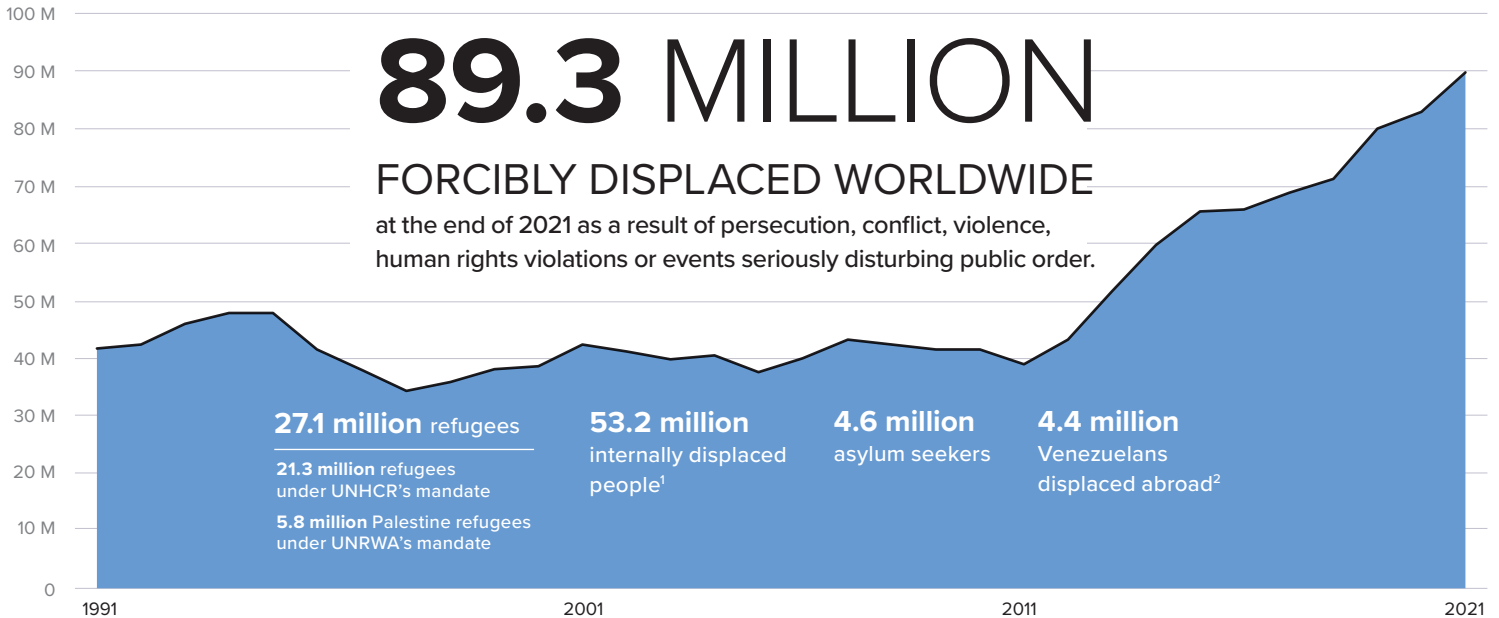


# GLOBAL TRENDS

FORCED  
DISPLACEMENT  
IN 2021



# Trends at a Glance



**83%**  
HOSTED IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES

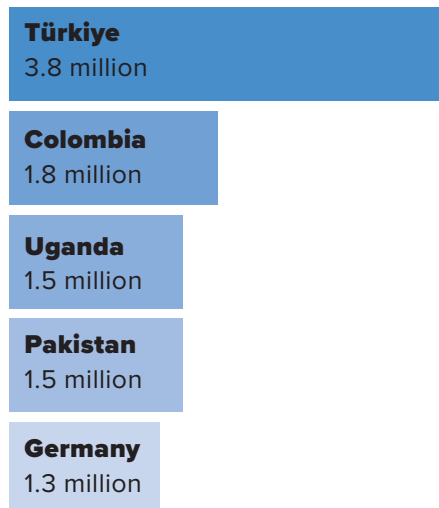
Low- and middle-income countries hosted 83 per cent of the world's refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad.<sup>3</sup> The Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 27 per cent of the total.

**72%**  
HOSTED IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

72 per cent of refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad lived in countries neighbouring their countries of origin.

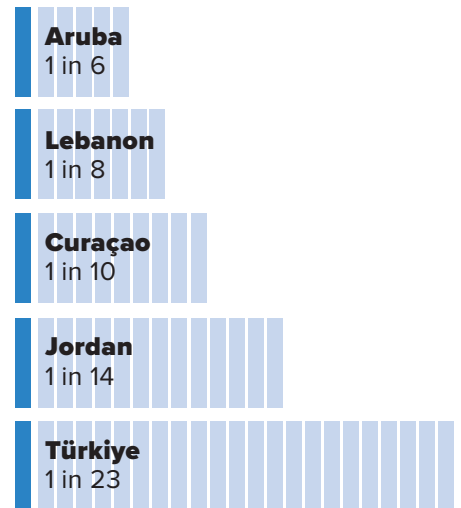
**3.8 MILLION**  
REFUGEES HOSTED IN TÜRKIYE

Türkiye hosted nearly 3.8 million refugees, the largest population worldwide. Colombia was second with more than 1.8 million, including Venezuelans displaced abroad.



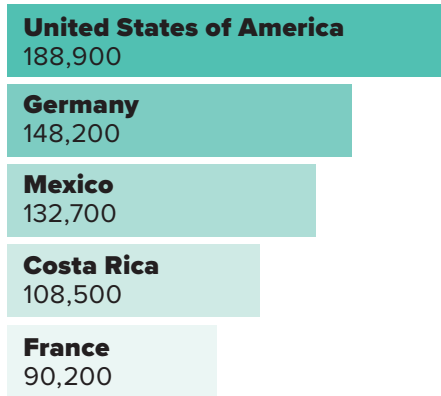
**1 IN 6**  
ARE DISPLACED

Relative to their national populations, the island of Aruba hosted the largest number of Venezuelans displaced abroad (1 in 6) while Lebanon hosted the largest number of refugees (1 in 8),<sup>4</sup> followed by Curaçao (1 in 10), Jordan (1 in 14) and Türkiye (1 in 23).<sup>5</sup>



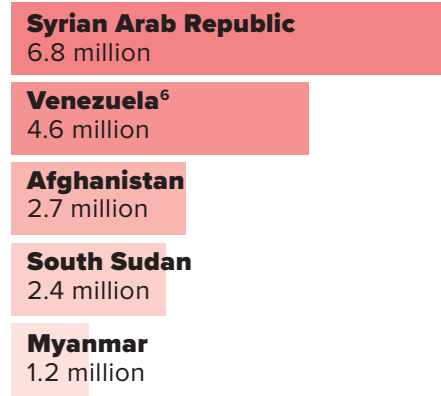
# 1.4 MILLION NEW CLAIMS

The United States of America was the world's largest recipient of new individual applications.



# 69% ORIGINATED FROM JUST FIVE COUNTRIES

More than two-thirds (69 per cent) of all refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad came from just five countries.

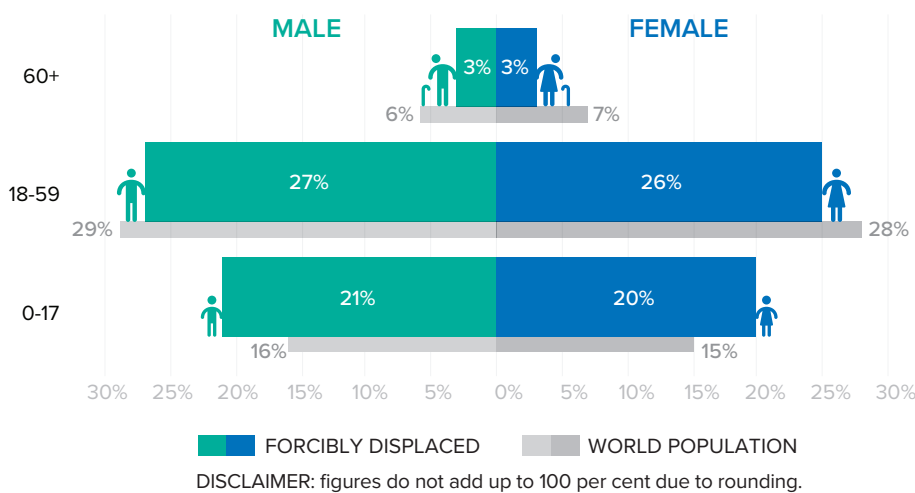


# 6.1 MILLION VENEZUELAN REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

This figure includes Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum seekers reported through the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.<sup>7</sup>

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN FORCIBLY DISPLACED

Children account for 30 per cent of the world's population, but 41 per cent of all forcibly displaced people.<sup>8</sup>



## SOLUTIONS

# 5.7 MILLION DISPLACED PEOPLE RETURNED

5.7 million displaced people returned to their areas or countries of origin in 2021, including 5.3 million internally displaced people and 429,300 refugees.

# 57,500 REFUGEES RESETTLED

57,500 refugees were resettled in 2021, two-thirds more than in the previous year (34,400), according to government statistics. UNHCR submitted 63,200 refugees to States for resettlement.

- 1 Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
- 2 This number excludes Venezuelan asylum seekers and refugees.
- 3 See [Classifying refugee host countries by income level](#)
- 4 When the 483,000 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA living in Lebanon are included, this proportion increases to one in five.
- 5 In addition, Lebanon hosted 483,000 and Jordan 2.3 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate.
- 6 This is the number of Venezuelan refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad.
- 7 See the [Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela](#).
- 8 Sources: Estimation of IDP demographics (IDMC); Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate (UNRWA); Refugees, people in a refugee-like situation, asylum seekers and Venezuelans displaced abroad are based on the available data (UNHCR) and World Population estimates (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs).

## Statistics for forcibly displaced people and the population of concern to UNHCR

The main focus of this report is the analysis of statistical trends and changes in global forced displacement from January to December 2021 among populations for whom UNHCR has been entrusted with a responsibility by the international community.<sup>9</sup> The data presented are based on information received as of 23 May 2022 unless otherwise indicated.

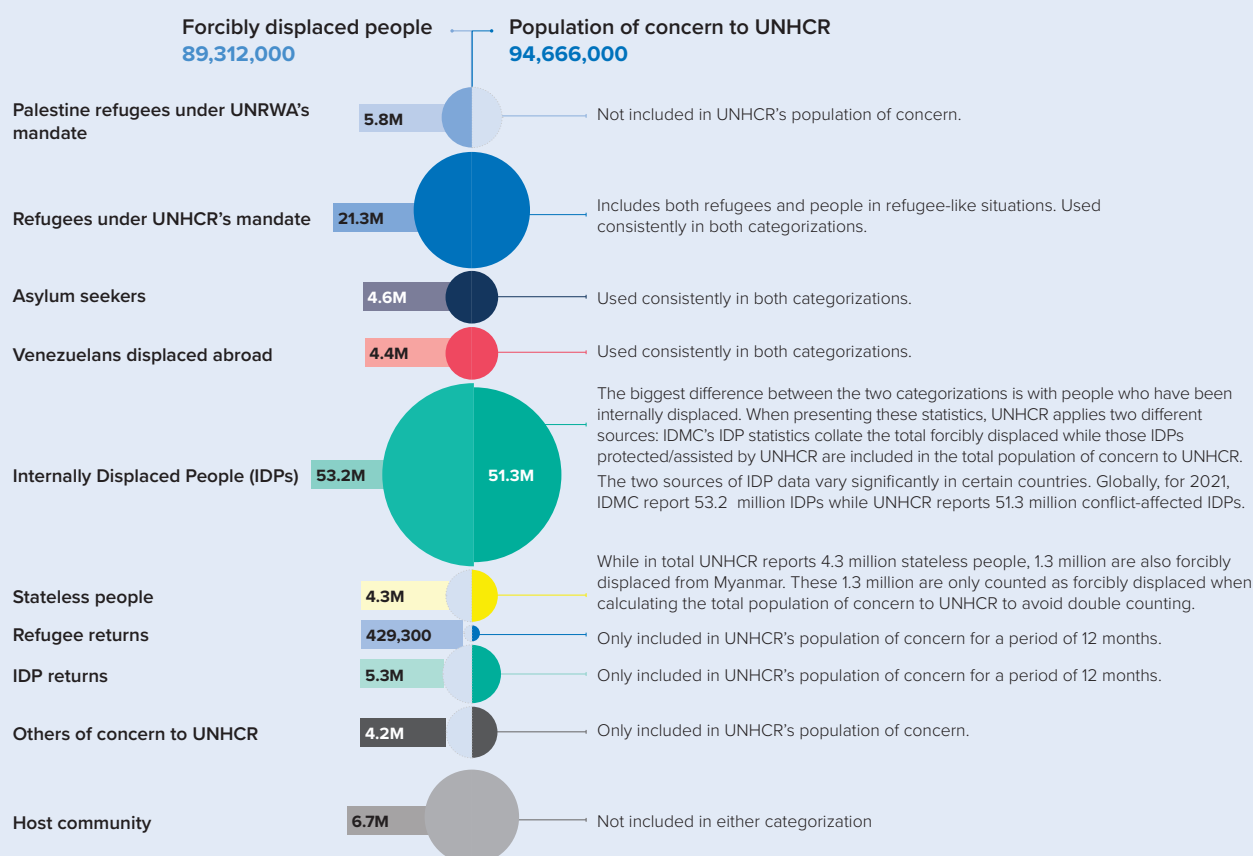
At the end of 2021, the total number of forcibly displaced people worldwide was 89.3 million, while the total population of concern to UNHCR stood at 94.7 million people.<sup>10</sup>

The total number of forcibly displaced people encompasses refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and Venezuelans displaced abroad.

It includes refugees and other displaced people who are not covered by UNHCR's mandate and excludes other categories such as returnees and non-displaced stateless people.

The total population of concern to UNHCR relates to the people UNHCR is mandated to protect and assist. It includes those who have been forcibly displaced; those who have returned within the previous year; those who are stateless (most of whom are not forcibly displaced); and other groups to whom UNHCR has extended its protection or provided assistance on a humanitarian basis.

These two categorizations are compared graphically below. A detailed breakdown of UNHCR's population of concern by category and country is provided in Annex Table 1.



The figures in this report are based on data reported by governments, non-governmental organizations and UNHCR. Numbers are rounded to the closest hundred or thousand. As some adjustments may appear later in the year in the Refugee Data Finder,<sup>11</sup>

figures contained in this report should be considered as provisional and subject to change. Unless otherwise specified, the report does not refer to events occurring after 31 December 2021.

<sup>9</sup> See the [Methodology](#) page of UNHCR's Refugee Data Finder for a definition of each population group.

<sup>10</sup> See: [What is the difference between population statistics for forcibly displaced and the population of concern to UNHCR?](#)

<sup>11</sup> See: UNHCR's [Refugee Data Finder](#)



## CHAPTER 1

# Global Forced Displacement

“ Every year of the last decade, the numbers have climbed. Either the international community comes together to take action to address this human tragedy, resolve conflicts and find lasting solutions, or this terrible trend will continue. ”

**Filippo Grandi**

UN High Commissioner for Refugees

Continuing a worrying decade-long rising trend, the number of people forced to flee due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order climbed to 89.3 million by the end of 2021. This is more than double the 42.7 million people who remained forcibly displaced at the end of 2012 and represents a sharp 8 per cent increase of almost 7 million people in the span of just 12 months. As a result, above one per cent of the world’s population – or 1 in 88 people – were forcibly displaced at the end of 2021. This compares with 1 in 167 at the end of 2012.

During 2021, some 1.7 million people crossed international borders seeking protection and 14.4 million new displacements within their countries were reported.<sup>12</sup> This is a dramatic increase from the combined 11.2 million a year earlier. While internal displacement in 2021 was markedly higher than in recent years, the number of people crossing

international borders seeking protection remained muted compared to pre-pandemic levels as health-related border and travel restrictions remained in effect in many locations. Access to asylum did improve during the year,<sup>13</sup> and most countries that remained closed to people seeking international protection at the end of 2021 had at least introduced some adaptive elements, albeit to varying degrees, rather than keep their asylum systems completely closed.

The year was perhaps most notable for the sheer number of existing conflicts that escalated and new conflicts that flared up (see map 1). According to the World Bank, 23 countries, hosting a combined population of 850 million people, faced high- or medium-intensity conflicts in 2021.<sup>14</sup> The number of conflict-affected countries has doubled during the last decade, with women and children disproportionately exposed to deep-rooted discrimination and extreme vulnerability.<sup>15</sup>

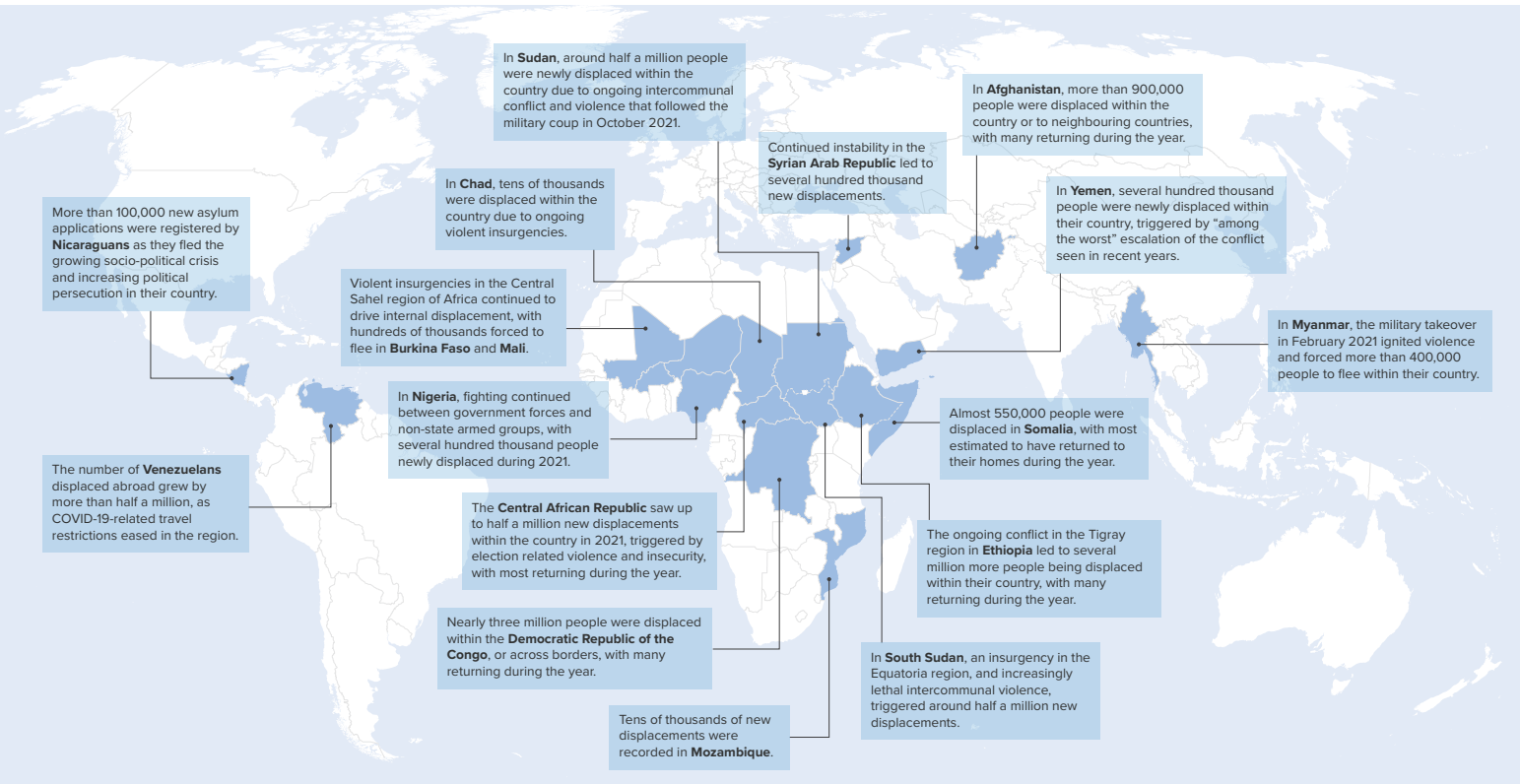
<sup>12</sup> Source for internal displacement: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC)

<sup>13</sup> By end-2021, asylum seekers were able to access 121 countries, up from 108 at the start of the year and up from just 84 in mid-2020, see [UNHCR’s COVID-19 Protection Issues dashboard](#)

<sup>14</sup> See: [Development and peace in uncertain times](#)

<sup>15</sup> See: [The Gender Dimensions of Forced Displacement – A Synthesis of New Research](#)

Map 1 | New displacements in 2021



In Afghanistan, the events leading up to the Taliban’s takeover of Kabul in August 2021 resulted in displacement within the country as well as into neighbouring countries. The number of people displaced internally rose for the 15<sup>th</sup> straight year, even as more than 790,000 Afghans returned during the year.

The conflict in the Tigray region in Ethiopia led to at least 2.5 million more people being displaced within their country, with some 1.5 million of them returning to their homes during the year.

Violent insurgencies in the Central Sahel region of Africa continued to drive internal displacement, particularly in Burkina Faso. The root causes of conflict in the region include extreme poverty and chronic underdevelopment. The climate crisis, with temperatures in the region rising 1.5 times faster than the global average, is making the humanitarian situation even worse.<sup>16</sup>

In Myanmar, the military takeover in February 2021 ignited widespread violence and forced many people to flee.

With renewed displacement from Venezuela, primarily to other Latin American countries, the number of Venezuelans displaced abroad also grew by more than half a million.

In addition, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, South Sudan, Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen all saw increases of between 100,000 and 500,000 people displaced internally during the year.

**While this report is focused on forced displacement in 2021, it is impossible to ignore more recent events in early 2022.** The war in Ukraine has captured global attention with, at the time of writing, more than 7 million Ukrainians displaced within their country and more than 6 million refugee movements from Ukraine having been registered.<sup>17</sup> It is one of the largest forced displacement crises since World War II, and certainly the fastest. It should be remembered that refugees fleeing Ukraine are hosted by predominately high-income European countries. They have also been offered temporary protection status by European Union Member States, with more than 2.8 million

<sup>16</sup> See: [A decade of conflict in the Sahel leaves 2.5 million people displaced](#)

<sup>17</sup> As of 29 May 2022, 7.1 million Ukrainians have been displaced internally (Source: [IOM](#)). From 24 February to 29 May 2022, 6.8 million refugee movements out of Ukraine were recorded, while 2.2 million population movements into Ukraine were recorded during the same period, including of a pendular nature (Source: [Ukraine refugee situation](#)).

refugees having registered for such schemes.<sup>18</sup> Many of the 36.2 million refugees, asylum seekers and others forced to flee across borders who were already displaced at the end of 2021 faced conditions that were much more dire.

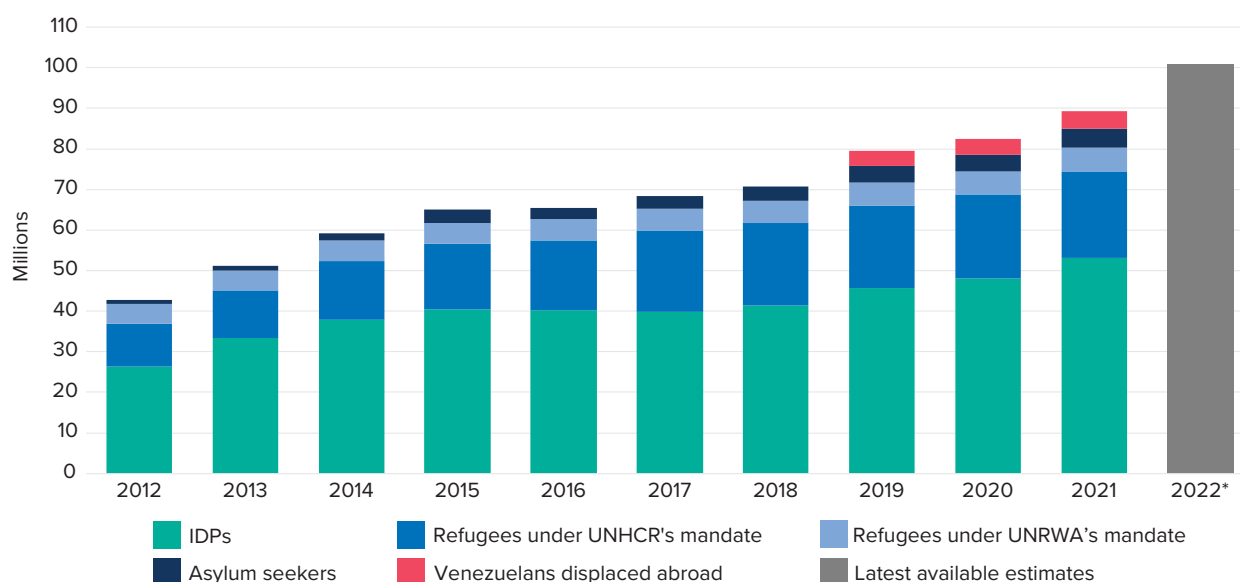
As an example, people forced to flee are heavily impacted by food crises, with many refugees, asylum seekers and people displaced within their countries struggling to feed their families. In Afghanistan, for example, a staggering 55 per cent of the population in the country did not have enough to eat each day. Worldwide, 82 per cent of internally displaced people (IDPs) and 67 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers originated from countries with food crises in 2021.<sup>19</sup> Some 40 per cent of refugees and asylum seekers were hosted in countries with food crises at the end of 2021.

There is also a clear equity gap in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations. As of March 2022, only 1 per cent of the 10.9 billion administered doses worldwide have been given in low-income countries. This means that 2.8 billion people around the world are still waiting to get their first shot.<sup>20</sup> Resources are therefore still needed for immunization-related activities and to ensure last-mile vaccine delivery.

Prior to the war in Ukraine, the global economy was expected to recover to pre-pandemic growth rates between 2022 and 2024. Recent forecasts are more downbeat, primarily due to the resulting impact of inflationary pressures on food and fuel.<sup>21</sup> Low-income countries, hosting nearly a quarter of the world's refugees, and more than two-thirds of people displaced within their countries are likely to be disproportionately affected. This will compound immediate and longer-term socio-economic challenges faced by displaced populations.

**In last year's Global Trends report, UNHCR predicted that “the question is no longer if forced displacement will exceed 100 million people – but rather when”.<sup>22</sup> The when is now.<sup>23</sup>** With millions of Ukrainians displaced at the time of writing, as well as further displacement elsewhere this year, notably in Burkina Faso and Myanmar, total forced displacement now exceeds 100 million people (see figure 1). This means 1 in every 78 people on earth has been forced to flee – a dramatic milestone that few would have expected a decade ago.

Figure 1 | **People forced to flee | 2012–2022**



\* 2022 figures are estimated using data available as of 16 May 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Source: UNHCR, [Ukraine situation: Refugees from Ukraine across Europe as of 29 May 2022](#)

<sup>19</sup> See: [2022 Global Report on Food Crises](#); 82 per cent of IDPs (source IDMC) and 72 per cent of refugees under UNHCR's mandate, people in refugee-like situations, Venezuelans displaced abroad, and asylum seekers originate from these countries. 40 per cent of those displaced across borders are hosted in these same countries.

<sup>20</sup> See: [Vaccination against COVID-19 will define countries' socio-economic recovery](#)

<sup>21</sup> See IMF, [War sets back the global recovery](#)

<sup>22</sup> See: [Global Trends 2020](#)

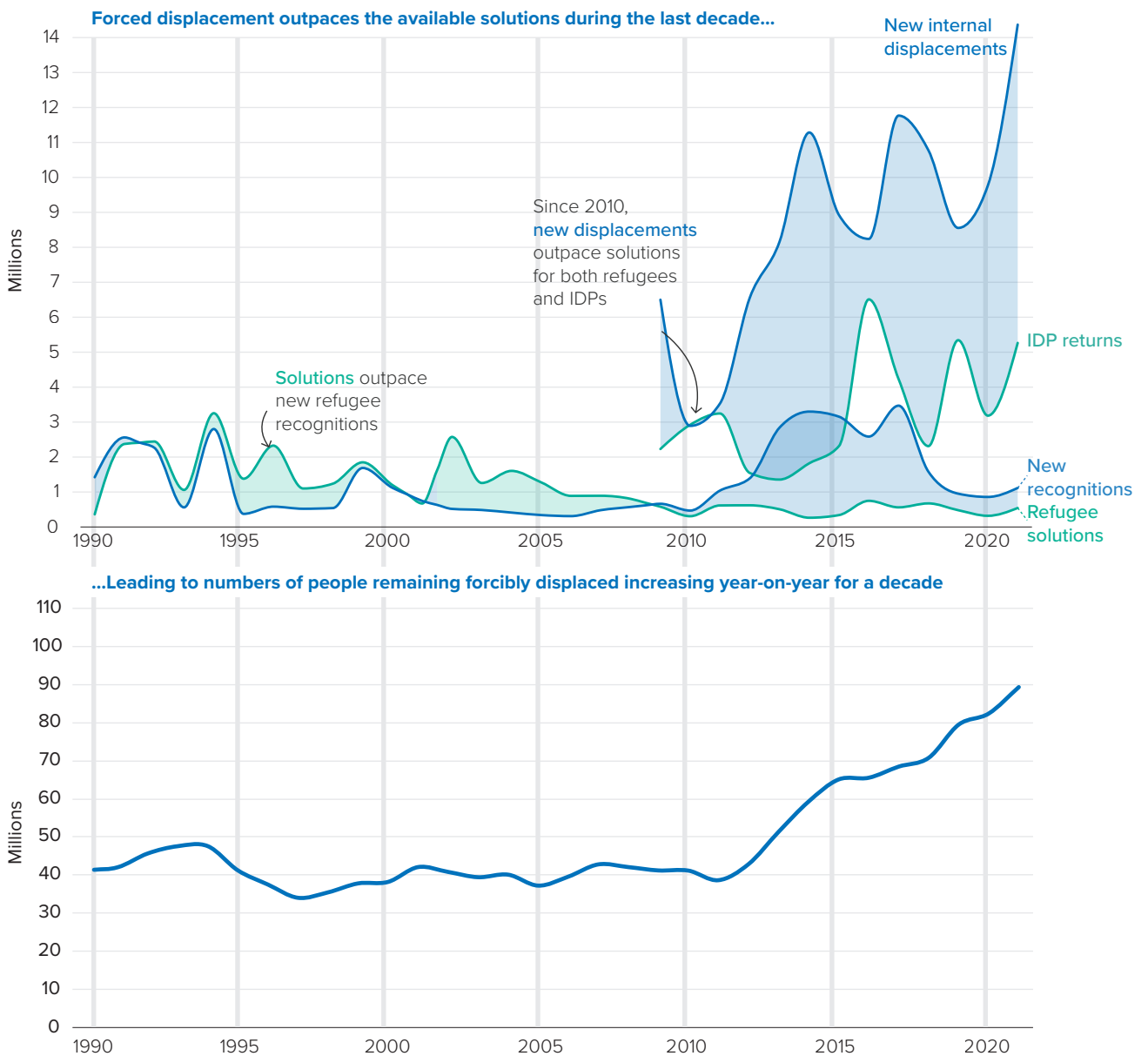
<sup>23</sup> See [100 million forcibly displaced](#)

## What next?

What direction is the world going to take in the years to come? The international community can take action, to redouble efforts to share responsibilities and find durable solutions, which could reverse the current trend, bringing displacement levels down significantly. The recent trend is concerning, as shown in figure 2 below, with the last decade quite different from the previous two decades. Historically, solutions for outflows from displacement situations have been available, but as new refugee situations intensify and

existing ones reignite or remain unresolved, there is an acute and growing need for durable solutions at increasing scale. However, given the pace of new displacement over the last decade, solutions have struggled to keep up. In 2020, the impact of measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 was keenly observed in the sharp drops in all forms of durable solutions. The numbers of refugees and people displaced within their countries benefitting from solutions increased in 2021, but remain a small fraction of the overall needs.

Figure 2 | **Forced displacement and durable solutions | 1990–2021**





If lasting peace were possible for current conflicts, how many refugees and IDPs would return? Return intention surveys, which UNHCR and its partners conduct in many countries globally, help indicate whether refugees wish to return to their countries of origin should the conditions allow. For example, some 7 in 10 Syrians hosted in mostly neighbouring countries hoped to return to Syria in the future.<sup>24</sup> More commonly, around one-third to one-half of other refugee populations have expressed a willingness to return in the future in similar surveys. If lasting peace were achieved in a few key locations, global refugee figures could halve to around 10 million, where they stood two decades ago. The most common reasons refugees tell us why return is not possible are ongoing insecurity and the lack of livelihoods or housing. But without the political will to make peace, the prospect for large numbers of refugees returning home in the near future will remain out of reach.

Other solutions include resettlement to third countries, a crucial tool for some of the most vulnerable refugees, who may face specific or urgent protection risks. However, the number of places for resettlement offered by States continues to fall far short of the global needs. In 2021, for example, just 4 per cent of the estimated 1.4 million refugees in need of resettlement were resettled.<sup>25</sup>

Naturalization is possible for refugees in some countries, including high-income countries in North America, Europe and Australasia. Administrative and bureaucratic hurdles, financial restraints and

other barriers may hamper refugees' acquisition of citizenship.<sup>26</sup>

Durable solutions have therefore become an option for fewer and fewer refugees and internally displaced people, and are far outpaced by the rising numbers of people forced to flee. As set out in the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR),<sup>27</sup> enhancing refugee self-reliance and easing the pressure on host countries needs to be stepped up while also redoubling efforts to expand durable solutions, especially in countries of origin. Finding durable solutions to displacement within countries is also critical, as underlined in the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.<sup>28</sup>

Greater international solidarity and responsibility-sharing, two core principles underpinning the GCR, is urgently required. Otherwise, the 21<sup>st</sup> century risks being increasingly shaped by the growing number and intensity of conflicts and a consequent rise in the numbers of people forced to flee, further exacerbated by exposure to climate change. As the world reached in excess of 100 million forcibly displaced people, UN Secretary-General António Guterres emphasized "This is a political crisis, and it will only be solved with solidarity and political will."<sup>29</sup> The international community must therefore work together now to resolve existing conflicts; to help address root causes to mitigate the risk of future conflicts unfolding in increasingly fragile states; and to deliver sustainable opportunities at the scale required to allow forcibly displaced people to live in safety and with dignity.

For detailed information on UNHCR's protection and assistance activities in support of forcibly displaced populations, see the [2021 Global Report](#)



<sup>24</sup> See: [Sixth Regional Survey on Syrian Refugees' Perceptions & Intentions on Return to Syria](#). Covering Egypt, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon, the survey canvassed more than 3,200 Syrian refugees, out of a total of 1.9 million in these countries. The seventh return intention survey, which is soon to be published, shows that the number of Syrians intending to return is slightly lower.

<sup>25</sup> See [Projected global resettlement needs in 2021](#)

<sup>26</sup> See [Barriers to European citizenship: an EU-wide analysis](#)

<sup>27</sup> See the [Global Compact on Refugees and the High-Level Officials Meeting in December 2021](#)

<sup>28</sup> See [UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement](#)

<sup>29</sup> See [100 million have now been forced to flee their homes](#).

## PREDICTING DISPLACEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warns in its intermediate scenario that by the end of this century the average global temperature will increase by between 2.1 to 3.5 degrees centigrade compared to the pre-industrial era.<sup>30</sup> Such a rise in temperature will have far-reaching implications on the earth's ecosystems – and the people living within them. For example, rain-fed agriculture is likely to be particularly impacted and, worryingly, this currently forms the basis of the majority of people's food security and livelihoods in Asia, Central and South America, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East and North Africa.

Over the millennia, population movements have always been a strategy for coping with or escaping unsustainable or deteriorating environments. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre estimates that in 2021 alone, there were around 23.7 million displacements of people within their own countries by extreme weather events like floods, storms and droughts. The questions, though, of how many people will be uprooted by climate change in future years, and how their basic needs will be met, remain unanswered. The latest Groundswell report estimates that 216 million people could be forced to move within their countries by 2050 due to slow-onset events across six regions.<sup>31</sup> Other scenarios have varied from 200 million to as many as 1 billion people displaced by climate change during the same period of time.

But such figures should be treated carefully, as the nexus between climate change and human mobility is extremely complex. The impact of climate change on displacement is also not a uniform process and includes the following:

- **Sudden-onset events** such as storms, floods and wildfires. The impact of sudden-onset events can be substantial in their immediate magnitude, but the people they displace usually remain nearby and seldom leave their country, with most returning within the first three months. There is little evidence so far that such events significantly shift the intermediate and long-term mobility behaviour of affected populations.
- **Slow-onset events** such as droughts, changes in precipitation patterns, and salination from sea-level rises. Seasonal rural-urban migration is common among rural households, particularly in lower- and middle-income economies, as people cope with poor harvests and seek to diversify income sources. The negative impact of climate change on crop yields can lead to an increase in seasonal and even more permanent population movements. Such movements are currently most common between regions within the same countries. In many countries, though not all, seasonal migration is dominated by younger, better educated, typically male household members, which often leaves more vulnerable family members and women behind to cope with a deteriorating situation. For an increasing number of households, the impact of climate change on their income may compromise their ability to move elsewhere due to a lack of resources, trapping them in an unsustainable situation.
- **Climate change related conflict.** Competition over diminishing land and water resources, movements to urban centres that strains their infrastructure, and rampant increases in global food prices that will hurt the urban population in low- and middle-income countries are the main factors heightening the risk of increased conflict. These risks are especially great in countries with weak governance and infrastructure and/or insufficient resources.

Any prediction of future displacement in the context of climate change is then faced with the following three challenges:

- In terms of the **statistics relating to displacement in the context of climate change**, simply put, what is not defined cannot be quantified, and what cannot be quantified cannot be predicted. The lack of

<sup>30</sup> See the [Sixth IPCC report](#).

<sup>31</sup> See the [Groundswell report](#).

proper and commonly accepted statistics on displacement in the context of climate change currently creates one of the biggest hurdles for predictive work and makes it difficult to compare figures across studies. From a legal perspective, UNHCR does not support the term “climate refugee” which does not exist in international law: such a new legal category is not needed to provide relevant protection.<sup>32</sup> It is also very difficult to assess whether someone who has been displaced in the context of climate change would have been displaced anyway had there been no climate change.

- Secondly, the **lack of historical precedent** for many situations that will arise as human-related climate change progresses, whose impact on human mobility has never been observed before. This means that it remains unclear how the changing climate will impact people’s decisions and behaviour in the future. Many communities affected by sudden-onset events have been hit by such events long before human induced climate change began and have learned to cope with them. For example, traditional Japanese architecture has been designed to accommodate frequent earthquakes. But an increased frequency and severity of sudden-onset events could bring these communities to the point where their traditional coping strategies are no longer up to the task. The effect might be a significant change in intermediate and long-term migratory behaviour.
- Finally, the **link between climate change and (forced) displacement** remains not fully measurable and there is no consensus that it is a direct causal link, with, for example, only limited information available on the impact of climate change on mounting poverty, political instability and armed conflict. The current violence involving farmers and herders in northern Cameroon, for example, shows a distinctly causal relationship between climate change and conflict, although the wider empirical evidence for this relationship elsewhere is still sparse. Climate change can be the catalyst for conflict in situations where other preconditions for conflict and war are already in place.<sup>33</sup>

The task of producing reliable and accurate data of future displacement in the context of climate change is therefore clearly challenging. Rather than focusing on specific figures, what can be derived from the analyses to date is a fairly accurate depiction of the populations and areas that are at greatest risk due to climate change. Datasets such as the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Index, which measures a country’s vulnerability to climate disruptions,<sup>34</sup> provide useful baselines. In fact, some 95 per cent of all internal conflict displacements in 2021 occurred in countries that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change,<sup>35</sup> and 78 per cent of new refugees<sup>36</sup> and asylum seekers originate from these same countries. Over the last decade, more than four out of every five newly displaced refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs have originated from countries that are highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.<sup>37</sup>

Clearly, the best way to mitigate the risks of displacement in the context of climate change is concerted action to reduce global emissions and support for green, inclusive and resilient development as well as equitable use of resources. Without this action, it will be these most vulnerable populations that will most likely need the most support in the future, focused on in situ adaptation. Measures such as weather-resistant infrastructure, drought-resistant crop variants and farming techniques, irrigation, coastal-protection measures, and help for rural households to diversify their income sources away from the land can all contribute to minimizing the risk of displacement.

<sup>32</sup> [Legal Considerations regarding claims for international protection made in the context of the adverse effects of climate change and disasters](#), UNHCR 2020

<sup>33</sup> See [Climate as a risk factor for armed conflict](#)

<sup>34</sup> A country’s vulnerability to climate change is determined from a combination of its exposure to climatic changes and its ability to cope with these changes given its financial and technical endowments.

<sup>35</sup> See [ND-GAIN index](#). The 2021 figures are calculated using the 2019 ND-GAIN index, determining the percentage of new internal conflict displacements reported by IDMC or new refugees and asylum seekers under UNHCR’s mandate originating from the lowest 30 per cent of ND-GAIN index values, i.e., countries that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Vulnerability data for South Sudan is not available, so Sudan is used as a proxy.

<sup>36</sup> See [the new forcibly displaced population flow dataset](#).

<sup>37</sup> The correlation between a high ND-GAIN index and large numbers of forcibly displaced people does not imply that there is a causal relation between a high vulnerability to climate change and forced displacement. Rather compounding factors like poverty and weak institutions will both increase a country’s vulnerability to climate change and a country’s likelihood for conflict with subsequent large displacement numbers.

CHAPTER 2

# Refugees

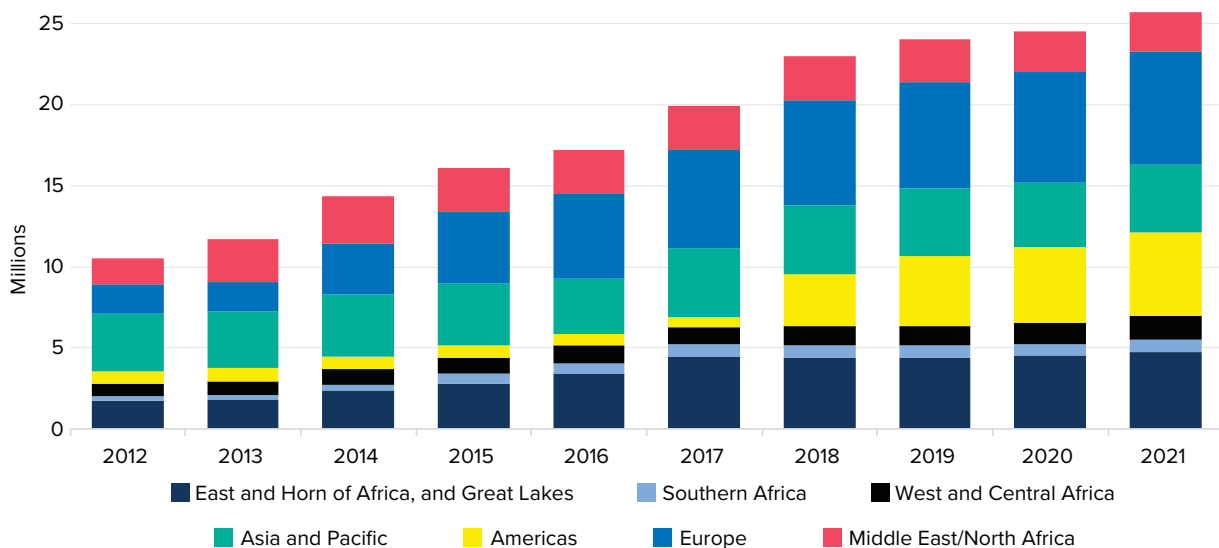
Over the span of the year, the number of refugees<sup>38</sup> worldwide increased from 20.7 million in 2020 to 21.3 million at the end of 2021, more than double the 10.5 million a decade ago. The number of Venezuelans displaced abroad also rose, from 3.9 million to 4.4 million, during the same period. Throughout the year, 794,100 people were granted international protection on an individual (494,900) or group (299,200) basis. While this is slightly more than in 2020 (765,200), it remains substantially below the pre-COVID-19 level of 952,800 people in 2019. Many of the Venezuelans displaced

abroad located in countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have been granted residence permits or other forms of legal stay during recent years, yet precise tracking data for these types of protection remain unavailable.<sup>39</sup>

In this chapter, the term “people displaced across borders” refers to refugees, people in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad, unless stated otherwise.

## By region of asylum

Figure 3 | People displaced across borders by region | 2012–2021



<sup>38</sup> Includes people in refugee-like situations and excludes Palestine refugees under UNRWA’s mandate.

<sup>39</sup> However, tracking data is available for Temporary Protection Status in Colombia. As of 31 December 2021, 1,696,399 people had been registered in the Registration System for Venezuelans (RUMV) and Migración Colombia had issued 39,618 Temporary Protection Permits. Data is publicly available and regularly updated on [Estatuto Temporal de Protección](#).



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO.  
Central African refugee,  
Valentine, 92, sits outside her  
makeshift shelter. She arrived  
with her family in early 2021,  
after fleeing her hometown. "It is  
the second time I am fleeing my  
country. I was afraid of the  
gunshots and could not bear to  
stay," she says.

© UNHCR/FABIEN FAIVRE





## Europe

In 2021, the number of people displaced across borders hosted in European countries increased by 3 per cent to more than 7 million. This increase reflects newly recognized refugees, who total 288,000, primarily in Germany (79,700), France (51,000) and Italy (21,100).

Türkiye remained the largest refugee-hosting country in the world in 2021, with more than 3.8 million refugees at year-end, or 15 per cent of all people displaced across borders globally. Germany was the second-largest refugee-hosting country in Europe, with 1.3 million refugees (5 per cent).

## Americas

The Americas region hosted more than 5.1 million people displaced across borders (20 per cent of the global population), with 86 per cent being Venezuelans. Sharp growth in the number of Venezuelans displaced abroad accounted for much of the 11 per cent rise (524,000) across the Americas. The number of displaced Venezuelans in Peru, Colombia and Ecuador increased by 276,400, 112,900 and 102,100 people respectively compared to the previous year as COVID-19-related travel restrictions eased in the region. At the same time, cross-border and pendular movements of Venezuelan refugees and migrants to and from their country also increased. Elsewhere in the region, significant numbers of refugees were recognized in Canada (33,800), Mexico (28,100) and the United States of America (20,600). At the end of 2021, Colombia hosted more than 1.8 million people displaced across borders, while Peru hosted 797,300 and Ecuador 560,500.

## Sub-Saharan Africa

As violence and conflict continued in parts of the continent, more than one quarter of all people displaced across borders were residing in sub-Saharan Africa. The East and Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region hosted more than 4.7 million refugees at the end of 2021, some 206,000 people, or 5 per cent, more than in 2020. One fifth of all refugees worldwide are hosted in this region, predominately in only three countries: Uganda (1.5 million), Sudan (1.1 million) and Ethiopia (821,300). In 2021, 165,400

refugees were recognized on an individual or group basis in the region, mostly in Sudan (66,300), Uganda (62,500) and Ethiopia (19,200).

Nearly 1.5 million refugees were hosted by countries in the West and Central Africa region, an increase of 134,900 (10 per cent) compared to the end of 2020. Chad (555,800) and Cameroon (457,300) together hosted more than two-thirds (68 per cent) of them.

The number of refugees hosted within the Southern Africa region grew by 62,900 people to 783,300 in 2021. More than half of the increase is attributed to the flight of refugees from the Central African Republic to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, due to the violence and insecurity that followed the December 2020 general election. The Democratic Republic of the Congo already hosted the largest refugee population in the region, reaching 524,100 refugees at year-end.

## Asia and the Pacific

The number of refugees in the Asia and the Pacific region grew by 138,400 people in 2021, reaching 4.2 million, or 16 per cent of the global refugee population, with Pakistan seeing the largest change. During the year, some 108,000 Afghans who fled to Pakistan were pre-screened by UNHCR. Meanwhile, a verification exercise is close to completion and has already led to a reduction of 383,900 registered Afghans as well as the registration of 198,600 births that occurred during the prior five years. A further 129,700 Afghans are pending verification at the time of reporting. As a result, the total number of refugees in Pakistan increased slightly to just less than 1.5 million. After Pakistan, Bangladesh (918,900) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (798,300)<sup>40</sup> hosted the largest refugee populations within the region.

## Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa region continues to see increases in refugee populations. Overall, the region recorded a slight decrease in the number between 2021 and the previous year refugees (3 per cent less) as a result of a refugee population review exercise ongoing in Yemen (83,300), data verification in Lebanon (32,200), as well as a relatively low number of refugees being newly recognized (33,000).

<sup>40</sup> This includes around 770,500 refugees and 27,800 UNHCR pre-registered new arrivals. Based on information received from the Government in October 2020, the Islamic Republic of Iran hosts 800,000 refugees, of which 780,000 are Afghan Amayesh cardholders and 20,000 are Iraqi Hoviat cardholders. These cards effectively offer refugee status to their holders. UNHCR has been in continuous engagement with the authorities in relation to these figures ever since. In view of the absence of updated data, UNHCR sought to estimate the changes in the refugee population considering the natural growth and onward movements, estimating the total to be some 770,000 refugees (out of which 750,000 were Afghans and 20,000 Iraqis).

Table 1 | Refugees, people in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad | 2020–2021

UNHCR regions	End-2020				End-2021				Change	
	Refugees	People in refugee-like situations	Venezuelans displaced abroad	Total	Refugees	People in refugee-like situations	Venezuelans displaced abroad	Total	Absolute	%
East and Horn of Africa, and Great Lakes	4,511,500	-	-	4,511,500	4,717,500	-	-	4,717,500	206,000	5%
Southern Africa	720,400	-	-	720,400	783,300	-	-	783,300	62,900	9%
West and Central Africa	1,353,500	-	-	1,353,500	1,488,400	-	-	1,488,400	134,900	10%
<b>Total Africa*</b>	<b>6,585,400</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>6,585,400</b>	<b>6,989,200</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>6,989,200</b>	<b>403,800</b>	<b>6%</b>
Americas	650,300	108,800	3,862,100	4,621,200	708,800	30,000	4,406,400	5,145,200	524,000	11%
Asia and the Pacific	3,968,400	48,000	-	4,016,400	3,801,600	353,100	-	4,154,700	138,300	3%
Europe (incl. Türkiye)	6,689,000	105,300	-	6,794,300	6,972,500	32,000	-	7,004,500	210,200	3%
Middle East and North Africa	2,481,900	26,000	-	2,507,900	2,415,100	26,000	-	2,441,100	-66,800	-3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,375,000</b>	<b>288,100</b>	<b>3,862,100</b>	<b>24,525,200</b>	<b>20,886,800</b>	<b>441,100</b>	<b>4,406,400</b>	<b>25,734,700</b>	<b>1,209,500</b>	<b>5%</b>

## Estimated demographic composition of people displaced across borders

UNHCR compiles data globally on the combined sex- and age-distribution of the populations of concern under its mandate at the end of each year. The availability of demographic data varies greatly by population group and by country of asylum. For example, demographic data by age and sex is available for 84 per cent of refugees and 42 per cent of Venezuelans displaced abroad at the end of 2021.

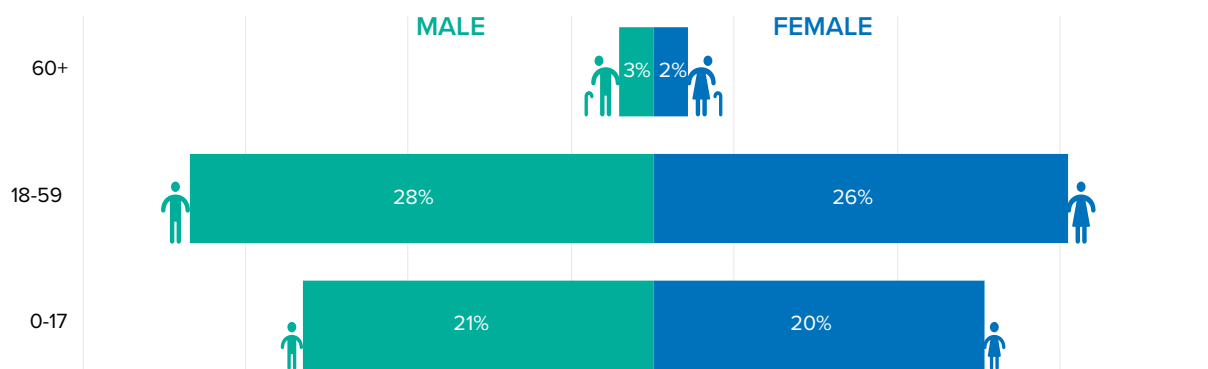
Statistical modelling can be used to impute the sex- and age-distribution for missing demographic data for these populations, helping to fill these data gaps with estimates.<sup>41</sup> Using this approach, 42 per cent of all refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad at the end of 2021 are estimated to be children. This varies by region with children estimated to represent almost

55 per cent of these populations in sub-Saharan Africa. By comparison, 38 per cent of refugees in Europe and only 26 per cent in the Americas are estimated to be under the age of 18.

Some 48 per cent of people displaced across borders are estimated to be women and girls. There are proportionally more women and girls among refugee populations living in West and Central Africa (54 per cent), while in Europe, this is estimated to be lower, at 44 per cent.

<sup>41</sup> These models are generated using the available data for a country of origin as a starting point. Where data for a particular country of asylum is missing, the values are estimated using statistical modelling from the available data for the same origin country in nearby countries of asylum.

Figure 4 | Demographics of people displaced across borders | end-2021



## BIRTH REGISTRATIONS

Data on births among refugee populations reported to UNHCR and registered by governments is incomplete and therefore undercount the number of children born into refugee status. To better assess the numbers of such children, UNHCR calculated estimates by imputing missing birth data for the years between 2018 to 2021.<sup>42</sup> The imputation had to accommodate the fact that forced displacement is likely to impact the fertility pattern of refugees. Refugees face a drastically different situation than those remaining in the country of origin and are usually not representative of the overall population. Thus, birth rates in the country of origin are not necessarily indicative of refugee populations that have fled these same countries.

Between 2018 and 2021, there were gaps in the data on children born into refugee status in many countries globally. The biggest data gaps on birth figures are prevalent among refugee-hosting countries in the Americas, Asia and the Pacific and Europe regions. By contrast, in the Middle East and North Africa, birth registration of Syrian refugee children has progressively improved since the onset of the crisis.<sup>43</sup>

UNHCR estimates that more than 1.5 million children were born into refugee life between 2018 and 2021, equivalent to some 380,000 children per year. Registration figures for 2020 were compromised by movement restrictions implemented by States to halt the spread of COVID-19, which made it much more difficult to conduct civil registration activities, but they have recovered in 2021. Considering that this imputation is based on several broad statistical assumptions, results should be interpreted as estimates and not precise figures. UNHCR, through its involvement in IDAC,<sup>44</sup> is leading efforts to improve data on displaced children.

<sup>42</sup> See [How many children are born into refugee life?](#)

<sup>43</sup> In the Middle East and North Africa, the percentage of Syrian refugee children born in the region that were undocumented at birth (i.e. received neither a birth certificate nor a birth notification) reduced from 35 per cent in 2012 to 4 per cent in 2021.

<sup>44</sup> See: [International Data Alliance for Children on the Move](#)



## By country of origin

Around 83 per cent of people displaced across borders originate from just ten countries, in line with previous years (see figure 5).

The Syrian refugee population continues to be the largest globally, with 6.8 million refugees hosted in 129 countries. Syrian refugees constituted 27 per cent of the global refugee population at the end of 2021. In the course of the year, the number of Syrian refugees increased by 145,900, due to new births and a rise in individual recognitions in Germany (38,100), Austria (7,900) and other countries in Europe. Even so, and after more than a decade of conflict, more than three-quarters of Syrian refugees are still hosted by neighbouring countries, mostly in Türkiye (3.7 million), Lebanon (840,900) and Jordan (673,000). Germany is the largest non-neighbouring host country, with 621,700 Syrian refugees.

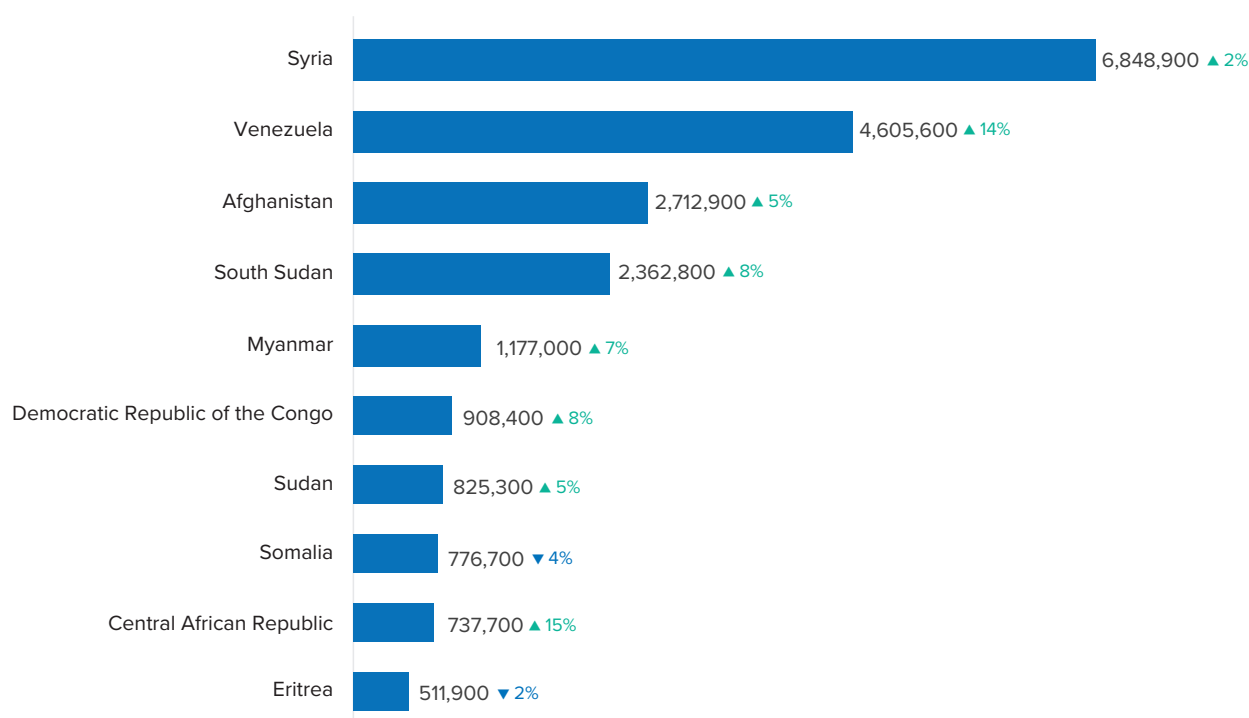
Venezuelans are the second-largest population displaced across borders, with 4.6 million. Nearly all are located in the Americas region without formal refugee status. In 2021, their population grew by more than 570,000, due to newly displaced Venezuelans fleeing to Colombia (112,900), Ecuador (102,100) as well as an improved estimation of displaced Venezuelans in Peru (276,400) and Chile (45,700).

Afghans represent the third-largest refugee population globally, with more than 2.7 million hosted by 98 countries. Their numbers grew by almost five per cent (118,000) in 2021, driven by new outflows to neighbouring Pakistan (108,000) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (27,800), newly registered births and new recognitions in Europe (59,100) and Asia and the Pacific (6,000).

The number of South Sudanese refugees increased from 2.2 million in 2020 to 2.4 million at the end of 2021. Almost all are hosted by four neighbouring countries: Uganda (958,900), Sudan (803,600), Ethiopia (386,800) and Kenya (135,300). Most of the 109,900 newly recognized South Sudanese refugees were recognized by prima facie procedures in Sudan (63,900), Uganda (30,600) and Kenya (9,000).

Following the sizeable displacement of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar in 2017, this population remains one of the largest displaced groups globally. In 2021, its number increased by some 73,800 people to reach 1.2 million, with more than three-quarters hosted in Bangladesh. The increase in 2021 was primarily due to the registration of new births, including the backlog from 2020, as registration resumed in 2021 after being suspended due to COVID-19.

Figure 5 | People displaced across borders by country of origin | end-2021

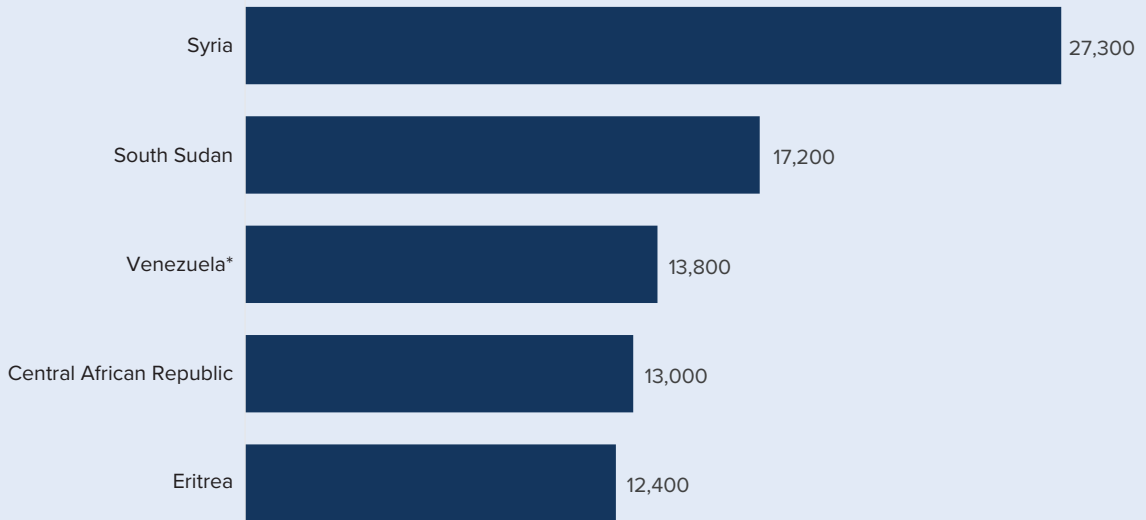


### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS – INDICATOR 10.7.4

The proportion of a country’s population who become refugees – SDG indicator 10.7.4 – is a useful way to identify the countries of origin whose population displaced abroad is highest relative to its inhabitants.<sup>45</sup> As shown in figure 6, the countries that have seen the greatest proportion of their national population become refugees are Syria (27,300 per 100,000 inhabitants), South Sudan (17,200 per 100,000) and Venezuela (13,800 per 100,000).



Figure 6 | SDG Indicator 10.7.4



Refugees, people in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad per 100,000 national population

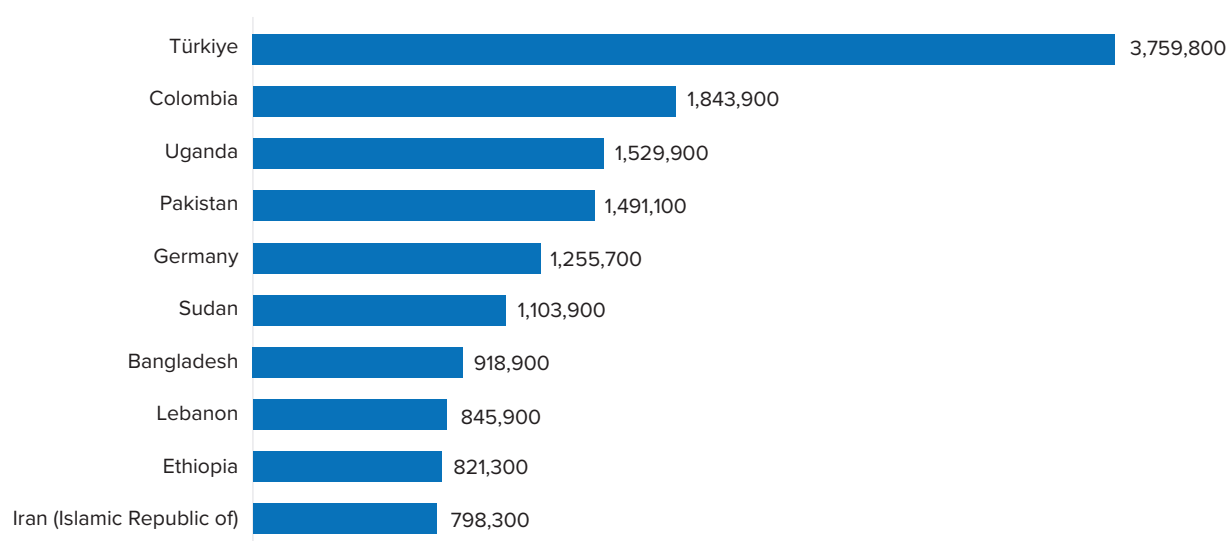
\*Includes Venezuelans displaced abroad

### By country of asylum

Türkiye, Colombia and Uganda remained the three largest hosting countries for those displaced across borders (see figure 7). The refugee population in Türkiye, almost all of whom are Syrians, grew to 3.8 million people in 2021. In Colombia, the number of

people displaced across borders rose to 1.8 million, as an additional 113,000 Venezuelans sought refuge in the country during the year. Uganda hosted the third-largest number of refugees, with 1.5 million at the end of 2021, mostly from South Sudan (63 per cent) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (29 per cent).

<sup>45</sup> See [UN Statistical Commission 51st session \(2020\) documents](#). Indicator 10.7.4 is computed as follows: [Number of refugees by country of origin at end-year / (End-year population in country of origin + number of refugees by country of origin at end-year)] \* 100,000. For this report, refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad have been included. The indicator excludes Palestine refugees under UNRWA’s mandate.

Figure 7 | **People displaced across borders by host country | end-2021**Table 2 | **Key facts for countries hosting the world's refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad | end-2021**

### 72 per cent hosted by neighbouring countries

Most people fleeing conflict and persecution prefer to remain near their country of origin. In 2021 nearly three-quarters of people displaced across borders were hosted in neighbouring countries.

### 83 per cent are hosted by low- and middle-income countries

Low-income countries continue to host a disproportionately large share of the global displaced population. According to the World Bank income classification for 2021,<sup>46</sup> low-income countries host 22 per cent of people displaced across borders. This includes very large refugee populations in Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. A further 21 per cent were hosted by lower-middle-income countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Upper-middle-income countries – including Türkiye, Colombia, Lebanon and Jordan – hosted 40 per cent of people displaced across borders. High-income countries, which account for most of the global wealth,<sup>47</sup> hosted only 16 per cent of people displaced across borders.

### 27 per cent are hosted by the Least Developed Countries<sup>48</sup>

The Least Developed Countries consist of 46 countries, including Bangladesh, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Yemen. Together, they account for less than 1.3 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product,<sup>49</sup> yet they were responsible for hosting more than 27 per cent of all people displaced across borders worldwide. At the end of 2021, the number of refugees in the Least Developed Countries stood at 7 million.

<sup>46</sup> See [World Bank Country and Lending Groups](#)

<sup>47</sup> High-income countries account for 62 per cent of global Gross Domestic Product (Source: [World Bank GDP statistics](#))

<sup>48</sup> See [UNSD methodology - Standard country or area codes for statistical use \(M49\)](#) for a list of Least Developed Countries.

<sup>49</sup> See [World Bank GDP statistics](#)

## HOW LONG DO REFUGEES REMAIN DISPLACED IN PROTRACTED SITUATIONS?

### Protracted refugee situations

Protracted refugee situations are defined as those where more than 25,000 refugees from the same country of origin have been in exile in a given low- or middle-income host country for at least five consecutive years.<sup>50</sup> This definition should be seen as a reflection of the refugee situation as a whole and does not refer to circumstances of individual refugees (see new research below).

At the end of 2021, an estimated 15.9 million refugees (74 per cent of the global refugee population) were in a protracted situation. This represented an increase of more than 203,000 refugees compared to the previous year. There were a total of 51 protracted situations in 31 different host countries. Some of the protracted situations are relatively recent, such as the ongoing displacement of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Zambia, while others such as Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania have been in prolonged displacement for decades.

### Estimating the duration refugees in protracted situations live in a given country

In new research, UNHCR has estimated the probability of individual refugees remaining displaced over time using the data it maintains in its case management system, known as proGres. UNHCR is responsible for registering refugees in 81 countries, totalling some 8.1 million refugees, more than one-third of the global refugee population. The research is focused on selected protracted situations.

For some refugee situations, only a limited amount of registration data is available. Also, circumstances that influence refugees' likelihood to remain displaced vary significantly based on their country of origin, and in which country of asylum they are hosted. For example, the opportunity to naturalize as a root to bringing refugee status to an end is not broadly available. Equally, opportunities for refugees to return to their home countries are not available to all of them and depend on a variety of factors. UNHCR has analysed nine protracted situations of varying durations, as shown in Figure 8, using the available events in its case management data to calculate the duration for which a refugee has remained displaced.<sup>51</sup>

The probability in these situations of someone remaining a refugee for at least five years – i.e. the minimum duration that UNHCR defines as protracted – varies between 63 and 99 per cent (see figure 8).<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the duration of each protracted situation varies, and the probability that someone remains a refugee for the entire duration of their situation decreases to anywhere from 96 to zero per cent. This likelihood varies considerably by situation: it is 96 per cent for South Sudanese in Sudan; 88 per cent for Rohingya in Bangladesh; 62 per cent for people from the Central African Republic in Cameroon; between 42 and 46 per cent for Syrians in Jordan, Iraq and Egypt; 26 per cent for Somalis in Kenya; and zero per cent for Burundians in the United Republic of Tanzania. Multiple factors influence these estimates – most notably returns, onwards movements and the opportunity to naturalize in refugees' host countries.

What is clear already from the research is that while the protracted situation designation is useful to summarize these situations, the categorization is not reflective of individual refugees' conditions, with individual refugees tending to be displaced for shorter durations, albeit with significant variation between situations. The years spent by refugees in displacement could reduce in the future if the international community as a whole contributed resources and expertise to support countries of origin, upon their request, to address root causes, to remove obstacles to return, and to enable conditions favourable to voluntary repatriation.

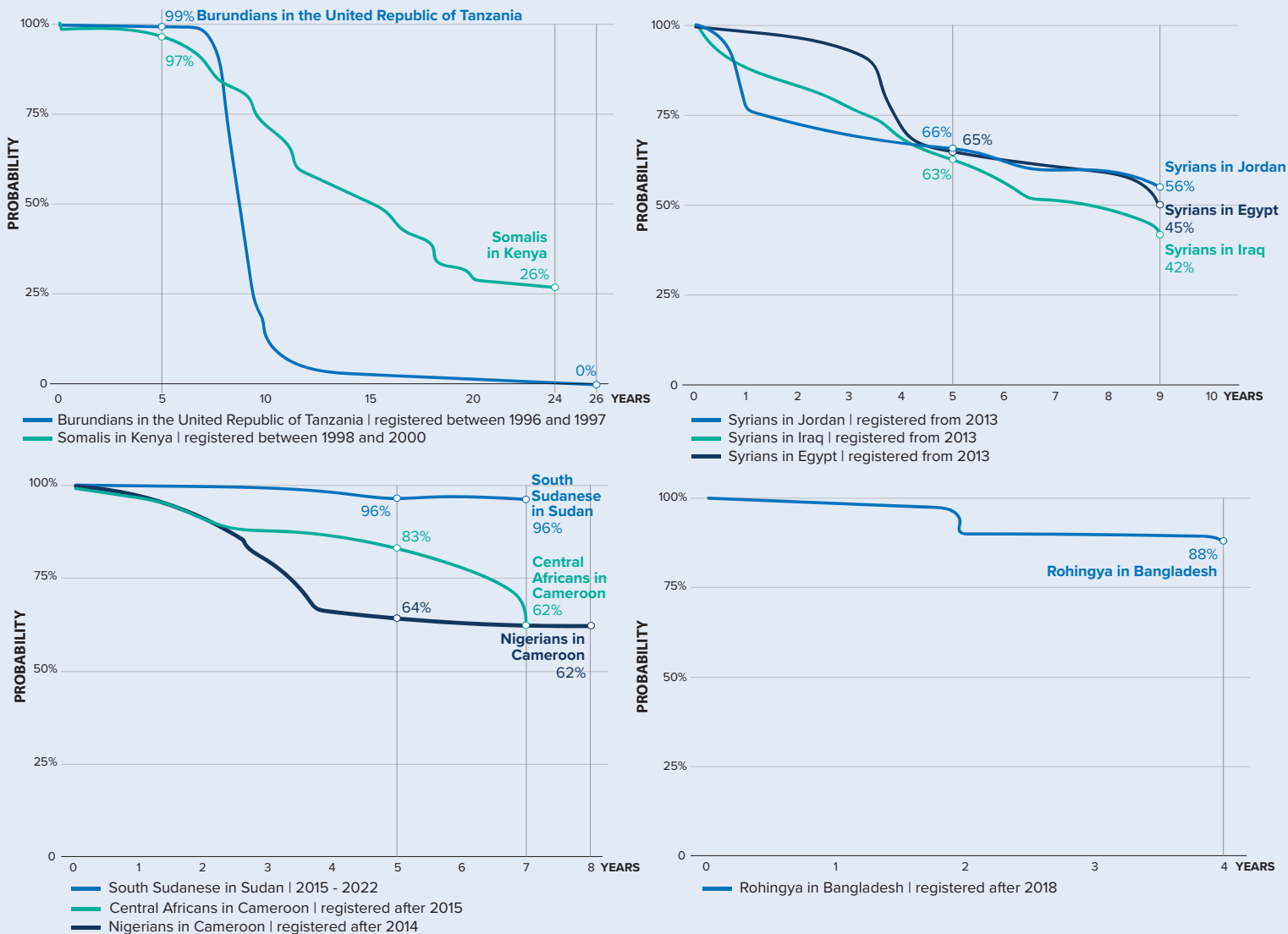
<sup>50</sup> Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate are excluded from this analysis.

<sup>51</sup> The refugee duration is calculated by comparing the registration date with the end of 2021 for active and 'on hold' cases, and the process status date for those cases that are closed or inactive. Cases on hold are those where UNHCR has not been able to contact the refugee, typically for three months. Closed and inactive cases are assumed to no longer be refugees, typically due to death, return or onwards movements. Biometric registration helps to ensure that individual cases are not duplicated should an individual be reactivated in the same country, or another country where UNHCR undertakes registration.

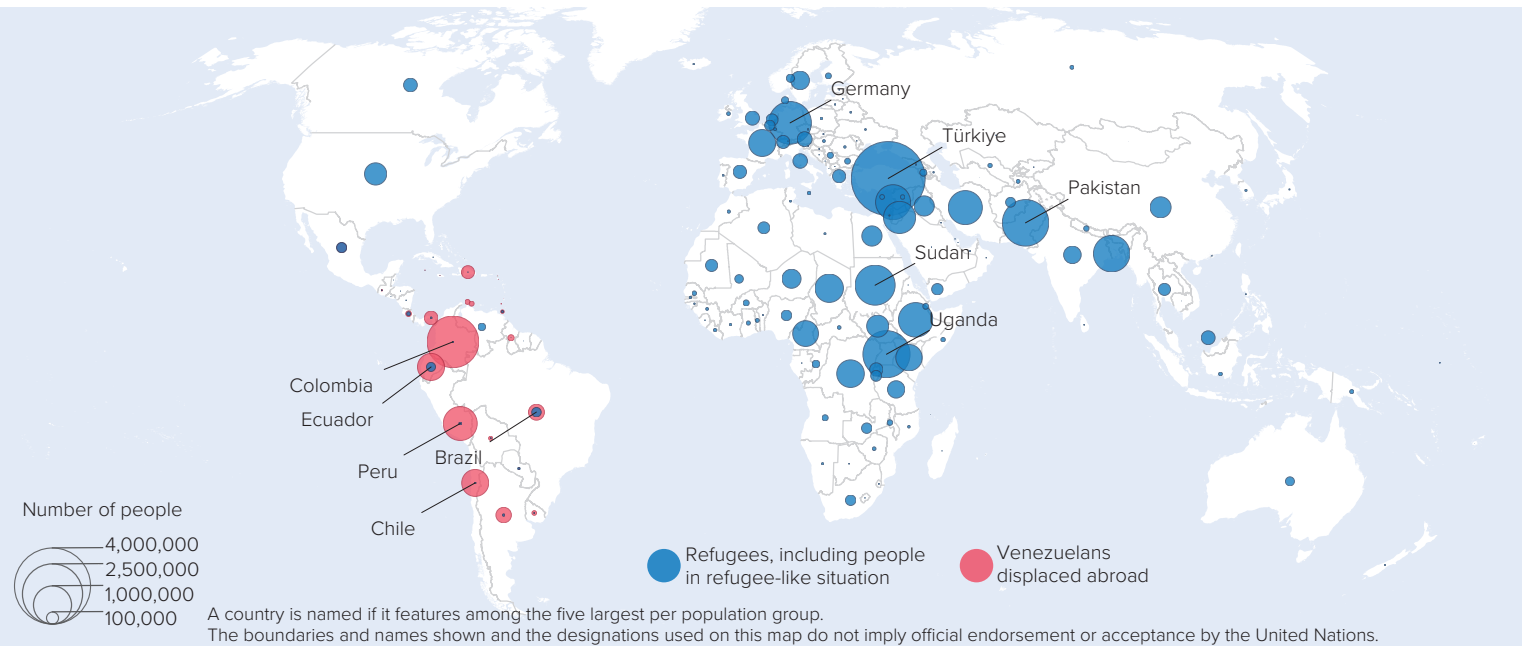
<sup>52</sup> Kaplan-Meier plots are used in this research to show the probability of a refugee remaining displaced for a given number of years. The probability will always decrease over time to a greater or lesser extent depending on a range of context specific factors, as well as mortality. For example, some 66 per cent of Syrians in Jordan are likely to remain displaced after five years, with the likelihood decreasing to 58 per cent after 10 years. This is more useful than a simple median or mean length of displacement, as these are skewed by the fact that most refugees remained displaced at the end of 2021.



Figure 8 | The likelihood of individuals remaining as refugees in selected protracted refugee situations | 1996–2021



Map 2 | Refugees, people in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad | end-2021



CHAPTER 3

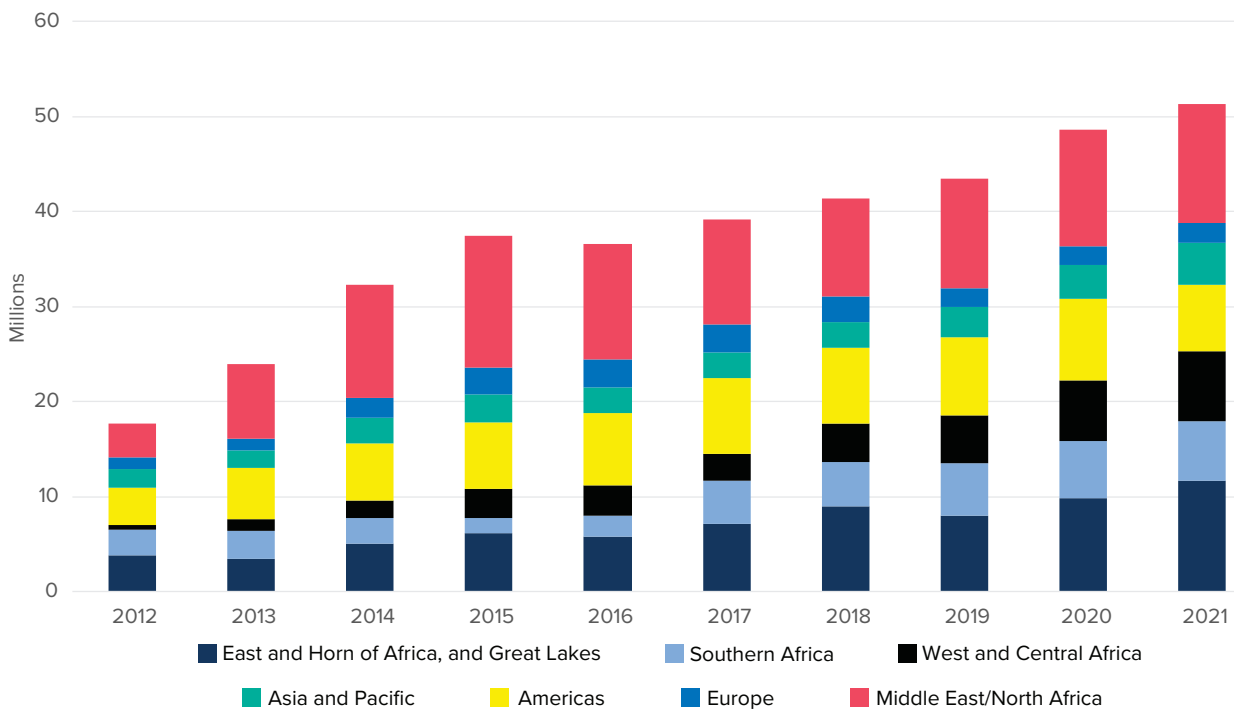
# Internally Displaced People (IDPs)

## Key global developments in 2021

People displaced inside their own countries due to armed conflicts, generalized violence or human rights violations continue to constitute the majority of the forcibly displaced population globally. Known as internally displaced people, or IDPs, they account for some 60 per cent of all people displaced.<sup>53</sup> By year-end, UNHCR reported on situations of internal

displacement in 35 countries, and all the following figures in this chapter relate to IDPs of concern to UNHCR, unless otherwise indicated. Worldwide, the IDP population has increased during nine of the last ten years, rising nearly three-fold from 17.7 million in 2012 to 51.3 million in 2021 – once again the highest level ever recorded.

Figure 9 | IDPs of concern to UNHCR by region | end-2021



<sup>53</sup> Source: [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre](#)



**MOZAMBIQUE.** *Moussa was displaced by the ongoing conflict in northern Mozambique's Cabo Delgado province. His friend Salimo helped him flee and board a plane to the city of Pemba, saving his life. Today, both men are separated from their families and hope for peace so they can return home.*

© UNHCR/MARTIM GRAY PEREIRA



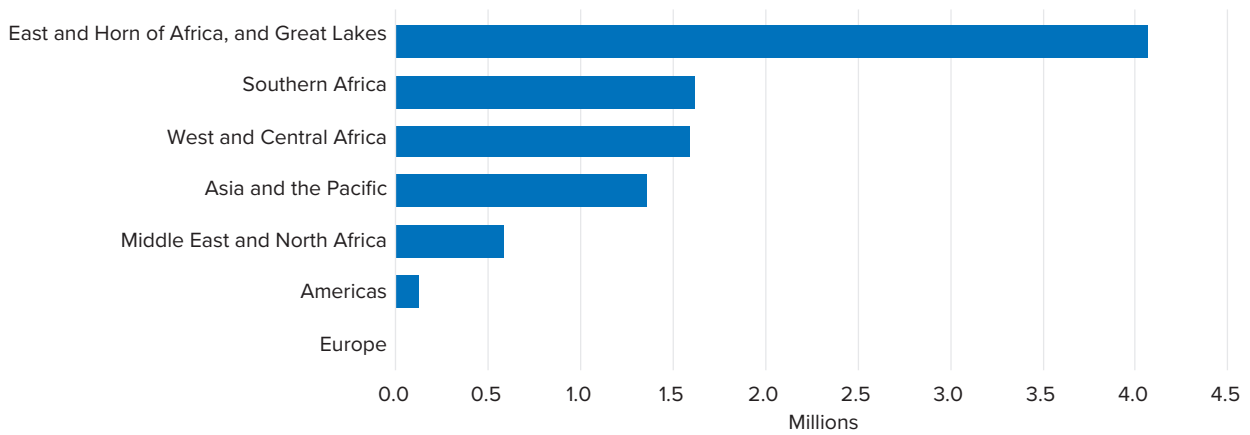


Data on IDPs reported by UNHCR includes only those internally displaced due to conflict and violence. In addition, there were 23.7 million internal displacements in the context of disasters and due to the impacts of climate change during the year, with 5.9 million people remaining displaced at end-year, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).

## Changes by regions and countries

Internal displacement increased in nearly all regions globally, driven by ongoing or escalating violence and conflicts (see Figure 10). More than three-quarters of all new internal displacements in 2021 occurred in Sub-Saharan Africa, consistent with recent years.

Figure 10 | Newly displaced IDPs of concern to UNHCR by region | in 2021



The largest numbers of people newly displaced within their countries in 2021 were observed in the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region, with nearly 4.1 million recorded in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan. The surge in numbers in Ethiopia was largely driven by the crisis in the north of the country. In late 2020, fighting in the Tigray region broke out between the federal government and the former regional government of Tigray, spilling over into the neighbouring regions of Amhara and Afar. The ongoing conflict, which made headlines for widespread violations of rights, including sexual violence, led to at least a further 2.5 million people being displaced within the country in 2021. A joint investigation by the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights concluded that forced displacement could “amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes”, with all parties to the conflict implicated.<sup>54</sup>

In South Sudan, an insurgency in the Equatoria region, and increasingly lethal intercommunal violence, worsened by widespread presence of weapons,

continued to trigger displacement. An estimated 528,900 people fled their homes during the year, bringing the total number of conflict-related IDPs in South Sudan to about two million. Its neighbour Sudan also witnessed more than half a million people (543,300) newly displaced within the country, primarily attributed to ongoing intercommunal conflict and violence that followed the military coup in October 2021. The number of IDPs in Sudan stood at more than 3 million at the end of the year. More than half a million people were also displaced in Somalia (544,200), with most estimated to have returned during the year.

In the West and Central Africa region, there were 1.6 million new displacements in 2021. These increased movements were mainly driven by escalating conflict in Burkina Faso and Nigeria, where fighting continued between government forces and non-state armed groups. In Nigeria, displacement has been growing rapidly since 2018, with 500,700 people newly displaced during 2021. The internal displacement crisis in Burkina Faso is one of the fastest growing in the world.<sup>55</sup> Until 2017, Burkina Faso was mostly spared from the violence that drove displacement

<sup>54</sup> See [Joint Investigation into Alleged Violations of International Human Rights, Humanitarian and Refugee Law Committed by all Parties](#)

<sup>55</sup> See [Sahel internal displacement tops 2 million as violence surges](#)



in many neighbouring countries. But the internally displaced population has since then grown many times over, rising from less than 50,000 at the start of 2018 to around 1.6 million four years later – including 507,600 new displacements during 2021. The Central African Republic also saw 392,800 people newly displaced within the country during the year, triggered largely by the violence and insecurity that followed the December 2020 general election. Most were able to return to their homes during 2021. In Mali and Chad, respectively, some 98,100 and 70,400 new displacements were recorded during the year. Chronic underdevelopment, economic inequality, and other socio-economic factors are among the root causes of conflicts in West and Central Africa. Addressing these underlying issues remains critical to stemming the growing internal displacement crisis in the region.

In the Southern Africa region, 1.5 million people were newly displaced within the Democratic Republic of the Congo and a further 76,900 in Mozambique. While many IDPs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo returned during the year, both countries saw substantial growth in their internally displaced populations at year-end (up 4% and 12% respectively).

Almost 1.4 million people were reported to be newly displaced in the Asia and Pacific region, stemming almost entirely from humanitarian crises in Afghanistan and Myanmar. In Afghanistan, 777,400 new displacements due to conflict were reported.<sup>56</sup> For over four decades, Afghanistan experienced successive conflicts which forced millions to flee their homes. The latest conflict ran for 20 years and mainly pitted government and foreign forces against the Taliban; it ended with the latter's takeover of Kabul in August 2021. The events leading up to Kabul's takeover resulted in further massive displacement, with many subsequently returning during the year. In Myanmar, the military takeover in February 2021 ignited widespread violence, including the heavy use of explosives and weapons in and around populated areas, leading to 433,000 new displacements. By year-end, the total number of IDPs had reached 671,000.

Millions of IDPs have remained displaced for years in the Middle East and North Africa. Evolving situations have led to new displacements in 2021, notably in Yemen (286,700) and Syria (237,600). The increase in Yemen is primarily attributed to what was described as “among the worst” escalation of the conflict seen in recent years.<sup>57</sup> In Syria, new displacement continued in 2021 due to instability.<sup>58</sup> Conversely, return activities following the ceasefire agreement in Libya in late 2020, led to a 36 per cent decrease in the overall IDP population to 179,000 by the end of the year. While the ceasefire has allowed many IDPs to return to their places of origin, returnees are confronted with numerous challenges, including limited access to services, contamination from explosive devices such as landmines and unexploded ordnance.

In the Americas, a further 124,000 people were displaced within Colombia. In Europe, no IDPs were newly displaced in 2021. However, an improvement in the estimation of people displaced in government-controlled areas in Ukraine led to an increase in the overall IDP population, which stood at 854,000 at year-end.<sup>59</sup>

## Internal displacement overview

At the end of 2021, Syria, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Ethiopia and Afghanistan continued to host the largest IDP populations globally (see figure 11). In Syria, more than 10 years of conflict have forced millions to flee within the country, and at the end of 2021 an estimated 6.9 million people were still internally displaced. This means that more than 1 in 3 Syrians remaining within the country were internally displaced at the end of 2021.

In Colombia, further to a revision of IDP figures in consultation with the Government, 6.8 million IDPs were still in need of humanitarian assistance and solutions at the end of the year.<sup>60</sup> This includes 124,000 new internally displaced people that were registered during the year.

<sup>56</sup> See: [Afghanistan: internal displacement due to conflict](#)

<sup>57</sup> See: [Escalation in Yemen “worst in years” – UN top envoy](#)

<sup>58</sup> See: [Increased Syria violence prompts largest civilian displacements in a year, as gridlock stymies political talks](#)

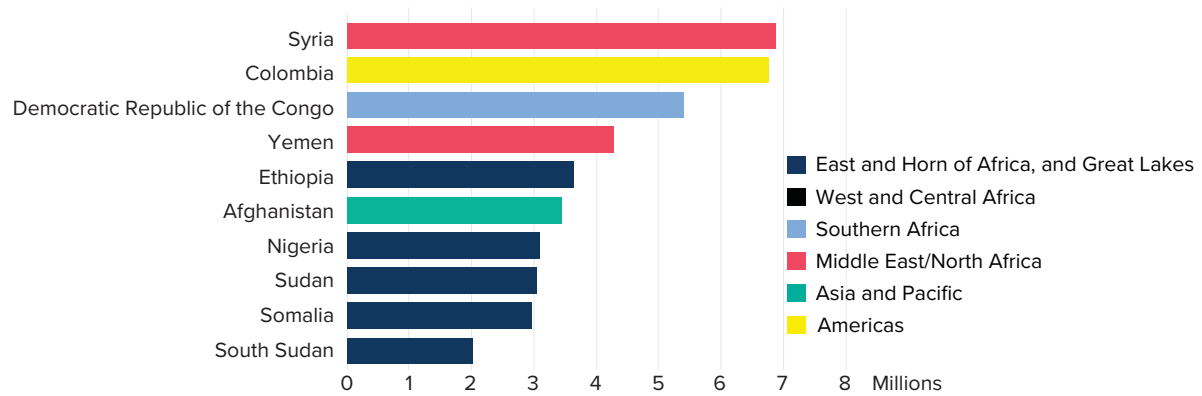
<sup>59</sup> This excludes internal displacement in 2022, which is estimated at 7 million at the time of writing (Source: IOM).

<sup>60</sup> The National Victims Registry of Colombia contains the historical accumulated figure of the number of victims of displacement, which continues to increase given that victims continue to be registered in the country. Thus, the total number of people recognized as victims of displacement (more than 8.2 million), includes the number of IDPs who are subject to attention and/or reparation, i.e. those who meet the requirements to access the measures of attention and reparation established in Colombian Law 1448 (6.8 million). The number of victims of displacement who are deceased, or IDPs who were victims of homicide or forced disappearance, and other victims who, for various reasons, cannot effectively access these measures, are identified as not being subject to attention or reparation and therefore not included in the figure of 6.8 million. The figure is constantly updated, considering that by legal definition, victims have up to two years to make their declaration and be included in the registry system. See the summary on the [Victims Unit website](#).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo hosts the third-largest IDP population worldwide and the largest one on the African continent. At end-2021, the number of IDPs there reached 5.4 million. In Yemen, more than 4.3 million people remained internally displaced at the end of 2021, an increase of 7 per cent compared to the previous year. The number of IDPs in Ethiopia

and Afghanistan also rose substantially during 2021. Internal displacement in Ethiopia has been growing rapidly, tripling in less than 4 years from 1.1 million to over 3.6 million. In Afghanistan, the total number of IDPs reached an estimated 3.5 million at end-2021, continuing an uninterrupted 15-year rising trend.

Figure 11 | IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR | end-2021



## Demographics of IDPs

UNHCR continuously aims to improve its collection of age-, sex- and location-disaggregated data of internally displaced. In 2021, sub-national location data for IDPs was available for 23 of the 35 countries where UNHCR collates IDP data; age- and sex-disaggregation was available in 13 countries; and sex-disaggregation was available in a further 6 countries.

In instances where location data was available, 48 per cent of IDPs lived in urban areas.<sup>61</sup> Women and girls accounted for 50 per cent of the internally displaced population in 2021, in line with previous years. There are, however, notable differences between countries. In the Central African Republic, six out of ten IDPs were female, and in Niger, Mali and Honduras there were at least 10 per cent more female IDPs than male. In contrast, in Sudan, 54 per cent of people displaced within their country were male.

Some 45 per cent of people displaced within their countries were children, who are particularly vulnerable in contexts of displacement. The proportion of IDPs who were children also varied widely between settings. For example, in Niger, Burkina Faso,

Somalia, Afghanistan and Yemen children constituted a substantially larger share of the IDP population than adult IDPs. In contrast, in Colombia, children accounted for just 23 per cent of the IDP population.

## IDP returns

When suitable conditions are in place, the return of internally displaced people to their place of origin is widely seen as a desirable outcome, reflecting a durable solution for IDPs. In 2019, IDP returns totalled more than 5.3 million. Then, as the COVID-19 pandemic set in, they dropped significantly, to 3.2 million in 2020. In 2021, IDP returns increased to reach pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 5.3 million people returning during the year.

Returns, however, varied substantially among countries. Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Iraq and South Sudan all saw significant reductions in IDP returns, while more IDPs were able to return in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nigeria and Somalia. The increase in the return of IDPs in Afghanistan is attributed to a significant reduction of hostilities following the Taliban

<sup>61</sup> Given that disaggregation of urban and rural locations was only available for 44 per cent of IDP data, the actual percentage is likely to be higher.

takeover. In the Central African Republic, the recapture of territories from non-state armed groups prompted the return of IDPs.<sup>62</sup> In Myanmar IDPs returned in 2021, as fighting subsided.<sup>63</sup>

Demographic data collected in 2021 on IDP returnees improved, with coverage by age and sex improving from 9 per cent last year to 26 per cent. This was notably due to the inclusion of demographics for this population group from Afghanistan. Overall, based on the available demographic data, the proportion of men and women among returnees is balanced and children represent the majority of IDP returnees, accounting for 58 per cent.

## Displacement in the context of climate change and disasters

According to IDMC figures, in 2021 there were 23.7 million new internal displacements globally due to disasters (these are in addition to those internally displaced due to conflict and violence). This represented a decrease of seven million, or 23 per cent, compared to the previous year. The largest displacements in the context of disasters in 2021 occurred in China (6.0 million), the Philippines (5.7 million) and India (4.9 million). Most disaster displacements during the year were temporary,

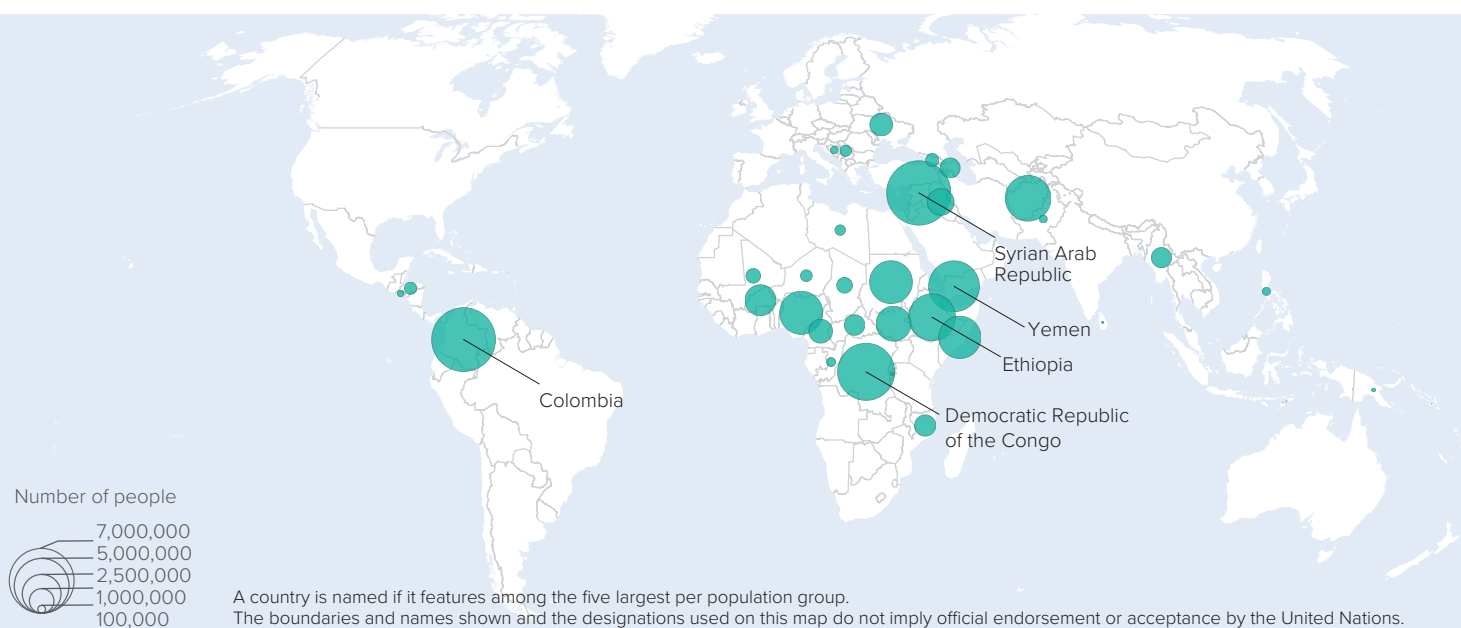
allowing the majority of IDPs to return to their home areas, but 5.9 million people worldwide remained displaced at the end of the year due to disasters.

As part of its implementation of the Strategic Framework on Climate Action<sup>64</sup> and commitment to improve the protection of IDPs, UNHCR developed a Practical Guidance on IDP Protection in the Context of Disasters and the Adverse Effects of Climate Change.<sup>65</sup>

## Protecting IDPs

UNHCR continues to promote the protection of IDPs – including by supporting the development of normative frameworks through technical assistance, advocacy and capacity building. In 2021, UNHCR supported the development of national laws and policies across several countries including Ukraine, Mozambique and Nigeria. In August, the Government of Mozambique adopted an IDP policy and strategy, while Nigeria adopted a law specific to the protection of IDPs in September. In late 2021, Ukraine adopted an IDP Inclusion and Durable Solutions Strategy and Operational Plan. UNHCR continues to support normative developments, notably in Burkina Faso, Chad, El Salvador, Honduras and Mexico.

Map 3 | IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR | end-2021



<sup>62</sup> See: [Central African Republic – Overview of population movements, July 2021](#)

<sup>63</sup> See: [UNHCR Myanmar emergency update, September 2021](#)

<sup>64</sup> See: [UNHCR - Strategic Framework for Climate Action](#)

<sup>65</sup> See: [Practical Guidance for UNHCR Staff on IDP Protection in the Context of Disasters and the Adverse Effects of Climate Change](#)

[+ Asylum applications](#)
[+ Asylum decisions](#)
[+ Pending asylum applications at end-2021](#)
**CHAPTER 4**

# Asylum trends

Refugee Status Determination (RSD) is the process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether an individual seeking international protection is a refugee under national, regional or international law. A strong refugee status determination system, which fairly and efficiently processes asylum applications, is a crucial step in ensuring that refugees receive protection, that public confidence in the asylum system is maintained and that long-lasting solutions for refugees are realized.

Refugee status can be granted individually or on a group basis. Group recognition most commonly takes place when there are readily apparent, objective circumstances in a country of origin which suggest that the majority of individuals fleeing from that country are likely to be refugees. In most cases, individuals being granted refugee status on a group basis will be directly registered as refugees, as opposed to an individual recognition where an individual will first be registered as an asylum seeker. This is why individuals undergoing group determination will normally not be counted in the “asylum application” total.

In 2021, States and UNHCR collectively registered some 1.7 million individual asylum applications in 155 countries, 35 per cent more than in 2020 (1.3 million). However, the overall number of applications remains well below pre-COVID-19 levels (for example: 2.2 million in 2019 and 2.1 million in 2018). The overall increase in 2021 from the previous year includes large increases in asylum applications in Germany, Mexico, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Costa Rica, but also significant decreases in Brazil, Peru, Spain and the United States of America.

An estimated 81 per cent of individual asylum applicants were registered at first instance<sup>66</sup> (that is, by the initial administrative or judicial authority), and the remainder at the second instance, such as upon review by courts or other appellate bodies.<sup>67</sup> In 2021, repeat and appeal applications increased at a greater rate than first-instance applications, suggesting that COVID-19-related restrictions still had an impact on access to asylum and territory during the year, as individuals making repeat and appeal applications would already be in the asylum country.

During the year, over one million individuals received a decision on their individual refugee claim, slightly more than in 2020. Some 494,900 people received refugee or other protection status in 149 countries, while 519,200 were rejected. Compared to the previous year, there were 8 per cent more positive decisions, and 5 per cent fewer rejections. In addition, some 299,200 individuals received an international protection status through group procedures, slightly fewer than in 2020 (305,500).

In 2021, 27,000 unaccompanied or separated children (UASC) lodged new asylum applications, accounting for two per cent of new asylum claims. This represents an increase of 6,000 applications compared to the previous year and also surpasses pre-pandemic levels. Yet figures for asylum applications by UASC remain significant underestimates due to the limited number of countries reporting data on UASC.

<sup>66</sup> The data for some countries may include a significant number of repeat claims, i.e. the applicant has submitted at least one previous application in the same or another country.

<sup>67</sup> Statistical information on outcomes of asylum appeals and court proceedings is underreported in UNHCR's statistics, particularly in high-income countries, because this type of data is often either not collected by States or not published.



*COSTA RICA. Nicaraguan asylum-seeker Francys lives in a small settlement in northern Costa Rica, where she has emerged as a community leader. She feels safe in Costa Rica, where she awaits the birth of her second child. In 2021, some 102,000 people fled Nicaragua and sought asylum in Costa Rica.*

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Figure 12 | Individual asylum applications registered by region | 2012 - 2021

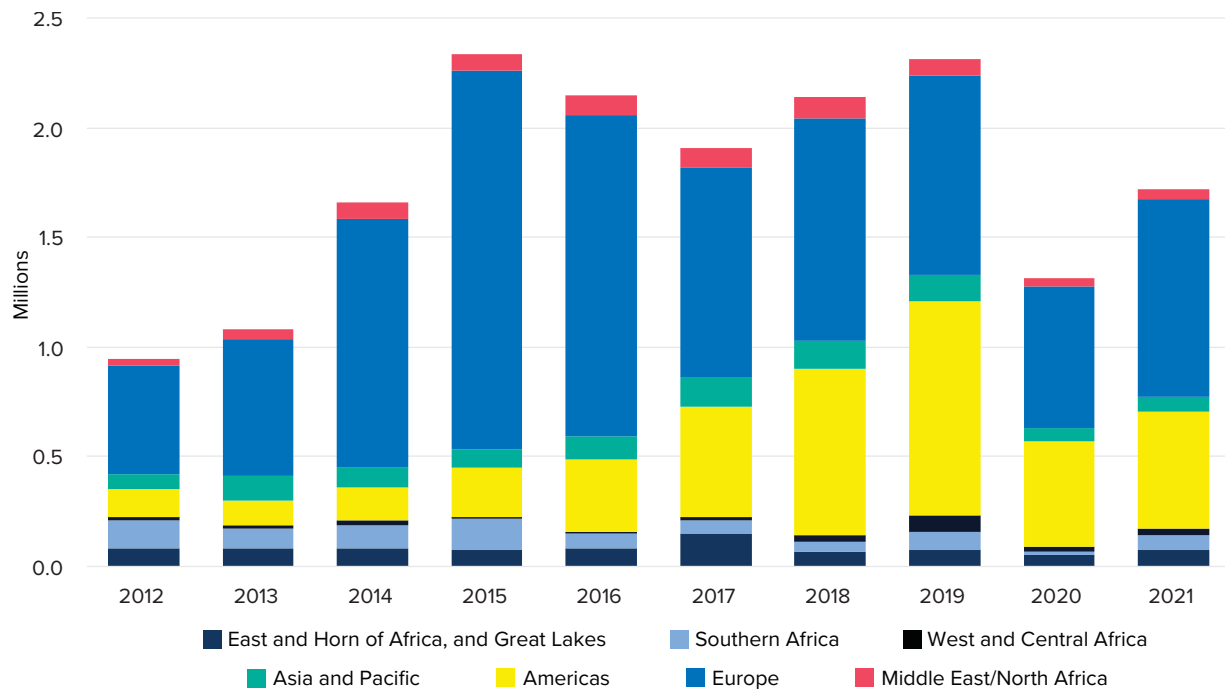


Table 3 | New and appeal applications registered | 2017 - 2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021*
<b>States</b>	1,660,600	1,902,400	2,191,100	1,214,400	1,632,700
<b>UNHCR</b>	263,500	227,800	124,900	56,400	86,800
<b>Jointly**</b>	22,300	11,400	1,500	600	700
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,946,400</b>	<b>2,141,600</b>	<b>2,317,500</b>	<b>1,271,400</b>	<b>1,720,200</b>
<b>% UNHCR only</b>	14%	11%	5%	4%	5%

\* Provisional figure

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

## Individual asylum applications registered

In 2021, the number of new individual asylum applications registered globally increased by 25 per cent, from 1.1 million to 1.4 million, compared with the previous year, although this remains lower than the 1.7 million and 2.0 million applications in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Given the numerous new and existing displacement situations, the lower number of new asylum applications reflects continued travel restrictions and barriers relating to access to territory that resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic, despite

adaptive measures that have been put in place. Some 81,700 new applications were made via UNHCR-mandate RSD procedures, 700 via joint UNHCR/State RSD procedures and 1.3 million via national RSD procedures.

The number of individual asylum applications received globally at appeal or other instances (including reopening and judicial review) grew by 63 per cent, from 196,800 in 2020 to 320,000 in 2021.

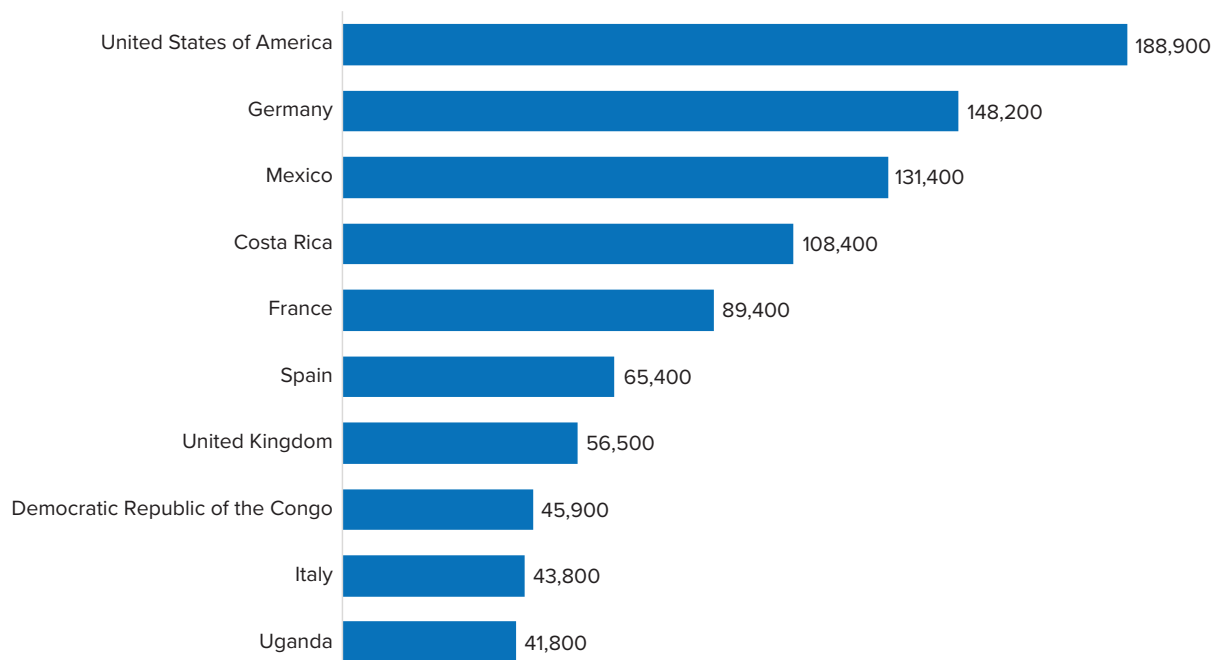
### By country of asylum

Of the 1.4 million new individual asylum applications, 66 per cent or 919,800 people were received in just ten countries (see figure 13). While there were fewer

new applications in Spain (23,400 less) and the United States of America (62,000 less), each of the other States registering the most applicants saw increases

compared to 2020, notably Mexico (up 90,200), Costa Rica (up 87,300), the Democratic Republic of the Congo<sup>68</sup> (up 45,800) and Germany (up 45,700).

Figure 13 | Major countries for individual registration of new asylum seekers | 2021



In the United States of America, more than half of all new applications in 2021 were lodged by nationals of just five countries: Venezuela (27,000 or 14 per cent); Guatemala (23,000 or 12 per cent); Honduras (19,600 or 10 per cent); El Salvador (14,900 or 8 per cent); and Cuba (12,900 or 7 per cent).

In Germany, nearly two-thirds of new applications were by nationals of Syria (54,900), Afghanistan (23,300) and Iraq (15,600). Mexico received the third-largest number of new asylum applications (131,400), which increased more than three-fold from 41,200 in 2020. More than two-thirds of them originated from Haiti (51,800, or 39 per cent) and Honduras (36,400, or 28 per cent).

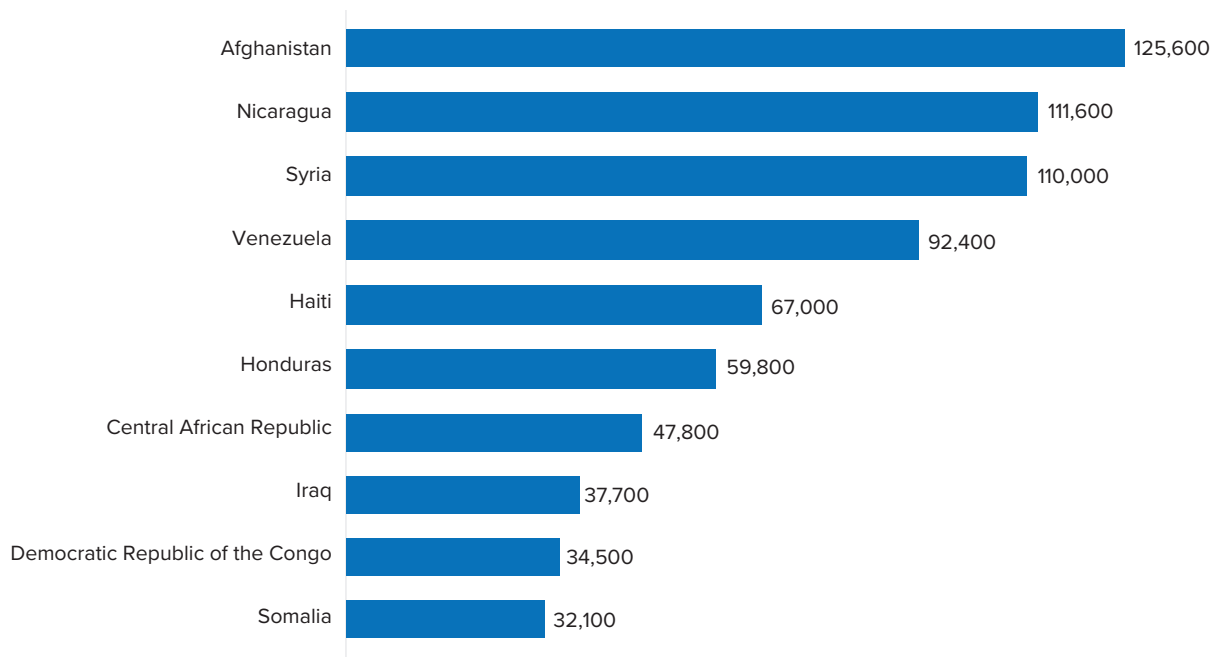
### By country of origin

In 2021, new asylum applications were most commonly registered by nationals of Nicaragua (up 92,700 or a five-fold increase from 2020), Afghanistan (up 49,300 or 65 per cent) and Syria (up 37,600 or 52 per cent). Nicaraguans fled the growing socio-political crisis and increasing political persecution in their country. The number of new asylum claims from Venezuelans dropped by 64,500, or 41 per cent. While this decrease is noteworthy, it does not indicate a decrease in Venezuelans leaving their country and seeking international protection. As discussed in chapter 2, depending on the options available to them, many Venezuelans regularize their stay in third countries through other, non-asylum mechanisms.

<sup>68</sup> The 2014 ministerial declaration that offered prima facie refugee status to persons fleeing generalised violence from the Central African Republic from January 2013 onwards is no longer applicable. As such, all refugees are assessed on an individual basis by the National Commission for Refugees.



Figure 14 | Major source countries of new asylum applications | 2021



### By asylum authority

UNHCR registered asylum applications for RSD under its mandate in 47 countries in 2021, primarily in the Middle East and North Africa as well as in Asia and the Pacific, three countries fewer than in 2020. Where possible, UNHCR supports States taking on their responsibilities for RSD, and therefore the number of States where UNHCR conducts mandate RSD should decrease over time. However, the reduction between 2020 and 2021 was due to locations that did not receive any applications throughout the year.

Since 2015, UNHCR has implemented a strategic direction on RSD,<sup>69</sup> which guides RSD that UNHCR undertakes within its mandate. Given that RSD can be a resource-intensive activity, UNHCR focuses its RSD activities on situations where there is likely to be a substantive protection impact (e.g. at the individual, case or operational levels).<sup>70</sup> In 2021, UNHCR improved the recording of statistics relating to those asylum seekers who do not require RSD, with 9,400 of them arriving during the year. This compares with 81,700 new asylum applications that did require RSD in

2021, an increase from the 50,300 in 2020, principally in Malaysia, Libya, Egypt and India.

### Group determination of refugee status

Slightly fewer people received international protection through group determination procedures in 2021 than during the previous year: 299,200 compared to 305,500. As in past years, most group recognitions occurred in Africa, as many African countries have a well-adapted legislative framework that provides for efficient group recognition in appropriate circumstances. These group recognitions notably took place in Chad (71,000), Sudan (64,500), Uganda (42,900), Cameroon (28,200), Ethiopia (19,100) and Niger (16,100).

<sup>69</sup> See [UNHCR's strategic direction on RSD](#)

<sup>70</sup> Unlike a State, which has the power to grant legal status in its territory after an RSD decision, such decisions under UNHCR's mandate may not have a protection impact for the individual involved, depending on the specific context.

Figure 15 | Type of recognition by country of asylum | 2021

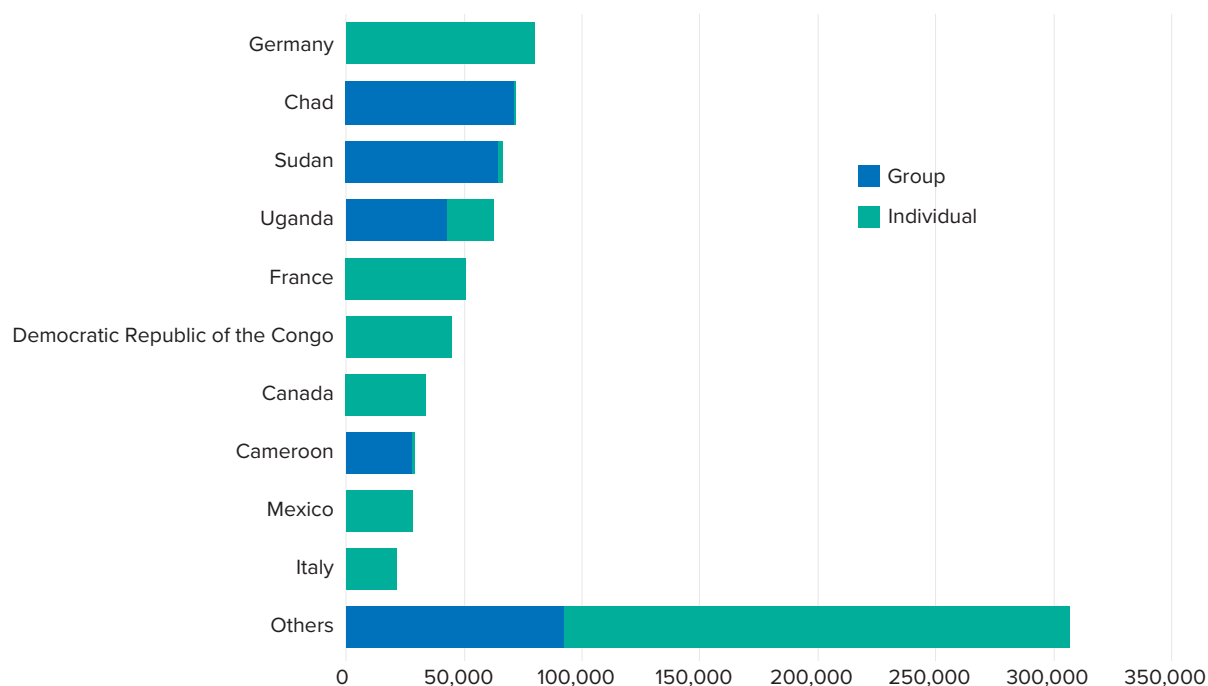
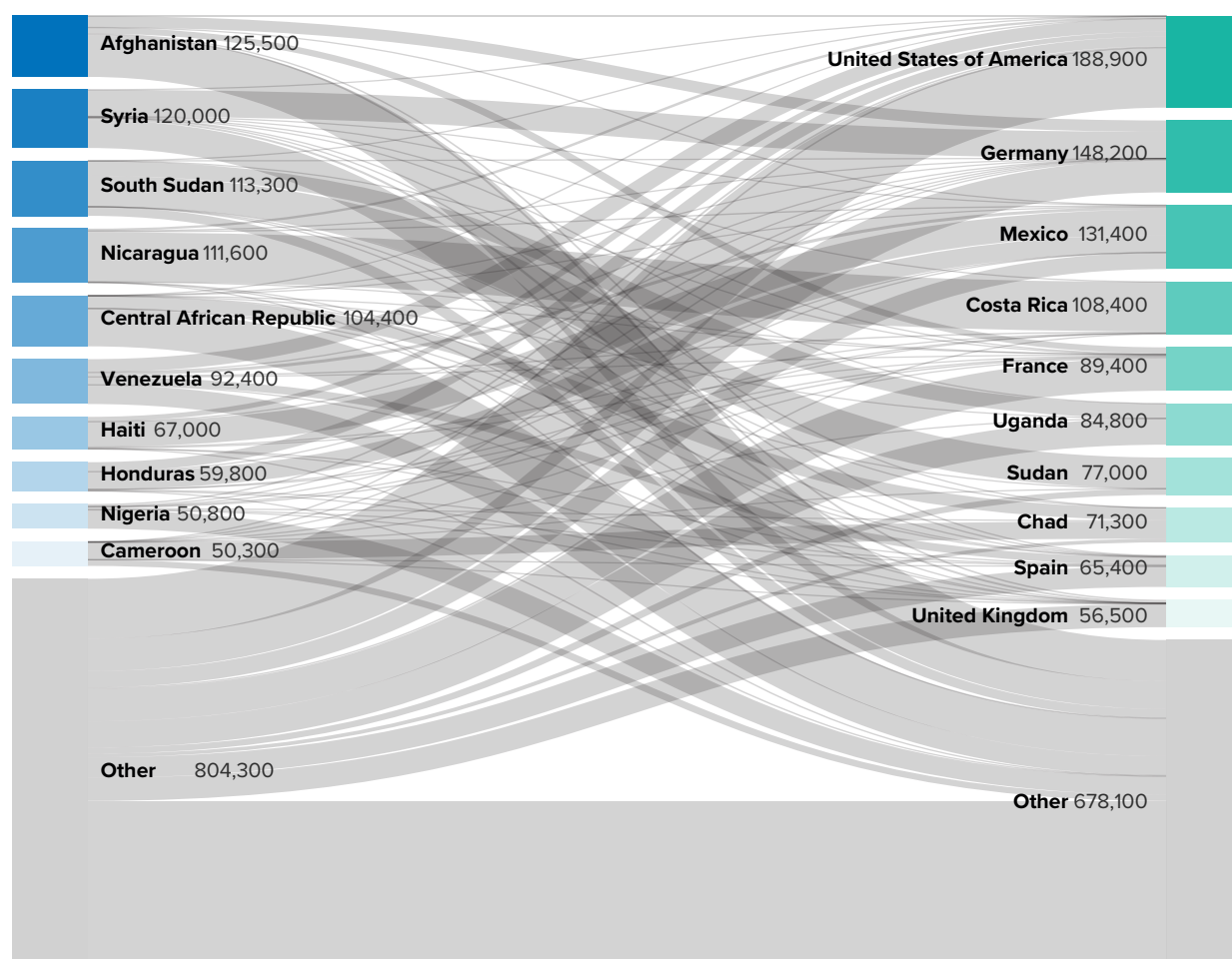


Figure 16 | Key flows of new individual asylum applications registered and group refugee recognitions | 2021





## Decisions on asylum applications

Some 1.4 million decisions were processed by States and UNHCR at all levels of procedures in 2021, of which about one million were substantive decisions,<sup>71</sup> and the rest were administrative closures.<sup>72</sup> While this overall number was comparable with 2020, specific countries dramatically increased or decreased their decision-making output as operational priorities shifted under COVID-19, backlog reduction exercises commenced or ended.

The Total Protection Rate, or TPR, is the percentage of substantive decisions that resulted in any form of international protection. Worldwide, this figure stood at 49 per cent in 2021, consistent with recent years.<sup>73</sup>

The overall number of decisions made by UNHCR under its mandate declined from 70,700 in 2020<sup>74</sup> to 52,800 in 2021. Among these, 25,000 (48 per cent) were substantive decisions, a decline of 31 per cent from the 36,100 during the previous year. As was reported in the 2021 Mid-Year Trends report,<sup>75</sup> the reason for this decrease in substantive decisions was largely due to COVID-19 and the impact it had on operations. In the initial stages of COVID-19 in 2020, many UNHCR operations were unable to effectively interview individuals for refugee status during lockdowns, as adaptive measures took some time to put in place. As a result, many of these operations focused decision-making on the cases of asylum seekers who had already been interviewed. Notable in this respect was Egypt, where UNHCR made a significant number of substantive decisions in 2020 while interviewing was suspended. In 2021, by

contrast, UNHCR conducted more interviews in Egypt but made fewer substantive decisions. In relation to administrative closures, these vary from year to year based on when data clean-up exercises take place, among other issues.

## Pending asylum claims

The number of asylum seekers waiting for a decision at the end of 2021 stood at 4.6 million, significantly more than at the end of 2020 (4.2 million). This increase emphasizes the need for States and UNHCR to ensure effective ways of processing asylum claims, including by focusing on strong data management, triaging cases and implementing differentiated RSD processing modalities. A growing backlog can create protection concerns if asylum seekers wait many years without legal certainty, and it is more difficult for rejected applicants to return to their country of origin.

In 2021, Canada, Ecuador, France and Greece were able to significantly reduce their backlog of pending cases. In Ecuador, the backlog was reduced by 73 per cent (from 26,000 in 2020 to 7,100 in 2021), in Greece by 40 per cent (from 60,900 to 37,100), in France by 36 per cent (from 118,200 to 75,700) and in Canada by 26 per cent (from 85,400 to 63,200). Conversely, the backlog increased in 95 countries during the year. Increases were greatest in Mexico (up 88 per cent, from 83,800 to 157,200), Costa Rica (up 70 per cent, from 89,800 to 152,500), and the United States of America (up 31 per cent, from 998,000 to 1,303,200).

<sup>71</sup> Substantive decisions include Convention status, complementary and other forms of protection, and rejected cases.

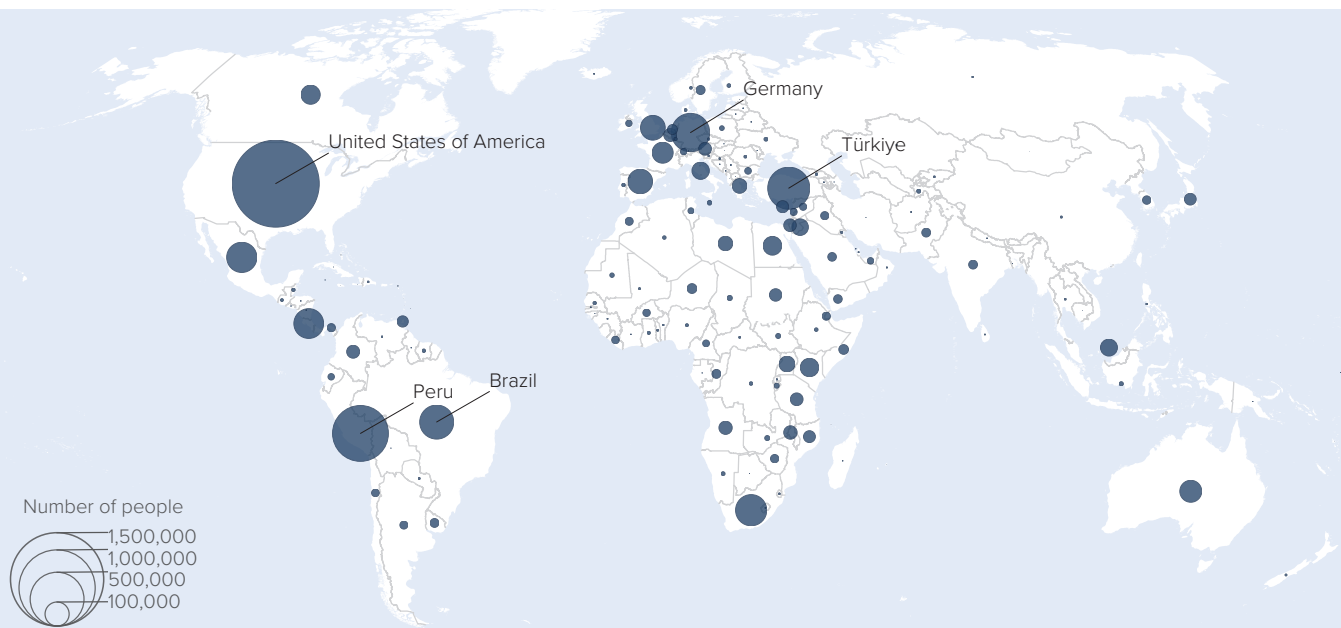
<sup>72</sup> These are the closure of a case without a decision on the merits. For example, from the death of the applicant, no-show for interview, withdrawal of the application, abandonment of the claim, or the determination that another country is responsible for the claim, among other factors.

<sup>73</sup> UNHCR uses two rates to compute the proportion of refugee claims accepted. The Refugee Recognition Rate is the proportion of asylum seekers accorded refugee status out of the total number of substantive decisions (Convention status, complementary protection and rejected cases). The Total Protection Rate is the proportion of asylum seekers accorded refugee status or a complementary form of protection relative to the total number of substantive decisions. Non-substantive decisions are, to the extent possible, excluded from both calculations. For the purposes of global comparability, UNHCR uses only these two rates and does not report rates calculated by national authorities.

<sup>74</sup> This is 45,100 fewer than reported in Global Trends 2020 due to a correction in the number of administrative closures for Iraqis and Yemenis in Jordan.

<sup>75</sup> See [UNHCR 2021 Mid-year trends](#)

Map 4 | Asylum seekers (with pending cases) | end-2021



A country is named if it features among the five largest per population group. The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



**ROMANIA.** A new home awaits an Eritrean family that spent a decade in refuge. They are currently staying in the Emergency Transit Centre in Timisoara, Romania, while they wait to be resettled to the Netherlands.

© UNHCR/STEFAN LORINT

## CHAPTER 5

# Solutions

As new refugee situations emerge and intensify, and existing ones reignite or remain unresolved, there is an acute need for durable solutions at increasing scale. The Global Compact on Refugees<sup>76</sup> notes that one strategic priority for UNHCR and the humanitarian community is to identify and support durable solutions that enable refugees to rebuild their lives and live in safety and dignity.

This chapter focuses primarily on durable solutions for refugees.<sup>77</sup> Durable solutions traditionally include voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement to a third country. While the number of refugees returning or naturalizing<sup>78</sup> has risen in 2021 and returned to pre-COVID-19 levels, resettlement remains well below this, albeit higher than in 2020.

## Return

For most refugees, returning to their home country based on a free and informed choice would be a preferred solution to bring their temporary status as refugees to an end. To realize this, political stability and economic opportunities are essential to ensure that the environment refugees face upon their return allows them to reintegrate in safety and with dignity. To ensure that the returns are sustainable, UNHCR, the country of origin and the international community all strive to achieve these enabling conditions.

Voluntary repatriation surged by 71 per cent in 2021, with 429,300 refugees returning to their countries of origin. As a result, in 2021, returns are comparable with recent pre-pandemic years.

Nearly two-thirds of refugee returns in 2021 were to South Sudan, totalling 270,200, even as the dire humanitarian situation in the country drove further forced displacement. South Sudanese refugees were mostly returning from Uganda (180,400), Sudan (44,200) and Ethiopia (28,200). Returns to South Sudan are difficult to verify, however, as they tend to be self-organized, and access is often constrained in areas of returns.

As part of the Joint Refugee Return and Reintegration Plan, the Burundian authorities, UNHCR, the UN Development Programme and other partners support the sustainable return of refugees to Burundi.<sup>79</sup> Returns to Burundi began in 2020, with 40,900 refugees returning during that year. This positive development continued in 2021, as 66,000 Burundian refugees returned to their country of origin throughout the year, primarily from the United Republic of Tanzania (30,100) and Rwanda (23,000).

In 2021, some 36,500 Syrian refugees returned to their home country from Türkiye (22,300), Jordan (6,800), Lebanon (3,600) and Iraq (3,400). While UNHCR does not facilitate refugee returns to Syria, together with its partners it supports local communities

<sup>76</sup> See [The Global Compact on Refugees](#)

<sup>77</sup> See the IDP chapter for an update on solutions for IDPs.

<sup>78</sup> Naturalization is the legal act or process by which a non-citizen in a country may acquire citizenship or nationality of that country.

<sup>79</sup> See [2021 Burundi JRRRP](#)



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO.  
Mulongwe settlement in South  
Kivu hosts thousands of  
Burundian refugees. Farming  
projects that bring refugees and  
the local population together are  
part of a wider approach to  
enhance socio-economic  
inclusion and self-reliance.

© UNHCR/ANTONIA VADALA



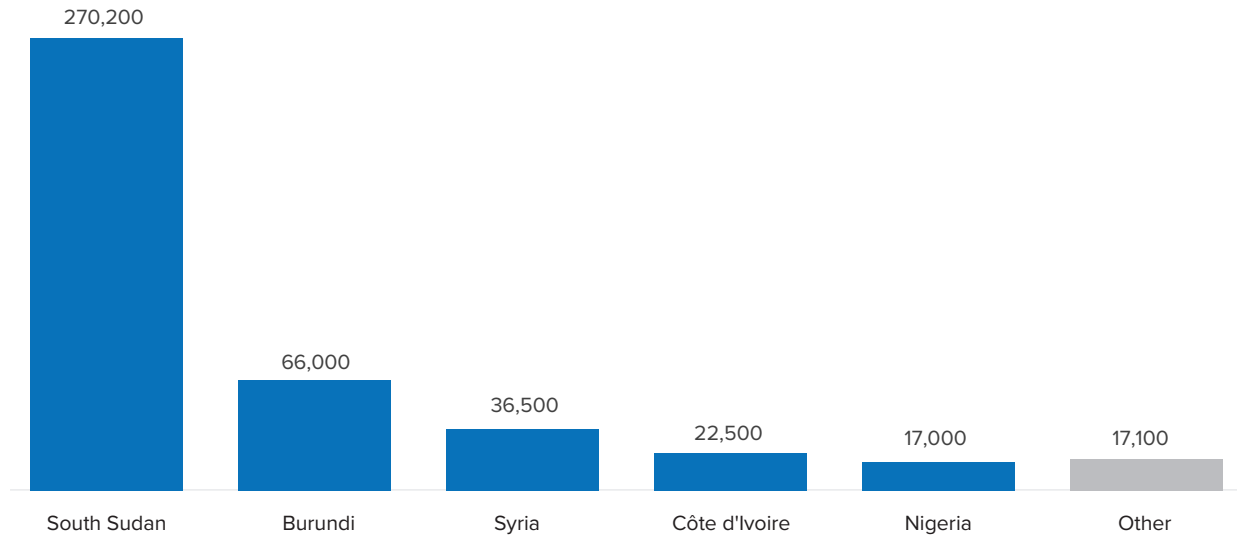


receiving returnees through concrete and practical interventions in areas such as shelter, legal aid and civil documentation, distribution of relief items,

livelihoods and repairs to schools, health facilities and other civilian infrastructure.<sup>80</sup>

Other sizeable refugee returns were observed in Côte d'Ivoire (22,500) and Nigeria (17,000).<sup>81</sup>

Figure 17 | Refugee returns by country of origin | in 2021



## Resettlement

While several countries have signalled their commitment to resettlement, demonstrating their solidarity with host countries, it is an option for fewer and fewer refugees due to a significant reduction in the number of places offered by States. Resettlement is a crucial protection tool and solution, and is a core activity mandated by UNHCR’s Statute, helping to protect some of the most vulnerable refugees, who may face specific or urgent risks. Of all cases submitted by UNHCR to States in 2021, 86 per cent were for survivors of torture and/or violence, people with legal and physical protection needs, and particularly vulnerable women and girls.<sup>82</sup> Just over

half (52 per cent) of all resettlement submissions concerned children.

While the number of refugees resettled grew by 67 per cent in 2021 compared to the previous year, reaching 57,500 according to government statistics, it remained substantially below pre-pandemic levels (e.g. 107,700 in 2019). In 2021, resettlement arrivals constituted just 4 per cent of the 1.4 million people globally that UNHCR estimated were in need of resettlement.<sup>83</sup> During the last decade, this share of resettlement needs fulfilled has never exceeded 15 per cent in any year (see figure 18). This year’s gap between the global resettlement needs and the number of places offered by States was the second largest during the last ten years and only slightly smaller than the previous year’s estimate of 2 per cent.

<sup>80</sup> See [UNHCR statement on the return of displaced Syrians](#)

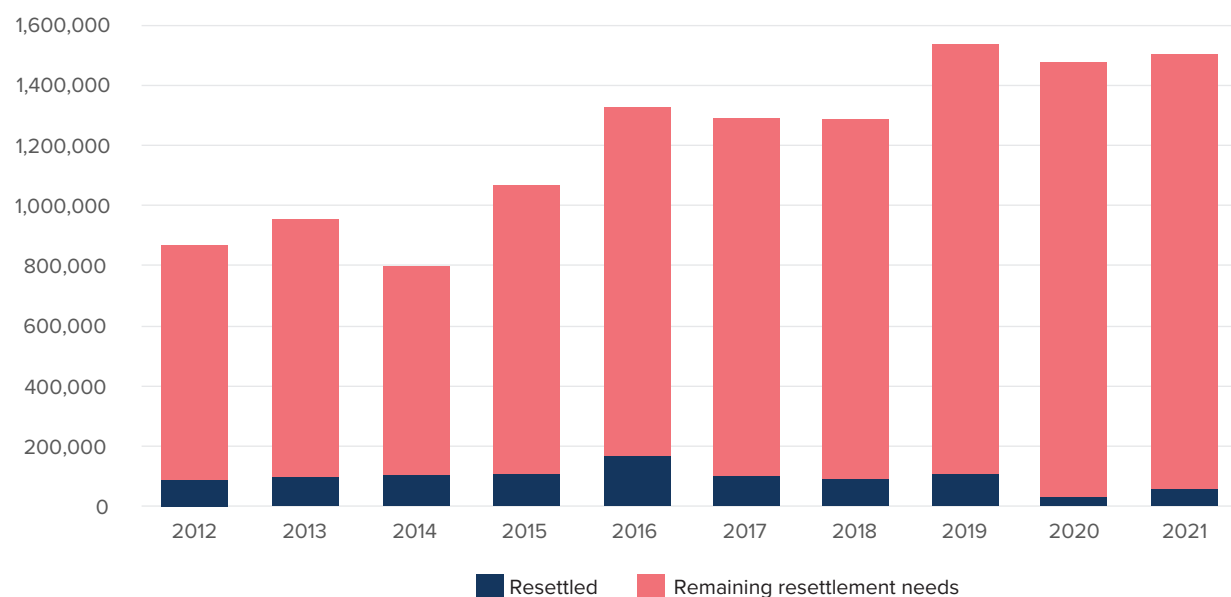
<sup>81</sup> It is likely that many of the returns to Côte d'Ivoire were former asylum seekers.

<sup>82</sup> See [UNHCR resettlement at a glance in 2021](#)

<sup>83</sup> See [Projected global resettlement needs in 2021](#)



Figure 18 | Gap between resettlement needs and resettlement arrivals | 2012 – 2021



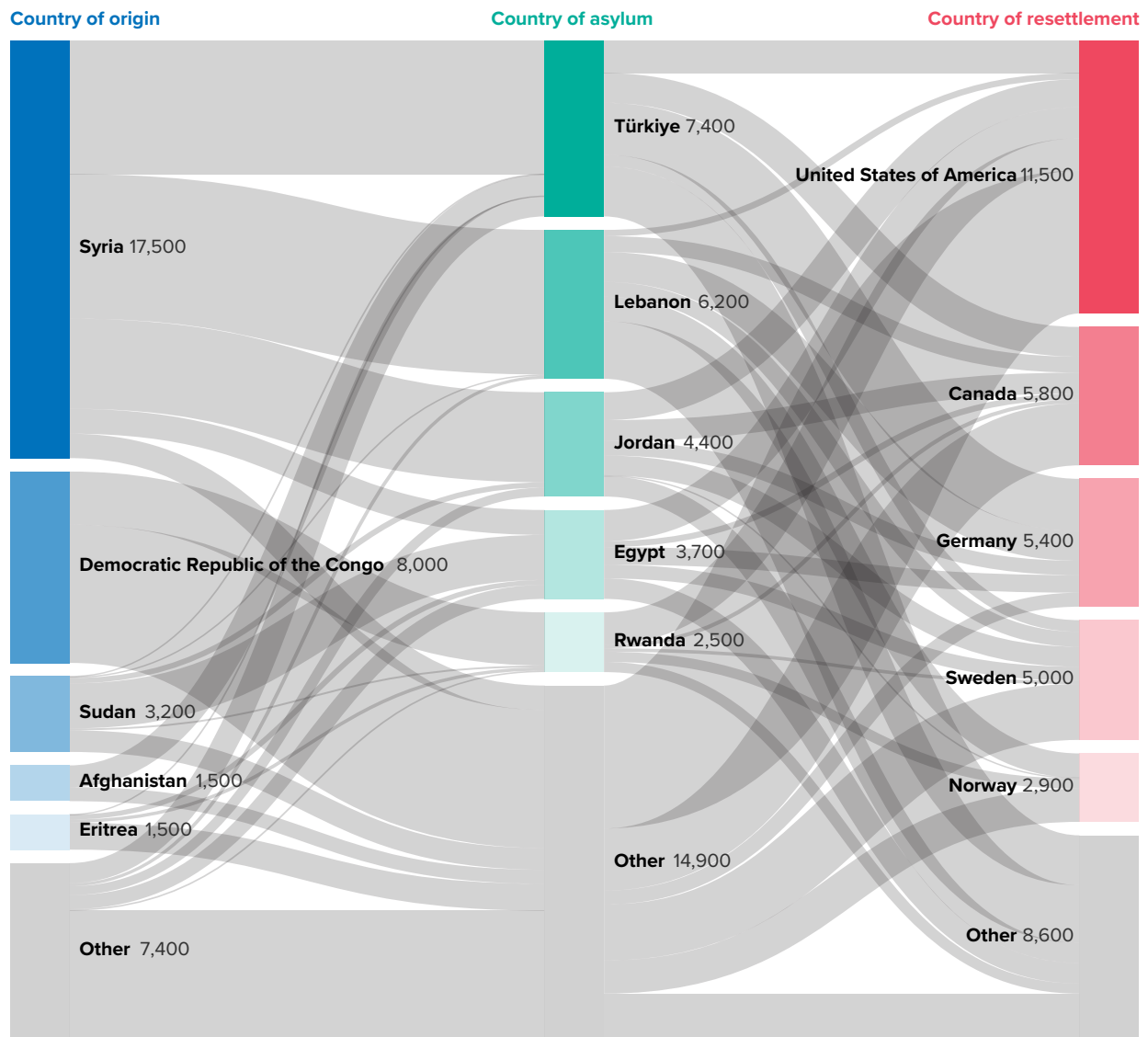
In 2021, Canada was the largest receiver of resettled refugees, welcoming 20,400 people, more than double the 9,200 resettlement arrivals in the previous year. Resettled refugees arriving in Canada came primarily from Afghanistan (6,100), Syria (4,200) and Eritrea (3,700). The United States of America received 13,700 refugees (43 per cent more than in 2020), coming mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5,200), Syria (2,000) and Sudan (1,100).<sup>84</sup> Sweden, the third largest country of resettlement welcomed 6,700 refugees mostly from Syria (2,600) and Afghanistan (1,600).

Two-thirds of refugees resettled globally were supported through UNHCR's resettlement programme. The remaining one-third were resettled through other means, most commonly private sponsorship programmes, which constitute the majority of resettlement arrivals in Canada.

Overall, most refugees whose resettlement was facilitated by UNHCR were previously hosted in countries in the Middle East and North Africa region (predominately Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt), the East and Horn of Africa and Great Lakes region (notably Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Uganda) and Europe (Türkiye).

<sup>84</sup> Afghans who were evacuated or resettled as part of the United States military exit from Afghanistan in August 2021 are not included in these estimates, but through an additional special procedure ("[Operation Allies Welcome](#)").

Figure 19 | UNHCR assisted resettlement departures | in 2021



Note: This figure presents data on resettlement departures during the year facilitated by UNHCR. The sum of this population is therefore smaller than the total number of resettled refugees in 2021, according to government statistics. Figures are rounded.

## Local Integration

In the absence of the possibility to return safely or be resettled, pathways are available in some countries for refugees to remain long-term or permanently in their country of asylum. Local integration helps ensure that refugees can build new lives in these countries. While refugees seek asylum in their host country for humanitarian reasons, when integrated successfully, refugees are empowered to pursue livelihoods

to sustain themselves and their families, while contributing to the social and economic life of the host country. The initial integration period, shortly after arrival, is of particular importance for the longer-term local integration of refugees in their country of asylum.

Inclusion in countries' labour markets has been shown to be especially critical during this period. Yet many countries, including high-, middle- and low-income countries, have exclusionary policies in place that limit refugees' access to the labour markets.<sup>85</sup> Such

<sup>85</sup> See Blair et al. (2021) for the comprehensive Developing World Refugee and Asylum Seeker Policy (DWRAP) dataset on exclusionary policies for refugees around the world.

policies may include restrictions on employment or movements, as well as excessively long asylum procedures. A wide array of research indicates that such policies harm refugees' ability to integrate into the labour market and thereby thwart their ability to become self-sufficient and contribute to their host country economically. Research from Germany, Switzerland and the wider European context has shown that if refugees face employment restrictions during their asylum period, their long-term success in the host countries labour markets is negatively affected.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, the level and the duration of the period of uncertainty during the asylum application process is a determinant of refugees' long-term local integration. A study in Switzerland, for example, found that refugees who benefited from a faster asylum process had higher employment rates than refugees who had been in the country for the same amount of time but had to wait longer for their asylum decision.<sup>87</sup> This research underscores the negative impact of extended periods of uncertainty and inactivity on refugees' longer-term integration prospects. The justification typically offered for exclusionary policies relates primarily to the prevention of negative economic or social effects within the host community. A recent study across low- and middle-income countries casts doubt on the effectiveness of such policies, showing that attitudes towards refugees and the impact on income levels within host communities do not differ across countries with more or less strict exclusionary policies.<sup>88</sup> It is clear from the research that exclusionary policies hold back the mutually beneficial opportunities for refugees and host communities to cooperate together.

Measuring local integration across a diverse set of refugee-hosting countries is challenging. While there are internationally recommended indicators to quantify and compare local integration,<sup>89</sup> the current availability of data in many countries limits their direct

applicability. Even in high-income countries where diverse sets of national and subnational datasets are available, statistics differentiating refugees from non-refugees are rare. In absence of more comprehensive alternatives, naturalization is often used as an imperfect proxy.

In 2021, an estimated 56,700 refugees from 161 different countries of origin naturalized in 23 host countries. This represented a two-thirds increase compared to the previous year and a return to pre-pandemic levels (55,000 in 2019). As refugee naturalization data reported to UNHCR is limited to a small set of countries, European countries are overrepresented in the statistics. In 2021, 89 per cent of all reported naturalizations occurred in European countries. Globally, the Netherlands (45,700), Canada (6,300) and France (3,700) reported the most refugees naturalizing in 2021. Refugees who obtained their host country's citizenship in 2021 were primarily from Syria (30,900), Eritrea (7,900), Iraq (1,700), or Afghanistan (1,500) or were stateless (1,700).

While naturalization may be considered as a proxy or end point of a successful local integration process, research indicates that the value of naturalization goes beyond recognition, providing new citizens with a positive boost in their social, economic and political integration. Ethnographic work focused on the post-2007 naturalization of Burundian refugees in the United Republic of Tanzania, for example, provides insights into the value of the host country's citizenship for refugees. This includes improved opportunities for political participation, better economic opportunities through freedom to relocate within the country and a greater perceived feeling of safety within the host country.<sup>90</sup> Similarly, two studies from Switzerland<sup>91</sup> indicate that obtaining Swiss citizenship increased refugees' interest in engaging with the country's affairs and their overall social integration.

<sup>86</sup> [Marbach et al. \(2018\)](#) explore a quasi-experiment in Germany in 2000 that capped the maximum length of employment restrictions during the asylum period and find a positive impact for refugees fleeing the Kosovo War five years after arrival; [Fasani, Frattini, Minale \(2020\)](#) use data on the labour market integration of refugees in European countries between 1985 and 2021 and explore geographic and temporal variation in employment restrictions for refugees, finding a negative effect on labour market participation. [Slotwinski et al. \(2019\)](#) compare employment outcomes of asylum seekers across Swiss regions with different levels of inclusiveness in their labour market policies for asylum seekers. The findings suggest that more inclusive labour market access regulations have a significantly positive effect (+20%) on the labour market participation for asylum seekers, especially those with better employment prospects due to their language abilities.

<sup>87</sup> [Hainmueller and Hangartner \(2016\)](#) utilize exogenous variation in waiting times for asylum seekers in Switzerland and find that one additional year of waiting reduces the subsequent employment rate by 4 to 5 per cent.

<sup>88</sup> See [Aksoy and Ginn \(2022\)](#)

<sup>89</sup> See [International Recommendations on Refugee Statistics](#)

<sup>90</sup> See [Kuch \(2017\)](#)

<sup>91</sup> See [Hainmueller, Hangartner, Pietrantonio \(2017\)](#) and [Hainmueller, Hangartner and Pietrantonio \(2015\)](#). The naturalization process in some of the country's municipalities prior to 2003 required a local referendum that decides on the naturalization applications of immigrants. Comparing migrant applicants who narrowly won or lost the referendum and following them over a long period, the analysis finds that naturalization strongly improved the long-term social integration of immigrants.

## CHAPTER 6

# Stateless people

More than 4.3 million people globally were estimated to be stateless or of undetermined nationality at the end of 2021.<sup>92</sup> Not recognized as nationals by any State, stateless people are often unable to access essential services and enjoy basic rights, including access to education or health care, formal employment, voting in elections or being able to travel.

The estimate represents an increase of 158,200 people compared to 2020. It is based on information provided by governments and other sources, such as quantitative and qualitative studies by UNHCR and its partners, for 96 countries (three more than in the previous year). Yet, the global figure remains an undercount as data on stateless populations or those of undetermined nationality is missing or incomplete for many countries, including some with known

stateless populations. The lack of reliable quantitative data continues to pose challenges to effectively address statelessness and advocate for solutions. Despite this overall challenge, several quantitative and qualitative studies were concluded in 2021, including in Lebanon<sup>93</sup> and the Philippines,<sup>94</sup> helping to better understand statelessness situations and identify appropriate solutions. UNHCR is also strengthening efforts to gather more reliable and comprehensive statistics on statelessness. This includes supporting the development of the International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics,<sup>95</sup> in cooperation with the Expert Group on Refugee, IDP and Statelessness Statistics (EGRISS),<sup>96</sup> which has been mandated by the UN Statistical Commission to develop these recommendations.

<sup>92</sup> See the [definitions of stateless and undetermined nationality](#) on the Refugee Data Finder.


<sup>93</sup> See: [Mapping and understanding statelessness in Akkar](#)

<sup>94</sup> See: [Desk review on populations at risk of statelessness](#)

<sup>95</sup> See: [International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics](#)

<sup>96</sup> See: [EGRISS](#)



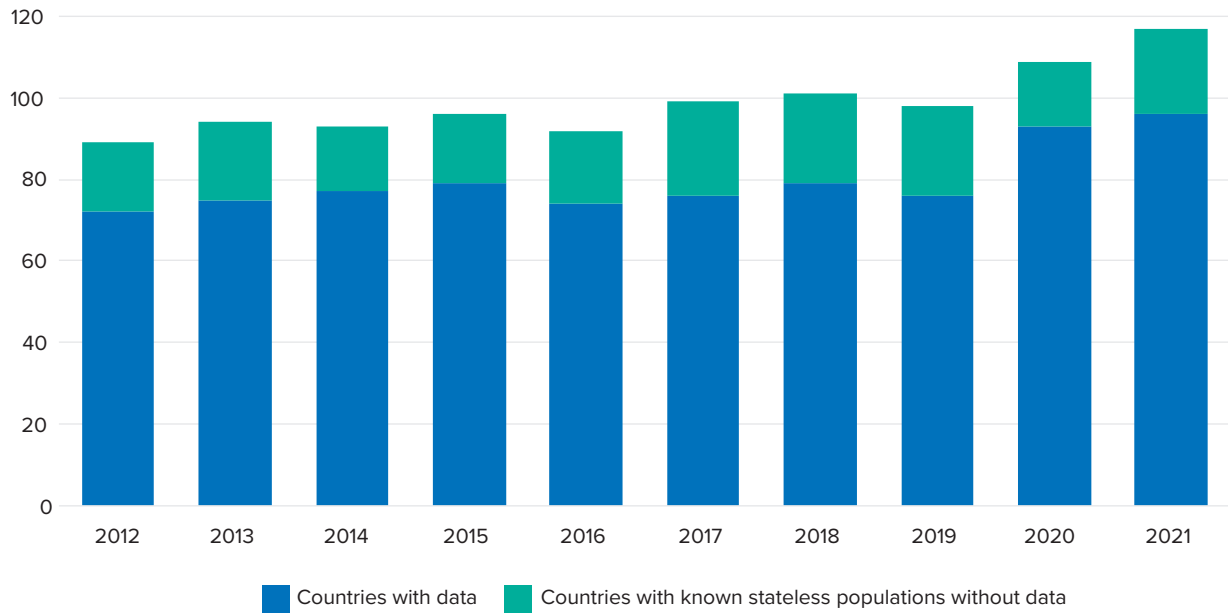


**BANGLADESH.** *Rohingya* refugee Hamida, a mother of four, in Cox's Bazar. She arrived in Bangladesh three years ago from Myanmar.

© UNHCR/SAIKAT MOJUMDER



Figure 20 | Number of countries providing statistics on stateless populations to UNHCR | 2012–2021



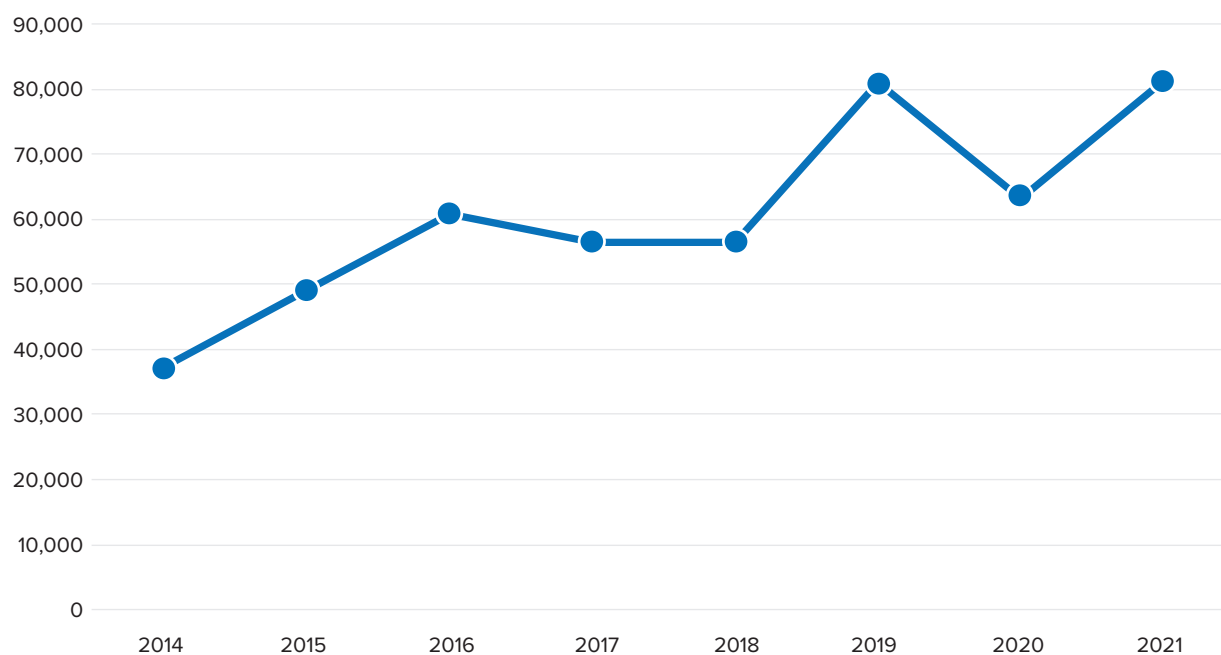
The increase in the reported global stateless population in 2021 was driven by a combination of factors. Firstly, additional countries reported stateless population estimates for the first time, following efforts to gather data on people affected by statelessness, most notably Uganda (67,000) and Rwanda (9,500). Secondly, improved registration and coverage in countries that already had a registered stateless population led to increases. Thirdly, a small proportion of the increase was due to new children being born stateless, underlining the need to prevent and resolve childhood statelessness.

In 2021, Albania, Chile, Colombia and Turkmenistan passed legislation establishing statelessness determination procedures. These measures will allow stateless individuals there to be recognized as stateless and access the rights enshrined in the 1954 Statelessness Convention and eventually acquire citizenship.

Significant efforts were made to reduce the number of stateless people in several countries. In 2021, some 81,200 stateless people, including those of undetermined nationality, acquired citizenship or had their citizenship confirmed. This is the highest recorded annual reduction in statelessness since the start of the #IBelong Campaign in 2014<sup>97</sup> and represents a 22 per cent increase from 2020 (or almost 18,000 people). Most people who acquired citizenship or had their nationality confirmed in 2021 were in Uzbekistan (32,100) and Côte d'Ivoire (23,400). Since the start of the #IBelong Campaign in 2014, some 485,400 stateless people, including those of undetermined nationality, have acquired citizenship. Figure 21 shows the annual global numbers of formerly stateless people who were reported as having acquired a nationality or having confirmed their nationality.

<sup>97</sup> See [Global action plan to end statelessness 2014 - 2024](#)

Figure 21 | Number of people who had their nationality confirmed or acquired citizenship | 2014–2021



Since 2019, UNHCR has reported on both displaced and in situ stateless people. Displaced stateless people are simultaneously included in UNHCR's official statistics as refugees, asylum seekers or IDPs and in its official statistics for statelessness. Prompted by the large-scale displacement of stateless Rohingya refugees who fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh, this approach reflects the fact that refugees, asylum seekers and IDPs without citizenship require specific and appropriate protection responses.

In situ stateless people constitute the largest share of the recorded global stateless population reported by UNHCR. By the end of 2021, this group amounted to more than three million, or 71 per cent of all reported stateless people. Stateless refugees and asylum seekers account for 1.1 million people, or 25 per cent of the reported global stateless population. In addition, another 150,500 stateless people are internally displaced. Stateless Rohingya in Myanmar and neighbouring countries constitute the majority of both stateless refugees and stateless IDPs.

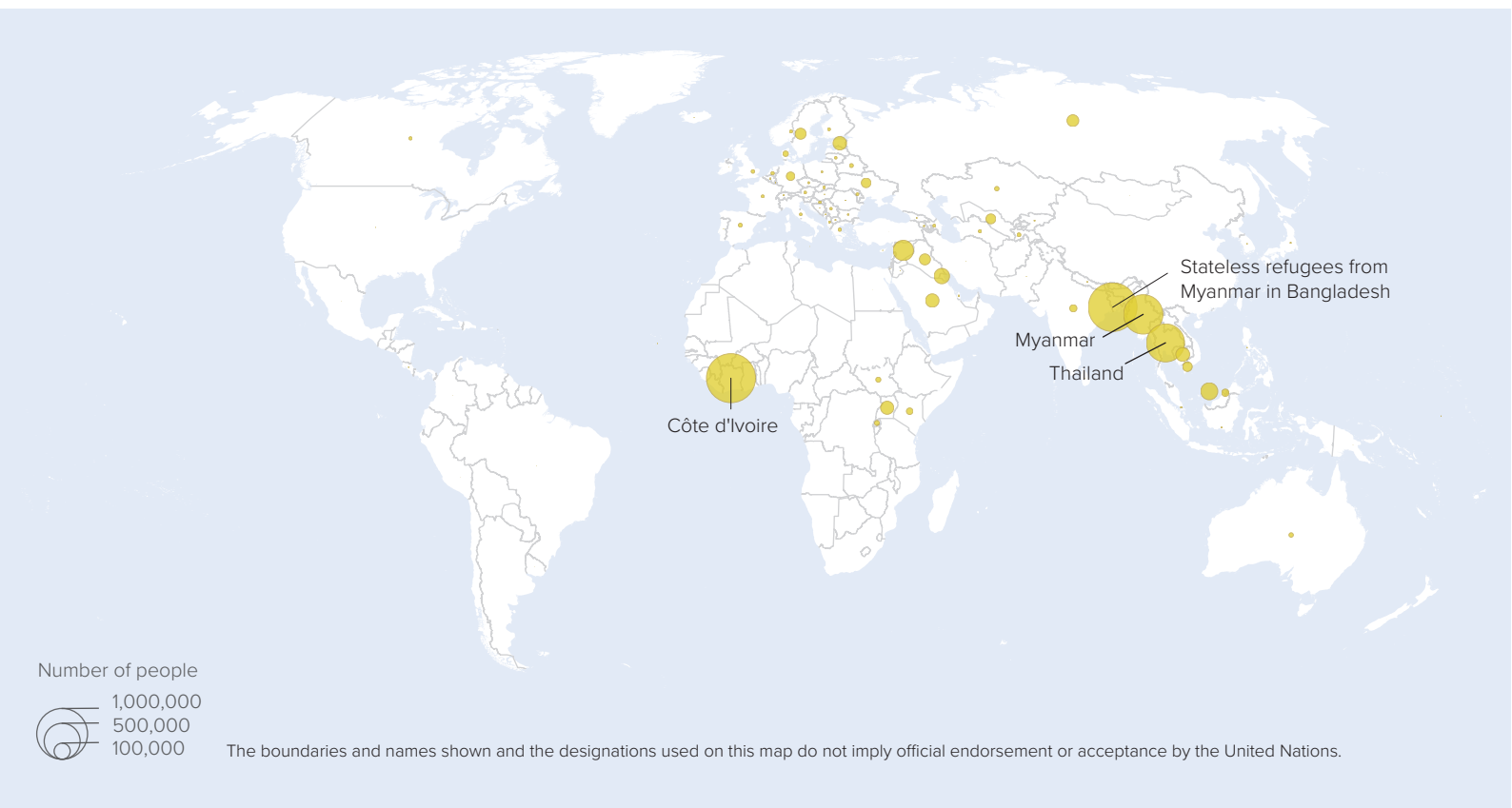
Figure 22 | Reported global number of stateless people | 2012–2021



UNHCR continues to improve the availability of age- and sex-disaggregated data on statelessness. In 2021, population statistics by sex were available for 60 per cent of the reported stateless population. Data disaggregated only by sex was available for an additional 14 per cent of the reported stateless population. Collecting demographic data for stateless people is of high importance to UNHCR, as it assists in the design of age- and sex-appropriate responses to statelessness. For example, the demographic data collected in Côte d'Ivoire is among the most complete

for any national stateless population. The data indicates that children account for 54 per cent of this population,<sup>98</sup> similar to the large stateless Rohingya refugee population in Bangladesh (52 per cent). In Côte d'Ivoire, children up to 4 years are the largest age cohort. This again underlines the importance of addressing the pressing issue of children born stateless.

Map 5 | **Statelessness | end-2021**



<sup>98</sup> This population includes people with undetermined nationality (93 per cent) and those who are stateless (7 per cent).





**MOZAMBIQUE.** Bernardela was forcibly displaced with her family as a result of violence in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique. Her T-shirt reads “For girls Progress”, representing a symbol of women and girls empowerment. Displaced women and girls are at risk of multiple forms of gender-based violence including sexual violence, and abduction, intimate partner violence, and spiralling rates of early marriage.

© UNHCR/MARTIM GRAY PEREIRA

### Who is included in UNHCR statistics?

UNHCR collates population data relating to people who are forcibly displaced or stateless. The data is sourced primarily from governments and also from UNHCR operations. See <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics/methodology/> for the detailed description and definitions of who is included in these statistics.

### Annex tables

Annex tables 1 through 22 can be downloaded from the UNHCR website at:

<https://www.unhcr.org/2021-global-trends-annex>

Annex table 5: <https://www.unhcr.org/2021-global-trends-annex-table-statelessness>

All data are provisional and subject to change.

Data is available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>



# GLOBAL TRENDS

## FORCED DISPLACEMENT IN 2021

PRODUCED BY UNHCR  
(16 JUNE 2022)

FRONT COVER

**ETHIOPIA.** *Hundreds of thousands of people have been internally displaced due to the effects of climate change and recent droughts in Ethiopia's Somali and Oromia regions.*

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This document along with further information on global displacement is available on UNHCR's statistics website:  
<https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics>