

# BRIDGES

Participatory Action Research on the Future of  
Migrant Education in Thailand

November 2019



This research was conducted in collaboration by:

**TeacherFOCUS Myanmar**

**Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF)**

**Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC)**

**Migrant Education Coordination Center (MECC)**

**Youth Connect Foundation Thailand (YCF)**

**Burmese Migrant Teachers' Association (BMTA)**

**Marist Asia Foundation (MAF)**

**Editor:**

**Greg Tyrosvoutis**

**Research Coordinator:**

**Lawi Chan**

**Research Team:**

**Naing Win, TFM**

**Tin Zar, TFM**

**Nwet Nwet Win, TFM**

**Naw Th'Blay Moo, TFM**

**Naw Nay Yu Paw, TFM**

**Pan Wut Yee Min, YCF**

**Cho Nwe Soe, YCF**

**Nay Chi Win, BMTA**

**Mi Nway, BMTA**

**Zin Min Kyaw, BMWEC**

**Gler Mu Taw, BMWEC**

**May Thazin Oo, MAF**

**Siraporn Kaewsombat, HwF**

**Eva Maria Munck, HwF**

**Alix Fontaine, HwF**

**Saw Lar Bar Tun, HwF**

**Chu Wai Wai Zaw, HwF**

**Kyar Htay, HwF**

**Tom Somchai, HwF**

**Yoon Htar Aein, MECC**

**Khanongrit Singhabut, MECC**

**Frank Bird, MAF**

**Mary (Htet Pyie Pyie Khine), MAF**

**Prasit Rugklin, MAF**



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This report is entitled BRIDGES.

The plural is exceptionally important. All children need an education that will lead to future opportunities for them, and these educational bridges are not the same for each child.

This is true whichever side of a border a child might be born on, as Thailand's Education For All (EFA) policy mandates. This is true whether children's goals are vocational, or whether, in the words of John Dewey, "the goal of education is to enable individuals to continue their education".

And this is particularly true for migrant children: children with complex definitions of "home"; children significantly at risk of never entering school, dropping out of school, being exploited, abused, and neglected; children who are often invisible within the data systems and structures of their host country.

The title of UNESCO's 2019 Global Education Monitoring Report, *Migration, Displacement and Education – Building Bridges, not Walls*, recognizes these dangers. With human migration at an all-time high, "there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution when it comes to creating pathways to accredited education" for migrant children, write Purkey and Irving (2019) in *Forced Migration Review*.

The editor and research team would like to gratefully acknowledge the participation and contributions provided by the government staff, teachers, school administrators, parents and students involved in this research project. Thank you to Louisa Gilder and Mary Ellen Gilder for your invaluable editorial support.

It is our sincere hope that the findings of this report will work to both build and strengthen existing educational bridges: sustainably improving education options to meet the diverse needs of migrant children, their families, and their teachers working in Thailand.

Thank you to Child's Dream Foundation for generously supporting this research.

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# 1. SUMMARY REPORT

Migrant children's educational prospects in Thailand have brightened greatly since 2015, when Save the Children and World Education conducted the last comprehensive research project on migrant education. Specifically, government-recognized education has now become accessible for many migrant children. Many Migrant Learning Centers now use recognized curricula (Myanmar Formal, as well as Myanmar Non-Formal and Thai Non-Formal) and therefore can provide their students with government-accredited educational certificates. Meanwhile, in 2018, the Ministerial Proclamation of Education For All (EFA) eliminated legal obstacles that had prevented migrant children from enrollment in Thai schools.

Despite these gains, more than half of all migrant children in Thailand are still out of school: the Ministry of Education and Migrant Working Group (2018) estimates the out-of-school population as 200,000 children or more. As the migrant population in Thailand has increased over the past three decades, so has the need to provide access to quality education. In order to provide an inclusive and equitable education for all migrant and out of school children there is still much work to be done to enable access to Thai Formal Government Schools and support the legal registration of Migrant Learning Centers and their teachers.

This paper reports on a large-scale Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, building on the 2015 work of Save the Children and World Education. This PAR project sought the perspectives of parents, teachers, educational leaders, and children at both Thai Formal Government Schools and Migrant Learning Centers. The survey included 1,763 participants in 47 locations: 32 Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) and 15 Thai Formal Government Schools (TFGSs), in 5 districts in Tak Province as well as Ranong Province.

## **QUALITY: Inclusive education for migrant children requires both Learning Centers and Formal Schools**

"Most of migrant students that I have taught try very hard and their education results are better than Thai students."

- Thai Formal Government School Teacher, Tha Song Yang District

The study's first finding gives cause for optimism: migrant students -- whether enrolled at Migrant Learning Centers or Thai Formal Government Schools -- consistently report that they are receiving a quality education. Similarly, their parents are largely satisfied with their choice for school enrollment and believe the school where their child is currently enrolled will provide them the most future opportunities. For example, when asked what languages are most important for their children's future success, the most frequent response by parents with children in TFGSs was Thai, followed by English. Similarly, parents with children in MLCs believed English was the most important language, followed by Myanmar language.

Migrant Learning Centers complement the Thai formal system by providing access to education for children on the fringes. MLCs help Thailand realize the goals of its inclusive educational policies by filling existing gaps and overcoming current barriers for migrant children to enroll into Thai Formal Government Schools.



Photo credit: MAF



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS



## RECOGNITION: Migrant Learning Centers are most likely to reach out-of-school children, but they need support to do so

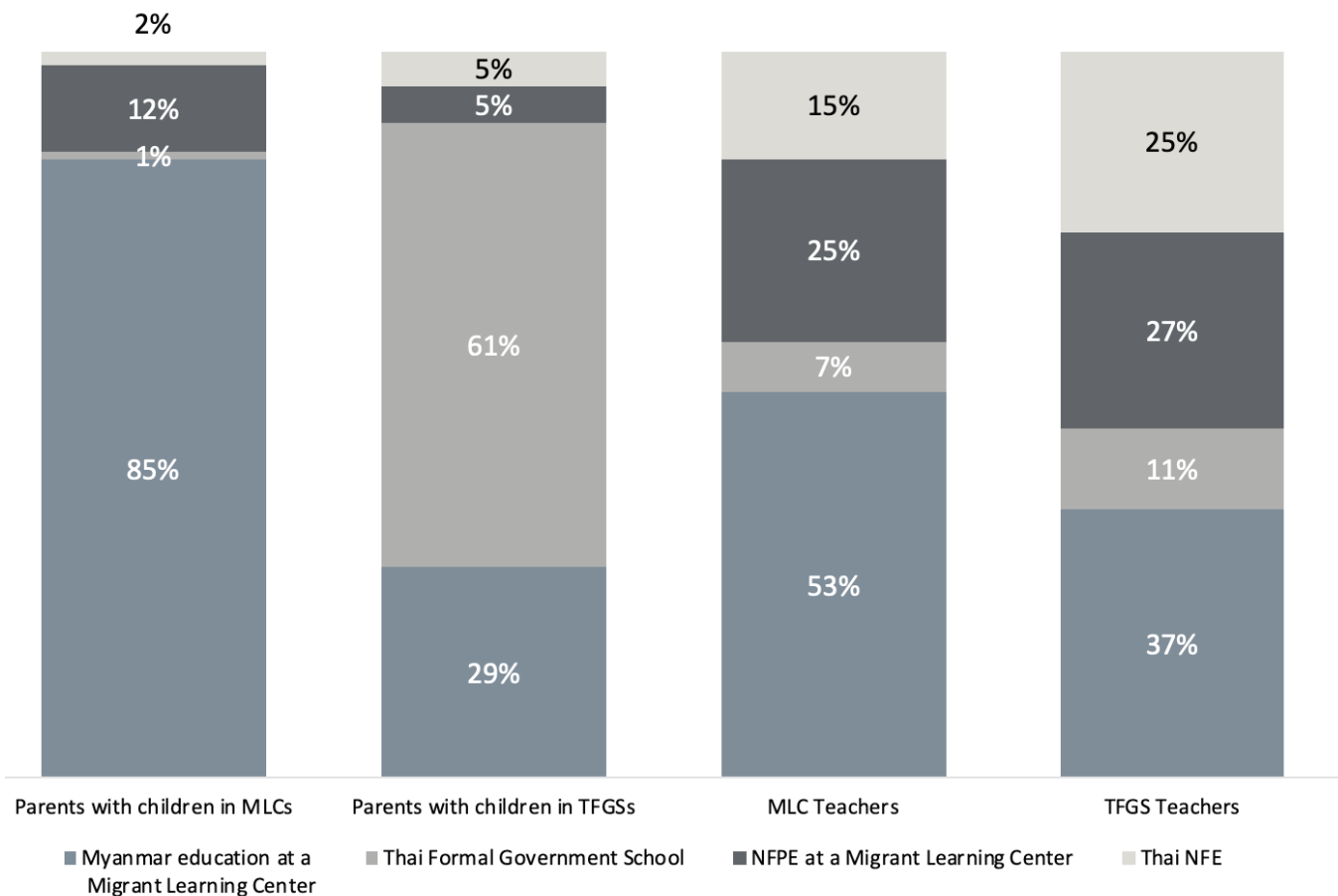
For the past three decades, migrant teachers have provided localized, culturally-sensitive mother tongue-based education for migrant children from Myanmar. 70% of surveyed teachers at Migrant Learning Centers stated they saw their career goal to be teacher. Despite their lack of formal governmental recognition or accreditation, the surveys found strong evidence of migrant teachers’ experience, training and educational backgrounds.

**When asked about their greatest need, the teachers’ most frequent response was *formal recognition* -- citing this more often than the need for increased salary.**

While teachers at Migrant Learning Centers remain unrecognized, in the last four years a great change has come for their students. Most of the MLCs now offer a bridge to either the Thai or Myanmar school system, via curricula that culminate in recognized educational certificates. 91% of surveyed MLC parents were confident that they could enroll their child into a Myanmar government school, should they one day return.

However, hundreds of thousands of migrant children remain unenrolled in any school. Overall, parents and teachers perceived Migrant Learning Centers as the most accessible education option for these out of school children, as seen in the figure below:

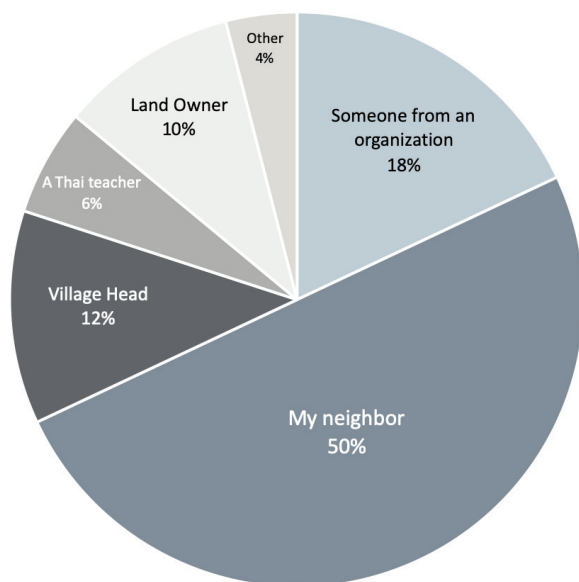
**Perceptions of most accessible education option for migrant children currently out of school**





## ACCESS: Migrant Learning Centers are a crucial complement to a school system otherwise out of reach for many migrants

### Person supporting migrant families to enroll their children into TFGSs



The Thai formal education system, guided by the recently revised Education For All policy, is inspiringly inclusive. All children in Thailand are entitled to the provision of 15 years of free basic education regardless of their nationality. But for many migrant families, major barriers to access still exist, primarily those of language and documentation. 62% of parents with children enrolled in a Thai Formal Government School stated they had help enrolling their children -- mostly from their neighbors, but also from local Village Heads, various organizations, and Thai teachers. Additional support mechanisms for migrant parents would likely result in greater enrollment for migrant children. However, substantial barriers previously cited in literature and confirmed in this research remain.

The access picture is much different for Migrant Learning Centers, which are devoted to the education of just this population. MLCs are a "gateway" to enroll children who have missed significant amounts of school

or who do not possess the Thai language fluency needed for success in the Thai formal system. These learning centers provide educational continuity for older or overage migrant children accompanying their parents to Thailand who, due to their age, would not be able to enter the Thai Formal system at the equivalent grade level they were attending previously in Myanmar. Older children enrolling in Thai Formal schools have largely dropped out in the past or been forced to start in a lower grade, significantly disrupting their education. In the absence of robust bilingual programs in TFGSs, there remains a need for MLCs to supplement the Thai Formal Schools for as long as the country is host to a substantial non-Thai-speaking migrant population.

## SUSTAINABILITY: A significant proportion of the migrant population sees their future in Thailand

59% of surveyed migrant teachers and 71% of migrant parents stated they had been living in Thailand for more than 10 years. Furthermore, according to the survey, 40% of migrant teachers and 43% of parents expect to stay in Thailand more than 10 years. Long-term education planning is thus possible: there exists a fairly stable community and a committed migrant teacher workforce with the potential to provide continuous mother-tongue-based education to migrant children for years to come. This research suggests that the farthest-reaching and most cost-effective solutions for many problems of migrant education would involve ratifying and investing in the Migrant Learning Centers and their teachers. Migrant parents continue to enroll their children in Migrant Learning Centers because these provide education aligned to their children's hopes and dreams for the future. Strong steps have been made to enable more migrant children to access a formal Thai education, however, barriers for migrant children to enroll and succeed at Thai Formal Government Schools remain. There is still much work to be done for inclusive education to be realized. Migrant education service providers have displayed remarkable resilience in the face of these shifting donor priorities, but the situation adds major pressure on already deficient education budgets. From the perspective of these unreached migrant children and their parents, financial and governmental support for Migrant Learning Centers cannot come too soon.

## SUMMARY of KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- A. Formal Recognition and Legalization of Migrant Learning Centers:** Migrant Learning Centers currently offer recognized mother-tongue based education relevant to migrant children. They also potentially serve as preparation centers for migrant children to transition to Thai Formal Government Schools and integrate into Thai society. Best-placed for the enrollment of OOSC, these learning centers play an important role as “safety nets” for some of the most marginalized children in Thailand. To continue in all this vital work, MLCs need a clear legalization process with flexible and achievable standards.
- B. Migrant Teacher Accreditation and Security:** Many migrant teachers possess both substantial experience and quality training. But like the schools in which they work, they need formal recognition. If either the Thai and/or Myanmar Ministry of Education could provide a pathway for these teachers’ accreditation – potentially including in-service training, distance courses, accredited summer programs, and teacher competency assessments -- the quality and stability of migrant education would continue to improve. Similarly, a formal process of legal registration and documentation are needed in order to provide needed security and stability for teachers in Migrant Learning Centers.
- C. Identification and Enrollment programs for Out-of-School Children:** In keeping with Thailand’s commitments in the ASEAN Regional Declaration on OOSCY, these children need coordinated efforts on their behalf.
- i. First, **identification**: Why are migrant children not in school? Where are they? Why are the existing channels not working for them? These questions need answers before action is possible.
  - ii. Second, **enrollment**: Parents and teachers—whether affiliated with Thai schools or migrant centers—have identified the MLCs as the most flexible educational pathway with the fewest barriers to enrollment for out-of-school migrant children.
  - iii. Third, parents need follow-up **support** to ensure these vulnerable children complete their education. It is only through the genuine participation of parents that children at risk can remain in school.
- D. Collaborative Community Awareness-Raising:** All the people involved in helping migrant children enroll in school – local Village Heads, teachers, parents, land owners, local government, employers, and NGO staff -- need a collaborative mechanism to share information. The Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) that already exist at Migrant Learning Centers are a locally-supported mechanism sensitive to work schedules, language considerations and cultural differences. Investing in existing PTAs and expanding this model to Thai Formal Government Schools would establish strong channels for sharing information about available educational pathways, the associated enrollment procedures, registration dates, and ways to address barriers to enrollment.
- E. Community Education Liaison Officers:** A corps of multilingual Community Education Liaison Officers, well-versed in EFA policies, could help those migrant parents with out-of-school children to enroll in the educational option that meets their needs (whether Migrant Learning Center or Thai Formal Government School). A good Liaison Officer would also be versed in work documentation processes; parents who do not have to hide their lack of documentation will be better able to enroll their children in Thai schools and support their children once there.



- F. Subsidization and Support to Complete Education:** Support should not stop with enrollment -- in-school migrant children are still children at risk. Many drop out of school at the age of 10 or 11 to work (Thame and Patrawart, 2017). These children need financial aid, school materials, transportation and lunches to keep them in school – whether they attend a Thai Formal Government School or a Migrant Learning Center.
- G. Stronger Government Engagement:** Governments must provide additional funding to both Thai Formal Government Schools and Migrant Learning Centers before policies such as Education For All (EFA) or cross-border initiatives can have their full impact. As things stand, vital functions of Migrant Learning Centers still depend financially on international organizations. Meanwhile, the funding sources of these NGOs continue to diminish. The inevitable result will be heightened drop-out rates -- further marginalizing children already vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. A well-educated migrant population will be a boon to Thai society and economic development, rather than a burden: a wise investment for any government to make.



Photo credit: HwF



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS



## 2. CONTEXT

It is estimated that of the 300,000 - 400,000 migrant children currently living in Thailand, over 200,000 are out of school (Ministry of Education and Migrant Working Group, 2018). The out of school estimates represent more than half of the total population of migrant children in Thailand. The majority of these children are from Myanmar: accompanying their parents who have migrated to Thailand due to a variety of political, conflict or poverty-related push factors and/or economic and vocational opportunity pull factors (IOM, 2016). The Myanmar Population and Housing Census Main Report (2014) indicates that the migrant population in Thailand has continued to increase over the past 3 decades from 229,504 in 1990 to 1,978,348 in 2015. To put this in perspective, IOM (2009) estimates that 10 percent of Myanmar's population resides abroad. It has been estimated that migrants contribute between 4.3 to 6.6 percent of Thailand's gross domestic product (ILO and OECD, 2017). World Bank (2016) estimates that migrant workers represent more than 80% of the total workforce in some sectors such as fishing and construction. With this increase in migration also comes the need to provide migrant children accompanying their parents with quality educational options.

The migrant community, in response to this need, established Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs). Currently there are 110 MLCs throughout Thailand (see Table 1). In recent years, these MLCs have made powerful strides to ensure migrant children from Myanmar receive a government-recognized education either from the Thai or the Myanmar Ministry of Education. In the 2018-2019 academic year 145,379 non-Thai children were enrolled in Thai Formal Government Schools<sup>1</sup> (TFGSs), 16,350 were enrolled in Migrant Learning Centers and 2,562 were enrolled in Thai Government Non-Formal Education (NFE), 360 of which were studying at MLCs (Ministry of Education and Migrant Working Group, 2018). Nonprofits (whether NGOs, INGOs, or individual donors) are the major funders of Migrant Learning Centers. In recent years funding for MLCs has been dramatically decreasing as donors shift their priorities from Thailand to Myanmar.

**Table 1** Migrant Learning Center enrollment 2018-2019

Province	Number of Migrant Learning Centers	Student Enrollment
Bangkok	3	139
Chiang Mai	2	44
Chiang Rai	4	190
Chumphon	2	72
Kanchanaburi	1	233
Pathum Thani	4	193
Phang Nga	3	300
Ranong	13	2,462
Rayong	1	50
Samut Prakan	2	47
Samut Sakhon	4	510
Tak	70	12,085
Trat	1	25
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>16,350</b>

Migrant Working Group and Tak Primary Educational Service Area Office 2 (2018) in United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand (2019)

<sup>1</sup> Also referred to as Royal Thai Government Schools in literature. This paper used Thai Formal Government School (TFGS) in order to differentiate between formal and non-formal education options.

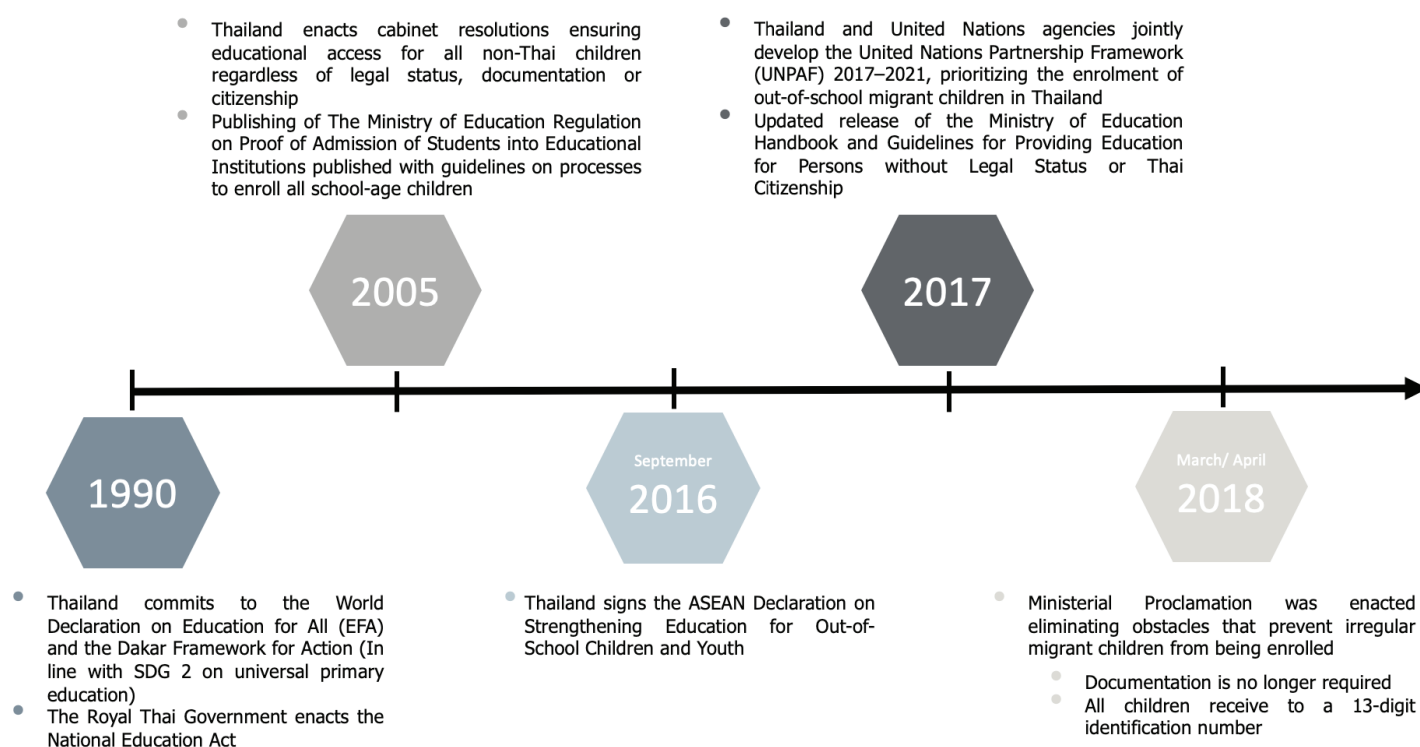
Obstacles for migrant children to enroll and complete their education at a Thai Formal Government School remain extensive and multidimensional, including:

- Linguistic, cultural and social barriers
- Educational costs
- Negative attitudes and perceptions toward migrant children
- A lack of understanding and capacity to implement Education For All (EFA) policies and procedures at the school-level
- Access to transportation and transportation costs
- Parental reservations about accessing government services due to limited documentation
- Limited understanding of available opportunities and enrollment procedures amongst migrant communities
- High levels of poverty; some migrant families need their children to work
- A lack of accurate data on the number of migrant children: those in school, those having dropped out of school and those never having entered school, which limits the extent to which service providers can accurately assess and meet the demand for education

(United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, 2019; Thame and Patrawart, 2017; World Education and Save the Children, 2015)

The harsh realities of critically limited MLC funding and ongoing barriers to access TFGs place many migrant children at further risk of being out of school. The Thai and Myanmar governments signed Memoranda of Understanding in 2002-2003 (revised in 2015-2016) to ensure legally available registration channels for migrant laborers. However, these documentation channels do not include dependents. Consequently, many migrant children lack legal status in Thailand even if their parents have followed formal processes. Some migrant families are scared to enroll their undocumented children in Thai Formal Government Schools, further marginalizing their children.

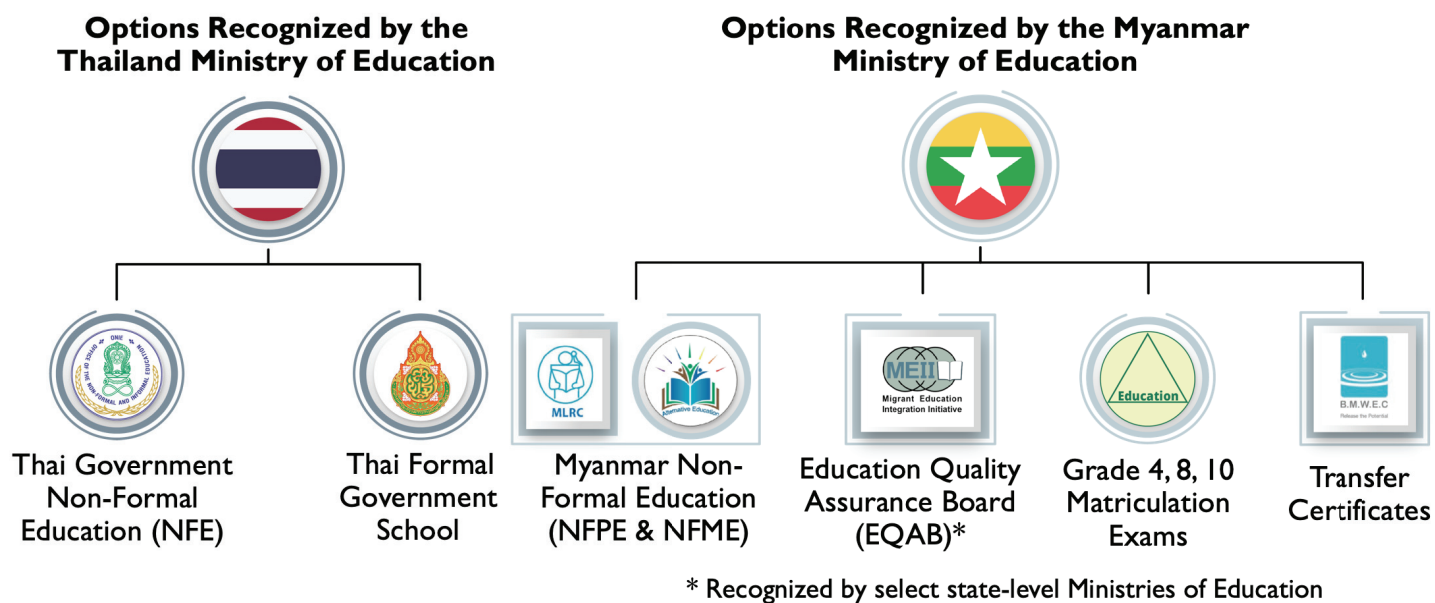
**Figure 1** Timeline of inclusive education policies in Thailand



With the signing of the July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005 cabinet resolution, Thailand guaranteed access to 15 years of free education for all children in the nation regardless of citizenship, documentation, or legal status. All children born in Thailand are also entitled to birth registration, enrollment in the migrant health insurance scheme, and child protective services. The Thai Ministry of Education has demonstrated its commitment to increasing access to education through the allocation of 76.6 billion THB in the 2018-2019 academic year for per-head count budget. All students, regardless of legal status, receive the same per-head count budget allocation. The Office of the Basic Education Commission's (OBEC) recently revised Education For All (EFA) policy has worked to promote access to Thai Government Formal Schools for non-Thais regardless of their legal status.

However, there is still work to be done providing access to recognized educational options for all migrant children. Currently there are multiple recognized educational pathways available for migrant children in Tak Province, as seen in Figure 2. Though much needed, many of these pathways are not available to all migrant children in the nation.

**Figure 2** Educational pathways available for Myanmar migrant children living in Tak province



Currently, most Migrant Learning Centers administer one (and in some cases two) recognized educational curricula. This recent development, achieved by migrant education stakeholder organizations including Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF), the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC), the Education Quality Assurance Board (EQAB) and Marist Asia Foundation (MAF) has allowed most migrant children enrolled in MLCs to attain recognized educational certificates. However, there still exists uncertainty for migrant children hoping to return and enroll in a government school in Myanmar. As an example, high school-aged students experienced multiple challenges concerning variable placement test criteria and tuition fees in Kayah State (Karenni Refugee Repatriation and Reconstruction Working Group in TBC, 2018). Clarity and standardization for education continuity remains an ongoing challenge for some migrant children. To address this concern for migrant children in schools under their supervision, BMWEC signed a landmark national-level agreement with the Myanmar Ministry of Education in 2013 enabling migrant children with a BMWEC transfer certificate to register at the equivalent grade level should they enroll in a government school in Myanmar. Other Migrant Learning Centers have made local agreements enabling their children to enroll in a Myanmar government school upon return with a recommendation letter and educational transcript, but again, issues regarding equivalency and placement tests have prevented some students from enrolling in the proper grade upon return.



In 2015, World Education facilitated the development of the Education Quality Framework (EQF) as a response to the need for consistent quality standards among MLCs and in order to more effectively advocate for government recognition. Following a pilot of the tool in the 2016-2017 academic year, 38 MLCs implemented the EQF in 2017-2018 and 54 MLCs followed in 2018-2019. The EQF specifically focuses on contextual issues that Migrant Learning Centers face, as well as their systems-level structures in 5 domains: Teacher Quality and Support, School Management, Child Protection, Parent Engagement and Student Recognition. Data from the 2018-2019 EQF assessment was submitted to the Tak provincial educational authority: the Tak Primary Education Service Area Office 2 (Tak PESAO 2), to quantify the quality of education provided by MLCs in Tak Province.

In the 2018-2019 academic year there were 13,620 non-Thai children enrolled in Thai Formal Government Schools (TFGSs) throughout Tak Province and 70 MLCs listed under Tak PESAO 2 enrolling 12,085 children and employing 700 migrant teachers (MECC, 2018). In these learning centers 351 students passed and received a Myanmar grade 4 certificate, 143 passed and received a Myanmar grade 8 certificate and 25 passed and received a Myanmar Grade 10 Matriculation certificate (BMWEC and HwF, 2019). The respective pass rates for these exams are all in line with rates at government schools across the border at government schools in Myanmar. In Ranong Province there was an estimated 2,462 students enrolled in 10 Migrant Learning Centers, and an estimated 150 Myanmar migrant children enrolled in TFGSs. Additionally, there were an estimated 200 Myanmar migrant students registered in the Thai Non-Formal Education Program (MAF, 2018).

In 2018-2019, 22 MLCs in Mae Sot, Phob Phra, Mae Ramat and Bangkok administered the Myanmar Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) curriculum, enrolling 718 students (see Table 2). Currently, the largest townships for Myanmar Non-Formal Education enrollment are all in Thailand. In 2018-2019, 83% of students passed the NFPE exam and 95% passed the NFME Exam.







**Table 2** Provision of Myanmar Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) at MLCs in Thailand

School Year	Number of MLCs	Students Enrolled	Areas	Number of NFPE Teachers
2014-2015	4	120	2: Mae Sot, Phob Phra	8
2015-2016	5	160	2: Mae Sot, Phob Phra	10
2016-2017	17	814	3: Mae Sot, Phob Phra, Mae Ramat	35
2017-2018	17	646	4: Mae Sot, Phob Phra, Mae Ramat, Bangkok	39
2018-2019	22	718	4: Mae Sot, Phob Phra, Mae Ramat, Bangkok	39

(Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation, 2019)

Many factors shape a child's success in school, but the largest influence on learning outcomes is the quality and expertise of the teacher (Hattie, 2009; Westbrook et al., 2014). All high performing education systems invest in and certify their teachers because educators play a such a critical role in improving student performance (OECD, 2011). Educators employed at Migrant Learning Centers face a myriad of endemic challenges largely outside of their control (see Figure 3). Despite receiving numerous trainings, including recent curriculum training provided by the Myanmar Ministry of Education, teachers in MLCs remain unrecognized and largely without legal documentation.

**Figure 3** Challenges faced by teachers at MLCs

-  Job insecurity
-  Insufficient salary/stipends
-  Limited legal documentation and access to health care
-  Inadequate teaching and learning resources
-  Inconsistent training and professional development opportunities across schools
-  Scarce options for professionalization and recognition by a government education ministry

Despite successes in negotiating beneficial policies between systems on both sides of the border, Migrant Learning Centers and their teachers remain on the margins of Thai society; government recognition and integration with the formal school system would substantially increase their impact for good.



Photo credit: MAF

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Building on the work of Save the Children and World Education (2015), a large-scale Participatory Action Research (PAR) project was undertaken to identify the perspectives of parents, teachers, educational leaders, and children enrolled in both Thai Government Formal Schools and Migrant Learning Centers. 1,763 participants were surveyed from 5 districts in Tak Province as well as Ranong Province (Table 3). Researchers were staff working in locally based organizations providing educational support for migrant children. This participatory approach was an opportunity to both build the capacity of participants through their intentional involvement in the research process and to leverage their extensive experience and intimate knowledge of the migrant community from Myanmar. Through a series of workshops, participants identified the existing gaps in literature, co-developed the research tools, collaboratively determined the sample population and research schedule, conducted field work and collectively analyzed the research data in order to determine main findings and make key recommendations. All local researchers were trained in research ethics, child protection procedures, and child safeguarding protocols as part of the workshops. They then facilitated mixed methods surveys with research subjects—children, teachers, and parents.

The project used quota sampling to ensure that it surveyed children and youth (aged 10-20) in proportions relative to the Tak and Ranong migrant population enrolled in primary, middle and high school in both MLCs and TFGSs. In Tak province, the children, teachers, and parents came from the 5 geographic districts with the highest population of migrant families: Mae Sot, Mae Ramat, Phob Phra, Umphang and Tha Song Yang. In total, the researchers administered surveys in 47 locations: 32 Migrant Learning Centers and 15 Thai Formal Government Schools (a complete list of participating schools is available in Annex A). A guiding belief of this research is that local education stakeholders are the active agents of positive change in their schools and communities.

**Table 3** Research participants

	Subtotal	Migrant Learning Centers	Thai Formal Government Schools
Students	766	514	252
Parents	638	424	214
Teachers	331	233	98
Enrollment Directors	26	-	26
Office of Basic Education Commission (OBEC)	2	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,763</b>		

# 4. FINDINGS

The research is structured around four thematic areas: Quality, Recognition, Access and Sustainability. Key research questions introduce each section. Throughout, specific cross-cutting insights are highlighted.

In order to quantify the levels of confidence, satisfaction and understanding among surveyed participants, Likert scales were utilized within the surveys. Within this report Likert scores are presented as weighted averages to demonstrate the overall perceptions of each particular group as a basis for comparison. Weighted averages are reported as a number between 1.0 and 5.0, which can be interpreted according to the corresponding interval ranges in Table 4 below:

**Table 4** Weighted average interval ranges with corresponding Likert values

Interval Range	Rating	Confidence	Satisfaction
1.00 to 1.79	Strongly Disagree	Not Confident at all	Very Dissatisfied
1.80 to 2.59	Disagree	Slightly Confident	Dissatisfied
2.60 to 3.39	Neutral	Somewhat Confident	Neutral
3.40 to 4.19	Agree	Fairly Confident	Satisfied
4.20 to 5.00	Strongly Agree	Completely Confident	Very Satisfied

## 4.1 QUALITY: In order to promote quality education for migrant children, what effective education standards, data systems and school-level support is needed?

### 4.1.1 EDUCATION QUALITY

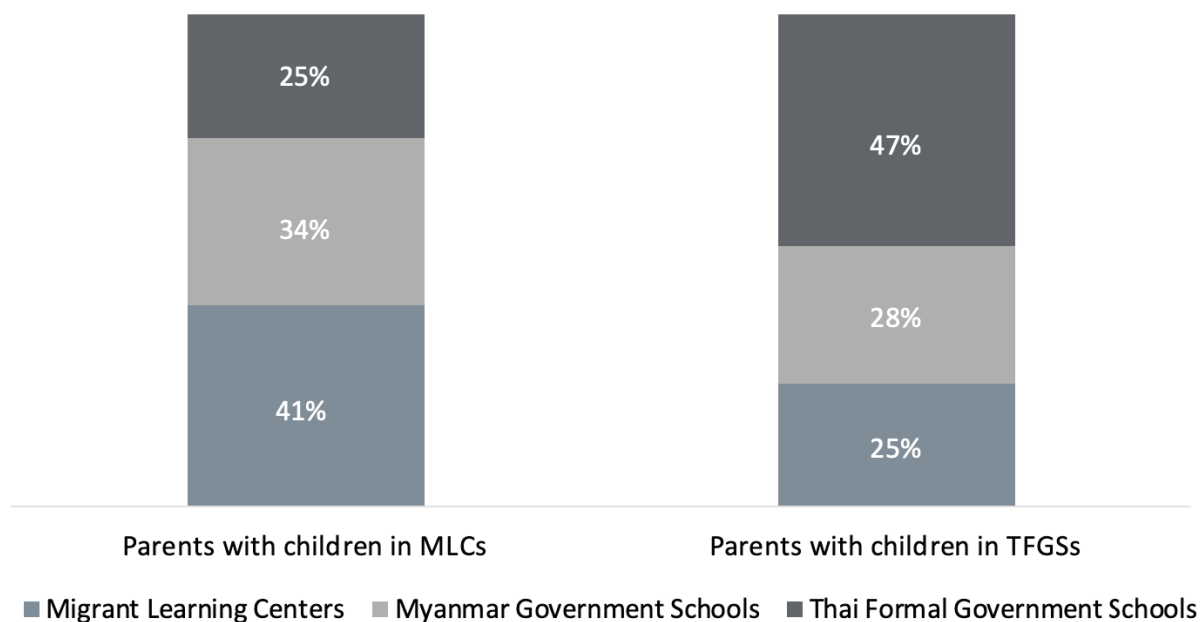
When asked what languages are most important for their children’s future success, the most frequent response by parents with children in TFGSs was Thai followed by English. Parents with children in MLCs believed English was the most important language followed by Myanmar language.

Students consistently reported high educational quality in both Migrant Learning Centers and Thai Formal Government Schools. When asked to rate their satisfaction of learning in five domains, students’ responses on a 5-point Likert scale were near equal across both school types: language learning support (4.22 MLC/ 4.46 TFGS, both Very Satisfied), teaching and learning approaches (4.26 MLC/ 4.51 TFGS, both Very Satisfied), relationship with other students (4.23 MLC = Very Satisfied/ 4.09 TFGS = Satisfied), relationship with your teacher (4.50 MLC/ 4.56 TFGS, both Very Satisfied), school rules and policies (4.35 MLC/ 4.32 TFGS, both Very Satisfied).

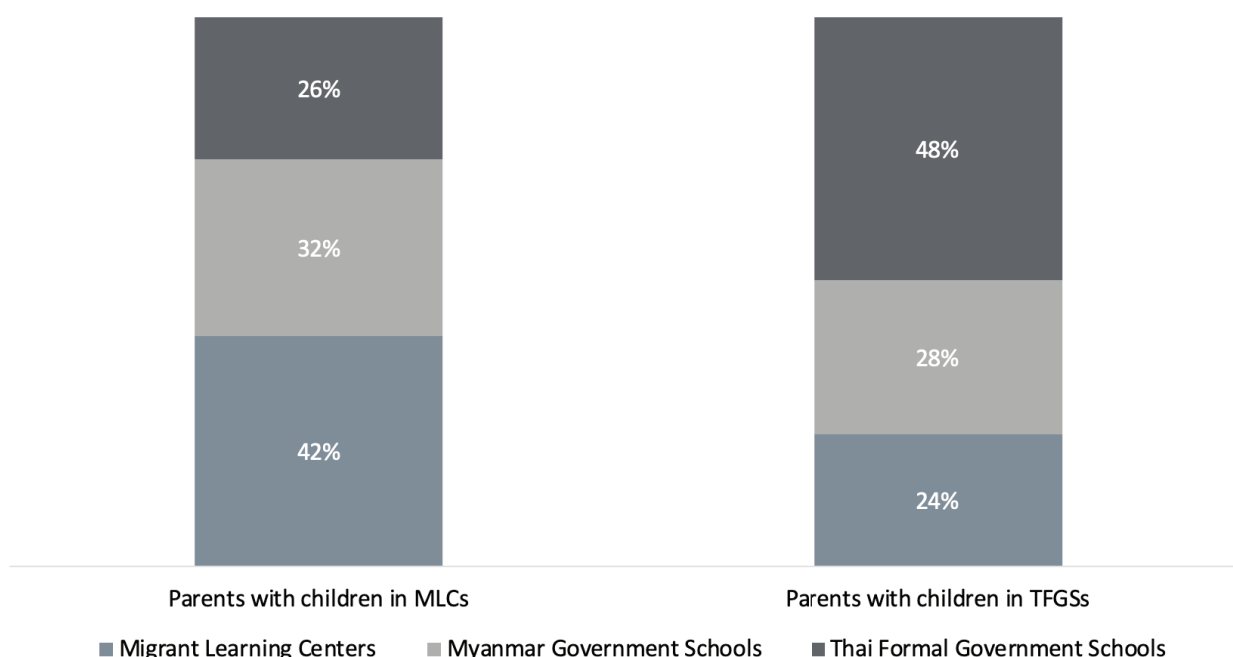


Parents, too, reported satisfaction with their choice of school for their children. Parents with children enrolled in MLCs perceived MLCs to be the highest-quality education available that provided the most opportunities for their children, followed by government schools in Myanmar and TFGSs (See Figures 4 and 5). Similarly, parents with children enrolled in TFGSs perceived TFGSs to be the highest-quality education available that provided the most opportunities for their children, followed by government schools in Myanmar and MLCs. When asked what languages are most important for their children’s future success, the most frequent response by parents with children in TFGS was Thai followed by English. Similarly, parents with children in MLCs believed English was the most important language followed by Myanmar language.

**Figure 4** Parents perception of school quality

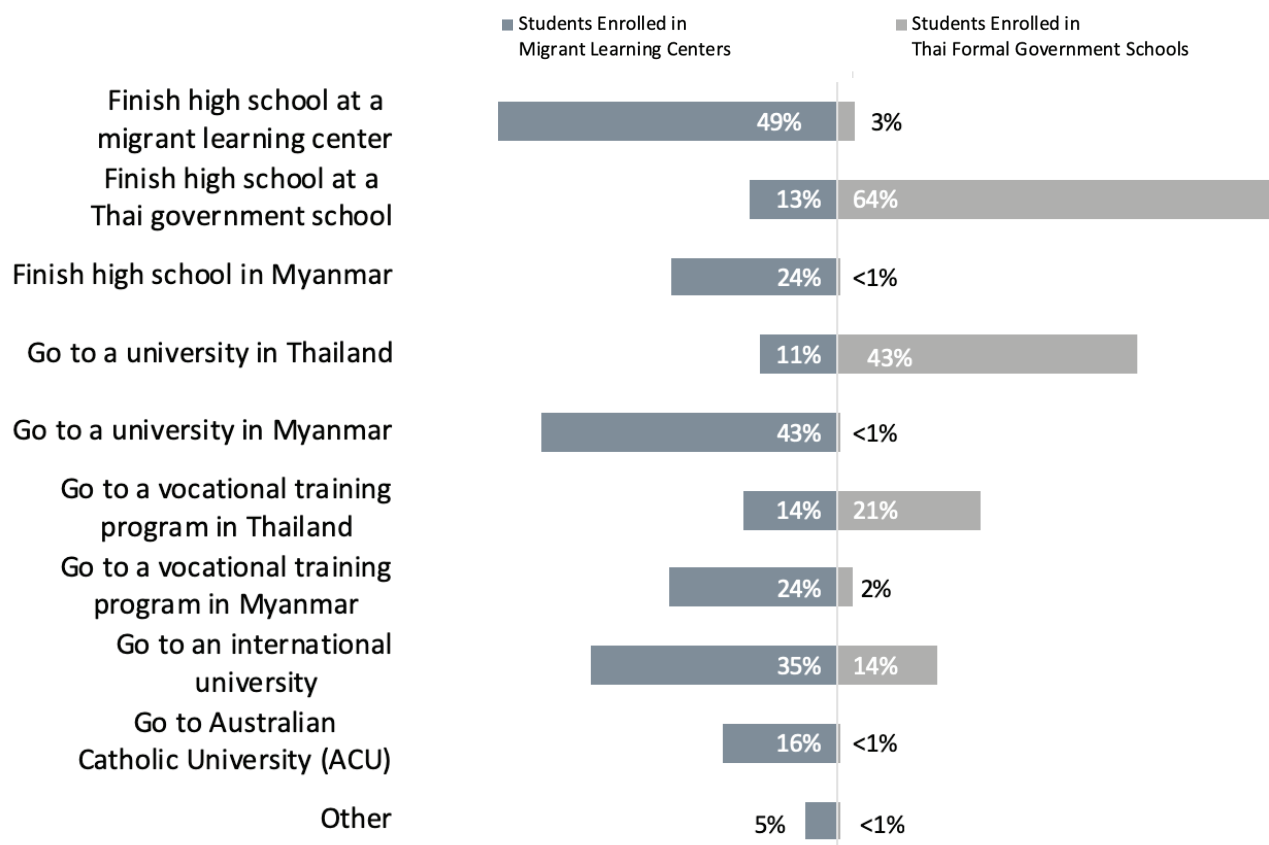


**Figure 5** Parents perception of opportunities provided by school options



By and large, surveyed students perceived their educational goals in line with the current educational pathway they were enrolled in. The most frequently cited goals of students studying in Migrant Learning Centers were to finish high school at a Migrant Learning Center (49%), go to a university in Myanmar (43%), and go to an international university (35%). Students studying in TFGSs selected that their goals were to finish high school at a Thai Formal Government School (64%), attend a university in Thailand (43%) or go to a vocational training program in Thailand (21%), as seen in Figure 6.

**Figure 6** Students’ educational goals (multiple responses were allowed for a single student)



“I want to finish my education in Thailand and get a good job to be able to support my parents”

– female student at a Thai Formal Government School, Phob Phra District



### 4.1.2 EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

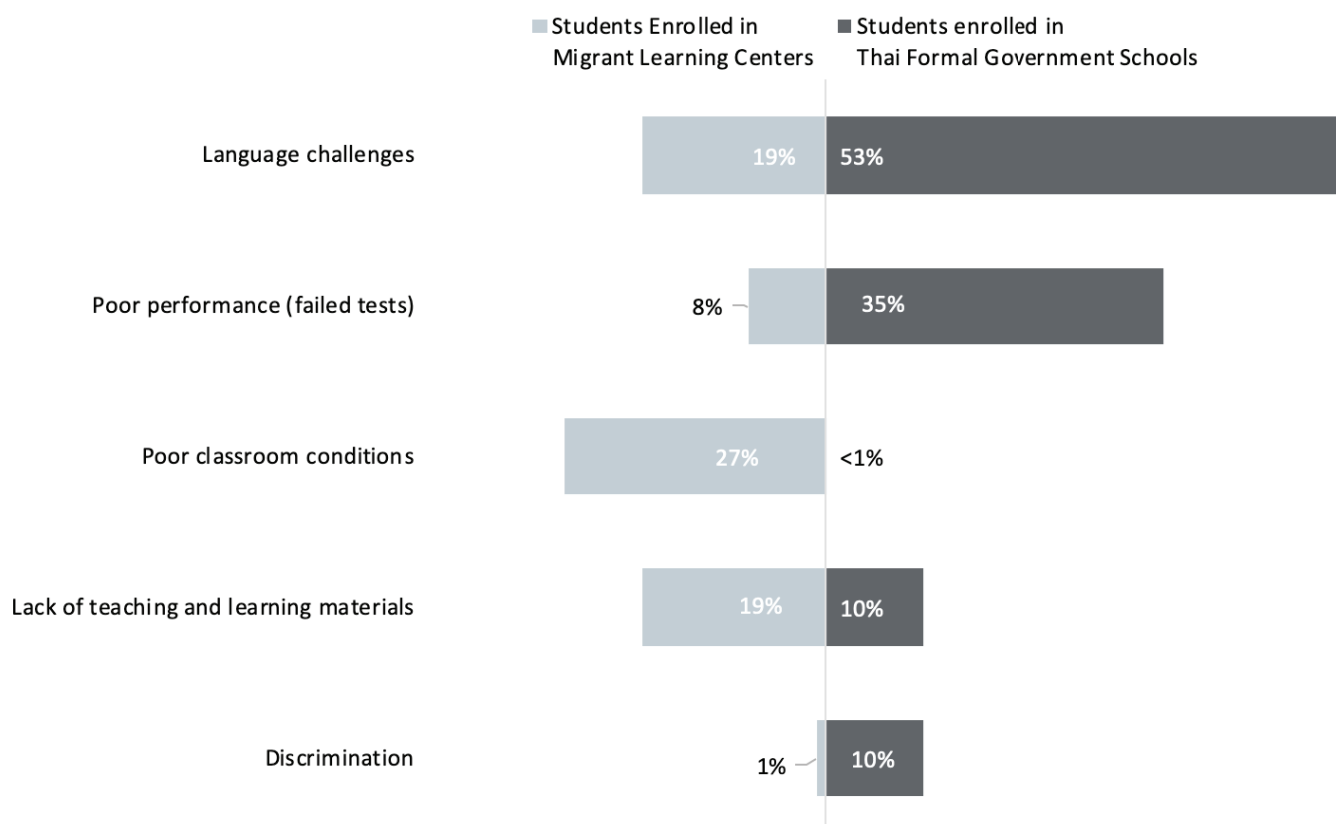
Depending on the type of school they attended, students reported different challenges (see Figure 7). For students enrolled in MLCs, the two most frequently-reported challenges were poor classroom conditions (27%) and a lack of teaching and learning materials (19%). For students enrolled in TFGSs the two most frequently-reported challenges were Thai language challenges (53%) and poor performance and failed tests (35%). The instructional language they experience at school influences students' language fluency. Out of a list of Thai, Myanmar language, and English, students in TFGSs perceived Thai as the language they were most confident to speak (4.04 = Confident) followed by Myanmar language (3.70 = Confident). Students in MLCs perceived Myanmar language as the language they were most confident to speak (4.49 = Completely Confident) followed by English (3.20 = Somewhat Confident).

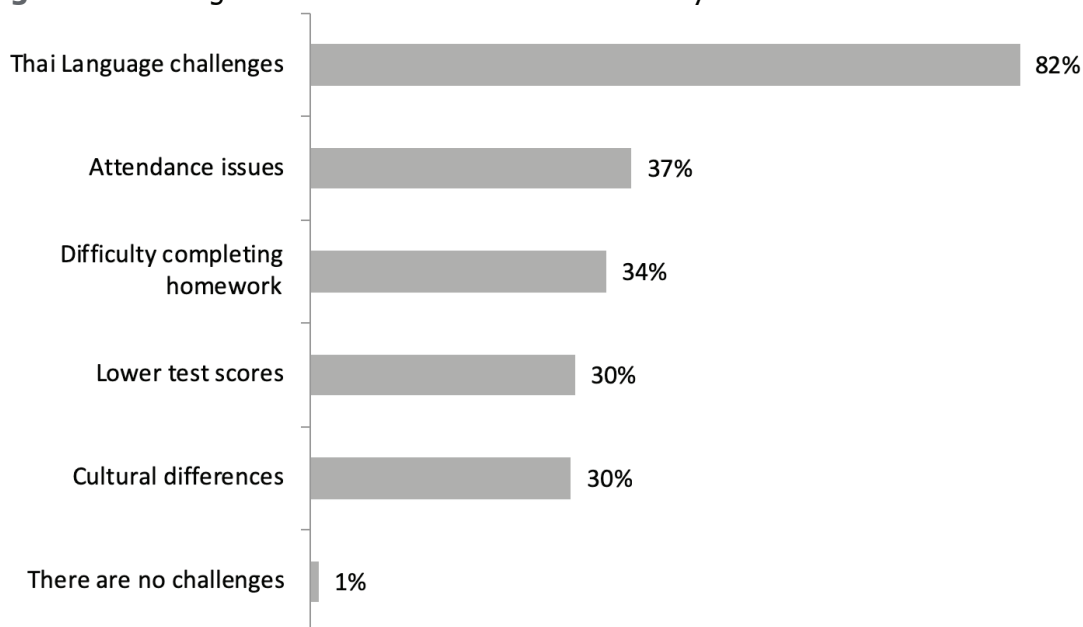
Through the qualitative responses of TFGS Enrollment and School Directors, it was clear that many migrant children require additional support and special considerations to succeed at school

70% of surveyed TFGS Directors and enrollment personnel (n=26) believed their school did not have adequate budget to provide needed support for non-Thai children at their school

Thai teachers corroborated and gave insight into their students' perceptions. The TFGS teachers reported Thai language as the greatest learning challenge for migrant children (82%), followed by attendance issues (37%) and difficulty completing homework (35%) (Figure 8).

**Figure 7** Educational challenges cited by students



**Figure 8** Challenges for non-Thai students at TFGSs by teachers

Teaching a class where the language of instruction is different from students' mother tongue language presents a myriad of challenges. Teachers in TFGSs identified the need for additional classroom support, in the form of a teaching assistant to help with translation (see Figure 9). Teachers also selected that they needed greater knowledge of the enrollment and documentation processes for non-Thai children (43%), and that Myanmar language training would also be beneficial (36%).

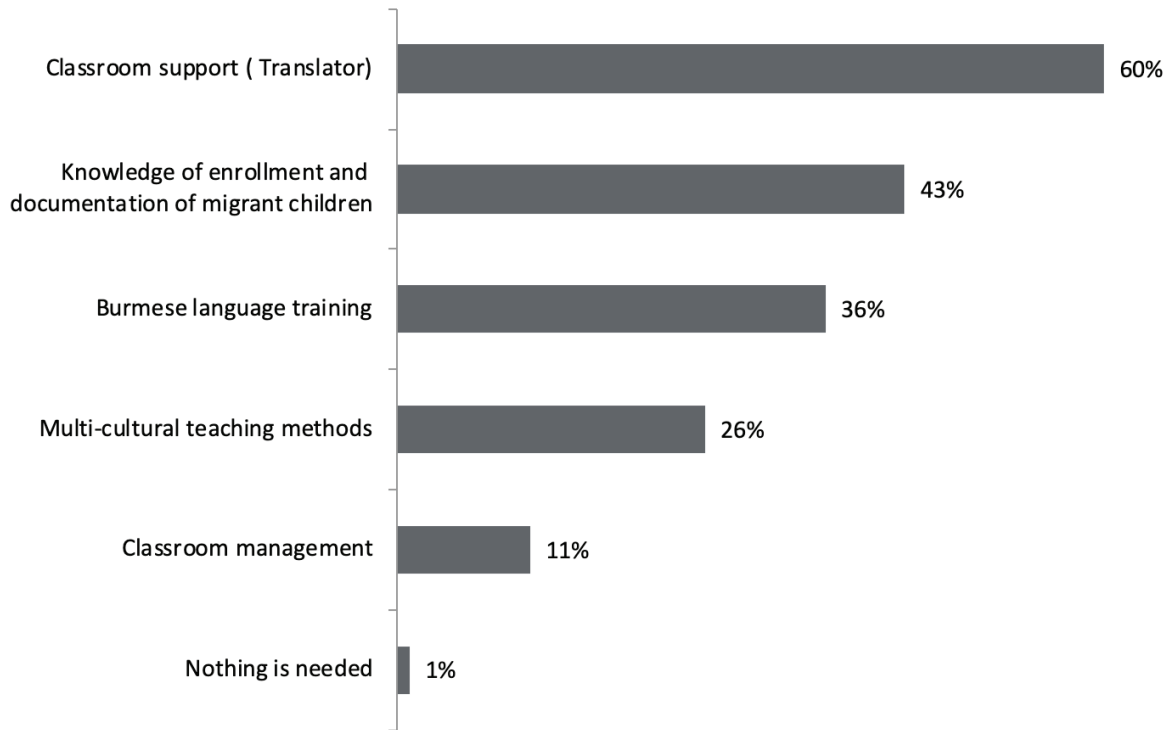
In many facets, migrant children are at a distinct disadvantage compared to their Thai classmates at Thai Formal Government Schools. Migrant children are learning in their 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> language, largely come from disadvantaged backgrounds and do not have parents who can engage in their education due to language barriers. When asked about school-level needs, teachers in TFGSs selected that substantial challenges exist for migrant parents to communicate with school staff, documentation challenges negatively impact the enrollment of non-Thai students, non-Thai students are more likely to drop out, and that the enrollment of non-Thai children is a deterrent for Thai parents to enroll their children at the school (see Figure 10).



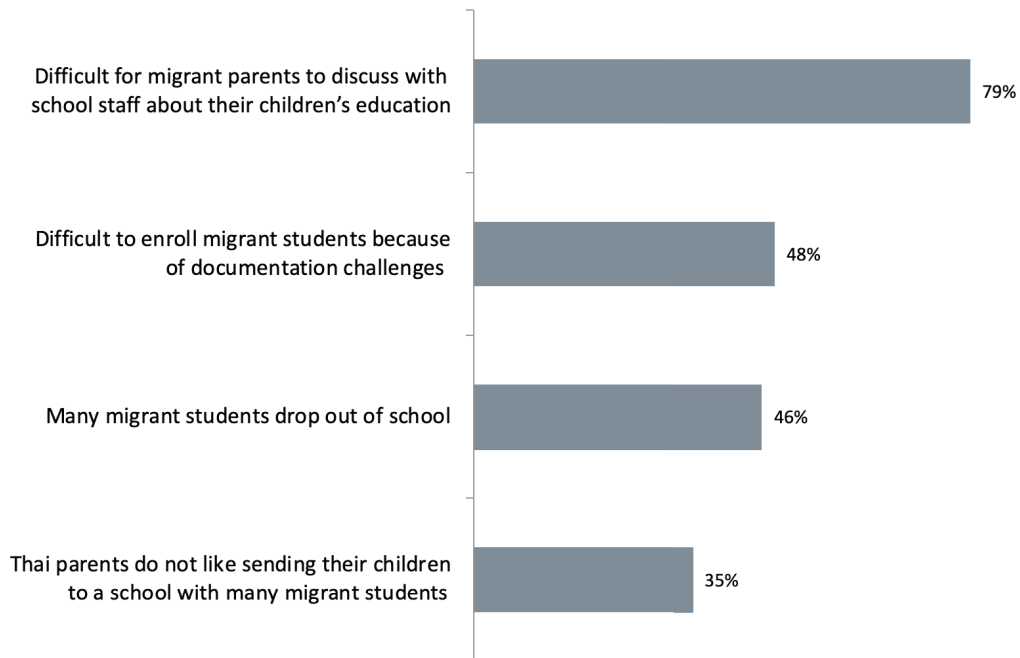
MECC staff facilitating surveys with migrant students at a TFGS  
Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS



**Figure 9** Support requested by Thai Formal Government School teachers



**Figure 10** School-level challenges associated with migrant student enrollment perceived by TFGS teachers



Through the qualitative responses of TFGS Enrollment and School Directors, it was clear that many migrant children require additional practical support and special considerations to succeed at school. TFGSs work to provide all students with needed learning materials, uniforms and daily lunches, however, many migrant children have greater needs including transportation to and from school. This economic burden is carried by migrant students' families. 70% of surveyed TFGS Directors and enrollment personnel (n=26) believed their school did not have adequate budget to provide needed support for non-Thai children at their school.

### 4.1.3 MIGRANT TEACHER QUALITY

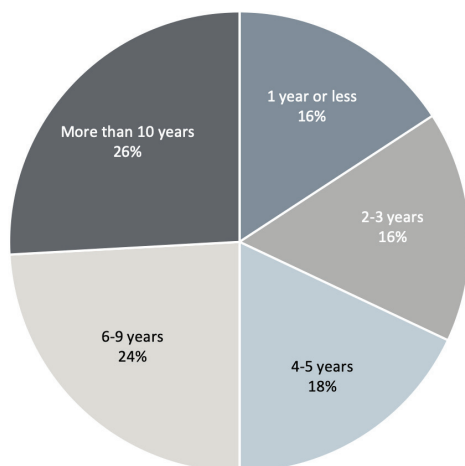
70% of surveyed teachers at Migrant Learning Centers stated they saw their career goal to be teacher

68% of surveyed migrant teachers reported 4 or more years teaching experience

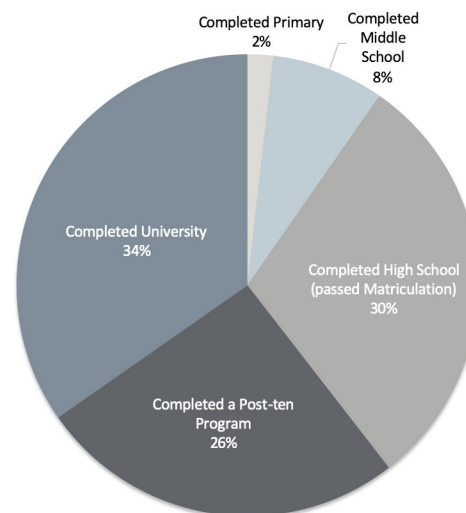
Survey responses demonstrated strong evidence of migrant teachers' experience, training and educational backgrounds, despite their lack of formal governmental recognition or accreditation. Of migrant teachers surveyed (n=223), a collective 68% of teachers reported 4 or more years teaching experience. 50% at least 6 years' experience, and 26% had 10 or more years teaching experience (see Figure 11). 90% of surveyed migrant teachers have either completed high school, a post-ten program<sup>2</sup> or university. Additionally, 77% of teachers have completed in-service teacher training, 72% have attended pre-service teacher training, 61% have received training from the Myanmar Ministry of Education and 72% had received subject-specific training. Migrant

teachers represent a skilled and qualified workforce providing an essential service for migrant children. These statistics compare favorably with government-recognized teacher training. To teach at a government school in Myanmar, educators must have passed the grade 10 matriculation exam and completed a 2-year teacher education program at an Education College<sup>3</sup>. To teach at a Thai Formal Government School, educators are required to complete a 4-year teacher education university program.

**Figure 11** MLC teacher years of teaching experience



**Figure 12** MLC teacher education level



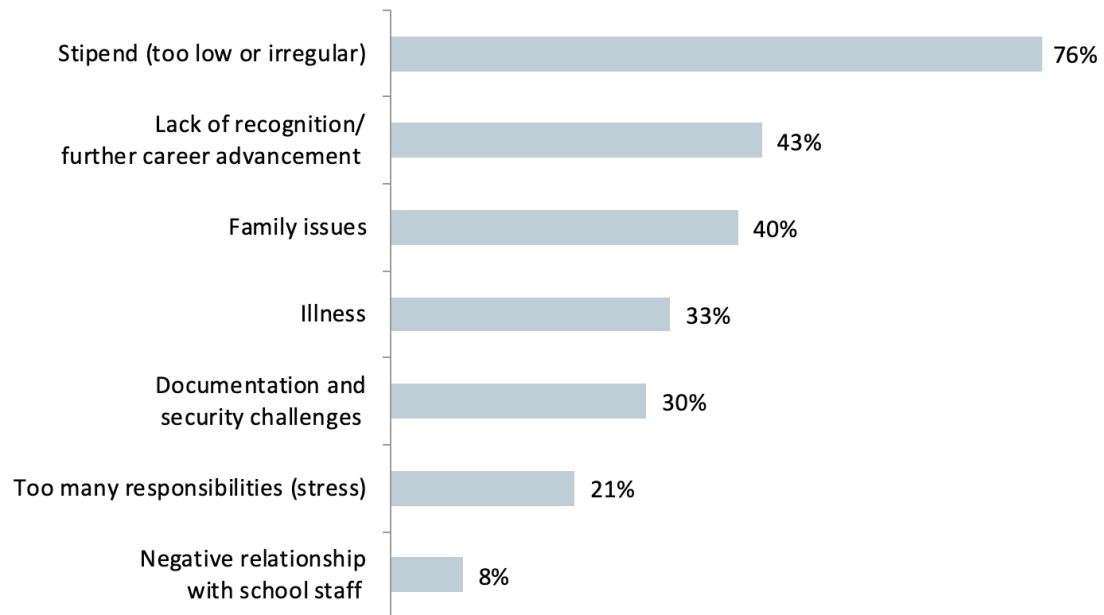
Migrant teachers face numerous challenges in order to provide quality education to migrant children. The most frequent response for why migrant teachers leave their position was low or irregular salary, followed by a lack of career-advancement opportunities and opportunity for recognition (see Figure 13). The majority of migrant teachers receive far below the 300 THB per day minimum wage in Thailand. In order to provide migrant children

<sup>2</sup> Post-ten programs are largely autonomous post-secondary educational programs ranging from 6-months to 2-year enrollment periods. They work to address the shortcomings of education for young people from Myanmar who do not possess a Myanmar government grade 10 Matriculation certificate. Each program is unique and typically offers a diverse range of subjects including English, communications and IT, social studies, science and life skills. Post-ten programs are largely unaccredited.

<sup>3</sup> The teacher education programs in Myanmar offered through Education Colleges are currently being reformed to become 4-year programs

a quality, mother tongue-based education, migrant teachers require appropriate and consistent remuneration and the prospect of government-accredited professionalization.

**Figure 13** MLC teacher perceived challenges



“Many migrant students have graduated from our school, finished vocational college and now have jobs”

– TFGS Director, Mae Sot District



HwF and BMWEC staff facilitating surveys with students at an MLC  
Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS



## 4.2 RECOGNITION: What is needed to strengthen bridges between Migrant Learning Centers, teachers, students and the Thai and Myanmar Ministries of Education?

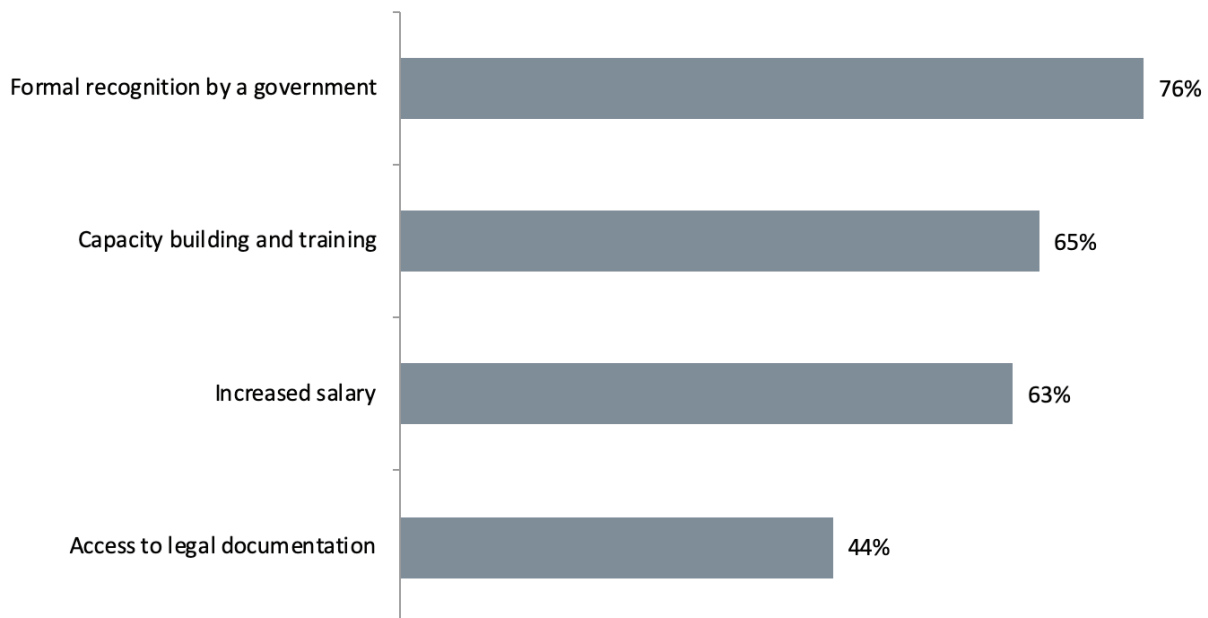
### 4.2.1 MIGRANT TEACHER RECOGNITION

The Thai Government should recognize Migrant Learning Centers. Schools depend on teachers to be sustainable. When teachers are safe, then they can focus on children's education."

- MLC Teacher, Mae Sot District

Local migrant education service providers have supported culturally-sensitive mother-tongue-based education for migrant children from Myanmar for the past 3 decades, despite the lack of formal government recognition and professionalization opportunities. This need for formal recognition was migrant teachers' most frequent response when asked about their greatest need (see Figure 14). **Formal recognition was more frequently cited by migrant educators than increased salary.**

**Figure 14** Needs of migrant teachers



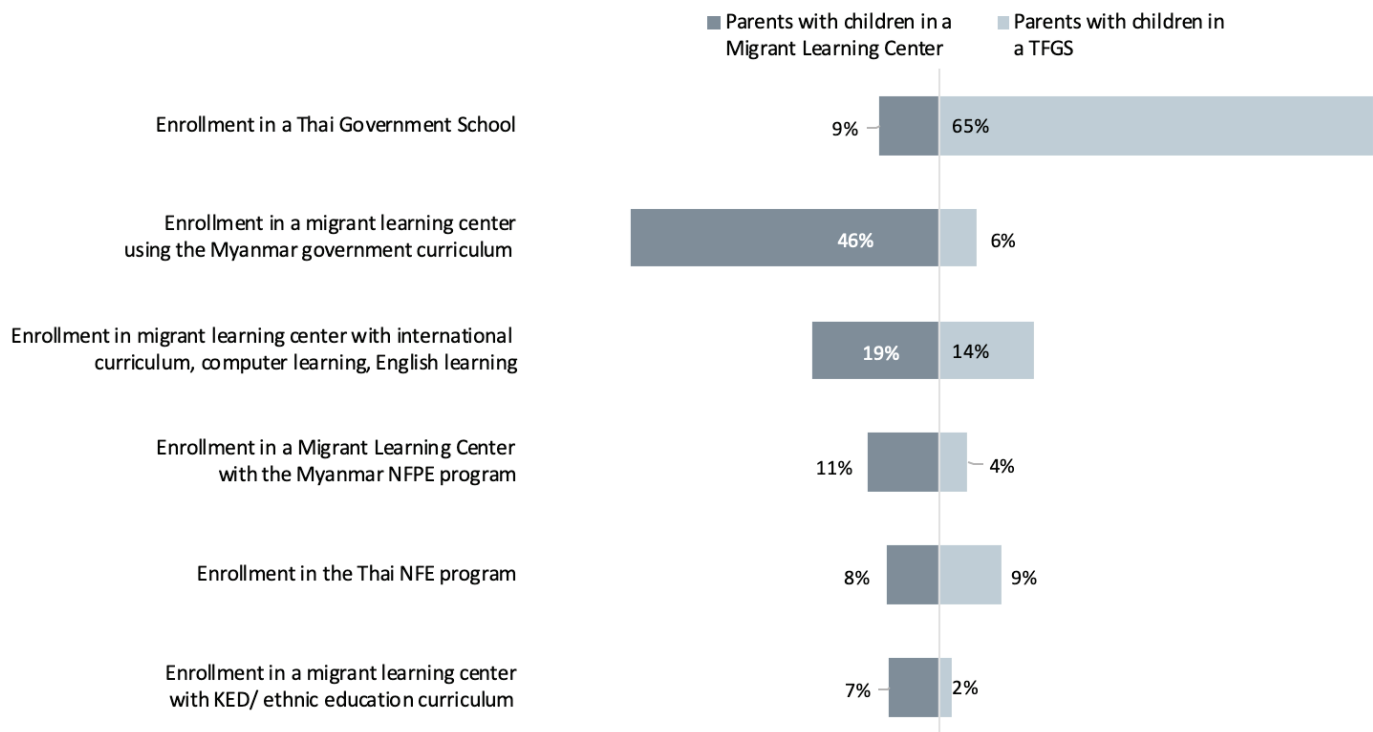


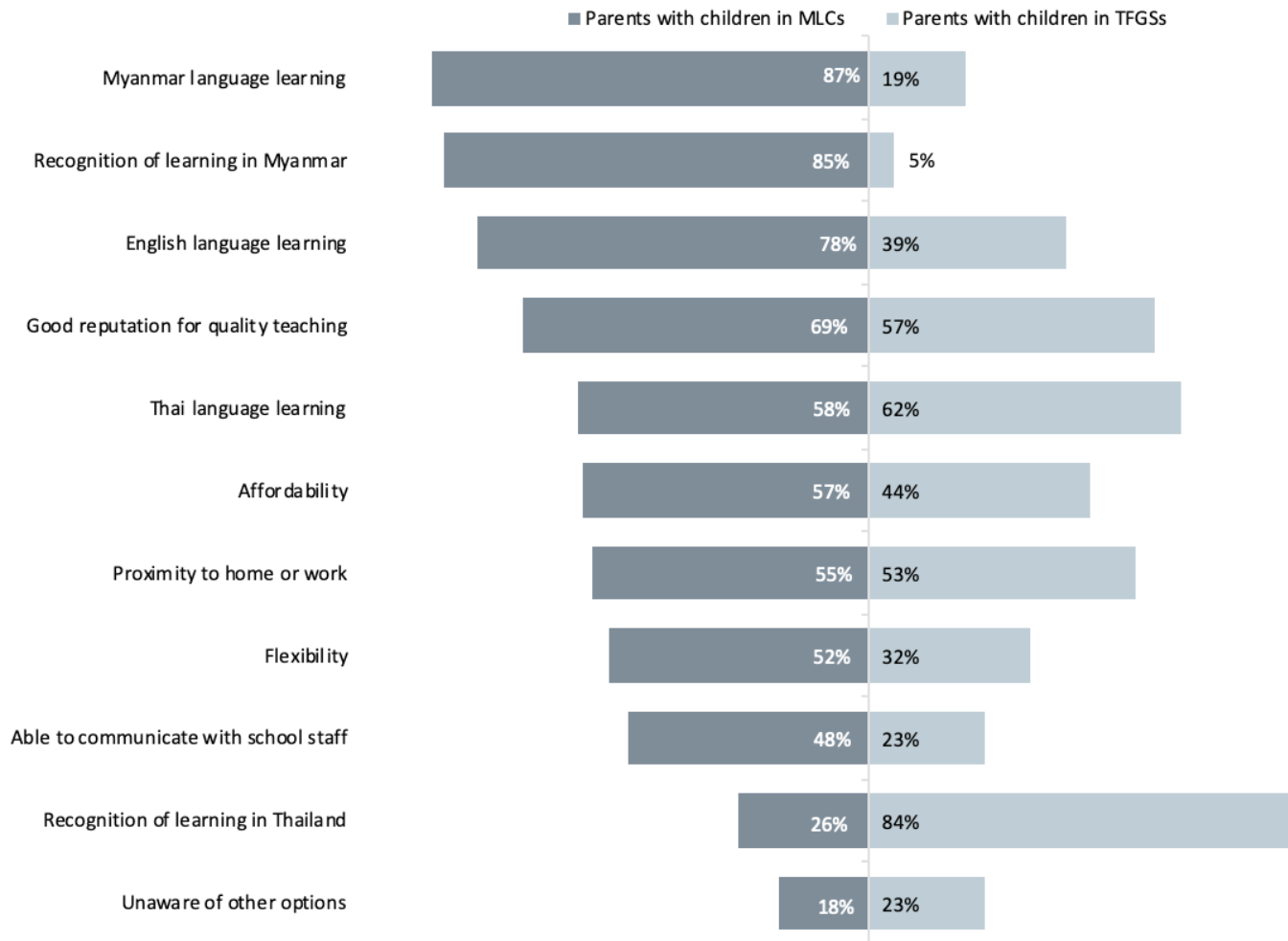
### 4.2.2 RECOGNIZED EDUCATIONAL CERTIFICATES

When asked which pathway is best for their children, parents largely believed that the pathway their child was currently enrolled in was the best option for them (See Figure 15). Reasons for their current enrollment choice, illustrated in Figure 16, largely support their decision. For parents with children in MLCs the most frequent responses were Myanmar language learning (87%), recognition of learning in Myanmar (85%), English language learning (78%) and good reputation for quality teaching (69%). For parents with children in Thai Formal Government Schools the most frequent responses were recognition of learning in Thailand (84%), Thai language learning (62%), good reputation for quality teaching (57%) and proximity to home or work (53%). When asked which educational certificates are most important for their children, *Myanmar grade 4, 8 and Matriculation certificates* was the most frequent response by parents with children in MLCs (84%) while *Thai government high school certificate* was selected by 95% of parents with children in Thai Formal Government Schools. The next most frequent responses were the non-formal education certificates provided by Myanmar (NFPE and NFME) and Thailand (NFE) with 38% and 30% selected respectively. This suggests migrant parents believe in their chosen educational pathway and have made an intentional, informed decision about where their children are educated. However, a significant percentage of parents, approximately 1/5<sup>th</sup>, selected that they were still unclear about other available educational options, which signals a continued need for awareness-raising.

91% of surveyed parents with children enrolled in MLCs were confident that they could enroll their child into a Myanmar government school should they one day return.

**Figure 15** Parents’ perception of best educational option for their children



**Figure 16** Parents' reasons for selecting their children's current school

"One of my students passed the Matriculation exam in Myanmar and now she is a high school teacher in Myanmar"

– MLC teacher, Mae Sot District

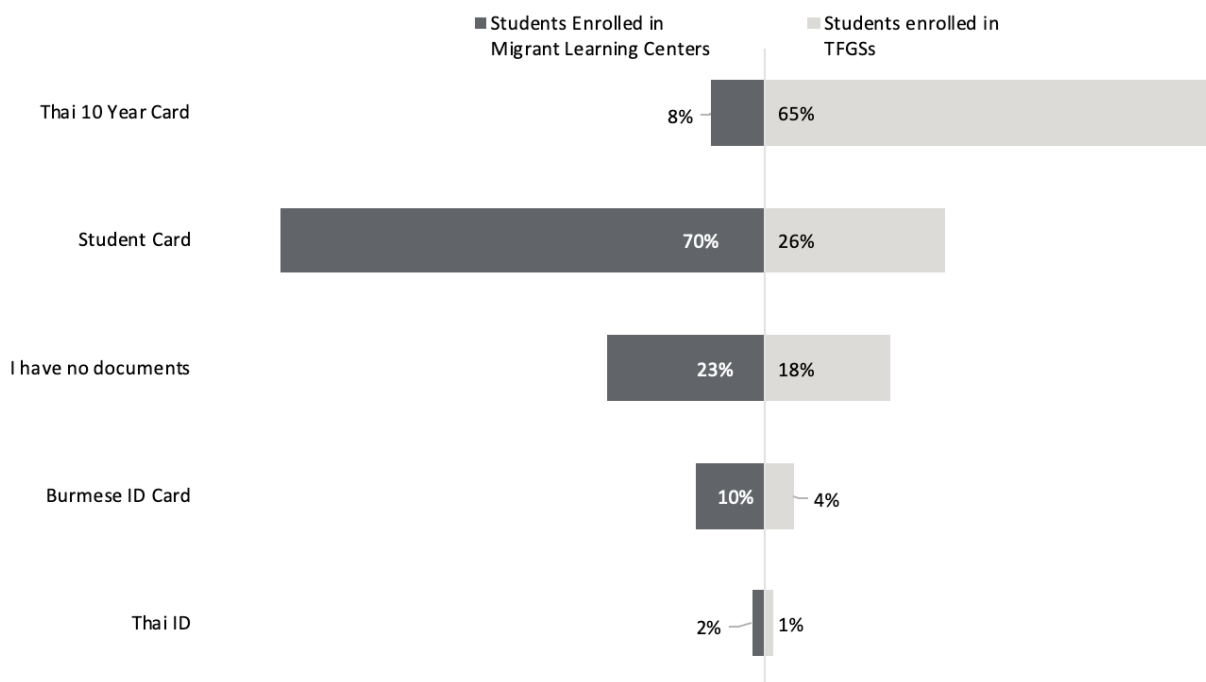
## 4.3 ACCESS: What solutions will enable out of school and migrant children to enroll and remain in school?

### 4.3.1 SCHOOL ENROLLMENT

The country where a migrant child was born effects their educational choice. Migrant children born in Thailand were more likely to attend a Thai Formal Government School than an MLC. 62% of surveyed children in TFGSs were born in Thailand, compared to MLCs where the majority of children (55%) were born in Myanmar. Similarly, 55% of the most-stable surveyed parents—those who selected they have been living in Thailand longer than 10 years and expect to stay longer than 10 years—had enrolled their children in a TFGS. The documentation of migrant students was varied, with many children in MLCs possessing little legal documentation. Local migrant education stakeholders have responded to this situation by issuing student cards to children enrolled in MLCs. 70% of surveyed children in MLCs possessed student identity cards. The majority (65%) of migrant children in Thai Formal Government Schools had received a Thai 10-year card. Thai 10-year cards are no longer issued to students at TFGSs, instead they are currently issued a 13-digit identity card. A 13-digit identity card is only issued to non-Thai students enrolled in TFGSs and does not provide access to healthcare or other services as was the case with some of the Thai 10-year cards. This policy change has caused substantial confusion among migrant parents. A significant number of children in both types of schools reported that they were undocumented: 23% in MLCs and 18% in TFGSs. This finding signals the need for urgent action as lack of documentation often prevents individuals from accessing social services and legal protection in Thailand, putting them at greater risk for exploitation and, importantly for children, trafficking.

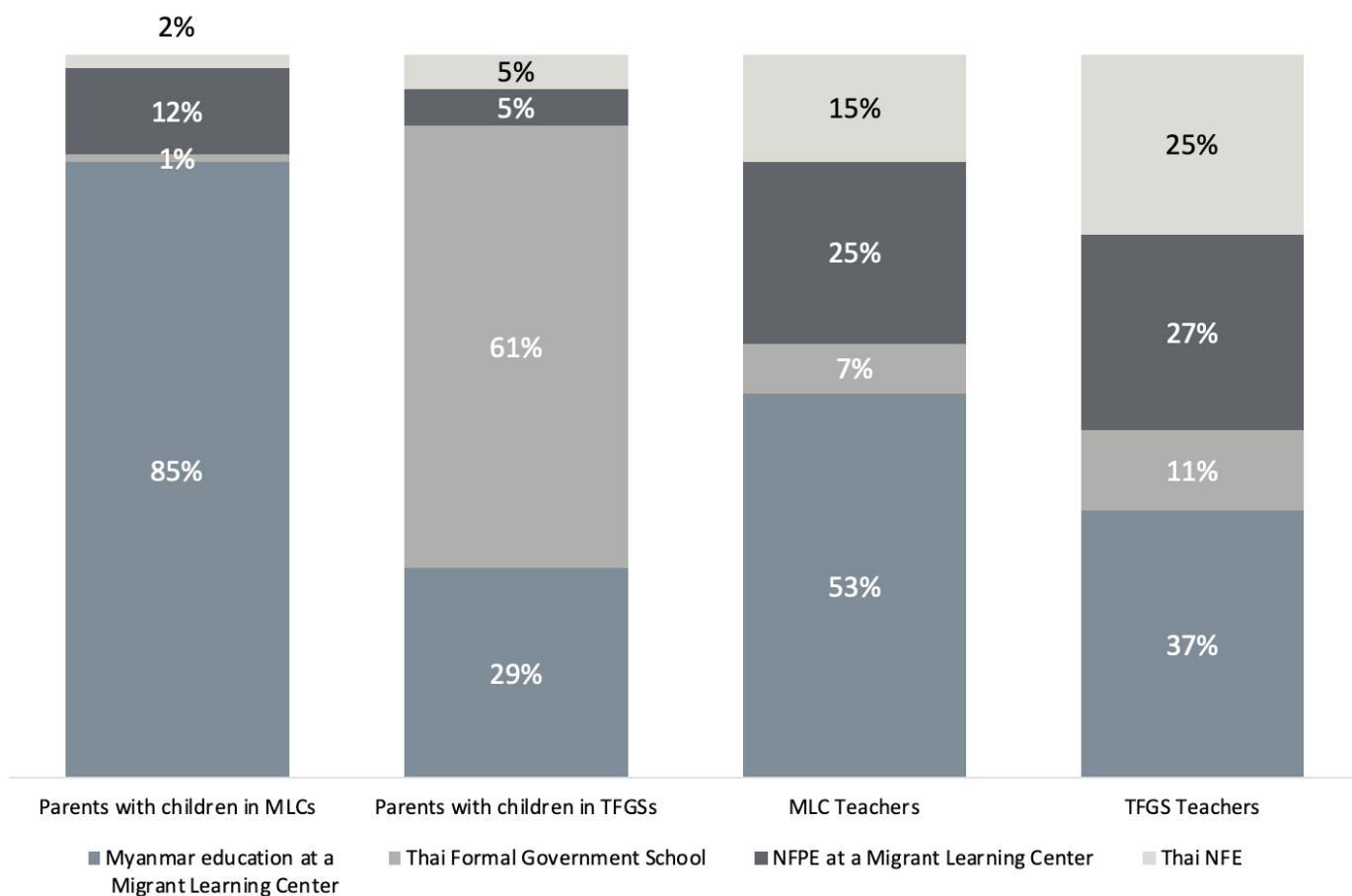
62% of parents with children enrolled in a Thai Formal Government School stated they had help enrolling their children

**Figure 17** Migrant student documentation



Teachers and parents of children at both MLCs and TFGSs were asked what they believed to be the most accessible education option for migrant children currently out of school. Teachers and parents largely believed the school option they are currently using or working in was the most accessible, however, teachers in TFGSs believed that Myanmar education at a migrant learning center was the most accessible for non-Thai children currently out of school (52%). **Across all surveyed stakeholders, Migrant Learning Centers were the overall most frequently-selected education option for out of school children (OOSC).** With better support, MLCs have the potential to act as a gateway for OOSC as they provide mother tongue-based instruction and have fewer barriers to access for migrant families.

**Figure 18** Perceptions of most accessible education option for migrant children currently out of school



72% of School directors at TFGS believed that the enrollment person at their school possessed the needed capacity to enroll non-Thai students

Many of the surveyed TFGS Directors and enrollment personnel reported encountering migrant families seeking to enroll their children in a Thai Formal Government School without any documents needed to enroll and with no family member able to communicate in Thai language. It is clear that bilingual liaisons familiar with documentation processes would help facilitate migrant children’s enrollment into TFGSs. There were many positive examples of collaboration cited between the Village Heads, migrant families, and Thai Formal Government Schools. One TFGS director noted, “The Village Head works together with our school really well - they help with school registration and communication with parents”. Some Village Heads provide recommendation letters for families wanting to enroll in the local TFGS, which states the



family’s address and gives contact information. TFGS Directors’ opinions on expanding school enrollment quotas were mixed, with 52% stating that they would expand the school enrollment quota to allow non-Thai children in their catchment area to access education. Those who stated they would expand the quota largely believed this was the way to realize the Education For All (EFA) policy: “Expanding the quota provides opportunities for migrant children who live our community to access education and services”. Directors not willing to expand the quota cited infrastructural, teaching staff and class-size limitations.

When asked what additional support they require, TFGS Directors’ most common requests were student database support (83%), Myanmar language translators (75%), and clear guidelines for enrolling non-Thai children with different documentation (75%). TFGS Directors disagreed over what documents were needed to enroll non-Thai students. They requested clear guidelines for schools and step-by-step processes for families to obtain documents. Capacity building trainings have been provided to TFGS Directors by Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation and the Migrant Education Coordination Center in Tak Province, most recently during January/February 2019. These workshops gave Directors useful steps to overcome challenges regarding non-Thai enrollment, but it is clear that more practical training is needed for inclusive education to be realized.

Parents demonstrated low confidence to be able to enroll their children in an education pathway different from the school type they are currently in (see Table 5). It was suggested that awareness-raising and information sharing channels would help migrant parents make informed decisions about their children’s educational futures. If parents are to be empowered to make informed decisions regarding their children’s education, they need to feel confident to enroll their children in any of the available options.

**Table 5** Percentage of parents confident to enroll their children in different school options

	Enroll in a TFGS	Enroll in Thai NFE program	Enroll into an MLC	Enroll into an MLC with NFPE
Parents with children in an MLC	42%	48%	95%	76%
Parents with children in a TFGS	99%	83%	66%	58%

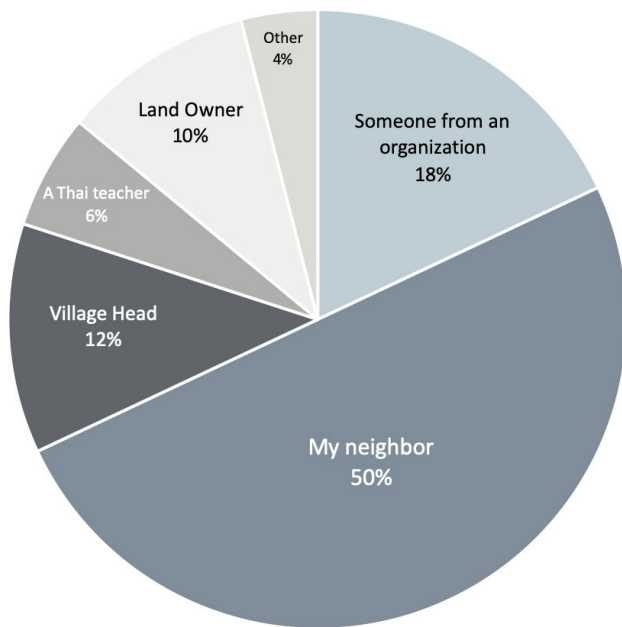
62% of parents with children enrolled in a Thai Formal Government School stated they had help enrolling their children. When asked who helped them, a range of supporters were selected—neighbors, their local Village Head, staff from an organization, and teachers—as seen in Figure 19. Given that the majority of parents who successfully enrolled their children needed help with the processes, access to these schools would likely improve with additional support mechanisms.

Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS

“In 2016-2017 our NFPE students got first, second, third and fourth prize for the NFPE exams! I am proud that our students are learning NFPE because they win prizes”

– MLC teacher, Phob Phra District

**Figure 19** Person supporting migrant families to enroll their children into TFGSs



When asked about issues they face with the graduation of a non-Thai student, the most frequent responses by Directors at TFGSs were: student name identity issues (74%), parents’ names incorrectly spelled or inconsistent (68%), challenges to issue the certificate (42%), and challenges connecting the students to further education opportunities – high school, vocational colleges and universities (32%). Regardless of the school type their children were enrolled in, migrant parents perceived completing high school as critically important for their children. On a 5-point Likert scale weighting importance, almost all parents selected 5 – *Very Important*, as seen in Table 6. Significant support to children and families is needed if they are to remain in and complete their education. Save the Children and World Education (2015) reported that fewer than 10% of migrant children make it beyond primary school and that older migrant students experience greater challenges: they are more likely to drop out by grade three or four (or when they are 10 or 11 years old).

**Table 6** Parents’ perceived importance of their children completing high school

Parents with Children in MLCs	Parents with children in TFGS
4.81	4.77
<i>Very Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>



“We need to get recognition from the Thai and Myanmar governments for the children. We need support in every area and formal recognition from both governments”

– MLC teacher, Phob Phra District



### 4.3.2 DROP OUT

When asked the reasons why children have dropped out of school, 83% of teachers in Migrant Learning Centers reported that it was because the child's family moved. Other reasons were: economic challenges (50%), a lack of parent support to stay in school (46%), and the child needed to work or take care of family members (42%). The substantial economic pressure on migrant families impacts their children's education—often directly, as their children have to carry the economic burden rather than completing their education. 73% of children in MLCs and 71% of children surveyed in TFGS reported they knew a non-Thai friend who had dropped out of school. Surveyed migrant children reported that their friends dropped out because their family moved (32% in MLCs, 55% in TFGSs), they needed to work or take care of family members (44% in MLCs, 33% in TFGSs), or they lacked parent support to stay in school (25% in MLCs, 30% in TFGSs). TFGS teachers found instability the greatest problem: 96% of them identified that migrant children drop out because the student's family moved, with smaller percentages citing a lack of parent support to stay in school (39%), the student needed to work to support their family (38%) (the teachers also reported in some cases a lack of interest in learning (30%) and lack of transportation (26%)).

Collectively, surveyed parents had a total of 82 children who were of school age but not enrolled in school. When asked to select the reasons why their children were not in school, the most frequent response was that they had to work or take care of family members (46%), economic challenges (35%), and a lack of parent support to stay in school (30%)

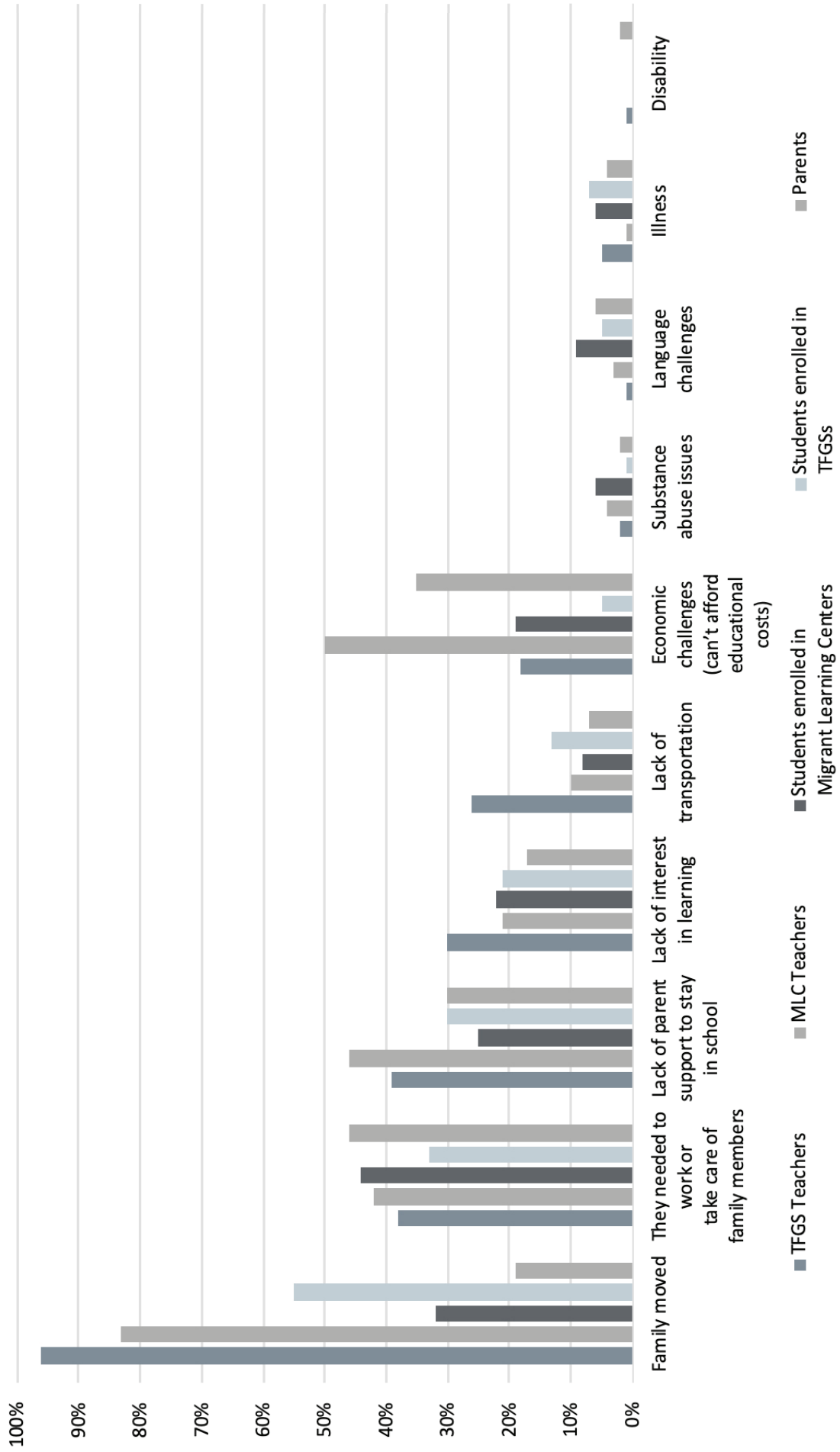
Conversely, the majority of surveyed migrant parents (77%) indicated that they had not moved<sup>4</sup> (the surveyed parents were drawn from PTA groups, thus likely to be more stable than the general migrant population; see "Limitations", section 5). Directors at TFGSs believed that stronger engagement of parents in their children's education would reduce drop-out, and some try to encourage this. One director explained, "We have a policy to follow up with students by meeting with their parents to reduce the risk of drop-out". Another suggested that they "conduct home visits and... raise awareness on the importance of education with parents" (letters are an ineffective communication channel in low-literacy areas). Many TFGS Directors had experienced migrant students dropping out due to their family moving. Of those, many cited instances where the families did not inform the school in advance, making it impossible for the school to offer supportive services and help the students transfer to another school.



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS

<sup>4</sup> "moving" in the survey was defined as changing locations such that parents need to enroll their child/children into another school

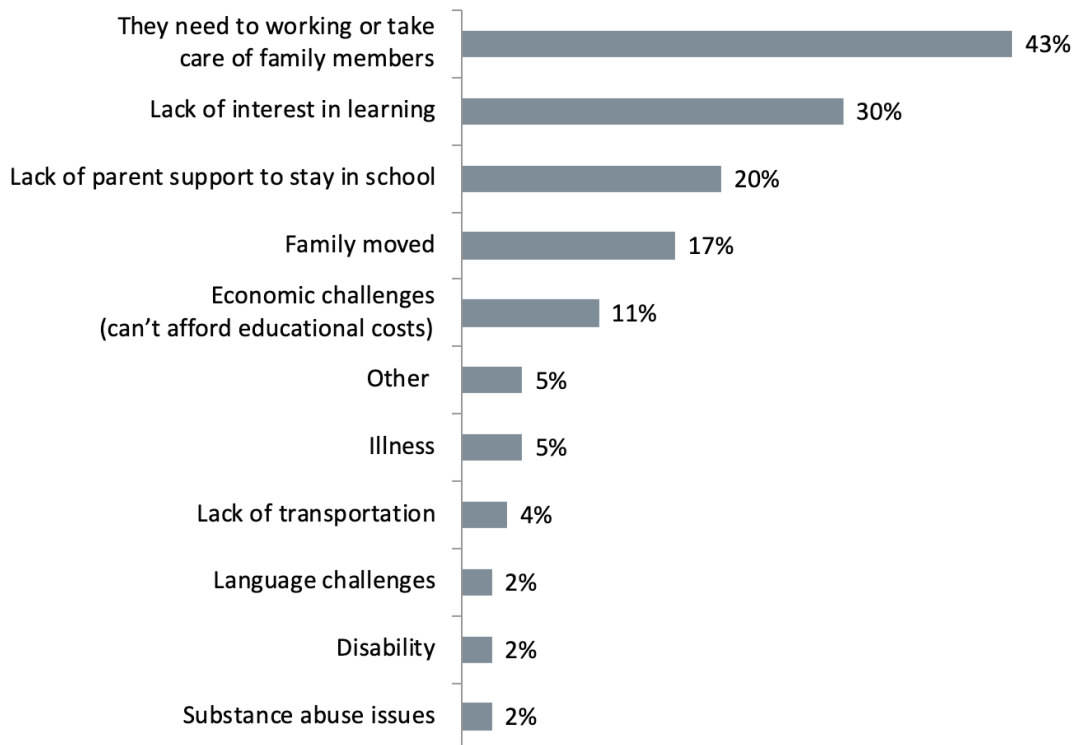
Figure 20 Perceived reasons migrant students drop out





The surveyors asked students if they had any siblings between the ages of 5 and 16 who were currently out of school. The students identified a total of 85 siblings, mostly out of school for three reasons: the need for work or care of family members (43%), a lack of interest in learning (30%), and a lack of parent support to stay in school (20%), as seen in Figure 21.

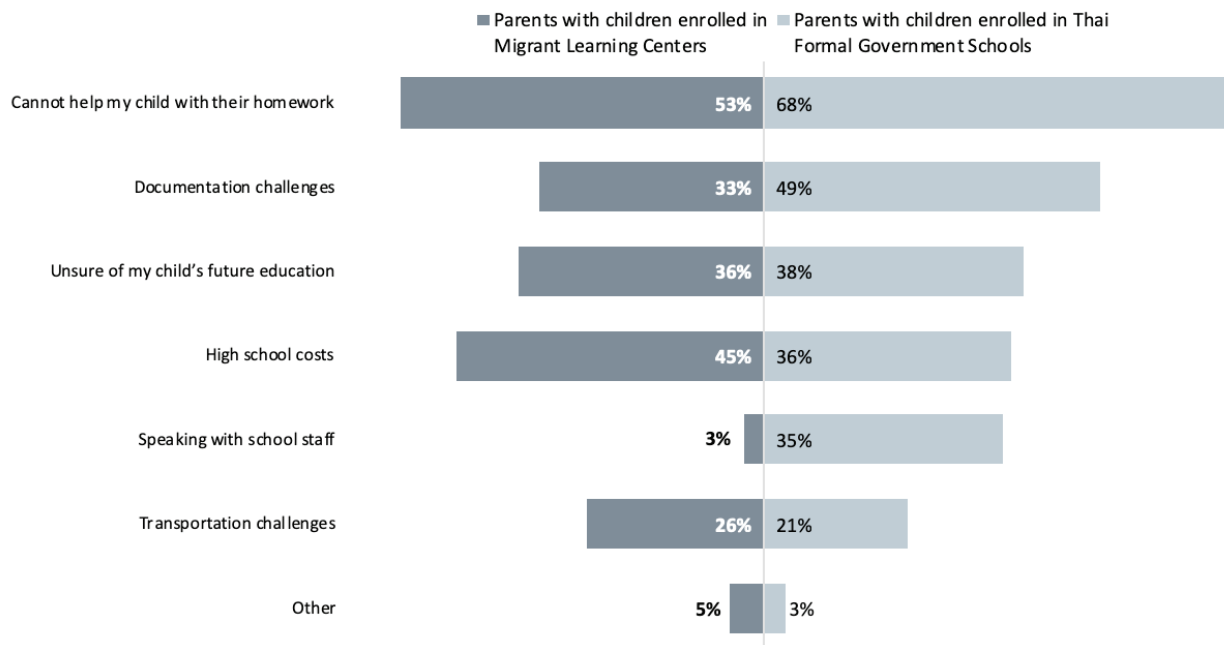
**Figure 21** Reasons student’s siblings were out of school



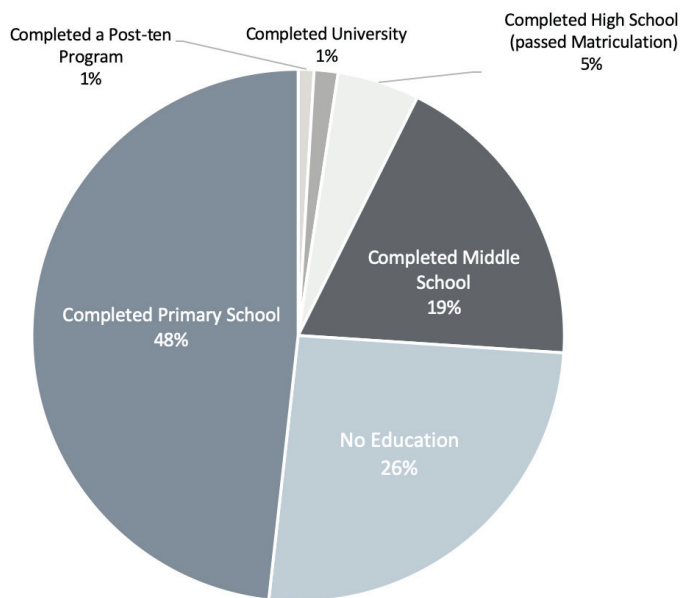
HwF staff facilitating surveys with migrant students at an MLC  
Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS

### 4.3.3 BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

**Figure 22** Challenges experienced by parents in supporting their children’s education



**Figure 23** Surveyed parents’ education level



The biggest challenge for the surveyed parents regarding their children’s education was the fact that they felt they couldn’t support their children with their homework (see Figure 22). This could in part be due to the low levels of parental education. Of surveyed parents (n=638), 26% reported having not completed any education and 48% only having completed a primary-level education (see Figure 23) (Note that the educational attainment of parents not involved in PTAs is likely to be lower than this). In a recent publication on literacy at migrant antenatal care clinics, less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of expecting mothers had completed grade 4 or above (Gilder et al., 2019). Students rarely cited their parents as a source of help with school work (20% for students in MLCs, 8% for students in TFGSs). Migrant children depend heavily on teacher support, especially TFGS students: 63% said the teacher was the person they would go to for help (see Figure 24). This finding

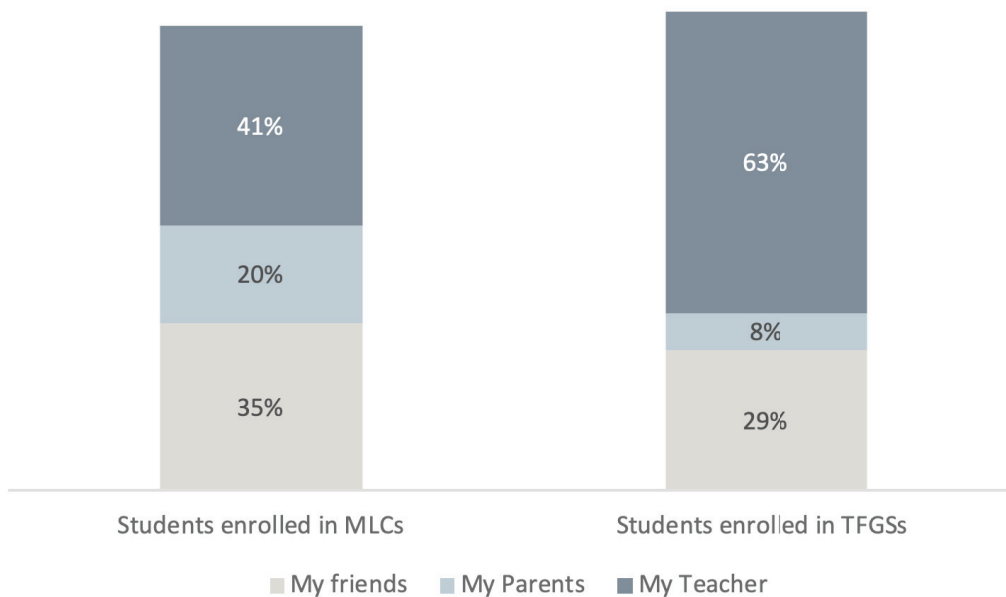
also highlights the social impact of enrolling a child into a school where parents cannot communicate easily with school staff, help with homework or read letters sent home from the school. TFGS teachers and Directors also raised this point, and largely recommended face-to-face communication with parents during PTA meetings where translation was available.

Migrant parents must manage great uncertainty in many facets of their life: documentation, access to health care, security and family economics being just some examples (IOM, 2016). Over a third of surveyed parents exhibited uncertainty regarding their children’s educational future, no matter whether those children attend MLC or TFGS (36% and 38% respectively). School costs also represented a challenge in each system, slightly more so for parents of children in MLCs (49%) compared to parents with children in TFGSs (36%). Speaking with school staff (35%) was a unique challenge for parents with children in Thai Formal Government Schools. When asked to rate their language ability, surveyed parents self-assessed their Myanmar language confidence as 4.47 *Very Confident* on a 5-point Likert scale compared to 2.79 *Somewhat Confident* for Thai language confidence. Parents with children enrolled in TFGSs had slightly higher perceived Thai language fluency (3.16 compared to 2.62), while parents with children enrolled in MLCs had slightly higher perceived Myanmar language fluency (4.57 compared to 4.28).

“We took some of our migrant students to compete in an academic competition and they won the gold medal. They also won a short film competition which was shown on the Thai PBS channel”

-Teacher at a TFGS, Ranong Province

**Figure 24** Students’ support person when academic help is needed



As for absenteeism, in total 8% (n=58) of surveyed students responded that they had missed more than 1 month of school. Illness (46%), family moving (20%) and a lack of interest in learning (10%) were the 3 most frequently selected responses. This finding highlights the continuing health-care access challenges for many migrant children.

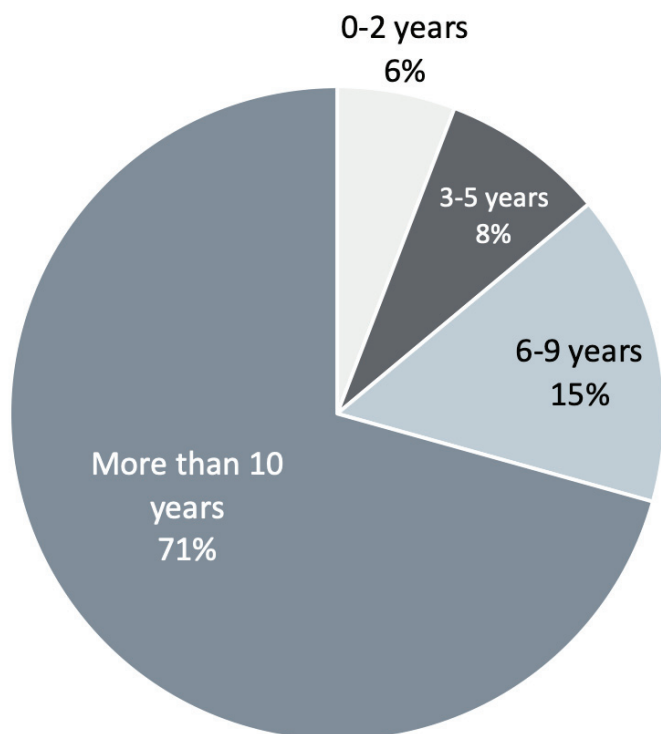
When parents were asked to estimate the annual cost of education for 1 child (including school fees, school materials, food and transportation) the average for parents with children in both MLCs and Thai Formal Government Schools were quite similar, averaging between 1000 THB – 2999 THB—highlighting, among other things, the hidden costs to migrants of the officially free TFGS system. Parents with children in MLCs are paying school fees to cover the running cost of the learning center. Most parents with children in TFGSs also need to spend money for their children’s education to pay for the materials, uniforms and transportation they need in order for their children to take advantage of the free education. A small number of parents with children in both systems cited either no-cost or high cost (over 10,000THB) annual education expenses, indicating large inconsistencies here.

## 4.4 SUSTAINABILITY: What is the future of migrant education in Thailand? What is still needed to promote holistic, lasting educational convergence for migrant children attending both MLCS and Thai Formal Government Schools?

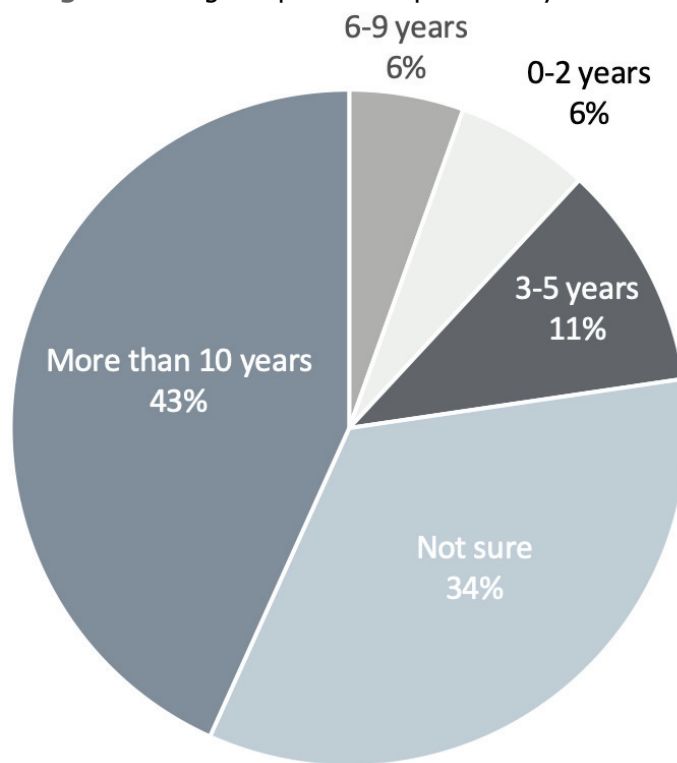
### 4.4.1 DOCUMENTATION AND RISK

A substantial proportion of the migrant population has been living in Thailand for a significant amount of time and see their future in Thailand. Migrant workers in Thailand tend to stay for long periods of time and should not be assumed to be temporary workers (Save the Children and World Education, 2015). 59% of surveyed migrant teachers and 71% of migrant parents stated they had been living in Thailand for more than 10 years and 40% of migrant teachers and 43% of parents stated they expected to stay in Thailand more than 10 years. This allows for long-term education planning: the migrant community is not on the brink of an en masse return to Myanmar. At the same time, this illustrates the commitment of the migrant teacher workforce and their potential to provide continuous mother tongue-based education to migrant children for years to come.

**Figure 25** Length of time parents have lived in Thailand



**Figure 26** Migrant parents' expected stay in Thailand





Documentation remains a widespread challenge for many members of the migrant community, but especially for teachers working at Migrant Learning Centers (see Table 7). Of surveyed migrant teachers only 20% possessed work permits and 15% had legal Thai documentation: either a 10-year card or Thai ID. In response to this challenge the Migrant Education Coordination Center (MECC) provides all migrant teachers working at MLCs in Tak province with a teacher card which states their profession and provides a contact number in case of challenges. 74% of surveyed teachers in Tak province possessed an MECC card. While the MECC card provides teachers some security, it is not a legally-recognized form of identify. Currently, there is not an option for someone from Myanmar to obtain a legal work permit with “teacher” as the listed profession. This obstacle and many other documentation challenges makes the life of a teacher at a Migrant Learning Center full of uncertainty and risk.

“I don’t have a sure place to live so I worry that my children will not be able to finish their education”

– Mother with children in an MLC,  
Phob Phra District

**Table 7** Legal documents held by MLC teachers

Work Permit	20%
Thai 10 Year Card	11%
Thai ID	4%

Parents with children in both types of schools face documentation challenges; about half of those with children in Thai Formal Government Schools (49%). When asked what identity documents they possessed, only 25% of parents had a certificate of identity (CI), 16% had a Thai 10-year card and 10% had work permits. 8% of surveyed parents selected that they had no identity documents.

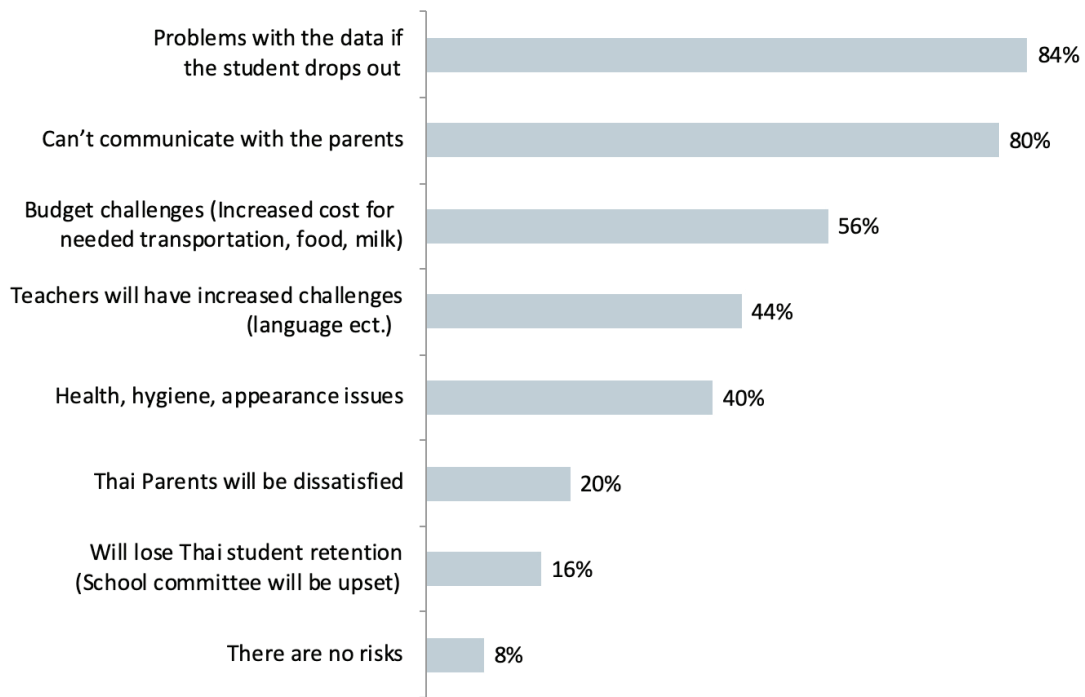
In addition to parents’ widespread misunderstandings about the benefits for non-Thai students of 13-digit cards, School Directors at TFGS also faced difficulty simply issuing these cards. Directors reported that “Requesting 13-digit cards is not easy. We need to contact the district office and they need to review and process all documentation”, and “It takes a long time to inspect and check information at the district level”. It was not always clear who is responsible for applying for these cards; some school officials believed that parents needed to take a greater role in the process. Currently, despite many parents’ belief otherwise, the 13-digit card is only for student identification and does not provide access to health services. Health care provision for non-Thai students was inconsistent across surveyed TFGSs. Some reported that the Ministry of Health provided services like vaccines, dental check-ups and health checks to all their students. Others requested health services for all students as they could not currently provide them.

Directors and enrollment personnel at TFGSs confirmed some of the risks previously identified with enrolling non-Thai children. To fully achieve Education For All (EFA), many challenges on the ground need attention to ensure non-Thai children can enroll and remain in TFGSs (See Figure 27).





**Figure 27** Perceived risks of enrolling non-Thai students at TFGSs



“Every migrant child should have the same rights and opportunities as Thai children with no discrimination”

-TFGS Teacher, Mae Ramat District



## 5. LIMITATIONS

An integral aspect of Participatory Action Research is that local researchers conduct the field work. PAR seeks to build local capacity and empower local voices to identify, interpret and articulate the nuanced issues within their community. Thus, project staff from local education stakeholder organizations familiar with the schools and their beneficiaries administered the surveys. There are many advantages to this approach, but at least two potential limitations.

Although researchers selected locations at random in line with pre-determined sample quotas, they selected some participants, such as parents, using convenience sampling. Researchers mainly surveyed parents following PTA meetings at schools or, in the case of Ranong, selected them because of an existing relationship which made scheduling less complicated. Migrant parents who attend PTA meetings or have strong relationships with school staff are largely very engaged in their children's education and therefore more stable. The discrepancy surrounding *parents moving* might be due to the fact that surveyed parents are more likely to be stable compared to parents who do not attend PTA meetings or are less engaged with their child's education. Further longitudinal research is needed to identify the specific migration patterns of migrant families.

There also exists a possibility of sampling and response bias. In order to be inclusive in a community with low literacy, local researchers wrote down the answers of parents unable to read or write. This may have introduced pressure for parents to give what they perceived as a socially desirable response. Generally, the project staff's presence during surveys has the potential to influence how participants respond. To minimize response bias, local researchers reminded participants that their responses would be confidential and would not impact current support or funding.



"Flexibility from Thai Government is needed in regard to documentation for staff at MLCs. Please recognize that migrants are making a positive contribution to Thailand's society and economy"

– MLC Teacher, Ranong Province

Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Significant progress has been made for migrant children since the last comprehensive research on migrant education was conducted in 2015:

- Many MLCs use recognized curricula (Myanmar Formal, Myanmar Non-Formal and Thai Non-Formal) and therefore can provide their students with government-accredited educational certificates.
- The 2018 Ministerial Proclamation eliminated some significant obstacles preventing the enrollment of irregular migrant children: enrollment no longer requires documentation; all children, regardless of nationality, are to receive to a 13-digit identification card.

Not all has been progress in the last four years. With philanthropic focus along the border shifting from Thailand to Myanmar, financial support for Migrant Learning Centers continues to decrease. Migrant education service providers have displayed remarkable resilience in the face of these shifting donor priorities, but the situation adds major pressure on already deficient education budgets. In the most bleak situations some MLCs have been forced to close due to insufficient funds.

“The Thai and Myanmar governments need to coordinate to have the best result and focus on the future of children’s education regardless what country they come from”

– Father with children in an MLC, Mae Sot District

The different educational pathways available for migrant children have distinct and necessary roles in the community. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SGD 4) is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. In order to realize this goal, the corresponding 2030 agenda, and the commitments made in the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out of School Children and Youth, governments and

international donors need to seize the opportunities and momentum provided by recent progress. **This research suggests that the farthest-reaching and most cost-effective solutions for many problems of migrant education would involve ratifying and investing in the Migrant Learning Centers and their teachers.**

Migrant parents continue to enroll their children in Migrant Learning Centers because these provide education aligned to their children’s hopes and dreams for the future. Teachers in these centers play an invaluable role—yet are still completely unrecognized for their efforts. Financially supporting Migrant Learning Centers and their teachers is one of the best ways to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all children. Determining sustainable models in such a dynamic context remains impossible without heightened government engagement.

For migrant families to fully access education at Thai Formal Government Schools, they need liaisons at both the community and school level. The recently revised Education For All (EFA) policy represents a framework for the inclusion of all children; however, turning the policy into practice still requires much work.



Currently the majority of migrant children are out of school. Without new action—in the form of more data, more resources, and more innovation—the chasm separating these children from education will become deeper and the costs greater.

Out-of-school migrant children represent some of the most vulnerable children for trafficking and exploitation in all of Thailand, especially in the context of quickly developing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and unregulated development on the Myanmar side of the border. The situation certainly requires further research to identify parents with children who are out of school and to determine what is the most successful way to enroll or re-enroll their children in one of the available education pathways.

“Every migrant child should have the same rights and opportunities as Thai children with no discrimination”

-TFGS Teacher, Mae Ramat District

This research points to Migrant Learning Centers—with their mother-tongue based education, educational certificates recognized by the Myanmar Ministry of Education, as well as the non-formal pathways they offer for over-age students—as the most accessible gateway to education for these vulnerable children. From the perspective of these unreached migrant children and their parents, financial and governmental support for Migrant Learning Centers cannot come too soon.



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS

# 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7.1 QUALITY: How can schools better educate migrant children?

### A. Thai Formal Government Schools:

- i. **Thai Language Support:** Language is a critical barrier to the enrollment of migrant children into Thai Formal Government Schools; however, teachers cited academic success for migrant children who were enrolled long enough to adequately learn Thai language. Thus, migrant children need support during the early years of their enrollment—specifically the first year of enrollment and at the pre-primary and primary level. Thai Formal Government Schools might introduce Myanmar language classes or support staff to help migrant children successfully navigate this transition.
- ii. **Best-Practice Sharing for Staff:** Effective examples of inclusive and supportive education for non-Thai children exist in many Thai Formal Government Schools. Staff need intentional opportunities to share best practices from school to school so they can effectively navigate the challenges that come with educating migrant children—including the above-discussed language barriers for students (and their parents); but also the school budget implications of integrating these non-Thai-speaking students; as well as enrollment procedures, transportation challenges and the provision of needed school supplies and uniforms for these students.

### B. Migrant Learning Centers:

- i. **Expansion of the Education Quality Framework (EQF):** In the 2018-2019 academic year, 54 MLCs in Tak Province participated in the EQF evaluation which assessed the quality of education in 5 domains: Teacher Quality and Support, Student Recognition, Child Protection, School Management, and Parent Engagement. Tak Primary Education Service Area Office 2 (TAK PESAO 2) received this data and subsequently issued all participating MLCs a certificate and official letter recognizing their participation. The framework ensures annual evaluation and support of consistent standards of educational quality, specifically acknowledging the contextual challenges faced by MLCs. The next step is to include additional MLCs and government bodies, broadening the usage and acceptance of the framework.
- ii. **Migrant Teacher Professional Database:** Collecting teacher profiles—including education background, trainings received, a teacher competency evaluation and years of teaching experience—would produce an evidence base of migrant teacher quality. This data would support advocacy for migrant teacher recognition.

- C. **Migrant Teacher Documentation and Compensation:** This study found that the pool of migrant educators is experienced and effective—despite working without either documentation or a fair living wage. The result is high attrition. To retain and support these teachers, both funding and a formal process of legal registration and documentation are needed

## 7.2 RECOGNITION: How can migrant education be protected and stabilized?

- D. Formal Recognition of Migrant Learning Centers:** A clear recognition process with flexible and achievable standards will ensure the MLCs can continue to offer a recognized mother-tongue based education relevant and accessible to migrant children, while also potentially serving as preparation centers for them to transition to Thai Formal Government Schools and integrate into Thai society. Migrant Learning Centers play an important role as “safety nets” for some of the most marginalized children in Thailand.
- E. Migrant Teacher Accreditation:** Either the Thai and/or Myanmar Ministry of Education must offer a pathway to formal recognition for migrant teachers, many of whom already possess both substantial experience and quality training. This could include continuous in-service training and study with an associated university, distance courses, accredited summer programs and teacher competency assessments.
- F. Expansion of “2-Track Models”:** Some participating Migrant Learning Centers provided their students with another recognized educational pathway alongside of their Myanmar Government Formal curriculum: either Myanmar Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) or Thai Government Non-Formal Education (NFE). These multi-pathway models work to ensure children can continue their education in both Thailand and Myanmar, and that after-school or night-study options are available for over-age children or youth who are working. Resources are needed to scale these comprehensive models, specifically hiring Thai NFE teachers.

## 7.3 ACCESS: What solutions will enable migrant children to enroll and remain in school?

- G. Out-of-School Children Identification and Enrollment programs:** A community enrollment team which can connect migrant parents of out-of-school children to learning centers that can meet their child’s needs would be a great step forward. Parents need follow-up support to ensure these vulnerable children complete their education.
- H. Collaborative Community Awareness-Raising:** All the people involved in helping migrant children enroll in school – local Village Heads, teachers, parents, land owners, local government, employers, and NGO staff -- need a collaborative mechanism to share information. The Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) that already exist at Migrant Learning Centers are a locally supported mechanism sensitive to work schedules, language considerations and cultural differences. They could become a channel for sharing information about available educational pathways, the associated enrollment procedures, registration dates, and ways to address barriers to enrollment.



- I. Community Education Liaison Officers:** A corps of multilingual Community Education Liaison Officers, well-versed in EFA policies, could help those migrant parents with out-of-school children to enroll in the educational option that meets their needs (whether Migrant Learning Center or Thai Formal Government School). A good Liaison Officer would also be knowledgeable about work documentation processes; parents who do not have to hide their lack of documentation will be better able to enroll their children in Thai schools and support their children once there.
- J. Thai school staff training in migrant enrollment:** In the Global Compact on Migration, Thailand joined with most of the world in promising to provide access to basic services for migrants (Objective 15); in EFA, Thailand committed to education for all. To make these things happen, staff at Thai Formal Government Schools need practical training on how to enroll non-Thai children, with specific focus on how to solve the challenges frequently cited by Enrollment Directors, especially inconsistently documented identity. Staff at Thai schools need capacity-building so they can understand and consistently implement enrollment procedures and placement policies, as well as navigate the data system.
- K. Preparation Program for Thai Formal Government Schools:** Language-intensive bridging programs that work to prepare migrant children for enrollment in Thai schools would greatly increase educational access. These would smooth transitions, reduce student anxiety, support student retention and take a substantial burden off of teachers in Thai schools. An effective model of this type of preparation program is provided by the Labor Rights Protection Network (LPN), where migrant children are supported to enter TFGs. Additionally, bilingual transition support staff (or Teaching Assistants) would greatly increase student participation by avoiding the “submersion” education that occurs when non-fluent students are placed in classes with Thai as the language of instruction.
- L. Support for School Transfer:** The most frequent response by teachers why students drop out was that their families moved. Families need support to be able to transfer their children to other schools in Thailand and the children need support to promote educational continuity. A system is needed to track the mobility of migrant students and help them transfer between schools when their families relocate.
- M. Stronger Dropout Student Tracking and Home Visits:** Parent-teacher engagement is challenging when parents cannot speak, write, or read the language of the school system. Face-to-face communication with the assistance of translators is recommended whenever possible. Thai Formal Government School staff find it difficult to address student absenteeism with parents; a process of home visits could solve this communication breakdown.





## 7.4 SUSTAINABILITY: What is the future of migrant education in Thailand?

- N. Subsidization and Support to Complete Education:** Support should not stop with enrollment -- in-school migrant children are still children at risk. Many drop out of school at the age of 10 or 11 to work (Thame and Patrawart, 2017). These children need financial aid, school materials, transportation and lunches to keep them in school – whether they attend a Thai Formal Government School or a Migrant Learning Center.
- O. Stronger Government Engagement:** Governments must provide additional funding to both Thai Formal Government Schools and Migrant Learning Centers before policies such as Education For All (EFA) or cross-border initiatives can have their full impact. As things stand, vital functions of schools still depend financially on international organizations. Meanwhile, the funding sources of these NGOs continue to diminish. The inevitable result will be heightened drop-out rates -- further marginalizing children already vulnerable to poverty and exploitation. A well-educated migrant population will be a boon to Thai society and economic development, rather than a burden: a wise investment for any government to make.
- P. Increased Documentation Support for Migrant Parents:** Migrant parents require clear and updated information on the documentation process for both themselves and their children. This includes the process of obtaining a CI (Certificate of Identity), work permit, recommendation letter from their local village head for the parents, and/or a 13-digit card and Thai birth certificate for their children (if relevant).
- Q. “One-Stop Service” for Migrant Documentation Issues:** As this research identified numerous documentation challenges for migrant children and their parents throughout, there is a glaring need for accessible documentation services. These one-stop services should be locally available with adequate Myanmar language support staff.
- R. Expansion of Migrant Education Coordination Centers:** The Migrant Education Coordination Center (MECC) is a proven model to connect the Migrant Learning Centers to the Provincial Primary Education Service Area Offices (PESAO). Currently non-government organizations support MECC financially. The MECC model would benefit other provinces with large migrant populations beyond Tak—such as Chiang Mai, Bangkok and Ranong; this work is crucial to Thai society and Royal Thai Government should directly support it.

Photo credit: HwF



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MECC staff facilitating surveys with migrant parents  
Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS

# 9. ANNEX

## Annex A: Research Sample

**Table 8** Migrant Learning Centers surveyed and focal organizations

Muditar Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Rose Field Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Phyo Khin Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Irrawaddy Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Hlee Bee Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	P' Yan Taung Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Noh Bo Academy, BMWEC	Parami Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Jesus Love Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Hope Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Nya Li Ah Hta Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	New Road Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Future Garden Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Su Kha Hong Sar Migrant Learning Center, HwF
Hsa Tu Gaw Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	BHSOH Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Parahita One Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	CDTC Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Hsa Htoo Lei Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Shwe Tha Zin Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Emmanuel Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	48 KM Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Divine Love Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Light Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Sunset Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	White Migrant Learning Center, BMTA
Stree Ranong School Migrant Learning Center, MAF	Ban Maria Migrant Learning Center, MAF
Ranongthani Migrant Learning Center, MAF	Wattana Migrant Learning Center, MAF
The Light ASEAN Myanmar Migrant Learning Center, BMWEC	Marist Asia Foundation, MAF

**Table 9** Thai Formal Government Schools surveyed and focal organizations

Ban Hway Nam Nat, MECC	Ban Htee Kapoe, MECC
Ban Hua Fai, MECC	Ban Mae Sala, MECC
Ban Mae Tao Phet, MECC	Ban Ton Phung, MECC
Ban Mae Pa Tai, MECC	Ban Ma Kham Pong, MECC
Ban Mae Pa Nuea, MECC	Ban Ta Ard, MECC
Kham Pi Ban, MECC	Eksin Ratpattana, MAF
Ban Mae Tao Mai, MECC	Ranong Pahatthana Mittrapthap, MAF
	Phichai Rattanakhan, MAF

**Table 10** Research locations by district

Location	Number of MLCs	Number of TFGSs
Mae Sot	15	7
Phob Phra	6	2
Tha Song Yang	1	1
Umphang	1	0
Mae Ramat	4	2
Ranong	5	3
Subtotal	32	15
Total	47	







This research was a collaborative effort by the following organizations working to promote access to high quality, recognized education for Myanmar migrant children in Thailand:

**Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC)** is an organization under Tak Primary Education Service Area Office 2 (TAK PESAO 2) and which leads coordination between MLCs, NGOs, CBOs and Government parties. All Migrant Learning Centers in Tak province are listed under MECC. <https://www.facebook.com/Migrant-Educational-Coordination-Center-TAK-PESAO-2-217234099046282/>

**The Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC)** is a community-based organization serving migrants from Myanmar in Mae Sot, Thailand. Founded in 2000, BMWEC is an administrative body for 23 migrant learning centers throughout Tak province. BMWEC is dedicated to providing quality education to migrant students, ensuring healthy, happy students with bright futures. <http://www.bmwec.org>

**Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF)** aims to fight the root causes of poverty and discrimination and violence through education, youth empowerment, health, child protection and community development for long-term sustainability. We work along the Thai-Myanmar border giving children, youth and their communities a chance for a brighter future. <https://helpwithoutfrontiers.org>

**The Burmese Migrant Teachers' Association (BMTA)** works to promote the rights of teachers through advocacy in collaboration with local and international education partners. BMTA promotes unity and the value of teachers by improving their status through school management training and teacher capacity building. <https://www.facebook.com/migrant.teachers>

**TeacherFOCUS Myanmar** aims to promote a flexible pathway to recognition for marginalized teachers from Myanmar who work in parallel education systems. Through contextual capacity building, media-based solutions, educational research and data-driven advocacy, we work to promote meaningful teacher integration to Myanmar. [www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org](http://www.teacherfocusmyanmar.org)

**Youth Connect Foundation** provides training, apprenticeships and career services so students can transition to safe, productive and independent lives. Through working with migrant learning centers as well as local Thai businesses and governmental authorities, Youth Connect Foundation has developed a unique and successful approach for migrant youth in Mae Sot. <http://youthconnectthailand.org>

**Marist Asia Foundation (MAF)** provides support for Burmese Migrant Families with Health and Education Programs. Marist Asia Foundation has been working in Ranong since 2006 and provides a HIV Health, Preschool, Secondary and University Online Program to give migrant children and families a brighter future. <http://www.maristasiafoundation.org>