of Serb refugees from Croatia reside, but even in some developed western host countries. Therefore, return for at least some of them is possible and even a certain option again, even without registration as returnees if they obtained the Croatian citizenship and have their (close) relatives already living in Croatia. Some returnees, after spending a certain amount of time in Croatia, decide to return to their refugee host country, or to resettle in a third country. We assume that the main, most frequent cause of re-emigration is the un-sustainability of return, for individuals or families. However, other reasons are possible, such as better living prospects opening up elsewhere, reuniting families, etc. So we should not simply label such cases as failed returns, but rather as re-emigration (in this case, undertaken voluntarily).

By non-returnees, we mean refugees who will seek one of two other solutions for their refugee status, rather than return. It is recognised that younger people,

with social capital, whether migrant workers or refugees, find it relatively easy to integrate into new surroundings. In addition, some quickly succeed in creating upward social mobility. This undoubtedly applies to some Serb refugees from Croatia. They are not essentially tied to their homes or country of origin, and it is hard to motivate them to return to face a new, unknown start in terms of social integration.

We have elaborated the typology of returnees' use of flats allotted through the Housing Care Programme, i.e. compensatory flats or formerly possessed flats, rather differently from the general typology of return (linked to the restoration of ownership), in order to emphasize its peculiarities. This typology illustrates the different ways in which the returnees returned, in order to highlight our finding that compensation is a complex process rather than a one-off event.

ii) Types Of Returnees' Use Of (Compensatory) Flats

a) Permanently Occupied Flats

b) Semi Occupied Flats

c) Temporarily Non-Occupied – Formally Occupied Flats

d) Non-Occupied Flats

Compensatory or returned flats in which our interviewees live, or for which we have information about their being permanently occupied, we have called permanently occupied. This is in fact the ideal model for compensatory flats, which are formally allocated for the purpose of (permanent) return. However, we need to consider two limitations, which is why we differentiate them from other types of (non) occupied compensatory flats. In the first place, some have been allocated only recently, so it is difficult to regard them as permanently occupied by returnees. In the second place, it would be unrealistic to expect that all minority refugees who gain the right to submit applications for the allocation of compensatory flats can simply move into such flats immediately

(if they do not have the prerequisites for making a livelihood in Croatia). And in the third place, as soon as the legal purchase of such flats is made available, it is up to the owners how to dispose of them.

By semi-occupied flats we mean compensatory flats whose tenants already live permanently in Croatia as returnees, mostly in the villages, where they are engaged in agricultural work, in order to provide a livelihood, and only use their replacement flats (for the time being) on an occasional basis.

It is well-known that some compensatory flats have owners who do not live in them. They visit their flats occasionally, but do not live in them permanently, for various reasons. Even the neighbours do not know where these people are. Some flats are occupied occasionally by “caretakers”, to prove occupancy, while new beneficiaries are unable to take possession of them for the time being, although they may wish to and plan to do so as soon as they secure the means for a livelihood. These are temporary non-occupied or formally occupied flats.

Finally, by non-occupied flats we mean the flats which their beneficiaries have not occupied yet and actually do not intend to, but would rather sell or exchange them for properties somewhere else.

For all the described types of the returnees, former holders of tenancy rights, i.e. for their (non)returnee personal or family strategies, transnational social networks are often very important. A returnee's life is not solely related to his or her homeland, as it may seem from the traditional perspective, but it also extends to transnational social spaces. Without consideration of the transnational social networks, the complexity, dynamics, and openness of the return process remains unclear and incomprehensible.

The fundamental thrust of our typologies is to point out on huge differences amongst the returnees and the returnee households with regard to their socio-demographic characteristics, social capital, social networks, refugee and returnee experiences, economic status, attachment to their “home” and the prospects for sustainable return. They “reveal” minority return as a dynamic, open, socially networked and reversible process.

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‘Mesić and Bagić have produced a work of great importance. As the authors record, displacement and return are complex, multidirectional and transnational processes. The departure and partial return of Croatia's historic Serb minority is a rich case study which they analyse right down to the communities where people live, and set out typologies which reflect the many ways in return. The introductory section where they elaborated the concept and controversies of return is masterful and is among the best review of recent literature. The approach and handling of the data is sophisticated and the focus on tenancy rights holders is most original. All in all, this is an extraordinarily significant study and the authors should be congratulated on it!’

— **Brad K. Blitz**

Professor of Human and Political Geography, Kingston University, London, Co-author of *War and Changes in the Balkans: Nationalism Conflict and Cooperation*, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

‘In short, the value of this book is two-fold, to say the least. First, it presents relevant scientific findings on complex return processes of Serb refugees to Croatia, which is still exceptionally important issue for the Croatian state and society. At the same time, Mesić and Bagić developed an analytical apparatus, and particularly a qualitative typology of return and returnees that might be tested in some other returnee flows. For instance, in my own research of refugee return to Bosnia and Herzegovina, I reached the conclusion – more on an intuitive basis – that there is a connection between return prospects and different ways of using the apartments that were restituted to the returnees. The authors have, however, developed an elegant and precise classification of this phenomenon as types of use of compensatory apartments by the returnees. The complexity and thoroughness of some parts of the book, particularly the conceptual discussion, surpasses standard UNHCR project reports.’

— **Marko Valenta**

Associate Professor at Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Co-author, together with Sabrina P. Ramet, of *The Bosnian Diaspora: Integration in Transnational Communities*, Ashgate, 2011.

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