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► Trends in child labour in Myanmar 2021–24

A study of Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan States

▶ Trends in child labour in Myanmar 2021–24

A study of Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan States

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Contents

▶ Acronyms and abbreviations	i
▶ Foreword	ii
▶ Acknowledgements	iii
▶ Executive summary	iv
▶ 1. Introduction	1
1.1. Overview of the context	1
1.2. Overview of this study	3
▶ 2. Methodology	5
2.1. Methodological approach	5
2.2. Challenges and limitations	7
▶ 3. Trends in child labour in the targeted states	9
3.1. Perceptions of overall trends and developments	10
3.2. Family and community resilience, poverty levels and the impact on child labour	16
3.3. Displacement and migration, and their impact on poverty	18
3.4. Perceptions of child labour at the family and community levels	23
3.5. Conclusions	25
▶ 4. Operational impacts	28
4.1. Impact of deteriorating security on service delivery	28
4.2. Adjustments to operations since 1 February 2021	30
▶ 5. Child labour case studies	33
▶ 6. Key priority areas and opportunities	42
6.1. Strategies to eliminate child labour	42
6.2. Operational requirements	45
▶ 7. Conclusions and recommendations	47
7.1. Recommendations for action	48
▶ Annex. Research tools	53

Acronyms and abbreviations

COI	Commission of Inquiry
CSO	civil society organization
FGD	focus group discussion
IDP	internally displaced person
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
KI	key informant
KII	key informant interview
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
My-PEC	Myanmar Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour
NGO	non-governmental organization
NMSP	New Mon State Party
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
SAC	State Administrative Council
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes
VSJA	village savings and loan associations
WFCL	worst forms of child labour

Foreword

The Myanmar Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (My-PEC), implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and funded by the United States Department of Labor, has been working tirelessly towards addressing and eliminating child labour in Myanmar. This report, prepared by My-PEC, provides a qualitative assessment of trends in child labour particularly in Mon, Kayin, Kayah (Karenni), and Shan States between 2021 and 2024. The study was conducted against the backdrop of a severely deteriorated security and socio-economic landscape following the military takeover on 1 February 2021.

This study draws on qualitative research, including a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted in early 2024. Despite the challenging conditions, the study captures valuable insights on the trends, causes, and nature of child labour in the target states. The findings indicate a worrying increase in child labour driven by heightened poverty, displacement and security concerns. Moreover, the study highlights the evolving nature of child labour, with children increasingly being drawn into hazardous forms of work, including forced recruitment into armed conflict and criminal activities.

My-PEC has continually adapted its strategies to respond to the dynamic and challenging environment in Myanmar. This study not only provides a situational assessment, but also offers recommendations for viable strategies to mitigate, address and work towards ending child labour in the current circumstances. The recommendations focus on enhancing child labour monitoring, supporting education and vocational training, promoting safe migration, and bolstering family economic resilience. They also prioritize awareness raising, psychosocial support, and safeguarding the physical safety of children, families, and all those working to address child labour.

We hope that the insights and recommendations presented in this report will guide stakeholders, civil society organizations, policymakers and international partners in their efforts to protect the children of Myanmar from the scourge of child labour, and ensure their right to a safe and prosperous future.

Finally, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the United States Department of Labor for its funding support to My-PEC since 2013, and all those who have contributed their valuable time, expertise and experiences to the development of this report.



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First and foremost, we extend our gratitude to the respondents – children, parents, and key informants from civil society organizations, My-PEC's implementing partners, international non-governmental organizations, case supervisors and case managers from the studied states, ethnic partners and organizations – who generously shared their time and valuable insights, making this study possible.

We would also like to acknowledge the dedication and hard work of Ms Hnin Wuit Yee, Research Officer of My-PEC, who conducted the data collection process. Her professionalism and commitment ensured the collection of accurate and reliable information.

We are immensely grateful for the unwavering support and guidance provided by Ms Holly Christofferson, International Relations Officer – Asia, Middle East, Europe (AME), Technical Assistance and Cooperation, Mr Wei Cheng, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, United States Department of Labor, and Ms Maria Gabriella Breglia, Project Technical Officer, Policy Oriented Research of the ILO FUNDAMENTALS Branch Research Unit. Gratitude is also due to Ms Piyamal Pichaiwongse, Deputy Liaison Officer, Mr Selim Benaissa, Chief Technical Advisor of My-PEC, and his team for their technical inputs and support throughout the study process. The final report was edited and designed by Ms Ruya Leghari, ILO Consultant.

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Executive summary

Since the military takeover on 1 February 2021, the security situation in Myanmar has deteriorated, poverty levels have risen – to 40 per cent of the population living below the national poverty line – and the number of displaced persons has increased sharply. The economy has contracted with international investors pulling out, and job losses and underemployment have increased significantly.¹ Democratic space has come under pressure with the military authorities cracking down on civil protest, trade union leaders and political opponents. Human rights violations, particularly of civil rights, have been documented and investigated in detail by a Commission of Inquiry (COI) established by the Governing Body of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

This study was undertaken to analyse and better understand how these developments have impacted child labour in Myanmar, and to provide inputs and advice on viable strategies to address child labour in the current circumstances. It includes a situational assessment, covering trends and developments in child labour in ethnically controlled areas in four states – Mon, Kayin, Kayah (Karenni) and Shan States. It also includes case studies of children engaged in child labour which illustrate key themes and developments in the incidence, nature and causes of child labour in Myanmar. The study was carried out in 2023–24, with field work conducted virtually in early 2024 due to the challenging security situation in the country. The study’s key conclusions of the study are based on the results of the field work, supplemented by the results of other recent studies and research. It is safe to assume that the conclusions have some applicability outside the study areas, even though statistically valid estimations of child labour are beyond the scope of this study.

Key conclusions

This study finds that the military takeover has impacted child labour in the four study areas – and most likely in all of Myanmar – in a number of ways. The top line conclusions are that:

- The risk of child labour appears to have increased since the military takeover. As a result of the deteriorating security and economic situation, more children are on the move, live in poverty, and face restrictions to their movements (such as checkpoints and documentation requirements that are difficult to meet). All of these factors increase the risk of child labour.
- These “outside” factors are significant drivers of child labour in Myanmar (and other conflict areas), and are underpinned by perceptions and cultural norms about who is a “good child” that pre-date the military takeover. They are also underpinned by perceptions and experiences of security and insecurity that are very significant in shaping preferences, for example, for work rather than education when schools are not regarded as safe.
- There has been a noticeable shift in attitudes towards child labour in Myanmar, primarily driven by a desire to avoid conscription. With the renewed enforcement of the People’s Military Service Law of 2010² by the military authorities, and conscription by some ethnic armed groups, many families now regard child labour as a means of keeping their children safe from recruitment into armed conflict. This change in perceptions appears to have contributed to an increase in child labour.

¹ ILO, “Press Release on ILO Myanmar Commission of Inquiry Finds Far-reaching Violations of Freedom of Association and Forced Labour Conventions”, 4 October 2023.

² Burma/Myanmar Library, “The People’s Military Service Law – SPDC Law No. 27/2010”.

- The renewed enforcement of the conscription law has also prompted many able-bodied adults to flee, leaving children behind to take up the economic responsibilities in their households.
- The nature of child labour in Myanmar appears to be evolving. While children are still primarily engaged in agriculture, there seems to be greater vulnerability to the worst forms of child labour. These include forced recruitment into armed conflict, as well as recruitment into criminal activities. Early marriages also appear to be increasing. The recruitment of children into the gambling and scamming industry appears to be of particular concern in border areas (Shan and Kayin States), where children able to speak Chinese. Children are often lured into gambling and scamming by recruiters who target children in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- It is difficult to determine whether the children recruited into gambling and scamming are usually boys or girls. However, other forms of child labour appear to follow traditional gendered patterns. Girls are more likely to be recruited for domestic work or forced into early marriages, while boys are at higher risk of (potentially forced) recruitment into armed conflict.
- Protecting children against child labour and other rights violations is increasingly difficult due to the security situation and the military authorities' policies and actions towards civil society organizations.
- There is an urgent need to adjust both technical strategies and operational arrangements to prevent child labour, protect working children, and ensure that children have alternatives to child labour, particularly its worst forms.

Key recommendations

Based on its findings, this study recommends stepping up action to prevent, address and end child labour in Myanmar. Initiatives need to address the underlying drivers of child labour – some of which are specific to the conflict situation, and some of which pre-date the military takeover – which contribute to increased risks and vulnerabilities faced by children and families. Therefore, the study recommends initiatives that focus on:

- continued child labour monitoring and referrals;
- support for education, including alternative and non-formal education and vocational training;
- ensuring safe migration;
- supporting families' economic resilience;
- supporting continued awareness raising on child labour, notably related to emerging or unrecognized forms of child labour – such as child labour in gambling and scamming, and the exploitation of children in monasteries/nunneries;
- providing psychosocial support to children and young people; and
- ensuring the physical safety of children and families, as well as community workers, other professionals and volunteers who provide to children and families.

For this support to be effective and efficient, it is necessary to take into account the current conflict environment, and tailor specific support services accordingly. It is also necessary for development partners to review procedures and requirements to fit the realities on the ground in Myanmar, allowing support to continue under extremely challenging circumstances for local organizations and community volunteers.





1

Introduction

► 1.1. Overview of the context

Since the military takeover on 1 February 2021, the security situation in Myanmar has deteriorated and the number of displaced persons has grown sharply. Poverty levels have risen – to 40 per cent of the population living below the national poverty line – the economy has contracted with international investors pulling out, and job losses and underemployment have increased significantly.³ Democratic space has come under pressure with the military authorities cracking down on civil protest, trade union leaders and political opponents. A high-level Commission of Inquiry (COI), set up by the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Governing Body in 2022, documented and investigated a range of human rights violations, particularly related to civil rights. Among its findings, released in October 2023, is the conclusion that the military authorities have severely curtailed the right to freedom of association and have consistently failed to fulfil obligations under the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29).⁴

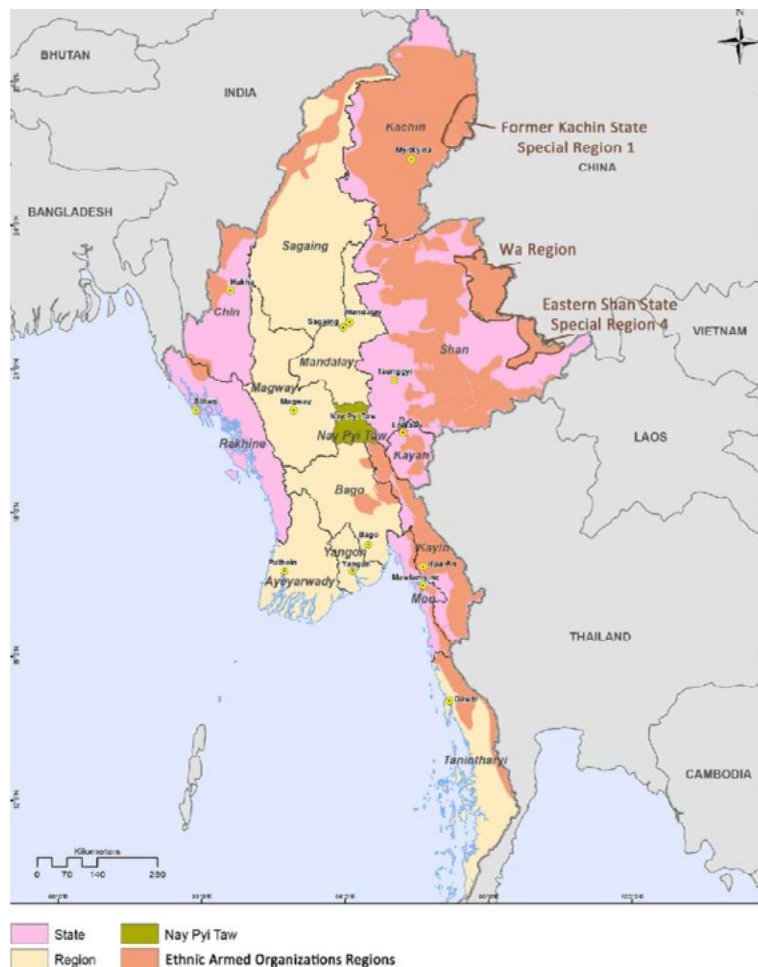
The severe deterioration in civil rights is directly linked to the severe deterioration in the security situation, with increased armed resistance and army retaliation impacting daily lives in areas controlled by the State Administration Council (SAC)/military authorities, as well as in areas controlled by ethnic armed groups. The armed conflict has taken place across the country in an unprecedented manner, and has escalated significantly since November 2023 in at least seven strategic locations across Myanmar, including Burmese ethnic areas, prompting predictions of a potential full-scale civil war.⁵ By the end of February 2024, ethnic armed groups controlled at least one-third of the country and fighting was ongoing, with ethnic armed groups increasingly joining forces in the resistance against the military authorities. The clear pattern is one of intensified conflict in many parts of Myanmar, and continued repression of the population in areas controlled by the State Administration Council. However, the situation is continuously evolving, and readers are encouraged to regularly seek updated information on which areas are controlled by which groups.

³ ILO, "Press Release on ILO Myanmar Commission of Inquiry Finds Far-reaching Violations of Freedom of Association and Forced Labour Conventions", 4 October 2023.

⁴ ILO, "Press Release on ILO Myanmar Commission of Inquiry Finds Far-reaching Violations of Freedom of Association and Forced Labour Conventions", 4 October 2023.

⁵ Jonathan Head, "Myanmar Junta's War Against Rebels Displaces Millions: UN", *BBC News*, 16 November 2023.

► Figure 1. Areas controlled by ethnic armed groups as of mid-2017



Disclaimer: This map has been reproduced from the source cited below solely to illustrate the diversity of areas controlled by different groups. The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map, do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Source: Kun Tang and Yingxi Zhao, "Health as a bridge to peace and trust in Myanmar: The 21 Century Panglong Conference", *Globalization and Health* 13, No. 1 (2017).

Fierce fighting has led to a sharp increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Myanmar. Their number rose from over 1.9 million internally displaced persons in November 2023 to over 2.8 million by April 2024.⁶ As of May 2024, the United Nations Resident Coordinator highlighted the bleak milestone of over 3 million internally displaced persons. This reflects a 50 per cent increase in the number of internally displaced persons within six months of intensified fighting, and a 900 per cent increase since the military takeover in 2021. Over one-third of these internally displaced persons are children.⁷

The upsurge in violence also includes what appear to be targeted attacks on schools and hospitals by military authorities forces, killing and maiming children and teachers.⁸ In addition, in 2024, the State Administration Council announced the renewed enforcement of the People's Military Service Law of 2010.⁹

⁶ UNHCR, "Myanmar", Operational Data Portal database, accessed 17 April 2024.

⁷ European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, "ECHO Daily Flash 6 May 2024".

⁸ Andy Brown, "Broken Sanctuary: Attacks on Schools in Myanmar", *UNICEF* (blog), 22 May 2017; Esther J. and Emily Fishbein, "Myanmar: Airstrike on School Killed Four Children, Witnesses Say", *The Guardian*, 7 February 2024.

⁹ Burma/Myanmar Library, "The People's Military Service Law - SPDC Law No. 27/2010".

This prescribes the conscription of all citizens from the age of 18 up to the age of 35 years old for men, and 27 years old for women. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), a military junta spokesperson has indicated that the intention is to conscript up to 5,000 persons every month, starting in April 2024.¹⁰ This has led to an upsurge in the number of adults and young people fleeing Myanmar to avoid forced conscription.

All of these developments have led to fears of a significant impact on the most vulnerable populations in Myanmar, including children. Increased child labour warrants immediate attention by the Myanmar Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (My-PEC) – implemented by the ILO and funded by the United States Department of Labor – to understand the extent of the problem, and to identify preventative and mitigation mechanisms. My-PEC significantly has already adjusted its approaches to respond to child labour in evolving circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic and, subsequently, to the current crisis environment, including both the security situation, the economic crisis and high inflation rates in Myanmar.

► 1.2. Overview of this study

As My-PEC is committed to refining its approaches in response to the current context, it commissioned this situational assessment of child labour in the ethnically-controlled areas of Mon, Kayin and Shan States. These states were chosen because they are receiving areas for displaced persons, as well as areas of conflict and resistance. Kayah (Karenni) State was added to the assessment due to the deteriorating situation there.

1.1.1. Purpose of the study

The overall purpose of this study is to provide inputs and advice on viable strategies to address child labour in Myanmar in the current circumstances.

The study offers a situational assessment of trends in child labour and developments in ethnically-controlled areas in Mon, Kayin, Kayah (Karenni) and Shan States. It presents the findings of interviews and focus group discussions conducted in early 2024, and compares these with other sources to produce an assessment of the situation of child labour in Myanmar, with a focus on the four targeted states. It also presents case studies of child labour that illustrate key themes and developments in the incidence, nature and causes of child labour in Myanmar.

1.1.2. Report structure

This report is divided into seven chapters. Following this initial introductory chapter, Chapter 2 outlines the study's methodology. Chapter 3 presents the study's findings on trends and developments in child labour, while Chapter 4 presents findings on the impact of the context on efforts for the prevention and elimination of child labour in the four targeted states. Chapter 5 shares anonymized individual case studies to illustrate the general findings. Chapter 6 discusses key priorities and opportunities for addressing them, while Chapter 7 presents the study's conclusions and offers recommendations for the ILO and other stakeholders.

¹⁰ OHCHR, "Press Release on Myanmar: Military Junta Even Greater Threat to Civilians as it Imposes Military Draft, Warns UN Expert", 21 February 2024.





Methodology

► 2.1. Methodological approach

This study is qualitative in nature, drawing on 22 key informant interviews (KIIs) and, where possible and appropriate, 17 focus group discussions (FGDs), with a total of 82 participants (see table 1). These respondents were identified through a snowball sampling technique, starting with ILO social partners, implementing partners and child protection case managers who helped to identify other participants, including parents, children, children involved in child labour, and employers.

Due to the sample size and the snowballing technique used (rather than the randomized selection of respondents), the findings of this study cannot be considered statistically valid or applicable outside the targeted locations. However, its results indicate a high level of triangulation of findings between different participants and across various stakeholder groups (who can be considered independent sources of information). Therefore, this study's findings can be considered a valid and reasonably accurate reflection of trends and developments in child labour, as well as the state of affairs in the four states analysed. Moreover, the findings of this study correspond to the findings of an earlier ILO study conducted in 2017 (cited in ILO 2022), which indicate that child labour rates in countries impacted by armed conflict are 77 per cent higher than the global average.¹¹ Therefore, while this study is not statistically representative of the general situation in Myanmar, it is very likely that its conclusions and recommendations will be relevant beyond the targeted areas.

The study also involved a desk review of available reports and research on the socio-economic and security context in Myanmar, as well as developments in the incidence and nature of child labour since the military takeover of 1 February 2021.

The methodology was designed in accordance with two key priorities:

- relevance to the study objectives and the target groups involved in the study; and
- the current security situation in Myanmar and the need to ensure the safety of field researchers and respondents alike.

Therefore, the design ensured that the research tools could be administered in virtual meetings if travel and face-to-face meetings were deemed unsafe. During the field work, travel by representatives of United Nations (UN) agencies to the target states was not possible.

¹¹ ILO, *Vulnerabilities to Child Labour*, 2022.

Therefore, the key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted through online meeting applications or, where there was no internet connectivity, through phone calls.

The two priorities guiding the methodology also determined the purely qualitative nature of the study. While a quantitative survey may have yielded important insights on the prevalence of child labour in the targeted states, the security environment is such that deploying field enumerators is not possible. Moreover, in the current security environment, respondents are likely to be reluctant to share information with strangers. Therefore, key informant interviews and focus group discussions – which take time and enable trust-building – were deemed more appropriate than surveys.

► **Table 1. Number of participants in the study’s key informant interviews and focus group discussions, by target group, state and sex**

Target group	Sex		State				Total participants
	Male	Female	Kayah	Kayin	Mon	Shan	
Implementing agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs)	3	8	2	3	4	2	11
International non-governmental organizations (INGOs)	2	5	1	2	4	-	7
Community representatives, case managers, case supervisors, teachers and trainers	4	11	2	1	6	6	15
Workers’ representatives	3	5	2	2	2	2	8
Small business representatives	5	1	1	2	2	1	6
Children and young people	6	5	-	5	6	-	11
Children engaged in child labour	3	3	2	2	2	-	6
Parents and guardians	9	9	3	6	6	3	18
Total	35	47	13	23	32	14	82

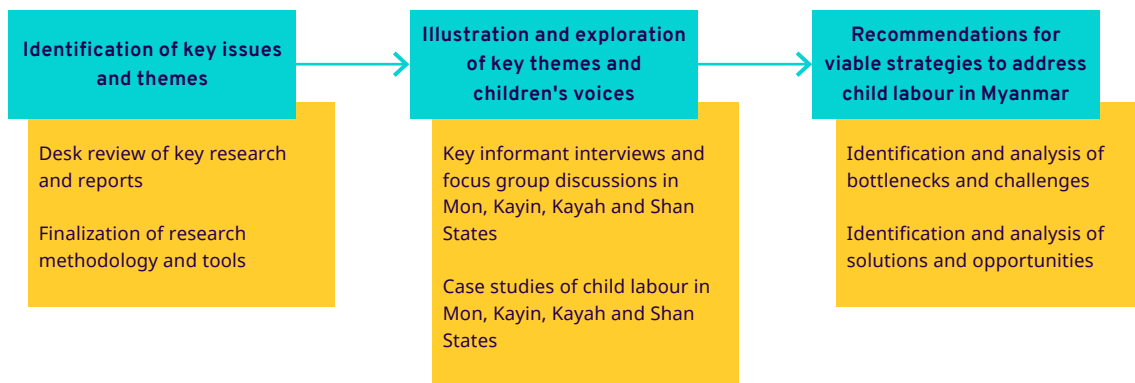
All of the key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted based on semi-structured checklists (see Annex 1), which were translated into languages which the respondents speak. Translations were not literal, but take into account local understandings of key concepts.

In addition to the interviews and focus groups, the study gathered case studies of six children engaged in child labour. Information on these cases was also gathered using semi-structured checklists, designed to be adjusted during the case study interviews as needed. The case studies illustrate key trends in child labour and the complex issues driving developments, as well as emerging themes and patterns seen from the perspective of children engaged in child labour.

Examples include the impact of displacement on child labour, how child labour might become a coping strategy when parents lose their jobs, and how the current security situation affects school attendance and engagement in labour. All of the respondents are anonymized and the names of the children in the case studies have been changed.

The figure below illustrates the study process. The different steps of the process are interlinked and, in reality, the study process was more iterative than the figure may imply.

► Figure 2. Study process

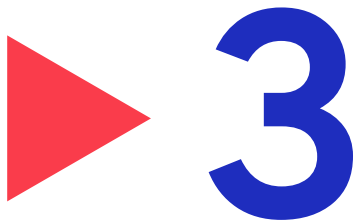


► 2.2. Challenges and limitations

As the design of the study took on board the security situation a priori, the study team did not face major challenges to securing interviews and generating high quality information. However, securing interviews with some participants, such as workers' representatives, proved difficult due personal security issues for the participants, and their reluctance to communicate with "outsiders" for fear of identification by the military authorities.

While the findings triangulate to a high degree and are considered valid and reliable overall, as noted above, readers must bear in mind that the findings cannot be considered representative of the situation outside the targeted areas. Moreover, as the findings are qualitative in nature, this report refrains from applying statistical methods to the interpretation of the findings.





Trends in child labour in the targeted states

This study's findings confirm that the military takeover in Myanmar has impacted child labour in the four states analysed – Mon, Kayin, Kayah (Karenni), and Shan States. Changes in child labour patterns correlate with a significant increase in the number of internally displaced persons in Myanmar, and increased migration to neighbouring countries.

It is important to remember, however, that **child labour, unsafe migration and internal displacement are not new**. These challenges existed in Myanmar before the military takeover in February 2021, although the situation has worsened ever since. For example, there are far more internally displaced persons than before. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there were 289,000 displaced persons in Myanmar before February 2021, a figure which has increased by 2,574,500 persons. The total number of internally displaced persons as of 1 April 2024 was an estimated 2,863,500 persons – nearly ten times the number of displaced persons before the takeover. In addition, there are approximately 60,000 displaced persons from Myanmar in neighbouring countries.¹²

There was already a strong culture of labour migration from Myanmar to Thailand and other countries in the region before the military takeover. One paper by Tun (2022) quotes a 2019 survey in the Ayeyarwady and Mandalay Regions, and Rakhine and Shan States. One-quarter of households surveyed had at least one member who had migrated abroad. The paper notes that migration dynamics have shifted since 1 February 2021. While people from Myanmar largely migrated in search of a better life before the takeover, **after the takeover, people are also migrating to escape a deteriorating security situation, including persecution by the military authorities, fighting and retaliation.**¹³

Furthermore, media reports indicate that the 2024 re-enactment of the People's Military Service Law of 2010 has triggered an increased flow of young people wishing to migrate to Thailand to avoid conscription, as discussed above.¹⁴ This outflow is of such an extent that the military authorities reportedly intends to ban young men from migrating in order to force through conscription.¹⁵

¹² UNHCR, "Myanmar UNHCR Displacement Overview 1 April 2024", Operational Data Portal database, accessed 17 April 2024.

¹³ Aung Tun, "Migration in Post-takeover Myanmar: A Critical Determinant in Shaping the Country's Future?", *Perspectives – ISEAS Yosuf Ishak Institute Perspectives* 37 (2022): 1–12.

¹⁴ See, for example: Kelly Ng, "Myanmar: Young People Attempt to Flee Ahead of Conscription Order", *BBC News*, 26 February 2024.

¹⁵ Aung Naing and Min Min, "Myanmar Junta Bans Conscription-age Men from Leaving Country for Work", *Myanmar Now*, 2 May 2024.

This may trigger both increased conscription and increased informal migration as formal labour recruitment channels may be obliged to shut down and young men may be denied visas.¹⁶

Therefore, pre-takeover patterns shape current patterns of displacement, migration and child labour, and existing vulnerabilities may be reinforced or deepened by the current environment, as discussed below. Patterns are also shaped by socio-cultural beliefs and structures, notably gender roles and perceptions of what it means to be “a good child”.

Before discussing this study’s findings, it is also important to note that impacts vary across different states. These impacts depend both on the situation before the military takeover (such as economic structures and levels of autonomy, for example in the education system) and on the security situation since the takeover. As the security situation is dynamic, it can change quickly in a locality if fighting intensifies.

Overall, the findings indicate that the impacts seem more severe in areas controlled by the military authorities. By contrast, focus group discussions in areas controlled by the New Mon State Party (NMSP) paint a picture of relative stability. For example, open schools and relative safety in NMSP-controlled villages mean that children attend school regularly and there is less displacement and insecurity-driven migration. The sections below describe the study’s findings in more detail, in line with different themes.

► 3.1. Perceptions of overall trends and developments

This section discusses the study’s findings on **perceptions of child labour**. As this qualitative study does not allow for statistical estimations of developments in the actual prevalence rates of child labour in Myanmar, the study looks at participants’ perceptions of trends and developments instead. In an effort to assess these trends, participants were asked to share their views on trends and changes in the nature and extent of child labour within their communities (or areas of operation). It is important to note that this does not provide information on actual trends, but rather on the perception of trends in child labour as a proxy.

Based on study participants’ perceptions, it is difficult to establish a firm, unidirectional picture of trends in the prevalence of child labour. Some participants report an increase in the number of children engaged in child labour in their localities, while others have not observed changes in the prevalence of child labour.

However, the study’s findings do indicate changes in the nature of work and other patterns. First of all, **participants repeatedly underlined that, in their view, children start working at a younger age**. Some reported coming across children as young as 8 years old working full-time. This age is perceived as younger than the common age at which children began working before the military takeover. Myanmar’s Labour Force and Child Labour Survey 2015¹⁷ did find a very low child labour prevalence among 5–11-year-old children (0.3 per cent). Therefore, any increase in the number of very young children engaged in child labour is likely to stand out. It is not unlikely that the perceived increase in the number of children entering child labour at an early age is a reflection of an actual change, and that more children are becoming involved in child labour at younger ages. This negative development is also a likely outcome of the significantly higher vulnerability of many more people, and the reduced ability to continue support programmes.

¹⁶ This development was ongoing at the time of drafting this report. The situation could change.

¹⁷ Myanmar, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, Central Statistical Organization and ILO, *Myanmar Labour Force, Child Labour and School to Work Transition Survey 2015: Executive Summary Report*, 2015.

3.1.1. Impact on education participation

Study participants across the states studied indicate that the military takeover has had a profound impact on children’s education. They note that more children drop out and fewer children enrol in education. It is difficult to determine whether this is primarily a rural or an urban development, as participants report the phenomenon in multiple settings. Some respondents consider that urban schools are safer, while others have removed their children from schools in urban areas and taken them back to their family homes in rural areas.

It is likely that school dropout rates are more closely tied to the security situation (or the perceived security situation) than to specific locations. However, the findings clearly indicate that the impact on school attendance and enrolment is greater in the areas controlled by the military authorities than areas controlled by ethnic armed forces, where respondents report a relatively more stable security situation. Participants from areas controlled by the New Mon State Party generally indicate that schools are open and that children go to school. Some participants also note that families are moving their children from government schools in urban areas to local village schools to improve the security of their children.

According to this study’s participants, there are multiple causes of lower levels of participation in education after the military takeover. **Respondents identify the deteriorating security situation in many parts of the states studied as a major driver of dropout rates and non-enrolment.** Parents in areas controlled by the military authorities worry about sending children to school for multiple reasons, including active fighting, harassment by soldiers at check points on the way to and from school, and the forced recruitment of older school children into the army. Given the high risks associated with school attendance, a logical conclusion in many families is that children are safer at home. Added to this are repeated school closures and the non-availability of education for internally displaced children in some areas. Children who are internally displaced and have lost their identification papers are regularly refused access to schools in new areas. They may also face language barriers when re-enrolling, particularly children displaced to Mon State from the dry zone.

Repeated and extended school closures also impact parents’ and children’s perception of the value of education, according to this study’s participants. As a result of closures, many families do not see the value of education and, therefore, there is an increasing preference for children to work rather than to attend school. This is particularly pronounced where there is a mismatch between a child’s age and the grade they have reached. Children are more likely to drop out if they are “too old” for their grade and older than their classmates. This could also be a reinforcement of dynamics that began with school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A preference for children’s involvement in work rather than in education is also likely to be connected to the economic pressures that many families face. Children’s earnings are needed to put food on the table in the immediate-term and, therefore, longer-term investments in education are not prioritized. Internally displaced families are under such financial pressure that they need children’s income, no matter how small, to cover basic needs. Among rural families who remain in their original areas, finding agricultural workers is challenging, as people (especially younger men and women) migrate out. As a result, children’s labour becomes increasingly necessary on family farms.

According to one key informant, some families send their children to monasteries or nunneries as “junior monks/nuns” to ensure their education and food security. While this may seem an attractive proposition – especially in a country where religious institutions, and the people within them, are held in high regard – the informant points to concerns that children are vulnerable to exploitation within monasteries and nunneries.

The informant reports encountering young children made to work hard, for long periods of time, with little or no education, receiving poor quality diets and possibly being subjected to physical and verbal abuse. While this case does not mean that child labour and/or abuse exist in all monasteries, similar reports have been published in the public domain.¹⁸

3.1.2. General developments in the nature and incidence of child labour

The monastery case also illustrates how **increased vulnerability among children and families after the military takeover may have increased the risk of children engaged in the worst forms of child labour (WFCL), including hazardous work and work taking place in circumstances that jeopardize children’s health and development because of abuse.** While this study does not attempt to offer statistical estimates of the worst forms of child labour, participants generally agree that there is a higher likelihood of children engaging in the worst forms of child labour after the takeover. A number of tendencies point in this direction, as discussed below.

Most families and children still work in agriculture on family farms. This can involve hazards associated with heavy lifting, severe weather, toxic substances and respiratory illnesses, similar to the situation before the military takeover. However, as people flee or migrate and often end up in camps for internally displaced persons, participants highlight that unsafe migration to Thailand is on the rise (see Chapter 1).

In addition, study participants highlight an emerging form of child labour that appears to have become more common over the last two years. **Children, especially from border areas in Shan and Kayin States, are increasingly entering the gambling and scamming industry in areas bordering China.** These children are typically recruited by agents to undertake support services, such as cleaning in gambling locations. Older children may also be recruited into online scamming schemes where gambling may be used as “the hook”. Children from Shan State often speak Chinese dialects that make them useful for organized criminal syndicates who scam Chinese citizens. In addition, key informants report that criminal organizations target vulnerable children in Myanmar for other criminal activities, such as drug smuggling.

Key informants report having seen recruitment agents from criminal syndicates in communities and camps for internally displaced persons, targeting vulnerable children and children who may have ambitions to earn more money. Sometimes recruiters make false promises to lure children into working for them, others may have some idea of what they are getting into. Regardless, **this is most likely a form of child trafficking, one of the prohibited worst forms of child labour.** The picture drawn by key informants is similar to what is described in other reports¹⁹ that have also found that children and young people from Myanmar (and other countries) are trafficked into the (mostly illegal) gambling and scamming industry in the Myanmar-China border area. Other reports point to online recruitment, for example via Telegram channels, in addition to recruitment agents on the ground.

¹⁸ See, for example: Radio Free Asia, “Children Endure Abuse at Myanmar Nunnery, Parents tell RFA”, 23 March 2023.

¹⁹ OHCHR, “Press Release on Hundreds of Thousands Trafficked to Work as Online Scammers in SE Asia, Says UN Report”, 29 August 2023; Mina Chiang and Sharlene Chen, *HRC Briefing: Cyber Slavery in the Scamming Compounds* (Humanity Research Consultancy, 2022).



Children face the threat of trafficking, with some brokers exploiting their vulnerability in camps by initially offering food donations to internally displaced persons. Then, these brokers entice children and families to venture outside for work, or to border areas, often luring them with incentives. Many families and children succumb to this manipulation, following these brokers and ‘donors’.

Tragically, in Shan State, known for high drug production, some children are involved in illicit activities, such as buying, selling for others, and sometimes using drugs themselves. Consequently, these children may be apprehended as drug carriers, and law enforcement may have them arrested and sent to the military frontlines. This perilous situation puts children at risk of being forcibly recruited as child soldiers, with little choice in the matter. They become victims of military and police exploitation, compelled into the role of child soldiers.”

– Key informant interview, Shan State

To sum up, the targeting of vulnerable children for different forms of criminal activities appears to be of growing concern after the military takeover. This study’s participants also point to an increase in informal work across urban centres, rural provincial centres, and in camps, for example, in food stalls and petty trading. Some of the employers interviewed for the study indicate that they are concerned by an increase in child labour, but that parents literally beg them to give their children a job to help their family survive. These employers claim they engage children only as a means of supporting children and families who have no other options. This is an attitude that had gradually started to change, according to key informants, and indicates a possible regression in perceptions and attitudes held before efforts to end child labour began in Myanmar.



Our implementing areas are controlled by one of the ethnic armed organizations [...who have] collected children as child soldiers in the villages. At first, they gave rice, oil and money (one lakh/100,000 Myanmar kyats) for one child to enter their group. When parents did not allow their children to be sent into the armed forces, they approached the village authorities and forcibly recruited. If some families cannot provide a soldier to this armed force, they have to pay 500,000 kyats. Most of the village authorities cannot complain to this armed organization, and provide whatever they request.”

– Key informant interview, Kayin State

3.1.3. Recruitment into armed conflict, and migration as a protection strategy

Several participants report concerns over forced conscription into the army or ethnic armed forces. As discussed above, the State Administration Council has reinforced the People’s Military Service Law of 2010 in 2024. In February 2024, the Restoration Council of Shan State/the Shan State Army introduced conscription for Shan State residents between 18 and 45 years old, regardless of their ethnicity. Concerns about conscription largely relate to boys, but it is important to note that **Shan State conscription concerns both men and women.** Forced recruitment appears to be a particular concern in border areas, as described by study participants.

Forced recruitment, as observed by some study participants, is a driver of families pulling boys out of schools to avoid children being “detected” by the armed forces, and for teenage boys increasingly migrating to Thailand. Participants report concerns that the armed forces do not check boys’ age when recruiting, and solely focus on their physical appearance. This means that boys who appear physically mature are recruited without further justification, regardless of their age. It is important to underscore that there is a concern among families about enlistment not only into the Tatmadaw and ethnic armed groups, but also young people’s inclination to join the People’s Defence Forces under the National Unity Government. The fear of fighting itself seems to prompt families to send their boys and young men to Thailand or other countries.

The fear of conscription appears to have paved the way for a change in attitudes towards child labour. Some families view child labour as a strategy to protect their children from conscription and fighting. In a sense, child labour is seen as a lesser evil than fighting.

This has the potential to significantly increase the number of children engaged in child labour in Myanmar and in neighbouring countries. **Migration, driven by the fear of recruitment into armed forces, is usually informal and facilitated by informal agents. This increases the risk of unsafe migration, human trafficking, and exploitative and hazardous working conditions in destinations.**

3.1.4. Gender dimensions of developments in child labour

Changes in the nature of child labour after the military takeover have a gender dimension, as some forms of child labour mainly involve either boys or girls. This gendering of child labour follows existing gendered patterns in child labour before the takeover, and is closely aligned with prevalent gender roles and stereotypes.

Boys may be more likely to join some of the sectors or occupations wherein participants identified an apparent increase in child labour. These include fishing and construction – typically male-dominated sectors with high risks of hazardous work. As discussed above, boys are especially affected by forced conscription in conflict-affected areas in Myanmar. According to study participants, boys constitute the vast majority of child soldiers recruited both by the Tatmadaw (Myanmar’s military) and ethnic armed groups. Other sectors in which participants identify a potential increase in child labour include seafood processing, salt pans, garbage collection, road construction, rubber plantations, and brick-making.

All of these sectors have been associated with risks of hazardous work and hazardous child labour. However, it is not possible for to determine from this study’s findings whether any increase in the number of children engaged in child labour in these sectors principally involves boys or girls.

Study participants report a clear increase in the number of girls (and to a lesser extent boys) who are sent to urban centres to engage in child labour in domestic work. According to the respondents, girls are often sent from areas with high levels of food insecurity and/or repression, instability and fighting, to urban centres. Girls who remain with their families are also impacted. Several participants reported that girls in general undertake increased amounts of domestic chores, partly to make up for working mothers, partly because schools are closed or inaccessible, and partly because work alternatives are unavailable.

Participants also stress that the pressures on families following the military takeover has led to what they believe is an increase in early marriages, especially of girls. Child marriage in itself is a violation of child rights. It also often leads to married girls dropping out of school to become full-time housewives. Therefore, early marriage drives an increase in child labour.

Participants identify pressure on families to earn a living, combined with the very limited access to alternatives to child labour, especially education, as the most important drivers of child labour, especially among internally displaced and migrant families. This clearly indicates an urgent need to cushion children and families against economic shocks, and to ensure access to education and recreational activities that provide meaningful alternatives to child labour.

► 3.2. Family and community resilience, poverty levels and the impact on child labour

This study’s findings are in line with other sources which indicate that the military takeover has impacted resilience and poverty negatively to a very high degree, such as the World Bank’s Myanmar Poverty Synthesis Note 2022.²⁰ The note analyses the “double impact” of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military takeover on the economy, poverty and welfare levels in Myanmar. It concludes that this two-fold impact has undermined the national economy, plunged people into poverty, and undermined access to basic social services. While the economy began stabilizing in 2022, as discussed in Chapter 1, the prolonged effect of crises means stabilization has been far less pronounced than in other countries in the region. Moreover, the reversal of –pre-takeover gains in poverty reduction and well-being has not been rectified by economic stabilization.

3.2.1. Deteriorating security situation

Increased poverty and vulnerability reported in 2022 appears to remain current, based on the responses of study participants in late 2023. **Participants indicate that increased insecurity is a direct result of the military takeover, as the Tatmadaw forces regularly destroy homes and villages in pursuit of ethnic armed forces. This has led to an “explosion” in the number of internally displaced persons.** As discussed above and in section 3.3 below, internally displaced persons are highly vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity, unlikely to be engaged in education, and are at high risk of unsafe migration, human trafficking and (hazardous) child labour.

Increased vulnerability is not just a concern for the internally displaced and migrant population. In general, people fear for their personal security and parents fear for their children. This came out strongly in interviews and discussions with parents, who worry about their children’s security, especially in areas controlled by the Tatmadaw.

3.2.2. Decreasing incomes, and increasing food insecurity and poverty

Respondents highlight the loss of livelihoods and growing food insecurity as concerns for both internally displaced and migrant families, as well as other families. While internally displaced families face the acute destruction of livelihoods and immediate poverty, families who remain in their communities also often face challenges. These challenges may fuel reliance on child labour. In some areas, such as Mon State, farming families face decreasing incomes due to low commodity prices for crops that were previously exported. Other families face job losses as foreign investors pull out of Myanmar, and as factories, for example in the textile sector, close down.

The impact of dwindling incomes is exacerbated by increasing inflation, according to several study participants. This impression of a stagnating economy and labour market – characterized by job losses, increasing informality and increasing poverty – is in line with available economic data, and matches the analysis of the situation by international organizations. For example, the World Bank’s Myanmar Economic Monitor for June 2023 points out that, although inflation was stabilizing in June, the overall economic outlook remains bleak.²¹

²⁰ World Bank, “Progress, Setbacks, and Uncertainty: Effects of COVID-19 and Takeover on Poverty in Myanmar”, World Bank Poverty Synthesis Note No. 8, 2022.

²¹ World Bank, *Myanmar Economic Monitor June 2023: A Fragile Recovery*, 2023.

3.2.3. Impact on individual well-being and community resilience

Economic challenges and insecurity have a profound day-to-day impact on the lives of many persons in Myanmar. This study's participants draw attention to multiple impacts. First, they highlight that **the nutrition status of children (and adults) is deteriorating**. Not only do they see families cutting back on the number of meals they eat per day – from three to two meals – but they also observe that diets are poorer in quality than before the military takeover, as many families can no longer afford high quality, nutritious food items.

Key informants also report impacts on psychosocial resilience and well-being. They underscore the heavy impact that traumatic experiences – such as violence towards their family members, the burning of homes, and fleeing from their homes – have on children across the country. According to Save the Children, at least five reactions, or impacts, are common among children exposed to long-term conflict.²² These reactions have been documented in conflict areas around the world, and there is no reason to believe they do not also impact children in Myanmar. These five impacts are: (1) anxiety, loneliness and insecurity, (2) emotional withdrawal, (3) aggression, (4) psychosomatic symptoms, and (5) turning to self-harm. These are all serious mental health issues that can impact traumatized children well into adulthood. For example, as highlighted by this study's participants, the psychological impacts of conflict make it harder for children to focus on and benefit from education. This, in turn, affects their working lives as adults, leaving them at higher risk of exploitation and poverty.

The psychological trauma inflicted by war also tends to impact the wider community. Traumatized community members are impacted in multiple ways, depending on the nature of the conflict, according to Bürgin et al (2022).²³ For example, the perceived sense of security matters, as does the sense of community coherence during the conflict. It is therefore difficult to establish, based on evidence from this study, to what extent and in which ways conflicts affect community coherence in different parts of Myanmar. Community coherence, however, is not only impacted by psychosocial factors. The ability to provide security for oneself and one's loved ones, as well as access to basic social services, also affect community coherence and resilience. The poverty, food insecurity and livelihood-related challenges discussed above are likely to negatively impact community resilience on their own. Adding to this, **research participants repeatedly expressed a sense of insecurity that could also negatively impact wider community resilience.**

Children's physical health is also impacted, according to study participants. In addition to both the longer-term and more immediate impact of food insecurity on children's health and physical development, some participants report serious concerns about an increase in physical disabilities caused by landmines. They indicate that landmines are used by the army to control ethnic armed groups' movement, and lead to children losing limbs. Landmines also cause severe psychological trauma and damage to children when they, or their family members, friends or other community members, are killed or maimed. The use of landmines also undermines livelihoods in some areas of Myanmar, as farmers have to give up farming in mined areas.

In light of both food insecurity and trauma, it is perhaps not surprising that study participants report increased drug use among families and, not least, among children. Drug use may be increasing especially in areas where drug production already existed before the military takeover – such as along Myanmar's borders with China and Thailand, where drugs are cheap and easily available.

²² Save the Children, "5 Ways Conflict Impacts Children's Mental Health".

²³ David Bürgin et al., "Impact of War and Forced Displacement on Children's Mental Health – Multilevel, Needs-oriented, and Trauma-informed Approaches", *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* 31, No. 6 (2022): 845–853.

Drugs are, therefore, often used to quell hunger and may seem attractive to traumatized children and young people. Drug use threatens to further undermine livelihoods and resilience, and to increase vulnerability as addiction deepens. It is worth noting that, in December 2023, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that Myanmar has become the world's largest producer of opium, overtaking Afghanistan.²⁴

The extreme vulnerability of some families is also illustrated in accounts shared by key informants. One informant, for example, reports witnessing parents “selling” children in local markets, or leaving children in hospitals out of desperation when they could no longer provide for them. The informant has no information on who children are sold to, for what purpose, or the extent of this practice. However, even if selling children is restricted to a few cases, it is a clear sign of the desperation of some families, and the limited survival strategies available to people in Myanmar. Children “sold” in markets are at extreme risk of the worst forms of child labour and other abuses.

Summing up, this study's participants report that many families and children in Myanmar have seen their resilience and livelihoods undermined since the military takeover, and that many more children and families are vulnerable than before the takeover. This picture, again, corroborates the picture painted by other studies on the impact of the military takeover.²⁵



Due to the military takeover and challenges in sustaining livelihoods, certain parents resort to selling their children shortly after birth, or within the first year of life, to other families. In families with a large number of children, there are instances where they either sell their newborns or leave them in hospitals. The occurrence of child selling is on the rise in our state.”

– Key informant interview, Kayin State

► 3.3. Displacement and migration, and their impact on poverty

The upheaval that Myanmar has experienced since the military takeover – with millions of people on the move through displacement and migration – has impacted poverty and child labour significantly, according to this study's participants, as discussed above. In addition direct effects, such as school dropout rates, it is important to understand that ripple effects are starting to show.

²⁴ “Myanmar Overtakes Afghanistan as World's Top Opium Producer”, *UN News*, 12 December 2023.

²⁵ See, for example: Thandar Hlaing, “Assessing the Impact of the Military Takeover on Families in Sagaing Region: A Case Study of House Burnings in Myanmar”, *Jurnal Sosiologi Dialektika* 18, No. 1 (2023): 71–81.

The migration and displacement patterns within Myanmar since the military takeover are highly complex, as illustrated in the map of migration patterns below, based on the information obtained through the focus group discussions and key informant interviews conducted for this study.

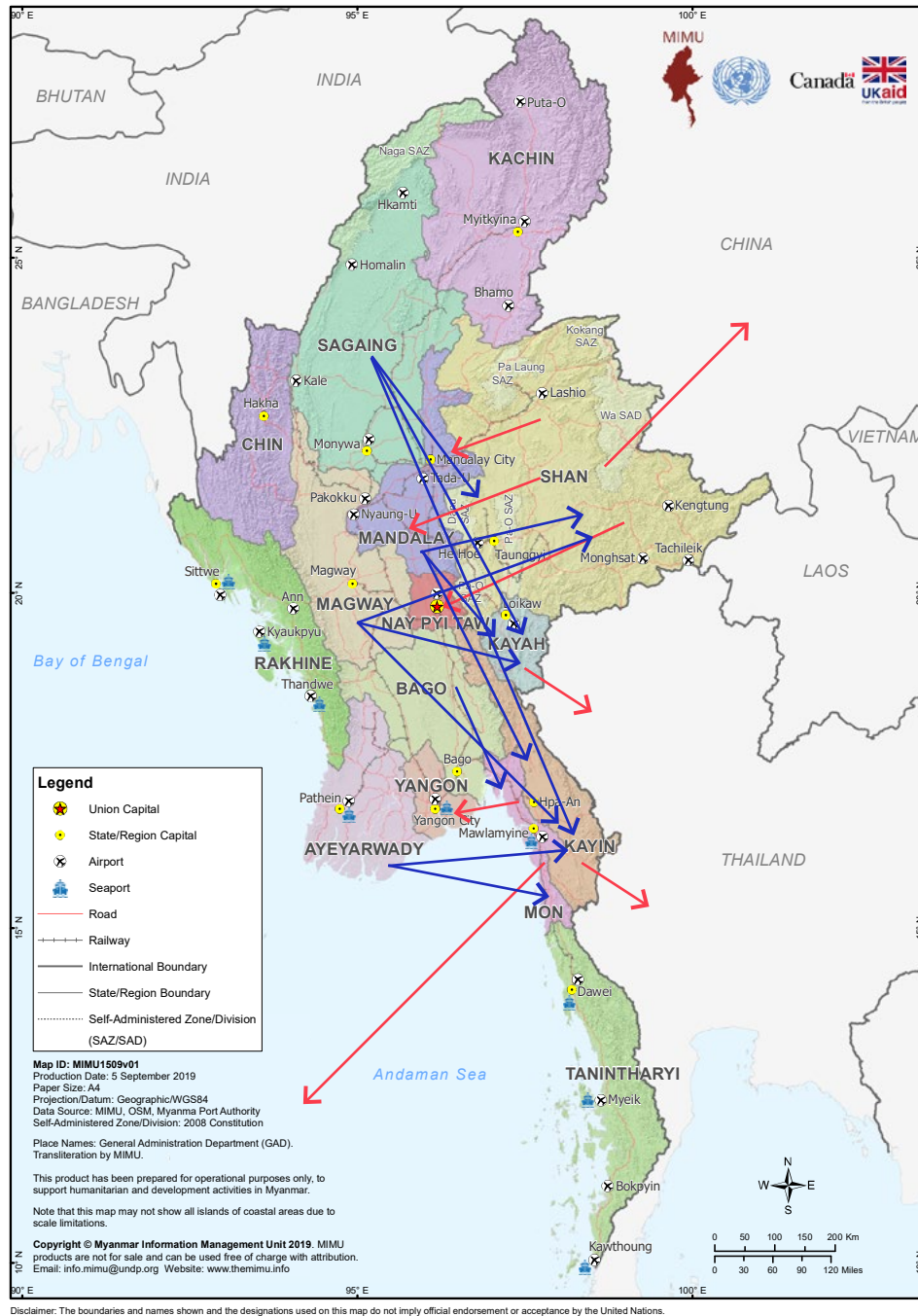
In addition to migration within Myanmar, many families use out-migration to neighbouring countries as a strategy to increase their income and resilience. This often means that children migrate informally with their parents. It may also mean that children get left behind with other family members, notably aging grandparents. This increases the risk that children will need to work to support elderly and increasingly frail caregivers.



There are three types of displacement that I noticed: those [displaced] due to armed conflict, those [displaced] due to problems in the economic sector, and finally external migration due to job opportunities. These three types are increasing since the military takeover. Due to armed conflict, people have migrated into urban areas. Due to the economic situation, people are migrating within the country between states and regions. External migration focuses on Thailand to find better job opportunities.”

– Key informant interview, Mon/Kayin State (edited)

► Figure 3. Migration and displacement movements in Myanmar since 1 February 2021, as described by the study participants (not statistically valid)



For example, **participants from Mon State report witnessing significant out-migration, mostly to Thailand, since the military takeover.** Children migrate with their families, as well as on their own. One participant indicates that children as young as 12 years old migrate to Thailand on their own in search of work. As more and more people from Mon State (both adults and children) migrate to Thailand, the state is facing growing labour constraints, for example, in agriculture. According to some participants, these labour gaps are increasingly filled by children displaced from the dry zone (the Ayeyarwady and Bago Regions). **In general, participants note the increasing substitution of adult workers with children.**



Many adults went to Thailand, so younger children are working in the villages. There are older people and younger children left in the villages. Most of the youths and adults went to Thailand for jobs with good wages.”

– Key informant, Mon State



Children are working on rubber farms as daily workers instead of adult workers – picking and processing betel nuts, doing piece work, working on the farm, fishing, and fish processing. There are increasing numbers of children [engaged] in child labour in these workplaces due to a shortage of adult workers. Some children came from the Ayeyarwady and Bago Regions as seasonal workers with their families, and worked in the fishing sector.”

– Key informant, Mon State

In addition to labour shortages, the separation of families caused by parents migrating to Thailand in search of work also has profound psychosocial impact on children and households. Children left behind with grandparents often have to work to replace adult labour and/or supplement the household income. They also suffer emotionally from infrequent or lost contact with their parents, adding to the intersectional vulnerabilities they face.

While Thailand is by far the most commonly cited destination country by this study’s participants, respondents also mentioned other destination countries, as shown in figure 4.

As discussed above, **the extensive movement of people within and outside of Myanmar is closely associated with increased poverty and vulnerability, which are driving many families to desperate measures.** This, in turn, increases the risk of child labour both within Myanmar and in neighbouring countries. Children who do not have a birth certificate may be turned down by educational institutions when they arrive in new locations, including camps for internally displaced persons.

Vulnerability levels are especially high among children and families in camps for internally displaced persons. Communities hosting these camps are also under pressure.

According to some participants, host communities are sometimes unable to cope with the influx of displaced people, as they lack enough resources to ensure that everyone has shelter and is food-secure. Resource constraints in host communities can potentially lead to conflict. This puts children from internally displaced families, as well as children who are not on the move, at increased risk. Moreover, all children within a community, whether displaced or not, may be at increased risk of the unsafe migration and human trafficking practices discussed above, as recruiters may target all vulnerable children. Therefore, when designing mechanisms to prevent and address child labour in camps for internally displaced persons, it is also important to include prevention and other support measures for host community children.

► **Figure 4. Migration patterns out of Myanmar, in addition to migration to Thailand, since 1 February 2021 as described by the study’s participants (not statistically valid)**



The accounts of this study’s participants correspond to the picture drawn by other sources. For example, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) highlights that children on the move are at greater risk of not attending school, being economically vulnerable, and being pushed into child labour and other forms of exploitation.²⁶ Recent research by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) documents some of the underlying causes of migration in and from Myanmar. It finds that security concerns are an important driver, but other factors also shape migration decisions – for instance, the search for employment and income may be just as important. In IFPRI’s study, 56 per cent of respondents cited employment opportunities as at least one of their key drivers when deciding to migrate. IFPRI also found that remittances from family members abroad are particularly important for rural families and poor families, with 16 per cent of households receiving remittances from a family member residing abroad.

²⁶ UNICEF, *Children Affected by Migration in ASEAN Member States: Myanmar Country Brief*, 2023.

These households had better dietary status and were less likely to be poor than households that did not receive remittances.²⁷

Overall, while it seems that poverty and migration are intimately connected for children and families in Myanmar, the causal relations between these factors are not unidirectional. Poverty – and the search for employment and a better income – can lead to migration, but migration can also lead to poverty, especially when unsafe or irregular.

Similarly, migration and displacement can have negative consequences for children and families in origin communities and in new host communities, especially when displacement happens on a large scale with limited support and infrastructure in place. On the other hand, remittances tend to have a positive impact on families back home, especially from a poverty, food security and nutrition perspective. Therefore, strategies to tackle the negative spirals associated with poverty and movement need to be carefully tailored. These should preserve the positive impact of some forms of migration, facilitate safe migration, and ensure safety for internally displaced people, rather than seeking to end migration altogether.

► 3.4. Perceptions of child labour at the family and community levels

Capturing changes in perceptions of child labour since the military takeover is difficult, as circumstances prevent more extensive research projects from being undertaken, such as follow-up studies to the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) surveys conducted by My-PEC in the past. However, information from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions conducted for this study do indicate some potential developments.

3.4.1. Parents' perceptions

Overall, most research participants indicate that perceptions of child labour have not changed significantly. Parents want the best for their children and would like to see their children secure good jobs, with high and/or stable incomes in the future. However, only two of the 18 parents who participated in this study's focus group discussions report having a child in school rather than working. The other 16 parents have children who are involved in work and do not attend school. All of the parents consulted do not believe that work impacts their children negatively. Most consider their children old enough and sufficiently skilled to work full-time, even though they have not completed their education. None of the parents consulted have concerns about the health of their working children, although a few are concerned that they have not heard from their children who have migrated.

Most parents cite insecurity and/or the need for income as the primary reason for their children dropping out of school and starting to work. This is the case both for parents whose children work alongside them on the family farm, as well as for parents whose children have migrated to Yangon to perform domestic work, or to Thailand to work in the urban informal sector or other industries. Therefore, **keeping children in school and out of child labour appears to be less of a priority due to the circumstances after the military takeover. Parents' first priority is no longer to invest in children's future through education and the acquisition of skills.**

²⁷ Myanmar Agricultural Policy Support Activity, "Migration in Myanmar", IFPRI Myanmar SSP Research Note No. 106, 2024.

Rather, their first priority is to keep children safe and away from fighting (both the impact of others fighting, and of children themselves being forced to fight), and to ensure that they do not go hungry. These immediate priorities supersede education and avoiding the negative impacts of child labour.

In fact, child labour may in some circumstances be seen as a strategy to keep children safe, for example, when children are kept away from risky commutes to school by working with their parents on family farms or by migrating to Thailand. In the focus group discussions, parents shared information 12 times about children already in (or on their way to) Thailand, making this one of the most commonly described events by this study's respondents. Migration to Thailand is seen as a desirable option, both for security reasons and because it is perceived as an opportunity to increase incomes and for children to learn new skills.

It is important to note, however, that migrating to work in Thailand is fraught with challenges. A 2023 survey by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) of more than 2,200 workers from Myanmar who migrated to Thailand after February 2021 finds that informal migrants and women earn very low incomes, sometimes below the Thai minimum wage.²⁸ Migrant workers also face significant expenses as part of the recruitment process, and not all workers can send back remittances. In fact, only about half of the migrant workers surveyed by UNDP (51 per cent) send back remittances. As such, while the expectation of higher incomes is an important driver of decisions to migrate, the reality may be different for a significant number of migrant workers.

3.4.2. Children's perceptions

Children who participated in the focus group discussions share their parents' view of work as the most desirable option in the current circumstances. While some of these children miss school, they all report wanting to work to support their families. This view may also be heavily influenced by cultural norms about what a "good child" is expected to do to support their family.²⁹

Hence, it is possible that some (or perhaps even many) children and parents in Myanmar have developed a preference for children engaging in child labour rather than going to school since the military takeover. This would not be unlikely given the prevalent cultural perceptions and norms that define how "a good child" puts family interests first, and prioritizes earning an income over education if needed. Given this perception – alongside the impact of the security situation, poverty and other drivers of child labour – it is likely that child labour is increasing. It is also highly unlikely in the current circumstances that families will prioritize school attendance over child labour.

As such, maintaining access to education alongside work (for example through non-formal education (NFE) and distance education) may be a more viable strategy in some parts of Myanmar at the present. This needs to be coupled with information dissemination and other steps to protect working children from hazards and risks to their mental and physical health and development.

Knowledge, attitudes and practices surveys conducted by My-PEC, particularly the endline survey in 2023, confirm that parents and children prioritize child labour over education in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the military takeover. While parents understand the possible negative consequences of child labour, and tend to value education, they see children's work as crucial to family survival. Moreover, they hold negative perceptions about children being "idle" during school closures.

²⁸ UNDP, *Exploring Opportunities Elsewhere: Exploring the Lives and Challenges of Myanmar Migrant Workers in Thailand*, 2023.

²⁹ For more on these cultural perceptions, see the knowledge, attitudes and practices surveys undertaken by My-PEC, such as: ILO, *Knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) study on child labour in Yangon, Ayeyarwady Region and Mon State 2015*, 2015.

Parents cite concerns over the security of their children, especially in military authorities-controlled schools, and they view work as the only available alternative to being idle or unsafe. The knowledge, attitudes and practices surveys also document the cultural perceptions of a “good child” as a child who contributes to the family livelihood.

My-PEC's endline survey indicates that many children make an active decision to leave school and start working to contribute to the family income, either because they wish to do so, or because they feel they have an obligation to do so. These findings correspond closely to the perceptions and priorities expressed by participants in this study.

3.4.3. Perceptions among other community members

Changes in perceptions of child labour among other community members closely mirror the perceptions expressed by children and parents consulted for this study. Employers largely perceive work as the best available alternative to idleness and insecurity, and consider that they are helping families by engaging children in child labour. This may also be connected to increasing pressure from parents. All of the key informants representing small businesses report heightened pressures and increased requests from parents looking for work for their children.

Employers may also be motivated by the perception that children are a source of “cheap” labour in times of economic pressures, as they are typically paid less than adult workers for the same jobs and for equally long working hours (up to 12 hours per day), according to the study's participants. Given the changed preferences among both parents, children and employers, combined with other drivers discussed above, it is likely that child labour in micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) in Myanmar has increased since the military takeover.

► 3.5. Conclusions

Summing up the discussion in Chapter 3, this study finds that the military takeover appears to have had a profound and negative impact on child labour in the areas studied. While the study has not generated statistical data on the prevalence, nature or underlying drivers of child labour, its qualitative findings provide a compelling picture of developments in child labour.

First and foremost, the military takeover and the resulting insecurity and economic downturn has made children more vulnerable to child labour. Many children are unable to attend school for various reasons, and often begin working due to a lack of viable alternatives. Moreover, families are under severe economic pressure and need the extra income that children can bring in.

The nature of child labour appears to remain structured along gender lines, leaving boys and girls vulnerable to different forms of child labour. Due to traditional gender norms and dynamics, girls are more at risk of child labour in domestic work, while boys are more at risk in other sectors, such as construction and fishing, among others.


Involvement in smallholder agriculture appears to remain the most common form of child labour. However, children are increasingly vulnerable to some of the worst forms of child labour, notably trafficking for labour in neighbouring countries, as well as for criminal activities in the gambling and scamming industry, domestic work, and forced recruitment into armed conflict.

Child labour is increasingly interwoven with displacement and migration. This appears to put children at higher risk of becoming engaged in the worst forms of child labour, as children on the move become targets for recruitment agents operating informally and, sometimes, illegally, in camps for internally displaced persons. Children in host communities are often also at increased risk.

While these severe developments play out, children and parents appear to increasingly perceive child labour as the “best available option” to keep children safe from fighting and increase family incomes in situations of severe economic distress. It may be useful to further analyse whether such regressive changes in perceptions exist in other conflict situations, and whether they are unique to conflict situations or could occur in other crisis situations, such as natural disasters.

The findings presented in this chapter paint a picture that is corroborated by other sources. While this general picture is incomplete, it can be considered sufficiently valid to use as a basis for programming to protect children from child labour, as well as other forms of exploitation and abuse in Myanmar’s current context.





4

Operational impacts

This study’s findings indicate that the military takeover has had a profound impact on the delivery of services to support children, families and communities in Myanmar, including services to prevent and address child labour. Due to Myanmar United Nation Country Team (UNCT) Engagement Guidance, this report only discusses the impact on civil society organizations’ operations.

All of the key informants representing civil society and (local and international) non-governmental organizations who shared information on their operations reported challenges since the military takeover in February 2021. Operations in areas controlled by the military authorities are particularly affected, where “red tape” and regulations to control civil society have been put in place. While cooperation with authorities representing ethnic armed groups has not always run smoothly, according to the informants, challenges appear particularly pronounced in areas under the military authorities’ control. In addition, the chapter also discusses some of the operational of the adjustments that organizations have made since 1 February 2021.

► 4.1. Impact of deteriorating security on service delivery

Key informants from organizations supporting children and families report that their operations have been affected by the deteriorating security situation since the military takeover, as well as by rising inflation in Myanmar and worldwide since 2022. These circumstances have had a serious negative impact on organizations’ ability to deliver services to children, families and communities in Myanmar.

In terms of the impact of inflation, the prices of basic commodities have increased the costs of essential support, especially emergency kits distributed to address acute loss of livelihoods and displacement. Inflation rates in Myanmar hit a high of 27.2 per cent in 2022, and were projected to remain high at 15.5 per cent in 2024.³⁰ Myanmar has the second highest projected rate of inflation among Southeast Asian countries in 2024, surpassed only by Lao People’s Democratic Republic.³¹ Continued price increases are likely to be a limiting factor for organizations providing support to families and children.

³⁰ ADB, “Economic Forecast for Myanmar [April 2024]”.

³¹ ADB, “Economic Forecast for Myanmar [April 2024]”.

The deteriorating security situation since the military takeover has also taken a toll on organizations' operations. Insecurity makes travel difficult, especially in areas controlled by the military authorities, impacting activities. This became clear for this study, when all focus group discussions and key informant interviews had to be conducted remotely, as security concerns made travelling impossible. The security situation also restricts the movement of social workers, community development officers, child protection staff and others. This limits their ability to conduct awareness raising, hold consultations, and deliver material support in communities.

In addition to security risks restricting organizations' movement, operations are also hampered by regulations imposed after the military takeover. Civil society organizations must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the military authorities in order to operate. According to key informants, obtaining an MOU is virtually impossible and, as a result, many organizations operate "under the radar". This has implications for the types of activities they can undertake. For example, assembling people for the purposes of information-sharing is not possible, and may not be safe.

The military authorities has also imposed restrictions on banking operations, including restrictions on withdrawals from bank accounts, making it difficult for organizations to buy supplies and disburse grants. Bans on phone use also exist in certain areas, alongside travel restrictions and roadblocks where travellers and vehicles are searched. According to key informants, all of this makes travelling very unsafe and most organizations uphold self-imposed travel bans from time to time in order to protect their staff from harm, arrest and detention during travel. As a result, communication, service delivery and providing emergency support packages have become extremely complicated.

Travel and communication challenges have a knock-on effect on civil society organizations' funding situation. Key informants stressed that donor funding for civil society organizations in Myanmar is available, but organizations are unable to make use of funding opportunities as they cannot live up to donors' requirements. For example, organizations are unable to comply with documentation requirements since travel (for monitoring) is restricted, and taking photos is off-limits in many parts of the country.

All civil society organizations – which by definition operate independently of the military authorities– experience harassment and restrictions, according to this study's key informants. They report that the situation is particularly dire for trade unions, which have had to stop all activities due to the military authorities "union-busting" activities. In 2023, an ILO Commission of Inquiry documented widespread persecution and violence against trade union representatives, and identified severe breaches of ILO Conventions on the right to freedom of association and protection against forced labour. The Commission urged the military authorities to put an immediate stop to all forms of violence, torture and inhumane treatment of trade unionists, as well as to end all forced labour, such as forced recruitment into the army.³²

In conclusion, the military takeover and high inflation have had a profound negative impact on organizations supporting children, families and communities in Myanmar. According to this study's participants, the tangible impact on the ground takes the form of less support and, therefore, a higher likelihood that children will become engaged in child labour.

³² ILO, "Press Release on ILO Myanmar Commission of Inquiry Finds Far-reaching Violations of Freedom of Association and Forced Labour Conventions", 4 October 2023.

► 4.2. Adjustments to operations since 1 February 2021

Organizations involved in supporting children and families have taken a number of steps to adjust to the new reality, leading to a continuation of some support activities. **All relevant key informants report delays and adjustments to activities since February 2021. In some cases, this has meant a complete cessation of activities at times when the security situation has been too tenuous. Completely ceasing work appears more common among international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) facing difficulties in obtaining approvals, as well as in Kayin and Kayah States, where security concerns are especially serious.**

As mentioned above, many civil society organizations – including both local and international non-governmental organizations – report keeping a “low profile”, especially when they do not have a Memorandum of Understanding with the military authorities. The means, for example, that the organizations do not hold large gatherings. Instead, all activities involve small groups that do not attract as much attention.

Travel restrictions and poor security have also led to the localization of activities. Rather than head office staff travelling to project implementation sites to carry out activities, organizations tend to hire local staff or engage volunteers within communities, who possess experience and relatively high levels of education. Local staff and volunteers communicate with and receive support from organizations’ head offices to the extent possible through telephone calls and messages.



Primarily, our approach is building communication with community authorities, but we have totally changed these strategies. We established networks of key persons at the community level who have basic levels of education and then provide some capacity building to them. We link up with these key person networks and then implement field activities.”

– Key informant interview, Shan State

While such adjustments undoubtedly complicate delivery, they may have a positive impact on communities in the longer-term, as they involve de facto capacity development at the community level. In essence, they are using a community-based approach that has proven effective in several projects, such as My-PEC. Localization appears to work better for organizations that had already established trust and good working relations with community representatives before the military takeover. It takes time to build trust and establish systems in communities, which is extremely challenging in the current circumstances.

For example, one respondent indicates that their organization abandoned efforts to work in new target communities where they do not already have operational structures and systems in place. There is a risk that children in communities that were not targeted before military takeover will be left even more vulnerable, as organizations may be unable to reach these children.

Challenges are exacerbated by high levels of migration and displacement, making it difficult for organizations to gain a foothold in communities in constant flux. Sustaining support for children and families on the move is a significant challenge which is hard to overcome. As discussed above, children tend to drop out of education when they and/or their families move. Moreover, case managers may be forced to discontinue services and close cases without adequate support or resolution in place, and with no possibility to follow-up and provide further support to children on the move.

All of this means that current systems of operations are no longer fit for purpose, and there is a need to explore different service delivery modalities. For example, new types of activities and services are needed that respond to current needs in an effective way, taking into account the limitations on gatherings and travel. Moving from face-to-face interaction to virtual interaction became common before the military takeover, during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, many education services moved online. Lessons learned from online learning systems during the pandemic could also be useful in the current environment where children and staff are unable to commute to schools, or where children work to augment family income. Online learning still has potential and could be rolled out much further. According to key informants, the development of an online learning curriculum could aid the process.

In conclusion, the current operational environment in Myanmar is extremely challenging for civil society organizations that support children and families, and work to address child labour. One key informant from Mon State clearly summed up the challenges, and the adjustments required, as follows.




We have limited funding from donors, and gaps in supplies³³ as well. The prices of materials are high and [we] cannot get enough of what is needed for delivery to the community. We have had to do a lot of modification of our programme and keep a low profile. The safety and security of staff are a high concern within the organization. Community participation is limited due to migration, and it has affected the programme as well. Even the project volunteers are resigning and migrating to other areas. It affects our programme.”

– Key informant interview, Mon State

³³ This presumably refers to shortages in goods and supplies, such as supplies of electricity.





5

Child labour case studies

This chapter includes six case studies, presenting the views of individual children consulted for this study, in their own words and voices. They each illustrate structures, dynamics and impacts discussed in this report, and offer a glimpse into how these dynamics and impact feel by the children impacted by them. As noted above, the children's names have been changed to preserve their anonymity.

► Saw Ler Lah's story: A 14-year-old boy working in an auto repair workshop in Than Taung Gyi, Kayin State

Saw's story illustrates how children have dropped out of school and started working after the military takeover. Both his own story and that of his sister, who is engaged in domestic work in an urban area, reflect school dropout and the gendered trend of boys engaging in hazardous work, for example in the mechanic industry, and girls ending up in domestic work.



► Box 1. Saw Ler Lah's story, in his own words

We are [of the] S'gaw Karen ethnic group. My family has six members – my parents and three children. My elder sister is 16 years old, I'm 14, my younger brother is 8, and my little sister is also 8 years old. Both of my parents are working in Thailand in a seafood factory, but we haven't had any contact for 3 years. My siblings and I live with our grandmother. My sister is working as a domestic worker in Meiktila town, and my little siblings are now attending school.

Before the military takeover, I was also attending school. My sister was not working in another town. She sold fruit in the village with our grandmother. We were happy at that time because we could live together.

Last year, my sister went to Meiktila as a domestic worker, and I moved to a car workshop to work as a helper and learn some techniques to repair cars.



► Box 1. Saw Ler Lah's story, in his own words (continued)

My grandmother and little siblings live in the village, and they survive with our salaries. I live in the workshop and eat there too.

My sister and I have no time to go back to school. We have very little contact because she can come back only once a year during the water festival [in April], and I can only have a holiday during the water festival too. We can meet during those holidays.

I am now the assistant to an adult worker in the workshop. They don't teach me too much. I'm learning by watching them. They are not patient with me when I ask them questions.

I'm in good health, but sometimes I have body aches when I carry heavy machine parts and wheels. I have some free time when there is no car in the workshop, so I can watch TV, sleep and sometimes can play with other children.

Working is good because we have to pay the debt we incurred when our parents went to Thailand. They didn't send back money to us, so grandmother sold the land and home where we live, and then repaid the debt. But there is still some amount we have to pay back, so my sister and I have to work.

Both my sister and I have to work to take care of our siblings and grandmother while our parents are not in contact with us.

I would like to become a very skilled mechanic who can support our family. I also would like to become a gamer in the future.

I don't have enough time to learn, and no one gives their time to teach me. I have basic knowledge of car repair and mechanics. I can read and write. I'm a quick learner.

I don't want to go back to school, but I want to live with my family. I want to follow my parents and find them. I want to see my younger sister and brother become educated people.

► Nant Wai Wai's story: A 13-year-old girl who works as a street vendor selling flowers in Hpa-An, Kayin State

Nant's story shows how the economic stability and resilience of families have come under pressure after the military takeover. Her story also demonstrates how economic pressures interplay with school closures and the deteriorating security situation. Nant is caught in a web of forces pushing her out of education, as well as in her own feelings of insecurity and the stigma attached to returning to school at a grade that is too low for her age. Nant's story is also a reminder of the long-term impact on individual psychosocial health and resilience.



► **Box 2. Nant Wai Wai's story, in her own words**

I'm 13 years old and I have five family members – my father, mother, brother, sister and me. My father drives a construction car in another area, while my mother sells traditional snacks at home. Now she cannot sell the snacks because she just had my baby sister. My father earns money to support our family but because of the difficult situation, he cannot support us too much. He has stopped working most of the time. Because my father's work is not stable since the military takeover, we don't have enough money to survive.

Since my mother was pregnant, my brother and I sold food, water and flowers at the bus station and terminal for our livelihood. I cannot go to school because I have to earn money for our family to live and have food. We have to pay some debt, and our home is not our own. It is rented.

We are many friends who sell flowers together on the streets and at the bus terminal. We are tired, but we are happy because we feel free.

I was attending school and stopped in Grade 3 because of COVID-19, and schools were closed at that time. After the military takeover, I don't want to attend school. Most of my friends also don't attend school. We work together selling food and flowers instead.

If the situation is good, we can sell up to night-time and we have enough earnings. But the security situation is not good, so we cannot sell food and flowers until late [in the evening] most of the time, so that it is not good for us. If we can sell flowers for 5,000 kyat, we can keep 1,000 kyat ourselves. Sometimes we sell up to 15,000 kyat worth, so that leaves 3,000 kyat for us. We also sell water bottles, tissues, betel nut and other snacks at the bus stop.

In our free time, we watch videos on the mobile phone of an older person and sometimes play TikTok videos. It is good we can use our own money, but it is not good that we cannot go to school anymore. Sometimes I miss student life; it was very good.

I want to be a teacher. My dream hasn't changed until now, even if it is not possible. But I have to do this work [selling flowers]. I cannot go back to school. I have only completed Grade 3, and now I am 13 years old. It is really shameful to attend at this age with younger children. If there is any opportunity, I want to attend night school so that I can become a teacher.

► Moe Thet's story: A 13-year-old girl from Demoso, Kayah State, who works as a waitress in a restaurant in Taunggyi, Shan State

Moe's story offers insights into the life of an internally displaced child who is engaged in, essentially, a form of bonded labour. Moe's family remained in their home village until the security situation forced them to move, eventually breaking up the family. Moe now lives with her aunt, and works in a restaurant. Yet her story also illustrates immense personal resilience, as she makes the best of a difficult situation and maintains her dreams despite the circumstances.



► Box 3. Moe Thet's story, in her own words

I lived with my auntie's family before they sent me to this restaurant to work as a waitress. I don't have a father, as he passed away since [the] COVID-19 [pandemic]. My mother and two siblings live in one of the churches in Hsi Hseng Township, Shan State, together with refugees from our village.

We lived in the western part of Demoso Township before the military takeover, together with my family. My mother was working in upland agriculture, while I was attending primary school.

When the military takeover happened, we didn't move to Hsi Hseng. We lived in our village for a long time and then moved to Loikaw in 2022 when the conflict was intense. Then we moved to Hsi Hseng in 2023, when Loikaw was attacked by a military group. I was living with my family, but we didn't have enough income to survive, so my mother decided to contact her sister and sent me to Taunggyi to work. I was living in my auntie's home for a week while they were finding me a job. Then I moved to this restaurant to work as a waitress.

I carry food from the kitchen to the customers, sometimes wash the dishes, clean the tables, and sweep. Some customers give us money as tips, but we have to pay that to the manager/supervisor. Food and accommodation are provided at the restaurant, but it is not too good. We have only a small space to sleep, and it is very close to the kitchen. Some boys sleep on the tables when the restaurant closes. The restaurant is a barbecue restaurant, so the smell is not very good. Sometimes, I have to take care of the barbecue counter. The restaurant opens daily and closes at 11 p.m. We have one day off per month. I get 100,000 kyats per month as a salary, but we have some penalty deductions if we break plates or glasses, etc.

I think it is good because I can give money to my mother. I don't want to live in the church [with my mother and siblings] with nothing to do. While I was living at my auntie's home, since they are also poor, my aunt found this job for me because I have to work to support my family and look after my siblings.

I want to be a designer. To become a designer, I need to attend sewing classes, but I don't have money and time for classes. I have to support my family because they are living in a church.



► **Box 3. Moe That's story, in her own words (continued)**

My aunt also took an advance salary from the owner of the restaurant, so it is not possible for me to leave.

We want to go back to our village, but my mother and auntie said that we cannot go back because our village has a lot of landmines. Two villagers were seriously injured by landmines in Demoso Township while returning home to fetch food.

► **Htoo Htoo's story: A 15-year-old boy from Loikaw, Kayah State, who works for a purified water factory in Yangon**

Htoo's story sheds light on displacement dynamics as a direct result of the military takeover and rising insecurity. Htoo believes that he and his family are lucky to have left their home town early, as the situation for families who left later is even more difficult. This illustrates the cumulative effect of internal displacement on both displaced persons and host communities, as discussed above in this report.



► **Box 4. Htoo Htoo's story, in his own words**

I'm now working in a purified drinking water factory and transporting water bottles in town. I dropped out of school when I was in Grade 5. I don't have parents, so I lived with my grandmother and my sister's family in Hlaing Thar Yar Township. But now, I've moved to the hostel provided by the factory and live with my colleagues.

Our family moved away from Loikaw in 2022, a year after the military takeover. Before the takeover, we lived together in Loikaw. We could survive even during the COVID-19 by farming and selling farm produce. I was attending Grade 5 before the takeover, and I could follow school lessons.

After the takeover, our area was seriously affected by fighting. My brother-in-law wanted to join ethnic armed groups, but my sister did not agree as they have young children. So, she decided to move our family to Yangon and then my grandmother and I followed with my sister's family. As the schools were closed at that time, I didn't have any document showing my resignation from school [a school leaving/school transfer certificate issued by a student's current school and required for enrolment in a new school]. That meant that I cannot attend school in Yangon. I dropped out [of school] and began working.



► **Box 4. Htoo Htoo's story, in his own words (continued)**

In the daytime, I work in the factory. Later in the afternoon and at night-time, I have to deliver water bottles to people's homes. All the buildings in Yangon are at least six floors high. I have to walk up to the sixth floor carrying 20 litre water bottles that may affect my health. I have backaches and body aches most of the time. When I have free time, I use a mobile phone, watch movies and sleep.

Now all the people from our state are fleeing, so we are lucky as we left early. The situation right now is good for me. As we had to leave from our original place, we migrated to Yangon. But living costs in Yangon are very high, so I have to work.

I'm interested in becoming an air-conditioner repair professional. I want to live my life as a professional person. Now I am using my strength to work, but I don't have technical skills. I have no time, and no money to learn. I've heard that some workplaces accept apprentices for air-conditioner repair and on-the-job training. I am interested in joining, but I don't have any contacts.

► **Nay Zaw Oo's story: A 14-year-old boy who works in road construction in Bilin, Mon State**

Nay's story offers a glimpse of what it is like to be a child engaged in hazardous child labour on a daily basis. His case also illustrates how the military takeover has led to fewer job opportunities, strained family's economic situations, and how this may fuel migration to neighbouring countries. Nay has been working for so long that his aspirations solely centre on earning an income for his family through a job that is manageable. In essence, Nay just wants a job that doesn't involve working all day under the hot sun.



► **Box 5. Nay Zaw Oo's story, in his own words**

I'm not attending school; I dropped out after Grade 2. I migrated with my family to Bilin Township and work with my family in road construction. I have seven family members – my grandparents, my parents, myself, my brother and my sister. My father has a disability and cannot walk, and my grandparents are not working. So, my mother, my brother and I work for our family. My sister is not working, but she is not attending school either, because she does not have a good memory.

We were also working in road construction before the military takeover, but then we had many projects and lots of work. We stopped for about a year because of the takeover. Afterwards, there was less construction work than before.



► **Box 5. Nay Zaw Oo's story, in his own words (continued)**

Adults from our site told me that the military authorities doesn't want to make a better country, so they don't do road renovation, road construction, bridge construction, etc.

Normally we work the whole day under the sun. Sometimes we have to work at night-time, if high-level military authorities staff come and inspect the road situation. I usually start work at 7 a.m. and stop at 6 p.m. We have a one hour break for lunch. Sometimes I sleep under a tree during daytime. If we have no construction work, I play football with friends. As our work is directly under the sun, I sometimes get a fever and headaches. During the rainy season, we don't have much work.

It is good to work because I can support my family. But the military takeover is not good because we don't have much work under the military authorities. There are only three people who are the breadwinners of my whole family. So, I have to work to support my family. I don't have a choice.

I just want to work in the shade. Working under the sun on the road can be exhausting and sweltering. Sometimes, adults may not want to work diligently and ask us to take on additional tasks on their behalf.

If possible, I want to go to Thailand and work there. Many people from our construction site said that there is a lot of work in Thailand, and we can go [through] brokers. When I am 16 years old, I could go to Thailand. Most of the young people from our state go to Thailand at that age and work.

► **Mi Htaw La Wei's story: A 12-year-old girl who works as a fish processor in Ye, Mon State**

The story of Mi and her family illustrates many of the consequences of the military takeover discussed in this report – children engaging in hazardous work that interferes with their education, early marriage, and displacement driven by the deteriorating security situation. Her story is also a glimpse into the psychosocial impacts of child labour as it kills off children's dreams and aspirations. Mi clearly explains her sadness and frustration, as dropping out of school to work in fish processing (which she dislikes) prevents her from becoming a doctor.



► Box 6. Mi Htaw La Wei's story, in her own words

I'm attending Mon school and now I'm in Grade 4. I have six family members – my mother, my sister and her husband, my brother, myself and my younger sister. My mother and sister work in fish processing in a fish paste production small business as piece workers. My brother helps my uncle with fishing. I have many friends in school, and I like to go to school. But I cannot follow the lessons very much as I have no time to practise them.

We were living in another village before the military takeover. But due to conflict and fighting in our village, we moved to this new village, because it is safe. My sister got married when she was 16 years old. My brother-in-law is now in Thailand, but there is no news from him.


Sometimes I am absent from school because I have to help my mother with her work in fish processing and fish paste-making, and sometimes with babysitting. My brother always follows my uncle to the sea for fishing.

My mother said that, next year, I cannot go to school as I have to help with fish processing and fish paste-making. After this school year, I have to work full time. Starting this year, I've been helping with this work already. I work after school and during holidays. Because I'm helping with this work, I cannot attend school regularly and I cannot follow the school lessons. I don't like the work because the smell is not good. When I pick and select the fish, I get injuries from the fish fins. I have to work at night-time when the fishing boats arrive very late.

I don't like these changes. I want to live in my old village, and I want to go to school. I don't like working with fish.

I want to become a doctor, but I cannot go to school regularly. My brother and sister didn't attend school either. I don't want to become like my sister and brother. I want to escape from this poor life. As we keep moving from one place to another, I will have no chance to attend school.





6

Key priority areas and opportunities

The findings of this study clearly highlight the urgent need for continued and increased action to protect working children, prevent child labour, and ensure that alternatives are available when children leave child labour – perhaps even more so now than before the military takeover on 1 February 2021. However, continued action to address child labour requires a change in direction on two parameters. First, it is necessary to adjust strategies to respond to the new realities of displacement, increased poverty and less prioritization of education, at least in the form of formal school attendance. Second, it is necessary to adjust operations to the new security situation – including the persecution of trade unionists, forced recruitment into the armed forces, and other forms of violence and oppression – and “red tape” regulations imposed on civil society organizations operating in Myanmar. Adjusting strategies and operations is an ongoing process that had already started before the military takeover, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. For example, changes to strategies and operations by My-PEC and its implementing partners have been documented extensively in outcome-based research in 2023, revealing how support services increasingly included emergency support.

This chapter discusses key priorities that require urgent attention, both from a strategy perspective and from an operational perspective. This outline of key priorities feeds into the specific recommendations presented in Chapter 7.

► 6.1. Strategies to eliminate child labour

This study’s findings indicate that there are five critical areas to prioritize in order to prevent child labour and ensure alternatives:

- ensuring protection for children on the move;
- continued monitoring;
- ensuring access to education and training for children who cannot to attend formal school;
- cushioning families against poverty; and
- continued awareness raising on child labour.

It is clear that a measure of emergency support will be required in the current context, such as emergency nutrition and hygiene packages for people in camps for internally displaced persons. However, this alone is unlikely to address risks, such as recruitment agents targeting displaced children for the gambling and scamming industry, among others. Outreach and awareness raising activities are also required to ensure that children and families have the knowledge they need to protect themselves against child labour.

Protecting children on the move requires the establishment and expansion of safe migration systems and mechanisms, especially in Myanmar’s border areas and in neighbouring countries. Efforts are already afoot to improve the safety of migrant workers, including through improved regulatory frameworks.³⁴ However, this study finds that families, children and young adults still migrate informally in search of work to Thailand through high-risk channels controlled by informal recruitment agents. Hence, efforts to promote safe migration for migrant workers from Myanmar is especially pertinent now, as the security concerns discussed in this report have added to well-established migration drivers (search for better incomes/employment) that pre-date the military takeover.

Continuing to monitor the child labour situation in different parts of Myanmar is essential, so that organizations that work to protect children have the knowledge required to put appropriate measures in place. Ideally, this would mean the continued strengthening and implementation of a child labour monitoring system (CLMS), alongside a wider child protection system in the country. This will be challenging given the nature of the military authorities. It may be necessary to explore the establishment of a parallel civil society-based system that allows for the tracking of children on the move, alongside the provision of educational and material support to children on the move.

Continued child labour monitoring is also vital to identify and address the worst forms of child labour, including new and emerging forms, such as the recruitment of children in the gaming and scamming industry. It is equally essential to track worrying developments in longstanding forms of child labour, such as increased child labour in domestic work, as well as phenomena such as early marriages.³⁵

Ensuring access to education for children in Myanmar, both those on the move and other children, is vital to promote alternatives to child labour. The provision of education and training needs to take into account the security situation, as well as the limited prioritization of education among families and children, as discussed in this report. Therefore, ensuring access to localized and flexible education is essential. Education must be localized to minimize security risks associated with boarding schools and commuting to school. It must be flexible to allow for light work alongside the pursuit of education, to enable children to contribute to strained household economies, and to address the fact that education is not a top priority for most families at present. Flexible education may seem more relevant to children and parents in the current circumstances. Offering more localized, flexible education will likely entail the establishment and expansion of non-formal education options.

With the erosion of the education system and what appears to be an increasing preference for learning skills or trades, rather than pursuing formal education, it is also important to explore ways to provide skills training and support for income-generating activities to older children and families alike. This will serve as an educational strategy for older children, as well as a strategy to boost the family economy.

³⁴ For an example of attempts to regularize migration from Myanmar to Thailand, see: <https://fivecorridorsproject.org/myanmar-thailand/myanmar-thailand-legal-framework>

³⁵ It is unclear whether children may be forced into early marriages. Therefore, this study refers to early marriages, rather than forced early marriages.

Cushioning the family economy against poverty must be a central element of any strategy to tackle child labour in Myanmar in the current conditions. This study's participants clearly indicate that families cannot afford to send children to school as they rely on their income to meet basic household needs.

For the time being, bolstering family income and well-being may require humanitarian assistance, such as food aid and cash transfers. This is necessary where the economy has all but collapsed, where there are no jobs, and/or where the security situation is so severe that people cannot go to work or trade. Where resources are available within communities, the increased use of community-based savings and credit schemes could be a viable strategy, such as My-PEC-supported village savings and loan associations (VSLAs).

Where an area is stable but has been “cut off”, and only access to the local market exists, other strategies may be needed. For example, study participants from Mon State describe the local situation as relatively stable with open schools, but with severe job losses and no access to export markets. Under these circumstances, the focus could be on economic diversification through income generating activities and support for small businesses servicing the local market. It could also involve agricultural development focusing on the local market, as well as developing alternative market channels and logistics for exports to strengthen the wider economic base in the area. This could include developing agricultural operations to service accessible markets and/or working to open corridors for exports.

This study's findings indicate that families perceive child labour as a survival strategy and a way to protect children from conscription. In a sense, attitudes and perceptions may be regressing with the increased acceptance of child labour as a “lesser evil” than food insecurity, poverty, and participation in fighting. **As child labour increases – including and new forms of child labour, such as the use of children in the gambling and scamming industry, as well as largely unrecognized forms, such as the exploitation of children in monasteries – continued awareness raising on child labour is essential.** Awareness raising will need to address social norms about what being a “good child” means, and what forms of work are suitable for children. These norms existed before the military takeover and My-PEC has worked to address them for over a decade. Given new developments in child labour and changes in perceptions of child labour, children, families and communities need to understand the risks involved in both new and longstanding forms of child labour. Moreover, it is important to maintain awareness raising on the protection of young workers, the right to education, and the intergenerational poverty cycles that child labour can perpetuate. This is important to ensure that child labour is not “forgotten” and de-prioritized as families and communities struggle to make a living. Awareness raising, therefore, is vital to halt the potential regression in attitudes towards child labour arising from the impact of the military takeover.

Across these five priority areas, it is essential to integrate initiatives that target the enforcement of existing legislation related to child labour, child protection and education, while taking the current circumstances into account. As Tatmadaw law enforcement cannot be relied upon to the same extent as before the takeover, approaches are needed that rely more heavily on compliance by families, employers and others. For families and employers to comply, however, economic resilience and access to education are necessary pre-conditions. Given the limited possibilities of relying on the military authorities to fulfil needs, community empowerment and community capacity development should be integrated as a key priority in all interventions through training and the mobilization of community volunteers.

► 6.2. Operational requirements

Operational systems must align with priorities in order to advance the five priority areas outlined above. Operations need to go where the children are, not least when aiming to reach children on the move. This may also involve moving operations to border areas, and even across the border, either through multi-country projects or through collaborative arrangements with organizations in neighbouring countries.

Given the evolving and emerging forms of child labour, it is equally important to maintain capacity development and continuous professional development for staff and volunteers, even when this may appear an unaffordable “luxury” in an emergency context. Staff and volunteers who are not well equipped to address all prevalent forms of child labour are unlikely to be able to support children adequately. The need for continued capacity development may be even more urgent in light of the localization of activities and services used to address the post-takeover operational constraints discussed in Chapter 4.

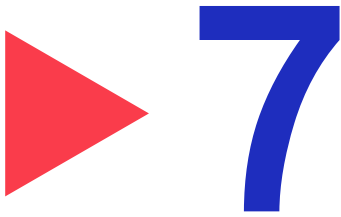
While civil society organizations in Myanmar can and are taking steps to ensure effective operations, adjustments by various development partners, especially funding agencies, would aid these necessary adaptations.

As discussed above, key informants indicate that they are unable to make use of available grants because the situation prevents them from living up to grant management documentation requirements. Hence, it could be an important step to explore options for more flexible grants, with fewer documentation requirements or alternative documentation modes, even if this increases the risk of the misuse of funds. It is important to note that, in the current context, development partners may be looking at a trade-off between controlling the use of funds and the risk that children and families in Myanmar will be left without urgently needed support.³⁶ Aligning grants and systems more closely with the localization of support – which organizations in Myanmar are increasingly using as a strategy to continue their operations – may improve both effectiveness and accountability. This could take the form of the increased use of cash grants to enhance logistical efficiency, as suggested by some key informants in this study.

Finally, it is critical to take inflation into account so that budgets match expected activities and outputs, including in existing grants. Ensuring the availability of additional resources to cover inflation is already standard practice for some agencies. This needs to be standard practice across the board.

³⁶ The tendency of some development partners to view local NGOs and CSOs as vendors, rather than partners, and the impact this has on the effectiveness of support for vulnerable children is also discussed in: ILO, *Outcome-based Research, and Lessons Learned and Good Practices Research on the Implementation of My-PEC in Myanmar, 2023*.





Conclusions and recommendations

This study's findings clearly indicate the military takeover in Myanmar has impacted child labour in the four states studied – Mon, Kayin, Kayah (Karenni) and Shan. These findings correspond to the findings of other studies and research projects conducted after the military takeover, such as research on children's vulnerabilities in conflict areas, and UNDP's survey of migrants from Myanmar in Thailand. It is not unreasonable to expect that the situation in other parts of Myanmar is similar to the situation in this study's targeted areas.

Conclusions on statistical trends in the prevalence of child labour cannot be drawn based on this study. However, based on its findings, it is safe to say that:

- **The risk of child labour appears to have increased after the military takeover.** The deteriorating security and economic situation means that more children are on the move, live in poverty, and face restrictions to their movements (such as checkpoints and documentation requirements that are difficult to meet) – all of which increase the risk of child labour.
- **These “outside” factors are significant drivers of child labour in Myanmar (and other conflict areas), and are underpinned by perceptions and cultural norms about who is “a good child” which predate the military takeover.** They are also underpinned by perceptions and experiences of security and insecurity that are very significant in shaping preferences, for example, for work over education when schools are seen as unsafe.
- **The nature of child labour in Myanmar seems to be evolving.** While children are still primarily engaged in agriculture, there seems to be greater vulnerability to the worst forms of child labour, notably forced recruitment into armed conflict and recruitment into criminal activities. Moreover, early marriages appear to be increasing, largely affecting girls.
- **Protecting children against child labour and other rights violations is increasingly difficult** due to the security situation, as well as the military authorities' policies and actions towards civil society organizations.
- **There is an urgent need to adjust both technical strategies and operational arrangements** in order to prevent child labour, protect working children, and ensure that children have alternatives to child labour, including its worst forms.

► 7.1. Recommendations for action

This section presents recommendations for action, organized by theme, for different duty bearers. While these recommendations are primarily directed at My-PEC, many may be relevant to other international organizations and development partners as well. Civil society organizations in Myanmar may also find the recommendations useful when they develop their localized support strategies for children.

7.1.1. Continue child labour monitoring

Continued child labour monitoring is fundamental to ensure the success of other strategies recommended below. Ensuring safe migration, as well as acceptable combinations of work and education requires knowing about children within communities, including knowing how and where they work, go to school, or move. Hence, it is strongly recommended that My-PEC continue its work to support and establish a community-based child labour monitoring system that can run independently of the military authorities.

7.1.2. Support education

Increasing access to education is an essential response to the highly concerning child labour situation in Myanmar. Children, and their families, need alternatives to government schools (which are not considered safe, especially in light of conscription laws), replacement education where schools are destroyed, and access to flexible (non-formal) education. The latter is vital for children on the move with no identity papers, and to enable safe, appropriate light work – including work on family farms – alongside education. It is therefore recommended that:

- International partners, such as My-PEC through its support for local civil society organizations, should **establish and run localized non-formal education centres as an alternative to government schools and that are open to children with no identity papers**. This could involve establishing non-formal education centres both inside Myanmar and in border regions in Thailand, the latter in close cooperation with relevant authorities and organizations already working with migrant communities.
- International partners, such as My-PEC, should **support online/remote education alternatives which can be delivered by civil society organizations, drawing on the experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic**. This would entail the development of a curriculum, using pre-military takeover non-formal education standards and curricula as a starting point. It would also involve taking stock of existing remote/virtual teaching and learning materials, as well as developing additional materials as required.
- As expanding education facilities in camps for internally displaced persons is needed to protect children from recruitment into criminal activities and other worst forms of child labour, **alternative/non-formal education initiatives should specifically target children in camps for internally displaced persons**. Since host communities are often overstretched, these education services cannot be delivered exclusively to displaced children. Instead, **education services must be open to all children within a community – both displaced children, and children who are members of host communities**.

- It is vital to ensure that children living with disabilities also have access to education. This concern is particularly important in the current environment in Myanmar, as fighting and landmines leave children both emotionally traumatized and with physical disabilities, thereby impacting their participation in education. Similarly, as child labour rates increase, occupational accidents and diseases are also likely to become more common. My-PEC and its partners should **take steps to include children living with disabilities in all activities, particularly in education promotion.**
- Many parents and children consulted for this study expressed a preference for children learning a skill over formal education in the current circumstances. This makes technical and vocational education and training (TVET) an important alternative to child labour. Prioritizing TVET would also be a natural progression of priority interventions under My-PEC before the military takeover. However, relying on formal TVET institutions is not likely to be viable, as children in TVET institutions are unlikely to be safer than children in formal schools. My-PEC should **work with local implementing partners to explore supervised apprenticeship schemes with master craftspeople and traders.** In some instances, this could include exploring how child labour may be transformed into apprenticeships for children who are already working.
- **Education opportunities should be organized in a way that allows children to work in safe and appropriate ways to augment family incomes.** This will entail the use of remote learning and flexible hours that allow children to combine education and work. It also requires appropriate monitoring to ensure that children are not performing work that may harm their health, safety and development, or their ability to attend non-formal education.

7.1.3. Ensure safe migration

The combination of insecurity, economic need, and a tradition of migration means that many children will migrate from Myanmar, either alone or with their families, now and in the future. Working to make migration safe is not only a response to the current situation after the military takeover. It is also an important investment in future protection systems. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- My-PEC should work with other organizations that promote safe migration, both internally in Myanmar and across the border, especially in Thailand, to **increase awareness among children and families on the risks associated with migration.** This should particularly focus on the risks of non-formal migration, which may increase as a result of the enforcement of conscription laws. Awareness raising is also needed on the steps that migrant workers can take to protect themselves and others, as well as information about support and assistance services available pre-departure and in destinations. Promoting safe migration between Myanmar and Thailand is not something new, but it is possibly more important than ever, given the new conscription law. My-PEC can add important outreach and knowledge to existing resources and capabilities.
- When promoting safe migration, My-PEC and its implementing partners should **pay specific attention to informing children and their families about the risks of recruitment and trafficking into the gambling and online scamming industry.** This is particularly pressing in camps for internally displaced persons, where recruiters target displaced children.
- Migration not only impacts persons who themselves migrate; it also affects those left behind. While there are positive impacts, such as improved living standards thanks to remittances, participants in this study also highlighted concerns, notably family separation.

My-PEC should work with appropriate partners to **facilitate ongoing contact between parents who have migrated abroad and their children left behind in Myanmar with grandparents or other family members, and support family reintegration where families have lost contact during internal migration or migration to neighbouring countries.**

7.1.4. Foster economic resilience

This study identifies poverty and economic shocks as major drivers of child labour in Myanmar since the military takeover. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- My-PEC and its implementing partners should **continue to support income generating activities for vulnerable families.** The definition of a “vulnerable family” needs to expand beyond poverty-stricken families to families impacted by fighting, families with children (or other family members) who have disabilities due to landmines, families from heavily mined areas, and families in camps for internally displaced persons.
- Income generating activities need to be carefully considered to be suitable in a wartime economy, where some areas of the country are cut off from external markets and where inputs are expensive. As such, **income generating activities should focus on targeting local markets, and supporting food security locally through agricultural development.** In all cases, appropriate market assessments should be an integral element of the support provided. **This support should include both skills training and business skills development, including financial literacy, as well as support for village savings and loan associations.** Such associations have proven effective tools to prevent child labour and empower families in the past. They could play a key role in financing income generating activities through micro-credit and savings schemes.
- As noted above, families – especially displaced families, as well as poor families – may need immediate emergency support, such as nutrition and hygiene support, before family members reach a level of physical and mental health that allows them to engage in income generating activities. My-PEC should **work with humanitarian agencies to ensure that children and families at risk of, or already engaged in, child labour are targeted for emergency support.** It is also recommended that My-PEC’s implementing partners deliver “combination packages” of limited emergency/humanitarian support combined with support for income generation, including agricultural development.

7.1.5. Engage in awareness raising

This study finds that families and children increasingly view child labour as a survival strategy, and as means of protecting children against conscription into the armed forces. Employers increasingly perceive hiring children as a means of helping families under severe economic pressure. This apparent regression in attitudes towards child labour makes continued awareness raising an important priority. As such, it is recommended that:

- **Awareness raising should take into consideration the localization of services,** as discussed above, **and it must be paired with initiatives to address poverty, security, and access to education and training** in order to be meaningful.
- **Children and parents should be reached with information on emerging trends in child labour in the gambling and scamming industry, as well as the exploitation of children in monasteries/nunneries.**

This should be done without losing sight of the fact that children are still engaged in agriculture, fisheries, domestic work, and the urban informal sector.

- **Awareness raising also needs to include information on the occupational risks and hazards associated with certain types of work, and links to other conflict-related risks**, such as risks associated with working on agricultural land that may have been mined by armed forces. Given the that fighting poses to children’s physical and psychological health and development, this should be a key component of awareness raising activities. Partners also need to find ways to inform children and families about first aid, trauma counselling, and disability rights and awareness.
- **Awareness raising activities must take high mobility levels into account, both within Myanmar and to other countries.** This will includes specifically targeting children and families in camps for internally displaced persons, those in neighbouring countries, and those who have moved back to rural areas or elsewhere for safety, who are living with relatives or others.

7.1.6. Provide psychosocial support

This study finds that the current security situation has had a severe impact on children’s mental health. It also finds significant risks of drug abuse, especially in border areas with longstanding trends of drug production, and growing risks of early marriages for girls. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- The provision of trauma counselling is likely to be a necessary condition for children to be able to benefit from education and other support services. This could include individual counselling, as well as peer support groups for children in camps for internally displaced persons, children who have been subjected to or witnessed violence, and/or children who have disabilities due to landmines or other explosives. My-PEC partners, with suitable experts, should **provide training for implementing partners’ staff and volunteers on supporting children who have suffered traumatic experiences.**
- Drug abuse rehabilitation and awareness raising on the risks of drug use are essential to support children’s physical and mental health, as well as to ensure that children can benefit from education support. My-PEC should **integrate drug abuse awareness raising in localized support services in project areas, and support implementing partners to collaborate with organizations that have the skills and expertise to care for children in need of drug rehabilitation.** This means putting in place a working referral system for drug rehabilitation, as well as including information about actual or potential drug use in the child labour monitoring system.
- Early marriage has the potential to turn students into full-time housewives at an early age. Married life and childbearing at an early age are also associated with both physical and mental health risks. My-PEC should **integrate awareness raising on early marriage into activities and include early marriage and risks into the child labour monitoring system, working with organizations that have the relevant skills and expertise in this regard.**

7.1.7. Safeguard physical safety

To implement operations in Myanmar, it is vital to protect the physical safety of children, parents, other community members, as well as civil society organizations' staff and volunteers. It is recommended that:

- My-PEC should **partner with organizations that have expertise on safety and security, for example, on mine awareness, marking and de-mining** (to the extent that de-mining is possible in the current situation), **as well as on support and rehabilitation for children and youth who have disabilities due to mines**. This could be combined with first aid training in communities where access to emergency medical care is limited, as well as with support for economic resilience.
- Finally, and very importantly, My-PEC should continue to **pursue the localization of support services to the greatest extent possible, by providing funding and capacity development support to civil society organizations' staff and volunteers**. This will contribute to minimizing dangerous travel, while bolstering longer-term capacity development within communities. Localization is, therefore, both a necessary operational adjustment in the current environment, and a long-term opportunity to build capacity that will last beyond military rule.

Annex. Research tools

Tool 1. Checklist for key informant interviews/focus group discussions with implementing partners and other organizations working directly with children and families

Name	Sex (male/female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please briefly describe your organization’s work with children and families to address child labour.
- Please describe, in general, how the COVID-19 pandemic, the military takeover, and inflation impact your organization and its work.
- How does the current security situation impact your ability to work with children, families and communities?
- What does increased displacement mean for children in Myanmar in general, and in your area?
- Have you observed any direct impact on the prevalence and nature of child labour as a result of displacement? Please describe.
- What does the increased number of refugees mean for the children in your area? Have you observed any direct impact on the frequency and nature of child labour? If so, please elaborate. [Skip if covered under questions 4 and 5]
- Have you observed a change in the number of children working since the military takeover on 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes. [Prompts: age, gender, area of origin, etc.]
- Have you observed a change in the number of children performing hazardous work since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed.
- Do you think there are changes in the type and nature of work that children perform? What changes have you observed?
- How do you think the prevailing (security) situation impacts children’s education?
- How do you think it impacts children’s mental and physical health?
- How did you adjust your organization’s activities to respond to the situation after 1 February 2021? What are your main concerns for the children and families you work with? [Possible prompt: child labour-related issues]

- Which opportunities do you see for supporting children and their families? [Possible prompt: child labour-related issues]
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Tool 2. Check list for key informant interviews/focus group discussions with workers’ and employers’ representatives

Name	Sex (male/female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please briefly describe your organization’s work with children and families to address child labour.
- How has the changed political landscape after 1 February 2021 impacted your members?
- How has increased displacement impacted your members?
- How are your members adjusting to the changed circumstances?
- How do you manage and implement your support for workers in these difficult circumstances?
- How is your organization changing?
- Have you observed a change in the number of children working since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed.
- Have you observed a change in the number of children performing hazardous work since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed.
- [If the respondent answers “yes” to question 7 or 8] What do think has caused the changes in the incidence and nature of child labour that you have observed?
- Do you think the type and nature of work that children perform has changed?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Additional questions for representatives of small businesses:

- How has the current (security) situation impacted your business?
- Would you be more willing to employ workers under 18 years old now than before the military takeover? Why/why not?
- Would you be more willing to employ children under 14 years old now than before the military takeover? Why/why not?
- Have you observed a change in the number, gender or age of children looking for work with your business?
- Do you think there are more children engaged in child labour today than before the military takeover on 1 February 2021? Why/why not?

Tool 3. Checklist for key informant interviews/focus group discussions with children and young people

Name	Sex (male/female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please tell me about your family (e.g. how many family members do you have, their ages, where you live, etc.).
- Do you currently go to school? If so, where and what grade do you attend?
- [For children who attend school] Do you attend school on all/most days? If not, why not?
- Do your siblings attend school? If not, why not?
- Do you do work outside your home? If yes, for whom do you work?
- If you work outside your home, what work do you do?
- Do you receive payment or remuneration?
- How many hours do you work per day (or week, if you do not work every day)?
- Do you do work or help on the family farm/with the family business? What activities do you perform?
- Do you help with household chores? If yes, what activities do you perform? How many hours per day (or week, if you do not help with chores every day) do you spend on household chores?
- Has your work changed since the military takeover on 1 February 2021? If so, how?
- Why have you changed work since the takeover?
- Has the work of your other family members (siblings or parents) changed? If so, how?
- Why did these changes occur?
- Do you like your work?
- Do you think your work has any effects on your health?
- Does your work impact your school attendance? Does it impact your performance at school?
- What would you like to do when you grow up?
- Are you worried about your future? Why/why not?
- Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Tool 4. Checklist for key informant interviews/focus group discussions with parents and guardians

Name	Sex (male/female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please tell me about your family (e.g. how many family members you have, their ages, where you live, etc.).
- What kind of work do you do?
- Do other members of your family work? If so, what kind of work do they do?
- Do your children currently attend school? If so, where and which grade? If not, why not?
- Do you children work after school/during holidays and on the weekends? If so, what do they do? For how long?
- Do you think work impacts your child’s/children’s health?
- Do you think work impact’s your child’s/children’s school attendance? Does it affect your child’s/children’s performance at school?
- Has your own work changed since the military takeover on 1 February 2021? If so, how?
- Why have you changed work since the military takeover?
- Has the work of other family members (children or spouse) changed? If so, how?
- Why did these changes occur?
- [If the respondent’s child/children work] Are you happy for your child/children to work?
- Has your view on sending children to work or to school changed since 1 February 2021?
- How many meals per day does your family eat?
- Would you say your family’s income is the same, higher or lower than it was before 2021?
- What are your major concerns for the future? For yourself? For your child/children?
- What would you like to see for your children as they grow up?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Tool 5. Checklist for key informant interviews/focus group discussions with community representatives, case managers, teachers and trainers

Name	Sex (male/female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please briefly describe your/your organization’s work with children and families to address child labour in your community.
- Please describe, in general, how the military takeover has impacted your community.
- How does the current security situation impact children and families in your community?
- How does the security situation impact your ability to work with children, families and communities?
- Has your community experienced increased displacement? If so, where to/from?
- Has displacement impacted the prevalence and nature of child labour in your community? If so, how?
- Have you observed a change in the number of children working since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed. [Prompts: age, sex, origin]
- Have you observed a change in the number of children performing hazardous work since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed.
- Do you think the type and nature of work that children perform has changed?
- How do you think the current (security) situation impacts children’s education?
- How do you think the security situation impacts children’s mental and physical health?
- How have you/has your organization adjusted activities to respond to the situation after 1 February 2021?
- What are your main concerns for the children and families you work with?
- What opportunities do you see for supporting children and their families?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Tool 6. Checklist for key informant interviews/focus group discussions with international organizations and international non-governmental organizations

Name	Sex (male/female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please briefly describe your organization’s work with children and families to address child labour.
- Please describe, in general, how the COVID-19 pandemic, the military takeover and inflation have impacted your organization and its work.
- What does increased displacement mean for children in Myanmar?
- Have you observed a change in the number of children working since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed.
- Have you observed a change in the number of children performing hazardous work since 1 February 2021? Please describe the changes you have noticed.
- Do you think the type and nature of work that children perform has changed?
- How do you think the current situation impacts children’s education?
- How do you think the situation impacts children’s mental and physical health?
- How does the security situation impact your ability to work with children, families and communities?
- How has your organization adjusted its activities to respond to the situation after 1 February 2021?
- What are your main concerns for the children and families you work with?
- What opportunities do you see for supporting children and their families?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Tool 7. Checklist for case studies with children engaged in child labour

Name	Sex (male/ female/other)	Location (state, city/village)	Occupation	Age (if under 18 years old)

- Please tell me about your life today (school, work, family situation, friends, etc.).
- Please tell me about your life before the military takeover on 1 February 2021.
- What are the most important changes/what changes have impacted you the most since the military takeover on 1 February 2021 with regard to:
 - school/education?
 - your place of residence/the place you live?;
 - your work?
 - your free time and the things you do during your free time?
 - your health?
 - anything else you would like to share?
- What do you think about these changes? Are they good/bad/both? Why?
- Can you tell me why you started working?
- What would you like to see for yourself in the future?
- What are the main challenges you face?
- What are the most exciting opportunities?
- Is there anything else you would like to share with us?



Trends in child labour in Myanmar 2021-24

A study of Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan States

This study analyses how developments since 2021 have impacted child labour in Myanmar through a qualitative assessment of trends in ethnically controlled areas in four states – Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan. Based on interviews, focus discussions and case studies of children engaged in child labour, the study explores key themes and developments in the incidence, nature and causes of child labour against the backdrop of a severely deteriorated security and socio-economic landscape. The study's overall purpose is to provide inputs and advice on viable strategies to address child labour in Myanmar in the current circumstances. It is hoped that the study's insights and recommendations will guide stakeholders, civil society organizations, policymakers and international partners in their efforts to protect the children of Myanmar from the scourge of child labour, and ensure their right to a safe and prosperous future.

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