

Development in Brief



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More Than 50 Million Refugees Worldwide

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The number of displaced people around the world has risen dramatically to reach its highest level since the Second World War. This is the core message behind the "Global Trends 2013" report issued by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to the report, more than 51.2 million people were fleeing war and persecution at the end of 2013, six million more than at the end of 2012.

Record numbers of internal refugees

The majority of displaced people around the world are IDPs (internally displaced persons), the number of which is estimated to have reached the unprecedented level of 33.3 million at the end of 2013. Of this number, 8.2 million became refugees in the course of 2013.

Four and a half million of these internal displacements can be attributed to the civil war in Syria, raising the total number of internal refugees in that country to 6.5 million. There were also very high numbers of internal refugees in Colombia (5.4 million, with "only" 115,000 newly displaced), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (3.0 million, with 1.0 million newly displaced) and Sudan (1.9 million, with 390,000 newly displaced). There was a dramatic rise in the number of internally displaced persons in the Central African Republic (844,000 new internal refugees in 2013). In contrast, the number of new displacements in Mali fell slightly (from 227,000 in 2012 to 111,000 in 2013). At the same time, 1.4 million refugees receiving assistance from UNHCR returned to their regions of origin. The highest numbers of returning refugees were observed in the DRC (595,200), Somalia (100,000) and Yemen (93,000).

Strong increase also observed in international movements of refugees

At the end of 2013, the total number of international refugees around the world came to

16.7 million. Of this number, 11 million fell within the mandate of UNHCR, while 5.7 million were Palestinian refugees registered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). In 2013 alone another 2.5 million people were displaced from their own countries – the sharpest rise since 1994. Half of all international refugees were girls or women, and half were under 18 years of age.

Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia the main sources of international refugees

If we exclude the Palestinian UNRWA refugees as a special case, Afghanistan has topped the list of the countries of origin for refugees for the 33rd time in a row. In 2013, 2.6 million Afghan nationals were seeking refuge outside their own country. Almost as many refugees (2.5 million) hail from Syria, where there were 2.3 million new displacements in 2013. This is the largest exodus of a single group of refugees since the Rwandan genocide of 1994. Other significant countries of origin for refugees included Somalia (1.1 million), Sudan (0.6 million) and both the DRC and Myanmar (0.5 million each).

While numbers of refugees remained relatively constant versus the previous year in Europe, the Americas and the Asia-Pacific region, the situation in Africa and the Middle East deteriorated significantly due to civil wars. At the same time, only 414,600 were able to return to their countries of origin in 2013 – this was the fourth lowest number in 25 years.

Pakistan, Iran and Lebanon take in the most international refugees

In 2013, more than half of all refugees were taken in by just ten countries. The largest numbers of refugees live in Pakistan (1.6 million) and Iran (0.9 million), with nearly all refugees in each case coming from Afghanistan. Other important host countries were

Lebanon (0.9 million), Jordan (0.6 million) and Turkey (0.6 million). All three of these countries were affected by the consequences of the civil war in Syria. Lebanon alone took in 737,000 new refugees from Syria in 2013. If we include the UNRWA refugees that have been in the country for many years, one in four residents of Lebanon was a refugee at the end of 2013. As a result, the country is reaching the limits of its socioeconomic capacity to take in refugees. Countries such as Jordan, Pakistan and Chad are facing similar problems.

Interestingly, only 14% of the world's refugees were hosted by industrialised countries in 2013, with the rest seeking refuge in developing countries – the highest level in 22 years. The particularly vulnerable sub-group of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) still offered refuge to 24 percent of the world's refugees.

Highest number of asylum-seekers in ten years

In addition to the 16.7 million international refugees, at the end of 2013 there were also 1.2 million asylum-seekers whose status as refugees had not yet been verified. The number of applications for asylum rose 15 percent over the previous year to reach its highest level in ten years. Germany received the most applications for asylum (110,000 applications in 2013, compared with 64,000 in 2012).

Conclusion

There was a spike in the number of internally displaced persons, international refugees and asylum-seekers in 2013, and the situation is not expected to improve in 2014 considering recent events in Iraq.

This also presents a huge challenge for international development cooperation. The short-term goal is to help the host regions and countries provide relief to refugees, while the aim for the medium and long term is to establish the conditions for their return and reintegration. Combating the reasons for their displacement and preventing armed conflict in particular will require more attention in general. ■