

CHAPTER I

SOURCES, METHODS AND DATA CONSIDERATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this chapter is to present information that will assist in interpreting UNHCR's published data. The information (also known as metadata) is provided to ensure an understanding of the basic concepts that define the data shown in the 2005 SYB including variables and classifications, the underlying estimation methods and key aspects of the data quality.

The 1951 Convention and the 1969 OAU Convention provide clear refugee definitions. The fact that more than 140 countries have acceded to the 1951 Convention and its 1967 Protocol, and many of these countries have incorporated the refugee definition contained in that Convention in their national legislation, should make refugees relatively easy to count; however, keeping accurate and comparable statistics is not always straightforward for various reasons. First, there may be a difference of opinion between UNHCR and different stakeholders (e.g. NGOs, Governments) about who is a refugee. For instance, nationals fleeing conflict in their country of origin may be officially recognized as refugees by some countries, but not by others. UNHCR statistics generally reflect the views of the host country. Second, although refugees are often registered individually, the accuracy of registration varies greatly, depending on the protection and operational environment. Third, refugees may not be aware of the need to register or may perceive the costs of registration as higher than its benefits. Fourth, some countries grant not only Convention refugee status, but also subsidiary forms of protection which are more difficult to compare internationally. Fifth, even though there is an international refugee definition, the administrative rules governing the granting of refugee status vary greatly. For instance, some countries have implemented strict criteria for asylum-seekers to be admitted to the asylum procedure. Sixth, 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.

DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

UNHCR's population of concern is composed of various groups of people, including refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons and returnees.

In UNHCR statistics, **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 a complementary form of protection and persons granted temporary protection.

The UNHCR mandate covers all refugees, except 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 2005, an estimated 4.3 million

Palestinian refugees were living in Jordan (1.8 million), the Occupied Palestinian Territories (1.7 million), the Syrian Arab Republic (435,000), and Lebanon (405,000). These Palestinian refugees are not included in UNHCR's statistics. However, the 350,000 Palestinian refugees living outside the 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") and the number of asylum-seekers whose asylum request has not yet been decided *at a certain date* ("backlog of undecided or pending cases"). Only asylum-seekers who are pending at end-year are included in UNHCR's total population of concern.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are often displaced for the same reasons as refugees. However, 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.

As per end-2005, UNHCR statistics are limited to conflict-generated IDPs to whom UNHCR extends protection or assistance, generally pursuant to a special request by the United Nations Secretary-General or by a competent organ of the United Nations and with the agreement of the country concerned. As such, UNHCR statistics do not provide a comprehensive picture of global internal displacement.¹ 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. In practice, operations may assist returnees for longer or shorter periods, however.

In addition to protecting persons who are or have been recently 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.

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

¹ For global IDP estimates, consult the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) website at www.internal-displacement.org.

stateless persons who are not refugees are difficult to enumerate, reliable global estimates on the scope of statelessness are currently not available.

Finally, the total population of concern also includes **others of concern**, which are populations not included in any of the above categories but to whom the Office extends protection and/or assistance.

While asylum and migration, also known as the so-called “asylum-migration nexus” are becoming more and more intertwined, the lack of statistical data does not permit an evidence-based analysis of mixed migration flows. Moreover, despite the humanitarian challenge and prominent media coverage posed by this phenomenon, most migrants do not claim asylum and are thus not included in UNHCR statistics.

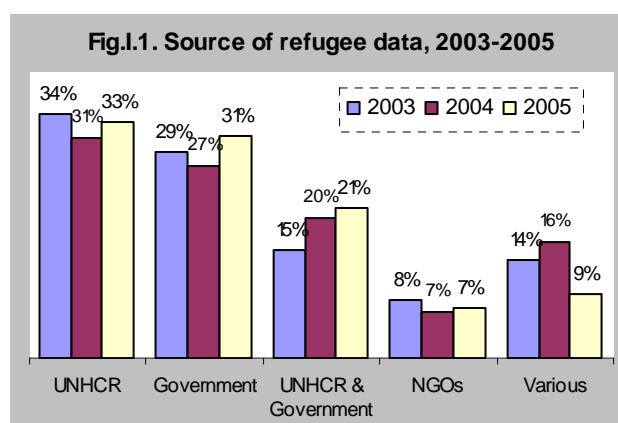
DATA SOURCES AND PROVIDERS

In an effort to ensure evidence-based resource allocation and policy formulation, a variety of information sources are utilized to quantify and profile UNHCR’s population of concern. There are, however, three main data providers in UNHCR statistics: governmental agencies, UNHCR country offices and NGOs. Data are collected or compiled using mainly 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. Adding to the complexity, voluntary repatriation and resettlement are often managed by separate government agencies. Sources may also differ within countries. 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 collected on an ad hoc basis through surveys.

In most industrialized countries, the host government is generally the sole data provider. In most non-industrialized countries, 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 in countries with limited means.

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 refugee situations or when populations are highly mobile, maintaining a refugee register is a serious challenge.

By the end of 2005, UNHCR was reported as the single source of refugee statistics in 50 countries (33%); governments were the sole data provider in 47, mainly industrialized countries (31%), whereas NGOs maintained data at the request of UNHCR in 10 countries (7%) (see Fig.I.1 and Table VI.1).



In 54 countries (36%), there was more than one refugee data source (36%). In 31 among these 54 countries (21%), statistics were a combined responsibility of the government and UNHCR, while 13 countries reported various sources that include the government, UNHCR and NGOs. In total, UNHCR was quoted as either the single source or one of the sources for refugee statistics in 94 countries. Governments were the single source or one of the sources in 91 countries (see Table VI.1).

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 52 per cent in 2005. This is the direct result of UNHCR's efforts in capacitating and transferring responsibility to governments in the area of refugee data collection.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Over the past years, various data collection methods, including registration/registers, surveys, censuses, and estimations have been used to provide a quite comprehensive picture of the persons under the Office's mandate. Each data collection method, however, has its own strengths and limitations. A **register** is often created to establish a legal or administrative record, to administer entitlements or to deliver services. In a register, all persons should be included and records should be updated regularly. As pressures to register outweigh those to de-register, data from a register may become inflated, requiring periodic verification. Nevertheless, registers have a tendency to exclude parts of the population, as not all those who qualify are able or willing to register. Periodic registration exercises are usually one of the main causes for a revision of the refugee estimate in a country.

Surveys and **censuses** are excellent sources 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, they may not provide a representative picture. In general, various data methods should be combined and triangulated to obtain the best possible result.

The role of UNHCR in registration depends on the country of operation. In many cases the government is doing the registration alone, whereas in other situations UNHCR may assist the government or be fully in charge of the exercise. Over the last few years, UNHCR has developed and started implementing a new registration software – proGres² – which is a comprehensive database with possibilities for the individual and continuous registration of beneficiaries. It is expected that the implementation of this new registration software will improve the statistics and facilitate well-founded programming decisions.

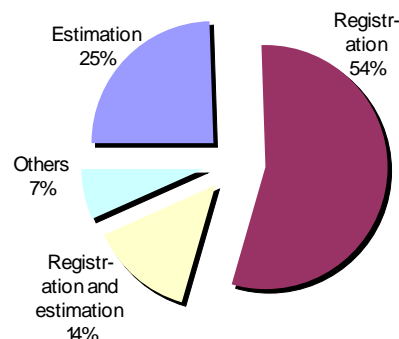
Similar to 2004, registration remains the main basis for UNHCR's refugee data. Registration was reported as the sole source of refugee statistics in 83 countries (54% of the countries). Estimates formed the basis in 37 countries (25% against 27% in 2004). A combination of registration and estimates were used in 21 countries (14%) while more than two methods of data collection were reported by 10 countries (7%).

² Profile Global Registration System (see Box 1)

Of the 37 countries where only estimates were used, 22 are industrialized countries without a refugee register. In these 22 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).

Fig.I.2 Basis of refugee data, 2005

Refugees who are living outside camps, sometimes unlawfully, are more difficult to track and are underrepresented 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.

Box 1: Registration of persons of concern to UNHCR

Registration data is a vital source for statistics for planning and management purposes. Refugees can only be adequately protected when they are registered. Refugee statistics are generally based on individual registration records, kept by the host government. As such, registration of refugees is a government responsibility, but in cases where the government is unable to register persons of concern, UNHCR can assist or undertake the registration activities.

During the registration process, data is collected, verified and updated for each individual (ideally) or for each household. The data includes, among others, 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. From the registration database it is possible to generate aggregated statistical information such as the total population size including demographic profile and geographical distribution.

In recent years, UNHCR has rolled out the registration software proGres and started introducing and applying 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 for refugee status determination, resettlement, and voluntary repatriation. For UNHCR offices which are conducting refugee status determination or are engaged in resettlement activities, some of the important statistics include the number of applications, positive and negative decisions, closed cases and recognition rates. This is important information for monitoring and analysing the levels and trends in the asylum procedures and in the population in general. In addition, it provides insight into the workload of the UNHCR office when dealing for instance with resettlement activities.

Registration data is equally important for analyzing community services activities. It is possible to follow the number of persons granted assistance and compare it to the total population in a camp. In addition, it can be used to calculate rates of e.g. school enrolment or demographic and health indicators, such as birth and death rates.

ESTIMATING REFUGEE POPULATIONS

As already highlighted above, UNHCR estimates the refugee population in a number of countries. In fact, most industrialized countries lack a refugee register and are thus not in a position to provide accurate information on the number of refugees residing in their country. To ensure that the refugee population in these countries is reflected in the global statistics, the number of refugees is estimated by UNHCR, based on refugee arrivals and the recognition of asylum-seekers over a 10-year (Europe) or 5-year (North America 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.

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

Example: Hungary

- Asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status at the first instance, 1996-2005: **1,675**
- Asylum-seekers allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons ("tolerated") at the first instance, 1996-2005: **5,358**
- Asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status on appeal, 1996-2005: **4**
- Asylum-seekers allowed to remain for humanitarian reasons ("tolerated") on appeal, 1996-2005: **6**
- Asylum-seekers recognized under the UNHCR mandate, 1996-2005: **315**
- Subsidiary protection granted by the police outside the asylum procedure, 1996-2005: **696**
- **UNHCR estimate of the refugee population in Hungary (= sum of all categories), end of 2005: 8,054.**

KEY CHARACTERISTICS PRESENTED IN THE 2005 YEARBOOK

In addition to providing the size and trends of UNHCR's population of concern, the 2005 Statistical Yearbook also contains breakdowns according to a variety of characteristics including 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 around 55 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 regards 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 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; those concerning the former Czechoslovakia have been reported under the Czech Republic; and, those concerning the former Yugoslavia have been reported under Serbia and Montenegro (no separate statistics are available for both countries). In most 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 2005 Statistical Yearbook does not refer to events occurring after 31 December 2005.