



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

Central Asia



Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan



A family in Bishkek, Kyrgystan, waits for a resettlement interview at a UNHCR office.



OPERATIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

- The Government of Kazakhstan adopted national refugee legislation, a significant step in bringing the country’s laws in line with its international obligations. UNHCR provided government officials with support during the drafting of the new legislation and will continue providing expert advice during implementation.
- The Government of Tajikistan granted access to its territory to an increasing number of Afghan asylum-seekers due to the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan. UNHCR works closely with the Government to protect the new arrivals.
- UNHCR’s capacity-building support has enabled the Government of Turkmenistan to undertake refugee status determination (RSD) in accordance with its international and national obligations.
- UNHCR continued to pursue durable solutions, mainly through resettlement, for a significant number of Afghans and Uzbeks.
- Sustained advocacy by UNHCR and its NGO partners raised the awareness of the authorities in Central Asia of statelessness issues. Some 11,800 stateless people were able to acquire Kyrgyz nationality in 2009. The Office will continue working with the authorities to identify stateless people and those at risk of becoming stateless.

| Working environment |

The year 2009 saw some positive developments in Central Asia. The Government of Kazakhstan adopted national refugee legislation, becoming the fourth country in the region to do so. In Turkmenistan, the Government assumed its responsibilities to undertake RSD. The Governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan expressed their willingness to address issues relating to the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

Despite these positive developments, slow progress related to the rule of law and concerns related to cross-border and national security issues continued to take precedence over national and international asylum obligations. The security of Uzbeks seeking asylum in the region remained a concern.

UNHCR continued to be confronted by challenges arising from a continuous increase in the number of Afghan asylum-seekers in Tajikistan. The problems were compounded by restrictions related to the registration and documentation of asylum-seekers.

| Achievements and impact |

UNHCR operations in Central Asia were focused on protecting refugees and providing appropriate durable solutions, reducing and preventing statelessness, and maintaining the capacity to respond to emergencies involving population displacement.

The new regional management system became operational. In light of the findings of the participatory assessments, UNHCR strengthened activities to address the situation of women and children and counter sexual and gender-based violence.

The Office trained border guards on referral systems and initiated preparatory work for an assessment of the migration situation in the subregion as part of its strategy to enhance refugee protection within mixed migration flows. UNHCR's efforts in this area have also been bolstered through its affiliate membership of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Border Management Staff College, based in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

UNHCR carried out a gaps analysis on the statelessness situation in the region, and teamed up with the OSCE for the Regional Conference on Statelessness that took place in Turkmenistan in December 2009. UNHCR strengthened its partnership with the UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Central Asia, and with it organized an international conference to discuss the situation in

Afghanistan as it related to Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers in the region.

Due to Central Asia's proximity to conflict zones, UNHCR reinforced capacity building for emergency management at the regional and country levels through the first-ever Central Asia Emergency and Disaster Workshop that was held in Kazakhstan in April 2009. The Government, as co-host, contributed generously to this event, which brought together some of 30 participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to discuss ways to improve the response to humanitarian emergencies.

UNHCR also participated in inter-agency planning to improve emergency and refugee-reception preparedness at the regional and country level. The Office played a role in a number of inter-agency mechanisms, such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and the UN's Delivering as One initiative.

| Constraints |

Sensitivities associated with national security continued to be one of the main constraints affecting refugee protection in the region. A discriminatory approach towards asylum-seekers from within the region and reluctance by some countries to register new asylum-seekers from Afghanistan contributed to the deterioration of the protection environment. The restructuring of governmental departments responsible for refugees and asylum led to more UNHCR resources being put into basic training instead of towards strengthening existing capacities.

| Operations |

UNHCR operations in the five Central Asian countries share similarities, given the common concerns and operating environments. Afghans remained the largest refugee group in the region. The Office assisted the Governments of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in developing a Plan of Action to prevent and address statelessness.

In **Kazakhstan** advocacy for the adoption of a national refugee law remained a priority in 2009. UNHCR continued to build the capacity of the Government and civil society through regular meetings and training sessions. In order to ensure legal protection for asylum-seekers with no access to national RSD procedures, UNHCR maintained its RSD capacity.

With regard to durable solutions, prospects for voluntary repatriation remained scarce and mainly concerned Chechen and a few Afghan refugees. Local integration continued to be a challenge due to restrictions in national legislation. Resettlement continued to be used as a protection tool for those whose basic rights could not be secured.

In cooperation with its implementing partners, UNHCR provided basic assistance to refugees with specific needs. Support was also provided in the areas of health and education. Progress was made in ensuring refugee children had access to the local educational system.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNHCR continued to provide legal support and ensure the maintenance of dignified conditions for refugees. The Office provided life-saving support to refugees and asylum-seekers during the 2008 - 2009 winter, through funds received in response to the UN's humanitarian flash appeal for Kyrgyzstan.

UNHCR continued to build the capacity of various government bodies to ensure protection against *refoulement*, access to the national RSD system, and respect for the civil, social and economic rights of refugees. An inter-ministerial and inter-agency expert working group was set up to draft concrete recommendations for actions to prevent and reduce statelessness. UNHCR also commissioned a study on the adherence of Kyrgyz legislation to the 1954 and 1961 UN Statelessness Conventions. These efforts contributed to the adoption of a comprehensive National Action Plan for the Reduction and Prevention of Statelessness in the Kyrgyz Republic.

In **Tajikistan**, RSD responsibilities were transferred from the Ministry of Labour to the Ministry of Interior. Given this development, UNHCR re-focused its efforts on developing the capacity of the new governmental structure. The provision of assistance to an increasing number of new arrivals was another challenge for the operation.

UNHCR strengthened its cooperation with the Afghan Refugee Committee, which provides support to new arrivals. UNHCR reviewed its local integration approach and developed new strategies for durable solutions, with more attention paid to the strategic use of resettlement.

UNHCR participated in several OSCE-organized training sessions for Tajik and Afghan border guards within the framework of the OSCE's border management projects. Contingency planning remained among UNHCR's priorities in the country, and the Office's concerns were given due weight within the Rapid Emergency Assessment and Coordination Team (REACT).

In **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR continued to advocate for secure access to asylum and protection against *refoulement*.

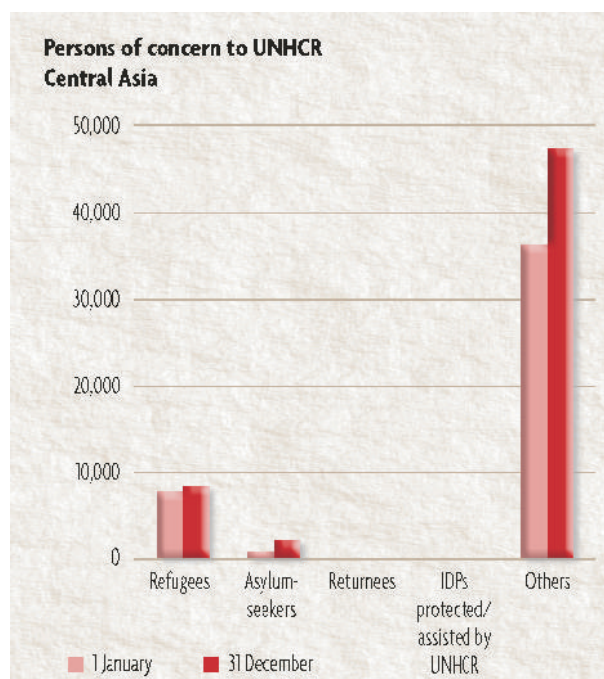
Training on protection and RSD was provided for staff of the State Migration Services as well as to judges of the courts in charge of processing appeals for asylum claims.

UNHCR continued to advocate for the Government to grant access to country's naturalization mechanisms for all remaining *prima facie* refugees. The Office helped improve the well being of populations of concern in relation to water, education, skills training for young people and women's economic empowerment.

In **Uzbekistan**, UNHCR found durable solutions, primarily through resettlement, for 226 refugees. Resettlement remained the most viable durable solution and protection tool for this group.

Financial information |

In 2009, additional funds were received to address protection needs and gaps. This included assistance for new arrivals in Tajikistan and capacity building efforts in support of new government officials responsible for refugee and asylum matters. In Kazakhstan there was a need for advocacy for the adoption of national refugee legislation, while Kyrgyzstan required an intensification of anti-statelessness activities. The budget in Turkmenistan was also increased in 2009 to cover improvements in social services and infrastructure, as well as and reproductive health programmes for refugees and host communities.



Budget and expenditure in Central Asia (USD)		
Country	Annual budget	
	Final budget	Expenditure
Kazakhstan	2,347,625	1,963,763
Kyrgyzstan	1,454,973	1,351,319
Tajikistan	627,597	614,878
Turkmenistan	705,867	700,211
Uzbekistan	158,607	158,563
Regional activities	88,500	52,486
Total	5,383,169	4,841,220

Note: Excludes indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities-mandate-related"(NAM) reserve.

Voluntary contributions to Central Asia (USD)			
Earmarking	Donor	Annual budget	Total
Central Asia subregion	Sweden	1,300,390	1,300,390
	United States of America	1,200,000	1,200,000
Central Asia subtotal		2,500,390	2,500,390
Kazakhstan	United States of America	100,000	100,000
Kazakhstan subtotal		100,000	100,000
Kyrgyzstan	Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)	110,797	110,797
	United States of America	66,960	66,960
Kyrgyzstan subtotal		177,757	177,757
Turkmenistan	UN Trust Fund for Human Security	155,017	155,017
Turkmenistan subtotal		155,017	155,017
Total		2,933,164	2,933,164

Note: Contributions listed above exclude indirect support costs that are recovered from contributions against supplementary programmes and the "New or additional activities-mandate-related" (NAM) reserve.