



# Migrant Learning Centers on the Thai-Myanmar Borderland

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## Giving New Meaning to "Live and Learn"

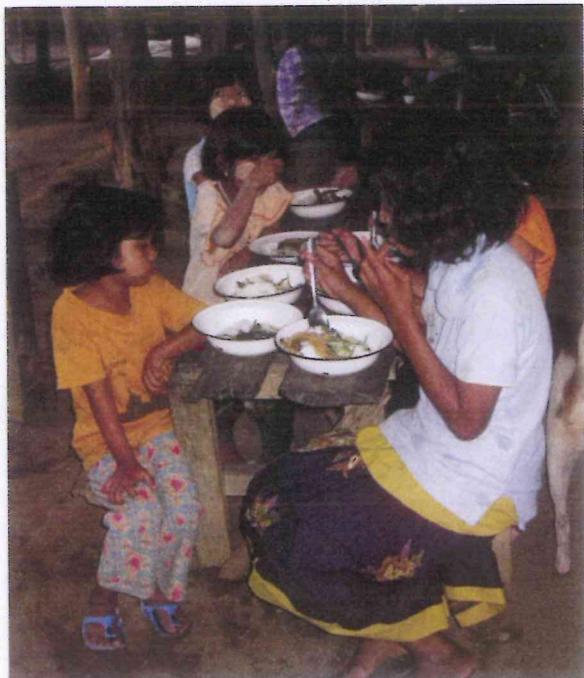
"It is the weakest among us who need education the most and we cannot stand by as they are being excluded," said Kishore Singh, UN Special Rapporteur on education, following the adoption of the Incheon Declaration at the World Education Forum in May 2015. He also called for "strategies to address inequality by focusing on girls and women, ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and children living in conflict-affected areas, rural areas and urban slums." One especially vulnerable group that has been denied their right to education are the children caught up in forced migration along the Thai-Myanmar border. One strategy, highlighted in this article, for ensuring these children have access to quality early childhood education and complete primary education with effective learning outcomes, is nonformal, migrant alternative learning centers. The authors present a case study of one such center, New Blood School and Boarding House, to demonstrate the critical role alternative care systems can play in meeting the needs of marginalized children and ensuring that no child is left behind.

By Jessica Ball and Angela Dim

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**A**round the world, children—especially unaccompanied children—who have migrated for political, economic, religious, or social reasons are among the most marginalized and vulnerable. In Myanmar (formerly Burma), an estimated two and a half to three million children and families, mostly belonging to ethnolinguistic minority groups, have fled the country, mainly to Thailand and China. Some have been the beneficiaries of international resettlement programs and are now living in third countries.

In Thailand, some Myanmar migrants have come to urban centers, particularly Bangkok, for work. About 120,000 forced migrants have official refugee status and live in nine temporary shelters (refugee camps) (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2012a). The vast majority of Myanmar migrants in Thailand do not have official refugee status, resulting in a large population, estimated around 2.5 million, living as undocumented, temporary residents of towns, villages, and institutions on the Thai-Myanmar border. For example, the town of Mae Sot in Tak Province, bordering Myanmar's eastern borders, has a population of 120,500 Thais and 106,000 Myanmar migrants recorded in the official census, and an estimated additional 100,000 undocumented Myanmar migrants. A similar influx of Myanmar migrants has resulted in the rapid expansion of the population of Chiang Mai in northern Thailand.



Myanmar migrants have fled armed conflict, persecution, and joblessness with the hope of realizing their human rights, earning a livelihood, accessing education, and securing their children's futures. In some instances, children migrate without adult accompaniment; sometimes, they are sent by parents hoping their children will find safety and education; sometimes, they are kidnapped by child and drug traffickers; and sometimes, they become separated from family during the violence and chaos of forced migration (Committee for the Protection and Promotion of Child Rights (Burma), 2009).

This article describes the circumstances for migrant children caught up in this forced migration, and highlights the roles of non-formal, migrant learning centers as an alternative provider of education, care, and support. New Blood school and orphanage is one such center that illustrates the critical roles that these types of alternative care systems can play in meeting the needs of disenfranchised children.

### Background

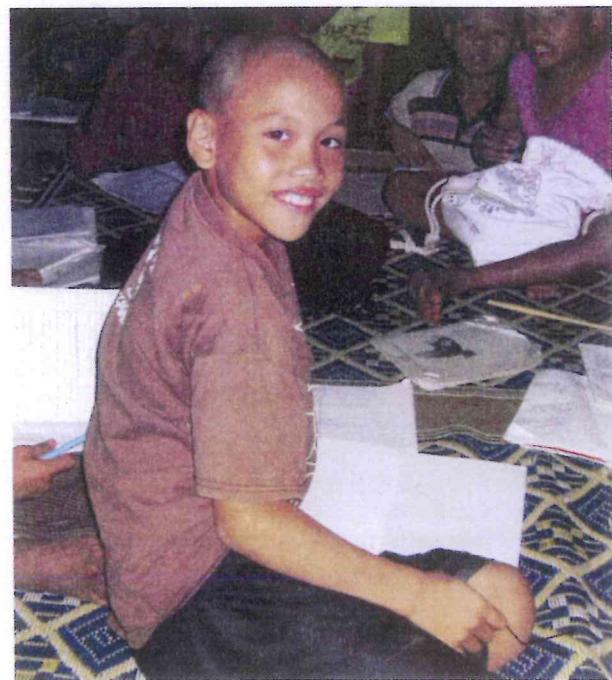
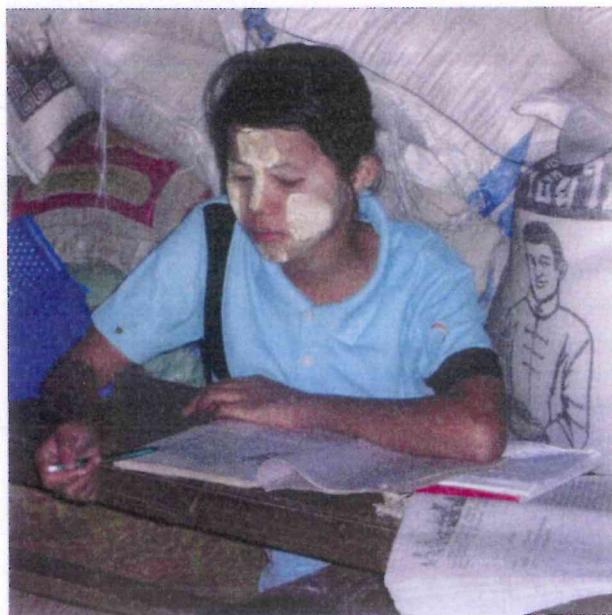
UNESCO estimates that between 300,000 and 600,000 migrant children live in Thailand. UNESCO and the Thailand Ministry of Education (2014) estimate that about 126,000 migrant children are enrolled in formal and non-formal education provided by the Thailand government. An unknown number of these are migrant children from Myanmar residing in the border area. While difficult to measure, it is generally understood by agencies working in this region that over half of migrant Myanmar children have no official identity documentation and are effectively stateless (UNHCR, 2012b). It is also difficult to estimate the number of undocumented children and the number of children who are never enrolled in any type of center for learning. However, some estimates suggest that less than 20% of migrant children attend school of any kind.

Access to education, identity documentation, and social protection are frequently cited unfulfilled child rights and immediate concerns for displaced Myanmar children in Thailand and, indeed, for stateless children around the globe. Lack of documented identity can set the stage for a host of lifelong difficulties and for multigenerational statelessness. Social protection is considered a priority for these children given the reported high prevalence of coerced involvement in sexual violence, trafficking, and drug transportation. Resources to address these children's physical health, psychosocial

and emotional development, and recovery from psychological trauma are also areas of tremendous need. Education is considered the gateway to their social inclusion and opportunities for success in Thailand, Myanmar, or possible third countries for resettlement. Over the past two decades, alternative learning systems that have been created to provide basic education have also tried to meet this wide array of unmet needs.

Educators and policymakers have recognized that traditional formal schooling is not adequate to achieve the Education for All Goals 1 and 2 of universal early childhood and primary education. Various forms of flexible learning strategies exist around the world, with the goal of enabling otherwise excluded children to fulfill their right to education through instruction and support to acquire functional basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as the life skills and competencies needed for a life with dignity and choice. The term "flexible learning strategies" has been suggested by UNESCO (2013) to subsume the various terminologies for varying initiatives, including equivalency programs, certified non-formal education programs, accelerated learning programs, second chance education, community-based education/school/learning, flexible school programs, complementary programs, alternative learning programs, and so on.

Flexible learning strategies for migrants are found in many countries. The most well-documented programs are along the U.S.-Mexico border, in European countries, and China (Danaher, Kenny, & Leder, 2009). Most of these have been established by the state for domestic (or internal) migrants, as



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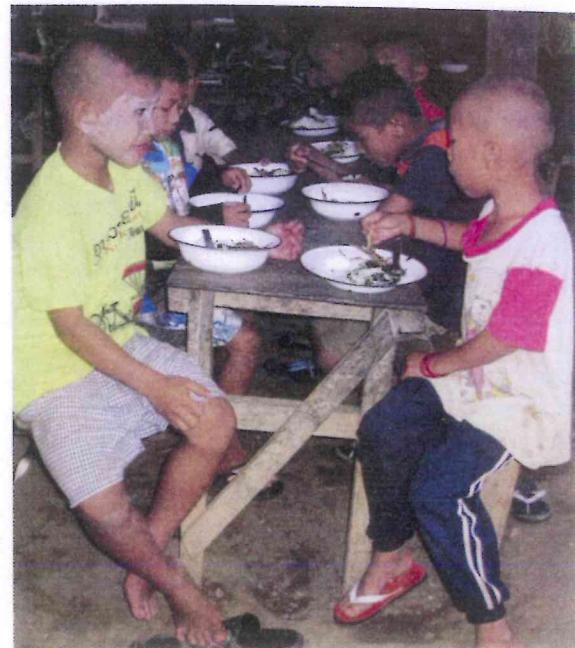
are very common in China, for example (Fong & Murphy, 2006). Currently, there are approximately 130 migrant learning centers in Thailand serving a total of 40,000 children (BEAM Education Foundation, [www.beamedu.org](http://www.beamedu.org); Committee for Promotion and Protection of Child Rights (Burma), 2009). In addition, 30,915 Myanmar children with refugee status are attending alternative learning systems in refugee camps along the Thai-Myanmar border (Oh, 2010). For children in refugee camps, basic needs for shelter, food, clothing, and medical care are provided in the camps and alternative learning systems focus specifically on providing basic education. The learning resources and curriculum are established by refugee committees and authorities operating each camp and have a reliable source of funding through various humanitarian assistance programs. In contrast, for forced migrant children who do not have official refugee status, there is no guarantee that their basic needs or access to learning support will be met. Thus, an informal network of grassroots, often migrant-led, precariously funded learning centers has emerged and they often try to meet children's basic needs as well as providing structured learning opportunities. These migrant learning centers have formed a network to share resources and advocate for more dependable, holistic, and enduring solutions for these children. The migrant learning centers range in size from 20 to over 650 students (e.g., New Blood School and Hsa Thoo Lei Migrant Learning Centres, respectively). The flexible learning strategies for Myanmar migrant children

in Thailand are unique in that they were mostly established by migrants themselves, in cooperation with non-government organizations, and the learners are either foreign nationals, in the case of documented children, or "aliens," in the case of undocumented children (Lee, 2013).

### **Education Systems on the Myanmar-Thailand Border**

**Migrant Learning Centers.** Most Myanmar children living in the border area of western Thailand are not able to gain access to formal, public education. This difficulty accessing formal education created the need for alternative learning programs for migrant Myanmar children. The first migrant learning centers were founded in the early 1990s; today, there are over 130 migrant learning centers serving over 40,000 children and youth (<https://bmta05.wordpress.com/about/>). The core mission of migrant learning centers is to provide a safe place for children to learn and develop, free from the high risks in this borderland of child trafficking, drug trafficking, abuse, and other child rights violations. Some migrant learning centers are day schools, and students live with family members in the area. Some migrant learning centers provide residential care for children who are orphaned, abandoned, or whose parents are not able to care for them because of poverty or long work hours (including working at night), or because they have been arrested or deported.

Most migrant learning centers receive no financial support from the Thai and rely solely on their own income generation and resourcefulness and the support of local and international donor organizations and volunteers. The government of Thailand has encouraged migrant learning centers to register with the Ministry of Education, and proposed legislation in Thailand may soon require



formal registration. This might open the door to funding by the Thai government as well as support for regulating the centers' curriculum and their eventual accreditation. Currently, migrant learning centers use widely varying curricula and have widely varying qualifications of teachers.

**Curriculum Choices.** Migrant learning centers must make decisions, based on the characteristics and goals of the particular population they are serving, regarding the opportunities for children's inclusion in formal education, sources of financial support, and whether to focus on preparing children for further education and employment in Thailand or for further education and repatriation to Myanmar. A few migrant learning centers have the cooperation of the Myanmar Ministry of Education to provide the standard Myanmar matriculation exam, although this is not uniformly or reliably available. Thus, some learning centers use a Myanmar curriculum delivered in the Myanmar language. The Myanmar language is not most migrant children's first language, however. Most belong to an ethnolinguistic minority group, with a first language such as Karen, Kachin, etc. Hence, the first learning challenge for students in these migrant learning centers is to acquire reading, writing, and oral language proficiency.

**Migrant Myanmar Children in Thai Schools.** Some learning centers have a significant Thai language component, with the goal of preparing children to integrate into the formal education system in Thailand. An estimated 4% of migrant Myanmar children attend Thai government schools (Migrant Education Integration Initiative,



www.meii.co). Although the Thai government has ultimate responsibility for migrant education, the government's policy commitment to Education for All was not established until long after the large influx of people fleeing from armed conflict in Myanmar in the late 1980s. As well, implementation of the Education for All policy and education law varies from region to region, and eligibility for enrollment varies from school to school (Thailand Ministry of Education, 2014). Obstacles to enrollment in Thai schools include: children lacking school records of their achievement; the incommensurability of the Thai, Myanmar, and alternative education systems; and children not being able to understand, read, or write Thai, which is the medium of instruction in Thai schools.

When Thai schools do open their doors to Myanmar children, they often do not recognize children's prior academic achievement, requiring them to enroll in lower grades than their age-mates and thereby creating a disincentive for parents to enroll their children. Some schools require identity documentation in order to enroll, and a majority of migrant Myanmar children lack identity documents. As well, a policy of the Thailand Ministry of Education, Office of the Basic Education Commission, requires that education stresses imperial loyalty and pride in "Thainess": children in Thai schools must pledge daily their allegiance to the Thai monarchy and nationality (Thailand Ministry of Education, 2014). Pressure to assimilate Thai identity is another disincentive for parents and children who wish to retain their Myanmar identity. As well, many families are hesitant to become involved in Thai institutions for fear it may make them vulnerable to arrest, detention, and deportation as illegal aliens (Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee, <http://www.bmwec.org/background/>). When this does occur, children are sometimes left behind in Thailand without anyone to care for them.

***School Within School Programs.*** At the lower primary school level, some migrant learning centers have linked with Thai schools for "school within school" programs. When this approach is formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding between the migrant learning center



and the affiliated Thai school, migrant students in grade 1 through 3 can officially enroll in the Thai school system while they receive their education at the migrant learning center. The children are educated in the Thai government's curriculum as well as in courses specific to the particular migrant learning center, such as Myanmar language or an ethnic minority language and traditional arts. Participating students take government examinations and their scores are forwarded to the affiliated Thai school. The migrant learning center receives some Thai government benefits, including materials and milk. They are under the supervision of the Thailand Office of Basic Education Commission, and receive monitoring



visits by Thai government teachers (International Labour Organization, 2014).

**Articulation Challenges.** To date, formal and non-formal education systems in Myanmar and Thailand have not negotiated a system for articulating courses (i.e., comparing the content) or articulating learning assessment indicators across systems, which is a first step in establishing transferability of credits earned by a learner in one system when they circulate to another system. Thai schools do not accept transcripts from migrant learning centers. Myanmar educational institutions do not accept transcripts or diplomas received from either Thai schools or from migrant learning centers. Thus, migrant learning centers have not yet been able to provide any recognized credentials upon completion of academic work, which is a serious deterrent to children's motivation, assured progress through levels of education as they move around from one education body to another, and ultimately to their chances for tertiary education, vocational training programs, and employment.

**Migrant Education Integration Initiative.** The Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII: [www.meii.co](http://www.meii.co)) is addressing this critical issue. This network of migrant and education organizations works with Myanmar and Thai officials to create legislation in both countries that protects the educational rights of migrants. One of the goals of MEII is to achieve recognition of transcripts from non-formal learning centers by the Myanmar and Thai public school systems. Other goals are to establish a standardized curriculum for migrant learning centers that is relevant to the lives and cultural identity of migrants, and to establish a diploma for migrants that is recognized by education authorities in Thailand, Myanmar, and other Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries. Achieving these goals is

essential, as an outpouring of economic migrants is likely to sustain the need for alternative education systems for migrant Myanmar children. MEII notes that migrants from ASEAN countries have the right to access the ASEAN Qualification Framework in their home country or abroad within the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015. Access to an accredited and recognized quality education for migrant communities along the Myanmar-Thailand border is also the goal of the Burmese Migrant Teachers' Association (<https://bmta05.wordpress.com/about/>), which has nearly 800 members who are teachers in 51 migrant learning centers in Tak Province in Thailand.

**Circulating Among Education Systems.** If migrant children are ever to return to their country of origin, their education achievements to date from both Thai schools and migrant learning centers need to be recognized by schools—and eventually by employers—in Myanmar. The Ministry of Education in Myanmar has recently stated that children enrolled in migrant learning centers in Thailand are welcome to return to Myanmar and integrate into the formal education system there; their grade level would be based on results of placement tests or former exams offered in upper secondary school (UNESCO, 2013). However, a number of factors make this accommodation unrealistic in many cases, including: teachers and students are not informed of the skills or content assessed on placement exams; students may not have Myanmar language as their primary language, but the placement tests are in Myanmar language only; and eligibility for placement tests may depend on being able to produce identity documentation that many children lack. Thus, in addition to doubts about the security of ceasefire agreements between ethnolinguistic minority groups and the Myanmar government, or the ability to find work, many migrant families are not confident about being able to secure education for their children if they return to Myanmar.

**Establishing Education Crosswalks.** As the community of states belonging to ASEAN draws closer, the education systems in ASEAN countries need to establish formal articulation agreements that can be used by students, advisors, and schools to ensure a student's appropriate grade placement and ensure their smooth progression. A recent pilot project is exploring this bridge between education systems. Cooperation by authorities in Thailand and Myawaddy Township authority in Kayin State in Myanmar enabled a Myanmar non-formal education curriculum to be introduced into Parami and A-yeon-ay learning centers in Mae Sot in 2014,





involving about 81 migrant Myanmar students. The courses take two years to complete, and all lessons are taught in the Myanmar language by Myanmar teachers from Myawaddy schools. After the courses are completed, and students have passed the Myanmar matriculation examination, the students will receive certificates issued by the Myawaddy schools; in principle, they will then be able to continue in higher education in Myanmar (Intathep, 2014). In Myanmar, higher education therefore refers to Grade 11 and 12 and beyond.

**Identity Documentation.** In addition to the right to an education, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child supports the right of children to have legal status as a person, to have a name and birth registration documents, and to have a nationality. In Thailand, children without identity documentation are at great risk of identity falsification and being trafficked or sold into hazardous or exploitative employment or forcibly recruited into military service. Besides being a condition for a life with dignity, identity documentation is typically required in order to access entitlements to services provided by the state, including education, health care, and social protection. As noted, despite commitments to Education for All, many schools in Thailand require identity documents when a child seeks to enroll. Similarly, government schools in Myanmar require evidence of a child's Myanmar identity, signaling their right to enroll in a Myanmar school, especially if they are arriving from outside the country. Lack of identity documentation is widely recognized as a persistent barrier to accessing formal education in Thailand, Myanmar, and third countries of resettlement. Many migrant learning centers work with other migrant organizations to try to obtain identity documentation for children enrolled in

their centers. As well, organizations operated by Myanmar migrants for the migrant community, such as BEAM Education Foundation, try to help children acquire Myanmar identity documents or to be named on the household register of families that do have legal documentation. For some organizations, the goal is to facilitate most children's eventual reintegration into the school system in Myanmar. Other organizations help children to acquire Thailand identity documents with the expectation that they will integrate into Thai society as citizens.

#### **New Blood Migrant Learning Centre: An Example of an Alternative System of Support**

New Blood Migrant Learning Centre is one of the largest migrant learning centers on the Thai-Myanmar border, housing nearly 200 unaccompanied Myanmar children, age 2 to 16 years, and providing day school for about 417 children whose families work in the farms or factories around Mae Sot on the Thai-Myanmar border. Founded in 2003, the school is a safe haven, especially for unaccompanied children from Myanmar. Many of the children lost their parents during armed conflict in Myanmar or Cyclone Nargis in 2008, or due to HIV / AIDS. Some of the children were separated from their parents when the parents were deported from Myanmar and they were left behind with no one to care for them. As residents of New Blood, the children are at less risk of being exploited or sold.

**Financing.** New Blood is financially dependent upon international and local donor agencies and individuals. Operational costs are mainly provided by Suwannimit Fuondation ([www.suwannimit.org](http://www.suwannimit.org)), which is a registered foundation in Thailand that aims to strengthen the operational

capacity, programming impact, and sustainability of community-based organizations that serve underprivileged people on the Thai-Myanmar border. In 2015, the Good Friends Centre in Mae Sot (<https://goodfriendscentre.wordpress.com/about/>) paid for electricity and transportation of a few students to two schools in Mae Sot and three schools elsewhere. The school has attracted support from a few charitable organizations, including the Burmese Refugee Academic Charity Events (BRACE), which is a non-profit group focused on fundraising for New Blood Migrant Learning Centre. Since 2011, New Blood has been a partner of Room to Grow Foundation (<http://roomtogrowfoundation.org/>), a non-profit charitable organization, which has provided funding for 25 of the residential children to attend a nearby Thai school and funded repairs to electrical wiring and construction of walls for one classroom that only had a floor and roof. It also provides deliveries of rice and yellow lentils and collaborates with Thai Children's Trust ([www.thaichildrenstrust.org.uk](http://www.thaichildrenstrust.org.uk)) to provide other food support for the boarders.

**Education.** With an emphasis on basic reading and writing of the Myanmar language, as well as mathematics, the focus of teaching and learning at New Blood is to prepare children to pass standard examinations that would enable them to enroll in schools in Myanmar if they return to their home country. The nursery and lower primary classes are held in one large, open air classroom, which also serves as the dormitory for younger children and as the main assembly hall. There are no desks in the primary classrooms. Secondary classes are held in rudimentary classrooms with desks, with several grades learning together. The classrooms are hot, noisy, and cramped; although both teachers and students struggle to get through their lessons, motivation is very high. This school aims to teach children to read and write in the Myanmar language and to follow the Myanmar curriculum, which consists simply of memorizing short chapters in the rudimentary textbooks from the Myanmar education system. The Myanmar education system is based on recitation of prescribed textbook material, and teachers serve as memorization coaches. Comprehension, problem-solving, and creativity are not skills taught or assessed in the current Myanmar education system. Whether the children understand what they are reciting is not considered essential; simply being able to provide the same information as found in the prescribed textbook is essential to pass examinations. Most

children get through the recitations, worksheets, and learning games assigned to them. Along with democratic reform, the Myanmar education system is currently undergoing a massive reform. Learning the Myanmar language is a challenge for most students, since most are Karen and speak Karen as their first language. The dominant language in conversation is Karen.

**Teachers.** Most of the teachers are actually graduates of the school, indicating that they found the school to be a safe and caring place for children and youth. For the equivalent of 50 dollars per month, most of these young adult teachers live on the premises, teaching the Myanmar curriculum; supervising homework, livelihood, and recreational activities; and monitoring the dormitories at night. In essence, they are giving their whole lives to the well-being of the youngsters growing up at the school. Training for these teachers is provided annually by World Education (<http://thailand.worlded.org>).

**Culture.** Students at New Blood acquire moral values, social skills, life skills (e.g., self-care), and livelihood skills (i.e., income generation). Children of all ages spend 30 minutes each morning and evening practicing meditation and Metta chanting (loving kindness chants). Since most of the children are of Karen ethnic origins, many Karen cultural festivals (e.g., Karen Wrist Tying Celebration) and rituals are celebrated by the whole school community; thus, the children enhance their Karen ethnic identity and have a sense of belonging to a persistent cultural heritage. Children with other ethnic identities from Myanmar, including Burmese, Mon, Shan, Arakaing, Kayah, and Kachin students, are encouraged to use their own languages outside of class time and to engage in their traditional festivals with the rest of the community.

**Nutrition.** The school serves boarding children three meals a day and day students a lunch with protein, vegetables, and rice or lentils, enabling children to meet minimum nutritional needs. A critical function of New Blood Migrant Learning Centre is the provision of healthy meals: it is generally reported that 31% of migrant Myanmar children age 5 to 12 years old are underweight for their age (Room to Grow, n.d.).

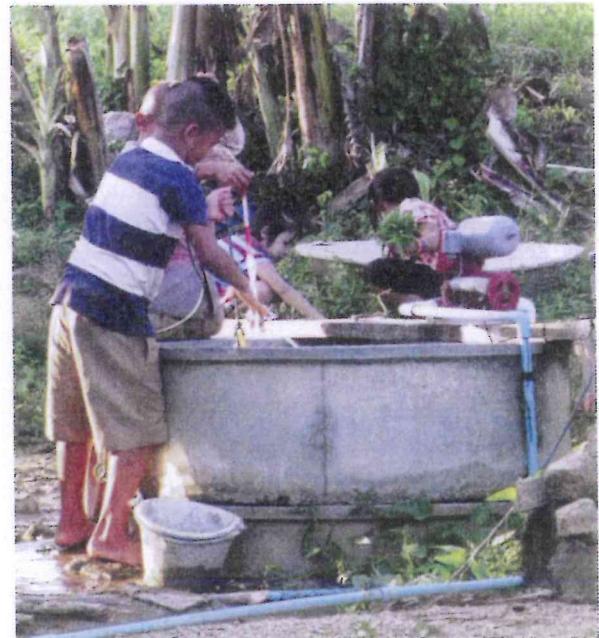
**Health.** Health workers in the region have reported difficulties gaining access to migrant children and youth. Migrant learning centers often serve as a contact point for health service providers to access children and for children to gain access to local clinics. New Blood cooperates with the community health post established by the Thai Ministry of Health in collaboration with

the International Rescue Committee and the International Organization for Migration. The children receive vaccinations for tuberculosis, pulmonary inflammation, yellow fever, and tetanus. The Shoklo Medical Research Unit (<http://www.ndm.ox.ac.uk/shoklo-malaria-research-unit-smru/>) in Mae Sot provides vaccination services and educates teachers and children about prevention of dengue fever and malaria, which a decade ago was the most serious health problem and the primary cause of death among the Myanmar population on the Thai-Myanmar border. The Mae Tao Clinic (<http://maetaoclinic.org/>) provides hand soap and health education, as well as some dry food assistance. Shoklo and Mae Tao Clinic are available to provide other health services as needed by the children or teachers. Dental care and growth monitoring is provided by Thailand's School Health Services. The school cooperates with Thai village leaders to provide sanitation and pesticide programs for the school compound.

**Inclusion.** The school accepts children with a wide range of needs and abilities—there are no academic eligibility criteria for acceptance. However, due to the rudimentary nature of its facilities and the high number of children to teachers, the school is not equipped to support children who are not physically able to care for themselves.

**Psychological Needs.** Most of the children at New Blood have experienced tremendous hardships, including having to flee villages under siege, witnessing violence and death among family members, hard core poverty, nutritional deprivation, and loss of primary caregivers. Teachers provide what care and attention they can, and are often seen holding and playing affectionately with young children. A teacher-monitor is available in the dormitories at night to soothe children experiencing night terrors and crying. However, support with managing and recovering from psychosocial trauma is the area of unmet need most often cited by teachers and the principal and observed by the authors.

**Community Living.** Residential children live in four dormitories: one for the youngest children, one for boys, one for younger girls, and one for older girls. With separate dormitories and washrooms for girls and boys, as well as one teacher monitor in each dormitory, the staff reports no problems with sexual safety; no case of sexual assault has come to light. The school provides older children with sex education and information about sexual safety and sends older students to any health workshops in the nearby community.



**Life Skills.** Children spend about half of their time in classrooms and about half of their day outside, performing chores, taking their meals, and playing games—soccer and kickball are favorite pastimes for boys, while girls are frequently seen engaging in dramatic play (cooking, teaching, being a doctor). Children as young as 2 are expected to wash, toilet, and dress themselves and do their own laundry in a communal area. Teachers ask older children to partner with younger children to assist them with such self-care activities and to sit with them during the communal meal time, encouraging them to eat their full meal. This arrangement seems to be valued by the younger child for the care they receive and by the older ones for the feeling of being grown-up and responsible. Children prepare and cook food for the school community, with the help of three staff members who work in the kitchen area. Children have assigned tasks to sweep the grounds; wash floors; bring water from the well and distribute it to the kitchen, laundry area, and washrooms; clean the toilets; and clean bushes to clear out mosquitoes.

**Livelihood Skills.** Like all migrant learning centers on the border, children engage in activities to supplement the school's resources and to generate income. At New Blood, children learn how to raise fish, chickens, pigs, and vegetables. For example, close to the residences, a number of concrete fish tanks are tended by children to produce fish for the school community and to sell. Children in junior secondary classes go out daily to nearby farmland rented by the school, where they raise vegetables for consumption at the school

and to sell. As well, some junior secondary school students take day labor jobs in nearby fields and use their wages to buy items such as shampoo and soap for other boarding house residents. The oldest children are not expected to work, since they need to spend all of their time studying for the Myanmar matriculation exam. For students who are not succeeding in academic studies, vocational training is provided to prepare them for jobs in construction, farming, and tailoring. This vocational training is extended to day students' parents and other migrants living in the community around the learning center, as part of its community outreach program.

**Identity Documentation.** About 35% of students at New Blood lack birth registration or other identity documentation. However, according to New Blood staff, children enrolled at migrant learning centers receive a student card, which legally entitles them to stay in Thailand as long as they are in school. On leaving school, children without official birth documentation become undocumented aliens once again. The school works with the Mae Tao Clinic and Suwannimit Organization to pursue avenues for acquiring birth registration for all children and they have reportedly met with success for some children. However, there are currently no avenues to obtain documentation for children without parents, with divorced parents, or whose parents cannot be contacted. While children who meet certain eligibility criteria are able to apply for Thai citizenship, the school has chosen not to pursue this because the children would lose their Myanmar identity and chance for reintegration as Myanmar citizens.

### Conclusion

Those who live, study, and play at New Blood Migrant Learning Centre carry the burden of their flight from Myanmar and their increasingly desperate situation on the Thai-Myanmar border, while nurturing the hope that one day they can either integrate as permanent Thai residents with rights in society or return to their country of origin. With the increasing openness of Myanmar to migrants' return, the migrant learning centers for Myanmar children are facing increasing difficulty with maintaining existing levels of funding and supply of teachers. They face ongoing barriers to accreditation and recognition of learners' academic achievements through the centers. While the future of New Blood Migrant Learning Centre is uncertain, with the help of the international donors and charitable organizations and alumni

who return to teach at the school, it is hoped that the center will continue to provide displaced children with access to some of their basic human rights, including education, food, shelter, culture, and identity. Alternative learning systems like the migrant learning centers serving the Myanmar community in Thailand are a crucial component in the mix of education approaches to achieve equity and dignity for marginalized children and to achieve Sustainable Development Goals.

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