

BURMESE
COMMUNITY PROFILE

© Commonwealth of Australia August 2006

Cover design by Spice & Co. Design, Canberra

Layout and design by Production and Digital Communication –
National Communications Branch – DIMA

This booklet has been compiled by the national office of the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to assist state and territory governments, service providers and other key settlement stakeholders to settle new entrants under Australia's Humanitarian Programme.

Accurate information about the pre-arrival experiences of refugees, including environmental conditions in camps, can be difficult to obtain and verify. While every effort has been made to ensure this document is factually correct, it may contain some inaccuracies.

Refugee experiences can vary considerably between individuals. Readers should note that this document is intended to provide a general background of the possible experiences of arrivals under the Humanitarian Programme. Information presented here may not always be applicable to individuals within the community in Australia or to new arrivals.

Where possible, more detailed information on specific groups of arrivals will be provided to service providers as an adjunct to this and other Community Profiles.

Policies in relation to Australia's Humanitarian Programme change over time. For current information visit the department's website at www.immi.gov.au.

The information provided in this document does not necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth or its employees.

Introduction

Burma (also known as Myanmar or the Union of Myanmar) is located in South-East Asia on the Bay of Bengal. It shares borders with Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. In this profile, the country is referred to as Burma and its people as Burmese. However, the current government is referred to as the Myanmar Government.

The country has always been known locally as Myanmar (and the capital as Yangon), however British colonists arriving in 1886 established the use of the terms Burma and Rangoon due to difficulties in pronouncing the local language. Burma became the country's official name internationally.

The country was briefly occupied by Japan during World War II (1942-45). Britain assisted Burma to expel the Japanese and in 1948 the country achieved independence from British rule. For the next 10 years, the Burmese Government struggled with challenges posed by hostile communist and ethnic minority groups. In 1962, General Ne Win led a successful military coup and since that time the country has been under the leadership of a military junta.

In 1989, the military junta enforced the use of the name Myanmar as the country's official title. However, this has been politically controversial and many countries have refused to accept this, questioning the authority of the junta to make such a change.

The Burmese people have experienced decades of oppression under a succession of military regimes. By the end of 2002 an estimated 600 000 Burmese were internally displaced, including people who were forcibly relocated by the military, and others who refused to relocate or who fled the relocation areas because they could not survive there. At the same time, more than a half million Burmese had sought refuge in neighbouring countries. To this day, arrests and harassment of pro-democracy activists continue.

Community in Australia

At the time of the 2001 Census, 11 070 Burma/Myanmar born people were living in Australia, an increase of nine per cent from the 1996 Census. According to the department's Settlement Database (SDB), between the period of 2000-05 a further 1875 Burmese¹ arrived in Australia (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Number of arrivals 2000-05

Migration Stream	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Total
Family	53	83	91	110	160	126	623
Humanitarian	104	166	72	54	70	368	834
Skilled	33	61	54	89	78	100	415
Unknown			2	1			3
Total	190	310	219	254	308	594	1875

Figure 2 shows the settlement location of Burma/Myanmar born arrivals over the period 2000-05. The largest number of arrivals settled in NSW (724) followed by Victoria (495) and then Western Australia (419). For privacy reasons, locations where fewer than 20 entrants settled are not identified.

Figure 2. Arrivals by state 2000-05

State of residence	Settler numbers
New South Wales	724
Victoria	495
Western Australia	419
Queensland	104
Australian Capital Territory	79
South Australia	23
Other states & territories	31
Total	1875

¹ Readers should note that data on country of birth is not always a reliable indicator of the social, cultural or ethnic background of humanitarian entrants. There is often a great deal of cross-border movement in world regions affected by instability, and conflicts between neighbouring countries can result in borders moving over time. Additionally, children born in one country may have parents who were born in a different country. These children are likely to share the cultural, ethnic or linguistic characteristics of their parent's country of birth rather than their own.

At the 2001 Census the main languages spoken at home by Burma/Myanmar born people in Australia were Burmese (47.6 per cent), English (38.7 per cent), and Chinese-Mandarin (2.6 per cent). Of those who spoke a language other than English at home, 82.8 per cent spoke English very well or well and 16.4 per cent spoke English not well or not at all.

The main languages reported by Burma/Myanmar born people who arrived in Australia over the period 2000-05 were:

- Burmese (59 per cent)².

Approximately 29 per cent of arrivals spoke either other languages or did not identify the primary language they spoke.

Of all these arrivals, 14 per cent reported having excellent English proficiency, seven per cent reported having very good English proficiency, 31 per cent reported having poor English proficiency and 21 per cent reported nil English skills. A further 28 per cent of arrivals in this period did not record their English proficiency (Figure 3).

Figure 3. English proficiency of arrivals 2000-05

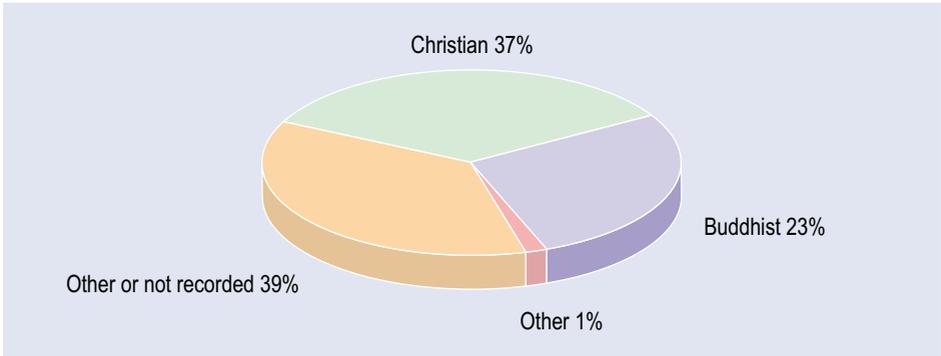
English proficiency	No. of arrivals	Per cent of arrivals
Very Good	257	14
Good	130	7
Poor	585	31
Nil	385	21
Not recorded	518	28
Total	1875	100

During the period 2000-05, the main religions stated by Burma/Myanmar born arrivals to Australia were Christianity and Buddhism (see Figure 4). A large number (39 per cent) either practiced other religions, or their religion was not recorded at the time of arrival. There was also a small number of other religions including Hindu and Muslim entrants (one per cent).

Burma’s population is composed of 135 ethnic groups with their own dialect, beliefs and customs. In the 2001 Census, the top three ethnic groups that Burmese-born persons identified with were Burmese/Burman (5080), Chinese (1030) and English (880).

² It should be noted that although 68 per cent of arrivals designated Burmese as their main language, the Burmese language has many distinct dialects. The current caseload speaks a wide range of dialects.

Figure 4. Religion of arrivals 2000-05



By contrast, the main ethnic groups of Burmese-born arrivals to Australia over the period 2000-05 recorded by the Settlement Database were: Burmese and Karen. However, the ethnicity of approximately 60 per cent of arrivals over this period was not recorded.

This calendar year there has also been an increase in the number of entrants from the Chin ethnic group. The majority of these people have been living in Malaysia.

Figure 5. Ethnicity of arrivals 2000-05

Ethnicity	No. of arrivals	Per cent of arrivals
Burmese	433	23.10
Karen (Burma)	270	14.40
Chin (Burma)	8	0.45
Rohingya (Burma)	8	0.45
Other ethnicities	25	1.30
Not recorded	1131	60.30
Total arrivals	1875	100.00

Pre-arrival experiences

The largest ethnic group in the country is the Burman people. Burman dominance over Karen, Shan, Rakhine, Mon, Chin, Kachin and other minorities has been the source of considerable ethnic tension, inciting recurring separatist rebellions. Many Burmese refugees, especially people from the Karen ethnic group, have fled the country over the past four decades due to clashes between ethnic minorities and with the Myanmar Government. The government has also followed restrictive human rights practices such as forced relocations, forced labour and executions.

Since 1988, close to a million Burmese have fled to neighbouring countries, predominantly Thailand. Burmese refugees have also fled to countries such as Malaysia and India, and may experience very different conditions from those in Thailand. Some arrivals from Malaysia may have been in detention prior to entering Australia. Due to ongoing instability in Burma, humanitarian arrivals from all of these locations are likely to increase.

Over 140 000 Burmese refugees are accommodated in nine main camps scattered along the border between Burma/Myanmar and Thailand. Assistance provided for refugees in camps along the Thai-Burma border has been provided by non-government organisations (NGOs) and the Royal Thai Government in partnership with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

Not all Burmese refugees reside in the border camps. Some live in small villages, some in the Maneeloy Burmese Centre, while others are living in Bangkok. Deadlines imposed by the Royal Thai Government for Burmese refugees to relocate to camps (by 31 March 2005) have meant that urban-based Burmese refugees are unlikely to be granted permits to exit Thailand.



Mae La Camp

As such, most Burmese humanitarian entrants have been living in camp environments prior to their arrival in Australia. Many refugees have been living in these conditions for more than a decade.

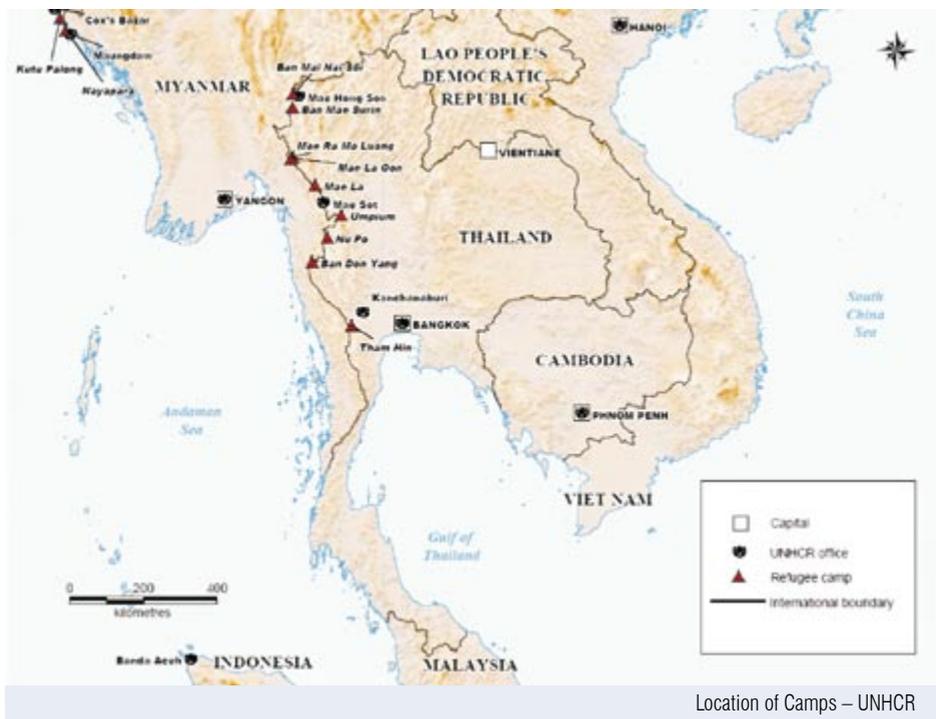
Burmese refugees and NGO workers have expressed concerns over some key issues:

- basic health needs, especially for refugees living outside the camps. Facilities in camp clinics are basic. However, a range of health and educational programmes are conducted
- violence against women in and around the camps and
- lack of income and food security in the camps as well as in the surrounding countryside.

Although there have been recent negotiations between UNHCR and the current Myanmar Government to repatriate refugees from Thailand, this is not a possibility in the near future as cease fires have faltered. The UNHCR feels that the current situation on the Thai-Burma border is not conducive for refugees to return in safety and dignity.

It is planned to introduce educational services such as English and Thai language classes and vocational training to the camps in Thailand in 2006. The Thai Government has committed to providing teachers and educational materials such as computers, textbooks and television. Previous to this new programme, the refugees have had limited access to education with very few resources. It is hoped that with increased education and skills, refugees will improve their prospects of successful resettlement.

Camp Conditions – Thai-Burma Border



There are nine major camps for Burmese refugees along the Thai-Burma border. Information on conditions in the camps is as follows:

Ban Mae Surin

Registered population: 2433 as at 10 May 2006.

Ban Mae Surin was established in 1992 with a small population of 150 refugees. In 1996 this camp consolidated with two other small camps and since that time the camp population has been increasing by births and new arrivals. Most of the population is from Kayah State and the majority are farmers.

There is one main health clinic and a satellite health centre in the camp which provide preventive and curative care. Water supply is a surface gravity flow system and is close to refugee houses. Sanitation workers are trained in building and installing latrines and in waste disposal.

Jesuit Refugees (JRS) provide educational support. There are two primary schools with 698 students and 43 teachers, four middle schools with 416 students and one high school with 96 students with a total of 34 teachers in the middle schools and high school (a total of 1210 students and 77 teachers).

There is also a programme for women's education which aims to empower refugee women by improving their education, confidence and skills (Women's Education for Advancement and Employment – WEAVE). It also aims to improve the physical and emotional well being of refugee children by providing support nursery schools.

Food supplies include rice, chilli, salt, yellow bean and cooking oil.

Ban Don Yang

Registered population: 3452 as at 10 May 2006.

Ban Don Yang was established in June 1997. It is situated only 300 metres from the Thai-Burma border, about 10 kilometres from the nearest Thai village of Huaymalai and a six-hour drive from Bangkok.

The camp has one health facility with both in-patient and out-patient departments and a laboratory. The camp has experienced some water shortages during the dry seasons. This is a major concern in the camp.

There is one nursery school, one primary school, one high school and one evening school. The high school provides education up to grade 10, but no options for students to pursue further education. In 2005-06, the schools are educating a total of 1466 students and have 62 teachers. The classes are taught in the Karen language although there is also an emphasis on learning Thai. The camp has one library.

The camp has a separate section for a group of Burmese urban refugees known as Persons of Concern, transferred to the camp at the end of March 2005. The population of this section is 220 persons. The Persons of Concern previously resided outside the camp. These people are a mix of Karen, Burmese and Mon and some have experienced difficulties in the language used in the camp (uniquely Karen). As a result, there has been a special school established for these residents.

Vocational training activities are available, and 11 trainers provide training in sewing, auto repair, tin-smithing, stove making, computer skills, cooking and baking.

Mae Ra Ma Luang

Registered population: 9199 as at 10 May 2006.

Mae Ra Ma Luang opened in 1995. It is the most remote of the nine camps and the most difficult to reach. For short periods during the rainy season it can be unreachable.

A number of non-government organisations coordinate educational and health services in the camp. As well as the basic health services of medical clinics and maternal and child health care, there are activities to assist with mine risk education and physical therapy (rehabilitation). Water supply is a surface water gravity flow system and water rationing is closely monitored. Some refugees have access to flush latrines. Many families have to share latrines.

The camp has seven nursery schools with 45 teachers and 774 children. There are six primary schools with 80 teachers (male and female) and 2586 students, and three secondary schools with 50 classes taught by 72 teachers (male and female teachers) to 1990 students.

As well, there are a number of vocational courses to teach skills in areas such as blacksmithing, bakery, music, sewing and mechanics. There has been agricultural training as well as other vocational training such as haircutting, shampoo making and balm making as ways of creating self sufficiency.

Tham Hin

Registered population: 9564 as at 10 May 2006.

This camp is situated approximately 12 kilometres from the Thai-Burma border and about 2.5 hours drive from Bangkok. The nearest Thai village is Ban Huay Sud (0.5 kilometres). Tham Hin camp opened in 1997 when three temporary camps combined to form a more fixed residence. There is significant overcrowding in living conditions.

Water supply is a major concern as supply is insufficient during the dry season. There is one health care facility with an in-patient department, an out-patient department and a laboratory facility.

The camp has one nursery school, one primary school, and one high school with a total of 2954 students and 151 teachers. There is an emphasis on learning the Thai language. There are no facilities for further study past year 10 except vocational training. A vocational centre opened in the camp in 2002 offering courses in sewing, auto repair, cooking, agriculture and computing. There are two public libraries.

Food supplies include rice, soybean, green bean, fish paste, dried chilli, cooking oil and salt.

Nu Po

Registered population: 11 397 as at 10 May 2006.

Nu Po has been running since 1997. The camp is situated 228 kilometres south of Mae Sot (a town on the Thai-Burma border and the regional UNHCR field office), across the road from the Thai-Karen village of Van Nu Po, about 10 kilometres from the Burmese border. It is located in a national wild animal sanctuary. Three other near-by camps have been consolidated into Nu Po.



Nu Po camp – weaving manufacturing

The camp has health facilities including preventive treatment and community health education activities. Malaria and diarrhoea are significant health issues.

There is one high school, one middle school, six primary schools and four nursery schools with approximately 4000 students and 130 teachers. There are also 50 students enrolled in the Teachers Preparation Course (TPC). The Karen, Burmese and English

languages are taught in the schools and Thai language classes are available for those interested. There is also a Baptist bible school operating in the camp – approximately half of the camp population is Christian. There are two public libraries.

Mae La Oon

Registered population: 13 614 as at 10 May 2006.

This camp was created as a relocation of the former Mae Kongkha Camp over the period of December 2004 – March 2005. It is located three kilometres from the border, 2.5 kilometres west of Mae Ra Lualung camp and 3.5 kilometres south of Mae Tolla village. The majority of refugees in this camp are farmers from Karen State in Burma. A number of NGOs work together to provide essential services such as health and education.

The health programme comprises four clinics, anti-natal care and a child health programme, as well as providing health education information.

Water is provided through a gravity flow system with water outlets located at standpoints. Food staples consist of rice, fish paste, salt, yellow bean and cooking oil.

There are 13 schools with classes from kindergarten to high school.

Ban Mai Nai Soi

Registered population: 17 538 as at 10 May 2006.

This camp was originally opened in 1996 when two previous camps, Pangyon and Huaybok, were amalgamated. A third camp was relocated to Ban Mai Nai Soi in 2002.

There is a comprehensive primary health care programme with two main clinics and two satellite health centres. Water supply is a surface gravity flow system and wells. Flush style latrines are used.

Educational programmes include primary, middle and high schools and a two year post-year 10 programme; special education to assist blind and deaf students; vocational training; a teacher training centre (two-year programme for primary and secondary teachers) and Thai language courses.

In addition, there is a Women's Education for Advancement and Employment (WEAVE) programme to empower refugee women which in turn improves physical and emotional conditions for children in the camp. Basic school supplies are provided by a non-government organisation.

Food supplies include rice, chilli, salt, yellow bean and cooking oil.

Umpium

Registered population: 18 565 as at 10 May 2006.

Umpium camp was created in 1999 to accommodate refugees being relocated from two previous camps. These camps had been located close to the Thai-Burma border and were subject to attacks by intruders from Burma. The camp has not been attacked since the move in late 1999.

Health facilities include an in-patient department, an out-patient department, a laboratory, a cholera and diarrhoea ward, a tuberculosis treatment centre, an eye clinic and a dental clinic. Preventive health and education include maternal, child health and community health education.

Major health problems in this camp are malaria and diarrhoea.

The camp has a number of schools (four year 11-12 schools, two high schools, three secondary/middle schools and two primary schools) with 5560 students and 219 teachers. In addition, there are nine nursery schools with a further 1614 student and 42 teachers. There is post secondary training for teacher preparation, a Special English Programme, an English Immersion Programme and a vocational training programme. The camp has three public libraries.

Mae La

Registered population: 45 456 as at 10 May 2006.

The camp is situated 66 kilometres from Mae Sot, and one kilometre from the nearest Thai village of Ban Mae La Moo. Mae La camp has existed since 1984. Other camps along the border have amalgamated with this camp between 1984 and 1996.

There are four health clinics in the camp where they treat malaria patients, provide antenatal care and deliver babies.

There are 23 schools (five high schools, four middle schools and 14 primary schools) with approximately 16 500 students and 675 teachers. There are also 22 nursery schools for children aged three to five years with a further 100 teachers. A number of high school graduates are taking Further Studies Programmes (FSP), some are studying a Teachers Preparation Course (TPC) and several students are on a Leadership Management Course (LMC).



Mae La Camp – Meeting room

There is a Baptist Bible school and other religious classes are run by mosques (there are four mosques in Mae La). There is also a school to teach the Thai language to refugee children. There are five public libraries.

Settlement considerations

AUSCO (Australian Cultural Orientation Programme) training is offered to all Burmese refugees between the ages of 12 and 60 currently being resettled in Australia. However, the team is not always able to access the camps and the cost of running a programme for only two or three participants can be prohibitive. This 15-hour course, which is spread over three days, is administered by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The aim of the programme is to enhance refugees' ability to adapt to life in Australia. The programme covers such topics as travel to Australia, settling, finding a job, health care, money management and budgeting, housing, transport and Australian law. There is a new programme for youth called AUSCO Youth Cultural Orientation for children aged nine to 16 years. The programme includes education and employment in Australia as well as expected changes to family structure, such as changing gender and parental roles.

The majority of the participants have a minimum of primary education. Some have completed some secondary education and a few adults have post secondary education. Most of the teenagers have received their high school education from schools in the camps. Indications from the AUSCO training sessions are that most participants are keen to further their education in Australia and find jobs that provide self-sufficiency. Those with a college education hope to find jobs in their fields of study. All will need to improve their English skills in order to reach their goals.

Since May 2006, the IOM has been conducting pre-departure medical screening (PDMS) for humanitarian entrants departing from Thailand. PDMS is conducted within 72 hours of departure. The purpose of PDMS is to reduce the number of medical issues that entrants present with after arrival and to ensure better follow-up onshore of medical issues that have been identified at the point of departure. Pre-departure screening and treatment information is forwarded to DIMA, enabling the department to ensure appropriate settlement and health services can be put in place for their arrival. IOM also provides screened entrants with a package of hard copy medical documents to take to medical appointments in Australia.

While health conditions are screened for and treated prior to visa grant and arrival in Australia, it is worth noting that within Thai camp environments tuberculosis (TB) is prevalent and has been identified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as a significant concern. Arrivals to Australia who have been treated for TB may nonetheless be experiencing fragile health as a result of their pre-arrival experiences and may require ongoing care.

Although many of the younger refugees (who have been in the camps for long periods of time) have received a comprehensive education, including English, most will need some ESL support. They will have minimal need for translation. Many older refugees have less developed English skills, so will need translation assistance as well as English classes.

It is worthwhile mentioning that Burmese communities in Australia, particularly in Western Australia and NSW, are well established and are in a strong position to assist with the settlement of new arrivals.

Burma country background

Location

Burma is located in south-east Asia. China is to the north and north-east, Thailand and Laos are to the east and Bangladesh and India to the west. To the south are the Andaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal. Burma covers an area of 676 577 square kilometres, comprising 14 administrative divisions.

75 per cent of the population lives in the central lowlands. Until recently the capital city was Yangon (known as Rangoon from the time of British Colonial Administration until 1989). Yangon is situated in the south where the Yangon and Bago Rivers meet.

However, in March 2006 the political capital was relocated inland to the newly established city of Pyinmana.

Climate and topography

Burma has a tropical monsoonal climate with three main seasons: monsoon, cool and hot. The hot and humid period is between February and May, with very little rain. The temperatures in this period are usually higher than 38°C. The rainy season runs from May through to October. The temperatures during this season are more moderate, ranging from 24°C to 32°C. Dry, cooler weather prevails from October to February with temperatures between 15°C and 32°C.

Burma is a large country with a rugged landscape. There is a dry plain in the centre of the country which is ringed by steep, jungle covered mountain ranges. The highest point is in Hkakabo Razi National Park at 5881 metres. 49 per cent of the land is covered by forest and woodlands. Four of Asia's largest rivers, the Irrawaddy, the Chindwin, the Sittang and the Salween, run through the country.



Population

In April 2006 Burma's population was approximately 50 million with a growth rate of 0.81 per cent. Life expectancy for the total population is 60.97 years (male: 58.07 years and female: 64.03 years). The infant mortality rate is 61.85 deaths per 1000 live births (male: 72.68 deaths/1000 live births and female: 50.38 deaths/1000 live births).

Figure 6. Age structure, Burma

Age	0 – 14 years	15 – 64 years	Over 65 years
Per cent of population	26.4	68.5	5.1

Ethnicity

The Burmese population is ethnically complex and is composed of approximately 135 ethnic groups and sub-groups, each with its own dialect, beliefs and customs. Figure 7 shows the geographical distribution of the country's largest ethnic groups. Many of Burma's ethnic minorities hope to gain autonomy for their home areas and to achieve a voice in the affairs of the country as a whole.

Language

The official language is Burmese and approximately 80 per cent of the population can speak Burmese. As noted above, the Burmese language encompasses a number of dialects. In addition, each of the 135 ethnic groups has their own language and dialect, and Burmese may be spoken as a second language. English instruction begins in primary school.

Figure 7. Ethnic groups, Burma



Thailand Burma Border Consortium

Family

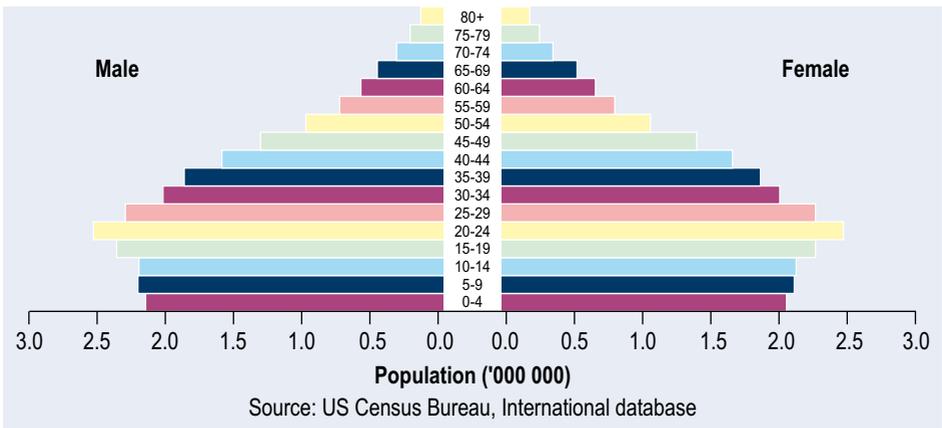
Arranged marriages are common and are often negotiated by an aunt or grandmother. An astrologer may be consulted to determine if the couple are compatible, and also to choose a name when children are born. In rural areas, people live with their extended family members.

A sense of equality is encouraged between husband and wife, although the husband may be considered the 'head' of the family. Traditionally, the family unit is matriarchal in Burmese society and women are considered to have primary responsibility for running the household and raising the children. A sense of respect is also encouraged between parents, children and relatives.

The average family has two or three children, however, notions of family are broader than in Australian culture: in Burmese culture first cousins are typically thought of as brothers and sisters. Children are under the guardianship, protection and control of their parents. Children are expected to be dutiful and obedient, helping in the home. There is an expectation that children will care for their parents in old age. Traditions and religious beliefs have an impact on roles within the family.

Naming conventions in Burma are very different from those in Western culture. Traditionally, people's names are not divided into 'first' and 'last' but rather form a whole. In some cases a person may have only one name.

Figure 8. Gender of population – 2005





Cultural Profiles Project (Canadian Government)

Gender

Traditionally, women have enjoyed a high social and economic status and have had similar rights to men. Women keep their names after marriage and usually manage the family finances. They work alongside men on family farms and in small businesses. However, there are few women in traditional male occupations and women are not permitted to practise some professions.

Religion

Buddhism (Theravada) is the main religion, practiced by 89 per cent of the population, and has a direct impact on all aspects of daily life including family. Christianity is practiced by four per cent of the people (Baptist three per cent, Roman Catholic one per cent), Islam by four per cent and the remaining three per cent practice Hinduism or animism.

Buddhism emphasises compassion, equality and wisdom, and requires worship, meditation, charity, pilgrimages, sponsoring the building of a pagoda or becoming a monk. Most boys in Burma are expected to spend some time in a monastery during their youth.

Dress

Traditional Burmese dress varies somewhat from one ethnic group to another. Within an ethnic group there are differences of design, colour and fabric. Burmese women weave colourful designs into fabric which is used to create their traditional sarongs and tunic style tops. The sarongs for men are called 'pasoe' and sarongs worn by women are called 'htamain'.

Health

A number of serious diseases are common in Burma. Some of these are related to contaminated water and food (typhoid, dysentery and viral hepatitis). Dengue fever and malaria are high risks in some locations. There are also cases of HIV/AIDS in Burma.



In the cities there are several good hospitals and clinics, however, rural medical conditions are less progressive. Immunisation for children against tuberculosis and other diseases such as measles and diphtheria has increased. Some families use traditional medicines and approaches for treating illnesses.

The current Myanmar Government is working in collaboration with the WHO, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and many other non-government funded agencies to improve health conditions across the country. Priority areas in health care are preventive health measures, improving essential basic health services and increasing access to safe water and proper sanitation.

Education

Historically, education in Burma was provided to boys in monasteries. British rule had significant influence on the education system, and preparatory schools and universities were established. With independence in 1948, the new government decided to create a literate and educated public. Government primary and secondary schools were opened with free education available. However, when the government changed hands once more, all schools were nationalised and some of the universities closed temporarily.

Primary school is compulsory and free, and is five years in duration. Students must pass a test to continue on to secondary study. Secondary education is divided into four years of middle school and then two years of high school for a total of eleven years of education. Students who have high scores in their exams can continue to tertiary education.

According to several sources, the literacy rate (age 15 and over can read and write) for Burma is approximately 90 per cent, with male literacy slightly higher than that of females. However, there is discrepancy in reported literacy rates, depending on the agency providing the figures. Some organisations estimate functional literacy to be much lower.

Only 27 per cent of the general population completes primary school. The low completion of primary school trend is changing. Educational reforms have seen increased enrolment in schools and a shift from rote learning to more critical thinking. There are also scholarships and fellowships for post-secondary study available through the Colombo Plan for students in most fields of study relevant to the progress of developing countries, including Burma.

Economy

According to the United Nations, Burma is currently one of the least developed countries in the world (based on annual gross domestic product (GDP), quality of life, and economic vulnerability). During the British rule, Burma's economy flourished. After the military takeover in 1962 there was an effort to consolidate and nationalise all industries. This was not successful and in 1989 the government began to decentralise economic control. At the same time, though, many of the profitable industries of forestry, oil and gems have remained in military control. The result has been a failing economy. To complicate matters, some nations have placed trade sanctions on Burma. The current government is making an effort to increase tourism and improve the education system in order to promote their workforce.

Burma is rich in natural resources including oil and gas. High quality gems such as rubies and jade are also mined. The country's main industries are agriculture, forestry (Burma is the world's largest exporter of teak), metals, and textiles.

Figure 9. Main industries

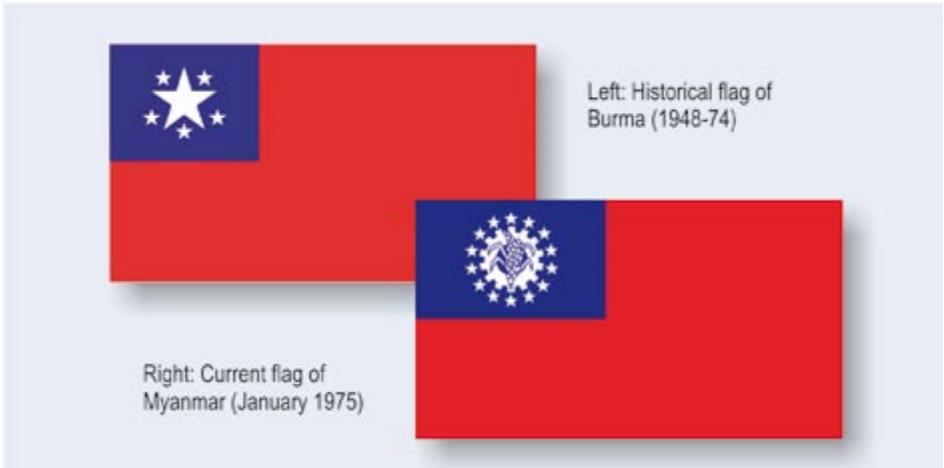
Industry	Agriculture	Services	Industry
Percentage	55	32	13

More than half of the population works in the agricultural sector. A large number of workers are employed in the retail, restaurant and hotel sectors. Manufacturing is also a large employer, engaging about 10 per cent of all workers. Others work in the mining, textile and jewellery (jade, pearls, rubies and sapphires) industries. Oil and gas companies also employ large numbers of people.

Burma is one of the world's largest producers of illicit narcotics and is a major exporter of opium, heroin and amphetamines. The area that the drugs are marketed out of is known as 'The Golden Triangle', the triangle formed where the borders of Thailand, Burma and Laos meet.

History

Although Burma has been inhabited since 2500 BC, the first Myanmar empire was established by a Burman ruler, King Anawrahtar, in 1044 AD. In the 13th century Burma was invaded by the Mongols.



A second kingdom was established in the 1500s and a third kingdom was founded from 1752 – 1825. 1826 saw the first of a long series of Anglo-Burmese wars.

Finally in 1886 the British gained control of the country, administering it as a province of India until 1937.

During World War II (1942-45) the Japanese invaded and occupied the country. In 1945, Britain, with the assistance of the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) led by Aung San, U Nu and others, liberated Burma from Japanese occupation. An interim government was set up until independence was gained through a new constitution in 1948.

When Aung San left the army in 1945, he became the recognised leader of the AFPFL. In 1946 Aung San was elected prime minister of Burma but was assassinated in 1947 before taking office. The loss of any recognised leader led to political instability. The Panglong Agreement of 1947 with the Sha, Kachin and Chin tribes created a unified Burma.

In 1948 Burma became independent from British rule with U Nu as the first prime minister, and a new constitution was established based on a democratically elected parliament. However, the government was almost immediately challenged by communist and ethnic groups and periods of intense civil war resulted. Although the constitution had declared some level of independence for the minority states, in fact they were never given this autonomy.

Political

In 1958, the military, under the direction of General Ne Win, removed Prime Minister U Nu from office in order to restore political order.

Although Ne Win allowed U Nu to be re-elected as prime minister in 1960, two years later, in 1962, he led a coup abolishing the constitution and establishing a military government with socialist economic priorities (Burma Socialist Programme Party). These policies had devastating effects on the country's economy and business climate.

In response to the worsening economic situation, student disturbances broke out in March 1988, then evolved into a call for regime change. Despite repeated violent crackdowns by the military and police, the demonstrations increased in size as the general public joined the students. During mass demonstrations on 8 August 1988 (known as the 8888 Uprising), military forces killed more than 1000 demonstrators.

The uprising ended on 18 September after another bloody military coup. At this time, General Ne Win nominally stepped down and in reaction to the riots and demonstrations, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was established. In an effort to restore order, the SLORC sent the army into the streets to suppress ongoing public demonstrations. Many were killed while others fled into the hills and border areas.

A year later, the SLORC changed the country's name from Burma to Myanmar and the capital city from Rangoon to Yangon. In 1997, the SLORC was re-formed as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). The SPDC was formed with top management from the SLORC along with many high-level military commanders. Although Ne Win had officially retired from leadership, it is believed that he continued to exercise significant influence on the military junta until 1998, when his influence began to subside.

In 1990 the last elections were held. The National League for Democracy (NLD) won with 80 per cent of seats.



However, the SLORC imposed martial law and declared itself to hold power. The military arrested and detained members of the NLD, in particular, General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi (awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991).

In July 1995, she was released with restrictions placed on her movements, but was placed under house arrest once more from 2000-02. In 2003 she was imprisoned again. Following medical treatment she was allowed to return home but was placed under house arrest which has continued to the present day.

In 2003 Khin Nyunt, the former first secretary, became the prime minister of Burma. He drafted a new constitution which was presented as part of a new 'road map' to democracy. The government opened a constitutional convention in May 2004 but the international community was critical of its legitimacy. In October 2004, Khin Nyunt was arrested and charged with corruption. He was replaced by Lieutenant General Soe Win who is the current Prime Minister.

In November 2005 the military junta decided to relocate the government inland from Yangon to the newly established city of Pyinmana (official opening ceremony held in March 2006). Martial law continues to be in force, and to this day, arrests and harassment of pro-democracy activists continue.

By the end of 2002 an estimated 600 000 Burmese were internally displaced, including people who were forcibly relocated by the military, and others who refused to relocate or who fled the relocation areas because they could not survive there. At the same time, more than a half million Burmese had sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Within the country, decades of war and militarisation have resulted in social and economic devastation.

International organisations continue to express grave concerns for human rights in Burma. Forced labour practices, forced displacement of thousands of villagers, risk of landmines planted by the Burmese army along the border, political imprisonment and executions as well as military censorship and restrictions are among the list of human rights issues of concern.

Sources of information

The information compiled in this report comes from a variety of sources as follows:

- Emails from relevant staff working with this caseload
- discussions with staff in the department's national office as well as state and territory offices
- the department's Settlement Database
- Ian Baker, DIMA WA, (photos from 2006 trip to refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border)
- *Community Directory – People from Burma (Myanmar) in Australia* (Baulkham Hills Holroyd Parramatta Migrant Resource Centre)
- camp profiles from UNHCR and
- the following references:

[UNHCR Country Operations Plan Myanmar 2006](#)

www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opendoc.pdf?tbl=RSDCOI&id=4332c63d2

[UNHCR Education for Refugees](#)

www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/news/opendoc.htm?tbl=NEWS&page=home&id=43a7d4564

[World Health Organisation \(Myanmar\)](#)

www.who.int/countries/mmr/en/

[US Census](#)

www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbpyr.html
www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html

[Myanmar Government](#)

www.myanmar.com/

[Wikipedia](#)

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burma

[Refugees International \(health: HIV/AIDS\)](#)

www.refugeesinternational.org/content/article/detail/1410/

[US AID: Health Profile of Burma](#)

www.synergyaids.com/Profiles_Web/Profiles_PDFs/BurmaProfileFINAL2005.pdf

[Health Issues](#)

www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/Asia.asp

[World Guide on Burma](#)

www.theworldnews.com.au/Worldguide/index.php3?country=33

[Canadian Cultural Projects](#)

www.cp-pc.ca/english/index.html

[World Factbook](#)

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/er.html

[DIMAnet: Community Information Summary](#)

www.immi.gov.au/statistics/info/comm_summ/summary.htm

[US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants](#)

www.refugees.org/countryreports.aspx

[Projects on the Thai-Burma border](#)

www.iwda.org.au/work/thai-burma_border/index.htm

[New Internationalist – Country Profile](#)

www.newint.org

[Australian Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade](http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/burma/index.html)
www.dfat.gov.au/geo/burma/index.html

[Lonely Planet](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/myanmar/)
www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/asia/myanmar/

[BBC Timeline of Burmese History](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1300082.stm)
news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/1300082.stm

[The Peaceway Foundation – Burma Issues](http://www.burmaissues.org/En/ethnicgroups1.html)
www.burmaissues.org/En/ethnicgroups1.html

[UNESCO \(United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation\)](http://www.unesco.org)
www.unesco.org

[UNICEF \(United Nations Children’s Fund\)](http://www.unicef.org)
www.unicef.org

[Global Appeal 2006 – UNHCR in Thailand](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/publ/opedoc.pdf?tbl=PUBL&id=43706f050)
www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/tehis/vtx/publ/opedoc.pdf?tbl=PUBL&id=43706f050

[Thai-Burma Border Consortium](http://www.tbcc.org)
www.tbcc.org