

Central Asia

Operational highlights

- More than 9,300 Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan and 9,500 Tajik refugees in Turkmenistan were naturalized in 2006.
- Some 1,500 refugees in Tajikistan, mostly Afghans, were resettled in third countries.
- Following the closure of UNHCR's office in Uzbekistan, some 700 of the 1,400 Afghan refugees in the country were referred for group resettlement to the United States.
- In June 2006, under the terms of the cessation clause of UNHCR's statute and the 1951 Convention, refugee status for Tajiks was deemed no longer applicable. UNHCR phased out its reintegration programme for Tajik returnees by the end of 2006 and also ended its repatriation programme for Tajik refugees.

Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan



Working environment

The fallout from the Andijan events in Uzbekistan in May 2005, when hundreds of protesters were killed by government troops, continued to affect the overall situation in Central Asia. Indeed, there was a deterioration of the protection environment in 2006. The decision of the Uzbek Government to close down the UNHCR Office in April is an indication of the changed working environment. In general, access to asylum was

further constrained, and the granting of refugee status subject to more restrictive conditions.

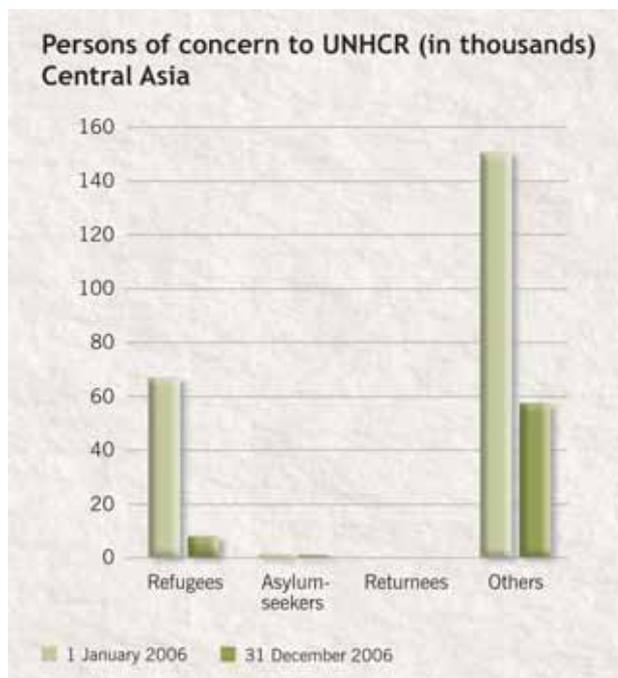
Central Asia continued to gain geopolitical importance due to its natural resources. Given the fragile political situation in the region, particularly in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, UNHCR and its partners prepared a contingency plan, which was regularly updated.

Achievements and impact

In 2006, UNHCR's strategic objectives for Central Asia were to ensure international protection for all refugees and others of concern; establish sustainable refugee protection regimes in an environment where governments were taking an increasingly restrictive approach to asylum; and find durable solutions for protracted refugee situations.

The search for solutions for Tajiks in Central Asia moved forward. In June 2006, under the terms of the cessation clause of UNHCR's statute and the 1951 Convention, refugee status for Tajiks was considered no longer applicable in light of improved conditions in Tajikistan. As a result, UNHCR phased out its reintegration programme for Tajik returnees by the end of 2006 and also ended its repatriation programme for Tajik refugees.

UNHCR has assisted some 53,000 Tajik refugees since 1992. The naturalization campaign for Tajik refugees in





UNHCR/IV. Tan

The centre for refugee women Dosti (friendship) opened in Bishkek on 10 May 2006.

Kyrgyzstan was almost completed by the end of the year, with more than 9,300 Tajik refugees having received Kyrgyz citizenship. In Turkmenistan, almost all the 9,500 Tajik refugees had been granted citizenship, and another 2,500 had been granted residence permits by the end of the year.

The Office shared a project document on the local integration of the remaining 1,000 Afghan refugees in Tajikistan with the Government. The official submission had to be postponed because of presidential elections in November 2006 and the possible transfer of asylum and migration responsibilities to a new government institution. With durable solutions found for the majority of refugees in Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, UNHCR will scale down its operations in these countries in 2007.

Durable solutions have also been found for many of the Afghan refugees in the Central Asian republics. A considerable number have been resettled in third countries, while others are in the process of gaining permanent resident status with UNHCR's help. In Tajikistan, UNHCR and the Government discussed the

possibility of issuing longer-term residence permits for the 1,000 Afghan refugees still in the country.

UNHCR made additional efforts in 2006 to protect asylum-seekers and refugees in the region. Protection activities, in particular refugee status determination (RSD), were increased in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Given that the asylum space in Central Asia is shrinking, UNHCR focused its efforts on building the capacity of governments in the region. This strategy is designed to make national protection regimes more sustainable.

With successful age, gender and diversity mainstreaming, multi-functional teams in each UNHCR office in Central Asia have been able to better identify the needs of refugees and help the Office readjust its programmes accordingly.

Constraints

The main constraints for UNHCR in Central Asia were the deterioration of the protection environment, the

increase in the number of highly politicized asylum cases and the gradual shrinking of the asylum space. Despite progress in identifying solutions to protracted refugee situations in Central Asia, the region experienced new protection challenges.

The growth in the number of asylum-seekers and refugees originating from and seeking protection within the region generated a highly politicized environment. Deportations and *refoulement* of asylum-seekers and refugees took place in violation of human rights principles and international law. Political instability persisted throughout 2006 in Kyrgyzstan and had negative implications on the implementation of UNHCR activities. In Uzbekistan, UNHCR closed its office at the request of the Government despite the presence of more than 1,400 refugees in the country. With Central Asia remaining vulnerable to potential conflicts, much of UNHCR's work was devoted to contingency planning and emergency preparedness.

Operations

The focus of UNHCR activities in **Kazakhstan** remained the creation of a comprehensive legal framework for refugee protection, including the adoption of draft legislation on asylum. Based on an analysis of existing laws, concrete steps were taken in 2006 to develop concepts for, and key elements to be included in, new national refugee legislation. A working group under the supervision of the Human Rights Commission was established for this purpose.

A network of legal clinics assisted more than 1,000 refugees and asylum-seekers in 11 locations across Kazakhstan. As part of its advocacy efforts, UNHCR helped to expand the number of university teachers of refugee law to 16 in nine cities. The Office gave financial assistance to more than 800 refugees and asylum-seekers in the country.

One of UNHCR's main activities in **Kyrgyzstan** was rebuilding the asylum system, which had deteriorated after changes in government structures and personnel, as well as the arrival of Uzbek asylum-seekers after the Andijan events. Furthermore, to assist the naturalization of virtually all long-staying Tajik refugees by the end of 2006, UNHCR implemented activities to facilitate local integration. More than 3,200 Tajik refugees and naturalized refugees were provided with health insurance policies for a period of one year, while more than 350 refugee children were enrolled in primary school.

More than 130 Afghan refugees in Kyrgyzstan received legal assistance, while more than 100 received social assistance and 30 participated in vocational training. Some 135 Uzbek asylum-seekers were officially registered by the local authorities and benefited from assistance until their departure for resettlement. The Kyrgyz authorities expressed an interest in accession to the statelessness conventions and requested UNHCR to become involved in the return of ethnic Kyrgyz to Kyrgyzstan.

UNHCR's priorities in **Tajikistan** were to strengthen the national asylum system and to protect, assist and find durable solutions for Afghan refugees. Though the authorities refused to register new asylum-seekers and to extend the validity of legal documents for those refugees already in the country, protection improved with the readmission of UNHCR as an observer to the national RSD Commission.

More than 1,500 refugees in Tajikistan, mostly Afghans, were resettled in third countries by the end of 2006. With the number of refugees in the country reduced by more than half, UNHCR proposed to the Government that the remaining 1,000 be accepted for local integration. The Office obtained the Government's agreement to allow 200 refugee children to enrol in local schools. Social and material assistance was provided to those with special needs and all refugees who needed it were given medical assistance. More than 90 Tajik returnees benefited from vocational training.

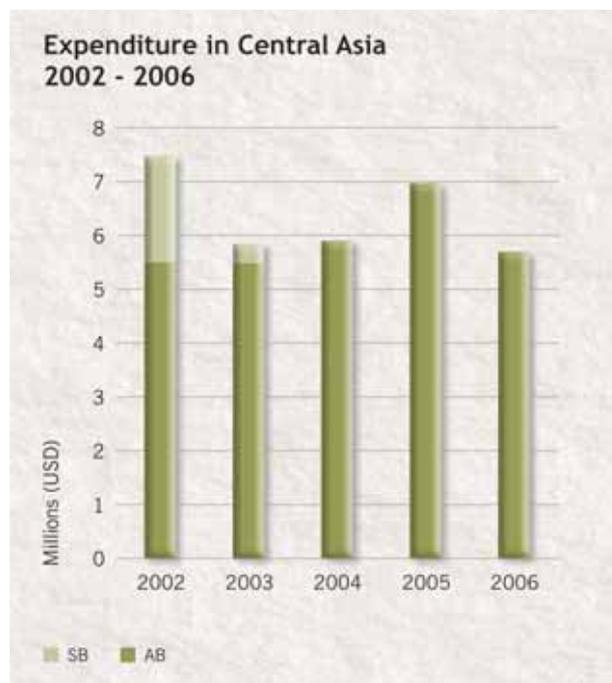
Advocacy and building the capacity of local authorities were UNHCR's priorities in **Turkmenistan**. Government officials were trained to prepare them to take charge of RSD. Mandate refugees benefited from the provisions of the national refugee law, such as legal stay, access to employment, education and health care. Financial, medical and educational assistance was continued for naturalized refugees while community services were upgraded. UNHCR gave priority to the needs of refugee women and children.

The UNHCR office in **Uzbekistan** was closed abruptly in April 2006 at the request of the Government. UNDP took over UNHCR activities related to finding a solution for the 1,400 refugees still in the country, 98 per cent of whom are Afghans. Some 700 Afghan refugees have been proposed for group resettlement and all non-Afghans have been proposed for resettlement. A small assistance programme for refugees with special needs has been maintained. In 2007 UNHCR will have to depend on the good offices of UNDP to find solutions for the Afghan refugees in the country, for whom group resettlement and voluntary repatriation would be the best solutions.

Financial information

The overall funding for the operations in Central Asia was adequate, although some activities were curtailed following the 20 per cent capping of UNHCR's budget. However, additional funding from several donors allowed UNHCR to fill gaps in protection and implement integration activities throughout Central Asia.

UNHCR's expenditures in Central Asia peaked at almost USD 7.5 million in 2002 and decreased to about USD 5.7 million in 2006. The decrease is partially explained by the phase out of the supplementary budget for the Afghanistan operation at the end of 2005. While additional funding was secured in 2006 for unplanned activities, the capping of UNHCR's budget and success in finding durable solution for refugees in Central Asia reduced expenditure.



Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	AB	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Kazakhstan	2,197,615	1,594,336
Kyrgyzstan	1,702,731	1,373,149
Tajikistan	1,590,183	1,052,475
Turkmenistan	1,145,685	858,871
Uzbekistan	1,153,730	592,159
Regional activities ¹	302,410	223,428
Total	8,092,354	5,694,417

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

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking	Donor	AB
Central Asia		
	European Commission	385,604
	Sweden	1,130,653
	United States	1,010,000
Sub-total		2,526,257
Kazakhstan		
	Norway	17,306
Sub-total		17,306
Kyrgystan		
	Russian Federation	50,000
Sub-total		50,000

Earmarking	Donor	AB
Turkmenistan		
	UN Trust Fund for Human Security	7,493
Sub-total		7,493
Uzbekistan		
	United States	2,206
Sub-total		2,206
Total		2,603,262