

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

STATISTICAL YEARBOOK 2008

Trends in Displacement, Protection and Solutions



Somali refugees in Hagadera Camp, Dadaab, Kenya. UNHCR/ E. Hockstein



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Influx of Congolese refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo into Uganda. UNHCR/J. Akena

Main findings

This section provides an overview of the major statistical developments in 2008. Key findings are summarized; for greater analysis of these developments, including the definitions used and limitations in the data, please see Chapters 1 to 6.

Total population of concern

The 2008 Statistical Yearbook identifies seven population categories: refugees; asylum-seekers; internally displaced persons (IDPs) protected/assisted by UNHCR; stateless persons; returned refugees; returned IDPs; and others of concern. These categories are collectively referred to as “total population of concern” or “persons of concern”.¹

By end 2008, the total population of concern to UNHCR was estimated at 34.5 million people, broken down by the above categories as follows: 10.5 million refugees;² 826,000 asylum-seekers; 604,000 refugees who had repatriated during 2008; 14.4 million IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR; 1.4 million IDPs who had returned to their place of origin in 2008; 6.6 million stateless persons; and 167,000 others of concern.

Refugees

The number of refugees at end 2008 was 10.5 million, including 1.4 million people considered by UNHCR to be in a refugee-like situation. The previous year, the figure was 11.4 million.

By end 2008, developing countries hosted 8.4 million refugees, or 80 per cent of the global refugee population. The 49 Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 18 per cent of the total refugee population.

By end 2008, Asia hosted over half of the global refugee population (54%), followed by Africa (22%), Europe (15%), North America (4%), Latin America and the Caribbean (3%), and Oceania (0.3%).³

Pakistan, with some 1.8 million⁴ refugees, and the Syrian Arab Republic, with 1.1 million refugees according to Government figures, hosted the highest numbers of refugees at end 2008. Other major countries of asylum included the Islamic Republic of Iran (980,000), Germany (583,000), Jordan (500,000 Government estimate), and Chad (331,000).

1 For a definition of the different population categories, see pp. 16-17.

2 The 4.7 million Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are not included in UNHCR statistics.

3 The geographical regions used are those of the United Nations Statistics Division, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, New York (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49.htm>).

4 Refugee figures for Pakistan include individually recognized Afghan refugees (2,000), registered Afghans in refugee villages who are assisted by UNHCR (764,900), and registered Afghans outside refugee villages who are living in a “refugee-like” situation (1,015,200). Individuals in all categories have been issued a Proof of Registration Card by the Government of Pakistan. Following the completion of the registration exercise in 2007, those living outside refugee villages are now in the “refugee-like” category. They do not receive direct UNHCR material assistance but they benefit from advocacy, and reintegration support upon return.

By end 2008, according to UNHCR estimates, there were more than 2.8 million Afghan refugees, including one million in a refugee-like situation. Afghan refugees accounted for one quarter of the global refugee population under UNHCR's responsibility. Iraq was the second largest country of origin of refugees (1.9 million)⁵, followed by Somalia (561,000), Sudan (419,000), Colombia (374,000), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (368,000).

Internally displaced persons

The number of internally displaced persons, including those in IDP-like situations who benefited from UNHCR's protection and assistance activities was 14.4 million at end 2008. The highest figure on record, this is an increase of more than 600,000 persons over 2007 (13.7 million), and more than double the figure of 2005 (6.6 million), prior to the adoption of the cluster approach.⁶

UNHCR statistics included IDP populations in 23 countries.

UNHCR offices reported more than 1.1 million new internally displaced persons in 2008, while at least 1.4 million IDPs were able to return home during the same period.

Stateless persons

By end 2008, UNHCR identified some 6.6 million stateless persons in 58 countries. However, UNHCR estimated that the actual number of stateless persons worldwide was far higher, at about 12 million people.

Durable solutions

In 2008, 604,000 refugees repatriated voluntarily to their home country, 17 per cent less than in 2007 (731,000). Afghans constituted nearly 40 per cent (278,500) of all returnees during 2008. Other major countries of return in 2008 were Burundi (95,400), Sudan (90,100), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (54,000), Iraq (25,600), and Angola (13,100). Fourteen countries of origin reported the return of more than 1,000 refugees each.

According to government statistics provided to UNHCR, 16 industrialized countries reported the admission of 88,800 resettled refugees during 2008, 18 per cent more than in 2007 (75,300). The countries resettling most refugees during 2008 were the United States of America (60,200 during its fiscal year⁷), Australia (11,000), Canada (10,800), and Sweden (2,200).

In 2008, UNHCR submitted to States more than 121,000 individual cases for resettlement consideration, the highest number of the past 15 years and 22 per cent above the 2007 level (99,000). During the year, some 67,000 refugees departed with UNHCR assistance. The highest numbers of refugees resettled with UNHCR assistance departed from Thailand (16,800), Nepal (8,200), the Syrian Arab Republic (7,200), Jordan (6,700), Malaysia (5,900), and Kenya (4,000).

5 This includes Government estimates for Iraqi refugees in Jordan (500,000) and the Syrian Arab Republic (1.1 million).

6 See footnote 15 for details on the cluster approach.

7 The US fiscal year covers the period 1 October to 30 September.

By nationality, the main beneficiaries of the UNHCR-facilitated resettlement programmes were refugees from Myanmar (23,200), Iraq (17,800), Bhutan (8,100), Somalia (3,500), Burundi (3,100), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1,800).

Refugee status determination

During 2008, 861,000 individual applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to governments and UNHCR offices in 154 countries. This is a 32 per cent increase compared to the previous year (654,000 claims) and the second consecutive annual rise. UNHCR offices registered some 73,400 applications, equivalent to 9 per cent of all applications.

An estimated 768,600 were initial applications lodged in first instance procedures, while 92,800 claims were submitted on appeal, including to courts.

With 355,500 asylum claims registered during the year, Europe remained the primary destination for people applying for asylum on an individual basis, followed closely by Africa (320,200). The Americas and Asia recorded 109,300 and 68,700, respectively, while Oceania received 7,700 applications.

South Africa was an important destination for new asylum-seekers with more than 207,000 asylum claims registered in 2008, or nearly one quarter of individual applications globally. The United States of America was the second most important destination of new asylum-seekers in 2008 with an estimated 49,600 asylum applications, followed by France (35,400), Sudan (35,100), Canada (34,600), the United Kingdom (31,300), and Italy (30,300).

Zimbabwe was the largest single country of origin of asylum-seekers in 2008, with 118,500 new applications submitted by Zimbabwean nationals during the year. Eritrea was the second largest country of origin of asylum-seekers (62,700) in 2008, followed by Somalia (51,900), Iraq (43,900), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (32,700), and Afghanistan (28,900).

Some 217,300 asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees (153,400) or given a complementary form of protection (63,900) during the course of 2008. This number includes an estimated 12,000 individuals who initially received a negative decision that was subsequently overturned at the appeal or review stage.

1951 Convention refugee status was granted in 30 per cent of first instance decisions made in 2008, which was slightly lower than the year before (33%). Including complementary forms of protection and humanitarian status, 43 per cent of all substantive asylum decisions taken at the first instance in 2008 were positive.

Some 22 per cent of all substantive asylum decisions taken on appeal during 2008 resulted in the granting of refugee status (17%) or a complementary form of protection (5%).

By the end of the year, some 826,000 individuals were reported to be awaiting a decision on their asylum claim.

Sex and age

For the 34.5 million people of concern to UNHCR, data on sex are available for 21.3 million people (62%), while data on age are available for 14.3 million (41%). Out of the 21.3 million people of concern for whom disaggregated information by sex is available, 49 per cent are female.

Children and adolescents represent the majority of people of concern in Africa and Asia. In Central Africa and the Great Lakes as well as in the East and Horn of Africa regions, children and adolescents constitute 57 and 55 per cent respectively, of UNHCR's people of concern.

The lowest proportion of children is found in countries covered by the Regional Bureau for Europe (22%). Whereas elderly people of concern (18%) constitute three times more than in any other region for which data is available.

Locations

Although the precise number of refugee locations is difficult to establish, in 2008, UNHCR reported data for over 1,100 different locations. An estimated 28.2 million people were living in these identified locations, equivalent to 82 per cent of the 34.5 million of concern.⁸

Sixteen per cent of persons of concern live in camp-type locations, 25 per cent in urban settings, and 29 per cent each in rural/dispersed and various locations.

Among the 10.5 million refugees reported at the end of 2008, 4.4 million (42%) were living in urban areas, 2.6 million (25%) live in camps, and 1.7 million (16%) in rural areas dispersed among the local population. Detailed location information was unclear or unknown for 1.8 million (17%) of the world's refugees.

The largest refugee camp in the world was Hagadera camp in Dadaab, Kenya, with some 90,000 inhabitants at the end of 2008. The Hagadera camp, along with the Dagahaley camp and the Ifo camp, is part of the Dadaab complex of camps which, at the end of 2008, had a total population of more than 300,000 refugees.

Host country capacities

Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees in relation to its economic capacity hosting 733 refugees per 1 USD Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (PPP)⁹ per capita.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo was the country with the second largest number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita (496 refugees), followed by the United Republic of Tanzania (262 refugees), and the Syrian Arab Republic (257 refugees). The largest refugee-hosting developed country was Germany at 26th place with 16 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita.

8 Location data is not available for the majority of people of concern reported by industrialized countries.

9 This refers to Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) GDP per capita. Source for Gross Domestic Product (PPP): International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2009 (accessed 30 April 2009). Source for national population: United Nations, Population Division, "World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision", New York, 2009.

Introduction

UNHCR systematically gathers and reports statistics on populations of concern, including numbers, locations, demographic characteristics, as well as legal and physical protection needs. Such information is required to design programmes that bring protection and improved welfare to refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and others of concern. The Statistical Yearbook is a key element in UNHCR's implementation of results-based management.

UNHCR has also developed the Yearbook as an effective information tool to assist donors and other stakeholders in incorporating refugee and IDP related issues into their respective policy frameworks and assistance programmes. In addition to reviewing global statistical trends and changes between January and December 2008 in the populations of concern to UNHCR, the Yearbook provides case studies that examine specific issues such as health, water and sanitation, and secondary movements.

The scope of the 2008 Yearbook has remained unchanged compared to recent years. Since the introduction of special features on specific topics within regions in 2006, the Yearbook has aimed to provide more analytical information geared towards the possible use of statistics in decision making.

As in the past, although global migration poses a challenge for asylum and refugee management, this report does not address mixed migration flows due to the lack of reliable and precise statistical information required.¹⁰

Neither does the Yearbook provide a global analysis of forced displacement within borders. Out of the estimated 26 million IDPs worldwide, only the 14.4 million (56%) directly or indirectly protected or assisted by UNHCR are included in this document.

Finally, statistics pertaining to the 4.7 million Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) are not included in the Yearbook.

The global number of refugees, asylum-seekers and conflict-induced IDPs by the end of 2008 was 42 million, a figure close to 2007. Of this number, 25 million people (10.5 million refugees and 14.4 million IDPs) were receiving direct or indirect protection and/or assistance from UNHCR at the end of 2008.

As observed in 2007, the analysis of 2008 refugee data revealed three major patterns. First, developing countries host four-fifths of the world's refugees, and the majority of refugees are hosted by countries neighbouring their own; more than 80 per cent of the refugees remained within their region of origin. Second, the number of refugees residing in urban areas continues to grow. Third, the decline in refugee returns, which started in 2001, continued; the number of returnees in 2008 was the second lowest in over a decade.

The 2008 Yearbook is structured in four sections. The first describes the metadata and methodological issues. This section is essential for understanding and using the data contained in the 2008 Yearbook. It presents the definitions and sources of the data, and provides insight into data quality and coverage (Chapter 1).

10 As part of the strategy to address the phenomenon of mixed migration flows, UNHCR has developed the "10-Point-Plan of Action" which aims at ensuring that protection space continues to be available for people in need of international protection. See <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/4742a30b4.pdf> for further information.

The second section provides a global analysis with regard to population numbers and trends as well as durable solutions. It consists of three chapters. Chapter 2 presents a global overview of the size and changes in the population of concern to UNHCR. Chapter 3 focuses on the main population movements during 2008, with particular emphasis on durable solutions and new refugee outflows. An overview of asylum applications and refugee status determination is provided in Chapter 4.

The third section analyses the population distribution as well as living conditions and welfare indicators. Sex and age characteristics, which are key variables in any refugee programme, are discussed in Chapter 5. This chapter also provides information on refugee locations, including camps and urban settlements. As in previous years, a chapter on well-being and the living conditions of refugees is included in the 2008 Yearbook (Chapter 6). Here, nutrition, including access to food, and anaemia indicators are used to assess trends and gaps in these life-saving areas.

The fourth and last section of the Yearbook contains the Annex Tables, which provide detailed data for 2008. Historical statistical data can be found on UNHCR's website (www.unhcr.org/statistics) and downloaded from UNHCR's Statistical Online Population Database at www.unhcr.org/statistics/populationdatabase.

Some data contained in this publication may differ from statistics published previously due to retroactive changes or the inclusion of previously unavailable data. Similarly, it is expected that the data contained in the 2008 Yearbook will be subject to minor changes in the future.