

# Central Asia

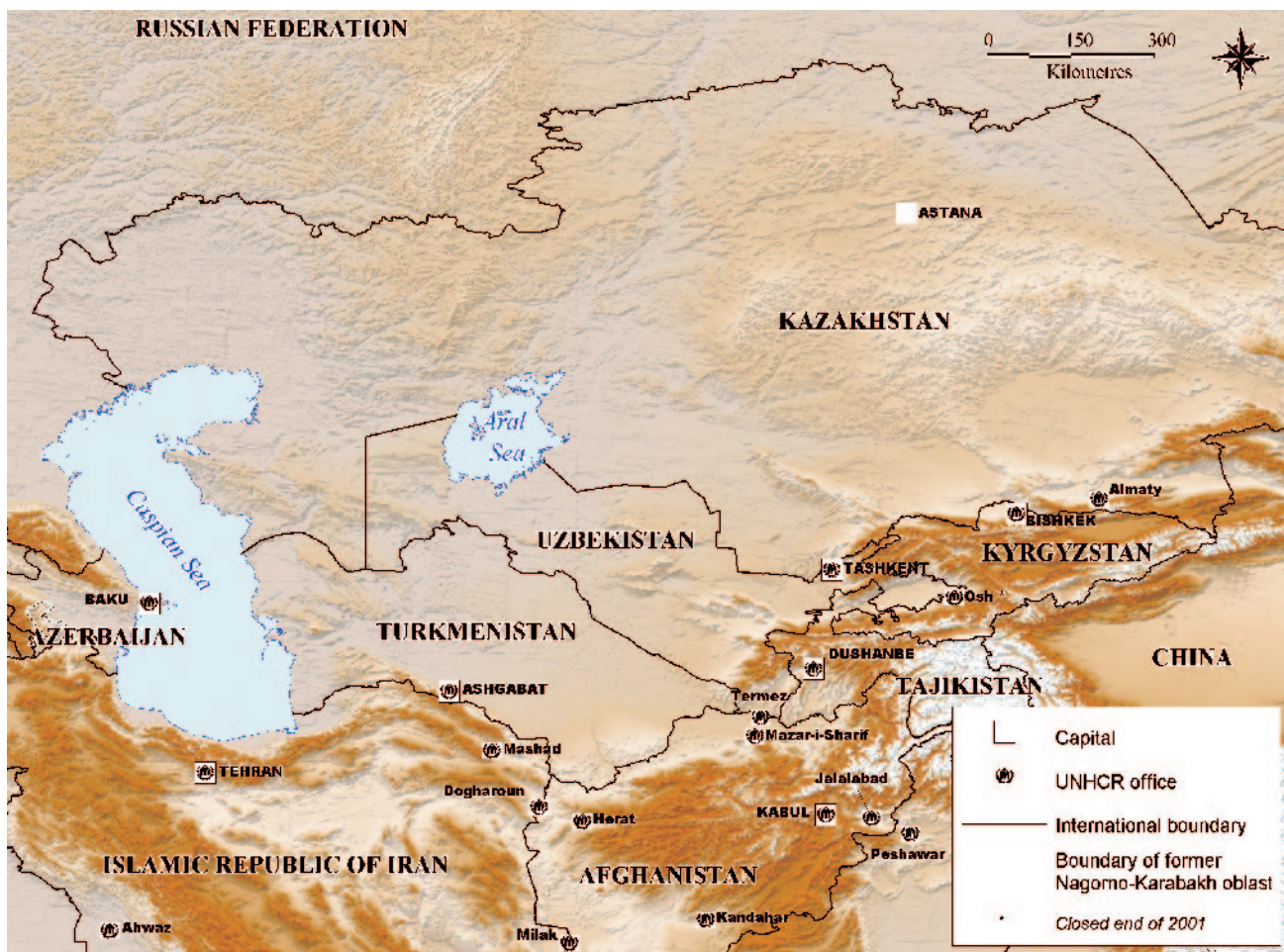
## Major Developments

The most significant development affecting the Central Asia region during 2001 was the Afghan situation from September onwards. Three of the five Republics share a border with northern Afghanistan; the other two Republics were also affected, though to a lesser degree.

In Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, preparations were made for a possible influx of Afghans as a result of military operations inside Afghanistan. In the event, this did not materialise and the focus changed to that of providing logistical support for operations and offices in Afghanistan. UNHCR's office in Termez, Uzbekistan, became a major point of delivery for goods and staff destined for the northern region of Afghanistan, particularly following the re-opening of the bridge between the two countries. Supplies and goods were purchased and sent into Afghanistan from all three countries.

In Central Asia in general, security concerns on the part of the governments resulted in the introduction of some measures restricting movements of

Kazakhstan  
Kyrgyzstan  
Tajikistan  
Turkmenistan  
Uzbekistan



foreign nationals. Instances of refoulement of refugees, however, were not reported.

## Challenges and Concerns

The major challenge for UNHCR in Central Asia remains advocacy of refugee issues and the promotion of effective asylum legislation. In Kazakhstan, the draft law on refugees remained pending. In Tajikistan, the Government's proposed new refugee law was a serious cause for concern, as were the restrictions on Afghan refugees' rights to freedom of movement and residence.

## Progress Toward Solutions

In the aftermath of the events of September, the preferred long-term solution for refugees, that of voluntary repatriation, drew nearer for some of the Afghans in the region, after more than two decades of war and displacement. While some Afghans

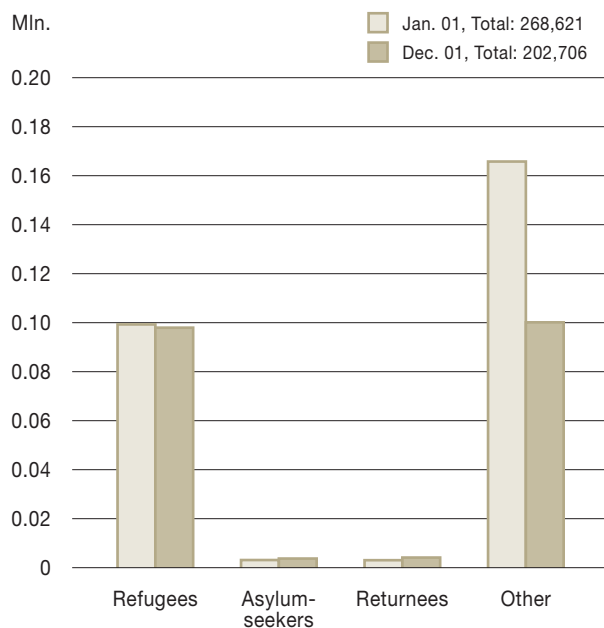
readily expressed an interest in voluntary repatriation, others took a wait-and-see approach. It is acknowledged that there may be refugees who will not be willing to return, at least in the short term; indeed, for some, resettlement may need to be considered as a possible solution. As regards local settlement, the programmes for Tajiks settling in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan will be continued into 2002. In Kyrgyzstan, encouraging progress was made in 2001 on the issue of citizenship acquisition, and the momentum generated in this regard is expected to continue in 2002. The situation in Chechnya has not so far proved conducive to a repatriation of approximately 12,000 Chechens in Kazakhstan and 300 in Kyrgyzstan.

## Operations

On 31 December 2001, the total number of Afghan refugees and asylum-seekers stood at 2,360 persons, 923 of whom were granted refugee status by the competent Commission in Almaty. The number

of Chechen refugees in the country remained unchanged at 12,000. In 2001, 877 Tajiks repatriated (for which additional funding had to be allocated) leaving 4,105 still in **Kazakhstan** at the year's end. There was an encouraging development on the issue of citizenship for stateless ethnic Kazakhs from the diaspora who returned at the call of the Government: 115,000 of the 215,000 returnees were granted citizenship.

#### Persons of Concern to UNHCR



UNHCR provided assistance to needy Afghan, Chechen and Tajik refugees, in partnership with two national NGOs. Medical assistance was provided through the Kazakhstan Red Crescent Society. One-time financial assistance was provided on a case-by-case basis to 4,756 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly widows, female heads of households, the sick and the elderly. Vocational and language training courses were completed by 213 refugees, and a rehabilitation/educational centre was established at a national NGO for refugee women and children, where the women attend hairdressing, computer and tailoring courses, designed to decrease dependency and increase their prospects of integration. Repatriation of Chechens and some Afghans may at some stage be possible in the future; at present, local integration is not a viable option. The repatriation of Tajiks will continue, and the Office is planning to carry out a survey in 2002 of those Tajiks who remain.

Progress made on the issue of citizenship for the Tajiks of Kyrgyz ethnicity, who have opted for local settlement in **Kyrgyzstan**, was very encouraging. In 2001, 252 of them acquired citizenship after a concerted lobbying effort at the highest levels of the Government, combined with the development of close working relationships and the provision of technical assistance to the key government agencies responsible. It is hoped that this number will increase following a special campaign to be undertaken early in 2002. In the area of local integration, the expansion of the accelerated education initiative covered 850 refugee children who had not previously attended school; 357 of them graduated to regular classes during the year. Some 349 families were provided with agricultural credit and 57 new micro-businesses were established.

A total of 1,190 Tajiks, who had opted not to integrate locally, repatriated during 2001. A further 320 Tajiks are believed to wish to repatriate.

Care and maintenance was provided for 1,800 needy Afghan and 372 Chechen refugees. Assistance mostly took the form of medical care, primary education, vocational training and humanitarian assistance packages. Emergency one-time assistance was provided to 158 vulnerable refugee families, including 34 single mothers. Legal assistance was also provided to 722 refugees. A total of 119 refugees, all Afghan except for one, were accepted for resettlement to the USA and Canada but they could not travel before the end of the year due to the events in September. Activities for capacity-building continued to be implemented, both with government and NGO partners. The Sixth Annual Summer Course on Human Rights and International Law was organised by UNHCR, in cooperation with OSCE and other organisations. A network of NGOs has been established in northern Kyrgyzstan, both to provide services to refugees and to function as a link between refugees and programmes provided by UNHCR and other agencies. Many of these NGOs are organised and run by refugees.

The general protection situation in **Tajikistan** remains a matter of concern to UNHCR. A new draft refugee law violates the most basic international standards relating to international protection. Resolutions passed in 2000, restricting the





Tajikistan: Tajik returnees back in their home village where projects were designed to help them re-integrate. *UNHCR / R. Colville*

rights and freedom of movement of Afghans, remained in force. The design of new registration cards delayed refugee registration and renewal. Although the Government took no specific measures against Afghans after 11 September, national security concerns moved back up to the top of the government agenda, mitigating official receptivity to UNHCR's advocacy of refugees' interests. Approximately 10,000 displaced Afghans who arrived in 2000 remained at the border; however, the authorities facilitated access by UN and NGOs, who were able to distribute food and other assistance. Hopefully, these Afghans will soon be able to return to their places of origin.

The Afghan crisis significantly affected UNHCR operations: the UNHCR office was involved in regional stockpiling for a potential influx and, when this did not materialise, in cross-border

assistance for Afghanistan. Care and maintenance assistance continued to be provided to the 4,638 Afghan recognised refugees, including subsistence allowances, medical assistance and activities for income generation (whereby 85 female heads of household were trained in sewing, knitting and carpet weaving). A Social Centre was also opened, where 1,649 refugees obtained social and legal counselling. Of 20 files submitted for resettlement, Norway had accepted eight (34 persons) by the end of the year. Under the repatriation programme, 2,343 Tajiks returned from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, and repatriation cash grants were paid to those who did not receive them on departure. Under assistance activities, land, tools, seeds and fertiliser were distributed to 1,200 households; 828 families received livestock on a credit scheme; 3,355 vulnerable families (of which 320 were female-headed households) benefited from cash credit schemes.

During 2001 in **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR assisted a total of 361 refugees to repatriate voluntarily: 276 of them were Tajiks, 68 Afghans and 17 Armenians. Changes in Afghanistan towards the end of the year were reflected in the increased interest in repatriation shown by Afghan refugees. Local integration projects for around 12,000 Tajiks and 900 Afghans of Turkmen ethnicity continued during 2001. Efforts were made to ensure that the surrounding population was also included, with the aim of facilitating local integration. A total of 233 refugees were resettled (153 Afghans and 13 Iraqis to the USA; and 67 Afghans to Canada). The Government's plans to create structures to oversee implementation of the refugee law did not materialise in 2001. UNHCR therefore continued to determine refugee status. The events in neighbouring Afghanistan resulted in contingency planning, including the identification of possible sites for camps, deployment of emergency staff and the stockpiling of supplies. Operations later centred instead on the provision of cross-border assistance and logistical and administrative support to operations in neighbouring areas of Afghanistan. Training, capacity-building and promotion of refugee law activities were carried out during the year, both locally and regionally. Human Rights and Refugee Law courses were organised jointly by UNHCR, OSCE, the British Embassy and the national Institute for Democracy and Human Rights; seminars on legal issues relating to refugees were also conducted in Turkmenabad, Mary and Turkmenbashi.

To assist their local integration, UNHCR provided refugees with water pumps, as well as medical supplies and medical services through the National Red Crescent Society and a local NGO. Vocational training, study courses, cultural orientation, language courses and training on advanced hygiene and sanitation were organised (women and children were the main beneficiaries). Income generation projects for refugee women, both in the urban setting and in the provinces, involving classes in dress making, embroidery and carpet making, served to increase their earning power and thus family income.

Towards the end of the year, after the events of 11 September, UNHCR gained more visibility and access to high-level government officials. The re-opening of the border bridge between Termez

and Hairaton was a positive development and allowed the transfer of relief items and staff into Afghanistan. UNHCR in **Uzbekistan** was involved in regional contingency planning and stockpiling as well as organising the transport of goods.

Asylum-seekers and refugees had full access to the refugee status determination (RSD) procedure administered by UNHCR. The number of registered mandate refugees increased from 1,350 to 2,579 by the end of 2001, the vast majority Afghans. Voluntary repatriation will hopefully become a viable option for many Afghans and this will be pursued during 2002.

The material assistance provided to vulnerable persons comprised financial assistance to 125 families, medical assistance (3,286 consultations) and counselling and other social services. In 2001, refugee children were allowed to attend regular schools for the first time. As some of the children have a poor knowledge of the local language, remedial lessons were provided through a local NGO. Some 80 refugee children started the classes in 2001, with the aim of being able to attend local schools in 2002. A total of 114 refugees, including 96 women, took part in income generation activities, such as sewing and embroidery courses and applied arts and leather courses, aimed at improving self-sufficiency in the absence of government authorisation to work. RSD and care and maintenance activities were also offered in Termez as well as in Tashkent. 58 Afghan family cases (238 individuals) were submitted in 2001. In its advocacy work, UNHCR remained constrained by the generally negative perception of refugee issues in the Government, despite the higher profile afforded UNHCR and refugee issues alike as a result of the Afghanistan situation. The Office held regular meetings with key government officials and departments, and organised courses on human rights and refugee law.

## Funding

Programmes in Central Asia, as in other regions of the world, have been subject to budget cuts in recent years. In 2001, budgets were reduced by 15 per cent under Action 2 and several posts were also cut. Field offices were required on a continuous basis to re-prioritise their use of reduced funds.

With more funds, more Tajiks could have been repatriated from Kyrgyzstan and the range of assistance measures, for instance for Chechen refugees in Kazakhstan, could have been enlarged. The reduced number of staff across the sub-region also left little flexibility during emergencies, with the result that ad hoc external missions had to be mounted as required by circumstances, as was the case in the post-September deployments in the three countries bordering Afghanistan.

Voluntary Contributions – Restricted (USD)					
Donor	Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Annual Programme Budget		Supplementary Programme Budget	
		Income	Contribution	Income	Contribution
Japan	Kazakhstan	175,000	175,000	0	0
	Kyrgyzstan	116,600	116,600	0	0
	Tajikistan	175,000	175,000	0	0
	Turkmenistan	116,600	116,600	0	0
	Uzbekistan	116,800	116,800	0	0
Norway	Central Asia	792,542	792,542	109,870	109,870
Private Donors Italy	Turkmenistan	1,511	1,511	0	0
Sweden	Central Asia	729,166	729,166	0	0
Switzerland	Central Asia	181,818	181,818	0	0
United States of America	Central Asia	2,200,000	2,200,000	0	0
	Kazakhstan	20,000	20,000	0	0
	Kyrgyzstan	90,000	90,000	0	0
	Turkmenistan	65,000	65,000	0	0
	Uzbekistan	25,000	25,000	0	0
<b>TOTAL<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>4,805,037</b>	<b>4,805,037</b>	<b>109,870</b>	<b>109,870</b>

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the various earmarkings, please refer to the Donor Profiles.

<sup>2</sup> Total funds available for obligation in the region also included unrestricted voluntary contributions, lightly restricted contributions, opening balances and adjustments.

Budget and Expenditure (USD)						
Country	Revised Budget			Expenditure		
	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total	Annual Programme Budget	Supplementary Programme Budget	Total
Kazakhstan	1,147,774	0	1,147,774	1,003,475	0	1,003,475
Kyrgyzstan	1,250,864	0	1,250,864	1,155,853	0	1,155,853
Tajikistan	1,820,155	596,381	2,416,536	1,731,649	562,056	2,293,705
Turkmenistan	990,597	339,052	1,329,649	941,311	133,905	1,075,216
Uzbekistan	1,035,766	417,501	1,453,267	892,686	303,198	1,195,884
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,245,156</b>	<b>1,352,934</b>	<b>7,598,090</b>	<b>5,724,974</b>	<b>999,159</b>	<b>6,724,133</b>