

SHORT INTER-AGENCY GUIDANCE NOTE: BOARDING SCHOOLS IN KACHIN

This guidance note intends to bring clarity on boarding school arrangements in the context of forced displacement in conflict-affected areas of Kachin. The guidance note is substantiated by two inter-agency child protection assessments conducted by UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDP and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in La Na Zup Ja Boarding School and Ah Len Bum Boarding School in Laiza during cross-line missions in January 2014.

1. Boarding Schools in Myanmar

In Myanmar, many communities in remote areas have limited access to schooling, especially beyond primary-level education. It is common practice to send children to bigger villages and towns where they either stay with relatives or in boarding houses to attend the local school. It is not only a question of accessibility, but schools in larger villages and towns are commonly perceived as offering better quality education, as experienced teachers are often reluctant to be posted in remote areas.

Boarding schools, where the housing facilities are located within the confines of the school, are an exception in the context of Myanmar. These are either limited to exclusive private schools in urban areas or those in conflict-affected areas. This Guidance Note focuses on the latter.

2. Boarding Schools in the context of the conflict in Kachin State

In Kachin State, boarding schools have expanded as a community coping mechanism, especially in Non-Governmental Controlled Areas (NGCAs) to ensure continuity of education in an unstable environment of frequent new displacement.

We can distinguish three major types of boarding schools in Kachin:

- ✓ Boarding Schools which predate the conflict;
- ✓ Boarding Schools which predate the conflict and have taken in significant additional numbers of IDP students (situation in La Na Zup Ja);
- ✓ Boarding Schools which have been created in response to forced displacement, with all students being IDPs (situation in Ah Len Bum, Laiza Town).

3. Boarding Schools from a Child Protection Perspective

The majority of communities, parents, and children interviewed during the assessments feel that boarding schools are a valuable and positive coping mechanism which allows continuous education. Notably, boarding schools are perceived by some as a protective environment, sheltering students from further displacement, from recruitment into armed groups/forces, and from trafficking and child labour.

In accordance with the *United Nations Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children*, the Child Protection sector recognizes that the family is the natural and most conducive environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children. However, given the specific challenges and difficulties families in conflict-affected areas are experiencing, Boarding Schools can provide an important means of ensuring that children can continue with their education.

However, it is important that **key ‘checking points’** are considered for each situation to ensure humanitarian interventions are supporting a safe environment for children, and to prevent neglect, abuse and exploitation of children.

CHECK	Safety	<p>Caregivers/Students ratio: Is there an appropriate number of caregivers present to ensure children’s safety including at night?</p> <p>Is there a gender-balance among care-givers, or an appropriate ratio of male to female care-givers, which reflects the proportion of male to female students?</p> <p>Sleeping arrangements: Are boys and girls sleeping separately? Are children separated into different age groups? Are children’s sleeping arrangements separated from those of caregivers/other adults?</p>
CHECK	Psycho-social needs	<p>Grouping a large number of children who have been forcibly displaced and may have witnessed violence requires psycho-social support systems to be in place, including through basic recreational activities to recreate a routine and help children to build their resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do students perceive teachers and caregivers as focal points for emotional support? - Are there sports/ cultural activities outside school hours? Life skills opportunities? - Are there emotional support services in place, including such designed to specifically meet the needs of child survivors of sexual abuse or violence?
CHECK	Family Separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there unaccompanied and separated children (UASC) among students who have completely lost contact with their families and do not know where they are? - Are there mechanisms or services in place to restore family links for those who are prevented to see their family due to economic reasons (visit unaffordable) or due to the effects of conflict (mines, family members living on the ‘other side’ NCGAS vs. GCAS)?
CHECK	Location and rationale for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can IDP families freely choose to send their children to the boarding school or to the local school?

	establishing the boarding school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a clear separation between civilian and military elements in the town or village where the boarding school is located? - Is the school located in close proximity to any groups (i.e. armed groups quarters) which may possibly target children for violence, abuse, or exploitative reasons? - Are students encouraged to join 'civil-defence training'? - Are schools are moved on a regular basis (risks of using schools as protective shields?)
CHECK	Prevention of exploitation (including child labour and trafficking)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are children only taking care of a limited number of chores i.e. running of the school (cleaning, gardening, and assisting in the kitchen? - What is the community perception of the boarding school? Is it deemed to be a safer place than IDP camps? - If children are accessing sources of livelihoods outside boarding school premises, are these sources not in contradiction with the worst forms of child labour for both girls and boys?

4. Key Child Protection/Education interventions

In line with the premise of impartial assistance, the child protection sub-sector discourages specific interventions at boarding schools without simultaneously assisting local schools and/or communities. Disproportionate support to boarding schools could create a pull factor and result in incentives to send children to boarding school even in a context where local schools are or are becoming accessible.

Child Protection	Education
Train teachers and care-takers on basic emotional care and case management to meet protection needs, including on referral to specialised services for children survivors of violence, including sexual violence.	<p>Provide teacher training and school management capacity development programmes; provision of education supplies (incl. furniture) and teaching and learning and recreation materials; support to additional tuition/catch up classes in both boarding and surrounding schools.</p> <p>Promote a clear separation between the boarding house and the school by not conducting education activities in the boarding houses, i.e. not distributing</p>

	education supplies and teaching and learning materials in the boarding houses (only the school) not conducting additional tuition/catch up classes in the boarding houses (only the school) etc.
Screening of students to identify separated children in need of tracing assistance and ensure family tracing and reunification and restoring family links activities and related documentation through CPIMS	Facilitate messaging with family living in IDP camps or in un-accessible areas (possibly through MRCS).
Link the Child Protection Groups within the village or IDP camp with the boarding school, including establishing a child-friendly complaint mechanism in all schools.	Develop a longer term strategy aiming to improve the education services in the areas where family members reside to discourage family separation.
Include IDP children living in boarding school into existing adolescent programming including life-skills training	Provision of other sectoral interventions using education as a base – MRE, health, and hygiene promotion, family linking and messaging etc in both boarding and surrounding schools
Improve supervision outside school hours	
<p>Jointly: Develop and maintain a mapping of boarding schools in GCAs and NCGAs orienting other sectors' interventions for addressing critical and humanitarian gaps.</p> <p>Other sectors' interventions could include:</p> <p>WASH – Ensure adequate number and sex-separated latrines, distribution of hygiene kits and hygiene promotion and education activities;</p> <p>FOOD and NUTRITION - Include boarding school within nutrition survey/surveillance to prevent nutritional deficiency (i.e. Beriberi disease); Ensure similar levels of support are provided to IDP camps, local schools (where school lunch is provided) and boarding schools;</p> <p>SHELTER - Address sub-standard housing facilities;</p> <p>NFI – Address shortages in clothing and bedding for children in boarding school and IDP camps, particularly during the winter months.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <u>Other sectors willing to intervene in boarding school should coordinate with:</u> ✓ Child Protection Working Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Kyaw Thu Lwin, UNICEF CP Officer in Myitkyina, ktlwin@unicef.org (09-5093337 or 09-8610102) ✓ Education Sector: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Thein Than Tun, UNICEF Education Officer in Myitkyina, ttun@unicef.org (098 610 100) ○ Zaw Wann, Save the Children Education Field Manager in Bhamo, Zaw.Wann@savethechildren.org (095343649) 	