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Thailand has become a key destination for migrant workers from neighboring countries, including Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, due to internal political conflicts and economic uncertainty in the three countries, as well as high demand for workers in Thailand's labour-intensive industries.

Thailand hosts approximately 3.9 million migrant workers from the three countries, and most of them enter Thailand without valid documents, as unregistered or undocumented migrants.

Some female migrant workers arrive with their children and others give birth in Thailand.

Children of migrants experience barriers to receiving education in Thai public schools due to their undocumented status. However, the 1999 Education for All Policy and the 2005 Cabinet Resolution on Education for Unregistered Persons decreed that all non-Thai children are entitled to enjoy free basic education in Thai public schools.

Despite these favorable education policies, only 35 percent of about 390,015 migrant children are enrolled in Thai public schools, leaving the majority out of school. This may be due to negative attitudes and social stigma towards migrant children and lack of understanding of their right to attend school as well as the changing nature of parental workplaces.

Some Thai public schools refuse to enroll migrant children because they are unaware of the Education for All policy, or because they fear children will require additional resources and create more challenges.



Migrant children living in construction site camps typically stop attending school if their parents move to other construction site camps. In addition, they may not be enrolled in schools because their ages are unsuitable for the classes available to them. Other challenges may include language and literacy barriers. All of these factors create obstacles for migrant children to integrate themselves into formal education.

To mitigate issues of access to education for migrant children, the Thai government and Ministry of Education should work collaboratively with relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental and civil society organisations, to strengthen the migrant learning centres located in many provinces.

Although migrant learning centres are not recognised as formal education sites, they are often the preferred choice for migrant children, especially those from Myanmar. This is due to the cultural sensitivity of service provision at the centres as well as the fact that teaching is done in Myanmar's language, creating a more effective learning environment for migrant children.

However, these learning centers still face critical challenges, including inadequate financial and human resources. Consequently, the Thai government and Ministry of Education should take enhancement of migrant learning centers into consideration to expand access to education to more migrant children.



Another proposed solution is that all stakeholders should promote initiatives in alternative education and literacy and numeracy programs. This solution may suit migrant children living in construction site camps. These alternative education initiatives may include mobile schooling with rotating teams of teachers in different construction site camps to deliver on-site sessions supported by learning applications (apps). This allows migrant children to learn their national literacy and numeracy, with their parent's support, from apps after on-side sessions delivered by teachers.

It is increasingly important to actively involve parents in these learning activities. Learning apps should be developed with more than one language and these should include the languages of Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar.



Teachers of migrant children should also be able to speak, read, and write the languages of their students. Teachers can be Cambodian, Laotian, and Myanmar students who are currently pursuing higher education in Thailand.

These students are capable of teaching migrant children and can be contacted via student associations at universities in Thailand.

This alternative education may not provide a standardised quality literacy and numeracy, yet it can be more responsive and effective in providing access to education, especially basic literacy and numeracy, for migrant children.

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TAGS

- education, migrants, learning centre, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, students

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