

Refugees from Burma

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Facts about Burma

Location:
Southeastern Asia,
bordering the
Andaman Sea and the
Bay of Bengal

Population: 57 M

Eligible Voters: 27 M

Neighbors:
Bangladesh, India,
China, Laos, Thailand



Facts about Burma

Size: 676,578 sq km
(about the size of Texas)

Terrain: Central
lowlands surrounded by
mountains

Weather: Tropical
monsoon, cloudy, rainy,
hot, humid summers

3 Seasons—

- *Rainy Season:* June –
September (80 degrees)
- *Cold Season:* October –
January (70–90 degrees)
- *Hot Season:* February –
May (95-105+ degrees)





Overview

- **Eight main ethnic groups** with unique languages
- Anthropologists counted more than **130 distinctive subgroups**
- Numerous mountains and hills enforce geographically isolated, linguistically and culturally diverse ethnic groups
- Occupying border regions: **Chin, Kachin, Karen, Kayah (Karenni), Mon, Rakhine, and Shan, and Rohingya.**

Major Ethnic Groups (2008 census)

Burman:	68%
Karen:	7%
Chin:	0.9%
Karenni:	0.75%
Kachin:	1.5%
Shan:	9%
Mon:	2%
Rakhine:	3.5%
Others:	7.35%





Ethnic Diversity

Ethnically diverse population due to 3 major migrations from Tibet and Central Asia:

- 1. Austro-Asiatic:** Mon, Wa, La, Palaung, Pale, Yao, Riang, Padaung, Yinbaw, Zayein, and others.
- 2. Tibeto-Burman:** **Burman, Karen, Karenni, Chin**, Kachin, Lolo, Rahkine, Kadu, Hpon, Maru, Lashi, Rawang, Azi, Nung, Daru, Yaw, Mro, Inthat, Naga, Gauri, Lisu, Lahu, and others.
- 3. Thai-Chinese:** Shan, Taungthu, and others.



Linguistic Diversity?

- **40+ Chin Languages, most, *mutually unintelligible***
- **Mizo-Kuki-Chin:**
 - **Central:** Mizo, Zyphe, Bawm, Hmar, Hakha, Ngawn, Senthang, Tawr, Zotung, Darlong, Pangkhua
 - **Northern:** Falam, Anal, Hrangkhoh, Zo, Aimol, Biete, Paite, Siyin, Tiddim, Thado, Chiru, Gangte, Kom, Lamkang, Chothe, Kharam, Monsang, Moyon, Purum, Tarao, Purum, Ralte, Ranglong, Sakachep, Simte, Vaiphei, Yos
 - **Southern:** Shö, Mara, Khumi, Daai, Mro, Mün, Nga La, Welaung



Political Background

- Former **British colony for over 100 years**; gained independence from Britain in **1948**
- In **1962**, military leader **General Ne Win staged a coup** and took power, oppressed the people, the economy crumbled.
 - Large outflow of refugees
- Many **revolts and peaceful protests** for democracy.
1988 popular uprising--over 200,000 people gathered in the capital city of Rangoon, to peacefully **protest for democracy**. The government fought back.
 - Many were killed, and more left the country as refugees.



Political Background (cont.)

- In **1990**, the military held the first nationwide **elections** in 26 years. (*Another elections planned for 2010.*)
- *Aung San Suu Kyi* and her party—the *National League for Democracy*, won **82%** of the parliamentary seats, but the military never recognized the election results.
- Aung San Suu Kyi has been **placed under house arrest** for most of the past 2 decades.
- **Saffron revolution**--In **2007**, the government fuel prices, and protests led by Buddhist monks was crushed down.
 - More fled to neighboring countries as refugees.
- State of civil war for much of the past 60 years.



Conflict with Ethnic Groups

- **“Divide and Rule” strategy:** promoting ethnic and language divisions
- 60% of the land is ethnic states bordering Burma
- Human rights violations against ethnic minorities:
 - Murder
 - Military abuse of women, using rape as a weapon
 - Torture
 - Forced labor: human minesweepers, human shields, road and railway builders
- Many fled to Thailand, Bangladesh, India, and Malaysia to seek asylum or as refugees



Burman



- Most of the Burmans follow the Buddhist religion and live in Central and lower Burma.
- **70 %** of the population speak the *Burmese* language.
- Member of the Tibeto-Burman language family. A tonal and analytic language, and uses the Burmese script.



Karen Ethnic Group



- Both Christian and Buddhist, the Karen live in Eastern and Lower Burma.
- **7 %** of the population speak the Karen language(s).
- 3 main languages (Sgaw, Pwo, and Pa'o) derived from the Tibeto-Burman language family, and use the Burmese script.



Karenni (Kayah Lii) Ethnic Group



- The name “Karenni” is given by Burmans; meaning *Red Karen*.
- Less than **1 %** of the total population in Burma.
- Speak the Kayah languages
- Most are Catholics



Kachin Ethnic Group



- Most Kachins follow the Christian religion.
- No written language until Christian mission came to Kachin territories in 1877; Kachin language uses Roman alphabet.
- **Six tribes:** Jinghpaw, Rhawang, Laowor, La Chik, Lee Su and Azee or Zai War



Chin Ethnic Group



- The name “Chin” is given by Burmans; meaning people of the *Chindwin* river valley.
- Less than **1 %** of the total population in Burma.
- Speak 25-40+ Tibeto-Burman languages, many of which are mutually unintelligible.
- The Chin writing system uses the Roman alphabet.



Chin Exodus





Chin Refugee Experience

- 20,000 to 25,000 Chin refugees live in Malaysia, mostly young men.
(Malaysia has not signed international agreements that protect refugee rights; refugees are considered illegal immigrants.)
- UNHCR in Kuala Lumpur has protection of and assistance to about 1,500 to 2,000 Chin refugees.
- There are an estimated 300 school-age children among the refugees.



Chin Refugee Experience (cont.)

- They are often on the run, taking shelter where they can, finding employment, and often being subjected to detention and deportation.
- Men work as day laborers on construction sites; women as waitresses.
- Suffer harassment and extortion by the police.
- *Urban areas*: Chins live in extremely crowded conditions, with as many as 40 people sharing a two-bedroom apartment.
- *Rural areas*: they live in make-shift huts and tents in the jungle.



Detention Center in Malaysia



Undocumented migrants in Malaysia Detention Center
Source: Chin Refugee Committee Malaysia



Chin Refugees in Malaysia



*Chin Refugees set up make-shift huts in the jungle surrounding Kuala Lumpur
(Image source: **Khonumthung.com**)*



Burman Refugees

- World's largest recruiter of child soldiers¹
- 2100 Political prisoners²
- Political refugees from 1988 uprising till Saffron revolution in 2007
- 1988 - Student generation refugees
- 2007 - Monk refugees
- 15-45 year jail term for “Violating the Electronics Act” i.e. owning an “unauthorized” fax machine or communicating with overseas media
- Many flee to neighboring Thailand where Burmans are considered illegal aliens

Source 1. Human Rights Watch

Source 2. Amnesty International



Kachin Refugees

- Human rights abuses
- Lack of freedom of religion or speech or language
- Flee to neighboring Malaysia where they are considered illegal aliens
- Refugees are not distinguished from undocumented migrants.
- Vulnerable to arrest for immigration offences, with subject to detention, prosecution, physical punishment, and deportation.



Rohingya Refugees

- Burmese government does not recognize Rohingya as an official national ethnic group
- 15% of Burma are muslims; out of 8 million muslims, 3.5 million Rohingya are Arkanese-Sunni Muslims.
- 1982 citizenship Law, the Burmese regime stripped away Rohingya' citizenship rights and rendered them stateless.
- Denied citizenship rights and subjected to repeated abuse and forced slave labor by Xenophobic pre-dominantly Buddhist military regime
- Not allowed to travel, marry or practice religion freely
- Conflict with Buddhist Rakhine population



Rohingya Refugee Experience

- Worst living conditions for any refugee camp ¹
- UNHCR in Bangladesh has protection of and assistance to 28,000 Rohingya refugees.
- Huge makeshift camps with little or no basic amenities, including food or water.
- Increasing violence and intimidation in a makeshift camps in Bangladesh

1. Doctors without borders



UNHCR statistical snapshot of vulnerable population from Burma (2009)

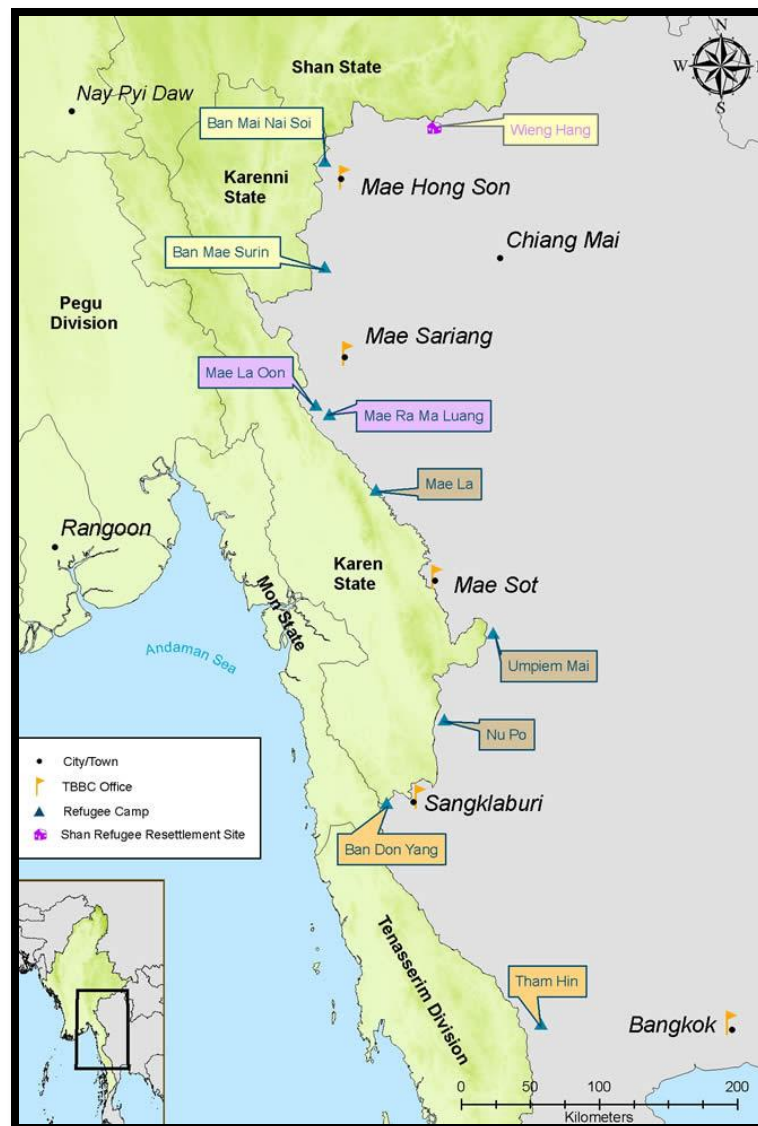
	<i>Refugees</i>	<i>Asylum Seekers</i>	<i>Internally Displaced Persons</i>	<i>Stateless Persons</i>	<i>Total Population of Concern</i>
Inside Burma	0	0	67,290	723,571	790,861
Outside Burma	184,412	22,338	67,290	0	274,040
Total					1,064,901

Thai-Burma Border Refugee Camps (03.2010)

1. **Ban Mai Nai Soi** (Karenni, Karen, other) **(15,058)**
2. **Ban Mae Surin** (Karenni, Karen, other)**(3,545)**
3. **Wieng Hang** (Shan) **(654)**
4. **Mae La Oon** (Karen, all)**(16,165)**
5. **Mae Ra Ma Luang** (Karen)**(17,476)**
6. **Mae La** (Karen, all)**(39,278)**
7. **Umpiem Mai** (all)**(17,784)**
8. **Nu Po** (Karen, all)**(15,532)**
9. **Ban Don Yang** (all)**(4,394)**
10. **Tham Hin** (all)**(8,143)**

Total: (138,029)

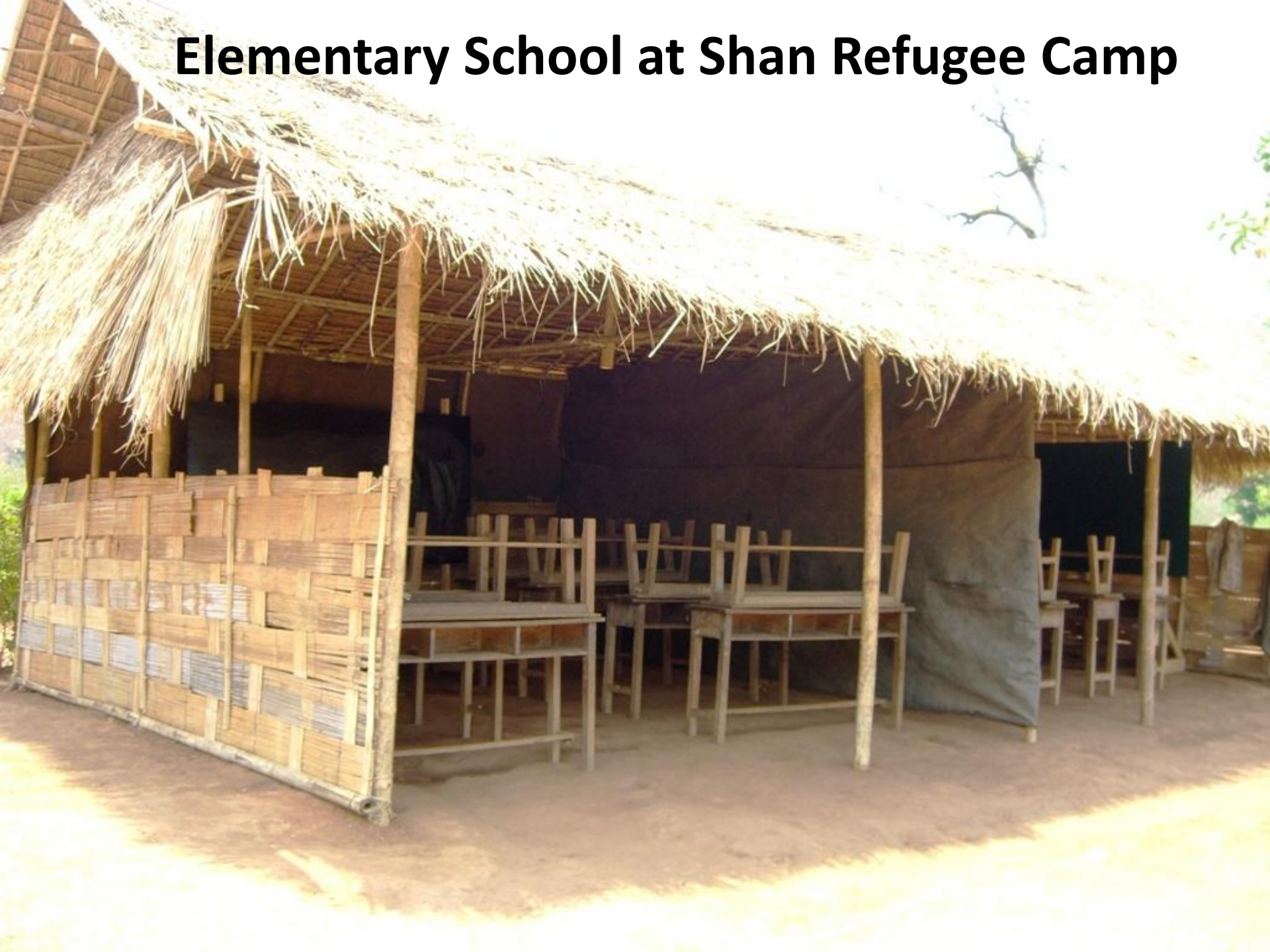
Source: TBBC (www.tbtc.org)



Wieng Heng (Shan) Refugee Camp (654 refugees)



Elementary School at Shan Refugee Camp





Kindergarten

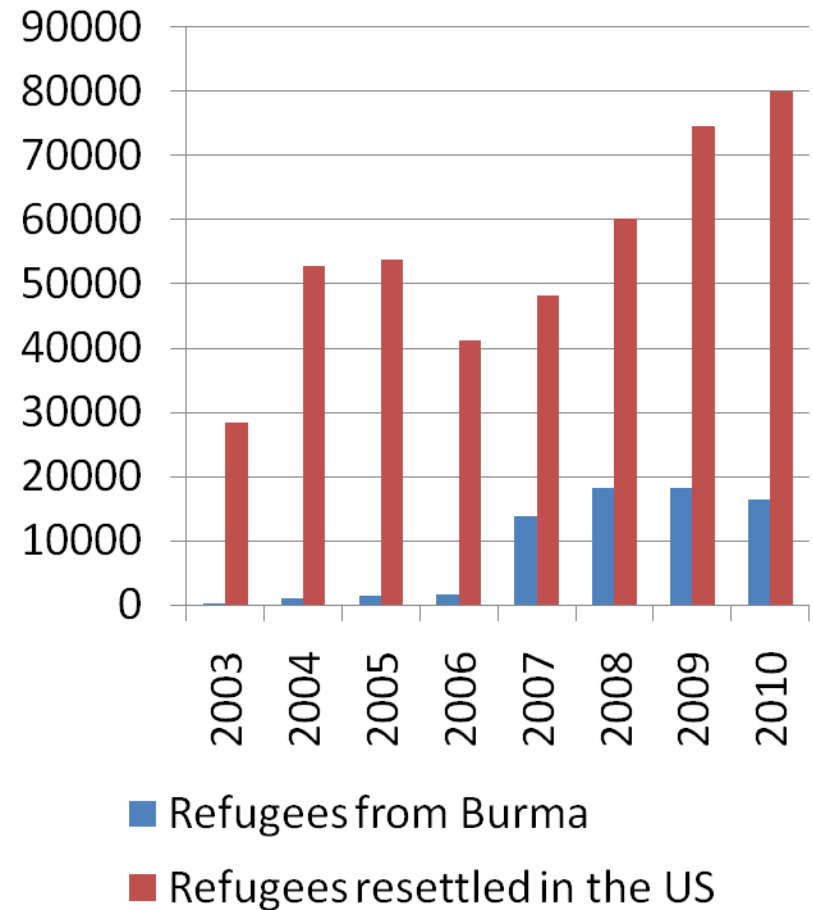




Snapshot of Refugees from Burma resettled in the US

(Source: www.wrapsnet.org)

Year	Refugees from Burma	Total Refugees resettled in the US	Percent of Total Refugees
2003	203	28,423	0.71%
2004	1,056	52,873	2.00%
2005	1,447	53,813	2.68%
2006	1,612	41,279	3.90%
2007	13,896	48,282	28.78%
2008	18,139	60,191	30.13%
2009	18,202	74,654	24.38%
2010 <i>(estimated)</i>	16,500	80,000	20.62%





Median Age and Gender of Resettled Refugees from Burma

Year	Refugees Admitted	Median Age	% Females	% Males
2008	18,139	22	44.7%	55.3%
2007	13,896	22	44.0%	56.0%
2006	1,612	22	47.9%	52.1%
2005	1,447	24.7	45.1%	54.9%

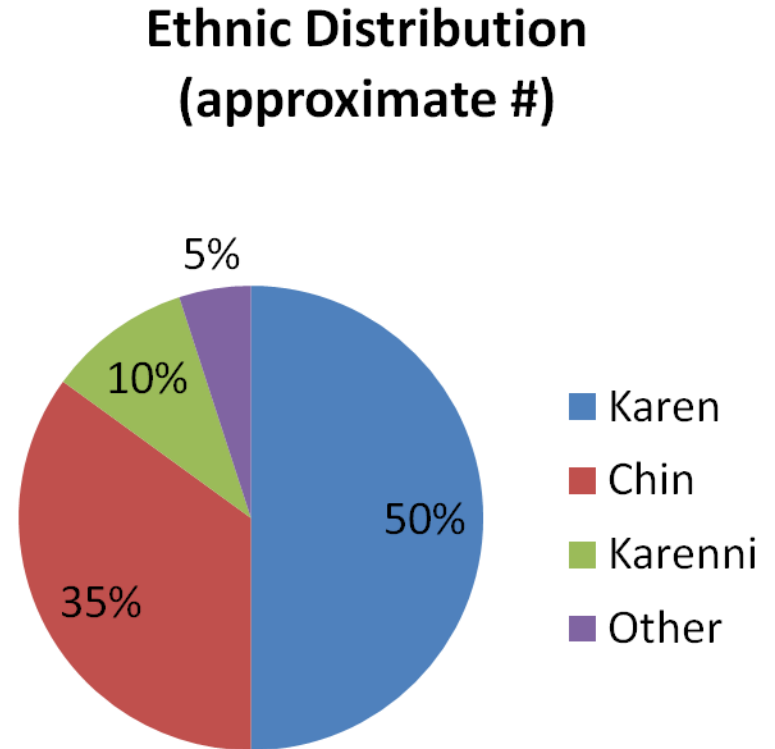
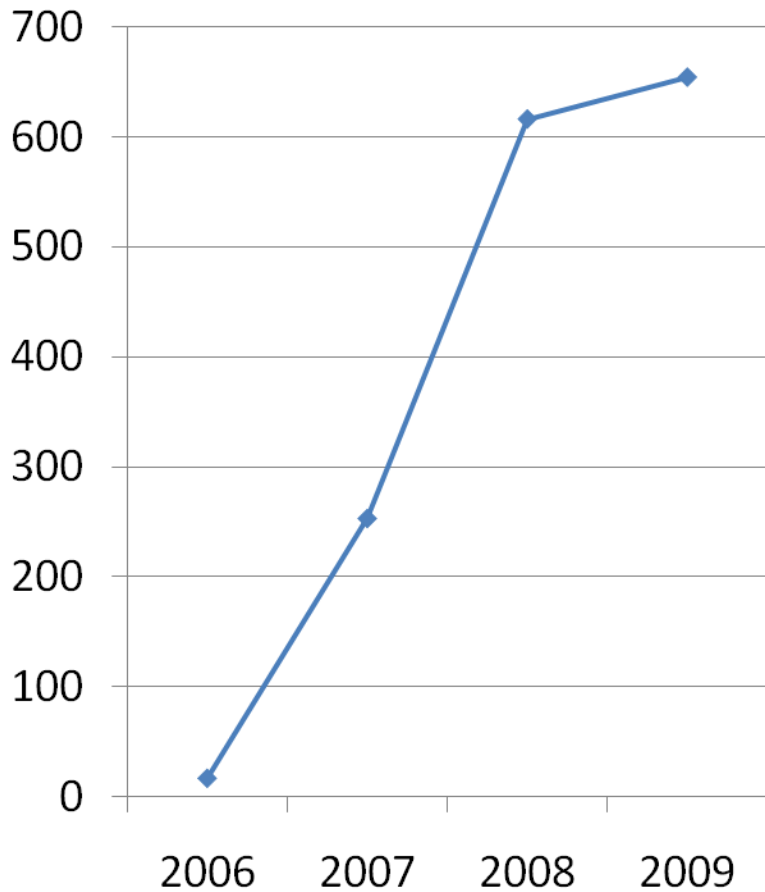


Select Age Categories of Refugees from Burma (2008)

Refugee Arrivals in US	Under 5 Yrs	School Age (5-17)	Working Age (18-64)	Retirement Age (=or > 65)
18,139	12.0%	28.3%	62.7%	1.4%



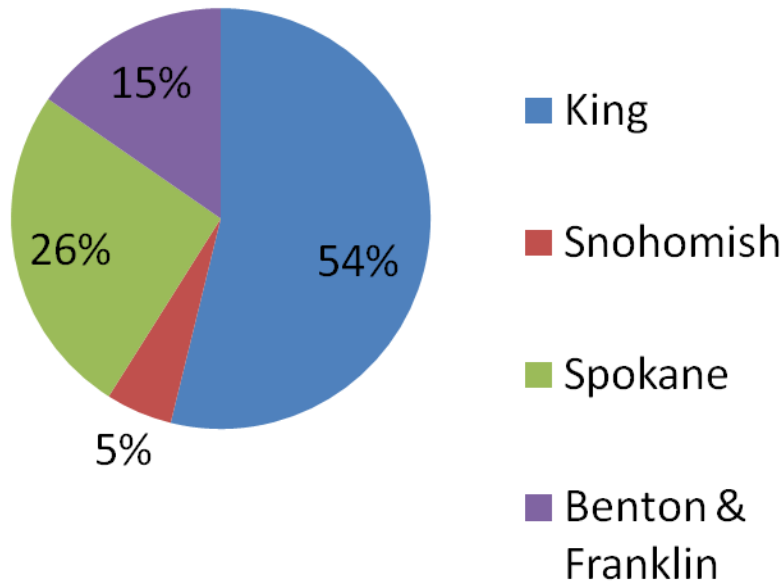
Refugees from Burma resettled in WA State





WA State Counties / Cities Resettled

Resettlement by Counties (approximate #)



King/Snohomish County:

1. Kent
2. Seatac/Tukwila/Burien
3. S. Seattle
4. Everett
5. Federal Way
6. Tacoma



Challenges in accessing information and resources

- Lack of English *language skills*
- Not understanding the *systems in place that provide services*
- Inexperience adapting to the *financial, medical and social service systems*
- Lack of *education*, in some cases, many are illiterate in their own native languages and have no exposure to written languages
- Lack of *technology skills* to use computers or the Internet
- Lack of skills for *employment*



Coalition for Refugees from Burma (CRB)

- Mutual Assistance Association (MAA) formed in 2009
- Non-profit 501(C)(3) organization registered in WA
- Helping refugees from Burma since 2006
- Board: 70% former refugees from Burma; Karen, Burman, Karenni, Chin, Kachin, and Burmese Muslims

Goal: to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate humanitarian and social support services to improve the living conditions and quality of life of resettled refugees

Approach: CRB intentionally reaches across ethnic, religious, and language barriers to provide services

Focus: community-based system of training to enhance basic life skills, and crisis resolution skills



CRB Objectives

Newly arrived refugees will have:

- shorter initial resettlement adjustment period by acquiring Life Skills
- culturally and linguistically responsive social services
- increased knowledge of and effective access to available service and support networks
- increased cross-cultural collaboration and relationship between refugees with disparate ethnic backgrounds
- broader integration due to help provided by volunteers from the local community

Vision: Refugees from Burma as successful, contributing members of society



Critical Needs for Refugees

1. Homelessness Prevention:

- *Emergency Rent Assistance* for those losing benefits
- *Safe, affordable housing* options

2. Employment/Job Training: For illiterate refugees, Level 1 English language capacity

3. Health care: Basic, Mental Health, Alcohol abuse treatment

4. Support for **Victims of Domestic Violence**

5. Legal help: For those who cannot afford attorneys

6. Youth programs: For after school homework help; summer camps; job training for at-risk youth; suicide and violence prevention

7. Support for **Elders**



CRB Activities 2006-Present

(partial list)

Basic Help:

- House visits for newly arrived refugees
- Clothing & Household goods Drive
- New Shoes and Shirts "Back to School" Project
- Reading Mail for illiterate or limited English refugees
- Fill out DSHS Forms, Low Income Housing Forms

Employment:

- Pre-Employment training, job application, and referral
- Co-op Farming Need Assessment and Informational Meeting
- Information exchange between Hmong Farmers and Burmese refugees interested in farming



CRB Activities (cont.)

Emergency Help:

- Accompany refugees for Medical Emergencies
- Domestic Violence Interventions
- Find Emergency Shelters & providing support for domestic violence victims & families
- Interpret for mental health clients
- Advocate for jailed refugees by mediating between prosecutors and public defenders and appeal for leniency
- Intervene with Child Protective Services when refugee youth are taken away



CRB Activities (cont.)

Health Care:

- Take new refugees to DSHS & Public Health for appointments
- Announced information on Flushot clinic at churches, provided transportation for elderly and youth for 2 day free H1N1 flu shot clinic with Public Health, and filling in consent forms
- Participated in Mental Wellness Helpers workshop for new arrivals
- Referrals for Substance Abuse Issues



CRB Activities (cont.)

Education:

- Preliterate ESL classes
- Computer Literacy classes using a mobile lab
- Liaise with Federal Way, Kent, Tukwila, Sammamish, and Seattle School Districts
- **Facilitated Parent-Teacher Conferences**
- Scholarship applications for 7th, 8th and 9th graders for College Bound Scholarship offered by Washington State
- World Affairs Council's Global Youth Leadership training (8th-10th graders)
- Summer Multi-media Storytelling Workshops
- **College Preparation Workshops**



CRB College Preparation Workshop





Parents-Teachers Night at Tukwila School District





CRB Activities (cont.)

Partner Workshops with Service Providers:

- Dialog on Domestic Violence with API Women and Family Safety Center
- Mental Health Workshop with ACRS and Lutheran Community Services

Other:

- Provide Burmese Cultural training to agencies and organizations
- Sponsor Refugee Awareness Raising Event - "Burma VJ" screening
- Organize Wing Luke Asian art museum's refugee exhibit



CRB Activities (cont.)

Community Building:

- **Senior “lunch-n-learn” program**
- Annual Refugee Picnic
- New Year Celebrations
- Refugee Youth Field Trips
- **Civic Engagement** - Citizenship Swear-in ceremony for refugee youth, and **participation in Seattle Mayor McGinn’s Youth and Families Initiative program**
- Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Atheist refugees all marching together at the **Seeds of Compassion** event featuring Dalai Lama
- Finding places of worship & spiritual support for newly arrived refugees: Catholics, Baptists, and Muslims



Senior Lunch-n-Learn





Civic Engagement—Mayor McGinn’s Youth and Families Initiative





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