



Bridging Refugee Youth & Children's Services

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Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal

By UNHCR

New York, NY

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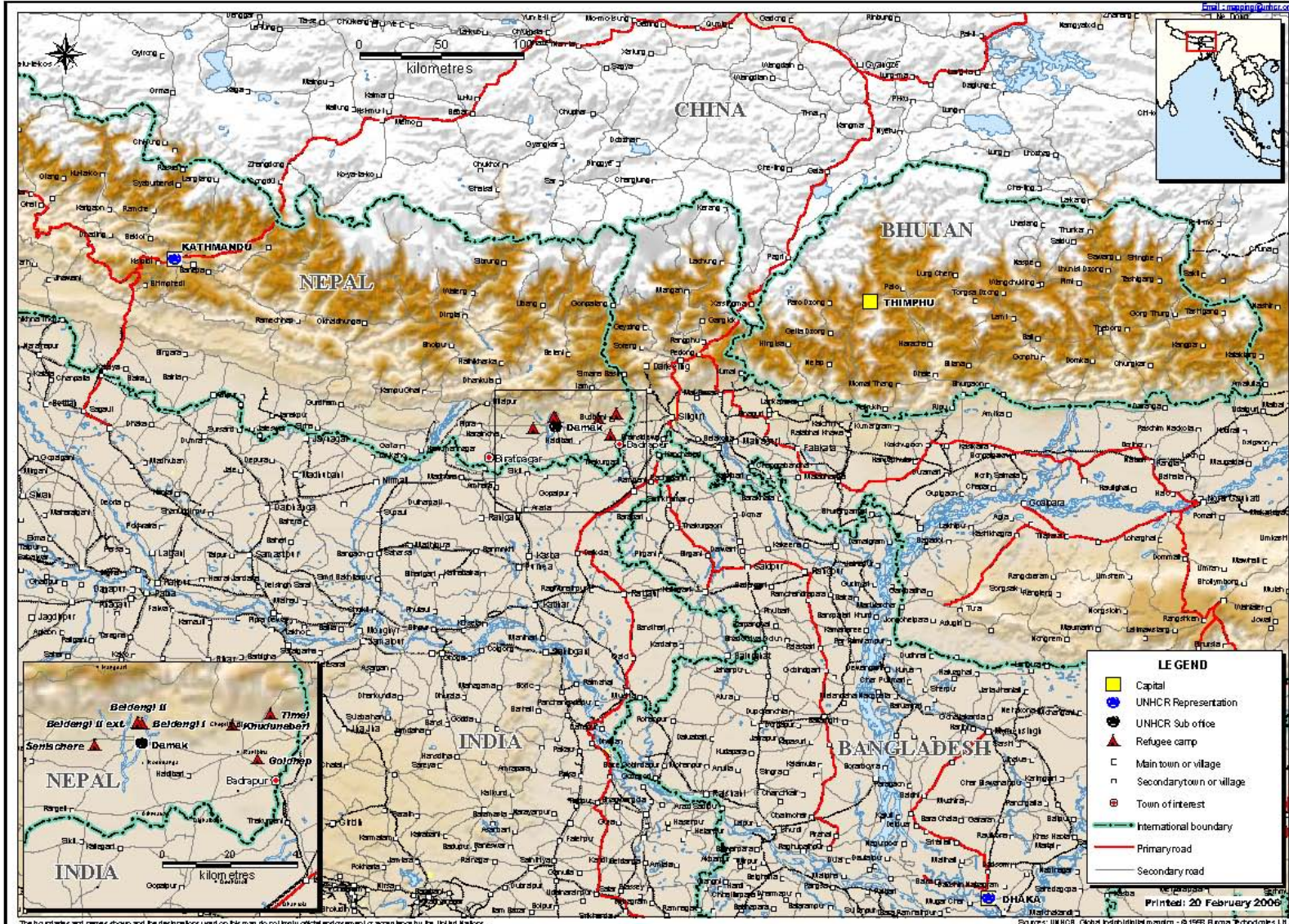
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Bhutanese Refugees in Nepal

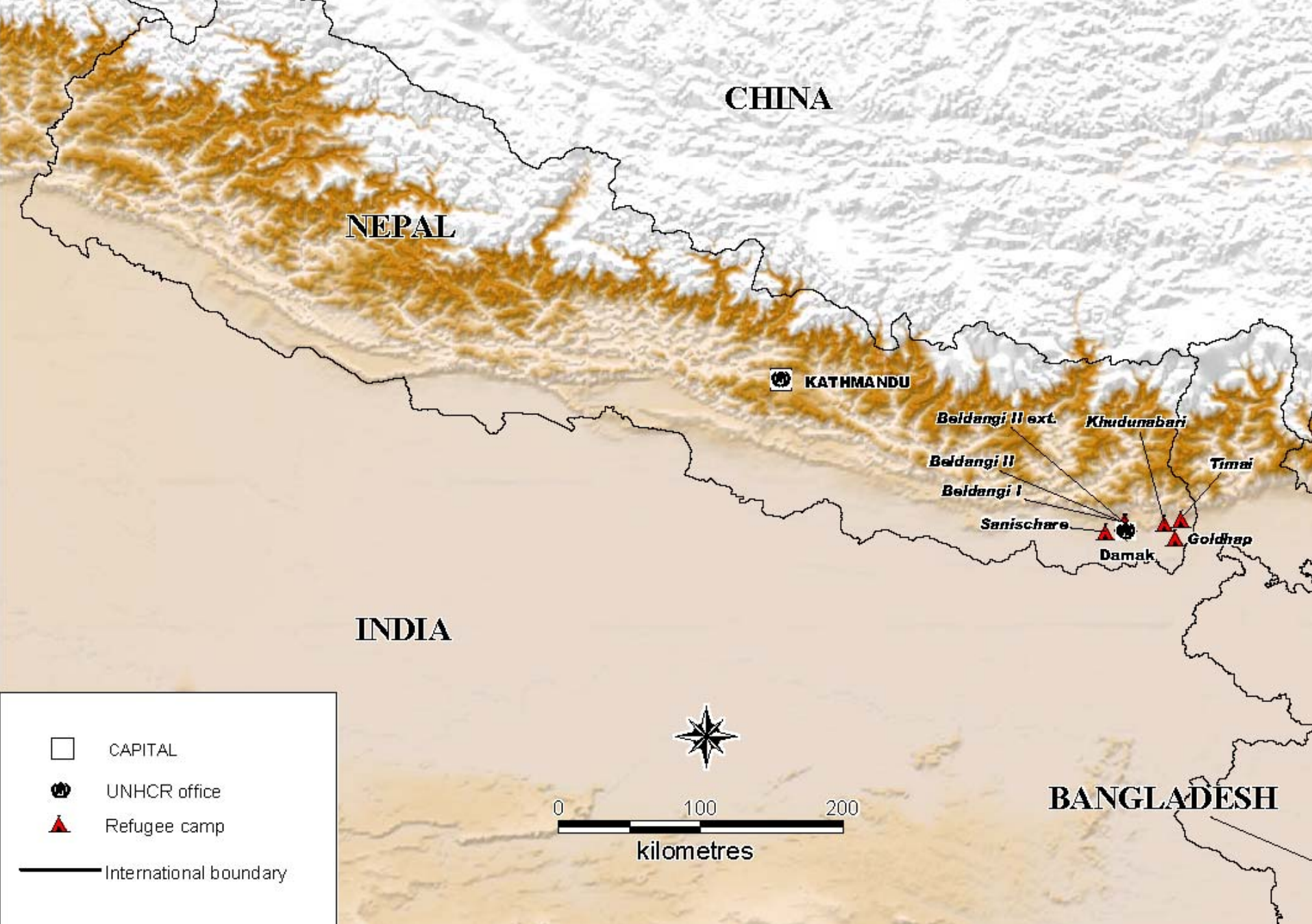


Bhutanese – Basic Facts

- Refugee Population - Approximately 108,000
- 95% are Lhotshampa or Southern Bhutanese
- Location – Seven Camps in Eastern Nepal
- Arrival in Nepal – Early 1990's (most by 1995)
- Status in Nepal – Prima facie refugees under UNHCR mandate



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



CHINA

NEPAL

KATHMANDU

Beldangi II ext.

Khudunabari

Beldangi II

Timai

Beldangi I

Sanischare

Damak

Goldhap

INDIA

BANGLADESH

CAPITAL

UNHCR office

Refugee camp

International boundary

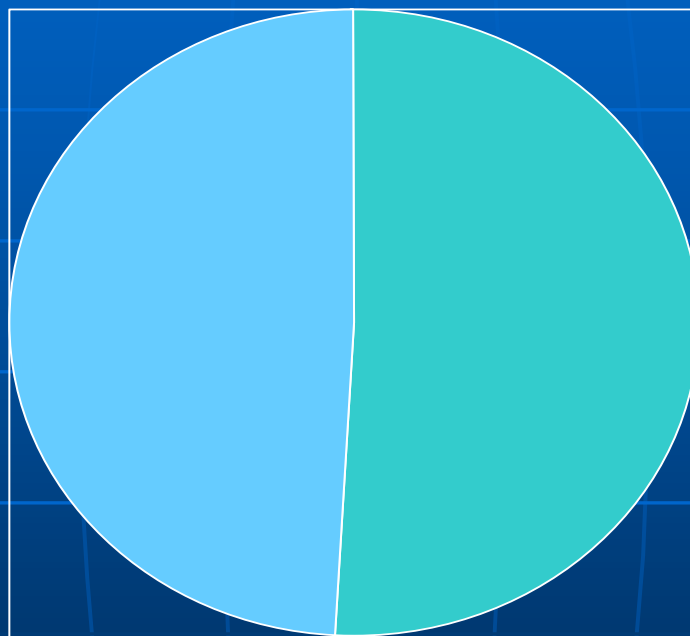
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kilometres

History leading to flight and need for resettlement

- 1980's – Bhutan adopts Bhutanization policies –limiting language, customs, religion, and political parties.
- 1988 - Census conducted to identify “genuine Bhutanese.” Many of Nepalese descent excluded.
- 1988- 1990 Demonstrations and protests in Southern Bhutan against new policies. Leaders jailed. First refugees flee to India.
- October 1990 - Bhutanese army fires upon demonstrations killing & wounding many.
- 1990-92 - Government closes schools, removes officials, and begins confiscating land. Government forces many to sign “Voluntary Migration Forms” before expulsion.
- 1993-95 - Refugee population at grows from first group of 40,000 to 80,000 as others flee and join relatives in Nepal.
- June 2003 – Nepal/Bhutan discussions on repatriation stall after pilot Bhutanese verification process finds only 2% of refugees are Bhutanese.

Demographics: Gender

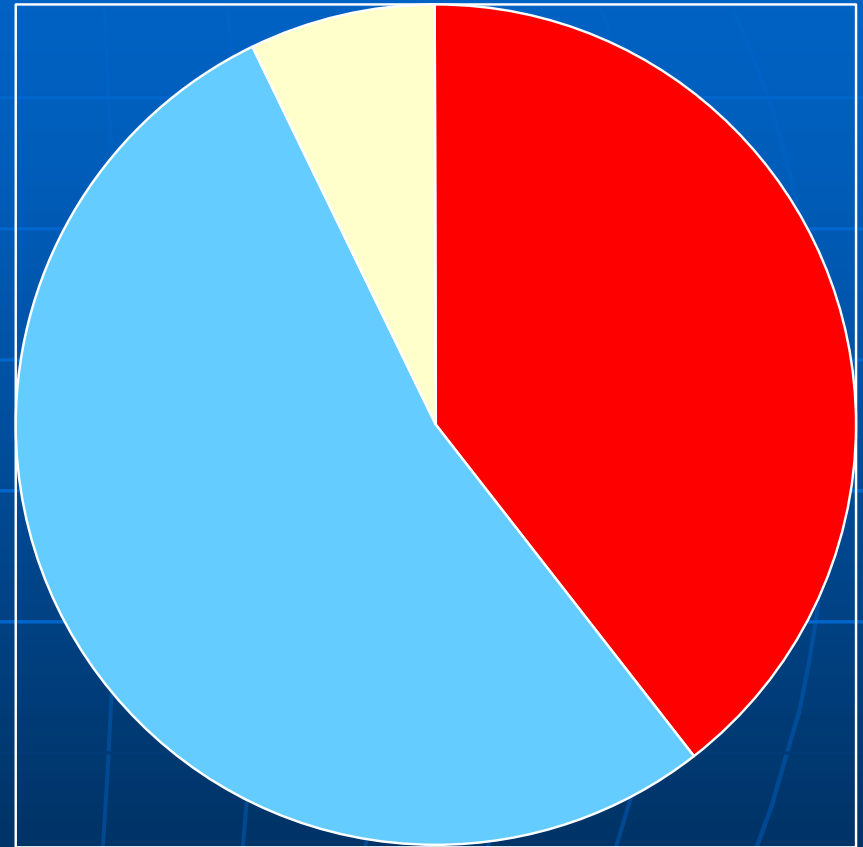


■ Male ■ Female

Male – 50.7% Female – 49.3%

Age Distribution

0-17 years old = 35.5%
(under 5 years old = 7.6)
18-59 years old = 56.9
60 and older = 6.6



■ >18 ■ 18-59 ■ 60>

Religion and Ethnicity

- Hindu – largest group (60-70%)
 - Buddhists – (20-25%)
 - Kirat (indigenous) - (5-8%)
 - Christians – (2-3%)
-
- Over 50 ethnic and caste groups in the camps (e.g. Brahman, Dahlits, Daming.)
 - Populations settled in camps along ethnic/caste lines which play an important role in social and camp dynamics

Language and Education

- 99% of the population speak Nepali
- 35% of the population speak some English
- 40% of the population are students
- Education is to grade 10 in the camps (Nepali curriculum)
- Some students attend Nepali schools beyond primary
- A few have attended university level in India
- 25-30% have no education



Efforts towards universal access to primary education have helped to reduce differences among groups in education.

Employment

- Limited opportunities in the camps.
- 10-15% were farmers.
- Other occupations – social workers, teachers, tailors, and weavers.
- Training for occupations has also been limited.



Current challenges in processing

- A small but politically active minority in camps insist on repatriation and oppose resettlement.
- There have been threats and violence against those stepping forward for resettlement.
- Much misinformation about resettlement in the refugee population.
- Peace agreement between government of Nepal and Maoist rebels remains fragile, renewed fighting would prevent resettlement.

Responses

- UNHCR is coordinating closely with the US and other resettlement countries to address problems.
- UNHCR working with government of Nepal to improve camp security.
- Active information campaign through meetings, publications and radio to ensure refugees obtain correct information on resettlement.

Challenges in Reception & Integration

- Caste as well as ethnic divisions amongst the caseload.
- Housing restrictions in camps have led to families being split, and children living with distant relatives.
- Significant number of victims of sexual-gender based violence.
- Some polygamous relationships.

On the plus side

- Data from recent census is accurate.
- Very high compliance and low incidents of fraud in registration.
- Talk of resettlement has so far not created a pull factor.
- The camps are well organized and relatively stable.
- The last year there has been a positive movement of the government of Nepal towards finding durable solutions.

Resettlement Outlook

- Numbers are hard to predict and will be based on how many refugees request resettlement.
- Expectation is for at least 20,000 refugees but this number could be much higher.
- This will be a multi-year resettlement program.
- Due to good UNHCR data, and establishment of US OPE in Nepal, resettlement should be able to start swiftly once camp conditions allow.
- Security in the camps remains a prerequisite to initiating the resettlement process.



Prepared by UNHCR
Washington, August 2007