

# 2008 Global Trends:

## Refugees, Asylum-seekers, Returnees, Internally Displaced and Stateless Persons



*Somali refugees wait to receive food rations at the Hagadera refugee camp in Dadaab, Kenya.  
UNHCR/ E. Hockstein*

16 June 2009

## 2008 IN REVIEW – STATISTICS AT A GLANCE

- There were some 42 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2008. This includes 15.2 million refugees, 827,000 asylum-seekers (pending cases) and 26 million internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Nearly 25 million people – 10.5 million refugees and 14.4 million IDPs – were receiving protection or assistance from UNHCR at the end of 2008. These numbers are similar to 2007.
- In 2008, UNHCR identified some 6.6 million stateless persons in 58 countries. The Office estimated that the overall number of stateless persons worldwide was far higher, about 12 million people.
- Some 604,000 refugees repatriated voluntarily during 2008. Repatriation figures have continued to decrease since 2004. The 2008 figure is the second-lowest in 15 years.
- More than 839,000 people submitted an individual application for asylum or refugee status in 2008. UNHCR offices registered nine per cent of those claims. More than 16,300 asylum applications were lodged by unaccompanied and separated children in 68 countries. With one quarter of applications globally, South Africa is the largest recipient of individual applications in the world.
- UNHCR presented 121,000 refugees for resettlement consideration by States. More than 67,000 refugees were resettled with UNHCR's assistance during 2008. According to Government statistics, 16 countries reported the admission of 88,800 resettled refugees during 2008 (with or without UNHCR assistance). The United States of America accepted the highest number (60,200 during its Fiscal Year).
- Women and girls represent on average 49 per cent of persons of concern to UNHCR. They constitute 47 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers, and half of all IDPs and returnees (refugees). Forty-four per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers are children below 18 years of age.
- Developing countries are host to four fifths of the world's refugees. Based on the data available for 8.8 million refugees, UNHCR estimates that half of the world's refugees reside in urban areas and one third in camps. However, seven out of ten refugees in sub-Saharan Africa reside in camps.
- Pakistan is host to the largest number of refugees worldwide (1.8 million), followed by the Syrian Arab Republic (1.1 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (980,000).
- Afghan and Iraqi refugees account for almost half of all refugees under UNHCR's responsibility worldwide. One out of four refugees in the world is from Afghanistan (2.8 million) and Afghans are located in 69 different asylum countries. Iraqis are the second largest refugee group, with 1.9 million having sought refuge mainly in neighbouring countries.
- Pakistan hosted the largest number of refugees in relation to its economic capacity. The country hosted 733 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita. It was followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (496 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita) and the United Republic of Tanzania (262). The first developed country is Germany at 26<sup>th</sup> place with 16 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita.

## I. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Forced population displacement has grown in size and complexity in recent years, and the *2008 Global Trends* report reflects many of the major humanitarian developments between January and December 2008. The report analyses the statistical trends and changes in the global populations for whom UNHCR has been entrusted with a responsibility by the United Nations General Assembly. These include refugees, returnees, stateless persons and certain groups of internally displaced persons (IDPs), collectively referred to in this report as “persons of concern”.

The outbreak, renewal and prolongation of armed conflict had a negative impact on peace, stability and security in many regions of the world during 2008, often resulting in the movement of people within and outside their home countries. While millions were newly displaced during the past year, millions of others were able to return home or found another durable solution.

Despite UNHCR’s efforts to find durable solutions during 2008, the total number of refugees and IDPs under its care remained high at roughly 25 million, almost unchanged compared to 2007, and together accounted for about three quarters of all people falling under the UNHCR mandate.

Available information suggests

there were 42 million forcibly displaced people worldwide at the end of 2008.<sup>2</sup> This figure includes 15.2 million refugees, of whom 10.5 million fall under UNHCR’s mandate and some 4.7 million Palestinian refugees under the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). The total number of people displaced within their country as a result of armed conflict is estimated at 26 million<sup>3</sup>, of whom just over half are protected or assisted by UNHCR. The number of people whose asylum applications had not yet been adjudicated by the end of the reporting period was estimated at 827,000.

Throughout the year, the Office extended the full range of its protection and assistance activities to refugees. At the same time, UNHCR, as a committed partner in the framework of shared responsibility established under the inter-agency cluster approach<sup>4</sup>, continued to expand the protection and assistance provided to internally displaced persons.

The 2008 statistics suggest that the large-scale repatriation movements observed in the past have decelerated. Return figures have continuously dropped since 2004 and current levels are among the lowest in decades. However, UNHCR’s efforts for securing alternative solutions such as resettlement are gaining new ground.

Category of displaced population	2007 (in mln)		2008 (in mln)	
	Total	Protected/ assisted by UNHCR	Total	Protected/ assisted by UNHCR
Refugees under UNHCR mandate	11.4	11.4	10.5	10.5
Refugees under UNRWA mandate	4.6	-	4.7	-
<b>Total number of refugees</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>11.4</b>	<b>15.2</b>	<b>10.5</b>
Asylum-seekers (pending cases)	0.7	0.1	0.8	0.2
Conflict-generated IDPs	26.0	13.7	26.0	14.4
<b>Total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs</b>	<b>42.7</b>	<b>25.2</b>	<b>42.0</b>	<b>25.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> This report has been prepared by the Field Information and Coordination Support Section (FICSS), Division of Operational Services at UNHCR Headquarters in Geneva. Any questions concerning the report should be addressed to FICSS at [stats@unhcr.org](mailto:stats@unhcr.org). Visit also UNHCR’s Statistical Online Population Database at <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that there are an additional 25 million people who have been displaced due to natural disasters. See *Forced Migration Review* #20, <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR20/FMR2021.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

<sup>4</sup> In December 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee endorsed the *Cluster Approach* for situations of internal displacement. Under this arrangement, UNHCR assumes leadership responsibility and accountability for three of the nine “clusters”, namely: protection; emergency shelter; and camp coordination and camp management.

The absence of a solution for millions of refugees in protracted situations<sup>5</sup> continues to pose a major challenge to UNHCR and its partners, to host countries, the refugees themselves and the international community at large. UNHCR estimates that there are currently more than 5.7 million refugees trapped in protracted situations and for whom there is limited hope of finding a solution in the near future.

The analysis of the refugee data reveals a few major patterns. First, four out of five refugees reside in developing countries. Second, more than three quarters of the world's refugees seek asylum in neighbouring countries or the immediate region. Third, available information indicates that one out of two refugees is living in an urban area.<sup>6</sup>

Some 6.6 million stateless persons were identified by UNHCR in 2008. This figure is more than double the figure of 2007. For the most part, this is not due to new situations of statelessness but, rather, the result of improved data availability. It also does not capture the full magnitude of the phenomenon of statelessness - a significant number of stateless people have not been identified and statistical data on statelessness is not yet available in many cases.

### Who are included in the statistics?

Over the past two years UNHCR undertook an internal review of statistical classifications and definitions in an effort to render its statistics more consistent across countries and categories. One of the main goals of this review was to evaluate its main statistical instruments and reporting processes. This process has been successfully completed in the course of 2008. As a consequence, the 2008 statistics analysed in this report are comparable with figures reported in 2007.<sup>7</sup>

This report is limited to populations for whom UNHCR has a mandate and does not provide a comprehensive picture of global forced displacement. The 4.7 million Palestinian refugees who fall under the mandate of UNRWA are not included in the subsequent analysis. Likewise, the report only covers IDPs who benefited directly or indirectly from UNHCR's protection and assistance activities.



*Newly arrived Somali refugees in Ifo camp, Dadaab, Kenya.  
UNHCR/ E. Hockstein*

Even though global migration poses a challenge for asylum and refugee management, this report does not address mixed migration flows. The main reason is the lack of reliable statistical data that would be required for an evidence-based analysis of this phenomenon.<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the report covers the period 1 January 2008 – 31 December 2008 and does not refer to events occurring after 31 December 2008.

The statistics in this report have for the most part been reported by UNHCR country offices, based on Government sources, non-governmental organizations and UNHCR's registration systems. The numbers have been rounded off to the closest hundredth or thousandth. As some minor adjustments may need to be made for the publication of the *2008 Statistical Yearbook*, to

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<sup>5</sup> See page 7 for definition of protracted refugee situation.

<sup>6</sup> Information on the location is available for 8.8 million out of the 10.5 million refugees at the end of 2008.

<sup>7</sup> For more details on the statistical changes introduced, see *2007 Statistical Yearbook*, pp. 11-22, UNHCR, Geneva.

<sup>8</sup> As part of UNHCR's 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.

be published later this year, they should be considered as provisional and may be subject to change.

UNHCR identifies seven population categories, collectively referred to as “persons of concern to UNHCR”. This includes: (a) refugees; (b) asylum-seekers; (c) IDPs; (d) refugees who have returned home (returnees); (e) IDPs who have returned home; (f) stateless persons; and (g) other people who do not fall under any of the above categories but to whom the Office extends its protection and/or assistance activities. In 2007, two additional sub-categories were introduced: (1) people in refugee-like situations (included under refugees); and (2) people in IDP-like situations (included under IDPs).

**Refugees** include individuals 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; individuals granted complementary forms of protection<sup>9</sup>; or, those enjoying “temporary protection”<sup>10</sup>. The refugee population includes people in a refugee-like situation.<sup>11</sup>

**Asylum-seekers** are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. Those covered in this report refer to claimants whose individual applications were pending at the end of 2008, irrespective of when they may have been lodged.

**Internally displaced persons** are people or groups of individuals who have been forced 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>12</sup> For purposes of UNHCR’s statistics, this population only includes conflict-generated IDPs to whom the Office extends protection and/or assistance. The IDP population includes people in an IDP-like situation.<sup>13</sup>

**Returned refugees (returnees)** refer to refugees who have returned voluntarily to their country of origin or habitual residence. For purposes of this report, only refugees who returned between January and December 2008 are included. However, in practice, operations may assist returnees for longer periods.

**Returned IDPs** refer to those IDPs who were beneficiaries of UNHCR’s protection and assistance activities and who returned to their areas of origin or habitual residence between January and December 2008. However, in practice, operations may assist IDP returnees for longer periods.

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<sup>9</sup> Complementary protection refers to protection provided under national or regional law in countries which do not grant 1951 Convention refugee status to people who are in need of international protection against serious, but indiscriminate risks.

<sup>10</sup> Temporary protection refers to arrangements developed by States to offer protection of a temporary nature to people arriving from situations of conflict or generalized violence without the necessity for formal or individual status determination. This usually applies to situations of large-scale influx.

<sup>11</sup> This sub-category is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin and who face protection risks similar to refugees, but for whom refugee status has, for practical or other reasons, not been ascertained.

<sup>12</sup> See: Addendum *Guiding principles on Internal Displacement* to the *Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission (on Human Rights) Resolution 1997/39*, United Nations, 1998, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add2.

<sup>13</sup> This sub-category is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are inside their country of nationality or habitual residence and who face protection risks similar to IDPs but who, for practical or other reasons, could not be reported as such.



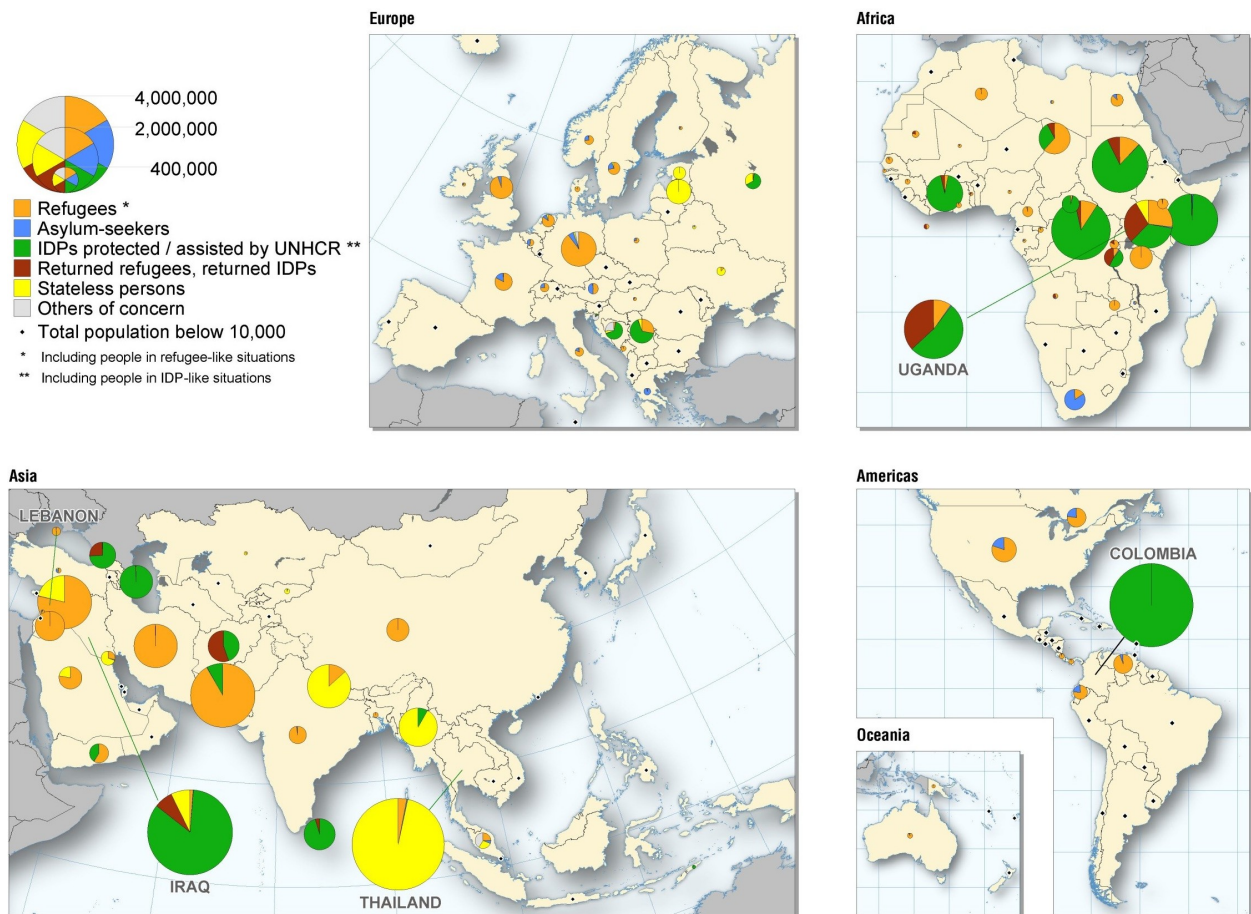
**Stateless persons** are individuals not considered as nationals by any State under national laws or who formally possess a nationality but where it is ineffective. The statistics in this report on statelessness also include people with undetermined nationality. UNHCR has been called upon by the General Assembly to contribute to the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. UNHCR’s Executive Committee has requested the Office to report regularly on the magnitude of the phenomenon. The Office also has specific functions under Article 11 of the *1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness* to receive claims from persons who may benefit from the safeguards contained in that Convention and to assist them and the States concerned to resolve those claims.

**Other groups or people of concern** refers to individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of the groups above but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds.

## II. Overview of global trends

By the end of 2008, the total population under UNHCR’s responsibility stood at 34.4 million. This figure reflects new displacement, durable solutions found, improved availability of data, revised estimates, as well as legal and demographic changes. The analysis in this report is limited to the individual population groups.

**Map 1: Total population by category, end-2008**

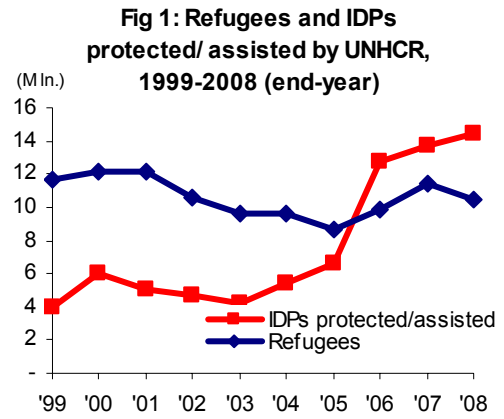


By the end of 2008, there were an estimated 10.5 million refugees under UNHCR’s responsibility, including some 1.4 million people in refugee-like situations.<sup>14</sup> The number of

<sup>14</sup> Ninety-five per cent of the 1.4 million people in a refugee-like situation are located in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ecuador and Pakistan.

IDPs protected and/or assisted by UNHCR was the highest on record. A total of 14.4 million IDPs, including 51,000 people in IDP-like situations, were receiving humanitarian assistance under arrangements in which UNHCR was either a lead agency or a key partner.

More than 1.3 million IDPs were able to return home during the year. In addition, some 604,000 refugees repatriated voluntarily during 2008, the lowest level since 2001. The asylum-seeker population, that is people whose asylum applications had not yet been adjudicated by the end of the reporting period, increased to 827,000. During 2008, UNHCR identified some 6.6 million stateless persons in 58 countries but estimated the total number of stateless persons worldwide at almost double that number, 12 million people.<sup>15</sup>



### III. Refugee population

In 2008, the refugee population under UNHCR’s mandate dropped for the first time since 2006. The decrease arose from two main sources. First, a number of refugees found a durable solution during the year, in particular through voluntary repatriation. Second, estimates for the Colombian and Iraqi refugee populations in Ecuador and the Syrian Arab Republic respectively were revised downwards (-32%). This constitutes a decrease of almost one million refugees compared to the year earlier (11.4 million).

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

**Most refugees remain within “their” region of origin**

The available statistical evidence demonstrates that most refugees remain in their region of origin and flee to neighbouring countries. Indeed, the major refugee-generating regions hosted on average between 75 and 91 per cent of refugees within the region. UNHCR estimates that some 1.7 million refugees (16% out of the total of 10.5 million) live outside their region of origin.

Table 1 (below) shows that one third of all refugees were residing in countries covered by UNHCR’s Asia and Pacific region, with three quarters of them being Afghans. The Middle East and North Africa region was host to about one fifth (22%) of all refugees (primarily from Iraq) while Africa (excluding North Africa) and Europe hosted respectively 20 and 15 per cent of the world’s refugees. The Americas region had the smallest share of refugees (8%), with Colombians constituting the largest number.

**Protracted refugee situations**

UNHCR defines a protracted refugee situation as one in which 25,000 or more refugees of the same nationality have been in exile for five years or more in a given asylum country. Based on this definition, it is estimated that some 5.7 million were in a protracted situation. These refugees were living in 22 different countries accounting for 29 protracted situations in total.

The decrease in the number of refugees was observed in almost all major regions, but mostly felt in the Americas (-19%) and the Middle East and North Africa (-14%). Both decreases, however, were primarily the result of revised estimates rather than population movements. In the Americas, the number of Colombians in Ecuador assessed to be in a refugee-like situation was adjusted from 250,000 to

82,300 following a comprehensive survey carried out by the Government and UNHCR. This survey was undertaken to determine the magnitude and the profile of the Colombian population

<sup>15</sup> Refugees and asylum-seekers who are at the same time also stateless persons are not included in this figure. They are reflected in the figures relating to the refugee and asylum-seeker groups concerned.

and assess the main protection gaps.<sup>16</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa region, the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic revised its estimate of Iraqi refugees from 1.5 to 1.1 million based on the presumption that a number of Iraqis have left the country either to return to Iraq or move onward to other countries.

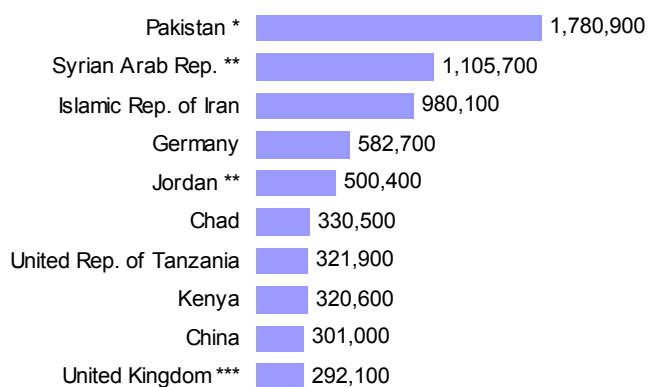
**Table 1. Refugee population by UNHCR regions, 2008**

UNHCR regions	Start-2008			End-2008			Change (total)	
	Refugees	People in refugee-like situations	Total refugees	Refugees	People in refugee-like situations	Total refugees	Absolute	%
- Central Africa and Great Lakes	1,086,200	15,000	1,101,200	978,200	27,800	1,006,000	-95,200	-8.6%
- East and Horn of Africa	815,200	-	815,200	763,900	-	763,900	-51,300	-6.3%
- Southern Africa	181,000	-	181,000	161,100	-	161,100	-19,900	-11.0%
- West Africa	174,700	-	174,700	175,300	-	175,300	600	0.3%
<b>Total Africa*</b>	<b>2,257,100</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>2,272,100</b>	<b>2,078,500</b>	<b>27,800</b>	<b>2,106,300</b>	<b>-165,800</b>	<b>-7.3%</b>
Americas	499,400	487,600	987,000	500,000	303,500	803,500	-183,500	-18.6%
Asia and Pacific	2,674,200	1,151,000	3,825,200	2,577,800	1,018,300	3,596,100	-229,100	-6.0%
Europe	1,580,700	5,500	1,586,200	1,616,000	5,700	1,621,700	35,500	2.2%
Middle East and North Africa	2,654,000	67,600	2,721,600	2,278,200	72,800	2,351,000	-370,600	-13.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,665,400</b>	<b>1,726,700</b>	<b>11,392,100</b>	<b>9,050,500</b>	<b>1,428,100</b>	<b>10,478,600</b>	<b>-913,500</b>	<b>-8.0%</b>

\* Excluding North Africa.

In Africa (excluding North Africa), the number of refugees continued to decline for the eighth consecutive year. By the end of 2008, there were 2.1 million refugees compared to more than 3.4 million in 2000. The refugee population decreased by 7 per cent between the start and end of 2008, primarily due to successful voluntary repatriation operations to Burundi (95,400), South Sudan (90,100), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (54,000) and Angola (13,100). Unfortunately, renewed armed conflict and human rights violations in the Central African Republic, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia and Sudan also led to refugee outflows of almost 210,000 people, primarily to Kenya (65,000 new arrivals), Uganda (49,500), Cameroon (25,700), and Chad (17,900).

**Fig 2: Major refugee hosting countries, end-2008**



\* Includes Afghans in a refugee-like situation.

\*\* Government estimate.

\*\*\* UNHCR estimate.

In the Asia and Pacific region, the total number of refugees and people in a refugee-like situation was estimated at 3.4 million at the end of 2008. This is a decrease of 6 per cent during the year mainly due to the voluntary repatriation of more than 274,000 Afghans from Pakistan. In contrast to the other regions, in Europe the refugee population increased slightly (+2%). This raise can partly be attributed to the figures from Montenegro in which 16,000 people from Kosovo (Serbia), previously reported as IDPs, were reclassified as refugees.

The five major refugee hosting countries in 2008 were the same as those in 2007. Together, these countries accounted for almost half (47%) of all refugees under the UNHCR mandate. Pakistan was again the country with the largest number of refugees (1.8 million), virtually all from Afghanistan.<sup>17</sup> This is a decrease of quarter of a million people over 2007 as a result of the

<sup>16</sup> See 2007 Statistical Yearbook, *Best practice in data collection: the case of Ecuador*, p.20, UNHCR, Geneva.

<sup>17</sup> Refugee figures for Pakistan include 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 upon return reintegration support.

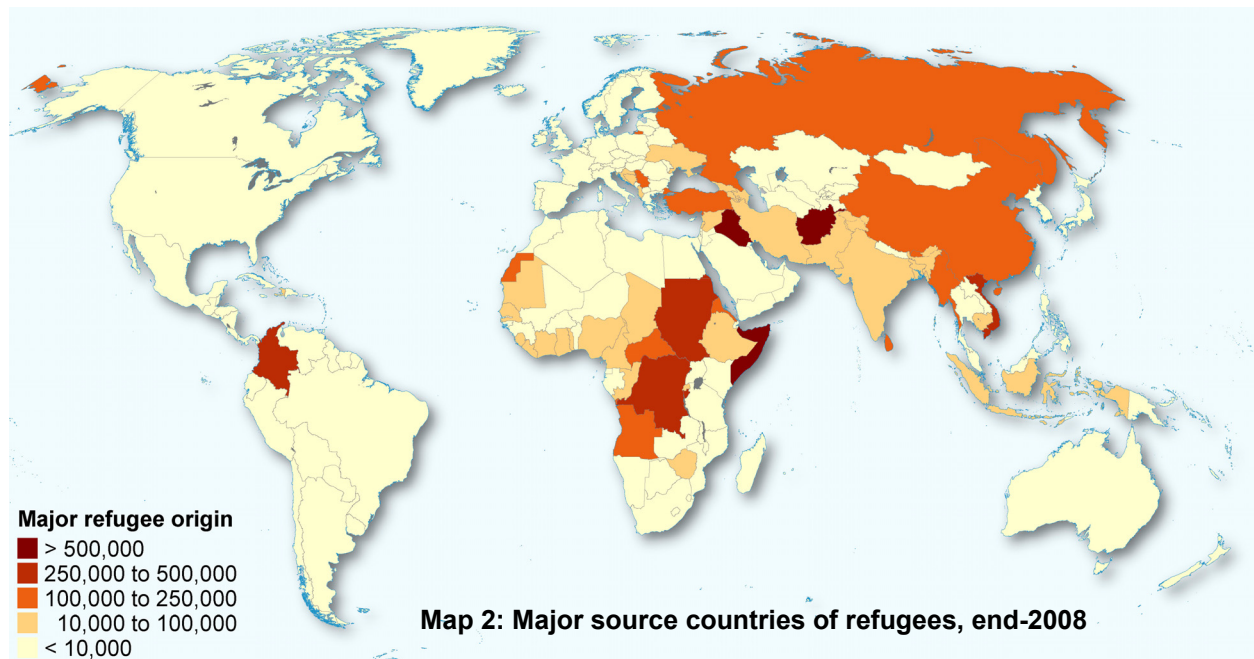


continuing repatriation of Afghans. According to the revised Government estimates, the Syrian Arab Republic was host to 1.1 million Iraqi refugees, making it the second largest refugee hosting country at year end. The Islamic Republic of Iran hosted 980,000 refugees, almost all Afghans, while Germany and Jordan<sup>18</sup> reported some 583,000 and 500,000 refugees, respectively. In all three countries, estimates remained fairly stable with changes not exceeding the two per cent from the previous year. Chad was the sixth largest hosting country at the end of 2008 with more than 330,000 refugees. The figure increased by 35,000 during the year (+12%), mainly as a result of new arrivals from the Central African Republic and Sudan. In the United Republic of Tanzania, the refugee population dropped to 322,000 (-26%) due to the voluntary repatriation of 95,000 Burundian and 15,600 Congolese refugees. Figures in the United Republic of Tanzania have more than halved since 2002 when the country was host to close to 700,000 refugees. On the other hand, Kenya witnessed a substantial increase during 2008 with the arrival of 65,000 Somali refugees. The country's refugee population stood at more than 320,000 by the end of the year (+21%).



*Influx of Congolese refugees from the DRC into Uganda. UNHCR/ J. Akena*

Afghanistan has been the leading country of origin of refugees for the past three decades with up to 6.4 million of its citizens having sought international protection during peak years. As of the end of 2008, there were still more than 2.8 million Afghan refugees. In other words, one out of four refugees in the world is from Afghanistan. Even though Afghan refugees were to be found in 69 asylum countries worldwide, 96 per cent of them were located in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran alone. Iraqis were the second largest group, with 1.9 million having sought refuge mainly in neighbouring countries. Afghan and Iraqi refugees account for almost half (45%) of all refugees under UNHCR's responsibility worldwide.



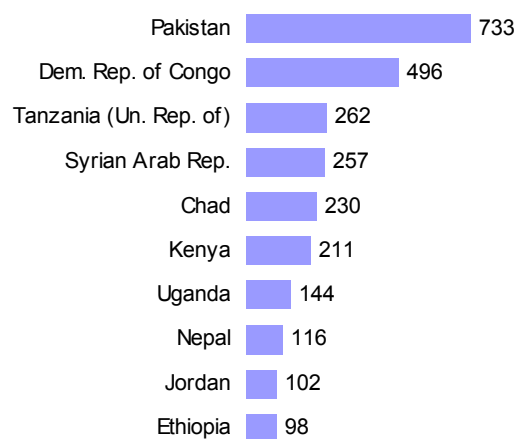
<sup>18</sup> Number of Iraqis in Jordan estimated by the Government.

Somali and Sudanese refugees constitute the third and fourth largest refugee group under UNHCR’s responsibility with 561,000 and 419,000 respectively. The trends, however, are moving into two opposite directions for these two groups. While the number of Somali refugees has gone up by 23 per cent due to the deteriorating political situation in the country, the number of Sudanese refugees has dropped by 20 per cent because of successful repatriation operations to Southern Sudan. Other main source countries of refugees were Colombia (374,000)<sup>19</sup> and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (368,000) (see Map 2 above).

### Capacities and contributions of host countries

It is generally understood that countries with strong economies are more likely to be capable of absorbing refugees. By comparing the refugee population with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (PPP)<sup>20</sup> per capita<sup>21</sup> of a country, a measure can be obtained of the relative impact of hosting refugees. If the number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita is high, the relative contribution and effort made by countries compared to the national economy can be considered as high. Among the 25 countries with the highest number of refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita, all are developing countries, including 15 Least Developed Countries.

Fig 3: Number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita, 2008



At the end of 2008, Pakistan was hosting the highest number of refugees compared to its national economy. As such, it hosted 733 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was second with 496 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita, followed by the United Republic of Tanzania (262), the Syrian Arab Republic (257), and Chad (230). The first developed country is Germany at 26<sup>th</sup> place with 16 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita.

## IV. Durable solutions

Millions of refugees around the world continue to live with little hope of finding a solution to their plight. Finding durable solutions is part of UNHCR’s core mandate. Solutions can take three different forms: (i) voluntary repatriation to the home country; (ii) resettlement in another country; or (iii) finding appropriate permanent integration mechanisms in the country of asylum. Voluntary repatriation is the durable solution which has historically benefited the largest number of refugees. Resettlement is a key protection tool and a significant burden- and responsibility-sharing mechanism. Local integration is a complex and gradual process and comprises distinct but inter-related legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions. It is, however, difficult to quantify in numerical terms given the large variety of forms it can take. The analysis of data on local integration is therefore limited to integration through naturalization of refugees by the host country.

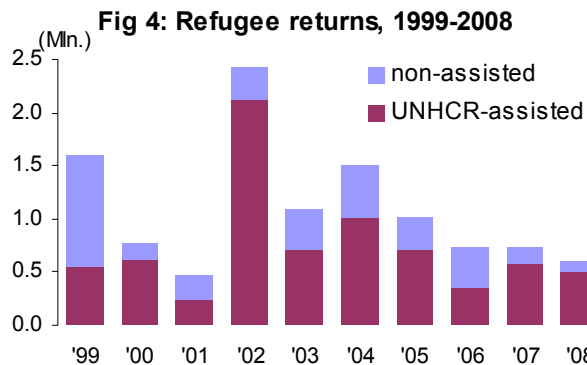
<sup>19</sup> This figure includes refugees as well people in a refugee-like situation in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Ecuador and other countries in the region.

<sup>20</sup> Source for Gross Domestic Product (Purchasing Power Parity): International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2009 (accessed 30 April 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Source for national population: United Nations, Population Division, "World Population Prospects: The 2008 Revision", New York, 2009.

## Voluntary repatriation

Based on consolidated reports from countries of asylum (departure) and origin (arrival), it is estimated that close to 604,000 refugees repatriated voluntarily during 2008, 17 per cent less than in 2007 (731,000). Repatriation figures have continuously decreased since 2004 with 2008 figures being the second-lowest out of the past 15 years. Only in 2001 was the number of returns lower (462,000). This is an indication that the large-scale repatriation movements observed in the past have decelerated. Globally, an estimated 11 million refugees have returned home over the past 10 years; 7.5 million, or 68 per cent, of them with UNHCR assistance.



The main countries of return in 2008 included Afghanistan (278,500), Burundi (95,400), Sudan (90,100), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (54,000), Iraq (25,600), and Angola (13,100). The largest number of refugee departures was reported by Pakistan (274,200), the United Republic of Tanzania (110,800), and Uganda (66,800).

Afghanistan continued to be the main country of return with 278,500 registered returns during the year. More than 5 million Afghan refugees – or one fifth of Afghanistan’s population – have returned home since 2002. The large majority has gone back to their areas of origin, but recent returnees face more difficulties as the country’s absorption capacity reaches its limit. Thousands of returnees have been unable to return to their villages due to insecurity and a lack of land, shelter, basic services or job opportunities. These challenges have been compounded by a food crisis and severe drought.



*Afghan boys and girls who have returned from Pakistan are attending classes in Qalinfaban. UNHCR/ E. Hockstein*

UNHCR’s repatriation operation for Burundian refugees living in the United Republic of Tanzania, began in 2002, reached the 300,000 mark in March 2008. As a consequence, the refugee population in the camps in north-western Tanzania in March fell below the 200,000 mark for the first time in 15 years. In total, more than 477,000 Burundian refugees, including spontaneous returnees, were able to return home between 2002 and 2008, 96 per cent of them from the United Republic of Tanzania only.

## Resettlement

Resettlement is a vital protection tool and an international responsibility-sharing mechanism, but also can be a key element in comprehensive solution strategies. It aims to provide protection to refugees whose life, liberty, safety, health or other fundamental human rights are at risk in their country of asylum.

Comparatively, resettlement benefits a small number of refugees; in 2008, less than 1 per cent of the world’s refugees directly benefited from resettlement. During the past 10 years, some 807,000 refugees were resettled, compared to 11 million refugees who were able to repatriate. Thus, for every refugee who has been resettled since 1999, about 14 have repatriated. However,

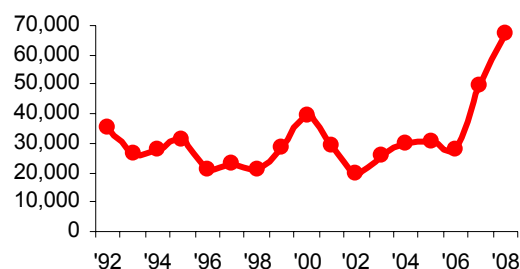
in recent years resettlement has been vital in resolving some protracted refugees situations around the world, including creating protection space and opening up solutions that may have remained closed otherwise.

During 2008, a total of 88,800 refugees were admitted by 16 resettlement countries, including the United States of America (60,200)<sup>22</sup>, Australia (11,000), Canada (10,800), Sweden (2,200), and Finland (750). Overall, this was 18 per cent above the total for 2007 (75,300) and the highest value since 2001 (92,100). Over the last few years, States in Latin America have emerged as new resettlement countries, albeit at a lower scale, offering a durable solution for refugees primarily from Colombia.

In 2008, UNHCR submitted more than 121,000 individual refugees for resettlement consideration by States, the highest number of the past 15 years and 22 per cent above the 2007 level (99,000). The figures were boosted by a major resettlement operation for Iraqis, especially in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Turkey, and for refugees from Bhutan in Nepal. The significant increase in the number of submissions over previous years reflects the improving ability of UNHCR to identify refugees in need of this solution, and a more conscious and strategic use of resettlement for durable solutions and protection purposes.

During the year, more than 67,000 individuals departed with UNHCR assistance, 17,000 more than the year before. This is the highest number since the early 1990s. By nationality, the main beneficiaries of the UNHCR-facilitated resettlement programmes in 2008 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).

**Fig 5: UNHCR-assisted resettlement departures of refugees, 1993-2008**



Some 85 UNHCR country offices were engaged in facilitating resettlement during 2008. The largest number of refugees who were resettled with UNHCR assistance departed from Thailand (16,800), Nepal (8,200), the Syrian Arab Republic (7,300), Jordan (6,700), and Malaysia (5,900). These five UNHCR offices together accounted for 7 out of every 10 resettlement departure assisted by the organization in 2008.

### Local integration

The degree and nature of local integration are difficult to measure in quantitative terms, though this is the final and crucial step towards obtaining the full protection of the asylum country. In those cases where refugees acquire the citizenship through naturalization, statistical data is often very limited, as the countries concerned generally do not distinguish between refugees and others who have been naturalized. Moreover, national laws in many countries do not permit refugees to be naturalized. Therefore, the naturalization of refugees is both restricted and under-reported.

The limited data on naturalization of refugees available to UNHCR show that during the past decade more than 1.1 million refugees were granted citizenship by their asylum country. The United States of America alone accounted for two thirds of them, even though their 2008 numbers are not yet available. Azerbaijan and Armenia also granted citizenship to a significant number of refugees during the same period (188,400 and 65,800 respectively). For 2008, UNHCR was informed of refugees being granted citizenship in Belgium (4,200), Ireland (1,000), Armenia (730), and the United Republic of Tanzania (490).

<sup>22</sup> Data for the United States of America refers to US Fiscal Year (1 October – 30 September) and may include people resettled for the purpose of family reunification.



## V. Age and sex characteristics

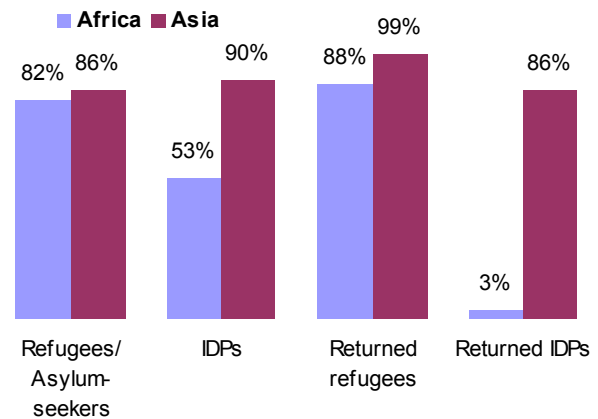
Among UNHCR's priorities are the development and application of policies to protect refugee children and ensure gender equality. Wars, conflict and related crisis situations have different impacts on women, girls, boys and men who face different risks and have different needs. UNHCR and its partners work towards ensuring that every person of concern, especially those most at risk, are properly identified and provided with appropriate assistance and protection. In order to monitor protection gaps and needs of those groups, UNHCR offices are encouraged to collect and provide sex and age-disaggregated information on persons of concern.

Although the available demographic information on persons of concern to UNHCR is still partial and tends to be variable across countries and population categories, the recent years have witnessed improved demographic data coverage. In absolute terms, the availability of sex and age-disaggregated data for persons of concern to the Office has almost doubled since 2005, increasing from 11 million to 21 million at the end of 2008. During the same period, the number of countries for which full or partial demographic data is available has gone up from 124 to 138. Much of this improvement is due to improvements in registration procedures and the ongoing roll-out of UNHCR's registration software *proGres*.<sup>23</sup>

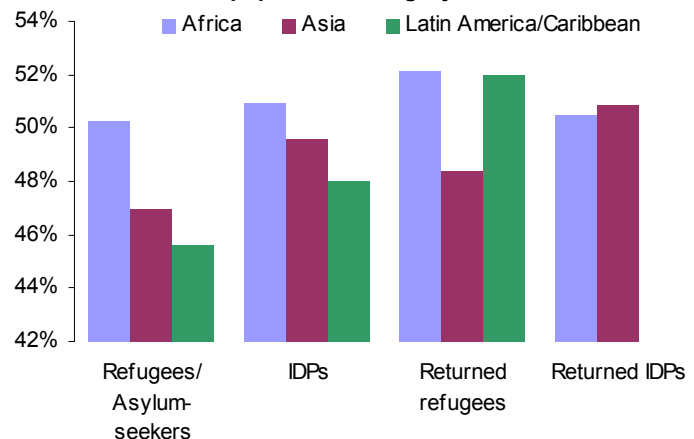
Data on the sex breakdown is now available for 62 per cent of all persons of concern while information on age for 42 per cent. These averages, however, hide the fact that for certain population groups and certain regions the availability of demographic data is considerably higher than for others. For instance, for refugees/asylum-seekers, IDPs and returned refugees it is available for at least three quarters. In contrast, the data coverage for returned IDPs is less than one quarter. These values tend to be much higher in developing countries, especially where UNHCR is operationally active. This is particularly true for most major population groups in Africa and Asia which can be considered as quite comprehensively covered.

The available data suggest that women and girls represent some 49 per cent of persons of concern (excluding stateless persons). They constitute 47 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers, 50 per cent of IDPs and returned refugees as well as 51 per cent<sup>24</sup> of those IDPs who have returned home during 2008. By region, women and girls represent in general half or more of persons of concern in Africa. In contrast, in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean they represent half or less of persons of concern in most of the population categories.

**Fig 6: Demographic data coverage by region and population category, end-2008**



**Fig 7: Percentage of women by region and selected population category, end-2008**



<sup>23</sup> The software has been rolled out to 72 countries by the end of 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Based on only 23 per cent data coverage for this category.

At the end of 2008, information by age was available for 14.3 million or 42 per cent of all persons of concern to UNHCR. The limited information shows that children below the age of 18 represent 44 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers and 43 per cent of IDPs. For returned refugees and IDPs, the proportion is higher with 58 and 56 per cent, respectively. Children below the age of five constitute on average one out of ten of refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. School-aged children (5-17 years) represent on average one third of refugees and asylum-seekers, IDPs and returned IDPs as well as 40 per cent of returned refugees. Among all age groups for children, boys and girls are equally distributed.

The share of elderly persons ranges between two and six per cent depending of the population category. Adults between 18 and 59 years constitute the majority of refugees and asylum-seekers (51%) and IDPs (52%) but only 38 per cent of returned refugees. The available data suggest that refugees and IDPs tend to be older than returnees. The fact that almost six out of 10 returnees are children below the age of 18 has strong implications with respect to the planning for sustainable returns, especially in relation to the necessary investments required in education, nutrition and health.

**Table 2: Sex and age breakdown of selected population groups, end-2008**

Category*	Female					Male				
	0-4	5-11	12-17	18-59	60+	0-4	5-11	12-17	18-59	60+
Refugees/ asylum-seekers	5%	9%	7%	24%	2%	5%	10%	8%	27%	2%
IDPs	5%	9%	7%	26%	3%	5%	10%	7%	26%	3%
Returned refugees	9%	12%	7%	19%	2%	9%	13%	8%	19%	2%
Returned IDPs	11%	13%	6%	25%	1%	10%	10%	6%	17%	1%

\* Excludes stateless persons and Others of concern due to lack of data.

## VI. Asylum-seekers

An asylum-seeker is an individual who has sought international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. It is important to note, however, that a person is a refugee from the moment he/she fulfils the criteria set out the *1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. The formal recognition of someone, for instance through individual refugee status determination (RSD), does not establish refugee status, but confirms it.

As part of its obligation to protect refugees on its territory, the country of asylum is normally responsible for determining whether an asylum-seeker is a refugee or not. The responsibility is often incorporated into the national legislation of the country and is in most cases derived from the 1951 Convention.

The following sections present some of the main trends related to asylum applications which have been lodged on an individual basis. They do not include mass refugee inflows nor do they make reference to people who have been accorded refugee status on a group or *prima facie* basis.<sup>25</sup>

During 2008, at least 839,000<sup>26</sup> individual applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to Governments or UNHCR offices in

**Table 3: New and appeal applications received**

	2005	2006	2007	2008*
State**	586,500	499,000	548,000	729,400
UNHCR	89,300	91,500	79,800	73,400
Jointly***	7,900	23,800	26,000	36,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>683,700</b>	<b>614,300</b>	<b>653,800</b>	<b>838,900</b>
% UNHCR only	13%	15%	12%	9%

\* Incomplete data.

\*\* Includes revised estimates.

\*\*\* Refers to refugee status determination conducted jointly between UNHCR and the Government.

<sup>25</sup> The decision not to record in asylum statistics people who were granted refugee status under UNHCR's mandate on a *prima facie* basis has been made to allow a direct comparison between State and UNHCR-conducted refugee status determination procedures. However, it should be noted that RSD procedures that provide for refugee status recognition on a *prima facie* basis generally go beyond the mere registration of applicants and usually involve in-depth screening and interviewing to establish the nationality of the applicants, the absence of exclusion triggers and identification of specific protection needs.

<sup>26</sup> Owing to the fact that some European countries have not yet released all their national asylum data at the time of writing, this figure is likely to be revised upwards later this year.

154 countries. This constitutes a 28 per cent increase compared to the previous year (653,800 claims) and the second consecutive annual raise. Two main reasons explain this trend. The first is the dramatic number of asylum applications in South Africa (more than 207,000); and second, the significantly higher number of certain populations seeking international protection during the year, in particular Afghans, Eritreans, Somalis, and Zimbabweans. When excluding South Africa from the analysis, the global increase in 2008 would have been only four per cent. Out of the provisional total of 839,000 asylum claims, an estimated 768,600 were initial applications<sup>27</sup> lodged in first instance procedures whereas the remaining 70,300 claims were submitted on appeal or with courts.<sup>28</sup>

UNHCR offices registered some 73,400 applications, or almost one out of ten out of the total of 839,000 claims in 2008. This number has decreased compared to 2007 (79,800 claims<sup>29</sup>). The Office's share in the global number of applications registered stood at 9 per cent in 2008 compared to 15 per cent in 2006 and 12 per cent in 2007. This drop is primarily due to the increase in applications received by States which are taking responsibility for refugee status determination.

With a total of 333,000 asylum claims registered during the year, Europe remained the primary destination for individual asylum-seekers, followed closely by Africa (320,200).<sup>30</sup> The Americas and Asia recorded 109,300 and 68,700 respectively while Oceania received 7,700 asylum-seekers.<sup>31</sup> These figures include applicants who have been unsuccessful at first instance and subsequently filed an appeal.



*A man with a small child crosses under a barbed wire fence on the Zimbabwe-South Africa border near Belt Bridge.  
UNHCR/ J. Oatway*

### New individual asylum applications received

With more than 207,000 asylum claims registered in 2008, or roughly one quarter of individual applications globally, South Africa was the main destination for new asylum-seekers worldwide.<sup>32</sup> The figure has more than quadrupled compared to 2007 when 45,600 individuals had sought international protection. Zimbabweans accounted for more than half of all claims submitted in 2008 (112,000 applications). With a cumulative total of more than 458,000 individual asylum applications since 2002, South Africa has rapidly evolved into one of the largest recipients of asylum-seekers in the world. In contrast, the number of new asylum claims lodged in the United States of America has remained fairly stable in recent years. The United States of America received only one quarter of the number of claims as South Africa, but was nevertheless in second position with 49,600 applications.<sup>33</sup> France was the third largest recipient during 2008 (35,400 claims), recording a 20 per cent increase compared to 2007 (29,400 claims)

<sup>27</sup> Despite the fact that statistical reporting on new asylum-seekers has improved in recent years, in particular in Europe, it should be borne in mind that the data include a significant number of repeat claims, i.e. the applicant has submitted at least one previous application in the same or another country.

<sup>28</sup> Statistical information on outcomes of asylum appeals and court proceedings is under-reported in UNHCR statistics, particularly in developed countries, because this type of data is often either not collected by States or not published separately.

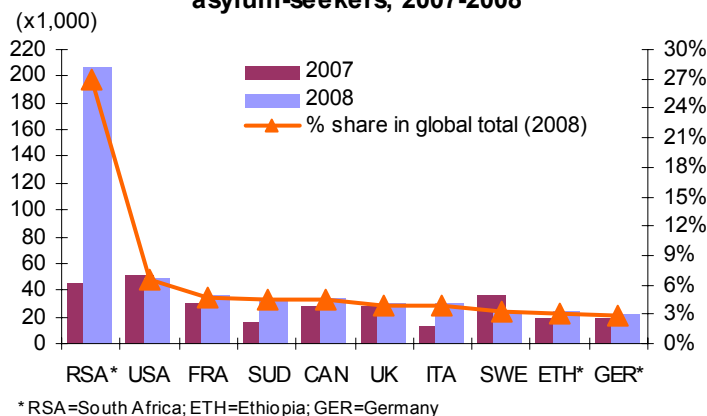
<sup>29</sup> This figure included 14,200 Somali asylum-seekers who were granted refugee status on a *prima facie* basis.

<sup>30</sup> The geographical regions used are those of the UN Statistics Division (<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49.htm>).

<sup>31</sup> For a detailed analysis of asylum trends in industrialized countries, see *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, 2008*, UNHCR Geneva, March 2009, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.

<sup>32</sup> This figure includes Zimbabweans arriving at South Africa's southern border and people who applied for asylum in the wake of the May 2008 xenophobic violence.

<sup>33</sup> Estimated number of individuals based on the number of new cases (25,500) and multiplied by 1.4 to reflect the average number of individuals per case (Source: Department of Homeland Security); and number of new "defensive" asylum requests lodged with the Executive Office of Immigration Review (13,900, reported by individuals).

**Fig 8: Main destination countries of new asylum-seekers, 2007-2008**

and the first rise in four years. France was the main destination for asylum-seekers in Europe in 2008. The increase can be partly attributed to additional asylum-seekers from Mali (2,700 claims), now the third most important country of origin of asylum-seekers in France, after the Russian Federation (3,600 claims) and Serbia (3,100). Sudan was fourth most important destination country for new asylum-seekers in 2008 with more than 35,000 registered asylum claims, mostly from Eritrea (32,800). Other important destination countries for asylum-seekers were Canada (34,800)<sup>34</sup>, the United Kingdom (30,500), and Italy (30,300).

In 2008, UNHCR offices received 69,600 new applications for refugee status and 3,800 on appeal or for review. These figures reflect the total number of applications received, including people who later may not have shown for their RSD interview or whose RSD interview was rescheduled. The office in Malaysia received the largest number of new requests (17,000). Turkey was the second largest operation in 2008 (13,000 new claims), followed by Kenya (8,100), the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya (4,900), and Cameroon (4,100). UNHCR offices in Malaysia, Turkey, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and Cameroon were confronted with an increase in applications while operations in Somalia, the Syrian Arab Republic and Hong Kong, SAR of China experienced a decrease. The top-5 receiving UNHCR offices together registered more than two thirds of all new applications in 2008. Moreover, 90 per cent of UNHCR's refugee status determination work (in terms of applications received) was concentrated in 14 countries.

By nationality, the highest number of new asylum claims was filed by individuals originating from Zimbabwe (118,500), Eritrea (62,700), Somalia (51,900), Iraq (43,900), and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (32,700) (see Map 3 below). These figures, however, hide patterns of certain nationalities tending to cluster in a limited number of countries. For instance, 9 out of 10 Zimbabwean asylum claims were lodged in South Africa alone. Similarly, two thirds of all new Eritrean asylum claims were lodged in Sudan (32,800) and Ethiopia (8,700) while almost half of all Somali requests were submitted in Ethiopia (14,700) and South Africa (8,500). In the case of Iraqi asylum-seekers, Turkey (6,900 claims; UNHCR asylum procedure), Germany (6,800), Sweden (6,100) and the Netherlands (5,000) were prime destination countries together accounting for more than half (56%) of all new Iraqi claims. Even though asylum-seekers from the Democratic Republic of the Congo sought protection in more than 80 countries, 8 out of 10 requested refugee status on the African continent, notably in South Africa (10,000) and Uganda (6,300).

**Table 4: New asylum claims lodged in 2008 in top 15 UNHCR offices\***

Malaysia	17,000
Turkey	13,000
Kenya	8,100
Libyan Arab Jamah.	4,900
Cameroon	4,100
India	3,300
Egypt	2,300
Yemen	2,200
Somalia	2,200
Kuwait**	2,100
Pakistan	1,400
Islamic Rep. of Iran	900
Syrian Arab Rep.	900
Morocco	800
Thailand	800

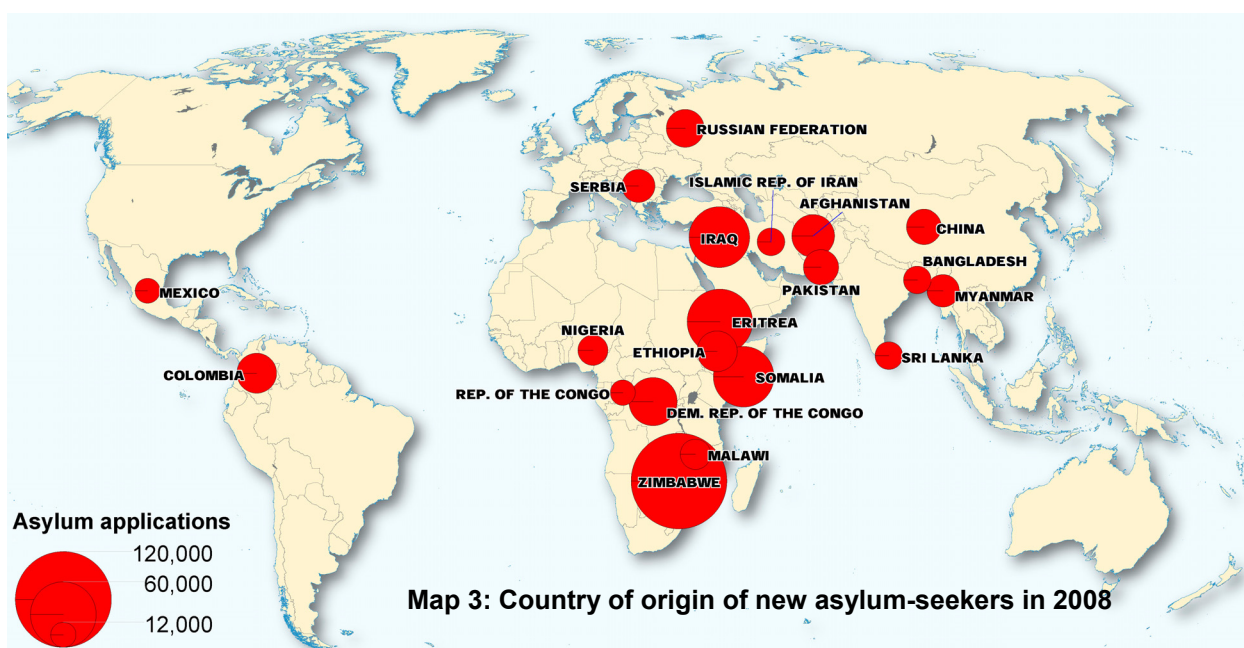
\* Excludes appeal/review claims.

\*\* This figure includes 1,770

Afghans who will undergo a preliminary screening/profiling to determine whether the members of this group will undergo individual refugee status determination.

<sup>34</sup> Source: Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB) Canada.





Note: The country of origin is shown if the total number of asylum applications lodged by its citizens exceeded 10,000 during 2008.

Provisional figures indicate that some 515,800 decisions on individual asylum applications were rendered during 2008, a 10 per cent increase as compared to 2007. UNHCR staff adjudicated close to 47,000, or 9 per cent of the total – a slightly lower relative share compared to previous years. In nine countries, including Ethiopia and Israel, more than 31,000 substantive decisions were taken jointly by UNHCR and the State concerned. These figures exclude cases which were closed for administrative reasons<sup>35</sup> without taking a decision on the substance. In 2008, close to 148,000 cases were closed without a substantive decision issued to the applicant.

**Table 5: Substantive decisions taken**

	2005	2006	2007	2008*
State	501,900	426,500	399,000	437,700
UNHCR	60,100	56,400	51,200	46,800
Jointly**	5,200	16,800	20,600	31,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>567,200</b>	<b>499,700</b>	<b>470,800</b>	<b>515,700</b>
% UNHCR only	11%	11%	11%	9%

\* Incomplete data.

\*\* Refers to refugee status determination conducted jointly between UNHCR and the Government.

It is important to note that the 2008 data is still incomplete owing to the fact that a few States have not yet released all their official statistics. As a consequence, the 2008 decision data quoted in this report are not fully comparable with previous years.

Some 211,000 asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees (148,200) or given a complementary form of protection (62,700) in the course of 2008. This number includes an estimated 5,700<sup>36</sup> individuals who initially received a negative decision, which was subsequently overturned at the appeal or review stage. Instances where the percentage of decisions overturned at the appeal stage is particularly high may be an indication of deficiencies in the asylum procedure in some countries.

The number of positive decisions issued to asylum-seekers has gone up in 2008 across all major regions with the exception of Europe. Here, the introduction of stricter asylum policies in a number of countries may have caused recognition rates to be lower than in previous years

<sup>35</sup> Also labeled as “non-substantive” decisions which might result from, among others, the death of the applicant, no-show for interview, withdrawal of the application, abandonment of the claim, or the determination that another country is responsible for the claim (‘Dublin II’ procedure).

<sup>36</sup> This figure is likely to be substantially higher but a significant number of decisions rendered by States at the appeal or review stage of the asylum procedure has not yet been released.

despite high application numbers. Nevertheless, European countries recognized the highest number of individual asylum-seekers during the year, followed by African and Asian countries.

One fifth of all positive decisions in Europe in 2008 were issued to Iraqi asylum-seekers. In Africa one third of all positive decisions were rendered to Eritrean asylum-seekers; the same is true in Asia for asylum-seekers from Myanmar. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 9 out of 10 recognitions were granted to Colombians. In Northern America and Oceania, one fifth each of positive outcomes benefited asylum-seekers from China.

Table 6: Positive decisions rendered by region

Region	No. of positive decisions		Change	
	2007	2008*	Total	%
Africa	51,100	60,200	9,100	18%
Asia	34,800	38,700	3,900	11%
Europe**	94,000	79,900	-14,100	-15%
Latin America/ Caribbean	4,200	5,800	1,600	38%
Northern America	23,900	24,300	400	2%
Oceania	1,800	2,000	200	11%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>209,800</b>	<b>210,900</b>	<b>1,100</b>	<b>1%</b>

\* Incomplete data.

\*\* Despite the fact that some European data are lacking for 2008, historical data suggests that the trend is likely to be true.

Some 305,000 claims were rejected on substantive grounds, 43,800 more than the year before. This number includes negative decisions at the first instance which might be appealed. Asylum-seekers who appealed a negative decision at first instance may have been counted twice in this figure.

**Unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) seeking asylum \***

In 2008, more than 16,300 asylum applications were lodged by UASC in 68 countries. This constitutes about 4 per cent of the total number of asylum claims lodged in those countries and is the highest value since 2006, the first year when UNHCR started collecting global data on UASC seeking asylum. In 2007 (11,300 UASC claims in 58 countries) and 2006 (9,900 UASC claims in 64 countries) the values were significantly lower. Europe received more than 13,100 or 80 per cent of the 16,300 UASC claims. The United Kingdom registered the highest number in Europe with close to 4,000 UASC claims, followed by Sweden (1,500), Norway (1,400), and Austria (770). Kenya and Malaysia were important destination countries for UASC outside Europe with 990 and 630 asylum claims respectively.

The available information indicates that 6,000 UASC were recognized as refugees or granted a complementary form of protection in 2008. This figure is consistent with the one observed the year earlier. Europe accounted for 65 per cent of all positive decisions rendered.

\* For additional information, see *2007 Statistical Yearbook*, pp. 52-53, UNHCR, Geneva.

At the global level, the Refugee Recognition Rate (RRR) amounted to an estimated 29 per cent of all decisions taken during 2008 while the Total Recognition Rate (TRR) was 41 per cent.<sup>37</sup> Both values are below the corresponding rates in 2007 (32 per cent for RRR and 45 per cent for TRR). However, global recognition rates are purely indicative as some States have not yet reported the relevant data. Also, in reality the proportion of positive decisions is higher, because decisions for those rejected on appeal are often counted twice; both as an initial rejection and as an appeal rejection.

By the end of the year, more than 827,000 individuals were still awaiting a decision on their asylum claim globally. This figure is 12 per cent higher than 2007. It includes people at any level of the asylum procedure and the real magnitude of undecided asylum cases is unknown as many countries were not able to report this information.

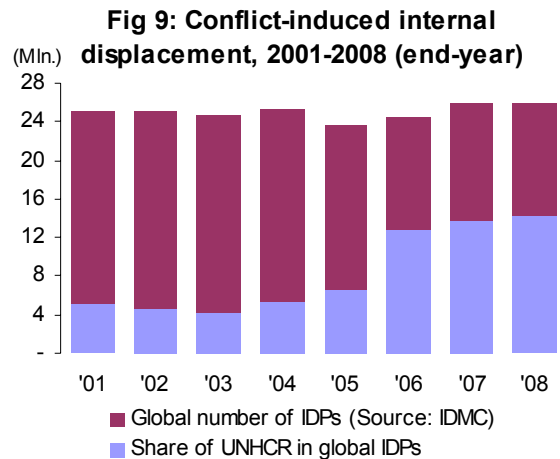
At the end of 2008, the largest number of undecided cases at the first instance and on appeal was reported by South Africa (227,000). This figure includes 138,000 undecided cases at the first instance and

<sup>37</sup> In the absence of an internationally agreed methodology for calculating recognition rates, UNHCR uses two rates to compute the proportion of refugee claims accepted during the year. The **Refugee Recognition Rate** divides the number of asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status by the total number of accepted (Convention and, where relevant, complementary protection) and rejected cases. The **Total Recognition Rate** divides the number of asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status and complementary form of protection by the total number of accepted (Convention and, where relevant, complementary protection) and rejected cases. Non-substantive decisions are, to the extent possible, excluded from both calculations. For the purpose of international comparability, UNHCR only uses these two recognition rates and does not report nationally calculated rates.

89,000 cases which were pending decision at the end of 2007. In the United States of America, the number of pending cases at the end of (its fiscal) year totalled 69,200. Other countries with high numbers of pending cases included Canada (54,200), Greece (38,100) and Austria (36,700).

## VII. Internally Displaced Persons

UNHCR does not have a mandate to protect or assist all conflict-generated IDPs, estimated at some 26 million at the end of 2008.<sup>38</sup> In recent years UNHCR has become increasingly involved with IDPs globally in keeping with the Office’s commitment to the cluster approach introduced in January 2006. The number of internally displaced persons, including people in IDP-like situations<sup>39</sup> who benefited from UNHCR’s protection and assistance activities stood at 14.4 million at the end of 2008, the highest figure on record. This constitutes an increase of more than 600,000 compared to the previous year (13.7 million) and more than double the figure before the activation of the cluster approach (6.6 million in 2005). UNHCR offices reported more than 1.1 million newly displaced people in 2008, while at least 1.4 million IDPs were able to return home during the same period.<sup>40</sup> In all, UNHCR statistics include IDP populations in 23 countries.



With an estimated three million internally displaced persons, Colombia continues to have one of the largest IDP populations in the world. In Iraq, the number of IDPs rose from 2.4 million in 2007 to more than 2.6 million at the end of 2008. It is estimated that more than 1.4 million Iraqis became displaced within their country in the past three years alone. Renewed armed conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and Somalia displaced hundreds of thousands of people. As a consequence, the number of IDPs in both countries increased to 1.5 and 1.3 million respectively, at the end of the year. Kenya also witnessed extensive new internal displacement in early 2008 following the outbreak of post-election violence – although 346,000 IDPs were able to return home in the course of 2008, an estimated 404,000 remained displaced within the country by the end of the year. Similarly, armed conflict in Georgia forced some 135,000 people to flee their homes in 2008; by the end of the year, an estimated 293,000 were considered internally displaced persons in Georgia, including 49,200 people in an IDP-like situation.

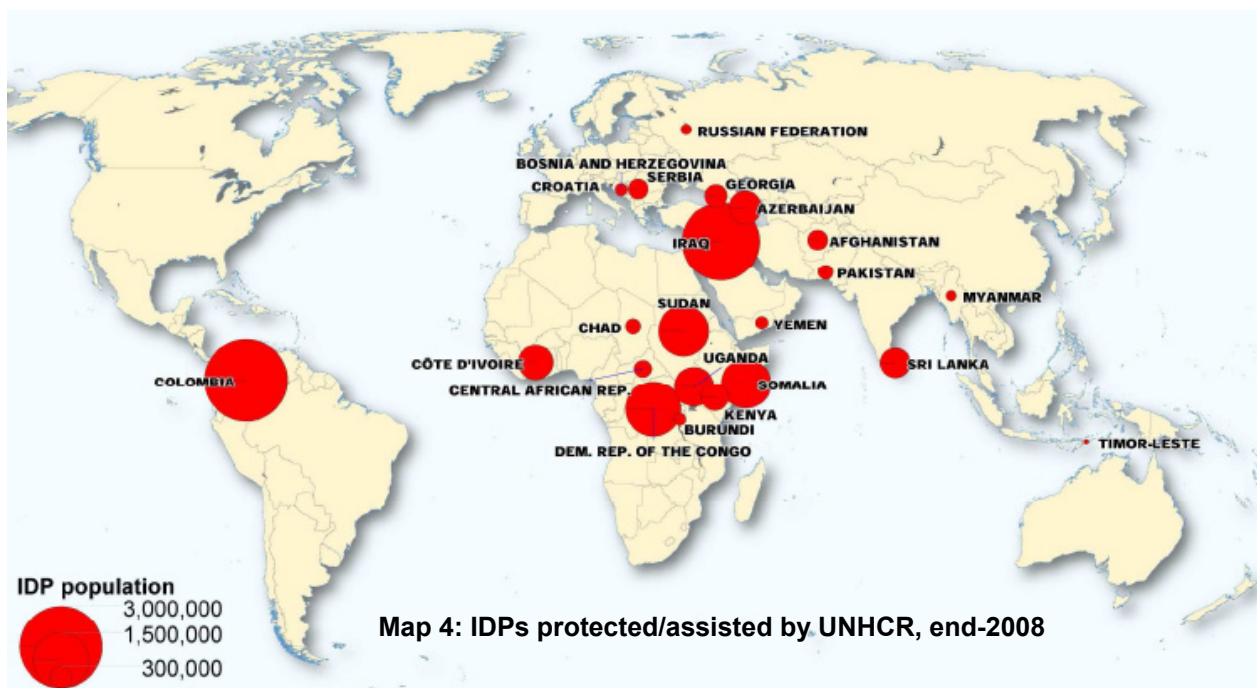
Some 603,000 IDPs in Uganda were able to return to their villages in the course of the year, reducing the IDP population remaining in camps and transit sites to 853,000. Both IDPs and IDP returnees continue to benefit from UNHCR’s protection and assistance activities under the cluster approach. In Sudan, the number of IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR was around 1.2 million by the end of the year. Afghanistan, Pakistan<sup>41</sup>, Sri Lanka, and Yemen were among those countries reporting either new situations of internal displacement or significant increases in the IDP population during 2008.

<sup>38</sup> For detailed statistics on global internal displacement, see the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) website of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

<sup>39</sup> The IDP-like situations refer to Georgia (49,200) and the Russian Federation (2,000).

<sup>40</sup> In the absence of reliable estimates on newly displaced and returned IDPs during 2008, this figure excludes movements in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>41</sup> At the time of writing, the number of IDPs in Pakistan had approached the 2 million mark as compared to 156,000 by the end of 2008.



### VIII. Stateless persons

Identifying stateless persons is key to addressing their problems and is fundamental to the discharge of the responsibility entrusted to UNHCR in regard to stateless persons. This responsibility is not limited to the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons, but also involves informing the international community of the magnitude of this problem. Measuring statelessness is complicated by the very nature of the phenomenon. Stateless people often live in a precarious situation on the margins of society, frequently lack identity documentation and are subject to discrimination. Only a few countries have procedures in place for the identification and documentation of stateless people which facilitates gathering precise data.

The statistics in this report only include data on countries for which reliable official statistics or estimates of stateless populations are available. Annex table 7 also includes some countries (marked with an asterisk) that have significant stateless populations but for which no reliable figures could be provided, including Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, India and Indonesia.

**Fig 10: Number of countries reporting statistics on stateless persons**



The data on statelessness in 2008 show a continuation of the trend already observed in previous years of a gradual expansion in coverage and knowledge on stateless persons. By the end of 2008, statistics on statelessness were available for 58 countries, four more than in 2007. This compares to 30 countries in 2004, the first year UNHCR started collecting statistics on stateless populations in a more systematic way, and reflects the efforts of UNHCR offices to gather better data on statelessness. These efforts were bolstered by an increasing awareness of statelessness in a number of countries around the world.

For 2008, the number of identified stateless populations more than doubled to almost 6.6 million. This is not necessarily due to new situations of statelessness but, rather, the result of improved



data availability. The majority of this increase was in Thailand which reported significant stateless populations for the first time.<sup>42</sup>

UNHCR is not yet in a position to provide comprehensive statistics on the number of stateless persons in all countries around the world. As a result, there is a discrepancy between reliable country-level data reported by UNHCR and the total estimated number of stateless worldwide, some 12 million people. The increase in data coverage means that there will also be a gradual narrowing of this gap.

### **IX. Other groups or people of concern**

UNHCR also extends its protection or assistance activities to individuals whom it considers “of concern”, but who do not fall into any of the above population categories. These activities are based on humanitarian or other special grounds and might, for instance, include asylum-seekers who have been rejected by States, but who are deemed by UNHCR to be in need of international protection. The number of people in these groups more than doubled from 68,600 at the start of 2008 to almost 167,000 by the end of the year. The increase arose primarily from the inclusion of close to 80,000 people in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. These are mostly former refugees or internally displaced persons who have returned home prior to 2008 but are still not fully integrated and therefore continue to receive UNHCR assistance.

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<sup>42</sup> There are an estimated 3.5 million stateless persons in Thailand including primarily members of hill tribes and immigrants, and their descendants, from neighbouring countries. The New Civil Registration Act and the Nationality Act became effective on 24 August 2008. They allow, for the first time, birth registration and certification of all children born in Thailand regardless of the status of the parents. This will not only help prevent statelessness in the broadest sense but will also benefit children of refugees or asylum-seekers born in Thailand.