

Central Asia



Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan

Afghan refugee children playing at the reception centre in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

ЮНИСКОП ФЛЮТНИКОВ



| Working environment |

While the 1951 Refugee Convention has been ratified by all countries in Central Asia except Uzbekistan, compliance with the Convention and related statutes remains problematic. Sustained efforts by UNHCR and other stakeholders to build protection capacity and maintain asylum space in the region, have produced modest results.

Nonetheless, there have been some positive developments in Central Asia recently, related to human rights, refugee protection and statelessness. Kyrgyzstan provided citizenship to all remaining former Tajik refugees in the country, supported surveys on statelessness and expressed its willingness to continue addressing this issue with UNHCR's assistance. The Government of Kazakhstan signed and ratified the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture. In Turkmenistan, an inter-ministerial working group was established to amend the refugee and citizenship laws. The Government also agreed to take over refugee status determination (RSD) from UNHCR. The number of asylum-seekers from Afghanistan in Tajikistan has doubled since last year. The restructuring of ministerial responsibility for asylum in 2009 has led to difficulties in the setting up of a new asylum framework, but it has also created an opportunity to advocate for amendments to refugee legislation to bring it in line with international standards.



| Strategy |

The five regional priorities for Central Asia for 2010–2011 are:

- **Strengthening asylum:** UNHCR’s primary strategic objective is to preserve and strengthen asylum space through advocacy for the Government’s compliance with international instruments, where applicable through the adoption of domestic legislation and the establishment of relevant mechanisms. The harmonization of approaches to RSD and assistance to asylum-seekers forms a critical part of this regional priority.
- **Prevention and reduction of statelessness:** Country-specific action plans will be prepared in line with a comprehensive regional strategy for the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons.
- **Protection of refugees within mixed migratory flows:** A regional strategy to promote a protection-sensitive entry system at the border will be accompanied by efforts to build the capacity of the relevant authorities.
- **Promotion of self-reliance and local integration:** Local integration will be pursued where possible for the remaining refugee groups. Resettlement will continue to be used as a protection tool for refugees whose physical security cannot be ensured.
- **Contingency planning and emergency preparedness:** Given the insecurity and unstable conditions in some parts of the region, the Office works with governments to prepare contingency plans for displacement.

Priorities for refugees centre on improving living standards, seeking resettlement in the absence of safety and security in countries of asylum, and facilitating socio-economic and legal integration. Based on the results of the participatory assessment, some key elements of UNHCR’s 2010–2011 programmes are: addressing the educational needs of children; ensuring access to primary health care; enabling women to take part in community mobilization and decision-making; preventing gender-based violence; and encouraging Governments to adopt age, gender and diversity-sensitive policies.

| Constraints |

The perception of asylum as a political issue and heightened national security concern presents significant challenges to the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in Central Asia. Any escalation of political instability may lead to population displacement and a change in the profile of the Office’s operations in the region.

In the case of Uzbekistan, where UNHCR does not have a presence and protection is carried out through UNDP, lack of direct contact with the relevant authorities hampers protection interventions and dialogue on durable solutions.

| Operations |

The Office’s operations in the five Central Asian countries are similar, given the common groups of concern and similar operating environments. Afghans remain the largest and the most widely dispersed refugee group in the region. In 2010–2011, the Office will

continue its advocacy for these countries to accede to the international statelessness instruments, and work with relevant national structures on prevention and reduction of statelessness.

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR continues to adjudicate refugee status for those who do not have access to State RSD procedures. Another challenge is the lack of durable solutions for the majority of Afghan refugees. However, the expected adoption of national legislation on refugees in late 2009 will, hopefully, improve the situation. Until that time, the Office will continue to maintain its capacity to ensure legal protection for asylum-seekers with no access to the national RSD procedure or protection due to political sensitivities or security considerations. The Office will seek to ensure basic standards of living for those people of concern who cannot support themselves.

In 2010-2011, UNHCR will work with the Government to improve administrative procedures for refugees and asylum-seekers, and for the eventual transfer of all RSD functions to the Government. In addition, UNHCR will work closely with the authorities on local integration projects for the remaining Afghan refugees, as well as devoting resources to a system for identifying, registering and referring potential asylum-seekers at the border.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Office will work to strengthen the capacity of the authorities to ensure protection against *refoulement*, improve access to the national RSD system, and uphold respect for refugees' civil, social and economic rights. Support for asylum-seekers' and refugees' access to basic services, scholarships and language classes will continue. Governmental reception facilities will be supported by UNHCR, and may need to be reinforced with additional humanitarian aid for food and energy during the winter. To safeguard the well-being and security of refugee women, children and other people with specific needs, the Office will continue to support the community structures of urban refugees. A field presence will be maintained in the city of Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan to assist local authorities in emergency preparedness for displacements in the area.

In 2010-2011, the Office will work to improve the self-reliance of refugees, open up access to naturalization and facilitate voluntary repatriation. Unless the national protection regime improves considerably, resettlement will remain the main durable solution for many refugees.

The Office will continue to support the efforts of the Government and civil society in preventing and reducing statelessness and the protection of stateless persons in Kyrgyzstan and hopes to make progress in the country's accession to the Statelessness Conventions.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR will give priority to developing domestic RSD procedures in cooperation with the newly established Refugee Department under the Ministry of the Interior. Given the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, priority will also be given to updating the contingency plan to protect and assist asylum-seekers fleeing from neighbouring countries. Joint activities, such as the training of border guards to ensure access to asylum within mixed-migration flows, will continue. The Office will also

pursue durable solutions, in particular local integration for some long-staying Afghan refugees, and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and their transit through Tajik territory.

Resettlement will continue to be used as a means of protection for those with specific needs, such as women-at-risk. Moreover, UNHCR will promote self-reliance to improve the social and economic well-being of people of concern.

No new asylum-seekers have been registered in **Turkmenistan** for several years, but a small group of refugees who fled the inter-ethnic conflict in Azerbaijan in the late 1980s are of concern to the Office. In 2009, the responsibility for adjudicating the protection needs of any future arrivals was handed over to the Government. The Office will work to ensure the implementation of the new Refugee Law, expected to be adopted in late 2009, and continue to deliver protection and assistance in Turkmenistan.

An action plan developed on the basis of a regional project on statelessness in 2009 will be implemented in 2010 and 2011. The Office will focus on reducing statelessness by seeking solutions for some 12,000 persons who are stateless or cannot document their nationality. It will seek to prevent further statelessness by working with the Government to amend the citizenship law, by ensuring consistent implementation of relevant legislation and by lobbying for Turkmenistan's accession to the Statelessness Conventions.

Since the closing of the UNHCR office in **Uzbekistan** in 2006, the protection of refugees in the country, mostly from Afghanistan, has been carried out in cooperation with UNDP in Tashkent. The UNDP Refugee Support Unit facilitates resettlement departures while local NGOs provide limited assistance to the remaining refugees. While the Uzbek Government formerly tolerated the presence of mandate refugees on its territory, currently it considers refugees to be migrants. Uzbekistan is neither a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor its 1967 Protocol.

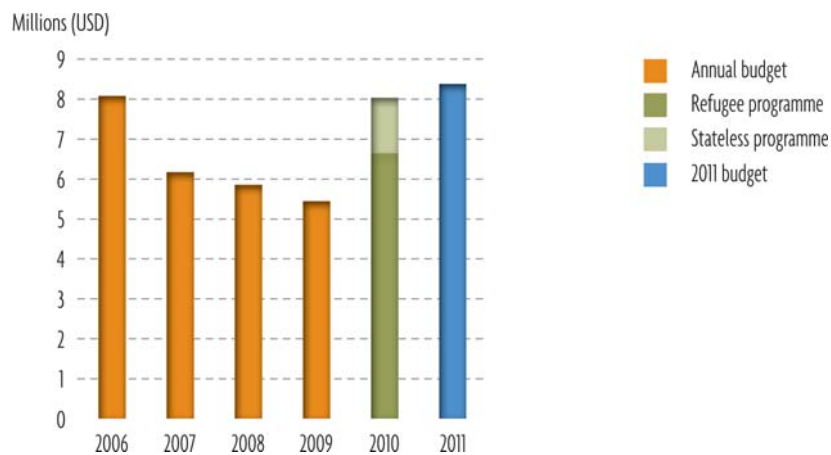
Under these circumstances, resettlement remains the most viable solution. Since 2006, UNHCR has resettled 682 refugees in third countries, and is committed to finding solutions for some 600 refugees remaining in Uzbekistan.

| Financial information |

The budget for Central Asia in 2010 has risen compared with previous years. In Kazakhstan this relates to the anticipated increase in arrivals and a strategy for greater community participation. Initiatives with the Government to find durable solutions for populations of concern will also be expanded. In Kyrgyzstan the main increase will cover logistics and supply for operational needs. In Tajikistan more training will be provided for refugees, while the higher numbers of new arrivals are expected to lead to more costs for RSD.

Operations in Turkmenistan will decrease due to the small caseload. However, UNHCR plans to continue its training of government officials and provide guidance and support for the national asylum procedure and statelessness issues.

UNHCR's budget in Central Asia 2006 – 2011



UNHCR budget for Central Asia (USD)

COUNTRY	2009 REVISED BUDGET	2010			2011
		REFUGEE PROGRAMME PILLAR 1	STATELESS PROGRAMME PILLAR 2	TOTAL	
Kazakhstan	2,470,557	3,494,127	626,983	4,121,109	4,250,000
Kyrgyzstan	1,443,473	1,721,411	425,043	2,146,454	2,300,000
Tajikistan	594,480	1,161,748	44,614	1,206,362	1,250,000
Turkmenistan	690,602	279,471	294,693	574,164	600,000
Uzbekistan	155,000	0	0	0	0
Regional activities	100,000	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	5,454,112	6,656,757	1,391,332	8,048,089	8,400,000