



About Protection Working Groups

The Protection Working Groups (PWGs) are multi-sectoral coordination groups comprised of representatives from humanitarian organizations and CBOs who are providing assistance, protection and solutions for refugees residing in the nine temporary shelters in Thailand.

Context and Objectives

In July 2021, the PWGs reviewed the changes in the protection environment during the first semester of 2021, building on earlier analysis done in the second semester of 2019 and the first semester of 2020, when restrictions to curb the spread of COVID-19 were first introduced. The protection analysis is a collaborative process to give an overall picture of the protection environment affecting the lives of refugees. The four provincial-level PWGs collaborated separately to produce a joint analysis of the protection situation in the nine temporary shelters (camps) on the Thai-Myanmar border.

The overall objectives of the protection analysis exercise are: **1) To identify and analyze protection risks amongst stakeholders; 2) To produce a common analysis which can be used as a baseline for monitoring trends; and 3) To prioritize responses, identify gaps and inform advocacy.** The COVID-19 assessment focuses on how the pandemic has impacted the protection environment in the camps.

Reported COVID19 cases during Jan. -July 2021

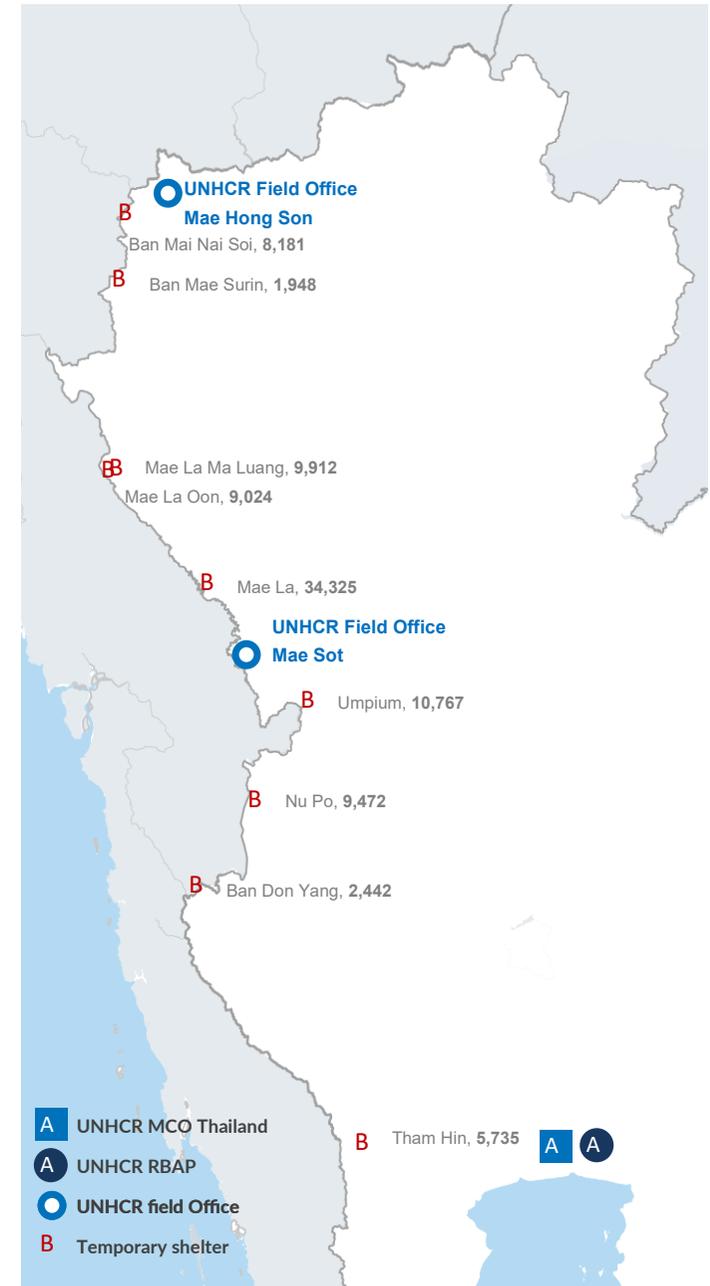
| Location | Number of confirmed cases |
|-----------------|---------------------------|
| Ban Mai Nai Soi | 0 |
| Ban Mae Surin | 0 |
| Mae Ra Ma Luang | 0 |
| Mae La Oon | 0 |
| Mae La | 3 |
| Umpium | 5 |
| Nu Po | 0 |
| Ban Don Yang | 0 |
| Tham Hin | 110 |

Highlights on Achievements

A COVID-19 outbreak at Tham Hin was managed effectively. After the first COVID-19 case was confirmed, partner conducted close contact tracing, enhanced surveillance, and Active Case Finding (ACF), resulting in the discovery of 110 cases by 28 May from 2,264 testing specimens (5.8% positive case rate). IRC and the Camp Committee established the first Field Hospital in the 9 temporary shelters with support from the Provincial Health Officer (PHO), the District Health Officer (DHO), the SPDO, and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Risk Communication & Community Engagement (RCCE) activities are being implemented successfully. Partners continued regular messaging through a combination of home visits, small group discussions, and loudspeakers. UNHCR continued to prepare, translate, and disseminate weekly Media Monitoring Reports on the COVID-19 situation in Thailand, Myanmar, and the rest of the world.

Basic needs of camp residents are being supported. UNHCR and partners continue to deliver assistance with food and Non-Food Items (NFIs) distributions in the camps despite access restrictions to humanitarian actors.





Restricted Humanitarian Access

Humanitarian organizations have been unable to access camps during lockdowns and camp residents encounter challenges to access camp passes. The Camp Commander provides camp passes to allow camp residents to leave the camps for reasons such as seeking medical care, attending court proceedings or any interventions required by NGOs for specific cases/camp residents. Only Health, WASH and waste management agencies have been allowed to maintain limited access to camp. All other humanitarian agencies apply for access permission from camp commander and inquiries evaluated on case-by-case basis. The restricted access has hampered the provision of assistance, particularly affecting the response to key protection issues. Awareness-raising activities on prevention and risk mitigation for SGBV have been reduced and this gap has not been adequately filled through remote methods due to connectivity challenges.

Key Protection Risks – COVID 19 related

A review of the risk analysis component of the provincial-level protection analyses supported the identification of the following top line protection risks prevalent across all locations on the Thai-Myanmar border during the period January-June 2021:

- Gender Based Violence (GBV),
- Safety and Security and
- Child Protection

Gender-Based Violence

Challenges in identifying and supporting serious crimes involving sexual violence: The increased pressure on families to meet their basic needs due to constraints on accessing the informal labour market, stress caused by the lockdown and movement restrictions, as well as increased reports of alcohol and substance abuse have been observed as contributing factors to continued incidents of domestic violence. For instance, while reports of domestic violence did not increase between 2019 and 2020, in 2021, UNHCR observed an increase of 48% in reports of domestic violence cases in the Tak camps. In 2021, 48 cases have been reported in Mae Sot, 37 in Mae Hong Song and 4 in Kanchanaburi.

COVID-19-related restrictions also contributed to underreporting during the first quarter of 2021. The presence of perpetrators of domestic violence, having to stay home due to movement restrictions, may have likely discouraged survivors of violence to reports incidents. Therefore, victims have less access to reporting mechanisms and assistance.

Safety and Security

Risks related to losing documentation has been newly classified as a critical protection risk in 2021. This applies for example to refugees who have felt compelled to work informally outside the camps to support their families, thus putting them at possible risk of deregistration from the Ministry of Interior database. Refugees in this situation have approached UNHCR and other PWG members for their assistance on their registration status and birth registration/certificates, often in cases where their parents had been deregistered. However, unresolved outstanding issues following the 2019 headcount exercise by the RTG has largely limited the PWG's advocacy capacity on issues related to registration and documentation.

Refugees have faced even more constraints in accessing the informal and ad hoc self-reliance opportunities during the lockdown period, and there have been some interruptions and delays in livelihood activities and training. As a result, more refugees have expressed interest in agriculture activities outside camps and partners have allocated more budget to these activities to facilitate increased participation. Agricultural projects have been observed as a positive activity to ensure the continued focus on self-reliance, to combat idleness and boredom, and generally avoid other negative coping mechanisms from arising. However, the more recent lockdowns have impacted access to the partners' agriculture spaces outside the camps.

Protection Trends*

| | | |
|---|--|------|
| Gender Based Violence (GBV) (new cases) | | 4% |
| GBV survivors accessing Thai and camp-based justice (new cases) | | 27% |
| Serious child protection (active cases) | | 127% |
| Child neglect (active cases) | | 37% |

*Represents comparison of Jan-June 2020 vs Jan-June 2021 statistics based on indicative data border wide



Child Protection

Heightened family distress resulting from e.g. domestic violence and family separation, have increased such child neglect cases compared to previous year. Along the

border, serious child protection cases (active) increased by 127% and active child neglect cases increased by 31% compared to the same period in 2020. Mae Hong Son reveals more worrying indicators, with 3 times more serious children protection cases and neglect reported. Noting that the lockdown has made it challenging to identify new cases, the partners have observed that the likelihood of child neglect has decreased whereas the impact of neglect has increased. For example, the more sustained and regular presence of parents/caregivers did not necessarily mean better care of the children, particularly when affected by substance abuse by caregivers.

Children have stayed out of school for an extended period of time though mitigating measures were taken by education partners such as support for home schooling and alternative learning modalities. School closures, cancellation of school break activities and reduced school hours were observed as triggers for negative coping mechanisms to emerge, particularly youth abusing drugs and alcohol.

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Action Plan

Based on the findings of this updated analysis, the PWGs based in Kanchanaburi, Mae Hong Son, Mae Sariang and Mae Sot have updated their action plans to focus on the following key outcomes and associated supporting activities for the remainder of 2021:

- ⇒ **Increase awareness on GBV** and support mechanisms in place to prevent and respond to GBV amongst the communities (refugees and host) and humanitarian organisations. Community-based initiatives to address drug and alcohol abuse are supported.
- ⇒ **Improve refugees' access to information for future planning** (such as documentation, safe migration and advocacy support for solutions)
- ⇒ **Improve the access of Persons with Disabilities and the most vulnerable** to services and information. Improve their inclusion in camp life.
- ⇒ **Strengthen coordination on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**
- ⇒ **Identify and address humanitarian workers and communities' protection capacity building needs**
- ⇒ **Support community to manage vulnerable child protection cases**

These activities will be complemented by overall and continuing dialogue with the RTG to improve the protection environment in the temporary shelters.