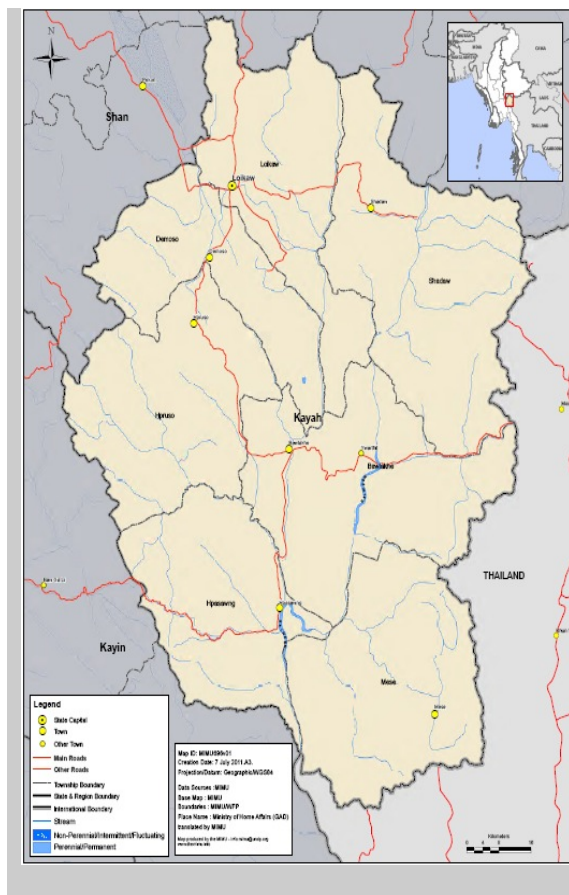


# KAYAH STATE PROFILE

UPDATED: JUNE 2014<sup>1</sup>



Map: Myanmar Information Management Unit

State	Kayah
Flag	
Previous Name	Karenni
State Capital	Loikaw
Number of Districts	2
Number of Townships	7
Ward and Village Tracts	105
Total population (2012 Est.)	360,379
IDPs	34,600
Refugees	11,662
Area	4,510 sq. miles / 11,670 sq. kms
Border	North: Shan State
	East: Mae Hong Son province, Thailand
	West and South: Kayin state
Latitude	18° 30'N and 19° 55'N
Longitude	94° 40'E and 97° 93'E
Ethnicities	Kayah, Kayin, Kayan, Kayaw, Bamar, Shan, Pa-O,

## Background

Located in eastern Myanmar, Kayah State is bounded by Shan State to the north, Kayin State to the south and west, and Thailand's Mae Hon Song to the East. Previously known as Karenni State, the territory is inhabited primarily by the Karenni ethnic group, also known as the Red Karen. As a sub-group of the Karen people, the Karenni have maintained a close historical relationship with Kayin State. Low intensity conflict has recurred in Kayah State since the 1947 Constitution established an independent Burma, which included then-Karenni State within the Union of Burma, despite assertions from Karenni representatives that their nation sought self-determination as independent and sovereign.

Much of the current displacement from Kayah State dates back to the mid-1990s, and the armed clashes before and after the failed 1995 ceasefire between the Tatmadaw and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP). Counter-insurgency strategies employed to varying degrees by both sides have historically exacerbated the forced displacement resulting from direct armed conflict between the government and the non-state actors

<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: These state profiles were printed in June 2014, and will be updated periodically by the UNHCR South-East Myanmar Information Management Unit to reflect new developments, additions and corrections.



(NSAs). While other NSAs in Kayah State signed ceasefires in the 1990s, the KNPP continued its armed opposition until ceasefire agreements in 2012 and 2013 launched the peace process anew.

As is the case throughout South-East Myanmar, reliable information about population figures and social indicators have been elusive in recent years, with no reliable census data since the 1980s. The available primary data and secondary sources overwhelmingly suggest that Kayah State is one of the poorest, most underdeveloped regions in Myanmar, with limited infrastructure and a fractured economy, owing to decades of conflict, instability and displacement.

## Population Profile

According to the 1983 census Kayah State had a total population of 168,355, while the 2012 estimated population was 360,379, according to government household and population data. There is a dearth of reliable information on the ethnic composition of Kayah State, with only two government sponsored attempts and one anthropological study on record to classify the various ethnic groups. The general consensus is that the Karenni people include several sub-groups, including the Kayah, Geko, Geba, Padaung, Bres, Manu-Manaus, Yintale, Yinbaw, Bwe, Shan and Pa-O, almost all of which have individual languages or dialects, several without written form. An estimated majority of the Kayah population is Buddhist, while a substantial minority is Christian, including possibly a majority of IDPs in Kayah State. Although only a small percentage of those in Kayah are believed to be exclusively animist, elements of animism continue to play a role in Buddhist and Christian communities.

Decades of conflict in Kayah State has left several thousand people internally displaced, while thousands more fled into neighbouring Thailand. As of September 2013, there are approximately 16,074 refugees from Kayah State split between Ban Mai Nai Soi and Ban Mae Surin camps in Thailand, 11,662 of whom are registered in the UNHCR ProGres database. Meanwhile, The Border Consortium (TBC) estimated in 2012 that 34,600 people remained internally displaced, a figure that was not updated in 2013, although several sources within Kayah State suggest the actual number of individuals may be considerably smaller.

Township	District	Refugees (2013) <sup>2</sup>	IDPs (2012)
Shadaw	Loikaw	6,352	1,140
Loikaw	Loikaw	1,613	3,220
Demoso	Loikaw	1,062	9,350
Hpruso	Loikaw	729	5,880
Bawlakhe	Bawlakhe	548	1,970
Hpasawng	Bawlakhe	1,348	8,570
Mese <sup>3</sup>	Bawlakhe	0	4,470
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>11,662</b>	<b>34,600</b>

One of the legacies of Kayah State's history of internal displacement is the presence of Su See villages, which remain in Shadaw Township and on the outskirts of Loikaw Town. Developed and allocated land by the government as planned settlements for IDPs, Su See villages are combined villages close to township centres with easy access to education, health facilities and markets, but often lack cultivation areas and livelihood

<sup>2</sup> Refugee figures are registered totals according to UNHCR ProGres database, not including unregistered caseload. IDP totals are from TBC.

<sup>3</sup> For reasons still under review, no refugees originating from Mese have been registered in Thailand, despite internal displacement in this Township.

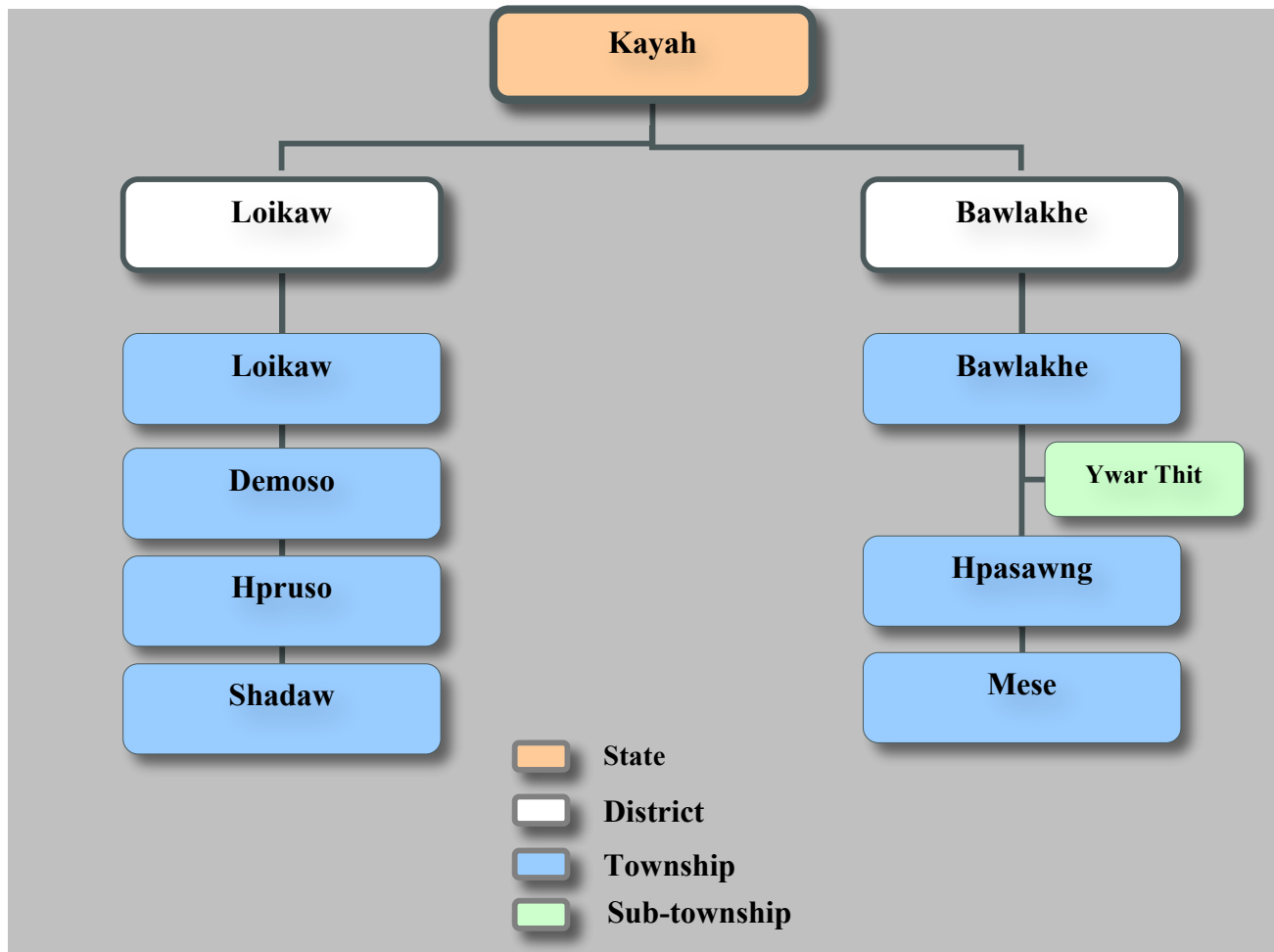


opportunities. UNHCR has observed that many residents of Su See villages appear to be maintaining homes there to continue to benefit from the available services and livelihood opportunities in town, while exploring return to their places of origin to recommence cultivating the land.

Similarly, UNHCR is aware many refugees in Thailand return on short term visits to their areas of origin in Kayah State, to attend festivals, visit family, assess livelihood opportunities, security, and if conditions are ready for permanent return. Return assessments are underway throughout Kayah State by UNHCR to monitor the trends regarding spontaneous refugee and IDP returns, and identify the key needs faced by returnees. Overall, both refugees and IDPs have begun returning to their villages of origin, although in the case of IDPs this process has been ongoing for some time, while the number of refugee returnees remains modest as of late 2013.

### Administrative Divisions

The capital of Kayah State is Loikaw, which serves as the economic, political and social hub of the state as well. The state is divided into two districts (Bawlakhe and Loikaw), which comprise seven townships and one sub township, along with 106 wards and village tracts.



### Name of Ministers and Ministries in Kayah State



No.	Name	Ministry
1.	Khin Maung Oo aka Bu Rei	Chief Minister
2.	Col Zaw Myo Tin	Ministry of Security and Border Affairs
3.	Than Kyaw Soe	Ministry of Finance and Revenue
4.	Poe Reh aka Po Reh Yan Aung	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Breeding
5.	Ye Win	Ministry of Forestry and Mines
6.	Taw Reh	Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development
7.	Chit Hla	Ministry of Transport
8.	Saw Huu Huu	Ministry of Electric Power and Industry
9.	Aung Naing Oo	Ministry of Development Affairs
10.	Koe Reh	Ministry of Social Affairs
11.	Sein Oo	Ministry of National Races Affairs (Bamar)

## Non-State Actors

Founded in 1957, the KNPP is the largest and most influential NSA in Kayah State. With an active armed wing called the Karenni Army, which boasts an estimated 1,400 combatants, the KNPP has been engaged in an armed conflict with the central government for decades. The KNPP long asserted its objective was equal rights for all ethnicities living in Myanmar, along with the right for each group to administer their own state government. This call for ethnic autonomy historically distinguished the KNPP from other NSAs that eventually resigned their demands for independence, however the KNPP has since harmonized its political rhetoric with the positions and objectives of the other NSAs negotiating with the union government.

As mentioned above, the KNPP has negotiated several ceasefires in the past, including the failed attempt in 1995, however unlike other NSAs, the KNPP has remained militarily active through the last decade. On 7 March 2013, a new ceasefire was signed with the Myanmar government, in the presence of international observers from UNHCR, the British Council and the American Embassy, with follow-up negotiations on 9-10 June 2013 and 22-23 October 2013. The June talks yielded a seven point agreement between the KNPP and the Union Peacemaking Work Committee, including one point regarding setting up pilot projects for IDPs, and a commitment to jointly support the ongoing nationwide ceasefire negotiations.

The Table below summarizes the status of the ceasefire agreements for the four most prominent Kayah State-based NSAs, the KNPP, the Kayan National Guard (KNG), Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF), and the Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), the latter three of which have maintained ceasefire agreements with the government since the 1990s.

## Ceasefire Updates

No.	Non-State Armed Group	Location/Conflict zone	Cease-fire Agreements	Situation
1	Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP)	Near Thai - Myanmar border in Kayah State.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signed a ceasefire agreement with the government on 21 March 1995. Broke down after 3 months.</li> <li>Signed cease-fire with the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seven-point agreement finalized on 22-23 October 2013, including points related to the</li> </ul>



			government on 8 March 2012. Follow-up negotiations on 9-10 June and 22-23 October 2013.	nationwide ceasefire, pilot projects for IDPs, demining plans and expansion of electricity services throughout Kayah State.
2	Kayan National Guard (KNG)	Special Region 1, Kayah State.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signed a ceasefire agreement with the government on 27 February 1992.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transform into BGF in accordance with 2008 constitution.</li> </ul>
3	Karenni Nationalities People's Liberation Front (KNPLF)	Special Region 2, Kayah State.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signed a ceasefire agreement with the government on 9 May 1994.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transformed into a BGF on November 8, 2009.</li> </ul>
4	Kayan New Land Party (KNLP)	Special Region 3, Kayah State.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signed a ceasefire agreement with the government on 26 July 1994.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The SPDC granted the KNLP a small territory bordering Mong Pai Township of Shan State.</li> <li>The KNLP has supported itself since 1994 through teak and gems trading.</li> </ul>

## Economy and Livelihoods

The people of Kayah State have traditionally relied extensively on agriculture for their livelihoods, with major crops being rice, maize, sesame and groundnuts. Despite ample natural resources such as teak, and considerable arable land, the agricultural sector has struggled in recent decades. Some sources suggest a majority of villagers have struggled to meet their subsistence needs, while unstable commodity prices and poor market integration have been exacerbated by conflict-related insecurity and resource exploitation. Although Kayah State is more protected from natural disasters than elsewhere in the South-East, flooding and droughts have both had a detrimental impact on the economy in recent years as well. Overall, poor agricultural productivity and ineffective irrigation strategies have not only hindered the local economy, but also resulted in reported food insecurity throughout Kayah State.

Several hydroelectric dams have been established in Kayah State, most notably the Lawpita plants in Loikaw Township, the first of which was built in 1961 and has been the source of further government-led development projects in subsequent decades, including the completion of a second plant in 1992. The Lawpita plants generate approximately one fifth of the country's energy supply, although the direct benefits to Kayah State's economy appear limited. Several smaller hydroelectric dams are scattered throughout Kayah State, with proposals to build more under discussion.

Many in Kayah State have also turned to the illegal manufacturing of drugs as a livelihood, due to unstable commodity prices and scarce alternatives in the professional sectors. Secondary sources suggest the industry expanded considerably in the mid-2000s, following the lead of neighbouring Shan State, first with the harvesting of opium and more recently with the establishment of factories manufacturing amphetamine-type stimulants. Not surprisingly, the proliferation of drug production has resulted in increased drug consumption within Kayah



State. The government's eradication programs, particularly related to poppy production, have received varying reports of success.

## Services and Infrastructure

As elsewhere in the South-East, the public services available in Kayah State are lacking in both quality and reach, with few significant alternatives in the private sector. In education, official statistics show that Kayah State has the lowest number of public schools in Myanmar, compounded by a shortage of qualified teachers. Although public primary schools are free in 2013, the indirect costs remain an obstacle for many families, while rural districts and areas with IDPs are often completely devoid of formal facilities. A 2013 report from The Border Consortium (TBC) suggests a third of primary school children are regularly absent in the rural areas throughout the South-East.

As a result of this historical lack of formal education, many communities in Kayah State have established their own informal schools, while others rely heavily upon the scholastic teachings offered at churches and monasteries. Unfortunately, neither of these informal systems offers educational services typically recognized by the formal state system, although there are reports the government has supported a select number of monastic schools. Nonetheless, UNHCR has observed that IDP returnees value education highly, in some villages paying 200,000 MMK per child to attend private schools in Shadaw or further afield.

The health care services in Kayah State likewise remain inadequate, with a substantial gap between services available in urban and rural areas remains vast as of 2013, while health centres in semi-urban villages and towns struggle to offer complete primary level care. Both public and private hospitals lack the sufficient resources to provide reliable health care to the majority of the population, and those in remote villages must travel long distances to receive treatment. Fortunately, there has been a notable increase in both the union government's expenditures in health throughout the South-East, and in the international humanitarian and development engagement within the sector. The Myanmar Information Management Unit (MIMU) reported in October 2013 that ten organizations were actively implementing health projects in Kayah State, although most concentrated around Loikaw and Demoso.

The remoteness of Kayah State has also resulted in a lack of basic infrastructure, including limited electricity and water supply outside of Loikaw. Despite the hydroelectric plants powering a significant portion of Myanmar, there is seldom access to the national power grid outside of Loikaw. Moreover, while there is road access to all townships, very few villages can be reached by vehicle, limiting the extent to which villagers can benefit from their improved freedom of movement and market access.

## Protection and Durable Solutions

As elsewhere in South-East Myanmar, recurring internal conflict has profoundly impacted the protection environment in Kayah State, although diplomatic progress and a cessation in active fighting have improved the security situation considerably. Nonetheless, as refugees and IDPs from Kayah State explore return to their places of origin, UNHCR and partners continue to monitor key associated protection issues, including land grabbing, arbitrary taxation and landmines. Through its ongoing monitoring work, UNHCR has observed a notable reduction in protection incidents throughout 2013. Many other international and national organizations have also increased their implementation in the protection sector throughout 2013, with MIMU reporting the sector benefits from the most widespread intervention in Kayah state.



Although there has yet to be any official landmine clearance in Kayah State, agencies including the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Mine Advisory Group (MAG) are actively involved in mine risk education. Reports suggest there is landmine contamination in all seven townships, with the exact locations to be confirmed. While landmine incidents have been rare, with only a small number reported each year, the risk increases as freedom of movement expands and refugees and IDPs continue to spontaneously return, hence the active engagement of agencies in surveillance and education.

Among the challenges to developing a comprehensive protection strategy and preparing for the return of refugees and IDPs is the difficulty of profiling Kayah State's history of displacement. On one hand, decades of government-led development projects with alleged counter-insurgency objectives have resulted in less than voluntary migration within Kayah State. On the other hand, UNHCR and partners struggled to verify the current scale of internal displacement in 2013, with legitimate questions lingering about how many reported IDPs have already achieved *de facto* solutions to their displacement.

In a UNHCR-led inter-agency workshop on internal displacement in early 2014, organizations suggested that not only may the number of IDPs awaiting a solution be smaller than estimated, but the needs of those displaced internally are not typically different from those of the rest of the local population. There was some suggestion that the situation in the Su-See villages may be a bit more unique, however some agencies suggested the livelihood opportunities in these relocation sites may in fact make the IDPs better off.

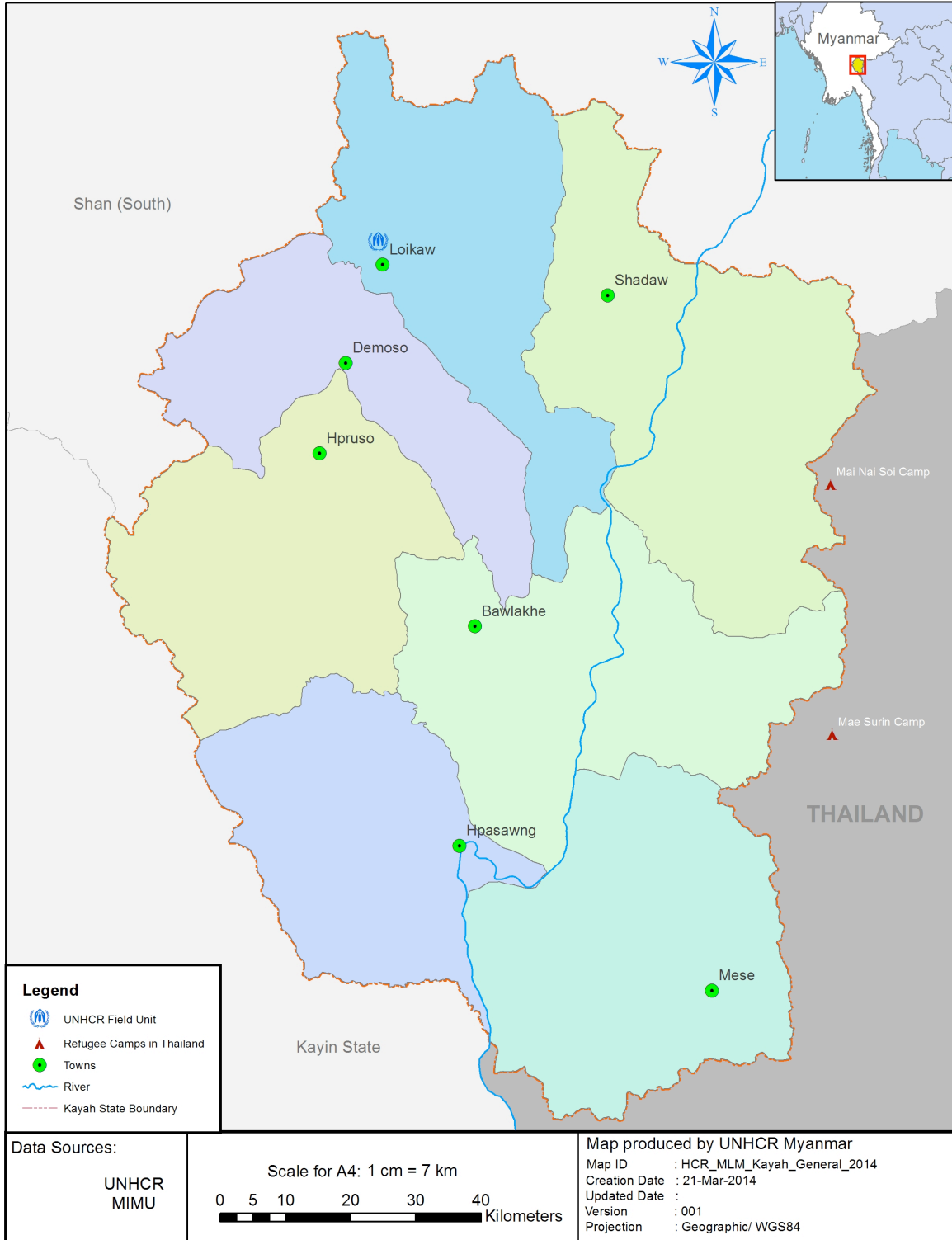
Otherwise, UNHCR's monitoring suggests there is cautious optimism among displaced populations, both internally and in the refugee camps in Thailand, with regards to possible return in the coming months and years. However, the government and KNPP tend to envision the return process as a planned, structured and top-down process, whereas potential returnees currently prefer spontaneous movements which allow them to cautiously assess the situation and draw upon their self-sufficient coping mechanisms. Planning for an eventual return process which is both organized and protection-sensitive remains UNHCR's priority as it engages all stakeholders in preparation for an eventual voluntary repatriation operation, including inter-agency partners, refugee representatives, and community-based organizations that are already supporting affected populations in returnees throughout Kayah State.



### Annex 1: Map



## Kayah State



Disclaimer: The names shown and the boundaries used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UNHCR





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