

# Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar: Civil Society Organization and Community Scoping Study

COUNTRY BRIEFS



CSO representatives at the 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit. Photo credit: AMPLIFY, August 2024.

## AMPLIFY

AMPLIFY is a five-year Women, Peace and Security (WPS) initiative that addresses the differential impacts of conflicts and human security threats on women in Southeast Asia by advancing their meaningful participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

The initiative supports the implementation of ASEAN's Regional Plan of Action on WPS and focuses on Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar through policy development, civil society partnerships, and community-level peacebuilding. AMPLIFY is funded by the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and implemented by The Asia Foundation.

**Women, Peace and Security (WPS) is a global policy framework recognizing that the meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding and decision-making is essential to achieving peace and preventing conflict. Guided by UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent resolutions, the WPS agenda's four pillars – participation, prevention, protection and relief and recovery – emphasize the need to protect and promote women's rights in fragile and conflict settings. AMPLIFY takes a WPS+ approach that applies beyond situations of conflict, addressing human security threats.**

## Country Briefs

In 2024, AMPLIFY conducted scoping studies across its three implementing countries, Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar, to better understand the current challenges faced by women at all levels of society.

In Cambodia and Lao PDR, research combined community surveys, key informant interviews, and civil society organization (CSO) needs assessments. In Myanmar, interviews explored the challenges facing women's rights organizations, women human rights defenders, and activists on both sides of the Thailand–Myanmar border.

These studies were further enhanced by informal consultations with stakeholders and by a Political Economy Analysis, **Securing Women's Peace: A Political Economy Analysis of Women, Peace and Security in ASEAN, Cambodia, Lao PDR and the Philippines**, conducted in early 2025.

The country briefs that follow draw on this research to present key findings and insights most relevant for WPS programming. They are intended as a resource for CSOs, policymakers, and donors, and form part of AMPLIFY's ongoing commitment to build and share knowledge on WPS in the region.



# Cambodia

- Context of Women, Peace and Security in Cambodia
- Civil Society Organization Capacity-building
- Migration and Human Trafficking
- Environmental Resilience and Security
- AMPLIFY's Approach



# CAMBODIA



## Context of Women, Peace and Security in Cambodia

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Cambodia has gained traction in recent years, with the country lauded at the regional level for its leadership in supporting women peacekeepers on international missions and supporting the development of WPS policy at a regional level in ASEAN (Gordon and Kry 2024). Nevertheless, domestic WPS implementation remains a work in progress, and several inhibitors to women's peace and security remain in Cambodia. There continues to be some unfamiliarity with the concept of WPS amongst women's groups and certain government actors, which influences its uptake and implementation at a national level.

Cambodia's historical context has been marked by the brutal regime of the Khmer Rouge, which included widespread human rights abuses, genocide, and occupation. Such a history has influenced the trauma and postconflict reconstruction narrative of peace and security in Cambodia, with implications for WPS. Despite women's important roles in postconflict rebuilding and transitional justice, women's contributions have remained largely unacknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

National equality frameworks such as the Neary Rattanak VI Plan and the National Action Plan on Violence Against Women exist, although their enforcement can be strengthened.<sup>2</sup> Social norms rooted in patriarchal beliefs still constrain women's public roles, including their role in the political sphere and peacekeeping. Cultural expectations and challenges with institutional accountability mean that women remain marginalized in decision-making spaces, even though their contributions to peacebuilding at a local level are impressive and well-documented.

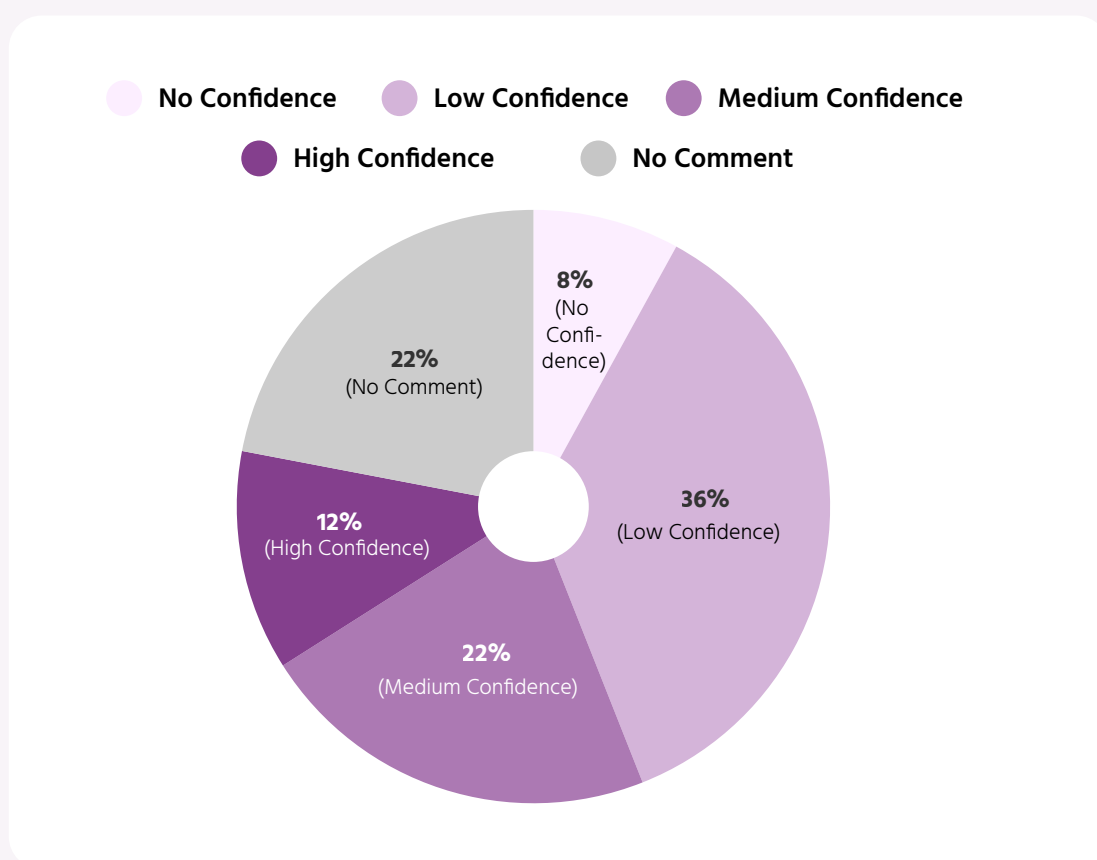
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<sup>1</sup> Kiernan, B. 2008. *The Pol Pot Regime: Race, Power, and Genocide in Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge*. Yale University Press; Hughes, C. (2009). "Cambodia in 2008: Consolidation in the Midst of Crisis." *Asian Survey*, 49(1), 206-212.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon, E. and Suyheang, K. 2024. *Peace, Gender and Care in Cambodia*. Melbourne: Monash University.

In 2024, the AMPLIFY program conducted a scoping study that showed many women migrate for work, seeking better economic opportunities, which can lead to greater financial independence and empowerment.<sup>3</sup> However, this often exposes women to vulnerabilities such as exploitation, human trafficking, and increased risk of violence against women—especially in foreign contexts where legal protections may be lacking. Additionally, the majority expressed low to no confidence (44%) in playing a role in WPS, followed by medium confidence (22%), high confidence (12%), and no comment (22%) - among 129 respondents (117 women and 12 men) as illustrated below.

**Figure 1: Confidence to Play a Role in WPS**



<sup>3</sup> The research was conducted during August-September 2024. The produced reports are for internal circulation within The Asia Foundation and are not intended for external distribution.



## Civil Society Organization Capacity-building

Sophea leads a civil society organization in Cambodia working to **promote positive peace and women’s participation in security** related spaces. But the operating environment is complex and often precarious.

Establishing and maintaining a CSO in Cambodia involves navigating a convoluted administrative process, complicated by government regulations and laws. Issues surrounding peace are sensitive in Cambodia and for CSOs like Sophea’s, the **challenges are compounded by bureaucratic hurdles** like additional registration requirements and high levels of reporting to different government levels at district, provincial and national level.

Safety for women’s rights CSOs remain a source of concern—including cases of harassment and intimidation. As Sophea explains, **“Our organization and staff have been threatened many times. When we have been worried and reported threats to the police or community authorities, no action was taken. Staff had to manage these situations with risk mitigation strategies.”**

Her CSO has implemented a range of measures to reduce exposure to risk, including security awareness training, emergency phone trees, travelling in pairs for fieldwork, engaging local leaders, and maintaining low-visibility offices. These are just some of the realities that CSOs face in doing advocacy work for Women, Peace and Security in Cambodia.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play an important role in Cambodia’s advocacy landscape for peace and security issues that affect women and girls. Organizations work in various spaces related to human trafficking, transitional justice, women’s political participation, violence against women, and promoting peace.

However, operating CSOs in Cambodia can present challenges, particularly when engaging with culturally or politically sensitive issues. Some organizations may encounter **heightened scrutiny** and experience a **more complex registration and reporting process**. Along with **concerns about ensuring a safe and enabling environment**, CSOs have, in some cases, been required to adopt safety measures and partner with international organizations to feel safe in conducting their important work.<sup>4</sup> Despite these risks, CSOs are committed to continuing their advocacy work, including for the WPS agenda.

One area for strengthening and supporting their work is **increasing capacity building** for CSOs in Cambodia. Many CSOs operate under short-term project cycles with insufficient flexibility for staff development. Supporting CSOs in developing familiarity with the WPS agenda and priorities in the Khmer language, helping to coordinate between CSO groups and the government, and supporting the development of peace-building skills will all be important for the future sustainability of WPS in Cambodia.

<sup>4</sup> Our research findings noted that some CSO’s were concerned about safety while at work. An example provided were threats from individuals who perceived that working on WPS and gender equality would disrupt household and community harmony.



## Migration and Human Trafficking

Sokha is a farmer and mother of two young children in a rural area of Cambodia.

Due to changing weather and environmental stressors, farming her land has become increasingly difficult, and her livelihood is no longer sustainable. For these reasons, she has decided to leave her children in her mother's care and cross the border into Thailand to find work.

Without many resources or information about the dangers she could face in her journey, and without her support network or community around her, the transit to Thailand is rife with danger for Sokha.

She encounters unsafe travel conditions in transit, and the **risk of exploitation and violence** from traffickers who scout the transit routes for people lacking safety protections and community, especially women.

Once she arrives in Thailand, she can't speak the language and feels invisible and helpless. People like Sokha are also vulnerable to changes in border security and bilateral relations, which could result in relocation.

Migration and human trafficking are among the most serious threats to women's peace and security in Cambodia. Environmental degradation and extreme weather have been drivers of displacement by altering the farming cycles in many provinces of Cambodia. Without a sustainable source of income through farming their land, many families have no choice but to migrate to make a living.

Migration often involves unsafe transit conditions and a lack of support from the government or the broader community. Social disruption has become a part of daily life in many rural provinces experiencing migration, particularly affecting women. Children are often left behind with elderly relatives.

Without the support of social networks or communities around them, women and girls face increased risks during transit to human trafficking, exploitation, and violence. Often, these women travel with minimal resources and insufficient documentation, and they are unfamiliar with the urban settings when they arrive, meaning they do not have adequate access to care or legal protections.

Indigenous women are profoundly affected by migration in Cambodia, particularly when they are forced to leave their ancestral lands. Migrating often means losing traditional cultural practices and livelihoods, which connect them to their community and land. Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking risks, due to a lack of access to essential information and protections compounded by discrimination.



## Environmental Resilience and Security

Chanvatey lives in rural Cambodia, where her family has a farm. She is responsible for collecting water for her household. In recent years, increasingly inconsistent rainfall and prolonged dry seasons have made it harder for her family to sustain their livelihood, and water has become more difficult to access.

Unpredictable weather has exacerbated water scarcity, so Chanvatey has to walk longer distances to access safe water for her parents and brothers.

She explains, **“Walking so far is hard and not safe for us.”** The risk of violence on her journey has increased as she spends more time transiting in unfamiliar areas.

Environmental shocks directly impact the security of women and girls in Cambodia. Women are disproportionately affected by extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, as well as increasingly erratic rainfall patterns, all of which continue to disrupt agricultural and farming livelihoods that many women depend on.

Social norms marginalize women from decision-making spaces regarding the environment in Cambodia and disaster response, which compounds their vulnerabilities in times of crisis and leaves them with limited avenues to influence community-level environmental resilience and security.

Weather events and environmental shocks also threaten peace, as communities under pressure grow increasingly tense about resource allocation, particularly concerning water and land use. With increasing water scarcity comes the need for people, especially women and girls, to travel further distances to collect water for their households.



## AMPLIFY's Approach

AMPLIFY in Cambodia is positioned to adapt a multi-pronged approach to respond to the interconnected risks of shrinking civic space, trafficking, and environmental insecurity. This approach includes uplifting women's agency, strengthening civil society coordination, and influencing policies at the national and provincial levels. **AMPLIFY Cambodia** is implementing **community-centered, context-driven activities** in Stung Treng and Mondulakiri provinces. These areas have been identified as vulnerable to weather and environmental shocks, security threats to women, and economic migration.

AMPLIFY is working with women leaders, grassroots civil society actors, and government counterparts to localize the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security (RPA-WPS), striving to help Cambodia meet its commitment of developing and implementing its own National Action Plan on WPS. AMPLIFY also supports civil society actors in **connecting with ASEAN-level platforms** to increase the visibility of Cambodian women's peace and security concerns, and to improve **accountability of regional mechanisms**. By strengthening the evidentiary base and developing knowledge resources in the national language, providing technical and financial support for dialogues, strengthening women leaders' and CSOs' capacities, and addressing harmful social norms through campaigns, AMPLIFY is ensuring that women feel confident in their self-efficacy to mitigate the disproportionate impacts of WPS+ issues.



# Lao PDR

- Context of Women, Peace and Security in Lao PDR
- Civil Society Organization's Experience in WPS
- Labor Migration and Human Trafficking
- Natural Resource Management
- AMPLIFY's Approach



# Lao PDR



## Context of Women, Peace and Security in Lao PDR

The Women, Peace and Security agenda (WPS) is a recently introduced and implemented framework in Lao PDR; however, its core principles are not entirely new or unfamiliar. Instead, WPS builds on work that has already taken place in Lao PDR to address women's physical and economic security and rights. In 1981, the government of Lao PDR ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which provided the normative groundwork for considerations of women's meaningful participation in all forms of decision-making that the WPS agenda has since enhanced by linking women's participation with peace and security. Since then, fragmented work relating to WPS has existed, although it has been framed in various ways, such as efforts to advance equality, women's empowerment, and women's leadership. With the recent entry of the WPS agenda as a formal framework, different stakeholders in Lao PDR (including the government, embassies, international organizations, and civil society organizations) understand WPS as an umbrella term for pre-existing women's programming and utilize WPS to navigate through peace and security issues in local contexts.

In Lao PDR, there are government committees, organizations such as the Lao Women's Union, National Commission for the Advancement of Women, Mother and Children, Lao Front for National Development, and Women's Caucus and the Ethnic Affairs Committee of the National Assembly that play pivotal roles in advancing women's participation, promoting equality, and safeguarding women's rights. However, it should be noted that despite various policy mandates to include female representation at each level across the country, women's participation remains below benchmarks in central government positions (of 30%), at the provincial level (20%) and the village level (10%), especially for women from marginalized groups as reported in the 2024 CEDAW Concluding Observations report.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women). 2024. "Concluding observations on the tenth period report of Lao." UN Doc. No. CEDAW/C/LAO/CO/10.

At the community level in Lao PDR, WPS is highly correlated to labor migration within and between Lao PDR and its neighboring countries. The figure below illustrates how Lao labor migrates. These labor flows are often associated with six prominent factors as identified by an AMPLIFY scoping study: violence against women, alcohol/drug use, illegal marriage, high-risk jobs, school dropout and closure, and implementation of business regulations and labor migration.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 2: Lao Labor Migration Map**



<sup>6</sup> The research was conducted during August-September 2024. The produced reports are for internal circulation within The Asia Foundation and are not intended for external distribution.



## Civil Society Organization's Experience in Women, Peace and Security

Syphone works for a civil society organization, and she is passionate about building a sustainable livelihood for ethnic communities.

In working with ethnic communities—especially women—she recalled that **“Women in rural area are shy and reserved;** hence it's more challenging to work toward the ideal of women's participation and leadership. **However, when it comes to implementation, women are no doubt the hardest working of all.”**

CSO members are often on the front lines and must be adaptable when exposed to risks. Syphone gave an example of when one of the projects resulted in unexpected hostility from the community they were working with. **“It was so terrifying,** and we decided **not to be involved directly** in addressing the issue but **through other more subtle means instead.”**

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have gained growing recognition. In recent years, they have been increasingly engaging with donor agencies and government entities to implement community programs, and they have more opportunities to influence and engage larger audiences. One recent example is that since 2023, CSOs in the country can now submit a parallel report to the CEDAW committee annually, signifying meaningful progress toward a more accountable government.

These CSOs work mainly in five sectors: economic empowerment, environmental resilience, law/legal disputes, disaster management, and unexploded ordinance—all of which affect women and girls.

CSOs often navigate complex administrative hurdles and operate in limited spaces. These issues are compounded by **safety concerns** experienced by CSO members when working on WPS and social issues.

Many CSOs have expressed interest in **receiving more support for capacity building,** particularly for improving their English language skills, finance and operations management, proposal writing, and technical knowledge.



## Labor Migration and Human Trafficking

Nang is in her early 20s and comes from a subsistence farming family living in the southern part of Lao PDR. Encouraged by her parents, Nang **hopes for and seeks ways to earn more** for herself and her family.

She came across an advertisement on a social media platform seeking young women and promising high pay in the northern part of Lao PDR. She recalled that **“Some of her neighboring parents encouraged their children to leave schools for work or marry for dowries.”** so she asked for pocket money from her parents and relatives. She then headed to Vientiane to work as a waitress in a few restaurants and bars before heading to the special economic zone in the north for higher pay.

Little did she know that she would end up working in the “entertainment” industry and **“...Women, like herself, who live in the border provinces to China and Thailand will face challenges, as buyers of sex workers come from East Asia to Southeast Asia.”**

**Labor migration** in Lao PDR is **driven by poverty** and the **lack of sufficient paid job opportunities** for young adults in their communities, resulting in men and women experiencing peace and security threats in displaced locations.

Most migrated individuals are young adults aged 21 to 25, followed by 26 to 30, who often leave their children in the care of elderly family members in their hometowns.<sup>7</sup> Reports indicate that individuals are enticed by promises of high salaries and often recruited via social media platforms to work in special economic zones—particularly in the north of Lao PDR.

Many become victims of **human trafficking, labor exploitation,** or are **forced into sex work,** particularly women. They are detained through various means such as substance-based control, detainment for ransom, and non-consensual/unlawful seizure of personal documentation, among others. Lao PDR is on the **Tier 2 Watch List** for human trafficking, as almost all cases of potential victims removed from the special

economic zones are **reported as “labor disputes” rather than prosecutions for trafficking.**<sup>8</sup> In these situations, women often face significant and disproportionate vulnerabilities due to language barriers, limited capital, knowledge, and access to social networks.

<sup>7</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), Lao People’s Democratic Republic Flow Monitoring Survey Report 2022 (IOM Lao PDR, 2022), 04, <[Flow Monitoring Report 2022.pdf](#)>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of State (DOS), 2024 Trafficking in Persons Report: Lao PDR (U.S. DOS, 2024), <[Lao PDR - United States Department of State](#)>



## Natural Resource Management

Chan is in her 50s and has been living in a semi-remote village near a big lake in the southern part of Lao PDR her whole life.

To support her granddaughter who has been in her care since birth—as her parents moved into city for work—Chan earns a small monthly income by selling skewers and woven floor mats.

She was financially impacted as **her house was flooded last year** by extreme rain that caused the lake to overflow. Recently, she heard from the village authority that the **lake will be sold to a private investor** who will turn it into a café and camping spot for tourists. Chan now must think of **other means to gather food as she frequently sources** frogs and fish from the lake for her and her family.

Lao PDR is vulnerable to environmental shocks<sup>9</sup> **and natural resource conflicts**, where marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by poverty, environmental degradation, and urban development.

The country's New Economic Mechanism shifts the country's **growth pursuit** to focus on **capital-intensive sectors** such as hydropower, mining, and the creation of special economic zones that prioritize **large-scale infrastructure and extractive industry projects**. While these boost Lao PDR's regional connectivity and overall GDP, they have also caused the displacement of people in marginalized and rural communities, a loss of livelihoods, a devastating impact on the environment, in addition to generating new insecurities for women, especially in the border regions of special economic zones.

The **postconflict legacy of unexploded ordnance**<sup>10</sup> remains a persistent **threat in rural areas**, creating unique community livelihood challenges in Lao PDR.

9 Interactive Country Fiches, Climate Change (Interactive Country Fiches, 2025), <<https://dicf.unepgrid.ch/lao-peoples-democratic-republic/climate-change>>

10 Guo, S. 2020. 'The legacy effect of unexploded bombs on educational attainment in Lao PDR'. ScienceDirect. <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304387820301024>>



## AMPLIFY's Approach

AMPLIFY Lao PDR is positioned to respond to the intersecting issues and problems of environmental degradation, extreme weather events, labor migration, UXO contamination, natural resource conflicts, and urban development. **AMPLIFY Lao PDR** is advancing a localized Women, Peace and Security agenda by focusing on **provinces with heightened vulnerabilities (Bokeo and Savannakhet)**. Through **evidence-based, community-centered interventions**, AMPLIFY seeks to promote **women's leadership** at the local level to ensure women's and marginalized groups' participation in addressing the root causes of WPS+ issues. These include environmental adaptation planning and postconflict resilience. AMPLIFY aims to provide responsive spaces for civil society organizations, the Lao Women's Union, and indigenous women's groups to **build leadership and advocacy capacity**, strengthen coordination **through CSO platforms**, and influence relevant policies at the national level by providing support to the government in revising Lao PDR's 10th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2026-2030.

As part of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS localization strategy, AMPLIFY Lao PDR will assist government and civil society actors in participating in relevant regional and national knowledge-sharing and learning platforms and contributing to regional and ASEAN-level WPS discourse. These efforts are guided by AMPLIFY's theory of change and monitoring, evaluation, research, and learning framework. They will be implemented through **WPS localization interventions** and tailored **partnership models that reinforce the ASEAN–New Zealand WPS collaboration**.



# Myanmar

- Context of Women, Peace and Security in Myanmar
- Civil Society Organization Capacity-building and Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders
- Internally Displaced Women and Girls
- Conflict-Related Sexual Violence
- AMPLIFY's Approach



# MYANMAR



## Context of Women, Peace and Security in Myanmar

The context of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda in Myanmar is shaped by decades of protracted conflict and, more recently, by the military coup of 2021, which has intensified violence and instability across the country. The coup triggered widespread armed resistance, leading to the expansion of territory controlled by ethnic armed organizations and resistance groups, and a decline in central control by the State Administration Council (SAC), now known as the State Security and Peace Commission (SSPC). In this environment, women and sexual minority groups have borne a disproportionate share of the conflict's impacts in non-combat settings, including increased risk of sexual and gender-based violence/conflict-related sexual violence (SGBV/CRSV), displacement-related protection risks, loss of income and livelihoods, and reduced access to essential health and protection services.<sup>11</sup>

SGBV/CRSV and intimate partner violence have all increased since the coup, with impunity widespread and survivors facing further threats such as forced marriage or stigma. Myanmar ranks 125th out of 146 countries on the gender inequality index,<sup>12</sup> and thousands of women have been detained or killed by SSPC (formerly SAC) forces since 2021.

WPS advancement in Myanmar is hindered by entrenched patriarchal norms, limited political will, and perceptions that women's equality is the domain of women's organizations alone. Women remain excluded from most formal peace processes. However, the brutality of the post-coup period has sparked greater public recognition of women's protection and participation as security issues. Some ethnic armed organizations, including the Karen National Union and Karenni National Progressive Party, have begun integrating women's equality into their administrative and justice systems, suggesting emerging openings for locally driven WPS implementation.

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<sup>11</sup> Women's League of Burma (WLB), *The Triple Resistance: Fighting Patriarchy, Combating Dictatorship, Building Democracy* (WLB, 2024), <<https://www.womenofburma.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Triple%20Resistance%20DESIGNED%20%26%20FINALISED.pdf>>

<sup>12</sup> UN Women, *Myanmar Country Profile 2024–2025* (UN Women, 2024).



## Civil Society Organization Capacity-building and Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders

Mya is part of a women's human rights organization. She describes the post-coup landscape as one of **deepening crisis**, where women's voices **remain sidelined despite their central role** in the resistance.

Despite being on the frontlines of humanitarian response and community organizing, **women are still excluded from leadership and decision-making**. Their participation is accepted only within limited roles.

**“The revolution requires human power, and with the contribution and participation of women, the momentum of the revolution is enhanced. Male counterparts understand this fact. Therefore, they accept women ‘in their spheres.’ This cannot be interpreted as traditional masculinity and patriarchal norms shifting.”**

For many, the risks extend beyond national borders. **Thousands of women activists now live undocumented in neighboring Thailand**, where they face housing insecurity, family separation, and limited access to protection services.

**“This time of armed conflict is more severe and widespread than [when the] coup happened before. Hence, when we say the practical needs of activists, we cannot just consider the needs of activists. Because the SAC, they target the family members and close contacts...”**

Women's rights organizations and women human rights defenders in Myanmar have continued their work with courage and determination, despite facing severe risks since the 2021 military coup.

Before the coup, although their formal participation was limited, women's groups across both urban and ethnic areas actively engaged in peacebuilding, protection and justice efforts.<sup>13</sup> In urban centers, women's organizations often focused on promoting women's participation in formal peace processes. In ethnic areas, women-led grassroots initiatives and informal diplomacy, often through ethnic women's organizations.<sup>14</sup> Since the coup, many groups have shifted to **lower-visibility work**, including raising awareness of the Women, Peace and Security agenda and advising emerging interim political bodies and women's armed groups.

Civil society organizations face an increasingly dangerous environment. **Women leaders and activists are at risk** of surveillance, arrest, harassment, and even sexual violence, both inside Myanmar and in exile.

Many **women have taken on triple responsibilities**—providing humanitarian support, caring for families, and continuing their activism—often with limited financial resources, legal protections, or mental health support. Entrenched patriarchal norms continue to shape expectations, with women's contributions often minimized or dismissed, even when they hold leadership roles.

<sup>13</sup> Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), *Women's Participation in Peace Processes: Myanmar Case Study* (CFR, n.d.), <<https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/myanmar>>

<sup>14</sup> Cárdenas M. L. and Olivius E. 2021. *Building Peace in the Shadow of War: Women-to-Women Diplomacy as Alternative Peacebuilding Practice in Myanmar*, *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 15(3), 347–366, <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17502977.2021.1917254>>



## Internally Displaced Women and Girls

Aye Aye was forced to flee her home in northern Myanmar after violence escalated in her village. She is now living in a makeshift camp. Conditions are harsh— overcrowded shelters, limited access to healthcare, and there are no formal protection mechanisms.

For women like Aye Aye, displacement brings heightened risks. Safety is a daily concern, with increased exposure to sexual and physical violence and no privacy or secure spaces. Many displaced women carry the burden of caring for children, managing daily survival, and supporting others around them, all while coping with trauma and uncertainty.

**The needs of displaced women are often overlooked in short-term aid responses.** There is little psychosocial support, and almost no funding for safe, adequate accommodation. For those who were activists or organizers before displacement, risks like surveillance and arrest continue even in exile.

Still, women are creating informal networks of care and resilience within camps. But without sustained, flexible support tailored to their realities, including long-term safety planning, these efforts remain fragile.

Internal displacement in Myanmar has surged dramatically in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup, with more than 3 million people displaced across the country as of April 2024 (UNHCR 2024). **Women and girls make up a significant portion of this population and face acute vulnerabilities** because of conflict and displacement.

The collapse of democratic institutions has been accompanied by shrinking civic space for women's rights organizations and deepening economic insecurity. These intersecting factors heighten the risks for displaced women, particularly those in ethnic minority states.

Displacement often results in the breakdown of social networks, with women and girls experiencing elevated threats to their safety and well-being. **Many live in informal or inadequate shelters** without legal protections, facing risks of arrest, surveillance, or exploitation, especially in border areas or when crossing into neighboring countries like Thailand without documentation. Displaced women and girls are also **more at risk of environmental and natural disasters**.<sup>15</sup> These conditions also have serious implications for mental health and long-term recovery.

Women human rights defenders, some of whom are also displaced, face compounding threats including extrajudicial violence, limited access to legal support, and insufficient funding.

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<sup>15</sup> The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar Earthquake and Supporting Women-led Responses* (The Asia Foundation, 2025), <<https://asiafoundation.org/myanmar-earthquake-and-supporting-women-led-responses/>>



## Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Ei Mon works with a local organization documenting cases of conflict-related sexual violence in Myanmar. Since the 2021 coup, she says, the risks facing women and marginalized identity groups have intensified, while the systems meant to protect them have all but collapsed.

**“The coup made the residents in Burmese majority areas understand the suffering and effects of armed conflict on the ethnic minority populations.”**

Areas like Sagaing and Magway, once distant from armed violence, are now experiencing atrocities once confined to border regions. Sexual violence is often used as a weapon of war.

**“Women and gender and sexual minority groups have a long history of protecting their rights, demonstrating resilience, and being at the forefront of the struggle to defeat the junta. Despite [this], there are genuine risks of the possibility of [revenge] rape and torture.”**

In both junta- and resistance-controlled areas, accountability is rare.

**“The perpetrator may be required to compensate a victim or her family with only a small amount of money or livestock... Worse, but common, the victim is killed or is forced to marry her rapist as a means of his taking ‘accountability’ or ‘responsibility’ for his actions.”**

With international justice mechanisms out of reach for many survivors, Ei Mon sees an urgent need for survivor-led support and locally grounded protection.

The escalation of armed conflict across Myanmar since the 2021 military coup has significantly **increased the incidence of conflict-related sexual violence**. These forms of violence are perpetrated by both the SSPC and some revolutionary forces. In the absence of functioning accountability mechanisms, **perpetrators often face no legal consequences**. In some cases, they may be required to pay symbolic compensation in the form of livestock or cash, or the **victim may be forced to marry the perpetrator**—particularly in areas with low trust in judicial systems. These practices reflect deep-rooted patriarchal norms and hegemonic masculinity that render women especially vulnerable in conflict zones.

Documentation of conflict-related sexual violence remains limited due to restricted access to conflict-affected areas and declining coordination among national and international organizations. **Informal justice mechanisms have expanded** in the absence of the rule of law, **but they often reinforce discriminatory norms and are ill-equipped to support survivors**. Even in areas with relatively strong community policing, such as parts of Karenni State, there are insufficient resources to detain perpetrators or deliver justice.

Although the violence has raised public awareness—particularly among previously unaffected Bamar-majority regions—structural impunity, digital insecurity for survivors, and onerous data requirements imposed by international actors continue to undermine access to justice.



## AMPLIFY's Approach

AMPLIFY Myanmar is addressing these issues by deploying a holistic and people-centered approach. The primary focus is on **women's protection and resiliency**, and it is done through engaging grassroots **women's rights organizations, women human rights defenders**, and other actors operating from the border towns of Myanmar and Thailand in the first phase. AMPLIFY will assess and closely monitor the situation inside Myanmar and will cautiously devise a strategy to engage actors inside Myanmar in the coming years.

AMPLIFY prioritizes support for **women's essential needs, organizational strengthening, and psychosocial well-being**. This is done in response to scoping study findings and in recognition of the trauma faced by women's rights organizations and women human rights defenders when working with communities in distress. AMPLIFY is piloting the provision of flexible grants and psychosocial health support and will address their safety and security needs in the digital spaces. AMPLIFY also strengthens **activist networks** and **low-visibility advocacy activities** that enable continued WPS action in the ever-changing context. AMPLIFY will also provide opportunities for women's rights organizations and women's human rights defenders to participate in regional events and learn from best practices of civil society actors in other countries.



**For more information:**

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