

CENTRAL ASIA

Kazakhstan,
Kyrgyzstan,
Tajikistan,

Turkmenistan,
Uzbekistan.

CENTRAL ASIA REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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Recent Developments

In view of the number of Tajik refugees who have already voluntarily repatriated with UNHCR assistance, it is expected that the 1999 target of 5,000 repatriates will be met. Repatriation was mainly from Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, although a few began to return from Kazakhstan at the end of the summer. Movements are expected to be on a similar scale during 2000.

Repatriates have continued to benefit from reintegration assistance. Their longer-term needs are gradually put within the remit of international financial institutions and agencies with a development focus. This approach effectively addresses the needs of repatriates but also enables UNHCR to wind down reintegration activities and eventually disengage.

Some Tajik refugees did not wish to repatriate, preferring to integrate in their countries of first asylum (mainly Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan). They were able to benefit in 1999 from initial local settlement programmes, which will continue into 2000 and 2001.

After Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan in 1999 became the latest signatory to the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. More importantly, these countries have continued to deepen their involvement in the management of refugee and asylum issues. Each country has adopted legislation to implement the Convention. In Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, specialist government departments have taken over responsibility for determining the status of refugees. Turkmenistan is actively studying the issue and Uzbekistan, although not yet a signa-

tory to the 1951 Convention, has nevertheless drafted migration legislation. This draft contains a section on asylum seekers and refugees and is going through Parliament.

Afghanistan remains a source of concern for the Central Asian states. Although continued instability and military activity in Afghanistan during 1999 did not cause significant movement of refugees into Central Asia, conflict in northern Afghanistan did displace people close to the borders of Central Asian states, increasing the risk of cross-border movement. At the political level, Central Asian countries have played a significant role in the search for solutions to the Afghan conflict. UNHCR and other agencies have been involved in contingency planning and limited cross-border activities.

The summer of 1999 witnessed violent action by militants in the part of the Ferghana Valley located in Kyrgyzstan. Some 7,000 people fled to other parts of Kyrgyzstan, where UNHCR provided limited emergency relief. If a political solution is not reached, there is a risk of regional instability in the more heavily populated Ferghana area.

Strategic Objectives

UNHCR hopes to conclude the current repatriation and reintegration of Tajik refugees by the end of 2001. However, if the Tajik peace process continues to evolve positively, it may well encourage more Tajik refugees to repatriate. The course and outcome of presidential and parliamentary elections, slated for November 1999 and spring 2000 respectively, will shed light on the prospects of accelerated voluntary repatriation. The watchword here is stability.

A key strategic objective remains the further development of effective asylum and protection regimes in each country and throughout the region. This will entail upgrading standards where necessary, and ensuring the training and involvement of appropriate state institutions, such as police, judiciary and border authorities.

It also involves ensuring that both existing and new asylum services are viable and sustainable. Recognised refugees are generally entitled to benefits on the same basis as nationals. These benefits represent a heavy burden on States, and outstrip the ability of UNHCR to assist financially. Thus, UNHCR will continue to advocate that bilateral and multilateral negotiations include longer-

term technical and financial assistance to develop and support new social security functions. In this context, there is a convergence of interests between States in the region and others, particularly in western Europe, that have in recent years felt the impact of irregular demographic movements.



It is vitally important to further expand cooperation with international development agencies operating in the region, such as UNDP, UNOPS, UNICEF, UNFPA, IOM, WFP, World Bank, and bodies focusing on conflict prevention and resolution, such as OSCE.

Following the UN Study on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, UNHCR will focus more on the specific needs and rights of young people. In partnership with UNICEF and Save the Children (UK), UNHCR is promoting universal access to education, children's rights initiatives, vocational skills training, and the training of partner agency staff. An essential element of this strategy is helping local NGOs and government agencies to better protect and assist refugee children.

An important aspect of UNHCR policy has been to highlight and safeguard an active social role for women, whose status has been eroded since the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

To enhance UNHCR's relationship with NGOs, a major European NGO has been requested to provide a field-based NGO Coordinator in Central Asia in 2000.

Operations

The following paragraphs summarise UNHCR's objectives and activities by country.

UNHCR's main objective in **Kazakhstan** is to strengthen the efforts of national and local authorities to determine the status of refugees and protect them. To this end, UNHCR will continue to provide operational and legal support in the form of legal advice and assistance in the drafting of a national refugee law. It will also organise publications and seminars on Refugee and Human Rights Law throughout the country. Through the Kazakh Red Crescent and Red Cross Society, the Office will provide material and medical assistance to the most vulnerable among the refugee population. Durable solutions will be sought in the shape of repatriation programmes for Tajik and Chechen refugees; the resettlement of those for whom local integration is impossible; and local integration of Afghan refugees. In all its activities, UNHCR strives to raise public awareness of human rights.

UNHCR's operations in **Kyrgyzstan** in 2000 will focus on the promotion of lasting solutions, including the voluntary repatriation and local integration of some 14,000 Tajik refugees. UNHCR will also strengthen the legal framework for refugees and the newly created Migration Agency, and use public information campaigns to enhance refugee safety. UNHCR will further reinforce emergency response capability in the country and support programmes related to conflict prevention. UNHCR will continue to jointly run the Bishkek Migration Management Centre, which it helped to establish to improve asylum and refugee legislation and its implementation in the region.

The approximately 5,000 refugees who repatriated to **Tajikistan** in 1999 and the equal number who are expected to return during 2000 will receive UNHCR's material assistance to facilitate their reintegration in Tajik society. However, the programme for the year 2000 will focus on coordination with financial and development organisations to bridge the gap in Tajikistan between the immediate needs of those returning and long-term development needs. UNHCR will continue to strengthen the administrative and operational capabilities of the Government and NGOs by means of technical advice and training. These efforts are expected to help sustain the momentum of the peace process in Tajikistan in 2000.

The search for lasting solutions in **Turkmenistan** in 2000 will focus on the voluntary repatriation of some 2,000 Tajik refugees and the local integration of the remaining 14,000 through micro-

projects and legal assistance to obtain Turkmen citizenship. Limited assistance will also be given to some 1,000 Afghan refugees who have settled in the country, and a few people from other countries. It is expected that for some refugees, settlement locations may have to be found. The Government will be helped to develop mechanisms to determine the status of refugees, including registration and documentation. The Office will continue to advocate accession to the Conventions on Statelessness. Technical assistance and expertise will be provided to the Government and to NGOs in the context of the CIS Conference Plan of Action. This includes training, seminars, the development of libraries and research centres, and the creation of a central refugee office.

The programme in **Uzbekistan** mainly provides international protection to Afghan and Tajik refugees in the country. Although Uzbekistan is not a signatory to the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol, UNHCR continues to work on strengthening mechanisms for coping with refugees. It has already substantially raised government and public awareness and developed a legal basis for the protection of refugees and asylum-seekers. During 2000, UNHCR's protection activity will include work through judicial institutions, material assistance for vulnerable refugees, gender-based economic empowerment for independent living, children's education (including orphans) and the resettlement of a few individuals. Capacity-building will continue apace, with support for the Government in the enactment of refugee and migration law, support for human rights institutions, as well as support for NGOs focusing on population movement, citizenship and disaster management. Furthermore, the offices in Tashkent and Termez will support repatriation to Tajikistan and provide contingency support for the region as a whole.

CENTRAL ASIA	
BUDGET (USD)	
Country	Annual Programme
Kazakhstan	703,645
Kyrgyzstan	1,242,427
Tajikistan	2,676,005
Turkmenistan	795,039
Uzbekistan	1,524,119
Sub-total	6,941,235
Bureau at Headquarters	240,900
Total	7,182,135

Capacity-Building in the Countries of the CIS

In the countries of the CIS, asylum is a relatively new concept, and popular misconceptions about refugees abound. In the wake of the break-up of the Soviet Union, any governmental bodies dealing with refugees are at an early stage of development. They often function imperfectly and with difficulty. The same is true of NGOs in their provision of assistance, protection, and legal and social advice. UNHCR therefore aims to help create and develop an asylum system with a legislative framework and established procedures. It also aims to foster a broader awareness of human rights conducive to the creation of local non-governmental bodies dedicated to refugee issues.

UNHCR, in its search for sustainable solutions, has adopted a capacity-building approach. Its is nourished by close and continual cooperation with regional and international organisations such as the OSCE, the Council of Europe and IOM and NGOs, so that complementary mandates dovetail and all available expertise is used to best effect.

The Office provides and guides technical expertise for the various governmental and NGO partners involved in refugee affairs. Training is provided for governments and NGOs on refugee protection and procedures for the determination of refugee status. Training in the wider field of refugee law and human rights is also extended to the judiciary, lawyers, university students and the local media, while other information campaigns target members of Parliament. UNHCR programmes in Central Asia and Eastern Europe include some material assistance for partners to support their operations. In tandem with other relevant organisations, UNHCR provides some training to help streamline organisational management, programme development, needs assessment and fund-raising. In so doing, UNHCR tries to involve its partners in a way that affords them hands-on experience. A number of national NGOs which initially received seed grants have since become competent implementing partners for UNHCR.

Repatriation and Local Integration of Tajik Refugees

As a result of the civil war in Tajikistan in 1992, large numbers of Tajiks sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Between 1993 and 1995, some 40,000 refugees returned to Tajikistan with UNHCR assistance. The voluntary repatriation programme was temporarily suspended following the breakdown of peace talks, but resumed after the Peace Accord was signed in June 1997. By the end of 1997, the repatriation of Tajik refugees from Afghanistan was completed. Repatriation is still underway from Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, with a total of 17,993 returnees from 1997 to September 1999. The Tajik Government's successful policy of national reconciliation underpins the expectation that voluntary repatriation will continue during 2000.

UNHCR's strategy will focus on the two durable solutions: **voluntary repatriation** and **local integration**. Some 5,000 Tajik refugees will be assisted during 2000 to return from asylum countries in the region. UNHCR will monitor the reintegration process, and provide assistance with

shelter repair and income-generation. It will also assist the Tajik Government to rehabilitate infrastructure in areas of return and reinvigorate agriculture and forestry. Other Tajiks prefer to settle down permanently in the country where they found asylum, mainly in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. UNHCR will help the respective governments to develop a legal framework for the granting of citizenship to facilitate the integration of refugees. It will also help with public works projects, income-generation, and training, paying special attention to the training, education and health needs of refugee women and children.

Relations between the country of origin and the various countries of asylum are generally good, so the process of repatriation to Tajikistan is likely to continue smoothly. The host governments concerned have given their full support to the concept of local integration. UNHCR works closely with governments, other UN agencies and NGOs in the countries of asylum as well as in Tajikistan itself.