

A high-angle photograph of a roadside market in Yangon, Myanmar. A woman in an orange shirt and blue patterned pants is carrying a large yellow sack on her back, walking through a market area. She is surrounded by several large woven baskets filled with green mangoes. In the background, a man wearing a traditional conical hat is sitting on the ground, sorting through produce. The ground is paved with cobblestones, and there are some plastic bags and other market items scattered around.

URBAN POVERTY: Unpacking Yangon

JUNE 2025

Cover Photo: A view of a roadside market in Yangon, Myanmar

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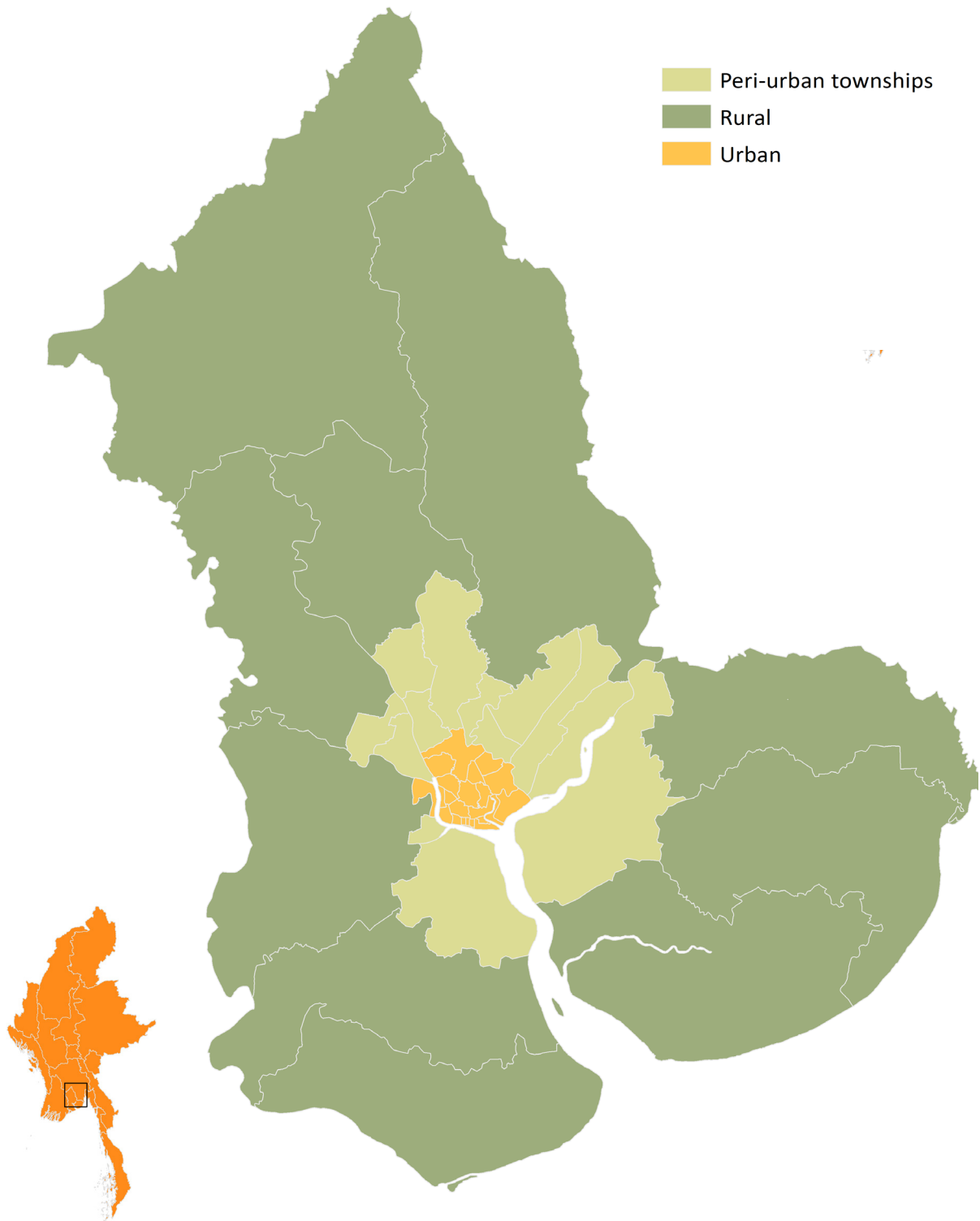
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Map 1:

Urban, peri-urban and rural townships in Yangon Region



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Executive Summary



Photo: An elderly man in Yangon, Myanmar.

Yangon, Myanmar's largest city and economic hub, is experiencing an unprecedented surge in urban poverty, particularly in its peri-urban areas, where those affected by economic collapse and conflict are seeking refuge. This study, based on a survey conducted in July 2024 with 4,800 respondents, provides a detailed portrait of the deepening vulnerabilities affecting Yangon's urban and peri-urban communities in the wake of economic downturn, political instability, displacement — and amid a backdrop of shrinking international aid and donor support that has further constrained response capacity.

The scale of urban poverty has risen dramatically in recent years. In 2017, 10% of Yangon's urban population was classified as poor. By 2023, this figure had increased to 43%. Given Yangon's total urban population of approximately 6.2 million people, this translates into an increase of about 2 million, with nearly 2.7 million individuals now living in poverty. The depth of urban poverty has also intensified, from 2% in 2017 to 26% in 2023. This means

that not only are more people in Yangon falling below the poverty line, but those who are poor are now much further below the poverty line than before. The situation is even more concerning in peri-urban areas, where nearly one-fourth of households now fall within the lowest asset quintile, compared to 7% in urban townships.¹ Among those who migrated to Yangon, the burden is heavier still—39% of migrant households² in peri-urban townships are among the poorest, highlighting the disproportionate economic strain on those who have relocated in search of security and opportunity. Nearly one-third of these migrants arrived after the 2021 military takeover, underscoring how the ongoing crisis continues to drive population movement.

Especially the migrants coming to Yangon after the takeover arrive with limited resources, often lacking the necessary documentation to secure formal employment, due to the breakdown of public services for household registration and civil documentation in their areas of origin. While peri-urban industrial zones have historically absorbed much of the labor migration, job competition, discriminatory hiring practices, and economic stagnation have left many struggling to find stable work. The financial pressures on these households are immense, with many forced into informal labor, borrowing money, or selling assets to meet basic needs.

Healthcare costs are an additional burden for those in Yangon, with 45% of respondents reporting medical issues requiring attention. Despite the severe financial constraints faced by poor households, 82% of respondents rely on private healthcare due to a lack of confidence in the quality of public services. Many households, particularly those living in poorer peri-urban areas, resort to borrowing money or selling essential assets to cover medical expenses, further entrenching them in poverty. Among the most vulnerable, barriers to reproductive and women's health services are particularly acute.

Education, a potential pathway out of poverty, is increasingly out of reach for many children and young adults living in and around Yangon. Among the poorest households, 17% of children are not attending school, and 37% of households report that their children contribute to family income, often at the expense of their education. The pressures of economic survival, coupled with safety concerns and financial barriers, are making schooling less of a priority for struggling households. A growing number of these young people in Yangon are choosing migration over education, viewing overseas work as a viable option for escaping poverty.

¹ The asset index is a measure of overall household well-being not restricted to income only.

² The term 'migrant' encompasses a broad spectrum of motivations—from those seeking jobs to those escaping violence or insecurity. Throughout this report, the term '(internal) migrants' is used intentionally to capture this full range of mobility. This approach reflects the development lens adopted by UNDP, which emphasizes long-term livelihood, service, and resilience needs that cut across both economic and crisis-driven forms of relocation.

Insecurity is another pressing concern, particularly in the poorer peri-urban neighborhoods of Yangon, where 44% of residents report feeling unsafe walking alone at night. This figure rises to 48% among migrants. Heightened fears of crime, extortion, and harassment by authorities further restrict mobility, limiting the search for work and access to essential services. The prevalence of gender-based violence is particularly troubling, with 33% of respondents witnessing such incidents in their neighborhoods. Awareness of support services remains low.

The crisis unfolding in Yangon's urban and peri-urban areas is not merely a reflection of an economic downturn — it is a structural unraveling of social and economic stability. While migration to the city has long been driven by economic opportunity, the current wave of displacement is increasingly fueled by desperation. Without urgent interventions to improve economic opportunities, strengthen public services, and enhance community security, the city's capacity to absorb and support its growing vulnerable population will continue to erode.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional response. Regaining some level of economic security requires investing in expanding employment opportunities, particularly for migrant workers who face discrimination and barriers to formal labor. This is difficult during a period of economic contraction, with several domestic and foreign private companies shrinking their exposure in Yangon. Investments in public healthcare are critical to reduce the financial burden on struggling households, while targeted education initiatives are urgently needed to prevent a generation of children from being locked into repeated cycles of poverty. The necessary investments in social sectors are inhibited by the continued high fiscal space absorbed by defense spending. While it is estimated that overall security sector spending remains high and expansionary, the commensurate strengthening of community security capacities that keep people safe — with human security protected in the poorer urban and peri-urban areas of Yangon — remains to be addressed.

As Yangon's urban poor face escalating hardship, this report underscores the need for urgent responses that acknowledge both the structural drivers of urban poverty and the new dimensions of vulnerability introduced by recent patterns of urbanization amidst an ongoing civil war. Without targeted corrective actions, the deepening and hardening of mistrust and instability will drive more households into a spiraling mix of hard-core urban poverty and insecurity, further destabilizing Yangon's already fragile economic and social fabric.

Introduction



Photo: Residential apartment buildings in downtown Yangon.

Globally, urbanization is one of the most significant trends of the 21st century, with the United Nations projecting that nearly 68% of the world's population will reside in urban areas by 2050.³ This rapid urban growth presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, where urban poverty is on the rise. According to the World Bank, urban poverty is increasingly becoming a pressing issue, with an estimated 1.3 billion people living in slums and informal settlements, often lacking access to basic

services such as clean water, sanitation, and adequate housing.⁴ The growing urban population can exacerbate rising poverty by creating environments where wealth disparities deepen, leading to "urban poverty traps" that limit access to essential services and economic opportunities for marginalized populations.⁵

Migration for employment opportunities is a key driver of urbanization. People from rural areas are increasingly relocating to cities in search of better livelihoods, education, and healthcare. However, the influx of migrants can strain urban infrastructure and services, leading to

³ United Nations (2018) World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision.

⁴ World Bank (2021) Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune.

⁵ Overseas Development Institute and Chronic Poverty Research Centre. (2010). Spatial inequality and urban poverty traps.

increased competition for jobs and resources, which in turn exacerbates urban poverty and contributes to the growth of slums.⁶

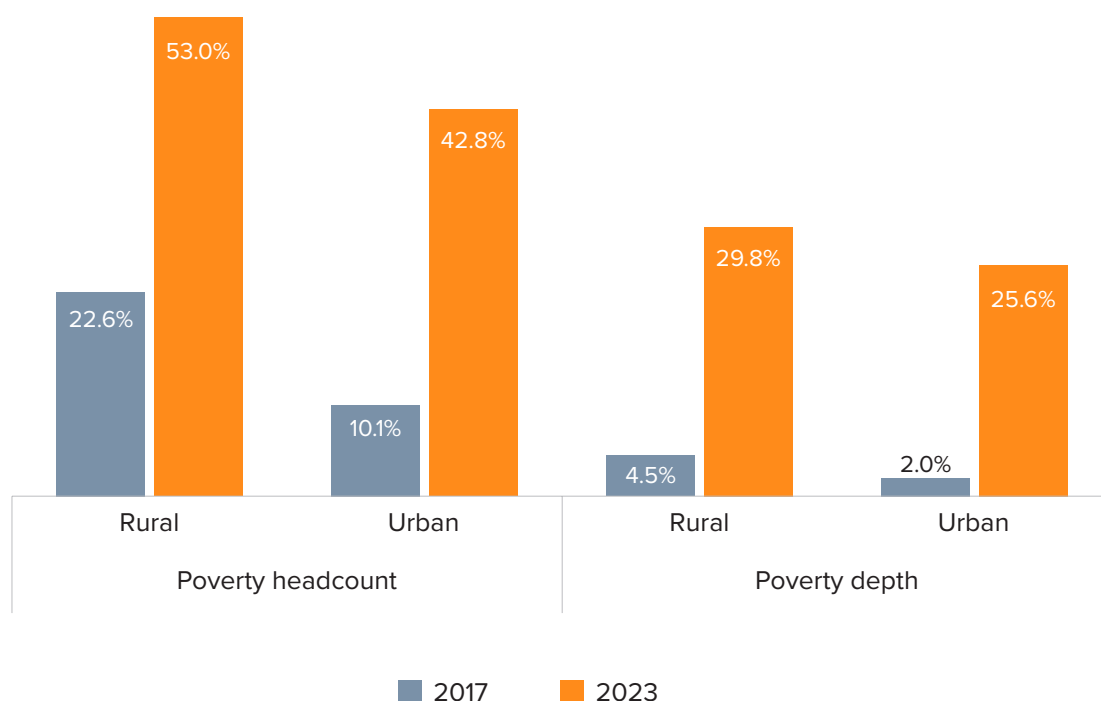
In Myanmar, the situation has been further complicated by the military takeover in February 2021, which led to widespread civil unrest, conflict, economic instability, and deteriorating living conditions. The People's Pulse Survey (2023) reveals a concerning trend in Yangon's poverty levels. While the poverty headcount in rural Yangon more than doubled — from 23% in 2017 to 53% in 2023 — the situation is even more severe in urban Yangon, where the rate quadrupled from 10% to 43% over the same period.⁷

The depth of poverty has also intensified. In rural Yangon, it increased sixfold — from 5% in

2017 to 30% in 2023. In urban Yangon, poverty depth rose more than tenfold, from just 2% to 26% over the same period. This means that not only are more people living below the poverty line, but the average poor household is now much further below that line than before.⁸ The rise in both poverty headcount and depth is significantly higher in urban Yangon than in rural areas, highlighting the distinct challenges of urban poverty.

The recent UNDP report, “Migrate to Cope”, which examines migration patterns across Myanmar, indicates that Yangon has become the most preferred destination for migrants, receiving approximately 41% of individuals relocating from other states and regions.⁹ This influx exacerbates the existing challenges faced by urban populations, particularly in

Figure 1: Poverty headcount and poverty depth of Yangon by urban/rural, 2017 and 2023



⁶ UN-Habitat (2016) World Cities Report 2016: Urbanization and Development: Emerging Futures.

⁷ Unless otherwise specified, references to urban poverty in this report include both urban and peri-urban areas of Yangon. UNDP (2024) Poverty and the Household Economy of Myanmar: A Disappearing Middle Class

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ UNDP (2023) Migration in Myanmar: Moving to Cope

peri-urban areas where infrastructure and services are insufficient to accommodate the growing number of residents. These areas often lack reliable transportation, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Many households in these areas are engaged in informal employment, which typically lacks job security and benefits, further entrenching them in poverty. The report also highlights that while only 4% of employment-induced migrants remain unemployed at their destination, this figure rises sharply to 31% among conflict-induced migrants, who face greater barriers to employment due to factors such as discrimination and lack of documentation.¹⁰

As economic conditions continue to deteriorate, households in these areas are becoming increasingly vulnerable to economic shocks, and the lack of access to social safety nets exacerbates their struggles. Reports of theft, domestic violence, and gang-related activities have surged in these peri-urban areas, creating an environment of fear and uncertainty. This

rise in criminal activities not only undermines the sense of security for residents but also hampers their ability to access essential services such as healthcare and education. Consequently, the combination of economic hardship and social insecurity in peri-urban areas makes it even more difficult, particularly for migrant households, to achieve decent living conditions.

Given this background, the study examines the socio-economic issues in urban Yangon, with a particular focus on peri-urban areas. It explores migration patterns and their implications for growing urban poverty. In the current context, security concerns are also analyzed, as they impact livelihoods and day-to-day activities. The study further investigates employment patterns and access to basic services, including healthcare and education. Finally, suggested actions are presented to address these pressing challenges and improve the resilience of vulnerable populations in urban settings.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Methodology

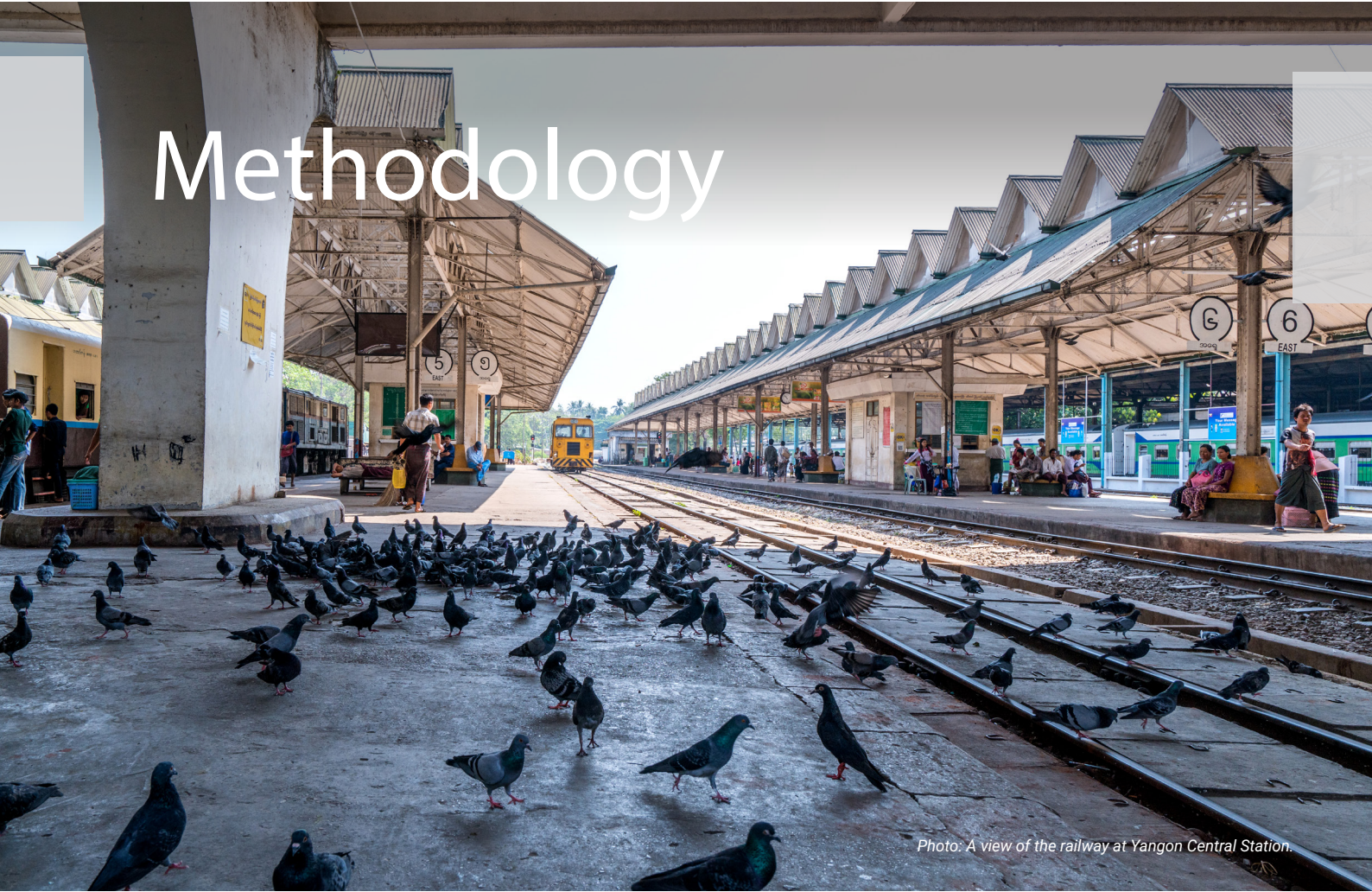


Photo: A view of the railway at Yangon Central Station.

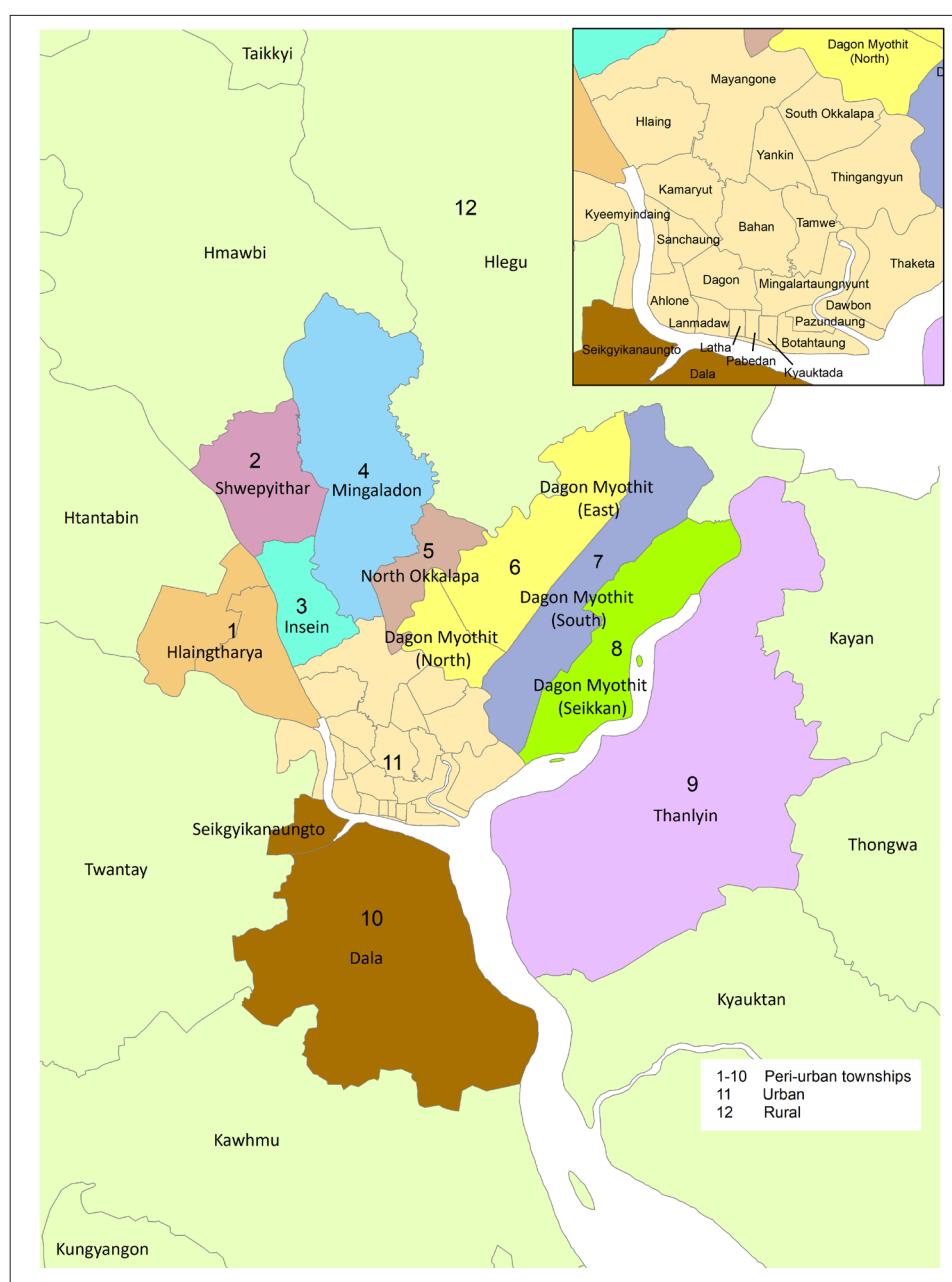
For this study, Yangon townships are classified into three categories—urban, peri-urban, and rural—based on their dominant characteristics, specifically in terms of agricultural land cover, settlement patterns, and tree cover, as observed through satellite imagery. According to this classification, peri-urban areas account for 49% of Yangon’s population, while urban areas comprise 24%, and rural areas make up 27%.

The Yangon Survey is a quantitative study conducted in Yangon using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) to collect data from respondents across peri-urban, urban, and rural townships. The sample consists of 4,800 respondents aged 18 years and above, with specific quotas for age groups and a balanced gender distribution. The survey was carried out during July 2024.

The study interviewed a total of 4,800 respondents, including 370 from each of the 10 peri-urban townships. In urban and rural townships, 550 respondents were interviewed for each group. The larger number of respondents in peri-urban areas reflects the study’s specific focus on these locations. Some smaller peri-urban townships were grouped together to ensure meaningful analysis. As a result, the data can be examined in three ways: by urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, as well as by individual peri-urban township.

To complement the quantitative findings, qualitative interviews were conducted in September 2024, with 25 respondents from Hlaingtharyar, Shwepyithar, and Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) to further explore the experiences and perceptions of people living in peri-urban areas.

Figure 2: Urban, peri-urban and rural townships in Yangon



The study interviewed a total of 4,800 respondents, including 370 from each of the 10 peri-urban townships. In urban and rural townships, 550 respondents were interviewed for each group. The larger number of respondents in peri-urban areas reflects the study's specific focus on these locations. Some smaller peri-urban townships were grouped together to ensure meaningful analysis. As a result, the data can be examined in three ways: by urban, peri-urban, and rural areas, as well as by individual peri-urban township.

Figure 3: Population distribution across townships in Yangon

Urban townships	Population	Peri-urban township	Population	Rural townships	Population
1) Pabedan	41,347	1) Shwepyithar	420,455	1) Kyauktan	206,380
2) Kyauktada	37,228	2) Insein	375,512	2) Twantay	277,420
3) Sanchaung	123,307	3) Hlaingtharyar	835,618	3) Cocokyun	2,385
4) Latha	31,065	4) Dagon Myothit (South)	455,442	4) Hlegu	330,691
5) Pazundaung	60,225	5) Dagon Myothit (Saikkan)	204,800	5) Kayan	194,852
6) Tamwe	205,108	6) Dagon Myothit (North)	253,718	6) Thongwa	195,128
7) South Okkalapa	199,269	7) Dagon Myothit (East)	203,289	7) Htantabin	178,377
8) Lanmadaw	58,137	8) Mingaladon	405,615	8) Taikkyi	341,390
9) Mingalartaungnyunt	164,015	9) Dala	211,506	9) Kungyangon	137,689
10) Dawbon	92,559	10) Thanlyin	329,787	10) Kawhmu	146,346
11) Ahlone	68,560	11) North Okkalapa	409,621	11) Hmawbi	299,687
12) Thingangyun	258,475	12) Seikgyikanaungto	41,675		
13) Thaketa	271,857				
14) Botahtaung	50,731				
15) Hlaing	198,026				
16) Kyeemyindaing	137,479				
17) Yankin	87,915				
18) Bahan	119,506				
19) Kamaryut	103,910				
20) Mayangone	243,583				
21) Dagon	30,828				
Total	2,085,303	Total	4,147,038	Total	2,310,345

Figure 4: Sample allocation

Cluster	Sample size
Peri-urban townships	3,700
1. Hlaingtharyar	370
2. Shwepyithar	370
3. Insein	370
4. Mingalardon	370
5. North Okkalapa	370
6. Dagon Myothit (North + East)	370
7. Dagon Myothit (South)	370
8. Dagon Myothit (Seikkan)	370
9. Thanlyin	370
10. Dala + Seikgyikanaungto	370
11. Urban townships	550
12. Rural townships	550
Total	4,800

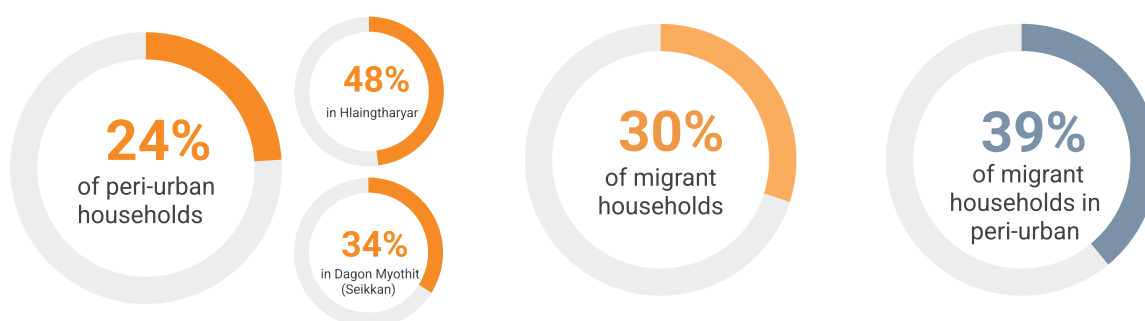
Urban Poverty



Photo: Urban scene of downtown Yangon, showing city streets and traffic.



Households in the lowest asset quintile:



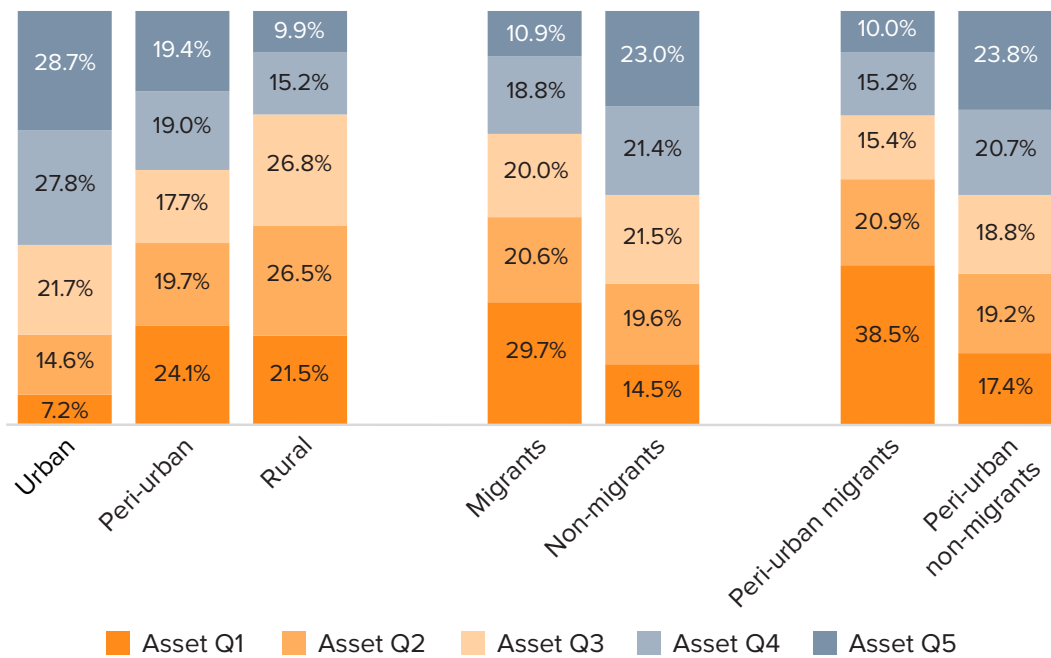
Households were categorized based on their asset ownership, serving as a proxy for a more robust measure of economic well-being compared to current income which is highly volatile under the present circumstances. The Myanmar Subnational Surveys (MSPS) conducted by the

World Bank highlight that asset ownership data is a valuable tool for estimating household well-being in data-constrained environments like Myanmar.¹¹ Previous studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between asset quintiles and consumption quintiles, which also extends to poverty headcounts.^{12,13} In this report, "poorest

¹¹ World Bank (2023) Myanmar Sub-national Phone Survey (MSPS) of the World Bank: Coverage, Reliability and Representativeness.

¹² UNDP (2024) Poverty and the Household Economy of Myanmar: A Disappearing Middle Class

¹³ CSO, UNDP and WB (2017) Myanmar Living Conditions Survey: Socio-economic Report.

Figure 5: Distribution of households by asset quintiles

quintile" refers to asset quintile-1 (Q1), while "richest quintile" refers to asset quintile-5 (Q5).

Households in peri-urban (24%) and rural (22%) areas are concentrated in the lowest asset quintiles compared to urban households (7%). Similarly, migrant households are more likely to fall into the poorest asset quintile compared to non-migrant households (30% vs. 15%). Within peri-urban settings, migrant households exhibit heightened economic vulnerability compared to their non-migrant counterparts (39% vs. 17%). These findings highlight the significant economic challenges and precarious living conditions faced by migrant households in peri-urban areas, underscoring their vulnerability within the broader socio-economic landscape.

The prevalence of poverty is particularly severe in specific townships, with Hlaingtharyar showing a 48% of households in the poorest quintile. Similarly, Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) reports 34% of households in the poorest

quintile. Qualitative interviews with respondents reveal that many impoverished households in Hlaingtharyar and Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) are predominantly migrant households. Survey data also suggest that Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) faces significant security concerns, which may contribute to the high proportion of households in the poorest quintile. These security challenges will be explored in the following section.

The prevalence of poverty is particularly severe in specific townships, with Hlaingtharyar showing a 48% of households in the poorest quintile.

Figure 6: Distribution of households by asset quintiles, in peri-urban Yangon

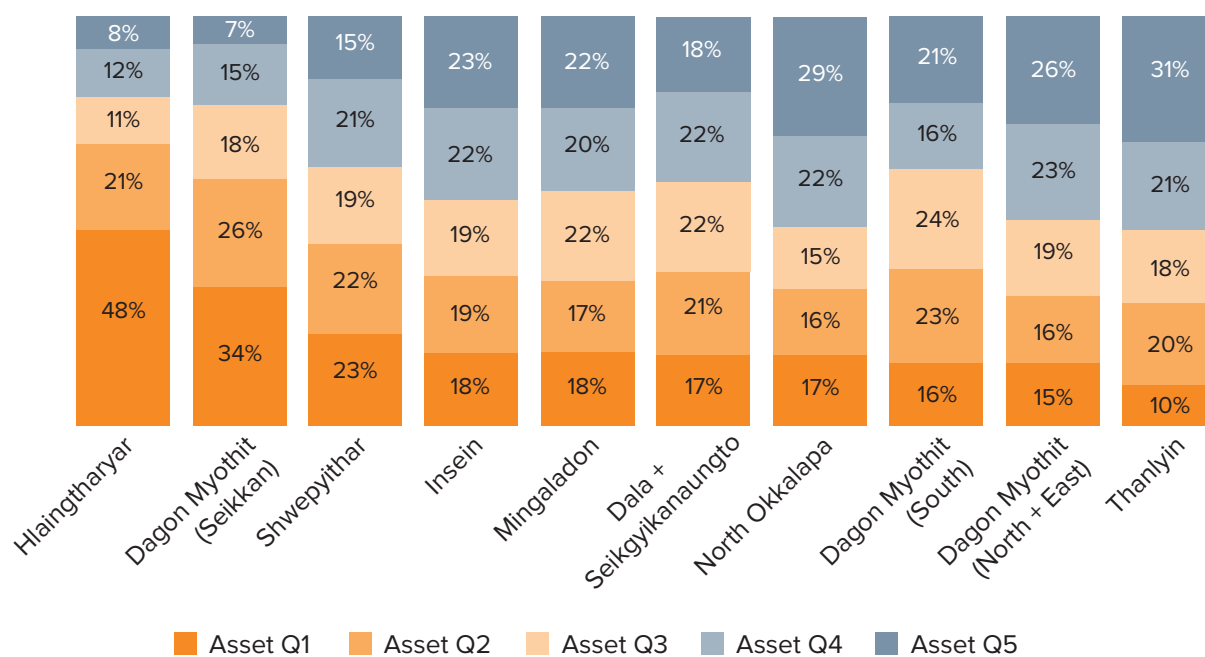


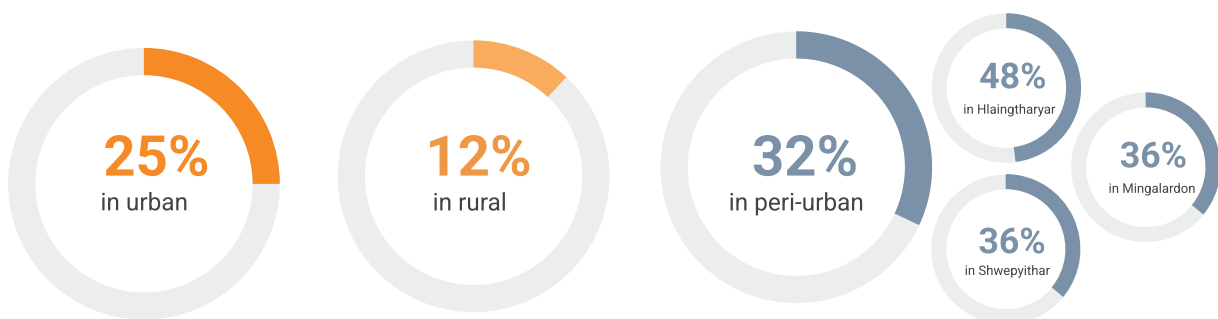
Photo: Myanmar people riding the Yangon Circular Railway, passing through the city.

Migration and Urban Poverty



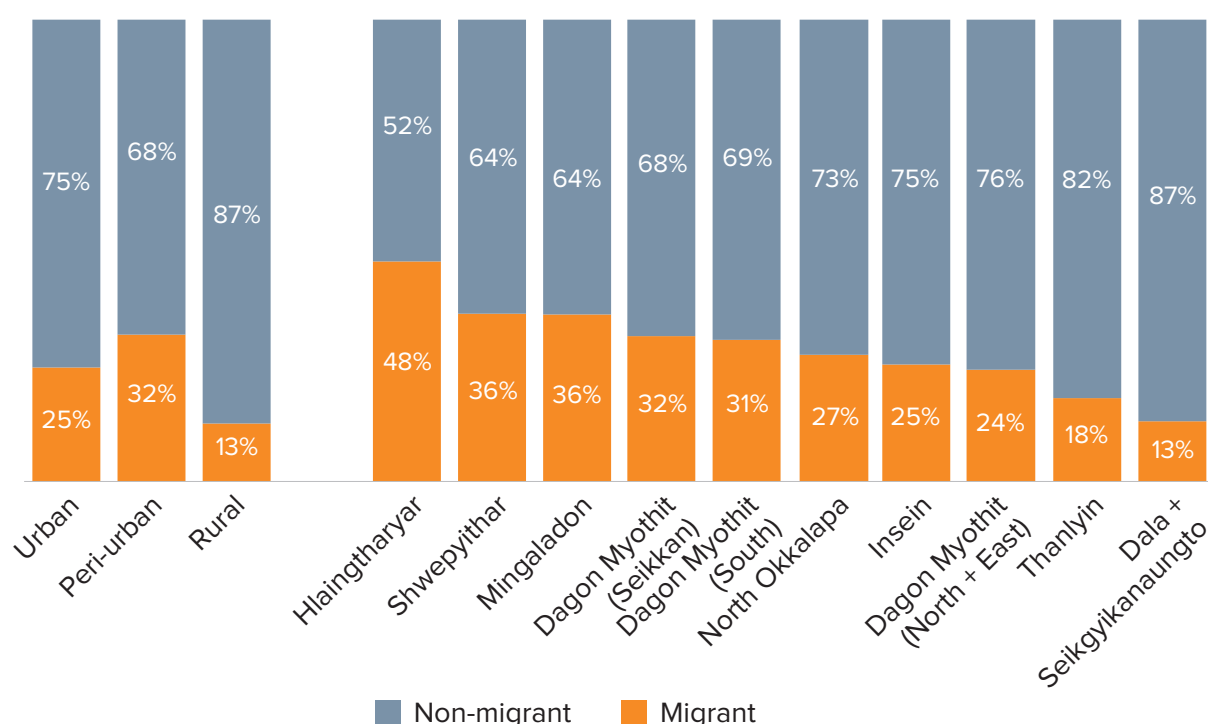
Photo: A group of women seated along a Yangon street, engaging in conversation.

Percentage of migrant households composed of :



According to the Yangon Survey, migrant households constitute a substantial portion of Yangon's population, accounting for 26% of all households. Most of these households originate from the Ayeyarwady region (40%), followed by Bago (14%), Mandalay (14%), and Magway (10%).

The majority of migrant households are concentrated in peri-urban areas (32% versus 25% in urban and 12% in rural), where labor demand is high, and the cost of living is relatively lower compared to urban townships. Garment and apparel factories, food and beverage firms, and construction sites are predominantly located

Figure 7: Proportion of migrant households in Yangon

in peri-urban townships, making these areas attractive to migrants seeking employment. Migrant households represent 48% of the population in Hlaingtharyar, with Shwepyithar and Mingaladon having 36% each. The Hlaingtharyar industrial zone, in particular, has become a hub for employment opportunities, drawing rural youth from nearby regions such as Ayeyarwady and Bago. Survey data show that 45% of respondents in peri-urban areas originated from Ayeyarwady, with 13% each from Bago, Magway, and Mandalay.

Findings from qualitative interviews suggest that the COVID-19 crisis and the subsequent events of 2021 initially led to a decline in the migrant workforce in peri-urban townships, but numbers have since rebounded following the reopening of factories. The introduction of conscription laws has further driven many

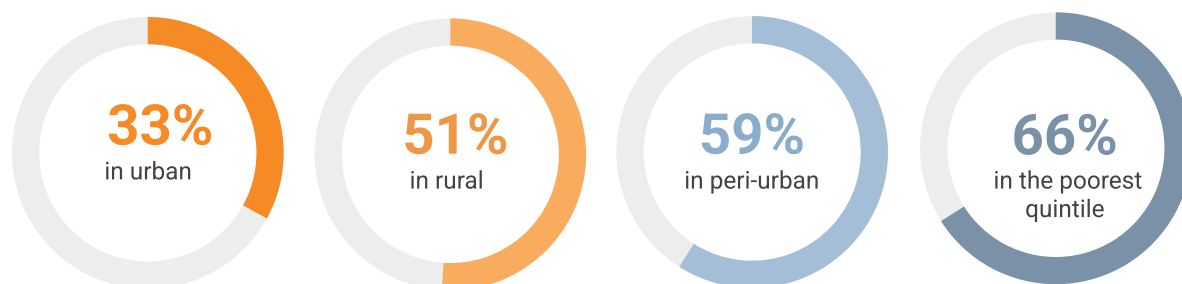
young people from rural areas to temporarily evade the threat of conscription in their home villages. However, not all of them can secure employment due to stringent documentation requirements, which are particularly challenging for individuals from Sagaing, Magway, and Rakhine, where administrative bodies are non-functional, preventing the renewal of national ID cards. Many firms and factories are reluctant to hire individuals from these regions, branding them conflict-induced migrants. Further complicating matters, ward administrators in peri-urban areas sometimes exert pressure on migrants. Survey findings reveal that 31% of conflict-induced migrants could not secure jobs at their new locations.¹⁴ Compounding these challenges, the cost of living in peri-urban areas is higher than in rural areas, with rising food prices and transportation costs forcing many migrants to live in precarious conditions.

¹⁴ UNDP (2023) Migration in Myanmar: Moving to Cope

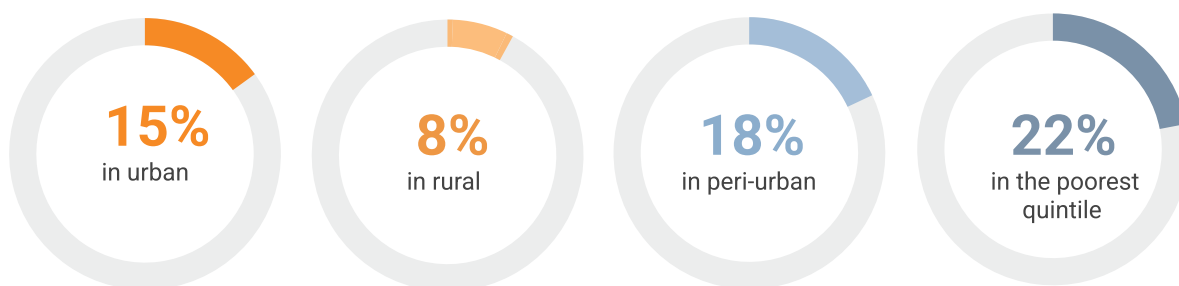
Job market and Household Business

Photo: A train operating on the Yangon railway road.

Rely on paid employment

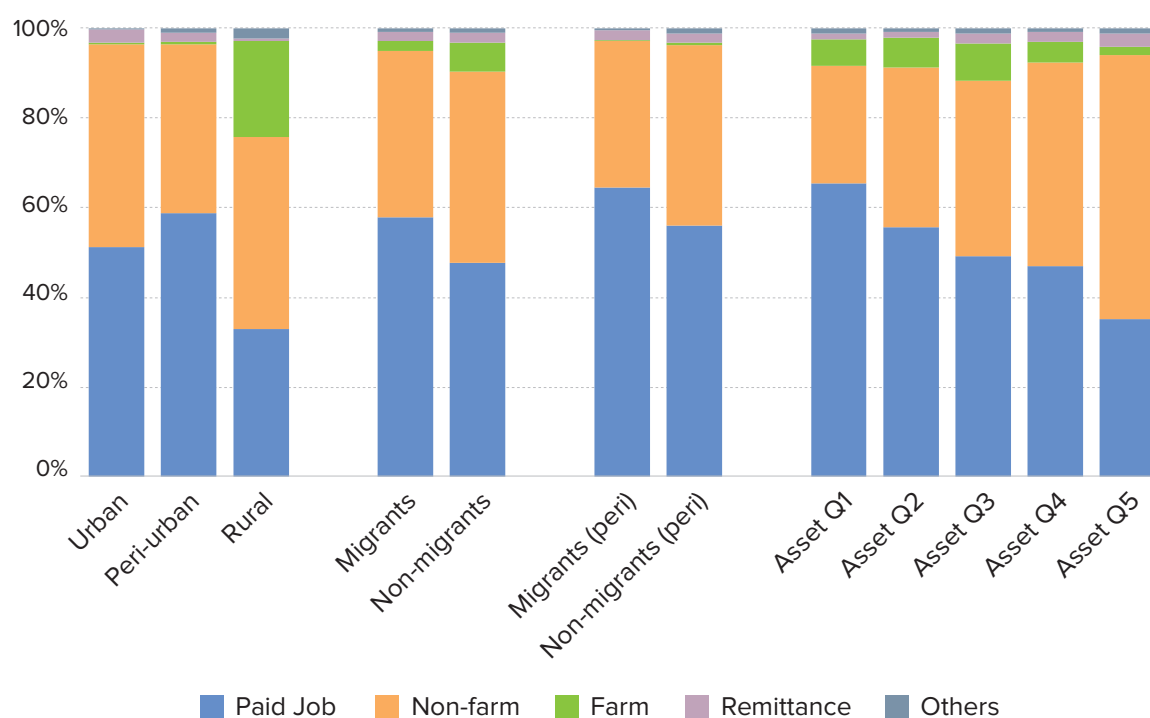
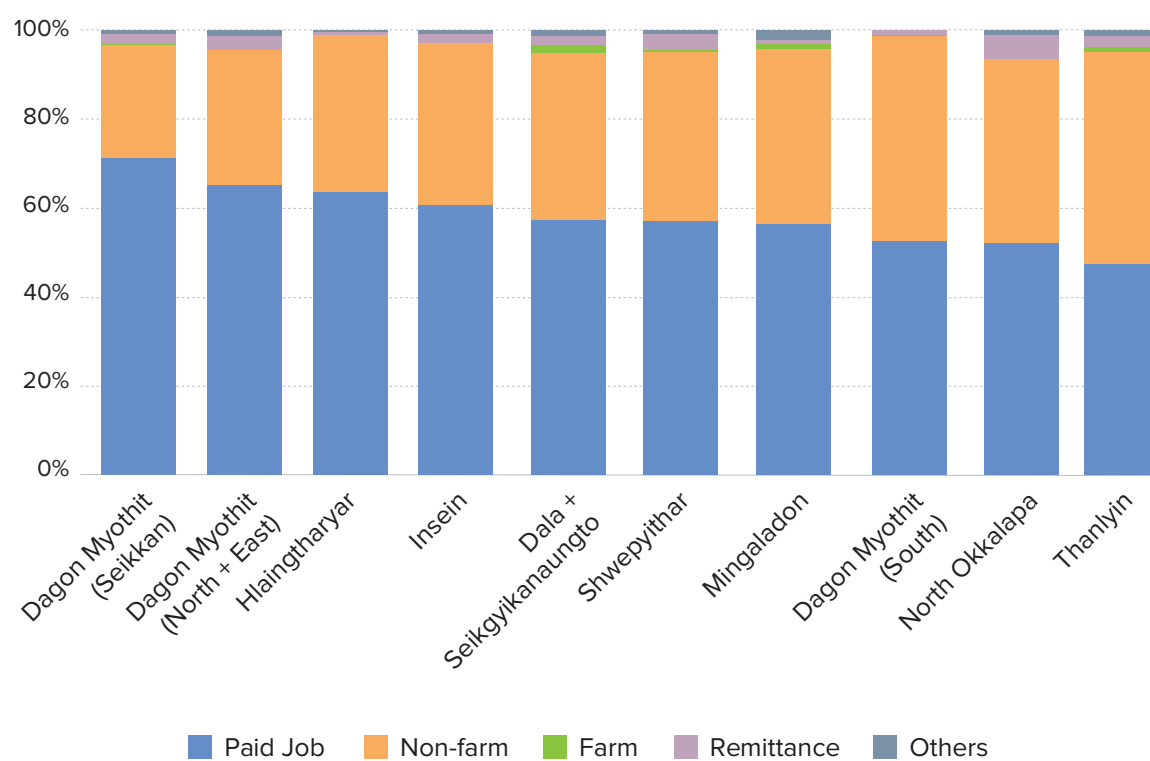


Unemployed individuals actively seeking job



Income sources are influenced by residence type, migration status, and asset wealth. Households in urban and peri-urban areas primarily rely on income from paid employment (51% and 59%, respectively), while rural households demonstrate a higher reliance on household non-farm income (43%) and a

notable dependency on agricultural activities (22%). Migrants are more likely to depend on paid jobs as their main income source (58%) compared to non-migrants (48%). Within peri-urban populations, migrants exhibit an even greater reliance on paid jobs (64%) compared to non-migrants (56%). Analysis across asset

Figure 8: Primary sources of household income

Figure 9: Primary sources of household income, in peri-urban Yangon


quintiles reveals that households in the lowest quintile (Q1) are most reliant on paid jobs (66%), while the richest quintile (Q5) predominantly depends on household non-farm income (59%) and has the lowest reliance on paid employment (35%).

Among peri-urban townships, Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) leads with 72% of households relying on paid employment, followed by Dagon Myothit (North and East) at 65% and Hlaingtharyar at 64%. This reliance on paid jobs is largely attributed to the concentration of migrant households in peri-urban areas, where industrial zones offer some employment opportunities. Consequently, individuals are drawn to these regions in search of work, reinforcing the dependence on paid employment as the primary source of income for households in these communities.

While the primary motivation for migration is often the pursuit of better employment opportunities, some migrants remain unemployed in their new locations, as indicated by the survey.¹⁵ This unmet expectation is reflected in the percentage of individuals "actively looking for a job," referring to those who are not currently employed but are actively seeking work.

In peri-urban areas, 18% of individuals are actively seeking employment, compared to 15% in rural and 8% in urban areas. Men reported significantly higher job-seeking rates at 30% compared to 11% among women. Migrants display a slightly elevated job-seeking rate of 17% compared to 14% for non-migrants. This trend is more pronounced in peri-urban areas, where 24% of migrants are actively seeking work, compared to 16% of non-migrants. The need for employment is particularly pressing among individuals in the poorest quintile, with 22% actively seeking jobs, compared to only 9% in the wealthiest quintile. Notably, individuals in

the poorest quintile within peri-urban areas have a job-seeking rate of 22.6%, underscoring both socio-economic and geographic disparities in employment needs.

This disparity can be attributed to several factors, including information gaps and limited job opportunities in new locations. Qualitative interviews reveal that most residents in peri-urban areas are employed in factories within industrial zones. However, many migrants face significant challenges in securing employment. A primary barrier is the inability to provide necessary personal documentation—an issue particularly acute for migrants from conflict-affected regions such as Sagaing, Magway, and Rakhine. Some factories discriminate against these individuals during the hiring process, often refusing to employ them due to concerns about challenges with authorities and potential links with opposition forces.

Additionally, securing a job can be difficult for those without connections to factory employees. Supervisors in these factories hold considerable influence over hiring decisions, and new applicants often rely on these connections to find employment. In some cases, new workers are required to pay their first month's salary to the person who facilitated their job placement. Factories often prefer hiring workers aged 18 to 25, making it challenging for older individuals to secure employment. Previously, some workers resorted to using national IDs of others to gain employment, but factories have since tightened hiring practices, likely due to pressure from the de facto authorities.

To enhance their employment prospects, survey respondents expressed a need for various forms of support. Diversified skills training emerged as the most sought-after assistance, with 64% of respondents indicating this need.

¹⁵ UNDP (2023) Migration in Myanmar: Moving to Cope

Figure 10: Unemployed population actively seeking employment

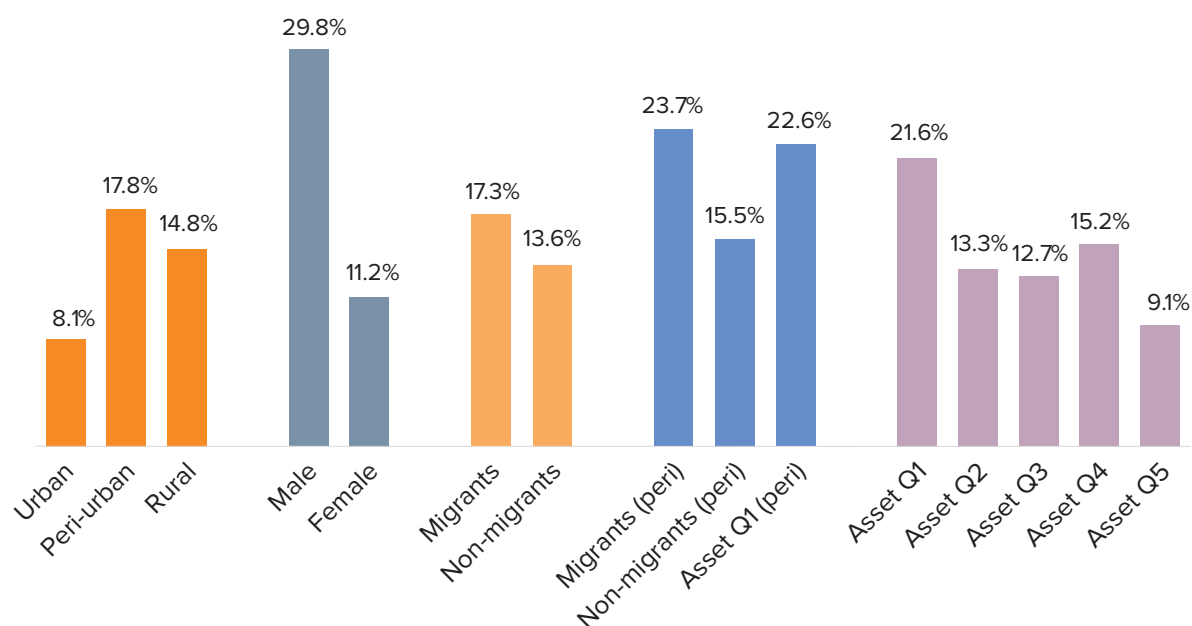
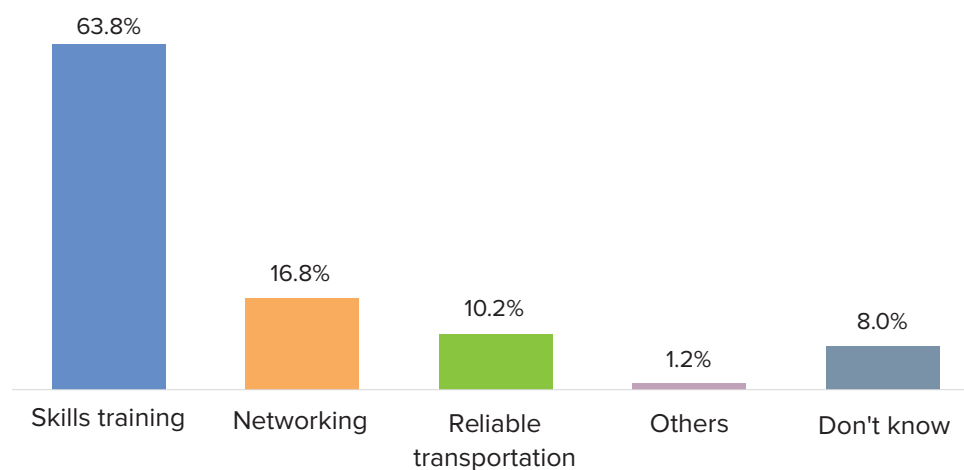


Figure 11: Types of support requested by respondents



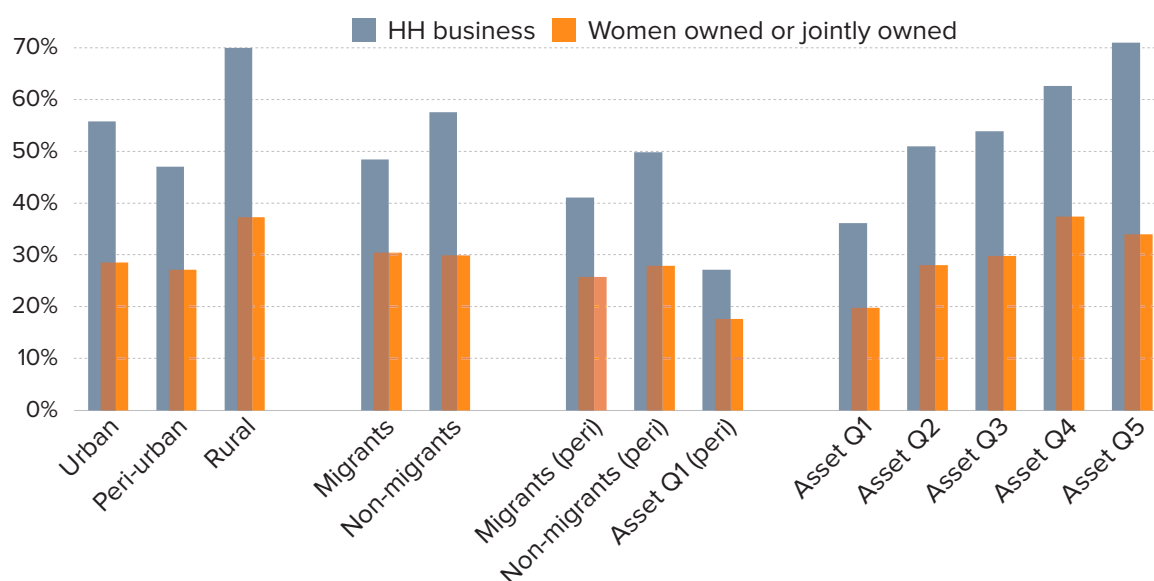
This demand is underscored by the survey of migrants¹⁶, which reveals that 59% of internal migrants are now working in sectors different from those they worked in prior to their move. This shift highlights the need for diversified skills development to better align with the opportunities available in their new environments. Additionally, 17% of respondents expressed a need for networking opportunities to facilitate job connections and foster community integration. Furthermore, 10% emphasized the importance of reliable transportation, particularly in peri-urban areas where security concerns are more pronounced, especially for young people. These concerns are more acute in townships such as Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) and Hlaingtharyar.

Household-owned businesses are the second most common source of income. Rural households rely more heavily on these businesses (70%) compared to urban (56%) and peri-urban (47%) households. Notably, non-migrant households are more likely to

depend on household businesses (58%) than their migrant counterparts (48%). Furthermore, households in the wealthier quintiles are more likely to own businesses than those in the poorer quintiles, indicating a correlation between wealth and entrepreneurial activity. Overall, 55% of household businesses are owned by women or jointly owned with women, reflecting the significant role of women entrepreneurship in these communities. This highlights the importance of supporting women in business to drive community development.

However, significant challenges persist. Access to loans remains a critical barrier, as many individuals struggle to secure financing. Informal loans often come with exorbitant interest rates, rendering them unsustainable, while formal loan processes are lengthy and cumbersome. A striking 95% of respondents emphasized that access to capital is essential for their businesses, underscoring the urgent need for financial support.

Figure 12: Household owned businesses: women-owned or jointly owned

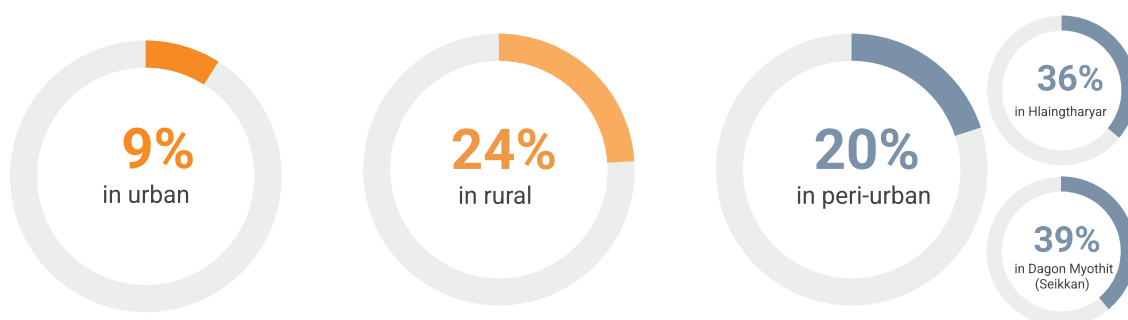


¹⁶ Ibid.

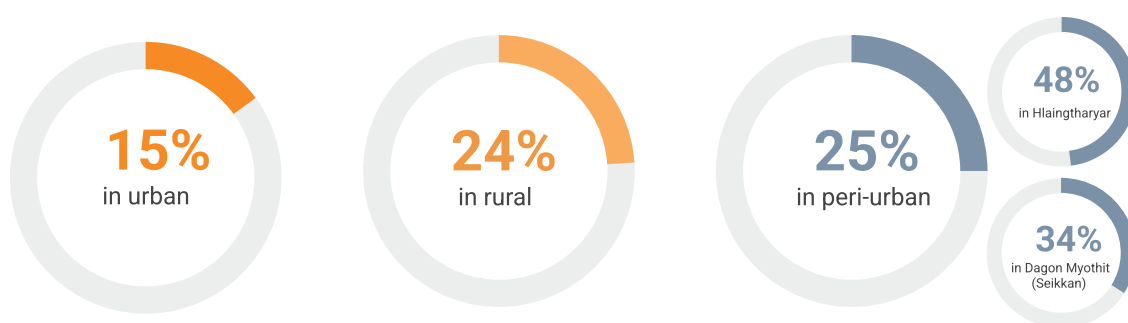
Healthcare Cost Burden

Photo: A healthcare worker measuring the blood pressure of an elderly woman.

⊕ Facing difficulties in obtaining reproductive and women's health services



🏠 Households selling assets to bear healthcare cost burden



The healthcare landscape in Yangon highlights significant health-related challenges for households. 45% of respondents reported that at least one household member experienced a medical issue requiring a doctor's attention in the preceding

30 days. There are minimal differences in the prevalence of health issues across different areas: 48% in peri-urban areas, 41% in urban areas, and 46% in rural areas. Importantly, there is no significant difference in the health issues reported between migrants and non-migrants,

Figure 13: Respondents reporting household members with medical issue requiring doctor's attention in the past 30 days

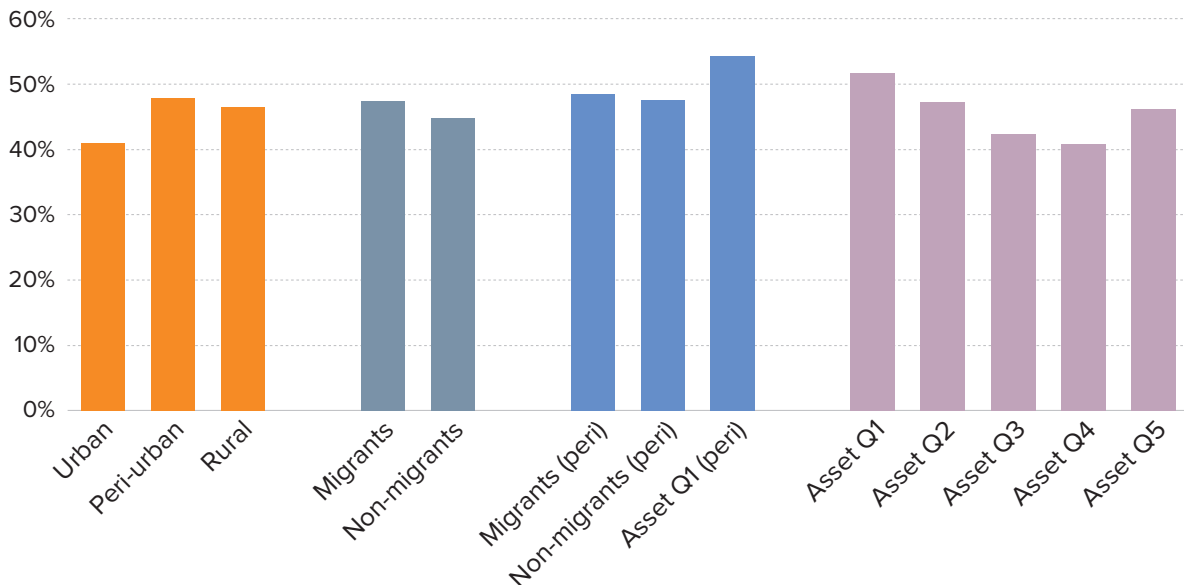
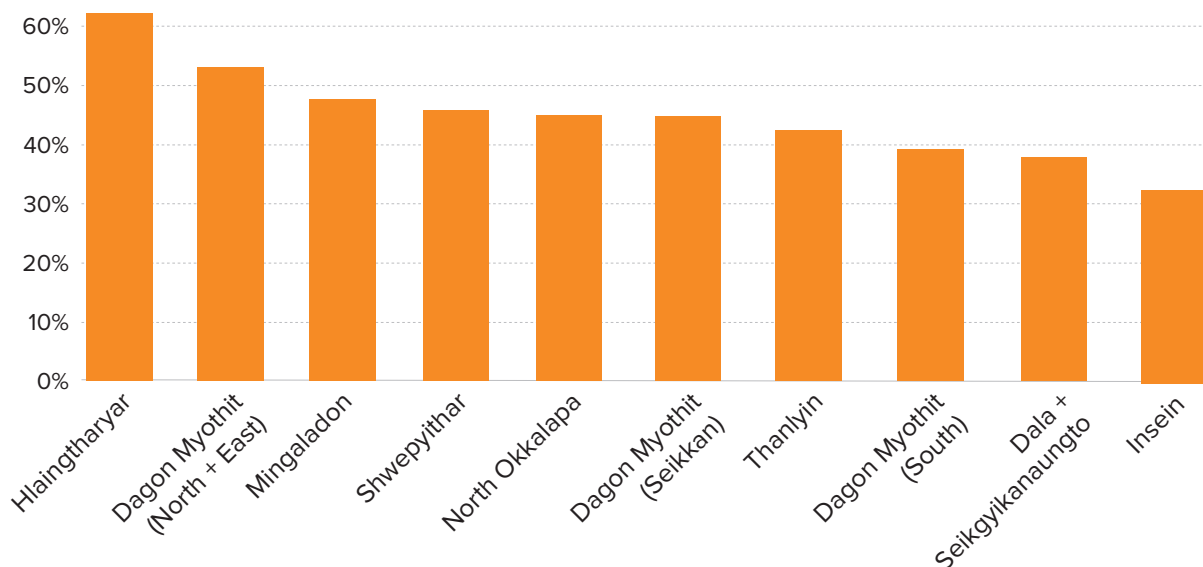


Figure 14: Respondents reporting household members with medical issue requiring doctor's attention in the past 30 days, in peri-urban Yangon



suggesting that the health issues faced are more broadly linked to systemic healthcare gaps rather than migration status.

Households in the poorest quintile reported the highest incidence of medical issues, at 51%, compared to other quintiles. This trend is even more pronounced in peri-urban areas, where the poorest quintile reporting 54%. Specific

peri-urban townships exhibit particularly high figures, with 62% of respondents in Hlaingtharyar and 53% in Dagon Myothit (North & East) reporting recent medical issues.

Interviews with respondents from peri-urban areas suggest that common health concerns among individuals in poor households include diabetes, diarrhea, and hypertension. These

issues are often worsened by the unaffordability of necessary medications and the tendency to consume whatever food is available, even if it is unsuitable for their health conditions.

These health challenges are compounded by concerns about the quality of public healthcare services. Only 20% of those needing healthcare utilized public facilities, with this percentage slightly higher among poor households at 26%. In contrast, a substantial 82% of respondents reported using private healthcare services, although this figure is slightly lower for households in the poorest quintile, at 76%. This trend reflects a lack of confidence in the quality of public healthcare, which not only drives individuals to seek more expensive private options but also contributes to the prevalence of self-medication. Insights from qualitative interviews confirm that many individuals perceive the service at public hospitals as very poor. 8% of households with members experiencing medical issues that required a doctor's attention resorted to self-medication, where the rate rises to 12% for those in the poorest quintile. Faced with limited access to reliable healthcare, many individuals—particularly in lower-income brackets—practice

self-medication, exacerbating health risks and financial burdens, leading to inappropriate treatments and misdiagnoses. Respondents from qualitative interviews confirmed that self-medication is a common practice among poorer individuals, who often resort to it unless it is absolutely necessary to visit a clinic or hospital.

Access to reproductive and women's health services remains a significant challenge, with 18% of survey respondents indicating that people in their neighborhood face difficulties obtaining these services. The issue is more pronounced in peri-urban areas, where 20% report access problems, and even more severe in rural areas, rising to 24%. Among households in the poorest quintile, 29% reported difficulties accessing reproductive health services, and this figure increases to 33% for those in the lowest quintile within peri-urban areas. Migrant households also face slightly higher barriers (20%) compared to non-migrants (17%), with the disparity particularly evident in peri-urban locations, where 22% of migrants and 20% of non-migrants report access issues. Certain townships exhibit alarmingly high rates of access difficulties, notably Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) at 39% and Hlaingtharyar at 36%.

Figure 15: Utilization of healthcare services

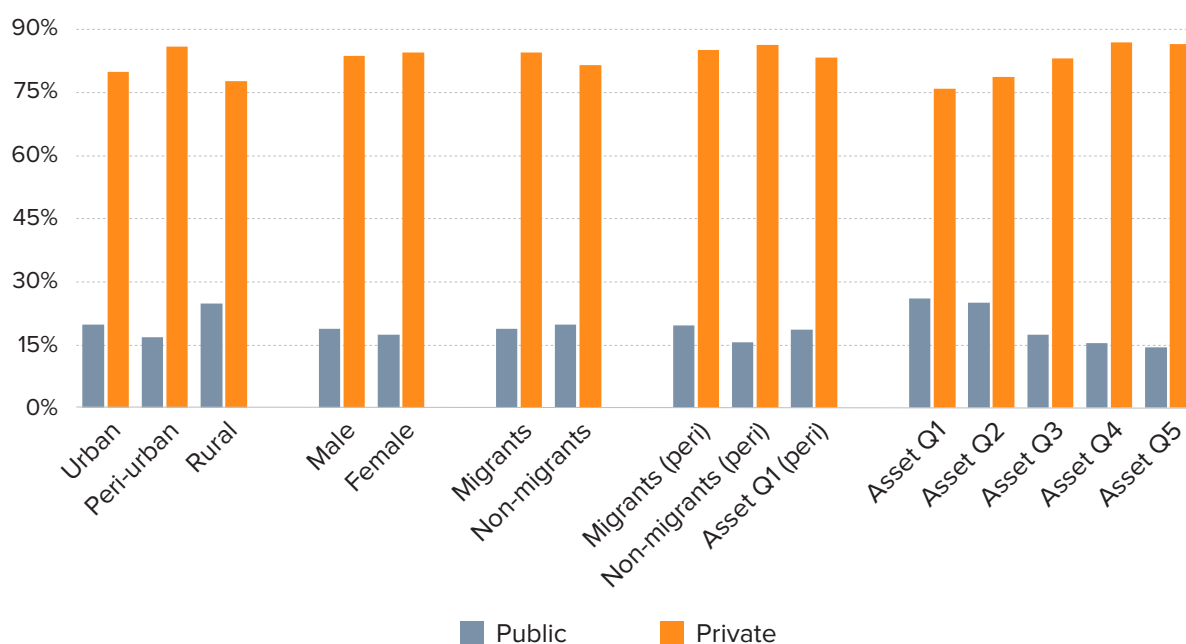
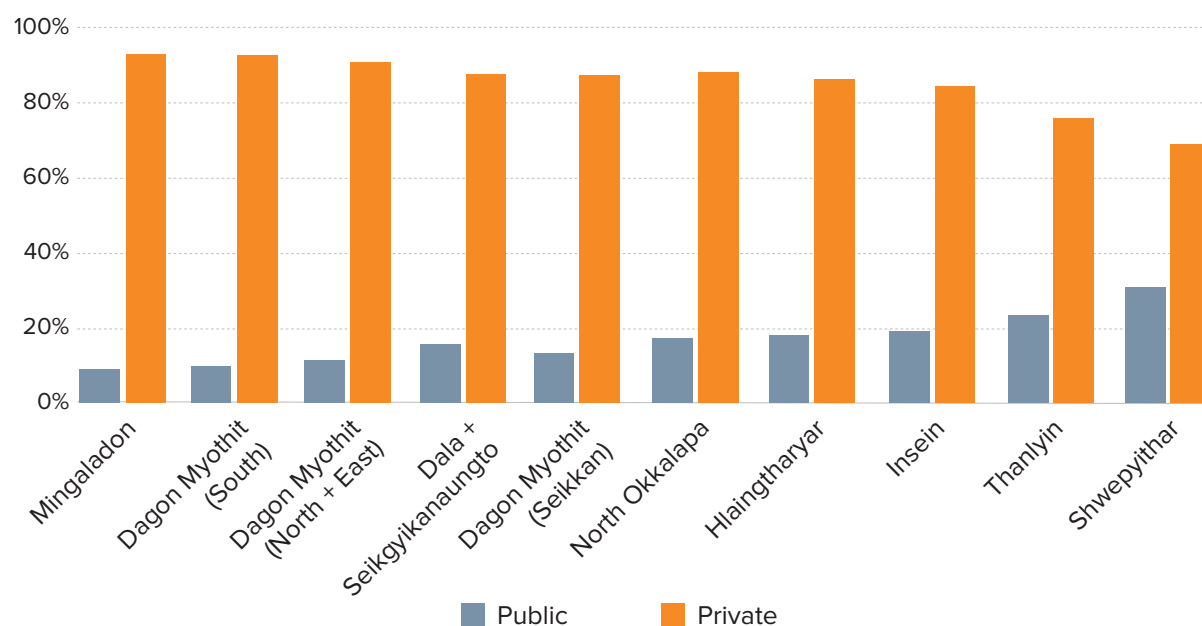


Figure 16: Utilization of healthcare services, in peri-urban Yangon

This limited access is likely to drive individuals toward self-medication, increasing health risks and negatively affecting the overall well-being of women and girls, especially in vulnerable populations.

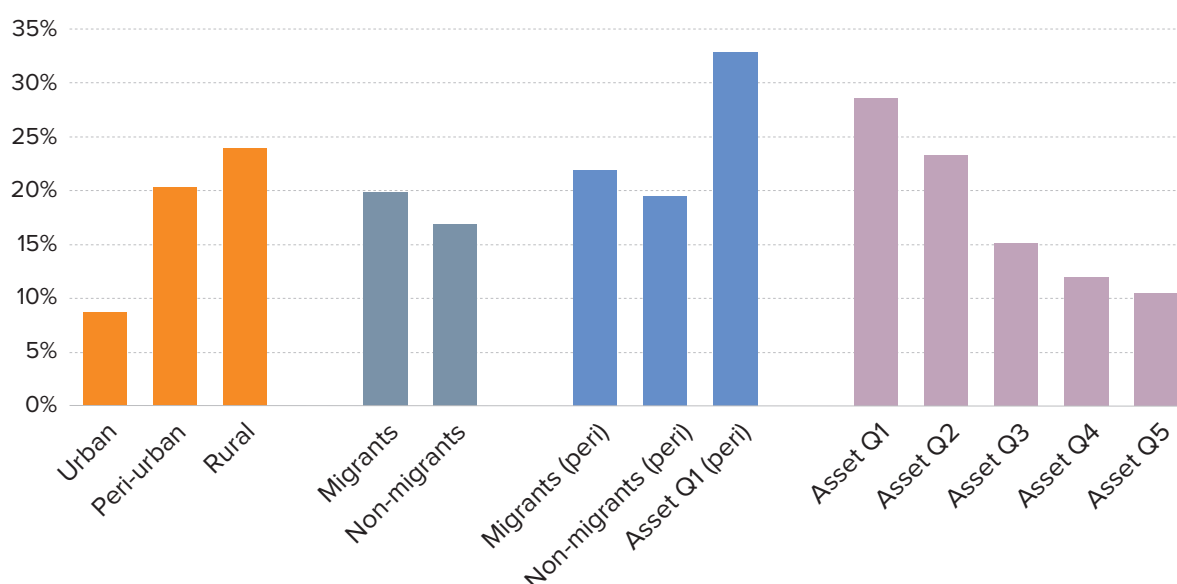
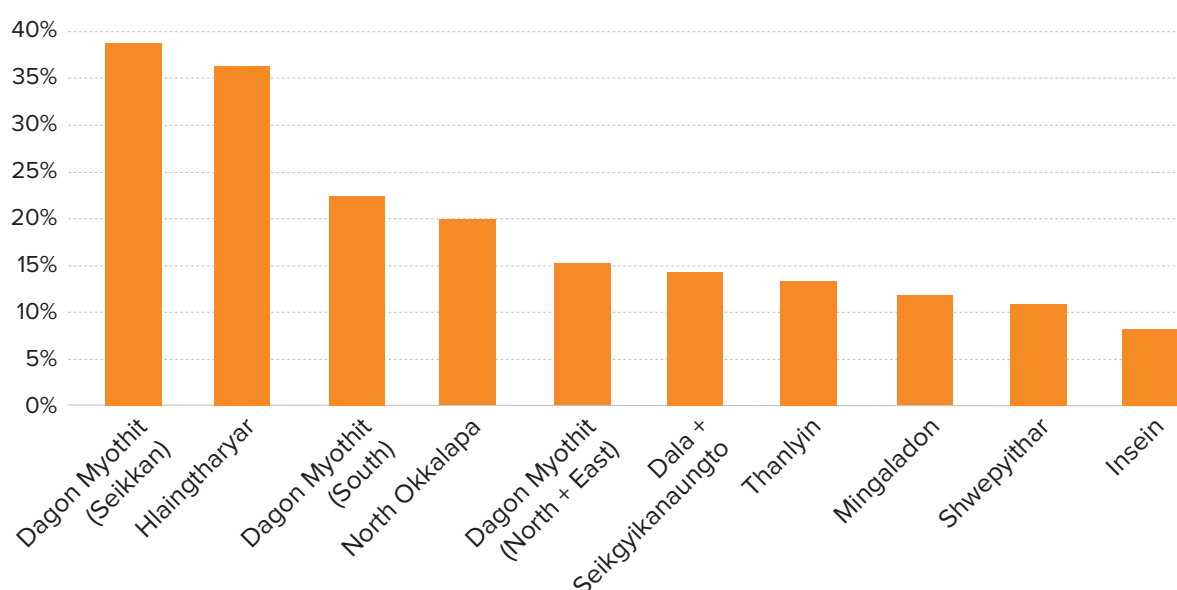
Qualitative interviews indicate that in Hlaingtharyar, “free clinics” supported by international organizations are beneficial to the community, but they are not widely promoted due to sensitivity concerns. As a result, the services are limited only to those who are aware of them. Additionally, some private clinics associated with social security schemes provide benefits to workers, but these services are exclusive to this group and not available to the broader population. Therefore, it is recommended that development partners continue to support and expand these free clinics to improve their accessibility within the community.

According to the People’s Pulse Survey 2023, households in Yangon allocate 16.4% of their total expenditure to healthcare costs.¹⁷ However, this allocation poses a significant financial strain,

particularly for poor households. The financial burden of healthcare expenses is evident, with 23% of households borrowing money to cover medical costs. This figure increases to 27% in peri-urban areas and rises to 44% among households in the poorest quintile, with 50% of households in the poorest quintile specifically in peri-urban areas resorting to borrowing. In Hlaingtharyar, 45% of households reported borrowing money for healthcare, while 42% in Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) faced similar challenges.

Additionally, 21% of households resorted to selling assets to manage healthcare costs, with this number rising to 25% in peri-urban areas, 35% among households in the poorest quintile, and 42% for households in the poorest quintile specifically in peri-urban areas. This trend aligns with the finding that a relatively higher proportion of households in Hlaingtharyar (48%) and Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) (34%) belong to the poorest quintile of the asset index, underscoring the significant impact of economic status on healthcare access and the financial burdens faced by these households.

¹⁷ UNDP (2024) Poverty and the Household Economy of Myanmar: A Disappearing Middle Class

Figure 17: Barriers to accessing reproductive and women's health services**Figure 18:** Barriers to accessing reproductive and women's health services, in peri-urban Yangon

Despite the presence of online healthcare platforms and the widespread use of the internet in urban Yangon, the adoption of online health consultations remains low, with only 7% of households utilizing this service and just 4% among poor households. Promoting the use of online healthcare platforms is essential, as increasing access to telehealth services could significantly reduce the financial burden on households and improve overall access to healthcare. By encouraging more individuals

to utilize these platforms, healthcare delivery could be enhanced, particularly for those in underserved communities, providing a more affordable and convenient alternative to traditional in-person consultations. This shift not only has the potential to alleviate some of the financial strain associated with healthcare costs but also ensures that more people receive timely medical attention, reducing the prevalence of self-medication.

Figure 19: Household borrowing or sold assets for health treatment and services in the past 12 months

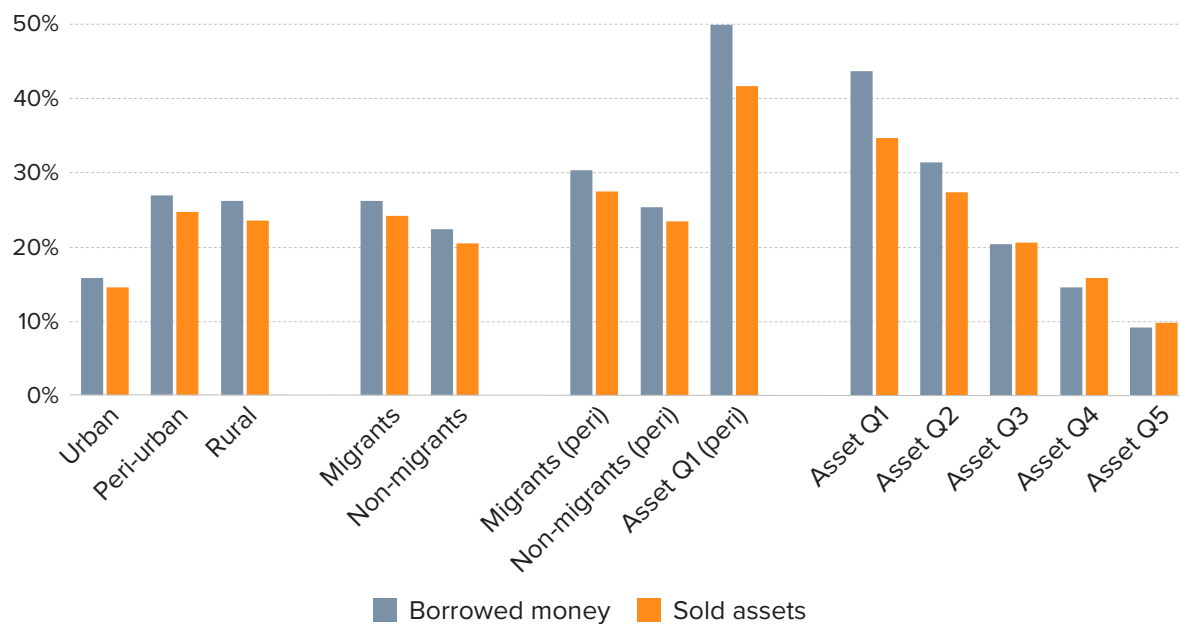
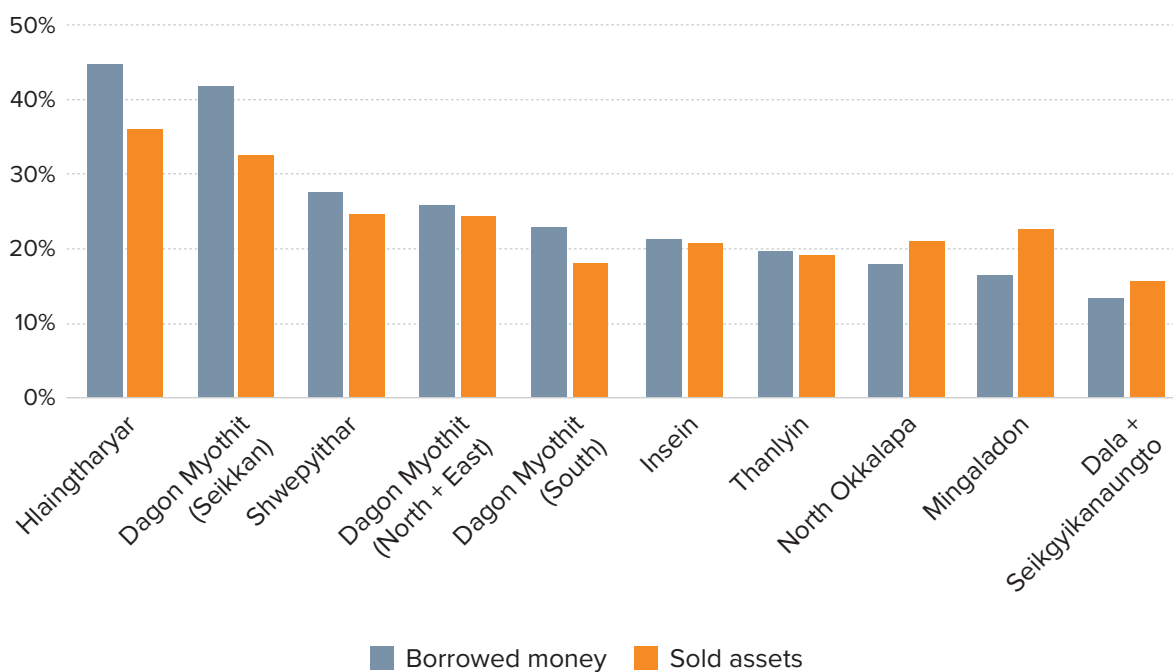


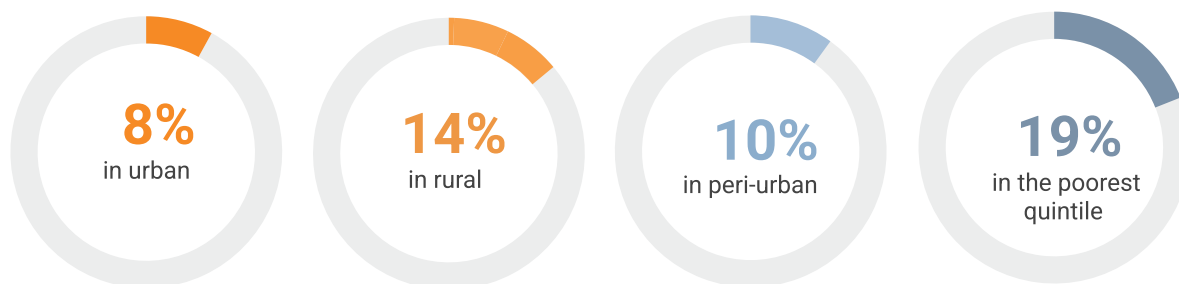
Figure 20: Household borrowing or sold assets for health treatment and services in the past 12 months, in peri-urban Yangon



Education Disincentive

Photo: A schoolgirl in uniform looking out from a classroom window in Myanmar.

Children not enrolled in school



Several factors pose barriers to children's enrollment in school, particularly among the poorest households. Non-enrollment rates are highest in rural areas, at 14%, followed by 10% in peri-urban areas. In peri-urban areas, 10% of children are not enrolled, but this figure escalates to 17% among poor households. Notably, children in the lowest asset quintile face the greatest obstacles, with 19% not

attending school. A major contributing factor is the necessity for children to work, as 37% of households reported that their children contribute to the family income, often at the expense of their education. Many children are seen collecting plastic bottles and waste to sell, while begging for money is also prevalent among those not attending school. For instance, a 7-year-old girl shared that she collects plastic

bottles alongside her mother because they cannot afford enough food on her mother's income alone.

Additionally, 18% of households indicated they cannot afford tuition fees and school supplies, while 16% cited safety concerns as reasons for non-enrollment. Even in public schools, there are additional costs for clothing, snacks, books,

and materials, along with occasional donations requested by the school. Discrimination against students from poor households is also evident, with some schools refusing to accept children from migrant households. Disturbingly, there has been a case of a student attempting suicide due to the discrimination faced within the school. Moreover, some teachers pressure students to attend their private tuition sessions

Figure 21: Households with children not attending school

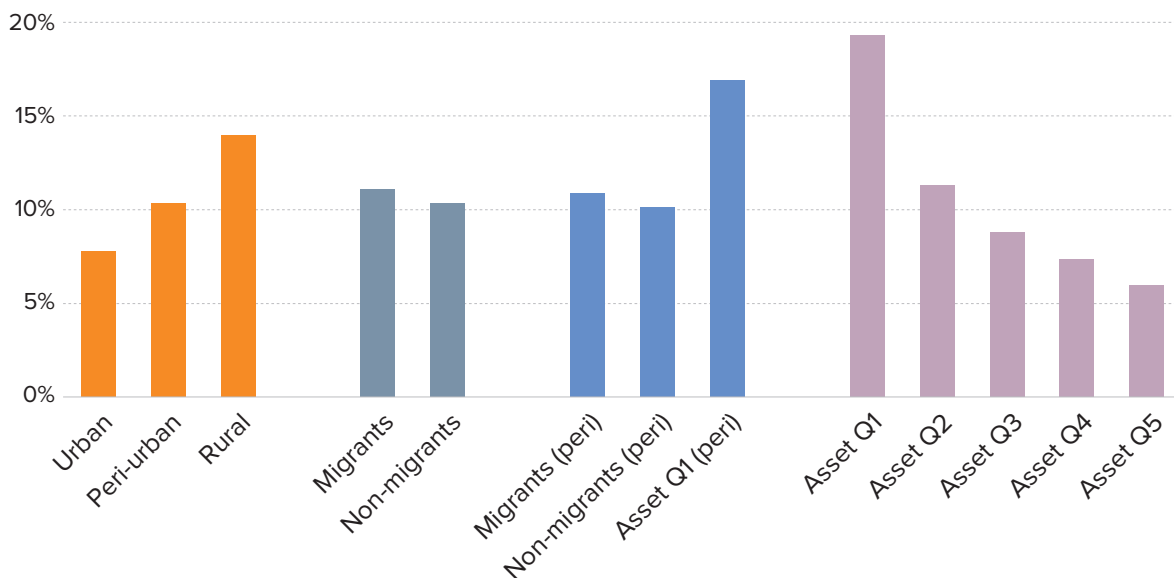
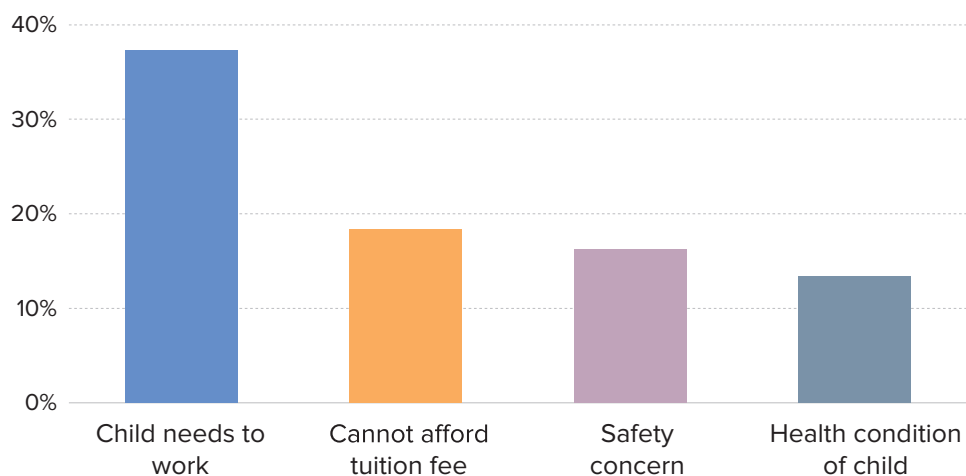


Figure 22: Reasons for children not attending school



In certain schools, students are required to pay for security forces under the pretext of ensuring safety, which adds another financial burden on households.

Health issues further complicate attendance, with 14% of households noting that their children's health problems hinder their ability to attend school. These interconnected factors not only restrict educational opportunities but also perpetuate cycles of poverty, underscoring the urgent need for targeted interventions to support both children's education and health, particularly for those in the poorest quintile.

Among students who have completed high school, 35% do not plan to pursue university education for various reasons. A significant 49% of these cited the need to work immediately to support their household, while 17% expressed safety concerns, which are exacerbated by the conscription law of the State Administration Council (SAC), creating anxiety about potential military service. Financial barriers also play a role, with 7% unable to afford tuition fees and related costs. Additionally, 17% plan to seek employment abroad, reflecting a trend of out-migration in search of better opportunities. This is supported by findings from the FGD discussion, where many young people expressed that migrating abroad is the only viable option for improving their lives.

Among those who abandon plans for university, there is a strong willingness to migrate, with language courses being the most in-demand training. This focus on language training—particularly in English, Thai, and Chinese—is driven by the desire to work abroad as unskilled labor, as there is a perception that non-graduates struggle to secure skilled labor positions in foreign countries. Furthermore, another 17% of students simply lack interest in further education, expressing a desire to explore vocational training.

Survey data indicates that the utilization of vocational training remains low, with only 17% of households in urban areas and 18% in peri-urban areas engaging in such programs. Participants primarily focus on language, accounting, and IT courses. This underscores the importance of supporting vocational training programs for young people, as they seek practical skills and immediate employment opportunities. By tailoring vocational training to meet the specific skills required by employers, young people can be equipped with the practical abilities necessary for employment. Programs that focus on in-demand fields not only enhance employability but also address skill gaps in the workforce.

“Among students who have completed high school, 35% do not plan to pursue university education for various reasons. A significant 49% cited the need to work immediately to support their families, while 17% expressed safety concerns.”

Figure 23: Reasons for high school graduates not pursuing university

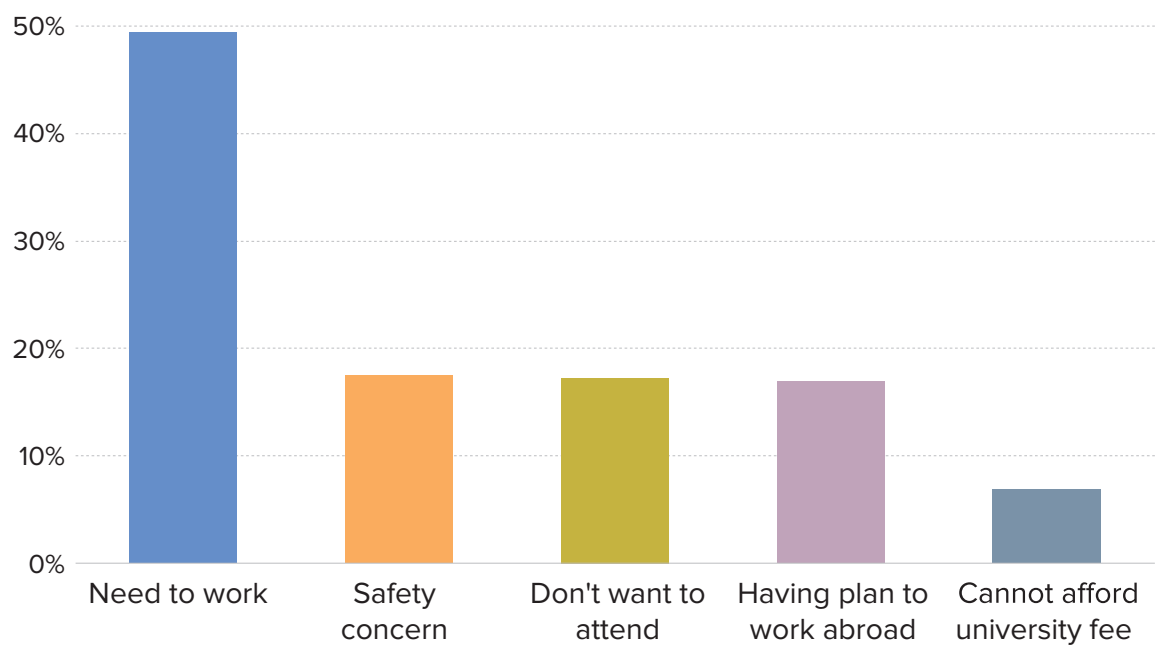
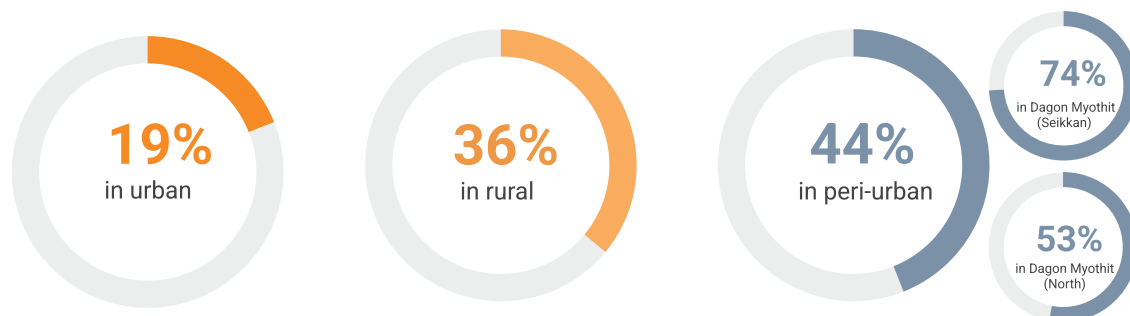


Photo: Primary school students crossing a suspension footbridge.

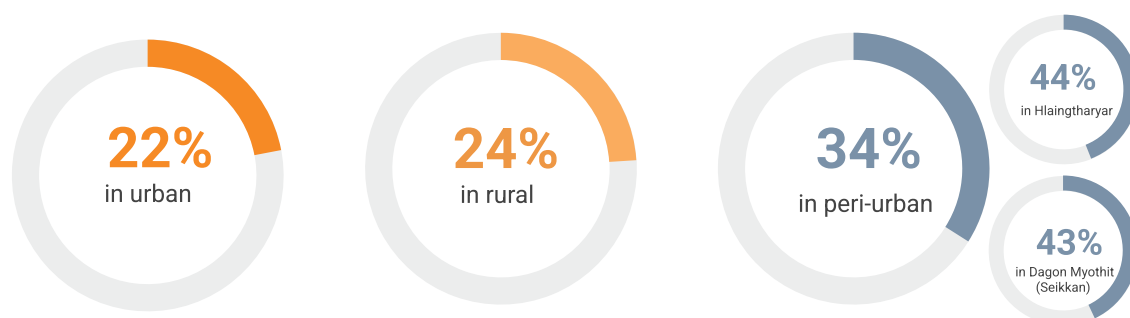
Security Concerns

Photo: A major road in downtown Yangon, Myanmar.

! Feeling "not safe at all" when walking alone at night



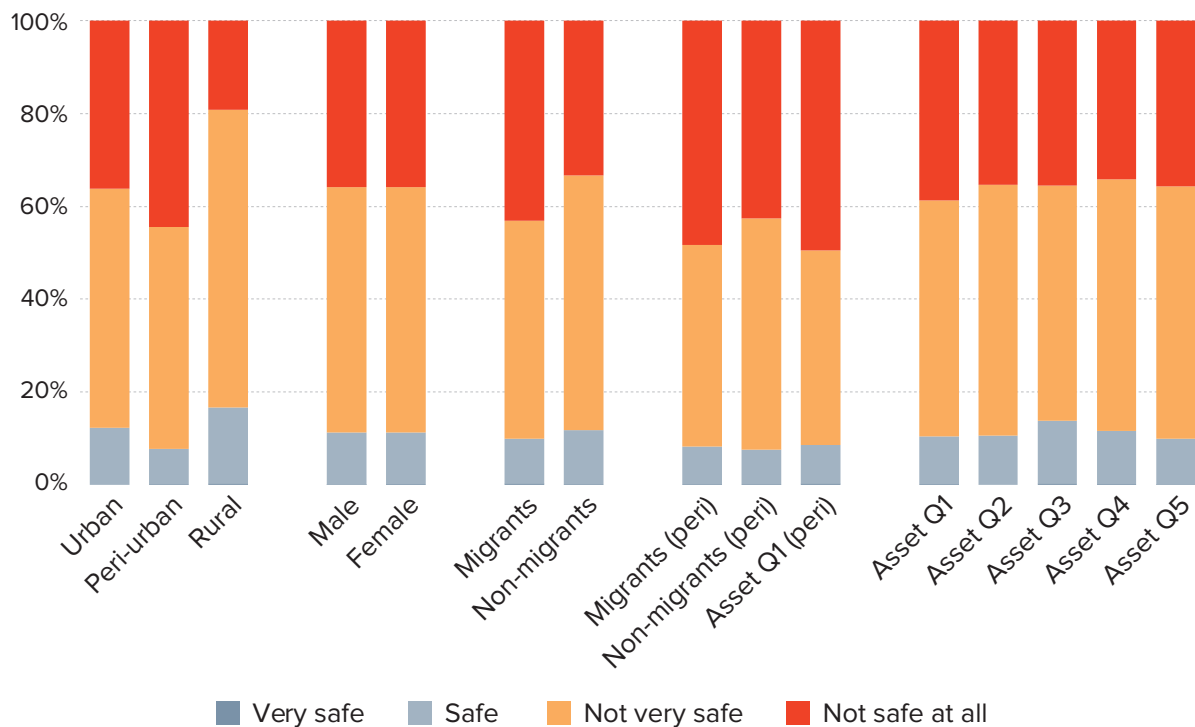
🔊 Violence against women



The perception of personal safety varies across different areas. Security concerns in peri-urban regions are concerning, with 44% of respondents feeling "not safe at all" when walking alone at night, compared to 36% in urban areas and 19% in rural areas. Migrants

are especially vulnerable, with 48% reporting feelings of insecurity. Among the poorest quintile in peri-urban areas, 50% expressed feeling unsafe. However, no significant association was found between gender and feelings of safety or between asset quintiles.

Figure 24: Perception of personal safety at night



Specific peri-urban townships exhibit particularly concerning safety concerns: 74% of respondents in Dagon Myothit (Seikkan), 53% in Dagon Myothit (North), and 52% in Hlaingtharyar, Mingalardon, North Okkalapa, and Dagon Myothit (East) reported feeling unsafe. These concerns prompt individuals to avoid certain areas or limit their working hours, which negatively affects their income and economic stability.

Qualitative interviews further revealed that migrants fear random checks by security forces, with some reporting being apprehended without cause. Migrants from Sagaing, Magway, and Rakhine face additional challenges, as non-functional government offices in their home regions prevent them from renewing national ID cards. This increases their risk of arrest and extortion. In areas like Dagon Myothit (Seikkan), residents often avoid going out after 7:00 PM, and migrant households are required to register guests every two weeks, incurring additional

fees. The prevalence of drug-related crimes also contributes to a general atmosphere of fear in peri-urban areas.

Violence against women remains a significant concern, with 33% of respondents across Yangon witnessing such incidents in their neighborhoods. The prevalence is significantly higher in peri-urban areas (34%) compared to urban (24%) and rural (22%) settings. Migrants are likely to report higher incidences of violence compared to non-migrants, 32% vs 26%. Areas with greater security concerns report even higher rates of gender-based violence, with 41% of respondents acknowledging such incidents compared to 21% in areas without notable safety issues. Hlaingtharyar (44%) and Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) (43%) stand out with particularly high reports of gender-based violence.

Awareness of support services for Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is low, with only 12% of respondents aware of such services in their

Figure 25: Perception of personal safety at night, in per-urban townships

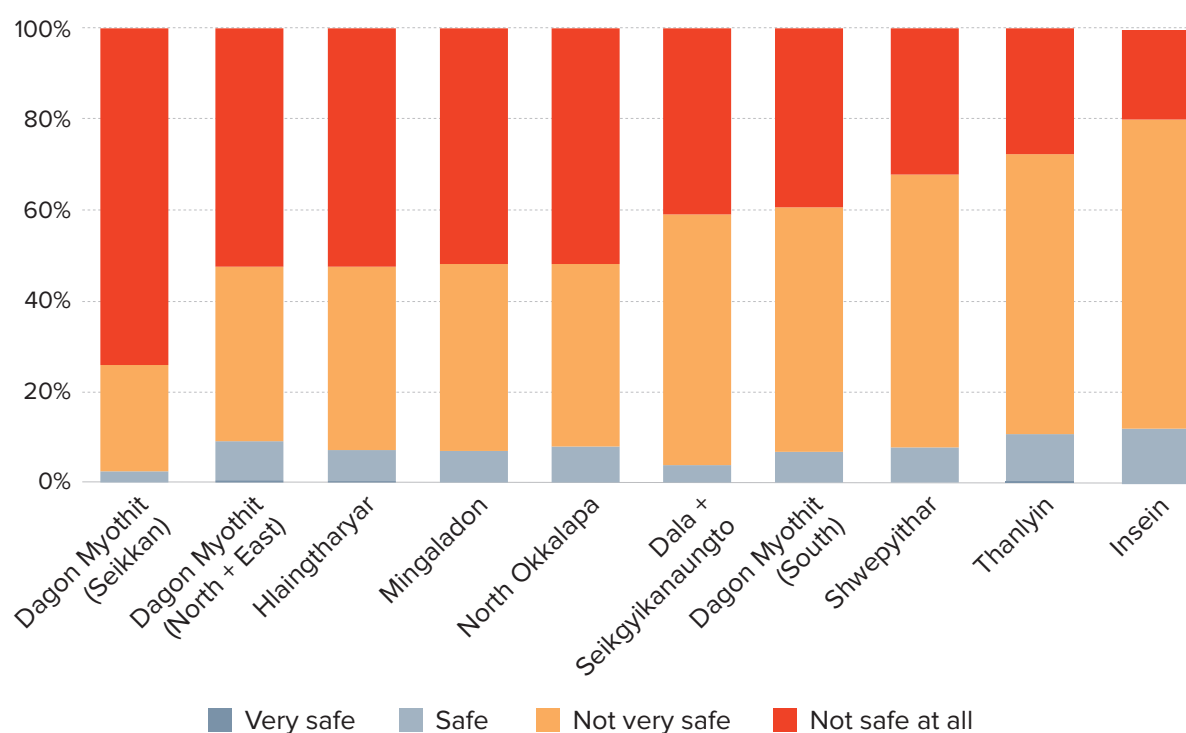


Figure 26: Incidence of gender-based violence and awareness of support service

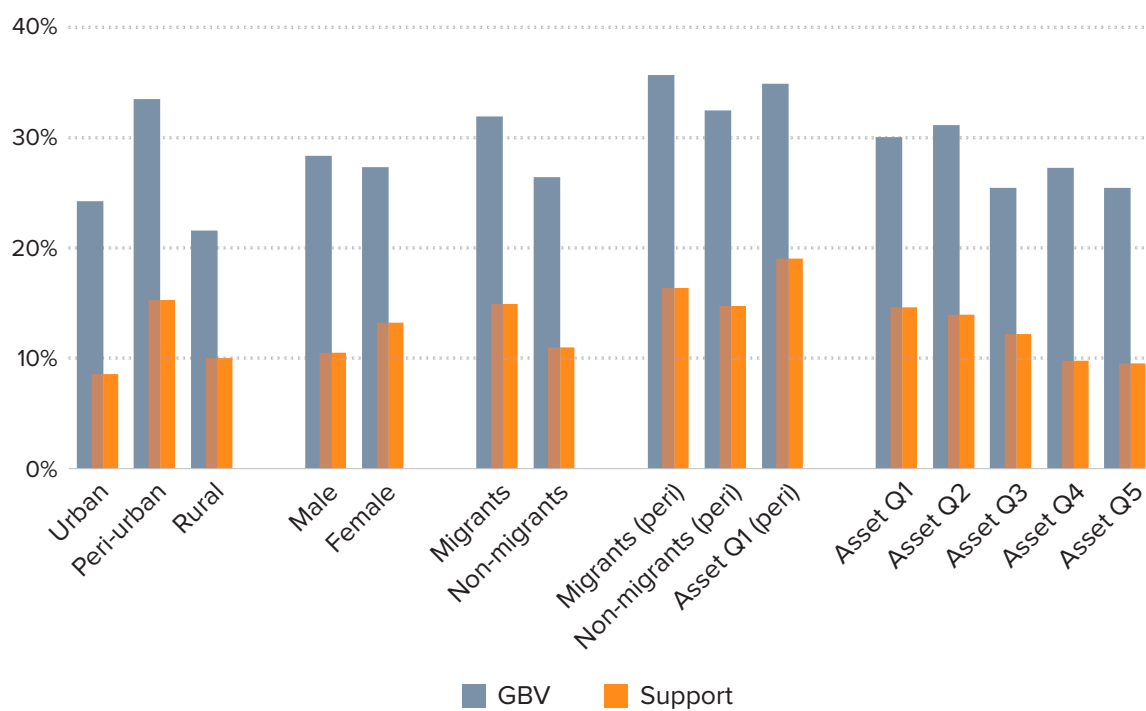
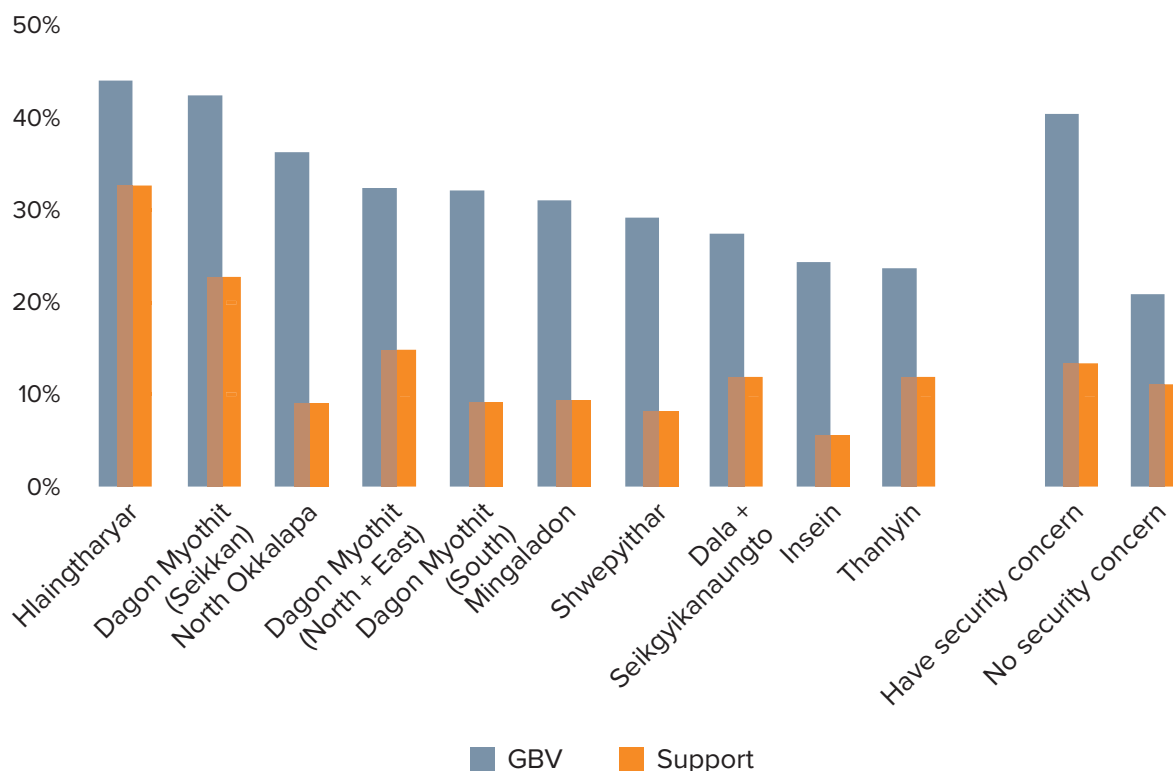


Figure 27: Incidence of gender-based violence and awareness of support service, in peri-urban Yangon



communities. Awareness is slightly higher in peri-urban areas (15%), compared to urban (8%) and rural (10%) areas, possibly due to the higher incidence of violence in these regions. For example, 33% of respondents in Hlaingtharyar and 23% in Dagon Myothit (Seikkan) reported awareness of GBV support services.

Qualitative interviews underscore the severity of the issue, particularly in peri-urban areas where slum clearances have left regions unsafe for women and girls. A tragic example includes the rape and murder of a girl in an abandoned area in Hlaingtharyar. GBV incidents are also

frequent among women returning home from late shifts, and women's dormitories are often targeted by security forces demanding bribes. Fear of further victimization deters many from seeking help at police stations.

The impacts of violence extend beyond individual victims, significantly affecting household well-being and community safety. Households often experience heightened stress and emotional trauma, underscoring the need for interventions to address violence against women as a matter of personal and community resilience.

Conclusion & Recommendations



Photo: A train traveling along the Yangon Urban railway route.

Addressing urban poverty in Yangon—particularly in its rapidly expanding peri-urban areas—requires more than short-term aid; it demands a coordinated, equity-focused strategy that tackles the structural drivers of economic vulnerability. The evidence is clear: poverty in Yangon is not only rising in scale but deepening in severity, disproportionately affecting migrants, women, and the youth. Without decisive, inclusive interventions, these communities risk being trapped in cycles of marginalization and deprivation.

The recommendations outlined here offer practical, cost-effective, and locally viable pathways to change. From upskilling workers to reducing preventable healthcare costs, and from empowering women entrepreneurs to safeguarding migrant livelihoods, each action has the potential to yield tangible returns—economically, socially, and ethically.

This is not just a moment for relief; it is a moment for building and deepening resilience - to withstand and to progress on human development even against the odds. By investing wisely and targeting the most affected, stakeholders, local and international, can help transform Yangon's current urban poverty and human insecurity challenges into a more just and secure urban development for all those living with great uncertainty in Yangon's poorer urban and peri-urban areas today.

Recommendations

Building on the findings of this study, the following recommendations present targeted, practical pathways to mitigate rising urban poverty in Yangon, particularly among peri-urban migrant communities. While they are limited by the prevailing context of conflict and economic dislocation, the proposals emphasize the need to address multiple aspects of this urban equation together. Taking a multidimensional approach also helps navigate and manage risks, with some dimensions unable to proceed at given times whilst others may find the space and resources to do so. Therefore, working to expand job opportunities through expanded skills training and strengthening local enterprises is high priority; while improving healthcare and education access, and safeguarding migrant and women's security and safety. These are not intended to be implemented in a strict sequence, but rather pursued flexibly, with full recognition of the fiscal and political constraints involved.

1. Expanded Skills and Employment Opportunities for All

- Vocational training with market alignment: Expand access to market-relevant training in sectors such as mechanical repair, garment manufacturing, digital marketing, and food processing; Prioritizing peri-urban youth, women, who are also often conflict-affected dislocated migrants – securing their employment includes removing obstacles to formal papers required for basic training and labour protections.
- Preparedness for migration, as relevant: Where options for domestic education and employment are increasingly limited, offer language, business management and other preparedness courses to support both domestic employment and safe, informed migration pathways.
- Apprenticeships and job matching platforms: Partner with factories and service sector employers to establish paid apprenticeships and job matching platforms, including for new migrants lacking professional networks.
- Rural area skills expansion: Create rural training hubs offering practical livelihood skills to reduce distress migration and jobs aligned with local area economic needs and market opportunities.

2. Women's Economic Empowerment

- Targeted support for women-led enterprises: Introduce and/or extend availability of interest-free micro-loans and tailored mentorship for women-led micro- and home-based businesses in sustained demand activities such as tailoring, food processing, and retail.¹⁸
- Integrated business development: Facilitate women's access to digital tools, financial literacy training, and incubation programs to grow businesses and access wider markets.
- Workplace equity measures: Promote anti-harassment policies in factories with confidential reporting channels and ensure women have equal access to decent work.

¹⁸ Interest-free micro-loans (~\$300) and enterprise training for women reflect positive outcomes from Grameen Bank's models in Bangladesh, where incomes rose by over 30% (Grameen, 2019).

3. Financial Inclusion and Literacy

- Access to credit for those without assets as collateral: Expand microfinance access for women- and youth-led enterprises and first-time borrowers, using risk guarantees and graduated interest rate schemes..
- Financial literacy campaigns: Implement budgeting, savings, and planning training targeting low-income households, especially women, to build long-term resilience.
- Innovative Lending Models: Pilot flexible lending tools such as portfolio lending and mobile-based micro-credit linked to digital financial identities.

4. Community Health, WASH, and Protection Services

- Affordable Preventive Care: Invest in community-based services such as maternal care, chronic disease screening, and vaccinations to reduce health-related financial shocks.¹⁹
- Telehealth and Outreach: Scale low-cost telemedicine services in peri-urban areas with high health burdens to increase access and reduce reliance on private clinics.²⁰
- Safe Sanitation and Water Access: Install latrines, greywater systems, water kiosks, and handwashing stations in underserved neighborhoods to reduce disease burden and improve productivity.^{21 22}
- Social advocacy campaigns and follow-up support to sustain behavior change: Launch community campaigns promoting improved WASH practices with high benefit-cost returns.²³
- Safe Spaces and GBV Services: Integrate legal aid and psychosocial support for women and girls into health and community centers in high-risk areas like Hlaingtharyar and Dagon Myothit (Seikkan).

5. Equitable Education Services and Access

- Education subsidies: Provide annual stipends (e.g., \$150 per child) to support school attendance among the poorest households, covering supplies and transport.²⁴
- Education opportunities for rural youth: Expand vocational and digital education in rural townships to prevent dropouts and reduce economic migration.²⁵

¹⁹ As seen in telehealth studies from Indonesia and the Philippines (ADB, 2022). World Bank (2020). Poverty and Shared Prosperity: Reversals of Fortune.

²⁰ ADB (2022). Leveraging Fintech to Expand Digital Health in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore. See also WHO SEARO (2020). Telemedicine Guidelines and Cost-Effectiveness Review.

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²⁴ UNESCO & UNICEF (2020). Educational Barriers in Low-Income Urban Settings.

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6. Investing in the Capabilities and Resilience of Migrants and the Rural Poor

- **Dedicated Migrant Support Centers:** Establish training and legal aid hubs in peri-urban Yangon to address migrant skill gaps and documentation challenges.
- **Legal identity and legal aid access:** Facilitate support to obtain NRC cards and household registration for migrants from conflict zones to improve mobility and service access.
- **Anti-Discrimination regulations and partnerships with private sector:** Collaborate with employers to eliminate hiring biases against migrants and promote inclusive labor practices.
- **Support rural micro businesses:** Provide targeted micro-loans, business training, and market access for rural women to strengthen local resilience, grow their micro businesses to the next level and reduce urban migration.

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