

Thailand

Main objectives

- Ensure that admission and reception of Myanmar asylum-seekers is in accordance with international standards.
- Monitor respect for fundamental refugee rights.
- Prepare refugees from Myanmar for durable solutions.
- Further promote protection for urban refugees and asylum-seekers by urging close adherence to international asylum standards.
- Seek durable solutions for urban refugees, including the processing of cases for resettlement.
- Ensure the provision of care and social support for vulnerable groups.
- Promote accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and compliance with international refugee law.



Planning figures

Population	Jan. 2004	Dec. 2004
Asylum-seekers	1,300	1,500
Myanmar (refugees)	131,700	142,100
Others of concern	10	10
Other refugees	400	400
Total	133,410	144,010

Total requirements: USD 6,321,446

Working environment

Recent developments

As of September 2003, there were 110,000 Myanmar refugees in camps along the border between Thailand and Myanmar. Efforts to find a durable solution for these refugees continued to be difficult in 2003. The situation was complicated by a number of political events in Myanmar, followed by renewed repression of the opposition. The Royal Thai Government did endeavour to normalise relations with Myanmar, in the hope of paving the way for the repatriation of migrant workers and refugees, but to no avail. At the time of writing, the prospect of voluntary repatriation to Myanmar remains remote. Although public tolerance of refugees in urban areas of Thailand decreased over the course of the year, in general the Government continued to adopt an open-minded approach to refugee issues. UNHCR cannot promote voluntary repatriation unless several fundamental conditions are met, including the granting of unhindered access for the purpose of monitoring return movements.

Constraints

Increased security concerns and the Government's measures against terrorism tended to limit the freedom of movement of urban refugees, who in 2003 faced a greater risk of arrest and deportation. Despite UNHCR's efforts to encourage the Government to accede to the 1951 Refugee Convention and other international refugee instruments, no progress was made in that direction. Myanmar refugees in nine camps along the Thai-Myanmar border continue to enjoy temporary asylum but are referred to by the Government not as refugees but as 'displaced persons fleeing fighting'. UNHCR considers these persons to be refugees, along with other persons of concern living outside the camps. Although working arrangements with the Government remain unspecified at a formal level, a pragmatic understanding has been achieved, and this has enabled UNHCR and the Government to collaborate effectively.

Strategy

Protection and solutions

While UNHCR will continue to seek durable solutions for Myanmar refugees, it is not expected that significant numbers will repatriate in 2004 unless conditions improve substantially in the country of origin. Contingency plans will be updated in the event that return becomes feasible. UNHCR will also increase efforts to facilitate the admission of new arrivals from Myanmar at border camps through the revival of the Provincial Admissions Boards, which ceased functioning in 2001. The Office will continue to re-register the camp population, with the aim of preparing refugees for eventual repatriation. In mid-2003, the Government announced plans to transfer to the camps all recognised Myanmar refugees in urban areas, as well as other asylum-seekers. UNHCR will assist with this endeavour in 2004. Pending the implementation of a viable admissions process at the border, the Office will continue to conduct refugee status determination (RSD) for Myanmar asylum-seekers in urban areas.

As part of efforts to ensure respect for refugee rights, UNHCR has established a comprehensive programme to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and will continue to implement this in 2004. The programme covers prevention and awareness raising activities, including a series of workshops for refugee women and a parallel series for refugee men. The programme also provides co-ordinated response mechanisms such as an incident reporting system, legal representation and advocacy for victims. UNHCR will continue to work with the Government to ensure that serious criminal offences in the camps are dealt with according to Thai law. While seeking to reunite separated children with their families, UNHCR will also continue to monitor their welfare in the camps and ensure the provision of appropriate services.

For the non-Myanmar urban group, which includes refugees from 25 different nationalities, UNHCR will continue to conduct RSD and ensure that adequate protection and assistance are provided while durable solutions are sought for them. The Office will issue refugee certificates to recognised refugees and protection documents for asylum-seekers. In addition, it will intervene with the authorities in the event of arrest, detention or the threat of deportation. The Office will continue to promote Thailand's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the adoption of national legislation on asylum. Activities will focus on enhancing awareness of UNHCR's mandate, international standards and refugee law among key Government counterparts, civil society and refugee communities. National institutions and NGOs will remain the focus of efforts to build the capacity of existing networks relating to asylum issues.

Assistance

As in previous years, the bulk of assistance to refugees in the camps along the border with Myanmar will continue to be furnished by NGOs. UNHCR will provide international protection to refugees and asylum-seekers by working in close co-ordination with NGO partners. Particular attention will be given to ensuring *non-refoulement*, physical protection, the administration of justice in the camps, the right of movement, registration and issuance of identification documents. Efforts will also focus on relocating refugee camps away from the border and initiating a dialogue with refugees on their prospects of durable solutions. UNHCR will continue to increase awareness raising activities to ensure that SGBV cases are promptly reported, and that appropriate action is taken to address incidents, including the provision of psycho-social support to victims. The protection of particularly vulnerable individuals will remain a priority for UNHCR through identification, tracing and regular follow-up.

A local NGO will continue to implement a programme on environmental improvement. In addition, collaboration between UNHCR and UNEP initiated in 2003 will be strengthened in 2004. UNHCR will provide funds for the project; UNEP will contribute a matching amount and provide technical resources for the implementation of environmental activities in refugee camps. Vocational training activities will be expanded to other camps in 2004. These will provide opportunities for refugees to learn skills that will be useful when they return to Myanmar. UNHCR will also continue to ensure that all children have access to education.

Administrative and material support will be provided to the Government to ensure better protection for refugees. In particular, provincial and district offices will be supported to enhance their capacity to protect asylum-seekers and refugees. Efforts will be made to ensure that refugees have proper access to the Thai judicial system; appropriate training will be provided to Government and NGO staff working in the camps to bolster this initiative.

Outside the camps, UNHCR assists 400 refugees of various nationalities. In addition to this group, 1,500 Myanmar refugees living outside the camps (who are recognised individually as refugees) will continue to be assisted until their transfer to the border camps is completed in 2004.

Desired impact

UNHCR will pursue its interventions with the Government to support the establishment of a fair and predictable procedure for status determination and the admission

of new arrivals, so that the basic needs of all refugees are met. Community-based support systems already in place should lead to a reduction in the incidence of SGBV. UNHCR's presence in the camps will further increase awareness of refugee rights, help maintain external and internal camp security and prevent arrest, detention and deportation.

Organisation and implementation

Management structure

The regional office in Bangkok will be supported by field offices in Kanchanaburi, Mae Hong Son and Mae Sot. In 2004, the operation in Thailand will be implemented by 61 staff (14 international, including four JPOs, and 47 national). The Bangkok office also covers activities in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

Co-ordination

The Office participates in various inter-agency meetings and thematic working groups, which are organised by the Government, NGOs, the Resident Co-ordinator, the UN Country Team and the Security Management Team.

Offices
Bangkok
Kanchanaburi
Mae Hong Son
Mae Sot

Partners
Government agencies
Ministry of Interior
Operation Centre for Displaced Persons
NGOs
Catholic Office for Emergency Relief for Refugees
Handicap International
International Rescue Committee
Shanti Volunteer Association
Vluchtelingen zorg Refugee Care
Others
UNEP

Budget (USD)	
Activities and services	Annual Programme
Protection, monitoring and co-ordination	1,701,288
Community services	436,266
Domestic needs	820,805
Education	568,597
Food	3,827
Forestry	130,558
Health	208,319
Legal assistance	631,531
Operational support (to agencies)	227,148
Sanitation	52,569
Shelter / other infrastructure	178,149
Transport / logistics	32,114
Water	117
Total Operations	4,991,288
Programme support	1,330,158
Total	6,321,446

A Karen refugee girl from Myanmar.
UNHCR / K. Singhaseni



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