Regional Brief

Delivering Change for Children
Working for a better future for all children and communities

Challenges in Shan State

Shan State in the east of Myanmar is home to around 5.8 million people, including more than 2 million children. Bordered by China, Laos and Thailand as well as other parts of Myanmar, the state has been affected by different armed conflicts for decades and also suffers as a centre of illegal drug production. Chronic underdevelopment and conflict have resulted in significant deprivation among the population and high out-migration to neighbouring countries. One in 10 children born does not live to age five. Nearly one in five children has not received vaccinations. School attendance is among the lowest in Myanmar, with almost a quarter of school-age children never having attended a school. Child employment rates are the highest in Myanmar and Shan State has the highest rate of child marriage (18 percent).

How we help

Residents in the area suffer multiple hardships as a result of the state’s longstanding cocktail of conflict, drugs and underdevelopment. UNICEF works with the Government and our partners, including civil society organisations, non-government organisations and Ethnic Health Organisations, on humanitarian support for people affected by conflict, including the displaced – and to build systems that can deliver long-term, sustainable results in health, education, water and sanitation, and child protection for children and their families.

Boosting Health and Nutrition

Raising child and maternal health. Together with partners UNICEF supports health care capacity building and delivery of health services in conflict-affected areas. We provide technical support to the Government to expand Infant and Young Child Feeding (IYCF) programmes, Management of Acute Malnutrition, and Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV, as well as supporting child vaccinations and child death surveillance. A pilot project is improving waste management in health care facilities. Working with the Department of Public Health, we support improved nutrition/micro-nutrient supplementation for mothers and children. In addition, UNICEF provides support for adolescents living with HIV, and is assisting the implementation of an open medical records system that is improving care for people living with HIV as well as data collection.

Improving Water and Sanitation

Safe water and improved facilities save lives. In northern Shan State, together with partners we provide
humanitarian support for safe water, improved sanitation, and hygiene promotion in camps for the internally displaced. Our technical support assists the Department of Rural Development in water testing and developing improved facilities in local villages. In the South of the State, UNICEF is supporting the Government to expand community-led water and sanitation for villages, schools and health centres in five townships, and to achieve more than 600 villages becoming open-defecation free within two years.

Raising Education
All children deserve a chance to learn. UNICEF supports education for children affected by conflict and displacement with essential learning packages. Our technical support assists the Government to strengthen the education system, including by expanding numbers of child-friendly schools. We also support nonformal learning opportunities giving adolescents a second chance at education, and 21st century skills-building for older children.

Increasing Child Protection
Keeping children safe from harm. Armed conflict and chronic insecurity are a constant threat to many children’s safety in Shan State. UNICEF supports a range of local partners to work in communities raising awareness of child protection and supports the Government to expand the social work case management system for children in need, including those in conflict with the law. Our support for mine risk awareness, including through social media fora, is helping keep children safer in an area of high levels of casualties from unexploded ordnance. UNICEF continues to co-lead the UN Country Task Force on the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on the six Grave Violations against Children under UN Security Council Resolution 1612 on Children in Armed Conflict. Together with the Government and partners, UNICEF also supports reintegration into society of former child soldiers. UNICEF also supports the Shan State Government and Department of Social Welfare to convene the Mine Risk Working Group coordination meetings together with different stakeholders in quarterly basis.

COVID-19 Response
Since the first case of COVID-19 was confirmed in Myanmar on 23 March 2020, the number of cases has risen daily. Given the trend in other countries, there is a high risk that the number of cases will soar and community transmission seems unavoidable. With limited health facilities and personnel, in particular in rural and/or conflict-affected townships in Shan State, there is limited capacity to deal with a major disease outbreak. Overcrowding, movement restrictions and blocks on humanitarian aid leave IDPs, many of whom have underlying medical conditions, especially vulnerable to a virus outbreak. The existing health, social and economic vulnerabilities of children and families living in conflict-affected areas will be further compounded by exposure to the pandemic.

UNICEF is working with Ministry of Health and Sport, Department of Rural Development, Department of Social Welfare and other Government and NGO counterparts with a focus on Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE), as well as provision of essential life-saving services and supplies to fill critical gaps in delivery. This includes local procurement and distribution of Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials and WASH supplies, as well as technical assistance to local authorities and frontline staff.

Our team
Due to the large size and complexity of the state which includes government controlled as well as non-government control territory, UNICEF maintains two offices that work to provide emergency support as well as long-term systems building for improved outcomes in health, education, water and sanitation and child protection. Our office in Taunggyi, the state capital, serves southern and eastern parts of the state. The office in Lashio serves the heavily conflict-affected northern part of the state. We also have staff based in Kentung in eastern Shan.

Results for children in 2019

With the coordination of the State Government and other local and international partners, UNICEF organised and developed township-level Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan for each township in northern Shan State.

In southern Shan State, adolescents with our support conducted drug-awareness talks in schools, targeting more than 10,000 children in middle and high schools.

A new open defecation-free campaign approach was piloted in southern Shan State in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Sports. Over 15,000 people affected by emergencies received essential hygiene and sanitation items, with nearly 10,000 people accessing safe toilets.

Over 1,000 pregnant and lactating women received micro-nutrient supplementation, with over 18,000 women and children in emergency situations provided with access to basic health care services.

In partnership with the State Planning Department, UNICEF brought over 100 Government officers to prepare a State-wide Local Social Plan with 7 key projects to support vulnerable populations.

A birth registration campaign was conducted at rural health centres and sub-centres of all 21 townships in southern Shan State. Almost 86,000 children under the age of 10 received Birth Registration Certificates.