

Thailand

Main Objectives

- Ensure that admission and reception of refugees from Myanmar takes place in accordance with international standards.
- Ensure and verify respect for fundamental refugee rights in camps.
- Prepare Myanmar refugees for durable solutions.
- Ensure respect for asylum for urban refugees, through adherence to international standards of protection.
- Promote accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and adherence to international refugee law.



Planning Figures

Population	Jan. 2003	Dec. 2003
Myanmar Refugees (camps)	110,436	112,000
Urban Refugees ¹	2,000	4,000
Total	112,436	116,000

¹ Myanmar refugees in urban areas, Laotians in Ban Napho, and refugees of other nationalities.

Working Environment

Recent Developments

Efforts by the Government to find a durable solution for the 110,000 Myanmar refugees at the Thai/Myanmar border were hindered by a number of incidents. The result was a deterioration in relations between the Governments of Thailand and Myanmar, precisely when the Thai Government was hoping for a rapid rapprochement with Myanmar, normalisation of the relationship, and the eventual repatriation of many migrants and refugees.

New arrivals in the camps averaged 229 per month in the first half of the year, against an average of 737 persons per month during the first half of 2001. Overall, the Government maintained its humanitarian approach towards refugees. Outside the camps, the Government has made serious attempts to address the presence of a huge popu-

Total Requirements: USD 5,779,835

lation of illegal migrants in the country. It has been estimated that there are some half a million unregistered migrants along the Thai/Myanmar border. Among this population are a significant number of refugees. UNHCR has reaffirmed the importance of clearly differentiating between refugees and illegal migrants.

UNHCR continues to monitor developments in Myanmar and assess refugee attitudes towards voluntary repatriation. However, several fundamental conditions need to be met for voluntary repatriation to be considered, such as the removal of the cause of flight, the safe and voluntary nature of repatriation and the possibility of international monitoring of the return process.

Constraints

Thailand has not acceded to the international refugee instruments. The Thai Government gives Myanmar refugees temporary asylum in nine camps along the border. Some camps are located too close to the border and remain at risk of military incursions.

In legal terms, the Government refers to the camp population as “displaced persons” fleeing fighting. For UNHCR, these persons are mandate refugees along with all others living outside the camps. They are in Thailand due to the fear of persecution in their country of origin. The working arrangements between UNHCR and the Government continue to be vague in terms of content and interpretation, although, at the practical level, it has been possible for UNHCR and the Government to function in a mutually supportive manner. Refugees outside camps lead an uncertain existence and sometimes get caught up by security operations, during which they could either be detained or deported as illegal migrants under Thai immigration law.

Strategy

Protection and Solutions

While the Office will continue to actively prepare for durable solutions in 2003, it will also strive to: revive the admission procedure for new arrivals along the border; seek admission to the border camps for those Myanmar asylum-seekers recognised as refugees by UNHCR; and ensure, as long as repatriation remains unsafe, that the Government continues to grant asylum to refugees currently in camps but not formally admitted by the Admission Boards. With the Government’s decision to push ahead with the identification and deportation of illegal migrants, UNHCR’s challenge will be to ensure that the refugees among the migrant workers are identified and protected from forcible return to their country of origin. This will require an enhanced working arrangement with the Government to allow asylum-seekers among illegal migrants to apply for recognition as refugees.

For non-Myanmar asylum-seekers, UNHCR will continue to conduct RSD and ensure that refugees are at least granted temporary asylum and that

their fundamental rights are respected until a durable solution is found for them. UNHCR will advocate on their behalf in cases of arrest, detention or threat of deportation.

In 2003, UNHCR will continue to promote accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention and the adoption of national legislation on asylum. The Office will also work to enhance awareness of UNHCR’s mandate, international protection standards and refugee law. As part of its promotion strategy, UNHCR will increasingly focus on national institutions and national NGOs to further foster the involvement of national networks and build their capacity.

Assistance

As basic assistance activities in the camps are covered by existing NGOs and Government programmes, UNHCR will focus on ensuring that the special needs of most vulnerable refugees are met. The physical protection of women and children against sexual and other violence within and outside camps calls for continued vigilance in 2003. UNHCR has raised the issue at various levels with the NGOs, the Government and refugee leaders. UNHCR continues to make individual case interventions, while it is in the process of setting up a system to address the issue in a systematic and sustainable manner.

UNHCR will continue to carry out its activities with a view to having a positive impact on the preservation of the environment in all border camps. Specific activities will include the ongoing environment of education programme in camps, bringing related issues to the fore in school curricula. UNHCR will also focus on supporting tree nursery programmes within the camps and the maintenance and prevention of land degradation resulting from roadside and pathway deterioration, the loss of topsoil and restoring streams and fresh water resources.

UNHCR will support the Government plan to conduct a new registration exercise for all refugees. UNHCR will also start a wide-ranging vocational training programme in all camps to prepare refugees for repatriation when conditions allow. Outside the camps, UNHCR assists some 400 refugees from various nationalities. In addition to this group, some 1,500 Myanmar refugees living outside the camps but individually recognised as refugees under UNHCR’s

mandate, will be assisted in 2003, pending the implementation of a Government decision to transfer them to the camps.

Desired Impact

Through UNHCR interventions, it is hoped that a fair and predictable procedure for determining the admission of new asylum-seekers will be established by the Government, the basic needs of refugees will be met without discrimination, a community-based support system will be put in place to protect women and children against sexual and other violence, registration and documentation will be updated, and voluntary repatriation will remain a viable future option for the refugees. UNHCR's presence will help maintain external and internal camp security. Continued measures will seek to prevent the arrest, detention and deportation of asylum-seekers and refugees. Public information campaigns will help mitigate negative public attitudes towards refugees.



Karen refugees from Myanmar at a distribution centre. UNHCR / K. Singhaseni

Organisation and Implementation

Management Structure

Three Field Offices in Kanchanaburi, Mae Hong Son and Mae Sot report to the office in Bangkok. In 2003, the operation in Thailand will be implemented by 59 staff (13 international, including four JPOs, and 46 national). The Office in Thailand also covers operations in Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam.

Co-ordination

The Office actively participates in various inter-agency meetings and thematic working groups organised through the Resident Co-ordinator, the Heads of Agencies, the Security Management Team, the Steering Committee (Operation Managers/Administrative Officers) and others. UNHCR also provides input to the UNDAF process under the co-ordinating umbrella of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Offices

Bangkok

Kanchanaburi
Mae Hong Son
Mae Sot

Partners

Government Agencies

Operation Centre for Displaced Persons, Ministry of Interior

NGOs

Catholic Office for Emergency Relief for Refugees
Handicap International
International Rescue Committee
Shanti Volunteer Association
Vluchtelingen zorg Refugee Care

Budget (USD)

Activities and Services	Annual Programme
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,245,776
Community Services	252,416
Domestic Needs	1,008,249
Education	627,515
Food	2,838
Forestry	127,685
Health	146,296
Legal Assistance	703,048
Operational Support (to Agencies)	217,872
Sanitation	23,961
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	97,204
Transport / Logistics	33,780
Water	34,636
Total Operations	4,521,276
Programme Support	1,258,559
Total	5,779,835