



ADVOCACY BRIEF

SAFETY NETS: A Situational Analysis of Non-Formal Educational Pathways for Migrant Children in Thailand's Tak Province

The Safety Nets research webinar held on April 29th, 2022 was attended by diverse representatives from the academic community in Thailand, both local and international organizations working to support children from Myanmar, and both teachers and headmasters providing essential educational services to migrant children in Tak Province, Thailand. What follows are the key action points, ideas, and advocacy messages that came out of the interactive sessions.

Voices of MLC Headmasters

Education for migrant children needs to change as the situation and dynamics on the border have changed. In order to continue to support migrant children we need to first ensure all children can access education. Longer term, new solutions are needed in order to ensure education is recognized and accredited. Solutions could include:

- A joint curriculum for migrant children
- Further development of the Learn Big platform
- Further development of online teaching and learning skills for teachers and students
- Working with higher education institutions to administer tailored admission systems that are more inclusive of marginalized learners
- Increased opportunities for vocational training (TVET) opportunities for youth
- Increased focus on Thai and English language learning
- Due to the widespread economic disruption of the pandemic, many migrant families cannot afford even nominal educational costs. Work needs to be done to engage private companies and new funding streams to keep Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) open
- Explore internationally recognized options for migrant children in addition to the GED and IGCSE

Over 2,500 migrant children have dropped out during the pandemic and intentional effort is needed to re-engage both children and their parents. The following are needed to motivate children to re-enrol and stay in school:

- Fundraising to provide school tuition fees for children from underprivileged families
- Awareness raising for migrant parents on educational pathways available. This could include supporting youth role models to share with their peers about the value of education
- Development of a comprehensive school nutrition program
- Strengthening socio-emotional support for teachers, parents, and children
- Increasing access to flexible learning opportunities for those who do not have internet

Perspectives from the Academic Community and Local Organizations

There are many opportunities to increase educational support for migrant children in Thailand. We need to build on and leverage the advancements that have already been made including access to non-formal education, and access to Thai Government Schools and Migrant Learning Centers. With the widespread disruption occurring in Myanmar, more flexible and recognized options are needed. Solutions moving forward could include:

- Supporting migrant children to access Thai educational pathways (both formal and non-formal) as these are both accredited. This will require work to overcome existing barriers including language, access to documentation, and educational costs
- Expanding flexible education options including the provision of online and open source learning options
- If the situation is such that migrant children move or drop out of school, a credit system is needed so that children can re-enroll and continue where they left off
- Implement certificated experience- or skill-based curricula for lifelong learning. This could include microcredentials
- The gender barriers that prevent young women from accessing vocational training need to be addressed and broken down for more inclusive access
- Awareness raising is needed to ensure parents understand alternative education pathways. If the education options available are not suitable for overage children or children who have dropped out, they should be connected to vocational and non-formal education options



Perspectives from International Stakeholders

Labels have real-world implications for access to services and support. To those in need, the labels ‘migrant’ or ‘refugee’ may appear to be a matter of semantics, however they have real consequences. For international audiences, the term ‘migrant’ implies that those crossing an international border had an element of choice in their decision to move. In many situations this is not the case and more robust advocacy is needed to clearly articulate the challenges and opportunities for migrants and refugees respectively. In other contexts, local governments have been far more effective at addressing these kinds of urgent education challenges compared to national-level structures. Stronger links with local authorities are needed to develop long-term solutions.

Migrant education should be considered as an Education in Emergency (EiE) context. While operating in an environment that meets many of the criteria to be considered EiE: widespread insecurity; governance challenges; ongoing social, economic, physical, and environmental hazards; and direct or indirect impacts of conflict (INEE, 2010) - non-state run education systems have protected migrant children’s right to education for decades without the large scale humanitarian funding or support that other protracted crises have received. We need to continue to ensure basic needs are met, that children are safe, and that as many children as possible can access education. Until that foundation is solidified, migrant children will continue to be at risk. Raising awareness to migrant families about the value of education will be an essential part of the solution. Amidst so much uncertainty, education is the only thing that can help children escape the cycle of poverty.

Education is one of the main agents to (re)build a country. Investing in education can keep future generations safe and empower them with necessary critical thinking skills. There are different pressing matters in the wake of both the COVID-19 pandemic and the coup d’etat - we need to ask ourselves if all these issues can be addressed in parallel. Education for children from Myanmar is being politicized, which has left millions out of school in Myanmar and thousands out of school in Thailand. We need to carefully consider ways forward, listen closely to local communities, and act with the best interests of children in mind.

Educational Accreditation

Education providers are walking on an accreditation tightrope as they weigh the advantages and drawbacks of aligning with different educational authorities. Among the options available, the Myanmar Department of Alternative Education (DAE), the Myanmar Ministry of Education, the National Unity Government (NUG), and Ethnic and Indigenous Education Departments each have an opportunity cost which must be carefully considered. What is clear is that communities must be consulted in these decisions. As much as is possible, a collective voice for migrant children is needed.

Our Next Steps

Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation and **TeacherFOCUS** are committed to finding solutions that meet the needs of migrant children - and we need your help to do this. In the coming months here are some of the ideas we will be exploring:

- Initiating a Back to School Campaign to raise awareness among migrant parents about the educational pathways available and the value of education
- Organizing a followup conference on flexible education pathways
- Delivering presentations to local education departments, the technical college, and local governments to identify new channels of collaboration
- Supporting Thai language teachers at MLCs with the aim to bridge to Thai Non-Formal Education (Kor Sor Nor)
- Submitting proposals for the development of a pre- Thai non-formal pathway for migrant children and youth to give them a needed headstart in Thai language
- Developing a non-formal education map with key stages and opportunities
- Supporting scholarships for non-formal education
- Expanding vocational training opportunities for migrant youth
- Integrating EiE best practices within our work, and sharing our learning with the international EiE community

Partner With Us!

We are looking for organizations and individuals to join us in our efforts to give all migrant children access to safe and high quality education. Please reach out using the contact information below:

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