

Project reference

REH/2004/078-459

EC Partners

- UNHCR/ZOA Refugee Care
- Karen Education Department

Facts and Figures

- Duration: **2004-2005**
- EC contribution: **€1.2 million**
- **31 709 Karen and 6 618 Karenni** attended school
- **1 027 Karen and 347 Karenni teachers** trained
- **23 Thai schools** directly benefited
- **99%-100% student enrolment rate** for most camps

**EUROPEAN
COMMISSION**

Migration and Asylum

A brighter future for Karen refugees

"Without education, children will have no chance in life, and our people will not thrive...Young people don't want weapons anymore."

A young teacher at Mae Ra Ma Luang Camp on the Thai-Burma/Myanmar border

**Context: An ongoing crisis**

Thailand has experienced mass refugee influxes from Burma/Myanmar for over two decades due to sustained and ongoing human rights violations committed against ethnic minorities in Burma/Myanmar. The refugees are mainly drawn from the Karen and Karenni ethnic groups with smaller numbers of other groups such as the Shan and Mon. Refugee numbers have risen from 20 000 in 1984 to 150 000 at present.

Education is a fundamental right for all. Yet in the camps it takes on added significance. Schools are highly valued as children are seen as the key to community and cultural survival. Access to schools also provides for a sense of normalcy in refugees' daily life, otherwise severely affected by the years spent living in camps and the traumatic reminiscences of flight.

Objective: Creating a sense of normalcy

The Karen Education Project (KEP) was established in seven refugee camps on the Thailand-Burma/Myanmar border in 1997 to improve the quality of education for refugee children and strengthen the capacity of refugee education leadership. Beneficiaries were Karen refugees in general and children in particular. The project focused on upgrading the skills and knowledge of students through new/revised curricula. Teacher training and teaching materials were supported. Emphasis was also placed on ensuring the relevance of the education system to the future of the refugees should they return to Burma/Myanmar (if the political situation permits) or relocate to third countries.

Impact: Giving refugee children a better future

From the refugees and the community leaders' point of view, the education services in the camps have steadily improved over the years. Literacy rates among the refugee population, which are traditionally rather low, are rising and the quality of education is increasing as a result of the schools receiving outside support from NGOs. On top of this, energetic and dedicated young teachers in the camps give the children an education that will provide more options in their lives.