UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

ASIA & THE PACIFIC REGIONAL TRENDS

Forced Displacement and Statelessness
2023

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Front cover image: © UNHCR/Oxygen Film Studio (Afghanistan)
An Afghan father and his children returning to Afghanistan from Pakistan, following the October 2023 announcement by Pakistani authorities to deport undocumented foreigners.

FIGURES AT A GLANCE

15.7 MILLION[1]

PEOPLE WHO ARE FORCIBLY DISPLACED, STATELESS, RETURNEES OR OTHERS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR in Asia-Pacific at the end of 2023[2]

The total figure relates to people UNHCR is mandated to protect and assist.[3] It includes those who have been forcibly displaced (refugees, people in refugee-like situations, asylum-seekers, internally displaced people and other people in need of international protection); those who have returned home within the previous year; those who are stateless; and other groups of concern to whom UNHCR has extended its protection or provided assistance on a humanitarian basis.

7.7 MILLION
registered refugees, people in refugee-like situations and asylum-seekers

6 MILLION
internally displaced people (IDPs) induced by conflict[4]

0.5 MILLION
IDP returnees

2.5 MILLION
stateless people, including displaced stateless people

99%
refugees in the region, including people in refugee-like situations, are hosted in low- and middle-income countries[5]

94%
refugees and people in refugee-like situations in the region are hosted in countries neighbouring the country of origin

49%
are children[6]

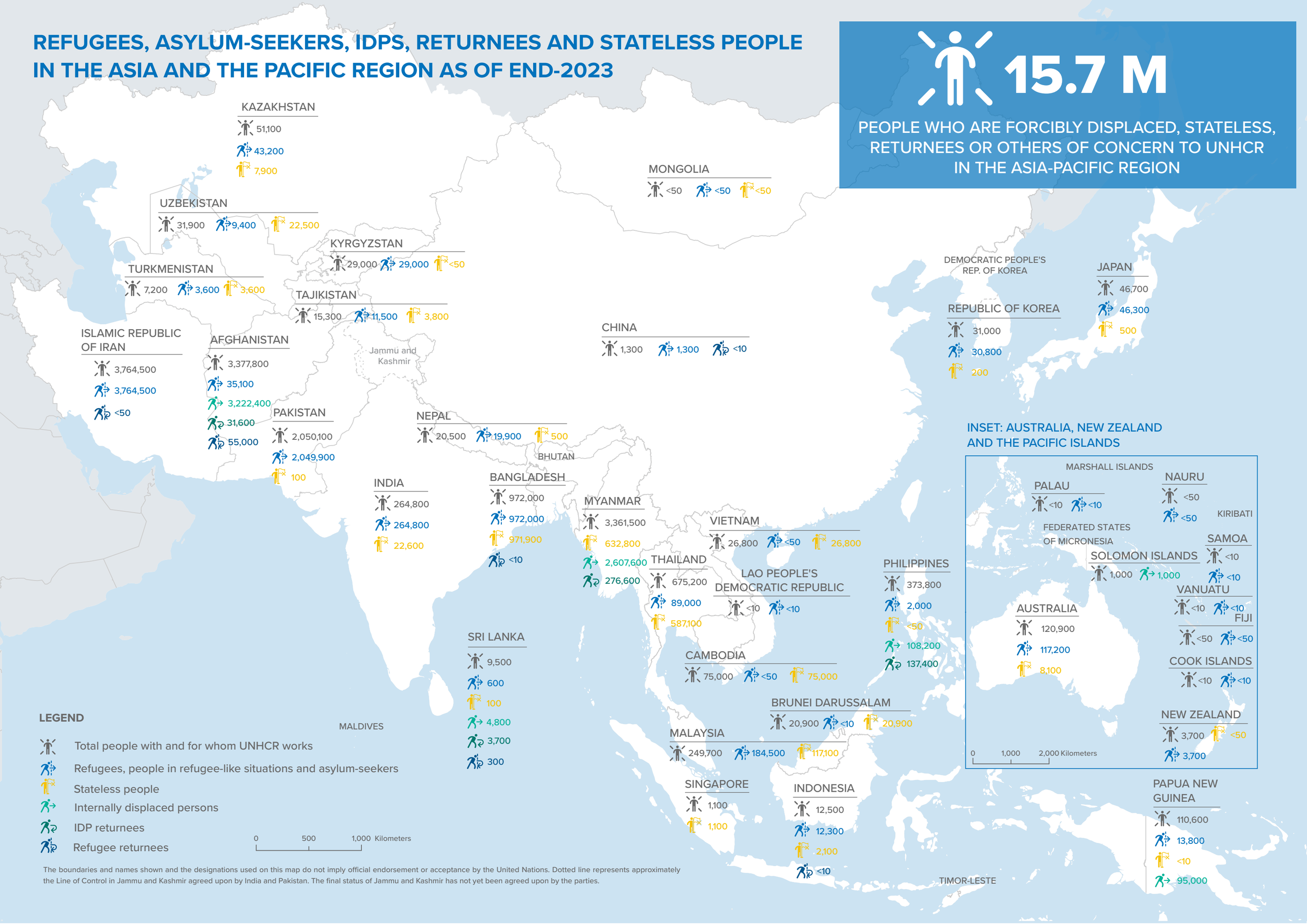
Children are disproportionately represented: they account for 27 per cent of the estimated inhabitants within the region,[7] but make up 49 per cent of the population UNHCR protects and/or assists in the region

1 Total includes stateless people who have also been forcibly displaced.
2 See Annexes for Global and Mid-Year Trends (unhcr.org) for UNHCR region classification.
3 See Forcibly displaced and stateless population categories | UNHCR for more information on UNHCR population groups.
4 For the purpose of UNHCR's statistics, this population includes only conflict-generated IDPs to whom UNHCR extends protection and/or assistance. The figures are different from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).
5 See World Bank Country and Lending Groups – World Bank Data Help Desk.
6 The proportion of children is based on the availability of disaggregated data by age and gender for all people with and for whom UNHCR works (89 per cent of 15.7 million).
7 Data source: World Population Prospects 2024 (https://population.un.org/wpp/).

REFUGEES, ASYLUM-SEEKERS, IDPS, RETURNEES AND STATELESS PEOPLE IN THE ASIA AND THE PACIFIC REGION AS OF END-2023

15.7 M

PEOPLE WHO ARE FORCIBLY DISPLACED, STATELESS, RETURNEES OR OTHERS OF CONCERN TO UNHCR IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION



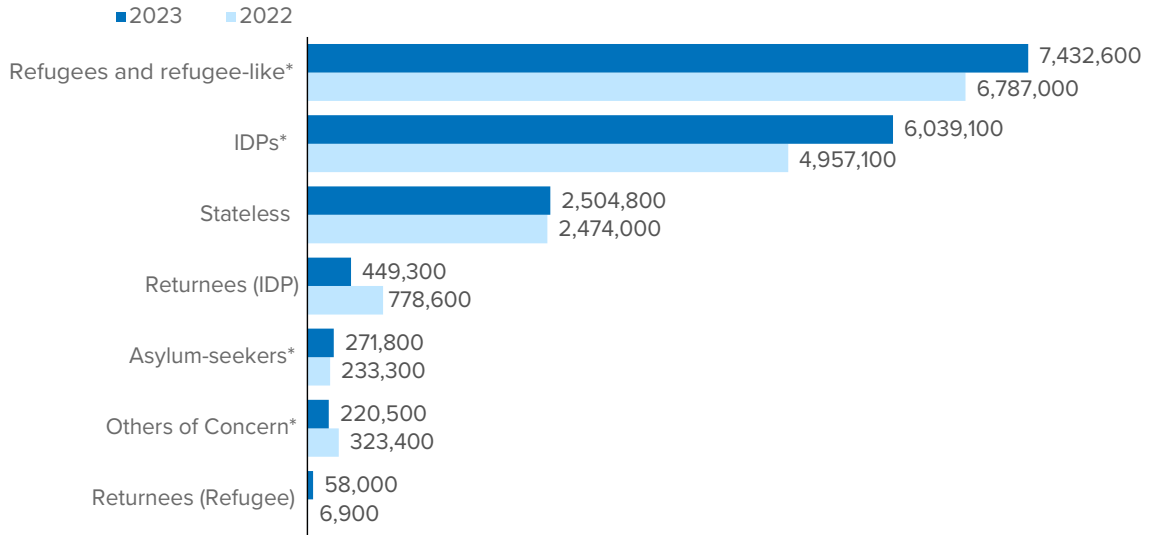
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

Chapter

1 REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The total number of refugees,[8] asylum-seekers, IDPs, stateless people, returnees and other people of concern to UNHCR in Asia-Pacific by end of 2023 stood at 15.7 million, a 10 per cent increase from 2022. The region hosts 13 per cent of the global total population UNHCR protects and/or assists (15.7 million out of 122.6 million). This includes 20 per cent of the world's refugees and asylum-seekers (7.7 million of 38.5 million) and 57 per cent of the world's recorded stateless population (2.5 million out of 4.4 million).

Figure 1 | **Population groups in Asia Pacific | 2022 - 2023**



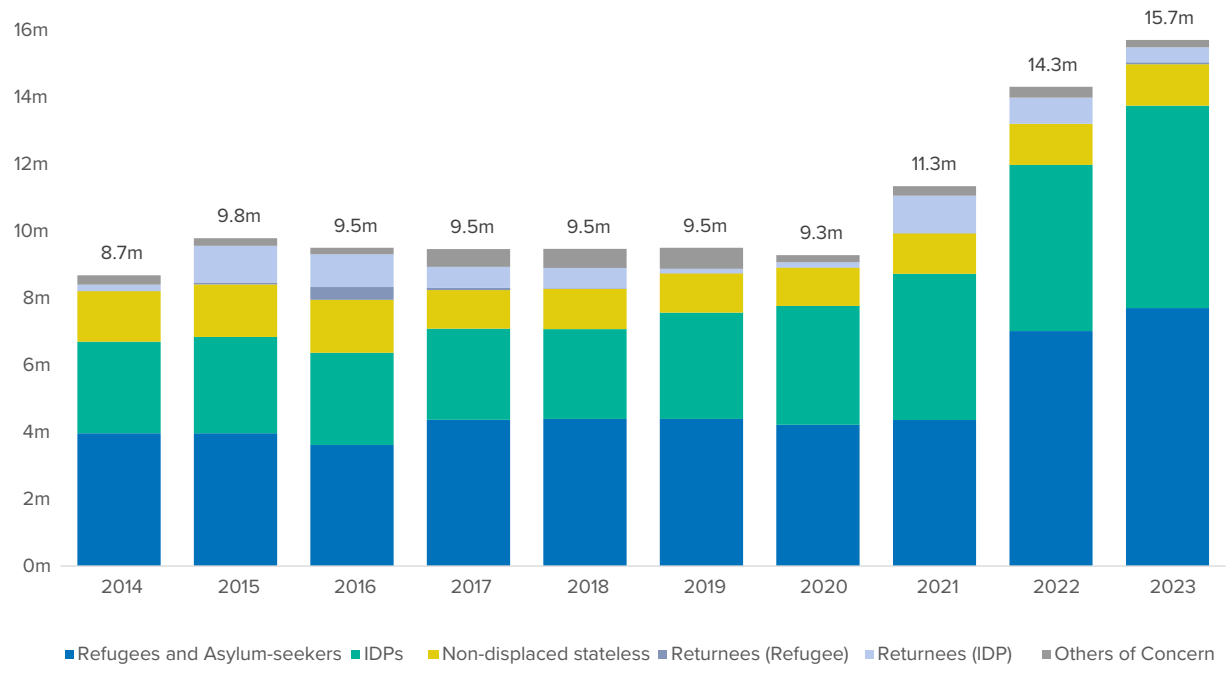
*Stateless people that have also been forcibly displaced are reported as stateless and within their respective displacement categories

A Rohingya refugee prepares food in Mina Raya Camp, Aceh, Indonesia. *© UNHCR/A. Jufrian*

8 Includes people in refugee-like situations. All further references to refugees include refugees under UNHCR's mandate and people in a refugee-like situation. The figures exclude Palestine refugees under UNRWA's mandate.

As of end-2023, there were 7.4 million refugees and people in a refugee-like situations, 6 million IDPs, 2.5 million recorded stateless people (including displaced stateless people), 449,300 IDP returnees, 271,800 asylum-seekers, and some 58,000 refugee returnees in Asia-Pacific. Compared to the previous year, the highest percentage increases were observed in refugee returnees (+740 per cent), followed by IDPs (+22 per cent), asylum-seekers (+17 per cent) and refugees (+10 per cent).

Figure 2 | **People who are forcibly displaced, stateless, returnees or others of concern to UNHCR in Asia Pacific | 2014 - 2023**

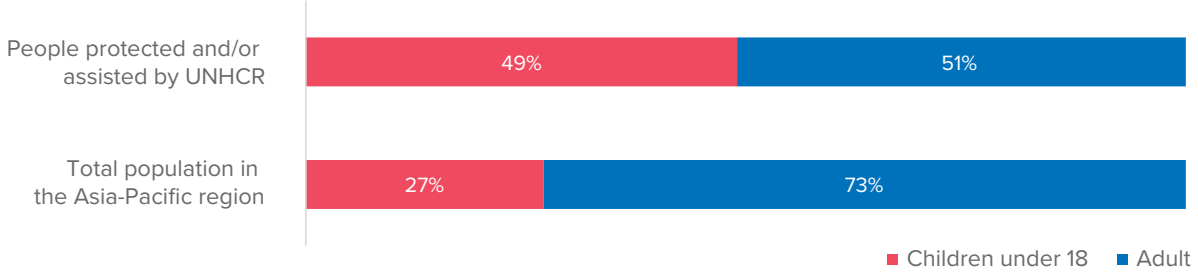


In the Asia-Pacific region, the total number of people with and for whom UNHCR works remained relatively constant from 2014 to 2020, averaging around 9.4 million. However, since 2020, there has been a progressive increase, with the population reaching 15.7 million by end-2023. The number of refugees, people in refugee-like situations and asylum-seekers increased by 94 per cent from 4 million in 2014 to 7.7 million in 2023. There was also a significant increase in the number of IDPs in the region. The IDP population more than doubled in 2023 compared to 2014, increasing from 2.7 million to 6 million (+121 per cent). The trend of refugee returnees in the past decade shows significant fluctuations, with a peak in 2016 when up to 385,100 refugees returned to their countries of origin in Asia-Pacific. After 2016, the number of returns decreased, but there was another surge in 2023, with some 58,000 refugees and people in refugee-like situations returning, most of whom were Afghans. Similarly, the trend of IDP returnees from 2014 to 2023 also shows notable variability. Returns were highest in 2015 and 2021. In 2023, the number of IDP returnees was around 449,300, showing a substantial decrease from previous highs.

The availability of disaggregated data by age and gender varies widely between countries and population groups, with demographics data available for 89 per cent of the total population UNHCR protects and/or assists in the region. Looking at the available demographic data, 52 per cent were women and girls, 49 per cent were children (under 18) and six per cent were elderly people above 60.

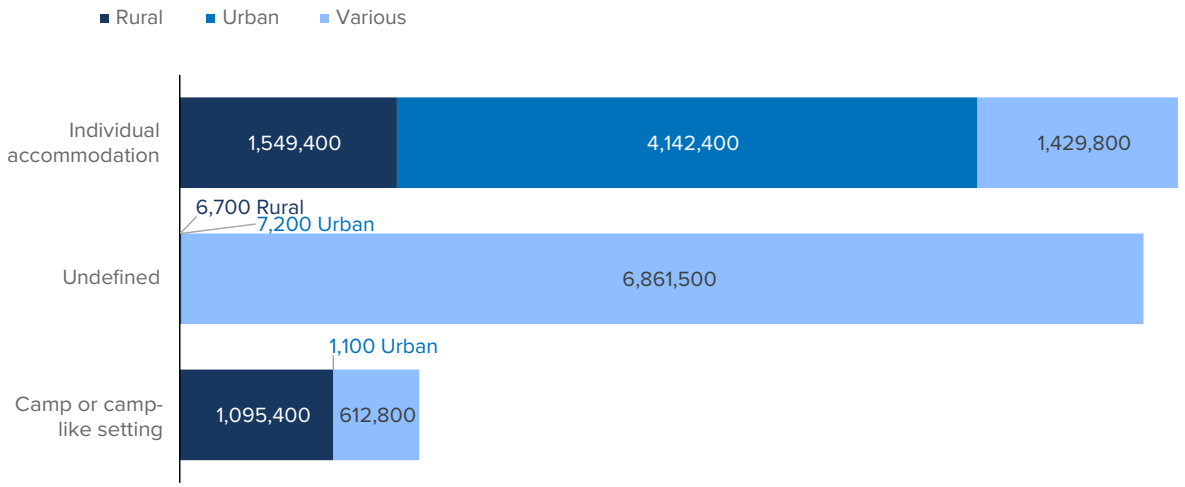
Some 49 per cent of the population UNHCR protects and/or assists were children, but children make up 27 per cent of the region's general population. Many forcibly displaced children will spend their entire childhoods away from home, sometimes separated from their families. They may have witnessed or experienced violent acts and, in exile, are at heightened risk of abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation, trafficking or military recruitment. UNHCR works with national authorities, other international and local organizations to assist, protect and find solutions for displaced children to ensure they are not left behind.

Figure 3 | **Proportion of children to adults: general population of the Asia-Pacific region and people who are forcibly displaced, stateless, returnees or others of concern to UNHCR | 2023**



Of the total number of people with and for whom UNHCR works, 11 per cent resided in managed camp or camp-like settings, while 45 per cent resided out of camps in individual accommodation. Some 44 per cent lived in undefined accommodation types. Of those residing in camps, 57 per cent were in Bangladesh, 25 per cent in Pakistan[9], 11 per cent in India, 5 per cent in Thailand and 2 per cent in the Islamic Republic of Iran .[10]

Figure 4 | **Accomodation type of people who are forcibly displaced, stateless, returnees or others of concern to UNHCR | 2023**



9 In Pakistan, 31 per cent of registered refugees reside in refugee villages. 90 per cent of the registered refugees were residing in the provinces of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab.

10 In Iran (Islamic Republic of), most refugees and people in refugee-like situations did not reside in settlements.

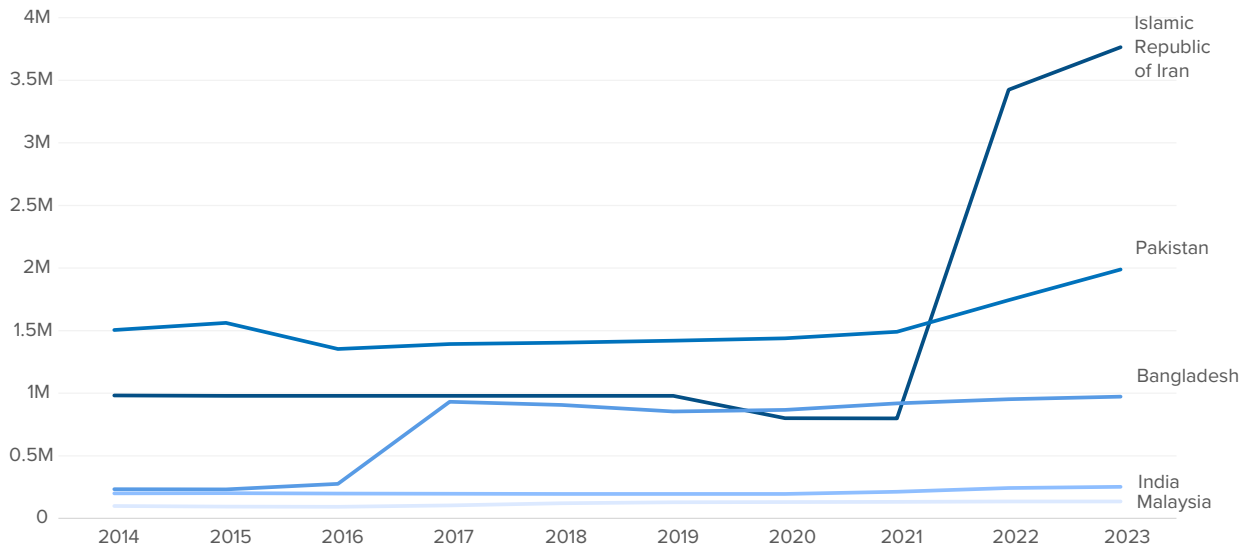
Chapter

2 REFUGEES AND PEOPLE IN REFUGEE-LIKE SITUATIONS

The number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations in Asia-Pacific grew by 645,600 in 2023, reaching 7.4 million, or 23 per cent of the global refugee population under UNHCR's mandate. This represents a 10 per cent increase compared to 2022. Most people fleeing conflict and persecution prefer to remain near their country of origin. In 2023, 94 per cent of refugees and asylum-seekers in Asia-Pacific were residing in neighbouring countries.

By country of asylum

Figure 5 | **Refugees and people in refugee-like situations by major country of asylum in Asia Pacific | 2023**

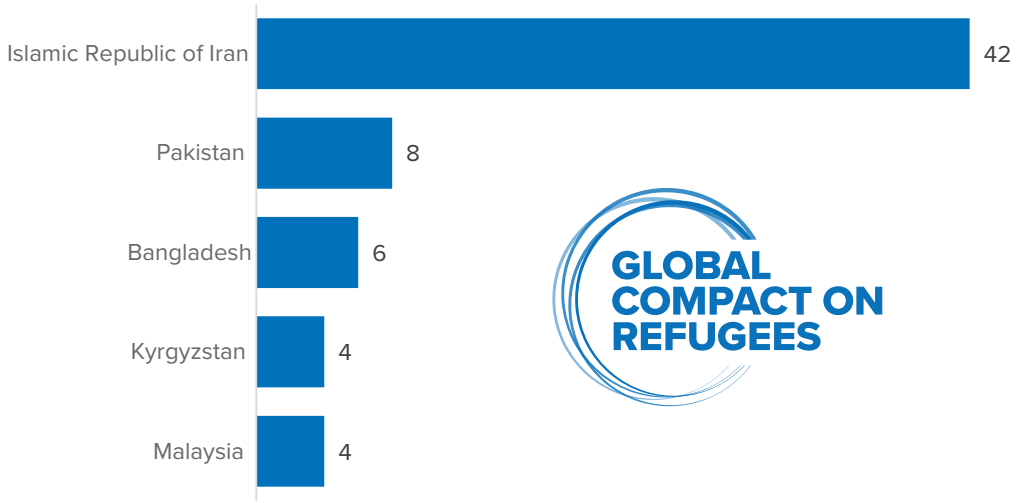


As of end-2023, Iran (Islamic Republic of) hosted some 760,900 Afghan Amayesh card holders, 12,200 Iraqi Hoviat cardholders and 2.6 million Afghans[11] recorded in a government-conducted 'headcount exercise' from 2022. An additional 365,000 undocumented Afghans in a refugee-like situation are estimated to be in Iran (Islamic Republic of) as of end-2023, resulting in some 3.8 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations in Iran (Islamic Republic of).

11 In 2022, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran conducted a recount of the previously "head counted" population and extended the scope of this scheme to all undocumented Afghans residing in the country, including those who had newly arrived due to the Taliban takeover in 2021 in Afghanistan. It is reported that 2.6 million Afghans enrolled in this exercise.

As of end-2023, 2 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations were in Pakistan (mostly Afghans), including around 1,371,400 registered refugees and around 143,900 unregistered members of registered families (UMRFs) who were recorded through the documentation renewal and information verification exercise (DRIVE) and were being verified at the time of reporting. It also includes an estimated 472,900 Afghans[12] who sought asylum in Pakistan, following transition in Afghanistan in August 2021.

Figure 6 | **Number of refugees per 1,000 inhabitants | 2023**



Comparing the size of the refugee population, including people in refugee-like situations, with that of the host country provides an important perspective to appreciate the full magnitude of the pressure felt by host countries. The number of refugees per 1,000 estimated inhabitants gives a relative perspective of the scale of the burden in host countries. Independent United Nations member states with a population size of at least 1,000 are included in this indicator. The top refugee-hosting countries in Asia-Pacific in relative terms are Iran (Islamic Republic of) (42 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants), Pakistan (8 refugees per 1,000 inhabitants), Bangladesh (6 per 1,000), Kyrgyzstan (4 per 1,000), and Malaysia (4 per 1,000). Even though India was the fourth largest refugee-hosting country in the region by end-2023, it does not rank amongst the top five countries due to its large population size. Globally, Lebanon had the highest number of refugees relative to their inhabitants (149 per 1,000).

In Asia-Pacific, refugees are hosted in one low-income country, 23 middle-income countries and six high-income countries.[13] Altogether 99 per cent of refugees and people in refugee-like situations in the region reside in low, lower-middle or upper-middle income countries. About 1 million refugees and people in refugee-like situations are hosted by countries in the region that are currently in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)[14] list, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Nepal. This accounts for 14 per cent of the total number of refugees and people in refugee-like situations in the region.

12 In total, some 600,000 Afghans arrived in Pakistan since the transition, according to the government estimates.
13 The classification of countries by income level is from the World Population Prospects 2024 (https://population.un.org/wpp/) as reported by the World Bank.
14 There are 45 Least Developed Countries. These are typically low- or lower-middle-income countries confronting severe structural impediments to sustainable development. The list of countries is revised every three years.

An Afghan refugee girl at school assembly in Semnan refugee settlement, Iran. All children, including refugees, have access to education in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

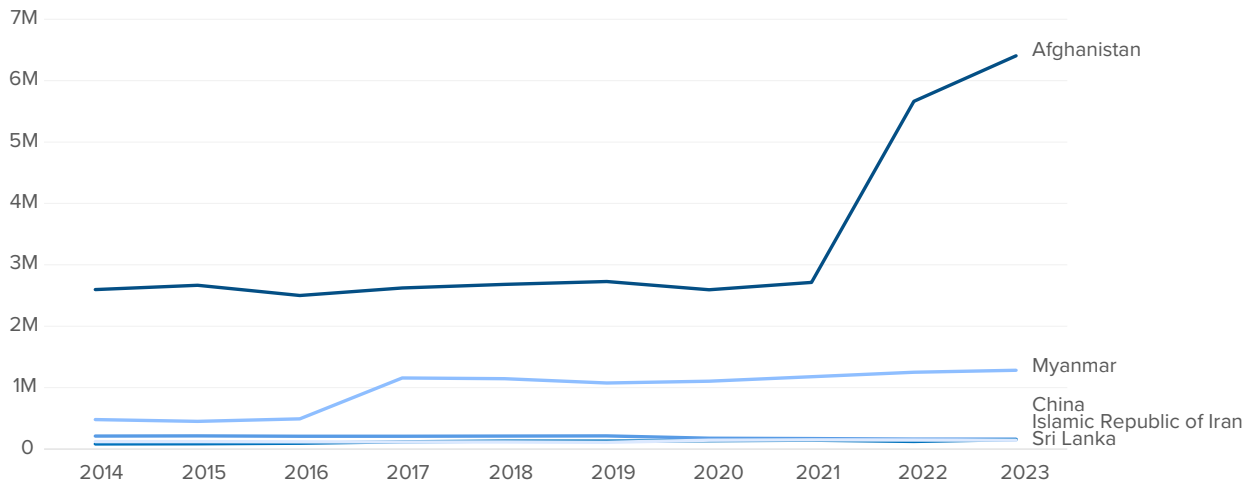
© UNHCR/Hossein Eidizadeh

By country of origin

The largest refugee population globally were Afghans, constituting one in six of all refugees under UNHCR's mandate. Slightly more than 6.4 million Afghans were hosted in 108 countries, an increase of 741,400 or 13 per cent from the previous year. This was predominantly due to the increase of Afghans in refugee-like situations in Iran (Islamic Republic of) (+327,300) and Pakistan (+189,800).[15] As in previous years, 90 per cent of all Afghan refugees were hosted in Iran (Islamic Republic of) (3.8 million) and Pakistan (2 million).

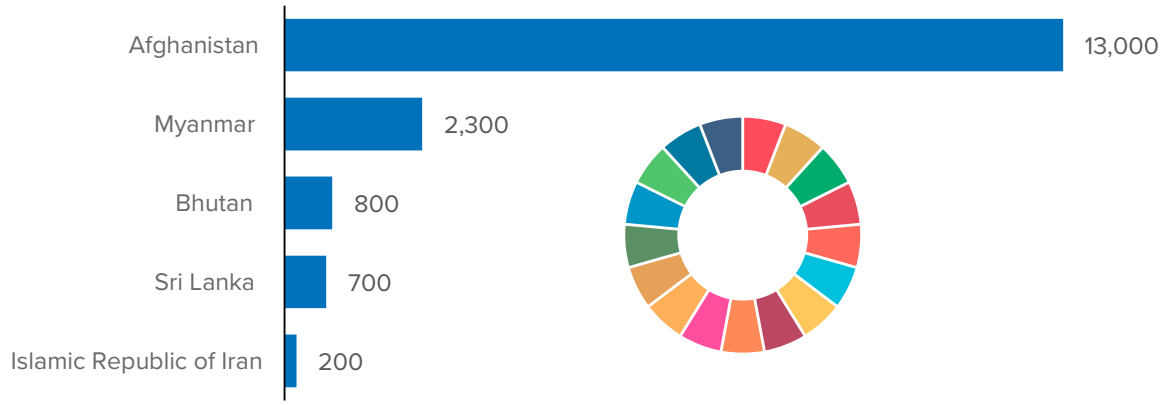
15 Following verification and registration exercises, the number of Afghans classified as people in refugee-like situations was revised in Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan.

Figure 7 | **Refugees and people in refugee-like situations by country of origin in Asia Pacific | 2023**



In 2023, the number of refugees under UNHCR's mandate from Myanmar increased by three per cent (31,800) from 2022 to reach 1.3 million, with more than three-quarters hosted in Bangladesh. The increase in 2023 was largely a result of the registration of new births in Bangladesh. India and Thailand also received an estimated 8,400 and 26,200 new arrivals respectively from Myanmar in 2023, but most people who fled to Thailand had subsequently returned to Myanmar.

Figure 8 | **SDG Indicator 10.7.4 | 2023**



*Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundreds

The proportion of a country's population who become refugees – SDG indicator 10.7.4[16] – is a useful way to identify the countries of origin with the most refugees relative to their number of inhabitants. Countries with the greatest proportion of their national population becoming refugees within the region were Afghanistan (13,000 per 100,000 inhabitants), Myanmar (2,300 per 100,000), Bhutan (800 per 100,000), Sri Lanka (700 per 100,000) and Iran (Islamic Republic of) (200 per 100,000). Globally, the Syrian Arab Republic had the greatest proportion of their national population becoming refugees (21,100 per 100,000).

New registration trends of refugees

In 2023, the 27 countries in Asia-Pacific that use UNHCR proGres[17] showed that registration trends surpassed previous rates, including before the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, the highest rate average quarterly registration in the region was 22,000 new registrations, compared to an average of 40,000 new registrations per quarter in 2023. The increase in registration can be attributed to all operations within Asia-Pacific becoming fully operational on proGres, continued increases in the registration of Afghan new arrivals across the region, and the registration of new births among the Rohingya in Bangladesh. The drop in registration in the second quarter of 2023 can be attributed to the transition of proGres to the cloud in April, during which all operations suspended registration in proGres for a three week period. However, registration trends increased again in May and June 2023 to clear the backlog of pending registration cases.

Figure 9 | **Estimated new registration trends by quarter in UNHCR operations using proGres | Q1-2019 - Q4-2023**

16 See UN Statistical Commission 51st session (2020) documents. Indicator 10.7.4 is computed as follows: [Number of refugees by country of origin at end-year / (End-year population in country of origin + number of refugees by country of origin at end-year)] * 100,000. For this indicator, refugees and people in refugee-like situations have been included.

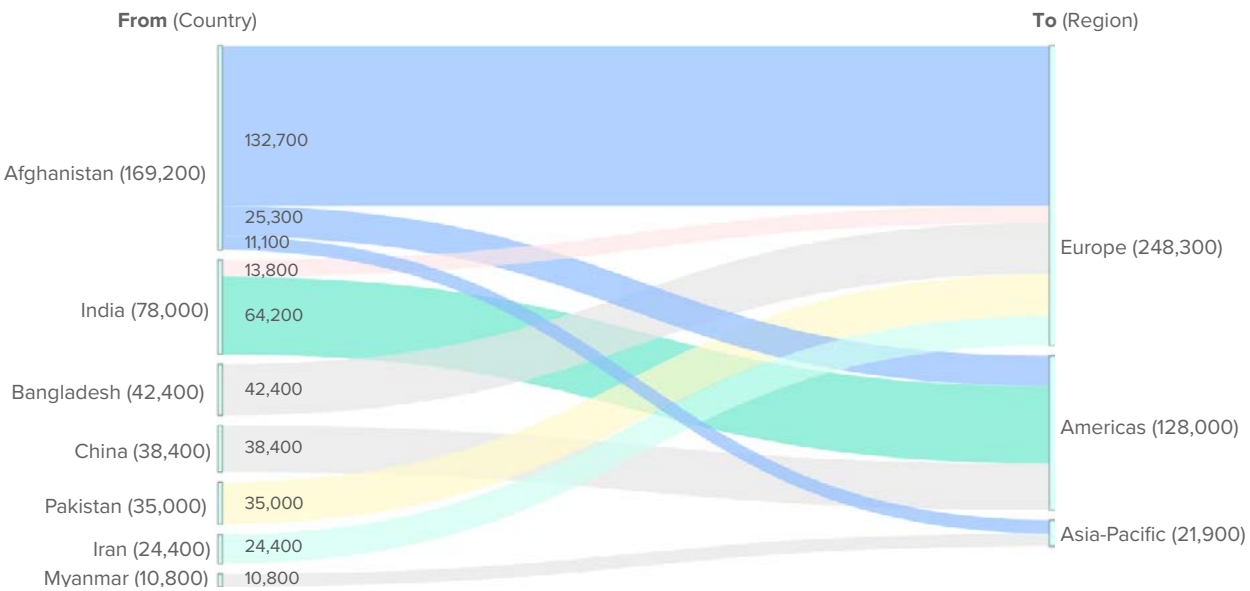
17 In 2002, UNHCR developed an IT case management tool called proGres (Profile Global Registration System).

Chapter

3 ASYLUM-SEEKERS

Asylum-seekers are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. Refugee Status Determination (RSD)[18] is the process by which governments or UNHCR determine whether a person seeking international protection is a refugee and assess asylum claims against the legal criteria in international, regional and national law.

Figure 10 | **Flow of asylum-seekers | 2023**[19]



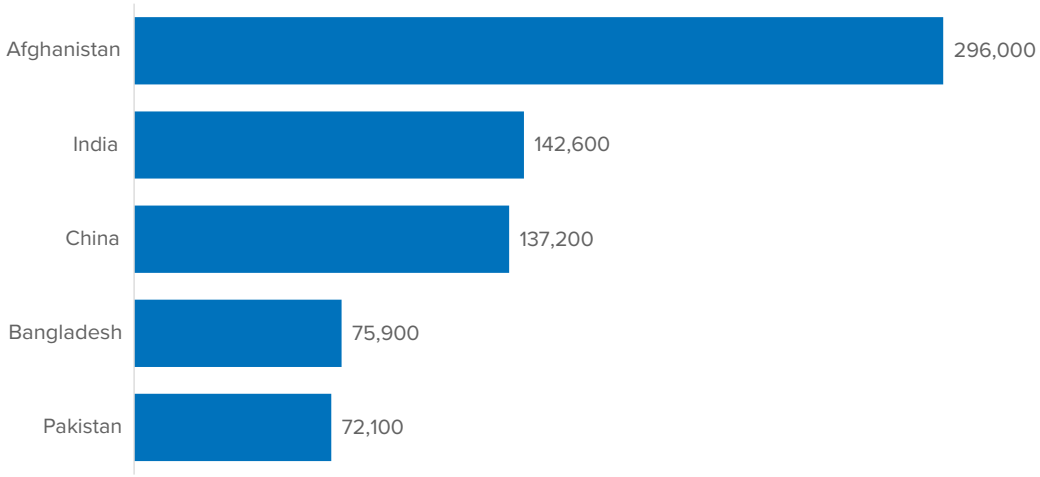
In 2023, the number of new individual asylum applications by nationals of countries in Asia-Pacific reached 551,200, marking a 21 per cent increase compared to 2022. Afghans submitted 169,600 new applications in 2023. Compared to 2022, new individual applications by Afghan nationals decreased by 19 per cent, and up to 132,700 (78 per cent) of these applications lodged in Europe. 11,100 new Afghan applications were received by countries in Asia-Pacific, partially due to the absence of a robust RSD system in many countries within the region. Significant increases in new applications compared to 2022 were observed among Chinese applicants, almost doubling to 48,100 applications primarily to the Americas. This was followed by Indian applicants (+45 per cent to 84,400), Bangladeshi applicants (+44 per cent to 57,200) and Pakistani applicants (+25 per cent to 51,600). Half of all new individual asylum applications from the region were lodged in Europe.

18 Refugee status can be granted individually or on a group basis. Group recognition most commonly takes place when there are readily apparent and objective circumstances in a country of origin which suggest that most individuals fleeing from that country are likely to be refugees. In most cases, those being granted refugee status on a group basis will be directly registered as refugees, as opposed to those recognized on an individual basis who will first be registered as an asylum-seeker. This is why individuals undergoing group determination will normally not be counted in the "asylum application" total.

19 Only refers to individual asylum application to countries with existing Refugee Status Determination process.

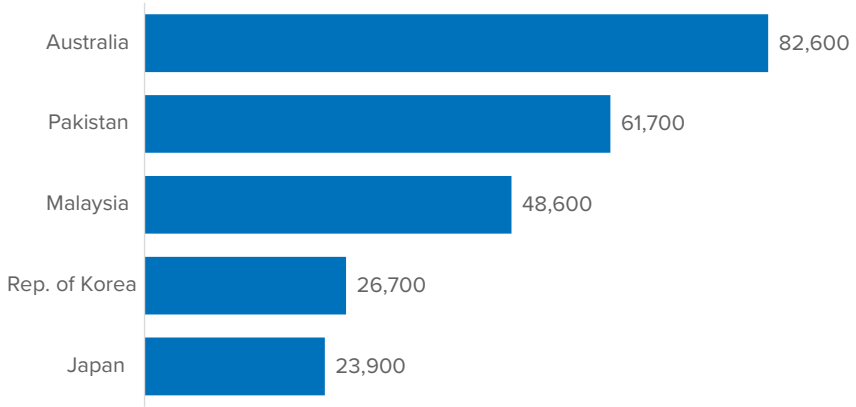
When examining pending asylum claims globally by the end of 2023, Afghanistan (296,000) stood out as the largest country of origin for asylum-seekers from Asia-Pacific, followed by India (142,600), the People's Republic of China (137,200), Bangladesh (75,900) and Pakistan (72,100). According to the European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA) annual overview of 2023[20], Afghans were the second largest group of asylum applicants in the EU+ in 2023, following Syria. In 2023, they lodged 114,000 Afghan applications, marking an 11 per cent decrease compared to 2022, positioning Afghans as one of the few major nationalities with a declining trend in EU+. The Afghan recognition rate[21] in the EU+ was 61 per cent in 2023 although there was significant variation between receiving countries. Nearly half of all decisions on Afghans applications were issued by Germany.

Figure 11 | **Asylum-seekers globally by country of origin in Asia Pacific | 2023**



Australia hosts the highest number of asylum-seekers (82,600) in the region by end-2023, followed by Pakistan (61,700), Malaysia (48,600), the Republic of Korea (26,700) and Japan (23,900). In the Republic of Korea (the), the number of asylum-seekers increased by 67 per cent compared to the same reporting period the previous year.

Figure 12 | **Asylum-seekers by host country in Asia Pacific | 2023**



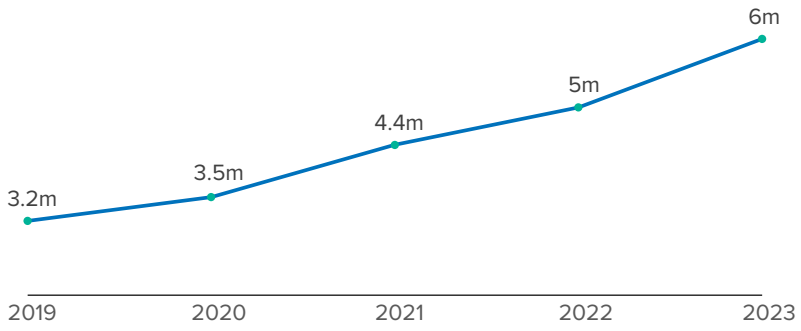
20 Source European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA): Latest Asylum Trends - Annual Overview 2023 | European Union Agency for Asylum (europa.eu)
21 Recognition rate includes refugee status and subsidiary protection but excludes national protection forms. It is calculated using only first instance decisions.

Chapter

4 INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE

In the region, the number of people displaced inside their own countries due to armed conflict, generalized violence or human rights violation continued to grow over the last five years.[22] By the end of 2023, there were 6 million IDPs in the region, nearly double the figure of 2019.

Figure 13 | **IDP trends in Asia Pacific | 2019-2023**



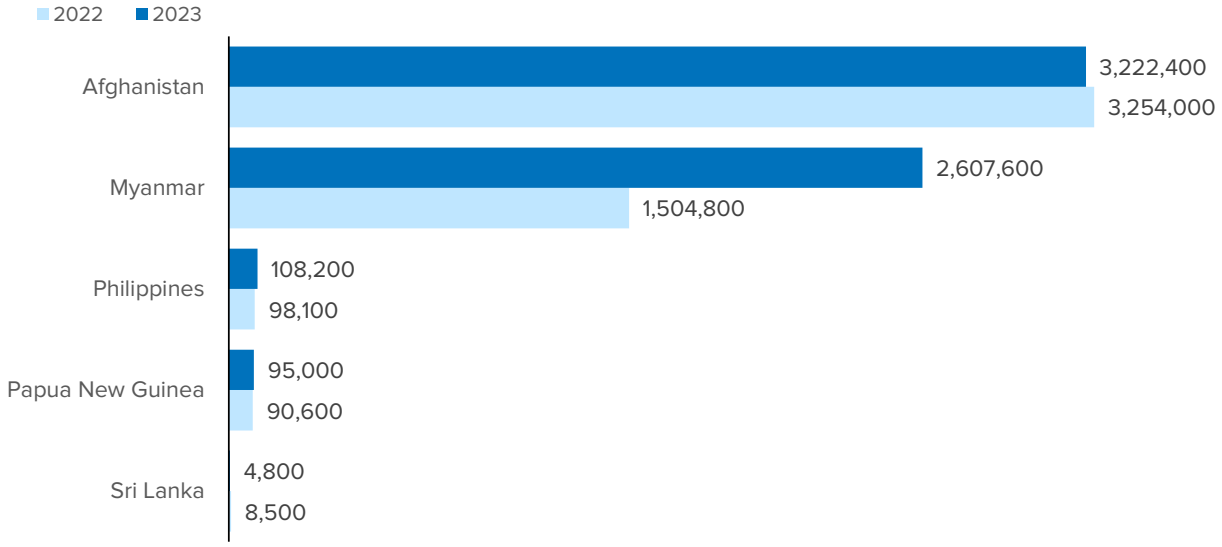
Women who are internally displaced balance large sacks of UNHCR relief items on their heads as they make their way back to their shelters. Rakhine State, Myanmar.

© UNHCR/Reuben Lim Wende

22 See footnote 4

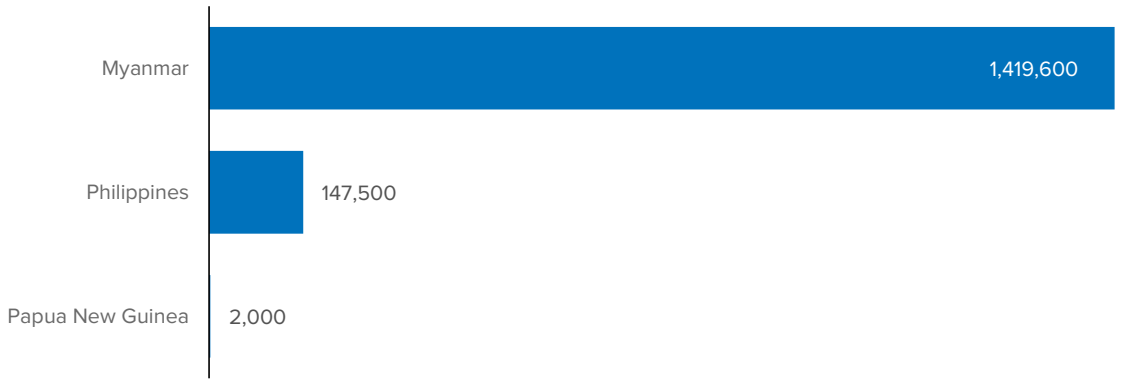
Six countries in the region reported conflict-induced IDPs. Countries with the most conflict-induced IDPs by the end of 2023 in the region were Afghanistan (3.2 million), Myanmar (2.6 million), and the Philippines (108,200).

Figure 14 | **Countries with the most conflict-induced IDPs | 2022-2023**



In Myanmar, widespread violence escalated in several regions, further exacerbating the human rights situation in the country.[23] In 2023, 1.4 million people were compelled to flee their homes and 2.6 million individuals remained displaced in Myanmar at end-year, an increase of some 73 per cent from the previous year. In the Philippines, some 147,500 new displacements were reported, most commonly in Maguindanao province due to clashes between government forces and non-state armed groups as well as clan feuds.

Figure 15 | **Newly displaced IDPs in Asia Pacific | 2023**



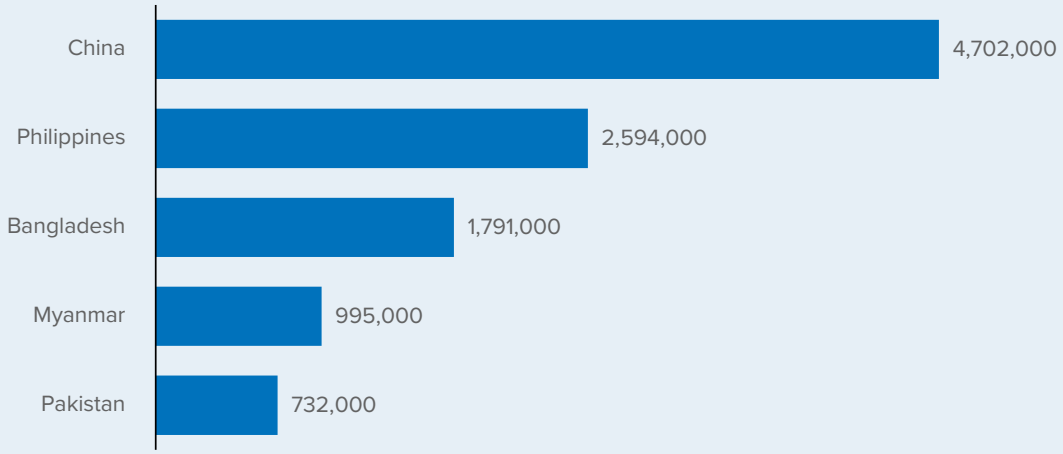
23 Myanmar: Human rights situation worsens as military lashes out indiscriminately amid losses | OHCHR and Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 (December 2023) [EN/MY] | OCHA (unocha.org)

Displacement in the context of climate change and disasters

In addition to conflict and violence, people were displaced within their countries due to disasters and the impact of climate change, which is dramatically reshaping the regional disaster risk landscape. Numerous countries in Asia-Pacific have faced multiple crises in recent years, including droughts, floods, earthquakes, typhoons and cyclones, and locust infestations. In 2023, 12.5 million internal displacements due to disasters were reported in the region, with 4.1 million people remaining displaced by the end of the year, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC).[24] Asia and the Pacific accounted for 51 per cent of disaster-induced internal displacements in 2023.

Three countries in Asia-Pacific were amongst the top five globally reporting the highest figures of internal displacements due to disasters in 2023: China (4.7 million), the Philippines (2.6 million) and Bangladesh (1.8 million). Primarily due to severe weather events, China reportedly had the highest number of internal displacements caused by disasters globally, accounting for 19 per cent of global disaster displacements and resulting in more than half a million people living in displacement by end-2023. The Philippines reported the third-highest number of internal displacements caused by disasters globally, mainly due to geophysical hazards, storms and floods. Bangladesh had the fifth-highest number of internal displacements caused by disasters globally in 2023.

Figure 16 | **Internal displacements during the year by disasters in Asia-Pacific | 2023**

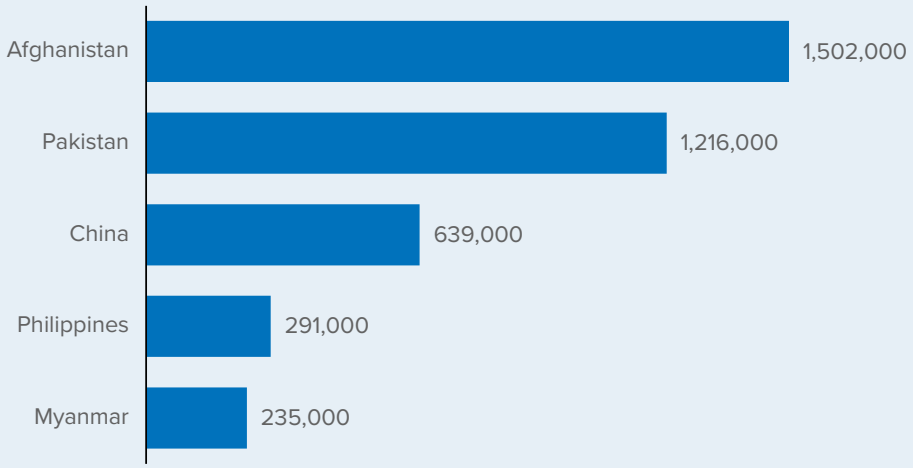


Cyclone Mocha triggered 1.3 million displacements, mostly in the Cox's Bazar district of Chattogram Division. While forecasting and early warnings enable authorities to implement emergency procedures, the storm still affected vulnerable communities, including Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazar, with about 30,000 temporarily located from their homes. Rohingya refugees faced further displacement when Cyclone Hamoon struck the same locations in October, causing a landfall that led to 273,000 evacuations. Flood displacements significantly decreased to 213,000 in Bangladesh, about half the decadal average. These displacements occurred exclusively in Cox's Bazar in August and resulted in damage to Rohingya refugees' shelters for the second time in the year.

24 See IDMC | GRID 2024 | 2024 Global Report on Internal Displacement (internal-displacement.org). IDMC reported an internal displacement as a forced movement recorded during the year. The same person can be forced to move multiple times, and each movement was counted.

In Afghanistan, a series of high-magnitude earthquakes and aftershocks struck the western province of Herat in October, triggering 380,000 internal displacements. The death toll and injuries were higher among women and girls since they were more likely to be in their homes due to increasing restrictions on their freedom of movement.[25] The earthquakes further exacerbated the challenges faced by already vulnerable communities, resulting in a significant loss of life, homes and livelihoods. Many affected were returnees (refugees and IDPs) who had previously been displaced by national disasters and conflict, only to return and now face the daunting task of rebuilding their lives once again.[26]

Figure 17 | **IDPs by natural disasters | 2023**



Climate change, particularly in this region, acts as a vulnerability multiplier. It erodes communities' coping capacities, exacerbates underlying fragilities, increases the risks of new tensions, underscores disparities in access to systems and services, and creates new challenges to finding solutions. In this context, UNHCR has developed a Regional Climate Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific, 2023-25[27], which proposes priorities to be advanced in all UNHCR country offices across the region. In the context of disaster displacement, UNHCR is focused on working with partners to ensure that forcibly displaced people fleeing from or living in climate-vulnerable countries can find solutions, are protected from and resilient to the impacts of climate change, and can achieve self-sufficiency in their lives.[28]

25 See Trapped in their homes: Women and girls comprise majority of earthquake casualties in Afghanistan | UN Women – Headquarters
26 See UNHCR Afghanistan Earthquake Response: Emergency Appeal October 2023 – March 2024 | ReliefWeb
27 See Asia and the Pacific: Climate Action Plan | Glo¬bal Focus (unhcr.org)
28 See Focus Area Strategic Plan for Climate Action 2024-2030 | UNHCR

HIGHLIGHT

AFGHANISTAN SITUATION

GLOBAL

10,045,200
Afghans protected and/ or assisted by UNHCR

6,403,100
Afghan refugees and people in refugee-like situations

296,000
Afghan asylum-seekers

3,222,400
internally displaced Afghans

ASIA-PACIFIC

9,198,400
(92%)
Afghans protected and/ or assisted by UNHCR

5,782,600
(90%)
Afghan refugees and people in refugee-like situations

70,600
(24%)
Afghan asylum-seekers

3,222,400
internally displaced Afghans

SOUTH-WEST ASIA

(Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan)

9,146,800
(91%)
Afghans protected and/ or assisted by UNHCR

5,740,000
(90%)
Afghan refugees and people in refugee-like situations

61,500
(21%)
Afghan asylum-seekers

3,222,400
internally displaced Afghans

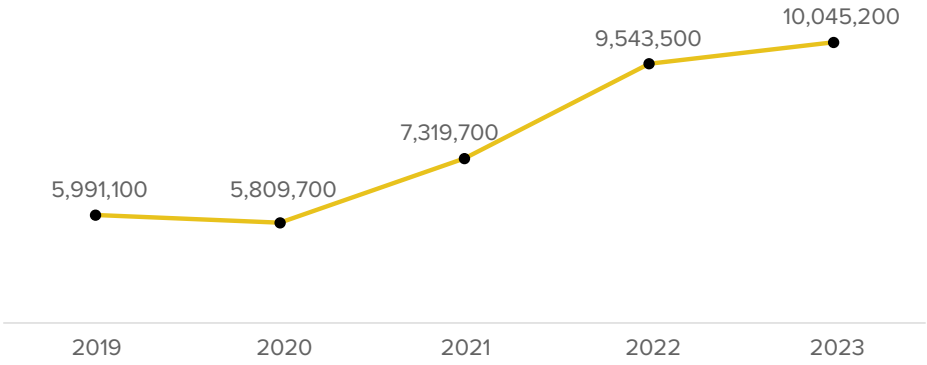
Globally, as of the end of 2023, UNHCR reported that over 10 million Afghans[29] were displaced, a five per cent increase from end-2022. Up to 92 per cent of Afghans protected and assisted by UNHCR resided in Asia and the Pacific region. The majority are displaced within Afghanistan or in neighbouring countries. The Afghanistan situation continues to be the largest in the region, with a continual increase in the number of people UNHCR protects and/or assists.

Afghanistan has now become the largest country of origin of refugees[30] globally. In 2023, the number of Afghan refugees reported globally increased by 741,400 to reach 6.4 million, mostly reflecting new population estimates reported by both Iran (Islamic Republic of) and Pakistan. 90 per cent of all Afghan refugees, including people in refugee-like situations, were hosted in Iran (Islamic Republic of) (3.8 million) and Pakistan (2 million). Opportunities for sustainable return remain limited, with almost half of Afghanistan's population of more than 40 million facing acute food insecurity, and millions displaced within the country.

29 Includes refugees, people in a refugee-like situation, asylum-seekers, IDPs, refugee returnees, IDP returnees and others of concern to UNHCR.

30 Includes people in a refugee-like situation. All subsequent references to refugees include people in a refugee-like situation.

Figure 18 | **Afghans UNHCR protects and/or assists | 2019 - 2023**



Note: Figures are as of the reporting period during their respective years and can be changed as the data is updated retro

In Iran (Islamic Republic of), the increase of 339,400 refugees and people in refugee-like situations in 2023 was mainly due to the inclusion of additional estimates of Afghans.[31] By end-2023, Iran (Islamic Republic of) hosted 3.8 million Afghan refugees and people in refugee-like situations. This includes 760,900 Afghan Amayesh cardholders, 2.6 million Afghans[32] recorded in a government-conducted headcount exercise from 2022, and an estimated 365,000 undocumented Afghans in a refugee-like situation.

Pakistan hosted 2 million Afghan refugees and people in refugee-like situations as of end-2023, including around 1,371,400 registered refugees and some 143,900 unregistered members of registered families (UMRFs) who were recorded through the documentation renewal and information verification exercise (DRIVE) and were undergoing verification at the time of reporting. It also includes an estimated 472,900 Afghans who sought asylum in Pakistan, following takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021.[33] The number of Afghan refugees and people in refugee-like situations in Pakistan increased from the end-2022 figure of 1.7 million, despite the implementation of the government's 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan (IFRP)' due to the inclusion of new population estimates during 2023 reflecting arrivals since the Taliban takeover.

In October 2023, the Government of Pakistan announced a new 'Illegal Foreigners' Repatriation Plan,' which sought to expel all undocumented foreigners. By November 2023, following the plan's implementation, UNHCR declared an internal Level 2 emergency for Pakistan and Afghanistan for six months to scale up the humanitarian response amid the rapidly evolving situation.[34] The plan has disproportionately affected Afghans, many of whom have lived abroad for decades. Almost half a million Afghans returned from Pakistan,[35] including some 28,000 who were deported. Approximately 49 per cent of those who returned were women or girls.

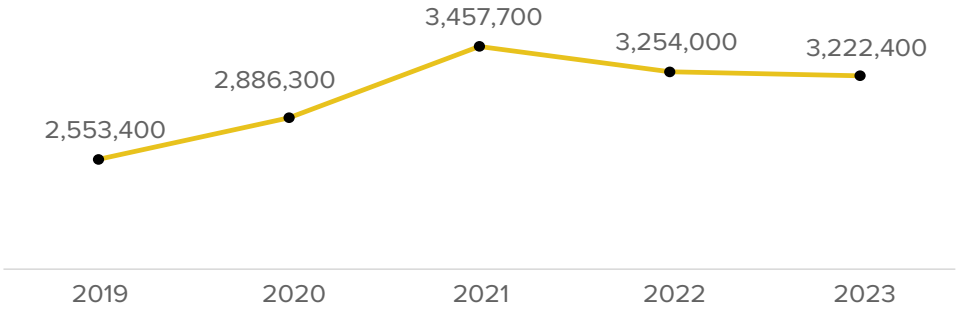
31 See footnote 11
32 It is estimated that out of these 2.6 million Afghans, around 1 million newly arrived to Iran (Islamic Republic of) following the August 2021 Taliban takeover in Afghanistan.
33 See footnote 12
34 See Document - Pakistan-Afghanistan - Returns Emergency Response #18 (unhcr.org).
35 See UNHCR Dataviz - Returns to Afghanistan.

28 per cent of returning households were women-headed, leaving them vulnerable to income loss and restricted mobility due to their lack of male support. As Afghanistan struggles to overcome the enduring effects of decades of conflict, economic hardship and poor public services, all Afghans are adversely affected, but those returning from displacement bear a disproportionate burden.

Conflict-induced IDPs in Afghanistan

Prior to 2022, the number of IDPs in Afghanistan steadily increased, peaking at some 3,457,700 by end-2021. Since then, the Afghan IDP figure has decreased, with about 3,222,400 people still internally displaced by end-2023, marking a 7 per cent decrease from 2021. Children under 18 made up 62 per cent of the IDP population while 21 per cent were women aged 18 and older.

Figure 19 | **IDP trends in Afghanistan | 2019 - 2023**



Following the Taliban takeover in 2021, active conflict in Afghanistan has largely ceased, presenting the country with new challenges after more than four decades of conflict. Nine out of ten Afghans live in poverty, and unemployment rates are soaring. Women and girls have been significantly marginalized from public life following a series of restrictive edicts that curtailed their social, economic and political rights. Among the most severe restrictions are the bans on female employment and the prohibition of girls' education beyond grade 6.

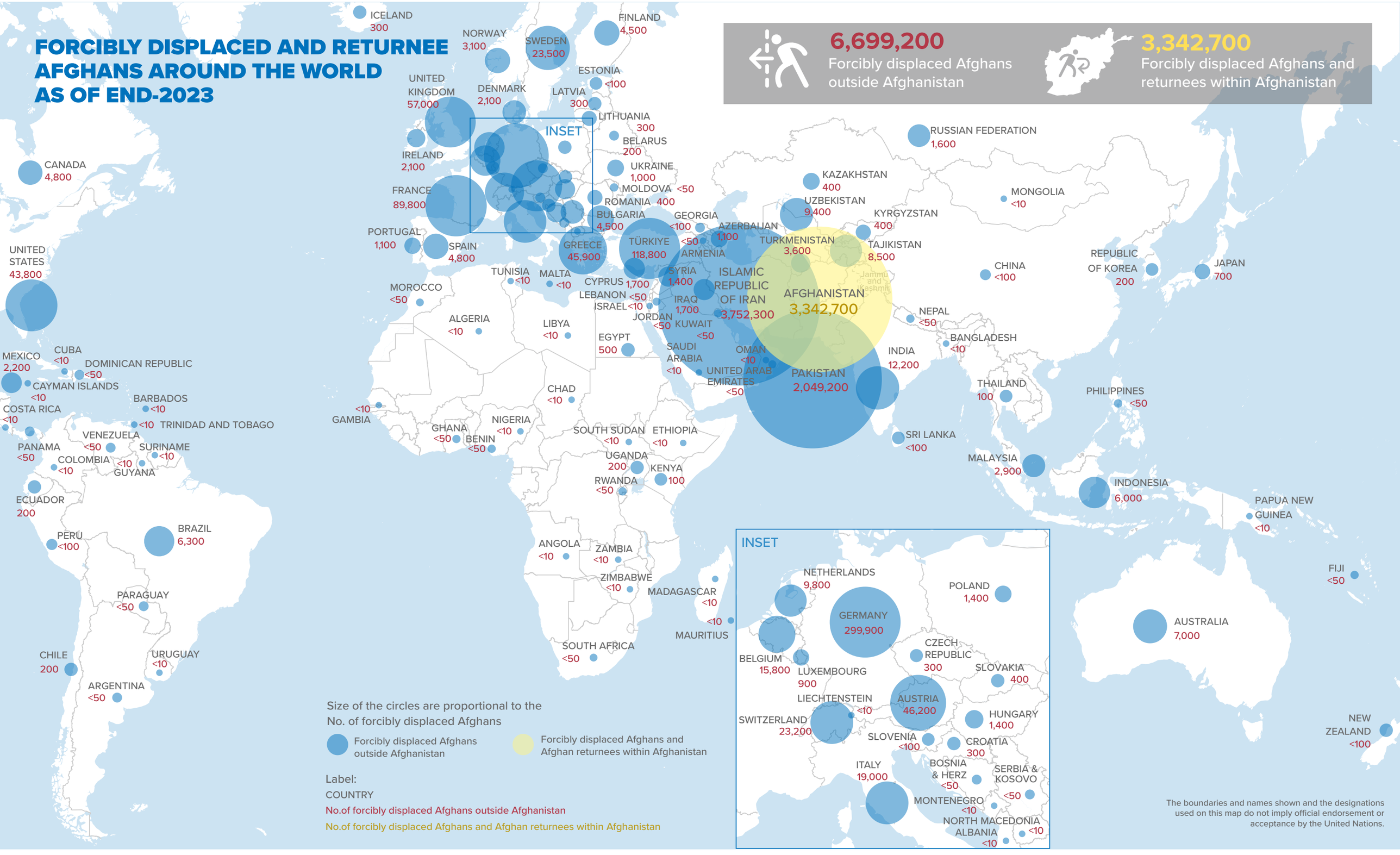
These measures have seriously undermined the country's socio-economic fabric, exacerbating the marginalization of women and girls and denying young girls their fundamental right to education and future opportunities.

HIGHLIGHT: AFGHANISTAN SITUATION

FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND RETURNEE AFGHANS AROUND THE WORLD AS OF END-2023

6,699,200
Forcibly displaced Afghans outside Afghanistan

3,342,700
Forcibly displaced Afghans and returnees within Afghanistan



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

Chapter

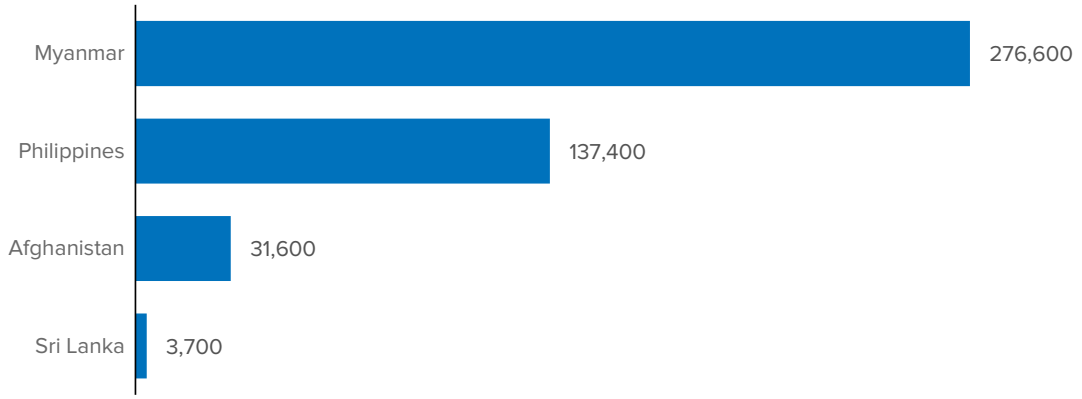
5 SOLUTIONS

Durable solutions for refugees include voluntary repatriation, resettlement or complementary pathways to a third country, and local integration. Due to ongoing instability in the countries of origin of most displaced people in Asia, limited opportunities for local integration in host countries in the region, and a relatively small number of third country solutions compared to the needs, a growing number of people remain in increasingly protracted displacement contexts without access to a durable solution. Although the number of refugee returns increased significantly in 2023, it accounted for less than one per cent of those who were displaced at the end of the previous year.

IDP Returns

IDP returnees decreased to 449,300 in 2023 from 778,600 in 2022, with Myanmar (276,600) and the Philippines (137,400) being the main countries of IDP returnees in the region in 2023. IDP returnees decreased by 87 per cent in Afghanistan and 15 per cent in Myanmar compared to 2022. In the Philippines, IDP returnees increased by 16 per cent. UNHCR is working to support UN Resident Coordinators and UN Country Teams in the region to operationalize the commitments outlined in the UN Secretary-General's Action Agenda on Internal Displacement.

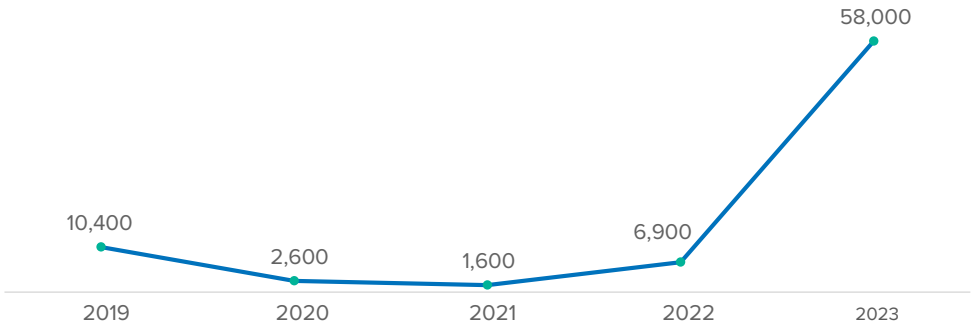
Figure 20 | **Returned IDPs in Asia-Pacific | 2023**



Refugee Returns

Between 2019 to 2021, the region experienced a steady decline in the number of voluntary refugee repatriations. In 2020 and 2021, reductions in the number of refugees returning to their countries of origin were mainly attributed to travel restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2022, the number of refugee returnees to the region has increased, with a significant surge observed in 2023, primarily among Afghan nationals. In 2023, 57,500 refugees returned to Afghanistan, with 99 per cent (56,800) returning from Pakistan.[36] There was a notable increase in the number of Afghans returning from Pakistan in 2023 overall, including through deportation, primarily driven by the implementation of the IFRP initiated in October 2023.[37]

Figure 21 | **Refugee returnee trends | 2019 - 2023**



Afghans return to Afghanistan from Pakistan through the Spin Boldak border point, following the October 2023 announcement by Pakistani authorities to deport undocumented foreigners.

© UNHCR/Oxygen Empire Media Production

36 Includes people in refugee-like situations.
37 See Document - Pakistan-Afghanistan - Returns Emergency Response #18 (unhcr.org).

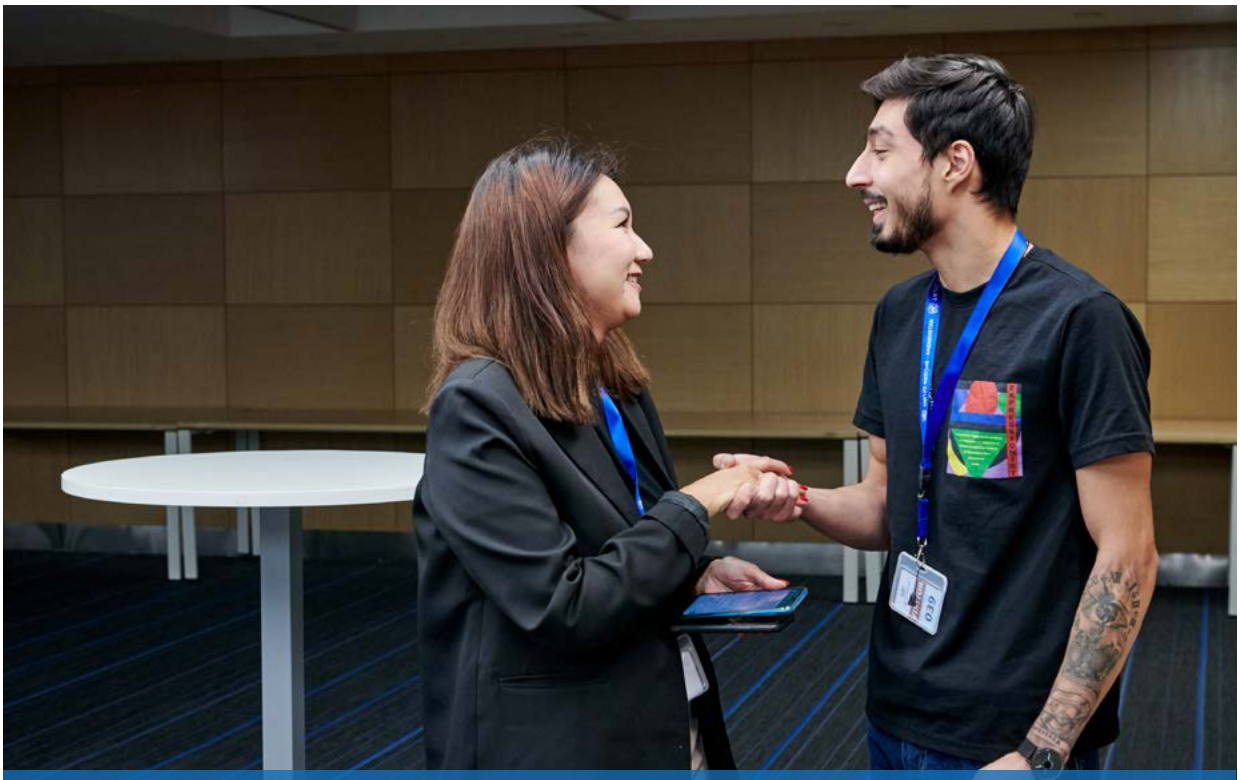
Resettlement and Complementary Pathways

UNHCR resettlement submissions from the region reached 39,700 in 2023, marking an 86 per cent increase compared to 2022. This rise can be attributed to continued efforts and focus on third country solutions for refugees from Afghanistan and Myanmar. In 2023, more than 12,400 refugees departed on resettlement from the region, a significant increase from about 4,500 resettlement departures in 2022. The primary countries for refugee resettlement from the region included the United States of America, Australia and Canada.

In 2023, UNHCR recorded approximately 8,500 departures from Asia on sponsorship, education, and labour complementary pathways, primarily to Canada and Australia, a slight decrease compared to some 9,000 in 2022.

Naturalization

Within the region, the reported naturalization of refugees decreased from 2,264 in 2022 to 1,363 in 2023, with the vast majority naturalized in Australia (1,327).



New and returning Afghan refugee students from the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative (DAFI) scholarship programme attend orientation sessions in Almaty, Kazakhstan. *© UNHCR/Izturgan Aldauyev*

Chapter

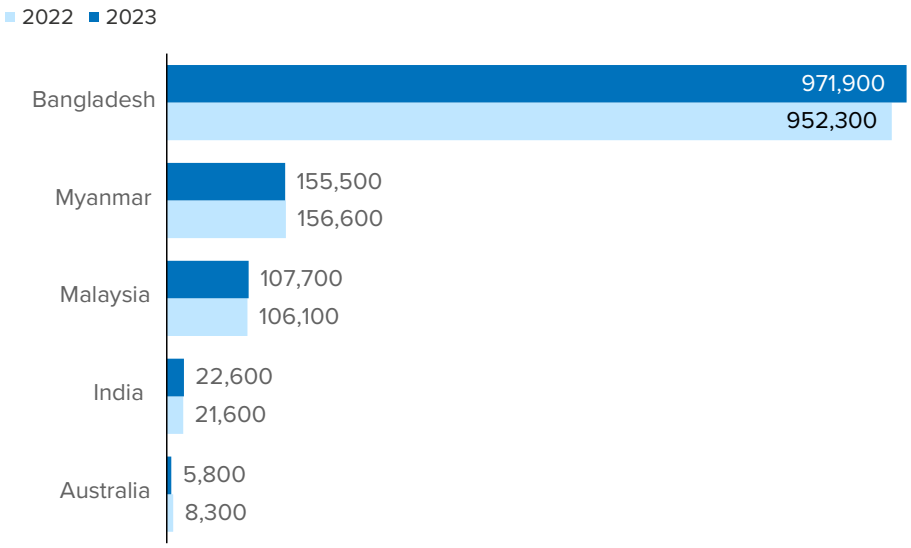
6 STATELESS POPULATION

57 per cent of the world's recorded stateless population resides in the Asia and the Pacific region. Within this region, there were 2.5 million stateless people, of whom 1.2 million were non-displaced stateless people and 1.3 million displaced stateless people. Displaced stateless people in the region included refugees, asylum-seekers or IDPs who are not considered nationals by any State. By the end of 2023, the stateless population in the region remained largely unchanged compared to 2022. Of the stateless population, 69 per cent were Rohingya.[38]

Displaced stateless people in Asia Pacific

The 1.27 million displaced stateless people consist of 1.09 million refugees, 0.16 million IDPs, and some 19,000 asylum-seekers. This represents a two per cent increase in displaced stateless people compared to 1.24 million at the end of 2022. Of the 1.27 million displaced stateless people in the region, over 99 per cent were Rohingya from Myanmar. Most reside in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, and India.

Figure 22 | **Countries with the most displaced stateless people in Asia-Pacific | 2023**

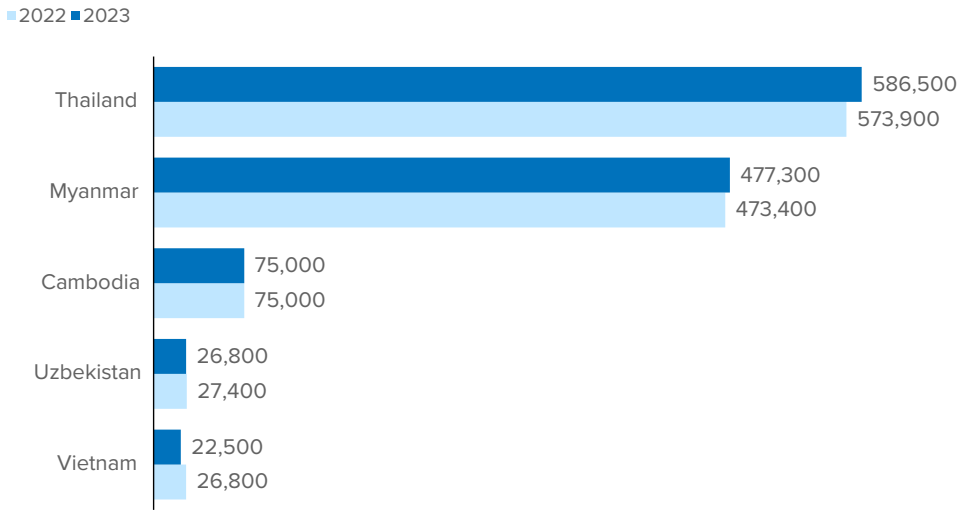


38 Details can be found in highlight: Myanmar situation (pg 36).

Non-displaced stateless people in Asia Pacific

There were increases in the non-displaced stateless population in 2023 in several countries in the region compared to the end of 2022. In Myanmar, the non-displaced stateless population increased by an estimated 4,400 people during the year. In Thailand, an increase of 21,300 people resulted from new-born registration, registration of undocumented people and the re-registration of previously de-registered cases.

Figure 23 | **Countries with the most non-displaced stateless people in Asia-Pacific | 2023**



In 2023, the acquisition or confirmation of nationality continued in line with Action 1 (resolve existing major situations of statelessness) of the Global Action Plan to End Statelessness by 2024. During the year, some 20,500 stateless people acquired nationality and permanent residence within the region. In Central Asia[39], the number of newly registered stateless people reported by governments and UNHCR partners indicated a decrease of around 8,300 stateless people in the sub-region. Notably, in Uzbekistan, the government continues to implement provisions that provide eligibility for citizenship for stateless people, with some 5,000 acquiring nationality or citizenship in 2023. In Thailand, some 7,700 stateless people acquired permanent residency.

One of UNHCR's efforts to make national civil registration systems more inclusive and accessible to refugees, asylum-seekers, IDPs, stateless people and people of undetermined nationality is the recent revision of the "Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit"[40] now entitled the "Bali Process Toolkit for Inclusive Civil Registration."[41] This updated and more concise version of the Toolkit is designed to help national authorities, such as civil registrars and national statistics offices, in assessing and resolving common gaps and barriers in civil registration systems.

39 Central Asia includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. See https://www.unhcr.org/centralasia/en.
40 See Bali Process Civil Registration Assessment Toolkit | Get Every One in the Picture (getinthepicture.org).
41 See Bali Process Toolkit for Inclusive Civil Registration – World | ReliefWeb.

Ensuring that civil registration and vial statistics (CRVS) systems are inclusive of all people in the State's jurisdiction and territory is instrumental to strengthening national planning exercises, such as public health responses. It is also vital to enhancing the enjoyment of rights and protection outcomes, such providing people under 18 with legal proof of their status as children and preventing and resolving family separation by providing official documentation of parentage and family composition. Although the Toolkit was developed specifically to improve the inclusion of forcibly displaced and stateless people, it is equally relevant for reaching other marginalized and hard-to-reach groups.

A-Der (left) and her mother Meecha (right) of the Akha indigenous ethnic minority share a laugh in their village in Chiang Mai. Both are registred stateless individuals in Thailand, fighting to obtain citizenship.

© UNHCR/Rachaphon Riansiri

6. STATELESS POPULATION

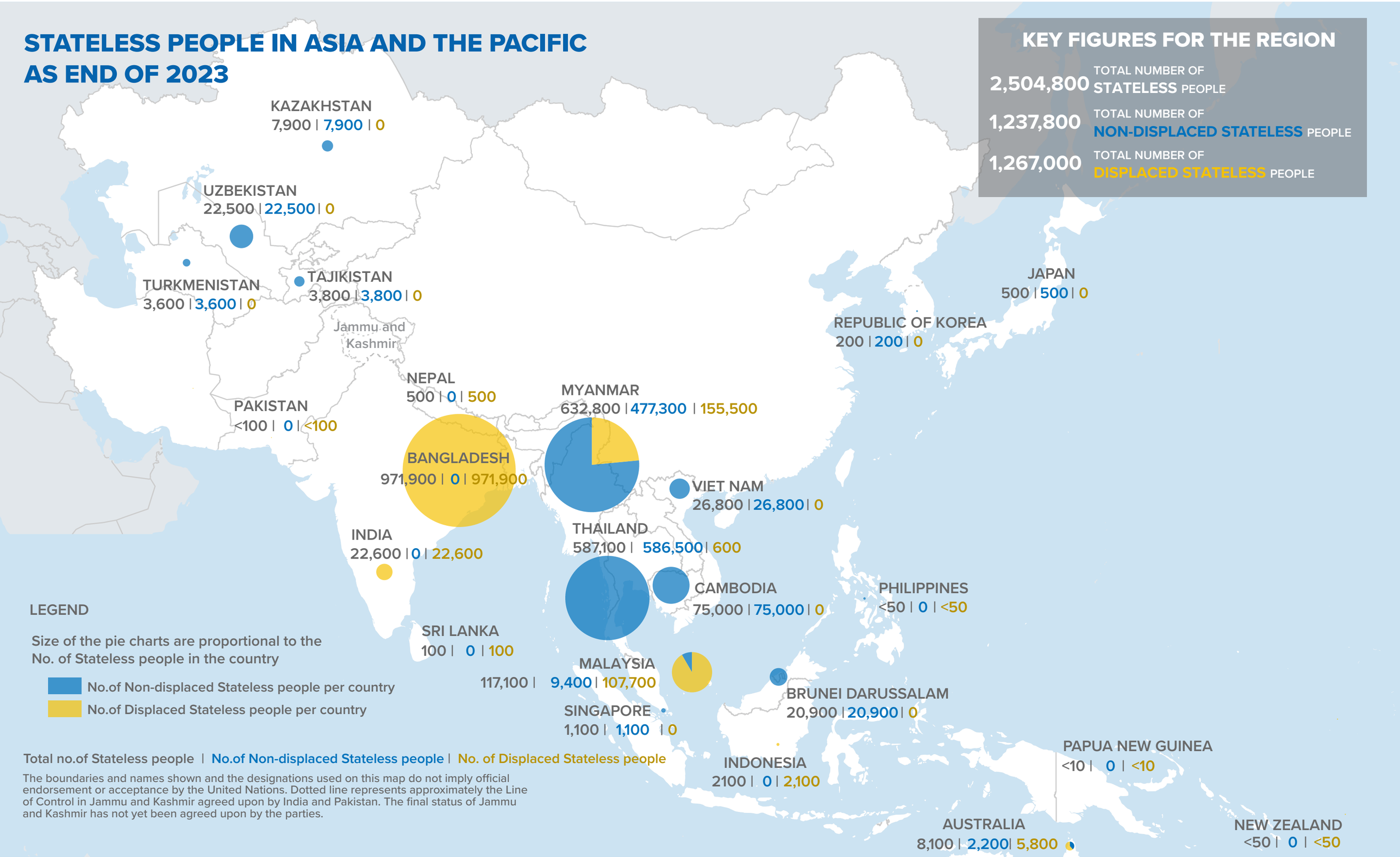
STATELESS PEOPLE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AS END OF 2023

KEY FIGURES FOR THE REGION

2,504,800 TOTAL NUMBER OF **STATELESS** PEOPLE

1,237,800 TOTAL NUMBER OF **NON-DISPLACED STATELESS** PEOPLE

1,267,000 TOTAL NUMBER OF **DISPLACED STATELESS** PEOPLE



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Dotted line represents approximately the Line of Control in Jammu and Kashmir agreed upon by India and Pakistan. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir has not yet been agreed upon by the parties.

HIGHLIGHT

MYANMAR SITUATION

GLOBAL

4,700,200
people from Myanmar protected and/or assisted by UNHCR

1,283,400
refugees and people in refugee-like situations from Myanmar

54,600
asylum-seekers from Myanmar

2,607,600
internally displaced people from Myanmar

ASIA-PACIFIC

4,688,100
(99.7%)
people from Myanmar protected and/or assisted by UNHCR

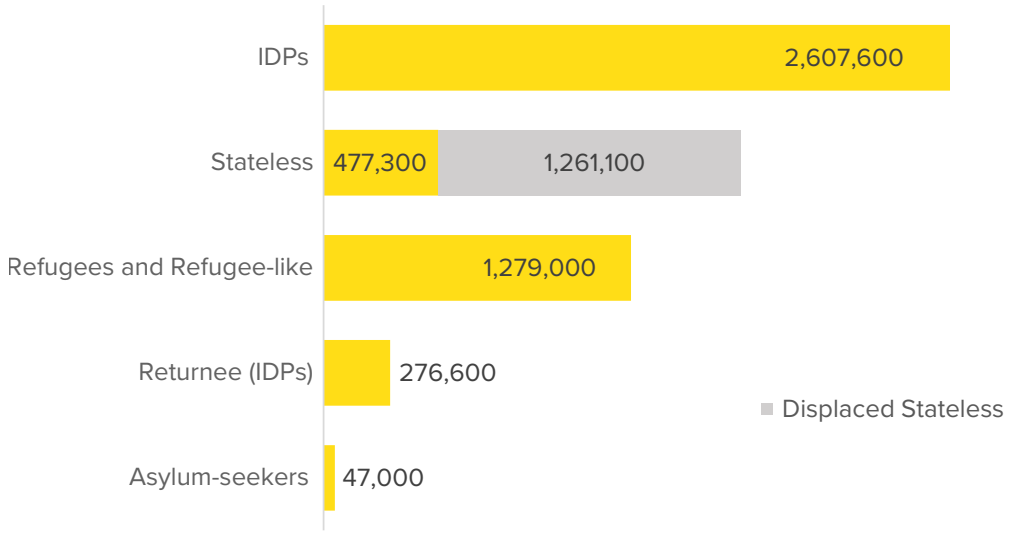
1,279,000
(99.7%)
refugees and people in refugee-like situations from Myanmar

47,000
(88%)
asylum-seekers from Myanmar

2,607,600
internally displaced people from Myanmar

The Myanmar situation refers to refugees, people in refugee-like situations, asylum-seekers, IDPs, IDP returnees and stateless people originating from Myanmar. The total number of people from Myanmar that UNHCR protects and/or assists increased from 3.6 million in 2022 to 4.7 million in 2023 – a 30 per cent increase. The vast majority (99.7 per cent) remained in Asia-Pacific.

Figure 24 | **Myanmar Situation | 2023**



More than 1.4 million people were displaced within Myanmar in 2023 due to escalating violence following the military takeover in February 2021, bringing the total number of IDPs in the country to more than 2.6 million by the end of 2023. The situation has deteriorated further due to escalating hostilities since October 2023, leading to a persistent rise in the number of IDPs in Myanmar, extending into 2024. According to the latest operational estimates, as of early July 2024, the number of IDPs in Myanmar reached some 3.2 million, an increase of about 511,600 compared to end-2023. An additional 1.3 million refugees and asylum-seekers from Myanmar were hosted in other countries, almost all within the Asia-Pacific region.

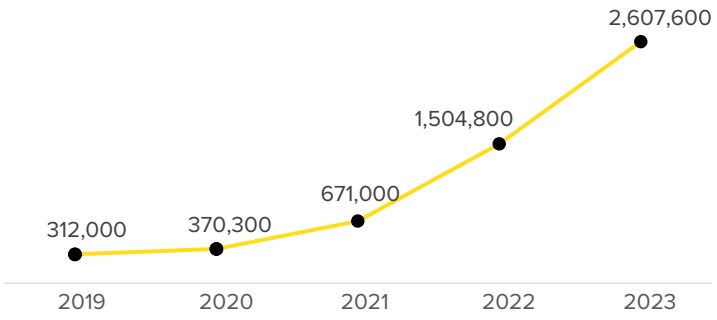
In 2023, neighbouring countries continued to experience an influx of refugees from Myanmar. Cumulatively, 34,600 people from Myanmar reportedly fled to Thailand (26,200) and India (8,400) in 2023. In India, approximately 8,400 arrived, mostly in the North-East, based on available estimates from community-based organizations, media and UNHCR's internal triangulation of data – not from a specific data source provided by the Government of India. Most arrivals in Thailand in 2023 reportedly returned to Myanmar.

According to data from UNHCR's registration database obtained in July 2023, 44 per cent of the registered refugee population with disabilities from Myanmar are women and girls, and the remaining 56 per cent are men and boys.[42]

42 See Disability and women and girls in displacement from Myanmar | UNHCR and UN WOMEN.

The number of IDPs in Myanmar has been continuously increasing since 2019, with a significant surge in 2023. Between end-2022 and end-2023, the total IDP figure rose by 1.1 million or 73 per cent, reaching 2.6 million by end-2023.

Figure 25 | **IDPs in Myanmar | 2019 - 2023**

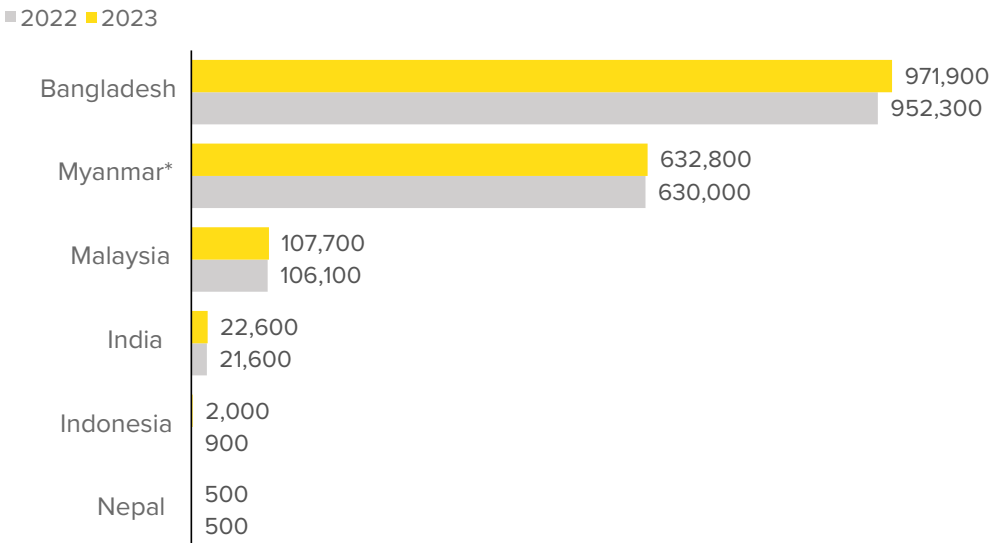


Rohingya

As of end-2023, there were 1.7 million Rohingya in the region, of which 72 per cent were displaced as refugees, asylum-seekers and IDPs. The remaining were non-displaced in Myanmar. The Rohingya population increased slightly by 2 per cent compared to end-2022. The largest increase was in Bangladesh (around 19,600) and this was mainly due to birth registrations.

Of the total 1.3 million refugees and asylum-seekers from Myanmar, about one million are stateless Rohingya refugees, most of whom fled Myanmar seven years ago. Most live in Cox's Bazar refugee camp in Bangladesh, where dependency on humanitarian aid is widespread, and security-related incidents have increased in 2023.[43] Desperation is driving Rohingya refugees to risk their lives on dangerous land and sea routes to Indonesia and Malaysia, which have been described as among the deadliest in the world. Estimates show that one Rohingya died or went missing for every eight who attempted the maritime journey in 2023,[44] making 2023 one of the deadliest years on record since the 2015 Andaman Sea Crisis.

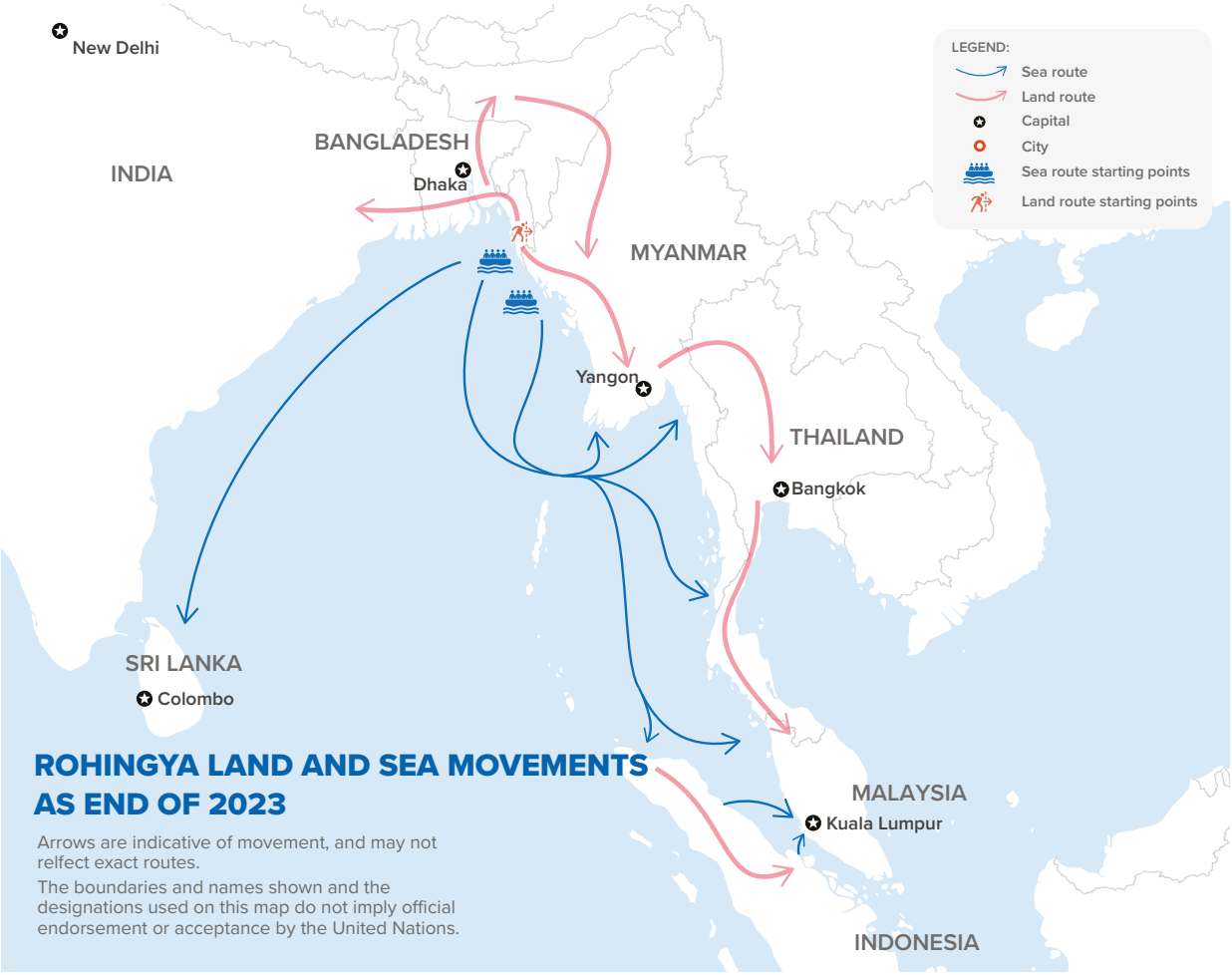
Figure 24 | **Countries with Rohingya | 2022 - 2023**



43 See 2024 Joint Response Plan Rohingya Humanitarian Crisis.
44 See Urgent action needed to address dramatic rise in Rohingya deaths at sea, UNHCR.

UNHCR estimates that 6,500 people attempted land and sea movements in 2023 from Bangladesh and Myanmar, including nearly 4,500 Rohingya refugees who embarked on perilous sea journeys. From 2021 until the end of 2023, maritime movements increased by 483 per cent, a worrisome trend that is likely to continue unabated unless the root causes of the movements are addressed.

A significant spike in boat movements to Aceh and North Sumatra in Indonesia was observed in 2023,[45] with a particular rise during the last quarter of the year.[46] From 2021 until end of 2023, new arrivals to Indonesia increased by 1,261 per cent, while a 341 per cent increase was recorded between 2022 and 2023. Accounts from survivors having disembarked in Indonesia highlight protection risks and various forms of abuse during the journey, including gender-based violence, extorsion, physical abuse, malnutrition, and exploitation.



Land and sea movements are often combined in multiple sub-routes, covering various countries, to reach the intended destination. While efforts are made to capture all land and sea movements, it is recognized that many journeys are not known due to their clandestine nature. The information in this report is compiled and triangulated from various sources including governments, partners, UNHCR operations, media reports and interviews with refugees. All data is provisional and subject to change.

45 See Rohingya Boat Arrival Response in Aceh Indonesia – Emergency Appeal.
46 See Myanmar Situation (unhcr.org).

MULTI-SECTORAL MONITORING

AS OF DECEMBER 2023

UNHCR's response to support the population it protects and/or assists in the Asia-Pacific region can be summarized using the organization's Multi-Sectoral Monitoring (MSM) Framework, as presented in the following infographic:

2.5 million forcibly displaced & stateless people accessed protection services

886,000 forcibly displaced & stateless children accessed protection services

Protection

1.7 million forcibly displaced & stateless people received cash assistance

Basic needs

16,500 children 6-59 months admitted for treatment of moderate acute malnutrition

3,700 children 6-59 months admitted for treatment of severe acute malnutrition

Nutrition

73% of countries had a multi-channel feedback and response system that was designed based on consultations with forcibly displaced & stateless people

Accountability to affected populations

4.3 million forcibly displaced & stateless people received essential healthcare services

337,600 forcibly displaced & stateless people received mental health and psychosocial support services

161,500 women & girls received sexual and reproductive health services (ante- or post-natal care, delivery, contraceptive or gender-based violence clinical services)

Health

ASIA & THE PACIFIC REGIONAL TRENDS

Forced Displacement and Statelessness 2023

Data, Identity Management and Analysis (DIMA) Unit,
UNHCR Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific
18th Floor, Capital Tower, All Seasons Place,
87/1 Wireless Road 10330
Bangkok, Thailand

Website: www.unhcr.org/asia
E-mail: rbapdima@unhcr.org

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