



International
Labour
Organization

▶ COVID-19 and Child Labour in Myanmar

Situational Assessment · April 2021



Working with Kantar Public Information Myanmar, the International Labour Organization conducted remote fieldwork to understand the impact that COVID-19 has had – and will continue to have – on the incidence and dynamics of child labour in Myanmar.

The study took place between July 2020 and January 2021 in six states and regions: Ayeyarwady Region, Bago Region, Kayin State, Mon State, Shan State and Yangon Region.

Overall, 1,091 surveys were conducted with parents and children in low-income households, along with 20 surveys and 19 interviews with community leaders, as well as discussions with six policy-makers and five representatives of the media.

The findings – summarized here – highlight a clear risk for increased child labour linked to the COVID-19 pandemic. The added strain put upon families, disruptions to household income and livelihoods, and the increased vulnerability of children being coerced into both paid and unpaid labour are issues that require urgent attention.

Confusion around child labour definitions

Few stakeholders could comprehensively define child labour.

There were mixed responses as to the legal age, and limited to reference to the disruption of education being a defining feature of child labour.

Just 28% of stakeholders consulted were aware of laws regarding hazardous work.

Parents: many children under-14 work



96%

of children interviewed were not attending school at the time of the survey.



75%

of parents surveyed suggested that it is common, or very common, for children under the age of 14 to work in their township.

These responses were consistent across urban and rural areas, and across states and regions. The service industry and agriculture were the sectors in which child labour is believed to be most common.

Stakeholders other than parents and children, denied that child labour was on the rise, however, with many focusing on the formal sector, in which child labour is known to be less common.

The impact of COVID-19 on children's work at home

97%

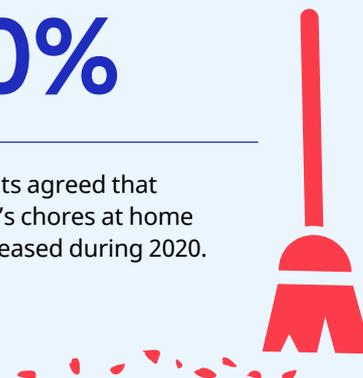
of respondents indicated that their child contributes to household chores – with estimates about hours working mostly being under 16 hours.

83%

of children said their contribution of chores at home had increased during 2020. This was largely attributed to children having more free time due to COVID-related school closures.

40%

of parents agreed that children's chores at home had increased during 2020.



Families under serious financial pressure due to COVID-19

COVID-19 has undoubtedly dealt a serious blow to the income and livelihoods of people across the country.

- ▶ 82% of respondents noted a decrease in their household income.
- ▶ Nearly half of respondents reported taking up a loan during 2020 – 75% of these doing so simply to meet basic household needs.
- ▶ 41% of respondents noted a loss of work by one or more household member.

Relying on savings, requesting salaries in advance and taking out loans were the most commonly cited methods for coping with income loss.

Stakeholders expressed concern that many families were in the precarious position of becoming trapped in debt cycles after taking on high-interest loans, which are common risk factors for children working.

The way forward

These concerning findings led researchers to recommend the following:

- ▶ Generate clear impact goals for each sector and community, then create a targeted plan for each context.
- ▶ Identify community actors, such as teachers and civil society leaders, who can help lead awareness-raising efforts.
- ▶ Desensationalize child labour, focus on addressing underlying socio-economic drivers, and encourage stakeholders to empathize with families touched by this issue.
- ▶ Plan further capacity-building for stakeholders, covering key concepts and broader perspectives of child labour, including children working in the informal sector. Provide translations into local languages as needed.
- ▶ Raise awareness around the long-lasting impact of COVID-19 disruptions to education and coordinate with actors on a recovery plan.

