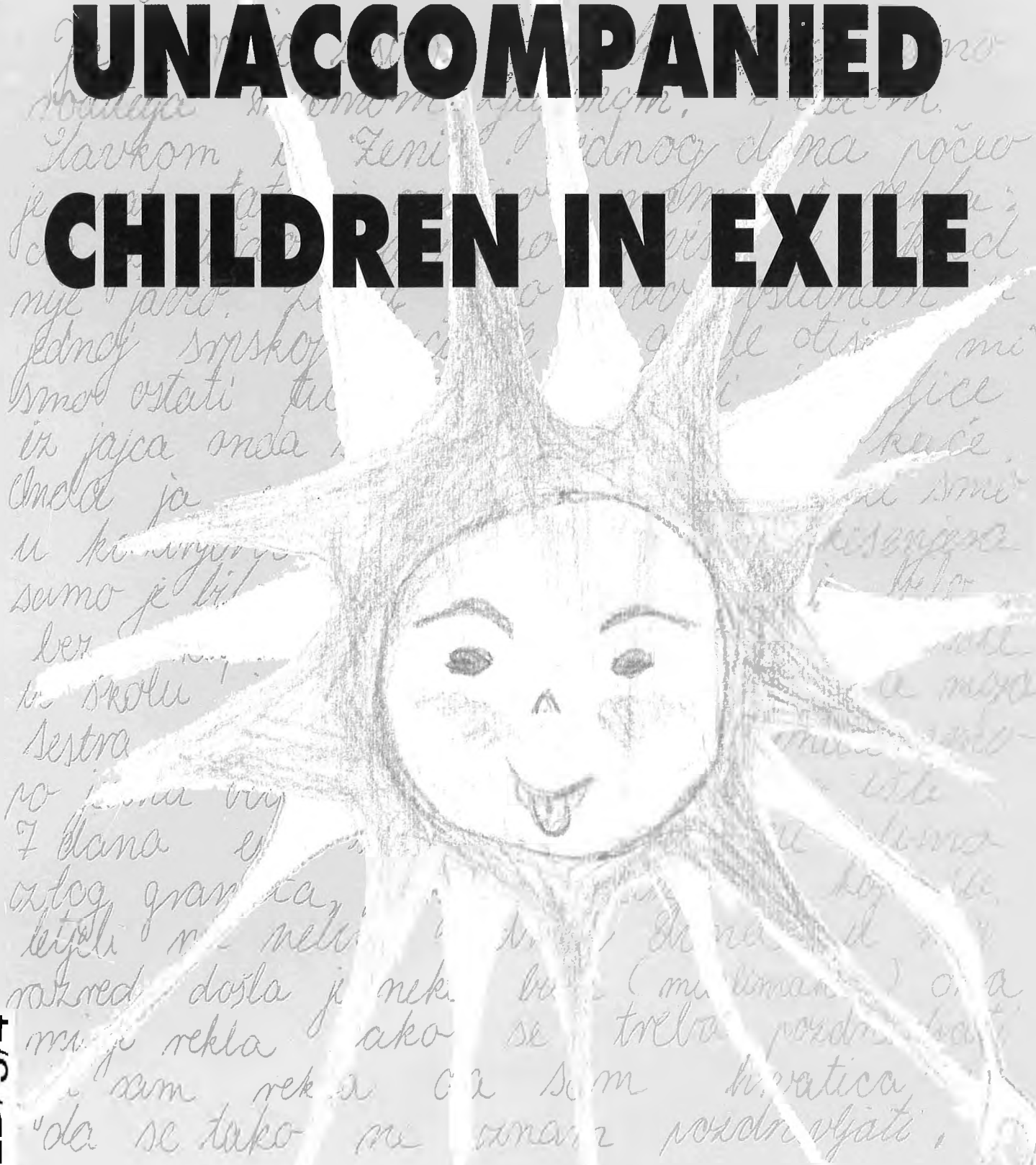


MOJ ŽIVOT U ZENICI
HRVASKOJ

Snježana i Daniela Janić

UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN IN EXILE



CSPI - Center for Social Policy Initiatives



Rädda Barnen
SWEDISH SAVE THE CHILDREN

Croatia, Zagreb 1998

Graphic design:

Lobel Machala

Printing:

Izvori d.o.o.

Zagreb, Trnjanska 64

Croatia

Language editing:

Nina H. Antoljak

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FOREWORD

The Best Interest of the Child

by Monica Lundgren, Programme Officer
Rädda Barnen/Swedish Save the Children

*"I am not a prophet, I can't foresee the future,
but I hope for a future without war, illness,
hunger and powerlessness.
My personal future I imagine to be to have a
successful education
in order to become a good professional and a
person of some influence".*

These are the words of a 16-year old girl - one out of thousands of children and young people from Bosnia and Herzegovina, who had to flee their home country and take refuge in Croatia as unaccompanied refugee minors. All these children have experienced separation and bereavement; they were all forced to leave behind people they loved and trusted, they all had to cope with unfamiliar circumstances in a foreign country.

Despite their grief and pain, many of them have managed to adapt themselves to the new situation they have somewhere to live, they are performing well at school and they have made new friends. One girl even observes that this war brought her something good, because living with an aunt and her family means that she now leads a "normal" life, whereas in her own family she was constantly neglected and maltreated. Others do not wish to dwell upon their life in Bosnia or talk about the future.

This book is an attempt to give these children a voice, as well as to convey to the reader a method of meeting their needs and of facilitating family reunification. The Croatian organisation Center for Social Policy Initiatives (CSPI) has more than four years of professional experience in developing and carrying out a comprehensive programme for assisting unaccompanied refugee minors - *"Unaccompanied Children in Exile"*. One may, of course, question whether yet another handbook on how best to assist unaccompanied refugee minors is needed. Isn't there enough literature dealing with this problem? Yes, and no: There are handbooks, manuals, international documents and declarations, but as a rule they describe the situation in non-European countries, or minors from other parts of the world arriving in Europe without a legal guardian. The reason for writing this book is the very special situation in what was only a short time ago known to us as Yugoslavia, a former socialist country in Europe, which has recently undergone the process of partition, followed by a devastating war. The authors are convinced that these particular circumstances call for a special approach to the problem of unaccompanied refugee minors.

One thing, however, the children of former Yugoslavia have in common with children all over the world: They have a right to - among other things - a name and nationality, to culture, religion and language. They have a right to life. All these rights are laid down in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by a majority of states, including those of the countries of former Yugoslavia. The Convention has inspired all the measures and activities carried out by the CSPI. It

also underlies the work and endeavours of *Rädda Barnen*, Swedish Save the Children. In the summer of 1996, our two organisations got to know each other and realised that we have common goals and interests. Since then *Rädda Barnen* supports the project "Unaccompanied Children in Exile" and gets profound knowledge and new ideas in return.

STOCKHOLM, June 1998.

INTRODUCTION

Why Has This Book Been Written? Who Is It For?

The aim of this book is to present the efforts of the UCE Project - Unaccompanied Children in Exile - as a non-governmental initiative in meeting the needs of unaccompanied refugee children on the territory of the former Yugoslavia in the period from the peak of the war hostilities in 1993, to the post-war and repatriation period in 1997. The book reflects UCE's 4 years of work experience in developing diverse program components to meet the needs of unaccompanied refugee minors - ranging from psycho-social needs, to family tracing and family reunification.

The activities undertaken were inspired both by the CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child - and other national and international treaties regulating human rights. The UCE program was designed to meet the needs of and to provide emergency services to unaccompanied refugee minors - but it also has a strong advocacy component for children's rights - the right of a child to a family, name and ethnicity. All the activities were carried out by taking into account the best interest of the child, with a strong non-discriminatory approach, and with respect for children's participation in the decision-making process related to their situation.

The book aims to show *HOW* the local NGO initiative, assisted by international humanitarian aid, succeeded in addressing the *UNMET NEEDS* of unaccompanied refugee minors. The unmet needs emerged in the spectrum of general refugee protection, that did not recognise the special needs and the special situation of unaccompanied refugee children. The unmet needs fall into the gaps in SOCIAL and LEGAL protection of children without adequate parental care.

Unaccompanied refugee minors as the target group of the program activities are/were refugee children from 0 till 18 years of age who were separated from their parents because of the circumstances of war.

In order to fill the gaps and voids in the social and legal protection of unaccompanied refugee minors, UCE has registered and documented unaccompanied refugee minors as the refugee group with special needs, and assisted in the process of selection and appointment of legal guardians to the largest number of identified unaccompanied refugee minors in countries of exile, like Croatia. Aiming to reduce as much as possible the period of family separation, in order to meet the best interest of the child and ensure the right of the child to a family, name and ethnicity, UCE has facilitated tracing of missing family members, and performed family reunification of the unaccompanied refugee minors with their parents and other family members.

In relation to the social aspects of special needs of unaccompanied refugee minors while in exile, UCE has developed foster care programs for unaccompanied refugee minors in Croatia. The foster care programs have targeted children with severe health problems - the specialised foster care program, children in transit to be reunited and repatriated - the transit foster care program, and the kinship foster care program for refugee children.

The book also aims to show *HOW* local professionals have developed the applicable know-how, compatible with local standards and, at the same time, matched to the international humanitarian, social and legal standards. Another objective of the book is to demonstrate how important it is to identify the local response from the international humanitarian assistance perspective. On the other hand, the responses that were locally available had access to the new and applicable know-how that

was offered from the international perspective to the local subjects. In this respect the UCE Project was given the opportunity to upgrade the skills and knowledge related to methods applied and engaged human capacities.

The focus of the book is to present HOW the consequences of war destruction and war hostilities have affected vulnerable unaccompanied refugee minors. It will show the enormous human suffering, pain and emotional traumas of children who were separated from their parents because of the war. It seeks to introduce the children who have lost the world of their significant adults, lost the world of their friends and neighbours.

This book could be interesting and useful for the local professionals as well as for international relief staff. It could serve as a guide for the relief staff who work, or are going to work, in war zones or close to war situations in central and eastern Europe, or in other geographic areas of the world where the former communist countries are faced with the armed conflict situations. The basic social welfare structure in the named geopolitical zone has similar patterns and in that sense the methods applied in the UCE project are compatible. We also hope that the book could serve as a very useful source of information for the international donor community, not only in raising the awareness about the unmet needs that refugee children are faced with in war situations, but also in providing information on the specific solutions to that problem that the UCE Project developed in the former Yugoslavia.

1.

Refugee Children Affected by the War on the Territory of Former Yugoslavia

1.1. Introduction

This part of the book will provide an idea of the *NEEDS* of the refugee children, tell us *HOW* the children became refugees, and *WHAT* the perspectives of children in refuge are.

1.2. The background of the refugee crisis in the region of former Yugoslavia

The refugee crisis was the consequence of war hostilities on the territory of former Yugoslavia: Croatia in 1991, and Bosnia-Herzegovina from 1992 till 1996. People fled their homes and countries either because they were directly forced to do so, or in fear of the fighting and destruction. Many also decided to seek refuge in neighbouring countries because they feared persecution, the main tool of ethnic cleansing that was systematically utilised by the warring parties in the region.

During this terrible war that raged in Europe - fifty years after the Second World War - millions of people became refugees or displaced persons. One of the tragic consequences of the horrifying conflict in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina was the separation of families whereby the children, separated from their parents, remained probably the most fragile element in the dramatic jigsaw of family destruction caused by war.

One third of the total refugee population were children from 0 till 18 years of age. Among

this child refugee population, the particular group with special and additional needs consists of unaccompanied refugee children, who had been separated from their parents and other family members by the war. According to statistical data from previous disasters, it was estimated that this group of refugee children could cover 2 to 5 % of the total child refugee population.

UCE experience and its data base have confirmed the estimation, strongly suggested in the book "Unaccompanied Children in Exile", Steinbock, Ressler, Boothby, Oxford University Press, 1988. Since 1993, the UCE Project has registered 5 000 unaccompanied children in 13 countries of exile - Croatia, Macedonia, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation in former Yugoslavia; the UK, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands, France, The Czech Republic and Austria in Europe; and, Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia, in Asia Minor and Asia.

1.3. How did refugee/internally displaced children become unaccompanied refugee children?

The migration/evacuation of the population was the direct consequence either of the fighting and destruction or of ethnic cleansing. Urban and rural settlements were subjected to shelling and bombing, which largely targeted the civilian population. People were also fleeing because of the fear of the threatened de-

struction. They fled, or were forced to flee, because of persecution - economic, religious and ethnic. Ethnic cleansing, in the form of direct violence, or economic and religious persecution, was the systemic strategy of the war - it was an effective tool in taking over more and more territory.

In mass or group or individual evacuations, children (from 0 to 18) participated in the total refugee population with 30%. Out of the total child population, 2 to 5% were unaccompanied refugee children (children without adequate parental care), or children from 0 till 18 years of age separated from both of their parents because of the war circumstances.

A large number of unaccompanied children were sent away by their parents. The majority of parents believed they were acting in the best interest of their children. The effort to save their physical lives was assessed to be the priority. In order to save their children, parents sent them out of the war zones. In the meanwhile, mothers stayed at home to look after family property and fathers were usually drafted by the respective sides in the conflict.

Children were also found unaccompanied because their parents were either missing or dead. These children were often directly exposed to the war operations and were often eyewitnesses to torture and killing. Their mental, and often their physical health were extremely vulnerable.

Although the types of experience and types of suffering that unaccompanied refugee children went through were different, they all had something in common. All unaccompanied refugee children share *THE TRAUMA OF SEPARATION* from their parents. *ALL* unaccompanied refugee minors have *SPECIAL* and additional *NEEDS*.

Most countries have developed special procedures for the registration of the refugee population that should determine the refugee status of all refugee groups. These procedures do not usually take into account the special situation and the special needs of unaccompanied minors. The UCE experience has once again confirmed this fact in the humanitarian history of the war disasters.

The following was unfortunately not a very typical example of one of parent's rationale for evacuating children. It happened at the very beginning of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina in May 1992. Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was under siege. Heavy shelling was directed at the city from the surrounding hills; the city was already in an advanced stage of devastation and many people had been killed. However, many still believed that 'this whole mess would soon be over and could not last more than a few weeks' - it lasted for the next 4 years! As a response to the emergency situation, the local Bosnia-Herzegovina NGO, "The First Children's Embassy" organised mass evacuation of children from Sarajevo - by planes and by buses.

"As a single mother of 2 daughters of 9 and 12, I had decided to leave Sarajevo, at a time when the city had already been under constant fire and shelling for weeks. I was sure that I wanted my daughters out of Sarajevo; I wanted them out of that hell. On top of that, I could no longer bear the horrible fear for their lives. Following this firm but difficult decision, I took my girls to the bus station where the row of buses was waiting for the potential passengers to take them out of the besieged city. There was an enormous mass of people at the bus station, parents and children trying to get on the buses. The local NGO "The First Children's Embassy", that had been established in Sarajevo the previous year, was in charge of the evacuation of mothers and children - by buses and by planes. The parents were desperately talking with the representatives of the NGO - "The First Children's Embassy" - asking about the transfer arrangements and the possibility of getting on the buses. I also made inquiries about the evacuation arrangements with the representative of the NGO, who happened to be a famous Sarajevo actor. I was told that due to the serious lack of buses in relation to the potential number of evacuees, the NGO has developed the following rules:

- small children up to 3 years of age were given priority. These children were to be accompanied by their mothers (fathers were

supposed to be drafted). All other children would be evacuated in the same buses, but without their parents accompanying them.

Once I received that information, I decided not to be separated from my daughters under any circumstances. Hence, I had to find some other way to leave Sarajevo together with my two daughters, but this time without the assistance of the NGO, "The First Children's Embassy". On the other hand, a number of parents made different decisions and were separated from their children. I left Sarajevo a few days later together with my two daughters, and we have been together ever since." (testimony of an eyewitness from Sarajevo)

1.4. Where are the refugees/unaccompanied refugee children living in refuge?

Since 1993 the UCE Project has identified 5 000 unaccompanied refugee minors in 13 countries of exile: in Croatia, Macedonia, Austria, The Czech Republic, France, the UK, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands, Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia.

Sharing and utilising UCE methodology for registration and documentation of unaccompanied refugee children from Bosnia-Herzegovina, since May 1994, the Save the Children Fund UK has registered and documented 3 500 unaccompanied refugee children from the region, on the territory of Serbia and Montenegro.

From October 1995 till November 1996, local social services in the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina registered and documented 1163 internally displaced unaccompanied children, through the facilitation of the UCE Project. Through eleven training sessions CSPI, as UNICEF implementing partner, has transferred its know-how to the social services of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The majority of unaccompanied refugee children registered by UCE, were situated in the neighbouring country to Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Croatia. There were 4409 or 86.5% of the total unaccompanied refugee minors registered in Croatia in 1994. The rest, thirteen percent (13%) of registered children were registered in 11¹ oth-

er countries of exile (UCE 1994 data base). Two thirds of registered unaccompanied refugee children were placed in private accommodation. The remainder was placed in hospitals, social institutions, and collective shelters. The majority of all interviewed children (87%) did not lose the contact with their parents. Of the remainder, 5.6% did not know the whereabouts of both of their parents while 7.4% did not know where one of their parents was.

The total figures for registered unaccompanied refugee children from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina do not fully correspond to the real distribution of the total refugee population from Bosnia-Herzegovina at that time. This is due to the fact that the Unaccompanied Children in Exile Project did not have access to a number of countries of exile of Bosnian and Croatian refugees, such as Germany, Spain, Portugal and Italy that could have had a reasonable number of unaccompanied refugee children from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. However, the sample is fully representative of the situation in Croatia where the UCE Project is still active.

As a neighbouring country to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia had one of the largest Bosnian refugee communities in exile, and was itself the first victim of the aggression on the territory of former Yugoslavia in 1991². In this respect, the presented situation analysis that is mainly focused on the situation in Croatia relevantly reflects the crisis in the region.

¹ The other countries of exile were: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, The Netherlands, United Kingdom, France, The Czech Republic, Austria, Turkey, Pakistan and Malaysia.

² According to the census from March 1991, following are statistical data (*Documentation 810, Zagreb, July 91*).

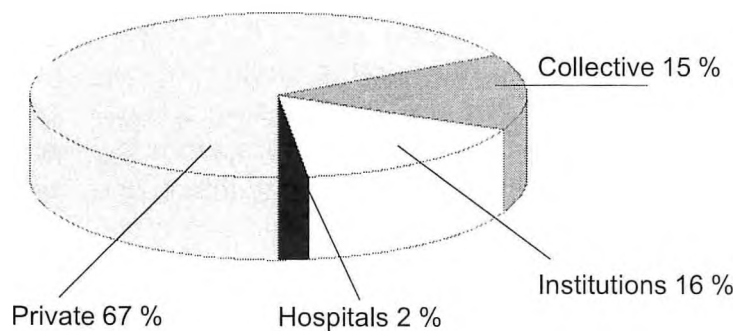
The total population of the former Yugoslavia consisting of 6 republics was 23 million 472 thousand, Croatia – 4 million and 760 thousand; Bosnia and Herzegovina – 4 million 366 thousand; Serbia – 9 million 722 thousand.

Accommodation of unaccompanied refugee minors

The 1994 UCE data base

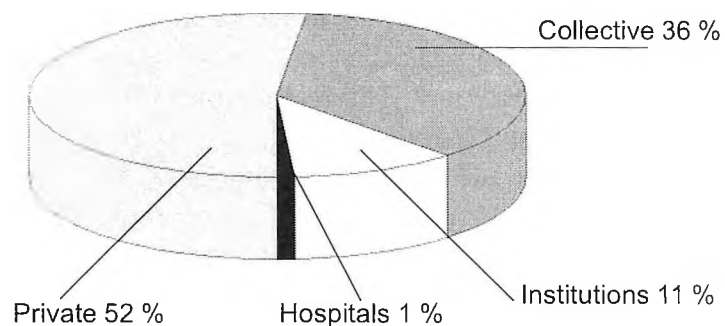
Accommodation in Croatia

Collective	15 %
Institutions	16 %
Hospitals	2 %
Private	67 %



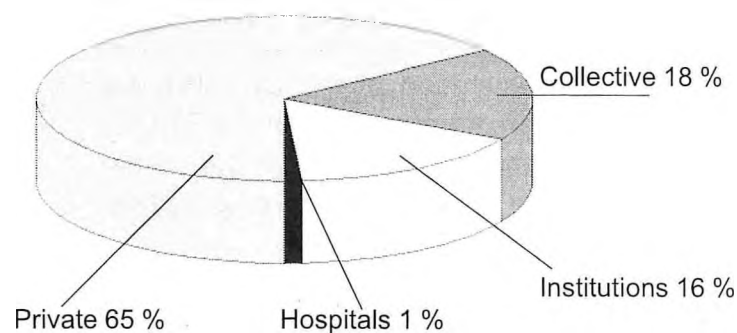
Accommodation - other countries

Collective	36 %
Institutions	11 %
Hospitals	1 %
Private	52 %



Accommodation - Total

Collective	18 %
Institutions	16 %
Hospitals	1 %
Private	65 %



Map of Europe

REFUGEES FLEEING FROM THE REGION OF FORMER YUGOSLAVIA



Accommodation of unaccompanied refugee minors
(UCE data base 1994)

2.

UCE Responding to the Needs of Unaccompanied Refugee Minors

2.1. Introduction

This part of the book will present the UCE Project response to the needs of unaccompanied refugee minors. It will tell us *WHAT* the UCE's Goals and Objectives were, *HOW* UCE tried to reach its goals, and *WHAT* was the character of the UCE's activities and services.

2.2. Background on UCE development

At the beginning of 1993, at the peak of active war hostilities raging in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the UCE (Unaccompanied Children in Exile) Project started up in Croatia as a NGO initiative to respond to the urgent needs for protection of unaccompanied refugee/displaced minors. The rationale of the UCE mission was to fill in the gaps and voids in legal and social protection of unaccompanied minors in countries of exile.

The UCE Project goals and objectives were: registering UAM's³, reuniting UAM's with their parents and close family members, reducing the period of family separation as much as possible and ensuring the best interim and durable care solutions under the circumstances.

The UCE Project is composed of a set of activities of legal, social and psycho-social character, that could be divided into 4 basic phases: Identification, Documentation, Tracing and Reunification. IDTR programs had already been

implemented in previous disasters such as those in Africa and Asia, in different environments with different methods and instruments. The UCE IDTR program is adjusted to the war situation in the European context.

Identification of unaccompanied refugee minors, as the refugee group with special needs, was implemented through the social mobilisation action focused on searching for and targeting unaccompanied refugee minors in a local community. Active search for children means that UCE social assistants were/are going out into the field, searching for the unaccompanied minors, and interviewing unaccompanied refugee minors in their home environment - host family, institution or collective shelter environment.

After being *identified*, the unaccompanied refugee children were *registered and documented*. Documentation - interviewing refugee minors - was an activity performed by professionals, who were either social workers or psychologists. Documentation was comprised of the case histories of the individual children. On the basis of individual case histories, the interviewers have developed individual plans for the children. The activity included the prioritisation of needs such as emergency needs, interim care needs and long term/durable needs.

Based on individual plans, social assistants were facilitating *tracing* of unaccompanied refugee children's parents or other family members, meeting the best interests of individual children. If *tracing* was not necessary, social

³ UAM - stands for *unaccompanied refugee minor*

assistants either re-established the contact between separated parents and children or started the process of family *reunification*. One of the goals of the UCE project is/was to reduce the period of family separation as much as possible. Reunification of children separated from their parents or other close family members because of the war circumstances seeks to ensure the child's right to a family, identity, name, ethnicity, culture and religion in the child's best interests. The UCE IDTR program is a set of child-focused activities, aiming to ensure care and protection of unaccompanied refugee minors in a European context.

In addition to the basic IDTR 4-phase program, over the four-year period UCE has succeeded in carrying out an ongoing follow-up of the unaccompanied refugee children situation in Croatia. The UCE data base has regularly been updated, at a minimum of twice a year.

In respect to the Identification, Documentation, Tracing and Family Reunification component of the UCE Program, UCE has closely collaborated with the respective governments in each of the countries of exile of Bosnian refugees, as well as with UNHCR and ICRC, as the leading international humanitarian agencies.

In May 1994⁴, UCE decided to share its know-how (questionnaires, guidelines, computer data base principles) with the Save the Children Fund UK, to expand the project implementation in Serbia and Montenegro.

⁴ The UCE Project was sponsored by US AID from 1993-1996. Since 1996 the UCE Project has been supported by Rädda Barnen.

From that period on, practically the same project was covering almost the entire region of former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia) and a number of countries of exile in Europe.

In productive co-operation with ICRC and UNHCR together with the respective governmental structures, UCE facilitated 600 family reunifications. Forty-nine percent (49%) of the total of reunited unaccompanied refugee minors were reunited with both of their parents, 23% were reunited only with mothers, 5% were reunited with fathers, 12% were reunited with grandparents, 2% were reunited with brothers and sisters, 9% were reunited with close family members.

Due to the co-operation with the Save the Children Fund UK based in Yugoslavia, during the period when communication was cut between Croatia and Yugoslavia, UCE - Save the Children Fund UK exchanged information via London, and as a result nearly 40 children were reunited with their families.

Implementation of UCE Project activities initiated establishing of a new local Croatian NGO, that could serve as the umbrella non-governmental organisation for the UCE Project, as well as for the new and additional project activities related to the social groups at risk. In 1995 professionals working on the UCE Project established the new local Croatian non-governmental organisation, the Centre for Social Policy Initiative - CSPI. In this respect a range of social welfare initiatives were developed as separate Project Activities.

* * *

One of the first new projects, for covering the unmet needs of unaccompanied refugee minors was the **Foster Care Program**⁵. The justification for organising the Foster Care Program for unaccompanied refugee children was/is based on the fact that Governmental Croat-

ian social services (having the mandate to organise and supervise the foster care program) have not included refugee children in the foster care program since the beginning of the war conflict on the territory of former Yugoslavia. By organising the foster care program for refugee children, the Center for Social Policy Initiatives - CSPI is filling the gap in the local social welfare system, as well as advocating and pro-

⁵ In 1994, 1995 and 1996, the Foster Care Program was supported by UNHCR, while in 1997 the Program was continued with the support of Caritas Netherlands

moting foster care program as an alternative to institutional care, which has direct systemic impact on the social welfare policy in Croatia.

The methodology used for the implementation of the Foster Care Program can be divided into 3 phases:

a) the identification of the potential beneficiaries - from the UCE data base - these children fall into two categories - children who already live in a host family (usually some relatives or friends of the child's family) but need additional and special support, or children who need to be placed with another family.

b) the diagnostic treatment of the already existing foster family and the search for, and diagnostic treatment of potential new foster families.

The reports on the two phases are analysed and the decision is based on these two reports.

c) the third phase includes the following activities

- regular (monthly) visits to foster families by CSPI/UCE social assistants and their assistance to children and care-giving families in local community integration, as well as assistance and support in family relations
- support in the decision-making process related to repatriation/family reunification
- regular monthly financial support to foster families
- meetings of foster parents, that act as interest support groups
- psychological evaluation of the unaccompanied refugee minors, focusing on children with special needs

In this respect, since 1994, the Center for Social Policy Initiatives has been implementing the Foster Care Program for refugee children.

The implementation of the Foster Care Program for refugee children serves the most vulnerable among the unaccompanied refugee children, and is a strong advocacy tool for lobbying for the alternative model of care and protection as against the dominant institutional model.

Since 1996, CSPI/UCE has developed the **INFO Center**⁶ for affected refugee families in Croatia, providing support and assistance related to the decision-making process in regard to the foreseen repatriation or local integration. In this respect the Center for Social Policy Initiatives is ensuring legal, psycho-social and health support for refugee families, applying different methods of counselling.

The INFO Centre functions as an open house ensuring services on a daily basis. Activities are performed by providing general information for the beneficiaries directly at the CSPI premises, or via telephone, fax or E-mail; through direct counselling on the spot, through field visits and regular support from CSPI assistants. By profession, the CSPI assistants in the INFO Centre program are social workers, psychologists, lawyers and paediatricians/nutritionists. In relation to the special needs of the refugee population, the INFO Center is organising individual and group counselling (cross-generation, gender and age-oriented) concerning mental health / psycho-social problems. Establishment of the interest support groups is aimed at strengthening the coping capacities of the beneficiaries.

The dissemination of information is supported by specially designed information materials, leaflets and brochures related to legal, health and psycho-social issues.

For the period of one year, in 1995/96, after the second population exodus from Srebrenica in Bosnia-Herzegovina, **CSPI** was invited by **UNICEF** as its **implementing partner** to facilitate the registration and documentation of unaccompanied internally displaced children, in order to support the process of family reunification. In this respect CSPI has trained social workers in social services in the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation in order to adopt the CSPI IDTR program as a daily routine in working with unaccompanied minors.

⁶ The INFO Center activities are supported by UNHCR

2.3. Lessons learnt

The socio-cultural component

Lessons learnt in the UCE project implementation have emphasised:

- the importance of recognising the specific local/national cultural component when the international assistance activity is in process,
- the importance of ensuring a prompt response, and
- the importance of professional involvement when protection of unaccompanied refugee minors is addressed in order to provide the most adequate answers for interim and long-term solutions that could meet the best interests of the child.

The fact that the war "happened" in the south east of Europe in a former communist country, made the approach and scenario of activities different from case studies that were known from before, from different demographic environments.

In each of the countries in which the UCE Project was implemented, applied activities were based on selective and respective demographic, cultural and socio-economic aspects of the social structure of the recipient country.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child - the CRC - had been ratified in all countries of UCE implementation. The treaty had even been ratified in the countries that had been part of former Yugoslavia and were involved in war - Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Many articles of the CRC are relevant to the situation of unaccompanied refugee minors, especially those touching on the issues of status, care and protection, tracing and reunification. During the implementation of the UCE Project the CRC was a strong advocacy tool for the rights of the children. The following articles were applied as the framework for UCE activities:

For example: Article 2 to justify the non-discrimination approach; Article 3 to stress the best interests of the child, the role of parents and the role of legal guardians; Article 7 to focus on the right to a name, nationality and the right to be cared for by the parents; Article 8 to

stress the preservation of identity; Article 10 to justify family reunification; Article 11 to stress the prevention of illicit transfer of children; Article 12 to stress the right of the child to be heard in proceedings affecting the child; Article 18 to stress and advocate the obligation of the State to prevent abuses by legal guardians; Article 20 to promote special protection of children deprived of family environment; Article 22 to promote protection and assistance for refugee and unaccompanied children and justify tracing; Article 24 to promote the right to health care; Article 26 to advocate the right to social security; Article 27 to promote the obligation of the State to assist parents/guardians to provide adequate standards of living to children; Article 28 to promote the right to education; Article 30 to promote the respect for culture, religion, language; Article 35 to advocate the prevention of abduction, sale and traffic of children; and Article 39 to advocate physical and psychological rehabilitation for child victims of war.

In spite of the war, governmental social services in Croatia and in Bosnia-Herzegovina were in place - with reduced human resources and often with reduced efficiency - but in place. In such a situation, actions had to be played by the rules. The role of social services, the role of the Government and NGO structures, the limits and advantages had to be recognised and respected.

The strategy and the consequent activities in the program implementation reflected the current legal and social structure in the respective host countries. Under these circumstances, the UCE Project addressed the respective governments concerning the need and the willingness of the national local authorities for additional support to the UCE Project in their own efforts of care and protection of unaccompanied refugee children.

In the Nordic countries, with high standards of social welfare, the UCE strategy was merely to complement the governmental efforts in the process of speeding up family reunification. UCE efforts were seeking to shorten the period of family separation as much as possible. In this respect, over a period of one year in Sweden in 1994, 50 unaccompanied refugee mi-

nors were registered and 30 family reunifications were performed.

In Croatia from 1993 till 1997, the spectrum of activities was very much different from the scale of activities in Sweden, and different from the activities in the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation during 1995 and 1996, where UCE was present as the UNICEF implementing partner training professionals in governmental social services.

Nonetheless, the approach and key patterns of the strategy were universal in all situations. UCE's mission, its strategy and applied activities were to fill the gaps and voids in the existing system of legal and social protection of unaccompanied refugee minors.

The strategy of partnership - sharing responsibilities and information with the respective governmental structures and ICRC and UNHCR - was successful in all countries of implementation: Croatia, Macedonia, the UK, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, France, Austria, The Czech Republic, and Turkey.

Relief and Development Component

At its inception the UCE Project had a strong emergency relief component. Registering and documenting of the unaccompanied refugee minors was recognised as an urgent need. After being registered, unaccompanied refugee minors became a visible group of refugees with special needs. In this respect, identification and registration of unaccompanied refugee minors served as a powerful preventive tool. Visibility, in some way, gave the unaccompanied refugee children an additional chance to avoid abuse.

Interviewing unaccompanied refugee minors provided space for planning for the children's future. It also opened an area for upgrading the skills and knowledge of local professionals in relation to the child protection issues.

Individual plans for unaccompanied refugee minors were developed for each and every child. The children's needs were prioritised and met accordingly in this respect:

a) urgent, emergency needs were expected to be met NOW. Urgent/emergency needs were focused on food, shelter, urgent health problems, serious psycho-social traumas;

b) interim care solutions were provided such as: establishing/maintaining of contact with parents and family members, tracing parents, appointing legal guardians and, in this respect, assisting local social services in Croatia in selection of suitable legal guardian figures, placing a child in the CSPI foster family care program, developing support groups for children and caregivers, facilitating individual and group/family counselling, developing a crisis intervention program for adolescents at risk;

c) long term/durable solutions; family reunification, repatriation, placing a child in the foster care program.

The emergency/relief as well as the developmental character of the project activities has influenced the design of the UCE network of project collaborators. The network of UCE collaborators was/is composed of professionals with an educational background in the social sciences (social workers, psychologists, sociologists, lawyers) preferably with work experience in the child welfare area. The emergency character meant that preference was given to collaborators who did not need basic information about the problem, but those who already had the knowledge and experience of it.

On the other hand, the upgrading of skills and knowledge of the project staff was a permanent goal. The developmental component was introduced through a series of planning and training workshops from the very start of the project.

The UCE Project mobilised local resources, seeking to ensure information in the local community related to the children's whereabouts and continually and actively advocating the rights of children - to a family, identity, ethnicity, participation.

Social mobilisation within the local community started with the question WHERE are the unaccompanied refugee children. With the information about potential whereabouts of unaccompanied minors, social assistants who

were trained to fill out the DBP questionnaire, started actively to search for the children. After identification of beneficiaries, the documentation phase was completed, and the planning phase commenced. The planning process identified the unmet needs of unaccompanied refugee children. To meet the unmet needs in local communities, the UCE social assistants were performing intensive local networking.

One of the side effects of the UCE activities was networking within the local community in order to cover the unmet needs of unaccompanied refugee children within that community. In this respect these activities benefited NGO development in Croatia.

On the other hand the UCE Project closely communicated with the governmental social services. UCE and the social services were sharing the confidential information about unaccompanied refugee minors. UCE assisted in

the preparatory work for the appointment of the legal guardians.

Management of the project activities was focused on maintaining and co-ordinating the newly established social system. The relationship between the central office, core team staff and branch offices reflected the diverse social roles within and outside the network.

The basic project "Unaccompanied Children in Exile" generated the other programs that the Centre for Social Policy Initiatives has implemented further on. These were/are the following projects; the Crisis Intervention Program, Foster Care Program - Specialised Foster Care Program, Transit Foster Care Program, Kinship Foster Care Program, and the INFO Centre as the support counselling centre for the refugee families.

3.

The Children's Response

3.1. Introduction

The following chapter focuses on the life stories of children who were separated from their parents or close family members, in towns and villages across war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina. These children were forced to flee their homes and their country, either because they were in direct fear for their lives or because of the threat of persecution - ethnic, religious and socio-economic.

The UCE Project structured a safety net for the support and the protection of the unaccompanied refugee children while they were in exile.

The selected children's stories reflect their situation in exile as well as the war atmosphere that engulfed the whole region of former Yugoslavia. The case histories are representative in the sense that they mirror the ethnic structure of the region; they reflect the diverse support activities that the UCE Project carried out, such as, for example, tracing missing parents and arranging family reunification; arranging foster care programs for refugee children; setting up a crisis intervention program for refugee adolescents at risk; planning models of psychosocial assistance and support.

Children have actively participated in the process of the development of this book. It is the joint effort of UCE collaborators and supporters and the unaccompanied refugee chil-

dren who were the beneficiaries of the UCE Project.

The book is trying to acquaint the reader with sections of Humankind's history at the end of the second millennium.

Children's Drawings



3.2. The Children's Stories

1. Sanja's Story

Sanja was registered in Croatia by the UCE Project in 1993 in Zagreb.

She came to Zagreb as a twelve year old girl from Northern Bosnia - today's Republika Srpska.

UCE initiated and supported the appointment of a legal guardian by the municipal Centre for Social Work, and Sanja's grandmother was appointed as her legal guardian. After the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) was contacted, a Red Cross message was forwarded to Sanja's mother who stayed on in Northern Bosnia-Herzegovina. At the same time UCE initiated the tracing process for Sanja's missing father with the ICRC.

Because of Sanja's serious health problems, the UCE Project has included Sanja as a beneficiary of the CSPI (Center for Social Policy Initiatives) Specialized Foster Care Program for refugee children with special needs, since 1995.

Related to Sanja's health problem, she was provided with nutritionist consultations and medical support.

Sanja and her grandmother respectively participate in the support groups for refugee adolescents and for the elderly within the CSPI Counselling/ INFO Centre. In addition, both Sanja and her grandmother are/were provided with individual therapy within the INFO Centre.

Sanja's story

(Sanja's story is written as directly narrated to the editor)

"I was born and lived in Northern Bosnia with my father and mother till I was twelve. My father was an electrical engineer and my mother a pharmacist. Just at the outbreak of war, the people were very tense; I remember the TV broadcasts continuously predicting a conflict. I did not understand it then as I understand it today; I was much more of a child at that time, than I am today. My parents were working and everything seemed more or less normal; my father's brother, my uncle, used to come to our place and he tried to persuade us to leave. My father did not want to listen to him, because he was a very naive person; he thought that nobody would do him any harm, since he never harmed anybody. They couldn't be persuaded, and things happened as they did.

My father was taken away in June 1992, they picked him up on the street. My parents are the "most unfortunate combination" - my father is ŠethnicĀ Croatian and my mother ŠethnicĀ Serbian. Had the situation been reversed - and my father a Serb - he would have been able to save the whole family. But, my

mother was helpless. I know that my father was detained in some of the camps, first in Kera-term and later on in Omarska.... After that I don't know what was happening, I don't know what happened to him, whether he is alive or dead. My mother is still in Bosnia, I think that she still works at the same pharmacy, but you know the situation there, she receives her pay every three months - practically as if she doesn't have a job at all. Now we can be in contact, because the telephone lines have been re-connected; she told me that she would call me for my birthday. She has a problem coming to Croatia, since she doesn't have a passport, and because of my health the doctors will not allow me to take such a strenuous trip, that would last a whole day. I have serious health problems with my kidneys, they are about to collapse, and therefore I cannot risk to take a trip and to get sick in some forsaken place. I live in Zagreb with my grandmother, my father's mother. My aunt, my father's sister, also lives in Zagreb. We live in the centre of town, across a park, and that is fantastic. I attend high school, just a 10 minute

walk from my home. I get along with my grandmother very well, but still she is 74, and our viewpoints differ on many things, an inter-generational clash exists between us. I have many friends, I am quite satisfied, I wouldn't go anywhere else, I would not like to return to Bosnia, I cannot imagine living in a smaller town than Zagreb, only possibly in a larger one.

After my father was taken away I lived on in my hometown for another year and a half. I finished the sixth grade of primary school, and then my mother found a way to transfer me through Belgrade and Hungary to Croatia. I do not know how my mother found the man, who organised the transfer, but I was not alone, there were a lot of other people who were transferred too. My aunt, uncle and my cousin waited for me at the Croatian border. CSPI assistants found my grandmother's address on a list, it was some 6 months after my arrival in Zagreb. At that time my father's brother, who had tried to persuade us to leave Northern Bosnia in time - had already emigrated to Australia. My mother and I talked a lot about my departure, for more than a month - I was well prepared and I knew where I was going and why, and that it had to be that way. At the time I still wanted to return, but now I don't know where it is better and safer for me. When my father was taken away my mother and grandfather asked for him everywhere, but all doors were closed for them.

Now I attend the third grade of high school; I have friends and I feel great. I am an "A" student and I don't let my health problems or anything else to get to me; I usually set high goals for myself; the higher the goal, the more I achieve.

My kidney problems started when I was 9; the cells that filter the blood are dying out - the system of perforated colanders - and my kidneys are collapsing. You just have to wait and then they put you on special machines for kidneys and then on the list for kidney transplantation. The physician, who founded the Children's Centre for Kidney Diseases, at the X Clinic in Zagreb, treats me. I can say that he is a very good physician. I also have to take special medications, that try to halt the dying out of those kidney cells and I take hormones that

regulate my metabolism and support the regeneration of the organism. The patients react differently to these medications; my creatinin level is 360, when it increases to 500-600, then I'll have to be on the kidney machine.

It is unbelievable how people - because of the war - forgot how they used to live before; before the war Bosnia was the World in miniature. I did not see when they took my father away, I only saw him once when they brought him home searching for his diskettes, because he was - an unbelievable stupidity - allegedly giving away data to the Croatian Army. He used to work at the Municipality in the Accountancy Department and he had a private firm with two or three other colleagues. They were the ones who actually plunged the knife into his back, they could have saved him with money. But, the money was dearer to them than my father.

It is hard for me to think about my father because I do not like to remember what has happened, but the fact is that I cannot forget it. I often wonder where he is now, what happened, whether he is alive somewhere - I wonder what he is doing at that moment. I would like to know what he is doing. There are people who claim that they know that a work camp exists. I hope - although it seems like Utopia - that he is alive.

I resemble my father in many ways, among others I am always an optimist, I never lose hope. For example, last year when I was on drug therapy, my doctor insisted that I stay at home in quarantine all the time while I was taking these immuno-suppressive drugs. I couldn't go to school for two months, and while all the other students had grades in all subjects, my columns were empty. I returned to school, and in spite of some malicious people, who hoped to see me having to take a special exam, I didn't allow anybody to see me crawling in the mud. I caught up with all my schoolwork and at the end I was an "A" student, although I missed 397 classes.

2. Darko's Story

Darko is an 11-year-old boy. Darko came to Zagreb to exile from Central Bosnia.

Now in the post-war period, his hometown is a town with a Bosniac Muslim majority, and an unfamiliar displaced family lives in Darko's apartment. This fact is the key reason why Darko is still a refugee outside his country of origin. He was registered by UCE in 1994 in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. At the initiative of the UCE Project, Darko's grandmother was appointed by the municipal social services as Darko's legal guardian.

Since 1995 Darko has been included in the CSPI Foster Care Program. The boy has benefited from individual psychological support. Darko's grandmother takes an active part in the support group for elderly people within the CSPI Counselling Centre.

Darko's story is based on the interview given to the editor.

According to the boy's grandmother, who is living with Darko in Zagreb, Darko's parents divorced while he was still a baby, not even a year old. "This marriage was simply a mistake, and they realised it very soon".

After the divorce the boy stayed with his mother. "My daughter and I had flats very near each other, so the boy spent a lot of time with me, actually more with me than with his mother. I used to take him to the kindergarten, and our relationship was a very close and warm one practically from the time of my grandson's birth".

Darko's grandmother used to be a teacher in their hometown. Before Darko's grandmother was retired she was the headmistress of the school. "Well, at the beginning of 1992, just after my retirement, serious changes started, foretelling the beginning of the war. Salaries were not paid out, food became scarce and, at the same time, everything became very expensive. My daughter and I agreed that we should try to take the boy away from this frightening and unknown future. We decided that she should stay in town to keep her job and the flat, and that I should take the boy and leave Bosnia."

Darko's grandmother and her daughter

planned that grandmother and the boy should move to Zagreb to a small flat that the family had bought before the war. The idea was that they would go away for a short period and that they would soon return to Bosnia, and their town, perhaps in 2 weeks, within a month at the latest, after the whole mess of war had been cleared up.

Although he knew that they were leaving, Darko's father did not try to help them or to persuade them to stay. One day the grandmother and Darko left the town with two small travelling bags, one full of Darko's toys, not anticipating that the bridge over the river Sava in the town of Orašje has been destroyed that day. This meant that they had to alter - in a completely unexpected way - their destination and their road to refuge. "Instead of in Croatia, we found ourselves in Serbia. My aunt and her daughter put us up in Belgrade, and I was doing everything I could to leave as soon as possible and to reach Zagreb. But Darko didn't have a passport and it was impossible to leave. In the meantime serious hostilities started in Bosnia and I knew nothing of the whereabouts of my daughter and son, nor could I get any information".

Grandmother and Darko stayed on for 3 months in Belgrade, leading a very hard life. Grandmother used to clean flats in order to get money for food and clothing for the boy, but she managed to find a kindergarten for him. After three months she managed to get a passport for the boy, but they still couldn't leave for Croatia. The grandmother knew that they had to leave soon, since the flat was too small for all of them and Darko started suffering from asthma. "I decided to leave for Montenegro, where relatives of my late husband, who was a Montenegrin, lived. These relatives are very good people, all living in a small village. We spent the whole summer in the village, but when autumn began, Darko started getting sick, and you couldn't reach a physician easily, since the

village is high up in the mountains. The relatives were very good to us, they helped us move to Podgorica (the capital of Montenegro) and helped me find a job in a shop. But my accent gave me away, and it wasn't pleasant at all. After 11 months of our moving around, my son managed to get in touch with me and finally we took off to Croatia through Hungary."

Darko says that he can hardly remember his departure from Bosnia, because he was "small" (only six years old), however he remembers that he saw "many soldiers" on the way to the border. He is not keen on remembering Serbia, because he did not like the kindergarten he had to go to "because Grandmother had to work so that we could have money for fruit and clothes". In Montenegro, Darko says, "it was much nicer, because we were in a village. There were a lot of fields and I could play, and I had a friend in the neighbourhood. We had a beautiful hunting dog and we fed him and he loved us very much."

The grandmother has tears in her eyes when she describes how the Croatian police "took them off" the train at the Croatian border, because they didn't have an entry visa for Croatia. "If I had not had the boy with me, I would have jumped into the river Drava right then. We no longer had any money and I didn't know where to go". As if a year and a half of exile for the boy and his grandmother had not been enough, they now had to spend five days waiting at the Croatian-Hungarian border. However, her son, who had reached Rijeka in the meantime, managed through some friends to get entrance visas for Marija and the boy, and they finally reached Zagreb (the capital of Croatia).

Meanwhile, because of the Croat - Bosniac Muslim conflict, Darko's mother Tanja had to leave their hometown and leave Bosnia. She went for Germany, found a job there and got married. Darko has regular contacts with his mother but does not want to go to Germany. Obviously wishing to forget the past, the boy likes to talk only about his life in Zagreb. He recollects: "I remember clearly when my grandmother and I walked into our little flat. I told her

that I was cold and hungry. I went to bed happily because I knew that we are finally in our own place, and that I would be able to play the next day as much as I wanted to, and that I would help my grandmother to clean and fix our little flat". Darko says that he doesn't want to return to Bosnia, he loves Zagreb, and their small but completely inadequate room, without a proper bathroom or kitchen. However, he calls it "my grandmother's and my apartment" - and he also insists that he is not a "Bosnian refugee", but that he is in Croatia in Zagreb in his "hometown/country".

Darko's father also survived the war but he does not have any contact with his son.

3. Katarina's Story

The next story is Katarina's. She came to Zagreb from the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina in April 1992.

Katarina was identified and registered by the UCE Project in 1994 as an unaccompanied minor in exile. The UCE Project initiated and supported the procedure for appointment of a legal guardian with the local social services.

Katarina was provided with UCE legal assistance concerning her rights to a pension after her late father. The UCE social assistants visited Katarina regularly, while she was staying in the family of her relatives, providing her with individual psychosocial support. The girl was provided with financial support for covering her medical expenses.

Katarina is a member of the support group for adolescents within the CSPI Counselling/INFO Centre.

Katarina's story is based on the interview with the editor.

Katarina used to live in the suburb of the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the new district in the city that has often been shown on many TV stations, as a part of Sarajevo that underwent frightful devastation. Katarina's parents died before the war, her mother when she was six and her father when she was thirteen. She lived with her aunt and uncle. Just before the attack on the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina her aunt and uncle went to another part of the city, and the part of the town where Katarina was left was soon cut off. Katarina spent the first two weeks practically all alone in her apartment. Persuaded to do so by her relatives from Zagreb and her two older brothers, who live in Germany, Katarina succeeded in leaving her hometown. "I packed only the most necessary clothes, since I truly believed that I was leaving my hometown for a couple of days and that the war could not last for long." Katarina reached Croatia by the last bus that crossed the bridge over the Sava River near Orasje, just prior to its destruction.

For four years Katarina lived with her relatives in Zagreb and when she started studying she moved to a student hostel. Today she lives

off a small pension inherited from her father and some modest financial support that she receives from her brothers in Germany - this is just enough to cover her basic living costs. In order to cover her other needs, she works part-time. After secondary education she continued her education at the Teacher's College and Study of Theology, as well.

"The theology classes and the UCE social assistants helped me very much in my recovery, since I was very down for a long time after I left my hometown. I started withdrawing into myself and stammering and I couldn't talk to anyone. I had a very bad relationship with my relatives in Zagreb. We just didn't understand each other". The UCE social assistants noted that Katarina was in a suicidal mood for a prolonged period. After the multiple psychological support, Katarina feels much better. "My best friend stayed in our hometown, she used to live in the apartment just across the street and we were like sisters. We swore that we would always take care of each other and stay in close contact. I worried very much about the fact that she was in the besieged city, in danger, maybe even dead, and I was powerless to help her. Thank God, today I know that she is alive, she even got married and has a baby, and like me, she is studying to become a teacher."

Katarina has a strong need to stress how much the UCE social assistants helped her. "I don't know what I would have done if I hadn't met Danijela Ša UCE social assistant/psychologist. I secretly called the office of the Center for Social Policy Initiatives, Project Unaccompanied Children in Exile, while I was still living with my relatives and Danijela came to visit me. Then I could talk to somebody and confide in somebody".

In the meanwhile, Katarina has adapted well to the University. She says that she loves what she studies, because she loves children very much, and maybe even because she lost her mother so early in her childhood. "I was only

six and a half years old when my mother died, but all the same, I remember her very well and I miss her very much."

"My brothers invited me to come to live in Germany, but I don't know the language and it would be hard for me to experience another change again. I feel good at the University. I have friends there, and I actually like Zagreb. I don't think any more about how I would like to

return to my hometown, but part of my heart is still there". Katarina has lost the apartment in her hometown, but she hopes that her brothers will get it back.

Katarina allowed us to publish one of her poems, that she wrote in Zagreb:

Katrina's poem in translation:

RETURN TO SARAJEVO

*In the morning I awaken in your wounds
Sarajevo, beloved city of mine,
for at night I flutter over your
mountains, the Miljacka, your brooks and buildings.*

*When will the moment come
when I feel your ground beneath my feet
and run with joy in my heart
into the clasp of your arms?*

*In my heart I cherish the hope
that I won't be a number on a list
but a Sarajevo girl, distraught of heart
who'll find repose at last in her home.*

(Katarina, 20)

4. Ivan's and Ana's Story

The following is the story of a brother and sister who live in exile, in a small village in Croatia.

Ivan and Ana Š. came to exile in Croatia from the small village in Northern Bosnia (now the territory of Republika Srpska, the eastern part of Bosnia-Herzegovina). The brother and sister have been in Croatia since October 1992. They have been living in the same village from the very beginning.

The children were identified and registered as unaccompanied minors in exile by the UCE Project in 1994 and the UCE Project initiated the appointment of legal guardians with the local social services.

Visiting them on a regular basis, the UCE social assistants were seeking to cover the needs of children as well as the basic needs of their care-givers. The family received individual psychosocial assistance, as well as support for clothes and food. The children were provided with legal assistance concerning their right to a pension after their late father.

The children were included in the CSPI Foster Care Program.

The UCE social assistants initiated specialised psychological treatment for the boy because of his special needs due to a prolonged suppression of emotions after the death of his parents.

The story of these children consists of the description of their situation, and it is taken from an interview with the aunt/care-giver and the children.

Ivan was born in 1981 as the sixth child in the Š. family and Ana is the youngest, the seventh child, born in 1986. Until 1992 the children lived in a small village in Northern Bosnia. In mid-June 1992 their parents died in their own home under tragic circumstances (there is no reliable data on their death, since even today it is a source of the children's trauma; we assume that the parents were killed by para-military forces). Ivan and Ana were not eyewitnesses to the tragic event, but they know a lot about it from their older sisters. Therefore, Ivan says, "The hardest moment was when we were leaving the

burnt-down house and our dead parents whom we didn't even bury". The younger Ana remembers: "They took away my father and mother and they didn't return them. That was THE DAY when the war started."

Their father used to work for a Slovenian company (Slovenia was the northern republic of the former Yugoslavia, and today is a sovereign country) to support his large family. Their mother was a housewife, illiterate, she took care of the children, grew vegetables in the garden and kept some cattle to cover the needs of the family.

Their Aunt Marija took over the care for the children after their parents were killed and their house burnt down. They all hid out in the woods for a certain period. In October 1992 they managed to escape to Croatia and there they found accommodation in a village, where they still live. The other members of the Š. family - the older sisters - managed to escape to Croatia, too, and in the meantime have started their own families. Their Aunt Marija took care of the three youngest siblings, Ivan, Ana and their older sister who came of age in 1997.

Aunt Marija became the children's legal guardian in Croatia, although she has eleven (11) of her own children. Ana and Ivan love her, and, in the assessment of the UCE social assistants, Marija takes good care of the children, "the same as if they were her own". Ivan therefore says that "he has the closest relationship with my sisters and my aunt", and Ana states that her "older sisters and my aunt" helped her the most.

Because of the extensive financial needs of the family, UCE social assistants did their best to help them: UCE managed to ensure winter holidays for the children through an Italian humanitarian organisation; through networking in the local NGO environment UCE social assistants managed to raise a donation for regular financial assistance for Ana and Ivan, enabling Marija to send them to school "properly"

- with books, notebooks and pencils. They also managed to get other types of humanitarian assistance to improve the living conditions of the very large family - two more rooms were built on to their house.

Ivan is a second-grade student of a technical high school in Osijek and Ana attends the fifth grade of elementary school in a small town 4 km away from the village where they found accommodation. During the summer Ana goes to school on foot or by bicycle and during the winter she travels to school by school bus. Ivan is a C student and Ana is a B student. It seems that Ivan has taken the family tragedy much harder, and he says that before going to sleep he always thinks about his "parents and the shooting". The psychologist reports that Ivan is introverted and a quiet boy, with deeply suppressed emotions. Ivan did not go through the needed grieving process for his parents, because of the danger to his own life. For a short period of time Ivan could not attend school because of insomnia and nightmares, that were evoking the scenes of the death of his parents. Ivan was burdened with serious suicidal thoughts. He is strongly attached to his aunt and does not want to change his present environment. He feels that he has been accepted well by the local community.

The extent to which Ivan and Ana have been affected by the war tragedy is best illustrated by their answer to the question concerning their future. When asked about their future Ana says: "I don't know what my future will be, but I don't think that it will be brilliant". They both say that they wish to return to Bosnia, using short formulations and no emotional stresses. It seems as if they feel an obligation to answer positively that they should like to go back to Bosnia-Herzegovina "if possible", although they have very painful memories about their past there. They talk about the "fear and loneliness" and the "destruction of the world". Although they do not say it openly, it seems that Bosnia primarily provokes a feeling of fear in them.

5. Suzana's Story

Suzana was born in 1980 in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Since 1992 Suzana has lived in exile, in the village of Nustar in Croatia.

Suzana was identified and registered as an unaccompanied minor in exile by the UCE Project in 1994. The UCE Project initiated the appointment of a legal guardian for special cases, for the period of separation from her parents. The girl received temporary financial assistance and assistance in clothing and food. Suzana was included in the CSPI Foster Care Program. She and her foster parents were provided with psychosocial support through the regular visits of the UCE social assistants. As she had difficulties with the curriculum at school, a tutor was provided to help Suzana catch up with her school work.

Suzana's story is based on an interview conducted by the editor.

Suzana has a younger brother Davor, who was born in 1983. As soon as her brother was born, their parents got divorced, and the father obtained custody of the girl while the mother was given custody of the boy. Suzana grew up with her father and his family and she very rarely saw her brother or her mother, since her mother remarried somewhere in Serbia. A couple of days before the war activities broke out Davor came to visit his father and sister and he could not return to his mother. As soon as the war started, the family left their home village in Bosnia-Herzegovina and settled down in Nustar in Croatia, where Suzana's uncle, her father's brother, lived. Suzana's father died after a serious illness in 1994, and the grandmother and grandfather took over the care of both Suzana and her brother Davor. The children were not entitled to a pension after their father's death and they lived off humanitarian aid and the help they received from their relatives and neighbours. Then the children received the news that their mother and stepfather were refugees in Vienna, Austria. However, in spite of the good news the children were not contacted or helped by their mother.

When Suzana was asked what she felt

when she was leaving their village in Bosnia, she replied, almost with poetical sadness: "I believed in another world". She does not want to remember her first encounter with the war. Suzana's destiny in exile in Croatia developed very dramatically, as if the falling apart of her family, the war, and their flight were not enough for this girl. After her father's death in 1994 her grandmother was appointed to be the legal guardian of both Suzana and her brother Davor.

In summer 1996, the children's grandparents returned to their home village in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to their destroyed family house, but Suzana and Davor could not go back with them, since they could not go to school there. Therefore, the family initiated a visit by the children to their mother. They both went to Vienna, Austria, and stayed there with their mother and her family. Unfortunately, their mother did not want to take care of both of her children. She took only the boy and Suzana had to return to Croatia to the village of Nustar. Suzana became depressed, but her uncle, her father's brother, decided to take over the care of the girl. Her uncle is a shoemaker, working in a factory, living on minimal wages in his house damaged by the war, with his wife and daughter. "When I am in school with my friends I forget everything for a moment", says Suzana, who is today a student of the third grade of secondary school, training to be a hairdresser. She earns pocket money by doing the hair of her neighbours, friends and relatives. She is thankful to her uncle and aunt, and she helps with the chores at home. Every summer she goes back to stay with her grandparents in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Thanks to the UCE Project, Suzana has taken part in a school excursion to Dubrovnik by the Adriatic Sea.

Suzana is always very happy to meet and talk with the UCE social assistants. She has no contact with her mother and brother, and, if

possible, avoids talking about them. When directly asked about them she answers briefly with tears in her eyes. Suzana's answers to the questions concerning her separation from her parents are short, and her only answer to the question as to what she felt when being separated was "sorrow". In exile, Suzana has developed the closest contact "with my peers", and she would return to Bosnia "only if I have no other choice, if I have to". In spite of the serious traumas - her parents, the war, leaving their home, the death of her father, the unfortunate emotional relationship with her mother - Suzana is, as a UCE social assistant has said: "a nice, modern girl, successful at school and in her work. She wants to help her grandparents and her uncle and brother. She is not scared of her future, because she believes in herself, she has quite high self-esteem".

6. Alen's Story

Alen came to exile in Zagreb, Croatia in 1992 from North West Bosnia-Herzegovina. He was born in 1985.

Alen was identified and registered in 1994 as an unaccompanied minor at the age of 9. The UCE Project initiated the appointment of a legal guardian for special cases, for the period of separation from his parents. The boy was given financial assistance and assistance in clothes.

Alen was included in the CSPI Foster Care Program for refugee children. His foster parents participate in the meetings of the foster parents support group. Together with the boy, they have been provided with health counselling services.

Alen's story is based on the interview conducted with him and his grandparents/foster parents.

Alen is the only child in the N. family that used to live in harmony in their hometown until the war started in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992.

Just before the war, the boy started going to school in his place of origin. He was well adjusted at school. He developed new friendships and it looked like the beginning of a happy childhood for Alen. The war started very dramatically. Alen describes it as: "I remember the alert sirens, the bombs falling near our building, going down to the shelter with our neighbours because mother was working and my father was drafted into the army". Soon after the general alert, mother packed up Alen and sent him away to safety - with her parents in Zagreb, Croatia. Alen says: "It was very hard for me to part from my mother and friends, and I didn't see my father, since he was on the front-line". Although Alen understood that he had to leave his parents, his town, school and his friends because of the war and general destruction, and that he had to live with his grandparents in exile in Croatia - his mother told him "you will soon be back with me and we will all be together again" - it was very hard for him to be separated from everything he loved, everything that was familiar to him.

Alen's grandparents live in a small apartment in one of the suburbs of Zagreb. Both of his grandparents are retired. They love Alen warmly and take good care of him.

His arrival in Zagreb completely changed the boy's life. He spent the first few days with his grandparents in the 14th-floor apartment, and as his grandparents describe those days "His eyes were often wandering along the horizon, trying to see his parents far away, in Bosnia-Herzegovina".

Alen soon started to go to school in Zagreb and he quickly developed new friendships there. He himself says that "starting school again, and meeting new friends and my new teacher" has been his best experience in exile. But, in moments of solitude, his mind often wanders to his father and his mother. Alen's mother was working in a hospital in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Sometimes she managed to call him by phone, but then he would feel very sad.

In exile Alen has developed the closest relationship with his grandparents. His grandfather helped him the most when he was trying - and succeeded - in getting in touch with his mother at the hospital through the International Red Cross. He received the information that his parents were alive!

Alen subsequently realized that he would be away from home for a longer period. The years passed. He was always an A student with merits, and his parents even managed to visit him a few times.

The war in Bosnia has ended, but Alen is still paying a high price for the separation from his parents. Since the war, his father has been without employment, and his mother had been mandatorily sent to the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina to do her residency in paediatrics. She barely manages to cover her accommodation expenses from her very low income in the capital.

The boy has actually no home to return to, and every night before sleep - still in exile - he thinks of an "urgent return to his parents".

In the meantime Alen turned 12, and he went through a series of difficult and ugly experiences. "My greatest wish is to wake up tomorrow and to find myself at home, as if all that I have been through had just been a nightmare".

7. Emina's and Indira's Story

The following is the story of two sisters who found themselves in exile in Croatia in 1992.

The sisters, Indira and Emina, were born in Central Bosnia. Indira was born in 1988 and Emina in 1989.

The girls were identified and registered in 1994 in Croatia as unaccompanied minors. The UCE Project initiated the appointment of their grandmother as their legal guardian. Both girls are included in the CSPI (Center for Social Policy Initiatives) Foster Care Program for refugee children.

The younger girl, who is suffering from epilepsy, was provided with special medical check-ups. The girls were also provided with support for special nutrition. The Foster Family received legal assistance concerning their refugee status.

The story is based on an interview with the children and the foster parents.

Indira and Emina are sisters who were born in Bosnia-Herzegovina in an ethnically mixed marriage i.e. the father is a Bosniac Muslim and the mother is a Croat. The girls remember the dramatic beginning of the war "we woke up in the middle of the night and heard an airplane flying very low, just above the roofs, and the breaking of windows and the tiles falling from the roof".

Because of the war circumstances the parents separated. The mother came with the girls to Croatia and the father stayed in Bosnia and joined the Bosnian Army. The parents separated because of their diverse ethnic backgrounds, firstly, because of the safety of the girls, but later on this became an emotional separation too. Their father started to live with another woman, and soon after they came to exile in Croatia, their mother left the girls and went to Germany as a refugee. The two girls were left with their grandparents, their mother's parents, who were also refugees in Croatia. The mother thought that it was in the best interests of the girls that they stay in Croatia with their grandparents. On the other hand, their mother thought - the girls' interpretation - that she had to leave for Germany in order to earn some money for the family. The grandmother remembers that "the girls

were crying when leaving their house in Bosnia". The girls told us: "we do not remember the separation from our father". The separation from their mother was not as dramatic, it was not "for good".

The UCE social assistants found the two girls in a very dramatic situation. They were living with their grandparents and a 17-year-old aunt in an old and very uncomfortable house. The health of all family members was endangered. The grandfather was suffering from a mental disorder, since he had spent a couple of months in a prison camp in Bosnia-Herzegovina and had been tortured there. Indira, the older girl, suffers from epilepsy and she often contracts infections and other different diseases. In spite of the circumstances, the girls attend school regularly. Their mother manages to send them some money from time to time, but it is far from sufficient to cover the needs of the family.

Under the circumstances, the UCE social assistants tried to support the reunification of the girls with their mother in Germany, as well as to establish contact with their father in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Some of those aims were met:

- Contact has been established with the father.
- The girls have regular phone contacts with their mother.
- The reunification with their mother is not feasible at the moment.
- The girls are very good students at school.
- Lately, the family's living conditions have been improved.

The girls say: "We wish to live with our mother, wherever she wants, Croatia, Germany or anywhere else".

"We do not remember any more what it was like in Bosnia", they say.

"We are not afraid of the future."

8. Ana's Story

Ana was born in Central Bosnia in 1980.

The girl was identified and registered as an unaccompanied minor in 1994 at the age of 14. CSPI initiated the appointment of her aunt as her legal guardian. She received financial support for purchasing books when starting secondary education. The girl was included in the CSPI Foster Care Program and she took an active part in the work of the psycho-social support group for adolescents at the CSPI INFO Center. In the framework of the CSPI INFO Center the physician took care of the health of the foster family through regular visits and consultations. Because of the difficulties that the girl had with the schoolwork, a tutor was engaged to help her out to improve her grades.

Ana was the second child in the M family in Austria where her parents were emigrant workers. Her birth brought great happiness to the M. family and their happiness was even greater when a third child, a son, was born.

The family was saving money to build a house in Bosnia-Herzegovina. They also planned to open the shop in their home village. They planned to return to Bosnia-Herzegovina as soon as possible. Ana's parents often traveled to Bosnia because they were very close to their parents and their home village. On one of these visits they left Ana and her sister with the grandparents, because they were planning to return soon. The girls stayed with their grandparents expecting that their parents and brother would soon be back to take them back to Austria. On their way to Bosnia their parents and their little brother were killed in a car accident just a couple of miles away from their home village. Ana was three years old at the time and she did not understand that the three coffins that arrived in the village were her mother, father and brother. She stayed on with her grandparents.

Ana started to go to school and it seemed that a beam of light was appearing in her young life. She remembers the sudden beginning of the war "the alert sirens, the first mortar shell and the escape into the shelter". The attacks

continued and Ana had to separate from her grandmother and her hometown and go to Zagreb to her aunt's place.

The girl comments on the departure: "It was very hard for me to leave the cemetery where my father, mother, brother and grandfather are buried".

Her aunt's family in Zagreb accepted the girl very well, and Ana soon adapted to their warm home and continued with her education. Her aunt often told Ana stories about her early childhood, and her late parents, whose memory was already starting to fade in Ana's mind. Ana slowly recuperated and became a diligent student at school, preparing herself for the job that her mother had been good at.

But a new tragedy struck Ana in this new family surrounding. After traumatic experiences during the war, her cousin committed suicide in the cellar of the family house. The entire family was deeply disturbed by this new tragedy. Ana's aunt was admitted to a psychiatric clinic. Soon after that, her uncle was diagnosed as suffering from lung cancer.

Ana had to move again, this time to her sick grandmother, who was also in exile in Croatia. The grandmother had been living alone. Ana had to start anew.

Ana takes care of her grandmother in her illness. Despite their poverty, her grandmother tries to fulfil Ana's modest wishes. Ana is a very good looking girl, determined and spirited, and her attitude does not reflect her very dramatic childhood. She claims that the persons who have helped her most in her life are her sister and her grandmother, and that she is not at all afraid of the future, since "nothing worst could happen that hasn't already happened".

9. Mirjana's story

Mirjana comes from Bosnia-Herzegovina. Today, she is 16 and she was registered as an unaccompanied minor in exile in Rijeka, Croatia in 1994.

The CSPI initiated the appointment of a legal guardian for her. Mirjana received temporary financial support and contacts were established with her school, with the appointment of a tutor to help her with the school work. The girl was included in the CSPI Foster Care Program and the CSPI assistants regularly visited the foster family to provide support for all of them. The CSPI psychologist helped the girl overcome her emotional crisis, which was provoked by her long separation from her parents and the very fast process of her maturing. Through regular contacts with the girl and the school, CSPI social assistants managed to help Mirjana to improve her grades and to develop a positive attitude towards studying. Mirjana's story is based on an interview with the CSPI social assistant.

At the beginning of the war, Mirjana, her twin sister Ana and her brother Bruno, who is one year older than the girls, were evacuated from Central Bosnia. The children were evacuated to Jadranovo, Croatia, where their parents had a summer house. Their grandparents were already at the summer house and they were waiting for the children to arrive.

Mirjana was about 10 at the time. She remembers the moment of their departure as "a moment of great sorrow, anxiety and powerlessness, tears were pouring. A moment of pain and fear". Today this sixteen-year-old girl remembers the time when she was separated from her parents in these words: "I was very sad and worried. I love my parents the most in the whole world".

The parents stayed on in their home town in Bosnia-Herzegovina in order to take care of their house and to defend it and their home town. They stayed there throughout the whole war. Today the parents visit their children and take them home during the school holidays, but they do not think that the time has come for the children's return, since the political situation is still unstable and the schools are ethnically separated.

In exile Mirjana and her siblings have developed a very close relationship with their grandparents and have done their best to be good students at school. Mirjana comments: "In a way our grandparents replaced our parents; they tried to give us everything we needed and they often comforted us, telling us that there is still hope for our return to our home town in Bosnia. I respect our grandparents and I am very grateful to them".

In 1996, after the death of the children's grandfather, the situation changed. Their grandmother's health deteriorated. The children had to start taking care of themselves. Their parents, who visit them from time to time, have noticed that the children have become very independent and that they have grown socially mature and responsible very early.

At the moment Mirjana, Ana and Bruno - and from time to time their grandmother - live in a rented apartment in Rijeka, where all three of the children attend school. They are all very good students and they have adapted well to the new social surrounding. The children and their grandmother, as well as the parents, live very modestly, all having one aim: a good education for all the children, and to keep the children away from ethnic intolerance.

Mirjana's response to the question concerning her future is: "I'm not a prophet, I can't foresee the future, but I hope for a future without war, illness, hunger and powerlessness. My personal future I imagine to be to have a successful education in order to become a good professional and a person of some influence". Those are the reflections of the sixteen-year-old Mirjana, a girl who has matured before her time and has been forced to take over the responsibilities of a grown-up person in very trying and difficult times. It is comforting that Mirjana still has childish fancies before going to sleep, such as "what is the weather going to be, what will happen at school, what's on TV the next day, when will the holidays start again, etc."

10. Mebrura's Story

Mebrura, born in 1983, came to Croatia from the territory that belongs today to Republika Srpska. The girl and her foster family are not yet able to return to their home village.

Mebrura was identified as an unaccompanied minor in 1994, and CSPI initiated the appointment of a legal guardian for her. Through regular visits the CSPI psychologist helped the girl to change her attitude towards herself and also to come to terms with the changed circumstances of life in exile (the older foster family, difficult financial situation, etc.). She received help with her school work in order to improve her grades in some subjects, and the foster family was given financial assistance for purchasing food and wood for heating. CSPI organised a visit to a physician by the entire foster family.

Mebrura was born in 1983 in a Bosniac Muslim family. When she was 5 years old her parents divorced and her mother was given custody of the child. Mebrura's mother very soon re-married, but her stepfather never accepted the idea of having a stepdaughter and very often openly expressed his animosity towards the little girl. He even physically abused her.

At the beginning of the war the family found refuge in Croatia. In this new situation the animosity of the stepfather increased, and Mebrura's mother, who did not want to get a divorce, left Mebrura with her aunt and she went with her husband to The Netherlands. Mebrura does not have her mother's address because her mother does not contact her at all. According to information obtained, the girl's father lives in Croatia as a refugee and he suffers from alcoholism. He has no interest in the child and maintains no contact with her.

Mebrura's aunt, who together with her husband took over the care for the girl, lives in a small town in Croatia, and Mebrura feels "at home" there. Her uncle found a job but because of their very low income the family lives very poor. Besides taking care of the girl, Mebrura's host family also takes care of the aunt's old and sick mother. At the beginning of their exile, they lived in a rented apartment. When they had exhausted their savings, they had to move to a collective shelter in barracks, where they live and cook in two rooms and they have one bathroom for the whole barrack.

It may seem surprising, but Mebrura points out the good side of her refugee life and says: "My life with my aunt and her family means that I lead a "normal" life, because in my own family I was constantly neglected and maltreated". Therefore the social assistants are trying to help the foster family and the girl to repatriate together. Reunification is considered impossible, not only because the girl was neglected by her parents, but also because Mebrura refuses to live again either with her mother or with her father. To think about her parents causes only pain for the girl, while Mebrura loves her foster parents and feels safe with them. Answering the two key questions concerning the person who had helped her most as a refugee and the person with whom she has the closest relationship, Mebrura's answer is short and clear: "my aunt".

Besides helping the family to prepare for repatriation, the CSPI assistants are trying to help Mebrura in a number of ways. The girl receives legal counselling concerning statutory and administrative issues, and psychological support for building up her self-esteem, since Mebrura is a very sensitive and emotionally highly vulnerable child. The social assistants are working on the prevention of possible conflicts between the foster parents and the girl, that is, manifestation of the adolescent crisis towards any authority.

Mebrura is in the eight grade of primary school and is not a very good student at the moment, although she passed most of her previous school years with very good grades. CSPI engaged tutors for two subjects for Mebrura to motivate the girl for further education. It is obvious that Mebrura is aware of her problem, since she says that before going to sleep she thinks about school.

In spite of everything, Mebrura is not afraid of her future and is generally an optimistic girl. She says, "I would like to study and to get a job and live in Bosnia. I certainly wish to return to my home town. This war brought me something good, because in my own family I was neglected and often beaten and my life with my aunt means that I am lucky enough to get to know a normal way of life".

11. Haso's Story

Haso came to Croatia from East Bosnia - today part of Republika Srpska. The twelve-year-old boy was registered as an unaccompanied minor in 1994 and CSPI initiated the appointment of a legal guardian for special cases. He received financial assistance for purchasing school books and the CSPI psychologist visited the boy regularly to help with his adaptation to the new surroundings, as well as to help the boy overcome his emotional crises that were provoked by the long separation from his mother and the impossibility of her visiting him. CSPI tried to assist the mother to get the necessary documents for a visit to her son. The boy received assistance with his school work to improve his grades and CSPI helped him with legal advice when the new registration was in process.

Before the war, Haso lived in a small town in Bosnia with his mother, grandmother and aunts. Since his home town was one of the first tragic places where ethnic cleansing took place at the very beginning of the war, the seven-year-old Haso escaped with his Aunt Azra and her family to a small village in Istria. "It was very hard for me to leave behind my grandmother, mother, the house, our garden, fruit trees, toys and my dog Lily", comments Haso when asked about his departure from his home town. Some time later his mother escaped to Austria and his grandmother and other aunts took refuge in a village near Tuzla. His father, who left the family before the war, escaped with his new family to Switzerland. Haso remembers the separation from his mother as a very traumatic experience: "We were saying goodbye in the bus, and I didn't want to let go of my mother, my aunt took me away and said that we have to leave. My Mom was saying "be a good boy and do not forget me".

Haso had difficulties in adapting to his new environment and to the school. "When I started going to school nobody liked me, I talked differently and I was from Bosnia, and at the time Croats and Bosniacs were in conflict. Now it is better, we are friends and today I got a new school bag from them", comments Haso on his

first school days. Haso developed reading difficulties and this has had an impact on his school work and the formation of his negative attitude towards learning. Because of the numerous restrictions concerning the entrance of refugees into Croatia, his mother could not visit him, but she regularly sent financial support for Haso and his aunt Azra, as well as the rest of the family that was living near Tuzla. Haso's father contacted him only sporadically.

Haso has already been a refugee in Istria for five years and is now in the fifth grade at school. "My aunt helped me the most, but also my teacher Jasna, who always told me to be courageous and to endure. I also have friends - Dragan, Damir and Ana. They helped me a lot because they played with me, and Drazen helped me because he shared everything he had with me. I am very attached to the dog Kruzy and now I have my own dog Bony", says Haso, describing his world. Thanks to the very good co-operation with the school and its respect for his problems, the boy is taking small steps towards progress in his studies. He also receives support to overcome his reading difficulties.

Haso sees his future in his home town. "The war will stop, and the people will live in peace. I will grow up and become a dredge driver (power shovel, excavator driver). I might have children of my own" says Haso. But his optimistic thinking is still mixed with fear that the "war might start again".

3.3. Stories of Parents Searching for Their Lost Children

Introduction

Almost from the very beginning of the UCE Project implementation, when the interviews with unaccompanied refugee minors started in refugee camps, parents who had lost contact with their children started to approach the Project. Soon, as this new need for tracing of children emerged, UCE staff designed special instruments/questionnaires TO RESPOND TO THE NEW NEED - tracing of missing children.

The following stories have been selected from among the 200 requests for searching for missing refugee children.

1. A Young Father's Story

One day, a young father looking like an adolescent himself, came to the CSPI (Center for Social Policy Initiatives) office with the request to help him locate his son and to be reunited with his child.

The young father's story is very unusual:

"After a few months of looking in vain for assistance from different international organisations and agencies, I came to the CSPI office with the request that they help me to be reunited with my child.

My wife and I were a young couple, and in 1992 we had a baby.

When the shelling of Sarajevo started my wife and I decided that she should take the two-month-old baby out of town. She left for Belgrade, since she was a Serb and I stayed on in Sarajevo as I am a Croat.

My wife stayed in Belgrade with some relatives, but after some time she moved to an institution for single mothers with children. One day she left the institution, she actually disappeared and left the child alone in the institution.

I did not have any news about either of them for nearly 3 years. Suddenly after 3 years I heard from a relative that my boy was in an orphanage in Belgrade, Serbia. At the same time I got the information from the police from a foreign country that my wife had died under strange circumstances.

By that time I was out of Sarajevo and was trying to continue my studies in Zagreb. Upon receiving the news about my boy I decided to find him and to get him back.

The CSPI Agency (Center for Social Policy Initiatives) in cooperation with SCF UK - Belgrade (Save the Children Fund, United Kingdom), based in Belgrade, Serbia, managed to get in contact with the orphanage and after a couple of months needed for the proper administrative procedure and the preparation of the child, I was able to return my child. The first meeting with my son was arranged in Hungary. My boy was transferred from Belgrade to Hungary by UNHCR and he was escorted by a social worker from the orphanage. I arrived at the same place with the CSPI assistant.

There, in a foreign country, between borders, I finally met my son. I was amazed and surprised and quite frightened about the possible relationship with my son. The two-month-old baby had grown into a fine 4-year-old boy with big blue eyes looking up to me, scared and shy. It is hard to describe my emotions. I was introduced to my son and bit by bit he came up to me, took my hand and did not let it go for the next couple of days.

In Zagreb, everything was new to my son and it all frightened him, since he had lived in an orphanage for over three years. In the evening he did not want to take off his clothes, to go to bed, to sleep. He was a child full of anxiety and pain. It was a very hard time for both of us. Only when he realised that I would not disappear when the lights were turned off did his tensions decrease, and gradually he started to sleep again. He did not want to part from me for a single second. Slowly he got to

know my friends and he started to be more relaxed.

My parents help me with the upbringing of my boy, since I am still a student at the University in Zagreb. At the moment my boy is with my parents in Sarajevo. He has continuous support from a psychologist and a specialist for speech disabilities. My son attends kindergarten and he always keeps asking about me. We

are in daily telephone contact. He knows about the death of his mother, but he never mentions the period spent in the orphanage in Belgrade.

Today my son is a happy and lively child. He is an emotional child and demands a lot of attention and love. The two of us are a family. Soon I will graduate and I hope to be able to build up a good future for us."

2. Reunification of Amila With Her Father

During the Spring of 1994 the father of a 5-year-old girl came to the office of the UCE Project in Zagreb, to ask for assistance in finding and evacuating his daughter from Gorazde, the Bosnia-Herzegovina Federation. This was the time when Gorazde was under siege and it was very hard to establish any kind of communication with the besieged city.

The father of the girl worked for a Bosnian company in Libya, and he had left Gorazde, and his wife and daughter, just before the war. When the war started the employees of the company were transferred to Croatia. Since Gorazde was under siege the father lost contact with his family. Through ICRC messages he received the information that his wife, the mother of the girl, had left Gorazde for an unknown destination, and that his mother had died. By sending additional messages he located his child. The child was taken care of by a completely unknown family in the city under siege. This family maintained contact with the father of the child through ICRC messages.

Because of the war circumstances and difficulties with communications, security reasons, etc., it took nearly 9 months to evacuate the child from Gorazde to Zagreb, Croatia. During that time the father waited for the child to arrive, he needed constant support, which he received from the UCE social assistants. Besides

waiting for the child he was focused on finding his wife. He had some information that she was in Slovenia with another man. He even tried to reach her, and although he did not have a visa he tried to cross the border, but was returned to Croatia. So, he gave up this search and waited patiently for the child to arrive.

When the time came (February 1995), one of the social assistants went to wait for the Red Cross buses that were transferring refugees from Bosnia, but the father was late. The CSPI social assistant picked up the girl and took her to the office and after some twenty minutes, the father arrived. When we asked the girl sitting patiently in a chair what she was waiting for, she turned her big brown eyes calmly towards us and said: "Well, for my dad, of course". The girl knew her father only from the photographs that she had seen at her late grandmothers' place, since she was a baby when they last were together. The father was surprised to see that his little baby has grown up into an open and pretty 5-year-old girl with enormous brown eyes looking out at the world with interest. Father and daughter were accommodated in a refugee camp and soon they were transferred to a third country.

3. A Reunification With a Father in Sweden That Did Not Take Place

At the end of July 95, the UCE Project was contacted by UNHCR in regard to the arrival to Zagreb of a 16-year-old boy (of Bosniac Muslim origin) who was in need of social and legal protection, as unaccompanied refugee minor. A friend of the boy's grandfather offered his help only for a day or two, but no longer. That was why the UNHCR contacted the UCE Project.

CSPI accommodated the boy in transit foster care placement, and provided him with the needed psychosocial support. In relation to legal protection, local social services were addressed to appoint a legal guardian for special cases (for the purpose of getting a passport and a visa and other needed documents). The plan was to reunite the boy with his father in Sweden.

Somehow the boy's arrival to refuge in Zagreb was not a complete surprise for the UCE Project. Actually, there had been an official request in August 1994 from Sweden from the boy's father for family reunification. At that time the boy was living in Banja Luka, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Republika Srpska. The boy's father did not have accurate information concerning the whereabouts of the boy; he just assumed that his son might be living at the old address in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Unfortunately the necessary steps for the family reunification were not feasible, since the parents were divorced and the mother had the custody of the children (the son and a daughter). The Swedish authorities requested the official document related to the custody of the boy. The situation on the other side in Banja Luka was very confused and the mother was too scared to initiate the official procedure related to changing of the custody of the boy. The boy was actually hiding around Banja Luka (because of fear of his being drafted into the Serbian army, fear for his life, fear of prosecution), and the mother was also hiding her daughter.

In summer 1995, the mother found transport for the boy to leave Banja Luka. During the trip from Banja Luka to Zagreb, that lasted 30 hours (the distance is less than a 100 miles), the boy acted as if he was deaf and mute. He experienced extreme fear since the bus had to pass through the Serb-held territories, and he was travelling with unknown people.

After the boy's arrival to refuge in Zagreb, it became clear that the foreseen reunification with his father in Sweden would not be feasible nor in the best interest of the child. WHY? The boy claimed that his mother and sister were also planning to come to refuge in Zagreb, Croatia, in due time, when the war circumstances would allow them to travel to Zagreb. In the meantime UCE social assistants had established a warm and trustful contact with the boy. He was strong and quite tall for a 16-year-old. He told stories about his life back in Banja Luka, and he smiled. He even smiled when describing the situation in school where he was being abused as a Muslim boy by his own school-mates; he described his confusion and said that he did not understand why he was abused on an ethnic basis. What had suddenly happened?

In his Muslim neighbourhood people had installed home alarms, and neighbours were trying to protect each other. He told us how his sister, who was a year younger, had had a nervous breakdown, as a consequence of her mother hiding her in the house for her protection and not letting her out for months. But his transportation to refuge was the priority. His mother was planning for months how to send him to Croatia, and how to save him.

After a few months, his mother and sister succeeded in leaving Banja Luka and coming to Zagreb. Immediately upon their arrival in Zagreb, they contacted ICRC - the International Committee of the Red Cross - and started looking for the boy. Since CSPI has established a very efficient cooperation with ICRC, the mother found her son the next day. With the help of the UCE assistants the family was placed in a refugee camp in Varazdin, North Croatia. The family planned to leave for a third country. In this regard, the UCE Project helped the family to contact IRC- International Rescue Committee (USA) - the resettlement office for a potential resettlement in the USA.

The family left for the USA in 1996. The UCE Project and its social assistants have received a letter from the boy informing his friends at the UCE Project about their new life in a new country.

ZDRAVO DRAGI MOJI PRIJATELJI

Evo pošto sam se malo privikao na ovu novu sredinu i dok sam se malo snašao uzeo da vam se javim. Ja i moja mama smo dobro i dobro se snalazimo sa engleskim jezikom. Mama je posla u školu na učenje jezika i dobila je posao u jednom velikom i jako lijepom hotelu. Ja ću poći 26.3.96 u školu u 10 razred. Još smo smješteni u zasedničkom apartmanu sa tri porođice iz Bosne. Bosanaca ima jako mnogo i još uvijek dolaze. Klima se jako lijepa zime nema nikad pa još neznam kako ću izbrisati one naše lijepe zime, proljeća i jeseni. Moja sestra se udala u Varazdinu i kad se već na moćićemo još poslati garantno pismo da nam dođu. Nedostaju mi mnogo i tramvaji na koje sam se navikao u lijepom Zagrebu. Sve u svemu ipak se nismo pokajali što smo pošli u Ameriku, jedino što mi vi moji prijatelji Veronika, Tibore, Danijela i Tamara mnogo nedostajete i tješi me mnogo to što sam u vama imao dobre prijatelje i što se nadam da ćete i dalje biti. Eto sad toliko od mene i javite se i vi kad budete mogli. Moja majka vas mnogo sve pozdravlja.

3.4. Original Children's Letters

The translation of the letter that the boy wrote to the UCE staff in Zagreb, after he and his mother resettled in Texas, USA.

Hi, my dear friends

After I got used a bit to the new surroundings and when I learnt my way around a bit, I took some time to write. I and my mother are well and I get along with the English language quite well. My mom started going to a language school and she got a job in a big and nice hotel. In March I will start going to school, in the tenth grade. We are still accommodated in a joint apartment with three other families from Bosnia. There are a lot of Bosnians here and they are still arriving. The climate is very nice, winter does not exist, therefore, I still don't know how I will erase our beautiful winters, springs and falls. My sister got married in Croatia, and as soon as her papers are finished we can send her a guarantee letter, so that they can come over. I miss also very much the trams, to which I got so used in the beautiful Zagreb. To cut the story short, we never regretted that we came to America, I only miss you very much my dear friends and I only find consolation that I have had such good friends as you and I hope that you will stay my friends. This is all from me for the time being, please write when you can. My mother sends her greetings to all of you. I, who am thinking often of you, am sending special greetings and do receive warm Texas greetings from me.

Write, chiao !!

1.

MOJ ŽIVOT U ZENICI HRVASKOJ

Snježana i Danijela Janković.

Ja i moja sestra Danijela živili smo roditelja mamom Ljiljanom, i tatom Markom u Zenici. Jednog dana počeo je rat tata je oostao, mama je rekla: da je otišao na posao i više se nikad nije javio. Živili smo kao gostujući u jednoj srpskoj kući. Te su gađe otišle i mi smo ostali tu. Kada su došli izbjeglice iz jaja onda su nas istjerali iz te kuće. Onda ja, mama i moja sestra otišli smo u kabinjeru to je bila njihina kesojeza samo je bila 4, sa kadorata. Tu je bilo bez kupatila, tu smo oživjeli i išli u školu ja sam ista u 1 razred a moja sestra 2 razred osnovne škole. Imale smo po jednu olovku i pješčanicu jer smo išli 7 dana u školu a roditelji su nam izdali olovku, granata, pucnjavu, i avijona. koji su letjeli na nebu. Jednog dana u moj razred došla je neka bula (muslimanka) ona mi je rekla kako se treba pozdravljati ja sam rekla da sam hrvatica, i da se tako ne znam pozdravljati.

Snježana's and Danijela's Letter

Translation of the letter of two unaccompanied refugee girls about their life in Bosnia and Herzegovina, before they and their relatives have found refuge in Croatia

The translation reflects the original letter and respects the irregular grammar and sequence of tenses.

MY LIFE IN ZENICA AND CROATIA

I and my sister Danijela lived with our parents, our Mummy, Ljiljana, and our Daddy, Slavko, in Zenica. One day war started Daddy - disappeared, Mummy said that he had gone to work and he never appeared again. We lived in a room in a Serbian house. Then the owners left and we stayed here. When the refugees from Jajce came, they drove us out of the house. Then I, Mummy and my sister went to a studio flat, it was my uncle's studio flat, only four meters by four. It had no bathroom, we lived there and went to school I went to the first grade and my sister to the second grade of elementary school. We had one pencil and notebook each because we went 7 days to school and 10 days we did not go because of the shelling, the shooting and planes that flew in the sky. One day a *bula* (Muslim woman) came to the class and told me how I had to greet someone and I said that I was a Croatian girl and that I didn't know how to greet someone in a Muslim way.

Then I came home and started telling Mummy what had happened at school. Mummy told me to keep quiet and say nothing about it. From then on I lost all our friends when they knew what we were called. And we are called Snježana and Danijela. When I came home I began to talk about what the children had told me and that they were running away from me. Mummy told me that we shouldn't say each other's name. After that Mummy was ill and sent us to see grandmother Anica, to have a bath and she didn't have electricity, not only her, but the whole area. Grandmother was sorry she couldn't give us a bath and she heated up the fire in some bucket or other. When we had our bath, we couldn't dry our hair because there was no electricity. Grandmother put headscarves round our heads and told us to hurry

up and that she would call if we came. We set off home with our headscarves tied up held each other's hands. We met a *bula* and she gave us some gum. We went on away from her, and she stopped us again and asked us what our names were and we said we were called Danijela and Snježana. She said that she had made a mistake that she thought we were little Muslim girls, because we had scarves on our heads. We asked Mummy why we had nothing to eat, and Mummy said that it was a state of war. Mummy could not go anywhere because she was ill. While I stayed near Mummy, grandmother Anica and my older sister Danijela went round the markets selling valuable things for a piece of bread. We gave our stereo, telephone, television and carpet for a kilo or two of flour. Mummy told us to eat, and we asked her why she didn't eat when we knew she was sick. It was night, Mummy was very sick, she didn't have the medicines she needed. So we called in the neighbour who lived near Grandmother's place. Could he take Mummy to the hospital – emergency ward. Then Uncle somehow or other by some official way ran away to Croatia. He told Grandmother and Aunt that if he found a job and a place that we should come. I, Mummy, my sister, grandmother, aunt, set off together to the Republic of Croatia where our uncle Marco was. We came to Croatia in 1994 in the twelfth month - December. We lived in B. for 3 months. It was expensive there, and we found a place to live in Kariski put. When I came to Croatia there was electricity, water, food, there was no shooting thank God. Here I got a new life, new friends and I went to school and I had a teacher Mira Sertic, and my sister Maria Mirković. Who helped us in everything here I went to school 2 and a half months. I went to the 3rd grade of Srdoci Elementary School. I came home and the next day I had to go and get the

2.

Čimdo sam došla kući i počela
 mami pričati ono što je se zbilo u školi.
 Mama mi je rekla da sutim i da
 ništa ne govorim o tome. Od tada
 sam izgubila sve prijatelje kćerka
 su znale kako se zovem. A zovem
 se Injezana i Danjilu. Kada sam
 došla kući počela sam pričati o onome
 što su mi pričala susedica i da
 bijež od mene. Mama mi je rekla da
 jednoj drugoj ne spominjemo ime. Od
 tada je mama bila bolesna i slala
 nas kod lake Anice da se okupamo i
 ona nije imala struje, nije sama.
 ona je cijelo naselje. Baka je bila
 žao da nas ne okupa pa je ugrijala
 vodu u nekoj kanti. Tada smo se
 okupale nji nam mogla osušiti kosu
 jer nije bilo struje. Baka nas je
 pozvala maramama i rekla nam
 da se poturimo, da će ona vratiti
 jomo li mi dođe. Mi smo krenule.
 domaća sa mehanikom maramama i
 držale se za ruke. Kupeli smo jednu
 bulu (muslimanke) i dala nam
 svake. Krenule smo dalje od nje i
 ona nas je još jednom zaustavila i pitala

3.

kako se zveemo mi smo rekli da se zveemo Danijela i Inijana. Ona je rekla da je se razvukla misleći da smo mi mali muslimani, jer smo bile vezane maromama. Pitali smo mameu zašto nemamo jesti a mama reče da je ratno stanje. Mama nije mogla nigdje ići jer je bila bolesna. Tok sam ja bila kraj mame. Baka Anica i starija sestra Danijela išli su po tržnicama prodavati vrijedne stvari za komod kruha. Dali smo liniju, telefon, televiziju i tepih za 10 kila brašna. Mama je rekla da jedemo a mi smo pitali zašto ona ne jede znajući da je bolesna. Bila je noć mama je bila jako bolesna nije imala lijekova koji joj trebaju. Pa smo ozvali susjeda koji je stanovala kraj bakinog stana. Da li može odvesti mameu u bolnicu da joj muži pruži pomoć. Ona je iako nekako službenim putem dobijala iz Hrvatske. On je rekao lako i lako ako nađe stan i posao da i mi dođemo. Ja, mama, sestra, baka, uina krenuli smo zajedno u Republiku Hrvatsku gdje je bio kao iko Marko. Došli smo u Hrvatsku 1994 g. 12 mjesec prosinac

4.

stanovali u Bilićima 3 mjeseca. Tu nam je bilo skup stan pa smo našli stan u Turškom putu. Ekala sam došla u Gmasku bilo je struje, vode, hrane nije bilo kucnjave krata Bogu. Tu sam postigla novi život, nove prijatelje i tu sam išla u školu i imala sam učiteljicu Miru Lertić, a moja sestra Maria Mirković. Tkoje su nam u svemu pomogle tu sam išla u školu 2 i pol mjeseca. Ja sam išla 2 razred, a moja sestra Danijela išla 3 razred "Prve škole", "Golci". Došla sam kući i sutra dan sam trebala ići po knjižicu to je bilo 16.6. Tada sam rekla mami da ja i sestra trebamo donesti 2 kolčića, a moja mamo je samo sutjela. Ja sam bilo došadna pa je laka rekla da će napraviti kolčića. Maria je otišla rano spavati, laka je otišla k njoj i rekla laka: zašto je otišla tako rano, a ona je rekla da se hoće odmoriti da je sutra novi dan. Spavala je s njom moja starija sestra Danijela, a ja i moja laka Anica spavale u drugoj sobi. Oko 3 sata u noć moja sestra je došla ispred vrata i rekla laki

ona uplašena da je mām^u
mr^{la}, a mama se nije oz^{vo}la.

Baka je rekla čekaj to si
sanjala otišla je u so^{lu}. Kada
je došla u so^{lu} mama je bila
mrtva. Mi nismo ništa
razumjele koga smo izgubile.

Jedna susjeda koja ovela nas
je kod s^{le}. Mi se nikad ni^{mo}
ratiti u BiH niti imamo

kome. Tu smo postigle škole
i prijateljstvo. Tu je mama
sahranjena i nikada se nećemo
ratiti. Izgubila sam mamu

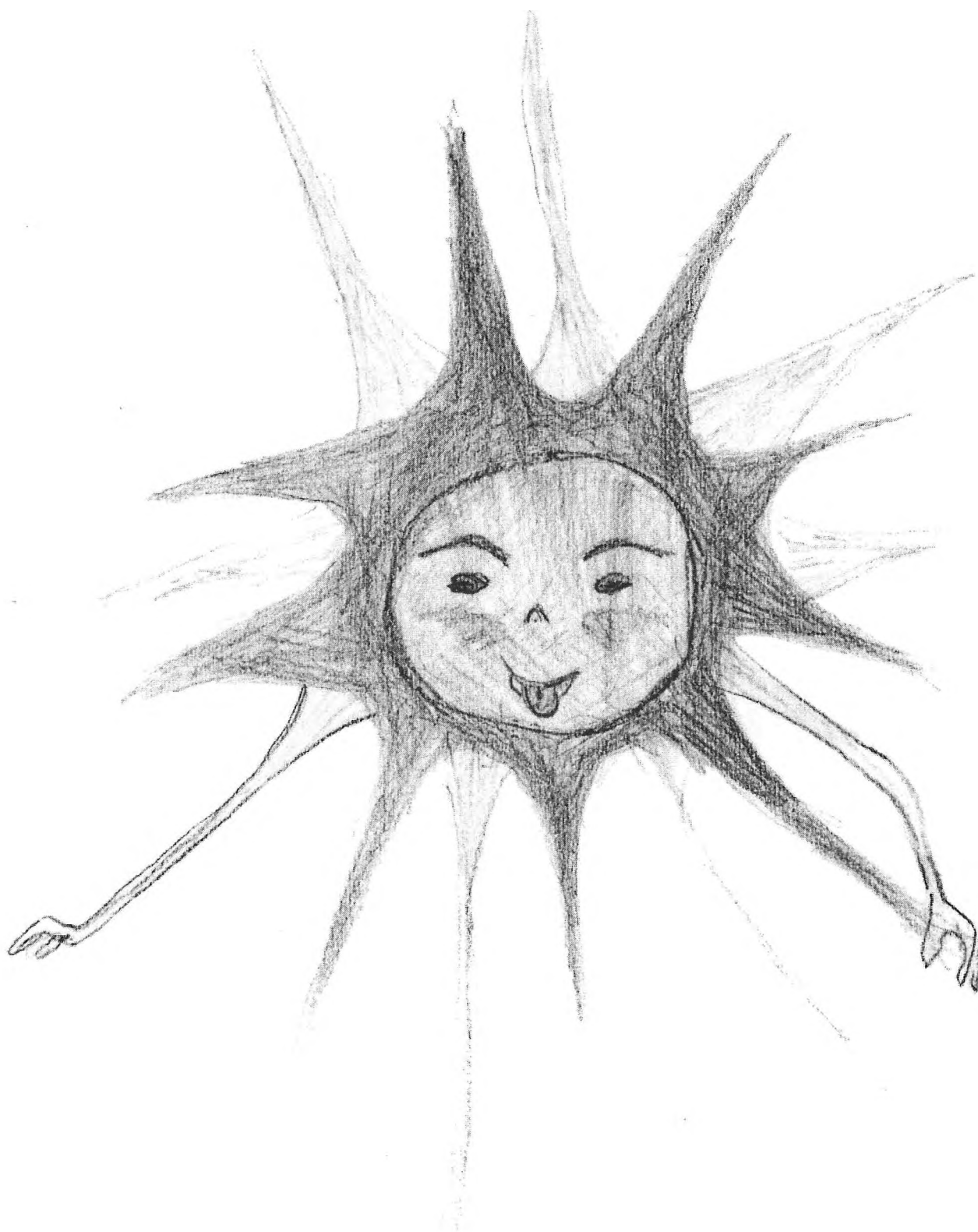
koja je bila najmilija i najdraža.

Id imam laku dok je lake
još je de^{ro}. Živimo sa u^{kom}
i on je ro^{tnar}. Nismo

mo^{čnosti} živjeti o^{dežno} jer
nemamo č^{me} platiti stan.

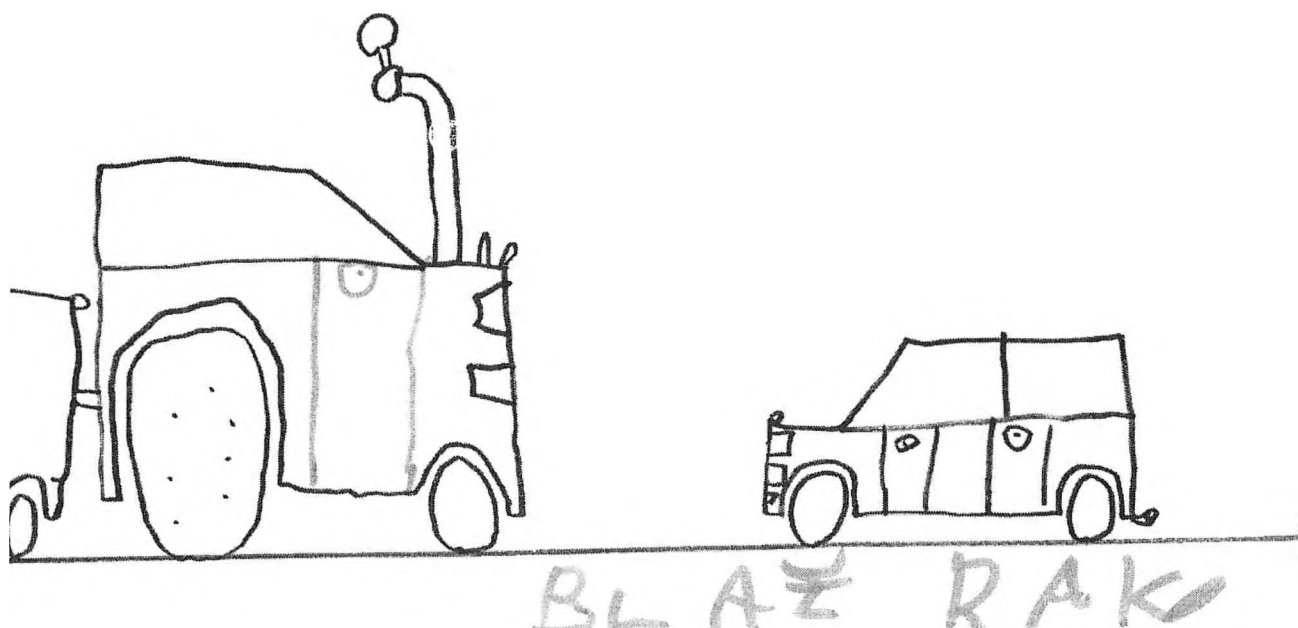
G.

Children's Drawings



savings book that was 16.6. Then I said that I and my sister ought to bring two cakes, but my mother just said nothing. I was persistent and grandmother said that she would make a cake. Mummy went to sleep early, grandmother went to her and grandmother said: why had she gone to sleep so early, and she said she wanted to rest and tomorrow was a new day. She slept with my older sister Danijela and I and my grandmother Anica slept in the other room. About 3 in the morning my sister came to the door and said to grandmother all frightened that she had called Mummy, and Mummy had not replied. Grandmother said wait you were dreaming and

went into the room. When she came into the room Mummy was dead. We didn't understand who we had lost. A neighbour Dora took us to her own house. We will never return to B-H, and we haven't got anyone to go to. Here we've got friends and a school. Here Mummy is buried and we shall never go back. I have lost a Mummy who was very dear and sweet. Now I have Grandmother and while there's Grandmother it's still all right. We live with Uncle and he's a lodger. We can't live by ourselves because we haven't got anything to pay for a place with.



4.

Abbreviations

UCE - Unaccompanied Children in Exile

CSPI - Centre for Social Policy Initiatives

CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child

NGO - Non-governmental organisation

SCFUK - Save the Children Fund, United Kingdom

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UAM - Unaccompanied refugee minor

IDTR - Identification, Documentation, Tracing, Reunification

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross

USAID - United States Agency for International Development

5.

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CSPI - CENTER FOR SOCIAL POLICY INITIATIVES

Mission Statement

CSPI efforts are focused on the improvement of the situation of the population in social risk, children with special needs, unaccompanied refugee and displaced children, multiproblem and poor families.

Our activities reflect a **strong family approach** with special attention on the social and legal protection of children in accordance with the **UN Convention on the Rights of the Child**.

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