



Central Asia

Major developments

Following a thorough assessment in 2004 of the circumstances of Tajik refugees, UNHCR began to consider the option of applying the cessation clauses to this population. The situation will be re-assessed in the course of 2005, before the Office takes any decision.

After two years of intensive negotiations, the Government of Turkmenistan agreed to carry out a registration of all refugees in cooperation with UNHCR. The registration exercise started in October 2004 and finished in February 2005. This exercise included some 12,100 Tajiks and some 1,000 Afghans of Turkmen ethnicity living in Turkmenistan. The registration was the first formal record of Tajik and Afghan refugees in Turkmenistan and gives UNHCR the means to discuss durable solutions with the Government of Turkmenistan. Since more than 80 per cent of those registered are eligible to apply for Turkmen citizenship, UNHCR will emphasize local integration and naturalization.

In 2004, UNHCR Uzbekistan successfully implemented an EU-funded project to rehabilitate two border crossing points, one in Termez and one in

Kazakhstan
Kyrgyzstan
Tajikistan
Turkmenistan
Uzbekistan



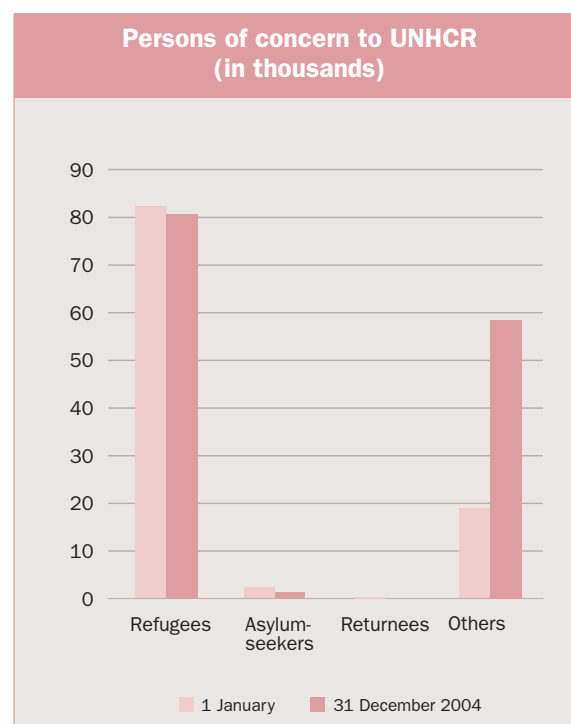
Ferghana. This fruitful collaboration subsequently led to the agreement of the EU/ Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (EU/TACIS) to fund a regional project for the amount of Euros 800,000. The project aims at strengthening protection capacity and support asylum systems in the region and will be submitted in the first half of 2005.

In 2004, a Protection Gaps Initiative was initiated in Central Asia, which will continue throughout 2005. Once the gaps are assessed and the solutions identified, UNHCR will organize a regional conference to bring together representatives of the Central Asian governments, civil society, UN humanitarian and development agencies, and donors, to work out the best way to implement these solutions.

Challenges and concerns

Although progress was made in strengthening asylum institutions in Central Asia and in achieving durable solutions for refugees, this still remained a considerable challenge.

The absence of national refugee legislation in Kazakhstan affects UNHCR's protection activities and necessitates further capacity building for government officials to raise the level of technical





Kyrgyzstan: An ethnic Kyrgyz family who fled Tajikistan's civil war and do not want to return. UNHCR is hopeful that the Government of Kyrgyzstan will give them citizenship in the next few months - a policy that has already seen thousands of refugees integrate locally in Ivanovka, Kyrgyzstan. *UNHCR/J. Redden*

expertise within the asylum system. In Tajikistan, neither the Law on Refugees of 2002 nor a variety of national resolutions complies with international standards. UNHCR provided comprehensive commentary on the current law to assist efforts to bring it into compliance with relevant standards and restore the satisfactory situation that existed before 2002. In Kyrgyzstan, implementing instructions for the simplified procedures for acquiring citizenship were adopted by the authorities in 2004. Citizenship was granted to over 1,000 Tajik refugees but the issuance of new Kyrgyz passports was delayed because of the introduction of a new passport for all Kyrgyz citizens. The naturalization of the Tajik

refugees is a slow process requiring UNHCR's occasional intervention.

Uzbekistan, the only Central Asian country yet to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention, showed an increased interest in migration issues. At present, refugees are tolerated on the basis of "a gentleman's agreement", whereby persons holding UNHCR mandate certificates are not to be detained, arrested or deported. However and despite the reluctance of the Government, a new initiative led by OSCE opens prospects for the inclusion of provisions on asylum-seekers and refugees in a new draft of a migration law.

Progress towards solutions

The main beneficiaries of the continuing repatriation programmes in all five Central Asian countries were Afghan, Tajik and Chechen refugees. In 2004, 605 refugees repatriated, comprising 249 from Turkmenistan, 174 from Kyrgyzstan, 89 from Uzbekistan, 66 from Tajikistan and 27 from Kazakhstan.

In Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, there were developments conducive to local integration. The citizenship campaign of 2004 in Kyrgyzstan resulted in 1,063 Tajik refugees obtaining Kyrgyz citizenship as well as the submission of approximately 1,800 citizenship applications. The five-month registration exercise in Turkmenistan began in October 2004. The results will provide a crucial basis for negotiation with the Government for naturalization of the majority of the refugees.

Resettlement (mainly of Afghan refugees) to Canada and the USA has served as a strategic tool in Central Asia, to help bring this protracted refugee situation to a conclusion. During 2004, 517 refugees departed for resettlement, comprising 435 from Kyrgyzstan, 129 from Uzbekistan, 116 from Tajikistan, 44 from Kazakhstan and 14 from Turkmenistan.

After the successful implementation of the revalidation exercise in Tajikistan in 2004, UNHCR developed its facilitated group resettlement programme for Afghan refugees and is using this as a strategy to encourage the Government to integrate the remaining Afghan refugees. Canada agreed to a large-scale accelerated resettlement procedure and accepted almost half of a group of approximately 2,500 Afghan refugees in Tajikistan. At the same time UNHCR negotiated a similar agreement with the US Government, to be implemented in 2005. Some 520 urban refugees in Turkmenistan who can neither return to their country of origin nor be locally integrated had their cases submitted in 2004 for resettlement to the USA and Canada. UNHCR in Uzbekistan intensified its resettlement activities and in late 2004 successfully submitted a group of 378 Afghan refugees for facilitated resettlement to Canada. Canada subsequently expressed willingness to resettle a larger number of Afghan refugees from Uzbekistan in 2005. This approach has been taken in order to facilitate discussions with the Government of Uzbekistan on establishing minimum protection standards for asylum-seekers and refugees and

integrating some 40,000 Tajik refugees of Uzbek ethnicity.

The year 2004 saw a breakthrough in relations with the authorities of Uzbekistan. This hinged largely on the successful implementation of the EU-funded project for the rehabilitation of two border crossing points. This project consisted of the provision of technical assistance and training for some 170 border guards on the rights of asylum-seekers (and human rights in general). UNHCR also managed to obtain the release of all but one of 37 detained refugees.

Operations

UNHCR offices throughout Central Asia focused on strengthening the institution of asylum, providing training to government officials and achieving durable solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers. As part of its cooperation with the European Union, UNHCR continues to be increasingly involved in border-management activities to protect the rights of refugees within broader population movements. Refugees received legal counseling and were assisted with medical care and education as well as vocational training in all Central Asian countries.

In **Kazakhstan** UNHCR continued to provide technical assistance to the Government to improve the work of the national RSD Commission based in Almaty. Working through implementing partners, UNHCR provided cash assistance to over 1,000 vulnerable mainly Afghan and Chechen refugees. Medical assistance was provided on a case-by-case basis to over 2,400 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly widows, female heads of households, sick and elderly persons. Vocational and language training courses were completed by 440 refugees. Seven training events were conducted in four cities with the theme "Start and Improve Your Business" and 30 Chechen families received small start-up grants under UNHCR's income generation pilot project.

In **Kyrgyzstan** UNHCR emphasized its activities on protection and local integration of refugees. Notable achievements were made in respect of legal assistance, health and education. In cooperation with local NGOs, 11 social and legal assistance centres for refugee women were created in 2004; 23 training workshops and seminars were held for 566 refugee women on SGBV awareness, reproductive

health and gender legislation. UNHCR facilitated full integration of almost 6,700 refugees and asylum-seekers into the national health care system. Refugee children enrolled in local schools received UNHCR assistance in the form of textbooks for some 2,000 children.

In **Tajikistan** primary and secondary education of Afghan refugee children continued through the financing of the Afghan Refugee School, where half of the students are girls. All refugee children were included in the country-wide measles vaccination campaign, undertaken by the Government of Tajikistan and UNICEF. Ongoing reintegration projects for Tajik returnees are proceeding successfully. These include a micro-credit and income-generation scheme which mainly targets refugee women and single heads of households. UNHCR and its implementing partners adopted a community-based approach to this programme, which benefits returnees as well as the local population.

In **Turkmenistan** UNHCR played an important role in the development of the NGO sector following a recent presidential decree requiring all NGOs working with the United Nations and other international organizations to be registered with the Government. Seven local NGOs and their provincial branches were involved in UNHCR projects in 2004 despite the difficulties of registration. Identification of durable solutions was intensified through the local integration programme for some 11,000 Tajik refugees

of Turkmen ethnicity. These projects included the construction and renovation of schools, organization of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS training for refugee women, vocational classes and the provision of medical equipment to settlements. Besides paying special attention to the needs of refugee women and children, community-based mechanisms have been established and maintained for the prevention of and response to SGBV.

In **Uzbekistan**, 60 per cent of the 2004 care and maintenance budget was utilized to support the most vulnerable refugee families through the provision of limited material assistance, medical care, non-formal education, social and legal counseling and income-generation training. Particular attention was paid to refugee women, notably in relation to registration, the provision of sanitary kits, women's participation in the distribution of humanitarian assistance through the gender-balanced Refugee Council, and the maintenance of special hotlines at UNHCR and its implementing partners for refugee women facing domestic violence.

Funding

The operations in Central Asia received adequate funding.

Restricted voluntary contributions (USD)		
Earmarking ¹	Donor	Annual programme budget
Central Asia		
	Sweden	1,236,264
	UN Development Programme	66,542
	United States of America	1,246,845
Sub-total		2,549,651
Tajikistan		
	United States of America	60,000
Sub-total		60,000
Uzbekistan		
	United States of America	40,000
Sub-total		40,000
Total		2,649,651

¹ For more information on earmarking, please refer to the donor profiles.

Budget and expenditure (USD)		
Country	Revised budget	Expenditure
	Annual programme budget	
Kazakhstan	1,393,099	1,387,213
Kyrgyzstan	1,193,911	1,101,848
Tajikistan	1,314,744	1,281,238
Turkmenistan	1,010,771	1,008,291
Uzbekistan	1,121,295	1,120,254
Total	6,033,820	5,898,844