UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

OPERATIONAL UPDATE
June, July, August 2022

UNHCR Representation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan

Key figures as of 30 June 2022

15,165*

Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

in Kazakhstan (1,000), Kyrgyzstan (1,119), Turkmenistan (15) and Uzbekistan (11)*.

44,332

known Stateless people

in Kazakhstan (7,558), Kyrgyzstan (482), Turkmenistan (4,463) and Uzbekistan

* In November 2021, the Government of Uzbekistan reported via mass media that 13,020 Afghan citizens had arrived in the country on short-term visas, of whom around 2,000 had valid visas as of July 2022. Given the ongoing situation in Afghanistan, UNHCR considers that they may be in a refugee-like situation.

In 2022, UNHCR requires $8.8 million to protect refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, including in response to the Afghanistan emergency.

Funded: US$3.2 million (36%)	Unfunded US 5.6 million (64%)

As of August 2022

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

As a member of the UN Country Team and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, UNHCR engages with governments, UN and development partners, international financial institutions and others across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to ensure refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people are not left behind in States' achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

SUB-REGIONAL

- With all avenues for their integration under national legislation exhausted, UNHCR is following up the **petitions of mandate refugees to President administrations with a plea for an extraordinary offer of citizenship** – 18 mandate refugees submitted petitions in Kazakhstan, 139 in Kyrgyzstan, 10 in Turkmenistan and nine in Uzbekistan. Central Asia hosts 'convention refugees' – asylum-seekers recognised as refugees by the State – as well as 'mandate refugees' – people recognised as refugees under the global mandate of UNHCR. Most mandate refugees have been living in their country of asylum for many years – some even decades. Despite being culturally integrated, without legal status in host countries, mandate refugees do not have access to most socio-economic rights and services guaranteed under the Convention, including access to local integration through naturalization.

- Across Central Asia – and the globe – UNHCR marked **World Refugee Day on 20 June**. In the Kyrgyz Republic, UNHCR, the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration and refugee volunteers organized a bicycle race, bringing together refugee and Kyrgyz youth to demonstrate that, with help from welcoming communities, people forced to flee can rebuild their lives. At the event, refugee brothers and cyclists Romal Ajmal, 16, and Lemar, 14 – who train under a national coach and have shown strong talent, winning several competitions – shared their wish to become citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic so they can compete internationally for the country. In Kazakhstan, a talk on refugee issues and protection was held with International Relations students at KIMEP University, and online lectures given to students in Uzbekistan and the 'Preventive Diplomacy Academy' alumni of the UN Regional Centre For Preventive Diplomacy For Central Asia Youth Initiative in Turkmenistan.

- With just two years left of the global **#IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness**, together with States, UNHCR and partners are accelerating **efforts to implement pledges and achieve the goals of the 10-year campaign** – including accession **to the Statelessness Conventions**. Throughout July, with engagement from the UNHCR Senior Statelessness Officer for Asia and the Pacific, UNHCR met with authorities responsible for statelessness issues – including: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Office of the Ombudsperson in Kazakhstan; Ministries of Internal Affairs and Justice in Uzbekistan; and Ministries of Digital Development and Interior, and Office of the Ombudsperson in the Kyrgyz Republic – discussing progress and challenges, and offering technical support and expertise to support their efforts to end statelessness.

- Together with partners, UNHCR is closely monitoring the evolving impact of the war in Ukraine on Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, including the number of applications for asylum. Citizens of the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Belarus have visa-free stay in all Central Asian States for 30 to 90 days, and in most cases do not require work permits. During strategic planning discussions, implementing partners alerted UNHCR about price increase of commodities and limited purchasing power of refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people. Through UNHCR email and phone 'hotlines' – maintained across the four countries for anyone in need of information or consultation on refugee and asylum issues – UNHCR and partners are responding to enquiries about asylum procedures.

Photo: UNHCR

Like his older brother, Lemar (14) is a promising cyclist, and a refugee.

The brothers train under a national coach and have already won several competitions.

Their shared wish is to become citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic so they can compete internationally for the country.

KAZAKHSTAN

State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

- On 10 June, UNHCR conducted an online session **for global law firm Morgan Lewis** on the situation of refugees in Kazakhstan, covering international refugee protection standards, basic principles of the 1951 Convention, and the relevant provisions of the national legislation of Kazakhstan.

- On 14 July, Kazakhstan presented its Second **Voluntary National Review (VNR)** at the UN High-Level Political Forum in New York, demonstrating the country's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Following advocacy efforts by UNHCR, forcibly displaced and stateless people were included in action points for:
  - SDG 10: "Granting access to basic socio-economic rights to refugees and asylum seekers on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, on an equal basis with foreigners permanently residing during their stay on the territory of Kazakhstan."
  - SDG 16: "Ensuring rights and interests protection of refugees' and stateless persons' children, ensuring safety and access to social and educational services." and "Ensuring birth statement in case of delivery outside the healthcare organization and lack of parents' documents of identification."

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- In early 2022, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan transferred responsibility for refugees and asylum-seekers to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection – the same ministry responsible for social welfare of citizens. On 2 June, UNHCR and the Ministry **co-signed a Plan of Cooperative Measures** which outlines joint activities to be undertaken throughout the year to protect the rights of displaced people in Kazakhstan. The workplan includes capacity building initiatives for local executive bodies on refugee protection, as well as development of joint proposals to improve legislation related to refugee rights.

- Ahead of the September 2022 **United Nations Transforming Education Summit** in New York, the Government of Kazakhstan convened national consultations in Astana on 14 June to develop a shared vision and discuss actions to transform education between now and 2030. **DAFI refugee scholar** and Kazakh-Russian Medical University student Armin Talebi participated, raising issues of access to education for refugees. Armin shared suggestions on changes that could help provide more educational opportunities for refugees through provision of grants and scholarships – points which were included in the final National Statement of Commitment of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the Transforming Education Summit.

READ MORE

Read the article Refugee Youth In Kazakhstan Aim Higher on the Transforming Education Summit blog.

- On 26 July, UNHCR delivered a session on refugee protection in Kazakhstan and international protection standards to representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Border Service of National Security, National Security Committee and Administrative Police Department as part of a workshop organized by the **Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA).** Particular attention was given to identification and referral of refugees and asylum seekers at border checkpoints, and access to territory and State asylum-procedures. Participants were also informed of refugee protection and human rights obligations of Kazakhstan under international conventions.

- UNHCR convened a **two-day training on refugee issues** on 28 and 29 June for 26 employees of the Migration Committee of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, and different local executive bodies, to form a unified approach in the application of the State's law on refugees in accordance with international standards and the Refugee Convention.

- To support education opportunities for refugee youth, on 30 June the Bureau of Continuing Professional Development (BCPD Ltd.) of the Astana **International Financial Centre (AIFC) held an online professional orientation masterclass** for 16 high school students in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The masterclass included information on how to write letters of motivation and resources to help decide on a profession. Following the session, BCPD Ltd. held a contest for the best letter of motivation among the participants. The five selected winners received free access to BCPD Ltd. courses, including a Life Skills Programme where specialists will teach the selected refugee youth the basics of financial literacy, setting and achieving objectives, effective communication and presentation skills, and other skills.

- For the second year, in 2022 the **Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI)** will support refugee youth in Kazakhstan to attend university. As in 2021, most of the applicants were women, and most applied to fields of study related to medicine. The 2022 application cycle has just been completed, with nine refugee youth selected.

- In the first six months of the year, UNHCR provided 116 refugee households (80 females and 127 males) with **multi-purpose cash-based assistance** to support them to cover their basic needs.

- In January, the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection published the new **Concept of Migration Policy of Kazakhstan for 2022-2026** for public comment. UNHCR submitted recommendations, advocating for improvement of national legislation with regards to refugees and asylum-seekers.

  - Published for public comment in July, the related draft decree "On approval of the rules for entry and stay of immigrants in the Republic of Kazakhstan" contained a clause which would undermine the country's commitments to refugee protection. UNHCR and partners prepared and submitted further recommendations and the clause has subsequently been omitted.

Ending Statelessness

- On 18 July, UNHCR and its partner Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law conducted a press briefing with the Migration Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to present the **results of a joint large-scale statelessness identification and documentation campaign**. Launched in October 2020, the 20-month campaign identified 8,822 undocumented stateless persons, after which 4,800 people confirmed their citizenship of Kazakhstan, and about 2,700 people received assistance with documentation.

READ MORE

Read the article Shadow of Statelessness Lifting in Kazakhstan on the UNHCR Central Asia website.

- On 31 August, the eve of "Knowledge Day" when children in Kazakhstan start the new school year, UNHCR and implementing partner NGO "Sana Sezim" **distributed stationery vouchers to 30 undocumented stateless children** at an event in Shymkent city. Also attended by representatives of the local akimat (provincial government) and the Migration Service Department, the event sought to highlight the importance of children's rights to education and legal identity, and to draw the attention of the government and the general public to the issues of statelessness. During the event one of the stateless children was issued his first identity document – a birth certificate.

A person of undetermined nationality receives legal counselling and assistance during Kazakhstan's countrywide identification and documentation campaign. Shymkent city, Kazakhstan.

THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

- Throughout June, July and August, UNHCR implementing partner "Legal Clinic Adilet" conducted interviews and legal assessments with asylum-seekers, and provided counselling **and assistance to prepare and lodge asylum applications**. Supporting efforts to resolve statelessness, Legal Clinic Adilet provided **consultations for stateless people on obtaining relevant documentation for confirmation or acquisition of Kyrgyz Republic citizenship**, and assisted with issuance of birth certificates and other types of civil registry documents.

- From 1 to 3 June, UNHCR and Legal Clinic Adilet conducted a **seminar for 19 judges** from across the Kyrgyz Republic, on national and international asylum, citizenship and statelessness legislation.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- At the High-Level Officials Meeting (HLOM) in December 2021, the Kyrgyz Republic pledged to **provide recognised refugees with due access to machine-readable travel documents, as well as healthcare, and social protection** on par with citizens. UNHCR continues to support the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration (in charge of refugee issues) and the Ministry of Health to implement these pledges, assisting the Kyrgyz Republic to comply to more of its obligations as party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Advancing these pledges:
  - On 1 June, the **Altyn Balalyk children's health and rehabilitation centre** was officially opened following refurbishment supported by UNHCR.
  - In July, the first working group meeting was held – with participation of the Ministries of Digital Development, Foreign Affairs, and Interior, the State Committee for National Security, UNHCR and other partners – to discuss the plan of action to develop the legal framework for issuance of the travel document.

- In June, the Cabinet of Ministers submitted to the Parliament a draft law "On Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Medical Insurance of Citizens in the Kyrgyz Republic". UNHCR submitted comments to inform Members of Parliament about international human rights standards related to health.

- On 1 July, the government published the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers "On Approval of the Procedure for Expulsion of Foreign Citizens from the Kyrgyz Republic" for public discussion. UNHCR and legal partners submitted comments and observations to promote alignment with international standards.

- Between June and August, UNHCR distributed **cash-based assistance** to 24 refugee households (45 females and 51 males) to help them cover their basic needs.

- On 26 July, UNHCR **handed over computer equipment to the Migration Department of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Migration** of the Kyrgyz Republic to support its work to protect the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers in the country. The equipment will be deployed to territorial units in Bishkek and Chui provinces for use by the authorities to receive, process and follow-up the applications of asylum-seekers and registration of refugees.

Ending Statelessness

- To strengthen technical capacity within government authorities, UNHCR supported two employees from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Digital Development to participate in the June-July **International Institute of Humanitarian Law online course on Statelessness** (in Russian).

- Supported by UNHCR, on 16 July, Legal Clinic Adilet delivered a training on statelessness for 58 members of the Department of the Population Registration in Jalal-Abad and Osh districts. The training sought to increase their knowledge on the statelessness international legal framework, advantages of accession to the 1954 and 1961 Conventions for the Kyrgyz Republic, statelessness determination procedure, and birth registration procedure to prevent further cases of statelessness.

Responding to Emergencies

- As a member of the UN **Disaster Response Coordination Unit**, UNHCR continues to engage with UN, NGO and other humanitarian members and contribute to the joint project "*UN Support for Strengthening Disaster Preparedness and Response Coordination in the Kyrgyz Republic*".

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT

Read about the refugee emergency simulation exercise held with the Ministry of Emergency Situations in May.

TURKMENISTAN

State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol
State Party to the 1954 and 1961 Statelessness Conventions

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- On 10 June, UNHCR conducted a working-level meeting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to discuss activities of the **Joint Workplan with the Government of Turkmenistan for 2022**. The meeting enabled discussion on the latest developments, tracking of the implementation stage of the workplan, and planning of future activities.

- On 29 August, UNHCR delivered an online lecture as part of a full day training for the third cohort of SDG Youth Ambassadors in Turkmenistan, raising awareness of the situations of refugees, role of UNHCR in ensuring international protection of people forced to flee, the legal foundation of international refugee protection as well as the cooperation mechanisms to find sustainable solutions.

- In July, UNHCR provided three mandate refugee households (3 females and 1 male) with **multi-purpose cash-based assistance** to support them to cover their basic needs.

Ending Statelessness

- Within the framework of the Joint **Data Center on Forced Displacement** project – "Support for data collection on statelessness through national population censuses in Central Asia" – UNHCR, together with UNFPA Turkmenistan, supported the Government of Turkmenistan to convene a **seminar on "Organization, methodology and main provisions of the population and housing census of Turkmenistan in 2022"** on 9 and 10 of August. The seminar aimed to familiarize around 100 representatives of the department of the State Statistics Committee with the main areas of work of local authorized regional statistical bodies, and the methodological provisions, for conducting a population and housing census. UNHCR delivered a session on the national census and statelessness identification to provide enumerators with a better understanding of statelessness, and discuss situations they may face while interviewing stateless people.

Responding to Emergencies

- Turkmenistan is part of the 2022 Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan (RRP) which, under the overall leadership of UNHCR, supports host governments to meet the needs of Afghans of varying statuses, including refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented people, as well as host communities, and potential new arrivals. There has been no mass influx of new arrivals from Afghanistan in Turkmenistan. UNHCR and partners are focusing on emergency preparedness activities while advocating for the government to enable safe and unhindered access to territory, and prevent non-refoulment. RRP partners in Turkmenistan are UNFPA and UNICEF.

- Within the Joint Workplan with the Government of Turkmenistan for 2022, on 31 August UNHCR conducted an online lecture on emergency preparedness and response in accordance with international standards for representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Defence, Labour, Internal Affairs, and, the State Migration Service, and State Border Service of Turkmenistan, as well as representatives of local executive bodies and other State officials who would be involved in the event of an influx of refugees.

UNHCR conducted an online lecture on emergency preparedness and response in accordance with international standards, building capacity of those who would be involved in the event of an influx of refugees.

UZBEKISTAN

- UNHCR and the National Human Rights Centre (NHRC) of the Republic of Uzbekistan continue to implement their second **joint annual workplan, encompassing refugee protection, and nationality and statelessness**. Activities include capacity building to support Uzbekistan's ambitions to accede to the Refugee and Statelessness Conventions as part of its accepted 2018 Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights recommendations.

- As a key UNHCR partner across the world, the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) of the U.S. State Department conducted a monitoring mission to Uzbekistan in June. In Termez, the delegation visited the UNHCR Regional Humanitarian Logistics Hub, and the premises of new national NGO implementing partner Barqaror Hayot. In Tashkent, PRM met with the National Human Rights Centre and the director of Barqaror Hayot. While the focus of the mission was on Afghanistan-related assistance, with reducing statelessness being another priority issue, PRM also met virtually with a Professor from Bukhara University who was previously stateless.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- In June, UNHCR provided three mandate refugee households (2 females and 2 males) with multi-**purpose cash-based assistance** to support them to cover their basic needs.

- In partnership with the National Human Rights Centre, on 06 June UNHCR convened a **roundtable discussion on** interim arrangements and referral mechanisms **for persons in need of international protection** in Uzbekistan. As Uzbekistan does not yet have a national asylum system, the event sought to explore provisional solutions to allow forcibly displaced persons access to due rights guaranteed by international and national law and humanitarian considerations. Opened by Akmal Saidov, First Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Director of the NHRC, the event brought together representatives of Ministries, the General Prosecutor's Office, and the National Security Service, as well as other State agencies and international organizations.

- UNHCR finalised the partnership agreement with NGO Barqaror Hayot and received approval from the Government for a 6-month pilot **project that seeks to improve the skills of Afghan citizens in Uzbekistan and the host community** – helping to fill national shortfall in human capital – enable individuals to achieve higher qualifications in new areas, and support groups to recover and rebuild. Trainings will include cooking, sewing, hairdressing, and language (Russian, Uzbek, English) classes for children. Initial training on UNHCR protection, programme and procedures – including Code of Conduct, and Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse – was delivered to the NGO staff, including lawyers and teachers, on 11 August.

UNHCR's partnership with Barqaror Hayot seeks to enhance skills of Afghan citizens in Uzbekistan and improve livelihoods opportunities. .

- On 26 August UNHCR and National Human Rights Centre, presented the findings of a **legal** analysis conducted to support Uzbekistan's considerations to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. The study was presented in a workshop in Tashkent to representatives of Ministries, the General Prosecutor's Office, the National Security Service, other State agencies and international organisations. First Deputy Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan and Director of the National Human Rights Centre, Akmal Saidov, delivered opening remarks. Commissioned as part of the joint annual workplan, the study analyses the legislation and practice of Uzbekistan related to refugee protection, and compares it with international standards and the country's legal obligations. The report highlights best practices and gaps, and provides recommendations and follow-up measures to guide future legislative changes and further development of the national protection framework.

- UNHCR and UNDP have signed a partnership agreement for a **climate action and sustainability project** that will engage Afghan citizens in Uzbekistan and vulnerable people from host communities in afforestation activities through a cash -for-work mechanism. To be implemented in Surkhandarya region, bordering Afghanistan, the project seeks to enhance the resilience of local communities while addressing the damaging impact of dust storms on the population and the economy.

Responding to Emergencies

- As a country neighbouring Afghanistan, Uzbekistan is part of the **2022 Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan** (RRP). Under the overall leadership of UNHCR, the plan seeks to support host governments to meet the needs of Afghans of varying statuses, including refugees, asylum-seekers and undocumented people, as well as host communities, and potential new arrivals. There has been no mass influx of new arrivals from Afghanistan in Uzbekistan. UNHCR and partners are focusing on preparedness activities while advocating for the government to enable safe and unhindered access to territory, and prevent non-refoulment. RRP partners in Uzbekistan are UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF.

- Established in October 2021 with support from the Government of Uzbekistan, the **UNHCR Regional Humanitarian Logistics Hub** provides 9000m² of storage space for humanitarian relief items. The hub – located within the Termez Cargo Centre – enables UNHCR to rapidly replenish local stockpiles and be more agile in its response, while reducing costs and risks associated with carrying large inventory in each country affected by the Afghanistan situation. By the end of August 2022, 1,168 tons – the equivalent of 98 truckloads – of relief items had been dispatched from the hub to support the Afghanistan and Ukraine emergency responses, including sleeping mats, tarpaulins, fleece blankets and kitchen sets.

- In June 2022, the President of Uzbekistan granted the Termez Cargo Centre the status of 'International Multifunctional Transport and Logistics Hub'. While the full meaning of this new status, and the opportunities it will bring, are still being clarified, an immediate benefit for UNHCR operations is the **simplification of border crossing for trucks** of humanitarian relief items into Afghanistan.

The UNHCR Regional Humanitarian Logistics Hub in Termez stores essential relief items that people need most in the first days after they are forced to flee, such as portable solar LED lamps and heavy-duty blankets. Providing vulnerable refugees and internally displaced people with these items supports their dignity, health, privacy and self-reliance, reducing further protection risks.

UNHCR is grateful for contributions directly to the UNHCR Representation to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well as donors of unearmarked and flexible funding, including:

Belgium partner in development
german humanitarian assistance
Irish Aid Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland
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Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft Confédération suisse Confederazione Svizzera Confederaziun svizra
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VISIT THE UNHCR CENTRAL ASIA WEBSITE

People forced to flee can find key contacts and updated information about asylum procedures in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on help.unhcr.org/centralasia, in English and Russian languages.