



**UNHCR**

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés

# 2005 GLOBAL REFUGEE TRENDS

STATISTICAL OVERVIEW OF POPULATIONS OF REFUGEES,  
ASYLUM-SEEKERS, INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS,  
STATELESS PERSONS, AND OTHER PERSONS OF CONCERN TO  
UNHCR

9 JUNE 2006

FIELD INFORMATION AND COORDINATION SUPPORT SECTION  
DIVISION OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES  
UNHCR GENEVA

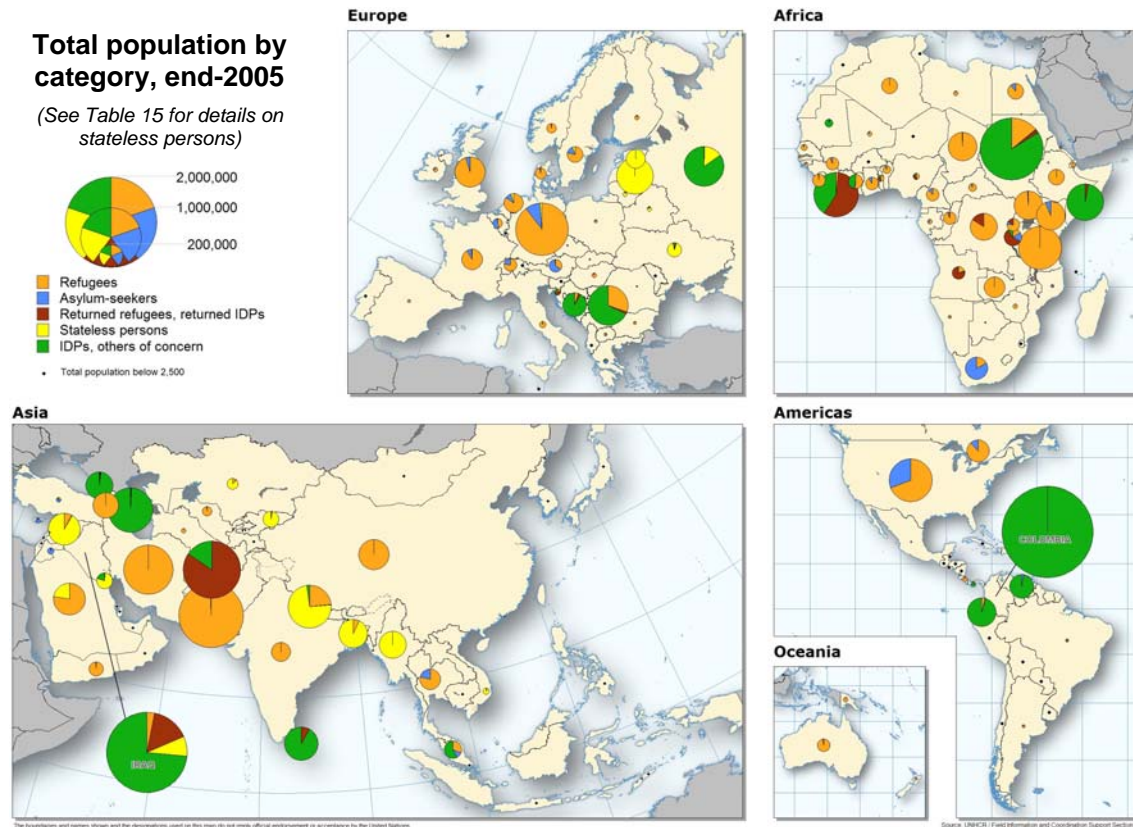
[HTTP://WWW.UNHCR.ORG/STATISTICS](http://www.unhcr.org/statistics)

## Introduction

1. This report summarizes changes in global trends and levels of the population of concern to UNHCR: refugees, asylum-seekers, internally displaced persons, stateless persons, and others of concern. The data, reported by UNHCR country offices, generally reflect the view of the host country. The statistics contained in this note should be considered provisional and subject to change.

2. This note provides only the main global trends of UNHCR's population of concern and does not make specific reference to mixed migration flows. Despite the humanitarian challenge and prominent media coverage posed by this phenomenon, most migrants do not claim asylum and are thus not included in UNHCR statistics.<sup>1</sup>

3. The total population of concern to UNHCR<sup>2</sup> increased from 19.5 million persons at the beginning of 2005 to 20.8 million by the end of 2005 (+6%)<sup>3</sup>. Refugees constitute 40 per cent of the total population of concern to UNHCR, down from 49 per cent at the start of 2005. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) protected or assisted by UNHCR are the second largest group under the Office's mandate accounting for 32 per cent, followed by stateless persons<sup>4</sup> with 11 per cent. The total population of concern to UNHCR, however, is not totally reflected in these figures, either because a significant number of stateless people have not been systematically identified, or statistical data is unavailable despite renewed efforts on the part of UNHCR.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup> For detailed statistics on 2005 (and previous years), see <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>.

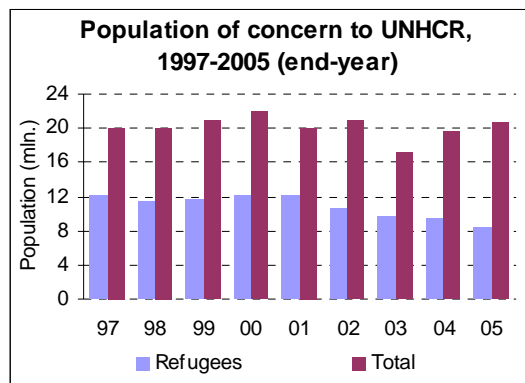
<sup>2</sup> Include: Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees (refugees who have returned during 2005), internally displaced persons (IDPs), returned IDPs (IDPs who have returned to their place of habitual residence during 2005), stateless persons, and others of concern not falling under any of the categories above.

<sup>3</sup> The Afghan refugee population in Pakistan at the end of 2004 was retroactively revised from 960,000 to 1.3 million following a 2005 government census of Afghans in Pakistan. As a result, the total population of concern to UNHCR at the end of 2004 increased from 19.2 to 19.5 million.

<sup>4</sup> Stateless refugees and stateless asylum-seekers are excluded from the category stateless persons but reflected in the categories refugees (stateless refugees) and asylum-seekers (stateless asylum-seekers).

<sup>5</sup> See page 9 for more details.

4. During the period 1997-2001, refugees constituted the largest group (55-61%) among all populations considered as of concern to the Office. In other words, roughly six out of ten persons were refugees. The recent years, however, have witnessed a gradual downward trend in the number of refugees worldwide while simultaneously seeing an upward trend in the overall population of concern. As a consequence, the proportion of refugees among the total population of concern started to decline, reaching its lowest level at the end of 2005 with only four out of ten persons being refugees. While in absolute and relative terms still the largest group under the Office's mandate, the current trend indicates that in future possibly only three (or less) out of ten persons will be a refugee. This scenario looks particularly likely, taking into account the expectation that UNHCR's involvement with internally displaced persons will expand in the coming years.



5. With over two million persons, Colombia remained the country hosting the largest population of concern to UNHCR by the end of 2005. The entire population is almost exclusively comprised of internally displaced persons. Iraq is the second largest host country with some 1.6 million persons of concern, followed by Pakistan (1.1 million)<sup>6</sup>, Sudan (1.0 million) and Afghanistan (912,000).

6. At the end of the year, Afghans constituted the largest group among UNHCR's total population of concern with some 2.9 million. Colombians were the second largest group (2.5 million), followed by Iraqis (1.8 million), Sudanese (1.6 million) and Somalis (839,000). These five nationalities alone accounted for 9.6 million or almost half (46%) of all populations considered as of concern to UNHCR at the end of 2005.

### Refugee population

7. By the end of 2005, the global number of refugees reached an estimated 8.4 million persons<sup>7</sup>, the lowest level since 1980. This constitutes a net decrease of more than one million refugees (-12%) since the beginning of 2005, when 9.5 million refugees were recorded. This is the fifth consecutive year in which the global refugee population has dropped and the second sharpest decrease since 2001. Over the five-year period, the global refugee population has fallen by one third (-31%). Decreases in the refugee population are often the result of refugees having access to durable solutions, in particular voluntary repatriation.

UNHCR Bureau	Start-2005	End-2005	Annual change
- Central Africa and Great Lakes	1,267,700	1,193,700	-5.8%
- East and Horn of Africa	770,400	772,000	0.2%
- Southern Africa	243,100	228,600	-6.0%
- West Africa	465,100	377,200	-18.9%
Total Africa*	2,746,300	2,571,500	-6.4%
CASWANAME**	3,062,100	2,467,300	-19.4%
Americas	581,300	564,300	-2.9%
Asia and Pacific	836,900	825,600	-1.4%
Europe	2,316,900	1,965,800	-15.2%
Total	9,543,500	8,394,500	-12.0%

\* Excluding North Africa.  
\*\* Central Asia, South West Asia, North Africa and Middle East.

8. About half (52%) of all refugees benefit from UNHCR assistance programmes, with the vast majority of them being located in developing countries, i.e. countries covered by the UNHCR Bureaux for CASWANAME<sup>8</sup> (47%) and for Africa (41%). The number of refugees directly assisted by or through UNHCR fell by 907,000 persons (-17%) to 4.4 million refugees by the end of the year.

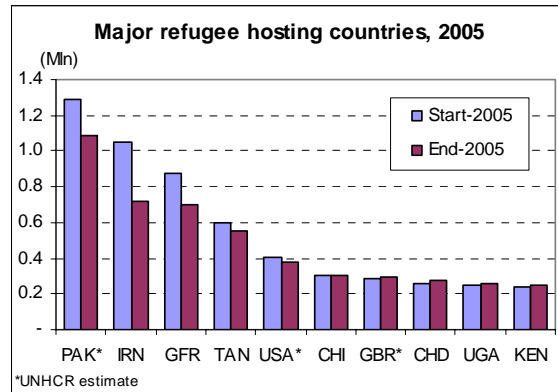
<sup>6</sup> UNHCR refugee figures for Pakistan only include Afghans living in camps who are assisted by UNHCR. According to a 2005 government census of Afghans in Pakistan and subsequent voluntary repatriation during the year, there are an additional 1.5 million Afghans living outside camps, some of whom may be refugees. Those Afghans living outside camps receive no UNHCR assistance except access to UNHCR-facilitated voluntary repatriation.

<sup>7</sup> In addition, some 4.3 million Palestinian refugees fall under the responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). These refugees are not included in UNHCR statistics.

<sup>8</sup> Central Asia, South-West Asia, North Africa and Middle East.

9. Virtually all regions reported a decrease in the refugee population during 2005 with the largest reductions being recorded in West Africa and CASWANAME (-19% each), followed by Europe (-15%). The only region experiencing a marginal increase was East and Horn of Africa (+0.2%). (See Box 1). Despite of the decreases, Africa and CASWANAME each hosted one third of the global refugee population at the end of 2005. Europe hosted about one quarter (23%) of all refugees, followed by Asia and the Pacific (10%), and the Americas (7%).

10. In 2005, Pakistan continued to be the main asylum country followed by the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>9</sup> By the end of the year, both countries together hosted one out of five (21%) of the world's refugees.<sup>10</sup> Both, however, experienced a 16 and 32 per cent decrease respectively during the year as a result of the voluntary repatriation of some 751,000 Afghan refugees back to their country. Germany remained the third largest asylum country of 2005 despite witnessing a 20 per cent drop during the year. This decrease is primarily due to an improved registration system providing more accurate statistics on the number of refugees in the country.<sup>11</sup> The United Republic of Tanzania and the United States (UNHCR estimate)<sup>12</sup> remain as the fourth and fifth largest asylum countries despite experiencing decreases of nine and six per cent respectively during 2005. Among the top-10 asylum countries, only Chad (+15,500 refugees) and Kenya (+11,400 refugees) saw a significant net increase during 2005.



11. Afghanistan continues to be by far the largest country of origin of refugees under the Office's mandate. At the end of 2005, 1.9 million Afghan refugees were reported by 72 asylum countries, constituting 23 per cent of the global refugee population. Nevertheless, due to continued repatriation, the number of Afghan refugees dropped by 21 per cent during the year.

12. Other major countries of origins of refugees experiencing important decreases during 2005 were Burundi (-10%), Iraq (-16%), Liberia (-31%), and Serbia and Montenegro (-21%). The strong fall in the Burundian, Iraqi and Liberian refugee populations is primarily the result of voluntary repatriation movements whereas the sharp decrease in the refugee population from Serbia and Montenegro primarily reflects the changed methodology for estimating the number of refugees in Germany.<sup>11</sup> Significant decreases in the refugee population, often as a result of durable solutions or revised refugee estimates following registration exercises were also recorded for refugees originating from Bosnia and Herzegovina (-119,000), Croatia (-96,000), Western Sahara (-75,000) and Sudan (-38,000).

13. Nevertheless, some refugee nationalities recorded an increase in the population during 2005. The number of Togolese refugees quadrupled, from 11,200 at the start of the year to 51,100 at the end of the year, due to mass outflows, mainly to Benin and Ghana. The number of refugees from Rwanda increased by 37,000 (+12%), primarily due to a revised population estimate in the Democratic Republic of the Congo while the number of Eritrean refugees increased by more than 12,000 (+9%).

<sup>9</sup> See footnote 6.

<sup>10</sup> See footnote 7.

<sup>11</sup> With the introduction of the new Immigration Act in 2005, the Central Aliens Register now encompasses new residence categories and simultaneously refines previous ones, allowing for a better differentiation of refugee statistics. The refugee data included in this note refers to 15 December 2005.

<sup>12</sup> UNHCR's method of estimating the refugee population in the United States is currently under review due to newly available information. As a result, the estimated refugee population in the country might increase significantly as of 2006.

## Refugee arrivals

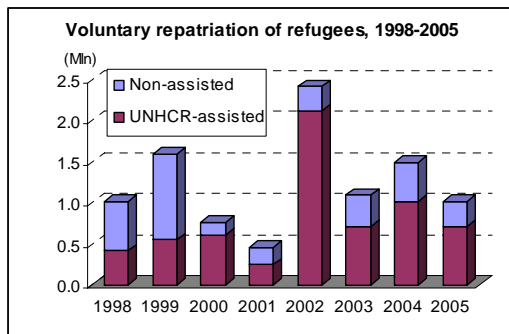
14. Refugees escaping war often move in large groups and flee the same conditions during the same time frame. By being part of the same group, these persons are often accorded refugee status as a group, i.e. on a *prima facie* basis. During 2005, a total of 136,000 *prima facie* refugee arrivals were reported by 19 asylum countries. The level of new outflows in 2005, however, was the lowest since 1976 when 113,700 persons fled their country in a mass outflow. As such, the 2005 level was also significantly lower compared to 2004 (-46%) and 2003 (-59%).

15. Ten asylum countries reported the arrival of more than 1,000 *prima facie* refugees during 2005, including Chad (32,400), Benin (25,500), Uganda (24,000), Ghana (13,600) and Yemen (13,200).

16. There were six countries of origin which produced more than 10,000 *prima facie* refugees in 2005: Togo (39,100), Sudan (34,500), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (15,600), Somalia (13,600), the Central African Republic (11,500) and Iraq (10,500).

## Voluntary repatriation

17. Based on consolidated reports from countries of asylum (departure) and origin (arrival), it is estimated that some 1.1 million refugees repatriated voluntarily to their country of origin during 2005. In all, there were a total of 15 voluntary repatriation movements involving more than 1,000 refugees.



18. The main countries of origin to which refugees returned during 2005 included Afghanistan (752,100), Liberia (70,300), Burundi (68,300), Iraq (56,200) and Angola (53,800).

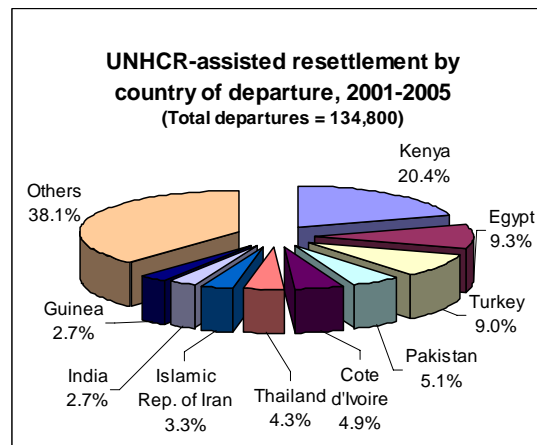
19. The past four years saw an almost unprecedented level of voluntary repatriation, mainly due to the return of more than 4.6 million Afghans from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Globally, more than six million refugees were able to return home during 2002-2005, of which 4.6 million with UNHCR assistance.

20. For statistical purposes, only refugees who have repatriated during the calendar year are included in the population of concern to UNHCR. In practice, however, operations may assist returnees for longer periods. This is for instance the case for Angola where, since the signing of the peace accord in 2002, more than 364,000 Angolan refugees have returned home, many of them benefiting from UNHCR reintegration activities.

## Resettlement

21. In 2005, some 30,500 refugees were resettled from their previous asylum countries with UNHCR assistance, virtually the same level as during 2004. The main nationalities benefiting from UNHCR-facilitated resettlement were refugees from Somalia (5,900), Liberia (4,700), Sudan (3,200), Afghanistan (3,200) and Myanmar (2,900).

22. Some 83 UNHCR country offices were engaged in facilitating resettlement departures during 2005, fifteen more than in 2004. The



largest number of refugees resettled with UNHCR assistance departed from Kenya (6,800), Thailand (2,500), Guinea (1,900), Ghana (1,800) and Egypt (1,300).

23. During 2005, a total of 16 countries reported the admission of resettled refugees, including the United States (53,800 during the US Fiscal Year)<sup>13</sup>, Australia (11,700), Canada (10,400), Sweden (1,300), Finland (770) and Norway (750).

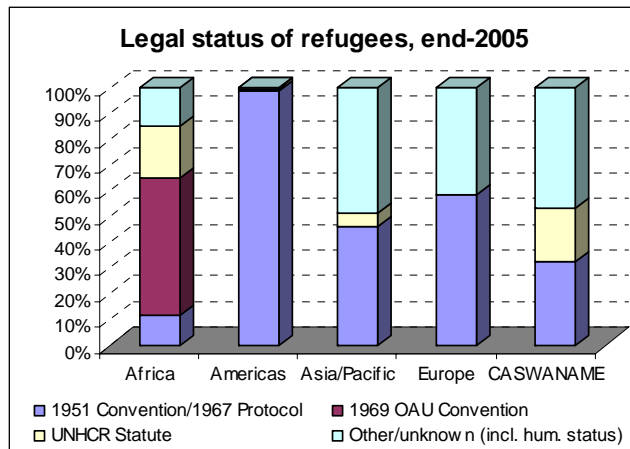
### Local integration

24. Local integration, an important durable solution to the plight of refugees, is a legal, economic, socio-economic and political process. In some countries, refugees have the opportunity to integrate locally because the host country has provided them with access to land or the labour market, while in others they remain confined to camps where they depend on assistance from the international community. Using UNHCR beneficiary statistics, it is possible to determine the degree to which refugees depend on the international community for their survival. Industrialized countries, where assistance is usually provided by the host country, are generally not included in these statistics.

25. By the end of 2005, 69 per cent of the estimated 6.1 million refugees hosted by developing countries had access to assistance provided by or through UNHCR. On a global scale, the proportion has remained fairly stable over the past five years ranging from 66 to 72 per cent. However, the proportion of refugees benefiting from international assistance varies greatly from one country to another, reflecting the different opportunities provided to refugees by the host country for local integration and self-reliance. Major asylum countries where less than 75 per cent of the refugee population depends on international aid include the United Republic of Tanzania (64%), Sudan (51%), Zambia (48%), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (8%), India (8%) and Armenia (5%).

26. Acquiring the citizenship of the country of asylum is the final and crucial step towards obtaining the full protection of the host country. However, national laws do not always permit refugees to get naturalized. Moreover, statistical data on the provision of citizenship to refugees is available on a limited scale only, and is thus under-reported. During 2005, UNHCR was informed about significant numbers of refugees being granted citizenship by the host country in the United States (58,900; during January-September 2005 only), Kyrgyzstan (3,400), Armenia (2,300), Belgium (2,300), Mexico (1,200) and Ireland (580).

### Legal status



27. It is estimated that 3.2 million or 38 per cent of the 8.4 million refugees have been granted protection under the 1951 Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. An additional 16 per cent of the refugees are recognized under the 1969 OAU Convention, whereas 13 per cent have been granted refugee status under the UNHCR Statute. The remaining one third have been granted either a complementary form of protection (humanitarian status, subsidiary protection etc) or their status is unknown to UNHCR.

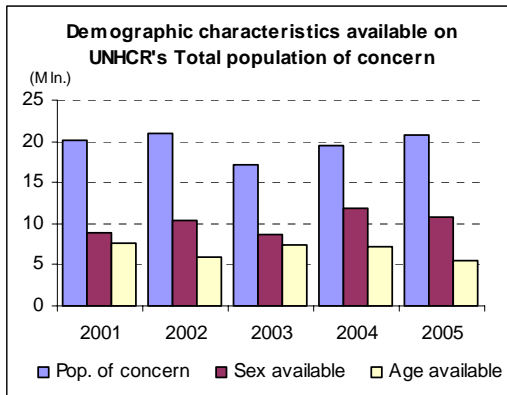
28. The majority of the world's refugees (64%) have been granted refugee status on a group or *prima facie* basis, whereas about one quarter (24%) has been granted refugee status following individual

<sup>13</sup> Resettlement statistics for the United States might also include family members for the purpose of family reunification.

determination. A large majority of refugees having been accorded *prima facie* refugee status reside in Africa (80%), CASWANAME (86%), and Asia and Pacific (85%), which is in sharp contrast to Europe (26%) and the Americas (0.4%), where most refugees have been granted refugee status following individual determination. These regional differences in recognition can in part be explained by the existing legal framework as well as by the level of economic development (individual refugee status determination is resource intensive).

## Sex and age

29. Demographic information on UNHCR's population of concern is not available for all countries. In



fact, at the end of 2005, data by sex was available for roughly half of the population (10.9 million out of 20.8 million) while information on the age breakdown for about one quarter (5.6 million persons). The availability of information is particularly limited for industrialized countries in Europe, North America and Oceania and tends to be high in countries where UNHCR has an operational role.

30. The breakdown by sex available for the 10.9 million persons of concern to UNHCR indicates that roughly half of them are female (49%). The proportion of female refugees varies greatly, depending on the nature of the refugee situation, the

region of asylum, age, etc. For instance, in countries with mass refugee situations, the proportion of female refugees tends to be around 50 per cent. The percentage of females among asylum-seekers, however, is significantly lower both in developing as well as developed countries. Moreover, women are over-represented in the older age category (60 and over).

31. Information on the age breakdown of UNHCR's population of concern is available for some 5.6 million persons. The data indicates that some 44 per cent are children under the age of 18, whereas 12 per cent are under the age of five. Half of them (50%) are aged between 18 and 59, whereas six per cent are 60 years old or more. As highlighted above, considering that most demographic data are available on refugees, asylum-seekers and others of concern living in developing countries, these figures are not fully representative for the entire population under the Office's mandate.

32. In Africa and in the CASWANAME region, half or more than half of the refugees are under the age of 18. The proportion of refugee children is significantly lower in Asia and the Pacific (35%), Europe (23%) and the Americas (24%).

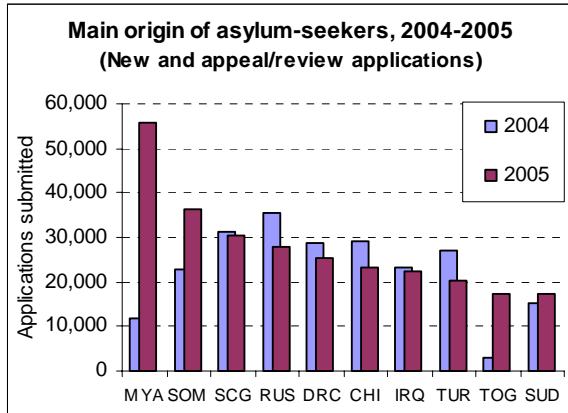
## Asylum-seekers

33. During 2005, a total number of 668,000 first instance or appeal applications for asylum or refugee status were submitted to Governments or UNHCR offices in 149 countries. The number of applications during 2005 decreased by two per cent compared to 2004 where 680,000 applications were lodged globally. Most claims were registered in Europe (374,000), followed by countries covered by the Africa Bureau (125,000), Asia and the Pacific (75,000), the Americas (72,000), and CASWANAME (22,000).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For a detailed analysis of asylum trends in industrialized countries, see *Asylum Levels and Trends in Industrialized Countries, 2005* (UNHCR Geneva, March 2006, available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/statistics>).

34. Countries receiving the largest number of new asylum claims during 2005 were France (49,700), the United States (48,900)<sup>15</sup>, Thailand (47,300)<sup>16</sup>, Kenya (39,000), the United Kingdom (30,500) and Germany (28,900).

35. The highest numbers of new and appeal asylum claims were filed by nationals from Myanmar (55,800), Somalia (36,200), Serbia and Montenegro (30,300), the Russian Federation (27,900), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (25,400) and China (23,100). The number of asylum-seekers from Myanmar, however, was concentrated in two countries only: in Thailand where a regularization of camp residents conducted by the Government's Provincial Admission Board took place (46,200) and in Malaysia (7,700). Almost two thirds (22,400 or 62%) of all applications submitted by Somali nationals during 2005 were lodged in Kenya where refugee status determination is conducted by UNHCR.



36. In Europe, 51,400 asylum-seekers were granted individual refugee status under the 1951 Convention in 2005 and another 37,800 a complementary form of protection (humanitarian status, subsidiary protection etc). Both figures were slightly above the 2004 level where the corresponding figures amounted to 48,800 and 34,300 respectively. Africa was the second largest region in terms of the number of asylum-seekers being recognized in 2005 (48,400), followed by the Americas (35,500), Asia and the Pacific (30,200), and CASWANAME (3,500).

37. The number of asylum claims which have not yet been adjudicated ("pending cases"), both at the first instance and on appeal, has decreased gradually over the past few years, reaching an estimated 773,500 by the end of 2005, the lowest level in at least a decade. In fact, the number of asylum-seekers waiting for a decision globally has gone down by 29 per cent since 2002. A fall in the backlog of asylum cases might indicate that asylum procedures have become more efficient. In addition, a drop in the backlog can also coincide with a decrease in the number of new asylum applications submitted, a situation currently experienced by many industrialized countries in Europe and North America.

38. At the end of 2005, the largest number of undecided cases at the first instance and on appeal was reported by the United States (169,700), South Africa (140,100), Germany (71,600), Austria (40,700), Thailand (32,200) and Canada (20,600). Many countries were able to reduce the number of undecided cases during 2005, including the United States (-93,000), Germany (-29,200), the Netherlands (-13,800) and Sweden (-12,300). The strong reduction of backlog cases in the United States refers by large to asylum-seekers from El Salvador (-44,400) and Guatemala (-25,600) whose applications were closed for administrative reasons during 2005. Increases in the backlog on the other hand were reported by South Africa (+24,900), Thailand (+31,100), Burundi (+9,200) and Jordan (+5,500).

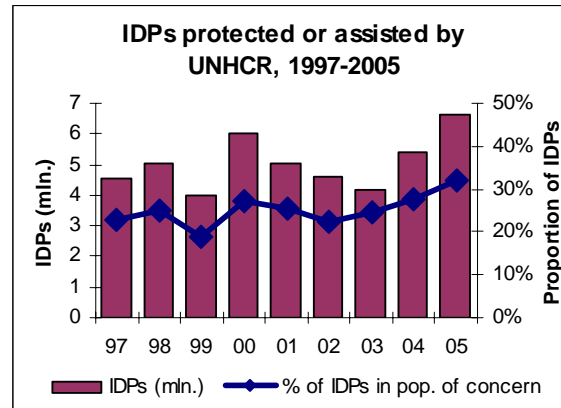
## Internally Displaced Persons

39. At the end of 2005, UNHCR country offices reported 6.6 million internally displaced persons in 16 countries compared to 5.4 million IDPs in 13 countries one year earlier (+22%). This increase primarily reflects the newly reported IDP situations in Iraq (1.2 million) and Somalia (400,000).

<sup>15</sup> USA: Sources: Department of Homeland Security (DHS), number of cases (24,200) multiplied by 1.4 to reflect number of persons (=33,900); and Executive Office for Immigration Review (EOIR), number of persons (15,000).

<sup>16</sup> The high number of asylum claims in Thailand reflects primarily the regularization of nationals from Myanmar residing in camps in Thailand.

40. Many countries reported a decrease in the number of IDPs indicating that durable solutions were found for those populations, including Liberia (-261,000 IDPs), the Russian Federation (-164,000), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (-126,500). No significant change, however, was recorded in Colombia<sup>17</sup> (over 2 million IDPs) and Azerbaijan (578,500). Considering the deteriorating situation in Sudan and the absence of a solution in sight, the number of internally displaced persons in the country reported by UNHCR has increased from 662,000 to 842,000 during 2005. With UNHCR's role expanding in protecting and assisting IDPs, it is expected that the global number of internally displaced persons reported by UNHCR offices will increase substantially in the future. As such, the available data supports this trend and confirms that the share of IDPs among the total population of concern has reached its highest level in at least a decade.



41. In addition to refugees, UNHCR has been tasked by the United Nations General Assembly through various resolutions to contribute to the prevention and reduction of statelessness and further protect stateless persons. In particular, UNHCR has been asked by the United Nations General Assembly to regularly inform the international community on the magnitude of the problem of statelessness.<sup>18</sup>

### Stateless Persons

42. In March 2004, UNHCR published an analysis of the replies made by 74 States to a questionnaire<sup>19</sup> on the steps taken by States to reduce statelessness and to meet the protection needs of stateless persons. One finding of the survey is that many States referred to the difficulty of identifying stateless persons.

43. Giving due importance to the identification and reduction of statelessness, UNHCR has expanded its data collection mechanism in 2004 aiming at the more systematic identification of stateless persons and in 2005 published its first results. As such, UNHCR was able to identify 42 countries hosting stateless populations and covering an estimated 1.5 million persons at 31 December 2004.

44. Although UNHCR is currently not in a position to provide reliable statistics on the global number of stateless persons, which is estimated to be at least 11 million persons, it has included countries with reliable official statistics, countries where estimates of stateless populations exist, as well as some countries where UNHCR is aware of significant stateless populations but where no reliable figures could be identified (*see Table 15*). By the end of 2005, UNHCR is reporting on the existence of stateless populations in 62 countries. For the 47 countries where data is available at the end of the year, the total number was estimated to be 2.4 million. As UNHCR is further expanding its data collection mechanism relating to stateless populations, it is expected that data coverage will gradually increase over time. The level of rights granted to the listed stateless populations varies considerably from one State to another, with some States granting almost identical rights to those of their own citizens, others granting the legal status provided by the 1954 Convention on the status of stateless persons, and yet other situations where stateless persons do not have access to basic rights.

<sup>17</sup> The Government estimates that there are between 2.5 and 3.0 million IDPs in the country, out of which 1.8 million are registered. According to NGOs, the figure might be up to 3.3 million IDPs.

<sup>18</sup> United Nations General Assembly Resolution 50/152 of 9 February 1996 (A/RES/50/152).

<sup>19</sup> Final Report concerning the Questionnaire on Statelessness pursuant to the Agenda for Protection (addressed to 191 States), March 2004.

## **Others of concern**

45. The total number of “Others of concern” to UNHCR, that is, populations not falling within the mandate of UNHCR but to whom the Office extends protection and/or assistance, increased from 606,100 at the beginning of the year to 960,400 at the end of the year (+58%). This increase primarily reflects the newly included persons of concern from Colombia in Ecuador (250,000) and Venezuela (an increased estimate from 26,400 to 200,000). These persons have not formally applied for asylum for various reasons, including security concerns, despite being in need of international protection. As indicated above, stateless persons are no longer included in the category “Others of concern”. Therefore, the statistics reported on 2004 cannot be directly compared to the 2005 data.