

Myanmar



TCF provides training to teachers working at Mon and Kachin States in May and June 2021

COUNTRY FACTS AND FIGURES



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| Population: | 55,136,911 (Ministry of Labour, Immigration & Population, 2021) |
| 2020 Global Index Score: | 64.95/100 (SDR 2021) |
| 2020 Global Index Rank: | 101/165 (SDR 2021) |
| SDG 4 Dashboard: | ● Major challenges remain (SDR 2021) |
| SDG 4 Trend: | ↑ On track or maintaining SDG achievement (SDR 2021) |
| SDG 10 Dashboard: | ● Significant challenges remain (SDR 2021) |
| 2019 HDI Value/Rank: | 0.583, 147 out of 189 (HDRO, 2020) |
| GNI per capita (PPP\$): | 4,961 (HDRO, 2020) |
| Gini Index: | 30.85 (Statista, 2020) |
| Income Group: | Lower-Middle Income Status (WB, 2020) |
| Education Expenditure: | 1.93% of the GDP, 10.6% of the total budget (UNESCO, 2019) |
| Secondary Net Enrolment: | Total: 64.1% Female: 66.6% Male: 61.5% (UNESCO, 2018) |
| Literacy Rate (15 years & older): | Total: 75.6% Female: 71.8% Male: 80% (UNESCO, 2016) |
| Out of School: | 91,889 children 848,088 adolescents-399,087 Female; 449,001 Male (UNESCO, 2018) |

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Civil Society Spotlight Report on SDG 4 for HLPF 2021

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Situated geographically between the economic hubs of China, India, Bangladesh, and Thailand, Myanmar covers an area of about 675,000 sq km (over 260,000 sq mi) and is considered the largest country in mainland Southeast Asia.¹ Its economy heavily depends on the agricultural sector and extractive industries. It has a total population of more than 55 million and is also culturally diverse with more than 135 ethnic groups.

The country's education system is composed of early childhood care and development (ECCD), basic education, alternative education (which targets out-of-school youth), technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education.² These systems are primarily public since private education accounts for only 5 per cent of primary school enrolments. It was once known for its high literacy rate (comprising 90% of the total population). However, after the 1962 military coup d'état and 1988 uprising that disrupted education, it has then faced long-term social, political, and economic challenges. Some of the current key challenges it is facing in achieving sustainable development and equitable economic growth are the COVID-19 pandemic, a high number of illiterate adults³ the disparity between the rich and the poor, teaching capacity limitations, outdated teaching methods, deficiencies in curricula, and the social unrest and political instability due to another illegal military take-over of power on 1 February 2021.

These challenges are expected to bring excessive impact to the most vulnerable children and youth in Myanmar, further aggravating the existing educational inequalities.

CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION AND SDGS

Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

On 21 July 2020, after a two-month closure brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak, the government imposed a segmented re-opening of classes starting with secondary schools. UNICEF worked closely with authorities and came up with a manual containing guidelines to prevent further outbreaks, additional safety measures were also put in place. However, a resurgence in cases brought a halt to this progress— come the end of August, schools were closed down again.⁴ With the country-wide school closures

- 1 The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Education. (2016). National Education Strategic Plan 2016-2021. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/myanmar_national_education_strategic_plan_2016-21.pdf
- 2 Ibid, p.33-35
- 3 Census report: Half a million young people cannot read or write. (2017, July 12). UNFPA Myanmar. <https://myanmar.unfpa.org/en/news/census-report-half-million-young-people-cannot-read-or-write>
- 4 Learning lessons from COVID-19 in Myanmar. (2020, October 7). UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/10/1074602>

causing a lack of access to organised learning for more than a year now, the education of more than 10 million Myanmar students, especially those marginalised, is now at risk. Moreover, the closure of TVET and Higher Education Institutions will affect 15,712 and 1.5 million students respectively in addition to the 939,000 out-of-school youth.

In response to this pressing challenge, the Myanmar Ministry of Education (MoE) released the Myanmar COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector, a holistic plan covering all states, regions, and sub-sectors in Myanmar that provides an overall framework of strategies and interventions aimed at the continuity of education for Myanmar learners, safe planning of school re-opening, and promotion of a safer and more resilient education environment.⁵ It is also in alignment with the National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) 2016-2021 to “Improve teaching and learning, vocational education and training, research and innovation leading to measurable improvements in student achievement in all schools and educational institutions.”⁶

Myanmar has not been exposed to the platform of distance learning so the prolonged period of school closures and unfamiliarity with the new platform could cause a significant increase in the school drop-out rates. Hence, the current health crisis further aggravates the already existing educational divides. Against this framework, it is critical to explore more alternative options for learning and training, across all sub-sectors to ensure the inclusion and continuity of learning, as well as proper planning for the safe reopening of education facilities when health conditions allow.

Equity and Financing Concerns

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2019 Open Budget Survey for Myanmar through the Ministry of Planning, Finance, and Industry (MoPFI) showed the following progress⁷:

- Budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Education (MoE) amounted to MMK 2,685 billion (or USD 1,612,640,000) in 2019/20, representing a share of 8.4 per cent of the Union budget
- The MoE has become the 4th largest budget holder after Ministries of Electricity and Energy, Planning and Finance and Defense. The MoE is now receiving more funding than the total sum of aggregate transfers from Union to States and Regions
- The budget of the Department of Basic Education represented 74.6 per cent of the total MoE’s budget; the Department of Higher Education represented 17 per cent; while the Department of Technical, Vocational Education and Training accounted for 6.8 per cent. The combination of these three accounts for 98.4 per cent of the Ministry’s total budget for 2019/20

5 Myanmar Ministry of Education. (2020–2021). Myanmar COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector. https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Core_Doc_Myanmar_COVID-19_National_Response_Recovery_Plan_for_Education_Sector_May2020-Oct2021.pdf

6 The Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Ministry of Education. (2016). National Education Strategic Plan 2016–2021. https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/myanmar_national_education_strategic_plan_2016-21.pdf

7 Ministry of Education and Ministry of Planning, Finance and Industry. (2020, December). Myanmar 2019–2020 Education Budget Brief. EU-UNICEF Public Finance for Children (PF4C). <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/2019-20%20Myanmar%20Education%20Budget%20Brief.pdf>

- At the Ministry level, the budget execution rate has been ranging between 92 per cent and 111 per cent during the period 2015/16 to 2018/19
- In 2019/20, more than 28 per cent of MoE budget allocations were for capital expenditure with the remaining 72 per cent for current expenditure. This allocation represented an increase in capital investment, compared with recent years
- The offices of Basic Education in States and Regions have received budget allocations from the Ministry’s Department of Basic Education for the implementation of their programme. The criteria used to determine allocations are based on inputs and efficiency in expenditure. The application of these criteria has ensured a steady, regular increase in allocations over the past years. Analysis has also shown some degree of adaptation to local conditions, although challenges around the achievement of consistent levels of service quality across the whole country have remained

Towards the latter part of March 2020, UNICEF Myanmar was granted a USD 140,000-fund by the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) to support the Ministry of Education in setting up an online communication mechanism for improved response planning and coordination. This also made it possible to set up an online platform to train the educators on the new curriculum.⁸

UNICEF allotted a USD 11 million grant for Myanmar that aims to support an inclusive and national response training programme anchored on capacity-building efforts intended for teachers and education officers responding to COVID-19; learning continuity through home-based distance learning during school closures prioritising the most marginalised; provision for water, sanitation and hygiene support to schools, including hand-washing stations and school cleaning kits; psychosocial support for teachers; and stipend for students living in COVID-19 affected areas to allow them to catch up to their appropriate learning levels.⁹

For the years 2020-2024, World Bank allocated USD 73,700,000 for a programme to improve equitable access to, and quality of, basic education delivered through formal, non-formal, and complementary institutions and providers.¹⁰

Similar to other countries, if the COVID-19 impacts are not properly addressed, this is projected to have a long-lasting effect particularly in the education sector. Considering the economic stoppage brought about by the COVID-19 global pandemic, and the “impact of the health crisis on international trade, investment, growth, employment, and small-scale income mechanisms, there is a risk that the Government of Myanmar’s spending on education may be reduced.”¹¹

Any reductions in education financing could affect recent progress and would notably worsen education access and quality.

Military Coup: The take-over of power by the military and the ensuing social, political and economic crisis will disrupt education and development

8 Global Partnership for Education. (2021). Myanmar. <https://www.globalpartnership.org/where-we-work/myanmar#:~:text=In%20late%20March%202020%2C%20the,improved%20response%20planning%20and%20coordination.>

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Myanmar Ministry of Education. (2020–2021). Myanmar COVID-19 National Response and Recovery Plan for the Education Sector. See https://themimu.info/sites/themimu.info/files/documents/Core_Doc_Myanmar_COVID-19_National_Response_Recovery_Plan_for_Education_Sector_May2020-Oct2021.pdf



National and worldwide resistance and condemnation were demonstrated when a coup d'état was again staged by the Myanmar military on 1 February 2021 which deposed the country's democratically-elected leaders and subjected the country into a year-long state of emergency in flagrant disrespect of democratic processes.

This brazen and unsettling military take-over comes at an already difficult time for people in the country reeling under the unprecedented adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their health, income, access to food, jobs, and overall well-being.

At the beginning of April 2021, the Military junta has appointed a new education minister, however, most of the teachers and administrators stood together with the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) countering the illegitimate new administration. With the deepening crisis, more than 800 people have been killed, schools are being bombed, children are being killed by the military and police forces during crackdowns of mass rallies against the military coup. Reports from various sources estimate that over 3,400 people have been detained (almost half of the detainees are youth), and those who express dissent are falsely accused of committing crimes and threatened with the death penalty. Teachers are being threatened and arrested, leaving them with no other option but to flee and try to avoid the persecution and abuse of state forces.

Military and police security forces have occupied more than 60 basic education schools and universities including public hospitals across the country since the onset of the military coup. Civil wars have recently intensified between the military and ethnic armed groups in Kachin State, Karen State, and Shan State. Over a million people, including the Rohingya, are being

displaced and become refugees and IDPs in Rakhine State, Kachin State, Karen State, Shan State, and Chin State due to armed conflicts, political persecution, and natural calamities even before the military coup.

The absence of peace and democracy not only threatens the achievement of SDG 4 but all the 17 SDGs. Therefore, it is important to urgently call on the international community, governments, agencies (including regional inter-governmental organisations), and the ASEAN to put more pressure on the military junta towards restoring democracy.

On 1 June 2021, the State Administration Council (SAC) announced the re-opening of schools across the country, however, 90 per cent of the student population have refused to enrol under the coup regime, leaving only a 10 per cent enrolment rate for the academic year (AY) 2021-2022. University student unions also released their statement expressing their refusal to enrol and would only do so if the regime steps back and restore democracy.¹²

Students and learners have been seeking education through alternative pathways outside the military-controlled formal education system such as home-based learning (using the internet), community-based learning (face-to-face small group learning), faith-based schools and ethnic-based schools. Young people expressed that they are keen to learn through these alternative ways even though they are facing many challenges.

12 Myanmar NOW. (2021a, May 26). Some 90 percent of Myanmar students refuse to attend school under coup regime, teachers say. <https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/some-90-percent-of-myanmar-students-refuse-to-attend-school-under-coup-regime-teachers-say>

Group of Chiang Mai University students participate in the workshop on Critical Thinking in Higher Education



RECOMMENDATIONS

- Explore alternative options for learning and training across all education sectors especially on account of the current political situation and the COVID-19 pandemic. This involves developing and financing a system of education and learning delivery plan that considers all aspects of the current country crises.
- Urgently call on the international community, governments, agencies (including regional inter-governmental organisations), and ASEAN to put more pressure on the military junta to end its unlawful seizure of power and immediately restore democracy and civilian rule in the country. This also includes demanding the immediate release of all detained leaders, activists, students, teachers and journalists by dropping all false charges against them and restore their civil liberties.
- Ensure the continuous flow of support services delivered by local, national, and international organisations especially to the most marginalised sectors - women and girls, children, ethnic minority groups, people with disabilities, those from the poor communities, the people affected by protracted civil wars in the various parts of the country, and those who continue to suffer from the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.
- Protect the health and well-being of learners, educators, and school staff in Myanmar amidst the ongoing uprising and political situation, and the threat of COVID-19, while ensuring that the learning needs are still being met.
- Devise a management and support mechanism for the development and retention of quality teachers.
- Upgrade the professional capacity of teachers for curriculum development and implementation ensuring that learners are well-equipped with the needed skills (re-skilling and upskilling to meet the demands of the changing labour market and help them navigate the multiple crises in the country).
- Develop a well-coordinated course of action for emergency response strategies and sustainable interventions. •



Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) is a regional association of more than 200 organisations and individuals working towards promoting quality education for all and transformative and liberating, lifelong adult education and learning.

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The **Thinking Classroom Foundation (TCF)** is an organisation that aims to promote democratic and quality education and learning in Myanmar, with a particular focus on classroom level change and policy level change to enable quality education in the country. It has outreach in ethnic schools in the country and in the disadvantaged areas within the Thai-Burma border. TCF trains teachers, on a needs-basis, in Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) skills, which will enable them to foster a culture of education, active learning, and independent critical thinking across Myanmar. TCF also promotes indigenous education through its initiatives in teacher professional development, curriculum and policy development. TCF is a member organisation of the Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE).