

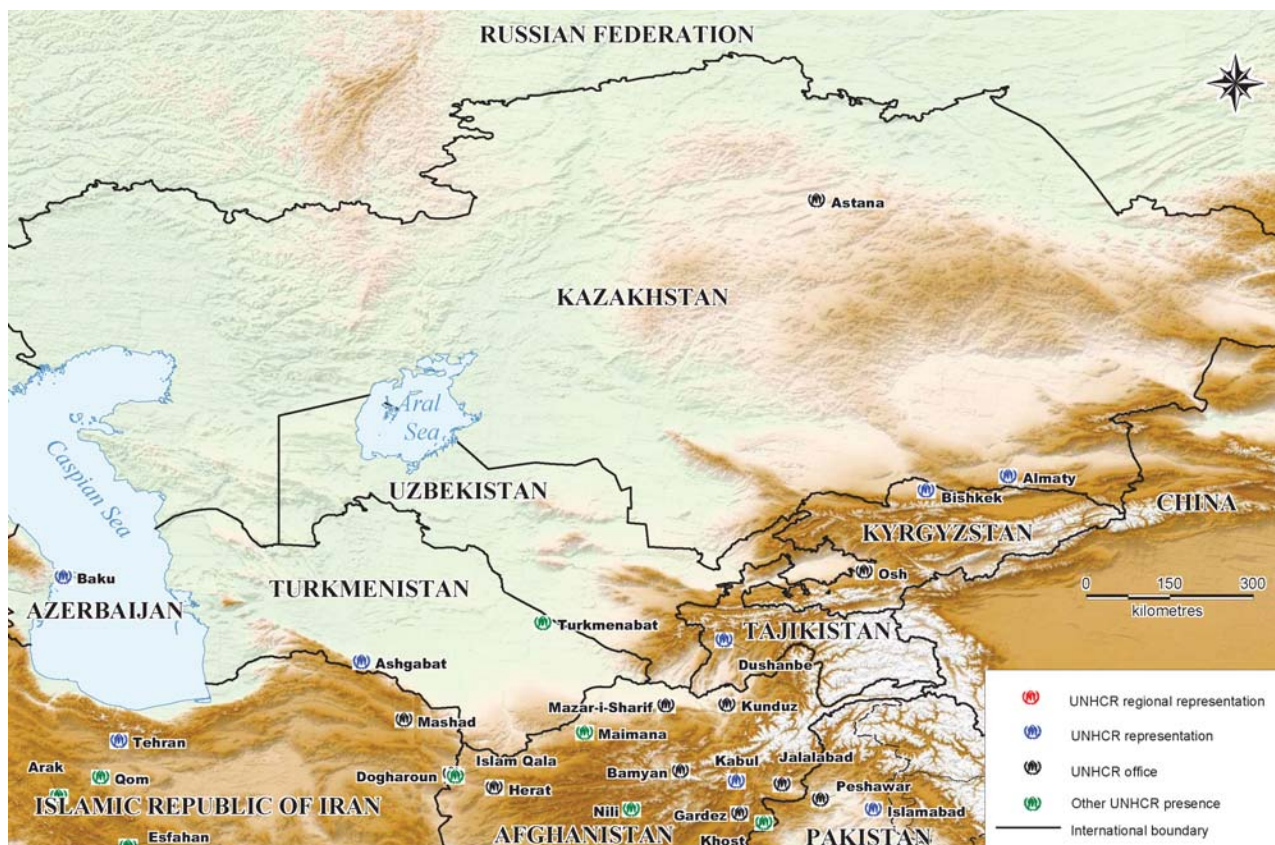


Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

Central Asia

Operational highlights

- UNHCR and the Government of Kazakhstan signed a cooperation agreement in November 2007. A first draft of national asylum legislation was finalized in November and will be discussed further in 2008.
- The number of Afghan refugees in Uzbekistan was reduced from 1,400 to 1,000, mainly through resettlement.
- The Turkmen authorities registered some 8,500 individuals who are stateless or at risk of statelessness, with a view to offering them naturalization or residence permits.
- UNHCR helped both Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan establish reception centres for asylum-seekers.
- UNHCR and UNDP agreed to establish a UN stock of non-food items to respond to future natural and man-made disasters.



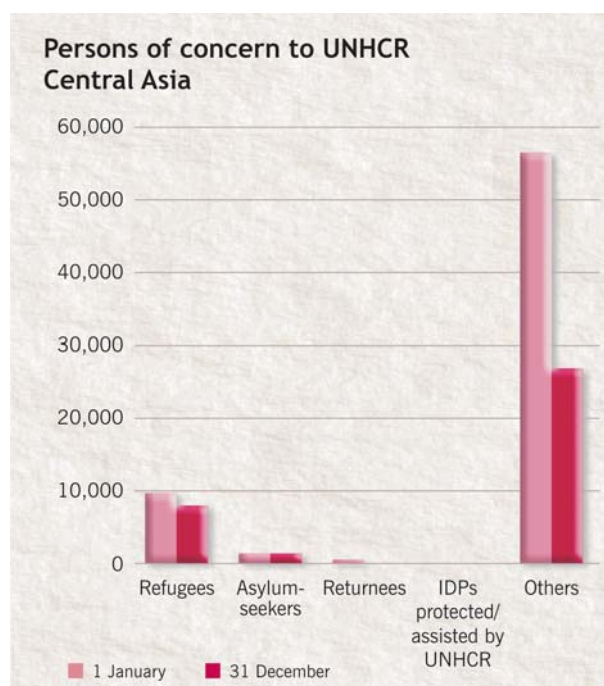
Working environment

The leaders of all the Central Asian countries consolidated their power in 2007. Elections in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan saw their presidents re-elected. In Turkmenistan, a new president was nominated, while the current president in Kyrgyzstan promoted a constitutional change and strengthened his parliamentary majority in the subsequent elections.

Though Governments in the region attach importance to their international obligations, concerns about national security and regional stability have had a negative impact on asylum. The shrinking of asylum space is compounded by inadequate implementation of refugee laws and asylum mechanisms. Though national refugee status determination (RSD) systems exist in most of these countries, political sensitivities fuel a discriminatory approach to asylum-seekers from neighbouring states. This often results in asylum not being granted. At the same time, the number of asylum-seekers from neighbouring States is increasing.

Due to its relatively high level of economic development and political stability, Kazakhstan took in the ninth-largest number of migrants in 2007, according to the World Bank. Most came from Central Asia.

The risk of regional instability led UNHCR and its partners to regularly update contingency plans and improve emergency preparedness.



Achievements and impact

In 2007, UNHCR focused on developing sustainable asylum regimes, finding durable solutions for refugees, reducing statelessness and improving emergency preparedness. The goal was to ensure international protection for all asylum-seekers, refugees and others of concern.

Faced with a restrictive approach to asylum by Governments in the region, UNHCR focused on the



UNHCR/V. Tan

Oralman Kazakh returnees at a festival in Almaty to mark the end of the celebration of Nauroz (Persian New Year). These Oralman have returned from Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran and China. They were at risk of becoming stateless upon their return but now have received citizenship.

protection of asylum-seekers and refugees, particularly by intervening on behalf of those from within the region. The Office established standard operating procedures in coordination with governments, and provided assistance through a network of legal clinics. In Kazakhstan, draft national asylum legislation was ready by the end of the year. It will now be discussed by Parliament.

The search for durable solutions for Afghan refugees in the region moved forward. Some 600 individuals, mainly from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, were resettled. UNHCR advocated for the local integration of long-staying refugees: A proposal to allow legal residence and local integration for some 1,000 long-staying Afghan refugees was submitted to the Government of Tajikistan.

UNHCR stepped up activities to prevent and reduce statelessness in Central Asia in 2007, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The Turkmen Government began the country-wide registration of some 8,500 people in a statelessness-like situation, mainly holders of former Soviet Union passports. This built on lessons learned from the joint UNHCR-Turkmen Government registration of Tajik *prima facie* refugees in the country between 2005 and 2006. In Kyrgyzstan, a preliminary survey estimated there were 10,000 stateless people in the country in 2007.

Multi-functional teams assessed the needs of refugees in all operations in Central Asia and protected and assisted them while taking account of age, gender and diversity considerations. Each office in the region conducted participatory assessments with refugees from Afghanistan, Chechnya (Russian Federation) and Uzbekistan. In addition, UNHCR held regular meetings with different refugee groups. One result was the development of vocational training programmes for refugees in Tajikistan, opening up more employment opportunities for them.

Contingency planning and emergency preparedness in the region were strengthened by the greater involvement of governments in the process, as well as the joint efforts of the UN, the Inter-agency Task Force for Central Asia and the UN Country Teams.

Constraints

Fragile asylum systems and a deteriorating protection environment continued to be the main constraints for UNHCR in Central Asia. Access to asylum procedures depended in many cases on political considerations, rather than the rule of law. Asylum-seekers and refugees are in general not protected from extradition, with *refoulement* affecting individuals from within the

region in particular. Access to asylum procedures is largely dependent on nationality, with the result that resettlement is often the only durable solution.

An additional constraint was the constant change of personnel and restructuring of local authorities dealing with asylum matters. This forced UNHCR to put more resources into building local capacity. The situation was particularly challenging in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In the last two months of 2007 there were 568 new asylum-seekers from Afghanistan applying for refugee status in Tajikistan, an increase of 66 per cent compared with the same period in 2006.

The number of asylum-seekers from within the region reflected continuing potential for a refugee influx. UNHCR urged Governments, their emergency services and migration authorities to keep borders open and be prepared to deal with large inflows.

Operations

In the absence of national asylum legislation, recognized refugees and registered asylum-seekers in **Kazakhstan** were protected by procedures established in agreement with the Government. UNHCR gave legal assistance to some 500 refugees and asylum-seekers throughout the country. The Office also submitted a proposal for the local integration of 200 long-staying Afghan refugees and their families.

UNHCR trained ministry personnel, border guards, immigration police and the office of the Prosecutor General in refugee law and protection. UNHCR also provided financial assistance to some 375 Afghan asylum-seekers and refugees, since opportunities for legal employment in the country are limited, even for recognized refugees.

With national health services now available to foreigners, including refugees, the office reduced its health assistance and restricted itself to counselling. No incidents of gender-based violence were reported. Refugee children received free primary and secondary education, and full attendance was recorded. Nonetheless, language barriers and the need for school uniforms and health cards remained a problem. As part of its contingency planning, the Office monitored Kazakhstan's southern borders and its frontier with Uzbekistan.

UNHCR's activities in **Kyrgyzstan** focused on building the capacity of the local authorities in a constantly changing political environment. The Office helped the State Committee for Migration and Employment establish an asylum-seeker reception centre in

Bishkek. Although the quality of refugee status determination (RSD) improved, in practice it remained selective.

Proposals for a country-wide survey on statelessness were submitted to the Government; initial surveys by implementing partners indicated that there were some 10,000 stateless persons in the country. The naturalization of Tajik refugees was completed in 2007, with the granting of citizenship to some 700 people. UNHCR helped the emergency services and migration authorities to build their capacity to handle a possible refugee influx, and identified possible camp locations in south Kyrgyzstan.

The Office gave legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, and provided some 260 vulnerable families with financial assistance. Some 4,270 refugees and asylum-seekers received a 12-month health insurance policy which allowed them to benefit from the national health scheme. Some 267 women, mainly refugees, participated in workshops on domestic violence and sessions to raise awareness on gender equality, sexual and gender-based violence, reproductive health and HIV and AIDS. In 2007, UNHCR implemented a school drop-out reduction project in 13 schools. As a result, 845 refugee children, among them 310 girls, returned to school on a regular basis.

The protection situation in **Tajikistan** improved throughout the year. All asylum-seekers were being registered, the validity of their documents was increased to 12 months, and no cases of *refoulement* were reported. UNHCR was able to exercise fully its supervisory role in the national RSD Commission; the Office was invited to observe RSD interviews, including those conducted in detention. An RSD consultant helped build additional national capacity in this regard.

UNHCR continued to urge the Government to abolish decrees forcing refugees to reside in rural areas and revise national refugee legislation accordingly. The orders remain in force, but the Government applied an unofficial "waiver" in implementing them, especially for people with disabilities and single women. Some 113 refugees were trained in vocational skills and received recognized diplomas. In addition, each received the necessary equipment (sewing machines, hairdressers' sets, etc.) to start a business.

Following the transfer of refugee children from the "Afghan school" to local schools, a UNHCR implementing partner conducted tolerance education programmes for some 100 refugee children. Some 510 asylum-seekers and refugees, mainly in households headed by single women, were given cash assistance.

In **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR worked with the Government to build the registration and protection

capacity of local authorities. The Office trained local officials in RSD procedures in preparation for the Government's assumption of responsibility for all asylum and refugee matters scheduled for 2009. The Office and the Government agreed on a joint action plan to review the national refugee legislation of 1997. The construction of an asylum-seeker reception centre at the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border improved protection.

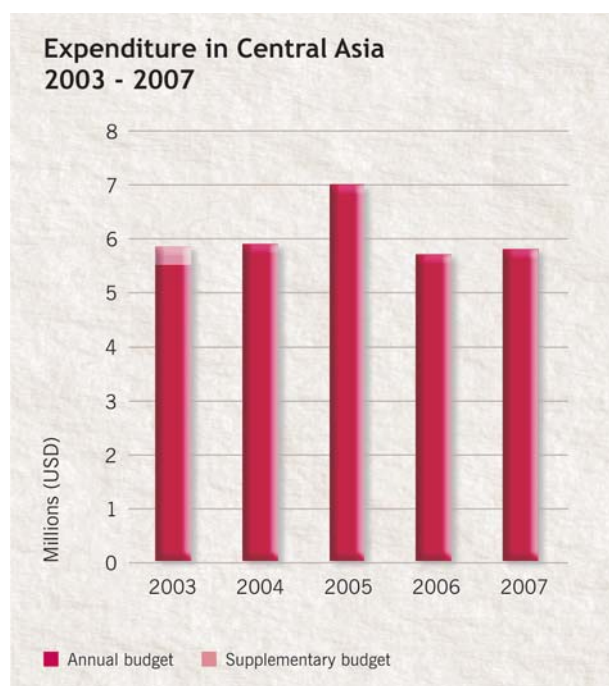
Recognized refugees benefited from financial, medical and education assistance. Naturalized Tajik refugees were assisted by the improvement of water facilities in their communities, the upgrading of community infrastructure and the rehabilitation of medical centres. They were also given legal assistance and vocational training. Education for refugee children remained a priority. Some 550 children with specific needs were provided with school materials. All refugee children could go to local primary and secondary education schools, and regular attendance was reported.

UNHCR continued to work for the protection of Afghan refugees in **Uzbekistan** through UNDP. The UNHCR Office in Kyrgyzstan supervised the protection work of the Refugee Support Unit under UNDP Tashkent. Some 400 Afghan refugees were resettled, which left some 1,000 of them in the country at the end of 2007. As refugee status is not recognized by the State authorities, several asylum-seekers were deported. UNHCR remains committed to finding solutions for the remaining refugees in Uzbekistan through resettlement.

Financial information

UNHCR's operations in Central Asia were adequately funded in 2007. Extra support from several donors was used to improve asylum systems and assist naturalized refugees in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Administrative and staffing expenditures were reduced as UNHCR began to implement the process of regionalization and restructuring of country operations in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

In 2007, the level of expenditures remained in line with the previous year, after a significant decrease between 2005 and 2006, due to the end of the Uzbek crisis.



Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Annual budget	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Kazakhstan	1,649,908	1,609,095
Kyrgyzstan	1,467,816	1,423,610
Tajikistan	1,018,464	937,863
Turkmenistan	873,575	729,288
Uzbekistan	181,775	163,571
Regional activities ¹	991,305	940,411
Total	6,182,843	5,803,838

¹ Includes institutional and capacity-building activities to strengthen asylum systems.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking	Donor	Annual budget
Central Asia	European Commission	572,056
	Sweden	1,310,044
	United States	1,000,000
	Sub-total	2,882,100
Kazakhstan	European Commission	210,068
	Sub-total	210,068
Turkmenistan	UN Trust Fund for Human Security	232,020
	Sub-total	232,020
Total		3,324,188

Note: Contributions shown exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against the "New or additional activities - mandate related" (NAM) Reserve.