



Refugee Council
of Australia



The Search for Protection

**Resettled refugees reflect on seeking asylum
in Asia and the Middle East**

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Supported by:



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Cover photo: Mae La refugee camp, Tak province, Thailand (Photo: RCOA)

Executive Summary

This report is based on the results of a listening study commissioned by the Refugee Council of Australia. It documents the experiences – in refugee camps or countries of first asylum – of Chin, Karen and Iraqi refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia. Drawing on the findings of interviews and focus group discussions with 53 individuals, the report aims to document respondents' experiences of seeking protection, including community based protection strategies. A secondary aim of the report is to document individuals' contact with, and perceptions of, non-government organisations (NGOs), and to outline their suggestions in relation to improving protection practices. The overall aim of the listening study is to deepen NGOs awareness of the protection-related issues faced by these refugee communities in countries of first asylum. It forms part of a wider Mainstreaming Protection project conducted by a number of Australian faith-based non-government organisations, coordinated by Caritas Australia and funded by the Australian Agency for International Development.

Protection Needs and Gaps

Concerns Specific to Ethnic Groups:

Karen respondents who had lived in camps on the Thai-Burma border were concerned about restrictions on their freedom to move within Thailand, and their lack of work rights and residency status. Many described working illegally outside the camps to provide for their basic needs, which increased their chances of encountering the Thai police. Some respondents were concerned about the provision of food rations and essential items, suggesting that the amounts were insufficient to meet their basic needs. Concerns were also raised about corruption within the food distribution system.

Like Karen respondents, Chin respondents who had lived in Malaysia, were concerned about their lack of legal residency status and work rights. Most worked illegally to support themselves. Many described living in fear of arrest, imprisonment or deportation by the Malaysian police or the vigilante force known the People's Volunteer Corps (or RELA). A number of respondents recounted stories of raids by the police and RELA on Chin refugee houses and workplaces. Some described their experiences of being arrested and mistreated, and being forced to pay large sums of bribe money to secure their release. Others had been detained in immigration detention centres in poor conditions.

Like Chin respondents from Malaysia, Chin respondents who had lived in India were concerned about their lack of legal residency status and work rights. Although the Indian police appeared to be less effective than the Malaysian police, respondents were concerned about the discrimination they experienced at the hands of landlords and employers, and women described experiences of sexual harassment. Respondents described living in conditions of extreme poverty in which they struggled to meet their basic needs. Concerns were raised about the UNHCR's reduction in financial assistance, which exacerbated difficulties in meeting daily survival needs.

Iraqi respondents were similarly concerned about their lack of residency status and work rights. Most described that they had been unable to work, and instead relied on savings and money sent from family members abroad. Due to concerns about arrest and deportation, many Iraqi respondents described living quiet lives and attempting to keep a 'low profile.'

Common Concerns

Respondents across all sample groups were concerned about their uncertain legal residency status and work rights, and were anxious about their possible arrest, detention and deportation. Another key concern was finding enough money to ensure basic survival needs, including food, shelter and health care. The need to provide for themselves and their families meant that many respondents felt the imperative to work although they were not legally able to do so. In this sense, respondents' protection concerns and their survival concerns were integrally related; in order to survive, refugees needed to work, which often raised new protection concerns, such as exploitation in the workplace and greater risk of arrest, detention and deportation. Female respondents also

identified a number of common concerns; for example, Chin women from India and Karen women described sexual harassment as a key issue.

Good Protection Practices Identified by Respondents

The lack of effective protection strategies was a common finding across all sample groups. Nonetheless, some respondents identified some community-based protection strategies. A common strategy identified by respondents from all sample groups was keeping a 'low profile' to avoid contact with the authorities. Karen respondents described travelling in groups and travelling after dark to minimise the risk of encountering the Thai police outside the camps. Chin respondents from Malaysia suggested that they relied on information networks amongst the Chin community to learn about potential raids by the Malaysian police. Some had lived amongst the Malaysian Chinese community so that they could more easily 'blend in.' UNHCR documents appeared to provide Chin respondents in Malaysia with marginally more protection, although this was no guarantee against arrest and detention.

Contact with NGOs and suggestions for improving protection practices

Respondents' across all the sample groups described having little contact with NGOs, and having little awareness of their work. Karen refugees, who had been in refugee camp environments, had a greater level of awareness of NGOs than Iraqi and Chin respondents who had been in urban environments. Karen respondents described receiving food, shelter, health care and education assistance from NGOs; however, most were unclear as to which organisations were responsible for which services. By contrast, very few Chin or Iraqi respondents described having any contact with, or receiving assistance from, NGOs.

Despite their lack of contact with NGOs, respondents had a number of suggestions for improving their protection-related work. Some Karen respondents suggested that NGOs could diversify their location within the camps, in order to build a greater level of trust amongst refugees. One Karen respondent suggested that the provision of agricultural land just outside of the camp boundaries would avoid the need for refugees to work illegally on Thai farms. Some Karen respondents suggested that the provision of more housing materials such as bamboo would avoid the need for refugees to venture outside the camps to collect their own. Chin refugees from Malaysia suggested that NGOs could provide more information about their work through Chin community groups and provide additional support to refugees in immigration detention. Chin refugees from India suggested the need for more attention to the long term survival needs of refugees, particularly given the reduction in UNHCR assistance.

Conclusion

The report has found that there are significantly different protection issues faced by each sample group. These differences are particularly pronounced between the Karen group (from refugee-camp environments), and the Chin and Iraqi groups (from urban environments.) The sample groups also share some common concerns; namely, an uncertainty about their legal status and work rights and anxiety about meeting basic needs. For the majority of respondents, concerns about issues such as arrest, detention, deportation and mistreatment by authorities were integrally connected to concerns about meeting basic needs. For example, in order to support themselves and their families, many respondents felt compelled to work, which often led to new protection concerns such as the potential for encounters with authorities. As a secondary finding, the report has identified very limited awareness of the work of NGOs amongst each of the sample groups, particularly amongst refugees from urban environments. NGOs may wish to conduct further research into this issue, and to explore the ways in which they could promote their presence and work more effectively in urban contexts.

1.0 Introduction and Aims

This report is based on the findings of a listening study commissioned by the Refugee Council of Australia. The primary aim of the report is to document the protection experiences – in refugee camps or countries of first asylum - of Chin, Karen and Iraqi refugees and humanitarian entrants to Australia. For the purposes of this study, ‘protection’ is understood in a broad sense as referring to all activities that seek to ensure respect for the human rights of the individual, including civil and political, economic social and cultural rights.¹ Drawing on first-hand accounts from refugees and humanitarian entrants gained from interviews and focus group discussions, the report explores individuals’ experiences of seeking protection. A secondary aim of the report is to explore individuals’ contact with, and perceptions of, the work of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and to document respondents’ suggestions for addressing protection issues. Wherever possible, the report attempts to use respondents’ own words and narratives of their experiences. The overall aim of the study is to deepen NGOs’ awareness of the protection related issues faced by these refugee communities, and to inform the development of policies, procedures and protection-related activities. The study fits within a broader Mainstreaming Protection project initiated by a number of Australian faith-based organisations, which seeks to strengthen understanding of duties and responsibilities in relation to the protection of people participating in development and humanitarian programs, and to inform the development of policies, procedures and protection-related activities.²

The report is structured into the following sections. Section two outlines the methodology used for the research study and sets out its parameters and limitations. Section three provides a brief overview of the legal entitlements of Karen refugees in Thailand, Chin refugees in India and Malaysia, and Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan. Section four, the main body of the report, sets out respondents’ views about their protection needs in countries of first asylum. Section five describes respondents’ contact with, and perceptions of, the work of NGOs, and offers their suggestions for addressing protection issues. Section six provides a summary of common findings across the different sample groups and a conclusion.

2.0 Methodology

There were two key reasons for the selection of Chin, Iraqi and Karen refugees as the sample groups for this study. Firstly, Burma and Iraq have been two of the most significant source countries for refugees to Australia over the past decade. Secondly, these groups represent a diversity of experiences of countries of first asylum, including urban settings in the case of Chin and Iraqi refugees, and refugee camp experiences in the case of the Karen. The research study sought to explore and contrast these experiences.

The research study involved interviews or focus groups with a total of 53 individuals, 28 women and 25 men. This included:

- Individual semi-structured interviews with 26 Iraqi, Chin and Karen refugees and humanitarian entrants (12 men and 14 women);
- Focus group discussions with 27 key informants from the Iraqi, Chin and Karen community (14 women and 13 men).³

Respondents were aged 18 years and older and comprised a mix of age groups. Individual interview respondents had all lived in Australia for 24 months or less. Key informants were selected for their leadership role in the community and knowledge of broader protection issues faced by

¹ See James Thompson, Developing Church Agency Protection Capacity: Integrating Protection into Humanitarian and Development Programs. See also ICRC, ‘Third Workshop on Protection, Background Paper’, in *Protective Action: Incorporating Civilian Protection into Humanitarian Response*, 7 January 1999

² Participating agencies are Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Anglican Board of Mission, Australian Lutheran World Service, Baptist World Aid Australia, Caritas Australia, National Council of Churches in Australia – act for peace, Uniting Church Overseas Aid

³ A detailed breakdown of interviews and focus groups is available from Refugee Council of Australia

their ethnic group. Separate male and female focus group discussions were conducted, except in the case of the Karen focus group.⁴

Respondents meeting the study requirements were identified with the assistance of staff of Australian settlement service agencies. Interviews with Chin and Karen individuals were conducted by Lia Kent, with the assistance of an interpreter, while interviews with Iraqi individuals were conducted by Dr Jamileh Abu-Duhou, in Arabic.⁵ Individual interviews were approximately one and a half hours to two hours in duration, while the focus groups were around two hours. Interviews were recorded by note-taking and tape recorder and were conducted between December 2008 and February 2009. The majority of interviews were conducted in Australia; however, two Iraqi respondents were interviewed in Syria during a field visit by Dr Jamileh Abu-Duhou in February 2009. Interviews and focus group discussions were based on a questionnaire which was informed by the following guiding questions:

- What protection needs and gaps have respondents identified from their experiences?
- How have respondents described their experiences of protection with community organisations, in particular church based organisations?
- What have respondents identified as good protection practices, including community-based strategies, for addressing protection needs and gaps?
- What suggestions for improvements to the policies, procedures and activities of organisations working on protection do respondents have?⁶

2.1 Study Parameters and Limitations

It is important to set out the parameters of this report and highlight a number of limitations. Firstly, the main purpose of the report is to document respondents own *perceptions* of their protection experiences and needs. As such, it does not attempt to verify facts or cross-check information provided by respondents, and draws upon very limited secondary research. The report is primarily based on first person narratives from Chin, Karen and Iraqi refugees.

Secondly, although the report provides some information regarding respondents' contact with – and perceptions of – NGOs, this was a secondary focus of the study; as such, the study did not involve interviews with NGO staff working with these communities. Given these parameters, the report does not purport to provide a comprehensive assessment of the protection-related work of NGOs, nor does it seek to provide concrete findings and recommendations in relation to NGOs. Rather, it seeks to provide a basis for further research and analysis in relation to these issues. Additionally, due to the limited ability to verify and cross-check information, RCOA has decided to remove the names of NGOs mentioned by respondents.

Thirdly, the short time frame and resources available for the study restricted the sample size. Due to the relatively small sample size, this study does not purport to provide a comprehensive summary of the views of Iraqi, Chin and Karen refugees but, again, to provide a basis for further research.

⁴ This was due to the time constraints of the person who assisted in bringing together the Karen focus group

⁵ An interpreter was not required for these interviews because Dr Abu-Duhou is fluent in Arabic.

⁶ See Appendix for Individual interview questionnaire

3.0 Background

The countries of first asylum in which the Karen, Chin and Iraqi respondents lived, differ in terms of their conditions and the legal status and protection accorded to refugees and asylum seekers. While Karen respondents had been based in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, the other sample groups had lived in urban environments. Chin respondents had lived in Malaysia (in and around the capital Kuala Lumpur), or India (in New Delhi) while Iraqi respondents had lived in Jordan or Syria. This section provides a brief overview of the status accorded to refugees in each of these locations.

3.1 Karen Refugees on the Thai-Burma Border

As of November 2008, there were around 117,000 Burmese refugees living in Thailand who are officially registered with UNHCR and another 8,700 asylum seekers pending assessment.⁷ The Thai Burma Border Consortium suggests that the actual refugee population is likely to be much higher, with estimates ranging from 140,000 to 145,000 refugees. Most Burmese refugees reside in nine official camps along the Thai-Burma border, and Karen refugees comprise about 61% of the population.⁸

Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol.⁹ Under Thai law, any refugees found outside the camps are considered to be illegal migrants and can be subject to arrest, detention and deportation. Refugees cannot work legally in Thailand, and thus, many seek illegal employment outside of the camps.¹⁰ The Thai government allows UNHCR to monitor camps along the border but not to maintain a permanent presence in them. NGOs with approval from the Thai Ministry of the Interior (MOI) have limited access to the camps.¹¹

3.2 Chin Refugees in Malaysia

There are around 25,000 Chin refugees in Malaysia.¹² Some reside in cramped accommodation in the capital, Kuala Lumpur, while others live in makeshift camps outside the city or in the Cameron Highlands.¹³

Like Thailand, Malaysia is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol and has no procedure for granting asylum or registering refugees.¹⁴ Malaysia does not distinguish between undocumented migrant workers and refugees; all those without valid residency status are subject to arrest, detention and deportation.¹⁵ The Peoples Volunteer Corps (RELA), numbering half a million members, is empowered by law to enter any premises and arrest 'undesirable persons' and suspected undocumented migrants without search warrants.¹⁶

The UNHCR handles refugee determinations in Malaysia and issues identification cards to those recognised as refugees, however this provides little guarantee of protection.¹⁷ Refugees are not entitled to work in Malaysia, and as such, many work illegally. The Malaysian government does not generally permit NGOs or the International Committee of the Red Cross to access immigration detention centres.¹⁸

⁷ UNHCR *Global Appeal 2009 Update, Thailand report*

⁸ Thai Burma Border Consortium, *Burmese Refugee Sites with Population Figures*, November 2008

⁹ U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008: Thailand*

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

¹² U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008, Malaysia*

¹³ Amy Alexander, 'Without Refuge: Chin refugees in India and Malaysia', *Forced Migration Review* 30, April 2008

¹⁴ Ibid. See also U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008: Malaysia*

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch World Report 2009: Malaysia

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008: Malaysia*; Amy Alexander, 'Without Refuge: Chin Refugees in India and Malaysia', *Forced Migration Review* 30, April 2008

¹⁸ U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants: *World Refugee Survey 2008: Malaysia*

3.3 Chin Refugees in India

An estimated 60,000 to 80,000 Chin refugees from Burma live in the Mizoram hills in India. UNHCR does not operate here, so many refugees travel to New Delhi to be registered.¹⁹ There are around 1,800 Chin refugees living in New Delhi.²⁰ Like the Malaysian government, the Indian government is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol, and there is no procedural mechanism for providing legal protection or benefits to refugees. Indian law does not distinguish between undocumented migrants and refugees, and can arrest, detain and deport any undocumented migrant.²¹ Refugees in India are not entitled to work.²²

The UNHCR has a presence in New Delhi and undertakes the registration and resettlement of refugees.²³ UNHCR provides a short term assistance allowance for newly recognised refugees; however, in 2003, this was phased out by cutting amounts by half after six months, and cutting them again after one year. This shift in policy has made it very difficult for refugees to meet their daily survival needs.²⁴

3.4 Iraqi Refugees in Syria

It is difficult to obtain precise figures of Iraqi refugees in Syria due to flows of refugees in and out of the country; however, estimates range from 750,000 to 1.3 million people.²⁵ The majority of Iraqis live in Damascus or other main towns. Of this number, UNHCR currently recognises only 151,000 as refugees, including dependents.²⁶ Syria is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol. Those recognised as refugees receive UNHCR certificates, however these are not residence permits or work permits. This means many Iraqis work low-paying jobs in the informal sector without legal protection.²⁷ In addition, UNHCR estimates that there are around 85,000 Iraqi women working as prostitutes.²⁸

3.5 Iraqi Refugees in Jordan

There are between 500,000 and 700,000 Iraqi refugees living in Jordan.²⁹ Jordan is not party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or 1967 Protocol, and most refugees are denied legal residency status. UNHCR issues identification cards to refugees and asylum seekers, however these explicitly state that they are not permits for work or residency.³⁰ As a result, Iraqi refugees are unable to work legally, and many work in the informal sector.³¹ Most lack access to the public education and health care system.³²

¹⁹ U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants: *World Refugee Survey 2008: India*

²⁰ Amy Alexander, 'Without Refuge: Chin Refugees in India and Malaysia' *Forced Migration Review* 30, April 2008

²¹ Human Rights Watch, *We are Like Forgotten People: The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, 2009

²² U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, *World Refugee Survey 2008: India*

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Amy Alexander, 'Without Refuge: Chin Refugees in India and Malaysia', *Forced Migration Review* 30, April 2008

²⁵ UNHCR Refugee Resettlement: performance outcomes 2007 and global projects 2009

²⁶ USCRI World Refugee Survey 2008: Syria

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Jamileh Abu-Duhou interview with UNHCR staff member in Syria, February 2009

²⁹ Human Rights First *Iraqi Refugees in Syria and Jordan*, January 2007

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ U.S Committee for Refugees and Immigrants *World Refugee Survey 2008: Jordan*

³² Ibid

4.0 Key Protection Issues Raised by Respondents

4.1 Karen Refugees on the Thai-Burma Border

4.1.1 Basic Needs

Basic needs including food, water, education, housing and health care were among the primary concerns raised by Karen refugees who had lived in camps on the Thai Burma border.

Food

Although refugees described receiving rice, salt, fishpaste, oil and chilli every two weeks, some respondents were of the view that these amounts were insufficient and that rations had to be saved in order that they did not run out before the next distribution. Others suggested that while the quantity of food was sufficient, there was little variety. In particular, the absence of meat and fresh vegetables made it necessary for refugees to supplement their diets. Some respondents noted that the limited diet was particularly difficult for children and older people who needed extra nutrition. As one male respondent stated:

It was harder for older refugees. They needed to eat more than rice. There was nothing extra provided for children and old people – it was the same for everyone.....As for children, they would naturally want sweets. Old people need more energy.

Despite this perception, some respondents mentioned that a supplementary food for pregnant women and malnourished groups existed.³³

Another concern raised by a number of respondents was that many recently arrived Karen refugees in the camps were not yet receiving rations.

Issues with Food Distribution

Another concern raised by respondents related to food distribution. A number of people expressed concerns that there was corruption in the food distribution system, and explained that while rations would be distributed appropriately to camp leaders, these amounts were reduced when it came for the camp leaders to distribute these to the camp population.³⁴ Some respondents described seeing rations for sale in another part of the refugee camp or in Mae Sot. As one male respondent put it:

When they distribute the rice, the camp leaders don't give us the full amount. They sell the leftovers in the camp. Everyone sees this but no one dares to confront the leaders.

Another woman described how the camp leaders would cut the containers used to distribute food to reduce the amounts:

Some of the containers would be cut and then covered up, to make the amounts lessened. We feel this happened all the time. We were scared to complain about the issue - we were not brave enough.

When asked whether it was possible to raise these concerns with the camp leaders, most respondents said they were too frightened of the camp leaders to do so, and suggested that culturally, the Karen do not like to complain. As one man explained:

We have camp leaders and zone leaders; there is a step by step process if you want to complain. But the Karen don't like to complain. We are not used to reporting things.

One female respondent stated that because she was an 'ordinary person' and not educated, the camp leaders were unlikely to listen to her concerns. A male respondent recounted a story of an

³³ See also WFP review of TBBC's food aid to the Burma Refugees at the Thai-Burma Border, October 2006, which describes the nutritional feeding program run by health agencies to address the needs of malnourished children, pregnant women and the aged.

³⁴ The potential for food misappropriation was also raised by the WFP evaluation.

NGO visit to his camp to conduct research on food distribution and amounts. He explained that no one dared to complain to the organisation because they were worried that the Karen leaders would be angry. Others pointed out that because they were refugees, and therefore strangers in Thailand, they just wanted to keep quiet and not cause problems. As one male respondent put it, 'It's not easy because we don't have a government. We refugees get whatever is left over.'

Housing

Karen respondents described living in houses constructed of wood, bamboo and dried leaves, which they built themselves from materials supplied to them. While most described their housing as 'adequate', many stressed that the materials distributed were insufficient, which meant they would need to go outside the camp into the forest to collect additional bamboo and leaves. This would raise the potential for encountering the Thai police.

Clothing and Mosquito Nets

Some respondents raised concerns about the lack of basic items such as clothing, mosquito nets and sleeping mats. While these items were distributed from time to time, many believed that the amounts were not sufficient. Some suggested that additional clothing was particularly important for young children, and older people, who felt the cold more.

Water

Water scarcity was another key issue raised by respondents. Water came from a number of different sources including pipes which channelled mountain water, wells and the river. In Mae La camp, where most respondents had lived, the river dried up in summer. Many respondents described the long queues at the wells, especially during the summer months of March and April, when they would often get up at midnight to line up in the queue. The water restrictions during the summer months were also problematic, and some said the limit of 2-3 buckets a day made it difficult to have baths.

Health and Education

Many respondents believed that health and education workers in the camps were 'doing the best they can' with limited resources. One problem raised was the high turnover of trained teachers and medical staff, due to people being resettled in third countries. Another issues raised was the lack of vocational training for young adults and the fact that there was little further education available for children once they finished year 10.

4.1.2 Security

Fear of Arrest and Harassment

Security, including restrictions on freedom of movement outside the camp, was an issue of great concern for many respondents. Security issues were directly related to the need for basic necessities, including food. A number of people described having to work outside the camp in order to provide for themselves and their family, some working as labourers on Thai farms. Others had left the camps to collect bamboo shoots, bamboo for housing, or to visit family members. These activities raised the potential for encountering Thai police and being arrested for illegal activity.

A number of refugees told stories of their encounters with Thai police. One male respondent described being stopped by the Thai police as he went to work on a Thai farm and forced to do labouring work for one week. Another woman described being caught while on her way to visit her older sister in a nearby Thai village. As she explained:

When I came back the Thai soldiers caught me. I was very scared. I could not communicate with them. I was asked to sweep the road, and then they led me go.

Another female respondent explained that it was particularly dangerous for women, who could be raped or sexually harassed if they left the camps:

If Thai men see a nice, pretty Karen woman, they could rape them. I was lucky but many women were raped when they went outside the camp to work. I was scared it might happen to me, even though I am not that young.

Protection Strategies

To minimise these risks, people described travelling early in the morning and after dark. They would generally travel in groups, via back roads, and always be on alert. They would try to confine their travel to nearby villages and farms rather than those further away.

Other security issues

Refugees were concerned about a number of other security issues, including attacks by the Burmese military and the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA). Many described not being able to sleep at night for fear of attacks and their sense of constant fear. As one male respondent said:

For the mums, when they heard the Burmese might be coming, they would get really worried about the children. Men would worry they would be recruited for forced labour. The older people were worried they would not be able to run.

One woman described her experiences of having to flee her home on one occasion when Burmese soldiers burnt down a number of houses within the camp:

There was one time when the Burmese soldiers burnt down the camp. I didn't have any time to prepare food before we ran, or to pack pots and pans. I had a pig, I let it free and it ran with us. We didn't make it outside the camp, but I hid with the children. We had dug a hole under the house to hide in but, when things got worse, we started to run. They burnt down 2-3 houses that time.

Another issue was that the Thai police or security guards would sometimes conduct searches for guns and bombs in people's houses. They would not ask for permission before entering the houses.

Although there were Karen security guards patrolling the camps, most respondents suggested that they were not able to provide protection against many of these issues. Many respondents did not have a high opinion of the Thai security guards who were based at the main gates of the camp. As one man put it, 'they are more interested in whether people leave the camp than in who comes in'.

Most respondents did not feel that there were any security problems amongst the Karen in the camps. Camp leaders would be responsible for resolving minor disputes between people and most respondents suggested this was an effective system.

4.2 Chin Refugees in Malaysia

4.2.1 Security

Fears of Arrest, Detention and Deportation

The primary concerns raised by Chin respondents who had been in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia related to security. Respondents expressed their fears of being arrested, detained or deported by the Malaysian police or the vigilante force known as RELA.³⁵ Many recounted stories about the *operasi* (operations/raids) conducted by the Malaysian police force and RELA, both during the day

³⁵ RELA is an abbreviation for Ikatan Relawan Rakyat (People's Volunteer Corps), which has special powers of search and seizure, and arrest without warrant that not even the regular police force possess. Malaysia Human Rights Organisations such as Suaram have called for disbandment of the force due to complaints about human rights violations and abuse of power. See Project Maje, *We Built this City: Workers from Burma at Risk in Malaysia*, July 2007.

at workplaces and at night. Many described being unable to sleep for fear of the *operasi*. As one female respondent described:

The worst part of life was that we scared of the police. We always listened out for news from each other. The police used helicopters and lights to track us down and arrest us. We were scared that they would break in and arrest us and put us in jail.

A number of respondents recounted their experiences of being arrested by Malaysian police or RELA, either in their work places or at homes. In some cases people were released on payment of a bribe. One male respondent described having to pay 700 ringgits (around 290 AUD) in bribe money. If people were unable to pay the police would ask family members to come to the police station and pay the bribe to secure their release. Other respondents described being detained in immigration detention centres for a number of months, and even being deported back to Thailand. For example, as one male respondent recounted:

In 1997 I was arrested twice as I tried to come into Malaysia and sent back to Thailand. Then I was arrested again in 2002 and jailed. This time I was arrested in my house, because I was illegal. I didn't have UNHCR status at the time. This time I was in jail [immigration detention] for three months. We didn't get enough food. Then they deported me back to Thailand again.

Those who were arrested by the police or RELA were sometimes mistreated. One male respondent recounted his experience of being arrested and beaten:

They [the police] pushed me into the room. They asked for money from other people living in the house. These people also blamed me for bringing the police into the house. When they arrested me they punched and kicked me, and they pulled my shirt until they tore. Another time they punched and kicked me in the police car.

Conditions in the immigration detention centre were poor. One man described not having enough blankets:

I was moved to three places in the prison. The first place was in the main centre where I was for two months. I was in a small cell with no blankets. The toilet and everything was in the same room.

Police Harassment in Public Places

In addition to raids on houses and workplaces, police harassment and arrests of Chin refugees also took place in public places, such as outside churches. A number of respondents described being fearful of going to church for this reason. As one woman described:

We could go to church in Kuala Lumpur but sometimes we didn't want to go because we were afraid the Malaysian police might arrest us. They would park their car down the street so that we wouldn't see them and wait for us. We Burmese look different because we come from a poor country. They notice this. They approach, say hello, and then ask to see our passport. If we don't have one, they arrest us.

Another respondent described the way in which Chin refugees would even be arrested as they queued to register at the UNHCR office.

Protection Strategies

Respondents explained that there was little they could do to protect themselves against arrest and detention. People described relying on information from each other in order to hear in advance of any imminent *operasi* and being constantly ready to run and hide. Some described having helpful employers who would maintain networks of contacts and inform them of potential raids. One woman described living amongst the Malaysian Chinese community so that she could more easily 'blend in'.

Those with UNHCR registration documents appeared to have had marginally more protection than those without. Respondents suggested that they were usually safer from arrest by the regular police, although they could still be detained by RELA. The main advantage of UNHCR documents seemed to be that it was easier to pay off the police or RELA with a bribe. It also seemed more likely that respondents would be able to gain release from immigration detention if they possessed UNHCR identification. As one female respondent explained:

After I got a UNHCR card I felt so relieved. Some police respected this. But we were not 100% safe. We still could not work. But if we were arrested we could tell our relatives to report to the UNHCR and we could be let out.

Similarly, as a male respondent described:

The UNHCR gave us a document but the police didn't care..... I remember they wrote in Malay language 'it is not a work permit' on the document. We had no one to ask for help so I was always ready to run from the police.

Discrimination in the workplace

Despite their fears of being arrested, respondents felt the imperative to work because they needed to support themselves. Due to their lack of work rights, however, they were relegated to the informal sector, where they faced discrimination in the workplace, for example, by being paid irregularly or being paid less than Malaysian employees.

4.2.2 Basic Needs

Housing, Education and Health Care

Respondents had all lived in and around the capital, Kuala Lumpur. Some described living in rental apartments or houses, in extremely crowded circumstances. Others described living in makeshift camps in the jungle, in shelters made out of wood. Based close to construction sites where many Chin refugees worked, the conditions of these camps were described as extremely basic. Those living in camps described being fearful of carrying money around with them in case of arrest and, instead, burying it in the ground for safekeeping. They lived in constant fear of the police or RELA conducting raids on their camp and setting fire to their tents, which happened regularly. As one female respondent described:

Sometimes at night we would have to run away from the operasi. Some people would get injured trying to escape. After we ran the police sometimes set fire to our house. If they saw something valuable they took it.

Access to education and health care was also problematic given that Malaysia does not provide primary education or free health service to refugees. Some respondents described the difficulties of having to pay for their own health care, and the discrimination they would face in the Malaysian health system. Respondents also described the difficulty in accessing education.

4.3 Chin Refugees in India

4.3.1 Security

The protection issues raised by Chin respondents who had lived in India were very different from those raised by the Chin in Malaysia. Respondents did not express the same fears of arrest, imprisonment and deportation by the police. Their security concerns related mainly to the discrimination and harassment they experienced, including in the workplace and by landlords. A number of respondents described being called 'Nepali' by Indian people – a derogatory term.

Exploitation by Employers and Landlords

Some respondents described having to pay more rent than Indian tenants. One woman explained that her landlord would demand the rent at irregular times in order to buy alcohol. Some described being abused by landlords if they cooked Burmese food, or were heard having Christian worship in the house.

Given the lack of legal entitlement to work, exploitation of Chin refugees in the workplace is rife. A number of respondents described being paid less than Indian employees and sometimes not being paid at all. As one woman described:

If you are Chin in India the main jobs are in the factories. If Indians do this work they get 2500 rupees [a month] but we get 800-1000 rupees. Sometimes the boss would only give us some of our salary at the end of each month. But there was nothing we could do.

Women were also harassed in the workplace. As one woman put it:

My boss treated me badly and abused me verbally. But I just ignored him. I just did my job. Sometimes he used very bad words – swearing – in private. At first I didn't understand. But after I understood I was shocked.

Sexual Harassment

A number of Chin women recounted stories of being sexually harassed in public, including on public transport, and in the workplace. Fears of sexual harassment by Indian men meant that many women were fearful of travelling alone on public transport. As one woman explained:

I was scared of going around on my own. If I had to go somewhere I would call my friends. Sometimes I would travel by rickshaw instead of the bus.

As another woman said:

In India the culture is different. Women wear a sari. Because we don't dress like this, the Indian men think we are prostitutes. They keep calling us 'Nepali Nepali', and they think they can do whatever they want to us.

Protection Strategies

Few avenues were available for refugees to report these issues. All respondents were conscious of their tenuous residency status in India and their lack of work rights. Most respondents believed there was no point reporting any issues to the Indian police as they would not be taken seriously. As one woman said 'If we called the police, they would want money from us or they wouldn't do anything.' Although one woman mentioned a legal aid centre attached to the UNHCR responsible for advocating for refugees' work rights, she said they had limited effectiveness, due to refugees' lack of legal entitlement to work.

4.3.2 Basic Needs

Respondents also described the difficulties in supporting themselves and obtaining basic necessities like food, water and housing. A number of people raised concerns about the reduction in UNHCR assistance since 2003, which had made it even more difficult to meet basic needs.³⁶ Two women had even been arrested and jailed for participating in demonstrations against UNHCR.

A number of people described sharing crowded apartments and often having restricted access to water. As one woman said:

While in Delhi my salary was only 1000 rupees (a month). We rented a house but the bathroom was very small. We had to pay about 1000 rupees a month for rent, so there was no money for food. We had about 5 people in one room, no kitchen. The house only

³⁶ According to respondents, after 2003 UNHCR financial support was available only for newly arrived refugees for six months. See also US Committee on Refugees and Immigrants *World Refugee Survey 2008: India*

had one toilet. Sometimes we had to wait a long time, with 25 people for one bathroom. Sometimes the landlord would demand the rent from us to buy alcohol.

Another described her limited access to water while living in an upstairs flat:

Water was restricted to about one hour per day. If the ground floor took the water then we couldn't get it.....Most of the time it wasn't enough. Sometimes we couldn't take a bath.

Buying food was also a struggle. A number of respondents explained that they would have to go to the market once a week, just before closing time, to collect left-over fruit and vegetables.

Access to health care was also difficult. Some respondents described being discriminated against by Indian health workers. Many people could not afford to pay for hospital care. One woman described the way a friend had died from vomiting and diarrhoea, as she and her friends could not afford to take her to hospital for treatment. Respondents also described the difficulties in accessing education. They were unable to access the public education system, and unable to afford the private school system.

4.4 Iraqi Refugees in Syria and Jordan

4.4.1 Basic Needs

Lack of Residency Status and Work Rights

The primary concern among Iraqi refugees in Syria and Jordan was their lack of legal residency status, and their inability to work to provide for their basic needs. Although respondents generally stated that they felt 'safe' in Jordan and Syria compared to Iraq, they were worried about finding money for food, health care and education. As one male respondent explained:

Syria is safe but no money, no life. We had to pay for everything: food, rent, doctors, everything. People were nice to us, but we could not buy food with their kindness.

As another said:

Yes Jordan was comfortable in a sense because we felt safe. But what kind of life is it? When we can't work, our kids could not go to school and, if you get sick, you die because we cannot afford the doctor.

Work

The majority of respondents who had been in Jordan or Syria did not work due to their lack of work rights. Most relied on their savings to support themselves, although some had family members abroad who would help out by sending money. A small number of people had worked illegally and were subject to exploitation. One woman described her son's experience in working in Amman:

I mean, they pay him very little cash and since he does not have a work permit the employers will take advantage of him. My older son worked for five months on and off in a café making coffee. He used to make 5JD (around AUD 15) daily. This money is not enough to buy a meal for a big family, but it was OK because at least he gets out of the house and he will not be upset and fight all day long. But after a few months the owner of the café came to him and said 'I am going to give you 4JD. My son argued with him and told him it was not fair, but the man said: 'What do you mean it is not fair? Then, is it fair that you come here from Iraq and take jobs from Jordanians? Besides I can find many Iraqis who will work for less.' So my son quit.

Health Care

Respondents all described having to pay for their own health care. As one male respondent explained:

There were a lot of doctors and hospitals and all types of services and, again, if you have money you can go to the doctor and, if not, then you have to make do without doctors and cure yourself in the best way you can. Thank God we were all healthy and strong and we did not need to go to doctors for any problems.

Housing

Most respondents described the housing they had in Syria and Jordan as 'adequate' for their needs, although cramped. One man described paying high prices for rent. Most described their services in terms of electricity and water as of reasonable quality. One woman, however, explained that the house she lived in had problems with sanitation:

The toilet was very old and broken. There was no shower in the house. The kitchen was a bad kitchen with no stove, so we used a gasoline stove to cook food and heat water. We lived a similar life to people in tents or some refugee camps, but thank God we had a roof over our heads, and we had access to some money to survive.

Education

The majority of Iraqi refugee children were not able to attend school in Jordan or Syria. Respondents explained that their children were not entitled to attend public schools. Most could not afford the fees for private schools. Even those who could afford private school education did not always want to do so, for fear of drawing attention to themselves. One woman explained that she was worried about enrolling her grandchildren in school due to fears of deportation. As she explained:

When we came to Amman, my grandchildren were still young and they did not need to go to school. But we stayed in Amman for three years, my two older grandchildren became 7 and 8 years old and they should have started school. But we did not look for schools for them because we were afraid that, if we started looking, the government will find out about us and deport us.

Similarly, a young female University student said:

I used to go to University. I was studying to become a nurse.....But because we did not have a residence permit my father did not want us to get into trouble so he said we better not go to school, even though we had money to pay for our education.

4.4.2 Security

Fear of Arrest, Imprisonment and Deportation

Many respondents spoke of their fears of being arrested, imprisoned or deported due to their lack of residency status in Syria and Jordan. They spoke of needing to keep a low profile in order to avoid attention. As one male respondent stated, 'We were all the time worried that the Syrian police would find us and put us in jail. Many Iraqis were put in jail in Syria.' Some said that their fears increased following the US intervention in Iraq because, in Jordan, people sometimes made derogatory remarks about Iraqi refugees coming to Jordan and threatening the country's security. As one female respondent put it:

The Jordanians, the people were very good to us. They treated us very well when we came to Amman but, when the bombing happened and they accused Iraqis, it became a bit uncomfortable. I mean, with the people, our neighbours and people we knew and they knew us, there was no problem. The people are nice but I mean the country in general, the official things, became a little bit hard. We had to keep away from public places and keep quiet all the time.

Although respondents had not been arrested or imprisoned themselves, some knew of other Iraqis who had. As one female respondent explained:

Some Iraqis got into trouble with the Syrian authorities. Some of them went to jail because they worked illegally. One Iraqi family had problems with the owner of the

house they lived in and the owner went to the police and the police found out they did not have visas and they were sent to prison.

As one male respondent said:

In Syria we always felt under threat. You can't work. You have to be careful in everything you say and do. If you work and the government finds out, they do not deport you; rather, they put you in jail. I know many Iraqis who went to jail for just working. So what kind of a life do you think we had in Syria? We spent all of our days being careful, worried about the future, the very near future, I mean, worried about what will happen the next day.

The desire to keep a low profile and not draw attention to themselves meant that Iraqi refugees lived very quiet lives and generally stayed away from public places. For example, while many Iraqis attended local churches, they did not always go every Sunday. As one male respondent described:

We did not or could not go [to church] every Sunday because sometimes rumours would be circulating that the Syrian authorities arrested some Iraqis and sent them back. So when that happened, we preferred to stay at home away from public places so that we would not be arrested.

The lack of legal status also made it difficult for people to seek assistance from anyone, including the police. As one person put it 'I mean if someone, anyone, started a fight with you on the streets for any reason you had to take it, because we could not file a complaint with the police.'

Domestic Violence

Although the study did not specifically look at impacts on family relationships, one woman spoke about domestic violence, explaining that her husband had become violent in Jordan due to his frustration at being unable to work. As she explained:

He [my husband] stayed all day in the house, he became nervous and he used to hit the kids for any little thing..... In Iraq my husband was very happy and never hit the kids and he used to buy them things like toys and nice food. But in Jordan things changed and we had family problems. You know, when a man cannot work or provide for his family, he gets nervous and takes it out on the family.

5.0 Perceptions of NGOs and Suggested Changes to Protection Practices

5.1 Karen Refugees on the Thai-Burma Border

Although Karen respondents were aware that they received food, shelter, health care and education assistance from the UNHCR and NGOs, they generally did not know the names of organisations and were unclear as to who was responsible for what. Very few respondents said they had had any direct contact with NGOs, many explaining that NGOs worked directly with the camp leaders, rather than 'ordinary people' such as themselves. Some said that, as they did not speak English, they would not be able to communicate with NGOs in any case. Despite the lack of direct contact, some respondents had general suggestions for improving the situation of Karen refugees in Thailand and recommendations for NGOs:

Health and Education: Some people suggested that more teacher training was needed and more vocational training in areas such as plumbing and electrician training, hospitality and tailoring. One respondent suggested that vocational training should be developed in order to enable the recognition of these qualifications in Australia. Respondents were very concerned about the steady depletion of health and education workers from the camps, many of whom have now been resettled in third countries, and suggested the need to recruit more staff schools and clinics. One respondent suggested that, if the salary of health staff was increased, this would help with recruitment.

Security: While many respondents were concerned about the lack of legal protection of refugees in Thailand, and the inability to work outside the camps, this was obviously a difficult issue to address. One respondent suggested the need for agricultural land just outside the camp boundaries on which refugees could legally grow their own crops and vegetables. She suggested that this could enable refugees to work without risk of being arrested or exploitation. She mentioned that one refugee camp – Tham Hin – has such a system in place.

Basic Needs: Many respondents focused on the need for an increase in basic necessities. It was suggested that NGOs could consider providing more food and additional variety. The provision of additional food could help alleviate the need for refugees to leave the camp in search of an income. It was also suggested that more housing materials, including bamboo and leaves, were needed so that refugees did not have to leave the camp to collect them. The need for more mosquito nets, clothing and charcoal was also mentioned. Some respondents suggested that the provision of more buckets to refugees for the collection of rainwater and the digging of more wells could help to address the water shortage. A number of respondents raised the need for greater attention to be paid to the many new refugees who are arriving in the camp, some of whom were not yet receiving rations.

Food Distribution: Respondents also had suggestions for resolving the issue of corruption in food distribution. Some suggested that more monitoring should occur, and that perhaps food could be distributed directly to the people, rather than through the camp leaders. One woman suggested that NGOs should organise an investigation into this issue to gauge the extent of the problem. She stressed that the investigation team would have to comprise Karen people. One man suggested that, if NGO staff were based in different areas of the camp, this would help build relationships and trust with Karen people, and may increase the likelihood that they would report their concerns.

5.2 Chin Refugees in Malaysia

Most Chin respondents who had been in Malaysia described having very little contact or assistance from NGOs. Very few were able to mention the names of any NGOs. Some respondents who had been in immigration detention stated that they had received no support or visits from any organisations. Some others mentioned that a Malaysian human rights organisation had visited and provided assistance to detainees. As one woman explained:

I wasn't able to go to visit [my husband in detention]. The NGO would go and I would give them some food to take. I don't know their name because my relative was the one who would communicate with them. The NGO helped us a lot. They would come to my relative's house to check what we needed, to see if everything was OK.³⁷

Some respondents described receiving health assistance at a free clinic. Those living in makeshift refugee camps also described receiving free food and medical assistance from an NGO, as well as plastic for tents when their housing was burnt down. One female respondent described an income generation project she had participated in, which was supported by an Australian organisation, Hope Adelaide. This organisation provided support to a Chin women's weaving project, through which the women made and sold Chin bags and other handicrafts. This woman spoke very highly of the project and the fact that it enabled her to make some money to survive. Some respondents mentioned that the Chin Refugee Committee (CRC) had provided free medical assistance and English language tuition. CRC would also provide emergency assistance to those needing to buy medicines or to help cover funeral costs.

Despite the perceived lack of contact with NGOs, some respondents had recommendations for their future work, or general recommendations for improving the situation of Chin refugees in Malaysia. One issue raised was the need for more information about the work of NGOs. Some respondents explained that they did not know much about NGOs work, or how to contact them. As one woman explained:

No matter what, if NGOs can do it that would be good. There are lots of people like me who don't know how to contact them. I don't know how to travel. I don't know how to ask for help.

This respondent suggested that NGOs could advertise their work through CRC. Another male respondent suggested that NGOs could visit the Chin community in their houses to check on people, talk to them and find out their problems rather than waiting for people to come forward.

Health care and education were other areas of priority. One male respondent emphasised the need for more resources to be put into educational support for young people, given they were unable to attend Malaysian schools. One woman suggested the need for more health care assistance:

I want to suggest that they (NGOs) provide more health care because there are lots of refugees and there is not enough to help everyone. Also, we can't speak Malaysian and the Malaysian staff look down on us.

The need for additional support to people who had been arrested was also raised. As one man who had been in jail explained:

I don't really know what NGOs should be doing. Maybe they could report to the UNHCR if people are arrested. I didn't have any contact or support [when I was in jail] but this would have been good.

5.3 Chin Refugees in India

Chin respondents who had been in India also described having limited contact with NGOs. Many believed that there were few NGOs working in India with the Chin community; some suggested that, while NGOs focus their attention on the Thai-Burma border, few are interested in India.

Some respondents described having access to a free clinic with limited facilities run by Burmese people. Some mentioned another organisation which provided free health care to those with UNHCR registration. Some respondents mentioned receiving some assistance in the form of

³⁷ While this respondent suggested the organisation was an NGO, it may have been the Malaysian Human Rights Commission, given that the Malaysian Government places heavy restrictions on NGOs visiting jails and detention centres.

emergency food aid. One woman described an organisation that provided free educational assistance; however, she suggested that it was difficult for many people to attend as the classes were held far away and people did not have money for the bus fare.

One respondent had worked for a Burmese women's organisation which had provided assistance to women victims of violence. She described being frustrated with the group's lack of resources, and inability to provide enough financial assistance or support to the women. She said that women stopped going to the women's centre to report cases of violence because they were frustrated with the lack of material aid.

Some respondents had had contact with a Chin organisation which could provide some limited emergency assistance such as temporary accommodation and funds for those who could not pay their rent. This organisation was described as a community organisation staffed by volunteers, and with limited resources.

The need for financial assistance was the most crucial issue for respondents, particularly since the UNHCR reduced its assistance to refugees in India in 2003. One woman suggested that, while there was some limited assistance available from NGOs for emergencies, there is little attention to the long term day-to-day needs of refugees. As she put it:

Money is the most important thing for us. Not just emergency assistance. If we don't have an income, we still need to eat, live, buy clothing. There is not enough long term help.

One woman suggested that more attention needed to be given to education and health care, and that this support was needed in accessible areas. One man suggested that NGOs could provide more assistance through the Chin community organisation so that refugees' needs could be met in a holistic and coordinated way.

5.4 Iraqi Refugees in Syria and Jordan

Very few respondents described having any contact with, or assistance from, NGOs. Most stressed that they had to pay for everything with their own savings. Many did not think that there were many aid agencies operating in Jordan and Syria. As one male respondent described:

I think the world forgot about us Iraqis. I am not sure if there is any agency or organisation that is set up to help the Iraqis. I think there should be some services that target Iraqis but, to tell you the truth, if there was I would have known about it.

Three respondents mentioned a Jordanian women's organisation that provided some lessons on nutrition and caring for children. This organisation was described as beneficial in that it allowed women to get out of the house. As one woman explained:

I used to go to a women's organisation. My neighbour took me with her. There we used to meet other women; some of them were from Iraq. We used to talk, the children got to play. We listened to lectures about many things like how to take care of our children and sometimes about our health. One time a team of doctors came to do a medical check up. It was good.

Interestingly, however, this woman did not accept that the services offered to her were a form of 'aid' or assistance. As she saw it, this was a community organisation serving the local people, and that this was not a program targeted specifically at Iraqis.

One woman mentioned a school that was opened by the Anglican Church [or perhaps an evangelical Christian Church] for Iraqi children. However, she were only able to attend the school for 6-7 months before it was closed down.

The only other assistance mentioned by some respondents was support provided by local churches. Some people described receiving presents such as toys for the children, clothing and

blankets, and occasional food supplies, from local congregations. One man described the kindness extended to him and his family from a couple at his local church:

There was this couple at the church. They were so nice and very caring. If we missed one Sunday they would come to our house right after church, even before they went to their house. They were angels. And the woman, when she found out we were OK, she insisted that we go with them to their house for Sunday lunch.....We used to spend Sunday all day with them at their house. They had a big old house with a big courtyard and a water fountain. My kids used to play and run around the courtyard for hours. It was nice; it made us feel human and very welcomed.

Given their lack of contact with NGOs, Iraqi respondents did not have specific suggestions for their work. Their primary suggestions for improving the situation of Iraqis in Syria and Jordan related to the need for the granting of residency status and work rights. For example, as one female respondent stated:

All of these issues, whether lack of education, health care or food, have a simple solution, and that is allowing Iraqis to apply for asylum in the Arab countries. That is real protection of refugees. Not to be accepted in the country only to be told later that your permit has expired, you are illegal here and you have to leave.....All of these issues can be solved if Iraqis have legal protection. Then aid organisations and the UN can help to provide food and aid and other things and the Iraqis can also work for a living and provide these things for themselves.

6.0 Summary of Common Findings and Conclusion

6.1 Common Findings

Although Iraqi, Chin and Karen refugees faced distinct protection-related issues, some findings are common to the experiences of all respondents. Firstly, almost all respondents identified their uncertain legal residency status and lack of work rights as a key concern. Many respondents lived in a constant state of anxiety about their possible arrest, detention and deportation. A common 'coping strategy' mentioned by respondents across the sample groups was keeping a 'low profile' to avoid contact with the authorities. In the case of Chin refugees in Malaysia, where the police and vigilante groups are especially harsh, a number of respondents had been arrested, detained and deported. A number of common protection concerns were also identified by female respondents. For example, female Chin refugees from India and Karen respondents raised the issue of sexual harassment as a key concern.

Another common finding is that almost all respondents were concerned about accessing enough money to ensuring their basic survival needs, including food, shelter and health care. The need to provide for themselves and their families meant that many respondents felt the imperative to work although it was often illegal to do so. These findings suggest that the issues of protection and basic necessities are integrally interrelated. In order to survive, refugees must work, which often raises new protection concerns, such as exploitation in the workplace and the potential for encounters with authorities, leading to arrest, detention and deportation.

A third common finding is that all respondents lacked awareness of, and contact with, NGOs. Karen refugees from refugee camp environments had a higher level of awareness of NGOs' work than Chin and Iraqi respondents from urban environments. The majority of Chin and Iraqi respondents perceived that they had received little, if any, assistance from humanitarian agencies. Even in the case of the Karen, respondents described having little direct experience of NGOs, as many suggested that contact was mediated through camp leaders.

6.2 Conclusion

Through documenting the protection-related experiences of Iraqi, Karen and Chin refugees and humanitarian entrants, this report has identified a number of key issues faced by these communities. Despite the limited sample size and the focus on respondents' perceptions rather than secondary research or interviews with NGOs, the study raises a number of significant protection issues and gaps which, the authors hope, may inform further research and policy development by NGOs.

The report has found that the protection issues faced by each sample group differ substantially; in particular, that refugees in urban environments have very different concerns from those in refugee camp environments. The sample groups also share some common concerns; namely an uncertainty about their legal status and work rights and concerns about meeting basic needs, and the fact that these issues are integrally interrelated.

The report has also identified that there is little awareness of the work of NGOs across the sample groups. This is particularly evident amongst the Chin and Iraqi refugees from urban environments. While the study parameters have limited any in-depth analysis of the reasons for this lack, this finding suggests that NGOs could consider conducting further research on this issue and give further consideration to how to promote their work and presence more effectively in urban environments.

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Appendix: Individual Interview Questionnaire

1. Introductory Questions

I want to begin by asking you some introductory questions about the place you lived before you came to Australia:

- How did you come to be in Australia?
- Where were you living immediately before you came to Australia? How long were you there?
- Can you tell me a bit more about your life there? (How long were you there? Were you with your families? Parents? Children? Close relatives? What was a typical day like? Work? School? Recreation?)
- What were the best aspects of your life there?
- What were the worst aspects of your life there?

2. Basic Necessities/Economic and Social Rights

I would now like to ask you some questions about your access to basic necessities in the refugee camp/place you lived before you came to Australia:

- Were you able to register with UNHCR? Did you have face any problems registering?
- Do you know who was responsible for providing your basic necessities (food, water, health care, housing, etc?) (Government/ Aid agencies/Humanitarian organisations/churches?)
- Did you have enough to eat and drink? If not, what problems did you face?
- Did you have access to health care? What kind? How often? Did you have any problems accessing health care?
- Was there adequate sanitation? If not, what problems did you have?
- Was your housing adequate? How did you get your housing? What kind of housing were you provided with? What problems did you face?
- Did you have any opportunity to work? If so, what kind of work? What problems did you have?
- Were you/your children able to attend school? What problems did you/they have?
- Were there any other basic necessities you lacked?
- Did you have any problems accessing basic necessities because you were a man/woman, young person/old person, particular ethnic group?
- How do you think these problems you have identified (access to food, water, health care, housing, work, education) could have been better addressed?
- Who do you think should address these issues? (Local Community/Government/Aid agencies/humanitarian organisations/churches?)

3. Physical security and protection

I would now like to ask you some questions about physical security.

- Did you feel safe in the place you lived? Why or why not?
- (If participant did not feel safe), who was responsible for making you feel unsafe?
- Did you face any particular safety issues due to being a woman/man, member of a particular ethnic group, young/old person?
- Did you feel able to practice your religion/culture? Why or why not?
- What steps did you or your local community take to help ensure your safety?
- Did anyone else help to ensure your safety? (local police, aid agencies, humanitarian organisations, churches?) If so, were they helpful or not? If not, how could they have done better?

4. Decision making

I would now like to ask you some questions about decision making processes.

- Did you feel you were able to participate in decision making about any the services provided to you? If so how? If not, why not?
- Were there any ways you could raise concerns with relevant decision makers? Who? Were these processes effective? Why or why not?
- How could these processes have been improved?
- Do you think refugee communities should be more involved in making decisions about the issues you have raised? If so, how?

5. Contact with Aid Agencies and Humanitarian Organisations

- Did you have any contact with aid agencies, churches or church based organisations in the place you lived? If so, what kind of contact? Who was responsible for what?
- What is your strongest memory of an encounter you had with an aid agency/church/church based organisation? (draw out this story)
- Do you have any suggestions for improvements in the work of aid organisations/churches/church based organisations you had contact with?

5. Ending the Interview

- These are all the questions I have. Is there anything else you would like to tell me that you think is important?
- Would you like to make any clarifications?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?
- Thank the participants again and reiterate contact details in the event of future questions or concerns.



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