

# Stepping Stones

The Impact of Twin Crises on the Future of Migrant Education in Thailand

December 2022



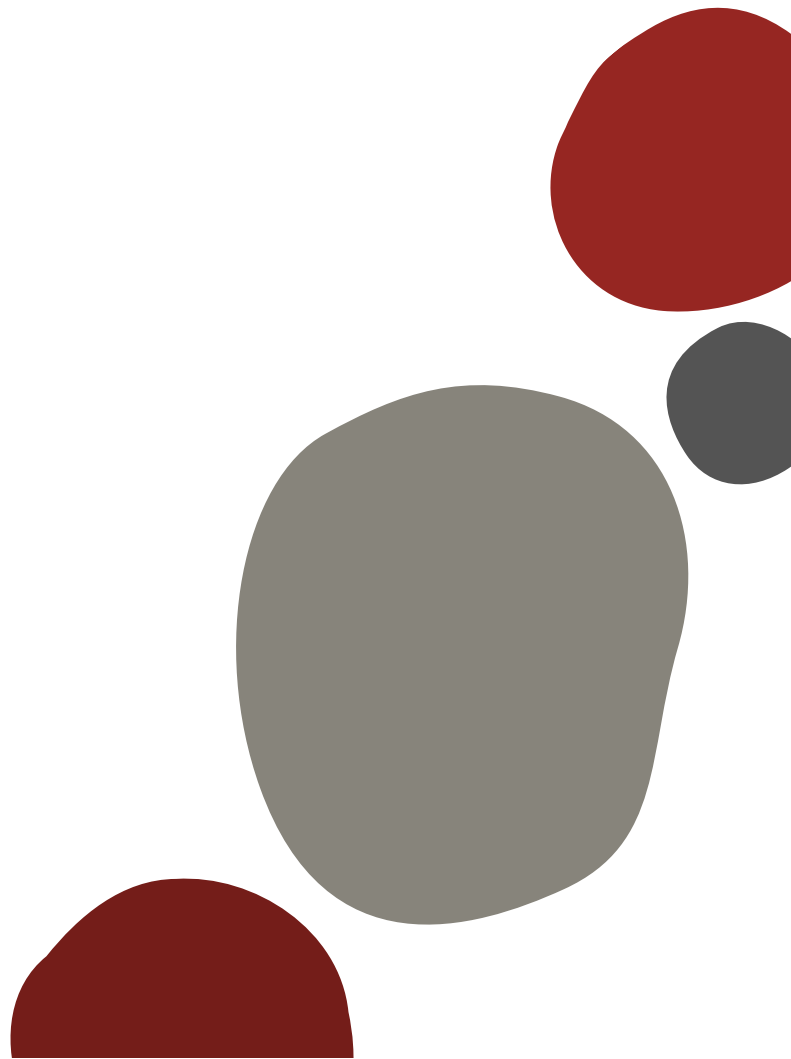


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Future of Migrant Education in  
Thailand

Tom Lowe, Naing Win, and Greg Tyrosvoutis



This research was conducted in collaboration by:

The Inclusive Education Foundation (InEd) and TeacherFOCUS

Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF)

The Mae Tao Clinic (MTC)

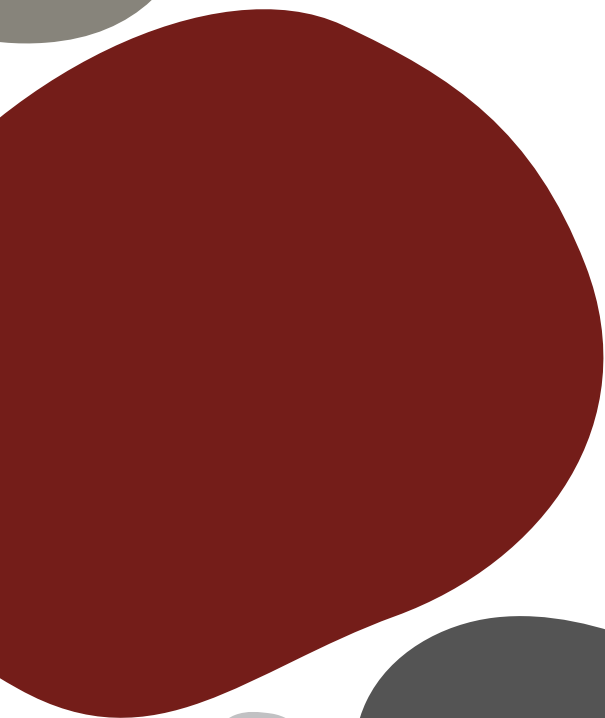
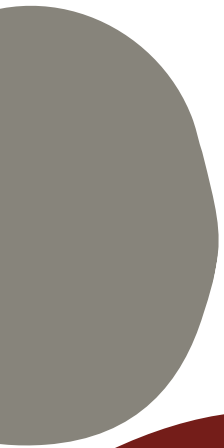
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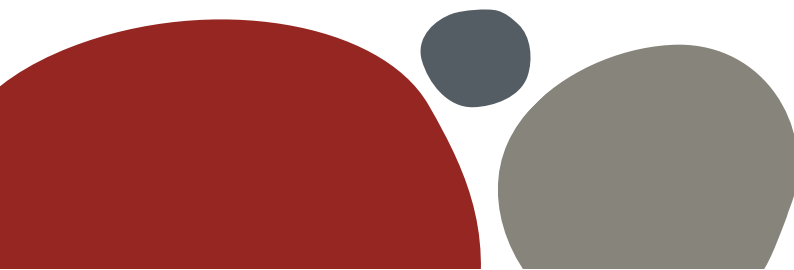
The research team would like to gratefully acknowledge the participation and contributions provided by the government staff, teachers, school administrators, parents, and students involved in this research project. It is our sincere hope that the findings and recommendations within this report will work to turn the existing educational stepping stones into the bridges needed by so many migrant children to achieve their full potential at this critical juncture in history.

A special thanks is due to Child's Dream Foundation who have not only generously supported this research, but have also provided essential funding for numerous organizations within the migrant education ecosystem for over 15 years. During this time, thousands of children have passed through this system, and today, over 11,000 migrant children have their right to education protected.



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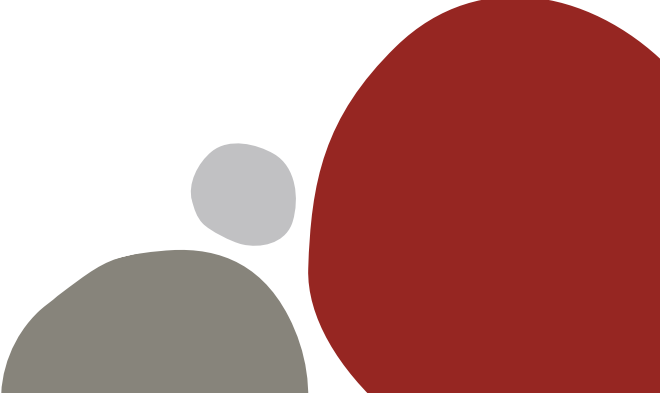
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## Abbreviations

BEF	Border Emergency Fund
CBO	Community Based Organization
EEF	Equitable Education Foundation
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GED	General Educational Development
HBL	Home Based Learning
iGCSE	International General Certificate of Secondary Education
INEE	Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGOs	International Non Government Organization
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ILO	International Labour Organization
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
MECC	Migrant Educational Coordination Center
MLC	Migrant Learning Centre
NFE	Non-formal Education <i>Used in this report to refer to Kor-Sor-Nor, the Thai Non-Formal Education System</i>
NFPE	Non-formal Primary Education
NFME	Non-formal Middle School Education
NGOs	Non Government Organizations
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
OER	Open Educational Resource
ONIE	The Department of Non-formal and Informal Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
WHO	World Health Organization



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# 1. Foreword

Education is the bedrock upon which futures are built. The events of the past two years have raised global consciousness that education is so much more than just the means to obtain functional literacy and numeracy. Education lies at the heart of friendship, safety, and socio-emotional development. Now, as we collectively seek to build back (and forward) better, it will be essential to take stock of the challenges ahead of us. According to the recent research into the state of education in Myanmar before the twin crises, Bhatta and Katwal (2022) found that:

- 89% of grade 5 students were not able to achieve minimum proficiency in reading
- Only slightly more than half of children completed middle school
- One in five children completed a high school education
- Significant learning disparities existed for children of linguistic minority backgrounds, children from low socioeconomic households, and those learning in rural areas

Now, as a result of more than two years with limited access to education, the learning poverty rate in Myanmar (defined as the percentage of 10-year-olds who cannot read and understand a short passage of age-appropriate materials) is expected to increase to 100%. Make no mistake, the future of education for children from Myanmar is, and will continue to be, categorically described as education in emergency. Education for migrant children in Thailand has long been described as being in a state of crisis (Save the Children, 2014). Yet, over the last thirty years, an education ecosystem has been gradually established throughout Thailand to provide access to education for tens of thousands of vulnerable learners from Myanmar. Despite these best efforts, hundreds of thousands of migrant children are still out of school (Harkins et al., 2019), and those enrolled in school continue to face a myriad of linguistic, cultural, and poverty-related challenges (Tyrosvoutis, 2019).

COVID-19 and the ongoing political and economic turmoil in Myanmar has resulted in an unprecedented paradigm shift in the migrant education landscape, driving migrant education from quiet crisis to outright emergency. Consequently, for the last two years, migrant education stakeholders have been forced to adapt: shifting their focus to meeting basic needs before being able to facilitate authentic learning. In educational parlance, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has had to supersede Bloom's Taxonomy. Despite great resilience, Bridges have become Stepping Stones. The title of this report represents the disintegration of the many recognized educational bridges migrant children once had to continue their education in Myanmar. Now, once established and recognized pathways have become precarious and politicized. The futures of hundreds of thousands of children are at stake.

Strong partnerships, collaborative approaches, and inclusive consultations undertaken in collective solidarity are the best tools I know of against this backdrop of disruption and uncertainty. Bespoke systems-level responses, such as those outlined in the recently published RAPID framework (World Bank et al., 2022b), will give us a needed foundation to guide planning. I continue to stand in awe of the remarkable resilience, dedication, and creativity of my colleagues and our education partners, without whom this report would not have been possible. Together, we will continue to forge ahead to build brighter futures for children on the fringes.



Greg Tyrosvoutis  
Co-Founder and Director  
The Inclusive Education Foundation and TeacherFOCUS






## 2. Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world. The unprecedented restrictions on gatherings affected over 1.6 billion learners and 100 million teachers in more than 190 countries (UNESCO et al., 2021). Worldwide, children have missed an estimated 2 trillion (and counting) in-person learning hours (UNICEF, 2022). Despite the great resilience demonstrated in the collective and concerted response, there is accumulating evidence that children experienced devastating learning losses as a result of the pandemic, and children from disadvantaged backgrounds suffered disproportionately (UNICEF, 2022). In October 2020, UN General Secretary Antonio Guterres warned of a ‘generational catastrophe’ (UN, 2020, para. 1) - a sentiment echoed in recent World Bank research (Bhatta and Katwal, 2022; World Bank et al., 2022a; 2022b).

Over the last thirty years, an educational ecosystem for Myanmar migrant children in Thailand has slowly evolved with the aid of inclusive shifts in Thai government policies, including the landmark 1999 Education for All (EFA) policy. Despite this progress, the ecosystem has long-existed in a state of quiet crisis defined by a multitude of challenges resulting in most migrant children not completing their education (Save the Children, 2014). In 2019, concerted efforts were made to address these challenges through a large-scale participatory action research project led by seven local education organizations. The final report, entitled *Bridges: Participatory Action Research on the Future of Migrant Education in Thailand* (Tyrosvoutis, 2019) created a roadmap of recommendations from the ground to drive improvement of access, quality, recognition, and sustainability of education for migrant children throughout Thailand. The title, *Bridges*, represented the multiplicity of educational pathways that were available for every migrant child to reach their full potential. Now, many of these bridges have been reduced to stepping stones and many education pathways hang in the balance.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on education systems throughout Thailand, resulting in increased drop-out rates, school closures, and learning losses across the country (Belghith and Arayavechkit, 2021; EEF, 2022). In Myanmar, the COVID-19 pandemic became the backdrop to a second crisis with historic implications. On February 1st 2021, the Myanmar military arrested the country's democratically elected leaders and seized power, making unsubstantiated claims of widespread electoral fraud (Goodman, 2021). As a result, the Myanmar education system endured one of the longest periods of school closures in the world (UNICEF, 2022). Today the country continues to experience ongoing political upheaval marked by intensifying civil war, economic crises, a fractured education system, and escalating humanitarian needs (Frontier, 2022b; UNOCHA, 2022; World Bank, 2021b; UNOCHA, 2021).

To explore the impact of these twin crises on the Myanmar migrant education ecosystem in Thailand, 32 local researchers from 8 organizations interviewed 1,013 participants as part of this participatory action research project. Fieldwork was conducted during October and November 2021 - the peak of the pandemic in Thailand. Approached through a lens of education in emergencies, the findings and recommendations are clustered through three themes - Access, Learning and Protection. The title of this report: Stepping Stones: The Impact of Twin Crises on the Future of Migrant Education in Thailand has been chosen to highlight the enduring resilience of educational pathways and the foundations upon which new bridges can be built.



*"Normally we eat 3 meals a day.  
Now we can only eat 2 meals a day."*

- Migrant Parent



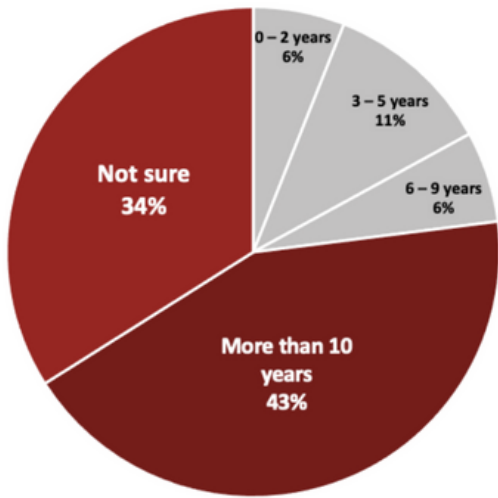
## Key Findings | ACCESS

The twin crises had a major impact on children's access to education. Between March 2020 and April 2022, over 3,331 children dropped out from migrant learning centers in Tak province - representing approximately 1 in 4 students (MECC, 2022). Those that remained experienced high levels of absenteeism - approximately 20% of students reported missing more than a month of school. The ongoing crisis in Myanmar has severely curtailed access to student's previously preferred educational pathways. Prior to February 2021, many children and youth studying within MLCs intended to return to Myanmar to continue their studies. Due to the crisis within the country, a large proportion of respondents felt that they could not return and consequently see their long term future in Thailand.

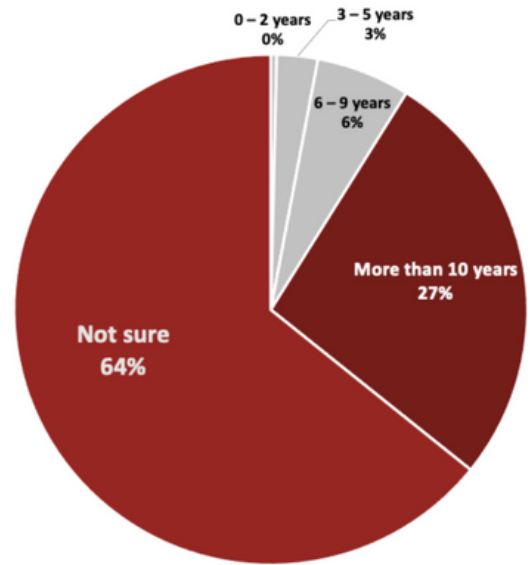
The shift to online and home-based learning modalities helped to fulfill children's right to access education, however, this also created new barriers to access. 80% of teachers in Thai schools, and 91% of teachers in MLCs reported teaching challenges caused by a lack of student access to the internet. Home-based learning required MLC teachers to visit multiple communities to meet with students and deliver printed worksheets. MLC teachers were more than twice as likely (72%) as Thai school teachers (30%) to report challenges with access to printed materials. MLC teachers also reported significant challenges with transportation due to increased costs and heightened travel restrictions.

Inequitable access to vaccines and financial support during the pandemic served as a stark reminder of the inequalities between systems. Experiences of children, parents, and teachers in Thai schools highlight the significant language support that is required to ensure the migrant learners are not excluded from or left behind within the Thai education system.

Migrant parents' expected stay in Thailand (Nov, 2019)



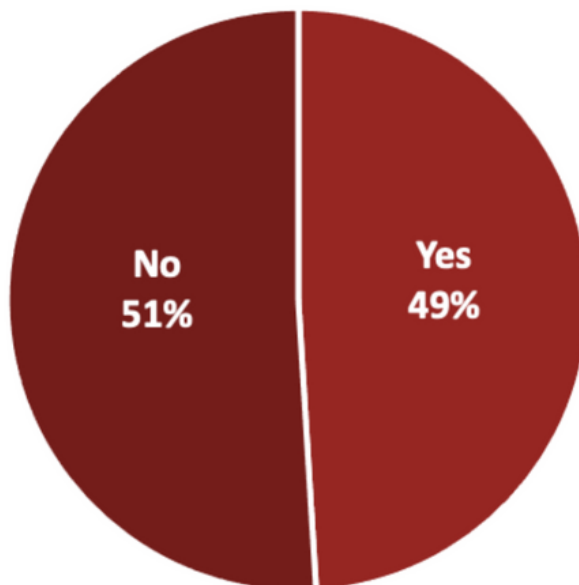
Migrant parents' expected stay in Thailand (Oct, 2021)



*"Due to the current situation in Myanmar, we changed our childrens' plan to go back and study in Myanmar. I planned for my children to enroll in high school in Myanmar because I want them to go to university in Myanmar. But now we do not have any way to go back. I now feel like I am losing the way of my children's education and ourselves."*

- Migrant Parent

**MLC Students' response: Do you know a friend who has dropped out of school since the start of the pandemic?**



# Key Findings | LEARNING

Quality of learning, as measured by teacher and student self-assessment of learner engagement, declined. Both students and teachers reported a lack of time to meaningfully teach, understand, and assess the curriculum. Under-resourced MLCs experienced a transition from quiet-crisis to outright emergency, with the lack of resourcing severely limiting the quality of alternative delivery modalities. The economic vulnerabilities of migrant families were exposed by the pandemic and then exacerbated by the increased costs of online-learning. Insufficient digital devices and a lack of access to low-cost, high-speed, reliable internet were major impediments to the delivery of quality, inclusive online-learning. The effectiveness of home-based alternatives were limited by time, printing costs, and access to transportation.

Language barriers severely impacted migrant children's ability to engage with the learning provided by Thai schools, and had an adverse effect on student's help-seeking behavior. Whereas 75% of migrant children in MLCs reported asking their teachers for help, only 32% of migrant children in Thai schools reported asking their teachers for help. Furthermore, almost 1 in 10 migrant children in Thai schools reported having nobody to ask for help.

Throughout the last two years, teachers have gone above and beyond the call of duty to earn the utmost respect from their students and communities. Students rated their relationship with their teachers as the most important factor in their education throughout the twin crises. However, teachers continue to work for below adequate wages, despite being pillars within their communities and the center of the strong network of professional relationships that contribute to community-wide resilience. Ultimately, migrant teachers deserve a professional pathway to formal recognition/ accreditation of their teaching skills that would enable them to continue to progress and work across different systems. The impact of the ongoing crises in Myanmar has made it more difficult for migrant teachers to earn recognition/ accreditation from Myanmar authorities and alternative means are needed to secure the professional futures of migrant teachers at this time in which they are needed most.





# Key Findings | PROTECTION

Children experienced direct harm as a result of the twin crises. COVID-19 mandated school closures pushed students into isolation, cutting them off from the social support networks provided by their peers, and the formal child protection and safeguarding mechanisms established within schools. The economic impact of COVID-19 restrictions led to 87% of families reporting a reduction in income. This directly impacted families' capacity to feed themselves, provide shelter for their children, protect their children from harm, or provide their children with access to education.

Parents reported that children faced significantly increased child protection risks, including mental health issues, early marriage, and child labour. 55% of parents reported increased risks of mobile phone game addiction. 1 in 5 surveyed students reported both increased stress and feelings of loneliness during the pandemic. When children were asked to describe their feelings during the pandemic, the results produced a cloud of negativity. The impact of the February 2021 political crisis forced migrant parents and their children to re-evaluate their long term plans, increasing uncertainty about future aspirations. The vast majority of migrant parents in Thailand are long-term residents and many hope to remain in the country, but qualitative responses throughout the research reveal that the events of the last two years have led to community-wide feelings of insecurity, uncertainty, and anxiety.

A key source of anxiety for all migrants from Myanmar in Thailand is continued access to appropriate documentation, which limits mobility, legal protection, and access to social services. Documentation is the perennial problem underpinning so many of the challenges faced by migrant education stakeholders. Over 80% of migrant parents surveyed during this research have resided in Thailand for over 10 years yet a significant proportion continue to face uncertainties surrounding their long term futures due to the challenges with accessing affordable, timely, and stable documentation.

The twin crises have further underlined the importance and urgency of addressing these issues. On the one hand, migrant workers are expected to be crucial to Thailand's post-covid economic recovery and long term economic goals as they have proven to be over the last twenty years. On the other hand, Thailand has the opportunity to demonstrate regional and global moral leadership in mitigating some of the damage inflicted by the ongoing and escalating humanitarian catastrophe along its longest border. Improving documentation rights of migrant parents, children, and educators holds the potential to bring about local, national, regional and international educational, economic, political and security benefits. Thailand is a country that has benefited greatly from migration and multiple sectors of Thailand's economy are highly reliant on the migrant workforce. Addressing the issues surrounding documentation today can strategically define what Thailand will be tomorrow. The ongoing crises in Myanmar will continue to negatively impact the wellbeing of Myanmar migrants in Thailand due to anxiety regarding their families at home, documentation in Thailand, and the availability of future educational and vocational opportunities.





# Legacies of the Twin Crises

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With vaccines administered, schools reopened, and lockdowns fading into memory, there is a distinctly 21st-century temptation to allow collective attention to be drawn towards the latest zeitgeist. However, the challenges of the last two years, as well as the responses to them, will continue to leave lasting legacies. The long term impact of these legacies depends on our collective efforts to address ongoing needs and build upon learning and resilience.

It is estimated that Thailand will require 400,000 new migrant workers in 2022 to rebuild the economy to pre-pandemic levels. Simultaneously, the ongoing crises in Myanmar are likely to continue to act as a push factor, and consequently migration to Thailand in the coming years is likely to increase, and thus the demands on the migrant education ecosystem are expected to increase.

For those currently within the ecosystem, all evidence suggests that migrant learners are likely to have experienced high degrees of learning losses. Research shows that children who have fallen behind academically, or who have previously missed extensive periods of education are more likely to drop out again in the future (Doll, 2013; Sabates, 2010). Thus it may be anticipated that without targeted action, the COVID generation will be at increased risk of dropping out in the coming years.

Events in Myanmar have politicized education. MLCs have lost access to resources, financing, and technical support from within Myanmar. Many migrant families intend to stay longer in Thailand, and Thai-accredited pathways are likely to become increasingly important - especially to younger learners. Older learners who are matriculating through the Myanmar systems are experiencing anxiety and uncertainty about their futures. A lack of alternative post-secondary education opportunities is likely to reverberate throughout the system compounding the increased risks of dropouts.

The events of the last two years have pushed the migrant education ecosystem further away from sustainability. The international donor landscape has shifted in response to COVID-19, needs in Myanmar, and crises in Afghanistan and Ukraine. The long-standing challenges of accreditation and recognition for migrant teachers and children now apply to hundreds of thousands more teachers and learners within Myanmar. Solutions to challenges on either side of the border have the potential to be scaled across multiple dimensions of the Myanmar education ecosystem.

If positives are to be found in the crises over the last two years, it is in the actions undertaken in response to the challenges. Every organization involved in this project has drawn upon the learning from throughout this participatory action research process to adapt programming and initiate new responses. This report spotlights examples that have played a key role in response to the twin crises such as The Border Emergency Fund which has supported over 5,000 families with dry food during the ongoing crises; The Out of School Enrolment TaskForce which has directly enrolled over 400 previously out of school children into education; Digital School which continues to produce over 160 educational videos that has reached over 100,000 learners via UNESCO's LearnBig platform; and Child-Friendly Spaces which offer creative, play-based, learning activities to over 1,300 migrant children led by a trained community champion.

The twin crises have had a major impact on the education of Myanmar migrant children in Thailand, and yet from the responses to crises grows resilience. Although educational bridges for Myanmar migrant children are better conceptualized in the current context as stepping stones, strong foundations remain. It is through evidence-based, community-led, collaborative efforts that resilience can be harnessed to ensure every Myanmar migrant child has access to the resources they need to achieve their full potential.





## Key Recommendations to Improve Access

- **Multilingual Classroom Assistants for Early Grades at Thai schools** - The Out of School Enrollment Task Force has found that the most difficult step for out of school migrant children to enter Thai school is the first year. They are 'submerged' into a class with a language they often don't understand or speak at home. This also places a lot of pressure on teachers who cannot speak children's mother tongue language. Additional classroom support is needed for migrant children to succeed. Our team currently supports 4 bilingual classroom assistants to help migrant children make a smooth transition into Thai formal education, but more are needed to meet the needs of all children.
- **Addressing the Digital Divide** - 80% of migrant teachers and 46% of migrant students reported access challenges regarding online learning. In line with UNICEF's (2020) report, *Reopening with Resilience: Lessons from remote learning during COVID-19*, it is recommended to continue providing IT infrastructure to leverage the digital teaching skills gained over the last 2 years. MLC teachers need training, guidance and financial support to deliver effective online teaching. Local organizations and INGOs with expertise and capacity should seek ways to improve MLCs' online capabilities. Financial support is needed for sim cards, data packages, routers, and laptops.
- **Greater Accessibility of Thai NFE (Kor Sor Nor) for Non-Thai Children and Youth** - The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has dramatically impacted migrant families who have lived and worked in Thailand for multiple years. They are increasingly seeking education options for their children that are accredited in Thailand. The non-formal entrance exam requires Thai language proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing at approximately a grade 3 level. This language barrier prevents migrant children from accessing this nationally accredited non-formal pathway. Pre-KSN programs for children with low Thai literacy levels are needed to bridge this critical gap. These could be stand-alone programs or integrated with the current MLC curriculum.
- **Explore Alternative Accredited Education Opportunities** - Quality education is not defined by accreditation, however, accreditation drives quality and brings greater opportunities to students. The loss of accreditation due to the Myanmar political crisis has been severely felt by education stakeholders on both sides of the border. It is unlikely a single solution to the accreditation crisis will be found. Multiple pathways should continue to be explored, this may include expansion of GED programs, implementation of iGCSE, or innovation in accredited distance learning courses.

# Key Recommendations to Improve Learning

- **Include Migrant Children in Large-scale Assessments of Learning Losses** - Understanding the extent of learning losses during the COVID-19 pandemic is the first step in mitigating the damage inflicted. Robust, rigorous, systematic analysis can support understanding of the gaps to be filled, the resources required and the areas and groups in most need of support to achieve equitable education for all. ASER, EGRA and EGMA are examples of types of assessments that can lead to high quality data that can be built upon. For further guidance explore: *The Guide for Learning Recovery and Acceleration: Using the RAPID Framework to Address COVID-19 Learning Losses and Build Forward Better*.
- **Expansion of Digital School** - To complement the teaching and learning initiatives proved by MLCs, Digital School provides children in Thailand and Myanmar with structured, creative, routine and interactive lessons to keep them engaged and learning. By live-streaming via facebook, Digital School has reached over 100,000 viewers. As of October 2022, over 160 videos have been produced and are available at learnbig.net. Additional funding is needed to scale the initiative to provide supplementary education.
- **Empower Migrant Youth Leaders** - Migrant communities possess an untapped resource: youth who are further in the Thai education systems. Youth leadership and empowerment programs should be rolled out to train youth as community volunteers to break down the language barriers between migrant parents and Thai school staff. Interviewed migrant children enrolled in Thai schools shared they had few people they could ask to help them with their homework. Migrant youth are best placed to help migrant children learn the fundamentals of Thai language as they can speak both children's mother-tongue and Thai.





## Key Recommendations to Improve Protection

- **Access to Legal Documentation for Long-term Working Migrants, Migrant Teachers, and Children** - Many migrant families who have lived in Thailand for years still lack necessary legal documents for their personal security. As security concerns continue to escalate, information on how to access legal documentation pathways are needed. Otherwise, migrant families live in fear of reprisal and remain hesitant to access services they are entitled to.
- **Expansion of Safety Nets for At-Risk Children** - The legacies of the twin crises have left children at increased risk of drop out. The expansion of existing formal and non-formal protection mechanisms and educational opportunities can build the resilience of migrant children. The *Child-friendly Spaces*, and the *Learning Resilience through Play* projects are examples of existing projects that employ responsible and trained community focal points to develop community based protection mechanisms.
- **Teacher Support Focusing on Essential Needs and Well Being** - Teachers are on the frontlines: forced to navigate numerous roles and responsibilities and be leaders during this time of uncertainty. Future teacher training should seek to supplement teacher stipends and provide teachers with the tools they need to provide holistic support to migrant children. Future training should also include teacher well-being as educators require outlets and a space to dialogue about the professional and personal challenges they face.



# 3. Context

## 3.1 Migration from Myanmar to Thailand

Situated at the heart of South-East Asia, Thailand has been a regional hub of migration for thousands of years. Over the last thirty years, Thailand has become one of the world's 'great development success stories' (The World Bank, 2021c, para. 1), undergoing a "remarkable transition from a low-income to an upper middle-income country in a single generation." (Yang et al., 2020, pp.7).

Between 1988 and 2018, immigration legislation was reformed to fill major gaps in labor markets (OECD/ILO, 2017) and during the same period official poverty rates declined from 65.2 percent to 9.8 percent (Yang et al., 2020). Thailand changed from a country which mainly sends migrant workers abroad, to a country which mainly hosts migrant workers (Harkins et al., 2019). Migrant workers in Thailand have played a significant role in the country's economic revolution (OECD/ILO, 2017).

In 2019, there were an estimated 3.9 million migrant workers in Thailand, 50 percent of whom were of Myanmar origin (IOM, 2022). Migrant workers make up a large percentage of employees in industries such as construction, agriculture, fisheries, hospitality, and domestic work, often taking positions that are referred to as the '3Ds': dirty, dangerous, and difficult (Rattanapratchetong, 2020). It is estimated that migrants in Thailand contribute between 4.3 to 6.6 percent of Thailand's annual GDP (OECD/ILO, 2017) and make up 10 percent of the workforce (Harkins et al., 2019).

Migrant workers are predicted to become more important to Thailand's economy in the future. By 2030, Thailand's population will be 'superaged' with over 20 percent of the population aged over 65 (UN, 2019). By 2060, over 30 percent of the population will be aged over 65, and there will be 30 percent fewer Thai people of working age than in 2020 (Moroz et al., 2022). Migrant workers will be an important catalyst if Thailand is to achieve the goals of the Thailand 4.0 agenda, escape the 'middle-income trap', and continue its journey of economic development from high-middle income country to high income country (Ladek, 2017).

**Figure 1** Thailand 4.0 agenda



Source: <https://thaiembdc.org/thailand-4-0-2/>



In recognition of the importance of migrant workers to the economy, the Thai government has taken great strides in improving legal protection for migrant workers (Ramani and Uden, 2021), however, further work is required to ensure that immigration and social protection systems are cost effective, efficient, secure, and user-friendly (Harkins et al., 2019). Existing systems fail to sustainably address trafficking, exploitation, mobility, and irregular migration, and contribute to negative public discourses surrounding migrant workers. As a result, both Thai businesses and migrant workers suffer (ibid).

The COVID-19 pandemic “has dramatically impacted the working conditions and labor migration dynamics across Cambodia, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Thailand, likely for the long term” (IOM, 2021, p.XIII). During 2020, the Thai economy shrank by an estimated 6.1 percent (ILO, 2021a) with migrant workers experiencing reduced working hours, wage cuts, and job losses. It is estimated that 1 in 10 migrant workers became unemployed between March 2020 and May 2021 (IOM, 2022). Legal migrants who lose their jobs have just one month to find new employment, or they lose their legal right to remain in the country. Official statistics record that 183,375 individuals returned to Myanmar between March 2020 and April 2021. The vast majority of migrants who returned to their home countries during the pandemic had resided in Thailand for less than two years (ibid). Many of those that have remained in Thailand have chosen to do so because they have families in Thailand (IOM, 2022).

As Thailand recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, research conducted by the Thai Government’s Department of Employment found that 400,000 new migrant workers will be required to fill critical labor shortages and restart economic growth in 2022 (ILO, 2021b). Although 90% of migrant workers in Thailand believe skills development and training leads to better employment opportunities, only 16% received any form of training in the last year due to a lack of available training, awareness of available training, or a lack of time outside of work (IOM, 2022). The historical and contemporary importance of migrant workers to Thailand’s economic development (Ladek, 2017) indicates that education provision for children from Myanmar in Thailand will be increasingly important in 2022 and beyond.

### **3.2 Education for Migrant Children from Myanmar Prior to February 2020**






Access to quality education during childhood is a critical window for children to develop skills, including soft skills and language skills, that bring life-long benefits. Developing sustainable and accredited educational pathways for migrant children is not only a critical issue of strategic national interest for Thailand’s 21st century economic development plans, but also an opportunity to demonstrate moral leadership on the regional and global stage at this historic juncture in international relations. This section summarizes the historical challenges education providers in Thailand have faced in ensuring migrant children from Myanmar have access to quality education within an accredited and sustainable system.



### 3.2.1 The Scale of the Challenge

As a direct result of multi-decade progressive policy-level reform, access to education for Myanmar migrants in Thailand has slowly and steadily improved. The two most popular pathways are provided by Thai public schools and through community-driven Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs). In 2018, 145,379 migrant children were enrolled in Thai Government Formal schools and 16,350 migrant children were enrolled in MLCs (Harkins et al., 2019). Although current research exists on the qualitative challenges faced on a daily basis by migrant children, parents, teachers, school directors and education organizations (cf. Tyrosvoutis, 2019; Harkins et al., 2019; Save the Children, 2014), limited quantitative data makes it difficult to ensure migrant children's fundamental educational rights are protected. In 2018, it was estimated that there are between 300,000 and 400,000 migrant children living in Thailand and a further 145,000 stateless and undocumented children, some of whom were born in Thailand (Harkins et al., 2019).

**Figure 2** Reasons migrant children are out of school

-  Leave school to work (many after grade 4)
-  Take care of younger siblings so parents can work
-  Lack of transportation
-  Parents can't afford school costs
-  Lack of support from parents to stay in school

Source: Tyrosvoutis, 2019

As migrant labor rights in Thailand have slowly improved over the last thirty years and so too have the rights of migrant children to access education. In 1990, Thailand led the world by hosting the historic World Conference on Education in Jomtien. The conference launched the global Education For All (EFA) movement that continues to bring enormous benefits to education today (Osstviet, 2022). As a direct result of the EFA movement, Thailand enshrined migrant and stateless children's rights to access 15 years of Thai public school education in the 1999 EFA Policy and 2005 Cabinet Resolution on Education for Unregistered Persons. In March 2017, the Thai government introduced a new policy that allows Thailand-born migrant and stateless children to apply for Thai citizenship if they graduate from a Thai university<sup>1</sup> (Apikul, 2019). In 2018, a Ministerial Proclamation removed documentation barriers that prevented migrant children from enrolling in public schools and the Equitable Education Act made additional funding available to schools to support children from low income families - including migrant children (ibid).

<sup>1</sup> For further details see: Secretariat of the Cabinet, "Government Gazette Book 134: Ministry of Interior Announcement," 16 March 2017, pp. 10-14, <http://www.ratchakitcha.soc.go.th/DATA/PDF/2560/E/079/10.PDF> (in Thai); and Moodjalin Sudcharoen, "The Anticipatory Childhood: Language Socialization of Burmese Migrant Children and Imaginings of a Thai National Future," paper presented at the 13th International Conference on Thai Studies in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on 15-18 July 2017

Migrant children and youth also have access to non-formal education pathways provided by state and non-state providers. In 2018, just 2,562 migrant children enrolled in the Thai non-formal education pathway, Kor-Sor-Nor (Harkins et al., 2019). Since 2014, MLCs have also offered Myanmar-accredited, non-formal, primary and middle school education pathways which serve hundreds of children every year. Since February 2021, Burmese migrant children have also been able to attend the newly established home-based learning pathway provided by the Myanmar National Unity Government. However, with the February 2021 political crisis, both formal accreditation systems and parental confidence in the Myanmar curricula have been undermined, and the future of these pathways is uncertain (Lowe et al., 2022). However, despite the laudable progress made by the Thai government in reforming access to public education and the expansion of non-state education pathways for migrant children, the majority of migrant children remain out of school. In 2018, long before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was estimated that 200,000 migrant children, or over 50% of learners were out-of-school (Harkins et al., 2019).

### 3.2.2 The Qualitative Nature of the Challenge

The challenges faced by the migrant education ecosystem are complex: a number of barriers limit student access, undermine the quality of education delivered, limit accreditation and recognition of academic achievement, and inhibit the development of sustainable solutions.

#### Barriers to Access

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, there were a number of barriers to access which prevented migrant children from enrolling in school:

- For many families, there is a long-standing lack of awareness of the rights of migrant children, or the available educational pathways (Nawarat, 2012; 2018; Tyrosvoutis, 2019). Research indicates this is true for both newly arriving migrants, and migrants who have lived in Thailand for many years (IOM, 2020).
- Although education within MLCs and Thai public schools are nominally free, associated costs of education can be prohibitively expensive for low-income families (UNICEF, 2021; Harkins et al., 2019; Ramani and Uden, 2021). Hidden costs include transportation, learning materials, and school uniforms.
- For families who are aware of their rights and options and can afford to send their children to school, language barriers often prevent migrant families from enrolling children in Thai public schools (Tyrosvoutis, 2019).
- Migrant families continue to face discrimination within Thailand (ILO, 2020; Ramani and Uden, 2021) which leads to a reluctance of migrant families to enrol their children into Thai public schools.
- Although every migrant child has the right to access education in Thailand, families often cite documentation as a barrier to accessing education (UNICEF, 2019; Tuangratananon et al., 2019). An indirect consequence of challenges with documentation is a perpetual fear of arrest by those who are concerned about their documentation status (Reddy, 2015).

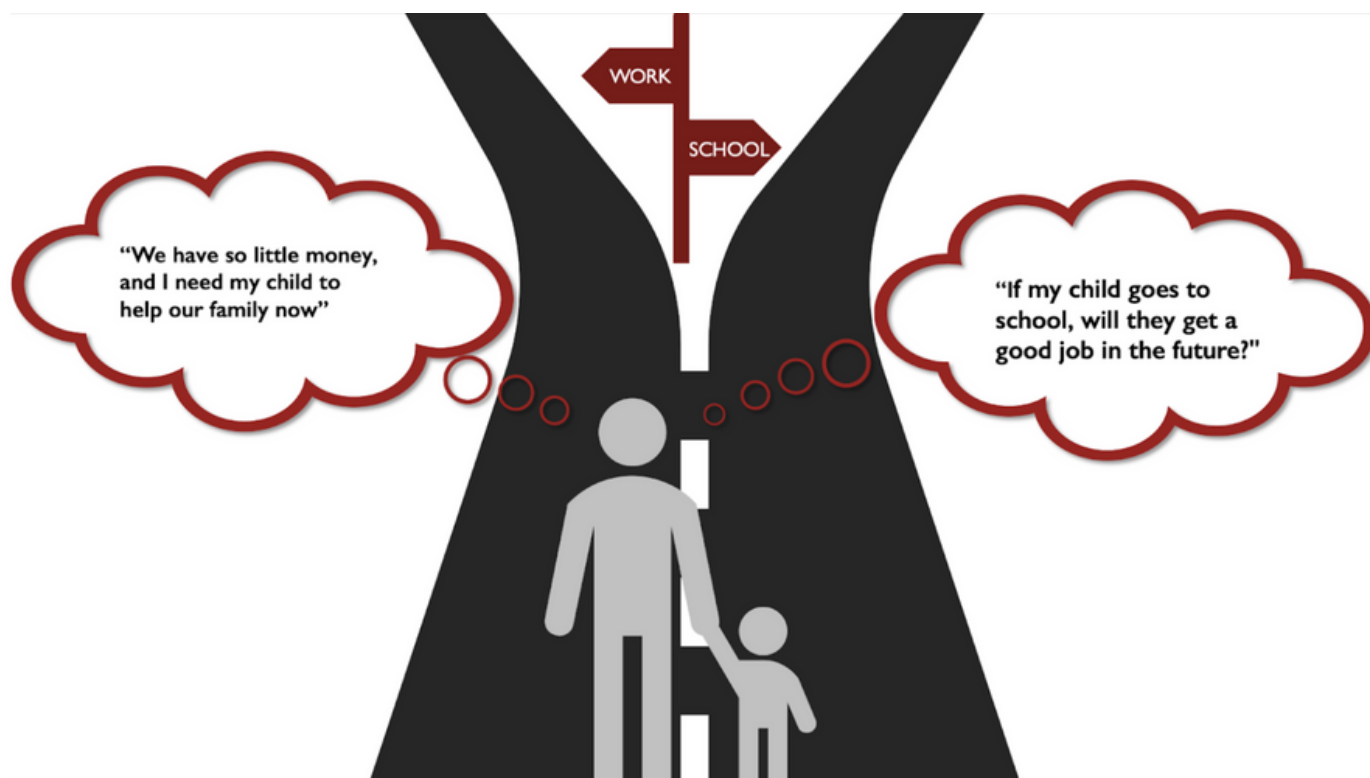
## Structural Challenges Undermining Quality

A number of structural challenges undermine the quality of the education migrant children can receive while enrolled in school:

- MLCs are primarily funded by local community contributions and/or by NGOs and international donors. As a result, MLCs are low-resource environments, with limited furniture, stationary, textbooks, and other essential classroom supplies.
- Although Thai public schools are better-resourced than MLCs, a lack of specialized language support for migrant children in Thai public schools undermines the quality of education migrant children receive (UNICEF, 2019).
- Teachers in both types of school have limited access to professional development opportunities. Teacher professional development is especially important for teachers at MLCs as most learn to teach while on the job.

These structural challenges not only undermine the quality of education provided to migrant learners, but also fuel an additional barrier to access: opportunity costs. Low-income migrant families are often forced to weigh the value of educating their children against the value of children supporting their households with chores, childcare, tending to livestock, or paid work. Pressure on either side of the scale can prove to be the tipping point for families juggling competing priorities.

**Figure 3** Competing priorities for migrant families





## Accreditation and Recognition Challenges

MLCs operate - both literally and figuratively - within a borderland. The status of 'learning center' does not afford the same position within Thai law as a school. By operating outside of Myanmar, teachers, students, and MLCs have limited access to Myanmar accreditation and certification systems which limits access to further education opportunities.

- Without appropriate recognition under Thai law, MLCs and their staff have restricted access to sources of funding and social protection mechanisms. A limited number of MLCs are supported by registered foundations, but this option is not yet available to all MLCs.
- Education within MLCs remains in search of sustainable, system-wide accreditation. Some migrant children in Thailand are able to undertake Myanmar-accredited board exams which facilitates their return home and integration into the Myanmar education system. Some MLCs offer two-track solutions: allowing children to receive a Myanmar education in addition to a Thai accredited non-formal education.
- The establishment of Myanmar-accredited non-formal primary education (NFPE) and non-formal middle school education (NFME) pathways have been a notable brightspot (Harkins et al., 2019) and a major achievement of the migrant education ecosystem, but these pathways are under threat (Lowe et al., 2022).
- Although a variety of NGOs offer vocational training courses for migrant youth, there continues to be limited post-secondary education options. This further undermines the perceived value of education for both parents and students.
- Despite evidence-based advocacy (Tyrosvoutis et al., 2021), migrant teachers delivering the Myanmar curriculum in Thailand are unable to become accredited teachers in Thailand or Myanmar. MLC teachers are already underpaid for their skills and are often driven by their love for the profession, sense of duty, and are sustained by the strong professional relationships and respect within their communities. Although these motivators are powerful, a lack of remuneration and access to professionalization opportunities critically undermines the MLC teacher career pathway. This leads to high attrition rates amongst educators and further undermines educational quality.

## Barriers to Sustainability

Ensuring migrant children have access to accredited, quality education is essential if Thailand is to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4. However, MLCs in Thailand are a long way from achieving their own sustainability.

- MLCs are primarily funded through parent and community contributions, alumni networks, and NGO grants. Without regular, sustainable financing, MLCs are unable to invest in, or work towards their own long term strategic priorities. Sustainable financing would empower MLCs and their communities to address the issues of access, quality and accreditation.
- Funding for MLCs has been declining since 2014, with international resources increasingly focused on projects within Myanmar (Yan Naing, 2017a; 2017b).
- Formal recognition under Thai law would enable greater financial sustainability, but also improve migrant teachers' access to documentation. Without documentation, teachers live in fear of arrest, and many need to find alternative employment which can provide support for documentation. Improving teachers' access to documentation would greatly reduce teacher attrition rates, thus enabling MLCs to retain their most valuable resource.

**Figure 4** Summary of challenges facing the migrant education ecosystem prior to March 2020



The progress in migrant education in Thailand has been achieved through hard-fought, daily battles by children, parents, teachers, school directors, CBO staff, donors, academics, and advocates. Despite the many challenges outlined above, prior to February 2020, the migrant education ecosystem was on an upward trajectory. The following sections outline how the twin crises of COVID-19 and the Myanmar political crisis have fundamentally changed the context in which migrant children learn.

### 3.3 An Overview of the Impact of COVID-19 on Education

COVID-19 is an unprecedented global crisis, with 6.3 million recorded deaths (WHO, 2022), and an estimated cost of over \$12.5 trillion to the global economy (Reuters, 2022). The impact on education, and the cost to future generations is unquantifiable. However, this long-term impact can yet be mitigated - provided that the damage inflicted is understood and appropriate lessons are learned. This section briefly outlines the impact of COVID-19 globally, and draws on selected secondary sources to further outline the global and local backdrops to which this research is set.

#### 3.3.1 Access

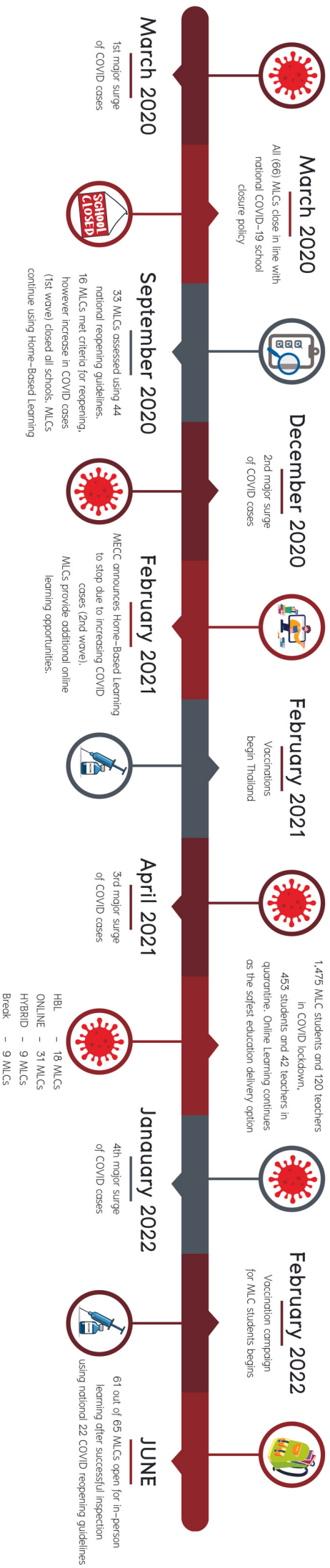
On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, and governments around the world responded by taking unprecedented steps of closing borders and shutting down education systems. An estimated 1.6 billion children across 169 countries (UNESCO, 2020) lost access to education due to COVID-19 school closures. UN statistics record that schools in Myanmar were affected by pandemic-related closures for 69 weeks, whereas Thai public schools were affected for 52 weeks. (UNESCO and UIS, 2022). Migrant Learning Centers were unable to open, and were affected by closures for over 100 weeks, from March 2020 - June 2022.

#### 3.3.2 Learning

To mitigate the impact of school closures, the world pivoted to various forms of distance learning, the most prevalent being online learning. However, a lack of access to digital devices and low-cost, reliable internet connections exacerbated already-existing inequalities in low-income countries (UNESCO and ITU, 2022). Research by the Equitable Education Foundation found that Tak province, a central focus of this research, was one of the five provinces in Thailand with the poorest availability of electricity, connectivity, and digital devices (EEF, 2021). Figure 6 below compares the various strategies used in the Thai public system and Migrant Learning Centers to protect children's right to education during school closures.



**Figure 5** A timeline of COVID-19's impact on migrant learning centers





**Figure 6** Learning modalities implemented by education providers during the COVID-19 pandemic

Learning Modalities Delivered by Migrant Learning Centers	Learning Modalities Delivered by Thai Public Schools
Modality: Learning using Worksheets	Modality: On-hand Learning
Students learn using worksheets which parents need to pick up from the school or that are delivered by teachers.	Students learn using worksheets which parents need to pick up from the school.
Modality: Home-Based Learning (HBL)	Modality: On-air Learning
Teachers go to students' communities to teach.	Students learn from TV/Radio.
Modality: Hybrid Learning	Modality: Online Learning
Students learn both online and in person through teacher visits.	Students learn from one of the online communication platforms with their teacher (Zoom, Messenger, LINE, ect.).
Modality: Online Learning	Modality: On-demand Learning
Students learn from one of the online communication platforms with their teacher (Zoom, Messenger, LINE, ect.)	Students learn using pre-recorded videos and online sources.
	Modality: On-Site Learning
	Students learn at school.

Despite these concerted efforts to maintain children’s access to education, it was clear that no modality can effectively replicate the quality of in-person learning. A growing body of quantitative research is now emerging which identifies that significant learning losses occurred even in countries that were able to implement effective distance learning programs, or reopen schools after relatively minimal shutdowns. The global average suggests that children missed six months worth of learning as a result of COVID-19 (Patrinos et al. 2022). World Bank research conducted across Thailand between April and June 2021 found that 50% of children faced learning difficulties attributed to an inability to focus on remote learning without adult supervision and a lack of access to learning devices (Belghith and Arayavechkit, 2021). Today, the Equitable Education Foundation reports that within Thailand, most students enrolled in the public system achieved no additional learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that Thailand has the 5th most significant problems in the region - with Myanmar facing the greatest losses (EEF, 2022). World Bank research reveals that even before the pandemic, 89% of grade 5 students in Myanmar were unable to read at a minimum proficiency level, and on average, very little learning was able to occur during the two years of the pandemic (Bhatta and Katwal, 2022).

### 3.3.3 Protection

The loss of access during the COVID-19 pandemic not only impacted the quality of learning around the world, but also had a major impact on children’s wellbeing and resulted in significant child protection challenges. Without access to school, children were cut off from the social support networks of their peers as well as formal child protection mechanisms. The transition to new educational modalities increased stress and reduced wellbeing amongst teachers, parents, and children. The impact of COVID-19 on global economies led to underemployment, unemployment, forced migration and increased risks of child labour (The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, 2022). Children from low-income and marginalized backgrounds have been more adversely affected (ibid.).

A rapid needs assessment of 64 MLCs in Tak province published in June 2020 found many migrant families without sufficient access to food and drinking water, vulnerable community members experiencing isolation, widespread anxiety and depression, and a rise in unemployment (Sasaki and Tyrosvoutis, 2021). In subsequent research conducted across 11 MLCs in July 2021, parents, children, and teachers reported increased risks of physical abuse, mental health issues, child labour, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, school drop-outs, and game addiction (Zar et al, 2021).

### 3.4 The Impact of the February 2021 Political Crisis on the Migrant Education Ecosystem

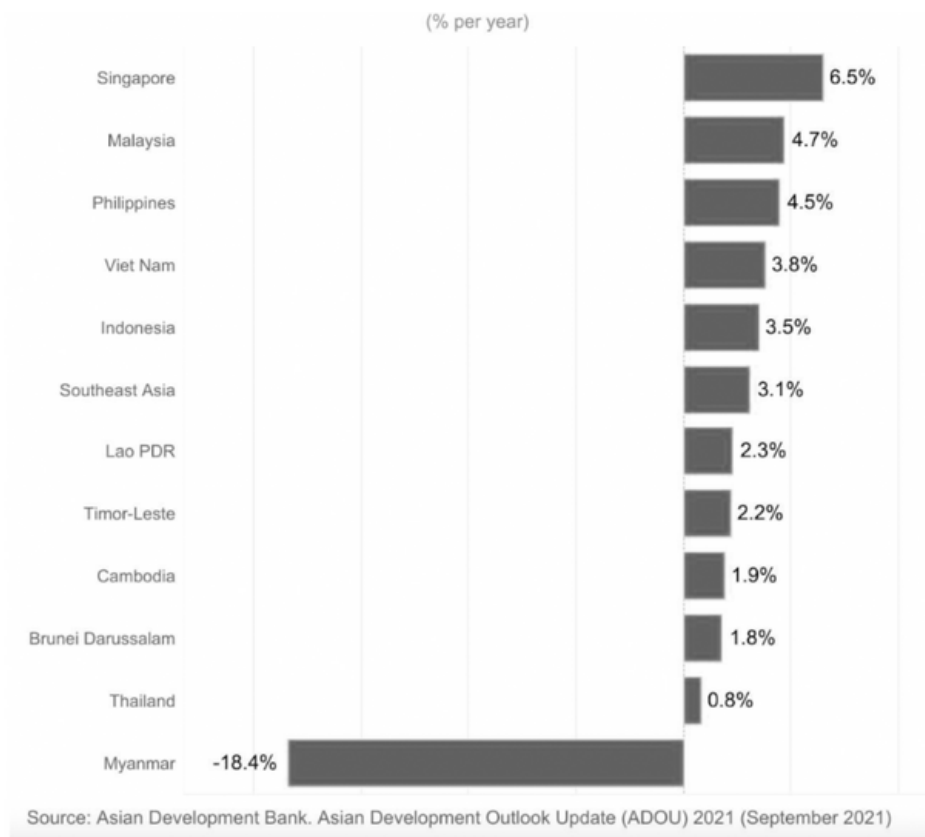
On 1st February 2021, as the migrant education ecosystem wrestled with the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the democratically elected government of Myanmar was arrested by the military-appointed State Administration Council citing widespread, but unsubstantiated, electoral fraud (Goodman, 2021). Peaceful protests erupted across Myanmar, and in diaspora communities around the world. Hundreds of thousands of civil servants, including tens of thousands of doctors, and 125,000 education staff joined a Civil Disobedience Movement in protest (Frontier, 2022a). In August, a third wave of COVID-19 swept the country, killing tens of thousands (Frontier, 2022b). Schools remained closed, and many parents refused to send their children to state schools (Mendelson, 2021). At school reopenings in May 2022, national statistics indicated that 4 million fewer children were enrolled in state schools in Myanmar than in 2019 (UNOCHA, 2022). Save the Children estimates that closer to 7.8 million children are currently out of school (Save the Children, 2022).

As a result of the widespread disruption caused by these twin crises, it is predicted that the Myanmar economy will decline by 18%, 1 million jobs will be lost (World Bank, 2021b), and over 50% of children in Myanmar will be living below the poverty line within a year (UNDP, 2021). As of July 2022, the Myanmar Kyat had depreciated by 50%, and while statistics estimate inflation is 17% (World Bank, 2022), analysts note that this fails to reflect the impact on ordinary people, with reports of the price of rice tripling in some areas (Nikkei Asia, 2022), and shortages of cooking oil (Frontier, 2022c). Conflict between the Myanmar Armed Forces and resistance groups, led by People's Defense Forces and Ethnic Resistance Organizations, continues to escalate. As of June 2022, 1.1 million people in Myanmar had been internally displaced (UNOCHA, 2022). In Myanmar's long history of political repression, economic mismanagement, and armed conflict, the current crises are described by humanitarian agencies as unprecedented (UNOCHA, 2021).



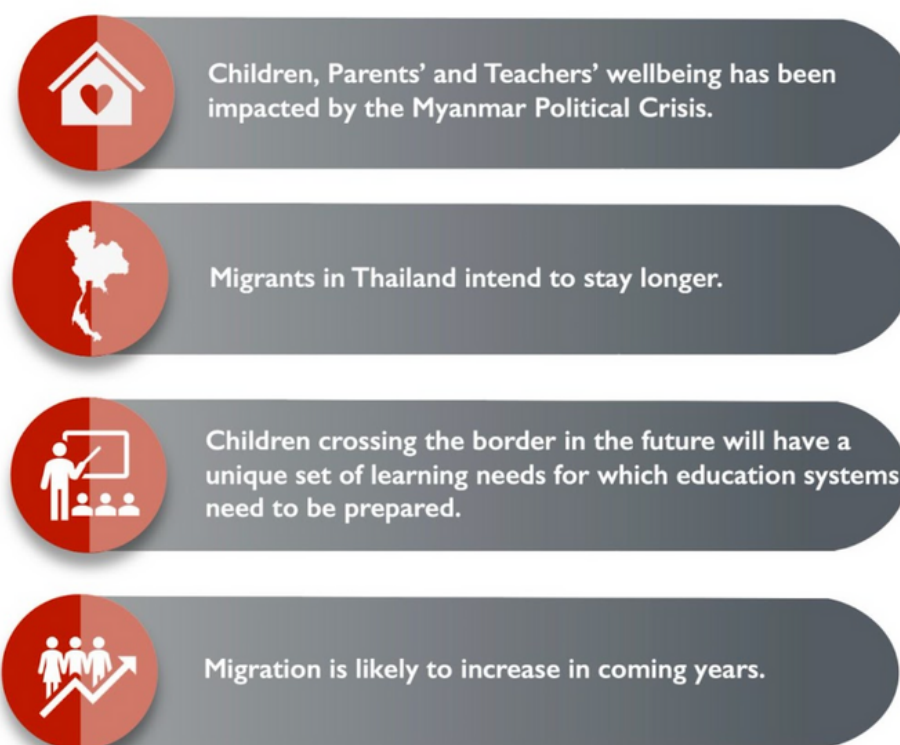


**Figure 8** GDP growth rate forecast of ASEAN countries in 2021



The impact of these humanitarian crises have been felt in migrant communities within Thailand. Parents, children, and teachers continue to be deeply concerned for the safety and wellbeing of friends and relatives within Myanmar, and many migrants who had previously planned to return to Myanmar, now intend to remain in Thailand. Migrant workers send a large proportion of their income home to family as remittances (IOM, 2021), and the worsening economic situation in Myanmar will increase the demands on migrant workers to send more money home. The social-emotional impact of the ongoing situation in Myanmar on all those connected to the country should not be underestimated.

**Figure 9** Major impact of the crises in Myanmar on migration to Thailand



### **The Power and Importance of Language: Migrant or Refugee?**

Words create the world we live in, and contain great power. Labels such as 'migrant', or 'refugee' create identities which define the scope and scale of solidarity, legal and political protection, and the futures of individuals' lives. People migrating to Thailand from Myanmar have historically done so due to a number of pull factors including seeking better economic or educational opportunities; and push factors such as fleeing political oppression, conflict, and poverty. The changes in context in Myanmar since February 2021 will fundamentally change many individuals' decision to migrate. Lee et al. (2017) advocate for the use of the term 'migrants from crisis' to highlight the precarious position of Myanmar people in Thailand today.

### **3.5 From 'Development' to 'Education in Emergency'**

The events of the last two years have fundamentally changed the context of education for migrant children from Myanmar in Thailand. Prior to March 2020, education stakeholders working with MLCs sought to overcome the quiet crisis in education by strengthening the existing ecosystem and working towards a sustainable and accredited future.

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed the quiet crisis within the migrant education sector into an outright emergency. Migrant communities were forced to fall back on long-standing sources of resilience and rapidly adapt to try and meet the basic needs of children, families, and teachers. It was vital to ensure families had enough to eat, were able to protect themselves from infection, had access to social-emotional support networks, and to some form of education. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs came to supersede Bloom's Taxonomy.

**Figure 10** TeacherFOCUS's Maslow before Blooms Advocacy Campaign



In light of these changes in the migrant education context, education stakeholders working along the border found it necessary to apply a humanitarian lens of Education in Emergencies to research, program design, and operations. The results of this pivot were manifold:

- With the demand to focus on the basic needs within Maslow's hierarchy, education organizations established the Border Emergency Fund (see *Spotlight on Action: The Border Emergency Fund*), to provide emergency food and hygiene supplies to communities experiencing lockdowns, individuals in crisis, and families displaced by conflict.
- Recognizing that principles of protection lie at the heart of an effective Education in Emergencies response, further research has been conducted into the impact of the twin crises on child protection and child safeguarding systems (Zar et al., 2021). Drawing upon the findings and recommendations developed during the course of this research, measures have been taken to strengthen child protection systems and establish child-friendly, safe spaces.
- Throughout the pandemic, recognition of the importance of teacher and student wellbeing has increased globally (INEE, 2021), and the emerging literature of best practices within teacher and student wellbeing produced by the Interagency Network of Education in Emergencies (INEE) has been integrated within teacher training projects along the border.
- INEE's Minimum Standards for Education in Emergencies (2010) have long been a cornerstone of operations in border education, but within the escalating crisis, additional best practices and lessons learned from crisis-contexts globally have been applied in work along the border. Analysis of migrant education non-formal education systems (Lowe et al. 2022) is one example.

Reframing the migrant education context as one of emergency has not only brought greater insights to those working on the border, but has also brought greater understanding and coordination between external actors to address the ongoing emergency. Finally, although accreditation, formal recognition, and sustainable financing remain vital to finding long-term, equitable, and durable solutions to the challenges encountered by migrant learners from Myanmar in Thailand, limited resources and increased needs within this emergency context have forced education organizations to concentrate efforts on saving - rather than strengthening - systems.

## Spotlight on Action: The Border Emergency Fund

The Border Emergency Fund (BEF) is a local emergency response network established in August 2021 by 4 community-based humanitarian organizations working on the Thai-Myanmar border. The BEF provides emergency relief to the displaced population via the provision of dry food packages and safe shelter materials.

Leveraging strong local networks, the BEF developed an efficient system to be able to respond to emergency needs within 24 hours in coordination with local authorities and emergency response networks. At present the fund is regularly receiving requests for support every 2-3 days. The BEF is able to swiftly respond as we have a storehouse of dry food, shelter materials, hygiene products, and medical supplies which our teams can deliver as needs become known. Currently, the BEF primarily operates in the 4 districts of Tak province with the largest migrant population: Mae Sot, Phob Phra, Mae Ramat and Tha Song Yang. The Border Emergency Fund has met the basic needs of over 21,000 people.



**TOTAL SETS DISTRIBUTED - 6,526**  
**TOTAL PEOPLE RACHED - 21,051**



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When donating, please state the donation is for  
**COVID-19 Response(or)IDPs**  
 Updated on December 2022



**1set**  
 Covers 4 people  
 for 2 weeks

- includes
- 15 kg rice
  - Oil
  - Yellow beans
  - Fish
  - Noodles
  - Salt and chillies
  - Masks and hand gel



**Total Families**

**6,061**



**Total Children**

**3,648**



**Total people  
 with disability**

**48**



**Total elderly people  
 at risk**

**254**





# 4. METHODOLOGY

## 4.1 Participatory Action Research into Education for Migrant Children from Myanmar

In 2019, seven education organizations working along the Thai-Myanmar border conducted a large-scale participatory action research (PAR) project on the future of migrant education in Thailand. The final report, *Bridges: Participatory action research on the future of migrant education in Thailand* (Tyrosvoutis, 2019) sought to demarcate the migrant education ecosystem and generate needed evidence-based recommendations.

Throughout the process, participants developed and enhanced their research capacities, ensuring that the knowledge generated belonged to those who most needed to use it. In addition, stronger partnerships were forged between organizations, laying the groundwork for collaboration on projects that would implement the report's recommendations. Bridges also fostered closer connections between organizations and the communities they serve by creating space for reflective discussions about the challenges faced and contextually relevant solutions.

Bridges generated an evidence base for engagement with government actors to discuss the transformational changes required at the policy level to place migrant children's education on equal-standing with mainstream education systems. Most significantly, the report's co-created recommendations laid out a roadmap for building multiple bridges for migrant children to reach their full potential. Those recommendations continue to shape projects and programmes along the border today, and many of the actions spotlighted throughout *Stepping Stones* were derived from the work of Bridges. Within the action research process, Bridges can be considered the first action research cycle. The methodology of *Stepping Stones* built upon the PAR processes, relationships, and reflections developed during Bridges and can be considered a second cycle within the same PAR project.

## 4.2 Purpose

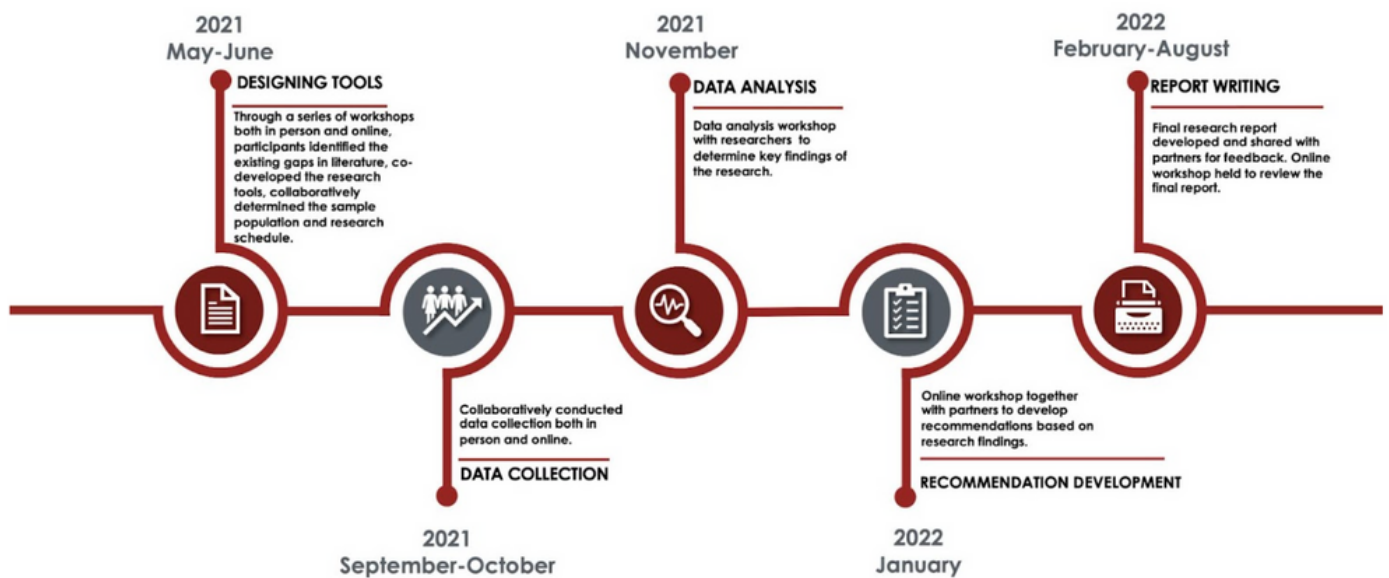
The changes in context brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Myanmar political situation resulted in unprecedented challenges requiring innovative solutions. *Stepping Stones* sought to understand the impact of the twin crisis on the future of migrant education in Thailand, and identify the short-, medium- and long-term strategies that education stakeholders can implement to ensure migrant children from Myanmar have continued access to safe, quality education.

## 4.3 Research Process

Guided by the principles of PAR (McIntyre, 2008), thirty co-researchers from eight different organizations collaborated to co-create this research. Researchers participated in a range of professional development workshops throughout the research process, including research ethics, child protection procedures, and child safeguarding protocols.



**Figure 11** Participatory action research timeline



The project was initiated in May 2021, with the identification of key challenges and priority areas for investigation. Research tools were co-developed throughout June, and a total of 1,013 respondents from five districts of Tak province and one district of Ranong were interviewed during September and October 2021. Collaborative data analysis took place in November 2021 to identify key findings, and recommendations were developed at a participatory workshop in January 2022.

In order to establish a comprehensive picture of migrant education, a range of education stakeholders were surveyed: students, parents, teachers, school directors and education organization representatives from across a spectrum of migrant education pathways. In recognition of the importance of children's perspectives on decisions that affect them (UN, 1989), and acknowledging that these perspectives are often overlooked (Lansdown, 2005), considerable effort was made to ensure large numbers of children were consulted. The project used purposeful sampling to ensure that it surveyed children and youth (Grade-4 and above) in proportions relative to the Tak and Ranong migrant population enrolled in primary, middle, and high school in both MLCs and Thai public schools. In total, the researchers interviewed participants in 41 locations: 29 MLCs and 13 Thai public schools (a complete list of participating schools is available in Annex A).



**Figure 12** Participant sample

Participant	Subtotal	Migrant Learning Centers Total (male/female)	Thai Public Schools Total (male/female)
Students	444 (180/266)	322 (112/210)	122 (68/56)
Parents	263 (56/207)	162 (34/128)	101 (22/79)
Teachers	245 (58/187)	161 (44/117)	84 (14/70)
School Directors	52 (22/30)	29 (13/16)	23 (9/14)
Organization and Government Stakeholders	9 (2/7)	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,015 (318/697)</b>		

This report’s precursor, Bridges, examined migrant education through the themes: Access, Quality, Sustainability, and Accreditation/Recognition. The transition into an emergency context necessitated a focus on the immediate and urgent needs of schools and their communities. Consequently, the findings within this report are presented under the categories of Access, Learning, and Protection. The research process was affected by the impact of the twin crises it set out to investigate. Research was conducted in line with COVID-19 restrictions and the vast majority of interviews and focus group discussions were conducted through Zoom and Facebook Messenger.

#### 4.4 Limitations

As mentioned, the vast majority of interviews were conducted online through the use of Zoom, Facebook Messenger, and phone calls due to COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, the sample population likely does not adequately represent children and parents with limited access to digital devices. The necessity of following COVID-19 guidelines restricted recruitment of respondents, with the vast majority of respondents contacted through their schools. As a result, children who have dropped out of school, and thus those most vulnerable to child protection risks, were not adequately represented within the research. Recent research by the ILO highlights that child labour is 77% more prevalent in contexts affected by conflict, and children from such contexts are 50% more likely to engage in hazardous work. (ILO, 2022). To overcome this limitation additional case studies were undertaken with out-of-school children, and their stories are spotlighted within the findings section of this report.

In order to contact a large sample size, the majority of interviews were conducted through focus group discussions. Although focus group discussions have many advantages, for some respondents who were not familiar with one another, such as parents, there may be anxiety or feelings of ‘*ana deh*’ (‘the consideration of others, not wanting to hurt others feelings or not wanting to embarrass or offend’ (Bui, 2019, p.57) when discussing personal issues or controversial topics.





# 5. FINDINGS

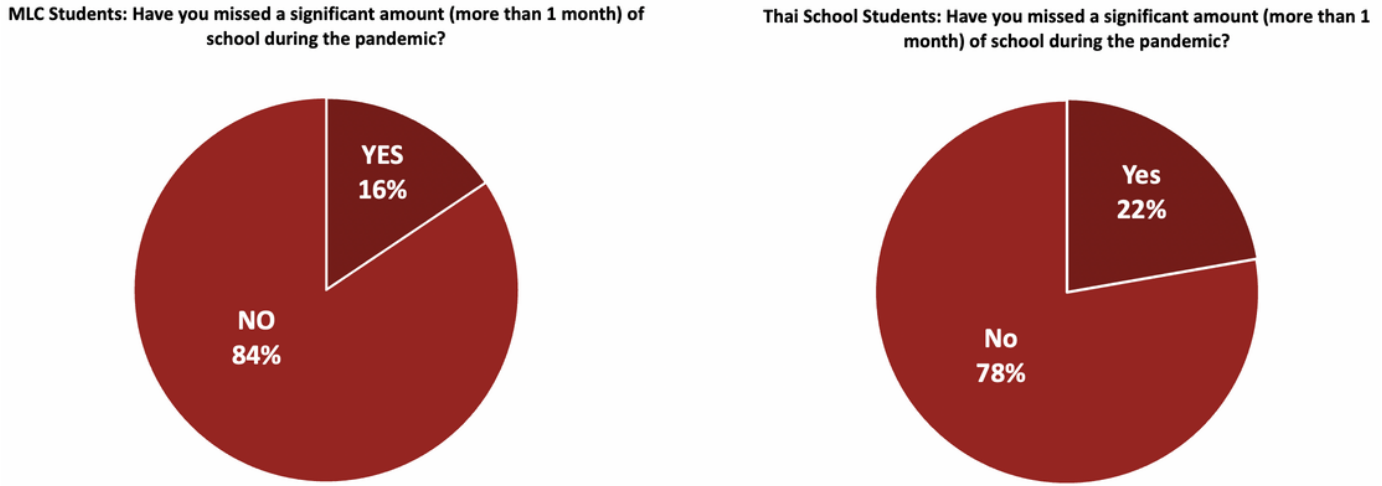
## 5.1 Access

The closure of Thai public schools and MLCs in March 2020 had a major impact on children’s access to education. Although alternative methods of instruction were subsequently developed and deployed, these methods could not replicate the quality of in-person learning, and they brought with them new barriers that restricted access. For many migrant children and their families, these barriers were insurmountable. Over the course of the pandemic 3,331 children (approximately 28% or 1 in 4) dropped out from Migrant Learning Centers (MECC, 2022). This figure represents double the national average within Thailand during the pandemic (Bangkok Post, 2021).

### 5.1.1 Student Dropouts

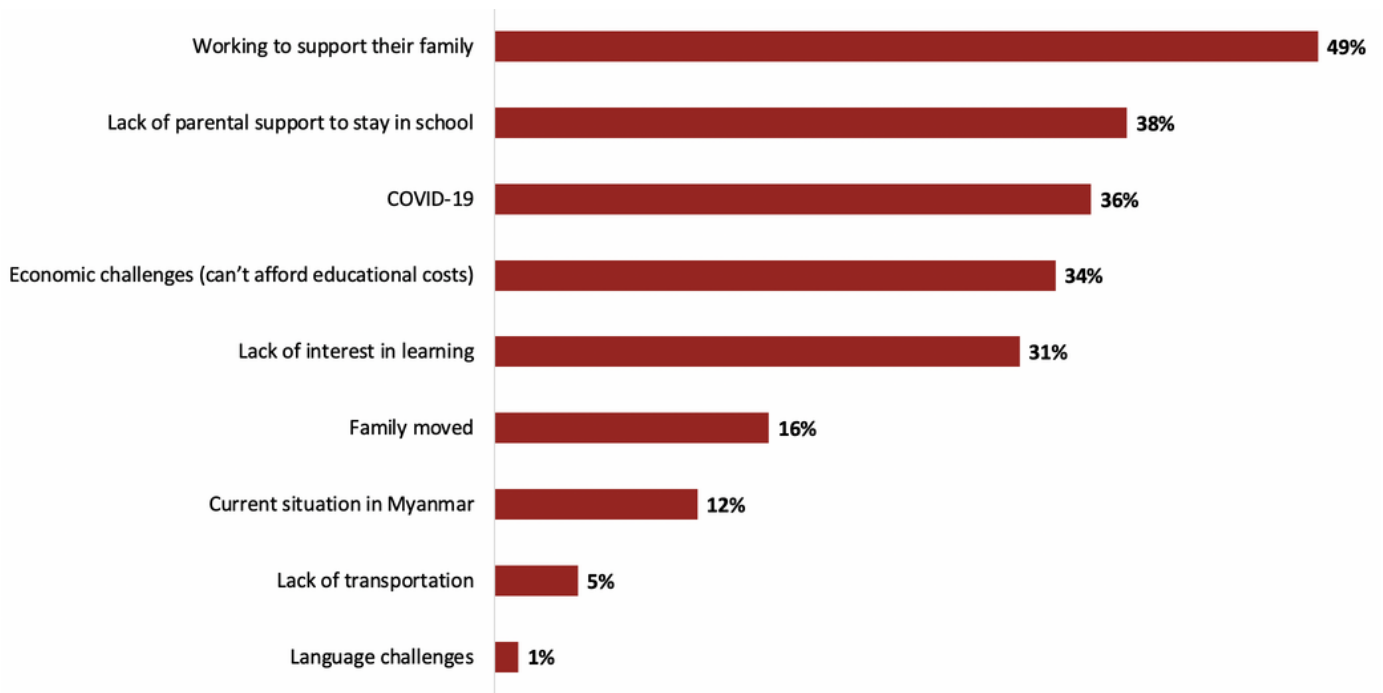
Figure 13 illustrates the percentage of interviewed students who knew of a friend who had dropped out of school during the pandemic. The data shows that 49% of MLC students knew at least one friend who dropped out from school during the pandemic. In Thai public schools, however, only 13% of migrant students reported that they know a friend who left school. 28% of interviewed parents indicated there were increased risks of school dropouts in their community.

**Figure 13** Percentage of students who knew of a migrant friend who had dropped out of school



There were multiple reasons why children dropped from school, however, the most common cause for student dropouts, as identified by children still in school, was related to child labour (see figure 14). 49% of children felt that the main reason their friends had dropped out was to work to support their family. Section 5.3.1 examines in further detail the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migrant families, and the consequences for drop-out rates. Other commonly identified reasons for students to drop out included: a lack of parental support to stay in school, COVID-19, economic challenges, and a lack of interest in learning. Responses also highlighted that children perceive that the situation in Myanmar impacting student dropout rates.

**Figure 14** Reason for dropout reported by students



### Looking Beyond Dropout Numbers: Aye Aye's\* Story

Aye Aye is a 14-year-old migrant child who used to study at one of the migrant learning centers in Mae Sot, Tak before the pandemic. She was a grade 8 student and her dream was to become a teacher. When asked why she wanted to be a teacher, she explained that she wanted to help children avoid dropping out of education.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, her father lost his job and was not able to find work. Aye Aye's mom was the only person who earned an income in her family. It was not enough to provide for the whole family. Aye Aye was forced to leave school and is currently working as a housekeeper.

*"I needed to help my parents during this time. Though I wanted to go back to school, I decided to help my mom. My family has a lot of debt, and my father did not have a job. Therefore, I quit school and went to work. My family had financial challenges even before COVID and it has become much worse during the pandemic."*

*"I want to go back to school when I see my friends walking their way to school."*

\*A pseudonym

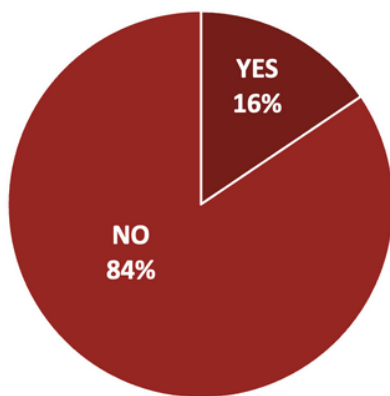


## 5.1.2 Absenteeism

School dropout is not the only indicator of the severity of access challenges experienced by migrant children. 16% of students in MLCs and 22% of students in Thai schools reported missing more than a month of school during the pandemic. Children missing extended periods of schooling is problematic in itself, but causes further concern considering that the concept of dropping out is a process that often begins with extended absenteeism. Children who miss significant amounts of school are far more likely to drop out of school in future years (Doll, 2013; Sabates et al., 2010).

**Figure 15** Student absenteeism as reported by students

MLC Students: Have you missed a significant amount (more than 1 month) of school during the pandemic?



Thai School Students: Have you missed a significant amount (more than 1 month) of school during the pandemic?

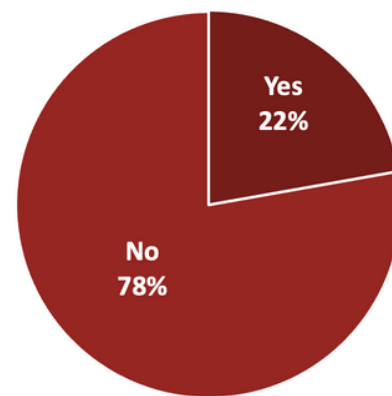
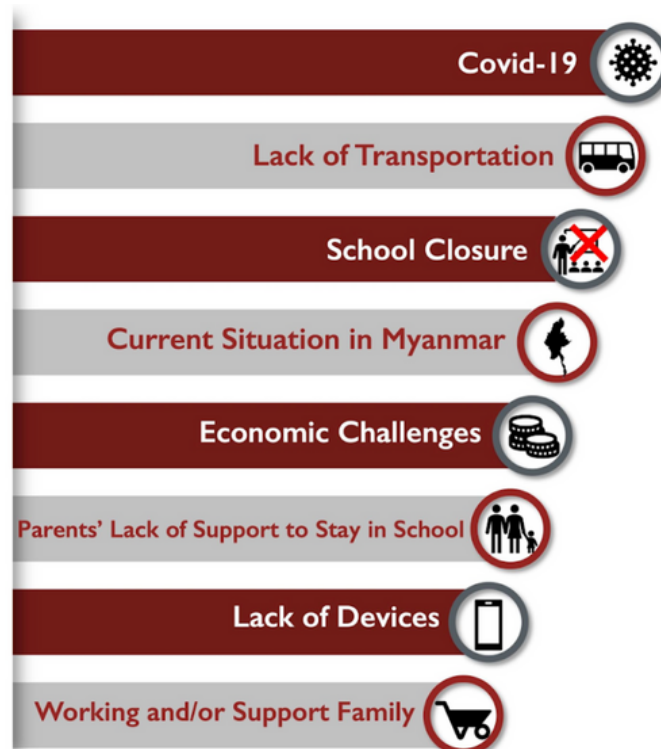


Figure 16 demonstrates the reasons identified by students for missing a significant amount of school. Both MLC students and Thai public school students cited COVID-19 and transportation challenges as the main reasons for missing school. Notably, the ongoing situation in Myanmar was also cited as a major factor for why students missed extended periods of schooling.

**Figure 16** Reasons for prolonged absenteeism from school according to children (ranked most to least)



### 5.1.3 Pathways

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has forced migrant families to reevaluate their plans. Within qualitative responses, many students highlighted that they felt that they would no longer be able to continue their studies in Myanmar due to the ongoing political, economic, and security situation. For students learning using the Myanmar curriculum within MLCs, particularly for those in the final stages of their education, this raises difficult questions for their post-secondary futures. For many, the lack of answers to these questions are a source of deep uncertainty. This unpredictability undermines motivation and increases the perceived opportunity costs of continuing their education: further increasing the risks for dropout amongst older learners.

#### Pathway Problems: The Voices of Students

*"We want pathways that are reassuring for our future. For example, now we are already in Grade 10 but don't know where to go or join after this grade."*

*"We can't go back now. At first, I planned to go back and study in Myanmar for high school but now it is difficult."*

*"I had planned to go back to Myanmar and continue my education so that plan has been badly affected. If we finish some grades here, normally we can transfer schools to attend in Myanmar but now it is difficult to do that. I planned to go back with my family and had planned to work in Myanmar after high school but now the plan has to be changed."*

-MLC Students

Pathways for younger learners have also been directly affected by the ongoing situation in Myanmar. In solidarity with those protesting the ongoing events in Myanmar, many international donors have withdrawn funding for programs supported by the Myanmar State. This led to existential questions for non-formal primary education (NFPE) and non-formal middle school education (NFME) pathways, as detailed in *Safety Nets: A situational analysis of non-formal educational pathways for migrant learners in Tak, Province, Thailand* (Lowe et al., 2022). The loss of these pathways would directly impact the most marginalized and vulnerable migrant learners' access to education, and the most appropriate pathway back into education for learners who have dropped out.





### 5.1.4 Vaccines

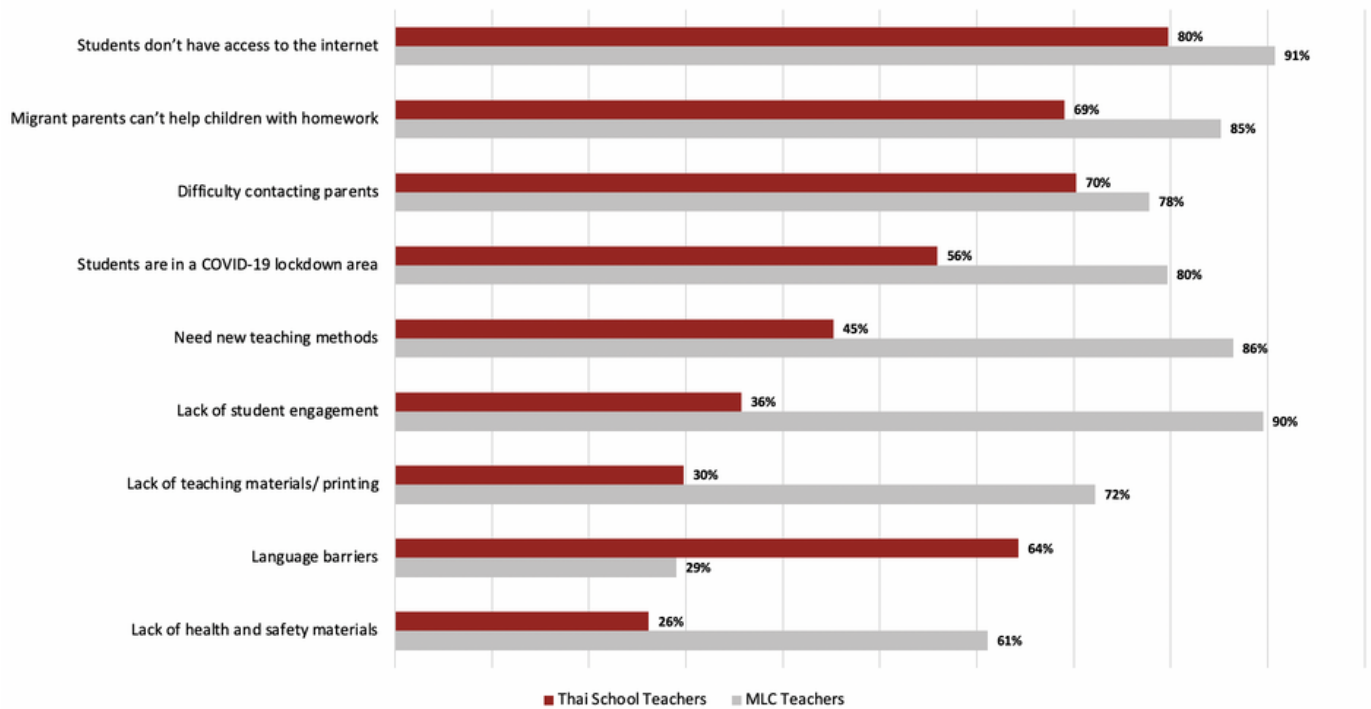
The research also explored the direct impact of COVID-19 and access to vaccines at the time of research. The responses highlighted the sense of fear with which migrant communities regarded the COVID-19 pandemic. Over 90% of parents stated that they would report a COVID-19 infection within their family to health authorities. The vast majority of qualitative responses reflected the strong sense of responsibility Myanmar migrants felt towards their adopted communities, “We have to share and report [COVID-19 cases] as we are living close to each other. We don’t want it to affect other families”. Parents with children in MLCs were found to be considerably less vaccine hesitant than the general population, with 78% of parents reporting they would get vaccinated if it were available to them, in comparison with a national average of 64% (Reuters, 2021). Despite this, difficult political decisions were required during periods of limited vaccine availability, and research findings correlated with wider reporting (Aljazeera, 2021) that migrant communities were some of the last groups to receive vaccines. During the first round of participatory data analysis in November 2021, BMTA reported that few to none of the parents from their network of 29 schools had received vaccines. Restricted access to vaccines amongst migrant communities prevented MLCs from undertaking home-based learning or hybrid-learning on a similar scale to Thai public schools. The limitations on access to vaccines highlights the need for equitable external support for migrant workers made vulnerable by a lack of alternatives.

### 5.1.5 Emergent Barriers to Access

To ensure children’s right to access education was protected, education systems were forced to adapt educational delivery methods throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure 17 shows the most commonly identified challenges to teaching migrant students as identified by teachers in Thai public schools and MLCs. The most common barrier for teachers was access to students caused by a lack of digital devices and a lack of reliable internet. 80% of teachers in Thai schools, and 91% of teachers in MLCs reported teaching challenges caused by a lack of student access to the internet. Students’ responses aligned with these findings. The most commonly reported challenge with learning during the pandemic, as identified by children, was a lack of online learning materials. Twice as many children reported challenges with online learning resources as any other challenge during the pandemic. Many parents and children reported having to share a single device between all family members, and thus when parents were at work and needed their mobile phones, children were unable to study. Many MLCs consequently offered more online classes in the early mornings and evenings to enable access. Families not only had to contend with reduced incomes but also with the increased costs of providing mobile data and digital devices for their children to continue their education. Thus, the pivot to online learning modalities significantly increased the direct costs and indirect opportunity costs of families continuing to support their children’s education.



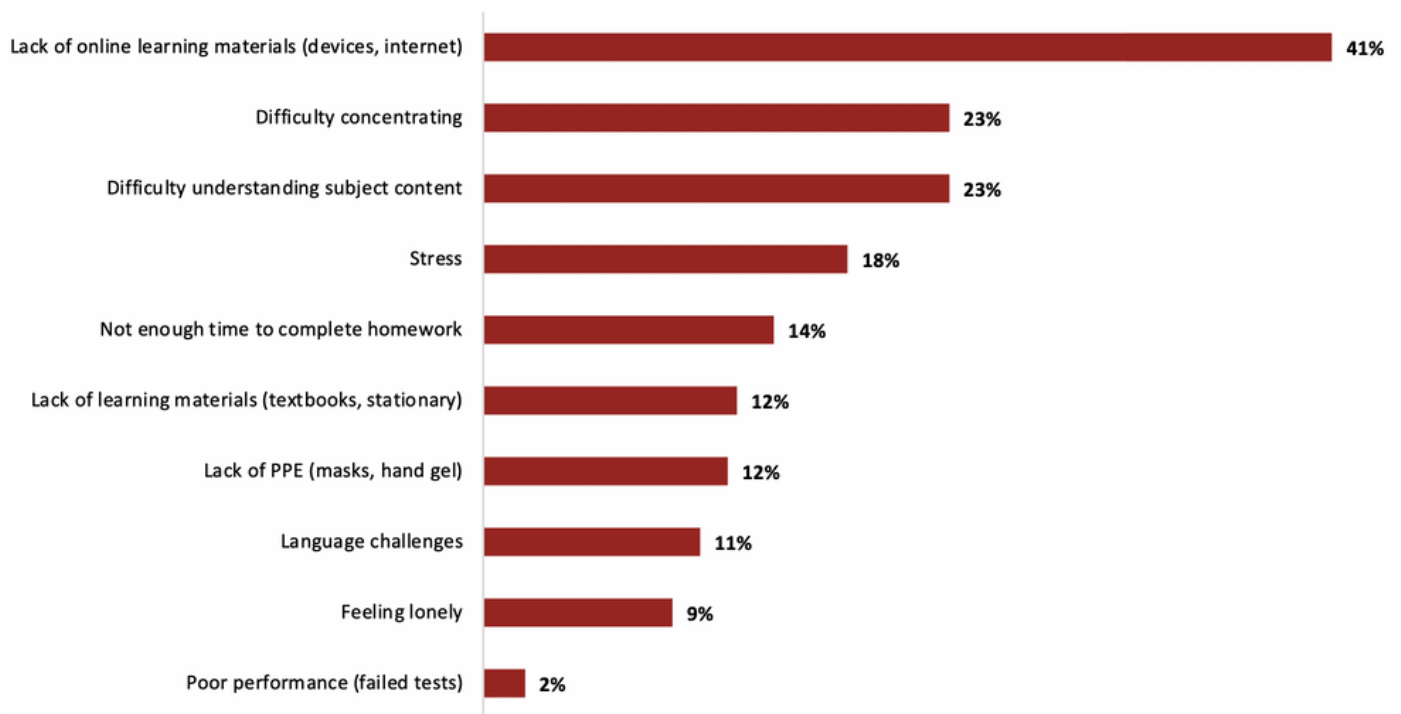
**Figure 17** Challenges faced by educators teaching migrant children during the pandemic



The lack of student access to the internet, in addition to difficulties adapting to online teaching methods, meant that many schools explored home-based, or worksheet-based learning. However, this required teachers to visit their students in their communities to deliver materials. Prior to the onset of the pandemic, affordable transportation was already an access barrier for many children, and some MLCs struggled to pay for drivers to bring children to school. Home-based learning required teachers to visit multiple communities to meet with students, significantly increasing transport costs. Community-level, regional, and national lockdowns further interrupted access to home-based learning. Insufficient teaching materials and the costs of printing were additional financial barriers for teachers implementing home-based learning. Without face-to-face contact, teachers, students, and parents reported challenges maintaining focus and engagement in education. Finally, the demands of shifting to new, unfamiliar modalities of distance learning required greater coordination and communication; not only between teachers and students but also new forms of communication between schools and parents. With limited opportunities to communicate, and entirely new systems being developed, communication and differences in languages were repeatedly cited by all stakeholders as new barriers to effective learning - especially for migrant children enrolled in Thai public schools.



**Figure 18** Barriers to accessing quality learning during the COVID-19 as identified by students



In a multiple choice question regarding students' preferred methods of learning during the pandemic, 96% of MLC students selected 'in-school', with hybrid, online, and worksheet learning being selected by only 7% of students. Migrant children in Thai schools also ranked 'in-school' learning as their preferred option of learning during the pandemic, but this was only selected by 62% of students, with online learning a popular second choice selected by 27% of respondents. In a final question, children were asked to share their thoughts for recommendations on how to improve their education. For MLC students, the vast majority of responses requested that schools reopen, and children be allowed to return to school. It is likely that these responses were influenced by MLC students' awareness that Thai public schools were permitted to partially reopen long before MLCs. It is notable that teachers in MLCs reported significantly more challenges than their contemporaries in Thai public schools. Without the backing of government financing and the full weight of a national education architecture, MLCs faced more challenges than Thai schools during the pandemic.



## Spotlight on Action: The Out of School Enrolment Taskforce

In order to keep at-risk migrant children in school and to help enroll out of school children into schools that can meet their needs, **the Out of School Enrolment Task Force** was established in 2019 through the collaboration of five organizations in Tak Province. The multilingual enrolment team possesses an intimate knowledge of migrant communities and has a network with Thai public schools in four districts as well as all 66 MLCs. As some migrant families earn only \$2-3 USD per day and cannot afford even the transportation costs needed to send their children to school, the team liaises between families and schools to ensure all needs are met.

The enrolment team has found that the most difficult aspect for an out of school migrant child to enter school is their first year. Once they have completed their first year, children are much more likely to stay enrolled in school. This critical first year requires a lot of support from the enrolment team to help the children (and in some cases, their parents) obtain the required legal documentation and complete all enrollment forms. The team provides significant follow-up support, especially during the first year. Being enrolled in school holistically improves the lives of children for the better and keeps them away from situations that could increase their vulnerability. Over the past three years, the enrollment team has enrolled and continues to support 428 at-risk migrant children to remain and thrive in the schools that meet their needs.

Challenges for Migrant Families	Activities of the Enrolment Taskforce
<b>Thai Language Challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A team of multilingual liaisons</li> <li>• Translated versions of all forms and processes</li> <li style="padding-left: 20px;">Piloting of bilingual classroom assistants in Thai public schools</li> <li>• Thai tutors in migrant communities</li> </ul>
<b>High Educational Costs</b>	Individual support contracts with migrant families pledging support for transportation, uniforms, and enrollment fees
<b>Lack of Knowledge about EFA</b>	Community Awareness Raising Roadshows using videos with case studies of available education pathways
<b>Hesitancy to Enroll Due to Documentation</b>	Tailored support to migrant families for obtaining documentation



## Stretching Resources, Strong Communities, and Overcoming Access Challenges: Ban Ta Ad School's Story

Ban Ta Ad is a Thai public school located directly on the Thai-side of the Thai-Myanmar border. As such, Ban Ta Ad has a high proportion of non-Thai students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ban Ta Ad school implemented a novel financial support management system to reach all of its' students, including migrant children. Similar to other Thai public schools, Ban Ta Ad school received financial support from the government to directly support students facing financial hardship during the pandemic.

*"The government provided 2,000 baht to every student. Another government agency named Education Equality Fund (EEF) provided 3,000 baht per year, but they had the condition that students must attend 80% of classes. To meet this condition we had to make an agreement with parents. There was also another 500 baht provided for students from low economic households",* stated the director of Ban Ta Ad school, Mr. Kitchnaphon Chalermwisutkul.

Recognizing that many migrant students did not have access to digital devices, the school reached an agreement with parents to provide students with upfront lump sums, rather than monthly payments based on attendance. This allowed parents to purchase digital devices so their children could attend online classes. To this, Mr. Kitchnaphon Chalermwisutkul stated, *"During the pandemic, survival is more important than education for migrant people. Whatever budget we get, we make sure that we support our students. We even bought internet packages for the students who need it. We don't get any support for the internet, we made it with our school budget, and it cost more than 60,000 baht".* Ban Ta Ad School is a model of how empowered local decision-makers can utilize close community connections to find the most appropriate solutions to access challenges.

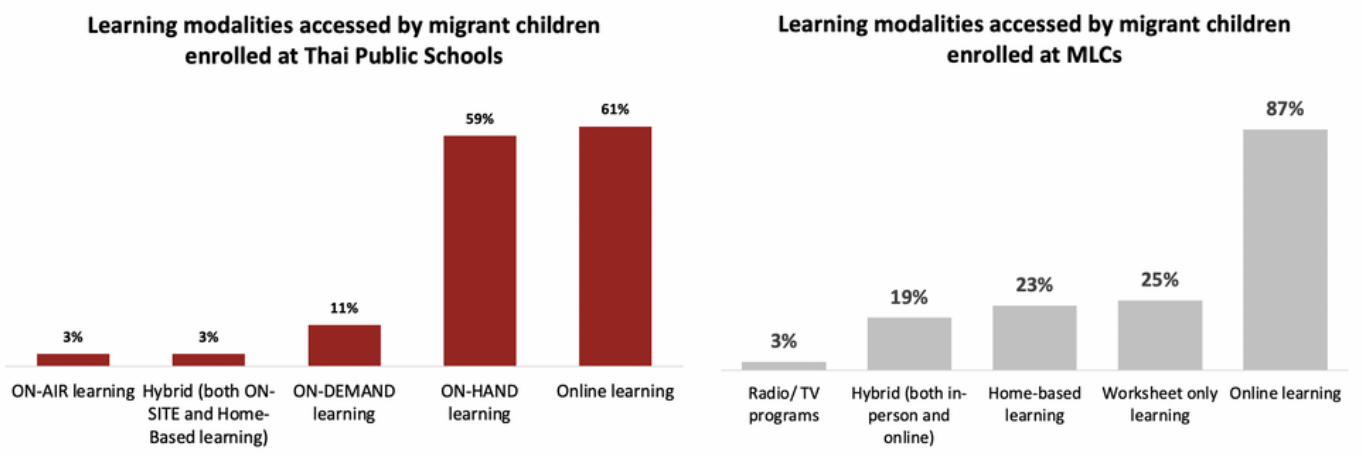
## 5.2 Learning

New delivery modalities were required to fulfill children’s right to education throughout the pandemic. Reimagining education required great innovation, flexibility, and collaboration to create new systems and pedagogies to overcome the restrictions on face-to-face gatherings. Globally, it is recognized that distance learning modalities are rarely an effective substitute for in-person learning (Patrinos et al., 2022). Each alternative system and pedagogy brings different advantages, but each is not without significant shortcomings. Addressing these requires trust, training, and time. All stakeholders reported struggles with adapting to new learning modalities. Nonetheless, the COVID-19 pandemic was a global learning experience, and if a silver lining is to be found within the considerable suffering and struggle of the last two years, it lies within this learning. This section explores the methods used in education systems for migrant children, the challenges within these systems related to delivering quality education, and the lessons learned from this protracted crisis.

### 5.2.1 Children’s Engagement with Learning

Thai public schools and MLCs implemented a range of different learning modalities to replace in-person learning. To understand students’ experiences of learning during the pandemic, children were asked to report how they had received their education during the pandemic. Students in Thai public schools reported a relatively equal combination of paper-based and online learning, whereas students in MLCs primarily reported receiving online learning. This research did not seek to exhaustively evaluate the differences between MLC and Thai public school approaches to alternative learning modalities, but it can be inferred that the state-funded system was better equipped to establish a well-resourced, paper-based learning system than the decentralized and underfunded MLC system. Twice as many MLC teachers reported challenges with a lack of printing materials than Thai public school teachers. Equally, twice as many MLC teachers reported challenges with access to sufficient health and safety equipment including face masks, hand gel, and temperature monitors.

**Figure 19** Learning modalities during the COVID-19 pandemic as reported by children



Adapting to entirely new pedagogies and delivery methods required enormous amounts of time and effort by teachers. Despite best efforts, all students saw a drastic reduction in the number of contact hours with their teachers. As a result, students were expected to take increased individual responsibility for self-directed learning with limited resources and support. For many children and their parents, these expectations were too high. 23% of interviewed children indicated they faced difficulties concentrating. 72% of teachers reported a lack of student engagement. At the time of interviews, 78% of parents indicated that their children were learning online and 27% indicated that their children were participating in home-based learning. 13% of parents reported that their children were not engaged in any learning activity. 30% of parents reported their children were helping around the house. 3% of interviewed parents reported that their children were going to work. Comparative data prior to the pandemic is not available, but the findings collectively add additional quantitative evidence to the broader picture painted in this research, and research globally: alternative delivery modalities are poor substitutes for in-person learning and lead to a reduction in student engagement resulting in significant learning loss (Patrinos et al., 2022).

### **5.2.2 Challenges to Delivering Quality Learning**

The transition to alternative delivery modalities required a reimagining of education, which required schools to create entirely new systems and structures of timetabling and communication. For teachers working in Thai public schools, qualitative responses highlighted how the pandemic exacerbated existing challenges caused by language barriers. Two out of every three teachers working in Thai public schools reported challenges regarding language barriers, and 70% faced challenges in contacting and communicating with parents. Teachers were forced to invent new ways of implementing the fundamentals of teaching: presenting content, assessing learning, and giving feedback. Whether implementing online learning, home-based learning, or hybrid combinations, teachers required new methods, new lesson plans, and new materials; all of which took considerable time and effort to develop. 14% of all students reported not having enough time to complete their homework under these alternative teaching modalities.

#### **Online Learning**

Synchronous online learning delivered through video conferencing software became the global standard of distance education, but along the border, the lack of devices and limited access to low-cost, high-speed, reliable internet limited students' access to, and the quality of, learning. For teachers and students alike, the transition to online learning required new digital literacies, many of which were slowly developed during the course of the pandemic. Many students and teachers reported learning challenges including ensuring enough time for the delivery of content, providing adequate assessment and feedback, and meeting individual learners' needs. Many children responded that they didn't have enough opportunity to fully understand the content or ask questions. All interviewed stakeholders spoke of their appreciation that online learning allowed for some form of learning continuity. Online learning was considered the safest modality during times of greatest threat from COVID-19 transmission.

## Home-Based learning

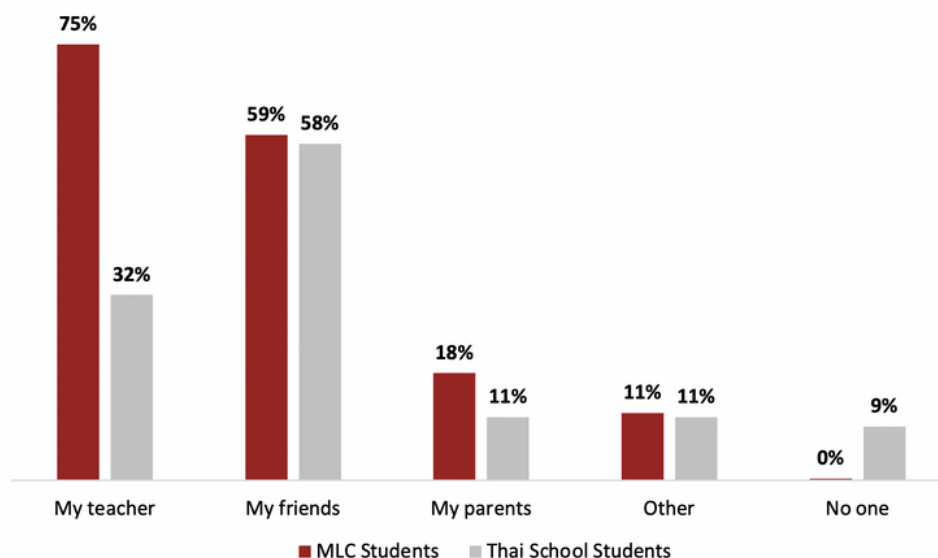
To overcome the shortcomings of online learning, many MLCs implemented home-based learning, which involved tutoring individuals, or small groups of students, in their homes or in outdoor, well-ventilated community spaces. Home-based learning allowed for teachers to use more traditional approaches to teaching but with less contact time. More effective home-based learning saw teachers developing worksheets for further practice and assessment of learning. However, Home-based learning included other drawbacks. Developing regular routines, rhythms, and systems became challenging when learning was frequently interrupted by community and national lockdowns. Worksheets required extra printing costs and all home-based learning required additional personal protective equipment which all added additional expenses. Many teachers reported transportation challenges as one of the most difficult aspects of home-based learning.

Despite these challenges, students noted some benefits of the new systems, including improved self-study skills and improved ICT skills. Some students noted that they felt more comfortable studying at home and at their own pace. Other students mentioned that they were less accountable for misbehavior or for failing to complete their homework. Despite the huge amount of learning and professional development by teachers over the course of the pandemic, 62% of teachers requested further support with professional development training to improve their skills in these new teaching modalities.

### 5.2.3 Help-Seeking Behavior of Children

The creation of new systems of educational delivery required close cooperation between all stakeholders and regular communication and coordination, which, was not always successful. Teachers and School Directors reported difficulties in contacting and communicating with parents. Challenges that were particularly pronounced for Thai public school teachers, who were twice as likely as MLC teachers to report challenges. In exploring how these challenges impacted children, it was found that migrant children in Thai public schools were far less likely to engage in help-seeking behavior. Although migrant children in both types of education system were equally likely to ask their friends for help, children in Thai public schools were half as likely as MLC students to ask their teachers for help with homework and nine times more likely than MLC students to have no one to ask for help.

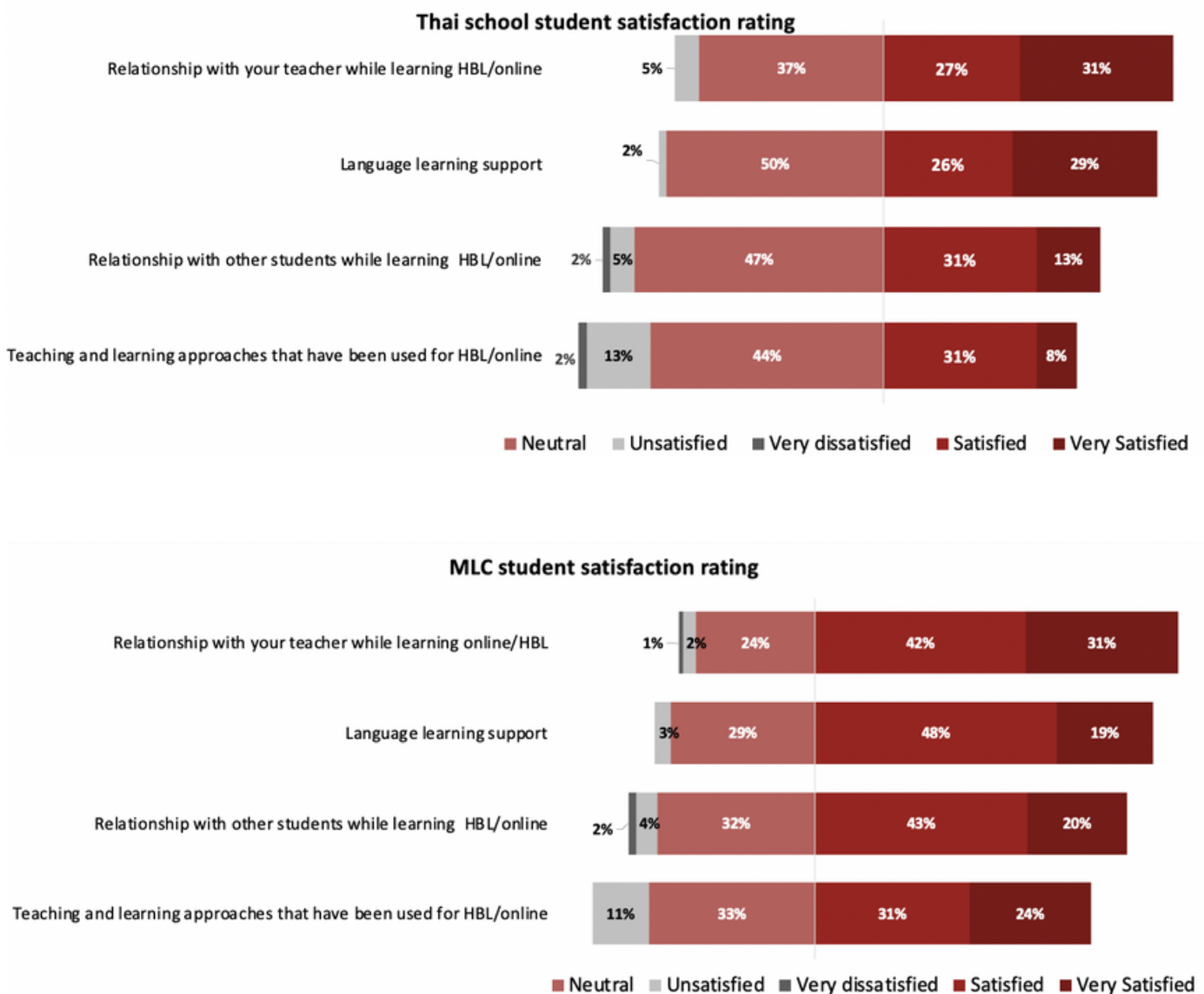
**Figure 20** Students help-seeking behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic



## 5.2.4 Student Satisfaction

When exploring children’s satisfaction with different factors of their education during the COVID-19 pandemic, one finding stands clear: despite challenges with access, resourcing, and language barriers, children continue to rate their relationships with their teachers as one of the best aspects of their education. This finding resonates with the 2021 World Teachers’ Day rally cry that ‘*Teachers lie at the Heart of the Education Recovery*’ (UNICEF, 2021). The area of their education that students expressed the least satisfaction with was the teaching and learning approaches that were used during home-based and online learning. This provides further evidence in support of teachers’ requests for ongoing professional development.

**Figure 21** Thai public school and MLC student satisfaction ratings





## 5.2.5 Strategies for Success

When school directors and teachers were asked to reflect on the strategies they found to be key to overcoming contemporary challenges, all recommendations fell under one single broad thematic area: the importance of communication. School directors cited the importance of building trust and strong relationships amongst all education stakeholders: parents, teachers, community leaders, and students. School directors were consistent in their recognition of the great efforts by teachers through eighteen months of turmoil. Teachers were forced to work harder than ever before whilst also managing challenging personal circumstances brought on by the twin crises. In a similar manner, school directors acknowledged the importance of their role in understanding not only teacher wellbeing, but also individual student wellbeing. Supporting student wellbeing was critical in the face of heightened child protection risks and increased likelihood of school dropouts. Finally, school directors recognized the vital position they played within their communities as reliable sources of trusted information. School directors felt it was essential for them to stay up-to-date with the latest news and information regarding COVID-19 and share that information with their staff and students.

### Strategies Recommended by School Directors

- Communicate, communicate, communicate!
- Build trust and relationships among parents, teachers, and students
- Build teacher morale
- Follow up, pay attention, and check in with students. Ask about students' living and studying conditions
- Share information - especially about COVID-19.
- Distance learning may not be perfect, but it maintains a pathway to education. Home-based learning and online learning encourage students to continue their education and gives hope to communities

The majority of recommendations created by teachers fell under a similar thematic area, and sought to address a key challenge highlighted throughout this research: creating and sustaining student engagement. Teachers reiterated the importance of communicating and working with parents to ensure students were as supported as possible at home. Teachers made substantial efforts to ensure that children's homes could serve as positive learning environments. Teachers also noted the importance of integrating students' home environments and accessible community into lessons. Teachers noted that this was an effective way to break down the barriers imposed by the screen and bring learning to life. Other tips recommended by teachers focused on the practicalities of teaching online effectively. Teachers used small group activities as much as possible, and reduced expectations for how much content could be covered in a single online class. Teachers also shared some of their favorite tips for bringing in additional digital learning resources into online lessons, including using videos, pictures, and online games or quizzes to support formative assessment. Some teachers also mentioned effectively using flipped classroom methodologies in which learners study the lesson content in their textbooks before coming to class, then apply their learning during interactive lessons. Finally, teachers noted the importance of giving clear instructions before, during, and after online classes to ensure students have a clear understanding of what is expected of them.

## Spotlight on Action: Digital School

Digital School is an online learning platform which provides supplemental mother tongue-based education to children along the Thai-Myanmar border. Digital School broadcasts video lessons mapped to the Myanmar curriculum on UNESCO's LearnBig platform and Facebook page. The video lessons reach children who have missed out on education due to the pandemic and ongoing disruptions and aims to develop literacy, cognition, and life skills through song, dance, reading and writing, science experiments, crafts, and games.

The pilot phase ran from February to May 2022 and targeted Kindergarten-level learners, covering all topics from core subjects of the Myanmar KG curriculum. From Monday to Friday, pre-recorded teaching videos were livestreamed on Facebook at 6:00pm Thailand time (6:30pm Myanmar time), with the teachers present online to respond to comments and questions in chat. The second phase of Digital School ran from June to September and covered topics from the Grade 1 and 2 English, Burmese, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies curricula. In 2023, Digital school will continue to provide daily online lessons spanning KG to grade 12.

The Digital School team also provides training and ongoing support to migrant teachers along the border, on topics such as child psychology, young learner teaching methods, and integrating multimedia into lessons. Digital School is supported by UNESCO Bangkok and is co-implemented by the Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC) and InEd.

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**DIGITAL SCHOOL**

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## Strategies Recommended by Teachers

- Go step by step - teach in small groups and focus on one subject at a time
- Be visual - use videos and relevant pictures to help students learn
- Give clear instructions to students before using any alternative method. Building digital literacy skills prior to online learning is essential.
- Encourage students to engage with their local environments by integrating their environments into lessons
- Consider alternatives to regular homework. Using quizzes or online games or video clips can be more engaging and can build self-study skills
- Include parents. Contact, or meet with parents regularly to encourage their involvement.

### Making Distance Learning Work: New Society Migrant Learning Center

New Society Migrant Learning Center, a primary school supporting migrant children in Tak's Mae Sot district, was able to provide continuous learning to 100% of their students throughout the period of school closure. War War Myint, New Society's School Headmistress explains how their MLC managed to reach all their students and make distance learning work in their context:

*"As soon as COVID started in China, I was thinking, what should I plan? What if the virus spreads to Thailand? So, I called a PTA meeting and presented to parents how the virus might affect our school in the near future. We explained how the school had started to prepare to teach online to children and asked for parents' active participation".*

The school director of New Society created Facebook Messenger groups according to the students' grades when parents came to enroll at the beginning of the school year and assigned teachers to each Messenger group to follow up with the parents. Eventually, 90% of students were taught online, with 10% receiving paper-based instruction. Teaching younger grades proved particularly challenging, and close coordination with parents was essential.

*"Our challenge was to teach KG and G1. We tried to come up with a solution. We divided students into 3 groups for KG and G1. While learning online, parents needed to sit near their children to explain the instructions in case the teacher's instruction was difficult to understand for young children. We divided students into a morning group (for parents who have time in the morning before they go to work), an afternoon group (for parents who stay at home all day), and an evening group (for parents who only have free time when they come back from their work). We also sent lesson videos in advance for children to watch and remember if they forgot the lesson the first time. We made the lesson videos by ourselves."*



## 5.3 Protection

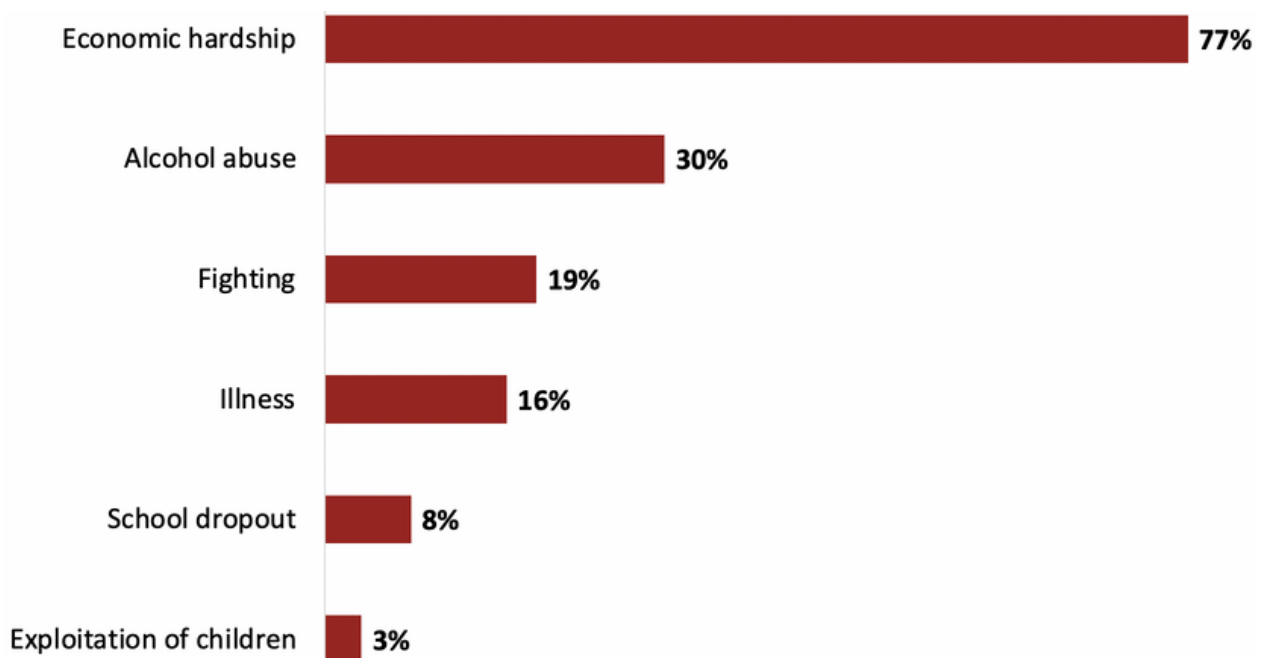
As UNESCO (2021) articulates in their report, *Education in a Post-COVID World: Nine Ideas for Public Action*, the pandemic exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities for marginalized communities throughout the globe - the migrant community on the Thai-Myanmar border being a case in point. Schools being closed in Thailand during much of the pandemic brought to light all the intangible protective benefits of having children attend school in person. These benefits, including the support of social, emotional, and psychological well being; physical protection and supervision; daily routines and stability; as well as health, nutrition, sanitation, and other more specialized services, are illustrated in INEE and the Alliance's (2021) report *No Education, No Protection*.

In response, teachers and school leaders were trained about COVID safety protocols and methods of psycho-social support (PSP) to address their students' socio-emotional needs. Resilient migrant teachers and the systems supporting them were able to adapt and reimagine both the role of teachers and the function of schools during the pandemic in order to keep children safe. Cope and Kalantzis (2016) in Lingard et al. (2021) articulate this transition well: "to teach and learn in such environments requires new professional and pedagogical sensibilities" (p. 24). This section will illustrate the protection concerns raised through the interviews and shed light on how they were addressed.

### 5.3.1 Economic Hardship

Migrant communities faced substantial challenges as a result of the pandemic, with economic hardship, alcoholism, illness, and fighting being the most common concerns highlighted by migrant parents (see Figure 22). Surveyed parents reported receiving lower wages (some as low as 100 THB or \$3 USD per day), fewer work opportunities and underemployment, extended periods of unpaid leave caused by COVID-19 lockdowns, employers requiring workers to be vaccinated without supporting access to vaccines, and in multiple cases, outright unemployment.

**Figure 22** Current challenges perceived by migrant parents during the pandemic



87% of surveyed parents reported a decrease in their income during the pandemic (see Figure 23). This significant decrease in already marginal incomes had negative impacts which permeated to children's wellbeing and education. Many parents were forced to focus on the basic needs of their family: food, shelter, and medicine took precedence over education. Those families that were able to continue to prioritize their children's education faced increased costs educating their children. As noted above, online learning requires internet access which most migrant families do not have. The vast majority of families access the internet via their phones which requires costly data package top ups. Many families share a single digital device. With reduced incomes, families struggled to provide their children with access to the internet, or provide community-financing to MLCs. Additionally, with the border closed, it became increasingly difficult for migrant workers to renew expired documents and permits. Those who experienced periods of unemployment were at risk of losing their legitimate documentation status along with their income. This increased security concerns for those affected and, as a result, families without documentation were reluctant to risk arrest and potential deportation to Myanmar by sending their children to school. Taken together, these compounding challenges likely influenced parents' decisions to remove their children from school.

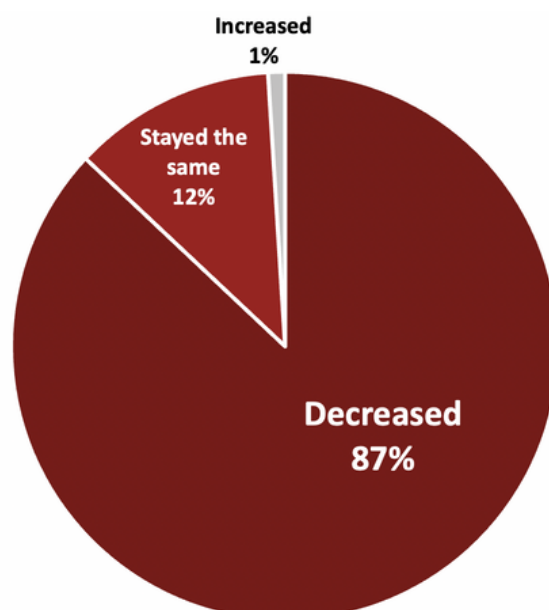
*"The main difficulty is the economic crisis because we can not regularly get a job during the pandemic. It is so challenging for us to support food and education" - MLC Parent*

*"Sometimes we cannot go and work due to restrictions in our community. Before COVID we could work almost all week but now we only have to work 2 or 3 days a week. Therefore, it is challenging for us to survive and support our children's education" - MLC Parent*

*"We don't have any jobs so we had to sell our things to meet our basic needs." - MLC Parent*

*"Children need to help their parents so they drop out to work. Students don't want to drop out but they have no choice. Half of my students have difficulty attending online classes because they do not have enough money for internet or devices." - Migrant Teacher*

**Figure 23** Impact on migrant parents' income during the pandemic



## Looking Beyond Dropout Numbers: Thiri's Story

Before the pandemic Thiri\* was a Grade 7 student at a Migrant Learning Center in Mae Sot, Tak. Thiri is now working as a full-time babysitter to help to earn additional income for her family. Her mom is a widow who continues to face manifold challenges providing for her children's basic needs as she has debts to pay back. When Thiri saw that her mother's income was not enough to make ends meet, she decided to work. She also works on the weekend as a housekeeper.

*"I laughed a lot while I was playing with my friends at school... I will go back to school when we can pay back all my Mom's debts" said Thiri.*

*\*A pseudonym*

*"Before COVID-19 we could save some of our money, but now we cannot save anything at all. All our money goes towards food, our children's education, and health supplies. We've needed to spend more money on our children's education so they can learn online. If we cannot top-up the internet, they might lose their education. We are trying to support them as much as we can."*

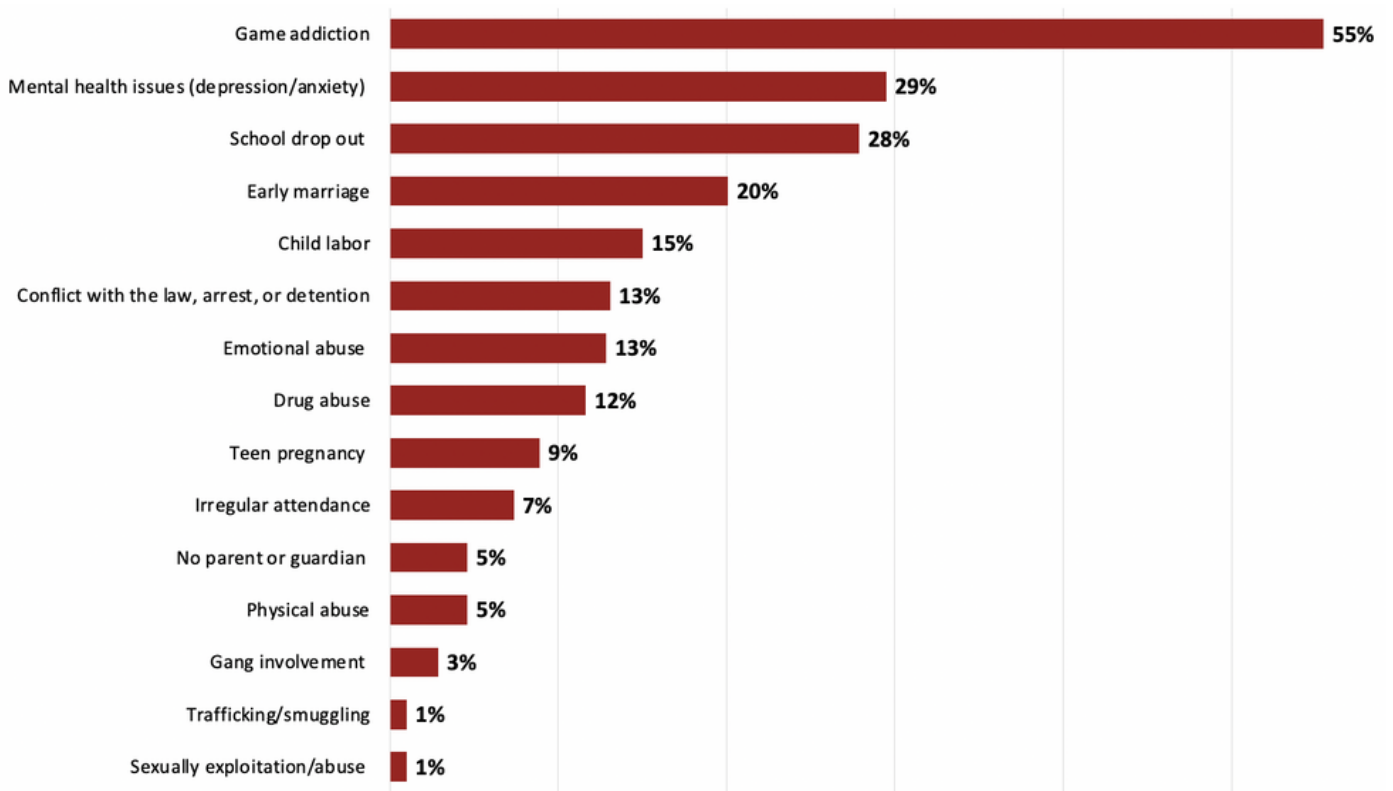
*-Migrant Parent*

### 5.3.2 Child Protection

Respondents from across stakeholder groups were unequivocal in their perception that children's wellbeing had suffered and child protection risks have increased throughout the course of the pandemic. 29% of surveyed parents reported an increased risk of mental health issues in their communities. This was echoed by children and youth as 1 in 5 surveyed students reported both increased stress and feelings of loneliness during the pandemic. As illustrated in Figure 24, the most prevalent child protection concern reported by parents was an increased risk of mobile phone game addiction, followed by mental health issues, dropout, and early marriage.



**Figure 24** Parents perception of the risks that have increased for children during the pandemic



### 5.3.3 Children’s Well Being

The 444 children participating in this research were asked to describe their feelings in three words. The weighted word cloud in Figure 26 represents the compilation of translated responses.

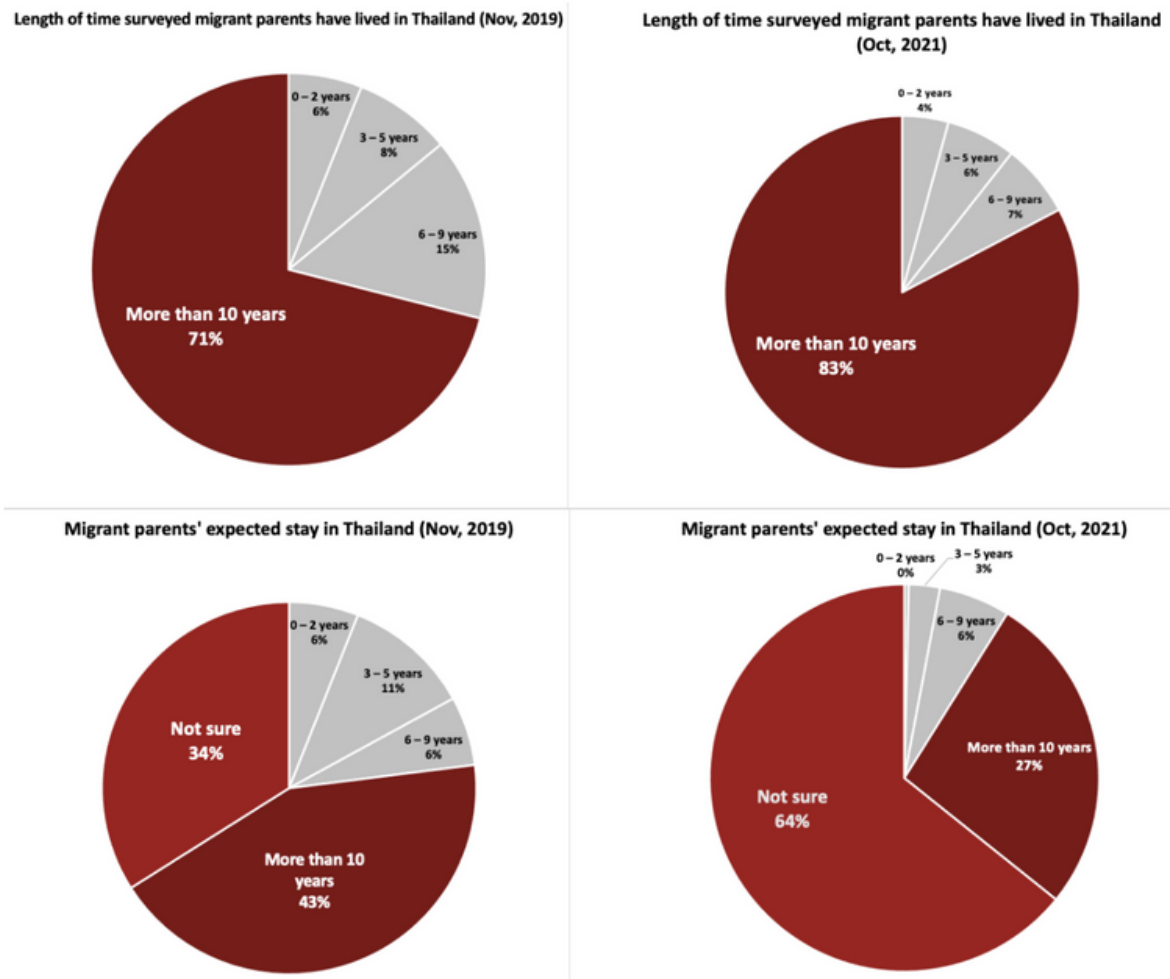
**Figure 25** Percentage of children’s formative school years impacted by the pandemic

Year of Birth	Grade Level	% of Educational Career Spent Out of School
2016	Grade 1	100%
2015	Grade 2	100%
2014	Grade 3	66%
2013	Grade 4	50%
2012	Grade 5	40%
2011	Grade 6	30%
2010	Grade 7	28.57%
2009	Grade 8	25%
2008	Grade 9	22.2%
2007	Grade 10	20%





**Figure 27** Surveyed parents length of stay in Thailand and future plans\*



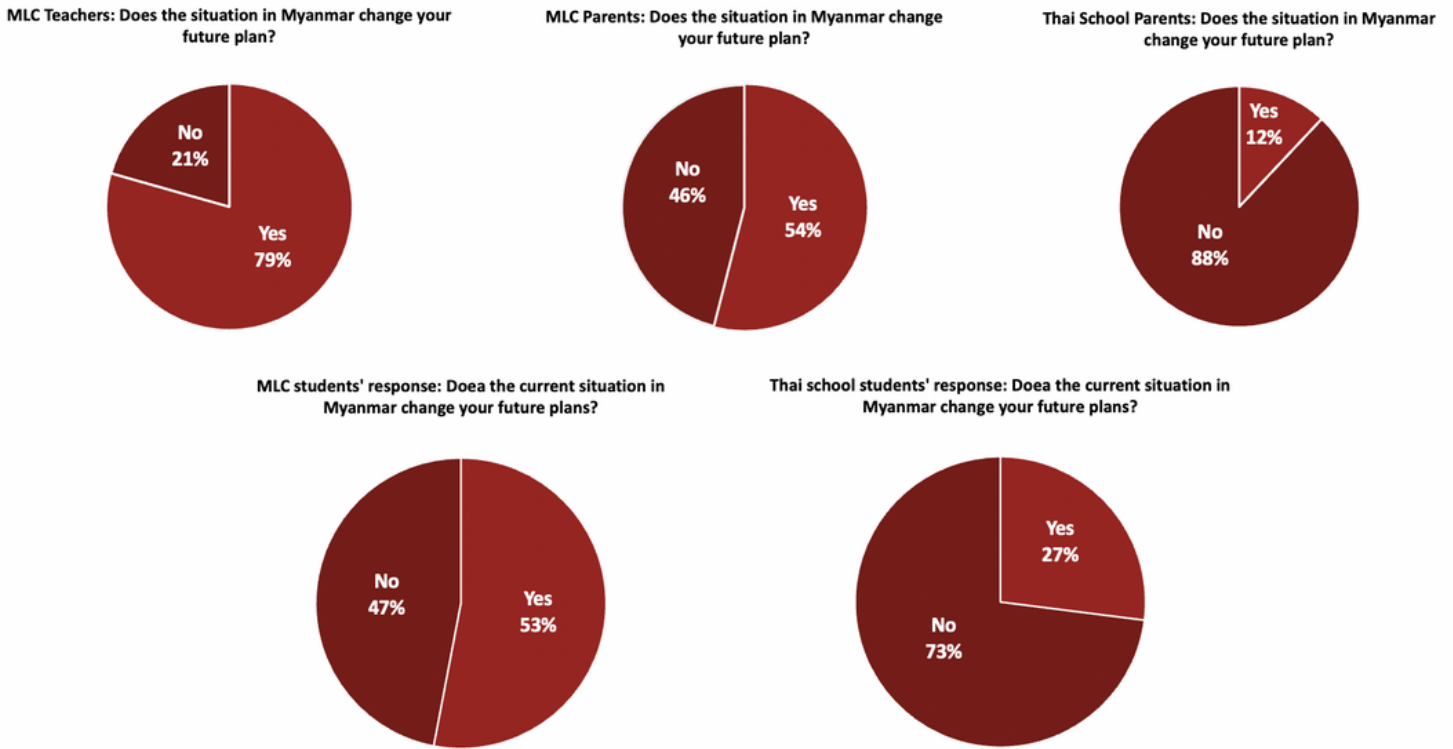
\*November 2019 figures from Tyrosvoutis, 2019

*"We used to go back to Myanmar often. Now, we don't want to go back to Myanmar because the situation is very bad... In Myanmar there is a lot of religious discrimination. I am Muslim and have been always looked down on. In Thailand we don't have documents and face many difficulties, but it is still better than Myanmar for work opportunities."*

- Migrant Parent

In the previous decade, as more and more opportunities became available with Myanmar's growing economy, an increasing number of migrant families were able to return and find work in their home country. The widespread economic destabilization and safety concerns that have escalated in Myanmar since February 2021 have severely impacted the long term plans of the migrant population (see Figure 28). Compared with the survey responses from Bridges (Tyrosvoutis, 2019), it is evident that migrant parents are being forced to navigate even more uncertain futures (see Figure 27). The impact was felt more acutely by participants connected with Migrant Learning Centers than those connected to Thai public schools. Parents with children in Thai schools either felt that they always intended for their children to live in Thailand, or felt that their children had alternative options. Qualitative responses reveal that many parents feel deep anxiety over the situation in Myanmar and what it may mean for their futures.

**Figure 28** Impact of the situation in Myanmar on migrant parents' future plans



*“Due to the current situation in Myanmar, we changed our children's plan to go back and study in Myanmar. I planned for my children to enroll in high school in Myanmar because I want them to go to university in Myanmar. But now we do not have any way to go back. I now feel like I am losing the way of my children's education and ourselves.”*

*“The situation in Myanmar has totally affected our future because we planned to go back. [Now]we can't and also students who are finishing grade 10 have lost their hope and future plans.”*

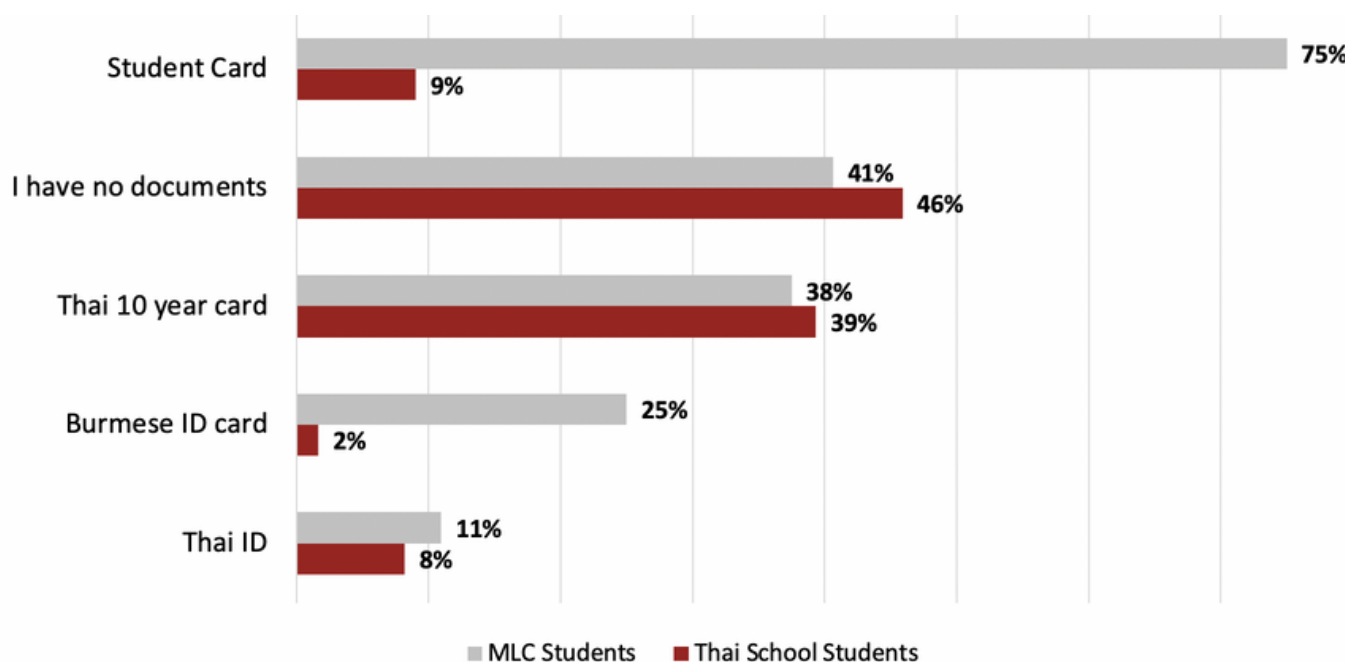
- MLC Parents

### 5.3.5 Documentation

A defining issue that undermines community wellbeing and efforts to strengthen both educational and child protection systems is documentation. Access to legal documentation for migrants remains varied. The processes for many migrants can be confusing, complex, and opaque. While multiple documentation options exist, many migrants are unaware of the differences between the processes and benefits of each. Language barriers continue to compound the difficulties of navigating existing systems. Pursuing one type of documentation may prevent migrants accessing alternative improved documentation options at a later date. In the words of one education stakeholder, “[Documentation options] give everything and nothing. There are many options, but taken together they are just confusing. Everything must be done on a case by case basis which is time consuming and expensive”.

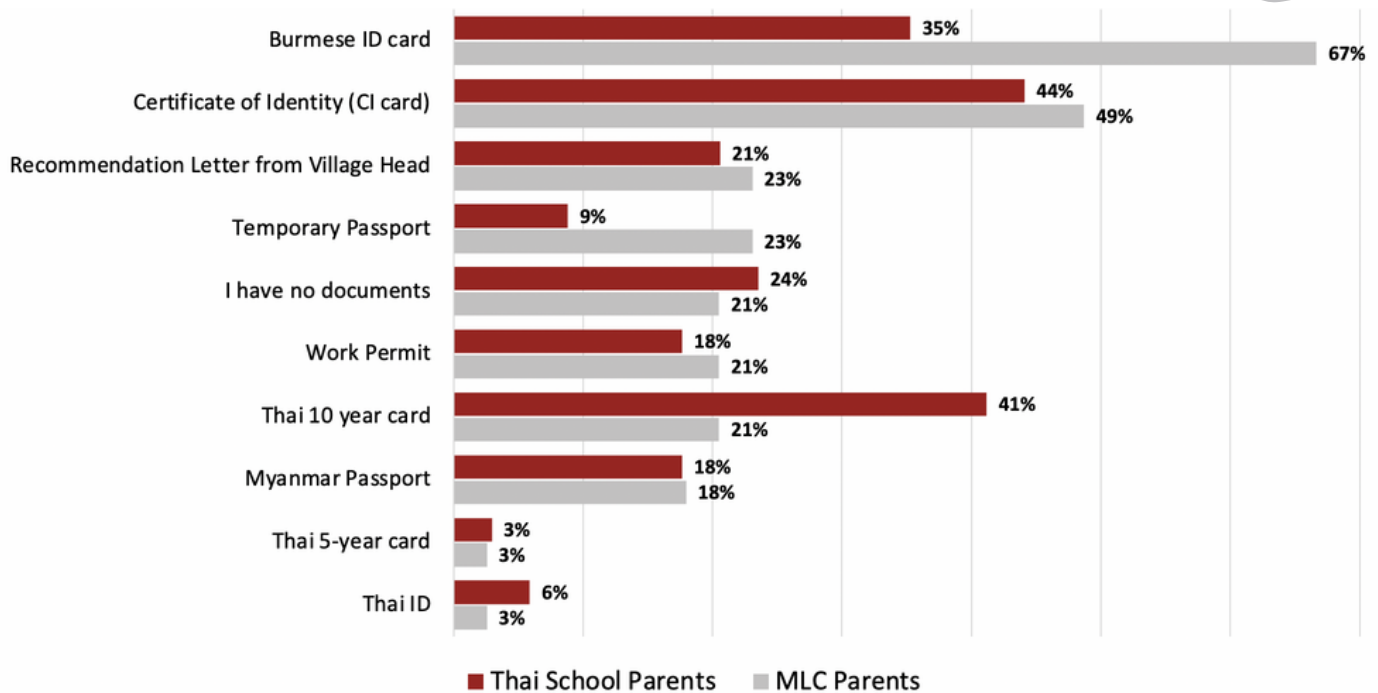
A significant number of children in both types of schools reported that they were undocumented: 41% in MLCs and 46% in Thai schools. A lack of documentation either directly prevents individuals from accessing social services and legal protection in Thailand, or results in a climate of misplaced fear and self-policing, preventing migrant families from accessing services such as vaccines and public education pathways. Without access to documentation, or information regarding the rights of different documentation statuses, migrant children are rendered vulnerable and face far greater protection risks, such as trafficking.

**Figure 29** Migrant students' documentation



Access to documentation decreased during the pandemic, largely due to the fact that the border remained officially closed. Nearly a quarter of interviewed parents stated they were undocumented (see Figure 29). Parents with children enrolled in Thai public schools were almost twice as likely to possess a 10-year card compared to parents with children at an MLC. This highlights that parents with access to long-term formal documentation are more likely to enroll their children in the Thai public school system. Thai finding also adds a quantitative dimension to qualitative reports that many Thai public schools are reluctant to enroll migrant children unless they can prove that they have long term plans to stay in the school. Improving access to documentation for migrant parents will lead to longer term stability for families and consequently their children's access to education. Migrant children who complete their education at a Thai public school will have the language skills that Thai employers have repeatedly stated are in demand (IOM, 2022). This will also provide the option of going onto completing undergraduate degrees in Thailand with further possibilities of securing additional documentation (Apikul, 2019). Improving parents' access to long-term documentation benefits migrant communities, Thai employers, and the Thai Government as it seeks to achieve the country's strategic educational and economic goals.

**Figure 30** Migrant parents' documentation



### Behind the Data: The Story of New Wave Migrant Learning Center

New Wave Migrant Learning Center worked hard to reach their students during the pandemic. They used online and small group in-person teaching when the school could not open. The economic hardship brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic was felt acutely throughout the school. Zaw Htet, the New Wave School Director explained, *“Most of my students are poor and don’t have a phone. Their parents can’t afford an internet data package for learning. In addition, bad connections and noisy backgrounds from their home are an extra obstacle for the students. Our solution for children who don’t have a phone was to go to their homes. We also teach some students who cannot pay... We don’t want students to stop learning because of their financial situation”.*

New Wave MLC has always valued parent engagement. This enabled the school to manage learning throughout the crisis by understanding the needs of students and also their families. New Wave MLC stood as a pillar in the community: sharing reliable news and answering questions throughout the pandemic. Zaw Htet shared, *“We normally run our school with the Parent Teacher Association. We try to meet with parents very often even though our school was closed this year. Mainly, we update the current news and situation around Mae Sot according to education, health, and security. The PTA is very important for our school. Our school values the PTA as a very important aspect. We include parents in almost all the school activities. We would like to suggest other schools to strengthen their PTA.”*

However, New Wave MLC is facing challenges with increasing dropouts as students’ families are dealing with significant financial crises in this challenging time. Many MLC students have had to drop out from school during COVID-19 in order to help their family. *“Our biggest challenge is the dropout issue. This year is the worst. The children are getting older, and their learning is very behind.”* said Zaw Htet.

## Spotlight on Action: Addressing Protection Challenges

To address the protection challenges that emerged throughout the pandemic, local NGOs and CBOs implemented a range of activities:

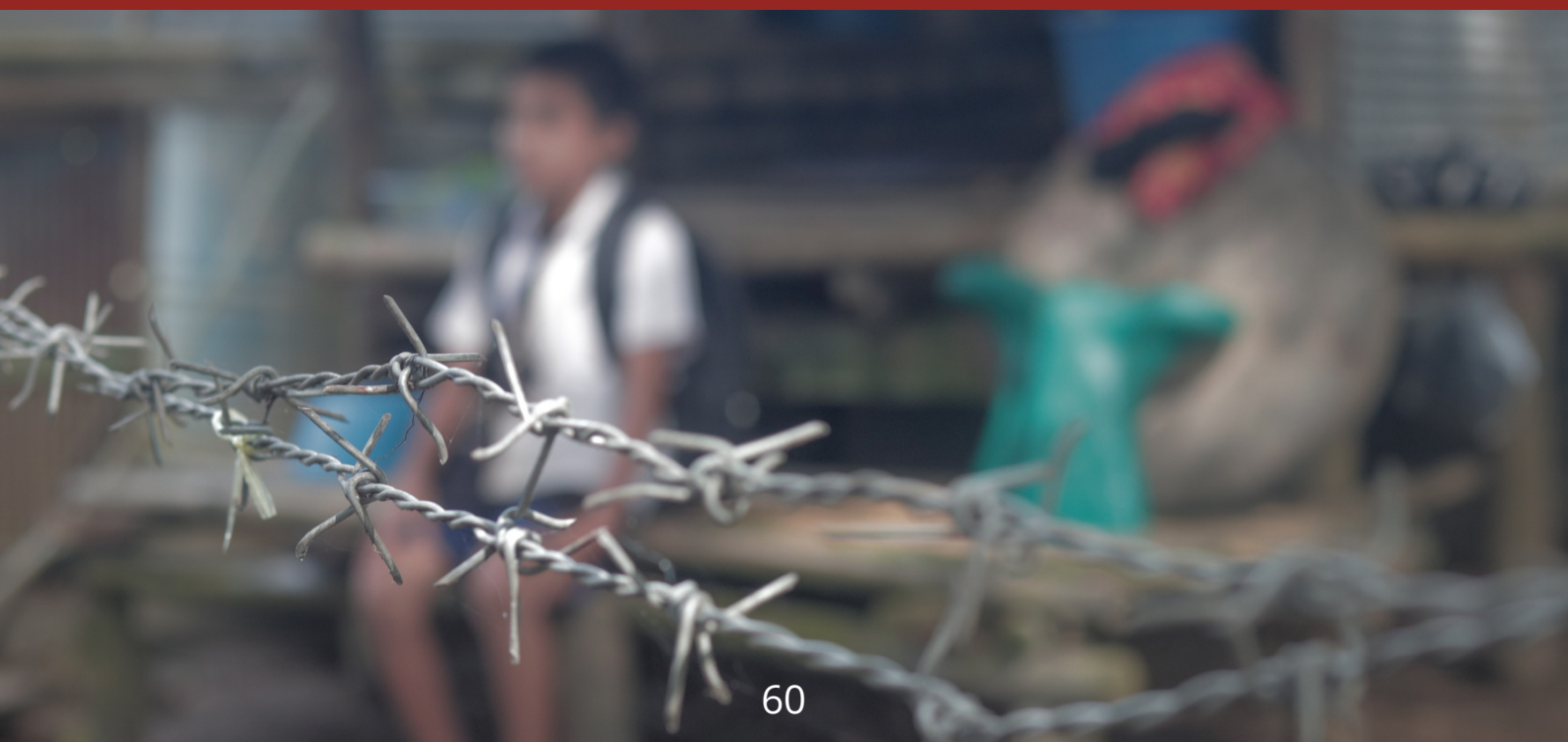
**Child-Friendly Spaces were established in 11 migrant communities by Help Without Frontiers Thailand Foundation.** These spaces are led by a trained community volunteer to offer creative, play-based learning activities for migrant children. Initially established as an alternative learning space during school closures, these spaces continue to benefit the community by running extra-curricular activities that develop children's wellbeing and social-emotional skills as well as ensuring a safe space in communities.

**Home-Learning Packs were produced with support from UNICEF.** These packs contained fun and creative learning exercises for children including puzzles, games, and math problems. Almost 9,000 packs were printed and distributed to migrant students from KG to Grade 8. These packs maintained a connection between the children and their MLCs during the time of closures, and also provided children with a learning alternative to playing online games or engaging in risky activities.

**Migrant Learning Centers largely waived their fees during closures.** Prior to the pandemic, many MLCs collected an enrolment fee and small monthly fees. These were not collected during school closures. Many MLC teachers continued to work unpaid to ensure that migrant families that suffered financially were able to keep their children enrolled in education.

**Kickstart Art supported a smooth transition back to school through art classes.** The border-based CBO Kickstart Art initiated a program of art classes for children in MLCs to ease the transition back to in-person learning. The classes supplement existing curricula to support children's mental wellbeing and foster the development of social-emotional skills.

**Developing emotional resilience by learning through play with PlayOnSide.** In 2020 PlayOnSide initiated a project to provide emotional and psychosocial support for children and parents affected by COVID-19 to promote and develop problem-solving, emotion management, and decision-making skills. To date, over 900 children from 10 MLCs have benefitted from this emotional resilience project.





# 6. DISCUSSION

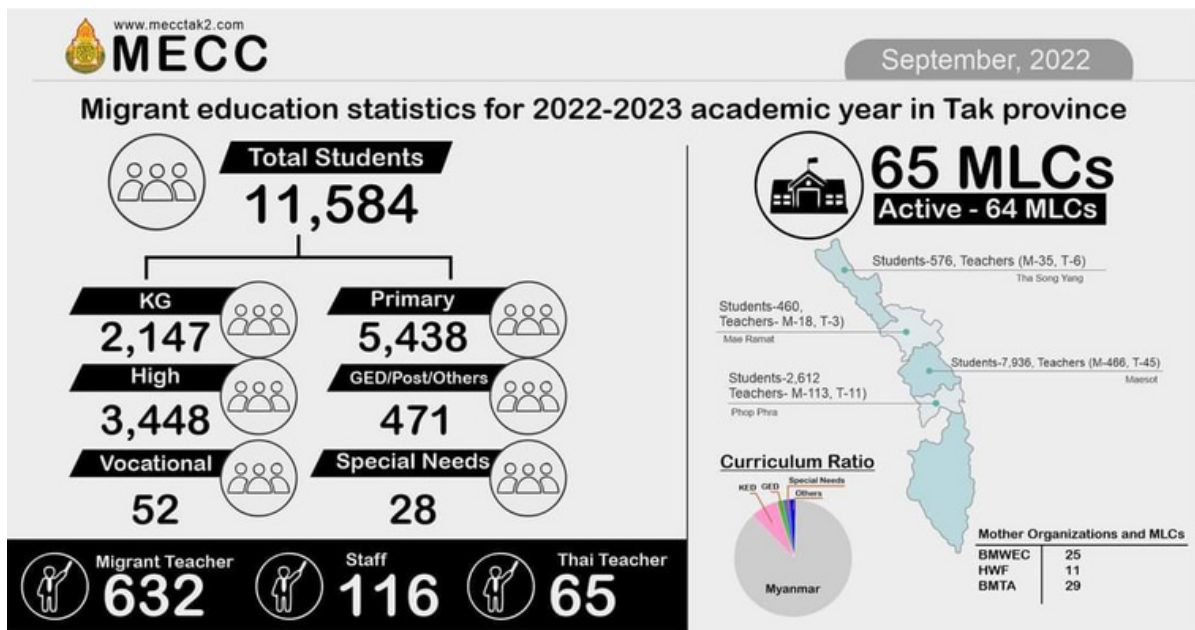
## Bridges to Stepping Stones

As the migrant education ecosystem moves from the response phase of the COVID-19 pandemic to a recovery phase, it is important to look beyond the impact of the twin crises and explore their potential legacy.

### Access

Although the return to in-person learning in June 2022 led to increased enrolment numbers, it is likely that the COVID generation will continue to experience high rates of dropout. Children who have missed extended periods of class time, those who have fallen behind academically, or those who have previously dropped out are all at increased risk of permanent drop-out. The education ecosystem will need to strengthen monitoring and support mechanisms to ensure that children are supported to stay in school.

**Figure 31** Migrant education statistics for 2022-2023 academic year in Tak Province



The events of February 1st 2021 in Myanmar have politicized education. For many children and youth, returning to state education pathways within Myanmar is no longer a viable or safe option. Alternative accredited pathways need to be developed, and students continue to require additional support to access existing pathways in order to achieve their full potential.

The ed-tech revolution catalyzed by COVID-19 opened new channels to access education, but the digital divide prevents those without financial resources and the necessary digital literacy skills from accessing them. A knock-on effect of the ed-tech revolution is the increased expectations of job-seekers to possess increasingly sophisticated digital literacy skills. Teachers and students will require continuous ICT training and resourcing to ensure migrant students are not left further behind in a digitizing world (Ladek, 2017).

## Quality

This report highlights how teachers, school directors, and parents worked valiantly throughout 2020 - 2022 to ensure migrant children were able to continue their education in some form. However, despite these best efforts, alternative modalities were unable to replicate the effectiveness of in-person learning. A growing body of evidence from across the globe indicates that children have experienced large-scale learning losses (World Bank et al., 2022a). The migrant education ecosystem will need to find the most contextually appropriate way to implement the RAPID framework (World Bank et al., 2022b) with particular focus on assessing learning losses, prioritizing teaching the fundamentals, and increasing the efficiency of instruction through catch-up learning.

The ongoing and escalating crisis in Myanmar is likely to continue to adversely impact migrant communities' collective wellbeing. It will be vital in the coming years to continue to develop the social-emotional competencies of children and youth, as well as prioritize the social, emotional, physical, and financial wellbeing of teachers to prevent burn-out (Falk et al., 2019). The ongoing crisis in Myanmar indicates that Thai accredited pathways will be increasingly important to migrant learners in the coming years as parents change their plans to remain in Thailand. Collaborative efforts will be required to ensure additional migrant children can access Thai public schools.

## Accreditation / Recognition

The accreditation crisis that has undermined Myanmar curriculum-based education for migrant children now extends to millions of learners throughout Myanmar. Enhanced coordination with education actors throughout Myanmar, who are better equipped to address questions of accreditation, may be the most appropriate means by which to ensure children who learn a Myanmar-language curriculum are able to receive certification for their learning, or transition to an appropriate post-secondary education pathway. Efforts to accredit migrant teachers through Myanmar state systems have thus far failed, and no longer appear to be viable or practical routes to recognition. Developing appropriate means of accrediting migrant teachers offers a means to sustain teacher motivation and enhance teacher wellbeing during an era when they are needed most. Professionalization opportunities for migrant teachers will also bring system-wide benefits of improved educational quality.

## Sustainability

The economic impact of the twin crises has pushed the migrant education ecosystem further from sustainability than ever before. The reduction in migrant incomes, and the likely increased need for remittances within Myanmar have left communities less able to support their children's education. The demands of sustaining access and recovering learning losses have increased costs while funding has remained the same or decreased.



# Key Challenges Undermining Migrant Education



grey = challenges prior to the twin crises  
red = challenges as a result of the twin crises

Donors face increasing demands from the ever-growing needs across the border in Myanmar, the global ramifications of the COVID-19 learning crises, rising global inflation, multiple international food crises, conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine, and the climate emergency. Globally, the percentage of official development aid directed towards education has fallen from 8.8 per cent in 2019 to 5.5 per cent in 2020. Spending on education in emergencies through humanitarian financing was reduced from 2.9 percent in 2019 to 2.5 per cent in 2021 (UNICEF, 2022). The reduction in education funding is likely to undermine efforts to sustain the existing migrant education systems. The political situation within Myanmar has left MLCs unable to receive material, financial, or logistical support from previous Myanmar state institutions. MLCs have become increasingly reliant on the limited community support available and donations from international donors.

The operating context of the Myanmar migrant education ecosystem has experienced significant changes as a result of the twin crises. The pathways to future opportunities for Myanmar migrant children that were once Bridges have been eroded. Today these pathways remain resilient, but due to the changes in context outlined throughout this report, perhaps today they are better thought of as Stepping Stones.





# 7. CONCLUSIONS

The unprecedented restrictions imposed in March 2020 resulted in the closure of all schools and learning centers across the globe. With this single extraordinary act, the educational rights of children were sacrificed in the interests of public health. Debate continues as to when it is appropriate to close schools during an infectious disease outbreak (Raffetti and Di Badassarre, 2022) as the enormous prices paid by children, parents, and teachers are now just being understood. Findings from around the world have demonstrated that children from disadvantaged backgrounds suffer disproportionately, and school closures drastically increase inequalities (UNICEF, 2022; World Bank, 2021a). This report contributes to that global evidence base, serving as a case study of the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on some of the most disadvantaged children in Thailand. The consequences of closing schools must be fully understood, and the findings within this report speak for themselves: school closures severely impacted education service providers' ability to fulfill children's right to access education. In addition to harm on children's mental-health and wellbeing, COVID-19 impacted the quality of education children received.

The ongoing crisis in Myanmar compounded these challenges. Access to previously sound educational pathways has been curtailed. Students perceive the situation as having contributed to their friends dropping out and the ongoing disruption and displacement has caused deep anxiety among migrants regarding families at home and their future in Thailand. Globally, an individual will earn an average of 10% more per hour, for every year spent in school (Patrinos, 2016). Thus a further three years in school would lead to a 30% increase in hourly earnings across a lifetime. Researchers from Stanford University predict that preventing student dropouts in Thailand would increase the national GDP by 3% and UNESCO economists estimate the benefits to be 228 billion baht per year (Bangkok Post, 2021). Parents with higher levels of education are also more likely to get their children vaccinated (Win et al., 2022) and research into child mortality in Myanmar found that children are 23% less likely to die before the age of five if mothers have a primary school education. Ensuring mothers have a secondary education increases child survival by 40% and tertiary education increases survival by 62% (Soe et al., 2019).

As this report and others have demonstrated (cf. Save the Children, 2014; Tyrosvoutis, 2019; Harkins, 2019), over the last thirty years Migrant Learning Centers have become a pillar of the Thai education system, supporting Thailand in fulfilling its duties to deliver EFA to tens of thousands of migrant children. In light of the impact of the twin crises on migrant education, and the proven contributions of the migrant education ecosystem in the face of continuous crises, perhaps now is the time to reignite the leadership displayed 32 years ago at Jomtien and explore new ways to support the migrant education ecosystem in working towards a shared and prosperous future with Education For All.





## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Mitigating the damage inflicted by COVID-19 on education systems in Thailand requires that all educational stakeholders make coordinated and collective efforts. The following recommendations outline specific steps that can be taken to ensure brighter futures for migrant children.

### Recommendations to Improve Access

#### Policy/Government Level

- **Migrant-Inclusive Approaches to COVID-19 Recovery Plans:** This report applauds the commitments made by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Labor for Thailand, to ensure that migrants' inclusion in Thailand's COVID-19 response and recovery plans remain a priority in line with the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM). The findings in this research further highlight the challenges migrant children face in accessing safe, quality education in the post-pandemic environment. This report echoes calls for MLCs to be recognized as complementary allies to Thai public schools in efforts to expand education for all children in Thailand (Tuangratananon, 2019).
- **Safe In-School Learning Opportunities** - The number one request of students throughout the research was a return to in-person learning, with 96% of interviewed children attending MLCs reporting that they want to learn in school. However, COVID-19 restrictions have further marginalized Migrant Learning Centers with tighter restrictions and forced closures for a longer period of time. MLCs complement the education provision of Thai public schools by reaching over 11,000 migrant vulnerable children. Continued coordination is needed for MLCs to safely operate during the 2022-2023 academic year. In future infectious disease outbreaks, school closures should come as an act of last resort.

## Organization Level (INGOs, NGOs, CBOs)

- **Multilingual Classroom assistants for Early Grades at Thai schools** - The Out of School Enrollment Task Force has found that the most difficult step for out of school migrant children to enter Thai school is the first year. They are 'submerged' into a class with a language they often don't understand or speak at home. This also places a lot of pressure on teachers who cannot speak children's mother tongue language. Additional classroom support is needed for migrant children to succeed. The Enrolment Team currently supports 4 bilingual classroom assistants to help migrant children make a smooth transition into Thai formal education, but more are needed to meet the needs of all migrant children.
- **Address the Digital Divide** - 80% of migrant teachers and 46% of migrant students reported access challenges regarding online learning. In line with UNICEF's (2020) report, [Reopening with Resilience: Lessons from remote learning during COVID-19](#) it is recommended to continue providing IT infrastructure to leverage the digital teaching skills gained over the last 2 years. MLC teachers need training, guidance and financial support to deliver effective online teaching. Local organizations and INGOs with expertise and capacity should seek ways to improve MLCs' online capabilities. Financial support is needed for sim cards, data packages, routers, and laptops.
- **Teachers at the Heart of Education Recovery** - Despite all the challenges, 84% of migrant students reported that they had not missed more than one month of learning, and students valued aspects of their education during the pandemic were their strong professional relationships with their teachers. This is testament to the hard work of migrant teachers who are giving everything to ensure that their students can continue to learn. INGOs must recognise that to support migrant children, supporting their teachers is essential. Migrant teachers need support for salaries, transportation costs, and wellbeing to be able to continue delivering education in emergencies.
- **Support Enrollment of Younger Migrant Children into Thai Schools** - As a result of the widespread destabilization in Myanmar, more migrant parents are looking to the Thai government education system for the long term future of their children. More than 2,500 children have dropped out of school in the past 2 years. It is recommended to hold a campaign targeting migrant parents to help enroll younger children into Thai school. Younger children have the greatest chance to succeed in Thai school and not drop out.
- **Greater Accessibility of Thai NFE (Kor Sor Nor) for Non-Thai Children and Youth** - The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has dramatically impacted migrant families who have lived and worked in Thailand for multiple years. They are increasingly seeking education options for their children that are accredited in Thailand. The non-formal entrance exam requires Thai language proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing at approximately a grade 3 level. This language barrier prevents migrant children from accessing this nationally accredited non-formal pathway. Pre-KSN programs for children with low Thai literacy levels are needed to bridge this critical gap. These could be stand-alone programs or integrated with the current MLC curriculum

- **Explore Alternative Accredited Education Opportunities** – Quality education is not defined by accreditation, however, accreditation drives quality and brings greater opportunities to students. The loss of accreditation due to the Myanmar political crisis has been severely felt by education stakeholders on both sides of the border. It is unlikely a single solution to the accreditation crisis will be found. Multiple pathways should continue to be explored, this may include expansion of GED programs, implementation of iGCSE, or innovation in accredited distance learning courses.
- **Expand the “2-Track” MLC Model** - Some participating Migrant Learning Centers provided their students with another recognized educational pathway alongside the Myanmar formal curriculum: either Myanmar Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) or Thai Government Non-Formal Education (NFE). These multi-pathway models work to ensure children can continue their education in both Thailand and Myanmar. After-school or night-study options are possibilities for over-age children or youth who are working. Resources are needed to scale these comprehensive models, specifically hiring Thai NFE teachers.

### **Local Level – Schools, Parents, Teachers**

- **Systems-Level Action Planning for Migrant Education Stakeholders** - We have entered a new era of education marked by nuanced contemporary challenges. Leadership from all stakeholders must unite to tackle emerging bottlenecks. It is recommended to develop a concrete action plan to determine collaborative ways forward in the best interests of migrant children. This may involve creating facilitated working groups to connect school directors in migrant learning centers across the country.
- **Data System Strengthening** - In collaboration with the Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC), MLCs have developed the most sophisticated data system seen within MLCs to date. MLC School Directors are encouraged to keep up-to-date records and accurate information to facilitate vaccination efforts; while also monitoring and channeling information to parents to keep them up to date on current regulations.





## Recommendations to Improve Learning

### Policy/Government Level

- **Security and Documentation Support for Teachers** - If complementary education for migrant children is to be sustainable, then migrant teachers need access to long-term legal documentation. This could be pursued through MLCs partnering to register as a foundation, developing partnerships with registered foundations, or pursuing registration as private schools.
- **University Transition Support** - Through interviews with migrant parents with children in Thai schools, our teams heard stories of youth who completed grade 12 but could not access Thai universities due to documentation challenges. Investigation and support is needed to help qualified migrant youth make the transition to university, and reach their full potential.
- **Continued and Strengthened Collaboration between all Education Stakeholders in Migrant Hosting Provinces** - Dr. Kraiyos Patrawart, Managing Director at the Equitable Education Fund Thailand (EEF), has advocated for *'for-all education'* and *'area-based education'* as inclusive education *"...cannot always be achieved on the national level. It has to be decentralized, to be managed at the provincial level and even more localized"*. With this in mind, localized solutions specific to the migrant context are needed to expand access. This could include greater collaboration between MLCs and The Department of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) to expand the delivery of accelerated Thai language short courses and increase registration of migrant youth into NFE programs.
- **Include Migrant Children in Large-scale Assessments of Learning Losses** - Understanding the extent of learning losses during the COVID-19 pandemic is the first step in mitigating the damage inflicted. Robust, rigorous, systematic analysis can support understanding of the gaps to be filled, the resources required and the areas and groups in most need of support to achieve equitable education for all. ASER, EGRA, and EGMA are examples of types of assessment that can lead to high-quality data that can be built upon. For further guidance explore World Bank (2022b) pages 42 - 52.



## Organization Level (INGOs, NGOs, CBOs)

- **Transportation, Teaching, and Learning Resources** - In order to strengthen existing learning systems, stable funding is needed to cover the daily transportation costs and teaching and learning materials. Education provision in the wake of COVID-19 is more expensive and cumbersome. Additional support is needed to keep these learning channels open.
- **Expand Digital School** - To complement the teaching and learning initiatives proved by MLCs, Digital School provides children in Thailand and Myanmar with structured, creative, routine and interactive lessons to keep them engaged and learning. By live-streaming via facebook, Digital School has reached over 100,000 viewers. As of October 2022, over 160 videos have been produced and are available at [learnbig.net](https://www.learnbig.net). Additional funding is needed to scale the initiative to provide supplementary education
- **Start Pre-KSN Thai Language Programs at MLCs** - Most migrant parents see their long-term future in Thailand. It will be essential to build migrant children's Thai language skills to be able to interact with Thai society and access educational and vocational opportunities. The non-formal 'Kor-Sor-Nor' program is a good way for migrant children to enter Thai society; however, historically migrant youth have struggled to pass the entrance exam due to the language barrier. If MLCs could be supported with teachers fluent in Thai, more doors would be opened for migrant children.
- **Empower Migrant Youth Leaders** - Migrant communities possess an untapped resource: youth who are further in the Thai education systems. Youth leadership and empowerment programs should be rolled out to train youth as community volunteers to break down the language barriers between migrant parents and Thai school staff. Interviewed migrant children enrolled in Thai schools shared they had few people they could ask to help them with their homework. Migrant youth are best placed to help migrant children learn the fundamentals of Thai language as they can speak both children's mother-tongue and Thai.
- **Thai Language and Transitions Center for Migrant Youth** - Migrant youth face unique challenges and have few opportunities to obtain a recognized education in the wake of the disruption in Myanmar. A "transitions" center that is specifically tailored to migrant youth needs could support them to gain Thai language fluency needed to enroll in Thai Non-Formal Education or gain the vocational skills necessary to find meaningful work. Many youth are feeling a sense of hopelessness about their future. They require tailored support to bridge to new opportunities.
- **Increase Online Learning Opportunities for Myanmar Speakers** - Digital learning solutions are not a panacea for the global education crisis, however, they have a crucial role to play. There are currently very few Open Educational Resources (OERs) for Myanmar speakers. Contextualizing, and/or translating existing OERs which are suitable for migrant students would provide much needed support to children in both Thailand and Myanmar. UNESCO's Learn Big app (<https://www.learnbig.net/>) and Learning Equality's Kolibri platform (<https://learningequality.org/kolibri/>) are powerful examples of what can be achieved and built upon. A recent collaboration by the Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC), TeacherFOCUS, and UNESCO called Digital School currently provides daily online lessons for kindergarten, G1, and G2 students aligned to the Myanmar curriculum. The goal is to expand the scope to reach all grade levels. Another example of such an OER that would benefit from further translation is: <https://ill-olc.net/>. Such an initiative may partly alleviate the lack of resources teachers and school directors highlighted in this research.

Support Schools in Implementing the Recommendations of the RAPID Framework - Schools and teachers will require additional training, mentoring, and support in addressing the damage inflicted on learning through two years of school closures. This work will require urgent prioritization to bounce back to effective in-person learning and prevent school cultures of poor performance from becoming calcified. For further guidance explore World Bank (2022b).

### Local Level – Schools, Parents, Teachers

- **Involve Parents in Learning** - The pandemic has increased parents' involvement in their children's education, and is an emerging systemic strength that can be built upon to enhance educational resilience. It is recommended that Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) establish regular schedules to discuss realistic ways that communities can continue to support children's learning and well-being, overcome learning losses, prevent dropouts and ensure that the positive learning points from the pandemic are not forgotten.
- **Assess Learning Levels Regularly** - The quantity and quality of learning during the pandemic declined and evidence suggests all children, but particularly migrant children, have experienced significant learning losses. The scale of the challenge remains unknown. Teachers will need to use a full range of diagnostic, formative, and summative classroom assessments to understand the unique challenges each child in their classroom is facing. For further guidance explore World Bank (2022b) pages 42 - 52.
- **Prioritize Fundamental Skills and Conceptual Prerequisites** - To overcome COVID-19 learning losses, teachers will need to dedicate additional time to supporting children to develop fundamental competencies in reading, writing, and math before moving forward with the curriculum. For further guidance explore World Bank (2022b) pages 53 - 64.
- **Increase the Efficiency of Instruction, Including through Catch-Up Learning** - Existing timetables and contact hours may not be sufficient to support the most at-risk children with recovering learning losses. Strategies such as structured pedagogy, targeted instruction, small group tutoring, self-guided learning, expanded instructional time and the effective integration of technology into teaching are all recommended approaches to supporting these learners. For further guidance explore World Bank (2022b) pages 65 - 114.
- **Strengthen Relationships Between MLCs and Community Leaders (Pu Yai Baan)** - MLCs are a pillar of their communities and must continue to build linkages to Thai society, in general, and local community leaders, specifically. These relationships have been critical during the past 2 years and will only be more important as MLCs seek to reopen for in person learning in the 2022-2023 academic year.





## Recommendations to Improve Protection

### Policy/Government Level

- **Access to Legal Documentation for Long-term Working Migrants, Migrant Teachers, and Children** - Many migrant families who have lived in Thailand for years still lack necessary legal documents for their personal security. As security concerns continue to escalate, information on how to access legal documentation pathways are needed. Otherwise, migrant families live in fear of reprisal and remain hesitant to access services they are entitled to.
- **Continue Support for Migrant Children to Gain Access to Appropriate Documentation.** - School closures made it increasingly difficult for migrant children to receive the 13-digit cards they would normally have access to before the pandemic. Thai school staff require continued support to process these important documents which give migrant children access to essential services such as healthcare.

### Organization Level (INGOs, NGOs, CBOs)

- **Expand Safety Nets for At-Risk Children.** - The legacies of the twin crises have left children at increased risk of drop-out. The expansion of existing formal and non-formal protection mechanisms and educational opportunities can build the resilience of migrant children. The Child-friendly Spaces, and the Learning Resilience through Play projects are examples of existing projects that employ responsible and trained community focal points to develop community based protection mechanisms.
- **Increase Teacher Support, Focusing on Essential Needs and Well Being** - Teachers are on the frontlines: forced to navigate numerous roles and responsibilities and be leaders during this time of uncertainty. Future teacher training should seek to supplement teacher stipends and provide teachers with the tools they need to provide holistic support to migrant children. Future training should also include teacher well-being as educators require outlets and a space to dialogue about the professional and personal challenges they face.

## Local Level – Schools, Parents, Teachers

- **Incorporate Well-being into Education** - 1 in 5 interviewed children shared they had experienced feelings of depression as a result of the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and the widespread destabilization in Myanmar. As we progress through the 2022-2023 academic year, it is critical to integrate the content and lessons learned regarding teacher and student well being into the curriculum and ensure it reaches students. Collaborative approaches between NGOs, schools and communities may be the most appropriate way to develop the holistic well-being of children.
- **Digital Safety Training for Children** - Gaming addiction was the most cited as the most common risk for children as perceived by parents. Modern game designs target dopamine receptors in the brain, generating pleasurable responses in the same way many other drugs do. Although technology has the potential to catalyze an emancipatory learning revolution, the same technology threatens to enslave future generations. Specific training for children and youth is needed to help them safely navigate the internet, know their limits and ensure students use technology effectively, rather than be used by it.





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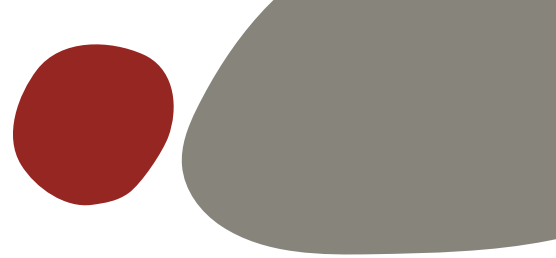
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# 10. ANNEX



## Annex A: Research Sample

**Table 1** Migrant Learning Centers surveyed and focal organizations

Saw Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Rose Field Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Pyo Khin Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Irrawaddy Migrant Learning Center, HwF
New Wave Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	P' Yan Taung Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Nam Tok Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Parami Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Sky Blue Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Hope Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Naung Bo Den Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Chicken Migrant Learning Center, HwF
BHSOH Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Su Kha Hong Sar Migrant Learning Center, HwF
48 KM Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Ah Yone Oo Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Shwe Thazin Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	New Day Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Light Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	KM42 Migrant Learning Center, HwF
White Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	New Society Migrant Learning Center, HwF
MACC Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Marist Asia Foundation, MAF
CDC Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Love Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
BLSO Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	Thoo Mwee Khee Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Morning Glory Migrant Learning Center, BMTA	

**Table 2** Thai Public Schools surveyed and focal organizations

Ban Mae Sala, MECC	Ban Htee Kapoe, MECC
Ban Hua Fai, MECC	Ban Mae Ku Noi, MECC
Ban Mae Pa, MECC	Ban Mae Tao Tai, MECC
Ban Mae Pa Tai, MECC	Ban Ta Ard, MECC
Ban Tom Bee, MECC	Ban Khao Nang Hong, MAF
Ban Kham Pi Ban, MECC	Kor-Sor-Nor Ranong, MAF
Ban Mae Tao Mai, MECC	Community College Ranong, MAF
Ban Thairakir, MECC	

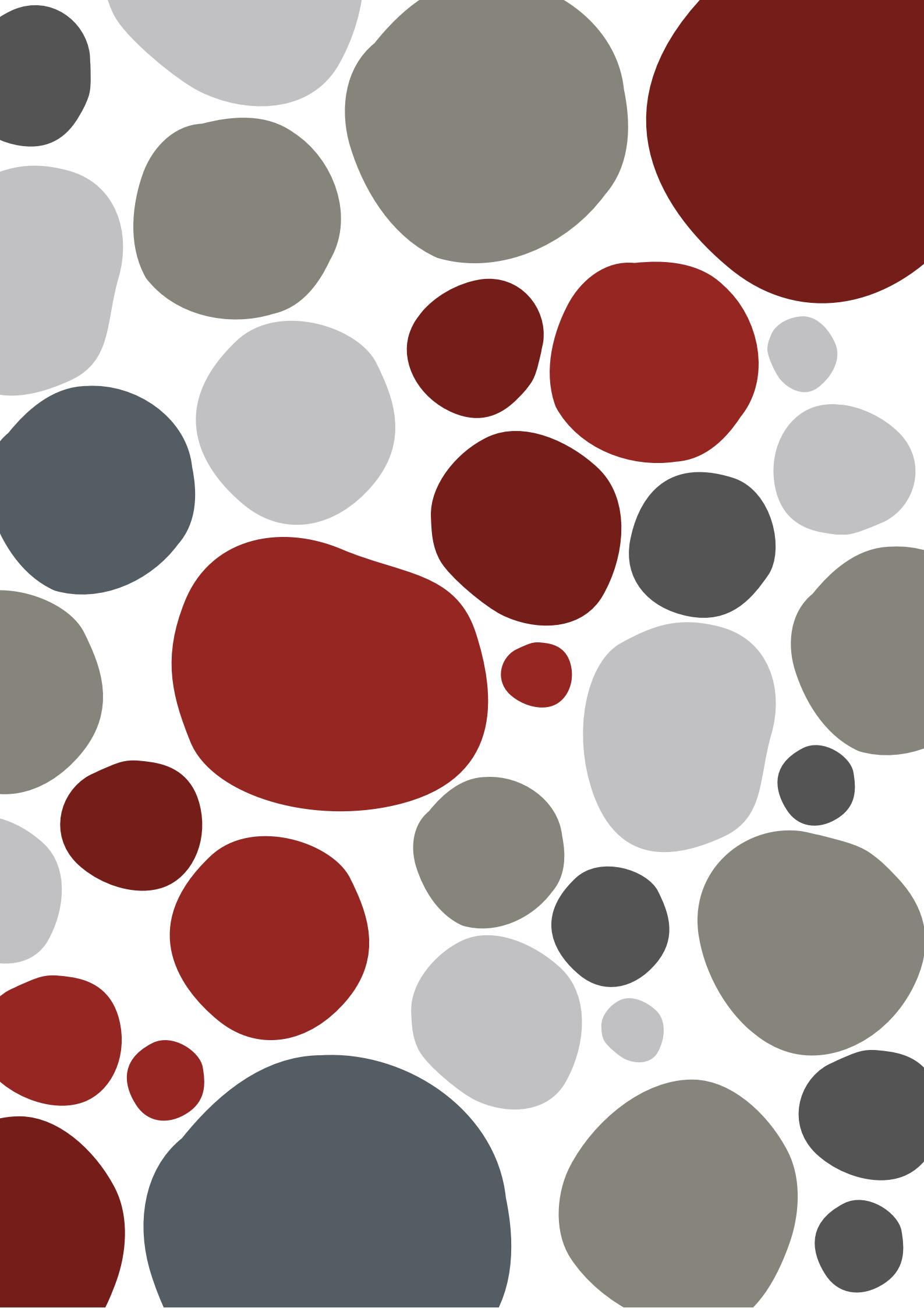
**Table 3** Research locations by district

Location	Number of MLCs	Number of Thai Public Schools
Mae Sot	22	2
Phob Phra	6	2
Mae Pa		1
Tha Song Yang		1
Mae Ramat		1
Ranong	1	2
Subtotal	27	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	









This research was a collaborative effort by the following organisations working to promote access to safe, inclusive, high quality, and recognized education for Myanmar migrant children in Thailand:

**The Inclusive Education Foundation (INED)** through its **TeacherFOCUS** project aims to reduce inequalities for all children by increasing access to and improving the quality of recognized education options. INED looks to close the gap through educational research, contextualized capacity building, educational system strengthening, community-based solutions, and data-driven advocacy. We believe education is the most direct pathway out of poverty and that a partial education is not enough to keep children safe from abuse, exploitation, and trafficking. [www.inedfoundation.org](http://www.inedfoundation.org)

**The Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC)** is an organisation under Tak Primary Education Service Area Office 2 (TAK PESAO 2) and which leads coordination between MLCs, NGOs, CBOs and Government parties. All Migrant Learning Centres in Tak province are listed under MECC. <https://www.mecctak2.com/>

**Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF)** aims to fight the root causes of poverty and discrimination and violence through education, youth empowerment, health, child protection and community development for long-term sustainability. We work along the Thai-Myanmar border giving children, youth and their communities a chance for a brighter future. <https://helpwithoutfrontiers.org>

**The Burmese Migrant Teachers' Association (BMTA)** works to promote the rights of teachers through advocacy in collaboration with local and international education partners. BMTA promotes unity and the value of teachers by improving their status through school management training and teacher capacity building. <https://www.facebook.com/migrant.teachers>

**The Youth Connect Foundation** provides training, apprenticeships and career services so students can transition to safe, productive and independent lives. Through working with migrant learning centers as well as local Thai businesses and governmental authorities, Youth Connect Foundation has developed a unique and successful approach for migrant youth in Mae Sot. <http://youthconnectthailand.org>

**Playonside**, a non-governmental organisation based in Mae Sot on the Thai-Burma border, was founded in 2013. It mainly uses football as a powerful tool to educate and empower displaced Myanmar migrants and refugees in Thailand. At the end of each weekend, around 1000 migrant children and young people from 27 different migrant schools gather to play, learn and compete while making new friends and expanding their networks. PlayOnside is a highly recognized local organisation focused on promoting social change for migrant communities. Over the past 9 years, we've developed a high-impact methodology using football as a powerful tool that empowers and educates vulnerable Myanmar migrants and refugees in the areas of social inclusion, gender equality, and empowerment." [www.playonside.org](http://www.playonside.org)

**The Marist Asia Foundation (MAF)** provides support for Burmese Migrant Families with Health and Education Programs. Marist Asia Foundation has been working in Ranong since 2006 and provides a HIV Health, Preschool, Secondary and University Online Program to give migrant children and families a brighter future. <https://www.maristasiafoundation.org>

**The Mae Tao Clinic** has been serving vulnerable and displaced populations along the Thai-Burma border since 1989. MTC's main programmatic areas are: 1) Primary Healthcare Services; 2) Clinical Training; 3) Education 4) Protection; 5) Community Health; 6) Organisational Sustainability; and 7) Burma Based Health Service in Karen State. Together, these programs enable MTC to holistically serve the needs of thousands of displaced and marginalised people from Burma and respond to the disease outbreak and humanitarian crises along the border. These services are complemented by the numerous collaborations that MTC undertakes with other CBOs, INGOs, networking groups, government and university institutions, ensuring that the plight of the displaced and migrant community is addressed by policy development and other services. <https://maetaoclinic.org/>

