

SICRIE Project Presentation on refugees from Burma in Czech Republic

SICRIE

Social inclusion on the cultural and
religious interfaces of Europe

From Burma (Myanmar) to the Czech Republic

An unanticipated development as part of the SICRIE Project was the engagement of the Czech partners with refugees from Burma being resettled in the Czech Republic



The integration of the refugees the Czech Republic has proven to be a much greater challenge than it was anticipated both by the government organizations and NGOs. First of all, they experienced substantial linguistic, cultural and occupational adaptation stress. Coming from agrarian background in a different climate zone they had no professional skills which they could employ in the new situation. The only thing that was familiar to them in the Central-European context was religion, as all people in the first refugee group were Baptists. Secondly, being housed in several municipalities, disrupted their usual patterns of communal life and having contributed to development of problems in their hierarchical relations and spread of negative attitudes. refugees.



The project participants learned about a number of ethnic and political sensitivities which have to be respected in working with the refugees. The SICRIE group was able to advise on the particularities of the religious needs of the refugees and about the social patterns associated with them. The greatest shortcoming of the otherwise generous and well-meant integration program of the Czech government was the disruption of the religious community life of the

On October 20th 2010 SICRIE volunteer group led by Peter Zvagulis visited the second group of refugees. As new arrivals all 40 refugees (eight families) were still living together as a community in a refugee housing facility.

Our involvement and advice with the first group apparently had helped the NGO to better understand the religious needs of the refugees (most of whom are Baptists) and it appeared that there was better communication and less misunderstanding as of what their new life in the Czech Republic would look like.

The group looked very motivated to learn Czech language (which for many was their first foreign language) therefore the SICRIE group leader communicated with them in Czech.





Members of the refugee community and the SICRIE project in Prague

With the help of IBTS and SVCC the SICRIE team was able to organize a bi-lingual (English-Burmese) worship service in Prague for the second group of refugees. This was followed by shared meal, a time of informal conversation with the multi-cultural community of SVCC and by a special Communion service for the refugees. As some of the refugees told the SICRIE team later during a guided tour of the Prague Castle area, this was very reassuring and encouraging experience for them.