



# UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

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Transcript of High Commissioner Press Conference

UNHCR's Annual Report Global Trends in Forced Displacement 2024

**HC:**[00:00:01] Thank you, Shabia. And, good afternoon, everybody. This is our yearly statistical moment. As you know, we do it every year. And, of course, we update statistics fairly regularly, but, this is fairly symbolic. It comes just before World Refugee Day, which is on the 20th of June. And it's meant really to shed a light on the global situation of forced displacement. So, it is about refugees. It is about people displaced in their own countries. It is, in fact also about stateless people that fall under our mandate.

The figure of this here and this is the main piece of news that I have to share with you is higher than last year.

We estimate, or we estimated that at the end of 20..... Sorry that the last figure that we have been sharing with you, if you recall, was 114 million. So we estimate that the most updated figure is now 120 million. So it has gone up by another 6 million. These are refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, people being forced by conflict, by persecution, by different and increasingly complex forms of violence. And they've had to flee their homes, either in their own country or crossing borders and becoming refugees.

120 million is a pretty high figure. And what is also very significant. Most regrettably, it is that it is the 12th consecutive year in which this figure goes up. And on this occasion, on this, June occasion.

Conflict remains a very, very big driver of displacement.

Last year, UNHCR declared 43 emergencies in 29 countries. I use this figure, frequently because I think it's interesting. I've been, you know, I've said it many times. I've been looking back at, what we did, what we have done in past years. This figure, until 2 or 3 years ago, used to be, on average, eight maximum ten times a year. It's gone up four times the number of emergencies.

You know, we have certain criteria to declare an emergency that requires specific resources 43 times. These are new conflicts or conflicts that are already ongoing and have a particular, surge in violence or an impact on civilians.

Some of you must may have followed what I said to the Security Council just a few days ago, literally. The way conflicts are conducted by the parties almost everywhere, by almost all parties, in complete disregard of the laws of war of international humanitarian law, and often with the specific purpose of terrorising people, of, making people, instill fear in people. This, of course, is a powerful contributor to more displacement than even in the past. And this is why I it is such an important feature of the work of many of us in the aid community, not only ICRC that has the custodianship of that set of laws, but for all of us, it's very, very important.

The big, I mean, many conflicts have driven this, growth in displacement. I would certainly single out Sudan. Because in Sudan, where the conflict has now been going on, this phase of the conflict has been going on for 14 months, almost 14 months. The number of people displaced is staggering. About 9 million, either internally displaced or about 2 million that have crossed borders. Now, some of them were already counted

under last year's report, but that figure has kept growing. In Chad alone, people are arriving in the hundreds every day. Just to give you an example. In South Sudan, where I will be for World Refugee Day, same. And in other countries. I can speak more about Sudan. I am very keen to single it out first because I think it is a crisis.

That and this is not applying to you who reports from here. So hear about that a lot but generally doesn't really make it to the headlines is a very forgotten crisis, although it's one of the most catastrophic ones, not just in terms of displacement, but in terms of hunger, lack of access, violation of human rights, and so forth.

The other crisis that I wanted to single out is Myanmar. Of course. Not only because UNHCR remains deeply engaged with the Rohingya refugees that have fled from Myanmar, but also because since the coup d'état a few years back, violence has continued to grow inside the country. Violence, carried out in the fights, in the different, different conflicts between, the military that are in power, in, Naypyitaw and different, armed groups representing different ethnic groups. We particularly are particularly worried about what's happening in Rakhine State. This is in the west of the country. This is the state from which the Rohingya originate. And the situation is very complex there because a new conflict or not a new conflict, an existing conflict has now escalated between the Myanmar Army, the Tatmadaw and the Arakan Army, which is one of these, ethnic, armed groups. And this is causing all sorts of problems and impact, including on the Rohingya. But suffice it to say that I remember I briefed the council in October last year. I told them that there was an escalation of conflict inside the country that was going to cause displacement. I briefed them again a few days ago, and I told them that between the briefing last time and now, one and a half more million more people that were displaced, and they will be almost all of them counted in this new report.

And then there is Gaza. You know, UNHCR is not involved in Gaza. For all the reasons that we've mentioned to you many times. But this report is about displacement globally, not just of people whom we deal with as an organisation. So, of course, in Gaza live, normally before this round of conflict, before the 7th of October lived about I think it's 1.6, 1.7 (million) Palestine refugees. These are counted under our statistics as refugees, although they are the responsibility of UNRWA, as you know now, many of them are displaced. The estimate is that well over 1.7 million people in Gaza have been displaced, as you all know, many of them, being pushed against the Egyptian border. Many of them are Palestinian refugees already. So somehow for them, it's a repeat of history to be displaced.

Now, without going into too many technical details, we have not counted these people twice. So if they were already counted as Palestine refugees, unfortunately, now they're also displaced. But they were not counted again. But those that were not refugees, just Gaza citizens and they were displaced are part of this increased number.

(Referring to Tarek) Am I correct Tarek in saying? I'm speaking under his control because it's very complex issues.

There's many other places where displacement has increased, but these are the ones that I wanted to single out also because they are the most, current.

But we should not forget the very long, endless conflict that continue to have an element of displacement. Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Somalia. Venezuela, Nicaragua, many others.

I can speak about more if you wish. Just a few, thematic issues that I wanted to add. One is let's not forget. I said it many times to you here and elsewhere that this population movements that we're talking about that are reported here are of an extreme complexity. We call them mixed flows. It's a bit of a dry word, but it describes how complicated and complex they are. The factors, the drivers I mentioned, conflict and violence. Violations of human rights. But increasingly they get mixed with other factors. Climate in particular, or climate change rather has an impact on population movement. And in particular, this is that the aspect of the climate crisis that is of interest to UNHCR, it has a close relationship with conflict. It can be a driver of conflict and hence of displacement, especially when you know the very scarce resources of poor

communities become even scarcer than because of climate change that drives conflict. We've seen it in so many parts in Africa, in the Sahel, for example, in the Horn of Africa, but also elsewhere. So this is an important feature.

And then you have these population movements that, with increased human mobility, tend to move from one country to the other and sometimes reach the shores of the Mediterranean or the US-Mexican border, or South Africa, or Southeast Asia and so forth.

And of course, especially when these flows reach rich countries immediately, because rich countries drive global communications. The perception that is generated is that all the refugees or migrants go to these rich countries. But this report says very clearly, once again, that 75% of those forcibly displaced, be they internally or externally forcibly displaced, live in countries that are either poor or middle-income countries. So the big forced displacement phenomenon is not in the rich country in spite of the perception.

Solutions are very rare. I think that our statistics say that about 5 to 6 million, 6 million people have returned to their home during last year. This is mostly the internally displaced people that have found a solution. Only about 1 million refugees here and there have been able to go back to their country, a very small figure compared to the total.

So, there is no comparison between newly displaced and those that are not displaced anymore. The disproportion is such that this is why these figures continue to go up.

But of course solutions do exist. I want to mention, I know my colleagues have mentioned this many times to you, but let me mention at least one important initiative that of the government of Kenya, the Shirika Plan, it's called. The president has decided and the country has, the institutions have approved that the 600 for the 600,000 refugees in Kenya, mostly Somalis and South Sudanese measures will be progressively taken to include them in the communities in which they live. I can give you more details, but I considered that a little bit in counter tendency, a positive trend. And Kenya being an important country in East Africa, a leading country, in a way, I hope that this will have a positive impact also on other countries.

Another theme I wanted to mention is that funding has remained extremely, extremely tight. As usual, you may say, but with the increase in challenges, in numbers of people in in different crisis with the strong attraction for funding represented by situations in the Middle East, Gaza in particular, or Ukraine, clearly some other operations, some other situations, Sudan in particular, Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, the Afghan situation remain and many others in Congo remain severely underfunded. So that is an area that needs a lot of attention.

You will see from the statistics. Very interesting that there is a rise again - Tarek I speak under your control (again referring to Tarek) in the number of new asylum claims. This number is growing. And, this is, significant because in many countries this goes in parallel with an increase in the backlog of unresolved asylum claims. The biggest backlog is probably in the United States. And. This is why we keep telling governments that it is extremely important to invest resources in asylum systems, in order to become more efficient in adjudicating asylum claims.

I could give you a lot more, examples or aspects, but I'll stop here. I just want to conclude by saying, you know, some of you may ask me, so is this a very difficult moment? Yeah, it is a very difficult moment. I think the combination of conflict of other complex drivers, of displacement, of, as I said to the Security Council, very fragmented international politics, which means less political solutions to conflict and hence less solutions to forced displacement.

One should add, the increasingly tight environment in which especially refugees move into, especially in rich countries, restrictive laws, constraints, in some cases outright xenophobia and hostility often fueled by some politicians. All of this creates an extremely difficult environment, which of course, we must meet, we must continue to work in.

You know that, in December last year, we convened the second Global Refugee Forum. 4000 people came. Hundreds of pledges were made. I think it was a very positive moment, showing that when people are motivated around an issue which is well explained with clear propositions of concrete action, you can still operate together, but it's tough and becoming more difficult. And, we need international support for that. Thank you.

**HC:** [00:17:45] Unless there is a shift in international geopolitics. Unfortunately, I actually see that figure continuing to go up. Maybe not significantly if we are lucky and we have no new conflicts. But even the non-resolution of the old ones means that, you know, also refugees increase in numbers. So, I hope still that there that somebody will see that there is a need for that light at the end of the tunnel. But at the moment I remained very, prudent in, in this, in this respect.

We have seen, the debate in the council. The Security Council is, in a way, the thermometer of the backgrounds of the situations in which we operate. Right. Of, your question of whether we will move toward a more, favourable context in terms of peacemaking. And frankly, all I see in the debates on the council is a great deal of divisiveness on everything. Even, you know, arriving at conclusions on humanitarian resolutions like we've seen around Gaza, for example. But Sudan is the same, and we've seen it in Ukraine. Seems very difficult for the council. So if they if they cannot agree, the hope for solutions is weakening and that is, very bad. But I can assure you that we won't give up.