



BLOCKED **AID**,

UNBROKEN PEOPLE

RESISTING JUNTA'S AID WEAPONIZATION



Photo credit: Shwe Bo Strike Force

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The briefing paper was co-authored by nine civil society organizations including one organization whose logo is still being developed as of this publication.

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Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBO	Community-based Organization
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CDMer	Member of the Civil Disobedience Movement
CRPH	Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw
CRSV	Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EO	Explosive Ordnance
ERO	Ethnic Resistance Organization
ERW	Explosive Remnants of War
HRD	Human Rights Defender
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
MoHR	Ministry of Human Rights
NUCC	National Unity Consultative Council
NUG	National Unity Government
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PWD	Person with Disabilities
SCEF	Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
WFP	World Food Programme
WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defenders

Introduction

Escalating violence and deliberate obstruction of aid by the military junta, combined with abrupt funding cuts by the international community, have deepened an already dire human rights and humanitarian crisis across Myanmar. Since Progressive Voice published “Setting the Tinderbox Alight: The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar’s Dry Zone (Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay Regions),”¹ in August 2022, the humanitarian situation across these three regions has deteriorated dramatically.

This paper examines how the military junta weaponizes humanitarian assistance in Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay Regions through systematic restrictions, blockades, and the broader Four Cuts strategy, assesses the resulting humanitarian consequences, and explores viable locally led humanitarian delivery pathways that have enabled frontline responders to reach affected communities despite these obstacles.

These regions remain strategically important to the junta because they are home to a majority Bamar Buddhist population, which the military has long exploited as a key source of recruits and resources for its decades-long militarization project. The year 2025 also marks a pivotal moment for the junta. While attempting to manufacture political legitimacy through a three-phase plan sham electoral process between December 2025 and January 2026, it has simultaneously intensified aerial bombardments and ground attacks deliberately targeting civilians

and driving further displacement.² Against this backdrop, the continued and expanded use of the Four Cuts strategy has been deployed as a brutal tool of collective punishment, targeting civilian populations and restricting access to essential resources and services.

At this critical juncture, locally led efforts and mechanisms remain the most effective means of delivering humanitarian assistance to the internally displaced communities. Thus, placing local organizations at the center remains critically relevant today, as highlighted in the previous briefing paper. Local civil society and community-based organizations (CBOs) have continued to expand their networks and humanitarian operations despite severe resource constraints, while developing sustainable locally led initiatives. Supporting these efforts requires direct and flexible funding, including extension and strengthening of border-based channels led by trusted local humanitarian and civil society organizations (CSOs) that have long served as Myanmar’s frontline responders with proven access to the most vulnerable populations across the country.

This paper underscores the urgent need for humanitarian responses to match the scale of needs on the ground. It also examines viable humanitarian delivery pathways that frontline responders have successfully used to bypass restrictions and blockades imposed by the military junta.

1 “Setting the Tinderbox Alight — The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar’s Dry Zone,” Progressive Voice, 31 August 2022, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/08/31/setting-the-tinderbox-alight-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-myanmars-dry-zone>.

2 “The Junta’s Sham Election: Attempt to Manufacture Legitimacy Through Violence and Fraud,” Progressive Voice, 10 March 2026, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/03/10/the-juntas-sham-election-attempt-to-manufacture-legitimacy-through-violence-and-fraud>.

The international community—including the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), international donors, and humanitarian organizations—must immediately end all direct or indirect partnerships with the junta including its civilian façade. Since the 2021 coup attempt, efforts to deliver humanitarian aid through or in partnership with the military junta have consistently failed to reach the most vulnerable populations while exacerbating human suffering. Furthermore, the military junta is and remains the principal perpetrator and root cause of Myanmar’s overlapping political, humanitarian,

human rights, and economic crises. Engaging with the junta offers no durable humanitarian solution instead prolong the suffering of Myanmar’s people. Therefore, the international community must avoid abetting or conferring political legitimacy on the rebranded junta and its illegitimate political structures and entities. Instead, it should engage and collaborate with legitimate governance actors and structures, including the National Unity Government (NUG), Ethnic Resistance Organizations (EROs), and federal governance units and local administrations.

Methodology

The paper integrates findings from both primary and secondary research. Desk research drew on news reports and publications by human rights organizations—including previous joint reports by the Progressive Voice and Myanmar CSOs—as well as reports from the UN and other mandate holders. Field research consists of semi-structured interviews with 32 participants from Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay Regions, conducted between February and March 2026. Among them, 14 were representatives—seven women, six men, and one LGBTQIA+—from nine grassroots CSOs and strike groups. In addition, one human rights defender (HRD),

not affiliated with any organization, was interviewed. A further 17 internally displaced persons (IDPs)—six women and 11 men—were also interviewed. Two sets of semi-structured interviews questions were used for the IDPs and for the organizations. Interviews were conducted online due to security risks faced by both interviewers and interviewees. However, 15 interviews with IDPs were conducted in person by a partner organization of Progressive Voice. These interviews were audio-recorded and shared with Progressive Voice through secured channel.

The Junta's Intensified and Recalibrated Violence Against Civilians

Since its illegal coup attempt on 1 February 2021, the Myanmar military junta has relentlessly intensified its attack against civilians. Following its coup attempt, the junta significantly expanded and adapted its notorious Four Cuts, or Phyat-Lay-Phyat, strategy. The strategy has been deployed for decades against ethnic resistance movements and civilian populations in ethnic areas, including Karen State during the 1960s and 1990s, Shan State in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Kachin State since 2011, and Rakhine State since 2018.³ The tactic aims to sever four essential pillars: food, funds, intelligence, and recruits. Following the coup attempt, the junta has extended this strategy into Myanmar's Dry Zone—central regions including Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay.⁴

Key Patterns of Junta Violence: Airstrikes, Arson, and Landmines

The former UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, Tom Andrews's report at the 61st Human Rights Council identified three defining features

that the Myanmar military junta deploys in its ongoing atrocities, including airstrikes, arson, and landmines.⁵ First, airstrikes have become the defining feature of the junta's campaign of violence. The junta systematically and deliberately carries out mass atrocities through aerial bombardments across the country, targeting towns, villages, markets, tea shops, mining sites, medical clinics, schools, religious buildings, locations hosting weddings, funerals, festivals or other celebrations, and IDPs sites, inflicting profound suffering and terror on the people of Myanmar.

From February 2021 to December 2025, the military junta committed a total of 6,591 incidents of airstrikes, resulting in killing a total of 3,957 civilians and injuring 7,035. The frequency of the junta's airstrikes shows that attacks have increased year by year with mass civilian casualties, injuries, and substantial infrastructural destruction.⁶

Since December 2024, the junta has expanded and diversified its aerial campaign, using fighter

3 Emily Fishbein, Nu Nu Lusan, and Vahpual, "What Is the Myanmar Military's 'Four Cuts' Strategy?" Al Jazeera, 5 July 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/5/what-is-the-myanmar-militarys-four-cuts-strategy>.

4 "Setting the Tinderbox Alight: The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar's Dry Zone," Progressive Voice, 31 August 2022, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/08/31/setting-the-tinderbox-alight-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-myanmars-dry-zone/>

5 Thomas H. Andrews, Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar, UN Doc. A/HRC/61/58 (Human Rights Council, 61st session, 2026), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/country-reports/ahrc6158-report-special-rapporteur-situation-human-rights-myanmar-thomas>.

6 "Aerial Attacks Carried Out by the Military Junta (September–December 2025)", Nyan Lynn Thit Analytica, 24 January 2026, https://wp.progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Aerial_Attacks_By_Military_Junta_Sep_Dec2025_Eng.pdf.



On 20 March 2025, three military junta jet fighters carried out an airstrike on Alalban village in Htee Lin Township.

[Source: YAWN]

aircraft, helicopter, drone, and ultralight aircraft, including paramotors, and gyrocopters.⁷ From December 2024 to January 2026, the junta carried out a total of 304 attacks using paramotors and gyrocopters against civilians, mainly focusing on central Myanmar, such as Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay Regions, as well as Bago Regions.⁸ One of the lethal bombings using such machinery was witnessed in Chaung-U Township, Sagaing Region, on 6 October 2025. The junta conducted this airstrike while people were celebrating a peaceful candlelight ceremony for Thadingyut—a Buddhist full moon festival—tragically killing at least 21, including three children as young as two years old, and injuring more than 40 people, half of whom were children.⁹

An IDP from Taze Township, Sagaing Region, described the constant fear of life under aerial threat, “There is a great deal of fear. None of us feel safe. We are afraid of air attacks. When drones come, we have to run and hide, and when aircraft come, we have to take cover wherever we can. There is no sense of security at all. We can no longer stay in our own village.”¹⁰

Since the military junta convened its sham parliament on 16 March, it has killed around 100 civilians as of 3 April in brutal, relentless airstrikes against civilians.¹¹ The junta significantly adapted its campaign of war by using the tactic of “mass-barrage airstrikes” as fleets of fighter jets are being deployed in coordinated barrages to inflict total destruction on a single target. On 21 March,

7 “The War from the Sky: How Drone Warfare Is Shaping the Conflict in Myanmar,” Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED), 1 July 2025, <https://acleddata.com/report/war-sky-how-drone-warfare-shaping-conflict-myanmar/>.

8 “Myanmar: Junta Increases Attacks on Civilians Using Paramotors and Gyrocopters,” Fortify Rights, 26 January 2026, <https://www.fortifyrights.org/mya-inv-2026-01-26/>.

9 “Myanmar Military Paramotor Strike Kills, Injures Dozens,” Human Rights Watch, 9 October 2025, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2025/10/09/myanmar-military-paramotor-strike-kills-injures-dozens>.

10 Interview with a male IDP (Taze_Ye-U_Sagaing_IDP2), Taze Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

11 Phoe Tar, “Myanmar Junta Airstrikes Kill 100 Civilians During Shift to ‘Civilian Rule’,” The Irrawaddy, 3 April 2026, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmar-junta-airstrikes-kill-100-civilians-during-shift-to-civilian-rule.html>.

eight Myanmar military fighter jets bombed Su Lay Kone village, Kani Township, Sagaing Region, destroying a monastery, a school, and several houses.¹² Just three days later, five junta jets bombed a hospital in Katha town in Sagaing Region.¹³

The systematic use of arson has become another central pillar of the junta's strategy of collective punishment. From February 2021 to February 2026, the military and its affiliates destroyed a total of 121,485 homes.¹⁴ Sagaing Region suffered the greatest losses, accounting for over 63 percent of civilian homes razed nationwide, followed by Magwe and Mandalay as the second and third most affected regions.¹⁵ The Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government (MoHR, NUG) revealed that Sagaing Region is the most targeted area for property destruction, where the scale and severity of attacks amount to the total demolition of villages, destroying not only civilian homes but also essential survival resources, including food reserves, religious buildings, schools, and medical clinics.¹⁶

The widespread use of landmines constitutes the third defining feature of junta's violence. The Myanmar military has long deployed antipersonnel landmines, including M-14 and MM-2 mines, which are banned under customary international humanitarian law, as well as the 1997 in Ban Treaty.¹⁷ Manufactured in the military's own factories, these mines have been used as part of the military's Four Cuts strategy. Their use has increased significantly since the illegal coup attempt in 2021. Landmines have deeply restricted movement and pose a long-term threat to civilian safety and contribute to prolonged displacement, severely disrupting livelihood activities and access to education and healthcare. The junta reportedly planted the landmines at villages, schools, medical clinics, monasteries, churches, plantations, cell towers and power stations, displacement camps, ports, development projects and bridges.¹⁸ Alarming, the junta has been using civilians as minesweepers. According to a Woman Human Rights Defender (WHRD) from Butalin Township Strike Force, Sagaing Region, the junta troops reportedly subjected civilians to forced portering and used them

12 "Attacks on Health Care in Myanmar (18–31 March 2026)", Insecurity Insight, https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/04/10/attacks-on-health-care-in-myanmar-18-31-march-2026?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

13 Ibid.

14 Data for Myanmar, "Documenting the Monthly Impact of Arson Attacks on Civilian Homes, Report No. 35 (April 2026)", Progressive Voice, accessed 21 April 2026, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/04/04/documenting-the-monthly-impact-no-1-of-arson-attacks-on-civilian-homes-april-2026>.

15 Ibid.

16 "The Systematic Erasure of Civilian Existence Through Property Destruction in Myanmar (31 March 2026)", Ministry of Human Rights, National Unity Government, accessed 21 April 2026, <https://mohr.nugmyanmar.org/reports/the-systematic-erasure-of-civilian-existence-through-property-destruction-in-myanmar-31st-march-2026/>.

17 "Myanmar: Military's Use of Banned Landmines in Kayah State Amounts to War Crimes," Amnesty International, 20 July 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2022/07/myanmar-militarys-use-of-banned-landmines-in-kayah-state-amounts-to-war-crimes/>.

18 "Myanmar: Surging Landmine Use Claims Lives, Livelihoods," Human Rights Watch, November 20, 2024, accessed 21 April 2026, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/11/20/myanmar-surging-landmine-use-claims-lives-livelihoods>.

as human shields and human minesweepers, deliberately exposing them to landmines during troop movements.¹⁹

In addition, a Human Rights Defender (HRD) from Magwe Region stated that, “Regarding landmines, there are two main sources of risk. Landmines laid by both the military junta and resistance forces affect local communities. This pattern is particularly evident in Pauk and Sidoktaya (townships in Magwe Region), where the situation in Pauk has been especially severe.”²⁰

He further emphasized that, “Landmines planted by the junta and Pyu Saw Htee²¹ militias have caused numerous incidents, particularly when villagers unknowingly travel through these areas. Many have lost limbs, including legs and arms. Most victims are farmers, who are injured while traveling to their farms for their livelihoods.”²²

The junta’s use of anti-personnel landmines in civilian areas has been a part of its Four Cuts strategy, through which it seeks to isolate, terrorize, and destroy civilians’ livelihoods as a form of collective punishment, resulting in several toll on civilian lives. While some resistance forces also use improvised explosive

devices (IEDs) and homemade landmines to counter junta offensives, the overwhelming majority of factory-manufactured anti-personnel landmines—including internationally prohibited M-14 and MM-2 mines—have been laid by the Myanmar military. These mines are produced by state-owned defence industries and are designed to inflict devastating and indiscriminate harm.

In light of severe landmine contamination, as part of its civilian protection efforts, the NUG has implemented mine risk education programs, including awareness-raising activities and the distribution of safety materials on landmines and explosive remnants of war.²³ Similarly, grassroots civil society and CBOs including Women for Justice and Shwe Bo Strike Force are providing Mine Risk Education on the ground.²⁴

Myanmar has recorded the highest number of landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) casualties worldwide, according to the Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor. For the second consecutive year, it remains the most affected country, with casualties surging to 2,029 in 2024, a dramatic increase from 1,003 in 2023 and 545 in 2022.²⁵ The United Nations Children’s Fund

19 Interview with Butalin Township Strike Force, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

20 Interview with a human rights defender from Magwe Region (05_HRD_Magwe), 25 February 2026.

21 Explanatory note: Pyu Saw Htee is described as “a group largely made up of military veterans and pro-military Buddhist supporters, with roots in Ma Ba Tha, an ultranationalist Buddhist organization that has been financially and politically supported by the military.” See: Setting the Tinderbox Alight: The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar’s Dry Zone. Available at: <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/08/31/setting-the-tinderbox-alight-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-myanmars-dry-zone>.

22 Interview with a human rights defender from Magwe Region (05_HRD_Magwe), 25 February 2026.

23 National Unity Government, “အမျိုးသားညီညွတ်ရေးအစိုးရ ပြည်ထောင်စုဝန်ကြီးချုပ် မနန်းဝင်းနိုင်သန်းက အပြည်ပြည်ဆိုင်ရာ မိုင်းအသိပညာဖြင့်တင်ရေးနေ့အခမ်းအနား သို့ပေးပို့သည့် သဝဏ်လွှာ” Facebook post, 4 April 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/19AcjY8fMN/>.

24 Interview with Shwe Bo Strike Force, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, 25 February 2026; and interview with YWAN, February 2026.

25 “Myanmar (Burma): Impact,” Landmine and Cluster Munition Monitor, accessed 21 April 2026, <https://the-monitor.org/country-profile/myanmar-burma/impact>.

reported that Shan State recorded the highest number of landmines and other explosive ordnance (EO) incidents and casualties, with 182 incidents and 245 casualties in 2025. This was followed by Rakhine State, which reported 74 incidents and 117 casualties. Magwe Region ranked third, with 58 incidents and 82 casualties.²⁶

Forms of Violence in Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay Regions

Across the country, airstrikes, arson, and landmines have emerged as defining features of junta's violence, driving widespread destruction and high casualty levels, with the most severe impacts concentrated in Sagaing, Magwe and Mandalay Regions. Analysis of data from Data for Myanmar shows that these regions are bearing a disproportionate burden of civilian harm, caused by both targeted killings and remote attacks, including artillery shelling, drone strikes, airstrikes, and landmines. Such violence against civilians includes deliberate shootings, executions, and abductions followed by killings, often carried out in everyday settings such as during travel or while working on farms, as well as in village raids, and attacks on individuals perceived to support resistance groups by junta

forces, as well as killings of military supporters by resistance groups.

According to Data for Myanmar, Sagaing Region²⁷ records the highest number of civilian deaths and injuries, with 5,304 killed and 3,788 injured between March 2021 and January 2025. This is followed by Mandalay Region²⁸, where 3,067 were killed and 2,778 injured, and Magwe Region²⁹, with 2,172 killed and 1,834 injured, both during the period from February 2021 to January 2026. Even accounting for the slightly shorter timeframe in Sagaing Region³⁰, the data indicate that it remains the epicenter of civilian harm, with the majority of casualties resulting from direct violence against civilians.

During the junta's sham electoral process, reports indicated that it intensified attacks against civilians across the country, despite substantial losses and a widespread public boycott, with central Myanmar remaining one of its primary targets.³¹

Forced Conscription

The above patterns of violence are not isolated tactics but part of the junta's broader strategy. The junta has further intensified its violence through

26 "Myanmar Landmine and Explosive Ordnance Incidents Information 2025 (April 2026)", United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), accessed April 21, 2026, <https://www.unicef.org/myanmar/reports/myanmar-landmine-and-explosive-ordnance-incidents-information-2025/>.

27 "Monthly Report on Civilian Casualties in Sagaing Region," Data for Myanmar, Facebook post, 14 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EDmTetKXb/>.

28 "Civilian Casualties in Mandalay Region," Data for Myanmar, Facebook post, 8 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1EBzfupRgS/>.

29 Civilian Casualties in Magway Region," Data for Myanmar, "Facebook post, 9 March 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1AazEEgGkR/>.

30 Data for Myanmar, "Monthly Report on Civilian Casualties in Sagaing Region 14 March 2025," published by Progressive Voice, available at: <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/03/14/monthly-report-on-civilian-casualties-in-sagaing-region>.

31 "The Junta's Sham Election: Attempt to Manufacture Legitimacy Through Violence and Fraud," Progressive Voice, 10 March 2026, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/03/10/the-juntas-sham-election-attempt-to-manufacture-legitimacy-through-violence-and-fraud>.

forced conscription, deploying conscripts as cannon fodder in its atrocity campaigns. On 10 February 2024, the Myanmar military junta launched³² its forced conscription campaign under a law enacted in 2010 by the previous military regime led by General Than Shwe. It exposes men aged 18 to 35 and women aged 18 to 27 to the risk of forced conscription. Since its implementation, the junta has aggressively targeted young people, including teenagers, to replenish its ranks amid mounting losses against resistance forces, forcibly sending them to the frontlines where they are deployed as porters and used as human shields.³³ As of February 2026, the junta has reached the 22nd batch³⁴ of its forced conscription campaign. While precise figures are unavailable, estimates based on recruitment quotas³⁵ suggest that more than 100,000 people have been forcibly conscripted.

The junta has been violently targeting young people through summons, lotteries, and abductions from streets, buses, planes, and homes, spreading widespread fear among youth across Myanmar.³⁶ It has further restricted freedom of movement as it exposed young people from

resistance stronghold areas to heightened risks of arbitrary arrest. Concurrently, many young people had to flee Myanmar by any means possible to escape conscription. Those arrested and deported from destination countries such as Thailand and Malaysia face risk of immediate conscription by the junta, with reports indicating that deported young men are handed over to junta authorities upon their return.³⁷

One HRD from Shwe Bo Strike Force said that “Although they (villagers) live in areas controlled by resistance forces, they do not dare to go into towns. No one dares to go. They (junta forces) arbitrarily arrest young people. To secure their release, people have to pay between 15,000,000 and 20,000,000 million kyats (equivalent to about US\$7,000–9,000). In some cases, if their whereabouts can be traced, families can pay for their release. In other cases, they do not know where their children have been taken. They are taken as porters and disappear without any contact.”³⁸

To date, the junta’s forced conscription campaign continues to target young people, forcing many

32 Jessy Wolf, “Myanmar junta to begin conscription drive in April: spokesperson,” Myanmar Now, 14 February 2024, available at: <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/myanmar-junta-to-begin-conscription-drive-in-april-spokesperson/>.

33 “Junta’s Forced Conscription of Youth Demands Urgent International Protection,” Progressive Voice, 6 March 2026, available at: <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/03/06/juntas-forced-conscription-of-youth-demands-urgent-international-protection>.

34 “22nd Batch of Junta Military Draftees Start Training,” The Irrawaddy, 19 February 2026 (shared via Facebook), available at: <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1KwUDNbDaA/>.

35 “Military Conscription to Begin in April After Thingyan Holidays,” Democratic Voice of Burma, 14 February 2024, available at: <https://english.dvb.no/military-conscription-to-begin-in-april-after-thingyan-holidays/>.

36 “Myanmar’s Youth at Risk: The Junta’s Intensified Forced Conscription Campaign,” Progressive Voice, 31 January 2025, available at: <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/01/31/myanmars-youth-at-risk-the-juntas-intensified-forced-conscription-campaign>.

37 “Junta’s Forced Conscription of Youth Demands Urgent International Protection,” Progressive Voice, 6 March 2026, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2026/03/06/juntas-forced-conscription-of-youth-demands-urgent-international-protection>.

38 Interview with Shwe Bo Strike Force, 25 February 2026.

young men and women to flee their communities both within the country and across international borders to escape the junta's forced conscription, while protection remains far from guaranteed.

Taken together, these forms of violence are not isolated tactics but interconnected components of the junta's broader strategy of collective punishment. Airstrikes, arson, landmines,

targeted killings, and forced conscription reinforce once another by terrorizing civilians, depopulating contested areas, destroying livelihoods, and restricting freedom of movement. Collectively, these tactics deepen humanitarian needs while creating the conditions through which the junta can obstruct, control and weaponize humanitarian assistance.

Systematic and Deliberate Destruction of Civilian Survival and Livelihoods

As part of its Four Cuts strategy, the military junta has systematically targeted civilian survival and livelihoods alongside its broader campaign of atrocities. These tactics are well documented³⁹, particularly in Karen State, where communities have long endured such attacks for decades. The same pattern has been expanded into central Myanmar, including Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay Regions. Karen Human Rights Group reported that it documented at least 33 incidents involving attacks on farmlands by the junta in 2024 alone.⁴⁰ The same pattern is now being reinvigorated across Myanmar, including in central regions.

Civilians are enduring immense suffering as the military junta systematically uproots and dismantles their fundamental pillars of

survival and livelihoods. Homes and villages are deliberately shelled, burned, destroyed, and looted, forcing communities prolonged displacement and precarious living conditions. These attacks have also destroyed livelihoods and productive assets, depriving communities of food supplies and income sources built over many years.

Widespread and Prolonged Displacement and Barriers to Safe Return

As the junta's offensive have intensified, displacement has become increasingly prolonged, leaving many IDPs unable to return home. All IDPs interviewed said they are unable to return to their villages of origin, although they hope to return one day. Some have stated that they have

39 "Defying Hunger: State Administration Council (SAC)'s systematic destruction of civilian livelihoods and food systems in Southeast Burma (January–December 2024)," Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG), 31 May 2025, <https://khr.org/2025/05/25-2-bp1/defying-hunger-state-administration-council-sac%E2%80%99s-systematic-destruction-civilian>.

40 Karen Human Rights Group (KHRG). Defying Hunger: State Administration Council (SAC)'s Systematic Destruction of Civilian Livelihoods and Food Systems in Southeast Burma (January–December 2024), 31 May 2025, <https://khr.org/2025/05/25-2-bp1/defying-hunger-state-administration-council-sac%E2%80%99s-systematic-destruction-civilian>.



Urgently needed rice, cooking oil, and shelter assistance are provided in August 2025 to 230 displaced families along the Kalay-Gangaw township road, Magway region, who have been fleeing for more than three years due to military junta invasion, artillery shelling, airstrikes, arson, and looting by Pyu Saw Htee forces under the military junta. Photo: [Young Wings].

been displaced for over five years⁴¹ while the rest of the IDP interviewees responded from two months to three years. Safety risks remain very high, particularly in villages near military bases, where there is an ongoing risk of shelling, raids, property destruction, landmine contamination, forced conscription, and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continue to prevent displaced villagers from returning safely.

One female IDP from Taze stated: “For now, it is not possible (to return to the village). That base (junta base) has not moved... The village remains at risk of being shelled with heavy weapons at any time, as the bases are located only four or five plots of land away.”⁴² She also added that her village, which is located in Taze Township,

Sagaing Region was razed, with around 40 to 50 houses destroyed.

Male interviewees reported fears of being forcibly taken as porters upon return. Some women nevertheless risk returning to villages under junta control to maintain or protect their homes and prevent them from being sealed.⁴³

Among the factors preventing IDPs from returning home is the risk of being targeted by the junta due to their family members’ involvement in resistance forces. One IDP from Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region, a father of a resistance member, was arrested and detained for four months because of his son’s joining the resistance. After his release, he fled to a

41 Interview with a female IDP (Kanbalu_Sagaing_IDP1), Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

42 Interview with a female IDP (Taze_Ye-U_Sagaing_IDP2), Ye-U Township, Sagiang Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

43 Interview with a male IDP (Ye-U_Sagiang_IDP5), Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

resistance-controlled area and now remains displaced, unable to return. He expressed, “It is not easy now since my son is involved. I no longer have the desire to return.”⁴⁴

In addition to the above reasons, another major factor is that some villages have turned into Pyu Saw Htee villages⁴⁵, particularly in areas where the junta established military bases. A Woman HRD from Young Wings—a local humanitarian organization from Sagaing Region—explained, “In this area, villages where the junta has established military bases are considered to be Pyu villages (Pyu Saw Htee militia’s villages). Some villagers have moved to other areas because

they do not want to be labeled as associated with Phyu villages. However, some families remain because of their livelihoods and daily survival needs.”

Landmine contamination remains a significant barrier to return. In late 2025, junta troops raided Kyikone Village in Chaung Oo Township, Sagaing Region, looting and burning more than 220 houses and planting landmines inside and around homes. A local humanitarian worker reported that 25 mines have been cleared so far. Yet the danger persists: three villagers were injured by landmines while attempting to return to the village, and one lost a leg.⁴⁶

44 Interview with a male IDP (Ye-U_Sagaing_IDP8), Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

45 Explanatory note: Phy Saw Htee is described as “a group largely made up of military veterans and pro-military Buddhist supporters, with roots in Ma Ba Tha, an ultranationalist Buddhist organization that has been financially and politically supported by the military.” See: Setting the Tinderbox Alight: The Humanitarian Crisis in Myanmar’s Dry Zone. Available at: <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2022/08/31/setting-the-tinderbox-alight-the-humanitarian-crisis-in-myanmars-dry-zone>.

46 “Some citizens were injured in the mines in the village by military group in Chaung Oo,” Mandalay Free Press, 12 January 2026, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/1DPbrrJE9w/>.



Urgently needed rice, cooking oil, and shelter assistance are provided in August 2025 to 230 displaced families along the Kalay-Gangaw township road, Magway region, who have been fleeing for more than three years due to military junta invasion, artillery shelling, airstrikes, arson, and looting by Pyu Saw Htee forces under the military junta. Photo: [Young Wings].

Further exacerbating these challenges, women, girls, LGBTQIA+, and individuals in conflict-affected areas are facing serious risk of SGBV. Women's League of Burma (WLB) documented 492 sexual violence and assault cases between February 2021 and June 2024, including at least 13 cases in which women were raped and subsequently murdered.⁴⁷ Burmese Women's Union's report, "Weaponizing the Body", published in November 2025, also stated that the military junta troops, Pyu Saw Htee, the military junta-appointed village chief and other local leaders, and individuals with strong ties to the criminal military junta perpetrated 31 conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) incidents, including 10 gang rapes. Of the total cases, 21 were from Sagaing and Magwe regions.⁴⁸

As of March 2026, OCHA estimates that more than 3.7 million people are internally displaced. Sagaing Region alone accounts for over 1.3 million IDPs, representing more than one-third of the total in Myanmar.⁴⁹ Restrictions imposed by the junta on international humanitarian agencies mean this figure likely represents a significant underestimate of the true scale of displacement. With the staggering number of people being rapidly displaced, the junta's continued atrocities targeting civilians have

forced many to flee multiple times, often leaving them with limited access to safe shelter, food, clean water, and healthcare.

Precarious Living Conditions

In central Myanmar, many are now living on open farmland in temporary shelters, because they believe these locations are less accessible to junta forces and farther from the junta bases. However, these sites have not been spared from aerial and artillery attacks. As of March 2026, a report by the NUG's MoHR documents more than 61 incidents of IDP shelters being burned or destroyed by the junta during ground operations and aerial attacks, with cases recorded in Sagaing and Magwe Regions and Karenni State.⁵⁰

One frontline humanitarian responder, himself an IDP, described the experience of repeated displacement. As the junta intensified its attacks in Mandalay Region, displaced people who had been living in Madaya Township since 2023 were forced to flee again to Sagaing Region at the end of 2025, as the junta escalated its attacks ahead of its sham elections in an effort to regain control of territory. He described the raid, "An estimated 4,000 to 6,000 (junta) troops raided and razed villages starting from the southeastern part of Madaya (township). Another factor is

47 "Nearly 500 Cases of Sexual Assault Against Women in Myanmar's Conflict", Radio Free Asia, November 2024. <https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2024/11/06/myanmar-women-sexual-assault/>.

48 "Using the Body as a Weapon of War," Burmese Women's Union (WLB), November 2025. <https://burmesewomensunion.org/?p=4892>.

49 "Operational Data Portal: Myanmar," UNHCR, accessed 23 April 2026, <https://data.unhcr.org/en/country/mmr>.

50 "The Systematic Erasure of Civilian Existence Through Property Destruction in Myanmar (31 March 2026)," Ministry of Human Rights, National Unity Government, accessed 21 April 2026, <https://mohr.nugmyanmar.org/reports/the-systematic-erasure-of-civilian-existence-through-property-destruction-in-myanmar-31st-march-2026/>.



Since 10 November 2025, residents from villages along the border of Kanbalu Township and Khin-U Township, Sagaing region have been forcibly displaced following a military junta invasion. The image shows civilians fleeing their homes and evacuating the area using ox carts.

Photo: [Peace Classroom]

aerial attacks, with fighter jets and Y-12 aircraft continuously bombing as they advance.”⁵¹

In addition, displaced interviewees and local organizations described living conditions of IDPs as increasingly precarious. Many displaced people are living among farmland, with those who do not own land sheltering in empty plots belonging to others. Others take shelter in monasteries and unused schools and houses. Some who have fled to nearby villages stay with relatives, while those who have moved to towns or cities live in rented houses. For example, a female IDP from Ye-U Township who fled to Kanbalu Township in Sagaing Region said she was allowed to stay in teachers’ housing at a school.⁵²

Another male IDP from Ye-U Township said that he and his family were allowed to stay in an unused house by community leaders.⁵³ In other cases, four IDP interviewees from Taze Township, Sagaing Region answered that their families are allocated at a village monastery in Ye-U Township, where they have to share a hall room (with other IDPs).⁵⁴

One human rights defender (HRD) from YWAN described the conditions of IDPs in Magwe: “There are no camps for IDPs. People move from one village to another. Some stay in rented houses, while others stay with relatives. They try to survive and work wherever they can.”⁵⁵

51 Interview with a male IDP (MDY_IDP), Mandalay Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

52 Interview with a female IDP (Kanbalu_Sagaing_IDP1), Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

53 Interview with a male IDP (Kanbalu_Sagaing_IDP2), Kanbalu Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

54 Interview with a female IDP, (Taze_Ye-U_Sagaing_IDP1-4), Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

55 Interview with YWAN, February 2026.

Dismantling Civilian Livelihoods

The military has increasingly employed scorched-earth tactics as part of its intensifying campaign of violence to dismantle civilian livelihoods. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines livelihoods as the capabilities, assets—including both material and social resources—and activities required to sustain a means of living.⁵⁶ The junta has systematically targeted these means of survival by razing entire villages, looting homes, and burning food stocks, livestock, crops, and agricultural tools, including motorbikes and cars. One male human rights defender (HRD) from Magwe who has been documenting the junta's violence described the deliberate destruction of livelihoods by junta forces: "When they (the junta forces) burn, they do not burn just the houses; they burn everything together, including machinery and livestock."⁵⁷

In mid-April 2026, a military column of approximately 100 troops launched clearance operations in Natmauk Township, Magwe Region. During the operation, junta forces killed three civilians, including two brothers with disabilities. Villagers reported that troops looted homes in Kyeekan Village and nearby villages, taking valuables such as cash, food supplies, and motorbikes, while more than 30 houses were burned.⁵⁸

The junta is systematically eroding the means

of survival of displaced communities through the complete destruction of agricultural assets, including seeds, livestock, farming tools, and land. Active military offensives—including airstrikes and artillery shelling—combined with movement restrictions and the establishment of military bases in and around villages, have severely disrupted local economies and stripped displaced communities of their means of survival. The impacts are particularly severe for rural communities in central Myanmar that depend on agriculture. Interviewees reported that the junta's deployment of bases in or near villages prevents some from returning to their homes, cutting them off from their land. One IDP from Taze described a life constantly disrupted by attacks, where even everyday livelihood activities become impossible: "It is becoming hard to survive when we cannot work. Even while we are working, we have to run due to (the junta's) artillery fire. We have to leave our work unfinished. The crops didn't grow well."⁵⁹

One HRD from Shwe Bo Township, Sagaing Region stated, "In Shwe Bo and Wetlet Townships, people are enduring constant artillery and airstrikes. The consequences are severe. People can no longer save or store anything for the future and are forced to survive day to day with whatever they can earn. In the past, when rice was plentiful, they were able to store it. Now, they no longer dare to keep rice."⁶⁰

56 United Nations Development Programme & United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2010), Guidance Note on Recovery: Livelihoods. Available at: https://www.unisdr.org/files/16771_16771guidancenoteonrecoveryliveliho.pdf.

57 Interview with a HRD from Magwe (05_HRD_Magwe), February 2026.

58 "Deaf brothers shot dead by Myanmar junta troops in Magway's Natmauk Township," Myanmar Now, 24 April 2026, <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/deaf-brothers-shot-dead-by-myanmar-junta-troops-in-magways-natmauk-township/>.

59 Interview with a male IDP (Taze_Ye-U_Sagaing_IDP3), Taze Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

60 Interview with a HRD from a local humanitarian organization in Shwe Bo Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

Humanitarian Catastrophe Driven by Aid Obstruction

In December 2025, the World Food Programme (WFP) warned that more than 12 million people in Myanmar will face acute hunger in 2026, with one million at emergency levels requiring lifesaving assistance. Michael Dunford, WFP Country Director in Myanmar, stated: “This is one of the worst hunger crises on the planet, and one of the least funded. We cannot allow this level of suffering to remain invisible. The scale of need is far outpacing our ability to respond.”⁶¹

Amid deteriorating humanitarian conditions, the military junta continues to block aid from reaching displaced communities, systematically weaponizing aid through administrative controls, checkpoint obstructions, seizures, and violence against aid providers.⁶² In addition, interviewees described on a wide range of essential goods that are restricted, including food, medicine, and flashlights, batteries, solar panels, generators, water pipes, well-drilling equipment, water pump components, and even A4 paper.⁶³ The OCHA reported in its November 2025 Myanmar Humanitarian Access Snapshot that ongoing

armed conflict has hindered relief operations across 11 states and regions. Due to intensified clashes, humanitarian activities in several townships in Chin, Karenni, Karen, and Mon States, as well as Sagaing and Mandalay Regions, were suspended for up to 30 days.⁶⁴

Massive funding shortfalls and rapid cuts⁶⁵ in international aid, combined with restricted access. Communities in central Myanmar already receive little to no international aid except limited live-saving emergency humanitarian and protection assistance to certain extent supported by private donors and diaspora communities through trusted civil society groups.

A WHRD from Justice & Equality Focus described the severity of the hardship, “There is extreme hardship. When it comes to food, regular meals are not available. Only simple food like vegetables with fish paste is affordable, and even then, eating three meals a day is not possible.”⁶⁶ Another serious gap in aid delivery is highlighted by a WHRD from YAWN, noting

61 “WFP warns that Myanmar faces rising displacement and unacceptable hunger levels in 2026,” World Food Programme, 10 December 2025, <https://www.wfp.org/news/wfp-warns-myanmar-faces-rising-displacement-and-unacceptable-hunger-levels-2026>.

62 “Briefing Paper: The Myanmar Military Junta’s Weaponization of Humanitarian Aid (2021–2025),” Progressive Voice, 9 December 2025, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/12/09/briefing-paper-the-myanmar-military-juntas-weaponization-of-humanitarian-aid-2021-2025>.

63 Interview with Shwe Bo Strike Force, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, 25 February 2026.

64 “Myanmar Humanitarian Access Snapshot,” United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs November 2025, available at: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-access-snapshot-november-2025>.

65 “Aid Cuts Deepening Myanmar Military-made Crisis,” Progressive Voice, 1 April 2025, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/04/01/aid-cuts-deepening-myanmar-military-made-crisis>.

66 Interview with Justice & Equality Focus, Mandalay Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

that during the rainy season, poor road access left IDPs in a camp in Sagaing Region without support, forcing them to rely on donations from nearby villages to survive.⁶⁷

Testimonies reveal that emergency humanitarian assistance included the distribution of food items such as rice, cooking oil, beans, and eggs, as well as small amounts of cash support, in some cases around 300,000 kyat (approximately US\$ 143)

per household. Assistance also covered basic needs, including raincoats and the construction of water wells and toilets. However, respondents consistently reported that such support was largely limited to the early stages of displacement and has since declined significantly. Respondents did not identify the organizations providing this assistance, although they consistently reported that it was delivered through trusted local humanitarian networks.⁶⁸

Evolving Community-led Coping Strategies and Household Resilience

In response to the junta-created worsening humanitarian catastrophe, communities have developed diverse coping strategies for survival and resistance. These include locally led humanitarian responses reaching those most in need, as well as adapting livelihoods and community-driven livelihood support initiatives. At the same time, people-led healthcare and education systems are emerging, filling critical gaps as the junta escalates attacks on healthcare and education infrastructure.

Locally Led Rapid and Responsive Humanitarian Assistance

Frontline local humanitarian workers, including civil society groups across Myanmar, have expanded their support in response to urgent needs on the ground following the attempted coup. These humanitarians provide assistance in the form of cash, food, water, medicine, hygiene

supplies, and health information, driven by a strong sense of responsibility to meet urgent community needs.⁶⁹

A HRD from Ah Kayar Civil Society, a local humanitarian organization in Magwe Region, described how, at one point, limited resources for food assistance led them to collect donations from nearby villages and distribute them to communities whose villages had been burned.⁷⁰ Through trusted local networks and coordination mechanisms, frontline humanitarian actors can respond rapidly, adapt to changing conditions, and reach communities that international assistance often cannot. Similarly, a WHRD from Butalin Township Strike Force highlighted that, “Normally, when there are displaced people, we have to look for donors to support them with items such as rice, oil, salt, and other food supplies. For example, if IDPs are staying at a

67 Interview with YWAN, February 2026.

68 Interviews with 17 IDPs from Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay regions, conducted between in February 2026.

69 “Our Shared Responsibility: How Civil Society is Strengthening Local Resilience for a Federal Democratic Burma/Myanmar,” Progressive Voice et al., 30 September 2025, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/09/30/our-shared-responsibility-how-civil-society-is-strengthening-local-resilience-for-a-federal-democratic-burma-myanmar>.

70 Interview with Ah Kayar Civil Society, Magwe Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

monastery, we provide meals, led and coordinated by camp leaders or the head monk.”⁷¹



An IDP family accesses food assistance and basic relief items provided by a local humanitarian organization in Mindon township, Magway region, after displacement caused by military junta ground invasion on 10 February 2026. Photo: [Ah Kayar Civil Society].

IDPs Adapting Livelihoods for Survival

While emergency aid partially addresses immediate needs for food, long-term support remains limited, forcing displaced families to rely on daily coping strategies to survive. Displaced people cannot rely solely on humanitarian aid and donations, as local communities are also facing hardship. Some rely on seasonal agricultural work as daily wage laborers, earning as little as 5,000 kyat (approximately US\$ 2) for a full morning’s

work. Those with larger household sizes and limited skills in agricultural work struggle to meet their basic needs.⁷² Beyond daily labor, some run informal businesses, including working as vendors and trading local products across areas.⁷³

While IDPs who move within rural areas can engage in agricultural work, those displaced from urban to rural areas face particular challenges, as they are often not familiar with or skilled in such work. A WHRD from Young Wings in Sagaing Region shared the case of a CDMer (a Civil Disobedience Movement member) family of four, including young children and elderly dependents, who rely on collecting recyclable materials such as cans and bottles from roadsides, as well as buying and reselling items like discarded hair and scrap metal, to meet their daily needs.⁷⁴

Another CDM teacher who fled to a resistance-controlled area in Sagaing Region shared that: “I want to continue teaching children in resistance-controlled areas and use my skills wherever I go. I have been teaching for over a year. Recently, I had to relocate... I had to flee about three months ago due to military offensives.”⁷⁵

Despite these efforts, such coping mechanisms remain fragile and insufficient. Displaced communities are forced to adapt livelihoods under extreme constraints. While these efforts reflect resilience and resistance, they do not provide stable or sustainable livelihoods. As displaced become increasingly protracted and the junta’s relentless attacks continue, these coping strategies continue to fall short of meeting basic needs.

⁷¹ Interview with Butalin Township Strike Force, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

⁷² Interview with Shwe Bo Strike Force, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Interview with Young Wings, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

⁷⁵ Interview with Young Wings, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

On the other hand, to meet needs and fill critical gaps, local frontline humanitarian responders and civil society groups are implementing sustainable community initiatives that support self-reliance, livelihoods, and social harmony. A joint report, *Our Shared Responsibility: How Civil Society is Strengthening Local Resilience for a Federal Democratic Burma/ Myanmar*, published in September 2025 by 18 CSOs, including Progressive Voice highlights how locally led initiatives are strengthening community resilience. These include livelihood and food security efforts such as agriculture and home gardening, as well as vocational training, community-led healthcare, and the development of local infrastructure across different regions and states. Through these initiatives, civil society groups are not only addressing immediate needs of the most vulnerable communities but also supporting long-term self-reliance and social cohesion.⁷⁶

By responding to actual needs, livelihood initiatives are tailored to the realities of the crisis. A local humanitarian organization from Shwe Bo Township, Sagaing Region, is supporting IDPs through goat rearing, rice cultivation, home gardening, and weaving programs. A representative from that organization explained that the goat rearing program has been established in four villages and described why this approach was selected: “Compared to pigs, goats are less vulnerable during (the junta) military operations or airstrikes, as soldiers (junta troops) may take some but not in large numbers, and goats can escape when needed. In contrast, pigs cannot run away.”⁷⁷

Community-led Education

Amidst adversity, communities are organizing themselves for the continuity of their children’s education through community-led education programs. It is well documented that schools

76 “Our Shared Responsibility: How Civil Society is Strengthening Local Resilience for a Federal Democratic Burma/ Myanmar,” Progressive Voice et al., 30 September 2025, <https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/2025/09/30/our-shared-responsibility-how-civil-society-is-strengthening-local-resilience-for-a-federal-democratic-burma-myanmar>.

77 Interview with a HRD from a local humanitarian organization in Shwe Bo Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.



in Myanmar are under attack by the military junta. As of 12 May 2025, since its illegal coup attempt, the military junta has targeted up to 333 schools. The highest number of attacks has been recorded in Sagaing Region with 84 schools, followed by Magwe Region with 38 and Mandalay Region with 28.⁷⁸

Community-led schools in resistance-controlled or liberated areas face growing security concerns due to their vulnerability to junta airstrikes. Children in displaced areas are now studying at community-led education centers. Frontline humanitarian workers often play multiple roles in providing essential services to communities, including education. A local humanitarian worker

from the Shwe Bo Strike Force said he has been working both as a teacher and as a member of the strike group. He supports outreach efforts to ensure that newly arrived displaced children are enrolled in community-led education centers by engaging with parents and coordinating with donors to mobilize support for their education.⁷⁹ There are extraordinary efforts in community-led education, with various training programs delivered on the ground, including basic computer training and reading clubs. For example, the Shwe Bo Strike Force opened⁸⁰ a second batch of computer training in March 2026 and is running⁸¹ a mobile library with 100 books across liberated areas within the Sagaing Region.



Posted in August 2025 on the Young Wings Facebook page, the image shows a mobile library initiative operating 2 days per week in towns across the Sagaing region. The program aims to foster a more cohesive and resilient society by providing children with access to educational resources and continuous learning opportunities. Photo: [Young Wings].

78 “Schools in Myanmar: The New Targets of Junta Airstrikes,” Myanmar Peace Monitor, May 2025, <https://mmpeacemonitor.org/en/eng-cover-story/schools-in-myanmar-the-new-targets-of-junta-airstrikes/>.

79 Interview with Shwe Bo Strike Force, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.

80 Shwe Bo Strike Force, “ကွန်ပျူတာသင်တန်းအပတ်စဉ် ၂ ဖွင့်လှစ်ခြင်း” Facebook, 31 March 2026. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1DLhH4aZt5/>.

81 Shwe Bo Strike Force, “ရွှေ့လျားစာကြည့်တိုက်ဆက်လက်ဖွင့်”, Facebook, 7 April 2026. <https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1ESjohp7QS/>.

Community-led Healthcare

Access to healthcare remains severely limited due to the junta's ongoing attacks on hospitals, clinics, and healthcare workers, as well as restrictions on medical supplies, forcing many to suffer worsening health conditions. Public health conditions continue to deteriorate, with displaced communities suffering⁸² from diarrhea and skin diseases and are in urgent need of food and medicine.

While community-level responses are ongoing, shortages of medicines, facilities, and trained personnel remain major challenges. A HRD from a local humanitarian organization in Shwe Bo

Township, said, "Sometimes people are injured by artillery, but they can't go for treatment. They are often afraid to say their injuries were caused by shelling, because hospitals may refuse to treat them. So, they have to go to township-level hospitals run by the NUG. Even there, there are not enough staff, medicines, or proper medical equipment."⁸³

Healthcare access for IDPs in central Myanmar remains severely constrained. Some areas lacking any services and others relying only on basic local providers. And an IDP said, "We have to go to other nearby villages to seek treatment. We

82 "Nearly 30,000 civilians displaced by fighting in Myanmar's heartland," Radio Free Asia, 28 February 2025, <https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2025/02/28/myanmar-displaced-in-heartland/>.

83 Interview with a HRD from a local humanitarian organization in Shwe Bo Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, February 2026.



This photo is sourced from Shwe Bo Strike Group's Facebook page, showing Shwe Bo Strike Group providing free healthcare services and distributing feminine hygiene products to displaced people in Shwe Bo Township. Photo: [Shwe Bo Strike Group]

don't have one (healthcare service provider) in this village.”⁸⁴

Women face some of the most acute and life-threatening consequences of this collapse. A WHRD from YWAN raised concerns about women giving birth without access to essential healthcare, relying only on traditional birth attendants, leading to high maternal and infant mortality rates.⁸⁵ Another WHRD from Women for Justice (WJ) underscored a particularly alarming issue: “Because menstruation is extremely painful, they (IDP women) have started taking contraceptive injections even

when not necessary. Fear of rape is also one reason—they (IDP women) are increasingly using it as a form of protection.”⁸⁶

In response, women organizations are at the frontline providing protection and services. For example, WJ works to advance women's rights and justice, operating in Sagaing Region and Chin State, with a focus on eliminating violence against women, including sexual violence and gender-based violence. Its services include support for survivors whose health has been affected by physical and sexual abuse, as well as the provision of safe houses.⁸⁷

84 Interview with a male IDP (Ye-U_Sagaing_IDP9), Ye-U Township, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

85 Interview with YWAN, February 2026.

86 Interview with Women for Justice, Sagaing Region, Myanmar, March 2026.

87 Ibid.

Conclusion

The displacement crisis in central Myanmar has ceased to be temporary; it has become protracted, and the junta's widespread violence and systematic destruction of livelihoods have driven an increasingly severe humanitarian crisis. For many, survival has become an extremely challenging daily struggle, yet communities continue to endure—supporting one another at their best, drawing on their skills, and holding on to fragments of normal life. Their resilience is sustained in part by frontline local responders and CSOs, whose efforts to provide emergency aid, livelihoods support, education, and healthcare remain vital but overstretched amid limited funding and ongoing junta attacks.

The evidence presented in this briefing paper demonstrates that the junta's obstruction of humanitarian assistance is not merely a consequence of conflict but a deliberate extension of its broader strategy of collective punishment. By simultaneously creating humanitarian need and restricting access to humanitarian assistance, the junta has weaponized aid as another instrument of collective punishment against Myanmar's people.

Survival should not depend on endurance

alone. The needs on the ground continue to outpace assistance, and the gap will only widen without expanded, flexible support and greater protection for those delivering aid. Displaced communities continue to hold on to a simple but powerful hope—to return safely to their places of origin. That hope must be matched with urgent, decisive action by the international community to ensure they can live with dignity and rebuild their futures. Meeting that hope requires urgent and coordinated international action. This begins with halting the junta's escalating violence—particularly its airstrikes and ground attacks against civilians—and ensuring that humanitarian assistance reaches affected communities directly and promptly.

International donors must urgently and substantially increase humanitarian assistance through direct, flexible support to trusted local civil society and CBOs, while expanding border-based delivery channels that bypass the junta and its mechanisms. Supporting these locally led responses is not only the most principled approach—it is also the most effective way to reach communities that continue to be deliberately denied humanitarian assistance.

Recommendations

To the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

- Urgently implement the October 2025 Summit decision to advance the safe, effective, and transparent delivery of humanitarian assistance through border-based channels that directly reach conflict-affected internally displaced persons without discrimination. As ASEAN Chair, the Philippines must operationalize this commitment without further delay;
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance bypasses the junta and its controlled mechanisms, including the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance and the Myanmar Red Cross Society;
- Facilitate aid delivery through border-based channels in collaboration with EROs, NUG and trusted CSOs, CBOs, grassroots networks, and emerging federal governance units including in Sagaing, Magwe, and Mandalay Regions;
- Move beyond the Five-Point Consensus and engage meaningfully and formally with Myanmar's legitimate stakeholders, the NUG, the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), Steering Council for the Emergence of a Federal Democratic Union (SCEF), and federal governance units to support the bottom-up federal democracy building process;
- Reject all institutions and representatives emerging from the junta's sham election and deny any form of legitimacy to the junta's rebranded "civilian" façade by halting all diplomatic, political, economic, and military engagement;
- Impose coordinated restrictions on weapons and aviation fuel supply lines, targeting the shipping and transport infrastructure that powers the junta's aerial bombardments;
- Ensure that no ASEAN Member State serves as a conduit for resources used in the junta's attacks against civilians;
- Work in tandem with the UN and Myanmar's legitimate stakeholders, including the NUG, EROs, SCEF, federal governance units, and local civil society and humanitarian organizations to effectively address the Myanmar's deepening and expanding human rights and humanitarian crises; and
- Support international accountability efforts focused on Myanmar including the exercise of universal jurisdiction in Timor-Leste and Indonesia.

To the International Community and Humanitarian Donors

- Bypass the military junta and all junta-controlled mechanisms to ensure humanitarian assistance reaches the internally displaced persons and other vulnerable communities;
- Recognize the essential and critical role of Myanmar's frontline humanitarian responders and civil society groups and provide robust, direct support to internally displaced communities through locally led, border-based mechanisms;
- Ensure that international humanitarian agencies apply the Do No Harm principle and human rights due diligence in all engagement with local civil society groups and affected communities, including protecting the confidentiality of identities and locations to prevent junta surveillance, reprisals, and other harms;
- Work in equal and meaningful partnership with local civil society and CBOs and affected communities, respecting their leadership and agency while facilitating assistance through locally led, border-based mechanisms;
- Provide/increase flexible financial support and technical resources for Myanmar civil society groups to sustain and expand their emergency humanitarian responses and sustainable community resilience initiatives, relax burdensome reporting requirements, and remove unnecessary registration requirements that create barriers to deliver assistance safely and effectively;
- Provide robust financial support for the protection and livelihoods of Myanmar HRDs, frontline humanitarian responders, and civil society actors to strengthen protection efforts to enable them to continue their human rights and humanitarian work;
- Provide flexible, multi-year funding and technical support directly to Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) health workers, community-based health organizations, and other groups independent of the junta through border-based mechanisms that strengthen people-led health systems and ensure access to health care for IDPs;
- Support locally led gender-responsive protection and referral pathways by providing direct and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organizations;
- Recognize and support Myanmar people's will and democratic aspirations and ongoing efforts to establish a federal democracy from the ground up, including providing technical and financial support for local governance infrastructure, administration, communication, and justice mechanisms to strengthen effective governance, civilian protection, and humanitarian aid delivery;

- Support efforts by resistance forces to undertake landmine demarcation and removal of landmines to strengthen the safety of local communities, particularly for livelihoods, humanitarian service activities, and travel;
- Reject all institutions and representatives emerging from the junta's sham election and deny any form of legitimacy to the junta's rebranded "civilian" façade by halting all diplomatic, political, economic, and military engagement;
- Impose a comprehensive global arms embargo against the junta, including targeted sanctions on aviation fuel, and ban all sales, supplies, and transfers of weapons, aircraft, drones, dual-use technologies, and related equipment that power the junta and enable atrocity crimes; and
- Advance accountability efforts to hold the perpetrators of atrocity crimes through all available international legal avenues.

To the National Unity Government, EROs, People's Defense Forces, and Federal Governance Units

- Respect and adhere to international humanitarian and human rights law and related codes of conduct at all times;
- Strengthen measures and take maximum precautions for civilian protection during military operations, including by providing clear, timely, and accessible security alerts to civilians;
- Establish, strengthen, and support justice and accountability mechanisms to protect women, children, LGBTQIA+ persons, persons with disabilities (PWDs), and other at-risk groups from sexual and gender-based violence and other forms of violence;
- Ensure full, equal, and meaningful participation of women, youth, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQIA+ communities, and PWDs at every level of decision-making, including in local governance structures, humanitarian response and protection mechanisms, and justice seeking processes;
- Recognize and support the critical role of women-led and women's rights organizations and CSOs that provide protection, humanitarian assistance, healthcare, psychosocial support, safe shelter, and monitoring and documentation of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected areas, and fully cooperate in their efforts to advance justice seeking for victims and survivors;
- Recognize the independent role of and cooperate with frontline local humanitarian responders, human rights defenders, CSOs, and CBOs;

- Respect the agency, leadership, and independent decision-making of local CSOs, CBOs, and frontline humanitarian responders as primary actors in addressing the humanitarian crisis through collaborative approaches that strengthen humanitarian access, community protection, resilience, and accountability; and
- Facilitate secure passage for humanitarian delivery by the local responders through equal, meaningful, and sustained partnerships to ensure that assistance reaches conflict-affected populations in a timely, effective, impartial, and non-discrimination manner.

Contact Information

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