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**Losing a generation: how the military junta is devastating Myanmar’s children and undermining Myanmar’s future**

**Conference room paper of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar**

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| *Summary*  Myanmar’s junta is at war with the people of Myanmar, and children are the war’s innocent victims. Without a prompt return to the path of democracy and concerted remedial action, Myanmar’s children will become a lost generation.  The military’s 1 February 2021 coup has meant disaster for Myanmar’s children. Military attacks on civilian populations have displaced more than 250,000 children, who join the roughly 130,000 children in protracted displacement and the more than half million child refugees from Myanmar in neighboring countries. The junta has arbitrarily detained over 1,400 children with at least 61 children currently being held hostage by the junta. Junta forces have tortured at least 142 children since the coup was launched. They have beaten, cut and stabbed children, burned them with cigarettes, forced them to hold stress positions, subjected them to mock executions, and deprived them of food and water. 33,000 children could die preventable deaths in 2022 alone, merely because they have not received routine immunizations. 1.3 million children and more than 700,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women require nutritional support. 7.8 million children remain out of school.  The relentless attacks on children underscore the depths of the military junta’s depravity and its willingness to inflict immense misery and hardship on innocent victims to try and subjugate the people of Myanmar. The suffering of children is further reason why the international community must rethink and reset its response to the worsening crisis in Myanmar. The world must return its attention to Myanmar and commit to doing everything reasonably possible to ensure that Myanmar’s children are able to enjoy fundamental human rights, starting with the right to life.  Member States, regional organizations, the Security Council, and other UN entities must respond to the crisis in Myanmar with the same urgency they have responded to the crisis in Ukraine. This requires a dramatic increase in humanitarian assistance and unequivocal regional support for refugees. It requires stronger and more unified targeted economic sanctions and coordinated financial investigations. It requires Member States that have imposed relatively little or no pressure on the junta to reassess their positions and take action. It requires Security Council Members to finally put a resolution forward for consideration, debate and a vote.  The stakes for Myanmar’s children, and for Myanmar’s future, could not be higher. |
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# Introduction

1. Since the 1 February 2021 military coup, the junta led by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing has carried out a ruthless campaign of violence and oppression against the people of Myanmar. Junta forces have killed nearly 2,000 civilians, arrested more than 14,000, displaced more than 700,000, and plunged the country into an economic and humanitarian crisis that threatens the lives and wellbeing of millions.
2. Children have not been spared in the junta’s attacks on the people of Myanmar. Rather, the willingness of the military and its allies to murder, abduct, detain, and torture children demonstrates the brutality and senselessness of the junta’s actions. The junta’s violent assaults on children, which are documented in this paper, are part of its ongoing widespread and systematic attack on the people of Myanmar and likely constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. The junta has also systematically and intentionally deprived children of the conditions and resources necessary to ensure their health and development. Junta forces have attacked schools and hospitals, arrested teachers, doctors, and nurses, blocked humanitarian aid, cancelled vital social programs, and created conditions favorable to the exploitation and abuse of children.
3. According to UN monitors, at least 382 children have been killed or maimed by armed groups since the coup. The Myanmar military is responsible for most of these deaths and injuries. The military has killed children in attacks by fighter jets, helicopters, heavy artillery, and foot soldiers. Some of these children were sheltering in camps for people displaced by previous attacks when they were struck and killed by artillery and bombs fired by the military. Soldiers executed children in their custody. Scores of children have died after triggering landmines planted by the Myanmar military or other armed groups.
4. Tatmadaw attacks on civilian populations have displaced more than 250,000 children since the coup. They join the roughly 130,000 children in protracted displacement and the more than half million child refugees from Myanmar in neighboring countries. The junta is systematically restricting the delivery of humanitarian aid to displaced populations and others with acute needs.
5. The junta has arbitrarily detained over 1,400 children since the coup. Many were arrested because of their opposition to the coup and the junta. Rohingya children have been arrested and detained because of discriminatory policies and restrictions on their freedom of movement. At least 274 child political prisoners remain in the junta’s custody as of 27 May 2021. The junta has detained children for extended periods of time, including those abducted and taken hostage because of their relationship to a family member sought by the junta. At least 61 children are currently being held hostage by the junta in such circumstances, some of whom are very young.
6. Soldiers and police officers have tortured at least 142 children since the coup, according to reports received by the UN. They have beaten, cut and stabbed children, burned them with cigarettes, forced them to hold stress positions, subjected them to mock executions, and deprived them of food and water. Torture techniques have included pulling out the fingernails and teeth of children. Soldiers and police officers have sexually assaulted and harassed detained girls. Injured children have been denied medical care.
7. For decades, the Myanmar military has used children as soldiers and for forced labor. Anecdotal reports suggest that the recruitment and use of children by the military has increased as the junta fights battles on an increasing number of fronts and suffers from high casualty and defection rates. Ethnic armed groups and newly formed People’s Defense Forces (PDFs) have also recruited and used the labor of children. In many cases, children’s affiliation with these groups is driven by a need for physical and social support in the face of the junta’s attacks or resentment against the junta’s human rights violations.
8. The coup has had a disastrous impact on children’s access to education. In 2020 and 2021, 12 million children were deprived of classroom instruction because of the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools reopened in 2021, many teachers and students stayed away because of security concerns or an unwillingness to participate in an education system controlled by the junta. Their fears and concerns are well founded. The UN has documented 260 attacks on schools and education personnel since the coup. Both the military and other armed groups are responsible for attacks on educational facilities, and both have occupied schools, ensuring the politicization and militarization of educational infrastructure. 7.8 million children remain out of school. The situation for Myanmar’s students is unlikely to improve so long as the junta remains in control of the education system.
9. The military coup and proliferating violence have created an economic and humanitarian crisis throughout the country, with devastating consequences for children. Poverty has doubled since early 2020, and households are responding by rationing food, taking on debt, and sending children to work. Prior to the coup, health and nutrition indicators already suggested a dire situation for children in Myanmar. The fallout from the coup has made a bad situation much worse. The public health system has collapsed. Rather than taking steps to restore health services, the government has arrested medical workers and patients, attacked and occupied hospitals, and blocked the delivery of medicines and medical supplies to displaced populations. The World Health Organization projects that 33,000 children will die preventable deaths in 2022 merely because they have not received routine immunizations. 1.3 million children and more than 700,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women require nutritional support. Experts warn of a looming food crisis and dramatic increase in rates of childhood malnutrition.
10. The coup has created conditions that are fueling the exploitation of children. Armed conflict, arrests, and other security concerns have often resulted in the separation of children from their parents, leaving them vulnerable to abuse. Displacement and school closures have altered living arrangements, with many children residing in places where they lack privacy and security. Groups working with children have reported an increase in physical and sexual abuse. Although comprehensive, countrywide data is lacking, human trafficking and child labor also appear to be on the rise, driven by financial hardship and the collapse of the state education system. Girls are particularly vulnerable and have been trafficked for the purpose of forced marriage and sexual exploitation. Many children born since the coup have not had their births registered, often because they are displaced or because of a breakdown in government services. These children will join the more than one-fourth of Myanmar’s population who lack citizenship or identity documents, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation.
11. The multiple crises faced by children in post-coup Myanmar can only be effectively addressed by a civilian government committed to upholding human rights. If the junta cared about the children of Myanmar, and the future of country, it would immediately relinquish power so that a legitimate, democratically elected government could be formed.
12. Strong, sustained action by the international community is needed to help end the suffering of Myanmar’s children. The international community must take all available steps to deprive the junta of the weapons and financial resources it uses to sustain its war on Myanmar’s children. UN Member States should also support measures to ensure accountability for the junta’s crimes against children, including by referring the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. The international donor community should fully fund the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022, which includes lifesaving programs to support the millions of children threatened by malnutrition, disease, and exploitation. Donors, UN agencies, ASEAN, and Myanmar’s neighbors must work together to ensure that aid is delivered to all populations in need, including by facilitating cross-border aid delivery.
13. With the requisite political will, UN Member States are capable of strong, timely action. Just four days following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, for example, there was a debate and vote on a Security Council resolution and an Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly. Sanctions were imposed against those responsible for the attacks and against financial institutions—including by cutting off some banks from SWIFT (the international banking messaging system), sanctioning Russia’s Central Bank, and freezing foreign currency reserves. European nations have welcomed millions of refugees since Russia’s invasion.
14. In contrast, sixteen months after the Myanmar military launched its assault on the people of Myanmar, including children, there has been no Security Council resolution; no Emergency Special Session of the UN General Assembly; no targeting of the Myanmar military’s access to the international banking system; no freezing of Myanmar Central Bank assets, except by the United States; no mobilizing of a multination task force to identify, hunt down, and freeze assets of the military junta; no broad opening of borders by neighboring countries to men, women, and children fleeing for their lives.
15. The children of Myanmar desperately need strong, principled action by world leaders as they fight for their lives and their future.

# Methodology

1. The Special Rapporteur prepared this conference room paper to highlight the impact of the 1 February 2022 military coup on the rights of children in Myanmar and to demonstrate why a strong, principled response by Member States is imperative. It focuses on the specific vulnerabilities of children and the particular ways they are impacted by the political, economic, and humanitarian crises caused by the coup and the junta’s relentless human rights violations.
2. To prepare this conference room paper, the Special Rapporteur sought contributions from UN agencies, humanitarian organizations, human rights monitors, and Myanmar civil society organizations. In April 2022, the Special Rapporteur published a call for submissions on violations of the rights of children in Myanmar.[[1]](#footnote-2) The Special Rapporteur received 18 written responses to his call. The Special Rapporteur and his team also held meetings with organizations and experts to discuss the situation of children’s rights in Myanmar. The Special Rapporteur extends his deep appreciation to all those who provided information for this paper.
3. Under international human rights law, children, like adults, are guaranteed the right to freedom of expression and the right to participate in public affairs. It is therefore imperative that children from Myanmar are given opportunities to speak for themselves and share their concerns about the human rights situation since the coup. However, working with children presents challenges concerning confidentiality, consent, and security. These challenges are heightened for the Special Rapporteur, as he has not been granted physical access to Myanmar and can only conduct meetings virtually. For this reason, the Special Rapporteur decided not to conduct one-on-one interviews with children. Rather, the Special Rapporteur worked with trusted partners to collect testimony from children for inclusion in the paper. The Special Rapporteur also spoke directly to a group of children accompanied by adult guardians.
4. Many of the organizations and individuals that shared information with the Special Rapporteur requested confidentiality because of security concerns. In many cases, the Special Rapporteur withheld source information and redacted identifying details from testimony to address those concerns. The Special Rapporteur received information concerning cases of serious human rights violations against children that was left out of the paper entirely because of worries about possible retaliation against victims or family members.
5. This paper focuses specifically on the situation of children who are currently in Myanmar. It does not consider the situation of Myanmar children in neighboring countries, except to address the trafficking of children across borders. In December 2021, the Special Rapporteur traveled to Bangladesh to examine the situation of Rohingya refugees in camps in Cox’s Bazar and on Bashan Char island. In his statement at the close of the mission, and in a summary of his mission findings, published as an appendix to his March report to the Human Rights Council ([A/HRC/49/76](https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc4976-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-myanmar-thomas)), the Special Rapporteur addressed the situation of Rohingya children, including by recommending that the Bangladesh government rescind orders closing community-based and private learning centers. The Special Rapporteur will look for other opportunities to address the situation of Myanmar refugee children living in neighboring countries.
6. In keeping with the approach of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in this conference room paper, the Special Rapporteur uses the terms “child” and “children” to refer to individuals under 18 years of age.

# Myanmar’s legal framework relating to children

1. The actions of the junta since the 1 February 2021 coup violate many international treaties to which Myanmar is a party. Additionally, many of the abuses against children committed by both the Myanmar military and non-state armed groups in the context of armed conflict are violations of international humanitarian law and may constitute war crimes. Other abuses against children committed as part of the military’s widespread and systematic attack on the people of Myanmar likely constitute crimes against humanity. The junta has also violated Myanmar domestic law protecting children, most notably the 2019 Child Rights Law.

## International law

1. Myanmar acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, less than a year after its entry into force.[[2]](#footnote-3) The Convention on the Rights of the Child is a foundational international human rights treaty and imposes binding obligations on state parties to uphold the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of children. Under the Convention, states parties must respect, protect, and fulfill children’s right to life, security of person, nationality, education, health, food, shelter, and an adequate standard of living as well as the rights to freedom of movement, expression, information, assembly, and association, among other rights. States parties must not abduct or torture children and must protect children from exploitation and abuse.
2. Myanmar has ratified two Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In 2012, Myanmar acceded to the Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, which requires states parties to prohibit and take measures to proactively prevent these abuses.[[3]](#footnote-4) In 2019, Myanmar ratified the Optional Protocol on the involvement of children in armed conflict, which requires states parties to raise their minimum age for recruitment into the armed forces to at least 16, not forcibly recruit children, and not send child recruits to the battlefield.[[4]](#footnote-5)
3. Children also enjoy the rights guaranteed by other treaties to which Myanmar is a state party, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,[[5]](#footnote-6) the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,[[6]](#footnote-7) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[[7]](#footnote-8) Myanmar is not a party to several foundational human rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. However, many of the rights enshrined in these treaties, which apply equally to children and adults, are also protected by customary international law and thus are binding upon Myanmar.
4. Myanmar is also party to a number of International Labour Organization conventions relevant to children, including the Forced Labour Convention (No. 29),[[8]](#footnote-9) the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138),[[9]](#footnote-10) and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182).[[10]](#footnote-11)
5. All parties to armed conflict have obligations towards children under international humanitarian law, as expressed in the Geneva Conventions, that are triggered in the context of a non-international armed conflict. Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions governs situations of non-international armed conflict and protects persons not taking part in hostilities, including children, from abuses including murder, torture, hostage-taking, degrading treatment, and sentencing or execution without judicial process.[[11]](#footnote-12) Children are also protected by customary international humanitarian law, which requires that children be granted “special respect and protections” in situations of armed conflict.[[12]](#footnote-13) A key tenet of international humanitarian law is the principle of distinction, which requires parties to armed conflict to distinguish between civilian and military targets.
6. Myanmar is not a party to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition, Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction, also known as the Mine Ban Treaty.
7. Abuses against children that are violations of international humanitarian law may constitute war crimes under international criminal law. Similarly, certain violations of the rights of children committed in the context of a widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population constitute crimes against humanity under international criminal law. Myanmar is not a party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, though on 17 July 2021, Myanmar’s National Unity Government lodged an Article 12(3) declaration with the Court, giving it jurisdiction over crimes committed in Myanmar since 2002.[[13]](#footnote-14) The Court, however, has yet to accept the NUG’s declaration. Thus, prosecution before the International Criminal Court of the perpetrators of war crimes or crimes against humanity in Myanmar that do not involve elements of crimes occurring in other jurisdictions would require a referral by the UN Security Council.[[14]](#footnote-15)

## Domestic law

1. In 2019, Myanmar’s Parliament passed the Child Rights Law, which replaced the 1993 Child Law.[[15]](#footnote-16) The Child Rights Law represented an improvement over its predecessor and extended important protections to children. The new law defines a child consistently with the Convention on the Rights of the Child as anyone under the age of 18. The law sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years of age and the minimum age for employment at 14. It establishes new non-punitive mechanisms for dealing with children in conflict with the law. The Child Rights Law also establishes protections for children impacted by armed conflict, including the killing or maiming of children, sexual violence against children, attacks on schools and hospitals, and obstruction of humanitarian aid. It prohibits the recruitment or conscription of children under 18 by the Myanmar military and non-state armed groups.
2. Despite these and other positive developments, the Child Rights Law is deficient in other aspects. It does not establish the right of children to a nationality, leaving children vulnerable to statelessness. As described below, military and junta officials have routinely disregarded legal protections for children, including those provided by the Child Rights Law, since the coup.

# Children, armed conflict, and violence

1. In February 2022, the Special Rapporteur spoke with a father who had fled a military attack on his village and taken his family to a shelter for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Kayah State. His only daughters, ages 15 and 12, were killed in their sleep when the IDP camp was shelled by junta forces. The man explained:

At about 1am, the camp was bombarded. My two daughters were among the victims. They were sisters. I am not sure if it was the shrapnel or the bomb itself that dropped between my daughters. The two girls were thrown in different directions. The stomach and lower body were blown to pieces.[[16]](#footnote-17)

1. Hundreds of children have been killed or maimed by the military and its allies. Some have been shot while participating in peaceful protests, some have been executed, and others have been the victims of indiscriminate attacks by the military. Countless others have suffered from torture, forced labor, and other human rights violations at the hands of the military. Child casualties are disturbing reminders of the military’s deliberate and systematic failure to distinguish between civilian and military targets in violation of international humanitarian law.
2. The unsettling fact remains: no one knows the true extent of the suffering of Myanmar’s children and their families at the hands of the junta and their forces. Systems established to monitor human rights abuses, including grave violations against children, have been severely disrupted. Travel restrictions, security risks, the arrest or displacement of staff and partners, the difficulty of training monitors, the lack of cooperation from authorities, funding shortfalls, and administrative challenges have all made it difficult to collect data on the human impact of armed conflict in Myanmar. Few organizations were prepared to monitor violations in places—like Sagaing or Magway Regions—that have become hotspots of violence since the coup. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict reported that her dialogue with the Myanmar military “halted” following the coup and cited challenges in monitoring and verifying grave violations against children.[[17]](#footnote-18) According to humanitarian actors, most efforts to quantify conflict-related human rights violations fail to capture the full scale of abuses.

## The military’s killing and maiming of children

1. Since the coup, the junta has killed and maimed children during violent crackdowns on peaceful protests, indiscriminate attacks on civilian populations, and mass executions of individuals in its custody. These attacks violate children’s rights to life, survival, and development.[[18]](#footnote-19) The junta’s killing and maiming of children are part of a widespread and systematic attack by the junta against the people of Myanmar and likely constitute the crimes against humanity of murder and other inhumane acts causing great suffering or serious bodily injury.[[19]](#footnote-20) When committed in the context of non-international armed conflict, they likely constitute the war crimes of murder, mutilation, and attacking civilians.[[20]](#footnote-21)
2. The UN verified the killing or maiming of 382 children by armed groups between February 2021 and March 2022.[[21]](#footnote-22) 59 percent of these deaths and injuries were caused by the military’s targeted or indiscriminate attacks. Landmine explosions (see below) and crossfire between armed groups accounted for most of the remainder. As of 27 May 2022, the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners had documented the killing of 142 children by junta forces since the coup.[[22]](#footnote-23) The Special Rapporteur reviewed other reports from monitoring groups indicating higher death tolls.[[23]](#footnote-24) Efforts to quantify child deaths and injuries—including AAPP’s and the UN’s—are limited by methodological constraints, and none comprehensively capture child casualties for the entire country.
3. In the weeks following the coup, children often joined adults in massive street protests calling for the restoration of democracy. The protests were overwhelmingly peaceful and enjoyed widespread public support. When the junta violently cracked down on the protests, many children were among the victims.
4. On 20 February 2021, a 16-year-old boy was shot and killed when police and soldiers used live fire to break up a protest in support of striking dockworkers in Myanmar.[[24]](#footnote-25) Dozens of children were killed on the streets of Yangon, Mandalay, and other towns and cities in the weeks that followed. Junta forces killed at least nine children in a deadly crackdown on several protests in Yangon on 14 March 2021.[[25]](#footnote-26) Based on video footage, photographs, and eyewitness accounts, Human Rights Watch determined that security forces in Hlaing Tharyar Township had surrounded and trapped protesters, a tactic known as “kettling,” before opening fire.[[26]](#footnote-27) At least five of those killed in Hlaing Tharyar on 14 March 2021 were children.[[27]](#footnote-28)
5. 27 March 2021, Myanmar’s Armed Forces Day, will be remembered as the bloodiest day of the junta’s crackdown on the protest movement. At least 16 children were among the more than 140 killed in brutal attacks on protesters in towns and cities throughout the country ([A/76/314](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=A%2F76%2F314&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False)).[[28]](#footnote-29) A ten-year-old girl was shot and killed, seemingly without reason, while she played in the front of her home in Mawlamyine.[[29]](#footnote-30)
6. In mid-2021, as the junta increasingly turned its attention from peaceful protesters to armed opponents, it continued to attack and kill unarmed civilians, including children. Many child victims were killed in attacks by fighter jets, helicopters, and heavy artillery on villages and encampments for IDPs. The child victims of killings by the Myanmar military include babies and young children.[[30]](#footnote-31)
7. The Karen Human Rights Group documented 31 attacks affecting children in Kayin State and surrounding areas since the coup.[[31]](#footnote-32) Over four days in late March 2022, airstrikes by Myanmar military jets on villages in this area killed 16 villagers, including three children.[[32]](#footnote-33) At least nine other children were injured.
8. In other cases, soldiers appear to have knowingly opened fire on unarmed children. On 27 May 2021, soldiers reportedly shot and killed a 14-year-old boy in his village in Loikaw Township, Kayah State.[[33]](#footnote-34) Villagers fled upon the approach of the military, but the boy was shot as he returned to the village to run an errand for his father. On 29 March 2022, soldiers reportedly opened fire on a family with five children as they traveled along a road between Thaton and Bilin in Mon State.[[34]](#footnote-35) In a video filmed by a soldier and circulated widely on social media, soldiers are shown firing indiscriminately into bushes where the family was reportedly hiding. One soldier can be heard warning another that children might be hiding in the bushes, but others yelled to keep shooting and the gunfire continues. One soldier yelled, “Even if they are children, don’t underestimate them.” A nine-year-old boy was killed on the spot and his six-year-old brother died later at a nearby hospital.[[35]](#footnote-36)
9. Children have also been the victims in execution-style mass killings. According to AAPP, at least 17 children have been killed while in the custody of the military.[[36]](#footnote-37) In early December 2021, junta forces reportedly executed 11 civilians, including five children, in Don Taw village, Sagaing Region.[[37]](#footnote-38) The victim’s hands were bound before they were shot, and their bodies were burned. In January 2022, Myanmar army soldiers detained nine men and a 13-year-old boy in Matupi Township, Chin State. Their bodies were found two days later with an unexploded landmine placed nearby.[[38]](#footnote-39) The father of the boy, who has been displaced by the junta’s violence, told the Special Rapporteur, “It's difficult to go on. There is nothing I can do under the situation. I have lost everything: my home, my occupation, my village, and my son.”[[39]](#footnote-40)
10. Also in January 2022, soldiers reportedly abducted a group of people including four boys aged 16 to 17 in Loikaw Township, Kayah State.[[40]](#footnote-41) Ten bodies, including those of the four boys, were found in a toilet pit two days later. The bodies showed signs of torture. In February 2022, soldiers arrested two sisters aged 14 and 16 along with their mother during a military raid in Kalay Township, Sagaing Region. Three days later, villagers found their burned bodies in a hut that had been set on fire.[[41]](#footnote-42)
11. A 15-year-old boy was one of at least 35 civilians murdered in a mass killing by junta forces in Hpruso Township, Kayah State on 24 December 2021. Two of the victims were employees of Save the Children returning from a humanitarian response mission.[[42]](#footnote-43) The hands of some of the victims appear to have been bound before they were murdered, and many of the bodies were subsequently burned beyond recognition. The boy’s mother said that her son was riding in a truck and helping to make a gas delivery to earn money on the day soldiers murdered him:

Early that morning he picked up my phone call, but later I could not communicate with him anymore. I didn’t know what happened to my son. Later, the news was reported about the killings, and people told me about what happened. … In the morning, he left without expecting that he would be killed. I don’t know why my son and the others were killed. … We hate the brutal act of killing people. We feel a lot of pain. Sometimes we cry while we are eating because we miss our son so much.[[43]](#footnote-44)

1. While hundreds of children have been killed and injured in attacks by the military, untold numbers live daily with the fear that they will be among the next round of victims. A 17-year-old girl from Kayah State described the fears she felt because of the military’s attacks and patrols in her area:

I heard the gunshots in the morning. I thought it was over after that. But again, in the afternoon, loud noises of bomb blasts continued. I was shocked and terrified. I am afraid that heavy artillery will shell my house. We don't have a bomb shelter. If the clash happens again, I have nowhere to run to. What if the police and soldiers come in suddenly? … I’m scared when I hear the police patrolling the streets. I am afraid of what might happen if they suddenly break into my house.[[44]](#footnote-45)

1. A 13-year-old girl from Magway Region described hearing about other children losing their parents in attacks and said, “I felt [I] used to be free as a bird, but now it is like [I am] in a cage.”[[45]](#footnote-46) A 16-year-old boy from Magway Region described how he and his family constantly fear an attack by the military:

[W]e hear gunshots at [minimum] four or five [times each] night. Everyone in our area is thinking about running overnight. We also get a lot of sleep deprivation. Adults could not sleep much because of anxiety. I was wondering when we would be free from these dire situations. Every day I pray to Buddha for our release as soon as possible.[[46]](#footnote-47)

## Landmines and unexploded ordnance

1. Anti-personnel landmines are inherently indiscriminate weapons and pose a particular risk to children wherever they are deployed, even years after active armed conflict. Unexploded ordnance, including the mortars used in the indiscriminate attacks on villages and IDP sites, also threaten the lives, wellbeing, and human rights of children.[[47]](#footnote-48) Children are more likely to die after triggering a landmine or unexploded ordnance.[[48]](#footnote-49) Survivors often suffer disfiguration and permanent disabilities, including the loss of limbs, sight, or hearing. Many require physical and psychosocial support for the rest of their lives. Landmines and unexploded ordinance contamination also impacts children’s ability to travel, play, attend school, and access medical care. It can contribute to displacement, lost livelihoods, and economic hardship for families. Children suffer when parents or caregivers are killed or disabled by explosions.
2. Both the Myanmar military and other armed groups deploy landmines. The International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) has documented the new use of anti-personnel landmines by the Myanmar military in every year since it began publishing its Landmine Monitor report in 1999.[[49]](#footnote-50) Since 2018, Myanmar is the only country in the world in which the new use of landmines by government forces has been confirmed.[[50]](#footnote-51) Photographic evidence from 2022 shows frontline Myanmar army units in possession of landmines, suggesting their continued use.[[51]](#footnote-52) In ICBL’s latest report, Myanmar was one of only six countries with the confirmed use of landmines by non-state armed groups.[[52]](#footnote-53)
3. According to UNICEF, 19 Myanmar children were killed and 55 injured by landmines and unexploded ordnance in 2021.[[53]](#footnote-54) In the first three months of 2022, nine children were killed and 28 injured.[[54]](#footnote-55) It is likely that these figures do not reflect the true extent of child casualties of landmines and unexploded ordnance in Myanmar. The monitoring and documentation of landmine injuries and fatalities has become more difficult since the military coup given the operational constraints for non-governmental organizations, internet shutdowns, and shifting patterns of armed conflict.
4. Monitoring organizations working in ethnic states have noted an increase in injuries to children by landmines and unexploded ordnance as conflict has intensified since the coup.[[55]](#footnote-56) The changing map of armed conflict in Myanmar has also resulted in new areas becoming contaminated with landmines and unexploded ordnance. In 2020, UNICEF recorded casualties from landmines and unexploded ordnance in one township in Chin State and one township in Magway Region and recorded no casualties in Sagaing Region or Kayah State.[[56]](#footnote-57) In 2021, as those states and regions became the site of fierce battles between the military and other armed groups—including newly formed PDFs—UNICEF recorded casualties in five townships in Chin State, three in Magway Region, seven in Sagaing Region, and two in Kayah State.[[57]](#footnote-58) PDFs have reportedly used mines to inflict casualties on junta forces, although it is unclear if they are using victim-activated or command-detonated mines.[[58]](#footnote-59) Experts believe that PDFs are in possession of anti-personnel landmines captured from the Myanmar military and are likely to deploy them. Children have reportedly been killed or injured while producing improvised explosive devices.[[59]](#footnote-60)
5. Mine risk education programs have not reached many areas where landmines have been laid for the first time since the coup. Children in these areas likely have little or no awareness of the threat posed by landmines, especially if armed groups have not warned civilian populations about their use or location.

## Displacement

1. The junta’s relentless targeting of civilians and rampant human rights violations have contributed to widespread internal displacement. As of 23 May 2022, there were more than one million IDPs in Myanmar, of whom over 700,000 had been displaced since the coup.[[60]](#footnote-61) Over 380,000 of Myanmar’s IDPs are children, with more than 250,000 displaced since the coup.[[61]](#footnote-62) Approximately 69,000 of the 140,000 Rohingya displaced and confined to closed IDP camps in Rakhine State since 2012 are children.[[62]](#footnote-63) Tens of thousands of children in Bago Region, and Chin, Kachin, Kayin, and Shan States have also suffered internal displacement. These figures are in addition to the more than half million refugee children from Myanmar that are currently in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand, and elsewhere.[[63]](#footnote-64)
2. The junta’s intentional mass displacement of civilian populations, including children, violates the human rights of children[[64]](#footnote-65) and likely constitutes the crime against humanity of forcible transfer and the war crime of displacing civilians.[[65]](#footnote-66)
3. Displacement is often driven by fear for the safety of children. Families with children frequently flee their homes in anticipation of possible military incursions rather than waiting for attacks to occur. Many children and their families have been displaced multiple times, first fleeing their homes, and then relocating again when IDP camps or sheltering sites come under attack or are threatened by the military. A 14-year-old girl from Kayah State described her plight:

When I was working on harvesting corn in the field, my aunt came and told us that we also need to flee as we heard the weapons loudly. It was urgent and [we] couldn’t take so many things. My mother packed some clothes, pots, and plates. Then, we left our home. I was worried so much and thinking … what if the weapon hit us. So far, I was afraid of them [soldiers], and I always pray they would not come here [near the camp]. I also don’t want to hear the sound of the heavy weapon again. Still, I [feel] insecure and unhappy living in a place [that] is not my home, and I badly want to go back [to] my home. I imagined that I would buy some beautiful blouses when I returned home, but now it is not possible.[[66]](#footnote-67)

1. Displacement has frequently resulted in the separation of children from family members, deepening the risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation and contributing to psychological harm. Displacement disrupts education and increases the risk of human trafficking, recruitment by armed groups, child marriage, in particular for girls, and other forms of exploitation described in this paper. Since Myanmar’s economy is largely driven by agriculture, especially in the rural areas that are most affected by armed conflict, displacement often is accompanied by a loss of livelihood opportunities. Experts warned the Special Rapporteur that protracted displacement could precipitate a food crisis in the coming years, severely impacting the nutrition and health of children.
2. A 15-year-old girl from Kayah State said that repeated displacement had taken a toll on her and her family:

Due to the fighting, our village and nearby villages were evacuated for the first time from May 2021 until July. We returned to our village at the end of July as the situation had calmed down. But the fighting spread in September, and we fled again from our homes. The current place is not convenient for me since it is not my home. We [live] in tents built with bamboo and tarpaulins, which could not prevent the rain and wind. And we also face difficulties in [getting] enough water. I can no longer think of attending university after my high school education. Sometimes I imagine it would be nice if all the incidents in which children were killed, arrested, and lost homes were just a nightmare.[[67]](#footnote-68)

## Recruitment and use of children by armed groups

1. The Myanmar military is currently facing serious challenges meeting its personnel needs. Thousands of casualties and reported defections have thinned the military’s ranks, and the public’s deep hatred of the military has made recruitment difficult.[[68]](#footnote-69) At the same time, military forces have been stretched across an increasing number of conflict zones, with new battlefronts emerging in Sagaing and Magway Regions, Chin and Kayah States, and elsewhere. The Special Rapporteur is extremely concerned that these pressures will lead to more flagrant use of children as soldiers, porters, and human shields by the military.
2. The conscription, enlistment or use in hostilities of children under 15 years of age is a war crime.[[69]](#footnote-70)
3. In the decade preceding the coup, progress was made in reducing the number of child soldiers serving in the Myanmar military.[[70]](#footnote-71) However, the military never took the steps needed to end the practice, and children remained in the military’s ranks.[[71]](#footnote-72) A return to the military’s previous recruitment practices would have devastating consequences for children.
4. In February 2021, the International Labour Organization (ILO) raised concerns about increasing reports of forced labor by the Myanmar military and “associated armed groups,” including the forced recruitment of “young persons.”[[72]](#footnote-73) The Special Rapporteur has received various reports that the recruitment and use of children by the Myanmar military has indeed increased since the coup. Secondhand accounts suggest that, at least in certain parts of the country, junta officials and junta-aligned armed groups have placed demands on villages or households to produce a certain number of recruits, without safeguards to ensure that children are not enlisted. Statistical data on new child soldiers recruited by the military—or forcible recruitment more generally—is lacking and many of the systems put in place to monitor and prevent child recruitment have broken down. Therefore, the extent to which children are being enlisted or conscripted into military service is unclear even though warning signs are clearly present.
5. In December 2021, local media reported that children of military personnel over the age of 15 had been required to undergo military training.[[73]](#footnote-74) The Myanmar military has previously provided military training to the wives and teenage children residing with soldiers in or near conflict zones. The recent reports suggest an expansion of this practice to other parts of the country.
6. The Myanmar military has also reportedly used children as human shields since the coup.[[74]](#footnote-75) In November 2021, Myanmar army soldiers reportedly arrested a 16-year-old Chin boy alongside two adults and took them to the front line where they were fighting the Chinland Defense Force. The three were required to walk in front of the soldiers to detect landmines.[[75]](#footnote-76) Representatives of the Mindat People’s Administrative Council told the Special Rapporteur that during the military’s siege of Mindat, Chin State in May 2021, “The military … arrested ten Mindat youth and they forced them to walk in front of them as a human shield … the ten were walking ahead with the soldiers behind them.”[[76]](#footnote-77)
7. Junta-aligned Border Guard Forces in Kayin State have repeatedly forced large groups of villagers including children to serve as porters or to perform labor around camps.[[77]](#footnote-78) For example, on 20 September 2021, Border Guard Forces soldiers reportedly forced 300 civilians, including nine girls and three boys, to carry ammunition and rations to a military camp in Bilin Township, Mon State.[[78]](#footnote-79)
8. The Special Rapporteur has also received credible reports of the recruitment of children by some ethnic armed organizations since the coup. In the past year, recruitment drives by armed groups in Shan State have reportedly resulted in the conscription of children.[[79]](#footnote-80) The threat of conscription has also caused children to flee, contributing to displacement in the region. The UN received evidence of child recruitment by six non-state armed groups between February 2021 and March 2022.[[80]](#footnote-81) The number of cases of child recruitment by these groups reported to the UN in the first quarter of 2022 suggests a significant increase in child recruitment by EAOs.[[81]](#footnote-82)
9. Some ethnic armed organizations have used children as forced labor, including to carry military supplies in conflict zones. The Special Rapporteur reviewed credible reports based on firsthand testimony concerning the use of Rohingya children for forced labor by the Arakan Army since the coup.[[82]](#footnote-83) Children as young as 12 were reportedly forced at gunpoint to carry 50-kilogram bags of rice and were beaten when they were exhausted and paused to rest.
10. The Special Rapporteur received reports from several sources that many children are living, working, and fighting with PDF units. Often these children are making weapons, serving food, or acting as lookout guards. It is also likely that children have been involved in fighting with PDFs. In March 2022, the National Unity Government issued guidelines on the protection of children in armed conflict that specifically prohibited PDFs from recruiting or enlisting children under 18 years of age.[[83]](#footnote-84)
11. The junta’s brutality is a motivating factor driving children to join the ranks of PDFs. Many have previously been involved in street protests that the military has violently suppressed. Some have seen friends or family members killed or arrested during the crackdown on peaceful dissent. The junta may have issued arrest warrants for some of these children. Many have been separated from their families or have voluntarily kept their distance to protect relatives from the junta. The economic crisis engulfing Myanmar has deepened the vulnerability of adolescents. The lack of access to schools has reduced hopes for the future and disconnected children from social networks and support structures. In many cases, children have turned to PDFs only after other sources of sustenance, social support, and protection have been cut off.
12. Children associated with PDFs and ethnic armed organizations have been killed or injured in battle and, in some cases, may have been the victims of violations of international humanitarian law by the Myanmar military. In one widely reported incident from September 2021, soldiers killed 18 members of a lightly armed village defense force in Magway Region, of whom 11 were reportedly under the age of 18.[[84]](#footnote-85) Local villagers indicated that many of the victims were shot at close range in the temple.
13. The coup has also hampered programs aimed at preventing military recruitment of children and the use of children as forced labor by armed groups. The ILO warned that the transition from its Forced Labour Complaints Mechanism to a national mechanism run by the Myanmar government was disrupted by the coup.[[85]](#footnote-86) The coup has also suspended efforts to conclude Joint Action Plans with armed groups to end the recruitment and use of children.[[86]](#footnote-87) International organizations said that, since the coup, the focus of many ethnic armed groups has been drawn away from efforts to end the use of child soldiers as they have been focused on armed conflict with the military.

# The junta’s arbitrary detention, torture, and denial of fair trial rights of children

1. Since the coup, the junta has arbitrarily detained over 1,400 children. Hundreds of children remain in detention, where they may be subject to torture and face grave threats to their health and safety and uncertain prospects for their release.
2. The detention of children, and their abuse while in the junta’s custody, violates their rights to liberty, to a fair trial, and to be free from torture, among other rights.[[87]](#footnote-88) The junta’s mass detention of children likely constitutes the crime against humanity of imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty.[[88]](#footnote-89)
3. As of 27 May 2022, AAPP had recorded the detention of 337 children by the junta since the coup because of their pro-democracy activities or opposition to military rule or because of their relation to an individual associated with the opposition.[[89]](#footnote-90) Of these children, 274 remained in the junta’s custody as of 27 May 2022.[[90]](#footnote-91) UNICEF and its implementing partners provided legal aid to 1,485 detained children since the coup.[[91]](#footnote-92) UNICEF’s total is higher in part because of the inclusion of hundreds of Rohingya children detained on immigration charges due to discriminatory laws prohibiting their freedom of movement throughout the country. The true number of children detained almost certainly exceeds UNICEF’s total, as many detained children presumably did not receive support from UNICEF or its partners.
4. 39 children currently detained as political prisoners are under the age of 10, according to AAPP.[[92]](#footnote-93) These children are detained even though Myanmar law sets 10 years as the statutory minimum age for criminal responsibility, which is not in conformity with international law.[[93]](#footnote-94)
5. Children detained by the junta have been held in various locations, including police detention centers, youth rehabilitation centers, and prisons. Children are often placed in prison cells with their family members and other adults when they are arrested together. However, children who are arrested without family members are often kept in police stations or sent to rehabilitation centers. Many children have been detained without access to lawyers or family members.[[94]](#footnote-95) The whereabouts of some detained children is unknown even to their family members. In May 2022, a lawyer providing services to detained children told the Special Rapporteur that she had knowledge of 10 to 15 active cases in which they had not been able to discover the location of a detained child. These facts suggest that the junta may be responsible for the crime against humanity of enforced disappearance.[[95]](#footnote-96)
6. Many of the children detained by the junta were arrested merely for their participation in peaceful protest activities. An 18-year-old boy from Yangon described the lingering effects of the trauma he experienced after being imprisoned as a minor because of participation in a protest:

I was released because I [was] under 18, and the jail was almost full. When the prison staff interrogated me, I told them ... I didn’t do anything against them. At first, they put my age as 19. I’ve tried hard to prove that I was still 17. Before I was released, they took my photos from every side, front, side, and back, and I signed a paper stating that I will not protest again. I am more afraid of the soldiers than other people. One day, after I got released, the soldiers came into my home at 11pm. I was shocked to death, as they were holding guns and looking at me. They came inside my home to search for a person. A few moments later they went outside, as they couldn’t find anyone, and told me to close the door. … After that event, I couldn’t sleep for three days and got frightened whenever I heard a strange voice.[[96]](#footnote-97)

1. The junta has also arrested and detained hundreds of Rohingya children for violating discriminatory restrictions on their freedom of movement that violate international human rights law. Since the coup, junta administrators in Rakhine State have issued orders extending the need to get pre-approval for travel for those without citizenship or National Verification Cards (NVCs). These requirements directly impact the Rohingya, many of whom do not have citizenship documents and whose only means of obtaining identity documentation is through the discriminatory NVC system.
2. The junta has also increased the enforcement of movement restrictions against the Rohingya since the coup. Between February 2021 and March 2022, UNICEF’s implementing partners provided legal services to 545 Rohingya children facing migration-related charges.[[97]](#footnote-98) Most of these children were arrested while attempting to flee Myanmar.[[98]](#footnote-99) In November 2021, 234 Rohingya, including 90 children, were reportedly arrested by the Myanmar navy while apparently trying to leave Myanmar by boat. Children under 10 were reportedly released the next day, but older children were detained for several weeks and were only released after being convicted for trying to “illegally migrate” in violation of the Immigration Act.[[99]](#footnote-100)

## Taking children as hostages

1. According to AAPP, the junta has detained 61 children as hostages since the coup.[[100]](#footnote-101) Most have been arrested to exert pressure on parents to turn themselves in or, as appears to be the case in at least one instance, to extract information from a parent already in the junta’s custody.[[101]](#footnote-102) Those detained include many young children.
2. In October 2021, a 10-month old child from Falam Township, Chin State was reportedly detained for four days alongside her mother, aunt, and grandmother after soldiers failed to arrest her father, a soldier who joined the Civil Disobedience Movement.[[102]](#footnote-103) A woman and her two daughters—aged four and 17—were detained in Mandalay Region in June 2021 after the junta failed to locate her husband, an anti-coup activist.[[103]](#footnote-104) The four-year-old was released after two-and-a-half weeks in detention, and the mother and older daughter were released four months later.[[104]](#footnote-105)
3. In another case reported extensively by local media based on eyewitness accounts, soldiers abducted a three-year-old boy from his kindergarten in Yangon on 5 April 2022 only hours after arresting his mother.[[105]](#footnote-106) Later on the same day, soldiers arrested a 14-year-old boy at his home in Yangon. The junta was apparently seeking the boy’s father, who was friends with the detained mother. The next week, the junta announced that it had arrested 15 members of Yangon resistance groups based on information provided by the mother during interrogation, raising concerns that the child had been arrested in order to pressure the mother to disclose information concerning junta opponents during interrogation.[[106]](#footnote-107) The Special Rapporteur was unable to confirm the whereabouts of the mother, her son, and the 14-year-old boy, all of whom appear to remain in the junta’s custody.
4. Parents have also been held hostage to put pressure on children. The Special Rapporteur reviewed testimony concerning a boy who turned himself in to junta officials after they briefly detained his mother.[[107]](#footnote-108)

## Torture of children in detention

1. The military is systematically torturing children whom it believes are affiliated with PDFs or other opposition armed groups, according to credible reports received by the Special Rapporteur. Children arrested because of their peaceful protest activities have also been tortured. The UN received reports of the torture of 142 children between 1 February 2021 and 31 March 2022.[[108]](#footnote-109) Given the lack of access to detained children by family members and lawyers, this number almost certainly does not capture many cases of torture against children currently in the junta’s custody. Detained children have reportedly experienced many of the same types of abuses that have by used against adults: cutting with knives, beating with fists, guns, and rods, kicking, pulling out fingernails and teeth, burning with cigarette butts, stress positions, mock executions and burials, deprivation of food and water, and being forced to drink toilet water.[[109]](#footnote-110) Children who have sustained injuries during torture have been deprived medical care. One boy reportedly died while in the custody of the military one day after being detained.[[110]](#footnote-111)
2. There is an absolute prohibition against torture under international human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and customary international law.[[111]](#footnote-112) The junta’s acts of torture against children likely constitute crimes against humanity given that they have been committed as part of the junta’s widespread and systematic attack on the people of Myanmar.[[112]](#footnote-113) The torture of children in the context of a non-international armed conflict also constitutes a war crime.[[113]](#footnote-114)
3. A 17-year-old boy from Bago Region described how he was tortured after being arrested following a protest in April 2021:

They put a sack on my head and then beat my head and face with the stocks and butts of their [guns]. When I fell over, they stepped on my face. I was taken first to some of the police stations where I was beaten repeatedly and then taken to an interrogation center. My age and name were asked there. They took away all my possessions and when a call came through from my mother, they told me to tell mother that I was safe and sound. They asked me if I took any military training anywhere and forced me to answer that I set up bombs and used explosives. ... At the interrogation centers, I wasn’t allowed to sleep until 1 pm at night and then had to get up at 5 am. The people took turns asking me questions for which I had no answers. They asked me if I killed any policemen or any of their informers. Some of the days, I wasn’t given any food. I got to eat the leftover food. There wasn’t clean drinking water at any of the places. I had to drink the water we use for bathing and toilet. … I still have bad headaches and I also had rashes all over my body when I arrived back home.[[114]](#footnote-115)

1. The Special Rapporteur has also received credible reports of torture in the form of sexual abuse of girls in detention centers as well as sexual harassment. Media outlets have also reported cases of harassment and abuse of women and girls.[[115]](#footnote-116) The Special Rapporteur is aware of reports of sexual violence against men over the age of 18 and is concerned that detained boys could also face sexual abuse. Given the lack of access to detained children and the reluctance of many victims to speak publicly, the Special Rapporteur believes that there may be far more cases of sexual harassment and gender-based violence against children in detention centers than those that have been publicly reported.

## Denial of fair trial rights

1. Many children currently detained by the junta have been charged under section 505A of the penal code, a section added by the junta after the coup which makes it a crime to “cause fear to a group of citizens” or “spread false news.” Children have also been charged under other penal code provisions, the Counter-Terrorism Law, the Public Property Protection Act, and other laws.
2. Given the sheer volume of cases against individuals because of their opposition to the junta—as well as the junta’s mismanagement of judicial processes—the pace of trials has ground to a halt. Many detained children are thus in indefinite arbitrary pre-trial detention.
3. The declaration of martial law in 11 townships allows cases to be tried in military courts. Military courts are not accessible to the public, and martial law suspends some of the protections purportedly offered to children under the Child Rights Law, were it to be implemented fully. At least four children have been tried and sentenced in military courts.[[116]](#footnote-117) Given the lack of information and transparency, it is possible that there are others. Two of these children, both boys, were sentenced to death in July 2021.[[117]](#footnote-118) Subsequent to their conviction and sentencing, their case was transferred to a juvenile court, where they will be re-tried because of their age.[[118]](#footnote-119)
4. Children tried in civilian courts are also deprived of a fair trial.[[119]](#footnote-120) Courts have been moved inside prisons, preventing access by family members, media, or the public. Defense lawyers have reported threats and harassment by military officials. Some defense lawyers have been arrested and detained. Judges have reportedly pressured children to confess crimes.

# Education

1. The military coup has had a disastrous impact on children’s right to education.[[120]](#footnote-121) The disruption and violence triggered by the coup deprived many children of a return to the classroom after the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered schools in 2020 and 2021. Millions of children have had no formal education for two years and have little hope of returning to the classroom in the near future.
2. In 2020 and 2021, pandemic-related school closures kept approximately 12 million children out of classrooms.[[121]](#footnote-122) Following the coup, teachers were among the first to join the Civil Disobedience Movement in large numbers. In May 2021, the Ministry of Education fired more than 125,000 of the country’s 430,000 basic education teachers because of their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement.[[122]](#footnote-123) The same month, the Myanmar Teacher’s Federation estimated that half of the country’s teachers had joined the Civil Disobedience Movement.[[123]](#footnote-124) Hundreds of teachers are now political prisoners, charged with serious crimes in relation to their participation in protests, the Civil Disobedience Movement, or other forms of opposition to the junta.[[124]](#footnote-125)
3. Many families have made the decision not to send their children to schools that are controlled by the junta. Junta officials and their allies have reportedly threatened children who remain out of school to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement as well as their parents.[[125]](#footnote-126)
4. Safety concerns have also been a major factor keeping children out of the classroom. Risks include attacks on schools, the occupation of schools by armed groups, threats to children traveling to school, and the arrest of children in schools. According to individuals working in the education sector, safety concerns are the primary reason that parents cite for not sending their children to school. Some teachers may be staying away from government schools because of their fear of reprisals by anti-junta forces.
5. In November 2020, a junta spokesperson stated that 4.7 million children had enrolled for school and that only 3.3 million were attending.[[126]](#footnote-127) At the beginning of June 2022, Save the Children estimated that 7.8 million children in Myanmar were out of school.[[127]](#footnote-128) The UN projects that 6.3 million children and adolescents require education support.[[128]](#footnote-129) Children who have returned to the classroom are receiving an inferior education. Striking teachers have been replaced by unqualified and inadequately trained educators.
6. The disruption of education over the past two years will impair children throughout their lives and have a long-term impact on Myanmar’s economy and society. Children denied schooling are more likely to suffer mental and emotional distress and more likely to embrace violence to resolve personal and political conflict. Their earning potential will be reduced, and they will be more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking, child marriage, and child labor. If access to education is not restored, these risks will continue to compound and contribute to a lost generation of human potential.
7. A 17-year-old girl from Kayah State described how her hopes for further education and a career had been crushed by the junta:

When the coup happened, I was only 16. My whole life is in chaos right now. I planned my life to be at university …, join external courses, and work right after that. I imagined earning my own money. Now, I haven’t even finished high school.[[129]](#footnote-130)

## Attacks on schools and occupation of schools

1. The Myanmar military and other armed groups have carried out hundreds of attacks on schools and teachers. Attacks on schools may constitute a war crime when committed in the context of a non-international armed conflict.[[130]](#footnote-131)
2. The UN has documented 260 attacks on schools and school personnel between February 2021 and March 2022.[[131]](#footnote-132) There was a spike in attacks at the start of the 2021-2022 school year, with many explosions occurring at government schools. These attacks were presumably carried out by anti-junta groups and subsided after the NUG called for PDFs to avoid attacking educational facilities.[[132]](#footnote-133)
3. The Myanmar military has attacked schools using helicopters, fighter jets, and heavy artillery. In late March 2021, airstrikes destroyed three high schools run by Karen authorities in Kayin State.[[133]](#footnote-134) The military has also reportedly captured teachers and forced them to serve as guides. Ethnic armed groups, militias, and PDFs have reportedly also been responsible for attacks on teachers, including for supposed collaboration with the junta.
4. Attacks on schools are a foreseeable consequence of the militarization of schools by armed groups. In many cases, attacks on schools were preceded by the occupation of those schools by the military or other armed groups. The Myanmar military has frequently used both government schools and schools run by ethnic organizations as bases for military operations. The UN documented 320 cases of the use of schools by armed groups between February 2021 and March 2022.[[134]](#footnote-135) Often, soldiers have remained in schools for months at a time.
5. Soldiers have also occupied schools while children were present, putting their lives in jeopardy and raising concerns that children are being used as human shields or being held as hostages. On 27 February 2022, Myanmar military soldiers detained more than 100 children, most aged three to six, at a monastery school in Yinmabin Township, Sagaing Region.[[135]](#footnote-136) The students were held by the soldiers for approximately 36 hours, while the soldiers battled opposition armed groups in the area. In a similar incident in April 2021, soldiers reportedly occupied the Yangon Education Center for the Blind and restricted the movement of about 50 disabled students and 30 staff and relatives for over one week.[[136]](#footnote-137)
6. Ethnic armed groups and PDFs have also reportedly used schools for military purposes, including when defending themselves against attacks by the Myanmar military. In many villages, a school represents the largest, most solid structure, and thus an obvious defensive position when the military attacks.
7. Fighting near schools has created safety concerns and interrupted study. A nine-year-old boy explained his fears about returning to school:

The schools were briefly opened in June. When I see other children going to school, I want to go too. But I’m afraid because I heard guns and bomb blasts near my school. I don’t like bomb blasts and guns shooting at school, because I’m scared that the school will be on fire and students will die. If there were no more soldiers and bomb blasts at school, I want to go back to school.[[137]](#footnote-138)

## Education for displaced and vulnerable populations

1. For decades, Myanmar’s education system has disadvantaged children from ethnic minority communities and other vulnerable populations.[[138]](#footnote-139) Schooling in rural areas has been underfunded and is often inaccessible to dispersed populations. The lack of mother-tongue education in the state education system is a major impediment to learning, given that more than 30 percent of Myanmar’s population are from ethnic minority groups. Many ethnic people view schools as a tool used by both military and civilian governments in the “Burmanization” of minority areas. Curriculum often includes affirming references to Buddhism. Progress in addressing some of these challenges under the National League for Democracy (NLD) came to an abrupt halt after the coup.[[139]](#footnote-140)
2. The children that have historically suffered from these deficiencies have generally been the most impacted by the education crisis precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic and military coup. The formal education system in Chin State has completely collapsed in the past year due to high rates of participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement and the military’s campaign of violence and arson in major towns in the state. Displacement has further complicated efforts to ensure quality education to rural and vulnerable populations.
3. For decades, Rohingya children in Rakhine State have been systematically denied access to education opportunities. The tightening of travel restrictions on the Rohingya under the junta have made a bad situation worse, with children unable to move between locations to attend lessons. Government teachers are also reluctant to teach in Rohingya areas, often citing fears for their safety.[[140]](#footnote-141) Less qualified teachers are often assigned to schools with Rohingya students. Given the lack of formal education opportunities, many communities organize informal educational instruction by community or religious leaders, who lack sufficient training and education. For most Rohingya children in IDP camps in Rakhine State, temporary education centers run by NGOs or volunteers represent the only opportunity for learning.[[141]](#footnote-142) These centers do not have sufficient books, supplies, and qualified teachers and lack clean water and sanitation facilities. Attitudes among the Rohingya population often result in unequal educational opportunities for Rohingya girls.[[142]](#footnote-143)
4. Children with disabilities also face extraordinary challenges in accessing education. Most schools are not easily accessible by children with disabilities. Few teachers in Myanmar have received any training on instruction for children with disabilities. In Rohingya learning centers and many other informal education settings, overcrowding limits accessibility by children with disabilities.[[143]](#footnote-144)

## Alternate education systems

1. The collapse of the state education system has forced families and communities to seek alternate schooling arrangements. Students formerly enrolled in government schools have moved to schools run by ethnic administrations and civil society groups. Communities have also banded together to establish new education initiatives.
2. Some ethnic armed organizations, such as the Kachin Independence Organization, Karen National Union, and New Mon State Party, already had robust education systems prior to the coup. These systems have seen a dramatic increase in enrolment by students that formerly attended government schools.[[144]](#footnote-145) In some cases, enrollment in school systems run by ethnic administrations has doubled or tripled, and total enrollment in these systems is estimated to be above 400,000.[[145]](#footnote-146) The National Unity Government has also tried to fill the gap in formal education by developing home-based learning programs utilizing Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram.[[146]](#footnote-147) Civil society organizations, religious institutions, and volunteer networks, often supported by teacher participants in the Civil Disobedience Movement, have also set up new projects to provide alternate education opportunities.[[147]](#footnote-148) In IDP camps, camp committees and other community groups have established informal schools.
3. These important initiatives face enormous challenges, foremost a lack of funding and insufficient teaching and learning materials. Many of these programs have not been supported by the international donor community and instead rely on community donors. Parallel education systems are also at risk of being targeted by the junta, including through physical attacks and the arrest of teachers or students. They lack accreditation, which will be an obstacle for students seeking to continue their education in other countries or to reintegrate into the formal education system at a future date. Poor internet accessibility in many parts of the country, exacerbated by internet shutdowns and rising internet prices, is a major barrier to online learning.

# Economic and humanitarian crisis for children

1. The coup has had a huge impact on Myanmar’s economy, which was already reeling from the COVID-19 pandemic, with devastating consequences for the rights of children.[[148]](#footnote-149) The World Bank estimates that the economy is 30 percent smaller than it would have been without the “twin shocks” of the pandemic and coup.[[149]](#footnote-150) Nearly half of Myanmar’s population has fallen into poverty, as urban poverty has tripled since early 2020.[[150]](#footnote-151)
2. An unpublished economic impact assessment shared with the Special Rapporteur by an aid organization found a 56 percent drop in the income of surveyed households between January 2021 and February 2022. At the end of the study period, 18 percent of more than 1,500 surveyed individuals—which included a broad spectrum of workers and community members—reported no household income in the preceding month. Most respondents reported drawing down some or all of their household savings to address income shortages.
3. Inflation has further stretched the resources of families. The prices of food, fuel, and transportation have all risen precipitously.[[151]](#footnote-152) Costs for agricultural inputs, including fertilizer, have risen, affecting crop yields. Electricity and internet cuts have disrupted lives and livelihoods.
4. To address economic hardship, families have adopted a wide range of coping strategies that have a detrimental impact on children. Many families are eating less often or consuming less nutritious foods. Others have taken on large amounts of new debt or sold assets, hindering their ability to recover when the economic crisis subsides.
5. Adolescent children are being sorely impacted by Myanmar’s economic collapse. Without education or livelihood opportunities, teenagers may lose hope and adopt risky coping strategies. Poverty is an important driver of many of the human rights challenges highlighted in this paper, including child recruitment by armed groups, human trafficking, and child labor. Girls are particularly vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of child marriage and sexual exploitation. Poverty also feeds militarization and instability, with impacts likely to last for decades.
6. It is not only the general economic decline that is affecting children, but also the disruption of initiatives aimed at combating childhood poverty. Beginning in 2014, the Department of Social Welfare implemented a Maternal and Child Cash Transfer (MCCT) program that was reaching more than 200,000 women and children in five regions and states as of 2019.[[152]](#footnote-153) Evaluations found that the program reduced household debt, reduced stunting, increased access to antenatal care, increased breastfeeding rates, and improved the diets of children and mothers.[[153]](#footnote-154) Although the project was approved for expansion to reach 678,000 beneficiaries, the project was put on hold following the coup, because of donor policies prohibiting engagement with the junta and the junta’s decision to stop the implementation of its social protection program, of which MCCT was a component. Some international NGOs have sought to introduce new cash transfer programs to fill the gap left by the collapse of the MCCT initiative, but these programs are small in scale and do not have the same reach as the MCCT.[[154]](#footnote-155)

## Humanitarian aid

1. Five million children are in need of humanitarian assistance in Myanmar according to the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022, an annual report compiled by UN agencies and aid organizations.[[155]](#footnote-156) More than four-and-a-half million children are food insecure.[[156]](#footnote-157)
2. UN Member States and other donors have failed to address the humanitarian needs of children, with devastating consequences. As of 29 May 2022, donors had committed only $86 million, or 10.4 percent, of the $826 million required to fund the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022.[[157]](#footnote-158) Only 19 percent of UNICEF’s Humanitarian Action for Children requirements for 2022 had been received as of the end of May 2022.[[158]](#footnote-159) Humanitarian groups confirmed that lifesaving programs for children are not being implemented because of funding deficits.
3. Even when funds and resources are available, the junta has intentionally erected barriers to the delivery of aid. Humanitarian organizations have highlighted the severe operational constraints impacting their ability to deliver lifesaving aid. These include COVID-19 restrictions, challenges in maintaining registration, bureaucratic delays, the requirement of travel authorization, and explicit denial of access to certain parts of the country. When access to deliver aid is granted, it is often time-limited and subject to multiple layers of approval. The areas for which aid deliveries are not authorized are often those with the greatest humanitarian needs. Internet restrictions have also posed challenges for the coordination and distribution of aid. The Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022 states that 5.3 million people requiring humanitarian aid are in areas with high or medium access challenges.[[159]](#footnote-160) Most or all of Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, and Rakhine States and Magway and Sagaing Regions fall into these categories.
4. The Special Rapporteur reviewed numerous public and non-public reports concerning the Myanmar military’s obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid. In many cases, the junta’s actions disrupt the delivery of supplies earmarked for children and families. The Special Rapporteur received reports about the junta’s confiscation or denial of deliveries of food, nutritional powders, hygiene kits, breastfeeding supplements, umbrellas, and raincoats, among other goods.
5. Approximately 3,000 children were among those displaced from Mindat, Chin State by heavy fighting and the military’s indiscriminate attacks in May ([A/76/314](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/A_76_314_E.pdf)). The military subsequently closed roads into the town, blocked aid convoys, and looted and destroyed supplies in the town.[[160]](#footnote-161) A pregnant woman and two children were among six displaced persons from Mindat who reportedly died because they could not access medical care.[[161]](#footnote-162)

# Health and nutrition

1. Prior to the coup, health and nutrition indicators already suggested a dire situation for children in Myanmar. 29 percent of children under five experienced stunting.[[162]](#footnote-163) 18 percent of children lacked access to clean drinking water.[[163]](#footnote-164) Less than half of babies were delivered in a health facility.[[164]](#footnote-165) The maternal mortality rate was double the average for Southeast Asia.[[165]](#footnote-166) In an unpublished February 2021 survey of more than 1,500 individuals across five states and regions, 41 percent of respondents indicated that they had difficulties accessing healthcare services. Children threatened by conflict and discrimination were particularly vulnerable. 41 percent of children in Chin State experienced stunting, as did 48 percent of children in Rohingya IDP camps around Sittwe.[[166]](#footnote-167) Despite progress made under civilian governments over the preceding decade, Myanmar health infrastructure was among the weakest in the region. And for a year prior to the coup, COVID-19 threatened the lives and health of children throughout the country.
2. The coup precipitated a health and nutrition crisis affecting children in all regions and populations in Myanmar. The junta has repeatedly attacked medical infrastructure and personnel. Access to medical care has declined precipitously, as the public health system has collapsed. Economic decline, displacement, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid have left many children without access to adequate food and clean water. Essential public health initiatives, including vaccination programs, have been disrupted. The junta’s attacks on health care and the collapse of health infrastructure and nutrition programs have had a devastating impact on children’s right to health.[[167]](#footnote-168)

## Health care under attack

1. Medical workers, patients, and health facilities throughout Myanmar are under attack by junta forces.[[168]](#footnote-169) The military has shelled hospitals and clinics using airstrikes and heavy artillery. Doctors and nurses have been arrested, beaten, and killed. Patients have also been arrested, sometimes while receiving medical care. Junta forces have blocked the delivery of medicines and supplies to hospitals and clinics. Attacks on medical facilities are one of the grave violations against children that have been condemned by the UN Security Council and are reported on annually by the UN Secretary-General.[[169]](#footnote-170) The Secretary-General’s Special Representative on Children and Armed Conflict recently warned that attacks on hospitals can have “devastating impacts on civilian populations, especially children.”[[170]](#footnote-171)
2. The World Health Organization recorded 299 attacks on health care resulting in 31 deaths and 64 injuries between 1 February 2021 and 29 May 2022.[[171]](#footnote-172) This number includes physical attacks on health care facilities with guns, heavy artillery or bombs, violence against health workers, the arrest of health workers, the looting and destruction of medical equipment and supplies, and the obstruction of media services.[[172]](#footnote-173)
3. The junta has made the military occupation of hospitals a strategy, deploying soldiers to health facilities throughout the country starting weeks after the coup began.[[173]](#footnote-174) The UN has documented 51 instances of the use of health facilities by armed groups since the coup.[[174]](#footnote-175)
4. Along with teachers, health care workers formed part of the core of the Civil Disobedience Movement. According to reports, up to 70 percent of doctors and nurses joined the movement in some parts of the country, causing public hospitals to restrict services.[[175]](#footnote-176) In ethnic areas and regions where opposition groups are strong, many hospitals have shut their doors completely.[[176]](#footnote-177) Although some have returned to their former jobs, the state health system remains tremendously understaffed.
5. The military’s attacks on civilians and resulting displacement has also put medical care out of reach for many children and families. Hundreds of thousands of children and families have been driven from towns and villages that were previously served by hospitals, clinics or medical programs run by NGOs. Humanitarian groups and volunteer health workers are struggling to reach these populations in IDP camps and sheltering sites. For those that have not been displaced, distrust of the junta prevents many families and children from seeking medical care at government facilities.
6. Families have become heavily reliant on private clinics or medical services set up by striking doctors and nurses. In addition to working in pre-existing private clinics, doctors and nurses have provided services in monasteries and set up mobile clinics. Despite the important role that private medical facilities and programs are assuming, services are often limited. Private clinics suffer from a lack of access to medicines. In conflict-affected areas, shortages of medicines and medical supplies are exacerbated by the junta’s obstruction of the delivery of humanitarian aid. Junta officials have indicated to aid organizations that they believe medicine and medical supplies destined for IDPs will likely be used to support opposition armed groups.
7. For many families and children, medical services in private clinics are inaccessible because of price. The increasing cost of health care through the private sector has wiped out some of the gains made in the public health system under the NLD government. The migration of doctors and nurses from the state health care system to private clinics has also made certain types of care unavailable. State hospitals may have the equipment and medicines needed for sophisticated procedures but lack skilled doctors to perform them. The clinics in which those doctors are now practicing lack the necessary equipment and medicines. Health professionals working in private clinics are also at risk of arrest or persecution by junta authorities. Government officials have at times revoked the licenses of doctors found to be providing medical services in the private sector.
8. The decline in access to health care since the coup has been greater in rural areas and areas with high levels of displacement, such as Chin State. Severe restrictions on freedom of movement impede access to medical care for Rohingya children in Rakhine State, where few Rohingya villages have primary health care providers, and Rohingya are usually unable to access mainstream medical systems.[[177]](#footnote-178) Nighttime curfews in place in Rakhine State prevent Rohingya families from seeking emergency care for children who are injured or fall ill at night, or mothers who go into labor. Rohingya families have been forced to pay bribes to visit clinics or hospitals.
9. The lack of access to health care has particularly impacted children. Thousands of infants are at risk of dying from respiratory disease, neonatal sepsis, diarrhea, and other easily treatable conditions because they do not receive checkups and cannot access care or medicines when they get sick.

## Immunization

1. The World Health Organization has estimated that there will be 33,000 preventable deaths in Myanmar in 2022 because of missed routine childhood immunizations.[[178]](#footnote-179) Both the COVID-19 pandemic and the events following the coup have disrupted childhood immunization programs. One public health expert said that even after immunization programs were restarted following the mid-2021 COVID-19 wave in Myanmar, they only returned to about ten percent capacity because of the coup, the Civil Disobedience Movement, and collapse of the state health system. The risk and expense associated with transportation in the post-coup period has also impeded vaccination campaigns. In order to address these challenges, some doctors and aid groups have changed vaccination schedules, increasing the interval between vaccines.
2. Approximately one million children have missed routine immunizations in the past year.[[179]](#footnote-180) Children in areas affected by high rates of displacement are especially unlikely to receive immunizations.[[180]](#footnote-181) During the past year, nationwide measles vaccination coverage has dropped from 91 percent to 34 percent.[[181]](#footnote-182) Until these vaccination programs are restored, Myanmar will remain at very high risk for outbreaks of preventable diseases.

## Nutrition and hygiene

1. Since the coup, many children and families have struggled to meet their nutritional needs. The UN estimates that 1.3 million children and more than 700,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women will require nutritional assistance in 2022.[[182]](#footnote-183) 291,000 children under five will require life-saving treatment for acute malnutrition.[[183]](#footnote-184) Unfortunately, donors have not provided the resources to address these immense needs. As of 31 May 2022, only two percent of the humanitarian budget for nutrition programs had been funded.[[184]](#footnote-185) The UN warned that 7,500 children could die from malnutrition if these funding needs are not quickly met.[[185]](#footnote-186)
2. Food diversity for children has declined significantly in many parts of the country. Aid groups shared with the Special Rapporteur that families in many communities, especially those that had been displaced, were having trouble securing proteins and vegetables.
3. A 17-year-old boy from Kayah state described the deterioration in his family’s diet:

We can no longer have regular meals like before. We have fewer meals and less amount of food these days. The elders at home said that we need to save food in case we need to run. Before, we all had three meals a day. Now the elders have just one meal a day while the youths have two and the babies three. No meat at all.[[186]](#footnote-187)

1. A mother in an IDP camp in Kayah State described her inability to feed her children and wondered when support would come from the international community:

For us adults, we can even make do with just one meal a day, but can you at least help our children so that they can have regular meals, please? Now we are feeding them porridge for some meals. Though they do not complain, it is breaking our hearts not to be able to feed them even basic rice.[[187]](#footnote-188)

1. Humanitarian actors cited the bureaucratic and security challenges to delivering aid, described above, as a major impediment to the delivery of nutritional support. For these reasons, and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Food Programme was unable to deliver food and nutrition assistance to nearly 600,000 children targeted by its programs in 2021 and reached less than half the children targeted for malnutrition treatment.[[188]](#footnote-189) School closures and low attendance impacted school feeding programs that provided vital nutritional support for children. The World Food Programme was not able to reach a third of the students it intended to support with such programs.[[189]](#footnote-190)
2. The junta’s obstruction of aid delivery has extended to nutrition programs. The junta’s interactions with aid workers indicates that it fears that nutritional goods, such as “ready to use” foods for IDPs, could be used to sustain opposition armed groups. Displacement and disruption of humanitarian aid shipments mean that five million children will not receive planned vitamin A supplementation.[[190]](#footnote-191)
3. Infants and breastfeeding mothers have also been severely impacted by the displacement and the obstruction of humanitarian aid. Fully six out of ten children under five and pregnant or breastfeeding women cannot afford a diet that meets their nutritional needs.[[191]](#footnote-192) Nutritional deficiencies and stress, particularly among displaced mothers, has sometimes led to lactation problems. Women who are separated from their children because of conflict or personal security risks often stop lactating. Deliveries of breastmilk substitutes have at times been blocked by junta forces. When mothers obtain substitutes, they must mix them with clean water, which is not always accessible for displaced families or those living in deprived communities.
4. Nutrition outcomes are closely tied to economic conditions in the country. One development expert said that the collapse of the Maternal and Child Cash Transfer program would contribute to an increase of stunting to 40 to 50 percent, wiping out the gains from ten years of development programming. Protracted displacement and the increasingly high levels of debt among villagers in agricultural areas could drive food insecurity and malnutrition for years into the future.
5. Three million children in Myanmar lack access to clean water for drinking and hygiene.[[192]](#footnote-193) This problem is compounded by displacement. Conditions in both established IDP camps and new sheltering sites for displaced persons are dire. Many IDPs are reliant on rainwater for a source of fresh water.[[193]](#footnote-194) In January 2022, there was an outbreak of acute watery diarrhea in IDP camps in Rakhine State. Rohingya camps were most affected, and children under five accounted for more than 85 percent of cases.[[194]](#footnote-195) Aid groups attribute the outbreak to the lack of clean water in the camps. Displaced children in Chin State and Magway Region have reportedly contracted skin diseases because they lack access to clean water.[[195]](#footnote-196)

## Psychosocial needs

1. Many children will experience long-term psychological suffering because of the trauma endured at the hands of the military junta. Many have lost parents or other family members or have themselves been the victims of acts of violence. Children in conflict zones have lived with the constant threat of military attacks for months on end and have experienced severe deprivation after being displaced. The collapse of the education system deepens the isolation of children and separates them from support networks. Aid workers report that children are exhibiting signs of severe psychological stress.
2. Children suffer when their parents experience stress from security risks, displacement, job loss, and financial struggles. Given these challenges, many parents struggled to adequately protect and nurture their children. Displacement, internet shutdowns, and the threats to NGOs hamper the ability to deliver psychosocial support to children experiencing mental suffering.
3. A 14-year-old girl from Magway described how the crisis is affecting children in her area:

This is a challenging time for families, including us. I have been concerned for all the citizens and children because of COVID-19 and political crisis. Children have lost their right to education as schools are not open. Parents and children could not sleep for the sounds of gunfire. In this crisis, everyone is stressed out, worried, and frustrated.[[196]](#footnote-197)

# Exploitation and abuse of children

1. The violence, social upheaval, and economic turmoil unleashed by the coup have created an environment that is rife with opportunities to exploit and abuse children. Parents and caretakers confronting multiple crises are often ill-equipped to protect and nurture their children. Some adults also take out their frustration on children or exploit the vulnerabilities of children during chaotic times. Children are more vulnerable to human trafficking and economic exploitation when they are poor, displaced, and out of school. Girls, in particular, are vulnerable to forced marriage and sexual exploitation.
2. Under international human rights law, states must protect children from violence, sexual abuse, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation.[[197]](#footnote-198) Not only has the junta failed to meet this fundamental responsibility, but it is creating the conditions that give rise to the exploitation and abuse of children. It also stands in the way of efforts by others to protect children and mitigate harms.

## Physical and sexual abuse of children

1. Displacement, security risks, financial difficulties, and other hardships have increased stress levels for parents and caretakers, leading to increased physical violence and corporal punishment against children. Displacement, the lack of access to schools, and dangers outside the home have upended daily routines and increased the amount of time families, relatives, and neighbors spend confined together in homes, shelters, and hiding places, further increasing opportunities for abuse. Children, as well as organizations working with children, have reported an increase in physical abuse of children by caretakers and others.[[198]](#footnote-199)
2. A 15-year-old girl from Mandalay Region said, “Some of the children are often scolded and beaten because they are playing games all the time as they are stuck at home day in and day out.”[[199]](#footnote-200)A 13-year-old boy, also from Mandalay, said, “These days, parents are using the sticks a lot to discipline the children because the economy is very bad. … I feel very bad, and I want parents to be more aware of child rights.”[[200]](#footnote-201)
3. Altered living arrangements have also increased the risk of sexual abuse of children. Many children have been separated from their parents during the crisis or are sharing living spaces with people who are not family members or trusted caretakers. IDP camps and sheltering sites create new vulnerabilities for children. Children lack privacy in these locations, many of which do not have separate toilets and showers for women and girls.
4. A displaced teenage girl told the Special Rapporteur about her loss of privacy after being displaced and separated from her parents:

Many children including me have had to move to a safe place because it is dangerous. Then we have to live in refugee camps or with our relatives. We lost all of our privacy. We had to live with many people. We have to be very careful when we change our clothes or take a bath. I lived in a [displaced persons] camp for a few days. Now I live with my relatives. It is better, but I still don't have privacy.[[201]](#footnote-202)

1. Researchers face many barriers in collecting data on the number of children suffering physical and sexual abuse in Myanmar. Cultural norms, disruption of service delivery, and the difficulty communicating and traveling in the post-coup environment mean that most cases of abuse go unreported. Nevertheless, organizations working to protect children and support victims suggest that cases of physical and sexual abuse are increasing. Calls to hotlines for victims of gender-based violence “increased significantly” in 2021.[[202]](#footnote-203)
2. The Myanmar military has a long and well-documented history of perpetrating rape and sexual violence against civilian populations, with women and girls being particularly at risk.[[203]](#footnote-204) Media and local human rights organizations have reported the rape or sexual abuse of girls by Myanmar army soldiers since the coup.[[204]](#footnote-205) When the Myanmar military or other armed groups pass through or set up camps in inhabited areas, residents often fear that women or girls may be sexually assaulted or abused. Many villagers have expressed that these fears are heightened when soldiers are drinking alcohol, which they sometimes confiscate from village shops.[[205]](#footnote-206)
3. Organizations that provide services to children at risk of physical and sexual abuse have faced many of the same challenges threatening civil society more generally. These include increased security risks, travel restrictions, financial administration challenges, and the difficulty of staying registered and obtaining official authorization for activities. These challenges mean that both parents and children are not able to get the help that they need to prevent abuses or address physical and emotional suffering resulting from abuse.

## Trafficking of children and child marriage

1. The coup and the junta’s human rights violations have created conditions that drive human trafficking, including the trafficking of children. Experts and monitoring organizations have reported an increase in human trafficking since the coup and expect the trend to continue in 2022 and beyond.[[206]](#footnote-207) Myanmar was assigned to Tier 3 on the United States government’s 2021 Trafficking in Persons Report.[[207]](#footnote-208) Tier 3 is the lowest possible designation indicating countries that are not meeting minimum standards on preventing trafficking.
2. The displacement and economic devastation caused by the coup and escalating armed conflict in Myanmar have increased the vulnerability of children to exploitation by traffickers. Many children have been separated from their parents by armed conflict, displacement, arrest, or other personal security concerns. These children are more vulnerable to threats, coercion, deception, or abduction. Millions of children remain out of school and thus more likely to take risks while seeking economic opportunities to support their families. More than a quarter of Myanmar’s population do not possess citizenship or identity documents, making them particularly vulnerable to trafficking.[[208]](#footnote-209) As described in the section that follows, armed conflict, displacement, and the breakdown of government services will increase the number of undocumented children, heightening vulnerability to trafficking for decades to come.
3. Ethnic minority groups impacted by discrimination and conflict are susceptible to smugglers and traffickers who promise work abroad. Children in border areas and IDP camps are particularly at risk. Girls are especially vulnerable to trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, often in neighboring countries. Economic insecurity and unsafe conditions in camps often lead children to accept offers of work in neighboring countries without safety guarantees.
4. Children in Kachin and northern Shan States are vulnerable to traffickers that operate near the Chinese border. Kachin girls have been forced into marriages with Chinese men through deceptive offers by brokers falsely promising employment or a better life in China. Previous studies have indicated that hundreds of Kachin and Shan girls under 18 years of age may suffer forced marriage or be forced to bear children in China each year.[[209]](#footnote-210) Credible reports indicate that girls continue to be trafficked to China, and that their vulnerability has increased due to the economic impact of COVID-19, the coup, and rampant land confiscation.
5. The extreme persecution and discrimination faced by Rohingya people makes Rohingya children particularly vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. Restrictions on movement drive Rohingya to use unsafe and irregular migration channels. Rohingya children both from IDP camps in Rakhine State and from refugee camps in Bangladesh have been among the thousands of Rohingya to board overcrowded boats to try to migrate to Malaysia.
6. Researchers and aid organizations report that more Rohingya women and children have attempted the journey to Malaysia in recent years.[[210]](#footnote-211) The circumstances of their travel to Malaysia suggests that many are the victims of human trafficking for the purpose of marriage.[[211]](#footnote-212) Humanitarian workers assert that many girls traveling to Malaysia appear to be very young, even elementary school age.[[212]](#footnote-213) Some have never met their “husbands” and were “married” by phone. Some children who set out for Malaysia end up being stranded at sea or land in Indonesia. Those who try to continue to Malaysia must engage smuggling networks, further raising risks of trafficking and exploitation. Some women and girls have ended up in sex work after landing in Indonesia.[[213]](#footnote-214)

# Statelessness

1. Statelessness is a massive and growing problem in Myanmar, with severe repercussions for children, who are guaranteed the right to a nationality by international human rights law.[[214]](#footnote-215) The coup represents a further setback in efforts to address statelessness, including of the Rohingya. The collapse of government services and the junta’s ongoing attacks on civilians have created new challenges to registering births and obtaining identification documents.
2. At the root of the statelessness crisis in Myanmar are the 2008 Constitution and the 1982 Citizenship Law, neither of which provide birthright citizenship or other guarantees to a nationality.[[215]](#footnote-216) The discriminatory 1982 Citizenship Law established different classes of citizenship. The Rohingya, not being one of the officially recognized national ethnic groups, must apply to become naturalized citizens by providing “conclusive evidence” that they resided in Myanmar prior to 1948 or have at least one parent that is a citizen. Very few Rohingya can meet the evidentiary requirements of the law, which are applied in a discriminatory manner against the Rohingya. Since 2015, the Myanmar government has coerced Rohingya to accept “Nationality Verification Cards,” which do not convey citizenship and effectively identify Rohingya as foreigners.[[216]](#footnote-217)
3. Nearly all the 600,000 Rohingya residing in Rakhine State and the more than one million in refugee camps in Bangladesh lack Myanmar citizenship. At present there seems to be no path forward for resolving the statelessness of the Rohingya. Rather, statelessness compounds, passing from generation to generation.
4. Even among the recognized national ethnic groups, many children lack identity documents. According to Myanmar’s 2014 census, about a quarter of the population does not have access to citizenship or an identity document.[[217]](#footnote-218) This problem has been exacerbated by the coup. The collapse of government services and the widespread displacement caused by the junta’s human rights violations means that new births are not being registered in many parts of the country.[[218]](#footnote-219) The statelessness crisis will continue to spiral until Myanmar installs a democratic government that respects human rights, including the right to a nationality.
5. Children that lack citizenship or identity documents are vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and human rights abuses. Stateless and undocumented children may struggle to access education, healthcare, and social services. The lack of identity documents follows children as they grow older, leading to disenfranchisement and lack of livelihood opportunities, preventing the full exercise of rights under the protection of the law. Statelessness has helped to enable systematic discrimination, restrictions on movement, and genocidal violence directed at the Rohingya population over the past decade.

# Children’s exercise of fundamental freedoms

1. Like adults, children, without exception, are guaranteed the rights to freedom of thought, expression, peaceful assembly, association, and access to information, as well as the right to participate in all matters affecting them.[[219]](#footnote-220) Since the coup, the junta has used violence, arrests, prolonged arbitrary detention, unfair trials, censorship, and internet restrictions to close civic space and take away the fundamental freedoms of the people of Myanmar, including children.
2. As described above, in the weeks and months following the coup, children often participated in peaceful protests. The violence and arrests used to crush the protests were human rights violations in their own right, but also took away the right of the children of Myanmar to peacefully express their opposition to the junta’s actions.
3. Under the NLD government, children became more involved in public life in Myanmar. Some children were given the opportunity to meet with parliamentarians and government officials to advocate for policies that better protect the interests of children.[[220]](#footnote-221) These activities are no longer possible after the coup, given the near certainty that the junta will consider policy advocacy to be a form of dissent to be met with violence and repression. More mundane civic activities by children are also extremely risky. Children told the Special Rapporteur that they were no longer able to participate in civic clubs or other social activities with their peers because of security concerns and worries about violence and official repression.[[221]](#footnote-222)
4. Censorship and internet restrictions also impact children in Myanmar. In the weeks following the coup, the junta imposed rolling nationwide internet blackouts and blocked social media and messaging platforms. In recent months, the junta has imposed local internet shutdowns in conflicted-affected areas, including in Sagaing and Magway Regions and Chin State. The junta has also ordered internet service providers to increase prices for internet connections, putting online access beyond the means of many families. These conditions have prevented many children from taking online classes, accessing news, and connecting with friends.
5. A 16-year-old girl from Magway Region explained:

We no longer receive updated news. Previously we were able to watch TV without any restriction. But the village administrator asked us to detach the satellite dish, so now we do not feel secure watching the news anymore. The internet data price has also increased three times, and we cannot afford to use the internet anymore. We have to read print[ed] materials as the use of TV and phone [has] become impossible for us.[[222]](#footnote-223)

# Conclusions and recommendations

1. **The rights of children in Myanmar, like children everywhere, must be respected and affirmed, starting with the basic right to live. But in Myanmar, the rights of children and families are under siege. Children are not only caught in the crossfire of an illegal military junta’s war against the people of the nation, but they are also targets.**
2. **As this paper documents, none are more vulnerable to the junta’s brutality than Myanmar’s children.**
3. **While the future of Myanmar is in the hands of the courageous people who are willing to risk everything to resist the junta and save their children, stronger support from the international community is imperative.**
4. **After nearly a year and a half of escalating human rights violations and steadily deteriorating conditions, particularly for Myanmar’s children and families, it is clear that the international community’s response to the deepening crisis in Myanmar has failed. A change of course is needed. But for a change to be possible, there must first be a recognition by Member States that the status quo is untenable and unacceptable.**
5. **This paper demonstrates why it is so important for Member States to reassess and redesign their response to this crisis. It documents the price that is being paid by those who can least afford it: Myanmar’s children.**
6. **While the crisis in Myanmar generated significant international interest and concern in the early days following the coup, it has since slipped from media reports, computer screens and attention spans. It is imperative that UN Member States, particularly those that serve on the Human Rights Council and Security Council, reengage and refocus on this crisis and its youngest victims.**
7. **The Special Rapporteur urges Member States to reassess their policies and practices with respect to Myanmar. As part of this process, Member States should answer questions that loom over the failed international response to the crisis. For example:**
   * **Why are Member States unwilling or unable to support the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan? Why has only 10.4 percent of what is required been allocated? What must be done to reverse this unacceptably large deficit?**
   * **What action can be taken to reduce the military junta’s financial resources and thereby its ability to kill and maim children? What more can be done to change the military’s calculus?**
   * **Why have efforts to exert pressure on the junta lacked support from some Member States that have nevertheless been willing to impose economic pressure on others? What factors are behind their reluctance to act and what is necessary to encourage and engage these nations to do so?**
   * **Why have governments that have been willing to impose economic pressure on the military junta been unwilling to directly target the junta’s largest sources of revenue and ability to move funds?**
   * **What is required to recognize and engage the National Unity Government as a resource to end the crisis in Myanmar?**
   * **How are Member States and other entities wittingly or unwittingly providing the military junta with the appearance of legitimacy? What steps must be taken to deny the junta the legitimacy it seeks to project?**
   * **For those countries on the UN Security Council: What is required for a resolution to be offered, debated and voted upon by the Security Council?**
8. **The Special Rapporteur further recommends that the UN Security Council adopt a resolution to (i) impose a comprehensive arms embargo on Myanmar; (ii) impose targeted economic sanctions on the Myanmar military, its leaders, and its sources of revenue; and (iii) refer the situation in Myanmar to the International Criminal Court. The prospect of a veto by a Member State in the UN Security Council should not deter other members from placing a resolution before the Council for consideration, debate, and a vote.**
9. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that UN Member States coordinate efforts to:**
   1. **Immediately halt the sale or transfer of weapons and dual-use technology to the Myanmar military;**
   2. **Target those individuals and entities providing arms and munitions to the Myanmar military with economic sanctions;**
   3. **Degrade the military’s ability to finance its atrocities by sanctioning the Myanmar Foreign Trade Bank, Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise, and other key sources of revenue;**
   4. **Work in coordination with national financial intelligence units, law enforcement agencies, and ministries of justice and finance to identify and seize assets belonging to the State of Myanmar;**
   5. **Support efforts to hold perpetrators of atrocity crimes, including crimes against children, accountable in impartial and independent courts, including the International Criminal Court, the International Court of Justice, and national courts in countries with universal jurisdiction laws;**
   6. **Facilitate cross-border aid to internally displaced persons, with a focus on children and families; and**
   7. **Increase humanitarian assistance to the people of Myanmar, including by fully funding the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022.**
10. **The Special Rapporteur recommends to the Myanmar junta:**
    1. **Dissolve the State Administrative Council; release all political detainees; and allow a legitimate, democratically elected parliament to convene and a legitimate government to be formed;**
    2. **Give clear and unequivocal orders to security forces to stop their attacks on civilians, schools, teachers, and health workers and facilities and to refrain from other human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law;**
    3. **Release all children arbitrarily detained, including those detained because of their exercise of fundamental freedoms or because of the identity of a family member or other relation and refrain from arbitrarily detaining children, subjecting them to torture or ill treatment, or using them as hostages;**
    4. **Depoliticize education, including by allowing students and teachers to return to the classroom without punishment or retaliation for participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement and by respecting the choice of students, families, and teachers who decide to engage with alternative education systems;**
    5. **Stop blocking the delivery of humanitarian aid—including medical, nutritional, and educational support—to vulnerable populations, including children and IDPs, and take proactive steps to facilitate aid delivery by national and international NGOs; and**
    6. **Respect the fundamental human rights of children including the rights to freedom of expression, assembly, and association.**
11. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that all armed groups, including the Myanmar military, PDFs, EAOs, and militias, immediately:**
    1. **Establish humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid and ensure access to all regions, regardless of which groups are dominant in the area;**
    2. **Cease all attacks on schools, teachers, and education administrators and refrain from occupying schools or using schools for military purposes;**
    3. **Stop the recruitment and use of children, including by eliminating incentives that drive child recruitment, implementing procedural safeguards against the recruitment and use of children, and ensuring accountability for violations of policies prohibiting the recruitment and use of children; and**
    4. **Refrain from the destruction of economic assets, including agricultural equipment, crops, and products.**
12. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that the National Unity Government and leaders of the democratic opposition:**
    1. **Promote and advance the National Unity Government-PDF code of conduct, which provides guidance on the laws of armed conflict and treatment of civilians; and**
    2. **Depoliticize education, including by advising PDFs and supporters to cease all harassment, intimidation, and violence against individuals engaging with government education and health systems, including children, families, teachers, doctors, nurses, and education and health administrators.**
13. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its Member States:**
    1. **Facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to all populations in need, including by supporting cross-border humanitarian assistance delivered through local humanitarian and civil society organizations;**
    2. **Deny the Myanmar military legitimacy at every opportunity, including by disinviting junta representatives to all ASEAN summits and forums;**
    3. **Accept refugees from Myanmar and provide them with the support required under international standards; and**
    4. **Increase engagement with the National Unity Government.**
14. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that international humanitarian organizations and donors providing support to Myanmar civil society and the humanitarian and human rights response to the coup:**
    1. **Increase humanitarian assistance to children in Myanmar, including by fully funding the Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan 2022;**
    2. **Provide robust support to alternative education programs, including to ethnic-based education administrations, CSO and volunteer-led programs, Temporary Learning Centers, and online and at-home education initiatives;**
    3. **Increase funding to organizations and programs addressing the psychosocial needs of children, including those suffering from trauma associated with armed conflict, arbitrary detention, torture, physical and sexual abuse, and economic deprivation;**
    4. **Integrate landmine and unexploded ordnance risk education, including instruction appropriate for children, into humanitarian aid delivery programs, ensuring that populations in areas newly affected by conflict are informed of the risks posed by landmines and unexploded ordnance;**
    5. **When possible, work directly with local and community-based organizations to deliver humanitarian aid in areas that cannot be accessed by international humanitarian organizations; and**
    6. **Adopt creative solutions to address operational challenges for organizations in Myanmar, including by relaxing reporting requirements, adopting alternative methods of transferring funds, refraining from requiring registration with junta-controlled bodies, adapting operational procedures to allow urgent and timely humanitarian responses, and shifting from restricted grants to core funding whenever possible.**
15. **The Special Rapporteur recommends that a future civilian government:**
    1. **Accede to key international human rights treaties including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination;**
    2. **Accede to the 1997 Convention on the Prohibition, Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and their Destruction;**
    3. **Amend the 2019 Child Rights Law in full conformity with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including by guaranteeing the right to nationality and to not be stateless; and**
    4. **Repeal the 1982 Citizenship Law or amend it in line with international human rights standards.**

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