

Thailand

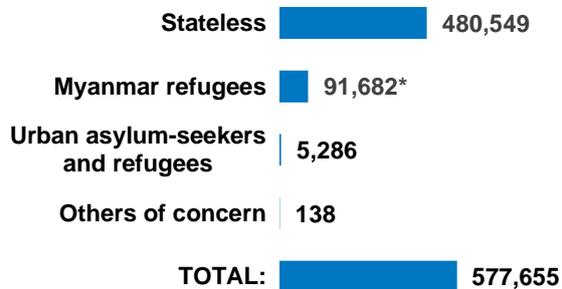
30 June 2021

Populations of concern include **91,682** Myanmar refugees, **5,286** urban asylum-seekers and refugees and **480,549** 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.

POPULATIONS OF CONCERN



FUNDING (AS OF 30 JUNE 2021)

USD 23.6 million

requested for the Thailand operation

Unfunded
66%
13.2 million



Funded
44%
10.4 million

UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

114 National Staff
22 International Staff

Offices:

1 Multi-Country Office in
Bangkok
2 Field Offices in
Mae Hong Son
and **Mae Sot**

PHOTO: UNHCR supporters participate in a football painting workshop in Bangkok to commemorate World Refugee Day and raise funds for refugees, June 2021.
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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 as long ago as 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 and are therefore reliant on non-governmental humanitarian services for their basic needs. UNHCR's interventions focus on **protection and solutions**, with material assistance provided by NGOs.
- Since October 2016 over 1,000 refugees have returned to Myanmar through the **Facilitated Voluntary Return (FVR) programme** led by the governments of Thailand and Myanmar with the support of UNHCR and partners. However, as the large majority have not come forward to apply for return, UNHCR continues to work closely with the both governments, the refugee community and other stakeholders to unlock a **multi-solutions approach** to find a dignified, sustainable and comprehensive end to this situation of protracted encampment.

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 40 countries residing in Bangkok and surrounding urban areas. Population flows into Thailand have been of a mixed nature, with **arrivals both from surrounding countries and other regions**.
- 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.
- In a development welcomed by UNHCR, the Thai Cabinet approved in December 2019 the **establishment of a screening mechanism** to distinguish people who need international protection from economic migrants. While the Regulation is not a conventional asylum law, once established, it is hoped that the screening mechanism will lend some predictability to and increase the protection space for those who need it.

STATELESS PERSONS

- According to the latest official RTG statistics as of December 2020, there are **480,549 stateless persons** registered with the RTG, although some unofficial estimates are higher. 81% of the registered stateless population reside in five provinces near border areas. Statelessness in Thailand has a number of causes. Some of the communities affected by statelessness **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, therefore, do not hold any identity documents.
- Following important reforms to Thailand’s nationality and civil registration laws, and the adoption of a **progressive nationality strategy to address statelessness**, over 100,000 registered stateless persons have acquired Thai nationality since 2008. 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**.
- Further, stateless persons have only **limited access to State social protection mechanisms** and have faced challenges in meeting basic needs, particularly in the context of COVID-19. UNHCR works with an NGO partner in support of the Thai authorities to **provide legal support to stateless persons** in applying for nationality and prevent statelessness in three districts of Chiang Rai Province.



PHOTO: As a matter of preparedness, 10,000 masks, sleeping mats and blankets, as well as 5,000 plastic tarpaulins and mosquito nets have been procured by UNHCR which could potentially be provided to support the Thai Government’s efforts in managing an influx of individuals across the border from Myanmar into Thailand.
 © UNHCR/Manu Kheereesantkul

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.
- **Strategic alliances** with key international and national NGOs, civil society and faith-based organisations, private sector partners and academia help to 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).

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- UNHCR maintains a stock of emergency relief supplies, as well as monitoring, assessment and response capacity which allows it to undertake a stand-alone and/or inter-agency emergency response. Protection, medical and GBV emergency telephone hotlines are active seven days a week for urban persons of concern. Refugees residing in the nine camps on the Thai-Myanmar border can contact UNHCR’s field offices via dedicated hotlines.

Main Activities

PROTECTION

- In the context of COVID-19, **inter-agency coordination mechanisms** established by UNHCR as well as **COVID-19 outreach, risk communication and community engagement activities** remain ongoing for all three population groups. In coordination with its partners, UNHCR continues to advocate that marginalized groups (including persons of concern to UNHCR) in Thailand should be **fully included in government COVID-19 national surveillance, response and planning activities**, and should be able to access COVID-19 testing, clinical care and case management, as well as be included in the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) vaccine distribution plan in line with the national allocation framework.
- **UNHCR commends the Guidelines issued by the Thai Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) in May 2021** that authorize public hospitals and provincial health offices to provide medical treatment to "patients who do not have rights to access governmental treatment scheme", which are in principle beneficial to refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, as well as other vulnerable groups. Following assurances by the RTG in May 2021 that everyone living in the country will be included in its vaccination plan, and the recently reported issuance of the above-mentioned guidelines, **UNHCR and partners are seeking clarification from the RTG as to how refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons can access vaccinations.**
- UNHCR and its partners are aware of the continuing increased level of hardship being faced by POCs in Thailand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to **provide support to POCs** to address some of their basic needs. In urban areas during April-June 2021, **2,498 POCs** benefitted from **cash grants** received by household members with specific needs. In addition, UNHCR provided financial support to **61 POCs** to enable them to **access in-patient department (IPD) medical care**, while **218 POCs** received **psychosocial support** and **296 POCs** received **legal assistance.**
- UNHCR continues to engage with the RTG on potential support to complement its **preparedness and response efforts** related to the potential displacement of Myanmar refugees into Thailand. UNHCR stands ready to support the Thai authorities to assess the protection needs of this group and together with humanitarian partners, provide relief assistance to complement RTG-led efforts. As a matter of preparedness, **10,000 masks, sleeping mats and blankets, as well as 5,000 plastic tarpaulins and mosquito nets have been procured** by UNHCR which could potentially be provided to support the Government's efforts in managing an influx of individuals across the border from Myanmar into Thailand. In addition, UNHCR has been **working with partners to strengthen coordination both in Bangkok and in the border provinces** to ensure sufficient provision of support to the RTG.
- UNHCR continues to effectively engage with RTG counterparts, particularly at the technical level, around capacity building for **implementation of a screening mechanism** approved by the Thai Cabinet in December 2019 to distinguish people who need international protection from economic migrants, including engaging in the process through which the Criteria, Procedures and Conditions for the screening mechanism will be established. In the context of COVID-19, UNHCR continued to undertake mandate **registration, RSD, and resettlement activities** using remote procedures developed as part of the COVID-19 response.
- UNHCR continued to **support POCs in immigration detention** and advocate for the increased use of alternative to detention (ATD), particularly to reduce the risk of close-quarter contagion in the context of COVID-19. While in-person access to immigration detention centres (IDCs) across Thailand remains suspended under further notice in line with the COVID-19 prevention measures of the RTG, during April-June 2021 UNHCR was able to conduct remote protection counselling and interviews in some provincial IDCs.
- During April-June 2021, UNHCR continued to conduct **regular remote monitoring of Rohingya POCs** accommodated in government facilities, as well as assess the international protection needs of new arrivals. UNHCR also continued to advocate for the implementation of ATD, including through the conducting of joint assessment interviews with the Thai authorities.
- As of 30 June 2021, a total of **545 POC children** were enrolled in **primary education** and **114 POC children** were enrolled in **secondary education. 35 POC children** were attending **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, all urban refugee and asylum-seeker new-borns were issued with RTG birth certificates.

SOLUTIONS

- Despite setbacks caused by COVID-19, UNHCR's partner **submitted 721 nationality applications of stateless persons** during April-June 2021.
- During April-June 2021, resettlement submissions were made for **88 refugees** in the whole country, while **177 refugees** departed on resettlement.

External/Donor 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 2021:

**Australia | Belgium | Canada | Denmark | France | Ireland | Germany |
Netherlands | Norway | Sweden | Switzerland | United States of America**

- 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.

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