

## **CHAPTER V**

# DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND LOCATION

### INTRODUCTION

The demographic and geographical characteristics of UNHCR's population of concern are essential information for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating humanitarian support and programmes. In particular, UNHCR policy priorities of gender equality, children, including adolescents, and older refugees require the availability of age and sex disaggregated data. UNHCR projects often target persons of concern assisted at the local level. Therefore, the 2004 Yearbook provides demographic data disaggregated by age and sex at the camp level as well as for urban locations.

While the 2004 Yearbook focuses primarily on the size and trends of its population of concern, other UNHCR data collection programmes, including the Standards and Indicators initiative allow the evaluation of the well-being of refugees and other populations. This programme includes information on various topics such as nutrition, education, access to water, sanitation, shelter and health.

In 2004, demographic data was reported by 80 per cent of the countries covering about 61 per cent of the total population of concern to UNHCR. Most demographic information is available from countries where UNHCR has an operational role. The 31 countries for which no sex or age breakdowns are available are mostly industrialized countries where governments are responsible for data collection.

This chapter has two main parts. First, it presents sex and age characteristics for countries which have reported such data. The absence of refugee statistics by sex and age in most industrialized countries affects not only programme planning, but also biases the global demographic profiling. With the industrialized countries under-represented, UNHCR statistics show a relatively high presence of children and few older refugees.

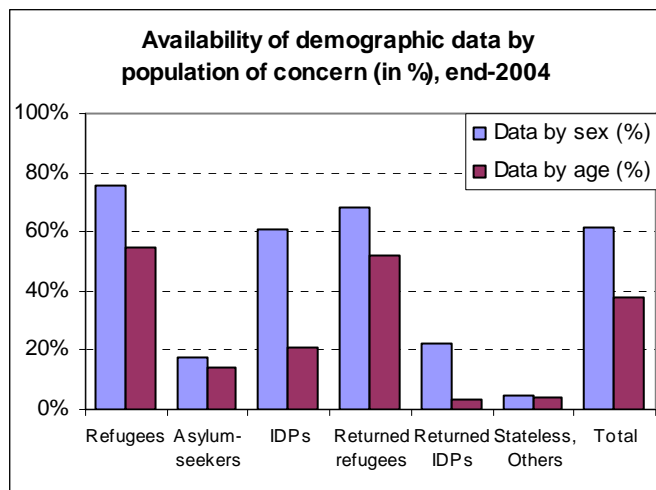
Second, it presents statistics on the location of the population of concern, i.e. the type of settlement in which refugees and other populations live. This includes camps/centres, urban or rural/dispersed settlements.

### SEX AND AGE

Among the 19.5 million persons considered as of concern to UNHCR, information on the sex breakdown was available for only 11.8 million and on age for 7.3 million resulting in sex and age coverage of 61 and 37 per cent respectively. This should be kept in mind in interpreting demographic characteristics. As already highlighted above, major asylum countries, including the USA, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Canada did not provide any or only limited demographic information. This total coverage hides marked differences across type of population of concern. The age-sex coverage of refugees, returned refugees and IDPs is much higher than for asylum-seekers and other groups (see graph below). In fact, refugees represent 59 per cent and IDPs 28 per cent of the more than 11.8 million for which information by sex is available.

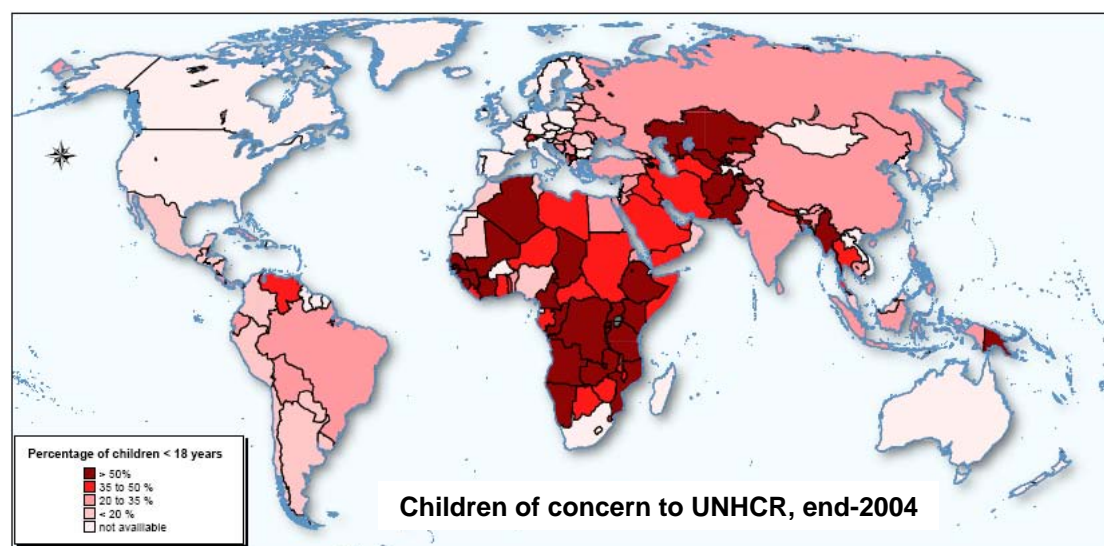
Of the more than 11.8 million persons of concern to UNHCR for whom information by sex was reported in 2004, 5.8 million (49%) are women of all ages.

As noted, the 7.3 million persons for whom information by age was reported tend to be young. Some 47 per cent are under the age of 18, while 13 per cent are under five years of age. Six per cent are aged 60 or over (see *Table IV.1*).



The proportion of females is around 50 per cent for most age groups. Females constitute 49 per cent of the children under five, of those aged 5 to 17 years and among the population aged 18 to 59. The over-representation of women among refugees aged 60 and over (53%) probably reflects among other factors the higher life expectancy of women in general.

Higher fertility rates and presumably the death of many parents during armed conflict in developing countries is also reflected in UNHCR's statistics. As such, children under the age of five represent more than one out of six persons of concern (18%) in Africa and more than one out of 10 (12%) in Asia and Oceania but only two per cent in Europe. The proportion of children under the age of 18 is generally high in Africa (55%), Oceania (50%), and Asia (49%).



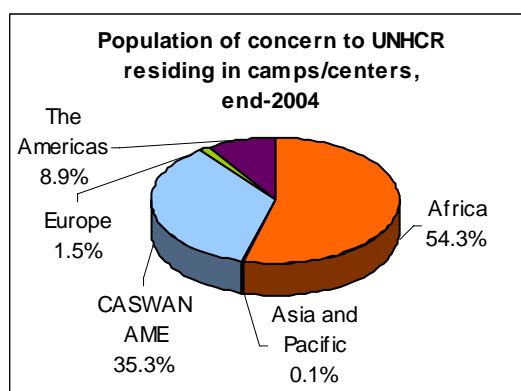
In contrast, the proportion of children in Europe (21%) and Latin America and the Caribbean (25%) is limited, generally reflecting the lower birth rates prevalent in these regions. In addition, the low proportion of children in some countries might reflect age-selective refugee movements to urban locations and industrialized countries.

Countries with low birth rates tend to have a high proportion of older persons. This demographic process, referred to as ageing, is also reflected in the refugee

population. The proportion of refugees aged 60 years and over is significant in Europe (18%), but only three to five per cent in the rest of the UN major areas.

## LOCATION

UNHCR protection and assistance programmes are generally implemented at the field level. A key factor in every project is the settlement pattern of the assisted population: are refugees living in camps, in urban areas or in rural areas among the local population?



In 2004, the type of location was reported for some 14.8 million persons in 126 mainly non-industrialized countries. This represents 77 per cent of the total population of concern. Of these, 3.9 million were residing in camps or centres (26%), 2.7 million (18%) in urban areas, whereas 6.2 million persons (56%) were either living in rural areas among the local population or their type of settlement was unknown.

Slightly more than half of all camp residents live in countries covered by UNHCR's Africa Bureau (54%). The CASWANAME region hosts the second largest camp population (35%), followed by Asia and the Pacific (9%), and Europe (2%). As noted, industrialized countries, where asylum-seekers are often hosted in reception or detention centres are generally not included in these data.

In 2004, UNHCR received information on over 300 locations classified as camps or centres. The precise number of refugee camps is difficult to establish. Should it have a minimum size or population density? Should camps have a clearly marked perimeter? Should detention centres, transit centres, collective centres and settlements be considered as camps? Moreover, reliable camp statistics may not always be available due to lack of UNHCR access or presence.

In 2004, the average camp size was around 8,500 residents with a large variation in population size (this excludes some areas of Pakistan, where no information was provided on the individual camps). Just over 100 camps had fewer than 1,000 residents, while 89 camps hosted over 10,000 residents. The available information on age suggests that the majority of the population living in camps in Africa, Asia and Oceania are young people under the age of 18 while the 18-59 years group represents the majority in urban locations.

Camp populations of concern to UNHCR, end-2004: demographic characteristics								
UN major area	Female	Age group					Coverage	
		<5	5-17	<18	18-59	>60	age	sex
Africa	50%	19%	37%	56%	41%	3%	85%	85%
Asia	52%	15%	40%	55%	41%	4%	86%	89%
Europe and the Caribbean	48%	5%	20%	25%	57%	18%	76%	80%
North America	47%	1%	7%	8%	88%	4%	100%	100%
Oceania	..	..	..	..	..	..	0%	0%
Total	48%	12%	38%	50%	46%	4%	100%	100%
	51%	17%	38%	55%	41%	4%	85%	87%

Urban locations are considerably smaller than camps or centres. The 273 urban locations where UNHCR carried out protection or assistance activities hosted on average 5,200 persons of concern to UNHCR. But it is important to note that "urban locations" is not very well defined and sometimes might include several settlements

or towns in a province or district. Some 200 urban locations (73%) hosted fewer than 1,000 persons, while 43 per cent of the urban locations hosted fewer than 100 persons.

Urban populations of concern to UNHCR, end-2004: demographic characteristics								
UN major area	Female	Age group					Coverage	
		<5	5-17	<18	18-59	>60	age	sex
Africa	44%	9%	33%	42%	56%	2%	29%	51%
Asia	47%	7%	25%	31%	59%	10%	56%	94%
Europe	50%	2%	19%	22%	61%	18%	84%	88%
Latin America and the North America	39%	5%	18%	23%	73%	3%	97%	97%
Oceania	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Total	48%	5%	23%	28%	60%	12%	59%	83%

Data from major refugee camps and settlements indicate that most refugee camps have a balanced sex ratio. In 75 per cent of the major refugee camps, the proportion of females was between 45 and 55 per cent. Camps located in developing countries have a high proportion of children. In contrast, camps in more developed countries host fewer children, but more ageing refugees. In sum, the demographic structure of refugees closely resembles that of nationals.