



COUNTRY OPERATIONS PLAN

OVERVIEW

Country: Turkmenistan

Planning Year: 2006

Executive Committee Summary

Country Operation Plan 2006 : TURKMENISTAN

(Updated September 2005)

Part I: OVERVIEW

1. Protection and socio-economic operational environment

At the end of 2004, UNHCR had successfully implemented the registration of approximately 12,000 Tajik and Afghan refugees of Turkmen ethnicity with the Government of Turkmenistan. The exercise was completed end February 2005. The 2006 programme is based on the far-reaching durable solution for the vast majority of registered refugees in Turkmenistan that was generously offered by Presidential decree in August 2005: All Tajik refugees of Turkmen ethnicity were offered naturalization. Other Tajik refugees were offered residence permits, supporting their local integration. In addition, UNHCR will seize every opportunity to further build the capacity of the State Service for Registration of Foreign Citizens (SSRFC), the newly created government agency mandated to deal with foreigners including refugees and stateless persons. At the same time, in view of UNHCR's plan to apply the cessation clause in relation to the Tajik refugees, it is pertinent to note that a declaration of cessation will not amount to UNHCR's withdrawal from its protection and integration responsibilities for Tajiks.

Another major development in 2004 is the submission of resettlement cases of all urban refugees to the United States and Canada. The concerned group is made up of some 520 persons who cannot repatriate to their country of origin nor be locally integrated in Turkmenistan. With over 80% of acceptance rate, it is expected that most of the accepted refugees will depart to third countries before the end of 2005. With this resettlement project, the Office intends to achieve two objectives: the identification of an effective durable solution for urban refugees who cannot avail themselves of any other durable solution and the facilitation of the local integration and naturalisation of the remaining refugee population in Turkmenistan by the Government, in return for the efforts made by UNHCR to resolve the situation of the urban refugees.

Other constraints remain: (i) the lack of a national asylum procedure; (ii) the absence of an effective NGO/civil society sector that could be relied on to eventually assume protection/assistance activities in regard to refugees and asylum seekers in the country; (iv) the lack of readiness of other development agencies to ensure the continuum between humanitarian assistance and longer-term development.

Additionally, UNHCR will continue to play an essential role in training, capacity building and the promotion of refugee law, through local and regional initiatives, with particular emphasis on the implementation of the *Agenda for Protection*. In addition to quarterly round tables/workshops for Implementing Partners on refugee protection and programming, including SGBV, gender and age policies, OCM Ashgabat plans to continue a series of trainings for IPs and the competent government authorities in 2005 and 2006. This includes lectures on human rights, humanitarian law and refugee law, border management and UNHCR's mandate, to the representatives from SSRFC, border, security and customs service

and ZAGS (civil status registration departments) officials, as well as the students of the Military Institute and the Turkmen State University.

Information centres on International Law, Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at the Police Academy, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, at the National Institute for Democracy and Human Rights, and at the Turkmen State University, which were established with UNHCR funding, will continue to receive UNHCR support, including information materials on international human rights and humanitarian law, refugee law and technical assistance, since the centres provide access to and, serve to raise awareness on, the principles of refugee protection among the decision makers and those who influence the decision making process.

UNHCR also foresees the facilitation of the participation of Turkmen officials to the relevant sessions of the Standing Committee and the Executive Committee, as well as other workshops and seminars overseas, which would enhance their awareness of international principles in relation to refugee protection.

2. Operational goals and potential for durable solutions

Derived from UNHCR's Global Strategic Objectives 2006-2007, the following are the overall strategic goals of the 2006 Turkmenistan refugee programme:

- In line with the Global Objective 1 "Advocate for, and support governments in the creation and maintenance of an international protection regime, and the provision of protection and assistance, pursuant to the *Agenda for Protection*", encourage the Government to operationalise the institutional framework for the implementation of the refugee law and continue efforts to build the capacity of the State Service of Turkmenistan for Registration of Foreign Citizens and other competent Government agencies to work on asylum and refugee issues.
- Continue the registration process of all refugees and persons of concern with the eventual hand-over of these functions to the competent government structures, in accordance with the Goal 2 "Strengthening implementation of the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol" of the *Agenda for Protection*.
- In line with the Global Objective 3, pursue voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration, resettlement or local integration for refugees, with a special focus on those in protracted refugee situations, to identify the most appropriate durable solutions to the refugees who do not qualify for naturalisation.
- Continue to advocate for building the capacity of the civil society/NGOs in dealing with refugee and humanitarian issues.
- In accordance with the Global Objective 10 "Advocate for the inclusion of persons of concern to UNHCR in Millennium Development Goal programmes", foster partnership and complementarities between UNHCR and other operators, particularly NGOs and UN system agencies, as the essential platform for attaining the objectives of the 2006 programme, while enhancing the role and capacity of the Government to assume a primary management and delivery role in protecting and assisting refugees.

- Continue to deliver mandated protection and assistance services for the refugees still in Turkmenistan in 2006 to enhance their security and material welfare, focusing particularly on the policy priorities relating to women and children, refugees with special needs, HIV/AIDS, the environment, and addressing the sectors of education, health care, and community services.

The 2006 implementation strategy, therefore, is planned on the basis that the promotion of durable solutions, particularly naturalisation of locally integrating *prima facie* refugees, and capacity-building efforts will continue to be crucial features of the programme in 2006 and beyond.