

JUNE 2020

EDUCATION REIMAGINED

COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE
FOR MIGRANT EDUCATION

TAK PROVINCE, THAILAND



This research was conducted in collaboration by:

TeacherFOCUS (TF)

Help Without Frontiers Thailand Foundation (HwF)

Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC)

Migrant Educational Coordination Center (MECC)

Burmese Migrant Teachers' Association (BMTA)

Cotton On Foundation (COF)

Mae Tao Clinic (MTC)

Author:

Mia Sasaki

Editor:

Greg Tyrosvoutis

Research Team:

Naing Win, TF

Lawi Chan, TF

Tin Zar, TF

Nwet Nwet Win, TF

Naw Th'Blay Moo, TF

Naw Nay Yu Paw, TF

Nay Chi Win, BMTA

Mi Nway, BMTA

Min Min Thein, BMTA

Shee Sho, BMTA

Eh Si, BMTA

Nan Phyu Hnin Eain, BMTA

Nan Phyo Hnin Eain, BMTA

Gay Pho Yim, COF

Po Ke Chanaphaopooree, COF

Maphai Tarachankard, COF

Zin Min Kyaw, BMWEC

Gler Mu Taw, BMWEC

Myat Thu, BMWEC

Siraporn Kaewsombat, HwF

Saw Lar Bar Tun, HwF

Chu Wai Wai Zaw, HwF

Kyar Htay, HwF

Hla Bwel Doh Say, HwF

Tom Somchai, HwF

Yoon Htar Aein, MECC

Khanongrit Singhabut, MECC

Kleh Moo, MTC

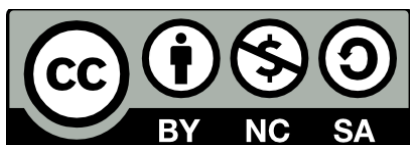


Emergency food packages include 15 kilograms of rice, 1 liter of oil, 1 kilogram of yellow beans, a bag of salt, and a half kilogram of dried fish and chili. This feeds a family of five for one week, costing about 500 THB, the equivalent of 15 USD.

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SUMMARY

For the educators working in Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) on the Thai-Myanmar border, teaching was already a demanding profession. Resources were already scarce. Uncertainty was already a constant. Now, in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, education as we know it is being redefined. The upcoming academic year will look and feel completely different. New solutions, strategies and support mechanisms will be essential in helping migrant educators to navigate the “new normal” of their classrooms.

In the wake of COVID-19, it is crucial to first learn and listen to migrant communities in order to identify how they are resiliently bridging the existing gaps. Only in this can there be an informed partnership with migrant communities, allowing local leadership to speak to the actual ongoing needs of their communities. 64 MLC headmasters participated in a rapid assessment focusing on school readiness, home-learning support, and safety in response to COVID-19. As part of the assessment, all learning center classrooms were measured to determine student capacity with social distance guidelines. Most MLCs will need to implement a rotating schedule or reallocate students in order to accommodate all students in the 2020-2021 academic year.

The data clearly shows that all MLCs are in need of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) not only to prepare to safely open in line with Thai regulations, but also to support migrant children to learn at home in their communities while schools remain closed.

Effects of COVID-19 on the Migrant Community



Increased risk of child labor



Families without food or drinking water



Increased child protection and domestic violence cases



Vulnerable community members more isolated



Widespread depression and anxiety



Inability to travel



Rise in unemployment

Headmasters reported that if these materials are provided, their learning center will be able to fulfill all government mandates in regards to COVID-19 protection measures. At the same time, the challenges have been redefined in the midst of the pandemic. MLCs are facing even greater burdens financially. 24 out of the 64 MLCs surveys reporting critically low funding, unable to support teacher salaries, school rent fees, and operational running costs.

Meanwhile, MLCs are preparing to implement home-based learning for the month of June. Currently, MECC has announced that MLCs shall remain closed until the "green stage," when Thai schools are allowed to operate with no need for COVID-19 safety guidelines. This could take months to go into effect. For MLCs, this means potentially staying closed for 4-5 months. MLC Headmasters are thus looking for a coordinated response by which teachers can support student learning. With limited resources--including electricity, connectivity and available devices--this is a sizable challenge. All MLCs will use a paper-based model to ensure children are learning and engaged while schools remain closed.

There is widespread concern that many migrant children will not return once MLCs are allowed to open. The devastating economic impact on migrant families has meant many can't afford sufficient food. Older children are at risk to enter the workforce and never return to MLCs. Child protection and social emotional support will need to be at the heart of any intervention as surveyed Headmasters perceived their school communities as having widespread depression, stress and anxiety and at greater risk for domestic violence, drug use, child abuse and child labor.

"We worry that **learning** might not be effective.

We worry that there will be **more child laborers**.

Students will **loose their focus/ attention**.

Teachers will be **tired**.

We might have to spend more on **transportation**.

We couldn't get support from parents as we **can't collect some school fees**. We have some challenges with fund raising activities."

--MLC Headmaster in Mae Sot District

Challenges Facing Students for Distance Education at Home

Difficult for parents to monitor and support
Finding safe spaces to teach
Scheduling Teacher motivation and support
Printing costs for learning materials
Students not focused Transportation
Obtaining permission from local authorities

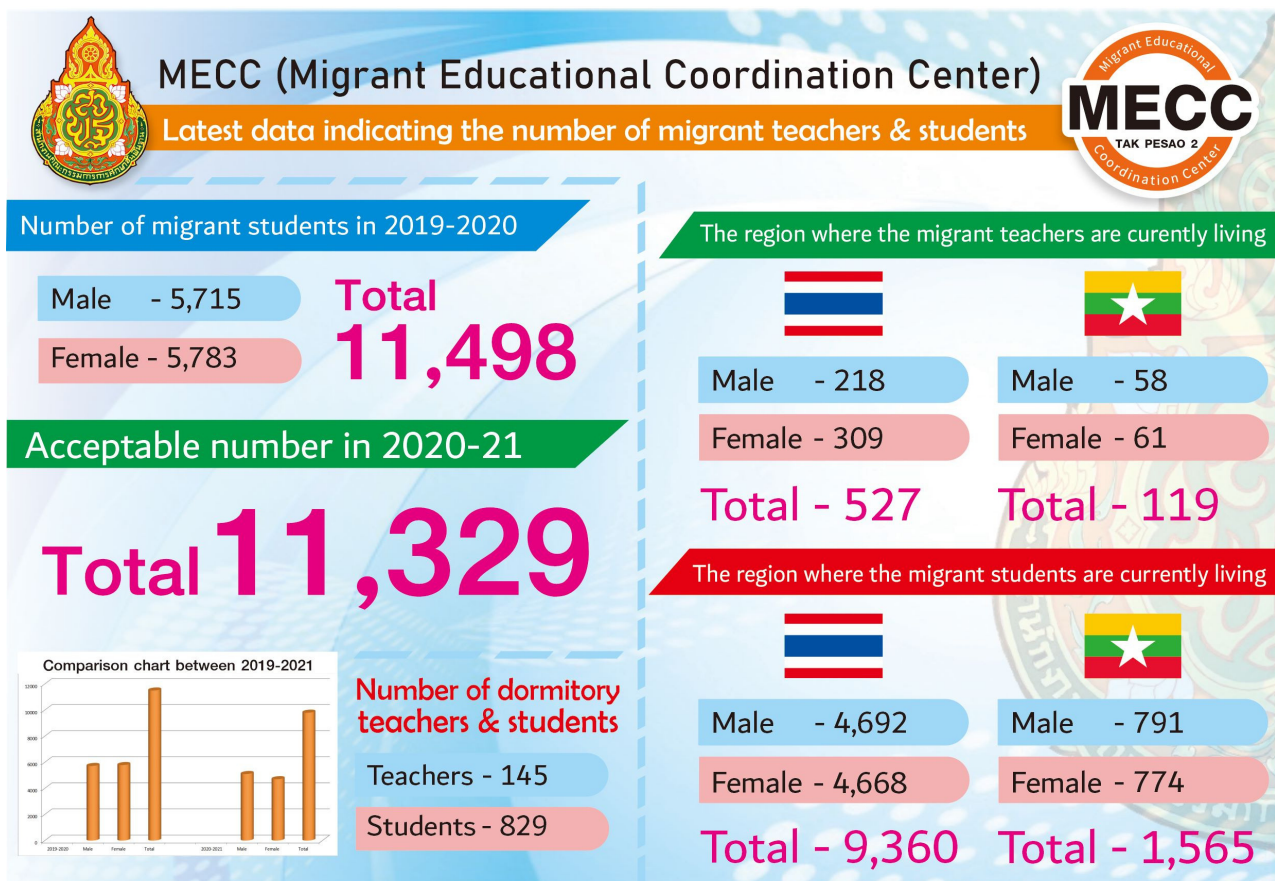
CONTEXT

For one of Thailand's most vulnerable populations, migrant children, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has left them feeling afraid, confused and uncertain about when their education will continue. Currently, there are over 200,000 migrant workers in Tak province, most of which are employed in factories and agricultural work. Despite concerns that most migrants had returned to Myanmar in the wake of COVID-19, many migrant families living on the border have remained in Thailand.

It's likely the majority of returnees to Myanmar had come up and through from Bangkok where threats from the pandemic were more present. This finding was confirmed by the Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee (BMWEC) in their May 2020

Situational Analysis¹ conducted in 26 Migrant Learning Centers (MLCs) in 5 districts of Tak province. BMWEC found that many migrant families living on the border have remained in Thailand and don't plan to return, even if a one-way border was established. Within their school communities, 73% of surveyed school leaders had only a few families (less than 10) return. Many families have at least one earner currently out of work and require support for basic needs, specifically food and hygienic supplies. In regards to MLCs, 1,565 students are currently in Myanmar, while 9,797 have remained in Thailand, based on last academic year's MLCs' population (MECC, 2020).

There are currently over 200,000 migrant workers in Tak province.

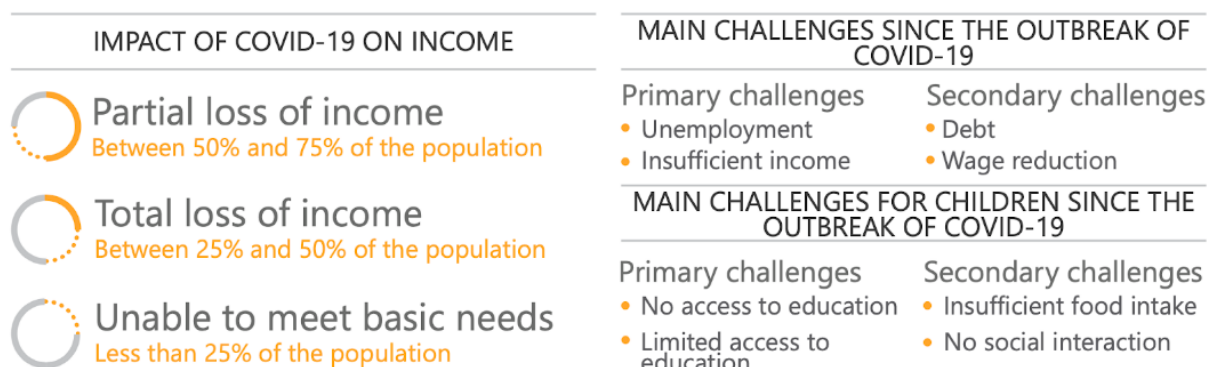


¹ From "BMWEC Situational Analysis," by Burmese Migrant Workers Education Committee, 2020, <https://www.scribd.com/document/459148399/BMWEC-Situational-Analysis-20200430>

119 MLC teachers are currently in Myanmar, while 527 have remained in Thailand.²

Migrant Learning Centers are also facing the same economic challenges as their communities. Many MLC donors have decreased or withdrawn their financial commitments as a result of COVID-19. Many MLCs depend on financial support from international donors and organizations. Some headmasters fear they will not be able to provide necessary education because they cannot pay teacher salaries. Some headmasters shared they might not be able to open their schools at all, putting a lot of migrant children at significant risk. A rapid assessment of non-Thai

nationals by IOM³ found that 57% of migrant community respondents reported that the greatest challenge since the outbreak of COVID-19 is insufficient income. 24% of their respondents reported that the greatest challenge faced by migrant children is limited access to education. 65% of respondents indicated that lack of literacy is the main reason why non-Thai nationals do not understand COVID-19 information and 61% of respondents indicated that non-Thai nationals have misperceptions about COVID-19. In their assessment, IOM (2020) also found that, out of 111 villages in Mae Sot, COVID-19 had a substantial economic impact on the migrant community (see figure below).



Source: IOM. (2020, May). Rapid Assessment: COVID-19 RELATED VULNERABILITIES AND PERCEPTIONS IN MAE SOT DISTRICT, TAK PROVINCE, THAILAND.

Across Thailand, unemployment is rising, and the migrant community is heavily impacted. Based on data from Migrant Workers Rights Network,⁴ temporary closures of businesses and factories are the most common problem facing migrant workers. Without this income, workers are unable to afford basic needs and cannot send remittances to their families.

In response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, a coordinated response is needed to ensure that both migrant children and their families have access to resources, educational materials, social-emotional support and information needed in order to make safe, informed decisions for their children.

² From "Latest data indication the number of migrant teachers & students," by MECC, 2020, <http://mecctak.com/#:~:text=Migrant%20Educational%20Co%2Dordination%20Center,Centers%20are%20listed%20under%20MECC>

³ From "Rapid Assessment: COVID-19 Related Vulnerabilities and Perceptions of Non-Thai Population in Thailand," by International Organization for Migration, 2020, <https://thailand.iom.int/rapid-assessment-covid-19-related-vulnerabilities-and-perceptions-non-thai-population-thailand>

⁴ From "Thailand Situation Update on COVID-19 Emergency Response" by Migrant Workers Rights Network, 2020.

Help Without Frontiers Community Survey Findings with 356 Families

46%

of surveyed families have reduced access to drinking water because of the COVID-19 lockdown

80%

of surveyed families have not received any support from anyone during the lockdown

42%

of surveyed families had skipped meals because of the COVID-19 lockdown

56%

of surveyed families will not be able to pay school fees for the upcoming academic year

87%

of surveyed families had not received any medical assistance or support



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS, 2020

BASIC NEEDS

Help without Frontiers Thailand Foundation is continuously conducting a community survey to identify the needs of the migrant population on the Thai Myanmar border. As of May 28th, 2020, they had surveyed 356 families. 60.7% of surveyed families reported that their usual family income before COVID-19 was less than 3,000 THB (95 USD per month). Now, in the wake of COVID-19, 43% of surveyed migrant families (153 families) reported they only had enough food

for the next week. 41.9% (149 families) stated they had or could purchase food for only 2 weeks. Support to migrant families is holistically limited: 80% of surveyed families stated they had not received any support during the quarantine. 56% of families said that they cannot pay school fees for the upcoming academic year. As many families rely on daily wage earners, and most families do not have savings to rely on, COVID-19 has left the marginalized migrant population even more vulnerable.

METHODOLOGY

In response to the new educational, livelihoods, health and economic challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic, a mixed methods rapid needs assessment was undertaken to identify:

- What is needed to establish a home-based learning model while MLCs are closed?
- What support do Migrant Learning Centers need to safely operate once schools are permitted to open?
- What are the overall perceptions and concerns of MLC Headmasters as they look to the 2020-2021 academic year?

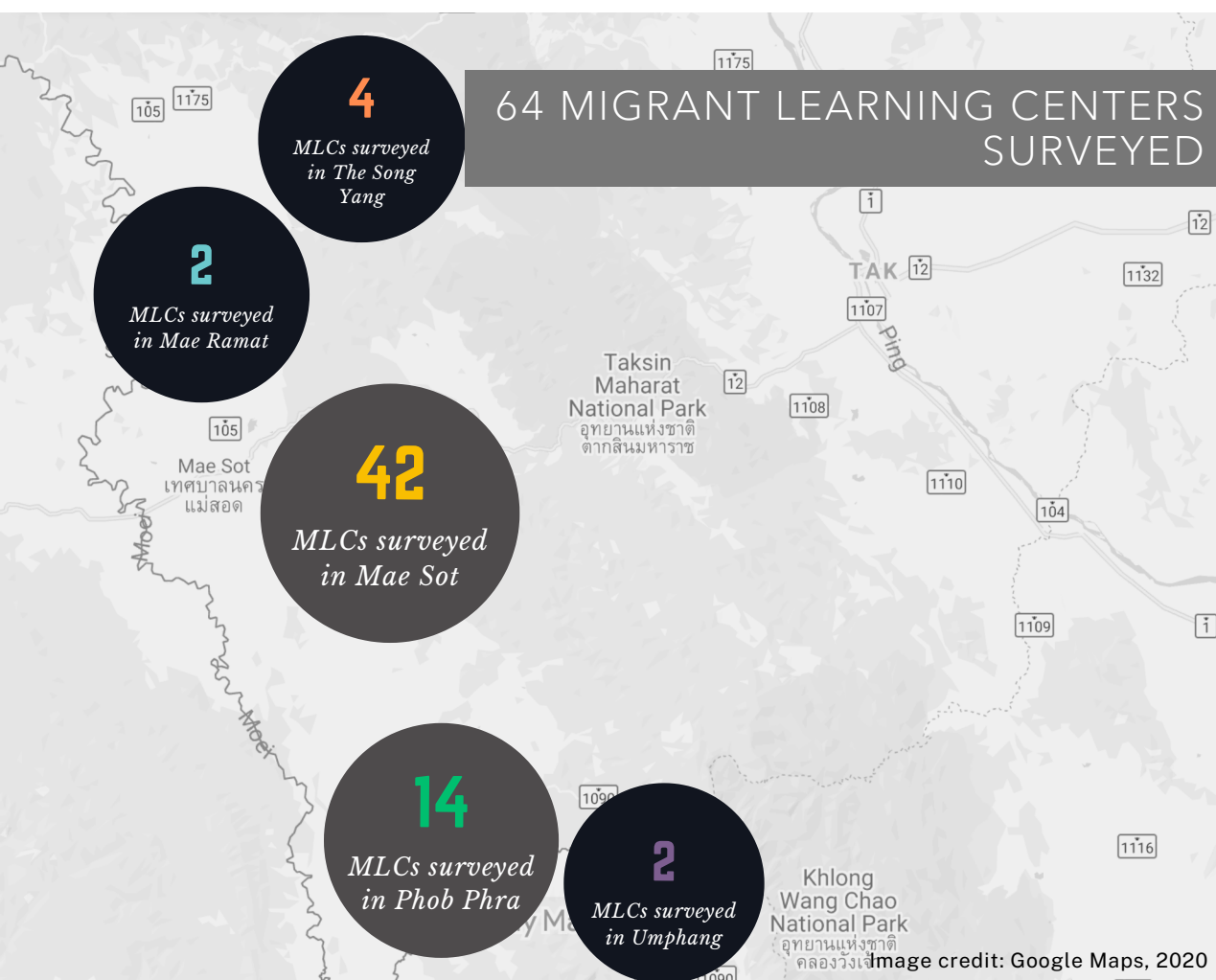
Field work⁵ was conducted at migrant learning centers in the 5 border districts of Tak Province: Mae Sot, Mae Ramat, Tha Song Yang, Phob Phra and Umphang. Through a series of 3 participatory workshops, 20 participants contributed to the development of the assessment survey and were trained in safe data collection methods. As part of this, senior

staff from Mae Tao Clinic provided training to the entire data collection team on how to safely access and interview research participants. Researchers were also trained how to measure the area of MLC classrooms and were provided the required resources to do so.

After a collaborative schedule was developed, multi-organizational teams were assigned and conducted the survey with a total of 64 (29 male/35 female) Migrant Learning Center Headmasters. All teams were equipped with the necessary protective equipment including cloth masks, face shields and alcohol hand gel. Surveys were conducted at a minimum of 1.5 meter distance between the researchers and participants. Informed consent was established with all research participants.

At locations where travel wasn't possible, data was collected via phone. All data was entered and stored in a password-protected, cloud-based platform.

⁵ The research team was composed of staff from the following 10 organizations: TeacherFOCUS, Help Without Frontiers Foundation Thailand, Migrant Educational Coordination Center - TAK PESAO 2, Burmese Migrant Workers' Education Committee, Cotton On Foundation, Mae Tao Clinic, Save the Children Thailand, Suwannimit Foundation, the International Organization for Migration and Burmese Migrant Teacher Association



MAIN FINDINGS

What are the challenges you face to reach students for home-based learning?

1. Some students went back to Myanmar
2. Some stay in a very remote area and are not sure how to share their location
3. There are not enough teachers
4. Transportation is difficult, especially with legal drivers' licenses.

--MLC Headmaster in Mae Sot District

In line with other needs assessments conducted with the migrant population on the Thai-Myanmar border, this rapid assessment found that COVID-19 has had an overwhelming economic impact on the migrant population.

All MLCs reported the need for PPE in order to comply with Thai government regulations for reopening schools. 100% of the 64 surveyed MLCs said they need thermal scanners, face masks, hand sanitizing gel and hand soap. At the same time, 97% stated the need for disinfectant and gloves.

PPE ITEMS REQUESTED IN MIGRANT LEARNING CENTERS

Keeping students safe post COVID-19



100%

NEED THERMAL SCANNERS

For measuring students and staff temperatures at all entry/exit points



100%

NEED MASKS

For all students and staff to wear during the school day



98%

NEED HAND SANITIZER & SOAP

For all students and staff to regularly wash their hands



95%

NEED DISINFECTANT

For all MLCs to maintain safe, clean learning spaces for students



90%

NEED GLOVES

For all MLC staff to wear throughout the school day while teaching

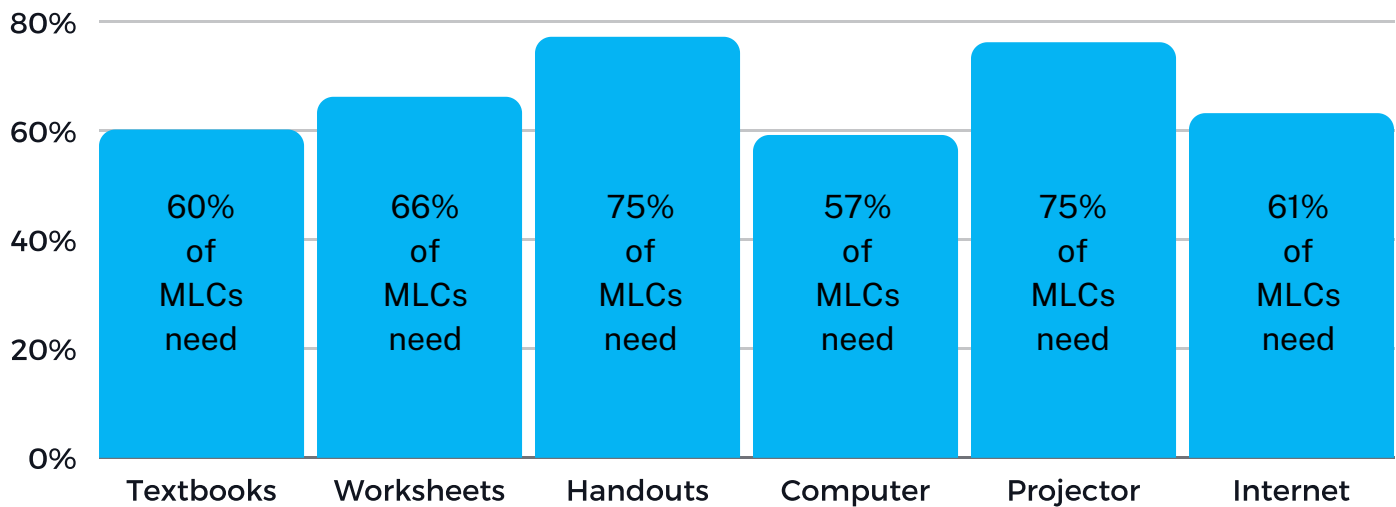


OTHER NEEDS

MLCs request hand washing stations, mops, brooms and face shields

See page 20 for how COVID-19 relief efforts are meeting community needs

Needed Materials for Student Self-Study in June



Under normal circumstances the academic year would begin in early June. In light of COVID-19, Thailand has required all schools to remain closed. Educators around the world have been pivoting their education approaches to maintain educational continuity, however, most of these innovations depend on technology. For MLCs, both the upfront and recurring costs of technology make them very difficult to use as part of emergency interventions. For example, 65% of surveyed MLCs stated that they did not have a computer or laptop. An even higher percentage of MLCs operate without internet: 67% said they do not have internet on site.

For migrant educators facing limited resources and widened gaps from the pandemic, innovative approaches are crucial. Out of the 64 responding Headmasters, 48 stated that they have a plan for distance education in June. In inventorying materials, the following are needed:

- 60% need additional textbooks
- 66% need worksheets for home learning
- 75% need handouts for home learning
- 57% do not have a functioning computer or laptop
- 75% do not have a projector
- 61% do not have an internet connection

What is your plan for distance education in June?

1. To meet the students' parents first and explain the situation
2. To find the learning place
3. To teach the children in the community (1 teacher to teach for one community)
4. Need volunteers
5. To assess whether community accept it or not"

--MLC Headmaster in Mae Sot District

*“We are planning to teach in the community.
We will gather students in the community and teach basic lessons relevant
to their curriculum and hygiene.”*

--MLC Headmaster in Mae Sot District



In light of the closed border, MLC Headmasters were asked to assess the situational context of both teachers and students. Previous reports on migrant and out of school children have highlighted the difficulty establishing communication channels with this vulnerable population.

Headmasters estimated that they can still reach 80% (6,932) of their students through a variety of communication platforms, including face-to-face, by phone, Messenger, email, etc. Headmasters plan to involve 364 teachers in June's distance education programming. This highlights the essential contribution MLCs can have in the wake of crisis: they act as a conduit to migrant communities and act as a safety net for at-risk migrant children.

However there are significant challenges in delivering and monitoring community-based, distance education.

MLC Headmasters were asked to evaluate their center's financial situation for June and July. Collectively, only 13 out of the 64 surveyed MLCs forecasted that they will be able to support their existing teachers' stipends. 24 MLCs stated that they do not have the financial resources to support teacher salaries for June and July.

A similar trend was reported for school rent, running costs, dry food and hygiene supplies. 28 surveyed MLC Headmasters stated they were unable to support any transportation for teachers to their communities due to a lack of funding. In terms of needed learning materials, only 33% of surveyed MLCs stated they had sufficient teaching and learning materials to support home-based learning.

Through qualitative responses, MLC Headmasters articulated the dual impact of COVID-19 on school funding:

- International fundraising has decreased as donors have been forced to prioritize funding. As a result, many have either decreased or withdrawn financial support completely.
- Local fundraising through Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) has diminished as a significant proportion of the migrant community is out of work with no or limited income.

Thus, when asked to rank the challenges facing their MLC, the most frequent response reported was financial needs (43% of all MLCs). Similarly, 52% of respondents selected financial needs as the primary challenge facing their teachers.

COVID-19 CHALLENGES FOR MIGRANT EDUCATION

MLC Headmasters expressed their concerns for the upcoming academic year

11,329 STUDENTS

need access to migrant education in Tak region



51 of 64 MIGRANT LEARNING CENTERS

will not be able to support existing teacher stipends



130 USD MONTHLY

equivalent to 4,000 THB, supports one teacher's monthly salary



67% LEARNING MATERIALS

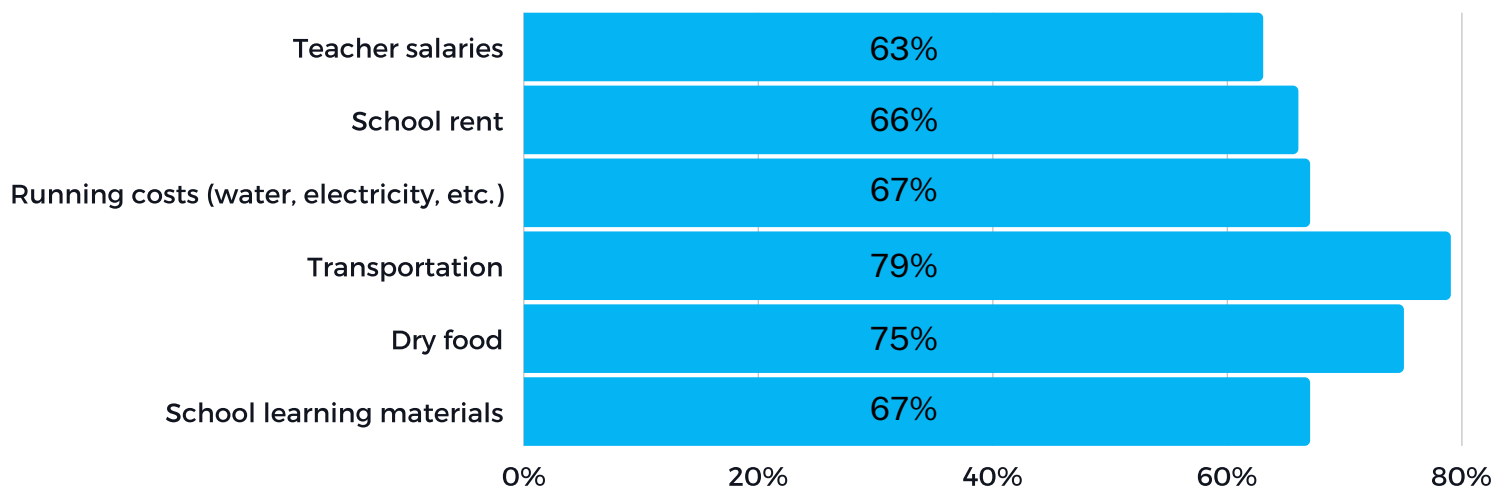
of MLCs do not have sufficient teaching and learning materials to support home-based learning



EMERGENCY SUPPORT IS NEEDED

To respond to this need, please contact
infoteacherfocus@gmail.com

Percentage of Support that MLCs Need in June and July



Headmasters perceive that legal documentation (26%), food access (19%) and school dropout (16%) are the greatest challenges students are facing currently. In order to implement the COVID-19 continuous education plan, headmasters shared that the most pressing MLC needs are for PPE, transportation and educational support materials. Headmasters also shared other concerns regarding students:

“Some students live very far away, and it’s difficult to reach them. Some have moved to a new place.”

“Some migrant children are already working, especially those in grades 6, 7 and 8. Children have to go out to work due to their family’s hardship and economic problems.”



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS, 2020

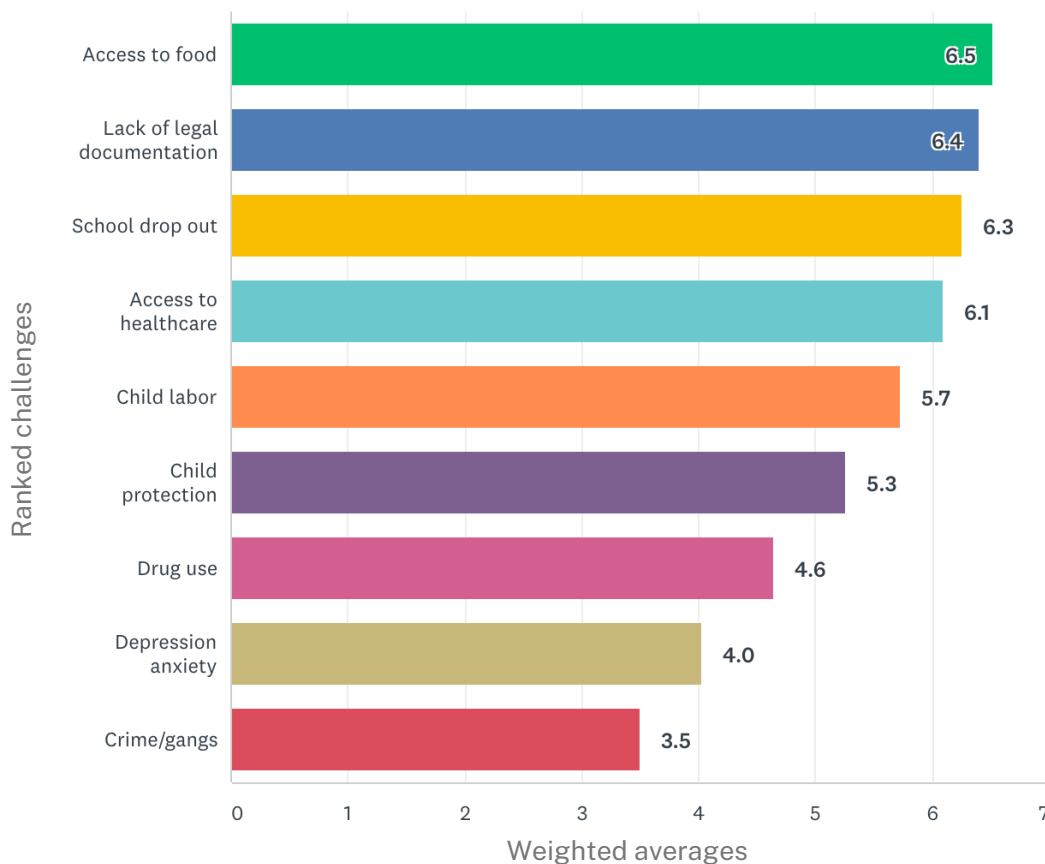


Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS, 2020

“When students are home, children are at risk for abuse by their parents. Migrant parents are facing financial problems. Students are likely to be neglected when their parents are struggling. Because the children will spend a lot of time in their community, I worry that some might get involved with drugs.”

“The students from older grades are at a greater risk to drop out of school and begin working. If their parents can’t afford school fees, they will quit school and join the workforce.”

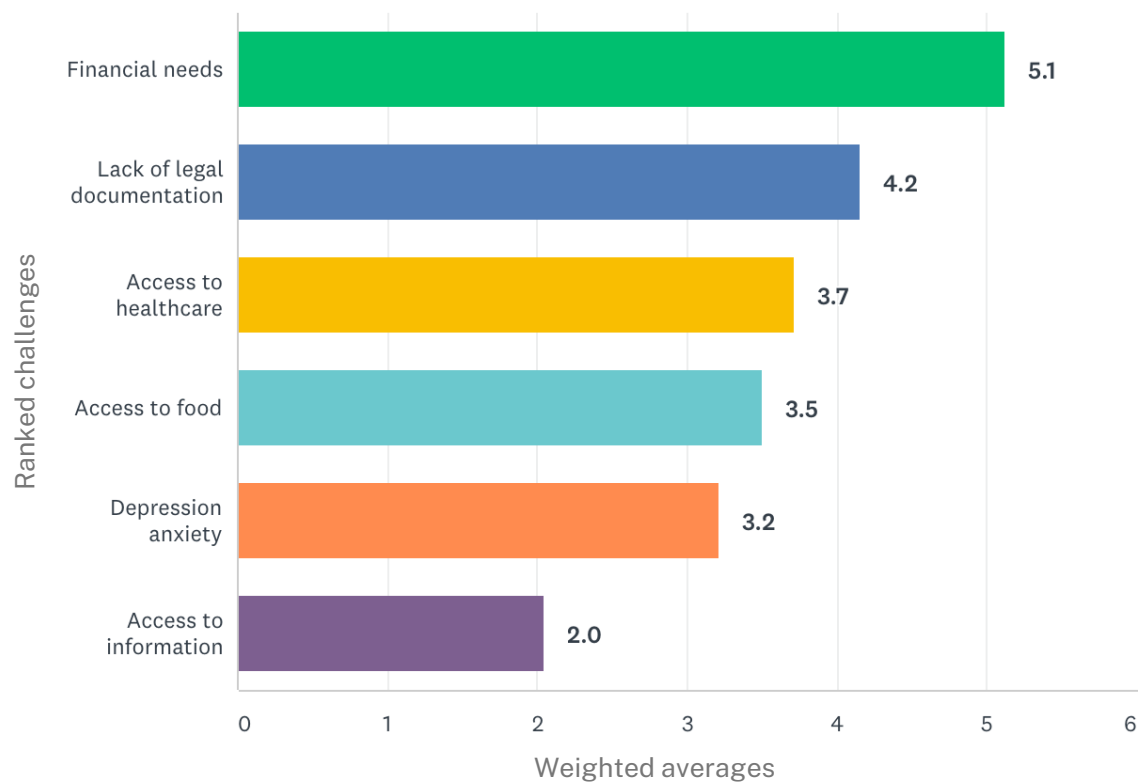
Greatest Challenges Currently Facing MLC Students Ranked



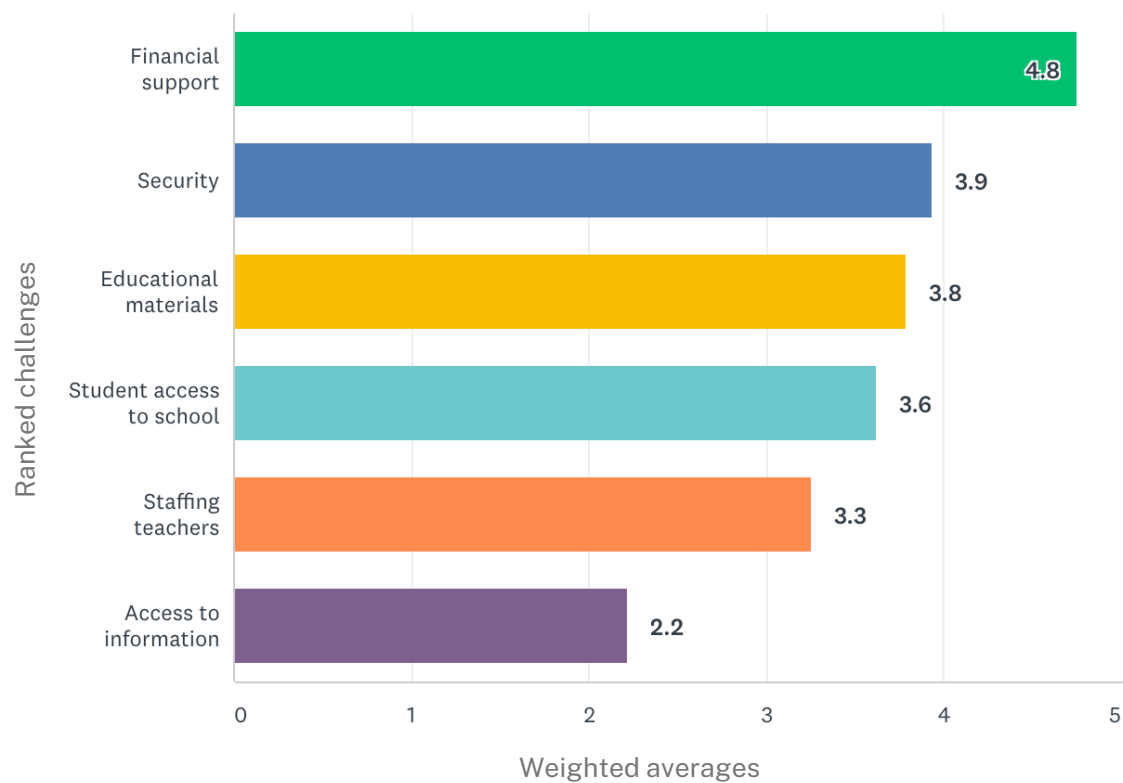
“The students are worried that they won't have a chance to attend school anymore. They are afraid of the disease and afraid of not being able to attend school.”

--MLC Headmaster in Mae Sot District

Greatest Challenges Currently Facing MLC Teachers Ranked



Greatest Challenges Currently Facing MLCs Ranked

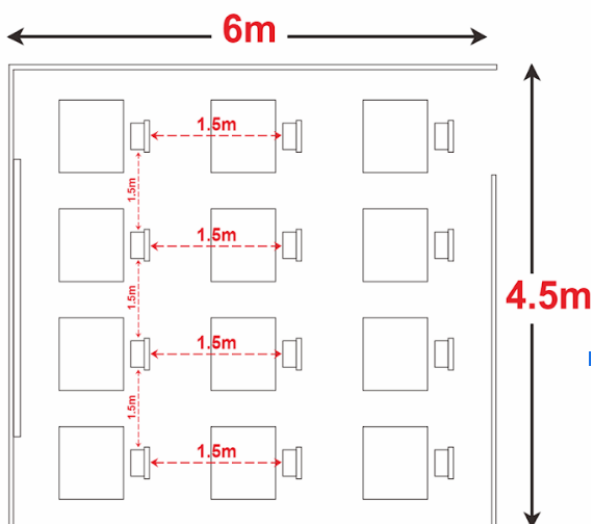


As part of the assessment, all MLC classrooms were measured to determine the capacity of each space. Classrooms ranged from 11 square meters to 59 square meters. The average MLC classroom is approximately 6 meters by 4.5 meters (27-square meters). During a typical school year, one of these classrooms could have up to 30 children learning. A 27-square meter classroom has the capacity for approximately 12 students under Thai social distancing guidelines (see figure below). This will pose a significant challenge for Migrant Learning Centers once the students are able to return. 51% of surveyed MLCs had additional covered space available for learning, however, in most cases it was not enough space to account for all enrolled students.

Additionally Headmasters stated they required additional desks, tables, chairs,

whiteboards, mats and funding to cover small repairs in order to use these spaces. Headmasters will need support to develop individualized school schedules in order to accommodate all students or reallocate students to other centers with available capacity. Headmasters shared a range of concerns through qualitative responses. As most migrant students enrolled in MLCs do not have health insurance cards, access to healthcare was a prominent concern. Headmasters are witnessing firsthand the negative impacts of COVID-19 in their school communities.

“Teachers cannot cross to Myanmar to renew or process documents. Parents will not obtain legal documents for their children, because they don’t have enough money.”



Maximum capacity
12 students
a classroom



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS, 2020

When asked to rank the challenges in light of COVID-19 facing their MLC, the most frequent response reported was financial needs (43% of all MLCs).

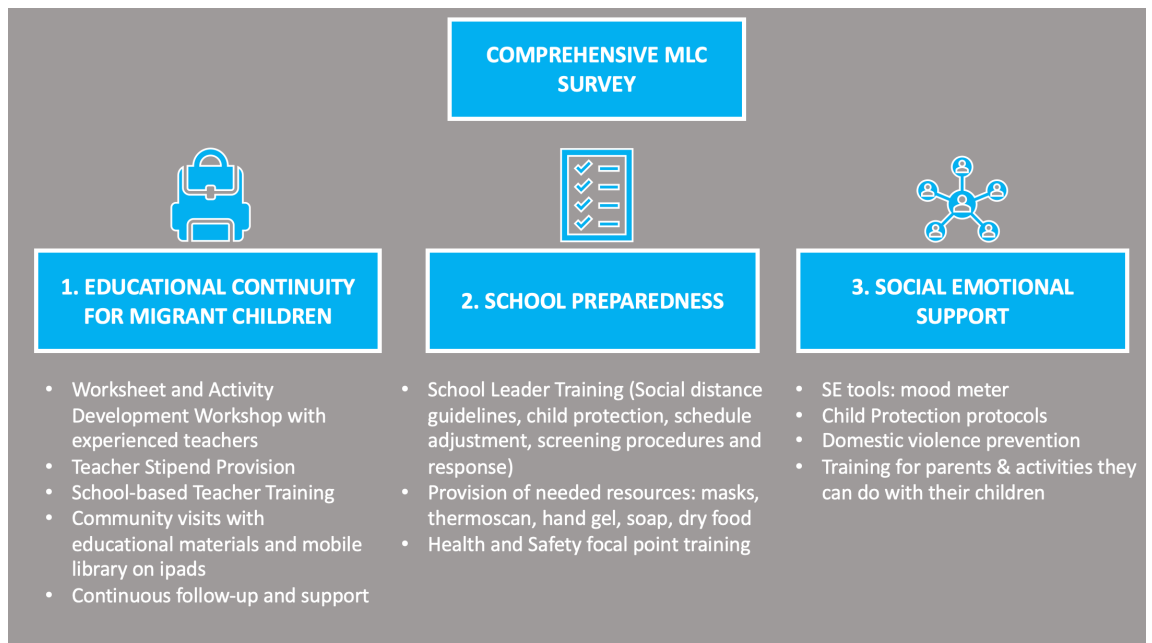
Similarly, 52% of respondents selected "financial needs" as the primary challenge facing their teachers.



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS, 2020

Teachers participating in home-based learning workshop training in June 2020.

RESPONSE



In response to the findings of this rapid assessment, a plan for continuous education was developed in order to support all Migrant Learning Centers through this challenging time. The plan focused on the three emergent themes from the survey:

1. Educational continuity for migrant children while schools are closed
2. School preparedness for safe re-opening in line with Thai national policies
3. Social emotional support for teachers and children

Migrant children are especially vulnerable during this critical time. In addition to the heightened risk for domestic abuse, the economic hardships placed on migrant families as a result of COVID-19 will increase the likelihood that children enter the workforce. Teachers are respected pillars of their school communities and the more they can be empowered to support children and families, the less risk there is for school dropout. Teachers will be trained to holistically support migrant children and their families through this difficult time. Migrant teachers want to support children during this critical time, but need training and resources to do so safely and effectively. Through a collaborative workshop, learning materials have been curated for migrant children to learn at home while schools are closed.

Migrant Learning Centers are a network of safety nets for some of the most vulnerable children in Thailand. Research conducted with the migrant and Thai community in 2019 found that MLCs were the best-placed to enroll out of school migrant children and they offer inclusive, Myanmar-recognized education (Tyrosvoutis, 2019).⁶

⁶ Tyrosvoutis, G. (2019). Bridges: Participatory action research on the future of migrant education in Thailand. TeacherFOCUS.

Strengthening and supporting MLCs will ensure migrant children are safe, supervised and engaged in learning. Social emotional support for the endemic anxiety and depression affecting the migrant community will be provided through teacher training. This will place a heavy burden on teachers, so social-emotional support and coaching is also planned to support teachers.

While June home-based learning is currently funded, future month-to-month support is tenuous. MLCs will not be allowed to open until the Thai government announces the "normal range," where there is no longer any threat of COVID-19 in schools. With an undetermined timeline for home-based learning, support is needed for teacher stipends, transportation, dry foods packages and learning materials printing costs.

A number of partners have been implementing activities to prepare MLCs for home-based learning and school readiness. PPE for all MLCs has been provided by multiple donors, and various local organizations have committed to provide health and safety training to MLCs. Over the next month, partners including MECC are working to provide the needed information for social distance guidelines.



Photo credit: TeacherFOCUS, 2020

Measuring MLC classrooms for COVID-19 social distancing policies

"Some students went back to Myanmar. Some live in very remote areas and cannot be reached. There are not enough teachers to reach all students. There are difficulties providing transportation for teachers to the community."
--MLC Headmaster in Mae Sot District

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thanks to the response of donors and partners, a number of needs have already been met. Distance education in June has received support, providing for teacher capacity building, transportation, and printing of student materials. PPE has been purchased for all MLCs, including thermal scanners, face masks and hand sanitizing gel. A number of organizations have supported the distribution of basic dry food goods to all teachers in MLCs.

While the funding needed to support home-based learning in June is secured, the coming months and the remainder of the upcoming academic year face significant challenges.

1

Sustained financial support for MLC Teachers is needed.

Qualified teachers are the foundation of quality education. For stable schools and student retention, it is vital to sustain teachers, both professionally and financially.

2

MLCs need support for basic infrastructure like rent, running costs andK transportation.

Education for the general public is most often supported by governments, but for migrants who have limited resources even before the pandemic, there is no governmental support. In the wake of COVID-19, this gap needs a sustainable solution.

3

Legal Protection

The comprehensive MLC survey responses highlight the critical need of Thai government protections for MLC staff and students. While the 2018 Ministerial Proclamation of Education for All has eliminated legal obstacles for migrant students to enroll in Thai schools, legal documentation for students enrolled in MLCs is necessary.

4

Technology Systems Upgrading

Conversations regarding IT in education must expand to include marginalized groups and their needs. For MLCs along the Thai-Myanmar border, technology is increasingly necessary, but this technology needs to match the contextual needs. Most schools need basic ICT like a laptop or tablet, a projector and wifi to be able to respond to the emergency in real time.

5

Hygiene and PPE

Other WASH needs like hand washing sinks and additional cleaning materials were highlighted in the assessment. Additional support is needed to provide running water at certain MLCs, so that MLC students and staff can prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Special thanks to the following organizations who have supported COVID-19 emergency relief efforts



12,000 Masks Q4Q Social Enterprise and CottonOn

12,000 Masks from ActNow for Children



Thermo-scanners and hygiene packages for all 70 MLCs



Hygiene packages for 14 MLCs



Hygiene kits for 195 teachers



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Emergency food packages for all MLC teachers

Embassy of Switzerland in Thailand



Installing 40 hand washing basins and water system in boarding houses and MLCs providing COVID-19 behavioral change and M&E workshops to teachers and partners, including the follow-up training (approximately 80 participants for 4-day training and 2-day follow-up workshop), in total 6 days



Emergency support for home-based learning in June (transportation costs, emergency stipends for teachers, printing costs for home learning materials, stationary for all children), emergency teacher training workshop costs and the generous support to publish this report

Emergency support is still needed.

To respond to this need please contact infoteacherfocus@gmail.com