



UNHCR Representation to Central Asia

Before fleeing Afghanistan to Kazakhstan in the 1990s, Homa was an architect and Abdul Wahab was a philosophy lecturer. While both recognised refugees, without permanent residency they do not have access to most socio-economic rights and depend on the support from UNHCR and its partners. At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, Kazakhstan pledged to provide refugees with equal access to medical care, employment, education, and social assistance on par with citizens and permanently residing foreigners, which would allow Abdul Wahab and Homa to contribute to the country's sustainable development. (Photo: UNHCR/ Anzhela Son)

Key figures as of 01 January 2024

20,111*



Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

in Kazakhstan (753), the Kyrgyz Republic (1,457), Tajikistan (8,483), Turkmenistan (13) and Uzbekistan (5)*.

37,819



known Stateless people

in Kazakhstan (7,892), the Kyrgyz Republic (21), Tajikistan (3,827), Turkmenistan (3,583) and Uzbekistan (22,496).

* Based on government reports in mass media, UNHCR estimates there are 9,400 people in Uzbekistan in a refugee-like situation.

In 2024, UNHCR requires \$10.03 million to protect refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people across Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.



Funded
20%

Unfunded
80%

As of 29 February 2024

SUB-REGIONAL

- In December 2023, some 4,200 delegates from 168 countries gathered at the [Global Refugee Forum](#) to address urgent challenges and identify long-term solutions needed for more than 114 million displaced people around the world. Held every four years, the Global Refugee Forum is the largest international conference on refugee issues. Government delegations from all five Central Asian countries participated in the 2023 event. With the support of UNHCR, [21 pledges were made by government, academia, and the UN Country Teams of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan](#) to improve the lives of refugees and stateless people.
- At the invitation of **Jessup – the world’s largest moot court competition for law students** – on 16 and 17 February, UNHCR served as judges for the Central Asia contest, with 11 teams from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan exercised their debating skills in a simulation of a fictional dispute between countries before the International Court of Justice. This year’s focus was the right to political expression, emphasizing obligations of States under the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, and the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations.

At a sub-regional level, and linked to the multistakeholder pledge [Protection – Ending Statelessness](#), the Central Asia Network on Statelessness (CANS) pledged to:

- Join the Global Alliance to End Statelessness
- Collaborate with Central Asian governments to enhance legislation for preventing and reducing statelessness
- Raise awareness about statelessness in Central Asia
- Collaborate with Central Asian governments to improve national registration and documentation systems
- Collaborate with civil society organizations and individuals in situations of statelessness

- With 2024 marking the **final year of the global #IBelong campaign**, States, UNHCR and partners are accelerating efforts to implement earlier and new pledges to achieve the 10-year goal of ending statelessness – including access to the Statelessness Conventions. In 2023, Central Asia helped over 11,000 people acquire or confirm a nationality – including by adopting laws preventing childhood statelessness and conducting awareness campaigns to identify those at risk – reducing statelessness in the sub-region by almost a quarter.



The #IBelong Campaign to End Statelessness directly links to target 9 of Sustainable Development Goal 16: to provide legal identity for all, including birth registration, by 2030.



UNHCR served as judges for the Jessup Central Asia contest, with 11 teams of law students from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan exercising their debating skills, focusing on obligations of States under the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons, 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. (Photo: Jessup)

KAZAKHSTAN

State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

COMMITMENTS TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the **Government of Kazakhstan** pledged to:

- Introduce a refugee quota for its higher education scholarship programme by 2024.
- Provide foreigners with refugee status in Kazakhstan with equal access to medical care, employment, education, and social assistance on par with citizens and permanently residing foreigners by 2024-2025.
- Address gaps in national legislation and establish effective referral mechanisms, fostering a cooperative approach among responsible bodies to streamline the handling of asylum applications at border checkpoints, detention centres, and in cases of asylum-seekers' irregular arrival.
- Establish relevant legislative safeguards to reduce statelessness in Kazakhstan within 2024-2025.
- Reduce the number of stateless persons through naturalization in 2024.

Maqsut Narikbayev University committed to:

- Introduce a course on statelessness and refugees into its curriculum in 2024.

The **UN Country Team** committed to: *protect, promote and respect asylum-seekers, refugees and stateless persons' dignity and self-reliance and enhance their integration into the Kazakhstan society through a greater than ever engagement into UN programmes and projects, enhanced UNCT-wide advocacy, and adapting UN-internal analytical frameworks.*

- On 7 December, UNHCR delivered an opening address at the second meeting of the **Scientific Advisory Council under the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan**, underlining the universal right to access justice, as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and detailed in further covenants and human rights treaties. UNHCR encouraged Kazakhstan to ensure asylum-seekers, refugees, and stateless persons have access to justice through the Constitutional Court on par with citizens.
- To celebrate the **75th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, on 7 and 8 December, Kazakhstan Human Rights Commissioner convened an international conference on integrating international human rights laws into national legislation. UNHCR delivered opening remarks, promoting full reflection of the Refugee Convention in Kazakhstan legislation as well as accession to both Statelessness conventions, and emphasizing the universal, indivisible nature of the rights in the declaration, covering non-citizens as much as citizens.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- UNHCR submitted recommendations and comments to draft government rules and resolutions, promoting inclusion of forcibly displaced people, including:
 - To the draft rules for **“The registration and consideration of asylum applications”**, advocating for quality asylum procedures, access to territory, principle of confidentiality, uniform requirements for medical check-ups of asylum-seekers, fair and transparent decisions based on the latest country of origin information,

considering special procedures for persons with specific needs.

- To the rules for **“Creation and adjustment of an Individual Identification Number”**, advocating for refugees and asylum-seekers to also receive the personal identification number required by all residents in Kazakhstan to access public services, including opening bank accounts, signing employment contracts, receiving payment for services rendered, and filing tax returns.
- To the draft resolution of the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan **“On improving the regulation of entities in the payment services market and non-cash payments”**, promoting access of refugees and stateless persons to bank cards issuance.
- Following UNHCR advocacy, at the end of 2023, the Ministry of Science and Higher Education amended regulations relating to the scholarship programme for foreigners in Kazakhstan, **enabling refugees to compete for State grants and allocating 10 Bachelor-level scholarships for refugees.**
- In November and December 2023, five DAFI students participated in a **two-month online English language course**, conducted by volunteer tutors from Nazarbayev University and covering various aspects of language learning, including speaking, writing, reading, and grammar.



- In 2023, UNHCR provided **multi-purpose cash grants** to 171 very vulnerable asylum-seeker and refugee families (reaching 465 individuals) to support them to cover basic needs.
- On 10 January, **Armin Talebi, a DAFI scholar and Afghan refugee, met with the Chairman of the Committee on Social and Cultural Development of the Parliament of Kazakhstan**, sharing his personal experiences as a refugee and pressing challenges refugees face in Kazakhstan, including employment, medical care, social assistance and naturalization. UNHCR advocates that in Kazakhstan – like in other countries – refugee status is equated with the status of a permanent resident from the moment of recognition, according to refugees the same rights as permanent residents. Currently, refugees are only granted temporary residency, renewable annually, which restricts their access to many Refugee Convention rights.
- To kick-off the second half of the academic year, on 12 January UNHCR and partner Red Crescent Society met online with 13 students studying through the **DAFI refugee scholarship programme** in Kazakhstan, discussing academic performance and brainstorming ideas for social events and trainings in 2024.
- On 25 February, UNHCR **delivered closing remarks** at the International School of Astana Model United Nations conference which focused on "Embracing Challenges and Illuminating Conflicts through Innovation."
- Following a 7-magnitude earthquake on 23 January along the China-Kyrgyz Republic border, on 31 January UNHCR partner Red Crescent Society conducted an **earthquake preparedness session** for eight refugees in Almaty.
- From 26 February to 1 March, **UNHCR partner Red Crescent Society met with refugees and asylum-seekers in the Shymkent region**, consulting recipients of multi-purpose cash and education grants. The partner met with authorities in Shymkent city to discuss refugees' and asylum seekers' access to healthcare and vaccination of their children, and with the Center of Employment and Social Protection to discuss primary education and employment.

Ending Statelessness

- In 2023, **624 people with undetermined nationality or at risk of statelessness were identified in Kazakhstan, and 664 people were assisted to obtain documentation** by UNHCR's partners, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law (BHR) and Legal Center for Women's Initiatives "Sana Sezim".
- On 13 December, UNHCR and the Migration Service Committee of the Ministry of Internal Affairs conducted a **joint workshop to improve procedures for identifying and documenting stateless persons**. Forty-six participants – from the Migration Service Committee, UNHCR, and NGOs – discussed the existing "*Rules for determining the legal status of persons in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan who are not citizens of Kazakhstan and lack evidence of belonging to the citizenship of another state*". Workshop participants made eight joint recommendations to upgrade the current rules, enhancing effectiveness and fairness in the process of determining the status of stateless persons in Kazakhstan.
- On 31 January, UNHCR delivered **two guest lectures at the Law Enforcement Academy** under the Prosecutor General's Office, familiarizing nearly 50 future prosecutors with international standards in the protection of stateless persons.

READ ALSO



Read also: [UNHCR supports education initiatives to empower refugees in Kazakhstan](#)

- On 25 January, UNHCR organised a screening of Netflix movie "**The Swimmers**" for **25 students at Nazarbayev University**, raising awareness about refugee issues and stimulating conversation among the students on refugee rights and access to asylum.
- UNHCR **delivered an online lecture** to around 100 students of Maqsut Narikbayev University as part of its "A-Step to Graduate" course, designed to enhance students' job-searching skills, providing insights into UNHCR's work, and offering students a real-world perspective on humanitarian efforts.

THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

COMMITMENTS TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the **Government of the Kyrgyz Republic pledged to:**

- Provide access to legal aid for refugees, stateless persons and persons applied for the status of Kairylman.
- Provide refugees with equal access to higher education opportunities, inclusive of ensuring that tuition fees for refugees are the same as for Kyrgyz citizens.
- Ensure children have access to secondary education, regardless of legal status of parents or their registration.
- Improve its Refugee Status Determination procedure through introduction of a database with advanced collection of statistical data.
- Arrange for an automated exchange of information between state agencies to collect birth statistics in the country.

The **American University of Central Asia in the Kyrgyz Republic pledged to:**

- Provide summer language courses for the refugee community, and Capacitate Legal Academia on Refugee Law by including a Refugee law course as part of the regular curriculum.

The **UN Country Team committed to:** *Achieve positive impacts for refugees (including mandate refugees), asylum-seekers and stateless persons through facilitation of their better access to equal rights and opportunities with nationals; in cooperation with the host government pursue ultimate prevention of statelessness, and access to legal identity and civil registration.*

- At a Human Rights Day event on 11 December to mark the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, **UNHCR received an Ombudsperson Certificate of Appreciation** for its efforts to protect forcibly displaced and stateless people in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- Between December 2023 and January 2024, UNHCR and the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent Society **distributed winter clothing donated by Fast Retailing/ UNIQLO to 87 refugee and asylum-seeker households** (reaching 392 individuals). The clothing distributed in the Kyrgyz Republic is one part of a larger contribution from UNIQLO that will also be distributed to forcibly displaced people and vulnerable members of the host community in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
- On 11 December, UNHCR handed over **information stands and equipment for the refugee reception room** to authorities at Manas International Airport in Bishkek.
- Between 15 November and 12 February, UNHCR conducted an **education profiling exercise** to strengthen understanding of refugees and asylum-seekers' language proficiency, education level, professional experience, and aspirations for skills development. While the data is still being analyzed, initial findings indicate that:
 - **285** people participated in the exercise – 162 (57%) men and 123 (43%) women.
 - **85%** of the respondents have at least “basic” level of Russian, and **42%** “basic” Kyrgyz.

- **47%** of the respondents are employed, and 50% are not. Of the 50% who are unemployed, only 34% are currently looking for employment as they are otherwise occupied with responsibilities at home or elsewhere.
- **53%** of the respondents feel that additional courses can help them to secure employment, for example language and IT-skill courses and vocational training in areas such as tailoring and beauty industry.

The data captured will be used to address expressed needs and match support accordingly.

- In 2023, UNHCR provided **multi-purpose cash grants** to 89 very vulnerable asylum-seeker and refugee families (reaching 362 individuals) to support them to cover basic needs. 21 families were provided with education grants, supporting 18 girls and 26 boys with school-related expenses.



UNHCR and the Kyrgyzstan Red Crescent Society distributed donated winter clothing to refugee and asylum-seeker families. (Photo: UNHCR)

TAJIKISTAN

State Party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- In support of the Government of Tajikistan's initiative to adopt a new Refugee Law, on 18 January, UNHCR met with parliamentarians, providing technical advice on the drafting process and creation of a working group with clear roles and responsibilities.
- On 8 February, UNHCR brought together seven DAFI refugee scholarship programme graduates, and 18 ongoing students, to share information about opportunities to pursue complementary pathways through education (for example, the UNIV'R University corridor for refugees to France) and labour mobility schemes, as well as to advance digital, language and soft skills through free online courses.
- In 2023, UNHCR provided cash assistance to 348 very vulnerable asylum-seeker and refugee families (reaching 1,781 individuals) to support them to cover basic needs.

Ending Statelessness

- In 2023, with the support of UNHCR and its NGO partners, **1,832 people with undetermined nationality or at risk of statelessness were identified**, 3,379 individuals secured or had their Tajik citizenship confirmed, 11 individuals were confirmed as nationals of other countries, and a further 410 were officially documented as stateless.
- On 19 December 2023, UNHCR partner convened a roundtable discussion titled "[Results of PO Chashma's Activities in the 'Prevention and Eradication of Statelessness' Project](#)." The event

brought together officials from the Khatlon region, PO "Chashma" staff, and representatives from various jamoats (municipalities) and public organizations to discuss challenges to addressing statelessness in Tajikistan and explore solutions for the last year of the #IBelong campaign.

Responding to Emergencies

- As a country bordering Afghanistan, Tajikistan was part of the [2023 Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Plan \(RRP\)](#), with activities seeking to support 8,500 Afghanistan citizens in Tajikistan, and 46,000 members of the host community. RRP partners, ACTED, IOM, Mission East, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNODC, UNWOMEN, WFP and WHO:
 - Provided **2,533** Afghan refugees with legal assistance.
 - Facilitated access for **1,722** Afghan and host community children to primary and secondary education.
 - Delivered **15** trainings on Humanitarian Border Management for national entities
 - Supported **1,223** Afghan citizens with access to secondary and tertiary healthcare, and 306 individuals with cash assistance for health and nutrition.
 - Provided **3,218** refugees with business grants, cash for work, or in-kind support for businesses and **377** with vocational training.
 - Distributed cash assistance for shelter and basic needs to **175** Afghan refugees, and providing **1,832** households with core relief items, including winterization assistance.

SEE ALSO



TURKMENISTAN

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

- On 11 December, the Government of Turkmenistan hosted the **international forum "Dialogue as a Guarantee of Peace"**, dedicated to the International Day of Neutrality and the 28th anniversary of the permanent neutrality of Turkmenistan. In the session *Using dialogue as an Instrument of Preventative Diplomacy*, coordinated by the UN Regional Centre for Preventative Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), UNHCR underlined the importance of conflict prevention and resolution, respect for human rights, and inclusive sustainable development to prevent and resolve situations of forced displacement and eradicate statelessness.
- International Committee of the Red Cross in Turkmenistan, IFRC and UNHCR held a **hybrid awareness-raising event** in Ashgabat on 31 January, titled "Principles of Patriotism and Humanism", discussing cooperation with international organizations and structures, and noting Turkmenistan's contribution to global efforts as a State party to Refugee and Statelessness Conventions.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- In 2023, UNHCR provided **multi-purpose cash grants** to two mandate refugees to support them to cover basic needs.

Ending Statelessness

- In 2023, with UNHCR support, **340 people with undetermined nationality** or at risk of statelessness were identified in Turkmenistan, and are being assisted by UNHCR's partners.
- In 2023, **Turkmenistan granted citizenship to 1,301 stateless people**, representing 32 different ethnic backgrounds. Since the launch of the #IBelong campaign, the Turkmenistan has consistently demonstrated its commitment to ending statelessness by granting citizenship to a substantial number of stateless persons annually, totalling over 17,800 individuals since 2014.

Responding to Emergencies

- As a country bordering Afghanistan, Turkmenistan was part of the [2023 Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Plan \(RRP\)](#), with activities seeking to support 5,000 Afghanistan citizens in Turkmenistan, and 2,500 members of the host community. RRP partners, IOM, UNFPA, UNHCR and UNICEF:
 - Supported **949** people with access to secondary and tertiary healthcare services.
 - Provided **100** individuals with vocational training.
 - Delivered **3** trainings on prevention of gender-based violence for national entities

UZBEKISTAN

COMMITMENTS TO THE GLOBAL COMPACT ON REFUGEES

The **UN Country Team committed to:** *Improve access of persons in need of international protection and stateless persons to protection, legal (including right to residency and protection from non-refoulement), socio-economic rights, and social services in line with the international norms and standards through inclusion of their situation into existing UN projects and programmes and strengthened joint UN advocacy efforts, in partnership with key development actors and stakeholders at the national and community levels.*

- In February 2024, UNHCR and the National Centre for Human Rights of Uzbekistan signed their fourth annual joint workplan.

Protecting Refugees and Asylum-Seekers

- In the lead up to Human Rights Day, on 6 December UNHCR conducted an **online lecture for some 80 students** from Tashkent Law University, the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, and the Academy of the General Prosecutor's Office of Uzbekistan. Part of the joint workplan between UNHCR and the National Centre for Human Rights, the lecture sought to increase students' awareness on asylum law, based on the universal right to seek and enjoy asylum from

persecution in other countries enshrined in the Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

- On 3 December, at COP28, [UNHCR and solar technology company LONGi announced](#) a new three-year global climate action partnership that will include projects in Termez, Uzbekistan. To provide income generation and employment opportunities for forcibly displaced Afghan citizens and host communities, while reducing environmental hazards and mitigating the impacts of extreme weather, LONGi will support afforestation activities to be implemented by UNHCR and UNDP. A second project will see the UNHCR Regional Humanitarian Logistics Hub – and other UNHCR emergency preparedness stockpiles around the world –

transformed into solarised facilities. The afforestation activities are aligned with the national ‘Yashil Makon’ initiative, launched by the Government of Uzbekistan in 2021 with the aim of planting 1 billion trees over five years.

- In 2023, UNHCR provided **multi-purpose cash grants** to two vulnerable mandate refugee families (reaching six individuals) to support them to cover basic needs, and financial aid to five mandate refugees to assist with expenses associated with regularization of their stay.

Ending Statelessness

- Following the momentum set by the #IBelong campaign, and supported by 2020 amendments to the Citizenship Law – developed with UNHCR’s support – **in 2023 Uzbekistan documented 676 individuals as stateless, and 4,410 individuals as citizens of Uzbekistan, and granted a further 583 people Uzbek citizenship.** From 2020 to 2023, Uzbekistan has reduced statelessness by nearly 80%, granting or confirming citizenship for 79,000 previously registered stateless persons. At end-2023, 22,496 stateless people were registered in Uzbekistan – the largest stateless population in Central Asia.

Responding to Emergencies

- In 2023, UNHCR dispatched 96 trucks from its **Regional Humanitarian Logistics Hub in Termez** to

support emergency responses in Afghanistan and Iran, transporting 843 metric tons of relief items – including 204,000 mosquito nets; 121,485 blankets; 34,514 solar lamps; 525 family tents; 350 Refugee Housing Units; 20 rubhalls, as well as various medical equipment.

- As a country bordering Afghanistan, Uzbekistan was part of the **2023 Afghanistan Situation Refugee Response Plan (RRP)**, with activities seeking to support 11,700 Afghanistan citizens in Uzbekistan, and 21,750 members of the host community. RRP partners, IOM, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR and UNICEF:
 - Provided **245** Afghan families – representing approximately **1,224** people – with general counselling, including information on how to request political asylum, mindful of the challenges.
 - Trained **1,325** professionals on child protection support and standards, and 444 host and Afghan community members on prevention of gender-based violence.
 - Provided **1,041** people with vocational training courses, from sewing and nursing, to welding and food-processing
 - Supported **526** school-aged children with access to primary education
 - Trained **349** healthcare providers and schoolteachers on Water, Sanitation and Hygiene management.

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- As a member of all four UN Country Teams and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, UNHCR engages with governments, UN and development partners, international financial institutions and others across Central Asia to ensure refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people are not left behind in States’ achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Thank you for the support

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



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UNHCR maintains email and phone ‘hotlines’ across the four countries for anyone in need of information or consultation on refugee and asylum issues. People forced to flee can find key contacts and updated information about asylum procedures in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on help.unhcr.org/centralasia, in English, Russian and Dari.



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