

ROUNDTABLE

Resilience and Resistance: Migrant Workers' Struggle for Rights in Thailand [Roundtable]

Coordinator

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Roundtable Description

Migrant workers from Myanmar come to Thailand with the aim of forging a better life. They come with hopes, but little information. Pre-COVID-19, between Chiang Mai Province and the Mae Sot border area of Tak Province which is adjacent to the Myawaddy border, there were around 120,258 migrants from Myanmar officially registered, and many more who had fallen out of the system or were never in the system. Migrants are only allowed to work in jobs that are considered “unskilled,” ranging from construction, agriculture, service work, domestic work, and certain types of factories such as garment. While more migrants have been crossing the border using the regularized migration scheme of the MOU, there were many others who either came through informal channels or have been in Thailand a long time with stateless status. Under the formalized recruitment scheme, migrants generally feel protected and receive their full labor rights. The others, especially those who work in the informal sector, or in remote or isolated locations where enforcement of labor laws is weak, are vulnerable to rights violations and exploitation. Regardless of the channel, they enter the country, few migrants are aware of their labor rights – what they are entitled to, and how to secure those rights. The formal system of government in Thailand is quite new for migrants from Myanmar. They do not know what benefits they are entitled to as workers, or how to ensure they receive these benefits. When these rights are violated, they are not aware that there are redress mechanisms in place which they can use to claim their rights. Overcoming language barriers is a key step towards realizing their rights. However, there are also aspects of the law that discriminate against migrants, and migration policies that undercut or conflict with other rights. In the end, migrants can access the rights they are entitled to, but they usually need assistance.

BEAM Education Foundation and MAP Foundation have been working to assist migrant workers for a decade. MAP Located in Chiang Mai and Mae Sot, and BEAM works through the network in 7 provinces in Thailand. Both organizations are running a number of programs aimed at empowering migrant workers to receive their proper rights. This includes labor rights, women’s rights, access to health care, youth, and children’s education. As organizers of this panel, speakers will draw on their experience to give examples of how migrants face up to the various systemic problems they face in securing their rights. Panelists will look at the laws and policies in place and analyze how these acts as hindrances and how they can be harnessed to support migrant workers’ rights. Panelists will approach labor rights issues from various angles, including the legal aspects and using a

3rd INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
BURMA/MYANMAR STUDIES
5-7 MARCH 2021, CHIANG MAI UNIVERSITY

gender perspective.

Keyword: resilience and resistance, migrant workers, rights