



Maritza (in yellow), who has been internally displaced, is one of 120 core volunteers working with the Nansen Award-winning 'Butterflies with New Wings' network in Buenaventura, Colombia. Having overcome abuse and personal tragedy, she now studies to be a nurse and, through the Butterflies network, helps empower other women in the region. She is pictured here, counselling a young mother on health issues. Colombia continues to have one of the world's largest internally displaced populations, totaling more than 6 million people at the end of 2014.



Demographic and Location Data

Central to any collection of population statistics are robust data disaggregated by demographic characteristics at all levels within a specific period. Within the humanitarian community, comprehensive demographic data is the foundation of effective and efficient programme analysis as well as strong response. The movements of population groups are often unstable, thus making robust data all the more necessary for effective decision-making. Still, because the movement of displaced groups is often fluid, collecting data disaggregated by location and demographics is typically challenging. This challenge is further heightened during emergencies, when the immediate needs of displaced persons result in a focus on protection and life-saving assistance.

Data disaggregated by location and demographics are indispensable for identifying protection gaps, allowing for significantly improved resource allocation and the efficient delivery of a programme within UNHCR's mandate. To the extent possible, then, all data collected need to be disaggregated by location and demographics. In recent years, UNHCR has intensified its efforts

in this area, though collecting comprehensive primary data on displaced persons, especially during emergencies, has been a major challenge for the humanitarian community.

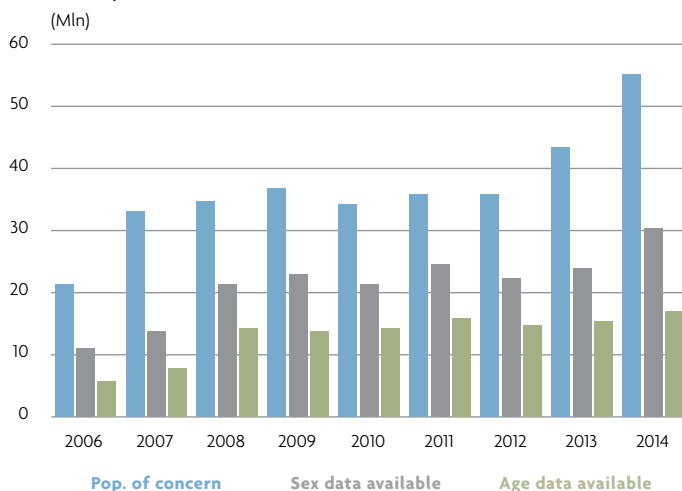
Disaggregated data are more complete and more easily obtained in certain locations than in others. Such data tend to be systematically and consistently collected in areas where UNHCR has an operational role – i.e. predominantly in developing regions. However, where governments are exclusively responsible for data collection, detailed statistical information disaggregated by sex or age is often lacking. Thus, the availability of demographic data is uneven across the various populations of concern, presenting an important limitation to comparative analysis across geographic locations over time.

It is in this context that this chapter focuses on the analysis of demographic and location data of the populations of concern to UNHCR, with an emphasis on refugees. The chapter concludes with an article from an external contributor highlighting the importance of a functioning civil registration and vital statistics system in the refugee context.

Data disaggregated by sex

Overall, the number of countries that provided information disaggregated by sex increased from 157 in 2013 to 164 in 2014, a 4.5 per cent increase. At the end of 2014, data disaggregated by sex by these 164 countries were available for 30.4 million persons – 55 per cent of the 54.96 million persons under UNHCR’s mandate. Data disaggregated by sex was thus available for 6.5 million more persons than in 2013, when such information was available for 23.9 million. The sex distribution of this 30.4 million persons shows that the proportion of males and females is almost at par – 15.24 million men versus 15.14 million women.

Fig. 51 Demographic characteristics available on UNHCR’s population of concern | 2006 - 2014



Data disaggregated by age

Availability of age-disaggregated data on persons of concern continued to increase in 2014.⁶⁷ These data were available for almost 17.0 million persons by the end of the year, 1.8 million more than in 2013 and 2.1 million more than in 2012. This translates into age-disaggregated data coverage of 31 per cent of the 54.96 million persons of concern for 2014. As in previous years, refugee data showed the highest coverage, with information broken down by age available for almost 9.0 million out of the 14.4 million refugees under UNHCR’s mandate. This compares to a coverage of 7.5 million refugees at the end of 2013 (64%). At the end of 2014, refugee children made up 51 per

cent of the global refugee population, a marginal increase from the previous year (50%).

As in previous years, statistical coverage during 2014 differed among the various populations of concern to UNHCR. But the year also saw significant improvement in the statistical coverage of asylum-seekers (83%) compared to the previous year (56%). The proportion of sex-disaggregated refugee data remained virtually at par between these years, at 71 per cent for 2014 compared to 72 per cent in 2013. Its availability was relatively high for refugee returnees (78%), others of concern (61%), and IDPs (51%). Stateless persons (23%) recorded the lowest proportion of sex-disaggregated data during 2014, though this is still a significant improvement from the previous year (8%).

At the end of 2014, the proportion of females was slightly higher for IDPs (52%), IDP returnees (52%), stateless persons (51%), and refugee returnees (51%), while this figure was slightly lower for refugees (49%). In contrast, the proportion of female asylum-seekers was disproportionately lower, at 33 per cent. Among others of concern, the proportion of women and men was at par, at 50 per cent.

It is important to note that coverage of demographic data is not fully available. By the end of 2014, refugee information disaggregated by sex was available for 10.2 million persons – 5.0 million women and 5.2 million men. For IDPs, data disaggregated by sex are available for 16.3 million persons – 8.4 million women and 7.9 million men.

cent of the global refugee population, a marginal increase from the previous year (50%).

Age-disaggregated information was also available for refugee returnees (56%), others of concern (55%), asylum-seekers (41%), and returned IDPs (40%). It was particularly lacking for stateless persons (just 1%) and IDPs (18%). The absence of age-disaggregated data for stateless persons constitutes an important challenge for any meaningful analysis of this population. By contrast, the availability of sex-disaggregated information for

⁶⁷ The availability of information according to age breakdown is particularly limited for countries in Europe, North America, and Oceania. Thus, the figures are not fully representative of the entire population under UNHCR’s responsibility.

stateless persons is better than for that disaggregated by age.

The demographics of the global refugee population have undergone some gradual changes over the years. For instance, the proportion of refugee girls and women has increased from 47 per cent in 2010 to 49 per cent four years later, implying that almost one out of every two refugees today is a female. An even more important change has been seen in the proportion of refugee children, which increased from 46 per cent in 2011 to 51 per cent in 2014.

The large Syrian refugee population in the Middle East and Turkey appears to be partly responsible for this increase in the proportion of refugee children, as the shift coincided with the start of the Syrian crisis. Excluding this population from the global demographic analysis reveals that the proportion of refugee children stands at 49 per cent, below the global figure of 51 per cent – indicating that the number of Syrian refugee children is slightly higher than the average. The same result is also achieved after excluding the three major source countries of refugees (Afghanistan, Somalia, and the Syrian Arab Republic) from the demographic analysis. In general, then, the global proportion of refugee children appears to

TABLE 5.1 Demographic characteristics of refugees | 2003 - 2014
(% of total population)

Year	Women	<18 years	18-59	>60 years
2003	48%	49%	46%	5%
2004	48%	50%	45%	5%
2005	48%	46%	49%	5%
2006	47%	47%	49%	4%
2007	47%	46%	49%	5%
2008	48%	44%	51%	5%
2009	47%	41%	54%	5%
2010	47%	44%	51%	5%
2011	48%	46%	49%	5%
2012	48%	46%	49%	5%
2013	49%	50%	46%	4%
2014	49%	51%	46%	3%

The percentages are based on available data and exclude countries where no demographic information is available. This is in particular the case for industrialized countries.

be relatively unchanged by the size of a given refugee population from a particular country, with the exception of the Syria situation.

These averages do hide significant variations across countries, however. Among the major refugee-hosting countries, the percentage of refugee children exceeded 60 per cent in Egypt, Niger, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Uganda. On the other hand, it remained below 15 per cent in Brazil, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Israel, and Serbia and Kosovo (S/RES/1244 (1999)).⁶⁸

Location characteristics

The importance of location information for refugee populations cannot be overemphasized, as such data can provide guidance for determining the required needs for an effective programme response. To harmonize the classification of dispersed and diverse locations, UNHCR categorizes the geographic location of refugees as urban, rural, or various/unknown. The latter is used in situations where a particular location is not clearly defined. The national definitions and classifications of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ differ across countries, though UNHCR has been consistent and systematic in its classifications of refugee locations to the extent possible.

In addition to location information, UNHCR collects data on refugee accommodation type. The agency breaks this down into six main categories: planned/managed camp, self-settled

camp, collective centre, reception/transit camp, individual accommodation (private), and various/unknown if the information is unknown or unclear. Each of these types can be found in urban or rural locations across refugee-hosting countries.

Of the 14.4 million refugees under UNHCR’s mandate at the end of 2014, information on geographic location was available for 12.2 million (85%). This comprised 7.5 million in urban (61%) and 4.7 million in rural (39%) locations. At the end of 2014, the exact geographic location was unknown for nearly 2.2 million refugees (15%), while the accommodation type was unknown for 17 per cent. Still, this latter figure compared to 19 per cent in 2013, 20 per cent in 2012, and 26 per cent in 2011, an improving trend that is a direct result of UNHCR’s efforts to collect detailed location information in all its offices around the world.

As in previous years, the distribution of refugees in the six main accommodation types varied

⁶⁸ Figures based on at least 50 per cent data coverage.

TABLE 5.2 Accommodation of refugees | 2012-2014 (end-year)

Type of accommodation	No. of refugees			Distribution			% women			% children			% Urban		
	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012	2013	2014	2012 ^a	2013 ^b	2014 ^c
Planned/managed camp	2,955,500	3,274,300	3,512,500	35.3%	34.4%	29.3%	50%	51%	51%	56%	56%	56%	0.4%	7.1%	7.0%
Self-settled camp	542,300	345,800	487,500	6.5%	3.6%	4.1%	52%	53%	53%	58%	60%	56%	0.5%	1.0%	0.4%
Collective centre	323,500	304,300	302,000	3.9%	3.2%	2.5%	48%	48%	48%	56%	35%	54%	18.0%	93.9%	95.3%
Individual accommodation (private)	4,551,900	5,559,900	7,578,400	54.3%	58.4%	63.2%	46%	48%	48%	39%	46%	49%	93.4%	88.3%	87.3%
Reception/transit camp	2,100	33,900	111,700	0.0%	0.4%	0.9%	53%	51%	51%	60%	59%	51%	8.3%	2.8%	15.1%
Sub-total	8,375,300	9,518,200	11,992,100	100%	100%	100%	48%	49%	49%	46%	50%	51%	53.4%	56.1%	61.2%
Unknown	2,122,700	2,181,100	2,393,200												
Grand Total	10,498,000	11,699,300	14,385,300												

Notes

^a Percentages are based on data available for 8.1 million refugees. Calculation excludes accommodation types which are unknown.

^b Percentages are based on data available for 9.0 million refugees. Calculation excludes accommodation types which are unknown.

^c Percentages are based on data available for 12.2 million refugees. Calculation excludes accommodation types which are unknown.

significantly in 2014. Out of the 12.0 million refugees where information on accommodation type was available by the year's end, 7.6 million (63%) resided in individual accommodation types, indicating that this category is the preferred residence for refugees. Further, this proportion has grown in recent years, demonstrating that refugees prefer to live outside of traditional camp-like structures, a finding that is fully in line with UNHCR's *Policy on Alternatives to Camps*.⁶⁹

While this growing trend has been observed across a number of countries, it is particularly evident in Turkey, the world's largest refugee-hosting country. At the end of 2012, two-thirds of all Syrian refugees in Turkey were residing in camps and one-third in residences classified as individual accommodation. By the end of 2014, this situation had reversed, with only 15 per cent of the more than 1.5 million registered Syrian refugees living in camps and the other 85 per cent in individual accommodations. Overall, 3.5 million (29%) of the global refugee population under UNHCR's mandate resided in planned/managed camps at the end of 2014, with overall camp residence by refugees having seen a reverse trend since 2012.

The distinction among different accommodation types changes significantly when rural versus urban locations are taken into account. Where classified as rural, the majority of refugees (67%) lived in planned/managed camps in 2014, as opposed to the 19 per cent who lived in individual accommodation. The opposite is the case in locations defined as urban, where 85 per cent of refugees were reported as living in apartments or similar arrangements.⁷⁰ It is important to note that planned/managed camps are predominantly

located in rural areas as opposed to urban locations.

Breaking out these accommodation types classified by UNHCR's geographical regions exhibits some notable trends. Planned/managed camps, for instance, are the predominant accommodation type in sub-Saharan Africa, mostly located in rural areas. However, an increasing number of refugees in this region are also opting to move to individual accommodation types, according to available evidence. In 2012, planned/managed camps accounted for 70 per cent of all accommodation types in sub-Saharan Africa, but this figure dropped to 63 per cent in 2013 and again to 60 per cent in 2014. During the same period, the proportion of individual accommodation increased from 14 to 26 per cent. In most other regions, planned/managed camps are far rarer. ■

⁶⁹ See <http://www.unhcr.org/5422b8f09.html>.

⁷⁰ These proportions exclude locations defined as urban or rural but whose exact accommodation type was unknown.



The sun rises over Khanke camp for internally displaced persons in northern Iraq. The camp is home to over 10,000 displaced Iraqis, mainly from Sinjar, who fled their homes in August 2014.

Civil registration and vital statistics for refugees

– Contributed by Helge Brunborg⁷¹ –

Civil registration (CR) is the recording of vital events (live births, deaths, marriages, and divorces), whereas vital statistics (VS) constitute the collection, analysis, and publication of statistics on vital events. The acronym CRVS is used for the combination of these. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs' *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*,

'Civil registration is defined as the continuous, permanent, compulsory and universal recording of the occurrence and characteristics of vital events pertaining to the population, as provided through decree or regulation in accordance with the legal requirements in each country. Civil registration is carried out primarily for the purpose of establishing the documents provided for by law.'⁷²

⁷¹ Independent researcher, formerly Senior Research Fellow, Statistics Norway. The work on this article was administered and funded by the NORCAP programme of the Norwegian Refugee Council. The views and opinions expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The author acknowledges valuable comments received from Carla Abouzahr, Eivind Hoffmann, Vibeke Oestreich Nielsen, Lars Østby, and Vebjørn Aalandslid.

⁷² *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*. Revision 3. Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division Statistical Papers, Series M No. 19/Rev.3UN, NY 2014. See: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/Demographic/standmeth/principles/M19Rev3en.pdf>, p. 65.

For statistical purposes, vital events are events concerning life and death of individuals, as well as their family and civil status. Internal and external migrations are not considered to be vital events in this context, despite being of great importance for statistical purposes, and many countries register these events.

Registration, particularly of births and deaths, can yield timely knowledge of the size and characteristics of a country's population, which is a prerequisite to socio-economic planning and informed decision-making. 'Vital statistics and their subsequent analysis and interpretation are essential for setting targets and evaluating social and economic plans, programmes ... and the measurement of important demographic indicators of levels of living or quality of life,' according to the *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*. This is 'including the monitoring of health and population intervention ... such as expectation of life at birth and the infant mortality rate.'⁷³ Also: 'Vital statistics are obtained preferably through a civil registration system, as this is the ideal source from which to derive accurate, complete, timely and continuous information on vital events.'⁷⁴

BIRTH AND DEATH REGISTRATION

Birth registration has a dual function, both legal and statistical. The recording of a birth is usually accompanied by the issuance of a birth certificate, which is important from a human rights perspective. A birth certificate may help to prove age, name, parents (including their marital status), nationality, and country of birth, all of which are essential for obtaining a passport and other identification documents.

This is particularly important for a child, consistent with Articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁷⁵ Birth registration is a right of children and is related to a number of issues including child labour, juvenile justice, under-age marriage, health, human trafficking, and child prostitution. Some of these risks are related to the need for

proof of age, while others involve the difficulty in acquiring official travel documents, and still others hinge on the need for evidence of family composition.

Birth registration is also important in relation to education, voting rights, and nationality, with the latter being enshrined in Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as other international instruments.⁷⁶ Such registration is seen as a tool in combating injustices and providing children with rights and freedoms that children should enjoy. Accurate knowledge of children's date of birth, ensured through a birth registration system, provides a means of establishing age and, as a result, providing protection to children. Linking birth registration to immunization programmes and other child health services may be beneficial for these programmes while also improving the coverage of birth registration. Yet UNICEF has estimated that 'the births of nearly 230 million children under the age of five worldwide (around one in three) have never been recorded.'⁷⁷

Birth registration is often understood as the issuance of a birth certificate, which is normally done in connection with the registration of a birth. However, in some instances, a birth is recorded but no birth certificate is issued, which is a legal and human rights problem. In other instances, a birth certificate is issued but the birth is not recorded, which is a problem for administration and statistics.

In most countries, the parents of a newborn child will receive a document, often called a birth notification, if the birth occurs at a health facility or in the presence of medical personnel. To obtain a birth certificate, the parents have to take this notification to a civil registration office, where the birth is registered (recorded). Births outside medical institutions also have to be reported by the parents to the civil registration office. A similar procedure has to be followed by the next of kin to obtain a death certificate. In some (mostly developed) countries, health facilities forward information

about births and deaths directly to the civil registration institution at the local or central level, where the event is registered and a certificate is issued.

As with births, the registration of deaths has both a legal and a statistical function. Death certificates are important for several purposes, particularly to obtain burial rights and to ensure that property rights can be legally transferred when a family member dies. In many countries, death certificates are needed by widows to lawfully remarry, which in itself may be a requirement to register subsequent births.

CURRENT SITUATION

The recent drive to improve civil registration has focused on registration of births in most countries, less so on deaths, and very little on marriages and migrations. Deaths are under-registered by an even wider margin than are births. Only 57 per cent of countries have at least 90 per cent coverage of death registration, while 62 per cent of countries register at least 90 per cent of births.⁷⁸ An estimated two-thirds of deaths are never registered and are therefore not counted in the vital statistics system. More than half of the Member States of the World Health Organization

⁷³ *Principles and Recommendations for a Vital Statistics System*, p. 4, see note 72.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5, see note 72.

⁷⁵ Article 7:

1. The child shall be registered immediately after birth and shall have the right from birth to a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents.

2. States Parties shall ensure the implementation of these rights in accordance with their national law and their obligations under the relevant international instruments in this field, in particular where the child would otherwise be stateless.

Article 8:

1. States Parties undertake to respect the right of the child to preserve his or her identity, including nationality, name and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference.

2. Where a child is illegally deprived of some or all of the elements of his or her identity, States Parties shall provide appropriate assistance and protection, with a view to re-establishing speedily his or her identity. See: <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>.

⁷⁶ See: <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

⁷⁷ See: <http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/birth-registration>.

⁷⁸ 'Coverage of Birth and Death Registration', United Nations Statistics Division. See: http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/crvs/cr_coverage.htm.

obtain either no data for mortality and cause of death, or they obtain data of such poor quality that these are of little value for public health policy and planning.⁷⁹ India is an example of this, with death registration in 2012 covering just 69 per cent of the estimated number of deaths, compared with 84 per cent for births.⁸⁰

CIVIL REGISTRATION AND REFUGEES

Civil registration of vital events among refugees can be used in two ways. First, it can be part of the national civil registration, which is particularly important if the size of the refugee population in the host country is significant. In this case, the role of civil registration for refugees as part of the national system needs to be clarified legally, administratively, and statistically. Routines for transferring data on refugees to the national system should be clarified, and double registration should be able to be avoided if roles and divisions of work are clear. Second, vital statistics from civil registration of refugees can be used to gain insight into the demographic and health trends of the refugee population, including comparing these trends with those of the host country population. Trends in the number of births and deaths may say something about the welfare of the population and be used to plan and target assistance as well as projecting the future number of refugees and their family members.

In both cases, complete and inclusive civil registration procedures are important for refugees for protection reasons. ‘Lack of civil registration and related documentation makes persons vulnerable to

statelessness and associated protection risks, and ... birth registration is often essential to the reduction and prevention of statelessness.⁸¹ An accepted birth certificate may help a refugee to acquire identification papers and a legal identity in the country where he or she seeks protection. In addition, birth registration creates a permanent record of a child’s existence. Unfortunately, birth registration is often mistaken for conferring nationality of the State in which the child is born, and this has proven to be an obstacle for the registration of refugee births in many countries.

The overwhelming majority of countries do not offer automatic citizenship to everyone born within their borders.⁸²

Proper identification of the legal status of asylum-seekers and refugees (and other vulnerable groups) may help to ensure protection and integration in the country of refuge. This process may also help in repatriation, in reducing human trafficking, and avoiding double counting and other errors in refugee statistics. Moreover, possession of a credible identification document (ID) may be necessary for refugees to access public services such as health and education, to open a bank account, to buy or rent property, as well as to obtain a driving license, a passport, or other travel documents. However, such documents may also assist the authorities to expel refugees, asylum-seekers, and undocumented immigrants, if everybody in a country is required to carry an ID.

UNHCR’S AIMS

Of the eight priorities of UNHCR for 2014–2015, ‘Securing birth registration, profiling and individual documentation based on registration’ is listed as the second.⁸³ The UNHCR Campaign to End Statelessness Within 10 Years was launched in 2014. It includes a Global Action Plan that calls on the international community to ‘Ensure birth registration for the prevention of statelessness’ (Action 7), with a goal of ‘No reported cases of statelessness due to a lack of birth registration.’ UNHCR says it

79 Carla AbouZahr et al.: ‘Civil registration and vital statistics: progress in the data revolution for counting and accountability’, *Lancet*, May 11, 2015. See: [http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736\(15\)60173-8.pdf](http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140-6736(15)60173-8.pdf), p.2.

80 http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011-Documents/CRS_Report/CRS_Report2012.pdf, pp. x-xi.

81 ‘Conclusion on civil registration’, No. III (LXIV) – 2013, EXCOM Conclusions, 17 October 2013, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/525f8ba64.html>.

82 John Feere (2010): ‘Birthright Citizenship in the United States: A Global Comparison’, Center for Immigration Studies. See: <http://cis.org/birthright-citizenship>.

83 UNHCR *Global Report 2014*, <http://www.unhcr.org/gr14/index.xml>.

can help to achieve this in several ways:

1. Support States to identify legal, procedural and practical obstacles, including those encountered at the community level, to register births.
2. Promote birth registration including by facilitating access to procedures at the community level, deploying mobile teams to address existing deficits and integrating birth registration with other public programmes such as those relating to childbirth, maternal-infant care, immunization and education.
3. Complement the efforts of UNICEF, UN regional commissions, UNFPA, WHO, UNDP, the World Bank, regional development banks and bilateral donors, including in the context of the UN Development Assistance Framework, to promote and provide technical support for birth registration and to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems.
4. Support the provision of information, legal aid and documentation campaigns to assist stateless individuals and individuals at risk of statelessness with applications for birth registration.⁸⁴

UNHCR's Executive Committee has likewise voiced strong support for civil registration, both to enhance protection and for policy and humanitarian planning, in particular 'that every child shall be registered immediately after birth, without discrimination of any kind.' The Executive Committee encourages States to undertake 'the necessary legal and practical measures to overcome the difficulties in conducting civil registration, including through establishing or strengthening existing institutions responsible for civil registration, building their capacity and ensuring the safety and confidentiality of their records' and urges UNHCR to 'facilitate civil registration in cooperation with governments, international and national institutions.'⁸⁵

UNHCR's Global Report 2014 mentions related improvements:

'Increases in the systematic issuance

of birth certificates to new born children have been reported in 22 refugee situations, of which 6 are at a standard of 100 per cent and another 13 are now close to the standard of 100 per cent.'⁸⁶

FAILURES TO REGISTER

There are a variety of legal, financial and practical reasons why registration of refugees' vital events is often not done. Ideally, refugees should be treated similarly to the rest of the population with regard to civil registration – such as by age, sex, region and nationality – if their presence is known and recognized by the authorities. There may be discriminatory laws and practices in some countries, where refugees and other non-citizens are not allowed to register their births, deaths, and marriages.

There is often a failure to register births and deaths among refugees because they are not aware of the importance of registering such events or are unable to access the national systems due to financial, social, or physical barriers to civil registration. This is often because they are not integrated in the general population or because only citizens are included in the registration system.

Disincentives for death registration apply also in non-refugee populations, as there is evidence of failure to register deaths in a timely way in order to continue to receive benefits such as humanitarian assistance, for example.⁸⁷

However, in many locations, unless a death is registered, the deceased cannot legally be buried. In Lebanon, for instance, most Syrian refugees are living not in camps but in informal settlements, often geographically removed from key services, including civil registration facilities, making the accessibility of registration services particularly relevant. As such, many Syrian refugees have reported being unable to bury their dead legally and are resorting to illicit burials or dependence on the goodwill and cooperation (usually facilitated by cash payments) of cemetery guardians.

⁸⁴ UNHCR Global Action Plan to End Statelessness, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/545b47d64.html>.

⁸⁵ UNHCR, *Conclusion on Civil Registration*, 17 October 2013, No. 111(LXIV)-2013. See: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/525f8ba64.html>.

⁸⁶ UNHCR *Global Report 2014*, <http://www.unhcr.org/5575a7858.html>.

⁸⁷ See <https://www.lovemoney.com/news/12953/dont-commit-fraud-after-death> for some examples in the UK.

HOW MANY REFUGEES ARE REGISTERED AT BIRTH?

Registration can mean different things. Most refugees are registered by the State, UNHCR, or NGOs when they arrive in the country of asylum. Many are given identification documents, but with a format, content, and legal status that vary from country to country. This article, however, is concerned with the civil registration of births and deaths.

The advantage of birth registration over the regular registration of refugees is that information about the child is usually better authenticated, especially with regard to country and place of birth, date of birth, and name of parents.

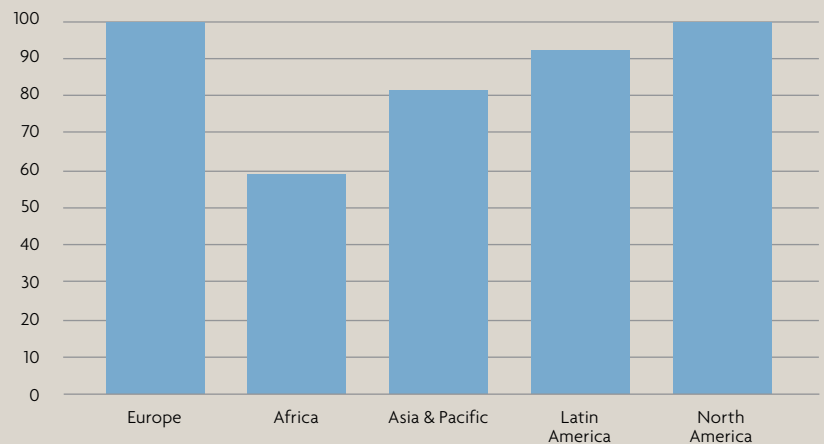
The registration of citizenship at birth varies from country to country, however, depending on legislation and practice. Children born in the country of asylum of refugee parents are registered as refugees in some countries and as ordinary residents in others, again depending on legislation.

Children born of parents who are asylum-seekers may present a special problem. Their birth may be registered in some countries, and a birth certificate may or may not be issued. Their legal status may be weak or unclear, especially if their parents are not granted asylum.

Most children born in refugee camps are registered at birth, particularly those born in camps managed by well-established agencies, such as UNHCR. This may also be the case for children of registered refugees living outside camps,⁸⁸ especially if there are benefits such as rations and other assistance available for refugees. Marriages and divorces are also often recorded in the refugee registration as this is an essential element of ensuring accurate information on family composition. However, registration of a vital event such as birth, death, marriage and divorce with UNHCR or with the national body responsible for asylum and migration, does not confer the same status as civil registration, including the issuance of birth certificates or future documentation to attest to the

Fig. 5.2

Average per cent of persons below five in the general population who have been registered, for countries with data on both birth registration and refugees



vital event. For unregistered refugees not living in camps, the level of birth registration depends on the general civil registration situation and law in the country of asylum, and on rules for registering births for refugees and other non-citizens.

UNICEF AND UNHCR ESTIMATES

UNICEF regularly publishes estimates for most countries on the proportion of children who have been registered by the age of five, but not necessarily at birth. The most recent of these estimates were released in November 2014, with data based on the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), as well as other national household surveys, censuses, and vital registration systems.⁸⁹

These statistics have been combined with UNHCR's statistics on refugees and individuals in refugee-like situations,⁹⁰ identifying the birth registration percentage for 154 countries with statistics on refugees. These cover 13.9 million refugees or 97 per cent of the estimated total number of refugees at the end of 2014. The estimates are the lowest for Africa and Asia [see **Figure 5.2**].

In 2014, 53 countries had an estimated 100 per cent birth registration, including all industrialized countries and several others. For these countries, there is

probably also a very high level of registration of children born in the country to refugee parents, if they are recognized as refugees; if the parents are not recognized, there is a chance that their children are not registered. The total number of refugees and individuals living in refugee-like situations in these countries is some 3.1 million, or 23 per cent of all refugees globally.

For the 4.4 million refugees and individuals living in a refugee-like situation in the 41 countries with an estimated 90-99 per cent birth registration, the majority of children of refugees are probably registered at birth. It is estimated that only about 150,000 of the 4.2 million refugees in these countries have not been registered at birth or before reaching age five in the country of asylum. There are several important host countries in the developing world with universal or very high rates of birth registration, such as the Islamic Republic of Iran (99%) and Colombia (97%).

Lebanon is listed with a 100 per cent registration rate. However, this figure only covers Lebanese citizens, while

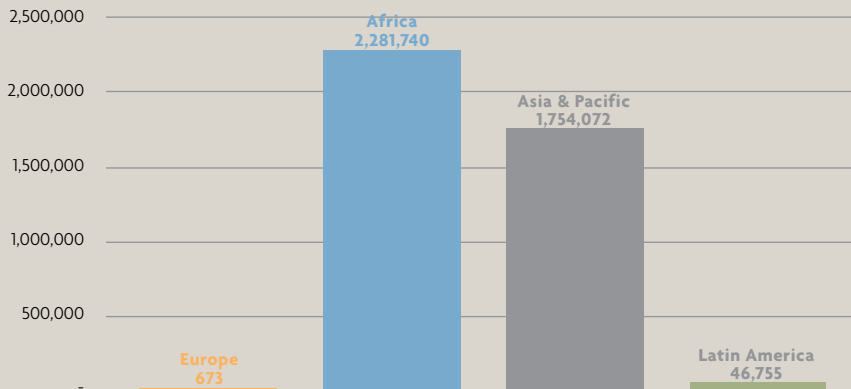
⁸⁸ UNHCR has estimated that 63 per cent of refugees live in individual accommodation, according to *Global Trends 2014*, <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>.

⁸⁹ <http://data.unicef.org/child-protection/birth-registration>.

⁹⁰ UNHCR *Global Trends 2014: World At War*, <http://www.unhcr.org/556725e69.html>.

Fig. 5.3

Number of refugees who have not been registered at birth, if the proportion is the same as for the population of the country of asylum



refugees face many obstacles in having their children registered. A 2014 assessment showed that 92 per cent of refugees interviewed from the Syrian Arab Republic were not able to complete the legal and administrative steps to register the births of their children born in Lebanon, for a variety of practical, legal, administrative, and economic reasons.⁹¹ This situation makes the risk of not having a legal identity and potential statelessness among refugee children particularly acute. The Syrian Arab Republic is also listed by UNICEF with a nearly universal registration of births (96 per cent), but this is probably far from correct today as that figure is based on a 2006 survey.

However, most countries hosting a sizeable refugee population have low rates of birth registration. These include, for instance, Ethiopia (7%), Chad (16%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (28%), and Pakistan (34%), according to UNICEF.

If it can be assumed that all children born to refugees are registered at the same rate as children under age five in the country of asylum, about 9.8 million or 71 per cent of all refugees and individuals in refugee-like situations should be registered. This would imply that at least 4.1 million refugees are not registered, taking into account that the birth registration percentage is unreported for about 50 countries. Most of these live in

Africa (2.3 million) and Asia (1.8 million) [see Figure 5.3].

The assumptions behind these estimates have several weaknesses, however. In some countries, only the births of citizens are registered, whereas in other countries the births of all legally resident persons are registered, including refugees and in some cases asylum-seekers. In other countries, birth registration may be more common among refugees than among the general population, especially for those born in camps. On the other hand, birth registration of residents has been introduced or expanded in some countries only quite recently, implying that few adults were registered when they were born.

The registration practice in the countries of origin also varies significantly. Some individuals have fled countries with low rates of birth registration, such as Somalia (3%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (28%), South Sudan (35%), and Afghanistan (37%). Others have fled countries where most births are registered, such as Iraq (99%), Viet Nam (95%), and Myanmar (72%) – but often they fled many years ago, when birth registration was probably less common.

Thus, there is no clear pattern in the birth registration of refugees, although most of the large refugee flows are from low-income countries to other low- or middle-income countries, both with low rates of birth registration. Since few if any of these countries have a system of population registration, refugees are not 'de-registered' when they flee. And even if there were such systems, few refugees would be motivated to register their flight or would even dare to do so.

SYRIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

As stated above, the UNHCR study among Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that refugee children are not necessarily registered at the same rate as the population in the country of asylum. Fully 70 per cent of children born to Syrian refugees in Lebanon are without a birth certificate. In most cases, it is possible for parents to

⁹¹ 'Birth Registration Update: The Challenges of Birth Registration in Lebanon for Refugees from Syria,' Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance Programme, Norwegian Refugee Council, Lebanon, January 2015. See: http://www.nrc.no/arch/img.aspx?file_id=9192763&ext=.pdf.

register their children only if they have an official marriage certificate. But many have fled the Syrian Arab Republic without such documents, and it would be risky to return to collect such documents.⁹²

The lack of birth registration or the absence of documents does not, on their own, make a person stateless. However, such situations do create a risk that an individual will not be considered a national by any state.⁹³ The risk of statelessness is especially pronounced for children forcibly separated from their fathers, as Syrian paternity is the legal basis for acquiring a nationality.

The Lebanese Government has long been concerned with registration of refugees, particularly in relation to Palestinians who have been in the country since the 1940s. Changing demographic composition since the last population census, in 1935, could alter the political balance between different religious groups.⁹⁴

Lebanon is not a Party to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Lebanon is also not a Party to the 1954 Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons or the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, nor has it accepted the Arab Charter on Human Rights, all of which have specific provisions protecting children's right to a legal identity in circumstances of displacement.

However, Lebanon is a Party to the Convention of the Rights of the Child and has international obligations to register births that take place within its territory. Given this legal framework, the Lebanese Government in cooperation with international partners has worked to increase access to birth registration for children born in Lebanon during the Syrian crisis.⁹⁵

DATA GAPS

It is relatively easy to establish reliable estimates of the number of refugees who have been registered at birth from UNHCR data sources. It is more difficult to do so when using other data sources, although rough estimates indicate that the numbers

are most likely high, as shown above. To obtain better estimates, it would be necessary to ask about birth registration status in censuses, household surveys,⁹⁶ and special surveys of refugees, or to collect data from the civil registration and vital statistics system in individual countries.

As mentioned above, many refugees are registered when they are arriving in the country of asylum or soon thereafter. This kind of registration is not equivalent to civil registration of births, however. Registration of infants at birth has numerous advantages over ID issuance at specific ages, both for the baby and, perhaps more important at this stage, for the parents and family members who may need to be able to prove their claims with regard to a particular child. Data are more likely to be recorded accurately and the number of events is better captured if births are registered within a few days of the event.

CASE STUDY: NORWAY

All vital events that occur in Norway, including those of refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless persons, are registered at the hospital, in the Medical Birth Register, and in the Central Population Register (CPR). A birth certificate is sent to the parents of a child if they have recorded an address, or it is issued on demand. The same is the case for family members of a deceased person. However, there is a difference in how these events are handled by the Central Population Register and how they are treated statistically.

All those formally residing in Norway, including foreign citizens, are given a unique personal identification number (PIN) and are registered in the Central Population Register. Asylum-seekers are given a temporary PIN ('D-number') issued to non-residents with obligations or rights in Norway. This includes children born while their parents' asylum applications are being considered. Such births are not included in the annual vital statistics for Norway, however. If the parents are later recognized as refugees and given a permit to live in Norway, the child will be

registered as an immigrant. Children born in Norway of refugee parents are not considered refugees but their residence status is identical to the status of their parents if both are foreign citizens.

It is possible to produce statistics on the vital statistics of refugees, but this is normally not done. Such statistics are of little significance in Norway, after all, as refugees living in the country have the same rights and obligations as other foreign citizens. Instead, statistics and analyses are occasionally made of births, fertility, and other demographic factors by country of birth and citizenship of the parents.⁹⁷

CONCLUSION

Civil registration of refugees is very important, from a human rights and legal perspective as well as for statistical reasons. Countries of asylum that do not have a system for this process should be encouraged to consider adapting their laws and practices in this regard. They should also generate and publish statistics on the vital statistics for refugees, when possible. In countries of asylum where UNHCR and other organizations carry out the civil registration of the refugees' vital events, there should be a system that allows for the transfer of data recorded by UNHCR into a national setting. ●

⁹² Radha Govil: 'Is the Concept of Legal Identity Relevant to UNHCR's Statelessness Mandate?' The Hague Colloquium on the Future of Legal Identity, 20-24 April 2014.

⁹³ 'Birth Registration Update: The Challenges of Birth Registration in Lebanon for Refugees from Syria.' See footnote 91.

⁹⁴ 'Lebanese, UN fallout over refugee registration', Al-Monitor, 21 July 2015. See: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/lebanon-syria-refugees-unhcr-gebran-bassil-rejection.html>.

⁹⁵ 'Birth Registration Update: The Challenges of Birth Registration in Lebanon for Refugees from Syria.' See footnote 91.

⁹⁶ This is unfortunately not included in the United Nations census recommendations.

⁹⁷ Report of Statistics Norway and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees on statistics on refugees and internally displaced persons, Statistical Commission, Forty-sixth session, 3-6 March 2015, E/CN.3/2015/9, para. 43, page 12. See: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc15/2015-9-RefugeeStats-E.pdf>.