Syrian refugees at a UNHCR registration centre
in Cairo, Egypt. Since 2013, they have been facing
increasing intolerance and hardship.

1 Sources, Methods, and Data Considerations

◖ Introduction

ROBUST DATA ARE ESSENTIAL AND, to some extent, indispensable for effective and meaningful decision-making at all levels. Inasmuch as reliable and accurate data are important in the field of displacement, the sources and methods of attaining such data must be equally credible in order to pass the test of statistical standards globally. As a result, UNHCR ensures that the various sources for data collection are both authentic and verifiable. Similarly, the organization ensures that the underlying methods of collecting data, particularly during emergencies, are justifiable. It must be noted, however, that the humanitarian field is unique in that it is often dealing with unpredicted emergencies that require careful and appropriate methods in order to collect robust data.

UNHCR's mandate requires the organization to collect and disseminate statistics on refugees and other persons of concern and, the agency remains a global leader in the provision of refugee statistics. It is important to note that the principal agents of refugee data collection are governments, UNHCR, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which often employ the techniques of registration, survey, census, estimation, or a combination of these methods for their data collection. Due to the importance that UNHCR attaches to the methods of data collection, many focal points of these agents have received the requisite training on appropriate methodology.

This chapter starts out by providing definitions of the various categories of persons of concern to UNHCR. It then offers descriptions of the sources of data on refugees as well as the data-collection processes and methods, and explains data-related quality-control processes. Finally, the chapter concludes with a contribution from the Swedish Migration Board (SMB) on its step-by-step approach for estimating asylum flows in Sweden.

◖ Definitions and scope

UNHCR identifies seven population categories, collectively referred to as 'persons of concern': refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees who have returned home (returnees), IDPs who have returned home, persons under UNHCR's statelessness mandate, and others who do not fall under these categories but to whom the agency extends protection. Since 2007, two additional subcategories have been added: individuals in refugee-like situations (included under refugees) and those 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 Organization of African Unity (OAU) Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, those recognized in accordance with the UNHCR Statute, individuals granted complementary forms of protection,[9] and those enjoying temporary protection.[10] The refugee category also includes individuals in a refugee-like situation.[11]

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9 'Complementary protection' refers to protection provided under national, regional, or international law to persons 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.

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

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

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 2013, irrespective of when those claims may have been lodged.

Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons 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, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border.[12]

UNHCR is involved in situations of internal displacement in a number of countries. The populations reported in its statistics are limited to conflict-generated IDPs or persons in an IDP-like situation[13] to whom the agency extends protection or assistance. Therefore, UNHCR's IDP statistics do not necessarily reflect the entire IDP population in a given country but rather only those who are protected and/or assisted by the agency. Moreover, under the cluster approach,[14] UNHCR provides support to both IDPs and other affected persons, though the latter are not included in these statistics. Hence, UNHCR's statistics provide a comprehensive picture neither of global internal displacement nor of total numbers assisted by the agency in such situations.[15]

Returned refugees (returnees) are former refugees who have returned to their country of origin, either spontaneously or in an organized fashion, but are yet to be fully integrated. Such returns would normally take place only under conditions of safety and dignity. For the purposes of this report, only refugees who returned between January and December 2013 are included, though in practice operations may assist returnees for longer periods.

Returned IDPs refers to those IDPs who were beneficiaries of UNHCR's protection or assistance activities, and who returned to their area of origin or habitual residence between January and December 2013. In practice, however, operations may assist IDP returnees for longer periods.

Persons under UNHCR's statelessness mandate are defined under international law as those 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 refer to persons who fall under the agency's statelessness mandate as those who are stateless according to this international definition, but data from some countries may also include persons with undetermined nationality.

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 agency also performs a specific function, under Article 11 of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, in receiving claims from persons who may benefit from the statelessness safeguards contained in that Convention, and in assisting those individuals and the States concerned to resolve these claims.

Other groups or persons of concern refers to individuals who do not necessarily fall directly into any of these groups but to whom UNHCR has extended its protection and/or assistance services, based on humanitarian or other special grounds.

> 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.

[12] See: *United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Francis M. Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission resolution 1997/39. Addendum: Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, 11 February 1998.

[13] This term is descriptive in nature. It includes groups of persons 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.

[14] 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: protection, emergency shelter, and camp coordination and camp management.

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

◖Refugee data

At the end of 2013, governments, UNHCR, and NGOs remained the principal agents of refugee data collection around the globe. States have the primary responsibility to provide protection to refugees within their territories. Therefore, States too have the primary responsibility to collect and provide data on refugees. However, in many cases, especially with regard to countries in the developing world that may lack resources and the requisite capacity, UNHCR and its partners often provide the means of collecting data. In contrast, in industrialized countries, the collection and dissemination of refugee data remains almost exclusi-

vely a government responsibility, with limited involvement of UNHCR.

Comparing information on the different data sources of refugee statistics shows that the distribution has remained virtually unchanged over the past five years. In the majority of instances, it is either UNHCR or the competent State authority that is the main source of refugee data. In some cases, UNHCR and States together figure as a source of refugee statistics. Figure 1.1 depicts the trends in refugee data providers from 2009 through 2013.

For the first time since 2009, the proportion of refugee data collected by UNHCR alone and States alone was

virtually identical, at 37 and 36 per cent, respectively. In the case of UNHCR, this constitutes a decline from 45 per cent in 2012. Despite this decline, UNHCR remained the most important source of refugee data worldwide, though marginally. By the end of 2013, the proportion of data jointly collected by both States and UNHCR significantly increased, from 6 per cent in 2012 to 15 per cent in 2013. Data collected from multiple sources (which may include UNHCR, governments, or NGOs, among others) increased modestly from 10 per cent in 2012 to 12 per cent in 2013.

The number of countries where UNHCR is the only source of refugee data has continued to decline since 2010, partly reflecting increased government co-responsibility in providing such information. For instance, by the end of 2013, the number of countries reporting joint UNHCR-government data sources had increased to 25, from 21 the previous year. Where UNHCR was reported as the sole data source, the number of countries providing such information dropped from 76 in 2010 to 63 in 2013. Nevertheless, the number of countries where States alone provide refugee statistics remained unchanged from 2012, at 61.

**Fig. 1.1 Trends in sources of refugee data** | 2009 - 2013
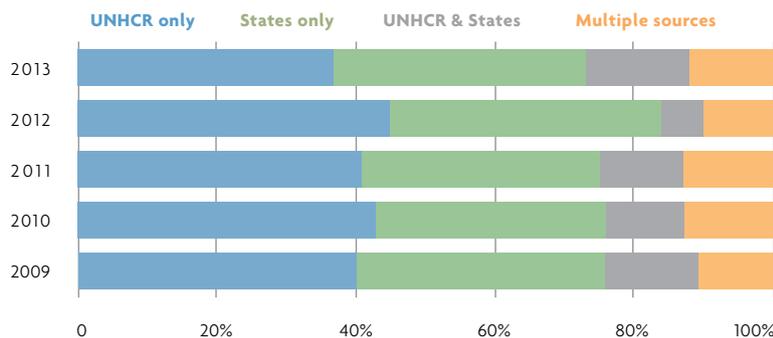
Refugee data are coordinated by UNHCR and the government concerned. However, it is important to note that the success of this coordination rests on specific key actors, particularly in field locations: governments, UN country teams, implementing and operational partners, and NGOs. The unique capacity of each of these entities contributes significantly to the overall data-collection processes, which are often interwoven between major stakeholders and key actors.

The major stakeholders directly or indirectly involved in refugee data collection include refugees, governments, donors, UNHCR, UN country teams, host communities, and NGOs, among

others. The mission of each of these is invariably the common goal of achieving data of high quality for the benefit of all stakeholders. Similarly, the interests

of stakeholders are often balanced with the goals of actors, while respecting the core tenets of data-collection methods.

Fig. 1.2 Key actors involved in data collection
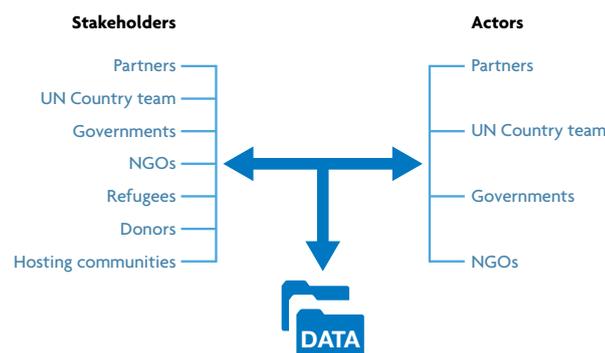
The collection of refugee data involving this spectrum of actors and stakeholders makes for an extremely complex process. At times, it requires consensus-building and knowledge-sharing among both the actors and stakeholders. Figure 1.2 depicts the scheme of data-collection processes and the connection between key actors and stakeholders.

DATA-COLLECTION METHODS

The methods of collecting refugee-related data have remained largely unchanged over the past decade. The principal methods are registration, census, surveys, and estimation. Since no 'one size fits all' approach applies in the humanitarian context, the application of a particular method differs from country to country, guided by several factors: the nature and situation of the refugee population (emergency vs. non-emergency), capacity, human and financial resources, and timeframe. While some countries rely exclusively on a single method, others use a combination of methods to collect refugee data. Each of these methods has proven to be reliable and, therefore, the use of a particular method does not affect the quality of refugee statistics.

Over the past decade, registration has continued to serve as the most widely used method by UNHCR and its partners to collect refugee data. This is largely linked to the rollout of UNHCR's registration software, *proGres*,[16] which begun a decade ago.

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16   Profiling Global Registration System (proGres).

| TABLE 1.1 | **Sources and methods of refugee statistics** | 2013 |

(Number of countries: 170)

		Data collection methods				
		Registration	Estimation	Registration & estimation	Various	Total
Source of refugee data	UNHCR only	58	-	2	3	63
	States only	32	25	1	3	61
	UNHCR & States	12	-	6	7	25
	Multiple sources	12	2	3	4	21
	Total	**114**	**27**	**12**	**17**	**170**

Today, some 80 countries use *proGres* to record individual information about refugees. Registration as a method of data collection is used for refugees residing in both urban and non-urban environments. Effective and accurate registration provides a firm foundation for the delivery of protection, assistance, and monitoring, and since its rollout *proGres* has become a vital resource tool for providing refugee statistics. UNHCR's refugee statistics rely heavily on registration data extracted from the proGres database, which offers both legal and administrative status on the provision of entitlements to beneficiaries.

Table 1.1 shows a cross-tabulation of the total number of countries in terms of agents and methods used for refugee-related data collection. In 2013, UNHCR only and States only used registration in 58 and 32 countries, respectively. In terms of estimation, there is no country where UNHCR as the sole source of data estimated the number of refugees, though estimation was used in 25 countries where States were the sole source of this information.

At the end of 2013, 114 countries exclusively used registration, accounting for 67 per cent of the available methods used to collect and compile refugee statistics. This compares to roughly 60 per cent a decade ago, an increase that reflects improved registration standards implemented by UNHCR and others during this period. Still, the total number of countries using registration has slightly declined, from 120 in 2012 to the 114 cited earlier.

In 2013, 27 countries (representing 16%) exclusively used estimation as a method for refugee statistics. In addition, 12 countries (7%) used registration and estimation combined, while the remaining proportion included a combination of various sources. Figure 1.3 provides a summary of the proportion of countries using each method of data collection. Unlike registration and estimation, no country relied on surveys as a sole method for providing refugee statistics, though five countries combined surveys and registration.

For countries that provide refugee-related data, it is often that country's decision as to which methodology to use. However, some countries do receive technical advice on which method may be most suitable, in which case each approach is evaluated on relevance and robustness for the collection of refugee statistics. For instance, registration is mostly used in locations where UNHCR has an operational role, while estimation is used in many industrialized countries, particularly those that do not maintain a dedicated refugee register and thus are not in a position to provide related statistical information. In the latter situation, UNHCR estimates the number of refugees based on official data of asylum-seekers recognized over a 10-year period. ■

Fig. 1.3   **Basis of refugee data** | 2013

- Registration
- Estimation
- **Registration & estimation**
- **Others**

UNHCR / C. FOHLEN
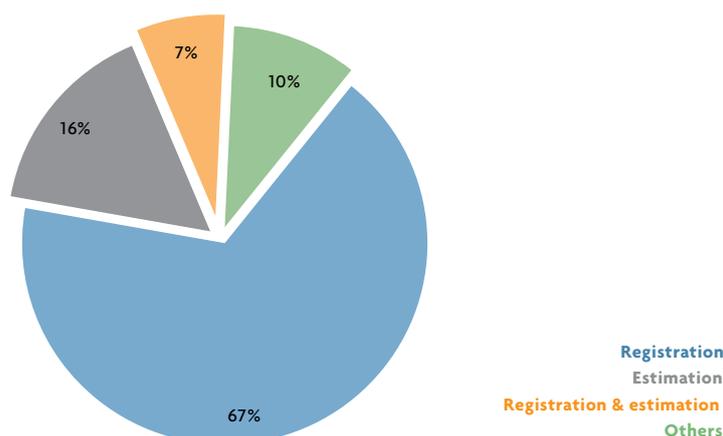
From Boali in the Central African Republic, Hajara, 19, and her two small children wait for a hot meal in the Dosseye refugee camp in Chad. They escaped ongoing violence in their country and found safety in Chad.

Is it possible to estimate asylum-seeker flows?
The Swedish perspective on prognosis

– by the Swedish Migration Board, Government of Sweden[17] –

INTRODUCTION

The Swedish Migration Board (SMB) has long experience with prognoses. According to a commission of the Swedish Government, the Board shall submit five prognoses for asylum influx each year, as a component of public financial management. These prognoses are also used for the internal planning of operations, where proportioning, re-prioritizations, and contingency plans are developed based on prognostic data.

Prognoses for asylum influx should cover a relatively long period of time, between zero and five years. Of course, making prognoses over broad periods is associated with varying degrees of uncertainty. The longer the time horizon that needs to be translated into prognostic figures, the greater the risk of errors in the prognosis. As such, this requires an approach to assessment that is able to take into account the effects of short, medium, and long periods.

THE DEVELOPMENT WORK THAT TOOK OFF IN 2010

In 2010, a prognosis development project was launched by the SMB with the purpose of improving the quality of prognoses and reducing the incidence of errors. One activity implemented during the initial phase of the project set the tone for the future focus of the development work. The work began with a look back, comparing the prognoses for the period 2006–2009 to the actual outcomes. The aim was to investigate what factors were included in assessments of the number of asylum-seekers and what it was that steered the prognosis revisions during this process. What steered SMB's assessments? What was good, and what caused the prognoses to be incorrect?

The findings spoke very clearly for themselves. The incidence of systematic errors led to poor assessments in earlier prognoses. Isolated factors steered the prognoses, which therefore were not in line with what was actually happening in the real world. The most obvious example was the war in Iraq. The prognoses were based solely on this group, while the potential effects of other changes in the environment were not included in the prognostic calculations. This also resulted in both over- and underestimations in the prognostic calculations. Likewise, one example of an event that was not included in the prognostic calculations during 2008–2009 was the decision to introduce visa liberalization for countries of the Western Balkans. In 2010, asylum-seekers from the Western Balkans became the largest asylum group in Sweden.

Another issue that contributed to errors in prognoses was the lack of methods for distinguishing between shifts in trend and recurring seasonal variations. When an increase in the number of new asylum-seekers took place, it was important to distinguish the catalytic factors. Was the increase caused by an ad hoc event, was there a new trend on the way, or was this simply an expected seasonal increase? Was the increase therefore of a temporary nature or on the way to becoming something more permanent?

The conclusions revealed the lack of a number of essential assessment instruments in the analytical toolbox, particularly a qualitative, holistic approach that could keep up with the changeable and complex world. Thus, the question was, simply, where the starting point should be.

DEVELOPING A NEW METHODOLOGY: THE MIGRANT'S JOURNEY

Traditional prognoses are based largely on a high degree of certainty and statistical outcomes. Though statistics are a common means of describing trends, they are far from sufficient as a model for explaining which mechanisms steer asylum flows. Over the course of the project, a number of dramatic events unfolded, including the Arab Spring and the outbreak of armed conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic.

Working with prognoses of asylum influx thereby required a shift in perspective, leaving what was certain and instead working on uncertainties as a starting point. What causes uncertainty in the asylum prognoses? It arises in the contextual interaction between events and individuals – individuals who, at a certain critical point, make the decision to leave their homeland in search of a safer existence. The smallest and most important component of the qualitative approach to prognoses is, thereby, the migrants themselves. The relationship between individuals and events or other factors has been developed and transformed into a holistic, quantitative model that the SMB chose to call the Migrant's Journey.

The model consists of six dimensions, which are defined based on a migrant's various steps on his or her journey to Sweden. Following the migrant's journey is a means of identifying key uncertainty factors that can affect prognoses. There are many factors that can affect prognoses, but which are important and which can make a difference?

The first step is made up of those

Fig. 1.4 Migrant's journey

COUNTRY

REGIONAL/
SETTLEMENT

ROUTE/
MOVEMENT

EU SYSTEM

EU NATIONAL

SWEDEN
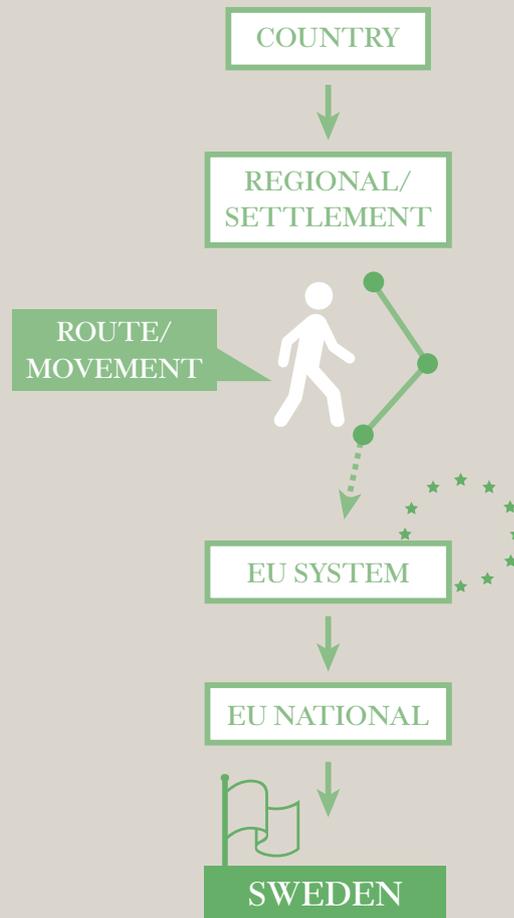
events that trigger an exodus from a country. The second step is the broader regional situation, where it is identified whether the migrant can remain in the region or if the migrant must venture further afield along the routes towards Europe. That decision to move towards Europe constitutes the third step. If and when the migrant makes that decision, the SMB investigates the possibility of travel to Europe by established migration routes. Do certain migrant groups, such as those who have more resources, have a better chance of making progress, or is it just as difficult for everyone due to border controls?

Once the migrant has finally managed to enter Europe, the SMB analyses the fourth and fifth steps: the European dimension. This consists of both the EU's common standpoints (step four) and individual Member States' positions on specific migrant groups (step five). How does the EU view the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, for example? Is there any common strategy for handling people fleeing that country? If not, what is the situation in terms of distribution of Syrian asylum-seekers within Europe? What practices do individual EU Member States apply and how does this contribute to a higher or lower number of asylum-seekers in certain countries?

The sixth and final step on the journey is the situation in Sweden, based on both the European context and the migrants

themselves. What are practices like in Sweden in relation to other countries, and what can Sweden offer the individual based on his or her needs? Are the migrants coming to Sweden alone or with their family based on what Sweden can offer?

When significant factors in the migrant's journey have been evaluated, these are then taken into further consideration based on a rating scale. Figure 1.5 shows an example of factors for Syrian asylum-seekers, rated on the degree of uncertainty and the impact. In this example, this information is evaluated against the impact on the number of Syrians seeking asylum in Sweden. The most important factors for the prognoses are those characterized by a high degree of uncertainty and great impact.

The findings reveal that three factors above all others cause uncertainty in prognoses: the future development in Lebanon

Fig. 1.5 Validation of key factors 2014 and 2015, Syrian asylum-seekers
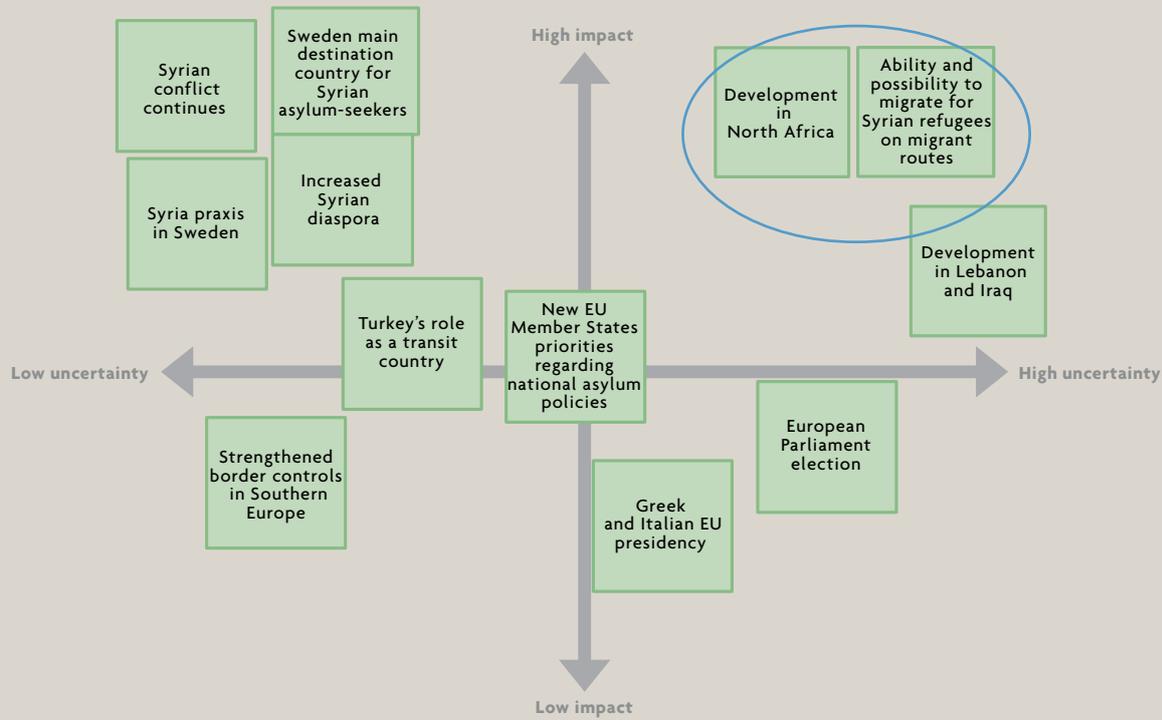
and Iraq, the development in North Africa (a major transit region for Syrian refugees), and Syrians' opportunities to make their way from the region to Europe.

The Migrant's Journey model facilitates the identification, analysis, and rating of the important factors in a systematic and structured way. Factors that are rated based on a high degree of uncertainty and great impact are then transformed into indicators that are continuously followed in order to minimize the risk of errors in the prognoses. The model also reduces the risk of getting stuck in previous patterns whereby one factor had steered the prognoses.

TRANSLATION OF QUALITATIVE OUTCOME INTO FIGURES

How does the SMB translate uncertainty factors into prognostic figures? Before it begins establishing prognostic figures, there are a number of important initial values to take into consideration. The more uncertainty factors, the more

uncertain the prognosis. The narrower the insight and information one can gather on the uncertainty factors, the more difficult it is to establish an exact prognosis. The degree of uncertainty can also vary at different points, and the time aspect is an integrated part of the uncertainty.

One way of translating the uncertainty in prognoses is to work with a prognosis interval. When uncertainty concerning the prognoses for the number of Syrians seeking asylum was at its greatest, the interval was between 18,000 and 29,000, with the most likely scenario at 23,000.[18] Figure 1.6 shows how the major uncertainty factors from Figure 1.5 are translated in each prognosis interval.

Scenario 29,000: Not only single men but also a large proportion of families are leaving the region due to a deterioration of the situation in Lebanon and Iraq. Increased access to boat transport from the North African coast, especially Libya, leads 29,000 Syrians to seek asylum in Sweden.

Scenario 23,000: Deterioration of the situation in Lebanon and Iraq reduces the chances for Syrian families to leave the region. It is thus mostly single men leaving the North African coast, and there is good access to boat transport from Libya.

Scenario 18,000: It becomes more difficult to leave Libya due to a destabilization of the situation in the country due to, for example, an increased level of conflict or the Government strengthening its forces and tightening border controls. A reduction in the availability of boat transport from Libya leads to fewer Syrians seeking asylum.

Figure 1.6 also shows which indicators are priorities to monitor for the upcoming prognoses. What will the outcome be? Will there be greater or fewer chances to leave the region? Will there be a status quo in Libya? Will more families or single people seek asylum in Sweden?

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18 The interval and the most likely scenario was established in SMB's prognosis in April 2014.

Fig. 1.6 **Syrian asylum-seekers – outcome and prognosis**
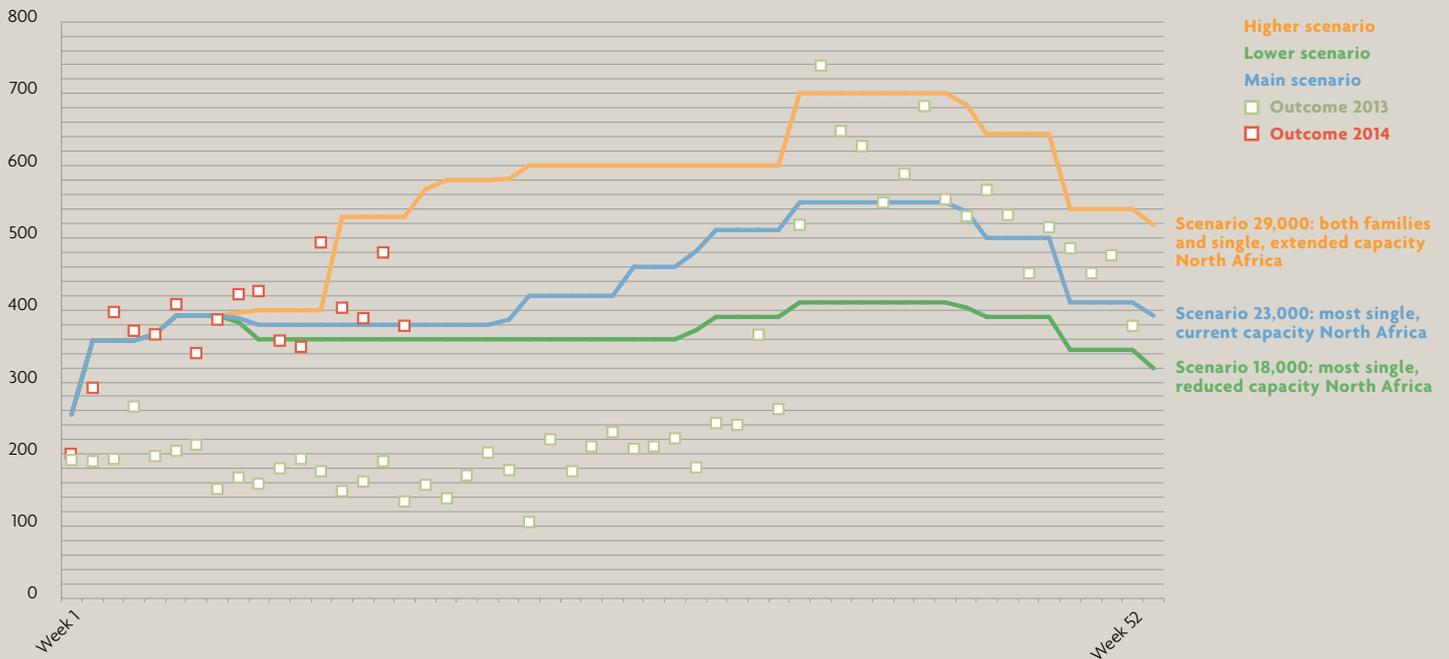
CONCLUSION

Prognosis related to the asylum-migration nexus differs from many other sectors within public administration. It requires an approach that takes nothing for granted and which includes interplay with variability and dynamics. Development work on the qualitative approach as an important complement to figures and statistics indicated very promising results. Working systematically with systems of events and factors in combination with the individual perspective provides more forward-looking dimensions for prognoses. This method, which supports forward-looking perspectives, is a necessary complement to statistical outcomes, which are based on historical developments and past events.

One successful outcome of this work was the prognosis in October 2012, with an estimate of 54,000 new asylum-seekers in Sweden for 2013. The outcome for 2013 was 54,259. This strong result was due largely to uncertainty factors surrounding Syrian asylum-seekers being followed and continuously rated.

There are also expectations from decision-makers that prognoses will be as precise as possible, preferably resulting in a figure that can be planned for several years in advance. During the development work, decision-makers also gained a better understanding of why the prognoses can be uncertain and why at certain times it is not possible to provide a figure for the forces driving migrants' decisions. Terms such as *uncertainty*, *prognosis interval*, *the scenario*, and *preparedness* have become part of the work on prognoses, which means that several alternative developments have now been taken into account in the planning processes.

Finally, it is important to highlight that there are still no methods or prognosis models that can ensure that prognoses are not wrong. One can gain strong knowledge and a solid assessment of all the steps in the migrant's journey to Sweden (or elsewhere), but one should never create false expectations that one can predict the unpredictable. The Arab Spring is one example to learn from. When Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi was ousted in July 2013, the situation led to a dramatic increase in Syrians and stateless persons seeking asylum in Sweden during the three months that followed.

The knowledge that there will always be 'blind spots' should be a constant reminder of how prognoses should be communicated to various interested stakeholders. Communicating uncertainty also requires clarity as well as, sometimes, the courage to say that the outcome cannot be prognosticated.

In conclusion, the work on prognoses also adds value. This comes when we include a dose of empathy and the ability to see the migrants' driving forces and the range of decisions that were taken behind asylum figures and flows. One additional recommended method is, thereby, to try to get in another person's shoes, analytically speaking – in this case, the migrant's. ●