

South Sudanese
refugees in
Gambella, Ethiopia.

Hosting the world's refugees





Every day, millions of people worldwide – whether in positions of power in government, the private sector, the civil service or in their individual capacity – show their concern for the well-being of others. Compassion compels many people to protect and assist those whose lives have been uprooted and placed in grave danger.

Caring for refugees brings many daunting challenges to host communities. Nevertheless, examples abound of groups and individuals in host countries who do much more than expected to meet the needs of refugees. This chapter recognizes some of the challenges faced by refugee-hosting countries and communities, and features some remarkable stories of compassion for people in times of great need. ●●●

In 2014, the impact of the major L3 emergencies in the Central African Republic, Iraq, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria) on neighbouring countries can be seen in **Chart 1**, which shows the evolving numbers of refugees (including people in a refugee-like situation) being hosted in countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, Ethiopia, Jordan, Kenya, Chad and Uganda. The regions hosting the largest refugee populations in the world remained Africa, Asia and the Middle East, with Europe (Turkey) occupying the no. 1 position at the end of the year, just ahead of Pakistan, which had until then been the largest hosting country for more than a decade.

CHART 1 Major refugee-hosting countries, 2014 (in millions)

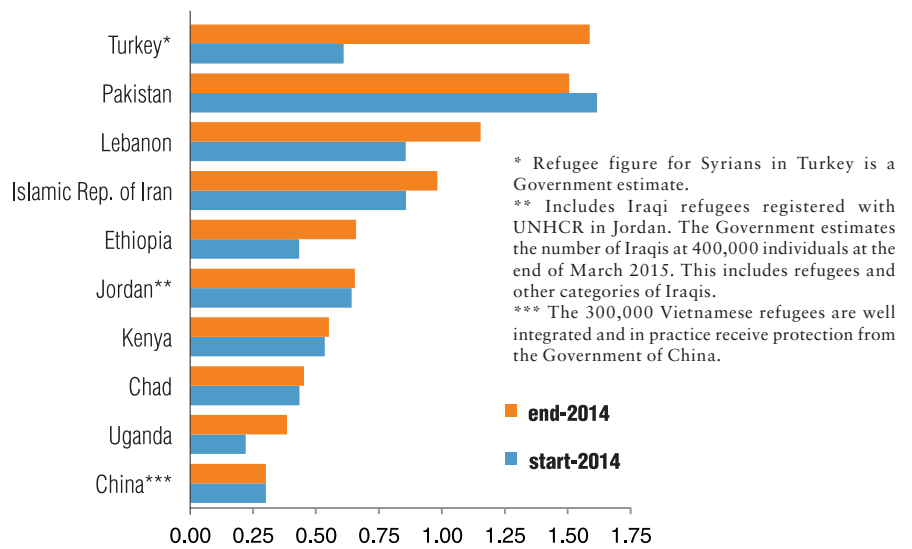


CHART 2 Number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants, 2014

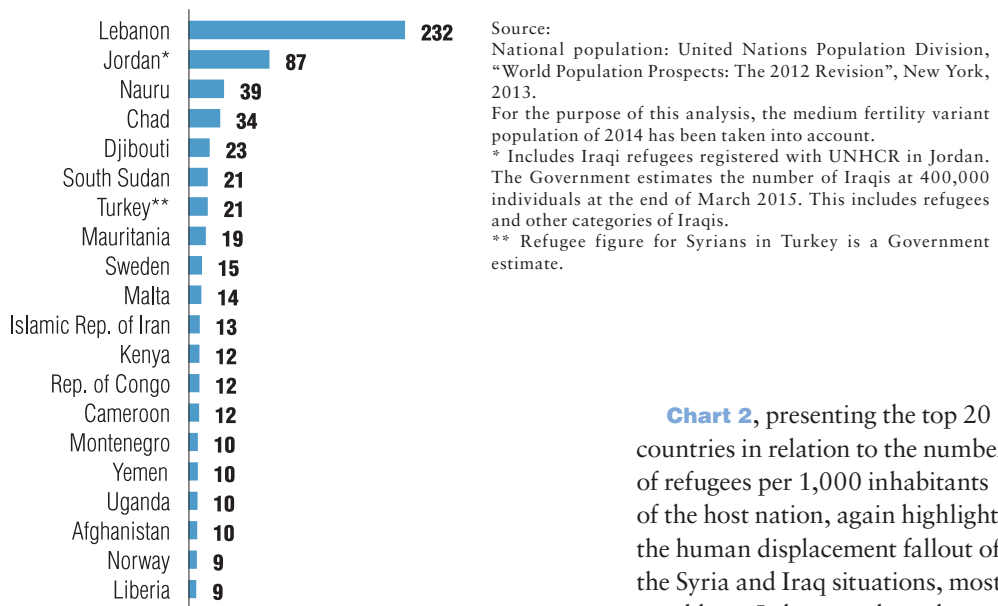
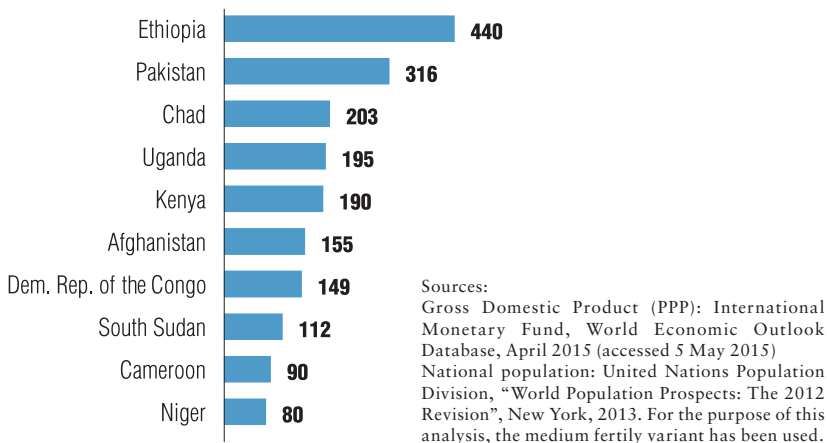


Chart 2, presenting the top 20 countries in relation to the number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants of the host nation, again highlights the human displacement fallout of the Syria and Iraq situations, most notably on Lebanon where the ratio of refugees to national population further increased from 178 refugees per 1,000 Lebanese in 2013 to 232 per 1,000 in 2014.

Chart 3 shows the number of refugees per 1 USD GDP per capita in 2014, and once again as in 2013, all hosting countries in the listing were in developing regions of the world, predominantly Africa, followed by Asia.

For more details and analysis of refugee-related statistics, see UNHCR's *Global Trends 2014* (available mid-2015).

CHART 3 Number of refugees per 1 USD GDP (PPP) per capita, 2014



Hosting countries play the primary role in protecting and assisting refugees. The majority of United Nations Member States (148 of the 193 Member States as of December 2014) are party to either one or both the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. As such, they have committed themselves to the protection and assistance of refugees in support of UNHCR's mandate and, more importantly, to refraining from “expel[ling] or return[ing] (*refouler*) a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

The preamble to the 1951 Refugee Convention acknowledges that the granting of asylum may place “an undue burden on certain countries because of their geographical situation, and that a satisfactory solution of a problem of which the United Nations has recognized

the international scope and nature cannot be achieved without international cooperation.” As such, UNHCR is deeply concerned with international solidarity and burden sharing, which are crucial to make resolute progress in taking effective humanitarian action and attaining durable solutions.

As time goes by, the presence of refugees may also produce developmental impacts, as well as both positive and negative social and economic returns, particularly in areas where the local population may have few resources of its own.

Equally, refugees may have different skill sets that complement or compete with the host country's labour force; but the benefits of their contributions – both potential and actual – on the local economy could outweigh the cost of supplying them with food, shelter and other goods and services. Refugee-hosting communities may also be positively affected by improved infrastructure, public services and other forms of assistance to meet the needs of both refugee and local populations.

■ The socio-economic impact of conflict

The presence of a large population of refugees is invariably considered to constitute a significant development challenge. A related challenge concerns the economic impact of conflict in a neighbouring country and its spill-over effects. This is poignantly illustrated in Lebanon, where the conflict in neighbouring Syria has adversely affected the country's economy (see *World Bank and the UN (2013): Lebanon: Economic and Social Impact Assessment of the Syrian Conflict*). The diversion of government and direct foreign investment, particularly in areas where conflict has spilled across borders, and the breakdown of cross-border trade relations, are examples of the impact that the Syria situation has had on the Lebanese economy. As government revenue drops, public funds available for infrastructure and public services become correspondingly limited.

In Lebanon, the strain on public services, especially for health and education, has been compounded by the arrival of over 1 million Syrian refugees. Many have arrived with limited or no financial and material means, and rely heavily on humanitarian assistance and public services to meet their immediate needs. The same applies to the country's infrastructure, including the water supplies, sanitation, municipal services, electricity, and transportation.

In response, UNHCR's cash-based assistance programmes, which have been expanded in the region insofar as funding has been available, aim to reduce poverty and dependency, and to ease the burden refugees can represent for local communities. Cash and vouchers can be equally useful in urban or rural settings by injecting new economic impetus into a local economy.

True humanitarian spirit

In spite of the challenges local communities face when welcoming large numbers of refugees, there are many remarkable accounts of ordinary people who show extraordinary generosity towards refugees.

OVERCOMING THE COMMUNICATION GAP

Tan Szee Ling, a Malaysian national, first became aware of the presence of refugee communities in her country when she was looking for volunteer work in 2013. She agreed to volunteer with primary school-aged refugee children as an English language teacher. At first, the language barrier between herself and her young students was difficult to overcome, but thanks to training with UNHCR, she was soon equipped with a range of tools to enable her to communicate better with the children.

The young volunteer teacher's commitment to teach her students and their enthusiastic response to her work brought her a deeper understanding of the causes and consequences of forced



UNHCR / TAN SZEE LING

displacement. "I feel really lucky to be a Malaysian citizen," she said. "I myself am from a poor family, but I believe education can bring hope and eventually change the destiny of a family." Tan Szee Ling added that she now feels more motivated than ever to continue working with refugee children as a volunteer teacher.

A WELCOMING HOST

In Lebanon's Bekaa Valley, Foddiye Abou Nomri owns a beautiful property, which she has opened up to welcome several Syrian refugee families.



UNHCR / E. DORFMAN

POZZALLO: WORLD CAPITAL OF HOSPITALITY

In 2014, more than 3,000 people with different profiles and needs, including asylum-seekers and refugees, lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea. These individuals took to the sea to escape violence and persecution in their homeland, hoping to find sanctuary and a better life in Europe, but vessels were too often unseaworthy and distress calls too distant.

Asylum-seekers and refugees use the term “boat of death” to describe the dangerous sea journey to cross the Mediterranean Sea. Many are beaten, raped, tortured or tossed overboard simply for having tried to move in a crowded vessel. Of the 160,000 who disembarked in Italy in 2014, the majority were rescued at sea by the Italian Navy operation *Mare Nostrum*.

Moreover, many community members where these “boat people” disembarked have made great personal sacrifices to care for new arrivals.

Luigi Ammatuna, Mayor of Pozzallo, a small town in the southern part of Sicily, has frequently boarded rescue boats – day and night – to oversee the arrival of refugees and migrants. In spite of stormy weather, 2,500 refugees and migrants, including hundreds of children, disembarked in Sicily in just one week in November 2014. All were rescued by merchant vessels or the Italian Navy, and Mayor Ammatuna was there to greet them. “I want to be the mayor of a town that welcomes migrants and refugees,” he told UNHCR.

The town’s Deputy Mayor, Virginia Giugno, was so moved by the arrival of children that she chose to become the legal guardian for

An Italian navy boat disembarks 186 people coming from different countries all over the world from the Grecale Navy ship to the San Giusto war ship.





UNHCR

Deputy Mayor Virginia Giugno (on right) welcomes UNHCR spokesperson Melissa Fleming at Pozzallo's town hall. Ms. Giugno has become legal guardian to some 500 children who arrived alone.

around 500 unaccompanied minors. She said that if she could, she would give them all a home and provide them with a mother's care, a family life and the opportunity to study. "I consider myself lucky," she said, "because I live in a place where we – myself, Mayor Ammatuna and the residents – have opened the doors."

One of these rescued children is Mohamed, a young Somali who arrived traumatized after witnessing the death of 10 fellow passengers from hunger and thirst during the

journey across the Mediterranean Sea. He hopes for a better future for himself and his brothers, who might join him some day in Europe. "I would like to find a job and be a painter," he said.

These are just a few examples of the many contributions made by a multitude of individuals who tirelessly show support for their Government's efforts in hosting and caring for refugees. UNHCR salutes their courage and compassion. ■



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Group photo at the Comiso Home for unaccompanied minors who have arrived in Pozzallo after being rescued by the Italian Navy.