



Central Asia

Working environment

The fallout from the Andijan events in Uzbekistan in May 2005, when hundreds of protesters were killed by government troops, continues to affect the overall situation in Central Asia, where there have been further signs of deterioration in the protection environment in 2006.

The *refoulement* of four Uzbek refugees and one Uzbek asylum-seeker by Kyrgyzstan in August 2006 and the subsequent abduction of Uzbek asylum-seekers from Kyrgyzstan were preceded in April 2006 by the Uzbek Government's decision to close UNHCR's office in the country. In general, access to asylum has been further constrained, and granting of refugee status is subject to more restrictive interpretations.

Nevertheless, there was progress in some areas. The search for solutions for Tajiks in Central Asia has moved forward. In June 2006 under the terms of the cessation clause of UNHCR's statute, refugee status for Tajiks was considered to be no longer applicable in light of improved conditions for them in their homeland and elsewhere. More than 10,000 Tajiks have received citizenship in Turkmenistan. Furthermore, a naturalization campaign for Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan will be almost complete by the end of 2006, with some 8,700 people given citizenship. Following these developments, UNHCR's returnee programme for Tajiks is about to be phased out. Reintegration activities will be taken over by development agencies.

Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan



Afghan refugees in all the Central Asian Republics have also benefited from durable solutions. Many of them have been resettled in third countries; those who have not are trying to gain permanent resident status with the help of UNHCR. In Tajikistan, in particular, UNHCR and the Government are discussing the possibilities of longer-term forms of residence for the 1,000 Afghans still in the country.

Given the fragile political situation in the region, particularly in Uzbekistan's Ferghana Valley, UNHCR and its partners have prepared a contingency plan which is regularly updated.

Strategy

UNHCR will continue to support Central Asian Governments to improve their national asylum regimes to guarantee the protection of refugees and others of concern. Supporting national refugee status determination procedures remains UNHCR's top priority in the region.

In this regard, partnerships with civil society institutions, human rights NGOs, international organizations and key States in the region are critical.

Another equally important objective for UNHCR in 2007 is finding durable solutions for Afghan refugees. UNHCR has decided that in 2007 it will move resources from resettlement to local integration activities, particularly for those Afghans for whom return is not an option.

In 2007, the offices in the region will focus on the implementation of activities which take into consideration the needs of specific groups in the population including women, girls, boys, older people and people with specific needs.

UNHCR and its partners will continue to update contingency plans at the national and regional levels in consultation with key stakeholders. The re-establishment of an office in Osh, southern Kyrgyzstan, has improved the Office's capacity to receive asylum-seekers and respond to emergencies.

Operations

UNHCR will support **Kazakhstan's** decision to develop a migration strategy and encourage the Government to adopt national refugee legislation. Pending adoption of such laws, UNHCR will work with the Government on interim arrangements for the protection of asylum-seekers and refugees. In addition, the Office will provide legal assistance and protection to all those in need. This will cover temporary health and financial assistance to the most vulnerable refugee families; informal education for refugee children not enrolled in the national system; and income-generation programmes.

The drastic changes in the political and government structures in Kyrgyzstan together with the crisis in Uzbekistan have weakened **Kyrgyzstan's** asylum system. Only after lengthy discussions did the Kyrgyz authorities agree to register all Uzbek asylum-seekers—but on

condition that they are immediately resettled if their status is confirmed by UNHCR. This new agreement represents a step backwards from previous procedures. Significant efforts are necessary to restore the local authorities' capacity to provide protection to asylum-seekers and refugees.

UNHCR will continue efforts to find durable solutions for all refugees in Kyrgyzstan. These will range from helping to finalize the naturalization process for Tajik refugees and strengthening laws related to local integration, to advocating the naturalization of other refugee populations. The Office will also help ascertain the number and categories of stateless people and assist

the Government in devising a strategy to reduce statelessness in the country.

UNHCR will provide medical assistance through the state health insurance programme and facilitate access to primary and secondary education. It will empower refugee women through vocational skills training and programmes for the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR will continue its efforts to assist national institutions to deal with asylum-seekers and refugees in accordance with international standards. Furthermore, UNHCR and the Government are working



Microcredit programmes set up by UNHCR have helped hundreds of Tajik returnees rebuild their lives back in their country.
UNHCR / J. Redden

to develop an asylum regime which fully respects the principle of *non-refoulement* and conducts refugee status determination in accordance with accepted standards. UNHCR has recently been re-included in the National Refugee Status Determination Commission.

UNHCR and the Tajikistan Government are discussing the possibility of granting longer-term forms of residence to those Afghans remaining in the country after current resettlement programmes are completed. In addition, the Office will continue to promote awareness programmes on HIV-AIDS and the prevention of sexual and gender-based violence.

In **Turkmenistan**, some 10,000 Tajik refugees of Turkmen origin will be naturalized by the end of 2006. UNHCR will continue to push for the naturalization of another 2,500 Tajik refugees of Uzbek and Afghan origin. It will assist in the local integration process to ensure that former refugees attain living standards similar to those of the local population. Such projects cover schooling, vocational training and the empowerment of women and girls.

UNHCR remains committed to helping the State Service for Registration of Foreign Citizens and other government agencies dealing with asylum issues to boost their ability to implement the national refugee law. However, with solutions being found for most of the refugees in Turkmenistan, it is likely that UNHCR's operations in the country will be reduced in 2007.

The UNHCR office in **Uzbekistan** was closed abruptly in April 2006 at the request of the Government. Therefore, in 2007 UNHCR will depend on the good offices of UNDP to find solutions for some 1,400 Afghan refugees remaining in the country. Group resettlement and voluntary repatriation would be the best solutions for this group.

Budget (USD)		
Country	Annual Programme Budget	
	2006	2007
Kazakhstan	1,834,526	1,644,523
Kyrgyzstan	1,291,566	1,439,904
Tajikistan	1,319,032	1,152,957
Turkmenistan	1,020,770	765,635
Uzbekistan	1,277,649	0
Total	6,743,543	5,003,019

