

# FRAGMENTED AID AND RESISTANCE ALONG THE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER



exile hub



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# Fragmented Aid & Resistance along the India-Myanmar Border

A Research Report by

**exile hub**

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This research was led by Exile Hub, a feminist, on-the-ground organization committed to providing holistic support to Myanmar human rights defenders (HRDs), enabling them to safely continue their work and amplify the voices shaping Myanmar's human rights discourse. Exile Hub is committed to upholding independent media and free expression as fundamental pillars in building and defending the values of democracy and pluralism. Our existence is rooted in the belief that these HRDs are the backbone of a just society, especially in the face of adversity and persecution.

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## Abstract

This paper explores the challenges posed by fragmented support networks for Myanmar refugees and pro-democracy resistance groups along the India-Myanmar border, emphasising how these divisions complicate aid coordination. Drawing on insights from various organizations and individuals on the ground, the study highlights key issues such as funding shortages, difficulties in transferring funds from international actors to local groups, and inconsistent access to healthcare and education due to inadequate logistical networks. In addition, it examines the unequal distribution of aid and the politicization of relief organizations. The paper proposes strategies to improve collaboration, ensure more inclusive support, and foster sustainable resource mobilization to address these challenges. More broadly, we hope this paper can serve as a case study to distill actionable lessons for cross-border aid coordination in similarly complex and politically sensitive environments beyond the Myanmar context.

## Note

The following paper uses the 1951 International Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees' definition of the term "refugee," to refer to individuals who, due to a "well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it"<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, individuals from Myanmar who fall within this definition and who have sought safety in northeast India's Mizoram State, are referred to as "refugees" in this paper. Those who have fled intolerable living conditions in Myanmar and have since established residency elsewhere within the country are referred to as "internally displaced persons" (IDPs).

We frequently reference human rights defenders (HRDs), to which we describe "people who, individually or with others, act to promote or protect human rights in a peaceful manner"<sup>2</sup>. Lastly, all names followed by an asterisk (\*) have been changed to protect the identity and security of individuals. These pseudonyms are used to ensure anonymity in contexts where disclosure could pose a risk.

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR. (n.d.). *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees*, p.14. <https://www.unhcr.org/media/1951-refugee-convention-and-1967-protocol-relating-status-refugees>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> OHCHR. (n.d.). *About human rights defenders*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/about-human-rights-defenders>. Last Accessed June 18, 2025.

## I. Acronyms

<b>AA</b>	Arakan Army
<b>ABSDF</b>	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
<b>AIF</b>	Anti-Fascist International Front
<b>BIMSTEC</b>	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
<b>BJP</b>	Bharatiya Janata Party
<b>BSF</b>	Border Security Force
<b>CBI</b>	Central Bureau of Investigation
<b>CBO</b>	Community-Based Organization
<b>CDF</b>	Chinland Defence Force
<b>CDM</b>	Civil Disobedience Movement
<b>CHO</b>	Chin Health Organization
<b>CHRO</b>	Chin Human Rights Organization
<b>CJDC</b>	Chinland Joint Defense Committee
<b>CNA</b>	Chin National Army
<b>CNDF</b>	Chin National Defence Force
<b>CNF</b>	Chin National Front
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>EAO</b>	Ethnic Armed Organization
<b>ECOSOC</b>	United Nations Economic and Social Council
<b>FBO</b>	Faith-Based Organization
<b>FCRA</b>	Foreign Contribution Regulation Act
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FMR</b>	Free Movement Regime
<b>HLC</b>	High-Level Committee
<b>HRD</b>	Human Rights Defender
<b>ICNCC</b>	Interim Chin National Consultative Council
<b>IDP</b>	Internally Displaced Person
<b>IIMM</b>	Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Governmental Organization
<b>ITD</b>	Income Tax Department
<b>LDF</b>	Local Defense Force
<b>MHA</b>	Ministry of Home Affairs
<b>MHPSS</b>	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

<b>MoD</b>	Ministry of Defence
<b>MSF</b>	Médecins Sans Frontières
<b>MSO</b>	Mara Students Organization
<b>MSU</b>	Mizoram Student Union
<b>NCA</b>	Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NGOCC</b>	Non-Governmental Organization Coordination Committee
<b>NLD</b>	National League for Democracy
<b>NSCN</b>	National Socialist Council of Nagaland
<b>NUG</b>	National Unity Government
<b>PDT</b>	People's Defense Team
<b>PDF</b>	People's Defence Force
<b>RFA</b>	Radio Free Asia
<b>RMC</b>	Relief and Management Committee
<b>RSD</b>	Refugee Status Determination
<b>SAC</b>	State Administration Council
<b>TABC</b>	Thantlang Association of Baptist Churches
<b>UNHCR</b>	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
<b>VLC</b>	Village-Level Committee
<b>XCEPT</b>	Cross-Border Conflict: Evidence, Policy and Trends Program
<b>YLA</b>	Young Lai Association
<b>YMA</b>	Young Mizo Association
<b>ZEP</b>	Zoram Entu Pawl
<b>ZPM</b>	Zoram People's Movement

## II. Introduction

Myanmar's ongoing Spring Revolution,<sup>3</sup> precipitated by the February 1st, 2021 military coup, has led to severe political turmoil and a widespread humanitarian crisis that reverberates far beyond its borders. This impact is particularly pronounced along Myanmar's 1,643-kilometer border with India, where the two nations share a complex, intertwined history spanning centuries of cultural, ethnic, and political ties.

India and Myanmar's relationship has been shaped by a shared colonial history, most notably the British-drawn border that continues to influence contemporary geopolitical dynamics. Following Myanmar's 1988 uprising against General Ne Win's military dictatorship, India initially froze diplomatic relations and emerged as a vocal supporter of pro-democracy forces, offering refuge to activists and aligning itself with democratic aspirations in Myanmar.<sup>4</sup> However, the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 prompted a broader reassessment of India's national security priorities. Rajiv Gandhi's successor, P.V. Narasimha Rao executed India's "Look East Policy," which sought to strengthen strategic and economic ties with Southeast Asia while counterbalancing China's expanding regional influence.<sup>5</sup> Concerned about insurgencies along its northeastern frontier, India moved towards pragmatic cooperation with the Myanmar junta, which culminated in joint military operations along the India-Myanmar border in 1996, aimed at counter-insurgency and cross-border security cooperation.

What transpired in the 1990s marked the beginning of a foreign policy recalibration, as strategic and security concerns began to take precedence in India's approach to Myanmar. India aimed to secure energy resources, suppress insurgencies along its northeastern border, and improve regional connectivity. As ties with the Myanmar junta deepened, the two countries signed a series of military and trade agreements. These efforts were further expanded under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2014 "Act East Policy," which strengthened India's political, economic, and cultural engagement across Southeast Asia through major investments in infrastructure and key industries.

In the preceding four years since the 2021 military coup in Myanmar, escalating conflict (particularly in the northwest regions) has triggered large-scale cross-border migration into India's northeastern states. Despite this humanitarian crisis, the Indian government has continued its engagement with Myanmar's military regime, prioritizing regional security and the protection of its economic investments in Myanmar. A key concern for India has been

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<sup>3</sup> The Spring Revolution is an ongoing nationwide movement in Myanmar that began in early 2021 in response to the military coup d'état on February 1, when the Tatmadaw seized power from the democratically elected government. Initially characterized by peaceful demonstrations, the movement evolved to include civil disobedience, economic boycotts, and armed resistance as the military responded with violent crackdowns, leading to the formation of organized resistance structures like the People's Defense Forces (PDFs) and the National Unity Government (NUG).

<sup>4</sup> Human Rights Watch. (2009, January 28). *'We are Like Forgotten People': The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.17. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/01/28/we-are-forgotten-people/chin-people-burma-unsafe-burma-unprotected-india>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Haokip, T. (2014). India's Look East Policy: Its Evolution and Approach. *South Asian Survey*, 18(2), pp. 239-257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0971523113513368>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

managing the increasing flow of refugees across the shared border. The northeastern region, already marked by historical tensions with the central government, is uniquely affected due to strong ethnic and cultural ties with communities in Myanmar. This is especially evident in the close kinship between the Mizo in India and the Chin in Myanmar. As the civil war intensifies, ongoing violence, economic collapse, and forced military conscription have further driven civilians to flee, deepening the humanitarian and political challenges at India's border.



**Figure 1:** The destruction of homes photographed in Mindat Township, Chin State, during our second research trip to the India-Myanmar border in November 2024.

According to the independent research organization Data for Myanmar, between May 1, 2021, and July 31, 2023, widespread violence in Myanmar's Chin State led to the destruction of at least 1,637 homes,<sup>6</sup> primarily as a result of indiscriminate artillery fire by the State Administration Council's armed forces (Sit-Tat).

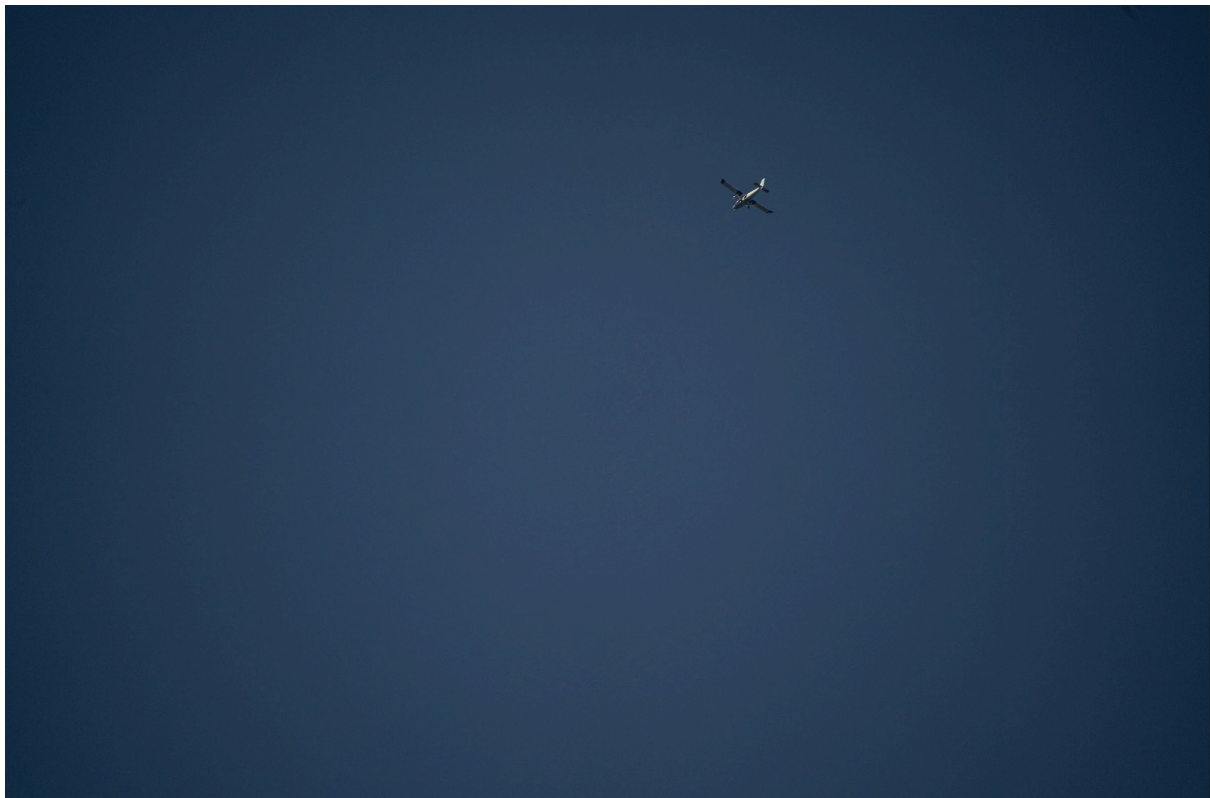
This sustained military aggression has triggered mass displacement, forcing tens of thousands of civilians to flee. According to the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO), an estimated 120,000 individuals have been displaced within Chin State; a figure that independent researcher June Nilian Sang corroborated through interviews with five aid relief providers in early 2023.<sup>7</sup> Displacement patterns across Chin State vary: civilians in southern

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<sup>6</sup> Data For Myanmar. (2023). *Burned Houses Data 2023 (08/08)*. [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Rcg1SsX1lKTzlhlskDWZzbkT2\\_9TUGarxGSzpOXsSc/edit?gid=0#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1Rcg1SsX1lKTzlhlskDWZzbkT2_9TUGarxGSzpOXsSc/edit?gid=0#gid=0). Last Accessed January 01, 2025.

<sup>7</sup> Sang, J.N. (2023). *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*. XCEPT: Online. <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/resistance-and-the-cost-of-the-coup-in-chin-state-myanmar/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

Chin State have largely remained internally displaced due to limited mobility, while those in the north (aided by better transportation links) have increasingly crossed into India. This influx has placed significant strain on India's northeastern states, particularly Mizoram, which has accommodated over 50,000 Myanmar refugees since the 2021 coup,<sup>8</sup> and Manipur, where more than 6,000 have sought refuge.<sup>9</sup> By March 31, 2025, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that over 83,000 Myanmar refugees had fled to India in total.<sup>10</sup>



**Figure 2:** A China-built Myanmar junta Y-12 aircraft photographed in Mindat Township, Chin State, during our second research trip in November 2024.<sup>11</sup>

Amid this mass displacement, Myanmar human rights defenders, political activists, and civil society leaders have been among those forced to flee. Many use their new base in India to engage in cross-border activism, providing support for resistance movements and

<sup>8</sup> Singh, V. (2022, September 25). Over 40,000 refugees from Myanmar based in 60 camps set up in Mizoram, says Rajya Sabha MP. *The Hindu*.

<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/over-40000-refugees-from-myanmar-based-in-60-camps-set-up-in-mizoram-says-rajya-sabha-mp/article65930882.ece>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> International Commission of Jurists. (2024, May 10). *India: Immediately halt forced returns of Myanmar refugees in Manipur and respect the non-refoulement principle*.

<https://www.icj.org/india-immediately-halt-forced-returns-of-myanmar-refugees-in-manipur-and-respect-the-non-refoulement-principle/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>10</sup> UNHCR. (n.d.). *Operational Data Portal: Myanmar Situation*. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/myanmar>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> The Y-12 light transport aircraft was originally intended for training and short-range transport, but has been repurposed by Myanmar's State Administration Council (SAC) to carry out bombing missions in regions such as Chin, Rakhine, Shan, Karen, Karenni, and Sagaing. Despite its limited combat capabilities, the aircraft has been used to drop bombs (sometimes from its rear doors) on civilian areas, and is recognizable by its distinctive buzzing sound.

humanitarian efforts within Myanmar. The growing presence of these activists in India highlights the critical need for focused research to better understand the specific challenges faced by displaced pro-democracy resistance groups, as well as to assess the evolving political, security, and humanitarian needs in India's northeastern states.

These dynamics differ significantly from those on the Thai-Myanmar border, where decades of refugee presence and Thai government-recognized displaced persons camps have given rise to well-established support systems and robust international aid networks.<sup>12</sup> In contrast, the political landscape, security conditions, and support needs along India's border present unique challenges that cannot be effectively addressed through generalized approaches or lessons drawn from aid distribution on the Thai-Myanmar border. While some international attention has been given to the plight of Rohingya refugees indefinitely stranded in Bangladesh with no safe prospects of returning to Myanmar under the current military regime, the broader impact on Myanmar's western neighbors, including India, has largely been overlooked. Addressing this distinct and underexplored context requires targeted research to better understand the specific needs and challenges faced by pro-democracy resistance activities operating from the India-Myanmar border.

Building on these distinct dynamics, this research by Exile Hub stems from our direct experience supporting Myanmar human rights defenders (HRDs) and pro-democracy activists in exile since 2021.<sup>13</sup> Following the military coup, many HRDs and activists within our network have sought refuge in India, highlighting the urgent need to examine the unique challenges faced by pro-democracy resistance movements operating from this region. A critical barrier to effective support has been the lack of communication and understanding between resistance and civil society groups along the India-Myanmar border. This disconnect has resulted in information gaps that this research seeks to bridge; providing a clearer picture of the needs, strategies, and obstacles faced by those resisting military dictatorship from the Indian side of the border.

Accordingly, this research paper examines the challenges faced by support networks for Myanmar refugees and resistance groups in Northeast India, with a particular emphasis on Mizoram State. Mizoram is a key focal point due to its role as a primary refuge for Myanmar refugees, with deep ethnic and cultural ties with communities across the border in Myanmar's Chin State. This makes it a crucial site for understanding the resource constraints, logistical challenges, and socio-political complexities that hinder the effectiveness of refugee aid. Key issues explored in this research include funding shortages for on-the-ground support networks, difficulties in channeling funds from international actors to local groups, inconsistent access to healthcare and education due to inadequate logistical networks, unequal aid distribution, and the politicisation of aid relief organizations.

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<sup>12</sup> Sullivan, D. P. (2022, July 12). Paths of Assistance: Opportunities for Aid and Protection along the Thailand-Myanmar Border. *Refugees International, Thailand Report*. <https://d3iwam0i5codb7.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/ThailandReport-July2022-FINAL.pdf>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>13</sup> Exile Hub. (2024). *About Us*. <https://www.exilehub.org/about>. Last Accessed January 20, 2025.

As the number of displaced individuals continues to rise, the demand for coordinated support in areas such as humanitarian aid, medical assistance, legal aid, mental health support, and capacity building for resistance activities becomes essential. However, coordinating support for displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border is complicated by competing priorities between political and armed factions, such as the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) and the Chinland Joint Defense Committee (CJDC) in Myanmar's Chin State. During our research trips along the India-Myanmar border in June and November 2024, we witnessed first hand how competing priorities between political, humanitarian, and armed groups have created additional barriers for comprehensive humanitarian aid efforts. With this in mind, our paper explores how internal tensions complicate the effectiveness of assistance and offers insights into how improved coordination and resource mobilisation can help address these challenges. Through this analysis, we aim to deepen understanding of how complex socio-political dynamics between political and armed groups can impact aid provision and propose strategies to foster greater cooperation among support networks.

The necessity of critically examining existing aid networks for Myanmar refugees and pro-democracy resistance groups along the India-Myanmar border has become even more pressing following the abrupt U.S. government policy shift in late January 2025, triggered by President Donald Trump's executive order to reassess and realign foreign aid. According to Human Rights Myanmar, \$39 million in USAID funding designated for human rights, democracy promotion, and media development in Myanmar has been suspended.<sup>14</sup> This sudden financial disruption poses a grave threat to essential humanitarian assistance, particularly for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) along the border, where NGOs often serve as the primary providers of critical services, including healthcare, education, emergency shelter, and food distribution.

Organizations already operating under severe financial constraints have been forced to make difficult decisions, including staff layoffs, program suspensions, and substantial reductions in essential services. Some smaller organizations have already ceased operations indefinitely. As reported in an interview with Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) Executive Director Sa Uk Ling in late January 2025, CHRO "has had to fire 16 of its psycho-social support staff and 40 healthcare workers due to the loss of US funding".<sup>15</sup>

Given the current trajectory, long-standing civil society infrastructure supporting Myanmar refugees and resistance efforts may face irreversible collapse, significantly undermining opposition to military rule at a crucial juncture. Therefore, it is imperative that emerging research assess the immediate and long-term consequences of this funding crisis and develop contextually informed strategies to strengthen coordination and resource

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<sup>14</sup> Human Rights Myanmar. (2025, February 06). *Trump freezes \$39 million for rights, democracy, and media in Myanmar*.

<https://humanrightsmyanmar.org/trump-freezes-39-million-for-rights-democracy-and-media-in-myanmar/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Brunwasser, M. (2025, January 31). 'America first' in action: Trump's aid freeze erodes an already anemic response to Myanmar crisis. *Frontier Myanmar*.

<https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/america-first-in-action-trumps-aid-freeze-erodes-an-already-anemic-response-to-myanmar-crisis/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

mobilisation among aid organizations. Such an approach is essential to maximizing the impact of increasingly limited financial and human resources in support of displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border.

### III. Methodology

Our research was guided by three primary questions:

- What are the main challenges faced by support networks for Myanmar refugees and resistance groups operating in Mizoram State?
- How do legal, cultural, and financial factors affect these support efforts?
- What strategies can improve coordination and resource mobilisation among these groups?

Our research process began with an extensive review of existing literature on the India-Myanmar border. Presented in Appendix I at the end of this paper, our literature review revealed critical gaps in scholarship; particularly regarding cross-border support networks for refugees and pro-democracy resistance activities in the aftermath of the 2021 military coup. While some studies have examined the role of ethnic armed organizations and migration patterns in the region, there is minimal research on the challenges faced by human rights defenders and pro-democracy activists engaged in cross-border resistance. Furthermore, the influence and operational strategies of churches and diaspora networks in sustaining Chin refugee communities on both sides of the border remain largely understudied.

These gaps in existing literature not only limited our ability to build upon previous findings, but also emphasized the necessity of primary research to capture the evolving dynamics of support systems and informal governance structures. The absence of in-depth studies on cross-border humanitarian assistance, security coordination, and grassroots resistance efforts further highlighted the need for a nuanced, field-based investigation into the current realities shaping Myanmar refugees and pro-democracy resistance groups along the India-Myanmar border.

Accordingly, our research team conducted two distinct field trips to gather primary data. The first focused on Delhi and Mizoram State in June 2024, where researchers interviewed 14 political and civil society organizations engaged in support and advocacy for Myanmar refugees. These interviews helped map the organizational landscape, identify current support infrastructures, and understand coordination mechanisms and policy-level advocacy.

The second trip in November 2024 extended to refugee camps along the India-Myanmar border, and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps within Chin State, Myanmar. This phase enabled researchers to assess ground realities through direct observation, and through five key informant interviews with refugees, IDPs and aid relief workers. This proved vital in revealing operational challenges and barriers to aid delivery that were not apparent from the organizational-level interviews conducted during our first research trip.

A key methodological challenge in researching clandestine cross-border humanitarian assistance, activism, and armed resistance was navigating the interconnected dynamics of access and positionality. As ethnographer John van Maanen describes, researchers are often embedded in “webs of local associations”,<sup>16</sup> which shape the contours of field engagement and influence the kinds of knowledge accessible to them. We experienced this firsthand during our two field trips, where internal divisions within the Chin community (most notably between the Chinland Council and the Chin Brotherhood) complicated our entry points and interactions. Recognizing this, we sought to mitigate bias by intentionally engaging with actors across these political and territorial divides. Interviews were conducted with representatives from both factions, and field visits were made to refugee and IDP camps located within areas under their respective control. This approach allowed for a comparative assessment of aid penetration and effectiveness across different jurisdictions, which helped us document varying needs, challenges, and governance structures.

Throughout our research, we followed the ethical guidelines established by the Murad Research Institute, known as the Murad Code.<sup>17</sup> This set of principles places a strong emphasis on transparency, integrity, and ethical behavior across every stage of the research, encompassing data collection, analysis, and reporting. Serving as a comprehensive framework, the Murad Code guided us in upholding the utmost standards of research ethics and integrity throughout the entire study.

Our data collection methods included a total of 19 key informant interviews, two focus group discussions, direct observation in three refugee camps in India and one IDP camp in Myanmar, site visits to aid organizations, and documentation of aid delivery systems and logistical constraints. We paid particular attention to security concerns and the sensitivity of cross-border operations. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees and FGD participants prior to each session. To protect the safety of participants, all identifying details have been removed or masked in our research outputs, unless we received explicit consent otherwise. These measures were taken to minimize risks, especially for individuals operating in high-threat environments and/or under surveillance.

## Key Informant Interviews

During our two-week fieldwork trip to India in June 2024, Exile Hub researchers conducted 14 in-person key informant interviews. Facilitated by independent Chin researchers based in India, their local knowledge and linguistic fluency ensured both cultural sensitivity and contextual accuracy in the interview process. The selected informants represented a cross-section of civil society organizations (CSOs), local NGOs, grassroots volunteer groups, and international aid agencies. Their work spans a range of sectors including emergency relief, humanitarian aid, shelter provision, healthcare access, and advocacy on

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<sup>16</sup> Van Maanen, J. (1991). *Playing Back the Tape: Early Days in the Field*. Shaffir, W., & Stebbins, R. A. (Eds). *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

<sup>17</sup> Murad Code Project. (2022, April 13). *The Global Code of Conduct for Gathering and Using Information about Systematic and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*.

refugee protection. An overview of the different organizations interviewed is listed in Appendix II at the end of this paper.

This set of interviews illuminated the multi-layered ecosystem of aid provision along the India-Myanmar border, highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses of existing support networks. Informants also reflected on the challenges of navigating India's restrictive refugee policies and described how patterns of humanitarian support are often shaped by ethnic, religious, political and/or local ties, resulting in uneven and at times exclusionary access to assistance.

As part of our research into cross-border humanitarian responses and displacement dynamics, we conducted a follow-up field visit in November 2024 to four camps situated along the India-Myanmar border. These included three refugee camps in Mizoram: Siatlai Refugee Camp in Saiha District, Lawngtlai Refugee Camp, and Canan Refugee Camp; as well as Sa Tuu village IDP camp located in Matupi Township, Chin State, Myanmar. These sites were strategically selected to capture a range of displacement experiences, encompassing both cross-border refugee communities and internally displaced populations within Myanmar. Over the course of these visits, we carried out five key informant interviews with a group of actors directly involved in the day-to-day operations and survival of these camps. Interviewees included camp leaders managing logistical and security challenges, refugee camp teachers navigating the complexities of education delivery, and a medical aid provider offering critical health services.



**Figure 3:** A view of Mizoram's Lawngtlai Refugee Camp, November 2024.

## Focus Group Discussions

The two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted during our June 2024 fieldwork in Delhi were designed to complement the key informant interviews by foregrounding the lived experiences and perspectives of Myanmar refugees themselves. The recruitment process for participants was guided by purposive sampling, ensuring that each discussion brought together individuals with direct lived experience of displacement as well as active involvement in refugee rights initiatives.

The FGDs were organized by local Chin co-researchers, who structured the groups by gender: one with women human rights defenders and the other with male community leaders. This gender-segregated approach, though unplanned, proved to be a methodological strength. In a context where barriers to women's ability to speak openly in the presence of men was at times observed, the creation of a women-only FGD facilitated conversations where the participants could speak more freely; particularly on topics related to power, leadership, and community decision-making.

Each FGD included three participants, a size that facilitated active engagement. An overview of the participants' backgrounds is listed in Appendix III at the end of this paper. Core areas of inquiry in the two FGDs included:

- Participants' journeys to India and their experiences of displacement.
- The availability and accessibility of humanitarian aid.
- The specific challenges faced by undocumented refugees in securing legal status, healthcare, education, and housing.
- The role of faith-based institutions, community networks, and international organizations in providing support and gaps in assistance.
- The psychosocial impact of long-term displacement, including stressors related to gender, language barriers, and discrimination.
- Suggestions for improving protection and inclusion mechanisms for Myanmar refugees living in India.

These two FGDs provided essential context for understanding the gendered and community-based dimensions of refugee support and self-organization among Myanmar refugees in India. Participants emphasized the bureaucratic obstacles faced in accessing legal status and basic services, and the reliance on informal networks in navigating life in exile. The participants' inputs also revealed a need to center localized knowledge and community-based coping strategies in policy responses to refugee displacement along the India-Myanmar border.

## Scope and Limitations

The scope of this research was shaped by several logistical and geopolitical constraints, particularly the ongoing conflict and the varying territorial control exercised by multiple armed groups in the region. These complex dynamics at times restricted our ability to engage directly with local displaced communities, as access was mediated or limited by resistance actors operating across different jurisdictions. Moreover, several areas remained inaccessible due to travel restrictions, government-imposed limitations, and security risks, all of which constrained the extent of our field-based assessments.

Another limitation stems from the political tensions between competing Chin resistance factions. These rival groups control distinct territories and are often unwilling to share sensitive information about governance structures or humanitarian coordination efforts. The highly sensitive nature of humanitarian aid distribution and logistical operations exacerbated this issue, as some organizations refrained from disclosing detailed operational strategies due to concerns over security and/or unintended political consequences.

We made efforts to consult a range of actors throughout our fieldwork, including: Chin and other Myanmar refugees and IDPs, local support groups on both sides of the border, Indian community-based organizations, and representatives in the Mizoram state government. However, most who agreed to participate on-the-record were Chin or other Myanmar stakeholders, leaving a representational imbalance of Indian perspectives in this paper. This limits the extent to which we are fully able to convey the complexity of cross-border aid coordination from the Indian governance perspective, and may inadvertently center Myanmar narratives without sufficient counterbalancing viewpoints from Indian stakeholders.

Lastly, we acknowledge that our relatively small sample size in our key informant interviews and focus group discussions may raise questions regarding how thorough we were in examining the complexity of the aid ecosystem along the India-Myanmar border. While purposive sampling enabled us to capture key variations in organizational structures, geographic coverage, and political affiliations on both sides of the border, a broader set of interviews with Indian-based stakeholders would have helped validate and deepen the findings presented in this paper. More sustained interaction and dialogue regarding cross-border aid distribution between Indian and Myanmar stakeholders remains an essential area for further exploration.

Despite these constraints, our research benefited from close collaboration with independent Chin researchers based in Mizoram, and the establishment of an advisory board composed of local and international researchers with extensive knowledge of cross-border humanitarian aid along the India-Myanmar border. Throughout the research, the advisory board offered methodological guidance, verified the validity of our approach, and reviewed and provided feedback on the final report prior to publication.

This collaborative and consultative model enhanced the reflexivity and responsiveness of the research, ensuring that it remained grounded in the needs and priorities of affected

communities and aligned with principles of equity, inclusivity, and sustainability. Through a mixed-methods approach incorporating focus group discussions, interviews, humanitarian reports, and policy analyses, we were able to develop a nuanced understanding of factional coordination, informal governance mechanisms, and the broader implications of political fragmentation along the India-Myanmar border.

Our research paid particular attention to India's Mizoram State, complemented by contextual analysis from Myanmar's Chin State to better understand cross-border humanitarian aid efforts and the mobility of displaced populations fleeing into Mizoram. The decision to focus on Mizoram reflects the state's strategic and humanitarian significance in receiving Chin refugees. However, due to India's federal structure, each state operates under distinct governance frameworks, laws, and policies regarding refugees and migrants. As such, while the findings from Mizoram provide valuable insights into localized support mechanisms and challenges, they cannot be uniformly applied to other Indian states hosting Myanmar refugees, such as Manipur or Nagaland. Nonetheless, the observations presented here offer important contributions to broader policy and programmatic discussions on supporting Myanmar's exiled communities in diverse subnational contexts.

## IV. Context

### India-Myanmar Relationship

The relationship between India and Myanmar is shaped by centuries of shared history, complex ethnic ties, and evolving geopolitical interests. Understanding this historical context is crucial for analysing contemporary support networks for Myanmar refugees and resistance groups in India. The northeastern border region between the two nations has long been home to diverse ethnic communities, including the Chin and Mizo peoples, who maintain close ethnic and cultural ties that predate modern state boundaries. Historically, these societies resisted centralized state control by structuring their social organizations, subsistence practices, and culture around principles of autonomy, flexibility, and mobility.<sup>18</sup> Rather than existing in fixed opposition to state systems however, they navigated a fluid political landscape; sometimes evading incorporation, at other times engaging strategically with state authorities when it served their interests.<sup>19</sup> This tradition of adaptable political organization continues to inform the ways in which cross-border communities respond to displacement, conflict, and shifting power dynamics today.

This dynamic, however, was disrupted by British colonial rule in the 18th century, marking what many consider “the end of a unified and free Chinland”.<sup>20</sup> New boundaries and governance systems were imposed by British authorities, who partitioned the Chin-related populations across three colonial administrative zones: Chin in present-day Myanmar, Mizo in India, and Kuki in what is now Bangladesh. This dismantled traditional forms of self-governance, and laid the foundation for lasting political and social divisions. The colonial legacy of border-making continues to shape contemporary dynamics, influencing patterns of migration, the articulation of ethnic identity, and expressions of transnational solidarity. Today, these divisions are especially pronounced in the context of refugee flows and pro-democracy resistance movements, as ethnically linked communities along the India-Myanmar border mobilize to support those fleeing conflict in Myanmar.

Following the 1988 nationwide uprising against General Ne Win’s military dictatorship in Myanmar, India froze diplomatic relations and extended refuge to pro-democracy activists.<sup>21</sup> However, geopolitical considerations (particularly China’s growing influence in Myanmar) prompted India to shift its approach. In 1991, the Indian government launched its “Look East Policy” to strengthen strategic and economic ties with Southeast Asia while

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, J. C. (2011). *The art of not being governed: An anarchist history of upland southeast asia*. Yale University Press; Van Schendel, W. (2005). Geographies of Knowing, Geographies of Ignorance: Jumping Scale in Southeast Asia. Kratoska, P.H., Raben, R., & Nordholt, H. S. (Eds). *Locating Southeast Asia: Geographies of Knowledge and Politics of Space*. Singapore: Singapore University Press, pp. 275-309.

<sup>19</sup> Leach, E. R. (1954). *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*. London: London School of Economics and Political Science; Sakhong, L. H. (2003). *In Search of Chin Identity: A Study in Religion, Politics and Ethnic Identity in Burma*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press; Sadan, M. (2013). *Being and Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch. ‘We are Like Forgotten People’. *The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.9.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch. ‘We are Like Forgotten People’. *The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.17.

counterbalancing China's expanding influence in the region.<sup>22</sup> This shift led to a resumption of engagement with the Myanmar military regime, culminating in a 1994 agreement between the two nations to suppress armed insurgencies along the India-Myanmar border. This agreement included joint military operations targeting ethnic opposition forces, including the Chin National Army (CNA).<sup>23</sup>

India's engagement with the Myanmar junta deepened further after the "Look East Policy" transformed into the "Act East Policy" in 2014. This revised policy prioritized regional economic integration and security cooperation in Southeast Asia, leading to the ratification of new trade agreements and increased Indian investments in Myanmar's infrastructure and industries. One of the most notable projects under this initiative has been the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit and Transportation Project, which "envisages goods being transported by sea from Kolkata, India, to Rakhine's Sittwe seaport. From there, the goods travel up the Kaladan River to Paletwa, where they are offloaded for an overland journey on a 110-kilometre (68-mile) road snaking north to Mizoram's Zorinpui".<sup>24</sup>

That said, the 2021 military coup tested India's cross-border economic investment interests. While India officially expressed "its deep opposition to the violence in Myanmar and support for a transition to democracy as soon as possible",<sup>25</sup> its actions suggest a more pragmatic approach. India has continued to engage with Myanmar's military junta, providing arms and military equipment, including naval supplies, missile-related technology, and radio communications gear, as highlighted in the United Nations Human Rights Council's June 2024 report on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.<sup>26</sup>

Despite India's continued cooperation with the junta, regional instability has forced a nuanced recalibration of its strategy. For instance, India has begun tentatively reaching out to democracy forces out of concern for the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, which runs through Manipur and Mizoram into territories in Myanmar at the center of the armed resistance movement and subject to Sit-Tat (State Armed Forces) airstrikes. In January 2024, Indian lawmakers visited Myanmar's Paletwa Township in Chin State to discuss the highway project with Arakan Army (AA) representatives,<sup>27</sup> signaling a willingness to engage with various factions to secure the border and protect Indian interests.<sup>28</sup> In

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<sup>22</sup> Haokip, T. *India's Look East Policy: Its Evolution and Approach*, pp. 239-257.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch.

<sup>24</sup> Choudhury, A. (2024, March 13). Is India Finally Waking Up to a New Reality in Western Myanmar? *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/is-india-finally-waking-up-to-a-new-reality-in-western-myanmar/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>25</sup> OHCHR. (2024, June 26). Banking on the Death Trade: How Banks and Governments Enable the Military Junta in Myanmar. *Human Rights Council Fifty-sixth session 18 June–12 July 2024*, p.8. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session56/a-hrc-56-crp-7.pdf>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>26</sup> OHCHR. Banking on the Death Trade: How Banks and Governments Enable the Military Junta in Myanmar, p.11.

<sup>27</sup> In recent years, the Arakan Army (AA) has expanded its territorial control beyond Rakhine State into southern Chin State. After a series of battles with the Myanmar military, the AA captured Paletwa in January 2024, which is of strategic importance both for its control over key trade and transportation routes connected to the India-funded Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, and for its potential to generate substantial revenue through the regulation of cross-border trade.

<sup>28</sup> Choudhury, A. Is India Finally Waking Up to a New Reality in Western Myanmar?

November 2024, the six core political and armed groups now in control of the India-Myanmar border, including the Chin National Front and its armed wing the Chin National Army, the Chin Brotherhood, the Arakan Army, the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF), Sagaing Forum, and the NUG, each travelled to New Delhi for individual meetings with the Ministry of External Affairs.<sup>29</sup> These engagements reflect a strategic flexibility consistent with Researcher Angshuman Choudhury's observation that Indian officials have shown "a strong appetite to work with whichever groups are willing to secure the border and, in turn, Indian interests".<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, military cooperation between the Indian government and Myanmar junta remains a core aspect of bilateral relations. In July 2024, Myanmar's Army General and Union Minister of Defence Maung Maung Aye met with India's Ambassador to Myanmar, Abhay Thakur, in Nay Pyi Taw to discuss increased military collaboration.<sup>31</sup> Their discussions focused on border security, stability, and law enforcement, reinforcing India's strategic engagement with Myanmar's military government despite its stated support for democratic transition.

With India not signatory to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, this legal vacuum leaves refugees on Indian soil without formal protections under international law. Moreover, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is not authorized to operate freely in India and is instead restricted by government-imposed limitations, preventing it from extending services in India's northeastern states, and instead relying on local partner NGOs to provide financial and non-financial support.<sup>32</sup> As a result, refugees along the India-Myanmar border are unable to register with the UNHCR, which is crucial for securing protection from deportation. Instead, they must undertake a dangerous 2,460-kilometer journey to the UNHCR's only India office in New Delhi, navigating checkpoints and avoiding detection along the way.<sup>33</sup> India's refusal to grant international aid organizations and UN agencies access to northeastern states such as Mizoram further exacerbates the humanitarian crisis, leaving many refugees without essential support.

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<sup>29</sup> International Crisis Group. (2025, April 11). A Rebel Border: India's Evolving Ties with Myanmar after the Coup. *Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°182*, p.14. [https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/b182-india-myanmar-evolving-ties\\_0.pdf](https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2025-04/b182-india-myanmar-evolving-ties_0.pdf). Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>30</sup> Choudhury, A. (2024, August 28). 'Two lions in a cave': Revolutionary divisions in Chin State. *Frontier Myanmar*. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/two-lions-in-a-cave-revolutionary-divisions-in-chin-state/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>31</sup> Mohinga Matters, (2024, August 01). August Monthly Magazine. *Freedom Memoirs 4(7)*, p.6. <https://mohingamatters.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/MM-Volume-4-Issue-7.pdf>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Levesque, J., & Rahman, M. Z. (2008). Tension in the Rolling Hills: Burmese population and Border Trade in Mizoram. *IPCS Research Papers*. New Delhi: Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, p.7.

<sup>33</sup> Once refugees reach New Delhi, their ability to move freely is restricted while they await documentation from the UNHCR office. The process of obtaining legal status can take many years (in some cases, decades). As a result, multi-generational Chin communities have become effectively stranded in Delhi, unable to return to Myanmar or resettle elsewhere. During our fieldwork in June 2024, the research team spoke with several Chin families who shared firsthand accounts of their long-term, undocumented lives in the city, characterized by economic hardship, limited access to essential services, and an ongoing fear of arrest.



**Figure 4:** View of the border town of Reikhawda from the Myanmar side of the India-Myanmar border, November 2024.

## Chin-Mizo Relations in Mizoram State

India's federal government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), maintains restrictive refugee policies, including limitations on the operational mandate of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and enforces strict border controls through paramilitary forces such as the Assam Rifles and the Border Security Force.<sup>34</sup> However, state governments possess autonomy in shaping local asylum policies. Mizoram has historically exercised this discretion to implement an asylum framework rooted in ethnic kinship between the Chin and Mizo communities. Through initiatives such as the High-Level Committee on Myanmar Refugees,<sup>35</sup> the Mizoram state government has provided logistical and material assistance to an estimated 50,000-60,000 refugees (both documented and undocumented) residing in 40 to 50 refugee camps. This approach underscores a localized asylum policy that diverges from the restrictive stance of the federal central government.

The ethnic and cultural bonds between the Mizos and Chins trace back to their shared ancestry as descendants of the Zo people, who settled in the Lushai Hills over seven centuries ago. This historical connection, reinforced by the widespread adoption of Christianity following missionary activity in the late 19th century, has fostered a sense of solidarity.<sup>36</sup> As a result, Chin refugees (particularly Mara and Lai sub-ethnic groups) arriving in Mizoram have generally been received into an inclusive asylum framework grounded in ethnic kinship. While instances of xenophobia, targeted arrests, and deportations have occurred,<sup>37</sup> Mizoram's overall approach to Myanmar refugees (particularly Chin populations) has been characterized by support and hospitality, shaped by deep-rooted ethnic ties.

However, government-sanctioned support for Myanmar refugees in Mizoram has declined since December 2023, following the electoral victory of Chief Minister Pu Laldhuma and the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM). Unlike previous administrations, the ZPM has aligned more closely with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) at the federal level, contributing to increasingly restrictive refugee policies that prioritize border security over humanitarian considerations.<sup>38</sup> This shift has been marked by a growing securitization of the

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<sup>34</sup> The Assam Rifles is a paramilitary force responsible for policing the India-Myanmar border. It operates under the joint authority of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and is also tasked with counterinsurgency and counter-narcotics operations in border regions. The force has the mandate to regulate refugee crossings. Similarly, the Border Security Force (BSF) is a paramilitary force that polices specific sections of the India-Myanmar border, particularly in Manipur. Unlike the Assam Rifles, the BSF operates solely under the MHA and is additionally responsible for law enforcement and riot control. The BSF also holds the authority to permit or restrict refugee movement across the border.

<sup>35</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border. (2024), p.14.

<sup>36</sup> Levesque, J., & Rahman, M. Z. Tension in the Rolling Hills: Burmese population and Border Trade in Mizoram, p. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Human Rights Watch. 'We are Like Forgotten People!' The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> Sitlhou, M. (2024, August 16). How Thailand and India continue to fail Myanmar refugees. *Himal Southasian*. <https://www.himalmag.com/politics/myanmar-refugees-india-thailand-military-junta-conflict-manipur-mizoram?access-token=64fe0943-6c68-4bcf-8c0d-d89c0f40b3f3-1725276975454>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

India-Myanmar border,<sup>39</sup> driven by the central government's populist stance on immigration and national security. The suspension of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) in February 2024,<sup>40</sup> previously a key mechanism enabling cross-border mobility for local communities (including refugees), further underscores this transition, alongside the deployment of additional security forces along the border.<sup>41</sup>

Despite this policy shift, our 2024 field research in Mizoram revealed a sustained commitment among local humanitarian actors to support Chin refugees. Civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) continue to play a crucial role in aid distribution, forming larger coordination networks to facilitate resource-sharing and targeted assistance. These grassroots initiatives demonstrate the resilience of local actors in maintaining refugee support systems; even as government policies become increasingly restrictive.

Nevertheless, Mizoram State's capacity to sustain refugee assistance is constrained by both economic and political challenges. With a gross domestic product of \$1.43 billion USD, Mizoram is one of India's poorest states, ranking just above the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.<sup>42</sup> Financial insecurity has been exacerbated by the federal government's failure to disburse Mizoram's rightful share of tax revenues, which was publicly highlighted in February 2024 when the state's Chief Minister complained about the lack of expected tax transfers from the central government.<sup>43</sup> This economic vulnerability, combined with the state government's restrictive approach to refugee policy, poses grave obstacles for relief organizations assisting Myanmar refugees and resistance groups. Chronic funding shortages, a limited presence of international NGOs due to federal restrictions, and logistical challenges (including difficulties in delivering healthcare and securing adequate shelter) have strained local relief efforts. As the refugee population continues to grow, these constraints exacerbate the fragility of existing humanitarian initiatives.

Moreover, Mizoram State's ethnic-based asylum framework has reinforced structural inequities in refugee assistance. Humanitarian aid is largely distributed along tribal and sub-tribal affiliations, disproportionately benefiting larger Chin sub-ethnic groups, while

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<sup>39</sup> In mid-May 2025 for example, the Assam Rifles unit reportedly killed ten members of Myanmar's Local Defense Force (LDF), near the India-Myanmar border in Manipur's Chandel district. While Indian media described the incident as a successful operation against "armed extremists," resistance groups in Myanmar claimed that the victims were detained and killed without an armed encounter, raising serious concerns about cross-border operations and growing militarization. See: Bhattacharyya, R. (2025, May 20). Indian Security Forces Massacre Burmese Resistance Functionaries. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2025/05/indian-security-forces-massacre-burmese-resistance-functionaries/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border. (2024), p.7.

<sup>41</sup> In addition to Myanmar resistance groups, the security landscape along the India-Myanmar border is further complicated by the presence of Indian separatist movements, including factions of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) and other Northeast insurgent groups operating in and around Mizoram. Their continued activity has contributed to the central government's increasingly securitized posture toward the region.

<sup>42</sup> Hazarika, S. (2023, March 21). 'Now this is home for us': Chin refugees from Myanmar find a welcoming sanctuary in Mizoram. *Scroll.in*. <https://scroll.in/article/1045343/now-this-is-home-for-us-chin-refugees-from-myanmar-find-a-welcoming-sanctuary-in-mizoram>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Hazarika, S. 'Now this is home for us': Chin refugees from Myanmar find a welcoming sanctuary in Mizoram.

smaller groups, particularly those from southern Chin State, receive less support due to weaker ties with the Mizo population. Similarly, non-Chin and non-Christian refugees face systemic barriers to accessing aid, as their lack of ethnic and religious affiliation with local communities limits their inclusion in existing support networks.<sup>44</sup>

These disparities are further reflected in the broader treatment of ethnic minorities within Mizoram, particularly the Chakmas, who, with an estimated population of 100,000, constitute the state's largest minority group. As a predominantly Buddhist community, the Chakmas have historically faced systematic marginalization, including "the cancellation of trade licenses, denial of their right to employment, deletion of names from electoral rolls, the withdrawal of healthcare and educational facilities since the 1980s, and other forms of persecution".<sup>45</sup>

These patterns of exclusion highlight the limitations of Mizoram's ethnic-based refugee support system. While the kinship framework has facilitated critical assistance for many Chin refugees, it has also entrenched disparities that disproportionately disadvantage smaller, less-connected Chin sub-groups, non-Chin ethnicities, and non-Christian populations. As a result, existing socio-political hierarchies limit equitable access to aid for all displaced Myanmar communities.

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<sup>44</sup> Fishbein, E. (2023, March 15). In India's Mizoram, ethnic ties drive response to Chin conflict. *Frontier Myanmar*. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/in-indias-mizoram-ethnic-ties-drive-response-to-chin-conflict/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Gogoi, S. (2023, June 02). In Mizoram, a refugee crisis highlights Mizo tribal affinities and hostility. *Himal Southasian*. <https://www.himalmag.com/comment/mizoram-refugee-crisis-chin-kukichin-bangladesh-myanmar-mizo-tribal-affinities-hostility>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

## Unification Among Chin Armed Actors?

The Chin armed resistance movement has been characterized by extensive periods of factionalism, with two primary groupings emerging: the Chinland Council, led by the Chin National Front (CNF), and the Chin Brotherhood, a coalition of six resistance forces that emerged after the 2021 coup.



**Figure 5:** *An elderly woman climbs a hillside in the mountainous terrain surrounding Mindat Township, Chin State, November 2024.*

This division is rooted in the historical trajectory of the CNF and its armed wing, the Chin National Army (CNA), both of which were founded in Mizoram in 1988 mere months before Myanmar's pro-democracy uprising. For decades, the CNF/A remained the dominant force in Chin resistance. However, internal fractures began to surface during peace negotiations in the mid-2010s, ultimately leading to further splintering within the movement.

It must be noted that the factionalism within the Chin armed resistance movement is not merely a product of strategic or ideological disputes, but is deeply intertwined with ethnic sub-group identities, linguistic divisions, and historical patterns of institutional development. Although Chin State's administrative boundaries encompass diverse dialect groups, they do not reflect the linguistic realities on the ground, where many dialects remain mutually unintelligible. Religious institutions, particularly Baptist churches, have played a central role in shaping group identity and social cohesion over the past century. For example, once Thantlang became an independent township from Hakha, the Thantlang Association of Baptist Churches (TABC) was established in 1975, reflecting the township's growing religious autonomy. Over time, however, linguistic and cultural differences contributed to

the fragmentation of the Baptist community, leading to the creation of separate institutions for the Lai, Zophei, Lautu, and Mara sub-groups.<sup>46</sup> This institutional diversification mirrors broader patterns of identity formation in Chin society. The overlapping cleavages of language, religion, and political allegiance continue to shape localized identities and complicate efforts to build a unified Chin resistance. The *Sit-Tat's* (State Armed Forces) destruction of 21 out of the 22 existing churches in Thantlang further underscores the vulnerability of these deeply rooted institutions.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 6:** A CDF-Mindat soldier inspects his rifle in Chin State's Mindat Township, November 2024.

The establishment of the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) in April 2021 initially suggested a move toward unity by bringing together key Chin political stakeholders, including the CNF/A, elected parliamentarians, political parties, and civil society organizations. However, ideological rifts soon emerged, particularly between factions aligned with the National League for Democracy (NLD), which sought to maintain Chin State's role within a federal Myanmar, and those advocating for a more autonomous Chin political identity.<sup>48</sup> By early 2023, these divisions had escalated, prompting the CNF/A's withdrawal from the ICNCC.

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<sup>46</sup> Hup, C. L. (2024, December 19). Thantlang. *Institute of Chin Studies*. <https://www.ichins.org/posts/thantlang>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>47</sup> OHCHR. (2024, June 18). Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar. *Human Rights Council Fifty-sixth session 18 June–12 July 2024*, p.7. [https://bangkok.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-12/ahrc5623\\_18\\_jun\\_2024\\_0.pdf](https://bangkok.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/2024-12/ahrc5623_18_jun_2024_0.pdf). Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>48</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.9.

The competing agendas of the ICNCC and Chinland Council have hindered efforts to establish a cohesive administrative structure, particularly in the management of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the distribution of humanitarian aid. The situation was further complicated by the unilateral implementation of the Chinland Constitution by the Chinland Council, which intensified tensions in the resistance movement. Concerns over the CNF/A's lack of inclusive stakeholder consultation, and an unsystematic constitution drafting process were just some of the reasons which led to the formation of the Chin Brotherhood. As a coalition initially formed by the Chin National Defence Force (CNDF), the PDF-Zoland and CDF-Mindat,<sup>49</sup> the Chin Brotherhood grew to include three additional armed groups (the Maraland Defense Force, CDF-Matupi, and CDF-Kanpetlet), working in collaboration with various People's Defence Forces (PDFs)<sup>50</sup> to counterbalance the CNF/A's increasing political dominance.<sup>51</sup> Conversely, the CNF/A contends that the Chin Brotherhood's association with the Arakan Army (AA) jeopardizes Chin autonomy, citing the AA's control over Paletwa Township in southern Chin as a significant threat to the region's self-governance.

At the core of the division between the Chin Brotherhood (formed independently but later began collaborating with the ICNCC) and the CNF/A-led Chinland Council, lies a fundamental contestation over legitimacy.<sup>52</sup> Elected lawmakers derive their authority from the 2020 general election results (de jure legitimacy),<sup>53</sup> whereas ethnic armed actors claim legitimacy through grassroots support and military control on the ground (de facto legitimacy).<sup>54</sup> Despite these divisions, key political actors continue to engage in dialogue, acknowledging the necessity of a unified governance framework for Chin State. Several third-party mediators including the Mizoram chief minister, the Finnish NGO Crisis

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<sup>49</sup> Berezini, V. (2025, March). A Scalable Typology of People's Defence Forces in Myanmar. *Centre on Armed Groups*, p.55. [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628c94ceae15ed6eb64d03fd/t/67e30d7341636c6700153d03/1742933372744/report\\_typology-PDFs-Myanmar\\_2025.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/628c94ceae15ed6eb64d03fd/t/67e30d7341636c6700153d03/1742933372744/report_typology-PDFs-Myanmar_2025.pdf). Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>50</sup> The People's Defense Force (PDF) is the armed wing of Myanmar's National Unity Government (NUG), formed in May 2021 in response to the military coup, comprising regular PDFs, Local Defense Forces (LDFs), and People's Defense Teams (PDTs). In Chin State, these forces operate alongside other resistance groups like the Chinland Defense Force (CDF), formed in April 2021 in nine different townships in Chin State, which has successfully liberated much of southern Chin State from military control, with anti-regime forces now controlling over 80 percent of the region according to the Chin Brotherhood.

<sup>51</sup> One group operating within the Chin Brotherhood and collaborating with the CNDF is the Anti-Fascist International Front (AIF), a body of foreign volunteers founded in October 2024. See: Hanrahan, J. (Host). (2025, April 30). The Western Volunteers Fighting in Myanmar (Audio podcast]. *Popular Front*. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/7lu8YbEY6ailQGp8loYR6G?si=7b0eaded28e54db3>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>52</sup> This aligns with David Brenner's analysis of internal struggles within ethnic armed resistance movements, where he argues that legitimacy hinges not merely on military strength or formal leadership structures but on whether the grassroots of a movement perceive their rebel elites as exercising legitimate authority. Although Brenner's work focuses on the pre-coup context, the dynamics he describes remain relevant to post-coup configurations such as those in Chin State, where vertical ties between leaders and local communities are central to both cohesion and legitimacy. See Brenner, D. (2019). *Rebel Politics: A Political Sociology of Armed Struggle in Myanmar's Borderlands*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p.13.

<sup>53</sup> De jure legitimacy refers to the legal and formal recognition of a government or state. It is based on constitutional and statutory frameworks that establish the legitimacy of the government.

<sup>54</sup> De facto legitimacy refers to the actual control and authority exercised by a government or state, regardless of whether it is legally recognized.

Management Initiative,<sup>55</sup> and Chin Christian pastors (as highlighted in a Chinland Council Facebook post on 26th February, 2025), have attempted to facilitate reconciliation between the rival factions.

In a significant development for the Chin armed resistance movement, the Chinland Council and the ICNCC (including the Chin Brotherhood) have initiated a formal reconciliation process aimed at overcoming long standing internal divisions. In late February 2025, representatives from both factions convened in Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, where they signed an agreement to establish a unified political and military body known as the Chin National Council.<sup>56</sup> As part of this accord, the parties also committed to drafting a Chin National Charter, which will delineate the powers and responsibilities of the new council as the sole legitimate resistance authority within Chin State. This reconciliation initiative has been facilitated by Mizoram's Chief Minister Lalduhoma, whose Advocacy Group for Peace has been tasked with supporting and monitoring the unification process.

The agreement to form the Chin National Council represents a potentially transformative step toward resolving the intra-ethnic divisions that have hampered coherent governance and humanitarian coordination in Chin State since the 2021 military coup. While the agreement signals important progress at the leadership level, persistent tensions on the ground (particularly among armed groups aligned with the former rival factions) may pose ongoing challenges to full unification. The long-term success of this initiative will depend on the new council's ability to reconcile differences around regional autonomy, and to establish inclusive and functional administrative structures. Addressing these foundational issues will be essential for improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance and ensuring more coordinated resistance efforts across Chin State. Despite the complexities involved, the reconciliation effort holds considerable promise for enhancing political cohesion and strengthening support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the years ahead.

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<sup>55</sup> Lovett, L. (2025, February 14). Q&A: 'The CNF will be abolished after the revolution', says Chin leader Sui Khar. *Frontier Myanmar*. <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/ga-the-cnf-will-be-abolished-after-revolution-says-chin-leader-sui-khar/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>56</sup> Myanmar Now. (2025, February 28). *Rival Chin groups agree to form unified 'Chin National Council' after years of tension*. <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/rival-chin-groups-agree-to-form-unified-chin-national-council-after-years-of-tension/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

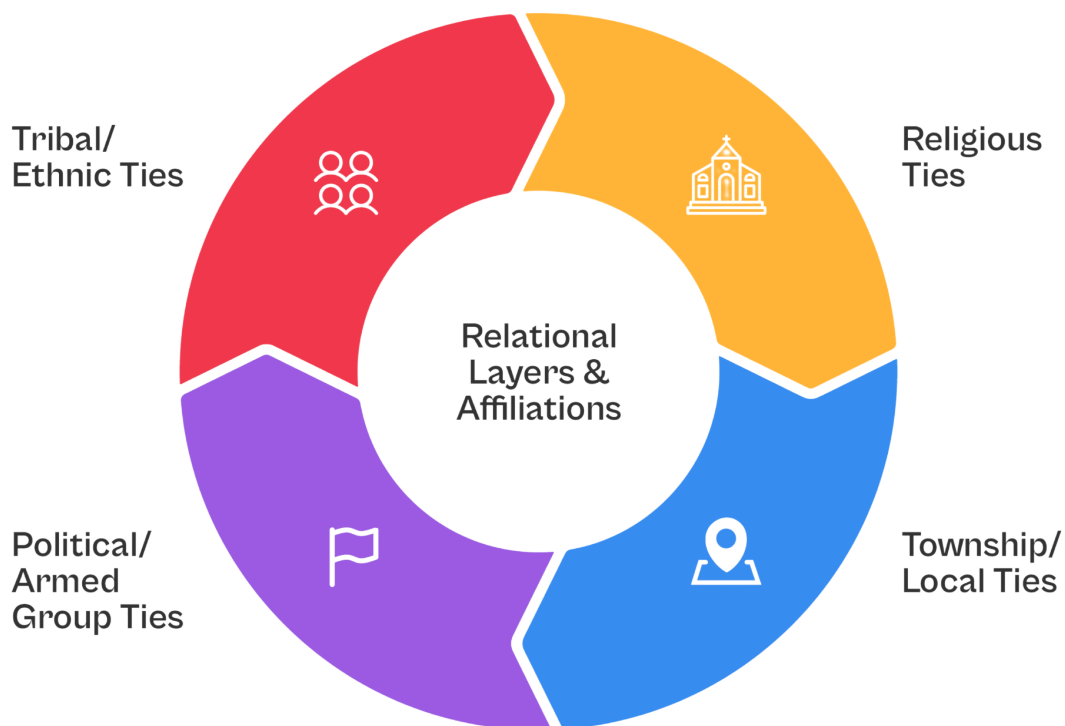


**Figure 7:** A CDF-Mindat soldier patrols on the roof of an abandoned building in Chin State's Mindat Township, November 2024.

## V. Findings

### Relational Layers and Affiliations

The complex social fabric of the India-Myanmar border region (particularly in Mizoram and Chin State) is characterized by multi-layered identities and affiliations. These interconnected ties not only shape individual identities but also significantly influence the dynamics of cross-border activism, humanitarian aid distribution, and community integration efforts. Understanding these multi-layered affiliations is essential for navigating the complex social and political landscape of the India-Myanmar border region.



#### Tribal/Ethnic Ties

The region is home to numerous sub ethnic and linguistic groups, each with its own distinct identity and cultural practices. In Chin State alone, there are at least 53 identified tribes, linked by shared historical narratives, geographical proximity, and traditional governance structures. However, these affiliations transcend national borders, creating strong kinship ties between communities in Myanmar and India, particularly in Mizoram. These transborder ethnic and tribal bonds have facilitated the movement of displaced populations, while simultaneously contributing to the establishment of a social hierarchy in which access to resources and support networks is uneven.

For example, aid relief groups and support networks in Mizoram often operate along ethnic lines, providing assistance primarily to communities with which they share kinship ties. As a result, larger and more established sub-ethnic groups tend to receive disproportionate support due to their stronger cultural and linguistic affinities with the local Mizo population. In contrast, smaller or less-connected sub-groups, especially those from southern Chin

State, as well as non-Chin ethnicities and non-Christian populations, frequently face marginalization and limited access to aid.

### Religious Ties

Religious affiliations play a pivotal role in shaping social structures and support networks in both Mizoram and Chin State. In Chin State, over 85% of the population identifies as Christian,<sup>57</sup> primarily affiliated with Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, which often serve as the first point of contact for displaced individuals.



**Figure 8:** A church service in Mizoram's Lawngtlai Refugee Camp, November 2024.

Rather than fostering uniform solidarity however, religious institutions have reinforced intra-ethnic distinctions. In Chin State, the splintering of previously unified Baptist church structures into separate branches, such as those aligned with the Lai, Zophei, Lautu, and Mara, reflects and perpetuates deep-seated sub-ethnic divisions. This religious and linguistic segmentation within faith communities mirrors the region's complex ethnic landscape and has, at times, constrained efforts to coordinate collective resistance and equitable aid distribution. While churches remain powerful actors in shaping public opinion and responses to the refugee crisis, their influence is often filtered through these sub-ethnic and denominational boundaries, thus affecting the scope and reach of cross-border solidarity efforts.

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<sup>57</sup> Department of Population Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population. (2016, July). The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census. The Union Report: Religion (2-C), p.3. [https://www.dop.gov.mm/sites/dop.gov.mm/files/publication\\_docs/union\\_2-c\\_religion\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://www.dop.gov.mm/sites/dop.gov.mm/files/publication_docs/union_2-c_religion_en_0.pdf). Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

## Political/Armed Group Ties

The political landscape of the region is characterized by various armed groups and political factions, each with its own support base and political leanings. An individual's place of origin within Chin State can often indicate their likely political or armed group affiliation. These affiliations may be based on kinship networks,<sup>58</sup> ethnicity, and/or ideological alignment.<sup>59</sup> As David Brenner aptly notes, they can also be shaped by pragmatic considerations, such as the absence of viable alternatives or the provision of basic services and protection by armed actors. As he writes, these ties “need not involve conscious conviction and outright support of the rebels’ political cause. Indeed teachers and students in rebel-operated schools may simply lack alternatives. Similarly, local communities might support rebel groups that can provide effective security in times of war without necessarily sharing their ideologies”.<sup>60</sup> Within this context, the coexistence of over 20 armed Chin resistance groups, such as the national-level Chin National Front (CNF) and its armed wing, the Chin National Army (CNA), alongside newer local or township-based armed groups formed since the coup, creates a complex web of loyalties and potential conflicts.

These affiliations have tangible consequences for access to humanitarian aid and political legitimacy. Armed groups with stronger cross-border networks and/or historical ties are better positioned to attract support from international actors and local civil society organizations. This has created disparities in the distribution of resources among refugee populations in Mizoram, where some communities are more closely aligned with prominent resistance factions than others.

These patterns of political and armed group affiliation contribute to structural inequities in how aid is distributed and accessed across refugee and IDP communities. As affiliations are often shaped by one's place of origin and embedded in historical or cross-border ties, disparities in humanitarian assistance are not incidental but are instead reflective of the broader political landscape and flow of resources.

To conceptualize these dynamics more clearly, Paul Staniland's institutional approach offers a valuable analytical lens. Developed through comparative research on armed resistance movements in Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Sri Lanka, Staniland's framework identifies two key dimensions of organizational structure: horizontal ties among rebel elites and vertical ties between these elites and grassroots actors.<sup>61</sup> In the Chin context, where local affiliations are often deeply rooted in one's place of origin, the strength of vertical ties is vital for sustaining legitimacy, mobilizing resources, and ensuring operational effectiveness. When these ties are weakened, such as the erosion of trust within communities, vertical fragmentation can occur. Such fragmentation disrupts the support networks essential for asymmetric resistance against the Sit-Tat (State Armed Forces). Applying Staniland's framework to Chin State helps illuminate how internal disunity and localized political divisions can undermine

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<sup>58</sup> Brenner, D. *Rebel Politics: A Political Sociology of Armed Struggle in Myanmar's Borderlands*, p.18.

<sup>59</sup> Berezini, V. A Scalable Typology of People's Defence Forces in Myanmar, pp.35-36.

<sup>60</sup> Brenner, D. *Rebel Politics: A Political Sociology of Armed Struggle in Myanmar's Borderlands*, p.18.

<sup>61</sup> Staniland, P. (2014). *Networks of Rebellion: Explaining Insurgent Cohesion and Collapse*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

broader efforts at resistance, deepen humanitarian disparities, and complicate the pursuit of cohesive political strategies across a highly localized and ethnically diverse landscape.



**Figure 9:** Members of a local Chinland Defence Force (CDF) in control of Mindat Township, Chin State, dry their clothes and lay out ammunition outside their shelter, November 2024.

### Township/Local Ties

In Chin State, township and local affiliations play a significant role in forming social connections, often transcending ethnic, religious identity, or armed group affiliations. These ties are deeply rooted in one's sense of belonging to their home regions within Chin State. Regardless of their current location, people often maintain strong connections to their home townships. This affinity can serve as a unifying factor among individuals from diverse ethnic or religious backgrounds who share a common place of origin. For instance, someone from Hakha Township may feel a sense of kinship with others from Hakha, even if they belong to different sub ethnic groups or practice different religions.

Some sub ethnic groups in Chin State, such as the Mara, do not have their own designated townships and instead reside across multiple administrative areas. The Mara, for example, are spread across several townships in southern Chin State, including parts of Matupi, Lailenpi, and Thantlang. Despite this geographic dispersion, humanitarian aid distribution in Chin State is typically organized around township centers, with assistance extending outward from these administrative focal points.

Hence, the strength of township and local ties can influence the distribution of humanitarian aid and resources. Some groups work to support people from their township

regardless of ethnic or religious affiliation, potentially leading to more inclusive aid efforts within specific geographic areas. In other words, these local ties can also serve as a foundation for building more comprehensive support networks that bridge different sub ethnic and religious groups within Chin State. On the other hand however, this aid delivery model can oftentimes result in uneven access, with communities living in rural peripheries receiving less support compared to those residing in towns and easily accessible villages.

### **Categorization of Support Actors**

Based on a two-week fieldwork trip to India in June 2024, during which Exile Hub conducted 14 key informant interviews and two focus group discussions with Myanmar refugees and key stakeholders in Delhi and Mizoram, we undertook a mapping of the primary actors involved in the provision of humanitarian aid along the India-Myanmar border. This data was further supplemented by our participation in the 4th International Conference on Burmese/Myanmar Studies at Chiang Mai University, as well as through follow-up field visits to three refugee camps and one internally displaced persons (IDP) camp in November 2024.

Our findings reveal a network of diverse support actors, rooted in ethnic, religious, political, and geographical affiliations. These deeply embedded ties influence both the modes of aid delivery and the strategic positioning of humanitarian actors. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for effective engagement with different groups supporting aid distribution to Myanmar refugees and resistance groups along the India-Myanmar border. The support actors can be categorized as follows, with consideration given to how relational ties impact their operations:



## Local CSOs, CBOs & NGOs

Local civil society organizations (CSOs), community based organizations (CBOs), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) form a critical layer of the humanitarian response along the India-Myanmar border, delivering essential services such as food distribution, shelter, medical aid, and education for displaced children. Many operate through a mix of formal structures and informal community networks, with the distribution of aid often shaped by shared ethnic, religious, political, or geographic affiliations. Examples include the Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Mara Students Organization (MSO), and the Young Lai Association (YLA), which direct their efforts primarily towards sub-groups within the Chin refugee community, offering targeted support that reflects their own identity-based ties.

On one hand, this approach facilitates targeted humanitarian aid and support for cross-border activism within those communities. On the other hand however, this results in the exclusion of Myanmar refugees who fall outside of these affiliations (such as non-Chin and/or non-Christian refugees) who must then seek aid from alternative support networks.

## Faith-Based Organizations

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), particularly those affiliated with Baptist and Seventh-day Adventist churches, have been instrumental in mobilizing humanitarian relief for displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border. Organizations such as the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), frequently coordinate local and international fundraising efforts, and leverage established church networks to assist in the provisioning of food, shelter, and essential supplies. Although not always, their assistance is typically directed to individuals with shared Christian affiliations.

A key challenge in assessing the role of FBOs in humanitarian work is the lack of existing research on their decision-making processes, which tend to be hierarchical and non-transparent. Compared to CSOs, CBOs, and NGOs, which are subject to donor reporting requirements, legal frameworks, and independent evaluations, and external oversight, FBOs function with fewer regulatory constraints. For instance, decision-making within FBOs is typically concentrated among religious leaders or church committees. Combined with the absence of clear accountability mechanisms, this raises concerns about bias in aid distribution, and makes it difficult to ensure that their interventions are needs-based, impartial, and equitably distributed across all refugee groups.

## Armed Resistance Support Groups

Armed resistance support groups operating along the India-Myanmar border are a largely invisible force providing indispensable logistical, medical, and material assistance to frontline fighters against the Sit-Tat (State Armed Forces) in Chin State. During our fieldwork in June 2024, we conducted key informant interviews with several of these support groups under the condition of anonymity. Their insights revealed how aid is carefully channeled, with support often delivered via kinship and ethnic networks that transcend official state boundaries.

One support group we interviewed was Organization E\* (anonymized for security concerns), which described its work assisting injured PDF and ethnic armed group soldiers. Established to address critical gaps in medical and rehabilitation support, the organization arranges safe passage for wounded fighters from Chin State to medical facilities in India. Initial treatment typically occurs in Aizawl, with more comprehensive care provided in Delhi. During our visit to their shelter in Delhi, we met patients like Thomas\*, injured by a landmine, and Ba Khat\*, hurt while handling explosives, both of whom were transferred under Organization E\*'s guidance.

These support groups play a vital role in sustaining armed resistance efforts in Chin State, particularly as the ethical dilemma of supporting violence (even against a brutal military dictatorship), makes both local and international actors hesitant to engage. In doing so, they fill a critical void in the infrastructure of cross-border resistance.

### National Unity Government

Established by elected lawmakers and pro-democracy actors following the 2021 military coup, the National Unity Government (NUG) has maintained an informal yet politically strategic presence in India. Though not officially recognized by the Indian government, the NUG has “deputed two unofficial representatives to the country for political and strategic liaising with various actors, including the federal government and state governments”.<sup>62</sup> This India office has played a behind-the-scenes role in coordinating support for Myanmar refugees, particularly members of the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM),<sup>63</sup> by working with state governments and local humanitarian actors.

In sectors like education, the NUG has provided some school supplies for educational institutions in certain refugee camps along the India-Myanmar border. While refugee children in Mizoram are granted “access to education in public schools ... up to secondary school”,<sup>64</sup> transportation challenges (particularly for those in remote camps) and linguistic barriers,<sup>65</sup> have led many families to favor schools administered by the NUG. Across Mizoram, approximately 20 to 30 refugee camp schools operate under the NUG's oversight; however, these institutions lack formal policy guidance and face severe financial constraints, struggling to secure adequate teaching materials and teacher salaries. As a result, many refugee communities are compelled to fundraise independently to sustain these educational programs.

Despite these contributions, the NUG's operations in India are constrained by its unofficial status. As we observed in our own fieldwork, their office “remains operationally hamstrung,

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<sup>62</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.20.

<sup>63</sup> The Civil Disobedience Movement in Myanmar refers to the widespread protests and acts of civil disobedience that emerged in response to the military coup that took place in Myanmar on February 1st, 2021. The participants in the CDM (also known as CDMers) have faced various forms of repression and retaliation from the military junta in their efforts to protest and resist the coup.

<sup>64</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Refugee students from Northern Chin State experience fewer language barriers compared to those from Southern Chin State, as Northern Chin languages share greater linguistic similarities with Mizo languages.

compelled to keep a low profile and limit its humanitarian engagements”,<sup>66</sup> which impacts its ability to provide sustained support. In June 2024, we interviewed the NUG’s then-representative in India, who described his efforts to build alliances with global diaspora networks and local stakeholders to coordinate aid and medical assistance. However, his tenure was cut short by allegations of sexual harassment against female staff members in his office, leading to his removal from the position on August 1, 2024, shortly after our interview. The decision followed an investigation conducted by the NUG’s Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuses (PSHEA) Policy Central Committee, which found that he had repeatedly harassed a secretary at the NUG’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in India.<sup>67</sup> The incident has had significant repercussions, severely undermining the office’s capacity to function effectively as it struggles to restore trust and credibility in its humanitarian and diplomatic operations.

### United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees & International NGOs

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) encounter severe structural limitations in their ability to support refugee populations in Mizoram, stemming from India’s long standing refusal to adopt a formal refugee policy. Without legal recognition or a dedicated framework for refugee protection, the UNHCR is not authorized to operate freely in northeastern states such as Mizoram and must instead navigate a complex landscape of bureaucratic restrictions and political sensitivities. With INGOs required to obtain case-by-case permission to deliver aid, these restrictions force many INGOs to operate in a low-visibility, semi-clandestine manner, relying on local partners and informal networks to reach refugee communities.

### Chin Diaspora

The Chin diaspora has become central in supporting displaced populations and resistance efforts along the India-Myanmar border.<sup>68</sup> Building on a history of forced displacement dating back to the *Sit-Tat’s* brutal counter-insurgency campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s, Chin refugees were resettled elsewhere in Asia, such as India and Malaysia, as well as in Western countries, including Australia, the United States, and Canada. Since the 2021 military coup, the Chin diaspora around the world have cultivated robust transnational networks that fundraise for displaced communities and for the Spring Revolution. As noted by researcher June Nilian Sang, “community-based and religious fundraising groups [within the diaspora] ... contribute the majority of funds received by resistance groups and local humanitarian providers”, which he estimates to be as high as 90 percent.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.20.

<sup>67</sup> Khonumthung News. (2025, March 18). NUG Representative in India Fired for Sexual Harassment. *Burma News International*. [www.bnionline.net/en/news/nug-representative-india-fired-sexual-harassment](http://www.bnionline.net/en/news/nug-representative-india-fired-sexual-harassment). Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>68</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 10.

<sup>69</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 10.

This reliance on diaspora networks presents concerns about the sustainability, equity, and coherence of the broader humanitarian response supporting displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border. By relying predominantly on external funding, local groups may risk fostering long-term dependencies that could undermine their capacity for self-sufficiency. Moreover, the uneven distribution of funds, which often favor larger Chin sub-ethnic groups like the Hakha Chin, while smaller Chin sub-groups and non-Chin refugees are left with limited assistance due to the absence of equally strong international networks, highlights a critical equity issue. This disparity potentially marginalizes more remote or less-connected communities, perpetuating existing socio-economic divides and creating a fragmented response to humanitarian needs. Prolonged dependence on diaspora funding risks fostering a culture of external reliance that may ultimately weaken the development of localized, self-sustaining support mechanisms. While the Chin diaspora remains a powerful force in bridging urgent humanitarian gaps, these structural imbalances underscore the need for a more inclusive and coordinated response strategy that addresses disparities in aid distribution and strengthens the capacity of local actors to lead their own recovery and resistance efforts.

### Mizoram State Government

The Mizoram state government has been a key actor in supporting displaced communities, particularly through initiatives such as the High-Level Committee (HLC) on Myanmar Refugees. Coordinated efforts include facilitating access to formal identification to previously undocumented refugees, access to public schools, public healthcare, and providing support for the construction of refugee camps and temporary shelters.

However, as discussed earlier in this paper, the state government's approach to refugee support is shaped by strong ethnic and kinship ties between the Mizo population and certain Chin sub-groups. These affiliations have influenced how aid and protection are extended, often benefiting refugees with closer ethnic links to the local population (such as the Mara and Lai Chin), while creating barriers for non-Chin or Chin individuals from sub-ethnic groups with weaker kinship ties to the Mizo population (such as those from Southern Chin State).

Moreover, the political shift following the December 2023 election when the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) came to power has marked a turn toward more restrictive refugee policies. Under the ZPM administration, a growing emphasis on border control and national security (in line with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance coalition that controls the Indian federal government) risks undermining humanitarian efforts and further narrowing access to support for already vulnerable refugee populations.

## Indian Federal Government

Rooted in a long history of cultural interlinkages, colonial disruption, and evolving regional dynamics, India's engagement with Myanmar and its refugees is shaped more by strategic interests than humanitarian imperatives. While cross-border ethnic communities, especially in Mizoram, have mobilized grassroots support for Myanmar refugees, the federal government has largely prioritized economic integration and security cooperation under its Act East Policy, often at the expense of vulnerable populations. Its continued military and economic engagement with the Myanmar junta, despite condemning the 2021 coup and expressing nominal support for democracy, underscores a pragmatic approach that privileges border control and infrastructure development over the protection of displaced communities.

Glaring gaps remain in the central government's refugee response, especially in terms of legal recognition, access to protection, and humanitarian support. India's refusal to sign the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol leaves Myanmar refugees in a legal grey zone, without formal rights or safeguards against deportation. Additional restrictions on international humanitarian organizations and UN agencies operating in border regions undermines aid delivery, forcing refugees to rely on overstretched local support systems.

## VI. Key Challenges

Patterns of displacement within Myanmar’s Chin State vary geographically: while those in the southern region are predominantly internally displaced, those in the north, benefiting from better transportation networks, have increasingly crossed into India. The majority of Myanmar refugees arriving in India come from Chin State, while others come from Sagaing and Magway regions, with smaller groups arriving from Rakhine and Kachin states. This influx has had a significant impact on India’s northeastern states such as Mizoram, which has accommodated over 50,000 Myanmar refugees since the coup, and Manipur, where more than 6,000 individuals have sought refuge since 2021. Smaller, less quantifiable refugee populations are also present in other northeastern states, including Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.

In Mizoram, many refugees have settled in districts such as Champhai, Siaha, and Lawngtlai, with the village of Zokhawthar, situated near the Tiau River, serving as a key entry point. Similarly, refugees have entered through Manipur, particularly in districts such as Churachandpur and Tengnoupal, with the border town of Moreh acting as a prominent crossing site.



**Figure 10:** The Zokhawthar-Rihkhawdar bridge connecting Chin State’s Rihkhawdar and Indian’s Mizoram State, November 2024.

In the course of our research, we consistently returned to a framework proposed by June Nilian Sang in his March 2023 report, “Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar,” which outlines three distinct patterns of displacement within Chin State: relocation to urban areas, movement to nearby villages, and settlement in IDP camps. Sang’s

typology is particularly valuable for understanding the differentiated experiences and vulnerabilities of displaced populations. According to his analysis, the smallest segment of IDPs comprises those who have relocated to urban areas. These individuals tend to have comparatively better “access to livelihood security, health, and education”.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, those who flee to nearby villages face more severe socio-economic hardship, where sudden influx of displaced people into a village often leads to resource shortages (particularly water scarcity), and local authorities who are reported at times to restrict newly arrived civilians from building their own shelters and from cultivating land.<sup>71</sup> The largest group, as identified by Sang, consists of IDPs living in camps, with approximately 40,000 individuals residing in such settlements across Chin State.<sup>72</sup> Through interviews with aid relief providers, Sang identified the majority of camps (80 percent) to be located in the southern areas of Paletwa, Mindat, Kanpetlet, and Matupi Townships, which offer limited basic subsistence support such as shelter, food, health and education.<sup>73</sup>

Sang’s classification provides a critical lens through which to understand the heterogeneity of displacement experiences and is equally instructive for examining displacement dynamics across the border in Mizoram. By referencing this framework, we aim to foreground the varied socio-economic contexts of both Myanmar refugees in India and IDPs within Chin State. This distinction is essential for moving beyond homogenized representations of displacement and toward a more nuanced, context-sensitive analysis of needs and vulnerabilities.

For our own study, Sang’s typology offers a useful comparative tool. It helps illuminate the different forms of support required by displaced populations depending on their settlement context. For instance, refugees who have resettled in urban areas such as Aizawl may require targeted interventions related to employment and healthcare access. In contrast, those residing in remote camps or villages, such as in Lawngtlai District in southern Mizoram, may face more immediate challenges related to shelter, food security, and access to basic services. By incorporating these distinctions, our research has benefited in an increased understanding of how humanitarian responses and community-based support networks can be tailored to meet the differentiated needs of displaced groups, ultimately contributing to more equitable and effective forms of assistance.

## Political Divisions and Unequal Aid Distribution

The distribution of aid to displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border is entangled in political divisions and factional affiliations. Multi-layered identities, particularly those shaped by political and armed group loyalties, have become key determinants of who receives humanitarian assistance and who does not. In both refugee and IDP contexts, an individual’s place of origin within Chin State often signals their likely alignment with a particular political or armed faction, such as the ICNCC or the Chinland Council. These

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<sup>70</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 14.

<sup>71</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 14.

<sup>72</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 14.

<sup>73</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p. 14.

affiliations, shaped by ethnic ties, historical loyalties, ideological leanings, and practical survival strategies, have led to the politicization of aid distribution. As a result, access to resources is at times, governed by perceived political loyalty, as opposed to humanitarian need, thereby undermining impartiality and entrenching structural inequities across displaced populations.

This politicization of aid distribution has led to the emergence of a de facto two-tiered aid system. The political split between the ICNCC and the Chinland Council has had direct and detrimental consequences on humanitarian access. As described by U Zeya\*, a camp leader in Lawngtlai refugee camp during our field visit in November 2024, camps affiliated with the ICNCC, namely with the Chin Brotherhood, have been excluded from basic aid:

*“Before the [ICNCC and Chinland Council] split, the situation was peaceful, and we received regular support from organizations for both education and humanitarian aid. However, since the division, assistance has ceased entirely. I heard that camps supporting the Chinland Council still receive aid, but we have received nothing because this is a Chin Brotherhood-affiliated camp. This year, 2024, has been significantly harder than previous years.” – U Zeya\*.*

According to U Zeya\*, his camp of almost 400 residents received only one 30kg bag of rice in a four-month period, highlighting the stark disparity. In addition to material deprivation, approximately 100 students in Chin Brotherhood-affiliated camps were reportedly denied admission to Chinland Council-run schools. To make matters worse, attempts to provide education independently within the camp faced threats of expulsion from Mizoram by the Central Young Lai Association (YLA), illustrating how political divisions are reinforced not only through aid distribution but also through local enforcement mechanisms.

Humanitarian access is increasingly mediated by power structures and armed actors, who often impose their own criteria for aid eligibility. Local humanitarian organizations, in turn, must navigate a landscape fraught with suspicion. Many face restricted access to communities due to real or perceived associations with certain political and armed factions, limiting their ability to deliver aid and monitor program outcomes. This erosion of neutrality complicates the work of frontline responders and reinforces cycles of marginalization among politically excluded communities.



**Figure 11:** Bags of rice stored for distribution at Lawngtlai Refugee Camp in Mizoram, November 2024.

To mitigate these challenges, some organizations such as the Chin Health Organization (CHO) have adopted alternative strategies. By partnering with township-level CSOs that have local legitimacy, these groups have been able to deliver aid more discreetly and effectively in areas where direct access is restricted. Funds and materials are also channeled through grassroots networks trusted by local communities, allowing for better reach. While this model has enabled support to flow across politically sensitive areas, it introduces new concerns around coordination, oversight, and adherence to humanitarian principles.

The recent agreement between the Chinland Council and ICNCC to form a unified Chin National Council offers a tentative path forward. Given the deep-rooted mistrust and localized factionalism that continue to shape inter-group relations however, the resolution of political fragmentation is likely to be uneven and slow.

### **Education as a Priority**

Despite the extreme precarity faced by displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border, education has emerged as an enduring priority for refugees. Although chronically underfunded and reliant on volunteer labor, refugee-led educational initiatives have persisted against considerable odds. Teachers operate within a volunteer-based system where they receive minimal compensation, often relying on small monthly contributions of 200-300 INR (\$2.30-3.50 USD) per student from families who are themselves struggling to survive. This financial burden forces difficult decisions, with many parents having to choose which of their children can attend school.



**Figure 12:** An education center in Sa Tuu village IDP camp located in Matupi Township, Chin State, Myanmar, November 2024.

Nevertheless, refugee educators remain committed. In Lawngtlai Refugee Camp, we spoke to teachers Daw Thiri\* and Ma Thanda\*, who have postponed their return to Matupi, now under Chinland Defense Force (CDF) control, to ensure their students can complete the academic year.

*“Matupi city is now under the control of the CDF, but we have not returned yet. Some of my neighbors have already gone back. I am volunteering in interim education organized by the Matupi Committee’s Board of Education. I teach high school students, grades 10 to 12, and several of my students are in grade 12. Their academic year will finish in March 2025. If not for these students, I would have already returned home. I am eager to go back, but I cannot leave them at this critical time. So, my family and I are waiting for the academic year to end.” – Daw Thiri\*.*

This dedication persists despite receiving minimal compensation, with Ma Thanda\* noting that by 2022, their Board of Education established 33 refugee schools in Mizoram, serving approximately 4,000 students supported by 600 CDM teachers. However, funding shortages have forced most of these schools to close, with only five schools in Mizoram remaining in operation during our research trip in November 2024.



**Figure 13:** Students attending class at Lawngtlai Refugee Boarding School, Mizoram, November 2024.

That said, approximately 20 to 30 refugee camp schools in Mizoram remain in operation under the NUG's oversight. With the support of local humanitarian groups, including Organization B\*, Organization C\*, and Support Network J\*, essential school supplies and NUG-recognized matriculation certificates are provided. However, these schools lack formal policy direction, and face severe funding shortages, and inadequate resources to support teacher salaries or meet students' needs. Public schools in Mizoram technically offer access to education up to the secondary level, but barriers such as language and transportation limit their accessibility. Consequently, many families opt for NUG-affiliated schools, despite their instability.

### Access to Healthcare

Healthcare access among Myanmar refugees is severely constrained by a combination of financial hardship, limited service availability, and unequal aid delivery. Interviews with refugee and IDP camp leaders revealed that even basic medical care along the India-Myanmar border remains inaccessible for many due to high costs. For example, at Canan Refugee Camp in Mizoram, hospital visits range from 10,000 to 30,000 INR (\$117-351 USD), with surgeries costing as much as 80,000 to 100,000 INR (\$937-1171 USD), figures unattainable for most refugee families who struggle to meet daily subsistence needs. In our interview, Canan Refugee Camp leader Soe Lin\* explained that while they have an assigned medic in the camp to distribute discounted medicine, this limited support is

insufficient to meet the complex and pressing healthcare needs of the nearly 400 refugees living there.



**Figure 14:** A healthcare worker organizes boxes of humanitarian supplies, including medicine delivered to Canan Refugee Camp, November 2024.

Beyond financial barriers, political divisions significantly impede access to medical care. Throughout our key informant interviews, participants described how affiliations with different political and armed groups extend into the healthcare sector, shaping trust in and availability of services. U Zeya\*, a camp leader in Lawngtlai, noted that residents deliberately avoid the local clinic because the CDM doctor staffing it is aligned with the Chinland Council. Fears of bias, discrimination, or denial of care based on political affiliation have led many to forgo treatment altogether, deepening health vulnerabilities among already marginalized populations.

Medical care for injured refugees is another critical area of need, especially for those arriving from active conflict zones. Some receive initial emergency care at the border through Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), with more complex cases transferred to hospitals in Aizawl, Mizoram, where two facilities are equipped to provide advanced treatment. Organization C\* plays a vital role in coordinating ongoing support for these individuals. Speaking to one Organization C\* representative in June 2024, they explained how cases of refugees with severe injuries (such as gunshot wounds or amputations) often require months or even years of rehabilitation. Organization C\* works to ensure that these patients have access to food, shelter, and medical follow-up throughout their recovery. In instances where specialized care is not available in Mizoram, patients are referred to hospitals in Shillong, Kolkata, or Delhi. However, this referral system is complicated by the fact that

many refugees lack formal identification documents, which are often required for hospital admission or inter-state travel.



**Figure 15:** A resistance fighter from CDF-Mindat injured by shrapnel from a military artillery strike receives medical treatment in Mindat Township, Chin State, Myanmar, November 2024.

These challenges are particularly acute for vulnerable populations including: women, children, the elderly, and individuals with chronic or complex health conditions. The absence of basic sanitary supplies disproportionately affects women’s health and dignity, while patients with long-term illnesses such as HIV or tuberculosis receive little to no specialized care. As CHRO program manager for health and protection, Dr. Biak Cung Lian, explained in an interview with journalist Kiana Duncan for Radio Free Asia (RFA) in May 2025, the termination of USAID funding has further diminished healthcare availability.<sup>74</sup> In the absence of sustained and politically neutral health interventions, displaced communities are forced to rely on informal and limited care systems that struggle to survive.

## Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) remains one of the most critically underserved sectors in the humanitarian response for Myanmar refugees and IDPs along the India-Myanmar border. Despite the immense psychological toll of displacement, armed conflict, and ongoing insecurity, mental health services are largely absent from existing assistance frameworks. Refugees and IDPs continue to endure profound trauma, loss, and

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<sup>74</sup> Duncan, K. (2025, May 02). Health workers say disease on rise in Myanmar as aid cuts bite. *Radio Free Asia*. <https://www.rfa.org/english/myanmar/2025/05/02/myanmar-public-health-donors-diseases-usaid/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

uncertainty, yet the infrastructure needed to support trauma-informed care is virtually nonexistent. This includes both the lack of trained personnel and the absence of culturally sensitive mental health interventions.

The consequences of this service gap are wide-ranging. Without access to comprehensive and long-term mental health care, many individuals experience prolonged emotional distress, which diminishes their resilience, hinders their ability to integrate into host communities, and undermines their capacity to participate in political and community rebuilding efforts. Refugees and human rights activists, many of whom are engaged in resistance efforts or organizing humanitarian aid under extremely stressful conditions, are particularly at risk. These frontline workers often bear the burden of secondary trauma and emotional exhaustion, yet receive little to no psychosocial support themselves.

A deeper structural challenge lies in the limited mental health literacy within Myanmar society more broadly. As one informant noted, psychology curricula in Myanmar remain outdated, with some still based on materials from 1949, thus indicating a systemic failure to modernize mental health education and practice. This gap is further compounded by the fact that Myanmar's mental health laws are still governed by the 1912 Lunacy Act, a colonial-era piece of legislation that has not been meaningfully revised. Such outdated frameworks reflect not only institutional neglect but also a broader societal disregard for mental health as a legitimate and essential component of well-being.

Moreover, widespread social stigma remains one of the most significant barriers to addressing mental health challenges. Many continue to internalize mental health struggles rather than seek help, due to cultural perceptions that equate emotional suffering with personal weakness. This repression of psychological distress is particularly harmful in communities already contending with intergenerational trauma: historical cycles of violence, displacement, and multifaceted insecurity, that are passed from one generation to the next. Without interventions that address these legacies of trauma, both individual and collective healing remain elusive.

Addressing Myanmar's mental health crisis requires a dual strategy: strengthening access to professional psychosocial services in refugee and IDP settings, while simultaneously promoting long-term cultural change that challenges stigma and fosters mental health literacy. In recent years, grassroots efforts have begun to emerge in response to these gaps, as we witnessed with Organization C\*'s programming. Additionally, mental health podcasts,<sup>75</sup> together with informal peer support initiatives, aim to raise awareness and normalize conversations about emotional well-being. These efforts represent important entry points for breaking stigma and fostering culturally resonant pathways to care. Nonetheless, the scale of displacement, the prevalence of trauma, and the systemic neglect of mental health indicates an urgent need to prioritize and expand mental health and

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<sup>75</sup> Andersson, J. (2025, March 12). Myanmar's Resilient Voices podcast: Resilience through storytelling. *Democratic Voice of Burma*. <https://english.dvb.no/myanmars-resilient-voices-podcast-storytelling-skills-for-gen-z/>. Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

psychosocial support services as a core component of humanitarian and post-conflict recovery efforts.

## Safety and Security Issues

The safety and security of IDPs in Chin State remain dire amid ongoing and widespread conflict, with persistent threats of military attacks, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, and civilian homes. The volatile security landscape places thousands at risk of harm, limiting their access to essential services and compelling many to flee across the border into neighboring Mizoram.



**Figure 16:** The destruction of a church photographed in Matupi Township, Chin State, during our second research trip to the India-Myanmar border in November 2024.

While Mizoram offers relative safety for Myanmar refugees compared to conditions inside Chin State, it is not without its own set of complex security challenges. Local humanitarian groups and elements of the Mizoram state government have facilitated safe passage and temporary shelter for many displaced persons. However, systemic barriers continue to undermine the long-term safety and dignity of refugees. These include legal limitations on residency, restricted freedom of movement, and the lack of formal refugee protections.

As noted in our key informant interviews with local support groups in Mizoram, freedom of movement varies by district. In the absence of a unified policy, some district authorities have issued temporary refugee registration cards that permit travel within Mizoram. In contrast, other districts impose additional restrictions, which complicate mobility and access to services. Security concerns become even more acute when refugees travel outside Mizoram.

Other Indian states, including Assam and Manipur, lack the informal protection frameworks present in Mizoram, leaving refugees exposed to arbitrary arrest, detention, or deportation.<sup>76</sup>

Legal barriers in Mizoram further compound these challenges. Refugees are prohibited from leasing property in their own names, prompting members of local support groups with identification documents to rent accommodations on their behalf. Humanitarian organization-run shelters in Aizawl and other urban areas are often overseen by caretakers, who assist residents, particularly those recovering from medical procedures or coping with severe health conditions. However, the lack of formal legal status means these arrangements remain precarious.

Compounding these vulnerabilities is the limited security literacy among refugee communities and their support networks in Mizoram. There is a widespread perception that Mizoram is a safe zone, which has resulted in a false sense of security and a general underestimation of both physical and digital risks. This stands in contrast to the Thai-Myanmar border, where Exile Hub's first-hand experience operating on the ground reveals how years of exile have fostered more robust awareness and preparedness among refugee networks. Without adequate training and awareness, refugees in Mizoram remain susceptible to surveillance, exploitation, and coercion.

## **Legal Barriers to Refugee Protection and Humanitarian Response**

The legal and political environment in India presents substantial challenges for Myanmar refugees and the organizations working to support them. India is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, and there exists no formal domestic refugee protection framework. As a result, refugees from Myanmar lack recognized legal status, rendering them vulnerable to arbitrary detention, deportation, and a general absence of basic legal protections. This precarious legal limbo not only undermines the rights of displaced individuals but also obstructs the efforts of humanitarian actors striving to provide essential services.

India's broader political climate, particularly under the BJP government, has created an increasingly restrictive operating environment for civil society. The government has been known to target local NGOs and INGOs through statutory institutions such as the Income Tax Department (ITD) and the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).<sup>77</sup> Legal instruments such as the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) have been employed to monitor and limit foreign funding. The increasingly stringent regulation of funding flows, coupled with the revocation of registrations for various INGOs, has constrained the financial resources available to refugee support initiatives, especially those operating in border regions like Mizoram.

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<sup>76</sup> RFA Burmese. (2024, June 20). Jailed Myanmar Activists in India in Danger of Deportation: Rights Groups. *Radio Free Asia*. [www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-activists-india-06202024075349.html](http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/myanmar-activists-india-06202024075349.html). Last Accessed May 24, 2025.

<sup>77</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.21.

Furthermore, the absence of an integrated and cooperative support framework undermines the overall effectiveness of refugee assistance. It leaves refugee communities without equitable access to services while placing additional strain on already overburdened aid providers. During our fieldwork in Delhi for instance, we met with Myanmar refugees who have remained in the city since the early 2000s, awaiting asylum. Many continue to face prolonged delays in the UNHCR registration process, leaving them without any form of legal documentation or the right to formally rent housing. These individuals occupy a liminal and precarious space where they are present, but unrecognized by the legal system. In the absence of documentation, they are excluded from UNHCR-supported services and receive no financial assistance. As a result, many are forced to live in overcrowded conditions, often sharing single rooms with multiple families and enduring limited access to basic amenities such as clean water, electricity, and sanitation facilities. Addressing these legal and political barriers is essential for creating a more coherent, sustainable, and rights-based response to the crisis facing Myanmar refugees in India.

### **Livelihood Support Challenges**

As a core component of humanitarian aid, livelihood support enables displaced communities to meet their basic needs and develop sustainable self-reliance. However, field visits in November 2024 to three refugee camps in Mizoram, and one IDP camp in Chin State, revealed how local regulations prohibit displaced communities on both sides of the border from engaging in income-generating activities.

A key factor behind this lies in resource constraints of the local communities. In Mizoram for example, the host community lacks the capacity to support the increasing number of arrivals in an economy already under strain. The absence of effective livelihood policies from both state and central governments has further compounded these pressures, leaving local authorities without sufficient resources to address the needs of Myanmar refugees in a systematic way. Similarly, both IDPs and local communities in Chin State face competition over scarce resources and disruptions to supply chains caused by the ongoing conflict.<sup>78</sup>

While urban-based displaced communities may experience better access to livelihood opportunities compared to those living in rural areas, this group constitutes a minority, and their improved conditions are often precarious, relying on informal networks, diaspora support, or low-wage, insecure labor.<sup>79</sup> The majority of displaced communities reside in rural areas, and face persistent barriers to livelihood security. IDP camps in areas such as Paletwa and Matupi offer little more than temporary shelter, with residents depending on infrequent external aid to meet their basic needs. In Mizoram, several of our key informant interviewees noted how local authorities have explicitly restricted refugees from working in certain sectors. These limitations not only exacerbate dependency on external aid, but also create prolonged cycles of vulnerability.

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<sup>78</sup> Sang, J.N. Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar, p. 14.

<sup>79</sup> Sang, J.N. Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar, p. 14.

*I don't feel safe working with my networks [in Mizoram] ... There are many artists and influencers in our community and we are trying to become more harmonious [with the local community]. But this is not really safe, since we have no rights to work and we don't dare to work. – Bawi, a Chin musician residing in Mizoram\**

Given these challenges, there is an urgent need for international NGOs to work with local authorities to develop policies that permit livelihood activities for refugees and IDPs. Local authorities should be supported to develop inclusive frameworks that enable displaced communities to engage in income-generating opportunities, while also providing host communities with the necessary resources to manage the increased population pressures.

### **Declining External Support and Financial Insecurity**

The sharp reduction in external aid and financial resources has emerged as a critical challenge for displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border. Interviews with camp leaders and humanitarian actors serving both urban and rural refugee communities in Mizoram reveal a substantial reduction in funding from both the Indian central government and INGOs in the past year. The suspension of USAID funding in January 2025 has further exacerbated the situation, leading to even greater resource scarcity. With fewer resources to share, on-the-ground humanitarian organizations are forced to prioritize their own operations over collective action, thereby reducing opportunities for collaboration in comprehensive service delivery.

The consequences of financial insecurity (even prior to the suspension of USAID) was acutely visible within the refugee and IDP camps that we visited in November 2024. At the Canan Refugee Camp, leader Soe Lin\* described the irregular and inadequate nature of aid:

*“Foreign support has come infrequently, only a few times. The rice bags currently in the camp were provided by the Indian Government, but this was the last support received. In 2022 and 2023, NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provided free medical treatment for everyone in the camp, but they no longer offer support. Zoram Entu Pawl (ZEP) used to provide chickens as food for the camp, but the quantity was insufficient to cover all households. Only three or four homes benefited each time they delivered food. There is no consistent support from NGOs or other groups anymore.” – Soe Lin\**

Adding to these challenges is the lack of regular income-generating opportunities. Most Myanmar refugees in Mizoram cannot access formal employment and instead depend on occasional daily-wage labour, which pays an average of 500 INR (\$5.80 USD). Interviews with local support actors confirmed that both urban-based refugees and those residing in rural camps largely survive on remittances from relatives abroad. This reliance is seen by many as deeply disempowering. As Daw Thiri\*, a schoolteacher at Lawngtlai Refugee Camp, explained, such dependence on diaspora support is often perceived as “embarrassing.”

Together, these conditions reveal a fragile and under-resourced support system, unable to meet the growing and diverse needs of Myanmar’s refugee population. Without renewed, stable, and coordinated funding assistance, refugee protection and aid efforts in Mizoram will continue to fall short, leaving vulnerable populations without access to essential services and support.



**Figure 17:** A family gathers to cook dinner in Siatlai Refugee Camp in Mizoram’s Siaha District, November 2024.

## Cultural and Social Integration

The integration of Myanmar refugees in Mizoram is shaped not only by policy and humanitarian frameworks but also by intricate cultural and social dynamics. While the Mizo community has demonstrated notable solidarity with Chin refugees, grounded in shared ethnic and religious identities, this support is selective and uneven. Refugee inclusion is often contingent upon kinship and cultural familiarity, rather than a universal application of human rights principles. As a result, Myanmar refugees, particularly those who are Chin and/or Christian and speak related languages, benefit from greater social acceptance and more consistent community-based support.

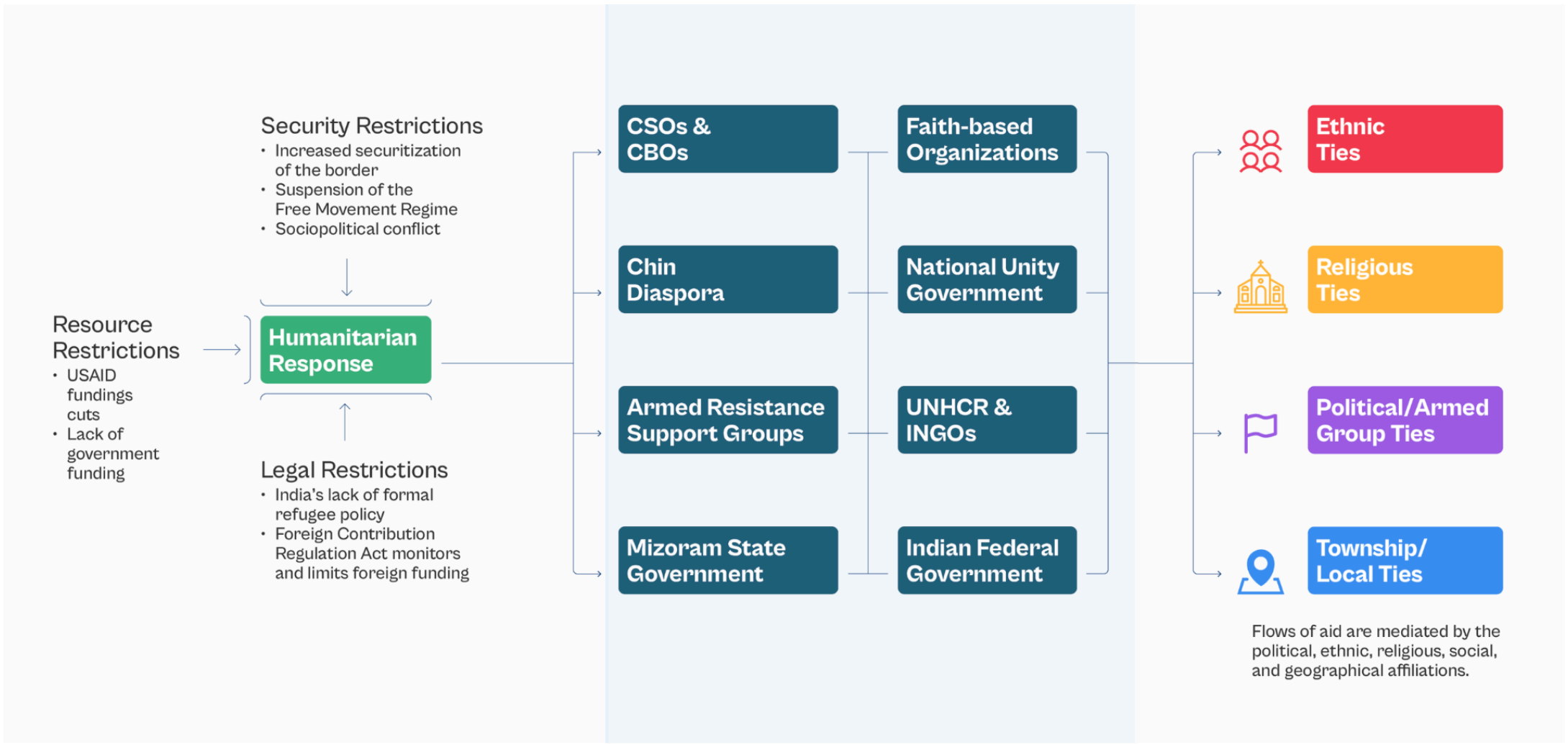
Conversely, refugees who fall outside these cultural and religious affiliations, including non-Chin and non-Christian groups, face barriers to integration. These groups experience social exclusion, linguistic isolation, and limited access to local aid structures. Southern Chin refugees, for example, have reported particular difficulty integrating due to their unfamiliarity with the Mizo language, which restricts their participation in communal life and limits their access to essential services and support networks.

Ethnic and political tensions compound these integration challenges. For instance, intra-refugee group dynamics can be fraught with mistrust and competition for limited resources, while interactions with local communities are sometimes marked by hostility. Our interview with schoolteacher Daw Thiri\* at the Lawngtlai Refugee Camp revealed strained relationships with local Lai Chin communities in Mizoram, which foster a pervasive sense of insecurity among camp residents. Similarly, camp leader U Zeya\* in the Lawngtlai Refugee Camp recounted threats from the Central Young Lai Association (YLA) when refugees sought to establish independent educational initiatives for children excluded from Chinland Council-affiliated schools, thus illustrating how community control over aid can be used to enforce exclusionary practices.

These issues are complicated by widespread stereotypes and xenophobic attitudes within mainstream Mizo society. Refugees are at times portrayed in local discourse through a lens of suspicion and hostility, characterized as drug traffickers, economic burdens, or legal-political threats.<sup>80</sup> These narratives exacerbate refugee vulnerability and shape public opinion and policy in ways that undermine inclusive support. Accordingly, effective refugee assistance in Mizoram must go beyond material provision to address the deep-seated socio-cultural and political conditions that shape integration. Without confronting these structural and attitudinal barriers, the long-term social integration of Myanmar refugees remains uncertain.

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<sup>80</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.14.



## VII. Conclusion

Looking ahead, greater coordination among diverse actors will be crucial to enhancing the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of humanitarian assistance along the India-Myanmar border. While recent reconciliation initiatives among rival Chin political and armed factions provide a potential foundation for more cohesive governance and aid distribution, substantial obstacles persist in translating high-level agreements into practical, community-level cooperation.

This research report has explored the evolving dynamics of displacement and refugee assistance along the India-Myanmar border, with a particular focus on Mizoram State. Drawing on a combination of key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and existing scholarship, our analysis has traced how financial insecurity, political instability, and social exclusion intersect to shape the daily lives and vulnerabilities of Myanmar refugees and IDPs.

It is essential to recall that the borders separating India and Myanmar are a legacy of British colonial occupation. They are artificial lines that cut through longstanding familial, tribal, and relational networks. These ties run far deeper than the border itself, and our research demonstrates how the imposition of this boundary has created new realities for borderland communities. As these communities navigate the tension between inherited connections and the restrictions of the modern nation-state, colonial artifacts continue to shape everyday life.

One of the central insights emerging from this research is the critical importance of relational affiliations, whether tribal, ethnic, religious, political, and/or township-based, in structuring displacement experiences and access to aid. These relational layers form a complex social fabric that not only shapes identities, but also influences who receives support and how. Cross-border ethnic and religious affinities, especially between Chin refugees and the local Mizoram population, have played a leading role in facilitating early forms of solidarity and refuge. However, these same affinities have also reproduced patterns of exclusion, with aid distribution reflecting internal hierarchies within Chin society. Larger and more culturally connected groups frequently receive disproportionate support, while smaller sub-groups, non-Christian minorities, and non-Chin ethnicities remain marginalized. Religious institutions and political affiliations, though vital in mobilizing support and shaping public responses, can reinforce sub-ethnic divisions and inhibit inter-organizational collaboration. Similarly, township-based identities foster strong localized networks of care, but often operate in isolation from broader solidarity efforts, thus limiting the scope of collective responses.

## Pathways of Exclusion and Humanitarian Gaps

### Factionalism → Camp-Level Exclusion → Humanitarian Gaps

The research documents how political and armed group factionalism within Chin society translates into exclusion at the camp and community level. Camps or individuals perceived to be aligned with one faction (e.g., Chin Brotherhood or Chin Council) may be denied access to education, food, and healthcare by local authorities or community organizations aligned with rival groups. This politicization of aid does not just reflect elite-level disputes but produces tangible humanitarian gaps, leaving certain populations systematically underserved.

### India's FCRA Constraints → INGO Exit → Funding Vacuum

The Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) imposes strict controls on foreign funding for organizations working with refugees. As a result, many international NGOs have been forced to scale back or exit operations in Mizoram, creating a significant funding vacuum. This has left local civil society and community-based organizations struggling to meet the needs of a growing refugee population with dwindling resources, exacerbating gaps in essential services such as healthcare, education, and emergency relief.

The importance of relational affiliations in structuring access to aid along the India-Myanmar border contributes to a broader pattern of displacement experiences globally, where aid distribution is rarely neutral and often mirrors existing social hierarchies. One may draw parallels with South Sudan's "Protection of Civilians" sites (POCs), where international humanitarian actors have been known to engage with displaced communities through easily legible centralized leadership structures. A key example was the UN Security Council's peacekeeping mission, which in 2022 "handed over control of all but one of these [POC] sites to South Sudanese authorities," where "most of the IDPs living in these redesignated camps belong to the country's ethnic minorities and are living in areas dominated by forces that had previously fought against them".<sup>81</sup> While the UN Security Council's decision may have been operationally convenient, this has reproduced existing social hierarchies that favour larger ethnic groups such as the Dinka, and lead to marginalization of aid relief access for smaller groups, like the Shilluk and Nuer.<sup>82</sup>

These patterns reveal broader structural tendencies commonly observed in humanitarian systems worldwide. In order to fully understand the socio-political economy of

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<sup>81</sup> Sullivan, D. P. (2022, January 13). Do Not Forget: Aiding and Protecting Civilians in South Sudan. *Refugees International*. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports-briefs/do-not-forget-aiding-and-protecting-civilians-in-south-sudan/>. Last Accessed May 30, 2025.

<sup>82</sup> Van Oudenaren, D. (2017, February 27). Politicised humanitarian aid is fuelling South Sudan's civil war. *The New Humanitarian*. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/opinion/2017/02/27/politicised-humanitarian-aid-fuelling-south-sudan-s-civil-war>. Last Accessed May 30, 2025.

displacement and the uneven distribution of humanitarian resources, it is thus vital to recognize and engage with these relational affiliations. Such an approach would advance more inclusive, context-sensitive responses that move beyond kinship-based assistance toward intersectional and community-driven approaches.

With this in mind, it is important to highlight the need to reconceptualize displacement responses along the India-Myanmar border. Future interventions must extend beyond short-term relief to support localized, inclusive, and durable strategies that reflect the complex realities faced by displaced communities. This entails sustained financial investment from international donors, socially inclusive policies from host communities, and improved coordination between formal humanitarian agencies and informal grassroots networks. Without such systemic changes, displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border will continue to inhabit a precarious grey zone, caught between the inadequacies of cross-border protection and the fragmented solidarities of local support systems.

## **VIII. Recommendations**

This section presents actionable, context-specific recommendations to address the protracted humanitarian crisis along the India-Myanmar border. The recommendations are rooted in field-based insights and a rights-based, conflict-sensitive framework, reflecting the realities of a region where colonial borders have artificially divided deeply interconnected communities. Our aim is to provide practical guidance for Indian-based stakeholders, Mizoram state actors, humanitarian actors, and international partners, grounded in the recognition that while the border is not a natural or neutral construct, it now shapes the lived experience of refugees, host communities, and cross-border networks alike.

The goals of this paper are to:

- Illuminate the operational and structural challenges facing Myanmar refugees, host communities, and support networks in Mizoram.
- Offer evidence-based, locally relevant recommendations that respect existing power dynamics and social fabrics.
- Encourage policies and practices that move beyond short-term relief toward more inclusive, sustainable, and equitable humanitarian responses.

By engaging with these recommendations, stakeholders can expect a roadmap for strengthening protection, coordination, and accountability mechanisms, ultimately envisioning a future where humanitarian aid is not only more effective but also more just, context-aware, and community-driven. Given the limited fiscal capacity of the Mizoram state and local actors, recommendations are sequenced to prioritize effective allocation of scarce resources, with an emphasis on building local capacity and leveraging existing flows of support.

## To the India-Based Stakeholders

1. **Facilitate Humanitarian Access:** Permit structured, needs-based access for UN agencies and international NGOs to operate in border regions, aligning with vulnerability assessments and humanitarian principles. Prioritize support for existing cross-border flows and trusted local actors, such as established diaspora networks, faith-based organizations, and humanitarian groups with deep community roots, rather than creating parallel new systems.
2. **Review and Amend the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA):** Recalibrate the FCRA to allow accredited humanitarian and human rights organizations greater flexibility in receiving emergency funds from international and diaspora sources, particularly during crisis periods. Consider pilot exemptions or fast-track mechanisms for organizations with proven local legitimacy.
3. **Reinstate and Expand Financial Allocations to Mizoram State:** A critical issue has been the federal government's failure to disburse Mizoram's rightful share of tax revenues. The state's Chief Minister publicly highlighted in February 2024 that Mizoram's financial condition remains unstable due to the lack of expected tax transfers from the central government.<sup>83</sup> To address this crisis, the federal government must not only restore Mizoram's tax entitlements, but also increase budgetary provisions for humanitarian intervention. By providing dedicated funding, the federal government can enhance coordination between state authorities and humanitarian organizations, helping to mitigate the impact of restrictive refugee policies while reinforcing India's commitment to regional stability.
4. **Support Humanitarian Corridors Across the Border:** Rather than establishing entirely new aid channels, formalize and protect existing flows of cross-border humanitarian support, leveraging the networks of Myanmar resistance groups, diaspora organizations, and trusted community actors. Monitoring should be participatory, involving both host and refugee community representatives to ensure neutrality and accountability.
5. **Continue and Expand India's Humanitarian Relief to Myanmar:** India's swift and substantial response under Operation Brahma, including delivering over 625 metric tonnes of aid, deploying NDRF rescue teams, establishing field hospitals, and treating thousands of patients, demonstrates both capacity and commitment to humanitarian principles. Recognizing the military junta's selective permissions and its obstruction of aid to contested zones like Sagaing, India could pursue creative delivery mechanisms such as engaging trusted intermediaries, supporting local humanitarian networks, and developing contingency plans for areas with restricted access.

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<sup>83</sup> Hazarika, S. 'Now this is home for us': Chin refugees from Myanmar find a welcoming sanctuary in Mizoram.

## To the Mizoram State Actors

1. **Strengthen Interagency Coordination:** Facilitate inclusive coordination platforms that bring together local CSOs, faith-based organizations, humanitarian actors, and relevant state departments. Ensure that marginalized groups such as women, youth, and sub-ethnic minorities are represented in decision-making and resource allocation.
2. **Advocate for Flexible Humanitarian Budgets:** Pursue increased fiscal autonomy and dedicated emergency funds from the central government, with a transparent mechanism for prioritizing the most urgent needs. Sequence investments to first stabilize essential public services (health, education), then expand to integration and social cohesion initiatives as resources allow.
3. **Promote Community-Based Integration:** Design integration programs in consultation with both host and refugee communities, targeting sectors with labor shortages and supporting access to informal employment and education. Provide incentives for host communities to participate in and benefit from integration efforts, recognizing their role as frontline responders.
4. **Improve Health and Education Access:** Build partnerships between state health and education providers and refugee-serving organizations. Expand access to maternal health, communicable disease control, and especially mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS), using mobile clinics and community health workers to reach underserved areas.
5. **Invest in Social Cohesion:** Support dialogue platforms, intercultural activities, and commemorative events that reflect shared histories and foster solidarity. Prioritize initiatives that address sources of tension and build trust between host and refugee communities, and encourage informal, community-level cross-border trade to strengthen livelihoods and mutual resilience.

## To Local Humanitarian Actors and INGOs

Local actors including community-based organizations (CBOs), faith-based groups, and informal volunteer networks have played a frontline role in responding to the humanitarian fallout of the protracted crisis in Myanmar.

1. **Capacity Development Pathway:** Implement a staged approach to capacity-building for local organizations.
  - a. Capacity: Offer training on humanitarian standards, financial management, protection protocols, and data security.
  - b. Capability: Provide mentorship, peer learning, and small grants to enable organizations to apply new knowledge in practice (e.g., managing pooled funds, conducting needs assessments, advocacy).
  - c. Leadership: Encourage local actors to take on coordination and advocacy roles, with ongoing support from INGOs and diaspora partners.
2. **Support Livelihood and Vocational Opportunities:** Develop income-generating programs for refugees in cooperation with host communities and local authorities. These can include small-scale agriculture or household gardens, manufacturing, and work in the service sector.
3. **Support Host Communities:** Develop programs that directly benefit host communities alongside refugees such as infrastructure improvements, livelihood projects, and shared social services to mitigate integration pressures and foster mutual support.
4. **Scale Up Mental Health and Digital Health Initiatives:** Advocate for donor support to expand culturally and linguistically appropriate MHPSS and healthcare access, leveraging mobile and digital platforms to reach remote populations.
5. **Enhance Inclusive Coordination:** Ensure that smaller organizations, especially those led by women, youth, and sub-ethnic minorities, are meaningfully represented in coordination mechanisms and funding consortia. Establish regular monthly or quarterly gatherings to share information, align activities, and strengthen collective response.
6. **Promote Multi-Year and Flexible Funding:** Encourage donor agencies to shift from project-based grants to pooled or core funding models that are responsive to long-term displacement and adaptable to local contexts. Explore existing consortia and networks that are trusted in the community through which to channel resources.

## To International Diplomatic Networks

Global actors, particularly those with established ties to India and Myanmar, must shift from rhetorical concern to strategic engagement. Their involvement should be grounded in humanitarian diplomacy and centered on enabling safe, dignified, and rights-based responses to displacement.

1. **Facilitate Cross-Border Diplomatic Humanitarian Frameworks:** Convene a cross-border humanitarian working group involving embassies, international agencies, and local civil society to coordinate strategies, monitor risks, and facilitate information-sharing along the India-Myanmar border. Build on existing cross-border support flows rather than imposing new structures.
2. **Encourage Humanitarian Dialogue:** Leverage India's participation in multistakeholder and regional fora to promote humanitarian and protection-focused dialogue on cross-border displacement, with emphasis on non-interference by the SAC and respect for international norms. This can be achieved by:
  - a. Convening side meetings or thematic sessions on displacement during regional summits and ministerial gatherings with Indian stakeholders.
  - b. Developing regional principles for refugee protection in line with international norms.
  - c. Using diplomatic channels to discourage interference by the Myanmar SAC in humanitarian operations.
  - d. Coordinating technical cooperation for safe shelter, health services, and legal aid for displaced persons.

This multi-forum approach could encourage India to champion a consistent, rights-based humanitarian stance across its regional and diplomatic engagements

3. **Support Research and Knowledge Solidarity:** Fund collaborative research on displacement, integration, and regional instability, ensuring that scholars and practitioners from both India and Myanmar are included. Use research to inform policy and practice, and to ensure that marginalized voices are represented in program design.
4. **Champion the Border as a Facilitator:** Advocate for policies that recognize the border as a facilitator of commerce, humanitarian assistance, and social connection, not merely as a barrier. Avoid approaches that force all cross-border populations into the "refugee" category, and instead promote flexible, rights-based frameworks that respect longstanding ties.

These recommendations aim to foster a more inclusive, accountable, and locally grounded humanitarian response for those displaced by the ongoing civil war in Myanmar. We urge each stakeholder to move beyond reactive measures and toward sustained, principled engagement that reflects both regional responsibilities and global human rights norms. Without such coordinated interventions, the worsening humanitarian crisis risks deepening into a protracted emergency with profound implications for democratic futures, borderland stability, and the recovery of displaced populations.

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## Appendix I: Literature Review

### Human Rights Watch, “‘We are Like Forgotten People’. The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India.” (January 2009).

In our initial investigation, we conducted an extensive review of the existing literature addressing the challenges faced by displaced communities along the India-Myanmar border, and the effectiveness of support networks following the February 1st, 2021 Myanmar military coup. A pivotal contribution to this body of knowledge is the 2009 Human Rights Watch report titled “‘We are Like Forgotten People’. The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India.” This report investigates the human rights violations and livelihood challenges experienced by Chin refugees in Mizoram State, India. It sheds light on the widespread discrimination and abuse perpetrated by both local authorities and voluntary aid organizations, alongside the lack of adequate protection mechanisms. Interspersed with in-depth accounts of personal experiences, the report offers harrowing testimonies from Chin refugees, including women and children, illustrating the severe hardships they endure. Drawing on approximately 140 interviews, the report provides a comprehensive examination of the daily struggles of Chin refugees in Mizoram, underscoring both the individual and systemic nature of their suffering.

The report’s contextual background on the Chin people offers crucial insights into their political history, migration patterns, and the changing economic conditions along the Chin-Mizoram border. The report emphasizes the ethnic diversity of Chin populations, noting that they belong to six primary tribes and 63 sub-tribes, all “connected by a common history, geographical homeland, traditional practices, and ethnic identity”.<sup>84</sup> The report traces the Chin’s political history from the 18th century, highlighting the impacts of British colonial rule, which divided the Chin into three separate populations across Myanmar, India, and Bangladesh, disrupting their traditional governance systems.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the report examines food insecurity and economic challenges along the Chin-Mizoram border, notably exacerbated by the cyclical bamboo flowering phenomenon, where bamboo flower-eating rats turn to agricultural crops, leading to famine and increased migration.<sup>86</sup> This detailed contextual background is invaluable for our own research, as it not only frames the systemic causes behind past migration flows, but also deepens our understanding of the complex identities and historical struggles along the Chin-Mizoram border. Moreover, the report’s historical and economic framework facilitates a more nuanced examination of the factors shaping refugee experiences, particularly in relation to discrimination and the lack of

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<sup>84</sup> Human Rights Watch. *‘We are Like Forgotten People’. The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.14.

<sup>85</sup> Human Rights Watch. *‘We are Like Forgotten People’. The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.9.

<sup>86</sup> Human Rights Watch. *‘We are Like Forgotten People’. The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.20.

protection mechanisms, which are central to our investigation of the Chin refugees' ongoing plight in Mizoram.

Another strength of this report is its thorough analysis of India's historical relationship with the Myanmar junta, up until 2009. The evolving dynamics between India and Myanmar are examined, tracing their shared colonial history and the establishment of the 1,640-kilometer border by the British. Following the 1988 Myanmar uprising, India initially froze diplomatic relations and extended refuge to pro-democracy activists.<sup>87</sup> However, as the geopolitical landscape evolved, particularly with the increasing influence of China in Myanmar, India gradually resumed engagement with the military regime, starting in 1992. The report outlines how strategic and economic interests, including India's desire to secure energy resources and counter insurgencies along the India-Myanmar border, prompted deeper ties with the junta generals, resulting in the ratification of new military and trade agreements.<sup>88</sup> Such agreements incorporated economic investments into Myanmar's infrastructure and industries, as seen with the report's reference to the Kaladan Multi Modal Transit and Transportation Project, which "envisages goods being transported by sea from Kolkata, India, to Rakhine's Sittwe seaport. From there, the goods travel up the Kaladan River to Paletwa, where they are offloaded for an overland journey on a 110-kilometre (68-mile) road snaking north to Mizoram's Zorinpui".<sup>89</sup>

What is particularly valuable about this analysis is its depth and nuance, with few existing studies providing such a detailed, thorough exploration of India's shifting foreign policy toward Myanmar over the years, particularly in terms of the diminishing focus on humanitarian concerns in favor of strategic interests. This contextual insight is crucial for our research, as it helps to frame the broader political and economic forces shaping India's treatment of Myanmar refugees, particularly Chin communities in the post-2021 military coup context.

One notable shortcoming of this report however, is its focus on India's legal obligations toward refugees, without sufficiently addressing the role and effectiveness of local and international aid organizations operating along the Chin-Mizoram border. The report extensively discusses India's non-signatory status to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol,<sup>90</sup> highlighting the legal gaps regarding refugee protection, but overlooks the unique challenges faced by aid organizations operating in the region. These organizations are constrained by various factors, including: legal limitations, cultural integration issues, logistical barriers, and limited funding as they work to support Chin refugees. As a result of India's refusal to grant UN agencies and international aid organizations access to northeastern states like Mizoram, many refugees are left without critical assistance. Despite these challenges, local and international actors continue to

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<sup>87</sup> Human Rights Watch. *'We are Like Forgotten People': The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.17.

<sup>88</sup> Human Rights Watch. *'We are Like Forgotten People': The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.17.

<sup>89</sup> Choudhury, A. 'Two lions in a cave': Revolutionary divisions in Chin State.

<sup>90</sup> Human Rights Watch. *'We are Like Forgotten People': The Chin People of Burma: Unsafe in Burma, Unprotected in India*, p.77.

provide essential services, such as shelter, food distribution, medical aid, and education, yet the report does not adequately examine the efficacy of these efforts. This omission creates a gap in understanding the full scope of support available to Chin refugees. Our research seeks to address this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the operational challenges and successes of aid organizations in Mizoram, offering a more comprehensive view of both the legal obstacles and the on-the-ground efforts to alleviate refugee suffering.

Lastly, this report's 2009 publication date inherently limits its applicability to the current context of Chin refugees and the rapidly evolving situation in Myanmar. The sociopolitical landscape has undergone significant changes since the 2021 military coup, including increased violence, further displacement, and shifts in both regional and international responses. These developments are naturally not reflected in the report, making its insights on refugee experiences somewhat outdated. Moreover, changes in local governance and administration in both Mizoram and Chin State add another layer of complexity. In Mizoram, shifts in the political climate and alterations to local government policies, such as the December 2023 electoral victory of the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), which has pushed for more restrictive refugee policies, have affected the delivery of aid and the treatment of refugees by the local host communities. Similarly, in Chin State, the coup has led to increased instability, disrupting local governance and public services, further exacerbating the challenges faced by displaced populations. These evolving political dynamics in both Myanmar and India significantly impact the refugee experience, introducing new challenges related to asylum, governance, and the interaction between aid organizations and local authorities. As such, our research seeks to illuminate the current realities faced by Chin refugees by providing a more contemporary analysis, incorporating recent developments, and exploring the ongoing effects of the 2021 post-military coup landscape on both refugees and the local governance structures that support them.

Nonetheless, the 2009 Human Rights Watch report provides critical historical context on the Chin refugee crisis in Mizoram, highlighting issues such as systemic discrimination, inadequate protection mechanisms, and India's evolving geopolitical relationship with Myanmar. While the report offers valuable insights through personal testimonies and a detailed geopolitical framework, it is limited in its scope, particularly in regard to the role of aid organizations and the legal framework surrounding refugee protection. Accordingly, our own research builds on this report as a foundational text to understand the broader historical and political relations between India and Myanmar, as well as the enduring legacy of Chin refugees fleeing to Mizoram over the past several decades. By incorporating this context, we aim to examine the evolving dynamics of the refugee experience, particularly in light of the volatile political changes and the operational challenges faced by aid organizations.

**June Nilian Sang, “Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar.” (XCEPT: Online, March 2023).**

The next literature source for analysis is the March 2023 report by the Cross-Border Conflict: Evidence, Policy and Trends (XCEPT) program, funded by UK Aid. Authored by lead researcher June Nilian Sang, the report, “Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar”, provides critical insights for humanitarian and development policymakers through a comprehensive analysis of the political, social, and humanitarian dimensions of the thousands of civilians displaced in Chin State and Mizoram, as well as the shifting power dynamics among its armed and political actors.

Sang’s study employs a robust and multifaceted methodology to examine these issues, with data collection conducted between December 2022 and February 2023. The research utilized qualitative methods, including 45 key informant interviews, as well as participant and non-participant observations along the Chin-Mizoram border. The study engaged a diverse range of stakeholders, including leaders of armed resistance groups, representatives of civil society organizations (CSOs), humanitarian workers, displaced individuals, and members of the Chin diaspora, with women constituting 40% of the interviewees. Incorporating a gendered perspective enriched this research by capturing the distinct experiences and critical roles of women, who are disproportionately affected by displacement and violence yet remain essential in community resilience and resistance. Furthermore, Sang’s linguistic proficiency in Lai, Laizo, Mizo, and Burmese, facilitated meaningful engagement with Chin sub-ethnic groups, enabling a deeper exploration of the complex dynamics shaping the experiences of displaced populations.

The findings are organized into three thematic sections. The first section examines the political and armed actors in Chin State, with a focus on internal divisions. The second section addresses the conditions of displaced populations, emphasising the roles played by both local and international networks in responding to humanitarian needs. The third section explores inter-communal relations between Chin refugees and host communities in India’s Mizoram State, situating these interactions within the broader socio-political context of the India-Myanmar border region.

Sang’s analysis provides a thorough and nuanced exploration of the shifting dynamics among key political and armed stakeholders in Chin State, presenting a clear picture of the complexities within Chin State’s evolving political landscape. A major strength of the analysis lies in its articulation of the sources of tension between the Interim Chin National Consultative Council (ICNCC) and the Chinland Joint Defense Committee (CJDC), emphasising the ideological divides that have hindered cohesive governance in Chin State.<sup>91</sup> The paper outlines how these tensions stem from differing priorities within the ICNCC, particularly between “the unionist National League for Democracy members and others who prioritized a stronger ethnic Chin agenda”.<sup>92</sup> These divisions led the CNF/A to withdraw from the ICNCC in early 2023 and pursue effective political governance in Chin State

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<sup>91</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>92</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.9.

through an alternative coordination body, the CJDC. However, the CJDC itself faces internal challenges in balancing its military and political roles, which has led to difficulties in coordinating governance on the ground, particularly in managing the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>93</sup> The competing priorities between the ICNCC and CJDC have resulted in a lack of unified governance in a politically fragmented environment, complicating the administration of IDP camps, and distribution of humanitarian aid in Chin State.

This detailed breakdown of governance challenges offers critical insights for our own research on support networks for displaced communities along the Chin-Mizoram border. Sang's analysis highlights how ideological divides and governance fragmentation can undermine the effectiveness of coordinated efforts, which may mirror the challenges faced by refugee support organizations in Mizoram. By examining these parallels, we aim to better understand how potentially similar tensions between different factions might affect the ability of support networks to provide cohesive assistance to refugee populations in Mizoram. Sang's work underscores the importance of addressing governance fragmentation to enhance coordination and resource mobilisation; key areas that will inform our investigation into improving the efficacy of support systems for Chin refugees and cross-border resistance.

However, a limited exploration of the diverse array of actors involved in humanitarian aid to refugees in Chin State is available in the report's first section. While Sang extensively covers the role of Chin State's various governing bodies and the Chinland Defense Forces (CDFs), scant attention is given to the wide range of organizations contributing to the humanitarian efforts on the ground. The section could have benefited from a more detailed breakdown of the various humanitarian actors, including faith-based organizations, local humanitarian groups, and informal activist organizations. For instance, faith-based entities such as churches play a pivotal role in providing material support to refugees, yet their contributions are barely mentioned. Similarly, humanitarian organizations like Health and Hope and the Chin Health Organization (CHO) operate in the region with limited capacities, but remain crucial in addressing medical emergency needs. By omitting a thorough examination of these diverse actors, the report misses an opportunity to offer a more complete understanding of the humanitarian landscape in Chin State, which could have illuminated the varying levels of support and the challenges these actors face in coordinating aid. Our research aims to address this gap by investigating the roles of these organizations and individuals, providing a deeper understanding of the multiplicity of humanitarian actors and their efforts in supporting displaced communities.

In Sang's second section of this report, Chin State's displacement crisis is effectively captured through the incorporation of essential data that illuminates both the scale and the living conditions of IDPs. According to the Chin Human Rights Organization, an estimated 120,000 individuals had been displaced within Chin State at the time of the research, a figure that Sang corroborated through interviews with five aid relief providers.<sup>94</sup> One of the

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<sup>93</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.9.

<sup>94</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.12.

key strengths of this section is its distinction between three types of displacement (movement into urban areas, to nearby villages, or into IDP camps), which enables a more detailed understanding of the diverse challenges faced by IDPs. This aspect of the analysis stands out in our preliminary research, as it was not addressed in the other literature we reviewed. Sang notes that the smallest group of IDPs consists of those who have relocated to urban areas, and that these individuals generally have the “greatest access to livelihood security, health, and education”.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, those who flee to nearby villages face more severe socio-economic hardship, where sudden influx of displaced people into a village often leads to resource shortages (particularly water scarcity), and local authorities who are reported at times to restrict newly arrived civilians from building their own shelters, or from cultivating land.<sup>96</sup> According to Sang, the largest group of IDPs reside in camps, with approximately 40,000 individuals living in such conditions across Chin State.<sup>97</sup> Through interviews with aid relief providers, Sang identified the majority of camps (80 percent) to be located in the southern areas of Paletwa, Mindat, Kanpetlet, and Matupi Townships, which offer limited basic subsistence support such as shelter, food, health and education.<sup>98</sup>

The classification of displacement types provided by Sang is instrumental in understanding the specific challenges faced by IDPs in Chin State, as it recognizes the diverse circumstances and vulnerabilities for those with varying socio-economic backgrounds. By distinguishing between those displaced to urban areas, nearby villages, and camps, a nuanced approach to assessing the varying needs of displaced populations is provided. This distinction is particularly valuable for our own research on the Chin-Mizoram border, as it offers a framework for understanding how different displacement contexts, ranging from urban migration to camp settlements, demand tailored responses from support networks. For instance, refugees who have moved to urban areas in Mizoram such as in Aizawl may require different forms of aid, such as livelihood security and access to healthcare, compared to those in remote villages or camps such as Mizoram’s Lawng Tlai, who face more immediate issues related to shelter and basic necessities. By incorporating these distinctions, our own research will be better positioned to evaluate how support networks can adapt their strategies to meet the specific needs of each displaced group, ensuring that interventions are both effective and context-sensitive.

Furthermore, this report’s second section explores the Chin diaspora’s pivotal role in supporting displaced populations along the Chin-Mizoram border. Sang highlights how the Chin diaspora has become central to post-coup humanitarian efforts.<sup>99</sup> Following the Myanmar Army’s (known locally as the Tatmadaw) campaign of terror in the 1990s, Chin refugees were resettled elsewhere in Asia, such as India and Malaysia, as well as in Western countries, including Australia, the United States, and Canada. Since the 2021 military coup, the Chin diaspora around the world has provided crucial financial assistance to displaced communities, especially given the limited humanitarian aid available through official

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<sup>95</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.14.

<sup>96</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.14.

<sup>97</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.14.

<sup>98</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.14.

<sup>99</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.10.

channels. As Sang notes, “community-based and religious fundraising groups [within the diaspora] ... contribute the majority of funds received by resistance groups and local humanitarian providers”, which the research identified to be at 90 percent.<sup>100</sup> By highlighting the diaspora’s contributions, Sang provides an interesting perspective on the non-institutional support systems that are crucial to displacement contexts. This focus on alternative pathways to fundraising has inspired our own research to explore the dynamics of diaspora-driven aid networks, particularly how these informal channels can complement or even overshadow traditional aid systems.

Despite underscoring the critical role of the Chin diaspora in providing financial support to displaced persons and resistance groups, Sang’s report fails to critically engage with the broader implications of reliance on diaspora networks, including how dependency may affect the sustainability of local humanitarian and resistance efforts. By relying predominantly on external funding, coordinated along tribal and sub-tribal affiliations, local groups may risk fostering long-term dependencies that could undermine their capacity for self-sufficiency and resilience. Moreover, the uneven distribution of funds, as briefly noted in the report: “areas with larger diaspora communities, such as Hakha and Thantlang, receive considerably more funding from overseas than rural areas”,<sup>101</sup> highlights a critical equity issue. This disparity potentially marginalizes more remote or less-connected communities, perpetuating existing socio-economic divides and creating a fragmented response to humanitarian needs. Sang’s analysis would benefit from a deeper examination of these structural inequalities and their implications for local agency, as well as potential strategies for mitigating such challenges to ensure more equitable and sustainable support systems. Accordingly, our own research will address these dimensions, thereby illuminating the opportunities and limitations inherent in diaspora-driven aid. We hope to provide actionable insights into how coordination and resource mobilisation might be improved among these groups, ensuring a deeper examination of structural inequalities, their implications for local agency, and strategies to promote more equitable and sustainable support systems.

As we move into the report’s third section, Sang provides a detailed and well-structured analysis of the challenges faced by Chin refugees in Mizoram, effectively contextualising their experiences within the region’s governance framework. By examining how historical settlement patterns and tribal affiliations influence contemporary living arrangements, the section offers a nuanced understanding of the socio-spatial dynamics at play. For instance, Sang draws on an interview with a civil society leader in Aizawl, noting that “Chin refugees now reside in at least 45 different locations across Mizoram,” with many choosing destinations based on “tribal bonds and cultural similarities”.<sup>102</sup> This observation suggests a degree of agency in selecting places of residence. However, the report highlights that this apparent freedom is tempered by significant challenges experienced across socio-economic strata and geographic locations.

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<sup>100</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.10.

<sup>101</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.15.

<sup>102</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.17.

Among the most pressing issues is financial insecurity. As Sang notes, “most refugees living in rented houses in cities and towns receive remittances from relatives, whereas refugee camp dwellers tend to depend on humanitarian aid”.<sup>103</sup> The challenges faced by refugees are further exacerbated by variability in freedom of movement. While most district administrations lack formal mechanisms for permitting travel beyond their jurisdictions, some have issued temporary refugee registration cards that “can be used to travel across most parts of Mizoram without restrictions”.<sup>104</sup> However, in certain areas, additional requirements and constraints are imposed, complicating mobility further. Access to healthcare and education is similarly inconsistent. For instance, certain districts provide “special privileges for their medical needs at local clinics,” while others require refugees to pay for services.<sup>105</sup> In terms of education, Chin refugee children are generally admitted to public schools up to secondary school, but they often need to provide registration cards or proof of prior schooling, which can be a barrier to access.<sup>106</sup> Finally, the report’s discussion of aid distribution highlights critical inequities. Sang observes that “most international NGO support focuses on refugee camps, meaning non-camp dwellers may be excluded”.<sup>107</sup> Our preliminary research during a scoping trip to Mizoram corroborates this observation, revealing how the politicisation of local humanitarian aid groups has led to uneven support. Some areas of Mizoram receive limited aid due to perceived threats posed by members of certain support organizations that do not belong to the same ethnic group as the local population. This uneven allocation underscores the structural limitations in current support mechanisms, which disproportionately disadvantage refugees outside formal camp settings.

Through its comprehensive exploration of these issues, this report’s third section not only illuminates the complexities of Chin refugees’ experiences but also provides a critical foundation for understanding the socio-political and economic structures that shape their lives. The emphasis on the intersection of governance structures, resource distribution, and socio-cultural dynamics offers a basis for examining how these factors impact local agency and resilience. By building on these insights, our research will endeavour to identify and propose strategies to address these inequities, fostering more sustainable and inclusive support systems for Myanmar refugees along the Chin-Mizoram border.

Sang’s “Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar” serves as a valuable resource for analysing the key challenges faced by Myanmar refugees along the Chin-Mizoram border, particularly highlighting the variations in their living conditions. While the report does not fully address certain areas, such as the diversity of aid providers and the long-term sustainability of support networks, these gaps provide an opportunity for further exploration. Building on Sang’s work, our research seeks to address these gaps by exploring the wider array of organizations involved in humanitarian relief. We also aim to highlight how the civil society landscape has become deeply politicized along ethnic and

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<sup>103</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.17.

<sup>104</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.18.

<sup>105</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.18.

<sup>106</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.18.

<sup>107</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.18.

political lines, significantly undermining the coordination and equity of support systems for refugees along the Chin-Mizoram border and jeopardising their long-term sustainability.

### **“Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border.” (April 2024).**

Our subsequent source for review, “Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border”, published in April 2024, offers an analysis of the complex dynamics shaping the experiences of Chin refugees in the border states of Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland. It examines the border as a pivotal site where humanitarian needs intersect with geopolitical considerations, focusing on the 2018 Free Movement Regime (FMR) and its suspension in February 2024. Particular emphasis is placed on Mizoram’s localized and inclusive response, which contrasts sharply with restrictive national policies. The report highlights critical challenges, such as resource shortages, logistical barriers, and political opposition, while drawing attention to disparities in refugee support among the border states. Situating these issues within the broader contexts of regional conflict and cross-border displacement, the study provides valuable insights into the systemic inadequacies of current aid mechanisms and the fragile conditions faced by Chin refugees.

Its analysis of the stark divergence between India’s federal and state-level approaches to asylum policy is particularly valuable. The federal government, guided by ethnonationalist politics under the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has implemented restrictive measures, including limited mandates for refugee protection and stringent border control policies enforced by paramilitary forces like the Assam Rifles and Border Security Force.<sup>108</sup> In contrast, “state governments have significant autonomy to decide local (state-level) asylum policy,” with Mizoram leveraging its discretionary powers to establish an asylum framework rooted in ethnic kinship ties between the Chin and Mizo communities.<sup>109</sup> Through bipartisan support and initiatives like the High-Level Committee on Myanmar Refugees, the state government has provided political, logistical, and material assistance, exemplifying a proactive approach.<sup>110</sup>

Furthermore, the report’s inclusion of a diagram, visually mapping the multi-layered refugee response system in Mizoram strengthens the aforementioned analysis. This system involves key contributions from the state government, Mizo civil society organizations (CSOs), community-based organizations (CBOs) led by Myanmar refugees and activists, and local and transnational faith-based organizations (FBOs).<sup>111</sup> Secondary support comes from

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<sup>108</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.14.

<sup>109</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.3.

<sup>110</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.14.

<sup>111</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.13.

external NGOs, international NGOs (INGOs), and diasporic groups.<sup>112</sup> By clarifying the complex interplay of these actors, the diagram enhances the reader's understanding of the intricate mechanisms at play. This methodological approach has inspired our own research, prompting us to incorporate similar visual elements in our forthcoming report. These tools will help contextualize the spatial and logistical challenges faced by refugees along the Chin-Mizoram border, providing a more comprehensive analysis of fragmented support networks and the geographical distribution of aid.

Accordingly, the examination of Mizoram's asylum framework in this report underscores the critical role of local governance, offering a valuable lens for analysing decentralized responses to forced migration. Mizoram's policies reveal how localized initiatives can effectively bridge gaps left by restrictive federal approaches. However, the emphasis on Mizoram's unique paradigm also reveals a broader challenge: the absence of a cohesive national refugee policy in India. This inconsistency perpetuates disparities in refugee protections and experiences across border states, underscoring the need for a unified and equitable asylum framework. Building on these insights, our research seeks to explore practical strategies for bridging policy gaps, advocating for solutions that balance local autonomy with coordinated national responses.

Additionally, the report explores the various local initiatives that support Chin refugees in Mizoram, emphasising both the breadth of assistance provided and the intricate dynamics between the host community and the refugees. Notably, the pivotal role of Mizo civil society organizations (CSOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in driving aid efforts is assessed. Many of these organizations have formed larger networks of support, including the NGO Coordination Committee (NGOCC), which enables resource sharing and targeted assistance through structures like the Relief and Management Committee (RMC) and Village-Level Committees (VLCs).<sup>113</sup> These networks facilitate "access to rural communities along the border" positioning them "as the first responders to the ongoing refugee crisis".<sup>114</sup> Their ability to navigate local politics and mobilize resources efficiently reflects their entrenched presence and influence within Mizo society, as well as their importance in providing aid in areas where other actors, such as international NGOs (INGOs), may struggle to establish a foothold.

Despite these successes, local actors face challenges that hinder their ability to sustain support for Chin refugees in Mizoram. Chief among these are chronic funding shortages, particularly as many organizations rely on local donations, and the limited presence of INGOs due to federal government constraints.<sup>115</sup> Logistical issues, including providing health services and meeting the growing demand for shelter, further complicate the situation. This scarcity limits their ability to scale up relief efforts, and jeopardizes the sustainability of

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<sup>112</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.13.

<sup>113</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.15.

<sup>114</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.15.

<sup>115</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.17.

existing initiatives amid rising refugee numbers. Beyond these material challenges, the report also explores the contrasting local attitudes toward Chin refugees, shedding light on the social dynamics that affect the distribution of aid. While Mizoram has generally welcomed Chin refugees due to shared ethnic and religious ties, prejudices and xenophobic sentiments persist. These manifest in “three perceptions within mainstream Mizo society: refugees as drug peddlers; refugees as economic threat to locals and burdens on the government; and refugees as a politico-legal threat to Mizoram”.<sup>116</sup> This social dynamic, along with India’s broader fractured stance on refugee policy, reveals the complexities of refugee support, which extends beyond material aid to include the socio-political factors that influence the efficacy of assistance.

While the report provides an overview of the constraints on refugee aid in Mizoram, particularly in relation to the central government’s increasingly restrictive regulatory environment, it does not fully delve into the specific challenges posed by the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), which constrains funding for refugee support organizations. The report notes that the BJP has “been clamping down on foreign funding channels linked to NGOs, INGOs and think tanks, using various statutory institutions, such as the Income Tax Department (ITD) and Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI),” as well as legislative instruments to enforce these restrictions.<sup>117</sup> Mention is also given to “the increasingly strict regulation of funding flows and registration revocations” on INGOs,<sup>118</sup> which further intensifies the precarious situation of refugees in the region. However, the report does not fully explore the implications of these regulatory barriers on the long-term viability of refugee support networks. The report would have benefitted from an examination into the specific impacts of the FCRA and other regulatory measures, with a particular focus on the legal and logistical obstacles that hinder the provision of consistent support to Myanmar refugees in Mizoram.

Nonetheless, the report’s inclusion of the implications of India’s closure of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and its plans to fence the India-Myanmar border provides a unique perspective not fully explored in other research articles we reviewed (apart from some in-depth media coverage). By placing these policy shifts within the broader context of India’s evolving border management strategies, the report reveals how national security concerns have increasingly overshadowed humanitarian considerations. It emphasizes the growing securitization of the India-Myanmar border, driven by the federal government’s populist stance and its focus on tightening border controls. This shift is underscored by the deployment of additional security forces and the suspension of the FMR in February 2024,<sup>119</sup> which had previously facilitated cross-border mobility for local communities, including refugees.

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<sup>116</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.14.

<sup>117</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.21.

<sup>118</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.3,

<sup>119</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.7.

The analysis also addresses the broader implications of these policies on cross-border movement, emphasising the challenges that a potential border fence would pose to refugees attempting to flee conflict zones. While the fencing may curb smuggling, it would also increase the militarisation of the border and “make refugee crossings [more] challenging”.<sup>120</sup> The report also critically examines the feasibility of fully implementing an India-Myanmar border fence, given opposition from local governments and the challenges posed by Mizoram’s 510 km unfenced border with Chin State. Despite this, the suspension of the FMR has already sparked political unrest in Mizoram, “with local groups viewing the move as the federal government’s disregard for Mizo sentiments and customary practices around the open border”.<sup>121</sup> This nuanced analysis enhances our understanding of the complex intersection between national security policies and local humanitarian responses, offering insight into the potential consequences for Chin refugees caught between these competing priorities.

Towards the end of the report, a brief discussion is provided on the role of the National Unity Government (NUG) in supporting refugees along the India-Myanmar border, offering a perspective that is seldom addressed in the other research reviewed. The section highlights the NUG’s informal presence in India, noting that it has “deputed two unofficial representatives to the country for political and strategic liaising with various actors, including the federal government and state governments”.<sup>122</sup> It also describes how the NUG’s India office has been collaborating with a broad range of stakeholders, including state governments, CSOs and CBOs. However, this discussion is considerably brief and would benefit from a more in-depth analysis, particularly in light of the operational challenges the NUG faces due to its informal status and the Indian government’s reluctance to formally engage with it. As mentioned, the NUG office “remains operationally hamstrung, compelled to keep a low profile and limit its humanitarian engagements”,<sup>123</sup> which impacts its ability to provide sustained support. Therefore, further research is essential to assess the NUG’s current operational capabilities and explore potential avenues for increased coordination in refugee aid efforts. A more thorough evaluation of the NUG’s effectiveness, considering local perspectives, practical constraints, and strategic opportunities for positioning it within the broader humanitarian response, is critical. This is a complex undertaking, but our research aims to address these gaps, offering a more detailed examination of the NUG’s role in refugee support,<sup>124</sup> and the implications of its constrained operational capacity.

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<sup>120</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.22.

<sup>121</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.22.

<sup>122</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.20.

<sup>123</sup> Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border, p.20.

<sup>124</sup> The operational challenges faced by the NUG’s India office have been further exacerbated following the dismissal of Salai Isaac Khen from his position as an NUG diplomatic representative on August 1, 2024. This decision was made after the NUG’s Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuses (PSHEA) Policy Central Committee conducted an investigation into allegations of sexual harassment against him. The investigation revealed that Salai Isaac Khen had repeatedly harassed an ethnic Chin female employee during her tenure as a secretary at the NUG’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ Indian office. This incident has severely impacted the office’s capacity to operate effectively, as it struggles to rebuild trust and maintain credibility in its humanitarian and diplomatic efforts.

Ultimately, “Refugees as Kin/Refugees as Threat: Humanitarian Aid Networks for Myanmar Refugees Along the India-Myanmar Border” presents a detailed picture of Mizoram’s localized governance in supporting Myanmar refugees, constrained by systemic challenges such as funding shortages, political opposition, and regulatory barriers pose significant obstacles to long-term sustainability. By providing a nuanced analysis of Mizoram’s refugee support system, the report underscores the critical need for a cohesive national asylum framework in India to address the fragmented and inconsistent refugee responses along the India-Myanmar border.

## **Appendix II: Organizational Backgrounds of Key Informant Interviews**

### **Organization A\***

Founded in 1995, with a Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) since 2018, Organization A\* provides critical support to Myanmar refugees in India from two main locations: Delhi and Mizoram. In Delhi, Organization A\* manages shelters, housing approximately 140 individuals, including injured refugees seeking medical care. Housing costs range from 8,000-12,000 INR (\$90-140 USD) per month, creating significant financial pressure. In Mizoram, Organization A\* oversees approximately 90 unofficial refugee camps, assisting with the distribution of basic necessities among diverse ethnic and linguistic groups. While Mizoram's shared cultural ties with the Chin people in Myanmar create a somewhat supportive environment, Organization A\* must operate with caution to avoid political complications. Across their two core locations in India, the organization serves a broader community of around 80,000 Myanmar refugees.

### **Organization B\***

Organization B\* was established in 2021, and registered as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in the United States. Organization B\*'s mission is multifaceted, encompassing documentation of human rights violations, producing regular reports for international bodies such as the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM), the United Nations, and the U.S. government. In addition to its research and documentation, Organization B\* engages in humanitarian aid initiatives on the Mizoram-Chin State border, focusing particularly on health and education.

On the ground in Mizoram, Organization B\* operates in Champhai district, where it has established a medical center in Zokother. This facility includes a free clinic staffed by two doctors who visit twice weekly, three full-time nurses, and a mobile medical clinic that provides monthly services. Organization B\* also supports charity schools and supplies essential resources, such as school uniforms and teaching materials, to refugee children. In close collaboration with local village governance, Organization B\* has also employed CDM teachers to educate these children, ensuring continuity in their schooling amidst displacement.

### **Organization C\***

Organization C\* was formed after the 1988 revolution by members of the Lai Chin community to support fellow refugees struggling to adjust to life in Mizoram. During Myanmar's tentative reforms in the 2010s and a decade-long period of pseudo-democracy, many of these refugees returned back, prompting the organization to go dormant. After the 2021 military coup however, Organization C\* was revived to support a new wave of refugees arriving into India, including members of the pro-democracy resistance movement.

Organization C\* provides essential support to injured individuals who lack family connections or resources in Mizoram. The organization ensures that these refugees receive

vital humanitarian aid. For younger refugees, Organization C\* facilitates access to education; children are generally able to attend local schools in Mizoram, though private schools are often more accessible due to fewer bureaucratic requirements. Fees for day schools range around 2,000 INR (\$23 USD) per month, while boarding schools cost between 7,000 and 9,000 INR (\$80-103 USD).

Medical care for injured refugees is another core component of Organization C\*'s work. Many receive initial treatment at the border through Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), with more complex cases transferred to Aizawl in Mizoram, where two hospitals offer advanced care. For those with severe injuries, such as amputations or gunshot wounds, rehabilitation can take several months or even over a year. Organization C\* provides continuous support to these individuals during their extended stays, ensuring they have access to necessary resources throughout their recovery. When specialized treatment is not available locally, patients may be referred to medical facilities in Shillong, Kolkata, or Delhi. However, accessing these services often requires identification, which many refugees lack.

Beyond educational and medical support, Organization C\* assists refugees with: reuniting lost individuals with their families, providing psychosocial support for those grappling with mental health challenges, and managing funerary arrangements for deceased individuals who lack the means for burial. The organization collaborates closely with the YMA to handle these cases, securing necessary permissions and support for burials.

## **Organization D\***

Organization D\* is a youth-led, non-profit organization founded after the 2021 military coup. Organization D\*'s mission is to support vulnerable refugees along the India-Myanmar border and residents in southern Chin State, specifically Matupi, Thantlang, Paletwa Townships, and IDP camps. Through advocacy, humanitarian aid, and fundraising, Organization D\* provides vital services in Education in Emergencies (EiE), basic healthcare, food security, shelter, and civic awareness. Since its founding, Organization D\* has educated over 2,800 students and provided medical treatment to 228 patients across six community clinics.

Serving approximately 32 percent of Chin State's population, Organization D\* works in areas often underserved by governments and other NGOs. The organization is led by skilled and dedicated youth with deep knowledge of the local context, language, and culture, enabling effective outreach. It collaborates closely with civil society and local defense forces to ensure security and communication, making it well-positioned to deliver critical services and meet pressing community needs. Notably, over 70 percent of Organization D\*'s funds directly support program operations.

## **Organization E\***

Organization E\* is a key support group working to aid injured members of Myanmar's resistance movement who have been displaced to India due to ongoing conflict. Originally established to fill gaps in medical and rehabilitation support, Organization E\* provides

critical aid to combatants who have sustained severe injuries in the struggle against Myanmar's military junta. The organization has become a lifeline for individuals facing challenging recovery journeys, offering assistance for medical treatment, logistical support for safe transport, and coordination with local networks.

Organization E\* operates by arranging safe passages for injured individuals from Myanmar to India, often coordinating with local Mizo authorities and community groups to mitigate risks at checkpoints and ensure access to necessary care. Once individuals arrive in India, they often receive initial medical treatment in locations like Aizawl before transitioning to more comprehensive facilities in Delhi, where advanced care options are available. In our visit to their shelter in Delhi, we met patients like Thomas\*, injured by a landmine, and Ba Khat\*, who sustained injuries while handling explosives. Both were transferred from Aizawl to Delhi under Organization E\*'s guidance for further treatment.

Although resources are limited, Organization E\* collaborates with local Mizoram organizations to assist in securing transportation, basic supplies, and financial aid to cover day-to-day expenses. Additionally, Organization E\* has developed informal support networks to help injured individuals navigate India's challenging social and legal environment, providing advice on communication safety, local customs, and integration.

### **Chin National Front Regional Committee in India**

The Chin National Front (CNF) and its armed wing, the Chin National Army (CNA), were established in Mizoram in 1988, making them among the earliest resistance groups to engage in the decades-long civil war against Myanmar's military junta. The CNF/A has played a significant role in advocating for Chin self-determination and autonomy while actively participating in armed resistance.

The CNF Regional Committee in India was initially formed in 2009 but remained largely inactive until July 2022, when it was reactivated to address the escalating humanitarian and logistical needs of Chin communities displaced by the conflict. Operating from Delhi, the committee consists of 12 representatives from Chin diaspora communities in the United States, Australia, Europe, and Singapore. This global representation enhances its capacity to mobilize resources and coordinate international support.

The committee primarily focuses on securing financial donations, supplies, and essential resources for the CNA, thereby sustaining its operational effectiveness. Additionally, it collaborates with various Chin civil society organizations to provide humanitarian assistance to Chin refugees in India. Through these efforts, the CNF Regional Committee in India functions as a crucial intermediary, bridging Chin resistance forces with both local and international supporters while advocating for the broader Chin struggle against Myanmar's military dictatorship.

## Organization F\*

Wunna Hein\*, a former NLD representative and protest leader from Mandalay, relocated to Delhi after his imprisonment in Myanmar's Obo Prison from February to June 2021. Wunna Hein\* leads Organization F\*, an advocacy group focused on raising awareness about Myanmar's ongoing conflict and humanitarian crisis among Indian citizens. Despite being one of the few who holds a UNHCR card, his refugee status creates ongoing challenges with local authorities. Operating in exile, Wunna Hein\* faces significant obstacles: legal uncertainty, safety concerns, surveillance, language barriers, and limited funding since international NGOs prioritize humanitarian over political aid. Nevertheless, he maintains his political activism, supporting Chin resistance groups and coordinating cross-border activities through secure communication channels. His position in India, though precarious, enables political advocacy work that would be impossible within Myanmar.

## NUG Representative in India

Salai Isaac Khen is a long-time Chin activist and politician. Before entering politics, he served as the director of the Gender and Development Initiative Myanmar, a research and advocacy organization focused on gender equality and development issues. In 2016, he was appointed Minister for Municipal Works, Electricity, and Industry in the Chin State government, where he oversaw key development initiatives, including the Hakha urban city plan, the Hakha Township local market, and the Falam Water Distribution Project. However, in May 2018, he resigned from his ministerial position, citing challenges in the implementation of these projects and taking responsibility for their shortcomings.

Following the 2021 military coup, Salai Isaac Khen became actively involved with the National Unity Government (NUG), a parallel government formed by elected lawmakers opposing the military junta. While the NUG has an informal presence in India, they do collaborate with the Mizoram state government, as well as local CSOs and CBOs to coordinate support to newly arrived CDM participants and other displaced individuals. As the NUG's representative in India, he worked to mobilize support and coordinate efforts among Myanmar's diaspora and international allies. His role primarily involved establishing networks to facilitate humanitarian aid, medical assistance, and coordination among Myanmar's exiled communities in India.

However, his tenure was cut short by allegations of sexual harassment against female staff members in his office, leading to his removal from the position on August 1, 2024, shortly after our interview. The decision followed an investigation conducted by the NUG's Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuses (PSHEA) Policy Central Committee, which found that Salai Isaac Khen had repeatedly harassed a secretary at the NUG's Ministry of Foreign Affairs office in India.<sup>125</sup> The incident has had significant repercussions, severely undermining the office's capacity to function effectively as it struggles to restore trust and credibility in its humanitarian and diplomatic operations.

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<sup>125</sup> Khonumthung News. NUG Representative in India Fired for Sexual Harassment.

## Chin Center for Peace and Reconciliation

The Chin Center for Peace and Reconciliation (CCPR) operates with four primary programs: governance, research, humanitarian relief, and legal work. Governance and research are at the core of CCPR's mission, as they focus on building administrative capabilities and fostering local leadership within Chinland.

CCPR actively participated in the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA) process,<sup>126</sup> where it facilitated discussions around policy and stakeholder engagement, particularly with the Chin National Front (CNF). A major area of CCPR's focus is promoting alternative governance models within Chinland, helping communities establish functional administrative bodies in areas where formal state structures are absent. The organization has conducted assessments of local administrative bodies, provided capacity-building support, and equipped these groups with necessary equipment, such as laptops and printers, to improve their governance capabilities.

CCPR maintains limited engagement with the National Unity Government (NUG) due to strategic differences, particularly concerning federalism and governance. This cautious approach reflects broader concerns within Chin political and civil society organizations regarding the potential for centralized control under the NUG. Rather than aligning with a centralized political framework, organizations such as CCPR and Support Network I\* prioritize strengthening local governance structures that uphold community autonomy. Their approach is characterized by a bottom-up model that emphasizes local decision-making and self-governance in Chinland, thus reducing dependence on centralized political entities.

Another area of focus for CCPR is advocating for the rights of refugees, particularly those who have fled Myanmar since the 2021 military coup. CCPR has called for greater pressure on Indian authorities to recognize refugee status, issue exit permits, and formalize the presence of refugees in Mizoram and other parts of India.

However, the recent passing of CCPR's deputy director has impacted the organization's financial stability and operations, as they played a crucial role in securing funding, managing donor relations, and overseeing staff recruitment. Like many organizations, CCPR operates within a hierarchical structure where senior leadership holds essential institutional knowledge, donor connections, and strategic partnerships. The leadership vacuum has slowed decision-making and placed additional burdens on remaining staff, thereby reducing overall efficiency. This challenge reflects a broader issue in civil society organizations, where leadership transitions can create vulnerabilities when crucial knowledge and networks are concentrated in a single individual, making it difficult to maintain financial stability and operational continuity.

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<sup>126</sup> The 2015 Myanmar Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement was a peace agreement signed on October 15, 2015, between the government of Myanmar, the Myanmar military (*Tatmadaw*), and eight ethnic armed organizations (EAOs). The agreement aimed to establish a framework for political dialogue, reduce armed conflict, and promote national reconciliation.

## **Young Mizo Association**

The Young Mizo Association (YMA), founded in 1935, is one of Mizoram's largest voluntary organizations, focused on the preservation of Mizo culture and heritage. The YMA is managed by a central committee based in Aizawl, with a network of five sub-headquarters, 47 groups, and 805 branches across Mizoram and neighboring states. It is no surprise that the YMA holds significant "political clout and influences government decisions on sensitive issues".<sup>127</sup>

## **Mara Students Organization**

Established in 1965, the Mara Students Organization (MSO) advocates for the educational and cultural advancement of the Mara ethnic group in Mizoram. Headquartered in Siahia district, the MSO works to improve educational outcomes through initiatives like study camps and partnerships with other civil society organizations to address local social issues.

## **Young Lai Association**

Similarly, the Young Lai Association (YLA), founded in 1970 and based in Aizawl, supports the Lai community's educational, social, and cultural development. They organize programs, leadership training, and community events to empower youth and preserve Lai cultural heritage.

## **Organization H\***

Organization H\* emerged as a grassroots organization in Mizoram to support refugees arriving in India after the 2021 military coup. Originally focused on providing immediate humanitarian aid, Organization H\* faced difficulties in fundraising for direct assistance and eventually shifted its primary mission toward education and human rights. Organization H\*'s documentation of human rights abuses and educational outreach extends to conflict-affected areas within Myanmar. For instance, the organization has run several teacher training programs in Chin State's Paletwa Township, aiming to improve educational opportunities for displaced children and communities affected by clashes between the junta and armed resistance groups.

To raise awareness and foster a positive perception of refugees in India, Organization H\* has engaged in media outreach by producing content in Mizo language, aiming to reach and educate local audiences in Mizoram about the humanitarian crisis facing Myanmar refugees. However, Organization H\* faces challenges in accessing reliable communication channels and verifying information from conflict zones in Myanmar, which complicates their efforts to provide timely reporting on human rights abuses. Nonetheless, collaborations with members of Support Network J\* have been crucial in ensuring the dissemination of accurate information and countering harmful stereotypes within the community. Organization H\*

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<sup>127</sup> Hazarika, S. 'Now this is home for us': Chin refugees from Myanmar find a welcoming sanctuary in Mizoram.

also benefits from the guidance of experienced activists like Saya Min\*, who provides strategic advice on navigating the complex landscape of refugee support in Mizoram.

### **Support Network I\***

Thura Aung\* has spent decades advocating for the rights and welfare of the Chin community both in Myanmar and in exile. His background includes extensive experience in civil society work, with a focus on human rights, governance, and community organization. In the aftermath of the 2021 military coup, Thura Aung\* has been instrumental in revitalising Support Network I\* to respond to the increasing needs of displaced communities, which ceased its activity several years prior to 2021. Support Network I\* strives to bridge the gaps between local Chin organizations and international donors, emphasising the need for structured support systems, financial management skills, and program development.

Thura Aung\*'s work currently centers on governance, legal research, and stakeholder engagement within Chinland. His support network focuses on analysing the effectiveness of local administrative structures and supporting the establishment of alternative governance models, especially in areas where formal institutions are absent or lack efficacy. Between 2022 and 2023, Support Network I\* provided capacity-building support to 18 local administrative groups, equipping them with laptops, printers, and cash to enhance their operational capabilities. This effort aims to strengthen bottom-up federalism and empower local governance structures across Chinland, while maintaining an independent stance in relation to other political entities, including the National Unity Government (NUG).

### **Support Network J\***

Support Network J\* was established to facilitate coordination between the Mizoram government, local and international NGOs, and Myanmar refugee communities, ensuring effective support for displaced individuals and resistance groups. Comprising member organizations such as Organization A\*, Organization H\*, and the Chin Health Organization (CHO), along with various other humanitarian actors, Support Network J\* focuses on providing shelter, humanitarian aid, education, healthcare and psychosocial services to address trauma among refugees.

Coordination between the member organizations is primarily facilitated through an encrypted messaging platform, allowing representatives to exchange information, assess conditions in various refugee camps, and allocate resources accordingly. This digital communication system enhances the efficiency of aid distribution, ensuring that assistance reaches the most vulnerable populations.

A key factor in Support Network J\*'s operational effectiveness has been its strong relationships with influential local organizations, including the Central Young Mizo Association (YMA), the Mizoram Student Union (MSU), and Zo Ro, a Chin men's support group. In addition to Support Network J\*'s relations with local religious leaders, these partnerships enable the consortium to navigate complex regulatory environments and facilitate access to critical resources for refugee assistance. By leveraging these networks,

Support Network J\* engages with local authorities and ensures smoother integration of refugees within Mizoram's host community.

Support Network J\*'s initiatives are largely sustained through fundraising efforts, relying on financial contributions from Mizo business owners, churches, and U.S.-based organizations. These funds have formed a community-supported aid structure that offers a range of essential services, including emergency solar power installation, food distribution, and vocational training programs such as sewing classes for refugee women.

In the education sector, Support Network J\* has provided essential school supplies for refugee-run educational institutions within the camps. While refugee children in Mizoram are granted “access to education in public schools ... up to secondary school”,<sup>128</sup> transportation challenges (particularly for those in remote camps) and linguistic barriers<sup>129</sup> have led many families to favor schools administered by the NUG. Across Mizoram, approximately 20 to 30 refugee camp schools operate under the NUG's oversight; however, these institutions lack formal policy guidance and face severe financial constraints, struggling to secure adequate teaching materials and teacher salaries. As a result, many refugee communities are compelled to fundraise independently to sustain these educational programs.

Support Network J\* also plays a role in supporting local media initiatives, such as the youth-led Matupi Times, which provides coverage of the humanitarian crisis and ongoing armed conflicts in Chin State. However, these independent media outlets face persistent challenges related to funding and capacity-building, as they navigate the complexities of reporting on conflict dynamics and the evolving security situation. In addition to its media engagement, Support Network J\* actively lobbies the Mizoram state government to advocate for continued acceptance and support of newly arriving refugees, particularly during periods of intensified conflict in Chin State. Through these efforts, Support Network J\* seeks to maintain effective coordination between local authorities and humanitarian organizations to uphold essential services and safeguard refugee welfare.

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<sup>128</sup> Sang, J.N. *Resistance and the Cost of the Coup in Chin State, Myanmar*, p.18.

<sup>129</sup> Refugee students from Northern Chin State experience fewer language barriers compared to those from Southern Chin State, as Northern Chin languages share greater linguistic similarities with Mizo languages.

## Appendix III: Participant Backgrounds from Focus Group Discussions

### Focus Group Discussion 1

The first FGD was held on 11th June 2024 in Delhi and brought together three women human rights defenders (WHRDs), all of whom had relocated to India following the 2021 military coup.

- Samantha\*, a former protest leader from Yangon, relocated to Delhi in 2022 with her three children. Deeply involved in refugee rights and activism in Myanmar, Samantha\* now grapples with an illegal status in India that puts her at constant risk of arrest.
- Mary\*, an assistant lecturer from Kalay University and a participant in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), fled to India in 2021 with her family after her husband who is a politician was arrested and later released by the junta. Mary\* has since become actively involved in the Chin-Mizo community, volunteering with the Chin Human Rights Organization (CHRO) to assist refugees, particularly with medical needs.
- Polly\*, a volunteer from the church community, also moved to India in 2021 after her husband, a fellow CDM participant, fled Myanmar. Polly\* focuses on providing education support, especially to fellow refugees in her church community. However, health issues and language barriers make life challenging for her in Delhi, particularly when seeking medical care.

### Focus Group Discussion 2

The second FGD was conducted on 12th June 2024, also in Delhi, and included three male human rights defenders from Myanmar, each with extensive experience in education, activism, and community leadership.

- U Salai\*, a former high school principal and participant in the CDM, left Myanmar for safety reasons after leading protests against the military junta. Initially relocating to Mizoram in September 2021, he moved to Delhi in March 2022, hoping to receive humanitarian support from the UNHCR. With limited support available, U Salai\* has taken on a leadership role within Delhi's CDM community, supporting others in exile as they navigate similar struggles of life with no legal documentation.
- Lian\* was prompted to flee Myanmar after his wife, a schoolteacher, joined the CDM. Leaving Kalay, they moved to Manipur before settling in Delhi in August 2021. As a community leader, Lian\* works to address the needs of fellow refugees, despite facing racial discrimination, poor living conditions, and the ongoing challenge of lacking proper identification, which restricts access to basic services.
- Pachha\*, originally from Matupi in Chin State and a member of the Mara tribe, arrived in Delhi in January 2022, joining a group of young people seeking educational opportunities. Over the years, he has taken on various jobs, including teaching, housekeeping, and selling ice cream, to support himself and his community.

End.