

Thailand

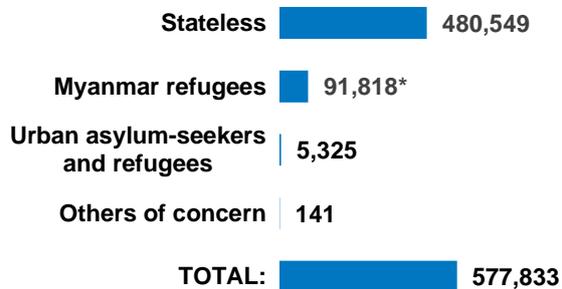
31 March 2021

Populations of concern include **91,818** Myanmar refugees, **5,325** urban asylum-seekers and refugees and **480,549** persons registered by the Royal Thai Government (RTG) as stateless.

Myanmar refugees reside in **9 temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border**, while urban asylum-seekers and refugees and stateless persons reside in **different areas of the country**.

UNHCR works with the RTG, international agencies, NGOs and donors to address the **protection, assistance and durable solutions needs** of these groups.

POPULATIONS OF CONCERN



FUNDING (AS OF 31 MARCH 2021)

USD 22.2 million

requested for the Thailand operation

Unfunded
90%
20.1 million



Funded
10%
2.1 million

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

102 National Staff

19 International Staff

Offices:

1 Multi-Country Office in

Bangkok

2 Field Offices in

Mae Hong Son

and **Mae Sot**



PHOTO: UNHCR supports Royal Thai Government-led response efforts by providing core relief items to Myanmar refugees affected by a fire in Mae La Temporary Shelter, Tak Province, February 2021.
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Population Overview

MYANMAR CAMP-BASED REFUGEES

- The group of refugees residing in the nine camps on the Thai-Myanmar border are of **mainly Karen, Karenni and Burmese ethnicity**, some of whom have lived in Thailand as long ago as the mid-1980s after fleeing conflict between ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar military.
- Under the applicable legal framework for this group, they are **not permitted to access national institutions** (e.g., health, education), nor to move outside the camps including for the purpose of accessing livelihood opportunities. They rely on non-governmental humanitarian services for their basic needs. There is no police presence in the camps, and camp schools are not accredited by the Thai system. UNHCR's interventions focus on **protection and solutions**, with material assistance provided by NGOs.
- Since October 2016 over 1,000 refugees have returned to Myanmar through the **Facilitated Voluntary Return (FVR) programme** led by the governments of Thailand and Myanmar with the support of UNHCR and partners. However, as the large majority have not come forward to apply for return, UNHCR continues to work closely with the both governments, the refugee community and other stakeholders to unlock a **multi-solutions approach** to find a dignified, sustainable and comprehensive end to this situation of protracted encampment.

URBAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

- At present, UNHCR continues its full complement of **protection and assistance activities** for some 5,000 urban refugees and asylum-seekers from over 40 countries residing in Bangkok and surrounding urban areas. Population flows into Thailand have been of a mixed nature, with **arrivals both from surrounding countries and other regions**.
- There is currently **no national legal framework** in place for the specific protection of “urban” refugees and asylum-seekers in Thailand, in contrast to the situation of Myanmar refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border. Nor has Thailand acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. As such, UNHCR documentation in the form of a Refugee or Asylum-Seeker Card is not officially recognized by the RTG and therefore **provides no official protection** for them. Urban asylum-seekers and refugees are considered “illegal” in the country and are at risk of being detained on immigration grounds if they entered illegally or overstayed their visa.
- As they have no right to access employment, many urban asylum-seekers and refugees are **dependent on humanitarian or other forms of support**, including from UNHCR, to sustain themselves. Under the RTG’s **progressive “education for all” policy** urban asylum-seeker and refugee children can go to school although many face challenges doing so due to language barriers and costs associated with schooling.
- In a development welcomed by UNHCR, the Thai Cabinet approved in December 2019 the **establishment of a screening mechanism** to distinguish people who need international protection from economic migrants. While the Regulation is not a conventional asylum law, once established, it is hoped that the screening mechanism will lend some predictability to and increase the protection space for those who need it.

STATELESS PERSONS

- According to the latest official RTG statistics as of December 2020, there are **480,549 stateless persons** registered with the RTG, although some unofficial estimates are higher. 81% of the registered stateless population reside in five provinces near border areas. Statelessness in Thailand has a number of causes. Some of the communities affected by statelessness **migrated to Thailand hundreds of years ago**. They are mostly members of ethnic minorities living in mountainous regions, including indigenous groups who had not been registered and, therefore, do not hold any identity documents.
- Following important reforms to Thailand’s nationality and civil registration laws, and the adoption of a **progressive nationality strategy to address statelessness**, over 100,000 registered stateless persons have acquired Thai nationality since 2008. Whilst some progress has been made, stateless people in Thailand **continue to face challenges** accessing some of their basic rights, including freedom of movement – many stateless individuals face restrictions travelling beyond their registered provincial areas - and healthcare, including **gaps in access to national health insurance**.
- Further, stateless persons have only **limited access to State social protection mechanisms** and have faced challenges in meeting basic needs, particularly in the context of COVID-19. UNHCR works with an NGO partner in support of the Thai authorities to **provide legal support to stateless persons** in applying for nationality and prevent statelessness in three districts of Chiang Rai Province.



PHOTO: Urban POC children attend Thai language classes during March 2021, delivered online by UNHCR’s partner in line with COVID-19 prevention measures. To support their continued participation, internet allowance, worksheets and stationery have been provided to 60 students. This will allow them to access the Thai education system.
 © UNHCR/Jennifer Harrison

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- UNHCR works in **close partnership** with the Royal Thai Government (RTG), UN agencies, humanitarian organizations, and civil society to improve protection and solutions for refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless persons, and other persons of concern to UNHCR, while supporting their inclusion in national systems.
- **Strategic alliances** with key international and national NGOs, civil society and faith-based organisations, private sector partners and academia help to address a range of issues including alternatives to detention, improved access to domestic legal and social services, and alternative forms of temporary protection pending solutions.
- **Partners:** Ministry of Interior (MOI), Adventist Development and Relief Agency Thailand (ADRA), Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR), Humanity and Inclusion (HI), International Organization for Migration (IOM), UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), UN Volunteers (UNV).

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- UNHCR maintains a stock of emergency relief supplies, as well as monitoring, assessment and response capacity which allows it to undertake a stand-alone and/or inter-agency emergency response. Protection, medical and GBV emergency telephone hotlines are active seven days a week for urban persons of concern.

Main Activities

PROTECTION

- In the context of COVID-19, **inter-agency coordination mechanisms** established by UNHCR as well as **COVID-19 outreach, risk communication and community engagement activities** remain ongoing for all three population groups. In coordination with its partners, UNHCR continues to advocate that marginalized groups (including persons of concern to UNHCR) in Thailand should be **fully included in government COVID-19 national surveillance, response and planning activities**, and should be able to access COVID-19 testing, clinical care and case management, as well as be included in the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) vaccine distribution plan in line with the national allocation framework.
- UNHCR and its partners are aware of the increased level of hardship being faced by POCs in Thailand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to **provide support to POCs** to address some of their basic needs. In urban areas during January-March 2021, **1,840 POCs** benefitted from **cash grants** received by household members with specific needs. In addition, UNHCR provided financial support to **51 POCs** to enable them to **access in-patient department (IPD) medical care**, while **154 POCs** received **psychosocial support** and **319 POCs** received **legal assistance**.
- UNHCR is engaging with the RTG on potential support to complement its **preparedness and response efforts** related to the displacement of Myanmar refugees into Thailand. UNHCR stands ready to support the Thai authorities to assess the protection needs of this group and together with humanitarian partners, provide relief assistance to complement RTG-led efforts. As a matter of preparedness, **10,000 masks, sleeping mats and blankets, as well as 5,000 plastic tarpaulins and mosquito nets are currently under procurement** by UNHCR which could potentially be provided to support the Government's efforts in managing an influx of individuals across the border from Myanmar into Thailand.
- UNHCR continues to effectively engage with RTG counterparts, particularly at the technical level, around capacity building for **implementation of a screening mechanism** approved by the Thai Cabinet in December 2019 to distinguish people who need international protection from economic migrants. UNHCR also continued to undertake mandate **registration, RSD, and resettlement activities** using remote procedures developed as part of the COVID-19 response.
- Following the RTG's signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on alternatives to detention for children** in January 2019, there were no children of concern to UNHCR detained in the main Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) for foreigners as of 31 March 2021. UNHCR continued to **support POCs in immigration detention** and advocate for the increased use of ATD, particularly to reduce the risk of close-quarter contagion in the context of COVID-19.
- During January-March 2021, UNHCR visited or communicated via phone with some **newly arrived Rohingya individuals** to assess their protection needs and provide humanitarian items in support of the efforts of the Thai authorities and plans to visit more individuals during the upcoming period. At the same time, UNHCR advocated for **non-refoulement, ATD and Victim of Trafficking (VOT) screening** as part of its protection interventions and continued to seek longer-term solutions for Rohingya POCs remaining in detention and shelters.
- As of 31 March 2021, a total of **523 POC children** were enrolled in **primary education** and **90 POC children** were enrolled in **secondary education**. **68 POC children** were attending **Thai language classes** provided through a partner to equip them with skills to access public schools under Thailand's progressive "Education for All" policy. In addition, all urban refugee and asylum-seeker new-borns were issued with RTG birth certificates.

SOLUTIONS

- Despite setbacks caused by COVID-19, UNHCR's partner **submitted 714 nationality applications of stateless persons** during January-March 2021. UNHCR also welcomed the Thai Cabinet's approval in March 2021 of the inclusion of the second group of over 5,000 students who have been screened and hold an eligible ID number in the **National Healthcare Fund for Persons with Legal Status Problems**. This will allow these students to access government health facilities, by supporting the cost of health services they could not otherwise afford. These students have also received documentation and benefited from an improvement in their legal status, and as a result, new pathways have opened up to enable them to eventually resolve their statelessness.
- During January-March 2021, new resettlement submissions were made for 63 refugees in the whole country, while **32 refugees departed on resettlement**.

External/Donor Relations

- Special thanks to major donors of un-earmarked and broadly earmarked funds as well as to donors who have contributed directly to the operation to date during 2021:
Australia | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | Ireland | Germany | Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United States of America |
- Un-earmarked, broadly earmarked and direct contributions were also received through private donations from the L'Oréal Foundation, Spain and Thailand.
- UNHCR has raised funds from the private sector since 2008 for POCs both in Thailand and globally.

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