

# ILLEGAL SELF-SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND: HOW BURMESE REFUGEES COPE WITH LIFE IN EXILE

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# SUBJECTS

- 1) **SELF-SETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES**
- 2) **INTEGRATION IN COUNTRIES IN THE SOUTH**

**CASE-STUDY: BURMESE REFUGEES IN THAILAND-** Field work in Tak province, 2006-2007

# CAUSES OF FLIGHT

- Economic and environmental mismanagement
- Human rights abuses, e.g. forced labour
- War and counter- insurgency tactics e.g. forced relocations

# 'CHOICE' OF SETTLEMENT IN THAILAND

- Refugee camps versus self-settlement
- **Over 2 million self-settled: why?**
  - Remain master of own life
  - Desire to work
  - Family connections
  - No knowledge of camps or entrance procedure
  - Belonging to different rebel or religious group
  - No more asylum requests processed after November 2005

# INFLUENTIAL FACTORS OF INTEGRATION IN THAILAND

Framework by Banki (2004)

- Positive impact: quiet pace of arrival, porous border, shared ethnicity (for some ethnic minorities)
  - Negative impact: political, security and temporal factors
  - Ambiguous: economic factors
- ➔ Conflicting policies of migration, labour and national security

# OVERALL PICTURE INTEGRATION

**Weak to intermediate refugee integration, dependent also on individual characteristics and strategies:**

- De facto mutual recognition and integration
- Economically integrated
- Self-sufficient (although living standard can be low)
- Some refugees have been able to obtain land
- Access to local health facilities (albeit language issues remain)
- Refugees are dispersed among the local population
- Social integration: can be problematic (ethnicity important factor)
- Structural integration (education, legal access to work, ID cards): mixed picture

# POLICY OPTIONS: HOW TO ASSIST SELF-SETTLED REFUGEES

- Migration will continue (pull and push factors unchanged) Management needed, broader than containment and deportation
- **Wider view on durable solutions:** explore options for self-settlement/local integration
- **Legal, economic, social process** (Crisp, 2004) to be supported by Thai

# CONCLUSION

- **More inclusive approach needed** to the benefit of both the refugees and the host population
- Support for **self-settlement is beneficial for any durable solution**

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