



Minutes of Information Management Network Meeting

8th October 2024, 3PM MMT, online via Zoom

Agenda

1. Trends in Child Labour in Myanmar 2021-2024: A study of Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan States in Myanmar (ILO)
2. Mapping Myanmar's Civilian Vulnerability to Conflict (MDO/UNDP)
3. Adjustments to the IM Network Meeting Schedule
4. Updates on cluster/sector/agency initiatives
5. Activity Updates from MIMU
6. General Discussion and AOB

Attendance

Chair: Ole Hansen (MIMU / UNDP)

Participants: ILO, MIMU / UNDP, MDO / UNDP, UNFPA, WWF, MALSE, SIPRI, IFPRI, ADPC, UNICEF, INGO Forum (19 participants from 11 organisations)

1. Trends in Child Labour in Myanmar 2021-2024: A study of Mon, Kayin, Kayah and Shan States in Myanmar (ILO)

Since 2021, Myanmar has faced deteriorating security, intensifying conflict, increased poverty, a sharp rise in displaced persons, economic problems, and escalating job losses, exacerbating the prevalence of child labour.

To understand the situation, a situation assessment of child labour was commissioned in ethnic-controlled areas in Mon, Kayin, Shan, and Kayah states where lack of resources, conflict, poverty, and displacement is prevalent.

The study uses a qualitative methodology given the difficulties of conducting a quantitative survey under current circumstances. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted in the first quarter of 2024. Due to the non-randomized selection and sample size, the findings are only statistically valid within the study locations. Despite these limitations, there is a high level of agreement between different participants and stakeholder groups, suggesting that its conclusions and recommendations will be relevant outside of the study areas

The topline conclusions were then presented. These included the impact of military takeover and how the deteriorating security and economic situation has increased the risk of child labour. Contributing factors such as displacement, poverty, and movement restrictions were discussed. Significant drivers include conflict, cultural norms, and perceptions of security. Changing cultural perceptions such as schools being unsafe are leading to preference for work over education. Conscription Law also plays a major role as families view child labour as a means of protecting children from recruitment. As able-bodied adults flee conscription, children are also forced to take up economic responsibilities. Evolving forms of child labour was also observed. While children are still primarily engaged in agriculture, more and more are involved in dangerous activities prevalent in sectors such as gambling and scamming industry, armed forces (as child soldiers), and criminal enterprises. In terms of gender differences, boys are more likely to be recruited into armed conflict and scamming industries, while girls are more likely to be recruited for domestic work or forced into early marriages.

Overall trends and developments in child labour and education include children entering the workforce at a younger age (around 8 years old), increased school dropout and decreased school enrolment rates. Age-grade mismatches were also observed. Language barriers and inadequate documentation make enrolling in new places difficult for relocated children.

Trends in the worst forms of child labour were also discussed. There has been a notable increase in early marriage cases. Children as young as 12 are relocating to Thailand for employment due to displacement. To a certain degree monastic schools fill the education gap, but some of these schools are reported to be violating the children's rights and to be exploitative at times. Forced recruitment of children as child soldiers is prevalent, from both Tatmadaw and ethnic armed organisations. Extreme vulnerability is allegedly leading to cases of families selling or abandoning children.

Economic hardship has led to a significant decline in nutrition levels, with meals being reduced from three to two per day and the consumption of lower-quality food. Traumatic experiences have impacted the mental health of the children. Drug use is also reportedly rising. Landmines have caused physical injuries and psychological trauma. The worsened social, health and security conditions have undermined community coherence and resilience.

Different types and drivers of displacement were further elaborated. Changing perception of child labour at the family and community level was discussed in detail including how some parents see migration to Thailand as a desirable option for children's future as they now prioritize immediate survival needs over children's education. On the employers' side, they consider children as cheap labour, paying lower wages while working the same workload as an adult. They justify this practice with increased pressure and requests from parents and that they are keeping the children safe in their employ.

Protecting children from child labour and other rights violations is becoming increasingly difficult for civil society organizations, hindering their protection efforts. Challenges include increased red tape, security risks, inflation and funding limitations. Trade unions have also ceased all activities due to persecution and violence. The adjustments made by organisations include localisation of activities, reducing visibility and even ceasing operations.

Recommendations include continued child labour monitoring and service referrals. It is important to adjust the strategies and operational procedures to introduce urgent measures to protect children, especially from dangerous forms of labour. Education support, including access to alternative and non-formal education and vocational training, is needed. Safe migration must be ensured. Awareness-raising on child labour must continue. It is also necessary to safeguard the physical safety of children, families, community workers, and other professionals and volunteers supporting them.

More in the recently released [report on ILO website](#).

Discussion

- Talks are underway with some border-based organisations on safe migration.

2. Mapping Myanmar's Civilian Vulnerability to Conflict (*MDO / UNDP*)

Vulnerability to Conflict (VCI) index aims to provide insights into conflict vulnerability for implementing partners and other UNDP projects so that they can consider the security situation and provide better support to vulnerable populations.

VCI is an index of pure conflict indicators — it does not gauge the socio-economic situation — that are directly affecting civilians, with no differentiation between the actors.

The data sources used are both open-sourced: ACLED (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data) and Data for Myanmar. The steps involved in generating the index were presented in detail. In the first step, the original 26 indicators in ACLED are filtered down to 19 that has impact on civilians. In the second step, the 7 most significant indicators were chosen by standard deviation and the rest were combined into one indicator termed "Others". These 8 indicators were then normalized using first 6-month as the base period. The weighting process followed where they were all given an equal weight for equal representation. In the final step, the normalized indicators and their weights were used to generate the VCI index. Usually, burned houses data would be applied during the second step, but this was not the case this time due to the unavailability of data from Data for Myanmar (a local

organisation providing free and open-source data on conflict, collected through media and focal persons on the ground).

The selected indicators are as follow.

1. Shelling/ Artillery/ Missile Attacks
2. Remote explosion/ landmine/ IED
3. Attack
4. Arrest
5. Displacement
6. Civilian Fatalities
7. Airstrike
8. Others

Geographically, the index measures at the township level. It is updated every 6 months.

Some limitations were discussed. The index does not consider urban/rural divide and is gender blind. Since most of the data relies on media reporting, there might be some underreporting and some misrepresentation.

Trends across 8 indicators was briefly presented. This starts from 2020 to better understand the changes since the 2021 military takeover. Civilian fatalities are the most prevalent throughout this period. Maps showing the overall VCI and individual indicators at the township level was also presented, highlighting the hotspots. Trends for states and regions were presented. The VCI scores for top 10% of the townships were also broken down by state and region and by the indicators. In conclusion, it shows that Sagaing, Rakhine, Shan (North), Tanintharyi, Kayah and Kayin are the most vulnerable areas.

The [updated dashboard](#) is now available to explore.

3. Adjustments to the IM Network Meeting Schedule

Currently, the IM network meetings are organised every two months for both Myanmar and English language chapters. Given that the attendance rates have been going down a bit and the overlapping members that mostly speak Myanmar language, it was proposed to change the meeting schedule to quarterly for each language group starting in 2025 with slightly longer meetings (hence a total of 4 meetings in English and 4 meetings in Myanmar language per year) The meetings will be organized in an alternating arrangement to limit the number of presentations being repeated in both meetings.

There were no objections and by consensus, it was agreed to proceed with the quarterly schedule.

4. Updates on Cluster/Sector/Agency initiatives

Other participants did not provide any updates on their activities.

5. Activity Updates from MIMU

October

- Products from latest MIMU HDP Nexus Round (Dashboards and maps)
- Landmine Infographics Update

November

- IM Workshop
- Data Visualisation and Communications Training
- Gender Infographic Updates (16 Days Campaign)

December

- Excel Distance Learning Training

6. AOB and other discussions

An email will be sent out to IM network members and other partners if they have anything to present in December. If they have, there might be an ad-hoc meeting in December. Otherwise, as per the revised schedule, the next regular meeting will be in the first half of January 2025.