



Asylum policy

Evaluation of the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme

Key facts

Initial situation

During the conflict in the province of Kosovo, Switzerland accepted approximately 52,000 war victims in 1998 and 1999. On 11 August 1999, the Federal Council decided that the repatriation of those people temporarily accepted by Switzerland was reasonable. It authorised the Federal Department of Justice and Police and the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs to implement an extensively structured programme for voluntary repatriation.

The Federal Office for Refugees invested approximately CHF 184 million in this programme. Along with guidance provided by the Cantonal Repatriation Advisory Service, the programme comprised, on the one hand, individual measures (financial support, material assistance, as well as repatriation orientated educational programmes in Switzerland) in support of those people returning voluntarily, and on the other hand, on the spot structural assistance (in the infrastructure, public sector, agriculture sectors amongst others, as well as promoting small and medium-sized enterprises) which is mainly directed at the collective needs of the population. Within the scope of this programme, from July 1999 to the end of 2000, in total 32,000 people returned to the province of Kosovo, added to this between March 2000 and May 2001, 9,000 more people returned without individual assistance.

In autumn 2001, the Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) carried out an evaluation of the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme and on the basis of Impact Hypotheses, examined the following three questions

The result

1. What role did cooperation between the different parties involved in the implementation of the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme play?

We consider the positive effects of the good cooperation between the different parties involved in the implementation of the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme as given. This cooperation contributed decisively to the successful implementation of the programme. The selected project organisation also proved to be appropriate. In particular

worth indicating is the good cooperation between the repatriation assistance (Federal Office for Refugees) and the structural assistance and development cooperation (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation).

The targeted information and advisory strategy, which Switzerland's repatriation policies and the accompanying measures openly and transparently presented, contributed in no small measure to the fact that the programme had the desired effect on the target groups and their environment not just in Switzerland but also in Kosovo. In addition, this objective and transparent depiction of the repatriation assistance programme, especially the different individual measures, created a level of acceptance not just of Switzerland's repatriation assistance policies but of understanding of the humanitarian and development goals pursued.

2. What effects did the individual repatriation assistance measures have on the early and obligatory return of those entitled to take part in the programme?

The effects of the individual measures in the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme on the actual decision of those entitled to take part in the programme to return early are available. These measures, especially individual financial support, had much less of an influence on the actual decision to return and more an influence on when to return.

The reasons motivating the return to the province of Kosovo are closely linked to the actual reasons why people fled and the fact that these reasons were no longer applicable. For the vast majority of the people who fled from Kosovo as a result of the war (violence, threats, insecurity), the end of the war signalled the start of the return. Very quickly the overwhelming will to return, in order to participate in the reconstruction of Kosovo, was palpable. With regard to other, complementary factors, e.g. accommodation or a place to live, economic prospects, access to the health care system and family ties which also decisively influenced when people returned, the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme provided a solid bedrock and had the following effect:

- As an important part of repatriation assistance, the **repatriation advisory service** (individually or in groups) influenced the decision to return early. The success of the repatriation advisory service is closely linked to the appeal of the individual measures to the individual returnee, the consistent enforcement of asylum adjudications and the knowledge of those concerned about the execution of asylum adjudications.
- For the greater part of the returnees, the **financial incentive** (1,000 or 2,000 francs per adult) represented the cornerstone of the assistance on offer. The combination of financial and material assistance made sense and covers the most urgent on the spot needs of the returnees, in that one's existence in the first few months of the return can be secured. The financial incentive, combined with on the spot material assistance (equivalent to up to 1,000 francs per person), influenced the timing of the return. 39 million francs were invested in financial assistance and 15 million francs were invested in material assistance.
- Overall, participation in the **repatriation orientated educational project in Switzerland** influenced the decision to return of few participants. This measure had little influence on the entire programme in that only approximately 1% of all returnees

took part in an educational project of this type. By imparting specialist knowledge, the chances of on the spot reintegration were increased and thereby lowering the potential for return migration (long-term effect). Cost amounted to 3 million francs.

- The **structured assistance components** had scarcely any direct influence on the individual decision to return or the timing of the return. In fact these components are important criteria at the national level (in relation to the population in the country being returned to and critical circles such as relief organisations and the church), as well as on the foreign affairs level (in relation to the interim governing powers – UNMIK and UNHCR) for the acceptance of Switzerland's repatriation policies. 109 million francs were invested in these components on the spot.

The basis for the successful implementation of the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme was the clearly-defined political attitude of Switzerland right from the start towards those seeking asylum from Kosovo, i.e. that once the war was over, they would return to Kosovo. This attitude was articulated **purposefully** and clearly to the Kosovarian asylum seekers. It is well known that the longer people stay in a third country this influences negatively the decision to return and becomes accordingly more difficult to persuade asylum seekers to return to their homeland. Finally it should be pointed out that asylum policies are only credible if the decisions taken and communicated are also implemented as practised in the case relating to Kosovo.

3. To what extent could the Confederation overall reduce costs by repatriation assistance measures which would have resulted without repatriation assistance?

Amongst the assumptions and estimates made by the SFAO, the judicial use of funds in the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme is given. To what extent in the course of this costs can be effectively cut cannot be conclusively answered within the scope of the SFAO clarifications due to the fact that the consequential costs in Switzerland which would have arisen had there been no Kosovo repatriation assistance programme could not be reliably estimated. According to SFAO estimates, net savings achieved with the Kosovo repatriation assistance programme for the Confederation amounted to at least CHF 100 million in the relief sector.

All in all, within the Confederation as well as externally, the programme was judged by all parties to be very successful. The success of the programme is due to (amongst other things) the "voluntary" repatriation of 32,000 people, and to the fact that long-term legal complaints procedures with the associated resulting costs were able to be avoided.

Conclusion

Increased or more intense focussing on voluntary repatriation assistance is generally supported. The statements from the SFAO lead to the conclusion that the success of such a programme is dependent on specific requirements, as was the case with Kosovo. The different repatriation assistance measures of the programme should be viewed as an effective supplement. Crucial for success is primarily the changed situation in the country of origin, which was not directly under Switzerland's influence with the corresponding perspectives compared to when the people fled, the relatively short stay in Switzerland and

the clear political Swiss stance in relation to the asylum seekers. The success of the repatriation programme is therefore also dependent not lastly on external, very often scarcely controllable factors¹. A repatriation assistance programme initiated by Switzerland based on a system of incentives can therefore trigger, provided certain prerequisites are at hand, the time of the return, as well as instilling a dynamic into the return procedure, whereby individual financial assistance for the vast majority of people concerned, represented the cornerstone of the various measures.

The original text is written in German

¹ Situation in the country of origin, asylum policies of other countries, cooperation with the countries of origin, etc.