

Urban Education Project, Thailand



Refugee and asylum-seeking youth access vocational training such as sewing, to improve their chances of future employment.

Country Context

Bangkok hosts an estimated 4,400 refugees and 800 asylum seekers. They come a variety of countries including Myanmar, Pakistan, Palestine, Syria, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Somalia, Iran, China, Iraq, and Democratic Republic of Congo.

Under Thai immigration law, refugees and asylum seekers are considered illegal immigrants. While there have been efforts in recent years to improve the processing of asylum seekers to better determine who requires protection due to the situation in their home country, the refugees and asylum seekers remain highly vulnerable to deportation, arrest, detention, exploitation, abuse and discrimination.

The right to work and higher education opportunities are extremely limited meaning these groups face poverty, homelessness and despair affecting their psychosocial health.

About the project

The Urban Education Project provides educational opportunities to young refugees and asylum-seekers living in Bangkok.

With Jesuit Mission support, our partner Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Thailand are providing training in Thai and English language and vocational and digital skills for urban refugees and asylum seekers aged 15-35 years to build their resilience and independence while living in Thailand. JRS also provides safe spaces for youth to attend peer support activities and build a support network.

The project seeks to reach over 500 people with training, employment and peer support activities in 2023.

Key Project Activities include:

- **Language classes** in Thai helps the integration of the young adults with the host community for daily needs and education. The four-month intensive English language course prepares students for higher education and employment opportunities.
- **Vocational skills training:** Youth receive practical training and internships in a range of vocational skills such as beauty services, dress making and computer skills. Additionally, some students enrol in formal, multi-level digital training courses.
- **Higher education and internship support:** Scholarships are provided for at least 20 students to be able to participate in higher education and internship opportunities.

- **Psychosocial and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL):** SEL courses and learning is integrated across all courses to build resilience and independence among refugee youth.
- **Advocacy, peer support and exchange activities** are organised with refugee and asylum seeker youth and Thai youth and community members, to strengthen support networks and understanding of refugee issues.

Project outcomes and measures

The overall goal of the project is to improve access to education, entrepreneurial, and social integration opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers in Bangkok to enhance their self-resilience.

This is broken down into the key objectives with measurable indicators to assess outcomes and impact.

Key Objective	Measurable indicators
Provide skills training and opportunities for refugees to access higher education and internship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refugee youth have accessed language, vocational and digital skills training. • Increased awareness and participation rates in higher education and internships among refugee youth/young adults.
Promote understanding and awareness on refugee issues among the Thai communities by organizing exchange activities, SEL sessions, and publishing materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange activities with Thai community build connections and an understanding of the refugee experience. • Psychosocial support and social and emotional learning (SEL) sessions build resilience among participants. Youth trained to be leaders in SEL. • Advocacy and awareness activities and materials implemented with Thai community.

JRS staff maintain records on the students' progress and attainment in schooling as well as monitoring their wellbeing. Participation and effectiveness of activities are also measured through surveys, interviews and attendance records. Jesuit Mission Australia staff review regular written and financial reporting from JRS; attend regular update meetings (remotely) and monitoring visits when possible, and provide advice on a range of project management, monitoring and evaluation areas.

Budget

In 2023, the planned funding for this project is \$69,000 inclusive of Jesuit Mission Australia Administration costs (10%). The partner budget has been converted from USD at 0.62

Potential for Pilgrims 100 members to visit

A visit to the project facilities is possible in small groups at a time to minimise risk to the project participants, who may have uncertain legal status. Participants may also be able to meet Pilgrims off-site.

Hear their Stories

Maira*

In 2013, Maira and her family fled religious persecution in Pakistan. Maira came from a culture in which being a woman and from a minority group meant she did not have the opportunity to pursue higher education.

When she first arrived in Bangkok, Maira was on the brink of severe depression as she faced the risk of arrest and deportation daily and lived in extreme poverty. She started to consider opportunities for learning as she sought change in her life.



When thinking of those early days that motivated her to seek out university programs, she says:

"If I tried and failed, it's okay. But if I never try, I'll just be living with regret and it's more painful."

She couldn't believe her eyes when she saw the announcement of a scholarship program for higher education from JRS Thailand. She had never before seen opportunities for higher education specifically for asylum seekers and refugees. The scholarship meant she could study a Master's degree program.



Despite her limited English skills at the start of the semester, she worked hard with JRS support to bring up her skills and progress in her studies. Maira also invested a lot of time in extracurricular events and joined an international students club to connect and to learn.

Maira is extremely grateful for the support she has received and looks to a better future.

"Refugee people are given a second chance with their lives. I was given the opportunity to study in the University and start my life over."

**Name has been changed to protect her identity*