

CHAPTER VII

SHARING THE BURDEN: CAPACITIES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF HOST COUNTRIES

INTRODUCTION

Most refugees and asylum-seekers originate from developing countries and they primarily seek asylum in their region of origin, as shown in Chapter II. In most cases, less than 10 per cent of those in need of international protection seek refuge in another region than their own. UNHCR continues to encourage burden sharing, as many countries of asylum and origin in the developing world have difficulty in coping with large number of refugees. Indeed, refugee situations have triple impact: on refugees themselves, on the country of origin and on the country of asylum.

The social, psychological and economic impact on refugees themselves is understandable, as most refugee situations result from wars or other types of armed conflict. For countries of origin, especially in the case of *prima facie* refugees, the social impact can be estimated for instance by analyzing the level of distortion of family structures reflected by an increase in the number of separated families and unaccompanied children. The number of abandoned villages, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence and psychological disorders that usually 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 socio-economic and psychological impact is not quantifiable because of their qualitative nature or the lack of data.

In addition, there is a significant impact on the host country. Refugee arrivals in host countries might have both negative and positive effects. The negative effect is related to pressure on scarce resources and the influence of some political groups which tend to build their strategy by assimilating refugees and asylum-seekers to economic or irregular migrants. In contrast, when allowed to integrate locally, refugees contribute actively to the host economy and society as workers and consumers.

The contribution of countries 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 most conflict zones, host large groups of refugees, caring for refugees implies a significant additional burden to an already fragile economy. To alleviate these pressures, the international community, especially high-income countries provide assistance through UNHCR, other international agencies, non-governmental organizations or bilaterally. They also admit refugees, either through planned resettlement programmes or by accepting asylum-seekers.

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 and rank countries according to their respective "refugee burden".¹

METHODOLOGY

Ideally, the impact of refugees should be quantified both in terms of the national and

¹ This term should not be interpreted negatively but rather as an expression of international solidarity.

international assistance they receive as well as the contributions they make to the host country society and economy. However, comprehensive and comparable data on these issues are not always available. Therefore, the 2005 Yearbook uses both the volume and the duration of stay of refugees in asylum countries as a proxy for the "refugee burden" in host countries.

Under the assumption that countries with strong economies are more likely to be capable of hosting refugees than those which have fewer resources, the Office determines the ability or capacity to host refugees, by applying three parameters: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita², 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 and development, even though it does not reflect the sometimes very unequal distribution of its wealth. The GDP, however, may not adequately take into account the informal economy, which tends to be sizeable in developing countries. By comparing the refugee population with the GDP per capita of a country, a measure is obtained of the relative burden of providing protection although protection and assistance are not only a wealth issue. If the number of refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita (PPP) is high, the burden can be considered as high. 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.

Other criteria such as the Human Development Index (HDI) and its three components were also considered, but their statistical relationship with the number of refugees by origin was found very weak. However, it is worth mentioning that the analysis has also shown that both the HDI and its component indices were negatively correlated with the number of refugees per country of origin in developing countries. In other words, if a country's level of education, GDP, life expectancy and therefore human development index is high, it is less likely to produce refugees. Without implying any causal relationship, these findings are fully in line with UNHCR's strategy in developing policies for durable solutions and life saving activities in areas such as education, health or self-reliance, benefiting both the refugees as well as host populations.

GDP PER CAPITA

Developing countries, including eight least developed countries (LDCs) predominantly in sub-Saharan Africa, occupy the first 10 places in the classification of number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita. Given their low GDP (PPP) per capita and large number of refugees, African and Asian countries shouldered the highest refugee burden per one dollar GDP at the end of 2005. Because of its relatively small GDP (PPP) per capita and the large number of refugees it hosts, the United Rep. of Tanzania³ shouldered the largest refugee burden in 2005. During the

² In order to compare countries, both the purchasing power parity (PPP) and the Current GDP are considered.

³ The country has hosted the fourth highest refugee burden with a yearly average of more than 600,000 refugees during the past five years.

period 2001-2005, the country provided, on average, asylum to almost 868 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita. Pakistan, which hosts the largest number of refugees in the world, was the country with the second highest refugee burden compared to its economic resources (522 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita), followed by the Dem. Rep. of the Congo (344 refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita).

When only the GDP (Current) criterion is considered, the three countries with the highest burden in 2005 were the Dem. Rep. of the Congo, Pakistan and the United Republic of Tanzania. They were also the top three countries in 2004, however, in a different order. Between the 10 major refugee-hosting countries, the burden differs significantly. In the United Rep. of Tanzania, the highest ranking country, the burden is nine times higher than in Chad, which ranked 10th.

The number of refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita in industrialized countries is relatively small. The highest ranking industrialized country is Germany occupying the 24th position, followed by the United States (34th), the United Kingdom (37th), and France (49th) (see Table V.1). Serbia and Montenegro, the European country with the highest number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) is ranked 17th.

Fig.VII.1 Number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita, 2001-2005

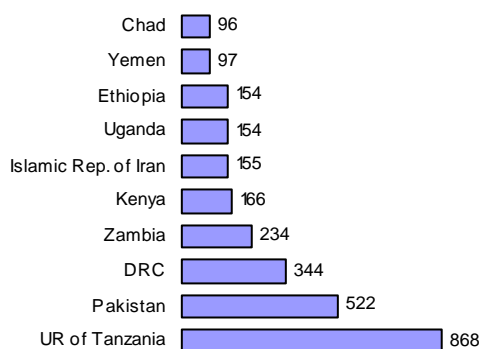
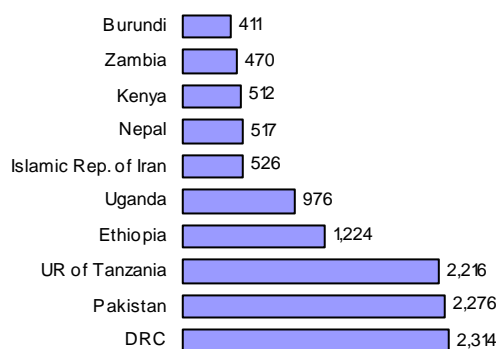


Fig.VII.2 Number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (Current) per capita, 2001-2005

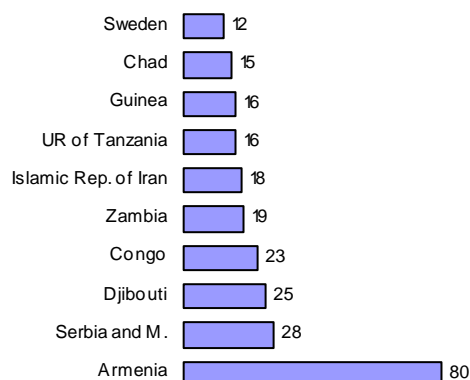


POPULATION SIZE

The second criterion after the GDP (PPP) classification considered in the 2005 Yearbook is the size of the national population. The number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants 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 this criterion is used, the country with the highest refugee burden is Armenia. On average, Armenia hosted 80 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants during the period 2001-2005 compared to 84 refugees for the period 2000-2004. In other words, about eight per cent of Armenia's current population consists of refugees. Serbia and Montenegro ranked second, hosting 28 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants (34 the year before),

Fig.VII.3 Number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, 2001-2005



followed by Djibouti (25), Congo (23), and Zambia (19).

Among the top-10 refugee-hosting countries per 1,000 inhabitants, four countries (Chad, Islamic Rep. of Iran, United Rep. of Tanzania, and Zambia) featured also among the top-10 countries with the highest refugee number per GDP per capita.

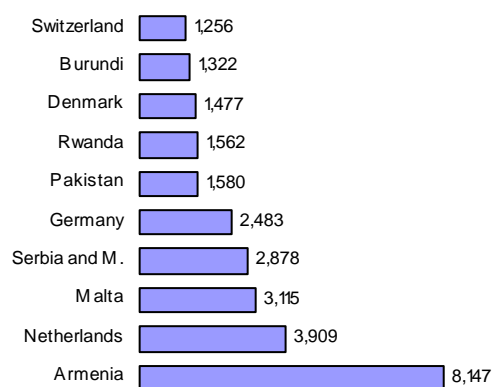
As noted earlier, the 4.3 million Palestinian refugees falling under the mandate of UNRWA are not included in UNHCR statistics. However, in relation to their population size, Jordan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Syrian Arab Republic all rank among the top refugee-hosting countries or territories.

LAND AREA

The capacity of countries to absorb refugees not only depends on their economic structure but also on the population density. In developing countries, where the economy is primarily driven by agriculture, population density and availability of land are crucial indicators. The size of the national territory, however, is a very crude indicator because it does not differentiate between land that can be used for productive purposes and land that cannot. This indicator does not take the type of economy into account either. While access to arable land is essential in developing countries and for refugees with a farming background, this is less important in more developed countries which can sustain much denser populations than agricultural societies. This indicator can, however, provide a good insight into the problem of land pressure and subsequently potential protection-related implications it might have in developing countries.

Unlike the other two criteria analysed above, more than half of the countries included in the top-10 countries based on the comparison of the average annual refugee population during 2001-2005 and the size of the country are developed economies. Again, Armenia carried the largest refugee burden. On average, the country hosted almost 8,100 refugees per 1,000 square kilometres. The Netherlands ranked second (3,900 refugees per 1,000 square km.), followed by Malta (3,100), and Serbia and Montenegro (2,900) (see *Table V.1*). The latter and Armenia are the only countries appearing in the top-10 countries of both population and land criteria and among the major 20 countries of all three criteria.

Fig.VII.4 Number of refugees per 1,000 square kilometres, 2001-2005



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 the refugee burden is relatively important in some African countries, but also in the Islamic Republic of Iran and a few countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Finally, in relation to the size of the national territory, it was found that both industrialized and non-industrialized countries were present on an equal basis in the top-10 countries. Seven out of 10 countries with the lowest capacity to host refugees were located in Europe, primarily because of their size. However, it was also noted that the number of refugees per 1,000 square kilometres is of limited relevance in determining the capacity of industrialized countries to host refugees.