

Realising equal education rights for migrants, refugees and internally displaced people

Learning from a Misean Cara Effectiveness Review



1. Introduction

Throughout the world, education is a key that unlocks the doors of opportunity. Getting a quality education can transform a person's life, while lack of access to education limits life choices and stifles capacity to benefit from opportunities when they arise. 'Leave no one behind' is an overarching principle of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); yet migrant, refugee and displaced populations, especially children, are at great risk of being left behind and missing out on the opportunities created by a quality education.

In 2018, Misean Cara commissioned an effectiveness review of six projects in Kenya, South Africa, Lebanon, India, and Thailand, which focus on the educational rights of migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The review, carried out by independent consultants from Out of the Box Kenya, was completed in January 2019 against the backdrop of two new United Nations Global Compacts, one on migration¹ and one on refugees². The issue of education rights for migrants and refugees was further highlighted by UNESCO in its 2018 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report³, focusing on the education of displaced and migrant populations. Drawing on the two Global Compacts, the UNESCO report outlined seven ways in which countries could better address the education of migrants, refugees and displaced people.

Out of the Box presented their final thematic report with reference to these seven recommendations, and this Learning Brief is based on the findings presented in the thematic report.



Summer camp activities, Rmeileh centre, Fratelli project, Lebanon. The project ensures access to socio-educational activities for Iraqi and Syrian displaced children in Lebanon.

Seven key recommendations of UNESCO's 2018 Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report

1. Protect the right to education of migrants and displaced people
2. Include migrants and displaced people in national education systems
3. Understand and plan for the education needs of migrants and displaced people
4. Accurately represent migration and displacement histories in education content
5. Prepare teachers of migrants and refugees to address diversity and hardship
6. Harness the potential of migrants and displaced people
7. Support education needs of migrants and displaced people in humanitarian and development aid.

2. Evaluation Findings

The evaluation found that all six projects were effective in the areas of project design, planning, and delivery. Additionally, all six were noted to be contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals' targets on education agreed for 2030. Whilst the evaluators recognised different migration and displacement contexts in each of the projects visited, the critical factors for effectiveness remained consistent, albeit at different levels of application and maturity, due to variation in the duration of projects, the nature of migration and the context of the host community. The projects visited are shown in the table overleaf.

In addition to assessing the effectiveness of all six projects, the evaluators considered the seven recommendations from the GEM report, and confirmed that all the projects are strongly aligned with the recommendations.

¹ <https://www.iom.int/global-compact-migration>

² <https://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html>

³ <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/>

Location	Project Focus	Migration context
Kakuma, Kenya	Children with special needs	Long term, large refugee camp with one nearby host community.
Johannesburg South Africa	Migrants from different language group (to host country)	International migrants into host country urban community.
Rmeileh, Lebanon	Formal and informal education to Syrian/ Iraqi refugees	International migrants fleeing long-term conflict into host country urban community.
Phuket, Thailand	Myanmar women and children, rights-based	Economic migrants to Thailand.
Ranong, Thailand	Myanmar migrants, secondary education	Economic migrants to Thailand.
Kolkata, India	Basic education of children	Seasonal workers to brick pits who return to host community in off season

2.1 Protecting rights

Migrants and refugees are often denied access to education because of a lack of documentation, and in many countries, refugees are excluded explicitly from national education systems. For Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh, Burundian refugees in Tanzania, Karen refugees in Thailand and many Afghan refugees in Pakistan, education is provided in separate, non-formal, community-based or private schools, which may or may not be certified. All projects visited for this evaluation protected migrants’ and refugees’ right to education, regardless of identification documents or residence status, and formal processes were in place to inform migrants and refugees of their right to education and respond to any violation of this right. The evaluation highlighted that missionaries across all projects took on the role of advocate on behalf of the refugees, migrants, and IDPs with whom they worked:

"The fact that a Thai team is dealing with government officials on behalf of Burmese migrants is putting us in a good position to negotiate and get what we need".

Project Coordinator, Phuket

2.2 Inclusion within national systems

All projects worked to integrate migrant children into the formal education system in the host country, and thus aligned their own teaching content with the

national curriculum, making it easier for children eventually to make the transition. However, migrants need tailor-made educational programs that help learners to integrate into mainstream education.



Life-skills Class, Observatory Girls’ Campus, Three2Six project, South Africa. Since 2008, the project has provided a bridging programme for refugee children, preparing them for the transition to mainstream schools.

The strategies adopted across the projects were evaluated as simple and practical, and could be replicated in other regions by adapting the implementation to the local education system. The evaluators highlighted the project in India, noting that tailor-made resources for seasonal migrant workers and their children were developed to create and support the work of 59 brickfield⁴ schools. The same resources are being used to create more schools across the estimated 5,000 active brickfields in Kolkata. Similarly, in South Africa, the Department of Education supports a child’s right to a basic education. For migrant children, however, xeno-

⁴ Brickfields are locations in India where bricks are made by hand for the local construction industry. This industry depends on the cheap labour of migrant families and their children coming from some of the poorest districts of the neighbouring states.

phobia presents a significant barrier. With a specific focus on combating this, the project visited in Johannesburg supports refugee and migrant children to access basic education and integrate into the formal system, thus complementing government policy.

2.3 Responding to needs

Learning a host country's language or attempting to access a national welfare system are constant barriers facing migrants and refugees. All the projects visited provided language and other facilitating programmes as well as alternative, preparatory and accelerated education programmes when required. All the projects also helped families overcome the financial barriers of accessing educational programmes, as well as nutritional support, psychosocial support, and transportation options to and from project locations where possible.

One project in Thailand provides a four-year secondary education for migrant teenagers from Myanmar that encourages critical thinking and leadership, and provides academic qualifications as a gateway to higher learning. Graduates from this programme are then able to become teachers in learning centres and aim for entrance to an online university. The evaluation report commented that, "These classes are changing lives while creating and empowering the next generation".

"Because of the ... programme I am now able to teach in a learning centre and give back to my community. My friend is now doing translation from Burmese to Thai in a health clinic and another friend is helping [migrants] with their immigration papers. This program is enabling our community to have a more decent life within the Thai community"

Student, Thailand.

2.4 Recognising histories

Education provides a unique opportunity to challenge prejudices and develop skills for working and living together. Recognising and celebrating the two cultures (host and migrant/refugee) and finding common ground for peaceful co-existence is accelerated through education. The evaluation report noted how the immersion of missionaries in communities results in a deep understanding of local contexts and needs; living

the life of the people they support, while recognising their histories and helping them to preserve it. For example, the report describes how Lebanese society was at first hesitant to accept and support refugees due to the legacy of conflict between Syria and Lebanon, but the project strove to help over 700 students, teachers, and families overcome these barriers.



Secondary school students, after-school activity, Ranong, Thailand. The project aims to increase both the number of students who are migrants from Myanmar accessing Secondary Education, and the number seeking further education and employment opportunities.

2.5 Preparing teachers

The recruitment and retention of qualified teachers is a challenge for many countries, and is a key outcome indicator within SDG4. The profile and dedication of teachers are key to the success of any education project. However, as qualified and experienced teachers seek better remuneration elsewhere, schools with scarce resources find themselves lacking qualified teachers. The evaluation confirmed that across all six projects teachers are the key to providing quality education, with many being themselves members of the migrant/refugee community who have had access to training to develop skills, and support to bring those skills back to their own community. The education professionals involved in the six projects had received training on diversity, challenging stereotypes, tackling discrimination, recognising stress and trauma and referring those in need to specialists. At the project in Kenya, there is continuous training of staff from the refugee community, not only to teach, but also to provide counselling, psychological support and complementary healing to the refugee community. Each week teachers and staff in the project have in-service training to further develop these skills. The project successfully developed a Teacher Formation Programme, which includes classroom management principles and positive behaviour reinforcement.



Community Counsellors in-service training, Kakuma, Kenya. The project aims to address the needs of refugees in the areas of psychosocial support protection and those with special needs within the Kakuma Refugee camp, which contains an estimated 180,000 people.

2.6 Harnessing potential

The GEM report highlighted that, while migrants have great potential to contribute to their host communities and societies, often their skills are not recognised and so not fully deployed. There is therefore a need to reform institutions so that they recognise qualifications earned by migrants/refugees through formal and non-formal channels, and develop mechanisms to accredit prior learning which has not been formally certified.

The evaluation noted that in several projects, missionaries were able to identify employment opportunities for young migrant or refugee graduates within their parish and community networks, or to employ them directly in project activities. Thus the partnership approach, collaborative working methods, and missionary immersion in communities are playing a significant role in supporting the migrant/refugee community.

"Some children have many responsibilities, like working to help support their family or take care of their siblings, but here we give them the opportunity to live their childhood. You can see that they feel safe here, they have fun and at the same time they learn new things. The Fratelli project offered me the opportunity to cook for the kids and make some money to support my family"

Cook at project and mother of beneficiaries

2.7 Reforming humanitarian and development aid

The UNESCO GEM report identified that a lack of funding in education can be the result of shortcomings in several areas: political will; vertical coordination (from global to local) and horizontal coordination (across sectors and actors); humanitarian actor capacity; and accountability mechanisms. There is a need for humanitarian and development actors to co-ordinate in order to better provide predictable, multi-year funding and thus ensure the sustainability of interventions. In all projects visited there were efforts to create horizontal coordination with stakeholders from different sectors to increase the sustainability of projects and find partnerships that would add value to existing resources.

Different kinds of cross-sector partnerships are needed to create sustainable outcomes and compensate for lack of resources. This includes international partnerships through the missionary network to ensure a diversity of funds, and local partnerships with local government and NGOs to enhance sustainability and maximise impact on the ground. For example, the evaluation highlighted the Nawada intervention in India, where an agreement between the project and the state education department in Kolkata creates the opportunity to reserve school places in their home villages for children who are seasonal migrants. When they return home from the brickfields in the off-season and attend their local school, the education acquired in the brickfield schools is built on and not lost.

3. Conclusions

The evaluation concluded that all six projects were strong and effective in the areas of project design, planning, and delivery of quality education to migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons. Across all projects the faith-based missionary approach was evident and contributed to their effectiveness. The projects implemented a combination of interventions aligned with the GEM recommendations mentioned above, many of which are relevant to all projects, and could thus serve as a model for future project interventions.

The review also identified key factors which were essential to the effectiveness of the projects. While not all these elements may be achieved at the outset, the evaluation noted that projects should consider how they may introduce these practices over time, in a manner tailored to the context they are working in, as outlined below.



Brickfield school interactive activities with students, Kolkata, India. The project facilitates open-air schools under the shade of trees five days a week, empowering and educating the children of the migrant workers living in the brick fields on the outskirts of Kolkata.

3.1 Long-term presence, leading to contextual understanding and sensitivity

The dedication of missionaries and their local presence in the communities contribute strongly to their impact. A deep understanding of the context in which a project operates helps the management team understand the community and respond to local needs. This factor is particularly relevant to groups who face multiple barriers, such as migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons. Additionally, a compassionate understanding of migrant culture is essential in designing interventions to enable them to access education and other services. Living within the migrant community enables missionaries to interact and build relationships with community members to get a deeper understanding of norms, traditions, perceptions and behaviours. As trusted members of the community, they can leverage this position of trust for the betterment of others. This is unique to the missionary approach and contributes to a deeper impact across all projects.

"What makes educational development projects special when done by missionaries is that we are driving our project from our core values. Our programs are tailored for each child, because each child is by itself part of our mission."

Leadership member, Mission Development Office

Additionally, early engagement with community leadership through the community's established leadership structure is key to the success of a project. Community leaders can contribute in many ways, including sensitisation, advocacy and resolving contentious issues. Living in the same communities means missionaries are well placed to build trust with local leaders and provide vital information to other development agencies.

3.2 Quality Education

The quality of education determines its effectiveness. Quality in education has a number of key elements: a conducive learning environment (physical, emotional, and educational); qualified, capable and committed staff backed by effective leadership; openness to children from all backgrounds and communities; alignment with the host country's curriculum; an academic and non-academic focus through extra-curricular activities (including play and recreation) which contribute to the holistic development of students; ensuring children's voices are heard and respected; and the implementation of a child safeguarding policy while protecting and promoting the rights of the child.

"The three2six project teaches my children English which is the teaching language in local schools and spoken language in South Africa. Many children are like mine from franco-phone backgrounds with very limited English, and this is an opportunity for them to be able to be integrated in the community easily."

Mother of a student, Children's Education Project

The evaluation concluded that missionaries are passionate and committed to the achievement of educational rights for all, and are focused not only on the students, but also on the development of teachers, and the provision of resources.

3.3 Holistic approach

The evaluation acknowledged the holistic approach of the missionaries, focusing not only on the educational needs of refugees, migrants and IDPs, but also on other needs such as food, health, and psychosocial support. Across all six projects, missionaries recognised that the needs of people are multi-dimensional, and focused on the wider family and community, thus generating a

deeper and more meaningful impact for those supported directly and indirectly at project level. In all six projects, stakeholders spoke of how the environment created in the project is one where everyone (students, teachers, volunteers) feels part of the family and cares for others. This promotes caring and nurturing of the children and provides a safe environment where they can grow in confidence and ability. Additionally, stakeholders outlined the psychosocial support received and complimented the missionaries on their understanding and care for each individual, regardless of age, gender, or background.

3.4 Advocacy and innovation

The evaluation report noted how missionaries planned beyond the immediate objectives outlined in a project proposal, and examined more long-term challenges. For example, the inclusion of refugees as project workers in some of the projects also contributes to the development of the wider community, as these workers are encouraged to educate their own communities. At the project in Kenya, staff who are themselves refugees have become community leaders, and through this role contribute to the empowerment of their community members.

Migration and displacement affect people's experience of education, and education systems need to accommodate both those who move or those who stay behind. State actors must recognise migrants', refugees' and displaced persons' right to education in law and, more importantly, fulfil this right in practice. Education systems must be inclusive; teachers must be prepared to work with diverse groups; and mechanisms for recognition and accreditation of prior learning must be modernised.



A Student reading at the Good Shepherd school library in Phuket, Thailand. The project is a Thai-Myanmar cross-border initiative to protect the rights of Burmese migrant workers and secure basic services for their families.

The evaluation concluded that missionaries are working effectively by delivering innovative practices which align with the recommendations made in the 2018 GEM report and provide transformative educational opportunities to both children and adults. Projects implemented by Misean Cara's member organisations and their partners throughout the world are contributing both to the achievement of the SDGs, and to the realisation of the equal educational rights of migrants, refugees, and internally displaced persons. With the SDG deadline of 2030 almost a decade away, missionary organisations will continue to innovate and support those left furthest behind across the poorest countries on earth, upholding rights and transforming lives through holistic and inspiring development work.

About Misean Cara

Established in 2004, Misean Cara is an international and Irish faith-based missionary development movement made up of 91 member organisations working in over 60 countries. We work with some of the most marginalised and vulnerable people in developing countries. Adopting a human rights focus, we support communities addressing basic needs in the areas of education, health, and livelihoods, as well as advocating for economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. At times of humanitarian crisis, the trusted and long-term presence of missionaries in affected communities also allows for rapid, efficient and targeted responses.

Misean Cara and our members work collectively and individually through the missionary approach to development. This framework is based on five values: respect, justice, commitment, compassion and integrity. Together, these establish the basis for the approach of missionaries to good development practice.

Our Strategy 2017-2021 identifies five goals:

1. Uphold the right to quality education
2. Uphold the right to better health, clean water and sanitation
3. Uphold the right to sustainable livelihoods
4. Uphold and advocate for human rights
5. Enhance and promote the missionary approach to development.

Further expressing our desire to reach the most vulnerable and marginalised, the Strategy sees Misean Cara bringing a particular focus to bear on five groups: women, children, refugees, displaced people and people with disabilities.

Misean Cara Learning Briefs

This is one of a series of Learning Briefs produced by Misean Cara with a view to promoting learning and contributing to discourse within the development sector. The Briefs are based on monitoring, evaluation and research work done for Misean Cara. Previous issues cover topics such as education, health, project evaluation, women's empowerment and the response to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa. All Learning Briefs are available at www.miseancara.ie/public-resources.

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