



Central Asia

Recent developments

In May 2005, several hundred Uzbek asylum-seekers fled to southern Kyrgyzstan following violence in Andijan, Uzbekistan. UNHCR provided humanitarian assistance to some 500 Uzbek asylum-seekers registered by the Kyrgyz Government and monitored the refugee status determination process conducted by the local authorities. The situation in Kyrgyzstan after the revolution of March 2005, and the high profile of the group of asylum-seekers, created a difficult environment for the Government of Kyrgyzstan to protect the asylum-seekers in accordance with its international obligations as a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention. The mounting uncertainties surrounding the provision of international protection to the asylum-seekers in Kyrgyzstan and the repeated calls by the Kyrgyzstan authorities to support a solution for the group led to the humanitarian transfer of the group of 439 Uzbek asylum-seekers from southern Kyrgyzstan to Romania to assure their protection.

These developments have changed the operational environment for UNHCR in Central Asia. It is a complex situation with new protection challenges for 2006 that will require an increased effort to build the capacities of civil society and a

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan



strengthened partnership approach in order to maintain and enhance the protection of UNHCR's persons of concern in the region.

However, progress towards durable solutions continues. In August 2005, the President of Turkmenistan issued a decree granting citizenship and residence permits to over 12,000 registered Tajik refugees in Turkmenistan, a remarkable and far-reaching solution for Tajik refugees. This followed the completion of the registration of all *prima facie* Tajik refugees, jointly conducted by the Turkmen authorities and UNHCR, and subsequent advocacy for durable solutions for this group. UNHCR will submit individual applications for citizenship or residence permits for the remaining refugee population not covered by this decision.

A successful resettlement programme has been implemented in Tajikistan for Afghan refugees. Over 1,300 Afghan refugees have been accepted for resettlement to Canada, accounting for more than half the refugee population in Tajikistan. A similar programme was launched in Uzbekistan for the resettlement of Afghan refugees and some 230 Afghan refugees and their families have been accepted for resettlement.

Strategic objectives

UNHCR will support governments in the region to strengthen their respective national protection regimes in light of recent developments and with reference to the protection gaps analysis carried out in 2005. Targeted capacity-building work will therefore continue, such as training on national refugee legislation and development of training modules on refugee law for universities and schools. The Office will organize awareness-raising workshops with the authorities and civil society institutions to support Governments in the region to gradually assume the primary role in management and delivery of protection and assistance for refugees and other persons of concern. The Strengthening Protection Capacity project will support the Central Asian Governments to assume greater ownership in identifying solutions to refugee and displacement issues and help these governments to find the means to implement such solutions through focused national and sub-regional processes.

In 2006, UNHCR will continue efforts to promote durable solutions for refugees and persons of concern in the region. This includes support for



Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek refugees in Barash camp, shortly before their departure for Romania, from where they would be resettled to other countries. UNHCR / C. Zaccagnini

the integration of refugees, including the granting of citizenship or residence rights. Preparatory work for the implementation of the cessation clause is underway to ensure that meaningful solutions for Tajik refugees in neighbouring countries (as well as returnees) will be attained, and that any remaining protection needs of Tajiks can be identified. The Office will continue to support the voluntary repatriation of Afghans and other refugee groups in the region with the strategic use of resettlement as a durable solution for applicable cases.

Assistance will be provided to groups with special needs among refugees and other persons of concern in the region, in view of limited resources available to UNHCR. Gender and age considerations as well as other special needs will guide the targeting and management of community services, healthcare, education and income generation assistance programmes.

In 2006 UNHCR will seek to strengthen partnerships within the region and with international institutions and donors to support the achievement of UNHCR's protection mandate in Central Asia.

The situation in the Ferghana Valley and political developments in the region increase the need to regularly update contingency plans and prepare for different scenarios. UNHCR will actively participate in the efforts undertaken by the United Nations to increase the level of emergency preparedness at national and regional levels in Central Asia.

Operations

In **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR will promote the establishment of national refugee legislation work and will endeavour to reach an agreement with the

authorities to adhere to refugee-related provisions in existing laws and thereby provide minimum standards of protection. The Office will seek to strengthen national asylum mechanisms by supporting the national refugee status determination procedure and increase awareness on refugee protection issues among Government officials and the academic community. In addition, UNHCR will provide refugees with legal aid and assistance to the most vulnerable to cover basic health care, including reproductive health, education and income-generating activities.

The revolution in **Kyrgyzstan** in March 2005 shifted the regional geopolitical context of UNHCR's operations in Central Asia. In Kyrgyzstan, the revolution led to structural and staffing changes in key national agencies. After the Uzbek refugee crisis, UNHCR renewed its efforts to maintain the national asylum structures and procedures that have been built over the last years. The Office will support migration, law enforcement and judicial authorities and provide technical expertise for forthcoming legislative changes in migration management and citizenship. UNHCR will continue to support the local integration of Tajik and Afghan refugees. The new Kyrgyz authorities have demonstrated their commitment to the naturalization of Tajik refugees, a process which will be assisted by the Office.

UNHCR will continue support for the Government of **Tajikistan** to implement the planned amendments to the national refugee law to bring it in line with international standards and make the national refugee status determination procedure more transparent and rigorously adherent to legal fundamentals. UNHCR will also be actively involved in the EU-funded Border-Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) programme for training Tajik border guards following the handover of border control from Russian troops to the Tajik authorities. With the successful implementation of the resettlement programme to Canada and ongoing resettlement to the United States, UNHCR will encourage local integration of the remaining Afghans, although the Government does not consider naturalization to be an option for Afghans in Tajikistan. With the support of development partners and the ILO, reintegration programmes for

Tajik returnees will be implemented, also benefiting returnee communities.

In **Turkmenistan**, advocacy on refugee protection principles will remain a priority. Further to the recent passage of a law that stipulates that the implementation of refugee status determination be carried out by a government entity, UNHCR will train government officials and gradually hand over eligibility activities. 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 increase assistance for local integration activities. Activities will include income-generation schemes and reinforcing existing government structures in the areas of education and health. Special attention will be paid to the needs of women and children, especially for the establishment and maintenance of community-based mechanisms for the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence, reproductive healthcare and vocational classes.

In **Uzbekistan**, the Office will maintain activities to provide international protection and assistance to those in need. Uzbekistan has not acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and has no national refugee legislation in place. Although mandate refugees enjoy a degree of protection from arrest, detention and *refoulement* in Uzbekistan, local integration is generally not an option. Following a successful resettlement programme in 2005, the Office will continue to support resettlement and voluntary repatriation in a few individual cases.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme Budget
Kazakhstan	1,834,526
Kyrgyzstan	1,291,566
Tajikistan	1,319,032
Turkmenistan	1,020,770
Uzbekistan	1,277,649
Total	6,743,543