

# Regional Peer-Learning Platform and Program of Learning and Action on Alternative Care Arrangements for Children in the Context of International Migration in the Asia Pacific

9 September 2021 | Workshop on Access to Education

The International Detention Coalition (IDC) and Secretariat of the Asia Dialogue on Forced Migration (ADFM) have convened the *Regional Peer-Learning Platform and Program of Learning and Action on Alternative Care Arrangements for Children in the Context of Migration in the Asia Pacific* ([the Platform](#)) since November 2019.

The Platform brings together individuals from policy and implementing agencies in the governments of Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Thailand, as well as civil society and international organisations, in order to share positive practice and concrete examples of what is working. Due to COVID-19, the Platform has been convening virtually over the course of 2020/21, focusing on a range of themes related to Alternatives to Detention (ATD) proposed by participants. Although all five countries are at different stages in developing systems to support refugee and migrant children, experience from the Platform has shown there remain many opportunities to learn from each other.

## Summary of substantive session

On 9 September 2021 almost 50 people from government ministries, civil society organisations, and international organisations in the five participating countries came together to discuss access to education for refugee and migrant children. The focus of the workshop was on the **benefits to both society and the individual of allowing access to education for refugee and migrant children**. As the event was conducted under the Chatham House Rule, the following is a high-level summary of proceedings.

The Workshop began with presentations from Thailand and Indonesia on policies of access to education in their countries, followed by an interactive plenary discussion. Organisers welcomed participants from a number of Education Ministries to the session, all of whom were attending for the first time, and brought a great deal of knowledge and relevant perspectives to the discussion.

Some key themes and lessons that emerged in the discussions were:

- All countries have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which enshrines access to education for all. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 also calls for all girls and boys to have access to primary and secondary education by 2030. A number of national frameworks also include access to education for refugees and migrants.
- Education is a powerful tool in lifting socially excluded children out of poverty and into society, and narrows the gender gap for girls and women. For displaced children, education is not only vital for their own futures, but also the communities in which they live, bringing greater cohesion and inter-cultural understanding.
- Even in countries where refugees are living in transit, resettlement can take a long time. Access to education during this period not only benefits individual children but society as a whole. If children are accessing education they and their family are more likely to learn the local language, contribute to productive society, and it also reduces their vulnerability to human trafficking and other forms of exploitation.
- Access to education also has positive impacts in relation to immigration outcomes for children in community based ATD. We have seen through global research that families who have children in schools while they are waiting for an immigration outcome are extremely unlikely to abscond. They are more likely to remain in contact with immigration authorities because their children are

receiving an education, and are embedded within and supported by their local schools and communities.

- Having policies that allow for access to education for non-citizen children is a positive step, but needs to be coupled with effective implementation. There are important lessons from those working at the local level about what is working and what challenges remain. There are also many lessons to be learned from listening to Indigenous groups about welcoming and integrating newcomers.
- In many places national and international civil society organisations play an important role in supporting governments to implement access to education for non-citizen children. There are challenges in some cases with providing formal accreditation for refugees who may be undocumented. One suggested way of addressing this challenge is through the provision of temporary ID numbers specific to schooling.
- Language support for children is important, as is training teachers about the particular needs of refugee and migrant children, many of whom may have had their years of schooling significantly disrupted.
- Working across different government ministries and departments is important in ATD implementation, including in access to education. Some States have more established processes to enable this, while in others these links are more informal. Regardless, the stronger these links are the better the outcomes will be.

These policy shifts can take time, and sometimes over a decade to implement, but as one participant put it:  
*“where there is a will, there is a way”*

## Next Steps

The second session of the workshop split into small groups to discuss next steps for the Platform. Based on the feedback and ideas that emerged, co-convenors would like to propose the following next steps:

- **Convening follow up discussions on access to education with interested countries:** Some participants have expressed interest in follow up conversations on access to education policy and implementation. IDC and the ADFM Secretariat will work to convene one or more virtual discussions on this either bilaterally or multilaterally in the coming months.
- **Convening national discussions to advance key priorities:** The Co-Convenors are encouraged that some countries would like to continue meeting on these issues in their country groups, strengthening inter-agency ties. Co-Convenors stand ready to support these discussions if and when useful.
- **Continued virtual workshops as a full group:** We have been encouraged to make these more interactive, with more small group discussions. Co-Convenors will explore arranging the next session around a hypothetical scenario. Virtual site visits will also be explored if feasible. After polling participants during the event, the next session on ‘effective government and civil society partnerships in implementing ATD’ will likely take place in February 2021. ***Participants are invited to come forward with good practice they are open to sharing in this session.***
- **Knowledge and resource sharing:** IDC and the ADFM Secretariat will continue to facilitate information and resource sharing between participants on an ad hoc basis. We invite all participants to share resources or information they think would be useful to the group, including policy guides, frameworks, case studies and toolkits.
- **Involvement from those with lived experience of displacement and detention:** Co-Convenors remain interested in exploring ways to give affected communities the opportunity to contribute directly to the Platform in a meaningful way, in order to improve the quality and understanding of our discussions on these important issues. We welcome suggestions from participants in this regard.