

## Who are the Norwegian Refugee Council and what do they do in South-East Myanmar?

### BACKGROUND

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an international non-governmental organisation (NGO). It was set up in Myanmar in October 2008 to respond to Cyclone Nargis. Since then, the organisation has been carrying out projects to help communities affected by conflict across the South-East of the country (Kayin/Karen, Kayah/Karenni, Tanintharyi/Tenasserim, Mon and Southern Shan).

### ACTIVITIES

NRC is working on three main areas currently:

#### 1. Construction of shelter and schools

NRC's shelter project provides durable shelter to particularly vulnerable persons, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), conflict-affected communities and returned IDPs. The shelter projects include toilets and access to safe drinking water and a proper waste disposal system, which helps reduce malaria and other diseases. Beneficiaries also receive a kit including solar powered lights, mosquito nets and water filters. The



NRC-constructed shelter, Tanintharyi/Tenasserim

project also provides improved community infrastructure – bridges and roads – so that people can access basic services (health, education) and work/livelihood opportunities, for example, by being able to reach markets. The project reduces environmental damage through community forestry/reforestation. Since starting its shelter programme in 2010, NRC has provided assistance only for the IDPs and their host communities who are eligible for assistance due to their level of vulnerability. So far, NRC has not been involved in the construction of shelter for future refugee returnees (so-called 'relocation sites') either by itself or with others.

NRC also builds new child-friendly primary schools. This provides students, who previously struggled to access school, with education opportunities closer to home. The school compounds have water points or water harvesting, separate toilets for girls and boys, and furniture. NRC has also provided school kits to students and teachers. The permanent structures are built of reinforced concrete which can last for 50 years. This can also provide physical protection to the community in case of natural disasters. The schools also help protect communities from forced recruitment and labour.

Since the beginning of NRC's shelter activities, over 1,300 households have been provided with shelter, while 39 schools have been reconstructed and/or renovated in Kayin/Karen, Kayah/Karenni States and Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Division.

#### 2. Vocational Education/Life Skills

NRC has established two Vocational and Life Skills Education (VLE) Centres in South East Myanmar; one in Hpa-an/Paan, Kayin/Karen State and one in Dawei/Tavoy, Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Division. These centres provide a 3-month livelihood training for young people, aged 16-25 years, in dress making, food preservation, motor bike repair and short-term agriculture. As many of the

participants left school during primary school, literacy and numeracy classes are also available. The training also includes life skills and basic business planning.

The life skills section of the training course aims to prepare young people to deal with challenges in their personal lives and in their work. After training, students are able to make good life choices and find a way to make a safe and sustainable living in their own village or use their new knowledge and skills to find work opportunities outside in another community.

In addition the NRC Education programme offers onsite training opportunities in Hpa-an/Paan and Dawei/Tavoy. These include –life skills training, construction apprenticeships, food processing training and small machine maintenance training.

In 2015 NRC will also begin providing onsite teacher professional development for primary school teachers, in two schools built by NRC in Kayin/Karen State. The programme will involve working with teachers to provide quality learning for all children in these school communities.

During 2014, 468 students (236 female; 232 male) graduated successfully from training courses in the Hpa-an/Paan and Dawei/Tavoy Centres. 600 more students are expected to go through the training cycle by the end of 2015.

### 3. Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA)



NRC staff explaining ID card procedure, Karenni/Kayah

Since June 2012, NRC has been supporting the Myanmar Ministry of Immigration & Population to speed up the issuance of national identity cards/"pink cards" to conflict-affected communities in the South East. The Citizen Scrutiny Cards help people to exercise their basic rights, including freedom of movement, voting and education (university). They also help people access a number of important government services and to register their property or land. NRC supports the government to travel to villages throughout the South East, issuing cards to people on the same day that they apply for them.

People who are eligible for associate ("blue card") and naturalised ("green card") citizenship can apply for cards at their MoIP Township Office. NRC does not assist the government in issuing blue, green or white cards. Refugees who return to Myanmar/Burma, may be issued with pink cards, if they belong to one of the 135 nationally recognised ethnic groups and if they have a Household Registration List. Currently there is no special arrangement for refugees or returnees to access civil documentation in Myanmar. Discussions are currently taking place between the Thai and Myanmar governments, and before any organised return can take place, a system to ensure that returning refugees receive their civil documentation must be in place.

From the beginning of NRC's civil documentation activities in 2012 up to the end of 2014, nearly 227,000 people across the South East were issued with "pink cards". NRC is currently supporting the government in issuing cards to even more people in more locations in the South East, from Jan-Jul 2015 to try to ensure that people over 18 years can vote in the next general election.

NRC is also beginning a new project (started April 2015) to help families who received shelter assistance from NRC in Palaw, Tanintharyi/Tenasserim Division, they can secure their legal rights to the shelters, and plan a future there.

In January 2015, NRC also began a Cross-Border project, operating from Kayin/Karen State, which will work to help provide refugees in Thailand with information, from different sources, about developments in the South East of Myanmar. This information is intended to help refugees in Thailand be better informed about the situation in their places of origin or areas of possible return. This leaflet is part of that project and more information will follow, after more consultation with refugee representatives and organisations working in the camps, including government, non-government, community-based, and UNHCR.