



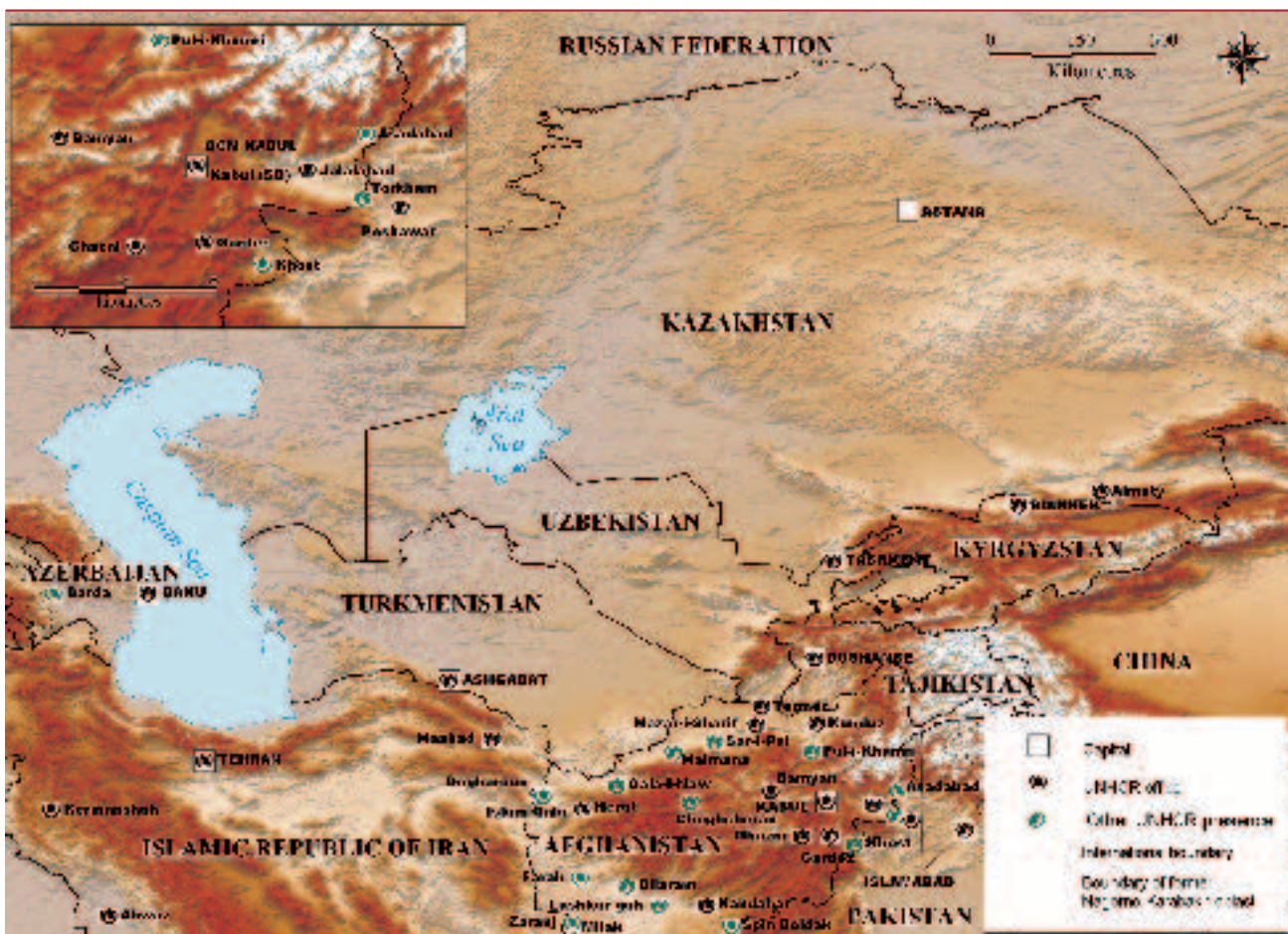
Central Asia

Major developments

By the beginning of 2002, UNHCR had stockpiled tents, blankets, and kitchen sets in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and deployed additional staff to support preparations for responding to the Afghanistan emergency. As the situation stabilised, those materials were moved into Afghanistan by road and barge, and across the recently reopened “Friendship Bridge” linking Afghanistan and Uzbekistan over the Amu Darya (Oxus River).

In the course of the year, UNHCR helped more than 10,000 Afghans return from the Central Asian Republics to their home villages in northern Afghanistan. Of these, 9,000 had been living on the island on the Pyanj river on the Afghan-Tajik border. Another 2,000 persons left spontaneously without any assistance, while more than 800 who had been living in urban areas went back with help from UNHCR. In addition to those returning from Tajikistan, some 500 Afghans returned from the other Central Asian Republics (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan). In the latter part of

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan



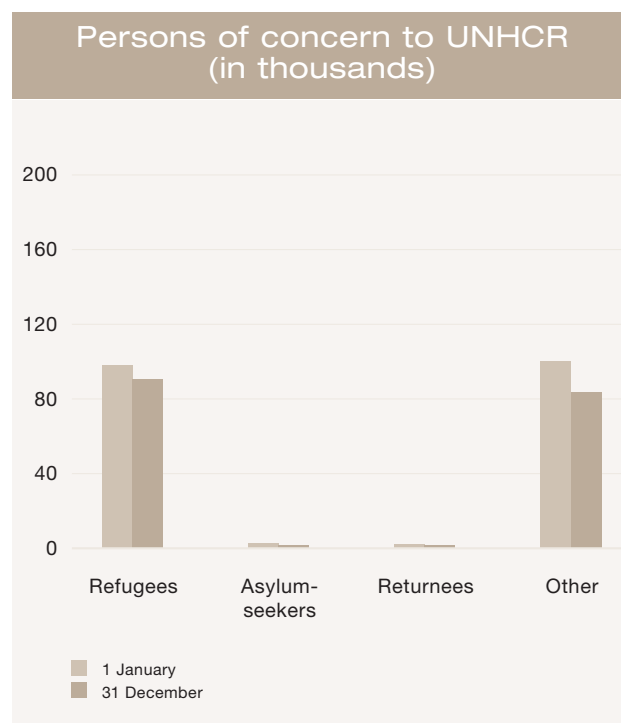
the year, UNHCR also arranged charter flights to bring back 250 Tajiks and their possessions from Pakistan to Tajikistan.

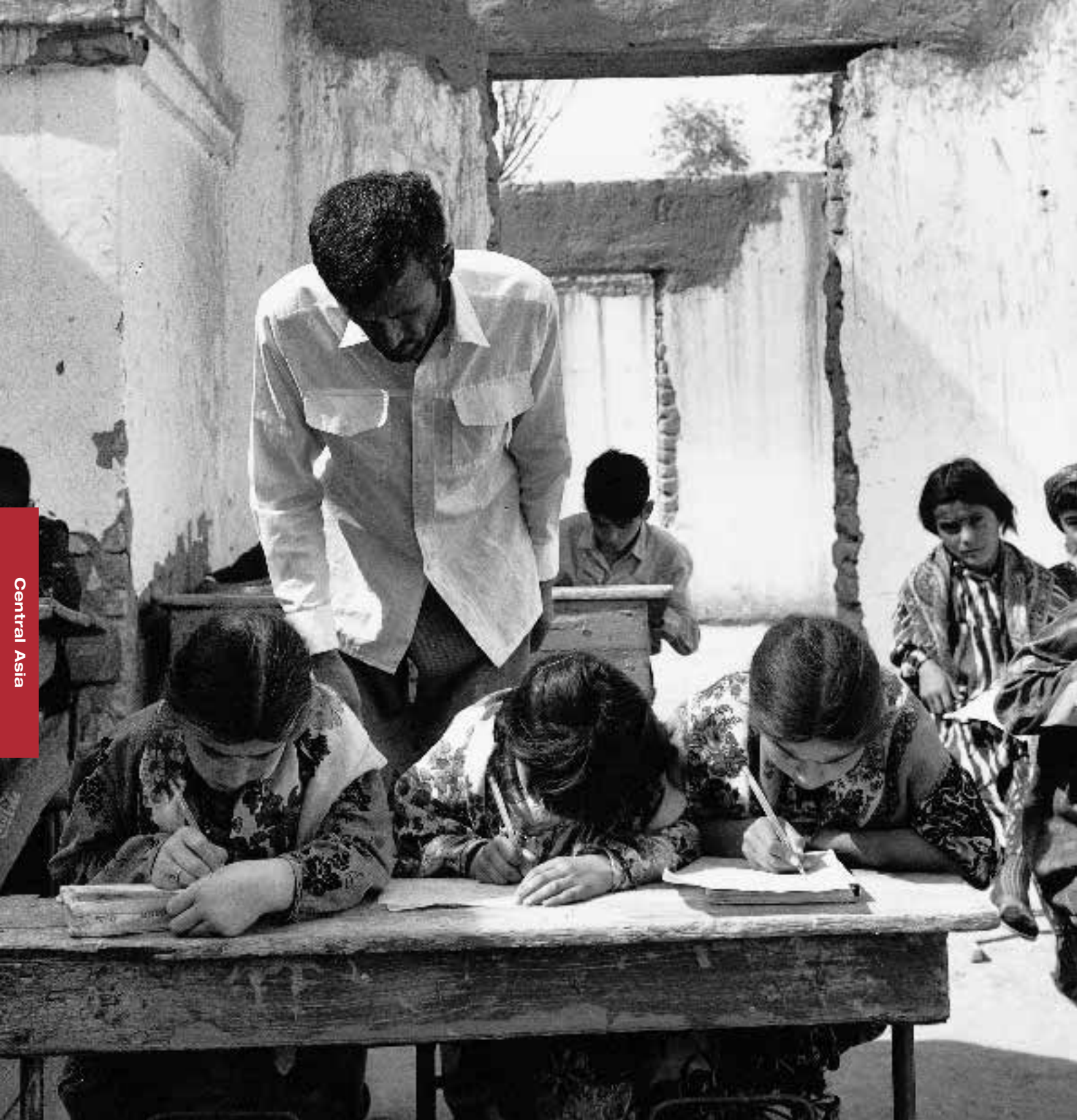
international standards. Visible progress was made in negotiations with the authorities on this matter at the end of 2002.

Challenges and concerns

Governments throughout the region remained concerned about security in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001. In addition, the Moscow hostage crisis of October 2002 had a negative influence on the asylum situation for Chechens, exacerbating regional security concerns.

In Tajikistan, economic hardship continues. Unemployment is a serious problem, forcing many people (including returnees) to seek work abroad. A new law on refugees passed by the Government of Tajikistan in 2002 replaced previous legislation that complied with both the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. This new law falls short of international standards and UNHCR and its partners are compiling a commentary, with a view to having the law revised and the legal framework restored to





Tajikistan: Returnees in Khatlon Province. Children attending Tajikabad's school which was damaged during the war.
UNHCR / A. Hollmann

Progress towards solutions

As well as supporting the voluntary return of Afghans, UNHCR also assisted the return of Tajiks and Chechens from other Central Asian Republics. A number of refugees who could neither repatriate nor be locally integrated in Central Asia were resettled in North America and Europe.

Meanwhile, offices throughout the region concentrated on resolving issues of statelessness and on encouraging local integration. The Government of Kyrgyzstan took a step forward in March 2002, by adopting a national law on refugees that meets basic international standards. The Governments of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Tajikistan ratified an agreement on simplified procedures

under which Tajik refugees can acquire citizenship in Kyrgyzstan. Just under one-third of the 2,300 Tajik refugees in Kyrgyzstan obtained citizenship in 2002, up from 250 in 2001. Other groups (Afghans, Chechens, and Uighurs) will not, however, qualify for citizenship and other solutions will have to be found for them.

Although the Kazakh Government does not fulfil all its obligations under the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, it has now granted citizenship to almost 170,000 of the 250,000 Kazakhs who have returned to their ethnic homeland.

Some progress was also made on local reintegration of Afghan and Tajik refugees in Turkmenistan, where UNHCR has been advocating the development of refugee/asylum mechanisms. The organisation would like to see the establishment of a legal process for the naturalisation of Tajik refugees of Turkmen ethnicity. However, the attempt on the life of the President of Turkmenistan impeded progress on this issue.

UNHCR began undertaking a survey of Tajiks living in Kazakhstan in order to develop a strategy for those who did not repatriate following a suspension of the assisted repatriation operation in 2002, because of the need to clarify qualifying criteria.

Operations

In addition to assisting voluntary repatriation, UNHCR maintained some basic assistance to refugees throughout the region, particularly in the areas of medical care and education, as well as income generation. In Central Asia, refugees have no access to State health care systems, and in many countries medical services are expensive. However, as more refugees obtain citizenship, and others repatriate, UNHCR expects the demand for health care assistance to gradually decline.

Efforts were made to help children acquire the language skills they need in order to attend local schools, as well as to provide Afghan refugees with lessons in Dari to ensure that they remain competent in their own language, should their families eventually return to Afghanistan. In some countries, children were also provided with warm winter clothing.

Offices ran training seminars on human rights and refugee law for a range of participants. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, judges and prosecutors were selected for special training. In Kazakhstan, UNHCR participated in the recently formed National Refugee Status Determination Commission; this enabled both UNHCR and the Commission to gain a deeper insight into each other's practices.

In **Kazakhstan**, there were some 20,610 refugees at the end of year. During 2002, a further 1,800 Chechens entered the country, bringing the total Chechen population to almost 14,000. Towards the end of the year, over 1,000 Palestinian refugees arrived, most of whom integrated well.

More than 600 Tajiks and 15 Afghans repatriated in the course of the year. UNHCR provided some basic assistance to approximately 10,000 refugees and asylum-seekers, primarily in the areas of health-care, vocational training and language lessons. The refugees' overall living conditions improved with the provision of medical services, clothing, and limited cash grants for accommodation, purchase of domestic/household items and coal for the winter. In addition, UNHCR provided more than 250 refugee women and children with psychological trauma counselling services.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the main focus was on lobbying for the new refugee law, which was passed in 2002. UNHCR has worked to improve existing asylum procedures, with the result that registration of claims has become more efficient. In addition, Chechens are now obliged to re-register only once every three months (along with other asylum-seekers) instead of on a monthly basis. A number of undocumented asylum-seekers were also granted access to refugee status determination.

In terms of assistance, UNHCR undertook seven infrastructure rehabilitation projects in communities with high refugee populations, covering four primary schools, two drinking water systems, and one hospital. Over 16,000 refugees and asylum-seekers visited medical clinics funded by UNHCR, while close to 800 refugee children previously out of school were given intensive coaching to enable them to catch up with the standard school curriculum. More than half of these children began to attend regular school classes during the year. In addition,

several workshops in literacy, vocational training and business skills were provided, targeting female refugees in particular.

In **Tajikistan**, the main aims were to reinstate the asylum policies and practices observed from 1995 to 2000, to help the Government find durable solutions for the remaining refugee population, and to monitor the protection situation and provide reintegration assistance for some 1,400 returnees. Following interventions by UNHCR and the international community on behalf of Afghans deported from Tajikistan in 2002, the Government reinstated the refugee status determination procedures that had been suspended since 2000. Reports of harassment, arbitrary arrest and detention decreased and respect for the principle of *non-refoulement* was demonstrated. UNHCR also provided refugee status determination training for judges presiding over cases presented by Afghans who appealed against the authorities' refusal to extend their refugee status.

The Office provided technical and material support to a school in Somoni where more than 700 Afghan refugee children receive free education. Almost 1,000 Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers received primary health care, and a similar number were given training to embark on small business projects.

In **Turkmenistan**, the promotion of refugee protection principles was the main priority. Also high on the agenda were local integration of Tajiks and Afghans who did not wish to return, and voluntary repatriation for those who did not decide to go home. Some 13,000 Tajiks and 800 Afghans were involved in assistance projects that also targeted local populations. Activities included construction and renovation of schools and clinics in rural areas, organising health and sanitation training for girls and women, and vocational classes for young adults.

Parallel to these local integration efforts, UNHCR launched a campaign to enable Tajik refugees of Turkmen ethnicity to acquire Turkmen nationality. Seminars, workshops, meetings with senior officials and missions to refugee settlements all served to back up a letter sent by the High Commissioner to the President to promote awareness of the option of granting citizenship. UNHCR also pursued the

other solution – resettlement – but only to a limited extent, with just over 100 Afghans of Hazara origin being resettled to North America.

In **Uzbekistan**, very little progress was made in the creation of a national asylum system, although UNHCR's profile rose as a result of its contribution to activities in Afghanistan. The Office has an informal agreement with the Government whereby individually recognised mandate refugees are not arrested or deported on the grounds of illegal stay or entry. The details of the agreement require constant monitoring, with intervention in individual cases. Moreover, because the agreement only covers mandate refugees, asylum-seekers and *prima facie* refugees are still under constant threat of arrest and deportation. UNHCR therefore continues to call for formal mechanisms to safeguard people of concern to the organisation.

Relatively few Afghans repatriated from Uzbekistan in 2002, largely because those who sought refuge in the country did so shortly after the fall of President Najibullah, and they feared that their association with the Soviet-backed regime might make it difficult for them to return.

Funding

Although the Afghan repatriation programmes were fully funded, and the work on building legal capacity was able to go ahead as planned, budget cuts reduced activity levels in other aspects of the Central Asia Operation, notably with regard to direct assistance.

Voluntary Contributions – Restricted / Earmarked (USD)

Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual Programme Budget		Supplementary Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
Kazakhstan					
	Saudi Arab Red Crescent Society (SAU)	45,500	45,500	0	0
Kyrgyzstan					
	Ireland	215,889	215,889	0	0
	United States of America	91,752	91,752	0	0
Tajikistan					
	Japan	50,000	50,000	150,000	150,000
	Norway	68,027	68,027	0	0
Turkmenistan					
	Japan	50,000	50,000	150,000	150,000
	Private Donors Austria	8,000	8,000	0	0
Uzbekistan					
	Bermuda	51,735	51,735	0	0
	Japan	50,000	50,000	150,000	150,000
	United States of America	6,776	6,776	0	0
Central Asia					
	Japan	500,000	500,000	0	0
	Norway	204,082	204,082	0	0
	Sweden	846,134	846,134	0	0
	United States of America	508,296	508,296	0	0
Total		2,696,191	2,696,191	450,000	450,000

¹ For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)

Country	Revised Budget			Expenditure		
	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total
Kazakhstan	1,625,949	0	1,625,949	1,337,510	0	1,337,510
Kyrgyzstan	1,057,694	0	1,057,694	953,139	0	953,139
Tajikistan	1,827,316	847,391	2,674,707	1,553,820	676,587	2,230,407
Turkmenistan	1,014,401	559,116	1,573,517	767,443	350,737	1,118,180
Uzbekistan	1,067,701	1,125,697	2,193,398	891,036	956,107	1,847,143
Total	6,593,061	2,532,204	9,125,265	5,502,948	1,983,431	7,486,379