

# SAFETY NETS

**A Situational Analysis of Non-formal  
Educational Pathways for Migrant  
Children in Tak Province, Thailand**

**April 2022**



This research was conducted in collaboration by:

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

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>1 . EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	I - XI
1.1 The need for NFPE/NFME	II
1.2 Alternative pathways offer potential and pitfalls	III
1.3 Investing in NFPE/NFME	VI
KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	IX
<b>2 . INTRODUCTION</b>	12
<b>3 . BACKGROUND</b>	13
3.1 Context	13
3.1.1 Burmese Migration to Thailand	13
3.1.2 Education for Burmese Migrant Children	13
3.1.3 The Impact of COVID-19 on Education for Burmese Migrant Children in Thailand	14
3.1.4 The Impact on the February 2021 Political Crisis on Education for Migrant Children in Thailand	15
3.2 Non-Formal Primary Education for Burmese Migrants in Thailand	16
3.2.1 The history of NFE for Burmese Migrants in Tak Province	16
3.2.2 The Successes of the NFPE/NFME Programs in Tak Province	17
3.2.3 The Impact of COVID-19 on NFPE/NFME	20
3.2.4 The Impact of the Burmese Political Crisis on NFPE/NFME	20
3.3 Overview of available pathways for Burmese Migrant Learners in 2021	21
3.3.1 Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE)	22
3.3.2 Non-formal Middle-School Education (NFME)	22
3.3.3 MLC formal education program	22
3.3.4 NUG Home-based learning program	22
3.3.5 Thai formal Education	23
3.3.6 Thai Non-formal Education ( <i>Kor-Sor-Nor</i> )	23
3.3.7 Vocational training	24
<b>4 . RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	26
4.1 Purpose	26
4.2 Objectives	26
4.3 Research Design	26
4.3.2 Stage One - Desk Review	28
4.3.2 Stage Two- Education Organization Interviews	28
4.3.3 Stage Three - Stakeholder Interviews	28
4.3.4 Stage Four - Analysis	28
4.4 Limitations	30

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>5 . FINDINGS</b>	31
5.1 Stakeholder perspectives on current NFPE/NFME programs	31
5.1.1 What are the perceived benefits and advantages of current NFPE/NFME programs?	31
5.1.2 What are the perceived challenges and disadvantages of current NFE?	34
5.1.3 What is the most important aspect of non-formal education?	35
5.2 Stakeholder perspectives on alternative pathways	38
5.2.1 Which pathways are students most interested in? Which pathways do adults consider most relevant for NFE students?	38
5.2.2 If the NFE programs were no longer available in the next academic year, which pathway would students prefer to follow?	40
5.2.3 Considering the current political and economic challenges facing the NFE system, which pathway would adults support in the coming academic year?	40
5.2.4 What are the perceived challenges with alternative pathways?	43
5.3 Stakeholder perspectives on the future of education for NFPE/NFME students	46
5.3.1 How has the political situation in Burma impacted parents' future plans?	46
5.3.2 What are the children's dreams for their future?	47
5.3.3 If the NFE programs are discontinued are children likely to drop out?	48
5.3.4 What are the ingredients of children's dream education pathways?	48
5.3.5 What skills do stakeholders consider important for children's future?	50
5.3.6 What are adult stakeholders' dreams for children's education?	51
5.3.7 If HwF is unable to continue supporting this project, will schools continue the NFPE/NFME program?	52
5.3.8 What support is needed for your school to be able to continue this program?	54
<b>6 . CONCLUSION</b>	55
<b>7 . RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	58
7.1 Policy Environment	58
7.2 Resourcing - Donors	59
7.3 Program Management - HwF	60
7.4 Practice - NFPE/NFME service providers	62
7.5 Further Research	64
<b>8 . REFERENCES</b>	65 - 70

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ANNEX 1: PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE FOR THE EFFECTIVE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NFE PROGRAMS</b>	<b>71-78</b>
A1.1 Policy Principle 1: Embed NFE programming within the national education architecture.	71
A1.2 Policy Principle 2: Remove administrative and financial barriers to accessing NFE opportunities.	72
A1.3 Policy Principle 3: Include post-primary skills and facilitate the transition from NFPE to formal education, post-primary education, or livelihood opportunities.	72
A1.4 Policy Principle 4: Certify NFE programs	73
A1.5 Policy Principle 5: Ensure sustainable financing for NFE programming	74
A1.6 Principle of Practice 1: Ensure that the design and delivery of NFE programming is inclusive and protective	74
A1.7 Principle of Practice 2: Build flexibility into NFE programs in terms of time, location, and delivery modality	75
A1.8 Principle of Practice 3: Ensure that NFE programs are relevant to the needs of out-of-school youth and adolescents	75
A1.9 Principle of Practice 4: Design holistic NFE programming that addresses health, peacebuilding, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and livelihood opportunities for youth and adolescents affected by crisis and conflict	76
A1.10 Principle of Practice 5: Promote the participation of youth and adolescents in the design and implementation of NFE programming	77
<b>ANNEX 2: DISCUSSION: NFE FOR BURMESE MIGRANTS THROUGH THE LENS OF BEST PRACTICES</b>	<b>78-79</b>

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>EFA</b>	Education For All
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>HwF</b>	Help Without Frontiers Thailand Foundation
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>KSN</b>	Kor Sor Nor (Thai Non-Formal Education)
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization for Migration
<b>ILO</b>	International Labor Organization
<b>INEE</b>	Inter Agency Network for Education In Emergencies
<b>MERB</b>	Myanmar Education Research Bureau
<b>MLC</b>	Migrant Learning Centre
<b>MLRC</b>	The Myanmar Literacy Resource Center
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NFE</b>	Non-Formal Education
<b>NFPE</b>	Non-Formal Primary Education
<b>NFME</b>	Non-Formal Middle School Education
<b>NUG</b>	National Unity Government
<b>OER(s)</b>	Open Educational Resource(s)
<b>OOSC</b>	Out of School Children
<b>PTA</b>	Parents Teachers' Association
<b>PAR</b>	Participatory Action Research
<b>RTG</b>	Royal Thai Government
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Since 2014, the non-formal primary education (NFPE) and non-formal middle school education (NFME) pathways established in Migrant Learning Centres (MLCs) in Tak Province, Thailand have provided a safety net for thousands of overage migrant children and youth from Burma, giving them a second chance at an education.** Currently, 251 students are able to receive an education thanks to these programs. This research spoke to 166 non-formal education stakeholders, including 86 NFPE/NFME students, their parents, and their teachers in the final weeks of November 2021.

The findings highlight the great efforts made over the last 8 years to create a system tailored to the needs of vulnerable children and youth who have lost their right to education via formal systems. Those efforts have created a system that is highly valued by school directors, teachers, parents, and children as being inclusive, flexible, practical, accelerated, and accredited.

**Since March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged education systems globally, but marginalized learners have suffered disproportionately (HRW, 2021; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021).** NFPE/NFME providers have worked hard to shift to new modalities in order to maintain learners' access to education. However, restrictions on gatherings have severely limited student-teacher contact time, and a lack of digital devices and low-cost, reliable internet are major barriers to equitable online learning.

**The February 2021 Burmese political crisis has called into question whether NFPE/NFME in Tak Province can continue.** With the loss of technical, material, and financial support from the Department for Alternative Education (DAE) in Burma, NFPE/NFME providers have not received training, textbooks, or teacher stipends for over twelve months. All stakeholders consider accredited education to be one of the most highly valued aspects of education, but with the potential loss of administrative support from the DAE, this second – and often last chance at education is at risk of being swept away. If non-formal pathways survive, they may be forced to adapt to a future of unaccredited programming.

In the first quarter of 2022, education providers will need to make rapid and difficult decisions if these pathways are to be protected. The evidence from this research underscores three key areas for consideration:

- 1. There is clear need for NFPE/NFME,**
- 2. Alternative pathways offer potential and pitfalls,**
- 3. Investment in NFPE/NFME can drive invaluable improvements.**



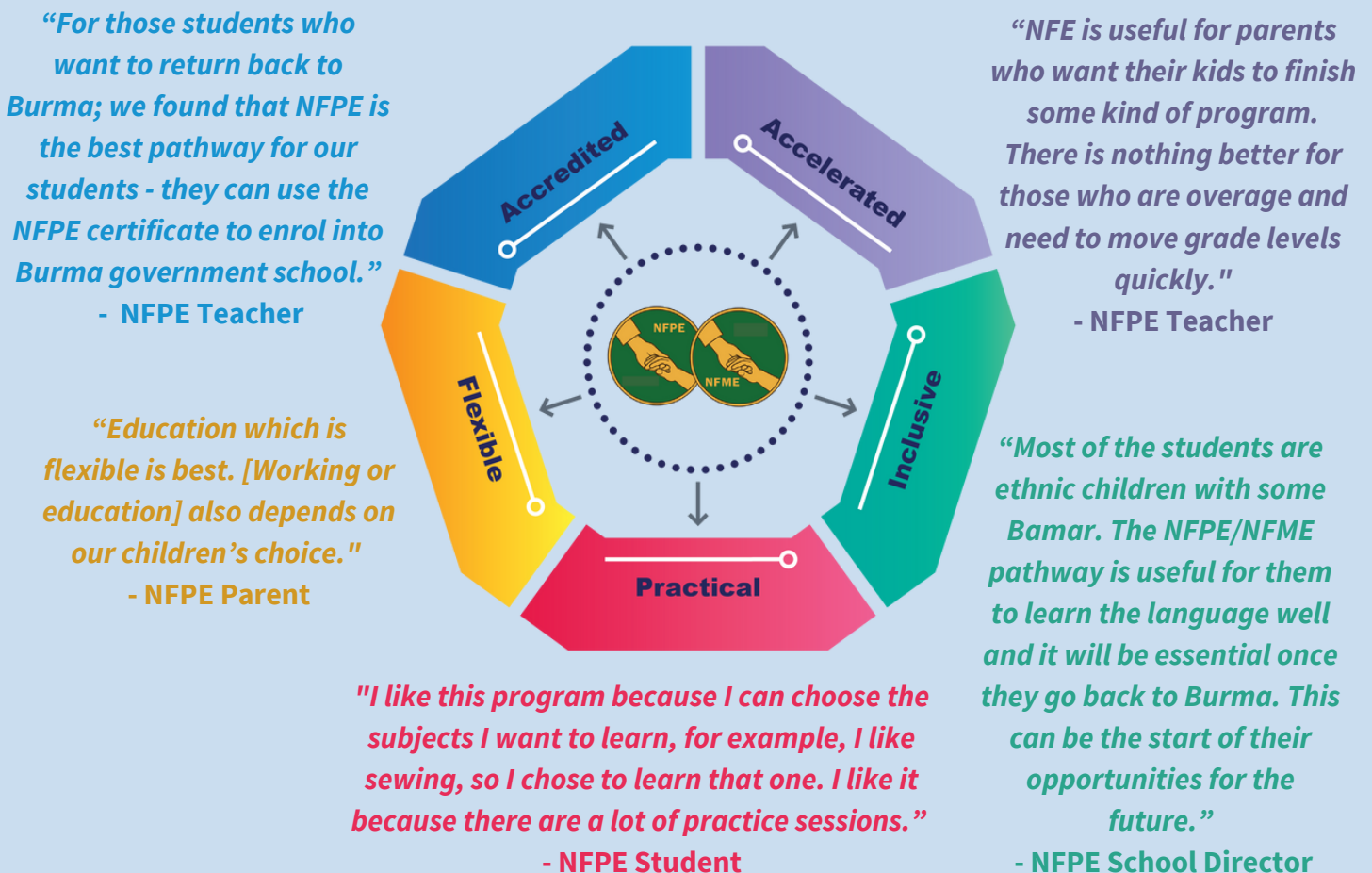


## 1.1 The need for NFPE/NFME

**NFPE/NFME bridges a crucial gap in educational delivery.** For overage students who are working, only non-formal education systems provide an inclusive environment with flexible timetables and an accelerated, practical curriculum that meets their diverse needs. Two-thirds of children interviewed in this research stated that their preferred educational pathway included at least one of these features.

If NFPE/NFME is unable to continue in its current form, stakeholders' responses reveal **there is no clear consensus on a viable alternative pathway that can meet NFPE/NFME students' diverse needs.** In their best efforts to replicate the benefits and advantages of the NFPE/NFME pathways, the majority of children and parents indicated they were interested in pursuing a combination of alternative pathways, and MLC staff indicated a willingness to adapt the NFPE/NFME program to support those choices. **Most alarmingly, 8% of students stated that if NFPE/NFME programs were unable to continue they would drop out of education. This figure is likely an underestimate.**

**The current contexts in Burma and Thailand make it highly likely that migration will increase in 2022 and beyond.** Children who cross the border will be escaping political repression, poverty, and conflict and will have missed at least two years of formal education. The educational expertise that has been carefully nurtured and has subsequently flourished over the last seven years in the NFPE/NFME ecosystem is well-positioned to provide a safety net for vulnerable new arrivals - should it continue.



## 1.2 Alternative pathways offer potential and pitfalls

**Parents are deeply uncertain about their future and the future of their children.** Prior to the political crisis, the majority of parents intended to return to Burma. Accredited NFPE/NFME education would have allowed their children to continue their studies. Today, 77% of NFPE/NFME students see their future in Thailand. If NFPE/NFME is unable to continue, or parents and students choose not to continue with the NFE pathway, children and youth face five alternative educational pathways:

1. The MLC formal curriculum,
2. The Thai formal curriculum,
3. Thai NFE,
4. The National Unity Governments’s (NUG) home-based learning pathway, or
5. Exploring vocational options.

As each pathway represents a change, they bring with them different advantages and disadvantages. **There are no easy alternatives for students who are currently enrolled in NFPE/NFME programs. Every student and family will need to carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages of each pathway relative to their individual circumstances.**

Pathway	NFPE	NFME	MLC formal education program	Home-Based Learning provided by the NUG	Thai formal education	Thai Non-Formal Education (Kor-sor-nor)	Vocational Training
Entry requirements	Read/Write Burmese	Grade 4 Certificate	—	Smartphones	—	Thai Entrance Exam (read & write Thai)	CERTIFICATE High School
Eligible ages	10	13	4-5	4-5	4-5	15+	18+
Length of program (years)	2	3	12	12	12	6	1-2
Language of Instruction	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar	Thai	Thai	Thai/Myanmar
Subjects included	Myanmar, English, Maths, Social, Income generating, General subject	ICT, Vocational skills, Life skills, Social skills	Myanmar, English, Maths, Social	Myanmar, English, Maths, Social	Thai, English, Maths, Social	Thai, English, Maths, Social	Thai, English, Life Skills, Vocational Skills
Recognized certification	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar	?	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar
Costs	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
Who is this pathway most suitable for?	Overage, dropout	Overage, dropout. Usually NFPE graduates.	Migrant children who want a Myanmar education	Migrant children who want a Myanmar education	Migrant children who will stay in Thailand for a long time	Migrant children who will stay in Thailand for a long time and want flexibility	Migrant youth seeking employment in Thailand
Full time/part time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Full time	Full time

Figure 1: Mapping of Migrant Education Pathways

**From the perspective of teachers and school directors, the MLC formal curriculum offers the smoothest transition.** Students will be able to continue studying in a language of their home country, in a curriculum that aligns with their past studies. The majority of NFME/NFPE programs are run through MLCs and there are strong professional relationships between MLC staff and the communities they serve. For NFPE/NFME students there are two major drawbacks in the MLC formal curriculum.

Firstly, the pathway is full time, and classes are not scheduled at flexible times that allow learners to work and study concurrently. Secondly, NFPE/NFME students will be required to join the grade level they are currently studying, potentially resulting in them sharing classes with students who are many years their junior. Flexible timetables and the ability to study with similarly-aged students were repeatedly listed by students and parents as important priorities for their preferred educational pathway.

Theoretically, the Thai NFE system offers many of the same advantages as the MLC run NFPE/NFME systems – it largely shares the core characteristics of being inclusive for over-age learners, offers flexible timetables, a practical and accelerated curriculum, and crucially is accredited by the Thai government. **However, a significant barrier for many learners are the entry requirements of basic Thai literacy.** Furthermore, there are additional hidden costs for uniforms, school supplies, and many parents are concerned about organizing transportation.

Although many school directors and teachers believe that the Thai formal education pathway is suitable for NFPE/NFME students, parents, and their children rate this as amongst the least viable pathways. It combines the disadvantages of the MLC formal curriculum (full time, lack of flexible timetable, necessity to study with younger peers) and the disadvantages of the Thai NFE pathway (language and cultural barriers, additional costs).

**For students who wish to stay in Thailand long term, enrolling in Thai education may be the most appropriate option.** Thai language skills offer students the most flexible, practical route to improved employment options. However, for learners with no interest in learning Thai, or who intend to return to Burma, the MLC formal curriculum pathway may be most appropriate. A final point for all parents to consider is that since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, MLCs have faced more severe restrictions than Thai government schools. It is likely that Thai government schools will be able to resume regular education long before MLCs.

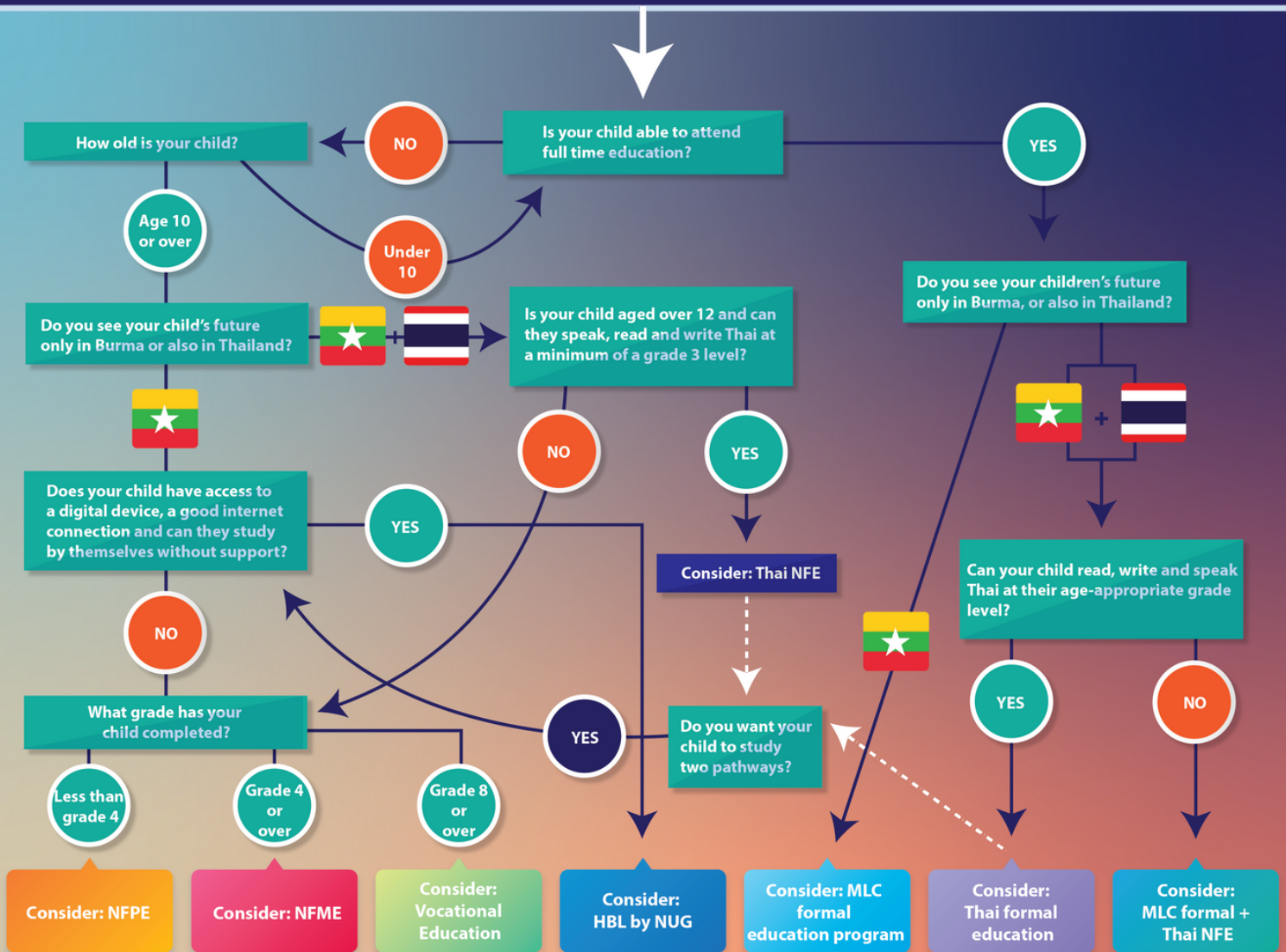


***“I want pathways in which I can work and study at the same time. I want to have pathways to be able to pass grades quickly, and which guide me on the way to a career.”***

**- NFPE Student**

**Migrant parents and their children often face impossible decisions between education and livelihoods.** Figures 1 and 2 provide additional guidance for families' decision making. **The loss of the NFPE/NFME safety net will make decision making harder.** Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 5 migrant children have disappeared from education records. **The loss of NFPE/NFME will make it less likely out-of-school children will be able to return to education.**

## Which educational pathway is best for your child?



**Figure 2: Pathway Decision Tree for Migrant Children**

**“I would like the students to keep studying in any way that makes their life better. For example, for the students who want to study at a university in Burma, they need to finish high school in Burma and for those who want to study internationally, they need to study for a GED or TOFEL qualification.”**

- NFPE School Director



## 1.3 Investing in NFPE/NFME

It is an oft repeated maxim throughout education in emergencies literature that the Chinese symbol for crisis consists of two characters – danger and opportunity (Charland et al. 2021). Although the existing NFPE/NFME pathways are in danger of losing accreditation and funding, there may be opportunities within the crisis. **If the existing NFPE/NFME programs are unable to continue in their current format, it may be appropriate for the resources and expertise from the NFPE/NFME ecosystem to pivot towards offering tailored supplementary programs that support migrant learners in alternative pathways.**



For example, for NFPE/NFME learners who wish to join the Thai government systems, a bridging program could offer additional classes in Thai language as well as subject content support in Burmese language. These additional classes would also enable NFPE/NFME students to maintain their current social support networks and receive supplementary schooling in Burmese literacy and culture.

To guide NFPE/NFME stakeholders on potential reform of existing pathways, this research conducted supplementary analysis of practices and policies drawing upon the latest research into NFE best practices in crisis and conflict affected contexts. (INEE, 2021).

Principles of Practice	Principles of Policy
Ensure that the design and delivery of NFE programming is inclusive and protective.	Embed NFE programming within the national education architecture.
Build flexibility into NFE programs in terms of time, location, and delivery modality.	Remove administrative and financial barriers to accessing NFE opportunities.
Ensure that NFE programs are relevant to the needs of out-of-school youth and adolescents.	Include post-primary skills and facilitate the transition from NFE to formal education, post-primary education, or livelihood opportunities.
Design holistic NFE programming that addresses health, peacebuilding, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and livelihood opportunities for youth and adolescents.	Certify NFE programs.
Promote the participation of youth and adolescents in the design and implementation of NFE programming.	Ensure sustainable financing for NFE programming.

**Annex 1** Synthesizes existing literature into NFE best practices (INEE, 2021) and sets out a series of contextualized guiding questions for NFPE/NFME providers to consider during design and delivery of programming.

**Annex 2** presents a broad-based analysis of the current NFPE/NFME programs in Tak Province through the lens established in Annex 1.

The broad-based analysis provided by this research suggests that prior to COVID-19 and the Burmese political crisis, NFPE/NFME programs for migrant children strongly reflected best practice principles, however these twin crises have dramatically undermined the policy environment in which teachers undertake their work.

Current NFPE/NFME programs are largely inclusive and protective (Principle of Practice 1). It was clear from across the research that NFPE/NFME providers are acutely aware of the needs of their learners and local communities; timetables, locations and delivery modality are frequently adapted to meet their needs. COVID-19 restrictions have drastically impacted on teachers' ability to deliver education in a flexible manner but has also equipped teachers with new skills enabling them to provide distance and blended learning (Principle of Practice 2).

Students frequently recounted the extent to which they appreciated the unique NFPE/NFME curriculum, and although they would appreciate even more vocational and practical training, some NFPE/NFME providers are already looking at ways to meet these needs. **Overall, NFPE/NFME is highly relevant to the needs of out-of-school youth and adolescents (Principle of Practice 3).**

In addition to providing analysis, this study looks to amplify the voices of children and parents to support teachers and school directors with integrating their perspectives into participatory program design and implementation (Principle of Practice 5).

**The single area of practice that holds potential for improvement is that of holistic programming (Principle of Practice 4).** Should the NFPE/NFME ecosystem receive sufficient external support to sustain the existing systems, and build capacity for any future migrant influx, the system may benefit from additional focus on integrating health, peacebuilding, MHPSS and social emotional well-being competencies.

The loss of integration with Burma's national education architecture (Policy Principle 1), and the subsequent loss of financial and administrative support (Policy Principle 2) and accreditation (Policy Principle 4) prevents NFPE/NFME graduates from transitioning to further education opportunities in Burma (Policy Principle 3) as well as fatally undermining NFPE/NFME sustainability (Policy Principle 5).

These policy environment barriers are long-standing issues within the migrant education ecosystem. The establishment of NFPE/NFME systems were a major milestone in addressing these challenges and improving access to quality education for migrant children from Burma in Thailand. **The loss of the NFPE/NFME pathways will set back migrant education by a decade.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The NFPE / NFME pathways may never be the same again, but the lessons learned by education providers, teachers, school directors, parents and children articulated in this report underscore six key messages:

1. NFPE/NFME for migrant children in Tak Province has been a resounding success story.
2. The NFPE/NFME system is needed now more than ever.
3. External support is needed now, more than ever.
4. NFPE/NFME is not only worth saving, but scaling.
5. Accredited, accelerated, flexible, inclusive and practical pathways are highly-valued characteristics of a safety net for out-of-school children.
6. Investment can save and strengthen an established system, or build upon firm foundations to innovate and improve a one-of-a-kind educational pathway.

**Within the ongoing education emergency on the Thai-Burma border, the immediate and urgent needs of NFPE/NFME providers are loud and clear:**



**Resources and Financing**



**Teacher Training**



**Support with Accreditation**



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Improve the Accessibility of Thai NFE (Kor Sor Nor) for Non-Thai Children and Youth:** During this difficult time, migrant parents who have lived and worked in Thailand for multiple years are increasingly seeking education options for their children that are accredited in Thailand. The KSN entrance exam requires Thai language proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing at approximately a grade 3 level. This language barrier prevents migrant children from accessing this nationally accredited non-formal pathway. Pre-KSN programs for children with low Thai literacy levels are needed to bridge this critical gap. These could be stand-alone programs or integrated with the current MLC curriculum.

**Thai Back-to-School Campaign:** In the current environment, it appears Thai schools will be able to resume face-to-face learning prior to the migrant education systems. This research has highlighted how migrant parents, and more importantly – children’s priorities, are changing. Many intend to remain in Thailand longer than they originally intended. A large scale ‘back-to-school’ campaign reminiscent of campaigns run in the past which specifically targets migrant children would widen the safety net and bring more children back to school. This would also mitigate some of the damage done by COVID-19 towards Thailand’s efforts to meet its Sustainable Development Goals and Education for All commitments.

**Anticipatory Action and Financing** - This research forecasts that accredited, accelerated, flexible, inclusive and practical pathways such as the NFPE/NFME system are likely to be in increased demand in the foreseeable future . This report presents an early warning, in line with contemporary best practice research into crisis sensitive education planning. Further research is required to identify triggers. Immediate action is required to develop pre-arranged action plans and pre-arranged financing in order to protect children’s learning and well-being needs in the highly likely event of escalating demand in the coming years.

**Explore Alternative Accredited Education Opportunities** – Quality education is not defined by accreditation, however, accreditation drives quality and brings greater opportunities to students. The loss of accreditation due the paradigm-shifting Burmese political crisis has been severely felt by all stakeholders. Further exploration is required to examine whether widely recognized international accreditation systems could be introduced. The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (iGCSE) is one such option that should be explored.

**Expand the “2-Track Models”** - Some participating Migrant Learning Centers provided their students with another recognized educational pathway alongside of the Burmese formal curriculum: either Burmese 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 Burma. After-school or night-study options are possibilities for overage children or youth who are working. Resources are needed to scale these comprehensive models, specifically hiring Thai NFE teachers.



# BEYOND THE BORDER, BEYOND TODAY.

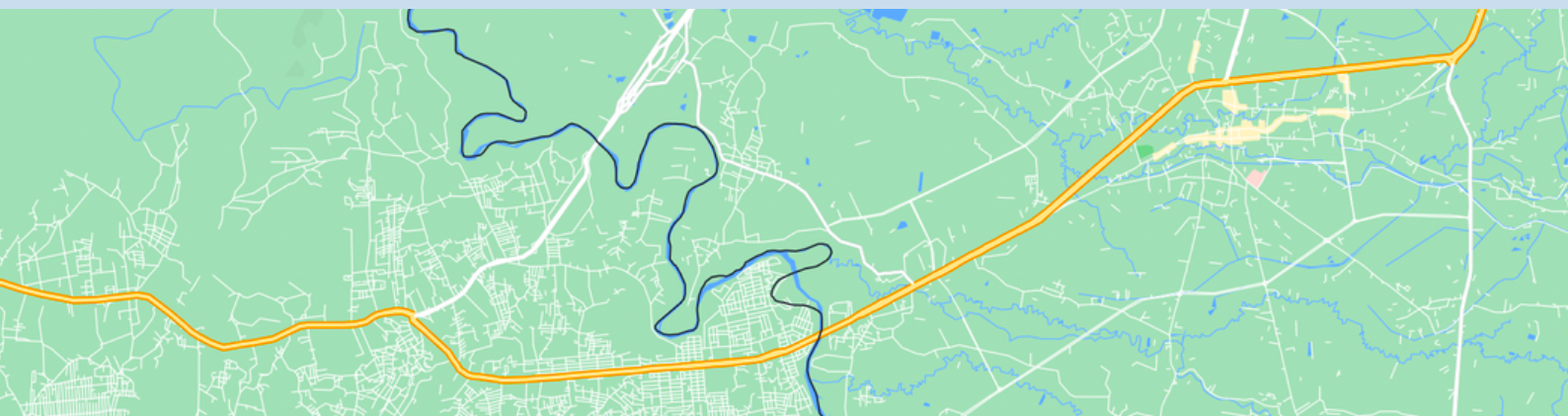
**The February 2021 Burmese political crisis has upended an established order and forced millions of parents to make difficult decisions regarding their children's educational futures - decisions nobody expected to or wanted to make.**

**Today, in Tak Province, Thailand, the education of 251 children hangs in the balance.** Parents facing already uncertain futures filled with difficult decisions are being confronted with questions that were supposed to be settled. For most there will no choice at all, but rather a careful calculation between the least worst options. The eleven NFPE/NFME service providers in Tak Province, their teachers, and their school directors have made it clear throughout their responses in this research that they are doing everything in their power to mitigate the damage being inflicted. Without financial, administrative, and logistical support, their influence is limited.

**However, the issues explored in this report reach further than the border and beyond the immediate crisis.** Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, over 2,800 migrant children have disappeared from educational records and have joined the ranks of the invisible out-of-school migrant children in Thailand. The findings in this report suggest the NFPE/NFME safety net would be well placed to catch them.

The economic, political, and security situation in Burma shows no sign of improvement, and as Thailand's economy bounces back from the COVID-19 pandemic, legal migration to Thailand is expected to increase. **Children crossing into Thailand from Myanmar in the coming years will have missed at least two years of formal education, and will likely bring with them diverse and complex learning needs.**

To a regional and global audience, this report provides a case-study highlighting the importance and power of non-formal education pathways as a safety net for disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Although not addressed within this research, the questions of accredited education also apply to the thousands of children enrolled within the MLC formal education system throughout Thailand, and beyond the border to the millions of out of school children in Burma. **Solutions piloted to address the immediate and urgent needs of the 251 NFPE/NFME students in Tak Province today hold the potential to shape the futures of thousands more children, on both sides of the border, tomorrow.**





## Voices from non-formal education in Tak Province

*"I don't know what to say about how the situation affects my kids' future. I am speechless. I planned to go back Burma before, but now I am lost. Which way do I choose?" - NFPE Parent*

*"Will school reopen again? I am getting old. What will I have to do? Work?" - NFPE Student*

*"I don't want my kids to be like me - without education." - NFPE Parent*

*"The students in the NFPE program have lost their rights. NFPE teachers have lost their salaries. We feel small. Our students ask, when the school will reopen? We can only tell them they will get to attend school again" - NFPE School Director*



## 2. INTRODUCTION

Over the last three decades, great strides have been made to establish an education ecosystem that enables migrant children from Burma to access education in Tak Province, Thailand. This has included the development of a network of over 60 migrant learning centres (MLCs), as well as significant reforms to the Thai national education system under the Education For All (EFA) agenda which removed legislative barriers for non-Thai children to enrol into Royal Thai Government (RTG) schools.

Despite this commendable progress, an unknown number of ‘invisible’ migrant children remain outside education (HwF, 2018). This is due to a number of reasons: migrant families are unaware of the education pathways available to them, migrants are regularly forced to move to find employment, migrant children are forced to work or support their families due to economic hardship, migrant children have fallen behind in their education and are overage for their grade level, education is perceived as having little practical use or value by migrants lacking a formal education themselves, and education is but one of many priorities that migrant families are forced to decide between (Tyrosvoutis, 2019).

Since 2013, Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF) has worked with a range of education stakeholders to create, consolidate, and sustain a Burmese non-formal education (NFE) system in Thailand for these learners (Payaksak, 2018). This system, consisting of both Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) and Non-Formal Middle School Education (NFME) provides an inclusive, flexible, practical, accelerated and accredited pathway for Burmese migrant children in Thailand. Learners with no other means to access education have had their right to education protected.

Since March 2020 COVID-19 has dramatically undermined both access to and the quality of all education pathways for migrant children from Burma. Furthermore, the events of the February 2021 Burmese political crisis have raised existential questions about the continued viability and sustainability of all migrant education pathways that are accredited in Burma, but especially the NFPE and NFME pathways. Closure of these programs would directly impact the 251 children who currently rely on NFPE/NFME to meet their diverse needs. The indirect impact is unquantifiable but alarming. Since the start of the pandemic, 2,808 Burmese migrant children have disappeared from enrolment lists to join the ranks of the ‘invisible’. In the coming years, Burmese migration to Thailand is expected to increase. Children crossing the border will have missed at least two years of education, and will be escaping conflict, poverty, and persecution.

NFPE/NFME is a safety net and a second chance at education: often the last chance at education. Without it, vulnerable and marginalised children and youth have few other options to earn an education. Consequently, the future of NFPE/NFME requires careful consideration and planning. This situational analysis looks to provide critical insights and recommendations from key stakeholders to inform strategic planning or a potential restructuring of the program.

## 3. BACKGROUND

### 3.1 Context

#### 3.1.1 Burmese Migration to Thailand

An estimated 2.3 million Burmese migrants live and work in Thailand, bringing significant economic benefits to both countries (IOM, 2013; IOM, 2015). With a GDP per capita of \$1,467, Burma is the lowest ranking country in Southeast Asia, whereas Thailand is the third wealthiest country in the region, with a GDP per capita five times that of Burma (World Bank, 2020). Migration to Thailand is an opportunity for Burmese workers to earn higher daily wages than at home, while Thai businesses benefit from a motivated workforce willing to work in positions which are undesirable for Thai nationals, often referred to as the three Ds – Difficult, Dirty or Dangerous (Rattanapratchong, 2020). It is estimated that migrants in Thailand, of which the vast majority are from Burma, contribute between 4.3% - 6.6% of Thailand's annual GDP (OECD, 2017).

Recognizing the importance of migrant workers to the economy, Thailand has passed three cabinet resolutions since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic extending the rights of migrant workers to remain in the country (Charoensuthipan, 2021).

As borders re-open, and global and regional economies bounce back from the pandemic, it is estimated that Thailand will require between 300,000 and 500,000 new migrant workers to sustain economic growth throughout 2022 (Chongkittavorn 2021; Theparat, 2021).

In the most recent surveys of migrant flows between Thailand and Burma, 14% of respondents reported having at least one child living in Thailand (IOM, 2019). An estimated 200,000 people from Burma live in Tak Province: the majority of whom are under the age of 19 (IOM, 2016).

#### 3.1.2 Education for Burmese Migrant Children

Since 2005, all children in Thailand have had their access to formal education pathways at Royal Thai Government (RTG) schools protected by law. They also have the right to access Kor Sor Nor, the Thai non-formal education pathway. This has ensured Burmese migrant children have more potential options for their education. However, the preferred pathway for most Burmese migrant families in Tak Province has been provided by the network of over 60 Burmese language Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs).

MLCs have existed for over three decades and are core pillars within migrant communities, acting as the main conduit for education, health care services, and child protection and child rights support. The MLCs provide Burmese children with basic education in their mother tongue using the same curricula used at government schools in their home country.

Children learning in their mother tongue has a multitude of benefits including, increasing student participation (Trudell, 2005), improving early grade reading outcomes (Gove and Cvelich, 2011), decreasing dropout rates (Laitin, Ramachandran and Walter, 2015), improving student self-confidence, self-esteem and identity (Cummins, 2009), and in this case it also allows students to successfully integrate into the Burmese education system\*\* or progress into Burmese higher education when they return home. Over the past three decades, tens of thousands of children have benefitted from the services provided by MLCs. The non-formal pathways explored in this study are predominantly run by MLCs.

### **3.1.3 The Impact of COVID-19 on Education for Burmese Migrant Children in Thailand**

Since March 2020, COVID-19 restrictions have had a major impact on MLCs' ability to deliver services. Restrictions on gathering forced all schools to close and adapt to home-based learning or online learning modalities. As of January 2022, only a small number of Royal Thai Government schools have since been allowed to re-open with in person learning. To date, MLCs have remained closed throughout the pandemic. Globally, the shift to alternative education modalities has led to a decline in the quality of education, and children from low-income families have been disproportionately disadvantaged (HRW, 2021; UNESCO & UNICEF, 2021). Locally, MLCs have been forced to deliver home-based and online teaching and learning due to movement restrictions and frequent community lockdowns, which has greatly impacted access, motivation, and attrition rates (Sasaki and Tyrosvoutis, 2020).

Burmese migrants in Thailand predominantly work in low-skilled, low-income employment sectors including construction, manufacturing, agriculture, hospitality, wholesale and retail trade and domestic work (IOM, 2015; IOM, 2018; IOM, 2019). Across Thailand, each of these sectors (with the exception of the construction industry) has seen major contractions due to COVID-19 restrictions and the slowdown in national and global economies.

Low-skilled workers in Thailand have borne the brunt of job losses and experienced a sharp rise in underemployment alongside wage cuts (IMF, 2021). As a result, migrant children from Burma learning in Thailand, have faced great economic insecurity during the pandemic. A survey of over 270 migrant parents across Thailand revealed that over 85% of families have experienced a decline in income due to the pandemic (TeacherFOCUS, 2022).

This decline in income has directly impacted on children's access to learning, the quality of the learning they receive, and has increased child protection risks. Families with reduced income are less able to support their children's school attendance financially. Seemingly minor costs such as transport, lunches and stationery become significant when household budgets are stretched. There are also increased opportunity costs when families need support at home with housework and social care or require children's support in earning income for the family.

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\*\*“government education system” is used within this paper to refer to administration by the democratically elected, civilian governments serving from 31 January 2011 to 31 January 2021, under the 2008 Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

Many migrant families share a single digital device. Mobile internet data is prohibitively expensive, and connections are limited in the rural areas where many migrant families live. With MLCs closed, migrant communities have reported an increase in child protection risks and reduced access to child protection services (Zar et al., 2021). 2,457 fewer children are currently enrolled in MLCs than at the start of the pandemic (MECC, 2021), representing a drop-out rate of 21%.

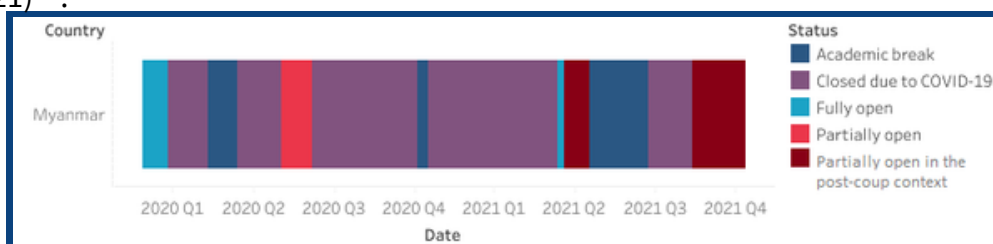
With both the Thai-Burma border officially closed and education in Burma indefinitely suspended, the best available data indicates that 1 in 5 migrant children are no longer accessing any form of education.

**3.1.4 The Impact of the February 2021 Political Crisis on Education for Migrant Children in Thailand.**

On the February 1st, 2021, Burma was engulfed in a paradigm-shifting political crisis. The Burmese Armed Forces declared the 2020 election results invalid and arrested civilian political figures. In response, the political opposition has formed a National Unity Government (NUG). The country has been plunged into a state of escalating civil war and COVID-19 has swept throughout the country. As a result of political destabilization and COVID-19, the ‘twin crises’, the Burmese education system has been closed for over 69 weeks out of the last 84 (UNESCO, 2021)\*\*.

Furthermore, it is predicted that within a year the Burmese economy will decline by 18%, 1 million jobs will be lost (World Bank, 2021), and over 50% of children in Burma will be living below the poverty line (UNDP, 2021). Children migrating from Burma to Thailand in the future will be departing from a traumatic context defined by increasing conflict, poverty, and political upheaval. They will arrive in Thailand likely having missed at least two years of formal education with diverse and complex learning needs.

Migrants currently residing in Thailand have clearly stated that they face great uncertainty in their future and are being forced to re-evaluate the dates of their planned return home. (TeacherFOCUS, 2022). Support for migrant education in Thailand from Burma has ceased, and consequently MLCs are enduring shortfalls in financial, administrative, logistical and technical support. The full scale of the impact of the political crisis on education for migrant children from Burma in Thailand is unclear, but the potential implications are far-reaching, long-lasting, and highly likely to further exacerbate the challenges migrant learners are experiencing due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



\*\*Official statistics of government mandated opening and closing of schools indicate that Burma’s education system has been fully or partially closed for 69 of the last 84 weeks. However, in practice this number is an underestimate. Not all schools were able to open during the brief windows between waves of COVID-19. Furthermore, although the education system has been officially open during much of 2021, in practice the majority of the population have boycotted the state education system since February 2021.

### 3.2 Non-formal Primary Education for Burmese Migrants in Thailand

Non-formal education (NFE) is broadly defined as “[Education which] takes place both within and outside educational institutions and caters to people of all ages. It does not always lead to certification. Non-formal education programmes are characterised by their variety, flexibility and ability to respond quickly to new educational needs of children or adults. They are often designed for specific groups of learners such as those who are too old for their grade level, those who do not attend formal school, or adults (INEE, 2010).

Globally, NFE is recognized as a powerful tool in the development of human capital and the pursuit of social justice, and vital in an educational emergency (INEE, 2021). Regionally, NFE is an important pillar of education provision in Thailand and Burma. Prior to the February 2021 political crisis, NFE in Burma was key part of the education recovery plans (MoE, 2020). In Thailand, Microsoft Thailand in partnership with UNESCO Bangkok and seven other agencies have launched the ‘Accelerating Thailand’ initiative which has trained 7600 non-formal education facilitators and benefitted over 100,000 non-formal learners through a range of online platforms including UNESCO Bangkok’s lifelong learning course website: [www.lll-olc.net](http://www.lll-olc.net) (UNESCO, 2021).

#### 3.2.1 The history of NFE for Burmese migrants in Tak Province

Under the broad definition outlined above, non-formal education has long been a core pillar of education in Burma (Lall, 2020), yet it has often been overlooked (Lopez Cardozo and Maber, 2019). Between 1962 and 2015, Burma’s education system declined from among ‘the best in Asia’ to one of the worst (Lall, 2020). In 1990, only 65.7% of eligible children were enrolled in primary school. As part of efforts to address this extreme educational poverty, the NFE systems which are used by Burmese learners today were established in March 2000 with the creation of the Myanmar Literacy Resource Center (MLRC) at the Myanmar Education Research Bureau (MERB) with support from the Japanese Grant Assistance for Grassroots Projects and UNESCO’s Asia Pacific Cultural Centre (IBP, 2008; Maclean and Wilson, 2009).

By 2009, education reforms in conjunction with the new NFE systems had increased primary school enrolment to 84.1%, but only 74.4% of pupils starting grade 1 reached grade 5 (Lall, 2020). To reach Burma’s Millenium Development Goals of universal primary education and 90% of learners achieving a grade 5 education by 2015, significant investment and efforts were required.

Throughout 2008/2009, UNICEF worked with MLRC and MERB and the MoE to further develop NFE systems (Fraser et al., 2019).



Non-formal education pathways for Burmese migrants in Thailand were established in 2014 by projects supported by HwF and World Education. Recognizing that “children living along the Thai-Burma border are often unable to attend school regularly due to family commitments such as tending livestock, childcare, or household chores” (World Education, 2015), MLCs were supported in creating pathways that enable children to attend evening and weekend classes, and which are tailored to meet the diverse needs of children not enrolled in formal education pathways. The courses and curriculum built upon the existing Burmese NFPE systems, which had been run since 2002 by MLRC (MLRC, n.d). This allowed HwF and World Education to work in partnership with the Burmese MoE to integrate the newly-established system in Thailand with the existing NFE systems in Burma, thus establishing an accreditation system for Burmese NFE students in Thailand. In May 2015, all 34 students in the first cohort passed their exams.

***“Students were presented with their recognized certificates from the Government of Myanmar and two students from the NFPE program received second and third place awards for outstanding student achievement for Myawaddy Township.” (World Education, 2015).***

U Kyaw San was an instrumental figure in bringing non-formal education to Burmese migrants in Thailand and deserves great recognition for the role he has played and continues to play in facilitating a program which has led to the education of so many children.

### **3.2.2 The successes of the NFPE/NFME programs in Tak Province**

Today, HwF provides financial, administrative, and technical support to the ten MLCs and one orphanage which deliver non-formal primary education (NFPE) and non-formal middle school education (NFME) programming in the Mae Sot and Phop Phra area to 216 NFPE and 35 NFME students. While the program is largely standardised, each school uses slightly different systems and timetables, depending on school capacities and the needs of the communities they serve.

The programs have clear benefits. NFPE/NFME students can complete a basic level of education which enables access to further educational opportunities. They, and their families, gain access to a wider range of health and social protection services through their schools. Perhaps most importantly, vulnerable and marginalized children with diverse needs join a community of their peers and make new friends. Figures 1 and 2 outline the number of children who have benefitted from the NFPE/NFME programs.

In 2018 - 2019, the final year of pre-pandemic programming, 20 students completed the full NFME program, 13 students returned to Myanmar to continue their formal education in high school, 1 student joined a technical vocational college in Myanmar, and three joined the Thai non-formal education pathway.

In the 2020 – 21 cohort, 74 out of an eligible 80 students were entered into the NFPE level 1 final exams, resulting in a pass rate of 88%. 139 students sat for the NFPE level 2 final exams, with 83% passing. The NFME program has a 100% pass rate.



Thanks to the NFPE and NFME programs, thousands of migrant children in Tak Province have received an education - the pathways have delivered over 3,500 enrolments. For overage students without a basic education, non-formal programs provide an educational lifeline and a second chance at an education. For many, it's their last chance (INEE, 2020)

*“Daw Aye Aye\* graduated from the NFPE program with AYO learning centre. She continued her education in the MLC formal pathway. She then went to high school, passed the matriculation exam with a distinction in one subject, and is currently waiting to enrol in university.”*

\*name withheld

*In 2016, U Chit Ko graduated from the NFPE program run by Sauch Kha Hon Sar Learning Center with the highest score in Kayin State.*

Find out more at:

[https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1582282/migrant-kids-get-chance-to-blossom.](https://www.bangkokpost.com/thailand/general/1582282/migrant-kids-get-chance-to-blossom)

NFPE Enrolment Statistics									
School Year	Level 1			Level 2			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2014-2015	20	14	34	21	23	44	41	37	78
2015-2016	40	48	88	33	39	72	73	87	160
2016-2017	272	216	488	191	186	377	463	402	865
2017-2018	143	116	259	205	179	384	348	295	643
2018-2019	207	185	392	186	180	366	393	365	758
2019-2020	123	84	207	133	138	271	256	222	478
2020-2021	59	41	100	119	85	204	178	126	304
2021-2022	40	40	80	86	50	136	126	90	216
<b>Total</b>	<b>904</b>	<b>744</b>	<b>1,648</b>	<b>974</b>	<b>880</b>	<b>1,854</b>	<b>1,878</b>	<b>1624</b>	<b>3,502</b>

NFME Enrolment Statistics			
School Year	Male	Female	Total
2017-2018	11	11	22
2018-2019	11	9	20
2019-2020	19	16	35
2020-2021	15	18	33
2021-2022	16	19	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>145</b>





### 3.2.3 The impact of COVID-19 on NFPE/NFME

As outlined above, COVID-19 has had a debilitating impact on access to education and child protection services for all migrant children. Throughout 2020-2021, two MLCs were forced to close their NFPE/NFME pathways, and 45 NFPE/NFME students dropped out – a far higher number than in previous years.

With many NFPE/NFME students coming from low-income and disadvantaged backgrounds with limited access to digital devices and reliable internet, the shift to online learning has arguably been felt even more acutely by this segment of the migrant student body.

With the closure of the Thai-Burma border in March 2020, Township Education Officers (TEOs) were unable to travel from Burma to Thailand to facilitate accredited exams. Consequently, the hard-won accreditation systems of the NFPE/NFME programs were suspended. Students enrolled in NFPE/NFME programs were unable to receive officially recognized accreditation for their studies. Unwilling to see 478 students lose access to their preferred education pathway, Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation worked with local education authorities, and MLCs to maintain the system in the face of this crisis.

The Burmese non-formal assessment system has been honed over decades to allow for overage students to study an accelerated curriculum in a flexible timetable that emphasizes practical skills. Attendance, participation, and weekly and monthly classwork and practical work contribute to students' final assessments in conjunction with exams. Teachers record student data, which is collated and checked every 60 days by township monitors based in Thailand, and data is sent to regional monitors in Myawaddy.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, township monitors continued their work, even though it was not possible to administer final exams. A workaround was eventually found that allowed the 2019-2020 cohort to graduate.

### 3.2.4 The impact of the Burmese political crisis on NFPE/NFME

In the past, NFE programs in Thailand received administrative, material, and financial support from the DAE and Department of Basic Education (DBE) in Burma. The administrative support provided ensured that migrant students were able to receive accredited education. Schools were provided with government-issued textbooks. Township monitors and teachers received basic stipends to finance their work. All support ended in February 2021, but, drawing on lessons learnt during 2020 - 2021, those involved in the system have continued working to ensure NFPE/NFME students can complete their education.

Through existing networks and personal relationships developed over decades of cross-border collaboration, it appears that administrative support may be able to resume in 2022, allowing students in NFPE and NFME to complete their accredited education. However, non-formal programs will no longer receive material or financial support from Burma. Current sources of external funding and support are due to expire, and despite the best efforts of everybody involved in the system, there are fears that the existing non-formal pathways for Burmese migrants will be forced to close. The Burmese political crisis has led to existential questions regarding the future of NFPE/NFME for Burmese migrants in Thailand.

3.3 Overview of available pathways for Burmese Migrant Learners in 2021

NFPE and NFME are two of seven educational pathways available to Burmese migrant children and youth living in Tak Province. This section outlines a broad overview of each pathway to provide additional context of the educational ecosystem in which NFPE/NFME operates. Student and parental choice are limited to the seven pathways (figure 3), but combinations of pathways are possible. If the NFPE and NFME pathways are forced to close through lack of funding, families will be faced with two choices – to join another pathway or discontinue education.

Migrant learning centres are responsible for delivering three pathways: NFPE, NFME and the MLC formal Burmese curriculum. Similarly, the Royal Thai Government offers two pathways, Thai formal education and Kor Sor Nor – Thai non-formal education. The Burmese National Unity Government has begun to offer a new home-based learning pathway which is online and self-directed.

Finally, children and youth may choose to pursue a vocational pathway. This study identifies four well-established vocational programs that Burmese migrant children and youth are eligible to join, however it is understood that additional vocational projects, programs, and courses are intermittently offered by a variety of community-based organizations and businesses depending on capacity and funding.

### Mapping of Migrant Education Pathways

Pathway	NFPE	NFME	MLC formal education program	Home-Based Learning provided by the NUG	Thai formal education	Thai Non-Formal Education (Kor-sor-nor)	Vocational Training
Entry requirements	Read/Write Burmese	Grade 4 Certificate	—	Smartphones	—	Thai Entrance Exam (read & write Thai)	CERTIFICATE High School
Eligible ages	10	13	4-5	4-5	4-5	15+	18+
Length of program (years)	2	3	12	12	12	6	1-2
Language of Instruction	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar	Myanmar	Thai	Thai	Thai/Myanmar
Subjects included	Myanmar, English, Maths, Social, Income generating, General subject	ICT, Vocational skills, Life skills, Social skills	Myanmar, English, Maths, Social	Myanmar, English, Maths, Social	Thai, English, Maths, Social	Thai, English, Maths, Social	Thai, English, Life Skills, Vocational Skills
Recognized certification	Star icon	Star icon	Star icon	?	Star icon	Star icon	Star icon
Costs	2 coins	2 coins	2 coins	1 coin	2 coins	1 coin	1 coin
Who is this pathway most suitable for?	Overage, dropout	Overage, dropout. Usually NFPE graduates.	Migrant children who want a Myanmar education	Migrant children who want a Myanmar education	Migrant children who will stay in Thailand for a long time	Migrant children who will stay in Thailand for a long time and want flexibility	Migrant youth seeking employment in Thailand
Full time/part time	Progress bar	Progress bar	Progress bar	Progress bar	Progress bar	Progress bar	Progress bar

### 3.3.1 Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE)

The non-formal primary education pathway gives overage students the opportunity to complete Burmese primary education. To enter this pathway, students must be at least 10 years old and be able to read and write in Burmese. In the first year of the NFPE program, students are able to complete Grades 1 and 2 of the Burmese national curriculum and Grades 3 and 4 during the second year. Students who complete this pathway often join the MLC formal education programs or move onto the NFME pathway. The NFPE pathway is a part-time course, which allows students to work and study concurrently. As a result of the Burmese political crisis, this pathway can only be accredited locally.

### 3.3.2 Non-formal Middle-School Education (NFME)

The non-formal middle-school education pathway gives overage students the opportunity to complete Burmese middle school education. To enter this pathway, students must be at least 13 years old and hold a grade 4 certificate. The NFME pathway is a three-year program which gives students the opportunity to complete the grade 8 board exam, as well as develop vocational skills, ICT skills, and life skills. This pathway can only be accredited locally due the Burmese political crisis.

### 3.3.3 MLC formal education program

The MLC formal education program is the main pathway for migrant learners who want to study the Burmese basic education curriculum. Some MLCs offer nursery and kindergarten-level classes, but most MLCs begin at grade 1.

MLCs accept all students provided they meet the grade level requirements. The MLC formal pathway offers students a full twelve years of study using the Burmese basic education curriculum, with students able to take the Burmese recognized grade 4, 8, and 12 board exams. MLCs no longer receive funding from any government, and so have less funding available to support students' costs, such as uniforms, lunch or stationery. MLC students are required to attend full time during the week. Due to the Burmese political crisis, these exams can now only be accredited locally. This pathway usually serves migrant families and children who intend to return to Burma.

### 3.3.4 NUG Home-based learning program

This new pathway is under development through the National Unity Government's Facebook [page: https://web.facebook.com/BE.moeNUG](https://web.facebook.com/BE.moeNUG). Various educational resources for Burmese students are available through grade level Facebook groups, Viber groups, Telegram channels and a YouTube channel. The accreditation system for this pathway is currently unclear. Due to the fact that all learning is currently delivered through online platforms, the core entry requirements are a digital device and an internet connection.

Other than data costs, this pathway is free. The NUG was invited to participate in this research to provide further insights into how this pathway might develop in the future but were unavailable for interview at the time of this research.

### 3.3.5 Thai formal education

Since the 1999 adoption of the Education For All (EFA) policy and the 2005 cabinet resolution, in principle all children in Thailand have had the legal right to 15 years free basic education in Thailand regardless of their legal status.

However, in practice many migrants are unaware of their legal rights, and some schools are more welcoming to migrant learners than others. The Royal Thai Government formal education system accepts students from kindergarten. Children learn a range of subjects in Thai language, and receive Thai government accredited certificates after KG, grade 6, grade 9 and 12. The school day is from 8am to 3pm every day.

Thai formal school is slightly more expensive than other pathways due to costs for different uniforms for different grades and different subjects. Some schools have funding available for low-income students to support uniform costs and lunch. Students who finish grade 12 are able to go Thai university. Those that complete a three-year bachelor's degree are able to obtain Thai ID cards.



### 3.3.6 Thai Non-formal Education (Kor-Sor-Nor)

The Thai Non-formal education system is called Kor Sor Nor. The Kor Sor Nor program requires students to be at least 15 years old before they can join. However, some MLCs in Tak province have local agreements which allow Burmese children who are as young as 12 to join. To join Kor Sor Nor, children need to be able to speak, read and write basic Thai – at approximately the same level as a grade three student. Migrant students and parents do not need documentation to join the Kor Sor Nor program, however they do need signatures from their village head to confirm their identity and address.

The Kor Sor Nor program lasts 6 years and offers an accelerated version of the Thai formal curriculum. The first two years cover grades 1 to 6 of the Thai formal curriculum. Years three and four cover grades 7 to 9. The final two years cover grades 10 to 12. Students receive accredited certificates at grades, 6, 9 and 12. The Kor Sor Nor program also includes self-directed learning activities and practical subjects such as agriculture, industrial arts, and sewing. Kor Sor Nor students need to attend approximately one day every week. There are no fees to take the Kor Sor Nor program, the only fees associated with this pathway are uniform and stationery.

In line with the Thai formal education system, students who complete grade 12 are able to undertake undergraduate studies at Thai universities. As noted above, those that complete their undergraduate studies are eligible for improved documentation rights.

### 3.3.7 Vocational training

There are a variety of different vocational programs and courses available to migrant learners who choose to follow a vocational pathway, although they are predominantly aimed at youth rather than children. Four of the most well-established options are spotlighted below – Mae Sot Technical College, Youth Connect Foundation, Hospitality Catering Training Centre and the HwF’s Rays of Youth programs.

**The Mae Sot Technical College** is the largest vocational school in five border districts. Approximately 2,000 students currently study in the 30 different accredited vocational and technical courses which include accounting, hospitality, mechanics, construction, logistics, marketing and digital business studies. Students who have graduated with a grade 9 certificate from the Thai formal education system or Kor Sor Nor are eligible to join this vocational college (Maesod, 2021).

**The Youth Connect Foundation** was founded in 2007 to prepare migrant youth for employment and connect them with work placements in one of 70 local businesses. The Youth Connect flagship program delivers a bespoke curriculum of life skills, mathematics, and practical Thai to youth aged between 18 and 25 who are enrolled in high school, high-school equivalent education, as part of a post-10 education program, or an alternative education program for young adults. Approximately 45 students who complete this first phase are able to move on to the ‘Intensive Training and Apprenticeship’ phase which includes 12-weeks of further studies of life skills, mathematics and practical, profession-specific Thai, and a 12-week paid internship in a business of the student’s choice.

In the final stage, youth receive support from Youth Connect Foundation’s Career Centre to find full time work. The Career Centre has a 100% success rate – every graduate from the program has found full time employment. (Youth Connect, 2021).





**The Hospitality-Catering Training Centre (HCTC)** in Mae Sot was launched in 2009 and runs a two-year training course for 30 migrant youth, which includes two internships and weekly practical training at ‘The Passport’ restaurant. HCTC also has a partnership agreement with Mae Sot Technical College, meaning that graduates can qualify for an accredited State Diploma. In the most recent reporting period 75% of graduates found a job within a year of graduation. (IECD, 2021).



[www.helpwithoutfrontiers.org](http://www.helpwithoutfrontiers.org)

**The Rays of Youth program** has been run by HwF since 2009, offering two vocational pathways to migrant youth. The peer leadership program supports 20 youth for one year to develop a range of skills to build their confidence and support their personal development. Youth receive training on a range of social issues such as human trafficking, safe migration, human and child’s rights, gender equality and sexual reproductive health and rights. In the final part of the program, youth pass on their learning to peers at migrant schools and throughout their communities through mini projects. The Rays of Youth Music program works with an additional 20 youth who spend a year developing their musical talents and receiving training on social issues, the group then integrate key messages into live performances delivered throughout communities and across media platforms. During the first decade of the program, over 100 youth graduated from the Leadership program, and awareness raising activities and events have reached more than 49,000 community members (HwF, 2022).





## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Purpose

The aim of this research is to provide Help Without Frontiers, and other stakeholders supporting education for Burmese migrant children, with an actionable situational analysis of non-formal education programs in Tak province.

Through collating the experiences, perspectives and preferences of key stakeholders, this report provides a series of recommendations on how children currently enrolled in the NFPE/NFME pathways can be best supported in 2022 and beyond.

### 4.3 Research Design

This research followed a four-stage process. Research was conducted from 18th November to 23rd November, 2021. All interviews were conducted online. Figure 4 outlines the research process.

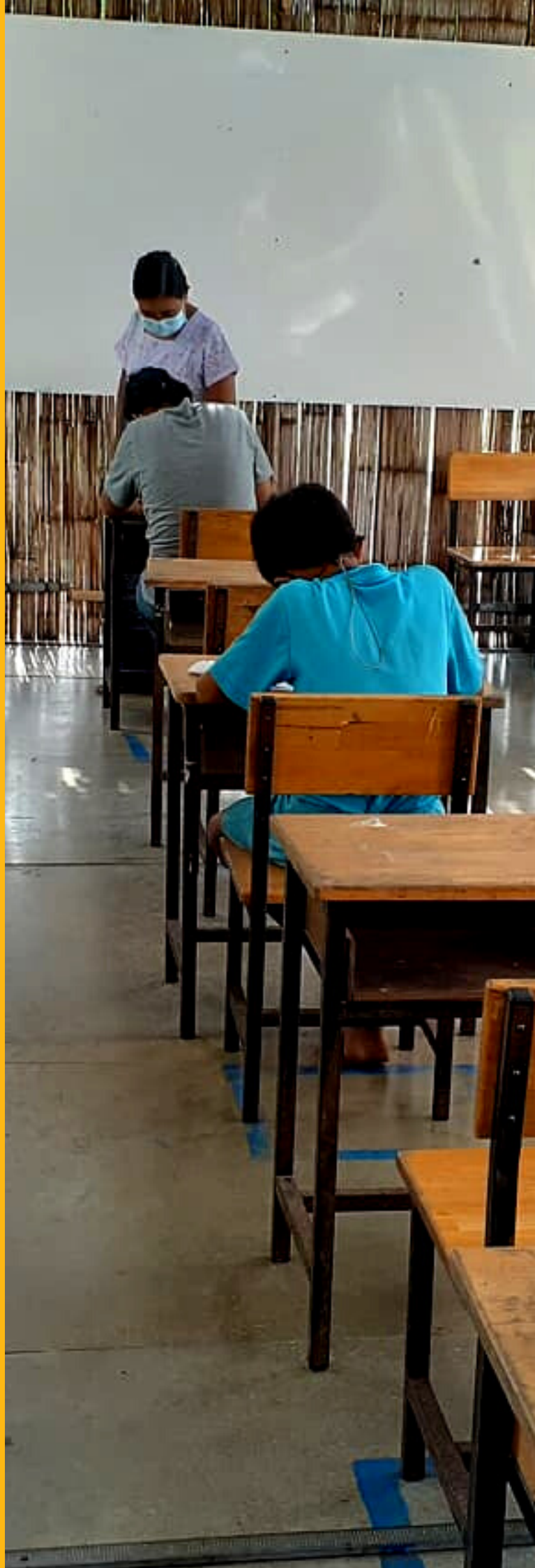
Process	Methodology	Data Source
Stage 1	Desk Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Key documents provided by HwF</li><li>• Relevant literature on NFE best practices</li></ul>
Stage 2	Key Informant interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Relevant personnel in education organizations in Thailand and Burma</li></ul>
Stage 3	Focus group discussions and mixed methods surveys Key Informant interviews and mixed methods surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students</li><li>• Parents</li><li>• Teachers</li><li>• School directors</li></ul>
Stage 4	Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All collated data</li></ul>

Figure 4: The Research Process

### 4.2 Objectives

This situational analysis is centred on the following objectives:

1. Identify viable education pathways available to students currently enrolled in NFPE and NFME programs via a multimodal research approach.
2. Consult with key stakeholders on the factors that influence their educational preferences.
3. Capture potential advantages and disadvantages of each educational pathway available to migrant children to inform long term strategic decision making.



#### 4.3.1 Stage One – Desk Review

An initial desk review was conducted to identify the various educational pathways available to migrant learners in Tak Province. The desk review also explored the history of the non-formal education system in Tak Province and global recommendations for best practices within non-formal education systems. Findings from the desk review informed the research overview and subsequent research design.

#### 4.3.2 Stage Two – Education Organization Interviews

Drawing on findings from the desk review, key informant interviews were conducted with representatives from eight different education organizations involved in non-formal education in Thailand and Burma. Findings from these interviews enabled the creation of a pathway map that became the cornerstone of research in stage three. A full research proposal was submitted and approved by the Community Ethics Advisory Board (CAEB), operated by the Mae Tao Clinic, prior to the onset of stakeholder interviews.

#### 4.3.3 Stage Three – Stakeholder Interviews

In line with best practice recommendations from INEE (2010), the core findings of this research are derived from focus group discussions and key informant interviews with those directly involved in or benefitting from existing non-formal education pathways in Tak Province. A full breakdown of participants and group sizes is detailed in Figure 5.

Focus groups were organized through HwF, who contacted school directors who subsequently arranged interviews with teachers, parents, and NFPE/NFME students. Every interview began with child-friendly consent protocols which included an overview of this research. The research overview outlined the challenges the non-formal system faces regarding future accreditation and financing as a result of the Burmese political crisis. Thus, discussions were framed in the context of the difficult decisions that donors, education organizations, schools, parents, and teachers will be forced to make in the coming year regarding the continuation of non-formal education.

#### 4.3.4 Stage Four - Analysis

Findings from stages one to three were collated and analysed by the research team. All stakeholders' perspectives are equally valued within this research as each group is crucial to the success of a child's education. Participants' voices are given primacy throughout the analysis. However, in recognition of the importance of the opinions of children in decisions that affect them (UN, 1989), and acknowledging that too often children's voices are not heard (Lansdown, 2005) this research places children's opinions at the forefront of findings.

Comparative quantitative analysis presents factors in order of children's preferences, and qualitative findings place children's opinions first. Final recommendations were co-developed between TeacherFOCUS and Help Without Frontiers.

Stakeholder	Male	Female	Total	Number of focus groups/ interviews conducted	Average number of participants per group	Number of different schools / organizations represented
School Directors	5	8	13	9	1.4	9
Teachers	3	7	10	6	1.7	5
Parents	5	41	46	11	4.2	10
Students	40	46	86	19	4.5	10
NFPE Students	30	39	69			
NFME Students	10	7	17			
Education Organization Representatives	4	7	11	8	1.4	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>53</b>		

**Figure 5:** Research Participants



## 4.4 Limitations

Although focus group discussions have many advantages, for some respondents who are not familiar with one another, such as parents, there may be anxiety or feelings of ‘ana deh’ (the consideration of others, not wanting to hurt other’s feelings or not wanting to embarrass or offend’ (Bui, 2019)) when discussing personal issues or controversial topics.

For many stakeholders, this research was the first time they have been introduced to the political and economic challenges facing the existing non-formal education system. For many children and parents, it is likely this was the first time they had been introduced to a full map of educational pathways available to migrant children.

The educational organizations contacted for this study deliver a broad range of educational programming in Thailand and Burma, whereas children, parents, teachers, and school directors are directly involved with the NFE programs. All children interviewed are currently enrolled in NFE programs and have spent at least one year working towards their NFE certification. This research did not conduct interviews with prospective students or parents of students who may enrol in NFE in the future due to the difficulty of arranging such interviews.

As a result, most respondents interviewed have a strong personal interest in seeing their children or students complete their current programs.

As can be seen in figure 5 above, far fewer teachers were interviewed than other stakeholder groups. This is because there are comparatively few NFE teachers. NFE teachers are highly trained by MLRC and the DAE to deliver the specialised curriculum, and most of their time is dedicated to NFE students. There are approximately 20 NFE students to every trained NFE teacher. The majority of NFPE and NFME teachers were interviewed for this research. However, with fewer teachers interviewed, there are a limited number of perspectives, therefore caution is required when interpreting the comparative quantitative data presented in this report between different stakeholder groups.

Finally, all students who participated in this research were contacted through their schools. It is likely that those children who participated in this research are among the most engaged in their education. In one surprising finding, only 8% of children in this interview stated that they were currently working as well as studying.

This does not likely fully represent the number of NFPE/NFME students who currently work and study. It is possible that those children who are working as well as studying were working at the time of the interviews.

## 5. FINDINGS

### 5.1 Stakeholders' perspectives on NFPE/NFME programs

#### 5.1.1 What are the perceived benefits and advantages of current NFPE/NFME programs?

School directors, teachers, parents, and children were first asked what they liked about the NFPE/NFME programs, and why they had chosen to support them or enrol in them. Within children's responses to this question, a core theme emerged that would resonate throughout all of children's responses in this research: children attend NFPE/NFME because they value the opportunity to receive an education - an opportunity they would otherwise be denied without access to NFPE/NFME.

*"We enrol in NFPE because we would like to get education."*

- NFPE Student.

When asked in follow up questions about what they liked specifically about their education with NPF/NFME, over half of the focus groups highlighted that they felt the non-formal curriculum is practical, relevant to their needs, and offers choice.

*"I like this program because I can choose the subjects I want to learn, for example, I like sewing, so I chose to learn that one. I like it because there are a lot of practice sessions."*

- NFPE Student

A significant proportion of children also noted that they enjoyed studying with their friends. While this is undoubtedly true of all students in every classroom, it is important to reiterate that only the NFPE/NFME programs allow children to study with similarly over-aged children at the same grade level in Burmese language. It is much easier for children in NFPE/NFME programs to find peers from similar backgrounds and make friends.

Children explained that they enjoyed working through content quickly using the accelerated non-formal curriculum. Some children shared that they appreciated being able to work and study at the same time. In contrast to other stakeholder responses to the same question, only one group of children mentioned the importance of accreditation as a key reason why they had enrolled in the NFPE/NFME programs.

Parental focus groups echoed children's responses - they enrolled their children in NFPE/NFME because it was an opportunity for children excluded from formal systems to earn an education. Within parents' discussions two key reasons emerged regarding the advantages of NFPE/NFME over other pathways: timetable flexibility and appropriateness for their overage children.

*"My kids are getting older, so NFPE/NFME is the best for my kids. When I enrol in MLCs, my kid has to learn with younger students, and my kid feels shy."*

- NFME Parent

In contrast to children and their parents, half of interviewed teachers referred to accreditation as a key aspect of the non-formal programs, however, over half of responses also raised how important NFPE/NFME programs are for overage learners.

*“I know many students who want to study, but they are kind of old: around 13 years old. NFPE is the best for them.”*

- Teacher

Teachers highlighted that NFPE/NFME is flexibly designed for students who are working, and inclusive for children of diverse ethnic backgrounds who desire to learn Burmese should they wish to return to Burma.

*“Most of the students are ethnic children with some Bamar. The NFPE/NFME pathway is useful for them to learn the language well and it will be essential once they go back to Burma. This can be the start of their opportunities for the future.”*

- Teacher

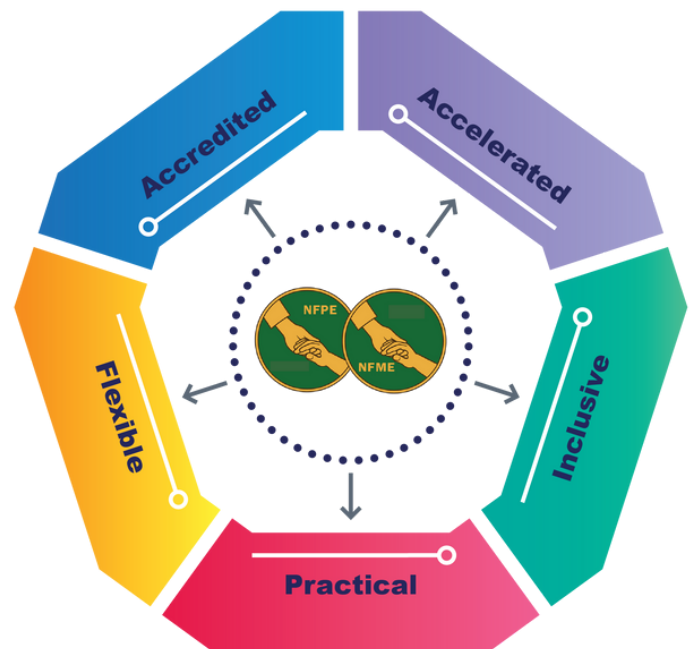
School directors, who perhaps hold a more strategic view on the importance of NFPE/NFME to the migrant community, most frequently cited accreditation as the key reason they chose to start supporting NFPE/NFME programs.

*“As a migrant school we always need to consider students recognized education. Especially for those students who want to return back to Burma; we found that NFPE is the best pathway [for] our students - they can use the NFPE certificate to enrol into Burma government school.”*

- School Director

School directors also emphasized the importance of NFPE/NFME to students who are overage and working. They noted that children in NFPE often become highly motivated as they pass through the curriculum quickly, and that the NFPE program becomes a steppingstone to further education opportunities. In the past, education officers in Burma were able to provide support to NFPE/NFME students to enrol in other programs. Additionally, it was noted that, in the past, children were more easily able to renew their Burmese Citizenship Card with an accredited NFPE/NFME certificate.

In summary, analysis of stakeholder responses identifies five core-characteristics that are most valued in the existing NFPE/NFME programs. They are **inclusive, flexible, practical, accelerated and accredited.**



- **Inclusive:** NFPE/NFME programs target overage learners, those who are older than their school grade level. This allows children who are aged 10 and over to complete primary education. One student interviewed for this study has just turned 18, and thanks to his school's NFPE/NFME program, is working towards completing his middle school education.
- **Flexible:** NFPE/NFME classes are often held during the evenings or weekends. This allows students who are enrolled in a Thai education pathway (formal or nonformal) the opportunity to also learn the Burmese curriculum. Most significantly, it also provides access to education for learners who are working, and who would otherwise be unable to attend school. 8% of children interviewed in this research reported that they were currently working and studying. School directors noted that students' work is often seasonal, and the percentage of children working and studying increases during intensive periods of agricultural work. One current student interviewed for this study currently works 72 hours a week, from 8am to 8pm everyday in a shop, yet is able to study for at least 30 minutes every day to continue their basic education.
- **Practical:** NFPE/NFME programs incorporate a range of different vocational subjects and skills. This provides children with employable skills that will make finding work easier in the future. Over the last five years, MLCs offering NFPE/NFME have tailored their curriculum and assessment systems to best meet the needs of their students. One school offers students agriculture classes in which 30% of the final assessment is exam-based, and 70% is practical.
- **Accelerated:** NFPE programs also cover two years' worth of academic study in a single year. This allows the over-age students to complete grades 1 and 2 in a single year of NFPE study, and grades 3 and 4 in the second year. Completion of the NFPE program provides students with primary school completion equivalency. Students are eligible to progress to grade 5, or the NFME program. NFME allows students to complete 4 grades in three years. Students who complete the NFME program, graduate with a grade 8 equivalent qualification.
- **Accredited:** HWF and World Education's work in 2014 established a system whereby Burmese authorities from the Department of Alternative Education (DAE) would cross the border to administer nationally standardised board exams. The exam papers were then returned to Burma to be externally assessed by teachers and township education officers within Burma. Consequently, NFPE/NFME students have been able to receive certificates accredited by the Burmese Department of Basic Education (DBE).





**5.1.2 What are the perceived challenges and disadvantages of current NFE programs?**

Children largely reported challenges stemming from the shift to different home-based and online learning modalities caused by COVID-19. The most common challenges identified by children were: difficulty understanding due to less contact time with teachers, decreased educational quality, expensive internet fees, and time management challenges caused by sharing digital devices with family members and working to support their family whilst studying, or studying in multiple pathways.

Parents’ responses largely mirrored those of their children, though parents were more likely to report challenges with families sharing devices, or the costs of internet data. Parents also noted the difficulties children face in balancing their work and NFPE/NFME studies. One parent highlighted that in their opinion, some parents did not value education because they felt their children would still be working as laborers even with an NFPE/NFME certificate.

The most common challenge identified by teachers was students’ ability to regularly attend and complete homework. Teachers felt that the pandemic exacerbated this challenge, and they believed it was often a result of parents’ financial difficulties.

Teachers highlighted ways in which their NFPE/NFME programs had adapted over time to overcome challenges. To improve attendance, one MLC works in different locations depending on where their students are working. Another MLC organizes transport for their students.

One teacher raised the point of how important it is for educators to know the individual needs of their students in order to motivate them. Finally, one group of teachers explained how adapting to the NFPE/NFME system had been a challenge at the start, but as the system developed it has become stronger.

*“At the beginning we faced many challenges with student’s data and paperwork as well as the ways of teaching because it’s so different from the formal education system. To teach NFPE/NFME well, we need to prepare students’ data and lessons before teaching.”*

**- Teacher**

The major theme throughout responses from school directors were challenges brought about due to COVID-19 and online learning. School directors reiterated the concerns raised by children, parents, and teachers – poor connections, high data costs, and the lack of devices. Specific pedagogical challenges with online learning were also raised including classroom management issues and challenges with online assessment. Two MLCs mentioned the need for in-service training for their teachers to overcome the new challenges they face.

The second major theme school directors shared echoed that of parents and teachers: challenges with attendance – challenges that have been exacerbated by COVID-19. One School Director noted that in response to high dropout rates they have chosen to only accept students who are likely to complete the program.

*“Due to migration, children miss school or do not finish programs as they leave or move along with their parents. Every year there are some who don’t finish the program. As a solution, we have chosen the most stable students who won’t leave and can finish the whole program. Consequently 7/10 finished the last academic year.”*

- School Director

A final major theme that resonated throughout responses from school directors was a lack of funding and resources for MLCs. Since the onset of the political crisis in Burma, NFPE/NFME programs have lost financial support from the Department for Alternative Education in Burma. As a result, they have not received textbooks, exercise books, or stipends for their teachers.

*“There are many challenges: children have no phones and cannot learn, they don’t have learning materials, uniforms, material support, and teacher stipends are no longer available”*

- School Director

**5.1.3 What is the most important aspect of non-formal education?**

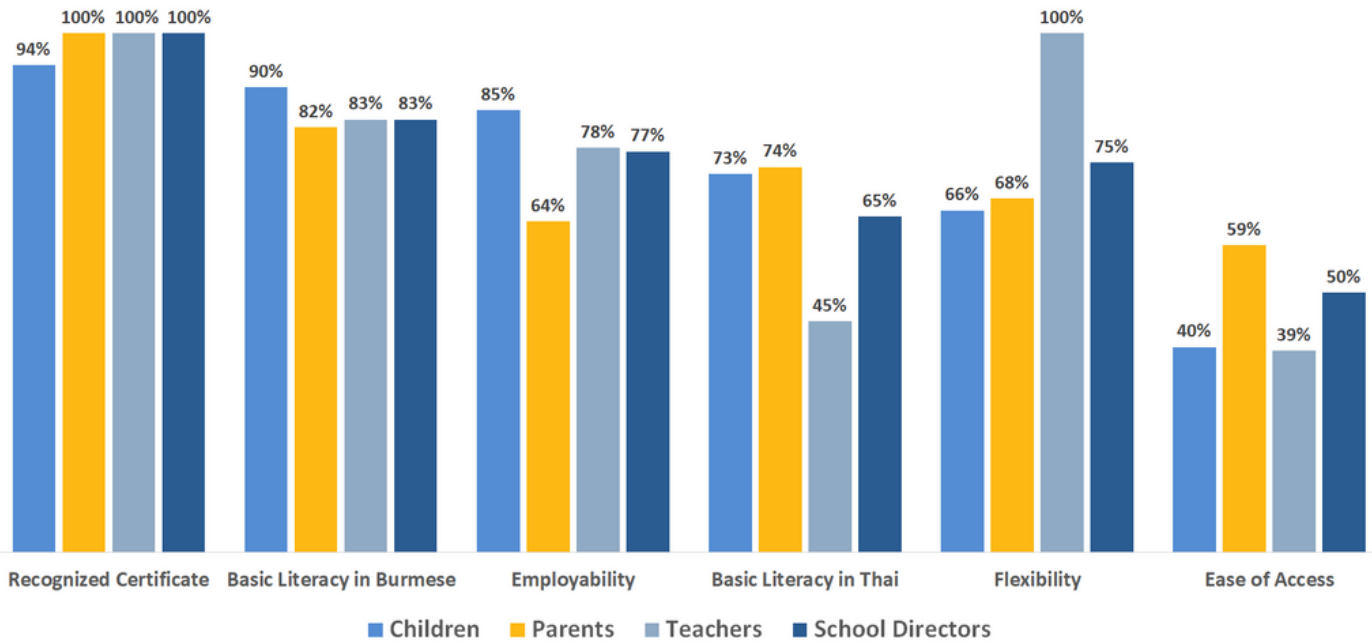
Prior to discussing the different education pathways available, participants were asked to rank six different aspects of education in order of their perceived importance. Responses are presented in Figure 6.

Although accreditation featured infrequently in participants early qualitative responses, at this stage all stakeholders considered a recognized certificate as the most important aspect of education, followed by basic literacy in Burmese. Children ranked employability higher than other stakeholders.

Although within this question children and parents considered basic literacy in Thai to be more important than their teachers and school directors, a subsequent question reveals that teachers and parents do consider Thai language to be important for migrant children’s futures. Teachers and school directors ranked flexible schedules for students who are working more highly than parents and students, which may reflect the concern shown in earlier qualitative responses by teachers and school directors for students who are less engaged in their education. It is likely that children and their parents who are less engaged in education were not sufficiently represented within this research.

Parents ranked ease of access more highly than other stakeholder groups, which may reflect their burden of responsibility to arrange transport for their children – a conclusion supported by other qualitative responses.





**Figure 6:** The most important aspects of education for all participants

Stakeholder	Benefits of NFE	Challenges with NFE
Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A second chance to earn an education.</li> <li>• Suitable for over-age and working students.</li> <li>• An accelerated curriculum, which includes practical skills and choice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online learning challenges – lack of devices / internet connections.</li> <li>• Lack of contact time.</li> <li>• Financial challenges.</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A second chance to earn an education.</li> <li>• Timetable flexibility.</li> <li>• Suitable for over-age and working students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online learning challenges – lack of devices / internet connections.</li> <li>• Time management.</li> <li>• Unclear benefits of education.</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable for over-age and working students.</li> <li>• Accredited.</li> <li>• Inclusive of Burmese students from different ethnicities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attendance</li> <li>• Students’ diverse needs.</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Data collection</li> </ul>
School Directors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suitable for over-age and working students.</li> <li>• Accredited.</li> <li>• Facilitates documentation processes.</li> <li>• Leads to further education opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online learning challenges – internet connections, classroom management, assessment.</li> <li>• Attendance and drop-outs</li> <li>• Finance challenges.</li> </ul>

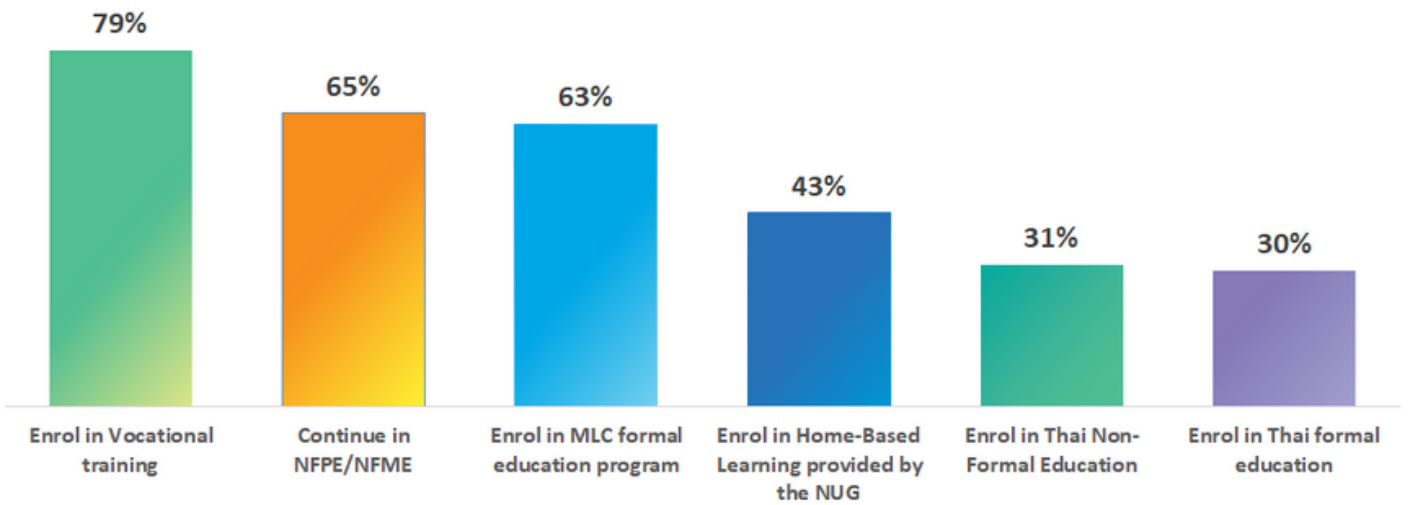
**Figure 7:** Stakeholder perspectives on current NFPE /NFME programs - summary



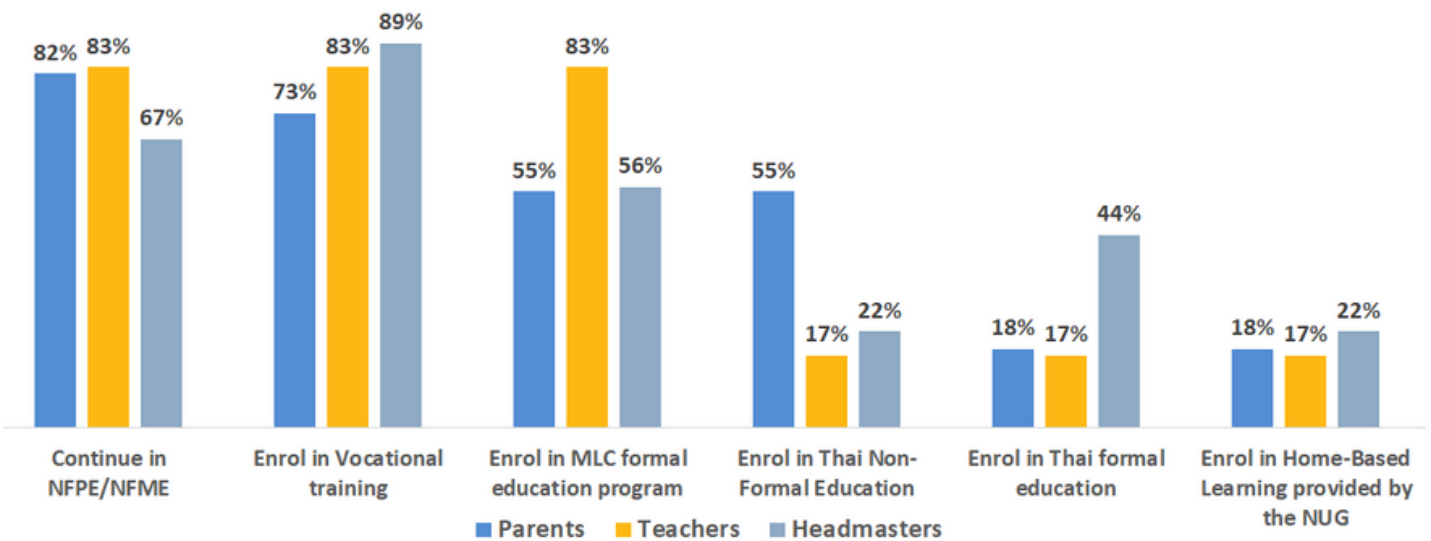
## 5.2 Stakeholders' perspectives on alternative pathways

### 5.2.1 Which pathways are students most interested in? Which pathways do adults consider most relevant for NFE students?

Each stakeholder group was presented with a child-friendly pathway map of the different educational options available to migrant learners. Children were asked which educational pathway they were most interested in. Adults were asked to select the three most relevant pathways for children/youth who are currently in the NFPE/NFME programs. Their responses are shown in Figures 8 and 9.



**Figure 8:** Which educational pathways are children most interested in?



**Figure 9:** Adults' views on the most relevant educational pathways for children and youth who are currently enrolled in the NFPE/NFME program

Students were most interested in the vocational training pathway, further emphasising the value non-formal learners place on practical education that will lead to eventual employment.

School directors and teachers also considered this the most relevant pathway for migrant learners enrolled in their programs.

Parents rated vocational training as the second most relevant pathway, however, they clearly value non-formal education as they were twice as likely to consider Thai non-formal education as a relevant pathway for their children than other stakeholders. Parents consider Thai non-formal education to be as relevant as formal MLC education.

Students consider NFE and MLC formal education as equally relevant pathways, and these were their second choice after vocational training. In contrast, teachers and school directors' rate existing NFPE/NFME programs as slightly more relevant for their learners than traditional MLC pathways.

Parents' first choice of pathway for their children is to continue with the current NFPE/NFME program, highlighting the appreciation parents have for the existing NFPE/NFME programs, and the challenges with changing to alternative pathways.

A large proportion of school directors felt that Thai formal education is a relevant pathway for migrant learners, and later qualitative responses indicate that many school directors feel that NFPE/NFME programs compliment Thai formal education. At the time of interview, adults felt that the home-based learning pathway provided by the NUG was the least relevant of currently available pathway options. However, children showed considerable interest in this pathway, with twice as many children indicating interest as adults.



**5.2.2 If the NFE program were no longer available in the next academic year, which pathway would students prefer to follow?**

As can be seen from the weighted treemap in Figure 10 below, a wide range of responses were given by children when asked which pathway they would choose if their current NFPE/NFME pathway was unavailable next year. Whilst a formal MLC education was the single most popular choice, mixed pathways that combined vocational training with other pathways were also popular. It's clear that students enjoy the practical, vocational subjects in their current program and value the focus on employability within their education. Those that are older or see their future in Burma were more inclined to study within the MLC system, however those that are younger, or see their future in Thailand were more likely to want to follow a Thai pathway. In most focus group discussions, only the most vocal learners gave strong opinions. The silent majority were unsure. As one student concluded:

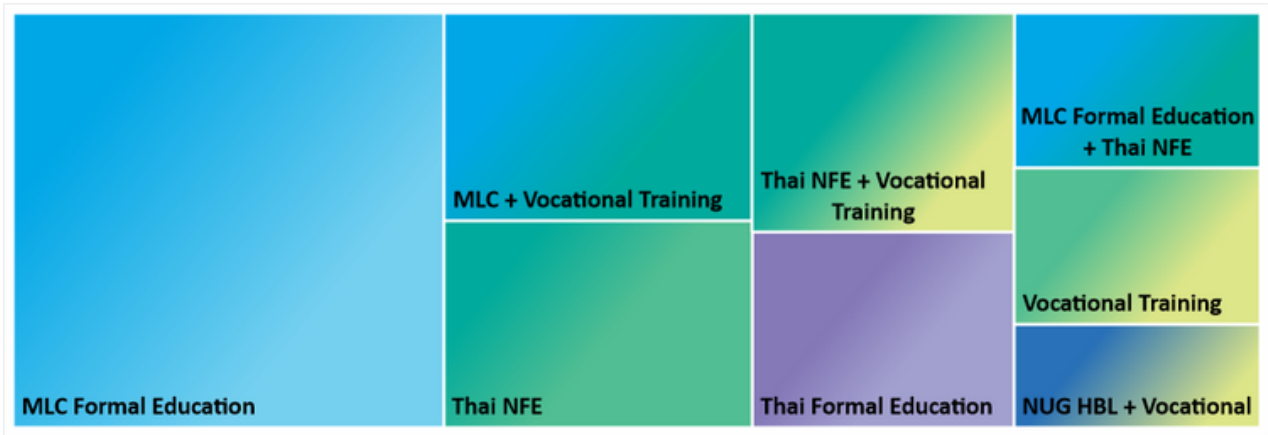
*“For me I just want to learn and be educated, it does not matter where it is”.*

- NFPE Student

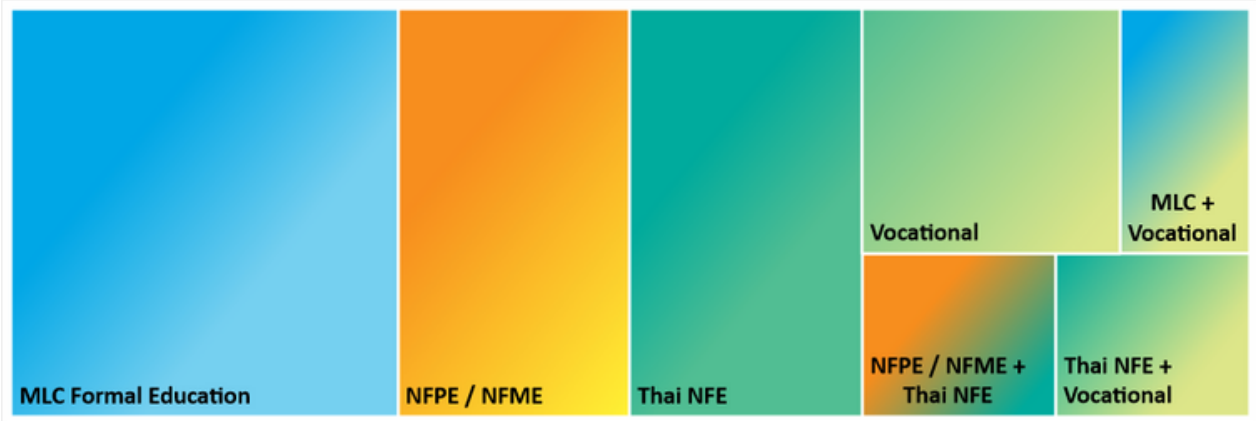
**5.2.3 Considering the current political and economic challenges facing the NFE system, which pathway would adults support in the coming academic year?**

Adult stakeholders were provided with a more complete picture of the political and economic complications facing the current NFPE/NFME system. In light of this situation, they were asked if they would continue to support or enrol their children in the current NFPE/NFME pathways or change to a different pathway. The general preferences of each focus group are shown in weighted treemaps in Figures 11, 12, and 13. Parents gave a broad range of responses to this question, reflecting the individual circumstances of their families and their children. Those with intentions to return to Burma or who held concerns about their children’s ability to adapt to a new system selected the existing NFPE/NFME system or MLC formal education system. None of the parents interviewed indicated that they would enrol their children in the Thai formal education system. It can be inferred that the Thai formal education pathway is the least appropriate pathway for overage students with limited Thai-language skills and out-of-school family or work commitments.

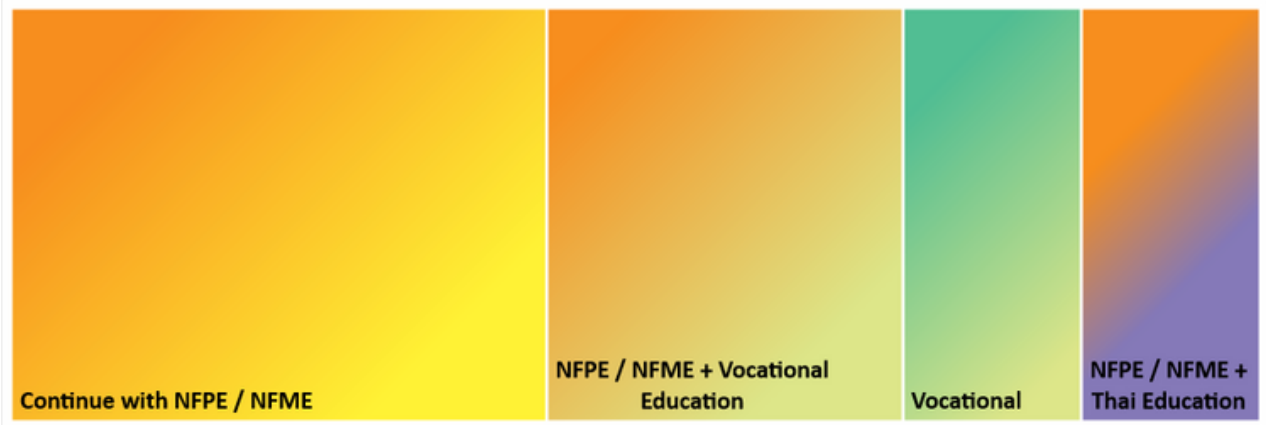




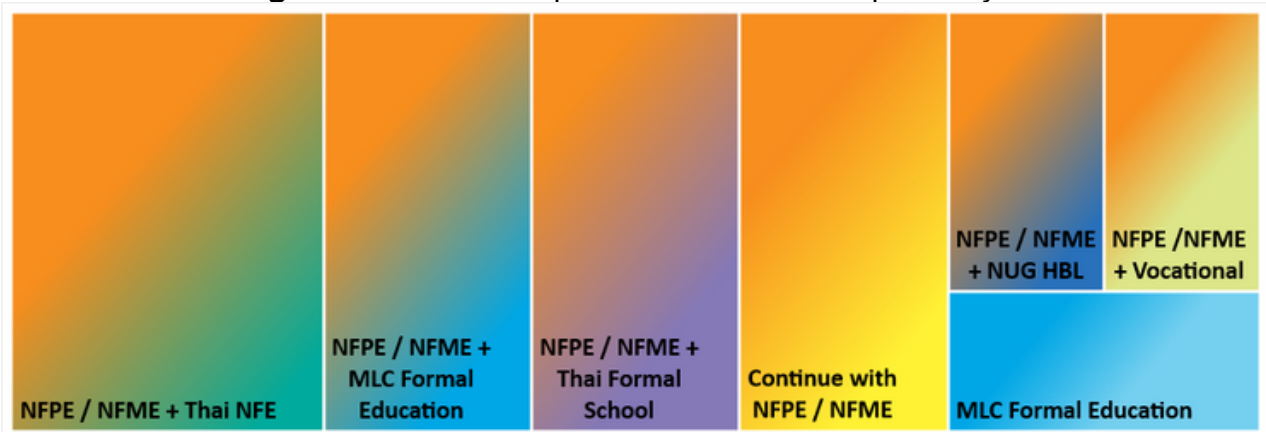
**Figure 10:** Students' preferred alternative pathways



**Figure 11:** Parents' preferred alternative pathways



**Figure 12:** Teachers' preferred alternative pathways



**Figure 13:** School Directors' preferred alternative pathways



Parents who selected Thai NFE pathways were clear they were doing so because the political events in Burma had forced them to change their plans. Parents who chose vocational pathways explained that they felt this was the best way for their children to find employment.

***“For my children's future. I want them to follow their dreams and learn how to work and how to earn money. Vocational training can support them to get jobs I think.”***

**- Parent**

As can be seen, the majority of parents stated they would consider changing their children’s pathway. However, it is important to repeat a key limitation of this research, for many parents this was the first time they were made aware of how the political situation in Burma would impact their children’s education. All parents responded that they would keep their children in education regardless of the challenges. The central theme running throughout parents’ responses is that they want what is best for their children, and many parents who did not voice strong opinions said they would let their children decide.

***“I don't want my kids to be like me - without education.”***

**-Parent**

The majority of teachers felt it was important to continue to support the NFPE/NFME system in some form, whether as a standalone or combined pathway (figure 11). Teachers across focus groups repeated the same rationale for the choices - in their view, NFPE/NFME is the best way to continue to support overage children who are at risk of dropping out and missing out on education.

***“We will continue to support education so that children do not go astray.”***

**- Teacher**

In concordance with parents' and children’s responses, many teachers felt it was appropriate for NFPE/NFME students to receive more vocational training to better enable them to find work and earn money. Teachers who recommended that NFPE/NFME students also join a Thai educational pathway felt that the existing NFPE/NFME programs provide much-needed support to students’ maths and English skills.

***“NFPE children learn about Math and English. When they move to a Thai school, they can continue with us to a more advanced level which is helpful. Sometimes, children in Thai schools are weak in Math and English so by starting with NFPE they are able to learn basic skills and then build up to more difficult subject skills as well.”***

**- NFPE Teacher**

Overall, teachers’ responses reflected their concern for what was best for their students. They recognized that the final decision regarding pathways lies with parents and children, but firmly advocated that all children should continue in some form of education.

***“Children should continue to higher education and aim for a degree. Children will have more opportunities for their future as well.... We have a student who will finish Thai high school [and NFE] and is going to study at university in the coming academic year.”***

**- Teacher**

Of the school directors contacted as part of this research, only one felt they were unable to continue to support the NFPE/NFME programs next year. They explained that their decision to discontinue their non-formal program was partly a political decision, but also a result of COVID-19 restrictions and the loss of financial support as a result of the political crisis.

Every other school director explained that they felt they must sustain the NFPE/NFME pathway for the benefit of their children. Throughout their responses, school directors reiterated the five characteristics of NFPE/NFME that make this pathway the best, or only, choice for their students.

*“NFE is useful for parents who want their kids to finish some kind of program. There is nothing better for those who are over-age and need to move grade levels quickly... at this time of the year when they pick chilies, some leave with their parents and miss school. Some came back, but some don't come back for the rest of the academic year.”*

- School Director

*“We want our students to receive at least one recognized certificate, either from the Thai or Burmese government.”*

- School Director

*“The reason we started to support NPFE was that a lot of our students enrol in Thai school during the daytime, and we want them to learn and gain recognition from our NFPE education pathways as well.”*

- School Director

### 5.2.4 What are the perceived challenges with alternative pathways?

Following discussions of the most appropriate pathway for NFPE/NFME students, all stakeholders were asked to identify the possible challenges learners would face with enrolling into the pathway identified. Figure 14 summarises their responses.

The current NFPE/NFME system has been carefully tailored over the last eight years to meet the needs of overage migrant learners, consequently, all stakeholders identified a variety of challenges with moving to alternative pathways.

#### Challenges with formal education at MLCs

The formal MLC pathway offers the fewest administrative challenges. There are strong connections between MLCs and NFPE/NFME programs. However, parents were concerned about additional costs and transportation challenges. Parents and teachers were concerned about the suitability of this pathway for overage learners, as well as NFPE/NFME students' ability to complete a full school timetable. Teachers felt that students would not find the curriculum as practical, relevant, or choice-based.

*“The challenges may be the children really want may not be same as what they have to choose to learn based on what is available. And also the financial problems for the family living because they need to give time for learning.”*

- NFPE Teacher

**Challenges with the NUG’s home-based learning pathway**

Children and school directors were interested to find out more about this pathway but currently felt there was a lack of information available. There were also concerns that if the pathway remained an online-only pathway, students would have difficulties with a lack of devices and data.

**Challenges with the Thai formal education pathway**

Enrolling in Thai formal education presents the most challenges for students currently enrolled in NFPE and NFME. In addition to being unsuitable for over-age learners and presenting timetabling challenges for learners who are working, there is a significant language barrier for migrant learners with limited Thai skills. Children and school directors were also concerned about costs. As noted, parents did not select this as a viable pathway and the lack of parental support for this pathway was an additional challenge noted by teachers.

*“We have to give time, some parents are not supportive of education. So, we have to get agreement with parents on what and how much their children need to be committed to learning.”*

- NFPE teacher

**Challenges with the Thai non-formal pathway**

The Thai non-formal pathway is perhaps the most appropriate for over-age learners, and for students who need flexible timetables. However, it was noted that students changing to this pathway would face a significant language barrier, a steep learning curve, and challenges with studying in a different cultural environment. As an indication of how seriously many stakeholders were considering this pathway as a viable alternative, both parents and students explained how they had explored the possibility of moving to this pathway but had encountered documentation challenges

*“Thai NFE is a bit difficult to enrol by ourselves. We heard from others that we should go through our MLC first. They have the connections. If we enrol ourselves, we need our village head's documentation, because we are Burmese, it can be hard to get.”*

- NFPE student

**Challenges with vocational pathways**

Although students were interested in vocational pathways, they felt they did not know enough about the specific options available to them, or how to enrol.

*“I might have a problem with enrolling because I don't know how to and I don't have any connections”*

- NFE student

Parents and teachers were concerned primarily with costs and transportation issues.

**Figure 14:** The perceived challenges of enrolling migrant children into alternative pathways

	MLC Formal Education	NUG Homebased Learning	Thai Formal Education	Thai NFE	Vocational Training
Children	Children consider this pathway to have fewer challenges than others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of information.</li> <li>Lack of digital devices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs.</li> <li>Transportation.</li> <li>Language barriers.</li> <li>Inflexible timetable.</li> <li>High level content.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language barriers.</li> <li>Costs.</li> <li>Documentation challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of information.</li> </ul>
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs.</li> <li>Transportation.</li> <li>Children will be unhappy being in classes with much younger students.</li> <li>Inflexible timetable.</li> </ul>	Not selected by parents as a viable pathway.	Not selected by parents as a viable pathway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transportation.</li> <li>Costs.</li> <li>An unfamiliar curriculum.</li> <li>Documentation challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Costs.</li> <li>Transportation.</li> </ul>
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children will be unhappy being in classes with much younger students.</li> <li>Inflexible timetable.</li> <li>Less practical and has less choice than NFPE / NFME.</li> </ul>	Not selected by teachers as a viable pathway.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of parental support.</li> <li>Language barriers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of parental support.</li> <li>Language barriers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport.</li> <li>Costs.</li> <li>Time constraints.</li> </ul>
School Directors	School directors consider this pathway to have fewer challenges than others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of information.</li> <li>Lack of digital devices.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language barriers.</li> <li>Steep learning curve.</li> <li>Time constraints.</li> <li>Not age appropriate.</li> <li>Costs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Language barriers.</li> <li>Steep learning curve.</li> <li>Challenges working with students from different backgrounds.</li> </ul>	No specific challenges identified by school directors.



## 5.3 Stakeholders' perspectives on the future of education for NFPE/NFME students

### 5.3.1 How has the political situation in Burma impacted on parents' future plans?

The Burmese political crisis has had a profound impact on parent's future plans. The clear themes throughout parents' responses were: deep uncertainty and the importance of their children's education. The depth of their concern is reproduced here with a chorus of their responses.

*"I don't know what to say about how the situation effects my kids' future. I am speechless. I planned to go back Burma before, but now I am lost. Which way do I choose?"*

*"I worry my kids will not be able to continue school in Burma."*

*"We are not sure of the situation right now, and we don't know what to do. The situation in Burma right now doesn't look to have impacted too much education in Migrant areas. Our children still have opportunity to study in some ways."*

*"However, if the situation changes, we must change our plans."*

*"No matter what the situation, [I need] to get an education for my children"*

*"Because of the political situation in Burma, I do not know what to do next, I do not know what to do next for my children's education in the future."*

*"I will support my kids as long as there is an education opportunity."*

*"Due to the political situation in Burma, I am worried about my child's education for the future."*

*"It will be difficult to relocate in Burma and move back for education. Actually, it's a tight position, the situation in here is challenging for family, I also can't go back to Burma."*

*"I will have to delay my children's education. I cannot continue their education."*

- The voices of parents with children currently enrolled in NFPE/NFME

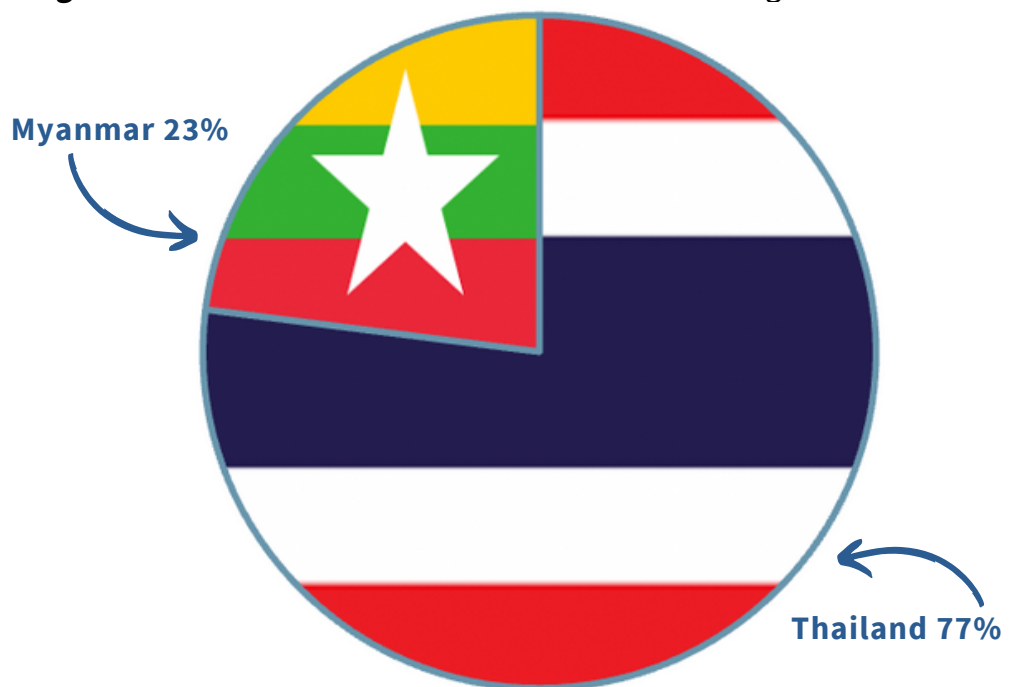
5.3.2 What are children’s dreams for their future?

In the largest-ever study of factors that influence student learning outcomes, John Hattie’s seminal text, ‘Visible Learning’ found that the most influential factor on student success is by far students’ expectations of themselves (Hattie, 2012). It is a sign of a healthy, well-functioning education system in that students hold high ambitions. Children were asked, ‘What is your dream career?’ Their responses are depicted in the weighted word cloud in Figure 15. 77% of children foresee their future in Thailand, as opposed to 23% who see themselves returning to Burma (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Children's dreams for their futures



Figure 16: Where do children see themselves living in the future?



**5.3.3 If the NFE programs are discontinued, are children likely to drop out?**

Children were asked if in the event that NFPE/NFME programs were discontinued whether they would continue with their education in a different pathway. 8% of children, the same number that stated they are currently working, revealed they were likely to drop out of education.

However, as noted, one of the key limitations of this study is that students who were interviewed for this research were contacted through their MLCs. It is very probable that those most at risk of dropping out were not included in this research. Approximately 2,500 children have ‘disappeared’ from the migrant education system since the start of the pandemic in March 2020 (MECC, 2021). The NFPE/NFME system is a second, and often last chance for overage learners, and for those who are working to continue their education in their mother tongue.

**5.3.4 What are the ingredients of children’s dream education pathways?**

Children were asked to describe their dream pathway. Discussions were analysed to identify key themes from the responses.

- 35% of students highlighted that they want to continue to study with similarly-aged students.
- 25% of students want to retain the option to work and study.
- 9% of students want to continue studying in an accelerated curriculum.

For this 69% of students, only non-formal education pathways (either through Thai schools or MLCs) are likely to be able to fulfil their dreams. Amongst other answers:

- 10% responded that they were interested in academic pathways – an education that would lead to higher education options such as the GED, IELTS, or a university degree.
- 4% specified they wanted to continue to study a Burmese curriculum.
- 7% felt that languages were a vital part of any future pathway
- 3% stated that vocational training was the most important part of their dream pathway.

These responses provide additional, context to children’s answers in section 4.3.2



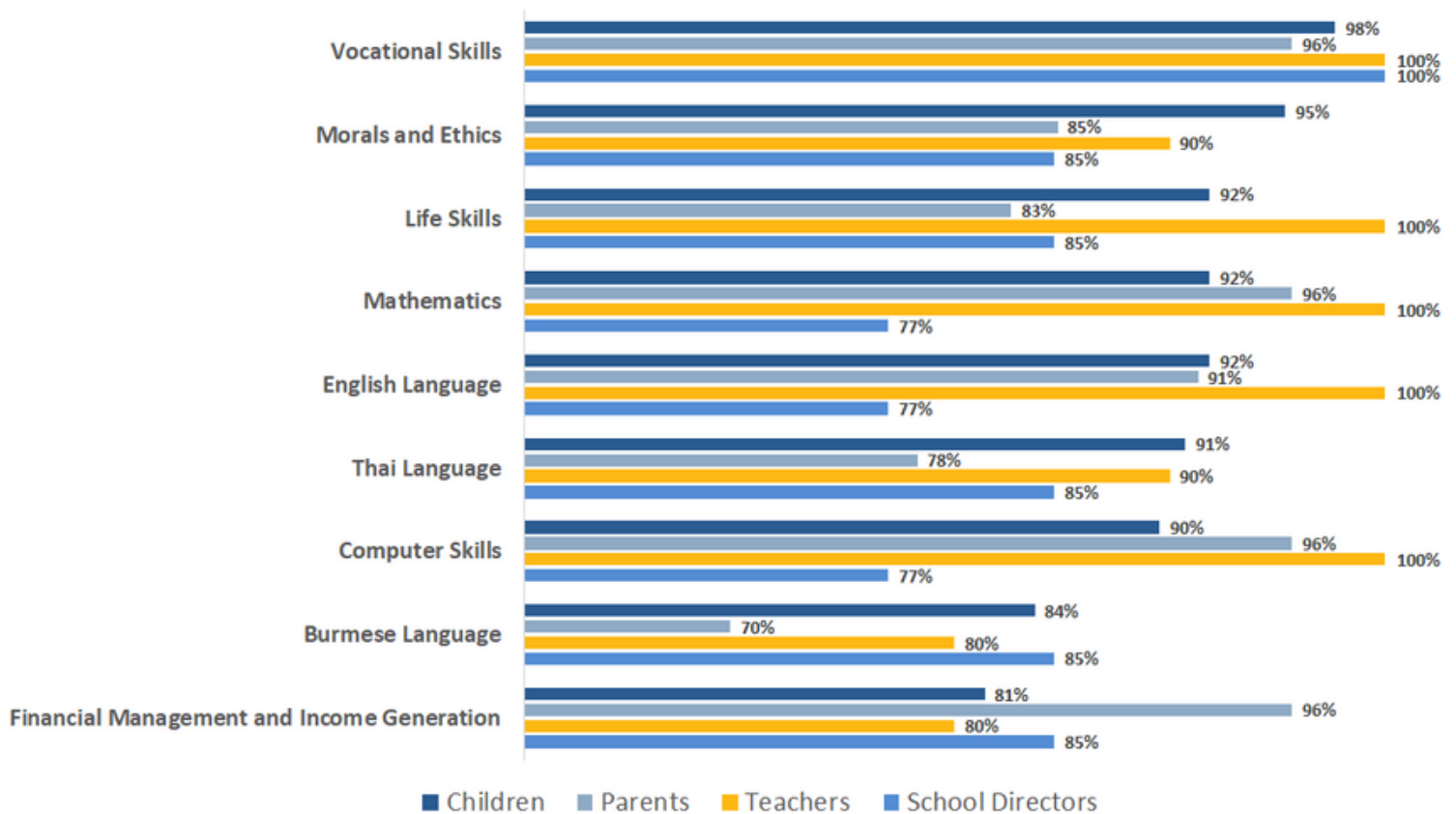




**5.3.5 What skills do stakeholders consider important for children’s future?**

Stakeholder responses to this question can be seen in Figure 17. All stakeholders considered vocational skills to be the most important, while basic Burmese language skills were considered among the least important. School Directors were the most selective in their choices, whereas teachers felt almost all subjects are important. Similarly, students selected the majority of subjects. Burmese language skills and financial management skills were considered least important by students, though were still considered important by 80% of respondents.

In contrast, parents ranked financial management skills as one of the most important skills for their children to learn, with equal weight to vocational skills, mathematics, and computer skills.



**Figure 17:** What are important skills for NFPE/NFME students to learn in the future?

### 5.3.6 What are adult stakeholders' dreams for children's education?

#### Parents

The most common theme within parents' responses was the desire for children to continue their education. In the past, the majority of parents who had enrolled their children in NFPE/NFME programs intended to return to Burma, with their children's NFPE/NFME accredited education allowing further study within the Burmese education system. Some parents hoped that their children would be able to study at a Burmese university. For some parents, this aspiration remains, however, others hope their children will be able to continue their education in Thailand or internationally.

*"I want my kids to be educated, I want them to have a job like a government worker, a teacher a doctor, or an electrical engineer in the future."*

- Parent

For other parents, academic achievement was considered less important than practical skills leading to eventual employment. For these parents, their immediate dreams were for their children to learn Thai and further develop vocational skills. Other parents had less specific dreams for their children's futures but were focused on supporting their children in any way they could to ensure their children could pursue their dreams and were happy.

*"Education which is flexible is best. It also depends on our children's choice. Our job is to provide encouragement and social support for their decisions"*

- Parent

#### Teachers and School Directors

Teachers and school directors spoke more specifically about the technical plans for their students, classes, and MLCs. The central theme throughout responses was that teachers and school directors dream of their students continuing in education after their NFE courses – completing a high school level education which grants access to further study in a Burmese university, a Thai university, or an international university.

*"I would like the students to keep studying in any way that makes their life better. For example, for the students who want to study at a university in Burma, they need to finish high school in Burma and for those who want to study internationally, they need to study for a GED or TOFEL qualification."*

- School Director

Some teachers and school directors felt the main shortfall of the current system is that Burmese language NFME finishes at grade 8. They also emphasised the importance of vocational training for students.

For these respondents, their dream was not only to keep children in education but to expand the vocational subjects that children have access to.

*"Right now, Burmese non-formal education stops halfway. Now I am working on ways for these children to get to learn computer skills, sewing skills, and basic electrician skills so that the children will be able to find work which is more comfortable."*

- Teacher

*“Currently our MLC has courses up to the middle grades and I wish I could extend our courses until the High school grade levels. At the same time, we want children to learn vocational pathways in parallel to the education pathways that are currently being offered. So, in the future, I plan to continue doing NFME (which teaches vocational skills) and I want them to finish high school level at our MLC. There is no high school around our area for NFE students. If we can extend NFE to high school grades our children can receive a complete package of education at our MLC”*

- School Director

When discussing their dreams for their students’ education, many teachers and school directors raised the importance of accreditation for children’s futures. Perhaps in recognition of the liminal spaces that migrant learners occupy (Wiggs et al, 2021), MLC staff voiced frustration that migrants’ only opportunities for accredited education are provided by the Thai and Burmese states.

*“At the least, I just want my NFPE students to able to read and write and get a recognized certificate - that is all we hope for our students.”*

- Teacher

*“My dream for children’s education is that they can choose freely any education based on their interests and hobbies and get an acknowledged certificate for their studies. It shouldn’t be as limited as Thai school or Burmese education.”*

- Teacher

A final theme that emerged throughout responses was the hopes that education could continue to meet the specialised needs of NFPE/NFME students.

*“I dream of education pathways in which children can study part-time, work for their family, and can finish high school.”*

-Teacher

### 5.3.7 If HWF are unable to continue supporting this project, will schools continue the NFPE / NFME program?

In a final series of questions, adults were asked if they planned to continue supporting the existing NFPE and NFME programs, even if HWF and other NGOs were unable to support them.

Seven MLCs intend to continue running their programs, at least until the current cohort of students have completed their studies. Teachers and school directors feel a strong sense of responsibility to their students, their parents, and the communities they serve.

*“If parents and students still want to join the NFPE program we as teachers are willing to keep supporting our students.”*

- Teacher

One MLC acknowledged that they would face difficulties if they could not pay their teachers, and it would depend on whether teachers are willing to keep working. Another school stated they would continue the program, even without outside support for teachers’ salaries. They intend to start a support program for the teachers.

Two MLCs intend to stop running the program.

Parents were unsure if they would continue to enrol their children within the NFPE/NFME programs, but all groups reported that they would pay, or do their best to pay and support their children's education.



### 5.3.8 What support is needed for your school to be able to continue this program?

With two years experience of running the NFPE and NFME programs under COVID-19 restrictions, and almost a year of concern and contemplation on the impact of the coup on their communities, teachers and school directors are acutely aware of the challenges they face and the support they require. Three key priorities emerged in stakeholder consultations: teacher training, accreditation, and material and financial resources.

#### **1. Teacher Training**

The most common area of support requested from both teachers and school directors is teacher training. The NFPE/NFME programs are highly specialised; they deliver vocational as well as academic subjects in an accelerated curriculum with a unique assessment system that is regularly updated. In the past the DAE provided teachers with regular in-service training and also took responsibility for providing pre-service training for new teachers.

Since February 1st 2021, all DAE-supported training has ceased, as have teacher salaries and stipends. Some MLCs have stretched budgets and found alternative means to continue paying teachers, for others, teachers have been working for free – an unsustainable situation. If, for any reason, the NFE system loses its existing highly-trained, specialised teachers, the lack of pre-service training will severely degrade the remaining system. The lack of in-service training undermines teacher motivation, and the quality of education delivered. Furthermore, the shift to online and home-based learning modalities has created unique professional development needs for teachers including knowledge of: synchronous and asynchronous learning platforms, online assessment systems, classroom management in the online environment, social-emotional learning competencies, student motivation and self-directed learning skills, and enhanced teacher-parent communication.

#### **2. Accreditation**

The NFE assessment systems have been kept on life-support by Thailand-based township monitors, MLC staff, and HwF without assistance from Burma for two years. MLCs have held student data and internal board exams with the understanding that once the border reopens, students who have completed their studies will receive accreditation from Burma. The future of the accreditation system is still unclear, and all stakeholders are in constant dialogue in attempts to mediate a solution. Requests for outside solutions and support in overcoming accreditation challenges were a consistent theme within the stakeholder consultations.

#### **3. Material and Financial Resources**

The third, and perhaps most urgent form of support needed to maintain any form of education, whether accredited or not, were requests for resources. In the past, the DAE in Burma provided textbooks, uniforms, and teacher stipends to maintain the system. With no support from the Burmese government since February, MLCs, parents, teachers, and students are struggling. This gap needs to be filled if the system is to be sustained.

## 6. CONCLUSION

**Non-formal education systems within Burma were originally created with the support of international donors to address decades of extreme educational poverty.** The expansion of these programs across the border has created a much-needed safety net providing migrant children with a second chance at earning an education. **To date, over 3,500 children have benefitted from NFPE/NFME in Tak province. The findings suggest six key messages:**

### **1. NFPE/NFME for migrant children in Tak province has been a resounding success story.**

Parents and teachers consider the existing NFPE/NFME programs the most relevant educational pathway for their community, whilst students and school directors consider NFPE/NFME the second most appropriate pathway for migrant children. Students are most interested in vocational pathways - a sentiment also recognized by school directors who are working to incorporate even more vocational training into existing NFPE/NFME programs. Seven of the nine NFPE/NFME providers contacted for this research currently intend to try to continue running their NFPE/NFME programs even if they are financially unsupported. 100% of interviewed parents stated they would be willing to contribute to the costs of their children's education if it is required.

### **2. The NFPE/NFME system is needed now more than ever.**

The COVID-19 pandemic has fomented an unprecedented global learning crisis in which marginalized and disadvantaged children have suffered disproportionately. The children's voices heard throughout this report represent some of the most marginalized and disadvantaged in all of Thailand. Without the NFPE/NFME safety net, it is unlikely their voices would be heard. Throughout the course of the pandemic, 2,457 migrant children, or 1 in 5 students, have disappeared from education records and their voices are silenced. Many may never return (Save, 2022). The findings in this research suggest that the accredited, accelerated, inclusive, flexible, and practical NFPE/NFME pathways are the most appropriate route for these children back into education.

### **3. External support is needed now, more than ever.**

The Burmese political crisis has severed financial, administrative, and material support to the NFPE/NFME program. COVID-19 has had a debilitating impact on migrant family incomes, reducing community-level capacity to fill the gap. COVID-19 restrictions on gathering have forced teachers to shift to online and home-based learning modalities, increasing the costs of education. This hard fought-for system stands at a critical juncture just as it's needed most.

### **4. NFPE/NFME is not only worth saving, but scaling.**

The attached broad-based analysis of the system (Annex 2) conducted through the lens of best-practice principles for NFE in crisis contexts (Annex 1) suggests that the NFPE/NFME system was largely operating in accordance with internationally recognized best-practice principles. The rise in the number of students who have been forced to drop out of education. In combination with the anticipated shockwaves caused by the ongoing Burmese political crisis indicate that the NFPE/NFME safety net will be in higher demand in coming years.

### **5. Accredited, accelerated, flexible, inclusive, and practical pathways are highly valued characteristics of a safety net for out-of-school children.**

The extent to which all children and parents value the five characteristics of the NFPE/NFME system is apparent throughout this research. Formal education systems and other education providers seeking to support at-risk and out-of-school children note many benefits from incorporating these principles into their own education programs. This study also highlights the perceived barriers and challenges for NFPE/NFME students and parents to enrol in alternative pathways. Through hearing the voices distilled within this report, all educational pathways may find means by which to improve access and quality of education.

### **6. Investment can save and strengthen an established system, or build upon firm foundations to innovate and improve a one-of-a-kind educational pathway.**

The COVID-19 pandemic and the 2021 Burmese political crisis have fundamentally changed the nature of education for migrant children. The evolution in educational technology and online teaching in the past two years has highlighted the extent to which education is still in its infancy of understanding how technology and technogogy can best be used to address education inequality. Both events have also further underlined the importance of digital literacy skills in the 21st century. The NFPE/NFME system for Burmese migrants in Thailand has the potential to be the perfect proving ground for new educational innovations, particularly those from low-resource backgrounds. Ideas and innovations piloted in Mae Sot have the potential to be scaled across the border.

### The Future of Non-formal Education for Burmese Migrant Learners

Evidence from this study suggests that the non-formal education pathways for Burmese migrants in Tak Province meet the demands for high quality and flexible education for marginalized learners. They are worth fighting for.

In light of the challenges the system faces, it appears four options remain:

- 1. Discontinue NFME/NFPE.**
- 2. Continue NFME/NFPE with accreditation, but receive little to no outside support.**
- 3. Reconfigure NFME/NFPE programs, potentially with outside funding and support, but, likely lose Burmese accreditation.**
- 4. Explore alternative avenues of accreditation that can be applied within the existing NFPE/NFME system.**

In March 2021, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank issued a joint statement on the enormous challenge education systems face in recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic:

*“When your house is on fire, you don’t worry about how big it is, the color of the paint on the walls, or whether the kitchen is too small. You just focus on putting out the fire. In the education sector, our house is on fire.”*

*(Gianni et al., 2021)*

In light of the findings from this report, how might we apply this analogy to non-formal education pathways for Burmese migrants in Tak Province?





## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Policy Environment

**Improve the Accessibility of Thai NFE (Kor Sor Nor) for Non-Thai Children and Youth:** During this difficult time, migrant parents who have lived and worked in Thailand for multiple years are increasingly seeking education options for their children that are accredited in Thailand. The KSN entrance exam requires Thai language proficiency in speaking, reading, and writing at approximately a grade 3 level. This language barrier prevents migrant children from accessing this nationally accredited non-formal pathway. Pre-KSN programs for children with low Thai literacy levels are needed to bridge this critical gap. These could be stand-alone programs or integrated with the current MLC curriculum.

**Thai Language Support During Early Years:** Once enrolled in Thai school, migrant children would greatly benefit from support to learn the fundamentals of Thai language. Thai is not their mother tongue language, is not used at home, and is unlikely to be spoken by children's parents. Intensive support in the form of multilingual classroom assistants is needed during the first year of enrolment and at the pre-primary and primary levels.

**Best-Practice Sharing for Thai School 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 non-Thai children. Common challenges include the above-discussed language barriers for students (and their parents), school budget implications when integrating non-Thai students, enrolment procedures, and the provision of needed school supplies and uniforms for these students.

**Thai Back-to-School Campaign:** In the current environment, it appears Thai schools will be able to resume face-to-face learning prior to the migrant education systems. This research has highlighted how migrant parents, and more importantly – children's priorities - are changing. Many intend to remain in Thailand longer than they originally intended. A large-scale 'back-to-school' campaign reminiscent of campaigns run in the past which specifically targets migrant children would widen the safety net and bring more children back to school. This would also mitigate some of the damage done by COVID-19 towards Thailand's efforts to meet its Sustainable Development Goals and Education for All commitments.

## 7.2 Resourcing - External support

**Anticipatory Action and Financing** - This research forecasts that accredited, accelerated, flexible, inclusive, and practical pathways such as the NFPE/NFME system are likely to be in increased demand in the coming years. This report presents an early warning. In line with contemporary best practice research into crisis sensitive education planning, further research is required to identify triggers. Immediate action is required to develop pre-arranged action plans and pre-arranged financing in order to protect children's learning and well-being needs in the highly likely event of escalating demand in the coming years.

**Increase Financial Support for the Out-of-School Children Enrolment TaskFORCE** - The Enrolment Taskforce is a collaborative team which connects migrant parents of out-of-school children to learning centers or schools that can meet their child's educational needs. Over the past two years the team has supported over 250 previously out-of-school migrant children to enrol in school. There are hidden costs such as transportation, school supplies, and uniform costs which migrant parents cannot afford. To date no child enrolled by the team has dropped out of school.

**Increase Online Learning Opportunities for Burmese Speakers** - Digital learning solutions are not a panacea for the global education crisis, however, they have a crucial role to play. There are currently very few Open Educational Resources (OERs) for Burmese speakers. Contextualizing, and/or translating existing OERs which are suitable for NFPE and NFME students would provide much needed support to children in both Thailand and Burma. <https://www.learnbig.net/> is a powerful example of what can be achieved and built upon. An example of such an OER that would benefit from further translation is: <https://lll-olc.net/> . Such an initiative may partly alleviate the lack of resources NFPE/NFME teachers and school directors highlighted in this research.

**Teacher Training for NFPE/NFME Teachers** - With the loss of support from the DAE, no existing NFPE/NFME teachers have received training during the past two years and no new teachers have been trained. Within the findings of this research, teacher training was the most frequently requested area for support from teachers and school directors. Cross-border collaboration and co-ordination between non-formal education providers may be the most effective way to achieve this recommendation.

## 7.3 Program Management - HwF

**Collaborative Community Awareness-Raising** - All the people involved in helping migrant children enrol and succeed in school – local Village Heads, teachers, parents, landowners, 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 enrolment procedures, registration dates, and ways to address barriers to enrolment.

**Establish Parental Advisory Services** - Throughout the course of conducting this research, it was observed that many migrant parents were unaware of the full range of education pathways available to them. Parents seeking to enrol their children into school would benefit from outreach, information, and independent guidance on the pathways available to their children as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each pathway. Annex 3 provides a starting point for such services.

**Systems-Level Action Planning for Migrant Education Stakeholders** - We have entered a new era of education marked by nuanced contemporary challenges. Leadership from all stakeholders must unite to tackle emerging bottlenecks. It is recommended to develop a concrete action plan to determine collaborative ways forward in the best interests of migrant children in advance of the next academic school year, beginning in May 2022. NFPE/NFME providers who are seeking to support their students through two-track pathways would greatly benefit from such an initiative. One such initiative may involve creating facilitated working groups to connect school directors in migrant learning centres across the country.

**Online Back-to-School Campaign** - Although the future of NFPE/NFME hangs in the balance, MLCs which aim to continue providing some form of NFPE/NFME pathway and have the capacity to enrol new students in the 2022-2023 academic year, should proactively promote the pathway. With MLCs currently unable to open due to COVID-19 restrictions, it is advisable to wait until the situation regarding school reopening is clearer before launching a full scale back-to-school campaign. An online campaign could reach those children who are currently online, but out-of-school. This research has highlighted some of the thousands of out-of-school migrant children in Thailand, and their unique learning needs. NFPE/NFME outreach has the potential to generate meaningful data on those invisible children and re-integrate them into education systems. NFPE/NFME providers may be unable to open in the short term, but online services can continue and expand. If NFPE/NFME providers can further prove to donors the demand for non-formal pathways, it may increase the likelihood of future financial support.

**Support MLC Financial Sustainability** - This research suggests the greatest threat to non-formal programming is resourcing. The loss of support from the DAE in Burma has resulted in a loss of training, teaching-learning materials, and teacher salaries. All avenues for resource generation need to be explored. Some MLCs are already exploring the possibility of generating income through vocational skills projects. This also aligns with students' requests for further vocational training. However, caution and potentially technical support is required to ensure that these programs are both cost-effective and deliver meaningful outcomes.

**Embrace the Potential of Innovative Curricula** - Reform of the existing NFPE/NFME program may create space for further innovation. Best practice guidance (INEE, 2021) argues that crisis-affected non-formal students greatly benefit from curriculum subjects such as health, peacebuilding, mental health, and psychosocial support (MHPSS).

**Explore Alternative Accredited Education Opportunities** - Quality education is not defined by accreditation, however, accreditation drives quality and brings greater opportunities to students. The loss of accreditation due to the paradigm-shifting Burmese political crisis has been severely felt by all stakeholders. Further exploration is required to examine whether widely-recognized international accreditation systems could be introduced. The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (iGCSE) is one such option that should be explored.

**Explore Alternative Avenues to Expand the Safety Net** - Non formal education is a broad term that can be applied to multiple different forms of implementation (INEE, 2020). This research has focused on protecting and developing the quality of the existing NFPE/NFME systems. However, throughout the research it has become clear the extent to which accelerated, inclusive, flexible, and practical education is valued within the migrant community. It may be appropriate to explore the development of less formal NFE programming, for example through sports and recreation clubs, which may bring out-of-school children and youth closer to a community of peers, develop life-skills and offer an entry point into other educational pathways.



### 7.4 Practice - NFPE/NFME Service Providers

**Keep NFPE/NFME Alive** - The voices of children and parents are clear throughout this report: NFPE and NFME are both highly valued. 100% of interviewed parents stated that they would pay to support the pathway if that is what is required. While two NFPE/NFME providers have been forced to close during the past year, and a further two do not believe they can continue, other providers are doing everything possible to keep the pathway available. This report commends their efforts and recommends they continue to explore innovative, community-based solutions to the challenges they face.

**Expand the Provision of Vocational Courses for Migrant Children and Youth** - Throughout this research, all stakeholders were vocal regarding the value they place on vocational educational pathway options. Three of the most well-established vocational options specifically designed for migrant youth were spotlighted in this research, but only have a combined capacity of approximately 100 youth per year. This barely meets a fraction of the demand. Furthermore, these vocational pathways require students to be at least 15 years old. There appears to be a significant gap in vocational education options for younger children and youth.

**Further Develop Thai Language Learning Opportunities** - This study has highlighted how the Burmese political crisis has caused great uncertainty for migrant families and their future plans. With many Burmese migrants now intending to stay in Thailand longer than expected, and the majority of children seeing their future in Thailand, one of the most employable skills children can develop is Thai language proficiency. Thai language fluency will also support students transferring to accredited Thai education pathways such as the Thai NFE system – a system which can lead to entry to a Thai university. Children transitioning into the Thai education systems will need not only language support, but also support in learning in a new cultural context, and potentially additional subject content support in their mother-tongue.

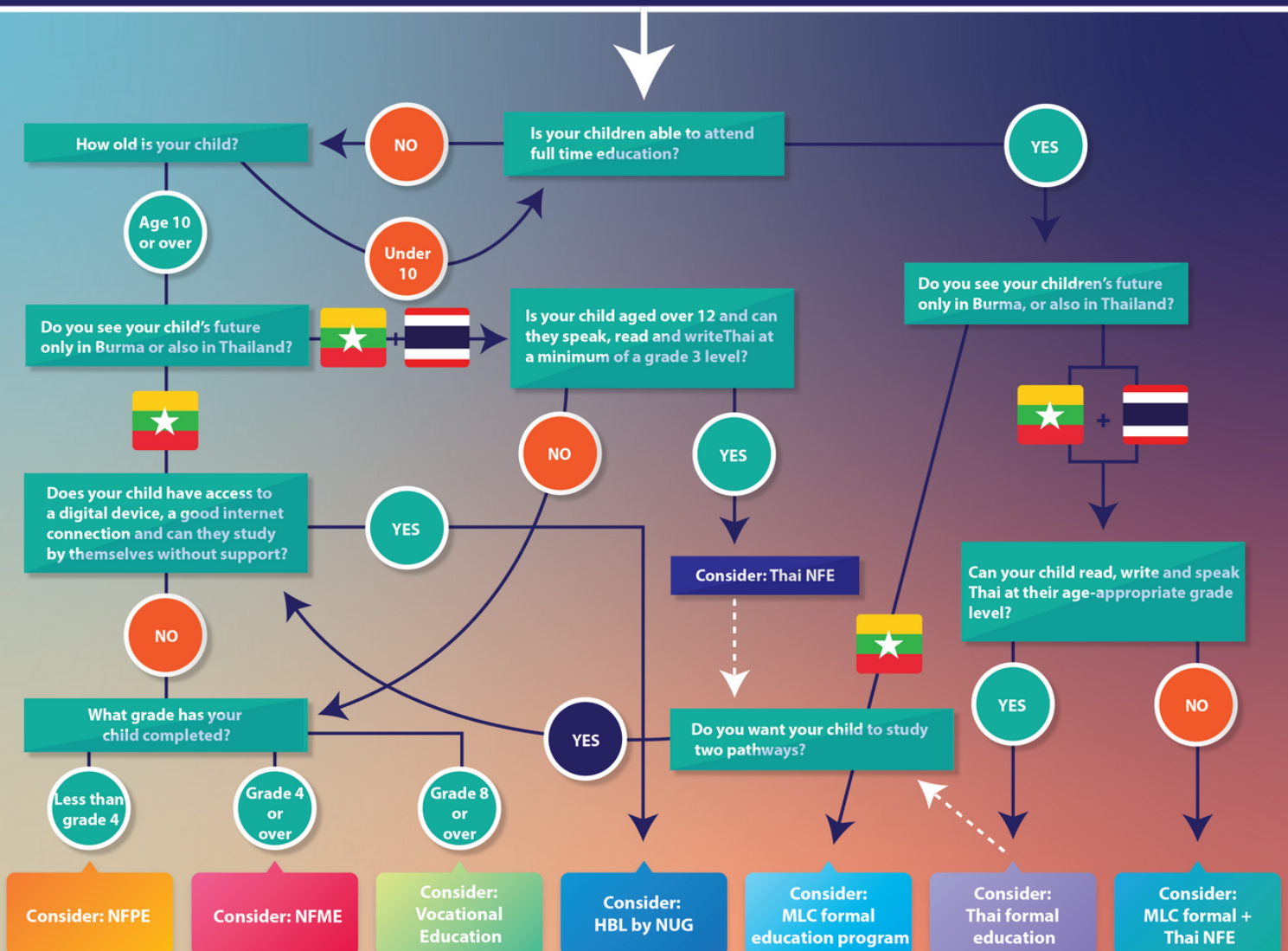
**Expand the “2-Track Models”** - Some participating Migrant Learning Centers provided their students with another recognized educational pathway alongside of their Myanmar formal curriculum: either Myanmar Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) or Thai Government Non-Formal Education (NFE). These multi-pathway models work to ensure children can continue their education in both Thailand and Myanmar. After-school or night-study options are possibilities for over-age children or youth who are working. Resources are needed to scale these comprehensive models, specifically hiring Thai NFE teachers.

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**Expand NFPE/NFME to Include Non-Formal High School Education** - The pathway analysis conducted as part of this research reveals that with the Burmese border closed, there are limited options for NFME graduates. Many NFME graduates do not have the requisite Thai-language skills to join the Thai non-formal education system. Multiple stakeholders spoke of their desires to see non-formal education for Burmese speakers expanded. The development of a non-formal high school education program would bring enormous benefits to both sides of the border in the immediate and foreseeable future.

**Celebrate Teacher and Student Achievements** - Teachers and students have worked incredibly hard in the face of great adversity during the past two years. The road ahead appears destined to bring further challenges. Sustaining motivation and fostering continued strong relationships between teachers, school directors, children and parents will be critical to continuing to deliver high-quality education (Hattie, 2012). Every effort should be made by all stakeholders to recognize the hard work and achievements of all those involved in the NFPE/NFME system.

## Which educational pathway is best for your child?



## 7.5 Further Research

**Political Economy Analysis of Migrant Education** - Parents and children were often unclear on the most appropriate potential educational pathway for their children. For many families, the opportunity costs of enrolling their children in education outweigh the perceived benefits. Further research could be conducted to examine the livelihood options, career paths, and expected income brackets of Burmese migrant learners who have followed different educational pathways. This information could empower parents and children to make more informed decisions about the available educational pathways.



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## ANNEX 1: PRINCIPLES OF BEST PRACTICE FOR THE EFFECTIVE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NFE PROGRAMS

This annex provides a brief overview of ten principles of best practice for the design and implementation of NFE programs. The theoretical framework presented through these principles provides greater context to stakeholder responses throughout this research and allows for a deeper situational analysis of current NFPE/NFME programming. Although the aim of this research is not to evaluate existing NFPE/NFME programs, by examining findings through the lens of these principles, tentative conclusions can be drawn on the strengths and weaknesses of the programming and the policy environment. The recommendations within this report have been informed by the principles presented here.

Long before COVID-19, it was widely recognized that migrant education in Thailand operated in a crisis context (Save the Children, 2016). In May 2021 the Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) published guidance for best practice non-formal education programs in the form of a policy note entitled “Creating an Enabling Non-formal Education Environment for Adolescents and Youth: Issues and Considerations for Crisis and Conflict Settings”. This policy brief sets out five principles for an effective policy environment and five principles for the effective design and implementation of NFE programs. These are summarised below along with a number of contextualised guiding questions to support the development of best practice NFE systems.

### A1.1 Policy Principle 1: Embed NFE programming within the national education architecture.

NFE programs which are embedded in national education architecture are more sustainable, perceived as more credible, and better able to meet the needs of their students by affording students access to national education benefits such as transport, uniforms, counseling services, and employment opportunities. National education systems which integrate NFE, in turn, become stronger systems, better able to provide Education for All, and meet national education targets. It is recommended that “international donors commit to supporting the strengthening of systems in order to facilitate the delivery of quality non-formal programs, and to having policy frameworks in place that allow for the implementation of a range of programs that meet the diverse needs of different youth, including those who are forcibly displaced and those living with disabilities.” (INEE 2021).

#### Questions to support the development of best practices.

1 . In what ways do Burma and Thai national education architectures support NFPE/NFME students?

2 . In what ways do Burma and Thai national education architectures hinder NFPE/NFME students?

*Points for consideration: Access to funding, recognition, and accreditation. Student eligibility for other benefits – nutrition programs, cash-based assistance, transportation accommodation, and counselling.*

### **A1.2 Policy Principle 2: Remove administrative and financial barriers to accessing NFE opportunities.**

Children and youth who enroll in NFE programs have often been unable to access formal education systems due to a number of barriers – age, language documentation challenges, lack of prior education, mobility and finances. It is important to ensure that, as an alternative form of education, NFE does not reproduce these barriers, or create others. In contexts of international migration and displacement, caution must be paid that foreign students are not excluded from host country NFE systems, and that a child’s NFE education does not become a barrier to returning home.

#### **Questions to support the development of best practices.**

- 1 . To what extent do Thai and Burmese NFE systems address the barriers which impede students access to formal education systems, thus allowing access to NFE?
- 2 . What administrative and financial barriers impede access to NFE opportunities?
3. In what ways do accreditation systems support or hinder student mobility between systems and between countries?

### **A1.3 Policy Principle 3: Include post-primary skills and facilitate the transition from NFE to formal education, post-primary education, or livelihood opportunities.**

Successful NFE programs do not stand alone, they prepare students for their next step. All students should have the opportunity to not only complete primary education, but also middle and high school equivalency. For some accelerated education programs, it is appropriate to help students catch up so that they may re-join formal education systems. Within other contexts, it is more important to ensure NFE students have access to tailored NFE programs for primary, middle, and high school equivalency. A successful policy environment creates linkages between each step in a students’ education and allows for flexible entry and exit points between stages, schools, and systems ensuring students have every opportunity to continue their education.

To enable students to take the final step from education to employment, NFE systems can include appropriate vocational and technical skills, and provide support such as counseling, mentoring, networking, internships, or business start-up support. At a minimum, all NFE programs should incorporate post-primary skills, such as life skills and vocational skills. This ensures that if the policy environment does not permit student progression, or students are unable for any reason to continue their education, graduating NFE students are better prepared for future employment.

**Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1 . To what extent do NFE programs facilitate student progression to the next stage of their education?

2 . To what extent do NFE programs incorporate post-primary skills?

3 . Do NFE systems utilize a full range of support mechanisms (counselling, mentoring, networking, internships or business start-up support) to enable students to access improved livelihood opportunities?

#### **A1.4 Policy Principle 4: Certify NFE programs**

International best practice recognizes that “If crisis and conflict affected adolescents and youth are provided certified NFE, they will be more likely to be retained in programs and then to transition into additional education or to livelihood opportunities” (INEE, 2021, p 11). Certification becomes especially important for displaced or migrant learners who require documented proof of learning in the event of further unplanned travel.

If NFE programs are unable to offer their own accredited certification, then students should have the opportunity to take nationally accredited examinations. NFE programs which include subjects and skills outside of national curriculums can compound the value of these skills through additional certification. It is recognized that certification must be situated within the dynamics of a context, but where possible integrate with existing assessment and accreditation structures.

**Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1 . To what extent are NFE programs certified and accredited?

2 . Do certification systems recognize the specialized practical and vocational skills included within the NFE program?

3 . Are students prepared to sit for accredited exams, even if they are unable to sit for them in the immediate future?

4 . How else can recognition, validation and certification systems be adapted to fit the dynamics of the context?



### A1.5 Policy Principle 5: Ensure sustainable financing for NFE programming

NFE programs which are integrated into national education architecture gain access to national education budgets, however those outside are often forced to rely on short term donor funding. In crisis contexts funding is often tied to short term humanitarian goals and falls far below what is required. In recent years there has been growing global recognition of the need to adequately address education financing in crisis contexts, however, shifts in policy have not yet filled the gaps in practice (King et al., 2019). Sustainable financing of NFE education in crisis contexts requires vision and long-term commitments from donors, as well as ensuring every effort is made by all stakeholders to generate revenue from a diverse range of streams.

#### Questions to support the development of best practices.

1. To what extent are donors aware of the need for NFE funding and the benefits it brings?

2. What doubts do donors have about funding NFE programs? How can these doubts be addressed?

3. What evidence exists to support donor decision making? What evidence is missing?

4. What actions can all stakeholders take to ensure NFE programs have a diverse range of long-term financing?

### A1.6 Principle of Practice 1: Ensure that the design and delivery of NFE programming is inclusive and protective

As noted in policy principle 2, students who enrol in NFE programs often do so because they have been excluded from formal education. As such, NFE students often share a number of intersecting characteristics that result in inherent vulnerability. These may include age, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, disability, or legal status amongst others. Recognizing students' vulnerabilities requires that close attention is paid to student safeguarding. While this can help mitigate student vulnerability in the short term, NFE program implementation can make extra efforts to meet not only the academic or learning needs of students, but their holistic development needs to reduce vulnerability in the long term. For example, supplementary language teaching can support students in joining foreign formal education systems and accelerated programs can provide learners with the certification they require to catch up to their peers in formal systems. Life skills training, counseling and mental health support can prepare students for entry into formal systems or provide students with the skills they will need after graduation.

**Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1 . To what extent do NFE programs meet the inclusion needs of their students? (Consider age, gender, language, religion, ethnicity, disability, or legal status)

2 . To what extent do NFE programs in non-mother tongue languages ensure students have the opportunities to develop language skills and content mastery?

3 . What child protection and adult safeguarding practices are in place?

4 . Do NFE programs avoid reinforcing harmful gender norms and practices?

5 . To what extent are NFE programs accessible for individuals with disabilities? Have teachers received inclusion and disability training?

**A1.7 Principle of Practice 2: Build flexibility into NFE programs in terms of time, location, and delivery modality**

The most effective way for NFE systems to ensure they are inclusive of all students unable to access formal education is by ensuring that programs are flexible. Effective NFE systems offer: flexible timing and scheduling, flexible locations of classes, flexible delivery modalities (face-to-face, blended, distance and self-study), a flexible curriculum (choice regarding subjects), and a flexible certification process (examination dates, locations, and modalities). Such flexibility increases overall access, attendance and achievement. (AEWG, 2017; Ngware et al., 2018)

**Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1 . Are NFE programs scheduled at flexible times? Are absences forgivable? Can students catch up?

2 . Are NFE programs scheduled in flexible locations?

3 . Are NFE programs delivered via a flexible modality? (face-to-face, blended, distance and self-study?)

4 . Do NFE programs follow a flexible curriculum structure? (modular curriculum design, skills-based assessments)

5 . Do NFE programs offer flexible certification processes (examination dates, certification points?)

### **A1.8 Principle of Practice 3: Ensure that NFE programs are relevant to the needs of out-of-school youth and adolescents**

Any education system must meet the needs of its learners. NFE students often have diverse, but shared learning needs. In contexts of migration and displacement it is important that the curriculum used is relevant for children's present as well as their future – NFE education should take into account students' current context as well as their future plans. Post-primary skills that build confidence, motivation, and self-direction such as life skills, communication skills and self-study skills ensure NFE graduates are well prepared for independent lives beyond education, single-employer or family support structures.

Technical and vocational skills are essential for preparing older learners for improved employment opportunities, however it is important that the skills students learn are relevant for local labour markets. It is important to avoid a mismatch between student interests and market opportunities.

#### **Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1. To what extent are NFE programs relevant to the needs of students? How do we know?
2. Do NFE programs include a variety of post-primary skills?
3. Do technical and vocational courses prepare students for appropriate local employment opportunities? Has the labor market been assessed to understand what skills are required and what jobs are available to young people?

### **A1.9 Principle of Practice 4: Design holistic NFE programming that addresses health, peacebuilding, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and livelihood opportunities for youth and adolescents affected by crisis and conflict.**

As noted in principle of practice 2, NFE students are often vulnerable. Learners from conflict afflicted contexts have yet more specialised learning needs. Education offers unique opportunities to support students during formative stages of life to address those needs.

NFE programs which work with students who have experienced conflict and crisis contexts can incorporate psycho-social support and social-emotional wellbeing training to address these needs. Furthermore, NFE programs can work to identify these learners' needs and connect them with the relevant health, mental health and psycho-social support (MHPSS), services. Teachers who work with these youth require specialised training and support for their own well-being. (Falk, et al. 2019).

**Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1 . To what extent do NFE programs build holistic competencies? (health, safety, psychosocial support, social-emotional learning)?

2 . To what extent do NFE programs provide psychosocial support to learners?

3 . To what extent are teachers trained in how to provide psycho-social support and social emotional learning to students?

4 . To what extent do NFE programs take into account the well-being of teachers?

**A1.10 Principle of Practice 5: Promote the participation of youth and adolescents in the design and implementation of NFE programming.**

The most effective way to ensure that NFE programs meet the needs of learners is to include students, parents, and teachers in the design of courses, curriculum, and assessment. This ensures programming is relevant to individual and community contexts, fosters buy-in, and leads to improved attendance, participation and achievement. Furthermore, it builds the legitimacy of programming, and can create advocacy champions within the community. The process of involving different stakeholders in the design of programming can in itself be a learning activity which fosters key competencies such as leadership, teamwork and decision making.

**Questions to support the development of best practices.**

1 . Have all relevant stakeholders (students, parents, teachers and community leaders) been consulted on the design and implementation of NFE programs?

2 . Are feedback mechanisms available for continual stakeholder input into NFE programs?

## ANNEX 2: ANALYSIS OF NFPE/NFME THROUGH THE LENS OF BEST PRACTICES.

Drawing on the principles of best practice outlined in annex 1, this section explores the state of the current NFPE/NFME system. A comprehensive evaluation of current NFPE/NFME programs is beyond the scope of the objectives of this research, but by applying the lens of best practice principles to the evidence presented throughout the above it is possible highlight some of the strengths of the current system, and other areas worthy of consideration for future reforms – should the system be saved.

Principle	Description	Discussion
<b>Policy Principle 1</b>	Embed NFE programming within the national education architecture.	The February 2021 political crisis has ended NFPE/NFME integration into national education architecture. NFPE/NFME providers have lost access to logistical and financial support. Administrative support may be able to resume in the future.
<b>Policy Principle 2</b>	Remove administrative and financial barriers to accessing NFE opportunities.	Relative to other potential pathways for Burmese migrants, NFPE/NFME has relatively few administrative and financial barriers. With the loss of financial support from the DAE and donors, these barriers may increase in 2022, though parents stated they are willing to fund NFPE/NFME if necessary.
<b>Policy Principle 3</b>	Include post-primary skills and facilitate the transition from NFE to formal education, post-primary education, or livelihood opportunities.	NFPE/NFME for Burmese migrants provides ample opportunity for learners to develop vocational and post-primary skills. Students' responses emphasize this is something they value highly in the existing NFPE/NFME programs.
<b>Policy Principle 4</b>	Certify NFE programs	Following the February 2021 political crisis, this remains the greatest question mark surrounding NFPE/NFME for 2022. It is unknown whether NFPE/NFME programs can continue to be certified.
<b>Policy Principle 5</b>	Ensure sustainable financing for NFE programming	Additional external financing is required to adequately support NFPE/NFME. Parents have stated they are willing to contribute to the costs of the program. Some NFPE/NFME providers revealed that they are working on plans to increase revenue through income generating vocational projects.

<b>Principle of Practice 1</b>	<p>Ensure that the design and delivery of NFE programming is inclusive and protective.</p>	<p>This area requires further analysis for definitive conclusions, however, it was noted that in some schools Burmese ethnic students make up the majority of students. MLCs implementing NFPE and NFME are increasingly well-served by ever-developing child protection mechanisms.</p>
<b>Principle of Practice 2</b>	<p>Build flexibility into NFE programs in terms of time, location, and delivery modality</p>	<p>Noted throughout participant responses, the existing NFPE/NFME programs go to great lengths to provide flexibility to their students, which is valued by all stakeholders. COVID-19 has dramatically impacted on teachers' ability to meet with students leading to a loss of access for many learners. However, the transition to online learning has equipped teachers with new skill sets which enable them to be able to deliver distance and blended learning.</p>
<b>Principle of Practice 3</b>	<p>Ensure that NFE programs are relevant to the needs of out-of-school youth and adolescents</p>	<p>Student's responses throughout this research indicate that they consider existing NFPE/NFME programs to be highly relevant to their needs. All courses incorporate a range of post-primary skills, and prepare learners to progress into MLC formal curriculums, or progress with the Burmese National Curriculum. Learners repeatedly stated how much they appreciated their curriculum.</p>
<b>Principle of Practice 4</b>	<p>Designing holistic NFE programming that addresses health, peacebuilding, mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), and livelihood opportunities for youth and adolescents affected by crisis and conflict.</p>	<p>Further research is needed to make meaningful comment on current NFPE/NFME programs fulfilment of this principle. A lack of data from within the research suggests this is an area for development, particularly in light of the likely needs of migrants crossing the border in the coming years.</p>
<b>Principle of Practice 5</b>	<p>Promote the participation of youth and adolescents in the design and implementation of NFE programming.</p>	<p>The findings generated from this research can support existing NFPE/NFME programs to better include student's perspectives in program design and implementation.</p>

