



**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency



# THE 2019-2021 REGIONAL STRATEGY FOR CENTRAL ASIA

**Addendum – in the context of  
the COVID-19 pandemic**

July 2020

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 Cover photo: Refugee children participated in sports competitions organized for the World Refugee Day 2019 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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This Addendum to the 2019-2021 Regional Strategy for Central Asia aims to build on existing strategic goals and address the emerging challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. To do so, UNHCR will make every effort to enhance and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, including UN Country Teams and international financial institutions and the private sector.

The global crisis caused by COVID-19 has affected all regions of the world and Central Asia is no exception. From a UNHCR perspective, the core changes taking place in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are threefold:

- ❶ **Over-stretched medical services** combined with **business closures and economic hardship** have put many people, including refugees and stateless persons, in a desperate situation.
- ❷ **Border closures** and limited movement as a result of public health measures have affected access to territory and asylum.
- ❸ In addition to epidemiological and livelihood challenges, the mental well-being of the population in general is rapidly deteriorating, increasing the risk of demonstrations and protests that could lead to **civil unrest and violence**. Given the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, **the risk of cross-border movements** to Central Asian countries should not be underestimated.

Since 2019, Central Asian states have made significant achievements, especially in the area of reducing statelessness. The Kyrgyz Republic became the first country in the world to end all known cases of statelessness. A Kyrgyz human rights lawyer received the 2019 Nansen Refugee Award for his significant contribution to this achievement.

However, due to considerable changes instigated by the current global COVID-19 pandemic, it is necessary to amend the existing Regional Strategy for Central Asia. The three overarching strategic goals remain:

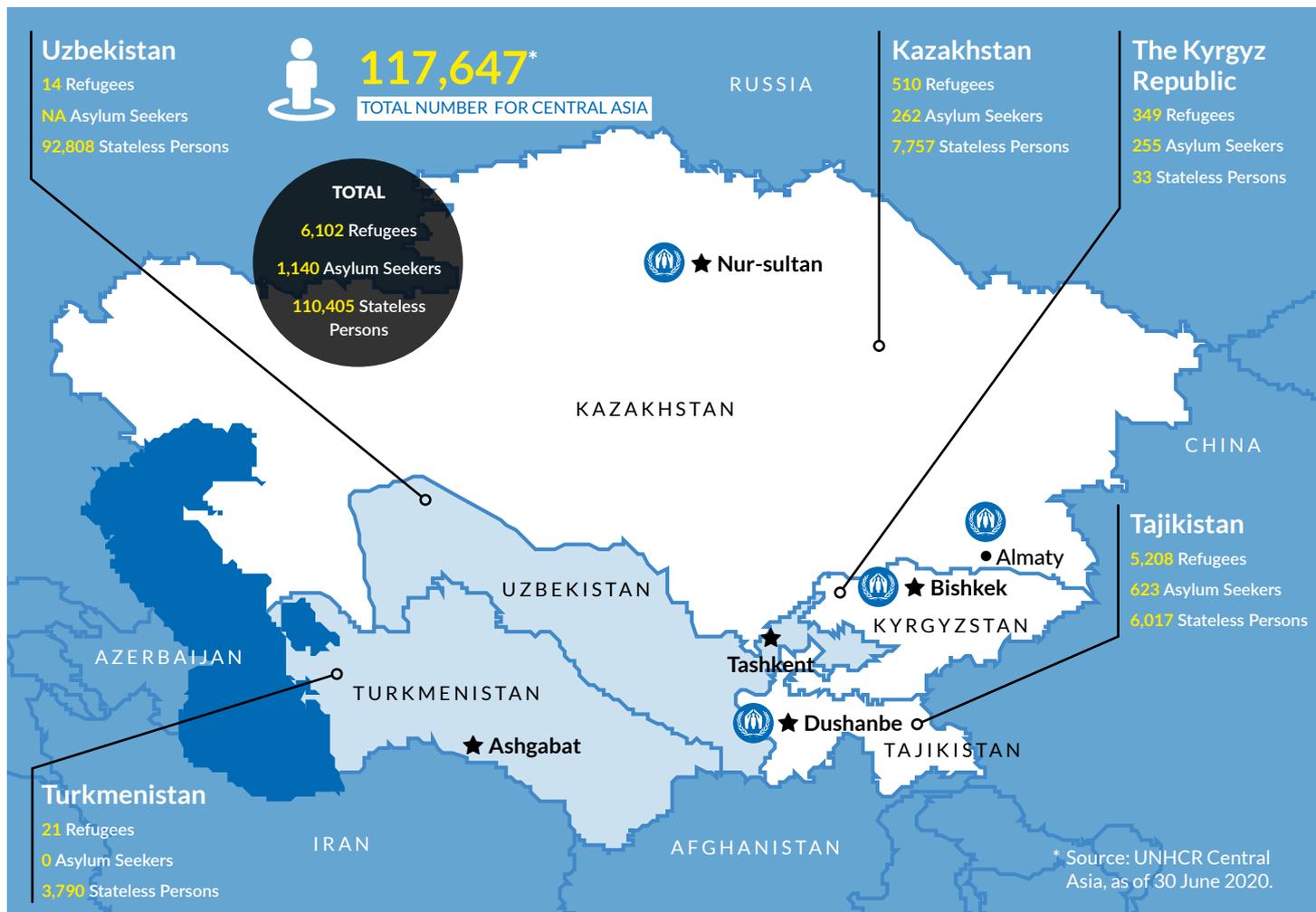
- ❶ preventing and reducing statelessness;
- ❷ quality asylum procedures and durable solutions; and
- ❸ emergency preparedness.

In line with the premise of “Leaving no one behind”, UNHCR advocates for an inclusive and non-discriminatory response to the COVID-19 crisis and access for persons of concern under its mandate to ensure all vital services. These include but are not limited to public health services, regular and modified education programmes and cash assistance. It is equally essential to ensure that refugees/asylum seekers and stateless persons are included in national socio-economic recovery and development plans.

Ensuring international protection and asylum space for refugees and asylum seekers remains priority. Closure of borders and restrictions on movement should not result in the closure of avenues to asylum. When health risks are identified, screening arrangements need to be in place, along with testing, quarantine and other measures to manage the arrival of asylum seekers in a safe manner.

Central Asia borders Russia, China, Iran and Afghanistan. As of mid-2020, these international borders are closed to most movement. UNHCR is determined to “stay and deliver”, by applying controlled physical meetings where possible, and online engagement with governments, the UN family, NGO partners and persons of concern.

# 1. REGIONAL OVERVIEW



Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the main assumptions were that the security, political and economic situation in Central Asia would not change significantly in the next five years and that stateless persons would continue to be identified and reduced. At the same time it was assumed that asylum seeker and refugee trends would remain similar to the previous three years. The UNHCR's 2019-2021 Regional Strategy for Central Asia aimed to hand over greater responsibilities on statelessness, asylum and refugee issues to host governments.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new dimensions to UNHCR's work in Central Asia. It has altered some of the earlier assumptions and brought in new challenges and opportunities, which can be summarized as below:

- Inclusion for all in **public health** in the fight against COVID-19 has become and will remain the top national priority for a long time. A key commitment under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "Leaving no one behind", including through the **eradication of statelessness**, has become an urgent necessity.

- **Access to health care for refugees** has become a growing concern in Central Asia. All persons of concern residing in Central Asian countries, regardless of their legal status, must have access to COVID-19 health measures, especially where emergency interventions are needed. Refugees' access to basic national health systems has become increasingly limited under the regulations of each country. At the time of writing this addendum (mid-2020) over ninety refugees have been reported as affected by COVID and/or COVID-like symptoms, and more than ten deaths have been confirmed. At least two refugee children have been orphaned as a result.
- The **economic situation** is deteriorating in this landlocked region. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are hit hard because they depend on remittances from migrant workers. The socio-economic impacts of COVID-19, such as the lack of jobs and livelihoods for many, may further contribute to and aggravate political instability, socio-economic tensions and border incidents in Central Asia. Along with seasonal floods, landslides and seismic activities, they warrant preparedness for internal and external displacement contingency planning.
- Earlier assumptions that several thousand **long-staying refugees had largely achieved self-reliance are no longer valid**. An estimated 99% of these refugees have suddenly become extremely vulnerable as their informal jobs, such as in markets, have vanished.
- Stateless persons, especially those with **undetermined nationality who lack valid identity documents** have also become vulnerable. They do not have access to formal employment and thus were relying on informal jobs. It is estimated that many of them have lost their income.
- Although host governments have for many years included refugees and stateless persons in public systems (schools, hospitals, etc.), the COVID-19 pandemic has overstretched national resources to protect the local population. As a result, **access to public systems by refugees and stateless persons are increasingly at risk**.
- The extent of the impact of border controls on access to territory and asylum for those in need of international protection and statelessness reduction activities is yet to be fully ascertained.
- Handing over greater responsibility for protecting refugees and stateless persons by UNHCR to national governments by 2021 has become unrealistic. Instead, UNHCR is likely to be expected to play a greater role in the future compared to assumptions made in the pre-COVID world.

Given the above, the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons in the provision of immediate humanitarian assistance, ensuring that they have access to basic needs such as food, basic hygiene items, medical care, education, and also the national socio-economic recovery plans are of the utmost importance.

## 1.1 UNHCR's Strategic Orientation 2019-2021

### Stateless Persons

While important achievements have been made in recent years in reducing and preventing statelessness in Central Asia, further progress hinges on maintaining strong political will and accelerating the implementation of country-specific action plans. These were developed under the Global Action Plan of the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness by 2024 and through the implementation of pledges from the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in October, 2019.

UNHCR will continue to promote an inclusive and non-discriminatory response to COVID-19 based on the premise that no one – including stateless persons - should be left behind. Without legal rights and access to services, statelessness leaves many economically marginalized and vulnerable to exploitation. Limited by their legal status, many work in the informal sectors, which can also hamper adherence to public health protocols such as self-isolation. In many cases, stateless people also live in sub-standard sanitary conditions.



📷 Personal protective equipment purchased by UNHCR for state border service staff in Kyrgyzstan thanks to donation from Japanese Government in April 2020. © UNHCR

UNHCR, in partnership with UNCT and other key development partners, will continue to advocate for the inclusion of stateless persons in COVID-19 national response strategies and action plans.

The right to nationality is a fundamental human right and it can mean the difference between life and death. In its advocacy, UNHCR will rely heavily on the key message that this pandemic can only be overcome if everyone, regardless of their legal status, is included in the response. It is expected that, in the context of the global pandemic, Central Asian states will further streamline the identification of the full extent of statelessness and the swift resolution of these cases through confirmation or acquisition of nationality, and securing identity documentation and access to essential rights and services, including healthcare. UNHCR will further strengthen inter-agency collaboration, in particular with UNICEF on ensuring birth registration, and with ESCAP on civil registry and vital statistics (CRVS). The forthcoming round of the census in Central Asian countries will play a significant role in mapping the stateless populations. UNHCR will strengthen cooperation with UNFPA and national statistics committees to render its support and expertise.

## Refugees

Following the closure of borders in all Central Asian countries due to the outbreak of COVID-19, the number of new asylum seekers has dropped significantly in the region, specifically since March 2020. Access to asylum is crucial to ensure timely registration and documentation of refugees and asylum seekers to prevent refoulement. UNHCR will maintain a partnership with the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) of the EU to join their border guard capacity building activities and will continue to advocate for the establishment of referral mechanisms in Central Asia. At the same time, UNHCR will continue to support governments in aligning the quality of refugee status determination systems with international standards.

The pandemic has brought to light many gaps in refugees' access to social and economic rights. UNHCR will scale up its advocacy and capacity building efforts with relevant government entities (migration authorities, border guards, judiciary, etc.) to improve the quality of legislation and the adjudication process, improve refugees' access to social assistance and put refugees on par with

nationals regarding the enjoyment of accorded rights. The priority is to continue advocating for the inclusion of refugees and asylum seekers in available state health schemes.

Refugees and asylum seekers are mostly employed in the informal job market, and most lost their incomes when movement restrictions were imposed in Central Asia. UNHCR will work closely with governments and development-oriented aid organizations to include refugees in national socio-economic recovery plans. Partnership with the business sector is critical. UNHCR is keen to join forces in any area possible to go through this COVID-19 crisis. It is necessary to look for innovative solutions and how refugee skills can be used in the post-COVID-19 period to ensure faster economic recovery of refugees. In consultation with refugee communities, UNHCR will explore market needs and provide support to refugees with access to targeted education and vocational training support. The provision of cash-based assistance and targeted medical assistance to the most vulnerable mandate refugees in Central Asian countries will need to continue until the refugees re-establish their self-reliance in their respective host countries as they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Together with the host governments, UNHCR will continue to explore solutions for mandate refugees, who are in a state of limbo as well as for convention refugees. To this end, UNHCR will make strategic use of available regional and international platforms. Namely these are the Almaty Process and the Global Refugee Forum.

### Emergency Preparedness

In addition to due diligence as a continuing institutional commitment, there is a need for further risk analyses considering the negative socio-economic impact of COVID-19. UNHCR considers emergency preparedness as one of its key priorities and is focused on building national capacities through staff trainings, workshops and simulation exercises.

The local population of Central Asian countries depended on the remittances of their migrant workers, who mainly moved to the Russian Federation. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, remittances have dramatically reduced, and many migrants have returned to their countries. Without

remittances and alternative incomes due to several months of imposed restrictions of movement, a large number of citizens have become vulnerable. In addition, the shortage of the medicines, unpredictable access to healthcare facilities and the rising prices of basic items such as food have caused further frustration for the population. Demonstrations, protests and other indications are reported in the region. Access to accurate information is critical.

The upcoming parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan and presidential elections in Tajikistan during the last quarter of 2020, in addition to fragile economic situations, may also pose challenges to the stability of the Central Asia region.

In neighboring countries, security and/or political situations may deteriorate. The conflict in Afghanistan continues and as the situation deteriorates, the risk of cross-border movements to Central Asian countries cannot be under-estimated.

One of the keys to successful emergency preparedness is to enhance national asylum systems, including the establishment of referral mechanisms. Online and/or any other alternative mode of emergency preparedness workshops will be organized to raise awareness on protection sensitive aspects of the humanitarian emergency response. UNHCR will support the participation of government officials and NGO partners in humanitarian emergency response trainings, organized by the UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness (eCentre) based in Bangkok, Thailand.

UNHCR will maintain a partnership with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and explore partnerships with others, such as the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA). UNHCR will participate in relevant emergency preparedness events, including those organized online, to ensure that important protection considerations are included.

## 2.

## ACHIEVEMENTS SINCE 2019

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📷 Abdusamat Saparov could start beekeeping business after receiving Kyrgyz citizenship thanks to NGO Ferghana Valley Lawyers Without Borders led by the 2019 UNHCR Nansen Refugee Award-winning Azizbek Ashurov. © UNHCR/Chris de Bode

### 2.1 Statelessness

As a result of the joint efforts of governments, UNHCR and civil society, the statelessness of some 19,000 persons was resolved in Central Asia in 2019 alone. This brings the total number of those who have found a solution from 2014-2019 to 79,000 persons. Nevertheless, at the end of 2019, close to 117,000 people were still known to be in a stateless situation in the region, but the actual number is estimated to be higher.

In January 2019, the President of Turkmenistan formally endorsed the ambitious National Action Plan to End Statelessness (2019-2024). While developing this roadmap, UNHCR rendered support and expertise.

In July 2019, the Kyrgyz Republic formally announced that it had ended all known cases of statelessness in the country, the first in the world, and shifted gears to working towards preventing statelessness. In October 2019, Mr. Azizbek Ashurov, the head of the UNHCR's NGO partner in the Kyrgyz Republic, received the 2019 Nansen Refugee Award for his significant contribution to this milestone achievement.

In the framework of the UNHCR-UNICEF Coalition on Every Child's Right to a Nationality and country-specific strategies for addressing childhood statelessness in Central Asia, advocacy was streamlined on reforming the law to ensure adequate safeguards in nationality laws and practices. In September 2019, together with the Human Rights Ombudsperson of Kazakhstan and in partnership

with UNICEF and ESCAP, UNHCR organized the second Regional Conference on the Right to Legal Identity and Prevention of Childhood Statelessness in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan. The event was attended by decision-makers from all Central Asian states, strengthening political will to end childhood statelessness.

In October 2019, the High-Level Segment (HLS) on Statelessness took place in Geneva. Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have formulated 12 pledges, such as ensuring universal birth registration, enacting Statelessness Status Determination Procedures, legislative amendments related to citizenship, collecting quantitative and qualitative data on the stateless population through censuses and considering accession to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

At the end of 2019, Kazakhstan was one of the first to implement its pledge by amending its legal instrument to ensure that all new-born babies are registered regardless of the legal status of their parents.

At the end of 2019, Tajikistan enacted a special time-bound Amnesty Law for stateless persons and foreign citizens in order to regularize their status.

In April 2020, Uzbekistan enacted a new citizenship law to be able to provide citizenship to some 50,000 stateless persons.

## 2.2 Refugees

In 2019, a total of 821 refugees found durable solutions through the following: naturalization (five persons), voluntary repatriation (80 persons) and departures to third countries through alternative pathways (736 persons).

Kazakhstan formulated one pledge at the First Global Refugee Forum in December 2019 to issue Convention Travel Documents to refugees and started implementing it through relevant legal amendments.

The Refugee Status Determination Distance Learning Programme (RSD DLP) 2020 cohort started in May with 36 participants enrolled in the self-study phase. Out of the total number, 26 participants are government officials from Central Asian countries. Representatives of the judiciary, migration services and other relevant ministries and government entities are participating in this programme. It consists of desk studies (self-study phase), on-line tutoring, group discussions and simulation exercises. In 2019, 16 officials from Central Asia completed the same course. This programme, conducted in Russian, is key to building the capacity of the national counterparts and practitioners.

# 3.

## UPDATE TO IMPLEMENTATION PLANS



📷 The Second Regional Conference on the Right to Legal Identity and Prevention of Statelessness in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, 5 September 2019. © UNHCR

### 3.1 Kazakhstan

#### Statelessness

In May 2020, Kazakhstan amended the Law on Migration of Population, which included the establishment of Statelessness Determination Procedures (SDPs). UNHCR will follow-up and render support to the Government of Kazakhstan in developing the first national SDPs. Within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2021-2025, UNHCR will keep monitoring the implementation of amendments to the Code on Marriage and Family made in November 2019 to ensure that all children born in Kazakhstan are registered at birth, regardless

of the legal status of their parents. UNHCR will continue advocacy and capacity building to ensure birth registration and the prevention of childhood statelessness, within the EU-UNICEF project on the protection of children affected by migration. The nationwide statelessness identification campaign planned for mid-2020, jointly with the Ministry of Interior and legal partners, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but will be resumed as soon as the situation permits.

#### Refugees

UNHCR will monitor and render its support to the Government of Kazakhstan on issuing new refugee travel documents in line with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards, as well

as the implementation of the newly amended law on the Migration of Population. This legislation waived some of the pre-existing requirements to facilitate refugees' access to permanent residency. UNHCR will also continue its advocacy and protection intervention activities to ensure access to quality asylum systems, access to territory and *non-refoulement*.

The socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 are expected to undermine the ability of a greater number of refugee households to meet their basic needs. The loss of jobs and income in the wake of rising prices will affect even long-staying refugees who were considered self-reliant. Since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020, the number of applications for financial assistance has increased significantly compared to the period before COVID-19. Non-traditional partnerships, such as with the private sector in the area of refugee employment has proven its effectiveness, as refugees continue receiving much wanted job placements that are particularly vital in the context of the economic recession. Cooperation with academia that provide scholarships for refugee students will help to develop better integration and self-reliance of refugees in the post-COVID-19 period. The new partners, such as the National Olympic Committee and Members of Parliament (MPs), will support UNHCR's sensitization and advocacy efforts on the naturalization of refugees and inclusion in national assistance schemes such as the Compulsory Medical Insurance Plan.

### Emergency Preparedness

The outbreak of inter-community violence in southern Kazakhstan in February 2020, as well as increasingly frequent public protests has revealed an existing threat of tension at the grassroots level. This could be further aggravated by the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, UNHCR plans to expand the project with the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society (KCRS) to include an emergency preparedness component in the Work Plan. UNHCR will participate in and include asylum and refugee components into the OSCE simulation exercise and the KRCSS emergency training exercise with the National Guard of the Republic of Kazakhstan. UNHCR will follow-up the National Action Plan on Emergency Preparedness, developed in the frameworks of the BOMCA project.



📷 Ryan's mother was a person with undetermined nationality in Kyrgyzstan. When Ryan was born, she did not get a birth certificate and later was refused vaccinations. Now both Ryan and her mother Zeynepkan are documented and have access to healthcare services.  
© UNHCR/Timur Epov

## 3.2 The Kyrgyz Republic

### Statelessness

After achieving a significant reduction in statelessness, and then becoming the historic first in resolving all known cases of statelessness, the Kyrgyz Republic made further commitments to prevent statelessness and protect stateless persons through time-bound pledges in the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in 2019. The Kyrgyz Government continued to implement the pledges in line with the set timelines. For example, the parliament approved the newly developed Law on Civil Acts, which ensures the registration of the fact of birth of every child born in the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic. Amendments to the Law on Aliens introducing anchor provisions in the Stateless Status Determination Procedure were approved by the parliament in 2020. In 2021, UNHCR will continue to support the Government in implementing its pledges through amendments in legislation in the area of civil registration and nationality. This includes the

development and endorsement of relevant bylaws and procedures in order to ensure no gaps in legislation, in line with international standards.

The national census planned for 2020 is likely to be postponed until 2021. Given the limited capacity of state resources, triggered by the COVID-19 crisis, the UNHCR-UNICEF Issue-Based Coalition will support the State Registration Service and other relevant state entities in enhancing the capacity of registry and passport officials to facilitate the timely resolution of any new stateless cases.

## Refugees

Economic instability caused by COVID-19 and growing socio-economic needs have increased pressure on the Government to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, including refugees and asylum seekers. Limited government capacity to address emerging needs in the long run will include the full restoration of the informal sector, among others, which employs most of UNHCR's persons of concern who depend on daily wages. UNHCR will need to continue to provide financial support to vulnerable refugees. At the same time, UNHCR will continue to work closely with the Government to ensure that persons of concern are included in national response plans and have access to state assistance.

In 2020, several legislative revisions were initiated that significantly affected the asylum space and refugee protection. The national Refugee Law was revised in 2020, introducing grounds for rejecting repeated asylum claims. Amendments to the Law on External Migration, which set more restrictions and penalties for illegal stay, have been submitted to parliament. The Code on Violations has been revised and submitted to parliament to allow for expulsion based on a decision by administrative authorities. UNHCR continues to work with the State Migration Service, judiciary and the State Border Service, the Ministry of Interior and the National Security Committee, in order to ensure access to territory and non-refoulement, with due legal process and the right to appeal, and advocate changes in legislation in line with international obligations and standards.

The Kyrgyz Republic plans to hold parliamentary elections in October 2020 which would entail a subsequent reshuffle of government officials. In 2021, UNHCR will enhance capacity building activities for newly elected Members of Parliament (MPs) and newly appointed government officials on asylum and refugee issues.

## Emergency Preparedness

The parliamentary elections in October 2020 could negatively impact the overall stability in the country given the fragile situation caused by COVID-19 and subsequent socio-economic challenges. Emergency preparedness/contingency planning is a UN Country Team priority. UNHCR will engage with its national counterparts and update the joint contingency plan for refugee situations and internal displacement scenarios. This will be followed by a simulation exercise that will build the contingency planning and emergency response capacity of state officials.



📷 Refugee and Tajik children came together to watch a puppet theatre play organized in Vakhdat, Tajikistan, for the World Refugee Day. © UNHCR/Didor Sadulloev

### 3.3 Tajikistan

#### Statelessness

The Government of Tajikistan announced its pledges during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness in Geneva in 2019. For example, the adoption of the Amnesty Law, as one of the pledges, was fulfilled in 2019 with implementation as of 2020. Amidst the COVID-19 outbreak, identification and information dissemination of Amnesty Law information were not significantly affected. However, the priorities of beneficiaries have shifted to their immediate basic needs such as food or medicine, rather than regularizing their legal status. Although UNHCR had a support system to cover administrative fees for nationality confirmation or issuance of documentation to a limited number of stateless persons who meet the vulnerability criteria, the segment of those becoming vulnerable has increased dramatically vis-à-vis the assistance available from

UNHCR. UNHCR is exploring new ways to ensure that stateless persons do regularize their legal status despite the challenges associated with the need to cover these fees. It should be noted that the Amnesty Law is time-bound, till 2023. In addition, UNHCR continues to advocate for legislative changes, support in the development of Statelessness Status Determination Procedures, and accession to the Conventions.

#### Refugees

Tajikistan hosts a comparatively large number of refugees and asylum seekers. Since the reporting of the initial COVID-19 cases in Tajikistan in April 2020, UNHCR has had to reconsider its planned activities and shift to addressing humanitarian needs of persons of concern. The situation is expected to continue until the end of the year, and most likely beyond, hence UNHCR will balance the nexus between capacity building activities and humanitarian response, with

a broad focus on medical interventions, financial assistance and education support. It is believed that the adverse implications of COVID-19 on the socio-economic development of Tajikistan will have lasting effects in 2021 and beyond. As such UNHCR will step up its livelihood interventions targeting both refugees and vulnerable host communities. At the same time, UNHCR will continue close cooperation with the Government on ensured access to territory and procedures, should the borders reopen. In parallel UNHCR will continue highlighting the principle of *non-refoulement* and acceptance of asylum cases in the event of illegal border crossings.

### Emergency Preparedness

UNHCR had planned to fully hand over emergency preparedness activities to the Government by 2021, maintaining only soft engagement for support and advice purposes. During the course of 2020, UNHCR planned to conduct a full-scale refugee influx simulation exercise with subsequent follow-up training for the Government, including participation of Committee of Emergency Situations staff, with technical support by the UNHCR Regional Centre for Emergency Preparedness (eCentre) based in Bangkok. All these activities have been postponed or canceled due to COVID-19, and there is a high probability that the plans will need to be entirely redesigned by incorporating new realities arising from COVID-19. For example, simulations will need to include additional means for physical distancing, hand washing and medical care in an emergency refugee reception, registration, referral, and assistance to vulnerable group, to name a few. Local capacity building, training of trainers, and handing over the emergency preparedness component to the Government are likely to require time beyond the scope of this strategy.



📷 Mukaddas Yusupova received the citizenship of Turkmenistan together with over 800 former stateless persons living in the country in accordance with the Presidential decree of 20 September 2019. © UNHCR

## 3.4 Turkmenistan

### Statelessness

The Turkmen Government has introduced very early measures to prevent the import of COVID-19 from abroad, including a strict travel restriction. At the time of writing this addendum, Turkmenistan has not officially registered any COVID-19 cases within its borders. In anticipation that the measures may continue throughout the year, the Turkmen Government and UNHCR have revised the joint annual work plan to introduce alternative online implementation modalities. This includes part of its support in the context of Turkmenistan's National Action Plan to End Statelessness (2019-2024). Some delays in obtaining the required documentations, such as certificates of lack of citizenship, are reported due to temporary suspension or limited presence of third country consulates. Nevertheless, the



📷 Tens of thousands of stateless people, many of whom became stateless with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, will benefit from Uzbekistan's new law confirming their right to citizenship. © UNHCR

statelessness identification and reduction component in Turkmenistan, implemented by UNHCR's civil society partners - Keik Okara and the National Red Crescent Society of Turkmenistan, continue as planned.

The Government's strong commitment to reducing and preventing statelessness has been reaffirmed through the pledges announced during the High-Level Segment on Statelessness. These include affirmations on the resolution of the existing stateless caseload, prevention of childhood statelessness through ensuring universal birth registration, protection of stateless persons through enactment of stateless determination procedures and improving qualitative and quantitative data on statelessness through the inclusion of related questions in the 2022 national population census.

## Refugees

The global pandemic has also affected the situation of refugees in Turkmenistan. UNHCR will continue to monitor their situation and intervene as needed to ensure that refugees meet their basic needs. UNHCR will continue its advocacy efforts to find lasting solutions for mandate refugees through regularization of their status. UNHCR will continue to advocate for the implementation of the Refugee Law, including access to territory and national asylum procedures.

## Emergency Preparedness

UNHCR will deliver the planned annual emergency preparedness and response trainings for the Turkmen government officials through alternative online modalities, depending on the further development of the pandemic. UNHCR will involve other UN Agencies, the National Red Crescent Society and civil society organizations.

## 3.5 Uzbekistan

### Statelessness

Uzbekistan is a country with a relatively large number of stateless persons. In February 2020, the Uzbek government and UNHCR agreed on the activities in the coming years and joint way forward. With the enactment of a new citizenship law as of April 2020, some 50,000 de jure stateless persons are expected to acquire the citizenship of Uzbekistan. While country-wide, population documentation, birth registration, and civil registry reforms are expected to further reduce and prevent statelessness. Advocacy for legislative reform will continue to be a major field of UNHCR's activities to ensure that due safeguards are in place in national legislations and practices to prevent statelessness. UNHCR will enhance collaboration with the Uzbek authorities in capacity building and promoting awareness about statelessness among the state officials, practitioners and the general public. With the UN Country Team, UNHCR will continue to support the Government in mapping the stateless population through the upcoming 2022 national population census, the first one since 1989.

UNHCR welcomes the recommendations on ratification of the 1954 and the 1961 UN Statelessness Conventions, formulated in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council and accepted by the Government of Uzbekistan. For Uzbekistan to align its legislation and practices with international standards, UNHCR, jointly with the National Human Rights Center, will commission a national comparative legal study, which will also serve as an advocacy tool for future action.

### Refugees

Due to restriction on movement in Uzbekistan, refugees, who were mostly employed in the informal sector, were immediately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Without legal status in the country, refugees have access only to emergency medical care, including COVID-19 related support provided by the Government. UNHCR will continue to monitor their situation and ensure that refugees meet their basic needs. UNHCR will continue its advocacy efforts to regularize the legal status of mandate refugees in Uzbekistan.

UNHCR stands ready to support the Government of Uzbekistan in implementing the UPR recommendations on accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol and offers its expertise in developing an efficient national asylum system in line with international standards.

### Emergency Preparedness

UNHCR stands ready to support the Government in training of trainers and in developing comprehensive preparedness and response plans, including an introduction of "regional guidelines on how to identify refugees and asylum seekers at the borders of Central Asia".

# 4. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

This UNHCR Central Asia strategy is implemented through annual programmes, the monitoring of which is guided by the UNHCR Results-Based Management framework throughout the Operations Management Cycle. Multi-Functional Teams consisting of UNHCR and partner personnel regularly verify the financial aspects of the projects, performance and, importantly, the impact indicators of the programmes.

More specifically, and as part of its Conventions' supervisory role, UNHCR closely observe access to asylum, the quality of refugee status determination procedures and decisions, and compliance of national legal and administrative frameworks governing asylum and statelessness matters in accordance with international standards.

As of mid-2020, the closure and strict control of state borders paired with lockdown within countries' borders and interrupted transportation opportunities have affected the operational mobility of all goods and services. The modalities of UNHCR's work for each country will be adjusted following the local rules and regulations.

UNHCR will continue to adjust and tailor its mode of operation in a cost-effective manner to meet the essential needs of persons of concern and to ensure UNHCR's adequate presence in the Central Asia region.

## FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS ARE ESTIMATED AS BELOW. [USD]

	2019	2020	2021
KAZAKHSTAN MULTI COUNTRY OFFICE (regional activities, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan)	5,528,849	3,171,295	2,859,492
THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC	813,836	712,750	700,000
TAJIKISTAN	2,333,462	2,020,000	2,020,702
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>8,676,147*</b>	<b>5,904,045**</b>	<b>5,580,194***</b>

\* 2019 – Source: UNHCR Global Report 2019, Regional Summaries: Asia and Pacific, [https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2019/pdf/05\\_Asia.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2019/pdf/05_Asia.pdf)

Of the total requirement of 8,676,147 USD; 5,156,196 USD was allocated and spent for the implementation of the planned activities. Some 2 million USD were made available by the governments of the United States, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic. The remaining amount was allocated from broadly earmarked funding sources.

\*\* 2020 – Source: Global Appeal, 2019 Update, UNHCR, page 103. As of July 2020, with the development of the COVID-19 pandemic, new needs have emerged, especially to cover the basic needs of the most vulnerable groups. UNHCR, through the budget re-allocation, provided immediate additional humanitarian assistance to the persons of concern. The estimated total requirement stands at 6.5 million USD, pending development of the situation on the ground during the second half of the year.

As of July 2020, UNHCR has appealed for 1,180,000 USD for additional needs for Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. Ref. Coronavirus emergency appeal, UNHCR's preparedness and response plan (REVISION), May 2020, page 34: <https://bit.ly/3g5UMhI>

\*\*\* Source: UNHCR 2020-2021 Global Appeal, Regional Summaries: Asia and Pacific, [https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2020/pdf/Chapter\\_Asia.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/ga2020/pdf/Chapter_Asia.pdf)





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