

CENTRAL ASIA

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Following the Bonn Agreement and subsequent establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority, prospects for voluntary repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan have improved dramatically throughout Central Asia. In Tadjikistan, Afghan refugees who had been stranded on the Pianj river island on the Afghan-Tajik border since 2000 returned to their villages in Northern Afghanistan, and 8,952 people (2,077 families) voluntarily repatriated in a joint UNHCR-IOM operation during the reporting period. Smaller numbers have repatriated from Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

At the end of March, the President of Kyrgyzstan signed a national law on refugees which is a significant improvement over the previous "Temporary Provision on Refugees." In particular, the Government now recognises the principle of safe third country as well as the submission of an asylum application within three days of illegal entry. To date, 1,210 refugees have received Kyrgyz citizenship. Another 2,889 refugees will benefit from the simplified procedures of citizenship acquisition under the Bi-lateral Agreement signed in June between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan.

In May, Tajikistan adopted a new law on refugees, however UNHCR is concerned as this law contains articles that contravene the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol.

Following the events of 11 September 2001, UNHCR has documented increasingly restrictive measures imposed in the region resulting in the arbitrary harassment, arrest, and in many cases, detention of asylum-seekers and refugees. This is a particular concern in Kazakhstan, where Uighurs and Chechens are having problems in accessing appropriate registration and documentation.

PROGRESS TOWARD OBJECTIVES, AND CONSTRAINTS ENCOUNTERED

UNHCR offices in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan devoted more attention to preparedness measures for the repatriation of refugees to Afghanistan. This included negotiating with the authorities of the three bordering states of Afghanistan for the establishment of logistical bases and warehouses and the despatch of material and equipment to Northern Afghanistan. In Tajikistan, however, the State Migration Service delayed issuing documents to new arrivals and renewing expired documents for recognised refugees and asylum-seekers.

ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE 2002

Regular activities in the countries of the region were related to providing protection to the persons of concern to UNHCR. In Kazakhstan, some 800 Tajik returnees received voluntary repatriation assistance while 26 persons were resettled to third countries. Basic assistance continued to be provided on humanitarian grounds to Chechens and Afghans. In Kyrgyzstan, UNHCR continued to promote the acquisition of citizenship as the preferred durable solution for the remaining Tajik refugees. Some assistance is being given in the areas of agriculture, water, shelter, education and health. In Turkmenistan, UNHCR organised workshops on statelessness for government officials. In addition, the Office helped 123 people to repatriate, and has continued refugee status determination and legal counselling. In Uzbekistan, where refugee status determination continues to be done solely by UNHCR, 2,500 Afghan refugees were registered by the end of June. Recent reports indicate that 10 per cent of the Afghans living in Tashkent are considering returning to Afghanistan. Medical assistance, social counselling and vocational training was provided to more than 2,000 people.

OUTLOOK FOR JULY-DECEMBER 2002

UNHCR offices in Central Asia will become less involved in the Afghanistan operation than earlier in the year. Offices will be able to focus again on their regional objective to advocate for the establishment of refugee-related legislation in accordance with international standards. Capacity-building

and technical support will be provided to governments to implement legislation, whilst encouraging civil society to promote and document concerns of refugees and asylum-seekers. The return of Afghan and Tajik refugees will continue to be supported wherever possible. In other cases, efforts will be made to pursue local integration.

| Financial Data (USD) | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Country / Activity | Annual Programme Budget | | | | Supplementary Programme Budget | | | |
| | Initial Budget | Revised Budget | Total Funds Available | Obligation Level | Initial Budget | Revised Budget | Total Funds Available | Obligation Level |
| Kazakhstan | 1,459,309 | 1,462,309 | 730,789 | 739,160 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Kyrgyzstan | 1,226,010 | 1,231,010 | 726,552 | 649,600 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tajikistan | 1,955,816 | 1,960,316 | 979,876 | 918,395 | 0 | 980,391 | 564,484 | 703,119 |
| Turkmenistan | 1,100,263 | 1,110,041 | 512,144 | 518,800 | 0 | 722,200 | 408,175 | 512,850 |
| Uzbekistan | 1,055,701 | 1,062,701 | 499,276 | 514,200 | 0 | 1,125,432 | 460,726 | 645,676 |
| Unrestricted Contributions | 0 | 0 | 500,000 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| TOTAL | 6,797,099 | 6,826,377 | 3,948,637 | 3,340,155 | 0 | 2,828,023 | 1,433,385 | 1,861,645 |