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Geneva Telegram – A dramatic milestone is reached – the UNHCR's new Global Trends report

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On the 16th of June 2022, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) presented its new [global trends report](#). While the report focuses mainly on developments in the calendar year 2021, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine in particular pushed the number of displaced persons over the 100 million mark within just a few weeks. Below are ten key findings from the report, highlighting the massive changes that are emerging as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine:

1. The number of forcibly displaced persons increased yet again in 2021: A total of 89.3 million people were displaced at the end of 2021; an above-average number of them (41%) were children, and 48% were women and girls. The proportion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) was just over 57%, at 51.3 million - roughly the same as in the previous year. 21.3 million were refugees under the UNHCR mandate; 5.8 million were refugees under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) mandate; 4.4 million were Venezuelans displaced abroad;¹ and 4.6 million were asylum seekers. 4.3 million people were stateless in 2021. Overall, the total number of displaced persons increased sharply by 8% compared to the previous year (when the total was 82.4 million).

2. Developments in 2022 - the massive impact of the war on Ukraine: The Russian war of aggression caused about one third of Ukrainians to become displaced by mid-2022. Nearly 7.1 million IDPs have been registered since 24th of February. About 7.5 million people fled Ukraine, about 2.5 million returned and 3.4 million sought temporary protection in the EU². Accordingly, the situation is considered one of the largest displacement crises since World War II, and the fastest growing worldwide. In just a few weeks, the number of displaced has exceeded 100 million - that is 1 in 78 people worldwide. UN High Commissioner Filippo Grandi mentioned that countries hosting refugees, or with large numbers of IDPs, are being especially hit hard by food insecurity, rising inflation and high energy prices, which were already devastating for many. This applies above all to the Sahel region, but also to the Middle East, especially Syria and Lebanon. As early as 2021, 82% of IDPs and 67% of refugees and asylum seekers came from countries with food crises, and 40% of refugees and asylum seekers were hosted in a food-insecure country. The war further accelerates current trends. Other countries where the situation deteriorated massively in 2022 were Myanmar and Burkina Faso.

3. The main countries of origin in 2021: In 2021, the number of countries affected by high or medium intensity conflicts doubled to

¹ Refers to Venezuelans who have not officially applied for asylum but are in need of international protection under the criteria set out in the 1984 Cartagena

Declaration - a regional agreement interpreted more broadly than the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees. ² More information can be found [here](#).

a total of 23, affecting a total of 850 million people. Many conflicts flared up again, escalated further or could not be resolved. In 2021, for example, two-thirds of all UNHCR refugees still came from just five countries: Syria (6.8), Venezuela (4.6), Afghanistan (2.7), South Sudan (2.4) and Myanmar (1.2). Syria topped the list of countries of origin from 2014 to the end of 2021, accounting for 27% of all displaced persons. Other countries of origin included: The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, Somalia, Central African Republic and Eritrea. High Commissioner Grandi also expressed particular concern over the situation in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel region (especially Burkina Faso), Afghanistan and Myanmar. Particularly high increases were seen in Venezuela (15% higher compared to the previous year) and the Central African Republic (14% higher).

- 4. The main hosting countries in 2021:** Turkey was the most affected country in absolute terms in 2021, hosting 3.8 million out of 36.1 million (15%) of all refugees and asylum seekers³. Turkey was followed by Colombia (1.8 million), Uganda and Pakistan (1.5 million each), and Germany (1.3 million). By taking in large numbers of refugees from Ukraine, Poland and Germany could move up or down this list in 2022. Sudan was again a main country of origin and a main host country in 2021. Per capita, the share of refugees in the total population remained the highest in Aruba, Lebanon, Curacao, Jordan and Turkey in 2021.
- 5. Europe under the impact of the renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine:** The picture described above could change significantly in 2022. On the 14th of June 2022, the UNHCR counted around five million displaced persons from Ukraine in Europe. It is estimated that 90% are women and children, and 15.7 million are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. In absolute numbers (as of the 15th of June 2022), Poland is the most affected country in the EU with

almost 1.2 million displaced persons, followed by Germany (780,000), the Czech Republic (almost 374,000) and Italy (129,000). However, if one relates the number of displaced persons to the respective national population, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Moldova, Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia are currently the most affected (in that order)⁴. These are predominantly countries that hosted few refugees in 2021 compared to the rest of Europe. As of June 2022, the number of refugees in the EU has roughly doubled since the end of 2021, as a result of Russia's renewed invasion of Ukraine. The UNHCR states that 1.23 million refugees from Ukraine are hosted in Russia - though this figure is based on estimates.

- 6. The impact of COVID-19:** Although 35% more asylum applications were submitted in 2021 than in 2020, numbers were still far below pre-pandemic levels, partly due to ongoing travel restrictions and barriers. Most applications were submitted in the USA, Germany, Mexico, Costa Rica and France. In the area of resettlement, two-thirds more places (67%) could be arranged in 2021 than in 2020. Nevertheless, only 4% of 1.4 million refugees could be resettled in 2021. By far the most places were provided by Canada, followed by the USA, Sweden, Norway and Australia (in that order).
- 7. A complex web of causes:** Wars and conflicts, government crises, deepening inequalities, the growing demographic gap, massive human rights violations and the impact of climate change all contribute to refugee movements. In 2021, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 23.7 million people were displaced within their own country due to extreme weather events. The question of how many people will be uprooted in the future due to climate change cannot be answered at present, according to the UNHCR.

³ UNHCR refugees and Venezuelans are counted together here and below.

⁴ These calculations were made based the table found [here](#).

8. **Neighbouring countries are particularly affected:** 72% of refugees in 2021 found refuge in a country bordering their country of origin, while 83% were sheltered in low- or middle-income countries.
9. **A sharp increase in funding needs:** With the Ukraine war unfolding amid rising humanitarian needs worldwide, UN High Commissioner Grandi warned against neglecting other conflict hotspots. Many other country situations are severely underfunded. This threatens to generate new crises. In 2021, the US was the largest government donor to the UNHCR budget with 40%, followed by Germany with 11%, and Japan and Sweden with 3% each. The EU contributed 7%. Overall, the US, EU and EU member states contributed 71% of the total budget in 2021.⁵
10. **A glimmer of hope:** Even though long-term solutions are lacking for an ever-increasing

number of people, 5.7 million people (5.3 million of them internally displaced) were nevertheless able to return to their region or country of origin last year. In addition, two-thirds more naturalisations were recorded in 2021, 89% of them in Europe. Grandi commented that the extraordinary response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis has shown how much is possible within just a few weeks, with sufficient political will and cohesion. He praised the provision of temporary protection status to Ukrainian refugees, and the widespread attitude that these are people in need that deserve support and are not dangerous or steal jobs. According to Grandi, the lessons learned from the Ukraine crisis must be applied to other crises to ensure an equal humanitarian response.

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⁵ More information can be found [here](#).