

Burmese Minnesota

This brief is about Burmese Minnesota as a people-page and as a warning about an umbrella. CLAS fifteen interpreter cards say Burmese. Minnesota Compass (ACS 2019–2023) says Burmese 17,123. Both are operations and a U.S. administrative name. They are not a people.

History and place

Origins and the Founding of a People

Bamar peoplehood on the Irrawaddy is older than the British and older than the junta. Theravada Buddhism, Burmese as a tonal language with its own script, wet-rice agriculture, and a sequence of kingdoms organized a majority that is not the whole country. Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni, Mon, Rakhine, Rohingya, Shan, and others are peoples, not dialects. The country checkbox that says Burma or Myanmar is already a mash.

History for the meeting

British colonial rule, independence in 1948, and decades of military government produced the file this desk meets. 1988. 2007. 2017 in Rakhine. 2021 coup — current structure. Camps in Thailand and Bangladesh are not a personality. They are years of interrupted school, interrupted care, and a kinship the form cannot see.

What people brought

What people brought: language (maybe Burmese, maybe not), church or monastery or mosque, large household, farming and plant skill, a memory of being hunted by a state. What they met in Minnesota: an English form, one “Asian” checkbox, and often one interpreter labeled Burmese for a household that is Chin or Karen.

The Geography of the Burmese World

Homeland is Myanmar — Yangon, Mandalay, the Delta, the hills, Chin State, Kachin State, Kayin, Rakhine. Do not draw one pagoda on a case note. Camps in Thailand (Mae La and others) and in Bangladesh (Cox's Bazar and others) are origin-of-arrival for many Minnesota families. Years. Not a layover.

Homeland

The U.S. map is not only Minnesota: Indiana, New York, Texas, California, and others hold Burma-origin communities. Minnesota is a real resettlement and secondary-migration state, including Greater Minnesota.

Minnesota

In Minnesota: Compass Burmese 79.9 percent Twin Cities, 20.1 percent Greater Minnesota. Name the town. Worthington, Albert Lea, Austin, Marshall, and Willmar are a Karen/Burmese pattern in public telling

(MSP Magazine on Minnesota's refugee history names those towns for Karen). Do not assume St. Paul. Do not assume the person in front of you has been to Yangon. A Worthington household is not a Minneapolis default.

Minnesota and Burmese History

Minnesota holds a Burma-origin community large enough for Compass to profile it — 17,123 on the ACS 2019–2023 umbrella — and mixed enough that the profile is a gate if you treat it as one people. This department will meet these households on waivers, child welfare, health care, cash, food, aging, and employment, in St. Paul and in Worthington.

Places

Places, not a blob: Twin Cities; Roseville as a Karen Organization of Minnesota address (a Karen door); Greater Minnesota plant towns — Worthington, Albert Lea, Austin, Marshall, Willmar among those named in public Karen/Burmese telling. Compass: about one in five outside the Twin Cities. Name the town. Do not assume St. Paul.

Partners

Partners: Karen Organization of Minnesota is a Karen door — not automatically this page. Burmese, Chin, and Rohingya groups and the churches, monasteries, and mosques families name. Pay the partner this household names. CECLC is a department door, not the whole community.

Burmese or Karen staff are not unpaid interpreters and not the community. Identity is not a staffing plan. A New Year visit is optional professional development. You are a guest. It does not make you the expert.

Culture and everyday life

People, place, and perspective

This brief is about Burmese Minnesota as a people-page and as a warning about an umbrella. CLAS fifteen interpreter cards say Burmese. Minnesota Compass (ACS 2019–2023) says Burmese 17,123. Both are operations and a U.S. administrative name. They are not a people.

Who this is

Not Karen as a synonym. Not Chin as a synonym. Not Kachin, not Mon, not Rohingya, not “Asian.” Compass Burmese can include Bamar — the majority people of Myanmar, often called Burman — and may overlap or sit beside Chin, Kachin, Rohingya, Mon, Karen. Compass methodology: the Census recodes some people who write Karen into Burmese, with nothing left to show the original response. Ask the people. If the household is Karen, open Karen Minnesota and put S’gaw or Pwo on the line. If Chin, book Chin — Hakha, Falam, or the variety they name. If Rohingya, Rohingya or Bengali may be the language. Burmese is not the default.

Who this is not

Compass, dated: Twin Cities 79.9 percent, Greater Minnesota 20.1 percent. Age 17 or younger 41.5 percent; 65+ 4.2 percent. Foreign-born 67.1 percent. Language other than English (age 5+) 89.6 percent.

English less than “very well” 67.0 percent — a severe language gate. High school or higher among 25+ 32.8 percent; bachelor’s or higher 11.8 percent. Median household about \$75,513. Poverty 29.6 percent. Owner-occupied 59.0 percent. Average household size 4.99. Disability 12.9 percent. Date Compass. A rate is not the person.

The diversity inside the umbrella is the point. A Bamar Buddhist elder who reads Myanmar script, a Hakha Chin Christian plant worker in Worthington, a S’gaw Karen household that should have opened the Karen page, a Rohingya family who should not have been booked Burmese, a U.S.-born teenager who uses English with friends and still translates a 67-percent-LEP parent — share a country checkbox and do not share a Tuesday.

How to read this

Always defer to the person in front of you. This page is a hypothesis you still test on this family.

Military Rule, Camps, 2017, 2021 — Foundational Events

If 1975 is Hmong Minnesota and 1991 is Somali Minnesota, military rule, the camps, and the later coups are the foundational events of Burma-origin Minnesota. They are not one event and not one people.

Foundational events

MSP Magazine’s state refugee timeline: refugees from Burma arrive in Minnesota in 1993, most of them named as Karen in that telling. Later waves include Chin, Bamar, and others. 2017 Rohingya atrocities — mass killing, rape, and expulsion, named as genocide by the United States in 2022 — produced a specific flight. 2021 military coup is current structure: kin still there, remittance, silence, status anxiety here.

Who you meet

Camps in Thailand and Bangladesh shaped literacy, time, and who counts as family. U.S. resettlement scattered people; secondary migration and church networks pulled some to Minnesota, including plant towns.

The desk in 2026 meets U.S.-born children and a parent facing a 67 percent LEP gate. If you only know “refugee,” you will miss the 18-year-old and still fail the form for the elder. Do not ask a Rohingya survivor to narrate the village for your chart.

Family

Households are large. Compass average household size 4.99. Married couples with children under 18 are 46.5 percent of households. Elders, in-laws, camp-made kin, adult children. Who cares for the child may not match the waiver checkbox.

Who is in the household

Camp years shape who is kin. A cousin who is not a cousin on the English form. A missing father. A household that formed in Mae La or Cox’s Bazar. Ask who is in the room. Do not reconstruct a family tree as icebreaker.

Who speaks

Women's labor — plant, care, second-generation school — sits next to a household in which an elder may still be named as head. Both can be true.

Do not skip mandated reporting and call it culture. Minnesota law still stands. A nuclear two-parent English form already has a who. It was built for a different household.

Burmese Minnesota — the heart of a people

There is not one heart under this umbrella. Bamar Theravada life, Chin Christian hill life, Karen Baptist or Buddhist life, Rohingya Muslim life — these are peoples. The U.S. file that recodes Karen as Burmese is how a census becomes a closed door.

In this state

In Minnesota it sits inside another fact: Asian in a checkbox that also holds Hmong, Chinese, Indian, and Korean histories they do not share; camp years; Greater Minnesota isolation for some; a language gate at 67 percent LEP.

This guide is a working orientation. Individual variation always supersedes group generalization. Ask who is actually in the room.

Core Concepts

Who is in the room. Bamar, Chin, Karen, Rohingya, Mon, Kachin. Ask. The country name is not the answer.

Language

Burmese is tonal with Myanmar script. Hakha, Falam, S'gaw, Pwo, Rohingya/Bengali are not Burmese. 67 percent LEP is the gate. Literacy in any script is not guaranteed.

Church, monastery, mosque

Information channel for some. Not the case plan unless they asked. Sunday and moon days are operations.

Camp time

Interrupted school, interrupted care, kin the form cannot see. 67 percent less than high school among 25+ is structure.

Large household

4.99. Ask who should hear.

Face and quiet endurance

A smile can be misread as agreement. Ask whether they agree. Do not take a smile as consent.

Religion and Healing

Theravada Buddhist majority among Bamar — monastery, moon days (Uposatha), Thingyan, offerings. A monk is not the case plan unless this family asked. Do not book a monastery as DHS programming.

Streams

Christian majority among many Chin and Karen streams in Minnesota — Baptist and other Protestant, some Catholic. Church is often the information channel and the English class and the ride. Sunday is operations. Church is not “the community” and not automatically the Karen Organization.

Practice

Muslim Rohingya. Mosque, Ramadan, halal. Do not copy Somali Islam blindly; do not assume Burmese is the language. Ask.

Do not assume pagoda. Do not assume Baptist. Illness meaning may sit next to blessing, vow, or monastery counsel. You can hold that next to a clinic. You do not mock it. You do not skip the waiver.

Greetings

Elders first. A slight bow or nod with an older person is safer than a hard handshake you assume is universal. Mingalaba is a common Burmese greeting. English hello is ordinary in many rooms and in the second generation. Chin and Karen greetings are not Burmese. Follow this room.

Titles

Say the name. Ask how to say it. Do not force a hand. Cross-gender touch with elders is not a default. Do not import Somali right-hand rules or Hmong nyob zoo onto this page unless this person uses them.

This room

Do not open with the junta. Do not open with “I have a Karen friend” if this household is not Karen.

Naming Conventions

Myanmar Bamar naming often has no family surname as the database wants. Personal names may be one, two, or more syllables. Honorifics U (for a man) and Daw (for a woman) in some rooms — titles, not first names. Do not invent a last name because the screen requires one. That invented name becomes a gate.

How to file

Chin and Karen naming differ — clan, baptismal, and English names exist in those streams. Rohingya naming may follow a different Muslim pattern. Ask how to file. Ask how to say it.

Do not “correct” a mother and child who do not share a last name as a fraud signal until you have a reason. The form that demands first-middle-last and a hyphen will invent a person.

Dates of Significance

Thingyan — Burmese New Year, mid-April — for many Bamar Buddhist households. Water festival in the homeland; quieter in Minnesota. Literacy. Not automatically this Chin or Karen family’s day.

Calendar

Buddhist moon days are operations for some. Sunday is operations for many Chin and Karen churches. Karen New Year is a Karen page — do not steal it as a Burmese holiday. Christmas and Easter for

Christian streams. Lunar Islamic dates if this family is Rohingya or otherwise Muslim.

A calendar click is literacy. It is not community engagement. Do not put “Asian holiday” on a case note. Ask which calendar this family uses.

Etiquette

Shoes off in many homes, monasteries, and some churches. Elders first. Head is high; feet are low — do not point feet at an altar, a monk, or a person if you are in a Buddhist household. Do not touch a child’s head as friendliness.

In the home

Hospitality is a virtue. Accept a little food if offered. You still keep medical and legal time.

Time

Quiet endurance can be misread as agreement. A smile is not consent to the plan. Ask whether they agree. Confirm in the language they use.

On-time for appointments. Plant shifts, multi-household logistics, and Greater Minnesota distance are real. Name the conflict. Do not punish a no-show you built in English only.

Language and Communication

Burmese (Myanmar language) is tonal and written in its own script. Confirm that this is the language. Compass: among those 5 and older, 89.6 percent speak a language other than English; 67.0 percent speak English less than “very well.” Date it. That is a severe language gate.

Language

A “Burmese interpreter” for a Hakha Chin household is a closed door. Same for Falam, S’gaw, Pwo, Rohingya, Bengali. Put the language on the request. Literacy of the spoken language is not literacy of the form. Many camp-schooled adults do not read the script you assumed.

A long answer may be story. A short English yes may be exhaustion or courtesy. Do not take a smile as consent.

Do not make a Burmese, Chin, or Karen coworker the interpreter.

LGBTQ

Queer and trans Burmese, Chin, Karen, and Rohingya Minnesotans exist. Conservative church, monastery, and mosque climates can mean silence or exile. Some people live a public English life and a private home-language life.

This person

You use the name they use. You do not out them to an elder as cultural humility. Minnesota’s Human Rights Act still applies.

So does the duty not to treat a whole umbrella as a family-values exhibit.

Hair, Dress, and Body

Longyi and thanaka among some Bamar — not a daily uniform in a Worthington plant. Karen and Chin traditional dress is public at New Year, not a clinic outfit. Muslim covering among some Rohingya. Second generation looks like Minnesota.

Dress

Do not ask if they “still wear the costume.” Do not touch hair or thanaka. Do not mash with Hmong New Year dress or Somali hijab.

Follow this person. Gender match if she wants it.

Music

Church hymn in many Chin and Karen streams. Buddhist ritual sound. Saung and classical Burmese as homeland art. Diaspora pop.

Variation

Funeral, monastery, and church are not staff entertainment. A playlist is not engagement.

A choir is not a case plan.

Sports

Soccer, volleyball, chinlone as a homeland image, ordinary school sport in the second generation. Greater Minnesota plant-town leagues exist.

Not the whole person

Sport clubs are not language access and not a case plan.

Do not assume the kid plays.

Literature

Burmese script and a written public are old. Oral literature in Chin, Karen, and Rohingya streams. Camp years interrupted schooling. Second-generation English.

Literacy in the lobby

You do not need to quote a novel. You need to know this is not a people without letters — and that literacy of the English form, and of Burmese script, is not guaranteed.

The form has to match the person, not the country checkbox.

Art

Thanaka, textile, monastery carving, church banner. Karen weaving is a Karen page — do not steal it as Burmese souvenir, and do not mash it with Hmong paj ntaub.

Guest

Guest. A New Year is not consultation. A display table is not a case plan.

Do not put a longyi on a Heritage Month booth.

Conflict, War, and the State

British colonial rule, independence, military government, 1988, 2007, the 2017 Rohingya atrocities, and the 2021 coup as current structure — that is the political file. Camps in Thailand and Bangladesh. A United States that resettled people into plant towns and then sent English PDFs.

The badge

Rohingya genocide is a fact. Do not platform denial. Do not ask a survivor to narrate the village for your professional development.

A DHS badge is not automatically help. Mandated reporting still exists. So does the duty not to treat a whole umbrella as a risk score.

Adjacent Peoples — Do Not Mash

Not Karen as a synonym — open Karen Minnesota for Karen; put S'gaw or Pwo on the line. Not Chin as a synonym — book Hakha, Falam, or the variety they name. Not Hmong. Not Vietnamese. Not Chinese. Not Thai as the camp country. Not “Asian American” as the file.

Adjacent doors

Rohingya is not Burmese by default. Mon, Kachin, Karenni — ask. Some households are mixed.

Ask this household. Never one Asian module. Never one Burma interpreter.

Counts, Dated

Minnesota Compass, ACS 2019–2023, Burmese cultural community (umbrella): 17,123; Twin Cities 79.9%; Greater Minnesota 20.1%; age 17 or younger 41.5%; 65+ 4.2%; foreign-born 67.1%; language other than English (age 5+) 89.6%; English less than “very well” 67.0%; high school or higher (25+) 32.8%; bachelor's or higher 11.8%; less than high school (25+) 67.2%; median household income about \$75,513 (2022 dollars, averaged); poverty 29.6%; owner-occupied 59.0%; renter-occupied 41.0%; average household size 4.99; disability 12.9%; uninsured 6.2%; households 3,655.

Counts

Census recodes some Karen write-ins as Burmese. This is an administrative umbrella, not a people-count. Date Compass.

What the count is not

A young age structure is not a personality. 67 percent LEP is a gate. 67 percent less than high school among 25+ is camp years, not a character. A rate is not the person.

Doors and Sources

Minnesota Compass Burmese profile (ACS 2019–2023). Compass cultural-communities methodology (Karen recoded as Burmese). CLAS fifteen interpreter cards: Burmese. Karen Organization of Minnesota

— a Karen door, not automatically this page. Churches, monasteries, and mosques families name. Burmese, Chin, and Rohingya groups they name. Pay that partner. MSP Magazine on Minnesota's refugee history (1993 Burma-origin arrivals; Greater MN towns).

Public doors

CECLC is a door, not the whole community. Learn on your own time. Do not make a Burmese, Chin, or Karen colleague your unpaid tutor.

Learn on your own time

Report back. Guest. Name the town.

Services, opportunity, and participation

Education

Compass Burmese, age 25+: high school or higher 32.8 percent; bachelor's or higher 11.8 percent; less than high school 67.2 percent. Date it. Camp years and interrupted schooling are structure, not a personality and not a refusal to value school.

School and language

A parent who speaks fluent Burmese, Hakha, or S'gaw and limited English is not illiterate. Literacy in Burmese script is not guaranteed even when Burmese is the spoken language. The English-only IEP is the gate. So is an interpreter in the wrong language.

Second-generation children are in English-dominant schools, including Greater Minnesota. The form still has to reach the parent. 41.5 percent of the Compass umbrella is 17 or younger. That is a school-and-waiver fact, not a vibe.

Other Considerations

Unvarnished, because Minnesota Nice is how a room that treats everyone the same deletes facts.

Named harms

Camp years and interrupted schooling: 67.2 percent less than high school among 25+ is structure. Do not write it as laziness or as "they don't value education."

Rohingya genocide is a fact. The United States determined in 2022 that the 2017 atrocities were genocide. Do not platform denial in a lobby. Do not book Burmese by default for a Rohingya household. LGBTQ people exist in every stream under this umbrella. Conservative church, monastery, and mosque climates can mean silence. You use the name. You do not out someone to kin and call it culture.

Greater Minnesota isolation is real — plant town, few interpreters, English IEP, a notice that never left a St. Paul eList. Name the town. Do not file this household under Karen if they are not Karen. Do not file them under Hmong. Do not file them under Asian.

Staff who share this community may add facts. They do not get to delete a fact because it is hard to say.

Health

Compass Burmese: disability 12.9 percent; among under-65, 10.0 percent; uninsured 6.2 percent. Date it. Camp and interrupted-care histories — hepatitis, anemia, dental, immunization gaps — are patterns in refugee clinical literacy nationally. This page does not invent a Minnesota clinic rate. Date a local figure when a controlling source exists.

Access

67 percent LEP is a health gate now. Literacy of the consent form is a health gate. A Burmese-script form for a person who does not read it is still a closed door.

Gender match may be requested in maternal and intimate care. Offer it. Believe reported pain. Do not skip developmental screening. Do not mash this page with Hmong late autism identification or Somali ADDM. Those are other intelligences.

If they name a monk, a pastor, or a healer, listen. Do not make them the case plan unless they asked.

Work, Markets, and Government

Compass Burmese, dated: median household about \$75,513; poverty 29.6 percent; owner-occupied 59.0 percent; about 69.2 percent of working-age adults employed (18–64). Food processing and other Greater Minnesota work for many Burma-origin households. Professional second generation. Public employment.

Work

Staff from this umbrella are not unpaid interpreters and not the community. Identity is not a staffing plan. Plant shifts are operations for appointments.

Staff

Relationship may precede a signature. That is not permission to skip a notice. It is a reason the first visit may not be the decision. A notice that never left St. Paul does not reach Worthington.

Health-care and Human-service Encounters

Who is actually in the room. 67 percent LEP. Literacy of the form. Greater Minnesota clinic with no interpreter on site. Church vs monastery vs mosque. Camp health history. Rohingya language not Burmese by default.

Language

Confirm people and language. Offer gender match. Ask who should hear. Do not make staff the interpreter.

The meeting

Believe reported pain. Mandated reporting still exists.

Connections to human services

Workplace culture and service delivery are both candidates.

Who is in the room: Bamar, Chin, Karen, Rohingya, Mon, Kachin. An interpreter labeled Burmese for a

Hakha Chin household is a closed door. If Karen, open Karen Minnesota. If Rohingya, Burmese is not the default language. Gender match may be requested in maternal and intimate care.

67 percent LEP: the severe language gate. Literacy of the form is a second gate — Burmese script is not guaranteed. English IEP for a parent who does not read it is a closed door.

Greater Minnesota: 20.1 percent. Worthington and other plant towns. An eList and an English PDF from St. Paul is not how this household was reached. Empty follow-up cells are theater.

Hour caps, exception processes, and life-sharing matches without language are not culturally neutral.

Child welfare and disability: camp years and interrupted schooling are structure. Mandated reporting still exists. So does the duty not to treat a whole umbrella as a risk score.

Workforce: Burmese, Chin, and Karen staff are not the interpreter pool and not the community.

Asian mash is a closed gate. Not Hmong. Not Karen as a synonym.

Legislation, funding, rule: you cannot advocate for a channel you will not study. This cultural intelligence exists so the 40% has a household in it — not a paternalistic program designed in a building that heard “Burmese” and booked the country.

Continue the connection

- **Equity Analysis Toolkit** — program page </learn/equity-toolkit>
- **Community engagement and connections** — program page </learn/community-connections>
- **Learning and resources** — program page </learn>