



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

REFUGEES IN MALAYSIA

UNHCR FACTSHEET

As of end March 2014, there are some 143,435 refugees and asylum-seekers registered with UNHCR in Malaysia.

- 133,070 are from Myanmar, comprising some 51,845 Chins, 35,563 Rohingyas, 11,764 Myanmar Muslims, 7,828 Rakhine, 3,623 Burmese & Barmars, 5,396 Mon, 5,218 Kachins, and other ethnicities from Myanmar.

- There are some 10,365 refugees and asylum-seekers from other countries, including some 4,216 Sri Lankans, 1,139 Somalis, 902 Syrians, 776 Iraqis, 319 Afghans, and others from other countries.

Some 70% of refugees and asylum-seekers are men, while 30% are women. There are some 29,996 children below the age of 18.

There are also a large number of persons of concern to UNHCR who remain unregistered. As part of UNHCR's ongoing data-gathering and analysis, UNHCR believes that there are some 35,000 unregistered asylum-seekers, who UNHCR is progressively working to register.



"Everyone has the right to seek and enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

*Universal Declaration of Human Rights,
Article 14(1)*

• **United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees** •

• 570, Jalan Bukit Petaling, 50460 Kuala Lumpur • Tel: 03 2118 4800 Fax: 03 2141 1780 Email: infomalaysia@unhcr.org • Website: www.unhcr.org.my •

:: Who are refugees?

"A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country."

~ 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1(a)(2)



Living as a refugee in Malaysia

The various refugee communities are scattered throughout Malaysia, living mostly in the Klang Valley. There are no refugee camps in Malaysia. Instead, refugees share living spaces in groups of up to 40 people or more, living in low-cost flats or housing areas side by side with local Malaysian homes in cities and small towns. Many also live near the construction sites or plantations where they seek employment.

The situation of refugees is difficult as a result of their lack of official status.

- They have no access to legal employment.
- They tend to work in jobs that the local population do not wish to take (the 3D jobs: dirty, dangerous and difficult). Some employers exploit their dire situation by paying extremely low or no wages at all.
- Their children do not have access to formal education. However, some children are able to attend community-run learning centres and learning centres set up by UNHCR and NGO partners.
- They are able to access healthcare facilities in Malaysia, but the cost of treatment and refugees' irregular income make healthcare unaffordable to many refugees.

UNHCR continues to establish constructive working relationships with different Malaysian authorities and civil society groups to address the challenging issues refugees and asylum-seekers face in the country.



:: Refugees and Migrants: What is the difference?

Unlike migrants, refugees do not choose to leave their countries; they are compelled to do so because serious discrimination in their home countries, armed conflict, serious public disorder and other complex human rights issues.

:: Economic migrants are persons who leave their countries to seek material improvements in their lives. The key difference between economic migrants and refugees is that economic migrants enjoy the protection of their home countries; refugees do not.

:: Economic migrants do not fall within the criteria for refugee status and are therefore not entitled to benefit from international protection as refugees.



UNHCR FACTSHEET

UNHCR in Malaysia

UNHCR began its operations in Malaysia in 1975 when Vietnamese refugees began to arrive by boat in Malaysia and other countries in the region. From 1975 until 1996, UNHCR assisted the Malaysian government in providing protection and assistance for the Vietnamese boat people. Over those two decades as part of an international burden sharing effort UNHCR resettled more than 240,000 Vietnamese to countries including the United States, Canada, Australia, France, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Norway. During that same period more than 9,000 persons returned home to Vietnam with the support of UNHCR.

During the 1970s and 1980s UNHCR assisted the Malaysian Government in receiving and locally settling over 50,000 Filipino Muslims from Mindanao who fled to Sabah. UNHCR also supported the Malaysian Government in locally settling several thousand Muslim Chams from Cambodia in the 1980s and several hundred Bosnian refugees in the 1990s.

Although Malaysia is not a State Party to the 1951 Convention and its Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Malaysian Government continues to cooperate with UNHCR in addressing refugee issues on humanitarian grounds.

As there are currently no legislative or administrative provisions in place for dealing with the situation of asylum-seekers or refugees in the country, UNHCR conducts all activities related to the reception, registration, documentation and status determination of asylum-seekers and refugees.

As part of its programme of humanitarian support for refugees, UNHCR cooperates with various partners including government agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations and volunteers to:

- provide assistance for refugees in a variety of areas including healthcare, education, financial support for vulnerable individuals, shelter, counseling and other welfare needs,
- provide outreach and community development support to refugee communities,
- carry out detention monitoring and intervention,
- provide legal representation in court for offences under the Immigration Act,
- carry out advocacy, capacity-building, training with the refugees, Government, media and civil society partners,
- mobilize resources including corporate and public fundraising, and
- support durable solutions for refugees, including resettlement to countries comprising, among others, Australia, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United States.

:: Who We Are

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was established on December 14, 1950 by the United Nations General Assembly.

The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country.

:: Contact UNHCR

▪ United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees ▪

▪ 570, Jalan Bukit Petaling, 50460 Kuala Lumpur ▪ Tel: 03 2118 4800 Fax: 03 2141 1780 Email: infomalaysia@unhcr.org ▪ Website: www.unhcr.org.my ▪