Education in Emergency and Child Protection Joint Needs Assessment

Myanmar

Executive Summary

The humanitarian crisis in Myanmar has left poverty levels not seen since 2005 with almost half the population unable to make ends meet, and more than 1.1 million displaced people across the country since the military takeover in February 2021. Ethnic and religious tensions, political polarization, human rights violations, and economic challenges are underlying factors driving the crisis, while limited national capacities and access constraints, and funding gaps have hindered international response. The closure of schools due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of the February 2021 coup d'état have interrupted education for almost two full years. Safety concerns have also been a major factor in keeping children out of school due to attacks on schools, occupation by armed groups and displaced populations, and threats to children's safety.

The Education in Emergency (EiE) and Child Protection (CP) Joint Needs Assessment (JNA) aims to provide further evidence on the current situation of children in Myanmar.

Due to the ongoing conflict in the country, a feasibility study was first conducted between June and July 2022 to determine the territories with secure access for data collection by the Education and CP AoR partners. Following in September 2022, a child participation risks, and mitigation workshop took place to determine the feasibility of consulting children as part of the JNA. The JNA used a mixed methodological approach of qualitative and quantitative data collection tools to collect information on schools[1], in-school children, and out-of-school children. The tools used included a school survey, key informant interviews with caregivers and people with relevant knowledge on education and child protection at the township level, as well as focus group discussions with high-school-aged children (children aged 14-17 years). Data collection took place in 27 townships of nine States/Regions — Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Magway, Rakhine, Sagaing, Shan (north), and Shan (south) — between November and December 2022, with questionnaires available in Myanmar language, Ta Ang, and Kachin languages.

The JNA presents limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results. The data was not representative, neither at the national nor at the state level due to restricted access to geographical areas because of the ongoing conflict and later bureaucratic impediments such as the introduction of the New Organizations Registration Law mid-way the data collection exercise. Furthermore, the data was collected through a purposive sample (i.e., implementing partners were given the choice of what schools to visit), potentially leading to a selection bias. Only caregivers with at least one child enrolled in **informal** school were interviewed as part of this assessment. Furthermore, partners only interviewed caregivers when considering the setting to be safe. Concerning child consultations, similar limitations apply: child consultations only took place in Kayin and Magway states, only adolescent children were targeted (for a choice based on preliminary considerations) and children to partake were selected purposively by the partner facilitating such consultations. A further limitation is that boys and girls were consulted in mixed groups, which limits data disaggregation by sex. Additionally, small sample sizes limit the accuracy of disaggregated results, and caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions from them. All in all, the results presented in this report should be considered as **indicative only** of regions where humanitarian actor have access.

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[1] This assessment covered both formal and informal schools, definitions of these terms can be found in the full report.

Key Findings

Access and Barriers to Education

- In assessed townships, the coup d'état has had a significant impact on the supply and demand of different types of schools/education, with an increase in demand for non-state-run schools/learning centers and some government-run schools being closed.

    o 11 out of the 26 assessed townships by the KII on education, reported that at least 1 school that was operating prior to March 2020 permanently closed and stopped providing learning activities since then. The Ministry of Education (MoE) Schools was the type of schools that closed in the higher number of townships: 10 out of 11 townships.

    o School Survey also supports the point that the coup d'état led to a reconfiguration of school supply: 22% of the 306 assessed schools in 24 townships reported to have been established after March 2020. Only 5% of assessed formal schools did not exist before the COVID-19 outbreak while this proportion increases to 25% for private and informal schools.

    o Among interviewed KI caregivers, 38% reported that they would like to switch their children to a different school if there were no constraints such as financial challenges, no security concerns, accessibility issues, or any other barriers. KI caregivers most frequently reported that they would like to switch their children to MoE and private schools. The most frequent reason why they would like to do so is "better job opportunity after school", followed closely by "to learn and improve their English proficiency".

- The four most reported reasons for closure of schools in these townships seem to be a direct or indirect consequence of the armed conflict: "For security reasons" was reported as one of the main reasons in six out of 11 assessed townships, followed by "Authorities instructed to close the school", "The area is/was under conflict", and "Not enough available teaching staff".

- Most of the schools reported an increase in the total number of enrolled students for all school levels in the current school year (2022-2023) compared to the 2019-2020 school year. However, these results are not necessarily in contradiction with the fact that enrollment has decreased at the national level, as suggested by secondary data. One possible explanation for this discrepancy is that the total number of schools in the assessed townships has decreased between 2020 and 2022, and the remaining schools have absorbed the students from the closed schools.

- From KI caregivers' point of view, the most salient need to improve both girls' and boys' access to education in their community is related to in-kind support and in cash form, followed by raising awareness among KI caregivers about the importance of education, and then appeared two needs related to teachers: appointing more teachers and providing training to the teachers (especially volunteer teachers) to ensure a better education. KIIs

on education provided almost similar results. Consultations with children also indicated that devaluing the importance of education is the main cause of school drop-out that highlights the importance of raising awareness amongst children and parents.

- According to the results of a school survey, language barriers pose a significant challenge to learning, with 28% of schools reporting at least one student who does not speak the language of instruction.

- In roughly half of the assessed townships by the KII on education, it has been reported that boys and girls with disabilities face challenges accessing education services. The most reported barrier that boys and girls with disability face to access education in the assessed townships is the lack of adequate infrastructure for them. Indeed, 45% of assessed schools did not have accessible classrooms, 80% lacked toilets that catered to limited mobility or vision, 45% lacked accessible hand washing facilities, and almost 50% did not have recreational spaces that were accessible to children with disabilities. In almost 60% of assessed schools, it was reported that no, or almost no teachers, have been trained to cater for the needs of children with disabilities.

- Of the 26 townships assessed by the KII on education, only two had no IDP children enrolled in any school or almost any school (Shan North and Magway), according to KIs.

- 35% of the assessed schools had at least one displaced child enrolled. Most of them (82%) reported an increase in the number of enrolled IDP children in the current school year (2022-2033) in comparison to the school year before COVID-19 (2019-2020).13% of enrolled students were identified as children who had been displaced in the last two years.

- Schools with IDP students enrolled were asked about the additional learning challenges they faced: only 18% reported that IDP students were not facing any additional learning challenges in relation to their status. The most reported challenges for IDP students were a lack of financial resources (24%), language difficulties (23%), difficulty keeping up with coursework due to missed schooling (22%), and a lack of documentation (20%).

- According to consultations with high-school aged children (aged 14-17), the top-five reasons why adolescent boys and girls drop out of school are: 1) children do not value the importance of education; 2) financial reasons; 3) political situation; 4) distance from school; and 5) students being below grade level. Additionally, other reasons mentioned by children include child marriage and needing to prioritize younger siblings' education.

Teaching and Learning Conditions

- During the 2021-2022 school year, the de facto authorities closed all public schools on July 9, 2021, in response to the third wave of COVID-19. Schools were instructed to re-open on November 1, 2021, resulting in around 16 weeks of school closures. However, the assessed schools were closed for an average of 25 weeks, with some schools closed for the entire school year (36 weeks). The main reasons for school closures were COVID-related (fear of COVID-19 or actual infections), followed by conflict-related (insecurity in

the area or protection concerns), and the lack of teachers. Approximately 75% of KI caregivers reported that COVID-19 impacted negatively on their children's education outcomes, and 66% reported that the coup d'état had a negative effect.

- Besides the above-mentioned impact of the political situation voted by children as the third main cause of school drop-out, consultations with children also showed that whether directly or indirectly, COVID-19 has had a harmful effect on children's wellbeing and reduced their right to education. Children indicated having suffered school closures which resulted in increased drop-out for several reasons, and they continue to fear that schools may close again.

- KI caregivers have reported that their children's learning has been adversely affected by the coup in several ways. Most KI caregivers cited safety concerns as the primary reason, with many schools intermittently closed due to conflict and others choosing not to send their children to school for fear of their safety. The latter finding is echoed by children taking part in consultations. Many KI caregivers and children taking part in consultations also noted that school closures had negatively impacted their children's previous levels of knowledge, leading to a loss of motivation to learn and difficulty catching up with learning when they resumed. In addition, the conflict has also had a significant impact on children's mental health and psychological wellbeing, which in turn has affected their ability to learn. One caregiver stated that *"children are scared, mentally hurt, and unhappy".* Finally, some KI caregivers reported a lack of teachers or a decrease in the quality of teaching due to the conflict. One caregiver reported, for instance, that *"teachers who are currently working just have a high school degree, so compared to the teachers before the coup d'état, their teaching quality is lower"*.

Learning Environment

- Most of the assessed schools reported operating in a solid finished building (70%). This proportion is larger among formal schools (85%) and lower among informal ones (67%).

- Overall, 18% of the classrooms among assessed schools, were reported to be tents or temporary structures (with some of the components of the building structure being made of what was perceived as unsustainable materials such as tin roof, bamboo walls etc.)

- Regarding sanitation facilities, assessed schools reported an average of 1 sanitation facility per 53 students, with informal schools recording a higher ratio. The overall average is quite high taking as a reference the sphere standards on WASH at school[2], especially for girls. In addition, 66% of schools reported that toilets are not separated for children and adults, 45% that they are not gender-segregated, and 27% that they cannot be locked from the inside. Sanitation in such conditions might aggravate protection and GBV concerns for users, especially girls.

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[2] The Sphere Standards establish that the minimum number of toilets at school, both in the short and the long run is one toilet for 30 girls and one for 60 boys. Information on toilets per girls and toilets per boys was not possible to estimate as many schools reported that toilets were not gender segregated.

- In addition, only 16% of the assessed schools reported to having at least one toilet that is accessible to those with limited mobility or vision.

- Most schools reported not having a feeding programme currently operative (60% of assessed schools), and among the almost 40% that reported having one, not all of them provide food every day or in enough quantities.

Teachers and Other Educational Personnel

- The average pupil-classroom ratio is reported at 28 students per shift. This ratio varies depending on whether the school is formal or informal, with formal schools recording a lower pupils per classroom ratio than informal schools (respectively 19 and 32 on average). However, among informal schools, the ratio skyrockets to 98 in the case of Temporary Learning Centers (TLC), which are primarily located in Rakhine.

- In 8 assessed townships, KIs on Education reported that at least 50% of currently active teachers in their townships started working as teachers after the coup d'état. The school survey provided evidence supporting this finding, as an average of 47% of currently working teachers in assessed schools started working in the school after February 1, 2021. While this does not necessarily mean that all of them were not working previously in other schools, this could also suggest a huge turnover after the military takeover and the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM).

- An average of only 30% of teachers in assessed schools has the minimum teaching qualification (i.e., at least has graduated from the University of Education or has a post-graduate teaching diploma). In addition, 40% of assessed schools reported not having clear selection criteria to hire teachers.

- In 12% of assessed schools no (or almost no) teacher received their salary in the month prior to data collection. Moreover, roughly 40% of the assessed schools and half of the assessed townships have at least one teacher that has not been compensated in the month prior to data collection.

- Among teachers that received their salary, the average compensation reported by schools was around MMK 142,600 per month in November 2022, which represents roughly USD 67, for an average of 27 hours worked per week. The poor compensation and the lack of training opportunities for teachers could be contributing factors to the shortage of qualified teachers in Myanmar.

Child Protection

- Cases of child marriage were reported by KIs in all the assessed townships, being the most reported child protection risk in the sample by KIs on child protection. Child marriage was also named by children in consultations as the 6th most voted reason for school drop-out. Girls feeling unsafe in the community was also among the most reported child protection risks (in 19 out of 25 townships). The second most reported child protection risk

was child labour in the case of both girls and boys (cases were reported in 22 out of 25 townships). Findings from child consultations also indicate that both boys and girls are considerably involved in child labour – whether outside or inside their homes. Additionally, findings indicate that a significant portion of children's free time is occupied by housework.

- When boys and girls are involved in work (especially outside and when bringing them into contact with adults), potential protection risks apply since the mentioned activities can be dangerous. Some children, whose families expect them to accomplish so many duties, also fear of reprisals at home including violence against children.

- During their daily routines, children have mentioned being scared also by drug users, vehicles, violence at home, violent behaviours (physical, verbal) by others. Some children affirmed to be scared by the impact of the conflict.

- Cases of children being seen with armed groups or forces in the proximity of the township were also among the most reported child protection risks (in 17 townships). Both boys and girls being recruited by armed forces and armed groups also appear among the most frequently reported risks, with 25% of KI caregivers reporting this as a concern for both genders who are out of school.

- When asked about trends of child protection risks in their areas since February 2021, KIs reported an increase in number of child labour, recruitment of children by armed forces and groups, and arbitrary arrests in most of the townships.

- KIs on child protection were asked about the key protection concerns for in-school and out-of-school girls and boys:
  - o **Regarding girls**: child marriage seems to be one of the main protection concerns for girls, both in and out of school. However, for out-of-school girls, this risk was more frequently reported. Suffering from physical or verbal harassment or violence (not sexual) was also one of the main concerns for girls. Child labour was much more reported as one of the main protection concerns for "out of school" girls (in 10 of the 25 townships) than for "in school" girls (in 5 townships). 60% of the KI caregivers in the assessed area reported being concerned about out-of-school girls engaging in child labour. Similarly, suffering from "sexual violence (including rape and forced prostitution)" was reported in 8 townships as one of the main protection risks for out-of-schools girls vs 5 townships for in-school girls.
  - o Being involved in drug use and abuse seems to be one of the main child protection concerns for boys, regardless of their school attendance status, especially in Kayin state.
  - o Hazards consequence of armed conflict and suffering from physical or verbal harassment or violence (not sexual) are also among the main protection risks reported by KIs regardless of their education situation (similar to girls). Similar to girls, child labour was more reported for "out of school" boys (in 7 townships out of 25) than for "in school" boys (in 4 townships). 63% of the KI caregivers in the assessed area reported being concerned about out-of-school boys engaging in

child labour. Child marriage was among the most reported protection risks for boys. However, child marriage was even more a concern for girls.

- o During focus group discussions, information provided by children indicated that the gender-dynamics that come to play in the lives of these adolescents reflect a strong segregation of tasks and reproduce traditional gender norms whereby boys help the family with manual work out of the homestead, whereas girls help their family mostly through taking care of household chores. Boys implement activities that require considerable physical engagement (fishing, working in farms, shepherding cattle, carry water). Girls implement quieter and in-door activities (such as house chores of various kinds, sewing clothes, crocheting) or visiting neighbours.

Safety at School and on the way to Schools

- KII on education reported only 8 out of 26 townships schools are generally safe for boys and girls. In 9 townships, KIs reported that schools are generally not safe for them and in 9 others, that only some schools are safe for children. MoE schools were reported as the type of schools that is more likely to be insecure for children by KIs on education.[3]

- Children partaking in consultations mentioned fearing considerable issues in school: that their school could be bombed; that schools may close again (which highlights the long-term consequences of COVID-19 school closures on children's mental health); that teachers may beat students; to walk alone to go to school; bullying.

- Among KI caregivers that reported that their children's schools are not safe (i.e. only 11% of the KI caregivers interviewed), the main security concern at schools were attacks on schools (reported by 79% and 77% of the KI caregivers interviewed, respectively for girls and boys).

- Most of the KI caregivers reported that the way to their children's school was safe, only 10% of KI caregivers of girls and 7% of KI caregivers of boys reported that the ways to schools were unsafe. The most reported concern among this subset was traffic accidents. However, children partaking in consultations mentioned that due to the political situation, many parents stop sending children to school for security concerns when they have to walk long distances to access schools in other villages. Apparently, safety concerns are particularly severe for female students.

- School surveys show that some schools could have a crucial role in providing support to children after the occurrence of a child protection incident, but not all schools are prepared to do so. While 64% of assessed schools provide psychological support for students, it is important to note that almost 50% of schools reported that none of their teachers have received training to identify and report child protection cases and only 5% of schools reported that all of their teachers had been trained.

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[3] MoE schools were generally identified as the ones relatively more (partially or fully) used for non-education purposes (i.e. used as shelters by internally displaced population or with military presence/occupation).

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This assessment was conducted as part of a Global Education Cluster (GEC) and Child Protection Area of Responsibility (GCPAoR) project funded by the Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA) to strengthen joint needs assessments. The project aims to improve the availability of data and evidence to support strategic planning, response, and preparedness at country level for both education in emergencies (EiE) and Child Protection (CP) actors. The classroom is an important space to identify protection needs, mitigate risks, and convey life-saving messages, raise awareness and promote behavioral changes.

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Child Protection Area of Responsibility Global Protection Cluster

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