

## **PANEL**

### **Understanding Education During Conflict and Crisis: Evidence from Monastic and Karen Schooling Contexts**

#### **Convener**

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#### **Panel Description**

Evidence on how conflict and crisis shape education experiences and outcomes, remains limited - an enduring challenge in the field of Education in Emergencies (Burde et al., 2016). The education landscape across Myanmar has become increasingly diverse and fragmented, with a multiplicity of providers collectively sustaining access to education (Salem-Gervais et al., 2024). This panel presents findings from the first wave of Pathways for Learning, a longitudinal mixed-methods, multi-country study of education in conflict and crisis settings, focusing on two prominent but distinct provider ecosystems in Myanmar: monastic (BaKa) schooling and Karen schooling.

Wave 1 data draws on questionnaires with students, teachers, and principals/headteachers, capturing (i) holistic child outcomes (literacy, numeracy, wellbeing, and social-emotional learning), (ii) exposure to conflict and crisis conditions, and (iii) background characteristics shaping participation and learning. This research is guided by the Education Research in Conflict and Protracted Crises (ERICC) Conceptual Framework (Kim et al., 2026), which conceptualizes how access, quality, continuity, and coherence interact with conflict and crisis dynamics and education system conditions.

The purpose of the study is two-fold: to generate evidence that can assist policymakers and practitioners in making decisions and allocating resources in these two schooling contexts, and to contribute to the national-regional-global evidence base on Education in Emergencies.

Monastic schooling has historically offered secular education following the national curriculum to socioeconomically disadvantaged populations across Myanmar (Lall, 2020). In the current period, it serves substantial numbers of internally displaced children (PPWT, 2024). Monastic schools often operate with meaningful autonomy under principals (monks or nuns) and can provide pathways for transition into the public system when desired. As of end-2024, more than 1,200 monastic schools were operating, serving an estimated nearly 360,000 children, with enrollment concentrated in the primary grades (PPWT, 2024)

In eastern Myanmar, across Kawthoolei, the Karen Education and Culture Department (KECD) administers the largest and longest-standing ethnic education system (Gyi and Waters, 2023). This provision is closely tied to a broader movement of self-determination led by the Karen National Union. Instruction in KECD schools occurs in Karen languages and is embedded in local Karen cultures, histories, and traditions, with strong community orientation and support. In 2023, nearly 110,000 children were enrolled across more than

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1,200 KECD schools, with substantial enrollment across primary, middle and high school (KNU Economic Committee Secretariat, 2023). Given shifts in population distribution and territorial control, figures are estimated to have increased markedly over the past several academic years (ERICC HelpDesk, 2025).

Our panel is structured around a clear analytic arc. An opening framing paper introduces the ERICC Conceptual Framework and outlines the collaborative design of Pathways for Learning in Myanmar. Two case papers then present empirical findings from the monastic and Karen studies. A final synthesis draws these together, linking evidence to wider discussion on equity and inclusion and knowledge production in Burma/Myanmar Studies.

Overall, the panel asks what becomes visible through measurement, what remains obscured, and what these two schooling contexts reveal about the intersection of education and social change.