

# WHO ARE POTENTIAL RETURNEES TO THE CROATIAN EAST?

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**B**ased on an extensive survey conducted on the representative sample of displaced persons from Croatian East the purpose of this paper was to highlight the differences in some sociodemographic characteristics, attitudes and expectations of the displaced who distinguish by their willingness to return home under the conditions of the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration. The majority (about 70%) of the interviewed persons intended to return to their homes unconditionally, about one quarter of them hesitated about the return because of the conditions of the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration or had not decided yet, and only 3% did not intend to return. By means of discriminant analyses the results of three groups of displaced persons were analysed: returnees, hesitant, and non-returnees. According to the results, the main difference between returnees and other two groups were their attitudes toward the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration, and the Plan was found to be prevalingly positive for the group of returnees. The group of non-returnees, although very small in number, differed from both, returnees and hesitant displaced, by younger age, poor family relationships, problem of invalidity and better adaptation to the place of resettlement. Present living conditions and expectations about future of the potential returnees were presented.

## INTRODUCTION

**A**ccording to the data of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) there were about 26 million of people of concern to UNHCR in 1996 in the world, which is a drop of one million from the previous year as some of the political turbulence of the early 1990 has subsided (<http://www.unhcr.ch/>, 1997). This number includes refugees, groups of people displaced within the borders of their own country, asylum seekers and returnees. All these people share the same destiny: they are currently displaced from their homes and have lost their home environment – often under dangerous circumstances, and are dependent for their survival on the goodwill of the community to which they have fled. They all have faced a critical life event which may

be a serious threat to their psychological well-being and has far-reaching and severe consequences that follow the rupture of person-place relationship (Fullilove, 1996). The problem of refuge and/or exile represent one of the most intractable problems facing the international community today (ICRC, 1991).

The consequences of dislocation on individual's mental health have been subject of numerous investigations (Fullilove 1996, Jerusalem et al. 1996, Roizblatt and Pilowski, 1996, Hinton et al. 1997). Migration per se is considered to be a stressful life event since it includes the adaptation of the displaced people to the new society, and the need to regain their previous levels of quality of life. Since migration may result from several events beside war, there are great differences between voluntary and forced migrations, as well as between "official" refugees and internally displaced people. While voluntary migrants make a significant effort to adapt to the new environment, many forced migrants focus on their eventual return to the native land, which is emotionally incompatible with the practical demands of their adaptation and integration into the new environment (Roizblatt and Pilowski, 1996). However, even the forced migrants would eventually adapt and integrate into a new community if the period of exile is long enough.

In 1996 in Croatia, there were about 200.000 internally displaced persons who were driven from their homes during the war (Živić, 1997). Although they represent only a small proportion of the world's displaced, they make about 4 per cent of the total population of Croatia.

The Croatian displaced persons, which were the object of this study, have spent more than six years in exile, but they have remained within the borders of their own country and their adaptation has not required mastering the practical demands of resettlement such as language or learning the ropes of the new culture. Thus, their social integration into the new environment was expected to be easier than in those migrants who cross language and cultural borders. By 1994 majority of displaced persons sheltered in Croatia lived in own households (81%) in the places of resettlement, about 20% of them had permanent jobs, 14% retirement benefits, children attended local schools or universities (Rogić et al. 1995). At the beginning of 1996, when UN Security Council issued a resolution with the aim to ensure the return of the displaced and refugees to their homes of origin, the question arised how many of the displaced were likely to go back to their devastated home villages and towns.

In order to investigate the willingness of internally displaced persons from Eastern Slavonija, Baranja and western Srijem ("Croatian East") to return home, and to obtain a comprehensive picture of their problems, attitudes and opinions in relation to the potential return under the conditions of the Plan for Peaceful Reintegration, a large survey was conducted in summer 1996.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this

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paper was to highlight the differences between groups of displaced in order to distinguish among them the potential returnees and to outline their principal characteristics.

## METHODS

### Subjects

The study was conducted on the sample of 1499 displaced persons from Eastern Slavonija, Baranja and Western Srijem. By the relevant characteristics, such as place of exile, present accomodation and sociodemographic characteristics, the sample was representative for the population of the displaced from that area. Sistematic sampling was done on the basis of registered displaced persons (June 1996) provided by the Office for the Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Republic of Croatia.

The main sociodemographic characteristics of the sample were as follows:

Sex:	Men	45.4%
	Women	54.6%
Age: (years)	>30	20.1%
	30-39	20.3%
	40-49	21.2%
	50-59	16.6%
	60<	21.8%
Education: (years of schooling)	>8	45.1%
	9-12	48.9%
	12<	6.0%
Nationality:	Croats	88.1%
	Hungarians	4.9%
	Serbs	2.9%
	Others	4.1%
Confession:	Catholic	92.6%
	Orthodox	3.0%
	Other	4.4%

### Instrument

The questionnaire consisted of 70 items investigating: opinions and views of the displaced about the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration, willingness to return home, questions concerning conditions of return, previous life style, expectations about future, satisfaction with the forms of relief provided by various institutions, readiness to participate in the Pilot-project on Return and a range of sociodemographic variables. The questions were of multiple choice type or 3 – to 5-point Likert-type scales and very few of them were open-type questions.

## Procedure

The study was conducted in summer 1996. The subjects were interviewed individually by a trained interviewer, who visited them in their temporary dwellings. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The interview took about one hour per person.

## Data analysis

The first step in data analysis was to identify the differences between the groups of displaced in relation to their willingness to return home which was assessed by the question:

*Do you intend to return to the place of your exile under the conditions determined by the Plan of the Peaceful Reintegration?*

*a) I intend to return*

*b) I should like to return but do not intend to under determined conditions*

*c) I should like to return but have not yet decided to do so*

*d) I do not intend to return, regardless of conditions*

Three categories of the displaced could be distinguished on basis of their answers:

Returnees – answer (a)            N = 1068 (71.2%)

Hesitant – answers (b)&(c)        N = 386 (25.8%)

Non-returnees (d)                N = 45 (3.0%)

In order to identify the variables differentiating these three groups the discriminant analysis was performed with the set of 57 questions/variables including: opinions about the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration (14 variables), information about the place of exile/return (13 variables), problems faced in exile (10 variables), satisfaction with the care provided for the displaced (6 variables), sociodemographic characteristics (sex, age, education level, nationality, confession, marital status, present accommodation).

Some of the questions were not appropriately scaled and could not be included in this analysis, but as they seemed relevant to the problem, Chi-square test was applied in order to outline the differences between the three groups of subjects.

Further analysis was based only on the subsample of returnees (N = 1068). Relative frequencies of their answers to the questions about their present living conditions and expectations about future are presented.

## RESULTS

Due to the some missing data the total number of subjects for the discriminant analysis was  $N=1303$ . However, the relative number of the subjects in each group remained basically the same as in the total sample:

Returnees  $N = 928$  (71.3%)

Hesitant  $N = 333$  (25.6%)

Non-returnees  $N = 41$  (3.1%)

The discriminant analysis with the three groups of displaced persons revealed two significant functions:

Function 1. Wilks  $\lambda = 0.697$ ,  $\chi^2 = 486.29$ ,  $df = 20$ ,  $p < 0.01$

Function 2. Wilks  $\lambda = 0.971$ ,  $\chi^2 = 37.56$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows the group centroids for the functions.

**Table 1**  
**Group centroids for the discriminant functions**

	Function 1	Function 2
Returnees	0.41	-0.01
Hesitant	-1.04	-0.09
Non-returnees	-0.73	0.93

As can be seen from the table the first obtained discriminant function differentiates the group of returnees from both, the group of hesitant and that of non-returnees. Representing the average profile of the group, the group centroids of the groups of hesitant displaced (-1.04) and non-returnees (-0.73) were relatively close to each other and apart from the centroid of the group of returnees (0.41). The second discriminant function differentiates the group of non-returnees from both, returnees and hesitant, but to a lesser extent than the first function.

Table 2 shows the factor structure of the obtained discriminant functions, i.e. the correlations between discriminating variables and canonical discriminant function. To facilitate understanding of the results the variables were rescaled in order to obtain positive correlations with the function and only the correlations above 0.20 are presented.

The factor structure of the first function showed that the variables which separated the group of returnees from other two groups mainly refer to the opinions and views about the Plan. The only sociodemographic variable which correlated with the first function was educational level. Generally, the results indicate that the group of displaced who are willing to return under the conditions

of the Plan have more positive views about the it and are of lower educational level than the group of those who are hesitant or not willing to return.

**Table 2**  
**Factor structure of the canonical discriminant functions**

Variables	Function 1	Function 2
PPR is mostly in accordance with the interests of displaced persons	0.74	
PPR will provide massive return of the exiled	0.61	
PPR will ensure personal safety of the returnees	0.52	
PPR will provide adequate living conditions for the returnees (employment, education)	0.46	
PPR will ensure complete implementation of the Croatian authority	0.44	
PPR does not protects the interests of the Serbs more than of Croats	0.44	
PPR will have beneficial effect for the future of the Republic of Croatia	0.38	
PPR will provide renewal of devastated places	0.36	
PPR will provide that the whole occupied region would be within the borders of the Republic of Croatia	0.31	
PPR will provide complete disarmament of the Serbian rebels	0.26	
Adequate care for the displaced provided by the Croatian government	0.25	
Lower educational level		0.24
Poor family relations		0.56
Age - younger		0.36
Problem of handicap		0.34
Well adapted to the present living conditons		0.24

PPR = Plan of Peaceful Reintegration

The factor structure of the second discriminant function, which separated the group of non-returnees from other two groups, should be interpreted with great caution. The group of displaced who do not intend to return to the place of their exile consisted of only 41 persons (3.1% of the sample). The results of this analysis indicate that they are younger than the rest of the sample, with poor family relations, they have difficulties with invalidity, and are well adapted to the present conditions of living. Further analyses which were aimed at examining the differences between the three groups in some of the variables that could not enter the discriminant analysis showed that in comparison with other two groups of displaced, non-returnees were more likely to leave the place of their exile irrespective of war ( $\chi^2=146.37$ ,  $df=6$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), most of them were students or pupils when the war started ( $\chi^2=103.97$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), they preferred to live in a an urban environment ( $\chi^2=221.41$ ,  $df=10$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) rather than in their village of origin.

Present living conditions of the subsample of returnees, i.e. people who declared willing to return to the place of their exile irrespective of the Plan as well as their expectations about future are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

**Table 3**  
**Present living conditions of potential returnees (N = 1068)**

		%
Present accomodation:	Hotel	6.9
	Refugee camp	10.1
	Flat/House:	
	– relatives/friends	10.2
	– private	4.4
	– provided by authorities	50.8
	– rented	9.4
	Inappropriate	0.8
	Other	7.4
Homes of their exile:	Slightly damaged	9.4
	Damaged	10.3
	Destroyed	20.9
	In good condition	37.1
	Condition unknown	22.3
Present employment:	Permanent	25.5
	Part-time	5.1
	Illegal	1.8
	Unemployed	55.9
	Other	11.7

**Table 4**  
**Expectations of potential returnees about their future (N = 1068)**

Expectations	%
Return is anticipated in (number of months)	
> 6	31.7
6 - 12	27.2
12-24	15.0
24 <	26.1
Expected number of years needed to regain previous property:	
< 5	11.8
5 - 10	22.5
10 <	10.1
Never	35.4
Don't know	20.3
Expected occupation:	
Agriculture	15.9
Official	23.3
Private owner	13.2
Retiree/Housewife	37.5
Don't know	9.1
Expected problems upon return (% of answers "very much"):	
Lack of money	69.5
Threatened personal safety	65.0
Difficulties in adaptation	44.0
Inadequate living conditions for children	43.9
Lack of population capable of working	39.2
Unemployment, poor economic prospects	38.0
Problems with Serbian neighbours	31.8
Participation of the Serbs in local authorities	23.8
Poor organization of local authorities	12.2
Poor traffic communication	8.7

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study showed that majority (about 70%) of the interviewed displaced persons from Croatian East intended to return to their homes unconditionally, about one quarter of them hesitated or were still undecided about their return because of the conditions determined by the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration, and only 3% did not intend to return. A corresponding proportion of potential returnees was obtained in the study of Rogić et al (1995) conducted in 1994 on the sample of the displaced persons from all regions of Croatia. This contributes to the assumption that the wish to return home is a quite stable feature in Croatian displaced persons, proving that the attachment to the places of their origin has not lost its intensity over the time spent in exile.

The most prominent characteristic of the group of potential returnees examined in this study, in comparison to hesitant displaced and non-returnees, was the positive attitude toward the Plan of Peaceful Reintegration. Except for the educational level, which was somewhat lower in returnees, the only variables which differed between the returnees and other two groups of displaced were the attitudes toward the Plan. It should be mentioned, however, that in the group of hesitant displaced their reluctance to return was based on certain conditions determined by the Plan, so that the differences in the attitudes toward the Plan between returnees and hesitant were as expected. The positive attitude toward the Plan in our group of returnees is also represented by the fact that at the time of the interview about 60% of them expected to return home within a 12-month period (Table 4). Taking into account the period that has elapsed since then, their expectations proved to be vain hopes that have not turned into reality so far. Does it mean that major difference between potential returnees and hesitant displaced is that nostalgia, idealization of the past and intense desire to return to their homes of origin lead the returnees in an unrealistic optimism in view of the time of their return, whereas the hesitant displaced proved more critical and realistic in their attitude?

The group of non-returnees was rather small and showed some differences in comparison to both, returnees and hesitant displaced. They were younger than the rest of the sample, with poor relationships within family, and were well integrated into the environment of resettlement. This result conforms with that reported in the study of Roizblat and Pilowskiy (1996) showing that migrants' children better adapt to the new environment and culture and more often decide to stay in the new country than their parents. A statement suggested in their study that "an exile that started as a tragedy became increasingly comfortable for some members of the family" could be applied also to our group of non-returnees with respect to their answers that they wished to migrate irrespectively of the war, and to live in an urban environment rather than in a small town or village of their exile.

Sociodemographic characteristics of our group of returnees show that the people of all ages, nationalities and confessions, as represented in the whole



population of displaced persons (Živić, 1997) intend to return home. The question that is still open is where would the displaced return if about 50% of their homes were damaged or destroyed and about 20% were of unknown condition at the time of interview (Table 3). This data, together with the data on their expected occupation and problems upon return, as presented in Table 4, should stimulate the authorities to provide necessary arrangements for their return. The most expected problems seem to be lack of money and threatened personal safety. It should not be forgotten that the displaced persons are still recovering from their traumas related to war so that their personal safety is of utmost importance and should not be jeopardized. Taking into account that return means a second migration, with all psychologically related implications, it is necessary to reduce as much as possible their expected problems so that the return would not result with disillusionment and feeling of failed hopes.

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## **TKO SU MOGUĆI POVRATNICI NA HRVATSKI ISTOK?**

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**C**ilj istraživanja bio je utvrditi razlike u nekim sociodemografskim osobinama, stavovima i očekivanjima hrvatskih prognanika koje se razlikuju s obzirom na namjeru povratka u mjesta progonstva. Istraživanje je provedeno na reprezentativnom uzorku prognanika s hrvatskog istoka. Rezultati su pokazali da se većina ispitanih prognanika (oko 70%) namjerava vratiti u svoje domove bez obzira na uvjete postavljene u Planu mirne reintegracije, oko jedna četvrtina prognanika ne namjerava se vratiti pod tim uvjetima ili to još nisu odlučili, a svega 3% njih ne namjerava se vratiti. Rezultati diskriminativne analize provedene s ciljem da se utvrde razlike u nekim obilježjima i stavovima između triju skupina ispitanika: povratnika, neodlučnih i ne-povratnika, pokazali su da varijable koje diferenciraju skupinu povratnika od drugih dviju skupina jesu stavovi prema Planu mirne reintegracije. Oni su bili pozitivniji u skupine povratnika nego u neodlučnih i ne-po-vratnika. Skupina ne-povratnika, iako vrlo mala, razlikovala se od ostalih dviju skupina po svojoj mlađoj dobi, lošijim odnosima u obitelji, problemima s invalidnošću i boljom prilagodbom na uvjete života poslije progonstva. U radu su prikazani i podaci o uvjetima života u progonstvu i očekivanja u vezi s povratkom skupine povratnika.

## WER KEHRT MÖGLICHERWEISE IN DEN OSTEN KROATIENS ZURÜCK?

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**D**as Ziel der Untersuchung war, die Unterschiede zwischen bestimmten soziodemographischen Eigenschaften, Einstellungen und Erwartungen kroatischer Vertriebener festzustellen, deren Zukunftspläne bezüglich des intendierten Aufenthaltsorts voneinander abweichen. Die Untersuchung wurde an einer repräsentativen Gruppe ostkroatischer Vertriebener durchgeführt. Die Resultate haben gezeigt, dass die Mehrzahl der Vertriebenen (etwa 70%) in ihre Heimatorte zurückkehren will, ohne Rücksicht auf die im Plan zur friedlichen Reintegration aufgestellten Bedingungen. Etwa ein Viertel der Vertriebenen hat nicht die Absicht, unter den geltenden Bedingungen zurückzukehren, oder ist noch unentschlossen; lediglich 3% sehen ganz von einer Rückkehr ab. Die Durchführung einer diskriminativen Analyse hatte zum Ziel, die Unterschiede in Einstellungen und Überlegungen zwischen den drei verschiedenen Personengruppen, nämlich Heimkehrern, Unschlüssigen und Nicht-Heimkehrern, zu ermitteln. Es erwies sich, dass die jeweilige Einstellung zum Plan der friedlichen Reintegration jene Variable ist, welche die Gruppe der Heimkehrer von den übrigen beiden Gruppen differenziert. Unter den zur Heimkehr Entschlossenen ist diese Einstellung positiver als unter den übrigen Vertriebenen. Die Gruppe der Nicht-Heimkehrer, obwohl geringen Umfangs, unterscheidet sich von den übrigen durch ein niedrigeres Durchschnittsalter, schlechtere Familienverhältnisse, Invaliditätsprobleme und eine bessere Eingewöhnung in die Lebensverhältnisse nach der Vertreibung. Die Arbeit illustriert außerdem bestimmte soziodemographische Merkmale, Lebensverhältnisse nach der Vertreibung und Erwartungen bezüglich der Rückkehr in die Heimatorte, die innerhalb der Gruppe der zur Rückkehr entschlossenen Vertriebenen zu beobachten sind.