



Lives on Hold

Making sure no child is left behind in Myanmar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Women and children at a market near the Sin Tet Maw camp for internally displaced persons in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

— 6 April 2017

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An unprecedented period of change and opportunity is under way in Myanmar. But too many children have yet to feel the benefits.

Ending the long-running conflicts and intercommunal violence that have plagued the country for decades – and tackling the issues of self-governance, resource-sharing and ethnic identity that have perpetuated them – is a key stated ambition of the Government of the National League for Democracy that took office just over a year ago.

Political, social and economic reforms initiated in 2010 are starting to impact on the lives of the children who make up approximately 34 per cent of the country's estimated 53 million population.¹ Social sector reforms are beginning to translate into critical investments in the systems that boost children's health, education and protection.

Even so, and in spite of this progress, the challenges are huge: as many as 150 children die daily before reaching their fifth birthday;² nearly 30 per cent of all children under five suffer from moderate or severe malnutrition;³ and one in five children is born without registration.⁴

For an estimated 2.2 million children, the promise of peace remains unfulfilled,⁵ leaving their hopes for a better future blighted by poverty, lack of opportunity and the ever-present fear of violence.

This Child Alert focuses on the situation of children whose lives and prospects are effectively on hold. Children such as:

- Saw Ba Sun, aged 9, who lives with memories of the explosion that injured him and killed two friends as they played near his village;
- Myo Thein, aged 10, whose dreams of becoming a doctor depend on finding a new school to attend in tension-racked Rakhine State;
- Taung Mi Mi, aged 14, who tends vegetables in a camp for internally displaced persons (IDPs) to help her family make ends meet.

Some of these children, especially those living in remote border areas, continue to suffer the consequences of protracted crises, intercommunal conflicts and discrimination. In too many cases, they are exposed to violence and exploitation – in violation of their rights.

A range of complex issues – including displacement, chronic poverty, vulnerability to natural disasters, statelessness, trafficking, and lack of access to health and education services – all contribute to the daily challenges that confront them.

In [Kachin State](#), near the border with China, an estimated 67,000 women and children are living in 142 camps and sites,⁶ amid ongoing tensions between the Myanmar Armed Forces (officially known as the Tatmadaw) and various Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs). The situation for children in neighbouring [Shan State](#) is equally fragile.

In [Kayin State](#), and in [the South-East](#) of Myanmar more broadly, an entrenched history of conflict has affected the lives of civilians, especially in more remote areas close to the border with Thailand. Although the major EAOs in the area have signed a National Ceasefire Agreement, about 2.5 million people live in townships affected by conflict.⁷

And in [Rakhine State](#), 120,000 internally displaced people continue to live in camps following the outbreak of intercommunal conflict between ethnic Rakhine and Muslims in 2012, which displaced them from their homes.⁸ In the northern part of Rakhine State, the situation escalated dangerously in October 2016 after coordinated attacks on a number of border guard posts. The counter-insurgency campaign launched by the Tatmadaw in response sparked international concern over alleged serious human rights violations against the Muslim Rohingya community.

UNICEF and its partners are working with the Government of Myanmar to help children in all parts of the country begin to benefit from the rapid economic development that is transforming much of the country.

Through investments that protect children against violence, marginalization and other risks, and which provide them with opportunities to learn, alongside basic services such as clean water, sanitation and health care, a stronger, more harmonious society can emerge that will support Myanmar's progress and stability.

But there is an urgent need to address the deeper challenges facing children in Myanmar. Without this push for action, children will miss out on the chance to contribute to a better, more peaceful and prosperous future for their country.



This Child Alert calls for renewed efforts to achieve peace and social cohesion so that all children can be provided with uninterrupted access to quality basic services and opportunities in life. It also calls for intensified efforts to protect children from violence and abuse.

In conflict-affected areas such as Kachin State, Shan State and the South-East, this Alert calls on all parties to the conflict to immediately allow humanitarian assistance to reach children affected by ongoing violence, and for an end to grave violations against children. The laying of landmines by all parties to the conflicts must end, and mine clearance work should start wherever possible.

In Rakhine State, the Alert calls for urgent measures to protect children against violence, and to ensure that the humanitarian needs of children in IDP camps are met. Rohingya and other ethnic minority children need protection and help.

It also urges rapid implementation of the interim findings of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State led by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The Commission's recommendations for investments in education and health care and the roll-out of a comprehensive birth registration campaign have already been broadly welcomed by the Government of Myanmar. These investments will be a first step towards improving the quality and coverage of basic social services for all children in Rakhine.

"Maths is my favourite subject. When I grow up I want to be a doctor, so I can help people."

Myo Thein, 10

Myo Thein works on his homework at the Sin Tet Maw camp for internally displaced persons in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

— 6 April 2017



Rakhine State

Gaps in education threaten the futures of all children

Sin Tet Maw camp, Pauktaw, Rakhine State: It's barely eight in the morning but already the rickety wooden classroom is shaking to the sound of young, rhythmic voices within.

"I love the monkey, I love the flower!" chant the children inside. "How are you? Fine, thank YOU!"

If the grasp of English pleasantries still needs some practice, there is no disputing the enthusiasm of the 30 or so pupils who sit on rough wooden benches inside the building. Outside, a green painted sign proclaims it to be the Basic Education Primary Level Teaching School Temporary No. 2.

Leading the class is head teacher, Kyaw Swe, a tall man in a red baseball cap who exudes as much energy as the boys and girls in his charge.

"This is a temporary learning centre but we still follow the government curriculum," Mr Swe explains. "Our aim is to raise the educational standard of the children in the camp because they cannot attend normal government schools."

In all, 518 Muslim children living in the camp attend the school.ⁱ Their families have lived in Sin Tet Maw since 2012, when their coastal community south of the state capital, Sittwe, was caught up in intercommunal violence between Muslims and Buddhists.

Myo Thein was only 6 when his family fled their former home. Now 10, he is used to life in the camp and eager to complete his education. He follows classes in Myanmar language, English, science and maths.

"Maths is my favourite subject," says Myo Thein. "When I grow up I want to be a doctor, so I can help people."

But there's a problem: once he finishes primary school next year, he will not be able to transfer to the nearby middle school for ethnic Rakhine children, due to the segregation between the two communities. It's a dilemma his teacher Mr Swe is uncomfortably aware of.

"We need a middle school so that the older (Muslim) children can continue their education. When they have access to secondary school, they will be able to realize their dreams."

"The gaps in education affect all communities in Rakhine State, and demonstrate how lack of investment in basic services is holding all children back"

In the Buddhist community near Sittwe on the opposite bank of the Kaladan River, worries about the limited school options for older children from poor families find an echo.

Ma Ya Tu, aged 11, comes from a troubled background, raised by an aunt who couldn't afford to send her niece to school, and instead took her to help sell fish in the market.

But last year, the opening of a non-formal primary school in the area (as part of a non-formal education programme supported by UNICEF in partnership with Myanmar Literacy and Resource Centre) allowed Ma Ya Tu to make a belated start to her education. Today, she is enjoying school and making good progress.

But, like Myo Thein, after Grade 4, Ma Ya Tu will have no government middle school in the area to attend, and she may have to abandon her education.

"I don't miss the days when I couldn't go to school," says Ma Ya Tu. "Being in school is better because I learn stuff and I make friends."

Finding solutions that will allow children like Myo Thein and Ma Ya Tu to stay in school is a challenge being addressed by UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International, the European Union, Denmark and other agencies.

"The gaps in education affect all communities in Rakhine State, and demonstrate how lack of investment in basic services is holding all children back," says UNICEF Chief of Sittwe field office Mandie Alexander. "We and our partners are working with the Government to provide post-primary opportunities for Muslim and Buddhist children alike."

i. UNICEF supports 55 Temporary Learning Spaces in Myanmar, in which 9,528 children aged 5–11 follow the state school curriculum as far as Grade 4.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY CONTEXT

The political changes initiated in Myanmar in 2010 set in motion a rapid and complex transformation of the country in three broad areas: from military conflict to peace; from autocratic to democratic government; and from a closed to an open economy.

Optimism was further fuelled by the signing of the National Ceasefire Agreement of 2015 and general elections held the same year, which resulted in the National League for Democracy taking office under the leadership of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

The new government set several key objectives. First and foremost, it committed itself to achieving national reconciliation, and to seeking a peaceful resolution to the various conflicts that have plagued Myanmar almost since it became an independent country. Transforming the country's governance to a democratic federal union and raising living standards for the general population were the new government's other overarching aims.

To support the achievement of these goals, a 12-point economic policy was announced in July 2016, and a national conference brought together signatories and non-signatories of the National Ceasefire Agreement with the hope of initiating political dialogue for lasting peace.

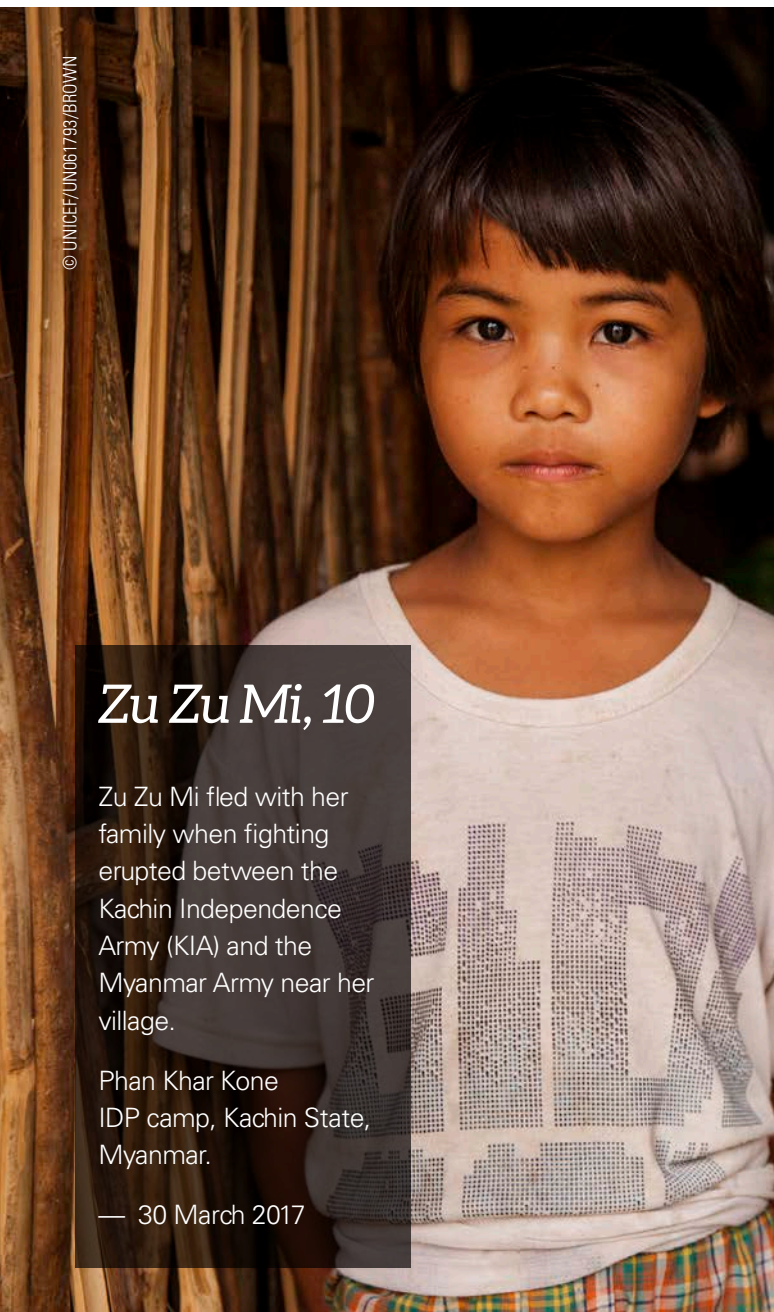
However, the optimism of 2015 and early 2016 has been tempered by slower-than-expected progress on economic and policy reforms. Even more worrisome is the escalation of several key conflicts in the country's more remote border areas.

In Kachin and Shan States, fighting between government and non-government forces has surged anew, resulting in the displacement of civilians caught between the opposing forces. For some, this is the second or third displacement – with their vulnerability increasing at each round.

All but one of Myanmar's six self-administered areas are found in Kachin and Shan States; they have also suffered the highest incidence of conflict, accounting for 95 per cent of the 1,350 recorded clashes involving the army and EAOs in 2015 and 2016.⁹ The situation in the two states is further complicated by the fact that they are richly endowed with natural resources, and are also hubs for large-scale opium, heroin and amphetamine production.

Myanmar's remote and mountainous South-East – a vast territory which comprises Kayin and Mon States and the Tanintharyi Region – is also greatly influenced by economic migration, mainly to Thailand. According to data reported by the International Organization for Migration, Mon and Kayin States and the Tanintharyi Region together receive nearly 70 per cent of annual worker remittances;¹⁰ in Mon State, nearly 1 in 10 children aged 6–10 lives away from a biological parent.¹¹

Meanwhile, in the northern part of Rakhine State, attacks on border guard police outposts in October 2016 prompted a large-scale security operation by the Government of Myanmar. Subsequent allegations of violations of human rights, including summary executions, rapes, torture, and burning of villages, sparked an outcry. Tens of thousands of Rohingya have been displaced and some have taken shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh.¹²



Zu Zu Mi, 10

Zu Zu Mi fled with her family when fighting erupted between the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the Myanmar Army near her village.

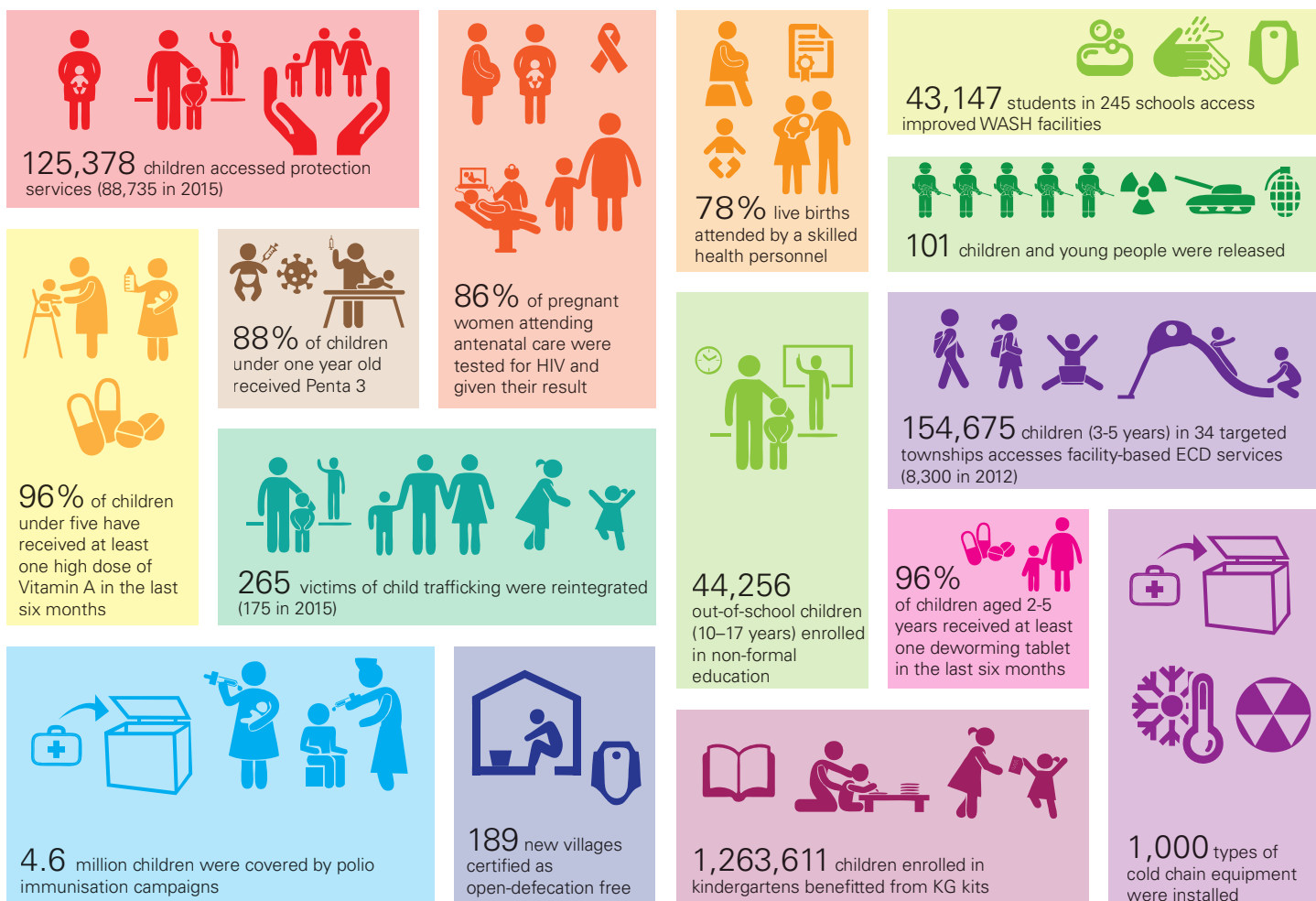
Phan Khar Kone
IDP camp, Kachin State,
Myanmar.

— 30 March 2017

Children of Myanmar: Fast Facts

- Children represent 34 per cent of Myanmar's population of 53 million people.
- More than half of these children live in poverty.
- One in five children is born without registration.
- Every day, up to 150 children die before reaching their fifth birthday.
- Approximately one third of children under 5 are stunted.
- Half of Myanmar's children reach adulthood with an incomplete education.
- A UNICEF-supported analysis revealed that two out of three children with disabilities do not attend school and 90 per cent do not visit the doctor.
- An estimated 2.2 million children still need peace: restrictions on freedom of movement and the discrimination they face prevent thousands of children in Rakhine State from accessing adequate health care, good nutrition and education.
- Nine out of the country's 14 states and regions are contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war. Over the past two years, there has been a new victim of landmines, on average, every three days. One out of every three victims is a child.
- Eight parties to the different conflicts in Myanmar are listed by the United Nations Secretary-General for their relentless recruitment and use of children as soldiers.

UNICEF Results 2016: Improving the lives of children in their communities



Kayin State and South-East Myanmar

Unresolved conflict blights children's futures

Ann Ka Law village, Kayin State, Myanmar: The little boy looked nervously at the metallic object in his hand. It didn't look like a toy, but the friends he was playing with were yelling at him to throw it at the bamboo patch a few metres away.

"It felt heavy – and the metal was hot," recalled Saw Ba Sun, aged 9. "Somehow, I knew it was dangerous."

As Saw Ba hesitated, another boy, So Aung Myo Win, snatched the metal thing out of his hand. As he raised his throwing arm, the device exploded, killing him instantly and injuring four others, including Saw Ba Sun.

More than two years on, memories of the accident are still fresh in this poor and remote corner of South-East Myanmar. Locals point out the unmarked spot, no more than 200 metres from the school, where they found the body of So Aung, and another injured child, Aung Min, aged 7, who died shortly after reaching the local hospital.

When Saw Ba Sun's father, Tar Leu, heard the explosion, his first thought was that Kayin's long-running armed conflict had once more descended on the village. His next fearful thought was for his wife and two sons.

Mr Leu, 43, is the pastor at the village church. He and his family returned to Myanmar in 2012, after spending years living in a refugee camp across the nearby border with Thailand:

"My mother encouraged me to come back here," said Tar Leu. "We thought it was safe, but it wasn't."

Time and again, forces of the Myanmar Army and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army sweep through the tiny community of 60 households, which lies in a contested area

of Kayin State. Each time, terrified families hide in crude shelters that they have dug under their wooden houses.

The unexploded grenade that led to the accident was probably left from clashes that had erupted weeks earlier.

Reconciliation efforts yet to bear fruit

Conflict has long shaped the lives of people living in this area. Recurrent fighting between government forces and a range of Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) has repeatedly displaced the civilian population.

The major EAOs in Mon and Kayin States and Tanintharyi Region are signatories to the 2015 National Ceasefire Agreement, but skirmishes have persisted.

"This troubled history has had tragic implications for the lives of around 2 million children living in the South-East of Myanmar," says Anne Cecile Vialle, who heads UNICEF's Mawlamyine Field Office.

"Apart from suffering the direct consequences of violence, children in disputed territories often cannot access basic services."

In such areas, almost a third of school-aged children (aged 6–17) are not attending school and one in three families does not have access to adequate toilets.ⁱ

The widespread use of landmines and contamination by explosive remnants of war are outcomes of decades of violence.

Many landmines and explosive remnants of war lie hidden – and usually unmapped – for years. Others are laid during successive bouts of fighting, posing a lethal threat to people attempting to recover property or resume work on their land.

i. Analysis by UNICEF Myanmar, based on administrative records and the 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, <www.unicef.org/myanmar/resources_26052.html>

Volunteers bring support and encouragement to landmine victims

In the remote town of Kawkareik, a Victim Assistance Centre has been set up, run by Handicap International and the Myanmar Physically Handicapped Association (MPHA) with the support of UNICEF and in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare.

The project offers services to landmine/explosive remnants of war victims as well as adults and children with disabilities. It also trains and mobilizes landmine survivors to deliver Mine Risk Education to people living in affected areas.

San San Maw, 33, is one of 30 volunteers working at the Centre. She lost her right leg when she trod on a landmine at the age of 13 while cutting bamboo on a mountain side.

“Here we do minor repairs and adjustments for people with prosthetic limbs,” says Ms. Maw. “But my main reason for volunteering is to give other victims encouragement in the same way I needed encouragement after my accident.”

A Mine Risk Working Group – established under the leadership of the local authorities and sponsored by UNICEF – is supporting the roll-out of a new national Mine Risk Education curriculum as well as initial discussions on demining in Kayin State.

With the long and difficult task of demining in Kayin State on hold, people living in vulnerable communities like Ann Ka Law are at daily risk of injury or death.

Nan Maw Maw Kyi, a teacher at the school Saw Ba Sun attends, says the village must live with this harsh reality:

“We always tell the children: if you find anything strange or unusual in the forest, never touch it, but go and tell an adult. Unfortunately we can’t say for certain that something similar won’t happen again.”

Min Thiya, 10

Min Thiya, 10, shows a large scar from injuries he sustained two years ago when he, Saw Ba Sun and other boys were playing with unexploded ordnance near Ann Ka Law village in Kayin State. Two other children were killed in the explosion.

— 3 April 2017



THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT ON CHILDREN

The ongoing violence in Myanmar continues to impact children and their communities in different ways. Displaced civilians need to be resettled, and basic services such as shelter, food, water and education need to be made available to them. Children require particular attention to protect them against abuse and exploitation.

Ensuring adequate protection for IDPs is a serious challenge in Kachin and Shan States, where IDP camps are divided between areas of Tatmadaw and EAO control. A draft report prepared for the United Nations Security Council in March 2017 referred to increased fighting close to IDP camps and in civilian areas, often involving air strikes and heavy artillery. As a result, the report said, a number of camps had suffered damage and in some cases, the population had fled.

The violence has greatly complicated the task of humanitarian organizations trying to help the IDPs and host communities. United Nations agencies have not been granted access to deliver aid to more than 40,000 displaced civilians in areas of Kachin State beyond government control. Access issues are also becoming more problematic in government-controlled areas, leaving IDPs heavily reliant on national humanitarian bodies.

A similar pattern is occurring in Shan State, where some areas remain inaccessible for both international and national aid organizations and more than 20,000 IDPs are in need of assistance.¹³ In March 2017, an upsurge in fighting in the Kokang Self-Administered Zone of Northern Shan State prompted an estimated 10,000 to 20,000 people to flee across the adjacent Chinese border.¹⁴

Too often, children in Myanmar have become directly caught up in the country's scattered conflicts, exposing them to violence and exploitation at the hands of a range of state and non-state actors. Instead of being in school, some children have been forced to serve as soldiers.

As a result of these and other practices – all of which are violations of children's fundamental rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Myanmar has ratified – the Tatmadaw and seven other groups are listed by the United Nations as persistent perpetrators of the use and recruitment of children.¹⁵ A task force (co-chaired by UNICEF) has been documenting, verifying and reporting grave violations against children by all parties to the conflict since 2007.¹⁶ The violations include use and recruitment, sexual violence, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction and denial of humanitarian access.

“Myanmar faces a real challenge in ensuring that children everywhere – and not just in urban areas – gain from the country's rapid development.”

Justin Forsyth, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director

Some progress has been made. Since the signing of a Joint Action Plan in 2012 between the United Nations and the government of Myanmar, more than 800 children have been released from the national army ranks, while additional efforts by UNICEF and partners have yielded positive results in engaging other parties to the conflict in the call to end and prevent child recruitment.

Despite the government's ongoing efforts to bring about national reconciliation, children continue to suffer the consequences of armed conflict – both direct and indirect.

Nine of Myanmar's 14 states and regions are contaminated with landmines and explosive remnants of war both from ongoing and past conflicts.¹⁷ As a result, the country has some of the highest mine accident rates in the world. According to Myanmar's Mine Risk Working Group, over the past two years, there has been a new victim of landmines on average every three days; one out of every three victims is a child.

The persistence of conflict in Myanmar carries an additional long-term risk. Children living in areas affected by violence are less likely to feel the effects of the rapid economic growth Myanmar has been experiencing in recent years. Already classified as a lower-middle-income economy by the World Bank since 2015, Myanmar is on course to becoming a middle-income economy by 2030, with per capita GDP of US\$2,000 –US\$3,000.¹⁸

“Myanmar faces a real challenge in ensuring that children everywhere – and not just in urban areas – gain from the country's rapid development,” says UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth. “There is a risk that many children and their families are excluded. This is especially the case for poorer children living in remote areas or trapped in situations of tension and conflict.”

SUPPORTING A REFORM PROCESS THAT WORKS FOR ALL CHILDREN

The inauguration of a new administration and parliament in 2016 provided significant opportunities to accelerate and reinforce commitments to children in Myanmar, and to capitalize on social sector reforms initiated under the previous government.

Critical to these efforts were data arising from new sources of information – most notably the 2014 census and the 2016 Demographic and Health Survey – which have generated a fresh understanding of the challenges that an estimated 17.5 million children living in Myanmar face, and the opportunities within their reach.^{19, 20}

All of this helped the Government and children's advocates formulate what they termed a 'New Vision: New results for children in Myanmar' during a high-level conference in October 2016.

The new administration used its first budget submission to gradually implement its new commitments to children, through increasing financial allocations towards its Social Protection strategy.

While still a work in progress, the national reform process led by the Government has already had a beneficial impact on children's needs and rights.

In [education](#), a comprehensive, evidence-based National Education Strategic Plan 2016–2021 was produced with assistance from UNICEF and other development partners – the first time Myanmar has had a joint policy framework to guide its investments in education. Additionally, a National Curriculum Framework for Basic Education has been developed. As a result, the new education system (Kindergarten to Grade 12) has started to be implemented, bringing the cycle length into alignment with many counterparts from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Efforts were also made in language policy development with initiatives such as Myanmar's first-ever International Conference on National Language Policy and Planning; and the drafting of state-level language policies in Mon, Kachin and Kayin through inclusive, participatory approaches.

In [child protection](#), a new child law was finalized by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement with UNICEF support. The draft law is expected to be submitted to parliament for approval in mid-2017. A national platform on adolescents was established, and the first adolescent conference held, feeding into the development of the Government's youth policy.

In [health and nutrition](#), as a result of continued advocacy, the Ministry of Health and Sports allocated nearly US\$3 million for procurement of traditional vaccines for the first time in Myanmar's history. With UNICEF's technical support, the country leveraged nearly US\$52 million for its immunization programme for the period 2017–2019.

The Basic Essential Package of Health Services was drafted with support from UNICEF and partners, as a basis for the country's National Health Plan (2016–2021), which aims to ensure universal access to evidence-based health and nutrition interventions to reduce newborn and under-five mortality.

In [water, sanitation and hygiene \(WASH\)](#), Myanmar developed its first-ever Rural WASH Strategy and Investment Plan (2016–2030), which has been approved by the Ministry of Health and Sports, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation. Meanwhile, UNICEF provided assistance to develop National Standards for WASH in Schools and Thant Shin Star School Guidebook (Three Star Guidebook).

A new 2016–2020 National Strategic Plan for [HIV and AIDS](#) was also developed, with strong emphasis on achieving the elimination of mother-to-child transmission (of HIV) and improved Health Information Systems for better evidence-informed programming and corrective action.

In the area of [public finance for children](#), as a result of UNICEF's support, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement received an increased budget allocation for the first time, part of which will go towards cash transfers for mothers and young children, as well as recruiting, training and equipping newly hired child protection social workers.

In the area of [social protection](#), a flagship programme of the National Social Protection Policy – the Maternal and Child Cash Transfer – received donor funding for implementation in Chin State, starting in 2017. This is the first National Social Protection Policy programme to be implemented throughout a state via an integrated, government-led system.

Kachin State

School provides displaced families with sense of hope

Bhamo, Kachin State: 28 October 2013 was the day Kachin State's long-running conflict finally reached the village of Mong Dein Pa. It was also a day the head teacher at the local school, Mr La Nu, 54, would never forget.

"Suddenly the shooting was all around us. I gathered my wife and son and two nephews, and we ran into the forest," La Nu recalled. It took two terrifying days and nights before the family managed to reach safety in the town of Bhamo.

In Kachin, the forced – and often-repeated – displacement of civilians has been a familiar but painful consequence of the clashes between the Myanmar armed forces, or Tatmadaw, and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) such as the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). Like other border areas of Myanmar, Kachin State has suffered from ongoing, low-intensity conflict almost since the country gained its independence in the late 1940s.

Little noticed by the outside world, these ethnic conflicts have scarred the nation and undermined its hopes of progress, while continuing to frustrate efforts to bring about conciliation between the Government and numerous EAOs.

For La Nu, the consequences have been even more direct, and painful. Today, he and his family, together with most of the other inhabitants of Mong Dein Pa, live in a camp for internally displaced persons, built on land provided by a church in the town of Bhamo. The camp is about 50 kilometres away from the inhabitants' former homes.

His one consolation is that he is still able to teach approximately 100 students who accompanied him from Mong Dein Pa, and who now attend the camp school. "I feel satisfied to be working for the children," he says. "But life here in town is different from the village, and I worry about the effect it has on them."

Camps shelter 87,000 IDPs reliant on delivery of rations and services

Long-term displacement from their home communities presents challenges for adults, too. Jobs are hard to come by and most families are reliant on food rations distributed by aid agencies.

Although most people fled empty-handed, recovering their possessions (or checking on their abandoned properties) is almost impossible due to the proximity of the shifting front line between the opposing forces.

In Kachin State, there are currently about 87,000 displaced people living in 142 separate camps or sites.ⁱ Most camps are located in towns held by government forces. The rest are situated in more remote KIA-held areas close to the border with China.

An upsurge in fighting that began in late 2016 displaced approximately 7,000 people and left tension high across the region.ⁱⁱ Evidence of this can be seen along the meandering single-lane road that runs for some 190 kilometres between Bhamo and the state capital of Myitkyina to the north. Troops man checkpoints in 'ghost villages' that have been emptied of their inhabitants and are steadily being reclaimed by the surrounding jungle vegetation.

Some of the buildings carry warning signs about the presence of landmines. Figures from the Mine Risk Working Group show that Kachin State and its neighbour, Shan State, accounted for 85 per cent of landmine accidents in Myanmar in 2016.ⁱⁱⁱ

Humanitarian agencies face challenge of reaching remote areas

The fragile security situation has had a serious impact on the access needed by UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations, particularly in areas that are under KIA control.

"These ongoing conflicts – especially in Kachin and Shan States – are making it very difficult and sometimes impossible for us to provide children with a range of essential services," says Cesar Villar, Chief of UNICEF field office in Myitkyina.

"UNICEF is doing what it can to facilitate coordination between the Government and non-state actors to ensure that health, nutrition, education and other services are available to all children equally."

The long years of strife have impacted children in other ways, too. Three EAOs in Kachin and Shan States are listed by the United

- i. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, '2017 Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan: January–December 2017', OCHA, December 2016, <<http://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/2017-myanmar-humanitarian-response-plan-january-december-2017>>.
- ii. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Myanmar Humanitarian Bulletin', no. 4 2016, October 2016–January 2017, p. 4, <<http://bit.ly/2jF280i>>.
- iii. Landmine & Cluster Munition Monitor, 'Myanmar/Burma Country Report', December 2016, <www.themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Assessment_Landmine_Monitor_Report_2016_ENG.pdf>.
- iv. World Bank Group, 'Myanmar: Ending poverty and boosting shared prosperity in a time of transition', World Bank, Yangon, Myanmar, November 2014, <<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/871761468109465157/pdf/930500CSDOP150070Box385388B000U0090.pdf>>.
- v. Ministry of Health and Sports and ICF, 'Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey 2015-16', MoHS and ICF, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, and Rockville, Md., 2017, <<http://dhsprogram.com/publications/publication-FR324-DHS-Final-Reports.cfm/pdf/930500CSDOP150070Box385388B000U0090.pdf>>.



“The life-skills class helps me deal with issues with other young people”

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Nations Secretary-General for grave violations against children, including recruiting them as soldiers or using them as guides or to carry weapons.

The violence has put an additional brake on social and economic progress in the region. Thirty-six per cent of households in Kachin State and 43 per cent in Shan State live below the poverty line.^{iv} In the two states, almost 5 out of 10 children under age 5 are stunted.^v

With a presence in Kachin State since 2001, and programmes dating back to the 1960s, UNICEF is working in different ways to improve the situation of all children regardless of where they live. This includes helping in the reintegration of child survivors of rights violations, in both government and EAO-controlled areas.

Education has been a particular priority: in Phan Khar Kone camp, UNICEF’s intervention led the local education authorities to recognize the school and to allocate teachers and learning materials. UNICEF supported the construction of the school buildings in 2014.

Even so, La Nu still keeps photos of the large school where he used to work on his mobile phone. “No one goes there now,” he says, shaking his head sadly. “The grass is growing all around it.”

Taung Mi Mi, 14

Since fleeing conflict in their region of Kachin State two years ago, Taung Mi Mi and her brother live in Lisu camp for internally displaced persons near the town of Bhamo.

Their father is a day labourer who travels frequently; the family work a small plot of rented land outside the camp to grow vegetables and raise pigs to supplement their meagre income.

— 30 March 2017

Students participate in a class at the internally displaced people school at the Phan Khar Kone camp in Bhamo city, Kachin State.

— 29 March 2017



Rakhine State

Harsh realities for Muslims

Sin Tet Maw camp for internally displaced persons, Rakhine State: U Ohn Pwint likes nothing better than to remember his home state of Rakhine the way it used to be. Until one fateful day in October 2012, Mr Pwint, a fisherman, lived happily with his wife and five children in the township of Kyauk Phyu, about 100 kilometres south of the state capital, Sittwe.

“We lived in the town centre, and we had lots of friends from all the different communities,” says Mr Pwint, smiling at the recollection. The family felt so settled that he bought a piece of land on which he planned to build a new house.

Then the troubles started, and nearly five years on, he still can’t explain why. “There was a problem between our ethnic Kamman group and the Rakhine,” he says. “So we fled here by boat, bringing no more than the clothes we were wearing. It was terrifying.”

Today, in central Rakhine, Mr Pwint is one of an estimated 120,000 Muslims living in displacement camps and barred from returning to their home communities.ⁱ Their plight has aroused strong international concern.

The situation is worse still in the northern part of the state, where tensions remain high following a series of attacks on border guard police outposts this past October, which triggered a four-month security operation by the Tatmadaw. As a result, tens of thousands of Rohingya Muslims fled to neighbouring Bangladeshⁱⁱ and an estimated 20,000 others are internally displaced.ⁱⁱⁱ

Sin Tet Maw camp – where Mr Pwint and his family currently live – together with the Muslim host community that is adjacent to it, has a population of approximately 6,500. With its simple wooden and tin-roofed houses, relatively open spaces, and long lines of sturdy latrines, the camp offers better conditions than many others in the region.

But for the camp’s management committee, challenges abound.

Securing an adequate water supply is one of those challenges: water for drinking and washing is piped into the camp from the neighbouring host community. But quantities are limited: in the dry season (from March to June), the daily allocation per household can be as little as 15 litres.

“If the rains are late it will be a problem,” says Tun Min Kyaw, who is in charge of the camp’s water management service. He gestures towards a dried-up rainwater collection pond on the camp perimeter which – in the dry season – contains just a few inches of dark-coloured water. He says most people supplement their household supplies from small wells that they dig for their own use.

Restrictions on movement compounded by limited basic services

If conditions at Sin Tet Maw are difficult, they are a lot worse further up the coast at Baudapha 2, one of 14 camps clustered around Sittwe. The camp, home to more than 6,900 people, consists of a scattering of low wooden huts set on dusty

mudflats bordering the Bay of Bengal. Security police prevent the inhabitants from going outside the camp perimeter fence.

Among the young people living in Baudapha 2, the sense of frustration is evident. In a child-friendly space supported by UNICEF, Save the Children and other partners, teenage boys and girls alike say that for one thing, more vocational training is needed.

“Life here is very tough,” said one woman, who used to live in downtown Sittwe. She says the lack of adequate health facilities is especially worrying.

In the camp nutrition centre, a wooden structure with an earthen floor, we meet Bibi Jama, a mother of four, and her one-year-old son, Zuru Katu, who is suffering from a high fever and malnutrition. Staff at the centre say such cases are common, even more so during the rainy season.

Listening to Ms Jama’s conversation in the clinic is UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Justin Forsyth, on a recent visit to Myanmar.

“Families here are facing great hardship,” says Mr Forsyth. “There are very high levels of malnutrition. The drains, sewage and water are very poor quality. There are some services but families can’t really get to the good hospitals and schools that are outside this camp. They’re not allowed to move freely.”

“We are doing our best as UNICEF, along with Save the Children and many other organizations. But we need to solve some of the root causes of this problem.”

Rakhine State is one of the poorest and most isolated parts of Myanmar, and its people are a long-marginalized minority. Inadequate investment has been made in its basic infrastructure (such as health facilities and schools) and in developing human resources such as teachers, health workers and social workers. Up to 78 per cent of its population live below the poverty line,^{iv} while indicators in child health, nutrition, education and water and sanitation are significantly lower than in other parts of the country, according to data gathered prior to the 2012 tensions.^v

Every second child aged 0–59 months in the State is stunted – an indication of long-term malnutrition – while almost 30 per cent of children are not enrolled in primary school, and 42 per cent of households have no access to safe drinking water. In addition, the region is prone to cyclones, floods and earthquakes.^{vi}

Implementing Commission proposals “will benefit children from all communities”

The Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by former United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, has highlighted many of those issues. The Commission was established in September 2016 and tasked with identifying “the factors that have resulted in violence, displacement and underdevelopment” in Rakhine State, and developing recommendations.

The Commission’s interim report, released in March 2017,^{vii} said that the economic environment was failing to provide adequate jobs, and that the population – especially Muslims – had insufficient access to basic health services and higher education.

Some of the Commission’s key recommendations include: a comprehensive plan for vocational and technical training in Rakhine State; the immediate expansion of primary education in the north of the state; and a call on the Rakhine State government to ensure that all communities had equal access to education and health treatment “regardless of religion, ethnicity, race, gender or citizenship status.”

The Commission also recommended a comprehensive, door-to-door, birth registration campaign that would reach and register all children in the state. It pointed out that birth registration of Muslim babies came to an almost complete stop after the violence in 2012, with the result that many Muslim children – and some Rakhine children – possessed no birth certificates.

“The Government has broadly welcomed the Commission’s findings, which is a very positive step,” said Justin Forsyth. “UNICEF stands ready to work with the authorities to implement vital measures that will benefit children from all communities in Rakhine State.”

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CALL TO ACTION

To confront the challenges facing children in Myanmar and to provide the support that children need to contribute to a better, more peaceful and prosperous future for their country, UNICEF calls for:

- **Renewed efforts to achieve peace and social cohesion in Myanmar** so that children can be provided with uninterrupted access to quality basic services and opportunities in life.
- **Intensified efforts to protect children from violence and abuse.** The protection of children affected by armed conflict is a legal and moral obligation for governments and ethnic armed organizations alike.
- **Strengthened investments in basic services** that benefit the health, education and futures of all children

In conflict-affected areas such as Kachin State, Shan State and the South-East

- **All parties to immediately allow humanitarian assistance to reach children affected by ongoing conflicts and violence,** to facilitate the delivery of aid encompassing health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education and child protection.
- **All parties to the conflict (national army and ethnic armed organizations) to end and prevent grave violations against children.** Professional armies do not use or target children. Armed forces and groups should include international law in their military training, and put accountability and disciplinary measures in place to ensure it is followed.
- **Government of Myanmar to continue its commitment to end recruitment and use of children by armed forces** by adopting the new Child Law and ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- **Government of Myanmar to support the signature of action plans** between the United Nations Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting and seven non-state armed groups in Myanmar which are listed by the United Nations Secretary-General as persistent perpetrators of child recruitment and use.
- **All parties to the conflicts to immediately stop laying new mines and start mine clearance wherever it is possible.** Long-term support to be provided for child survivors of landmines and their families, including health care, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, education and livelihoods.
- **All parties to provide quality basic services for children** in the areas that they control, before, during and after conflict.

In Rakhine State

- **Government of Myanmar, having welcomed the interim recommendations of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, to implement them** including through investment in education and health care, and the roll-out of a comprehensive birth registration campaign.
- **Government of Myanmar to take urgent measures to protect children from all violence,** and to support prompt, independent investigations into possible grave violations against children.
- **Government of Myanmar to ensure that the humanitarian needs of children in IDP camps in Rakhine are met,** and to find durable solutions for displaced people.
- **Government of Myanmar to revoke the movement restrictions imposed on ethnic and religious groups in Rakhine State** to allow all to earn a livelihood, and access health care and education.
- **Government of Myanmar to address the long-term deprivations faced by children in Rakhine State** through adequate development plans to improve quality and coverage of basic social services for all children in Rakhine.

CONCLUSION

The convening of the 2nd Panglong Peace Conference in late May 2017 is an opportunity to strengthen the protection of children from conflict.

Advancing the nation's peacebuilding efforts, and consolidating a reform process that is well advanced, are both essential to sustaining the hopes of a youthful nation.

There is still much work to be done. But a burgeoning economy and improving infrastructure are providing a foundation on which to build.

Investing some of the financial dividends from economic growth in ways that will benefit children and youth can help steer the country towards a more prosperous and stable future.

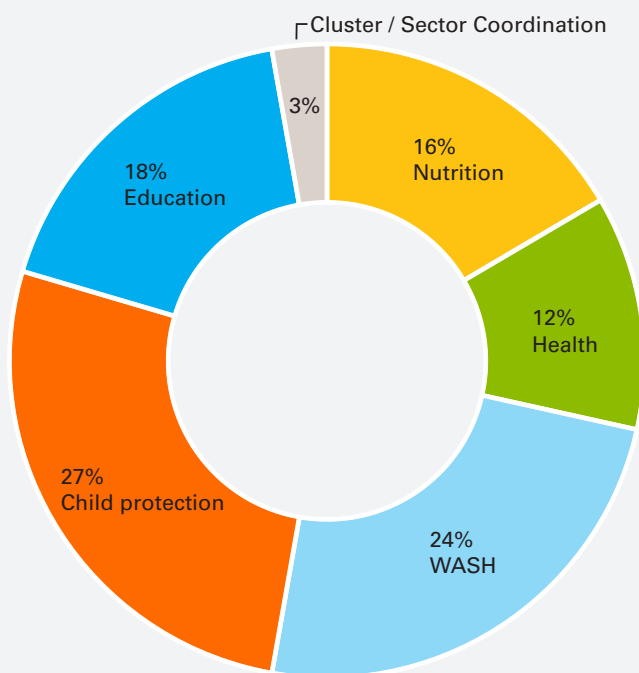
Children playing in
Lauk Lung village
in North East
Myanmar during a
health awareness
event organized by
UNICEF.

— 18 April 2017



UNICEF MYANMAR FUNDING NEEDS IN 2017

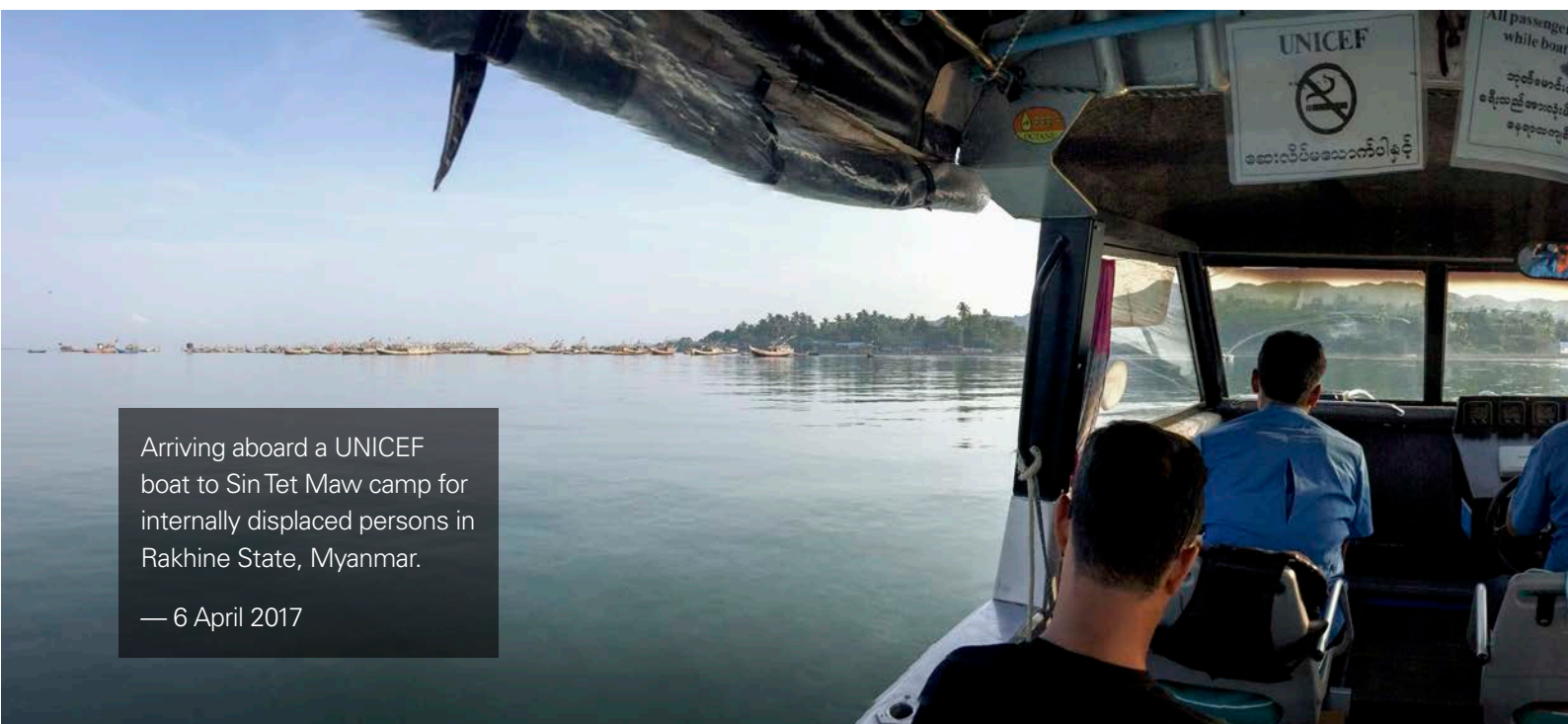
US\$25,105,000



Nutrition	US\$ 4,150,000
Health	US\$ 3,000,000
Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH)	US\$ 6,100,000
Child protection	US\$ 6,725,000
Education	US\$ 4,430,000
Cluster/sector coordination	US\$ 700,000

Arriving aboard a UNICEF boat to Sin Tet Maw camp for internally displaced persons in Rakhine State, Myanmar.

— 6 April 2017



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Lives on Hold

Making sure no child is left behind in Myanmar

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Child Alert is a briefing series that presents the core challenges for children in a given crisis location at a given time. This issue examines the impact of the reforms, economic growth and national reconciliation process in Myanmar, and the investments being made in children's health, education and protection. It also shows how children in more remote, conflict-affected parts of the country are yet to see the benefits.

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