

The Gendered Dimensions of Protracted Displacement: Livelihood Strategy and Protection Framework for Karenni Women in Thailand

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Abstract

Karenni refugee women who have been forcibly displaced from Myanmar and reside in the Ban Mai Nai Soi camp in Mae Hong Son Province, Thailand, have been encountering diverse livelihood experiences during the protracted displacement. The study explores how Thailand's restrictions on mobility and limited access to formal economic opportunities disproportionately affect refugee women, increasing their vulnerability, aid dependency, and livelihood precarity.

Using a qualitative ethnographic approach, the study conducted in-depth interviews with 19 Participants, including refugee women artisans and key stakeholders, as well as participant observation. The study uses the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework to examine how Karenni refugee women navigate vulnerabilities through craft-based activities as a coping mechanism to sustain their livelihoods. The analysis examines how a humanitarian governance system shapes refugee women's livelihoods in restricted, prolonged shelters.

The changes in Thailand's refugee right to work policy prioritize practically all male-dominated

sectors; they simultaneously restrict women's mobility and access to formal job opportunities. In addition, the study highlights the critical roles and constraints of non-governmental organizations and camp governance structures in mediating women's access to capital assets. In this regard, refugee women's engagement in craftwork serves not only as an income-generating activity but also as a protective framework. Finally, through the livelihood framework, the study points out the need for gender-responsive refugee policies in Thailand that recognize women's coping strategies within a rights-based protection framework.