

ROUNDTABLE

Organizing from the Margins: Refugee Youth Leadership and Education on the Thai–Myanmar Border

Coordinator

Khin Hla Oo

Roundtable Description

Along the Thai–Myanmar border, refugee and displaced communities have sustained education systems, mutual aid networks, and civic initiatives for decades under conditions of protracted violence and uncertainty. Within these spaces, youth have taken on roles as organizers, facilitators, peer educators, interpreters, and emerging leaders. These practices function as sites of learning and leadership development, shaping the next generation of community actors.

This practitioner-centered roundtable examines how these forms of youth-led and community-based organizing contribute to agency building and leadership development among refugee youth. While much scholarship and policy discourse frames refugee education primarily through access, protection, or service delivery, this session shifts the focus toward youth as civic actors. Drawing on experiences from refugee camps, migrant learning centers, and border-based initiatives, the discussion centers lived and field-based knowledge. What does it mean for young people growing up in displacement to organize within their communities? How do these practices shape educational pathways, senses of responsibility, and long-term commitments to community leadership?

Participants will share field-based insights into how youth-led initiatives and community-based programs cultivate practical capacities. The skills youth learn directly influence educational persistence, access to higher education opportunities, and the ability to navigate complex humanitarian and political environments.

The discussion will also address structural constraints. Refugee youth on the border navigate legal uncertainty, funding instability, and limited mobility. How can community-based spaces better support these forms of leadership without reproducing extractive, hierarchical, or donor-driven models? How can such spaces remain responsive to burnout, security concerns, and shifting political conditions?

Importantly, this roundtable centers refugee communities as dynamic spaces of initiative, creativity, and collective action. It highlights how refugee youth actively shape educational institutions, social networks, and civic responses within their communities. Their organizing work addresses urgent local challenges while also contributing to broader cross-border visions of social transformation.

By elevating practitioner voices and lived experience, this roundtable seeks to generate practical lessons and cross-learning that deepen understanding of education as a vehicle for

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social change in contexts of displacement. It positions community organizing as a bridge between learning, leadership, and collective futures on the Thai–Myanmar border.

Keyword: Community Organizing, Refugee Youth, Education in Displacement, Youth Leadership Development, Agency Building