

# Thailand

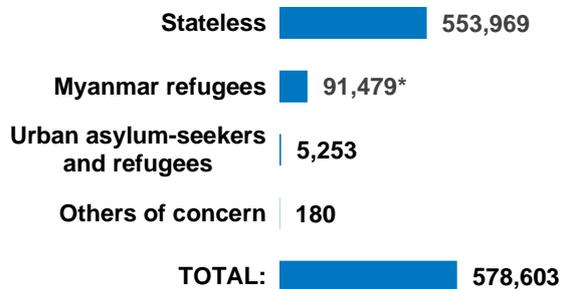
30 September 2021

Populations of concern include **91,479** Myanmar refugees, **5,253** urban asylum-seekers and refugees and **553,969** 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 30 JUNE 2021)

**USD 23.6 million**

requested for the Thailand operation

Unfunded  
36%  
**8.5 million**



Funded  
64%  
**15.1 million**

## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

**119** National Staff  
**21** International Staff

### Offices:

**1** Multi-Country Office in  
**Bangkok**  
**2** Field Offices in  
**Mae Hong Son**  
and **Mae Sot**



PHOTO: Refugees wait to collect cloth face masks respecting social distancing at Tham Hin temporary shelter in Thailand ©UNHCR/ James Ferguson

## 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 and are therefore reliant on non-governmental humanitarian services for their basic needs. UNHCR's interventions focus on **protection and solutions**, with material assistance provided by NGOs.
- **The Facilitated Voluntary Return (FVR)** programme led by the Governments of Thailand and Myanmar with the support of UNHCR and partners, has been suspended following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. As per the Thai Communicable Diseases Act 2015, borders with Myanmar have been and remain closed to passenger traffic to curb the spread of the disease

- From October 2016 until 2020, **over 1,000 refugees have returned to Myanmar** through the FVR programme. However, as the large majority have not come forward to apply for return, UNHCR continues to work closely with 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. 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.
- Following the Thai Cabinet’s approval in December 2019 to establish the **national screening mechanism** to distinguish people who need international protection from economic migrants, UNHCR welcomes the establishment of the **Screening Committee in 2020** and the **Sub-Committee on Criteria, Procedures, and Condition in 2021**. Once operationalized, it is hoped that the national 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 30 June 2021, there are 553,969 stateless persons registered with the RTG, although some unofficial estimates are higher. Almost **90% of the registered stateless population reside in 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 do not hold any identity documents.
- Important reforms to Thailand’s nationality and civil registration laws (e.g. 2008, 2016, 2019) have provided a route to restore nationality to those who had been deprived of it or have been unable to acquire it, and a **progressive nationality strategy was adopted in 2005 to address statelessness**. Consequently, over 57,000 registered stateless persons have acquired Thai nationality since 2015 including 2,740 in 2021. 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.
- 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 implementing partner for statelessness, ADRA has continued assisting stateless individuals by providing a **remote legal counselling through an online platform** and have implemented a “delivery box” system to collect documents from stateless persons to continue ongoing assistance.

#### 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. On the Thai-Myanmar border, UNHCR works with a consortium of NGOs called **the Committee for the Coordination of Services for Displaced Persons (CCSDPT)** that coordinate provision of food, NFI, shelter, health, education, water/sanitation, and livelihoods.
- **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. During July-September, UNHCR and partners continued to undertake various measures to prepare for a possible refugee influx from Myanmar. Preparedness measures were organized by sectors (education, food, health, NFIs, protection, shelter, and WASH) and supported by information management

# Main Activities

## PROTECTION

- UNHCR thanks the **Chulabhorn Royal Academy (CRA)** for making COVID19 vaccines available to refugees in urban areas and camps. The CRA implemented a pilot vaccination programme for urban refugees during August -September and has administered two doses of vaccine to **374 urban refugees**. In Tak refugee camps, the CRA has allocated 20,000 doses for up to 10,000 refugees. The vaccination rollout has started in September in Mae La with over **4,000 refugees** having received first dose of vaccine.
- UNHCR and its partners are aware of the continuing 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, UNHCR provides **cash-based intervention (CBI) to vulnerable refugees and asylum seekers**. CBI is distributed to POCs through cash cards via monthly deposit and the amount distributed varies based on family composition and vulnerabilities. The average amount provided to each household is approximately **THB 4,400/ household** (approx. USD 135) and helps refugees to meet their basic needs, particularly given the marked decrease in informal income opportunities as a result of the pandemic. During July-September 2021, **2,775 POCs** benefitted from cash grants received by household members with specific needs.
- UNHCR, with the support of partners, has conducted distributions to support prevention of the spread of COVID-19. During July-September, **3,830 hand sanitizer bottles** have been distributed to refugees in Mae La, Umpium, Nupo, Ban Mai Nai Soi and Ban Mae Surin camps. The distribution also targeted community-based organisations and RTG authorities interacting with POCs in the camp. **Refugees above three years old** in refugee camps in Mae Hong Son (one face mask/ individual) and in Kanchanaburi (two facemasks/individual) have been provided personal protective equipment in the form of **cloth facemasks** that are washable and reusable. In urban areas, **827 masks** have been distributed to 502 urban refugees and 70 asylum seekers with the support of Bangkok Refugee Center during July-September.
- UNHCR has procured a 4-months supply of sanitary pads for over 27,000 refugee women of reproductive age in nine refugee camps. During July – September, UNHCR distributed sanitary pads to 2,709 women of reproductive age in Umpium, to 1,687 in Tham Hin and 713 in Ban Don Yang, reaching almost 19% of its target.
- During July -September 2021, UNHCR provided counselling on general protection issues to **152 POCs** and held four remote **Focused Group Discussion** with Afghan POCs to address concerns about the situation in Afghanistan. In addition, UNHCR with the Bangkok Refugee Centre, provided support to GBV Victims with remote counselling and psychosocial assessment for individuals and couples.
- During July-September 2021, UNHCR continued to conduct regular remote monitoring of Rohingya POCs accommodated in government facilities, as well as to undertake protection counselling and interviews of new arrivals. UNHCR also continued to advocate for the implementation of ATD for mothers and children detained in Immigration Detention Centers following joint assessment interviews with the Thai authorities in June 2021
- As of 30 September 2021, a total of **545 POC children** were enrolled in primary education and 108 POC children were enrolled in secondary education. In addition, 31 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. During July-September, UNHCR provided financial support to **68 POCs** to enable them to access in-patient department (IPD) medical care, while 199 POCs received psychosocial support and **317 POCs** received legal assistance.

## SOLUTIONS

- Despite setbacks caused by COVID-19, UNHCR's partner **submitted 1,095 nationality applications of stateless persons** during April-June 2021.
- During July-September 2021, resettlement submissions were made for **121 refugees** in the whole country, while **262 refugees** departed on resettlement. Travel arrangements for resettling refugees are currently subject to disruptions as countries continue to reduce entry into their territories owing to the COVID-19 situation. Restrictions around international air travel have been introduced along with additional requirement of PCR testing within 72 hours of departure and quarantine upon arrival in the resettlement country. Some States have also placed a hold on resettlement arrivals given their public health situation, which impacts on their capacity to receive newly resettled refugees. The COVID-19 situation has also significantly affected the processing of resettlement cases by UNHCR and resettlement countries; due to limited access to the temporary shelters along the Thai-Myanmar border and Immigration Detention centers. However, remote interviewing measures are set in place to ensure uninterrupted processing of vulnerable cases for resettlement. The

# 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 | France | 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, Australia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Spain and Thailand.
- UNHCR has raised funds from the private sector since 2008 for POCs both in Thailand and globally.

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