Delivering Change for Children

Boosting health, water and sanitation, education and child protection

Challenges in the Southeast

Myanmar’s Southeast is bordered on the west, in part, by its coastline along the Gulf of Mottama and the Andaman Sea. To the east, mountainous terrain winds along the border with Thailand. The area is home to around 11.5 million people, including more than 2 million children, of different ethnic groups and cultures, and encompasses Kayin, Kayah and Mon states, Tanintharyi Region, and parts of eastern Bago Region and eastern and southern Shan State.

Parts of the Southeast have been subject to different armed conflicts for decades. While ceasefires are in place, many areas are still heavily militarized, and landmines pose a constant danger to civilians. Chronic underdevelopment and legacies of conflict mean that parts of the region rank among the lowest in Myanmar on aspects of child deprivation, including child wasting, child anaemia, and children (6-10 years) out of school. In addition, many children are living in poverty. There is large-scale migration to neighbouring Thailand, including people seeking employment, refugees returning from Thailand and stateless persons seeking to cross the Myanmar-Thailand border. ‘Children on the move’ in the South-East face protection risks. In the much smaller Kayah State to the south, home to around 290,000 people, rates of child stunting and children underweight are among the highest in Myanmar and as many as 50 percent of children under five do not have access to safe drinking water.

How we help

UNICEF works with the Government and partners, including civil society organizations and non-government actors to boost outcomes for all children in all communities on health, water and sanitation, education, and child protection.

Boosting Health and Nutrition

Raising child and maternal health. Together with partners and the Government, UNICEF is supporting expansion of the Myanmar Newborn Care Programme in Kayin State, including building the capacity of basic health staff to help caregivers with infant and young child feeding, and managing acute malnutrition. In July 2019, around 300,000 children under five were reached with two rounds of polio vaccination after an outbreak of vaccine-derived polio virus in Hpapun township, Kayin State.

Improving Water and Sanitation

Villages, schools and health centres see better facilities. Community-led water and sanitation projects are bringing water on tap to homes in rural villages, and improved facilities to schools and health centres. Children received messages on the importance of handwashing through the 2018 Global Handwashing campaign in Hpa-
An Township in 2018, and 64 villages in Kyar Inn Seik Kyi Township in Kayin State established Open Defecation Free communities. UNICEF also provides WASH support to communities in emergencies such as floods.

Raising Education Outcomes
Supporting a strengthened education system. Many children are losing out on education or dropping out of school. UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education in the provision of local curricula and bilingual textbooks for young ethnic children to promote a strong start to their education and development. To encourage older children to stay in school, UNICEF with partners are supporting school clubs that make learning more enjoyable. UNICEF works with the Government and partners to support non-formal education opportunities for teenagers who have dropped out of formal education. We support the Government to implement the key national policy tools for a strengthened education system - the National Education Strategic Plan and the National Early Childhood Care and Development Policy.

Strengthening Child Protection
Keeping children safe from harm. Our programme supports the Government to expand the social work case management system to handle cases where children suffer violence, harm, abuse or neglect, are in conflict with the law or are victims of trafficking. Parts of the Southeast are heavily mined, and children are among the main victims. UNICEF and partners are providing mine education awareness training for teachers and children. A mobile phone app is also spreading safety messages to communities. Victims are supported with cash and other supports. UNICEF also 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.

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 Kayin 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
UNICEF’s team in the Southeast is based in Hpa-An, the capital of Kayin State. Staff work across a large territory with complex challenges including limited infrastructure and different territories coming under separate administrations as nationwide peace efforts continue. UNICEF works together with the Government and all its partners to deliver results for all children in all communities, for a better future for everyone.

Results for children in 2019

Provided in-service training to primary head teachers and teachers in 3 townships in Kayin State, and support to student participation in 58 schools in Mon State. UNICEF also supported children in Myaing Gyi Ngu IDP camp to access education, with 77 children accessing primary and 66 children accessing pre-primary education.

Following an outbreak of vaccine-derived polio in Kayin State, with UNICEF’s support around 300,000 children under the age of five in Kayin State, Mon State and Bago Region were reached with two rounds of polio vaccination.

Cold chain refrigerators were installed across Kayin and Mon States and Tanintharyi Region.

Supportive supervision on the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission of HIV AIDS was carried out in 9 health facilities, 4 rural health centres and 4 sub-centres in Thaundaggyi township.

UNICEF continued to support the Government to maintain WASH in Schools in Kayin State, including through providing Training of Trainers. Based on the work done in 2019, 72 schools will receive a package of WASH support, including hygiene education and handwashing facilities, in 2020.

UNICEF continued to support the development of the child protection case management system, including providing technical support to 25 case managers and 15 post-primary teachers, as well as developing referral pathways.

UNICEF supported Mine Risk Education (MRE), including providing technical support to the Kayin State Mine Risk Working Group.