



Central Asia

Major developments

As part of the enhanced security regulations put in place in Turkmenistan following the attempt on the life of the President in November 2002, a new service was established in 2003 to regulate the migration and registration of foreign citizens. Its brief was "to accept and determine refugee status and register refugees and forced migrants on the territory of Turkmenistan and ensure their voluntary repatriation". However, at the time of publication, the service still lacked the operational capacity for such an undertaking.

In 2003, UNHCR reached agreement with the European Commission that it should become a partner in implementing an EU border management programme in Central Asia. As a first step, its office in Uzbekistan will rehabilitate two border posts, one in Termez and one in Ferghana, and provide training for border officials on refugee law. Through involvement in the programme, UNHCR can thus ensure that the rights and needs of refugees and asylum-seekers are respected.

Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan



Challenges and concerns

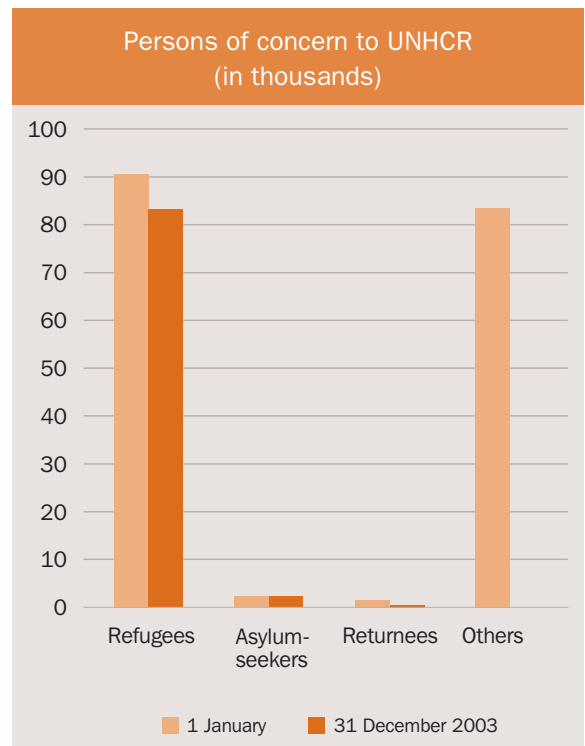
For some time, UNHCR has been encouraging the Governments of Central Asia to develop and strengthen refugee protection and to establish effective national structures to deal with asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons. Although progress has been made on some issues, many challenges remain.

Turkmen legislation does not, for example, foresee the establishment of special procedures for the naturalization of refugees. The Office is negotiating naturalization of refugees eligible under the 1992 Turkmen Citizenship Law (this would apply to almost all Tajik and Afghan refugees).

In Kazakhstan, the absence of specific national refugee legislation hinders the effective implementation of minimum protection standards for asylum-seekers and refugees. The situation is exacerbated by the lack of technical expertise among government employees and NGOs.

In Uzbekistan (the only Central Asian Republic which has not yet acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention), Government concerns about security

continue to impede the development of national protection mechanisms for refugees and asylum-seekers. Refugees do not, therefore, have any legal rights and are unable to work or gain access to social services, although refugee children are able to



attend Uzbek schools. Nevertheless, UNHCR has cooperated on the drafting of a new law on migration, which includes a chapter on refugees, and asylum-seekers, and is advocating its adoption.

Progress towards solutions

Over the past year, the Office made progress in establishing national asylum systems and ensuring the provision of refugee protection in a number of countries in Central Asia – particularly in Kyrgyzstan, where, under the 2003 Kyrgyz-Tajik Agreement on Simplified Procedure for Citizenship Acquisition, the Government is integrating ethnic Kyrgyz refugees from Tajikistan and giving them citizenship, thereby facilitating full local integration. UNHCR also urged the Government of Turkmenistan to naturalize and integrate refugees of Turkmen origin from Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Some progress was made in Tajikistan. In January 2003, the State Migration Service resumed the RSD process after a two-year suspension. The Government has agreed to a UNHCR-sponsored re-registration exercise which will result in the provision of documents to refugees and provide exact data on the refugees currently hosted by Tajikistan. Discussions on the local integration of the (mainly Afghan) refugees in Tajikistan have also commenced. In addition, the Tajik Government has agreed to revise the current refugee legislation. UNHCR has been advocating that this should conform to the Convention, and has provided detailed comments and amendments. Most of these have been endorsed and the revised law is expected to be approved in late 2004.

Meanwhile, UNHCR discussed with the Government the modalities for the registration of Chechens living in Kazakhstan. A survey of Chechens living in Kazakhstan was planned for early 2004 as a first step towards negotiating minimum protection for this group.

Although UNHCR worked principally towards the naturalization and local integration of refugees in Central Asia wherever feasible, voluntary repatriation and resettlement were also pursued. In 2003, the Office helped 362 Afghans to return from Central Asia (171 from Uzbekistan, 143 from Tajikistan, 33 from Turkmenistan, and 15 from Kyrgyzstan). Some 76 Chechen asylum-seekers returned from

Kyrgyzstan. While the vast majority of Tajik refugees are taking advantage of opportunities to obtain citizenship in Kyrgyzstan and to integrate locally in other Central Asian republics, some still opted for voluntary repatriation in 2003: 143 were assisted to return from Tajikistan, 83 from Kyrgyzstan and 52 from Kazakhstan.

During 2003, 208 refugees were resettled in third countries from Kyrgyzstan, 143 from Tajikistan, 135 from Uzbekistan, and 19 from Turkmenistan. A newly negotiated "facilitated resettlement programme" promises to resettle nearly all of a group of 600 recognized long-staying Afghans from Kyrgyzstan to Canada in 2004. The Kyrgyz authorities agreed to reconsider naturalizing the small group of Afghans who will remain in the country.

Operations

UNHCR offices throughout Central Asia focused on capacity-building, providing training in refugee and human rights-related issues to government officials and employees and NGO staff members. Refugees were able to obtain legal advice from counselling centres set up with UNHCR support. Efforts were made to ensure that refugees have access to education and medical care.

In **Kazakhstan** UNHCR provided technical expertise and advice to the Government on strengthening the activities of the existing national RSD Commission in Almaty and establishing a new Commission in Astana, as well as developing a registration database system. UNHCR also contributed to vocational skills training courses and activities for refugees, and, in areas where the national medical service could not meet all refugees' needs, supported the provision of additional services via the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNHCR emphasized activities to prepare Afghans for their eventual return home, including vocational training and support for a school with lessons taught in the Dari language. Efforts were also made to help Chechens become more self-sufficient through skills training and employment schemes. UNHCR provided funds to help children from especially poor refugee families to attend school. As planned, UNHCR phased out local integration activities for Tajik refugees.



Kazakhstan: An elderly woman who returned home to Kurgan Province. *UNHCR/A. Hollmann*

In **Tajikistan** reintegration projects continued, with an emphasis on micro-credit projects targeting women and single-headed household beneficiaries and on community development-related projects.

In **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR did not meet its objective of undertaking a comprehensive census/registration of refugees and persons of concern. Two local NGOs, however, conducted a survey of *prima facie* refugees in three provinces, which provided basic data for the comprehensive registration being planned with the Government in preparation for naturalization of eligible refugees.

Local integration projects for some 12,000 Tajik and 800 Afghan refugees of Tajik origin continued through 2003, with special emphasis on refugee women, children, and people with special needs. Locally integrating refugees and their new communities were assisted through the upgrading of community infrastructure, such as schools and drainage systems, and the provision of some medical equipment, water and health projects as well as vocational training activities. More than 1,300 people received legal counselling at the Legal Clinic established by UNHCR in Ashgabat.

UNHCR ran a series of training workshops and seminars for government employees on refugee issues and human rights.

In **Uzbekistan**, the most vulnerable refugees received basic material assistance. All had access to medical units run by UNHCR implementing partners and the opportunity to receive training on income generation. They also had access to legal clinics and received substantial counselling.

Funding

In Central Asia, some budgets were marginally decreased (Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) but these reductions did not have a negative impact on operations.

Voluntary contributions - Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget	
		Income	Contribution
Central Asia			
	Japan	400,000	400,000
	Sweden	1,026,226	1,026,226
	United States of America	1,372,000	1,372,000
Tajikistan			
	Canada	85,034	85,034
	Norway	565,771	565,771
Total		3,449,031	3,449,031

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)						
Country	Revised Budget			Expenditure		
	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total	Annual programme budget	Supplementary programme budget	Total
Kazakhstan	1,379,386	0	1,379,386	1,127,523	0	1,127,523
Kyrgyzstan	1,176,461	0	1,176,461	1,120,376	0	1,120,376
Tajikistan	1,591,163	145,629	1,736,792	1,395,463	113,867	1,509,330
Turkmenistan	913,245	74,000	987,245	861,091	67,099	928,190
Uzbekistan	1,073,534	198,866	1,272,400	979,890	181,741	1,161,631
Total	6,133,789	418,495	6,552,284	5,484,343	362,707	5,847,050

Note: The Supplementary programme budgets do not include a 7 per cent charge (support costs) that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.