

STATISTICS AND REGISTRATION:
A PROGRESS REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

1. This conference room paper focuses on developments concerning refugee statistics, as well as registration, since the last update to the Standing Committee in 1998 (EC/48/SC/CRP.45). The first part of the paper takes a critical look at both the evidence and use of data on refugee women, children and the elderly which are of particular concern to UNHCR. After a brief overview of available statistical information, it suggests that the use of statistics concerning refugee women, children and the elderly can be significantly improved. The first part concludes with a brief outline of statistical priorities for the year 2000. The second part of the paper addresses some registration issues. Following a brief recapitulation of recent experiences, the details of a new registration initiative are presented.

2. Since 1994, UNHCR's Statistical Unit has produced the annual Statistical Overview. The format for the 1999 issue will be similar to the one used for 1998 and will focus on the following topics: the population of concern to UNHCR, new arrivals and durable solutions, gender and age, asylum applications and refugee status determination decisions. As usual, the statistical information will be tabulated according to a number of characteristics, including country of asylum, origin, type of status, type of decision, beneficiaries of UNHCR-assistance, etc. The report will also contain a number of longitudinal tables on asylum, refugees and durable solutions. Mainly because of the late reporting by the industrialized countries, the Statistical Overview will be issued in June 2000.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF REFUGEES

Available data on refugee women and children

3. As part of its mandated responsibility, UNHCR has collected data on gender and age for some time now, and has published these statistics since the early 1990s. During the latest round of statistical data collection, UNHCR offices located in some 80 asylum countries reported the gender and age composition of some 4.7 million refugees by origin and location¹. Because the global statistics by gender and age are limited those refugees assisted under UNHCR's programmes, the overwhelming majority of the population reported on is located in Africa and Asia². Nevertheless, the data available show some marked tendencies, even in regions that are not so well covered. In an effort to explain regional differences, the refugee age structure is compared with the most recent United Nations global population projections for the year 2000 (medium variant)³. In addition, this paper compares the gender and age statistics for refugees in camps and those living in urban areas.

4. Of the 4.2 million refugees for which UNHCR offices reported both gender and age, 50.9 per cent were female refugees (see Table 1). In regions where the enumerated refugee population was very large (Africa: 2.2 million and Asia: 2 million), the percentage of female refugees was very close to 50, suggesting that, generally speaking, the gender selectivity of mass refugee outflows is limited. In Europe, the excess of female refugees (53.2 per cent) is mostly the result of the highly unequal gender balance in Croatia (59.6 per cent) [4](#). Conversely, the percentage of female refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean is considerably lower than that of male refugees (46.8 per cent). Oceania hosts very few UNHCR-assisted refugees. The percentage of female refugees in Oceania as provided in Table 1 (44.9 per cent) can therefore not be considered as representative for the entire region.

5. In Africa, the refugee population is particularly young; some 16.3 per cent are children below the age of five, which is virtually identical to the United Nations population projection for Africa (16 per cent). In Asia, three-quarters of all refugees for which demographic data are available were located in only two asylum countries: Pakistan (1.2 million) and China (292,000). It is not surprising, therefore, that the proportion of refugees under five years old (12.3 per cent) differs from the United Nations projection for the entire region (9.9 per cent for 2000). The relatively low proportion of refugee children in Europe (4.3 per cent) reflects not only the ageing of the total European population [5](#), but also the extremely small proportion of UNHCR-assisted refugee children reported for Croatia (1.9 per cent). As noted earlier, the figures for Oceania are based on a very small sample and can therefore not be considered as representative of the region.

Region	Female (%)				Male (%)				Grand total	
	0-4	5-17	18->	Total	0-4	5-17	18->	Total	%	'000
	Africa	8.2	19.6	22.4	50.1	8.1	19.6	22.1	49.9	100.0
Asia	6.3	16.1	29.4	51.8	6.0	15.1	27.2	48.2	100.0	1,966.1
Europe	2.1	10.3	40.8	53.2	2.2	11.7	32.8	46.8	100.0	54.6
Latin Am./Carb.	7.5	19.2	20.1	46.8	7.4	19.6	26.2	53.2	100.0	34.5
Oceania	9.6	15.3	20.0	44.9	11.7	20.1	23.3	55.1	100.0	3.7
Total	7.2	17.8	25.9	50.9	7.1	17.4	24.7	49.1	100.0	4,226.4

6. In sum, there appears little evidence at the aggregate level to suggest that there are considerably more female than male refugees in the world. In fact, year after year, the statistics reported by UNHCR offices have indicated that the global proportion of female and male refugees is virtually identical [6](#). Yet, clear differences exist in the gender composition of refugee populations between regions and countries. Concerning the under five population, regional differences are explained in large part by the demographic structure of the total population. However, due to a lack of refugee population data in some regions, variations between the refugee population and the total population of the region may still be significant.

"The majority of the refugees are women and children"

7. This statement is probably the most often pronounced truism concerning the composition of a refugee population, either globally or within the context of a particular asylum country or refugee situation. However, the statement does little to improve the knowledge of the gender and age distribution of a refugee population, and the logic of combining the two demographic groups of women and children into one single statistic may be questioned.

8. In part, this type of generalization may have been inspired by the lack of gender and age disaggregated data in the early days of programmes targeting women and children. In recent years, however, more detailed demographic data have become available, as presented above. At the same time, it is increasingly recognized that not all women are vulnerable, but that special needs are determined by characteristics such as those of single heads of household, older refugees without support systems, handicapped, etc. In short, combined statistics on women and children refugees have become increasingly unsuitable in the context of current programming approaches which are based on a more detailed and individual needs assessment. Moreover, from a statistical and demographic viewpoint, there appears little reason to combine the two groups into one statistic, as standard population classifications tabulate data by age and gender separately.

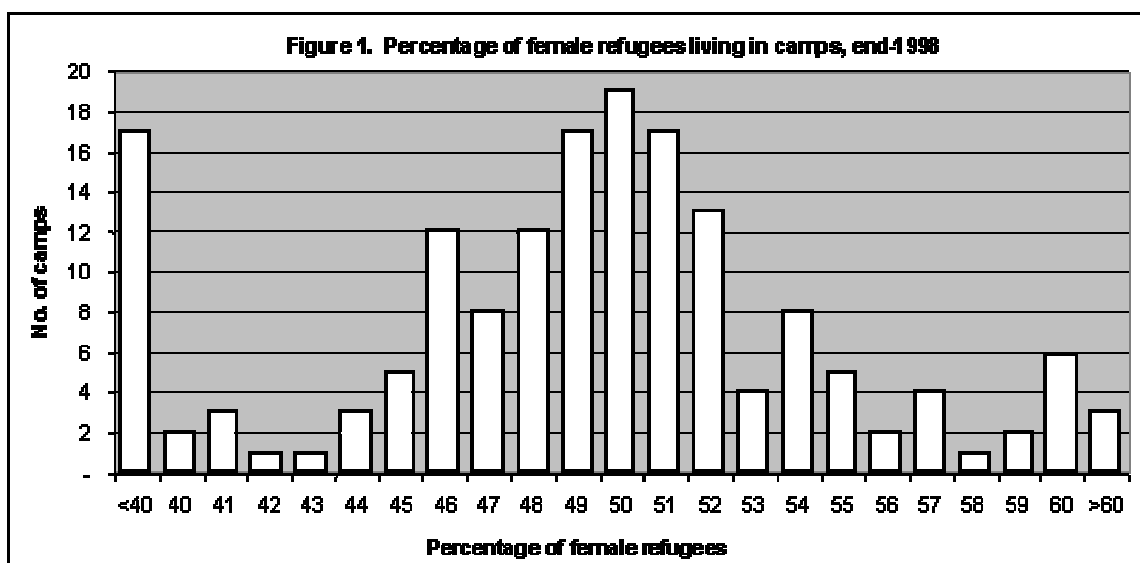
9. Lastly, whenever refugee women and refugee children are quantified, it is important that the age groups be specified. For instance, there is little use in stating that 75 per cent of the refugees are women if the age limits are not clarified. Are all female refugees included or only women above a certain age? The same applies to refugee children and older refugees.

Refugee population structure in refugee camps

10. In the last annual statistical survey, UNHCR offices provided gender and age statistics for some 165 locations designated as refugee camps or centres, located in 50 asylum countries and covering 3.5 million refugees⁷. It has often been suggested that whereas women and children tend to stay in camps, male refugees are predominantly absent from the camps. There is, however, little statistical evidence at the aggregate level to support this claim. Thus, the percentage of female refugees in refugee camps or centres (50.9 per cent) equals that for the entire refugee population. Clearly, the similarity between Tables 1 and 2 is due to the fact that the large majority of the refugees for whom gender and age data were reported, were living in camps.

Region	Female (%)				Male (%)				Grand total	
	0-4	5-17	18->	Total	0-4	5-17	18->	Total	%	'000
Africa	8.4	20.1	21.8	50.4	8.4	20.3	20.9	49.6	100.0	1,802.6
Asia	7.1	17.9	26.5	51.5	6.7	16.6	25.2	48.5	100.0	1,656.6
Europe	2.7	10.7	38.4	51.7	2.8	8.6	36.8	48.3	100.0	7.8
Latin Am./Carib.	9.2	21.9	18.7	49.8	9.0	22.0	19.2	50.2	100.0	24.1
Oceania	9.6	15.3	20.0	44.9	11.7	20.1	23.3	55.1	100.0	3.7
Total	7.8	19.1	24.1	50.9	7.6	18.6	22.9	49.1	100.0	3,494.8

11. If the assumption regarding the absence of adult male refugees from the camps were to be true, one would expect that the proportion of women in the age group 18 and above would be considerably higher. Again, the available data do not support this. At the aggregate level, the difference between female and male refugees aged 18 and above living in camps (a difference of 1.2 per cent) is the same as that for the entire refugee population (see Tables 1 and 2).



12. In 143 of the 165 camps (83.7 per cent), the percentage of female refugees ranged from 40 to 60. These 143 camps hosted, in total, some 97.1 per cent of the UNHCR-assisted refugee population in camps (see Table 3 and Figure 1). This means that only 2.9 per cent of the UNHCR-assisted refugee population is estimated to be living in camps where the percentage of female refugees is below 40 per cent or above 60 per cent.

Table 3. Percentage of female refugees in camps and camp population, end-1998

Percentage female	No. of camps/centers		Total camp population	
	Total	%	Total	%
0 - 20	5	3.0	25	0.0
> 20 - 30	4	2.4	1,810	0.1
> 30 - 40	10	6.1	84,800	2.4
> 40 - 50	81	49.1	1,356,600	38.8
> 50 - 60	62	37.8	2,036,800	58.3
> 60 - 70	3	1.8	14,800	0.4
> 70	0	0.0	-	0.0
Total	165	100.0	3,494,835	100.0

Refugee population structure in urban areas

13. Typically, a refugee camp population is made up of families, whereas refugees in urban areas are more often adult males. This general picture is confirmed by the available data. First, some 45.8 per cent of the 228,000 refugees assisted by UNHCR in urban areas are female. Second, there are relatively few refugee children under the age of five among the urban refugees (8.7 per cent) compared to the overall refugee population (14.2 per cent). Third, the share of adult males in the urban refugee population (38 per cent) is significantly higher than the overall proportion of adult male refugees (24.7 per cent) (see Tables 1 and 4).

14. Europe is the only region where urban refugees are predominantly female. This is due in large part to the anomaly in Croatia where 61 per cent of the UNHCR-assisted urban refugees were reported to be female. It should also be noted that the urban refugee data presented here excludes individual asylum-seekers in Western and Central Europe (see paragraph 17).

Table 4. UNHCR-assisted refugees in urban areas by gender, age and region, end-1998 (%)

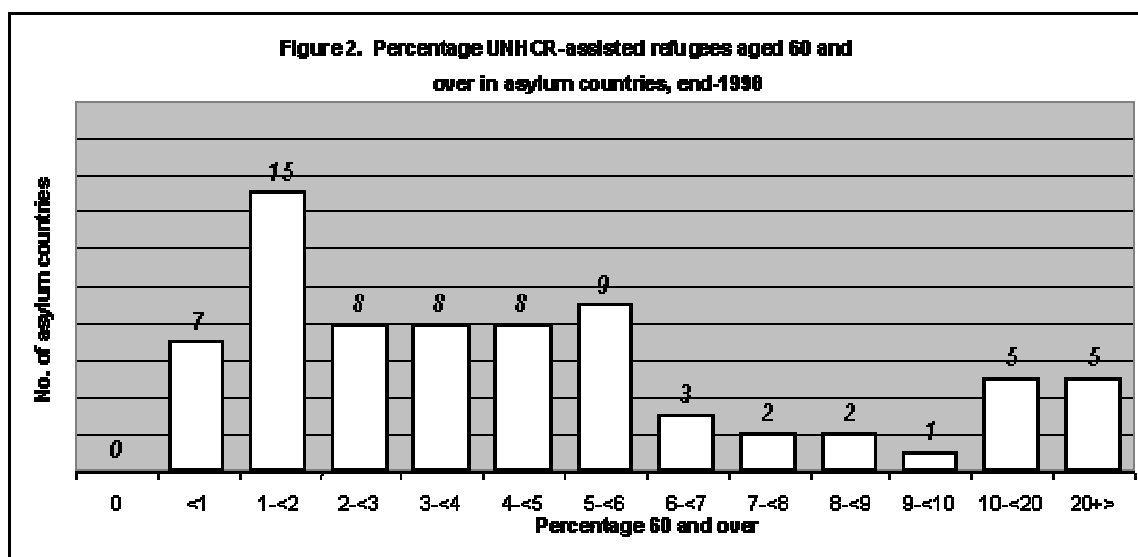
Region	Female (%)				Male (%)				Grand total	
	0-4	5-17	18->	Total	0-4	5-17	18->	Total	%	'000
	Africa	5.1	13.9	22.3	41.3	5.6	9.8	43.3	58.7	100.0
Asia	4.4	15.6	29.2	49.2	4.5	16.0	30.3	50.8	100.0	68.4
Europe	1.7	9.8	43.2	54.8	1.8	9.7	33.7	45.2	100.0	39.5
Latin Am./Carib.	2.5	8.4	25.4	36.2	2.7	9.7	51.4	63.8	100.0	7.8
Total	4.2	13.5	28.1	45.8	4.5	11.6	38.0	54.2	100.0	228.4

Older refugees

15. As the age group "60 and over" was introduced only recently, some UNHCR operations were not able to report on this category. At the end of 1998, UNHCR offices reported some 204,000 refugees aged 60 and over out of a total population of some 2.4 million (8.5 per cent). Again, global demographic tendencies are clearly reflected in the refugee data. First, some 55 per cent of older refugees are female, reflecting the higher life expectancy for women in general. Second, population ageing in the industrialized countries has reached an advanced stage; in Europe, 19.5 per cent of all refugees were reported to be 60 and over, which is quite similar to the United Nations population projection (20.3 per cent). On the contrary, only 4.2 per cent of the refugees in Africa are 60 years or older⁸. Since data on older refugees were not available for Afghan refugees in camps in Pakistan, the Asian figure (20.7 per cent) is highly influenced by Armenia, where 42 per cent of all refugees for which age data were available (238,000) were reported to be 60 years and over.

Region	60 and > in total population (%)			% female in 60 and >	Total 60 - > ('000)
	Female	Male	Total		
Africa	2.2	1.9	4.2	53.8	73.6
Asia	11.4	9.3	20.7	55.0	119.3
Europe	12.0	7.4	19.5	61.8	10.6
Latin Am./Carib.	2.1	2.0	4.0	50.8	0.9
Total	4.6	3.8	8.5	54.9	204.4

16. From the preceding analysis on the gender and age of refugees, it may be concluded that the demographic differences of refugee populations are more significant between regions than between locations (camps and urban areas) within the same region. This also applies to the older refugee population. At the global level, older refugees constitute some 4.4 per cent of the camp population, whereas they make up 6.7 per cent of the urban population assisted by UNHCR. These differences are much smaller than those reported between regions (see Table 5). Within Africa, the camp population appears to be slightly older (4.0 per cent aged 60 and above) than the urban population (3.5 per cent). Conversely, in Europe, the urban refugee population is slightly more aged (21.8 per cent aged 60 and above) than the camp population (20.7 per cent).



Asylum-seekers and refugees in industrialized countries

17. Demographic indicators concerning asylum applicants and refugees in the industrialized countries, particularly when registered by governments, are very limited, severely hampering effective programme and protection planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. From the data available, it may be concluded that whereas asylum applicants are about one-third female, the percentage of females among those who are recognized as refugees is significantly closer to 50 per cent (see Table 6).

Country	Description	Period	% female	Total ('000)
Belgium	Refugee population	1996	41.6	36.1
Canada	Asylum applicants	1989/93	36.9	147.8
Czech Rep.	Asylum applicants	1990/6	33.4	11.5
France	Refugee population	1995	41.1	129.2
Netherlands	Asylum applicants	1987/95	27.8	172.1
Sweden	Asylum applicants	1995/7	38.2	24.5
Sweden	Grants of stay	1995-1997	47.2	20.1
Switzerland	Asylum applicants	1993/6	32.6	75.9
Switzerland	Convention recognition	1993/6	47.5	11.7

Statistical priorities for the year 2000

18. To provide UNHCR's management and donor governments with more up-to-date information on the number of beneficiaries of UNHCR assistance activities, three to four trimestrial statistical summary reports will be issued during the year 2000, mainly focusing on UNHCR's largest operations (one such report was issued in mid-1999). As usual, statistical information will continue to be provided for official and ad hoc donor reporting, for public information and research purposes, to support internal management decisions, the work of the Bureaux, as well as UNHCR field protection and assistance operations.

19. Additionally, consideration is being given as to the extent key indicators on the effectiveness of selected refugee programmes and the well-being of refugees may be collected on a periodic basis. To increase the relevance and speed of submission of statistical indicators, alternative ways and tools of data collection are being explored.

20. In view of the continued interest in asylum issues in Europe, the Statistical Unit initiated monthly reporting covering more than 20 European countries. The results continue to be shared with interested donor governments and it is expected that the monthly asylum statistics reports will continue to be issued during 2000. The initial focus on Kosovo Albanian asylum-seekers will be widened to other nationalities. The current size of the Statistical Unit (two staff members) limits statistical activities to only the most basic tasks. Alternative arrangements are being explored to facilitate field data collection and reporting.

III. REFUGEE REGISTRATION: LESSONS LEARNT AND FUTURE PLANS

21. During 1999, refugee registration and verification activities continued to take place in many parts of the world. In a number of cases, regional and Headquarters assistance was provided in the form of registration materials (cards and forms), training, technical missions, computer support, etc. Moreover, all UNHCR field offices have been requested to report on progress in their registration activities as part of their Country Operations Plan. This information will serve as a basis for planning future registration support activities.

Kosovo

22. During the Kosovo emergency, providing refugees with documentation in Albania and The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia became a priority. In this context, the Microsoft corporation extended its assistance to UNHCR to develop registration field kits with the purpose of providing identity documents to refugees. As part of this private/public partnership, support was also provided to create a regional refugee registration database. Before the refugee identity cards could be issued on a large-scale, however, refugees returned en masse in June and July 1999. The Kosovo emergency has indicated, once more, that basic refugee registration is essential in providing protection and assistance to refugees, and in planning for durable solutions, but that registration is difficult to achieve during the first weeks of an emergency response.

Project "PROFILE"

23. As part of the overall change management process and the introduction of the Operations Management System (OMS), the preparation of the November 1998 Request For Proposals for the Integrated Systems Project provided UNHCR with the opportunity to examine the requirements for a "caseload management system" which would strengthen its registration capabilities. A project proposal has been developed for a global registration tool, tentatively called "PROFILE", which would allow UNHCR field staff to identify, register and manage beneficiary populations, as well as facilitate planning and implementation of durable solutions. Project PROFILE will require an extensive collaborative effort with interested agencies, particularly the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) as well as with the private sector. Among the critical factors for its success will be a review of current registration procedures, sustained inputs from key staff, support by Senior Management, and the availability of adequate funding and technical support in difficult field conditions.

24. As a first step in developing project PROFILE, it is planned to undertake a feasibility study to assess the viability of the project, its scope in terms of time, cost and infrastructure, possibilities for a modular approach, impact on UNHCR operations and partners, staffing implications, as well as a proposed structure for managing the project. The Division of Operational Support is taking the lead on the project, in consultation with other concerned units.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

25. The primary focus of UNHCR's statistical and registration activities is to ensure better programmes to provide international protection and assistance through more efficient registration procedures and enhanced programming based on disaggregated data relating to gender and age. Statistical information is crucial both to planning, implementation and monitoring the activities on behalf of refugees. The registration of refugees, in turn, is not merely a tool for identification, but also for ensuring their security and the protection of other basic human rights.

Notes

1 Refugees and Others of Concern to UNHCR: 1998 Statistical Overview, UNHCR Geneva, July 1999, Tables III.1 to III.5.

2 See: Refugee Registration and Statistics (EC/48/SC/CRP.35) for a discussion on the lack of refugee data by gender and age from the industrialized countries.

3 World Population Prospects, The 1998 Revision, Volume I, Population Division, United Nations Secretariat, New York, 1998.

4 See 1998 Statistical Overview, Table III.1 for gender and age statistics by country of asylum.

5 According to the United Nations projections, some 5.1 per cent of the population in Europe is aged 0 to 4.

6 See also previous annual Statistical Overviews.

7 In the case of Pakistan, the camp population (1.2 million refugees) was not broken down by individual camp. The total number of sites in this analysis, therefore, constitutes an underestimate.

8 United Nations population projection for Africa for 2000 (medium variant): 5.0 per cent.

9 See Refugee Registration and Statistics (EC/48/SC/CRP.35) for further details on the type of support provided.