



Central Asia

Working environment

Central Asia's location in an area rich in oil and gas reserves has contributed to its geopolitical significance in the post-Soviet era. Given its strategic position, events in the region are increasingly likely to have repercussions much further afield. As they try to ensure greater political stability, the Central Asian States are concerned about security, religious extremism and migration. These preoccupations lead at times to an emphasis on the rights of States over those of individuals.

In the past, Central Asia was a region that mainly hosted refugees; more recently, it has become a source of them. The movement of refugees and asylum-seekers originating from neighbouring States has increased the politicization of asylum issues.

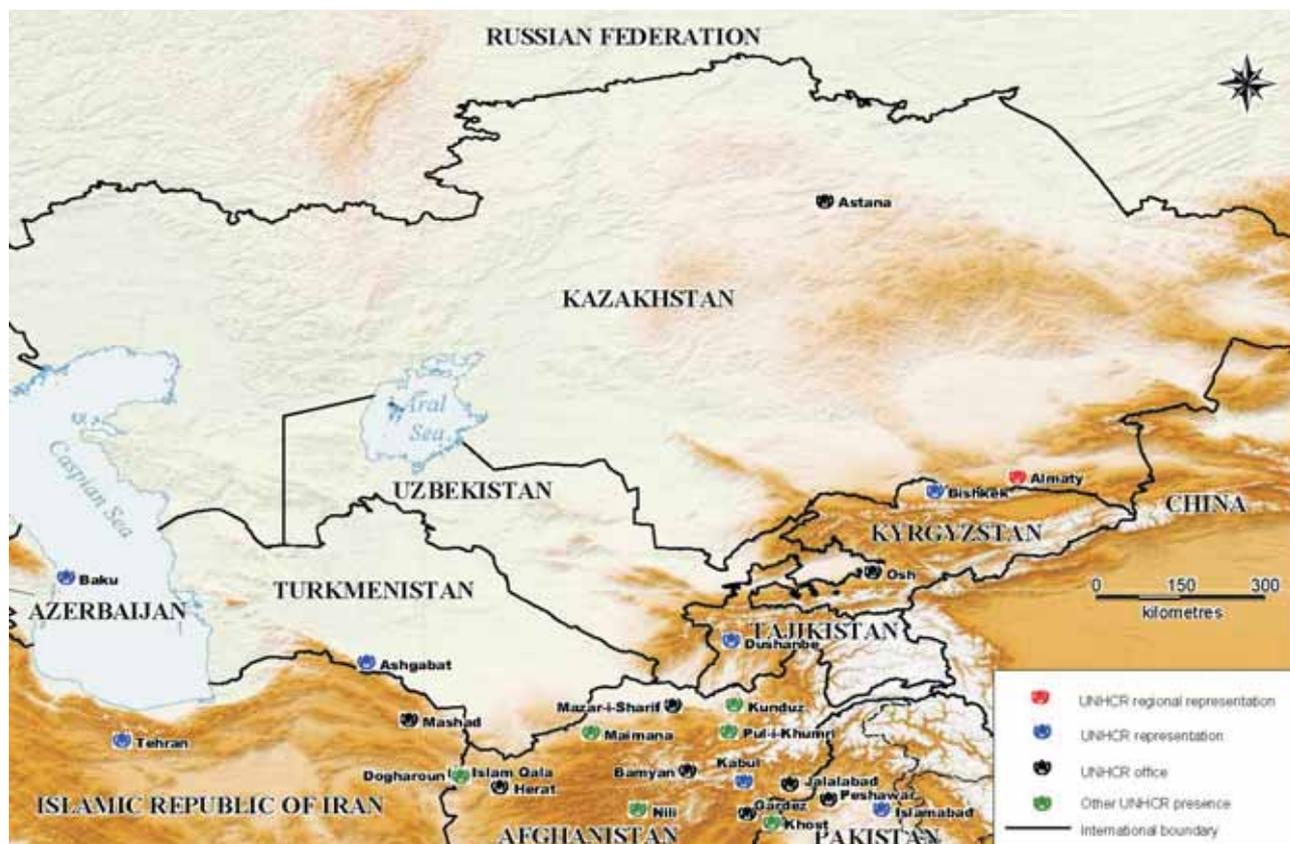
Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan



Despite a general deterioration of the protection situation, UNHCR has made some progress in finding solutions, in close collaboration with concerned States. The process of naturalizing Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan was completed by the beginning of 2007, and the cessation clause has been applied for Tajik refugees. Reintegration projects for Tajik returnees have been transferred to UNDP.

Solutions for a number of protracted Afghan refugee populations have been found in some countries, such as Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, through the strategic use of facilitated group resettlement. UNHCR will continue to promote the local integration of the remaining Afghan refugees in Central Asia. A project for the local integration of some 1,000 Afghan refugees in Tajikistan has been jointly presented by UNDP and UNHCR to the Tajik Government.

Strategy

UNHCR's overall goal for the region is to ensure that access to asylum is guaranteed, respected and sustained. In particular, the principle of *non-refoulement* needs to be preserved. The Office will pursue alternative protection mechanisms by using migration laws and regulations to help people who cannot be granted formal refugee status. UNHCR will also seek to ameliorate the situation of stateless people

in the region. Toward this end, partnerships will be strengthened and put into operation.

Given the political volatility, UNHCR and its partners will maintain updated contingency plans and a high level of emergency preparedness. Meanwhile, with durable solutions having been found for a large number of refugees, UNHCR will streamline its operations by downsizing country offices. The aim is to consolidate UNHCR's presence and to establish a regional office in Almaty, Kazakhstan, at the beginning of 2008.

Operations

UNHCR will help the Government of **Kazakhstan** to develop and adopt a national refugee law. Pending the establishment of such legislation, UNHCR is working with the Government to ensure minimum protection standards. The rights of asylum-seekers and refugees will be secured, sometimes through broader migration mechanisms. The Office will continue to provide temporary medical and financial assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families. They will also be helped to avail themselves of voluntary HIV and AIDS counselling and testing, safe-motherhood services, informal education for refugee children not enrolled in the national education system, and income-generation projects.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the political sensitivities related to refugee populations from neighbouring countries, mainly Uzbekistan, are having a negative impact on UNHCR's operations. The Office will guard against *refoulement* by focusing on improving access to national refugee status determination (RSD) procedures and promoting the civil, social and economic rights of refugees, the latter by supporting self-reliance opportunities.

To assist women, the Office will provide vocational training and support projects aimed at preventing sexual and gender-based violence. These programmes are implemented in all refugee communities throughout the country, all of which are also included in HIV and AIDS awareness programmes. The Office will continue to provide medical assistance through the state health insurance system and facilitate access to primary and secondary education.

UNHCR is also advocating for the naturalization of refugee populations, including all remaining Afghans in Kyrgyzstan. The Office has been successful in reducing statelessness: the authorities have permitted the naturalization of stateless people and the Government is implementing the new law on citizenship with UNHCR's assistance.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR and other UN agencies will help the Government find solutions for approximately 1,000 Afghan refugees, the majority of whom have been in the country for more than 15 years. The Office will support the Government in developing an asylum regime which fully respects the principle of *non-refoulement*. In this regard, it will help with the provision of appropriate documents to asylum-seekers and refugees. Furthermore, UNHCR continues to convince the authorities to bring relevant national legislation in line with international standards.

Participatory assessments will help the Office identify and address the specific needs of the most vulnerable groups, especially women and children. Gender and age considerations will be mainstreamed into all UNHCR programmes.



Young returnee in Rohi Nav village, Vaksh district, Kazakhstan.

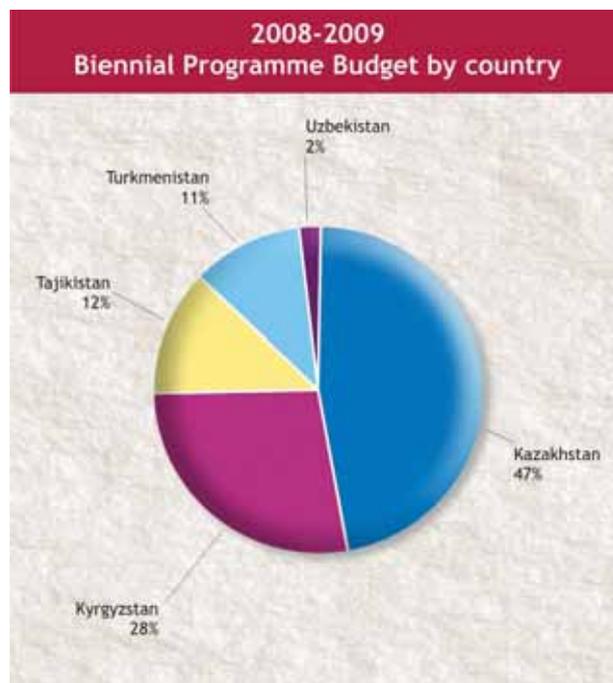
Following the successful naturalization of about 10,000 Tajik refugees in **Turkmenistan**, the Office will assist the Government with the establishment of a refugee-protection regime. It is promoting access to the country's naturalization mechanism for all remaining *prima facie* refugees and individually recognized refugees with family links to the country.

UNHCR will advocate for the fulfilment of Turkmenistan's commitments under the 1951

Convention, and will encourage the Government to acknowledge its RSD responsibilities. Furthermore, the Office will support a Government-initiated project for the registration and naturalization of some 10,000 people of different origins living in a quasi-stateless situation.

Through direct involvement and in partnership with local NGOs, people of concern will be protected against *refoulement*, violence, intimidation and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence. Assistance will be provided primarily to refugees with specific needs. The Office will also focus on projects related to HIV and AIDS prevention, education, health care and community services.

The number of Afghan refugees in **Uzbekistan** has gradually reduced to approximately 1,000 through resettlement. However, UNHCR will need to continue using the good offices of UNDP to protect and find durable solutions for this group.



| Budget (USD) | | | |
|--------------|-------------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Country | Annual Programme Budget | | |
| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
| Kazakhstan | 1,644,523 | 2,121,033 | 2,321,033 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 1,439,904 | 1,361,170 | 1,234,196 |
| Tajikistan | 1,152,957 | 766,984 | 407,110 |
| Turkmenistan | 765,635 | 520,033 | 490,180 |
| Uzbekistan | 0 | 100,000 | 100,000 |
| Total | 5,003,019 | 4,869,220 | 4,552,519 |