

## **CHAPTER I**

# SOURCES, METHODS AND DATA CONSIDERATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

Providing a comprehensive picture of UNHCR's population of concern is a difficult task for a number of reasons, primarily related to definitional issues, the use of different data sources and data availability. First, even though the 1951 Refugee Convention and other relevant conventions or protocols provide clear refugee definitions, and despite the fact that most countries have acceded to these legal instruments, different levels of interpretation remain between UNHCR and various stakeholders (e.g. Governments, NGOs) about the definition of a refugee. Nationals fleeing conflict in their country of origin may for instance be officially recognized as refugees by some countries, but not by others. In addition, the administrative rules governing the granting of refugee status vary greatly from one country to another, even though the same definition may be used. Over the past years, some countries have implemented strict criteria for asylum-seekers to be admitted to the asylum procedure. The statistics reported in this Yearbook have been collected through the Annual Statistical Report<sup>1</sup> and generally reflect the definition and data collection methods of Governments, except for those countries where UNHCR registration systems are used.

Second, a wide range of data collection methods are used by different countries or for different categories of persons of concern making the provision of comparable statistics a difficult task. Registration exercises implemented routinely, on an ad hoc basis by Governments, or UNHCR at the request of Governments also, constitute the main source of UNHCR data, especially for refugees and returnees. The main purpose of registration is to protect and assist refugees. Although refugees are often registered individually, the accuracy of registration varies greatly, depending on the protection and operational environment. In addition to registration, increasingly, estimates based on surveys are also used to enumerate and profile internally displaced persons in addition to refugees, in situations where registration is either difficult to implement or not cost-effective.

Third, many refugees are not registered because some may not be aware of the need to register or may perceive the costs of registration as higher than its benefits. Fourth, an increasing number of countries grant not only 1951 Convention refugee status, but also complementary or subsidiary forms of protection which are more difficult to compare internationally. Fifth, administrative records tend to overestimate the actual number of persons, because it is easier to register than to de-register persons. This is particularly the case when registration is linked to the provision of services or benefits.

The main purpose of this chapter is to present information that will assist in interpreting UNHCR's data. The information (also known as metadata) is provided to ensure an understanding of the basic concepts that define the data shown in the 2006 Statistical Yearbook, including variables and classifications, the underlying estimation methods and key aspects of data quality.

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<sup>1</sup> The Annual Statistical Report is the official data collection form completed in by all UNHCR country offices.

## DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

The 2006 Yearbook identifies seven population categories, collectively referred to as “total population of concern to UNHCR” or “persons of concern to UNHCR”. These include refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) protected/assisted by UNHCR, stateless persons, so-called “Others of concern”, returned refugees and returned IDPs. The two last categories are commonly referred to as returnees.

**Refugees** include persons recognized under the *1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees*, its 1967 Protocol, the *1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa*, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, persons granted complementary forms of protection<sup>2</sup> and persons granted temporary protection<sup>3</sup>.

The UNHCR mandate, and statistics related to this, do not include Palestinian refugees residing in areas of operation of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). By the end of 2006, an estimated 4.4 million Palestinian refugees were living in Jordan (1.9 million), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (1.7 million), the Syrian Arab Republic (442,000), and Lebanon (408,000).<sup>4</sup> However, the 334,000 Palestinian refugees living outside UNRWA areas of operation (mainly in Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia) fall under the responsibility of UNHCR and are thus included in UNHCR statistics.

**Asylum-seekers** are persons who have applied for asylum or refugee status, but who have not yet received a final decision on their application. A distinction should be made between the number of asylum-seekers who have submitted a request *during a certain period* (“asylum applications submitted”; also known as “flow”) and the number of asylum-seekers whose asylum request has not yet been decided *at a certain date* (“backlog of undecided or pending cases”; also known as “stock”). Only asylum-seekers whose cases are pending at the end of the year are included in UNHCR’s total population of concern.

**Internally displaced persons (IDPs)** are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural- or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.<sup>5</sup> Because IDPs have not crossed an international border, their legal situation, as well as the international response to their plight, differs significantly from that of refugees.

UNHCR statistics are limited to conflict-generated IDPs to whom UNHCR extends protection or assistance, generally pursuant to a special request by the United

<sup>2</sup> Complementary or subsidiary forms of protection are mechanisms complementary to the 1951 Convention to address the international protection needs of refugees under UNHCR's mandate who do not fall under the 1951 Convention definition as strictly interpreted. They are employed by States which have not opted to extend the refugee definition of the 1951 Convention to these groups of refugees and may be based on the country's obligations under international human rights law or on national (constitutional) provisions.

<sup>3</sup> Temporary protection is a specific provisional and time bound protection response to situations of mass influx providing immediate emergency protection from *refoulement*. It is granted on a group basis without individual status determination procedure. Beneficiaries of temporary protection may include both 1951 Convention refugees and refugees under the broader mandate definition. Temporary protection must remain exceptional and not diminish the protection afforded to refugees under the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol.

<sup>4</sup> Source: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East ([www.un.org/unrwa](http://www.un.org/unrwa)).

<sup>5</sup> Source: Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons (provisional release), p.6, Global Protection Cluster Working Group, December 2007 ([www.humanitarianreform.org](http://www.humanitarianreform.org)).

Nations Secretary-General or by a competent organ of the United Nations with the agreement of the concerned government. As part of the Cluster Approach, UNHCR is also involved in the collective response to situations of internal displacement in selected countries (see *Box 1 on page 23*). As such, UNHCR statistics do not provide a comprehensive picture of global internal displacement.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, UNHCR's IDP statistics are not necessarily representative of the entire IDP population in a given country but are exclusively limited to those who are protected and/or assisted by the Office.

**Returnees** refer to displaced populations (mainly refugees and IDPs) who have returned to their country or place of origin. In returnee situations, UNHCR seeks to reintegrate former refugees and IDPs as soon as possible by targeting both returnees as well as receiving communities as part of its durable solutions strategy. Partners are actively engaged to provide development assistance. For statistical purposes, only refugees and IDPs who have returned during the past 12 months (i.e. January - December) are included in the population of concern to UNHCR. However, in practice, operations may assist returnees for longer or shorter periods.

In addition to protecting persons who are or have been displaced, UNHCR extends support to **stateless persons** by seeking to avoid and reduce statelessness. A stateless person is someone who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law.

UNHCR has been entrusted by the General Assembly with fulfilling the functions under Article 11 of the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness*. As the agency designated to act as an intermediary between States and stateless persons, UNHCR provides expertise in the area of nationality and has been requested by its Executive Committee to promote accession to the *1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons* and the 1961 Convention as well as identify persons without a nationality.

Statelessness may be an important reason for fleeing one's place of origin. However, most stateless persons have not fled their country of habitual residence. Because stateless persons who are not refugees are difficult to identify, reliable global estimates on the scope of statelessness are currently not available.

Finally, the total population of concern also includes **other groups or persons of concern**, which are populations in a refugee-like situation but not included in any of the above categories and to whom the Office extends protection and/or assistance.

#### DATA SOURCES AND PROVIDERS

In order to enumerate the refugee population, a variety of data sources and groups of countries can be identified. The first group is composed of countries where governments are responsible for collecting and managing refugee information, mainly registration data, with varying levels of UNHCR involvement. These countries may use their own registration systems or request UNHCR for supplying registration tools and relevant guidelines. The second group is composed of countries which lack the capacity to implement refugee registration processes and where UNHCR manages the primary registration process in collaboration with the government. The third group is composed of countries, primarily developed ones, where UNHCR has little or no involvement in the primary process of data collection. Here, UNHCR's role focuses

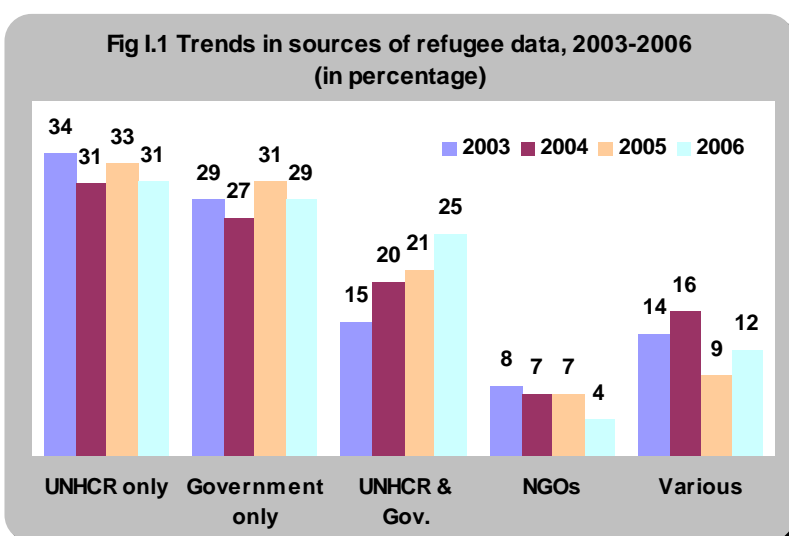
<sup>6</sup> For global IDP estimates, consult the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) website at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

on collecting data from national authorities and monitoring trends.

In addition to the data sources mentioned above, a variety of other information sources are utilized to quantify and profile UNHCR's population of concern to ensure an evidence-based resource allocation and policy formulation. These include registers, surveys, registration processes or censuses. Whereas the refugee or aliens registers, wherever available, may be the primary source of refugee statistics, asylum-seeker data are often derived from a separate administrative system. Information on voluntary repatriation and resettlement, on the other hand, are often managed by separate government agencies and by utilizing different information management systems. In many countries, refugee registration is not centralized, but maintained at the local level. Refugee characteristics, such as sex, age and specific needs may not be available from the register, but are collected on an ad hoc basis through surveys.

As already mentioned, in most industrialized countries, the host government is generally the sole data provider. In most non-industrialized countries, however, UNHCR assists the host country in refugee registration for the purpose of international protection, assistance or durable solutions. This assistance may vary from providing technical advice and limited assistance in countries with a developed statistical infrastructure to managing the entire registration.

To ensure that the refugee register is up-to-date, a record should be kept of all changes in the size of the population, including births, deaths, new arrivals, durable solutions and changes in legal status. In mass influx refugee situations or when populations are highly mobile, maintaining a refugee register is a serious challenge.



By the end of 2006, information on data sources was provided by 154 countries, with a significant number reporting more than one source. UNHCR was reported as the single source of refugee statistics in 3 out of 10 countries (31%, against 33% in 2005). Similarly, governments were the sole data providers in 29 per cent of all cases

(against 31% in 2005). This distribution has remained relatively stable over the past four years.

In 56 countries (36%), there was more than one refugee data source. In 38 of these, statistics were a combined responsibility of the government and UNHCR. In fact, this combined responsibility has seen a steady increase in recent years as reflected in Figure I.1. Whereas refugee statistics were jointly provided in 15 per cent of all cases in 2003, this figure has increased to 25 per cent by 2006. In some countries, data collection on refugees is conducted jointly, while in other countries, parallel systems are put in place where both UNHCR and the government collect refugee data independently, sometimes without consultation or covering different parts of the

country. On average, 12 per cent of the countries reported various sources that included either the government, UNHCR or NGOs. The latter maintained data at the request of UNHCR in only 4 per cent of the countries, significantly less than in previous years (see *annex table 18*).

In total, UNHCR was quoted as either the single source or one of the sources for refugee statistics in more than 100 countries. Governments were the single source or one of the sources in some 95 countries (see *annex table 18*).

The analysis of the most recent trends in data sources and providers shows an increasing role of governments in the provision of refugee statistics. The share of governments as the sole source or one of the sources of refugee data has increased from 44 per cent in 2003 to over 60 per cent in 2006. This is in some cases the direct result of UNHCR's efforts in capacitating and transferring responsibility to governments in the area of refugee data collection.

#### DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Various data collection methods, such as registration/registers, surveys, censuses, and estimations are being used to provide a comprehensive picture of persons falling under UNHCR's mandate. Each method, however, has its own strengths and limitations.

Registration data is a vital source of statistics for planning and management purposes. Registers are also created to establish a legal or administrative record, to administer entitlements or to deliver services. Refugees can only be adequately protected when they are registered.

During the registration process, data is collected, verified and updated, ideally for each individual or for each household. Such data includes name, sex, date of birth, country of origin, relationships within household, marital status, place of displacement and specific needs. The data is normally stored in a database and should be continuously updated for changes in the population.

In 2004, UNHCR started to roll out its registration software *proGres* (Profile Global Registration System) and started to promote the application of minimum standards for registration to ensure high quality data. This has helped in getting more harmonized and up-to-date statistics. *ProGres* can also capture a wide range of events relevant to the refugee status determination process, resettlement, and voluntary repatriation. For UNHCR offices which are conducting refugee status determination or are engaged in resettlement activities, important statistics include the number of asylum applications; positive and negative decisions with respect to refugee status determination and resettlement; and recognition rates. This is necessary information for monitoring and analysing levels and trends in the asylum procedures and in the population in general.

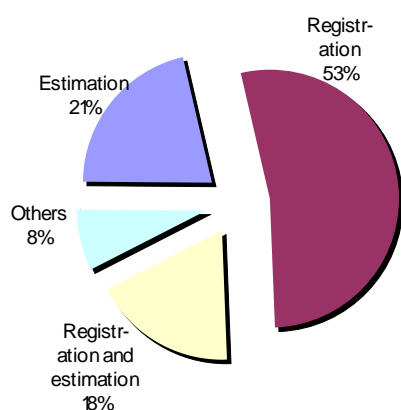
In addition to registers, surveys and censuses are excellent sources of data for planning purposes, but usually do not allow follow-up at the individual level. Although a census includes each individual, it provides only a "snapshot" of the situation and quickly becomes outdated. Surveys are cost-effective, but, unless carried out according to strict rules, may not provide a representative picture. UNHCR is increasingly using surveys to profile the IDP population it protects or assists, with a view to collect data that cannot be obtained otherwise. IDP profiling is an important way of improving the availability and quality of timely and reliable information on this

population and of obtaining an estimate through a collaborative process that can be used for both country operations and global statistical reporting. Such information can help obtain a better understanding of a situation of internal displacement in a particular country or area within a country.

The Office's increasing involvement in situations of internal displacement has led UNHCR to support the development of a scenario-based IDP profiling guidance document, jointly with the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and OCHA, within the framework of the Global Protection Cluster Working Group. The forthcoming IDP profiling guidelines were designed to help Humanitarian Country Teams gather better data on IDPs by proposing different methodologies and providing advice for choosing the optimum method for a given country context. The guidelines also examine a series of related issues: how to obtain a better picture of who IDPs are and where they are located; the difficulties of distinguishing them from surrounding communities; and how to compile workable estimates for protection, programming and advocacy purposes.

In general, UNHCR statistics reflect the use of various data methods which are combined and triangulated to obtain the best possible result.

**Fig I.2 Basis of refugee data, 2006**



As in 2005, registration remains the main basis for UNHCR's refugee data and was reported as the sole data collection method for refugee statistics in 53 per cent of all countries, virtually the same level as in 2005 (54%). Estimates formed the basis of refugee data in 21 per cent of the countries (compared to 25% in 2005). The combination of registration and estimates is increasingly being used because it formed the basis of the data in 14 per cent of all countries in 2005 as compared to 18 per cent in 2006. More than two methods of data collection, including registration and estimation in most cases, were reported by 8 per cent of countries.

Of the 33 countries where only estimates were used, 21 are industrialized countries without a refugee register. In these 21 countries, UNHCR estimates the size of the refugee population based on official data of refugee arrivals and the number of asylum-seekers who have been recognized over a 5- or 10-year period (see below).

Refugees living outside camps are more difficult to track and are under-represented in UNHCR's statistics. Nevertheless, estimates for self-settled refugees are included in the statistics of a number of countries.

As noted earlier, refugee registers require continuous verification and updating to align the administrative records with the changing situation on the ground. Consequently, the population size in refugee camps is sometimes subject to significant periodic adjustments.

#### ESTIMATING REFUGEE POPULATIONS

As many industrialized countries do not maintain a dedicated refugee register and are thus not in a position to provide accurate information on the number of refugees residing in their country, UNHCR estimates the refugee population in a number of

those countries. To ensure that the refugee population in these countries is reflected in global statistics, the number is estimated by UNHCR, based on refugee arrivals and the recognition of asylum-seekers over a 10-year (Europe and the United States of America) or 5-year (Canada and Oceania) period respectively. These different cut-off periods reflect the time it generally takes for a refugee to acquire the nationality of his/her host country. Until 2005, the refugee number in the United States of America was estimated based on a five year cut-off period. Recently available statistics suggest that the estimated average duration before refugees naturalize is at least 10 years. The estimate for the United States of America has thus been adjusted accordingly starting in 2006.

In the example of Greece below, the refugee population is calculated based on the above method.

Example: Greece

-Asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status, 1997-2006: **954**  
 -Asylum-seekers allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons, 1997-2006: **1,335**  
**-UNHCR estimate of the refugee population in Greece (= sum of both categories), end of 2006: 2,289.**

KEY CHARACTERISTICS PRESENTED IN THE 2006 YEARBOOK

In addition to providing the size and trends of UNHCR's population of concern, the 2006 Statistical Yearbook also contains a variety of population characteristics, broken down according to demography, legal basis, residence and location.

Demographic characteristics include sex and age group distribution of the population of concern. However, this type of information is recorded for only around 42 per cent for sex and less than 30 per cent for age. Location refers to the types of settlement of populations: camps, urban areas or rural/dispersed areas (see Chapter V).

For the refugee population, this Yearbook also provides information about the type of recognition (individually recognized or group based/*prima facie*) and the legal basis (conventions/protocol or mandate) under which the refugee status was granted (Chapters III and IV). With regard to asylum-seekers, information about the level and type of procedure as well as the recognition rate is also provided (Chapter IV). Selected indicators on nutrition, water and sanitation, HIV and AIDS, and protection (e.g. sexual and gender-based violence) are also provided (Chapter VI).

A detailed description and explanation of the above and other characteristics will be presented in the corresponding chapters.

OTHER DATA CONSIDERATIONS

Statistics concerning the former USSR have been reported under the Russian Federation while those concerning the former Czechoslovakia have been reported under the Czech Republic. With many asylum countries not yet being in a position to distinguish between Serbia and Montenegro in their national statistical systems, data concerning the former Yugoslavia as well as Serbia and Montenegro have been reported under Serbia and Montenegro. In most annex tables, the word "Democratic" has been abbreviated to "Dem.", whereas the word "Republic" is often reflected as "Rep." The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is referred to as TfyR Macedonia.

Figures below 1,000 are generally rounded to the nearest 10, figures between 1,000 and 10,000 are rounded to the nearest 100, figures between 10,000 and 100,000 are rounded to the nearest 1,000, figures between 100,000 and 1 million are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and figures above 1 million are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Unless specified otherwise, the 2006 Statistical Yearbook does not refer to events occurring after 31 December 2006.