

Chapter 5

Demographic characteristics and location

Introduction

This chapter presents some of the trends and patterns related to demography and geographic locations in 2008. It includes an overview of data availability and coverage, observed trends in the sex and age breakdown of UNHCR’s persons of concern and an analysis of the distribution of refugees by location with a special focus on refugees in urban settings.

UNHCR encourages its offices to collect and disseminate sex and age disaggregated information on persons of concern. Location data is also crucial for identifying gaps in interventions, and disparities in legal and physical protection within a given country. Information on both demographic and geographic characteristics of populations of concern to UNHCR is critical for planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating humanitarian support and programmes.

Unfortunately, there is a lack of reliable and complete statistics on sex, age and the geographic distribution of populations of concern to the Office. Sex and age data tend to be more available in countries where UNHCR is operational and involved in the registration and profiling of people of concern. As a consequence, most industrialized countries do not have, or do not report sex and age disaggregated data. This results in statistical problems in UNHCR’s global demographic profile, which shows a relatively high presence of children and few older refugees. The absence of demographic data for industrialized countries makes it impossible to determine if the patterns observed in UNHCR’s data in regard to sex, age and location are truly representative of the global population of persons of concern.

Sex and age

The available demographic information on persons of concern to UNHCR is partial and varies in availability and reliability between locations and populations. Nevertheless, demographic data coverage has improved in recent years. In absolute terms, the availability of sex and age data has almost doubled between 2005 and 2008, increasing from 11 to 21 million persons of concern. The number of countries for which demographic

Fig V.1 Trends in demographic data availability by category, 2006-2008

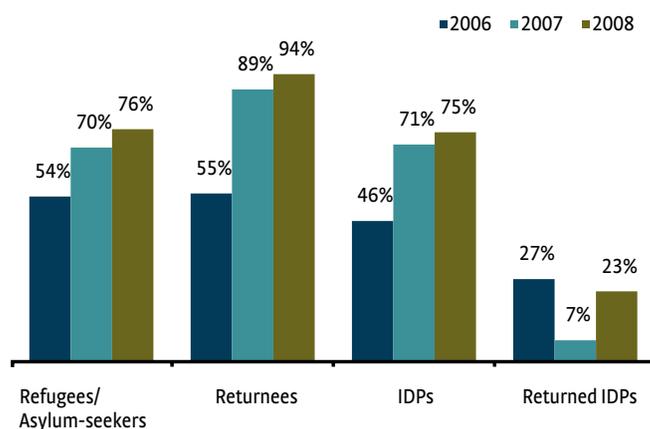
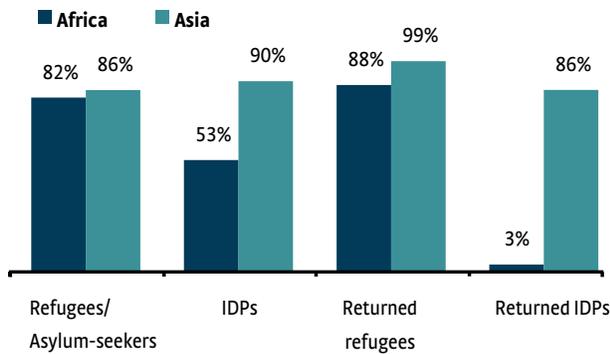


Fig V.2 Demographic data coverage by region and population category, end-2008



data is available has also significantly increased, from 124 to 138 during the same period, especially because of UNHCR’s registration software *proGres*, which, by the end of 2008, had been introduced to 72 countries.

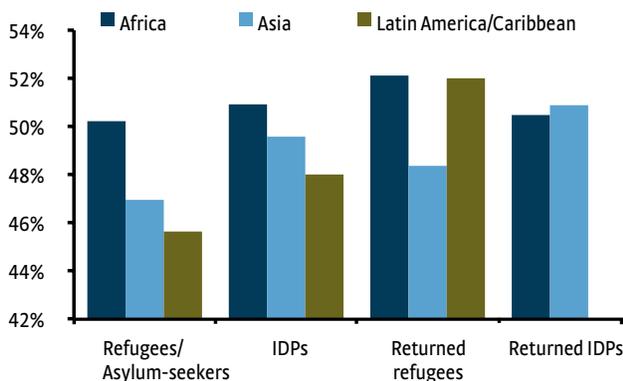
On average, across all populations of concern and locations in 2008, information on sex is available for 62 per cent of persons of concern, while age information is available for only 42 per cent. Not surprisingly, information availability is greater in countries where UNHCR is operationally active, and is the poorest for returned IDP populations, which are rarely registered and mostly estimated. In Africa and Asia the average coverage for this information is 82 per cent, providing a quite comprehensive picture of the sex distribution of refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. Interestingly, in Asia, the availability of demographic information for returned IDPs is also high (close to 90%).

Breakdown by sex for populations and regions

The available data indicates that women and girls constitute on average 49 per cent of persons of concern excluding stateless persons. Breakdowns by major population are as follows: 47 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers are women and girls; 50 per cent of IDPs and returned refugees; and 51 per cent of returned IDPs.⁵⁶

The available data by region indicate that women and girls represent in general half or more of the persons of concern in Africa, while men and boys are the majority in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Fig V.3 Percentage of women by region and selected population category, end-2008



56 Based on only 23 per cent coverage for this category. Figures exclude stateless persons due to low data coverage.

Breakdown by age for populations and regions

At the end of 2008, information by age was available for 14.3 million people or 42 per cent of persons of concern. Children below 18 represent 44 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers, 43 per cent of IDPs, and 58 and 56 per cent respectively of returned refugees and returned IDPs. Available data also indicate that children below five constitute 10 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers as well as IDPs, equally distributed between boys and girls. School age children (5 - 17 years) are also equally distributed between girls and boys, and represent, on average, one third of refugees and asylum-seekers, IDPs and returned IDPs, but 40 per cent of returned refugees.

Table V.1: Sex and age breakdown of selected population groups, end-2008

Category*	Female					Male				
	0-4	5-11	12-17	18-59	60+	0-4	5-11	12-17	18-59	60+
Refugees/ asylum-seekers	5%	9%	7%	24%	2%	5%	10%	8%	27%	2%
IDPs	5%	9%	7%	26%	3%	5%	10%	7%	26%	3%
Returned refugees	9%	12%	7%	19%	2%	9%	13%	8%	19%	2%
Returned IDPs	11%	13%	6%	25%	1%	10%	10%	6%	17%	1%

* Excludes stateless persons and Others of concern due to lack of data.

The share of older persons ranges between two to six per cent depending on the category of persons of concern. Adults between 18 and 59 years constitute the largest age category of refugees and asylum-seekers (51%) and IDPs (52%), but only 38 per cent of returned refugees and 42 per cent of returned IDPs. The fact that almost six out of 10 returnees are children below 18 years has implications in terms of the necessary investments in the areas of education, nutrition and health for return and reintegration activities.

Location

This section provides information on the type of location and settlements in which the populations of concern reside. UNHCR's statistical database includes in general three major types of location: camps, urban and rural/dispersed. The category "various" is used when location or settlement types are unclear or are a mixture of type.

Table V.2: Distribution of persons of concern by location, end-2008

UNHCR regions	Camps	Rural/ dispersed	Urban	Various
Central Africa and Great Lakes	16%	8%	1%	19%
East and Horn of Africa	46%	20%	20%	3%
Southern Africa	2%	0%	0%	0%
West Africa	1%	1%	1%	9%
Total Africa	64%	30%	22%	30%
Asia and Pacific	32%	24%	18%	17%
Americas	0%	3%	1%	37%
Europe	1%	5%	26%	11%
Middle East and North Africa	3%	39%	32%	6%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

In total, location information on the standard four categories was available for 28.2 out of the 34.5 million persons of concern or 82 per cent. Some 16 per cent of persons of concern live in camp-type locations, 25 per cent in urban settings while rural/dispersed and various locations account for 29 per cent each.

Camp locations

Some 4.6 million persons of concern reside in camps/settlements, mostly refugees (2.6 million) and IDPs (1.9 million).

Africa hosts about two thirds of all camp populations (64%). They are mainly clustered around the East and Horn of Africa (46%; almost half of the world camp population) and the Central Africa and Great Lakes region (16%). The camp population in the East and Horn of Africa is mainly composed of IDPs (1.5 million) and refugees (560,000), while in the other regions, refugees constitute the overwhelming majority of camp populations. With 1.5 million persons of concern (32%), including some 1.1 million refugees and 375,000 IDPs, Asia is the second largest region hosting camp populations. Close to 80 per cent of the Asian camp population is located in south-west Asia alone.

Three sub-regions host some 95 per cent of camp populations worldwide, namely the East and Horn Africa, south-west Asia, and central Africa and the Great Lakes. The number of such locations varies considerably depending on the population category. According to UNHCR's GIS⁵⁷ database, in 2008, there were some 480 refugee camps/settlements, including over 260 in Africa and close to 200 in Asia. Some 200 out of the 300 IDP camps/settlements available in this database are located in Africa, mostly in Uganda.

Rural/dispersed locations

Some 180 locations hosting primarily IDPs (4.3 million), refugees (1.7 million) and returned IDPs (1 million) are situated in rural areas. The large majority of these 8.1 million persons of concern are located in the Middle East and North Africa region (39%), Africa (30%) and Asia (24%). At close to three million, IDPs in Iraq constitute the largest group in this category, followed by refugees in the Islamic Republic of Iran (1 million) and both IDPs and returned IDPs in Kenya (750,000) and returned IDPs in Uganda (600,000). Roughly half (51%) of persons of concern residing in rural/dispersed areas are men or boys while 47 per cent are children below the age of 18.

Urban locations

The 2009 *High Commissioner's Dialogue on Protection Challenges* focused on urban areas; more than seven million persons of concern reside in this type of location, outnumbering - for the third consecutive year - those living in camps. With 4.6 million, refugees and asylum-seekers represent 65 per cent of persons of concern residing in urban areas, followed by IDPs (2 million or 28 per cent). UNHCR's GIS database includes close to 500 urban locations: 380 for refugees and 110 for IDPs. Europe accounts for over one third of refugees in urban settings, followed by Asia and Pacific (22%), Africa (20%) and the Americas (16%). Europe is also host to a large number of IDPs living in urban accommodations.

Persons of concern residing in urban locations are equally distributed across regions and sub-regions. About one third of the global urban population is located in the Middle East and North Africa region (Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Jordan), followed by Europe with 25 per cent. Africa and Asia each host 22 and 18 per cent respectively, of persons of concern residing in urban areas.

Sex and age data were available for 85 and 73 per cent respectively, of persons of concern residing in urban settings. Women represent on average 48 per cent of refugees in urban settings and 49 per cent in urban IDP areas. Children below the age of 18 and elderly persons represent 44 and 5 per cent respectively of persons of concern residing in urban areas.

These percentages exclude refugees in most industrialized countries for whom data is not provided to UNHCR. Although not included in these statistics, UNHCR presumes that a good percentage of the population of concern in industrialized countries reside in urban locations, increasing further the overall percentage of refugees and others who now find themselves in urban environments to an even higher figure. The absence of this information is a challenge in terms of having an overall view of the magnitude and needs of persons of concern in urban environments.

In focus: Refugees in urban areas

In 2008, UNHCR offices reported over 800 different locations hosting altogether an estimated 8.7 million refugees or 83 per cent of the 10.5 million refugees under UNHCR's protection.

Among the 10.5 million refugees under UNHCR's protection by end 2008, 4.4 million lived in urban areas, while 2.6 million lived in camps and 1.7 million in rural areas dispersed among the local population.⁵⁸ This means that nearly half of all refugees were living in urban environments rather than in camps or rural settings.

For those refugees for whom location information is available (8.7 million), 48 per cent resided in urban areas covered by UNHCR's Middle East and North Africa Bureau. This was due to the large urban Iraqi refugee populations in Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. However, UNHCR offices in Asia reported close to 1.1 million refugees in urban areas (34%), mostly in Pakistan. In Africa, only 12 per cent of the refugees in sub-Saharan Africa were reported to be residing in urban locations. However, as there was no standard definition of urban versus rural areas in use in UNHCR and not all offices systematically reported this type of information, more analysis would be required to understand better the impact of increasing urbanization on refugee populations.

Table V.3 Distribution of refugees by type of settlement and region, end-2008

UNHCR region	Refugees (in mln)	Location available		Distribution by location (in mln) **			Distribution by location **		
		Total (in mln)	%	Camps/ centers	Rural/ dispersed	Urban	Camps/ centers	Rural/ dispersed	Urban
Central Africa/Great Lakes	1.01	1.01	100%	0.71	0.23	0.06	71%	23%	6%
Southern Africa	0.16	0.12	73%	0.07	0.03	0.02	60%	22%	18%
West Africa	0.18	0.18	100%	0.05	0.08	0.05	26%	43%	30%
East/Horn of Africa	0.76	0.72	95%	0.56	0.06	0.10	77%	9%	14%
(sub-Saharan) Africa	2.11	2.02	96%	1.39	0.39	0.24	69%	19%	12%
Middle East/North Africa	2.35	2.32	99%	0.12	0.09	2.12	5%	4%	91%
Americas	0.80	0.25	31%	-	0.20	0.05	0%	81%	19%
Asia/Pacific	3.60	3.15	88%	1.11	0.96	1.08	35%	30%	34%
Europe	1.63	0.96	59%	0.01	0.05	0.89	1%	5%	93%
Total	10.49	8.70	83%	2.63	1.69	4.37	30%	19%	50%

** Figures and percentages are based on the available information and exclude unknown refugee locations.

58 The type of location was reported as unclear or unknown for about 1.8 million (17%) of the world's refugees.

Who were the refugees living in urban environments?

In most camp or communal locations, UNHCR was either carrying out or involved in population data collection, and therefore the availability of demographic information was usually good. It was much more difficult to get this information for urban or dispersed populations. While for most refugees residing in urban settings, information on the sex breakdown was available, breakdown by age groups was harder to gather.

Based on available data, 48 per cent of refugees in urban areas were women, compared to 50 per cent for camps and 46 per cent for rural settings. Refugee children below the age of 18 years constituted on average 41 per cent of the total refugee population in urban areas while in camps they accounted for 53 per cent of the population. Older persons (age 60 years and more) accounted for 6 per cent of all refugees in urban areas, which was higher than in camps.

Fig V.4 Sex and age coverage for refugees by type of settlement, end-2008

(% based on data for 8.7 million refugees)

