

CHAPTER VI

SHARING THE BURDEN: CAPACITIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF HOST COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION

Refugee situations have multiple implications for the refugees themselves, the countries of origin and the countries of asylum. While the social, psychological and economic impact on refugees themselves is obvious, the socio-economic impact on countries of origin and asylum is not sufficiently documented. For countries of origin, especially in case of *prima facie* refugees, social impact can be estimated in terms of distortion of family structures because of an increase in the number of divided families and unaccompanied children. The number of abandoned villages, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence and psychological disorders that might result from conflicts can also increase. Economic impact on these countries such as decreasing agricultural and livestock production can also be observed. Most of this impact is not quantifiable and where it is there is often not sufficient data to monitor some of these aspects.

The share of the refugee burden and responsibilities as well as the impact on host countries is also very high. Their contribution to international refugee protection is expressed by providing asylum and durable solutions as well as by assisting poorer countries in hosting refugees.

For developing countries which, due to their proximity to conflict zones, host large groups of refugees, caring for refugees implies a significant additional burden to an already fragile economy. To alleviate these pressures, high-income countries provide assistance through UNHCR, other international agencies or bilaterally. They also admit refugees, either through planned resettlement programmes or by accepting asylum-seekers.

Refugees should not however only be seen as a burden on host countries. When allowed to integrate locally, refugees contribute actively to the host economy and society as workers and as consumers.

This chapter quantifies the capacities and contributions of host countries in providing refugee protection. On the basis of selected indicators, a measure is provided to compare countries according to their respective "refugee burden".

METHODOLOGY

Ideally, the impact of refugees should be quantified both in terms of the national and international assistance they receive as well as the contributions they make to the host country society and economy. However, reliable, comprehensive and comparable data on these issues are not always available. Therefore, this report uses the volume of refugees in asylum countries as a proxy for the refugee burden on host countries.

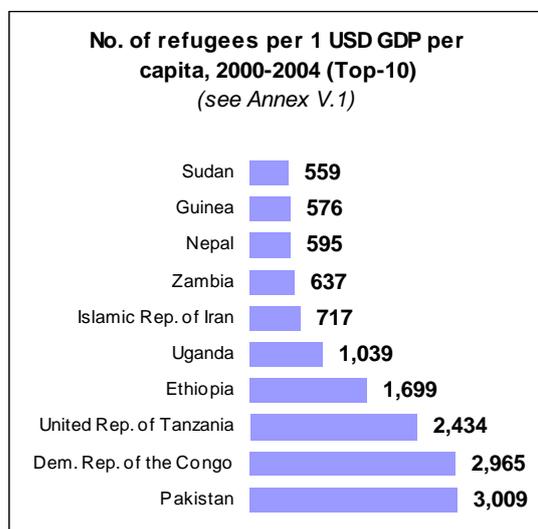
Rich countries are more able to host refugees than those which have fewer resources. To determine the ability or capacity to host refugees, this report applies three parameters: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, the size of the national population and total land area.

The GDP per capita is the most widely used measure of a country's wealth. By comparing the refugee population with the GDP per capita of a country, a measure is obtained of the relative burden of providing protection. If the number of refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita is high, the burden can be considered high although protection and assistance are not only a wealth issue. In contrast, if there are few refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita, the burden is considered as small.

Similarly, it may be argued that the capacity to absorb refugees is higher for larger countries, both in terms of national population size and surface area, than for smaller ones. While widely available, these parameters have considerable limitations. In most countries, refugees are not evenly distributed over the national territory, but are often concentrated in border areas or cities. Applying nation-wide indicators provide therefore a very simplified picture. Similarly, the national surface area does not take into account that large areas of a country may not be available for productive use. The GDP - although the most widely available and used indicator for development - may not adequately take into account the informal economy, which tends to be sizeable in developing countries as well as other factors as reflected in the United Nations Development Programme's human development index.

GDP PER CAPITA

Because of its relatively small GDP per capita and the huge number of refugees it hosts, Pakistan shouldered the largest refugee burden in 2004. During the five-year period 2000-2004, the country provided, on average, asylum to some 3,000 refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was the country with the second highest refugee burden compared to its economic resources (2,960 refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita), followed by the United Republic of Tanzania (2,430 refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita).

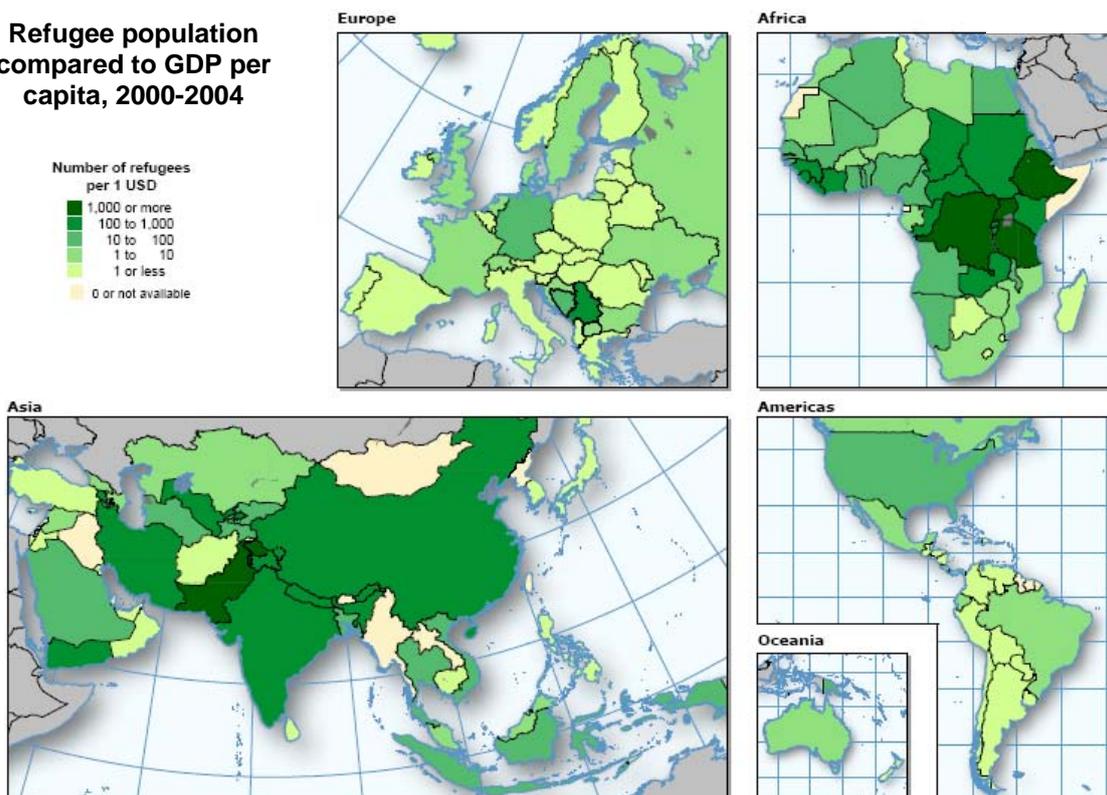


Eight of the 10 countries with the highest refugee burden measured in relation to their GDP per capita are Least Developed Countries (LDCs), mostly located in sub-Saharan Africa. Among these 10 countries, the burden differs significantly. In Pakistan, the highest ranking country, the burden is almost six times higher than in Sudan, which ranked 10th.

As can be expected, the refugee burden in industrialized countries in relation to their GDP per capita is relatively small. The highest ranking industrialized country is Germany occupying the 38th position, followed by the United States

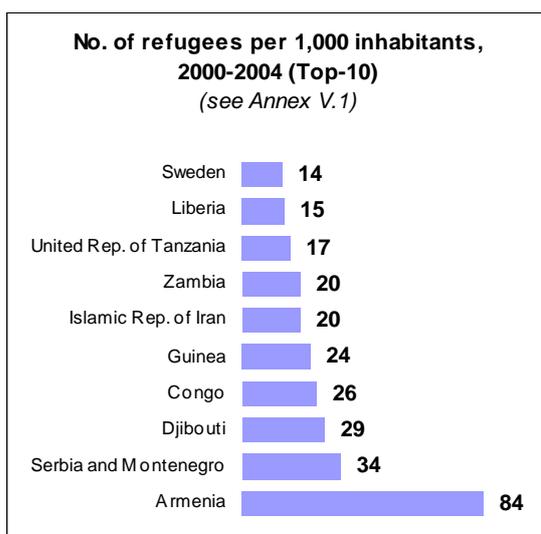
(49th) and the United Kingdom (56th) (see Table V.1).

Refugee population compared to GDP per capita, 2000-2004



POPULATION SIZE

Although less important than GDP per capita, the size of the national population nevertheless provides a useful indication of the capacity of countries to host refugees. Countries with larger populations can be assumed to absorb refugees more easily than countries with smaller populations.



When the capacity of host countries is expressed in relation to the size of their national population, the country with the highest refugee burden is Armenia. On average, Armenia hosted 84 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants during the period 2000-2004. Serbia and Montenegro ranked second, hosting 34 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, followed by Djibouti (29).

As noted earlier, Palestinian refugees falling under the mandate of UNRWA are not included in the 2004 Yearbook. However, in relation to their population size, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and the Syrian Arab Republic all rank among the top refugee-hosting countries or territories.

LAND AREA

As noted above, measuring the capacity to host refugees in relation to the size of the national territory is a very crude indicator. First, this measure does not take into account tracks of land which cannot be used for productive purposes. Second, access to land is essential in developing economies where most refugees have a farming background. In more developed countries, however, asylum-seekers and refugees often come from urban areas. Due to the economic structure, industrialized economies can sustain much denser populations than agricultural societies.

Based on a comparison of the average annual refugee population during 2000-2004 and the size of the country, Armenia carried the largest refugee burden. On average, the country hosted almost 8,600 refugees per 1,000 square kilometres. The Netherlands ranked second (4,100 refugees per 1,000 square km.), followed by Serbia and Montenegro (3,500) (see Table V.1).

The above analysis has indicated that the economic effects of hosting refugees are particularly felt in sub-Saharan Africa as well as in Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The demographic impact of refugees is relatively important in some African countries, but also in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in a few countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, in relation to the size of the national territory, it was found that seven out of 10 countries with the lowest capacity to host refugees were located in Europe. However, it was also noted that access to land is of limited relevance in determining the capacity of industrialized countries to host refugees.

