

## 1 OF 5 Communities in the “MINNESOTA’S EMERGING ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITIES” Report

### Who are the Bhutanese?

The Nepali-speaking Bhutanese families in Minnesota are Bhutanese citizens of Nepalese origin. Beginning in the late nineteenth-century, large groups of Nepali migrants came to southern Bhutan for work and economic opportunities, eventually staying to raise families. These families became known as the “Lhotshampas,” which translates to the phrase “people from the south.” The Lhotshampas integrated into Bhutan and attained citizenship following the Citizenship Act of 1958, and by the 1988 census the Lhotshampas made up over 1/6th of the total population of Bhutan.

Estimated Population in Minnesota – 1,142

Major Religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Kirat, and Christianity

### Why did they leave Bhutan?

Beginning in 1985, the Buddhist Drukpa majority became concerned about the growing economic power of the Lhotshampas, who were majority Hindu. By the late 1980’s, the government census branded the Lhotshampa population as illegal immigrants, despite their ability to demonstrate citizenship and land ownership. The Bhutanese government adopted a “One Bhutan, One People” policy, mandating uniform language, clothing, and cultural practices. Individuals who were unwilling, or unable, to comply with new laws to match the culture and language of the North Bhutanese, were severely punished. The Lhotshampas protested, and in response, the government further restricted resistant efforts. As a result, many Bhutanese were arrested, detained, and tortured. In 1992, the UNHCR built camps in Eastern Nepal that housed more than 105,000 refugees, while others fled to the neighboring India and other regions of Nepal.

### The Bhutanese in Minnesota.

In 2008, approximately 6,000 Bhutanese refugees arrived in the United States, scattered through a number of different states. Ninety-eight percent of Bhutanese refugees in Minnesota are of Lhotshampa ethnicity. Bhutanese refugees tend to have higher English proficiency rates compared to other new refugee groups, because of higher quality language classes taught in Nepali refugee camp schools. It is estimated that thirty-five percent of Bhutanese refugees speak English upon arrival to Minnesota.

Many of Minnesota’s Bhutanese population are clustered in the suburbs of Roseville, Lauderdale, and East Saint Paul. Unlike other new immigrant communities, many Bhutanese are vegetarians, and therefore do not seek employment in the meat packing industry. Instead, community members rely on English proficient community leaders for assistance with job placement opportunities.



*Minn. Stat. § 15.0145 — Ethnic Councils.*

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The Emerging Communities Report focuses on five emerging Asian Pacific communities in Minnesota, including the Karen, Karenni, Bhutanese Lhotshampa, Guyanese, and Chuukese peoples. The report's findings will feature an overview of each community's resettlement history; an assessment of each community's current population in Minnesota; and an analysis of each community's trending issues. As the demographic numbers for these communities grow, it is critical that policy makers, school districts, and community organizations have a broad understanding of each group's communal history. The Emerging Communities Report will shape our efforts to support these growing populations as they build communities in Minnesota.

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## 2 OF 5 Communities in the “MINNESOTA’S EMERGING ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITIES” Report

### Who are the Chuukese?

The Chuukese population come from the Chuuk Islands located in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), a nation composed of 607 islands located in the Pacific Ocean. While Chuuk is one of four states within FSM, the Chuukese constitute almost fifty-percent of the total national population of Micronesia. The Chuuk language is primarily an oral traditional that is heavily rooted in music.

Estimated Population in Minnesota – 1,003

Major Religions – Christianity, specifically Catholic and Protestant

### Why did they leave Micronesia?

Many Chuukese are practitioners of the traditional trades on the island, surviving on subsistence farming and fishing for their extended families. There are limited opportunities for higher education and employment on the Chuuk islands. In addition, the agricultural environment on their native islands is being compromised by increasing ocean water levels, which has led to island erosion, flooding, and crop degradation.

Immigration to the United States from the Federated States of Micronesia began in 1986, when the Pacific Island state signed a Compact of Free Association. Provisions in the Compact included aid for economic development, and the ability for citizens of Micronesia to freely move between the United States and their native islands. Under the Free Association Compact, Micronesians may work and reside within the United States, but are limited in options to attain citizenship, leaving them unable to fully integrate into a community. Without a pathway to citizenship, most do not qualify for federal loan programs or other federal support services.

### The Chuukese in Minnesota.

The Chuukese migrated to Milan, Minnesota, in Chippewa County, after a local Minnesota banker lived with a host family on the Romanum Island of the Federate States of Micronesia. He helped this first family migrate to Milan, and many more families have come since that time. Religious service attendance is generally very high, and congregations support their churches, and are majority Christian.

Today, Micronesians are estimated to makeup over seventy-five percent of the Milan population. Approximately, 420 Chuukese reside in Chippewa County and the surrounding areas, working in poultry production facilities.



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## 3 OF 5 Communities in the “MINNESOTA’S EMERGING ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITIES” Report

### Who are the Guyanese?

The Indo-Guyanese population come from the nation of Guyana, located between Venezuela and Suriname. Guyana is a small nation in South America, covered with dense jungle on its southern border. As a result most Guyanese citizens live in settlements along the coast, and are heavily influenced by Caribbean culture. The population of Guyana is approximately fifty-percent Indian ancestry (Indo-Guyanese) and thirty-percent African (Afro-Guyanese). Guyana’s official language is English, but residents also speak a creolized version of English which heavily mixes in African languages and Hindi.

Estimated Population in Minnesota – 1,939

Major Religions – Hinduism and Christianity

### Why did they leave Guyana?

From 1840 to 1920, the British government brought about 250,000 Asian Indians from northern India to Guyana to become indentured servants on the colony’s sugar plantations. Unlike indentured servants migrating from Western Europe, these Indian indentured servants were treated brutally by land-owners. The Indian populations were used to replace the African slave labor force, which had been outlawed within the British Empire.

In the late 1960’s, the People’s Progressive Party took control of the country for 20 years after independence. Guyana became a soviet, socialist state with 75% of businesses under government control. Indo-Guyanese residents were discriminated against under the People’s Progressive Party. An estimated 500,000 Guyanese have immigrated to the United States in the past 40 years, to escape Guyana’s corrupted government control.

### The Guyanese in Minnesota.

The Indo-Guyanese have immigrated to the United States since the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, searching for better economic prospects and a safer standard of life. The largest population resides in New York where they make-up the third largest minority group.

The majority of Minnesota’s Indo-Guyanese population reside in Hennepin County. Many are devout Hindus and attend regular temple service at Guyanese temples in Minneapolis and Farmington. The first wave of Guyanese Minnesota residents came from New York state, however, more populations are arriving to Minnesota directly from Guyana.



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## 4 OF 5 Communities in the “MINNESOTA’S EMERGING ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITIES” Report

### Who are the Karen?

The Karen are the second largest ethnic nationality group from Burma. In 2011, estimates for the worldwide population ranged from five to ten million. “Karen” is an English pronunciation of the Burmese word “Kayin”. While the Karen people may speak one of at least 12 different dialects, the Karen language has three main branches: Sgaw, Pwo, and Pa’o.

Estimated Total Population in Minnesota - 12,000

Major Religions - Christians, Buddhists, Animists, and very few Muslims

### Why did they leave Burma?

Since 1949, many Karen populated areas have been subject to government insurgency and often persecution. Tens of thousands of Karen villagers have been forcibly relocated from their homes and many have fled to the neighboring nation of Thailand. In their native Burma, the Karen have suffered executions, forced labor, forced relocation, confiscation of land, human minesweeping, sexual violence and the burning of entire villages, in addition to open discrimination.

Nearly all Karen fled from the fighting and oppression, beginning in 1996. The United States made an open-ended offer in 2005 to resettle those Karen refugees residing in camps in Thailand.

### The Karen in Minnesota.

An estimated twelve thousand Karen refugees and immigrants live in Minnesota. Most families reside in Ramsey County, with Saint Paul having the highest and fastest-growing Karen population in the state. In Greater Minnesota, there are smaller populations of the Karen community in Marshall, Worthington, Austin, Albert Lea, and Faribault.

Secondary migration from other states is growing as families reunite with relatives who have already settled in Minnesota. Many Karen refugees choose Minnesota as their new home because of the social services and support infrastructure offered to refugees exceeds those offered in other parts of the country. The Karen are quickly replacing other immigrants in meat processing centers in Worthington, Albert Lea, and Austin.



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## 5 OF 5 Communities in the “MINNESOTA’S EMERGING ASIAN PACIFIC COMMUNITIES” Report

### Who are the Karenni?

Karenni (-ni means “red”) refers to approximately 9 different ethnic groups, speaking many different languages and dialects, all residing in the Kayah state of Myanmar (Burma). The largest group in the Kayah state are the Kayah Li Phu people. The major language spoken by the Karenni people is Kayah Li. The Kayah state is also frequently referred to as the “Karenni” state.

Estimated Population in Minnesota - over 2,000

Major Religions - Mostly Christians, Buddhists, and Animists

### Why did they leave Burma?

The Karenni are the ethnic majority from the Karenni state, a mountainous region in Burma, bordering Thailand to the east, Shan state to the north, and the Karen state to the south. There are an estimated 250,000 people living in the state. The Karenni state is one of Burma’s poorest, with weak infrastructure, poor healthcare, malnutrition, few educational opportunities, and very little economic development.

Like the Karen and other Burmese minority ethnic groups, the Karenni allied with the British forces during World War II. Upon the independence of Burma in 1948, the Karenni did not agree to sign the Panglong Agreement, which would have acceded their state to form the Union of Burma. Since that time, the Karenni population has experience Burmese occupation and suppression.

The humanitarian situation in the Karenni state has continued to deteriorate. The Burmese government does not permit foreign individuals to travel into the Karenni state. Therefore no access is granted to any third party impartial observers or humanitarian aid organizations. Suspected human rights violations include forced labor, land confiscation, torture, arbitrary executions, and sexual violence.

### The Karenni in Minnesota.

Due to their small numbers, it is uncertain exactly how many Karenni live in Minnesota at this time. Based on aggregate data from community organizations, an estimated one to two thousand Karenni individuals reside in Ramsey County, and other areas of the state with high Karen populations. Many Karenni refugees find work in the meat processing industry or work in agriculture and manufacturing in Southwestern Minnesota.



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