



Central Asia

Working environment

Even though the significant energy reserves and strategic importance of Central Asia make it the focus of increasing international interest, progress towards more democratic systems and the rule of law has been slow. These developments affect protection for asylum-seekers from within and outside the region, particularly Afghans.

UNHCR has been confronted with new challenges related to a considerable increase in the number of Afghan asylum-seekers in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, the forced return of Afghans from Uzbekistan and fears for the security of Uzbeks seeking asylum in the region are UNHCR's primary concerns. These problems have been aggravated by the introduction of new restrictions related to the registration and documentation of asylum-seekers.

In Kazakhstan, however, there has been slow but steady progress, as seen in the Government's reaffirmation of its commitment to adopt national refugee legislation. The pursuit of durable solutions, essentially in the form of resettlement for a significant number of Afghans and Uzbeks, has continued successfully. Progress was also made in the local integration of Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, while the local integration of some 1,000 Afghans is under consideration by the Government of Tajikistan.

Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan



Strategy

The main goals of UNHCR in the region are to protect refugees, find durable solutions for all people of concern and maintain the capacity to respond to emergencies and crises involving population displacement.

In line with its reform initiatives, UNHCR in Central Asia will operate under the new regional management system. Given the similarities among the groups of concern and the political environment of the five countries—particularly in the areas of refugee status determination (RSD), resettlement and other durable solutions—the regional management system aims to support harmonization of the policies, pool resources and enhance the overall impact of UNHCR’s activities.

UNHCR has revised its strategic regional objectives for 2008 – 2009, which will now concentrate on strengthening refugee protection regimes and preventing the *refoulement* of asylum-seekers and refugees. The Office will help to build the capacities of relevant government bodies and NGOs and engage other international organizations in refugee issues. It will also help in the development of civil society and increase awareness on asylum-related matters.

Other UNHCR objectives are enhancing the options for durable solutions, developing adequate emergency preparedness measures and reducing and preventing statelessness. Joint initiatives will be undertaken with governments on migration issues. These will include

anti-trafficking policies and the development of a 10-point Refugee Protection and Mixed Migration plan of action for the region.

In this respect, two planned regional projects will:

- a) assess the migration situation in the region and provide training for border guards on referral systems and international standards for detention; and
- b) map the situation pertaining to statelessness in the region and advocate for action to reduce it.

Constraints

Sensitivities associated with national security concerns remain one of the main constraints affecting refugee protection in the region. Also contributing to a deterioration in the protection environment are a discriminatory approach in favour of asylum-seekers from within the region and a reluctance to register new asylum-seekers from Afghanistan.

Operations

UNHCR operations in the five Central Asian countries have similarities, given the common groups of concern and operating environments. Afghans remain the largest and the most widely dispersed refugee group in the region.



In **Kazakhstan** there are three refugees groups: 1) Convention refugees under the protection of the Government (mostly Afghan refugees); 2) refugees recognized by UNHCR under its mandate; and 3) those who left their countries for the same reasons as those deemed refugees but who have not been granted refugee status (Chechens).

Advocacy for adoption of a national refugee law remains a priority. UNHCR will continue to support government efforts to establish and implement a national refugee protection system and a training programme for civil servants and civil society. In 2009, UNHCR will maintain its RSD capacities to ensure legal protection of asylum-seekers with no access to the national RSD procedure.

Durable solutions for refugees remaining in Kazakhstan focus on developing and advocating for local integration plans for all residual persons of concern, including those from members of the Commonwealth of Independent States who cannot return; facilitating the voluntary repatriation of Chechen and Afghan refugees; and resettling those whose protection cannot be secured in the country.

In cooperation with national implementing partners, UNHCR will provide health, food and education assistance to ensure basic standards of living for those who cannot sustain themselves independently. UNHCR will also maintain the necessary level of early warning and emergency response capacity, and further engage the Government in refugee matters.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNHCR will build the capacity of the respective government bodies to ensure protection against *refoulement*, access to the national RSD system, and respect for refugees' civil, social and economic rights. The Office will maintain its field presence in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan to assist local authorities in emergency preparedness in case of forced displacements in the area. In 2009 UNHCR will work to improve the self-reliance of all refugees and asylum-seekers and provide access to naturalization for the refugee population. Voluntary repatriation will be facilitated and resettlement will remain a durable solution for selected individuals. The Office also plans to advocate for the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the UN Statelessness Conventions and will seek to consolidate the efforts of the Government, NGOs and international organizations on the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR will give priority to contingency planning to assure protection and assistance for asylum-seekers fleeing from neighbouring countries, taking into consideration that local populations and persons of concern have been particularly affected by the unusually harsh winter and the energy crisis which hit the country in 2008. Overall, UNHCR will redouble its efforts to support the Government in developing a full asylum regime and pursuing durable solutions, in particular local integration for the some 1,000 long- staying Afghan refugees. Additionally, the Office will facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and their transit through Tajik territory.

UNHCR will use resettlement solely as a protection tool, and special attention will be paid to identifying women at risk, for whom this might be the only possible solution. Moreover, it will promote self-reliance as the main way to improve the social and economic well-being of people of concern. In 2009, UNHCR will also advocate for the accession of the Republic of Tajikistan to the international statelessness instruments.

In **Turkmenistan**, some 600 ethnic Turkmen Afghan refugees, a small number of residual Afghan refugees, Azeri/Armenian refugees who fled the inter-ethnic conflict in Azerbaijan in the late 1980s, and a few refugee families from the Russian Federation (Chechnya) are of concern to UNHCR. To secure access to asylum and protection against *refoulement*, violence, abuse, intimidation and exploitation, including sexual and gender-based violence, UNHCR will continue to deliver protection and assistance services in Turkmenistan.

The Office will work to enhance refugees' security and material welfare, focusing particularly on women and children, refugees with specific needs, HIV and AIDS programmes and the environment, besides addressing needs in the education, health care and community services sectors. UNHCR will seek changes to national asylum legislation and build the capacity of the national refugee authorities to conduct RSD. UNHCR will also continue its lobbying for Turkmenistan's accession to the UN conventions on statelessness, and assist the government bodies dealing with emergency preparedness and contingency planning.

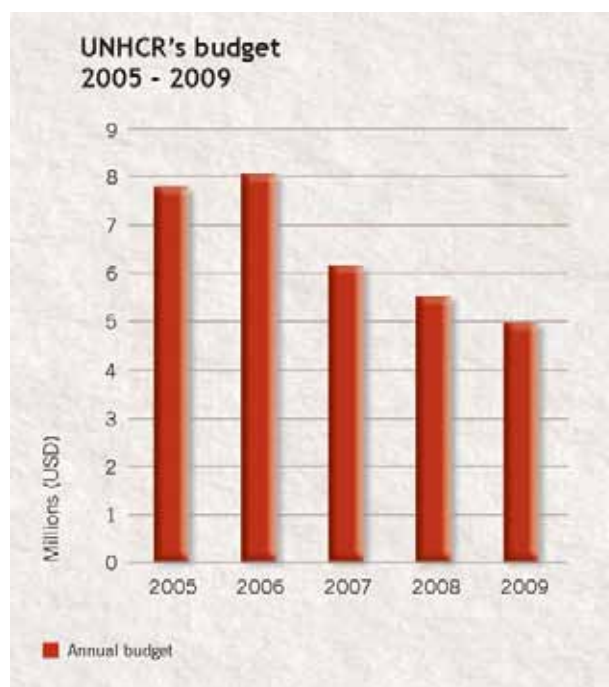
Following the landmark decision of the Turkmen Government to grant citizenship and residence permits to the majority of the *prima facie* Tajik refugees, the Office will continue assistance, although on a smaller scale, for local integration activities. These will focus

mainly on basic water supplies and providing health care in the remote settlements in border areas.

Through the "good offices" of UNDP **Uzbekistan**, UNHCR is continuing its efforts to find solutions for some 900 Afghan refugees in the country. Resettlement remains the most viable durable solution and protection tool for this group.

Financial information

Funding requirements have fallen steadily since the end of the Uzbek crisis in 2006. However, additional needs may arise from winter emergencies or an increase in the number of Afghan asylum-seekers.



Budget (USD)		
Countries	Annual budget	
	2008	2009
Kazakhstan	2,121,033	2,469,058
Kyrgyzstan	1,361,170	1,261,716
Tajikistan	766,984	585,575
Turkmenistan	520,033	496,052
Uzbekistan	100,000	155,000
Total	4,869,220	4,967,401