



7th 3C Forum: Inclusive Higher Education for Refugees

co-organised by Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR), the Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS) at the University of Auckland, and Mahidol University in collaboration with UNHCR

On Friday **1 December 2023** (0900 - 1700) at **Mahidol University, Salaya Campus, Bangkok**

For decades Thailand has hosted large refugee populations, with mixed results. In some ways the issues it has faced are unique: Thailand has both refugee camp populations, and urban refugees. Although it has not ratified the *1951 Refugee Convention*; thousands of refugees have found safety within the country.

Thailand remains a transit country for refugees from crises in Asia, and even from crises in Africa and West Asia. Yet the status for refugees is often precarious. Without legal recognition, their rights are limited. The Government perception and approach towards refugees tends to be seen as a humanitarian issue, one of ensuring basic needs, rather than a human rights issue or a Sustainable Development Goal. As a result, many refugees have unclear legal status and this reduces the willingness for refugees to access education, or universities to register them. Camp-based refugees are restricted to the camps, making universities inaccessible. As a transit country, many refugees do not know how long they will reside in Thailand, making plans for long terms university commitments difficult. There is little, if any, connections between refugee communities and the university sector, so these problems go unresolved as neither group has lines of communicating with each other.

However, universities in Thailand can play an important role in formalizing new policies on inclusive education for the government as well as, securing refugees' visibility, protection and contribution to their livelihoods. Apart from the direct contribution of education for refugees, universities can offer safety and stability. They can create long-term capacity development to ensure refugees can contribute to the communities they live in. Furthermore, Thai university programs can adapt to refugees' needs, and ease the problems of language and economic accessibility that deter enrolments. Also underpinning these problems is a recognition that refugees have much to contribute to Thai universities. Many refugee students are well educated and have much value to add to classes through their perspectives. Addressing challenges faced by refugees are best done with refugee participation. A university sector cooperating with the refugee community has benefits for all.

The *3C Forum* seeks to facilitate effective collaboration amongst participants leading to new initiatives to increase access to higher education opportunities for refugees in Thailand. Our main goals are:

(a) to involve as many interested stakeholders as possible to ensure that everyone who has the potential to develop solutions to the challenges of accessing higher education in the region; and



(b) to develop a new vision for the advocacy and civic role of the Thai higher education sector in contributing to the 15 by 30 target (to achieving enrolment of 15% of young refugee women and men in higher education by the year 2030) and strategic responses to ongoing refugee emergencies.

This participatory forum will engage and connect universities, refugee communities and key stakeholders across Thailand in addressing the urgent need to formulate new higher education policies.

The event will consist of interactive sessions based on participatory small group discussions aimed towards identifying outcomes, goals, and next steps towards enabling universities to better contribute to refugee communities. A full agenda will be developed over the coming months through a consultative process. The Forum will have two broad agendas:

Firstly, representatives from a variety of Thai universities and disciplines will discuss how to better serve the refugee community. Discussion will address problems of accessibility, support, and understanding of refugee needs. The stream will have translations in Thai language and bring together refugee students, university program heads, administrators, government officials, lecturers, and local refugee communities.

A second agenda concerns linking Thai universities to the international network working on refugees and higher education. The session will involve discussing how a network of support can be made available through international bodies such as the UNHCR, domestic support through local refugee NGOs, and refugee communities. This also includes how universities from different countries in the region and globally, which have online diploma programs and connected learning experience, can work with and support Thai universities and build new creative partnerships. Of importance is addressing the specific needs in Thailand such as the large transit population, where students may have to leave study programs before completing, can be considered, and the current influx of Myanmar refugees, many of whom are academics and students themselves.

Register to attend

To attend, please RSVP by [completing the on-line registration form](#). For your further questions please contact evan.jones@auckland.edu.ac.nz. Attendance is free.

About the hosts:

Mahidol University is one of the most prestigious universities in Thailand, internationally known and recognized for the high calibre of research and teaching by its faculty, and its outstanding achievements in teaching, research, international academic collaboration and professional services. This diversified institution now offers top quality programs in numerous social and cultural disciplines, including the most doctoral programs of any institution in Thailand.

Opening Universities for Refugees (OUR) is an initiative that brings together institutions that offer, and are willing to offer, higher education courses and/or diploma and certificate programs to refugees



and displaced people, and to create an open and accessible knowledge network accessible by all since 2016.

The **Centre for Asia Pacific Refugee Studies (CAPRS)** is a research institute based at the University of Auckland in New Zealand. CAPRS aims to respond to contemporary challenges of conflict and climate-induced displacement. CAPRS is driven by a transformative agenda that places social justice and human rights as core aspects of its work while working in close collaboration with refugee advocates, researchers, and community leaders to build local capacities in the Asia Pacific.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is a global organisation dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. Their vision is a world where every person forced to flee can build a better future.