

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
HUMANITARIAN AID OFFICE (ECHO)

EVALUATION of ECHO
INTERVENTIONS in the
FEDERAL REPUBLIC
of **YUGOSLAVIA**
(**SERBIA**)

SHELTER and
RETURN REPORT

PROLOG Consult – Belgium
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The views expressed herein are those of the consultants, and do not represent any official view of the Commission.*

A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A.1. THE EVALUATION

<u>Evaluated entity:</u>	Serbia (Federal Republic of Yugoslavia)
<u>Date of the evaluation:</u>	31/03 to 18/04/2003 (field mission)
<u>Consultant's name:</u>	Donatella Bradic
<u>Purpose & Methodology:</u>	

The overall objective of the evaluation was to assess the appropriateness of ECHO's intervention in Serbia, and to what extent its goals had been achieved on the eve of its final disengagement from that country. To that effect, the global plans of the last three years (i.e. as from 2000) had to be reviewed. The evaluation had also to analyse a number of current issues: phasing out strategy of ECHO, sustainability of interventions, and decision to fund a few selected last actions in 2003.

In that framework, the evaluation had to focus on two sectors: *Durable Solutions*, which is the subject of the present report, and Health. Significant needs for further shelter and repatriation/return activities were repeatedly stressed by ECHO partners and some other actors involved in this sector, which made the issue highly relevant for an assessment of results achieved and co-ordination/LRRD efforts. The evaluation was instructed by ECHO to focus the survey on refugees from BiH and Croatia. Kosovo IDPs, whose fate still depends from protracted political discussions, could not be considered in the same immediate perspective.

The methodology reflects the above objectives. Desired results¹ were translated into a frame containing corresponding evaluation questions, judgement criteria and indicators (Annex F). This frame was systematically used by the evaluation team, throughout the three standard phases of the evaluation. It was also designed to be readily transposed into the main body of the report below.

A.2. MAIN CONCLUSIONS

A.2.1. Overall Intervention Logic

Supporting shelter and return activities for refugees in Serbia has been ECHO contribution to the regional stabilisation process. Humanitarian bottom-up approach, however, was not able to ensure proper co-ordination with long term top-down development. Durable solutions were faced with institutional constraints of donors involved. They were also limited by complex regional politics. Implementations of national strategies, though gradually evolving, are still not always in full compliance with e.g. the principle of return stipulated in the Dayton agreement.

The inability to effectively link returnee families to EU funded programmes in BiH and Croatia has probably made the return effort a missed opportunity.

The programming decision to engage in shelter was appropriate and relevant to the humanitarian conditions in Serbia. In some cases the strictly humanitarian character of this programme can be challenged. However, protection as well as humanitarian principles are core ECHO principles; therefore, the right to adequate housing was identified as relevant and a justifiable intervention.

Although the number of people that moved out of collective centers as a direct consequence of the shelter programme remains modest, shelter projects significantly reduced the overall number of aid dependent beneficiaries. Nevertheless, the scheme and its implementation failed to target EVIs, to the notable exception of the elderly. To engage in rehabilitation of specialised institutions was a bold decision and its benefits are significant.

¹ Nine desired results were outlined in TOR, chapter 2.3

A.2.2. Results and Means Compared to Objectives

Due to its mandate and limited resources but also to restrictive Commission rules related to cross-border spending, ECHO in Serbia restricted its activities to the preparatory stage of the return process, without direct involvement in housing reconstruction or self-sufficiency, i.e. the sustainability of the process. In light of these limiting factors, ECHO adopted a modest objective of “promotion” of return as one of the durable solutions.

The effectiveness of ECHO support to the shelter programme in Serbia has been high. Such performance has been a result of, in most cases, an excellent choice of partners and close cooperation with a wide range of stakeholders in the consultative and implementation stage of the projects. This was also a result of an appropriate programming strategy that adequately responded to need for shelter, preventing any worsening in the impact of the crisis.

The shelter project includes an in kind grant amounting to an average 750 Euros per family. Although the need for self-sufficiency is indisputable, the utility of the in kind grants in practice was found to be questionable in non-rural areas, and their effects limited. In parallel, ECHO has also covered management costs of a UNHCR-led micro-credit scheme for more entrepreneurial or slightly better-off refugees.

The methodology in the implementation of the shelter scheme was self-help. This was generally well accepted by the beneficiaries and easy to manage. Most people who met the eligibility criteria, had basic skills or families/friends that could help them. However, self-help rule could exclude vulnerable groups.

A.2.3. Durable Solutions in Shelter Sector

The decision to support durable solutions for refugees stems also from the fact that, according to a survey funded by ECHO, 65% of the refugees have expressed their intention to stay in Serbia, the fact that the government of Serbia allowed all refugees to apply for citizenship, and last but not the least that the demand for housing assistance was great. The context was also highly political, though, and it was sometimes difficult for ECHO and its partners to ensure that needs remained the basis for intervention. However, in Serbia the determination of humanitarian needs was often a function of the availability of resources and willingness of donors rather than of a strictly humanitarian decision of what is needed.

The type of assistance was appropriate and it manifested in two ways; firstly, by helping the host families it contributed to a better social acceptance of the refugees and IDPs, and allowed them to find a more “natural habitat” while in refuge. Secondly, it alleviated the pressure on collective centers and demand for the creation for additional capacity in collective accommodation.

Over the period of three years ECHO has assisted almost 100,000 beneficiaries in private accommodation and most refugees accommodated in collective centers (30,000 average per year). With the available funding, 1/5 of the refugee/IDP population, in the shelter sector, has been reached and assisted. Having in mind the complexity of the needs, the dispersion of the refugees/IDPs throughout Serbia and the limitations stemming from the mandate, this is an impressive achievement.

It must be emphasised that these were still exceptions rather than common occurrences. However, it indicates that shelter, according to the criteria defined by ECHO, does not always have a humanitarian character. Within the limits of its resources ECHO targeted EVIs through its programme for rehabilitation of specialised institutions, i.e. houses for care of the elderly. In such operating context, protection needs were believed to be as important, if not more, than assistance and could not be artificially separated by strict adherence to humanitarian principles. One of the most valuable contribution of durable solutions in the shelter sector was to provide refugee families with a property that can be used as a collateral for credit, once legal and banking systems allow it.

A.2.4. Phase Out Strategy and LRRD

Had there been a timely and substantive LRRD with other Commission instruments primarily, ECHO could have phased out at the end of 2001 when the emergency phase terminated and the EAR² started the development agenda, though at the price of a difficult decision to cut support to the non-transparent

² European Agency for Reconstruction

management of collective centres by the Commissioner for Refugees. Nevertheless, there still was confusion about what were the most appropriate links between relief, rehabilitation and development and how to put them into practice in a complex political and institutional context. In the case of Serbia this confusion seems to lie in the fact that ECHO intervention was mainly aimed at alleviating the consequences of the war in the region and used procedures based on grassroots partners proposals, whilst other Commission instruments, namely CARDS³ and its implementing arm the EAR, mainly focused on transition aspects leading to the process of stabilisation and association (SAP), in a Country Strategy Paper framework. The disconnection led to a weak LRRD within the EC; LRRD with UNHCR and national authorities was slightly better.

A.2.5. Reduction of Aid Dependency

Aid dependency is more pertinent to other areas of ECHO's activities (food, winterisation) which are beyond the scope of this report. To the exception of rehabilitation in some collective centres, aid dependency in the shelter sector has been minimal because (i) provision of shelter as a form of assistance for refugees/IDPs in private accommodation did not exist and (ii), shelter *per se* is a durable solution and as such does not entail permanent supply of services, thus avoids dependency. A sensible housing/shelter policy in the mid and long-term would contribute to speed up the closure of collective centres and significantly reduce dependency on aid for the population in collective accommodation.

The process of organised returns is almost entirely dependent on international aid which includes ECHO funding as well. One of the reasons is the cost effectiveness of the repatriation programme. Namely, organised returns are per capita very expensive when compared to the national standard.

A.2.6. Recommendations for Future Phase Out Strategies

In most cases no hand-over was possible hence, stopping the operation was a logical objective. Donor pledges to funding the Government housing strategy have so far been minimal⁴. It is not certain, however, how far some key information about ECHO funded programs have been registered into institutional memory settings of other potentially concerned donors.

A.2.7. Continuation of Activities in 2003

The funding cut from 36,9 mEur to 6,6 mEur was probably too drastic. ECHO Belgrade expected a higher budget in its final year (8-10 mEur) but the field had limited influence in the funding decision process. A more generous last year budget could have eased the phase-out, avoiding a funding gap directed towards socially vulnerable cases.

A.2.8. Recommendations from Previous Evaluation

Few recommendations of the 2000 country evaluations were directly relevant to durable solutions. Most partners in shelter & return had 'proven ability and capacity'. ECHO efforts to promote LRRD were mostly curtailed by inadequate donor procedures (CARDS Return) or political situation (IDPs).

A.2.9. Cross-Cutting Issues

ECHO's stated policy of targeting the most vulnerable groups and the reluctance of ECHO and its partners to exclude less vulnerable groups, even though they do not have the means to come to the aid of the entire population affected by a particular crisis, is also present here. Given limited resources and limitations stemming from the mandate, this remains one of the most morally complex areas in humanitarian action.

³ Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation programme

⁴ Source: OCHA 'Humanitarian situation and strategy 2003', chapter 2 §2.

A.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall intervention logic

- More LRRD efforts should have been made with EAR on some selected activities, e.g. micro-credit scheme, and legal environment reforms conducive to micro-credit and NGOs.

Results and means compared to objectives

- In post-conflict situation, to enlarge ECHO strategic horizon and allow for multi-year strategic planning. This would result in a much improved shelter policy, responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable individuals.

Recommendations for other Phase-out and LRRD

- To achieve better complementarity / continuity after phase-out, by better identifying possible institutional constraints, detrimental to LRRD. A (joint ?) ex-ante evaluation to validate CSP settings might have outlined CARDS weaknesses in funding cross-border refugee returns.
- To ensure early ECHO engagement on a strategic level, by early benchmarking of exit strategy.
- To ensure that standard criteria applied by humanitarian aid (e.g. average of 2,500 Euro for rehabilitation of refugee house) are properly recorded in institutional memories of potentially concerned development donors, to avoid creating disparities or jealousy if similar programs are later decided.
- Efficient practices, related to cross-border/boundary needs assessments, design and implementation of programmes and funding decisions, in areas that are politically inter-linked, must be introduced. When ECHO has phased out from a country, 'trustees' or ad hoc focal points need to be maintained within Delegations, to ensure sustainable regional coherence.
- At EU level, the introduction of an enlarged "uprooted people" budget line⁵ that could continue providing assistance for refugees and IDPs on durable solutions should be considered.

A.4. LESSONS LEARNED

Results and means compared to objectives.

- Lengthy administrative procedures at ECHO HQ, resulting in late transfer of funds, significantly affects smaller NGOs, who are unable of pre-financing their activities. This causes unnecessary delays and has a negative impact on project implementation. This issue should be addressed in the future, or small NGOs may become "uncompetitive" and excluded from EC funding.

Phase-out and LRRD

- Specialised partners believe that a refugee may take up to three years in order to decide whether to return or not. If this is correct, the impact of the Go&See visits and the legal aid projects will be visible only 2-3 years from now when ECHO will no longer be present in the area.

Cross-cutting issues

Although probably above the standards of many refugee camps around the world, the collective shelters for IDPs and refugees represent a real drawback to a dignified life, create passivity and increases aid-dependency. Once such centers are established they become very difficult to close and the residents require constant and specialised care. Learning from experience in Serbia, centers should be avoided whenever possible. When this is challenged by circumstances, early engagement in finding alternative solutions to such accommodation should be a priority.

⁵ Uprooted people budget line – according to Parliament and Council regulation of 29 October 2001 on Aid to uprooted people of Asian and Latin American developing countries.