

Central Asia



Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan

A woman surveys the remains of her home, destroyed in a violent attack during the recent conflict in southern Kyrgyzstan.



| Working environment |

The 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol have been ratified by all countries in Central Asia except Uzbekistan. However, compliance with these instruments remains problematic. Despite sustained efforts by UNHCR and other stakeholders to build protection capacity and strengthen asylum systems, results have so far been modest.

The inter-communal violence that erupted in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 triggered the launch of a rapid emergency response to assist some 300,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kyrgyzstan and some 75,000 refugees who had fled to Uzbekistan. As the refugees returned home within weeks after the conflict, humanitarian efforts concentrated on providing protection and emergency aid as well as transitional shelter to returnees and IDPs in the south of Kyrgyzstan.

The events in June underlined the prevalence of threats and challenges in this multi-ethnic subregion. They also added

weight to UNHCR's decision to maintain a modest presence as well as a contingency planning and response capacity in the south of Kyrgyzstan over the last few years.

On the other hand, there have been some encouraging developments in Central Asia recently, related to human rights, refugee protection and statelessness. Kyrgyzstan has improved arrangements for asylum-seekers to gain access to registration and documentation. In Kazakhstan, a newly-adopted refugee law has come into force in January 2010, and since April 2010, all recognized refugees and asylum-seekers have been referred to the Government. Although the law contains key principles of international refugee law, a number of its provisions are not fully consistent with international standards. A ministerial working group is reviewing the national refugee law and developing arrangements for the transfer of refugee status determination (RSD) responsibilities from UNHCR to the authorities.



In Turkmenistan, the Government had already agreed to assume responsibility for RSD, and efforts to amend the refugee and citizenship laws are under way. Furthermore, the Government has achieved some progress in addressing statelessness. In Tajikistan, the number of new arrivals from Afghanistan has continued to grow unabated in 2010. The restructuring of ministerial responsibility for asylum that was undertaken in 2009 has continued into 2010, causing further delays in setting up a new asylum framework. On the other hand, this has also provided opportunities to advocate for amendments to the refugee legislation, in order to bring it into line with international standards.

Strategy in 2011

The five regional priorities in Central Asia for 2011 are:

- **Strengthening asylum:** UNHCR's primary strategic objective will continue to be preserving and strengthening asylum space, through advocacy on compliance with international instruments, the adoption of domestic legislation, and the establishment of relevant mechanisms. Harmonizing approaches to RSD, the profiling of refugees, and providing assistance to asylum-seekers will continue to be critical components of this regional priority.
- **Prevention and reduction of statelessness:** Under a comprehensive regional strategy, country-specific action plans will aim to protect stateless persons, as well as prevent and reduce statelessness.

- **Protection of refugees within mixed migratory flows:** A regional strategy addressing the protection concerns of entry systems at borders will be accompanied by efforts to build the capacity of the relevant authorities.
- **Promotion of self-reliance and local integration:** Where possible, local integration will be pursued for refugees remaining in the region. Resettlement will continue to be used as a protection tool for those whose legal or physical security is endangered, or who have no prospect of local integration or voluntary repatriation to their country of origin. At the same time, efforts will be undertaken to improve national legal instruments, with a view to providing refugees the possibility of acquiring citizenship.
- **Contingency planning and emergency preparedness:** UNHCR will strive to work with governments to prepare joint contingency plans for refugee influxes, and build national capacities to deal with internal displacement. The lessons learned from the June events in Kyrgyzstan will serve as basis of these efforts.

Based on the results of the participatory assessment undertaken in all Central Asian countries, key elements to be addressed in UNHCR's programmes in 2011 include: the educational needs of children; access to primary health care; the participation of women in community mobilization and decision-making; measures to prevent gender-based violence; and encouraging governments to adopt age, gender and diversity-sensitive policies.

Constraints

The perception of asylum as a political issue and a threat to national security continues to present significant challenges to the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers in Central Asia. At any time, escalation of political instability may lead to population displacement and change the nature of UNHCR's operations in the region.

In Uzbekistan, where UNHCR has no presence, and where protection activities are carried out through UNDP, the lack of direct contact with the relevant authorities hampers protection interventions and cooperation on durable solutions.

As demonstrated during the inter-communal violence in Kyrgyzstan, there is only limited capacity in the region to deal with internal displacement or major refugee influxes.

Operations

UNHCR's operations in the five Central Asian countries have common groups of concern and similar operating environments. Afghans remain the largest and the most widely dispersed refugee group in this subregion. In 2011, UNHCR will continue to advocate for the countries in Central Asia to accede to the international statelessness instruments, and work with relevant national structures on the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

Due to the recent referral of recognized refugees and registered asylum-seekers to the Government of **Kazakhstan**, UNHCR will be helping the State RSD Commission to increase its capacity. It will also seek to ensure *non-refoulement*, and intervene on behalf of all persons of concern who are denied access to protection due to political sensitivities or security considerations in the region.

Essential services such as cash assistance, access to health care and education will continue to be provided to the most vulnerable refugees. As part of its durable solutions strategy, the Office will seek to find self-reliance opportunities for refugees. In view of the recent events in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan, the contingency plan has been updated, and the Office will work on developing the capacity of the Government and implementing partners to improve emergency preparedness in the case of mass influx.

In 2011, UNHCR will work with the Government of Kazakhstan to improve national legislation and administrative procedures relating to refugees and stateless persons. It will also collaborate with the authorities on identifying and documenting

stateless persons and on the local integration of refugees. UNHCR will devote resources to set up a data system for identifying, registering and referring new asylum-seekers arriving at the border.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Office will continue to assist IDPs and returnees as well as support local communities and the authorities, as they address the urgent humanitarian needs arising from the inter-communal violence and subsequent displacement which occurred in June 2010. (See Box)

UNHCR will also continue to help strengthen the capacity of the authorities to ensure protection against *refoulement*, to improve the quality of the national RSD system, and to uphold respect for refugees' civil, social and economic rights. Asylum-seekers and refugees will continue to benefit from assistance in basic services as well as scholarships and language classes.

Governmental reception facilities will be supported by UNHCR, with additional humanitarian aid for food and energy, if needed, during the winter. To improve the well-being and security of refugee women, children and others with specific needs, the Office will continue to support the community structures of urban refugees.

UNHCR will also assist refugees to become self-reliant and have access to naturalization; and it will work to facilitate their voluntary repatriation. Until the national protection regime is improved, resettlement will remain the main durable solution for many refugees. The Office will continue to support the efforts of the Government and civil society to prevent and reduce statelessness, protect those who are stateless in Kyrgyzstan, and advocate for accession to the Statelessness Conventions.

In **Tajikistan**, UNHCR will continue to give priority to developing domestic RSD procedures in cooperation with the local authorities. Given the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan, priority will also be given to updating the contingency plan in order to protect and assist asylum-seekers fleeing from neighbouring countries. Joint activities, such as the training of border guards under the framework of the OSCE Border Management Staff College, will continue. The Office will also pursue durable solutions, in particular local integration for some long-staying Afghan refugees, and facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees and their transit through Tajik territory.

For those with specific needs, such as women at risk, resettlement will continue to be used as a means of protection. Moreover, UNHCR will promote self-reliance and community

Kyrgyzstan Emergency Situation

In mid-2010, a surge of violence targeting ethnic Uzbeks broke out in Kyrgyzstan and resulted in more than 300,000 people fleeing their homes. Of these, some 75,000 crossed the border into Uzbekistan. In 2011, UNHCR will address humanitarian needs and will help establish stability to prevent future conflict in this region. To this end, UNHCR is in close consultation with the Government and other partners regarding the nature of the activities

that will be undertaken to assist IDPs in Kyrgyzstan.

The possibility of a supplementary budget in 2011 is under review. The following activities are anticipated: reintegration support through confidence-building measures; protection activities; quick impact projects and other assistance targeting people and groups with specific needs; and contingency planning and emergency preparedness.

During the humanitarian crisis in June 2010, UNHCR assisted the Uzbek Government with an emergency team and the delivery of humanitarian relief items to cope with the influx of the approximately 75,000 refugees from Kyrgyzstan into Uzbekistan. Based on successful cooperation during the emergency, the Government of Uzbekistan is currently reviewing the possibility of opening a UNHCR Liaison Office.

participation to improve the social and economic well-being of people of concern. These activities will be in line with UNHCR's new policy on protecting refugees in urban areas, such as Dushanbe, which was chosen as one of six pilot cities. UNHCR will also work with the Government to prevent and reduce statelessness, while identifying and protecting stateless people in Tajikistan.

Although no new asylum-seekers have been registered in **Turkmenistan** for several years now, a small group of refugees who fled the inter-ethnic conflict in Azerbaijan in the late 1980s, as well as Afghan refugees, remain of concern to the Office. In 2009, the responsibility for adjudicating refugee claims of any future arrivals was handed over to the Government. Refugees remain under UNHCR's protection but the prospects for their local integration are limited.

The Government of Turkmenistan is committed to shoulder its responsibilities under the 1951 Convention, and has applied in 2010 for membership to UNHCR's Executive Committee. The Office will advocate for the adoption of the amended Refugee Law and its subsequent implementation in 2011. It will meanwhile continue to deliver protection and assistance to populations of concern, and work towards durable solutions for all remaining refugees in Turkmenistan.

Based on cooperation with the Government of Turkmenistan, a comprehensive plan of action has been developed for implementation in 2011, including as key elements the identification and registration of stateless persons and persons at risk of being stateless. Some 12,000 persons unable to document their nationality have already been registered. UNHCR estimates that the number of stateless persons may be more than 20,000. It will work with the Government to amend

relevant legislation, ensure its consistent implementation, and advocate for Turkmenistan's accession to the Statelessness Conventions.

Since UNHCR's office in **Uzbekistan** was closed by the Government in 2006, the protection of refugees remaining in the country, mostly from Afghanistan, has been carried out in cooperation with UNDP in Tashkent. The UNDP Refugee Support Unit mainly facilitates departures for resettlement. Since 2006, UNHCR has resettled more than 680 refugees and is committed to finding solutions for some 370 Afghan refugees remaining in Uzbekistan.

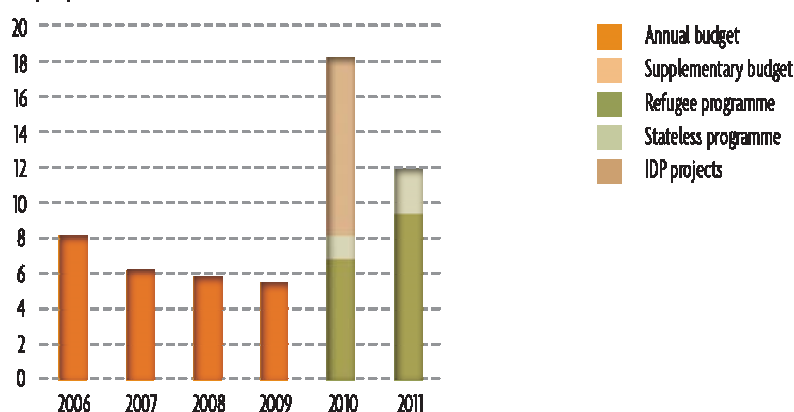
Financial information

The budget for Central Asia saw a dramatic increase in 2010 in part due to the introduction of the comprehensive needs assessment as well as the establishment of a supplementary programme in Kyrgyzstan. In 2011, the budget for Kazakhstan includes activities to improve refugees' self-reliance and community participation. The activities on statelessness will also continue to expand, in particular to support Government identification efforts through large-scale awareness-raising activities. In Kyrgyzstan, the main increase in the budget will cover logistics and supply for operational needs. In Tajikistan, more training will be provided for refugees, while the growing number of new arrivals is expected to lead to higher costs for RSD.

Operations in Turkmenistan have been reduced in recent years due to the small refugee caseload. However, UNHCR plans to maintain a presence in the country, primarily to address statelessness, ensure emergency preparedness and provide training and support to strengthen the national asylum system.

UNHCR's budget in Central Asia 2006 – 2011

Millions (USD)



UNHCR budget for Central Asia (USD)

OPERATION	2010 REVISED BUDGET	2011				TOTAL
		REFUGEE PROGRAMME PILLAR 1	STATELESS PROGRAMME PILLAR 2	REINTEGRATION PROJECTS PILLAR 3	IDPS PROJECTS PILLAR 4	
Kazakhstan Regional Office ¹	4,131,110	5,189,160	1,493,118	0	0	6,682,278
Kyrgyzstan	12,232,559	2,064,966	407,745	0	0	2,472,711
Tajikistan	1,286,362	1,698,956	175,042	0	0	1,873,998
Turkmenistan	584,164	365,582	446,307	0	0	811,889
Total	18,234,194	9,318,664	2,522,212	0	0	11,840,876

¹Includes the Office of the Regional Coordinator which provides support to countries in the subregion.