

Syrian refugee children
peek out of their family's
tent in Islahiye camp, Turkey.



Hosting the world's Refugees

“Syrian Refugee Crisis Takes its
Toll on Neighbouring Countries”

“Sahel States Struggle to Cope
with Northern Mali Exodus”

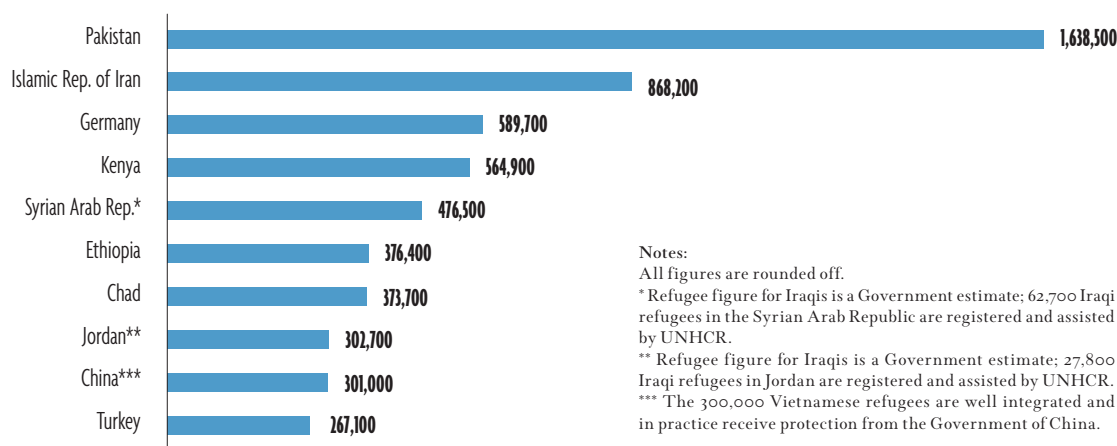
“South Sudan: Africa’s Newest State
Under Pressure from Sudanese Influx”

“Ecuador: Colombian Refugee
Numbers Climb Towards 200,000”

“Afghans in Pakistan: the Largest and Most
Protracted Refugee Situation in the World”

News headlines like these underline the fact that some of the world’s poorest countries are responsible for accommodating the world’s largest refugee populations. According to UNHCR statistics, at the end of 2012, developing countries hosted some 8.5 million refugees - equivalent to 81 per cent of the global refugee population - approximately a quarter of whom were to be found in the 49 least developed countries (LDCs). Ten years ago, developing countries hosted on average 70 per cent of the world’s refugees. ●●●

CHART 1 Major refugee-hosting countries, end-2012

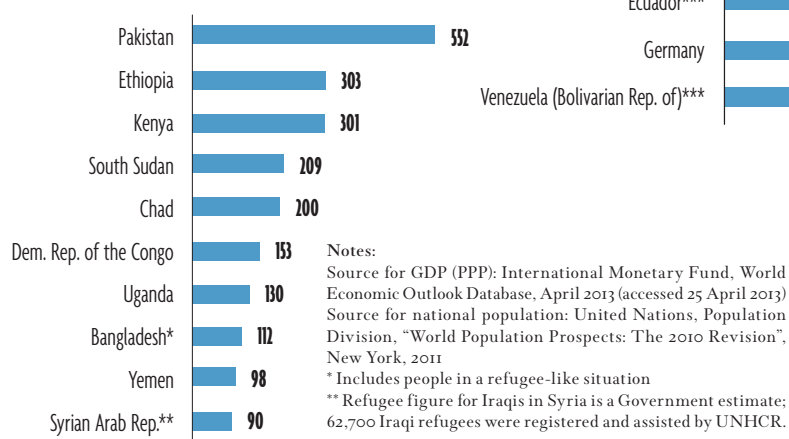


Notes:
 All figures are rounded off.
 * Refugee figure for Iraqis is a Government estimate; 62,700 Iraqi refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic are registered and assisted by UNHCR.
 ** Refugee figure for Iraqis is a Government estimate; 27,800 Iraqi refugees in Jordan are registered and assisted by UNHCR.
 *** The 300,000 Vietnamese refugees are well integrated and in practice receive protection from the Government of China.

Of the 10 countries with the largest refugee populations (see Chart 1), eight were to be found in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. And Chart 2 below shows that all 10 countries with the highest number of refugees in relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) were to be found in the developing world, more than half of them in LDCs.

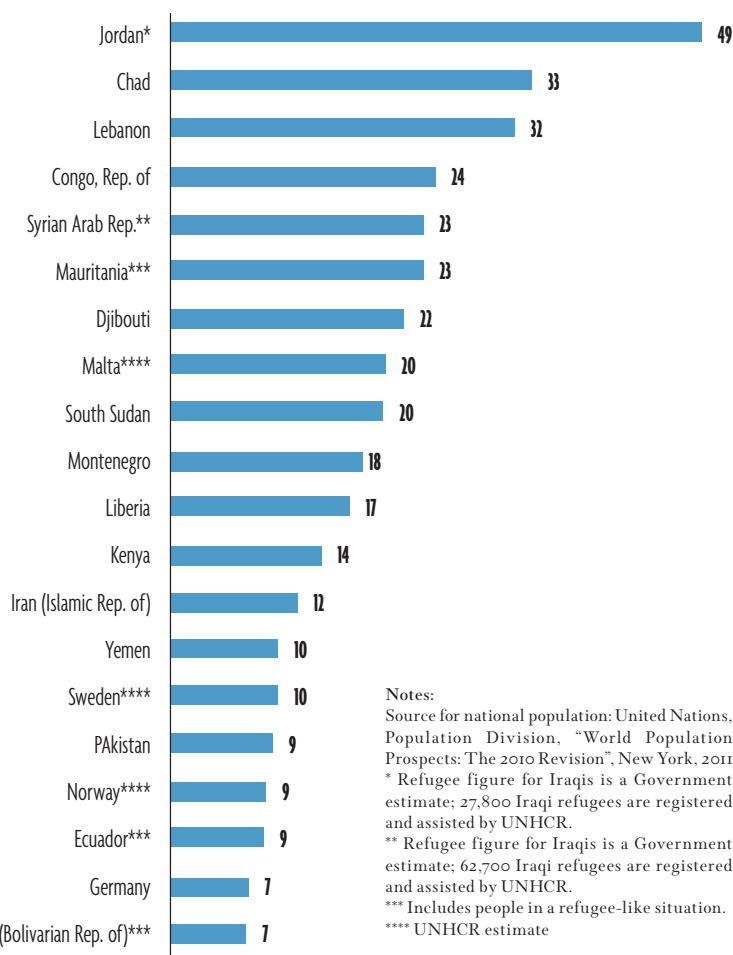
Chart 3 lists the top 20 refugee-hosting countries, taking into consideration the number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants of the host country. It is easy to see in the upper half of the table the impact of current emergency situations, such as those in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), Mali and Sudan/South Sudan, on neighbouring States. All but one of those in the top 10 are developing countries.

CHART 2 Number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita, end-2012



Notes:
 Source for GDP (PPP): International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, April 2013 (accessed 25 April 2013)
 Source for national population: United Nations, Population Division, "World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision", New York, 2011
 * Includes people in a refugee-like situation
 ** Refugee figure for Iraqis in Syria is a Government estimate; 62,700 Iraqi refugees were registered and assisted by UNHCR.

CHART 3 Number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, 2012



Notes:
 Source for national population: United Nations, Population Division, "World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision", New York, 2011
 * Refugee figure for Iraqis is a Government estimate; 27,800 Iraqi refugees are registered and assisted by UNHCR.
 ** Refugee figure for Iraqis is a Government estimate; 62,700 Iraqi refugees are registered and assisted by UNHCR.
 *** Includes people in a refugee-like situation.
 **** UNHCR estimate

While these figures provide a valuable insight into the substantial responsibility that many developing countries have ungrudgingly assumed in relation to refugees, they tell us little about the specific costs incurred by such States and the impact which exiled populations have upon the economy, society and administrative structures of those countries.

COST OF HOSTING REFUGEES

First, States that host refugees inevitably incur substantial financial costs, for example in paying and meeting the expenses of officials and members of the security services who are responsible for refugee-related tasks, and who are therefore unable to attend to pressing national or local issues. To this can be added the costs involved in constructing the buildings, roads and other infrastructural resources that are needed for refugee assistance programmes to run smoothly. In addition, it is a common scenario for UN agencies and other humanitarian organizations to recruit the best and brightest local staff from government service or the private sector, meaning that replacements have to be found and provided with appropriate training.

Second, forced displacement situations impose a wide range of economic, environmental and infrastructural costs on the countries where refugees seek protection and assistance. A sudden influx of people from a neighbouring State can increase market prices and decrease local wages; it can lead to deforestation and the reduction or contamination of water supplies; and it can lead to a significant increase in population density. In this context, it is important to recognize that refugee populations are often found in remote and isolated border areas, characterized by low levels of economic development and limited natural resources. In both rural and urban areas, public services such as health and education may be placed under additional strain by an influx of new arrivals from another State.

Third, States that host significant numbers of refugees incur important costs in terms of their security, their political systems and their relationship with other countries. When large numbers of refugees arrive in a country – and especially when they are in a destitute situation and do not share ethnic or cultural linkages with the host community – there is always a risk that social tensions, conflicts and even violence might arise.

In the worst-case scenario, refugee populations may be politicized and even militarized, a situation which has an evident potential to place serious strains on the relationship between the country of asylum and country of origin. Even in less threatening situations, States that host large numbers of refugees often find themselves devoting considerable amounts of governmental, parliamentary, judicial and administrative resources to refugee-related activities.

PROTECTION ROLE

Beyond the costs outlined above, it is important to acknowledge the role that developing countries play in sustaining the international refugee protection regime as a whole. Of course, protection standards vary considerably in different parts of the world, and in some developing countries refugees and asylum-seekers are confronted with a variety of serious threats: border closures, deportations, *refoulement*, confinement to camps and arbitrary detention, for example.

HOSPITALITY AND HOPE

Even so, many countries with large-scale refugee populations on their territory have nevertheless kept their doors open to new arrivals, providing them with hospitality and hope. Some hosting countries have offered refugees the opportunity to naturalize, while others have made resettlement places available to refugees from countries of first asylum. A modest but growing number of developing and middle-income countries also make direct contributions to UNHCR, both in cash and kind. Such gestures of

solidarity and responsibility-sharing set an important example to other parts of the world, and they reaffirm the continued relevance of the fundamental principles of international and regional refugee law.

CALCULATING CONTRIBUTIONS

To what extent is it possible to quantify the contribution that developing countries make to the international refugee protection regime?² The short answer is that it is an extremely difficult task, especially when compared to the relatively simple job of calculating the funds that 'donor States' make available to UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations.

A number of specific obstacles can be identified. First, many of the contributions made by such countries are very difficult, if not impossible, to quantify. How, for example, does one calculate the value of the land which a country makes available for the establishment of refugee camps; the natural water resources to which refugees have free access; or the rights that accrue to refugees when they are given long-term residency or the option of naturalization?

Second, the impact of refugees on their country of asylum is not a simple one, and must be approached in a differentiated manner. For example, while comparing refugee numbers to national GDP figures has some value, it also obscures the fact that the most important forms of refugee impact are felt at the local level.

And even at the local level, the arrival and continued presence of a refugee population may affect different groups of people in different ways. Workers may find that they face increased competition for employment, while employers benefit from a new source of cheap and willing labour. Local residents might witness the degradation of the environment in areas where refugees have settled, while entrepreneurs may move in to the area to take advantage of the commercial opportunities that often arise in refugee situations.

Third, the costs incurred by lower and middle-income countries with large refugee populations are to some extent offset by the funds that are channelled through UNHCR, as well as other humanitarian and development organizations. In certain countries, for example, the costs and expenses of government bodies established to manage refugee issues are covered in full or in part by UNHCR.

ENGAGING WITH DEVELOPMENT ACTORS

In many refugee situations, moreover, especially those that have become protracted, UNHCR strives to act as a catalyst for the engagement of development actors who can mitigate the negative impact of refugee populations and bring longer-term benefits to the areas where those refugees are to be found. In this context, it has to be acknowledged that the distribution of humanitarian and development resources to countries with large refugee populations is not necessarily an equitable one. Inevitably, perhaps, and for a variety of different reasons, some of those countries are able to attract greater and more sustained international interest than others.

RECOGNIZING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL POTENTIAL

Finally, while the preceding paragraphs have dwelt on the costs and negative impact of refugee populations, there is considerable evidence to suggest that exiled communities can make a very positive contribution to the economy and society of the countries where they have settled, especially in situations where they have been granted access to land, the labour market and freedom of movement.

UNHCR is firmly committed to the notion of self-reliance and to ensuring that refugees are able to maximize their value to the countries in which they live, pending the time when a durable solution can be found for them. ■



Ghulam in front of a truck ready to take his family and their belongings back to their home in Afghanistan.



RETURNING REFUGEE SUSTAINED BY FAITH IN THE FUTURE

UNHCR ISLAMABAD

PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN, APRIL 2012 |

Next week, the UN refugee agency and Switzerland are hosting an international conference in Geneva on the Afghan refugee situation. The “Solutions Strategy for Afghan Refugees” conference will discuss ways to help Afghan refugees and to improve their reintegration in Afghanistan.

Ghulam was a refugee in Pakistan for 18 years until he returned with his family to their home in Baghlan province earlier this week. For 10 years he worked in a factory in the city of Harripur. When the factory closed, he became a labourer working for daily wages. Ghulam and his family are among the nearly 4 million Afghan refugees UNHCR has assisted to return home since 2002.

UNHCR Senior Communications Officer Tim Irwin spoke to Ghulam shortly before he returned home from the northern city of Peshawar. Extracts from the interview:

Why are you going back to Afghanistan now?

I'm going back to Afghanistan because I have a job there with an agency that imports medical equipment. I am returning from Pakistan of my own free will because of my work. Before, I would travel back and forth between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Now, I am taking my

family with me. I have two sons. I'll try to help them find work in a factory or a hospital so that they can earn money and rebuild the country.

What do you expect life to be like back home?

Well, 20 years ago when we left our country, there was war and conflict. But since then the situation has changed significantly. I hope, and God willing, the situation will further improve. We have the international community working there with us. They are helping and supporting us. With their continued support Afghanistan will stand on its own feet. The country is progressing.

What are your plans for the future?

I hope that we will progress in our business slowly and gradually, finding business opportunities for my sons and myself, just like other people. We hope God will give us the opportunity to run a business and serve our country. With continued support from the international community, our country will develop further. I can't say what will happen after 2014, [when NATO troops are scheduled to leave Afghanistan] whether it would be good for the country or bad.

Can you describe what life was like as a refugee in Pakistan?

My life was good. I lived in peace and rented a house. I was working here. My

children were studying in school. And now I am leaving voluntarily and happily. I'm really happy with the people of Pakistan. They treated us just like their brothers and didn't make us feel that we were refugees.

Will you believe when I tell you that when we were leaving last night, all our neighbours – Pakistani women and men – were weeping and helping us to load this truck until midnight? I thanked them for their hospitality and sought their forgiveness if I had ever hurt them. They wished me luck and bid farewell. We had good times here.

If you were able to send a message to next week's international conference on Afghan refugees, what would it be?

I hope that from this conference, UNHCR and the international community will find a permanent solution to the problems of Afghan refugees.

We need better job opportunities inside Afghanistan. Once that's done, why would we go to Iran, Pakistan or foreign countries? If we could get a piece of bread at home, we don't need to go to other countries, endangering our lives, travelling by boats, walking in jungles. Once conditions inside Afghanistan improve, the refugees will come back. ■