

SPCP - Thailand

Update, October 2007

Overview

The Strengthening Protection Capacity Project (SPCP) was launched in Thailand in July 2006 with the objective of remedying many of the persistent protection problems that characterize the lives of the thousands of camp and urban based refugees in Thailand.



To date, over US\$1.5 million has been received from the US and Australian Governments, and the High Commissioner's Special Projects Fund to implement projects which are bringing about significant improvements in the lives of refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border.

Achievements

Developing a comprehensive response to refugee needs

The SPCP was introduced at a time when a consortium of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and UNHCR had launched the 'Comprehensive Plan Addressing the Needs of Displaced Persons'. The SPCP complemented this process through the publication of a gaps analysis and the development of projects to remedy the gaps identified. The result of this continuing collaboration is a comprehensive strategy covering a range of sectors, including Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) prevention and response, child protection, health and psychosocial services, education, and livelihoods. This process is ongoing, with new interventions to address remaining gaps under development. To ensure that the SPCP project package continues to reflect current funding requirements, a quarterly review of projects by UNHCR and NGOs has been

initiated. UNHCR and NGO Directors held a retreat in August, at which the state of implementation of the Comprehensive Plan and remaining gaps were key topics.

Creating a safer and healthier environment

SPCP projects are helping to provide a safer environment for women and children. Projects addressing SGBV are providing support services and referrals for survivors and sensitizing communities to the causes and consequences of SGBV. A reasonable degree of refugee participation and sense of ownership are critical to the process, and, as such, community-based organizations (CBOs) are provided with the knowledge and resources to prevent and respond to SGBV. Projects strengthening SGBV support mechanisms such as temporary safe houses are now in the preliminary stage of implementation.



Additionally, SPCP interventions are helping to strengthen the response to drug and alcohol addiction, improve health education for children and adolescents and increase recreational activities for unaccompanied children living in boarding houses. The ongoing provision of identification cards to refugees aged twelve years and above, through the Ministry of Interior, will improve documentation and legal security of camp-based refugees.

Expanding opportunities for self reliance

UNHCR is currently partnering with ZOA Refugee Care in the implementation of a pilot project which engages refugees and local Thais in agricultural activities outside of camps. This is a ground-breaking intervention

in that it provides refugees with an opportunity to earn an income outside of the camp environment. Funding opportunities to replicate this activity in other camps are currently being explored. Further livelihoods projects, focusing upon providing the disabled with opportunities to earn an income and helping refugees to start and expand their businesses are under development.



These projects follow the recommendations of the UNHCR/ILO Livelihoods Reports, produced under the SPCP, which outline a comprehensive strategy to increase self reliance of refugees on the Thai-Myanmar border.

Engaging civil society

As part of the SPCP initiative, the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) is implementing a project to engage Thai civil society and local organizations in refugee protection. Initial progress has been relatively slow partly due to the apparent lack of public awareness about the plight of refugees, despite their presence in Thailand



for more than twenty years. The rights advocacy approach has needed to be carefully calibrated to the difficult political environment prevailing in Thailand since the coup in September 2006. Emphasis has been

placed upon highlighting the economic benefits that would arise from allowing greater freedom of movement and increasing opportunities to earn an income for refugees. The project has recently formed a coalition of civil society actors drawn from the business, labour and faith communities with the objectives of raising awareness on the situation of refugees and advocating for policies that will respect their rights and enhance their potential contributions. As the coalition has just been formed, the impact of this intervention will be assessed between now and the end of the year.

Complementing UNHCR’s existing protection initiatives

UNHCR through the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has established Legal Assistance Centres (LACs) in three camps. They aim to strengthen the rule of law, provide greater refugee access to the Thai justice system and improve traditional justice mechanisms. UNHCR is further supporting a separate project with the Ministry of Justice on strengthening the administration of justice in the camps which is meant to complement the services of the LACs. Project implementation is expected to commence soon. Linkage of these complementary protection initiatives to existing and future SPCP projects, particularly those providing support to SGBV survivors, is being explored.



On a broader note, SPCP is working in tandem with the refugee resettlement programme in Thailand. With little opportunity to return home or to integrate locally, resettlement has offered the opportunity to start a new life in a third country to thousands of refugees. In the meantime, the continuing protection needs of the remaining refugees, including those awaiting resettlement, cannot

be overlooked. SPCP and resettlement are interlocking elements in UNHCR's overall protection strategy in the short to medium terms, and possibly beyond.

Corporate partnerships

The Council of Business Leaders (COBL), comprising of representatives from Manpower, Merck, Microsoft, Nike and Pricewaterhouse Coopers, visited Thailand in May 2007. To build upon the momentum of this visit, UNHCR has since formed a Bangkok-based Council of Business Leaders which met recently for the first time to discuss and develop refugee initiatives in Thailand. Manpower has been particularly active in exploring the possibilities of placing a small group of refugees and Thais from villages surrounding the camps in local industries, as well as expanding vocational training opportunities. In general support from the COBL has been positive, albeit uneven, and several initial project ideas committed by COBL members have yet to materialize.



UNHCR has also received funding in 2007 from ninemillion.org, a public-private sector initiative supported by COBL members, to implement projects increasing educational and recreational opportunities for children and youth.

Challenges

The interventions mentioned above are helping to bring about significant improvements in the lives of refugees. However, with over thirty projects yet to receive funding, continued support from donors to further strengthen refugee protection in Thailand is essential. Until the time comes when a durable solution can be found for all refugees, sustainability of projects is crucial.

As a priority, funding is required to enhance the overall protection environment through improved camp security, as well as bolstering camp management and providing necessary psycho-social support services to SGBV survivors and other refugees in need. Following the adoption of SGBV standard operating procedures, UNHCR's focus would now be on the effective implementation of the system established and the efficient functioning of support services. Amidst all this, there is a need to focus not only on the immediate needs of SGBV survivors but also those in the medium and longer terms. Scarcity of appropriate and properly capacitated implementing partners across the nine camps remains a challenge.



To expand refugee self reliance, the immediate priorities are to secure the necessary commitment from NGOs to implement livelihoods projects, and to obtain the necessary authorization from the Royal Thai Government (RTG) to allow refugees to earn an income outside of the camps. UNHCR is engaging in regular consultations with livelihoods stakeholders to ensure the development of concrete interventions based upon the findings of the Livelihoods Reports. Additionally, UNHCR and partners are engaging in ongoing advocacy with the RTG, aimed at easing restrictions on freedom of movement and increasing the opportunities for refugees to earn an income.