

According to information supplied by the UNHCR and the OSCE, as of 25 October 1998, 13,479 applications had been submitted to the ODPR since the adoption of the programme.³⁹ Of these, 5,625 had been cleared by the ODPR, and 1,331 had returned with UNHCR and ODPR assistance, and a further 907 had returned unassisted. In addition to these 2,238 returns under the programme, the ODPR has also recorded a further 1,884 who have returned with travel letters issued by Croatian diplomatic missions. These numbers are still relatively small, and in the week to 25 October 1998 only 135 people actually returned under the programme. However, with the ODPR aiming to process 500 applications per week, the numbers returning have increased since the programme got under way.

4. Returns to Occupied Properties

Although it is somewhat easier for Serb returnees physically to come back to Croatia since the adoption of the programme, it is still proving difficult for them to recover property. Some returnees are going back to houses which are both inhabitable and vacant, and in such cases it would be expected that delays could be kept to a minimum. Of the 5,625 applications cleared by the ODPR as of 25 October 1998, 3,608 were relatively easy cases of people who are returning to unoccupied housing, or who are going to host families or relatives. Fewer more difficult cases are being dealt with: 898 applications for return to destroyed or damaged housing have been processed, and 1,119 for people whose homes in Croatia are currently occupied.

In cases where the property of the returnee is occupied by a Croat DP, the process is proving problematic. The programme lays down the procedure for dealing with such cases. Returnees should claim the property through the housing commission in the locality concerned. Within five days the housing commission should inform the returnee of the status of their property. Once ownership has been proved, the housing commission must within seven days request the temporary occupant to vacate the property. This decision also indicates a deadline by which the property has to be vacated, while the temporary occupant has to be provided with alternative accommodation by the state. If alternative accommodation is not available locally, the local housing commission should inform the central commission charged with implementing the programme and the ODPR within five days, so that alternative accommodation can be found elsewhere. If the temporary occupant fails to vacate the property by the stipulated deadline, the housing commission should file a suit for their eviction with the municipal court within seven days.

³⁹ *Weekly Update by UNHCR and OSCE on The Government of Croatia Programme for Return and Accommodation of Displaced Persons, Refugees and Resettled Persons, 19-25 October 1998.*