

# Thailand

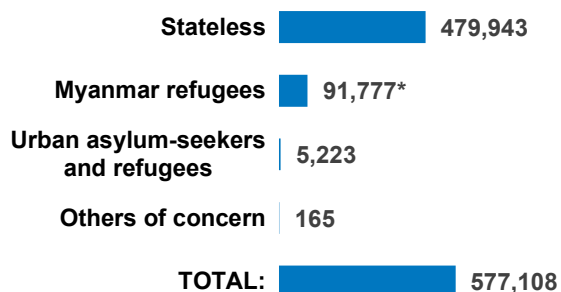
30 September 2020

Populations of concern include **91,777** Myanmar refugees, **5,223** urban asylum-seekers and refugees and **479,943** 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 SEPTEMBER 2020)

**USD 19.1 million**

requested for the Thailand operation



## UNHCR PRESENCE

### Staff:

**99** National Staff  
**21** International Staff

### Offices:

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



**PHOTO:** UNHCR staff distribute sanitary napkins to female refugees of reproductive age in Nupo Temporary Shelter on the Thai-Myanmar border in September 2020 as part of COVID-19 response efforts. © UNHCR/Pichitra Champa

# 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. They rely on non-governmental humanitarian services for their basic needs. There is no police presence in the camps, and camp schools are not accredited by the Thai system. 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, in contrast to the situation of Myanmar refugees along the Thai-Myanmar border. 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 statistics from the RTG as of June 2020, there are **479,943 stateless persons** registered with the RTG, although some unofficial estimates are higher. 85% 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:** ADRA Community Mobilizer Yuthachai Jaju provides advice to a stateless community member at a service point in Chiang Rai Province in support of the efforts of the Thai authorities.  
 © UNHCR/Korakrit x Nakin

### 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.

# 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.
- UNHCR and its partners are aware of the increased level of hardship being faced by POCs in Thailand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to **streamline and increase support to POCs** to address some of their basic needs. In urban areas during July-September 2020, **2,166 POCs** benefitted from **cash grants** received by household members with specific needs. In addition, UNHCR provided financial support to **444 POCs** to enable them to **access medical care**, while **93 POCs** received **psychosocial support** and **348 POCs** received **legal assistance**.
- UNHCR procured a four-month supply of **over 500,000 sanitary napkins** for distribution to female refugees of reproductive age in the nine temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border. As of end-September 2020, distribution has been completed in seven of temporary shelters to **over 20,000 refugees**. In addition, **emergency care assistance** was provided to **3,896 Extremely Vulnerable Individuals (EVIs)** during July-September 2020.
- UNHCR continued 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. UNHCR also continued to undertake mandate **registration, RSD, and resettlement activities** using remote procedures developed as part of the COVID-19 response.
- Following the RTG's signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on alternatives to detention for children** in January 2019, there were no children of concern to UNHCR detained in the main Immigration Detention Centre (IDC) for foreigners as of 30 September 2020. UNHCR continued to **support POCs in immigration detention** and advocate for the increased use of ATD, particularly to reduce the risk of close-quarter contagion in the context of COVID-19.
- During July-September 2020, UNHCR visited or communicated via phone with **newly arrived Rohingya individuals** to assess their protection needs and provide humanitarian items in support of the efforts of the Thai authorities. At the same time, UNHCR advocated for **non-refoulement, ATD and Victim of Trafficking (VOT) screening** as part of its protection interventions and continued to seek longer-term solutions for Rohingya POCs remaining in detention and shelters.
- As of 30 September 2020, a total of **514 POC children** were enrolled in **primary education** and **88 POC children** were enrolled in **secondary education**. **44 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.
- With UNHCR support, **435 birth certificates** were issued by District Offices to the registered and unregistered population in temporary shelters on the Thai-Myanmar border during July-September 2020. All urban refugee and asylum-seeker new-borns were also issued with RTG birth certificates.

## SOLUTIONS

- UNHCR continues to work closely with the Thai and Myanmar governments, 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. At the same time, UNHCR continues to **advocate for international protection** to continue to be extended to those who need it, while maintaining its focus on delivery of protection activities.
- Despite setbacks caused by COVID-19, UNHCR's partner **submitted 1,252 nationality applications of stateless persons** during July-September 2020.
- UNHCR also welcomed the Thai Cabinet's approval in September 2020 of the inclusion of the first group of over 3,000 students who have been screened and hold an eligible ID number in the **National Healthcare Fund for Persons with Legal Status Problems**. This will allow these students – including stateless students - to access government health facilities, by supporting the cost of health services they could not otherwise afford.
- During July-September 2020, **588 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 2020:  
**Australia | Canada | France | Denmark | Ireland | Italy | Japan | Germany | Netherlands | Norway | Spain | Sweden | Switzerland | United Kingdom | United States of America |**
- Un-earmarked, broadly earmarked and direct contributions were also received through private donations from Australia, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.
- UNHCR has raised funds from the private sector since 2008 for POCs both in Thailand and globally.