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Myanmar

Security situation



This brief report is not, and does not purport to be, a detailed or comprehensive survey of all aspects of the issues addressed. It should thus be weighed against other country of origin information available on the topic.

The report at hand does not include any policy recommendations. The information does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Danish Immigration Service.

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Executive summary

On 1 February 2021, Myanmar's military carried out a coup d'état, effectively ending the country's transition to democracy by illegally removing the elected civilian government and suspending fundamental freedoms.

Since the coup, the military has systematically detained hundreds of activists, journalists and human rights defenders. In addition, the military made it illegal to report on human rights violations and organise pro-democracy activities in Myanmar. Individuals who participate in or post on social media about protests risk arrest, imprisonment and torture.

Family members of pro-democracy activist continue to be targeted for arrest and there are still instances where parents are arrested in lieu of their children. The military has also encouraged pro-military groups to target pro-democracy groups and their families.

The military coup sparked widespread public anger and led to large-scale nationwide protests, which were brutally suppressed by security forces. In response, the ousted government, along with delegates from some ethnic groups, established a civilian government in exile called the National Unity Government (NUG).

In May 2021, the NUG formed the People's Defence Force (PDF) and launched an offensive against the military. While the recurring cycles of violence continue and intensify in Kachin, Chin, and Kayah (Karen) states, new conflict zones have developed in regions such as Sagaing, Magway and other areas previously unaffected by armed conflict.

The resistance movement gained significant hold in central Myanmar, an area predominantly inhabited by the ethnic Bamar who have supported the military historically. At the moment, the strongest and ongoing resistance originates from central Myanmar.

Since the coup in 2021, the military has lost control of large parts of the country; it currently maintains effective control over 17 % of the country. Meanwhile, opposition groups control more than 52 % of Myanmar's territory.

Globally, the highest number of incidents of violence against civilians by state forces in 2022 has been recorded in Myanmar. During 2023, the military has progressively increased its use of air power and shelling targeting civilians to maintain control of the country.

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Introduction

This brief report focuses on the political landscape in Myanmar, the current security situation, the status of ethnic minority groups and the circumstances faced by those returning to the country. In general, relevant information was scarce (see Access to information). In particular, information on conditions for returnees proved to be highly limited.

The report is based on written sources and supplemented with information from online interviews with six experts in the field. All six sources were located outside of Myanmar during the interviews.

The consulted sources were briefed about the purpose of the report and that their statements would be included in a publicly available report. Minutes were written for each interview. These were forwarded to the sources for approval, giving them the possibility to amend, comment or correct their statements. All sources approved their statements, which can be found in Annex 1.

For the sake of reader-friendliness, transparency and accuracy, paragraphs in the minutes of the interviews in Annex 1 have been given consecutive numbers, which are used in the report when referring to the statements of the sources in the footnotes. The Terms of Reference (ToR) are included in Annex 2.

Given the changeable political and security situation in Myanmar, the information provided may quickly become outdated. Therefore, the issues addressed in this report should be monitored periodically and brought up to date accordingly.

The research and editing of this report was finalised on 8 September 2023.

The report has been externally peer reviewed by the Norwegian COI-unit, Landinfo, in accordance with the EUAA COI Report Methodology.¹

The report is available on the website of the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) [us.dk](https://www.us.dk) and is thus available to all stakeholders in the refugee status determination process as well as to the general public.

¹ EUAA, *EUAA Country of Origin Information Report Methodology*, 22 February 2023, [url](https://www.euaa.europa.eu/en/COI-Methodology)

Access to information

Since the military took control of the country in February 2021, access to reliable and updated information on the situation in Myanmar from first-hand sources inside the country has proven to be a challenge.

In the aftermath of the military coup, the authorities have enforced widespread internet blackouts and blocked access to social media platforms throughout the country, especially in areas with significant opposition. Consequently, obtaining information from regions with active conflict is extremely challenging.² For further information on internet blackouts, please see [section 2.3.2](#).

Furthermore, the military government has forced internet providers to raise data prices and has introduced new taxes on data SIM cards, making internet access unaffordable for many. Three out of four telecom companies operating in Myanmar have direct links to the military.³

Freedom of expression

Another aspect that hinders access to reliable and updated information on the situation in Myanmar is the lack of freedom of speech in the country.

People are concerned about their safety when communicating with journalists, researchers, or military opponents. They fear that the authorities are monitoring their conversations with potential consequences including arrest and prosecution or, at the very least, threats and intimidation. Even when speaking completely off the record, people are reluctant to talk to a researcher, which ultimately affects the availability of information.⁴

Journalists have been singled out and targeted by the military since the coup, causing many to seek refuge by leaving the country. Similarly, independent news organisations have moved their operations to neighbouring countries. The quality of the reporting is thus compromised by the current conditions in Myanmar and information is difficult to validate.⁵

Myanmar ranks 173 out of 180 in the latest World Press Freedom Index published by Reporters Without Border.⁶

The military has enacted changes to current legislation, making it a crime to publish material or express opinions that could be interpreted as undermining the military government. According

² OHCHR, *Myanmar: UN experts condemn military's "digital dictatorship"*, 7 June 2022, [url](#); IMS, *Public interest infrastructure*, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 22, 30; International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 1; International Human Rights NGO: 1

³ IMS, *Public interest infrastructure*, March 2023, [url](#), pp. 32-34; OHCHR, *Myanmar: UN experts condemn military's "digital dictatorship"*, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁴ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 4-5

⁵ Freedom House, *Myanmar*, 2023, [url](#); International Human Rights Organisation: 8; Development Organisation: 9

⁶ RSF, *Myanmar – Index 2023*, [url](#), n.d.

to Freedom House (2023), hundreds of people have been arrested and charged under the revised legislation, usually for online comments.⁷

On September 7, a journalist was arrested in western Rakhine State while reporting for Myanmar Now on the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha. He was charged with four counts, including violating a natural disaster law and a telecommunications law, and received a 20-year prison sentence.⁸

Despite restrictions, many people are still using Facebook and other digital platforms, although not as extensively as in the past. Online platforms remain the primary means of accessing information for the general population.⁹

Although the access to information was restricted, DIS manage to collect reliable information by desk research and online interviews.

⁷ Development Organisation: 9; Freedom House, *Myanmar*, February 2023, [url](#)

⁸ Aljazeera, Myanmar jails photojournalist for 20 years on first day of closed trial, 7 Septemeber 2023, [url](#)

⁹ Development Organisation: 5; International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 5

Abbreviations

AA	Arakan Army
ARSA	Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army
ACLED	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
CDF	Chinland Defence Force
CDM	Civil Disobedience Movement
CNA	Chin National Army
CNDF	Chin National Defence Force
DFAT	Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
EAOs	Ethnic Armed Organisations
IIMM	Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar
ISP	Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar
KBC	Kachin Baptist Convention
KHRG	Karen Human Rights Group
KIA	Kachin Independence Army
KIO	Kachin Independence Organisation
KNDO	Karen National Defence Organisation
KNLA	Karen National Liberation Army
KNU	Karen National Union
MIPS	Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security
NLD	National League of Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PDFs	People's Defence Forces
RFA	Radio Free Asia
ULA	United League of Arakan
USDP	Union and Solidarity Development Party

Map



Source: Nations Online Project, *Political Map of Myanmar*, [url](#), n.d.

1. Political context

1.1 The political history and system

Myanmar, also known as Burma, gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948.¹⁰ Since then, the military has played a dominant role in the political governance of the country and has cracked down on all opposition.¹¹

In 1988, the military crushed the nationwide protests known as the 8888 uprisings and seized power.¹² In 1990, the National League of Democracy (NLD), which was founded by the student uprising in 1988 led by Aung San Suu Kyi, won a landslide victory which secured 60 % of the popular vote and 80 % of the parliamentary seats (392 out of 485). However, the military refused to recognize the results and eventually imprisoned most of the elected politicians, including Aung San Suu Kyi.¹³

In 2010, the country held its first multiparty general elections since 1992. The NLD boycotted the parliamentary elections in protest against a new controversial election law adopted by the military ahead of the elections.¹⁴

The military-backed party, the Union and Solidarity Development Party (USDP), formed just seven months before the election by the retired general Thein Sein, dominated the elections.¹⁵ The USDP won nearly 80 % of the seats in the National Assembly in 2010. The elections were widely criticised by the international community for being unfair and not free, with many political prisoners remaining detained and excluded from the political process.¹⁶

¹⁰ Kipgen, N., *Democratisation of Myanmar*, 30 September 2021, pp. 24-25

¹¹ International Commission of Jurists, *Violations of the right to freedom of religion and belief since the coup d'état in Myanmar: A briefing paper*, October 2022, [url](#), p. 2; Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 11; AI, *The Repression of the ethnic minority activists in Myanmar*, 16 February 2010, [url](#)

¹² Kipgen, N., *Democratisation of Myanmar*, 30 September 2021, pp. 41-42, 44; BBC News, *Myanmar coup: What protesters can learn from the '1988 generation'*, 16 March 2021, [url](#)

¹³ TNI, *The National League for Democracy: A Party for Democracy or Federalism?*, 2 October 2022, [url](#); HRW, *Burma: 20 Years After 1990 Elections, Democracy Still Denied*, 26 May 2010, [url](#)

¹⁴ ISDP, O'Hara, C., *The Myanmar 2010 Elections: A European Perspective*, March 2010, [url](#), p. 37; France 24, *Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition party boycotts key elections*, 29 March 2010, [url](#)

¹⁵ Xianghui, Zhu, Stimson, *General Elections in Myanmar from the Perspective of Inter-Ethnic Relations: Contest and Adaptation*, n.d. [url](#), p. 7; Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 11

¹⁶ Kipgen, N., *Democratisation of Myanmar*, 30 September 2021, p. 125; HRW, *Burma*, January 2021, [url](#), p. 2

Thein Sein was elected president of the new National Assembly and took office in March 2011. Six days after the 2010 elections, Aung San Suu Kyi, secretary general of the main opposition party NLD, was released from years of house arrest.¹⁷

Despite Myanmar's ethnic diversity, with 135 officially recognised groups, the political system in the country has historically been dominated by the Bamar, who pursued a policy in line with Buddhist-Burmese nationalism. This has created several long-running armed conflicts with the other ethnic groups (see more in [section 3](#)).¹⁸

1.2 Recent key political events

Between 2011 and 2021, major political upheavals occurred in Myanmar and the country gradually became more democratic. The military government was dissolved and democratic reforms were introduced.¹⁹

In 2015, Myanmar held its first nationwide multiparty elections. The NLD won a landslide victory and Aung San Suu Kyi was appointed leader of the government. The military government retained significant control though, with 25 % of the seats in Parliament.²⁰

The NLD also won the election in 2020. However, when the newly elected parliament was due to convene on 1 February 2021, the military overthrew the democratically elected government and appointed the head of the army as interim president. The military then declared a state of emergency, putting restrictions on civil liberties such as freedom of speech and assembly. Furthermore, it actively suppressed pro-democracy activities.²¹

The military coup caused enormous popular anger with widespread national protests, which were violently suppressed by the national security forces. In the aftermath to the coup, NLD and representatives from some of the ethnic organisations formed a civilian government in exile known as the National Unity Government (NUG).²²

In May 2021, the NUG declared the creation of the People's Defence Force (PDF) and launched an offensive against the military. This led to a resurgence of conflict between the military and several ethnically based armed groups.²³

¹⁷ Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar: Menneskerettighetssituasjonen per 2013*, 30 October 2013, [url](#), p. 8

¹⁸ International Crisis Group, *Identity Crisis: Ethnicity and Conflict in Myanmar*, 28 August 2020, [url](#); Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), pp. 11-13

¹⁹ ORF, Banerjee, S., *the Enduring Challenges to Democratic Transition in Myanmar*, 9 May 2022, [url](#), p. 5; Kipgen, N., *Democratisation of Myanmar*, 30 September 2021, [url](#), p. 131

²⁰ Atlantic, *Myanmar's First Free Election in 25 Years*, 11 November 2015, [url](#); Lidauer, M., *Democratic Dawn? Civil Society and Elections in Myanmar 2010-2012*, 1 June 2021, [url](#)

²¹ USDOS, *2021 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

²² Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 8

²³ Carleton University, *Report on the destabilisation of the country by the military coup in 2021 and its future effects*, 6 March 2023, [url](#), p. 1; International Crisis Group, *Breaking Gender and Age Barriers amid Myanmar's Spring Revolution*, 28 February 2023, [url](#)

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On February 1 2023, the military prolonged the state of emergency for an additional six months.²⁴ In the beginning of 2023, the military proceeded with their strategy to organise a general election to validate their governance as per the military-crafted 2008 constitution.²⁵ They have additionally enacted a new party registration legislation and made updates to the voter list.²⁶ The military has postponed the August 2023 elections due to ongoing violence across the country.²⁷

²⁴ Guardian, *Myanmar junta extends state of emergency, delaying promised elections*, 1 February 2023, [url](#); AP News, *Myanmar extends state of emergency, delaying expected polls*, 1 February 2023, [url](#); Aljazeera, *Myanmar military rulers extend state of emergency by six months*, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

²⁵ UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Myanmar (Burma): Critics of the military regime*, June 2023, [url](#), p. 13

²⁶ International Crisis Group, *A Road to Nowhere: The Myanmar Regime's Stage-managed Elections*, 28 March 2023, [url](#)

²⁷ Aljazeera, *Myanmar military extends emergency, postpones election*, 1 August 2023, [url](#)

2. Security situation

Since the military coup in February 2021, there have been widespread protest and civil disobedience movements throughout Myanmar. The military has cracked down on pro-democracy protests, political leaders, journalists, lawyers, health workers and activists. In reaction to this, opposition groups under the leadership of the National Unity Government (NUG) have resorted to armed resistance. Their primary objective is to overthrow the military government and reinstate democratic governance. This has led to widespread unrest and violence across the country.²⁸

According to a senior consultant from the International Crisis Group, Myanmar is currently witnessing a level of conflict not seen since the 1950s. The scale of geographic reach and the number of casualties are at record levels.²⁹

While the recurring cycles of violence continue in Kachin, Shan, and Kayin (Karen) states, new conflict zones have developed in regions such as Sagaing, Magway, Chin, and Kayah states, among others. In these regions, civilians have been targeted by the military and pro-military militias, with campaigns ranging from airstrikes, heavy artillery fire, and light weaponry to landmines, arson and outright executions.³⁰

The resistance movement gained significant hold in central Myanmar, an area predominantly inhabited by the ethnic Bamar group who have supported the military historically. At the moment, the strongest, ongoing resistance originates from central Myanmar. This turn of events took the military government by surprise, according to an international human rights NGO.³¹

During the second half of 2022, People's Defence Force (PDF) grew in influence and posed a greater challenge to the military's control over territories. In response, the military increased its use of airpower to specifically target opposition groups and civilian communities.³²

According to the New York Times, data suggests that there was almost a two-fold increase in military airstrikes during April, May, and June 2023 compared to the first three months of 2023, as illustrated in Figure 1. Moreover, the figure shows a steady increase in airstrikes over the two

²⁸ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 8; International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 6-7; HRW, *Myanmar: Year of Brutality in Coup's Wake*, 28 January 2022, [url](#)

²⁹ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 13

³⁰ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 8; International Human Rights NGO: 8, 12; Freedom House, *Myanmar*, 2023, [url](#)

³¹ International Human Rights NGO: 7

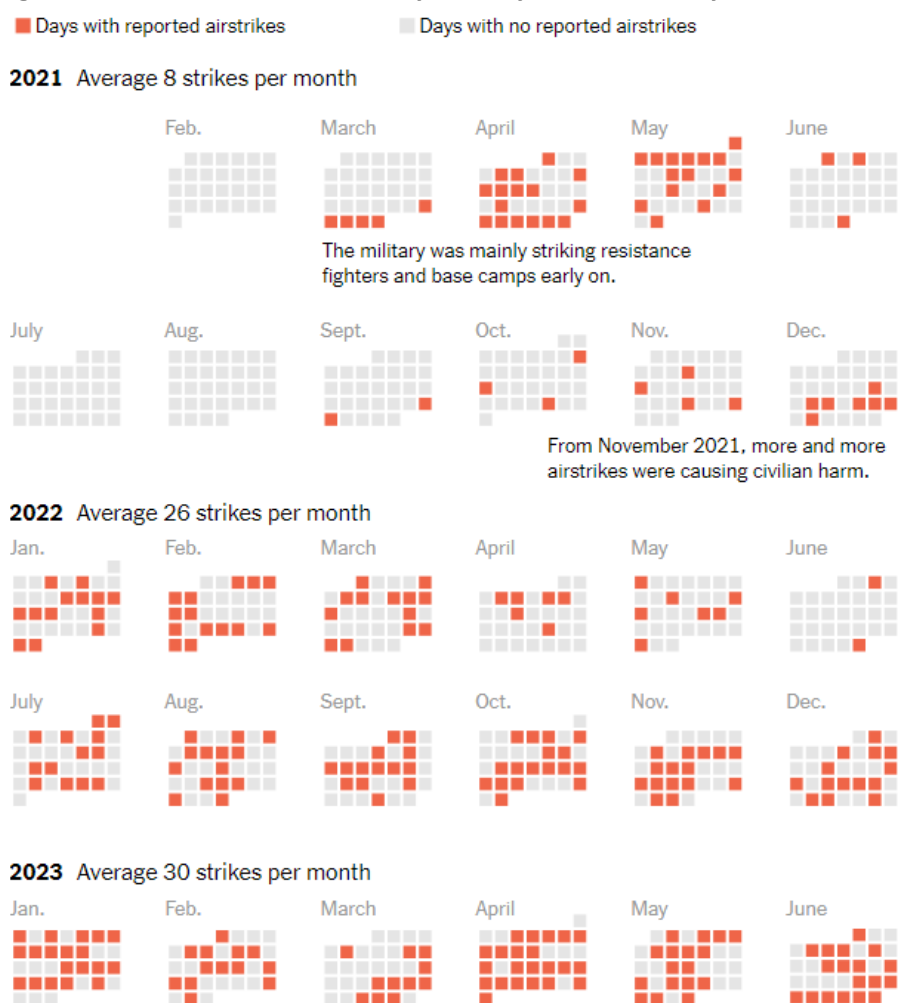
³² OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 5; International Human Rights NGO: 8

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years following the military coup; the average rose from eight attacks per month in 2021 to 30 attacks per month in 2023.³³

Similarly, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported in August 2023 that fighting had intensified in eight of Myanmar's states and regions, including Shan, Kachin, Kayah and Mon states and Sagaing, Bago, Magway and Tanintharyi regions, as the military attempted to take control of territory from opposition groups.³⁴

Figure 1: Airstrikes carried out by the Myanmar military



Source: ACLED/New York Times, 30 June 2023³⁵

³³ New York Times, *The Country That Bombs Its Own People*, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

³⁴ RFA, *Myanmar military steps up fighting in 8 states and regions*, 7 August 2023, [url](#)

³⁵ New York Times, *The Country That Bombs Its Own People*, 31 July 2023, [url](#)

In September 2022, the Special Advisory Council on Myanmar, an organisation of independent international experts, estimated that the military government had control over 17 % of the country, whereas opposition groups had effective control over more than 52 %.³⁶

2.1 Central Myanmar

As stated above, regions in Myanmar that were formerly peaceful are now experiencing conflict.

Myanmar's military maintains a significant level of control over Yangon, Mandalay, Naypyidaw, and other major urban areas. In rural areas, the military holds control over the Ayeyarwady region, the majority of the Bago region, and certain portions of the Magway region. In all other areas, ethnic armed groups, and in some instances resistance groups, often referred to as People's Defence Force (PDF), contest to control the area. Substantial parts of the country have transformed into conflict zones, particularly in central Myanmar, which had remained relatively free from active armed conflict for several decades.³⁷

Multiple armed groups have emerged in the newly affected conflict areas. These groups came into existence following the coup, as a response to the political situation. Some of these armed groups operate under the umbrella of PDF and collaborate with the NUG, while others function independently, following their own objectives and strategies. A common thread among all these groups is their shared anti-military stand.³⁸

In an effort to confront these emerging factions, the military has established its own paramilitary forces. These include the Pyusawhti Pyu Saw Htee, a hardline Buddhist ultranationalist group, and Thway Thauk, the name of which roughly translates to 'blood-drinking group.' The Pyu Saw Htee groups have been formed across the country and are using brutal and cruel methods to counter the anti-military movement. The Thway Thauk originates from Mandalay but appears to have extended its operations to Yangon.³⁹

The ethnic armed groups offer some level of support to these emerging anti-military groups in central Myanmar. It is important to note though that these new groups are primarily led by ethnic Burman youth, according to a senior consultant from the International Crisis Group'.⁴⁰

³⁶ SAC-M, *Myanmar junta 'losing control' as armed resistance digs in, rights experts say*, 5 September 2022, [url](#)

³⁷ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 12-13

³⁸ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 14

³⁹ Progressive Voice, *The Rise of Pyu Saw Htee*, 12 March 2022, [url](#); The Irrawaddy, *In Myanmar, Pro-Junta Vigilante Groups Wage Campaign of Violence, Disinformation*, 11 June 2021, [url](#); Aljazeera, *Shadowy pro-military militias target Myanmar's anti-coup movement*, 2 June 2022, [url](#); International Crisis Group, *Resisting the Resistance: Myanmar's Pro-military Pyusawhti Militias*, 6 April 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁰ UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note Myanmar (Burma): Critics of the military regime*, June 2023, [url](#), p. 25; International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 15

In April 2023, a senior consultant from the International Crisis Group stated that unlike the ethnic minority or rural areas, urban areas have not experienced significant clashes or confrontations. However, urban areas have witnessed bombings and targeted assassinations, frequently executed by underground cells opposed to the military coup. These attacks, which have become relatively common, primarily occur in Yangon although the military generally maintains control over the major cities.⁴¹

As mentioned previously, the military has already lost large territory to ethnic factions involved in protracted fighting on the borderlands as well as to new opposition groups since the coup. However, the military is also now encountering challenges even in the largest urban centres, where they had, until recently, exercised authority. A recent study shows that the military only has control of the highways around a number of major cities. Meanwhile, opposition groups are moving closer to the capital, Naypyidaw, and intensifying fighting in Yangon is reported.⁴²

2.2 Opposition movements and protests

Following the military coup, widespread protests and acts of civil disobedience occurred in all major regions and urban areas. A nationwide civil disobedience movement was initiated by healthcare workers and civil servants with the participation of railway workers, garbage collectors, bank employees, electricity workers, and various other individuals. Many of these protests were met with violent repression by the military, leading to a significant number of deaths, injuries and arrests of protesters.⁴³

In general, the nonviolent struggle is no longer the primary form of resistance; it has transitioned towards an armed conflict. Nevertheless, protests continue although they have been significantly reduced in scale.⁴⁴ In urban areas, flash mobs continue to occur, organised by young people who wanted to express their opposition to the military rule. However, these groups operate underground and limited information is shared ahead of the events to avoid attention from the police and military.⁴⁵

Another aspect of the nonviolent resistance is the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Numerous individuals from various sectors joined the CDM and went on strike. However, sustaining support over an extended period has posed challenges for the movement. Given the country's economic conditions, people are struggling to make ends meet and thus find it challenging to focus on their involvement in the CDM.⁴⁶

⁴¹ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 16

⁴² Council on Foreign Relations, *Myanmar's Junta Is Losing the Civil War*, 27 June 2023, [url](#)

⁴³ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 16

⁴⁴ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 9

⁴⁵ International Human Rights NGO: 9

⁴⁶ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 11

On the first anniversary of the coup, streets across Myanmar were deserted and shops closed as people stayed home in a 'silent strike' to mark their discontent with the military government. In response, the military threatened to charge persons who participated in the stay-at-home protest with sedition or terrorism.⁴⁷

In February 2023, pro-democracy activists across Myanmar held once again a "silent strike" in protest of the military rule.⁴⁸

2.3 The military's reaction to the anti-coup movement

Throughout 2021, 2022 and 2023, the military government has systematically detained hundreds of activists, journalists and human rights defenders. Moreover, the military has intensified its actions against groups and individuals who report on human rights violations and coordinate pro-democracy movements in Myanmar.⁴⁹

Individuals participating in or posting information about the protests risk arrest, imprisonment and torture.⁵⁰ On September 2022, the military expanded their measures and warned that social media endorsements such as 'liking' or 'sharing' pro-democracy/anti-military content could result in a prison sentence of up to 10 years.⁵¹

In July 2022, four political prisoners were executed. Among the four executed were a member of the ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the NLD, and a prominent democracy activist named Kyaw Min Yu.⁵² The military-controlled courts continue to issue death sentences.⁵³ From the 1 February 2021 coup to 22 June 2023, 157 have been sentenced to death, 42 of them in absentia.⁵⁴

According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP),⁵⁵ 3 679 civilians have been killed in connection with military-led actions against pro-democracy movements since the coup. The figure does not include killings by pro-military groups or civilian killings related to fighting

⁴⁷ Guardian, *Silent strike empties streets in Myanmar on anniversary of coup*, 1 February 2022, [url](#)

⁴⁸ BBC News, *Myanmar coup anniversary: 'Silent strike' marks two years of military rule*, 1 February 2023, [url](#)

⁴⁹ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 3 October 2022, [url](#), p. 9; OHCHR, *Report of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar*, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁰ UK Home Office: *Country Policy and Information Note - Myanmar: 2021 coup and protests* (2021), March 2021, [url](#), pp. 43-44; Germany, BAMF, *Briefing Notes*, 23 May 2022, [url](#), p. 8

⁵¹ HRW, *World Report 2023 – Myanmar*, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

⁵² OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 3 October 2022, [url](#), pp. 4, 7

⁵³ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

⁵⁴ AAPP, *Daily Briefing in Relation to the Military Coup*, 22 June 2023, [url](#)

⁵⁵ Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP) is a non-profit organisation that advocates for the rights and welfare of political prisoners in Myanmar (Burma), AAPP, *About*, [url](#), n.d.

in ethnic areas. The actual numbers are expected to be higher since many killings have not been reported.⁵⁶

The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar reported that the military has killed hundreds of civilians by using heavy artillery and airstrikes. In addition, the military has intentionally bombed camps for internally displaced persons and has repeatedly executed unarmed persons in their custody; this includes mass killings documented by local media and human rights organisations. In many cases, the bodies of the victims have been burned.⁵⁷

The Myanmar military has increased its use of force, incorporating tactics such as the four-cut strategy. This essentially involves cutting resources and food supplies, including humanitarian aid, as well as other dimensions of restrictions.⁵⁸ The latest legislation for humanitarian organisations is physically restricting these organisations' access to people in need.⁵⁹ In areas under the control of armed opposition groups, the military has implemented systematic measures to limit the distribution of humanitarian assistance to displaced individuals and affected populations.⁶⁰

The military widely uses landmines in civilian areas. Human rights researchers have found landmines and documented landmine explosions in fields, on paths used by villagers, in front of churches, outside toilets and inside civilian homes. According to UN figures, at least 41 civilians have been killed and 144 injured by landmines in the first six months of 2022.⁶¹

Healthcare workers are among those most often targeted in Myanmar. New data from violence monitor Insecurity Insight showed that from February 2021 to September 2022, a total of 750 health workers were arrested and 56 killed by the military.⁶²

⁵⁶ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 5; AAPP, *Homepage*, 2023, [url](#); PRIO, *Counting Myanmar's Dead: Reported Civilian Casualties since the 2021 Military Coup*, 2023, [url](#), p. 36

⁵⁷ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 3 October 2022, [url](#), p. 9

⁵⁸ OHCHR, *Military's 'four cuts' doctrine drives perpetual human rights crisis in Myanmar, says UN report*, 3 March 2023, [url](#); Human Rights Organisation: 10

⁵⁹ Human Rights Organisation: 11

⁶⁰ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 5

⁶¹ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 3 October 2022, [url](#), pp. 9-10; Human Rights Organisation: 10

⁶² Insecurity Insight, *Violence Against or Obstruction of Health Care in Myanmar*, January 2023, [url](#), p. 1 The New Humanitarian, *In Myanmar's worsening conflict, health workers deliver care and dodge death*, 12 April 2023, [url](#)

According to ACLED data, Myanmar registered the highest number of cases of violence against civilians committed by government forces globally in 2022. This count is two and a half times greater than that of Afghanistan, which ranks second worldwide.⁶³

The military continues to conduct arbitrary arrests and night raids across the country. Family members of protesters who have a warrant for their arrest or suspected affiliation with any type of resistance risk been detained (see more in [section 2.4](#)).⁶⁴

2.3.1 Martial law

On 3 February 2023, the day following the military's extension of the state of emergency for another half-year period, martial law was implemented in 37 more townships throughout the country.⁶⁵ Two weeks later, the military incorporated an additional three townships, bringing the total number of townships under martial law to 50. These include townships in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Mon states as well as in Yangon and Mandalay regions.⁶⁶

The military's use of marital law permits a disproportionate and open-ended response by the authorities, allowing for further suppression of basic rights to free expression, peaceful assembly, and association.⁶⁷

The military has been using military tribunals to prosecute and sentence civilians. These tribunals are held in areas under martial law. Thousands of people have been detained and tried in these military tribunals since the coup; approximately 140 or 150 people have been sentenced to death.⁶⁸

2.3.2 Internet blockade

Since the military coup in February 2021, the military has periodically shut down the internet. During the first weeks of the coup, the military ordered all service providers to block access to social media platforms such as Twitter [now X], Instagram and later Facebook. The shutdown was aimed at preventing citizens from organising protests and sharing information about the ongoing political situation in the country.⁶⁹

In some states, such as Chin State, internet access has been completely blocked and the majority of the population is without any means to connect online. This applies also to other areas in the country. Furthermore, the military has made it more difficult to access other communication channels, for example by instructing telecom companies to increase the price

⁶³ ACLED, *Myanmar: Continued Opposition to the Junta Amid Increasing Civilian Targeting by the Military*, 8 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁴ International Human Rights NGO: 14

⁶⁵ AA, *Myanmar military junta declares martial law in 37 more townships*, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁶ HRW, *Myanmar Junta Extends Martial Law*, 27 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁷ HRW, *Myanmar Junta Extends Martial Law*, 27 February 2023, [url](#)

⁶⁸ International Human Rights NGO: 18

⁶⁹ BBC News, *Myanmar coup: Internet shutdown as crowds protest against military*, 6 February 2023, [url](#); Access Now, *Update: internet access, censorship, and the Myanmar coup*, 26 January 2023, [url](#); Reuters, *Myanmar's internet suppression*, 7 April 2021, [url](#)

for data use. As a result, phone communication has become more challenging and expensive for the general population.⁷⁰

Following the military's ban on Facebook in Myanmar, people have resorted to using VPNs to bypass the restrictions.⁷¹

Initially, Telenor and Orido were commercial and independent telecommunication companies operating in Myanmar. However, after the coup, both companies decided to withdraw from the country and subsequently sold their operations to telecommunication companies affiliated with the military. As a result, all four major telecommunication companies currently operating in Myanmar have direct connections to the military and one is owned by the military. The core digital and telecommunication infrastructure is thus under the control of the military, enabling the military to shut down communication as they please.⁷²

2.3.3 Surveillance

Myanmar has a long history of monitoring its citizens. Various governments and military organisations have used the *Dalans* (informants) to gather information and intelligence on their opponents. The *Dalans* are embedded in the communities. The surveillance system relies on a combination of the state security apparatus as well as civilian informants who are pro-military people, including the ward officials or civilians. These civilian informants have no formal role in the state and are motivated by ideological reasons or financial incentives, among other things.⁷³

Following the coup, the military has increased its efforts to monitor the population. CCTV cameras have been installed in public spaces in Yangon and other cities. The cameras are equipped with facial recognition and license plate identification technology. These data are collected by the authorities and used to identify persons involved in anti-coup protests, according to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).⁷⁴

A source interviewed by the Danish Immigration Service (DIS) in April 2023 confirmed that the military has installed CCTV cameras in major cities, including Yangon and Mandalay, and these are operational. However, it is unclear how the military is utilising the surveillance technology.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Development Organisation: 4

⁷¹ Development Organisation: 4; Reuters, *Myanmar's internet suppression*, 7 April 2021, [url](#)

⁷² Development Organisation: 4; OHCHR, *Myanmar: UN experts condemn military's "digital dictatorship"*, 7 June 2022, [url](#)

⁷³ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 20; International Human Rights NGO: 20-21

⁷⁴ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 27; International Human Rights NGO: 21

⁷⁵ International Human Rights NGO: 24

Regarding the use of the CCTV cameras, the senior consultant from the International Crisis Group was unaware of whether any recorded footage had been used to arrest and prosecute individuals. The source further indicated that the installation of the CCTV cameras was rolled out under the NLD, the ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi's party; the current administration has continued with this strategy and has expanded the usage of CCTV to others cities. The source did not believe, however, that the military has a database required to make effective use of the CCTV cameras. The military still relies on paper records to a certain degree rather than a digitalised system, which naturally weakens the CCTV system's effectiveness.⁷⁶

A Human Rights Organisation interviewed by DIS stated that the military uses surveillance technology, such as CCTV cameras, to trace and arrest people.⁷⁷

The Cyber Security Law that came into effect in 2021 is providing military forces with the legal backing to arrest persons sharing anti-military content on social media. There have been documented cases where those who shared information about the April 2023 Shan State massacre were arrested. Furthermore, there are confirmed reports of people who were victims of doxing⁷⁸ through Telegram channels, subsequently becoming targets of pro-military militias or their security personnel.⁷⁹

Facebook, specifically, is subject to extensive online monitoring. In April 2021, the military daily released the names of numerous individuals who were being charged under section 505A for their social media posts.⁸⁰ In addition, the authorities have arrested a man and accused him of sedition after he recorded and disseminated a video of heavy rainfall caused by a cyclone. These charges suggest that the use of telecommunications and internet monitoring plays a role in severe responses against citizens, which included brutal attacks and forced disappearances as a disciplinary measure for their online activities.⁸¹

The military has continued with its agenda to mandate the registration of SIM cards and mobile phone numbers, strengthening its surveillance capabilities.⁸² All SIM cards are required to be registered under a national identity card. When the authorities obtain an individual's phone number, they can thus determine their location and identity number. This system has been used to arrest individuals, a practice observed both before and after the military coup.⁸³

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 23

⁷⁷ Human Rights Organisation: 17

⁷⁸ *The action of finding or publishing private information about someone on the internet without their permission, especially in a way that reveals their name, address, etc.* Cambridge Dictionary, 2023, [url](#), n.d.

⁷⁹ International Human Rights NGO: 19; Centre for Law and Democracy, *Myanmar: Note on New Draft Cyber Security Law*, April 2022, [url](#), p. 1; Diplomat, *Myanmar Junta Set to Pass Draconian Cyber Security Law*, 31 January 2022, [url](#)

⁸⁰ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 20

⁸¹ USDOS, *2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

⁸² OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 8

⁸³ Human Rights Organisation: 15-16

The Myanmar military exercises control over various sectors, including financial institutions, enabling them to monitor individuals' activities. This control extends to tracking people's transactions and making efforts to trace the origins of donations.⁸⁴

In addition, the military has introduced strip searches in public areas. Therefore, people leave their phones at home because the police might take the phone to check who they communicate with and what they have shared on social media.⁸⁵

2.3.3.1 Monitoring the diaspora

The military in Myanmar monitors people in the diaspora to some extent. The military uses internet platforms for surveilling individuals outside of Myanmar. When it comes to in-person monitoring, the process becomes more challenging; yet the military does have some capabilities in this regard which causes a significant degree of fear among individuals abroad.⁸⁶

The Myanmar military has allegedly provided the Thai authorities, particularly in the border town of Mae Sot, with a list of individuals they intend to arrest. This list is primarily being used to identify and target certain individuals, notably activists and members of the PDF.⁸⁷

2.4 Treatment of family members

Two years after the coup, family members of pro-democracy activists continue to be targeted for arrest. There are still instances where parents are arrested in lieu of their children. Furthermore, children under the age of 18 have been arrested as a substitute for their parents. An international human rights NGO had interviewed numerous individuals who were initially detained due to the involvement of their siblings, parents, or other family members in anti-coup activities.⁸⁸

The military has also encouraged pro-military groups to target pro-democracy groups and their families. Since late April 2022, pro-military groups have carried out a series of targeted killings of pro-democracy supporters and their families.⁸⁹

In the aftermath of the coup, there were widespread arrests. However, the military has now shifted to conducting targeted arrests of individuals who are believed to be associated with any form of resistance movement.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Human Rights Organisation: 14; International Human Rights NGO: 16

⁸⁵ Human Rights Organisation: 7

⁸⁶ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 24

⁸⁷ Human Rights Organisation: 21

⁸⁸ International Human Rights NGO: 16

⁸⁹ USDOS, *2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁰ International Human Rights NGO: 17

According to the US Department of State (USDOS), there are numerous reports of arbitrary arrests, including detentions by the military in unknown locations; more than 277 family members of pro-democracy supporters, including 43 children, are among those detained.⁹¹

Sources stated that a person may be arrested as a result of being a family member to a person facing arrest for alleged offences, to a protester, or to a person who is simply a pro-democracy supporter.⁹² In some cases, it is probable that family members who have been arrested due to the actions of an activist within their family have been subjected to torture.⁹³

Opponents of the military government have subjected both members of the military and their families to 'social punishment.' This involves public online shaming, harassment, revealing personal details (doxing) and spreading fake images. The target group is not only members of the military and their families but also people perceived as supporters of the military, such as civil servants who did not participate in the protest movement.⁹⁴

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), established by the UN Human Rights Council, has also received credible reports about civilians who have been arbitrarily killed because they were suspected of being informants or of collaborating with the military government.⁹⁵

⁹¹ USDOS, *2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

⁹² International Human Rights NGO: 14; International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 18-19, 31-32

⁹³ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 18

⁹⁴ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 29

⁹⁵ OHCHR, *Report of the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar*, 30 June 2023, [url](#), p. 9

3. Ethnic minorities

Many ethnic minorities experience violence and displacement due to ongoing conflict in their home states and regions. Generally speaking, members of non-Bamar ethnic groups in Myanmar face societal and official discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity; some groups (such as the Rohingya) are subjected to even more discrimination.⁹⁶

Ethnic minority groups, including the Chin, Karen, Karenni and others, are frequently subjected to violence at the hands of the security forces, largely on the basis of actual or perceived association with armed resistance movements.⁹⁷

The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) gathered over three million potential proofs of human rights violations in Myanmar between 2019 and 2022. This includes testimonies and reports of nearly 1 300 affected individuals and observers from Rakhine, Chin, Shan, Kachin and Karen states, areas predominantly populated by religious minorities.⁹⁸

3.1 Freedom of movement

As highlighted in the section on information availability, access to up-to-date information on Myanmar is limited. Therefore, some of the details in the following section are based on information that was available before the coup but which nonetheless broadly describes freedom of movement in Myanmar.

As mentioned in [section 2.3.3](#), however, and as emphasised by a human rights organisation interviewed in May 2023, the military has adopted many laws and regulations since the coup in 2021, including erecting a number of checkpoints that restrict the freedom of movement.⁹⁹

Freedom to travel within the country is not protected in national law. At regional and local levels, there are directives and regulations that restrict freedom of movement.¹⁰⁰ These are imposed mainly in the ethnic states and particularly in states with active conflict. For instance, in Rakhine, Kachin and Shan, there are formal travel restrictions, such as checkpoints, document checks and curfews.¹⁰¹

Since the coup in 2021, the military has tightened restrictions on movement. Several local media sources report on the installation of roadblocks and arbitrary searches of private cars and taxis. In Yangon and several other cities, night curfews have been imposed to restrict movement. The NUG and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have warned civilians to travel

⁹⁶ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-19

⁹⁷ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-19

⁹⁸ USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, 15 May 2023, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Human Rights Organisation: 8

¹⁰⁰ USDOS, *2022 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 13

only in case of emergency in areas affected by violence due to escalating fighting with the military.¹⁰²

Persons identified as the so-called ‘non-citizens’, referring to persons who were not recognised as citizens under the Citizenship Act of 1982, are restricted from movement.¹⁰³ This applies primarily to the Rohingyas. Groups such as the Kachin, Karen, Chin, Burman and Rakhine are considered full citizens and are not legally restricted from movement.¹⁰⁴

Several sources reported that the Rohingya are extensively restricted from moving around freely in Myanmar.¹⁰⁵ In 2019, a Rohingya representative informed the Norwegian COI unit, Landinfo that it was virtually impossible for Rohingyas to travel internally in Myanmar.¹⁰⁶

As stated in the the constitution of 2008, all citizens of Myanmar have the right to settle and stay in any place in the country.¹⁰⁷ However, local regulations may limit this right.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the right to settle wherever you want only applies to citizens who have a national ID card.¹⁰⁹

In Myanmar, the law requires that individuals must register their names and addresses with the local district or village chief in the area in which their permanent residence is located. This registration requirement also applies to temporary residents or those who are visiting friends, family, or acquaintances.¹¹⁰

3.1.2 *Treatment of ethnic minority groups outside of their region*

In 2022, Amnesty International (AI) reported that military forces have been systematically detaining civilians primarily from Karen and Karenni ethnic groups. These incidents frequently occur as these individuals are traveling to or from, or are residing in villages that have largely been deserted due to conflict or military artillery strikes. Moreover, AI stated that these attacks on civilians highlight the collective punishment they have been subjected to as the Myanmar military fights armed ethnic minority groups in eastern Myanmar.¹¹¹

¹⁰² USDOS, *2022 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰³ International Commission of Jurists, *Citizenship and Human Rights in Myanmar: Why Law Reform is Urgent and Possible A Legal Briefng*, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 7; Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁰⁴ International Commission of Jurists, *Citizenship and Human Rights in Myanmar: Why Law Reform is Urgent and Possible A Legal Briefng*, June 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁰⁵ USDOS, *2022 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#); HRW, *Rohingya Arrested in Myanmar Just for Traveling*, 7 January 2021, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰⁶ Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 13

¹⁰⁷ The constitution project, *Myanmar's Constitution of 2008*, [url](#), p. 70

¹⁰⁸ USDOS, *2022 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 14

¹¹⁰ Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar; Etniske og religiøse minoriteter i Yangon*, 12 April 2021, [url](#), p. 14

¹¹¹ AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 28

MYANMAR: SECURITY SITUATION

In December 2022, Reverend Dr. Hkalam Samson, a well-known religious figure from Kachin, was arrested at Mandalay International Airport while attempting to fly to Thailand for medical treatment. A month later, he was charged under the Unlawful Association Act and the Counter-Terrorism Law. Dr. Hkalam Samson, who actively participated in humanitarian aid efforts, was detained after being engaged in the delivery of humanitarian aid. Prior to his arrest, he had been vocal in advocating for the military to be held responsible for its violations of human rights.¹¹²

According to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2022 report, Chins residing both within and outside Chin State are allegedly discriminated against when accessing government services. This discrimination is evident in the acquirement of identity documents, in government job appointments and promotions, and in harassment by security forces at checkpoints. These experiences are similar to those experienced by other ethnic minorities in Myanmar who are neither Bamar nor Buddhist.¹¹³

¹¹² USDOS, *2022 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, 15 May 2023, [url](#); OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

¹¹³ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 21

MYANMAR: SECURITY SITUATION

Map of Myanmar



Source: Australia, DFAT, Map of Myanmar, 11 November 2022, Maps used in DFAT country information reports are subject to the Creative Commons 3.0 licence (reproduced below). Accordingly you are welcome to use the map subject to the licence conditions. [Creative Commons — Attribution 3.0 Unported — CC BY 3.0](#)

Myanmar is administratively divided into seven states, seven regions and a single union territory known as Nay Pyi Taw. The states are mainly populated by different ethnic groups, while the regions are mainly home to the Bamar ethnic community, which accounts for an estimated 68 % of the population.¹¹⁴

The following sections will focus on the security situation in Chin, Kachin, Karen (Kayin) and Rakhine states.

3.2 Chin State

Chin State is located in the country's western part. The Chin community, an ethnic minority in Myanmar, forms the largest portion of Chin State's population. Approximately 90 % of the Chin group identify as Christians. In recent years, the state has been in conflict due to the intense clashes between the Myanmar military and various armed ethnic minority factions.¹¹⁵

With an estimated population of approximately half a million people, Chin State is the second smallest state by population in Myanmar.¹¹⁶

Chin State is home to at least of 14 armed groups, including the Chinland Defence Force (CDF) and the Chin National Defence Force (CNDP). Both of these groups are allied with the long-established Chin National Army (CNA). The conflict in Chin State has resulted in the displacement of approximately 50 000 individuals.¹¹⁷

3.2.1 Security situation

Prior to the 2021 military coup, there had been reports of potential war crimes and arbitrary airstrikes in Chin state.¹¹⁸ Following the coup, the military escalated its actions within Chin State, leading to civilian casualties, property destruction, and prompting thousands to flee.¹¹⁹

UN's Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar wrote in a report from March 2022 that the military specifically targets the civilian population in its attacks.¹²⁰ In June 2022, the military conducted operations in areas such as Chin State to quell resistance.¹²¹

¹¹⁴ MIMU, *Country Information*, 2023, [url](#); Norway, Landinfo, *Myanmar: Nasjonalt ID-kort/statsborgerskapsbevis/Citizenship Scrutiny Card (CSC)*, 29 September 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁵ MRG, *Myanmar/Burma – Chin*, 19 June 2015 [url](#), pp. 1-2; Atlas of Humanity, *Myanmar, Chin People*, n.d., [url](#); Lian H. S., *Christianity and the state of religious freedom in Burma/Myanmar's Chin State*, 1 February 2021, [url](#), pp. 106, 113

¹¹⁶ MIMU, *Chin State*, 2023, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 15

¹¹⁸ OHCHR, *Enabling Atrocities: UN Member States' Arms Transfers to the Myanmar Military*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 11-12

¹¹⁹ CSIS, *Is Myanmar's Military on Its Last Legs?*, 21 June 2022, [url](#); HRW, *World Report 2022 – Myanmar*, 2022, [url](#); HRW, *Myanmar: Coup Crashes Democratic Rule*, 13 January 2022, [url](#); UNOCHA, *Myanmar – Humanitarian Update No. 15*, 15 February 2022, [url](#); UK Home Office, *Country Policy and Information Note: Myanmar (Burma): Critics of the military regime*, July 2022, [url](#), p. 22

¹²⁰ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 16 March 2022, [url](#), p. 4

¹²¹ AI, *Bullets rained from the sky – war crimes and displacement in Eastern Myanmar*, June 2022, [url](#), p. 39

In 2022, the US State Department (USDOS) described the situation in Chin State for the civilian population as very serious.¹²² Reports have emerged of repeated airstrikes, random detentions, torture, murder, unexplained disappearances, sexual abuse, compulsory labour, exploitation of children, and the use of civilians as human shields.¹²³

Amnesty International stated in March 2022 that the military had carried out several airstrikes and bombings against ethnic Chin civilians.¹²⁴

According Burma Human Rights Network, the military employs a 'kill all, burn all, and destroy all' strategy in relation to ethnic and religious minorities, including Chin.¹²⁵ During the last quarter of 2021, the military ordered soldiers to clear areas in Chin state.¹²⁶ Thantlang, a local town, was destroyed, causing 10 000 of its inhabitants to seek refuge in nearby villages or escape across the Indian border.¹²⁷ Subsequently, in June 2022, the military returned to the devastated Thantlang where they further burned down the historically significant Baptist Church and at least 164 homes.¹²⁸

In June 2022, the military prevented humanitarian aid from reaching areas affected by the conflict. The military imposed a block on supplies and denied travel permissions. In Chin State, the movement of goods has stopped almost completely and regular checks are taking place.¹²⁹

In March 2023, Radio Free Asia (RFA) reported that the military intensified its air attacks in Chin State due to the effective resistance from anti-military groups.¹³⁰ In April 2023, the Myanmar military carried out 47 airstrikes, resulting in fatalities and the destruction of holy structures and residential houses.¹³¹

Local sources reported that at least nine civilians lost their lives when a military fighter jet launched an attack on a high school in Chin State on April 2023.¹³²

In the north-western region of Chin State, the Chin National Army (CNA) engaged in a clash with the military on the Hakha-Gangaw road in the Magway region on 1 May 2023, leading to the death of several government soldiers. On 5 May 2023, the Chinland Defence Force (CDF)

¹²² USDOS, *2021 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 12 April 2022, [url](#)

¹²³ USDOS, *2021 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 12 April 2022, [url](#); OHCHR, *Enabling Atrocities: UN Member States' Arms Transfers to the Myanmar Military*, 22 February 2022, [url](#), pp. 16, 20; International Crisis Group, *Taking Aim at the Tatmadaw. The new armed resistance to Myanmar's Coup*, 29 June 2021, [url](#); AI, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Myanmar 2021*, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁴ AI, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Myanmar 2021*, 29 March 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁵ USDOS, *2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, 2 June 2022, [url](#)

¹²⁶ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 16 March 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹²⁷ AI, *The State of the World's Human Rights; Myanmar 2021*, 29 March 2022, [url](#); OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 16 March 2022, [url](#), p.6

¹²⁸ RFA, *Once-bustling town of Thantlang reduced to rubble by Myanmar's junta*, 11 April 2023, [url](#)

¹²⁹ USDOS, *2022 Human Rights Report: Burma*, 20 March 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁰ RFA, *Once-bustling town of Thantlang reduced to rubble by Myanmar's junta*, 31 March 2023, [url](#)

¹³¹ RFA, *Myanmar's western Chin state pummeled by junta's air force in April*, 27 April 2023, [url](#)

¹³² Myanmar Now, *Airstrike kills at least nine at a school in northern Chin State*, 10 April 2023, [url](#)

launched an ambush on a military base in the town of Matupi, resulting in the deaths of two officers. In response, on 9 May 2023, the military launched an airstrike on the group's headquarters located in Hakha Township, which caused the death of two people.¹³³

In August 2023, a Baptist church and a residential house were destroyed and seven people were injured as a result of military attacks.¹³⁴

3.3 Karen (Kayin) State

The Karen State, also referred to as Kayin, is located in the eastern part of Myanmar, stretching along the long border with Thailand. The state is home to a population of 1.43 million people.¹³⁵ The predominant residents of Karen State are the Karen population, which further consist of numerous ethnic groups.¹³⁶ Over two-thirds of the Karen population practice Buddhism.¹³⁷

From 1949 onwards, Karen State has been a battleground marked by conflicts between the Myanmar military and the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Army (KNU/KNLA), one of the oldest and largest ethnic armed organisations in Myanmar.¹³⁸

Similar to other areas populated by ethnic minority communities, the KNU/KNLA holds considerable control of the state, especially in the rural areas, and operates their own administrative apparatus.¹³⁹

3.3.1 Security situation

The situation regarding human rights and security in Karen State has deteriorated significantly since the military coup in February 2021. There has been an increase in reported violations of international law perpetrated by the Myanmar military in the state, including airstrikes, indiscriminate bombings, destruction of civilian homes, indiscriminate arrests, torture, and withholding of humanitarian assistance.¹⁴⁰

The Institute for Strategy and Policy – Myanmar (ISP – Myanmar) reported that a minimum of 2 193 confrontations took place between the military and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs)

¹³³ International Crisis Group, *Crisis Watch – Myanmar*, May 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁴ RFA, *Residents say Christian churches attacked by junta in Myanmar's Chin state*, 15 August 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁵ MIMU, *Kayin State*, 2023, [url](#)

¹³⁶ AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 13

¹³⁷ MRG, *Myanmar - Karen*, August 2017, [url](#)

¹³⁸ AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 13; UNHCR, *Kayin State Profile*, June 2014, [url](#); Stimson, *The Karen National Union in Post-Coup Myanmar*, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

¹³⁹ AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁴⁰ KHRG, *Deadly Encounters: Killings of civilians by armed actors in Southeast Burma (October 2022 - April 2023)*, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

within the period from 1 July 2021 to 20 March 2022. The vast majority of these confrontations - nearly 80 % - took place in areas controlled by the KNU/KNLA.¹⁴¹

The level of conflict between the KNU/KNLA and the military increased significantly following the coup. The KNU was the leading armed ethnic minority faction to contest the coup; it took on the responsibility of training newly formed resistance entities, including the People's Defence Force (PDF), which surfaced following the coup.¹⁴²

After the coup, many pro-democracy activists, participants of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), and leaders of the National League for Democracy (NLD) sought refuge towards the border to Thailand, primarily in areas within the Dooplaya District in Karen State. As of May 2021, about 3 000 CDM members were reportedly settled in this district, prompting a rise in military activity, including the erection of new checkpoints and heightened surveillance of travel routes in and out of towns in Kaw T'Ree (Kawkareik) Township.¹⁴³

Between March and May 2021, the military launched heavy airstrikes and ground offensives in KNU-controlled Mutraw. The attacks targeted for the most part civilian areas, including protected locations such as schools and churches, and they frequently occurred during the night time.¹⁴⁴ Fighting escalated in December 2021 and January 2022 and increased significantly in March 2022 when the KNU/KNLA, the Karen National Defence Organisation (KNDO) and the PDF came together to jointly oppose the military.¹⁴⁵

From January 2022 and April 2023, there have been at least 45 reported killings, with 22 of these occurring in the recent months, specifically from October 2022 to April 2023. It is likely that the actual number of such incidents surpasses the reported figures, according to the Karen Human Rights Group.¹⁴⁶

In April 2023, UNHCR reported on indiscriminate and targeted shellings, airstrikes, clashes and destruction of properties in several states in the country, including Karen State.¹⁴⁷

Over the last 70 years, Myanmar's military has implemented a series of policies targeted at suppressing opposition in the Karen State. Among these measures is the 'shoot on sight' policy. After the coup, several incidents have been recorded where Myanmar's military intentionally

¹⁴¹ AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁴² Reuters, *Explainer: Truce over as Myanmar's Karen insurgents brace for battle with junta*, 31 March 2021, [url](#); Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁴³ KHRG, *Bombs and Bullets Like Rain: Air strikes in the 'peace town' and places of refuge in Dooplaya District, December 2021 to May 2022*, 23 December 2022, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁴⁴ Stimson, *The Karen National Union in Post-Coup Myanmar*, 7 April 2022, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ ACLED, *Continued Resistance Against the Military Coup*, 2022, [url](#); KHRG, *Dooplaya District Situation Update: SAC military activity, displacement, livelihood challenges, travel insecurity and education, March to May 2022*, 3 February 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ KHRG, *Deadly Encounters: Killings of civilians by armed actors in Southeast Burma (October 2022 - April 2023)*, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ UNHCR, *Myanmar Emergency Update*, 10 April 2023, [url](#), p. 1

targeted civilians, often when they were engaged in their daily activities or even while they were escaping from attacks.¹⁴⁸ Among the 14 incidents recorded by the Karen Human Rights Group between October 2022 and April 2023, six involved a male being shot on sight and killed.¹⁴⁹

The fighting and numerous violations of international law committed by the Myanmar military have resulted in broad displacement across different parts of the country, including Karen State. In certain instances, whole villages have been evacuated, with civilians at times having to seek refuge multiple times over recent months.¹⁵⁰ As of 21 August 2023, over 166 200 individuals were displaced within Karen State, according to UN data.¹⁵¹

3.4 Kachin State

Kachin State, which borders both India and China, is the country's northernmost region. According to the 2014 census, the Kachin State's population is estimated to constitute about 3 % of Myanmar's overall population.¹⁵²

The Kachin represent a number of ethnic communities who speak twelve languages from the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family.¹⁵³ Currently, it is estimated that over 90 % of the Kachin population identify as Christian, with approximately two-thirds being Baptists. The Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC) is the most influential church and extends its influence beyond religious activities.¹⁵⁴

After the military coup in 1962, the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO), along with its militant wing, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), was founded to fight for Kachin's autonomy and independence.¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ KHRG, *Deadly Encounters: Killings of civilians by armed actors in Southeast Burma (October 2022 - April 2023)*, 8 June 2023, [url](#); AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 6; OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 3 October 2022, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁴⁹ KHRG, *Deadly Encounters: Killings of civilians by armed actors in Southeast Burma (October 2022 - April 2023)*, 8 June 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ AI, *Myanmar: "Bullets rained from the sky": War crimes and displacement in eastern Myanmar*, 31 May 2022, [url](#), p. 40

¹⁵¹ UNHCR, *Myanmar South East – Emergency Overview Map*, 21 August 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵² Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, *The Kachin Conflict, Testing the Limits of Political Transition in Myanmar*, 3 July 2018, [url](#), p. 1

¹⁵³ MRG, *Myanmar Kachin*, August 2017, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, *The Kachin Conflict, Testing the Limits of Political Transition in Myanmar*, 3 July 2018, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁵⁵ Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia, *The Kachin Conflict, Testing the Limits of Political Transition in Myanmar*, 3 July 2018, [url](#), pp. 12, 15

3.4.1 Security situation

After the coup in 2021, there was a significant increase in violence in Kachin State and the conflict between the military and the KIA expanded into northern Shan State, Sagaing Region, and Mandalay Region from 2020 to 2021.¹⁵⁶

According to the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security (MIPS), there were 312 clashes documented between the KIA and the military within the first six months of 2021. Additionally, during the period from March to June 2021, an estimated 12 000 civilians were forced to flee their homes in Kachin State, further contributing to the already existing protracted displacement of approximately 100 000 individuals since 2011. Furthermore, some factions within the KIA have been involved in providing training and weapons to PDF.¹⁵⁷

Civilians in Kachin State are at risk due to constant airstrikes and indiscriminate bombing of settlements.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, reports indicate that the military forced civilians to act as human shields, to transport supplies, or to perform other supporting tasks. Many human rights groups have recorded cases of villagers being exploited as human shields in various states in Myanmar, including Kachin State.¹⁵⁹

According to Amnesty International, since seizing power on 1 February 2021, the military has progressively increased its use of air power to maintain control over the country, including Kachin State.¹⁶⁰

In October 2022, the Myanmar military launched air attacks on an event in Hpakant Township, located in the northern Kachin State. The event was organised by the KIO to celebrate the 62nd anniversary of their Kachin organisation. The attack allegedly resulted in numerous fatalities, a claim that Amnesty International was unable to verify independently.¹⁶¹ According Human Rights Watch, more than 80 individuals lost their lives in the attack, with over 100 injured. After the incident, military forces prevented injured individuals from accessing medical assistance.¹⁶²

In April 2023, close to 200 villagers from a single community in Hpakant Township were detained, accused of supporting the KIA and the PDF. According to a local resident, around 150 individuals remain in custody.¹⁶³

In May 2023, the RFA reported that the security situation in Kachin State has deteriorated, resulting in the military detaining more than 700 civilians. According to residents who spoke to

¹⁵⁶ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁵⁷ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁵⁸ UNHCR, *Myanmar Emergency Update*, 11 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ USDOS, *2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Burma*, 21 March 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ AI, *Myanmar: Deadly air strikes in Kachin State appear to fit pattern of unlawful attacks*, 24 October 2022, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ AI, *Myanmar: Deadly air strikes in Kachin State appear to fit pattern of unlawful attacks* 24 October 2022, [url](#);

HRW, *World Report 2023 – Myanmar*, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶² HRW, *World Report 2023 – Myanmar*, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶³ RFA, *In Myanmar jade town, junta arrests 700 to use some for human shields, residents say*, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

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RFA, some of these civilians are being used as human shields in the military's confrontations with resistance groups.¹⁶⁴

According to OCHA, the conflict in Kachin, which began in mid-March 2023, has displaced over 14 000 individuals from various villages in Shwegu Township.¹⁶⁵ As of 21 August 2023, the total number of displaced people in Kachin State was 112 000.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ RFA, *In Myanmar jade town, junta arrests 700 to use some for human shields, residents say*, 10 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ UNOCHA, *Myanmar Humanitarian Update No. 30*, 13 June 2023, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁶⁶ UNHCR, *Number of people displaced since Feb 2021 and remain displaced*, 21 August 2023, [url](#), p. 2

3.5 Rakhine State

Rakhine State, historically known as Arakan, is located in western Myanmar. The state borders Bangladesh internationally and Magway, Bago and Ayeyarwady regions as well as Chin State internally. The estimated population of the state is around 3.22 million.¹⁶⁷

Rakhine State has been involved in an ongoing conflict between the Myanmar military and the Arakan Army (AA), an ethnic armed organisation representing the Rakhine people's interests.¹⁶⁸

The Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), an armed group primarily composed of Rakhine Muslims, known for their October 2016 attack on the Border Guard Police, which triggered an extensive security response against the Rohingya, remains active in Rakhine State.¹⁶⁹

3.5.1 Security situation

During the first year after the coup, Rakhine State saw less violence compared to many other parts of Myanmar. This was in part attributed to an informal ceasefire that was established between the military and the AA few months prior to the coup.¹⁷⁰

In July 2022, the ceasefire between the AA and the Myanmar military broke down. This led to several months of renewed fighting, the death of civilians, and large-scale displacement along the border of the Rakhine and Chin states.¹⁷¹

Since mid-July 2022, tensions have been escalating in Rakhine State between the military and the United League of Arakan/Arakan Army (ULA/AA), as the ULA/AA has strengthened its control of certain areas of the state. As a result, the military government strengthened its presence throughout Rakhine State and started arresting numerous individuals linked to the AA.¹⁷² The military bombed a ULA/AA base in Karen State on 4 July 2022, resulting in the killing of six ULA/AA members. In response, the ULA/AA retaliated by launching attacks on the military in Maungdaw township located in Rakhine State.¹⁷³

In September 2022, the military government imposed a ban on the UN and international non-profit organisations in six districts of Rakhine State, in response to the escalated conflict between the AA and the military. Furthermore, they stopped all public transport services in government-controlled areas.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ MIMU, *Rakhine State*, 2023, [url](#); TNI, *Arakan (Rakhine State): A Land in Conflict on Myanmar's Western Frontier*, December 2019, [url](#), p. 10

¹⁶⁸ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 16

¹⁶⁹ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 16; USDOS, *2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Burma*, 16 May 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ International Crisis Group, *Avoiding a Return to War in Myanmar's Rakhine State*, 1 June 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷¹ HRW, *World Report 2023 – Myanmar*, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷² Stimson, *Understanding the Arakan Army*, 21 April 2023, [url](#); ACLED, *Continued Resistance Against the Military Coup*, n.d., [url](#); The Jamestown Foundation, *The Arakan Army and Tatmadaw's Tenuous Truces in Myanmar's Rakhine State*, 16 December 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷³ ACLED, *Continued Resistance Against the Military Coup*, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁷⁴ HRW, *World Report 2023 – Myanmar*, 12 January 2023, [url](#)

3.5.1.1 Rohingya

The Rohingya constitute a minority group in Myanmar, both ethnically and linguistically as well as religiously. The majority of this community is found in Rakhine State. The Rohingya are subjected to considerable discrimination and human rights abuses within Myanmar. This includes severe limitations on their freedom of movement within the country, restricted access to vital services like education and healthcare, a ban on employment in public service jobs, requirements for official authorization to wed, and a widespread denial of citizenship.¹⁷⁵

The Rohingya are not recognised as an official ethnic group in Myanmar and have been denied citizenship since 1982. They are one of the largest stateless populations in the world.¹⁷⁶

As of 2022, approximately 130 000 Rohingya were residing in what are described as 'temporary' camps located in central Rakhine. These people have been living in these camps since they were forcibly displaced in 2012.¹⁷⁷

Close to 1 million Rohingya have sought refuge in Bangladesh, with 75 % of them arriving in 2017, following the massive scale of violence against the Rohingya in Myanmar.¹⁷⁸

Since the coup, the Myanmar's military has enforced new movement restrictions and aid blockages on Rohingya camps and villages. In addition to this, security forces have arrested an estimated 2 000 Rohingya, including hundreds of children, for 'unauthorized travel.' Many have been subjected to the maximum penalty of five years in prison.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁵ Council on Foreign Relations, *The Rohingya Crisis*, 23 January 2020, [url](#); MRG, *Muslims and Rohingya*, June 2019, [url](#); Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), pp. 18-19; OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 12

¹⁷⁶ UNHCR, *Rohingya Refugee Crisis*, 2023, [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 20

¹⁷⁸ UNHCR, *Rohingya Refugee Crisis Explained*, 13 July 2022, [url](#)

¹⁷⁹ HRW, *Myanmar: No Justice, No Freedom for Rohingya 5 Years On*, 24 August 2022, [url](#); OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 7

4. Return

Information on individuals returning to Myanmar is limited, especially for those returning from Europe and other Western countries. Likewise, there is limited information concerning returnees with perceived affiliation with resistance groups. The prevailing security conditions in Myanmar makes it difficult to investigate these issues (see section [Access to Information](#)).

Individuals returning to Myanmar who have left the country illegally can be punished with up to five years in prison for simply crossing the border illegally. The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population manages the task of interviewing individuals who return to Myanmar, except for the Rohingya returnees. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is responsible for managing Rohingya returnees.¹⁸⁰

To enter Myanmar, individuals must have a departure stamp on their passport. A Myanmar passport without this stamp is considered invalid for international travel and re-entry into the country. This stamp is verified upon re-entry and lacking it will lead to interrogation. The consequences of such questioning are uncertain. Furthermore, missing the necessary departure stamp typically makes boarding flights or passing immigration checkpoints challenging.¹⁸¹

Even following the military coup, people continued to return to Myanmar. However, there has been a substantial decline in this trend since mid-2022. Currently, the number of people returning to Myanmar is significantly lower than what it once was.¹⁸²

The majority of returnees come from Thailand with a significant number also returning from China. People return from other countries too. They usually return via land routes, with some returning by sea or, in certain cases, by air. Only a small number of these returnees, estimated to be around 10–20 %, are returning voluntarily.¹⁸³

According to an international organisation, approximately 50 % or close to half of those who have returned to Myanmar express an intention to re-immigrate.¹⁸⁴

The UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar stated in a report from May 2023 that some governments have made the decision to forcibly return refugees and other nationals of Myanmar, despite the potential risks of imprisonment, torture, or even execution.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), pp. 43-44

¹⁸¹ Human Rights Organisation: 27-29

¹⁸² International Organisation: 1

¹⁸³ International Organisation: 1

¹⁸⁴ International Organisation: 3, 4

¹⁸⁵ OHCHR, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*, Thomas H. Andrews, 9 March 2023, [url](#), p. 4

4.1 Treatment of returnees

Individuals returning to Myanmar, particularly those with prior political engagement, are not guaranteed a safe return, according to an anonymous source. They may be subjected to investigation, interrogations and face the possibility of being arrested when they return to the country.¹⁸⁶

Therefore, high-profile activists and those who are on the arrest list are specifically unlikely to return voluntarily to Myanmar due to the possible risk of detention, abuse, prosecution or imprisonment.¹⁸⁷

In one reported case, a person who returned to Myanmar was detained and subjected to sexual assault. This individual had originally left the country legally and followed all required immigration procedures and had no knowledge of being on any potential arrest list.¹⁸⁸

Individuals who left Myanmar shortly after the military coup could potentially face extensive questioning, particularly if his or her place of origin is a region involved in the ongoing conflict. The degree of the questioning is likely to vary. Not all returnees are subjected to it; however, it more likely occurs when 'red flags' are raised about an individual's status or activities.¹⁸⁹

DFAT has assessed that any failed asylum seeker returning to Myanmar from Australia would be at high risk of official harassment, arbitrary detention and violence, regardless of why they left Myanmar in the first place. This is due to the high level of scrutiny on people travelling in and out of the country and the severe consequences for anyone suspected of opposing or criticising the military government or having links to Western countries.¹⁹⁰

4.1.1 *Return conditions for ethnic minority groups*

As mentioned in [section 1.1](#) and [3.1](#), Burman solidarity has been strong in the past which has led to the marginalisation of ethnic minority groups. Currently, the main confrontation is between the military and opposition groups, which also include people of Burman ethnicity. Therefore, all ethnic groups are equal in terms of their ability to return, with the exception of the Rohingya.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Anonymous Source: 2

¹⁸⁷ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 25; Anonymous source: 6

¹⁸⁸ International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh: 26

¹⁸⁹ Anonymous source: 5-6

¹⁹⁰ Australia, DFAT, *Country Information Report Myanmar*, 11 November 2022, [url](#), p. 44

¹⁹¹ Anonymous source: 7-9

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Annex 1: Meeting minutes

International Human Rights NGO, 24 April 2023

Access to information

1. The source obtains information directly from reliable organisations inside Myanmar, which are not affiliated with the military, and can independently help verify information.
2. The use of encrypted communication channels such as Signal is essential for maintaining privacy and security, particularly in the ongoing security situation in Myanmar. The Norwegian telecommunication company Telenor, which sold its operations in Myanmar in March 2022 did not switch on live surveillance technology while it was operational in the country, and chose to exit due to pressure from the junta.
3. When conducting interviews with individuals in Myanmar it is essential to ensure their safety and privacy by creating a space where the conversation is less likely to be overheard or monitored.
4. Access to information is generally limited and affects all organisations/persons dealing with Myanmar – it is especially difficult to access information in real time. Getting information outside of Yangon is also difficult, unless provided by the resistance groups.
5. Sometimes there are admissions from the military such as the airstrikes in April 2023 in Sagaing region or other attacks conducted by the military. Nonetheless, it is essential to critically evaluate the information disseminated by the junta as it is frequently a form of propaganda.

Validation/collection of information

6. Regarding collection and validation of information, the source said that information is usually collected through civil society, INGO, witnesses and victims. Information is always crosschecked with other sources as conditions in Myanmar permit. Usually, information from Myanmar is delayed and international organizations, especially human rights organizations, have none or limited access to the country, which further affects the ability to validate available information.

Spread of protests, unrest and violence since the coup

7. Following the coup, there were widespread protests across the country. The resistance movement became strongest in middle Myanmar, where there is a majority ethnic Bamar presence, and who may traditionally have been pro-military due to the ethnic make-up of the Myanmar military. The strongest, and ongoing

resistance, has originated from central Myanmar. This development was unexpected by the military government.

8. Since the coup, airstrikes have been reported daily in areas such as Magway and Sagaing, which previously have not been unaffected by this type of attack (as opposed to parts of Myanmar where there are ethnic held areas such as in Kachin, Shan, Karenni and Karen states) . The increase of airstrikes also suggests that the military is losing ground battles. Therefore, the source predicts an increase in airstrike attacks, while dry season is underway to crush the resistance movement. This is a well-known tactic by the military, which have been employed in the fight against the ethnic-armed groups.
9. Flash mobs continue to occur in the major cities organized by young people who wanted to express their opposition to the military rule. However, these groups operate underground and limited information is shared ahead of the events to avoid attention from the police and military. The military continues deadly crack down on protests and arbitrary arrests of individuals participating in anti-military activities.

The security situation in the ethnic minority areas

10. The complex security situation in the ethnic areas is further complicated by the coup. Myanmar is home to many ethnic groups, and military regimes past and present have used this to divide the population. However, the majority of ethnic minority groups are united in their opposition to the Myanmar military junta.
11. Over the years, the military has established strongholds in places such as Shan State, Myitkyina in Kachin State and Rakhine State. After the coup, little opposition was seen in some of these areas. This suggests that the military already had a very clear control and people were reluctant to protest because of the military's strong presence and the heightened risk of retaliation from the pro-military ethnic militias such as the RCSS in Shan State. This ultimately also affects the flow of information coming from the ethnic minority areas.

The security situation in central Myanmar

12. The security situation in central Myanmar dangerous and extremely volatile – this is due to ongoing air and ground attacks by the military junta on its own people where civilians are frequently targeted, in violation of the laws of war.

Military response

13. The escalation of the conflict can be detected from the airstrikes conducted by the military. The grounds attacks are difficult to follow, as many of these occur in remote areas. The source has determined that the military is using enhanced blast weapons and other disproportionate forms of weapons against civilians.
14. The military continues to conduct arbitrary arrests and night raids across the country. Family members to protesters with arrest warrant or suspected affiliation with any type of resistance activity risk been detained.

15. Two years after the coup, family members are still targeted for arrest. There are still cases where parent are arrested in lieu of the children. In addition, children under 18 were arrested in lieu of the parents. The source interviewed countless people who were arrested originally because either their brothers or their sisters or their parents were involved in anti-coup activities.
16. Persons also can be arrested on the premise of donating money to anti-military groups. Many informants or Dalan report on this. So both the military can trace by both physical and cyber surveillance. Tech surveillance and app surveillance is suspected to be live and active. Hence, why we say do not use mobile phones and try to use Signal (but also telecoms are regularly shut down so this is difficult).
17. Widespread arrests were happening just after the coup. However, the military is now conducting targeted arrests of persons with actual or perceived association with the any type of resistance movement. There are extensive reports of torture during detention.
18. The military has been using military tribunals to prosecute and sentence people. These tribunals are held in areas under martial law. According to reports, thousands of people have been detained and tried in these military tribunals since the coup, approximately 140 or 150 people have been sentenced to death.

SoMe

19. The cyber security law came into effect in 2021, enabling the military to arrest individuals who post anti-military content on social media. There is information that individuals who posted information about the massacre in Shan State in April 2023 were arrested.
20. There are also known cases where individuals subjected to doxing via Telegram channels have been targeted and killed by pro-military militias or their security forces.

Surveillance

21. The military in Myanmar has a long history of monitoring its citizens. Following the coup, the military has increased its efforts to monitor the population. The military has also reportedly been using software technology provided by the Chinese government to monitor the communications of people, and has been conducting raids in an attempt to gather information of persons who are perceived as a threat to the government.
22. Various governments and military organizations have used the Dalans (informants) gathering information and intelligence on their opponents. The informants are embedded in the communities and the military rely heavily on their information.
23. The administration structure in Myanmar is at district level divided into townships, wards, and villages. Staff loyal to the military administrate the ward and township, particularly in Mandalay and Yangon. The military is therefore able to monitor who comes and goes at any point of time. The information collected by the ward or township staff are reported back to the Central Intelligence in Naypyidaw. The military

has a well-established system for monitoring individuals and is therefore able to target individuals of interest.

24. The government has installed CCTV cameras in in major cities, including Yangon and Mandalay and these are operational. In fact, it is unclear how they are utilizing the surveillance technology.
25. The CCTV cameras are equipped with facial recognition technology, which is able to recognize faces and license plates.

Minority groups and freedom of movement

26. Many have left their homes in the urban areas and returned to their villages, due to the fear of arrest by the military. This is not limited to ethnic minorities, but anyone who is worried about arrest or fears persecution by the military and its security forces. The military is known to carry out raids and arrests in urban areas; however, it may be more difficult for them to extend their control to areas such as Magway or even northern Mandalay, and carry out operations with limited infrastructure and access to communications.
27. Many are living in hiding and have been forced to adopt a low profile. They may be staying with family members or they may have fled to remote areas, such as the jungles or ethnic minority-controlled regions, to avoid arrest.
28. The military in Myanmar has a history of restricting the movement of minority groups, including the Rohingya, Kachin and Chin. These restrictions on movement are part of a broader pattern of discrimination and marginalization of minority groups. After the coup, these restrictions continue to be implemented.
29. A prominent Kachin community leader, with good relationship with the military, was arrested in December 2022 in Yangon. He was charged with six years of unlawful association and incitement. According to the sources, this sends a strong message to all ethnic groups, including the Kachin, that any dissent would not be tolerated by the military.
30. The ID cards in Myanmar display the individual's ethnicity and religion.
31. Restrictions on movement and the imposition of arbitrary rules by the military are not new in Myanmar. For instance, ethnic Rakhine needed permission to travel 20 years ago, and they still need permission to travel to Yangon today. These actions have been used as a means of controlling the population, particularly ethnic minority groups, for many years in order to get support from the ethnic Bamar majority.

International Crisis Group's Senior Consultant on Myanmar and Bangladesh, 27 April 2023

Access to information

1. In 2011, Myanmar transitioned to a civilian government, which led to a series of reforms, including the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector. Before 2011, the

internet access was very restricted and very few people had access. At the time of the 2021 coup, nearly everyone had internet access in Myanmar. The military tried to control the internet access, but most people are still able to access the internet. The only way the military can really restrict access is by shutdowns, and it has limited these to the areas where conflict is heaviest.

2. Organisations and persons outside Myanmar have a reasonably good level of access to information about what is happening in Myanmar. They can reach people in the country via Signal, email, Messenger etc. Nevertheless, quite a large part of the country is subject to the internet shutdowns. For instance, in Sagaing region around four million people do not have internet access, according to Freedom of Expression Activist Organization.
3. People in areas with internet shutdowns often find ways to bypass the restrictions, however, access to internet and information remains limited in these areas.
4. Another aspect, when talking about access to information in Myanmar is that people are concerned about their safety when communicating with journalists, researchers, or military opponents. There is a risk that the authorities could monitor their conversations. There is the potential for retaliation – arrest and prosecution, or at a minimum threats and intimidation.
5. Even when speaking completely off the record people are reluctant to talk to a researcher, which ultimately affects the availability of information. Nevertheless, due to widespread internet access many people are sharing information on Facebook about the situation in the country. In addition, informal small media organisations are starting up a very informal kind of operations. In spite of people being scared, there is still a reasonable amount of information about the situation on ground; however, it is very difficult to verify information posted in Facebook.

Developments since the military coup in February 2021

6. In February, March and April 2021 there were mass street protests. The military regime responded with crackdown on the protesters, using deadly force.
7. Around 1,000 people were killed by the military within the first months of the coup. It prompted tens of thousands of people to launch an armed struggle and led to the formation of numerous small-armed groups across the country. These groups vary in size, structure, and capabilities, and their primary objective is to resist the military.
8. Some armed groups are like small cells in urban areas that launches bombings or assassinations aiming at military personal or government buildings. Others groups operate in rural areas and under the PDF command; some are smaller militias independent from the PDF. Finally, some groups are working very closely with ethnic armed groups that already existed.
9. In general, the nonviolent struggle is no longer at the forefront of the resistance; it has shifted towards an armed struggle. Nevertheless, protests continue, but at a much lower scale. In urban areas, activists sometimes hold flash protests. The flash mobs are designed to be photographed in order to be shared on social media for domestic and

international political reasons. However, they can be dangerous for the participants – in one protest in December 2021, the military drove a car into the protesters and then arrested them. Protests also occur in places where the military does not have full control. The aim of these protests is often to show that the military does not have control and cannot stop the protests. The protests are generally not by armed resistance groups – they are activists and sometimes residents.

10. Another aspect of the nonviolent resistance is the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). Many people from various sectors participated in the CDM and went on strike. However, the movement has faced challenges in maintaining support over time. Due to the poor economic situation in the country, people are struggling to make ends meet, and find it difficult to prioritize participation in the CDM.
11. There are other types of protests, such as boycotts, that are still in effect, but they probably do not have the same level of momentum that they used to have. The fact that the nonviolent protest has waned should not be interpreted as people are accepting the military rule or that they are supporting or agreeing to military rule. Rather it is a result of the military's tactics and people having to survive.

How widespread is the armed conflict

12. The military is in reasonable strong control of Yangon, Mandalay and Naypyidaw, as well as in most other urban areas. In rural areas, the military is in control of Ayeyarwady region, most of Bago region, parts of Magway region. However, everywhere else is contested or under the control of ethnic armed groups or in some cases the resistance groups, many of which are referred to as PDFs. Summing up, huge parts of the country have shifted into being a conflict state, especially central Myanmar that have not seen any active armed conflicts for decades, since the 60s or 70s.
13. There has been little conflict in Kayah or Chin states for decades, but among ethnic states, these areas have seen the heaviest fighting since the coup. Myanmar has not seen this level of conflict, probably since the 1950s; the geographic spread and the number of casualties are almost at record levels.

Central Myanmar – actors in the conflict

14. The conflict situation in central Myanmar is very complicated. A number of armed groups are present in the new conflict areas. Following the coup, new groups were formed. Some operate under the PDF and cooperate with the NUG, while others operate independently. Common for all groups is their anti-military strategy. The military has also formed its own militias to combat these new groups. Many of these are known as Pyusawhti.
15. The ethnic armed groups provide some support to these new anti-military groups in Central Myanmar, but primarily these are ethnic Burman youth led new groups.
16. There are no clashes or confrontation in the urban areas as seen in the ethnic minority areas or rural areas. However, bombings and targeted assassination occur in urban areas. These attacks are quite common and carried out by anti-military underground cells that oppose the coup. The military has generally control over the major cities, but

the underground cells have mostly been active in Yangon. Their targets are people working for the military in some capacity. Low-level administrators are often killed in these attacks.

17. Specifically, ward administrators, who oversee the smallest administrative unit, in urban areas, are very vulnerable. These people are usually civilians, but they are often former government workers or former military officials sometimes, low ranking officers. These ward officials are important for monitoring what people are doing for local security reasons. They are seen as an important part of the military's strategy to maintain control over people. There is a lot of pressure on these officials to resign and those who have not resigned are all potential targets for the resistance movement, particularly if they are very actively supporting the regime such as by helping them identify activists and resistance fighters.

Treatment of family members of activists

18. If the military identifies an activist or someone who has joined an armed group that they want to apprehend, if they cannot find, then they often target the relatives instead. They sometimes arrest and charge the relative, which is a hostage situation that is fairly explicit in the sense that if the activist gives him/herself up, their relatives will be released. It is likely that in some cases the family members, who have been arrested for the actions of an activist in their family, have been tortured.
19. The reported cases are often the most extreme ones, including young children getting kidnapped or detained for example to get at parents. It happens quite regularly, it scares people, and it has a chilling effect on people's behaviour, because they worry about what the impact will be on their relatives.

Monitoring

20. The military in Myanmar has been in power for many decades and has established a surveillance system that includes the use of ward administrators and the state security apparatus to monitor the population. They purged their military intelligence in 2004. Subsequently, there was a period when the surveillance was not very good. The military intelligence, which had been responsible for most of the surveillance, regrouped afterwards. When the coup happened the Military Affairs Security, the replacement organ, was quite capable. People were scared of Military Affairs Security. Thus, the surveillance system is a combination of state security apparatus as well as civilian informants who are pro-military people, including the ward officials or civilians, who have no formal role in the state and who are doing it for ideological reasons, be or they are ex-military, with relatives in the military or for financial reasons. In terms of online monitoring in particular, Facebook is being monitored. According to the source, there have been thousands of cases. In April 2021, the military printed the names of dozens of people each day that it was charging under section 505A (three year prison term) for their social media post.
21. The military do not have the resources to monitor everybody. The ward officials keep an eye on things that happen in the neighbour to some extent, and informants (Dalan)

as well are keeping an eye on people in the neighbourhood, for example. If the underground cells can maintain a low profile oftentimes they will be able to survive for quite a while without being dismantled, but it is hard in urban areas for them to survive for a long time. In a dense area, it is hard to go unnoticed for a long time.

22. The military monitors individuals who have a history of political activism, including those affiliated with the National League for Democracy (NLD). After the coup, the military is also monitoring individuals who are running charity groups that might be providing support to the civil disobedience movement and those posting online on Facebook,. The source summed up by saying that there is a capacity for monitoring people, however, there is a limit to what they can do because of human, financial and technical resource limitations.

CCTV cameras

23. When asked about installation of CCTV cameras in the major cities to monitor people's behaviour and if footage from CCTV cameras been used to arrest and prosecute persons, the source did not know of such cases. Although, in press conferences the military has occasionally referred to CCTV footage. The installations of CCTV were rolled out under the NLD. The military have continued with this strategy and expanded the usage of CCTV others cities. Supposedly, the CCTV cameras have facial recognition, but the source did not think that the military has a database upon which to work. For this reason, it is unsure how useful the facial recognition technology would be. Similarly, the military has license plates scanning, but in a lot of cases people will have their car registered under a different name for tax reasons. The military does have CCTV cameras and it can be useful, but it is not on the level of effectiveness of what you would get for instance in China or in even in a western country where the police were investigating a case and they could go into records quite effectively to find information. The military does not have centralised databases. Sometimes files are on paper and not even computerised, which undermines these systems.

Monitoring of the diaspora

24. In terms of the military's capacity to monitor people in the diaspora, the military does to some extent monitor the diaspora. However, there is a resource limitation to monitor the large amount of people from Myanmar in Thailand. The military is monitoring online which does not depend on whether one is inside the country or outside the country. When it comes to the in-person monitoring, it becomes more difficult, but the military has some capacity and certainly people are very afraid of it. In places like Chiang Mai and Mae Sot there is an atmosphere in which people do not trust each other, because they worry that other people are informants or military spies. The military does have people on the ground, but there are so many people there that makes it very hard to keep track of everyone in Thailand even though they have the intent. There are cases of where Thailand has sent people back to Myanmar from Mae Sot, however a large number of exile Burmese remain in Thailand.

Return

25. For people from Myanmar who left the country and wish to return, one of the biggest issues is uncertainty about what will happen upon their return. For individuals who are high-profile activists or who are on an arrest list, it is unlikely that they would return to Myanmar. These persons may risk arrest, torture, death in custody, prosecution, prison sentence. However, for many other individuals who have left Myanmar and wish to return, there may be uncertainty and ambiguity about whether it is safe to do so.
26. The source knows of a case in which one person was arrested upon return to Myanmar. The person departed from the country in a lawful manner and through proper immigration channels, and was not aware of being included on any list for potential arrest. However, upon return the person was arrested and subjected to both torture and sexual assault. There is a genuine concern for those in the diaspora who are engaged in political activism. Even if the possibility of facing arrest upon return might be only 1 %, the consequences are potentially deadly with torture and deaths in custody common. Consequently, only a small number of people would be willing to take such a risk, as the potential lifelong trauma resulting from the experience could be devastating. That is a huge problem for people in the diaspora.
27. Exile Burmese stay abroad simply because they are afraid. In addition, it is getting more difficult to stay in Thailand legally, because the government in Thailand is tightening the screws in terms of visas. This implies that some people will face difficult decisions. They might decide to stay in Thailand illegally, but Thailand is becoming a more hostile environment; they might try to return informally by being smuggled over the border, which is possible, but it may imply that they will be living underground in Myanmar.
28. When asked if the source knew of other people who returned and encountered problems with the authorities, the source mentioned few cases where persons were arrested at the airport upon their departure from the country.
29. There are various ways to oppose the military. Fundraising for armed resistance organizations is common activity within the diaspora community. Many of these groups rely on crowdfunding for financial support. If a person who is identified as a fundraiser is caught by the military government, the person could be prosecuted under counter-terrorism laws and potentially receive a prison term of 10 to 20 years. The person might also be subjected to torture. Ethnic armed groups do not raise much money from the diaspora. They have their own income streams because they control territory. Their income stems from mining and informal businesses, including smuggling. The new-armed groups do not have those kinds of income streams, which means that they rely largely on crowdfunding both in an internet-based sense as well as in fundraising from local sources. It is common for people in the diaspora to be involved in fundraising for armed groups, and if the military was aware of this – and some of the fundraising activities are public –, but, they will be very much at risk if they went back to Myanmar.
30. If people from the political opposition, for example an MP returned to Myanmar, they would be at risk. For a low profile member of the opposition who is inside the country, they can reach a deal with your authorities, telling them they are going to stop their political work and that they do not have contact with the opposition. Then the

authorities will probably leave them alone, although, they will be monitored. The source did not know if this option existed for opposition members outside of the country. The source emphasised that MPs who has been part of anti-military activities, if you are in a Township level official, if you are a known supporter in your community and joined the anti-coup movement, you will be at risk of getting arrested and potentially killed.

31. Concerning the risk of family members of anti-military activists, it depends on the level of activities of the activists. If the activist has not been active since the coup, then they are reasonably safe and their families will be reasonably safe. However, if they have been politically active in opposing the regime, then their family members are at risk. There have been cases of family, members of NLD members, for example, who are politically active being detained, because the authorities cannot find the given NLD member. In most cases, the armed struggle and the political activities merged into one resistance movement. There are different strands of it. The NUG is a kind of figurehead for a lot of these armed resistance groups. Many former MPs have been involved in the armed struggle so there is a blurring of lines between political entities and the armed struggle.
32. Some family members of an anti-military activist were detained. In some cases, the family members have been charged with incitement. The source did not believe that these family members were necessarily guilty of any wrongdoing. Instead, they were related to an individual whom the authorities wanted to arrest, but were unable to find. These individuals were detained because of the activists of relatives. In such situations, authorities typically charge and sentence them to a few years in prison under Section 505a of the penal code, a charge frequently applied in similar circumstances.
33. The source assessed that the authorities tend to prosecute family members if the person they actually want to get, does not give himself up.

Ethnic groups living outside their home region (Yangon, Naypyidaw)

34. To a certain degree, the specific minority group plays a role in the discrimination experienced by ethnic minorities, as they generally face varying levels of prejudice. For example in the Civil Service and in the military, minorities tend to get less promoted compared to the Burmese. In the community, discrimination is evident. For instance, in schoolbooks that predominantly promote a Burman perspective. The experience varies greatly for different ethnic groups. Groups that are Buddhist, for example, tend to face less discrimination. In addition, those that are not recognised as an “official” ethnic group face greater discrimination, most notably the Rohingya.
35. At one point, there was a noticeable migration from urban centres to rural areas. After the coup, a number of factories closed down, causing people to leave cities and return to their rural home areas. The source assessed that this movement was not specifically the minorities who moved away from the cities. Many people who relocated to urban

areas are Burmans from rural regions, and they have since the coup returned to their hometowns, due to closure of factories as mentioned earlier. Currently, discrimination seems to be more focused on Burman individuals from areas affected by conflict, such as those from Sagaing and Magway regions.

36. The ID card features a numeric code that indicates the cardholder's originating state or region. Individuals from Sagaing and Magway have experienced discrimination because of this information. Numerous incidents have been reported where persons have faced difficulties in securing employment or renting accommodations, such as apartments. The source did not perceive any significant improvements for minority groups, following the coup.

Development Organisation, 8 May 2023

Access to information

1. In general, access to information in Myanmar varies, experiencing periods of increased and decreased availability. Wireless access is restricted, resulting in limited connectivity. Most of the media in Myanmar no longer publish print newspapers, leading to an increased use of online platforms for information dissemination. Particularly, Facebook serves as the primary channel for communication and sharing information within the country. Additionally, platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram are also being used for information sharing purposes. Consequently, most independent media outlets rely on Facebook as their primary platform reach their audience.
2. To restrict access to information, the military has implemented measures, including blocking of the internet. In some states, such as Chin State, internet access has been completely blocked and majority of the population is without any means to connect online. This applies also to other areas in the country. Furthermore, the military has made it more difficult to access other communication channels, for example by instructing telecom companies to increase the price for data use. As a result, obtaining phone services has become more challenging and expensive for the general population.
3. In response to the restrictions imposed by the military, people are exploring various methods to bypass these limitations. For instance, in areas like Chin State where internet access is blocked, some people are traveling to other regions where communication is available. They download news and information and then they return to their respective communities they share the acquired information, through alternative means like Bluetooth-based systems, which do not require internet connectivity. These strategies enable people to access and disseminate information despite the limitations imposed by the internet shutdown.

SoMe

4. Since the military, banned Facebook in Myanmar, people are using VNP to go around the blocked. The military exerts control over a significant portion of the country's digital

infrastructure. Initially, Telenor and Orido were commercial and independent telecommunication companies operating in Myanmar. However, following the coup, both companies decided to withdraw from the country and subsequently sold their operations to telecommunication companies with affiliations to the military. As a result, all four major telecommunications companies, currently operating in Myanmar have direct connections to the military, and one is owned by the military. Thereby, the core digital and telecommunication infrastructure is under the control of the military, enabling the military to shut down communication as they please. However, the economy of the country relies on access to the internet, which presents a challenging balancing act for the military government. On one hand, they seek to control access to information and on the other hand, they must consider the importance of a functioning economy, as internet access is crucial for businesses, trade, financial transactions, and overall economic growth.

Limitation of information

5. Despite the restrictions, many people are still using Facebook and other online platforms, although to a lesser extent than before. Online platforms remain the primary means of accessing information for the general population. Additionally, there are two independent TV channels, namely Missima and DVB. These channels produce content for social media platforms, but also provide programming for satellite TV, which majority of people in Myanmar can access. This allows these channels to reach a wider audience and provide alternative sources of information.
6. Following the coup, the military issued orders for people to remove satellite dishes, but this proved to be unfeasible due to the widespread use of satellite TV in Myanmar. As a result, a significant portion of the population is still able to receive information through satellite TV broadcasts. However, independent TV stations face competition from TV stations owned by the military government, which often produce propaganda and biased information.

Using the law to repress freedom of expression

7. While there may not be entire states experiencing internet shutdowns; there are certain regions that have suffered from internet shutdowns. For example, parts of the Sagaing region have faced limited or no access to the internet. The situation has evolved over time, but the shutdown in Chin State has been particularly prolonged, lasting for more than a year.
8. As mentioned previously, the military control the digital infrastructure and able to shut down the internet distribution in the country. This control extends to mobile connectivity, as the military, who owns one mobile company and have control over the three others by affiliation, has the capability to switch off mobile connections. In addition, the military is also able to control access to social media platforms, such as Facebook.
9. Since the coup, the military has been making extensive efforts to establish itself as the legitimate governing body in Myanmar. In pursuit of this goal, several laws have been

adopted to provide legal grounds for actions such as internet shutdowns, restrictions on mobile platforms, and the arrest of people for their Facebook posts. These measures are part of the military's broader strategy to control information flow and suppress opposition, consolidating their authority over the country. For example, they have introduced new clauses in the Penal Code, which make it illegal to publish content, that can be understood as undermining the military government. Thousands of persons have been jailed using this clause, which can give up to three years of prison. Many journalists have also been arrested and sentenced based on this clause. An example, in April 2023, a former journalist was arrested for posting content expressing sympathy towards communities targeted by the military. The person facing a maximum sentence of three years in prison for charges of incitement against the authorities, which is based on a revised law that was implemented after the coup.

Information about the conflict

10. Many journalists have left the country. National media outlets like Missima and DVB continue to operate through satellite TV broadcasts, as mentioned earlier. Additionally, there are numerous smaller media organisations serving specific ethnic communities within the country. These localised media sources rely on the availability of news and information from the ground. As previously mentioned, with the departure of many journalists from Myanmar, the media relies on citizen journalists. These citizen journalists can range from individuals sharing videos to person, who have a more systematic approach to news coverage. The available information is difficult to crosscheck. For instance if a certain incident is reported it is very difficult to verify what actually happened from other sources. Thus, the quality of the reporting is compromised by the current conditions in Myanmar.

Human Rights Organisation, 23 May 2023

Access to information and data collection

1. The methods for collection of data and information can vary, depending on the nature of the report, which is being written. For instance, the report on torture in detention, a documentation of human rights violations in Myanmar's detention centres by military authorities, the research team conducted interviews with survivors, who were once imprisoned, as direct access to present detainees is impossible. We interviewed individuals in person and remotely who had been released. The majority of these interviews were conducted remotely using secure communication channels.
2. In the context of the report addressing potential war crimes and crimes against humanity in South-eastern Myanmar, the research team conducted trips to the border areas. Gathering data for this report involved two types of data collection. Remote methods were used, employing geospatial analysis and open-source investigative techniques. For instance, the team mapped out the IDP camps and calculated the distance from a military camp to an IDP camp. The team additionally travelled to the

border regions and entered Myanmar itself, engaging with survivors and victims of crimes against humanity in an effort to document their experiences.

3. Another report discussed the role of Meta, hate speech and violence targeted at the Rohingya population, referencing episodes of violence from 2012, 2015 and 2017. The research methodology combined remote data collection with in-person interviews conducted in Thailand. The Tech Team researchers engaged with civil society experts located in Chiang Mai. Additionally, some remote interviews were also facilitated in Bangladesh.
4. Finally, the aviation fuel report, published in November 2022, documented 16 unlawful air attacks that amount to war crimes and the supply chain of aviation fuel to the Myanmar military. The report includes a comprehensive approach, using in-person and remote interviews, as well as corporate databases and open-source investigatory tools.
5. Generally, conducting on-the-ground interviews in Myanmar is extremely challenging. The risks associated with entering the country to perform these interviews are generally too high. As a result, more and more interviews are conducted remotely, corroborating the findings with open-source evidence. Sometimes information is cross-referenced with reliable media sources and other human rights reports from NGOs.

The security situation

6. The condition of human rights continues to deteriorate daily - this is a situation the source asserted with certainty. Rising violence constrains the ability to gather information as fear discourages individuals from sharing their experiences. As an example, the incident that took place in Shan State about a month ago where roughly that 20 to 22 individuals were killed by the military. However, due to the general fear, we could not report any details about this massacre, particularly the alleged involvement of the Myanmar military. People are in a difficult situation because they are caught between different armed groups in the region, making documentation of the situation increasingly challenging.
7. Because they are stuck between different armed groups in that area, it is increasingly becoming very difficult to document the development of the current situation. The human rights violations are escalating every day as stated before. In addition, the military has imposed many restrictions. For example, a privacy check in the public domain, thus people leave their phones at home because the police might take the phone to check who they communicate with and what they have shared on social media.
8. The military have enforced many laws and regulations, including a series of checkpoints that restrict movement. Moreover, freedom of speech has been significantly reduced, especially following the military coup. Journalists have been specifically targeted by the military, leading many to flee the country. Independent news agencies have likewise relocated and now working from neighbouring countries.

Military response

9. Violence against civilians by state forces can be categorized into three different kind of violations or abuses. The first type involves conflict-related human rights violations, which could potentially be crimes against humanity. These instances occur in Central Myanmar, which includes Sagaing, Magway, and the south-eastern part of Myanmar, as well as in the Karen and Mon states. Now including Southern Shan State, as well as Kachin State, most recently. There are clearly marked available maps from various sources that one can use to visually identify the locations of the conflict.
10. The second category includes killings, arbitrary targeting, landmine, human pottering, forced labour, gender-based crimes, and destruction of civilian properties. The Myanmar military has been escalating its use of force, incorporating tactics such as the four-cuts strategy. This essentially involves cutting out resources, food supplies, including humanitarian aid and other dimensions of restrictions by the Myanmar military.
11. The latest NGO legislation is for humanitarian organizations is physically restricting humanitarian organizations to access people in need. This significant problem has been widespread even before the coup. However, the restrictions are escalating in disproportionate proportion to the growing needs of the population, particularly in areas like the Sagaing region.
12. In urban areas, which are not affected by conflict, there exists a different set of violations. These include various forms of exploitation, intimidation, and misuse of laws and judicial processes.
13. So far, the source has observed unjust judicial proceedings, cases of torture during detention - as previously stressed - and abuse of authority. This is done to force people to pay money under the threat of extortion. Individuals are arrested on the grounds of supporting the PDF, opposing the military, or expressing anti-government sentiments. The population face risks to express dissent against the military due to the military's surveillance online and offline.
14. The military has control over many things such as financial institutions, including telecommunications, through which they can also track people's activity through, for example, financial transactions, and an attempt to track down donations.

Monitoring

15. All SIM card is required to be registered under a national identity card. Therefore, if the military obtains a phone number of an individual, they can determine his/her location, identity number.
16. This system has been used to arrest individuals, a practice seen both before and after the military coup. The individuals targeted could be those who have made contributions for various causes, whether it is for humanitarian aid or in support of civil disobedience movement or armed revolution.
17. The military has arrested many individuals by tracking their banking information, which is often linked to their mobile phone numbers. They have also gained access to banking records, with banks disclosing personal information - an act that oversteps the

- fundamental right to privacy. Secondly, the military uses surveillance technology, such as CCTV cameras, which are frequently used for tracking and arresting individuals.
18. The military has also exercised control and surveillance over individuals by regulating passport issuance. For instance, individuals participating in the Civil Disobedience Movement have found their passport renewal requests denied, leaving them without valid passports. Some have even been detained upon attempting to renew their passports. Furthermore, others have been arrested at the airport while trying to depart the country.
 19. The military record of all the personal information about their citizens. Thus, the government would easily trace persons of interest. In each village, up to the regional level, informants operate under the command of the military. In the aftermath of the coup, a new group known as Pyu Saw Htee emerged to counter the anti-regime movement and known for using brutal and cruel methods. Additionally, they are tasked with monitoring people's activities and movements, reporting it back to the military.
 20. The special rapporteur on Myanmar also mentioned this in his report submission at the UN Human Rights Council. That the Myanmar military is using Telegram as a tool to inflict fear upon the people and they are using it as a tool for violence.
 21. The Myanmar military has allegedly provided Thai authorities, particularly in the border town of Mae Sot, with a list of individuals they intend to arrest. This list is primarily being used to identify and target certain individuals, notably activists and members of the PDF.

Treatment of family members

22. A well-known transgender activist was involved in peaceful protests and therefore detained, though later released. She is currently out of Myanmar, but her sister has been arrested and now stands to face trial.
23. In another case, a family had their son taken by the military, only to be released after paying. In more severe instances, individuals have been detained and imprisoned due to their family members. According to our torture report, a family suffered the imprisonment of several members for almost a year because one of their relatives, a member of the NLD, was the intended target for arrest. Since the authorities could not arrest her, they proceeded to seize the family's properties. Furthermore, they imprisoned a person with disabilities and a woman in her 60 or 70, both of whom are related to the political figure in question.
24. There have been other extreme examples, including cases where children were abducted and imprisoned. In one particular case, a three-year-old child, mother, and grandmother were all detained because the authorities were unable to arrest the father of the family.

Ethnic minority groups

25. The source has not directly documented this, but in Central Myanmar, accounts occurred of individuals being refused employment opportunities in places like Yangon or Mandalay, simply because they come from regions affected by conflict, such as the Sagaing region. Allegedly, the Myanmar military has advised business owners against hiring individuals whose identification cards indicate they originate from certain regions. The rationale being that these individuals might have associations with the PDF, or possibly be former members of this organization.
26. In places like southern Shan state, numerous armed groups are active, leading to widespread human rights abuses against civilians. Therefore, the local populations live in a state of fear, threatened not just by the Myanmar military, but by these other armed factions as well. However, the Myanmar military stands out as the primary perpetrator of human rights violations, committing them on a striking scale that is simply unparalleled. This situation is not unique to Shan state; it reflects conditions found in various other regions across Myanmar.

Entry

27. Individuals are required to have a stamp indicating their departure for entry into the country. Passports from Myanmar that lack an exit permit stamp are considered invalid for travel to other countries, as well as for re-entry into their own country.
28. As a Myanmar passport holder, when you exit the country legally, an immigration officer at the airport or border will place a departure stamp in your passport. This stamp will be inspected upon re-entry to the country. Therefore, you will be interrogated/questioned going back without such departure stamp.
29. There is uncertainty about the potential outcomes of such an interrogation. Additionally, it is generally impossible to board a plane or cross the immigration checkpoint without possessing the necessary departure stamp.
30. In some cases, particularly involving cross-border migrants or refugees, they manage to enter countries such as Thailand and Malaysia without the necessary stamp or even without a passport, becoming undocumented migrant workers. When it comes to returning, they often use an alternative form of identification known as the Certificate of Identity. This is a green book, distinct from the usual documentation, which can be obtained by using your household registration, national identity card, or employer-provided supporting documents.

International Organisation, 9 May 2023

Returning migrants

1. Regarding movement of returnees, the organization has made efforts to track these movements to a certain extent. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these movements

were monitored carefully due to the large scale of returnees. Even following to the military coup, there were still notable numbers of individuals returning to Myanmar. However, there has been a substantial decline in this trend since mid-2022. Currently, the number of people returning to Myanmar is significantly lower than what it once was.

2. The majority of returnees come from Thailand, with a significant number also returning from China. Besides these two countries, returnees come from various other countries. They typically return via land routes, with some returning by sea or, in certain cases, by air. Large portions of the individuals are assisted to return have been deported from Thailand by Thai immigration authorities. Only a small number of these returnees, estimated to be around ten to twenty percent, are returning voluntarily.
3. There is a quite a high intention amongst the returnees to re-immigrate. According on the data, approximately 50 %, or close to half of those who have returned to Myanmar, express an intention to re-immigrate. Quite often, they aim to do so at the earliest time possible.
4. Most of the collected data is from Thailand. The organization does not have the same level of detailed data regarding returnees from other countries. The source does not have information on large-scale returns from other countries. The organization assists a small number of returnees through voluntary return and reintegration programs that it runs in various nations.
5. Rohingyas returning primarily from Bangladesh, among other locations, are not currently supported in their return, as conditions are not conducive to sustainable return.

Treatment of returnee

6. The source does not have extensive information on how returnees are treated by the authorities in Myanmar, since the organisation does not have contact with returnees at the point of entry to Myanmar, only after they have entered the country. This implies that the organisation would not necessarily be aware of people being arrested at the border.

Border to Thailand – the control situation

7. The SAC (military) oversee some areas, while others fall under the control of ethnic armed organizations. Moreover, there are regions where the control is mixed or disputed. Therefore, it is far from a straightforward or homogeneous scenario. The SAC manage official border crossings. However, the frequently used border crossings are located in areas that are not under government control. Incidents in these border areas are not captured in any official data.
8. The organization primarily assists returnees who have come back through the official checkpoints. The main crossing point between Myawaddy, Myanmar to Mae Sot, Thailand is where the organization can access and support returnees during their

quarantine period. However, it is important to note that the organization does not have a presence at the actual border crossing areas.

Enter to Thailand and require documentation

9. Generally, Thailand is the primary destination for migrants from Myanmar, most of whom relocate for employment opportunities. Prior to the COVID pandemic, the main border crossing between Myawadda and Mae Sot witnessed the migration for purposes of work of approximately 600,000 to 700,000 individuals per year from Myanmar.
10. Thailand is home to roughly 3 million migrants from Myanmar. Usually, about half of these individuals have migrated legally, having the required documents, while the other half are irregular migrants, either lacking proper documentation or having some papers. Thailand offers several registration programmes and opportunities for regularization. Many migrants choose to enter Thailand irregularly or decide to regularize their status while in Thailand.
11. Border passports are used for local movement within townships, states, or provinces along the border. Individuals holding such passports are restricted from traveling outside these specific areas. Nevertheless, those intending to irregularly migrate to Thailand might use the border passports as a means to leave Myanmar.
12. The general situation regarding documentation at border checkpoints are varied. Some individuals have the necessary paperwork to work in Thailand. As previously stated, others use their border passports for local trading within the border regions. Lastly, there are those with national or regular passports who cross the border for travel purposes.
13. The documentation process to enter Thailand is quite complex. To legally work the country, individuals need several documents, such as employer approval, a work permit, and health insurance. Subsequently, there are numerous documentation stages for anyone seeking to migrate to Thailand via this crossing point. This does not apply for highly skilled professionals who have different means by which they can enter and they can usually be doing so by flight rather than across the land border.
14. Currently, the traffic at the border is still not at the level as pre-COVID, but it has increased a lot since last year where the regular migration process to Thailand resumed; however, after an initial increase in numbers, they have since levelled-off. This suggests that fewer people are choosing the regular pathway to migrate.

Documentation to exit and enter Myanmar

Individuals are taking advantage of the natural borders to cross into Thailand. Some of them might not have any documentation, while others do. Many choose this route as it is faster, simpler, and less expensive, and they may or may not intend to regularize their status once in Thailand.

Anonymous source

Returning migrants

1. Supported returns to Myanmar undergoes an extra level of clearance to evaluate potential risks associated with their return. This includes assessing potential security-related, political, or any other types of risks they may encounter upon their return.
2. The majority of people who want to return are supported to return. However, individuals who may have had political involvement in the past are not guaranteed a safe return and may face scrutiny, questioning, or in the worst-case scenario, arrest upon returning to the country. Among those who have been assisted in their return, some have faced questioning upon arrival, but no instances of arrests have been reported.
3. There are certain areas of the country to which returns are not currently supported. These areas are predominantly conflict-affected regions like the Sagaing and Magway regions, and the Chin State. The conflict is particularly intense and escalating in the Sagaing region.

Documentation to exit and enter Myanmar

4. The documentation requirements in Myanmar are complex and have become increasingly more challenging. For example, obtaining a passport has become more difficult, and labour cards are now required.

Returns from Europe and other western countries

5. The assumption is that people returning by air may face less scrutiny. Naturally, those returning from Europe would be traveling by air. Based on limited observations of cases assisted to return, these individuals might face questioning upon their return. However, this depends on the individual situation. For instance, an individual who left the country soon after the military coup might face more questions, especially if they are from an area affected by the ongoing conflict. The degree of questioning is likely to vary, and not everyone is subjected to it. It is not a routine check where every single individual is interrogated, but likely where any 'red flags' are raised about an individual's status or activities. There is still a lot of air traffic and most people are coming into the country with a huge amount of hassle.
6. Despite the situation, air traffic continues and people continue to return to Myanmar. The circumstances for returning individuals are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Particularly, those with political affiliations should exercise caution. Individuals who fled Myanmar due to persecution and/or are seeking asylum should seek clearance from UNHCR or the responsible asylum authorities in the respective countries of destination. However, generally speaking, it is considered safe for some individuals to return to Myanmar, depending on their individual situations.

Return conditions for ethnic minority group

7. Historically, there was a strong Burman solidarity, and ethnic groups were often marginalized. At present, the primary conflict is between the military and opposition groups, including of Burman ethnicity. While other ethnic conflicts continue and in some cases intensify, they are less predominant sources of conflict in the country, relatively speaking.
8. However, it remains unclear whether this shift in conflict dynamics provides any additional protection to ethnic groups returning to Myanmar - it is hard to definitively say. Nonetheless, in theory, as long as an individual entering the country holds Myanmar identification such as a passport or other identification documents, there should not be any significant difference in their treatment.
9. The exception is the Rohingya, who cannot return through regular channels because they are not recognized as citizens of Myanmar. The authorities will generally not accept the 9ir return as citizens of Myanmar, but are working on pilot repatriations from Bangladesh despite concerns that conditions in Rakhine State are not conducive to return. For other ethnic groups, as long as they are acknowledged as one of Myanmar's ethnic groups, they should theoretically be able to return.

Annex 2: Terms of reference

1. Political context

- 1.1 The political history and system
- 1.2 Key recent political events

2. Security situation

- 2.1 2021 – 2023 political opposition and the spread of civil unrest
- 2.2 Military response and the degree of violence against civilians by state forces
 - 2.2.1 Treatment of persons of actual or perceived association with anti-government activities

3 Ethnic minority groups (pre and post military coup)

- 3.1 Freedom of movement
 - 3.1.1 Treatment of ethnic minority groups outside their home area
- 3.2 Security situation in Chin State
- 3.3 Security situation in Kayah State (Karen State)
- 3.4 Security situation in Kachin State
- 3.5 Security situation in Rakhine State

4 Return

- 4.1 Conditions upon return
- 4.2 Treatment of persons of actual or perceived association with association with the resistance movements upon return