

# การศึกษาคาทอลิก： โอกาสทางการศึกษาแก่เด็กข้ามชาติในประเทศไทย

## Catholic Education: Educational Opportunity for Migrant Children in Thailand.

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## บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อส่งเสริมการทราบถึงสภาพปัจจุบันของเด็กข้ามชาติในประเทศไทย และนำเสนอคำสอนของพระศาสนจักรคาಥอลิกเพื่อกระตุนเตือนการศึกษาคาಥอลิกในประเทศไทยให้ทราบถึงการรับใช้และพัฒนาสังคมด้วยการให้โอกาสทางการศึกษาแก่เด็กข้ามชาติ และเพื่อให้องค์กรศาสนามได้หวนกลับสู่จิตตามมั่นทางศาสนา ผลการศึกษาพบว่าหลักคำสอนของพระศาสนจักรคาಥอลิกสนับสนุนในการให้โอกาสทางการศึกษาแก่เด็กข้ามชาติ มนุษย์ทุกคนทุกเชื้อชาติ ทุกสถานะ ควรได้รับโอกาสที่จะได้รับการศึกษาในโรงเรียนคาಥอลิก เพราะจุดประสงค์แรกและที่สำคัญที่สุดของการจัดการศึกษานั้นเพื่อบริการคนยากจนและคนที่ไม่ได้รับความช่วยเหลือ เป็นการทำให้การศึกษาคาಥอลิกได้ปฏิบัติหน้าที่อย่างสมบูรณ์ และแสดงออกถึงความศรัทธาต่อคำสอนของศาสนาที่สอดคล้องกับการเจริญชีวิตและการปฏิบัติตามบัญญัติแห่งความรัก ในขณะเดียวกันเป็นการทำให้องค์กรศาสนามได้กลับไปสู่แก่นแท้ของจิตตามมั่นทางศาสนาซึ่งเป็นการพัฒนาองค์กรศาสนามและบุคลากรทางศาสนาด้วยเช่นกัน

คำสำคัญ: การศึกษา  
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**Abstract**

The purpose of this article was to promote awareness of the condition of migrant children in Thailand and urge Catholic education institutions in Thailand to realize the important mission of ministry and social development by providing education opportunities for the children of migrant workers. Moreover, these religious organizations were reminded of their purpose and duty. The findings of the study reinforced the resolution that the Catholic teachings supports the provision of educational opportunities for migrant children. All human beings of all races and statuses should have opportunity to be educated in a Catholic school. The primary objective of educational management was to serve the underprivileged and destitute people. The Catholic school should perform its duty completely and also evince faith to be harmonious with life and follow the spirit of love. In a way, it is a revival of the essence of religious intention, and simultaneously, it is a process to develop and prioritize religious organization and personnel as well.

**Keywords:** Catholic  
Education  
Migrant children  
Transnational  
Migrant Learning Center

## 1. Introduction

There are gaps between the stated policy of the Thai government and the reality of migrants in the Thai Public School (TPS) system. These gaps are being filled by Migrant Learning Centers (MLC) run by various international human rights organizations and Catholic organizations. It is the objective of this paper to highlight the crisis in migrant education and recommend a viable plan of action for the Catholic organizations to address the issue which is supported by the Catholic Church with regards to the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child and was also acceded by the country of Thailand.

Migrant children in Thailand are highly vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, drug abuse, sexual abuse, trafficking and disease, including HIV. Another major barrier is language, which is a cause of social isolation. The various expenses for attending Thai schools are not affordable for many migrant parents, and there is a conflict of demand as the parents strongly prefer their children to study their native language, history, and culture. Many migrant families are also fearful of becoming involved in Thai institutions as they feel that it may leave them open to arrest (Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee, 2014).

Thailand's labor shortage, fueled by global market trends is causing the Thai government to realize that an increasing demand for migrant workers is not a sustainable solution for replacing local labor demands, and should work toward softening the language and cultural barriers which prevent integration of migrants into Thai society (Stange & Sasiwongsaroj, 2020). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) projects that the migrant labor force will continue to increase to 5.36 million workers by 2025 (Murray, 2016).

Migrant children are displaced from their homeland, largely undocumented without birth certificates and have no citizenship. (Lasallian East Asia District, 2020). “Today, migrant children still constitute the largest group of children out of school in Thailand, with some estimates indicating that half of all migrant children are not receiving any form of education,” from a statement by Ms. Dana Graber Ladek, Chief of Mission of IOM Thailand (UNESCO Bangkok, 2019)

Nevertheless, nearly all migrant workers and their children have experienced some discrimination and human rights violations, particularly access to public services in education which results in their under-development, being exploited in various fields, becoming victims of human trafficking, including lack of access to other public services.

The futures of the migrant children therefore depend on the educational opportunities available in Thailand. Thailand stands out as a major migrant destination country in Southeast Asia with its commitment from the landmark 2005 Cabinet Resolution that all children would receive free education regardless of nationality. The sheer scope of this challenge, however, means there is much more work to be done thirty one years later. There should be no false sense of progress but acknowledgement of the progress that has been made (UNESCO Bangkok, 2019).

Due to the seriousness and suffering of human rights, dignity and discrimination, the authors therefore aim to revive the Catholic teachings to inspire and encourage those responsible for conducting Catholic education in Thailand to realize the service and social development in helping migrant children. This would also allow religious organizations to return to the spirit of giving meaning to human dignity according to the spirit that missionaries had done. At the same time, when the religious organization spirit is revitalized, it is like a return to the development of the religious organization itself as well.

This is an urgent opportunity for the Catholic Church to return to their roots and rise up to meet the challenge. To highlight the problem, at the meeting ‘Education Rights of Migrant Children’ organized by the Catholic Committee for Justice and Peace in 2011, the participants were informed that undocumented children are still being refused places in schools. Brother Victor Gill Munu stated that “Many school managers don’t seem aware of this, and still think accepting Burmese children is illegal”. Brother Victor is from the La Salle Foundation, which sponsors the Bamboo School for displaced migrant children and orphans in Sangkhlaburi (Kitsakul, 2011).

## **2. The Migrant Problem in Thailand**

### **2.1 Migrant Workers in Thailand**

According to statistics, the number of migrant workers who are authorized to work remaining throughout the Kingdom, as of February 2019, totals 3,293,819 (Foreign Workers Administration Office, 2019). The increasing rate of migrant workers is in line with the changing population structure; fewer children born, a decrease in working-age people, and an increase in the elderly population. This will further increase the need for Thailand to become more dependent on migrant workers in the future to replace lost Thai workers (Chantapong, Singhapong, & Lertpienthumm, 2018). The influx of migrant workers into the country is widely distributed in each region. They can be classified according to the type of immigration into two groups: legal immigration and illegal entry (Limkriengkrai, 2017).

### **2.2 Migrant Children Statistics in Thailand**

There are an estimated 150,000 migrant children currently enrolled in public schools in Thailand. However, despite the 2005 government policy in existence, there are still an estimated 200,000 migrant children who are not yet receiving any form of education (UNICEF Thailand, 2019).

Tracking and obtaining accurate information for unschooled migrant children is compounded by the issue that there are groups of migrant workers that are not legally registered or in some cases, they may enter the Thailand legally, but smuggled in to work in the country or in some cases may be working in the wrong profession. Such information does not clearly appear in the migrant register. (Kanchanadit, 2015)

Children also work illegally despite the country's labor laws. It is estimated that there are 177,000 child laborers aged five to seventeen working in Thailand – 75% of them in jobs which are considered hazardous. In Ranong province, many migrant children started working in the seafood industry as a result of their MLCs being closed down (Wongsamuth, 2020).

### **2.3 Integration of Migrants into Thai Society**

The Ministry of Education (2017) had studied the problem condition and the needs of this group of migrant workers children; in summary, there are several important points. One of the major problems is the problem of coexistence in education and learning. Children of migrant workers have difficulty living with Thai people. This is due to the attitude of some Thais that migrant worker children born in Thailand, or who have emigrated following their parents to work in Thailand are burdensome.

The World Vision Foundation of Thailand (WVFT) estimates that around 60,000 babies are born to migrant workers in Thailand every year (Stange & Sasiwongsaroj, 2020). Many Thais feel they should be sent back to their country. Most of these children learn Thai values and culture only from various media, many speak Thai but cannot read and write; and improper parenting and lack of educational opportunities prevent the child from developing normally.

A report released by the Thailand Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2019 stated that “while there are challenges to providing education to migrant children, there are successful case studies and good practices in effective provision of education services to migrant children, as documented from various provinces in Thailand.” (UNICEF Thailand, 2019).

An ongoing effort to build on previous multilateral cooperation was held in Bangkok on 6-8 August 2019. The 1st Joint High-Level Education Working Group Meeting on Migrant Children and Education between the Ministries of Education in Myanmar and Thailand to support transitions and access to quality, accredited education for migrant children in both countries. This was an attempt to establish an official Joint High-Level Working Group and initiate dialogue for potential collaboration and action plans (UNESCO Bangkok, 2019).

Phlainoi (refer to Limkriengkrai, 2017) states that access to education services for a limited number of migrant children is due to a number of problems, especially the problem of attitudes of most people in Thai society, and attitude of the service provider known as an ethnographic view, which is a negative feeling, thinking that he or she is inferior or is the enemy of the Thai people based on past experience. Or the reconstructed and reproduced issue of ethnic bias through media or mechanisms, reinforcing the view that transnationals endanger the national security.

According to the Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University (2017) many migrant children were discriminated against and their human rights violated due to limited access to public service education. This lack of educational opportunities creates an under-developed child. When he grows up he becomes an unskilled laborer with no life skills, being taken advantage of by employers with regards to welfare, becoming a victim of human trafficking, lacking accessibility to other public services or causing problems in living together with Thai people in the future.

### **3. Catholic Education in Thailand and the Catholic Education Concept**

The management of Catholic education in Thailand was established during the Ayutthaya period. French Missionaries created a seminary. This was the first private Catholic school in Thailand, named General College in the year 1665 at Maha Brahmin Island, Ban Mai, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya. After that, the school was expanded to places such as Phuket, Lop Buri, Bangkok and Nonthaburi. Later in the Rattanakosin period in 1885, Reverend Father Colombet established a school for boys, Assumption School which was considered the first modern Catholic school of that era and has been in operation continuously (Chinnakot, 2008), a great benefit to children and society. In addition, various other religious groups came to Thailand, and the number of Catholic schools increased at all levels and spread to many regions of Thailand and are very well known with Thai people up to the present.

#### **3.1 Catholic Teachings and Education**

In Catholic education, there is a concept in the framework of the Christianity that emphasizes God (Ultimate Being), which gives value and meaning to human dignity as a creation that is the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Saint Thomas Aquinas (AD 1225-1274) brought in Aristotle's philosophy, integrated with the teachings of Christianity, to form the basis of the Catholic educational paradigm. It is the development of people to become human being, physically, mentally, intellectually, and spiritually; using freedom and rational choice to achieve the truth of life along with respect for freedom and individuality in all dimensions. This corresponds with Chinnakot (2008), who said that the Catholic education is based on religious background and doctrine, therefore human beings are developed as good persons, as each human being is an image of God (Genesis. 1:26) and a child of God (1 John 3: 1).

### **3.2 Catholic Gospel Principles**

All human beings are brothers and sisters. Everyone has honor and dignity. Human beings must respect themselves and others. Learning the human potential that God has given to foster and develop ourselves and others as well as society through the means of the teachings of Jesus Christ which are summarized in the provisions of love in the Gospel of Matthew and John: "Love your neighbour as yourself." (Matthew 22:39). "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." (John 13: 34-35). Love is therefore a blessing and teaching that God wants man to adhere to in order to lead his life as a good person, a perfect human being in both inner and outer life, both to oneself and others.

### **3.3 Catholic Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) Mission & Vision Statements**

The following mission and vision statements from Catholic NGOs demonstrate the model of education assistance provided in Thailand today.

St. Anna Catholic Center for Migrants - the Archdiocese of Bangkok supports as its social apostolate "to love everyone especially the poor, the underprivileged and the migrant." (Caritas Bangkok, 2021).

The Marist Asia Foundation is an important work of the Society of Mary. Marists prefer to establish the Church's presence where it does not exist, or where needed, to help put life back into existing communities. Marists serve "the most neglected, the poor, and those who suffer injustice". The healing of divisions among God's people is a constant concern for Marists. (Marist Asia Foundation, 2021).

Another Catholic Organization, the Lasallian East Asia District Provincialate (LEAD) mission statement is “building truly human communities amidst the diversity of faith traditions, culture, educational and political-economic systems and that reflect the values of God’s Kingdom as expressed in the Gospel. Revitalize and seek new forms of educational ministry that are in service of youth, especially the poor and those at risk.” (Lasallian East Asia District, 2020)

#### **4. Catholic Education: Educational Opportunities for Children of Migrant Workers in Thailand**

Results from a study by Tuangratananon, Suphanchaimat, Julchoo, Sinam & Putthasri (2019) found that despite Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) not being recognized as formal education sites by the Thai government, they were the preferable choice for most migrant children as opposed to Thai Public Schools (TPS). The number of migrant children in MLCs is more than twice those in TPS. The main reason for choosing MLCs was because MLCs provided a more culturally sensitive service and often teaches the language, culture and history of the migrants’ home country.

MLCs are NGOs who work both collaboratively and independently of the Thai education system, and are supported by churches and numerous global human rights organizations such as UNESCO Bangkok, UNESCO Yangon, UNICEF Thailand, UNICEF Myanmar, UNICEF EAPRO, IOM Thailand, Save the Children Thailand and Migrant Education Integration Initiative (MEII) (UNESCO Bangkok, 2019). Three examples of Catholic MCLs that work with Burmese migrants in Thailand are presented.

#### 4.1 MLCs in Thailand run by Catholic Organizations

**Example 1:** Pastoral Care for Prisoners and Migrants, St. Anna Catholic Center for Migrants, Samut Sakorn

St. Anna Catholic Center for Migrants is located in the compound of St. Anna Catholic Church at Tha Chin in the province of Samut Sakorn. This center helps migrant workers and their children from various countries in their humanitarian needs such as education, hygiene and the culture of their home communities. The migrants are ethnic Burmese, Mon, Cambodian, etc. The center organizes education for the children age 4-12 and provides Thai language classes for their parents (Caritas Bangkok, 2021).

**Example 2:** La Salle Bamboo School, Sangklaburi, Thailand.

To overcome the prohibition of building permanent structures on the border, the school has been constructed creatively from bamboo, hence the name ‘Bamboo School’. Several hundred children are educated each day in kindergarten through grade 6 in another structure in nearby Sangklaburi. All of the students are from Myanmar, and make the risky border crossing each day to attend school. There is also dormitory for orphans and unwanted, abandoned children. In Thailand, their education is tolerated but formal schooling is only for documented children. The Brothers and the school assist in the documentation procedure for every student but this rarely ends in success (Lasallian East Asia District, 2020).

**Example 3:** The Marist Learning Center (Ranong)

The Marist Learning Centre goal is to prepare its students for an extended educational path in Thailand and places an emphasis on linguistic integration. Primary and secondary education is offered to approximately 200 Myanmar students. A two-year international diploma degree in cooperation with the Australian Catholic University is also offered (Stange & Sasiwong-saroj, 2020).

#### 4.2 The Rights of the Child and Catholic Education

In a Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishop's Conferences on Religious Education in Schools. Congregation for Catholic Education written by Cardinal Zenon Grochlewski, Prefect emeritus of the Congregation for Catholic Education, he stated "Education today is a complex task, which is made more difficult by rapid social, economic, and cultural changes. Its specific mission remains the integral formation of the human person. Children and young people must be guaranteed the possibility of developing harmoniously their own physical, moral, intellectual and spiritual gifts, and they must also be helped to develop their sense of responsibility, learn the correct use of freedom, and participate actively in social life." (Grochlewski, May 2009).

The declaration on Christian Education GRAVISSIMUM EDUCATIONIS (Paul VI, 1965) states that all men of every race condition and age, since they enjoy the dignity of a human being, have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. This declaration correspond to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29 (UNICEF Thailand, 2019), stating that every human being has the right to an education free of charge, at least in the elementary and basic stages. Education must focus on the full development of the human personality and to foster respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Both aiming to enhance understanding and friendship between nations, ethnic groups, and religious groups to maintain peace along with the current situation of the world, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are international development goals, were created by the United Nations for 2015 – 2030; Goal 4: Providing quality educational opportunities for children without status limit (United Nations, 2019).

The concept of Catholic education and the Catholic teachings are all related and interrelated because we, at one time, the Catholics in Thailand, were like transnational people being assisted by the missionaries who came to evangelize. This corresponds to the Bible verse, "You are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt" (Deuteronomy 10:19). Therefore, we are given this mission to do with others as well. And in accordance with the Gospel of Luke (12:48) "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.".

## 5. Conclusion

The population of migrant workers in Thailand continues to increase. There is a rapidly growing number of migrant children who are unable to work yet living in the country. This group of young migrant workers is facing difficulties in education. Although the Thai government has a policy of educating migrant worker's children, unfortunately it has been unable to meet the challenges in providing education to this group, and migrant children continue to face discrimination, exploitation, and lack of integration into Thai society until further measures are successfully implemented.

Thailand acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in March 1992 and the Catholic Church in 1990 (UNICEF Thailand, 2019), (United Nations Treaty Collection, 1989). The National Catholic Commission on Migration (NCCM), an organization within Caritas Thailand (under the Auspices of Catholic Bishops Conference of Thailand) has expressed concern that Thai government policy supports access for every child to public education, but the reality is that migrants need to be proficient in Thai and the TPS needs to be able and ready to accept the migrant children in their area (Murray, 2016).

First and foremost the Church should offer its educational service to "the poor or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith". Since education is an important means of improving the social and economic condition of the individual and of peoples, if the Catholic school were to turn its attention predominantly to those from wealthier social classes, it could be contributing towards maintaining a privileged position, and could thereby continue to favour a society which is unjust. (The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977). Therefore, the Catholic Church in Thailand should be involved in human development and social development by providing educational opportunities for migrant children because Catholic education is based on the concept of Christianity, giving value and meaning to human dignity as a creation that is the image of God and more so because of the ongoing migrant crisis.

As for the model of educational opportunities for migrant children, from experience in site study visits, the authors suggest that Catholic education can provide three broad educational opportunities for migrant children: 1) Education in the normal Thai Public School (TPL) system that is studied with Thai students. The advantage is to be a testimony of the human dignity expressed and passed on to people, students and parents in school clearly, but attention should be given to the educational, cultural adaptation and social integration of migrant worker children. 2) Education in a specialized system that is exclusively available to migrant workers children in border areas such as the Bamboo School and La Salle Sangkhlaburi School, however this requires considerable cooperation and assistance in the budget and personnel from the network. 3) Education in the form of a Migrant Learning Center (MLC) according to the system of migrant workers children's country, such as the learning center operated by the Congregation of the Sacred Stigmata at Ranong Province.

By this means, the children of migrant workers would have the opportunity to eventually return to study in their own country or at higher education institutions in Thailand. Counter-productive to this, resistance comes often from parents having issues of not wanting higher education, preferring their children to work at an early age to generate family income, or not trusting Thai schools, fearful of being taken into custody by the Thai authorities and possible deportation.

### **Recommendation**

The Thai Government should take the official position of collaborating with MLCs so that education coverage can be expanded to all children in Thailand. Such a policy procedure should engage all stakeholders, including education officials, health care providers, the Thai public, NGOs, MLCs' representatives, and migrants to improve the education standards of MLCs, and preserving their culturally-sensitive strengths (Tuangratananon et al., 2019). In the absence of full public school integration, the need for coexisting and government supported migrant school systems is a viable and practical solution.

### **Policy Suggestion**

The Catholic Education Council of Thailand should have a policy to organize seminars and teachings on Catholic education in the spiritual dimension to provide educational opportunities for migrant workers children.

### **Action Suggestion**

The Catholic Bishops' Council of Thailand or the Catholic Education Council of Thailand should have a research study conducted to determine an approach or pattern of educational opportunities for the migrant workers children in each diocese or religious involved in that area.

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