

THAILAND

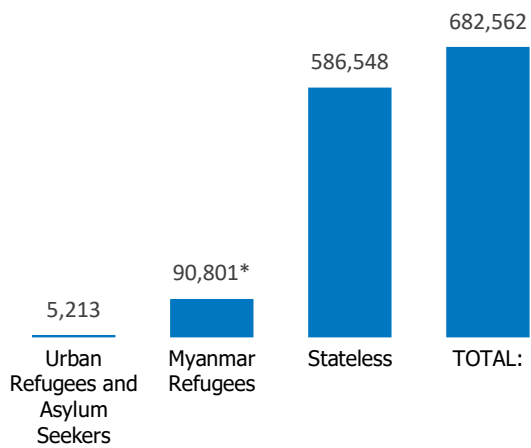
31 DECEMBER 2023

Thailand hosts 90,801 Myanmar refugees in nine temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border while 5,213 urban refugees and asylum-seekers reside in other areas.

In addition, the Royal Thai Government (RTG) registered over half a million stateless people, mostly living in highland border areas.

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

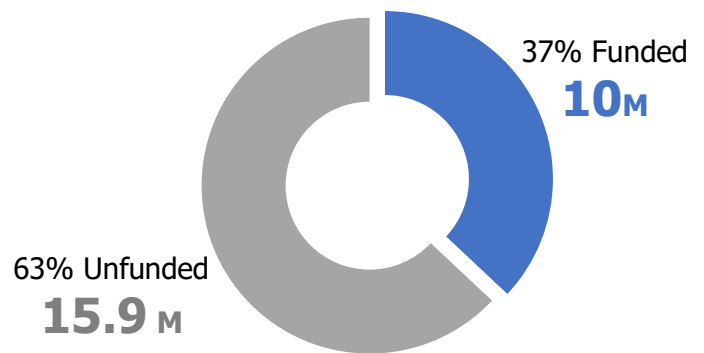
FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND STATELESS PEOPLE Figures



FUNDING (AS OF 31 DECEMBER)

USD 25.9 M

Requested for the Thailand Operation



*Myanmar Refugees living in the nine refugee camps as of 31 May 2023. The figures will be updated upon completion of the joint MOI-UNHCR verification exercise in January 2024

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

147 National Staff
20 International Staff

Offices:

01 Multi-Country Office in Bangkok
02 Field Offices in Mae Sot and in Mae Hong Son



Population Overview

MYANMAR CAMP-BASED REFUGEES

- Refugees residing in the nine temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border are of **mainly Karen and Karenni ethnicity**, some of whom have lived in Thailand since the mid-1980s after fleeing armed conflict between ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar military. Under the national legal framework, they are generally **not permitted to access national institutions** (e.g., health and education) nor to move outside the camps, including for the purpose of accessing livelihood opportunities. Therefore, they rely on non-governmental humanitarian services for their basic needs. **UNHCR's interventions focus primarily on protection and solutions**, whereas other sectoral areas are covered by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs).
- Registration of refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border is **led by the Royal Thai Government Provincial Admission Board (RTG-PAB)**. Since 2008, registration is only open to exceptional serious protection and/or medical cases. UNHCR identifies and refers such cases to the RTG-PAB in close consultation with the MOI. UNHCR, jointly with the Ministry of Interior (MOI) of the Royal Thai Government (RTG), conducted a data verification exercise in the nine temporary shelters between May and December 2023. The exercise has been completed in all nine temporary shelters, and the final figures will be shared once data are verified.

URBAN ASYLUM-SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

- **UNHCR** continues its full complement of **protection and assistance activities** in relation to urban refugees and asylum-seekers from 47 countries, residing mainly in Bangkok and surrounding urban areas. Currently, there is **no national legal framework** for the protection of "urban" refugees and asylum-seekers in Thailand nor has Thailand acceded to the 1951 Refugee Convention and/or its 1967 Protocol. UNHCR-issued documentation/identification in the form of a Refugee or Asylum-Seeker Card is not officially recognized by the RTG. Asylum-seekers and refugees continue to be at risk of being detained on immigration grounds for illegal entry or overstaying visas as they are considered "illegal" in the country without a national legal framework for protection.
- As they have no right to access employment, many urban asylum-seekers and refugees depend **on humanitarian or other forms of support**, including from UNHCR, to sustain themselves. Under the RTG's **progressive "education for all" policy**, asylum-seeker, and refugee children can, in principle, enrol in public schools, although many face challenges due to language barriers and costs associated with schooling.
- Following the Thai Cabinet's approval in December 2019 to establish the **National Screening Mechanism (NSM)** to distinguish people who need international protection from economic migrants, UNHCR welcomed the establishment of the Screening Committee in 2020, the Sub-Committee on Draft Criteria, Procedures, and Conditions in 2021, the Sub-Committees on Screening and Appeals in 2022. In 2023, the Criteria for determining status as a protected person in Thailand were published in the Royal Gazette. The NSM officially commenced on 23 September 2023. However, the implementation will be gradual as the broader set of procedural standards and policies required to implement the NSM remain under development by the RTG, with UNHCR technical support and advocacy. In a positive development, the RTG committed during **the 2023 Global Refugee Forum** to four substantive areas¹ of progress for the NSM.

¹ Areas of interests are: (1) investing in data and interpretation systems; (2) developing protection and referral frameworks, and conferring appropriate legal status to the "Protected Person"; (3) enhancing cooperation between government agencies and the civil society through whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach; as well as (4) cooperating with partner countries, UNHCR, and the Asylum Capacity Support Group.

STATELESS PERSONS

- In 2023, there are over half a million people registered as stateless with the RTG. Approximately **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 did not hold any identity documents. These communities face various challenges, including language barriers to accessing civil registration and nationality procedures, difficulties associated with living in remote areas, and a lack of understanding of the importance of civil registration in preventing statelessness.
- Significant 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 could not acquire it, and **a progressive nationality strategy was adopted in 2005 to address statelessness**. Consequently, 80,580 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.
- Moreover, during the **2023 Global Refugee Forum**, Thailand reiterated its pledge to resolve statelessness and committed to developing a national action plan for the reduction of statelessness within two years.

Main Activities

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- The volatile situation in Myanmar following the 01 February 2021 coup resulted in increased armed conflict and subsequent population displacement within and across borders, including 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. From February 2021 until 31 December 2023, the RTG recorded that over **46,298 Myanmar individuals sought safety temporarily in Thailand during several movements**. According to the authorities, these groups reportedly returned to Myanmar once the fighting subsided.
- Since June 2023, Myanmar refugees who fled the surge in conflict between Karenni forces and the State Administration Council (SAC) in Kayah State are sheltered in Temporary Safety Areas (TSAs) placed under the jurisdiction of the Royal Thai Army (RTA). Upon the authorities’ request, UNHCR and partners distributed various Core Relief Items (CRIs) to all TSAs, including plastic sheets, blankets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, mosquito repellents, kitchen sets, buckets, slippers, hygiene items, clothes, and solar lamps. As of 31 December 2023, the RTG reports that 1,419 refugees remained in TSAs in Mae Hong Son Province in two districts (i.e., Mae Sariang and Mueang Districts).



PROTECTION

- In the refugee camps at the Thai-Myanmar border, in line with amendments to the Civil Registration Act (2008), UNHCR supports the RTG in ensuring every child has access to birth registration. Additionally, UNHCR collaborates with Partners to identify verified refugees with severe protection and medical cases to be registered by the RTG through the Fast-Track Provincial Admission Board (FT-PAB) process.

- Between October and December, UNHCR provided **legal services** to 296 individuals and facilitated 6 individuals with **access to the Thai justice system**. Moreover, UNHCR supported the Protection and Legal Assistance Center of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in providing training on Community Service Orders in the Ban Don Yang refugee camp: 19 refugees participated in a workshop aiming to draft guidelines to implement a Community Service Team, and 18 refugees attended training on the roles and responsibilities of camp security. In Mae La, Nupo, and Umpium refugee camps, UNHCR trained over 200 security officers about the key concepts of Gender-based Violence (GBV) and how to respond when cases are reported. The objective of the training was to improve survivors' referral to appropriate services and create a safe space for survivors to report.
- UNHCR, in partnership with the COERR Foundation, **conducts case management and focuses on the protection of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)**. Between October and December, UNHCR Field Offices conducted Best Interest Assessments/Determinations (BIA/BID) for 7 refugee children across all refugee camps for protection or durable solutions.
- UNHCR Thailand, jointly with the Ministry of Interior, completed **the verification of refugees living in the nine camps along the border**. During the reporting period, the verification exercise was conducted in refugee camps in Tak and Mae Hong Son Province (i.e., Mae La, Ban Mai Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Maluang) In parallel, the resettlement expression of interest was completed in Umpium refugee camp. As of 31 December, UNHCR has already submitted 3,984 individuals for resettlement to the US under the group submission from the camps. While this newly launched resettlement programme will provide a durable solution to many, some refugees will remain in Thailand. Therefore, UNHCR continues to work to improve the protection environment in Thailand, to advocate for access to legal work opportunities, and for the inclusion of refugees into Thai institutions.
- In urban areas, UNHCR continues to provide **multipurpose cash grants (MPCG)** to refugees with specific needs. Between October and December, the UNHCR Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) panel allocated MPCGs to 408 households covering 1,246 individuals.
- UNHCR supported the displaced population with protection issues through **in-person counselling and referrals for needed services**. Between October and December, UNHCR provided protection counselling for 194 refugees and asylum-seekers living in urban areas. In the nine refugee camps, UNHCR counselled 293 camp refugees. Furthermore, UNHCR Reception for urban refugees continues conducting in-person activities by appointment, including card renewal, RSD interviews and notification of decisions, and ad hoc counselling.



- UNHCR conducted **in-person counselling and protection monitoring** at five different Immigration Detention Centres (IDC), four different shelters of the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, and the Welfare Protection Center for Victims of Human Trafficking. UNHCR distributed multi-purpose cash to around 450 Rohingya individuals and close to 30 urban refugees in IDCs. Besides, **UNHCR pursued its advocacy for non-refoulement and access to alternatives to detention (ATD)**, including in the case of children and mothers, under Thailand's Memorandum of Understanding on ATD.
- Between October and December, UNHCR introduced **a pilot activity to establish a community support network for stateless persons** in Chiang Mai by providing legal training for seven community-based volunteers. The trained volunteers assisted 33 stateless cases in preparing, submitting, or following up on their nationality applications or other legal status with the district offices.
- Between October and December, UNHCR and UNICEF finalized **the development of the Statelessness E-learning course** and started a test run on the agencies' platform. The course aims to strengthen knowledge on nationality, legal status, and rights of stateless and undocumented persons in Thailand through a free-of-charge comprehensive online learning platform for anyone interested in this issue, including government officials, NGO workers, students, and stateless people.
- In October 2023, UNHCR, jointly with NGOs, CSOs, and academia, **developed a theory of change strategy to reduce and resolve statelessness in Thailand**. Some 22 participants attended a 2-day workshop that produced a written description of the approaches, actions, conditions, and resources needed to facilitate change and achieve the goal of resolving statelessness in Thailand by 2030.
- UNHCR supported **transnational cooperation between Vietnam and Thailand to favor each country's ability to pool resources and expertise to resolve statelessness**. In November 2023, UNHCR organized a study visit for the Viet Nam's Ministry of Justice's officials to Thailand to foster an exchange of views and technical expertise on work related to civil registration and nationality, with active discussion, especially on policies and implementations.



EDUCATION

- In December, UNHCR, together with Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR), the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS) at the University of Auckland, and Mahidol University, co-organized the **7th 3C Forum: Inclusive Higher Education for Refugees in Bangkok**. The event aimed to raise awareness about refugees' challenges in accessing education, especially at the tertiary level. One of the UNHCR DAFI recipients was featured among the panelists to share his success story in overcoming difficulties and enrolling as an undergraduate student at Siam University in 2023. Thanks to the **DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship program**, UNHCR continues to support 7 urban refugees in Thailand with scholarships for university degrees.
- In urban areas, 506 refugee and asylum-seeker children aged 6-17 were enrolled in primary education, and 94 children aged 6-17 were enrolled in secondary education as of 31 December. In partnership with COERR, 92 children attended the **Intensive Preparatory Programme (IPP)** that aims to equip children with skills to access public schools under Thailand's "Education for All" policy. In addition to learning the Thai language, children are also taught basic science concepts and IT skills.
- UNHCR continues to provide a 3-month **Thai intensive learning program** to 23 adult refugees and asylum seekers 18-45 years old living in urban areas as of 31 December. In addition, UNHCR supported the access of 26 refugees over 17 years old to the primary and secondary levels.



HEALTH

- In urban areas, **UNHCR supported inpatient care** - focusing on life-threatening conditions and children under 5 years old. Between October and December, 78 refugees benefited from this support (through 91 referrals). In addition, 43 refugees benefited from in-person psychological therapy and assessment support conducted by UNHCR's psychologist, and 174 refugees received psychosocial support from the COERR Psychosocial unit.
- Between October and December, UNHCR distributed 2,642 packs of sanitary pads to 2,642 women of reproductive age in Ban Don Yang and Tham Hin camps.



ACCESS TO ENERGY

- In the refugee camps, UNHCR is engaging in efforts in line with **the Global Strategy on Sustainable Energy** by installing solar energy in the Temporary shelters. Between October and December, UNHCR installed solar panels in the GBV Committee's offices in Nupo and Umpium Refugee Camps. Moreover, UNHCR repaired the loudspeaker in Than Hin Refugee Camp, which is now run by a solar panel.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

- Between October and December, **resettlement submissions** were made for 4,029 refugees in the whole country, while 310 refugees departed on resettlement. In 2023, UNHCR submitted a total of 5,165 refugees for resettlement and 1,717 refugees have departed to third countries.
- During the same reporting period, UNHCR, in partnership with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), submitted **793 nationality and permanent residency applications** on behalf of stateless persons.

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, and stateless persons while advocating for their inclusion in national systems. On the Thai-Myanmar border, UNHCR works with **the Committee for the Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT)**, a consortium of NGOs that provide food, shelter, health, education, water/sanitation, protection, and livelihoods to refugees in the nine border camps.
- **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), Thailand, 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).

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 2023:

Canada | European Union | Denmark | France | Germany | Italy | Japan | Norway | Sweden | United States of America

Un-earmarked, broadly earmarked, and direct contributions were also received through private donations from Thailand. UNHCR has raised funds from the private sector since 2008 to support forcibly displaced and stateless people both in Thailand and globally.

CONTACTS

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LINKS

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

- PRESS RELEASE: [UNHCR and Thailand enhance cooperation in support of displaced and stateless populations](#) – UNHCR, 16 October 2023
- WEB STORY: [Along the Thai-Myanmar border, refugee youth empower each other to build a better future](#) – UNHCR, 14 November 2023
- [REFUGEE VOICE: Education helps refugees beat the odds](#) – an Urban Refugee in Thailand, 14 December 2023