



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

MID-YEAR TRENDS | 2021



Trends at a Glance

FORCIBLY DISPLACED WORLDWIDE MID-2021

26.6 million refugees¹

20.8 million refugees under UNHCR's mandate
5.7 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate

4.4 million asylum-seekers

3.9 million Venezuelans displaced abroad²

48.0 million internally displaced people³ end-2020

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES HOSTED

85%

Developing countries hosted 85 per cent of the world's refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad. The Least Developed Countries provided asylum to 27 per cent of the total.

73%

LIVED IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

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

5.7 MILLION VENEZUELAN REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

This figure includes Venezuelan refugees, migrants and asylum-seekers reported through the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela.⁴

555,400 NEW ASYLUM CLAIMS

Asylum-seekers submitted 555,400 new claims. The United States of America was the world's largest recipient of new individual applications (72,900), followed by Germany (58,900), Mexico (51,700), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (46,200) and France (36,500).

3.7 MILLION REFUGEES HOSTED IN TURKEY

Turkey hosted 3.7 million refugees, the largest population worldwide. Colombia was second with more than 1.7 million, including Venezuelans displaced abroad, followed by Uganda (1.5 million), Pakistan (1.4 million) and Germany (1.2 million).

Turkey 3.7 million

Colombia 1.7 million

Uganda 1.5 million

Pakistan 1.4 million

Germany 1.2 million

16,300 REFUGEES WERE RESETTLED

16,300 refugees were resettled in the first six months of 2021, a further decrease from the 17,400 and 28,700 in the same periods of 2020 and 2019 respectively, according to government statistics.

1.1 MILLION DISPLACED PEOPLE RETURNED

1.1 million displaced people returned to their areas or countries of origin in the first half of 2021, including 936,400 internally displaced people and 126,700 refugees.

1 IN 6 ARE DISPLACED

Relative to their national populations,⁵ the island of Aruba hosted the largest number of Venezuelans displaced abroad (1 in 6) while Lebanon hosted the largest number of refugees (1 in 8),⁶ followed by Curaçao (1 in 10), Jordan (1 in 14) and Turkey (1 in 23).⁷

Aruba 1 in 6

Lebanon 1 in 8

Curaçao 1 in 10

Jordan 1 in 14

Turkey 1 in 23

68%

ORIGINATED FROM JUST FIVE COUNTRIES

More than two thirds (68 per cent) of all refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad⁸ came from just five countries:

Syrian Arab Republic 6.8 million

Venezuela 4.1 million

Afghanistan 2.6 million

South Sudan 2.3 million

Myanmar 1.1 million

¹ The numbers contained in this report are rounded to millions, thousands or hundreds depending on the context and the rounded numbers may not sum to the correct absolute figure.

² This number excludes Venezuelan asylum-seekers and refugees.

³ Source: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre.

⁴ See the [Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela R4V](#).

⁵ Limited to countries hosting at least 10,000 people. Excludes Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

⁶ When the 481,000 Palestinian refugees registered with UNRWA living in Lebanon are included, this proportion increases to one in five.

⁷ In addition, Lebanon hosted 481,000 and Jordan 2.3 million Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

⁸ This is the number of Venezuelan refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

For nine consecutive years, persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing public order have fuelled an increase in the number of forcibly displaced people worldwide, a figure that stood at 82.4 million at the end of 2020. This worrisome trend has continued well into 2021. Six months into the year, the number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate had surpassed 20.8 million (an increase of 172,000), while the number of asylum-seekers had climbed to 4.4 million (an increase of 237,000). Although comparable figures for internal displacement are not yet available, based on the information at hand UNHCR estimates that global forced displacement likely exceeded 84 million by mid-2021.⁹

In the first half of 2021, many countries around the world slowly returned to some sense of normality after the tumultuous COVID-19-related events of the previous year. The transition by governments from attempting to contain the spread of COVID-19 to living with it was made possible primarily by the rollout of vaccination programmes. With “the global vaccination campaign representing the greatest moral test of our times”, as noted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres,¹⁰ it is encouraging that almost all countries have included refugees, asylum-seekers and others in need of international protection in their national COVID-19 vaccination plans.¹¹ Nevertheless, a substantial vaccine equity gap exists between wealthier and low resource countries. For every 100 people in high-income countries, 133 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered, while in

⁹ A complete overview of global forced displacement in 2021 will be presented in UNHCR's Global Trends report, to be released in June 2022.

¹⁰ See the [11 March statement](#) by the UN Secretary-General on the COVID-19 pandemic

¹¹ 99 per cent of the 160 countries that responded reported including refugees and/or others of concern in their national COVID-19 vaccination plans. See the [Multi-sectoral monitoring summary](#).

low-income countries, only 4 doses per 100 people have been administered.¹² Resources are therefore still needed for immunization-related activities and to ensure last mile vaccine delivery.

International protection and access to asylum continue to be life saving for many, and by mid-2021, asylum-seekers were able to access 117 countries, up from 108 at the start of the year and just 84 in mid-2020.¹³ Most of the countries that remained closed in mid-2021 had at least introduced some adaptive elements, albeit to varying degrees, rather than keep their asylum systems completely closed. However, health-related border and travel restrictions remained in effect in many locations, as States experienced their second or third waves of COVID-19 and continued to limit access to asylum.

Consequently, there were 555,400 new individual asylum applications in the first half of 2021, a slight increase compared to the same period in the previous year, but still well below pre-pandemic levels in 2019. The number of new refugee arrivals recognized on a group basis dropped to 144,700, 20 per cent lower than the comparable period in 2020, also suggesting that restrictions related to COVID-19 are still having a large impact on access to asylum and access to territory.

Durable solutions for forcibly displaced populations remained in short supply due to unresolved and escalating conflicts in many countries of origin, as well as the continuing restrictions on movement in

response to COVID-19 during the first six months of 2021. While the number of returnees did increase compared to the same period of 2020 (both refugees and internally displaced people - IDPs), it remained well below pre-COVID-19 levels during the same period of 2019. An estimated 936,000 IDPs were able to return to their places of habitual residence during the reporting period, compared to just 126,700 refugee returns. The number of refugees resettled to third countries, as reported by governments, dropped to just 16,300 in the first six months of 2021. Three-quarters of them were assisted by UNHCR to depart.

The number of active conflicts reached a record high in 2020, more than at any time since 1945, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and calls from the UN for a global ceasefire.¹⁴ In early 2021, consistent with 2020, most armed conflicts remained internal in their essence. Yet many of these situations have become increasingly internationalized, with interventions from a growing number of regional and global powers.

More than 4.3 million new internal displacements were recorded in the first six months of 2021 in the 33 countries where UNHCR is engaged in situations of internal displacement.¹⁵ This is a sharp increase from the same period of the previous year and higher than pre-COVID-19 levels. Intensifying violence led to significant new displacements in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Myanmar, South Sudan and countries in the Sahel region,¹⁶ among other locations.

¹² See [Open letter to G20 Heads of State and Government - UNHCR, IOM & WHO](#)

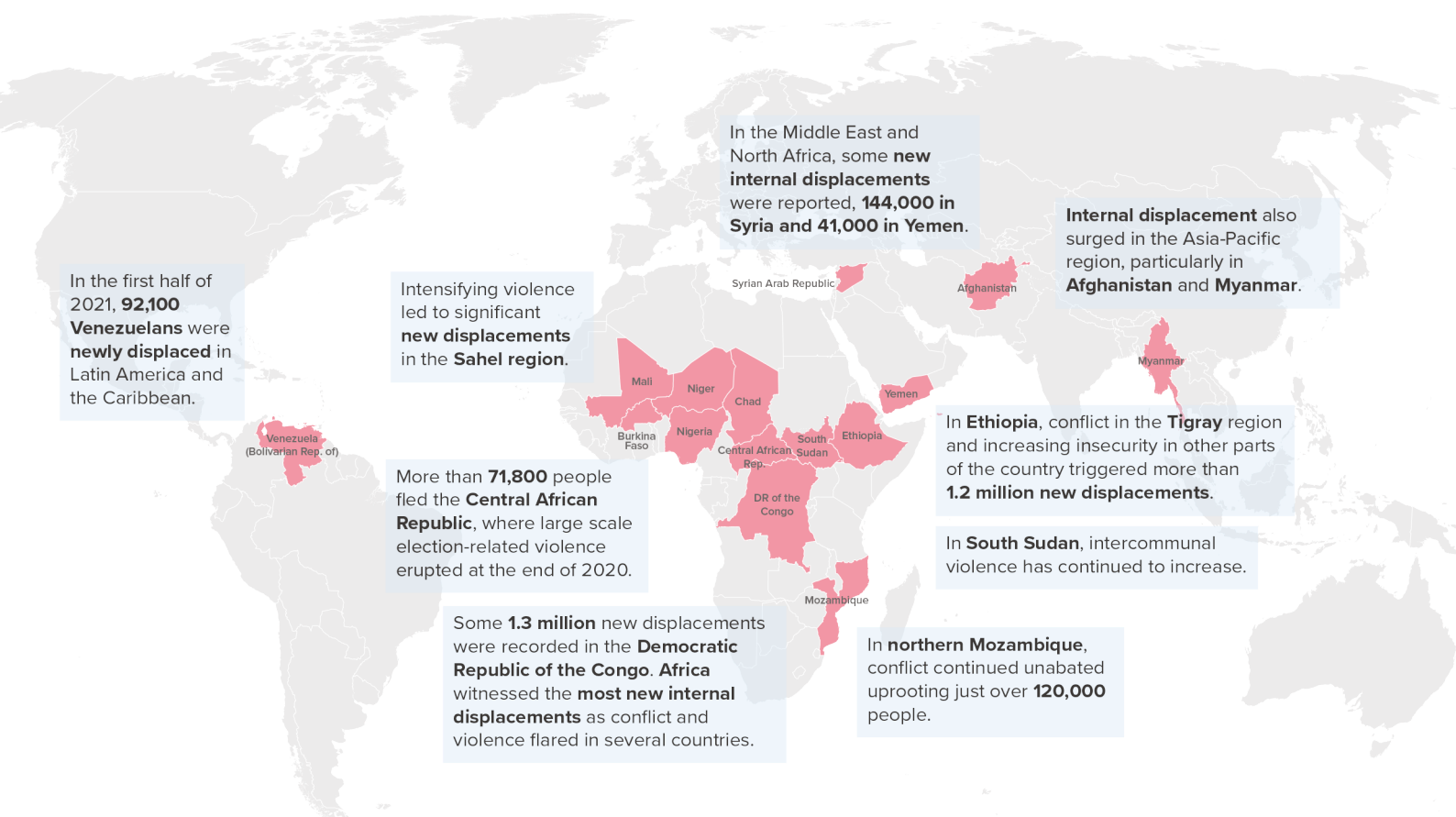
¹³ See [UNHCR's COVID-19 Protection Issues dashboard](#)

¹⁴ See [The Armed Conflict Survey 2021](#)

¹⁵ UNHCR protects or assists internally displaced people in 33 countries. The total new displacement is therefore likely to underestimate internal displacement globally.

¹⁶ Significant increases were recorded in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger.

Map 1 | New displacements | January-June 2021



Many people in countries facing increases in internal displacement in the first half of 2021 are struggling to feed their families.¹⁷ In these 18 countries, at least 1 in 9 inhabitants were already in crisis or worse (Phase 3 or above in the IPC acute food insecurity classification) at the end of 2020, with the food security forecast expected to deteriorate further by the end of 2021 in at least two-thirds of these countries. The most vulnerable in these societies, including internally displaced people, are often disproportionately affected. COVID-19 has exacerbated these existing food insecurities. Globally, it is estimated about 30 million more people may be facing hunger in 2030

than if the pandemic had not occurred, due primarily to greater inequality in access to food.¹⁸

This report provides a snapshot of displacement and solutions trends in the first half of 2021. The figures presented here were collected from governments and UNHCR offices around the world and supplemented, where needed, with data from non-governmental organizations. Unless otherwise specified, figures relate solely to events occurring up to 30 June 2021. The statistics included in this report should be considered provisional and subject to change.

¹⁷ See [2021 Global Report on Food Crises](#)

¹⁸ See [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2021](#)



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO. Following clashes between government forces and armed groups, this orphaned four-year-old was forced to flee the Central African Republic with his grandmother. Without any source of livelihood, and insufficient emergency assistance, the family can barely afford one meal a day. Hundreds of Central African refugee children have been detected with various forms of acute malnutrition.

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CHAPTER 2

Refugees

The number of refugees¹⁹ globally continued to increase during the first six months of 2021, reaching 20.8 million, 172,000 more than at the end of 2020. In addition, there were 3.9 million Venezuelans displaced abroad at mid-2021, an increase of 82,000 from end-2020. Unless otherwise stated, all references to “people displaced across borders” in this document refer to both of these populations.

New recognition of refugees

During the first six months of 2021, nearly 385,000 people were granted international protection either on an individual (240,200) or group (144,700) basis. This is broadly consistent with the same period in 2020 (398,500).

More than half of all new recognitions were from just five countries. More than 71,800 people fled the Central African Republic, where large scale election-related violence erupted at the end of 2020. Fighting between state forces and armed groups also continues, notably in the northwest of the country. In South Sudan, the 2018 peace agreement has resulted in reduced hostilities among the main conflicting parties, but intercommunal violence has continued to increase and is largely driven by competition over dwindling resources and recurring cattle theft.

As such, 61,700 people from South Sudan became refugees in the first half of 2021. Significant numbers of people from Syria (38,800), Afghanistan (25,200) and Nigeria (20,300) were newly recognized as refugees during the first six months of 2021.

In addition, in the same period there were 92,100 newly displaced Venezuelans in Latin America and the Caribbean. A further 16,100 Venezuelans were individually recognized.²⁰

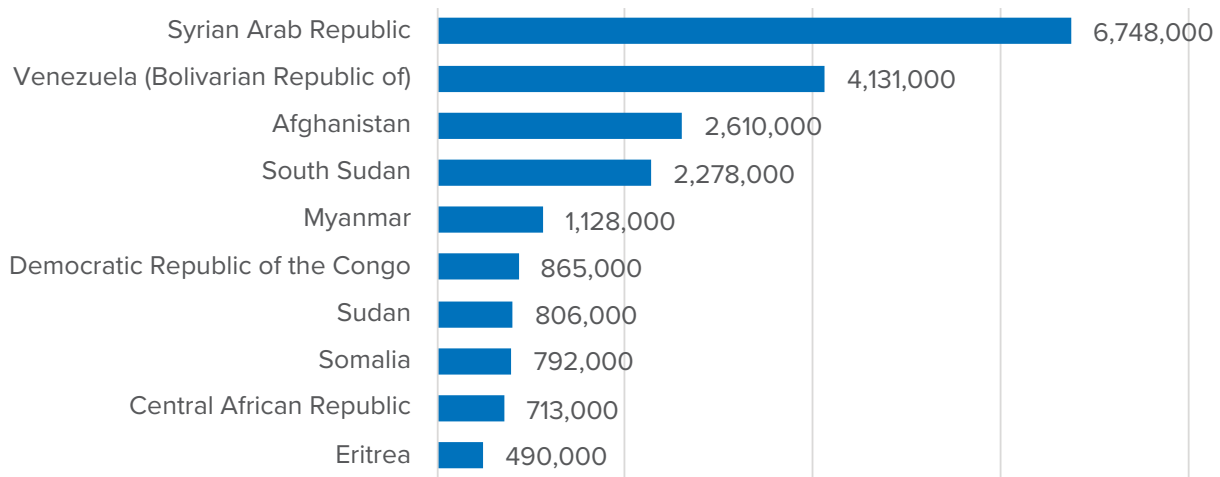
By country of origin

As in previous years, more than eight out of ten people displaced across borders (82 per cent) originated from just ten countries of origin, and these remained virtually unchanged since end-2020 (see Figure 1). More than a quarter of all people displaced were from Syria (27 per cent), which continues to account for the world’s largest refugee population. Nearly 6.8 million Syrian refugees were hosted by 129 countries. Turkey continued to host more than half of Syrian refugees (3.7 million). Other countries with large populations of Syrian refugees were Lebanon (851,700), Jordan (668,300), Germany (616,300) and Iraq (246,000).

¹⁹ Includes people in refugee-like situations.

²⁰ This includes in Spain, where some 8,600 Venezuelans were protected under a special humanitarian regime in the first half of 2021.

Figure 1 | **People displaced across borders by country of origin | mid-2021**



Venezuelans – with 186,800 refugees and a further 3.9 million Venezuelans displaced abroad – were the second largest group of people displaced across borders. They were seeking refuge in 62 countries globally, although more than 92 per cent of them remained in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Colombia (1.7 million), Peru (518,400), Chile (483,400) and Ecuador (447,100).

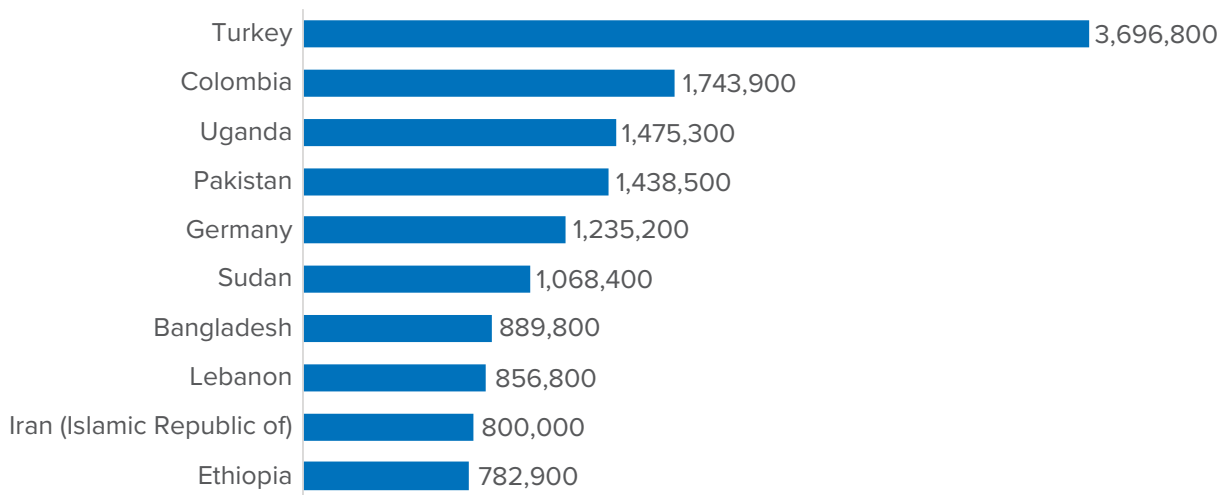
Mounting insecurity in Afghanistan during the first half of 2021 forced many Afghans to flee. More than 2.6 million Afghan refugees were living in 97 countries at mid-year, making Afghanistan the third largest country of origin for refugees. Some 85 per cent of Afghan refugees were hosted by neighbouring Pakistan (1.4 million) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (780,000). Germany hosted 152,700 Afghan refugees

at mid-year, which is about 6 per cent of the global Afghan refugee population.

By country of asylum

More than half of all people displaced across borders were hosted by just ten countries (see Figure 2), which have remained broadly consistent in recent years. Many of these countries hosted large groups of refugees from just one or two countries of origin. At mid-2021, Turkey hosted some 3.7 million Syrians, Colombia hosted 1.7 million Venezuelans, and Uganda hosted 923,500 South Sudanese and 429,500 Congolese refugees, while Pakistan hosted over 1.4 million Afghans. Germany provided asylum to 1.2 million refugees, including 616,300 Syrians, 152,700 Afghans and 147,400 Iraqis.

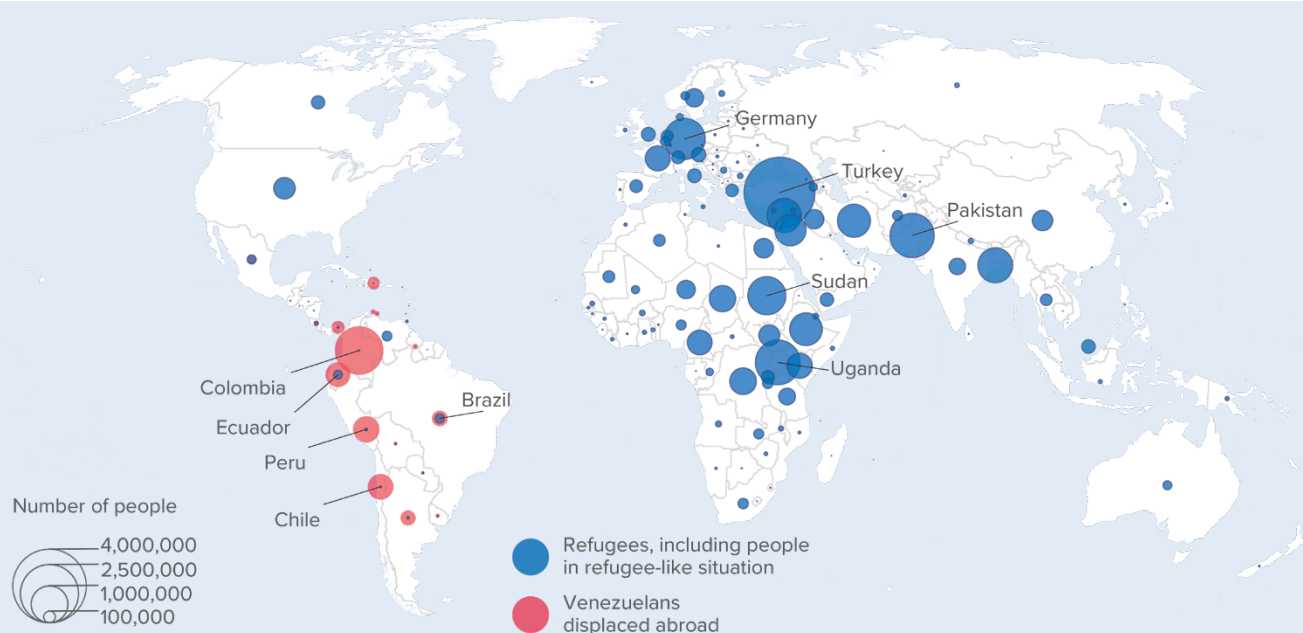
Figure 2 | **People displaced across borders by host country | mid-2021**



Key facts for countries hosting the world's refugees and Venezuelans displaced abroad | Mid-2021

73 per cent hosted by neighbouring countries	Most people fleeing conflict and persecution prefer to remain in close proximity to their country or region of origin. The statistical evidence shows that nearly three-quarters of people displaced across borders stay in neighbouring countries.
85 per cent are hosted by developing countries²¹	Developing countries continued to shoulder a disproportionately large responsibility for hosting displaced populations.
83 per cent are hosted by lower- and middle-income countries	According to World Bank classification, ²² high-income countries host just 17 per cent of people displaced across borders. Upper-middle income countries – including Turkey, Colombia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Lebanon and Jordan – hosted 43 per cent of people displaced across borders. A further 18 per cent were hosted by lower-middle-income countries and 22 per cent by low-income countries.
27 per cent are hosted by the Least Developed Countries²³	The Least Developed Countries – including Bangladesh, Chad, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen – were home to 14 per cent of the world's population. Accounting for just 1.3 per cent of the global Gross Domestic Product, ²⁴ they had the least amount of resources available to meet the needs of those seeking refuge. Yet together they hosted 6.8 million refugees.

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



A country is named if it features among the five largest per population group.

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

²¹ See [UN Statistical Division's Standard country or area codes for statistical use \(M49\)](#) for a list of countries included under each region.

²² See [World Bank Country and Lending Groups](#)

²³ See [UN Statistical Division's Standard country or area codes for statistical use \(M49\)](#) for a list of Least Developed Countries.

²⁴ Source [World Bank GDP data](#)

ETHIOPIA. *Internally displaced women and children gather in the Afar region in Ethiopia. Thousands of civilians have been killed, injured or subjected to gender-based violence as a result of the conflict in the Tigray region. The vast majority of those internally displaced within the country are women and children.*

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CHAPTER 3

Internally Displaced People

In the first half of 2021, millions more people were forced to flee their homes due to armed conflicts, generalized violence or human rights violations. Many of them faced additional challenges due to COVID-19, disasters, extreme weather and other effects of climate change. UNHCR continues to respond to situations of internal displacement in 33 countries, and by mid-2021 the number of internally displaced

people (IDPs) due to conflict and violence had risen to nearly 50.9 million (see Figure 3), almost 5 per cent more than the 48.6 million reported at the end of 2020. More than 4.3 million new displacements were reported by 18 countries (see Figure 4), 50 per cent more than the estimated 2.9 million people displaced during the same period in the previous year.

Figure 3 | **Countries with the largest number of new internal displacements | January–June 2021**

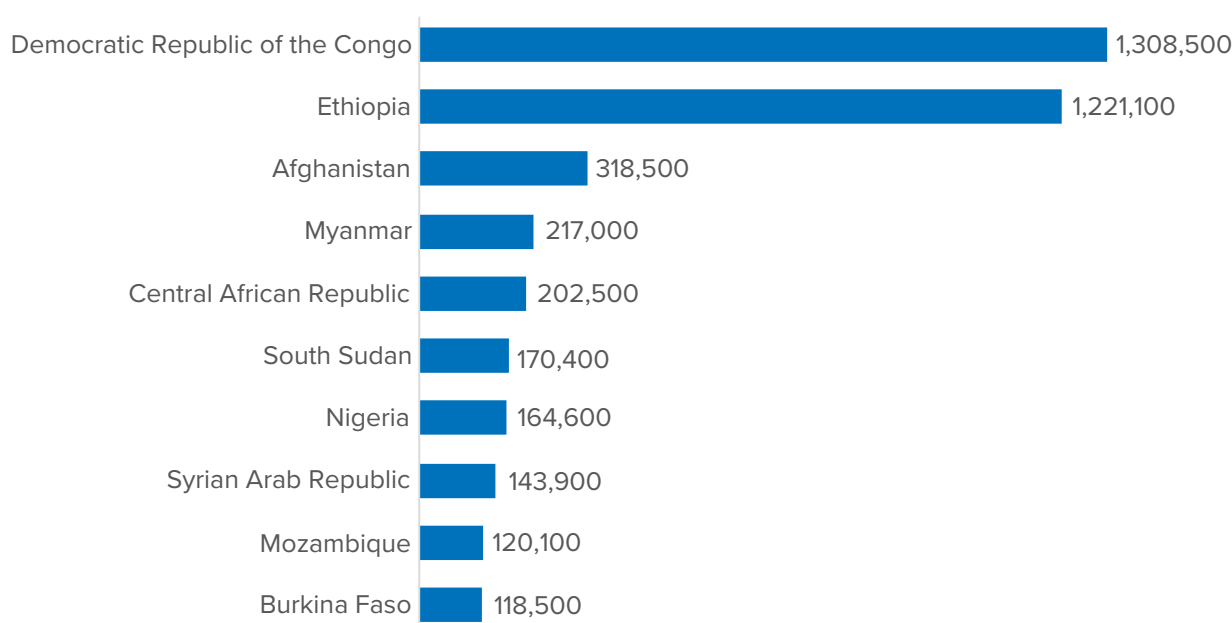
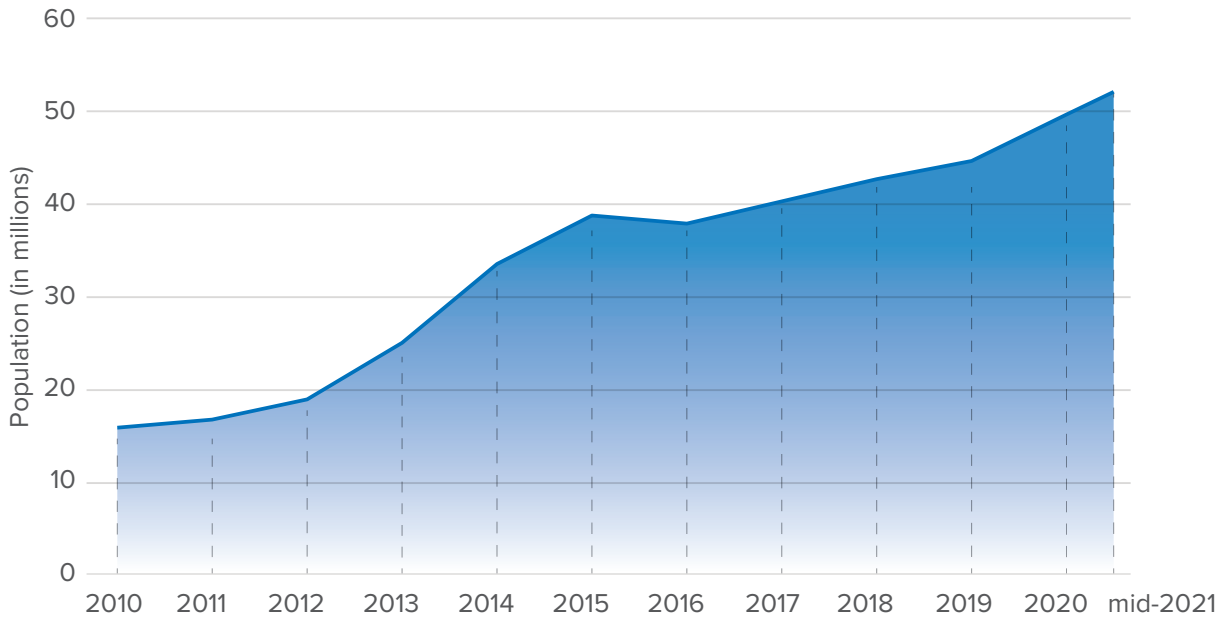


Figure 4 | IDPs of concern to UNHCR | 2010 – mid-2021



Consistent with 2020, Africa witnessed the most new internal displacements as conflict and violence flared in several countries across the continent. Some 1.3 million new displacements were recorded in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In Ethiopia, conflict in the Tigray region and increasing insecurity in other parts of the country triggered more than 1.2 million new displacements. In Mozambique’s northern province of Cabo Delgado, conflict continued unabated, uprooting just over 120,000 people, with a significant escalation of violence in Palma town in late March. A crisis of governance and instability in rural areas of Burkina Faso linked to the presence of armed insurgents has impacted the protection of civilians, further fuelling the fastest growing internal displacement crisis, with almost 120,000 new displacements in the first six months of 2021. In addition, large new displacements occurred in the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Nigeria (202,000, 170,000 and 165,000 respectively).²⁵

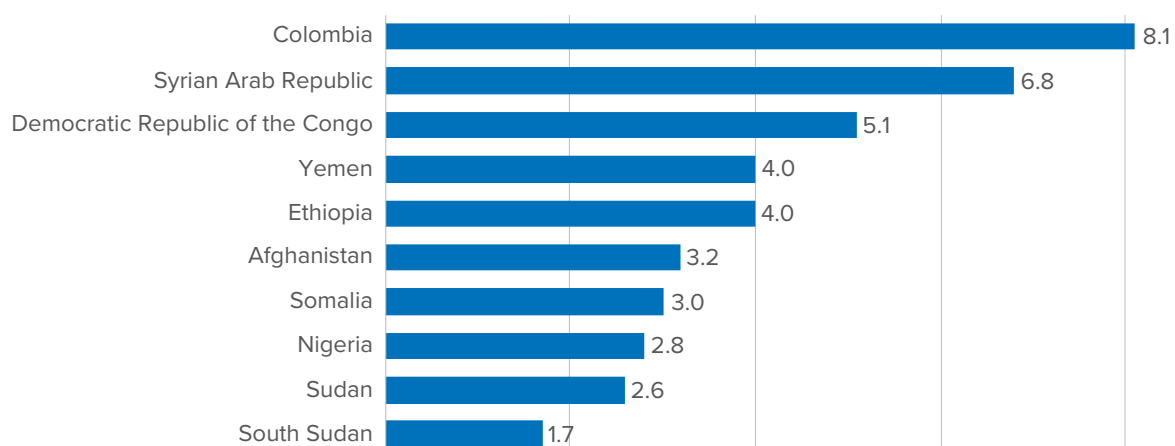
Internal displacement also surged in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in Afghanistan and Myanmar. In February, the military coup in Myanmar ignited widespread violence, bringing the total number of internally displaced people to an estimated 567,000, 54 per cent higher than the 370,000 at the end of 2020. In May, as drawdowns of foreign forces in Afghanistan continued, the Taliban launched a major offensive in nearly all provinces in the country, sparking a sharp increase in new internal displacements.

In the Middle East and North Africa, some 144,000 new internal displacements were reported in Syria. In Yemen, 41,000 new displacements occurred, with April’s heavy rains and flooding in several parts of the country affecting some 7,000 people, 75 per cent of whom were IDPs living in sub-standard conditions.²⁶

²⁵ See the refugee chapter on page 5 for background on the new displacements in the Central African Republic and South Sudan. In Nigeria, new displacements were primarily due to the fragile security situation in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (the BAY States).

²⁶ OCHA Yemen (2021). [Humanitarian Update, Issue 5](#)

Figure 5 | IDPs protected/assisted by UNHCR | mid-2021 (in millions)

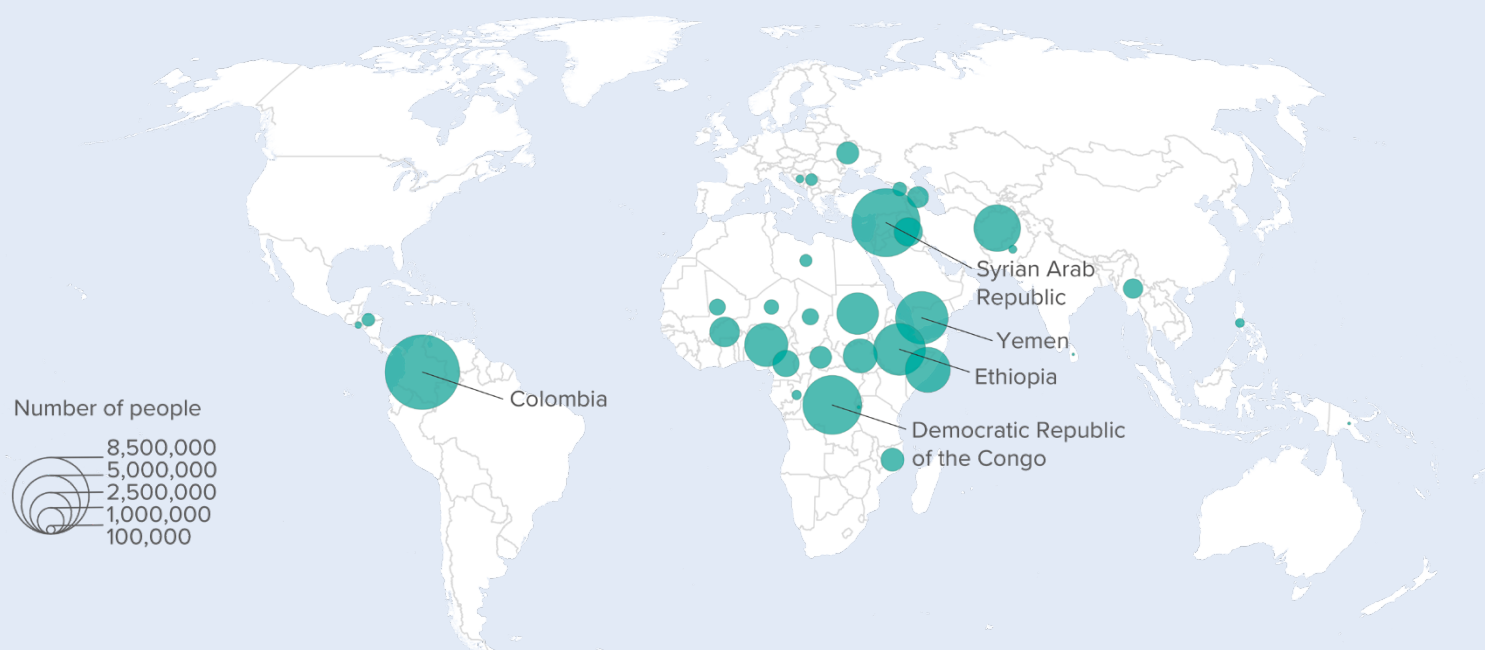


Path to solutions

In the first six months of 2021, an estimated 936,000 IDP returnees were reported in 13 countries, a 48 per cent increase compared to the same period in 2020, although well below pre-COVID-19 levels. More than 40 per cent of these returns, some 395,000, were reported in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with many people returning home soon after the volcanic eruption in North Kivu in May. Large numbers of returns were also reported in the Central African Republic (168,000) and the Philippines (132,000).

Pursuing voluntary, safe and dignified solutions for millions of IDPs remains a critical priority for UNHCR. This includes supporting law and policy making processes that reduce needs due to displacement and help IDPs enjoy their rights without discrimination. In Somalia, UNHCR supported the development of a national durable solutions strategy, representing an important milestone in finding solutions for many IDPs experiencing protracted displacement in the country. In Mozambique, in collaboration with partners, UNHCR supported the government in developing a Policy and Strategy on Displacement Management that addresses all causes and all phases of displacement, from prevention through to durable solutions.

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



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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA. *An asylum-seeker has planted corn, onions and gherkins, and is raising poultry and keeping bees at his home in a village near Bihac. He arrived in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018 after fleeing the Islamic Republic of Iran with his young son. Drawing on his knowledge as an agronomist, he hopes to establish a thriving business that will provide employment for local people.*

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[+ Asylum applications](#)
[+ Asylum decisions](#)
[+ Pending asylum applications at mid-2021](#)

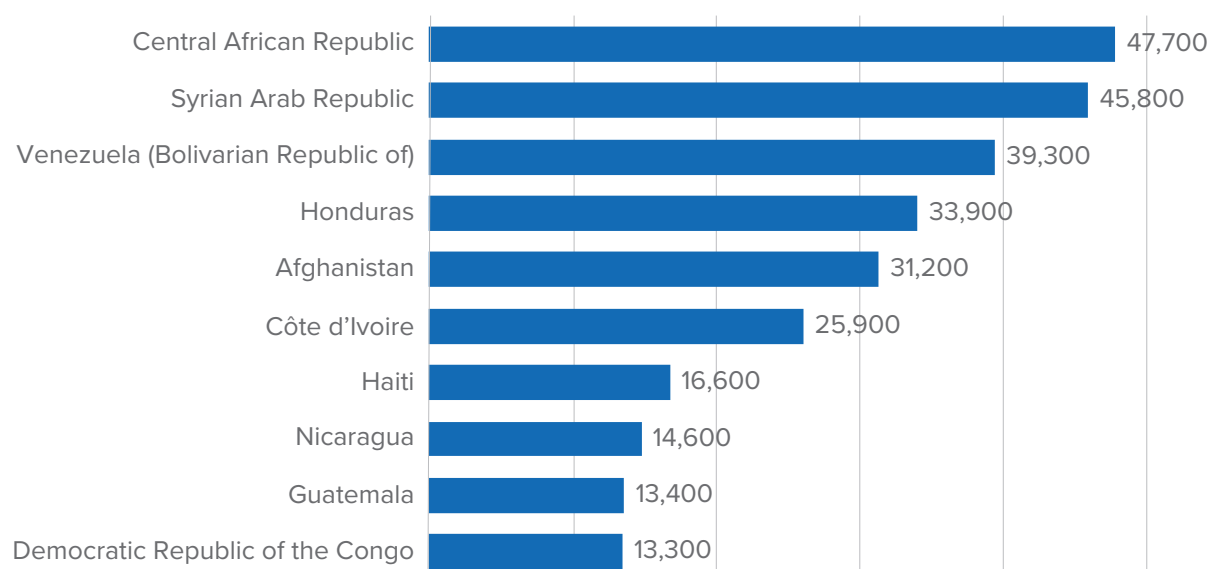
CHAPTER 4

Asylum-seekers

The total number of new individual asylum applications lodged globally with States or UNHCR during the first half of 2021 was 555,400 (see Figure 6), a slight increase from the same period in the previous year (554,000). This figure is still significantly below the pre-COVID-19 levels in 2019 (862,300). There was a much larger increase in the countries where UNHCR conducts Refugee Status Determination (RSD) under its mandate. In these locations, the number of new individual asylum applications grew by almost one-

third (31 per cent) to 35,000,²⁷ whereas in countries where the Government conducts RSD the number of new individual asylum applications dropped marginally to 520,100. There was also a large decrease in the number of new arrivals recognized on a group basis to 144,700, 20 per cent lower than the comparable period in 2020, suggesting that COVID-related restrictions are still having a large impact on access to asylum and access to territory (see Figure 7).

Figure 6 | Major source countries of new asylum applications | January–June 2021

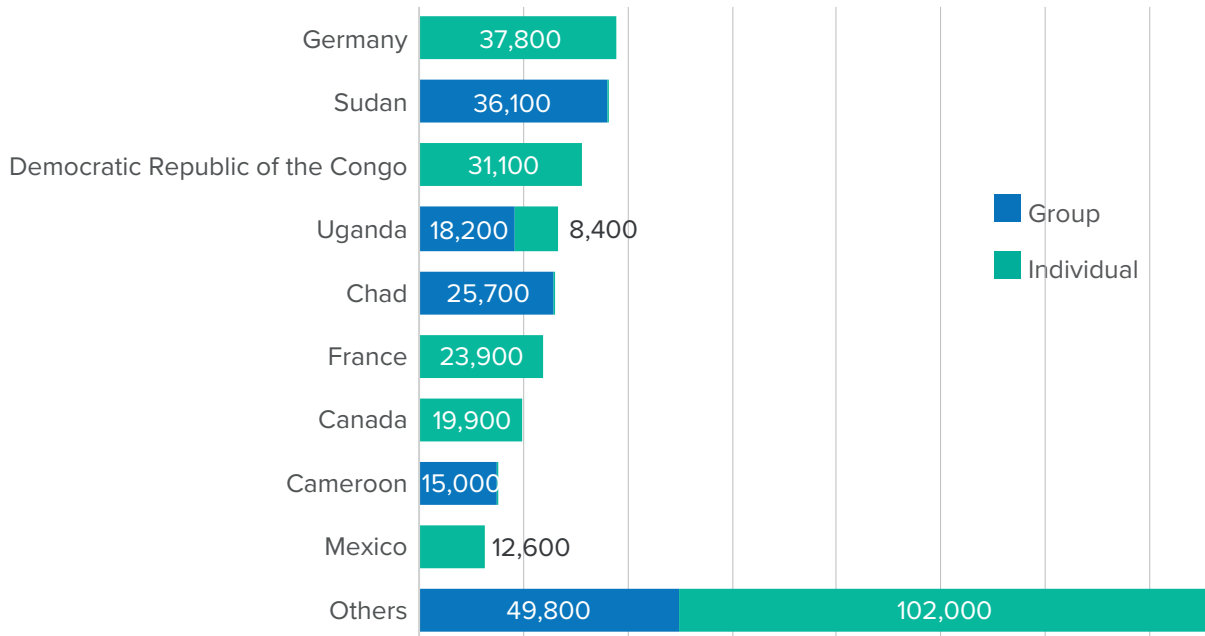


²⁷ It should be noted, however, that as per the discussion in the [2020 Global Trends Report](#) on strategic use of RSD in mandate RSD procedures, approximately 20 per cent of these applications to UNHCR mandate procedures may not be in need of RSD processing.

Overall, the total number of individual applications during the first six months of 2021 was 708,800, an increase of 4 per cent from the 679,300 applications the year before, as repeat and appeal applications

continue to increase. As individuals making these applications would already be in the asylum country, COVID-19 restrictions have less impact on such applications.

Figure 7 | Type of recognition by country of asylum | January–June 2021



The substantive number of asylum cases processed²⁸ also rose in the first six months of 2021, reaching 509,200, five per cent more than during the same period in 2020.²⁹ In some countries, it was not possible to conduct interviews during the initial stages of COVID-19 in 2020 due to lockdowns, so emphasis was placed on processing already interviewed cases, leading to increased decision-making in the short term, at the expense of commencing processing of new cases. For example, in countries where UNHCR conducts RSD under its mandate, the overall number of substantive decisions made in the first six months of 2021 decreased by 44 per cent to 12,300. This was largely due to the suspension of new interviews in Egypt for three months in early 2020, which yielded more decisions. Other UNHCR operations, such as Mauritania, reached more substantive decisions in the first half of 2021 – up from 650 to 1,700.

In countries where national governments conduct RSD, there was a net increase in the number of substantive decisions. Some countries decided significantly more cases, including Austria, Belgium, and Canada. Especially noteworthy was France, where the number of substantive decisions increased by 77 per cent, from 53,500 in the first six months of 2020 to 95,000 in the first half of 2021. Conversely, other countries, such as Greece, Australia and the United States of America produced fewer substantive decisions in 2021. It is not clear whether these decreases resulted from changing caseload dynamics, COVID-related challenges, realigned priorities or other factors.

The Total Protection Rate, or TPR, is the percentage of substantive decisions that resulted in any form of international protection. Worldwide, this figure stood at 46 per cent in the first six months of 2021, consistent with the previous year.

²⁸ Substantive decisions include Convention status, complementary and other forms of protection, and rejected cases. Non-substantive decisions are the closure of a case without a decision on the merits. For example, from the death of the applicant, no-show for interview, withdrawal of the application, abandonment of the claim, or the determination that another country is responsible for the claim, among other factors.

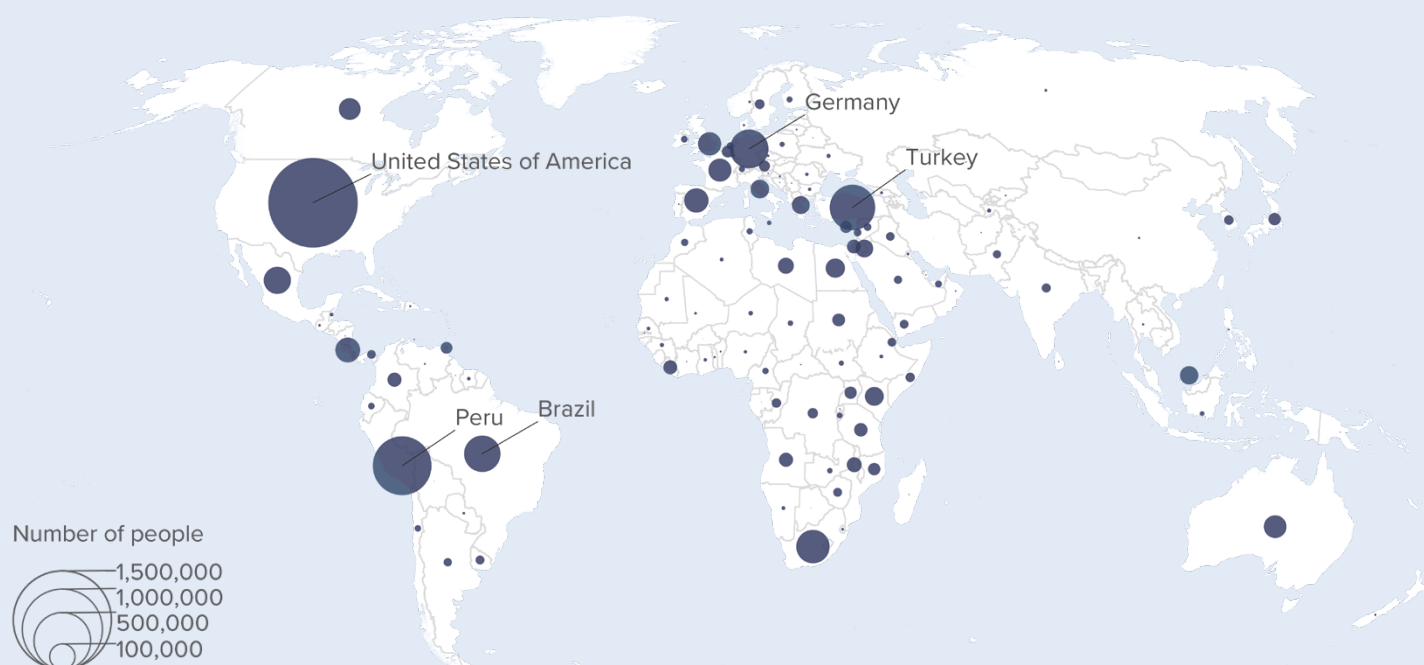
²⁹ In addition, 215,800 non-substantive decisions were recorded in the first six months of 2021.

In the first six months of 2021, asylum applications were most commonly lodged by nationals from Syria, Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Venezuela and Honduras. This was quite similar to the first half of 2020, except for the rapid rise in asylum-seekers from the Central African Republic, who lodged 47,800 applications between January and June 2021 (mostly in DRC: 45,900), compared to 1,700 in the first half of 2020.

At the end of June 2021, the number of pending individual asylum applications of all types stood at 4.4 million, nearly 7 per cent more than the 4.1 million

pending at the end of 2020. This trend is concerning, as lengthy backlogs heighten the risk that individuals with international protection needs will not be able to access protection and solutions in a timely and effective manner. If backlogs become protracted and asylum-seekers wait multiple years for a final determination of their claims without meaningful access to rights or certainty about their future, there will be negative consequences for everyone, including erosion of public confidence in the system, increased costs, and difficulties in returning rejected applicants.

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



A country is named if it features among the five largest per population group.

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SOUTH SUDAN. Displaced families return home to the Upper Nile State with help from UNHCR. Conflict broke out in South Sudan in late 2013, resulting in a cycle of inter-communal conflict and a humanitarian crisis. Efforts to implement the national peace process have encouraged some 375,000 South Sudanese refugees to return voluntarily since November 2017 and a further 1.6 million internally displaced people have also returned home.

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[+ Refugee returns](#)
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[+ Naturalisation](#)
[+ IDP returns](#)
CHAPTER 5

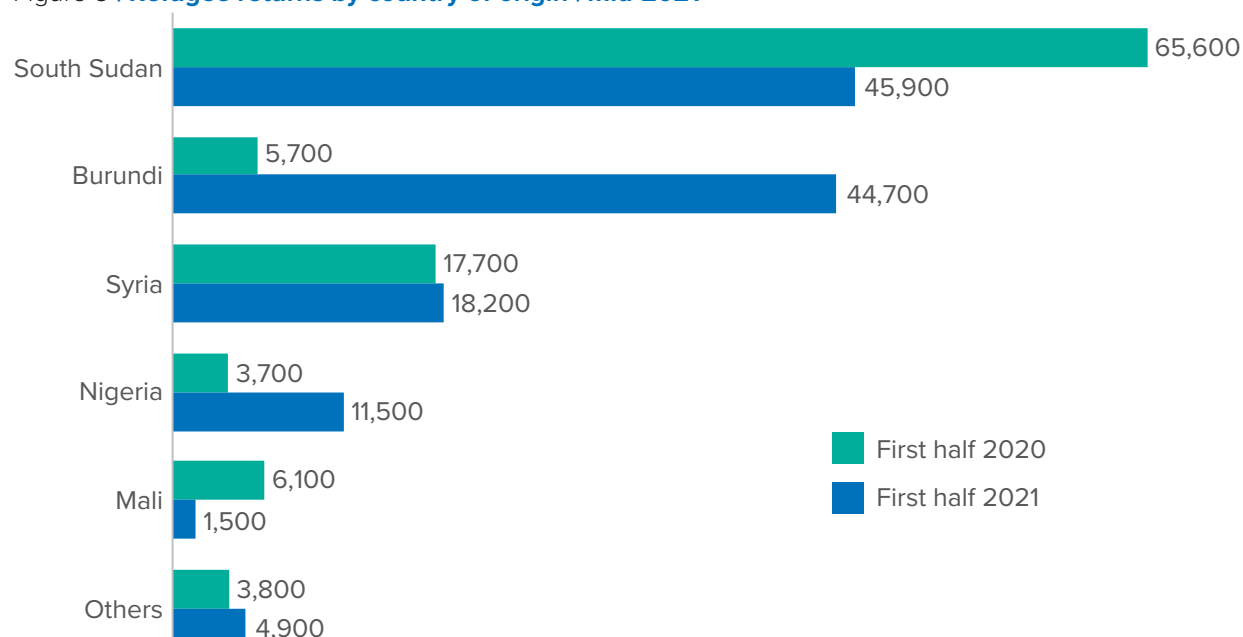
Finding Solutions

Identifying and supporting durable solutions that enable refugees to rebuild their lives and to live in safety and dignity is a strategic priority for UNHCR and the humanitarian community, as emphasized in the Global Compact on Refugees. Traditionally, durable solutions include voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement to a third country. However, as has been the case for several years, only a small fraction of displaced populations were able to find a safe and lasting solution in the first half of 2021.

Returns

Returning home in safety and dignity based on a free and informed choice remains the preferred solution for most of the world's refugees. In the first half of 2021, an estimated 126,700 refugees returned to 23 countries of origin from 41 countries of asylum (see Figure 8). Some of these returns were facilitated by UNHCR and its partners, while others were self-organized. While this marks a 23 per cent increase from the same period in 2020 (102,600), the number of returns remains slightly below the pre-pandemic levels in 2019 (131,000).

Figure 8 | **Refugee returns by country of origin | mid-2021**



As in recent years, most returnees in the first half of 2021 were South Sudanese (45,900) returning primarily from Sudan (27,700), Ethiopia (13,000) and Uganda (2,900). Overall, there were some 30 per cent fewer South Sudanese returnees than in the same period of 2020, primarily due to fewer returns from Uganda.

UNHCR and its partners continued to facilitate the repatriation of Burundians from neighbouring countries. The 44,700 Burundian refugees who were assisted to return in the first half of 2021 were mainly from Rwanda (20,300 or 46 per cent), the United Republic of Tanzania (20,100 or 45 per cent) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (3,700 or 8 per cent).

Resettlement

Increasingly protracted conflicts prevented most refugees from safely returning home, even as limited possibilities of local integration and the global COVID-19 pandemic put many refugees in an even more precarious situation. Resettlement and complementary pathways continued to be critical ways to protect some of the most vulnerable refugees, who may face specific or urgent protection risks. It is a tangible way for States to show solidarity and share responsibility.

However, the number of refugees resettled has yet to recover from the dramatic decrease in 2020, amid continuing movement restrictions due to the pandemic. In the first half of 2021, according to government statistics, the number of people resettled fell again to just 16,300, compared to 17,400 and 28,700 in the same periods of 2020 and 2019 respectively. More than half of the refugees were resettled with UNHCR's assistance. The 2021 figure represents just 20 per cent of the goal to resettle 80,000 people during the year as envisaged in the Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways.³⁰ Overall, UNHCR identified more than 1.4 million people in need of resettlement in 2021.³¹

The United States of America remained the most common destination, receiving about 3,800 resettled refugees in the first half of 2021. This is nevertheless the lowest number of refugees that the United States of America has resettled in many years. The United States of America was followed by Canada, which resettled nearly 2,900 refugees, down from 4,400 in the first six months of 2020. More positively, European countries resettled a total of 8,900 refugees, accounting for 55 per cent of the global total and 93 per cent more than in the same period of 2020. Notably, Sweden and Germany resettled 2,500 and 2,200 refugees respectively.

Over two-thirds of the resettled refugees originated from just three countries, each with protracted displacement situations: Syria (6,700), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (2,500) and Afghanistan (1,700).

Local Integration

Building a new life in their country of asylum offers refugees a solution when resettlement or voluntary repatriation are not viable options. Typically, this includes the provision of a legal status in refugees' country of asylum, including appropriate alternatives under domestic regulations on long-term residence.

During the first half of 2021, about 20,100 refugees from 130 countries of origin naturalized in 17 countries,³² representing no significant change compared to the 20,300 naturalized during the same period in the previous year. The vast majority of them naturalized in the Netherlands (16,800), France (1,700) and Canada (1,400). Over two-thirds of the naturalized refugees originated from Syria (11,100) and Eritrea (2,900). Given the lack of comprehensive data, these figures should be considered as indicative only.

With more people becoming displaced and fewer being able to return, resettle or naturalize, an increasing number continue to find themselves in protracted displacement situations.

³⁰ See [The Three-Year Strategy on Resettlement and Complementary Pathways](#), 2019.

³¹ See [UNHCR Projected Global Resettlement Needs 2021](#)

³² It should be noted that data on naturalization often does not distinguish between migrants and refugees in national statistical systems.



BANGLADESH. Rohingya refugee children play with marbles in a camp in eastern Bangladesh. Heavy monsoon rains and strong winds have caused flash floods and landslides, severely disrupting the lives of refugees living in the camp, especially children and women.

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CHAPTER 6

Stateless people

Improving the availability of high-quality statistics on statelessness remains a challenge for governments as well as for UNHCR and its partners. As such, the actual number of stateless people in the world remains unknown. Approximately half of all countries worldwide do not report data on statelessness, including many with known stateless populations. Data is currently available for 94 countries, with a total of 4.3 million stateless people³³ reported to UNHCR in mid-2021, virtually the same as the figure reported at end-2020. For many of these countries, the data provided may be partial and is often based on estimates. The true number of stateless people globally is therefore likely to be much higher.

Although the reported total number of stateless people has remained essentially constant since the end of 2020, this figure masks some notable increases and decreases. The Russian Federation and Uzbekistan each witnessed a significant reduction in the number of stateless people due to acquisition or confirmation of nationality during the reporting period. At the same time, natural population growth of Rohingya refugees led to an increase in the reported numbers of stateless people in countries hosting Rohingya refugees. Stateless people are now for the first time reported for Rwanda, following a government assessment and estimate of the statelessness situation in the country. The numbers of reported stateless people

also rose significantly in Thailand, where the Royal Thai Government has now included a previously unreported group, leading to a more accurate picture and more comprehensive statelessness statistics in the country. The largest stateless populations at mid-2021 were reported in Côte d'Ivoire (953,000), Bangladesh (889,000 refugees), Myanmar (600,000) and Thailand (554,100).

UNHCR continues to advocate for improved data on statelessness in line with Action 10 of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024.³⁴ In addition to the 38 State pledges³⁵ related to improving data on statelessness delivered at the High-Level Segment on Statelessness organized by UNHCR in October 2019, UNHCR has developed a Quick Guide on Researching Statelessness, which may further assist relevant actors interested in gathering more reliable statistics on statelessness.³⁶ UNHCR is also working with States and partners under the auspices of the Expert Group on Refugee and IDP Statistics (EGRIS) to develop International Recommendations on Statelessness Statistics (IROSS), which are planned to be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission for adoption in 2023. The recommendations will provide concrete guidance on how to improve the production, coordination, reporting and overall quality of official statistics on statelessness.

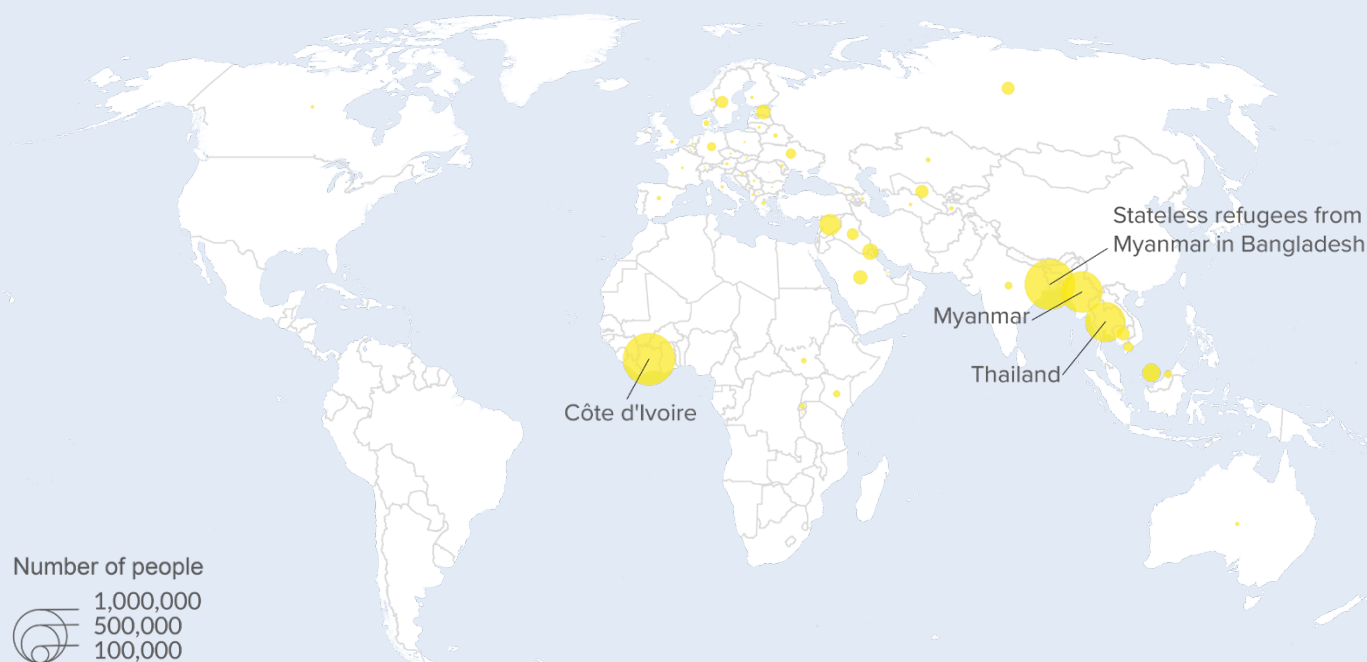
³³ These statistics cover stateless people and people of undetermined nationality.

³⁴ See [Global Action Plan to End Statelessness 2014–2024](#)

³⁵ See [High-Level Segment On Statelessness: Results and Highlights](#) page 41.

³⁶ See [Quick Guides: Researching Statelessness](#)

Map 5 | Statelessness | mid-2021



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

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/2021MYTannex.zip>

All data are provisional and subject to change.

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

MID-YEAR TRENDS

2021

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FRONT COVER:

MOZAMBIQUE. *A displaced mother fetches water with her children in Cabo Delgado Province. A conflict is raging in the region since 2017 and extreme violence, including arbitrary killings and rape by armed groups, has been reported.*

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

