

THAILAND

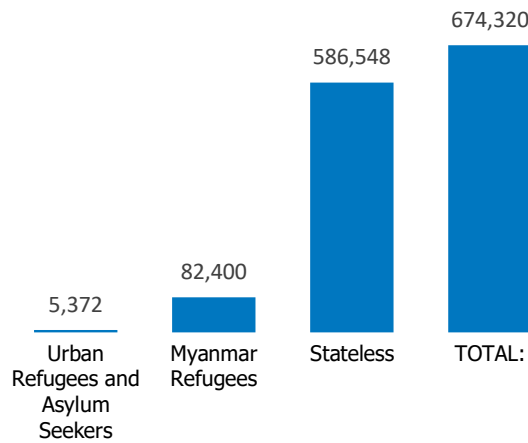
31 MARCH 2024

Thailand hosts 82,400 Myanmar refugees in nine temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border while 5,372 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.

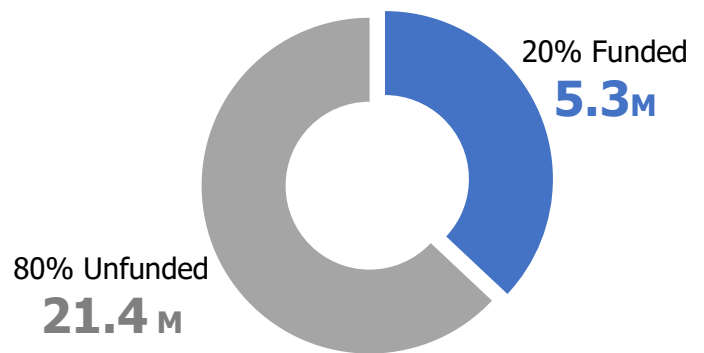
FORCIBLY DISPLACED AND STATELESS PEOPLE Figures



FUNDING (AS OF 31 MARCH)

USD 26.7 M

Requested for the Thailand Operation



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

119 National Staff

18 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 (GRF)** 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 2024, 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 persons in Thailand continue to face challenges accessing some of their fundamental 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 GRF**, 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 March 2024, the RTG recorded that over **48,572 Myanmar individuals sought safety temporarily in Thailand during several movements**. According to the authorities, these groups reportedly returned to Myanmar once the fighting subsided.
- In Thailand, the Mae Hong Son Border Command Center reported that all refugees residing in Temporary Safety Areas (TSAs) in Mae Hong Son Province had returned to Myanmar. The Nai Soi TSA was closed on 21 January, with all refugees reportedly returning to Myanmar. Before the closure of Nai Soi TSA, UNHCR distributed various CRIs, including 360 blankets, 300 mats, 300 mosquito nets, 100 solar lamps, 20 tents, 20 portable mattresses, and 20 pillows to the 1,232 refugees.
- Due to the response to the Mae Hon Son influx, which has depleted the stock available of Core Relief Items (CRIs) along the border, UNHCR initiated replenishing its CRIs stock for 10,000 new arrivals.
- In late March, the Royal Thai Army announced the establishment of Nong Luang TSA in Umphang district, Tak province, to host 74 refugees fleeing the conflict in Kayin state. UNHCR and its NGO partners have been providing humanitarian support in the form of food, water and relief items at the request of the RTG.



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 January and March, UNHCR provided **legal services** to 250 individuals and facilitated 14 individuals with **access to the Thai justice system**.
- UNHCR, in partnership with the COERR Foundation, **conducts case management and focuses on the protection of unaccompanied and separated children (UASC)**. Between January and March, UNHCR Field Offices conducted Best Interest Assessments/Determinations (BIA/BID) for refugee children across all refugee camps for protection or durable solutions.
- In 2024, after having completed **the verification of refugees living in the nine camps along the border**, UNHCR Thailand, jointly with the Ministry of Interior, has completed the verification exercise and now, are proceeding with expressions of interest camp by camp, in the same order as the verification exercise. As of 31 March, **13,148 refugees** expressed interest in resettlement, 1,669 of whom were from Ban Don Yan, 4,216 from Tham Hin and 7,263 from Umpium. 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, advocate for access to legal work opportunities, and encourage the inclusion of refugees into Thai institutions.
- In urban areas, UNHCR continues to provide **multipurpose cash grants (MPCG)** to refugees with specific needs. Between January and March, the UNHCR Cash-Based Interventions (CBI) panel allocated MPCGs to 57 households covering 163 individuals (85 female and 78 male).
- UNHCR supported the displaced population with protection issues through **in-person counselling and referrals for needed services**. Between January and March, UNHCR provided protection counselling for 248 refugees and asylum-seekers living in urban areas. In the nine refugee camps, UNHCR counselled 743 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), 11 different Ministry of Social Development and Human Security shelters, and the Welfare Protection Center for Victims of Human Trafficking. UNHCR distributed NFIs to the 105 Rohingya in the IDCs and MSDHS Shelter. 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.
- On 19 February, UNHCR organized **an art therapy session** with a group of women from the Ahmadi community. The activity was developed following a suggestion from the community during a mental health outreach event in January. This activity provided a safe space for women to express themselves freely through acrylic painting and create a personalized tote bag to take home. The

group had very positive feedback, and the community requested more activities to help alleviate their mental burdens due to the difficult living situation in Thailand.

- Following the success of its 2023 pilot project to establish a community support network for stateless persons in Chiang Mai by providing legal training for seven community-based volunteers, UNHCR is exploring a potential collaboration with the Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Justice to assist the authorities with IT equipment and capacity strengthening activities for government registrars in different areas across Thailand.
- Between January and March, 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.



EDUCATION

- Between January and March, UNHCR assisted seven students with their university applications by approaching the university admission committee to advocate and discuss the students' refugee status. As a result, two students were admitted into Thai universities, and UNHCR managed to expand university options for future students. Thanks to the **DAFI (Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative) scholarship program**, UNHCR continues to support six urban refugees in Thailand with scholarships for university degrees.
- In urban areas, 509 refugee and asylum-seeker children aged 6-17 were enrolled in primary education, and 90 children aged 6-17 were enrolled in secondary education as of 31 March.
- In partnership with COERR, 68 children attended the **Intensive Preparatory Programme (IPP)**, which 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. In addition, UNHCR supported the access of 29 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 five years old. Between January and March, 77 refugees benefited from this support (through 82 referrals). In addition, 43 refugees benefited from in-person psychological therapy and assessment support conducted by UNHCR's psychologist, and 104 refugees received psychosocial support from the COERR Psychosocial unit.



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.



DURABLE SOLUTIONS

- Between January and March, **resettlement submissions** were made for 6,149 refugees in the country, while 533 refugees departed on resettlement.
- During the same reporting period, UNHCR, in partnership with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), submitted **460 applications for obtaining legal status, nationality and permanent residency** 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 coordinates 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, Ministry of Justice (MoJ), Viet Nam, Adventist Development and Relief Agency Thailand (ADRA), Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees (COERR), Host International Thailand Foundation (HOST), Humanity and Inclusion (HI), 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: European Union | Denmark | Germany | Italy | Japan | Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | 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.

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LINKS

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