



## Laying the foundations for safe refugee return

### CARDS

#### Country

Bosnia and Herzegovina

#### Implementation period

2001-2003

#### Funding

€2.4 million

#### Results

Set up centres and systems to help refugees return to a number of target municipalities, build houses, and help with local capacity building through NGOs

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#### Partners

Alisei

With the war in the former Yugoslavia came a mass displacement of people. Today, the huge task remains to help these refugees, especially minority groups, return to their communities, build homes and secure peace and economic security in the region.

The European Union, through its CARDS programme, has funded numerous refugee return schemes in municipalities throughout the former Yugoslavia. In this case, the Alisei organisation has facilitated local capacity building and directly helped identify 230 families who will return to six target communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, namely, Hadzići, Foča/Srbiniya, Ustikolina, Goražde, Novi Grad and Novo Sarajevo.

The €2.4 million project, which ran from November 2001 to the end of May 2003, worked on a two-step plan to bring refugees back and help with the legal dimension of property law – the so-called PLIP or property law implementation plan.

#### Overarching objectives

Firstly, the project identified which families would benefit from the assistance scheme. It then proceeded to build their houses, (re)build the infrastructure and utilities, and help with capacity building, job creation, and legal advice to ensure they are reintegrated into society.

How did the project reach these goals? The first step was to get lists of potential candidates from local authorities and associations of displaced persons. Four local stations were also set up to receive applications for housing assistance. Over 1,100 applications were handed in and 230 were finally chosen.



Each applicant was interviewed several times by the project to test their genuine desire to return to their community. Convincing cases were then forwarded to the local municipality for approval and – if successful – a tripartite agreement between the recipient, municipality and the project was drawn up.

Once the beneficiary was identified and contracts signed, the project organised a tender for overseeing and carrying out all phases of the (re)construction.

### Further support

An important feature of the project was to engage in ‘capacity building’, which in this case meant identifying, equipping and training non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to carry on the work once the EU contractor completed its task in 2003. They were given the skills to process new housing applications, to carry out field research and counsel people on how to prepare a file.

It also sought to identify, train and equip another set of NGOs to help with local economic development, such as in the setting up of small businesses – farms, greenhouses, hairdressing salons, tailors, etc. – and advising villagers on the ins and outs of job hunting and the labour market. For example, in Ilijaš, the project laid the groundwork for a meat processing plant to be built, which has since created some 15 jobs for returnees.

### Overcoming the challenges

In 19 months, the project managed to put in place the systems and procedures to achieve its goals. By September 2003, when field visits took place, 190 families of the 230 approved files had already returned to their home towns and villages. But these people also freed up dwellings which could, in turn, be reoccupied by some 700 other families.

In Foča/Srbiniya, for instance, the situation is quite encouraging: the percentage of minority returns has increased thanks to good co-operation and relations with the local authorities. Refugees and internally displaced people have returned to their homes and are living normal and peaceful lives.