

# Thailand



## Main objectives

In 2005, UNHCR aimed to ensure the effective and efficient documentation and reception of asylum-seekers; address the security concerns and physical safety of refugees in camps and urban areas; prepare refugees from Myanmar and other countries for durable solutions; expand the strategic use of resettlement as a protection tool and durable solution; complete a re-registration exercise to improve information for the purpose of identifying durable solutions; and enhance partnerships with donors, the Government, UN agencies and NGOs.

## Impact

- A positive shift in the Thai Government's position on refugee matters was discernible in 2005. A national asylum procedure began to emerge as local authorities gradually assumed broader responsibilities, namely reception, status determination and camp registration. In the camps, an extensive resettlement programme was initiated.

- After several years at an impasse, the Provincial Admissions Boards (PAB) began functioning, and the status of more than 14,000 people from Myanmar living in the camps was regularized in late 2005.
- However, throughout 2005, refugees remained confined to the camps and could not gain access to employment or higher education. Sporadic cases of arrest, detention and deportation continued to be reported during the year.
- The Government acknowledged the negative consequences of the protracted refugee situation in the camps and recognized that nurturing refugees' skills facilitates durable solutions, including repatriation. For instance, the Thai Ministry of Education expressed an interest in increasing educational opportunities for refugees. Furthermore, the Government acknowledged in 2005 that resettlement was a viable solution for Myanmar refugees.
- UNHCR's partnership with NGOs improved quantitatively and qualitatively throughout the year. Through enhanced dialogue, a number of protection issues requiring concerted action were identified, joint advocacy initiatives were developed and participatory

planning with NGOs resulted in a comprehensive plan which details gaps in assistance and protection and ways to address them. This concerted effort influenced the Government's policy on conditions in the camps, the results of which will be evident in 2006.

## Working environment

### The context

Thailand has been hosting Myanmar refugees for over two decades as a result of the conflict between the Myanmar Government and ethnic armed groups calling for autonomy or independence. Almost 102,000 refugees were officially registered in 2005 and an additional 14,600 were subsequently "screened in" by the PABs and registered in the camps in the last quarter of 2005. More than 31,000 Myanmar refugees are still awaiting the PAB screening process.

### Constraints

Although a progressive change in the Government's policy towards refugees is apparent, further coordination among the various levels of administration will be needed to translate these good intentions into results on the ground. According to present regulations, protection is accorded to registered camp residents and does not apply outside camp boundaries. If they are apprehended outside the camp, for instance, recognized refugees risk de-registration and arrest. Even within the camps refugee leaders and camp administrators remain reluctant to refer any serious crimes to UNHCR or the Thai legal system.

Finally, there is a perception that granting asylum in some cases may constitute an unfriendly act or a pull

factor, as evidenced by a series of events in the latter part of 2005 that placed an increased strain on the relationship between the Government and UNHCR. This came to light in 2005, when 131 Thai Muslims fled to Malaysia from violence in southern Thailand. An additional cause for concern at the end of 2005 was the deportation to Laos of 27 Lao Hmong children who had arrived in Petchabun Province in 2004. On both issues, UNHCR and the Government continued to work towards a solution at the end of 2005.

### Funding

The operation in Thailand benefited from additional, specifically targeted, donor contributions which permitted an expansion of resettlement activities. At the same time, budget reductions, resulting from the global funding shortfall in the second half of the year, necessitated difficult decisions affecting the provision of assistance. Although most NGO partners sought alternative funding to cover the budgetary gaps, one NGO, which delivers services to urban refugees in partnership with UNHCR, had no choice but to cut refugee subsistence allowances by 30 per cent.

## Achievements and impact

### Protection and solutions

UNHCR's primary objective was to support the Government in establishing a national admissions mechanism for Myanmar asylum-seekers. Training sessions were conducted for the interview teams who processed the cases and a set of standard operating procedures was established for the admissions process. In the last quarter of 2005, progress was made through the reactivation of the PABs, which resulted in the regularization

Persons of concern					
Type of population	Origin	Total in country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent female	Per cent under 18
Refugees	Myanmar	116,500	116,200	49	51
Asylum-seekers	Myanmar	31,600	20,700	51	40
	Cambodia	200	-	39	41

Budget, income and expenditure (USD)				
Annual programme budget				
Final budget	Income from contributions <sup>1</sup>	Other funds available <sup>2</sup>	Total funds available	Total expenditure
9,639,050	2,537,390	6,314,617	8,852,006	8,852,006

<sup>1</sup> Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

<sup>2</sup> Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.



Karen refugee children from Myanmar at school in Mae Sot camp, Thailand. *UNHCR / D. Lom*

of almost 14,700 unregistered camp residents in Ratchaburi and Tak Provinces.

A priority for the Office was to expand the use of resettlement as a durable solution and as a protection tool. This proved especially challenging during the relocation to the camps of the urban Myanmar refugees in March 2005. The Office submitted the cases of 13,400 refugees for resettlement in third countries; 416 of them departed in 2005. In addition, 1,970 refugees among the urban Myanmar group departed for resettlement to nine countries. UNHCR also completed the registration of 15,000 Lao Hmongs in Wat Tham Krabok; most of them have been resettled in the United States, except for 700 still awaiting medical and other clearances.

In 2005, UNHCR continued to pursue initiatives aimed at improving the administration of justice in the camps. Workshops were organized with Thai enforcement authorities, justice officials and members of the refugee community to strengthen local capacities and provide basic knowledge on the Thai legal system and international legal standards. More activities were undertaken aimed at preventing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In partnership with NGOs, a set of standard operating procedures was developed. The

unified approach and functional referral system led to an increase in the number of reported SGBV cases. Yet difficulties persisted in seeking prosecution under Thai law. Survivors of SGBV who expressed an interest in resettlement were given priority consideration.

UNHCR continued to undertake refugee status determination (RSD) and to provide basic assistance to non-Myanmar refugees from 24 countries living in urban centres. UNHCR intervened with authorities in cases of arrest, detention, or threats of deportation. The existing 24-hour protection hotline continued to serve asylum-seekers and refugees facing serious security threats. Resettlement remained the only viable solution available to recognized non-Myanmar refugees. In 2005, a total of 291 non-Myanmar refugees departed Thailand for resettlement despite increasing difficulties.

In late 2005, the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming strategy was launched in Thailand. Participatory assessments were undertaken with refugees by multi-functional teams in coordination with a number of NGOs. These assessments shed light on the protection problems faced respectively by refugee women, men, girls and boys in protracted situations.



## Activities and assistance

UNHCR's main role was to ensure the protection of refugees confined to the camps as well as urban refugees and asylum-seekers, and bridge the assistance gaps that NGOs were unable to address.

**Community services:** A new registration and documentation database revealed that some 8,000 separated and unaccompanied children were living in the camps. UNHCR continued to monitor their situation, and strove to combat physical and sexual abuse. UNHCR also regularly intervened on behalf of refugee children in detention or at risk of deportation.

Mine-risk education was provided in eight refugee camps to more than 4,300 refugees, focusing on high-risk groups and refugee leaders. More than 300 mine victims received prosthetic devices, and physical and group therapy, enabling them to participate in social events and use facilities such as camp clinics, churches and the market. Some 10,000 posters and teaching pamphlets were distributed and displayed in refugee camps. A strong component of the project was the technical training of refugees in producing prosthetic devices.

**Domestic needs and household support:** Urban refugees have no legal status in Thailand, and are therefore unable to seek employment. Over 2,600 were provided with financial assistance to meet the cost of accommodation and food. This number included the urban Myanmar refugees, prior to their relocation to the camps.

**Education:** Over 37,000 children in the nine camps received school supplies and benefited from curriculum development, production of textbooks and teacher training delivered by a community-based organization. Other educational and cultural opportunities were provided through 22 libraries in seven refugee camps, available to some 90,000 children and adults. In an effort to promote self-reliance and restore a sense of self-esteem, training courses in motorbike maintenance and repair, tailoring, weaving, knitting, cooking and baking, agriculture and animal husbandry, stove-making, carpentry and radio mechanics were provided to more than 1,500 refugees in seven camps. Similar provisions were also provided to refugees in urban centres.

**Forestry:** Tree-planting activities were carried out in all nine refugee camps to further reduce the potential risk of soil erosion and promote environmental awareness among refugee communities.

**Health and nutrition:** In 2005, the Bangkok Refugee Centre recorded over 5,400 visits by urban refugees to

obtain primary and curative health services. In the camps, UNHCR's efforts aimed at strengthening information on HIV/AIDS, expanding access to voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) and improving access to care and treatment. In cooperation with NGOs and community-based organizations, 30 radio broadcasts, drama performances and competitions on HIV/AIDS themes were organized, leading to more people using VCT services in the camps.

**Legal assistance:** A large-scale re-registration exercise was completed in all nine camps using the new Project Profile data management software (*ProGres*). The registration operation in Thailand also included biometric features such as fingerprinting of all individuals. The information collected has proven crucial to the resettlement operation from the camps and, when conditions eventually allow, will assist UNHCR in preparations for repatriation. The exercise also provided valuable information on the unregistered population; this information was presented to the PABs. UNHCR proposed to the Government the issuing of individual identification cards; the proposal was accepted in principle.

UNHCR continued to conduct RSD for non-Myanmar urban asylum-seekers. The Office intervened with authorities in cases of arrest or threats of deportation, provided legal counselling and representation and facilitated resettlement exit clearance.

**Operational support (to agencies):** UNHCR provided support to implementing partner agencies to meet their project management costs.

**Sanitation:** In Mae La Camp, a waste management system was established and operated by a community-based organization. Through the regular collection and proper disposal of solid waste from the camp, this initiative has significantly reduced the health risks for some 40,000 refugees and nearby Thai villages.

**Shelter and infrastructure:** Following an assessment of the risks posed by soil erosion, flooding and landslides in a number of camps, UNHCR and a partner agency undertook a series of emergency measures. Intervention included the installation of 14 sets of culverts and soil-retaining structures in critical areas, drainage work and road repair as well as the relocation of some 200 families from high-risk areas. More interventions are needed to further reduce risks.

**Transports and logistics:** Some 1,400 refugees accepted for resettlement were transported to Bangkok before their departure to a third country and assisted with exit formalities.

## Organization and implementation

### Management

In 2005, the Thai operation had 97 staff members comprising 21 internationals (including four JPOs), 67 nationals and nine UNVs and secondees in Bangkok and the three field offices. The Bangkok Office also covers activities in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam and supports the field offices in Kanchanaburi, Mae Hong Son and Mae Sot responsible for Myanmar refugees in camps.

### Working with others

UNHCR maintained implementing arrangements with one government agency, six international and two national NGOs. UNHCR continued to enjoy excellent working relationships with government ministries, other UN agencies and NGOs. Partnership and coordination with humanitarian agencies working in the refugee camps was further strengthened throughout the year.

### Overall assessment

In 2005 a number of positive developments, in particular new resettlement opportunities, not only considerably expanded the prospects for durable solutions but also improved the protection situation and livelihoods of those remaining in Thailand. Joint initiatives with the Thai Government and civil society to expand educational and income-generating opportunities for camp refugees reinforced a process of exchange of ideas during the formation of policy. PABs put in place at least some of the basic constituent elements of a sound national asylum procedure for Myanmar refugees. The re-registration exercise provided more accurate information on the refugee population, while the introduction of the age, gender and diversity mainstreaming initiative exposed staff and partners to an innovative participatory planning methodology which includes stronger refugee involvement.

#### Offices

Bangkok  
Kanchanaburi  
Mae Hong Son  
Mae Sot

#### Partners

##### Government agencies

Ministry of the Interior/Department of Immigration  
Ministry of the Interior/The Operations Centre for Displaced Persons  
Ministry of Justice  
Ministry of Social Welfare  
National Security Council and Ministry of Foreign Affairs

##### NGOs

*Aide médicale internationale*  
American Refugee Committee  
Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees  
Handicap International  
ICS Asia  
International Rescue Committee  
Jesuit Refugee Service  
Malteser International  
*Médecins sans Frontières* (France)  
Shanti Volunteer Association  
Taipei Overseas Peace Service  
Thai Burmese Border Consortium  
Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment  
ZOA Refugee Care (Netherlands)

##### Others

Asia Institute of Technology  
UNDP  
UNEP  
UNICEF

## Financial Report (USD)

Expenditure breakdown	Current year's projects	Prior years' projects
	Annual programme budget	Annual and supplementary programme budgets
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,452,129	0
Community services	552,733	64,124
Domestic needs and household support	404,310	31,113
Education	902,875	187,351
Food	0	317
Forestry	24,403	5,745
Health and nutrition	119,377	28,521
Legal assistance	1,380,362	98,710
Operational support (to agencies)	241,437	38,060
Sanitation	70,184	29,843
Shelter and infrastructure	52,631	23,954
Transport and logistics	30,322	239
Instalments with implementing partners	906,166	(507,977)
<b>Sub-total operational activities</b>	<b>7,136,929</b>	<b>0</b>
Programme support	1,715,077	0
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>8,852,006</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Cancellation on prior years' expenditure</b>		<b>(76,689)</b>
<b>Instalments with implementing partners</b>		
Payments made	3,538,870	
Reporting received	(2,632,704)	
<b>Balance</b>	<b>906,166</b>	
<b>Prior years' report</b>		
<b>Instalments with implementing partners</b>		
Outstanding 1 January		630,011
Reporting received		(507,977)
Refunded to UNHCR		(55,181)
Adjustments		0
<b>Balance</b>		<b>66,853</b>