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Welcome Home?
Minority return in south-eastern Republika Srpska

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Translation: It's time to go home
You have the right to free and secure return!
Your police serve you
(Repeated in Latin and Cyrillic scripts)

Logo: UNMiBH (United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Summary

This paper presents an analysis of minority return in Srpsko Goražde, in Republika Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, based upon a series of key informant interviews with returnees conducted in situ in June and July 2002. This primary research is located in a broader analysis of primary and secondary written material. The study aims to fill a gap in research on return in Bosnia which is generally focused on the act of physical return. Instead it attempts to understand both the motivations for return and conditions and aspirations post-return. In so doing it highlights the use of concepts of 'home' and 'return' in this context.

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List of Acronyms

DP	Displaced Person
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Community Humanitarian Office
EU	European Union
EVI	Especially Vulnerable Individual
EWS	Early Warning Systems (UNDP Report)
GARP	Government-Assisted Repatriation Programme
GFAP	General Framework Agreement for Peace (Dayton Agreement)
GOAL	Irish NGO
IC	International Community
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former-Yugoslavia
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IEBL	Inter-entity Boundary Line
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPTF	International Police Task Force
IRC	International Rescue Committee
JEN	Japanese Emergency NGOs
KM	Konvertible Mark (Bosnian currency)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OHR	Office of the High Representative
OMI	Municipal Office for Return (English translation) in RS
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PLIP	Property Legislation Implementation Plan
RRTF	Return and Reconstruction Task Force
RS	Republika Srpska
SFOR	NATO-led Stabilisation Force
SORS	Self-Organised Return Settlements
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
USCR	United States Committee for Refugees
VARP	Voluntary Assisted Return Programme

List of Abbreviations

Bosnia	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Dayton Agreement	General Framework Agreement for Peace
Federation	Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina (Muslim-Croat Federation)

Note on pronunciation

Place names in this paper are given in the original Serbo-Croat (or Bosnian) spelling. The following letters have a pronunciation that is substantially different from the English equivalent, or are not present in English:

C	pronounced 'ts' as in 'ca*ts*'
C	pronounced 'tch' as in 'ma*tch*'
C	pronounced 't' as in 'fu*t*ure'
J	pronounced 'y' as in '*Y*ugoslavia'
Lj	pronounced 'll' as in 'mi*ll*ion'
Š	pronounced 'sh' as in '*sh*y'
Ž	pronounced 's' as in 'plea*s*ure'

Note on terminology

The term Bosniac, or *Bošnjak,* which dates back to the Middle Ages, was revived during the war by the Bosnian Muslims, in order to differentiate themselves from Serbs or Croats. For a fuller description of the nuances and implications of the term see Bringa (1995:34-36).

Preface

The purpose of this study is to explore the conditions facing ethnic minority returnees to south-eastern Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to one municipality in particular, Srpsko Goražde. It traces a caseload of interviewees' experience of forced migration, displacement and return, with particular emphasis on their conditions of life post-return.

The study is based upon a series of key informant interviews conducted in June and July 2002 for an MA dissertation, comprising both returnee heads of household, and other key stakeholders in the return process, representing both international and Bosnian organisations. Upon the prior recommendation of my MA supervisor, all interviews were conducted in confidence, primarily to protect the security of the returnees themselves. As a result, no list of interviewees has been appended to this document, although the methods used to select interviews is presented in chapter 3, and the broad profile of the caseload is described in various ways in chapters 4 and 5.

In addition to the interviews, this study makes use of primary documents produced by agencies working in the field of return in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the growing secondary literature on the conflict and its aftermath in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally the paper also draws on a range of studies of other return contexts.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Richard Black, for his support, advice and helpful comments on the design and development of the project. The study was greatly facilitated by the generosity of staff in UNHCR Goražde and Sarajevo, OHR Sokolac, IRC Goražde and GOAL Goražde who gave of their time and insights. My thanks also go to Desmond Maurer of UNDP, for valuable insights into life in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. My deepest sense of gratitude is reserved for the returnees themselves, who welcomed me into their homes and shared their personal and often painful experiences.

Introduction

Return, and in particular minority return[1] has been a defining characteristic of the post-war horizon in Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter Bosnia). The 1992-1995 war in Bosnia and its aftermath resulted in the death of 300,000 and the forced migration of 2.5 million people, both to locations within Bosnia and abroad. The General Framework Agreement for Peace (GFAP) initialled at Dayton, Ohio in November 1995 and ratified in Paris in December 1995, which ended the war prioritised the return of those displaced as an integral part of the peace-building process, by the inclusion of Annex VII, of which Article 1 states:

> All refugees and displaced persons have the right freely to return to their homes of origin. They shall have the right to have restored to them property of which they were deprived in the course of hostilities since 1991 and to be compensated for any property that cannot be restored to them. The early return of refugees and displaced persons is an important objective of the settlement of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This component of the Dayton agreement has proved in many ways to be the main focus of attention in the post-war environment. The international community's self-stated aim of *reversing* ethnic cleansing (UNHCR 1997: 170; Cox 1999: 204) has dominated the agenda of not only internal politics within Bosnia, but has also been a major component of foreign policy of the European Union (EU) and the United States, with the result that massive financial investment has been made towards the post-war rehabilitation and transformation of Bosnia, a major proportion of which has been to fund programmes for reconstruction and return.

If return is the 'great unwritten chapter' within the field of migration research (King 2000), then Bosnia provides only a partial exception. While a considerable quantity of written material has been generated by international agencies engaged in supporting return, most of this takes the form either of policy pieces concerned with solving practical problems in achieving return to pre-war properties, or quantitative measurements of the physical act of return.[2] The biggest challenge within the framework for return remains the return of minorities to their pre-war homes. Such returns have generally proved easier to the Muslim-Croat Federation (Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, hereafter Federation) than to Republika Srpska (RS) (UNHCR 1997: 170), with the dominant 'hard-line' political stance in eastern RS making this a particularly difficult area. Despite, indeed perhaps because of the massive investment in reconstruction programmes, as well as legislative and political attempts to break the 'log-jam' of displacement (ICG 2000), descriptions of return processes are generally restricted to a set of statistics concerning the repossession of pre-war property or the occupancy rates among reconstructed houses.[3]

This study represents an attempt to go beyond such numerical measurements of success and explore the return of minorities in broader terms, through an analysis of returnees' experiences of forced displacement and the process of returning to and living in their pre-war property. The aim of the study is to document these experiences with a view to increasing our understanding of the process of return and post-return life. In so doing, this paper will highlight some of the nuances present in the concepts of 'home', 'success' and 'sustainability' as they are applied in this particular context of 'return'.

This study focuses on minority return to a single municipality, that of Srpsko Goražde in eastern RS, and is based around a series of key informant interviews undertaken in June and July 2002.[4] This focus on one municipality provided the opportunity to gather comparable data, and to locate these results within a detailed analysis of the contextual factors specific to forced displacement and subsequent return in that area. The first chapter of this paper outlines the broad contextual issues of displacement and return in contemporary Bosnia, and highlights some of the conceptual debates surrounding 'return' in general. Chapter 2 narrows the focus to the specific conditions of Srpsko Goražde. This is followed by a presentation of the methodology used in selecting and conducting key informant interviews. These three contextual chapters thus provide the basis for the main body of the paper, which sets out and analyses the results of the

[1] 'Minority return' is defined as 'the return of an individual to a pre-war home which is located in an area now under the control of another ethnic group, whatever the ethnic distribution in the area prior to the war' (Cox 1999:202).

[2] While not an analysis of return *per se*, a notable and relatively recent exception to this trend is the UNDP's Early Warning System (EWS) survey of attitudes concerning, *inter alia*, inter-ethnic relations and security among both ethnic majority and minority populations.

[3] See for example PLIP Monthly figures (www.ohr.int).

[4] These interviews and accompanying observations draw upon the author's prior employment on return programmes within Bosnia between 1996 and 2000, and specifically from sixteen months working on return issues in and around Goražde and Višegrad in 1999 and 2000.

interviews in two chapters. Chapter 4 covers the interviewees' experience of forced migration, displacement and the process of physical movement back to their pre-war properties, while chapter 5 outlines the main issues post-return and in so doing, examines questions of success and sustainability in the context of these returns. Finally, the paper revisits the conceptual theme of a 'return home' in light of the interviewees' aspirations for the future.

1. Forced migration and return in Bosnia

1.1 The scale of displacement

The policy of 'ethnic cleansing' and subsequent fighting resulted in a massive change in the demography of the population in Bosnia. In the twelve months from the beginning of the war in April 1992, which heralded the swift and brutal cleansing of eastern and north-west Bosnia, to the creation of six 'safe areas' (Bihac, Goražde, Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Tuzla, Žepa) under UN Resolutions 819 and 824 in April 1993, northern and eastern Bosnia were emptied of virtually the entire Muslim population outside the six enclaves. The Bosniac-Croat conflict in central Bosnia and in Herzegovina during 1993 led to further movement between these two areas as they became largely ethnically homogenous, with central Bosnia being predominantly taken by the Bosniacs and most of Herzegovina by the Croats. Mostar, the main city in Herzegovina, was split between east and west as the Neretva river became the front-line, with Bosniacs on the east side and Croats on the west. This conflict between the Bosniacs and Croats was brought to an end in March 1994 by the Washington Agreement (Silber & Little 1995: 354).

Table 1. Population of Bosnia according to 1991 census

Group	Number	% of total population
Muslims	1.9m	43.7
Serbs	1.3m	31.3
Croats	753,400	17.3
Yugoslavs (includes ethnically mixed)	239,845	5.5
Others (Montenegrins, Gypsies, Albanians, Ukrainians)	106,755	2.2
Total	4.3m	100

Source: Bringa 1995:26

On July 11th 1995 Srebrenica fell to the Serbs (Honig & Both 1996: 26): some of the Bosniacs there were taken to government-held territory in the Tuzla region by UN convoys, but only after most of the men had been separated out by the Serbs. The torturing and killing of between 6,000 and 7,000 men by the Serbs in the Srebrenica district has since been described as the 'largest massacre in Europe since the Second World War' (UNHCR 2000:224). A week later Žepa was also taken by the Serbs, leaving Goražde as the only remaining 'safe area' in eastern Bosnia, although the size of the Goražde pocket had rapidly shrunk during April 1994 during a rapid offensive by the Serbs which resulted in all the suburbs on the right bank of the Drina being taken and being forced across the river.

During late summer 1995 the major offensive of Operation Storm by the now-allied Bosniacs and Croats re-took the Krajina region of Croatia and much of the territory in north-west Bosnia around Bihac, with the Serbs being pushed back towards Banja Luka. This was the last major population movement during the war, as thousands of Serbs fled to Serb-controlled areas around Banja Luka. From then on front-lines remained relatively stable until the Dayton (GFAP) agreement was finalised. Under the terms of the agreement however, the signatory parties agreed to 'hand back' some territories gained, which resulted in further population movements. The most significant of these was the post-war exodus of Serbs from the Grbavica and Ilidža suburbs of Sarajevo when the city was assigned as Federation territory: during March 1996 approximately 60,000 Serbs were forcibly evicted from their homes or the properties they occupied in Sarajevo by the Serb leadership in Pale (Holbrooke 1998:336), in an ironic end to the project of ethnic cleansing. Many were transported by buses organised by Bosnian Serb forces to eastern Bosnia, principally to Foca/Srbinje[5] and Višegrad. Both towns had been cleansed of their Muslim population at the beginning of the war and many Bosniac properties had been occupied by Serbs from outlying villages as well as those who had come from Goražde. The rest of the properties were rapidly allocated by the local authorities to Serbs arriving from Sarajevo, but the shortfall in available accommodation resulted in the use of public

[5] The pre-war municipality of Foca was split under Dayton, with the town and surrounding territory forming the municipality of Foca in the RS. The RS authorities named this town and municipality 'Srbinje', but this was not officially recognised by the international community for its discriminatory connotations. It has become common for commentators to refer to post-war, RS Foca as 'Foca/Srbinje'.

buildings, schools and military barracks as collective centres. From a pre-war Muslim majority of approximately 70% in each municipality, the population from 1996 was almost exclusively Serb.

Prior to the war the major towns, most famously Sarajevo but also Tuzla, Banja Luka, Mostar and others, had a multi-ethnic population. Most rural areas were populated by villages of mono-ethnic groups which together made up an ethnic patchwork throughout the country. The war had taken approximately 300,000 lives, and thousands had fled to the relative safety of territory held by their own ethnic group. In addition, many rural areas had been abandoned as people moved to urban centres. Thus, in the immediate post-war period, the population of Bosnia was therefore concentrated in largely ethnically homogenous urban areas. In total more than 50% of the total population had left their homes of origin. Together with the transfers of population during early 1996, only 42% of the total population remained in their homes of origin (Cox 1998:623).

Table 2. Immediate post-war displaced population, December 1995

Population group	Number
Internally displaced within Bosnia	1,300,000
Refugees in neighbouring countries	500,000
Refugees in Western Europe	*700,000
Total	2,500,000

* Of this figure 345,000 were in Germany

Source: UNHCR 2000:219

1.2 Foundations for return

As noted above, Annex VII of the Dayton agreement both enshrined the right of '[a]ll refugees and displaced persons … freely to return to their homes of origin' and designated their 'early return' an 'important objective' in the context of the post-war settlement (GFAP, Annex VII, Article 1). Annex VII has been described by some as a concession to the pre-war multi-ethnic character of Bosnia in what is effectively otherwise a document of partition (Vandiver 2001:169). Marcus Cox notes the incongruity of the acceptance of the terms of the Dayton agreement by the signatory parties 'being committed to paper so soon after the cessation of five years of bitter conflict waged explicitly for the purpose of dividing the population' (Cox 1998:609). Nevertheless, whatever the motivations of, or constraints upon the signatories of the GFAP,[6] a key product of Dayton was a massive and prolonged international commitment to and investment in the return of Bosnians to their pre-war properties.

Embedded within Annex VII of the Dayton framework and the subsequent efforts to implement its provisions are a set of assumptions concerning the possibility and desirability of return. Leaving aside for the moment the practical constraints upon the movement of forcibly displaced persons back to their pre-war homes, a theme which is pursued in detail in the remainder of this paper, it is important to clarify the underlying concepts implicit in these assumptions. As Laura Hammond notes, the terms 'return' and 'returnee' are 'riddled with value judgements which reflect a segmentary, sedentary idea of how people ought to live' (1999:230). In this, 'sedentarist' view, the supposition is that there exists 'a natural connection between place and people' (Kibreab 1999:388), and therefore that 'home' is identified with a specific territory and place, and, moreover, it is assumed that 'return' to this 'home' will improve the lives of refugees (Hammond 1999:229). These assumptions would seem to resonate in Annex VII's equation of an 'early return' to 'homes of origin' with a solution or 'settlement of the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina', to paraphrase Article 1.

This sedentarist conception of identity and return has been subject to criticism from a 'post-modern' perspective. This post-modernist view is that, in an increasingly globalised world, people are becoming less territorialised, that the equation of 'home' with a specific location is misplaced, and hence if 'home' never existed, it is impossible to 'return' to it. Taken to its conclusion, this viewpoint proposes that 'we are all refugees' (Warner 1992, quoted in Warner 1994:168).

The post-modern view may, however, overemphasise the extent to which globalising processes undermine the connection between place and identity, particularly in the case of mass, conflict-induced migration. In this approach 'the refugee problem is reduced to that of mobility' (Kibreab 1999:386), regardless of the cause or circumstance of that movement. In the case of Bosnia, the deployment of a nationalist identity, based on an explicit link between ethnicity and place, was exploited to develop the campaign of 'ethnic cleansing'. Ethnic cleansing is nothing if not a claim to the right to inhabit and control a place based upon a notion of 'homeland'. Nor indeed was it an accidental by-product of a war fought on other terms (see, for example, Silber & Little (1995:269); Simms (2001:ix)). If it is accepted that the war was

[6] For a detailed 'insider' description of these constraints see Holbrooke (1998).

founded upon territorialized notions of identity, it is thus unsurprising that the peace framework is grounded in similar concepts of identity and place. As Kibreab argues, '[t]here can be no deterritorialized identity in a territorialized space' (1999:387). The language of Dayton and post-Dayton implementation was and is infused by a territorialised notion of identity, albeit employing a different basis for (re)establishing claims to territory, namely legal rather than ethnic 'rights'.

Nevertheless, there is some utility in these critiques of more traditional, territorialised assumptions in that they suggest the need to treat concepts of 'return', 'returnee' and 'home' with some caution. While acknowledging their value-laden content, this paper continues to make use of these concepts, for the simple reason that these are the terms utilised by the key informants interviewed for this study. Several nuances are, however, highlighted in the use of these concepts and presented in the latter sections of this paper.

1.3 Strategies and phases of return

The strategies adopted by the international community to assist return in Bosnia have been phased and subject to change since the first returns during 1996, for a variety of reasons, including increased security over time, policies to deal with obstruction on the part of governmental and local officials, co-ordination between international agencies inside Bosnia, and dependence on the agendas and funding of donor countries.

The initial strategy for returns, which took place throughout 1996, was almost exclusively focused on 'majority' return.[7] Large-scale funding from donor governments was channelled through UNHCR to NGO implementing partners for the reconstruction of dwellings to enable people to move back to their properties and in so doing alleviate some of the problems of severe overcrowding, particularly in urban areas. However, many people who had moved from rural to urban areas were reluctant to return to the countryside, and, in the absence of any legislation to force people to return to their homes once they had been reconstructed, such people continued to occupy other people's property in the towns.

In August 1996 the German government announced the end of temporary protection for the majority of Bosnians, on the basis that 'Bosnians who fled Serb-controlled areas of Bosnia were safe from persecution in Bosnian government-controlled areas' (Frelick 2001:46). In line with this decision, approximately 255,000 Bosnians repatriated from Germany between 1996 and 2000, leaving only 23,000 in Germany with temporary *Duldung* ('tolerated' from deportation) status. Although ostensibly this repatriation was undertaken 'voluntarily' there have been criticisms levelled at Germany for their interpretation of 'voluntary'. Many Bosnians received threats of deportation and/or had their benefits suspended or reduced. Together with the highly publicised deportation of approximately 1,000 Bosnians from Germany, many more were induced to return (Cox 1998:618) through Germany's government-assisted repatriation programme (GARP). Other countries, notably Switzerland, also developed voluntary assisted return programmes (VARP), with the result that by the end of 2000 approximately 369,000 refugees had returned to Bosnia. Of this number 340,000 had returned to the Federation, despite the fact that the majority of them were originally from territory now in Republika Srpska (USCR 2001:206). This significant 'return' to majority areas only added to the problems of internal displacement within Bosnia, with migrants effectively trading a form of refugee status for life as an IDP, and effectively reinforced ethnic polarisations between and within the two entities.

With increased pressure from DP Associations, a shortage of housing in many municipalities, particularly in the Federation, and some improvement in the security situation, the emphasis then shifted to one of facilitating the return of minorities. The Return and Reconstruction Task Force (RRTF) was established jointly by UNHCR and the Office of the High Representative (OHR) in 1997 to coordinate this process. The structure designated 1998 as the 'Year of Return' in which the process of minority return would begin to solve the problems of internal displacement. The focus of the international community accordingly shifted towards a more coordinated effort aimed at identifying and implementing return along an 'axis' or 'axes', where population movements between pairs of municipalities were theoretically facilitated by each housing large numbers of displaced from the other, amid much talk of 'putting the spade in the ground'. The results were disappointing however, due to the continuing obstruction by local authorities, particularly in RS, and by the end of the year only around 35,000 minority returns had been achieved, mostly to the Federation (RRTF 2000:6).

During 1999 the international community pushed through significant amendments to property

[7] 'Majority' return denotes return to a pre-war property located in an area now in which the returnee would form part of the majority ethnic group, irrespective of the pre-war ethnic distribution in that area.

legislation in both entities, resulting in a clear procedure for pre-war owners to reclaim their property. Until the introduction of this legislation the legal system had provided no further recourse to those reclaiming their property who met with non-compliance (Cox 1998:613). In addition, the RRTF developed the Property Legislation Implementation Plan (PLIP), in order to ensure that the new 'return-friendly' legislation was backed up by a firm emphasis on the 'rule of law'. For each municipality a Focal Point was appointed from either UNHCR or OSCE to work with and monitor the local authority responsible, and Property Commissions were established as working groups in problem municipalities. This concerted approach to implement the 'rule of law' allowed cases of non-compliance to be identified much more easily. For those who continued to obstruct the implementation of property legislation there was the threat of removal from office, a threat carried out in November 1999 when the High Representative used his vested powers to remove 22 officials in Bosnia, most of them for obstruction of the return process.

While the focus of this paper is the experience of those who physically return to their pre-war properties, it should be noted that the property reconstruction and repossession processes described above do not always lead to the return of their pre-war owners or occupancy-right holders. Among the various reasons for the 'failure' of return to take place in such situations, a key consideration is the sale and exchange of newly repossessed or reconstructed property. In the case of repossessed properties, the occupancy-right holder or owner is under no obligation to actually return to the property in question. However, in the case of reconstructed properties where the international community has made an investment, there are standard 'tri-partite' agreements which govern the responsibilities of the international partner, the beneficiary and the local authorities. There is an increasing tendency to ignore the tri-partite agreements, which contained a clause that on repossession of a property which had received reconstruction assistance the owner could not sell the property for a period of 5 years. This was to ensure that the return agreed to by the owner would in fact take place. However the tri-partite agreements have never been legally binding documents and in cases where the owner simply did not return, there was in fact no legal recourse of the international community. Since the introduction of the new property legislation of 1999 there has been a decreasing reliance on tri-partite agreements to serve as a contract for return, not least because of difficulties in obtaining the signature of unwilling authorities opposed to minority return.

While legislation now allows that people who have had their properties reconstructed can be (and are) evicted from the property they are occupying, many people are not returning but are selling their properties and then using the proceeds to buy another property in the entity in which they are displaced. This obviously has the potential to further consolidate ethnic partition between the two entities. In 2000, Sadako Ogata, the then UN High Commissioner for Refugees, denounced the increasing propensity of sale and exchange as a continuation of 'the process of ethnic separation, which began during the war' (UNHCR 2000:232). In the course of researching this paper, some evidence emerged of differing opinions on this subject amongst members of the international community: while some view property sale and exchange as merely one form of 'durable solution' to the problem of displacement,[8] others endorse the position expressed in the quote from Ogata. This latter group are critical of the lack of enforcement measures taken by OHR, which they see as the organisation best placed to make the tri-partite agreements into legally binding documents.[9]

1.4 Rural and urban contexts

Due to the fact that rural areas were largely destroyed and abandoned, while urban areas were over-crowded with DPs, different strategies were adopted to achieve return in each case. Returns to rural areas are regarded as the least contentious of minority returns: by returning to abandoned villages pre-war owners will not displace others. For this reason local authorities have tended to make less of an issue of solving claims made for the legal return of rural property to the owners. As far as the international community is concerned, the reconstruction of villages in key areas will generate a 'critical mass' of returnees. Such returns provide for safety in numbers and, once security becomes less of an issue as the post-war population begins to accept the presence of returnees, returns can be extended to urban areas.

In south-eastern RS however, due to continuing obstruction by local authorities, there was no significant rural return until spring 2000. A combination of several factors, including initial 'breakthrough' return programmes to Foca/Srbinje and Cajnice municipalities in 1999, a tangible dwindling of donor funding, together with a sense of encouragement gained from the tent-

[8] Interview with IC official 27th June 2002.
[9] Interview with NGO official 3rd July 2002.

settlement on the inter-entity boundary line (IEBL) between Goražde and Srpsko Goražde (see below), then inspired 'spontaneous' or 'self-organised' groups of DPs to return to their villages and set up camp. These 'self-organised return settlements' (SORS) were the result of collective decisions taken within the DP Associations, and appeared in several parts of Bosnia, most notably in eastern RS municipalities such as Foca/Srbinje, Višegrad, Rogatica (Žepa) and Srpsko Goražde (ICG 2000:4). Some assistance was provided by organisations such as UNHCR (Fischel 2001:325), and many of them subsequently received reconstruction assistance under NGO programmes. Indeed, due to the need to identify only people who 'really want to return' for reconstruction programmes in order to get maximum returns from rapidly-dwindling resources, it is the case now that beneficiaries are almost exclusively those people who have been living in SORS.[10]

Towns pose a tougher challenge in which to achieve minority return for various reasons. Firstly they have a much higher population density both as a result of less destruction and also because they were the centres towards which people fled from the villages. They are of both political and territorial importance as they are seats of local and national power and they control local resources over a wide area. Therefore the local and national authorities tend to be more obstructive concerning the restitution of urban property as they have more to lose, and the post-war population are less likely to accept returnees as they may be further displaced themselves.

Return to urban areas in many cases involves the vacating of property of DPs before the pre-war occupant is able to return. Due to the lack of political will which manifests itself in obstruction, coupled with a desperate lack of alternative accommodation, progress has been slow. However, the PLIP campaign is proving successful in most areas of Bosnia, with the numbers of minorities being able to return to their property in urban areas increasing since 2000. The most challenging area is eastern RS which is generally accepted to be approximately two years behind most of the rest of the country. [11]

2. The case of Srpsko Goražde

The municipality of Srpsko Goražde was created as part of the GFAP. Prior to the war the territory now known as Srpsko Goražde was part of Goražde municipality, and its population was predominantly Muslim. Goražde was one of approximately forty-six municipalities split by the IEBL. The two main communities within Srpsko Goražde are Kopaci and Ustipraca, and much of the local population of Goražde continue to refer to the area as 'Kopaci' rather than adopting the official title of Srpsko Goražde.

During the war the area was bitterly fought over: the settlement of Ustipraca was taken by the Serbs in June 1993 and the population fled towards Kopaci and Goražde. Kopaci fell to the Serbs on 16th April 1994, during a rapid offensive by the Serbs heading towards Goražde town, in which an estimated 700 people were killed and almost 2,000 wounded (UNHCR estimates quoted in Sacco 2000:187). The whole remaining Muslim population fled to Goražde, and the Serbs took control of all the places on the right bank of the Drina up to the town centre. As per the Dayton Agreement, the IEBL between Goražde and Srpsko Goražde is situated at the outer limits of Kopaci.

The population of Srpsko Goražde is difficult to determine. Before the war out of a total of 4,446 people 82.5% were Muslim and 17.5% Serb.[12] The post-war population, until the first minority returns, was 100% Serb, with the majority displaced from Goražde or Sarajevo. The local authorities have insisted that the current population is more than 5,000, however this is quite likely an exaggeration based on their stated political aims of keeping the municipality a Serb community. The number of habitable Bosniac-owned properties in the municipality is approximately 350, and during a national re-registration exercise for DPs during 2000 the number of families which registered in Srpsko Goražde was 523. Based upon this, UNHCR estimate the total population at approximately 1,500 (UNHCR 2002:4).

Due to the fact that the pre-war population of Srpsko Goražde is almost entirely displaced *to* Goražde, and a large proportion of its post-war population is displaced *from* Goražde, the area provides a major 'return axis'. Although the pre-war population have shown determination in returning to their pre-war homes, the local authorities and the DPs in Srpsko Goražde have ensured that the story of minority return to Srpsko Goražde has been characterised by hard-line obstructionist tactics to frustrate every attempt at either reconstruction or repossession of property. These tactics have included the refusal of the Municipal Office for Return (OMI) to issue decisions on claims for property, the invention of impossible bureaucratic procedures

[10] Interview with UNHCR official 4th July 2002.
[11] Interview with UNHCR official 6th June 2002.
[12] Interview with representative of the Regional Board, 30th June 2002.

for reconstruction projects, vandalism of reconstructed property and incidents of violence to returnees.[13] Much interest has been generated within the international community both in Bosnia and elsewhere, as well as amongst the local population and media in the surrounding municipalities during the coordinated and concerted effort to achieve minority return to the municipality. This focus on Srpsko Goražde essentially served to polarise the issues surrounding minority return and created the perception that the municipality is the 'litmus test' (RRTF 2002:2) for minority return in eastern RS generally.

By late 1999, despite continuous pressure on the authorities in Srpsko Goražde to relent on their hard-line stance, there was still no substantial minority return.[14] During October, after reaching a level of unbearable frustration at the lack of progress, the DPs organised themselves into a working party to travel from Goražde to Kopaci and prepare their land for planting winter wheat. The convoy of tractors had been sufficiently well organised for news of it to be heard in Kopaci and the DPs were met at the IEBL with a protest by the Serb DPs in Kopaci which prevented it from reaching its destination. There was wide suspicion at the time that the protest had been incited by the municipal authorities in Srpsko Goražde although this was not proved. On the other hand, it is clear with hindsight that the 'camp' set up at the IEBL as the result of the blocked convoy had also been the fall-back plan of the DPs in Goražde. This camp turned into a tent settlement at the IEBL with representatives of most families displaced from Srpsko Goražde (not just Kopaci) spending at least some of the time there. It received both moral and material support from other Bosniac DP groups and the domicile population of Goražde, as well as substantial media attention, both national and international (for example, Wright 2000b). During November 1999, in a parallel attempt to break the stalemate, the High Representative removed the Mayor and the head of the OMI in Srpsko Goražde, as well as the Mayor of Goražde, from office, as part of a sweeping round of removals of obstructionist officials aimed at furthering the chances of minority return. Although they were replaced by other personalities with similar political views, these two events, the camp and the removal of officials, heralded a sea-change in Srpsko Goražde: during March 2000 two houses in Kopaci were vacated and the pre-war occupants able to reclaim them. The camp at the IEBL was then dismantled and recreated in the two houses, which became both a base and a symbol of return for the DPs displaced in Goražde.

During July 2000, following on from the camp at the IEBL and in line with the SORS appearing all over the country, several contingents of those displaced from Srpsko Goražde set up camp at the site of their destroyed properties to begin to clean their houses, cultivate their land and prepare for their return. Sites included Ustipraca, Zapljevac and Ogleceva (Fischel 2001:326). While some of these DPs have now received international assistance to return to their pre-war properties, other SORS continue to be set up in the municipality: during 2001 a further 20 settlements appeared and by mid-2002 a further 4 were set up, all of which received basic assistance, such as tents, tools and domestic items from international organisations (UNHCR 2002).

Amid constant pressure from the international community the local authorities in Srpsko Goražde finally began to issue decisions on contested property during late 2000 (Fischel 2001:323). The subsequent initial evictions of displaced Serbs from these properties then heralded a change in attitude of Serb DPs, when they realised that 'despite all the promises of their leaders that they would be able to stay in other people's properties, it wasn't true'.[15] This then provided the trigger for return of Serb DPs in Srpsko Goražde to reconsider their own prospects and many decided to return to Goražde. In February 2001 the first Serb tent settlements were set up in Goražde municipality. This was an important development as it meant the 'return axis' could finally begin to be resolved. As of July 2002 there were approximately 200 returnee families to the municipality (UNHCR 2002:4), following a series of reconstruction projects and the first round of evictions and property repossession.

3. Methodology

Prior to interviewee selection a period of collating background information was undertaken. This included field trips to other municipalities in the area to observe minority returnee locations and to speak with returnees, as well as meeting with several representatives of the international

[13] Personal experience of the author, 1999-2000, supported by returnee interviewees (see below, chapter 5), and interviews with NGO officials. See also Fischel (2001:323).

[14] During 1998, GOAL implemented an ECHO-funded return project to the village of Živojevici in Srpsko Goražde. While this constituted the first minority return to the municipality, it was to a remote and abandoned village only accessible from the Federation, and the 7 returnee households had no contact with the authorities or current population of Srpsko Goražde.

[15] Interview with NGO official 19th June 2002.

community responsible for the Goražde area. In addition the author was invited to attend a monthly meeting of the local RRTF, which provided an opportunity to obtain an overview of the activities of the international community generally in the area as well as the major current issues concerning return.

It was decided to split the interviews with returnees between those whom had repossessed their property and those whose houses had been reconstructed. This decision was taken in part to assess if the experience of return is markedly different between the two groups, and also to ensure a spread of return locations. Specifically, a typical location selected for reconstruction may be a settlement in which most of the housing units were destroyed along with the local infrastructure (e.g. electricity and water supply). Many of these locations are rural or semi-rural and were largely ethnically homogenous before the war. By providing reconstruction assistance on this basis it enables people to return in groups (thereby reducing security concerns) and at the same time keeps the repair costs of infrastructure to a minimum. With reference to the repossession of occupied properties, the eviction of DPs occupying properties is carried out (in the case of Srpsko Goražde) in the order of the date of application for repossession, without regard for the location of the property. This means that the property could effectively be anywhere in the municipality. In the case of Srpsko Goražde, as the majority of habitable housing units are in a fairly concentrated area, it thus follows that most returns due to repossession are to an area still (for the first returnees at least) largely occupied by DPs, thereby forming an ethnically mixed community.

To select reconstruction cases a list was obtained from both IRC and GOAL (as the two main NGOs undertaking reconstruction in the municipality) of their beneficiaries. IRC reconstructed houses under an EC-funded project between 1999-2001 and GOAL through two projects, both ECHO-funded, of 1999 and 2000. Return of the beneficiaries took place between late 1999 and Spring 2002. The lists were amalgamated and arranged in alphabetical order and every eighth case was selected for interview to generate 10 interviews from this category. For repossession cases a list of all repossessions to the end of June 2002 was acquired and the same method used to yield a further 10 cases. The dates of return of repossession cases selected was between May 2000 and April 2002. Of those selected and interviewed, 2 cases had yet to physically return: at the time of interview each had so far only repossessed a portion of the property and were carrying out repairs to it whilst waiting for the rest of the property to be vacated. 90% of all cases selected for interview were in the settlements of Ustipraca and Kopaci. Of the 20 cases initially selected, 4 were not interviewed on the basis of advice received from others: one family had left the area to work abroad, one householder had recently been widowed, one couple had divorced and were both living elsewhere, and one was suffering from serious illness. The total number of interviewees selected in this manner was therefore 16, comprising 9 reconstruction and 7 repossession cases.

The interviews with returnees were semi-structured, with the author completing a questionnaire of both open and closed questions. This allowed for the gathering of personal data as well as giving the interviewee the chance to give an opinion on a certain issue and to describe in their own words their experiences. Interviews were tape-recorded (with the permission of the interviewee) which enabled the author to draw out nuances on subsequent hearings which may not have been apparent at the actual interview. All interviews with returnees took place at their homes with the aid of an interpreter. Four different interpreters were used, in order to minimise the possible association in the minds of interviewees of the interpreter with any particular organisation and so to minimise bias. In most cases the head of household was interviewed. If the head of household was not present the spouse was interviewed, and in some cases both the head of household and spouse together answered questions: this type of interview was in fact the most informative.

During the interviewing process several issues came to light regarding current problems being experienced by returnees. In order to examine these problems in more depth, and after meeting with community representatives and discussing these and other issues, a further 3 interviewees were selected on the basis that they were in a category likely to experience the same problems. This was undertaken in order to cross-reference certain initial interview results to determine whether those results were particular to the household interviewed, or whether they had wider resonance with the experience of other returnee households. For example, initial results were corroborated in this way in the case of returnee households with children: since there were only 6 such cases in the initial sample of interviewees, 2 additional returnee households with children were identified and interviewed. In this example, these additional households were identified through unplanned encounters on visits to the return sites.

In presenting and analysing these results, the initial, randomly selected interviewee households are used as the basic caseload for generating core statistics. Reference to additional interviewee households and use of the results of these secondary interviews will be noted in the text or in footnotes. This has been done to preserve the original, deliberately random quality of the sample, and to minimise the potential for skewing the results towards problems perceived by the interviewer, interpreter or initial interviewees.

The total number of returnee interviews was therefore 19. Further interviews and observations were then undertaken within the local population in Goražde municipality to augment the overall research and to place interviews undertaken in Srpsko Goražde in a related context. Some of the major issues and initial findings were then discussed with various key actors within the international agencies working on return in Srpsko Goražde and the surrounding area to compare and further contextualise the information.

4. The cycle of displacement and return

4.1 Caseload profile

The core caseload interviewed consisted of 16 households. The heads of household were predominantly males of working age, with 1 female-headed household, and 5 headed by pensioners. The average mean family size at the time of interview was 3.625, with a range from 2 to 7 family members. There were 9 families with adult children, 3 with school-age children and 2 with pre-school age children. In 4 cases, there were also extended family members living with the interviewee household. Of the total interview caseload (including the 3 additional interviews), the bulk of the 19 households were located in Kopaci and Ustipraca, with 8 and 7 interviews conducted respectively in the two locations.

Kopaci may be described as the 'centre' of Srpsko Goražde: before the war it was one of the two main industrial zones in Goražde municipality,[16] providing approximately 800-900 jobs in three factories, specifically a wire factory, a cooling plant and a machine factory. These factories ceased production during the war, and now only the cooling plant remains in operation employing a handful of people (UNHCR 2002:5). Kopaci's administrative functions were under the jurisdiction of the Goražde municipal authorities. As the major population centre in the new post-war municipality of Srpsko Goražde the resident authorities are now responsible for the administration and governance of the new municipality, and as such the office of the Mayor, the local police, the Municipal Office for Return (OMI) and offices for amenities are based in Kopaci.

Ustipraca is approximately 5km from Kopaci and is situated above the Drina river at a point where the river Praca joins the Drina. It lies on the junction where the main road from Goražde meets the main Sarajevo-Višegrad route (from Višegrad the road continues to Serbia). It is a community built up around this road and river intersection which before the war was also a significant railroad junction. Consequently there were numerous cafes and restaurants to service travellers and, due to the employment opportunities drawing people in from the surrounding villages, there was also a primary school, a health clinic, a post office and a cinema. In 1989 a hydro-electric plant was developed down-river at Višegrad, which necessitated the flooding of the original settlement at Ustipraca. Arrangements for compensation were made and many inhabitants built new houses on the hill overlooking the newly-formed lake (although allegedly not all compensation claims have been resolved). Others arrived in Ustipraca from villages further up the mountain, mainly from Brda, which is 4km away. Most of them moved to Ustipraca around thirty years ago to be closer to amenities, in particular the primary school, yet many of them continue to cultivate their land in Brda. The relatively recent construction of the majority of the houses in Ustipraca proved to be advantageous when it came to reconstruction by international NGOs as it meant they were easier to rebuild.[17]

In addition to those undertaken in Kopaci and Ustipraca, 2 of the 'core' interviews took place in villages on the right bank of the river, namely Hubjeri and Pitino Polje. Hubjeri was a mixed ethnicity village before the war, and was famous locally for quality agricultural produce: many residents of Hubjeri made their living by selling their produce at the Goražde market. Pitino Polje is a small settlement consisting of three houses, whose people also made their living from agriculture.

4.2 Initial forced migration

The dates the interviewees fled their homes reflect the pattern of fighting in the area: most of those from Ustipraca left in 1993 when it was taken by the Serbs or in April 1994 during the

[16] The second major industrial zone was in Vitkovici in addition to which there was (and still is) the 'Pobjeda' munitions factory in Goražde towards Povrašnica.

[17] Interview with NGO official 3rd July 2002.

rapid Serb offensive which took territory from Ustipraca up to the suburbs of Goražde town. Almost all of those interviewed from Kopaci left on April 16th 1994 when it fell to the Serbs. The front-line moved so quickly during these periods that some families were separated from each other. For example, one man from Ustipraca who was employed as a driver left for work in Sarajevo on the day Ustipraca fell and did not see his family for two years as he became trapped in Sarajevo while his family were displaced to, and trapped in Goražde. During those two years before he was able to reach Goražde they had no news about each other, until he heard on the 'ham' radio that his family were alive and in Goražde. His wife said that if he had waited only another ten minutes then he would not have been able to go to Sarajevo at all. Similarly, one family who lived in Sarajevo were staying with parents in Ustipraca and were forced along with them to leave: they remained in Goražde for two years before they could return to their home in Sarajevo. Amongst the interviewees from Kopaci, 2 had family members killed during the offensive.

All the people interviewed were displaced within Bosnia for the duration of the war,[18] and spent most of the period of their displacement in the part of Goražde municipality controlled by government forces, although some of them had not gone directly there. One family had gone first to the village of Žužalo across the river, but finding no safety there after a short time had walked through the forest to Goražde. Another family from Ustipraca had gone first to stay with relatives in Kopaci but then when the front-line came nearer they also fled further until they arrived in Goražde. In general, most people were able to re-establish contact with at least some of their neighbours within 3 to 4 days after arriving in Goražde. This provided the displaced community with a network of information, which was important not least because some people had been separated from close family members during the exodus. These networks would become more formalised over the period of displacement and form the basis of the DP Associations, which function all over Bosnia as both social and political organisations. DP Associations are effectively communities in exile and as such provide a relatively safe base for individual DPs where they know they will be with their 'own people'. On this level they can be compared with the 'neighbourhoods' formed amongst the displaced Tigrayans in the Sudan studied by Laura Hammond (1999:238). More than this however, they have also functioned as local governments in exile with, in some cases, people who held official posts in local government before the war still being referred to by the same title within the association and taking on the tasks of organising the DPs politically. Due to the current election procedures, which allow for people to vote in either their area of origin or area of displacement, some DP representatives have been elected to office in the area of displacement: this was the case in Srpsko Goražde where a Bosniac was elected as President of the Executive Board.[19] During the period of food aid distribution DP Associations largely took responsibility for compiling lists of beneficiaries and staffing distribution points. With regard to return they have formed the main contact point for the international community with whom to organise assessment visits for DPs to their pre-war homes,[20] and are involved in close discussion with organisations working for return. They are now under the jurisdiction of the centralised Coalition for Return with regional level associations (Regional Board): the Regional Board for south-eastern RS is now based in Srpsko Goražde and has been partly funded by the international community to work on behalf of both DPs and returnees. They have considerable political clout locally and nationally and are well respected by the national media.

4.3 Secondary migration and conditions of displacement

Arrival in Goražde for most people did not mean the end of their migratory journey: the majority of those interviewed moved within Goražde several times, with one family having had to move 14 times before returning to their pre-war homes. These secondary movements were the result of numerous factors, including the individual actions of the arriving DPs as well as those of the local authorities.[21] For instance, on arrival in Goražde those who needed accommodation applied to the Housing Department, which allocated what was available, whether it be an empty property or collective accommodation. Empty properties were put under the jurisdiction of the local authorities due to legislation adopted during the war allowing them to be declared 'abandoned'.[22] There were

[18] 2 interviewees left for other countries after the war but returned during 2001.

[19] This post is specific to RS: the incumbent is second to the Mayor.

[20] Assessment visits are considered one of the first steps towards return and at the beginning were generally organised by UNHCR with the involvement of IPTF and the local police.

[21] Interview with UNHCR official 4th July 2002.

[22] Law on Abandoned Real Property Owned by Citizens During a State of War or in a Case of Direct Threat of War 1993, Law on Abandoned Apartments 1992 (Cox 1998:613).

not enough properties to cope with the influx so public buildings and factories were also used to provide collective accommodation. One family that recently returned to Kopaci had been housed in the '1st September' textile factory for four years between 1994 and 1998. After initial shelter was provided the local authorities moved people to more suitable accommodation where possible, and at the same time allocated alternative accommodation to those occupying property to which the owners had returned. Some DPs bypassed the system altogether by simply breaking into empty properties, and some of these were later given permits to stay temporarily in these properties, whilst others were moved into other accommodation. The overall outcome was massive confusion and overcrowding which resulted in the creation of the 'Expert Team for Housing Issues' which was tasked to sort out the confusion. This however was not achieved and due to the failure of the latter office the Housing Department once again took over the task of the allocation of housing from 1999. The Housing Department now works with the international community on PLIP issues and is responsible for organising evictions of both illegal occupants and those people who continue to occupy property after having repossessed their own pre-war properties.

Most of the interviewees had left behind not only their homes but also their jobs when they fled to Goražde. Most of the industry in Goražde was unable to function during the war and this, coupled with the fact that most military-age men were drafted to the front-line, meant that most people were unemployed and therefore had no income. Virtually the whole population survived on humanitarian assistance, and this was by no means regularly delivered to the enclave: Goražde effectively suffered an humanitarian aid blockage until air-drops in March 1993 (Sacco 2000:144). Between 1992 and the summer of 1993 the only way into Goražde was over the mountains to government-controlled Grebak (near Trnovo), the closest point to Goražde that humanitarian aid could be delivered.[23] This 'mule train' of soldiers and civilians effectively kept the people of Goražde alive (Silber & Little 1995:360), with both men and women carrying sacks of flour and barrels of oil, as well as small ammunition, for over 40km on a route through Serb-held territory: sometimes the journey took days as people had to hide in trees or bushes until the Serbs had moved on. For those people who could not go to Grebak the food situation was dire: one interviewee said that in the three months after his arrival in Goražde in April 1994 he lost 44kg, as he and his family were surviving partly by eating nettles: this was a common experience amongst both DPs and the local population in Goražde.

4.4 Changes in family structure

The average period of displacement of those interviewed was 7 years. It would be expected in any society during a period of this length that there would be significant changes in both the size and structure of household units, and this was certainly the case for the DPs in Goražde.

One family from Kopaci consisted of an elderly couple and their son and daughter at the time they fled to Goražde. During their displacement the father died and the daughter married and left the family to live with her husband's family.[24] The son also got married and he and his wife had a son. On return to Kopaci although the household size remained the same as before with four people, the structure had radically changed. In this particular case the son was relatively lucky as the death of his father meant that he became the head of household and so, once they had been able to repossess their property, he and his new family, together with his mother, had somewhere to live. However many young couples who met during or after the war, whilst still displaced, have no rights to any accommodation as they would have been living with their parents before the war. The property legislation makes no allowance for such cases, and couples in these circumstances, who generally have been occupying property, stand to be evicted if their pre-war head of household repossesses the pre-war property which the new head of household used to reside at, as they are termed 'multiple occupants'. Similarly if both old and new families are occupying properties, the latter are likely to be considered multiple occupants. The situation also makes it difficult for both local government and the international community to track family returns as only some members of a family may have returned to their pre-war property whilst the remainder continue to occupy other property. Given the fact that in common with PLIP most reconstruction programmes now aim to facilitate secondary return by enabling occupants to return to their pre-war homes, the existence of new families makes this aim difficult to achieve, and also poses a problem when assessing the 'success' or implementation of returnee programmes. More importantly however, it contributes to the critical lack of accommodation apparent in all regions of Bosnia, which in turn provides the ready excuse of a lack of alternative

[23] Trnovo and the base at Grebak were taken by the Serbs in June 1993 (Silber & Little 1995:372).

[24] This is a custom in Bosnia (Bringa 1995:119).

accommodation for authorities unwilling to carry out evictions.

4.5 Desire and decision to return

The most common response to the question 'Why did you want to return?' was a simple 'because it's my home'. Many people (especially the elderly) said they 'need' to be back on their own land. This echoes Laura Hammond's study of Tigrayans returning to Ethiopia from Sudan, in whose case study most elderly people would prefer to 'die "close to the place where your umbilical cord is buried"' (Hammond 1999:237). In the case of the Bosnians at least, it seems that this feeling is in part due to their close connection with the agricultural cycle: for many elderly people who have yet to return they seem to experience a tangible sense of exasperation at certain times of the year, most notably at planting times, as if they can not fulfil their purpose whilst they are away from their land. This sense of being unfulfilled was exacerbated by the economic necessity of planting crops for self-consumption, particularly as many DPs did not have access to alternative land during displacement. Indeed, this was one of the triggers for the original tent settlement on the IEBL during late 2000, as the Bosniac DPs, frustrated at not being able to repossess and cultivate their land, were attempting to prepare their land for the planting of winter wheat when they were prevented from doing so by the DP Serbs in Kopaci. It should also be noted however that this act was also a considered strategy to further the case for their return.

There was a subtle yet noticeable difference between responses of returnees in Ustipraca and Kopaci: whilst a majority in Ustipraca seemed to consider return as an opportunity to be back in their own homes and on their own land, four of those in Kopaci emphasised as their main reason for returning their legal right to reclaim their own property. This is because a return to Kopaci involves the eviction of the current occupant whereas, as already mentioned, most properties in Ustipraca were destroyed and, therefore, unoccupied. Whilst a barrier to return to Ustipraca and other rural areas has generally been security, an issue which is largely now of much less concern than in the early post-war years, there is still a perceptible struggle to reclaim property in more urban areas which are occupied by other DPs, particularly in such a highly-charged politically environment.

For some there is also an element of re-conquering territory from those who took it. Several interviewees said that although they knew their properties were being occupied and/or destroyed, and that all their possessions had been either destroyed or stolen, they knew that legally the land belonged to them and that 'they [the Serbs] couldn't take that away'. There is perhaps a sense that by returning people will undo the 'division' of Goražde and render the IEBL marker obsolete. Obviously this is also perceived by the current population of Srpsko Goražde, as well as the 'hard-line' politicians who control the eastern RS and it is for this reason that the first minority returns were so difficult to achieve. Amongst the Bosniac DPs from Srpsko Goražde there remains a feeling of solidarity, which was fanned and directed to some extent by the DP Association, but, it is safe to say, is shared also by much of the local population of Goražde, who regard return to Srpsko Goražde as a victory over an unfair political settlement which divided the town.

Taken together, these observations indicate the continued, and in some cases heightened importance of 'home' to the interviewees. With reference to the debate surrounding identity and place, these responses undermine the relevance of a deterritorialised concept of identity in the analysis of forced displacement. The caseload concerned are not refugees but IDPs, and arguably they more than refugees should be able to assimilate in their area of displacement, particularly as it was so close geographically. The DPs in this study were not treated as 'others' whilst displaced, which at first glance may seem to bear out the deterritorialised view. However, instead of losing their ties to or feelings for their 'homes', their sense of being displaced remained, their longings for 'home' did not diminish. Rather their determination to return could be said, judging by their actions, to have become stronger over time, until they were able to realise their wish to return.

The task of how to ensure people in Bosnia are able to make a 'free and informed choice' on whether or not to return is an ongoing challenge for the international community: press campaigns run by OSCE and OHR together with a UNHCR field presence within DP communities, particularly in 'hard-line' areas, have aimed at counteracting the pressures put on DPs by politicians, peer pressure and state-controlled media, and have concentrated on promoting and disseminating a more balanced flow of information. The influences on those as yet undecided are powerful. Marcus Cox outlines the difficulties:

> The circumstances now facing individuals – political pressures to move or to remain, physical destruction of property, lack of economic activity in their area of origin, illegal occupation of their homes by other displaced

> persons, fear for their own security – are so many and varied that identifying genuine choices is impossible. (1998:611)

Whilst security is becoming less of an issue as time goes on the other factors remain for the majority of potential returnees. In the case of those displaced from Srpsko Goražde, there is a strong determination to return which for many enables them to overcome some of the other difficulties, at least as regards the act of physical return. It could be argued that such determination has overshadowed the four main factors which influence the decision to return, as outlined by Walsh et al (1999:124), of education, health, employment and shelter. There is no doubt that all of these are critical for the long-term sustainability of return and yet, in the case of returnees to Srpsko Goražde the first three have generally not been met satisfactorily (see below, chapter 5). However, for reasons already explained, the decision to return is only one of the first steps towards actually returning, a process which is then beset by numerous obstacles, not least because those occupying contested property are also influenced by the pressures outlined above: in the case of Srpsko Goražde the determination of, and support to, the displaced Serbs to stay proved stronger than the ability of the original occupants, as well as the international community, to effect return until 2000.

With regard to the decision to return, the most important and reliable information is that which returnees gain themselves from sources they trust (Walsh et al 1999:124). This is borne out by the experience of Srpsko Goražde DPs: most potential and actual returnees had sufficient information to enable them to make a fairly accurate assessment of return conditions, mainly due to the geographical proximity of their area of displacement. However, whilst Walsh et al point out that information from sources such as host governments may be subject to political agendas (Walsh et al 1999:124), the same could be said of the DP Associations. It could be argued that it was in the interests of the DP Associations for the DPs to become reliant on their information at the expense of that coming from the international community: this was sometimes counter-productive to the overall return process as it meant that an alliance of the DP Associations, the DPs themselves and the international community was compromised. DPs were not always in a position to appreciate the details which frustrated the implementation of return mechanisms, such as the minor and yet significant bureaucratic obstructions from the local authorities with regard to both the issuance of decisions on property as well as reconstruction programmes. This resulted, during 1999 at least, in the frustration of those wishing to return with the international community, compounded by accusations from the DP Associations that the international community was not working sufficiently hard enough for return.

It is important to note that for many of the returnees interviewed, their return represented a significant improvement in their situation. Many of the interviewees said that life had become easier since they had returned, in the sense that, by being in their own homes, they were in secure accommodation, whilst in Goražde many were occupying someone else's property or had to pay rent. In addition, most of them had no access to land during their displacement and so could not sustain themselves. Therefore a return to one's property where one could be largely self-sufficient, particularly when it is still so close to Goražde, represented probably the best choice in the face of a lack of other alternatives. The element of choice is important in this regard: it could be argued that a better option than returning would be to migrate to a place where opportunities for improving the economic situation of the individual existed, an option generally given little consideration by 'disaster management experts' (Hammond 1999: 235). Of the interviewee caseload two families had tried and failed to leave Bosnia to live abroad, whilst eight of the others specifically said that even if they had been given a choice they would still have opted to return to their pre-war homes. In all cases however, interviewees responded that returning had proved to be the right choice, regardless of the difficulties experienced or those which lay ahead. To summarise, it is apparent that the decision to return is generally a 'best option', based on a mixture of factors, including the (un)suitability of accommodation in the area of displacement as well both material and political concerns regarding the area of return.

4.6 Processes of return

It is difficult to define one single event which enabled return to Srpsko Goražde. On an individual level the last barrier to return was either the reconstruction or the repossession of their property, although both of these can happen by degrees, as discussed below. There are however a number of identifiable catalysts which have enabled return, which happened either simultaneously or in sequence. On a general level these include initial assessment visits and the establishment of freedom of movement, as well as the adoption of return-friendly property legislation and its enforcement overseen by PLIP. In Srpsko Goražde it is due to a combination of

events already described, specifically the removal of the Mayor and head of the OMI in November 1999, the tent settlement on the IEBL in late 1999, initial 'breakthrough' minority returns to neighbouring municipalities,[25] the gradual weakening of the political regime in Srpsko Goražde and a shift in the attitude of the Serb DPs in Srpsko Goražde, this last due in part to the advent of evictions.[26]

There is no doubt that the tent settlement and its outcome, that of the first group of minority returnees in Kopaci in two houses, had a significant effect on return per se to Srpsko Goražde municipality. The Lessons Learned project of the EU and the ESI identifies as a key lesson from Bosnia that 'return itself is the key instrument for improving the security environment' (ESI 2002:1). That this is apparent can clearly be seen by the fact that, although there were several minor security-related incidents during the first weeks of the repossession of the first two houses in Kopaci,[27] all bar two of the interviewees reported that they had not experienced any attacks on them or their property since their return.[28] This serves to illustrate that the residents of Srpsko Goražde have generally accepted minority return to the municipality as a reality, despite the fact that certain barriers against further return, such as funding gaps and delays in repossession, remain.

More than half of the interviewees were involved in the tent settlement on the IEBL, regardless of where their homes are in the municipality of Srpsko Goražde. One male returnee in Ustipraca explained that by supporting the IEBL camp they were taking steps towards their own return. Almost all of them are convinced that the tents provided a major turning-point in the process of minority return. Not only did it send a strong message to the authorities and DPs in Srpsko Goražde that minority return would be achieved but, as can be seen by the considerable number of SORS set up in south-eastern RS from Spring 2000, it also set a precedent for the pattern of future returns to rural areas in south-eastern Bosnia.

Most returnees to Ustipraca were involved in the tent settlement established there during July 2000. One interviewee described the frustration which provided the impetus for the Ustipraca tent settlement as:

> [w]e were expecting that in the legal way everything would be possible. When we realised it was just a game, then on 27th July 2000 we decided to move back to Ustipraca.

They had taken a vote and were escorted to the site by SFOR. All of those interviewed had good things to say about the Ustipraca tent settlement: there was a good community spirit, with everyone sharing tools, a communal kitchen, and a positive sense of achievement. In general one representative per family would be present at various periods of a few days each, with a rotation system functioning. This was partly due, as one interviewee pointed out, to the numbers involved: there would simply not have been enough room or supplies for all people to have been present all of the time. One family interviewed had however left their allocated accommodation in Goražde and moved *en masse* to the tent settlement as they had felt they would have more autonomy there than in Goražde where they were occupying someone else's property.

Reconstruction began in Ustipraca mid-2001 with GOAL reconstructing 20 apartments through ECHO funding,[29] and IRC 48 houses through funding from the EC. Rehabilitation of electricity, water and sewage infrastructure was included, and returns took place in 2001 and early 2002. In Kopaci GOAL reconstructed 36 dwellings for minority returnees during 2000-2001, also as part of an ECHO-funded project.

Of the seven repossession cases interviewed, return dates were between May 2000 and December 2001. Of these, all but one had initially repossessed only a portion of their property (generally one floor) and continued to share their property with one or more Serb DP families. At the time of interview 6 of these had still to reclaim the rest of their properties. This is a not uncommon phenomenon in Kopaci: whilst in some case it poses little or no problems in others it is a cause of some animosity.

5. Success and sustainability

5.1 Measurements of success: a programme perspective

The factors which determine if return has been 'successful' vary according to the stakeholder. The RRTF 1999 Action Plan identified three main issues which would need to be solved in order for

[25] Including 24 Bosniac families to Miljeno in Cajnice municipality in 1999 and 8 families to Filipovici in Foca-Srbinje municipality in 1999, both implemented by IRC, as well as the GOAL project in 1998 which returned 7 families to the village of Živojevici in Srpsko Goražde.
[26] Interviews with UNHCR and NGO officials June 2002.
[27] Interview with UNHCR official 30th June 2002.
[28] Further details on these security incidents are given in chapter 5.
[29] Interview with GOAL Country Director 6th June 2002.

minority return to be successful: space, security and sustainability (RRTF 2000:1). 'Sustainable return' to the RRTF means 'making it possible for returnees to build a future' (RRTF 2000:1), which includes 'access to employment, health, education and basic services such as water, electricity and communications' (RRTF 2000:4). The problem of security can, to an extent, be solved by the return of significant numbers (as referenced in chapter 4, and see ESI 2002:1). Sustainability too, can only be addressed after physical return has taken place. Therefore, the continuing focus of the international community has been on how to achieve the space for returns. Moreover, as discussed in chapter 2, significant minority return to eastern RS only began in 2000, and even then primarily to tent settlements. For most returnees, physical return to their pre-war properties only took place within the last twelve months. This has meant a continuing emphasis on the first of the three issues identified by the RRTF, that of space.

As referenced in the introduction to this paper, the primary marker of success in the implementation of a reconstruction programme is a high 'occupancy rate', generally defined as the number of beneficiary families returned to their reconstructed properties. This number can however be difficult to determine, as some people may continue to stay overnight in their area of displacement due to security concerns, or perhaps only part of a family may return due to employment in the area of displacement or because children are attending school there. Although NGOs as service providers have a certain responsibility to their beneficiaries to ensure that the initial stages of return and integration occur without problems, this involvement rarely extends beyond the time-frame of a specific return project. The nature of donor-NGO relationships in most cases is such that measurable results are required within the defined time-frame of the project or soon thereafter. Although there may be the willingness or interest to follow-up on former project beneficiaries over a longer time period, resources are not generally allocated for such activities. For their part, donor agencies are also accountable to their wider governmental structures and ultimately to the tax-paying public and tangible results are again required within a given reporting or financial period.

Such statistical measurements of success are not limited to reconstruction programmes: PLIP is similarly measured by its implementation rate. The number of claims solved through evictions leading to property repossession determines compliance by the local authorities and therefore success. With regard to the return of refugees, the level of importance attached to post-return conditions by host governments is negligible: Walsh et al note 'the 'success' of return programmes is not related to experience after return, but rather the total numbers who have been able to reach Bosnia' (1999:120). Perhaps a similar observation could be made regarding donor governments' lack of interest in the conditions of returning IDPs.

As well as the combination of narrowly defined mandates and strict implementation and reporting procedures, the nature of organisations which provide humanitarian assistance is one of a rapid staff turnover. This has the effect of limiting institutional memory and is also a contributory factor to the inevitable outcome that, in the case of return in Bosnia, the emphasis is on problem-solving rather than assessing the broader social conditions of returnees.

There is also the question of what exactly return implies: is it the physical act of returning to a pre-war residence or of completing the bureaucratic process to acquire residential status? In order to be an official citizen of either entity a person must register in that entity to obtain a valid ID card: this system is soon due to be replaced, by the authority of OHR, by a state ID card.[30] In order not to lose rights in the entity of displacement, and also out of the fear of being discriminated against, many returnees do not de-register from the area of displacement after they return, meaning that technically they are not citizens of their municipality of residence. This has implications for access to healthcare (as explained below), pensions (as yet there is not a cross-entity agreement for the payment of pensions in place although an agreement has been signed) and education. In addition, only those returnees who have registered in the municipality of return appear in official governmental statistics. In practice however, for the purposes of figures calculated by UNHCR/RRTF a variety of sources are used, including those obtained from local government, those who have repossessed their property and beneficiaries of reconstruction programmes. Consequently population and return data can differ between local authorities and the international community.

5.2 Returnee perspectives

Each interviewee had overcome many problems by the act of returning, and still faced many more. However, almost all of them, with only one exception, said that despite problems experienced, both perceived and actual, returning

[30] Information from OHR website www.ohr.int.

had been the 'right choice' and that overall life had become easier since their return. The following sections detail the interviewees' main concerns post-return, and in so doing highlight many themes which pertain to the sustainability of return.

5.3 Security

Of the interviewees who had returned within the last year none of them said that security had been an issue since their return. Of those who had returned earlier, during 2000, there were two cases which had suffered threats and damage to their property. One elderly man who had been one of the first reconstruction beneficiaries in Kopaci during 2000 reported that during the reconstruction process the works had been wrecked three times, but once completed he had not experienced problems of security. Another who had repossessed one floor of his property in Kopaci and returned to it with his wife said that local Serbs had broken the windows by throwing stones and made threats concerning his safety during the first few weeks of his return, but that thereafter the situation had calmed down. There were however several comments concerning the willingness of the local police to act effectively in cases of criminal damage, such as looting (see below). This serves to undermine the confidence of returnees in the local police and judiciary system, which may fuel an atmosphere of mistrust.

5.4 Discrimination

Although there were few direct claims made regarding targeted instances of individual discrimination from the returnees interviewed, there were several incidents mentioned of general discriminatory practices against Bosniacs. For instance, the house of one of the first returnees is next-door to a property rented (by its Bosniac owner) to the Srpsko Goražde authorities which, until earlier this year, used it as the headquarters of the local radio station, 'Radio Srpsko Goražde'. This radio station is known for its anti-Muslim sentiment and has been used as a vehicle for disseminating propaganda against the return of Bosniacs to the municipality. Allegedly there were regular instances of its broadcasting propaganda and nationalist songs, made worse by the fact that loudspeakers were installed on the outside walls of the house. This made life extremely difficult for the returnees next-door, particularly as the elderly woman had recently undergone surgery for a brain tumour: she felt unable to even be outside the house because of the noise and harassment. After the radio station left the premises the property was then used as a place to hold public occasions, such as weddings and funerals, and also going-away parties for young men leaving to do their national service. These last are traditional in both entities, and can be a source of some pride for the families concerned. However, fuelled by alcohol and sentiment, they also have the right ingredients to create an opportunity for nationalist sentiment to be expressed without restraint, and can appear threatening to outsiders, in this case minority returnees.

An interesting claim of discrimination was made with regard to the RS electricity company 'Elektrodistribucija'.[31] In both entities, electricity meters must be bought from an approved company: needless to say, in the RS this company is a company based in the RS and in the Federation it is a Federation company. Although it is common practice for returnees to be charged high fees for reconnection to the electricity supply (RRTF 2002:2), there is also a specific claim regarding the installation of electricity meters.

Allegedly the engineers of Elektrodistribucija burn out the clock which regulates peak and off-peak electricity. The result is that the meter runs on the more expensive tariff. Although it can be fixed it involves taking the meter to a private company in Lukavica (an RS suburb of Sarajevo) which, for the majority of returnees, is both costly and inconvenient. There is no proof of this being done, but similar claims have allegedly been made by approximately 10 minority returnees to Srpsko Goražde.

Some interviewees felt that they were discriminated against on grounds of ethnicity with regard to employment. Of 33 interviewee family members available for work only 13 are employed and of these none are working in Srpsko Goražde, but in Goražde. None of them held out much hope that they would find employment in Srpsko Goražde in the current climate. This is due primarily to the desperate shortage of jobs anyway, but they commented that any jobs which do become vacant are always given to Serbs rather than Bosniacs, with a group of men interviewed saying that some local companies transport Serb DPs from Višegrad (approximately 30km distant) to Srpsko Goražde to fill jobs, rather than give them to Bosniac returnees. This sentiment was also echoed by local Bosniac representatives,[32] and forms part of a wider picture showing that, whether or not returnees *are* being discriminated against in this way, the

[31] Interview with representative of the Regional Board 30th June 2002.

[32] Interview with representative of Regional Board 30th June 2002.

fact that they feel they are could make it a self-fulfilling prophecy, in the sense that it may discourage both returnees and local residents from further integration. As with the claims regarding electricity connections, in some ways it is irrelevant whether the claim is justified or not, as it is indicative of a general sense of mistrust being experienced by returnees.

5.5 Repossession of property

Of the seven 'core' interviewees, plus two of the supplementary interviewees, who had returned by repossessing their property, eight had only regained a portion of it (generally one floor) while the rest of it continued to be occupied by a displaced family. This has come about because many properties in Srpsko Goražde were occupied by more than one family: each of these families constitutes a separate case to be solved either through eviction or by the reconstruction of their pre-war home. This has led to the rather bizarre situation of the returnee Bosniac family sharing their property with one or more displaced Serb families. Experiences amongst interviewees are varied: 3 seemed not to have any particular problem on a daily basis whilst the other 5 had experienced or were experiencing considerable difficulties.

One family who returned to Kopaci are sharing the house with an elderly Serb man whose own house in a neighbouring village was destroyed. The returnee owner accepts that the occupant has nowhere else to go and they seem to have a fairly amicable relationship, with the returnee family living on the first floor of the house and the elderly DP occupying the ground floor. However in a similar case, a young family who had returned to their property with the husband's elderly mother were experiencing significant problems with the occupants on the first floor of their house: several times they had called the local police to intervene in disagreements, and the owner alleged that the DP family have made several serious threats to his elderly mother when she has been in the house on her own. It is clear that in some cases the returnee family feel resentment against the fact that another family has a 'right', albeit temporary, to remain living in their property. One interviewee, despite receiving the keys to the first floor of his house in April 2001 had not returned by the end of June 2002, as he felt he could not return until he had regained possession of the entire house. Both of these last two cases cited their right to reclaim their own property as their major reason for wanting to return. This answer alone serves to illustrate their frustration at having to share their property with people they would not wish to and how this contributes to the continuing mistrust apparent amongst returnees.

Physical difficulties are also exacerbated by families returning to property they have only partly able to repossess. One elderly couple[33] who returned to their pre-war home during April 2001 have repossessed and returned to only one room of 12m^2 of their house and have no toilet facility. Their family consists of 16 people, including children and grand-children, and before the war all of them shared 3 houses built on their land. The parents returned in part due to the fact that they needed a place for their cow, and partly so that they could begin to cultivate their land. The rest of the family continue to occupy an apartment in central Goražde with no land for which the old man continues to pay rent. The only income they have between them is the old man's pension of 200 KM (Convertible Marks)[34] per month, which he receives in the Federation, although one of the sons occasionally gets some work on the 'grey market'. The relationship with the displaced Serbs occupying the rest of their property is strained and the overall situation is pretty desperate. In addition the house badly needs some repair – although he is on the list with an NGO for some reconstruction assistance they are not able to provide any materials until he has repossessed the entire property. However the old man is happy to have returned, and is in the process of applying for some sheep. When asked if he felt if he had returned 'home' his reply was 'Just to sit on the land here means I am home'.

5.6 Looting

It is a relatively common experience for those who repossessed their property to complain that the previous occupants have 'looted' their property. In most cases this means that most if not all furniture and possessions have been taken, and in severe cases also doors, windows, floorboards and even electric cable and light switches. Reasons given for looting include attempts to deter return and also to provide items to sell by the outgoing occupant in order that they can buy new possessions for their own return. In some cases, including some of those interviewed, return is certainly delayed, which holds up the return process further down the line as people can not move back in so continue to occupy other properties.[35] Instances occur not only in Srpsko Goražde but also in other municipalities and, although the local police are often present at

[33] Not a 'core' interviewee.

[34] The Convertible mark is pegged to the Euro (1 EUR:1.95583 KM) (UNDP 2001:21).

[35] Interview with RRTF representative 4th July 2002.

evictions when the looting is taking place they allegedly can do little or nothing about it without some kind of proof of ownership certificate of the owner.[36] Amongst returnees interviewed all of them had experienced some looting, and 2 of them said that the international community should have some kind of compensation programme for returnees to deal with the problem. One family who returned to Kopaci in August 2001 to one floor of their house found that their floor had been completely emptied of everything, including electric sockets: his opinion on the subject is that it is partly due to the lethargy of the local police, who he thinks would be forced to react if there was a more 'equal balance of power' in the municipality. By this he was referring to an increased presence of Bosniac returnees, both as ordinary citizens and in positions of authority. This was a sentiment echoed by several other returnees.

In other cases, what may appear initially to be looting may actually be a result of attempts at repair by occupants and owners alike. One elderly returnee to Kopaci explained, with some laughter, how he had recently visited his neighbour only to find his own floorboards in place in the neighbour's living room: they had presumably been put there by the family which had been occupying the house. Similarly he and another neighbour present at the time of the interview pointed out that the house opposite now has the windows of another house in the immediate vicinity. This came about both during and after the war as houses were damaged by shells or destroyed: there was no possibility of buying new materials to repair the damage so people did the best they could, which was salvaging what they needed from other houses in which no-one was living. This practice was certainly not limited to Srpsko Goražde and a personal account of it is described as happening in Goražde by Joe Sacco (2000:91).

Table 3. Unresolved issues highlighted by core interview caseload

Unresolved issues	Number of interviewees citing a particular concern
Education	4
Health	4
Employment	11
Livestock	2
Low Pensions	2
Transport	6
Reconstruction materials	4
More returnees needed	5

Source: Field data

[36] Discussion within Goražde RRTF 7th June 2002.

5.7 Education

A significant proportion of families are concerned about the implications return has for children's education. The provision of acceptable schooling is a major factor in the decision to return and, as each entity has its own school curriculum, is an issue that must be solved if education is to cease to have 'negative effects upon the consolidation of peace' (Bosnian Institute 1998:14). There is an ongoing campaign headed by OHR to harmonise curricula between the two entities,[37] but for now there are three parallel systems of education, each with its own interpretations of history, religion, language and literature (Bosnian Institute 1998:40). Before the war there was a primary school in both Ustipraca and in Kopaci: all children within the area then moved on to secondary schools in Goražde. Now the primary school in Ustipraca is closed, and the one in Kopaci is attended only by the children of Serb families, while the children of Bosniac returnees to Srpsko Goražde municipality attend primary school in Goražde. Similarly, Serb families who were displaced in Cajnice municipality (in RS) and have returned to Dubište in Goražde municipality continue to send their children to school in Cajnice for the same reason.[38] This means that not only are children as young as 7 years old having to travel by bus to a different town across the IEBL to attend school, which in itself is an unsatisfactory arrangement, but the financial costs for children to attend school are significantly increased. A child's monthly travel card for the bus from Ustipraca to Goražde costs 17.5 KM, and each child needs to take money for breakfast. For a family surviving on a pension of 200 KM or less per month this is an expense they can ill afford. Indeed, the eldest daughter of one family with three children which returned to Ustipraca in 2000 is now one year behind with her schooling as the family cannot afford to send all three children to Goražde.[39] Amongst returnees, as shown in the table above, the issue of education, and through that the issue of transport is of major concern, not just for those with school-age children but for the whole community.

5.8 Health

Despite a state-level agreement concerning funding for health services being recently signed,[40] the health service is currently severely

[37] Interview with RRTF official 4th July 2002.
[38] Interview with representative of Regional Board 30th June 2002.
[39] Not a 'core' interviewee.
[40] Interview with RRTF representative 4th July 2002.

fragmented. Before the war the hospital in Goražde town served the majority of the population in the area, with a regional hospital in Foca (now Foca/Srbinje) for more specialised care. In addition each sizeable community also had a local health clinic (*ambulanta)*. Aside from the fact that the *ambulanta* in Ustipraca has not yet re-opened, the fact that separate systems of health insurance function in each entity mean that health care is only provided for those possessing an entity ID card. In reality, as many Bosniac returnees have yet to register in RS most of them have to travel to Goražde municipality to receive health care. Similarly for citizens of Srpsko Goražde (and neighbouring RS municipalities), although there is an *ambulanta* in Kopaci, cases which require a hospital must travel to Foca-Srbinje: this entails them virtually driving past the hospital in Goražde.

This issue is not only one of bureaucracy, as many Bosniac returnees stressed their general mistrust of the health system in RS. One interviewee in Kopaci said that he had enquired at the *ambulanta* in Kopaci to see if they could treat his wife but they did not have the correct medication. In Cajnice the situation was further complicated by the fact that the long-standing Mayor of Cajnice was also until very recently the Director of the hospital: although he has not been officially indicted by the ICTY in the Hague he is widely thought of by many Bosniacs as a war criminal.

5.9 Livelihoods

Within the 16 core families interviewed, there were 41 adults of working age before the war. Of this number, 16 were employed in industry in Goražde municipality, representing the main income for 10 of the 16 families. Post-war, the number of people employed in industry has been reduced to two, from two households, and one of these has taken a reduction in remuneration. Neither of these are employed in Srpsko Goražde, but in what is now Federation Goražde. The total number in formal employment has fallen from 26 in 1992 to 13 in 2002, and eight people described themselves as 'unemployed' compared to zero before the war. At the same time, the number of adults of working age has reduced from 41 to 33, due to an increase in those drawing pensions as well as the fact that eight people from five households that were previously employed have not returned.

This phenomenon is slightly off-set by the younger generation reaching working age, but it is important to note that the unemployed category is entirely comprised of youth who have never worked.

Although the employment prospects are grim in Srpsko Goražde, particularly for returnees due to the possibilities of discrimination, the prospects in Goražde municipality are not much better. The level of unemployment throughout Bosnia is allegedly 41%,[41] however this figure varies if taking into account the number of people employed on the 'grey' market. UNDP estimated at the end of 2001 the total number of employed in Bosnia at 598,416 plus another 265,000 working on the 'grey' market (EWS 2001:25). It could be argued that, considering the geographical proximity of Srpsko Goražde to Goražde municipality that returnees have not significantly damaged their employment prospects by returning, as most of them were not working whilst they were displaced in Goražde. Those that were (13), continue to work in Goražde after having returned.

The on-going process of privatisation in Bosnia is fraught with problems: implementation is slow, allegations of corruption abound and as a result much needed inward investment is absent.[42] Although there was a possibility of foreign investment to revitalise the factories, this was abandoned after the Srpsko Goražde authorities refused to agree to the reinstatement of the pre-war workforce (UNHCR 2002:5). All three factories therefore remain effectively out of business, and there is little or no chance of people returning to their pre-war jobs. Of seven interviewees who had some idea of what could be done to improve the economy, six of them said that the factories should be reopened. However, only one said that an economic viability study should be carried out beforehand: all others said that it was the responsibility of the local authorities to reopen them, and did not seem to question whether or not they would be viable in the current economic climate. Whilst this attitude may be illustrative of the difficulties associated with the shift towards a capitalist economy, it should be noted that three of the interviewees said that they would like to start up small businesses of their own. One male head of household has bought a small truck and is running a small-scale transport company, however for the most part interviewees cited the difficulties of registering a business and concluded that it is not a possibility at the moment, due to inherent costs in registering a business (estimated at 5,000 KM).[43] Whatever the realities, it is clear

[41] Interview with RRTF official 4th July 2002.
[42] Interview with RRTF official, 4th July 2002. See also Wright (2000a), and ICG 2001.
[43] Interview with Representative of the Regional Board 30th June 2002.

that there is no financial incentive to start a business.

Before the war most people in rural or semi-rural areas supplemented their salary by growing at least a portion of their own food, and in addition to a substantial piece of land may also have had a cow or a goat, and a few chickens. During the war this form of supplementary income became, and remains, a major coping mechanism, for both returnee and domicile populations. All interviewees are surviving largely on food they produce themselves. In the face of a lack of other alternatives, some returnees are now hoping to expand their knowledge of such small-scale farming: one middle-aged lady in Ustipraca said she knows nothing about keeping sheep (she was a textile worker in a factory before the war), but now has applied for some sheep as she feels she has no other option for income, and will train herself.

It is clear that domestic level farming is currently the only area of 'sustainable' employment available to minority returnees in Srpsko Goražde, and throughout most of Bosnia. For this reason the international community are supporting agriculture and animal husbandry at the domestic and community level. In the Goražde area UNHCR funds an Italian NGO to implement agricultural initiatives such as the provision of seeds and technology and the donation of tractors to returnee communities. Similarly they fund IRC to supply and distribute livestock and the Japanese NGO JEN to build cowsheds.[44] Most of these projects work on the 'payback' system, whereby the primary beneficiary, who receives a pregnant cow, gives the calf to a secondary beneficiary family. For seeds a typical arrangement would be that a certain quantity of the produce is donated to a local school or an EVI beneficiary. Of the returnees interviewed six had been included in seed distribution programmes, none had yet received livestock although five had applied for some, and one family in Ustipraca had received a tractor for which in return he was expected to plough the land of other returnees in the area.

One possibility to further develop the potential for agriculture is the formation of co-operatives: the returnees to Kopaci have developed a formal proposal for an agricultural co-operative which would supply fruit for both the local market and possibly for export.[45] This proposal is being endorsed by RRTF, the representatives of which are assisting in trying to attract funding for the project,[46] in line with their strategy to promote small-medium initiatives (RRTF 2000:4).

5.10 Longer-term sustainability

A number of households explicitly mentioned transport and the need for other people to return as constraining factors in the development of their post-return situation. Furthermore, these themes relate to most of the problems described above. It is apparent that a critical mass of returns has yet to occur, and this is reflected in the response of certain interviewees who refer to the need for a greater 'balance of power' in Srpsko Goražde. In the case of Ustipraca increased returns, and therefore an increased population, would support the case for the establishment of health and transport services, as well as providing impetus for economic activity in the community. In Kopaci, from where facilities are more accessible, the desire for increased Bosniac return links more directly to concerns over discrimination.

In the thirty years before the war there was a significant trend towards urbanisation throughout Bosnia amongst younger generations. In the south-eastern part of the country the main drift was towards Sarajevo in Bosnia and the industrial towns of Priboj and Užice in Serbia. The war exacerbated this trend by the forced migration of those from villages to urban areas of relative safety. After a decade (in some cases) of living in towns many young people formerly from rural areas are reluctant to return not only because of the difficulties already described but also due to their 'self-urbanisation'. Whilst many elderly people see return to their pre-war homes as fulfilling their need to be back on their own land and back in their community – those interviewed referred to the happiness they found at being back 'with their own people' – it could be said that, if it was not for the fact that there is now very little chance of finding accommodation or employment in most urban areas in Bosnia, many of the young people may not wish to return to the villages. The 'sustainability' of the return of the elderly to rural areas is therefore questionable, as either younger generations may not return at all, or they may leave again as soon as they have an opportunity. It remains to be seen whether the counter-urbanisation trend of post-war return is a short-lived process to be replaced by a resumption of the pre-war urban drift, once the legal claims to property have been resolved.

Conclusion: Welcome Home?

This paper has traced the experience of a group of Bosniac minority returnees through a cycle of

[44] Interview with UNHCR official 6th June 2002.

[45] Interview with representative of Regional Board Srpsko Goražde 30th June 2002.

[46] Interview with RRTF official 4th July 2002.

forced migration, displacement and return within a specific area. It is apparent that the two distinct processes of return to Srpsko Goražde, those of reconstruction and repossession, have provided different challenges to the returnees. For example, minority returnees to Ustipraca, it could be argued, had in some ways a gentle return, as the process was phased. They were a part of the process of reconstruction as they were able to live close to the site as it was rebuilt, and could clear away the debris of a decade of neglect and plant their land in preparation for their return. For returnees to Kopaci however, although they did not have the psychological trauma of seeing their property destroyed, they had to cope with the fact that other people were living in their house and using their possessions. Although they may have had to wait for the legal system to run its course with regard to the repossession process, the actual return could be defined as abrupt: many of them had not been inside their properties until the day they received the keys, and so could not prepare themselves for what they might find. In addition, those who only repossessed a portion of the property still do not have complete autonomy over what happens to it. Instead, they remain in limbo, sharing their houses with unwanted guests.

The desire to return permeated the interviewees' years of displacement, just as '[t]he early return of refugees and displaced persons' was a key objective in the wider proposed solution to the conflict in Bosnia (GFAP, Annex VII, Article 1). The concept of 'return', however, implies movement back towards something which existed before, an imagery which is typified in the UN poster informing the people of Bosnia that '[i]t's time to go home',[47] and which resonates through the interviews. Most of the interviewees described their motivation to return with variations on the simple phrase 'because it is my home'. Moreover, on a more subtle level, many of their proposed solutions to their current difficulties were expressed in terms of recreating conditions which had existed prior to the war.

The question remains though, as to what extent these people were and are able to 'return' to a condition which approximates their pre-war existence. This caseload have moved from their places of displacement to a new municipality in a new statelet, itself part of a newly constituted country. They now reside in a new building, in the cases of reconstruction beneficiaries, or are making a new start in an empty shell that was their former residence. They have to scratch out a new livelihood for themselves and their families in a radically transformed and uncertain economic context, while their family structures have themselves been modified by births, marriages and deaths over the intervening years. Finally the individuals themselves have undergone a series of traumas and experiences, above and beyond the transformations in the physical landscape to which they have 'returned'.

Against this backdrop, and although not explicitly articulated as such, there has been some reconceptualisation of 'home' on the part of the interviewees. This emerges in reflections upon the success or otherwise of their return. Most interviewees stated that they were now 'home' and that returning had been the right decision, which would suggest an equation of 'success' with return 'home'. However, this apparently straightforward assertion was accompanied by a range of observations which undermine or challenge its simplicity. In terms of the returnees' current environment, there is a widespread acknowledgement of Goražde, rather than Ustipraca or Kopaci, as their new centre of gravity for a range of social functions, such as primary education, health care, access to shops and the like. Their home is thus stripped bare of many of the surrounding facilities which they used to frequent, either as a result of physical absence through destruction or dilapidation, or as a consequence of their desire to avoid potential harassment in the now Serb-dominated, ethnically polarised environment of their town or village. These changed social practices pose difficulties on an individual level, and highlight some of the challenges that will need to be overcome if these return communities are to develop and be sustained over a longer time frame. The economic environment stands out as the single most important of the threats to a successful and sustained return, although improved access to health, transport and education services, alongside a more ethnically-balanced population would also appear to be key requirements.

When questioned about the future, and improvements they would propose or anticipate, the interviewees tended to respond in terms of a re-establishment of aspects of their pre-war existence. In other words, the markers of further 'success' that they articulated indicated a desire to return to certain pre-war conditions, which in turn suggests that the 'home' of today's 'successful return' is a very different 'home' from that which existed before their forced migration, both physically and conceptually. This gap between the two concepts of home is perhaps analogous to the difference between a physical movement back to pre-war property and the more complex process of developing communities which are

[47] Front cover illustration of this paper.

socially and economically sustainable. This is not to endorse the returnees' own proposals for improvements to their situation as being necessarily realistic or appropriate means to create such communities. (Indeed the hope that 'someone' might re-open the factories betrays another conceptual gap, this time between perceptions shaped by the pre-war economic system and the changed reality of emerging post-war capitalism). What is important, however, is that these aspirations indicate the extent to which the physical movement of these families from the area of their displacement to the area of their pre-war residence is only one step in a process of re-establishing 'home'. It is a return of sorts, but it remains to be seen whether this movement is the final chapter in the war-related migration of the individuals and families concerned. At the time these interviews were conducted, all the interviewees indicated their intention to stay, with two families adding the qualification that they would move abroad should there be an opportunity to do so. It would be interesting to revisit this caseload at future intervals to assess whether the short-term improvement in their prospects that this return has brought will translate into a durable and satisfactory solution to their forced migration and displacement.

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