



A UNHCR staff member speaking with flood victims in the remains of their house in Mandulog village, northern Mindanao, the Philippines. This family received UNHCR plastic sheeting which will serve as emergency shelter while they begin rebuilding their lives.



Sources, Methods and Data Quality Issues

POLICY DECISIONS WITH respect to UNHCR operations around the world, as well as budget considerations, depend on accurate data. Inaccurate data can potentially mislead policy decision-makers which could consequently affect programmes and activities in the organization. Essentially, accurate data on persons of concern can be considered as the ‘bedrock’ of most key policy decisions affecting UNHCR’s operations. Therefore, the

sources and methods used to collect this vital information need to be clearly outlined and understood in order to ensure the credibility and reliability of the data. Similarly, careful and precise analysis of collected data is crucial to ensure easy understanding for all users.

UNHCR disseminates statistics on refugees and other persons of concern to the general public. The Office strives to ensure that data on populations of concern are provided in a timely and accurate manner. The

main purpose of this chapter is to introduce the basic concepts underlying the data presented in this Yearbook. These include definitions, sources, methods, estimation methods and other aspects of data quality. Most of the statistics have been collected through UNHCR’s Annual Statistical Reports¹⁹, and generally reflect the definition and data collection methods of governments, except in countries where only UNHCR registration systems are used.

DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

UNHCR identifies seven population categories, collectively referred to as “persons of concern”: (1) refugees; (2) asylum-seekers; (3) internally displaced persons (IDPs); (4) refugees who have returned home (returnees); (5) IDPs who have returned home; (6) stateless persons; and (7) other people who do not fall under any of the above categories but to whom the Office extends protection. In 2007, two sub-categories were introduced: (a) peo-

ple in refugee-like situations (included under refugees); and (b) people in IDP-like situations (included under IDPs).

Refugees include individuals recognized under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol; individuals recognized under the 1969 OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa; those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute; in-

dividuals granted complementary forms of protection²⁰; and those enjoying “temporary protection”²¹. The refugee category also includes people in a refugee-like situation.²²

Asylum-seekers (with “pending cases”) are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. Those covered in this report refer to claimants whose individual applications were pending at the end of 2011, irrespective of when they may have been lodged.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are people or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of, armed conflict,

¹⁹ The Annual Statistical Report is the official data collection form completed by all UNHCR country offices.

²⁰ Complementary protection refers to protection provided under national, regional or international law to people who do not qualify for protection under refugee law instruments but are in need of international protection because they are at risk of serious harm.

²¹ Temporary protection refers to arrangements developed to offer protection of a temporary nature, until the situation in the country of origin improves and allows for a safe and dignified return or for individual refugee or complementary protection status determination to be carried out.

²² This sub-category is descriptive in nature and includes groups of people who are outside their country or territory of origin, and who face protection risks similar to refugees, but for whom refugee status has not been ascertained, for practical or other reasons.

situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural/man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.²³

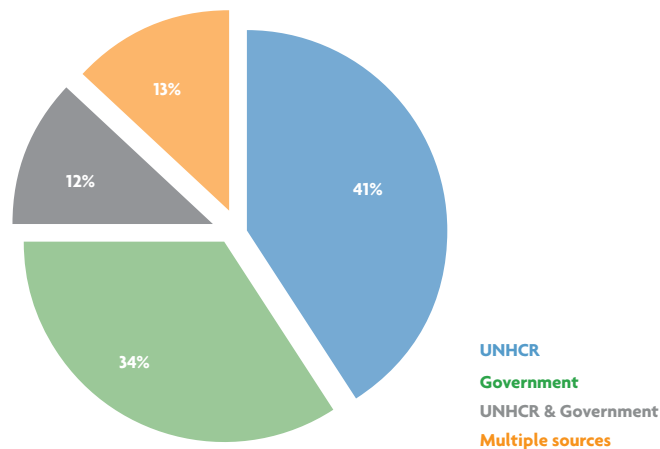
UNHCR is involved in seeking to address situations of internal displacement in a number of countries. The populations reported in its statistics are limited to people displaced by conflict, or persons in an IDP-like situation²⁴, to whom the Office extends protection or assistance. UNHCR's IDP statistics do not therefore necessarily reflect the entire IDP population in a given country, but only those who are protected and/or assisted by the Office. Moreover, under the cluster approach²⁵ UNHCR provides support to both IDPs and other affected persons, whereas the latter are not included in the statistics. Hence, UNHCR's statistics do not provide a comprehensive picture of global internal displacement, nor of total numbers assisted by the Office in such situations.²⁶

Returned refugees (returnees) are former refugees who have returned to their country of origin spontaneously or in an organized fashion but are yet to be fully integrated. Such return would normally only take place in conditions of safety and dignity. For the purposes of this report, only refugees who returned between January and December 2011 are included. However, in practice, operations may assist returnees for longer periods.

Returned IDPs refer to those IDPs who were beneficiaries of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities and who returned to their areas of origin or habitual residence between January and December 2011. However, in practice, operations may assist IDP returnees for longer periods.

Stateless persons are defined under international law as persons who

Fig. 1.1 Sources of refugee data | 2011



are not considered as nationals by any State under the operation of its law. In other words, they do not possess the nationality of any State. UNHCR statistics mainly refer to persons who fall under this definition. UNHCR has been given a global mandate by the United Nations General Assembly to contribute to the prevention and reduction of statelessness and the protection of stateless persons. The Office also has specific functions under Article II of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness to receive claims from persons who may benefit from the safeguards contained in that Convention and to assist them and the States concerned to resolve those claims. UNHCR's Executive Committee has requested the Office to report regularly on the magnitude of the phenomenon.

Other groups or people of concern refer to individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of the groups above, but to whom UNHCR extends its protection and/or assis-

tance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds.

SOURCES OF REFUGEE DATA

Governments, UNHCR and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are the principal actors in refugee data collection. It is important to note that States have the primary responsibility to register and care for refugees. As not all States have the resources and capacity to collect refugee data, UNHCR often provides the requisite technical assistance and resources for data collection. The collection of data is either conducted by governments on their own, by UNHCR alone, or jointly. These two sources accounted for 87 per cent of UNHCR's refugee statistics in 2011. In many industrialized countries, refugee data collection is often done by governments alone with virtually no, or minimal input, from UNHCR.

The trend of combined data collection between governments and UNHCR has remained virtually unchanged for the past three years despite numerous efforts to transfer data collection responsibility to states providing asylum. In 2011, UNHCR alone accounted for 41 per cent of global refugee data, government accounted for 34 per cent, joint collection between UNHCR and governments accounted for 12 per cent while NGOs and others

²³ See: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Addendum to the Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission (on Human Rights) Resolution 1997/39, E/CN.4/1998/53/Add2 (1998).

²⁴ This sub-category is descriptive in nature, and includes groups of people who are inside their country of nationality or habitual residence, and who face protection risks similar to IDPs but who, for practical or other reasons, could not be reported as such.

²⁵ In December 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee endorsed the "cluster" approach for handling situations of internal displacement. Under this arrangement, UNHCR assumes leadership responsibility and accountability for three of the nine clusters, namely: protection; emergency shelter; and camp coordination and camp management.

²⁶ Global IDP estimates are provided by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), available at www.internal-displacement.org.

accounted for the remaining percentage. Refugee statistics in some countries are from multiple sources. In 2011, 23 countries collected data from multiple sources.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The methods of refugee data collection include census, registration and surveys or estimation. In some operations, a combination of methods is used to provide refugee data while other operations may rely on only one method. Registration accounts for a greater proportion of the methods used for collection of refugee data by UNHCR.

UNHCR attaches great importance to refugee registration. As a result, the Office has rolled-out its own registration database, *proGres*,²⁷ in many of its operations around the world in order to ensure effective registration and accurate recording of refugee data. The *proGres* database has become a vital resource tool for providing refugee statistics. Accurate registration provides a firm foundation for the delivery of protection, assistance and monitoring and enhances the activities of the Office. UNHCR's refugee statistics rely heavily on registration data extracted from the *proGres* database. This da-

tabase has both legal and administrative status for providing entitlements to beneficiaries. By the end of 2011, this software was used in more than 80 countries, including its application by governments in six countries.

Biometric registration is being used for refugee data collection in a number of operations [see page 19]. This electronic system of refugee data collection provides credibility and reliability to refugee statistics. Biometric registration is able to detect double or multiple registrations and invariably improves data collection.

nationals of the country. The biometric device cannot prevent or detect non-refugees from registering as refugees. To be fully effective, it should not be used as a stand-alone method. Ideally there should be an existing national finger-print database to ensure cross-matching. Moreover, the biometric device itself is relatively expensive. At the end of 2011, 15 countries had rolled-out biometric registration in their various operations.

In 2011, more than 180 countries and territories provided refugee data. While some countries used a single

UNHCR HAS BEEN GIVEN A GLOBAL MANDATE BY THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO CONTRIBUTE TO [...] THE PROTECTION OF STATELESS PERSONS

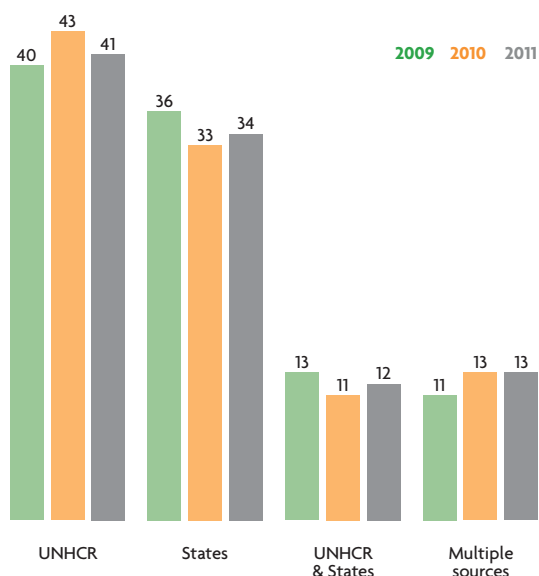
The use of biometric registration can significantly deter fraudulent registration. However, it is important to note that biometric registration is not a panacea for both registration and identity fraud. It is especially not effective in an operation where there is no existing finger-print database of

method for refugee data collection others tended to use multiple data collection methods. Clearly, each method of data collection has its strengths and weaknesses. For instance, aside from being expensive and time consuming, registration is a very comprehensive method of data collection. It provides detailed information on registered individuals and is therefore highly accurate. Estimation provides information quickly and is a method that can be used regardless of the security situation. It lacks, however, the accuracy of registration. In principle, estimation can have a large margin of error, rendering the data less reliable.

In the majority of countries – some 65 per cent – registration was used as the main method of data collection. Estimation accounted for 15 per cent, while registration and estimation combined accounted for 6 per cent. Some 26 countries (14%) obtained refugee figures through surveys, censuses and/or combined methods (see Figure I3).

In most industrialized countries, which do not provide statistical information on the number of refugees,

Fig. I.2 Trends in sources of refugee data | 2009-2011 (in %)



²⁷ Profile Global Registration System

UNHCR uses estimation based on official data on the number of asylum-seekers recognized over a 10-year period. In 2011, estimation as the sole basis for refugee data was used in 28 countries (15%), most of them industrialized.²⁸

The example of Sweden illustrates the estimation process in industrialized countries. Ten years is assumed to be the average time required for a refugee to acquire the nationality of his/her host country.

In some countries, more than two methods are used, making data comparability difficult. UNHCR ensures that statistics from all sources are triangulated to increase the reliability and quality of the data. This requires regular interaction with the stakeholders involved in collecting and compiling statistics.

SOURCES OF IDP DATA

Data on IDPs are collected by states, UN agencies, including UNHCR, inter-agency organizations and NGOs. The overwhelming majority of the data is from inter-agency organizations through the cluster approach. Unlike refugee statistics, IDP statistics in the Yearbook do not include all IDPs around the world. The IDP statistics only account for IDPs who were beneficiaries of UNHCR's protection and assistance activities during the reporting period. UNHCR is directly or in-

directly involved in the source of IDP data for this report.

The main methods for collecting IDP data include estimation, profiling and surveys. Profiling is a frequently used approach in many IDP situations to the extent that the term profiling has virtually become synonymous with IDP data collection. Profiling provides an assessment of the needs and characteristics of a cross-section of IDPs that is eventually used to estimate or extrapolate the general information and data on IDPs.²⁹ In the context of IDP statistics, the major source is the joint parties of the IDP clusters.

OTHER DATA QUALITY ISSUES

Taking into account the limitations of some methodologies in data collection as well as the capacity constraints of certain countries, data obtained from each country are carefully evaluated and reviewed. Due to the importance of statistics, any data received are processed and analyzed to ensure validity of the data collection method. UNHCR has put in place a rigorous mechanism of data quality control. The system of quality control ensures data consistency across all countries for effective and meaningful data analysis and dissemination. All data for this report have undergone thorough standard data cleaning techniques to ensure completeness, consistency and reliability.

Example: Sweden

- Asylum-seekers granted Convention refugee status, 2002-2011: **13,121**
- Asylum-seekers granted a complementary form of protection, subsidiary protection and/or allowed to remain in the country for humanitarian reasons, 2002-2011: **73,142**
- UNHCR estimate of the number of refugees in Sweden, end of 2011: **86,263**

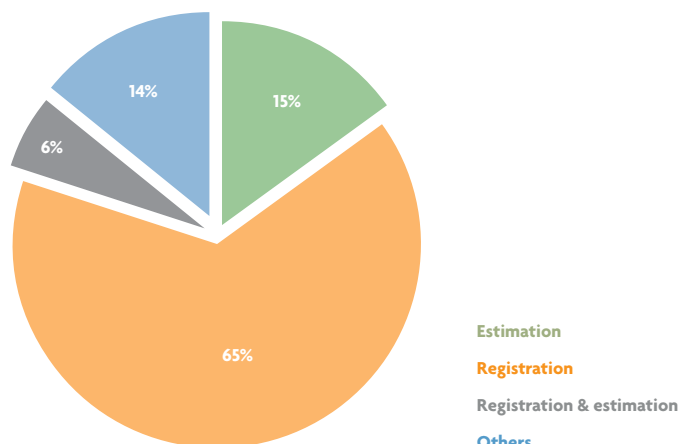
In compiling refugee statistics, the Office ensures that data from different sources and with different methods are triangulated for the purpose of data comparability, reliability and credibility. The triangulation of data also provides robust statistics for meaningful analysis. It is important to note that data confidentiality of persons of concern is respected and taken into account for statistical reporting.

Special attention should be paid when analysing data referring to a country which has dissolved. In the Statistical Yearbook, historical data pertaining to the former USSR are reported under the Russian Federation, while those for the former Czechoslovakia are reported under the Czech Republic. Data for the former Yugoslavia as well as Serbia and Montenegro have been reported under Serbia (and Kosovo: S/RES/1244 (1999)). Data pertaining to Sudan before the declaration of independence of South Sudan includes the latter. Since independence, data for South Sudan has been reported separately. In most tables in the Annex, the word "Democratic" has been abbreviated to "Dem.", whereas the word "Republic" is often reflected as "Rep."

Figures below 1,000 are generally rounded to the nearest 10; figures between 1,000 and 10,000 are rounded to the nearest 100; figures between 10,000 and 100,000 are rounded to the nearest 1,000; figures between 100,000 and 1 million are rounded to the nearest 10,000; and figures above 1 million are rounded to the nearest 100,000.

Unless specified, the 2011 Statistical Yearbook does not refer to events occurring after 31 December 2011.

Fig. 1.3 Basis of refugee data | 2011



²⁸ Since many countries now have access to proGres, estimation is rarely used in non-industrialized countries.

²⁹ See www.IDP-profiling.org

In focus: Biometric registration in Liberia

The post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire in late November 2010 forced about 200,000 Ivoirians to seek refuge in Liberia. The refugees resided in camps, relocation areas and host communities across Liberia in four different counties (Nimba, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, and River Gee). The dispersed nature of the population movements to various regions in Liberia posed many challenges to their proper

registration and the subsequent provision of protection, assistance and monitoring interventions by UNHCR and its partners. To address registration and identity management difficulties, efforts were made to undertake comprehensive biometrics finger-printing of persons of concern in Liberia.

UNHCR Liberia implemented biometric registration of its refugee population in early 2012. The exer-

cise commenced in Bahn Camp in the town of Saclepea in Nimba county with the participation of about 160 UNHCR, UN and partner staff including the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission. Liberia was the first country in the history of UNHCR operations in the West African sub-region to include biometrics enrolment as part of its individual registration activities.

BIOMETRICS – A TOOL FOR IMPROVING DATA COLLECTION

Biometric enrolment in the context of UNHCR's individual registration efforts is a technique that refers to the identification of persons of concern by their unique and measurable characteristics or traits – such as fingerprints. Since biometric identifiers are unique to individuals, they help UNHCR to verify and properly identify each individual of concern.

Biometrics compares fingerprint data of all individuals to detect when an individual attempts to register more than once. This is often referred to as double or multiple registrations

and can often happen in the confusion of an emergency.

The goal of biometric registration is to establish the unique identity of an individual at the time of initial registration. This is especially important in countries or operations where refugee populations pose certain statistical challenges. Each individual has a unique fingerprint. The use of biometric registration ensures that no multiple registrations occur.

As a result, protection and assistance are provided to those persons of

concern who presented themselves at the outset of the emergency.

In addition to eliminating double registration among refugees, the fingerprinting exercise also discouraged some Liberians from attempting to fraudulently register as refugees. Prior to the commencement of the biometric exercise in Liberia, a mass information campaign was undertaken during which refugees were informed about the process and Liberian nationals were requested not to register as refugees, as doing so may have adverse consequences on their rights as citizens.

BIOMETRIC REGISTRATION IN ACTION

Liberia's registration exercise initially started in seven camps (two in Nimba County, four in Grand Gedeh County and one in Maryland County). Once the exercise was completed in the camps, the operation moved to the relocation and host communities. All the partners, including the government and the other United Nations agencies operating in Liberia, were fully involved in the process of registration and biometric enrolment of refugees. Before each exercise, refugees were given prior notice with an emphasis on information sharing at least one week before the commencement of the biometric registration to sensitize the individuals of concern.

Biometric enrolment activities are typically combined with UNHCR's verification exercises during which detailed biographical information about

refugees including photographs are collected and verified. Generally, the inclusion of biometric enrolment takes more time when combined with refugee verification. The entire process requires detailed planning and substantial resources. Depending on the total refugee population in a given location, the exercise might require anywhere between 50 and 200 personnel.

The biometric enrolment in Liberia lasted from one to three weeks, depending on the total number of the refugee population and resources available at any given time. During the exercise, a biometrics fingerprint scanner was used to fingerprint the index fingers of both hands. The fingerprints collected were then instantly compared with other fingerprint data already collected to determine that no match already existed. If a match was

found, implying double registration, additional measures were taken to ensure that the individual concerned did not receive assistance more than once.

In each refugee camp where biometric registration was undertaken, the size of the registered refugee population was 40 to 50 per cent smaller than initial estimates. In some communities, the reduction was as much as 70 per cent.

In the case of Liberia, it is clear that the capture of biometric data acted not only as a deterrent to fraudulent activities but it also allowed UNHCR to ensure that persons of concern were properly identified in the emergency context. By eliminating multiple registrations by individuals, biometrics has helped to establish accurate population statistics and has gained credibility in UNHCR's emergency operations. ■