

# Thailand

## AT A GLANCE

### Main Objectives and Activities

Ensure that the fundamentals of international protection, particularly the principles of asylum and *non-refoulement*, are respected and effectively implemented; ensure that refugee populations at the Thai-Myanmar border are safe from armed incursions, that the civilian character of refugee camps is maintained and that their protection and assistance needs are adequately met; promptly identify and protect individual asylum-seekers; promote the development of national refugee legislation and status determination procedures consistent with international standards.

### Impact

- The vast majority of some 19,000 asylum-seekers from Myanmar were admitted to Thai soil, although the Thai Government applied more restrictive criteria than those recommended by UNHCR.
- The civilian nature of the camps was maintained and none of the refugee camps were subject to cross-border attacks.
- The ongoing registration procedure in the camps enabled UNHCR to effectively identify vulnerable persons and their special needs (subsequently addressed by appropriate NGOs).
- As no progress was made towards the regularisation of the status of urban refugees, UNHCR gave priority to resettlement as a durable solution for this group.



Persons of Concern				
Main Refugee Origin/Type of Population	Total in Country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent Female	Per cent under 18
Myanmar (Refugees)	104,600	104,600	48	49

Income and Expenditure (USD)				
Annual Programme Budget				
Revised Budget	Income from Contributions <sup>1</sup>	Other Funds Available <sup>2</sup>	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
5,389,786	3,420,711	1,721,480	5,142,191	5,142,019

<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.

The above figure do not include costs at Headquarters.



## WORKING ENVIRONMENT

### The Context

Although voluntary repatriation is considered the most appropriate solution for Myanmar refugees at the Thai-Myanmar border, the necessary pre-conditions for an organised repatriation were still not met in 2000. Two hostage-taking incidents by Myanmar insurgents (Myanmar Embassy in October 1999 and Ratchaburi Hospital in January 2000) had a negative impact on the initially substantial reserves of public sympathy towards Myanmar refugees. Under growing public pressure, the Government limited access to new arrivals and restricted the formal admission of refugees to the camps. UNHCR alleviated some of the pressure by agreeing to the Government's request to resettle the entire urban Myanmar refugee population at Maneeloy Burmese Students Centre (MBSC).

### Constraints

These developments led the Thai authorities to implement the Working Arrangements agreed upon with UNHCR in 1998 in an increasingly restrictive manner. The criteria used for the admission of asylum-seekers by the Provincial Admission Boards were often limited to persons fleeing actual and confirmed fighting, as

opposed to persons fleeing fighting and its consequences. Transparent and uniform procedures have yet to be implemented by the Admission Boards.

Access by UNHCR to new arrivals was sometimes impeded or delayed. A closer dialogue with the camp population was hampered by the Government's delay in authorising the establishment of a working base from which UNHCR workers could conduct field activities in the camps. The Government reaffirmed its harmonisation policy whereby all Myanmar refugees and asylum-seekers in Bangkok should move to the border, from whence they seek admission to the camps. However, no practical steps have yet been undertaken for the actual transfer of these persons to the camps.

### Funding

The general funding constraints of the Office led to a budget reduction of 20 per cent. Several activities had to be cancelled, including a survey of the protection and special needs of women and children at the border camps, recruitment of community service staff for each camp and improvement of the living conditions at detention centres in Bangkok. The fact that vehicles for the field offices were not replaced affected essential monitoring visits to the refugee camps.



## ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACT

### Protection and Solutions

There were a few incidents in which asylum-seekers from Myanmar were denied access to Thai territory, yet the majority were eventually admitted and had their cases submitted to the Provincial Admission Boards. Ad hoc UNHCR interventions at the border and in Bangkok contributed to the high rate of admission. A total of 5,414 persons were formally admitted, while 500 were rejected. Of these 500, two groups totalling 268 persons were deported despite UNHCR's objection. Late in the year, UNHCR received confirmation of an open invitation to attend Admission Board sessions as an observer. The authorities agreed with UNHCR's requests that the voluntary nature of any spontaneous return should be verified and that refugees be fully aware of the conditions prevailing in their destinations prior to return.

The identification of vulnerable groups, as a result of the ongoing registration exercise, allowed UNHCR to draw the attention of NGOs to groups such as unaccompanied minors, female heads of household, the elderly and the disabled. During the year, 9,726 new arrivals and newborn babies were registered at the camps.

In the absence of domestic refugee legislation, UNHCR continued to conduct refugee status determination for non-Myanmar asylum-seekers and recognised 135 urban refugees under its mandate. UNHCR systematically reviewed the situation of long-staying refugees and promoted the early resettlement of vulnerable cases. The number of resettlement departures was higher than in previous years. From MBSC, 1,111 refugees departed for resettlement. At the end of the year, 943 refugees remained at MBSC; 370 of them had already been accepted for resettlement and the rest were under consideration by prospective resettlement countries. Sixty-three non-Myanmar refugees from various countries were also resettled.

### Activities and Assistance

**Community Services:** Through camp committees, UNHCR organised sports activities for children and teenagers. Social counselling and family visits were undertaken regularly to improve the overall atmosphere at MBSC. A social counsellor regularly visited the Special Detention Centre (SDC) in Bangkok.

**Crop Production:** An agricultural self-sufficiency project was initiated at MBSC under the patronage of the King

of Thailand. It helped 30 residents with an agricultural background to grow vegetables and raise livestock. The products were later sold to the residents and at the local market. The participants kept 80 per cent of their profits and paid 20 per cent into a revolving fund for the project.

**Domestic Needs/Household Support:** The distribution of cooking fuel to the refugee population at the border, and to MBSC residents, served to reduce environmental degradation caused by the gathering of firewood. Sixty-four home visits were conducted to assess the assistance needs of urban refugees. UNHCR social counsellors oriented urban refugees by providing them with information on assistance available to them (education, health and social services, and income-generating projects). Vulnerable cases were referred to appropriate organisations. UNHCR made donations to three social centres assisting vulnerable persons such as terminally ill HIV/AIDS patients, unaccompanied minors, and minors with parents in detention.

**Education:** As a pilot project, two library buildings were built in Mae Kong Kha camp and 46 children's books were translated into refugees' own languages, with refugees participating in all phases of the project. A contribution was made to four local Thai schools located in areas affected by recent influxes of refugees. A total of 150 students from MBSC attended the Burman school, plus 96 at the Karen school and 40 at the Mon school. A further 228 adult refugees benefited from vocational training and English classes to improve their chances of self-reliance upon resettlement. Cultural orientation classes were also provided at MBSC for refugees scheduled for resettlement. Refugee volunteer teachers at the SDC in Bangkok were provided with textbooks and stationery. Sewing equipment and training were provided for refugee women so that they could make clothes for themselves and their children. A carpentry workshop was also built at the Centre to enable refugees to develop their skills. The Bangkok Refugee Centre (BRC) supported formal education for refugees eligible for enrolment in local public Thai schools. Scholarships gave a few refugees access to higher education. The Centre provided informal education, such as English and Thai language courses and vocational training. Pre-school classes and recreational activities were also organised at the Centre. In total, all 98 refugee children in Bangkok in 2000 benefited from formal or informal education, and 82 adults, including 28 women, participated in education and training activities. Upon completion of training courses, women were encouraged to apply for start-up loans for small business initiatives.

**Food:** Residents of MBSC received weekly dry food rations, consisting of rice, preserved fish, shrimp paste, chicken, fresh vegetables, eggs, salt and cooking oil. Dry rations were introduced in 1999 to reduce dependence on assistance, but several hundred long-staying refugees refused to adjust to dry rations and continued to receive cooked food. A supplementary feeding programme was implemented for pregnant women, malnourished children and tuberculosis and HIV patients.

**Forestry:** At Umpium camp, to which 15,000 people were reallocated from two camps during 1999, an environmental project was initiated to prevent further degradation. Environment committees, as well as students and women's groups, disseminated environmental messages in the camp and supported refugee initiatives such as fishponds, model organic gardening centres, model kitchen gardens, seeds and toilet construction. UNHCR provided the committees with equipment, educational materials and training on various environmental projects. Locations prone to erosion during the rainy season were reforested. Over 12,600 trees and 6,400 seeds were distributed. Thirty-four culverts and 500 water diversion channels were dug to distribute and divert water. Environmental training courses were furthermore organised in all ten border camps.

**Health/Nutrition:** Three nurses and a doctor ran the MBSC clinic for 40 to 80 patients per day. During the year, 423 patients were referred to various regional hospitals. Two vaccination campaigns were undertaken at the Centre. Family planning education was conducted at the Centre. Condoms were regularly distributed, as well as information on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Basic training in mental health and counselling was provided for 25 residents and a mental health survey of the population was conducted in July. As a result, individual counselling was provided for 260 persons, particularly in the areas of mental health, drug abuse and domestic violence. The BRC provided free basic medical services to urban refugees. In case of emergency or serious illness, refugees were referred to Government hospitals and costs were covered by UNHCR. The BRC medical team visited refugees in detention twice a month to monitor their health. Newborn refugee children were referred to the relevant district office to register the birth. Special attention was paid to refugee women, who often developed stress-related conditions as a result of their precarious situation in Thailand.

**Legal Assistance:** UNHCR and the Ministry of Interior regularly updated the joint registration database for the border population. Interpreters were hired both at the

border and in Bangkok to assist with interviews of refugees and asylum-seekers in a total of 14 languages. Twenty-four seminars on refugee law and UNHCR's mandate were organised for more than 1,000 people. The seminars were attended by border police and military officers, government officials from Thailand, Viet Nam and Cambodia, peacekeeping forces, NGOs working at the border, Thai students, airline staff, journalists and UN staff. *NGO Field Guidelines* and the *Guiding Principles for IDPs* were translated into Thai and widely distributed. UNHCR installed public address towers in seven camps to enhance camp security. Telecommunications networks were established with provincial or district authorities in the four border provinces to enable the local authorities to communicate rapidly with UNHCR when new arrivals crossed the border. A pilot landmine risk education project was initiated in Tak Province, as a result of an increase in mine incidents at the border. This preventive programme was also linked to existing rehabilitation activities in the camps. Educational tools for mine awareness are being developed with the assistance of refugee artists. A mine risk database was configured and information-gathering interviews started both in refugee camps and in Thai villages. Women's organisations in the camps were involved as they provide an essential community network with which to develop the programme. The programme is to be included in the camp schools curriculum. A local exhibition of paintings, "Images: Refugee in Thailand", was held with the works of 29 Thai artists and a contribution from Karen refugee artists. The exhibition highlighted Thailand's role in assisting refugees over a quarter of a century. The sale of the paintings benefited refugees in Thailand and elsewhere. In November, on the occasion of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its co-operation with Thailand, UNHCR organised a symposium on the Indochinese refugee crisis with the participation of Thai and international eminent persons who had played a major role in the Indo-Chinese refugee saga.

**Operational Support (to Agencies):** UNHCR supported implementing partners with logistics and telecommunication costs to allow the smooth delivery of assistance activities. UNHCR covered the running costs of the BRC, and refugee volunteers at the Centre received stipends.

**Sanitation:** At MBSC, the latrines were maintained and repaired as necessary to provide a minimum of one toilet for eight people. Regular disposal of human waste and garbage kept sanitary conditions under control. Thermal fogging took place twice to control out-

breaks of Dengue fever and fly papers were distributed to residents.

*Shelter/Other Infrastructure:* Roads and ditches at the MBSC were maintained to ensure vehicular access and infrastructure was repaired as required. UNHCR also contributed to the improvement of accommodation and infrastructure at the SDC in Bangkok to provide a healthier environment for detained refugees.

*Transport/Logistics:* Transport was provided 1,090 refugees to reach the MBSC. The costs of food delivery to the Centre were also covered. UNHCR facilitated the departure from Thailand of 152 non-Myanmar refugees to resettlement countries. A total of 18 refugees were also able to voluntarily return to their countries of origin.

*Water:* The water supply at MBSC was consistently above the minimum daily WHO standard, with an average of 50-70 litres per person per day. Maintenance of all water supply systems was undertaken on a daily basis.

## ORGANISATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

### Management

UNHCR's structure in Thailand consisted of the regional office in Bangkok and three offices at the Thai-Myanmar border. In total, there were 15 UNHCR international staff (including three JPOs) and 49 national staff. The office in Bangkok also provided functional support to the offices in Phnom Penh and in Hanoi. Regular contact was maintained with the UNHCR office in Yangon to obtain information on areas of origin of refugees.

### Working with Others

UNHCR worked with six implementing partners, two local NGOs and four international NGOs. As in previous years, the basic assistance needs of the Myanmar refugees at the border were covered by international NGOs with their own funding sources. UNHCR's assistance programme mainly supported protection activities. UNHCR participated in, and financially supported, the monthly meetings organised by the Committee for Co-ordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand, which is an NGO network to co-ordinate efforts and represent their interests to the Thai Government, international organisations and embassies. UNHCR also participated in two tripartite meetings attended by NGOs, embassies and UNHCR. As a result of the enhanced co-operation between UNHCR and NGOs, a protection group, comprised

of UNHCR and NGO representatives, was formed to address issues of refugee protection and capacity-building.

## OVERALL ASSESSMENT

In the light of the increasing public intolerance and the Government's frustration with the lack of prospects for organised repatriation for the near future, the temporary protection of refugees in Thailand was adversely affected and admission criteria were applied in an increasingly restrictive manner. UNHCR therefore increased its ad hoc protection interventions as well as advocacy activities designed to restore faith in the value of asylum among civil constituencies, government circles and the public at large. The situation further increased the need for a review of the Working Arrangements agreed with the Government in 1998 as the basis of UNHCR's involvement at the Thai-Myanmar border. The provisions of this agreement, which remain of a semi-official nature, were often subject to a range of interpretations. The High Commissioner and the Assistant High Commissioner visited Thailand in October and March respectively, and raised these concerns at the highest level. Despite the negative climate described above, continued co-operation and dialogue with the civilian and military authorities at all levels have permitted the vast majority of persons who sought admission in Thailand to remain on Thai soil.

### Offices

#### Bangkok

Kanchanaburi  
Mae Hong Son  
Mae Sot

### Partners

#### Government Agencies

Ministry of Interior - Operations Centre for Displaced Persons

#### NGOs

Burmese Border Consortium (Christ Church of Thailand, Diakonia, International Rescue Committee, Jesuit Refugee Service Thailand, Thai Baptist Missionary Fellowship, ZOA Refugee Care-Netherlands)  
Catholic Office for Emergency Relief and Refugees  
Foundation in Support of Refugee Assistance  
Handicap International  
International Rescue Committee  
Shanti Volunteer Association

Financial Report (USD)				
Expenditure Breakdown	Current Year's Projects		Prior Years' Projects	
		notes		notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,541,194		0	
Community Services	11,485		263	
Crop Production	8,123		0	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	659,263		13,247	
Education	122,168		8,765	
Food	239,960		59,892	
Forestry	61,524		1,552	
Health / Nutrition	164,964		68,290	
Legal Assistance	348,963		37,223	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	214,944		109,122	
Sanitation	35,786		48,853	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	65,667		167,201	
Transport / Logistics	18,135		26,404	
Water	2,135		10,505	
Transit Accounts	3,862		0	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	384,644		(174,884)	
<b>Sub-total Operational</b>	<b>3,882,817</b>		<b>376,433</b>	
Programme Support	1,120,471		126,545	
<b>Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries</b>	<b>5,003,288</b>	(3)	<b>502,978</b>	(6)
Unliquidated Obligations	138,731	(3)	0	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5,142,019</b>	<b>(1) (3)</b>	<b>502,978</b>	

#### Instalments with Implementing Partners

Payments Made	1,231,831		237,936	
Reporting Received	847,187		412,820	
<b>Balance</b>	<b>384,644</b>		<b>(174,884)</b>	
Outstanding 1 January	0		361,201	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		45,247	
Currency Adjustment	(679)		(6,303)	
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>383,965</b>		<b>134,767</b>	

#### Unliquidated Obligations

Outstanding 1 January	0		738,732	(6)
New Obligations	5,142,019	(1)	0	
Disbursements	5,003,288	(3)	502,978	(6)
Cancellations	0		153,441	(6)
<b>Outstanding 31 December</b>	<b>138,731</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>82,313</b>	<b>(6)</b>

Figures which cross reference to Accounts:

(1) Annex to Statement 1

(3) Schedule 3

(6) Schedule 6