



A refugee from Iraq at the emergency transit centre in Timisoara, Romania.

Through an agreement established with UNHCR in 2009, Romania provides a temporary haven for refugees in urgent need of evacuation from their first asylum countries due to life-threatening conditions. They can stay for up to six months before being resettled in third countries.



4 Asylum and Refugee Status Determination

THIS CHAPTER LOOKS at the various components forming the refugee status determination (RSD) process. First, levels and trends in the number of asylum applications submitted worldwide are analysed. Despite the fact that some 150 countries have acceded to the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol, asylum policies and practices are far from harmonized, and national asylum statistics are thus sometimes difficult to compare.

The second part of this chapter addresses the different types of decisions taken during 2012. This includes

asylum-seekers who have been granted refugee status or a complementary form of protection, those who have been rejected, or those whose asylum application has been closed for administrative reasons. In addition, this section examines the two types of recognition rates calculated by UNHCR and also provides an overview of asylum claims that are still pending – i.e. that had not yet been adjudicated by the end of the year. This chapter does not include information on mass influxes of refugees, however, nor on those granted refugee status on a group or *prima facie* basis.

Who is an asylum-seeker?

An asylum-seeker is an individual seeking international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined. ●

It should be stressed that even though the concepts of asylum and refugee status are sometimes used interchangeably in the 2012 Yearbook, territorial asylum can only be accorded by States. UNHCR may grant refugee status under its mandate, but it cannot provide asylum.

Global Trends

APPLICATIONS

Close to 920,000 individual applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to governments or UNHCR's offices in 176 countries or territories during 2012, the second highest level of the past 10 years. While this constituted a 6 per cent rise globally compared to 2011 (864,600 claims), the increase in industrialized countries was even higher, an estimated 8 per cent.⁴⁶ Of the total 919,700 asylum claims, an estimated 752,700 were

TABLE 4.1 New and appeal applications registered | 2010 - 2012

	2010	2011	2012
State*	747,300	734,100	781,100
UNHCR	96,800	98,800	115,800
Jointly**	6,200	31,700	22,800
Total	850,300	864,600	919,700
% UNHCR only	11%	11%	13%

Note

* Includes revised estimates.

** Refers to refugee status determination conducted jointly by UNHCR and governments.

⁴⁶ For a detailed analysis of asylum trends in industrialized countries, see *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, 2012*, UNHCR Geneva, March 2013, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/5149b81e9.html>.

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initial applications⁴⁷ lodged in 'first instance' procedures, while the remaining 167,000 claims were submitted at second instance, including with courts or other appellate bodies.⁴⁸

Of the total 919,700 claims in 2012, UNHCR's offices registered some 115,800 individual asylum applications, significantly more than the year before (98,800). The agency's share in the global number of applications registered also increased, from 11 to 13 per cent.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR REFUGEE STATUS DETERMINATION

In countries where national asylum procedures are not in place or where States are unable or unwilling to assess asylum claims in a fair or efficient manner, UNHCR may conduct RSD under its mandate.

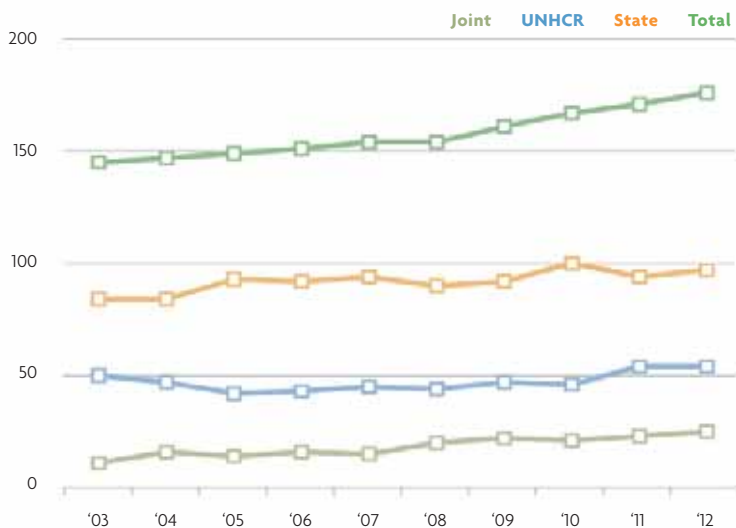
Between 2003 and 2012, the number of countries or territories that shared asylum statistics with UNHCR increased from 145 to 176. One of the main reasons for the significantly higher

country coverage during the latter part of this period is the inclusion of a number of Caribbean and Pacific islands that had previously not been reporting such information. In addition, State successions in Europe and Africa during this period led to the creation of new RSD procedures.

In 2003, the government was responsible for implementing the RSD procedure in 84 out of 145 countries or territories that shared asylum statistics with UNHCR (58%). A decade later, in 2012 the proportion stood at 97 versus 176 (55%) [see **Figure 4.1**]. Over this period, the number of countries in which UNHCR was responsible for the RSD procedure increased from 50 to 54 countries. Also during this period, UNHCR's involvement in RSD procedures implemented jointly with governments increased from 11 to 25 countries/territories.

UNHCR also conducted mandate RSD in parallel to government and/or joint RSD procedures in several other countries/territories. This was particularly the case in contexts where government or joint RSD procedures did not ensure access to procedures for all asylum-seekers or where mandate RSD provided the basis for a durable solution (notably resettlement). In addition, UNHCR continued to be involved in certain aspects of many government RSD procedures through the provision of advice or training, or participation in national eligibility commissions.

Fig. 4.1 Responsibility for RSD (by country/territory) | 2000 - 2012



⁴⁷ The data for some countries includes a significant number of repeat claims, i.e. the applicant has submitted at least one previous application in the same or another country.

⁴⁸ Statistical information on outcomes of asylum appeals and court proceedings is under-reported in UNHCR's statistics, particularly in industrialized countries, because this type of data is often either not collected by States or not published separately.

NEW INDIVIDUAL ASYLUM APPLICATIONS REGISTERED

By country of asylum

With 82,000 new asylum claims registered in 2012, South Africa topped the list for the fifth successive year, accounting for almost a tenth of all individual applications worldwide.⁴⁹ Although the country's 2012 figure for claims was 23 per cent lower than in 2011 (107,000), it was more than half again as large as that of 2006, when a mere 53,400 individuals had sought international protection in South Africa.

Asylum levels, meanwhile, have gradually dropped from the 2009 peak of 222,300 claims [see **Figure 4.2**]. Over the last 10 years, South Africa regis-

tered almost one million new asylum applications, making it by far the top destination for asylum-seekers during this period. Zimbabweans accounted for more than half of claims submitted in South Africa during this period, some 532,000 asylum applications. As in past years, Zimbabweans again lodged the

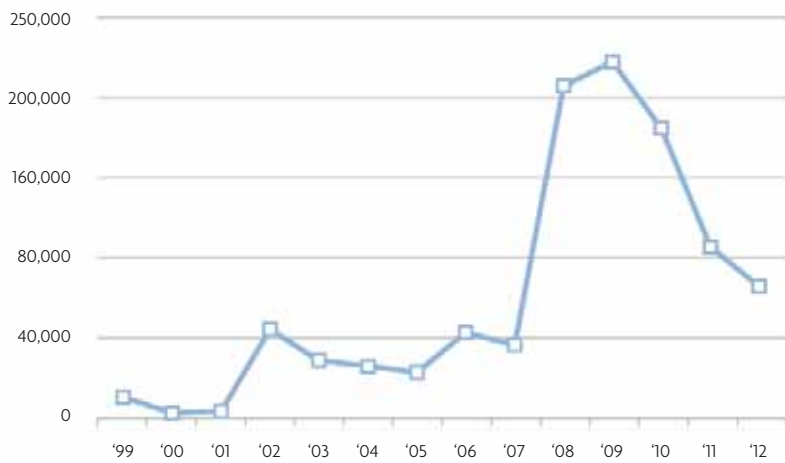
majority of new asylum claims in South Africa for 2012 (20,500).

The United States of America received an estimated 70,400 new asylum claims registered during the year.⁵⁰ This number represented an increase of 9 per cent over 2011 (64,400, a revised estimate). Asylum-seekers from

⁴⁹ The figure reported in the 2012 Global Trends report (<http://www.unhcr.org/51bacb0f9.html>) was 61,500, based on provisional data reported to UNHCR by the Government of South Africa. The latter subsequently revised its initial figure to 82,000 applications.

⁵⁰ Estimated number of individuals based on the number of new cases (43,050) and multiplied by 1.1 to reflect the average number of individuals per case (Source: US Department of Homeland Security); and number of new 'defensive' asylum requests lodged with the Executive Office of Immigration Review (23,050, reported by individuals). Until recently, UNHCR applied a factor of 1.4 for data provided by the US Department of Homeland Security, though this figure was revised due to newly available information. As a result, the figure quoted in this report differs from the one quoted in the document *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, 2012*, UNHCR Geneva, March 2013 (<http://www.unhcr.org/5149b81e9.html>).

Fig. 4.2 New asylum claims lodged in South Africa | 1999 - 2012



Egypt (+101%), Honduras (+36%), Mexico (+33%), and Guatemala (+13%) primarily accounted for this increase. Almost half of all asylum claims in the United States of America were lodged by asylum-seekers from China (24%), Mexico (17%), or El Salvador (7%). Violence generated by transnational organized crime, gang-related violence, and drug cartels in some parts of Central America may have contributed to the increased number of individuals from this region seeking international protection.

For the first time since 2002, Germany is again listed among the three largest recipients worldwide of asylum-seekers and as the main recipient in Europe, with 64,500 new asylum claims registered in 2012. This was a 41 per cent increase over 2011 (45,700 claims), and the fifth consecutive year in which figures have gone up. Serbia (and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 [1999]) was the top country of origin for asylum-seekers in Germany (10,400 claims), followed by Afghanistan (7,500 claims), the Syrian Arab Republic (6,200), and Iraq (5,400 claims). A sizable number of applicants from the Balkans were believed to be of Roma origin,⁵¹ and a fifth of all applications were lodged by people coming from Kosovo (S/RES/1244 [1999]). In addition, the number of Syrians fleeing conflict and violence in their country and seeking asylum in Germany more than doubled, from 2,600 applications in 2011 to 6,200 a year later.

France was the fourth largest recipient of asylum-seekers in 2012,

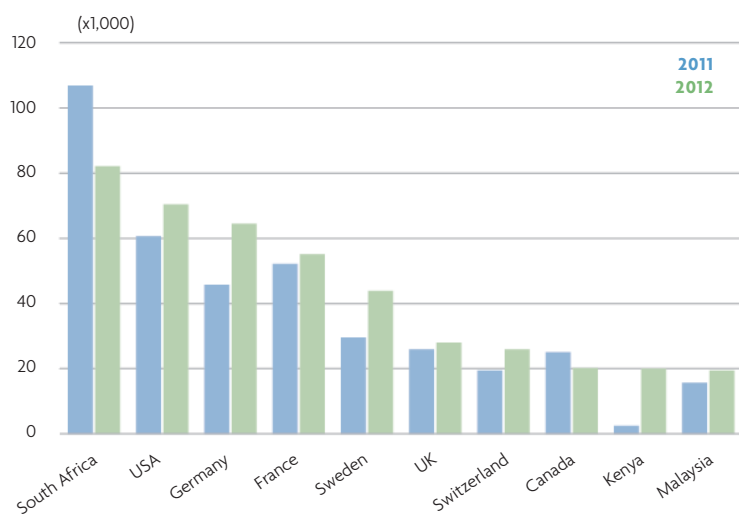
with 55,100 new asylum requests registered during the year. This was a 6 per cent increase compared to 2011 (52,100 claims) and the highest since 2004 (58,600 claims). This rise was due particularly to higher numbers of asylum-seekers from the Russian Federation (+32%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (+38%), and Albania (+45%). Overall, the Russian Federation was the top country of origin of asylum-seekers in France, with close to 5,400 applications, followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5,300 claims) and Serbia (and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 [1999]) (4,000 claims).

Sweden ranked fifth in 2012, with 43,900 applications received during the year, a 48 per cent increase compared to 2011 (29,600 claims). This was the second highest level since 1992, when more than 84,000 people, many of them fleeing the former Yugoslavia, requested asylum in Sweden. The 2012 increase was mainly due to increased numbers of asylum-seekers from the Syrian Arab Republic, with 7,800 claims received in 2012 compared to 650 claims in 2011. The number of Somali and Afghan asylum-seekers also increased (+42% and +15%, respectively). Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Syrian Arab Republic were the top three source countries of asylum applications in Sweden, accounting for 41 per cent of all claims registered.

Other important destination countries for asylum-seekers were the United Kingdom (27,500), Switzerland (25,900), Canada (20,200),⁵² and Kenya (20,000).

In 2012, UNHCR's offices registered 110,700 new individual applications for refugee status and 5,100 on appeal or for review. The office in Kenya received the largest number of new requests (20,000), followed by Malaysia (19,400), Turkey (16,700), Indonesia (7,200), and Egypt (6,700). With the exception of Egypt and Yemen, countries listed in

Fig. 4.3 Main destination countries for new asylum-seekers | 2011 - 2012



⁵¹ According to the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 92 per cent of all asylum applicants in Germany originating from Serbia (and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 [1999]) were of Roma origin.

⁵² Source: Canadian Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB).

Unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) seeking asylum

Available data indicate that 21,300 individual asylum applications were lodged by UASC in 72 countries in 2012. This is the highest level on record since UNHCR started systematically collecting such data in 2006. The 2012 figure constituted about 4 per cent of the total number of asylum claims lodged in those countries, and was consistent with the percentage observed in the past five years (4% each). In absolute terms, however, the number of UASC seeking asylum increased compared to both 2011 (17,700 claims in 69 countries) and 2010 (15,600 claims in 69 countries).

Europe received 14,300, or two-thirds, of the 21,300 UASC claims. Sweden and Germany again registered the greatest number of UASC asylum claims in Europe, with 3,600 and 2,100, respectively. Austria and the United Kingdom were other important recipients of UASC applications, with 1,600 and 1,100, respectively. Outside Europe, Canada reported having registered 280 UASC claims, the first time it has ever provided such data. Kenya and Indonesia were other important destination countries for UASC, with 3,200 and 1,100 asylum claims, respectively.

The available information indicates that more than 5,400 unaccompanied or separated children were recognized in 2012 as refugees or granted a complementary form of protection. Despite a significantly higher number of UASC applications, this figure was comparatively lower than in 2011 (5,200 positive grants), 2010 (5,400), and 2009 (7,700). Europe accounted for 67 per cent of all positive decisions rendered in 2012. The available information on the country of origin of UASC confirmed the trend already observed in previous years, whereby mainly Afghan and Somali children applied for asylum (7,000 and 1,300 claims, respectively). Eritrean UASC also submitted some 420 asylum claims, while a significant number of UASC originating from South Sudan sought asylum in Kenya (2,100 claims). ●



Table 4.2 saw an increase in individual asylum applications. The top five UNHCR offices receiving asylum applications in 2012 registered 63 per cent of all new claims for the year. Four-fifths of UNHCR's RSD work (in terms of new applications registered) was concentrated in 10 countries.

By origin

For the first time since 2008, Zimbabwe was not the top source country of asylum-seekers. Rather, the highest number of new asylum claims filed by individuals either with UNHCR or with States originated from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (54,100), Afghanistan (50,000), the Syrian Arab Republic (32,300), Pakistan (30,700), Eritrea (30,200), and Somalia (29,700). These figures should be considered as indicative, however, because the country of origin for some asylum-seekers is unknown or undisclosed by some States.

As in previous years, asylum-seekers tend to cluster by nationality in particular countries. For instance, almost half of all new Congolese asylum claims were lodged either in Rwanda (17,100) or Burundi (8,200). Similarly, about half of all new Eritrean asylum claims were registered in Sudan. Although

Decisions

Available data indicate that States and UNHCR rendered close to 700,000 substantive decisions on individual asylum applications during 2012. These figures do not include cases that were closed for administrative reasons with no decisions issued to applicants.

Of this number, UNHCR staff adjudicated 54,400 substantive decisions – 8 per cent of the total and a portion similar to 2011 (9%). In 12 countries, 18,200 substantive decisions were taken in joint RSD procedures. Data relating to individual decisions are incomplete, however, as a few States did not release all their official statistics. The 2012 de-

⁵³ This figure is likely to be substantially higher, as a significant number of decisions rendered by States at the appeal or review stage of the asylum procedure have not been released.

TABLE 4.2
New asylum claims lodged in top 10 UNHCR offices* | 2012

Country	Total
Kenya	20,000
Malaysia	19,400
Turkey	16,700
Indonesia	7,200
Egypt**	6,700
Libya	4,500
Pakistan	3,900
Cameroon	3,500
Somalia	3,400
Yemen	3,400

Note

- * Excluding appeal/review claims.
- ** Includes appeal claims.

asylum-seekers from the Syrian Arab Republic sought protection in 90 countries, 6 out of 10 requested refugee status on an individual basis either in Sweden (7,800 claims), Germany (6,200 claims), or Libya (3,800 claims). In the case of Afghan asylum-seekers, five countries registered half of all new claims: Germany (7,500), Sweden (4,800), Turkey (4,400), Indonesia (4,100), and Austria (4,000). Overall, the top five countries of origin accounted for a quarter of all new asylum claims submitted in 2012.

cision-related data quoted in the Yearbook are therefore not fully comparable with previous years.

Some 261,900 asylum-seekers were recognized as refugees (210,900) or given a complementary form of protection (51,000) in the course of 2012. This number included an estimated 20,500⁵³ individuals whose initial negative decisions were overturned at the appeal or review stage. On a global level, the United States of America recognized the largest number of asylum-seekers (25,300 during the US fiscal year), followed by Germany (17,100), Rwanda (15,100), Sudan (14,000), Sweden (13,700), Malaysia (13,100), and Turkey (10,900).

In addition to the 261,900 persons who received a positive decision on their asylum application during 2012,

some 438,000 claims were rejected on substantive grounds, 77,200 more than the year before. This increase can be partly attributed to the higher number of asylum applications received in industrialized countries, as well as the high number of rejections (40,000) reported by the various appellate bodies in South Africa in 2012. The latter information was not available for 2011.

Figures on rejected asylum-seekers also include negative decisions at the first instance, which thereafter may be appealed. For this reason, asylum-seekers who appeal a negative decision at first instance may be reported twice, depending on methods used by governments for reporting asylum decisions. If an asylum-seeker withdraws or abandons his or her asylum application, or if an asylum-seeker dies before issuance of a substantive decision, the asylum application is, in most national statistics, recorded as having been closed for administrative reasons and therefore reported as 'Otherwise closed' in UNHCR statistics.

This is also applicable to so-called 'Dublin II' cases in Europe, whereby the responsibility for the adjudication of an asylum claim is transferred to the country responsible in accordance with the Regulation criteria. In 2012, at least 205,400 such cases were reported to UNHCR, with the highest numbers being recorded by the United States of America (47,000), Switzerland (17,400), and Greece (14,800).

REFUGEE RECOGNITION RATES (RRR)

Recognition rates indicate the proportion of accepted refugee claims during a particular period. Highly differentiated recognition rates with regard to the same nationality could point to different standards of treatment between

TABLE 4.3 Substantive decisions taken | 2010 - 2012

	2010	2011	2012*
State	512,800	518,000	627,200
UNHCR	61,100	52,600	54,400
Jointly**	5,200	6,500	18,200
Total	579,100	577,100	699,800
% UNHCR only	11%	9%	8%

Note

* Provisional figure

** Refers to refugee status determination conducted jointly by UNHCR and governments.

asylum countries. In countries aiming to harmonize their asylum policies, recognition rates may be expected to converge over time.

Still, the meaning of recognition rates in comparing country practices should not be over-emphasized. Asylum-seekers of the same nationality may have a different regional or ethnic origin, or they may have fled for different reasons or at different times. For these or other reasons, divergent recognition rates for the same nationality during the same period may well be explained when the detailed profile of the individual claimant is taken into account.

In the absence of an internationally agreed methodology for calculating recognition rates, UNHCR uses two rates to compute the proportion of refugee claims accepted during the year. The refugee recognition rate (RRR) divides the number of asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status by the total number of substantive decisions (Convention status, complementary protection, and rejected cases). The total recognition rate (TRR) divides the number of asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status or a complementary form of protection by the total number of substantive decisions (Convention status, complementary protection, and rejected cases). Non-substantive decisions are, to the extent possible, excluded

from both calculations. For the purpose of global comparability, UNHCR uses only these two recognition rates and does not report rates calculated by national authorities.

At the global level (UNHCR and State asylum procedures combined), the RRR was estimated to be 30 per cent of all substantive decisions taken during 2012. The TRR, on the other hand, was 37 per cent. These rates have remained relatively stable over the past three years, though they are indicative only, as some States have yet to report relevant data [see **Table 4.4**].

At the same time, the TRR has fluctuated over the years. A decade ago, it was less than 30 per cent. This figure gradually increased to 46.5 per cent in 2009, only to drop again slightly below 40 per cent in the years that followed. There is a significant difference in the TRR in asylum procedures administered by UNHCR compared to that of States. Over the past decade, the TRR in UNHCR procedures never fell below 65 per cent, while the TRR for States never exceeded 40 per cent.

The consistently higher TRR in UNHCR procedures can also be explained by the nature of the contexts in which UNHCR implements RSD procedures. These often involve precarious protection environments, bordering areas characterized by conflict or serious human rights violations resulting in significant outflows of persons of concern, many of whom are very vulnerable. It can also be explained by a less restrictive interpretation or application of the refugee definition.

In 2012, among the main receiving industrialized countries (where States are responsible for conducting RSD), Norway and Switzerland had the high-

TABLE 4.4 Total recognition rates | 2003 - 2012 (in %)

Responsible for RSD	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
States	24.8	25.2	30.3	33.6	37.7	33.6	39.3	33.2	32.7	32.4
UNHCR	65.7	73.1	83.3	77.0	76.7	77.7	84.9	80.4	77.8	77.6
Global*	27.3	28.7	36.1	38.5	44.5	40.3	46.5	38.5	37.5	37.4

Note

* Includes RSD conducted jointly by UNHCR and governments.

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est TRR at the first instance (56% and 55%, respectively). Among the countries listed in **Table 4.2** where UNHCR is conducting RSD, TRRs in 2012 were above 60 per cent. Cameroon was the only exception, with a TRR of 22 per cent.

In UNHCR and State asylum procedures combined, the TRR for persons from the Syrian Arab Republic, Eritrea, and Myanmar were highest in 2012, with over 90 per cent of cases being recognized at the first instance. Recognition rates were also high for asylum-seekers from Somalia (83%), Sudan (76%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (72%), Iraq (71%), the Islamic Republic of Iran (63%), Afghani-

stan (59%), and China (57%). In contrast, among the top 20 countries of origin of asylum-seekers in 2012, the TRR was low for persons from Zimbabwe (2%), Serbia (and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 [1999]) (3%), Nigeria (10%), Colombia (13%), and Pakistan (17%).

The annual change in the number of undecided cases is an important indicator of the efficiency of an asylum procedure. A rise in the backlog of pending applications often correlates with an increase in the waiting period for applicants, as more applications are being submitted than decided. In contrast, a decline in the backlog may result from a sometimes sharp decrease in new

claims, rather than from increased decision-making. Depending on the country context, a prolonged waiting period can have a significant impact on the protection and/or assistance of asylum-seekers.

By the end of 2012, at least 928,200 individuals awaited decisions on their asylum claims, including people at any stage of the asylum procedure. South Africa reported the largest number of pending asylum applications (230,400), followed by Germany (85,600), France (49,900), and Kenya (41,900). However, the true number of undecided asylum cases globally is unknown, as many countries do not report this information.

RSD under UNHCR's mandate: past, present, and future

The past decade saw significant changes in the nature of displacement. Towards the end of the decade, the world witnessed a scale of simultaneous refugee crises not seen in many years. As a result, following an initial decrease in individual asylum applications registered globally at the beginning of the decade, applications reached a new peak at the end of the decade.

Africa and the Middle East became the central sites of refugee crises, replacing Europe and Asia as the main refugee-producing regions. As a result of these changes, many countries in

Africa and the Middle East, but also Asia and Oceania, emerged as new destination countries for individual asylum-seekers. This resulted in a diversification of destination countries and a relative decrease in applications registered in 'traditional countries' in the industrialized world.

The larger volume and increasingly diverse composition of movements of persons seeking asylum has contributed to a tightening of immigration and asylum policies and practices in both the industrialized and non-industrialized world. While countries in Africa

and the Middle East continued to show extraordinary hospitality, welcoming significant numbers of refugees to their territories, such policies and practices resulted in an overall shrinking of protection space.

On the one hand, this shrinking contributed to impediments in access to territory or asylum. On the other hand, this process also prompted many third-country nationals who had been able to secure informal protection in countries of asylum – such as Somalis in Kenya or Ethiopians in Yemen – to seek either formal protection in countries of asylum or onward movement. Such developments further increased pressures on RSD procedures, thereby resulting in a further tightening of immigration and asylum policies and practices.

Due to these developments, over the past decade UNHCR has been required to conduct RSD in a greater number of countries, and to register an increasing number of individuals seeking international protection. Between 2003 and 2012, UNHCR registered some 900,000 individual asylum applications, making the organization the second largest asylum body in the world, after the Government of South Africa.

At the global level in 2003, UNHCR's share in individual applications registered amounted to 7 per cent. While fluctuating between 8 and 15 per

Fig. 4.4 New and appeal applications registered | 2003 - 2012

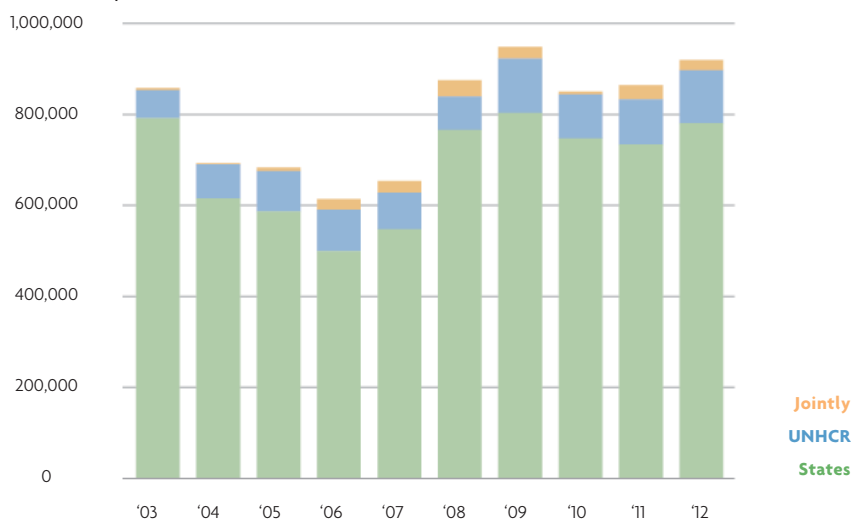


TABLE 4.5 Asylum claims registered vs. decisions rendered | 2003 - 2012

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Applications (UNHCR)*	61,900	75,500	89,300	91,500	79,800	73,400	119,100	96,800	98,800	115,800
Decisions (UNHCR)**	39,900	45,400	60,100	56,400	51,200	46,800	69,200	61,100	52,600	54,400
Ratio (UNHCR)	64%	60%	67%	62%	64%	64%	58%	63%	53%	47%
Ratio (States)	85%	94%	86%	85%	73%	61%	64%	69%	71%	80%

Note

* First instance and appeal combined.

** Excludes non-substantive decisions.

cent annually in subsequent years, it stood at 13 per cent in 2012. Between 2003 and 2007, UNHCR registered on average 80,000 asylum applications per year. This figure had increased to an average 100,000 per year between 2008 and 2012. Over the past decade, UNHCR registered the largest number of applications in Malaysia (197,600), Kenya (191,100), Turkey (95,000), Egypt (50,600), and Jordan (32,800). These five UNHCR offices accounted for almost two-thirds (63%) of all asylum applications registered with UNHCR over the past 10 years.

Between 2003 and 2012, UNHCR issued 537,000 substantive individual RSD decisions. Of these, 78 per cent resulted in the granting of refugee status. Also between 2003 and 2012, UNHCR's decision-making capacity increased from 39,000 individual substantive decisions issued to 54,100 (+36%). Over this period, the number of substantive decisions issued in joint RSD procedures increased six-fold, from 2,500 to 18,200. By contrast, the decision-making capacity of States dropped from 676,100 decisions in 2003 to 627,200 in 2012 (-7%).

Comparing States' versus UNHCR's share in adjudicating applications shows a divergent picture over time. The ratio for the former decreased from a high of 94 per cent in 2004 to a low of 61 per cent in 2008, before gradually increasing again to 80 per cent in 2012. In contrast, UNHCR's decision-making capacity exceeded the 60 per cent mark almost consistently between 2003 and 2010, though it dropped significantly in subsequent years, reaching a low in 2012 with 47 per cent [see **Table 4.5**].

The relatively low relative decision-making capacity of UNHCR is primarily due to the significant increase in the total number of individual asylum ap-

plications registered by UNHCR. Despite a strengthening of UNHCR's decision-making capacity, mainly through improved staffing and efficiency in the agency's RSD procedures, the number of individual asylum applications registered consistently exceeded the number of individual asylum decisions issued, at times at a ratio of 2:1. As a result, UNHCR's RSD backlog increased from 73,700 in 2003 to a historical high of 146,800 in 2012.

Over the past decade, UNHCR has not only been required to increase its RSD activities in many of its existing

outside their country, but also of persons of concern resident in or transiting through Libya. In the midst of the evacuation of 210,000 migrant workers, UNHCR set up new temporary individual RSD operations in the deserts bordering Egypt and Tunisia to adjudicate asylum applications of third-country nationals fleeing Libya. In the Syrian Arab Republic, existing UNHCR RSD operations, set up to adjudicate the asylum applications of Iraqi nationals, are now required to respond to the protection needs not only of Syrians displaced inside and outside

THE CHANGING NATURE OF DISPLACEMENT
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RSD operations but also to establish new, often temporary, RSD operations. Part of this new requirement is for emergency or other special protection responses, including in situations of mass influx where governments and UNHCR were traditionally able to rely on group approaches to RSD. Events related to the 'Arab Spring' – in particular the conflicts in Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic, the unrest and instability in Egypt, and other countries in the region hosting large numbers of refugees – have placed significant pressure on UNHCR's RSD operations in the Middle East and North Africa, Europe, and beyond.

In Libya, UNHCR was required to respond to the protection needs not only of Libyans displaced inside and

their country but also of persons of concern resident in or transiting through the Syrian Arab Republic.

The changing nature of displacement over the past decade has created particular challenges for UNHCR, including in the area of RSD, which are expected to continue in the coming years. The agency will continue to enhance its capacity to deliver protection through RSD in regular and emergency or special operations. But at the same time, UNHCR recognizes that the scale of its current RSD activities, in addition to its ever-increasing broader protection responsibilities, is not sustainable. UNHCR will therefore also intensify its efforts to urge governments to assume greater responsibility for RSD. ■