



Central Asia

Recent developments

Measurable progress has been made in establishing national asylum systems and providing refugee protection, most notably in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz Government is now integrating Tajik refugees of Kyrgyz origin and giving them Kyrgyz citizenship. By September 2003, more than 5,000 former Tajik refugees had received Kyrgyz citizenship, in a manner that could serve as a model for other countries in the region, and indeed in other parts of the world.

UNHCR has been negotiating with the Government of Turkmenistan to integrate, and give citizenship to Tajik refugees of Turkmen origin, and it will continue to pursue this in 2004. The Office has approached the Government of Tajikistan with a proposal for the integration and naturalisation of Afghan refugees.

Despite these achievements, national protection mechanisms are still weak, both in terms of technical systems and human resources.

Strategic objectives

Four of the five central Asian republics are signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan



Only Uzbekistan has yet to accede to these international instruments. UNHCR is maintaining its assistance to governments throughout the region in order to develop and strengthen the protection of refugees and establish effective national structures to deal with asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons. UNHCR will continue to provide technical assistance and legal advice to enable governments to deal with the significant number of refugees in the region, mainly Tajiks, Afghans and Russians of Chechen origin, with the majority located in Kazakhstan. UNHCR began a thorough review of its operations in Central Asia in 2003 and is currently in the process of preparing a multi-year strategy for future involvement in the region.

Operations

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR will continue to provide technical assistance in matters of protection, and refugee legislation. In so doing, it will encourage central and local government authorities to adhere to international legal standards. In line with the regional strategy for 2004 aimed at developing national asylum policy and mechanisms, UNHCR will further strengthen its capacity-building activities for government and non-government institutions. In order to strengthen the refugee protection

framework, and for planning purposes, Chechen refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country will be registered. Meanwhile, the Office will continue to facilitate Tajik and Afghan voluntary repatriation programmes, conduct professional vocational training for refugee women and adolescents, facilitate pre-school classes for refugee children, and provide medical and psychological counselling.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the aim is to have almost all long-term Tajik refugees locally integrated by the end of 2004. Voluntary repatriation will also be organised for those Afghan and Tajik refugees wanting to return home. UNHCR will continue to monitor the protection and welfare of all asylum-seekers and refugees until a durable solution is found for them. The Office will continue its capacity-building activities for the government authorities dealing with RSD and for local border forces. Resettlement will be pursued as a priority for the most vulnerable cases.

In **Tajikistan**, the priority will be to support governmental and non-governmental entities in collaboration with other stakeholders, to strengthen national asylum policy and practice, ensure sustainability and guarantee an approach under which human rights are respected. A primary concern is the urgent need to amend the current refugee legislation to conform to the 1951 Refugee Convention



Kazakhstan: A dance group of Afghan refugee girls waiting for their performance. Private pictures

and 1967 Protocol, to which Tajikistan is a signatory. UNHCR will also aim to ensure that the recently resumed RSD process is maintained in a transparent manner. At the same time, UNHCR will intensify efforts to find durable solutions for the Afghan refugees and other persons of concern. The Office will facilitate the repatriation of Tajik refugees during 2004, albeit on a smaller scale than in previous years. It will endeavour to encourage greater involvement of development agencies.

In **Turkmenistan**, advocacy for refugee protection principles will remain a priority. Also high on the agenda will be the local integration of Tajik and Afghan refugees who do not wish to return, and the voluntary repatriation of those who decide to return. Parallel to these efforts, UNHCR will continue a naturalisation campaign to enable Tajik refugees of Turkmen ethnicity to acquire Turkmen nationality.

The establishment of a national refugee protection structure, and a census (registration exercise) of refugees in Turkmenistan, will be further pursued through regular meetings with government officials, training sessions and public information activities.

Tajik and Afghan refugees will be encouraged to participate in assistance projects targeting host communities as well as refugees. Activities will include the construction and upgrading of schools and medical clinics in rural areas, vocational classes for women and young adults and the distribution of sanitary supplies. Special attention will continue to be paid to the specific protection of refugee women and girls, including the provision of training on the prevention of gender-based violence.

In **Uzbekistan**, UNHCR will focus on increasing co-operation with the Government to assist it to develop a legal framework for the protection of refugees and

asylum-seekers. This includes raising awareness of refugee rights among many different governmental interlocutors (particularly law enforcement bodies and members of the judiciary) through training activities on refugee rights and close co-operation with ongoing and planned programmes of other international organisations in Uzbekistan. UNHCR is negotiating with the Government for the incorporation into the Migration Law of a Refugee Chapter, drawn up by a quasi-governmental drafting body. Capacity-building of local structures that promote refugee rights will continue to be supported by UNHCR, as will other promotional activities aiming at eventual accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. In the meantime, and in the absence of a domestic legal framework, UNHCR will continue to conduct RSD. Protection activities will include seeking durable solutions through resettlement and voluntary repatriation for the mainly Afghan refugees. Female heads of household and single refugee women, who often lack support within the refugee community and are therefore in a particularly vulnerable situation, are considered a priority within UNHCR's 2004 programmes.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Kazakhstan	1,435,967
Kyrgyzstan	1,152,531
Tajikistan	1,434,764
Turkmenistan	909,379
Uzbekistan	1,136,879
Total	6,069,520