



IDPs who fled their homes in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas register with UNHCR at the Jalozai camp near Peshawar.



Sources, Methods and Data Quality

RELIABLE AND ACCURATE DATA are central to any effective policy-related decision-making on forced displacement, which often requires immediate humanitarian response to provide assistance and protection for affected populations. In such situations, poor policy decisions, based on inaccurate or unreliable data, can have catastrophic humanitarian consequences.

Given these needs but also to stand the test of time, UNHCR seeks to ensure that data collection on displaced

populations and other persons of concern meets global scientific standards. As such, the sources and methods of data collection on the populations of concern to UNHCR need to be standardized and understood by all concerned parties. It is equally important to ensure that users of this data clearly understand the proper ways to analyse and disseminate related information, in order to ensure effective and meaningful subsequent decisions.

As a global leader on refugee statistics, UNHCR has a mandate to regu-

larly collect and disseminate statistics on refugees and other persons of concern. For this reason, the organization ensures that data on all persons of concern are both timely and accurate. This chapter describes the various sources and methods of data collection used at all levels of UNHCR, ranging from the beneficiaries through the field and country offices to the agency's headquarters. It also includes an 'external' view on refugee data as seen through the eyes of a journalist.

Definitions and scope

UNHCR identifies seven population categories, collectively referred to as 'persons of concern': refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees who have returned home (returnees), IDPs who have returned home, persons under UNHCR's statelessness mandate, and others who do not fall under these categories but to whom the agency extends protection. In 2007, two sub-categories were also

introduced: individuals in refugee-like situations (included under refugees) and those in IDP-like situations (included under IDPs).

Refugees include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; individuals recognized under the 1969 Organization of African Unity (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;¹³ and those enjoying 'temporary protection'.¹⁴ The refugee category also includes individuals in refugee-like situations.¹⁵

Asylum-seekers (with 'pending cases') 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 2012, irrespective of when they may have been lodged.

Internally displaced persons are individuals or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes

¹³ Complementary protection refers to protection provided under national, regional, or international law to persons who do not qualify for protection under refugee law instruments but are in need of international protection because they are at risk of serious harm.

¹⁴ Temporary protection refers to arrangements developed to offer protection of a temporary nature, until the situation in the country of origin improves and allows for a safe and dignified return or for individual refugee or complementary protection status determination to be carried out.

¹⁵ This term is descriptive in nature. It 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.

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 man-made disasters – but who have not crossed an international border.¹⁶

UNHCR is involved in situations of internal displacement in a number of countries. The populations reported in its statistics are limited to conflict-generated IDPs or persons in an IDP-like

under conditions of safety and dignity. For the purposes of this report, only refugees who returned between January and December 2012 are included, though 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 2012. Again, in practice operations may assist IDP returnees for longer periods.

Persons under UNHCR's statelessness mandate are defined under international law as those not considered as nationals by any State under the operation of its law. In other words, they do not possess the nationality of any State. UNHCR statistics refer to persons who fall under the agency's statelessness mandate because they are stateless according to this international definition, but data from some countries may also include persons with undetermined nationality.

UNHCR has been given a global mandate by the United Nations General Assembly to contribute to the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. The agency also performs a specific function, under Article II of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, by receiving claims from persons who may benefit from the statelessness safeguards contained in that Convention, and by assisting them and the States concerned to resolve these claims.

Other groups or persons of concern refer 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.

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situation,¹⁷ to whom the agency extends protection or assistance. Therefore, UNHCR's IDP statistics do not necessarily reflect the entire IDP population in a given country but rather only those who are protected and/or assisted by the agency. Moreover, under the cluster approach,¹⁸ UNHCR provides support to both IDPs and other affected persons, though the latter are not included in the statistics. Hence, UNHCR's statistics provide a comprehensive picture neither of global internal displacement nor of total numbers assisted by the agency in such situations.¹⁹

Returned refugees (returnees) are former refugees who have returned to their country of origin, either spontaneously or in an organized fashion, but are yet to be fully integrated. Such returns would normally only take place

¹⁶ See: *United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39. Addendum: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 11 February 1998.

¹⁷ This term is descriptive in nature. It 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.

¹⁸ In December 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee endorsed the 'cluster' approach for handling situations of internal displacement. Under this arrangement, UNHCR assumes leadership responsibility and accountability for three of the nine clusters: protection, emergency shelter, and camp coordination and camp management.

¹⁹ Global IDP estimates are provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), available at www.internal-displacement.org.

Refugee Data

DATA SOURCES

The principal actors of refugee-related data collection continue to be governments, UNHCR, and NGOs. Similarly, States remain the primary agents around the world to register and care for refugees. In view of limited resources and capacity to collect refugee data by some States, UNHCR and its partners provide requisite resources and technical assistance for data collection.

For the past five years, UNHCR and governments have remained the major sources of refugee data, often collected either by governments alone, by

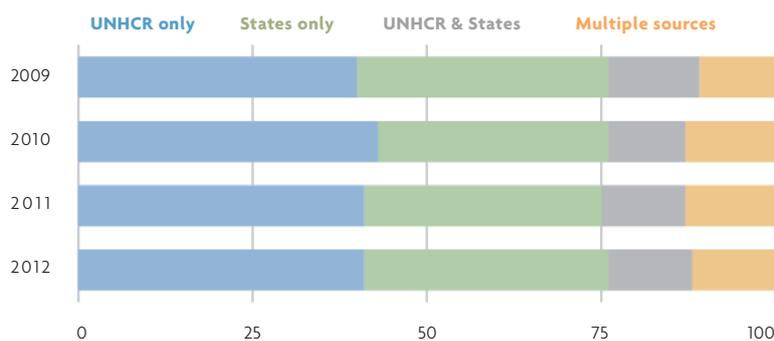
UNHCR alone, or jointly by governments and UNHCR. Such joint collaborations are the principal data collection methods in many developing countries, while in most industrialized countries these data are typically gathered by governments alone, with limited UNHCR involvement. **Figure 1.1** shows the trends in refugee data providers from 2009 through 2012.

UNHCR continues to lead in the collection of refugee-related data, even though the number of countries where UNHCR exclusively provides such in-

formation has consecutively declined, from 76 in 2010 and 74 in 2011 to 70 in 2012. Proportionally, there was no significant change in the trends of refugee data providers between 2011 and 2012, though the proportion of countries where refugee data is exclusively provided by governments has gradually increased, from 33 per cent in 2010 to 35 per cent in 2012.

UNHCR's contribution as the sole provider of refugee data in particular countries has remained unchanged since 2011, at 41 per cent. During that same period, government contributions slightly increased, from 34 to 35 per cent. Joint data collection between States and UNHCR accounted for 12 per cent, while NGOs and others accounted for the remaining proportion. Refugee data are typically reported by one single source in many countries, though in some countries refugee statistics may be obtained from multiple sources. Unlike the other populations of concern, for which data coverage may be more limited, more than 185 countries and territories provided data on refugees in 2012.

Fig. 1.1 Trends in sources of refugee data | 2009 - 2012
(in percentage)



DATA COLLECTION PROCESSES AND METHODS

Data collection remains a complex process involving many actors – governments, NGOs, implementing and operating partners, and the United Nations country teams, among others. This process is often a collaborative effort, in many cases requiring agreement by all parties involved. In the refugee context, data collection is typically coordinated by UNHCR and the government concerned. **Figure 1.2** depicts the scheme of key actors involved in data collection.

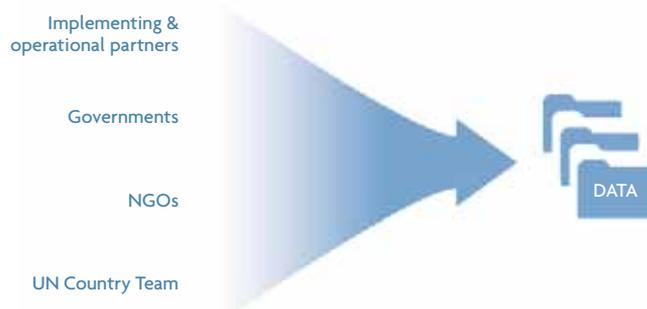
Over the past decade, the methods for collecting refugee-related data have remained virtually unchanged, with the main techniques continuing to be censuses, registrations, and surveys or estimations. Some countries rely on a

single method while others use combinations to provide refugee statistics. It is important to emphasize that the use of one particular method or another does not necessarily affect the quality of the data. However, registration has remained the main method used

by UNHCR, likely because the agency attaches a great deal of importance to refugee registration.

Some 10 years ago, the agency rolled out its own registration software, known as proGres,²⁰ aimed at assisting with effective registration and the accu-

Fig. 1.2 Key actors involved in data collection



20 Profiling Global Registration System.

rate recording of refugee data in many of its operations around the world. Effective and accurate registration provides a firm foundation for the delivery of protection, assistance, and monitoring, and the software has since become a vital resource tool for providing refugee statistics. UNHCR's refugee statistics rely heavily on registration data extracted from the proGres database, which offers both legal and administrative status on the provision of entitlements to beneficiaries.

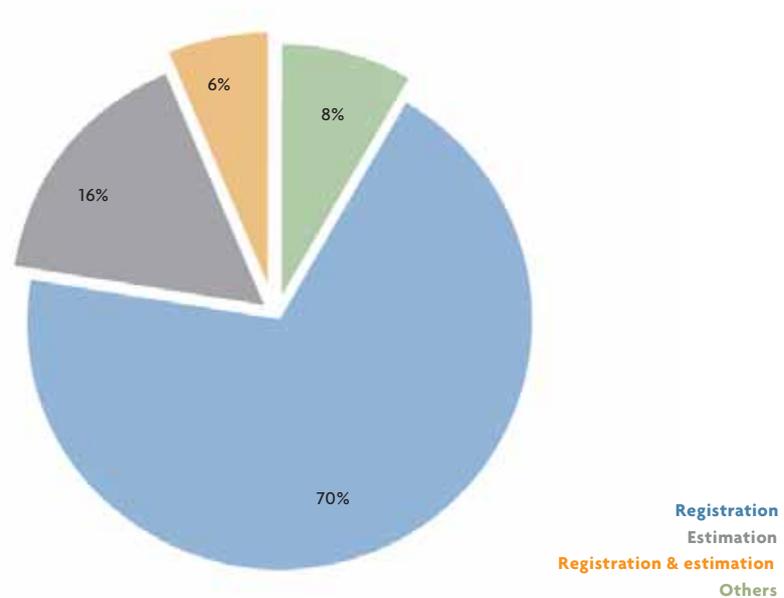
According to information summarized in **Figure 1.3**, the number of countries using registration as their main method of refugee data collection in 2012 remained unchanged, at 120. The vast majority of refugees residing in camps have been registered, and this has contributed to the high proportion of registration. In addition, estimation as a method accounted for 16 per cent, registration and estimation combined accounted for 6 per cent, and the remaining proportion came from various sources.

Each method of data collection is evaluated in order to determine its relevance and robustness for refugee statistics. Registration is mostly used in locations where UNHCR has an

operational role, while estimation is used in many industrialized countries, particularly those that do not maintain a dedicated refugee register and thus are not in a position to provide related statistical information. In this analysis,

UNHCR uses estimation based on official data for the number of asylum-seekers recognized over a 10-year period. In 2012, the number of countries that used estimation remained unchanged from 2011, at 28.

Fig. 1.3 Basis of refugee data | 2012



DATA QUALITY CONTROL

Because data are worth far less if they are not accurate, relevant, reliable, and timely, UNHCR continues to undertake regular quality control of all annual statistical data it receives from offices around the world. In order to ensure completeness, consistency, and reliability of reported statistics, all data for the 2012 Yearbook have undergone standard data-cleaning techniques.

The processes of data quality control start in the field. Thereafter, data received at headquarters undergoes additional validating procedures. Further, in 2012 the limitations of each data collection method were evaluated to determine the quality that they produced. This process also examined the capacity constraints of certain countries and the resulting reliability, credibility, and relevance of the data from those countries.

To ensure that the sources of data are authentic, UNHCR continues to undertake triangulation exercises with principal actors (such as government authorities). This validation process is aimed at ensuring that data across the various countries are comparable, reliable, and credible. In order to ensure transparency, the agency's data-control mechanism aims to be systematic and comprehensive, with the ultimate goal of providing robust statistics for meaningful analysis and dissemination.

Other mechanisms used by UNHCR for data control include biometric registration, information management strategies, training, and various mission supports. The introduction of biometric registration has improved data quality, preventing both redundancies and waste while also allowing for the

processing of refugee data within the shortest possible timeframe.

UNHCR has also put in place effective new information management strategies to streamline both the collection and dissemination of data. Prominent among these are strengthening the predictability of information and deploying expert information management personnel to various field locations at very short notice. As a result, UNHCR offices are being provided with the necessary support to effectively manage the data they are both using and producing. The use of advanced information systems has reinforced the quality of information management across the countries where the agency operates, and this support mechanism has immensely contributed to improved data quality in the

operations where the new strategy has been implemented.

UNHCR provides training to all principal data collection agents. As part of the process of improving data quality, in 2012 the agency trained more than 60 personnel through its Operational Data Management Learning Programme. The aim of this initiative was to promote effective data management at the field level, and participants acquired skills in applying the appropriate methods and tools of data collection. Besides this regular learning programme, the agency trains other staff members involved in data collection on the proper means of doing so. UNHCR has also provided various field support missions tasked with improving data quality, with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jordan, and Myanmar, among others, benefitting from these initiatives in 2012.

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONAL STATISTICAL OFFICES

In an effort to further improve data collection in the humanitarian context, in

2012 UNHCR initiated a strategic collaboration with Statistics Norway, the national statistical office of Norway. The purpose of this collaboration is for qualified staff from Statistics Norway to be seconded to UNHCR for short-term assignments to support operations in collecting, analysing, and disseminating statistical information. This collaboration is supported by the Norwegian Refugee Council and is expected to yield its first positive results in 2013. UNHCR envisages similar collaborations being extended to other national statistical offices around the world in coming years.

DATA USAGE AND ROUNDING NOTICE

Special attention should be paid when analysing data referring to a country that has dissolved or otherwise formally ceased to exist. In the Statistical Yearbook, historical data pertaining to the former USSR, for instance, are reported under the Russian Federation, while information on the former Czechoslovakia is reported under the

Czech Republic. Data for the former Yugoslavia as well as Serbia and Montenegro has been reported under Serbia (and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 [1999]). Data pertaining to Sudan before the declaration of independence of South Sudan includes the latter; since independence, data for South Sudan has been reported separately. In most tables in the Annex, meanwhile, the word 'Democratic' has been abbreviated to 'Dem.', while the word 'Republic' is often truncated to 'Rep.'

It is also important to note that figures in the Yearbook are often rounded. Numbers below 1,000 are generally rounded to the nearest 10; between 1,000 and 10,000, to the nearest 100; between 10,000 and 100,000, to the nearest 1,000; between 100,000 and 1 million, to the nearest 10,000; and figures above 1 million are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Finally, unless otherwise specified, the 2012 Statistical Yearbook does not refer to events occurring after 31 December 2012.

Better data for better aid²¹

– Contributed by Norman Green, producer –

In 2012, the international community faced the planet's worst refugee crisis in many years. Every day, on average, 3,000 people became refugees. Tracking the data over the last 10 years, UNHCR and its partners have charted these rising waves of misery. Even as one wave has crashed and receded, another has built, often nearby.

Today, more than 45 million people worldwide are displaced by violence or its threat, nearly half of them children. They flee conflict, persecution, and catastrophe. To find and help them requires data. Indeed, to bring them food and water, educate their children, integrate them into their host societies, or help them to voluntarily and safely return home – each of these actions requires data.

According to UNHCR estimates, in 2012, 6.4 million refugees lived in a total

of 30 protracted crises, in 25 host countries. In the largest and most protracted refugee crisis, the total population of Afghan refugees living in Pakistan swelled to 2.6 million. That's almost twice the population of Manhattan, in New York City. So many people have lived away from their homes for so long that the global community is said to be facing a permanent refugee crisis. The data trends indicate that the ranks of refugees will continue to climb in the coming decade.

Once the basic needs of refugees are secured, it is data that drive the three durable solutions: to help refugees integrate into their countries of asylum and to live in their new homes, to help them return home voluntarily if do-

ing so would not place them in danger, or to find them new places to live. The international community helps to keep millions of refugees alive and provides them with durable solutions to their crises by collecting and analysing data. The better the data, the better the aid.

Centuries ago, one of science's more historic insights was inspired by a map of one type of data. When cholera epidemics terrorized Europe and America during the 19th century, one doctor charted his city's cases by drawing dots on a map. Finding the cases clustered in a London square around a water pump, the doctor asked town officials to remove the handle from the pump. Thereafter, the cases stopped, and

²¹ The views and opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

health officials realized that cholera spread through their drinking water.

This was the birth of the medical science of epidemiology. But it was also how the people of London learned to defeat cholera. Under the city's streets, the water supply flowed through pipes linking the city's neighbourhoods. So, all neighbourhoods – rich and poor – worked together to devise new, safe systems of pipes, providing fresh water to all.

There are two lessons here. The first is the importance of good data. The second is that communities are interconnected and need to share both the data and the responsibility to relieve crises. It's one of science's great leaps forward: Good data save lives.

YEAR OF THE URBAN REFUGEE

New conflicts and emergencies created challenging new trends in 2012. For instance, millions of refugees lived in cities over the course of the year, more than ever before. In this sense, 2012 was the year of the urban refugee.

Refugees from two of the most serious crisis regions struggled to cope with the expense and complexity of city life. Refugees from Afghanistan, for instance, lived in cities such as Islamabad and Peshawar in Pakistan. Likewise, about one in 10 refugees from the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic did not live in the well-known Za'atari refugee camp but rather in Jordanian cities such as Amman and Zarqa, often residing in unheated or unfurnished apartments or garages.

In these cities, refugees faced overcrowding, high rents, and exorbitant costs for necessities like food and heat, as well as growing problems integrating into their host cultures. These families and individuals also pose special challenges. Because they are spread throughout urban centres, they are often harder to find, making data collection more difficult.

A young member of a recently arrived Somali family is fingerprinted by UNHCR during the registration at a transit centre in Dollo Ado, Ethiopia. Due to a combination of insecurity and drought, the number of new arrivals continued to rise during the year.



During 2012, UNHCR deepened its data collection abilities with the use of new technologies, including satellite imaging, interactive mapping, text messaging, and forms of biometric registration like digital fingerprinting. Biometric registration increased the agency's efficiency by improving the accuracy of its data and reducing redundancies like multiple counting. It also helped to prevent the misidentification of refugees. The agency and its partners also used older technologies in innovative ways. For instance, text messaging was used to locate refugees, while electronic vouchers and cash cards helped in the provision of financial assistance, counselling, medical services, and education.

Improved data collection methods have also allowed UNHCR and its partners to improve the quality of aid offered. Using enhanced techniques such as participatory assessment, these methods include directly involving refugees in the design of data collection processes and working closely

with beneficiaries to understand their changing needs.

As UNHCR's data have grown more comprehensive, increasingly nuanced refugee profiles are emerging. For example, the data from 2012 show that nearly three children died every day from malnutrition and preventable illnesses like diarrhoea in the refugee camps of South Sudan, where families from the Blue Nile region of Sudan sought refuge.

Elsewhere, a participatory assessment for Syrian refugees in Jordan focused on the protection of urban refugees. These individuals were found to need aid as basic as money for food and clothes as well as more complex help like medical care, legal aid, counselling for post-traumatic stress, job training, child protection and education, protection from gender-based and sexual violence, and help integrating comfortably into their host society.

UNHCR's data collection trend is towards sustaining a constant dialogue with refugees to articulate their needs and challenges. Partnering with ben-

eficiaries in this way deepens the quality of data, increasing the effectiveness of aid and helping to break refugees' isolation. In cities like Kuala Lumpur, Cartagena, Sana'a, and Damascus, urban refugees benefited from increased UNHCR engagement with the communities in which they lived.

Refugees have often fled dangerous conditions in their home countries only to find themselves again in peril in their host states, and this is critical information for humanitarian agencies to have. Refugees from the conflict in Sudan in 2012 contended with the spread of malnutrition and preventable diseases, as well as human trafficking. Somali refugees (whose numbers swelled to over 1.13 million) fleeing military conflict and severe famine in their home country faced military attacks in the Kenyan camps where they sought asylum. This underscores the challenge of collecting data and delivering aid in the midst of military conflict, as well as the effects of cross-border conflict on civilian populations fleeing shifting lines of fire.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY AND RESPONSIBILITY

The frequent lack of coordination between countries of origin and host countries raises questions about sovereignty over data, as well. Because States have the primary responsibility to register and care for refugees, conflicts of interest can arise when either countries of origin or host countries are at war with or are actively targeting displaced communities.

Better data help to enhance legal protections for refugees in host countries and provide momentum to legislative initiatives to defend refugees from *refoulement*, placing them back home in the way of harm. But the increasingly complex situations refugees faced in their host countries in 2012 – living in conflict conditions, in remote locations, or both – posed great challenges to gathering data and delivering aid.

In Mali, some 380,000 persons fled armed conflict in 2012, with more than 150,000 Malians seeking refuge in the neighbouring states of Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger. This region already suffers from drought and food insecurity, and armed conflict made the

north of Mali virtually inaccessible to humanitarian actors. Overall, almost half a million Malians were forcibly displaced in 2012, and UNHCR was able to help only about a third of them.

The major refugee countries of origin change from year to year, as do the host countries. But what does not change is the fact that the countries providing asylum to the greatest number of refugees are among the least able to support them economically. The data reveal that in 2012, once again, the countries hosting the most refugees were among the least developed. And again, generally speaking, those with the highest standards of living and the greatest abilities to help hosted the fewest. Such decisions are not deliberate, of course, but rather a simple dynamic of proximity. A few States host disproportionate communities of refugees due to their nearness to conflict and catastrophe.

Meanwhile, exponentially growing computer processing capacity grants science the power to collect and manage ever-larger datasets. These in turn

provide the international community with greater views of the global displacement of people from their homes, and deeper understanding of the details of their needs. With greater data, however, comes greater responsibility.

This global perspective – of human beings forcibly displaced from their homes, of people living without the protection of their States – makes it clear that responsibility cannot solely reside in host countries. Refugee families are not just dots on a map. Human dignity insists that States share responsibility for displaced people and vouchsafe their future.

This global view of the world's, perhaps permanent, refugee crisis also lights the way to enduring solutions. Shared data and shared responsibility mitigate suffering. Increased coordination among countries of origin and host countries lessen misery. The nations of the world are linked by the flow of families seeking refuge, and it behoves every nation to acknowledge every refugee family and to protect them. ■