



# Central Asia

## Major developments

In 2005, further progress towards durable solutions was made. Cessation of refugee status was declared for Tajik refugees in December 2005 and will be implemented in June 2006. Many Tajik refugees were able to integrate in their country of asylum. In Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, naturalization campaigns were pursued and a number of Tajik refugees were granted citizenship. For those still in need of international protection, appropriate procedures were put in place in all five Central Asian countries. With the support of key resettlement countries, UNHCR was also able to find a durable solution for Afghan refugees in Central Asia. More than 2,000 Afghan refugees were resettled in 2005.

With the March revolution in Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia again showed itself to be a potential conflict zone. Then in May, the events in Andijan (Uzbekistan) caused the flight of some 500 Uzbek asylum-seekers to Kyrgyzstan. UNHCR managed to secure the protection of the Uzbek asylum-seekers, evacuating some 450 to Romania where they were granted temporary stay prior to being resettled in other countries.

The country chapters of the Central Asia Protection Gaps Initiative within the Strengthening Protection Capacity Framework were finalized. However, the developments

Kazakhstan

Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan

Turkmenistan

Uzbekistan



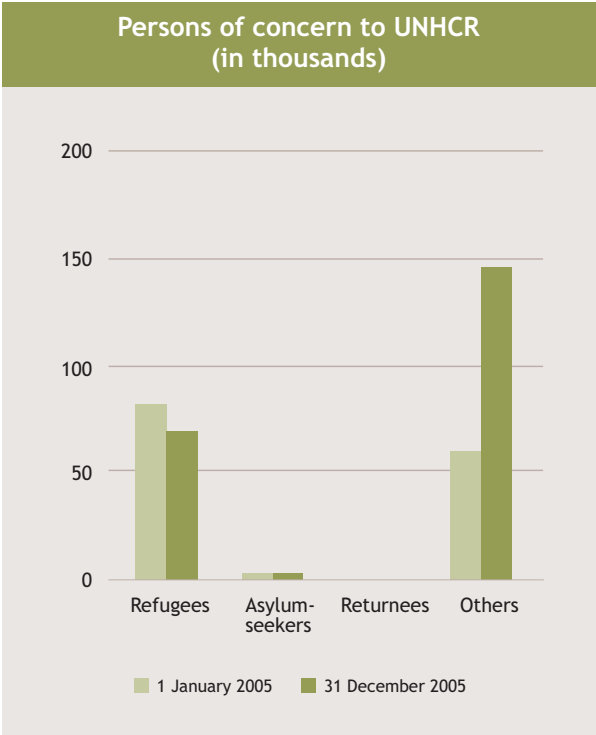
in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have led to a review of UNHCR’s approach. It was decided to drop the regional component of the initiative and integrate the results and the responses to the identified gaps in the country operation plans.

In the absence of national refugee legislation in Kazakhstan, UNHCR continued to address protection gaps. UNHCR’s work became more difficult due to the increasing number of Uzbek asylum-seekers entering Kazakhstan. The overall protection situation in Tajikistan deteriorated despite UNHCR’s preventive

### Challenges and concerns

Despite progress in identifying solutions to the protracted refugee situations in Central Asia, the region experienced increasing protection challenges. The number of asylum-seekers and refugees originating from and seeking protection within the region has been growing. This trend has generated a highly politicized environment. Deportations and *refoulement* of asylum-seekers and refugees took place in violation of human rights principles and minimum standards of international refugee law. In 2005, the fundamental challenge for UNHCR was how to combat the all too evident primacy of States’ perceived political and security imperatives over compliance with their international obligations to protect refugees and asylum-seekers.

As a result of the Uzbek refugee crisis and continued political volatility in much of Central Asia, UNHCR offices were involved in various contingency planning and preparedness activities within UNHCR, as well as the UN system.



efforts. Notable disappointments were the *refoulement* of 17 Afghan refugees and the loss of observer status previously accorded to UNHCR in the inter-ministerial Refugee Status Determination (RSD) Commission. The process of amending the refugee law and bringing it into conformity with international legal standards was suspended by the authorities and UNHCR failed to prevail upon the Government to rescind three restrictive resolutions.

Tensions in Kyrgyzstan and the outflow of Uzbek asylum-seekers changed UNHCR's working environment in Kyrgyzstan, as well as in other States hosting Uzbek asylum-seekers and refugees. In Kyrgyzstan, UNHCR had to rebuild its ties with the newly-created State Committee on Migration and Employment and other key government authorities.

Uzbekistan remains the only country within the CIS that is not a State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The events of Andijan in May 2005 shook the already fragile protection environment prevailing in the country. They also put a severe strain in the relation between the Government and UNHCR, ending in the forced closure of UNHCR's offices in 2006.

## Progress towards solutions

A decreasing number of refugees, mainly Afghan and Tajik, chose to repatriate. In 2005, 109 refugees repatriated from Central Asia, with 11 from Kazakhstan, two from Kyrgyzstan, 25 from Tajikistan, 45 from Turkmenistan and 26 from Uzbekistan.

A major achievement in Kyrgyzstan was the progress in the naturalization of the Tajik refugees. The simplified naturalization procedure supported by UNHCR

and its NGO partners was implemented smoothly despite internal political changes; over 3,370 Tajik refugees were granted Kyrgyz citizenship, representing almost 90 per cent of the Tajik refugee population in Kyrgyzstan.

The joint registration by the Government and UNHCR of all *prima facie* refugees in Turkmenistan was completed in February 2005. As a result of the registration almost 11,800 refugees (2,570 families) from Tajikistan and Afghanistan were registered. After many years of intensive work, UNHCR's efforts and lobbying to achieve local integration became a reality for thousands of Tajik refugees. Further to a decision by the President of Turkmenistan in August 2005, some 9,500 refugees from Tajikistan were in the process of being granted Turkmen citizenship at the end of the year.

Following the successful completion of the resettlement programmes for Afghan refugees in Tajikistan, local integration of the remaining refugees became a joint priority for UNHCR and the Government. A survey of these refugees was conducted during the last two months of the year.

Resettlement was successfully used as a strategic tool for solving the protracted Afghan refugee situation, and 2,115 Afghan refugees were resettled: 4 from Kazakhstan, 138 from Kyrgyzstan, 187 from Turkmenistan, 469 from Uzbekistan and 1,317 from Tajikistan.

An important development towards durable solutions was the declaration of cessation of refugee status for Tajiks who fled their country as a result of the civil war in Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997. This will be implemented in June 2006 provided that appropriate safeguards are in place to identify those still in need of protection.

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Final budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Kazakhstan	1,380,847	1,291,454
Kyrgyzstan	2,583,937	2,212,796
Tajikistan	1,423,816	1,252,045
Turkmenistan	1,132,472	997,007
Uzbekistan	1,300,641	1,215,822
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,821,713</b>	<b>6,969,124</b>





Tajikistan: In 2005, UNHCR help set microcredit programmes like this one to help returnees reintegrate into their communities.  
*UNHCR / J. Redden*

## Operations

UNHCR continued its systematic efforts to build a sustainable protection environment and strengthen the institution of asylum in all five Central Asian countries. The significant protection challenges that were triggered by the Uzbek refugee crisis led to a review of UNHCR's capacity-building activities in the region, especially those relating to the ability to meet the immediate needs of asylum-seekers. Cooperation with the European Union on border management activities was expanded and UNHCR played an active role in the overall implementation of the Border Management in Central Asia programme in Tajikistan, ensuring a proper balance between security concerns, human rights and refugee

rights. A total of 768 Tajik border guards were trained. Despite the refugee emergency and the political changes in the region, UNHCR was able to continue its legal assistance to asylum-seekers and refugees, to provide medical assistance and to guarantee education for all children of concern. HIV/AIDS and sexual and gender based violence activities are streamlined in all operations in Central Asia.

The focus of UNHCR activities in **Kazakhstan** remained the creation of a comprehensive legal framework for refugee protection, including the adoption of the Refugee Law. An analysis of the existing legal framework was prepared by UNHCR and shared with the Inter-Ministerial Working Group on Migration of the Government of Kazakhstan. Legal assistance was provided

to over 1,000 asylum-seekers and refugees through a nationwide lawyers' network in 12 major locations. A preliminary estimate based on the 2005 census of Chechen refugees suggests that they will not exceed 5,000. UNHCR frequently had to intervene to ensure the protection of asylum-seekers from within the region, especially as sensitive asylum claims in a highly politicized environment tended to have a bearing on the regional and strategic interests of governments. In five regions of the country, more than 1,000 refugees and asylum-seekers received health assistance. Targeted financial assistance was provided to some 1,300 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers after verification through interviews and home visits. Modest funding for income generation projects was made available to 73 families in seven regions. The scheme was managed effectively and significantly increased the self-reliance of the beneficiaries.

In 2005, the fledgling refugee protection system in **Kyrgyzstan** faced major challenges due to regime change and the influx of Uzbek asylum-seekers following the Andijan events in May. These developments forced UNHCR to change its focus from previously planned activities to a complex emergency response and the rebuilding of the asylum regime in Kyrgyzstan. UNHCR and its partners provided assistance and protection to the Uzbek refugees in a camp setting, which included legal representation during extradition procedures initiated against many of the camp residents. The Office was compelled to carry out a humanitarian evacuation to Romania of 500 Uzbek refugees, who were subsequently submitted for resettlement. Despite the refugee emergency and the political changes in 2005, UNHCR was able to implement most of its planned activities either directly or through its implementing partners. All refugees and asylum-seekers (some 1,900 women and 2,100 men) benefited from a medical insurance programme. A project on increased school attendance covered eight rural schools (attended by over 7,200 school children, including 2,000 classed either as refugee children or children from recently naturalized families).

In **Tajikistan**, the special needs of refugee women and children were given precedence in the design and delivery of assistance. Women had daily access to a social centre where they acquired skills and participated in educational events. Medical assistance was provided to over 650 refugees; almost 400 of the most vulnerable refugee families received cash allowances. The education of over 500 children was further supported by

financing the Afghan Refugee School. Within the ongoing reintegration programme, some 1,200 Tajik returnees participated in microcredit scheme projects, mainly in southern Tajikistan. Returnee communities participated directly in projects funded by UNHCR and implemented by local and international agencies.

In **Turkmenistan**, UNHCR continued to play an important role in the strengthening of the NGO sector. All care and maintenance activities were implemented through NGOs, rather than directly by UNHCR. Through implementing partners, UNHCR provided over 4,800 refugees and persons of concern with legal counselling on naturalization, property rights, and documentation. Of the most vulnerable refugees, 135 were provided with subsistence allowances. Medical supplies and equipment were distributed to medical aid posts and hospitals in more than 10 refugee settlements housing some 7,270 refugees. Two schools in refugee settlements were rehabilitated for the benefit of more than 550 refugee children and school supplies were distributed to the pupils.

Since UNHCR was the only agency providing protection and assistance to refugees in **Uzbekistan**, a large part of the operational budget was spent on basic assistance. Material assistance was made available to 145 of the most vulnerable refugee families. Although most of the refugee children had access to local public schools, some 87 children were provided with non-formal education because of their poor knowledge of local languages. Medical assistance was provided to some 4,000 refugees, this included 105 hospitalizations. Income-generating activities were launched in order to maximize the self-reliance of some 90 refugee women and 20 men. In addition, legal counselling was offered to all refugees who needed it. UNHCR interventions resulted in the release of all but one of the 15 detainees whose cases were registered with the Office.

## Funding

The overall funding of the operations in Central Asia was adequate within the existing frameworks. However, given the Uzbek refugee crisis, Kyrgyzstan faced an increased influx of asylum-seekers from Uzbekistan, for which additional funds of USD 1 million were required. With the start of the naturalization process in Turkmenistan the operational and administrative budget also had to be increased.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking <sup>1</sup>	Donor	Annual programme budget
Central Asia		
	Sweden	1,361,573
	United States	620,000
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>1,981,573</b>
Tajikistan		
	Norway	476,190
	United States	19,800
<b>Sub-total</b>		<b>495,990</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,477,564</b>

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.