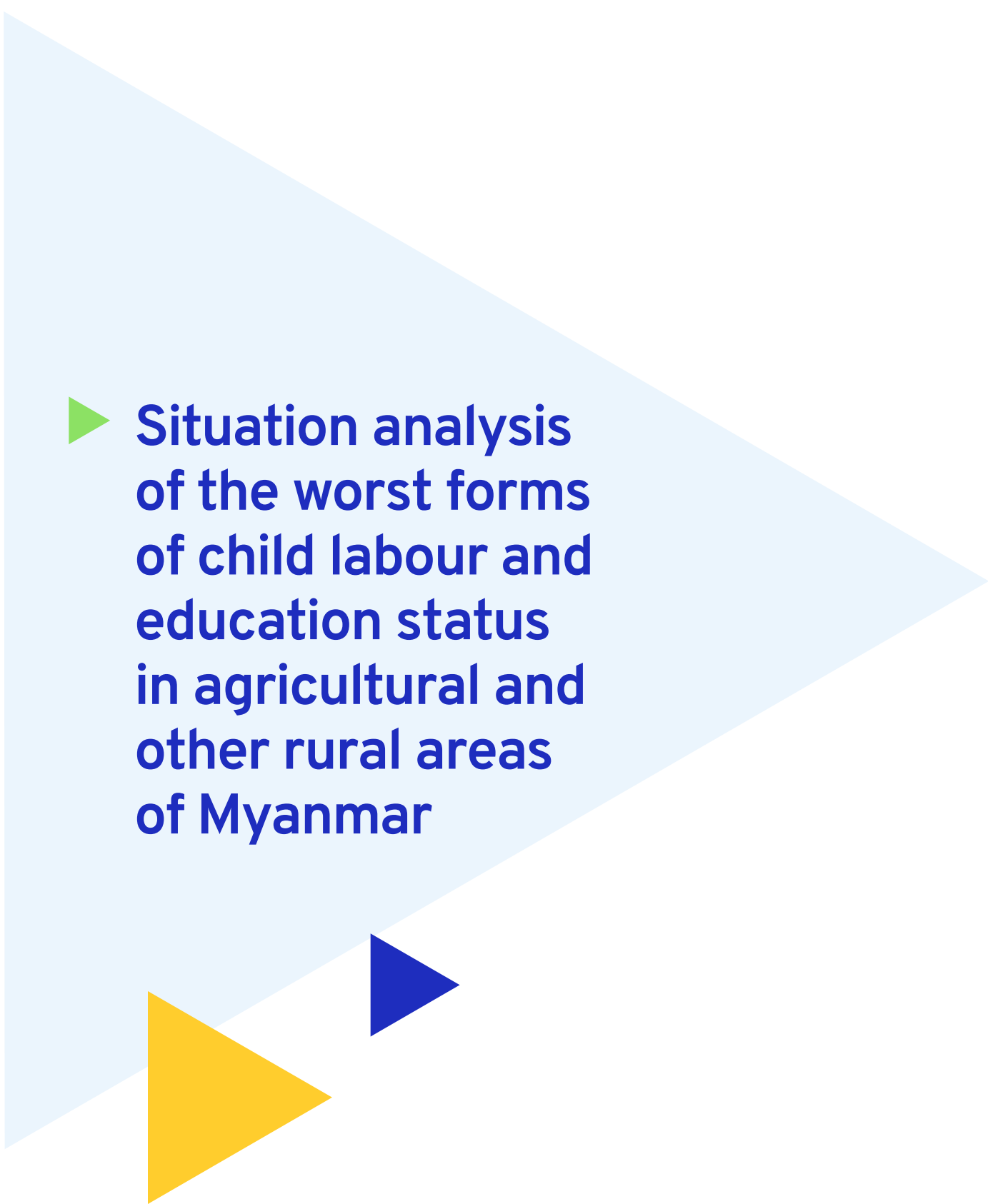




International
Labour
Organization



► **Situation analysis of the
worst forms of child labour
and education status in
agricultural and other rural
areas of Myanmar**

- 
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Foreword

Child labour remains one of the most pressing challenges affecting children across Myanmar, including those living in agricultural and rural communities, where poverty, limited access to education, livelihood insecurity and ongoing crises continue to increase children's vulnerability. These challenges have been further exacerbated by conflict, displacement and the socio-economic impacts of recent natural disasters, placing many children at greater risk of entering child labour, including its worst forms.

The Achieving Reduction of Child Labour in Support of Education (ARISE) project, implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) with the funding support of the Government of Japan, aims to reduce child labour in agricultural and rural communities by improving access to education, strengthening household livelihoods opportunities, enhancing community-based child protection mechanisms and promoting evidence-based interventions. As part of these efforts, this Situational Analysis Study on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Education Status in Agriculture and Rural Areas of Myanmar was undertaken by the ARISE project in Mon State, Southern Shan State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region to better understand the current situation, drivers and characteristics of child labour in the project areas.

The study was conducted using qualitative research methods, including a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with parents, community leaders, teachers, employers, workers' organizations and civil society organizations. The study highlights how poverty, limited access to education, a lack of livelihood opportunities, and the growing impacts of conflict, displacement, and economic hardship are driving child labour in agricultural and rural communities across Myanmar, underscoring the need for integrated efforts to improve education, strengthen family livelihoods, and enhance community-based child protection systems.

The evidence presented in this report has informed the design and implementation of the ARISE project interventions and provides practical recommendations for strengthening child labour elimination and response mechanisms. It highlights the importance of expanding access to education, improving livelihood opportunities for Myanmar population, strengthening child protection and referral systems, enhancing coordination among stakeholders, and promoting awareness of children's rights.

We hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for social partners, development partners, civil society organizations and community stakeholders working to eliminate child labour in Myanmar. The findings and recommendations are intended to support evidence-based programming and collaborative action to ensure that every child can grow up in a safe environment, enjoy quality education and realize their full potential.

We are very grateful to our social partners, implementing partners, trainers, community members etc for their valuable contributions made this report possible and will help inform future efforts towards the progressive elimination of child labour in Myanmar. Finally, my thanks to the ARISE project team who generously shared their time, knowledge and experiences throughout this study.



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The study team extends appreciation to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the successful completion of this analysis. We acknowledge the collaboration of the implementing partners and area representatives, whose coordination and operational support facilitated fieldwork across 17 villages in five townships in four states and regions.

We extend sincere thanks to all the study participants, including village leaders, village committee members, parents, children, teachers, religious leaders, market actors and employers, representatives of civil society organizations and workers' unions, who generously shared their time and perspectives in often challenging circumstances.

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Abbreviations

ARISE	Achieving Reduction of Child Labour in Support of Education Project (ILO)
CSO	Civil society organization
FGD	Focus group discussion
ILO	International Labour Organization
KII	Key informant interview
My-PEC	Myanmar Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO)
NGOs	Non-government organizations
TVET	Technical and vocational education and training

Definitions

Working children:

Working children are all persons younger than 18 years engaged, within a reference period, in any activity to produce goods or provide services for use by others or for own use, within the general production boundary as defined by the System of National Accounts. This includes own-use production work by children, comprising production of goods and services for own final use; employment work by children, comprising work performed for others in exchange for pay or profit; unpaid trainee work by children, comprising work performed for others without pay to acquire workplace experience or skills; volunteer work by children, comprising non-compulsory work performed for others without pay; other work activities by children, not presently defined but including such activities as unpaid community services and unpaid work by prisoners, when ordered by a court or similar authority. Own-use provision of services and volunteer work in households producing services are forms of work outside the System of National Accounts production boundary but within the general production boundary. Not all work performed by children is classified as child labour. (The 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians Resolution (Resolution IV), adopted in October 2018, amends the 18th ICLS Resolution concerning child labour statistics.)

Child labour:

Work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. It reflects the engagement of children in prohibited work and, more generally, in types of work to be eliminated as socially and morally undesirable as guided by national legislation, the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) as well as their respective supplementing Recommendations (No. 146 and No. 190). Children engaged in child labour include all persons aged 5–17 years who, during a specified time period, were engaged in one or more of the following categories of activities:

- (a) worst forms of child labour;
- (b) work within the System of National Accounts production boundary performed by children younger than the minimum age; and
- (c) hazardous unpaid household services, when child labour is measured on the basis of the general production boundary.

Hazardous work by children:

As clarified in the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190), hazardous work by children involves:

- (a) work that exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse;
- (b) work underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces;
- (c) work with dangerous machinery, equipment and tools or that involves the manual handling or transport of heavy loads;
- (d) work in an unhealthy environment that may, for example, expose children to hazardous substances, agents or processes or to temperatures, noise levels or vibrations damaging to their health; and/or
- (e) work under particularly difficult conditions, such as work for long hours or during the night, or work wherein a child is unreasonably confined to the premises of the employer.

The determination of hazardous work is established by national legislation following tripartite consultation.

Worst forms of child labour:

According to Article 3 of ILO Convention No. 182, the term comprises:

- (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;
- (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;
- (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; and
- (d) work that, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of a child. However, a definition of the unconditional worst forms of child labour has not yet been fully developed.

Executive summary

Background

Child labour remains a significant challenge in Myanmar. It closely links to poverty, economic vulnerability and limited access to quality education. In recent years, the situation has worsened due to the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, political instability, armed conflict and natural disasters, which have increased the child labour risks for children and their families.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is implementing the Achieving Reduction of Child Labour in Support of Education (ARISE) Project in Myanmar, with funding from the Government of Japan. The project aims to contribute to the reduction of child labour, particularly its worst forms, in agricultural and other rural communities while strengthening young people's access to education. Phase I of the project ran from March 2020 to December 2024, followed by Phase II, which commenced in September 2025 and is scheduled to conclude in August 2026. The project covers five townships in Mon State, Shan State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region.

A situation analysis qualitative study was recently conducted to assess the nature and reported extent of child labour, including its worst forms, in the agricultural and other rural communities within the selected project areas. Although it did not generate numerical data, the intent of the study was to produce qualitative evidence to inform programme design and implementation and to provide reference points for future monitoring under the ARISE Project.

Study methodology

The situation analysis used a qualitative research design to examine child labour and its worst forms in selected agricultural and other rural communities. Primary data were collected through 24 key informant interviews and 68 focus group discussions conducted with a total of 435 participants across 17 villages in the five townships: Chaung-U, Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe, Taunggyi and Ye. The interviews were conducted in Yangon and at the township level of the selected project areas in Mon State, Shan State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region. Secondary data were drawn from ILO project documentation and relevant published literature.

The key informant interviews and focus group discussion participants included village representatives, parents of children aged 5–11 years, children aged 12–17 years, youths aged 18–24 years, teachers, market actors and employers and with representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), a workers' union, implementing partners and the ILO Myanmar staff. Where relevant, the interviews included case studies relating to child labour. Six trained researchers collected data from 11 to 25 January 2026. As a qualitative study, the research did not lead to statistically representative estimates of the prevalence of child labour. Additional limitations included language barriers, especially in Mon State, limited availability of case-specific participants and smaller-than-planned focus group sizes in some villages in Nyaungshwe Township (Shan State). These factors may have influenced the depth and breadth of information collected in specific areas.

Findings

Profile of the study areas:

The 17 villages included in the study vary considerably in population size, ethnic composition and religion. Ye Township had the study's largest communities, whereas Nyaungshwe Township had the smallest communities. In Chaung-U and Kyaukse, the majority of residents identify as Bamar or Buddhist. In Nyaungshwe, communities include Inthar and Taungyo ethnic groups, who are largely Buddhist. Taunggyi Township has a mix of ethnic groups, including Pa-O and Buddhist communities, and internally displaced

persons from Kayah State, such as Kayan and Kayaw, many of whom identify as Christian. Ye Township is primarily inhabited with Mon, Buddhist and Bamar communities, with some seasonal and migrant workers from other states and regions.

Livelihoods and economic challenges:

Agriculture is the principal source of livelihood in most of the study areas. In addition to farming, households engage in daily wage labour, carpentry, masonry, petty trade and other forms of casual work. Agriculture production varies by location. In Chaung-U, farmers cultivate rice, onions, garlic, chillies, chickpeas, wheat, sesame and golden honeydew. In Kyaukse, rice, chickpeas, sesame, green grams (mung bean), onions and chillies are widely grown. In Ye, common crops include betel nut, rubber, durian and konjac. In Shan State, the two study townships of Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi cultivate paddy, onions, garlic, potatoes, tomatoes, chillies and other seasonal cash crops.

The study participants reported multiple challenges affecting households' livelihoods, including natural disasters, declining crop yields, price volatility, increased transportation costs, rising input prices and limited livelihood opportunities, particularly for internally displaced persons. High levels of indebtedness were reported in several communities. According to the participants, financial pressures have largely contributed to the decision for children to drop out of school and/or to work either temporarily or on a longer-term basis. For this analysis, the assessed work conditions constituted child labour situations.

Access to education:

Overall, access to basic education is available across most study locations; however, the quality, safety and consistency of service delivery vary significantly by area and type of education provider. All villages but one in the Kyaukse Township study area, for example, have a primary school. In Ye Township, both the government schools and the Mon national schools (established by the Mon National Education Centre) operate in many locations. In Chaung-U, village-level schools are primarily community learning centres (community-established schools in conflict areas). Classrooms that are vulnerable to armed conflict disruptions and other infrastructure constraints were highlighted in Chaung-U, whereas earthquake-related damage to school facilities was reported in parts of Kyaukse. Among the community learning centres, common challenges cited in the study were shortages of teaching materials, unavailability of textbooks, limited teaching staff and concerns regarding teacher qualifications and remuneration. Based on the study participants' descriptions, the Mon national schools in Mon State seem to have significantly better conditions, facilities and resources than the community learning centres in Chaung-U.

School dropouts:

The study participants reported an increase in students dropping out of school, especially in the secondary level and largely in Nyaungshwe and Ye townships in recent years. According to the situation analysis findings, the increase was slight but according to the literature review findings it was considerable. Contributing factors largely were household economic hardship and the perceived limited returns to education, as well as age-grade mismatch, reduced interest in schooling and various insecurity situations.

Child labour:

Study participants across the five townships indicated that child labour is present in the agriculture and non-agriculture sectors. Although this qualitative study did not generate statistical prevalence estimates, participants frequently pointed out that adolescents aged 12–17 years were more likely to be child labourers than younger children. Boys were described as more commonly involved in physically demanding activities, particularly in rural areas. Engagement in child labour was often linked to dropping out of school or irregular attendance. In the agriculture sector, children were reported as engaging in the planting and harvesting of different crops, climbing tall trees to collect betel nut, rubber tapping, applying fertilizers and pesticides, removing weeds, operating machinery and transporting agricultural produce. Children were also reported to work in rice mills and other post-harvest processing activities. In the non-agriculture sectors, children were said to be working in construction, carpentry, masonry, scrap collection, small retail shops and other forms of manual or service-related work that was harmful.

Hazardous work:

Certain activities described by the participants across the study areas fall within the hazardous forms of child labour. In agriculture, this includes the handling of pesticides and agrochemicals without protective equipment, pulling weeds due to the high risk of snake bites (with insufficient stock of venom antidote), climbing tall betel trees due to the high risk of falling, operating machinery and performing physically strenuous tasks. In construction and related sectors, children were described as carrying heavy loads and working at heights.

Worst forms of child labour:

Children were described in activities that constitute the worst forms of child labour as defined under the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), including involvement in armed conflict, for example in Chaung-U, Kyaukse and Ye townships, and illicit activities, such as drug trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation in Taunggyi Township.

Drivers of child labour:

Poverty and economic vulnerability were consistently identified as primary drivers of child labour in most of the study areas. Households experiencing displacement, parental illness or death, family separation or migration were described as facing heightened risk of having a child drop out of school, mainly to work. Parental attitudes towards education, perceptions of immediate income needs and the broader social environment, such as peer pressure and social media, were acknowledged as influencing the decisions regarding children's engagement in child labour.

Recommendations

Education access and retention

Strategic level

- Strengthen equitable access to free, compulsory basic and quality education by addressing the indirect cost barriers for vulnerable households.
- Improve the quality and safety of school environments.
- Strengthen teacher recruitment, certification and professional development systems.
- Improve the effectiveness and accessibility of technical and vocational education and training pathways.

Specific level (local context)

- Strengthen the formal and non-formal education systems to ensure that all children, including internally displaced persons, migrants and ethnic minorities, can access education.
- Support resilient school infrastructure and facilities in areas of insecurity in Chaung-U Township and disaster-prone areas in Kyaukse and Nyaungshwe townships.
- Facilitate coordinated access between the government schools and the Mon national schools to allow a smooth transition from one to another.
- Promote participatory, interactive and age-appropriate teaching methods.
- Encourage the active participation of parent-teacher associations and/or appoint a students' counsellor to prevent and address school dropout issues.
- Ensure a sufficient number of trained and certified teachers across all levels.
- Provide psychosocial support for students in need and extracurricular programmes, including sports, arts and life skills.

Livelihood vulnerability and social protection

Strategic level

- Integrate child labour prevention objectives into rural development, agriculture and poverty-reduction policies.
- Expand disaster-responsive resilient and protective systems, including forming disaster risk reduction committees and income-support mechanisms.
- Strengthen financial inclusion and responsible lending frameworks.
- Promote livelihood diversification and climate-resilient agricultural strategies.

Specific level (local context)

- Develop targeted livelihood programmes to diversify income sources for families that are in line with the local context.
- Integrate vocational training for parents and caregivers to enhance long-term household stability.
- Facilitate access to microfinance through low-interest or subsidized schemes for vulnerable families.
- Align social protection interventions with local seasonal risks.
- Encourage community cooperatives and local market linkages that provide predictable income streams, stabilize agricultural pricing and reduce financial shocks.

Prevention of hazardous and worst forms of child labour

Strategic level

- Strengthen enforcement of the minimum age legislation and hazardous work lists, in alignment with ILO Convention No. 182 and the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138).
- Develop sector-specific child labour risk mitigation frameworks for the agriculture, construction and informal urban service sectors.
- Enhance the child labour monitoring capacity, particularly in the most susceptible sectors where the hazardous and worst forms of child labour are concentrated.
- Strengthen the referral and case management mechanisms.
- Expand awareness initiatives for employers, parents and communities on hazardous work, the legal system, child labour policies and long-term impacts of child labour.

Specific level (local context)

- Raise awareness among parents, children and communities on recognizing the worst forms of child labour and the long-term social, health and economic consequences.
- Establish household-focused sustainable livelihood interventions that help to reduce economic pressures.
- Provide accessible and safe vocational training programmes tailored for adolescents and youths who are out of school or at risk of dropping out.
- Encourage coordinated community-based monitoring of child labour in collaboration with civil society organizations, schools, communities and local authorities.
- Advocate employers on awareness and compliance with the Child Rights Law.

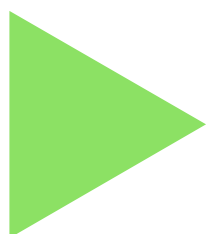
Policy and institutional strengthening

Strategic level

- Strengthen the national and subnational coordination mechanisms that link labour, education, social welfare and rural development authorities.
- Institutionalize standardized child labour monitoring and reporting systems with clear mandates and accountability structures.
- Build up the capacity of township-level child protection and child labour monitoring bodies through training, technical support and operational guidelines.
- Integrate child labour elimination targets into national development, education and social protection strategies.
- Promote systematic data collection and periodic assessments to inform evidence-based policy decisions and resource allocation.

Specific level (local context)

- Strengthen collaboration between civil society organizations, village committees, local authorities and education departments to improve child protection.
- Promote awareness and enforcement of relevant national and international frameworks, including the Child Rights Law, ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 and the National Action Plan on Child Labour.
- Support capacity-building for social partners, school administrators and community leaders on the harmful consequences of child labour and the laws and their enforcement to prevent child labour.
- Align the national, ethnic and community-led education systems with child labour prevention strategies to ensure free, accessible, safe and compulsory schooling.





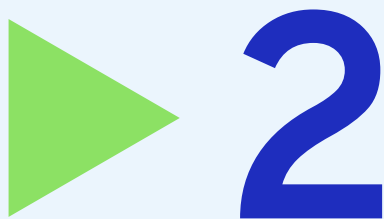
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Introduction

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is implementing the Achieving Reduction of Child Labour in Support of Education (ARISE) Project in Myanmar, with financial support from the Government of Japan. The project aims to contribute to the reduction of child labour, particularly its worst forms, in agricultural and other rural communities while strengthening young people's access to education. The ARISE Project is also operating in the Philippines.

Phase I of the Myanmar project ran from March 2020 to December 2024. Phase II, which began in September 2025, is scheduled to conclude in August 2026. In Myanmar, Phase II is operating in four states and regions: Mon State, Shan State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region. Mon and Shan states were covered during Phase I, with Phase II turning to Mandalay and Sagaing regions.

In Phase II, the ILO is collaborating with four civil society organizations (CSOs) as implementing partners in the four project areas. As part of the initial activities, the situation analysis of child labour was conducted in selected agriculture-based and other rural communities across all four of the project's states and regions. The study provided qualitative evidence to inform programme design, support implementation and contribute to future monitoring under the ARISE Project.



Study objectives

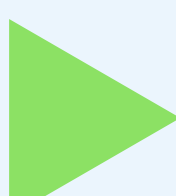
► 2.1 Overall objective

The overall objective of the study was to assess the current situation of child labour, including its worst forms, in agricultural and other rural communities across Mon State, Shan State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region. The study aimed to generate qualitative evidence to inform programme design and implementation and to provide a reference point for future monitoring under the ILO-supported ARISE Project, which is funded by the Government of Japan.

► 2.2 Specific objectives

The study was commissioned to:

1. Examine the forms and drivers of child labour in agriculture and related rural sectors within the selected project areas.
2. Analyse how poverty, indebtedness, displacement, social norms and access to services influence household decisions regarding children's engagement in child labour, including its worst forms.
3. Review the availability, accessibility and quality of education and training opportunities, and identify barriers to school enrolment, retention and completion, particularly in contexts affected by conflict and natural disasters.
4. Assess livelihood patterns of farming households, including income sources, economic vulnerabilities, children's participation in child labour and access to social protection mechanisms.
5. Examine the capacity of local governance structures, civil society organizations and relevant public institutions to implement and monitor child labour-related laws and policies.
6. Develop context-specific recommendations to strengthen programme interventions and contribute to broader policy dialogue on child labour in Myanmar.



3

Literature review

► 3.1 Socio-economic and humanitarian context

Myanmar gained independence in 1948 and became a member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in 1997. Since its independence, the country has experienced prolonged internal armed conflict involving various ethnic armed organizations and affecting governance structures, public service delivery and economic development in several regions.

In February 2021, the political changes resulted in political and institutional disruption. Since then, conflict intensity has increased in parts of the country, contributed to the displacement of households and reduced people's access to essential services.

In March 2025, a major earthquake in central Myanmar further exacerbated the humanitarian needs in Mandalay and Sagaing regions. According to humanitarian assessments, millions of people required assistance following the disaster, compounding the pre-existing vulnerabilities linked to conflict, displacement and economic hardship.¹

These overlapping crises – conflict, displacement, economic contraction and natural disasters – have heightened livelihood insecurity, particularly in the rural and agriculture-dependent communities. Such conditions are widely recognized as structural drivers of child labour.

► 3.2 After the earthquake of March 2025

The devastating 7.7 magnitude of the earthquake's epicentre in central Myanmar, in Mandalay Region, caused more than 3,500 deaths and 5,000 injuries.² Roughly 2 million people urgently needed help after the earthquake, and its aftershocks disrupted critical services. Even before the disaster, around 20 million people were in need of aid, including 2.1 million displaced persons within the affected area due to the ongoing armed conflict (ILO 2025). Combined with military air strikes in civilian areas, which prompted the displacement of more than 3 million persons,³ the country's poverty rate in 2023 had doubled, from 25

¹ See OCHA, *Myanmar Humanitarian Update*, 2025.

² See ReliefWeb, [Myanmar: Earthquake – March 2025](#).

³ See UNHCR, *Myanmar*.

per cent in 2017.⁴ The disrupted livelihoods were further affected by the earthquake, which left economic conditions worse than ever (Mansaray et al. 2025).

► 3.3 Child labour trends and patterns

Child labour in Myanmar, exacerbated by the existing poverty and ongoing armed conflict, presents as one of the country's most persistent challenges. According to the latest available data, which date to the 2015 Myanmar Labour Force Survey report, the number of children in child labour represent a significant crisis, with more than 1 million children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour as of 2015. More than half of them – approximately 57 per cent – were in the agriculture sector, while more than 25 per cent were trapped in hazardous work conditions (MOLES, CSO and ILO 2015).

The survey findings also indicate a clear positive correlation between age and labour participation: Although only 1.7 per cent of children aged 5–11 were working in 2015, the incidence increased to 22.7 per cent among those aged 12–14 and to 75.6 per cent among those aged 15–17. This trend was consistent with the education statistics, demonstrating a negative correlation between age and school attendance: Attendance was relatively high among younger children (at 88.9 per cent of those aged 5–11) but declined markedly among older adolescents (at 47.7 per cent of those aged 15–17) (MOLES, CSO and ILO 2015).

The 2015 Labour Force, Child Labour and School-To-Work Transition Survey findings (MOLES, CSO and ILO 2015) indicate that children aged 12–17 years endured extremely long work hours, averaging around 60 hours per week. A majority of the child labourers, at 60.7 per cent, were employed in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Manufacturing and wholesale and retail followed, with these three sectors accounting for more than 80 per cent of all working children. Although fewer children worked in industries, such as mining or electricity supply, many were found in construction, food services and other sectors typically associated with hazardous conditions.

According to an ILO (2023) assessment of child labour in Yangon Region, Ayeyarwady Region and Kayin State, girls reported earning lower wages than boys in general. The average reported working time in child labour for both sexes was 5.6 days per week.

Although the country achieved a 40 per cent reduction in child labour between 2000 and 2016, the ILO (2024c) reported a significant resurgence following the 2021 political change.

► 3.4 Current status of child labour

Threats and challenges

Continued armed conflict since the 2021 political change, along with enforcement of the conscription law that had been dormant since 2010,⁵ threatens youth nationwide. Additionally, the declining socio-economic conditions, the unstable political situation, the volatile security situation, deteriorating law enforcement and displacement or migration of affected communities are current major threats associated with child labour.

⁴ See UNDP, "Middle Class Disappearing and Poverty Deepening in Myanmar", 11 April 2024.

⁵ On 10 February 2024, the military junta announced that two years of military service would be mandatory for all men between the ages of 18 and 35 and all women between the ages of 18 and 27.

Opportunities

Aiming to identify, monitor and address child labour in Myanmar, a Community-based Child Labour Monitoring System (ILO 2019) pilot began in the ILO's Myanmar Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (My-PEC) and the ILO's Asia Regional Child Labour Programme in 2019. There are plans to broaden the ARISE Project, such as further into Shan State and into Bago Region. This expansion will be supported by a governance approach built on wide-ranging collaboration among those other programmes and projects with CSOs and social partners, with strong emphasis on community ownership driving the process (ILO 2024a).

Drivers of child labour

According to the findings of an ILO My-PEC study (ILO 2024c), household vulnerability is a key factor leading to child labour. It affects large families with many children the most. These families are highly vulnerable to economic shocks. Labour shortages in farming have emerged due to rural outmigration, in which people move from rural areas to urban areas in search of higher-paying work. Cultural traditions and beliefs also have a role, for example, the perception that children must leave school to help support their family if it is needed. Moreover, such a child is praised as a "good" boy or girl within the community. Limited awareness and information about the risks of child labour also contribute to the problem. Despite Myanmar having a National Education Law (2014), a Basic Education Law (2019) and a Technical and Vocational Education Bill (2020), the education system reflects deficiencies, such as limited access and insufficient teacher quality.

Many employers have previously acknowledged a preference for low-cost, unskilled and part-time labourers and that includes children, who are easy to manage and make fewer complaints than older workers (ILO 2023).

Perception of child labour in communities

Rather than a negative view of child labour, many of the parents, employers and other community members indicated in a 2015 assessment an attitude of acceptance – that working children, even if in child labour situations, is necessary for household survival, especially among families with financial issues (ILO 2015). Although some community members may be well-aware that child labour is a punishable offence or breaches the Child Rights Law, the influence of traditional and cultural values is overwhelming. For example, a working child who financially supports their family is praised for "doing the family duty" or for being a good boy or girl.

Policy and enforcement for child labour

Myanmar ratified the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) in 2013 and the Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) in 2020. Although the draft version was completed, the bill for the list of types of hazardous work has yet to be adopted. Section 3 (b) of the Child Rights Law, Myanmar (2019) defines a "child" as someone younger than 18 years. The Child Rights Law also prohibits work by anyone younger than 14, although children aged 14 and older who work are protected by strict legal safeguards, including limits on working hours, prohibition of night and hazardous work and requirements that the work must not interfere with their education. Other labour (sector-based) laws, however, define a child in different age groups. The labour laws also are inconclusive or sector- or subject-focused, such as targeting factories, shops, establishments and mines and do not cover the informal sector, which is where most working-age people and children work (ILO 2022).

Nonetheless, the National Action Plan for Child Labour (2019–33) is a comprehensive policy framework designed to combat child labour, with emphasis on eliminating the worst forms of child labour under its second five-year phase (2024–28). It is a major response to the 2015 Labour Force Survey, which found high rates of child labour in the agriculture and informal sectors. Gaps in the enforcement of legal protections, worsened by the socio-economic conditions, have sustained child labour throughout Myanmar. Efforts by government agencies were hindered by the political instability and scarce resources, thus limiting effective enforcement of the child labour laws (Aye Chan Thar 2024).

Target 8.7 of Myanmar's own Sustainable Development Goals (for 2025), which aimed for the elimination of all forms of child labour – modern slavery, human trafficking and the worst forms of child labour, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers – is clearly overdue.⁶

► 3.5 Education access

Enrolment was made free in government primary schools as of the 2010–11 school year, for middle school in 2013–14 and for high school in 2015–16. As of the 2016–17 school year, Myanmar's education system evolved into different three-level terminology: primary, lower secondary and upper secondary.⁶ The shift was accompanied with a change in the curriculum that some students found difficult to manage.⁷ Although improvement is seen in enrolment at the primary level and the gradual expansion of lower- and upper-secondary school enrolment, it faces a fragile balance between formal access and quality. A compulsory education law exists, but enforcement is uneven across regions, particularly in the conflict-affected areas, thus contributing to the high dropout rate and the gaps in literacy (Soe et al. 2017). According to Roy et al. (2023), due to the ongoing conflicts, displacement, insecurity and precarious socio-economic conditions, the number of school dropouts soared after the 2021 political changes.

► 3.6 Vocational training among youth

Around a million youths drop out of school annually in Myanmar, but only 10 per cent of them can access technical and vocational education and training (TVET), which is largely available in Yangon and other mostly urban centres. Public TVET options encompass four government technical colleges, 24 institutes and 35 technical high schools. Before 2010, the previous military regime planned to open 55 secondary school-level industrial, agriculture and livestock schools aimed to broaden access, but there was uncertainty about the alignment with current or future labour market demand (Thutanyana 2023).

Project activities through CSOs, community-based organizations, or non-government organizations (NGOs) have been providing vocational training. However, many training-review reports highlight that, irrespective of the service providers, the training courses are not in line with market demands (ILO 2023).

⁶ The primary school level (after kindergarten) encompasses five years; the lower-secondary level is four years; and the upper-secondary level is three years.

⁷ Myanmar initiated a comprehensive national curriculum reform in the 2016–17 academic year to modernize its education system by replacing the outdated, rote-learning curriculum that had been in use since the late 1990s. The reform aimed to promote learner-centred education and strengthen critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and the practical application of knowledge while aligning the national education system with international standards. The new curriculum was implemented gradually by grade level, beginning with kindergarten and Grade 1 in the 2016–17 academic year, followed by Grade 2 in 2018–19 and Grade 3 in 2019–20. Between 2020 and 2022, the curriculum reform was progressively expanded across all remaining levels, ultimately establishing a standardized kindergarten+12 education structure across the country.

4

Study methodology

This situation analysis employed a qualitative approach to understand the depth of child labour and its worst forms in the study areas. It consisted of (i) primary data collected in the field and (ii) secondary data gathered from project documents and a literature review. The primary data collection was done through qualitative data collection tools, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs).

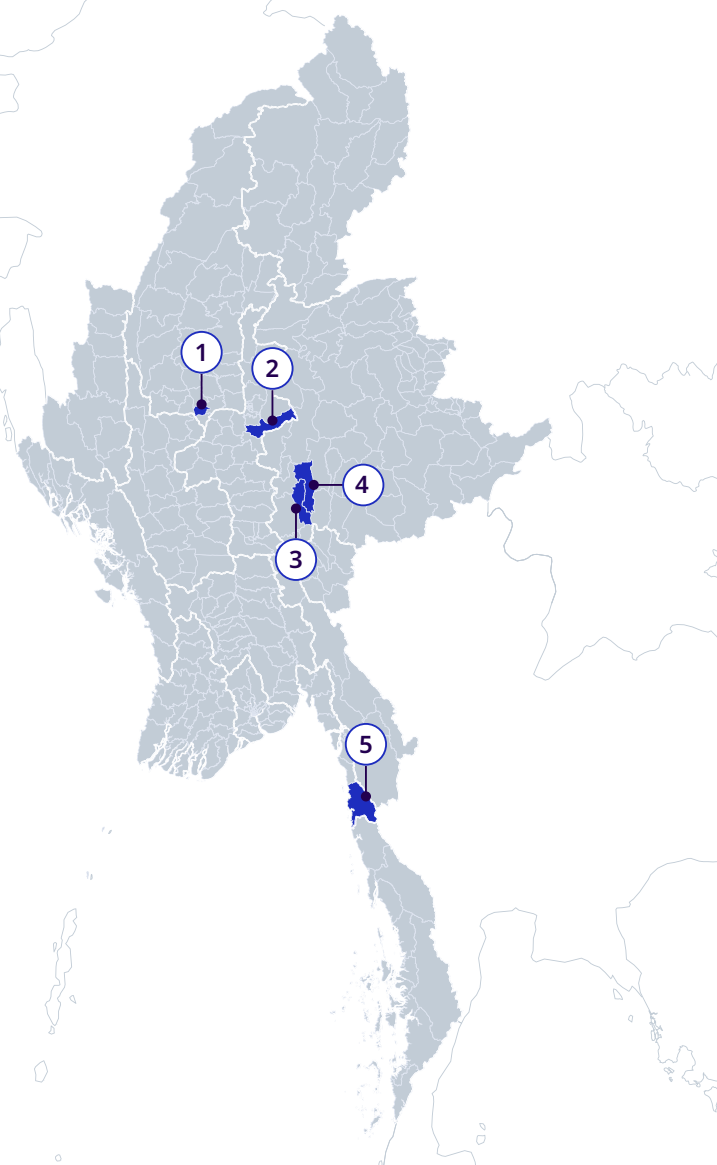
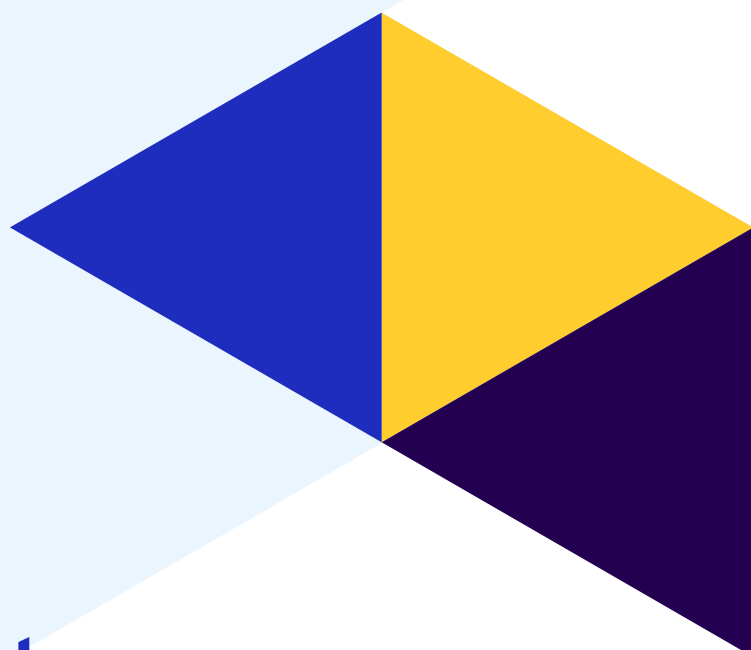
► 4.1 Study areas (townships and villages)

The study was conducted in five project townships in four states and regions (figure 1):

- **Figure 1. Map of Myanmar showing the five study townships: Chaung-U, Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe, Taunggyi and Ye**

1. Chaung-U Township in Sagaing Region
2. Kyaukse Township in Mandalay Region
3. Nyaungshwe Township in Shan State
4. Taunggyi Township in Shan State
5. Ye Township in Mon State

In each study township, the selection of study villages was based on the diverse nature of child labourers and the feasibility of field data collection. As a result, two to four villages were selected in a township. A total of 17 villages were involved in this study. Among the selected villages, many are ARISE Project sites, but a few are not.



► 4.2 Data collection tools

The study used guidelines for the key informant interviews and focus group discussions as qualitative data collection tools. .

► 4.3 Sample for key informant interviews and focus group discussions

Informant interviews

A total of 24 KIIs were made with diverse types of participants (table 1):

1. Officers with civil society and community-based organizations working on child labour-related activities (one in each township except Chaung-U and Ye)
2. Teachers (formal and informal schools, men and women) from schools of selected villages or adjacent villages, two in each township)
3. Market actors and employers (one in each township)
4. Workers' union official
5. Child labourers in study villages for case studies
6. Representatives of implementing partners (one in each state or region) and
7. ILO staff (Project Coordinator and M&E Officer)

► **Table 1. Number of key informant interviews, by participant type in five townships across the four states and regions**

Region or State	Mandalay	Mon	Sagaing	Shan		Total
Township	Kyaukse	Ye	Chaung-U	Taunggyi	Nyaungshwe	
 Officer of CSO (with child labour-related activities)	1			2		3
 Teacher (two per township)	2	2	2	1	1	8
 Market actor or employer (one per township)	1	1	1	1	1	5
 Workers' union official	1					1
 Child labourer for case study	1			1		2
 Representative of implementing partners	1	1	1	1		4
 ILO staff	1					1

Focus group discussions

Up to four FGDs were conducted in each study village (table 2), for a total of 17 that overall involved 435 persons:

1. Parents of children aged 5–11 years.
2. Children aged 12–17 years (two groups included: 12–14 years and 15–17 years) (in the presence of parents, guardians or teachers).
3. Youths aged 18–24 years (including youths who had dropped out of school, youth labourers in agriculture and other sectors, members of a village committee or youth group, disaggregated by gender or disability).
4. Village representatives (including older persons, members of different village committees, members of a farmers' and women's group or committee and a religious leader who provides monastic education). The sex ratio of the participants was not fixed in each group discussion.

The youths (18–24 years) included both school-attending and out-of-school youths in a village. Some of the participants, especially in the FGD with children aged 12–17 years, included child labourers. In each FGD, although the exact ratio was not fixed, males and females participated, for example, adult male and female parents, boy and girl children or male and female youths. A total of 68 discussions were conducted for the study.

► **Table 2. Number of focus group discussions, by participant group in the selected villages and townships across the four states and regions**

Region or State	Mandalay	Mon	Sagaing	Shan		
Township	Kyaukse	Ye	Chaung-U	Taunggyi	Nyaungshwe	Total
 Village	4	4	4	3	2	17
 Parent of a child aged 5–11 (one per village)	4	4	4	3	2	17
 Child aged 12–17 (two groups: 12–14 and 15–17) (one per village)	4	4	4	3	2	17
 Youth aged 18–24 (one per village)	4	4	4	3	2	17
 Village representative (one per village)	4	4	4	3	2	17

► 4.4 Field data collection process

A three-day in-person training was arranged for the field data collectors, from 7 to 9 January 2026. The consultant team led the training, with the ILO ARISE team attending the first day of the training. During the final day of training, the field data collection schedule was arranged through discussion between the consultant team and the four implementing partners.

After the training, the data collectors (one team of two data collectors per study township) carried out the interviews and discussions in 17 villages across the five townships (see Annex I for the schedule from 11 to 25 January 2026) under the supervision of a respective implementing partner. Due to security concerns, the audio files of the KIIs and FGDs were sent to the data manager as promptly as possible, depending on the availability of internet service. The consultant team monitored the data collection process remotely. At completion of the field data collection, the consultants and data collection team met for a debriefing session on 30 January 2026 in Yangon.

► 4.5 Data analysis process

The consultant team processed the qualitative data using a manual method. The transcripts from the KIIs and the FGDs were summarized in Myanmar language (later translated into English), and the data manager reviewed the Myanmar-language versions alongside the audio files to identify main themes. Discussion points were categorized under core themes based on the study objectives and with attention to minor themes that emerged for inclusion. The responses from the KIIs and FGDs were analysed systematically to reveal insights about the nature of child labour and education access in the study areas. In a final stage of analysis, the qualitative findings were triangulated with the secondary sources from the literature review, leading to thematic summaries. Direct quotes that illustrated important points from the data were pulled out for inclusion in the report. The findings were validated and interpreted to deepen the understanding of child labour and its worst forms, especially in the agriculture sector, and to highlight the potential educational and employment opportunities. The preliminary findings were presented in a validation workshop that the ILO ARISE team organized in March 2026 and that involved representatives of implementing partners, other stakeholders, the research team and ILO Myanmar to review and verify the findings. Comments and recommendations from the workshop were incorporated into the final report where appropriate.

► 4.6 Limitations

Prevalence of child labour

As a qualitative exercise, this study could not arrive at a prevalence rate for child labour in the study's townships. Instead, this study report describes the status and nature of child labour, including its worst forms, as presented by the participants in the study areas.

Language barriers

In Ye Township (Mon State), most discussion participants were Mon and had a general understanding of the Myanmar language; however, they expressed themselves more comfortably in Mon language. To facilitate effective communication, an implementing partner staff member supported interpretation from Mon to Myanmar language, which the data collectors spoke. Although this may have led to minor nuances being less precisely conveyed, efforts were made to ensure that the participants' responses were accurately captured. Similarly, in Nyaungshwe Township (Shan State), the participants spoke a local Myanmar-language dialect that required additional clarification during facilitation. Despite these linguistic variations, the data collection team took appropriate measures to maintain the overall quality and reliability of the data collected.

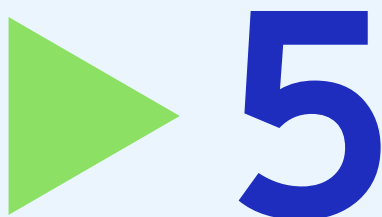
Recruitment of study participants

The field data collection faced recruitment shortfalls: Due to the unavailability of the required number of participants in time, some FGDs had few participants (three to four) and thus fewer perspectives, especially in Ye Township (Mon State) and in Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships (Shan State). In Chaung-U Township (Sagaing Region), the FGDs with 12–17-year-olds did not include school dropouts, leaving some sessions in some villages without these children. For FGDs with youths aged 18–24, disabled youths were not found or recruited in the study villages, so their voices are missing from the data.

Limited key informant interviews with workers' unions and case study

Due to the availability issues, only one interview with a workers' union official was conducted, in Kyaukse Township (Mandalay Region). Due to time limitation and distance to contact child labourers and consent issues, only two case studies were possible with child labourers who were involved in hazardous work.





Findings

► 5.1 Profile of studied areas

Demographic background

The 17 surveyed villages have considerable variation in population size, reflecting different settlement types and local contexts. The largest population among the study sites was in Ye Township (Mon State), while the smallest population was in Nyaungshwe Township (Shan State).

Likewise, ethnic composition varies by region. In Mandalay and Sagaing regions, the population is predominantly Bamar and Buddhist, indicating relatively homogeneous and long-established communities. In Taunggyi Township (Shan State), the demographic structure reflects displacement linked to armed conflict, with host Pa-O and Buddhist communities residing alongside displaced Kayah, Kayan, Kayaw and Christian households. In Ye Township, households are mostly Mon and Buddhist; a few Myanmar Buddhist migrant workers from other states and regions were reported to be residing there at the time of the study. Religion seems to broadly correspond with the ethnic composition. Buddhism is the majority religion in Chaung-U and Kyaukse (central plains), Nyaungshwe (lakeside) and Mon (southern coastal area), while Christianity is more prevalent among displaced communities in Taunggyi (hilly area).

The sex distribution data indicate a gender imbalance in several villages. In some villages in Sagaing, for example, women outnumber men. This pattern may be associated with male labour migration and conflict-related factors. As a result, many women have become primary caregivers and income earners.

Children younger than 18 years constitute a significant proportion of the population in several villages. In some villages in Taunggyi, children accounted for nearly 40 per cent of residents. This demographic structure suggests increased demand for education, child protection and livelihood support, particularly in contexts affected by displacement and economic vulnerability.

Livelihood and economic context

Agriculture remains central to most of the villages, but its role and viability vary by geography and security conditions. Earnings vary with location and resources. Households in the Mandalay and Sagaing study areas, for example, reported growing diversified crops but faced limitations in irrigation, climate variability and unequal land access, which was causing volatility. Displaced households in Taunggyi Township (Shan State) and landless workers in Kyaukse Township (Mandalay Region) said they can only avail of low-wage labour, with high indebtedness inflating their financial vulnerability (table 3).

► **Table 3. Livelihood activities, income, debt sources, interest rates and economic challenges across the study townships**






Region or State	Main livelihood activities	Income level (monthly)	Main debt sources	Interest rates	Economic challenges and reasons
Ye (Mon State)	Farming: betel nut, rubber, konjac	Up to 700 000 kyat	Informal and formal lenders (various)	Varies	Market price fluctuations
Chaung-U (Sagaing Region)	Farming: rice, onions, garlic, chilli, chickpeas, wheat, sesame, seasonal crops	Moderate and variable	Relatives, village elders	Up to 10% per month	Irrigation constraints (due to shared dam water among villages), production risks
Kyaukse (Mandalay Region)	Farming: rice, chickpeas, sesame, mung beans, onions, chilli Wage labour (landless households)	150 000–200 000 kyat (landless households)	Microfinance institutes, pawnshops	2.5% to 10%	Debt cycles, income instability
Taunggyi (Shan State)	Casual wage labour (displaced households)	150 000–200 000 kyat	Microfinance institutes and informal lenders	2.5% to 10%	Limited livelihood assets, displacement

► 5.2 Child labour and its worst forms in the agriculture sector and rural areas

Child labour in general

Child labour was reported across multiple sectors, including agriculture, construction, services and trades. It was mentioned as more common among adolescents than younger children, with patterns influenced by age, gender and season. Children aged 12–17 were the most affected. In particular, boys aged 12–14 were said to frequently engage in labour-intensive activities, such as working in tea shops, construction and scrap collection, while girls aged 16–17 were reported as more often involved in exploitive working conditions in sales, sedentary roles, factory work and domestic work. Children younger than 12 were rarely cited as engaging in some form of work and instead were described as doing household chores, seasonal agricultural tasks or assisting migrant families in agriculture work.

The estimated prevalence of child labour by the key informants varied by region and season. In Nyaungshwe Township, for instance, 20 per cent of children (30 of 170 children in one village) were estimated to be engaged in child labour, while during planting and harvesting seasons in Kyaukse Township, children constituted up to an estimated half of the total workforce. Key informants in Kyaukse and Taunggyi townships noted that the socio-economic disruptions after the political change in 2021, including increased displacement of families, unemployment, reduced household income and school dropouts, had further exacerbated the prevalence of child labour in many areas.

The gendered dimension of child labour was notable from the different discussions. Boys tended to dominate in physically demanding work, such as farming, carpentry, masonry, quarry work and operating machinery, whereas girls were more frequently employed in weaving, sugarcane cutting, clothing and beauty shops and factory work with harmful conditions. Both boys and girls were described as engaging in paid and unpaid labour, earning daily wages ranging from 5,000 kyats to 10,000 kyats, with typical working hours from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. When the employment is with another family, they may provide food, accommodation or profit sharing as compensation. The study participants' responses in Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe and Ye townships illustrated this diversity of work, with boys assisting largely in agriculture or construction and girls participating in urban service sectors or domestic work in another household.

The urban and rural contexts further distinguished the child labour situation. In Taunggyi, for example, urban children were said to typically work in tea shops or in manual labour conditions while rural children assist their parents in agricultural activities. Similarly, in Chaung-U and Kyaukse townships, boys were characterized as involved in gold mining or loading agricultural products and girls worked in garment factories or domestic work in another household. The work assignments reflected both age and physical capability: Younger children were generally limited to lighter tasks, whereas adolescents performed more intensive and higher-paying work.

Hazardous work

Among the study areas, a substantial number of children engage in hazardous work, as defined under the ILO's Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190): tasks that expose children to physical, psychological or sexual risks; dangerous machinery; heavy loads; unhealthy environments; or excessively long hours. In the agricultural regions, such as Kyaukse and Nyaungshwe, children aged 12–14 were reported as frequently spraying pesticides without protective equipment, carrying heavy bags, shovelling soil, irrigating fields and operating machinery. These activities expose them to chemical hazards, extreme weather and environmental dangers, such as snake bites.

Construction and manual labour are particularly hazardous. In the study areas, boys were reported in masonry, carpentry, quarry work, electrical works and timber processing, often handling heavy loads or working at heights. In Taunggyi Township, for example, children who had assisted with chainsaws or tractors had suffered severe injuries, including the loss of fingers. Urban service work, including in tea shops, restaurants, KTV establishments and scrap collection, had exposed children to unsafe conditions, verbal abuse, the potential for human trafficking and drug-related risks. The reported night work, long hours and employment abroad, especially in Thailand under uncertain conditions, further increased the hazards among children. In Ye Township, children climbed 25–50-foot trees to collect betel nuts, drove motorbikes and operated machinery on farms. Climbing betel nut trees is particularly hazardous because the tall, straight and smooth trunks make them difficult to climb, placing children at a high risk of falling and thus serious injury.

Worst forms of child labour

The worst forms of child labour, as defined under ILO Convention No. 182, encompass slavery, forced or compulsory labour, sexual exploitation, involvement in illicit activities and any work likely to harm a child's health, safety or morals. In this study, the reported worst forms of child labour were in multiple sectors, although they mostly related to Convention No. 182's section on hazardous work.

Agriculture sector

Adolescents engaged in pesticide spraying, heavy lifting, machinery operation and long hours of work on farms, exposing them to chemical, physical and environmental hazards.

Construction and heavy labour

Children were engaged in masonry, carpentry, quarrying, timber work and chainsaw operations – areas with severe accident risks. In Taunggyi, for instance, some children had suffered permanent injuries while assisting with machinery. Boys had engaged in gold mining, drug trafficking, timber business and other high-risk employment.

Urban areas

Girls were involved in sexual exploitation, online sex work and clothing and beauty shops and factory work under exploitive conditions.

Conflict and criminal involvement

Child soldiering was reported in Kyaukse and Taunggyi townships, with recruitment by both sides of the conflict. Although Kyaukse Township (Mandalay Region) is not a conflict area, children had been forced to participate in the armed conflict. Children were also involved in marijuana cultivation and other parts of the illicit drug business or had been trafficked into exploitive and illegal forms of work in Taunggyi.

These forms of labour can severely impair children's physical, psychological and social development and disrupt their education. In the study areas, boys were primarily exposed to physically hazardous or conflict-related worst forms of child labour, while girls were more frequently reported as subject to sexual exploitation and exploitive urban work. Economic pressures and displacement after the political change in 2021 intensified the prevalence of the worst forms of child labour, particularly among adolescents aged 12–17.

► Case study 1.

I would like to cry, but no tears ever come down

My name is De Dee. I am a 14-year-old boy from Mobyè, close to Kayah [Karenni] State [but in Taunggyi Township of Shan State]. To avoid armed conflict, my family and I moved here [this village] two years ago: my mother, two little sisters and me. My father remained in Mobyè to continue farming. Unfortunately, last year, my father was killed by artillery shelling while he was working on the farm.

As a result, I had to quit school while I was in Grade 6 to help support my two sisters' education. Since then, my mother and I have worked as masons on a daily wage basis, earning 20,000 kyats per day. There is no regular work for us; it is usually only a few days a week, and sometimes we have no work for the entire month. My working hours are from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with one hour for lunch. We do not work on Sundays; we attend church.

I am not happy with my work. I have to work under sunlight for hours, and my job often requires me to carry heavy cement bags. I feel very tired, and I frequently fall ill. When there is no work, I hang out with my friends.

I feel a profound sadness, especially when I think about my father. I would like to cry, but no tears ever come down. Instead, I feel a pain in my chest, and I try to laugh loudly. I do not want my mother and sisters to know how I feel. Sometimes, I hit the wall.

I have no idea about my future; I do not want to go back to school either. I hope for a less strenuous and easier job for me in the future, but I do not know what type of work that might be.

Reasons for and drivers of child labour

The study findings, especially from Chaung-U, Kyaukse and Nyaungshwe townships, indicate that child labour in the study villages is mainly driven by family hardship and poverty-related survival needs, including households struggling to provide for basic needs and children being expected to contribute to the family's income. Even though education is free, for many marginalized families, the cost for the uniform, donations for school occasions or having to buy cleaning tools for the classroom (such as brooms and dustbins) had turned schooling into an extra burden on parents, especially in Kyaukse. In some cases, children had started out only helping a parent with work but had shifted into full-time work to support the whole household, especially when the parent's livelihood was affected by a disaster, such as a flood or the earthquake. Study participants in Nyaungshwe explained that these situations had worsened due to the resulting increased cost of living. Additional pressures were reported, also in Nyaungshwe, to quit school and work to support the family. Example scenarios cited included a parent becoming ill or dying and a child, likely the eldest, leaving school to work to cover the education expenses for other siblings (see case study 1 from Taunggyi) and a young adolescent with a family relationship issue struggling to follow school lessons or having lost interest in schoolwork (see case study 2 from Kyaukse). Some children left school to work because they wanted cash for personal spending, modern gadgets or to move far away. At times, peers influenced the decision to leave school.

Gender norms and attitudes towards education also shape decisions, as one mother from Nyaungshwe explained: "Boys are strong and dependable for the family. If a good strong boy, he has a real strength equal to nine tigers. We want them to give a hand on family needs. So, we do not favour education for boys. For girls, they are like the phrase, 'women are weak'. So, we want them to be softer and calmer, like a teacher."

In Nyaungshwe, an increase in child labour is expected with the increase in children dropping out of school due to economic hardship and difficulties in adapting to the new curriculum, including changes in the syllabus and teaching methods. In addition, study participants perceived that increasing engagement with social media has reduced students' interest in schooling and is contributing to the increased school dropout rates.

In the Taunggyi study villages, impoverished parents without much education who were in the group discussions indicated a lack of awareness or appreciation of the long-term benefit of schooling, which had led them to prioritize immediate family needs. As one employer noted, "Whether they go to school or not, they end up working in farming. Those who do not attend school go work on farms, and even those who graduate return to the village and do the same."

Wider drivers of dropping out of school and/or child labour described during the study include the political instability, armed conflict, displacement, lower socio-economic status and rising schooling costs. Some children who had dropped out were reported as drawn to "easy money", including into the illicit drug business. Migrating families have also contributed to the incidence of child labour when their children follow their migration and follow them into working, which was described in Ye Township. Displacement and seasonal migration can also result in families relocating to new places, including a village farm or construction site, where children inevitably start working and lose touch with their education.

Study participants' perceptions of child labour

Parents of younger children

In the FGD with parents of children aged 5–11, family hardship had led parents to take a child to their workplace to also work to boost the household income during periods of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the political instability after 2021 and due to the rising cost of living. Many of the study participants sympathized with households needing whatever income that could be managed, but they also worried about the long-term consequences of children leaving school: They recognized that child labour disrupts education, exposes children to unsafe environments and raises fears of early marriage, drug abuse or crushing injuries. Some of the participants in Chaung-U, Kyaukse and Ye townships considered child labour as a product of limited knowledge, attitude and wisdom among the parents.

Others viewed child labour as reinforcing a cycle of poverty, wherein children who miss out on education and skills development are more likely to become low-skilled adults with limited livelihood opportunities, thus increasing the likelihood that their own households will remain impoverished and will also rely on child labour in the future.

Teachers

Teachers said they discourage child labour among school-age children. They acknowledged families' hardships and sympathized with them. But they also emphasized the risks to academic progress, social development and mental well-being and reported that they advocate keeping children in school whenever possible.

Children (in child labour and school-going children)

Children who were in a child labour situation expressed mixed feelings: Some said they enjoy earning money, learning a skill (carpentry) and supporting their family. Others admitted fatigue from balancing their work with their studies or that they work in unsafe conditions.

School-going children expressed sympathy for their peers who were working but perceived child labour negatively, believing education should come first. School-going children in Chaung-U, Nyaungshwe and Ye townships said that even though working during holidays can bring extra income for children, it raises concerns about long-term risks and the impact on a young person's well-being.

Youth

Some school-going youths viewed child labour as a compromise they want to avoid because they value education and a secure future more highly. Others, especially working youths, appreciated the earnings and freedom in life, although they acknowledged the hard work and social stigma involved. The stigma described by participants relates to their interactions with peers and society. Working youths reported feeling embarrassed or inferior because they had missed educational opportunities, had a lower level of education and fewer skills than their peers and therefore had fewer prospects for future employment. They appreciated the income and independence that work provides while simultaneously experiencing feelings of disadvantage and social exclusion resulting from their limited education and skills. Many youths in Ye Township said they favour protecting childhood and learning while recognizing the hardships that push families towards child labour. The findings are not contradictory but reflect the coexistence of short-term benefits and longer-term social and educational disadvantages.

Employers

The employers in the group discussions expressed some degree of concern about child labour, noting it as a form of cheap labour when children work alongside their parents. They professed to be not in favour of child labour and reflected broader concerns about the legality, ethics and impact on young persons' development and future opportunities. However, some employers in Nyaungshwe admitted the agile, active character of children for certain difficult work situations and the opportunity to pay lower wages than what an adult would be paid.

Community members

Some community members in the Ye Township group discussion perceived children's involvement in work as normal. A commonly expressed perspective was that children working is natural, and it is determined by physical strength rather than age. Such perceptions highlight a limited understanding of childhood as a concept, age-appropriate work and the nature and risks of child labour.

► **Case study 2.****I feel sad whenever I miss my mother**

My name is Sai Sai. I am a 13-year-old boy of mixed blood of Shan and Bamar. I have two siblings: an elder brother and a sister who is married. My mother died of breast cancer when I was 4. After her death, my father remarried and left home. Since then, I have been taken care of by my aunt, my mother's sister in the same village in Kyaukse.

When I was in Grade 4, at 10 years old, I felt a loss of interest in school because I did not understand the lessons well. So, I left school for good and started working as a manual labourer. I earn about 300,000 kyat per month [roughly 10,000 kyat per day; other adult workers earn 15,000–17,000 kyat per day]. Every day I spend about 3,000 kyat on snacks and give the remaining earnings to my aunt. In my leisure time, I play chinlone with friends. I find my work very hard, carrying stones and bricks and making concrete; my working day is from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., which is too long. Sometimes I get blisters on my hands. Luckily, my employer doesn't punish me when I can't do something as he tells me to do.

To be honest, I do not enjoy my present life and have no clear hope for the future. I feel sad whenever I miss my mother, and I cannot go to entertainments like other children. Sometimes my father calls me by phone. I feel happy only when someone buys me new clothes. Anyway, I would like to work as a barber instead because I think it seems less demanding work for me. I am now saving my earnings to attend barber training and expect to be a barber sometime later.

► **5.3 Access to formal and informal education****Infrastructure and system****Chaung-U Township**

The villages in the Chaung-U study areas have community learning centres in place of government schools due to the armed conflict prevalent there, with school levels either up to Grade 10 or Grade 12 (upper secondary). These learning centres use the syllabus from the Ministry of Education but their teaching methods differ. Most of the community learning centres only operate up to the lower-secondary level and are supported with learning materials, including stationery, textbooks, exercise books, backpacks and village-built infrastructure and roof improvements. One community learning centre in the study exemplified self-help education, with a pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 system that is led by a religious leader and charges a modest monthly contribution from families to pay the teachers. The monastery-linked and other alternative community learning centres reflect how communities have adapted to crises to maintain young people's access to an education and thus uphold their right to an education when the formal system is disrupted.

Kyaukse Township

Among the five villages included in the study in Kyaukse Township, four have a government primary school. All government schools in Kyaukse use the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. The children from the one village without a school travel to the primary school in the nearby village. The primary school is the more commonly found education facility in villages, offering kindergarten to Grade 5 with a limited number of teachers, such as 80 students and five teachers. Some villages offer only primary education, requiring students to travel to a nearby village or to Kyaukse town to continue their lower- and upper-

secondary schooling. Travel to school typically is with a bicycle or takes 7–15 minutes by car. Transportation costs vary, and options depend on distance and available vehicles, illustrating how primary schools and secondary schools are accessible.

Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships

In Nyaungshwe, two of the four study villages have no school. At the upper-secondary level, children in all four villages must travel to the government school located in the largest of the four villages. In Taunggyi, only one of the two villages in the study has a primary school. The older children in both villages must go to the government secondary school in a nearby village. All government schools in Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi use the curriculum of the Ministry of Education.

Displacement and security often affect their schooling. Children of displaced families encounter documentation barriers that prevent formal school continuation because they do not have the necessary documents. Monastery education, however, remains accessible to them. Education quality suffers from teacher shortages, unqualified teacher recruits and learning disruptions. Access barriers are particularly pronounced for older students who must travel a considerable distance to an upper-secondary school.

Due to armed conflict, schools are not always safe, which contributes to some students' decision to drop out. Some communities have created an alternative option for students who drop out of the government school, such as a monastic or non-formal learning centre.

Ye Township

In Ye Township, three of the four study villages have both government schools and a Mon national school. The remaining village has only a government lower-secondary school. Depending on the village, the Mon national school network provides primary, lower-secondary or upper-secondary education, with brick buildings as the basic school structure and enough teaching staff. For enrolment, both systems require parents' identification, household list registration and the child's birth certificate. Tuition (private tutoring) and supply costs were reported at around 10,000 kyats per month, with the additional expense of the uniform and writing books. The Mon national school network offers a pathway from kindergarten through Grade 9, supporting continuity for students within the Mon education framework amid broader regional challenges, such as armed conflicts and instability. The government upper-secondary education is accessible to anyone who has completed the lower-secondary level in a government or a Mon national school.

All the government schools and Mon national schools in Ye Township use the curriculum of the Ministry of Education. However, the Mon national schools add teaching the Mon language.

Needs of schools

School infrastructure

In Kyaukse Township, the main issue discussed was damage to school buildings caused by the March 2025 earthquake. In Chaung-U Township, challenges included leaking school roofs, inadequate desks and insufficient access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. In Nyaungshwe Township, teaching aids for science subjects are limited, and some schools depend on nearby monasteries for their water supply. Classrooms lack proper seating; some schools in Chaung-U have only a concrete floor with no mats, benches or desks. Additional safety measures are required for many community learning centres in Chaung-U, including underground classrooms and bomb shelters to protect against air raids and artillery shelling.

School system: Teacher quality, private tuition and school upgrading

Teacher quality in Chaung-U and Kyaukse townships are hampered by the insufficient number of teachers, which requires them to take on multi-subject loads, and by limited teaching qualifications due to inadequate training and lack of certification. In conflict-affected Chaung-U Township, there is a need for qualified teachers and safer school facilities to protect students. Tuition (private tutoring) and funding gaps affect enrolment in Nyaungshwe and Ye townships. Some Mon national schools in Ye are unable to upgrade to government schools because they do not meet the requirements, particularly the requirement to employ a sufficient number of certified teachers.

School accessibility, continuation and communication with teachers

Many textbooks were not available in the Mon national schools in Ye Township when the school year began in June 2026. Some students from a Mon national school in Ye Township had transferred to a government upper-secondary school to continue their education. However, they reported facing several challenges after the transfer, including language barriers, ethnicity-based discrimination and discrimination related to their previous learning background. The Mon national schools primarily use Mon and English as the medium of instruction, whereas the government upper-secondary schools use Myanmar language, making the transition difficult for some students. Students in Shan State faced different challenges across townships. In Taunggyi Township, for instance, maltreatment by teachers in government schools was reported. In Nyaungshwe Township, students experienced difficulties with transportation to school and limited access to learning materials.

Education access and risk

Overall, access to education is constrained by physical, economic and security challenges. For example, in Ye Township, many school buildings are old and require repair or upgrading. In Kyaukse Township, although most villages still have a brick school building, many were damaged or structurally weakened by the March 2025 earthquake. For instance, the earthquake severely damaged a primary school in one village in Kyaukse Township, forcing the children into temporary, overcrowded learning spaces. In Chaung-U, government schools were replaced with community learning centres that rely on local volunteer teachers. These learning centres typically operate in bamboo or thatch structures with minimal protection. Safe sanitation and water supply are inadequate, and students frequently share broken toilets and rely on an unsafe water source.

Although most villages have a primary school, secondary education is limited, requiring long and sometimes unsafe routes to access them, especially in Chaung-U Township. During the planting season in Mon State and the tomato harvesting season in Shan State, children are withdrawn from school to work in the agricultural fields. For many children, dropping out of school is not a choice but a necessary response to family debt. In addition, the damage to school infrastructure caused by the earthquake and armed conflict, the limited access to safe learning spaces and the limited access to higher levels of education also have contributed to the increased rate of students dropping out of school.

Needs of families

The cost of keeping children in school, such as transport expenses or availability and the tuition (private tutoring) fee, have risen since the political change in 2021. A comment from a CSO representative in Mandalay, that “Myanmar education is no more an education system but has become a business”, reflects the idea that without money, there is no schooling. Parents experiencing financial hardship typically cannot afford to keep their children in school, whether boys or girls, because providing for the family’s basic needs is the priority. Parents’ poverty has reduced school favourability because a child going to school burdens the family financially, but a child working can contribute to family income. The dropout-friendly environment currently has created more free time and potential for child labour, with many children following an elder sibling’s path to dropping out. Understandably, the rising cost of going to school has forced some families to remove their children from school to work instead. In Nyaungshwe, school attendance is determined by the cost for outside tutoring in some villages. Among children of internally displaced families in Taunggyi, school continuation requires an academic completion certificate

to transfer schools. In Ye, teachers reported that they found it difficult to meet with parents to discuss a child's performance or how the student was at risk of dropping out because the parents were too busy with their livelihood.

School enrolment

Basically, in all study areas, enrolment to a government school requires a parent's national ID, household list registration and the child's birth certificate, which can be obtained from the provincial authorities. The private tutoring fee varies with the educational level of children. Moreover, some schools in Kyaukse require parents to provide the uniform and exercise books, while other schools supply the textbooks and exercise books. However, it was reported that children of internally displaced families and impoverished families are unable to enrol in schools in Taunggyi. In Nyaungshwe, more girls are typically enrolled than boys because of the population difference between them. In some areas, parents who are concerned with security or preoccupied with their work are not likely to enrol a child in kindergarten. In Ye, overaged children or children born abroad, for example in Thailand, are not accepted into the government schools. The Mon national primary school accepts such children for a fee but provides exercise books for free.

School attending and retention

In Chaung-U, family difficulties challenge school retention, especially among internally displaced families residing in two communities near the ARISE Project village. School attendance data indicate that absenteeism has been higher among boys than girls, likely due to their involvement in work.

Strong community leadership by the village monk, who consistently reinforces messaging on the benefits of education and the importance of staying in school, was cited as a protective factor in Chaung-U. Parents in that township expressed interest in their children's education and willingness to enrol them in secondary school. The monastic school in Chaung-U, now operating as a community learning centre, reopened in 2021 after the political change with an enrolment of around 700 students and has since expanded to approximately 1,000 students, including those from neighbouring villages and children of internally displaced families.

Study participants' perceptions of schooling and school life

Parents on schooling among children

At the individual level, some parents expressed a negative perception of an education for their children. But in the overall findings of the FGDs involving parents, the perceptions were more mixed. Fundamentally, parents favoured sending their children to school, with the expectation that they would complete Grade 12. Some parents aimed higher, at a university education. Some parents expressed a desire to send older adolescents abroad for work. A few parents, especially in Kyaukse Township, said that children aged 15–17 would benefit more from working than from continuing their education. They said that continuing education was not worthwhile due to the high cost of schooling and the ongoing insecurity disrupting children's education. Some parents in Ye Township remarked that once children reach the age of 12 or 13, sending them abroad to work, particularly in Thailand, is a better option than keeping them in school.

Similar comments were heard in Chaung-U, where parents were characterized as allowing education up to Grade 12 and then open to sending older youths abroad to work. In fact, most parents in the FGDs said they supported continued education (upper secondary and even university), and some of them emphasized their investment in schooling outcomes. However, the insecurity and risk factors have reduced enrolments, with a few parents viewing schooling as unsafe. Despite such challenges, many participating parents expressed positive views about education, although a small portion remained sceptical about its value. Some youths attending school relayed the negative perceptions they had endured from relatives. One young woman in Chaung-U who was older than 18 described being ridiculed by her relatives for continuing her education: "They told me, 'At your age, you should work instead of going to school and wasting your parents' money'."

School-attending children on school life

Most of the children in the Chaung-U FGDs who were still in school said they feel happy and positive about school life, especially in the community learning centre with its diverse activities and teacher-assisted games. However, many expressed they feel insecure and fear due to the repeated air strikes, artillery shelling and drone bombings and that their psychological distress had risen as the violence became more frequent (three to four times per month). As one school-attending adolescent explained, “We are afraid of bomb blasts all the time. We do not want to attend school with Boom! Bang! Boom! ... and school closed again. While we are in the classroom, artillery shelling is coming – such things happen!”

Despite these fears, parents remain supportive of their children’s education as long as schooling continues to be enjoyable.

Reasons for dropping out of school

School dropouts

The responses on school dropouts indicated a mix of gender patterns and a mix of reasons for dropping out. Across the school system, especially in Nyaungshwe and Ye, more boys than girls had thus far dropped out, particularly at the secondary level, with several cases per year and the numbers having risen after the 2021 political change. At the primary and lower-secondary levels, children who had dropped out of school reported that they mainly left because they had lost interest in an education. A rare exception was a Grade 5 boy in Kyaukse Township who left school to enter the monkhood.

Among older youths in Taunggyi, those in Grade 12 who had failed exams considered dropping out or moving to work or vocational training after the first failing. Disruptive behaviours and drug abuse were reported in some study sites, notably among boys, and was increasing their risk of dropping out of school. Participants described drug abuse as a growing problem in Ye Township and noted that the Mon National State Party had opened rehabilitation facilities to address it. Information on domestic migrant families indicated some children had left school in Grades 4 and 5, but there was a greater proportion of migrant children dropping out at the secondary levels, partly due to the transport costs to get to a school. Among internally displaced families and impoverished households, teenage marriage was cited as driving young people to leave school early. The overall findings, particularly from Chaung-U and Ye, indicated that the recent school dropout rates were higher for boys than girls and worst among internally displaced families and disadvantaged groups.

Related to parents and family

Family hardship and economic difficulties were repeatedly cited as drivers of the increasing school dropout rate. Although there were no direct schooling costs, responses in Chaung-U referenced other threats to staying enrolled, including an unsafe path to school due to muggings, while in Kyaukse, drug abusers were said to be a threat on the way to and from school. In Ye, insufficient pocket money for students’ school lunch and snacks was reported as a considerable issue. Even when schooling was nominally free, families were reported as struggling with broader economic pressures that pushed their children towards work or other responsibilities, which thus reduced the priority and feasibility of continued education, as reported in Chaung-U and Ye. Disruptions in Taunggyi, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the political changes, had compounded family hardships, thus contributing to the loss of interest in education and the increase in the number of students dropping out.

Related to children

Children’s struggle to engage in learning and their readiness were cited as factors: Difficulties in following lessons and language or communication barriers had led to a lack of interest in schooling and had prompted students to drop out in Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe and Ye. Age-related transitions, such as the attraction of earning income to fulfil personal or social needs, was mentioned as motivation to leave school in Nyaungshwe. In Ye, personal challenges, such as a disability or a health issue, had contributed as a school dropout risk factor.

Related to schools

In an interview, a CSO representative noted that families' perceptions of school usefulness and limitations of the education system influence the decision to leave school early. In Chaung-U, for example, the inability to provide completion certificates (which is the case with community learning centres) or the absence of pathways to higher education were cited as discouraging continued enrolment, even when a basic level of schooling was available.

Related to broader social, community and regional factors

Broader social, community and regional factors also have contributed to the school dropout problem. These include the armed conflict, drug and alcohol abuse and gambling. For example, in Chaung-U Township, armed conflict-related insecurity had disrupted children's education and contributed to the increased number of students dropping out. In Ye Township, exposure to environments in which drug and alcohol abuse and gambling are contributed to some students becoming disengaged from school and eventually dropping out. Also in Ye, societal attitudes, such as acceptance of early marriage or the preference that boys work, had influenced parents to shift priorities away from education. In Chaung-U Township, the high cost of travelling to a state university or college, limited local education and employment opportunities and safety concerns encouraged some students to leave school early and seek opportunities outside their communities.

Perceptions of children and youths who have dropped out of school

Several indicators seem a positive sign that some young people who had dropped out wanted to resume their schooling. Some adolescents in Chaung-U and Ye who had left school early, for example, said that seeing their peers going to school makes them want to return. Similarly, in Chaung-U and Taunggyi, children who had dropped out due to personal or family circumstances also wanted to continue their education. However, some group discussion participants in Taunggyi and Ye who had dropped out of school admitted they remained disinterested in returning to school and instead wanted to pursue work or vocational training, typically due to their parents' attitudes or their own age-related issues.

Recommended action to increase school enrolment rates

Community members in Kyaukse and Taunggyi proposed measures focused on household and community support: increasing family income, ensuring adequate teachers (numbers and quality) and improving child safety at school to encourage enrolment. They also emphasized a need to educate and support parents on ways to boost their livelihoods so that education becomes a sustainable and enjoyable experience for their children, aided by engaging teaching practices. In more urgent terms, especially in Chaung-U, some community members recommended practical safety improvements, such as installing a bomb shelter or reinforced underground classrooms to address security concerns.

Perceptions on preventing school dropouts

Teachers

In Kyaukse Township, teachers emphasized the importance of making learning more interesting and engaging to encourage children to remain in school. In Chaung-U Township, teachers highlighted the need to treat all children fairly, without discrimination and to encourage school attendance through moral and practical support, including support from respected community members, such as religious leaders. They also stressed the importance of ensuring children's safety by providing protective facilities, such as a bomb shelter or underground classroom, when necessary. In Taunggyi Township, teachers emphasized the importance of role models, positive behaviour and creating a supportive and education-friendly environment that encourages children to stay in school.

Children

School-going children in the FGDs emphasized that students who struggle with their lessons require greater encouragement and support from teachers and parents. Excessive online gaming has become a problem that is impacting some students' interest in school and should be addressed in some way. Suggestions in Chaung-U and Kyaukse pointed to how peers and educators can be constructive role models to sustain motivation.

Parents

In Ye Township, study participants emphasized that preventing school dropout requires raising parents' awareness of the value of education, addressing family economic hardship and improving household income through community support and income-generating activities. They also highlighted the importance of engaging CSOs to support low-income families by conducting need assessments to determine families' needs and then providing appropriate guidance.

Before and after the 2021 political change

Before the political change

Before the political change in 2021, the school context and student retention were relatively stable, with only a few students dropping out. In Nyaungshwe, for example, it was described as two to three students a year. There were the ongoing challenges from natural disasters, but school operations generally continued with community support. Some families faced hardship but were able to keep their children in school. In Taunggyi, the number of households internally displaced was limited in the study areas and access to schooling remained relatively steady, according to a CSO informant. Moreover, there were non-formal education services present.

After the political change

According to the informant interviews and group discussions, disruptions due to the 2021 political change had caused many interruptions and setbacks. Some schooling resumed after the reopening of the government in the 2022–23 academic year, but retention issues intensified, with more students dropping out (up to three to four per year in Nyaungshwe, for example). A misalignment of age and grade and a lack of interest among students have emerged, especially reported in Chaung-U and Kyaukse. A natural disaster, such as flooding, or other disruptions have sometimes increased the interruptions in schooling in Nyaungshwe.

Psychological impacts have increased among children and have contributed to behavioural changes and trauma. There has been a rise in the internal displacement of families from Taunggyi, thus straining local resources. Additionally, law enforcement and foreign aid have weakened, while community schooling has faced challenges and teacher shortages. Non-formal education services in Taunggyi ended because development projects were withdrawn. In Ye, enrolment in the Mon national schools had increased in some areas as families sought alternative options after the government schools closed due to an abrupt shortage of teachers.

Post-earthquake schooling

After the Mandalay earthquake eruption in March 2025, school operations and community dynamics changed markedly in some of the affected areas, such as in Kyaukse Township. The destruction of school buildings led to a two-shift school day to maintain children's learning in Kyaukse or children were sent to a primary school in a nearby village. Increased incidence of school dropouts and child labour were reported. Although houses and pagodas suffered damage, school life remained largely unaffected. The disaster heightened emotional and social distress, with more children experiencing setbacks and families experiencing unemployment due to fewer livelihood opportunities and the supply of labour exceeding that of demand.

Although Taunggyi Township has remained relatively free from armed conflict, it has received internally displaced persons from conflict-affected areas of Northern Shan State, Kayah State and parts of Shan State. In the Inle Lake and Pindaya areas, some farming households sold their land and relocated, disrupting their children's school enrolment and limiting their livelihood opportunities. Participants also reported that law enforcement had weakened and was not consistently enforced in Shan State.

In some communities in Ye, child labour increased as children helped their family in farm work or followed their parents to Thailand to work. Some locations reported no significant impact, although the region overall experienced heightened vulnerabilities and disrupted education systems.

► 5.4 Economic vulnerability

Challenges to livelihoods

Kyaukse Township

The study participants characterized livelihoods in Kyaukse as challenged by the lack of skills and unstable incomes, both of which force households to accept low, uncertain earnings from casual labour and crop production. Market price fluctuations have increased the cost for inputs and reduced profitability for farming and associated work. Climate and disaster risks have compounded this situation, resulting in low yields and occasional flooding that has reduced livelihood opportunities and driven up debt for many households. The uncertainty of demand and pricing makes it hard to plan for the future, and debt burdens exert ongoing pressure on families. "We need reliable buyers and stable prices for agricultural products to improve resilience," one discussion participant pointed out. Water insecurity and irregular work have compounded the stress, with no reliable dam water and sparse casual labour options. This has led to higher costs and greater debt for many families as they struggle to maintain farming or switch to less stable income sources.

Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships

In Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships, livelihoods have been severely affected by natural disasters, climate change and the political situation, which has led to a sharp decline in tourism and reduced income-generating opportunities for local communities. In Nyaungshwe Township, flooding damaged rice fields and disrupted farming cycles, reducing agricultural production and household income. As a result, many families are relying on loans, including those provided through the government-led Mya Sein Yaung loan programme, while some also borrow from informal lenders at high interest rate to cope with their financial difficulties. In Taunggyi, households have faced multiple agricultural challenges: Crop pests and diseases have damaged agricultural production while livestock losses have increased production costs. In addition, transport disruptions and restricted market access have limited the sale of agricultural products, further increasing household vulnerability. In Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi, the household struggles with debt, agricultural disruptions and unstable casual employment have resulted in uncertain and fluctuating incomes from year to year.

Chaung-U Township

In Chaung-U, transportation and market access were cited as persistent obstacles, with high input costs and low or fluctuating market prices squeezing the margins of profit for farmers and traders. Market instability, disease risks in livestock and a lack of regular work for daily wage workers have intensified the financial pressures, pushing households towards increased debt and risky coping strategies. Some of the study participants reported opportunities in wage work or small businesses, but the transport costs due to multiplying checkpoints had raised the cost of delivering goods to market and thus was undermining profitability. The armed conflicts and political instability have strained resilience and long-term planning for households.

Ye Township

In Ye, weather variability, such as heavy rain and drought, has disrupted crop yields and market prices and contributed to increased losses and debt for households. Limited market information and price volatility also have hampered the planning for crops, like betel and other cash crops, making it hard to sustain a stable income.

► 5.5 Availability of vocational training

Before the COVID-19 pandemic in Kyaukse Township, vocational training programmes – making soap, bakery and tailoring (for youths up to age 25) – were offered to all genders without an education requirement (except for tractor driving), although none of the study participants could remember which organization sponsored the training.

In Shan State, particularly in Taunggyi Township, the Kanlatt Mitta Organization, a local CSO, had recently launched an eco-printing initiative for poor families. The organization also provides vocational training in tailoring, computer skills, nurse-aide services and pig rearing. Following the earthquake in March 2025, the ILO launched an Employment Intensive Investment Programme in the Inle Lake region to support livelihood recovery and create short-term employment opportunities for earthquake-affected communities. In Nyaungshwe Township, ILO-supported programmes provided tailoring and computer skills training, together with financial assistance and accommodation for participants.

The Kengtung Avocado Association Fund provided avocado grafting training in Taunggyi in October 2025. The training covered basic grafting knowledge and was open to individuals regardless of age or educational background. By applying the practical grafting skills learned during the training, participants were able to increase their income.

► 5.6 Policy challenges and service gaps

Child Rights Law

A broad awareness gap was evident among the informant interviews and group discussion responses regarding the Child Rights Law. Generally, many people reported awareness that anyone younger than 18 should not work, but details of the law or associated policies were not well-understood, even among employers in all study areas.

Convention No. 138 on minimum age

General community members as well as employers in all study areas were not clear on the age threshold relevant to working children.

Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour

The study participants could not specify which types of child labour would constitute its worst forms. Most of them, however, were aware that involvement in armed conflict, human trafficking or illicit drug or sexual work is the worst form of child labour. Some hazardous work, such as applying pesticides, working with machinery and working in masonry or carpentry, was recognized as a worst form that can cause harmful impact on children.

Formal and systematic pathway for reporting child labour

Study participants in Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi were aware of the availability of pathways to report the incidence of child labour to a CSO or a workers' union, but they were described as not systematic. There have been rare and isolated reports of child labour situations and support by workers' unions in Kyaukse in cooperation with local law enforcement and security forces. But there has been no coherent child labour framework or reliable reporting. Stakeholders had minimal formal support, and CSO activity had declined due to the security concern after the 2021 political change.

Stakeholders working to prevent child labour

There is limited activity by social partners or civil society groups to prevent child labour. In Mandalay, a CSO officer reported that their organization advocates for children's rights but reporting and protection mechanisms are weak and their activities are constrained by the current operating environment. There have been communication initiatives, such as disseminating pamphlets, but there has been no binding framework for protection and services, especially in Nyaungshwe, Taunggyi and Ye townships. After 2021, the political change limited CSO activity and weakened protection and awareness of children's rights and the harms associated with child labour, for example in Mandalay. Despite the policies against child labour, there has been a lack of enforcement and interest from authorities, thus making advocacy difficult.

► 5.7 Risk and protective factors

Risk factors

Families face persistent economic hardship, which drives their vulnerability to child labour. In Taunggyi Township, village child labour committees have been established. However, study participants reported that cooperation from parents to prevent child labour is weak. Even when development organizations pay vocational training fees, the security concerns, including passing through military checkpoints, the risk of being questioned or forced recruitment, the travel restrictions and the general insecurity discourage many adolescents from attending vocational training opportunities, thus reducing the effectiveness of these programmes. Weak law enforcement further limits protection for vulnerable adolescents. This has led to a more constrained operating environment, with perceived governance challenges, contributing to greater caution and hesitancy among CSO and NGO actors. And families prioritize survival over education, further elevating the risk of children entering or remaining in child labour, a dynamic observed across Kyaukse and Taunggyi townships.

Protective factors

The study participants identified several protective mechanisms to address child labour. These included reporting cases to the police and village committees, training and awareness-raising on the Child Rights Law and intervention by village-level child rights groups with support from CSOs. In Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships, schools in certain areas are still supported by CSOs, such as Shwe Inn Thu and Shan youth organizations, to address child labour within the education setting. However, rural areas often rely solely on village administrators and lack a coordination with child labour organizations. The formal Township Child Rights Committees⁸ exist but they struggle with financing, skills and the absence of a hotline. Ongoing support from UNICEF, Save the Children, World Vision and other networks continues to sustain the child rights work and community engagement in several locations in Chaung-U, Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships.

⁸ The Township Child Rights Committee is an administrative body responsible for implementing and coordinating child protection and development activities. Under the Child Rights Law (2019), these committees are formed by the National Committee to ensure that children's rights are upheld vertically, from the national level down to communities.

6

Discussion and conclusion

► 6.1 Forms and drivers of child labour in the agriculture sector and rural communities

The study confirmed that child labour in the surveyed areas is multifaceted, spanning hazardous work and the worst forms of child labour. Adolescents, especially those aged 12–17 years, have been the most affected, with boys predominating in physically demanding tasks, such as in agriculture, construction, gold mining and machinery operation, and girls in exploitive domestic, service-oriented or urban-based work. Seasonal demands, such as harvest periods in Kyaukse Township and planting seasons in Mon State, have intensified children's presence in these situations. Hazardous work is common, exposing children to chemical, physical and environmental risks, including pesticide exposure, machinery accidents and unsafe urban employment. The worst forms of child labour further include sexual exploitation, armed conflict involvement and engagement in illicit activities, which present severe threats to children's development, health and education.

The cited drivers of child labour in the study areas were deeply intertwined with household economic vulnerability, displacement and socio-cultural norms. Poverty, indebtedness and the loss (or severe illness) of adult family members had pushed children into an income-generating role to help cover the family's basic needs. Gender norms had also shaped expectations, with boys perceived as family labour assets and girls as caretakers or domestic workers in urban areas. Peer influence and the allure of modern gadgets as well as social media's influential portrayal of material consumption had further contributed to early engagement in child labour. The political and economic instability following the 2021 political change, together with the impacts of the 2025 earthquake, has intensified these underlying drivers, increasing household reliance on children's work to meet basic survival need.

► 6.2 Influence of poverty, indebtedness, displacement, social norms and access to services

Economic hardship emerged as a primary determinant of child labour in this analysis. Households with unstable incomes, limited land access or seasonal employment were relying on child labour as a coping strategy. Debt cycles, often aggravated by microfinance loans and high-interest informal lending, had exacerbated vulnerability. Displacement from conflict or disaster had disrupted livelihoods and education continuity and was compelling children to work in new environments.

Social norms strongly influenced the decisions regarding children's work. In some communities, child work was normalized based on physical strength rather than age (and that normalization of working based on strength helped create an environment more tolerant of child labour situations), and parental attitudes towards education were influenced by the perceived immediate benefits versus long-term outcomes. Limited access to social protection, vocational training or affordable education had compounded the challenges, leaving families with little options, except sending their children to earn what they could.

► 6.3 Educational opportunities and barriers

The education systems showed considerable variation across the study areas. Although Kyaukse and Ye townships had relatively robust school infrastructure, severe gaps were evident in Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi, particularly for secondary education. Internal displacement, natural disasters and disruptions after the 2021 political change had further restricted enrolment and retention. Teacher shortages, inadequate teaching and learning materials, unsafe facilities and long distances to a secondary school constituted structural barriers that were strongly associated with the increased rate of students dropping out.

Dropping out of school was reported to be more common among boys, while girls were more likely to remain in school. Parents generally valued education, but economic pressures, insecurity and opportunity costs drove the decision to move a child into a working situation, even into child labour conditions. In Chaung-U Township, although the community learning centres reflect many communities' effort to protect the education right of affected children amid the armed conflict, that solution lacks formal recognition and sufficient resources.

► 6.4 Livelihood patterns and economic vulnerabilities

Agriculture was the primary livelihood across the study areas, but income stability varied by townships. Families in Chung-U and Kyaukse townships had diversified crop production but struggled with climate and irrigation challenges. Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships had a larger number of landless and displaced households reliant on casual labour. The post-disaster and political change conditions had increased economic vulnerability, thus resulting in child labour as a temporary coping mechanism for family hardship.

Households' financial instability, seasonal employment and limited livelihood diversification had contributed directly to child labour. Vocational training for adolescents and parents, income-generating activities and market access improvements are recommended to enhance household resilience and reduce the dependence on child labour.

► 6.5 Risk and protective factors for school life and beyond

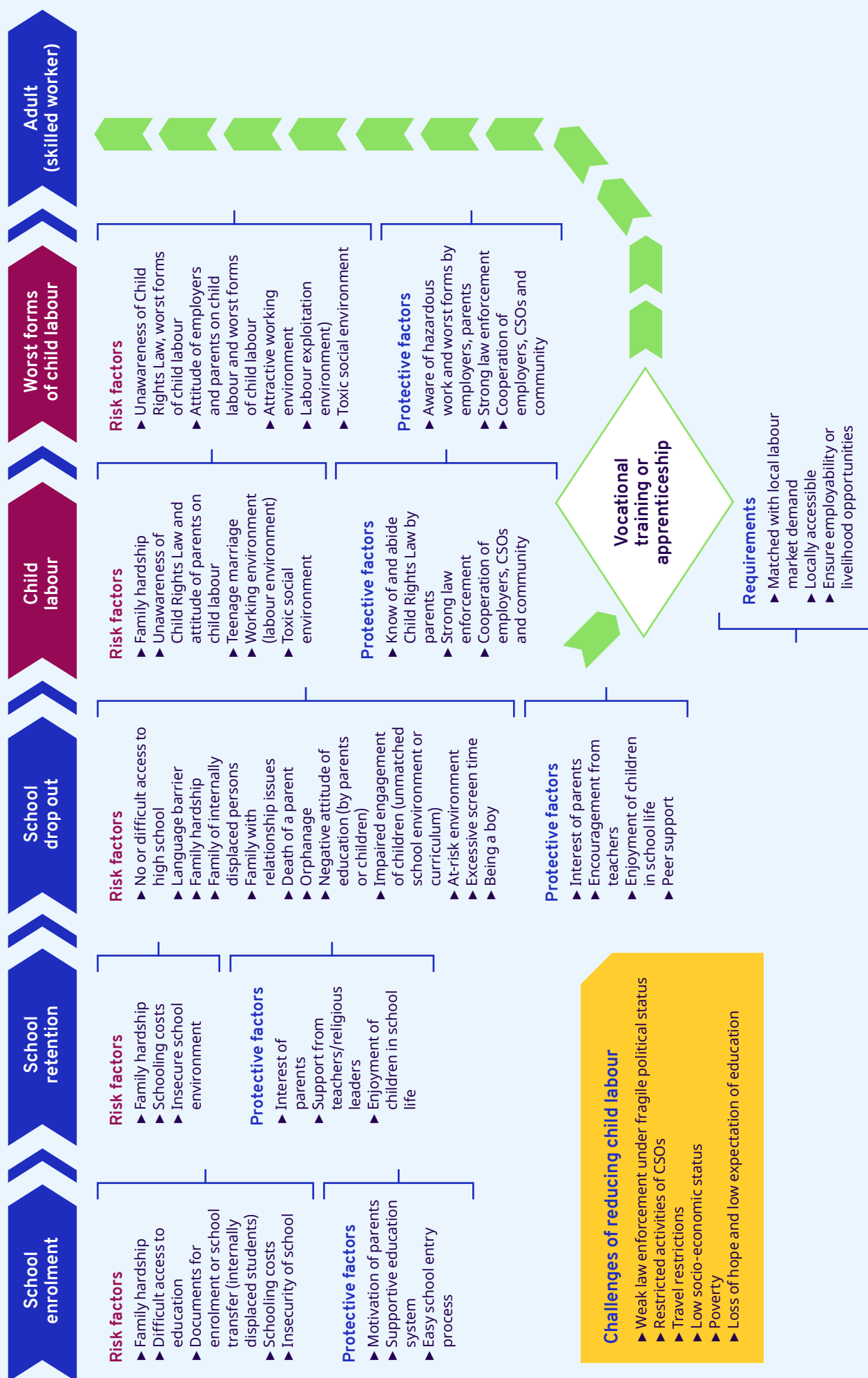
Based on the study findings, the following illustration (figure 2) highlights the risk and protective factors across a child's school life, from school enrolment and retention to dropping out and transitioning into child labour, even its worst forms. It also underscores the challenging factors that contribute to the practice of child labour. Most importantly, it records the emergence of the role of a vocational training or apprenticeship programme as crucial in preventing child labour among at-risk or already-dropped-out children and youth and in helping them become prepared to work as skilled adults in their chosen sectors after turning 18.

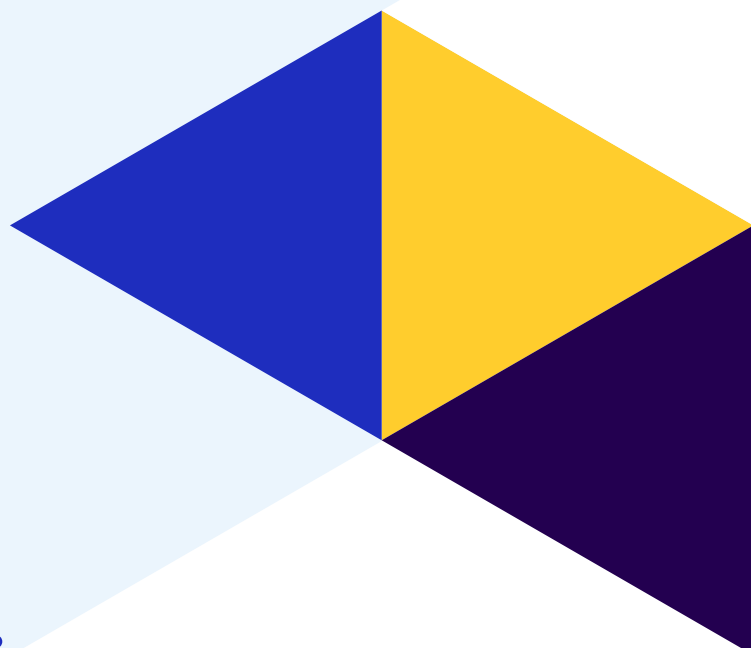
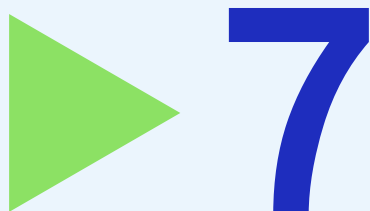
► 6.6 Institutional capacity and policy gaps

Local governance, CSOs and public institutions have critical roles but have become constrained by fragmented coordination, limited enforcement and restrictions since the political change in 2021. Awareness of child labour laws exists superficially, but enforcement is weak, and systematic reporting mechanisms are largely absent. Village committees and CSOs provide some protective oversight, but coordination between families, schools and authorities remains limited. Strengthening institutional frameworks, enhancing monitoring and building up trust between families and service providers are essential for sustainable child protection.

Community members in the group discussions emphasized the need for coordinated strategies that integrate household economic support, education accessibility, vocational training and institutional reinforcement. They also stressed that protective school environments, psychosocial support and livelihood diversification are critically needed interventions to reduce the child labour prevalence.

► Figure 2. Risk and protective factors across a child's educational pathway, from enrolment and retention to dropping out and entry into acceptable work or child labour and its worst forms





Recommendations

The following recommendations derive directly from the study findings and align with the international labour standards, particularly the ILO frameworks, including Conventions No. 138 and No. 182. The recommendations speak to: (i) education access and retention; (ii) livelihood vulnerability and social protection; (iii) prevention of the hazardous and worst forms of child labour; and (iv) policy and institutional strengthening.

► 7.1 Education access and retention

Findings

The study findings demonstrate that dropout rates increased at the lower- and upper-secondary levels, particularly among the boys, internally displaced children and economically vulnerable households in the study areas. Indirect schooling costs, documentation barriers, insecurity, damaged infrastructure (including earthquake-affected schools), teacher shortages and weak transition pathways contributed to children's disengagement from education. Seasonal agricultural work also disrupted school attendance, with many children required to help their family during the busy farming periods.

Recommendations

Strategic level

- Strengthen equitable access to free and compulsory basic and quality education by addressing the indirect cost barriers (transport, learning materials, documentation requirements) through targeted education support mechanisms for vulnerable households, including internally displaced and migrant families.
- Improve the quality and safety of the learning environment, including minimum infrastructure, safe water and sanitation standards and crisis-resilient school preparedness in high-risk areas.
- Strengthen teacher recruitment, certification and professional development systems to address the shortages and improve the child-centred teaching approach.
- Improve the effectiveness and accessibility of vocational training or TVET pathways that are aligned with local labour demand and linked to job placement opportunities.

Specific level (local context)

- Strengthen the formal and non-formal education systems to ensure that all children, including internally displaced persons, migrants and ethnic minorities, can access education without undue barriers, such as the cost for private tutoring (tuition) or transport to and from a school.
- Support resilient school infrastructure, such as reinforced classrooms, bomb shelters and safe water and sanitation facilities, in areas prone to insecurity or disasters.
- Facilitate coordinated access between the government schools and the Mon national schools to allow a seamless progression from primary through the secondary levels or from one to another.
- Promote participatory, interactive and age-appropriate teaching methods to increase engagement and reduce the risk of students dropping out.
- Encourage the active participation of parent-teacher associations to address dropout issues and, where needed or based on feasibility, provide resources for a qualified teacher to be the students' counsellor⁹ who can encourage consistent attendance and work with students at risk of dropping out, such as frequent absence or poor attendance or exhibiting behaviour changes – loss of interest, poor performance or truancy.
- Ensure a sufficient number of trained and certified teachers across all levels, with incentives for retention in remote or conflict-affected areas.
- Provide psychosocial support to school children in areas under armed conflict in Chaung-U and earthquake-affected areas in Kyaukse and extracurricular programmes, including sports, arts and life skills, to improve retention and address trauma related to insecurity or displacement.
- Align educational policies with household realities by addressing the indirect costs (transport, uniforms, school materials) through scholarships, subsidies or conditional cash support.
- Prioritize outreach and awareness campaigns to help parents see the value of education.

► 7.2 Livelihood vulnerability and social protection

Findings

Livelihood instability – due to market volatility, irrigation constraints, climate shocks, displacement, indebtedness and low wages – emerged as a primary driver of child labour. Households in Kyaukse, Nyaungshwe and Taunggyi townships experienced debt cycles; agricultural incomes fluctuated in Chaung-U and Ye townships; and landless or displaced families relied heavily on insecure wage labour.

Recommendations

Strategic level

- Integrate child labour prevention objectives into rural development, agriculture and poverty-reduction policies in high-risk sectors and prioritize the economically vulnerable households, including internally displaced and landless persons and people with high debt burdens.
- Expand disaster-responsive resilient and protective systems, including forming disaster risk reduction committees and income support mechanisms targeting vulnerable households.
- Strengthen accessibility to financial products and services and responsible lending platforms to reduce high-interest debt cycles that pressure families to withdraw children from school.

⁹ Based on the report of a religious leader on preventing school dropouts (Chaung-U), the students' counsellor role is to assess and support students who show signs of potentially dropping out and becoming a child labourer, especially in the lower- and upper-secondary school levels. This role would enhance teachers and school committees (teachers, parents and other education and village stakeholders) to manage properly and prevent individual dropout cases. Assigned staff or committee members should receive capacity-building to effectively address at-risk students. Alternatively, members of a parent-teacher association can replace the role of a students' counsellor to manage the prevention of school dropouts.

- Promote livelihood diversification and climate-resilient agricultural strategies to stabilize household income across seasons.
- Incorporate child labour risk indicators into vulnerability assessments used for targeting social protection and livelihood programming.

Specific level (local context)

- Develop targeted livelihood programmes to diversify income sources for families that are in line with the local context.
- Integrate vocational training for parents and caregivers to enhance long-term household stability.
- Facilitate access to microfinance through low-interest and promote financial literacy to address high-interest debt among vulnerable families.
- Align social protection interventions with local seasonal risks, such as harvest cycles, floods and climate-related shocks.
- Encourage community cooperatives and local market linkages that provide stable market prices, stabilize agricultural pricing and reduce financial vulnerability.
- Integrate livelihood programming with education interventions to reinforce the link between household stability and school attendance.

► 7.3 Prevention of the hazardous and worst forms of child labour

Findings

Children aged 12–17 engaged in hazardous agricultural tasks (pesticide spraying, heavy lifting, machinery operation), construction, quarrying, timber work and urban service work. Reports also indicated involvement in illicit activities, sexual exploitation and recruitment associated with armed actors – forms consistent with the worst forms of child labour under Convention No. 182.

Recommendations

Strategic level

Prevention and response strategies should prioritize the elimination of hazardous work and the other worst forms of child labour, in line with Convention No. 182.

- Strengthen enforcement of the minimum age legislation and hazardous work lists, in alignment with ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182.
- Develop sector-specific child labour risk mitigation frameworks for the agriculture, construction and informal urban service sectors.
- Enhance child labour monitoring capacity, particularly in the rural and informal sectors where the hazardous and worst forms of child labour are concentrated.
- Strengthen the referral and case management mechanisms that link local authorities, child protection players, education providers and communities.
- Expand awareness initiatives for employers, parents and communities on hazardous work, legal policy and long-term impacts.

Specific level (local context)

- Raise awareness among parents, children and communities about the worst forms of child labour, highlighting the long-term social, health and economic consequences.
- Establish household-focused interventions that help to reduce economic pressure, emphasizing sustainable livelihoods alongside educational support.
- Provide accessible and safe vocational training or TVET programmes tailored for adolescents who are out of school or at risk of dropping out, ensuring compliance with age-appropriate and safe work standards.
- Encourage or strengthen coordinated community-based monitoring of child labour in collaboration with CSOs, schools, community and local authorities.
- Advocate for employer awareness and compliance with the Child Rights Law.

► 7.4 Policy and institutional strengthening

Findings

The study identified gaps in awareness of the child labour legislation, weak reporting systems, limited coordination among stakeholders and declining institutional capacity in all study areas. Township Child Rights Committees and community mechanisms exist but lacked resources, standardized procedures and enforcement authority.

Recommendations

Strategic level

Sustainable progress requires a coordinated, institutional response grounded in legal standards and supported by functional monitoring and enforcement systems.

- Strengthen the national and subnational coordination mechanisms that link labour, education, social welfare and rural development authorities.
- Institutionalize standardized child labour monitoring and reporting systems with clear mandates and accountability structures.
- Build up the capacity of township-level child protection and labour monitoring bodies through training, technical support and operational guidelines.
- Integrate child labour elimination targets, especially the National Action Plan on Child Labour into national development, education and social protection strategies effectively.
- Promote and scale up systematic data collection and periodic assessments to inform evidence-based policy decisions and resource allocation.

Specific level (local context)

- Strengthen collaboration and coordination between CSOs, village committees, local authorities and education departments to prevent child labour, especially its worst forms.
- Promote awareness and enforcement of the relevant national and international frameworks, including the Child Rights Law, ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182 and the National Action Plan on Child Labour.
- Support capacity-building for social partners, school administrators and community leaders.
- Align the national, ethnic and community-led education systems with child labour prevention strategies to ensure free, accessible, safe and compulsory schooling.

See Annex II for the recommendations related to the Marrakech Global Framework for Action Against Child Labour (ILO 2026). See Annex III for the detailed recommendations specific to the Myanmar context.

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Annex I. Field data collection schedule

Date	Activities of data collection teams				
State or region (township)	Mon State (Ye)	Sagaing Region (Chaung-U)	Shan State (Taunggyi)	Shan State (Nyaungshwe)	Mandalay Region (Kyaukse)
7 Jan 2026	Interviewer training Day 1 (Yangon)				
8 Jan 2026	Interviewer training Day 2 (Yangon)				
9 Jan 2026	Interviewer training Day 3 (Yangon)				
10 Jan 2026	Preparation for the trip and field data collection				
11 Jan 2026	Yangon to Mawlamyine (night stop at Mawlamyine)				
12 Jan 2026	Mawlamyine to Ye				Informant interview with representative of GOAL, a CSO
13 Jan 2026	An Din Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher	Yangon to Moneywa	- Informant interview with a CSO officer - Informant interview with a market actor		
14 Jan 2026	Du Lei Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)	Moneywa to Chaung-U	Nyo Mee Hpa Yar Hpyu (camp for internally displaced persons): - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher - Informant interview with a child for case study		

Date	Activities of data collection teams				
State or region (township)	Mon State (Ye)	Sagaing Region (Chaung-U)	Shan State (Taunggyi)	Shan State (Nyaungshwe)	Mandalay Region (Kyaukse)
15 Jan 2026	Khao Jae Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)	Shwe Hlay Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher	Ta Dar Mee Laung Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)		
16 Jan 2026	Tao Tak Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher - Informant interview with an employer	Taw Chaung-Gyi Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher - Informant interview with an employer	Loi Kaung Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)		
17 Jan 2026	Ye to Mawlamyine, (night stop at Mawlamyine)	Hman Cho Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)		Ywar Gyi Lae Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher - Informant interview with a market actor	
18 Jan 2026	Mawlamyine to Yangon	Ma Gyi Gwa Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with an implementing partner representative in Chaung-U		Yae Thar Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with an implementing partner representative in Taunggyi	

Date	Activities of data collection teams				
State or region (township)	Mon State (Ye)	Sagaing Region (Chaung-U)	Shan State (Taunggyi)	Shan State (Nyaungshwe)	Mandalay Region (Kyaukse)
19 Jan 2026		Moneywa to Mandalay (one day stopover in Mandalay)			Taunggyi to Kyaukse
20 Jan 2026	Informant interview with an implementing partner representative in Ye	Mandalay to Yangon			Logistics Planning and Preparation of group discussion and informant interview transcripts
21 Jan 2026					Ywar Thit village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher - Informant interview with a child for case study
22 Jan 2026					Pan Kwar Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)
23 Jan 2026					Ka Tae Village: - Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents) - Informant interview with a teacher
24 Jan 2026					Pa Nan Village: Group discussions (village representatives), (children aged 12–17), (youths aged 18–24) and (children aged 5–11 with parents)
25 Jan 2026					Kyaukse, Mandalay to Yangon

Date	Activities of data collection teams				
State or region (township)	Mon State (Ye)	Sagaing Region (Chaung-U)	Shan State (Taunggyi)	Shan State (Nyaungshwe)	Mandalay Region (Kyaukse)
26 Jan 2026					• Informant interview with implementing partner representative in Kyaukse • Informant interview with workers' union officer in Kyaukse
30 Jan 2026	Debriefing session (Yangon)				

Annex II. Recommendations related to the Marrakech Global Framework for Action Against Child Labour (2026)

A road map to 2030.¹⁰

We all commit, by 2030, taking into consideration the demonstrated, essential role of social dialogue and multi-sectoral cooperation, to developing solutions to eliminate child labour, to scale up action to:

1. Achieve universal ratification of Convention No. 138 by:

- a. encouraging all Member States of the ILO to consider ratifying Convention No. 138 and, as appropriate, support the efforts of the International Labour Office in the promotion of its ratification; and
- b. providing technical assistance, as appropriate, to Member States which have not yet ratified Convention No. 138 to overcome any obstacles to ratification.

2. Align domestic legal frameworks with the provisions of Conventions Nos 138 and 182, particularly to ensure that:¹¹

- a. the minimum age for admission to employment or work is not less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling with the exception of “light work” in accordance with Convention No. 138, and in any case not less than 15, or 14 as a transitional measure, which should be progressively raised; and
- b. all worst forms of child labour are prohibited, including by prohibiting hazardous work for anyone under the age of 18, and a list of hazardous work prohibited for children, developed and implemented through full and genuine consultation with social partners, is adopted and regularly reviewed, placing special emphasis on the worst forms of child labour associated with the use of technologies.

3. Ensure implementation of Conventions Nos 138 and 182, including by:

- a. adopting and implementing comprehensive, gender-responsive, multi-sectoral national policies on child labour, taking into consideration ILO Minimum Age Recommendation, 1973 (No. 146) and ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Recommendation, 1999 (No. 190) and the importance of enhanced international cooperation and assistance to developing countries;

¹⁰ This document is non-binding.

¹¹ Information on national legal frameworks, including links to national hazardous work lists in countries that have adopted them, will be available and updated regularly in the Child Labour Observatory.

- b. promoting integrated area-based approaches, which effectively prevent entry into, and withdraw children from, all forms of child labour and prevent their displacement from one form of child labour to another;
- c. taking immediate, effective and time-bound measures to eliminate the worst forms of child labour, including by adopting preventive and protective measures, enforcing sanctions against perpetrators, taking into account the views of children currently and formerly in child labour, facilitating access to appropriate care, mental health services and psychological support, taking into account the special situation of girls and addressing gender-based violence;
- d. strengthening the capacities of judicial systems and of a well-resourced, adequately staffed and independent labour inspection through the continuous training of inspectors, the establishment of specialized teams, coordinated action with other social actors, including community-based child labour monitoring systems and the implementation of inspection protocols adapted to new labour modalities and informal work, with priority given to combating the worst forms of child labour;
- e. accelerating efforts to address child labour in domestic work and other sectors where girls are disproportionately at risk, carrying out awareness-raising and advocacy to transform social attitudes and to address the widespread acceptance of child labour in domestic work and prohibiting hazardous work in the sector, including long hours and night work;
- f. developing and implementing through robust social dialogue, with the involvement of social partners, including teachers and their organizations and trade unions, specific strategies for sectors with major incidence of child labour;
- g. tackling all forms of commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), including technology-facilitated CSEC, by strengthening global cooperation, advancing victim-centred and gender-responsive protection measures in accordance with national legislation, and promoting the responsible design and use of digital technologies;
- h. reinvigorating efforts to end other worst forms of child labour, including trafficking of children and forced criminality, which can include forced begging and illicit activities (including by criminal organizations) and their exploitation in situations of armed conflict, including by taking preventive measures against their forced recruitment by armed forces and armed groups by any means, in accordance with Convention No. 182, Article 3 (a) and (d);
- i. emphasizing the central and indispensable nature of the universal birth registration of all children, particularly those in vulnerable situations, as an essential measure that formalizes their vital existence, allowing them to access fundamental rights, including the rights to education and health, as well as to be protected from violations of their rights including refoulement, forced labour, or forced recruitment by armed forces or armed groups;
- j. improving governance structures for the elimination of child labour, in accordance with national law, by strengthening State capacity to develop, coordinate, and monitor integrated policies and actions, including the formulation and implementation of national strategies with clear guidelines and targets, the establishment of tripartite national bodies responsible for coordinating and overseeing related initiatives, and the enhancement of systems for collecting, analysing, and disseminating data on child labour, in order to support evidence-based public policy development, by focusing on the horizontal and vertical articulation of the different levels of government and strengthening tripartism, and by ensuring that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them;
- k. integrating the goal of preventing and eliminating child labour into broader policy frameworks, including those concerning poverty reduction, trade, child protection, just transition to environmentally sustainable economies, and migration governance;

- l. designing and implementing targeted strategies to address child labour among children aged 5 to 11, who represent the largest share of child labour globally and are mostly engaged in child labour in agriculture as unpaid family labour, and among whom progress has been the slowest, including ensuring universal birth registration and strengthening integrated child protection systems;
- m. recognizing that child labour is often caused by household poverty and informal and family-based livelihoods, particularly in developing and Least Developed Countries, priority action should focus on efforts to reduce poverty to create income security to secure access to essential public services and to protect children from hazardous work;
- n. decentralizing child labour elimination efforts, including by allocating resources for development and bringing essential services closer to communities affected by child labour; enhancing engagement with civil society organizations and representative organizations of smallholder producers, including cooperatives; supporting communities to develop local solutions, in particular to identify children in child labour and refer them to appropriate services; linking labour inspection to community-based child labour monitoring systems; investing in water, sanitation and hygiene, electrification and other infrastructure, the lack of which are important drivers of child labour, particularly in rural and remote areas;
- o. promoting South-South and triangular cooperation, multistakeholder, multilateral, global and regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the Alliance 8.7, the Regional Initiative Latin America and the Caribbean Free of Child Labour, regional cooperation processes under the aegis of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children (SAIEVAC), the Ten Year Action Plan on the Eradication of Child Labour, Forced Labour, Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery of the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the implementation and monitoring of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Code of Conduct on Child Labour;
- p. respecting, promoting and realizing a safe and healthy working environment for all, including through public policies to support the creation of formal employment, occupational safety and health, and the professional training of adolescents of working age, ensuring the school-to-work transition, as well as by promoting sharing of knowledge and best practices, on voluntary and mutually agreed terms, in particular from developed to developing countries;
- q. eliminating child labour in humanitarian situations by taking decisive measures to combat and prevent forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, in accordance with national law, and by ensuring practical coordination and collaboration amongst humanitarian responders and development actors at all levels to strengthen child labour prevention and response actions in emergencies; and
- r. eliminating child labour among migrant children, including those exposed to trafficking networks that exploit them as domestic workers, in commercial sexual exploitation of children, drug trafficking, and other transnational criminal activities.

4. End child labour in agriculture by:

- a. providing resources to the International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture (IPCCLA) for the development of an inclusive global strategy to end child labour in agriculture, including in hard-to-reach subsectors such as fisheries and aquaculture and enhancing cooperation among agricultural and other rural economy stakeholders at all levels, by promoting the ILO Policy guidelines for the promotion of decent work in the agri-food sector and the ILO Right of Association (Agriculture) Convention, 1921 (No. 11), ILO Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129) and ILO Safety and Health in Agriculture Convention, 2001 (No. 184);

- b. supporting rural economies and increased productivity in order to reduce poverty, including by investing in infrastructure and services, logistics and technology to enhance efficiency, climate-smart and safer agricultural practices, promoting the proper use of agricultural inputs and attracting agricultural workers; and
- c. promoting the access of rural populations to labour inspection, education, health, social protection services, support for formalization and supporting rural workers' organizing, cooperatives, and associations that enable communities to build collective power and secure alternative livelihoods.

5. Secure increased resources from diverse sources for the elimination of child labour and enhance coordination and international cooperation, including by:

- a. promoting cooperation to address child labour within the framework of international trade;
- b. promoting collaboration with international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other relevant UN institutions to systematically mainstream child labour elimination into their programming and policy dialogues; and
- c. promoting collaboration between initiatives, programmes and projects that focus on the elimination of child labour, including by ensuring sustained financial support for initiatives supporting the capacity of developing and Least Developed Countries to effectively scale and implement these efforts.

6. Promote decent work for adults and youth and tackle informality, including by:

- a. strengthening efforts to promote, respect and realize the fundamental principles and rights at work and ensuring decent working conditions through an integrated approach, including respect for freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining for all workers, as critical means of addressing the root causes of child labour;
- b. strengthening social dialogue and collective bargaining, empowering wage-setting institutions, promoting an adequate minimum wage, statutory or negotiated, and incremental progression from minimum wages to living wages, taking into account the national circumstances and economic factors, in line with the conclusions of the ILO Meeting of experts on wage policies, including living wages, in accordance with national law;
- c. promoting the implementation of the ILO Transition from the Informal to the Formal Economy Recommendation, 2015 (No. 204), taking into account the ILO 2025 Resolution concerning the general discussion on addressing informality and promoting the transition to formality for decent work and the ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193);
- d. supporting access to decent youth employment opportunities through participation in apprenticeships, skills development and vocational training programmes as key drivers of productivity, employability and enterprise development; and
- e. creating an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, in particular micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to prosper, invest and create decent work opportunities.

7. Ensure universal access to free, compulsory, inclusive and equitable quality basic education up to the minimum age for admission to employment or work, and encourage the continued provision of lifelong learning opportunities beyond that age, including by:

- a. recognizing teachers as the most influential factor in learning outcomes and investing in policies that guarantee every child is taught by a qualified, supported, and motivated teacher, including by striving for teacher salaries that are competitive with other professions requiring similar qualifications and that continuous professional development is provided; and
- b. involving teachers and their representative organizations in the design, implementation, and monitoring of policies to eradicate child labour through meaningful social dialogue, including collective bargaining.

8. Promote universal access to social protection by:

- a. providing social protection floors in line with ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), and with the UN 2025 Doha Political Declaration, paying attention to rural areas and the inclusion of all workers, including in the informal economy;
- b. establishing and strengthening access to comprehensive, adequate, universal and financially sustainable social protection systems, including universal child benefits and other measures such as universal health coverage, social insurance, school feeding programmes or other forms of support based on specific national circumstances and capacities and adapted to diverse needs; and
- c. strengthening the role of social workers in promoting access to social welfare and social protection for vulnerable groups, especially children at risk of or currently or formerly in child labour, their families and communities.

9. End child labour in domestic and global supply chains, including by:

- a. supporting enterprises to conduct human rights due diligence, in line with the ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights;
- b. promoting responsible purchasing and sourcing practices that enable decent work, and respect fundamental principles and rights at work;
- c. complementing supply chain due diligence efforts by promoting and supporting integrated area-based approaches that address the root causes of child labour, strengthen local child protection systems, and reach the deepest tiers of supply chains, including informal and unregulated sectors, through collaboration among governments, business, employers' and workers' organizations and civil society;
- d. creating national and international legislation and policies that encourage a business culture committed to human rights for the prevention and elimination of child labour in supply chains;
- e. creating an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises, including micro-, small and medium enterprises; and
- f. promoting the sharing of due diligence best practices, and multi-stakeholder and/or sectoral collaboration.

Annex III. Detailed recommendations (specific to the Myanmar context)

This detailed recommendation annex outlines a strategic approach to reducing child labour and its worst forms in Myanmar through the following frameworks that are explored in depth. The framework comprises four phases:

1. **Education access and dropouts**
2. **Prevention and management of child labour**
3. **Prevention and management of the worst forms of child labour**
4. **Policy and enforcement**

By outlining these phases, this annex sets the stage for targeted, possible interventions that address both the causes and the consequences of child labour and its worst forms while aligning with broader interventions in awareness and assistance (supportive action).

► 1. Education access and dropouts

1.1 Awareness (family, children, school and community)

A proactive approach to preventing school dropouts begins with strengthening awareness among all stakeholders connected to a child's education, including students, teachers, families, CSOs and the greater community. It is essential to target the attitude of families with school-going children and instil a positive attitude towards education and recognition of the long-term benefits of education as well as the consequences of dropping out on the child, the family and society. This awareness should expand beyond families and students. Families and students should benefit from life skills and soft skills training delivered through peer education, particularly at the lower- and upper-secondary levels.

Teachers should be trained to treat students equally and to strengthen the teacher-student relationship, especially to overcome discriminatory attitudes towards certain ethnic groups, internally displaced students and students moving from other schools. It is recommended to prevent school dropouts with support from the parent-teacher association. All stakeholders should accept the fact that education is not only the issue of the children and their families but also shared concern for the whole community or society. As a result, the early signs of losing interest or impending drop out can be managed or intervened before it gets too late. To nurture a positive environment for school-going children, the community should actively participate in reducing harmful social behaviours, such as drug abuse and gambling, and transform the environment into a role model atmosphere, starting from their own school environment.

Suggested methods of awareness-raising activities: Use pamphlets in Chaung-U Township where it is not safe or suitable for community gatherings. Other townships can promote awareness through public talks, edutainment campaigns and events on World Day Against Child Labour (June 12) and National Children's Day (February 13) and World Children's Day (November 20), in cooperation with village committees, a parent-teacher association, an implementing partner or civil society and community-based organizations.

1.2 Assistance and supportive actions (family, children, school and community)

Moving from awareness into action requires targeted assistance across multiple levels – family, children, school and community. Economically empower vulnerable families – with the possibility of a child dropping out of school – through income-generation activities (with technical training and/or capital or financial support). If it is technical support, it should be responsive to local market demands, and products must be locally marketable, for example, growing mushrooms, tailoring or making wheat straw hats in Chaung-U, avocado grafting in Taunggyi and making handicrafts with water hyacinth stems, tomato paste or jam in Nyaungshwe.

Technical support should be accompanied with some practical support, such as assistance with school fees or in-kind help to stabilize a child's ability to attend and stay in school. Considering that school dropouts and child labour more commonly occur among secondary school students, the support should focus more school-going children aged 12–17. Students who are at risk of dropping out may need access to essential materials, such as stationery, textbooks, safe facilities and partial or full school or tuition fee or travelling cost.

Schools require supportive infrastructure and safety measures, including secure buildings, protection from air strikes or artillery shelling in Chaung-U, durable and hygienic facilities and, where applicable, fencing, flooring (such as in Chaung-U) and protective structures. Making schools more accessible and safer is crucial because the travel distance and safety on the way to school are significant challenges for some children, especially in Kyaukse and Nyaungshwe.

Equally important is empowering the quality of teaching staff (in terms of quality and quantity) and community engagement: encouraging the active participation of the parent-teacher association to address the dropout issues and, where needed or based on feasibility, providing resources to appoint a qualified teacher as a students' counsellor who can sustain consistent attendance and reach out with counselling support to adolescents with frequent absences or poor attendance or who exhibit behaviour changes, such as loss of interest, poor performance or truancy. The quantity and quality of teaching staff is also important to strengthen to address the needs of curriculum and students, including psychosocial support for children attending school under constant threats of insecurity in Chaung-U.

To strengthen community resilience, a village committee for disaster reduction response should be established. Other village-based committees or groups that can support or strengthen the resilience of the community are also recommended, such as a development committee, a revolving fund, a savings and loan group or a women's groups.

► 2. Prevention and management of child labour

2.1 Awareness (family, children, employers and stakeholders)

Raise awareness across multiple levels and groups to prevent child labour and particularly to avoid children ending up in the worst forms of child labour. For families who have a child who has dropped out of school, there should be focus on raising awareness about the harms of child labour. The same message applies to children. Employers must be similarly informed about child labour and the importance of preventing the worst forms of child labour. Stakeholders, including civil society and community-based organizations or child rights-based committees and the broader community, should receive the same guidance, with additional emphasis on how to report and handle child labour cases and issues effectively.

Overall, community members, especially parents, teachers, employers and civil society and community-based organizations, should be supported by providing information on the harms of child labour and child rights-related laws and policies. Trained community members should work together, if necessary, forming a child labour prevention committee (child rights-based) to further advocacy. The outcome should be linked with reducing the incidence of child labour.

2.2 Assistance and supportive actions (family, children, school and community)

The assistance level should focus on family, children and schools. For families with children who have dropped out of school, the emphasis should be on income-generating activities or vocational training to support economic needs. Children and youths who have dropped out should be able to access locally available and responsive-to-labour-market vocational training or practical and beneficial apprenticeship opportunities, with psychosocial support provided as needed. For those dropouts who want to resume their education, provide an alternative pathway to resume school life through non-formal education services or vocational training linked to formal classes.

With the assistance of local or international donors and NGOs, CSOs should have capacity-building to implement projects dedicated to the prevention and management of child labour and the more serious worst forms through a case management model applying a child labour monitoring system. Getting cooperation and support from communities and other stakeholders will be essential for successful implementation. Encourage the forming of village-based child labour and child rights committee that relies on the child labour monitoring system. Similarly, strengthen the resilience communities with a disaster risk reduction committee.

► 3. Prevention and management of worst forms of child labour

3.1 Awareness (family of child labour, employers and community)

The next phase activities should be similar to Phase II but with more awareness-raising targeting the prevention of the worst forms of child labour.

Awareness-raising should target various groups on preventing the worst forms of child labour, and it must align with the child labour laws. For families with children already involved in child labour, messaging must emphasize the negative effects on family, children and society as well as the strategies that promote decent work. Children who have dropped out of school or at risk of engaging in child labour should receive guidance on the worst forms of child labour and the impact on their life and the broader community. Employers must be informed about the worst forms of child labour, children's rights and what is hazardous work for children. The focus should be on moving young people out of child labour towards decent work while adhering to the child labour laws and highlighting the long-term negative consequences for individuals and society. Communities and CSOs must share the same awareness goals.

3.2 Assistance and supportive actions (family, children and stakeholders)

The assistance level in a next phase should focus on both families and children. For families, provide support centres on income-generating activities or vocational training to counter the family hardship by targeting long-term income stability. To develop marketable skills and required continuing education, children should be able to access vocational training, apprenticeships and non-formal education opportunities, as in Phase II. Vocational training, whether formal or informal, should provide technical training and financial support to conduct effective vocational and skill development courses that align with labour market demand. Additionally, the child labour monitoring system should be strengthened through cooperation with CSOs and communities to prevent the worst forms of child labour and to support initiatives aimed at reducing child labour based on project needs.

► 4. Policy and enforcement (law, policy, advocacy and enforcement)

4.1 Strengthening law and policy

At the national level, the goal is to strengthen the child labour laws and urgently adopt the Hazardous Work Law that was drafted in 2019.

4.2 Local authority, through the Township Child Rights Committee

Through targeted advocacy, the Township Child Rights Committees should be equipped with a better budget and staffing. This will enable the Committee to work more actively with social partners, as well as with community-based stakeholders, such as civil society and community-based organizations, and families affected by child labour and its worst forms.

4.3 Schools (all state, ethnic and community-led centres)

School policies in all state, ethnic and community learning centres should be strengthened to improve enrolment and prevent students from dropping out. The compulsory education law should be gradually and practically strengthened. There should also be a clear strategy for addressing students who drop out, including networks and connections with other non-formal education services or vocational training programmes attached to continued education.

4.4 Civil society and community-based organizations (acting on child labour)

The civil society and community-based organizations should be equipped with effective capacity-building to prevent child labour and its worst forms through a child labour monitoring system. They should take on a mediator role between law enforcement and communities and lead awareness-raising efforts among communities, families, children, employers and teachers.

4.5 Workers' unions (addressing worst forms of child labour)

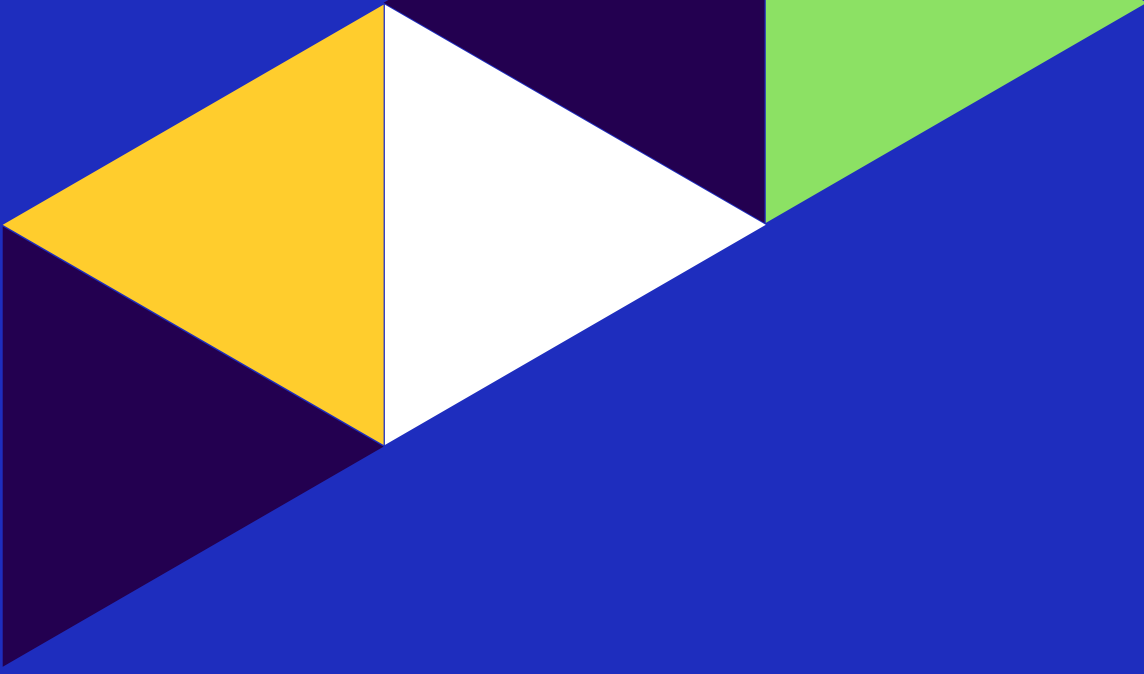
Workers' unions should take a more proactive role in understanding and applying policy and legal frameworks related to child labour and its worst forms. They have an important mandate to advocate for all stakeholders and contribute to reducing child labour and its worst forms.

4.6 Market actors and employers

Employers and market actors should heighten their awareness of child labour, the minimum working age, decent work and hazardous work and work collaboratively to reduce child labour and prevent its worst forms by avoiding labour exploitation and abuses of children.

4.7 ILO Myanmar

ILO Myanmar has an important role in providing technical expertise, evidence and guidance on child labour prevention and elimination, and in supporting coordination and knowledge-sharing among relevant stakeholders. Continued engagement with social partners civil society organizations, development partners and other appropriate actors can help strengthen efforts to address child labour and accelerate progress towards SDG Target 8.7, in line with relevant international labour standards.



Situational Analysis Study on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and Education Status in Agriculture and Rural Areas of Myanmar

This study examines the current situation of child labour, particularly its worst forms, and the education status of children in agricultural and rural communities in Mon State, Southern Shan State, Mandalay Region and Sagaing Region. Based on a desk review, key informant interviews and focus group discussions with children, parents, community members, employers, workers' organizations and civil society organizations, the study explores the nature, drivers and characteristics of child labour, as well as the barriers to education faced by vulnerable children. Conducted under the Achieving Reduction of Child Labour in Support of Education (ARISE) project, the study provides an evidence-based understanding of the challenges affecting children in the target areas and identifies practical recommendations to strengthen child labour prevention and response. It is hoped that the findings and recommendations presented in this report will support social partners, development partners, civil society organizations and other stakeholders in designing effective interventions and promoting coordinated efforts to progressively eliminate child labour and ensure that all children have access to quality education and opportunities for a better future.

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