Gratefully acknowledging partner organizations’ inputs to the Myanmar SDG Monitoring Mechanism.

Compilation of the 9 most relevant goals
Based on the latest available data
The Myanmar Development Observatory (MDO) specializes in research and analytical work concerning the development trajectory of Myanmar, with particular focus on the socio-economic circumstances, the progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, and the impact of the conflict. Working with a range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, Civil Society, the private sector and think tanks, the MDO acts as an interlocutor between evidence from the ground and the actual programming to benefit the most vulnerable in Myanmar and enhance their resilience.

Please reach out to us at observatory.mm@undp.org and visit our website.
SDG 1: End Poverty in All its Forms Everywhere

TREND SINCE 2020

UN Myanmar data updates since 2020

- 1.1.A: Proportion of population below international poverty line disaggregated by sex, age group and location (UNDP-modelled)
- 1.2.A: Proportion of population living below national poverty line, disaggregated by sex and age group (UNDP-modelled)
- 1.2.B: Percentage of households with reduced income since past 12 months
- 1.3.A. Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex
- 1.3.C. Government spending on social protection (% total budget, % GDP)
- 1.4.A. Percentage of women facing challenges to access basic services
- 1.5.A. Number of (a) deaths and missing persons, and (b) directly affected people attributed to disasters per 100,000 people.
- 1.a.A. Total official development assistance for poverty reduction as a share of gross national income
- 1.a.B. Government spending on essential services (education, health, protection)

The situation up to 2020

Myanmar had made steady progress in reducing poverty up to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a steady decline in the number of people living below the national poverty line in 12 years (48% in 2005 to 24.8% in 2017). This decline was more marked in urban (32.2% in 2005 to 11.3% in 2017) than rural areas (53.9% in 2005 to 30.2% in 2017). Main levers of poverty reduction came from a fast-growing economy while government spending on social protection and other social services still had marginal effects on lifting the most vulnerable from absolute poverty. Many areas, in particular remote, conflict-affected or peri-urban, were left with very limited access to basic services. Women were gaining increased access to economic opportunities and resources, although land property remained overwhelmingly a male domain.

Key evolutions since 2020

COVID-19 and the ensuing military coup have led to massive losses of livelihoods and incomes, as evidenced in a recent survey (2022)¹ where 56% of households reported income drops by 50 to 75% in just one year. This economic shock has marked a sudden stop to the steady poverty decline noted over the past 15 years. According to a poverty modelling exercise conducted by UNDP, 46.3% of the population was estimated to live under the national poverty line early 2022², equivalent to

¹. FAO & WFP. Food Security & Livelihoods Assessment, August 2022.
². UNDP. Impact of twin crises on human welfare in Myanmar, November 2021.
to a loss of 12 years of poverty reduction gains in just two years.

Extreme poverty, according to the international poverty line ($1.90 per day), is estimated to have increased six-fold during the same period, to reach 13.9%. The compound crisis also has the effect of increasing urban poverty a faster rate than rural poverty. The rural-urban poverty gap stands at 12.7 percentage points in 2022 against 18.9 points in 2017. Peri-urban informal settlement populations have relatively suffered more from the massive economic shocks created by the crisis than rural settings, due to the comparatively higher impact of the crisis on manufacturing, trading and service sectors and repeated movement restrictions and breakdown of security in many cities linked to the political repression following the coup. Urban areas also hosted before 2020 a larger share of the near poor – the most likely category to fall in poverty in case of catastrophic event(s). Alarmingly, child poverty was at 31.2% in 2017 and surged to a concerning 53.3% by 2022.

Geographically, the States and Regions with highest poverty rates before COVID-19 and the military coup (Chin, Rakhine, Kachin and Magway), also topped the list in 2022, but the poverty shock post-2020 has been fiercer in comparison in Yangon and Sagaing. Although

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3. Rural poverty in 2022 stands at 49.9% against 37.2% in urban areas (UNDP modelling), while the ratio was 30.2% vs. 11.3% in 2017 (MLCS 2017)
still nascent in Myanmar, the social protection system had gained some ground by 2019 and additional momentum was created by the pandemic and the need to protect the most vulnerable. At the end of 2020, 6.3% of the population in Myanmar was covered by at least one social protection floor, with the highest coverage among seniors (14.9%), the disabled (10.6%) and work-injury victims (8.5%)\(^6\). It should be noted that social security scheme not only covers only employees with a formal work contract but also does not cover unemployment. In terms of social government expenditures, actual figures confirmed by the IMF are only available up to 2019 so far (with spending equivalent to 0.93% of GDP and 4.55% of total budget) but the World Bank reports a rapid decrease of overall social spending post-pandemic, including for social protection\(^7\).

In 2016, multidimensional deprivation across health, education and standards of living, was estimated to concern 38.3% of the Myanmar's population, with a further 21.9% being vulnerable to multidimensional poverty\(^8\). Access to basic services has become notoriously more difficult anywhere in the country since the military takeover, and particularly in conflict-affected areas (which have also expanded in size compared to before the pandemic). A survey by UN Women in 2022\(^9\) reports for example that challenges in accessing basic services are witnessed by women for all basic services, and particularly for financial services (56%), protection services (41%), education services (35%) and health services (26%).

Besides the dreadful impacts of the pandemic and the military takeover on economic resources and access to services for most of the population, the resilience of the Myanmar people is also tested by the recurring natural disasters hitting the country, partly linked by climate change. In 2023, Naypyitaw was struck by a tornado, while Cyclone Mocha impacted regions including Rakhine, Chin, Magway, Sagaing, and Mandalay, affecting nearly one million individuals and their families\(^10\). Hence, the resilience of Myanmar people, already strained and diminished by the socio-economic repercussions of ongoing crises, is vulnerable to further deterioration challenged by natural disasters.

More than ever, in a context of severe multidimensional crisis, domestic and external funding is needed to attenuate the dire consequences on the livelihoods and resilience of Myanmar people. In 2020, Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Myanmar designated for poverty alleviation rose notably by 44% from the previous year, reflecting donors’ enhanced commitment in response to the COVID-19 aftermath. However, in 2021, there was a 17% decrease from 2020 levels, attributed to sanctions imposed following the military coup\(^11\). On the domestic side, government spending on essential services (health, education, social protection), after peaking in 2019 (18.7% of total expenditures), has plummeted in 2020 to 12.5% and, according to the World Bank, the negative trend remains as well for fiscal year 2022/2023, while government spending towards the energy and military sectors continues increasing in share\(^12\).

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6. ILO Social Security Inquiry Database.  
11. OECD Creditor Reporting System (CRS) Database  
Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- People living in informal settlements in peri-urban areas, as options for livelihoods have tremendously narrowed since the takeover and political repression has been fierce and has further deteriorated the already limited basic services available to them. Urban poverty is estimated to have raised three-folds by 2022.

- Populations in conflict-affected areas, which now cover a larger share of the country (estimated 1.9 million people in conflict hot spot areas\(^1\)) and receive also more forcibly displaced populations. The poorest States and Regions prior to 2020, such as Rakhine, Chin, Kachin or Magway, see exacerbated levels of poverty and a widening poverty gap.

- Landless farmers (among which there are more women than men) in rural Myanmar are uniquely vulnerable in the current socio-political landscape. Landless farmers often lack access to alternative livelihoods, rendering them highly susceptible to food insecurity and indebtedness.

- Women in economically hardest-hit areas, especially in urban settings, are more vulnerable as they often engage in informal employment and face a higher likelihood of job loss compared to their male counterparts. The military takeover and subsequent political repression have further amplified barriers for women accessing essential services, exacerbating gender inequalities and putting women at greater risk. The absence of gender-responsive social safety nets increase women's exposure to poverty risks.

- Children, and particularly younger ones, as child poverty rate, that was already 7% higher than that of the general population before 2020 – to reach 31.20% is estimated to have increased to about 53.30% in 2022\(^4\).

- Youth in Myanmar face a precarious future as the younger generation grows up amidst political instability, economic downturns, and recurrent natural disasters, their overall well-being, future prospects, and resilience are at significant risk. Their access to opportunities, including employment and higher education, has been notably curtailed, with many potentially being pushed into informal sectors or facing long-term unemployment.

Future scenario

- Poverty is likely to keep increasing at all levels as the military takeover undermines future economic growth prospects and thereby also the restoration in country economy.

- The increase in child poverty is also likely to have negative implications for human capital formation of the next generation, as poverty is closely linked to poorer health and education outcomes.

- Moreover, with prolonged poverty, Myanmar could see a ‘lost generation’ of young adults who, despite their potential, are unable to contribute meaningfully to the country’s growth due to a lack of access to resources, opportunities, and a stable environment.

- Risks level on people’s resilience remain very high, with ongoing conflict events across the country and the probability of disaster hitting on disaster prone areas.

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13. UNDP. Vulnerability to Conflict Index, 2023
Programming recommendations

Economic Recovery and Livelihood Support
- Prioritize immediate assistance to the most vulnerable populations, including those in peri-urban informal settlements, conflict-affected areas, and areas with high levels of poverty. This should include food aid, cash transfers, and access to clean water and sanitation.
- Support economic recovery efforts, including job creation and income-generating activities, in both rural and peri-urban areas where poverty rates have risen sharply.
- Promote vocational training and skills development programs as well as support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enhance employability, particularly among youth and women.

Social Protection Strengthening
- Assist in improving the coverage and effectiveness of social protection schemes, ensuring they reach those in need.
- Implement gender-responsive social safety nets to mitigate the increased poverty risks faced by women, who are more prone to informal employment.

Gender-Responsive Interventions
- Implement gender-responsive poverty reduction programs that address the specific vulnerabilities faced by women, particularly in informal employment.
- Promote women’s economic empowerment through access to resources including land ownership, financial services, and entrepreneurship opportunities.

Child-Focused Initiatives
- Prioritize child well-being by supporting access to quality education, healthcare, and nutrition for children, as child poverty rates have increased significantly.
- Promote child protection and child-sensitive social services.

Access to Basic Services
- Advocate for improved access to basic services, including healthcare, education, and financial services, especially in conflict-affected and remote areas.
The situation up to 2020

In the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the military takeover, progress was made on the target of ending hunger and ensuring access to safe and nutritious food. Prevalence of undernourishment declined from 4.1% in 2015 to 2.9% in 2019. However, 1 in 4 children were still stunted and 7% suffered from wasting when the pandemic arrived in Myanmar. As a country dominated by small-scale farming, agricultural output in Myanmar remains underwhelming when benchmarked against neighboring countries. For instance, a day’s work in Myanmar yields only 23kg of paddy, while in Cambodia it produces 62kg and in Thailand, a substantial 547kg. Limited use of modern machinery and equipment, underfunded agriculture research, unsustainable management of natural resources, high exposure to climate relevant extreme weather events, water scarcity, and poorly developed agriculture infrastructure, were amongst the main limiting factors for increasing agricultural production.

Key evolutions since 2020

The combined impacts of the escalating conflict and attacks, the sharp rise in inflation, the devaluation of the Kyat, and the ongoing disruptions in logistics have worsened the vulnerabilities of millions of people across Myanmar who are struggling with inadequate food consumption and malnutrition. Inflation and conflict trends have severely affected food production and prices.


UN Myanmar data updates since 2020

- 2.1.A Percentage of people with (a) insufficient food consumption; (b) poor food consumption; (c) borderline food consumption, using the Food Consumption Score.
- 2.1.B Prevalence of food insecurity in the population as (a) moderate & severe; (b) moderate; (c) severe, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES)
- 2.1.C Number of vulnerable and at-risk population receiving non-governmental support for food (in-kind and food vouchers).
- 2.1.D Percentage of households reducing their food intake due to household income reduction.
- 2.2.E Number of pregnant and lactating women admitted for (a) blanket supplementary feeding; (b) targeted supplementary feeding, in non-governmental feeding programmes.
- 2.3.B Agricultural productivity by land unit [agricultural GDP at constant 2015$/harvested area in ha]
- 2.3.C Gross Production Index Number for (a) crops, as (i) total (base 2014-2016 = 100).
- 2.3.D Percentage of farming households reporting reduced (a) crop production, (b) livestock herd size, compared to a previous year.
- 2.4.A Proportion of irrigated farmland out of total agricultural land
- 2.4.A Indicator of food price anomalies, by Consumer Food Price Index
at a time when populations are also losing their means of livelihood and resources, resulting in poor diets, especially insufficient protein consumption. UN surveys showed that 37% of households in 2020 (during pandemic) reported reducing their food intake due to income shortages. The same indicator went up to 40.6% a year later (end of 2021) – but much higher among women-headed households (34.6%) than in men-headed ones (11.2%). The consumption decrease was caused by an increase in shocks affecting household ability to produce and/or buy food: in May 2023, 60% of households reported at least one such shock against 55% in September 2021 and 20% of household reported about unusually high prices against 16% in September 2021. In September 2022, 24% of the population had insufficient food consumption (see Figure 2), an increase of 4 percentage points compared to one year ago. Poor food consumption remained marginal (based on the Food Consumption Score) at 2% in 2021 (update not available for 2022) but had already almost tripled due to COVID-19 and the early part of the post-coup period. It is expected to have increased again since then.

**Figure 1** Food Consumption Score Percentage of people

![Food Consumption Score Percentage of people](image)

Source: FAO/WFP

**Figure 2** Prevalence of Food Insecurity based on the FIES

![Prevalence of Food Insecurity based on the FIES](image)

Source: FAO/WFP

Ibid.
As of May 2023, a staggering 14.8 million people are estimated to be at risk of moderate to severe food insecurity and hunger – an increase of 1.6 million since September 2021 (or 11% more) – meaning that almost one in four of the population is food insecure (see Figure 3). Prevalence of food insecurity follows the seasonality of Myanmar’s crop cycles (lower at beginning of year and highest by end of summer, during the lean season). Yet, trend since 2020 is clearly to a worsening of food insecurity in both seasons, year over year, and both for moderate (from 18.3% in 2020 to 21.4% in 2023) and severe (from 1.0% in 2020 to 1.8% in 2023) food insecurity.

Localized data by FAO/WFP on food insecurity (see Figure 3) shows that the situation has worsened sharply in all areas in 2021, due to the shocks caused by the military take-over on the economy and supply chains, compounded with previous impacts of COVID-19. After 2021, the situation has not evolved the same way across all S/Rs. Clearly, food insecurity has continued deteriorating sharply all year-round in the most conflict-affected areas (Chin, Rakhine, Shan, Sagaing, Kayah), where insecurity and high prices of fuel and food have pushed households to the edge. In other S/Rs, food insecurity remains high and deteriorating year-on-year during the lean season, but situation has improved since 2023 during the dry season (see positive change between S1 2022 and S1 2023 in Yangon, Mon, Kayin, Bago). Rural areas have also been doing worse since the start of the crisis than urban areas (post-2021 data not available) in absolute terms, but food insecurity has grown faster comparatively in urban areas after the coup, linked to breakdown of supply chains and security crackdowns which heavily affected economic activity, hence income sources, of urban households in 2021. As a response to the fast-spreading hunger crisis, non-governmental food aid support (UN and partners) has increased 6-fold since 2019, reaching 2.1 million people in 2021 (compared to 0.34 million in 2019)10. The same number remains a target for food aid operations in 2023.

The consequences of the large increase in food insecurity on malnutrition are particularly worrisome for women and children. In 2023, the Humanitarian Country Team estimates that 2.2 million people will be affected by malnutrition12 and are in need of assistance – this is an exponential increase of over 10 times (or 2 million people) since 2021. Rising inflation, loss of livelihoods, market disruptions and poor harvests meant that households adopted poor feeding practices and could not afford nutritional or dietary supplements or dietary diversity. The reduction in availability of health services following the military takeover and the decline in incomes has also reduced access to nutritional supplements and resulted in a situation where treatable conditions such as diarrhea are increasingly leading to malnutrition in small children. All of this is likely resulting in a higher malnutrition caseload including

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8 OCHA (2023). Humanitarian Needs Overview – Myanmar 2023
9 For 2020, data from FAO/WFP assessments covers only 7 S/Rs, then 9 in 2021 and 14 S/Rs since 2022.
14 Share of mothers with children aged 0-59 months consuming an adequately diverse diet.
children and pregnant & lactating women (PLW), although it has been difficult to definitively measure given the lack of access for assessments. In selected urban areas, a 2021 survey showed that maternal dietary diversity decreased from 61.5% in 2018 to 34% in 2021. A proxy indicator for the disastrous nutritional situation of PLW are the soaring numbers of PLW admitted for supplementary feeding in non-governmental feeding programmes (see Figure 4). According to humanitarian estimates, 290,000 children under the age of five suffered from acute malnutrition in 2021. Among them, 49,000 children (17%) were at risk of severe acute malnutrition.

Agricultural production has been hard hit by the pandemic and the military takeover. Farmers have been affected by declining incomes due to lower farm gate prices for their produce, logistics and market disruptions arising from both COVID-19 restrictions and ongoing instability, and cash/liquidity constraints due to financial sector disruptions following the military takeover. The situation had been exacerbated further due to rising farm prices.
input prices, particularly for fertilizers, fuel, seeds and equipment due to the depreciation of the kyat and an increase in global energy prices; the increase in conflict and violence in certain areas has also destroyed crops and limited farmers’ agricultural activities. Many farming households have depleted their savings and are unable to access loans. Beyond the short-term consequences on livelihoods, this also risks having longer term consequences on agriculture productivity and market functionality as farmers have less means to maintain and operate machinery and rural infrastructure. There is evidence of farmers switching from high value and high input/labor intensive crops to low value and less input/labor intensive crop production to cope with the situation, which may give rise to a vicious cycle of low productivity, low income, and less investment. Recent data covering the period 2020-2023 show that one in two crop farmers and livestock owners has experienced a reduction in harvest amounts and/or herd size nearly every year since the pandemic. The situation seems worsening faster in terms of crop outputs at the end of 2022 / early 2023, compared to the trend observed since 2021. This accelerating downhill trend is noted in almost all S/R, except in Shan State. The drop in production is even higher in areas that used to practice more intensive forms of agriculture relying on chemical

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18 By August/September 2022, nearly half (47 per cent) of assessed farmers reported having no access to fertilizer (Source: FAO/WFP).
inputs or mechanization to maintain higher productivity. This is the case in the flood plains of the Delta area (Ayeyarwady, Yangon, Bago) and the in the Dry Zone. Other areas, such as Chin, Kayah or Kayin States, displacement and conflict are probably among the main sources of reduced outputs.

After years of steady climb up to the pandemic, agricultural productivity has suffered in Myanmar since 2020. Agriculture in Myanmar is labour intensive and dominated by smallholder farmers (with 80% of farmers having less than 10 acres). Only 17.6% of total agricultural land is covered by irrigation systems in 2021(almost unchanged since 2015 – 17%). A wide range of factors contributed to low agricultural productivity before 2020, including low levels of investment in agriculture leading to limited use of modern machinery and equipment, underfunded agriculture research, unsustainable management of natural resources, high exposure to climate relevant extreme weather events, water scarcity, and poorly developed agriculture infrastructure- and most of these barriers to higher productivity have surged since 2020.

Figure 8  Agricultural productivity by land unit [agriculture GDP at 2015$/harvested area in ha]
Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- Residents of conflict-affected areas, as conflict severely disrupts access to food and livelihood opportunities, as well as access to nutrition services. Ongoing conflict and movement restrictions imposed by the de facto authorities continue to undermine people’s capacity to produce and source enough nutritious food. Foods has become scarce in some conflict areas.

- Displaced populations: IDPs living in camps are almost exclusively dependent on humanitarian assistance for their food needs. Others are dependent on the support of the host communities in which they are sheltering, but the ability of host communities to support more people has declined during the crisis. IDPs repeatedly list food as a priority need in humanitarian assessments and some IDP households have no food to eat at all. Delays in protection and humanitarian service provision, including cash distributions due to access constraints, are negatively affecting food security in some locations and as result IDPs are resorting to harmful coping strategies, including eating less food, selling items, or buying lower quality food. They are forced to make high-risk life choices such as taking on hazardous or exploitative work that may entail trafficking or other forms of exploitation and abuse.

- Female-headed households: food insecurity is systematically higher among female-than men-headed households.

- Agricultural households, smallholder farmers and those living off livestock are more likely to be food insecure. This is because they are simultaneously facing their own challenges in accessing agriculture inputs, as well as enduring a drop in farm gate prices for their produce and other market difficulties.

- Households with debt, and those vulnerable to economic shocks, who showed the worst food security outcomes in regular surveys since 2020.

Future scenario

- Decreased production, stemming from localized paddy crop losses, combined with the high prices of energy, fuel and essential food items, may cause a significant decline in output leading to a deterioration of food availability and affordability, and subsequent food security outcomes in 2023. These challenges are further exacerbated in heavy conflict areas due to displacement, mine contamination risks, protection and safety threats, and disrupted value chains.

- Access to land for smallholders will continue being at risk in 2023, as land confiscation, expropriation and land-grabbing cases by the de facto authorities and powerful individuals and companies, have increased since 2022, along with increased cases of landmines being placed around farmland in Kayah and Kayin, hindering villagers’ access to land. Parallel land registry systems are also emerging between de facto authorities and EAOs, causing confusion among local populations regarding where they should register their land ownership. The number of IDPs requesting assistance on land registration has increased.

13. UNDP. Vulnerability to Conflict Index, 2023
• Agricultural disruptions due to conflict and displacement, mine contaminated land, and high input prices, will heavily affect on the national economy and food availability in the country. The people of Myanmar will be confronted with continued elevated food prices, food insecurity and corresponding malnutrition. On top of this, natural disasters remain a recurrent threat with annual flooding across many parts of the country, seasonal risk of cyclones and the ever-present danger of earthquakes.

• If the current conflict trends and patterns continue, nutrition needs and gaps will likely deteriorate in 2023, leaving vulnerable groups especially children and PLW (Pregnant and Lactating Women) at grave risk. In the medium and long term this could significantly impact the health and development of the next generation, compromising learning potential and in turn future economic opportunities.

Programming recommendations

Emergency food assistance
• Prioritize the provision of emergency food assistance to conflict-affected areas and vulnerable populations, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) and female-headed households. Ensure timely and efficient distribution of food aid to those in need, with a focus on nutritional support for children, pregnant and lactating women, and malnourished individuals.
• Provide comprehensive support to internally displaced persons, including shelter, clean water, and healthcare, to mitigate the impact of displacement on their food security.

Food security and nutrition programs
• Implement nutrition programs targeting children and pregnant/lactating women to address malnutrition. Promote behavior change communication to improve feeding practices and nutritional awareness among caregivers.
• Design food security programs that address the specific needs of women, who are often disproportionately affected by food insecurity.
• Promote income-generating activities to help households afford basic food items.

Agricultural support
• Support smallholder farmers and agricultural households with access to seeds, fertilizers, and modern farming techniques.
• Strengthen local agricultural value chains to ensure farmers receive fair prices for their produce.
• Assist farmers in adopting climate-resilient agricultural practices to mitigate the impact of extreme weather events on food production.
### SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

#### The situation up to 2020

Myanmar had made steady progress in reducing the prevalence of communicable diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis and has shown remarkable progress in key targets such as maternal mortality, newborn mortality and child mortality towards SDGs targets. However, when compared to other countries in the region, newborn and under-five mortalities are still the second highest in the region. The health system still suffered from decades of underinvestment and there were huge disparities in access and quality of care between urban and rural areas. Out-of-pocket expenditure on health care (as a share of income) was among the highest in the world, which was preventing access to health care, particularly among the poor.

#### Key evolutions since 2020

The health sector has been severely disrupted by COVID-19 and the military takeover. Mobilization of health facilities and personal to respond COVID-19 Pandemic has negatively impacted the other health services. On top of the COVID-19 Pandemic, access to healthcare services is further disrupted by the political instability of the country resulting further increase in out-of-pocket expenditure for health and economic crisis.

Recent WHO monitoring data show that availability of key healthcare services sharply dropped across the country in 2021, while partly recovering in 2022 – but

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2. EPI = Expanded programme of immunization; RMNCAH = reproductive, maternal, neonatal, child and adolescent health; NCD = non-communicable diseases.
For instance, availability of malaria treatment services remains concerningly low and even further decreased in 2022. This lower coverage of basic healthcare needs is not just the result of temporary barriers linked to COVID-19 or to post-February 2021 social unrest and security crackdown: it is also clearly the outcome of reduced government spending on health services. Health spending was already among the lowest worldwide prior to 2020 and now is further falling behind, as the de facto authorities privilege military and security spending over social services.

It is highly likely that the deteriorating access to quality healthcare services is adversely affecting the health outcomes of the population. However, concrete evidence of this negative trend remains limited. This is due to the time it takes for health outcome data to be compiled, and the significant challenge of obtaining timely and high-quality health data in Myanmar. Since 2000 both child mortality and neonatal mortality have shown slow but steady decline though neonatal mortality witnessed a much slower reduction rate when compared to child mortality rate. The Maternal mortality shows remarkable progress and if the current trend continued, there is a possibility of achieving SDG target by 2030.

Tuberculosis incidence has started rising again in 2021, reaching a level not seen since 2016. Similarly, malaria has also been on the rise. These unfavorable trends are associated with the ongoing instability, which reduces the availability of health workers for tracing and treatment, as well as the insufficient investments in

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3. Assuming that all healthcare services delivered at township levels suffered the same sudden drop in 2021, akin to that for EPI – the only healthcare service indicator monitored by WHO prior to 2020.
health research. WHO estimates that half of the increase of 400,000 malaria cases in South-East Asia between 2020 and 2021 happened in Myanmar;\(^4\) the impact in terms of mortality rate is disastrous as it has more than tripled from 0.24 to 0.72 per 100,000 population at risk during the same period.\(^5\) New HIV infections had been declining steadily until 2020, reaching a rate of 0.192 per 1,000 uninfected population. However, in 2021, there was a reversal of this trend, with new infections rising to 0.21 per 1,000 uninfected population.\(^6\)

Latest estimates on access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, indicate a consistent upward trend in the utilization of modern family planning methods among both married and unmarried women. In 2022, 78.7% of women aged 15-49, who have a need for family planning, were covered by modern methods, up from 77.5% in 2020.\(^7\) These results need to be taken carefully though, given the impact of the country’s turmoil on the functioning of sexual and reproductive health-care services and financial capacity of women to continue using modern family planning methods.

Finally, Myanmar’s persistent underinvestment in healthcare and disruptions in healthcare services have also had repercussions on the country’s readiness to handle health emergencies, as evidenced by the most

5. WHO. The Global Health Observatory.
6. Ibid.
7. TRACK20
recent assessment of the IHR score (International Health Regulations capacity and health emergency preparedness). While Myanmar’s average IHR score improved by 4% in terms of capacity, rising from 57 in 2021 to 61 in 2022, it still falls below the regional average of 68 and the global average of 66. This places the country at heightened risk of epidemic and pandemic disease outbreaks and leaves it highly susceptible to other

Figure 5 Incidence of tuberculosis and malaria

![Graph showing incidence of tuberculosis and malaria](image)

Source: UN-IMGF

Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- Populations in conflict-affected areas, which now cover a larger share of the country and receive also more forcibly displaced populations, increasing risks of infectious disease outbreaks.

- People in areas most affected economically by the crisis, as prior to 2020, out-of-pocket health expenditures accounted for 75% of total health spending (2018). With an increasingly defunded public health system, the expenses associated with accessing healthcare in Myanmar post-2020 are likely to have risen.

- HIV-exposed population groups, including drug users and sex workers, in Kachin, Northern Shan, Sagaing, Mandalay and Yangon, as these states and regions gathered up to 75% of the total number of people living with HIV in the country prior to 2020.

- Children, and particularly infants, as they may not receive timely immunization or access to child healthcare, as both services are still not available in all townships of the country.

- People working in occupational groups highly exposed to TB risks, such as mining, factories, public transport, health workers and those who work in highly congested or/and enclosed areas. Men and young men are overrepresented among the population most exposed to TB.

8. Capacities for 1) policy, legal and normative instruments to implement IHR and 2) health service provision, decreased the most in 2021.
Future scenario

- If the conflict and disruption levels do not increase in the near future, it is probable that functioning of the healthcare system will continue recovering and improving, as noted already through empirical observations, and more and more townships offering the full pack of essential healthcare services, as was the case before 2020.

- At the same time, the economic hardships known by a larger share of the population than before will also exclude more people from accessing effective health treatment for financial reasons, as the government health spending is decreasing at the same time – meaning that out-of-pocket health expenditures are increasing in proportion.

- All in all, the deterioration of health outcomes noted since 2020 could stabilize but the likelihood of witnessing significant improvements in this regard appears to be low. In particular, the situations concerning malaria and tuberculosis are expected to continue deteriorating in the near future.

- Pandemic and other health crisis risks in Myanmar will remain high as well due to the declining capacity of the national health system to prevent and respond to such events.

Programming recommendations

**Strengthening Primary Health Care**
- Prioritize the rebuilding and strengthening of primary health care infrastructure, especially in conflict-affected areas.
- Increase mobile health clinics in areas where health facilities have been destroyed or are inaccessible due to conflict.
- Work with community health workers, volunteers, and local NGOs to provide essential services, such as immunizations, maternal health, and child health services.
- Provide health vouchers or subsidies for priority populations like pregnant women, children, and people with specific illnesses.

**Capacity Building and Training**
- Reinforce training programs for healthcare providers, especially in areas like infectious disease management, maternal and neonatal care, and mental health services.
- Enhance training on the prevention and treatment of communicable diseases such as TB, malaria, and HIV.

**Disease-specific Interventions**
- Intensify efforts to combat the resurgence of malaria and TB, and scale up HIV prevention efforts, especially in high-risk areas.

**Sexual and Reproductive Health**
- Ensure the continuity of family planning services, emphasizing the availability of modern contraceptive methods.
The situation up to 2020

In the years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, progress had been made on several education related targets. Primary and secondary school enrollment rates had increased significantly, and more people pursued higher education. Nevertheless, school completion rates for secondary education (53% for lower secondary and 21% for upper secondary) and learning outcomes (only 12% of primary school children met minimum reading requirements in 2019) remained low by regional standards, and considerable disparities remained across population groups and State and Regions in terms of access and quality of education. Cognizant of these shortcomings, the NLD government had initiated a number of policy reforms and steadily increased education funding to reach 9.8% in FY 2019/2020.

Key evolutions since 2020

Up to academic year 2019/2020, year for which the last of comprehensive set of education statistics is available, universal enrolment in basic education in Myanmar had been on steady rise: 110% of primary school age children were enrolled in that year, 86% of lower secondary school age children and 57% for upper secondary school. Similarly, completion rates were also steadily improving in Myanmar up to the pandemic – although a plateau could be noted for upper secondary since 2017 with only 21.6% for upper secondary school (see Fig.1). Gender parity in completion rates was achieved and even largely exceeded for secondary school (1.11 in favour of girls for lower secondary and 1.41 for upper secondary).

The pandemic and the military takeover have disrupted education for almost all students at all education levels and exacerbated education inequities across wealth groups. Except for a brief period (secondary schools opened July-August 2020), the pandemic resulted in school...
5. The reopening in November 2021 excluded 46 townships.

6. 27% of households with out-of-school children and youth stated “costs” as the main reason for children not attending school in the 2015 Labour Force Survey.

closures at all levels, including universities nationwide from March 2020 to November 2021.\(^5\) After public schools reopened, other non-formal education programmes and centres have also reopened. Yet, going to school, as a student or as a teacher, has also become increasingly dangerous since the takeover: the number of security incidents reported in and around schools has been increased enormously since the takeover and schools are increasingly used for military purposes – or just for hosting populations displaced by conflict. In 2022, at least 487 attacks against schools and school personnel have been reported. After the events since February 2021, education has also become highly politicized and many parents refused to send their children back to schools run by the de facto authorities.

Furthermore, already before the compounded crisis, one of the main reasons for school dropouts and non-completion, especially for poor families, was the direct and opportunity costs of schooling.\(^6\) With household incomes declining since 2020, economic barriers to education are also increasing further. Stakeholder consultations reveal that girls are at increased risk of entering child marriages instead of attending school and boys are at increased

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5. The reopening in November 2021 excluded 46 townships.

6. 27% of households with out-of-school children and youth stated “costs” as the main reason for children not attending school in the 2015 Labour Force Survey.
risk of being drawn into child labour. Finally, the crisis, and in particular, the takeover has had serious impact on teacher availability and attendance at schools – teachers were among public servants, together with health sector staff and others in government services, that joined a civil disobedience movement more than 125,000 to demonstrate opposition to the military takeover. Nearly 30% of basic education teachers formerly working in public schools were suspended by de facto authorities for their participation in the movement, and there is no evidence that they have been able to return to teaching in schools after the 2021 suspension. If student/teacher ratios have steadily improved in Myanmar between 2016 to 2020 (20.5 for primary education, 26.7 for lower secondary and 23.0 for upper secondary) as a result of an important teacher recruitment and training driven by the former government, anecdotal evidence shows that the situation is unravelling fast since then. While a loosening of pandemic restrictions resulted in schools and other education spaces opening as of November 2021, many communities report that schools under the de facto authorities remain closed in their localities and indicate that the inability to staff schools (with teachers and administrative personnel) is a significant reason, compounded by the concerns about school safety noted above.

As a result of all the above, the school attendance rate has been plummeting since 2020. During the pandemic, when schools were closed, a large share of students was unable to continue learning though alternative means, and particularly students from low-income households, and those in rural areas and conflict-affected areas due to limited access to reliable electricity, internet, and equipment to support digital learning. When schools fully re-opened in December 2021, only a small percentage of the children and youth that were enrolled in 2019/20 academic year re-enrolled, meaning that most school aged children and youth remained out of school for two consecutive academic years.

Up to 2019/2020, participation in higher education has been growing (from very low levels), reaching almost 19% of corresponding age group (16-21). This marked a 5.5 percentage points increase compared to the academic year 2015-16. However, it has decreased to 0.3% of corresponding age group in 2020-2021 academic year. The situation has also been less positive with participation in technical – vocational programmes, as it steadily decreased since 2018, and remained in any case marginal as a higher education path for Myanmar youth. Similar to basic education, universities were closed throughout COVID-19 and in the aftermath of the military takeover. While there is no data on the number of university

### Figure 3 Participation rates in higher education and TVET

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Higher education</th>
<th>TVET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>17.0%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Myanmar Statistical Yearbook

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7. Consultations conducted by UNESCO.
10. Consultations conducted by UNICEF.
students having re-enrolled, anecdotal evidence suggests that an increasing number of the young people that have the opportunity are leaving Myanmar to access education and work abroad as they feel that their opportunities inside Myanmar have diminished with the military takeover. Some youth also opted to join various resistance groups, including militarized ones, after the takeover. All in all, there is an increasing risk of “brain drain”, which will have a negative effect on Myanmar’s future development trajectory.

Impacts of the compounded crisis in terms of learning outcomes are huge. At the end of 2020, the World Bank estimated that the student cohort from 4 to 17 years of age had lost between 0.4 to 1.0 Learning Adjusted Year of Schooling and this was before yet another semester of lost schooling (2021), leading to projections of total LAYS losses of 1.2 to 2.2. This comes onto a rather catastrophic pre-pandemic situation in Myanmar where only 12% of school children at the end of primary education were proficient in mathematics and 11% in reading. At the societal level the compounded factors of disruption in education may negatively affect human capital formation for years, and in turn Myanmar’s social wellbeing and economic growth potential.

To improve the education system, the Ministry of Education under the NLD government had initiated a number of policy reforms and steadily increased funding on education, all be it from very low levels. In FY 2018/19 government expenditures on education reached an all-time high of 9.82% of total government spending, but the education sector was still highly underfunded. From FY 2019/20, education spending has been steadily decreasing, as for other social spending. Furthermore, the status of significant reforms that were in progress before the pandemic, such as curriculum and assessment reforms aimed at modernizing learning content, teaching methods, and student progress evaluation, teacher education reform, and measures to enhance equity within the education system, currently remains uncertain.

In many cases, these reforms are believed to have been halted or, in some instances, even reversed. Some reorganization of education responsibilities across Ministries have taken place, which education sector partners consider as further undermining coordination and harmonization in the sector. In addition, the de facto authorities have disabled existing online learning platforms, including the “Myanmar Digital Education Platform”, which was developed before the military takeover by the Ministry of Education and offered open access to textbooks and a wide range of education materials. Also, due to teacher shortages, teacher training institutions have offered accelerated pathways to teacher qualifications which undermines quality of teaching and learning. Such measures subvert access to continued learning among children and youth.

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14. The education budget increased between 2011/12 to 2018/19.
15. The NLD government’s target for education spending was 20% of total government expenditures.
16. The responsibility for TVET has been moved away from the Ministry of Education to the Ministry of Science and Technology and a Department of Teacher Education has been established (it has been a longstanding view of education partners that this should be part of university education).
Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- Children from areas affected by conflict: Significant barriers persist in regard to both access to and quality of education, especially for children in areas affected by armed conflict. Education spaces, including formal schools, continue to have barriers to children’s participation including insecurity and lack of qualified education personnel. Furthermore, the quality of education in conflict-affected areas is also affected by generally poorly resourced education environments and a lack of qualified teachers. Limited access to support children’s education in those areas keep vulnerabilities at high levels. The numbers of children affected by conflict and crisis has increased substantially since the military takeover and resulting escalation in conflict. Prior to the takeover, over 92,000 school-aged children were displaced and another 123,300 children were not displaced but in need due to crisis faced by Rohingya populations in Myanmar.\(^\text{17}\) By the end of 2022, the number of school-aged children who were displaced had tripled; with the total number of IDPs since the takeover totaling 1.2 million.\(^\text{18}\) Moreover, State Administration Council amended section (43) sub-section (b) of the National Education Law in October 2022 that only the Burmese language must be used as a classroom language which will impose restrictions on the teaching and learning of indigenous literature and languages. In areas historically affected by conflict and in non-government-controlled areas there are more established education options which seem more resilient to conflict and crisis, such as networks of schools run by non-governmental actors, including monastic schools following the national curriculum, schools run by ethnic organizations, and temporary learning classrooms. However, such networks are less developed in areas where new conflicts have broken out. In addition, due to mainstream school boycotts, there has been an influx of students from mainstream education settings to alternative education such as monastic and ethnic education providers. While compensating for barriers in educational access, it has put their capacity under further strain.\(^\text{19}\)

- Children and youth from low-income households and/or remote rural areas: these children were first more prone to not being able to shift to remote learning during the school closure period caused by the pandemic, as their families lacked financial means to ensure sufficient access to the internet, electricity and digital tools (or their location impeded the use of such technology); then, with economic growth reversing and plummeting after the takeover, this is hitting even harder populations that were already considered as poor before 2020. Children in low to very-low-income households are more prone to leave the education system for good and join the workforce, even before legal age, or be part of child marriage (for girls).

- Children and youth with disabilities: in 2018, only about 1% of public schools had access to adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities.\(^\text{20}\) Instead, 12 designated schools for children with special needs existed but were poorly equipped, and mostly catered for children with special needs in Yangon and Mandalay. With access to schools decreasing even further due to reduced household incomes and increase in conflict, children and youth with disabilities may be at a particular disadvantage and to an even greater extent unable to realize their right to education, worsening an already appalling situation for the fulfillment of the right to education among children and youth with disabilities.\(^\text{21}\)

\(^\text{19}\) Frontier Myanmar (2021). Amid education boycotts, ethnic schools help to fill the gap.
\(^\text{20}\) UNESCO-UIS.
\(^\text{21}\) In 2017, 38.5% of women with disabilities and 26.8% of men with disabilities had not received any formal education (Source: Department of Population and UNFPA (2017). Thematic Report on Disability).
The damage inflicted on education access and education outcomes over the past two years seems difficult to reverse in the short/mid-term, even to prevent further damage. It would require a significant shift in regard to public sentiment and the political situation, as well as policy among authorities. Much greater advocacy and investment in safe and acceptable education for children in Myanmar would also be required from the international community. Children in poor households, remote rural or conflict-affected areas, including children in IDP camps, have for some dropped out for good much earlier than they would have in normal circumstances, and barriers to returning to education will only increase if they are routed into child labour or early marriage. Those that remain in education spaces have to deal with under-resourced education environments, shortage of educators, increasing direct and opportunity costs to participating in education, and ongoing risks of violence in and around education spaces – hardly an environment conducive to learning.

While severely under-resourced, non-state education provision (ethnic education, community education) has been far more resilient to crisis than the public system. Looking forward, diversifying options for individuals who opt for alternative forms of education, including online alternatives, appears to be the most viable approach. This strategy would uphold the crucial role of the state in delivering education services while also incorporating various other service providers and pathways. By doing so, education can be delivered in the safest and most appropriate manner, tailored to the specific location and population demographics.

The profound decline in education outcomes in Myanmar since 2020 is set to have enduring repercussions on the country’s development for generations to come. These impacts will be felt not only in terms of economic growth but also across the social fabric and overall well-being of the nation. This situation casts a shadow over Myanmar’s long-term prospects for achieving a stable, peaceful, and inclusive society.

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**Future scenario**

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**Programming recommendations**

**Alternative Education**

- Support the non-state education provision, including ethnic and community education. These institutions have demonstrated resilience and could fill the educational gap for many children in the interim.

**Economic Support**

- Provide financial assistance to families hit hardest by the economic downturn. Reducing economic pressure can help keep children in schools and away from child labor or child marriage.

**Infrastructure Development**

- Focus on building or rehabilitating educational infrastructures, particularly in conflict-affected areas, with an emphasis on inclusive facilities for children with disabilities.

**Teacher Training**

- Given the shortage of educators, it’s important to develop programs that can quickly but effectively train educators, without compromising the quality of education.

**Strengthening Multimodal Learning**

- Given the uncertainties, a hybrid education system combining physical classroom teaching, online platforms, and community-based learning should be developed to ensure continuity of education, regardless of the prevailing circumstances.
SDG 5: Gender equality

The situation up to 2020

Some progress had been made on ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls, particularly in terms of putting in place policy frameworks for the advancement of gender equality and updating and removing discrimination from legal frameworks. Yet, social norms reinforcing stereotypical roles of men and women in family and society still prevailed, especially in rural areas where 70% of women still reside, and inequalities for women remained entrenched in all spheres of political, economic, and social life. Gender-based violence (GBV) was also common, especially among young married women (in 2016, 20% of young women 15-19 reported experiencing physical or sexual abuse in the last 12 months) 1.

Key evolutions since 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic and the military takeover has increased the risk factors for gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence due to prolonged confinement to the home, rape by people in a position of authority given the military and police operations on restive areas and possible use of rape as a deterrent or reprisal tool. Yet, there remains a lack of substantial, verifiable evidence to confirm an actual increase in gender-based violence. Official data on rape and sexual assaults is often plagued by the issues of underreporting and a lack of reliability. Yet, historically, there have been longstanding challenges in access to justice for violence

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1. Demographic and Health Survey 2015-2016
survivors,\(^2\) and these have been exacerbated by the military takeover, since the rule of law has deteriorated, leaving the home is more unsafe than before for women (see below) and the functionality of the justice sector has been reduced.

Despite being the most prevalent crime facing women, domestic violence and sexual assault cases remain the least likely to be brought to formal or informal justice mechanisms.\(^3\) Prevailing socio-cultural norms and traditions surrounding GBV and the potential for stigmatization of survivors who seek help, are key reasons why GBV incidents go unreported. Survivors in this period of strife are to an even greater extent than before turning to informal justice mechanisms, for help (particularly in areas where ethnic armed organizations operate).\(^4\) For domestic violence, 26% of women respondents in a survey conducted in late 2021\(^5\) agreed with the statement that there had been more beating, slapping or punching between household members during COVID-19 or after the coup. At the same time, up to 33% of women thought in 2022, in another survey,\(^6\) that domestic violence was justified in specific cases.

Another proxy indicator for women’s increased exposure to risks of violence since 2020 resides with their feeling of security when walking alone. Available data show that women feel more unsafe in 2021 than in 2019. This indicates a concerning trend, with approximately 30% more women expressing feelings of insecurity within just two years. The primary drivers behind this growing sense of insecurity are the breakdown of the rule of law and the increasing incidents of random acts of police and military repression that have followed the military takeover, particularly in urban areas and specific regions.

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**Figure 1** Rape cases reported by the police and prosecuted per 100,000 population.

![Figure 1](image1.png)

Source: CSO Yearbook and Court Annual Report

**Figure 2** Feeling of safely (in community, during the day) among women by location and age.

![Figure 2](image2.png)

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2. In 2016, among young women (15–19-year-old) who reported experiencing physical or sexual violence only 7.8% had sought help from the formal justice system (DHS 2015–2016).
4. UNFPA/UNDP GBV Essential Services Package Rapid Assessment (2021)
5. UNDP and UN Women. Regressing Gender Equality in Myanmar: Women living under the pandemic and military rule, 2021.
A significant shift in women’s perception of insecurity at night has emerged, with a striking increase from 15% feeling unsafe stepping out of their house at night to 35% now even feeling unsafe while being at home during nighttime. This escalating sense of insecurity may be attributed to factors beyond domestic or gender-based violence.

The crisis context, initiated by the advent of COVID-19, has led to a decline in the recognition and valuation of women’s unpaid care and domestic labor. In Myanmar, gender norms have traditionally placed women as the primary caregivers in households. For those women who also engaged in paid employment, they have shouldered the dual burden of both remunerated and unremunerated work. Lockdown periods, whether caused by the pandemic or political repression, have increased the burden of domestic work for 50% of women and one third of them declared in 2021 that they had to cease paid work to attend to this surge in caring responsibilities (and it went up to nearly 39% among women in their thirties) and in lower-income households.

Women’s use of enabling technology, such as mobile phone and internet, as a means of empowerment is the only area that has seemingly benefited from the compounded crisis. Indeed, according to Oxford University’s Digital Gender Gap Index, the gap in the use of information and communications technology between men and women in Myanmar has narrowed since 2019. Lockdown periods, the closure of traditional independent media sources (newspapers, TV, radios) and concerns for the safety of relatives, may have triggered more women to use ICTs for their information and communication needs.

![Figure 3](feeling_of_safety_among_women_when_going_out_of_their_home.png)

**Figure 3** Feeling of safely among women when going out of their home.

![Figure 4](digital_gender_gap_index_for_myanmar.png)

**Figure 4** Digital Gender Gap Index for Myanmar (5.b.A)

Source: www.digitalgendergaps.org

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7. [www.Digitalgendergaps.org](http://www.Digitalgendergaps.org). The closest to “1” the index value, the lesser the gender gap.
Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- Women in urban areas and in regions report higher feelings of insecurity than women in rural areas and/or in states. This difference is probably related to the fact that the post-coup security crackdown concentrated in large urban settings at the start (survey was done at the end of 2021). It is probably that, with a widening of the security impact of the coup to rural areas and states, this difference is lessening in 2022.

- Younger women and women of lower educated women are also more exposed to risks of violence (nearly 48% of women with primary education level or below feel unsafe going out of their community, against 38% for women above primary education). Women and sexual minorities living in conflict-affected areas, including women IDPs living in camps, remain highly exposed to risks of sexual violence committed by the security forces and armed forces, as reported through qualitative research. However, verified data to capture the scale of that violence is not available as access to the areas where the crimes take place is limited.

- Women political prisoners are among the most exposed to risks of sexual violence in detention centers (about 30% of those arrested following the military takeover are women). They have little access to support as the de facto authorities have removed the right of access to legal aid during pre-trial detention.

- Women in lower-income households are more likely to bear a higher share of the increased domestic unpaid care work triggered by lockdown or consequences of the income shock on many households caused by the crisis.

Future scenario

- With the persistence of armed confrontation between the de facto authorities and people resisting the military takeover, with varying intensity of fighting, across the country but more markedly in states, it is doubtful that risks of women’s security and safety are going to recede in the near future. Women in hotspots of rebellion, whether informal settlements in urban settings, or women in communities on the frontline of fighting between EAOs and the army, will remain under high risks of sexual and gender-based violence.

- With no sign of economic recovery and poverty levels doubling from before the pandemic, multi-dimensional regress on women’s economic empowerment (labor force participation, salary gap, informal employment) is highly expectable. Hard evidence in these areas is difficult to gather in the absence of country-wide labor force surveys (last one was conducted in 2020).
Programming recommendations

Economic Recovery and Livelihood Support

- **Strengthening of Reporting Mechanisms:** Establish anonymous and accessible reporting mechanisms for Gender-Based Violence (GBV) with the assurance of protection for the victims. This will address the underreporting of violence against women due to socio-cultural norms.

- **Support Informal Justice Mechanisms:** Recognizing that many survivors are turning to informal justice mechanisms, there should be efforts to engage with, sensitize, and support these mechanisms to ensure they provide justice and support to survivors.

- **Psycho-Social Support Systems:** Develop and strengthen psycho-social support systems for victims of GBV, including counseling services and rehabilitation programs.

- **Economic Empowerment Programs:** Initiate women-focused economic empowerment programs, including skill-building and financial literacy training.

- **Local Community Engagement:** Collaborate with local community leaders and influencers, especially in rural areas, to challenge and change the socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities and violence against women.

- **Digital Empowerment:** Given the increased use of ICT by women, facilitate workshops on digital literacy, online safety, and how to leverage technology for economic growth.

- **Support for Political Prisoners:** Advocate for the rights and safety of women political prisoners and ensure they have access to legal support during their detention.
The situation up to 2020

In the years prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, progress had been made on increasing access to basic drinking water services (for 82% of the population) and improved sanitation facilities (80%), especially in urban areas. The Government also achieved progress in WASH sector development. However, challenges remain on delivering safely managed sanitation services and in bridging disparities between urban and rural locations and between the richest and the poorest in society. Moreover, access to clean water and sanitation for internally displaced people (IDPs) and people living in informal urban settlement slagged significantly behind. Myanmar was also endowed with stable water resources and showed low levels of water stress.

Key evolutions since 2020

In 2020, during the pandemic, an estimated 83.7% of the population had access to basic drinking water services. This is almost double the figure for the year 2000, when access to basic drinking water was only 46%. Yet, access to water services does not always mean access to safe drinking water as, in 2020, right during the pandemic, still over 40% of people could not access safely managed drinking water. Although steadily decreasing as well over the past decade, disparities between urban and rural areas for access to water remain significant, with still over 21 percentage points in access to safely managed services between urban and rural households. However, even within urban areas pockets of deprivation remain for drinking water as informal peri-urban settlements do not usually avail state-managed basic infrastructure and rely on makeshift, mostly unsafe, sources. Access was also widely different between areas of the country with Yangon Region topping at 56% access for safely managed services and Rakhine State only 16% (2019, Inter-Censal survey). In areas with limited access, many people are still using water from unimproved sources or surface water, causing diarrheal diseases. Access to safe
drinking water also differs across the household wealth spectrum. In 2017, poorest households ranked five percentage points below the national average during the dry season as they could not resort to alternative – paying – water sources such as trucked or bottled water.  

Their limited income also precludes them being able to repair pipe networks or buying fuel to operate pumps or purifying water. With the rapid decline in household income and shooting poverty levels, families have to sometimes deprioritize water services for other basic needs as food or medicine. For example, in informal settlements of Yangon, a survey in 2021 showed that 67% of households relying on bottled water prior to the twin crisis could no longer afford it and had shifted to more unsafe water sources. 

Progress on access to at least basic sanitation has been much slower or even not happening at all, when it comes to safely managed services, which are plateauing at 61% since 2015. In 2020, about 75% of the population had access to basic sanitation but still 20% of the population (over 4 million children) lived in households that did not use improved toilets or households practicing open defecation. Access to handwashing facilities with soap and water was available for 75% - a positive feature to control the spread of the corona virus. An urban – rural gap remained in terms of access to safely managed sanitation services and, though it is less intense than

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2 WHO/UNICEF JMP (https://washdata.org/data/household#/)  
3 UN-Habitat. Survey conducted in March 2021.  
4 2019 ICS
for drinking services (difference is 10.6 percentage points in 2020), it is striking to see that the gap has been steadily increasing since 2015, pointing to a lack of sufficient investments on safe sanitation programmes in urban informal settlements by government.

While data beyond 2020 is not yet available, it is reasonable to assume that the reduction in income, coupled with a general lack of government investment in social and infrastructure programs following the coup, may have adversely affected the provision of safer sanitation services to the population. The potential disruption of state-run water services, as observed in other public services since 2021, further contributes to this negative impact. The sole mitigating factor against this trend could arise from heightened awareness among the population regarding the significance of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) services, particularly emphasizing good handwashing hygiene in the aftermath of the pandemic. This increased awareness may motivate households to prioritize sanitation services, even during periods of substantial income contraction.

Myanmar is endowed with abundant water resources. Potential water resources volume is about 1,082 km³ for surface water and 495 km³ for groundwater. Freshwater resources have increased quite significantly since the baseline year of 2000 as the area, in 2021, of permanent bodies of water has increased by 20.3% and for seasonal water bodies by 30.4%. Man-made water reservoirs are also presenting a much higher usable capacity than 20 years ago (increase of about 42%). In total, inland wetland areas represent in 2021 8.61% of the country land mass. The proportion of freshwater withdrawal for consumption is very low which indicates low levels of water stress. In 2019 (latest available data) 5.8% of total available freshwater resources were withdrawn for consumption, mostly for agriculture (89%), followed by domestic use (10%) and then industry for only 2%. Water withdrawals have been stable over the past year. Yet, this does not mean that parts of the country at times are subjected to water scarcity. Given Myanmar’s diverse climatic conditions (4 agro-ecological zones) and an uneven distribution of rainfall, some regions (the Dry Zone) do experience water shortages and drought during parts of the year.

Water quality on the other hand has deteriorated overall in freshwater bodies since 2010. The number of lakes exhibiting extreme to high turbidity has surged by a substantial 37.3%, and those with a high to extreme trophic state have increased by 4.2%. However, it is noteworthy that the situation has shown improvement compared to the peak observed in 2018, with a decrease of 11.4% noted in 2018. Additionally, there is a concerning estimate that Myanmar has lost 6.63% of its mangrove area over the past two decades.

![Figure 3](attachment:Surface_area_of_freshwater_bodies_compared_to_2000_baseline.png)

**Surface area of freshwater bodies compared to 2000 baseline (=100)**

For drinking services (difference is 10.6 percentage points in 2020), it is striking to see that the gap has been steadily increasing since 2015, pointing to a lack of sufficient investments on safe sanitation programmes in urban informal settlements by government.
Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- Rural populations in general have a more difficult and intermittent access to safe drinking water, especially in the dry zone area and in areas affected by regular natural disasters such as flooding or landslides. Access shortages are felt more strongly during the dry season in rural areas, while such seasonality in access is barely noticeable in urban areas. Rural populations also cannot avail the same level of state services for maintenance of water supply networks – and most of them rely anyway on non-grid solutions for water supply – and are therefore more self-dependent when it comes to facing the consequences of regular incidents and disasters affecting water supply. For sanitation, while in general rural populations have lesser access to sanitation overall, for those who have, sanitation services available are of better quality than in urban areas.

- Residents of informal settlements and homeless people.

- Poor households, especially those most susceptible to the economic repercussions and income setbacks stemming from the dual crisis, not only previously lacked the financial means to access alternative drinking water sources but also struggled to afford the maintenance of drinking and sanitation facilities. Confronting with the dilemma of allocating their remaining income to meet essential needs such as food and health, these households may find themselves with no option but to deprioritize WASH services. Consequently, they might resort to non-improved and unsafe water or sanitation services perceived as more cost-effective.

- Internally displaced populations who rely almost exclusively reliant on humanitarian support for their WASH needs. At the end of 2022, the displaced population has grown to about 1.95 million people. Delivering humanitarian WASH services to those in protracted displacement has become increasingly challenging since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic due to restrictions on movement and lack of supplies, and it has become further complicated after the military takeover due to deteriorating security. Reaching the newly displaced is even more difficult as many do not reside in organized camps and do not avail therefore basic WASH supplies and services such as water storage and purification tablets or basic hygiene supplies, and are forced to practice open defecation, which exposes them to increased risk of life-threatening diseases. Displaced women and girls are particularly affected by the lack of WASH services. The WASH situation has also become increasingly challenging for communities hosting IDPs as the limited WASH services that exists now have to cater for more people.

- Women in general, but especially in rural areas, IDP camps and informal settlements, as there is a lack of gender responsive WASH services, lack of access to sanitation facilities in schools and hospitals, which in turn complicate girls access to education, and drive maternal and child mortality upwards.

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5. https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/myanmar-situation#:~:text=Conflict%20triggered%20by%20the%20military,are%20currently%20displaced%20within%20Myanmar
6. Need assessments conducted by UNICEF in 2021 showed that more than 30% of IDPs are using unimproved surface water as their source of drinking water and that more than 50% of respondents had seen signs of open defecation in their camps.
Future scenario

While there are no imminent threats of the availability of water resources in Myanmar, neither from climate change impact or through change in withdrawal patterns – except for areas already witnessing a difficult supply situation in dry season – threats are increasing on keeping the progress trend noted for the past two decades on access to safe drinking and sanitation services. This is mostly due to rising poverty levels and, at the same time, reduced state effectiveness and efficiency in maintaining and expanding the water and sanitation networks.

Also, while the enabling environment for further improving WASH services had been strengthened in the years leading up to the military takeover, including a national WASH strategy and Investment Plan (2018-2030) launched in 2017, and cross-governmental coordination improved, since the military takeover, reforms have been stalled and it is unclear what the WASH priorities of the current de facto authorities are.

Programming recommendations

Strengthening Rural Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation:
- Establish programs to quickly restore access to clean water in areas most affected by disasters, focusing especially on the dry zone and areas prone to flooding or landslides.
- Dedicate resources to bolster and repair the water infrastructure in rural areas.
- Given the vulnerability of some areas to natural disasters and climate-related events, design programs that build community resilience. This can include creating community water storage facilities, promoting water conservation techniques, and building flood-resistant sanitation facilities.

Targeted Programs for Vulnerable Populations:
- Design interventions to introduce or strengthen access to safely managed drinking water in informal peri-urban areas lacking state-managed basic infrastructure.
- Given their reliance on humanitarian aid, enhance the delivery of essential WASH services to IDPs.
- Initiate subsidized programs to help the most economically vulnerable to gain access to improved water sources and sanitation facilities.

Gender-responsive Interventions:
- Ensure that all WASH programs and facilities are gender-responsive, keeping in mind the unique challenges faced by women and girls. This might involve building sanitation facilities in schools, ensuring safety in accessing water sources, and incorporating women in decision-making processes around WASH.
**SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

**DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

The situation up to 2020

With Myanmar was on a steady path of economic growth and job creation in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. GDP grew by more than 6% almost every year since 1999, first driven by natural resource-based industries such as agriculture, fisheries and forestry, oil and gas, and mining and then, thanks for large infrastructure projects, the tourism, service, and manufacturing sectors expanded. MSMEs accounted for 90% of the economic activity and employment, with about 62% of workers considered vulnerable employment. While the labor force participation set at 60% was rather low by regional standards, unemployment was very low (1.5% in 2020) – but much higher among youth at 4.9% (15–24-year-old) and 15% of youths are not in employment or training. Financial inclusion was also lagging in the country, with only 26% of people with a bank account, another sign that the private sector was still dominated by a high level of informality.

Key evolutions since 2020

During the first year of the pandemic (FY 2019/2020), Myanmar's economic growth remained positive at 3.2% and was on a path of steady recovery. However, the military takeover caused a huge drop, leading to a substantial 18.6% decrease in the GDP per capita during FY2020/21. A modest recovery at 3% is forecast for FY 2021/2022, which still leaves the country's economic output at the end of 2022 12% points below

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what it was before the pandemic. The evolution of the labor productivity, or annual growth rate of real GDP per person, which had reached 8.4% in FY 2018/2019 –

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP per capita</th>
<th>GDP per employed person</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>-5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>-10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2022</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank & ILO Stats

among the highest in the world – and remained positive during the pandemic (+3.8%) also felt the shock of the combined crisis and receded by 14.8% in 2021. ILO estimates that labor productivity has further receded by 2% in 2022.

Following the military takeover on February 1st, 2021, Myanmar has been facing major difficulties in its economy and labor market. The economy declined notably, causing disruptions in agriculture, manufacturing, trade, tourism, and foreign investment. Businesses have struggled due to conflicts, internet shutdowns, and ongoing instability. This turmoil has disrupted industries, leading to job losses and fewer chances for employment. The operating capacity of Myanmar firms has been heavily impacted by the dual crisis. While during COVID, supply chain breakdowns, restrictions on movements of goods and staff, market closures, and reduction in

2. World Ban
3. ILO Stats
access to credit, where the main triggers of reduced business operations, since the military take-over, insecurity, power outages, the volatility of the MMK and reduction in sales (linked to massive income loss among the population), are the main challenges faced by businesses. The World Bank, through its bi-yearly Firm Impact Survey, estimates that, in average, Myanmar businesses operate at 63% of their capacity at the end of 2022, while their profit level is done by 26% compared to a year before. This is a relative improvement to the situation a year before, after the first 6 months of the military takeover, when business reported on average a drop of 59% in profit.

As firms are reporting at the end of 2022 the lowest operating capacity since the start of the political crisis in average (and mostly in the industrial sector due to energy costs and foreign exchange restrictions), expectations are that the average profit level in 2023 will experience a new significant drop anew. In general, smaller firms remain more vulnerable to challenges to business operations.

Myanmar firms have massively adopted digitalization to conduct their business since 2020. The pandemic had already triggered a first wave of digitalization, also supported by the government, but the military take-over with all the additional challenges brought to business operations, seem to have convinced even more firms to shift to digital payments, social media, or accounting software to run their business. For instance, the adoption of digital payment methods or debit and credit cards is likely a response to both cashflow issues and a drop in value for the Kyat. Similarly, entrepreneurs are likely looking to reverse the issue of declining sales with social media presence for promotion.

A longstanding challenge for private sector development in Myanmar has been the lack of access to banking and financial services for individuals and business. COVID-19 increased vulnerabilities in the already weak banking and finance sector as non-performing loans rose due to the economic shock that the pandemic posed on businesses and individuals. However, this challenge was relatively small compared to the

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**Figure 3** Percentage of firms using digital tools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Digital Tool</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounting software</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>40.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debit/credit card</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital payment</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of any digital tool</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP

**Figure 4** Access to credit for Myanmar businesses in % of firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reduction in access to credit</th>
<th>S1-2021</th>
<th>S2-2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Loan from bank</td>
<td>2.02%</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan from MFI</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction in access to credit</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank, UNDP
substantial outflow of bank deposits that followed the military takeover in February 2021, due to a loss of trust in the banking system. To prevent a total collapse, restrictions on withdrawals and foreign currency transactions were imposed. The lack of functionality in the formal banking system has led to the emergence of an informal market for cash, where charges can range from 3% up to 12% of the cash withdrawal amount. The bank liquidity challenge also limits the ability of the banking sector to provide credit to businesses, thereby further reducing their ability to address short-term cash flow issues and longer-term development needs. The situation had improved slightly on the formal credit market at the end of 2021, according to WB monitoring, but has taken again a negative turn in the first semester of 2022 (20% of businesses reporting reduction in access to credit). Nevertheless, borrowing from a formal financial institution remains extremely marginal among Myanmar businesses as most resort to family or money lenders for their cashflow needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, only 2.24% of businesses used formal financial institutions for the financing needs (against 11.6% from non-formal sources), while this ratio went to 4.19% since the military take-over. One of the reasons explaining this surge could be that government grants that were available as external source of financing during COVID-19, are no longer available in 2021.

Since 2020, micro-finance institutions have remained in full operation, despite their deteriorating asset quality caused by an increase in non-performing loans and other operational challenges. They have remained an important source of emergency financing for households facing sudden income cuts due to COVID and then the military take-over impact. Amounts loaned through MFIs, to both households and MSMEs peaked in 2020, and receded in 2021, which could be a consequence of the fast-growing poverty levels whereby households cannot provide even the minimum level of guarantee to take a micro-loan anymore while MFIs may also be facing a surge in non-performing loans which obliges them to restrict the issuance of new loans. As would be expected, the savings portfolio held by MFIs remained almost unchanged during the period and even started decreasing again in 2021, as did the number of active savers, as the saving capacity of Myanmar households has been hit hard by the economic crisis. Constraints to MFI operations in conflict-affected areas, including displacement of clients, shutting down of MFI branches by security forces, threats on staff security, increasing portfolio risk, have led some MFIs to apply for termination to the Financial Regulatory Department at the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Industry.

Employment was hard hit by COVID-19 and the military takeover. According to ILO estimates, annual employment (both formal and informal) is estimated to have been reduced by 1.6 million jobs in 2020 and 1.8 million in 2021. Working hours are estimated to have decreased by 28.9% in 2021 compared to 2020, after already decreasing by 8.7% in 2020 – which speaks of increased underemployment, an issue that was already prevalent in pre-COVID Myanmar (12.7% of labor force was under-employed in 2017). Losses in working hours and employment were greater for women than men.

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**Figure 5: MFI Operations**

![Graph showing MFI operations from 2019 to 2021](image)

Source: Myanmar Micro-Finance Association

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5 All data on job and working hour losses is found on ILO Stats, and comes from ILO’s Rapid Employment Assessment reports.

as the number of employed women declined by 19% compared to 17% for men in 2020 and a further 9% for women in 2021 and 7% for men. In 2022, employment has known a small rebound, with a positive balance of 700,000 new jobs compared to 2021 and a 5.7% increase in working hours per week. Still, employment levels in 2022 remained 1.1 million below the situation pre-COVID. Construction, garments, tourism, and hospitality were among the hardest hit industries, with year-on-year employment losses reaching an estimated 31%, 27% and 30%, respectively between pre- and post-COVID time. In less productive sectors such as agriculture, workers have continued working but shifted into poorer-quality, lower-paid production.

All in all, unemployment is expected to have increased significantly in Myanmar as a result of the crisis, but no estimates are available past 2020 as Labor Force Surveys have not been conducted since then. In 2020, just before the pandemic, unemployment remained very low at 1.5% of the labor force (but 2.2% among women and 4.9% among youth 15-24). Limited-sample household surveys since then confirm that workers in urban areas and in regions (where most of the industrial and service sectors are located) have been the most affected by job losses (27% of households in regions had at least one member losing his/her job in the past year vs. 15.6% in states, and 31% in cities vs. 21% in rural areas).

The quality of jobs is under serious strain. Labor conditions are tenuous for many workers with severe incursions of labor rights as referred to by the ILO Committee on Freedom of Association, ILO Governing Body and in the International Labor Conference (ILC) Resolution of 2021. In 2021 and 2022, these ILO bodies reports as well as the ILC Resolution reflect a significant regression in compliance with international labor standards compared to 2020. Accordingly, the ILO Governing Body, in March 2022 decided to establish a Commission of Inquiry into Myanmar’s non-observance of the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No. 87) and the Forced Labor Convention, 1930 (No. 29).

Vulnerable employment (defined as so called own-account workers or contributing family workers), as modelled by ILO, remains high and almost unchanged in 2020 (64%), up from 62% in 2019 and in 2020, 81% of workers were in informal employment (ILOSTAT). Available evidence shows that the already meagre average salary (about 157 USD per month in 2020), has known cuts, especially in the agriculture and garment sectors.

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8 UNDP (2021). “People’s Pulse Survey: Socio-economic Impact of the events since 1st February 2021 on households in Myanmar”,
9 ILO (2022) Interim Report - Case No 3405 (Myanmar)
10 ILO (2023) GB.347/INS/12 and decision
11 ILO, Resolution for a return to democracy and respect for fundamental rights in Myanmar, International Labour Conference, 109th Session, 19 June 2021
Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- People living on incomes below or close to the poverty line, including people in vulnerable employment, who are likely to benefit less from limited growth rebound and have already seen their working conditions worsen from the two crises and are most prone to forced labor or pay cuts.

- Workers in industrial and service sectors in urban areas and regions, who have been hit more than in any other sectors by job losses and loss of rights.

- Women, as the pre-existing gaps with men in terms of employment, salary, and decent working conditions, are exacerbated by the crisis, in addition to women having to bear a higher share of domestic work (especially during COVID) in a situation of continuing high level of disturbance to security and education sector from the struggle between de-facto authorities and the opponents. Women are hence less likely to benefit from the employment rebound in the near future.

- MSME owners face more difficulty maintaining their operating capacity and profit given lower access to external finance, lack of digitalization, lack of assistance from government and higher exposure to supply chain ruptures and currency volatility.

Future scenario

- Beyond 2023, the baseline outlook remains weak, according to the World Bank. On some measures, business expectations about the future have strengthened. But household incomes have weakened, and coping mechanisms appear to be under increasing strain, limiting the potential for a pick-up consumption. With global commodity prices remaining at relatively high levels and persistent downward pressure on the kyat exchange rate, domestic prices for food, fuel, and other imported inputs are likely to remain elevated over the short to medium term, constraining both production and domestic demand. Elevated levels of conflict in some areas are expected to continue to constrain productive activity, particularly in agriculture. In conjunction with the deterioration in the policy environment, these constraints imply that a return to pre-pandemic levels of economic activity in Myanmar is unlikely in the near term. This sharply contrasts with the situation in the rest of the East Asia and Pacific region, where GDP in all large countries has already recovered to above 2019 levels or is projected to do so in 2023.

- Beyond the devastating short-term impact that the historic economic contraction of 18% continues to have on people's livelihoods and food security, the military takeover is also likely to curtail Myanmar's previously promising growth trajectory for years to come, as the increase in insecurity and political instability, combined with the enhanced banking, logistics, and energy supply challenges have negatively affected both domestic and foreign businesses appetite to invest, and thereby also the prospects for technological upgrading and innovation that could lead to further industrialization and a shift towards sectors that create more productive and higher paid jobs for workers.

- It is likely that the economy will again become more dependent on natural resource-based industries including oil and gas, while the private economy weakens. In such an economy, people will benefit less from economic growth. In other words, growth is likely to become less inclusive.

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14 Ibid.
Programming recommendations

Immediate Crisis Response and Recovery:
- Roll out immediate livelihood support and cash transfers to the most vulnerable populations, especially women and those in vulnerable employment.

Resilient MSME Development and Job Creation:
- Build on the rapid digital adoption by offering training and capacity-building for MSMEs in leveraging digital platforms for business growth and resilience.
- Address the unemployment among youth by providing vocational training and skills development programs, especially in digital and green economy sectors. Engage with all stakeholders, including the private sector, to ensure that labor rights are upheld, especially given the current challenges noted.
- Address the disproportionate impact on women by creating gender-sensitive employment programs and providing support for women entrepreneurs.

Encourage Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Growth:
- Invest in promoting sustainable industries, such as renewable energy, which can drive economic growth and job creation.
- Given Myanmar’s reliance on agriculture, introduce sustainable farming practices and invest in Agri-tech solutions for smallholder farmers.
The situation up to 2020

With a high number of residents of informal settlements and homeless people, Myanmar still had a long way to go to ensure access to adequate, safe, and affordable housing for all at the time the COVID pandemic happened. Rapid economic growth had put increased pressure on transport systems and the impact of cities on the environment was increasing. The negative impact of disasters was high both in terms of loss of lives and economic losses.

Key evolutions since 2020

Disaster risk reduction is of critical importance to Myanmar, given that it is prone to a range of natural hazards including earthquakes, cyclones, floods, droughts, and landslides, which are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change. Communities, particularly the poor and vulnerable, suffer high losses from disasters. In total, disasters have, in the last two decades, caused about 140,000 deaths, affected the lives and livelihoods of approximately 5 million people and resulted in approximately USD 5 billion economic loss. This places Myanmar in 2021 as one of the two countries experiencing the worst impacts of extreme weather events on the Global Climate Risk Index, behind only Puerto Rico. On May 2023, Cyclone Mocha struck Rakhine State, Myanmar. This event marked one of the most powerful cyclones to hit the country in decades. The cyclone has devastated coastal areas, hitting hundreds of thousands of already vulnerable people. As it progressed inland, Cyclone Mocha inflicted significant damage, unleashing strong winds, heavy rainfall, and flooding across Chin, Sagaing, Magway, and Kachin regions.

The disaster prevention and response capacities of the country have also been affected, as all public services, with the change of regime. Disaster prevention capacities, which contribute to reducing the human impact of unpredictable disasters, are also weakened by the conflict conditions now affecting nearly half of the country. The loss of income and worsening poverty is limiting the ability of households to invest in building their own resilience to disasters. This is compounded by restrictions in access to information and delivery of basic services due to the impeded functioning of public services. Even before the military takeover, early warning information was not reaching all at-risk communities due to challenges such as the lack of digital

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1. Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT), [https://public.emdat.be/]
2. [https://germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_2.pdf](https://germanwatch.org/sites/default/files/Global%20Climate%20Risk%20Index%202021_2.pdf)
3. OCHA Situation Report no.1, 25 May 2023
4. The Department of Disaster management has lost many capable staff members who previously led strategic reforms due to their participation in the civil disobedience movement (Source: UNDP).
connectivity and actionable early warning information. The increased distrust of the public towards information coming from the de facto authorities has meant that the use of early warning information has now diminished further in many locations.

The efforts to decentralize budgeting, planning and implementation of preparedness strengthening efforts to the community level have also been disrupted since the military takeover, due to the shrinking civil space. For example, community development committees are no longer allowed to register as they are being viewed with suspicion by the de facto authorities, and many local CSOs are inactive due to increased security risks. Under the situation of the country that has never been polarized politically as it is now, forming functioning community-based organization is extremely difficult. As the situation in Myanmar deteriorated, focus also shifted to addressing immediate needs, sometimes at the expense of building resilience for the future.

Additionally, as conflicts persist across numerous states and regions, a significant migration of people towards cities is underway, causing a rapid surge in urban population density. This surge exerts substantial pressure on transportation systems, housing and waste management system, amplifying the environmental footprint of these burgeoning urban bubs.

On the target of ensuring access for all to adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services and upgrading slums, Myanmar still has a long way to go. In 2018, an estimated 56.1% of the urban population lived in urban slums and in 2014 census, close to 1 million people (about 2% of the population) were homeless. Access to basic municipal services including piped water, sanitation facilities and solid waste management services is limited in many informal settlements and as they are often located along the city’s riverbeds, an estimated 34% of the residents are under severe risk of flooding and water logging. Residents of informal settlements have no safety of tenure and live under threat of eviction. Their situation worsened significantly during COVID-19 and following the military takeover. Spot surveys conducted at the time in Yangon among residents of informal settlements showed that in November 2020, 69% of households felt at threat from eviction. Forced evictions and resettlement has been the longstanding approach to dealing with informal settlements. However, in the years just before the pandemic, there had been an emerging shift towards approaches that to a greater extent recognize the right of residents of informal settlements. In 2019, some initial steps were taken to recognize communal land tenure and to start upgrading conditions in informal settlements instead of resettling residents. These processes have stalled following the military takeover and the threat of eviction has increased. In October 2021, more than 8,000 families living in informal settlements in Yangon were evicted and left homeless, without any compensation.

The situation of residents of informal settlements also worsened from the economic impact of the compounded crisis on their income, especially for the many households where members worked in the construction and garment industry. In March 2021, about 93% of households in these settlements reported a fall in income over the past 30 days and almost all households (97%) reported no alternative source of income. During lockdowns and restrictions of movement imposed in response to the spread of Covid-19, additional hardship was created.

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5. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)
6. Idem
by the imposition of martial law and curfews in areas of Yangon where large informal settlements are located, which further restricted access to livelihoods. In turn, the decline in incomes restricted access to necessities such as drinking water as most residents there rely on buying bottled water given the lack of public investments in building basic infrastructure. In addition, the restrictions on movement also negatively affected solid waste management, as the confinement to home increased likelihood of indiscriminate disposal of waste generated and made it difficult to properly dispose of it.

Steady progress had been made in recent years on the target related to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. Myanmar has two sites (Pyu Ancient Cities and Bagan) on the UNESCO World Heritage List and 15 (7 cultural and 8 natural) sites registered on the Tentative World Heritage List. A third site, the ancient city of Mrauk-U in Rakhine, has also been proposed but still pending consideration. In 2018, the Conservation of Biodiversity and Protected Areas Law and the Forest Law were adopted. In 2019, the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage Regions (sites) law was passed. In addition, there had been progressive policies for the development, protection, and preservation of specific sites. Following the military takeover, capacity building and technical assistance programmes have been put on hold and the relevant Ministries have lost some of the staff working on heritage protection. Efforts to restore and renovate monuments have also been disrupted. Given the increase in insecurity and conflict, natural and cultural heritage are at increased risk of damage and destruction.

Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- The urban poor (mostly migrants living in informal settlements), rural poor, women, children, the elderly, people with disability; and IDPs sheltering in camps are disproportionately affected by disasters. The reasons for the disproportionate impacts include lack of inclusiveness of the planning processes and leaving the groups that are most affected out, as well as lack of choice and opportunities among these groups, which makes them more vulnerable in disaster situations. Women may face barriers in access to information and resources needed to adequately prepare for, respond to and cope with a disaster - including access to early warning and safe shelter, to bank accounts to protect savings from disasters and stable income, as well as their ability to exercise personal freedom of choice. In certain cases, the disparities may also be associated with the fact that many women stay behind following a disaster to look after their children and relatives. Despite gender-based vulnerabilities, women could become powerful change agents to improve community preparedness for disaster if given opportunities.

- Residents of informal settlements and homeless people as they are targeted by increasing operations of eviction and police/military repression for being active members of the popular upheaval against the military coup. Also, their access to basic services, already poor before the COVID pandemic and the coup, has been even more difficult since then after progressive policies and infrastructure programmes for urban regeneration have been halted by the new regime.

8. Idem
9. Listed in 2014 and 2019 respectively.
10. For example, during cyclone Nargis in 2008, almost 61% of fatalities were women.
Future scenario

- Risks level on people’s resilience remain very high, with unrest spreading across the country and the probability of a major disaster hitting Myanmar.

- In a context of severe economic crisis and deprioritizing by the de facto authorities of social expenditures, including for upgrading infrastructure and living conditions in informal urban settlements, the probability that the share of population living in urban slums increases and that their access to basic services becomes even further restricted. The number of homeless people, as a result of the economic crisis and loss of livelihoods, conflict and political repression, and suspension or reduced scope of social protection programmes and safety nets, is also estimated to continue increased.

- In the absence of long-term strategic interventions, heritage properties face serious threats, including deterioration of property structures, materials and ornamental features of historic and architectural importance, leading to a loss of historical authenticity and cultural significance.

Programming recommendations

Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):
- Reinforce the capacities of local communities, especially in disaster-prone areas, through training on disaster preparedness, response, and post-disaster management. Invest in strengthening infrastructure to withstand natural disasters, especially in vulnerable zones. This includes durable housing, storm-resistant shelters, and flood barriers.
- Improve the early warning system, ensuring that information is disseminated in a timely and accessible manner, even in areas with low digital connectivity.

Informal Settlements:
- Prioritize the provision of basic services like clean water, sanitation, waste management, and energy, especially in informal settlements where access is limited.

Cultural Heritage:
- Strengthen efforts to safeguard cultural and natural heritage sites, especially in conflict zones.

Economic Empowerment:
- Design and implement programs to support livelihood opportunities, particularly in sectors where most of the urban poor are employed.
- Reinforce or introduce social protection programs to provide immediate relief to families hit hardest by the economic downturn.

Vulnerable Groups:
- Promote women’s participation in decision-making roles and community leadership, leveraging their potential as change agents for community preparedness.
- Provide essential services, security, and advocacy for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and those living in camps.
The situation up to 2020

From 2011 and up to the military takeover on 1 February 2021, initial steps towards democracy took place under a hybrid form of civilian–military rule. Reforms to enhance good governance, modernize institutions and introduce increased checks and balances, were initiated, but remained far from complete. Progress on promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice was slow before the military takeover. The constitutional set-up with the military holding 25% of seats in Parliament and the broad powers of the executive to nominate most senior officials in the judiciary, undermined separation of powers and judicial independence, and gave the military considerable influence over law-making and control over the judiciary.

Key evolutions since 2020

Armed conflict continues to undermine progress on the SDG target of significantly reducing all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere. Since the military takeover, the level of armed conflict and violence has intensified, which has led to a dramatic increase in people killed and conflict related casualties and victims of conflict related violence. Prior to the military takeover, conflict related violence and insecurity almost exclusively affected ethnic minority communities. Since the military takeover it has also spread to areas that were previously spared from violence and that are predominantly inhabited by the Bamar ethnic
Figure 1  Conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population

![Chart showing conflict-related deaths per 100,000 population from 2015 to 2022.]

Source: Upsalla Conflict Data Programme

Figure 2  Left: VCI (Aug 22 - Jan 23), Right: VCI (Feb 23 - July 23)

![Maps showing vulnerability to conflict index (VCI) in Myanmar.]

group, as shown in the figure below presenting the vulnerability to conflict index produced by UNDP\(^2\).

In the first half of 2023, Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Kayin and Mon were most conflict-vulnerable according to the vulnerability to conflict index.

A direct consequence of the widespread conflict situation in Myanmar is the internal displacements of its population. The total number of IDPs in Myanmar was reaching 1,498,000 by the end of 2022, compared to 649,000 in 2021.\(^3\) This is the highest number of IDPs in Myanmar in the last 20 years.

Among the consequences of the rising conflict levels are increasing attacks on health and humanitarian workers, which have also surged since 2021. As of mid-2023, a staggering 95 healthcare and humanitarian personnel died in Myanmar due to attacks directly linked to conflicts and while carrying out their duties.\(^4\) Such level of danger for aid workers and health personnel earned the country the undesirable ranking of being the 3rd most dangerous for aid workers in 2022.\(^5\)

Criminal violence, not related to conflict or suppression of political opposition by security forces, had been gradually rising up since 2015. In 2021, Myanmar Police

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2. [Vulnerability to Conflict Index](#).
3. Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, [Global Internal Displacement Database](#).
4. MDO calculation based on data from WHO [Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care (SSA)](#) and [USAID Aid Worker Security Database](#).
recorded a rate of 4.42 homicides per 100,000 people, marking nearly twofold increase compared to the previous year. However, it should be noted that historically, official data are considered to not capture properly the scale of human trafficking in Myanmar. In spite of these rather tame criminality figures, the feeling of safety among the population has deteriorated during that period. Survey results show that 30% of women did not feel safe going out during the day in 2021 against only 4% in 2019.\textsuperscript{6} Although not measured in that survey, similar trend would be expectable among men. The prevailing sense of insecurity primarily stems from the military’s crackdown on resistance against the takeover and a notable surge in criminal activities.

With the closure of the Union Parliament and all Region and State parliaments following the military takeover the SAC has taken complete control over the legislative process and all previous progress on promoting the rule of law and ensuring equal access to justice has been wiped. The little judicial independence and impartiality that existed before has disappeared as the institutions that adjudicate and administer the law are now effectively under military control. The SAC has amended and introduced many new laws that

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\textsuperscript{6} UNDP Public Perceptions Survey on Government Services (2019) and UNDP/UN Women Gender Survey (2021)
severely constrain the civic space, including those that criminalize peaceful protest and expression, enable violations of the right to privacy and facilitate arbitrary arrests, detention, and surveillance. According to UNESCO, at least 4 constitutional provisions, laws or policies for guaranteeing public access to information have been amended or repealed since 2021 and two new laws have been passed that severely constrain this universal right. Such laws have been used by the military to target, arrest and intimidate individuals opposing military rule. More than 19,000 individuals have been detained, arrested and/or charged since February 2021. No information is available on many of those detained. The primary targets for persecution are human rights defenders, journalists, lawyers, trade unionists, artists, social media users, celebrities and any individuals involved in protests or the Civil Disobedience Movement.

Key vulnerabilities in 2023

- Ethnic minorities and marginalized communities, especially in conflict affected areas, stateless populations, and vulnerable people.
- Populations in areas most affected by the fight between military and resistance groups, especially Sagaing, Tanintharyi, Kayin and Mon areas.
- Journalists, human rights / civil society activists, lawyers, trade unionists and former MPs and politicians from the ruling party.

7. Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (Burma)
Programming recommendations

Conflict Resolution
- Collaborate with local NGOs and civil society to develop community-based mediation and conflict resolution initiatives.
- Offer conflict sensitivity trainings for local partners to ensure interventions do not inadvertently exacerbate tensions.

Protection of Vulnerable Populations
- Advocate for the creation of safe zones or areas of non-conflict, where vulnerable populations can find refuge.
- Increase support for IDPs in Myanmar, focusing on provision of basic needs, protection from abuse, and psychosocial support.

Strengthening Rule of Law
- Support the provision of legal aid to those detained arbitrarily. Train local lawyers and paralegals in human rights and advocate for detainees’ rights.

Protecting Civic Space
- Offer programs that educate citizens about their rights, non-violent resistance, and the importance of democratic governance.

Research and Data Collection
- Support periodic and real-time conflict analysis to understand the changing dynamics and adapt interventions accordingly.
- Collaborate among agencies to maintain an updated database of displacements, ensuring aid and support is directed where most needed.