

Key Objectives

In 2006, the Government of Canada accepted 806 Karen refugees for resettlement in Canada. These refugees lived in Mae La Oon camp in Thailand, 800 kms northwest of Bangkok. Most of the people in the camp have been refugees in Thailand since the mid 1990s when they were forced to flee widespread persecution in Burma. Their villages had been burned and both men and women were forced into slave labour, building roads and acting as porters for troops.

The key objectives of this project are to ensure a more targeted and efficient service on the part of the service provider community and a faster and smoother adjustment on the part of the resettled refugees by making the Canadian service provider community more aware of the Karen people through individual needs assessment reports and a cultural profile.

The individual needs assessment reports give individualized information about each person interviewed. The cultural profile gives a brief introduction to the Karen people, their lives in Burma and in Thailand, a description of some of their cultural values, and a discussion of issues that may hamper their smooth adjustment to Canada.

Beneficiaries

- 806 Karen refugees living in Mae La Oon camp who have been accepted for resettlement to Canada in 2006
- The Karen community in Canada
- Canadian communities and Canadian organizations dealing with Karen

Project Details

Donor and Partner

Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Project Countries

- Thailand
- Canada

Project Start Date

July 2006

End Date

31 October 2006

Assessing the Individual Needs of Karen Refugees in Thailand



Shy smiles in Mae Oon.
© IOM 2006 Photo: Peter Salnikowski

“The camp is very deep in the forest and access in the rainy season (when we did the survey) is by boat only. There is no phone service or other means of communication there so we could communicate with the interviewers only on the weekends when they went to the nearest town.”

- Peter Salnikowski, IOM Cultural Orientation Coordinator for South East Asia

Concrete Benefits

- The project will help the Canadian community of destination to better understand Karen values, customs, and life experiences.
- Canadian communities will better be able to target their services and head off problems before they have even begun.
- It is expected that a better understanding of the refugees would lead to a more welcoming attitude on the part of the whole community.
- Issues that may hamper the Karens' smooth adjustment to Canada will have been identified.



Karen boys undergoing initiation ceremonies to become Buddhist novices.
© IOM 2006 Photo: Peter Salnikowski



Mae La Oon camp.
© IOM 2006 Photo: Peter Salnikowski

Project Description

IOM conducted an individualized assessment of 238 Karen families for the Government of Canada, representing 806 individuals, from Mae La Oon camp in Thailand, bound for resettlement to Canada. IOM also delivered a Cultural Profile of the Karen people, outlining Karen culture in general. Lastly, IOM provided a photo-essay of the life of the Karen in their homes in the camp.

Mae La Oon is the most isolated of the nine refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. It lies in deep jungle, a three-hour drive in dry conditions, from the nearest town. In the rainy season (June to October) it is accessible only by boat. It houses some 15,000 people.

The project will be repeated this year, following its successful implementation in 2006.

Principal IOM Activities

- Create a questionnaire geared towards giving service providers and sponsors in Canada with personal information about each individual they will be assisting.
- Produce individualized needs assessment reports based on the above-mentioned questionnaire.
- Create a photo essay showing the day-to-day life of a family in the camp
- Ask young children to draw pictures of their hopes and fears regarding Canada. The children's description of their pictures will be recorded and included with the pictures drawn.
- Write a Karen Cultural Profile.

To learn more about this project and other IOM activities, please visit www.iom.int/activities.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. As an intergovernmental organization, IOM acts with its partners in the international community to: assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration; advance understanding of migration issues; encourage social and economic development through migration; and uphold the human dignity and well-being of migrants.



IOM International Organization for Migration

For further information, please contact:

Peter Salnikowski

International Organization for Migration

183 Rajanakarn Building, 18th floor South Sathorn Road
Sathorn District, Bangkok 10120, Thailand

E-mail: iombangkok@iom.int • Website: www.iom-seasia.org