UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

# MID-YEAR TRENDS | 2020

# Trends at a Glance

FORCIBLY DISPLACED WORLDWIDE MID-2020

**26.4** million refugees
- **20.7** million refugees under UNHCR's mandate
- **5.7** million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate

**4.2** million asylum-seekers

**3.6** million Venezuelans displaced abroad

**45.7** million internally displaced people[1] end-2019

## 67% ORIGINATED FROM JUST FIVE COUNTRIES

More than two thirds (67 per cent) of all refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad came from just five countries.

**Syrian Arab Republic** 6.6 million

**Venezuela** 3.7 million

**Afghanistan** 2.7 million

**South Sudan** 2.3 million

**Myanmar** 1.0 million

## 580,000 NEW ASYLUM CLAIMS

Asylum-seekers submitted 580,000 new claims. The United States of America was the world's largest recipient of new individual applications (155,100) followed by Germany (49,000) and Spain (44,600).

New claims were **33 per cent fewer** than the same period in 2019.

## 3.6 MILLION REFUGEES HOSTED IN TURKEY

Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees worldwide, with 3.6 million people. Colombia was the second with 1.8 million, including Venezuelans displaced abroad.

**Turkey** 3.6 million

**Colombia** 1.8 million

**Pakistan** 1.4 million

**Uganda** 1.4 million

**Germany** 1.1 million

## 2.9 MILLION NEW IDP DISPLACEMENTS

In countries where UNHCR was working to address internal displacement, 2.9 million IDPs were displaced. One-fifth of all newly displaced IDPs (574,600) were from the Sahel region.[2]

New IDP displacements: **15 per cent fewer** than in the same period of 2019.

## 4.5 MILLION DISPLACED VENEZUELANS

138,600 refugees, 808,200 asylum-seekers and 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad.

## 822,600 DISPLACED PEOPLE RETURNED

822,600 displaced people returned to their areas or countries of origin, including 102,600 refugees and 635,000 internally displaced persons. In addition, 85,000 Venezuelans returned from neighbouring countries.

Returned refugees: **22 per cent fewer** than in the same period of 2019.

## 398,400 PEOPLE WERE RECOGNIZED AS REFUGEES

More than 398,400 people were recognized as refugees, with Niger and Germany accounting for the highest numbers.

1 Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

2 The Sahel region covers Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.


1 Introduction
2 COVID-19 and Forced Displacement
3 Refugees
4 Internally Displaced Persons
5 New Displacements in the Sahel Region
6 Asylum Trends
7 Finding Solutions
8 Stateless people

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

As the year 2020 got underway, an estimated 79.5 million people remained forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously disturbing public order,[3] and few could have anticipated how dramatically the novel coronavirus would affect their lives in the months ahead. Yet COVID-19's socio-economic impact has weighed heavily on the world's most vulnerable, including forcibly displaced and stateless people, leaving them in critical need of solidarity and support.

Despite an urgent appeal from the U.N. Secretary-General on 23 March 2020 calling for a global ceasefire to address the pandemic, new displacement has not halted.[4] While COVID-19 has temporarily led to a reduction in the number of new asylum-seekers due to movement restrictions and border closures, including when no exceptions are made for admission to territory, the underlying factors leading to conflict in situations globally remain unaddressed. Trends which UNHCR reported previously have continued: political crises and conflict have created new humanitarian emergencies further raising the number of those forcibly displaced.

Achieving durable solutions for forcibly displaced populations has become even more challenging, as conflicts go unresolved and insecurity remains widespread in many countries of origin. At the same time, resettlement countries are accepting smaller numbers of refugees, and host countries are struggling to integrate displaced populations. Restrictions on movement and concerns about transmission of the virus have resulted in some solutions programmes being almost entirely suspended. Consequently, the first half of 2020 saw a significant decline in the number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who could avail themselves of a solution compared to the same period in previous years. Therefore, an increasing number found themselves in protracted and long-lasting displacement situations.

3 Source: https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/
4 See https://www.un.org/en/globalceasefire

The World Bank's analysis of the impact of COVID-19 has shown that pandemic-related job losses and deprivation worldwide are hitting already-poor and vulnerable people hard, while also altering the profile of global poverty by creating millions of "new poor."[5] The World Bank projects that, in 2020, between 88 million and 115 million people could fall back into extreme poverty as a result of the pandemic, with an additional increase of between 23 million and 35 million in 2021, potentially bringing the total number of new people living in extreme poverty to between 110 million and 150 million. Three factors account for this anticipated increase: the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflict and climate change. These phenomena are expected to acutely impact a substantial number of countries that host forcibly displaced populations or are source countries for displacement.

For instance, conflict across the Sahel region in Africa remained one of the major drivers for new displacement in the first half of 2020. Massive security problems caused by armed groups prevail. Thousands of women have been raped as part of the dynamics of violence. More than 3,600 schools in the past few years have been destroyed or closed. In addition, given the increasing impact of climate change on conflicts in this part of the continent, strengthening the regional capacity to respond to population movements through initiatives such as the Bamako process[6] remains critical to help rapidly address the challenges the region is facing.[7]

Significant new displacement has also been registered during the first half of this year in the Syrian Arab Republic (Syria), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Mozambique, Somalia and Yemen, among other locations, due to continued, new or increasing violence. While a full picture is yet to be established, UNHCR estimates that global forced displacement has surpassed 80 million at mid-2020.[8] International protection and access to asylum, therefore, continue to be life-saving for many.

This report focuses on displacement trends in the first half of 2020. The figures presented here were collected from governments and UNHCR offices around the world and supplemented, where required, with data from non-governmental organizations. Unless otherwise specified, figures relate solely to events occurring up to 30 June 2020. The statistics included in this report should be considered provisional and subject to change.

5 World Bank, 2020, Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune, Washington DC, at https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/poverty-and-shared-prosperity

6 The governments of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger have committed to place the protection of displaced people and their host communities at the core of their response. In October 2020, these governments launched the 'Bamako Process,' an intergovernmental platform for concrete and rapid actions to strengthen coordination between security and humanitarian actors and to ensure humanitarian access, protection, and assistance to affected populations.

7 See reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/international-community-must-act-urgency-end-crisis-central-sahel-enar

8 A complete overview of global forced displacement in 2020 will be presented in UNHCR's Global Trends report, to be released in June 2021.

EXPLORE THE DATA

+ COVID-19 platform November-2020[9]

CHAPTER 2

# COVID-19 and Forced Displacement

**168**
countries with fully or partially closed borders as the first wave of the pandemic crested in April

**33%**
decrease in numbers of asylum applications in the first half of 2020 in comparison to the same period in 2019

**90**
countries where access to territory was denied with no exceptions for asylum-seekers as the first wave of the pandemic crested in April

**33,900**
forcibly displaced and stateless persons have been infected by COVID-19 worldwide (22 November 2020)

**1.8 MILLION**
children and youth in 57 countries were out of school (September 2020)

9 Since the end of March 2020, UNHCR has been monitoring global protection issues linked to COVID-19 and the impact it has on populations under its mandate. The information is updated every two weeks.

**THAILAND.** *Refugees from Myanmar share hand sanitizer at Mae Ra Ma Luang temporary shelter, located on the border of Thailand and Myanmar. Thailand is home to 93,000 refugees from Myanmar – mostly of Karen, Karenni and Burmese ethnicity – who live in Government-run shelters.*
© UNHCR/DUEAN WONGSA

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted every aspect of human life, exacerbating many of the pre-existing global challenges and vulnerabilities affecting forcibly displaced and stateless people. As of the time of writing, more than 64 million people worldwide were confirmed to have been infected with COVID-19. Countless others are suffering from the pandemic's socio-economic impact, especially the millions of forcibly displaced people whose lives often depend on employment in the informal sector. Forcibly displaced populations have also been severely impacted by restricted access to international protection and basic services.

## Protection

Although COVID-19 has affected all forcibly displaced and stateless people to some extent, their experiences vary based on age, gender and diversity. In many countries, forcibly displaced women and girls have faced heightened risks and a rising incidence of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence/domestic violence. Reported cases of child, early and forced marriage and child labour have also increased.[10] Save the Children estimates that half a million more girls are at risk of child marriage due to the economic impact of the pandemic.[11] Children's access to education, health and psycho-social support services has also become more limited.[12]

Stateless people have also been impacted by COVID-19. Given their inability to prove their nationality or to present an identification document, stateless people have struggled to access urgently needed medical and social services. The suspension of services such as birth registration in some countries has also increased the risk of statelessness for newborns. Good practices can, however, be found in Central Asia, where countries have taken a fully inclusive and non-discriminatory approach to stateless people in terms of testing and treatment.[13]

Measures implemented by governments to limit the spread of COVID-19, including restricting freedom of movement and closing borders, are making it considerably harder for people fleeing war and persecution to reach safety. As the first wave of the pandemic crested in April, 168 countries fully or partially closed their borders, with about 90 of them making no exception for people seeking asylum.[14] Movement restrictions have increased the risk of persons fleeing insecurity resorting to smuggler networks and more dangerous routes in order to seek international protection.[15] However, a number of states have found ways to preserve some form of access to territory for people seeking international protection despite the pandemic. Uganda, for example, has accepted thousands of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo while ensuring that necessary health measures, including quarantine, were also taken.

Positively, the implementation modalities of national asylum procedures have been changed as a result of COVID-19, with more than 100 countries adapting registration procedures for new applicants. UNHCR has worked with State authorities to introduce remote asylum application procedures by mail, phone, email and web-based to help guarantee individuals' right to seek protection and effective access to asylum procedures.[16] The use of digital technologies has boosted confidence in these new approaches. They have proved to be highly successful in promoting remote access to asylum systems and referral and counselling services.

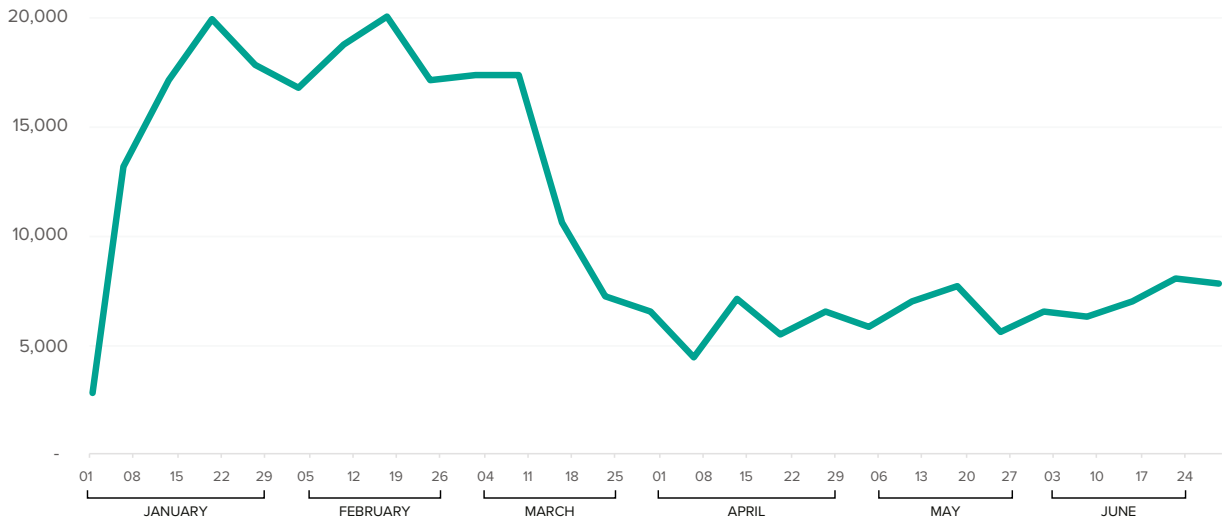
Despite global efforts, there has been a 33 per cent drop in the number of asylum applications lodged in the first half of 2020 in comparison to the same period in 2019, primarily due to the lockdown restrictions imposed by many States and the disruptive effect on service delivery.

Another useful measure of the impact of these restrictions is refugee registration conducted by UNHCR, which decreased by three-quarters between mid-February and early-April – from nearly

**10** See Report on UNHCR's Response to COVID-19, UNHCR, September 2020.
**11** See www.savethechildren.net/news/covid-19-places-half-million-more-girls-risk-child-marriage-2020
**12** See Protecting Forcibly Displaced Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic, UNHCR, August 2020.
**13** See Report on UNHCR's Response to COVID-19, UNHCR, September 2020.
**14** See https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/10/5f7de2724/unhcrs-gillian-triggs-warns-covid-19-severely-testing-refugee-protection.html and im.unhcr.org/covid19_platform/ for the current situation
**15** See www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/7/5f22e2844/unhcr-warns-increased-covid-19-related-trafficking-risks-refugees-displaced.html
**16** See Report on UNHCR's Response to COVID-19, UNHCR, September 2020

20,000 to some 4,400 individuals registered per week (see figure 1). The 27,300 registrations in April were the lowest monthly figure since 2012, when refugee registration started to increase significantly, notably due to the conflict in Syria. In May and June 2020, registration remained at lower levels (6,700 registrations per week on average between mid-April and end-June), most notably in East Africa and the Middle East/North Africa.[17]

Figure 1 | **UNHCR weekly refugee registration** | January-June 2020




## Health

Often unable to practice social distancing due to overcrowded living arrangements, and with inadequate access to information and health care services, forcibly displaced and stateless people remain at a high risk of contracting the virus.[18] Countries have been generously including forcibly displaced and stateless persons in their national COVID-19 preparedness and response plan. However, more than 85 per cent of refugees are hosted in low- and middle-income countries,[19] where health systems have often been overwhelmed, with limited capacity to manage persons with severe COVID-19 complications. The pandemic is drawing attention to these already overburdened public health systems, and to the very low capacity and limited service availability outside of major centres, including in many refugee hosting areas.

As of November 2020, at least 33,900 forcibly displaced and stateless people in 103 countries, including in refugee and IDP camps, have contracted the virus, of whom 321 have died.[20] Infection prevention and control measures implemented by governments together with UNHCR, international agencies and non-governmental organizations, have so far helped mitigate major outbreaks in large refugee situations.

## Livelihoods

Lockdown measures have weakened economies around the world, leading to mass layoffs and greater economic insecurity. In the case of forcibly displaced populations, who are often part of the informal labour market and excluded from social safety nets, they have been impacted by the deterioration of countries' economic situation. In Rwanda, for

**17** All figures relate to UNHCR's web-based case management system proGres.
**18** See storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e1da7d80fbcf4ce8a3a954910c1e7f37
**19** See www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/
**20** Source: UNHCR.

instance, most of the 12,000 urban refugees in employment lost their jobs due to business closures.[21] In Morocco, among the 44 per cent of the refugee heads of household with jobs, the vast majority (87 per cent) have had to stop working during the lockdown.[22]

As a result of the deepening economic and financial crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of refugees living in Lebanon under the extreme poverty line has jumped from 55 per cent to over 75 per cent. A survey conducted in Jordan showed that only 35 per cent of refugees said they had a secure job to return to after the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions. To mitigate the lost income, UNHCR has scaled up cash assistance programmes globally, reaching some 3 million vulnerable people during the first six months of 2020.[23] Granting displaced populations non-discriminatory access to employment, social services and safety nets remains crucial to mitigate the negative effect of the pandemic.

## Education

In line with "Refugee Education 2030"[24] the inclusion of refugees in national response plans and ensuring that refugees have meaningful access to support programmes has been a key element of the COVID-19 response. Nevertheless, some 1.8 million refugee children and youth in 57 countries were not attending school because of closures intended to limit the spread of coronavirus, as of September 2020.[25] In response, UNHCR has worked to ensure that families have access to these programmes, supporting more than 744,000 children and youth with distance/home-based learning.

Even before the pandemic, refugee children were at a grave disadvantage in terms of access to education. COVID-19 has worsened the situation, with a refugee child being twice as likely to be out of school as a non-refugee child.[26] UNHCR remains deeply concerned by the lasting effect of the pandemic on education - as many as half of all refugee girls in secondary school may not return to class without greater socio-economic support to their families, water, sanitation and hygiene measures in schools, as well as catch-up learning opportunities.

### THE NEED FOR TIMELY AND ACCURATE DATA

The availability of adequate and timely information has become more important than ever in order to assess the pandemic's impact on forcibly displaced populations. To mitigate these data gaps, humanitarian and development organizations have been collecting data remotely, such as through telephone surveys, self-directed surveys and remote key informant interviews.[27] Datasets detailing the impact of COVID-19 on forcibly displaced populations in Lebanon, Kenya, Mauritania and Zambia are already available in UNHCR's Microdata Library, with more datasets being curated.[28]

**21** See www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/5/5eccbfec4/urban-refugees-struggling-survive-economic-impact-covid-19-worsens-east.html
**22** See Enquête sur l'impact de Covid-19 sur la situation socioéconomique et psychologique des réfugiés au Maroc, High Commission of Planning of Morocco.
**23** See UNHCR Cash Assistance and COVID-19: Main Findings from Post-Distribution Monitoring, UNHCR, October 2020.
**24** See https://www.unhcr.org/publications/education/5d651da88d7/education-2030-strategy-refugee-education.html
**25** See Report on UNHCR's Response to COVID-19, UNHCR, September 2020.
**26** See Coming together for Refugee Education, UNHCR, September 2020.
**27** See Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion – Emerging practices to address the COVID-19 pandemic, UNHCR, September 2020.
**28** See microdata.unhcr.org/index.php/home

**COLOMBIA.** *A Venezuelan family arrives at the Integrated Assistance Centre in Maicao in northern Colombia upon its re-opening following COVID-19 lockdown measures. Maicao has one of the highest populations of Venezuelan refugees and migrants in the region.*
© UNHCR/DUEAN WONGSA

EXPLORE THE DATA
+ By origin and asylum

CHAPTER 3

# Refugees

With an overall increase of almost a quarter of a million refugees during the first six months of 2020,[29] the number of people displaced across borders[30] reached 29.9 million, including 5.7 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate and 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad. This is a continuation of the trend observed in previous years as a result of new refugee recognitions together with fewer available durable solutions for existing refugees which both contributed to the overall increase.

## New recognitions of refugees

In the first half of 2020, some 398,500 people were granted international protection either on an individual or group basis, 16 per cent fewer than during the same period in 2019 (498,000). As is frequently the case, countries directly neighbouring crisis situations experienced the greatest increases in the first six months of 2020.

Despite the overall decrease in recognitions compared to the first six months of 2019, there were notable increases in the number of newly recognized refugees in three situations. Firstly, the deepening crisis in Africa's Sahel region and neighbouring countries,[31] where conflict and climate change are endangering many communities, led to an increase of some 128,800 new refugees (32 per cent of all new recognitions) (see also Chapter 5). Secondly, 45,600 Venezuelans (11 per cent) were newly recognized as refugees, mainly in Spain, Brazil and Mexico. And thirdly, 42,200 Syrians (11 per cent) were granted international protection, mainly in Germany and Greece.

## By region of asylum

The greatest increase in the number of people displaced across borders in the first six months of 2020 was in Africa (3 per cent), particularly in West and Central Africa (9 per cent) and is a consequence of the crisis in the Sahel. The number of refugees in the East and Horn of Africa grew by two per cent due to arrivals of new refugees to Ethiopia (primarily from Eritrea, Somalia and South Sudan) and Uganda (primarily from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan). In the Americas, the 0.8 per cent increase is mainly due to continued displacement of Venezuelans within the region, notably in Brazil and Mexico. In the Middle East and North Africa, the reduction of 0.6 per cent was primarily due to

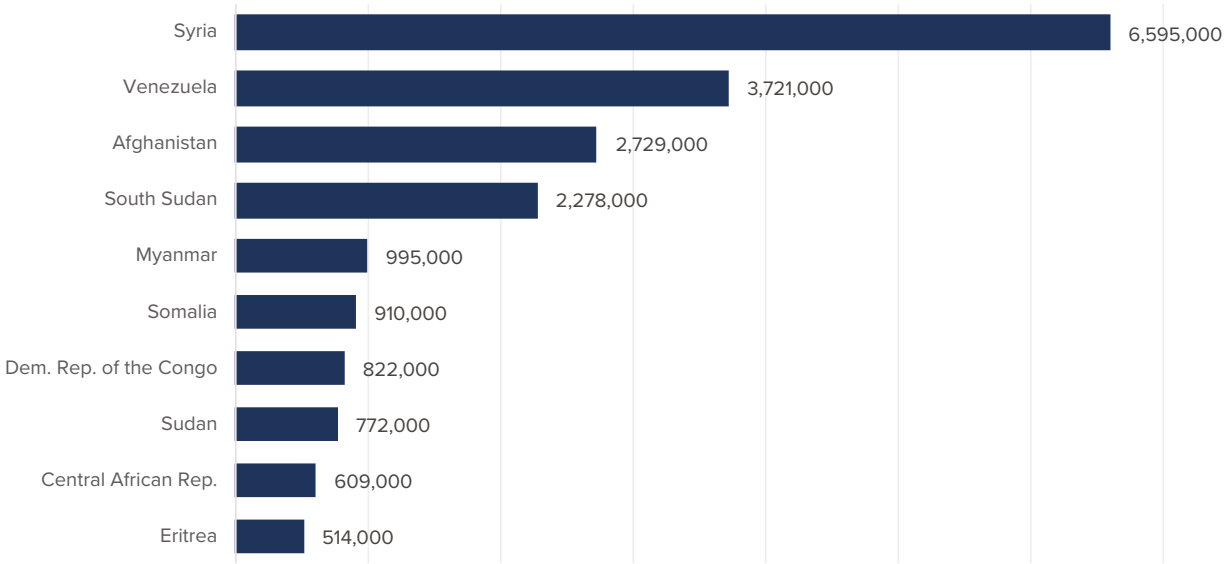
29 See www.unhcr.org/globaltrends2019/
30 Unless otherwise stated, all references in this chapter to "people displaced across borders" refer to refugees under UNHCR's mandate, persons in a refugee-like situation and Venezuelans displaced abroad. It excludes Palestine refugees under the mandate of UNRWA.
31 Includes Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan and Sudan.

statistical adjustments, improving the accuracy of figures. Southern Africa and Europe also experienced small overall decreases in the number of refugees (below 1 per cent each).

## By country of origin

With 8 out of 10 people displaced across borders originating from just ten countries (82 per cent), the main countries of origin remained consistent with the end of 2019 (see figure 2). Since 2014, Syria has been the main country of origin for refugees. Overall, there were 6.6 million Syrian refugees globally, hosted by 127 countries. Turkey continued to host more than half of Syrian refugees (3.6 million). Other countries with large Syrian refugee populations were Lebanon (884,000), Jordan (658,000), Iraq (245,000) and Egypt (130,000). Germany (562,000) and Sweden (114,000) continued to host the largest Syrian refugee populations outside the immediate region.

Figure 2 | **People displaced across borders by country of origin** | mid-2020




Venezuelans made up the second largest group of people displaced across borders, with 138,600 recognized refugees and a further 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad. In addition, there were 808,000 Venezuelan asylum-seekers at mid-2020. Venezuelans were displaced in 66 countries globally, although more than 97 per cent of refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad remained in Latin America and the Caribbean, among whom 1.8 million were hosted in Colombia, 454,000 in Chile, 366,000 in Ecuador and 334,000 in Peru.

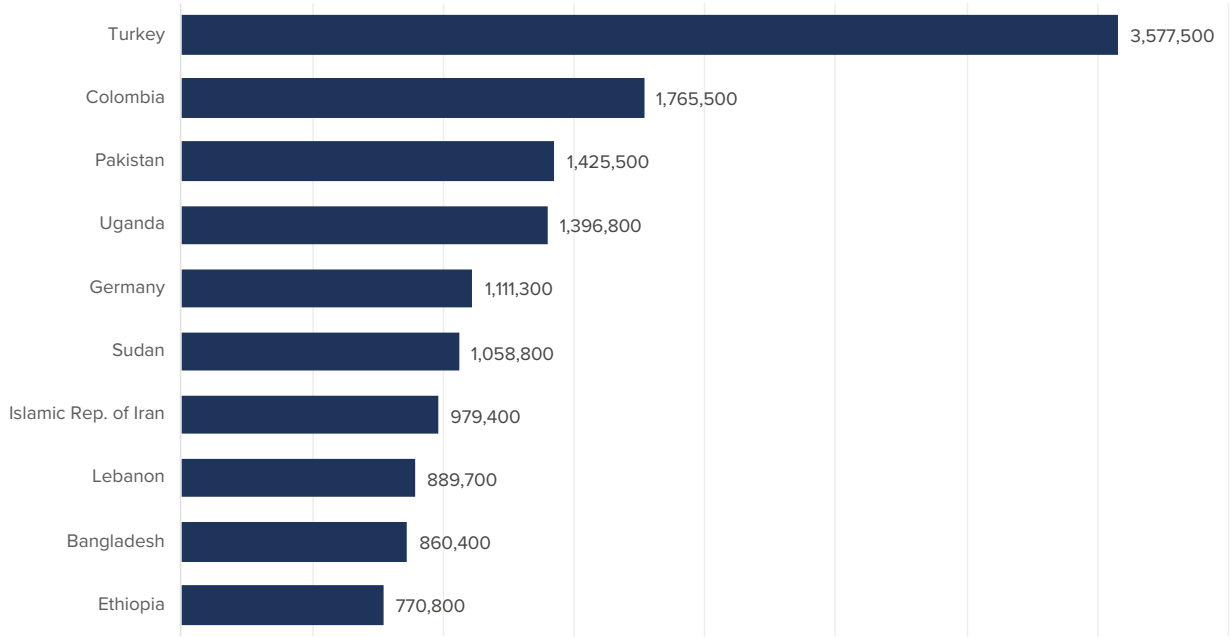
For more than four decades, the number of Afghan refugees has remained sizeable. At mid-2020 there were 2.7 million registered Afghan refugees hosted by 96 countries. Half of them (1.4 million) are residing in Pakistan, followed by 951,000 hosted in the Islamic Republic of Iran and 133,000 in Germany.

## By country of asylum

Nearly 3 in 5 people displaced across borders were hosted by just ten countries (see figure 3 and map 1). Turkey continued to host the world's largest number of refugees (3.6 million), almost all Syrians.[32] Colombia hosted the second largest number of people displaced across the borders, nearly all of whom are Venezuelans. Pakistan hosted the third largest refugee population, totalling 1.4 million people by the middle of 2020, almost all of whom are Afghans.

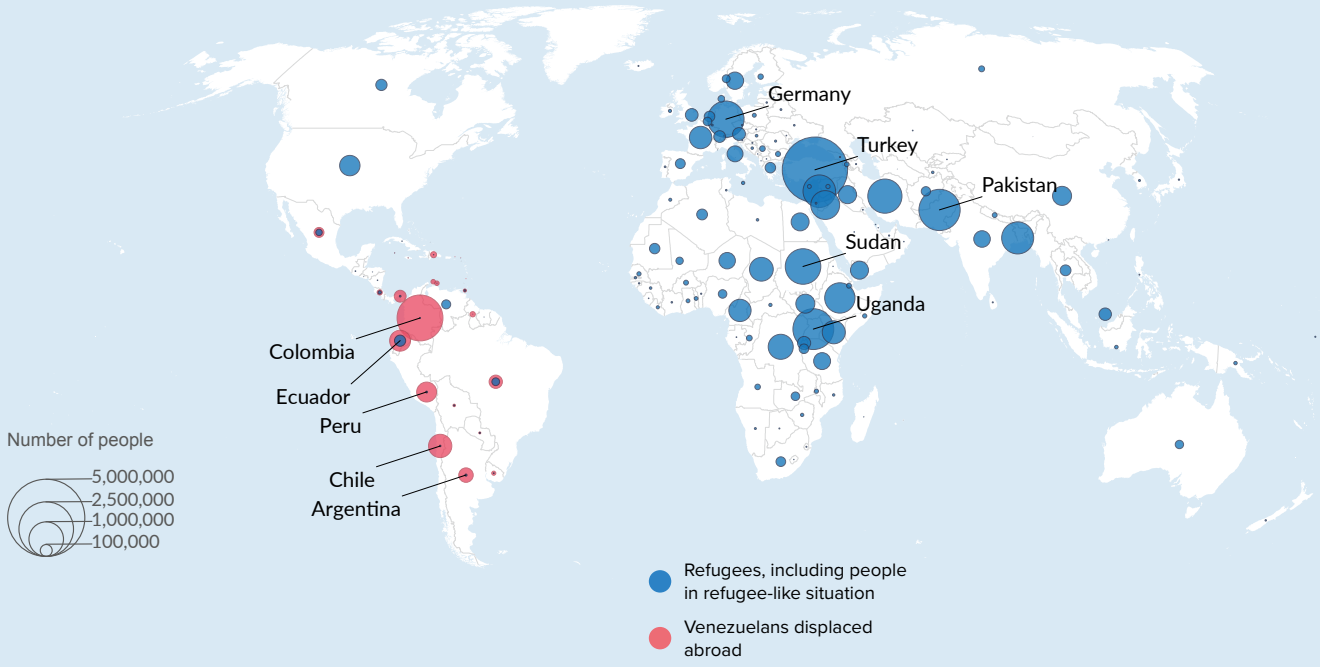
**32** Apart from decreases due to resettlement departures, mid-2020 population statistics for Turkey are not yet available.

Figure 3 | **People displaced across borders by host country | mid-2020**




The largest decrease among major refugee-hosting countries was in Germany, with an overall drop of some 35,300 refugees to 1.1 million at mid-2020. It is the first decrease in the refugee population in Germany since 2013. The primary reason for the decline is that refugees have had their protection status revoked or withdrawn.

Map 1 | **Refugees, people in refugee-like situations and Venezuelans displaced abroad** | mid-2020




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

**MOZAMBIQUE.** *"The insurgents arrived at 4 am while everyone in the village was still asleep. We woke up hearing neighbours' screams and the sound of gunshots. We fled to the bush and returned the next morning to find our house completely burned." said Joaquina* (wearing mask). Sitting with her family and relatives in front of her brother's home in Montepuez, north-east Mozambique, her family were displaced by extremist violence in Cabo Delgado.*

© UNHCR/DEILIANY LAZARA DE SOUZA

** name changed for protection reasons*

EXPLORE THE DATA

+ By origin

+ IDP returnees

CHAPTER 4

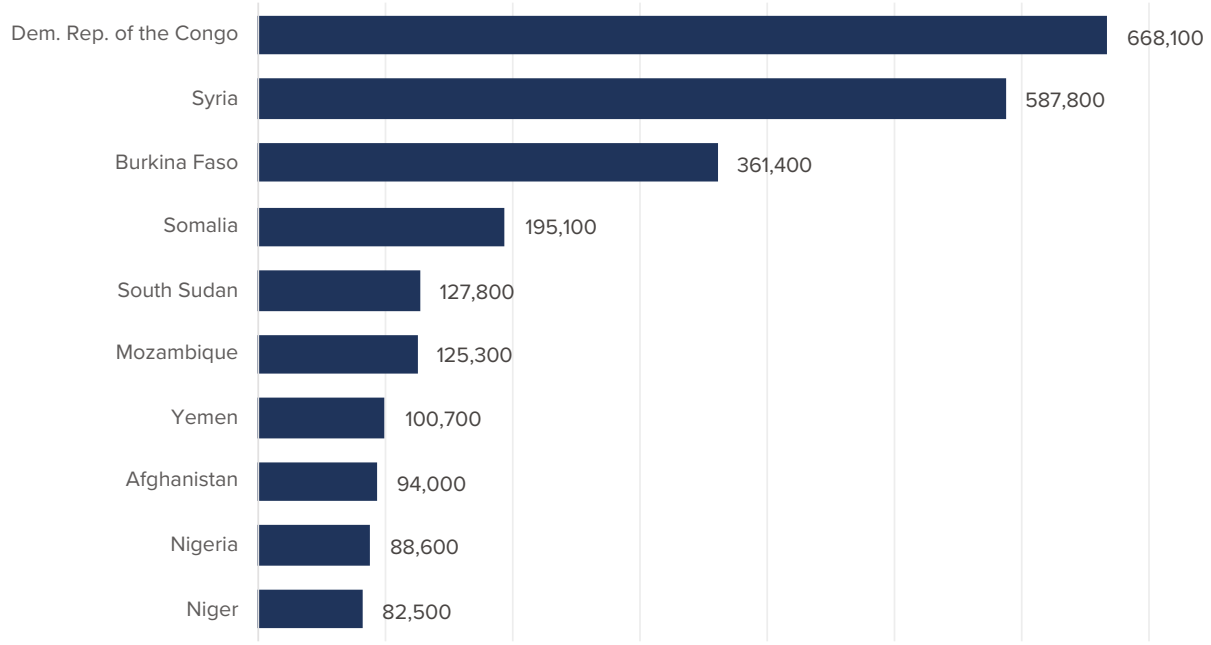
# Internally Displaced Persons

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of people displaced within their own countries due to armed conflicts, generalized violence or human rights violations has continued to increase significantly. By mid-2020, the number of internally displaced persons[33] reported by 33 UNHCR operations rose to an estimated 45.9 million persons, up from 43.5 million at the end of 2019 (+6 per cent). The numbers exclude those displaced due to extreme weather events or disasters.

In countries where UNHCR was working to address internal displacement, some 2.9 million people were newly displaced within their own countries in the first half of 2020, 15 per cent fewer than the 3.4 million displaced during the same period of 2019. New internal displacements took place in 20 countries in the first half of 2020, with the largest displacements shown in figure 4. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an estimated 668,000 were displaced due to conflict and violence, most notably in Ituri province, while in Syria, 588,000 new displacements were due to renewed fighting in Idlib governate.

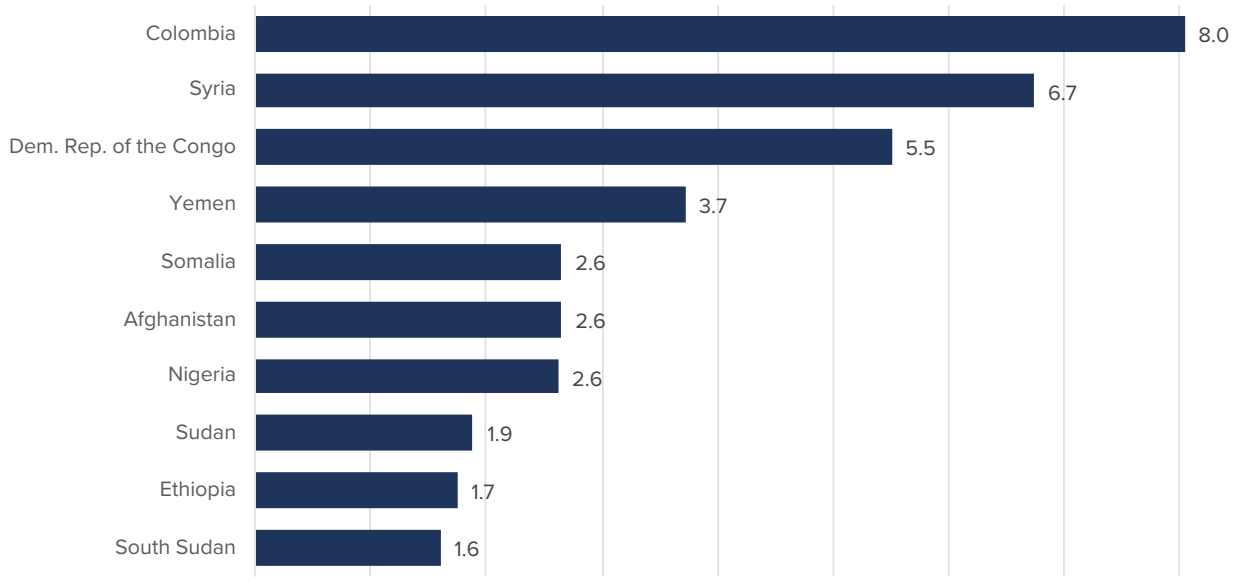
33 Figures collated by IDMC that are used in the calculation of global forced displacement are not available at mid-year. Instead the internally displaced persons protected/assisted by UNHCR are used in this report. IDPs include people or groups of individuals who have been forced or obliged to flee or 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 or violations of human rights and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Figure 4 | **Countries with the largest new internal displacements** | January-June 2020




While Colombia reported relatively low numbers of new displacements compared to other countries (19,500) in the first half of 2020, it remained the country with the largest population of internally displaced people, with just over 8 million in the country (see figure 5). The large number of registered IDPs comes from the total cumulative figure in the Government's Victims Registry, which commenced in 1985.[34]

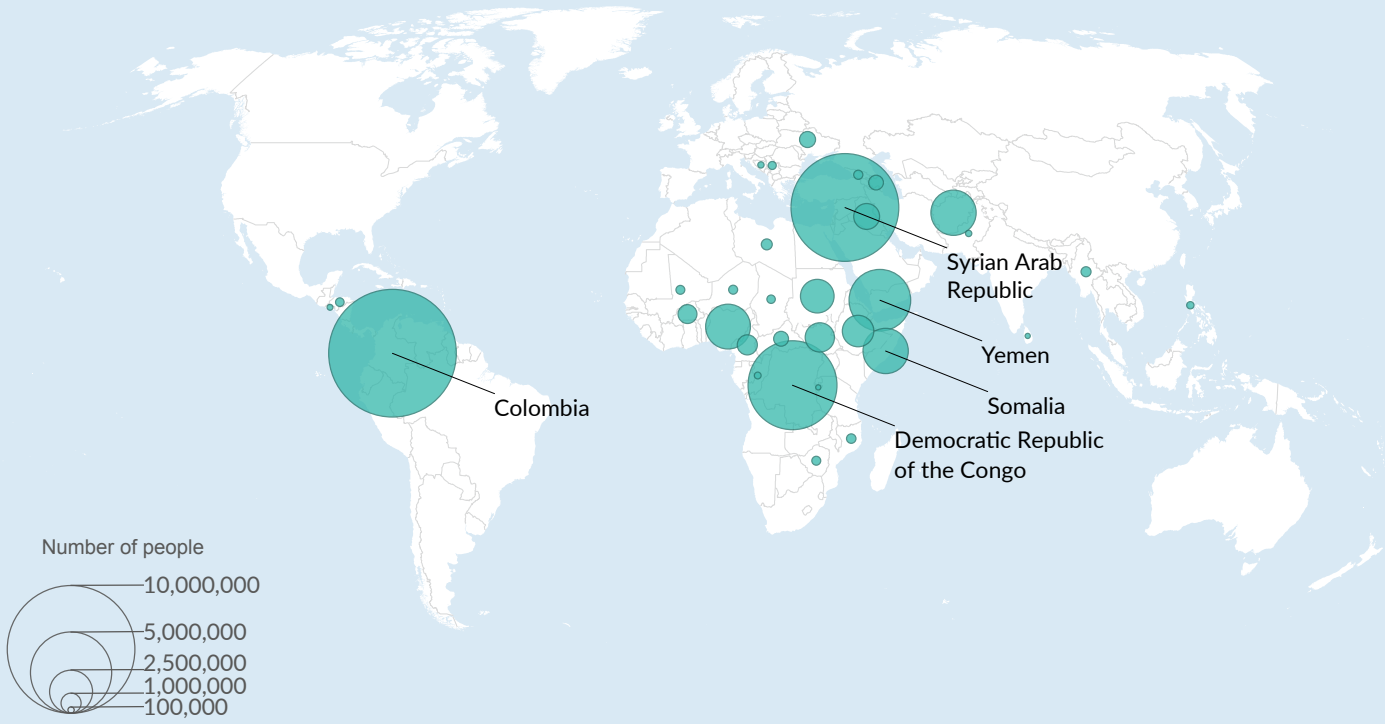
Figure 5 | **IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR | mid-2020 (in millions)**




**34** See: www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/en

Syria has the second-largest number of IDPs (6.7 million), followed by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5.5 million). Other countries with large IDP populations include Yemen (3.7 million), Somalia, Afghanistan and Nigeria (all three between 2.6 and 2.7 IDPs each) – see also map 2.

Map 2 | **IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR** | mid-2020




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

## Returns

IDP returns were reported by 15 countries in the first half of 2020, totalling 635,000. This compares to 2.3 million IDP returnees in the same period during 2019 (a drop of 72 per cent). This is the lowest number of IDP returns recorded in many years. Two-thirds of all IDP returns took place in three countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo (180,000), Iraq (122,000) and South Sudan (107,000).

**BURKINA FASO.** *Malian refugee students at school in Goudoubo camp. Because of rising insecurity in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso, where the camp is located, teachers were not able to come for class, while students taught each other lessons, even without teachers, books or chalk. Following attacks and ultimatums by armed groups, the camp has been effectively empty since April 2020, as refugees fled to seek safety elsewhere.*
© UNHCR/SYLVAIN CHERKAOUI

EXPLORE THE DATA
+ By origin
+ By asylum
+ Asylum applications
+ Asylum decisions

CHAPTER 5

# New Displacements in the Sahel Region

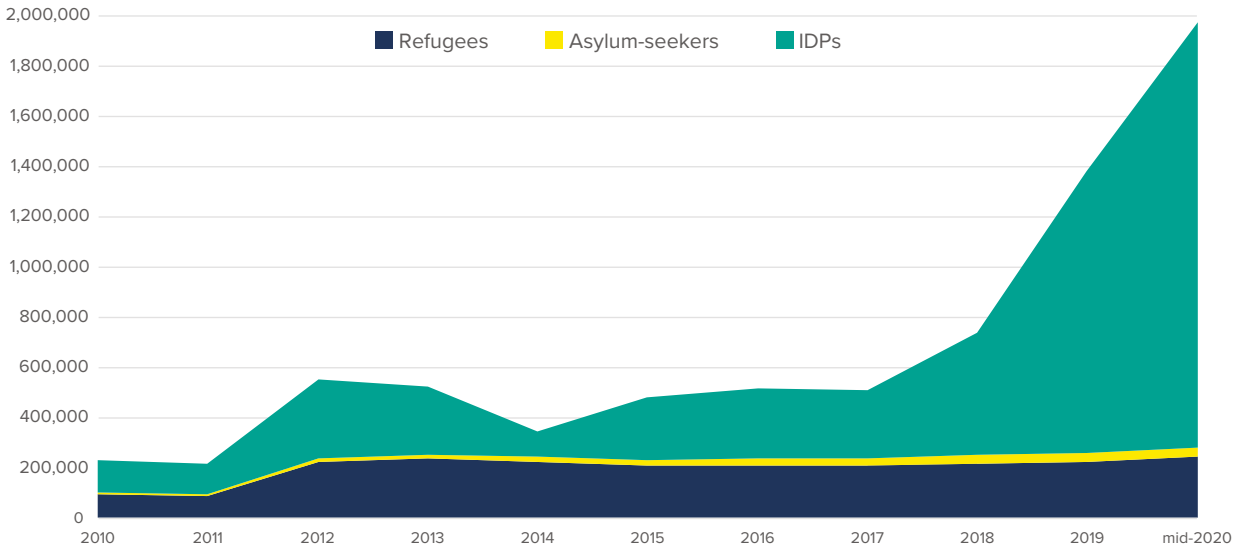
The Sahel region[35] in Africa continues to face a severe humanitarian crisis. Widespread and indiscriminate violence by armed groups has intensified since the beginning of 2020, while social and political tensions are rising, forcing more people to flee their homes, intensifying pressure on the already limited natural resources and social services in the new hosting areas. This is compounded by the pandemic and the climate emergency with major flooding having affected the region earlier this year. This volatile context allowed armed groups to expand their range of operations southwards with a growing impact on coastal countries.[36]

At mid-year, a total of 2 million people were forcibly displaced across the region, a 43 per cent increase since end-2019. Nearly one-fifth of all newly displaced IDPs (574,600 or 20 per cent) and a tenth of all refugees globally granted international protection on a group basis (21,700) in the first half of 2020 were from one of the five countries in the Sahel region.

In addition to the dire security situation, the Sahel is one of the regions at greatest risk of facing the adverse effects of climate change. Temperatures there are projected to rise by 3 degrees Celsius by 2050, double the projected global average increase of 1.5 degrees Celsius. Already the region is seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of floods, droughts and other climate-related hazards. Climate change and the related extreme weather events have contributed to the degradation of some 80 per cent of the Sahel's farmland, fuelling competition for land and inter-communal tensions systematically exploited by insurgent groups.[37]

35 The Sahel region covers Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.
36 See data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/77069
37 Ibid.

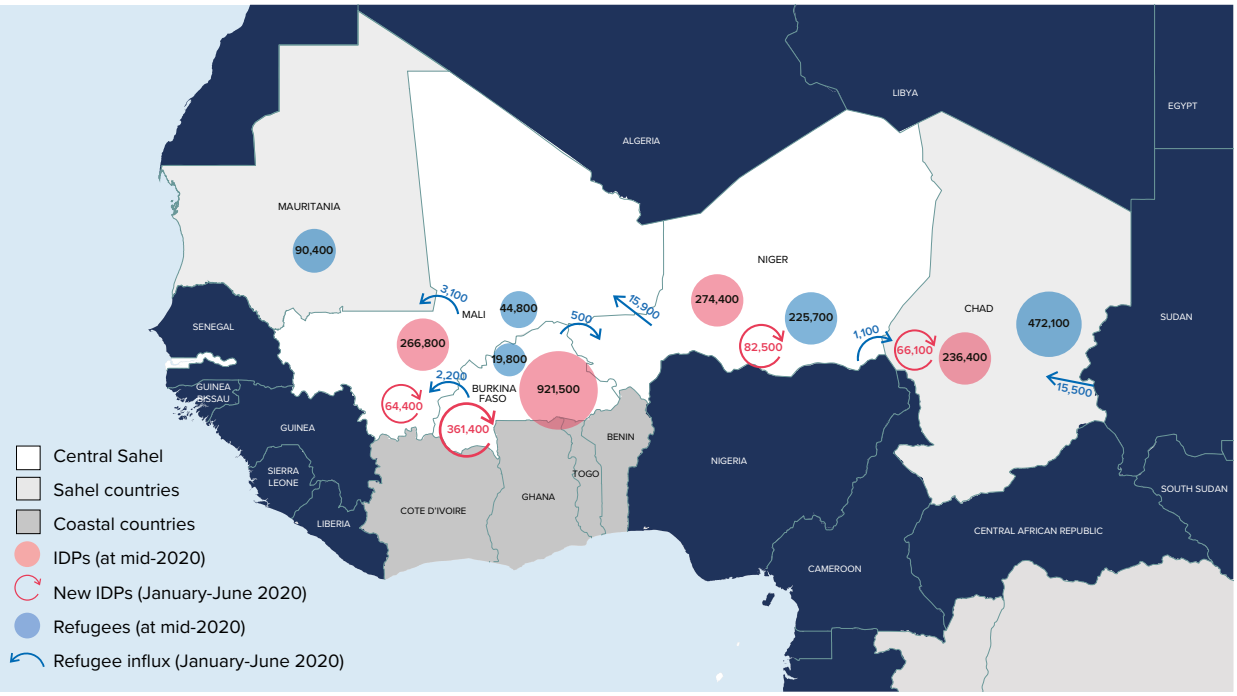
Figure 6 | **Forcibly displaced persons from the Sahel region** | 2010 to mid-2020




Since an initial outbreak of armed conflict in northern Mali in 2011, fighting has spread to central Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. As living conditions further degrade and livelihoods disappear, more people are likely to be displaced within the region and possibly southward to coastal countries such as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo or northward to North Africa and Europe.

The recent statistics show a sharp increase in forced displacement within and from each of these five countries. The total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs from these countries rose from 742,000 in 2018 to 1.4 million in 2019 and reached almost two million by mid-2020. Internal displacement accounts for the largest proportion of new displacement, with IDP numbers in the Sahel growing from 489,000 in 2018 to 1.1 million in 2019. Displacement increased by a further 50 per cent in the first half of this year to reach 1.7 million by mid-2020. Similarly, the number of refugees originating from countries in the Sahel rose 8 per cent in the first six months of 2020, up from 228,000 at end-2019.

Map 3 | **Forcibly displaced persons in/from the Sahel region and neighbouring countries** | mid-2020



In the first six months of 2020, 6,000 new applications for asylum were lodged by nationals of the five countries across the Sahel region and 23,500 people were granted international protection (1,800 individually and 21,700 on a group-basis).

While the number of asylum-seekers hosted by these five countries dropped from 44,200 at end-2019 to 10,200 at mid-2020, some 82,600 refugees were recognized on a group-basis during the same period. Of these, 61,000 were due to new influxes from deteriorating situations in neighbouring countries – namely northern Nigeria (45,500, recognized predominately in Niger[38]) and the Darfur region in Sudan (15,500, all recognized in Chad[39]). Within the region, the largest number of newly recognized refugees were 16,000 Nigeriens in Mali.

Most of the forced displacement in the Sahel region took place internally within countries, rather than across national borders. More than half a million people (574,600) were displaced internally within their own country in the first half of 2020, almost two-thirds in Burkina Faso (361,400), followed by 82,500 in Niger.

## IMPROVING DATA AND STATISTICAL MODELLING IN THE REGION

A predictive analytics exercise for the Sahel region was launched in February 2020 under UNHCR's leadership, supported by the United Nations High-Level Committee on Programmes. This exercise aims to better understand the interconnectedness of displacement, climate risks, food insecurity, increased violence and threats to livelihoods in the Sahel region. The project seeks to curate relevant high-quality datasets and to apply data science techniques to identify the likelihood of future outcomes in the region based on historical data. Multi-functional teams of researchers will provide guidance on the appropriate models to apply (e.g. meteorological models), and initial results of the project are expected in mid-2021.[40]

**BURKINA FASO.** *Displaced women and children from the Sawadoga family stand in front of everything they could carry with them from home. They arrived in Kaya, a town 150 kilometres south, the night before, exhausted and showing signs of trauma. Three days prior, they had been forced to flee their home in Bokoum, after armed men attacked their home, killing two men in front of their families. More than 600,000 Burkinabe have been forced to flee indiscriminate attacks by armed groups against civilians, which have included executions, widespread gender-based violence and destruction of civilian infrastructures, particularly schools.*
© UNHCR/SYLVAIN CHERKAOUI

38 See data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/79535
39 See data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/78962
40 See unsceb.org/content/report-38th-session-10-11-october-2019-turin

**BELGIUM.** *During the COVID-19 lockdown, Cameroonian musician and asylum-seeker Tabero wrote a song about the pandemic – which he describes as a falling star descending on us – and the compassion he has for those affected, as well as his love for frontline health workers.*
© CROIX ROUGE/G.WATTEEUW

EXPLORE THE DATA

+ Asylum applications

+ Asylum decisions

+ Pending asylum applications at mid-2020

CHAPTER 6

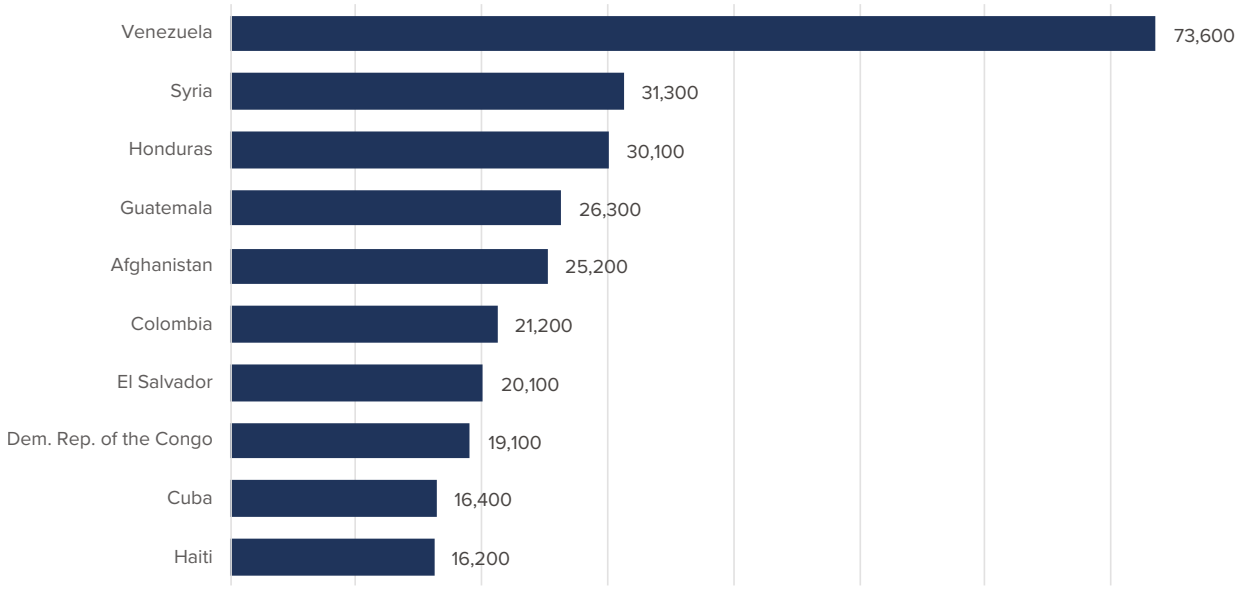
# Asylum Trends

During the first half of 2020, an estimated 580,000 new individual applications for asylum were lodged globally with States or UNHCR, 33 per cent fewer than the same period in 2019. At the same time, the number of individuals receiving refugee or complementary forms of protection status through prima facie or group-based mechanisms fell from 239,800 in the first half of 2019 to 187,900 in the first half of 2020, a drop of 22 per cent. These twin decreases highlight the toll that COVID-19 – and the absence of adaptive admission, reception and other protection systems – has had on people with international protection needs globally.

The United States of America received the highest number of new individual asylum applications in the first half of 2020 (155,100).[41] Similar to previous years, applicants from the north of Central America made up almost half of these new applications, reflecting growing insecurity in parts of the region (Guatemalans: 24,700, Hondurans: 20,200 and Salvadorans: 14,800). Asylum claims from Venezuelans in the United States of America also remained high (16,300). Germany (49,000), Spain (44,600), France (38,500) and Greece (24,100) received the highest number of new individual asylum claims after the United States of America. While asylum claims in Germany were mainly from Syrians, Iraqis and Afghans, those in Spain were overwhelmingly lodged by Latin Americans, principally Venezuelans and Colombians. Globally, Venezuelans lodged the most individual claims (73,600), as a result of the situation in their country, followed by Syrians (31,300), Hondurans (30,100), Guatemalans (26,300) and Afghans (25,200), as shown in figure 7.

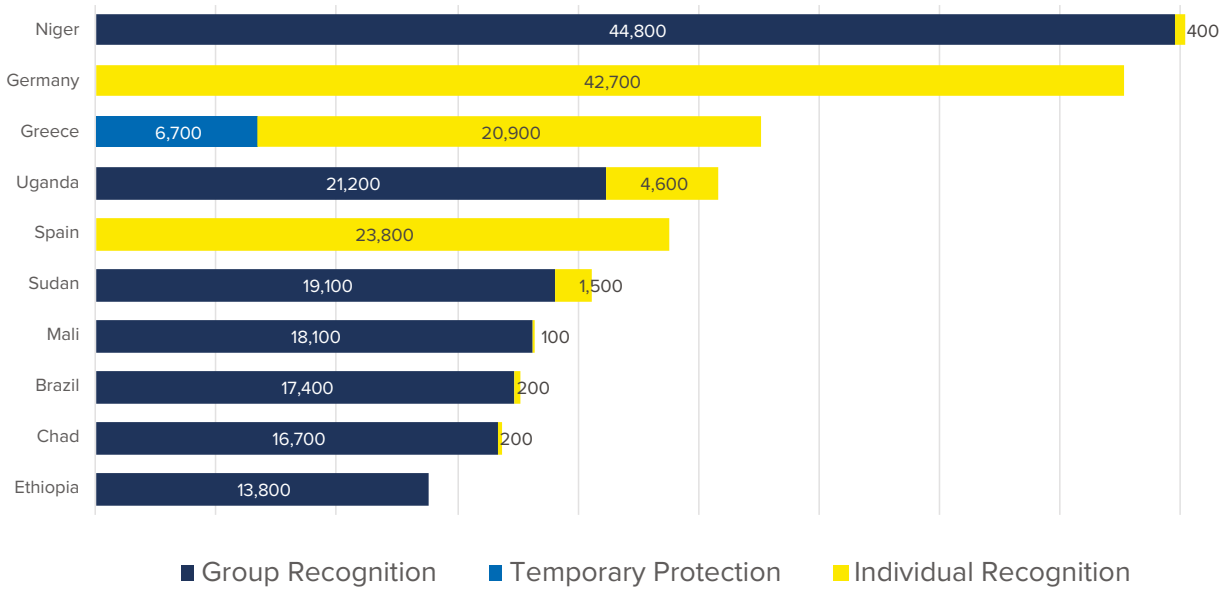
41 Estimated number of individuals based on the number of new affirmative asylum cases (53,200) and multiplied by 1.49 to reflect the average number of individuals per case (Source: US Department of Homeland Security) and the number of defensive asylum applications (75,900 individuals) (Source: US Department of Justice).

Figure 7 | **Major source countries of new asylum applications** | January-June 2020




During the same period, several countries continued to receive and/or recognize large numbers of refugees through group or individual procedures. Notably, Niger recognized 44,800 on a group basis (mainly Nigerians), followed by Uganda (21,200), Sudan (19,100), Mali (18,100) and Brazil (17,400).

Figure 8 | **Type of recognition by country of asylum** | January-June 2020



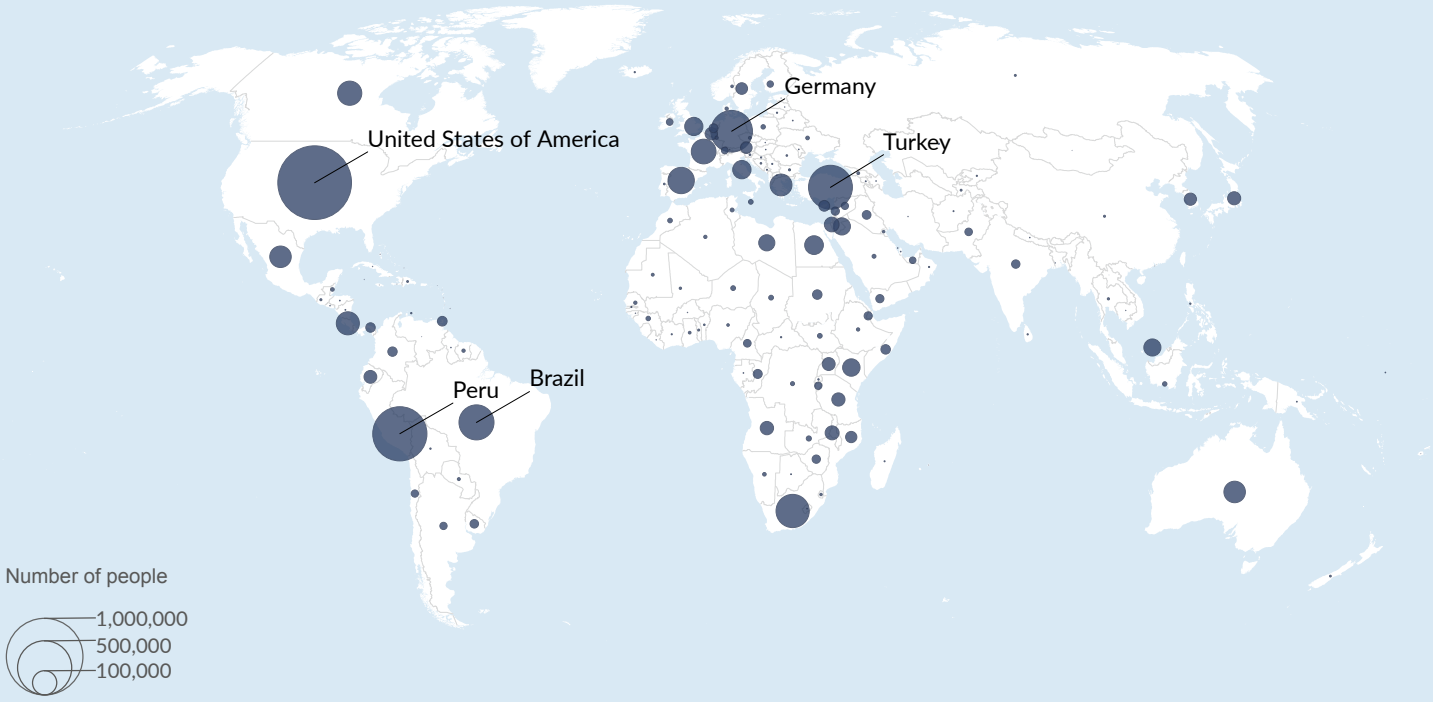

In the first half of 2020, some 551,500 decisions were taken by States and/or UNHCR. The global protection rate remained relatively stable at around 44 per cent. The German authorities granted the highest number of positive asylum decisions on an

individual basis during the reporting period (42,700) (see figure 8).

Adaptability is one key to a robust asylum system. After total or partial closures of their national systems during the first months of the pandemic, several States adapted their asylum procedures to the context of COVID-19. In addition to reopening borders to asylum-seekers (with appropriate health safeguards in place), some States focused on finalizing asylum assessments, taking decisions on claims and implementing remote procedures. As a result, in some national systems, such as Costa Rica, Mexico, Spain and the Republic of Korea, as well as in some countries where UNHCR conducts refugee status determination under its mandate, such as Jordan, the total number of decisions issued actually increased from the comparable period in 2019.

By the end of June 2020, despite the substantial drop in new asylum claims, the global backlog of pending individual applications remained at close to 4.2 million, virtually at par with six months earlier. Further introducing, developing and strengthening adaptive measures both for access to territory and the asylum system will remain crucial in 2020 and beyond. To ensure that backlogs do not become overwhelming and protection space is preserved for those in need of it, introducing adequate backlog management processes while maintaining procedural fairness will be key moving forward. The use of accelerated and simplified border procedures can contribute to address effectively such backlogs.[42]

Map 4 | **Asylum-seekers (with pending cases)** | mid-2020




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

**42** See Fair and Fast: UNHCR Discussion Paper on Accelerated and Simplified Procedures in the European Union, July 2018.

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC.** *Central Africans returning home from Mole refugee camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo disembark from a boat on the shores of the Ubangi River in Bangui, where they will first be tested for COVID-19 symptoms by a team from the Ministry of Public Health and Population. The first ever voluntary repatriation programme began in late-2019 for around 172,000 people forcibly displaced by the conflict in the Central African Republic in 2013. Some 15,000 refugees have expressed their wish to return home.*

© UNHCR/STELLA FATIME

EXPLORE THE DATA

+ Refugee returns

+ Resettlement arrivals

+ Naturalisation

+ IDP returns

CHAPTER 7

# Finding Solutions

Finding durable solutions that enable displaced people to rebuild their lives and live in safety and dignity is at the core of UNHCR's work. Traditionally, the durable solutions include voluntary repatriation, resettlement to a third country and local integration. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the first half of the year saw a significant decline in the number of refugees who could access any of the durable solutions compared to the same period in previous years.

## Returns

Returning home in safety and dignity remains the preferred solution for the majority of the world's refugees. In the first six months of 2020, an estimated 102,600 refugees returned to their countries of origin, a 22 per cent decline from the 131,000 refugees who returned during the same period in 2019. Refugees returned to 25 countries of origin from 42 countries of asylum.

The 65,600 South Sudanese who returned to their country in the first half of 2020 accounted for about two-thirds of the global number of refugee returns. They returned mostly from Uganda (44,600), Sudan (9,000) and Ethiopia (6,400). Returns to South Sudan are difficult to verify as many were self-organized and access is often constrained in areas of returns.

Syria reported the second largest number of returns in the first half of the year (17,700), mainly from Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq and Jordan. This, however, represents a 57 per cent drop from an estimated 41,400 refugees who returned to Syria during the same period in 2019.

Some 6,500 Burundian refugees returned to their country of origin, mainly from the United Republic of Tanzania as well as Rwanda, and these constituted the third largest number of returns.

In addition to refugee returns, some 85,000 Venezuelans displaced abroad are reported to have returned to Venezuela in the first half of 2020. The return movements are elevated due to the economic hardship resulting from job losses and business closures in Latin America during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Resettlement

Resettlement continues to be a critical way to protect some of the most vulnerable refugees, who may face specific or urgent protection risks. It is a tangible way to demonstrate solidarity and responsibility-sharing as set out in the Global Compact on Refugees.

The goal envisaged in the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways,[43] which was launched in 2019, is to resettle some 70,000 refugees to 31 countries in 2020. Nevertheless, only 17,400 were resettled to third countries in the first half of 2020, according to government statistics, more than half of them with UNHCR assistance. This is just half the figure one year earlier.

The temporary hold on resettlement travel announced in March 2020, which was necessitated by disruptions and restrictions to international air travel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, delayed the departures of some 10,000 refugees to resettlement countries. This hold was eventually lifted in June. Throughout this period, UNHCR and its partners continued to process and counsel refugees and resettled scores of emergency and urgent cases.

With only a very limited number of refugees able to be resettled, the gap between the number of refugees in need of resettlement and the places made available by governments around the world is widening. Only one per cent of the more than 1.4 million refugees estimated to be in need of resettlement[44] departed in the first six months of 2020.

With 4,500 refugees resettled to the United States of America in the first half of 2020, the US was the most common destination country despite a 71 per cent drop compared to the same period 2019 (15,600). The 2020 figure is the lowest number of refugees the United States of America has resettled in many years.

The United States of America was followed by Canada, which resettled 4,400 refugees in the first six months of 2020, followed by Australia with 3,500. European countries resettled a total of 4,600 refugees in the first half of 2020 (27 per cent of the global total). Overall, the majority of resettled refugees were Syrians (5,500), Iraqis (2,600) and Congolese (DRC) (1,800).

## Local Integration

When resettlement or voluntary repatriation are not viable options, the provision of a legal status - including appropriate alternatives under domestic regulations on long-term residence - offers an opportunity for refugees to build a new life in the country of asylum.

During the first half of 2020, about 20,300 refugees from 140 countries of origin naturalized in 25 countries.[45] Of these, 10,200 were in Canada, followed by Guinea-Bissau (6,200) and the Netherlands (2,800). Given the lack of comprehensive data, these figures should be considered as indicative only.

Senegalese (6,200, all in Guinea-Bissau), Syrians (5,100) and Iraqis (1,200) accounted for more than 60 per cent of all reported refugees who naturalized during the reporting period.

**43** See The Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways, 2019.
**44** See UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2020.
**45** It should be noted that data on naturalization often does not distinguish between migrants and refugees in national statistical systems.

**BANGLADESH.** *Amir Khan (65), works at sewing clothes, under the light provided by solar panels, at night, in Camp 1 East, Kutupalong camp, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. An estimated 915,000 Rohingya live in refugee camps in the area of Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. More than half of them (nearly 55%) are children under the age of 18 years.*
© UNHCR/VINCENT TREMEAU

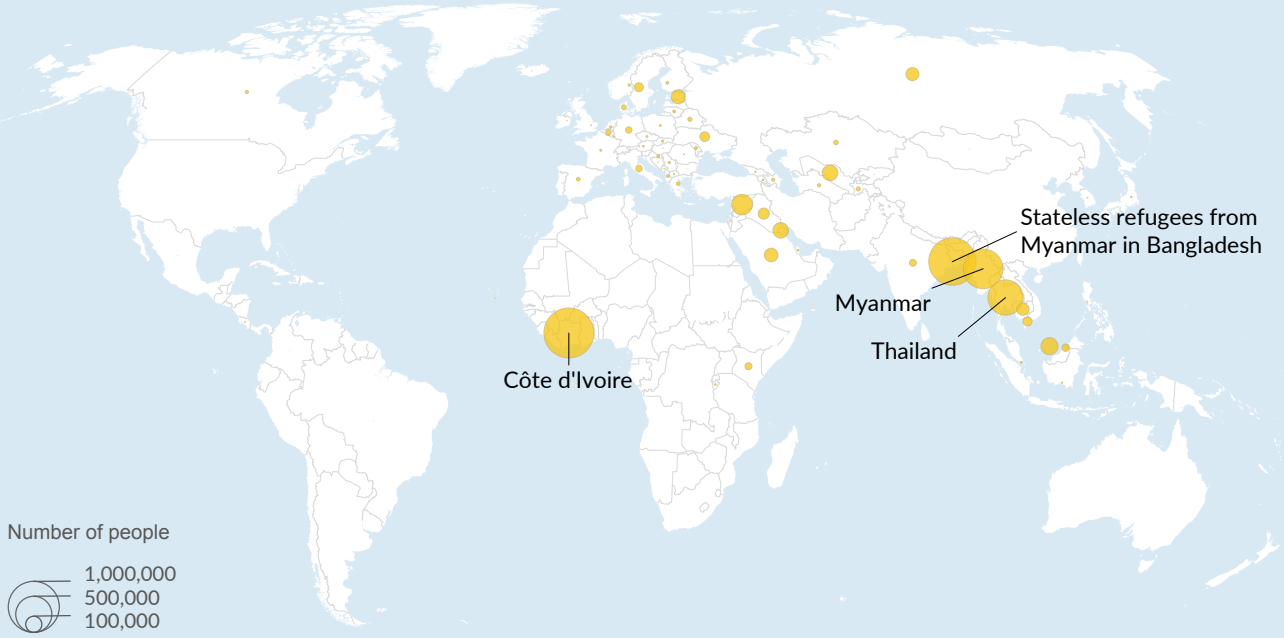
EXPLORE THE DATA

+ By asylum

CHAPTER 8

# Stateless people

The actual number of stateless people in the world remains unknown. Collecting data on stateless populations is a perennial challenge for governments and for UNHCR and its partners. Data is currently reported to UNHCR by 79 countries, with a total of 4.2 million stateless people at mid-2020, virtually unchanged from the reported figure at end-2019. Given that approximately half of all countries do not report any data on statelessness, and the fact that countries that do submit data may only partially include existing stateless populations, the global number of stateless people is likely to be much higher.




The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

UNHCR continues to advocate for improved data on statelessness in line with Action 10 of its Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024.[46] There is evidence of increased political will and interest by countries in improving data in this area. Of the 360 pledges delivered at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness organized by UNHCR in October 2019, more than 30 State pledges[47] related to improving data on statelessness, either through qualitative and quantitative studies or through inclusion of relevant questions concerning nationality and statelessness in national censuses. UNHCR is partnering with UNFPA on improved use of censuses in this regard and working through the World Bank-UNHCR Joint Data Centre on Forced Displacement on initiatives aimed to improve global data on statelessness.

Based on the latest data available, significant decreases in the number of stateless persons due to acquisition or confirmation of nationality took place during the reporting period in the Russian Federation, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In addition, Colombia granted nationality by birth to 7,687 children born in Colombia of Venezuelan parents displaced abroad bringing the total to over 47,000 children who have benefited from this initiative since August 2019. The largest stateless populations at mid-2020 were reported in Côte d'Ivoire, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand. During the first six months of 2020, there was a slight increase, from 76 to 79, in the number of countries reporting on stateless persons as new data became available in States hosting displaced stateless Rohingya populations.

**46** See www.unhcr.org/54621bf49.html
**47** See www.refworld.org/docid/5ec3e91b4.html, page 41.

## Who Is Included In UNHCR Statistics?

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

## Annex tables 1 and 2

**Download from the UNHCR website at:**
https://www.unhcr.org/statistics/2020MYTannex.zip
All data are provisional and subject to change.
Data is available at: https://www.unhcr.org/refugee-statistics

# MID-YEAR TRENDS 2020

**PRODUCED AND PRINTED BY UNHCR**

**FRONT COVER:**
**KENYA.** *South Sudanese refugees practice social distancing during the COVID-19 pandemic as they await the distribution of food at Kakuma refugee camp.*
© UNHCR/SAMUEL OTIENO

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

© **2020 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**
All rights reserved. Reproductions and translations are authorized, provided UNHCR is acknowledged as the source.

Statistics and Demographics Section
UNHCR Global Data Service
UN City, Marmorvej 51
2100 Copenhagen, Denmark
stats@unhcr.org

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