

Documenting Factors Contributing to the Emergence, Proliferation, and Development of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand¹

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ABSTRACT— This research aims to examine social and economic factors that led to the establishment, proliferation, and development of Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) in Thailand. With the migration of millions of Myanmar people to Thailand over the past 30 years, Thailand's economy has positively benefited from their contribution to the labor sector but has also experienced unexpected challenges in realizing migrant children and youth's right to education. With approximately 200,000 non-Thai children out-of-school, an education chasm threatens the safety and opportunity of migrant children and has necessitated alternative forms of learning via MLCs.

The establishment of Migrant Learning Centers was a result of

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three key factors including: 1) large numbers of Myanmar migrants residing in Thailand; 2) high numbers of out-of-school Myanmar migrant children; and 3) collective efforts by members within the Myanmar migrant community to provide education for their children. The vital factors that influenced the proliferation of MLCs in Thailand include investment by the Thai State in migrant education via ministerial regulations and international human rights commitments, as well as economic investment by the international donor community, which was a major impetus for MLCs to grow. Over the past 30 years, MLCs have gone through major developments in the ways they operate, coordinate, and advocate. What began as mostly siloed education has now largely become a network of schools that cooperate for increased standardization, recognition, accreditation, and parallel learning pathways.

Keywords : Migrant Learning Center, migrant education, emergence, proliferation, development

Introduction

Tides of migration between Myanmar and Thailand are centuries old and were an integral part to the lives and economies of people within the region. As formal State boundaries became designated by colonial forces, cross-border relationships became guarded by new standards and requirements creating challenging dynamics in the flow of human traffic within the region. Moving forward to modern times, the 1980s heralded new demands in the labor work force with local supply dwindling (Truong et al. 2014). Labor shortages, along with the 1988 uprising in Myanmar, created strong push and pull factors, rapidly increasing the Myanmar migrant presence in Thailand. Following this, 1992 brought about a new policy for select provinces allowing for unskilled Myanmar

migrants to work legally within the country through a registration process (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal 2012). It was this time, around the early '90s, that Migrant Learning Centers began to emerge within Thailand.

With the migration of millions of Myanmar people to Thailand over the years, whether because of tradition, economy, warfare, educational opportunities, or a mix of factors, children also arrived. Many came, and still come with their parents, while others have been born in Thailand with some never having been to Myanmar (Nawarat 2019). Unfortunately, most of these children remain outside government safety nets and struggle to access basic social services, such as education. With more than 200,000 children still out-of-school (Tyrosvoutis 2019), cycles of poverty, exploitation, and limited opportunity pervade, while the States of Myanmar and Thailand lose out on populations who could contribute in more meaningful and diverse ways to the development of both countries.

The emergence of Migrant Learning Centers began with migrant community collectives to support children born or brought into an educational system that was not prepared to absorb them. From grassroots beginnings, the first Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand responded to the immediate need of education for Myanmar children, but lacked formal structures, networks, or legal status (Nawarat 2014).

Progressing from the 1990s until the mid-2000s, international human rights campaigning, coupled with Thailand's commitment to national and international policy, saw a rapid growth in the number of Migrant Learning Centers along the Thai-Myanmar border, as well as in industrial hubs of the Bangkok Metropolitan Region. Prior to the opening of Myanmar, concerted investment, primarily by international non-government organizations (INGOs), gave financial footing for Migrant Learning Centers to open and grow; but this was subsequently set-back, as these same funders shifted their investment in-country with the Myanmar's move toward "democracy."

Despite national funding cutbacks, MLCs across Thailand have continued to develop and strengthen till today. Spurred by local commitment to recognition and accreditation, many remaining Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand participate in networking among other MLCs, with the Thai government, and previously with the Myanmar government before the 2021 coup d'état. This has resulted in increased security of schools, teachers, and students through quasi- legal standing and has also widened the breadth of continued learning paths for students who are now able to access a variety of educational opportunities via MLC education and services.

Emergence of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand

The following subsections breakdown the contributing factors of MLC emergence into more detail, toward elucidating a general history of the phenomenon. It should be noted, though, that this is a generalization of events and may not capture the nuances of each Center; yet there exist similarities that can be studied and extrapolated for creating a general history of the inception of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand.

Myanmar Migration and Population Proliferation Across the Thai State

Migration of peoples throughout Southeast Asia is centuries old, but it wasn't until the late 1800s and early 1900s that Thailand, along with other countries throughout Southeast Asia, began to develop a strong concept of the nation-state; during this time, under pressure from Western colonial forces, the Kingdom of Siam (Thailand) began to trace its boundaries with neighboring nations (Suphanchaimat et al. 2017). Since this time, the complexity of government policies to control migration, as well as the economic and political factors affecting movement of people, particularly from Myanmar to Thailand, has become increasingly complicated.

One critical draw for inward migration has been economic opportunity. Structural shifts in the Thai economy began in the 1960s (Vivatsurakit & Vechbanyongratana 2020), but throughout

this time and the 1970s Thailand's industrialization was fueled mostly by workers from rural provinces particularly from the north and northeast (Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal 2012). In the 1980s, economic prosperity in the Gulf region began to boom and subsequently drew this same rural labor population from Thailand to abroad (Ibid.). Concurrently, compulsory education was increased to nine years (Ibid.) reducing the number of young laborers entering the workforce and creating increased demand for foreigner workers in the Thai labor market.

In neighboring Myanmar, the 1962 military coup brought hardship, particularly in peripheral states, in various forms, including economic instability (Devi 2014). Under the leadership of General Ne Win, the Union of the Republic of Myanmar (at the time called Burma) isolated itself from the globe from 1962-1988 leading to economic deterioration, food insecurity, and displacement (Maizland 2022, 2). Wide-scale departures of people from Myanmar happened over the years (Devi 2014) seeking security not guaranteed to them in their homeland. Even though work prospects were limited, and compensation was usually below Thailand's minimum wage, many Myanmar people began to migrate for better payment than available in their home country (Chalamwong & Prugsamatz 2009). These work opportunities often fell into the 3D job sector (dirty, dangerous, and difficult) and with most laborers working illegally.

In addition to economic migration, systemic violence has pervaded the rule of Myanmar's military regime since 1962 with significant impact on ethnic border states; this consequently saw large-scale movement to Thailand after an unsuccessful uprising Myanmar in 1988 against the military regime (Alden et al. 1996). Many of the opposition groups during this time took refuge in the border areas of Thailand, particularly Mae Hong Son, Tak, and Ranong Provinces (Htut 2018), of which Tak and Ranong Province would eventually birth large numbers of Migrant Learning Centers.

Post-1988 uprising in Myanmar, the 1990s saw the Thai government begin to formally acknowledge irregular migrant

workers. From 1990 – 2000, “low-skilled migrant workers from neighboring countries were first acknowledged in Thai society” and the “government implemented the quasi-regularization of migration which concerned national security, economic necessity and employer demand. The most important policy at this stage was the ‘registration policy,’ which was first amended in 1992” (Chalamwong 2012, 17). In this year, employers in nine provinces along the Thai-Myanmar border were allowed to register migrants under their employment (Martin 2007). This was followed with almost bi-yearly policy changes, some more attractive than others, but none responding to the true extent of migration into the country.

Myanmar Migrant Children and Their Educational Obstacles Across Thailand

Across Thailand, researchers and development experts have noted many Myanmar workers are young, or have dependents, (BEAM 2012) and they live in families within Thailand. Their children are either born in Myanmar or Thailand (Rattanapan et al. 2017) and often fall through the cracks of the social service system. Such patterns contribute to domestic demographic transformation, as workers arrive not as single travelers, but move more often with families and children (Stange & Sasiwongsaroj 2020). Despite many development entities identifying a vast number of migrant children within Thailand, the true scope and scale of non-Thai children has remained unknown as many are undocumented (Ibid.). As Stange and Sasiwongsaroj cite in their research, 2018 estimates from The International Organization for Migration report there were between 300,000 and 400,000 migrant workers’ children residing in-country (Ibid., 186). Stange also goes on to cite The World Vision Foundation of Thailand’s figures which estimates that approximately 60,000 babies are born to migrant workers in Thailand each year (Chanwanpen 2018, n.p.; Stange & Sasiwongsaroj 2020, 186). While many children are born in Thai hospitals, the birth registration process can be confusing, and many migrant parents do not procure the proper documents within the allotted amount of time to formally document their

child. In other more remote locations of Thailand, children may be born outside of the formal healthcare system.

The implication of being undocumented can have dire consequences on the learning opportunities of migrant children. In a study conducted throughout select ASEAN countries including Thailand, researchers found that “many stateless children within the region are still denied access to education. They suffer negative impacts due to denial of the right to education, with no opportunity for further studies and employment, which eventually leads them to poverty” (Selvakumaran et al. 2020, 361). Fear of detention and deportation due to illegal status is one critical factor for low enrollment rate in Thai Public Schools (UNICEF 2019). Other reasons can include the cost of education, lack of information about the right to education, lack of interest or concern for education, discrimination by service providers, uncertainty of duration of stay in Thailand, and moving frequently from place to place within the country (Ibid., 16). Additionally, while migrant education policy remains strong on paper, practical implementation remains weak. Many teachers and principals are unfamiliar with the process of enrolling migrant children, especially migrant children who are stateless or whose parents have limited documents, leading to some children being denied enrollment; there is an ongoing misconception that children living illegally in the country are not allowed to enroll in Thai schools, which is expressly in contrast to Thailand’s 2005 Cabinet Resolution on Education for Unregistered Persons (Ibid.). Many teachers feel unconfident and ill-equipped to teach multilingual children with diverse learning needs (Ibid.) causing friction and miscommunication between teachers and non-Thai students and their parents.

While many scholars and advocates place pressure on the Thai State for high rates of out-of-school children, it should also be noted that in some cases migrant families themselves are reluctant to integrate their children into Thai Public Education, which does not always meet their unique needs. For example, in a statement published by BEAM Education Foundation, one of

the leading foundations working towards holistic education needs of marginalized, migrant, and refugee populations, they found, "...numerous migrant parents, upwards of 80%, choose not to send their children to Thai state schools due to a feeling that the curricula of these schools do not adequately prepare their children for a return to Myanmar..." (BEAM 2012, 3).

Thus, the converging factors of high numbers of Myanmar migrant children along with State education that is not accessible, suitable, or desirable to migrant populations has given rise to a need for an alternative schooling option in the form of Migrant Learning Centers.

Community Interventions in Migrant Education

The coalescence of migration movements of Myanmar people into Thailand, large numbers of migrant children within country, and subsequent numbers of out-of-school children has necessitated the emergence of an alternative education option: Migrant Learning Centers. During their inception, MLCs were primarily community-led by Myanmar nationals (Tyrosvoutis 2019). In the north, particularly in areas such as Chiang Mai and Tak, MLCs were often founded by members of the children's ethnic group and were aligned with their ethnic ideology (Nawarat 2012).

In these early days, MLCs often operated out of private residences or sometimes community spaces and were usually taught by comparatively educated people within the area. The education attainment levels of MLCs teachers varied and could include having passed the Myanmar matriculation exam, partial or incomplete study at university, or university graduation.

In Mae Hong Son Province, the founder of an MLC providing high school education with linkages to Thai Non-formal Education (NFE) recalls the following reasons for opening his Center,

"Before I founded my school, I used to work in villages located along Thai-Myanmar border for my daily survival. At that time, I personally saw the different lives of the people who fled from Myan-

mar's civil wars that are still going on. These people had to find and do different work to survive, and they were not able to afford to send their children to high school. Some of their children left from their villages to the city to find work to support their families.

A lot of children from villages in the Mae Hong Son municipality area ended up marrying at an early age or working as maids, construction workers, waiters, and waitresses. Some girls sadly turned to sex work while some of them ended up as minor wives for wealthy men...Some of the girls died from HIV because of sex work and some from husbands who had risky behavior.

I saw these things happening nearby and that the children from the parents who came from Myanmar were having bad things in their future. I could see that these children had very little education and were unable think of better things for their future. I hoped and believed that if at least the children could get more education and a high school education, they could be able to think of things that could benefit their future."

Male, Karen Ethnicity, Learning Center Founder

(Personal Interview, 19 January 2023)

In analyzing published literature on the emergence of Migrant Learning Centers a few generalizations can be made. The first is that there existed an unmet need in education for vast numbers of migrant children in Thailand, and that MLCs were initially an ad hoc response to fill this void. The second is that the first founders were from Myanmar communities. While not overtly described in MLC formation literature, it can be inferred that all MLC founders were affected by political instability, as mentioned in the MLC founder testimonials from Mae Hong Son, which led them to migrate; whether they were directly affected by conflict or pushed to leave because of an economy crippled by warfare. These factors eventually played a critical role in prompting the formation of the first MLCs.

Factors Contributing to the Proliferation of Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand

From 1990 – 2005, Thailand's participation in human rights campaigns and subsequent domestic policy ran in tandem with Migrant Learning Centers' proliferation. Some of the most notable achievements during this time include the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 (OHCHR 1990), the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2534 (Kingdom of Thailand 1991), Convention on the Rights of the Child (Assembly, UN General 1989),³ Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand of 1997 (Kingdom of Thailand 1997), Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (Peppler Barry 2000), and the National Education Act of B.E. 2542 as Amended by National Education Act, B.E. 2545 (Kingdom of Thailand 2002). In reviewing Thailand's education commitments and policies over this time, there emerges acknowledgement of migrant children's presence within Thailand as well as a child's inherent right to receive education, which coincides with a global investment trend in education and children's rights. Yet, throughout this decade of policy making, policy did little in supporting or legitimizing Migrant Learning Center education, but international participation and domestic policy engagement would eventually set the stage for one of the most critical policies to affect MLC proliferation.

In 2005, Thailand made its biggest actionable shift in support of migrant education via the Rule of the Ministry of Education's Evidentiary Document for Pupil/Student Admission into Educational Institutions B.E. 2548. This formally opened Thai Public Schools to migrant children regardless of their ID status and provided opportunity for migrant students enrolled in Thai schools to receive an identity card through the State (Tuangratananon et al. 2019).

International Investment in Migrant Education in Thailand

From scattered Centers across the border in the 1990s,

3 The Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force in 1990 but wasn't ratified by Thailand until 1992.

MLCs continued to rise in number as international investment supported their operations. By the 2018 – 2019 school year, most of the 110 documented Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand (Tyrosvoutis 2019, 12) were to some extent supported by external funders for their activities.

International funding has become important to maintain many MLCs' operations but has also heightened financial vulnerability (Tyrosvoutis 2019, 7). In recent years, the funding for MLCs has seen dramatic cuts (Purkey & Irving 2019), affecting operations of MLCs across Thailand. As of 2021, the number of MLCs in Thailand dropped to 91 centers (Chulalongkorn University and UNICEF Thailand 2022, 24). Reduced funding of MLCs corresponds to the previous opening of Myanmar and prioritization of efforts within country, as well as forced closure of schools (including Thai government schools) for more than a year during COVID-19. With the turn of political events in Myanmar and increasing conflict, it has yet to be seen if the international funding will shift back to migrant education in Thailand.

Thailand's global and domestic policy engagement, along with increased funding, brought the number of MLCs from smatterings along the border to more than 100 in 2019 (Tyrosvoutis 2019, 12). Throughout this time, Migrant Learning Centers did more than just grow in numbers; they also formed concerted networks and initiatives for the development and realization of multi-national accreditation.

Factors Contributing to National Developments of Migrant Learning Centers

Over the past 30 years, Migrant Learning Centers have gone through major transformations in the ways they operate, coordinate, and advocate. What began as mostly siloed education efforts have now largely become a network of schools that coordinate on specific thematic areas for increased standardization, recognition, and accreditation. The significance of this development has led to several outcomes, some of the most important being that many MLC students now have pathways to accredited education,

Migrant Learning Center have representation during domestic and international discourses on migrant education, and MLCs are transitioning into more secure legal standing and strengthened relationships with Thai authorities.

Migrant Learning Center Standardization and Accreditation Initiatives

The development of Migrant Learning Centers began to take tangible steps forward in 2013 through groundbreaking cross-border agreements and the formation of advocacy initiatives that would go on to build formal relationships with MoE's in Myanmar and Thailand.⁴ This stood in stark contrast to MLCs' formative years. Prior to such movements, Migrant Learning Centers in Thailand began largely as individual educational endeavors, without concerted coordination or standardization among MLCs within country. This process of operation meant that children were receiving education often had no formal secondary and tertiary educational linkages. Upon graduation, students might receive a certificate from their MLC, but it usually held no credit among other educational pathways. Thus, if students wanted to transfer to another learning institution, they often had to start from the beginning, as opposed to continuing their equivalent level of completed study.

In response, Migrant Learning Centers, NGOs, and INGOs identified that for MLCs to gain recognition among Thai and Myanmar Ministries of Education, it was necessary to begin formal collaboration among MLCs and with representatives of the Thai and Myanmar government. MLCs had made huge steps from their largely home-based operations, had grown in physical structural size, catchment, and had semi-regular support from international donors. With MLC proliferation, stakeholders

⁴ Within the scope of this research, standardization and accreditation in MLC movements is presented through the work of the Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) under BEAM Education Foundation; these initiatives represent the most comprehensive movements for MLC development and recognition regarding their broader geographical inclusion of MLCs within Thailand and the breadth of stakeholders engaged.

involved in migrant education saw that children attending these schools also needed accredited studies that would provide them transcripts and the ability to transfer to different educational pathways, including higher education (Purkey & Irving 2019).

Establishing a Migrant Education Network

To begin a formal, strategized process of standardization and accreditation, it was first necessary to establish a comprehensive migrant education network. Thus, in 2013, the Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) was founded to develop an accredited migrant education system that would provide migrant children and youth the ability to continue their studies wherever they resided (BEAM 2023b). The initial MEII Committee was comprised 17 community-based educational organizations throughout six provinces of Thailand included Chiang Mai, Tak, Bangkok, Samut Sakorn, Ranong, and Phang Nga Provinces that took a leading role in developing strategy and implementing activities towards standardization and multi-national accreditation (Ibid., n.p.).

In addition to the core MEII Committee, the initiative also built a broader partner network with government actors, including but not limited to the Office of Non-formal and Informal Education (ONIE) and the Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) under Thailand's MoE, and international organizations, including but not limited to UNESCO, UNICEF, and Save the Children (MEII 2019). Growing and strengthening this network has been an essential foundation to build bridges among MLCs and community-based organizations with governing bodies and international human rights organizations; this has led towards MEII's strategy being acknowledged, implemented, and realized under Thailand's commitment to Education for All and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Strategies in Migrant Education

Prior to COVID and the Myanmar coup, MEII coordinated extensively with the Myanmar MoE, Thai MoE, and international agencies to solidify agreements and actions for recognizing migrant

education. The following activities highlight these activities with the caveat that needs and alignment have shifted significantly after the global pandemic and political upheaval in Myanmar.

Curriculum Standardization and Quality Assurance:

Prior to MLC coordination efforts, most MLCs worked in isolation determining their own curriculum which could vary as per school (Nawarat 2014). Under MEII, the network developed a curriculum standards framework, allowing for adaptation and addition depending on contextual needs (BEAM 2023b). MLCs within the MEII network adopted this framework with an additional component of quality assurance overseen by the Education Quality Assurance Board (EQAB). Through EQAB activities, standards of assessment have been developed and implemented so that participating MLCs are uniformly measuring learning outcomes of their students.

Cross-Border Education Coordination and Development of Regional Accreditation: Over the years, MEII and its networks have also been able to establish cross-border education committees together with Thai and Myanmar educational authorities, MLC representatives, and INGO and NGOs. Prior to 2021, these activities resulted in agreements with at least 5 state and region level education authorities in Myanmar, that enabled MLC students to transfer to Myanmar government schools upon their return; these coordination efforts included the development of a manual to detail the process of cross-country transfer from MLCs to Myanmar government schools (MEII 2016, n.p.).

Capacity Building for Migrant Teachers: Capacity building for MLC teachers has been an on-going process with topics including, but not limited to, critical thinking, child protection, early childhood development, and monitoring and evaluation. Another important activity building on efforts of the EQAB was a series of student database trainings to help track student records enabling MLCs to issue reports and recommendations required for the education equivalency transfer process (MEII 2018).

Advocacy Initiatives: From MEII's start, advocacy has

been an ongoing component among the migrant community, Thai and Myanmar educational authorities, Myanmar educational reform bodies, and related UN agencies and organizations (MEII 2013). Since 2021, strategies have evolved to include community rebuilding to support MLCs to become more resilient, such as through fundraising campaigns for teachers support, building new coordination bodies towards inclusive education with emerging and evolving education entities in Myanmar, Thailand's MoE, and UN agencies, as well as continuing to promote recognition of MLCs through registering MLCs (MEII 2023).

Developments in Accreditation

Despite major setbacks within Myanmar that threaten the future of the nation's education, MLC's relationships with the Thai Ministry of Education continue to progress, as well as expand into more intentional and strategic alternative education pathways. Listed below are several study options being provided at many MLCs with note that some MLCs are not linked to the full range of options as described.

Vocational Training: This education option is sometimes provided on-site at MLCs; the theme of the courses varies depending on the school. For example, at one newly restructured MLC in Ranong Province, a teacher has been recruited to teach a tailoring course on the weekends which is advertised on Facebook and is open to students as well as the broader Myanmar community. This recurring course runs approximately one month in length and provides students with skills that can be put to immediate use, particularly for those pursuing independent entrepreneurship. The importance of having this option was highlighted by one former MLC student who commented,

"I would suggest that they [Migrant Learning Centers] should have more activities, such as vocational training courses, so that students can have basic job skills because some students only study from...let's say...Grade 1 to Grade 5, and then they leave to start working. These kids don't have foundational education. But, if they had vocational training, like tailoring, they could use this in their

lives so that they could their own businesses.”

Female, Burmese/Karen Ethnicity, Former MLC Student & Current MLC Volunteer Teacher

(Personal Interview, 11 November 2022)

Thai Non-formal Education: Many MLCs have linkages to local NFE centers. Sometimes the NFE curriculum is integrated into the schools themselves, others have the option of studying at an NFE on the weekends in addition to their Monday – Friday courses at their respective MLC. NFE accreditation is of significance because it is recognized by Thai educational authorities and provides students the chance to continue their studies at the Thai tertiary level (BEAM 2012). As one former MLC student reflected,

“If I hadn’t studied and graduated from the NFE, I wouldn’t be able to continue my studies at Ranong Community College.”

Female, Mon Ethnicity, Former MLC Student & Current MLC Teacher

(Personal Interview, 26 July 2022)

Internationally Accredited Education: Some Migrant Learning Centers offer the chance to study in international programs, which are largely taught online, and are accepted by select international institutes. For example, BEAM Education Foundation offers on-site higher education preparation for the General Education Development (GED) Exam (BEAM 2023a) which is now also available online to MLCs throughout Thailand. The GED certificate allows students the opportunity to apply for scholarships and attend international programs at Thai universities or abroad (Ibid.). The importance of international education pathways was expressed by one former MLC student who shared,

“I studied there [at a Migrant Learning Center] for around four years, and I took more English classes...After, I joined the online diploma program which took about two years for me to complete, and I got a diploma in Liberal Arts...After that, I tried applying for

a scholarship to a Thai university, and I got one...I just finished my bachelor's degree this year in April."

Male, Karen Ethnicity, Former MLC Student & Current Freight Forwarder Company Employee (Personal Interview, 24 December 2022)

Myanmar Ministry of Education Accredited Education:

Since COVID-19 and the subsequent coup, formal relationships with Myanmar's MoE have largely been suspended until the country regains stability. Prior to these crises, some MLCs would affiliate their students under Myanmar public or monastery school umbrellas. If the students passed their exams, they would be issued a certificate of grade level completion which was recognized by the Myanmar MoE or state level education departments. Currently, coordination efforts are underway to reimagine and rebuild accreditation pathways with emerging and evolving education entities in Myanmar.

Conclusion

The birth of MLCs came from expressed need; people leaving conflict and economic hardship came to Thailand for greater safety and security. With them came their children, who needed an option for education that wasn't accessible for most migrants. Thus, concerned Myanmar community members began to teach from their homes and in ad hoc fashions. With demand ever growing and international attention and funding now finding its way to Migrant Learning Centers, MLCs began to grow in number, size, and sophistication. Realizing the need to accredit their studies, stakeholders from MLCs joined with international organizations to launch bi-lateral advocacy efforts towards recognition. These efforts gained momentum and achieved relative success with the MoE's from Thailand and Myanmar, as well as some international institutes, but took subsequent backsteps with school closures following COVID-19 and the subsequent military coup in Myanmar; from the latter event, most transfer programs to schools in Myanmar have been put on hold until the political situation improves. Even within Thailand, the legality of MLC

operations remains tenuous, but increased communication and collaboration have meant some MLC students and teachers have been afforded greater security.

Millions of Myanmar people within Thailand are critical to the economic wellbeing of the country but also hold complex challenges for the Thai government. MLCs are one avenue to support Thailand's MoE to address the massive number of out-of-school children. MLC proliferation has helped to ease the Thai State's weight of providing education to Myanmar migrant children that is culturally and contextually appropriate. Additionally, MLCs have demonstrated through their development a willingness to find middle ground in curriculum development, providing an opportunity for the melding of education systems which will ultimately lead to more knowledgeable and adept migrant youth who are able positively to contribute to both Myanmar and Thai society.

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