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FACTS ABOUT REFUGEES

Refugees, asylum-seekers and global displacement have in recent years become a hot topic in the political and public debate. Nevertheless, the topic is surrounded by myths and, too often, lack of facts. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, provides you with 10 important facts on refugees – for a fact-based discussion.



1 1% of humanity is displaced

Global displacement is at a record high with conflicts becoming more protracted and root causes more complex. At the end of 2020, 82.4 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations. This figure has doubled in the past decade, meaning that today 1 in 95 people on earth has been forced from their homes.

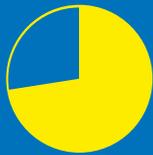
Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2020



2 2/3 of all refugees come from only five countries

Altogether, more than two-thirds of all refugees worldwide, 68 %, come from just five countries. Syrian refugees continue to account for the largest refugee population in the world with 6.7 million. This is followed by Venezuela (4.0 million), Afghanistan (2.6 million), South Sudan (2.2 million) and Myanmar (1.1 million).

Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2020



3 3 in 4 refugees are in countries bordering their homelands

73 % of the world's refugees are hosted by countries neighboring their countries of origin. These include some of the world's poorest and least developed countries. Only 14 % of the world's refugees are hosted in high-income and developed countries. Low- and middle-income countries are under severe economic strain further exacerbated by COVID-19. It has disproportionately impacted refugees and forcibly displaced people as they face lost livelihoods, poverty, insufficient aid and development.

Sources: UNHCR Global Trends 2020



4 Millions are displaced within their own countries

While 26 million refugees have fled their countries, there are 48 million internally displaced people who have fled within their own countries. Even if they have not crossed a border, their protection and humanitarian needs are often similar to those of refugees. The countries with the largest populations of internally displaced people are Colombia, Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2020



5 Arrivals to Europe have dropped significantly

The number of refugees and migrants crossing the Mediterranean and arriving in Europe has decreased substantially in recent years. In 2020, a total of 95,031 people arrived in Europe via the Mediterranean routes and the Canary Islands route, compared to approximately 1 million in 2015. An estimated 1,401 people lost their lives in 2020 in attempting to cross the Mediterranean Sea, an increase from the previous year.

Source: UNHCR's Operational Data Portal, Mediterranean Situation



6 3 in 4 refugees are caught up in protracted crises

76 % of the world's refugees, almost 16 million, are estimated to be in situations of long-term forced displacement. At the end of 2020, a total of 49 protracted refugee situations were registered, characterized by at least 25,000 refugees hosted for five consecutive years in the same host country. One example is the Afghan refugee situation, now in its fifth decade.

Source: UNHCR Global Trends 2020



7 More than 95% of resettlement needs are unmet

As the number of vulnerable refugees is growing, the need for places for resettlement in safe, third countries is urgent. UNHCR estimates that 1.4 million refugees are in need of resettlement as they cannot receive adequate protection in their current host country. However, only 34,400 refugees were resettled in 2020, down from 107,800 in 2019.

Sources: UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2022
UNHCR Global Resettlement Needs 2020



8 42% of the world's forcibly displaced are children

While children account for 30 % of the world's population, at the end of 2020, some 42 % of all forcibly displaced people were children and youth under 18 years old. The proportion of children is particularly high in the three sub-Saharan regions, standing above 50 percent of the displaced populations. UNHCR estimates that almost one million children were born into a refugee life between 2018 and 2020.

Sources: UNHCR Global Trends 2020



9 90% of refugees come from countries most vulnerable to climate change

In 2020, 95% of all conflict displacements occurred in countries vulnerable or highly vulnerable to climate change. While consequences of climate change are factors driving or amplifying displacement globally, climate change and climate-related disasters, such as flooding and drought, are increasing the vulnerability of those already forced to flee. Almost 9 of 10 refugees originate from countries most vulnerable to climate change, and 7 in 10 IDPs live in such a country.

Sources: UNHCR Global Trends 2020,
UNHCR Data Finder



10 It is never a crime to seek asylum

The right to seek asylum in another country for those who have lost the protection of their own country, is enshrined in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Refugee Convention is the first treaty which turned the ideals of the Declaration into legally binding obligations. It is therefore not a crime to seek asylum, even if the person has entered the country irregularly.

Source: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights