

# Thailand

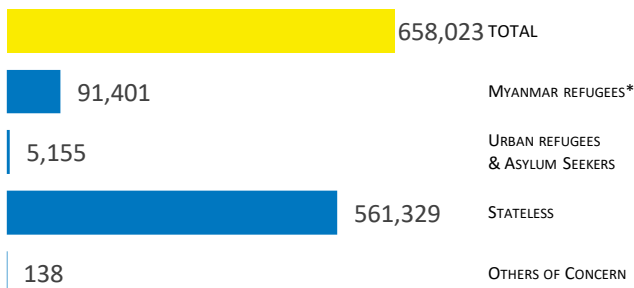
31 MARCH 2022

In Thailand, populations of concern include **91,401** Myanmar refugees, **5,155** urban asylum-seekers and refugees and **561,329** 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.

## POPULATION OF CONCERN

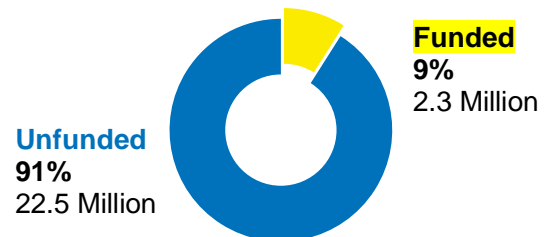


\* Verification Exercise conducted from Jan-Apr 2015 and subsequent data changes to-date. Under reverification

## FUNDING (AS OF 31 MARCH 2022)

**USD 24.8 M**

requested for the Thailand Operation



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

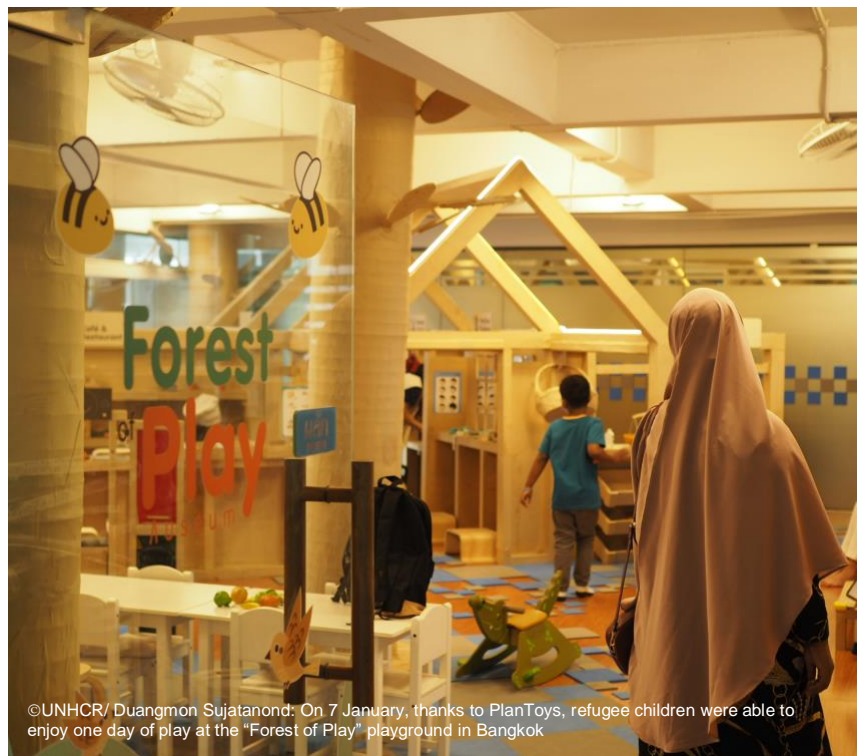
112 National Staff

23 International Staff

### Offices:

1 Multi-Country Office in Bangkok

2 Field Offices in Mae Hong Son and Mae Sot



©UNHCR/ Duangmon Sujatanond: On 7 January, thanks to PlanToys, refugee children were able to enjoy one day of play at the "Forest of Play" playground in Bangkok

# 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 since 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 are, therefore, reliant on non-governmental humanitarian services for their basic needs. UNHCR's interventions focus primarily 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. Since the military takeover in February 2021, UNHCR has been concerned about the deteriorating situation in Myanmar, which is not conducive for refugee return. UNHCR continues to advocate for access to Thai territory and protection as long as is required, as well as for the principle of non-refoulement, to be upheld.

## 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 51 countries residing in Bangkok and surrounding urban areas. 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 welcomed 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 increase the protection space for those who need it.

## STATELESS PERSONS

- According to the latest official RTG statistics as of 31 December 2021, there are 561,329 stateless persons registered with the RTG, although some unofficial estimates are higher. Almost **81% of the registered stateless population reside in provinces near border areas**. While statelessness in Thailand has a range of causes, many affected communities 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. These communities face

a range of challenges, including language barriers to accessing civil registration and nationality procedures, difficulties associated with living remotely, and lack of understanding of the importance of civil registration in preventing statelessness.

- Important reforms to Thailand's nationality and civil registration laws (e.g. 2008, 2016, 2019) have provided a route to restoring 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. 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.

## 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 coordinates provision of food, NFI, shelter, health, education, water/sanitation, and livelihoods.
- **Strategic alliances** with key international and national NGOs, civil society and faith-based organizations, private sector partners and academia help 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).

## Main Activities

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- The volatile situation in Myanmar following the 01 February 2021 coup has resulted in increased armed conflict and subsequent population displacement within and across borders, including into Thailand. UNHCR continues to engage with the Royal Thai Government (RTG) on its availability to complement RTG-led response and preparedness efforts in close coordination with other relevant partners. In January 2022, UNHCR and partners updated the Refugee Preparedness and Response Plan (joint inter-agency plan), which provides a strategic response framework until June 2022 among 18 partners. The inter-agency preparedness and response are underpinned by multi-sector coordination mechanisms established at the national level and in the provinces to support the RTG in responding to the humanitarian needs of newly arrived refugees. This coordination mechanism, which is separate from the coordination mechanism for the existing nine camps, is structured around the following sectors: Education; Food; Health; Non-food items (NFIs); Protection; Shelter; and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH).


**PROTECTION**

- UNHCR continues to provide cash-based intervention (CBI) to refugees with specific needs in urban areas. From January to March, the UNHCR CBI panel allocated **951 cash grants, covering 2,727 individuals**.
- UNHCR with the Bangkok Refugee Centre supports gender-based violence victims through remote counselling and psychosocial assessments. From January to March, UNHCR provided protection counselling support to **159 POCs**. UNHCR also conducted **three remote focus group discussions** in January and February, targeting adult individuals, males, and females, who did not register for the COVID-19 vaccines. The focus groups discussed their perception of the COVID-19 vaccine and possible vaccine hesitancy. The individuals selected for the focus group discussions were mainly from Iraq, Cameroon, and China. The objective was to address concerns of vaccine-hesitant, answer questions and increase vaccination coverage among urban refugees. As a result, the majority of urban refugees have access to COVID-19 vaccines however hesitancy and scepticism persist in regard to the effectiveness of the vaccines.

- To mark Thailand's National Children's Day, PlanToys, a local sustainable toy manufacturer, opened the doors to their "Forest of Play" playground to **31 refugee children**. The "Give Through Play" event in Bangkok was organized in collaboration with UNHCR. PlanToys' playground has been conceptualized to focus on children's physical and cognitive development. Using specially designed wooden toys, the playground includes spaces to encourage imagination, exercise motor skills, advanced problem-solving skills, and explore senses with music, shapes, and colors. During the "Give Through Play" event, PlanToys' child specialist and UNHCR's child protection team conducted a short assessment of the needs of each child who visited the "Forest of Play" playground to identify which toys could answer their developmental needs. In this sense, they observed how the child played alone and with their parents to assess family dynamics and parenting styles. Based on this short assessment and consultation with their parents, each child received a toy adapted to their needs



©UNHCR/ Duangmon Sujatanond



©UNHCR/ Duangmon Sujatanond

- Due to the resurgence of COVID-19 starting in late December 2021, most Immigration Detention Centers (IDCs) reintroduced the restriction to suspend in-person visits from January 2022 onwards. Thus, UNHCR continues with **remote arrangements to conduct regular monitoring** and undertake protection counselling and interviews of new arrivals. UNHCR distributes Core-Relief Items, material assistance, and multi-purpose cash to Rohingya POCs in IDCs. Besides, UNHCR continues its advocacy for non-refoulement as well as access to alternatives to detention (ATD), including in the case of children and mothers, under Thailand's Memorandum of Understanding on ATD. In March 2022, UNHCR and IOM conducted in-person training for **40 local officials** from the Department of Children and Youth (DCY) and the Division of Anti-Trafficking in Persons (DATIP). The training aims to strengthen understanding of the Rohingya situation and promote health, psychosocial support, and self-care activities to care providers who work in 20 governmental facilities of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security.



- On 4 March 2022, UNHCR launched the **Leading Women Fund (LWF) in Thailand** with Mrs. Waewwan Gunnanthorn, CEO of Rosegold Thailand to establish a women-led community to support refugee women. The donation, collected via annual membership fee, will be directly delivered as cash assistance to Syrian refugee women who are single mothers and heads of household in Jordan. Since the launch of the fund, UNHCR has received over 3 million Thai Baht to support the cause.



## EDUCATION

- In urban areas, as of 31 March 2021, a total of **555 POC children were enrolled in primary education**, and **94 POC children were enrolled in secondary education**. In addition, **80 POC children** attended 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, UNHCR supported the continuity of Thai formal education for persons of concern over 17 years old: 4 at the primary level and 17 at the secondary level.
- In February 2022, UNHCR expanded its 6-months Thai intensive learning programme to adult POCs above 18 years old: **30 urban POCs** enrolled in it. Besides, the Thai learning programme continues with children aged 6-17. From January to March 2022, **80 POC children** followed the language course. During this course, students learn English, Maths, and Cultural Studies. Additionally, the programme entails non-academic activities such as weekly Mind & Body and Art & Craft sessions promoting social and emotional development, leadership, mindfulness, and creativity. Due to COVID-19, classes had to be entirely conducted online for POC children during this reporting period. However, a blended programme, consisting of 3 days of online learning and one day of onsite classes, was conducted for POC adults.

**HEALTH**

- UNHCR, with the support of partners, distributed facemasks to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. In urban areas, **63 masks were distributed to 21 urban refugee students** by Bangkok Refugee Center between January and March. In refugee camps, **7,656 cloth masks were provided to 2,552 students and Persons with Specific Needs (PSNs)** in Mae La and Umpium camps. The stock of facemasks distributed comprised UNHCR procured items and facemasks generously donated by UNIQLO Thailand Company Limited.
- In Mae La, Mae La Oon, and Mae Ra Ma Luang camps, UNHCR distributed **56,436 packs of sanitary napkins to 14,109 refugee women of reproductive age**, and **5,302 packs of soap bars were provided to 5,302 refugee women**. The sanitary packages are composed of 18 units each; each package covers a woman's need for one monthly cycle. In addition to hygiene items, UNHCR also provided **23,221 blankets to 5,468 households** in Ban Mai Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La Oon, and Mae Ra Ma Luang camps.
- In urban areas, UNHCR continues to support inpatient care - focusing on life-threatening conditions and children under 5 - and financially assisted **65 Persons of Concerns (POCs)** from January to March. In addition, **25 POCs** benefited from remote UNHCR psychosocial support conducted by UNHCR's psychologist.

**DURABLE SOLUTIONS**

- Despite setbacks caused by COVID-19, UNHCR's partner, ADRA, helped **submit 499 nationality applications for stateless persons** between January and March 2022. In 2021, 5,090 stateless acquired Thai Nationality, and 451 received permanent resident status.
- During the same period, resettlement submissions were made for **145 refugees** in the whole country, while **200 refugees** departed on resettlement.

## External / Donors 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 2022:** European Union | Sweden | Norway | Netherlands | Denmark | Germany | Switzerland | Private donors Spain | Belgium | Ireland
- 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.

**CONTACTS**

**Morgane Roussel-Hemery**, Associate External Relation Officer

[rousselh@unhcr.org](mailto:rousselh@unhcr.org), Tel: +66 81 140 4353

**LINKS**

[UNHCR Thailand - Twitter](#) – [Facebook](#)

[Situation Thailand - Myanmar Cross Border Portal](#)

[Supporting refugee children through play in Bangkok](#) – UNHCR Asia & Pacific, 15 February 2022