

A Phenomenological Study on the Role of Civil Society Organizations in Supporting Urban Refugees in Thailand

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Abstract : Thailand is host to the largest number of refugees in the region. The country has been one of the most accessible points of entry to refugees around the world because it has relatively lenient visa requirements, enabling asylum seekers to enter the country and subsequently search for legal assistance. However, because Thailand is not a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Convention on Refugees which governs the refugee status determination and safeguards several rights of the refugees, there are no national laws or administrative framework on the protection of refugees. Refugees are considered as illegal migrants, and certain groups are permitted to stay temporarily only upon executive discretion. Aside from the documented group of refugees from the Myanmar border, there are many others who came from different parts of the world. They are known as urban refugees believed to be in the thousands and are scattered in the impoverished areas of Bangkok and the suburbs. This study aims to advance understanding of the role of civil society organizations in supporting refugees, with particular focus on urban refugees. Using the method of triangulation in qualitative research, the study investigates the life journey of a refugee family from Pakistan, their difficulties and struggles to survive in perilous situations. The study presents the dynamics of how civil society works and collaborates to fill the gap for much-needed social services. It also discusses the depth and scope of the role of faith actors in the protection and support of this vulnerable sector. The engagement of civil society reveals framework and structure that aims to create long-term impact. The help provided is not merely monetary or material dole-outs but a platform for refugees to integrate with community, develop skills and make productive use of their time.

Keywords : asylum seeker, civil society, faith actors, refugees

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