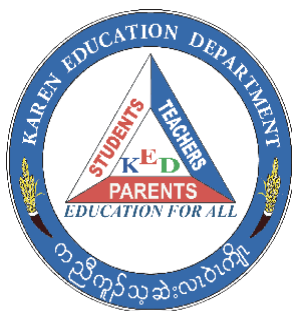




REFUGEE STUDENT TRANSITION

POLICY POSITION AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

October 2015



About Contributing Organizations

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

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

Karenni Education Department (KnED): Our education system started even before we came to the refugee camps. In the ethnic controlled areas in Karenni State along the borderline, we developed our education to ensure that our children could learn our ethnic language and culture. When we fled to Thailand, we brought our education system to the refugee camps. Over the years, we managed by ourselves. Since 1997, when the Royal Thai Government, allowed NGOs to work in the refugee camps, we partner with the Jesuit Refugee Service to further develop and improve our education system.

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

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

Karen Women's Organization (KWO): KWO is a community based organization active in all seven Karen refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border, one internally displaced camp and in seven Karen districts within Burma working for women's equality, empowerment and freedom. In 2015, KWO celebrated its 30th year supporting and strengthening women's roles in all spheres of life. KWO has grown into an organization of 50,000 members. KWO aims to build the capacity of women to advocate for their rights and empower them in politics and decision-making, whilst supporting the Karen community to maintain its culture and identity. KWO is a founding member of the Women's League of Burma (WLB).

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

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

This position paper focuses on:

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

We recommend that:

1. The Myanmar Ministry of Education (MoE) coordinate with KRCEE and KnED to **develop clear policies and procedures** to support refugee children's access to Myanmar government education services. These policies and procedures must 1) uphold refugee children's right to education; 2)

recognize the education level that refugee children have achieved while living in the refugee camps in Thailand; and 3) be consistently communicated and implemented within areas of potential return throughout Myanmar.

2. The Myanmar MoE engage KRCEE and KnED, together with supporting UN agencies and (I)NGOs, to develop an **education transition program** that supports refugee children's access to and integration within Myanmar government schools based on the program recommendations put forth in this paper. The education transition program should be consistently implemented in government schools that receive returning refugee children. The high level recommendations for an education transition program are set out below.

Refugee Student Transition Program Recommendations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

While this position paper focuses on the policy and program mechanisms needed for refugee children to successfully transition into Myanmar government education services, it is important to note that this is only one of several education options for returning refugee children. This position paper should therefore not be interpreted as either promoting return before the time for repatriation is right, or promoting the transition of refugee students into Myanmar government education only. Rather, the repatriation of refugees must

abide by international principles and refugee children must have the right to continue their education within the education systems available in the areas in which they return.

Overview of Education Services in the Refugee Camps

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KRCEE and KnED administer board examinations in grade 6, 9 and the final year of high school and students who successfully pass their final year of basic education are issued with school completion certificates and academic transcripts. KnED conduct yearly exams and issue completion certificates and academic transcripts in Myanmar and English language upon request. These certificates are recognized by the KED and KnED education systems within SE Myanmar. Therefore children who transition between refugee and KED and KnED ethnic education systems within Myanmar are able to continue their education without disadvantage. However, both the Thai and Myanmar MoE do not recognize the education provided, or the certificates issued, by KRCEE and KnED and this has significant impact on refugee children's ability to access and continue their education within either the Thai or Myanmar state education systems.

Myanmar Education Law and Policies Impacting Refugee Student Transition

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

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

The amended Education Law recognizes the existence of non-government schools and the need to develop 'arrangements in accordance with the set rules about the way that Government schools and other schools interlink' (Article 42). The linkages between Government and non-government schools is further examined in the draft NESP, which notes that the 'contribution of these schools needs to be recognized. Ideally there should be space within the government system to allow coexistence and coordination between the two systems, including for children's ability to transition between these schools and take government exams.'² To this end, the NESP provides program strategies to enable universal access to basic education. A core component of the strategy is the 'development of a partnership coordination mechanism to facilitate the active participation of different service providers in free and compulsory basic

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

education provision.’³ A key activity under this component of the strategy is the development of policy guidelines, establish mechanism and implement programs for linkages of complementary schools with the government system and alternative education programs (border schools, mobile schools, schools by ethnic groups where appropriate, NFE programs) with formal schools.⁴

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

Barriers to Access and Integration within Myanmar Government Education

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

1. Barriers to Access

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

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

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

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

Recommendations to Address Access Barriers

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

³Ibid p. 57

⁴ Ibid p. 64

Recommendation 2: Clarify the documentation and fees required for returning refugee students to enroll in government schools and ensure that the requirements are consistently communicated and implemented in all government schools. Support should be provided to returning refugee students and their families to obtain the necessary documentation. Financial support plans for school fees should also be made available so that returning refugee students are not prevented from accessing education due to poverty.

Recommendation 3: The Myanmar MoE should engage refugee education stakeholders to **project enrolment rates in potential Government areas and plan for the appropriate expansion of facilities and allocation of resources**, including teaching and learning materials. Projections should also anticipate human resource needs so that teacher student ratios are not negatively impacted. Refugee teachers could play a significant role in supporting refugee children within government schools and options for their employment should be explored.

2. Barriers Impacting Grade Placement within Government Schools

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

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

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

Standard 10 student, Ban Mai Nai Soi camp, 2014

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

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

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

Recommendations to Address Grade Placement within Government Schools

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

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

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

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

3. Barriers to Social and Cultural Integration

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

Recommendations to Address Social and Cultural Barriers

Recommendation 8: Develop an orientation / induction program for returning refugee students so that they are supported to integrate within a new school environment and school community. This program should familiarize refugee children with school rules and expectations as well as provide social integration opportunities through peer-to-peer and extra curricula activities.

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

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

Annex A

KRCEE and KnED Grade Structure and Subjects

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

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