

# MULTI-YEAR STRATEGY 2023 - 2025 THAILAND MCO



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### 1. Strategy

#### 1.1 Executive Summary

UNHCR's Thailand multi-country office covers Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), Thailand, and Viet Nam. The context across the four countries varies in terms of legal frameworks, socio-economic conditions, and the State's approach to forcibly displaced and stateless people. Cambodia is the only signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and none of the four have acceded to the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

UNHCR's overall vision for 2025 and beyond is for all refugees, asylum-seekers, and stateless people in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam to have better access to international protection, greater access to basic rights, and durable solutions. In 2025, UNHCR will work to expand the existing protection space through advocacy, capacity development and direct protection interventions.

Conflict in Myanmar is expected to persist in 2025, displacing people into Thailand. In view of this, UNHCR will continue to work with the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and the inter-sector working groups nationally and locally to advocate access to territory, non-refoulement and humanitarian access for people fleeing violence and persecution in Myanmar.

UNHCR will pursue opportunities and partnerships to improve protection and solutions for the protracted refugee population in the nine camps on the Thailand-Myanmar border. The office will continue to work with partners to strengthen child protection mechanisms and optimize efforts to address gender-based violence and access to the Thai justice system. In 2025, the focus will be on maintaining the large-scale resettlement programme that started in 2023 for the camp-based population. UNHCR will also advocate for refugees' inclusion in Thai institutions, including their access to job opportunities and public services outside the camps.

In 2025, UNHCR will support Government efforts to prevent and reduce

statelessness across Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam through continued active engagement with actors working on reducing statelessness, expanding partnerships with local actors and strengthening capacity-building activities. Steps will also be made to bolster protection and access to rights for stateless people. More broadly, UNHCR will continue to work with its UN partners to support the implementation of UN Sustainable Cooperation Frameworks in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam. These frameworks include stateless people and, in the case of Thailand and Cambodia, refugees as well, in line with the UN Member States' pledge to leave no one behind.

## 1.2 Situation analysis

The resurgence of conflict in Myanmar since the 2021 February coup caused new waves of displacement within Myanmar and to neighbouring countries, including Thailand. The RTG is managing the response to new arrivals, who, in accordance with established Government procedures, are accommodated in Temporary Safety Areas (TSAs) until fighting subsides before returning to Myanmar. UNHCR and other humanitarian actors have established national and provincial coordination structures to coordinate the humanitarian response, providing relief assistance when requested by the authorities. Despite advocacy efforts, UNHCR has had limited access to those who crossed the border.

As of 1 January 2024, 82,400 refugees resided in the nine refugee camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border. Those camp refugees are mainly Karen, Karenni, and other ethnic groups from Myanmar, some of whom have lived in Thailand since the mid-1980s after fleeing persecution or conflict between ethnic armed groups and the Myanmar military. Camp residents are not officially permitted to access public services or live outside the camps and are reliant on humanitarian services to meet their basic needs.

UNHCR focuses on protection and solutions in the camps. Efforts are ongoing with partners to strengthen child protection interventions and reduce duplication in addressing gender-based violence and improve access to the Thai justice system. Verified refugees are eligible to express interest in resettlement and private sponsorship to third countries, while advocacy continues for interim solutions such as access to employment and public services outside camps.

In urban Thai areas, there were 3,509 refugees and 1,704 asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR as of 31 December 2023. As they lack legal status, they are at risk of arrest and detention. Additionally, they do not have the right to work and do not have access to essential services on par with nationals.. UNHCR carries out refugee status determination under its mandate and facilitates durable solutions for the most vulnerable refugees. In parallel, the RTG has developed the National Screening Mechanism (NSM), a regulation to distinguish people needing international protection from economic migrants. The NSM commenced implementation in September 2023

although gaps remain in its policy and procedures, including with respect to legal status of those recognized as “ Protected Persons” and access to rights and services.

The protection environment remains precarious for Rohingya arrivals in Thailand. Although they have access to the victim of trafficking procedure under the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act, there are concerns about the consistency of decision-making under the mechanism. Rohingya encountered by the State are detained in Immigration Detention Centres or, in the case of children and mothers, under the Memorandum of Understanding on the Determination of Measures and Approaches Alternatives to Detention of Children in Immigration Detention Centres (MOU) kept in closed shelters without freedom of movement. While the MOU has been more effectively applied with respect to the urban (non-Rohingya) population there remain gaps in its implementation.

Thailand also hosts one of the worlds’ largest stateless populations, with 586,548 registered stateless individuals. Thailand continues to show a political commitment to addressing statelessness, as reflected in its support for the #IBelong campaign to end statelessness and pledges made at 2023 Global Refugee Forum (GRF). Civil registration and nationality laws provide a route to accessing nationality for some categories of stateless individuals, and more than 100,000 registered stateless people have acquired Thai nationality since 2008. Processing applications for a corresponding reduction in statelessness, however, remains slow. Stateless people in Thailand face challenges accessing their basic rights, including freedom of movement and healthcare.

Cambodia, uniquely amongst countries covered by UNHCR’ s Thailand MCO Office, is a signatory to the 1951 Convention s. Further, it has a Sub-Decree on Procedure for Recognition as a Refugee or Providing Asylum Rights to Foreigners in the Kingdom of Cambodia. Cambodia currently has 28 refugees and five asylum-seekers of various nationalities registered with its Refugee Department. Asylum processing and access to asylum system, however, needs to be strengthened alongside guaranteeing in line with national law that refugees’ fundamental rights are upheld including accessing employment, having adequate standards of living and housing, purchasing property, obtaining driver's licenses, accessing banking services and freedom of movement.

In July 2023, Cambodia passed a Law on Civil Registration, Vital Statistics and Identification. The new law is intended to provide a comprehensive legal framework for civil registration, vital statistics and identity. The implementation framework for the new law is currently under development. Official statistics on statelessness are unavailable in Cambodia. The Cambodia Immigration Department reported that 75,000 ethnic Vietnamese had their legal documentation revoked and are stateless. Currently, stateless people do not have the right to work and have limited access to social protection in Cambodia, with little information to assess their community

participation and self-reliance.

Neither Laos or Viet Nam have a framework for identifying international protection needs, nor are they a signatory to the 1951 Convention or its 1967 Protocol. In recent years, only a few individuals have raised international protection needs in each country.

While the official statistics on stateless people are unavailable in Laos, a significant number of people are believed to live on Laos territory without legal documentation to prove their nationality. Laos is developing a civil registration management information system to enhance the accuracy of civil registration statistics under its Civil Registry and Vital Statistics Strategy 2016-2025. It has amended its civil registration law to improve the registration of children born on its territory and is preparing for a national census in 2025.

Viet Nam reported 26,811 people would fall under UNHCR's statelessness mandate at the end of 2022. In Viet Nam, the causes of statelessness include gaps in nationality law, such as the single nationality principle and provision to renounce nationality without adequate safeguards. Gaps preventing access to civil registration contribute to the risk of statelessness. Currently, stateless people do not have the right to work and have limited access to social protection. Viet Nam still implements the 2020 Prime Minister's Decision No 402/QD-TTg on the Plan on the Implementation of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which is a firm commitment to undertake a range of activities to address statelessness.

### 1.3 Vision and strategic orientation

UNHCR's vision is for all forcibly displaced and stateless people in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Viet Nam to enjoy improved access to protection, safety, basic rights and durable solutions.

In 2025, UNHCR will aim to expand access to territories for those seeking international protection and to persuade governments to uphold the principle of non-refoulement through stronger legal frameworks and enhanced understanding of the rights of forcibly displaced and stateless people.

Along the Thailand-Myanmar border, UNHCR will continue to advocate for greater access to international protection, solutions and standardized humanitarian assistance for all new arrivals from Myanmar. In the nine border camps, protection and solution activities will address the protracted situation, including birth and civil registration, access to justice, healthcare, protection from gender-based violence, child protection services and formal education. The group resettlement programme will continue to offer solutions to eligible camp residents while advocacy will continue for the residual groups' right to work. Regular communication with refugee leaders and communities will ensure their voices are reflected in policies and advocacy efforts.

UNHCR's strategic priorities in urban areas include:

- supporting the RTG to implement the NSM fairly and effectively;
- improving refugees and asylum seekers' access to basic services and the right to work
- promoting safe ATD);
- building partnerships to provide a safety net for refugees and asylum-seekers requiring support; and
- prioritizing resettlement for refugees where they are at heightened risk and lack access to local solutions.

UNHCR will prioritize engagement with the RTG on Rohingya arrivals, including with respect to access to asylum, and application of the national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking alongside identifying durable solutions.

In Cambodia, UNHCR will offer technical and capacity-building support to further strengthen the national asylum system and will advocate for greater access to rights for forcibly displaced people.

To better identify, prevent and reduce statelessness, UNHCR will support the authorities in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Viet Nam to implement improved law and policy frameworks, including those related to civil registration and vital statistics, legal identity and nationality procedures.

UNHCR will support efforts to:

- improve access to rights and services for stateless people, including healthcare, education, social protection mechanisms and livelihoods;
- raise awareness of issues affecting stateless persons, including amongst Government officials and the general public; and
- support civil society engagement with government to help identify and resolve statelessness.

A key priority in both Thailand and Viet Nam will be to support Government efforts to meaningfully reduce their stateless populations, most notably through access to nationality procedures.

## 1.4 Age, gender and diversity

Along the Thailand-Myanmar border, an approach shaped by the Age, Gender and Diversity (AGD) policy and Community-Based Protection principles enables the systematically capturing of diverse views of refugees residing in the camps which in

turn are integrated into UNHCR programming. This approach is multi-pronged. At its center is joint registration with the RTG that regularly updates the individualized data with AGD breakdown, including for those with varying registration statuses.

Registration is complemented by numerous outreach efforts with the refugee communities include protection counselling, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and home visits for people with specific needs, as well as hotline/helpline calls, direct emails, and complaint boxes to ensure Accountability for Affected Populations.

In urban areas, UNHCR mainstreams its AGD approach by:

- accelerating registration and RSD for vulnerable individuals;
- conducting vulnerability assessments to identify recipients of cash assistance,
- advocating for ATD for different vulnerable groups;
- enhancing Communication with Communities

Also, UNHCR is supporting the RTG to develop an AGD-sensitive protection framework in conjunction with its NSM.

In the context of statelessness, AGD is at the core of effective engagement and communication with stateless communities on civil registration and nationality procedures. These efforts are increasing stateless persons recognition as a group at risk of being left behind in development-related efforts.

## 2. Impact statements

**Statelessness is identified, prevented and reduced through effective implementation of improved law and policy frameworks, including those related to civil registration and vital statistics, legal identity and nationality procedures.**

*Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments*

### Outcome statements

Law and policy strengthened, and Administrative institutions and practice developed/strengthened.

*Outcome area: Protection policy and law*

Stateless people have access to civil registration and civil status documentation.

*Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation*

**Refugees and asylum-seekers have access to territory, are protected from refoulement, and are able to seek asylum and enjoy their full range of rights through strengthened national protection frameworks.**

*Impact area: Attaining favourable protection environments*

Outcome statements

Refugees and asylum seekers have access to the territory and are profiled and registered.

*Outcome area: Access to territory, registration and documentation*

Asylum seekers have access to quality status determination procedures.

*Outcome area: Refugee status determination*

Law and policy strengthened, and Administrative institutions and practice developed/strengthened.

*Outcome area: Protection policy and law*

Refugees and asylum seekers have access to legal assistance and legal remedies.

*Outcome area: Safety and access to justice*

**Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees and stateless people enjoy improved access to basic rights and essential services through strengthened law and policy, improved understanding, capacity and coordination amongst service providers, and greater awareness of people we serve as rights holders.**

*Impact area: Realizing rights in safe environments*

Outcome statements

Risk of gender-based violence is reduced and the quality of response improved, and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse is mainstreamed in all areas.

*Outcome area: Gender-based violence*

Protection of children strengthened through effective structures and response services.

*Outcome area: Child protection*

All refugees can sufficiently cover their basic needs.

*Outcome area: Well-being and basic needs*

Population has sufficient access to clean energy.

*Outcome area: Sustainable housing and settlements*



Health status of the refugees improved.

*Outcome area: Healthy lives*

Operation management coordination and support strengthened and optimized.

*Outcome area: Systems and processes*

Logistics and supply optimized to serve operational needs.

*Outcome area: Operational support and supply chain*

Organizational oversight, administration and support are provided.

*Outcome area: People and culture*

Resources are mobilized and media/communication support is provided.

*Outcome area: External engagement and resource mobilization*

**Refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless people are able to become self-reliant and benefit from access to inclusive and equitable quality education, meaningful livelihood opportunities and increased community empowerment and engagement in a safe and discrimination-free environment, including on gender-related grounds.**

*Impact area: Empowering communities and achieving gender equality*

Outcome statements

Community mobilization strengthened and expanded.

*Outcome area: Community engagement and women's empowerment*

Displaced and stateless people have optimal access to inclusive and equitable education and learning opportunities within the national education system.

*Outcome area: Education*

Stateless people are self-reliant through access to means of livelihoods.

*Outcome area: Self-reliance, economic inclusion and livelihoods*

**Refugees and stateless persons have improved access to a range of durable solutions, including local integration, third-country solutions, facilitated voluntary return and acquisition of nationality.**

*Impact area: Securing solutions*

Outcome statements

Potential for voluntary return realized.

*Outcome area: Voluntary repatriation and sustainable reintegration*

Potential for resettlement and complementary pathways realized.

*Outcome area: Resettlement and complementary pathways*

Potential for integration realized.

*Outcome area: Local integration and other local solutions*