

December 2017

Refugee Integration Education Review



Preface

World Education Inc. (WEI) is an international, non-governmental, non-profit organization working across 22 countries to improve the quality of life through education in Asia, Africa, and the United States for more than two million children and adults. In Asia, World Education implements multi-sectoral projects working in formal and non-formal education, safe migration and anti-trafficking, financial literacy and financial services, persons with disabilities and landmine survivors, and empowering women and youth, alongside a sustained commitment to assisting refugee and displaced populations across the region. In the Thailand-Myanmar region, and most recently through the USAID-funded Project for Local Empowerment (PLE), World Education Thailand's strategic focus on quality, access, and recognition has directed support to fourteen local partners in order to improve the lives of refugee, migrant and ethnic minority children across four provinces and seven refugee camps in Thailand, and four states and two regions in Southeast Myanmar.

Much has changed in Myanmar since the PLE project began in 2011; however these changes have not significantly impacted the lives of the refugee children in camps along the Thailand-Myanmar border, where teacher, learning materials, infrastructure, training and administration needs remain. However, alongside the needs, there is now an additional and ever-broadening range of challenges, as the discourse on refugees and durable solutions increasingly shifts toward a return to Myanmar. Questions abound: Will the camps be closed? Will my child be able to continue her education in Myanmar? How does the peace process affect her future options? How does national education reform impact on her opportunities? What are the connections between political dialogue and education reform? In the context of refugees and refugee return, education services are provided by a range of actors: ethnic service providers in the home country, state providers in the home country, ethnic service providers in the host country, (I)NGOs in the host country, (I)NGOs in the home country,

local CSOs in the home country, local CBOs based in the host country now working in the home country and with faith-based or independent entities delivering services in both countries. It is a complex mosaic spanning two countries, with many layers and levels of dialogue. Through relationships with providers on both sides of the border, and along with roles in chairing refugee education meetings, co-ordination and facilitation, World Education Thailand has developed a strong understanding of the complexities associated with this return process, to a region engaged in a peace process and to a country engaged in a national education reform. This report seeks to build upon this work, and the range of institutional experiences garnered by ourselves and a range of providers.

As the PLE project drew to an end, the report was commissioned to take stock of the current situation for refugee children's schooling through a lens of refugee return, and to review the key issues impacting a successful return in order to inform respective current and future stakeholders. We hope that the recommendations provide a useful basis for the provision of stable support to refugee children in an unstable environment. Generously funded by USAID, the opinions expressed in the report are solely those of the author(s), do not necessarily reflect those of USAID or World Education Thailand, and neither party assumes responsibility for any errors or omissions.

*World Education Thailand Management,
November 2017*

Refugee Camp Locations in Thailand



Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	6
Terminology	7
Acronyms and Abbreviations	8
Executive Summary	10
Recommendations	11
Background and Introduction	18
Education Context	21
Education in Host Country	21
Education in Home Country	25
A Changing Landscape	30
Political Dialogue and Return	30
Durable Solutions and Return	31
Return and Education	32
Policy Engagement	33
Methodology	36
Process	36
Research Sites and Participants	36
Research Limitations	38
Findings, Discussion & Analysis	39
Attitudes Regarding Return	39
Readiness and Concerns	39
Distinct Populations and Attitudes	41
Responsiveness from Host Communities	42

Vulnerable Populations	44
Ethnic and Religious Minorities	44
Children with Disabilities	46
Out-of-School Youth	47
Coordination	48
Engagement and Inclusion	49
Data Collection and Information Dissemination	51
Host Community Planning	52
Issues in Education	54
Broad Preferences and Considerations	55
Language in Education	56
Recognition of Refugee Education and Student Transition	57
Teacher Recognition	63
Holistic Community Approaches and Managing Expectations	70
Conclusion	73
Bibliography	74
Annexes	78
Annex. 1	79
Annex 1: KnED, KRC-EE, KWO, KTWG, KED (2014) Strategic Plan Towards Education Convergence: Durable Solutions for Refugees Along the Thailand-Myanmar/Burma Border	79
Annex 2: KnED, KWO, KTWG, KED (2016) Policy Briefing Paper: Enhancing Learning and Development through Diversity: Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education	85
Annex 3: KnED, KRC-EE, KWO, KTWG, KED (2015) Refugee Student Transition: Policy Position and Program Recommendations	91

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Laura Dowding, with contributions and input from many members across the World Education Thailand team. Laura has worked in the refugee context on the Thailand-Myanmar border for five years, in youth leadership programming, teacher training and most recently as World Education Thailand's Monitoring & Evaluation Coordinator. The report draws upon the views and voices of youth, parents, families and education personnel impacted by years of conflict, by displacement within and from Myanmar, and most recently by planning regarding refugee return. Sincere appreciation is extended to the 410 respondents who participated, as well as key humanitarian and government stakeholders, consulted between January and March 2017 for this study. In particular, appreciation is extended toward the Karen and Karenni Refugee Committees (KRC and KnRC), the Karen Refugee Committee-Education Entity (KRC-EE), the Karenni Education Department (KnED) and the Karen Education Department (KED), without whose support and commitment this study would not have been possible.

Terminology

The term *return* is utilized in the recognition that many refugees and particularly children were born in the camps and thus may not be ‘returning’, but migrating to Myanmar. *Home country* references Myanmar and *host country* refers to Thailand, yet where *host community* is utilized in the findings, discussion and analysis section, this refers to communities in areas of return that receive returning refugees.

The terms *Southeast* and *Southeastern* Myanmar may be used interchangeably throughout the report; both terms reference the area of Myanmar covering Mon State, Kayin State, Kayah State, eastern and southern Shan State, Tanintharyi Region, and eastern Bago Region.

Myanmar is used to refer to the country as a whole, while KNU/KNPP and GoUM-defined locations may be used interchangeably, in line with specific respondent identifications. The terms *Karen* and *Kayin* or *Karenni* and *Kayah* are used interchangeably throughout the report; terms refer to the ethnic group, language, and/or geographical region in Southeast Myanmar.

The terms *Myanmar language* and *Burmese* may be used interchangeably throughout the report; both terms refer to the national language of Myanmar.

The terms *refugee camps*, *camps*, and *temporary shelters* may be used interchangeably throughout; all terms refer to the refugee settlements under the authority of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) along the Thailand-Myanmar border populated with displaced communities from Myanmar, specifically Ban Nai Soi, Ban Mae Surin, Mae La Oon, Mae Ra Ma Luang in Mae Hong Son Province, Mae La, Umpiem, and Nu Po in Tak Province, Tham Hin in Ratchaburi Province, and Ban Don Yang in Kanchanaburi Province. Where a reference to ten camps is cited, Khong Jor Camp in Chiang Mai is included, however other than quantitative data citations; a focus on Khong Jor is outside the remit of this study.

Finally, where *state* is utilized, this refers to Kayin State or Kayah State, and is separate to *national*, which refers to the country as a whole.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
CBO	Community Based Organization	GoUM	Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
CCSDPT	Committee for the Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand	IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
CESR	Comprehensive Education Sector Review	IHE	Institute of Higher Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization	(I)NGO	(International) Non-Governmental Organization
DAE	Department of Alternative Education	IOM	International Organization for Migration
DHE	Department of Higher Education	JRS	Jesuit Refugee Services
DWT	Daily Wage Teacher	KED	Karen Education Department
EAG	Ethnic Armed Group	KG	Kindergarten
EIP	English Immersion Program	KII	Key Informant Interview
FESR	Framework for Economic and Social Reforms	KnED	Karenni Education Department
FGD	Focus Group Discussion	KNGY	Kayan New Generation Youth
		KNPP	Karenni National Progressive Party

KnRC	Karenni Refugee Committee	ONIE	Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education
KNU	Karen National Union	OOSC	Out-of-School Children
KRC	Karen Refugee Committee	OVEC	Office of the Vocational Education Commission
KRC-EE	Karen Refugee Committee-Education Entity	PTA	Parent Teacher Association
KSEAG	Karen State Education Assistance Group	RTG	Royal Thai Government
KSNG	Karen Students' Networking Group	SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
KTWG	Karen Teacher Working Group	TBC	The Border Consortium
KWO	Karen Women's Organization	TC	Transfer Certificate
KYO	Karen Youth Organization	TCSF	Teacher Competency Standards Framework
MNED	Mon National Education Department	TEO	Township Education Office/Officer
MoE	Ministry of Education	UN	United Nations
MOI	Ministry of Interior	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
NCA	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
NESP	National Education Sector Plan	UNIAP	United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking
NFPE	Non-Formal Primary Education	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
NLD	National League for Democracy	UPC	Union Peace Conference
NMSP	New Mon State Party	VT	Vocational Training
OBEC	Office of the Basic Education Commission		
OCEE	Office of Camp Education Entity		

Executive Summary

The democratic elections in Myanmar in 2015, subsequent government reforms, including of the education sector, and socio-economic developments in both Thailand and Myanmar have all led to intensifying discourse around refugee return from the refugee camps on the Thailand side, and reintegration into Myanmar. Alongside a range of complex global challenges for internally displaced and refugee children in accessing education, many children continue to experience barriers upon return to home countries as a result of prior gaps in their education, difficulties integrating into a different education system that may use a different curriculum and language, as well as lack of inclusion in national and education sector planning.

Given the recent intensity in dialogue around refugee return to Myanmar, and returns in progress, and in light of a notable lack of documented discourse around refugee concerns in education, a review and examination of return dynamics and education issues was thus considered timely to focus attention on concerns that refugee children will experience significant challenges in their pursuit of education upon return.

The Refugee Integration Education Review was designed to assess the dynamics of the future return of refugees within the context of education in order to broadly identify the educational interests and hopes of refugee families upon return to Myanmar, uncover potential and existing challenges for children aiming to access various forms of education, and begin to explore the current situation in areas of return, including existing gaps and opportunities.

Findings from this review study have been drawn upon to develop recommendations in the areas of service provision, policy engagement and planning, information management, coordination, state/regional-level engagement, and student and teacher recognition. In doing so, this report aims to offer pathways toward solutions to ensure the continued provision of quality, recognized education for refugee children and youth returning to Myanmar. To aid accessibility and momentum, and in particular for audiences familiar with refugee education, the recommendations are put forward at the outset.

Recommendations

Service Provision

Continued support for camp-based education at adequate funding levels is required, in recognition of refugee community readiness to return. Emphasizing a holistic approach in refugee return, funding should ensure continued stabilization in the provision of quality camp-based education, alongside community and mixed-administration schooling provision in the Southeast.

- Complementary to, and not at the expense of funding for service provision, funding arrangements should recognize the increased demands of the evolving context on the administration of service provision. Engagement in return planning and education reform requires increased resourcing at refugee and ethnic service provider organizations. In particular, cross-border meetings, coordination, advocacy, research, data management, and outreach require technical staffing positions, which place additional demands on limited resources. Funding mechanisms should recognize the demands on organizational structures, including for example human resources restructuring and capacity development.
- Donors should promote and invest in a regional approach to refugee return through investments that recognize that issues in education for refugee return require a concerted focus in Thailand and Myanmar simultaneously for most effective use of resource allocation. Single-country allocations may not be appropriate for the demands of cross-border outreach, assessments, planning, transition, and movement.
- All stakeholders should invest in holistic education programming through community approaches that build on existing mechanisms in areas of return in the Southeast in order to ensure a sustainable and harmonious integration. Models of funding should draw from humanitarian, peace-building, and development resource pools to provide responses to refugee return to communities in the Southeast.
- Donors should invest in preparedness programming for refugees in order to ensure expectations are realistic. This should include pre-departure orientation led by and with communities in the Southeast.



- All stakeholders should work toward the scaling-up and out of the education infrastructure, programming and human resource capacity for returning children with disabilities in the Southeast.
- In order to address the needs of out-of-school youth, flexible programming such as the Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) program, as well as Vocational Training opportunities should be scaled up in areas of return. For over-age or older youth, and to mitigate risks of unsafe further migration and exploitation in a return environment, all stakeholders should invest in documenting safe return migration pathways, identifying social capital assets, and mapping of resource and infrastructure gaps, particularly with migration to urban areas in mind.
- All stakeholders should promote and ensure sufficient investment in programmatic nuances targeting additionally vulnerable groups in refugee return or onward migration, in particular the Muslim community.

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Policy Engagement and Planning

The GoUM and MoE should promote and foster trust through the inclusion of refugee issues in education reform, policy, and planning.

- The GoUM and Myanmar MoE should ensure the systematic inclusion of refugees in national education sector plans, budgets, programming, and monitoring in order to ensure a sustainable reintegration for refugee children, to mitigate risks to dangerous further migration experiences, and to support Myanmar to monitor its progress toward national and global commitments in education.
- The GoUM should formally recognize the role of refugee providers and their ethnic counterparts in education service provision for displaced and marginalized people in and from the Southeast. Building on the interim arrangements in the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA), the GoUM and MoE should ensure that refugee and ethnic concerns in education are addressed in a coherent approach across political and education reform dialogues.
- The MoE should not wait on the outcomes of political dialogue process to promote the inclusion of ethnic education providers within education reform. The MoE should recognize the overlaps between national education reform and the political dialogue, and prepare accordingly for reconciliation through education by prioritizing refugee and ethnic education concerns now.
- The MoE at state, regional and central levels should foster appropriately active and structured dialogue in recognition of the role of providers, and to ensure policy and planning concerning displaced communities is conducted in consultation with those communities.
- Ethnic Armed Groups, whether signatory to the NCA or not, should continue to address issues in refugee return and specifically issues in education, drawing upon the insight and leadership of the refugee and ethnic education service providers in political dialogue. Structured internal dialogue would promote assurance that the interests of ethnic and refugee children are adequately addressed in an accountable and transparent manner, and in line with refugee and ethnic education service provider messaging in national education policy and planning.
- The GoUM should ensure issues in education and return be formally and appropriately addressed in and through the Bi-Lateral Working Group with the Royal Thai Government (RTG), and through preparation for a respective tripartite agreement on repatriation, in consultation with stakeholders in refugee education in Thailand and Myanmar.
- The MoE should clarify decision-making capacity, authority, roles, and responsibilities on refugee return issues. The GoUM should formally identify the Department of Basic Education as the respective coordinating department for issues in education and map additional departments and ministry responsibilities for improved consultation, coordination, and collaboration. The MoE Department of Basic Education should identify a Focal Person within its structure to coordinate and address issues in education and return.

Information Management

Despite the range of actors engaged, there remains much room for enhanced information management, across geographical boundaries, as well as across existing coordination mechanisms to inform refugee

decision-making, host community planning, and pre-departure support.

- All stakeholders should invest in community-led and field-level data collection, documentation and dissemination of prior returnee experience to inform refugee decision-making and host community planning. Similarly all stakeholders should invest in refugee-led exploration and relationship building initiatives (for example student return pilots, teacher exchanges, go-and-see visits, refugee access to technical colleges). In order to address capacity demands on refugee and ethnic providers, support should be provided to for example school principals, KSNG members, KYO members, PTA, or school committee members through respective overseeing entities such as return committees.
- All stakeholders should invest in collaboration initiatives for ethnic provider personnel and township-level officers to jointly collect data, analyze and disseminate information. This would be highly beneficial in identifying issues in schooling upon return, informing refugees, informing respective responses from stakeholders, and building trust between state and ethnic/refugee providers at the field-level in return areas.
- All stakeholders should invest in joint monitoring of state-level coordination agreements to ensure that field-level implementation reflects the intended purpose.
- The UN should support governments, INGOs, and local education service providers with enhanced documentation and discussion papers on global examples of best practice, lessons learned and proposed solutions for the Thailand/Myanmar context, in light of its specificity and complexity. For

example further exploration of tripartite agreements (Kenya-Somalia, Liberia-Cote d'Ivoire, Pakistan-Afghanistan, Ethiopia-Sudan, Central African Republic-Sudan, and Kenya-Sudan) would help to unpack terminology around the acceptance of certificates, equivalency and comparability to home country qualifications/learning attainments.

- INGOs should continue to support mechanisms to gather and track data on student transition from camps to Myanmar. Where possible, and building upon previous support, existing ethnic service provider and state data management structures should be utilized. Where not possible, given academic year data collection cycles or due to capacity constraints, rapid data gathering exercises should be supported to gather data for immediate follow-up mapping of experiences post-transition, and in order to identify gaps in integration support, and to inform future programming.
- The Myanmar government, with the support of a development partner, should create a library platform or similar mechanism for enhanced information dissemination on government priorities, developments and actions in education reform.

Coordination

In a host and return context with a wide range of providers and actors with varying degrees of authority, experience and community trust, ensuring the protection and successful integration of returnees requires a coherent strategy designed with refugee and ethnic service providers, through strong coordination mechanisms.

- Donors should invest in and support the implementation of a cross-border, cross-sector, cross-level education-

specific coordination mechanism, with linkages to national-level working groups active in education reform and developments.

- NGOs and UN agencies should strengthen internal communication and coordination mechanisms across country borders, mapping project activity in Thailand and Myanmar to identify complementary activities and developing country office policies where required that enable cross-border engagement.
- The UN should clarify agency-specific responsibilities regarding refugee education to assist in coordination.

State-Level/Regional-Level Engagement

Interventions that promote consultation and jointly implemented activities and monitoring in education among ethnic/refugee service providers and state/regional-level government will enhance working relationships.

- Donors should continue to invest in state-level coordination between the state education departments and refugee and ethnic service providers. Coordination meetings should be more frequent, take a workshop style, technical and/or thematic-focus to ensure strong outputs, and plans for the joint monitoring of resolutions. Similarly, township level education coordination meetings/workshops between ethnic/refugee service provider personnel and government TEOs should be supported to promote dialogue and trust-building through the identification of collaborative actions.
- Donors should provide for equitable capacity development, financial assistance and technical preparation support prior to and post-meetings/work

shops for both education departments and refugee/ethnic service providers, including input into staffing, transportation and administrative costs in line with engagement expectations.

- Donors should invest in collaborative piloting, programming and monitoring of state-level coordination agreements, for example the acceptance of refugee transfer certificates.

Student Recognition and Language

The recognition of refugee children's prior learning is crucial to a successful integration. Kayin and Kayah state-level authorities would benefit from enhanced support from central MoE, alongside clarity in decision-making authority, to address refugee student integration. Refugee and ethnic service provider engagement in dialogue will foster an environment of joint decision-making, collaboration, and trust.

- The Myanmar MoE Department of Basic Education should address barriers to access for returning students in particular through strengthened dissemination of guidance and policy around enrollment procedures and entrance requirements, and should formally document the acceptance of refugee and ethnic provider Transfer Certificates in state schools. Financial and technical support should be provided to township-level offices to ensure consistent, fair and appropriate approaches to enrollment.
- The MoE should strengthen support to its state-level departments in Kayin and Kayah to assess the effectiveness of the placement test(s) for returning children, and identifying whether it is the most useful tool for placement at appropriate grade-levels, particularly in the case of non-Myanmar speaking children entering a school where their mother tongue is not the language of instruction.

Placement tests should be reviewed and revised in collaboration with refugee and ethnic providers, with technical support where required for both parties on grade equivalency and mapping.

- The UN should conduct and disseminate education sector-specific information on student transition in the first Voluntary Repatriation process, including details on grade-level equivalency, case-studies of procedures of enrollment and details of follow-up assessments on integration success in both community and state schooling. Both INGOs and the UN should utilize the experiences garnered to inform a comprehensive strategy for support provision to local stakeholders, for continued dialoguing across stakeholders on authority and responsibility, to pilot transition support initiatives, to inform the RTG and GoUM on tripartite agreement components, and to identify resourcing requirements to support the potential return of the remaining refugee students.
- The MoE should recognize the needs of non-Myanmar speaking returnees, alongside the needs of ethnic mother tongue speakers in the Southeast. Returnees should be provided with the opportunity to continue learning in their mother tongue, with resources and classroom environments that nurture ethnic language development.
- The MoE should clarify the content of the Myanmar Language Enrichment program/ the familiarization period upon enrollment, and be supported to co-design a suitable reintegration strategy for returning students with refugee and ethnic service providers.
- INGOs and local stakeholders should build upon initiatives such as those for migrant children in Thailand to outline clear procedures for refugee transition and enrollment.
- INGOs should incorporate programming and activities that build upon or mirror community-led initiatives such as the Community Transition Guidelines policy between the KED and KRC-EE supporting student transition to community schools. Support should continue to be provided for the monitoring of the transfer of students and use of the Guidelines.

Teacher Recognition

The recognition of refugee teacher skills is key to successful reintegration. Refugee and ethnic teachers offer a solution to addressing current and future teacher demand in the Southeast of Myanmar, both in the teaching of ethnic languages and across all curricular content. Recognizing teacher skills and qualifications would support refugee teachers to return with dignity, with opportunities to be self-sufficient in supporting their families, and would provide opportunities to contribute to a developing Myanmar by supporting communities in the Southeast to enhance learning outcomes.

- The Myanmar MoE should address the NESP-identified need for pathways to accreditation for refugee teachers. As part of the ongoing reforms in teacher education and management, the MoE should review entrance requirements for Teacher Education Colleges, and criteria for teacher licensing, and identify and program mechanisms that ensure the inclusion, certification and further professional development opportunities of refugee and ethnic teachers.

- The Myanmar MoE should build on the flexibility in programming demonstrated through the daily wage teacher (DWT) initiative to provide for accelerated and flexible pathways to certification, in recognition of the skills, experience and training of refugee and ethnic teachers. Programming should be designed with conflict-cognizant assessments through the inclusion of refugee and ethnic providers in teacher education and management reforms. Examples may include accelerated training and certification courses provided to teachers in the refugee camps, or at ethnic teacher education colleges, one-off competency tests that allow returning refugee teachers to become immediately qualified, or the provision of additional trainings in Myanmar for those teachers not ready to meet competency requirements. Ethnic teacher access to state in-service trainings, or teacher exchanges should continue to be supported, where relevant, and with associated certification.
- The UN should, along with respective development partners, ensure the engagement of refugee and ethnic providers in teacher education and management reforms at central level in Myanmar, providing the legitimacy of a globally respected body to support refugee and ethnic teacher skills validation. Development partners engaged in teacher education and management reforms should seek to explicitly support the inclusion of refugee and ethnic teacher concerns into planning, and associated coordination with non-state providers.
- The Myanmar MoE should decentralize authority on teacher certification to Kayin and Kayah State education departments in order to enable the piloting of initiatives, in a similar manner to how teacher management authority has been increasingly decentralized.
- INGOs and donors should, in cross-border programming, provide financial and technical support for collaboration between refugee and ethnic providers to pilot initiatives for teacher certification, for example, piloting a program to locate refugee and ethnic teachers in state teacher education colleges, or bridging/partnership initiatives between ethnic pre-and in-service models and the state teacher education system. Technical workshops at Kayin and Kayah state-level would facilitate program and pilot design.
- INGOs and local education stakeholders should continue to encourage and support the documentation of skills and experience of teachers at camp and community level, including increasing information dissemination on the profiles of refugee and ethnic teachers, details of trainings completed, comparatives between pre- and in-service curricula, standards in the Myanmar Teacher Competency Standards Framework or content of pre-service state colleges.

Background and Introduction

As of 2017, there are approximately 65.6 million forcibly displaced people globally, with 22.5 million of these classified as refugees.¹ With half of the 22.5 million under the age of 18, there are substantial threats posed to youth and children impacted by displacement, significantly in their pursuit of education.² Access to education significantly decreases upon displacement, with 61 percent of refugee children enrolled in school compared to the global average of 91 percent, and only 23 percent of refugee adolescents attending secondary school compared to global rates of 84 percent.³ A number of risk factors push children out of school, including poverty, displacement, conflict, disabilities, early marriage and pregnancy, gender discrimination, and being of an underserved ethnic or linguistic minority.⁴ In stable situations these factors lead children and youth to take breaks from

their education, making it more difficult for them to reintegrate at a later time, and, in extreme cases, leads to permanent drop-out from school. With many of these factors exacerbated by instability, conflict and displacement, refugee and IDP children face unique challenges in accessing education.

Military and counter-insurgency tactics, including forced relocations and exploitation, open conflict, and chronic under-development have contributed to decades of displacement within and from Myanmar's Southeast.⁵ Reflective of the global challenges in defining migration flows, the complex and protracted nature of displacement in Southeast Myanmar renders it challenging to accurately determine the number of people displaced in this context. Recent authoritative estimates cite a figure of 400,000 IDPs in the Southeast,⁶

¹See UNHCR (2017).

²UNHCR (2017b), p.4.

³UNHCR (2017b), p.5.

⁴See UNICEF (2016)

⁵See Jolliffe's (2015) Annex for an analysis of the role of populations and displacement in Myanmar's ethnic conflict
See TBC (2012) for a discussion on impacts of under-development and displacement in the region.

⁶TBC (2012), p.2 and TBC (2014) Executive Summary

and approximately 2.5 million Myanmar migrants in Thailand.⁷ While it is estimated that since 1994, 250,000 refugees have passed through the camps in Thailand,⁸ the number of refugees residing in the camps has fluctuated on an annual basis, with incidents of conflict and instability within Myanmar, resettlement to third countries, migration out of the camps into Thailand, and more recently spontaneous returns to Myanmar. At present there are approximately 100,000 refugees in ten shelters across five border provinces, the largest of which resides 36,591 people.⁹ An estimated 50 percent are under 18,¹⁰ with roughly 800 children believed to be out of school.¹¹ Seven of the camps have a predominantly Karen population; across all camps 79.6 percent of the population are of Karen ethnicity, 10.1 percent Karenni, 3.2 percent Burman, 0.7 percent Mon, and 6.4 percent are of other ethnicities.¹² Approximately 50 percent of camp populations are Christian, 35 percent Buddhist, 8 percent are Muslim, and the remaining of animist or other religious faith.¹³ It has been estimated that approximately 65 percent of camp

residents are of Kayin State origin, with 15 percent from Kayah, 8 percent from Tanintharyi, and approximately 10 percent from Mon and Bago.¹⁴

In 2016, 552,200 refugees returned to their countries of origin globally.¹⁵ While there exists an array of challenges for internally displaced and refugee children in accessing education within situations of displacement, many children continue to experience barriers upon return based on prior gaps in their education, difficulties integrating into a different education system that may use a different curriculum and language, as well as lack of inclusion in national and education sector planning. If barriers prevent access to education for children from the refugee shelters upon return to Myanmar, numbers of out-of-school children may increase, which increases vulnerability to trafficking and child protection threats in a region where youth are often hidden from protection measures. In considering future pathways for refugee children in education, a number of scenarios can be identified:

⁷World Education Thailand and Save the Children (2014), p.6.

⁸Figures cited by IOM at the CCSDPT Bi-Annual meeting November 2016, Bangkok. World Education files.

⁹TBC (2017), figures represent TBC verified caseload

¹⁰Handicap International (2017)

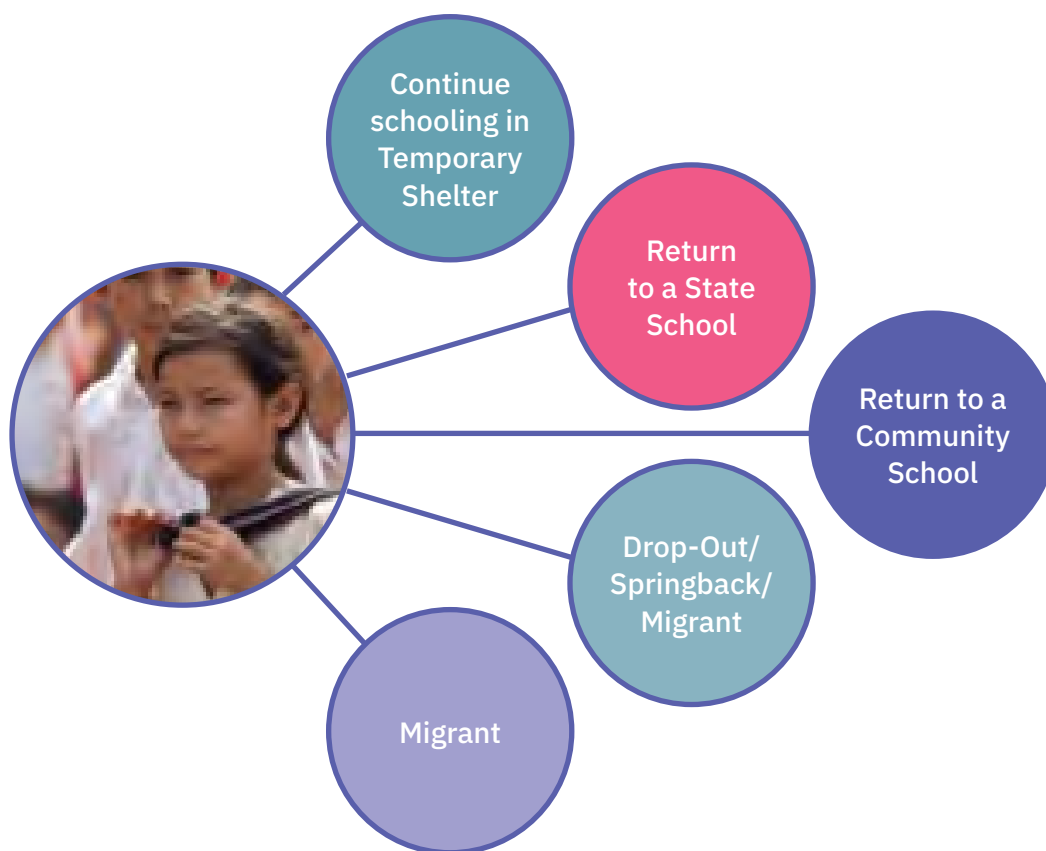
¹¹KII Interview

¹²Ibid

¹³UNHCR (2016b)

¹⁴UNHCR (2013), based on registered population, October 2013.

¹⁵UNHCR (2017b), p.23.



- » Children continue to gain access to basic education service provision in the refugee shelters
- » Children return and seek to enroll in a Myanmar MoE state school
- » Children return and seek to enroll in a community (ethnic education provider-supported) or mixed-administered (both MoE and ethnic education) school in Myanmar
- » Children who have returned to Myanmar face barriers to accessing education and as a result drop out of school and/or 'spring-back' to Thailand after a period of time.
- » Children leave camps and seek to absorb into migrant communities in Thailand

Here forward, the review provides contextual background to education for refugee children in Thailand, and subsequently to education for children in Myanmar. To add depth to the review, an overview of the wider implementation environment is provided with a presentation of relevant information in a rapidly evolving context; namely on the political change and the peace process in Myanmar, the search for durable solutions for the refugee community in Thailand and the shifting focus toward a return to Myanmar, an overview of broad interconnections across discourses on return and education, and specific reference to the policy landscape impacting education in the return context. Following an overview of the methodologies utilized in the study, key findings are presented in a discussion style, with additional review analysis or information provided for further depth, where deemed relevant.

Education Context

Education in Host Country

There are currently 34,595 children engaged in schooling across the camps, S’gaw Karen is the predominant first language across all camps, apart from Ban Mai Nai Soi where it is Karenni. S’gaw Karen is used as the language of instruction in the majority of schools in the Karen camps, and the remaining schools utilize Myanmar language. In the two northern camps, Myanmar or Karenni is predominantly used as the language of instruction. Nursery, basic, post-secondary and vocational education is provided within the refugee shelters, managed and staffed by members of the refugee community, and supported by INGOs

and development partners. While local refugee-led organizations the Karen Refugee Committee- Education Entity (KRC-EE) and the Karenni Education Department (KnED) take responsibility for the provision of the bulk of education service delivery, a range of independent or faith-based schools exist in delivering services simultaneously.

Within the Karen camps, refugee-staffed Office of Camp Education Entities (OCEEs) act as the central overseeing body at camp level, in a direct relationship with the Karen Refugee Committee’s Camp Committee structure, and simultaneously under the management of the KRC-EE. The OCEEs assume day-to-day responsibility

Refugee Education Students 2016-2017 AY			
Level	7 Karen Sheltercs	2 Karenni Shelters	Total
Nursery	5,774	1,052	6,826
Basic Education	22,076	3,704	25,780
Post-Secondary	1,438	82	1,520
Special Education	405	46 (mainstream)	451
		18 (home based)	18
	29,693	4,902	34,595

Source: CCSDPT Education Sub-Committee (April 2017)

KRC-EE and KnED Grade Structure and Subjects			
KRC-EE	G1 – G6	G7 – G9	G10 – G12
KnED	KG – S4	S5 – S8	S9 – S10
	Karen/Karenni	Karen/Karenni	Karen (KRCEE only/KnED introduce Thai)
	English	English	English
	Burmese (KRC-EE from G3)	Burmese	Burmese
	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
	History (KRC-EE only)	History (KnED from S7)	History
	Geography (KRC-EE only)	Geography (KnED from S7)	Geography
	Social Studies (KnED only)	Social Studies (KnED to S6)	Social Studies (KRC-EE only)
	Health and Physical Education	Art/VOS (KRC-EE only)	Art/VOS (KRC-EE only)
	Art/VOS (KnED Music and Library)	Science	Science

Source: (Annex 3)KnED, KRC-EE, KWO, KTWG, KED (2015) *Refugee Student Transition: Policy Position and Program Recommendations*

for human resource management, teacher training and policy implementation at the camp-level. Special education in the Karen camps is administered by local CBO the Karen Women's Organization (KWO), and both the KWO and KRC-EE administer nursery education. Building upon relationships fostered in Ban Vinai and Phan-at Nikhom refugee camps in the 1980s, a consortium of international education agencies was granted permission to support the existing refugee-built education services on the Thailand-Myanmar border in the late 1990s. Under the auspices of the Committee for Coordination of Services to Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT), the MOI-recognized coordination agency, the INGOs provided assistance with the goal of "support(ing) the development of an effective and sustainable education system that could be replicated and adapted once the refugees return to Burma."¹⁶ Since then, and via coordination through CCSDPT's

Education Sub-Committee, INGOs have provided technical and financial support for the administration of education services in the areas of policy, teacher training, infrastructure and school buildings materials, school libraries, adult literacy, personnel stipends, and systems strengthening.

Basic Education under the KRC-EE provides for 12 years of schooling, with a 6-3-3 model defining grade levels (primary: G1-G6, Middle School: G7-G9 and High School G10-12). Children in the KnED administered-schools follow an 11-year 5-4-2 model (primary KG-S4/ lower secondary: S5-S7 and upper secondary: S8-S10). Locally developed curricular content is utilized in KRC-EE administered schools; aligned with that utilized in Karen Education Department (KED)-administered schools in the Southeast,¹⁷ and unique from MoE Thailand or MoE Myanmar curricula.

¹⁶A History of Consortium in Thailand, Phase 1, World Education internal file

¹⁷In KNU-identified areas, known as Kawthoolei, which roughly equate to Kayin State and areas of Mon State, Tanintharyi Region and East Bago.

Despite various efforts and successes at collaboration with the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) MoE Office of the Vocational Education Commission (OVEC), Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) and Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) within the camps in vocational training and the provision of Thai language instruction, given the Thailand MoE's lack of mandate over refugee education policy, equivalency mapping against the Thailand state curriculum has not occurred. Similarly, with the absence of a structured framework available, equivalency mapping with Myanmar state curriculum content has been hampered.

With a current teaching force of approximately 1,950,¹⁸ teacher education and teacher professional development is provided within the shelters; however corresponding accreditation is provided neither by the Thailand nor Myanmar MoE. Content alignments have not been examined to date in order to identify potential overlaps with the Myanmar state pre-service training at teacher education colleges, nor respective in-service trainings. Teacher trainings within the camps take the form of short trainings which are led by (I)NGOs in partnership with local refugee education stakeholders. In the seven predominantly Karen camps, Right to Play/Save the Children work with the KRC-EE and OCEE to deliver pre- and in-service training. In the two northern camps, training is provided in a combined effort between the Jesuit Refugee Services (JRS) and the KnED, targeting new teachers with pre-service general teaching methodology, as well as subject-content training throughout the year. A 2014 profiling exercise found that

while only 1 percent of the 2014-2015 basic education teaching community had completed a Bachelors of Education, the general level of education amongst teachers is relatively high.¹⁹ Of the teachers working in basic education; 14 percent had completed primary school as a highest level, 50 percent had completed high school, 29 percent had completed some form of post-high school education, 7 percent had completed a university degree, 87 percent had attended some form of teacher training and many had attended more than one training course. In that same year, 15 percent of refugee teachers were under 20 years old, and the majority were between the ages of 20 and 29.²⁰

The restrictions, to which the refugee community in Thailand is subject, including freedom of movement and employment, lack of access to state education services, and authorizations over infrastructure, continue to impact the quality of service delivery and respective learning outcomes.²¹ In this environment, while the refugee community has been successful in developing an education service delivery mechanism that responds to the basic need of access to education, it has had to simultaneously employ coping mechanisms to adapt to a changing environment. In particular, the impacts of resettlement and the departure of educated and trained personnel have had a major impact on human resource management and the ability for continual systems strengthening, and resulting in impacts on teacher quality, monitoring and training capacity, student motivation, and respective systems for the delivery of quality in education.²² Refugee-led solutions such as the introduction

¹⁸CCSDPT (ESC) July 2016, includes basic education, post-secondary, nursery and special education

¹⁹See Dare (2014) for a comprehensive overview of refugee teacher education and management.

²⁰Ibid

²¹See Oh (2010)

²²See Banki and Lang (2007) and Banki and Lang (2008) for a discussion on the impacts of resettlement on refugee education in the Thailand camps



of the Institute of Higher Education (IHE) system, a system of camp-based post-secondary junior colleges whose graduates take up education-related and leadership positions in camps and along the border areas, demonstrate the resilience of the community.

The UNHCR's Missing Out campaign, mirroring its 2012-2016 education strategy, highlights the need for the systematic inclusion of refugee data in host country national education sector plans, budgets, programming, and monitoring, and posits that "refugees should be included in national education systems and follow national curricula rather than pursue parallel courses of study that cannot be supervised or certified by the host country."²³ In early 2017, in reiterating its position vis-à-vis refugee education, RTG representatives asserted that the responsibility for education recognition sits with the Myanmar government, and committed to raising education issues through its Bilateral Working Group on Voluntary Repatriation.²⁴ With this stance, and given the

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²³See UNHCR (2016)

²⁴See Summary Report, Meeting between the RTG, UNHCR and Education NGOs and CBOs working in Thailand (Feb. 2017)

complex and protracted nature of the refugee situation in Thailand, the lack of MoE engagement education service provision in the camps and the lack of mechanisms within the national legal and policy framework, inclusion in national education planning seems unlikely. Following the UNHCR logic that including refugee children in national education systems is the most sustainable way of responding to their needs, and given the recent shifts toward dialogue on return, it becomes pertinent to consider if and how returnee children's right to education is enshrined in Myanmar's national laws and policies. This is discussed in more detail in subsequent sections.

Education in Home Country

There are approximately 8.8 million students in over 45,000 state schools in Myanmar,²⁵ where the MoE is the largest education service provider. In line with its 2012 Framework for Economic and Social Reforms (FESR), the GoUM committed to initiating a series of national education reforms, which began with a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), a three-stage process which sought to examine the current status of education in Myanmar and inform the development of a budgeted strategic plan to guide investment in education. Prior to 2012, education in Myanmar had suffered from decades of chronic under-resourcing, where rote memorization techniques reflected the poor quality of teaching and learning in the classroom, and enrollment and completion

rates reflected an overall under-investment in children's education priorities. In 2011, the net completion rate for primary school was 54.2 percent,²⁶ the labor force participation of children aged 10-14 years stood at 18 percent among the poor and 10 percent among the non-poor,²⁷ and only one-third of the 1.2 million students enrolled in Grade 1 progressed to Grade 11.²⁸ With increasing education allocations and early reforms in education, primary education was made compulsory and school fees eliminated.²⁹ Underpinned by the 2008 Myanmar constitution and respective education legislation, namely the 2014 National Education Law (amend. 2015), the National Education Sector Plan (2016-2021) strategic priorities include further restructuring of and within MoE departments, lengthening the compulsory education cycle, revising curricular content, reforming teacher education and management, decentralizing decision-making and enhancing systems for data-driven decision-making.³⁰ To date, key developments include the inception of the Department of Alternative Education (DAE), the development and implementation of new grade content for Kindergarten and Grade 1, increases in the volume of new teachers deployed and the development of a teacher competency standards framework.

In the Southeast, and areas of refugee origin, education service delivery is highly fragmented, with a range of wider providers engaged through a variety of evolving rela-

²⁵Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary figures for 2015-2016, excluding monastic or private schooling. MoE NESP (2016), Table 1.1

²⁶Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Ministry of Health and UNICEF, Myanmar Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2009-2010 In Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development and UNICEF Situation Analysis of Children in Myanmar (2012), Executive Summary

²⁷See UNDP/IHLCA (2011)

²⁸Addison et al., (2014)

²⁹Despite the free education system, the common practise in Myanmar continues where students attend and pay for extra-curricular classes in order to access the entire curriculum and successfully complete their schooling. This acts as a further barrier to many children, particularly those of lower income families.

³⁰MoE NESP (2016), Table 5.1

tionships. As a result of conflict, displacement, terrain, chronic under-resourcing, poverty, and the desires of communities themselves, education in the Southeast has been largely community-driven. In Kayin, Mon, and Kayah states, ethnic education providers the Karen Education Department (KED), the Mon National Education Department (MNED) and the Karenni Education Department (KnED) act as the departmental education social service providers under the structure of Ethnic Armed Groups (EAGs) the Karen National Union (KNU), the New Mon State Party (NMSP), and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) respectively, and have as such established leading roles in support of community education and service delivery. While these non-state systems of education differ in structure and form across the Southeast states, they commonly utilize locally-developed curricular content, provide mother tongue based instruction and have developed context-tailored teacher education mechanisms to support community schools. Simultaneously, in many cases, school governance and administration is shared between state and non-state actors in 'mixed-administered schools', where Myanmar and/or a mother tongue, or both, are used in the classroom and with the Myanmar and/or the non-state curriculum.³¹

In Kayin State, the KED provides support to 173,631 and 10,840 teachers across seven KNU-defined districts in 1,573 schools, from primary to post-secondary education.³² Key features of the ethnic education system reflect a well-established conflict-responsive model including its governance

structure, the provision of mother tongue instruction, locally developed curricular content, the provision of teaching and learning materials, and teacher education and management. Aligned with the KNU governance structure, the KED oversees school administration and policy across 28 townships through a network of field education personnel, and school management committee/parent teacher association members, including coordination with the Karen State Education Assistance Group (KSEAG) for the provision of school and learning materials, and the Karen Teacher Working Group (KTWG) for pre- and in-service (mobile) teacher professional development.³³

Within Kayah State, the KnED administers 460 primary, 33 middle, and 12 high schools reaching roughly 50,300 students (2011-2012 academic year),³⁴ alongside Kayan New Generation Youth who supported 101 schools reaching roughly 8,700 students (2016-2017 academic year).³⁵ Averages of pre-school attendance (61%) and primary enrollment (96%) have been attributed to the large number of faith-based education service providers, resulting in Kayah State levels exceeding national averages in 2010, which stood at 23% and 88% respectively.³⁶

In remote Mon State, and in some townships in Kayin State and Tanintharyi, the MNED manages and delivers educational services for 11,781 students supported by 752 teachers in the 136 community schools administered directly by MNED, as well as the 14,698 students in 95 government schools where the MNED supports

³¹For further insight into community-driven schooling, the role of non-state armed actors and education service delivery in the Southeast, see Karen Education Department (2016), Jolliffe and Mears (2016) and South and Lall (2016)

³²Karen Education Department data (2017).

³³For an overview of the role of KSEAG and KTWG, in collaboration with the KED, see Johnston (2016)

³⁴Jolliffe (2014).

³⁵KNGY data provided (2017).

³⁶UNICEF (2015).

154 Mon language teachers to deliver Mon literacy and history classes at the end of the school day.³⁷ Additional to policy and administration for community-schooling and pre-service teacher development, the unique feature of the Mon system is its provision of education to Mon youth in Mon language.

Across ethnic education service delivery in the Southeast, despite the active community engagement and contributions,³⁸ under-resourcing and poverty impacts the provision of education and learning outcomes.³⁹ Continued under-re-

³⁷Since recent state-level agreements have MNED-supported language teachers been able to teach Mon Language at Mon State Education Department (MSED) schools after regular school hours

³⁸For example, according to the MNED, community contributions in AY 2015-2016 accounted for approximately 35 percent of MNED-administered running costs/ teacher stipends

³⁹Across all states, there is a prevalence of high grade-to-grade drop-out as a result of children withdrawing from school to work, high grade retention as a result of absenteeism with insufficient numbers of schools with upper grades in remote regions and the inability for families to send their children to another township to continue their studies.

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sourcing has the potential to widen gaps further in learning attainments between urban and rural Myanmar, across ethnicities and for those children who have experienced an interrupted education cycle, in a situation where development reforms risk excluding children “trapped in situations of tension.”⁴⁰ Despite their significant role in education service delivery in the Southeast, ethnic service providers are not recognized by the MoE as legitimate entities in education delivery. The services they provide and community schools under their administration remain invisible in national education planning, and as such in respective national budgeting allocations. Research on development reforms in EAG-administered/contested areas suggests that the expansion of MoE development efforts as a result of reforms and increased investments have had negative effects on some communities in the Southeast, for example with a loss of community ownership as growing numbers of community schools become officially registered as state schools,⁴¹ community teacher displacement and impacts on ethnic

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⁴⁰UNICEF (2017), p.10

⁴¹See Karen Education Department (2016)

language learning provision.⁴² Given the challenges facing the MoE in providing access in the Southeast,⁴³ the assertion that state policy reforms should consider ethnic education service providers as valued partners nationally in service provision is pertinent both for children in the Southeast, and those displaced in Thailand seeking to return. For refugee children, whether seeking to enter a state, mixed-administered, or community school upon a potential return, the forging of sustainable pathways for their integration is highly interlinked to the evolving relations between the government and the ethnic service providers. This is further discussed in subsequent sections.

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⁴²See Johnston (2016)

⁴³See Jolliffe and Mears (2016)



A Changing Landscape

Political Dialogue and Return

Against an evolving socio-political backdrop; with bi-elections and general elections, a new NLD-led government, and initiatives under the national reconciliation agenda, there are increasingly shifting expectations that the refugee community's readiness for return would or will increase. Political negotiations with signatory EAGs in the Southeast are ongoing, following the signing of a Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) in 2015. While a framework for political dialogue has been established and initiated, significant contentions around its implementation,⁴⁴ as well as reports of increased militarization in the Southeast,⁴⁵ highlight the fragility of the political dialogue. Despite challenges around the sequencing of steps on a reconciliation roadmap, such as transitional justice,⁴⁶ national dialogue is viewed as essential,

in particular for addressing “substantive issues of constitutional reform, security sector reform, land rights and the reintegration of displaced persons.”⁴⁷ The cessation of conflict and signing of an NCA that guarantees “no citizen shall be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity, religion, culture or gender”⁴⁸ holds high potential for the refugee community displaced as a result of the conflict. However, and drawing upon analysis of repatriation cases in Mon and Kachin States, where ceasefires alone neither fostered nor resulted in durable solutions, the inability of ceasefires to ensure displaced populations' protection in the long term demonstrates a need not only for a comprehensive solution that addresses the root cause of displacement, but one that engages the displaced in associated arrangements.⁴⁹ The recognition of the role of EAGs in education service delivery through the interim arrangements pre-

⁴⁴See *Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement is a Forlorn Hope*, <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/nationwide-ceasefire-agreement-forlorn-hope>

⁴⁵See KHRG (2016)

⁴⁶See TBC (2014)

⁴⁷TBC (2014), p. 2

⁴⁸NCA, p.1

⁴⁹See South & Jolliffe (2015) for a comprehensive discussion on lessons learned regarding returnee integration in Myanmar



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sented in the ceasefire agreement and dialogue⁵⁰ provides potential for the issues and insecurities of returnee children to be addressed as part of a comprehensive durable solution. However, political dialogue has focused to date neither on education, nor on the displaced/education/policy reform nexus.

Durable Solutions and Return

The legal status of the border refugee community within Thailand has not changed since their arrival, given Thailand's stance vis-à-vis the Refugee Convention, which the government has not ratified. While Thailand has broadly committed to protection and to the principle of non-refoulement in the case of the refugee shelters, more recently the government has voiced the need for a voluntary, sustainable, and gradual return to Myanmar, "when the Myanmar government is ready"⁵¹ and increased bilateral dialogue with the new government and military on returns. Despite early limitations in establishing an operational and coordinating presence,

⁵⁰NCA Section 25 (a)(i)'s

⁵¹TBC (2016), p. 10

through agreements between the UNHCR and the RTG in 2001, the UN agency was able to respond to its core protection mandate in taking action toward one of three identified durable solutions: resettlement. With the closing of the resettlement program in 2014⁵² however, and with no changes in legislation to provide options for an organized integration in Thailand, the UNHCR focus has shifted toward repatriation as the primary durable solution. Into 2017, the agency maintains the position that the benchmark indicators that would trigger a UNHCR promotion of return have not yet been reached,⁵³ that significant groundwork remains in Myanmar areas of return, and as such that facilitated return is the most appropriate course of action.⁵⁴ Having initiated return preparedness activities in 2015, the first UNHCR-facilitated Voluntary Repatriation occurred in October 2016 with 71 individuals returning to Bago and Yangon Regions, and Kayin, Kachin, and Rakhine States. Following a verification of refugee nationality by the Myanmar government in Nu Po and Tham Hin camps, assistance was provided to include protection counseling, transportation from shelter to the border, cash assistance grants for transport, and food and an in-kind delivery of a net and sanitary kit.⁵⁵ A further 247 individuals made up of 70 households are currently engaged in a second voluntary repatriation, having completed the GoUM verification process in July 2017, and are now awaiting authorization from the GoUM in order to return. Most recently, in July

2017, the UNHCR compiled a list of 28 households/129 individuals across the refugee camps interested in return. This third group of individuals has identified preferred areas of return, with Kayin State being the most common area, followed by Bago, Yangon, Kayah, Shan, Rakhine, Ayeyarwady, and Mandalay.⁵⁶

Return and Education

While the Voluntary Repatriation had the support of both governments, refugee community leaders themselves have expressed concerns on their role in the process, and involvement in planning and preparedness activities.⁵⁷ More broadly, and with an estimated 12,000 having returned independently,⁵⁸ concerns around the lack of a comprehensive government policy for returnees, the sequencing and integrating of refugee issues into the political dialogue, land allocation and tenure issues, access to basic services, livelihoods and food security, physical safety and security, and civil documentation all continue to dominate discussions on refugee return and sustainable reintegration into already impoverished areas.⁵⁹ The KRC, KNU and refugee stakeholders maintain the position that sufficient progress has not been made, and that conditions remain unsuitable for return, yet simultaneously agree that preparations for return are necessary in order to progress toward successful integration.⁶⁰ Cautious confidence amongst refugee leadership in return planning pro-

⁵²UNHCR (2014).

⁵³The three potential modes of return/repatriation are identified as spontaneous, facilitated and promoted. See UNHCR (2017c) for benchmarks.

⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵Assistance to those participating in the first voluntary repatriation was provided by the RTG, GoUM, UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Programme (WFP)

⁵⁶UNHCR (2017).

⁵⁷TBC (2016) p.10

⁵⁸Ibid

⁵⁹See TBC (2012). 59% of households were reported as impoverished based on a cross-sector assessment of food security, health, education and protection indicators.

⁶⁰Meeting between the RTG, UNHCR and Education NGOs and CBOs working in Thailand (Feb. 2017) Summary Report

cesses through community-driven return preparations is apparent however; with the formation of return committees, the development of return guidelines and exploratory cross-border outreach. A series of ‘go and see’ visits initiated through the Karen Refugee Committee and camp management enabled refugee leadership to develop group return plans via cross-border visits, consultation with home communities and surveys on access to natural resources, livelihoods, social services and protection. In education, having built on the pilot experience of transitioning the post-secondary English Immersion Program (EIP) from Umpiem Mai camp to Kayin State, the KRC-EE’s Department of Higher Education (DHE) has facilitated a strategic transition planning process to explore the future of nine camp-based post-secondary schools in areas of return. Through the 2015-2016 transition planning exercise, college principals and/or school committee members engaged with communities in Myanmar to identify potential return sites, to define current conditions on the ground, to build strategic relationships with administrative and military bodies, to identify changes in the camps and/or Southeast Myanmar which would initiate relocation of the programs, and to plot specific actions required before, during, and after relocation. While camp-based post-secondary schools cautiously inch forward with transition plans, the process itself has illuminated a range of considerations around security, transportation of materials, coordination constraints, community awareness, human resources capacity and requirements, technical capacity and requirements, infrastructural deficits and funding commitments, which provide useful field-level input for ongoing return dialogues around the successful transition of students in basic education.⁶¹

With the support of CCSDPT agency members, and in response to the education planning and reforms in Myanmar, since 2012 education refugee stakeholders have engaged in a process of dialogue around the key issues facing refugee children upon a potential return through the Refugee Education Stakeholders Group quarterly platform. The following key issues, presented below in Annex 1 were identified as most pertinent, regardless of the type of school a child returns to: policy engagement, student recognition, teacher recognition, language, and curriculum. These are discussed in more detail throughout subsequent sections of the report.

Policy Engagement

Building upon the 2008 Myanmar Constitution and the National Education Law (amend. 2015) and recognizing the right of all Myanmar citizens to free, compulsory education at the primary level, in May 2015 at the World Education Forum in Incheon, the GoUM, in the company of leaders and practitioners from around the globe, affirmed commitments toward addressing inequalities, “including internally displaced persons and refugees,” and to “making the necessary changes in education policies”⁶² in respect of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four which pertains to access to education. The commitments set forth by the GoUM in Incheon echo general sentiments around reform planning in Myanmar, such as the transformational shifts expected as a result of the NESP.⁶³ While Myanmar’s commitments toward this global agenda are encouraging and present promise toward ensuring that no child is left behind, the need for the development of national-level policy to support access to education for returnee students and their integration has been

⁶¹See KRC-EE (2016)

⁶²Education 2030 Incheon Declaration for Education and Framework for Action Preamble, 7: Inclusion and Equity

⁶³See Myanmar MoE (2016), Chapter 3 for an overview of the transformational shifts which underpin reform

often documented and highlighted.⁶⁴ The limited extent to which refugee agencies responsible for education in the refugee camps delivery were formally or adequately engaged in the reform planning process is reflected in a single reference to refugee in the NESP.⁶⁵ The lack of formal engagement is indicative of the range of institutional and structural barriers associated with refugee and more broad ethnic inclusion in national education policy, including representation capacity, technical and decision-making capacity, a fast-paced reform process, logistical and financial constraints, alongside wider political constraints associated with the recognition of ethnic service providers and the ongoing peace process as discussed earlier. For education, the sequencing and alignment of steps on the reconciliation and development roadmaps in Myanmar has posed challenges for policy engagement, particularly in the case of engagement of refugee and ethnic providers. Given that a process of fast-paced legislative and education reform began prior to the initiation of the political dialogue, and thus prior to any political discussion on engagement with ethnic service providers, the potential for the NESP to act as a transformative tool in promoting reconciliation through education was limited. Therefore the lack of recognition of refugee or ethnic service providers by the Myanmar government resulted in the neglect of the complex needs of refugee children in reform planning. In this vein, the assertion that “reforms cannot wait until all conflicts are resolved, rather the education sector must become better adapted to uncertain political and security

situations”⁶⁶ is pertinent, alongside recommendations for the MoE to allow space for the contributions of other actors.⁶⁷ While the development of a partnership coordination mechanism to facilitate the active participation of different service providers in basic education is outlined⁶⁸ in the NESP and had presented much potential, such a mechanism has not engaged ethnic or refugee providers to date.

Early reforms and MoE restructuring had sought to decentralize aspects of decision-making, for example in teacher deployment and budget management, however as the NESP notes there is “a need to further clarify the authority and roles and responsibilities of these local governments so that they can play a more active role in expanding access to essential basic services.”⁶⁹ Despite the centralized nature of education and the reform⁷⁰ and the inability for ethnic providers to engage in national policy education planning, there has been increased dialogue between state-level (regional) education departments and ethnic education providers in Kayin, Mon, and Kayah, which has presented potential for discussions around refugee student return, issues of enrollment, language, and teacher deployment. Through coordination meetings, dialogue around key issues sought to identify, agree upon and implement field-level collaborative solutions with a view toward ‘feeding-up’ examples of joint practices to the national level.

In Kayin and Kayah, for example, in an effort to address the lack of policy around

⁶⁴For example see *Annexes for Education Stakeholders Convergence Plan (2014)*, *Education Stakeholders Policy Paper on Student Transition (2015)* or the *Education Stakeholders Policy Paper on MTB-MLE (2016)*

⁶⁵Myanmar MoE (2016), p. 144

⁶⁶See Jolliffe and Mears (2016)

⁶⁷See Jolliffe and Mears (2016)

⁶⁸National Education Sector Plan, *Sub-sector report No.3, Access, Quality and Inclusion*, July 2015, p.42

⁶⁹Myanmar MoE (2016), p. 10

⁷⁰Education is overseen by the state Minister for Social Affairs, as there is no state/region level education minister position

school enrollment and transition across systems, engagement by the KED and KnED with local government authorities has resulted in ‘gentlemen’s agreements’ that enable students to enter GoUM schools with a KRC-EE/KED/KnED school transfer certificate. However, in practice while there has been increased engagement and sharing, it has been simultaneously hampered by a lack of official documented endorsement of agreements, a lack of follow-up and monitoring on the implementation of agreed upon directives at the field-level, subsequent monitoring to establish whether potentially successful models of collaboration actually reach the national level for discussion/analysis as well as a continuing lack of clarity around decision-making capacity on specific issues (for example refugee teacher accreditation) and gaps in communication capacity between state (regional) and national level. This is discussed in more detail in the analysis.

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Methodology

Process

The information in this report was obtained through primary data collection and analysis using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and utilizing existing documents on refugee return and on education services in the refugee camps as well as in areas of potential return. Local organizations, in particular the KRC, the KRC-EE, the KED, and the Karenni Refugee Committee (KnRC) have played a key role in supporting the design and implementation of this research. These organizations have provided input at different stages of the research, including: defining the scope of the research and developing the methodology; recruiting local Research Assistants to assist with data collection; sharing information about the project with local authorities and arranging consultations; contributing relevant information and data; and/or providing input to the analysis of research findings and recommendations. Additionally, a number of international agencies involved in the provision of education and other services to refugee communities have shared data and information relevant to the issues of refugee return and education services for refugees returning/integrating into Myanmar. These various

sources of information and data sets have been used to contextualize and add depth to the analysis of the qualitative findings of the field research.

As further detailed below, qualitative data collection was conducted with key education-related stakeholders; including parents, students, school teachers and principals, school committee members, local education and community authorities, EAGs, international agencies, and government departments. In total, the research team conducted interviews and FGDs with 410 research participants. Prior to commencing the field research, data collectors were trained in research ethics, data management and ensuring stakeholder confidentiality. Participation in this research project was entirely voluntary and the privacy and confidentiality of all research participants was protected during and after the research, with no names or identifying features of individuals being included in this report.

Research Sites and Participants

Research sites were selected in consultation with the KRC, KRC-EE, KED, and KnRC. Field research was conducted in: refugee

camps and urban centers in Thailand; schools and communities in Kayin State where there are IDPs; and in schools, communities and urban centers further afield in Myanmar. The research team conducted primary data collection in four of the refugee camps in Thailand: Mae La, Mae Ra Ma Luang, Nu Po, and Ban Mae Surin. These four camps were chosen based on the presence of large refugee populations, specific characteristics of the refugee populations, such as ethnicity and religion, as well as the origins of and likely areas of return in Myanmar for refugees currently living in these camps. In the final selection of refugee camp research sites, considerations also included time and budgetary constraints as well as practicalities of access and availability in line with the academic year cycle.

The research team conducted primary data collection in a number of key areas of likely refugee return in Myanmar. These different research sites were chosen based on the likelihood of refugee return to these areas, previous return of refugees to these areas, specific characteristics of the site (e.g. urban versus rural, administrative centers, etc.), the presence of relevant stakeholders and service providers, as well as the nature of education service provision in these areas, for example villages in Kayin State as well as Yangon, which are likely or existing areas of refugee return. In addition, primary data collection was conducted in Tak Province, Mae Hong Son Province, and Bangkok in Thailand, as well as in key centers in Kayin State and Kayah State in Myanmar, since these sites enabled the team to conduct 47 interviews with key stakeholder informants.

In recruiting research participants, the research team endeavored to reach individuals and communities with diverse experiences and potentially different perspectives in relation to refugee return as well as

education systems in Thailand or Myanmar. Sixty-one structured FGDs and interviews were conducted with 363 parents, students, school staff and principals, school committee members, and local education and community authorities. Research participants were selected based on criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling frequently used in qualitative research and meaning that research participants were selected based on predetermined criteria, including profession, ethnicity, religion, and experiences of education. Additionally, research participants were recruited by drawing on existing networks of World Education and local partner organizations.

The research team conducted FGDs with 33 students, including: students who were born and educated in the camps and have never lived or studied in Myanmar; refugee students who participated in the program of voluntary repatriation but then returned to Thailand to finish their education in the camps; students who were originally living and studying in the camps but then went to live and study in Myanmar; and students from diverse areas in Myanmar who had never lived or studied in Thailand and who had always lived and studied in Southeast Myanmar. Key informant interviews were conducted with representatives of ethnic education service providers, other ethnic service providers, ethnic armed organizations, non-government organizations, and UN agencies in Myanmar and Thailand, as well as with representatives of education-related and other key government departments in Thailand. Key informants were selected on the basis that these actors work for organizations and agencies which are key stakeholders in refugee return and/or in the provision of education services to communities in the camps and/or in areas of likely refugee return within Southeast Myanmar.

Research Limitations

Due to the nature of the research project and practicalities of access, a number of limitations need to be highlighted. For one, the field research was conducted primarily in Kayin State. Effort has therefore been made in the analysis to reflect the nuances and differences of the various contexts within which research was conducted and where children may return.

A potential source of bias could stem from the recruitment of specific research participants in the different research sites. Additionally, there may have been a certain degree of self-selection, despite employing criterion sampling, with those agreeing to take part in the research perhaps already being more engaged in issues around refugee return and/or education. To counteract this, in analyzing the information gathered through this research, the research team sought to triangulate findings by comparing information from different sources and types of participants. However, perspectives on refugee return and on education systems in the camps and in Myanmar are diverse, and while this report does not claim to represent all opinions, the research team has taken steps to seek out the most diverse experience within the confines of the project.

It was not possible within the timeframe to collect information through interviews with state- or national-level representatives of the GoUM. Due to the scope and focus of the research project, the research team ad-

opted a localized approach in selecting key informants in Myanmar, and therefore prioritizing local actors. Key informants were selected based on their role in refugee return preparations, refugee education service provision, and service provision in these areas of Southeast Myanmar. The perspectives of government service providers were sought however through the participation of principals and teachers at a sample of MoE and mixed MoE/KED schools in potential areas of return in order to understand situations where refugee students are returning to areas under GoUM administration and/or where education services are provided by the government.

Finally, the political sensitivities associated with the issue of refugee return are noted, and that a number of potential participants declined participation in the research or to respond to specific questions. Some participants also seemed uncomfortable with expressing their own opinions on these issues, and deferred instead to the leadership in their respective communities. The research team noted varying levels of willingness and openness among agencies involved in refugee return or the provision of education services. Finally, discussions and activities around refugee return are dynamic and ongoing. The information in this report represents the state of affairs at the time of publication and is intended as a ‘snapshot’ of current activities and opinions concerning the dynamics of refugee return and the education needs of and priorities for refugees returning/integrating into Myanmar.

Findings, Discussion & Analysis

Attitudes Regarding Return

Key Findings:

- » While the majority of refugees expressed a desire to return to their area of origin, there is diversity in the plans of refugees, which are influenced by age, level of education and training, prior experience living in Myanmar, material and personal connections in Myanmar, and economic situation. This may lead some refugees to seek out new areas to reside upon return, namely urban areas for those with greater opportunity to do so.
- » The peace process heavily influences return decision-making and instability contributes to community members' hesitancy in considering return, as well as concerns among leadership about promoting return. This was consistent across sampled populations in all camps.
- » Local ethnic leaders and providers are trusted sources of guidance on return and their locally based structures

serve as valuable mechanisms for the gathering and dissemination of information and case studies. Given their responsibilities in administering programming, engaging in the peace process and acting as advocacy representatives, they have conflicting priorities and suffer from inadequate resourcing.

Readiness and Concerns

“The peace they are trying now is unguaranteed peace. What if the refugee students return and the peace falls apart? I think the education situation will get worse if that happens again. Even though they are trying for peace, there are still civil wars in Kachin State and children are losing opportunities for education.”

-Religious leader, Muslim refugee community, Nu Po Refugee Camp

Overwhelmingly, refugee parents, education personnel and leadership expressed that they are not ready to return and would not do so until the situation in Myanmar improved. Specifically, respondents cited as key prerequisites for return: the absence of conflict, agreements and clarity around GoUM and EAG governance, roles and responsibility in areas of return, access to services and resources in areas of return, and acceptance among communities in the Southeast upon return. The hesitancy among refugee communities to develop and/or share plans for return was echoed by others who have conducted FGDs with refugee communities related to repatriation in recent years.

A lack of trust in the peace process and concerns for its impact on education were widespread in discussions with parents and refugee community leaders, and were seen to play a significant role in influencing return decision-making, with many stating that return hinged entirely on the stability of ceasefires and peace within the country. Respondents expressed a lack of clarity around the current state of the peace process, alongside a lack of trust in its stability moving forward. As such, communities deferred to ethnic leadership engaged in these processes, specifically the KNU in the case of Karen respondents, when discussing whether and when they would potentially return to Myanmar, and entrusting planning and decision making to local political and ethnic bodies. A number of stakeholders echoed this sentiment, citing the need for greater local inclusion and representation in planning, with local entities commenting on their limited participation in the process to date. The dependency on ethnic leadership to lead decision making was recognized by wider informants alongside the need for transparent and accountable leadership in locally-led

group return initiatives in order to negate risks of exploitation of refugees, leading to unsafe and unsustainable return.

Alongside this, concerns were expressed about the capacity requirements for ethnic bodies to prioritize return planning, given the demands of representation in an evolving context, engaging in national, regional, and local level advocacy efforts, and administering day-to-day programming activity. Specifically, in the case of refugee education service providers, who are likely to face greater competing priorities moving forward, there were calls for continued encouragement and resourcing support for current programming and administration of refugee education, along with similar support for the resourcing of return planning, preparation and engagement.

“Even though the bird is eating the fruit of the tree, it has to be afraid of the people who will shoot it. Likewise, even though we live in what people call peace, we are afraid of those who will shoot us. We are not sure whether it is a really peaceful situation or not. Let alone talk about refugees coming back, we are even worried to stay here (in Karen State).”

-Village Leader, Cho K'Lee, Kayin State

Among community members in the Southeast, similar concerns regarding the stability of the peace process were shared. Lack of trust in the ceasefire, and in the peace process led some respondents to state that now is not the time for return. KNU district-level education personnel echoed



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these concerns, citing challenges associated with engaging in the peace process and preparing for returnees simultaneously. It is clear that ethnic leadership face conflicting priorities on both sides of the border, and may as a result face challenges in effectively preparing for refugee return.

Distinct Populations and Attitudes

“We do not want to stay here for a long time because this is not our country. We want to return if our country is really peaceful.”

-Ration Leader, Nu Po Refugee Camp

While the majority of respondents stated that they were not prepared to return at present, with many demonstrating hesitancy to discuss the topic, particularly in Mae La camp, discussions with some parents revealed that the majority intended to return to their area of origin, most of which lie within KNU administered areas. Simultaneously, among

those hailing from rural areas, there was an acknowledgement of a lack of services, namely secondary and post-secondary education, within these areas and the challenges this poses for family unity upon return. Within a broader sentiment of hesitancy to return, refugee community and education leaders, as well as (I)NGO stakeholders, anticipated that younger populations, particularly those who have grown up in the camp and have never lived in Myanmar, would be least likely to want to return to Myanmar. This sentiment was echoed by youth in the camps who shared various fears and reasons for not wanting to return, many of which centered on limited education and employment opportunities. An overwhelming majority of students expressed a strong desire to pursue a recognized higher education, as well as expressing concerns about discrimination and security, with an acknowledgement among camp respondents, as well as NGO and UN stakeholders, that young populations, particularly those born in the camp, would be less likely to return to their parents' areas of origin. With many youth benefiting from increased access to post-secondary education and vocational training opportunities as a result of residing in the camp, and with many having gained experience working as teachers, health workers or in junior management positions, they are thus better prepared for life in urban areas, and more qualified for diverse employment opportunities. It was noted that given these different experiences of education and training, and that youth in the camp have not, for the most part, engaged in agricultural work and may not be accustomed to village life that return decision making may be impacted, with an expectation that younger populations would seek to move to urban areas for greater education and employment opportunities, perhaps through a secondary internal migration wave.

A second key factor contributing to differentiation in decision making is the financial status of refugee families and individuals, personal and financial connections within Myanmar, such as land and housing ownership, having family ties for support or associated social capital, and the ability to be self-sufficient upon return. Parents within Ban Mae Surin additionally discussed the influence that wealth and personal connections have on the selection of areas of return, with refugees who could afford it more likely to move to urban areas, while those lacking the financial means or personal connections more likely to return to their areas of origin in rural or remote ethnic administered areas. As such, the role of economic factors and social capital in reintegration and decision-making on areas of return is noted here.

Responsiveness from Host Communities

Among those communities in Myanmar included in this study, the majority were welcoming to the prospect of former refugees arriving to their area. In particular respondents cited strengths of the camp education system, and felt that the arrival of former refugees would benefit the communities by introducing well-educated individuals who could contribute to community development. Some also felt as though the return of refugees into their communities, and Myanmar as a whole, would result in increased external support, which would contribute positively to development. For example, one school committee member in a mixed-administration area stated "there would be more opportunities for the Myanmar government with the return of refugees because (international) support would come to refugees through the government."

Within the Lay Kay Kaw resettlement area in Kayin State, the arrival of returnees and

the increasing diversity of residents were cited as having brought greater harmony to the area. However, and simultaneously, concerns were expressed about returnees, previously accustomed to living in homogenous communities, threatening community cohesion through nationalistic sentiment, alongside fears of increasing inter-ethnic divisions within communities. In a mixed-administration area of Kayin State, teachers noted increased militarization of the community in response to return and a growing population, and presented fears for future stability, highlighting the impact that security and peace have on attitudes towards returnee and their successful integration.

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Vulnerable Populations

Ethnic and Religious Minorities

Key Findings:

- » Vulnerable populations – religious minorities, out-of-school youth, and people with disabilities - face unique challenges that influence return decision making and successful integration in communities, given the current socio-political context in Myanmar and lack of infrastructure in areas of return.
- » Muslim populations fear for safety upon return with all of those sampled in this study reporting that they do not see the possibility of a secure return. The majority were prepared to stay in Thailand indefinitely, and called for the need to investigate durable solutions for this.
- » School-age children with disabilities are likely to face significant challenges in returning to Myanmar, both during the journey and afterward. Within potential host communities in Southeast Myanmar, there is a lack of infrastructure and human resource capacity to support students with disabilities.

- » Out-of-school children, children and youth at risk of dropping out, and adults who have not completed their education are at risk of exploitation during and after transition to Myanmar. There is a lack of programming to ensure the safety of these populations and prepare them for employment in areas of return. There is a need to pilot and/or scale-up pre-departure and post-arrival programming to ensure sustainable integration of children, youth and adults.

Ethnic and Religious Minorities

“Even when I was in grade nine in Myanmar, there was religious discrimination. There was unfairness toward our education. And there were fewer job opportunities. Even graduated (Muslim) people have to work in basic jobs. For the religious conflict situation right now, I don’t dare to think about going back (to Myanmar) as a Muslim.”



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Things won't be fine for us in terms of education, social life, economics, and so on. For the future of our children, we don't want them to be like us."

– Refugee parent of school-age child from Muslim refugee community, Mae La Refugee Camp

Discussions with leaders and members of the Muslim refugee community revealed a strong disinterest in return, with the majority citing that they see no possibility of a safe return given the current socio-political state within Myanmar, many specifically referencing tension and conflict in Rakhine State. Unlike other ethnic groups, who shared concerns over security but noted increasing steps toward peace in their respective communities, respondents from the Muslim community expressed growing fears of returning to Myanmar and a strong desire to stay in Thailand permanently. In relation to these fears, one religious leader from the Muslim refugee community stated, "If we are forced to return to Burma, we will not return and we are better off dying here. As a personal feeling, if I am asked whether go back or stay in the jail in

Thailand, I would rather stay in jail or die here. If we get the chance to go to a third country, we would go. If not, we would move into Thailand if the authorities allow us to stay and access Thai education for our children.” The sentiment puts forward an additional need to address, and prepare for likelihoods of migration, particularly amongst the Muslim community, into areas within Thailand with existing migrant populations, for example Mae Sot. Within the Southeast, particularly in rural and ethnically homogenous areas, responses echoed concerns facing the Muslim community in a successful integration, highlighting, the need for nuanced attention to be provided for vulnerable and minority groups in the context of return.

Children with Disabilities

“If we return to Myanmar with our children with disabilities, they wouldn’t be able to do anything. Parents would have to care for them and it would be difficult for parents as well. We (refugees) would be happy to receive support from organizations for people with disabilities. We would be happy to return and live in Myanmar if support, help and advice is provided. This would be one of the strengths (of return assistance).”

-Karen refugee parent of school age child, Mae Ra Ma Luang Refugee Camp

Among refugee community members, as well as NGO and CSO stakeholders working within the camps, there was a general concern regarding a lack of services, including infrastructure and human resource capacity, to address the needs of disabled children and students returning to Myanmar. Former refugee students now living in Myanmar commented on the availability of support both within and outside of schools in the refugee camps for children with disabilities. Respondents currently working within refugee camps to support disabled populations cited an expectation that families with disabled children would be most reluctant to return to Myanmar due to a lack of services there, demonstrated by the fact that individuals living with disabilities in the Southeast continue to enter the camps to seek out these services.

Correspondingly, school principals, community leaders, and education personnel from both ethnic- and mixed-administration areas acknowledged the lack of services within their communities, and the need for greater attention to the needs of disabled children. In recognition of the need to tackle these issues, the government has acknowledged that nearly half of those living with a disability have never attended school as a result of numerous barriers including limited infrastructure, a lack of teachers with required expertise, and insufficient learning materials tailored to the needs of students.⁷¹ In ethnic areas in Kayin State, respondents cited school leadership as well as the KNU as responsible for leading in these efforts, while the Karen Women’s Organization emphasized the need for stakeholders to include special education within wider education planning and reform, and to firstly support existing community efforts, rather than duplicat-

⁷¹Myanmar MoE (2016), p. 49

ing or replacing them. Within the Karenni refugee community, parents of children with disabilities, as well the KnRC and KnED expressed similar concerns about a lack of services in Kayah State. This was further echoed by international respondents active in Loikaw, who acknowledged a rise in programming in the Southeast to address the needs of disabled individuals, but simultaneously cited a need for concentrated scale-up in order to meet the demand of returning populations.

Out-of-School Youth

“If out-of-school children from the camp return, they would have to work. I think that there should be training available that persuades and encourages children and youth to be interested in their studies to go back to school.”

-Karen refugee parent of school age children, Day Buh Noh, Karen State

When asked, nearly all parents and education personnel within the refugee community expressed concerns about support available for children and youth currently out of school, putting forward many questions about access to education in the Southeast and concerns about increases in children and youth vulnerability to risks such as illegal employment, trafficking, and recruitment into armed groups. Recognizing the lack of awareness of livelihood opportunities and in-demand skills in the Southeast, as well as potential competition for employment, refugee respondents cited additional concerns for adults who had not completed their education. The work of organizations such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and Right to Play within the refugee camps was cited specifically as being highly beneficial to providing skill development opportunities, building confidence of youth and adults, and ensuring that risks to those out of work and school are minimized. There was a call for similar programs to be established and scaled-up within areas of return to support refugee communities as they transition and reduce risks to children and youth.

Coordination

Key Findings:

- » There is a need to develop and strengthen coordination mechanisms to increase cross-sector, cross-border and cross-level cooperation and information sharing, recognizing the role of NGOs as trusted intermediaries between the UN/governments and CSOs/communities. This will ensure trusted local leadership is included, clarify the roles and responsibilities of different bodies, avoiding confusion and inefficiency.
- » Community leaders in Southeast Myanmar are overwhelmingly waiting for more return to take place until they engage in preparing and implementing response plans.
- » There is a lack of sector-specific information about areas of return and previous returnee experiences available for refugees and stakeholders involved in refugee return. There is limited/no community-driven documentation (case-studies) of previous return experiences. This limits the ability of refugees to make informed decisions about return based on trusted sources, and of leaders and service providers to effectively support returnees before and after their transition.
- » Similarly, there is a lack of data on previous returns and lessons learned about refugee interests, including demand for location and education preference, as well as host community resources, such as housing and schools. This minimizes the ability of local communities to identify scale-up needs, of service providers to support host communities, and of returnees to effectively select areas of return and prepare for integration.
- » Community-led convergence efforts build understanding and trust through education, and support efforts in the recognition of ethnic and refugee education systems. Teacher exchanges, go-and-see visits, joint return committees, and the documentation of prior learning offer valuable and trusted information to support refugees and communities for return and integration.

- » There is a lack of consistent external support for planning and response to returning refugees in areas of return.

Engagement and Inclusion

“We don’t want to return into an uncertain future. I would like to see our people return in dignity.”

-Karen Refugee Committee-Education Entity (KRC-EE) staff member

Discussions with refugee populations regarding repatriation are sensitive and challenging due to a lack of awareness among refugees of existing and emerging return plans, and a lack of trust in how their responses will be used in line with these plans. This is exacerbated by reductions in donor funding into the camps in recent years and increasing planning and implementation for refugee return, which contribute to heightened feelings of insecurity among refugee populations. Furthermore, a lack of sector specific information, including that which pertains to access to land, essential services and livelihood opportunities in Southeast Myanmar was seen to influence attitudes regarding return.

Information sharing within the camps is being carried out by the UNHCR through their Voluntary Repatriation Centers, which provide information on relocation sites and services available, as well as informally through local leadership as well as more formally by Camp Information Teams, supported by ethnic and camp leadership. When asked about mechanisms for accessing information regarding return, refugee respondents mentioned monthly camp meetings wherein information was disseminated through local camp leadership, as well as word of mouth, as being the most relied upon means of accessing information

about return. Respondents also mentioned the UNHCR services available; however, few reported utilizing these systems as a result of uncertainty about how engagement with these systems might impact their future ability to remain in the camp. As such, the majority of refugee parents had little concrete knowledge of previous returnee experiences, the education situation in areas of return, which highlights significant gaps in access to information in camps, and opportunities for strengthened information sharing via local leadership.

Simultaneously, reports of a lack of engagement by local leadership were voiced, specifically with regard to the first Voluntary Repatriation process in late 2016. This was acknowledged by UNHCR, who cited limitations on the agency’s ability to share information about the Voluntary Repatriation process within the camps, due to the fact that return is being facilitated, rather than promoted. Concerns were simultaneously voiced that word of mouth information coming from other sources, has resulted in misinformation, lack of trust, and unrealistic expectations among refugee communities. There are multiple potential sources of information at the camp level, however, rather than resulting in greater awareness among camp residents, this appears to have created confusion about where to access reliable information and a lack of trust in particular bodies and mechanisms. Among local refugee stakeholders this was seen to have contributed to a lack of clarity among refugee populations about the roles of each body and what information was most, or at all, reliable.

With camp populations looking predominantly to ethnic leadership for guidance on return, pre-existing structures, such as the Camp Management Committee, act as valuable platforms for trusted informa-

tion sharing. Throughout the study, these were identified by ethnic leadership, and wider NGO stakeholders as being the most viable form of information sharing at the camp level. Recently established structures, such as Return Committees, as well as community-driven mechanisms to prepare for the transitioning of education systems, personnel and students, were deemed most likely to be the most trusted mechanisms for informing discussions of return. It was recommended that there be greater collaboration with local entities to disseminate information, and in order to ensure that refugees are able to make informed decisions reflective of their personal interests and needs. The progress made in previous 'go and see visits' in establishing cross-border relationships and trust, was particularly emphasized here, as an example of a model to support local structures in gathering and disseminating village-level information to inform return decision making.

KRC-EE



Data Collection and Information Dissemination

“There is a gap in the amount and detail of information being shared with camp residents about school facilities available in Myanmar. There is also a gap in the detail of this information within the UN.”

-UNHCR Thailand staff member

For service providers at the NGO level, as well as ethnic leaders aiming to inform potential returnees, a lack of sector-specific information relating to the availability of schools, clinics and livelihood opportunities in areas of return was reported, with the KRC noting that there is a need for further, and specifically sector-specific information-gathering, including for example cross-border trips to map services available in the Southeast. Among youth in the camp there was a notable gap in information about options for education and employment within areas of return. Youth interviewed in Ban Mae Surin echoed this, stating that they were unsure about whether it was safe to return, where they should consider returning to, what curriculum and schools were available in Myanmar, and how to enroll in school. Similarly, youth from Nu Po camp who had participated in the 2016 Voluntary Repatriation and who subsequently returned to Nu Po to complete their academic year cycle, called for more information to be shared with returnees and students, prior to return.

With refugees looking within their own communities for information, the documentation and dissemination of case studies of previously returned refugees could prove to

be a valuable form of sector specific information and real-life experiences of return, aiding in effective preparatory measures. Within an education lens, this could include documenting the experiences of children transitioning into community, as well as government schools, and the opportunities and barriers faced during enrollment and attendance at school. While Return Committees and/or refugee leadership are well placed to gather real-life case studies in order to paint a picture of school-life in Southeast Myanmar for future returnees, in collaboration with ethnic counterparts in the Southeast, given competing priorities, and limited resources among these groups, solutions for how this is administered must be carefully considered.

“One of the problems is (student) tracking and the quality and verification of data. Another issue is the difficulty to track students in the context of return.”

-Right to Play Thailand staff member

Stakeholders at the UN, NGO, and ethnic leadership level interviewed in this study echoed one another in acknowledging strong examples of community-driven return planning. At the refugee education and camp leadership level, informants spoke of plans they have made to prepare for return, including the development of Return Committees, the completion of ‘go and see’ visits, the development of school transition plans, and the production and distribution of teacher portfolios and student transfer certificates. There is evidence of community level leadership capacity to conduct cross-border coordination, to gather information about potential areas of return, and to prepare communities for transitioning. However, while education stakeholders in the camps and in ethnic

areas of Myanmar are attempting to track the transition of students to better understand demand for services, there remain resource constraints to effectively conduct the activities, and consequently to plan for education needs and ensure that children do not experience gaps in their education. In all cases, community led transition efforts would benefit from targeted financial support, as well as increased coordination with groups on the other side of the border with access to this information.

Both NGO and CSO stakeholders cited that while refugee and ethnic leadership had prioritized the development of transfer guidelines to assist children in transitioning from camp to community schools, there is a lack of understanding among refugee parents and students as to the value of gathering transfer documents which enable student movement to be recorded and tracked. Hesitancies to request transfer certificates were additionally reported, due to fears that such requests would negatively impact on their ability to stay in the camp. This was reported as contributing to inconsistent and unreliable data in early attempts to track the distribution of certificates and movement of students. In order to address these gaps, stakeholders called for greater cross-border, cross-sector and cross-level coordination of groups between and across CBO, NGO, UN, and government level in return planning in order to develop evidence-driven responses, ensure the representation of communities on both sides of the border, and to streamline efforts to best utilize resources.

Host Community Planning

At present, given the small number of large-scale group returns into concentrated areas to date, many community leaders in the Southeast stated that they prefer to observe the situation further before developing wider re-integration plans.

Simultaneously, many communities reported dealing with return situations without any formal guidance, such as when students return to schools without transfer certificates or transcripts. While some communities had an awareness of mechanisms such as the Return Committees, and had attended community meetings to discuss refugee return, local leadership and education personnel emphasized the need for greater information-sharing between government, UN and NGO stakeholders, refugee leadership and community leadership in order to increase awareness among community leaders of the return plans of refugee populations.

“Let’s say the Myanmar government comes and builds houses for the villagers (and returnees). They will take advantage of the situation and will build factories and water dams in this place. As a result, there would be many side effects and we would have fewer opportunities to work and to live. For us, we only know farming and how to do hand-crafts. Even if they come and build factories, we won’t be qualified and won’t have any job opportunities related to the projects.”

*-Mixed-administration (GoUM – KED)
School Committee member, Kyainseikkyi
Township, Karen State*

In nearly all cases, community members commented on the lack of GoUM engagement in service provision at the local level in ethnic areas in support of both existing and returning populations. More broadly, community members expressed distrust

in government regarding returnee support provision, and expressed concerns that government-built settlements represented attempts to claim territory and develop natural resources rather than to fulfill its mandates in the provision of equitable access.

In a few instances, education personnel called on the government to take responsibility for the financial resourcing of services, to decrease the pressure being put on local community leadership as a result of returnees, with one school principal stating, “Returning refugees would be a burden for us because we will have to take responsibility for refugees. Host communities will have difficulties to help them.” Calls for government support were most common in urban and mixed-administration areas and schools and when discussing government service provision, such as access to identification (ID) and household

registration. A teacher from a private high school that has accepted returnees in Hpa’an explained the school’s efforts in obtaining civil documentation for returnee students, and described a slow challenging process. Similarly, teachers from government schools in other areas expressed a lack of clarity around who is responsible for providing identification and documentation for returnees.

With regard to solutions, a responding agency in Loikaw spoke specifically of a UNHCR coordination model of identifying support needs and subsequently issuing referrals to relevant NGOs working in the area, to respond accordingly and in line with their area of expertise. This model of cross-level, sector and border coordination represents a potential model for scale-up in order to anticipate and address the needs of returnees and host communities.

Issues in Education

Key Findings:

- » The majority of refugee families included in this study prefer ethnic education systems, emphasizing for example mother tongue-based (MTB) education. These characteristics, as well as barriers to access in GoUM education systems, highlight a need for continued advocacy efforts for GoUM- recognition of the role of ethnic and refugee education actors in service provision.
- » The issue of language in education influences not only desires to return and decisions around where to return to, but determines when and whether children can integrate successfully in Myanmar.
- » While the majority of respondents identified ethnic education systems as their preferred choice upon return, there are a large number of students who can be expected to enter GoUM schools due to their age and area of return. There is a need for documented policy and procedures to support those children and youth that will be transferring into the GoUM system, and to address the challenges that they may face. At present, these remain inconsistent and unclear despite the existence of local-level agreements. Without clear guidelines from central government, local government representatives and education personnel struggle to make decisions, resulting in for example students continuing to face difficulties in understanding requirements for transition from camp to schools in Myanmar.
- » There is a need to clarify and standardize entrance policies and procedures at GoUM schools to ensure that students are prepared and can enter school without difficulty.
- » There is a need to explore pre-departure and post-arrival school transition programs that ensure students can successfully enter and remain in new schools in Myanmar. This could include training in the language of instruction and curriculum content, as well as orientation to school culture and teaching styles.

- » Refugee teachers provide invaluable early education for refugee and ethnic students, particularly in the area of MTB education, however, there are limited or no opportunities for them to gain accredited skills and certifications in Myanmar
- » Refugee teachers present opportunities in addressing teacher shortages in Myanmar. Recognition of their skills will ensure employability upon return and greater likelihood of successful reintegration

Broad Preferences and Considerations

When considering educational options and expectations in the case of return, many respondents began by acknowledging the strengths of camp-based education structures. Education personnel, parents and students alike cited the opportunity to learn in mother tongue languages, access to courses including English language and ethnic histories, student-centered teaching styles, and pathways to vocational training opportunities as unique strengths of the camp education systems. Additionally, there was a value placed on post-secondary opportunities within the camps, which recognize prior learning of refugee students. Education service providers at the local and NGO level cited the greater level of donor investment in camp-based education structures as central to the rise of flexible pathways such as vocational training, special education and post-secondary opportunities in contrast to Southeast Myanmar. While these options are growing within Southeast Myanmar, they are still cited as being in need of vast scale-up to meet the demands of returning refugee populations.

When considering education systems within Myanmar, those within ethnic camp-based systems were most likely to prefer ethnic education systems within Myanmar, as opposed to state schooling. Specifically, parents within refugee communities cited the costs of transportation to reach GoUM schools and the cost of tuition, particularly for students preparing to take standard board and matriculation exams as major barriers to accessing state schools. The KnED, for example, cited that recognition was of most importance to parents within the camp, but that the costs associated with attending state schools acted as a significant barrier to pursuing this pathway. Both parents and students within the Karenni refugee community echoed a focus on certification, but expressed fears of losing their education system, alongside barriers to learning ethnic languages and histories in the same manner in the state system. As with planning for and leading return, refugee respondents overwhelmingly look to ethnic leadership to advocate for the recognition of refugee and ethnic education in order to ensure that returning refugee children have access to post-secondary options and employment opportunities. The KnED spoke at length of the efforts it has undertaken to document the experience of their teachers and the learning of their students in order to demonstrate the quality of their education system, with one Karenni parent stating, “The certificates of the schools in our camp should be accredited by the international education system so that our children can continue their studies in Thailand and Myanmar.” While efforts by ethnic leaders are noted, the diversity of the educational systems in the camps poses challenges for certification, alongside the lack of recognition of ethnic providers in education reform in Myanmar.

Language in Education

“The government needs to change the education policy to be able to ensure students from the camps can access education. They need to recognize student certificates and teacher accreditation and also change the education policy in order to welcome ethnic students by promoting mother tongue learning. Ethnic languages should be included in the education system.”

-Karen Women’s Organization

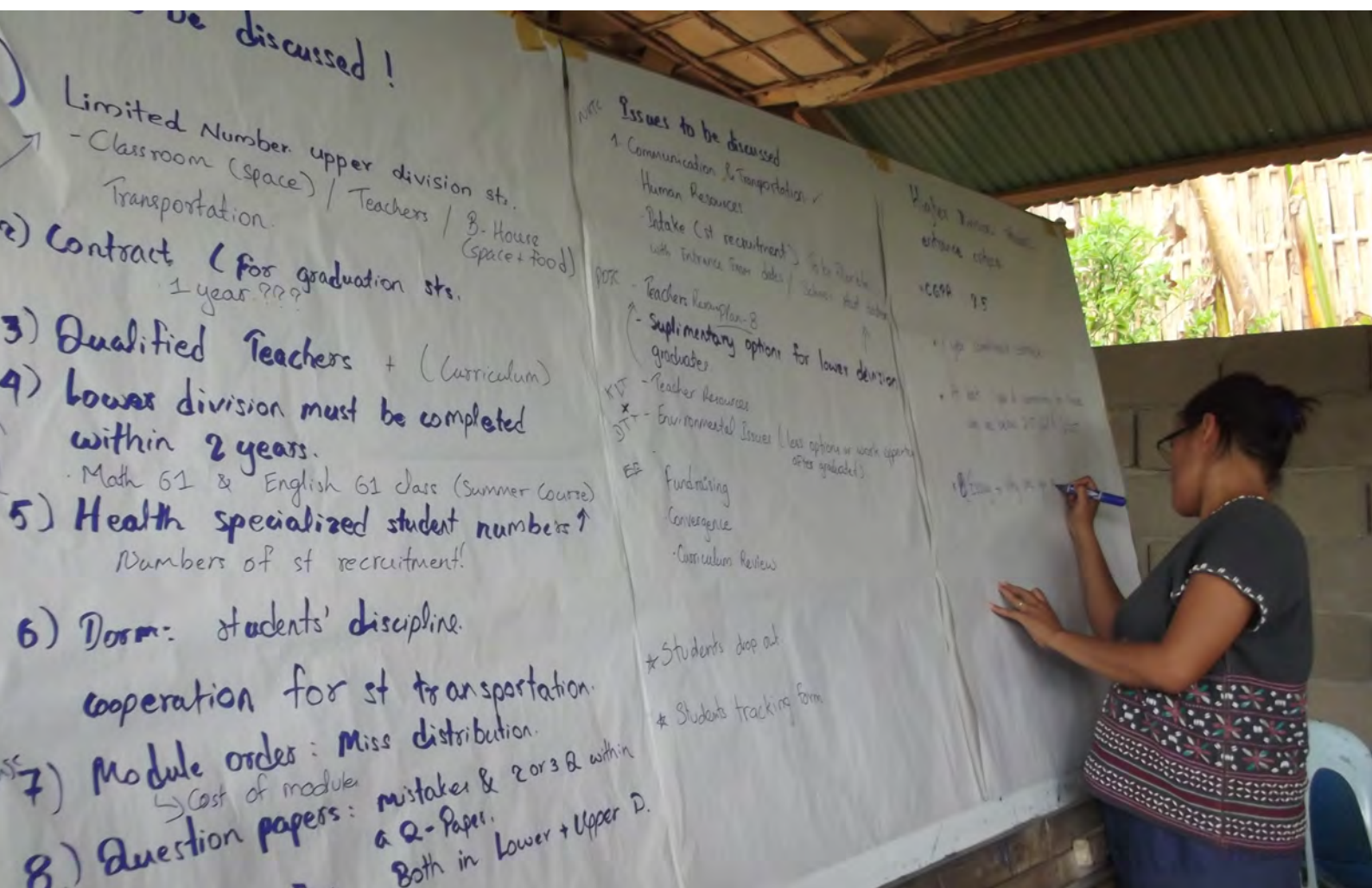
Mother tongue-based learning was cited as a key strength of the camp system across the study, and references to fears of the loss of language demonstrate the influence language considerations have on return. In contrast in the state system, Myanmar National Education law provides for the official language of oral and written instruction in all government schools to be the national language: Myanmar language, and states that “if there is a need, an ethnic language can be used alongside Myanmar language as a language of instruction at the basic education level.” At present, while national policy permits state or regional governments to implement the teaching of ethnic languages during school hours, the policy is implemented to varying de-

grees across different states and regions, and there remains a lack of clarity around the use of ethnic languages as languages of instruction, which promotes fear of loss of language in a return situation. In the camps, where mother tongue-based education is predominantly utilized, a study by Save the Children International found that mother tongue education is not only supporting students to read in their home language, but is additionally enabling them to read in a second language, chiefly Myanmar.⁷² In a situation where refugee children return to a state school in Myanmar, language in education has the potential to act as a significant barrier to successful reintegration, where children risk poor first language development, and make it difficult for children to understand content or improve the second language proficiency necessary for success.

Prior to the study, and reiterated further throughout the study, refugee education stakeholders highlighted the call for the Myanmar government to provide for policy that ensures that ethnic languages are supported and that children receive instruction in their mother tongue - see Annex Two below for a briefing paper produced by stakeholders in 2014 on mother tongue language and refugee learning.⁷³ While commitments to the teaching of ethnic languages are cited in the NESP, and progress has been demonstrated through efforts on the drafting of state-level language policy, challenges remain in implementation and policy, including clarity in the law, political

⁷²Save the Children (2014)

⁷³The Annex 2 paper was developed in 2014 by refugee and ethnic education providers as a result of workshops and dialogue on refugee return. It emphasizes the potential of an MTB-MLE system to Myanmar’s future, endorsing the benefits on the individual child, on social cohesion at the community level in a post-conflict society, on economic benefits and more broadly as reflective of the fundamental links between language, education and peace-building in an evolving Myanmar. Whilst acknowledging the challenges of implementing MTB-MLE, providers encouraged the MoE to “explore with local stakeholders the best evidence-based models for MTB-MLE in the Myanmar context” and to drive policy that “should aim for children to mainly receive curriculum and instruction in mother tongue for at least six years, with the gradual introduction and phasing in of a second language”



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go-ahead and decision-making, representation and coordination, technical capacities and the nuances of language planning in education.⁷⁴ For refugee children then, the issue of language in education influences not only desires to return and decisions around where to return to, but determines when and whether children can integrate successfully in Myanmar.

Recognition of Refugee Education and Student Transition

“Student integration into government schools would be easier if ethnic education departments, like the KED, reached official agreements with the government.”

-Principal, KRCEE-administered school, Mae Ra Ma Luang Refugee Camp

⁷⁴For example, see UNICEF/Meyers (2016) Introducing mother tongue-based education through early childhood in Myanmar presented at 5th International Conference on Language and Education: Sustainable Development through Multilingual Education, Bangkok

A central theme throughout discussions with education personnel in Southeast Myanmar was the need for recognition of refugee education, which sits within the broader issue of recognition of the role of ethnic education service providers in education service provision in Myanmar. Within ethnic areas this was deemed an essential component of sustainable integration of refugees into Myanmar. Many called for a reform of the GoUM education system in order to recognize ethnic education and enable students to gain recognition of their prior learning. Among those working within ethnic education systems, it was expected that returning students would experience a relatively smooth transition into ethnic administered schools. Local-level initiatives contributed to this expectation and in particular the collaboration between KED, KRC-EE, and KRC in 2016 for the development of procedures and policies to support the transition of children from refugee camp-based education systems to the community-schooling system under the KED. Through that collaboration, a Community Transitioning Guidebook was disseminated in seven camps and Karen State, containing useful information on documentation needed to enroll in community schools, alongside training for education personnel in the camps and in KED-schools. With complementary initiatives by the KED to strengthen its data collection processes, it is envisaged that enhanced data collation on returning refugee students will be obtained into the future, however for both KRC-EE and KED it was noted that resource limitations continue to hamper community-led initiatives such as these.

“There is no system for returned refugee children to enroll in school. There is no person to take this responsibility to help us through how

we have to do the process.”

-Returnee father of school-age children from Nu Po Refugee Camp, currently residing in Yangon

Among local community leaders in the Southeast, it was noted that the most optimal opportunities for a successful integration were for those that had strong connections inside Myanmar with access to land, housing, employment and ID. Noting the importance of documentation for accessing services, and as a key determinant in a successful and sustainable transition into Myanmar, many were unsure if returnees were already or could be provided with this in order to successfully integrate and gain full access to education services. In education, for example one respondent who had participated in the 2016 Voluntary Repatriation shared difficulties experienced in enrolling his children in school as a result of their lack of Myanmar ID and household registration, stating “There is no system for returning refugee children to enroll in school. There is no person taking responsibility to help us to understand the process.” The process of obtaining proper documentation upon arrival in Myanmar can act as a significant barrier to integration for parents as well as children, posing threats of education breaks and dropout.

The education services provided by the KRC-EE and the KnED in the refugee camps are unique and are not aligned to the government education systems of either Thailand or Myanmar. While attempts were made in the early years to engage the Thailand MoE in a process of equivalency design to benefit children residing within the refugee camps, Thailand MoE mandate was limited to non-formal education provision which ended in the early 2000s. The learning achievements of refugee children are currently unrecognized by the Myanmar state and there exists no formal mecha-

nism or pathway that enables recognition of the prior learning for children to transition into the Myanmar state education system. Among those respondents who had already returned to Myanmar from the camps, there was a lack of clarity around school enrollment procedures. Among the GoUM and non-ethnic administered schools sampled, enrollment policies varied, with some preferring to place students in a lower grade and providing additional Burmese language classes and others requiring students to sit an entrance exam. With entrance requirements varying across schools and districts in practice, state school principals and teachers are responding with little guidance from above in order to enroll and support ethnic students. One notable example, through the study was that of a government school teacher in Kyainseikkyi, who has accepted camp-based school transfer certificates in Karen language but was unsure about whether this was being practiced at other schools, and called for the development of clear procedures on enrollment and a system for disseminating this information from the central government to schools and communities.

“Refugees should not join Myanmar government school because they will become disappointed and quit school if they cannot keep up with the lessons.”

-Student, Ban Mae Surin camp

A 2014 Save the Children study on barriers to access for returning students highlighted the need for state-level dialogue to occur, for policy to address access, and for procedures for enrollment to be clearly laid out. In particular the study emphasized

the inconsistent practices at school level in Myanmar regarding documentation needed of returning students (including ID and documentation of learning), a lack of clarity and information for refugee families around fees for enrollment, and the practice of placement testing in an unfamiliar language, social and cultural integration challenges.⁷⁵ Subsequently, through a policy recommendations paper on refugee student transition (see Annex 3), refugee and ethnic education providers requested the MoE to engage with refugee stakeholders to draft policy around the transitioning of students, including the recognition of camp certificates and the development of a suitable grade level diagnostic test to enable children to continue education at an appropriate grade level. The need for a transition program to support adjustment to the Myanmar curriculum, and as well as training for state teachers to ensure successful reintegration for returning students was additionally highlighted. . Given the inconsistencies reported at school level, recommendations focused on the need to ensure procedural steps were disseminated downwards to township and school level in areas of return. In the same year, the Myanmar MoE cited the need for a placement test, which would require a returning child without a MoE-recognized certificate to sit an examination in English, math, and Burmese subjects in order to identify the appropriate grade level. With key differences in the subjects taught, the language of instruction, years of schooling and the curricula followed, this is problematic for the learning achievements of refugee children to be recognized.

With an absence of formal references to the transitioning of returning refugee children in the NESP or the education reform

⁷⁵Dare (2015).



dialogue, or further national-level policy around transitioning and recognition, issues are deferred to state-or regional-level government to resolve. At state level in Kayin, momentum for state-department and non-state actor dialogue on key issues in ethnic education has potential for informing the case for refugee children, given similarities in barriers to access. Dialogue between the KED and the Kayin State Education Department (KSED) relating to the recognition of KED/refugee certificates in government schools has been slow but progressive. In late 2015, KSED committed to the recognition of Transfer Certificates (TC) from ethnic service providers yet maintained the need for a placement test in Myanmar and math. In subsequent communication, English has been added as a requirement. This was reaffirmed in May 2016, whereby it was agreed that, “Children will be placed as per TC or requested grade for some time for familiarization, first. Next, Myanmar language enrichment program will be supported to be able take Myanmar test well.”⁷⁶

KRC-EE

⁷⁶Kayin Education Sector Working Group Meeting Notes: Outputs of Kayin State Education Sector Coordination Meetings

A grade equivalency agreement was discussed whereby Grade 5 at a KED school is aligned with Grade 4 at a state school.⁷⁷ In a subsequent 2017 meeting, focused on refugee return, the KSED claimed full responsibility for addressing the educational challenges for returning children, explaining that testing will be conducted after the familiarization period of 1-2 months, and that Myanmar language testing would be oral. Despite these state-level agreements, there remains much uncertainty around civil documentation requirements for the matriculation exam (e.g. birth registration), whether refugee students would need to take the Grade 4 exam, whether students would need to have taken the Grade 9 exam in order to progress to the matriculation exam, and as to the composition and development of the Myanmar language enrichment program. With an absence of documented state or national level policy to accompany the agreements, it remains unclear how procedures will be implemented

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⁷⁷*Ibid*



consistently at the school level into the future, and subsequently how this information will be communicated to the refugee community. With UNICEF and INGO support, coordination and dialogue has increased, however the engagement itself remains limited in frequency.

“Even without instruction we try to adjust (our system) and accept the children who would like to enroll in the school.”

-GoM school principal, Kyainseikkyi, Karen State

Whether a returning student transitions into an ethnic school or GoUM school, respondents acknowledged that there will be differences in curriculum, learning style, language, and associated costs and responsibilities. As such, respondents, particularly those working within camp education systems, cited a need for schools on both sides of the border to adjust in order to ensure the smooth transition of students. This included pre-departure Myanmar language training and orientation to school culture in Southeast Myanmar, and pre-departure vocational training in line with livelihood opportunities in areas of return for those students out of school. Acknowledging the potential challenges for returning students, one parent in Nu Po Refugee Camp expressed that they would “like education leaders to consider the education and language problems that will exist for Karen students entering GoUM schools. Changing the education system can help this, for example, including Karen as a minor subject instead of using Karen language across all five subjects. In other words, use a more balanced curriculum to prepare students for school in Myanmar.” A returnee student now living in Lay Kay Kaw commented that transition into the school was quite smooth with the use of transfer

certificates and transcripts, but specifically cited Myanmar language and math as being the most challenging subjects for himself and other returnee students, an observation echoed by many GoUM school teachers, and suggested additional training in these subjects, as well as an orientation into state school culture, to help students prepare for integration.

GoUM teachers interviewed noted that students still struggle with Myanmar language and the different learning environment, resulting, in extreme cases, in psychosocial impacts on children during the transition period, and posing risks for student drop-out. GoUM school teachers in Kyainseikkyi provided examples of students experiencing such difficulties and cited the provision of extra language classes as beneficial responses, while also recommending that placing students at lower grades could aid in successful integration. Alternatively, respondents from within the refugee and ethnic education communities called for more flexible entrance policies that recognized the challenges of utilizing a placement test in assigning students at their appropriate grade, while also providing extra language support. In reporting on the key issues facing refugee children in education and the experiences garnered through the Voluntary Repatriation process, the UNHCR has emphasized that all children were enrolled in school and that transfer certificates were recognized in both KED and GoUM schools, resulting in children either entering at their current grade level, or close. However, there remains a lack of qualitative data on the experiences of returning children into both state and community schools through the formal Voluntary Repatriation process, including for example, as to how a grade level was deemed appropriate given the lack of formal equivalency documentation, experiences of the enrollment process, information on stakeholder involvement and support provided, language abilities of the

children prior to repatriation, as well as follow-up monitoring regarding success in the new classroom.

Additionally, through the study, other local precedents were found to have the capacity to inform the transitioning of refugee children into state schools. Most recently, and simultaneous to ongoing discussions in Kayin State, the Mon National Education Department (MNED) and the Mon State Education Department (MSED) have engaged in dialogue in Mon State to build bridges between the provision of mother tongue-based education and receipt of state recognition. Collaborative dialogue has resulted in agreements to provide Mon community-school students with the opportunity to sit Grade 8 state exams, which in turn provides the necessary prerequisites for students to access the state matriculation exam. The Mon case of negotiating the terms of the Grade 8 agreements provides an example of the key role that ethnic education providers play, not only in the implementation of service delivery but in acting as a liaison channel between state authorities, EAGs and communities. Similarly, in dialogue around migrant children return, there have been a number of progressive achievements that could pave a path to solutions, for example the provision of Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) to displaced Myanmar-speaking children in migrant areas in Thailand, and increasing engagement by the MoE's Department of Alternative Education in the NFPE provision. With the Department of Basic Education, recent achievements in dialogue with migrant stakeholders have resulted in the development of a 'systems manual' for migrant children transition and the

formation of implementing committee for further rollout. While the issues affecting returning refugees in education differ to those of migrants and the structure of the Mon system differs to the systems in other states, the examples nevertheless provide for precedents to inform further policy development and dialogue around refugee student success in a state school system.

Teacher Recognition

Recognition of the skills and experience of refugee teachers – who have worked in extraordinarily challenging contexts – is another issue that has been inadequately addressed. Across the refugee community, there was a call for the recognition of refugee teacher experience, as well as concerns expressed on livelihoods opportunities for teachers upon return. Prior to the study, in September 2016, as part of the Refugee Education Stakeholders Group, and building on regular convergence planning workshops, refugee and ethnic providers came together to discuss the issue of refugee teacher accreditation. Building on the work of World Education and Save the Children's 2014 study,⁷⁸ which found that most refugee teachers lack information on professional and livelihood options in order to make informed choices in a return process, discussions centered on the need for recognition of refugee teacher skills and qualifications in order to enable diversity in the workforce, to support teacher retention and motivation, and to provide refugee teachers with a means of livelihood upon return. The following presents a summary of some key questions put forward in discussions:⁷⁹

⁷⁸Dare (2014)

⁷⁹Education Stakeholders Meeting Sept 16th 2016: Internal Meeting Notes

1. Policy Process: How will the government involve diverse education stakeholders in the process of finalizing policies relating to teachers? Specifically, how will ethnic community education providers and refugee education stakeholders be involved and listened to?
2. Diversity: How will the government ensure a diverse range of teachers of different ethnicities, languages, cultures are teaching? Will language, culture, and ethnicity be considered in teacher recruitment and accreditation policies and in the competency framework?
3. Existing resources: Given the need for local language teachers able to work in remote areas, how will the government make efforts to recognize and work with the existing extensive networks of experienced and trained refugee and community teachers?
4. Flexible and multiple pathways: What flexible pathways will be provided for experienced and trained community and refugee teachers to gain accreditation more rapidly? Will the government consider options such as temporary certification, competency testing, and job up-skilling/accreditation programs?
5. Decentralization: As the 2008 constitution and the peace process move Myanmar towards decentralization, how will this be reflected in the teacher education system? Many other countries have decentralized teacher education policy; what is the government's plan in this regard?
6. Accountability and management: How does the government aim to tackle the issue of teacher absenteeism? Will the government consider decentralized accountability and management systems, which have been successful in other countries such as the use of PTAs for the hiring, monitoring and performance evaluation of teachers?

The discussions on teacher recognition were timely in that they occurred prior to an MoE-led seminar on teacher education and management in Naypyidaw,⁸⁰ ran parallel to the development of the Myanmar Teacher Competency Framework (TCSF), and built upon initiatives in camp education to support teachers to develop portfolios documenting their skills and experience. While refugee stakeholders were unable to attend the invitation-only seminar in Naypyidaw, it enabled a dissemination of information on up-to-date developments in Myanmar.

Reflective of the challenges in the supply of teachers, teacher quality and teacher performance faced globally,⁸¹ the challenges facing Myanmar are immense⁸² and in all communities included in this study there were calls for increased

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⁸⁰Myanmar MoE Teacher Education Seminar, August 4th-5th, 2016, Naypyidaw

⁸¹See the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2015, Policy Paper 19

⁸²Myanmar MoE (NESP), pp. 51-53





numbers of teachers in order to meet the needs of existing and returning students, highlighting this need at the local level. The NESP places teachers at the heart of implementation of reforms⁸³ recognizing that “a motivated and well-trained teaching force is a prerequisite for quality education, and that this can only be realized through improving the status, quality, management and professional development of teachers.”⁸⁴ Building on initiatives to promote teacher quality such the Strengthening of Pre-service Teacher Education in Myanmar (SITE) program, and programs targeting the English language methodology skills of teachers, and recognizing the need for an integrated approach, priorities for the 2016-2021 Myanmar reforms are identified as:

- 1) The strengthening of teacher quality and management via the development of a TCSF (finalized August 2017), a teacher accreditation system which will be developed in

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⁸³Myanmar MoE (NESP), p. 11

⁸⁴Myanmar MoE (NESP), p. 140

later years⁸⁵ and the implementation of an equitable teacher recruitment, promotion, and deployment system.

2) Improving the quality of pre-service education via the revision of teacher training materials and models, the upgrading of education colleges from two to four years including management and administration of the Education Colleges, and strengthening practicum opportunities.

3) Improving quality of in-service teacher professional development through a Teacher Professional Development Program and short-term in-service trainings on the new curriculum.

While the NESP does cite the need for recognition of refugee teachers,⁸⁶ implementation plans for how this will happen have not been developed or dialogued with refugee stakeholders, reflective of a broader lack of discussion on the role of refugee and community teachers in education service provision for Myanmar children, and/or their respective potential to alleviating the supply needs in the Southeast. For the returning refugee community, an education/livelihoods nexus demonstrates the likely challenges that refugee teachers would face in securing teaching work in Myanmar upon a potential return. While teachers have attended teacher trainings in the camps, with the provision of pre-service and classroom support ongoing, there is

currently no formal mechanism or flexible pathway to obtaining certification that will enable employability upon return. In the majority of cases, both refugee and ethnic teachers remain ineligible to access teacher education colleges⁸⁷ and lack the criteria to obtain a teacher license.⁸⁸ Similarly, ethnic pre-service colleges (in potential areas of return) remain unaccredited by the state,⁸⁹ and in-service models that have been responding to teacher professional development needs in hard to reach areas remain under-researched in reform efforts.⁹⁰

Throughout the study, references were made to recent government responses to teacher shortages and the need for community consultation mechanisms in the rollout of interventions that support teacher quality strengthening. For example, respondents referenced the Daily Wage Teacher mechanism, which sought to address issues in teacher supply in underserved areas in the Southeast by deploying teachers with limited trainings to remote areas. A camp education leader commented on their understanding of this scheme, stating, “in some KED schools the government sends their teachers to work or teach at the school and they receive pocket money and salaries from the government. But our local KED teachers don’t get any salary from the government and most of the school administration becomes controlled by the government teachers.” The statement is reflective

⁸⁵Myanmar MoE (NESP), p. 143

⁸⁶Myanmar MoE (NESP), p. 144

⁸⁷For example, the completion of the state matriculation exam.

⁸⁸Example criteria cited at the MoE Teacher Education Seminar in Naypyidaw in August 2016 included: Myanmar citizenship, having passed Grade 10 Matriculation, a demonstration of moral behavior (requiring a reference), health conditions (requiring a health certificate), 1 year experience and passing a written/oral/practical test.

⁸⁹The KRCEE administers a teacher training program at Pu Taw Memorial Junior College (PTMJC) in Mae La refugee camp which enables refugee youth who have graduated from KRCEE 2-year lower division junior college programs to specialize in education and teaching over the course of a 2-year program. Within Southeast Myanmar, the Karen Teacher’s Working Group (KTWG) enables youth to access 2-year teacher training courses through their two Karen Teacher Training Colleges, which combine subject training and teaching methodology, as well as a practicum component in rural schools across Southeast Myanmar.

⁹⁰For an in-depth overview of the Karen Teacher Working group model, see Johnston (2016).

of wider observations presented on the initiative, detailing less positive impacts such as high teacher absenteeism, classroom challenges due to language barriers, community teacher displacement, and impacts on community cohesion.⁹¹ In a similar vein, research on the KTWG-model, which provides context-relevant models of pre- and in-service teaching, posits the need for an independent and inclusive teacher accreditation system to support ethnic teacher development, and highlights the need for the MoE “to explore opportunities for engaging with and understanding the teacher professional development training and modalities provided by ethnic education groups”⁹² in order to effectively utilize existing resources within Myanmar.

“We have prepared teacher portfolios of certificates, years in service, and more. That’s why we are confident to call for the recognition of our students and teachers.”

-Karenni Education Department (KnED) staff member

A range of recommendations have been put forward to guide the inclusion of refugee teachers in both the NESP development phase. In the drafting process, education stakeholder feedback recommended that the NESP “commits to working on the necessary strategies and programs for teachers from ethnic education systems in the same way it has for DWT teachers to become fully qualified teachers.”⁹³ Subsequent recommendations,⁹⁴ reiterated to varying degrees throughout the study, have called for:

- inclusive and responsive strategies to address the teacher shortage in the Southeast and in ways that build upon existing mechanisms rather than eroding values associated with education service delivery
- decentralized decision-making around deployment and inclusive and responsive strategies that see the GoUM incorporate local recruitment strategies and teacher management into reforms
- reforms of teacher training colleges to include refugee representatives and equivalency mapping of teacher training curricula
- the removal of citizenship and matriculation requirements under admission and eligibility criteria of state teacher education colleges
- the development of an independent accreditation body or an appointed neutral university to manage accreditation
- the development of 1-2 year accelerated courses at state teacher education colleges that experienced ethnic/refugee teachers could attend in order to be recognized and be able to be employed by the MoE
- or the incorporation of a transition period in which flexible, temporary and rapid accreditation pathways are made available for ethnic and refugee teachers. This should allow for different levels of accreditation/certification and thus offer a range of certification levels and/or professional development opportunities.

While movements toward decentralization have occurred, progress on teacher cer-

⁹¹See Johnston (2016)

⁹²Johnston (2016), p.47

⁹³See Myanmar MoE (NESP), Section 1.3.11)

⁹⁴World Education internal notes and draft papers from stakeholder workshops 2016 and 2017

tification or recognition remains slow or stagnant. In Kayin State, despite verbal agreements on teacher deployment and management between KSED and KED,⁹⁵ initial promises toward progress have been slow at the implementation level, and respective state and ethnic education actors continue to dialogue for resolutions. Most recently the KSED confirmed that it did not have the authority to negotiate or discuss accelerated programs, or consider pilots between the refugee community and state education colleges in the Southeast, but committed to raising the issue with central MoE.⁹⁶ With a complex array of factors and with sustainable reintegration a key goal, bridging the gaps for the refugee teacher community in recognition, licensing, eligibility and professional

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⁹⁵Kayin Education Sector Working Group Meeting Notes: Outputs of Kayin State Education Sector Coordination Meetings

⁹⁶Kayin Education Sector Working Group Meeting Notes: Hpa'an, May 23rd 2017 WE Minutes



development, and livelihoods will all require political will, but present the potential to send a reconciliatory message to those returning to the country.

Holistic Community Approaches and Managing Expectations

Key Findings:

- » Holistic community approaches and support provision ensure sustainable integration. Existing and potential host communities currently face large gaps in education services and limited resource capacity. To avoid community-level conflict, there is a need to identify and address the requirements of entire communities as well as returning refugees in infrastructure, resourcing and service provision.
- » There is a need for preparedness programming for refugees in order to ensure expectations are realistic and to ensure successful integration into host communities. This should include pre-departure orientation on local cultures, customs and norms, livelihood opportunities for adults, training in Burmese language.

“Locals have the same needs as returning refugees.”

-Karen Refugee Committee - Education Entity (KRC-EE)

Throughout the study, refugee respondents as well as INGO and ethnic stakeholders referenced the challenges experienced by communities in Southeast Myanmar on a daily basis, and emphasized that support would be needed to ensure that these communities could absorb former refugees. Respondents from the camps, as well as previous returnees, commented that acceptance of returnees by local communities was a key factor in decision-making

on return, as well as successful integration. Without the support and acceptance of local communities, refugee respondents raised concerns about discrimination as well as potential conflict over access to resources, with one refugee parent expressing fears that this discrimination was already present even before return, commenting, “The host community should change their perception and end discrimination upon refugees before we go back. Although they don’t say anything, their actions and the way they look at us makes it obvious that they look down on us.” Actors working within the livelihoods and education sectors in Myanmar shared observations of refugees keeping their identities private post-return for fear of discrimination, and refugee respondents suggested relocating returnees in groups across communities in order to minimize stigma and discrimination. These concerns highlight a need for continued cross-border engagement at the local level in order to build trust between returnees and host communities and the need for holistic community approaches that target the needs of the entire community as well as those of returnees.

“If more people go back, this will limit natural resources such as water, food and challenge job opportunities by narrowing the land for farming for the communities. Also, there might be conflict over natural resources like water and land.”

-Camp Committee member, Mae Ra Ma Luang Refugee Camp

Communities expressed strong concerns about their capacity to support returning refugees with the necessary infrastructure and resources, given that many of these

communities are already struggling to provide for existing residents without government support. Community respondents expressed fears of conflict over resources as well as concerns of decreasing quality of services if there were not sufficient inputs into existing infrastructure and services to prepare for large numbers of returnees arriving. Closely linked to access to land, water, and housing, was the issue of access to employment, with many community respondents, as well as NGOs working in the field of livelihoods in South-east Myanmar, noting the already limited number of regular employment opportunities available. Students involved in a Karen Students Networking Group (KSNG) youth forum expressed similar concerns about a lack of regular employment opportunities in Myanmar and the challenges they are likely to face in finding employment due to lack of Burmese language and skills appropriate for jobs in the country. This once again sparked fears of competition and resentment toward new arrivals, and led to calls for the creation of jobs in potential areas of return in order to meet the existing needs of working-age community members and former refugees. In all cases, there was a clear expression of the need for increased access to vocational training to diversify the skillset of communities and prepare returnees for life and work in Southeast Myanmar.

“If about 100 students from the camp returned here, it would be a problem. We would need more teachers, textbooks, teaching materials, and more school buildings.”

-Karen parent of school age child, Day Buh Noh Village, Karen State

One school principal noted that refugee students are welcome, but “to be able

to accept refugee students, we need good schools, good boarding houses, a good school environment, salary for teachers, and enough financial support to do all of this.” Anticipating that the majority of Karen students would transition into ethnic schools, community members and education personnel expressed concern about the capacity of existing infrastructure and resources to meet the demands on returnees. While educational interests were high priority for parents, refugees, returnees, and stakeholders highlighted the implications livelihood opportunities have on education. For example, a GoUM school teacher noted the return of families from camps, only to see parents return to Thailand in order to seek out employment, leaving students to stay in boarding houses alone to complete their studies, or to return to Thailand, experiencing further breaks in their education. Thus, while the scale-up of education services is essential, many other factors that impact upon students’ ability to stay in school are closely linked.

“They should know the principles of our community, how we live, the situation in this area, and job opportunities available.”

-School Committee member, Mixed-administration (GoUM-KED) school, Kyainseikkyi, Karen State

Finally, while increased services within areas of return is agreed to be a priority, there is also a need to manage expectations of returnees to Southeast Myanmar, where they are likely to experience far fewer services and support. While those with family ties were observed by previous returnees to adapt the most successfully, this is not a reality for all returnees. While the Voluntary Repatriation process was commended as groundbreaking in steps toward facilitated return and reintegration,

tion of refugee populations into Myanmar, among respondents who had participated in the process, a number expressed disappointment in the reality of the travel and housing situation in comparison to their expectations, again highlighting the need for clear and accurate information to be disseminated prior to transition. Previous returnees, particularly those moving to urban areas and without family ties, made calls for support to last longer post-transition in order to enable refugees to access employment and housing and gain personal stability within Myanmar. A broader recommendation from refugees, returnees and host communities, was pre-departure training covering for example rights, local law and customs, as well as livelihood opportunities to ensure that their expectations of life in Myanmar are realistic.

“We struggle to work on the farm (to grow food), so they need to struggle with us too. We don’t have support like they do in camp,” shared one parent in Kayin State. This was echoed by returnees in Lay Kay Kaw who commented on difficult living conditions and how more information about the local culture, village life and school would have resulted in a smoother transition. By receiving pre-departure orientation based on evidence gathered from local communities, refugees would be best prepared to integrate into host communities and contribute meaningfully, limiting potential conflict and spring-back to Thailand. Local leaders were, once again, cited as being best placed to take the lead in these efforts in order to ensure that their communities were prepared for a successful return.

Conclusion

Recent political reforms in Myanmar and socio-economic developments in both Thailand and Myanmar have led to intensifying discourse around refugee return and reintegration, alongside the first UNHCR supported voluntary return in 2016 and ongoing independent returns to the country in recent years. Limited inclusion of refugee interests and the continued lack of recognition of ethnic and refugee education systems raise a number of concerns for children returning to Myanmar. Despite the rise of locally-driven convergence efforts, including state-level agreements to facili-

tate enrollment, children remain likely to experience barriers to enrollment as well as successful completion upon return. As such, and in response to findings from this review, recommendations, which are presented at the outset, are offered to government, UN, EAG, (I)NGOs, local service providers, and/or wider stakeholders to guide future funding decisions, program development and advocacy engagement to ensure that refugee children have continued access to quality and recognized education, and no child from Myanmar is left behind.

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Annexes

Annex 1: KnED, KRC-EE, KWO, KTWG, KED (2014) *Strategic Plan Towards Education Convergence: Durable Solutions for Refugees Along the Thailand-Myanmar/Burma Border*

Annex 2: KnED, KWO, KTWG, KED (2016) *Policy Briefing Paper: Enhancing Learning and Development through Diversity: Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education*

Annex 3: KnED, KRC-EE, KWO, KTWG, KED (2015) *Refugee Student Transition: Policy Position and Program Recommendations*

Annex. 1

Strategic Plan towards Education Convergence

Durable Education Solutions for Refugees along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border

Developed by:

Karen Refugee Committee -
Education Entity
Karenni Education Department
Karen Education Department
Karen Teachers Working Group

In Cooperation with:

Save the Children Thailand Jesuit
Refugee Service
Adventist Development and Relief
Agency – Thailand
Right To Play
World Education

Background and Context

Since the elections in November 2010, the new Government of the Union of Myanmar (GoUM) has commenced an ambitious reform process. Significantly, President Thein Sein has declared achieving true ethnic peace as a top priority and throughout 2012 a series of preliminary ceasefires have been negotiated between the GoUM and non-state armed groups, including the Karen National Union (KNU) in Karen (Kayah) State and the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) in Karenni (Kayah) State, from where a significant portion of the refugee population originate. Furthermore, the positive changes in the political context in Myanmar have raised hopes among many within the international community that true peace in Myanmar can now be achieved. If true peace in Myanmar is realized, the potential for voluntary repatriation of refugees in the short to medium term will also become increasingly likely.

The Royal Thai Government (RTG) first allowed support for education in the nine (9) refugee camps along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border in 1996. Education services have since been provided by local education organizations with the support of (I)NGOs. The Karen Refugee Education Entity (KRCEE) provides education services in the seven (7) predominately Karen camps and the Karenni Education Department (KnED) provides education services in the two (2) predominately Karenni refugee camps. Currently, there are approximately 33,000 students being taught by approximately 1,600 refugee teachers in 87 basic education schools.

In recognition of the changing context and the need to support durable education solutions for refugee students and teachers, the KRCEE and the KnED have come together with their ethnic education counterparts, the the KED, KTWG and KSEAG, in a series of Education Stakeholder workshops to develop a strategic plan for durable education solutions.

The plan recognizes the interconnection between working towards durable education solutions for refugees and key issues pertinent to ethnic education convergence. For instance, achieving recognition of teachers, supporting policy debate on mother-tongue based (MTB) education and working to further develop quality local basic education curricula are not only relevant to durable education solutions for refugees but are also key components of ethnic education convergence. Hence, this plan, while working specifically on durable education solutions for refugees, is also designed to support ethnic education convergence.

The plan also recognizes that convergence of ethnic education systems with the GoUM national education system is contingent on the positive progress of ongoing ceasefire negotiations and peace processes within Myanmar/Burma. Hence, this strategic plan is a working document designed to support an enabling environment for ongoing ceasefire negotiations and peace processes by contributing to the broader ethnic education convergence agenda inside Myanmar/Burma.

Definition of Education Convergence

The term ‘convergence’ has gained currency along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border and is used extensively within the health sector, where local health organizations are working to enhance health services in Southeastern Myanmar/Burma through coordinating and collaborating (converging) ethnic health systems with the GoUM national health system. Education stakeholders along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border define convergence as it relates to education as follows:

Convergence is a process of dialogue, collaboration and agreement within and across borders to ensure all people have equal access to relevant and quality education and training that is valued and recognized.

Education Convergence Goals

Education convergence goals have been identified. The goals speak to not only the need to work towards durable education solutions for refugees but also the need to support the broader ethnic education convergence agenda and the ongoing peace process.

Goal 1: Recognition and/or Accreditation of Refugee Teachers skills, experience and qualifications

Enable teachers to continue teaching in Myanmar/Burma by achieving recognition and/or accreditation of their experience, skills and qualifications

Goal 2: Recognition of refugee student learning

Refugee students have opportunities to access and complete a relevant and accredited quality education

Goal 3: Support for local curriculum development

A quality and culturally relevant basic education curriculum that promotes peace and unity, which is recognized and accredited by the GoUM, is available

Goal 4: Support for Mother- Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB- MLE)

Children return to communities that support children’s access to quality learning through officially recognized month-tongue instruction

Goal 5: Policy engagement

The needs of refugee students and teachers are addressed in repatriation agreements and refugee education stakeholders engage in and contribute to GoUM and ethnic national education reform processes

Education Convergence Objectives and Activities

In order to contribute to the achievement of the education convergence goals, specific objectives and high-level activities have been developed.

Goal 1: Recognition and/or Accreditation of Refugee Teachers skills, experience and qualifications

Enable teachers to continue teaching in Myanmar/Burma by achieving recognition and/or accreditation of their experience, skills and qualifications

Objective: Teachers are provided with relevant accredited teacher training

Activities:

- 1.1** Establish an accurate profile of the education and professional background of refugee teachers and promote the use of teacher logbooks
- 1.2** Map the teacher training programs available in the refugee camps and along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border and identify the core competencies they aim to develop
- 1.3** Compare the teacher training programs available with the GoUM MOE teacher training Colleges and regional and/or international teacher training programs to establish options for recognition and/or accreditation of refugee teacher qualifications
- 1.4** Establish teacher training pathways that lead to accreditation

Goal 2: Recognition of refugee student learning

Refugee students have opportunities to access and complete a relevant and accredited quality education

Objective: Refugee students are supported to access and continue their education beyond the refugee camps

Activities:

- 2.1** Advocate for recognition of refugee education, including refugee student learning
- 2.2** Explore and negotiate entry requirements to different types of schools in Myanmar and Thailand
- 2.3** Explore and develop a plan to address barriers to access to education for refugee students

Goal 3: Support for local curriculum development

A quality and culturally relevant basic education curriculum that promotes peace and unity, which is recognized and accredited by the GoUM, is available

Objective: Review and improve the quality of the KnED and KED/KRCEE basic education curricula so that they meet minimum standards, ensuring that they support MTB early grades literacy and are culturally relevant.

Activities:

- 3.1** Undertake a review of refugee camp education to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the quality of education
- 3.2** Identify minimum standards for curriculum review based on GoUM minimum standards and/or ASEAN/international minimum standards
- 3.3** Undertake curriculum review / mapping against defined minimum standards
- 3.4** Align KnED and KED/KRCEE curricula to meet minimum standards
- 3.5** Advocate for the recognition of local curriculum by GoUM MOE

Goal 4: Support for Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE)

Children return to communities that support children's access to quality learning through officially recognized mother-tongue instruction

Objective: Promote and support efforts to achieve a MTB-MLE national education language policy within Myanmar/Burma

Activities:

- 4.1** Design and implement a MTB-MLE promotion campaign for refugee camp communities and communities in areas of potential return
- 4.2** Undertake an audit of MTB education materials in Karen and Karenni language
- 4.3** Support and advocate for a MTB-MLE language policy within Myanmar and contribute to the evidence base where possible (e.g. refugee camp MTB literacy assessment)

Goal 5: Policy engagement

The needs of refugee students and teachers are addressed in repatriation agreements and refugee education stakeholders engage in and contribute to GoUM and ethnic national education reform processes

Objective: Ensure the inclusion of refugee education stakeholders in planning for voluntary repatriation and in ethnic and GoUM education policy forums

Activities:

5.1 Support and promote inclusion of refugee education stakeholders in voluntary repatriation dialogues

5.2 Support and promote inclusion of refugee education stakeholders in ethnic policy forums (e.g. NNER, MINE ect.)

5.3 Advocate for inclusion of ethnic education policies in the GoUM national education reform.

This plan to support durable education solutions for the refugees in the nine (9) refugee camps along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border is a working document. The plan recognizes that durable education solutions for refugees is intrinsically linked to broader ethnic education issues pertinent to the current Comprehensive Education Sector Reform (CESR) underway in Myanmar. The plan therefore seeks to promote engagement of both refugee and ethnic education stakeholders in the CESR and other relevant forums, and in so doing support an enabling environment for ongoing ceasefire negotiations and peace processes.

This plan will be regularly reviewed to ensure that the goals, objectives and high level activities identified remain relevant and on track to achieving durable education solutions for the refugees along the Thailand – Myanmar/Burma border.

Annex. 2

Policy Briefing Paper

Enhancing Learning and Development through Diversity: Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education

About Contributing Organizations

This Policy Briefing Paper was developed in collaboration with the following organizations:

Karenni Education Department (KnED)
Karen Education Department (KED)
Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG)

Karen Women's Organization (KWO)

With Support From:

Save the Children
World Education
Right to Play
Jesuit Refugee Services
Adventist Development and Relief Agency

Introduction

Myanmar has a rich linguistic diversity, with over one hundred languages spoken in the country and over one third of the population speaking a language other than Myanmar as their mother tongue.ⁱ As the Myanmar government embarks on its commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 “Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning”, a key issue is how to best address the needs of children from the country’s many different language groups. This short briefing paper outlines the need for mother tongue-based multi-lingual education (MTBMLE) in Myanmar with a particular focus on the Karen and Karenni populations.

The Challenge

It is essential that the Myanmar education reform process adequately address the issue of language in learning so that all children have an equal opportunity to learn. Strong language development strategies are fundamental to children’s success, and without them children are more likely to struggle with exams, drop out of school, and ultimately be illiterate. While it is recognised that greater efforts are needed to boost the learning outcomes of children in poverty and disaster-affected areas, the central role of language in learning is often overlooked in education programme design and funding.ⁱⁱ

The need for children to learn in their native language has been long recognised,ⁱⁱⁱ yet an estimated 200 million children worldwide^{iv} lack access to education in a language they understand. This is especially problematic for displaced populations such as those in the Thai-Myanmar refugee camps, and in poor or rural or areas such as Karen and Karenni areas in Eastern Myanmar, where children speak one language most of their lives. It will be especially difficult for

them to enter school and encounter an unfamiliar language.

International data demonstrates that children who speak a different language than the language of instruction in school perform significantly worse than children who speak the same language.^v When children are instructed in a language they do not fully understand, they will use most of their attention to learn the new language and translate what is being spoken rather than absorbing the curriculum.^{vi} Teachers may also spend a lot of time translating between national and local languages, significantly reducing the amount of curriculum covered. If children advance to upper primary school, they require a range of academic vocabulary to comprehend subjects including science, math and history. Children first need to develop a base of vocabulary, understanding, and skills in these areas in their mother tongue, which will then enable them to transition to study in a second language.

Moreover, in the crucial area of early literacy, it has been shown that children will become better readers if they first learn to read in their mother tongue, and then transfer these skills to reading in a second language.^{vii} Failure to provide instruction in children’s native languages contributes to poor early grade literacy results in multi-lingual countries such as Myanmar. Reading assessments of Karen and Karenni children living in Thailand indicate that those studying in their mother tongue are doing better than those studying in a second language,^{viii} a finding replicated by research in the Irawaddy region^{ix} of Myanmar.

Unless children first develop their mother tongue language through basic education, they will remain ‘trapped between two languages’ – poor first language development will only provide children with basic social communication at home, and make it

difficult for children to learn the curriculum or improve second language proficiency necessary for educational success.^x If children build a strong base of development in their mother tongue, it will allow them to advance in the curriculum and learn secondary languages more easily at school.

Language is also vital for community and school relations. If teachers do not speak the language of parents, it is difficult for them to communicate and collaborate, and the community will be less involved in the school and children’s education.

Finally, in many countries the exclusion of ethnic minority languages from the education system has contributed to the marginalization of ethnic groups and to continued tension. Thus, in countries engaged in a peace process, such as Myanmar, using mother tongue in schools and curriculum can make a positive contribution to reconciliation and the building of a harmonious society. Diversity should be celebrated and embraced if all students are to thrive.

What is the solution?

Several countries including the Philippines and Ethiopia are introducing a form of teaching that provides 21st-century

children with strong language and learning skills. MTBMLE uses learner-centred teaching techniques to expand children’s development of their first language, which is essential for the cognitive and linguistic development needed to learn educational curriculum and build skills in national and international languages. Through teaching new concepts in mother tongue, and then introducing second language related to these concepts, children’s understanding of second language grows to the extent that it can be increasingly used to deliver the curriculum alongside first language. An ideal MTBMLE program allows children to learn in their mother tongue for at least six years, with a gradual introduction and transition to a second language as children move through the grades. See Figure 1 as an example.

MTBMLE teaching can be further strengthened through community-based strategies to help parents boost children’s first language development, and by making more reading materials available outside school in both first and second languages. Results show that children from MTBMLE programs in poor or remote areas are now achieving high levels of skill across the whole curriculum, in both national and foreign languages. ^{xi} MTBMLE develops highly skilled citizens,

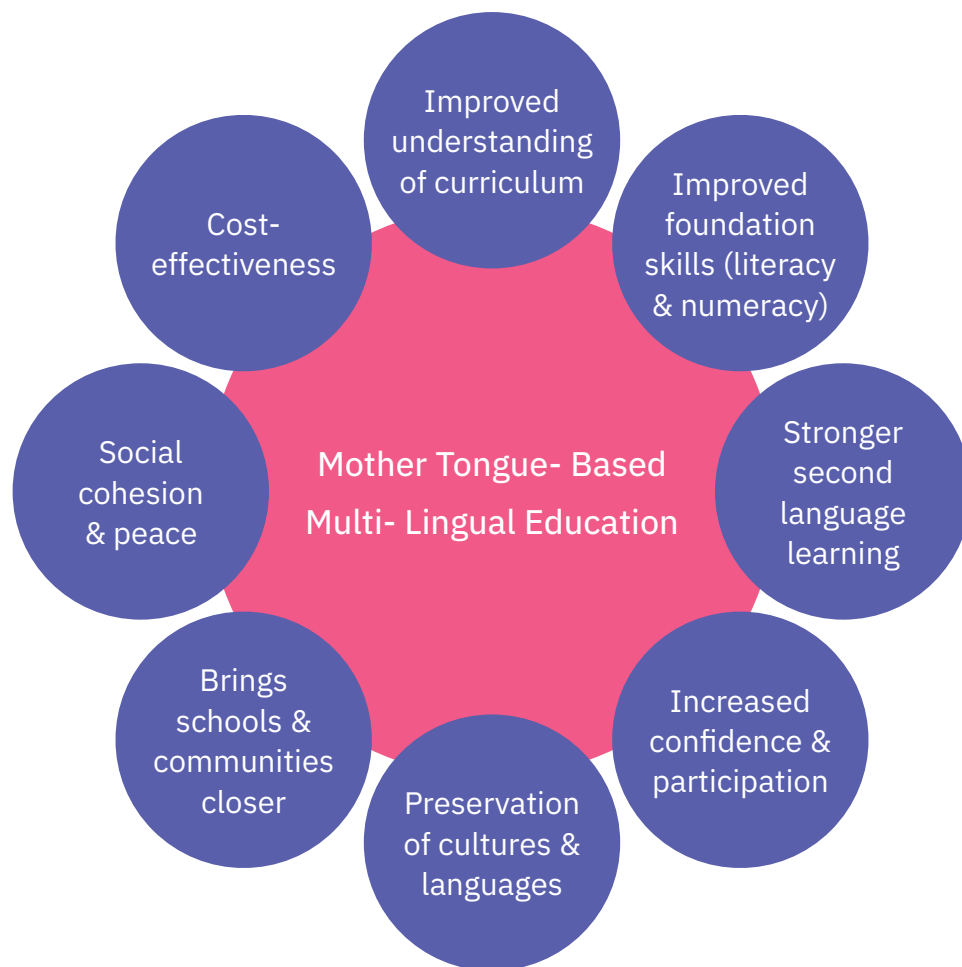
Figure 1: Recommended MTBMLE Cycle

Primary Level	G6	L1 (Lol+subject)	L2 (Lol+subject)
	G5	L1 (Lol+subject)	L2 (Lol+subject)
	G4	L1 (Lol+subject)	L2 (Lol) + L25L
	G3	L1 (Lol)	L25L
	G2	L1 (Lol)	L25L (oral+written)
	G1	L1 (Lol, literacy in L1)	L25L (oral)
Pre-primary Level	KG2	L1 (Lol)	L25L (oral)
	KG1	L1 (Lol)	

strengthens national language for minority children, brings schools and communities closer, and promotes cohesion in society. It is therefore a fundamental part of a peace-building education system, and is a key opportunity for Myanmar to demonstrate its commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and to the rights of indigenous language groups.

It should be recognised that MTBMLE is not always easy to establish, and requires investment in curriculum and teacher development at the initial stages. However, in the long-term, reductions in student drop-out and repetition mean that MTBMLE is more cost-effective, and the benefits too important to ignore.

Figure 2: Benefits of MTBMLE



Policy Recommendations

- » **The government's education and language policy should promote and ensure the participation and learning of ethnic, indigenous, and minority language groups.** MTBMLE is proven to give all children the best chance to succeed in school. MTBMLE will not only enhance children's learning and understanding of the curriculum, it will give them the basis to learn better in other languages as they progress.
- » **The peace process in Myanmar should recognise MTBMLE as a key contribution towards harmony and cohesion,** as valuing diverse ethnic cultures and languages will help all communities to be part of a new Myanmar. Similarly, to ensure the process is inclusive and representative, **ethnic and minority language groups should participate in the development and implementation of the language and education policy at all stages.**
- » **The government should pay particular attention to the language needs of those in rural areas and from low-resource contexts** such as refugee camps or those living in remote areas of Myanmar as they experience less exposure to other languages in their community, and the support for language development (especially academic language) outside school is often weak.
- » **Policy should ensure that children receive both curriculum and instruction in their mother tongue.** Where textbooks are not available in mother tongue, efforts should be made to develop them, and in the meantime teaching aids and supplementary reading materials should be made available in mother tongue.
- » The government should **explore with local stakeholders the best evidence-based models for MTBMLE** in the Myanmar context. The evidence suggests that for MTBMLE to be effective^{xii}, policy should aim for **children to mainly receive curriculum and instruction in mother tongue for at least six years**, with the gradual introduction and phasing in of a second language.
- » **Language should be a central consideration of Myanmar's teacher recruitment and development policies.** MTBMLE can only work effectively if teachers are recruited who speak the same language as their students. In the Karen and Karenni context, there is a significant advancement on this front as thousands of Karen and Karenni teachers have already gained significant teaching experience and training in community and refugee education systems.

- » The government should **invest in local MTBMLE curriculum**. In the case of the **Karen and Karenni groups**, as with other ethnic education systems, there is already significant progress in local curriculum development in the refugee camps and community schooling systems, which provides a good starting point for moving forward. Local MTBMLE curriculum will not only enhance linguistic development, but will also ensure that local cultures and traditions are reflected in school.
- » **In multi-lingual contexts** where many languages are spoken in one school, the government should support programs to **provide additional support to minority language learners** who are not studying in their mother tongue, for example: Teachers can learn some of the students' language, bilingual teaching assistants from the local community can be used, culturally appropriate teaching aids can be provided, minority language learners can be provided with additional support outside of school through community activities such as reading clubs or peer study programs.

ⁱGoddard, Cliff (2005), *The Languages Of East And Southeast Asia: An Introduction*

ⁱⁱBenson, C. & Wong, K. M. (2015). Development discourse on language of instruction and literacy: Sound policy and Ubuntu or lip service? *Reconsidering Development*, 4(1), 1-16

ⁱⁱⁱUNESCO. (1951) "The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education: The Report of the UNESCO Meeting of Specialists," in *Readings in the Sociology of Language*, J.A. Fishman (ed.) The Hague: Mouton Press.

^{iv}Dutcher, N. (2004) *Expanding educational opportunity in linguistically diverse societies*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.

^vMartin, M.O., Mullis, I.V.S. and Foy, P. (with Olson, J.F., Erberber, E., Preuschoff, C. and Galia, J.) (2008) *Students' Backgrounds and Attitudes Towards Science*, Chapter 4. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS. International Study Center, Boston College.

^{vi}See Cummins, 2001: "The biggest predictor of success in a second language is the level of development in the mother tongue"

^{vii}UNESCO (2008) *Improving the Quality of Mother Tongue-based Literacy and Learning*

^{viii}See Save the Children and World Education (2015) *Pathways to a Better Future: A Review of Education for Migrant Children in Thailand*, Reading Assessment, and Save the Children (2014) *Early Grade Reading Assessment in the Thai-Burma refugee camps*.

^{ix}Naw Khu Shee (2012) *Assessing the impact of using the national language instead of the learners' mother tongue in primary education in Myanmar*

^xDumatog, R. and Dekker, D. (2003) *First language education in Lubuagan, Northern Philippines*. Manila: SIL International, available at: http://www.sil.org/asia/lc/parallel_papers/dumatog_and_dekker.pdf

^{xii}Heugh, K. (2005) *Mother tongue education is best*, HSRC Review Vol 3 No. 3, September 2005

Annex. 3

Refugee Student Transition

Policy Position and Program Recommendations

October 2015

About Contributing Organizations

The following refugee and ethnic education organizations developed this policy and program position paper:

Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE):

The KRCEE was established to serve and represent Karen refugees in the temporary shelters along the Thailand – Myanmar border through the provision of education services. The KRCEE administers primary through to tertiary education with support from (I)NGOs.

Karenni Education Department (KnED):

Our education system started even before we came to the refugee camps. In the ethnic controlled areas in Karenni State along the borderline, we developed our education to ensure that our children could learn our ethnic language and culture. When we fled to Thailand, we brought our education system to the refugee camps. Over the years, we managed by ourselves. Since 1997, when the Royal Thai Government,

allowed NGOs to work in the refugee camps, we partner with the Jesuit Refugee Service to further develop and improve our education system.

Karen Education Department (KED):

The KED, the education wing of the Karen National Union (KNU), is the governing body that works alongside communities to oversee the standardization, structuring, delivery and monitoring of sustainable educational activities for the Karen people inside Myanmar.

Karen Teachers Working Group (KTWG):

The KTWG is a community-based organizations working to improve access to and quality of education for ethnic Karen children in Karen areas of Eastern Burma since 1997. We do this by training teachers and school management committees, working with parents and communities, providing education assistance funds and materials for schools and working to help strengthen education administration in Karen areas.

Karen Women's Organization (KWO):

KWO is a community based organization active in all seven Karen refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, one internally displaced camp and in seven Karen districts within Burma working for women's equality, empowerment and freedom. In 2015, KWO celebrated its 30th year supporting and strengthening women's roles

in all spheres of life. KWO has grown into an organization of 50,000 members. KWO aims to build the capacity of women to advocate for their rights and empower them in politics and decision-making, whilst supporting the Karen community to maintain its culture and identity. KWO is a founding member of the Women's League of Burma (WLB).

Acknowledgements

Technical support for the development of this policy and program position paper was provided by our partners, Save the Children (Thailand Country Office) (SC), World Education (WE), Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) and Right to Play (RTP). The Myanmar Education Consortium (MEC) provided up to date information on Myanmar's Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) and the draft National Education Sector Plan (NESP).

Funding to support the development of this position paper was provided by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the Save the Children led Preparing for Reintegration through Education and Participative Solutions (PREPs) project.

Executive Summary

Approximately 110,000 refugees from Myanmar currently live in nine (9) temporary shelters (camps) along the Thailand – Myanmar border. Over 29,000 refugee children are enrolled in 80 basic education schools throughout the nine (9) camps.

Education services in the camps are mostly provided by the Karen Refugee Committee Education Entity (KRCEE) and other private service providers in seven (7) camps in Rathchaburi, Kanchanaburi, Tak and Mae Hong Son Provinces and the Karenni Education Department (KnED) in two (2) camps in Mae Hong Son Province. Education services in the camps are supported by International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs) and other private donors.

The education services provided by the KRCEE and the KnED in the refugee camps are unique and are not aligned to the government education systems of either Thailand or Myanmar. There are key differences in the subjects taught, the language of instruction used and the curricula followed. Therefore, refugee camp education is not accredited by the Myanmar Ministry of Education (MoE) and the learning attainment of refugee children is not recognized in Myanmar.

Procedures to support the transitioning of refugee students to community schools in KNU and KNPP controlled areas are well established. Refugee students are able to transfer at their grade level to community schools under the administration of the KED and KnED.

While durable solutions for the refugees in Thailand have not yet been found, this position paper focuses on refugee children's right to access Myanmar government mainstream education services upon potential repatriation. It is, however, important to note that this position paper does not over-ride our current position that the situation in Myanmar is not yet right for the return of refugees. Furthermore, it does not counter other policy positions in relation to Myanmar's education reform; such as the rights of ethnic minority children to mother tongue based education, but rather seeks to re-affirm our position by providing recommendations to strengthen education.

This position paper focuses on:

1. The current **lack of clear policies and procedures** to support refugee children's access to Myanmar government education services, and
2. The **existing barriers** to refugee children's access to and (re) integration within Myanmar government education services.

We recommend that:

1. The Myanmar Ministry of Education (MoE) coordinate with KRCEE and KnED to **develop clear policies and procedures** to support refugee children's access to Myanmar government education services. These policies and procedures must 1) uphold refugee children's right to education; 2) recognize the education level that refugee children have achieved while living in the refugee camps in Thailand; and 3) be consistently communicated and implemented within areas of potential return throughout Myanmar.
 2. The Myanmar MoE engage KRCEE and KnED, together with supporting UN agencies and (I)NGOs, to develop an **education transition program** that supports refugee children's access to and integration within Myanmar government schools based on the program recommendations put forth in this paper. The education transition program should be consistently implemented in government schools that receive returning refugee children. The high level recommendations for an education transition program are set out below.
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Refugee Student Transition Program Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Develop policy guidelines and procedures that uphold refugee children's rights to access Myanmar government education without disadvantage or discrimination.

Recommendation 2: Clarify the documentation and fees required for returning refugee students to enroll in government schools.

Recommendation 3: Engage refugee education stakeholders to project enrolment rates in Government areas and plan for the appropriate expansion of facilities and allocation of resources, including teaching and learning materials.

Recommendation 4: Recognize the learning attainment of refugee children through the recognition of refugee camp certificates and allow returning refugee children to continue their education without disadvantage, at the same grade level.

Recommendation 5: Develop a grade placement policy that supports refugee children to continue their education at their grade level and offer a transition program to support them to adjust to the new language of instruction and curriculum.

Recommendation 6: Analyze the KRCEE and KnED curricula against the Myanmar curriculum and develop a transition program to better support refugee children's adjustment to the Myanmar curriculum.

Recommendation 7: Develop a Myanmar language assessment to assess returning refugee children's ability to adapt to Myanmar as the language of instruction. Refugee children who require additional language support should be provided with language upgrading classes and bilingual teachers

should be placed within schools to provide in-class language support.

Recommendation 8: Develop an orientation / induction program for returning refugee students so that they are supported to integrate within a new school environment and school community.

Recommendation 9: Conduct an awareness raising campaign among teachers, students, parent teacher associations (PTAs) and the broader school community so as to build understanding of refugee children's experiences and support social cohesion.

Recommendation 10: Develop and implement training workshops for government teachers to ensure that government teachers are trained to support the integration of refugee children within government schools. Introduction

Introduction

Refugees began fleeing conflict in Myanmar into Thailand during the early 1980s, and the refugee situation in Thailand is now considered one of the most protracted in the world. There are currently approximately 110,000 refugees living in the nine (9) camps along the Thailand – Myanmar border.

Elections in Myanmar in 2010 and the signing of the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) by some ethnic armed groups (EAGs) in October 2015 have raised expectations about the prospects for national reconciliation and the voluntary return of refugees. However, there are many obstacles to the return of refugees. Landmine contamination and a lack of security, lack of access to land rights and livelihood opportunities as well as social services, such as education and health, in areas of potential return have not been addressed.

While a durable solution to the refugee situation in Thailand has not yet been found, refugee and ethnic education organizations, in coordination with partner (I)NGOs, have begun to lay the groundwork to resolve barriers to potential repatriation. Within education, this means identifying and addressing barriers to refugee children's access to and integration within education systems in areas of potential return.

Education within Myanmar is fragmented. In areas of potential return, education services are provided not only by the Myanmar MoE but also by the education departments of non-state actors, such as KED and KnED, as well as faith based and monastic education providers. Therefore, in order to ensure refugee children's rights to continue their education upon potential return, support must be provided for them to access and integrate within the different education systems available within Myanmar.

While this position paper focuses on the policy and program mechanisms needed for refugee children to successfully transition into Myanmar government education services, it is important to note that this is only one of several education options for returning refugee children. This position paper should therefore not be interpreted as either promoting return before the time for repatriation is right, or promoting the transition of refugee students into Myanmar government education only. Rather, the repatriation of refugees must abide by international principles and refugee children must have the right to continue their education within the education systems available in the areas in which they return.

Overview of Education Services in the Refugee Camps

The education services provided by KRCEE and KnED in the refugee camps in Thailand have sought to address the education needs of refugee children since refugees first began arriving in Thailand in the early 1980s. Many of the core elements of the Karen and Karenni ethnic education systems in Myanmar were adopted in the refugee camps and these systems were later supported and further developed with support from (I)NGOs. The core elements of the KRCEE and KnED refugee education systems include:

Basic Education Cycle and Use of Unique Curricula: The KnED system follows the current Myanmar 11 years of basic education while the KRCEE education system has developed a 12 year cycle of basic education. The KRCEE and KnED have developed curricula that address the linguistic and cultural needs of refugee students (see Annex A for a breakdown of the grade structure and subjects taught).

Language of Instruction: The KRCEE and KnED education systems uses mother tongue language as the language of instruction. In the KRCEE education system, Sgaw Karen is mainly used as the language of instruction and most teaching and learning materials are in Sgaw Karen, with Myanmar and English being taught as additional languages. Schools with majority Burmese or non-Karen speakers use Myanmar as the language of instruction and use Myanmar language teaching and learning materials. English language teaching and learning materials are used in high school.

¹See Save the Children, *Mother Tongue is Working for Refugee Children, Policy Brief*, 2014.

In the KnED education system, Karenni is the oral language of instruction in Ban Mai Nai Soi camp, where the majority of refugees are ethnic Karenni, and Sgaw Karen is the oral language of instruction in Mae Surin camp, where the majority of refugees are ethnic Karen, in the early years. The KnED education system introduces bilingual instruction (Myanmar language and Karenni / Sgaw Karen) from Standard 5. Due to lack of resources, textbooks are in Myanmar language in the early years and English in the later years.

The use of Karen and Kerenni as the language of instruction in the KRCEE and KnED education systems in the refugee camps responses to the linguistic rights and needs of refugee children. A literacy assessment conducted in the camps in 2014 supports international evidence that children's early grade literacy is best supported through mother tongue teaching and the use of mother tongue teaching and learning materials¹. The use of mother tongue as the language of instruction in the camps is consistent with our policy position that mother tongue based multi lingual education (MTB-MLE) should be adopted as part of Myanmar's current education reform.

Assessment and Certification: The KRCEE and KnED systems of assessment of student learning differ. The KnED system has a substantial continuous assessment component, while the KRCEE system is based mainly on examinations, but is moving towards a continuous assessment model.

KRCEE and KnED administer board examinations in grade 6, 9 and the final year of high school and students who successfully pass their final year of basic education are issued with school completion certificates and academic transcripts. KnED conduct yearly exams and issue completion certificates and academic transcripts in Myanmar and English language upon request. These

certificates are recognized by the KED and KnED education systems within SE Myanmar. Therefore children who transition between refugee and KED and KnED ethnic education systems within Myanmar are able to continue their education without disadvantage. However, both the Thai and Myanmar MoE do not recognize the education provided, or the certificates issued, by KRCEE and KnED and this has significant impact on refugee children's ability to access and continue their education within either the Thai or Myanmar state education systems.

Myanmar Education Law and Policies Impacting Refugee Student Transition

The 2008 Constitution provides a framing set of principles for children's access to basic education, and specifically a commitment to a free and compulsory primary education system (Chapter 1, Article 28c). This principle is enshrined in the amended National Education Law (June 2015), which recognizes the right of all citizens to education and of free, compulsory education at the primary level.

The Myanmar MoE is currently in the process of finalizing the Comprehensive Education Sector Reform (CESR) process, which will culminate in a National Education Sector Plan (NESP) for 2016-2021.

The amended Education Law recognizes the existence of non-government schools and the need to develop 'arrangements in accordance with the set rules about the way that Government schools and other schools interlink' (Article 42). The linkages between Government and non-government schools is further examined in the draft NESP, which notes that the 'contribution of these schools needs to be recognized. Ideally there should be space within the government system to allow coexistence

and coordination between the two systems, including for children's ability to transition between these schools and take government exams.² To this end, the NESP provides program strategies to enable universal access to basic education. A core component of the strategy is the 'development of a partnership coordination mechanism to facilitate the active participation of different service providers in free and compulsory basic education provision.'³ A key activity under this component of the strategy is the development of policy guidelines, establish mechanism and implement programs for linkages of complementary schools with the government system and alternative education programs (border schools, mobile schools, schools by ethnic groups where appropriate, NFE programs) with formal schools.⁴

The NESP does not articulate how 'linkages' or a 'partnership coordination mechanism' will be established between non-government and government education systems. Nor does it elaborate on what mechanisms could be developed to support children's transition between different education systems.

Barriers to Access and Integration within Myanmar Government Education

Information gathered on the experiences of refugee children attempting to access government education services upon return highlight a number of significant barriers to returning refugee students access to and integration within Myanmar government education. Barriers are identified within three broad categories 1) access, 2) grade placement within government schools, and 3) social integration. Recommendations to overcome these barriers are put forth below.

1. Barriers to Access

Policy and Procedures: Lack of government policy on recognition of refugee student learning and procedures for enrollment of returning children into Myanmar government schools.

Documentation: Lack of clarity and consistency in the documentation required by parents and 'sending' schools to enroll refugee children within government schools, including identification.

Formal and informal fees: Lack of clarity and consistency in formal (enrolment fees) and informal (e.g. fees for school materials and festivals) school fees required to enroll within government schools.

Facilities / Education Materials

and Human Resources: Lack of planning and the appropriate allocation of resources to support education service providers in potential areas of return to absorb returning refugee students within schools.

Recommendations to Address Access Barriers

Recommendation 1: The Myanmar MoE should **develop policy guidelines and procedures** that uphold refugee children's rights to access Myanmar government education without disadvantage or discrimination.

Recommendation 2: **Clarify the documentation and fees required for returning refugee students to enroll in government schools** and ensure that the requirements are consistently communicated and implemented in all government schools. Support should be provided to returning refugee students and their families to obtain the necessary documentation. Financial sup-

²National Education Sector Plan, Sub-sector report No.3, Access, Quality and Inclusion, July 2015, p.42 footnote 280.

port plans for school fees should also be made available so that returning refugee students are not prevented from accessing education due to poverty.

Recommendation 3: The Myanmar MoE should engage refugee education stakeholders to **project enrolment rates in potential Government areas and plan for the appropriate expansion of facilities and allocation of resources,**

including teaching and learning materials. Projections should also anticipate human resource needs so that teacher student ratios are not negatively impacted. Refugee teachers could play a significant role in supporting refugee children within government schools and options for their employment should be explored.

2. Barriers Impacting Grade Placement within Government Schools

Recognition of refugee camp education certificates: Whether the Myanmar MoE will recognize the level of education refugee children have received in the refugee camps is not clear. While some government schools have accepted refugee camp education certificates; others have not. Some government schools have allowed returning refugee children to enroll at their grade level based on education certificates issued in the refugee camps; others have not.

Placement tests: Prior to the release of the NESP, we understood from meetings with State and Union MoE officials that the transition of refugee students into government schools would be predicated on a placement test. While this mechanism is not discussed in the NESP, or in any other government policy documents, the evidence suggests that the placement test

is administered at the school level and is conducted in Myanmar language against the Myanmar curriculum.

The placement test is problematic for returning refugee children hoping to continue their education within the government education system. As noted above, refugee children receive education in the camps in their mother tongue and the KRCEE and KnED curricula are not aligned to the Myanmar national curriculum. Hence, returning refugee children will face challenges in sitting and passing a placement test in an unfamiliar language and based on a curriculum they have not learnt. There is also evidence that the test being used by many schools is heavily focused on the memorization of facts, rather than testing students' competencies or applied skills. This puts students at a further disadvantage, as they have not studied the same curriculum con-

'I went back to Myanmar last summer and tried to get into Standard 10 there. The principal said I would have to take the tests in all of the Standard 9 subjects. I studied and tried hard to study. But in almost every subject, the curriculum was very different. So it was very difficult for me.... I did not feel confident and I thought I would fail. So I chose to come back (to the refugee camp).'

-Standard 10 student, Ban Mai Nai Soi camp, 2014

³Ibid p. 57

⁴Ibid p. 64

tent in the camps. The results of the placement test policy is that either students chose not to sit the test and do not enroll in school, or that students are placed in lower grades with younger students. Being placed in lower grades means that students are removed from their appropriate peer social networks and face inappropriate teaching approaches for their age and stage of development. There is a strong correlation between school attendance and drop out when children are over-aged.

Language of Instruction: As noted above, mother tongue is used as the language of instruction in the KRCEE and KnED education systems. Therefore, returning refugees students may not have the Myanmar language skills necessary to effectively learn within government schools where the language of instruction is Myanmar.

Recommendations to Address Grade Placement within Government Schools

Recommendation 4: The Myanmar MoE should **recognize the learning attainment of refugee children through the recognition of refugee camp certificates** and allow returning refugee children to continue their education without disadvantage, at the same grade level. Supporting returning refugee children to access education at their current grade level will avoid disadvantaging returning refugee children who have undertaken their education in the camp, will avoid children being placed in age inappropriate classes and will significantly reduce the risk of dropout.

Recommendation 5: Develop a grade placement policy that supports refugee children to continue their education at their grade level and **offer a transition program**

to support them to adjust to the new language of instruction and curriculum.

Recommendation 6: Analyze the KRCEE and KnED curricula against the Myanmar curriculum and develop a transition program to better support refugee children's adjustment to the Myanmar curriculum.

Recommendation 7: Develop a Myanmar language assessment to assess returning refugee children's ability to adapt to Myanmar as the language of instruction. Refugee children who require additional language support should be provided with language upgrading classes and bilingual teachers should be placed within schools to provide in-class language support. As noted above, refugee teachers could play a significant role in supporting refugee children within government schools and options for their employment should be explored.

3. Barriers to Social and Cultural Integration

Social and Cultural Integration: Many refugee children were born in the camps in Thailand and they may face challenges socially integrating within Myanmar government schools. The social integration needs of refugee children should not be overlooked as their ability to make new friends and bond with teachers will significantly impact their retention within government schools and their learning experiences.

Recommendations to Address Social and Cultural Barriers

Recommendation 8: Develop an orientation/induction program for returning refugee students so that they are supported to integrate within a new school

environment and school community. This program should familiarize refugee children with school rules and expectations as well as provide social integration opportunities through peer-to-peer and extra curricula activities.

Recommendation 9: Conduct an awareness raising campaign among teachers, students, parent teacher associations (PTAs) and the broader school community so as to build understanding of refugee children's experiences and support social cohesion.

Recommendation 10: Develop and implement training workshops for government teacher to ensure that government teachers are trained to support the integration of refugee children within government schools. Teacher training should focus on sharing information about refugee camp education and the learning experiences of refugee children. It should equip teacher with skills to support the psychosocial needs of returning refugee children as well as provide training in child protection and positive discipline.

Annex A

KRC-EE and KnED Grade Structure and Subjects			
KRC-EE	G1 – G6	G7 – G9	G10 – G12
KnED	KG – S4	S5 – S8	S9 – S10
	Karen/Karenni	Karen/Karenni	Karen (KRCEE only/KnED introduce Thai)
	English	English	English
	Burmese (KRC-EE from G3)	Burmese	Burmese
	Mathematics	Mathematics	Mathematics
	History (KRC-EE only)	History (KnED from S7)	History
	Geography (KRC-EE only)	Geography (KnED from S7)	Geography
	Social Studies (KnED only)	Social Studies (KnED to S6)	Social Studies (KRC-EE only)
	Health and Physical Education	Art/VOS (KRC-EE only)	Art/VOS (KRC-EE only)
	Art/VOS (KnED Music and Library)	Science	Science

Note: KnED introduced Thai language in high school from July 2007 to Dec 2013 through the Office for Non-Formal Education, which was supported by UNHCR.