

Learning with The Irrawaddy, No. 39

To accompany the **October 2009** issue of The Irrawaddy magazine.

Selected article extract: *'Free from fear but still struggling' from A Fresh Start*

A. **Activities before reading**

This article is about refugees from the Thai-Burma border being resettled in new countries.

Activity 1

Discussion: What do you think?

Look at the photo



A last goodbye before leaving Ban Mae Surin in June 2009. (Photo: TBBC)

Discussion questions:

- What is happening in the photo?
- Is the man on the bus happy or sad – what do you think?
- Where is he going?
- What is he leaving behind?

Activity 2

Vocabulary

- Check your understanding of some words in the article, by answering this quiz.
✓ Tick the correct answer
- Check your answers before reading the article (?)

Word or phrase

Meaning

- | | |
|----------------------------|--|
| 1. immigrants (<i>n</i>) | a) refugees
b) people returning to their home country
c) people who move to live in another country |
| 2. a mixed blessing | a) something good, like a salad of mixed fruit
b) something part good, part bad
c) a wonderful opportunity |
| 3. employment (<i>n</i>) | a) paid work
b) play
c) something to do |
| 4. consumes (<i>vb</i>) | a) eats up
b) helps
c) makes difficult |

- | | | |
|----|---------------------------|---|
| 5. | assistance (<i>n</i>) | a) money
b) help
c) food |
| 6. | support themselves | a) hold themselves up
b) look after their health
c) work and earn money |
| 7. | loss of identity | a) to lose your teeth
b) to lose your culture
c) to lose your way |
| 8. | tight-knit (<i>adj</i>) | a) close (to each other)
b) closely woven (material)
c) knitted tights |

Activity 3 Vocabulary Practice

After checking your answers, write out a definition of any three words or phrases that you got wrong, or that you think would be useful to remember. Write your answers like this:

'Word or phrase' means answer

Activity 4 Grammar check: Subject-verb agreement ~ singular or plural

Choose the correct form of the verb to agree with the subject in the following sentences.

- Resettlement in third countries provide / provides new educational opportunities.
- Education and healthcare is / are amongst the main advantages of moving to a new country
- Loss of identity in some communities is / are less of a concern
- One challenge facing many refugees is / are learning a new language
- Many Karen people living in the US do / does not ask for help

B. Activities during reading

Activity 5 Vocabulary

As you read the article, find as many different words that mean 'difficult' (*adj*) or 'difficulty' (*n*) as you can.

Write these down. You should find at least five, and you may find more.

Activity 6 Comprehension:

Write your answers to the questions in full sentences.

- Q1: What is the main problem facing refugees in a new country ?
- Q2: Give two reasons why refugees have difficulty getting jobs.
- Q3: What are two benefits of resettlement ?
- Q4: Why is Nai Taing Htaw worried ?
- Q5: What is the strength of Karen refugee communities in the US?

Bonus Question!

If you have time, have a go at this question:

- Q6: The strength of the Karen communities is a mixed blessing. Why is the strength also a weakness?

Activity 7 Summarising: making notes

Read the article again. Make a list of the things the article says are good about resettlement (benefits), and the things that are difficult (problems). Make the list in the form of a table:

Resettlement	
Benefits	Problems

c) Activities after reading**Activity 8 Summarising: writing a paragraph**

Write a short paragraph summarising the main benefits and problems of resettlement. Write at least five sentences. Look back at your notes in activity 7 to help you.

Activity 9 Discussion: Which is which?

Here are three young people, all aged 17, with different opinions about resettlement. Discuss which person might have which opinion, and say why you think so. Draw a line to match the person with their opinion.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>i. Saw Eh Kaw Thaw's parents are both dead. He has two sisters and lives with his grandmother. He has lived in Thailand for ten years.</p> | <p>a. Wants to return to Karen State when it is safe</p> |
| <p>ii. Naw Paw Eh came to Thailand two years ago after her people had to move away from the fighting. Many of her family stayed behind.</p> | <p>b. Wants to settle in Thailand</p> |
| <p>iii. Saw Doh Soe was two years old when his family came to Thailand. He has many friends and enjoys playing football near his house</p> | <p>c. Wants to move to a third country</p> |

Activity 10 Discussion: Resettlement – yes or no?

Discuss your views about resettlement. What are the problems and benefits? In your discussion use:

- Information from the article
- Things you already know
- Things you thought about as you worked on the activities

d) Wider Reading

'Free from fear but still struggling' is an extract from a longer article 'A Fresh Start'. If you have finished all the questions, have a go at reading the rest of the article. Ask your teacher for a copy.

Activity 11 Before reading: Vocabulary Review

Match the word with its type. Each type is only used once.

i	Resettle	a	noun
ii	Resettled	b	verb
iii	Resettlement	c	adjective

Match the word with its meaning

1	foreseeable (<i>adj</i>)	a	limitation
2	shattered (<i>adj</i>)	b	contentious / provoking debate
3	thorough (<i>adj</i>)	c	minor change
4	controversial (<i>adj</i>)	d	forced
5	restriction (<i>n</i>)	e	predictable
6	amendment (<i>n</i>)	f	preventing progress
7	coerced (<i>adj</i>)	g	rigorous
8	hindrance (<i>n</i>)	h	broken

What do you think these phrases mean? Have a go at writing a short definition

A	Give the green light	B	Brain drain
C	Capacity building	D	Cherry-pick
E	Identity fraud		

Activity 12

During reading: Comprehension

Now read the article in four stages, and check your understanding with these short comprehension questions

Paragraphs FS 1 to FS 4 comprehension questions:

- 1 How many different countries are taking refugees from camps? _____
2. Which year will resettlement from Mae Ra Ma Luang and Mae La Oon start _____

Paragraphs FS 5 to FS 8 comprehension question:

Which of the following phrases in the text is the best topic sentence? Tick ✓ the best one

1. The selection procedure is thorough
2. Half those screened express interest in resettlement in the US

Paragraphs FS 9 to FS 19

1. What problems does resettlement create in the camps?
2. What problems are created for Ban Mai Lai Soi, by Plu Reh and his wife leaving the camp?

Paragraphs FS 20 to FS 24

1. What abuses of the resettlement process have been discovered? Write down at least two.
2. What will happen to those who are found to be abusing the process?

A Fresh Start

Free from Fear, but Still Struggling

1

Like most immigrants, resettled refugees from the Thai-Burmese border soon find that life in a new country is a mixed blessing. While they are no longer forced to live in constant fear for their safety or in restrictive camps, they quickly learn that life in the West comes with its own anxieties and obstacles.

2

The foremost problem facing newly resettled refugees is employment. Although all host countries provide assistance during the settling-in period, newly arrived refugees are expected to support themselves as soon as possible. However, many lack the needed language skills and find the application process complex. And once they find work, they soon learn how much of their lives it consumes. As Nai Taing Htaw, a married Mon refugee living in the United States, put it: "I have no time for further study. I just have to work, work, work."

3

For school-age children, however, resettlement provides undreamed of educational opportunities. This, along with the availability of healthcare, is seen as one of the major advantages of moving to a new country. "My children now have a chance of getting a good education," said Agostino, a Karenni refugee who worked as a teacher before moving to Australia three months ago.

4

Some, however, fear that a Western education could come at a high price. Nai Taing Htaw said he worried that his children "will not preserve my values, culture and language."

5

But in some communities, loss of identity was less of a concern. During a visit to the US last year, Jack Dunford of the Thailand Burma Border Consortium found that many Karen continued to live in tight-knit, often church-centered groups, relying more on each other than on services provided by their host country. He also discovered, however, that "Karen strengths are often their weaknesses. It seems that many do not ask for help when they should and accept conditions that they shouldn't."

6

Perhaps the greatest challenge facing many resettled refugees is their sense that their real struggle is still the one they left behind on the Thai-Burmese border.

7

"Our dreams are always about life in the refugee camp or about running to the jungle to escape from Burmese soldiers," wrote Shah Paung, a former reporter for The Irrawaddy, five months after moving to Australia.

8

Until a lasting peace finally comes to Burma, many refugees may find it difficult to truly settle anywhere.

Extension article

Irrawaddy October 2009: A Fresh Start

FS 1

Nowadays, we don't greet people any more with 'How are you?'" said Tun Tun, 40-year-old secretary of the committee administering Mae La refugee camp in Thailand's Tak Province. "We say, 'When is your resettlement interview?'"

FS 2

Third-country resettlement is a major topic of discussion among the residents not only of Mae La but of the other eight camps strung out along Thailand's eastern border with Burma. With hopes of returning in the foreseeable future to their shattered villages at an all-time low, resettlement in the West offers refugees their only realistic chance of leaving the camps and leading normal lives again.

FS 3

Since the Thai government gave the green light to resettlement in 2005, more than 46,000 refugees have left the camps for the US and 10 other countries. About three-quarters have been accepted by the US—the rest have gone to Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden and the UK.

FS 4

The US has been working on its resettlement program on a camp-by-camp basis, beginning with Tham Hin, then moving on to the largest camp, Mae La, in 2006, and farther north in 2009, to the Karenni camps 1 and 2 in Thailand's Mae Hong Son Province. The two remaining camps, Mae Ra Ma Luang and Mae La Oon, will take their turn next year.

FS 5

The selection procedure is thorough. After registration by the Thai authorities, refugees are admitted to the camps, where they are screened by officials of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

FS 6

The UNHCR information is added to a database kept by the US Overseas Processing Entity (OPE), and refugees expressing interest in resettlement in the US are interviewed by officials of the US Department of Homeland Security, who tour the camps three or four times a year. "About half those screened by the UNHCR and OPE express interest in resettlement in the US," said a US official.

FS 7

The Patriot Act passed by the US Congress after the 9/11 attacks made a controversial addition to the requirements for resettlement in the US, barring refugees who had provided material support to terrorist groups or rebel movements. The restriction effectively blocked entry to the US to any refugee with links to the Karen National Union and its armed wing, the Karen National Liberation Army or the border-based All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), even though none of the groups appeared on the US State Department list of terrorist movements.

FS 8

A later amendment watered down the unpopular provision, which now confines the ban to refugees who took up arms for a rebel cause—unless applicants for resettlement can prove they were coerced into military service.

FS 9

Although resettlement has relieved pressure on the camps, it has also created problems.

The Thailand Burma Border Consortium estimates that the nine border camps have lost three-quarters of their qualified residents—teachers, medics and administrative staff—in a worrying “brain drain.”

FS 10

Relief workers say the loss of a proportionately high number of young, qualified refugees is an inevitable result of the demographics of the camps, where the majority of residents are under 40.

FS 11

New refugee arrivals include people with the skills or the potential to fill posts left vacant, but even here problems arise. Often they are from different ethnic groups, leading to language and communication difficulties.

FS 12

“We have struggled resiliently to prevent our community services from collapsing by recruiting new work forces and giving them capacity-building training,” said Mae La camp’s Tun Tun. “It takes time, but it works.”

FS 13

An interview conducted in June with a young Karenni couple as they left for the US vividly illustrated the problem. Plu Reh, 23, and his 20-year-old wife, Pray Meh, both taught in the Karenni refugee camp 1, Ban Mai Nai Soi.

FS 14

Plu Reh, who had lived in the camp since 1996, taught health and social studies in one of its primary schools. His wife had library experience and also taught in the camp. They left for the US with their 2-year-old daughter—and also took with them a useful collection of classrooms skills.

FS 15

“I have great hopes for my daughter, Naw Gay,” said Pray Meh in an interview with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) before the family flew out of Bangkok on the long journey that would change their lives for ever. “She will go to a good school and get a good education. She has no future here.”

FS 16

Pray Meh and her husband, like all successful candidates for resettlement, had been prepared by the IOM for their new lives in the US with “cultural orientation” instruction and language lessons.

FS 17

The IOM also handled their travel arrangement.

The IOM hailed the departure of Plu Reh and his family as one more success story, but officials emphasized that the combined skills of the young couple had not influenced their selection for resettlement.

FS 18

US officials also insisted that no preference is given to applicants with professional skills and qualifications. “We don’t ‘cherry pick,’” a US official told *The Irrawaddy*. “Two years old or 80, male or female, healthy or handicapped—all are welcome.”

FS 19

The official said reports that Padaung “long neck” women applying for resettlement were being advised to remove their traditional brass rings were unfounded. “Around one-half of the residents of three Padaung villages in Mae Hong Son Province have expressed interest in resettlement,” he said. “Brass rings would present no hindrance.”

FS 20

Identity fraud is another big problem faced by the camps and resettlement officials. About 60 cases have been uncovered this year of refugees who no longer want resettlement selling their identity documents to others who do—sometimes using the services of brokers.

FS 21

Myat Thu, a former member of the ABSDF who lives in Mae Sot, said friends of his had cleared procedures for resettlement in the US but were told at the last minute that they couldn't go. "Officials told them people with their names had already been resettled in a third country," he said.

FS 22

There are also claims that some camp officials accept money from brokers to admit unauthorized Burmese migrants, who then register for resettlement.

FS 23

Disturbed by the growing number of abuses, the UNHCR has launched a campaign to stamp out fraud, declaring that offenders will be treated with "zero tolerance."

FS 24

Kitty McKinsey, UNHCR's senior regional public information officer in Bangkok, described for *The Irrawaddy* what "zero tolerance" means: "Offenders will be permanently barred from applying for resettlement. The resettlement program is not an immigration or economic benefits initiative. It's intended to protect people who wouldn't find a life anywhere else."