



MYANMAR
PROTECTION CLUSTER STRATEGY
2024 - 2025

I. INTRODUCTION

Myanmar continues to struggle with longstanding human rights concerns and a decades-long humanitarian crisis, which has become more complex by the military takeover of February 2021. This strategy forms the basis of the Protection Cluster's coordinated response to the complex protection crisis in Myanmar. This strategy aims to provide strategic direction to partners in the Protection Cluster and the wider humanitarian community about the intended protection outcomes for the affected people by conflict and human rights violations and complements the strategies of the Protection Cluster's Areas of Responsibility (AoR) such as Mine Action (MA) Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Child Protection (CP) in Myanmar.

The work of the Protection Cluster is guided by international law, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the 2013 Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Statement on the Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action, the 2015 IASC Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action, the IASC Guidelines on Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in Humanitarian Action, 2019 , International Mine Action standards (IMAS) and the 2016 IASC Policy on Protection in Humanitarian Action, the objectives listed in the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) 2024, and the HCT Protection Strategy.

II. THE CONTEXT

Armed conflict, violence, insecurity, widespread fear, inter-communal tensions, institutionalized discrimination, absence of judicial remedial mechanisms, lack of respect of principles of the rule of law and natural hazards remain the key drivers of human rights violations and displacement in Myanmar. The military takeover in February 2021 and subsequent developments, including the escalation of violence since 27 October 2023 with armed clashes, artillery shelling, and indiscriminate attacks reported in about two-thirds of the country, have resulted in a deep human rights crisis and have contributed to the emergence of a major humanitarian crisis across Myanmar,, significantly increasing the protection risks and deepening vulnerability, including increased exposure to landmines and explosive ordnance. The deteriorating socio-economic and living conditions are exacerbating the already poor protection environment and are triggering negative coping practices and measures among the conflict and displacement affected population, including the increasing use of credit/borrowing cash, selling of assets, crime, human trafficking, substance abuse, child labour, and unsafe migration. According to UNHCR, as of 29 April 2024, an estimated 3,006,500 individuals were internally displaced, including over 289,000 individuals displaced before 1 February 2021 and 2,717,500 after. The Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) 2024 has an estimated 18.6 million people, including 6 million children in need (12.2 million for the Protection Cluster), and an estimated 5.3 million people are prioritized for humanitarian responses (3 million for the Protection Cluster), including for lifesaving and emergency responses.

III. THE KEY PROTECTION RISKS¹

The following provides a summary analysis of key protection risks that the Protection Cluster and partners have identified and will focus on in 2024 and 2025. Protection actors acknowledge that this is not an exhaustive list of protection risks faced by affected populations. However, the risks below have been highlighted due to their frequent and overarching impacts on vulnerable and conflict-affected people. Each of these risks may have a disproportionate impact on women, children, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, and minority groups, heightening risks of violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Considering the current context, it is imperative to note that the Protection Cluster continues to monitor and analyze the protection situation to understand the emerging risks or assess the intensity of the risks to ensure tailored responses.

Risk to life, physical safety and security: Following the military takeover in February 2021, and the escalation of violence since 27 October 2023, armed clashes have intensified in several parts of the country, severely affecting civilians, including IDPs, who face significant risks of violation of their rights to life, physical safety and security. The Protection Incident Monitoring System (PIMS), protection monitoring, and analysis reports indicate an increased risk to physical safety and freedom of movement stemming from armed conflicts, including artillery shelling, airstrikes, targeted or indiscriminate attacks against civilians, violence, explosions, and widespread fear. While the main protection risks are specific to the people that the protection and humanitarian partners serve, members of the civil disobedience movement and those who are suspected of being associated with anti-takeover or opposition groups or supporters of the military takeover are also exposed to the protection risks and threats in the current context. The conflict has exposed women and children to grave violations, forced recruitment, killing, maiming, arbitrary arrests and detentions. In addition to the grave violations, women and children are at a heightened risk of other forms of sexual and physical abuse, violence, exploitation and neglect, including, inter alia, an increase in child marriage, human trafficking, forced recruitment into armed groups, psychosocial distress and child labour. Explosive ordnance is now affecting all 15 states and remains a major protection concern for men, women and children, limiting their freedom of movement and presenting a significant risk when engaging in livelihood activities. In 2023 alone, casualties surged by a staggering 270% compared to the previous year, underscoring the severity of the situation. Incidents involving landmines and other explosive ordnance are now reported across all states and regions of Myanmar, with a concerning encroachment into residential areas heightening the risks faced by civilians. The Rohingya population is disproportionately affected by an additional range of physical security risks because of their lack citizenship, documentation and limited freedom of movement. Further, increasingly complex and mixed-movement situations resulting from the current crisis have increased the risk and incidence of trafficking, exploitation and abuse among affected populations.

Forced displacement: By April 2024, an estimated 3,006,500 individuals were internally displaced, including over 289,000 individuals displaced before 1 February 2021 and 2,717,500 after. It is estimated that some 1,306,686 Myanmar people are currently refugees or asylum seekers in neighbouring countries. Among the IDPs, those who have been in the protracted displacement areas continue to live in camps, displacement sites, villages or religious facilities, while those newly displaced are living either in the forests, open areas, camp-like situations, or monasteries where living conditions are extremely challenging and harsh. In the South East, due to continued insecurity caused by the conflict, returned refugees have been fleeing for safety, sometimes leading to secondary displacement. Displacement not only exposes IDPs to difficult living conditions in collective sites or ad hoc hosting arrangements, it also compromises the safety and security of those who flee and places heavy burdens on host communities that negatively impact their already precarious capacity to meet their own basic needs amidst prevailing insecurity. Children, young women and people with disabilities face a heightened risk of being separated from their families, due to mobility challenges and abduction risks. In addition, displacement and mobility that increased throughout 2023 and first quarter of 2024 are likely to continue in peri-urban and urban areas.

¹ Protection risks emerging in the current context continue to be identified and analyzed as the situation evolves, with preliminary information relied upon during the time of drafting.

Human rights situation and systemic discrimination: Since February 2021, the human rights situation in Myanmar has dramatically deteriorated with the civilian population being daily exposed to a wide range of violations, thus exacerbating already dire protection needs. This is compounded by concerns stemming from the pre-existing discriminatory system which led to denial of citizenship rights, lack of civil documentation and statelessness. All this is further encompassed by the complete absence of independent judicial remedies and of the rule of law granting impunity for perpetrators. Disregard for International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) by the military and to a lesser extent by other groups leaves conflict-affected individuals exposed to widespread rights violations such as killings, arrests, torture, disappearances, use of human shields, trafficking, forced recruitment and labour, sexual abuse and violence, burning of villages, destruction, confiscation, and damage of civilian property, occupation of the property by military personnel, and denial of access to

Protection of Civilians

Protection monitoring underlines a continuous disrespect for principles of protection of civilians, IHRL, and IHL by the military and to a less extent other groups. Arbitrary and targeted attacks by air, land, and the sea against civilians and civilian objects have continued relentlessly killing, injuring, and destroying. School, hospitals and health facilities, and religious buildings have been attacked in flagrant disregard. Other rights violations include torture, sexual violence including conflict-related sexual violence, raids and arrests, violence and repression, and enforced disappearances. Children have also been subject to arbitrary detention, killing, maiming and use as human shields.

services fundamental to survival. Women, men, and children, elders, persons with disabilities are all continuously exposed to violations, especially in areas under martial law. Arbitrary arrest can occur at any time or point with detainees and prisoners living in squalid conditions without access to lawyers or family. Torture is reported to be systematic and widespread and deaths in custody of the military have soared to unimaginable levels. Fundamental freedoms, such as assembly or association, as well as expression, are severely curtailed hampering the ability of responders to address the multiple protection needs of people. Stateless Rohingya IDPs in protracted camps in Rakhine face an additional host of rights violations due to their lack of citizenship, systemic segregation, movement restrictions, forced recruitment to armed groups, and extortion or payment of bribes and unofficial fees. Lack of citizenship and access to civil documentation exacerbates creates additional obstacles to access to social protection programs and social services, especially education, housing, land and property documentation, and freedom to exercise any political rights, or recourse to justice.

Access to services in safety and dignity: Ongoing conflict, civil unrest, protracted displacement, and lack of prospects for solutions stretch families' coping mechanisms, reduce income, weaken family and community support structures, and cause psychosocial distress. Particularly for vulnerable people like women, persons with disabilities and those with specific needs access to basic social services is obstructed by the distance to service centres and health facilities. In addition, difficulties affording transportation or acquiring permits needed for transporting food and non-food items, and accessing farming and livelihood activities have increased. Lack of documentation and systemic segregation, including the practice of extortion and increasing requirements for written permission, make access to protection and essential services with safety and dignity further complicated and challenging. The ongoing armed conflict has exacerbated systemic, long-standing protection concerns such as GBV, child marriage, child labour, negative coping mechanisms among women and young girls, weak accountability mechanisms, and the lack of access to specialized protection services, including case management for children and survivors of GBV and basic and specialized MHPSS support. In addition, displaced women and girls face barriers in accessing basic social services and facilities due to long distances, unsafe routes (lack of protective means etc.), and discrimination, thereby making it more challenging for them to meet their basic needs. A general lack of awareness of the right to assistance and limited coverage of response services, complicated by deep-rooted social norms related to gender and inclusion make accessing services ever more challenging. People with disabilities face a particular lack of access to information and poor access to humanitarian services. Extortion by authorities and armed actors equally limits access to services and freedom of movement.

Access to documentation: Myanmar's legal framework around citizenship is complex and excludes certain categories of minorities. The Rohingyas mostly lack citizenship and access to civil registration and legal identity documentation. In consequence, they lack access to formal justice and face challenges claiming their basic rights, including housing, land and property rights. As a result, people are excluded from participating in governance. Displaced stateless people in protracted camps in Rakhine face additional rights violations such as systemic segregation, movement restrictions, forced recruitment to armed groups, and extortion. The lack of citizenship and access to civil documentation creates additional obstacles to access social protection programs and basic social services. People with disabilities also have a lack of formal recognition and legal status, which has put them particularly at risk during the current conscription process. The loss of land rights without the right to restitution or compensation hinders the ability of IDPs to engage in livelihood activities to be self-reliant, and to access durable solutions in the future, whether through return to their land holdings or use of compensation for lost land to locally integrate or resettle. Women's lack of land ownership documentation particularly impacts displaced female-headed households who want to reclaim their land upon return and further exacerbates their vulnerability.

Involuntary or Unsustainable Returns: Efforts to promote closure of protracted IDP camps continue, nominally in line with the National Strategy for Closure of IDP Camps and Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons ('Camp Closure Strategy') issued by the Government in November 2019. In reality, though, the process typically involves the construction of new sites at or adjacent to the camp with overall limited progress towards durable solutions that comply with relevant international standards, and in some cases relocating to nearby villages and towns. Despite the concerns on meeting the minimum international standards on finding durable solutions for IDPs, the implementation of the 'Camp Closure Strategy' featured fairly prominently on the agenda of the de facto authorities. These efforts have, however, been hampered by the ongoing intensified armed conflict, safety and security conditions, protracted and cyclical displacement, and human rights violations, which impede large-scale and sustainable solutions. The presence of Unexploded Ordnance and landmines, lack of access to civil documentation, lack of access to essential services continued proximity and deployment/proliferation of armed actors, forced labour, and spikes in forced recruitment continue to hinder the prospects for sustainable solutions. Additionally, housing, land and property (HLP) issues remain a serious concern. Many people have lost their property, land, and houses, most of which have been razed with no hope of recourse to justice and or compensation. This will pose significant challenges for durable solutions whenever the time is right.

Human Trafficking: While comprehensive quantitative data on trafficking is not available, reports, proxy indicators and case data indicate a potential increase in trafficking in persons in Myanmar. This includes a proportional increase (relative to overall figures of persons on the move) in the numbers of trafficked victims identified in the main countries of destination, particularly Thailand. Reports indicate a high incidence of exploitation and abuse amongst returned migrants from Thailand and China. Further reports describe increased internal trafficking, particularly of women and girls, for purposes of sexual exploitation including child marriage and forced labour, with a high prominence of such accounts in Yangon, Mandalay, Kachin and Shan. As the internal and cross-border movements continue to increase and become more complex and dynamic, human trafficking and related protection risks are likely to increase. Therefore, measures to counter and prevent trafficking, protect victims and support their reintegration remain critical areas of intervention.

Explosive Ordnance: Myanmar is historically heavily impacted by Explosive Ordnance, including landmines, as a result of conflicts between the MAF and different EAOs. The full extent of contamination in Myanmar is unknown as no systematic Non-Technical Survey has been permitted by the de facto authorities. Explosive Ordnance, including mines, Unexploded Ordnance, Abandoned Ordnance, Booby traps, and other devices as defined by the CCW and IEDs have been documented and continue to kill, maim and prevent access to essential services and threaten food security. The situation is alarming, with data from January to December 2023 depicting the highest recorded number of incidents affecting civilians in Myanmar's history. Explosive ordnance is now affecting all 15 states. Indiscriminate use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas (EWiPA) and the use of landmines across the country represent a serious threat to the lives and limbs of civilians. Victim assistance to survivors and persons with disabilities is limited. As consequences, they may experience lifelong impairments, psychological trauma, social exclusion, livelihood and educational challenges. Continued contamination impedes any prospect of solutions for displaced people.

Other protection risks and concerns: Additional protection risks or concerns include the denial of, or constraints to, accessing basic rights and freedoms (including freedom of expression and work); lost or destroyed documents (particularly those impacted by destructions of the homes and properties); loss of livelihoods; unaccompanied and separated children (UASC); loss of/denial of access to education and other basic services; denial of humanitarian assistance (including through denying humanitarian access to the affected people); privacy and personal data protection (search and seizure of information and communication devices in a targeted manner); discrimination; violence; continuing insecurity for those displaced; and heightened risks of GBV. Reduction in income and the protracted nature of displacement are both stressors leading to mental health and psychosocial distress, negative coping mechanisms (including drug use and survival sex), increased vulnerabilities of children, exposure of women and girls to violence, abuse and exploitation .

GROUPS IN CIRCUMSTANCES OF HEIGHTENED RISKS AND VULNERABILITY

Women and girls: In humanitarian contexts, unpaid care responsibilities of women and girls increase in the face of limited resources and reportedly worsened during the crisis. Studies also show that during crisis, the income generating roles in the household shifts wherein women take on the responsibility of providing for the family especially when the men or able-bodied members of the household leave to seek for better livelihood opportunities or becomes casualties of conflict. This, coupled with no to limited livelihood opportunities, forces women and girls into domestic servitude and harmful coping mechanisms, further exposing them to sexual abuse and exploitation. Women and girls are also subjected to forced and or early marriage in face of the economic difficulties and also considering marriage as a means of protection and as a survival mechanism. Overcrowding, lack of privacy, lack of proper shelter or housing, insufficient energy, and unsafe WASH facilities have resulted in increased insecurity, contributing to increased risk of GBV. Ongoing conflict, violence and widespread fear put women and girl's physical safety, dignity, and psychological well-being at risk in Myanmar. Current protection risks include trafficking, sexual exploitation and abuse, increased or shifting household responsibilities, loss of livelihood or economic opportunities, loss of employment opportunities in urban areas, precarious situation of shelter particularly for those who have been displaced recently, constraints on freedom of movement and limited access to essential services continue to increase their protection risks. Women and children face unique problems both as victims and survivors of Explosive Ordnance and hostilities. It worsens when their husbands and male family members die.

Women and children are also expected to bear the heaviest brunt of the escalating crisis with those most at-risk including single women, pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls, ethnic and religious minorities, older persons, people with disabilities, children and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. The LGBTIQ+ populations flagged serious concerns about their mental health and wellbeing before the coup, and these concerns are now heightened. Moreover, with continued arbitrary arrests and detainment of women and girls and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, serious protection concerns persist with continued reports of sexual harassment and of sexual violence perpetrated against activists and detainees. While the need to provide support to these population groups increases, the operational environment is becoming more and more challenging due to the ongoing conflict/insecurity in addition to the banking crisis and the access restrictions.

Children: The conflict has severely weakened the protective environment for children in Myanmar, making them further vulnerable to violence, sexual abuse and exploitation, and neglect. Pre-existing risks, such as children witnessing or experiencing violence in their home and in their community, and neglect have been exacerbated by the conflict, especially during the escalation of violence and displacement since 27 October 2023, which has severely undermined children's resilience and protective environment. Ongoing conflict and violations put children's physical safety and psychological well-being at risk. Current protection risks include the risk of Explosive Ordnance, child recruitment, child labour, sexual abuse and exploitation, increased burden of being family providers, child marriage, trafficking, and the militarization and attacks against educational services, mainly in non-government-controlled areas. The lack of parental and peer-to-peer contact and engagement can have a significant impact on their psychosocial well-being.

Adolescents and Youth: Myanmar census data shows that nearly one in five adolescents in Myanmar have migrated, either internally or externally. In some cases, this involves extreme protection risks, for example, teenage girls in Rakhine sent to marry in Malaysia, and extreme GBV risks while held en-route and elsewhere on the journey. Reports of young girls being trafficked for the promise of good livelihood opportunities in neighboring countries are also increasing.

Older Persons: Forcibly displaced older persons are at heightened risk of violence, including sexual and domestic abuse, exploitation by family members, discrimination, indiscriminate killing and exclusion from access to humanitarian assistance, livelihoods, health care, and other services due to most, to their inability to easily move.

Men and boys: In conflict situations men and boys are often targeted by violations such as killing, forced recruitment and detention. In Myanmar, there have been reports of men and boys being targeted, mostly on suspicion of having participated in the CDM, ethnic armed organizations and people's defense forces. Boys are also at risk of family separation, harmful coping mechanisms, child recruitment, child labour, being used as human shields, arbitrary arrests, detention, and other grave violations against children. Some are tortured and experience extreme physical and sexual violence during their imprisonment. In addition, the recent activation of the People's Military Service Law increases protection risks to men and boys as Myanmar's *de facto* authorities have imposed mandatory military service for all men aged 18-35, who must serve for up to two years and up to five years in a state of emergency.

Persons with Disabilities: Persons with disabilities face additional risks to life, lack of accessible infrastructure, and limitations in accessing protection or other essential services. It is particularly challenging in times of conflict where those with mobility limitations cannot quickly access safe places or leave an area under siege. Moreover, persons with disabilities have difficulties accessing social protection benefits in the conflict affected areas due to lack of information on availability of such services. These individuals are often dependent on care givers, medication and assistive devices, which are limited or not available for all based on their specific needs. Children with disabilities are at heightened risks of violence and exploitation including sexual violence. In addition, children living with caregivers that have a disability experience a heightened risk of child labour and other risks as they are acting as caregivers.

Indigenous People: Some indigenous people such as Mro, Khami and Dagnet are being moved down from their ancestral domains in Rakhine State into villages constructed by government on or adjacent to burned and bulldozed Rohingya villages. Due to lack of access for protection actors it is unclear as to whether they have any choice in the matter, whether they are free to return to their lands, and what is being done on the land they have moved from. There are also indications of some being forced to convert to Buddhism in some instances. Additionally, in Kachin and other ethnic-based states, the imposition of development and extractive activities in indigenous territories is posing a threat to self-determination and undermining self-reliance.

IV. KEY PROTECTION OUTCOMES AND PRIORITIES

In line with the Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP), the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Protection Strategy, and the core responsibility of the Protection Cluster, the goal of the Protection Strategy is to collectively prevent, mitigate, and respond to the protection risks of the most vulnerable groups affected by conflict, displacement, and disasters.

Vision
Crisis-affected people across Myanmar are protected and can fully exercise and enjoy their rights in accordance with international and national law.
Mission
Within the overall humanitarian response, the Myanmar Protection Cluster works to ensure that protection is central to humanitarian action through standalone programming and mainstreaming, including monitoring and assessment, analysis and advocacy.
The Protection Cluster will work towards the following three main objectives, developed for the 2024 HNRP

Objective 1: Protection assistance is provided to nearly 3 million people (including Child Protection, GBV and Mine Action), including mitigation of harm and risks and improved access to quality and inclusive protection services.	Objective 2: Respect for human rights, humanitarian principles, and IHL is promoted and supported, including through training and dialogue with duty bearers and responders to mitigate the effects of armed conflict on civilians.	Objective 3: Cluster coordination and information management are strengthened at all levels, including for all Protection AoRs.
To realize the above objectives, the Cluster has identified the following strategic priorities in line with the Cluster's six core functions.		
- Targeted specialized services for survivors of human rights violations - Protection monitoring and analysis - Capacity-building - Coordination - Advocacy - Protection mainstreaming - Localization - Community-Based Protection - Community Engagement for accountability to affected people		- Supporting service delivery - Informing strategic decision-making - Planning and strategy development - Monitoring and evaluation of the response - Preparedness and contingency planning - Collective advocacy

V. MYANMAR PROTECTION CLUSTER CORE FUNCTIONS IN 2024 - 2025

Supporting service delivery	Inform HCT strategic decision-making	Plan and implement Cluster strategies	Monitor and evaluate the response	Support collective advocacy	AAP and Protection Mainstreaming
Continue working through the cluster and Strategic Advisory Group members to ensure appropriate coordination	Set up appropriate mechanisms to collect/gather data on key indicators	Develop a multi-year Protection Cluster strategy	Monitor response progress monthly/quarterly (5W)	Develop a collective advocacy strategy and action plan with clear priorities, objectives, targets, actions and leads	Train protection partners on protection mainstreaming principles and AAP
Ensure appropriate participation and inclusion of national/local actors in the coordination structure in 2024-2025 by establishing co-ordination role in the sub	Consolidate and analyse quarterly Protection data and information analysis.	Contribute to the implementation of the HCT Protection Strategy	Monitor program and service quality (field visits, peer-2-peer visits, etc)	Develop, update and disseminate key collective messages/talking points to be used by cluster partners	Engage OCHA to ensure concrete protection mainstreaming requirements and community engagement in HRP and Pooled Fund projects – including through clearly identified

national protection cluster as well as by inviting a national CSO and national NGO to join the SAG membership.					resources
Update the 5Ws on a monthly basis, and share reports on a quarterly basis to ensure the protection partners' activities and response are reflected.	Produce Protection Analysis Updates (PAU) by identifying protections risks and providing recommendations	Ensure the Centrality of Protection in the HNRP and other strategic and operational planning processes	Identify priorities for training and capacity building for partners on sector standards	Contribute to HCT advocacy actions to address acute protection risks	Train/Sensitize cluster partners on protection mainstreaming principles and requirements prior to HRP and Pooled Fund projects submissions
Address duplication of action and take action on critical challenges and response delays or gaps.	Define severity mapping & People in Need (PiN)	Engage donors	Train protection cluster and other cluster partners on protection mainstreaming/integration	Brief ICCG, donors, HCR SM on regular basis on main advocacy messages	Engage interagency WG on AAP, Communication with Communities (CWC)
Update the sub-national mapping of service providers on a regular basis. Adopt and disseminate referral minimum standards.	Organize regional and national workshops for collective risks and needs analysis	Contribute to Country-based Pooled Funds (CBPF) and to the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF)	Sensitize and engage cluster partners on the Cluster Coordination Performance Monitoring (CCPM) and Organize CCPM workshop with partners to review achievements and discuss survey results	Draft advocacy notes on regular basis and organize advocacy sessions (e.g member-state briefings) together with GPC	Coordinate partners approaches on Complaints and Feedback Mechanisms (CFMs) in line with applicable standards and link partners to the Community Voices Platform
	Draft Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP)	Engage in the Protection of Civilians (PoC) and/or durable solution strategies (nexus)	Adopt CCPM report and action plan		Mainstream The centrality of protection and AAP

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Targeted specialized services for vulnerable individuals: Specialized services are required for persons of concern with critical lifesaving protection needs. Protection actors will continue to provide and, where possible, expand specialized services for identified people in need of targeted support. Humanitarian personnel working with persons in need of specialized care, including persons with disabilities and persons with chronic medical conditions, will receive specialized capacity building, support and supervision in handling such sensitive cases, including safe identification and referral. Collaboration with agencies offering specialized services will be enhanced so that referral mechanisms are strengthened. The nature and type of services will be determined by approved standards and context of the relevant Areas of Responsibility (AoRs) on CP, GBV, MA and MHPSS WG. There will also be efforts to identify specific protection needs of people in other situations of vulnerability linked to disability, age and gender. The provision of targeted services will be continuously strengthened through interagency referrals and collaboration.

Protection monitoring and analysis: Protection monitoring remains a fundamental activity linked to the analysis and understanding of protection risks and situations impacting civilians including IDPs, statelessness people, IDP and refugee returnees across the country. The volatile situation in Myanmar has resulted in increased human rights violations characterized by widespread displacement within and outside the country. Protection actors will continue to strengthen protection monitoring to safely collect, verify and analyze information, where possible analyze the impact of the crisis to women, men, boys and girls. The purpose is to identify rights violations and protection risks encountered in IDP camps/sites, host communities, among returnees/resettled/locally integrated persons, non-displaced stateless people, and vulnerable crisis affected communities. The monitoring aims at disaggregating data as per the age, gender, disability, other diversity criteria of the affected persons and area-specific aspects of the monitored incidents. Strengthening and expanding monitoring of violations in newly affected and hard to reach areas is imperative. All findings will be used for evidence-based advocacy to mobilize resources and call for the prioritization of humanitarian interventions. In addition, the advocacy will call for the respect of IHL and IHRL by all parties to the conflict. Protection monitoring will be conducted through a combination of methodologies including Rapid Protection Assessment (RPA), Protection Incident Monitoring System (PIMS), situation monitoring, community-level assessments, focus group discussions and in-depth household protection assessments. Efforts will be enhanced to monitor the protection of civilian trends through an integrated, complementary and inclusive manner. The Cluster will establish and coordinate a task team on protection monitoring. The task team involves all agencies that conduct protection monitoring. The task teams continuously assesses challenges, identifies ways of addressing them, and devises ways for the collective use of monitoring results. Moreover, protection-focused needs assessment will be enhanced through actively contributing to multi-sectoral needs assessments (MSNA) and other inter-agency assessment processes.

Capacity-building: The Protection Cluster will prioritize capacity building through trainings and, where possible, coaching and mentorship targeting newly recruited staff as well as existing staff members of Protection Cluster, protection and non-protection partners. The training packages will be guided and/or contextualized. Key training materials/package will be translated into local languages by the respective AoRs. The Protection Cluster will continuously source for opportunities and partners willing to offer trainings in relevant areas for partners.

Coordination: With the expansion of the geographic area to be covered in 2024, the Protection Cluster, together with the three AoRs and the MHPSS WG, will continue to strengthen coordination at national and sub-national levels. Coordination will be aligned with the overall humanitarian coordination structures to be adopted by the HCT following the coordination review process. Coordination and linkage with area-based and nexus structures (e.g. Maungdaw Inter-Agency Group – MIAG and South East Working Group – SEWG) as well as other relevant thematic working groups including the GiHA, Disability TAG, PSEA Network and Humanitarian Access WG at the national and sub-national levels will be established strategically. This will help to ensure effective coordination of the response, avoid overlapping and increase collaboration at every level. The identification of operational and geographical gaps will be facilitated by the Protection Cluster's 5Ws, the GBV 5Ws, the CP 5Ws, the MA 3Ws, and the MHPSS and AAP 5Ws related Kobo forms. Engagement with actors will continue to identify potential operational partners in areas with no or limited presence of protection actors, recognising the added value brought by local actors. Community

Engagement and Accountability to Affected Population (CEA) gains and Gender in Humanitarian Action collaborations will be retained and incrementally strengthened, along with enhanced coordination with INGO Forum and other clusters, including participation in working groups under Inter-Cluster Coordination Group (ICCG). The sub-national Protection Cluster WGs will establish Co-Coordinator roles through INGO/NGO participation in 2024.

Advocacy: Following the events of February 2021 and the escalation of violence since 27 October 2023, the situation in Myanmar remains extremely dangerous for civilians challenging and entails a high risk to engage in all forms of advocacy. Yet, protection concerns continue to intensify, with an ever-increasing inability for protection actors to address them due to strict policies by *de facto* authorities. The issues will be identified in close collaboration with Protection Cluster and Strategic Advisory Group (SAG) members, AoRs and other interested protection actors. Based on the issues identified, the SAG members will develop advocacy briefs and talking points, which will be shared with donors and other targeted entities. The Protection Cluster will collaborate with, among others, the advocacy unit of the Global Protection Cluster (GPC), Human Rights Task Team, and Global AoR to engage donors, representatives of member states and other relevant bodies based upon analysis of their varying potential leverage. The key protection issues for urgent advocacy include: protection of civilians, impact of the People's Military Service Law and forced recruitment, access to essential, emergency and life-saving services (including CP, GBV, MA, MHPSS), freedom of movement, sustainable/durable solutions in line with international standards, respect for IHL and IHRL, and periodically identified protection issues and concerns.

Protection Mainstreaming: Ensuring that protection is central to the humanitarian response remains key in Myanmar. The Protection Cluster and partners will ensure that other clusters are provided with the necessary support to ensure meaningful access, safety and dignity in humanitarian services. The Cluster will invest in enhancing protection mainstreaming including through developing tools and provide trainings to protection and non-protection partners across clusters. All initiatives will espouse the key principles including: prioritize safety and dignity, avoid causing harm, contribute to meaningful access, promote accountability and encourage participation and empowerment. In addition, the Cluster will also work towards enhancing the mainstreaming of prevention and mitigation of GBV, child safeguarding, gender equality, inclusion (in particular disability inclusion), and EORE.

Community Engagement for Accountability to Affected People (CEA): It is imperative that CEA activities are embedded, to the best of operational capabilities, into all the protection response and recovery actions in Myanmar. CEA activities in protection assessment, monitoring, and service delivery must, at a minimum, proactively seek inclusion and contribute to strengthening collective accountability and protection efforts of humanitarian actors in Myanmar. This will include positioning and strengthening shared and common understanding and approaches to CEA in protection action.

Initiated through collective tools like RICAA (Rapid Information, Communication and Accountability Assessment) and CORA (Community Consultations on Response actions) or ICA (Information, Communication and Accountability) integrated components drawing from the RICAA and CORA tools in protection assessments, the analysis will inform targeted actions to calibrate processes and approaches to community engagement that strengthen community voices and feedback-including closing the loop. Essential collective or standalone partnerships that enable improved outreach and proactive engagement with communities will be prioritized. Furthermore, inclusive key messages, information-communication-education (IEC) and other advocacy materials for social mobilisation and behaviour change will be deployed utilizing learning and evidence on preferred channels for diverse target groups (partners, community organizations and community members) across the entire spectrum of protection services, including cash-based interventions.

Purposive engagement with other in-country collective inter-agency mechanisms, particularly the AAP WG, and other networks or communities of practice (including specifically PSEA, Disability inclusion) will play a crucial role in maximizing presence with communities and progressively strengthen community engagement for improved protection outcomes. Moreover, collective advocacy on community engagement and accountability with an all-of-protection cluster lens (including all sub-clusters) will be instrumental to improving the centrality of protection in all humanitarian action, increasing geographic presence and potentially imbibing protection-centered engagements with duty bearers. If appropriately applied and contextualized by the protection cluster and partners, CEA will be an

efficient cross-cutting mechanism that will help enhance community participation and improve the overall quality of the humanitarian interventions.

Localization: Local actors are often the first responders and at the heart of a humanitarian response. They bring cultural and historical knowledge and credibility, access to local networks and affected populations, as well as an understanding of political and social dynamics and they usually continue to operate when international agencies withdraw. Therefore, they contribute to a more effective, efficient and sustainable humanitarian response with enhanced accountability to affected populations. The Protection Cluster and partners will be guided by the principle “as local as possible, as international as necessary”. Increased reliance on local actors should be complemented with an increase in the meaningful engagement of these actors in coordination mechanisms and encourage their leadership. It is important that local actors contribute to decisions and participate in coordination group efforts. Local actors will, therefore, be encouraged to engage in the Protection Cluster at the national and sub-national levels and to participate in advisory bodies such as the SAG. The Protection Cluster will remain attentive to eventual challenges to localization, such as the potential risks that representatives of local organizations might face in taking part in coordination structures. In pursuit of localization, the Protection Cluster will also call for expression of interest for Co-Coordination roles on the sub-national level for the WGs in the four different regions.

Community-Based Protection (CBP): CBP can support affected communities to enhance their security, secure their rights, and take or recover control over their lives. Protection actors will engage meaningfully with communities and ensure they are involved at every stage of programming. CBP will be anchored in identifying and working with and through existing community-based structures and the protection measures already employed, while mitigating harmful and negative “protection” practices. The Protection Cluster will develop a CBP framework as a means to promote and support the strategic efforts it based on good practices and continuously convene all agencies engaged in CBP to devise means of strengthening it. Investment and enhancement in the CBP approach will also be done to complement the localization process or mutually reinforce it for effective and sustainable protection outcomes. Moreover, in order to enhance self-protection capacity in the community, the protection cluster will ensure the provision of technical support and capacity building to the local actors in operation areas.

VI. CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

Limited access to deliver aid: Humanitarian access to deliver—and for people in need to access—aid and services has significantly been constrained. Since February 2021, access constraints have increased. Some locations especially in Rakhine, North-West and South-East regions remain unreachable due to recent escalation of armed conflict, which limits access to forcibly displaced and stateless persons by humanitarian and protection partners, and hampers their access to services. The bureaucratic requirements often found to be restrictive, travel authorization processes, delays in renewal of Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) and local NGO/CSO, and difficult and strenuous processes with issuance of visas for international humanitarian staff. Early indications show that some opposition groups are likely to maintain similar bureaucratic impediments that the de facto authorities have been using.

Safety and security: Since February 2021 and the escalation of violence since 27 October 2023, the security situation in many parts of Myanmar remains unpredictable and challenging, while in some areas (e.g. North-West, South-East and some part of North-East regions) the the armed conflict is intense and ongoing. As a result, protection partners’ ability to provide prioritized protection responses—including conducting protection monitoring or carrying out the RPA or providing targeted responses—remains extremely limited. Staff and community volunteers face significant risks, both from a safety and security point of view, as well as with regard to their well-being. Preventing and responding to safety and security risks of the partners and protection response providers will be taken into the consideration while implementing the Protection Cluster strategy.

Funding: In 2023, 97 Protection Cluster partners reached 1,9 million (80% of target) people. The Protection Cluster received 53.9 million, which is 37 % of the funding requirement by the end of 2023. In 2024, 12.2 million people (1 million children, 1.6 million women and girls and 382,000 persons with disabilities) are in need of protection

assistance. In 2024, the Cluster plans to reach 3 million people, utilizing a prioritized approach based on a thorough review of data, the protection response requires 161M. By end of the first quarter in 2024, only five percent of the HNRP funding requirements were received and protection partners reached 10 percent of targeted population.

Information and connectivity gaps: Due to limitations with access, ongoing armed conflict and other operational challenges, information on protection issues is incomplete. In some instances, the systems for data collection are not properly constituted, which makes it hard to obtain accurate, comprehensive and reliable information. In addition, internet shutdown and telecommunication interference, especially in some parts of North-West, Rakhine and South-East regions, is impacting humanitarian work and access to information.

Appendices: Action Plan – see Annex 1