

CENTRAL ASIA

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

During the first half of 2001, the fighting in northern Afghanistan continued to give rise to concern regarding possible population displacement to neighbouring countries. In February, a high-level UNHCR mission visited Tajikistan in order to assess the situation of approximately 10,000 Afghans at the Pyandj River between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The mission found that some of the assistance meant for the displaced population was being put to military use. Following the mission's recommendations, the decision was taken to suspend further material assistance until certain conditions such as free access and the separation of combatants from civilians have been met.

In March, a group of 55 Tajiks of Uzbek ethnicity were expelled from Uzbekistan. Their legal status in Tajikistan was unclear after many years of residence in Uzbekistan and the group found themselves stranded at the border for about three weeks. They received assistance from international agencies. Although it was found that none of them had left Tajikistan for well-founded fear of persecution, a high percentage among them were in fact stateless. The situation was subsequently resolved by the group being allowed into Tajikistan.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES: PROGRESS AND CONSTRAINTS

There is no change in the overall strategic objectives in Central Asia. Attention is paid to the effect of the general economic situation and the perceived threats to regional stability from various sources, including the possibility of spill-over of the Afghan conflict. The offices in the region, particularly in Tajikistan, are closely monitoring the situation and contingency plans for a possible emergency are kept updated.

The reductions through Action 2 earlier this year meant further cutbacks in staffing, affecting all offices in Central Asia. Dates have been set for phasing-out of the programmes of reintegration of returnees in Tajikistan by mid-2002, and local integration of Tajiks in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan by the end of 2002. Unallocated amounts of the operational budgets, which would otherwise have been used to increase assistance to refugees, were eliminated.

In order to increase emergency response capacity within the region, two workshops on emergency management for UNHCR staff were held in Tashkent in late April and early May. These workshops are being complemented by parallel training for NGOs and government counterparts. In addition, a workshop on statelessness took place in Bishkek in March.

ACTIVITIES UNTIL 30 JUNE

In **Kazakhstan**, assistance (such as food, clothing, household items and medical support) was provided to the most vulnerable of the estimated 12,600 Chechen refugees from the Russian Federation. During the first half of the year, 219 Tajik refugees were assisted to repatriate with the provision of transport and cash grants. In pursuit of its objective of encouraging the adoption of national refugee legislation consistent with international instruments and standards, UNHCR has provided comments on the draft law on refugees, held discussions with the concerned authorities and conducted refugee law training seminars not only for the government executive structures but also for both the lower and upper chambers of the legislative body.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, 503 Tajik refugees voluntarily repatriated during the first half of

the year. In the last six months, 70 Tajik refugees have obtained Kyrgyz citizenship, which shows an increased political will on the part of the Kyrgyz Government - previously only one refugee had been granted citizenship. The local integration project for Tajik refugees progressed well, despite 15 per cent budget reduction as part of Action 2 circumscribing the scope of the programme in education and income generation. A pilot project for refugee children in accelerated classes, which began in 2000 with the objective of facilitating their speedy integration into local schools, has been significantly expanded in 2001 with 631 children now participating in 15 schools in northern Kyrgyzstan. In southern Kyrgyzstan, 45 Tajik young refugee adults have commenced courses in sewing, TV/radio repair, shoe-making and cooking. Five refugees are also studying under the DAFI programme. Training on international standards relating to refugees and asylum seekers took place for Kyrgyz border guards. This was followed by a border patrols project, aimed at establishing a system of registration of asylum claims at border points and developing instructions for the procedure. Resettlement is being actively pursued as a possible durable solution for about 40 Afghan refugees. The number of Chechens registered as asylum-seekers has increased to 330, with 58 receiving a one-time assistance package from UNHCR. The draft Refugee Law passed its first reading in the Parliament; it is expected to be presented for its second reading at the autumn session.

During the first half of the year, 808 refugees returned to **Tajikistan** from asylum countries in Central Asia. In view of the objective of phasing out from the reintegration programme by mid-2002, co-operation with other UN agencies and partners has been further strengthened in the implementation process. The current reintegration programme includes agricultural programmes (distribution of seeds, fertiliser, agricultural tools, livestock and allocation land for cultivation), micro-credit activities and the establishment of four women's centres to train women in tailoring,

embroidery and carpet weaving in the returnee affected areas, benefiting some 8,100 returnees. UNHCR is continuing a dialogue with the Government on the subject of the repeal of Decree 325, which restricts movement of Afghan refugees, and in relation to a proposed revision of the existing Refugee Law.

In **Turkmenistan**, limited financial assistance is provided to the most vulnerable among the urban refugees. In the first half of the year, a national partner provided assistance in the areas of employment, education and medical care to 217 refugees in Ashgabat and Turkmenabad. The office in Ashgabat continues to carry out refugee status determination procedures, in the expectation that the Government Refugee Office, approved in principle in 2000, will become operational during 2001. By the end of June, 166 refugees departed to be resettled in the United States and a further 93 Afghan refugees have been accepted by Canada. The Office continues to work with the Government on the acquisition of Turkmen nationality by the Tajik refugees with Turkmen ethnicity. The local integration programmes of Tajiks, begun in 2000, are continuing in Lebap and Mary through implementing partners. Sub-agreements with three national NGOs specialising in assistance to refugee women and children were concluded for the implementation of the programmes aiming to assist refugees to adapt and adjust to life, culture and traditions in Turkmenistan. These programmes include, among other things, activities in increasing knowledge in public health care services and advanced hygiene, education on environment issues and language classes. Voluntary repatriation of Tajiks continues, with 86 refugees repatriating during the first half of the year. A two-week seminar on Human Rights Law for local government officials was organised jointly with other actors.

In **Uzbekistan**, where refugee status determination is carried out solely by the Office, 546 families (1,810 persons) - mostly Afghans - were granted mandate refugee

status by the end of June. Refugee status determination activities have been extended to those located in the southern border town of Termez, and a local NGO has been identified as an implementing partner. Although the number of detentions or even short-term arrest of refugees has decreased in comparison to the same period in 2000, the office in Tashkent intervened in instances where persons of concern were detained. The way in which such instances were dealt with has indicated considerable progress; they were often solved on the condition that UNHCR would subsequently establish whether the person in question falls under UNHCR's mandate. Resettlement has been pursued as an important component of the overall protection strategy for the Afghan refugees. Currently, the preparation is ongoing for 55 families to be resettled in the United States. Delivery of assistance to refugees and most the vulnerable was carried out through two local NGOs who provide social services assistance (material, medical, social counselling and income generation) as well as vocational education for refugee children and adolescents. UNHCR continued its co-operation with, and support for various national organisations who are working in the areas of providing legal assistance to minorities and stateless persons, and humanitarian and human rights promotion.

OUTLOOK FOR JULY-DECEMBER

No major changes in objectives are foreseen in any of the Central Asian countries during the second half of the year, and the close monitoring of the situation in northern Afghanistan and their possible effects in the region will continue.

Given the pending closure of the office in Osh at the end of 2001, as stipulated in Action 2, the office in Bishkek is exploring options to ensure effective implementation of the local integration programme and voluntary repatriation in southern Kyrgyzstan. Both in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, the continuation of repatriation is closely linked to granting of citizenship for Tajiks wishing to settle permanently in the respective countries. This, in turn, is linked to UNHCR's commitment to continue providing local integration support to the end of 2002 when such activities will cease as a result of Action 2 decisions. From Kazakhstan, pending the availability of funds, a further 600 Tajiks will be repatriated during the year.

A major factor undermining the impact of the capacity building activities in Kazakhstan has been the high turnover in personnel in governmental structures dealing with refugees. Emphasis will continue to be put on refugee capacity and institution building through training of governmental and non-governmental staff. In Uzbekistan, the Office will continue the dialogue with the Government on the issues related to refugees and asylum seekers.

The general protection situation in Tajikistan remains of concern. One of the priorities for UNHCR is to continue the dialogue with the Government both on the repeal of Decree 325 and amendments to the draft revision of the Refugee Law to bring it in line with international standards.

FINANCIAL DATA (USD)

Country	Annual Programme Budget			
	Initial Budget	Revised Budget	Total Funds Available ¹	Obligation Level
Kazakhstan	1,072,578	1,051,693	626,400	471,100
Kyrgyzstan	1,206,206	1,221,864	763,339	577,900
Tajikistan	1,931,071	1,820,155	1,051,897	770,500
Turkmenistan	1,054,307	967,678	623,021	421,800
Uzbekistan	1,427,857	1,102,731	565,272	455,900
TOTAL	6,692,019	6,164,121	3,629,929	2,697,200

¹Includes income from unrestricted contributions, income from contributions restricted to the regional, sub-regional and/or country level, opening balance and adjustments.