

Thailand



Working environment

The context

Though not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention, Thailand has over the last three decades provided asylum to some 1.2 million refugees. Refugees from Myanmar live in nine camps along the border and are subject to *ad hoc* administrative arrangements, while refugees outside the camps are considered illegal migrants under Thai law. Official admission to the camps is managed by the Provincial Admission Boards (PABs), which were re-established in 2005.

Since mid-2006, the situation in Thailand has been characterized by a reduction of the protection space for all groups of concern. As a result, UNHCR is having difficulty in implementing its mandate. In April 2007, the Office was requested by the Thai authorities to stop its refugee status determination (RSD), pending consultation. Furthermore, it has become increasingly difficult to resettle urban refugees accepted for third-country resettlement due to restrictions on exit

visas. An equally significant problem is the difficulty of reaching refugees and asylum-seekers in detention centres.

Migratory movements in the East Asia and the Pacific region that converge on Thailand have increasingly grown through the years. The country is host to more than two million migrants. Within this context, considerations of national security and bilateral cooperation take precedence over the principle of asylum. In addition, concerns about a perceived pull factor play a role in shaping the Thai Government's stance on refugee issues.

The needs

Myanmar refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border

In 2005, UNHCR began to collaborate with the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), a consortium of NGOs, to undertake annual joint needs assessments for Myanmar refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border. In

2006, UNHCR launched the Strengthening Protection Capacity Project to identify gaps in refugee protection and humanitarian assistance.

The situation of Myanmar refugees in Thailand is among the most protracted in the world. The majority of these refugees have lived in the camps for more than two decades. They face insecurity in all aspects of their lives, both inside and outside the camps and have to contend with various social problems arising from a protracted encampment situation.

Refugee children are facing great difficulties in pursuing education past Grade 10. Meaningful involvement of women in camp activities needs to be increased. Refugees' basic rights and needs for their economic, social and psychological well-being remain unfulfilled. They do not have the right to work, and those who seek work outside the camps are at risk of abuse and exploitation.

Against this background, the introduction of third-country resettlement has opened a significant durable solutions window. Some 10,000 departures are projected by the end of 2007, with anticipated submissions of 27,000 persons in 2008 and 22,000 in 2009.

Urban refugees and asylum-seekers

Participatory assessments conducted with urban refugees and asylum-seekers, most of whom live in Bangkok, reveal that their concerns revolve around their illegal status in Thailand. Fear of arrest and deportation, intimidation by the host community, extreme poverty, lack of legal employment, exploitation and lack of educational opportunities are some of their main concerns.

UNHCR is also concerned about the situation of the Lao Hmong, of whom 149 have been detained in Nong Khai since the end of 2006. There are also some 8,000 Lao Hmong living in temporary shelter in the northern town of Petchabun. UNHCR does not have access to this group, although some of them may be in need of international protection. The Royal Thai Government is planning to screen and repatriate those whom it deems do not have protection concerns. UNHCR is calling for a state screening procedure that is in line with international standards of protection.

Total requirements

2008: USD 11,580,394

2009: USD 12,010,847

Main objectives

- Ensure the protection and physical security of all persons of concern.
- Promote and assist in the development of national refugee-management bodies and procedures in line with international protection standards.
- Improve the social and economic well-being of refugees.
- Expand the search for durable solutions for refugees.

Key targets for 2008 and 2009

- The use of resettlement as a protection tool, a durable solution, and a responsibility-sharing mechanism is maximized; efficient pre-departure and departure arrangements are in place for refugees accepted for resettlement.
- Provincial Admissions Boards are strengthened, with fair and efficient standards for admission, screening and protection of Myanmar asylum-seekers.
- The administration of justice in the camps is improved, and refugees and asylum-seekers have fair and efficient access to judicial and legal remedies as well as traditional justice mechanisms; the Legal Assistance Centres in the camps function effectively and objectively.
- Refugees in camps reach a higher level of self-reliance by engaging in income-generation activities, non-formal education and vocational training.
- The prevention of, and response to sexual and gender-based violence is improved through community-based approaches.
- Refugee children, including unaccompanied and separated minors, are monitored and protected, and undergo a best interests determination process.
- Refugees have access to quality HIV and AIDS services, and prevention and awareness-building activities are implemented.
- Refugee women benefit from greater participation in camp management and related activities.
- Urban asylum-seekers have access to fair and efficient RSD.
- Urban refugees and asylum-seekers enjoy basic medical care and referrals to local hospitals.
- Urban refugee children and adolescents have access to primary, secondary, and higher forms of education; adults avail of non-formal education and vocational training.
- UNHCR is able to access and provide protection to asylum-seekers and refugees held in detention.



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Some 140,000 refugees from Myanmar live in nine refugee camps in Thailand. Many have lived in camps for almost two decades.

Strategy and activities

The strategy for Myanmar refugees is twofold: while pursuing resettlement as the only durable solution available for the time being, UNHCR will also try to alleviate the problems resulting from prolonged encampment. It will focus on improving its access to the camps for newly arrived refugees in need of international protection; enhancing the protection environment within the camps; and promoting self-reliance.

The strategic use of resettlement has provided a solution to the protracted situation in Thailand. The introduction of this large-scale resettlement programme has been a landmark development from which thousands of refugees have already benefited. UNHCR will continue with a measured and controlled approach to group resettlement.

As urban refugees are not permitted to engage in employment, UNHCR will continue to strengthen their skills through vocational training, formal and informal

Planning figures

Type of population	Origin	Jan 2008		Dec 2008 - Jan 2009		Dec 2009	
		Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR	Total in country	Of whom assisted by UNHCR
Refugees	Myanmar	124,000	124,000	112,480	112,480	102,330	102,330
	Various	1,720	1,700	1,900	1,900	2,000	2,000
Asylum-seekers	Myanmar	13,500	13,500	10,000	10,000	5,000	5,000
Others of concern	Various	750	-	830	-	910	-
Total		139,970	139,200	125,210	124,380	110,240	109,330

education, as well as to provide them with a minimal monthly subsistence allowance, including medical care and education support. With no formal status, and considered illegal migrants by the Thai authorities, all refugees and asylum-seekers are subject to arbitrary arrest, detention, and possible deportation. In the absence of a national mechanism to process the claims of non-Myanmar asylum-seekers, UNHCR will continue its consultations with the Thai authorities on RSD and possible solutions for this group.

Constraints

The Thai Government's policies have recently become more restrictive, reducing the asylum space for urban refugees and asylum-seekers. This is the result of a shift from a solutions-oriented approach to a deterrent position aimed at controlling illegal immigration. Refugees and asylum-seekers are in most cases not distinguished from illegal migrants, and are thus more susceptible to arrest and detention. The conditions of detention have deteriorated seriously: too many people are crammed into limited amounts of space, and UNHCR has not been granted formal access to asylum-seekers and refugees in detention.

For the Myanmar refugees at the border, the recent change of policy has cast a shadow on the encouraging prospects that arose in 2006 with the issuance of identity cards and the inclusion of refugees in the national HIV and AIDS programme. No major progress has been made with regard to the development of self-reliance activities, and access to the labour market and opportunities for higher education are still limited.

Organization and implementation

UNHCR presence

	2008	2009
Number of offices	5	5
Total staff	156	70
International	12	12
National	53	53
UNVs/Others	84	0
JPOs	5	5
Deployees	2	0

Coordination

The complex nature of the refugee situation in Thailand requires careful coordination with all key stakeholders. To respond to the protection needs of refugees and to overcome political constraints, UNHCR relies to a great extent on the experience of its international and local humanitarian partners. UNHCR also values its partners' technical expertise in maintaining the security of refugees.

The border assistance operation caring for the refugees from Myanmar is staffed by a total of some 20 international and local NGOs. Collaboration has been structured through the establishment of the Committee for Coordination of Support to Displaced People in Thailand (CCSDPT), with which UNHCR works closely. This collaborative framework ensures the efficient delivery of assistance to refugees and helps avoid duplication.

Partners

Implementing partners

Government: Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Justice

NGOs: *Aide Médicale Internationale*, American Refugee Committee, Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees, Handicap International, International Rescue Committee, Right to Play, *Ruam Mit* Foundation for Youth, Shanti Volunteer Association, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, Women's Education for Advancement and Empowerment, ZOA

Others: UNDP, United Nations Office for Project Services.

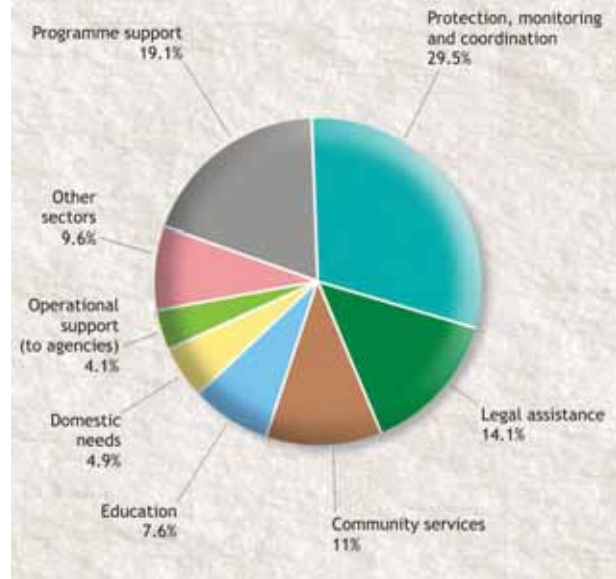
Operational partners

Government: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare, National Security Council.

NGOs: ICS Asia, Jesuit Refugee Service, *Malteser* International, Taipei Overseas Peace Service, Thailand Burma Border Consortium.

Others: ILO, OHCHR, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO.

2008-2009 Biennial Programme Budget by sector



Budget (USD)

Activities and services	Annual Programme Budget		
	2007	2008	2009
Protection, monitoring and coordination	2,612,332	3,497,988	3,461,808
Community services	816,100	1,209,843	1,388,135
Domestic needs	308,500	567,238	595,600
Education	866,900	820,806	979,607
Forestry	210,000	110,500	116,000
Health	198,200	380,277	399,271
Income generation	0	281,700	295,800
Legal assistance	1,618,100	1,623,324	1,704,538
Operational support (to agencies)	543,700	472,530	500,572
Sanitation	163,540	165,800	174,100
Shelter and other infrastructure	140,000	153,700	161,400
Transport and logistics	98,500	14,283	14,977
Total operations	7,575,872	9,297,988	9,791,808
Programme support	2,209,864	2,282,406	2,219,039
Total	9,785,736	11,580,394	12,010,847