

Annual Results Report

2023

Kazakhstan Multi Country

Acknowledgements

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- 4.1- Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

Section 1: Context and Overview

1.1 Changes to the Operational Context

The number of asylum-seekers and refugees in Central Asia increased in 2023 with global developments – particularly in Afghanistan to its south and the Russian Federation to its north – seriously impacting the region. International sanctions linked to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine transformed economic flows, reduced remittances and generated new sources of income. Although inflation shrunk from more than 20% at the start of the year to around 10% by year-end, poverty levels and inequality were on the rise in most areas.

In 2023, Central Asian governments began to engage more closely with the de facto authorities in Afghanistan while still adhering to UN decisions and resolutions. By year-end, Kazakhstan removed the Taliban from its registry of terrorist organizations. Concentrating on political and economic stability, the country's human rights situation stagnated and little progress was made to advance refugee protection.

Expert analysts noted no improvements in the rule of law and human rights situation in the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan or Uzbekistan. All three countries faced increasing water shortages. Food insecurity in Turkmenistan and energy insecurity in Uzbekistan was reported, with countries lacking the capacity to absorb potential population growth. Despite progress made by Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to reduce statelessness, refugees being denied access to territory or protection continued to be reported.

Uzbekistan adopted a new constitution allowing the President to be re-elected for another seven-year term. Uzbekistan presented its 2nd Voluntary National Review on the country's progress on the Sustainable Development Goals and its human rights record for the fourth time at the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review. Although Uzbekistan agreed to the 2018 Universal Periodic Review recommendations to accede to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, this was not achieved in 2023.

1.2. Progress Against the Desired Impact

1. Impact Area: Attaining Favorable Protection Environments

By 2025, all UNHCR beneficiaries are able to actively participate in the social and economic life of host countries

By 2025, refugees and asylum-seekers enjoy unhindered access to the territory of the country, efficient status determination procedures and can exercise their fundamental rights

By 2025, statelessness is eradicated in the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan and significantly reduced in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan

Country	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	65.31%
Kazakhstan	1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	97.33%	97.61%
Kyrgyzstan	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	85.84%	100.00%
Turkmenistan	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	0.00%
Turkmenistan	1.2 Proportion of people who are able to move freely within the country of habitual residence	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Uzbekistan	1.1 Proportion of people seeking international protection who are able to access asylum procedures	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	0.00%

Refugees and asylum-seekers had some limited access to territory, fair and efficient recognition and fundamental rights in 2023. Some access was facilitated through advocacy, including with UN country teams, donors and civil society stakeholders.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, Kazakhstan pledged to establish border referral procedures by 2024 and ensure equal access to healthcare, employment, education and social assistance for refugees by 2025. Following sustained advocacy by UNHCR, Kazakhstan waived the requirement for refugees to demonstrate they do not have a criminal record before obtaining residence permits. Authorities recognized 81 asylum-seekers. A 2022 recommendation by the Ombudsperson to the Justice Ministry regarding integrating non-refoulement into national legislation awaits implementation.

Despite efforts to strengthen asylum authorities' capacity in the Kyrgyz Republic, only five new refugees were recognized, while 114 asylum-seekers were rejected. Notwithstanding UN intervention, three asylum-seekers were refouled and another three denied access to asylum procedures from detention. UN recommendations to improve legislation and practices that secure access to asylum procedures for people in detention and strengthen non-refoulement safeguards are awaiting implementation. Nevertheless, the country made some progress advancing the pledges made at the 2021 High-Level Officials Meeting, namely providing recognized refugees with access to healthcare and insurance on par with citizens. It also made pledges in the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, including providing refugees with equal access to higher education.

Given that only people with valid visas could cross Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan's border controls, no new asylum-seekers had been registered in Turkmenistan since 2005. While UNHCR was unable to verify refoulement or access to asylum, including for detained people requiring international protection, no Afghan citizen was forcibly returned from Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, advocacy and capacity-building efforts continued in response to reports that an

increasing number were pressured by authorities to return “voluntarily”.

In 2023, national authorities worked with UNHCR to implement pledges made at the 2019 Global Refugee Forum and announce new pledges that enable forcibly displaced and stateless people to participate in the social and economic life of their host countries. UNHCR hosted a sub-regional roundtable event in preparation for the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, with high-level participation from the four countries. Following this, Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic announced new pledges and a delegation from Uzbekistan attended the Global Refugee Forum for the first time. UN country teams from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan joined the UN Common Pledge 2.0, promising to support the inclusion of refugees and stateless people in national plans, budgets and service delivery systems.

All countries in Central Asia demonstrated the political will and public support to reduce statelessness. In 2023, statelessness in the sub-region decreased by 17%. More than 10,000 people acquired or confirmed a nationality by adopting laws preventing childhood statelessness and conducting awareness campaigns to identify those at risk.

In Kazakhstan, 1,622 stateless people were granted citizenship, 48 gained the citizenship of another country, and 664 were assisted with documentation.

The Kyrgyz Republic revised three laws introducing safeguards against statelessness in citizenship renunciation, ensuring all children born in the country are registered at birth, and authorizing the creation of a statelessness determination procedure by the Government. The Kyrgyz Republic granted citizenship to 275 stateless people and pledged to enable automated information exchange between relevant ministries at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum to ensure all children are effectively registered at birth.

As part of its National Action Plan to end statelessness by 2024, Turkmenistan granted citizenship to 1,301 stateless people. Uzbekistan reduced its stateless population by 18% to 22,496.

4. Impact Area: Securing Solutions

By 2025, all beneficiaries to UNHCR benefit from wide range of solution, including access to civil registration documentation and naturalization

Country	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Kazakhstan	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Kazakhstan	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Kazakhstan	4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	1,679	2,240
Kazakhstan	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	40	0
Kyrgyzstan	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Kyrgyzstan	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	33	0
Kyrgyzstan	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	10	3
Kyrgyzstan	4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	128	277
Kyrgyzstan	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	24	21

Turkmenistan	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Turkmenistan	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Turkmenistan	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Turkmenistan	4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	2,657	1,261
Turkmenistan	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	3
Uzbekistan	4.1 Number of refugees who voluntarily return in safety and dignity to their country of origin	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Uzbekistan	4.2a Number of people who departed on resettlement	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	0
Uzbekistan	4.2b Number of people who departed through complementary pathways	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0	1
Uzbekistan	4.3a Number of stateless people for whom nationality is granted or confirmed	Stateless Persons	32,091	4,993
Uzbekistan	4.3b Number of refugees for whom residency status is granted or confirmed	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	1	5

In pursuit of the global #IBelong campaign goals, all four countries continued statelessness reduction and prevention efforts, including by ensuring universal birth registration and enacting statelessness determination procedures. UNHCR convened a high-level roundtable in 2023 attended by Central Asian governments, civil society and UN agencies to strategize solutions for statelessness. It also advocated long-lasting solutions that empower refugees to rebuild their lives, particularly mandate refugees.

UNHCR supported Kazakhstan's efforts to establish legislative safeguards to reduce statelessness and provided technical expertise and recommendations to improve laws and the effectiveness of statelessness determination procedures. UNHCR provided legal assistance with partners to people with undetermined nationality to support them in acquiring or confirming Kazakh citizenship or be recognized as stateless. It also conducted activities to identify people with undetermined citizenship. Workshops were organized for authorities on statelessness reduction and international standards in protecting forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Through its partner, UNHCR provided consultations and referrals for 21 stateless people in the Kyrgyz Republic and those with undetermined nationality. Two acquired Kyrgyz citizenship and two were granted statelessness status.

In Turkmenistan, 1,301 stateless people from 32 different ethnic backgrounds were granted Turkmen citizenship and the status of two mandate refugees was legalized through residency permits. Through NGO partners, UNHCR continued to identify people who are undocumented or at risk of statelessness and provided them with counselling and referrals to migration authorities for documentation and naturalization processes.

Uzbekistan regularized the stay of all five mandate refugees. UNHCR referred cases of newly born Afghan children in Uzbekistan to UNICEF for registration and birth certificate issuance.

Other Core Impact Indicators

Country	Indicator	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	96.95%
Kazakhstan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%
Kazakhstan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	23.48%	34.66%
Kazakhstan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Stateless Persons	86.55%	93.02%
Kazakhstan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	97.33%	97.61%
Kazakhstan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Stateless Persons	86.55%	93.02%
Kazakhstan	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Kazakhstan	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Kazakhstan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	100.00%
Kazakhstan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Stateless Persons	Unknown	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	40.28%	92.25%
Kyrgyzstan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Stateless Persons	99.33%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Stateless Persons	99.33%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	17.75%	9.53%
Kyrgyzstan	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Stateless Persons	Unknown	100.00%
Kyrgyzstan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	100.00%
Turkmenistan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Turkmenistan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%
Turkmenistan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%

Turkmenistan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Stateless Persons	55.58%	59.50%
Turkmenistan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	23.08%
Turkmenistan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Stateless Persons	55.58%	59.50%
Turkmenistan	3.2a Proportion of children and young people enrolled in primary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	0.00%
Turkmenistan	3.2b Proportion of children and young people enrolled in secondary education	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	0.00%
Turkmenistan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	100.00%
Turkmenistan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Stateless Persons	Unknown	100.00%
Uzbekistan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%
Uzbekistan	2.2 Proportion of people residing in physically safe and secure settlements with access to basic facilities	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%
Uzbekistan	2.3 Proportion of people with access to health services	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%
Uzbekistan	3.1 Proportion of people who have the right to decent work	Stateless Persons	100.00%	100.00%
Uzbekistan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Unknown	100.00%
Uzbekistan	3.3 Proportion of people feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark	Stateless Persons	Unknown	100.00%

1.3 Challenges to Achieving Impacts

The protection environment continued to shrink in 2023 with national security and geopolitical considerations impeding fair and efficient refugee recognition and protection across the sub-region. Three instances of refoulement in the Kyrgyz Republic and a low recognition rate underscored the influence of geopolitical considerations and State priorities on asylum issues.

The invasion of Ukraine continued to affect countries in Central Asia receiving an increasing number of refugees from Ukraine and the Russian Federation. Most arrivals from these countries did not immediately seek asylum but were instead effectively in a refugee-like situation, which is expected to deteriorate when alternative stay options expire or prove insufficient to prevent refoulement.

All land and air borders remained closed to Afghan citizens without business, education or diplomatic visas in 2023 including Afghan refugees.

The frequent turnover of government personnel in 2023 hindered UNHCR's ability to conduct activities as planned. New personnel required briefing sessions and training, resulting in slower and lower-quality decision-making as authorities familiarized themselves with their new roles. Inadequate State budgets for asylum offices and procedures, including interpretation, compounded these challenges.

The precarious legal status of mandate refugees in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan persisted in 2023 despite UNHCR advocacy and individual requests to presidential administrations for an extraordinary offer of citizenship. Despite having lived in the countries for many years and being culturally integrated, without legal status mandate refugees were unable to access most socioeconomic rights and services, including access to local integration through naturalization.

Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Turkmenistan have laws on refugees, national asylum systems, and national refugee status determination procedures. Kazakhstan's refugee recognition rates improved slightly in 2023 but declined in the other countries. There were no applications for asylum in Turkmenistan.

Uzbekistan did not accede to the Refugee or Statelessness Conventions in 2023 and remains the only country in Central Asia without refugee legislation and procedures. This impeded access to international protection and protection, social and legal rights.

Gaps in nationality laws and insufficient safeguards during citizenship renunciation and against childhood statelessness persisted and contributed to statelessness.

1.4 Collaboration and Partnerships

As an active UN country team member and integral part of UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in each country, UNHCR engaged with government, UN, development, financial, diplomatic and other partners in 2023 to ensure forcibly displaced and stateless people were not left behind in States' efforts to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

UNHCR strengthened constructive engagement with responsible government entities, including ministries of foreign affairs, digital development, education, emergency, health, internal affairs and labour as well as president administrations, prosecutor generals' offices, border guards services, judiciaries, the Ombudsperson's Offices, committees on migration, social policy and security, and commissions on human rights.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were part of the 2023 Afghanistan Situation Regional Refugee Response Plan which – under the overall leadership of UNHCR – supported host governments' efforts to meet the needs of Afghans of varying statuses and host communities. UNHCR engaged with UN partners to coordinate and implement activities in both countries. In Uzbekistan, for example, it convened regular strategic and technical level working groups with UN partners to ensure effective coordination and identify strategic solutions to address the situation of Afghan nationals in need of international protection.

In the spirit of 'leave no one behind' and in support of the Global Compact on Refugees, UN country teams in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan contributed to the UN Common Pledge 2.0 at the 2023 Global Refugee Forum. The three States developed collective commitments, which were integrated into country-level UN plans (including the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework) and supported Government plans.

To strengthen the humanitarian-development nexus, UNHCR consulted with development agencies, international financial institutions and the private sector to identify areas for cooperation and the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people in their projects. UNHCR also cooperated with European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe projects.

Key partners received targeted messages to advocate the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people. In addition, collaboration with universities and the private sector enhanced educational and other learning opportunities for refugees and promoted legal awareness of refugees and statelessness as part of efforts to reach potential future policymakers and practitioners.

Section 2: Results

2.1. Outcomes and Achievements

1. Outcome Area: Access to Territory, Reg. and Documentation

Access to civil registration and identity documentation is improved for stateless persons and all children born in the country are registered with a civil authority.

Refugees and asylum seekers benefit from efficient and functional referral mechanisms

Plan	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan MCO	1.1 Proportion of refugees and asylum seekers registered on an individual basis	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	89.49%	90.00%	87.88%
Kazakhstan MCO	1.3 Proportion of people with legally recognized identity documents or credentials	Stateless Persons	94.07%	96.00%	88.45%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

To improve the efficiency of referral mechanisms for forcibly displaced people, UNHCR and partners evaluated admission procedures and reception facilities for asylum-seekers at four land border points in Kazakhstan. Border guards were trained on asylum-seekers' rights and international principles of protection regarding access to territory and asylum.

Refugees and asylum-seekers arriving at the Kyrgyz Republic border checkpoints were able to access essential information delivered by UNHCR from information stands and waited in newly-refurbished refugee reception rooms at Osh and Manas airports. UNHCR visited 18 crossing points along the borders with China, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, monitored admission practices, and conducted information sessions for more than 150 border guards on asylum procedures.

UNHCR delivered workshops targeting Turkmenistan officials on emergency preparedness and response in case of a mass influx of forcibly displaced people. However, UNHCR was unable to monitor the efficiency of referral mechanisms since no new asylum applications had been registered by the Government in 15 years. Universal birth registration had nearly been achieved in Turkmenistan, with 99.99% of births registered. This was, complemented by mechanisms for late registration to address cases previously unnoticed by the authorities.

Uzbekistan members of Parliament and authorities gained a greater understanding of establishing referral mechanisms for people in need of international protection following a UNHCR workshop on refugee law. Since Uzbekistan did not have a national asylum system in place, an analytical report prepared by UNHCR also explored interim arrangements that would allow Afghan citizens in the country to legalize their stay and access their rights.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the Kyrgyz Republic pledged to support automatic information exchange between relevant ministries to ensure all children are effectively registered and documented at birth.

UNHCR conducted a workshop for the State Migration Service of Turkmenistan to enable a critical analysis of statelessness prevention and reduction practices against international standards and identify key areas for improvement. These efforts were supported by an information session on statelessness and asylum for the Ombudsperson's Office.

A workshop on statelessness determination procedures for the Ministry of Internal Affairs provided a

comprehensive review of the identification and documentation processes for stateless people in Uzbekistan as well as international standards and practices and fostered an understanding of common challenges.

2. Outcome Area: Status Determination

Asylum seekers have access to fair and efficient RSD procedures

Plan	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan MCO	2.3 Proportion of people undergoing asylum procedures who have access to an effective appeal mechanism after first instance rejection of their claim	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

Efforts to enhance asylum procedures and fair and efficient refugee recognition in 2023 included a focus on improving the quality of refugee status determination procedures in the region.

A UNHCR-facilitated eight-week distance learning programme on refugee status determination was completed by 34 state officials, members of national refugee status determination commission, judges and staff of organizations providing legal assistance to refugees and asylum-seekers from Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic.

A four-day practical workshop in Astana for those who completed the online programme enabled them to exercise the theory and exchange experiences.

Six government officials from Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Uzbekistan gained a better understanding of international refugee law after enrolling in an online course offered by the International Institute of Humanitarian Law, Sanremo.

A two-day online UNHCR country of origin information training session enhanced the knowledge of 25 Kazakhstan officials responsible for conducting refugee status determination. Meanwhile, 19 employees from 19 local executive bodies in Almaty learned more about local and international legislation on refugee protection at a UNHCR training course. In addition, UNHCR shared recommendations on the rules on registration and consideration of asylum applications to bring them in line with international standards. People in need of international protection could access State refugee status determination procedures after UNHCR and partners successfully intervened in cases of non-registration and provided legal assistance to access asylum procedures, including through e-platforms. A small resumption of refugee recognition was reported.

Working with the UN Resident Coordinator in the Kyrgyz Republic and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNHCR intervened in cases of hindered access to asylum procedures and three reported cases of refoulement. To help address the challenge of national refugee status determination procedures not being applied fairly and efficiently, UNHCR conducted 22 capacity building activities on asylum and refugee protection, including extradition, international standards and the State's obligation. These activities were attended by 232 law enforcement officers, border guard personnel, staff of the National Human Rights Institute, Ministry of Labour refugee unit staff, judges and prosecutors, and legal academia. UNHCR also worked with a local partner to enhance 162 government officials' understanding of asylum and statelessness issues.

Uzbekistan did not ratify the Refugee Convention and its Protocol and still lacks a national asylum system. Consequently, people in need of international protection do not have access to registration, refugee status determination procedures or other forms of protection.

3. Outcome Area: Protection Policy and Law

National legal and procedural frameworks are harmonized and refugees have access to rights accorded by the 1951 Convention.

Safeguards against statelessness are included in the national legal frameworks and protection of stateless persons is ensured through statelessness determination procedures in line with international standards.

Plan	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan MCO	3.1 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	Not yet aligned ≤69 points	Broadly aligned: ≥ 90 points	Broadly aligned: ≥ 90 points
Kazakhstan MCO	3.2 Extent national legal framework is in line with the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness	Stateless Persons	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points	Progressing towards alignment: 70-89 points

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

To protect and promote the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people and harmonize national legal and procedural frameworks with the 1951 Convention and international standards, UNHCR maintained joint workplans with Government counterparts in the four countries that outlined shared activities to be undertaken throughout the year

UNHCR and the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in Kazakhstan signed a memorandum of understanding in 2023 to strengthen their cooperation. Statelessness determination procedures in Kazakhstan were in line with most international standards. UNHCR shared recommended amendments with the Government to establish safeguards against statelessness and provided technical expertise to enhance the effectiveness of established procedures.

The Kyrgyz Republic greatly improved its law to grant recognized refugees access to healthcare and insurance (on par with nationals) and introduced a definition for refugee travel documents. Although Government regulations were still forthcoming, UNHCR supported the Ombudsperson's Office with legal expertise to analyze the situation of asylum-seekers in the country, with the resulting report providing recommendations to improve national legislation. These recommendations were expected to be part of the Ombudsperson's Office Annual Report and would be binding for relevant ministries when accepted. Moreover, UNHCR supported the drafting of statelessness determination procedures. In 2023, the Government introduced nationality law safeguards to ensure children born in the country were granted citizenship if they would otherwise have been stateless.

In Turkmenistan, mandate refugees maintained access to some rights, including healthcare and social protection, however, challenges persisted, including the requirement for 'propiska' registration and the need to renounce their original nationality before naturalization. To enhance the awareness of national human rights institutions on refugees' rights, UNHCR organized an information session for the Ombudsperson's Office. Current legislation incorporates most safeguards against statelessness although some provisions regarding children born outside the country and the renunciation of current citizenship before applying for Turkmen nationality remain unaddressed. Nevertheless, statelessness determination procedures were in place and in line with most standards.

To support Uzbekistan's considerations to accede to the Refugee Convention, UNHCR delivered information sessions on asylum and statelessness, protection principles, the right to seek asylum and protection against refoulement for the Ombudsperson Apparatus and its regional branches and the Training Center for Lawyers under the Justice Ministry. UNHCR also gave technical expertise to the National Human Rights Center which was drafting the refugee law.

8. Outcome Area: Well-Being and Basic Needs

Basic needs of refugees and asylum seekers are met through monetary support

Plan	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan MCO	8.1 Proportion of people that receive cash transfers and/or non-food items	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	77.00%	82.00%	37.43%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

High inflation across the sub-region increased the costs of food, clothing, medicines, rent and utilities, diminishing the purchasing power of refugees and asylum-seekers. As asylum-seekers and refugees remained ineligible for social protection, UNHCR used cash assistance to ensure the most vulnerable could meet their basic needs.

UNHCR provided multi-purpose cash grants to 465 asylum-seekers and refugees in Kazakhstan and supported 240 vulnerable refugees and asylum-seekers in accessing urgent health services beyond the minimum provided by the State. UNHCR's partner distributed clothing to 38 vulnerable refugee families and baby diapers to 15 families with infants.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, multi-purpose cash assistance enabled 362 asylum-seekers and refugees to better cover their own basic needs. Education grants were provided for 20 families, as were school supplies for 45 refugee and asylum-seeking children. With the support of partners, UNHCR distributed 504 items of clothing to 252 refugees and asylum-seekers and conducted two capacity building events for 40 social workers, school headmasters, heads of State, and medical clinics and health insurance personnel to advance access to healthcare and education for refugees and asylum-seekers.

Multi-purpose cash assistance provided some relief to two mandate refugees in Turkmenistan and two mandate refugees in Uzbekistan. Additional aid was provided to all five mandate refugees in Uzbekistan to assist with expenses associated with regularizing their stay.

13. Outcome Area: Self Reliance, Economic Inclusion and Livelihoods

Refugees' resilience increased through income generating opportunities

Plan	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan MCO	13.2. Proportion of people who self-report positive changes in their income compared to previous year	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	0.00%	50.00%	51.54%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

While many convention refugees had some access to livelihoods, rapidly increasing living costs meant those previously self-reliant became dependent on aid while others who were already economically vulnerable were pushed into poverty.

In 2023, UNHCR supported 12 refugees and asylum-seekers in the Kyrgyz Republic seek sustainable livelihoods through vocational training and language courses. To strengthen the understanding of refugees' and asylum-seekers' language proficiency, education level, professional experience and aspirations for skills development, UNHCR conducted a data collection exercise and the information captured will be used to address expressed needs and match support accordingly.

Two masterclasses in traditional needlework enhanced the income generation potential of 26 refugee

women, promoted cultural integration, and gave them access to inter-group support.

At a UNHCR summer camp, 11 young refugees developed their project planning and public speaking skills, and 13 young refugees participated in a design thinking process for innovation. Another eight refugee students pursued higher education through the DAFI refugee scholarship programme and one mandate refugee was included in the UN Youth Advisory Board, empowering them to advocate their community's needs and aspirations.

At the 2023 Global Refugee Forum, the American University of Central Asia pledged to provide one refugee student with a 50% discount on tuition fees for a bachelor's degree – providing they maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA – to support the objectives of the Global Compact on Refugees. The university also agreed to provide summer language courses for refugees and asylum-seekers at no cost.

In Uzbekistan, a joint UNHCR-UNDP project on enhancing the resilience of communities to climate related and environmental risks was extended into 2023. The project supported national afforestation efforts and provided Afghan citizens and vulnerable host community members with cash-for-work for afforestation activities, while mitigating the damaging impact of dust storms in the regions bordering Afghanistan. In 2023, 413 Afghan citizens and 362 members of their host community participated in the project.

16. Outcome Area: Integration and other Local Solutions

UNHCR beneficiaries are provided avenues for naturalization and regularization of their status and documentation and are included in the public welfare, social, health, education services alongside with nationals

Plan	Indicators	Population Type	Strategy Baseline	Target (2023)	Actual (2023)
Kazakhstan MCO	16.2 Proportion of people covered by national social protection systems	Refugees and Asylum-seekers	3.32%	81.00%	60.73%

Progress Against the Desired Outcome

With all avenues for integration under national legislation exhausted, UNHCR supported the submission of petitions by mandate refugees to Presidential Administrations in each country in 2022 for an extraordinary offer of citizenship: 18 in Kazakhstan, 120 in the Kyrgyz Republic, 10 in Turkmenistan and six in Uzbekistan.

In 2023, two mandate refugees were granted residency permits in Turkmenistan, meaning three of 13 in Turkmenistan had legal stay. Uzbekistan regularized the stay of all five mandate refugees. However, authorities in Kazakhstan and the Kyrgyz Republic did not progress in regularizing the stay of remaining mandate refugees. Without legal status, mandate refugees were unable to access socioeconomic rights or services, including lawful employment, healthcare, or social protection.

Following UNHCR advocacy, Kazakhstan submitted a 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledge to ensure equal access to healthcare, employment, education and social assistance for refugees by 2024-2025 and removed the requirement for refugees to provide proof of lack of criminal record to obtain residence permits. UNHCR participated in the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population Working Group established to implement the 2023-2027 Migration Policy Concept. UNHCR support to implement the action plan and align national legislation with the 1951 Convention included contracting a consultant to draft a regulatory policy advisory document to initiate legislative amendments.

UNHCR implementing partners in the Kyrgyz Republic interviewed, counselled and conducted legal assessments with asylum-seekers, and assisted in the submission of asylum applications. Following UNHCR advocacy, the Kyrgyz Republic adopted new regulation on a “compulsory medical insurance policy” granting refugees and asylum-seekers access to healthcare on par with citizens. UNHCR supported commitments to the Global Compact on Refugees by the Government, UN country team and academia in the Kyrgyz Republic through 2023 Global Refugee Forum pledges to advance the local integration of refugees through access to education.

2.2. Age, Gender and Diversity

Data collected by UNHCR and its partners in the four countries was disaggregated by age, sex, and diversity (including specific needs) and used to design programmes and inform strategic priorities. However, such data was not always available from authorities.

In 2023, UNHCR maintained 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, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in English, Russian and Dari on the UNHCR Central Asia help page.

To better understand the specific protection needs to inform programming, UNHCR conducted participatory assessments with refugees and stateless people in the Kyrgyz Republic. Focus groups were divided by gender, age, asylum status and country of origin to foster open and constructive discussions. For the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR conducted participatory assessments with mandate refugees and stateless people in Turkmenistan, which highlighted needs related to the issue of ‘propiska’, requirements for naturalization, and barriers in accessing public services. Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan, access challenges and Government restrictions inhibited participatory assessments.

Mainstreaming refugee and stateless populations of all age, gender, and diversity groups into national development programmes to improve their social and economic status continued. Active UNHCR participation in structures and teams, including UN sustainable development cooperation frameworks, national strategies and plans, as well as working groups on human rights, gender, and youth, supported efforts to ensure refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people would not be left behind in the sustainable development of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Section 3: Resources

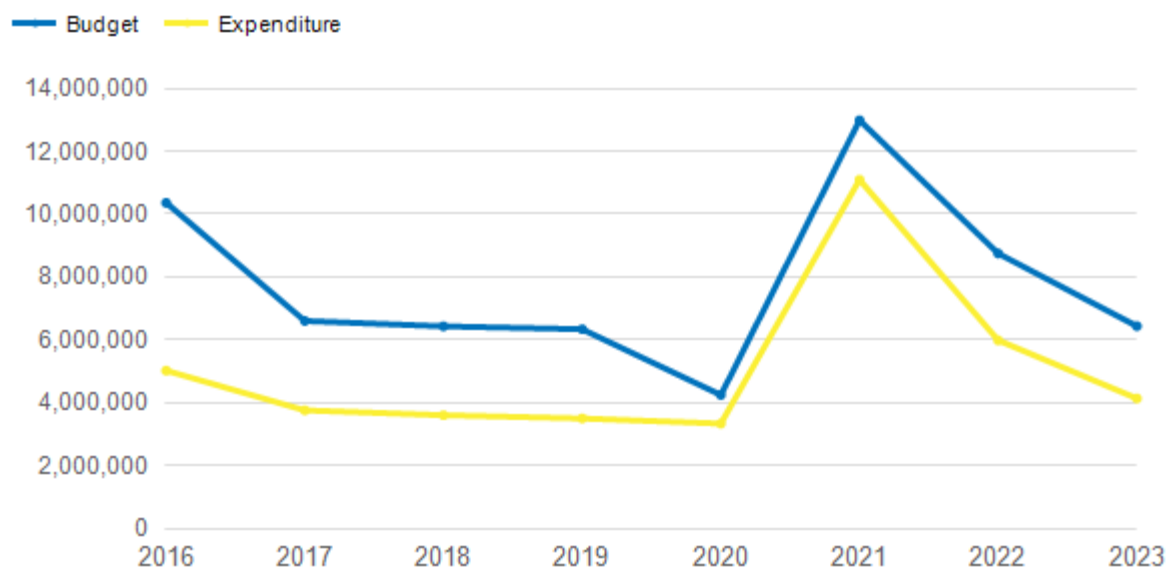
3.1 Financial Data

(Financial figures in USD)

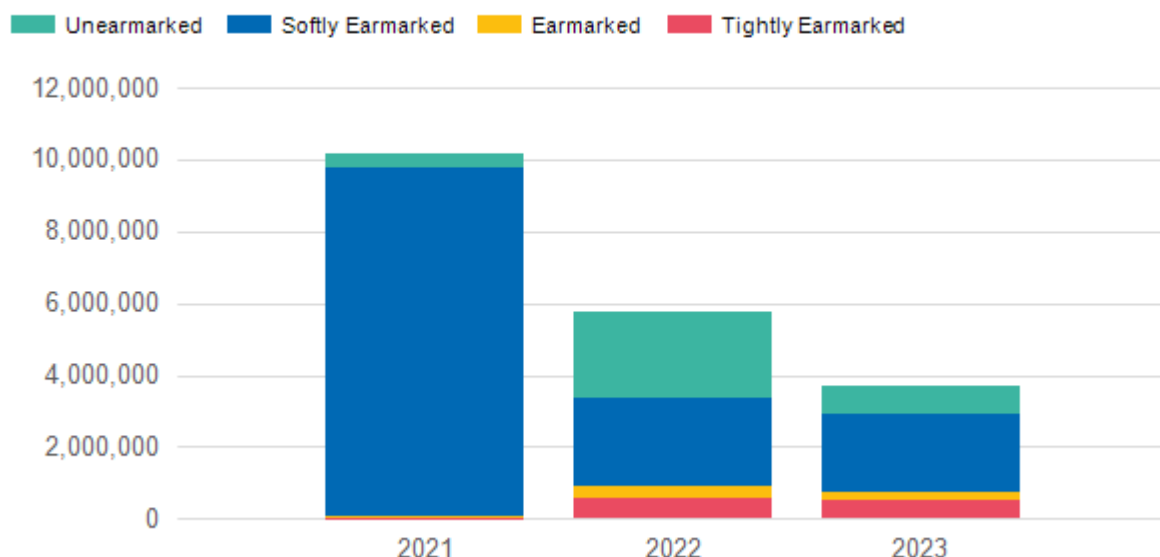
Impact Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
IA1: Protect	4,145,567	2,690,155	64.89%	2,690,155	100.00%
IA4: Solve	2,295,782	1,452,250	63.26%	1,452,250	100.00%
Total	6,441,349	4,142,405	64.31%	4,142,405	100.00%

Outcome Area	Final Budget	Funds Available	Funds Available as % of Budget	Expenditure	Expenditure as % of Funds Available
OA1: Access/Doc	2,002,041	1,148,584	57.37%	1,148,584	100.00%
OA2: Status	647,567	556,539	85.94%	556,539	100.00%
OA3: Policy/Law	1,592,702	875,199	54.95%	875,199	100.00%
OA8: Well-being	985,042	701,009	71.17%	701,009	100.00%
OA13: Livelihood	252,393	212,271	84.10%	212,271	100.00%
OA16: Integrate	961,603	648,803	67.47%	648,803	100.00%
Total	6,441,349	4,142,405	64.31%	4,142,405	100.00%

Budget and Expenditure Trend



Contributions Trend by Type



3.2. Resources Overview

UNHCR’s programme focused on access to quality national asylum, durable solutions for refugees and reducing statelessness, with a cross-cutting focus on partnerships.

By year-end, UNHCR operations in the four countries were 60% funded. Funds were mostly used for activities to ensure life-saving cash assistance to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees, support access to asylum, improved status determination procedures, legal counselling service provision, or to advance efforts to harmonize local frameworks with the 1951 Convention.

With Central Asia no longer receiving support from the Afghanistan Situation, UNHCR had to discontinue protection activities for Afghan citizens in Uzbekistan, including livelihoods interventions and social assistance.

Faced with an increase in the number of new arrivals and refugee-like populations triggered by the Ukraine Situation, UNHCR has had to re-prioritize activities to enable targeted protection monitoring for newly arrivals and better understand their needs and concerns.

Moreover, activities related to psychological and social support, durable solutions and statelessness eradication could not be implemented due to funding limitations. Unmet needs also included cross-border emergency preparedness simulations and the revision of cash assistance.

In view of these challenges, UNHCR increased its resource mobilization efforts given the increased vulnerability of asylum-seekers and refugees. Unearmarked funding enabled UNHCR to support governments’ inclusive policies and advocate greater protection space for refugees and asylum-seekers. Thanks to a more robust approach to private donors, funding for a climate action project in Uzbekistan was secured for 2024.

Section 4: Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

4.1 Lessons Learned and Future Outlook

Investing in strengthening partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders proved pivotal in enhancing the protection space, fostering inclusion, preventing refoulement and promoting durable solutions, including alternative pathways. Recognizing UNHCR's reduced capacity due to the current resource constraints engaging development actors more closely also strengthened their efforts to advocate the protection of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Central Asia.

In addition, close collaboration with the forcibly displaced and stateless people, the UN, Governments, development organizations, civil society, academia, donors and other partners facilitated strategic resource allocation and agile re-prioritization according to needs.

Pilot initiatives on climate action and education have shown that bridging the humanitarian-development nexus should be further explored. Moreover, non-transactional engagements with international financial institutions should continue where possible.

Challenges faced by host governments, including shifting priorities, low budget allocations, and human capacities, will continue to require considerable investment. Partnerships with experienced local NGOs will remain UNHCR's primary implementation arrangement.

UNHCR will also need to invest in national emergency preparedness and response that adhere to minimum humanitarian and protection standards, to manage expectations and mitigate negative impacts in case of disaster.



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

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