

Central Asia

Recent Developments

Prospects for the voluntary repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan improved throughout Central Asia in 2002. In Tajikistan, nearly 9,000 Afghan refugees who had been stranded on the Pianj river island (on the Afghan-Tajik border) voluntarily returned to their homes in a joint UNHCR-IOM operation. Smaller numbers repatriated from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

At the end of March 2002, the President of Kyrgyzstan brought a new refugee law into force. To date, 1,210 refugees have received Kyrgyz citizenship. Another 2,889 refugees will benefit from the simplified procedures of citizenship acquisition under the bi-lateral agreement signed in June 2002 between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan.

In May 2002, Tajikistan adopted a new law on refugees. However, UNHCR remains concerned

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan



that the law is not totally consistent with certain principles of international refugee law and is trying to minimise its effects through closely working with the authorities over the implementation of the law.

Following the events of 11 September 2001, UNHCR has documented evidence of increasingly restrictive measures being imposed on migrants in the region; these have adversely affected refugees and asylum-seekers.

Strategic Objectives

All but one of the Central Asian States have acceded to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, providing a strong foundation for countries in the region to develop mechanisms and national bodies to address the protection needs of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. To this end, UNHCR will provide technical

assistance to the respective governments in 2003. The Office will also pursue durable solutions for refugees in the region, including voluntary repatriation, local settlement, where possible, and, in exceptional cases, resettlement. UNHCR will provide limited and basic assistance to the most vulnerable refugees. The Office will also advocate accession to relevant international instruments and, wherever necessary, encourage the passage of legislation to alleviate the problem of statelessness in countries where this is of concern.

Operations

UNHCR will provide technical assistance in protection matters, refugee registration and the promotion of international legal standards for central and local government authorities in the fifteen regions of **Kazakhstan**. The Office also hopes to facilitate the return of 500 Afghans and 1,000 Tajik refugees

to their respective countries. Working through the good offices of its operational partners, UNHCR will establish and monitor the Returnee Adaptation Centre in central Kazakhstan. The Centre will assist ethnic Kazakhs who are returning to Kazakhstan, providing language and vocational training courses to returnees to enhance their re-integration in Kazakhstan. UNHCR will recruit two lawyers to provide legal counselling to stateless returnees in the two regions with the highest concentration of "stateless" persons. The Office will continue to encourage the Government to provide Kazakhstani citizenship to eligible persons.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNHCR will pursue durable solutions for, and provide international protection to all

beneficiary populations, whilst strengthening the refugee protection framework. In 2003, the Office expects to achieve durable solutions for the remaining Tajik refugees of Kyrgyz ethnicity, primarily through local integration and the acquisition of citizenship. While Tajik refugees wait to receive citizenship, UNHCR will focus its end of the year activities on local integration. By the beginning of 2003, it is expected that only a small residual population wishing to return to Tajikistan will remain in Kyrgyzstan.

UNHCR will search for durable solutions for the remaining refugee groups. In the interim, the Office will provide them with limited care and maintenance assistance. Given the evolving situation in Afghanistan, it is expected that Afghan refugees will repa-



Turkmenistan: Ethnic Turkmen Afghan refugees established on the Afghan border. A. Harper

triate voluntarily to their country of origin. UNHCR will continue to support care and maintenance activities, including vocational training, for those refugees who are in need of international protection.

The Office will also work towards strengthening the protection framework in Kyrgyzstan. The adoption of the refugee law by Parliament in February 2002, and the subsequent endorsement of the law by the President in March 2002, constitute a major achievement. In consultation with the Kyrgyz Government, UNHCR has identified a number of technical assistance activities including: providing technical support to the Government for the drafting of the by-laws; conducting training on RSD for government officials, members of the judiciary and law enforcement officials; improving the appeal system; and establishing a computerised database of information on the refugees and asylum-seekers in the country.

UNHCR will pursue its efforts to provide effective protection to individual refugees and asylum-seekers. The UNHCR-supported and restructured legal clinic for refugees will play a key role in providing the required protection, as well as documenting their needs. The Office will pay particular attention to the detention and harassment of refugees and asylum-seekers, and in exceptional cases will consider resettlement as a durable solution.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR will provide protection and material assistance to refugees and returnees in Tajikistan. The Office expects to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of up to 1,000 Afghan refugees. At the same time, UNHCR will encourage the Government to allow the local settlement of refugees or provide continued protection to Afghan refugees and may be in need of international protection, due to their affiliation with the

former Najibullah regime. The Office will also encourage an environment which would allow the return of Tajiks from neighbouring countries through the provision of transportation assistance, a cash grant and the monitoring of the borders in close co-operation with OSCE and the local authorities.

UNHCR will endeavour to provide training in refugee law, statelessness, RSD and registration practices to strengthen the capacity of the Government, civil society groups and law enforcement officers (e.g. police and border officials).

In **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR will call for the naturalisation of some 12,000 refugees who qualify for citizenship under Turkmen laws. UNHCR will also encourage the Government to establish an office with a mandate to handle refugee affairs, and develop asylum procedures.

In **Uzbekistan**, UNHCR will conduct RSD and provide international protection through the issuance of documents to UNHCR-recognised refugees and resettlement where needed. The Office will give limited and basic assistance to the most vulnerable refugees through a care and maintenance programme. UNHCR will suggest that the Government adopt formal protection mechanisms capable of addressing the needs of persons of concern to UNHCR.

Budget (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Kazakhstan	1,396,598
Kyrgyzstan	1,192,035
Tajikistan	1,852,538
Turkmenistan	873,755
Uzbekistan	1,088,148
Total	6,403,074