

2015 UNHCR subregional operations profile - Central Asia

<http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45afd6.html>

| Overview |



In Central Asia, UNHCR's [work](#) focuses on developing national asylum systems, seeking solutions for refugees and stateless people and supporting the implementation of emergency preparedness measures.

National refugee legislation in the subregion is inconsistent with international standards. [States](#) are preoccupied with cross-border/transnational threats and national security, which impacts asylum policy and the protection of refugees. Progress in political reforms and developments are prerequisites for a favourable protection environment and sustainable solutions for those of concern to UNHCR.

Improving national asylum systems involves ensuring that access to territory, improved reception conditions and refugee [status](#) determination (RSD) procedures meet international standards. To advocate for this, regional platforms for refugee protection and international migration, such as the Almaty Process, are used.

Voluntary repatriation is facilitated on a case-by-case basis; however, interest in returning to an uncertain future in Afghanistan has been limited in [2014](#). Resettlement can help maximize protection dividends in the subregion and address the protracted nature of the Afghan refugee situation, alongside efforts to advocate for alternative stay arrangements, and pursue local integration.

While in 2015 the socio-political environment is not expected to change dramatically, UNHCR does not exclude the possibility of mixed migratory movements from Afghanistan and within the subregion. In relation to this, individual countries are expected to raise national security concerns

about asylum and migration, influencing policies. The Office will continue to cooperate with government ministries in Central Asia and partner agencies on overall emergency preparedness, in particular for a possible influx of refugees from Afghanistan.

The UNHCR Seeds for Solutions initiatives in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2014 have been designed to target ending statelessness within the next decade.

Turkmenistan is the first and only country in Central Asia to accede to both the 1954 and 1961 UN Statelessness Conventions. UNHCR continues to advocate residence permits for mandate refugees who are not eligible for naturalization, and pursues resettlement for a small number of Afghan refugees. In July 2014, the Government introduced identification and travel documents for refugees and stateless people, which are compliant with the standards of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and will be issued [free](#) of charge for refugees.

In Kyrgyzstan, UNHCR is implementing programmes as part of a UN-wide peacebuilding plan funded by the Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility of the UN Peacebuilding Fund. Projects focus on sustainable reintegration of those affected by inter-ethnic clashes in June 2010. Activities include trust- and confidence-building measures between individuals, communities and authorities. In addition, Kyrgyzstan is a pilot country of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee Decision on Durable Solutions. UNHCR, together with the UN Country Team in Kyrgyzstan, is providing the strategic framework for its successful implementation.

In light of the volatile security situation in the Fergana Valley, a joint contingency plan was drafted and endorsed by the Kyrgyz Government in 2013. Several activities, such as joint simulation and high-level working group meetings, have enhanced emergency preparedness for any mass refugee influx from neighbouring countries.

In Kazakhstan, the Government has been responsible for RSD since 2010, but UNHCR continues to cooperate with government agencies dealing with asylum. Kazakhstan hosts approximately 600 refugees and asylum-seekers, and around 7,000 officially-registered stateless people. In 2014, UNHCR, together with the Government, has initiated an information campaign to identify and [register](#) stateless people and find solutions to their situation.

Tajikistan hosts approximately 4,000 asylum-seekers and refugees (97 per cent are of Afghan origin), the largest refugee population in Central Asia. The country faces a range of socio-economic challenges affecting both Tajik nationals and refugees. Refugees do not have the freedom to establish their place of residence, and are banned from living in major cities. The asylum system is fragile and the quality of RSD is insufficient. The statelessness of thousands remains a challenge. UNHCR is reinforcing its efforts to address statelessness issues, and promote inter-agency partnerships to enhance emergency preparedness.

The Office has not been present in Uzbekistan since 2006. Nonetheless, it caters for a small number of refugees (133 people), predominantly of Afghan origin, through a project with UNDP aimed at finding solutions for them, including improved stay arrangements and resettlement. Uzbekistan hosts a significant stateless population. The country is not a party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, nor to either of the two Statelessness Conventions.

| **Response and implementation** |

In **Kazakhstan**, legislative improvements are required in various laws and administrative procedures to ensure the asylum system functions properly. UNHCR continues to advise on national legislation and share good practice for refugee protection. Advocacy and support efforts continue with a view to the country's accession to the UN Statelessness Conventions and the reduction of statelessness. Contingency planning and emergency preparedness will remain UNHCR priorities.

In **Tajikistan**, the Office will work closely with the Government and other partners to identify and achieve solutions for stateless people. It will reinforce its inter-agency preparedness work, considering potential displacement scenarios, including in relation to the Afghanistan situation. UNHCR will continue to promote access to asylum and ways to safeguard border management systems, as Tajikistan is located at the crossroads of complex subregional population movements, including human smuggling and trafficking, which often originate in Afghanistan. The organization will support the strengthening of national asylum systems, while ensuring sufficient capacity to address any gaps in mandate RSD.

Priorities for UNHCR in **Turkmenistan** include: engaging the Government in procedures for receiving asylum-seekers and processing asylum claims, as well as continuing to assist relevant government structures in finding durable solutions for stateless people registered in 2011. In 2015, UNHCR will continue to seek durable solutions through naturalization and resettlement. It will assist the Government in developing and implementing a statelessness status determination procedure. Government partners will receive assistance to develop their refugee emergency preparedness and response capacity.

In **Kyrgyzstan**, the Office will continue to work towards ending statelessness. Innovative programmes funded by the UNHCR Seeds for Solutions initiative are being implemented with government partners and local NGOs. The activities include on-the-spot registration of undocumented and stateless people by multifunctional mobile teams.

Strategic priorities include: building a comprehensive protection system and providing durable solutions for individual beneficiaries, as well as improving the quality of state registration and RSD. The reintegration strategy entails improved dialogue between the Government and communities, impartial and timely analysis of problematic areas, and collaborative problem solving. It is anticipated that the activities designed as part of the peacebuilding project will be successfully implemented, enabling UNHCR to close its offices in the south by the end of 2015.

In **Uzbekistan**, provision of services to refugees will continue through the UNDP project aiming at finding solutions. Advocacy efforts to improve stay arrangements and other solutions for refugees will continue with the Government.

| **Financial information** |

The budget for Central Asia has gradually decreased from USD 33.3 million in 2010, reflecting the activities initiated after the conflict in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, to USD 16.7 million in 2014. For 2015, the subregional budget stands at USD 14.7 million.

UNHCR in Central Asia maintains contingency plans for possible population movements from Afghanistan in the event of any political or social instability. Should there be any significant refugee influxes from Afghanistan to Central Asia, the mobilization of additional funding would be required.

UNHCR 2015 budgets for Central Asia (USD)

Operation	2014	2015			Total
	Revised budget (as of 30 June 2014)	Refugee programme PILLAR 1	Stateless programme PILLAR 2	IDP projects PILLAR 4	
Total	16,680,100	9,052,161	3,959,898	1,657,546	14,669,605
1. Includes activities in Uzbekistan.					
Kazakhstan Regional Office[1]	7,428,386	4,742,400	2,526,919	0	7,269,319
Kyrgyzstan	6,298,968	1,857,413	747,425	1,657,546	4,262,384
Tajikistan	2,093,364	2,180,013	263,265	0	2,443,279
Turkmenistan	859,383	272,335	422,289	0	694,624

Source: [UNHCR Global Appeal 2015 Update](#)

Ashgabat meeting proposes way forward on migration and statelessness

<http://www.unhcr.org/53a96dbd6.html>

Press Releases, 24 June [2014](#)

ASHGABAT, Turkmenistan (June 23, 2014) – Delegates at the International Conference on Migration and Statelessness in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, [today](#) emphasized the need to undertake targeted actions, including legal reforms and greater regional cooperation, to tackle pressing challenges in the areas of migration and statelessness in Central Asia.

The conference focused on identifying practical measures to realize the agendas for migration and statelessness set out in the 2013 UN High Level Dialogue on International Migration and Development and the 2009 Regional Conference on Prevention and Reduction of Statelessness and the Protection of Stateless Persons in Central Asia.

The conference, which was hosted by the Government of Turkmenistan and co-organised by UNHCR and IOM, identified best practices for addressing situations of statelessness and for improving the management of migration in Central Asia and globally. Over 40 delegations took part.

Stateless people in the region face significant obstacles in accessing their basic human rights, such as education, documentation, medical support and the ability to travel, according to UNHCR's Director of International Protection Volker Türk. "Statelessness is a major cause of human suffering around the world and decisive action is required to resolve existing situations and prevent new ones." he said.

Turkmenistan has achieved considerable progress with regard to the reduction and prevention of statelessness. This includes the introduction of safeguards to prevent statelessness in its 2013 nationality law. The country has also acceded to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in 2011, and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in 2012.

Since 2005, the Government of Turkmenistan has granted citizenship to more than 20,000 stateless people. Continuing this practice of resolving statelessness, the first day of the conference concluded with a citizenship ceremony, which saw the naturalization of nearly 1,000 stateless persons. Türk also emphasized that statelessness remains a major challenge in the 21st century across the globe. "A number of governments present at this conference have shown that the problem can be solved. UNHCR is counting on their leadership for our campaign to end statelessness within a decade."

This year UNHCR marks the 60th anniversary of the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons. With 10 million people worldwide believed to be stateless, many in a protracted situation of statelessness, UNHCR is launching a global campaign in September 2014 aimed at the elimination of statelessness within the next decade.

UNHCR project helps ethnic minority in Fergana Valley get Kyrgyz nationality

<http://www.unhcr.org/52a08dc29.html>

Making a Difference, 5 December 2013



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A Lyuli family discuss their case with a UNHCR staff member.

JANY-KYSHTAK, Kyrgyzstan, December 5 (UNHCR) – The minority Lyuli people have been living in Jany-Kyshtak and other villages of the fertile Fergana Valley for more than 200 [years](#). Many grew up under Soviet rule, when the Fergana straddled the Soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, and nationality was not a major consideration.

Up to half of the 3,700 inhabitants – all ethnic Lyuli – of the village in western Kyrgyzstan never obtained [personal](#) identity documents, but in recent years they have found that lack of such documents, including birth certificates, can restrict their access to many basic human rights in independent Kyrgyzstan.

The UN refugee agency is trying to help the Lyuli regain an identity as part of a wider project to assist thousands of people in the country whose nationality is undetermined. They are at risk of statelessness because they are completely undocumented, which means they face particular difficulties establishing that they qualify for Kyrgyz nationality.

Koria Urmanova, who was born in 1977 when Kyrgyzstan was part of the Soviet Union, has never had a passport or other documentary proof of nationality. "My parents died when I was a young child. When the time came to get a passport [at [age](#) 16], I did not know where my birth certificate was, so I did not get the passport," she explained.

In time she got married and over the years gave birth at home to six children, none of whom were registered at birth. At first, this was not a major problem, even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. As her children grew older, she realized that lack of documentation could hinder their and her access to basic rights, including education, health care, employment, social allowances and more.

But with the help of UNHCR, its local partner and the government, Koria and many of her neighbours have been able to obtain documents that are vital if they are to live a normal life in Kyrgyzstan, which became independent in 1991. "Thanks to this UNHCR project, my eldest son,

who has just turned 12, received his birth certificate," said Koria, who was discussing how to get a passport with visiting lawyers from the NGO, Fergana Valley Lawyers without Borders. "I hope that all my children and myself will eventually get proper identity documents," she added.

The visit of the legal team attracted a lot of interest here, with many questions about how to obtain identity documents and access to all of citizen's entitlements. Some of the older generation only hold invalid Soviet passports as identification and wanted to find out if they could [trade](#) these in for Kyrgyz passports to ensure access to government services.

The six-month project in Jany-Kyshtak village represents just a small fraction of UNHCR's efforts in Kyrgyzstan to help more than 20,000 people of all ethnic groups, including Uzbeks and Tajiks, gain proper identity documents and prevent statelessness. In the first nine months of this year, more than 9,360 people handed in their expired Soviet passports and were given Kyrgyz ones. In Jany-Kyshtak, 330 villagers have received [free](#) legal assistance which helped 106 of them obtain birth certificates or passports.

Azizbek Ashurov is the director of Fergana Valley Lawyers without Borders, which works with UNHCR by providing legal aid to stateless people and people of undetermined nationality. He listed the main reasons for statelessness in Kyrgyzstan. "First is the collapse of the USSR [Soviet Union]. People did not exchange their Soviet passports and became stateless," he said, adding that a second reason was the lack of harmony between the nationality laws in different countries.

"People moved from one country to another, got married, thus finding themselves in situations that were not envisaged by national laws. Gaps in the different legislations led to the difficulty in acquiring a citizenship." He cited inefficient bureaucracy as the third reason.

But the problem has also been exacerbated over the years by a simple lack of awareness among the public about the importance of obtaining documentation, and especially in deprived rural areas. "I hold many meetings with residents to raise awareness on the importance of documents," affirmed Ruslan Urinov, the Jany-Kyshtak village chief.

"These people were previously nomads; they were never documented. This explains why parents did not have identity documents and never got documents for their children. Now the situation is changing. People want to get documents and they need advice and support," he stressed. In addition, he noted, some children did not have birth certificates because they were born at home. If their parents lacked documents, they could not obtain birth certificates and passports for their children.

But despite the distinctive and independent way of life of the Lyuli in Jany-Kyshtak and other villages, which has led to discrimination in the past, they have started to understand the importance of having documents to access things like health care and education.

The local school admits children even without documents, says the principal, Gulchehra Abdullaeva, adding that parents seem to be more and more interested in getting their children a basic education. "I am happy to see these children in my school. I have accepted them without

identity documents because education is the right of everyone in our country," she said, adding: "A total 245 out of the 544 children study without documents."

Meanwhile, Munajat Orokova has finally received a Kyrgyz passport at the age of 40. Her application was complicated by the fact that her parents did not have documents and she was registered as the daughter of her in-laws when she got married. This has affected her eight children. "Two of them were born in a maternity clinic, the rest were born at home. None of my children has birth certification," she said. But, now she is optimistic that with the help of UNHCR and its partners, the children will have a brighter future.

By Ainagul Abdrakhmanova in Jany-Kyshtak, Kyrgyzstan

Statelessness in Kyrgyzstan

Two decades after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, thousands of people in former Soviet republics like Kyrgyzstan are still facing problems with citizenship. UNHCR has identified more than 20,000 stateless people in the Central Asian nation. These people are not considered as nationals under the laws of any country. While many in principle fall under the Kyrgyz citizenship law, they have not been confirmed as nationals under the existing procedures.

Most of the stateless people in Kyrgyzstan have lived there for many years, have close family links in the country and are culturally and socially well-integrated. But because they lack citizenship documents, these folk are often unable to do the things that most people take for granted, including registering a marriage or the birth of a child, travelling within Kyrgyzstan and overseas, receiving pensions or social allowances or owning property. The stateless are more vulnerable to economic hardship, prone to higher unemployment and do not enjoy full access to education and medical services.

Since independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan has taken many positive steps to reduce and prevent statelessness. And UNHCR, under its statelessness mandate, has been assisting the country by providing advice on legislation and practices as well as giving technical assistance to those charged with solving citizenship problems. The refugee agency's NGO partners provide legal counselling to stateless people and assist them in their applications for citizenship.

However, statelessness in Kyrgyzstan is complex and thousands of people, mainly women and children, still face legal, administrative and financial hurdles when seeking to confirm or acquire citizenship. In 2009, with the encouragement of UNHCR, the government adopted a national action plan to prevent and reduce statelessness. In 2011, the refugee agency will help revise the plan and take concrete steps to implement it. A concerted effort by all stakeholders is needed so that statelessness does not become a lingering problem for future generations.

Three generations of this woman's family are stateless. Originally from Tajikistan, she was brought to Kyrgyzstan aged 16 by her husband-to-be. His family had fled to the Kyrgyz Republic

during the 1992-97. Because she is stateless, her marriage is not registered, making her children stateless. She cannot receive benefits for her children, though the family lives in extreme poverty. Her mother-in-law has an expired Soviet passport and cannot receive a pension and must pay the foreigners' rate for medical services.

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Stateless women live in these houses in Ivanovka village, some 50 kilometres from the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. Many people who fled the 1992-97 civil war in Tajikistan settled in this region, but they became stateless. After the war, UNHCR helped about 9,000 refugees to repatriate, while the Kyrgyz Republic gave citizenship to some 10,000. But some people were left stateless.

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Mukhadam, 49, is stateless. When her husband died two years ago she went to live with her mother-in-law and began working as a cleaner. She says that since she is stateless she cannot hope to find any other job.

December 2010
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Saliya is stateless because she lost her old Soviet passport in 2003 and never applied for Kyrgyz citizenship. Her husband, Ismail, has Kyrgyz citizenship, but lost his passport during a wave of violence in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2010. UNHCR helped them to rebuild their house and is assisting Ismail to get new personal documents. They cannot receive pensions and welfare benefits without Kyrgyz citizenship and valid passports.

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