



GENDER IN BRIEF: MYANMAR

1. Country Context

According to latest national census conducted in 2014, Myanmar has a population of 51,486,253 people,¹ though UN estimates that the overall population has reached 54,500,091 in 2024.² Women represent over half of the country's population and, while women's life expectancy is generally higher than men's, women spend a larger share of their later years with health challenges and disabilities resulting from their lifelong triple burden of domestic work, poverty, and violence. In the 2023 Gender Inequality Index (GII), Myanmar ranked 125 out of 145 countries included in the index.³

Presently in Myanmar, not only are more people trapped in poverty, their poverty levels are more severe. After the military takeover in February 2021, Myanmar's poverty gap - a measure of the average income shortfall of all those who are poor - stands at 24.4 percent. This compares to 18.5% in 2022 and 5.2% in 2017, an increase of over 6 percentage points since 2022.⁴ As of June 2024, "UN figures suggest that the number of people displaced nationwide reached 3.1 million and continues to climb, with 2.8 million displaced since the military takeover in 2021."⁵ Of these, an estimated 72,000 people have fled from Myanmar to neighboring countries.⁶ Airstrikes by the Myanmar Armed Forces (MAF) across the country, including in Chin, Kachin, Karen, Karenni and Rakhine states and Bago, Mandalay and Sagaing regions, have increased significantly since 2023. Airstrikes in some areas, particularly Rakhine and Mandalay, have increased by more than 300 percent in the past year.⁷ According to the Joint statement of UNFPA and UN Women report (2021), "Women and girls experience challenges to access sexual and reproductive health services due to the collapsed health

system, with attacks on hospitals, financial barriers and movement restrictions further jeopardizing their health and well-being." The report notes that "conflict-related sexual violence remains a key risk given recent reports on top of evidence of widespread previous allegations."⁸ Despite this worsening situation, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and women's organizations/activists have been working hard to respond to all these increasing safety, health and protection risks faced by women, girls, young people and people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientation.



The northwest region of Myanmar, comprising Chin State, **Sagaing** and **Magway regions**, is at the epicenter of one of the country's most severe humanitarian crises. Escalating conflict has led to mass displacements and the collapse of critical infrastructure. By November 2024, it accounted for more than 1.7 million internally displaced persons,⁹ making it the most displaced area in Myanmar. **Sagaing** has experienced the highest concentration of displacement due to conflict, including airstrikes, and the destruction of civilian property, while Chin State has faced targeted airstrikes and shelling that has displaced

¹ [The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census | MIMU \(themimu.info\)](https://mimu.info)

² [United Nations Data Portal, Population Division; By Location | Pivot Table | Data Portal \(un.org\)](https://data.un.org/DataPortal/?table=1&columns=1)

³ <https://borgenproject.org/tag/gender-inequality-index/>

⁴ [Poverty and the Household Economy of Myanmar: a Disappearing Middle Class | United Nations Development Programme \(undp.org\)](https://www.un.org/development/desa/poverty/publications/poverty-and-the-household-economy-of-myanmar-a-disappearing-middle-class/)

⁵ Myanmar Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2024 Addendum, UNOCHA, p.8

⁶ [RAM3 COAR.rdl \(unicef.org\)](https://www.unicef.org/ram3-coar-rdl)

⁷ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2024/country-chapters/myanmar>

⁸ Joint statement from UNFPA and UN Women in Myanmar: impacts of the compounded political and health crisis on women and girls in Myanmar, 1 August 2021.

<https://myanmar.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-08/UNFPA%20UNWomen%20joint%20statement%20on%20Myanmar.pdf>

⁹ UNOCHA. (2024, November 27). Myanmar humanitarian update no. 42. OCHA. <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/myanmar/myanmar-humanitarian-update-no-42-27-november-2024>

thousands to remote areas or across the border into India.¹⁰ Seasonal floods have further exacerbated existing vulnerabilities in the region. Women, girls, and other marginalized groups bear the brunt of these crises, facing heightened risks of gender-based violence, exploitation, and lack of access to essential services. There are increasing reports of abductions, detentions, and arrests of civilians, particularly men. In some regions, the increased arrival of refugees—many of them women, girls, and elders from Rakhine and other regions—has raised concerns about the equitable distribution of resources such as water, land, and jobs as their numbers increase.

2. Gender Norms and Gender Roles

Gender and harmful social norms in Myanmar create barriers for women and girls to access information and to exercise control over resources related to their economic empowerment and SRH rights. In 2020, three out of five women stated that caring responsibilities have increased since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and nearly half (48.3%) of the women felt that their level of housework had increased. Importantly, two-fifths (40%) of women with increased caring responsibilities said this had impacted their ability to pursue a livelihood and nearly one-third reported they could no longer do paid work because of increased domestic care responsibilities.¹¹ The current conflict has also exacerbated the burden borne by women. For example, according to a report from Radio Free Asia (RFA) on 22nd February 2024, at least 400 Rohingya boys and men have already been forcibly recruited from villages and IDP camps in Sittwe and Buthidaung townships by the military-led State Administration Council (SAC) to fight the Arakan Army (AA). Under these difficult circumstances, women and girls, including people with disabilities, from both Rohingya and Rakhine communities, have had to contend with the double

burden of care and productive roles as female heads of households in the crisis.

3. Agency

3.1 Confidence and Mobility

Young women living in rural areas in Myanmar face restrictions making their own decisions and even their mobility.¹² While women in general participate and contribute to communal social and religious activities, the leadership of these activities and other community initiatives are seen to be the domain of men. It is more common than not to have men holding the key leadership positions in the community and even when women are part of the leadership structures, they tend to occupy supporting administrative roles, e.g., secretary, accountant/treasurer or member. In religiously and traditionally conservative communities, women are traditionally not permitted to communicate with men outside of their immediate family and often not able to participate in public spheres including social, political and religious activities. Women's mobility is highly restricted particularly among Rohingya women in Muslim communities because of their cultural and religious beliefs. Thus, women in these communities mostly stay at home for safety and protection. Compared to Rohingya women, Rakhine women have more freedom in movement but may also have restrictions on their mobility for personal safety reasons including fear from GBV, displacement and ongoing armed conflicts. Moreover, mobility of women and girls with disabilities is even more restrictive because of lack of inclusive infrastructure facilities in their communities or unadapted shelters. As a result, they face excessive barriers for accessing available public services and employment opportunities.

¹⁰ OCHA (2024). Myanmar 2024 HNRP
<https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/myanmarhumanitarian-needs-and-response-plan-2024-december2023-enmy>

¹¹ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/mn-Myanmar-Women%20Report-NEW-06032022.pdf>

¹² National Review on the implementation of BPFA
[https://asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/documents/Myanmar%20\(English\).pdf](https://asiapacificgender.org/sites/default/files/documents/Myanmar%20(English).pdf) accessed on 13 May, 2023

“In cities, villages, and displacement sites across the country, women are shouldering their families’ burdens. (UN Human rights report, July 2024). The UN Special Rapporteur observed that, “Facing these challenges, many women and girls are turning to negative coping strategies and are vulnerable to gendered protection concerns, including trafficking, sexual exploitation and early marriage.”¹³



After Cyclone Mocha, PIM Rakhine Team conducting a rapid assessment.

3.2 Sexual and Reproductive Health

Due to barriers in accessing financial resources, healthcare needs of women and girls in Myanmar are being neglected and they are unable to fully exercise their SRHR, which is defined as a state of physical, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality. Based on UNFPA research (July 2021), the “adolescent fertility rate is 20.3 births per 1,000 women aged 15-19 while the total fertility rate is 2 children per woman for women aged 15 to 49. The infant mortality rate is 31 deaths per 1,000 live births.”¹⁴ The contraceptive prevalence rate is 52.2%¹⁵ and the unmet need for family planning is 16%.¹⁵ Plan International Myanmar’s rapid gender assessment report for the Education Cannot Wait (ECW) program observed that community norms regarding the roles of women and girls in the home and wider caring responsibilities are significant barriers to

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/07/myanmar-new-report-urges-robust-support-women-girls-and-lgbt-people-post>

¹⁴ UNFPA, “Empowering women in Myanmar to exercise sexual and reproductive health rights and choices in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic,” July 2021

girls’ education.¹⁶ Assessment results indicated that 16.5% of the respondents identified cultural barriers and negative gender stereotypes as major obstacles to accessing gender education, with girls being more affected than boys.¹⁷

According to Gender Profile of 2024, healthcare access is severely compromised, with 188 incidents of violence against healthcare infrastructure reported in 2023 compared to 118 in 2022. Mental health services, especially for survivors of sexual violence, are nearly non-existent, leaving many women and girls to manage trauma alone, without psychosocial support. Most of these attacks occurred in **Sagaing, Magway, and Mandalay regions.**



People are living on the street in Mandalay (Earth quake 2025).

4. Condition and Position

¹⁵ <https://myanmar.unfpa.org/en/topics/sexual-reproductive-health-21>

¹⁶ Plan International Myanmar, Rapid Gender Assessment, Education Cannot Wait project, 2023.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Due to these harmful societal gender norms, women and girls often find themselves in low earning, menial jobs, while also facing barriers in accessing credit. They are expected to take on unpaid care work responsibilities for children and the elderly which further limits their livelihood options. Within the household, 83% of married women aged 15-49 report that they have sole or joint decision-making power in their own health care, while 74% participate in decisions about major household purchases, and 88% participate in decisions about visits to family or relatives.¹⁸ In general, women in Myanmar show a higher propensity towards peacebuilding than men. 71% of the respondents in an opinion poll administered by Nyein Foundation suggests that women tend to desire durable peace while men tend to want power. Sadly, there has not been enough investment in women's rights and livelihoods in Myanmar for women to be more involved in peacebuilding.¹⁹ For example, according to 2021 OECD data, only 0.68% of Official Development Assistance (ODA) in Myanmar goes to women's rights organizations.

In **Magway Region**, resource strain from the incoming displaced population exacerbates challenges related to water, land, and job availability. Food insecurity has pushed many women into extreme poverty, leading them to resort to high-interest loans and harmful coping strategies such as exploitative informal labor, transactional sex, and risky migration (Gender Profile 2024).

5. Gender in Emergencies

5.1 Disaster Risk Management

Currently, there are an estimated 9.7 million women and girls in Myanmar in urgent need of humanitarian assistance and almost half the population is now living in poverty (*Inequality and Insecurity: Facts and Figures by UNDP 2024*). In 2019, the Myanmar government developed the country's COVID-19 Relief Plan with seven goals, 10 strategies, 36 action plans to mitigate the spread of the pandemic. These measures collapsed after military coup in 2021, while international and national NGOs, humanitarian

assistance and access to affected people remained heavily restricted by 2022. Access to healthcare, clean water, sanitation facilities, and hygiene practices are now increasingly significant challenges, posing health risks, particularly for women.

According to Kachin State's Disaster Management Ministry report, 222 natural disasters occurred during 2020-23, and assistance was provided to over 13,900 affected households, including a total of 37 natural management trainings, drills and educative talks. Plan International Myanmar's Cyclone Mocha rapid needs and gender assessments highlighted that women and girls from IDP camps lack knowledge of key topics such as first aid, climate change and emergency preparedness. They also mentioned that women do not normally participate in emergency preparedness meetings.

On March 28, 2025, A powerful earth quake of magnitude 7.7 struck near the Sagaing Region. The earthquake impacted a widespread area across Myanmar, spanning east and west from **Sagaing and Mandalay region to Shan state**, as well as **Naypyidaw** and Bago region and smaller shocks and tremors being felt in Ayeyarwady region, Karen and Karenni states.

¹⁸ <https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/SR235/SR235.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://myanmar.un.org/en/262611-it%E2%80%99s-time-invest-women-and-girls-safer-more-gender-equal-myanmar>



“Seeing buildings collapse right in front of my eyes... I've never experienced anything like this in my life. Even talking about it now makes me want to cry. Our building is cracked, so I don't dare go back to my home.

Everyone is just living by the roadside." said Aye (a young woman who is a local resident in Mandalay city)

5.2 Rebuilding basic infrastructure and services

Since the 2021 military takeover, more than 38,000 houses have been destroyed or burned down, leading to widespread displacement of over 1.1 million people. In Kachin, due to IDP camp closure ordered by SAC,²⁰ the continued tension between ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and government military forces prevents IDPs from safely relocating to their homes as there remain concerns about armed conflict in their areas, coupled by lack of arable land, livelihood opportunities, destroyed homes and assets, and a lack of support to rebuild their lives. According to UN Women, nearly 3.2 million persons along Myanmar's Andaman Sea coastal

²⁰ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/12/myanmar-over-50000-exposed-forced-evictions-and-housing-destruction-say-un>

areas are considered to be most vulnerable to cyclone impacts based on analysis of shelter quality, food insecurity and coping capacity. Women and girls are disproportionately impacted, and much more likely to experience increased violence, insecurity and gender specific barriers and inequalities.²¹

Since early September 2024, more than 1 million people across 70 townships in Myanmar have been affected by flooding due to torrential monsoon rains and the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi. **Bago, Kachin, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, and Shan**, several of which were also affected by Typhoon Yagi **(600,000 Women and girls/ 270,000 children/ 270,000 reproductive aged women/ 12,974 Pregnant Women)**.

Many of the affected people and communities were already displaced due to ongoing conflict, compounding their vulnerability. Some townships in **Mandalay** Region and eastern and southern Shan also experienced repeated flooding in early October.

6. Gender Based Violence and Child Protection

Due to the current crisis, children in Myanmar are exposed to numerous risks, such as separation, killing and maiming, physical and psychosocial injury, trafficking, gender-based violence (GBV), recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence,

being forced to drop out of school, early marriage, arbitrary arrest, and unlawful detention of adolescents. (Myanmar Child Protection Area of Responsibility Reports)²² In Myanmar, there are no laws to protecting women and girls from violence although there are provisions in the penal code prohibiting rape and sexual assault. In 2017, the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) initiated the "Prevention and Protection of Violence against Women Law (POVAW Law)" collaborating with UN, INGOs, NGO and CSOs to produce a draft bill. However, the bill was not enacted as a result of the military takeover and ongoing political crisis. One in five women in Myanmar have seen violent behavior against a

²¹ <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2023/05/cyclone-mocha-makes-dire-situation-worse-for-millions>

²² <https://www.themimu.info/>

women or girls in their neighborhood since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.²³ Much of these violations go unreported. Only 8% of 15–19-year-olds who have experienced physical and sexual violence in Myanmar have sought help. One in five married women in Myanmar, aged 15–49, have experienced some form of intimate partner violence. The displacement of over 1.5 million women around the country over the last three years has only increased their risks of sexual violence.²⁴ According to Gender Profile 2024, These vulnerabilities also increase women and girls’ risk of exploitation from traffickers, who deceive them with job promises, leading to high-risk situations.

7. Participation in Leadership

The widespread perception that the spectrum of politics and public affairs are “male spaces” and, that women should not occupy the same leadership space due to their domestic responsibilities, persists in Myanmar. This perception can be seen in electoral laws, legal processes, and institutional cultures, especially those of political institutions, families, communities, and wider society, including the media. For instance, only 5.8% women hold cabinet level positions in the SAC government.²⁵ By contrast, it is noted that female civil servants in Myanmar’s public administration constitute 49% of director and decision-making level positions.²⁶

8. Diversity

Myanmar’s Constitution guarantees all persons the enjoyment of equal rights and equal legal protection under the law (Section 347) and does not discriminate against any Myanmar citizen on the basis of sex (Section 348). However, the voices of the estimated 5.9 million people living



with disabilities in Myanmar, representing about 13% of the country’s population, face ever-present vulnerabilities and access to government services.²⁷ Women and girls with disabilities experience compounded vulnerabilities, including restricted access to essential health services and a heightened risk of gender-based violence. In conflict settings like in Myanmar, children and women with disabilities face attenuated vulnerabilities. Displacement further heightens their risks and limits access to social protection mechanisms.²⁸

LGBTIQ persons are identified as an increasingly vulnerable population group. In Myanmar’s shrinking civil society space, LGBTIQ groups face unmitigated discrimination, resulting in most LGBTIQ-led organizations keeping a low profile.²⁹

There are 135 ethnic minority groups in Myanmar. Expanded military operations have resulted in numerous war crimes against ethnic minority populations in Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan States.³⁰

²³ [Infographic GBV in Myanmar Nov2023 MIMU IG007v1.pdf \(themimu.info\)](#)

²⁴ [A Joint Statement from UNFPA and UN Women in Myanmar | UN Women – Asia-Pacific](#)

²⁵ [UN Women Myanmar 2024-25 Country Profile](#)

²⁶ Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Ministry of Planning and Finance, *Gender Statistics in Myanmar*, https://www.csostatat.gov.mm/FileUpload/cso/FileDownload/Gender_2022.pdf

²⁷ UN Myanmar, “Strengthening Support and inclusion for persons with disabilities amid humanitarian crisis in Myanmar,” 23 Dec 2023, <https://myanmar.un.org/>

²⁸ [United for Inclusion: Empowering Persons with Disabilities in Myanmar | United Nations in Myanmar](#)

²⁹ [Gender Statistics in Myanmar 2022 \(csostatat.gov.mm\)](#)

³⁰ [World Report 2023: Myanmar | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

9. Enabling Environment

In the three years since the military takeover of the civilian government, civic space has shrunk dramatically. By enacting the organizational registration law, the military government has further constrained organizations' ability to access funding while also placing restrictions on social media access, which had become a channel for the opposition to raise awareness and mobilize resistance. The SAC is now enforcing a mandatory military conscription law that requires young men (18-35 years) and young women (18-27 years) to serve at least two years in the military.³¹

10. Women and Girls in Humanitarian Needs.

Women and girls in Myanmar are in urgent humanitarian need. Estimated People in Need (PiN) numbers (**female**) by State/Region (2024) by UNDP is shown below.

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| Sagaing 1,549,118 | Mandalay – 612,592 |
| Magway 1,014,747 | Bago (West) -365,576 Bago (East)- 588,270 |
| Shan(south) 345,152 | Naypyitaw 158,241 |
| Shan(North) 476,491 | |

Conclusion

Despite active participation by women-led organizations, women's leadership remains low at all levels.

-Women have limited representation in decision-making roles in both Kachin and Rakhine States.

- The lower labor force participation rate among women compared to men means that women often have fewer opportunities for income generation.

- Gender disparities in education can restrict individuals' future opportunities for employment and income generation.

- Gender equality is guaranteed by the constitution, but specific laws addressing gender inequalities are lacking.

-Women and children constitute a significant portion of the population in IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps.

-Unsafe water, sanitation issues, and a lack of awareness about contraceptives are prominent health concerns.

- Domestic violence, including intimate partner violence, is widespread.

- limited protection mechanisms can increase the risk of human trafficking, particularly among women and girls.

³¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-68261709>