



**The Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census

# Policy Brief on Gender Dimensions



Department of Population  
Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population  
With technical assistance from UNFPA



*Like all countries around the world, Myanmar has a responsibility to ensure that women's rights are guaranteed. This includes women's equal access to resources, opportunities and services, and their representation and participation in decision and policymaking at all levels and in all spheres of society (Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs, 2013).*

This policy brief is based largely on the findings of the Thematic Report on Gender Dimensions (August 2017) drawn from the 2014 Myanmar Census.



## Key points

- (1) The government of Myanmar has committed to a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) 2013-2022. Myanmar is also a member of the ASEAN committee on women and a committee on the Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. The 2008 Myanmar constitution prohibits discrimination in many forms including gender. Despite these pledges, gender divides can be seen across all sectors. Bridging inequalities must be an urgent priority moving forward.
- (2) The Global Gender Inequality Index ranks Myanmar 85 out of 155 countries. The index measures against reproductive health, empowerment and economic activity.
- (3) Infant mortality is 62 per 1000 live births. This is high for the region e.g. Malaysia: 6.2, and Singapore: 2.2 infant deaths per 1000 live births.
- (4) Life expectancy at birth for women (Union average) is 9.16 years longer than for men. Men have a life expectancy of 60 years, women, 69. Globally life expectancy for women is 73.6 and men, 69.4. Both the infant mortality figures and life expectancy overall suggest that poor health provision is impacting on both men and women. Improving health provision is necessary for both sexes. In particular, it should seek to address the poor care of infants and children and men as they age. Figure 1 illustrates the significantly higher number of women who live till 65 and over compared to men.
- (5) The Union level sex ratio is 93 males to 100 females. Despite this sex ratio women are underrepresented in the political sphere and the labour market.

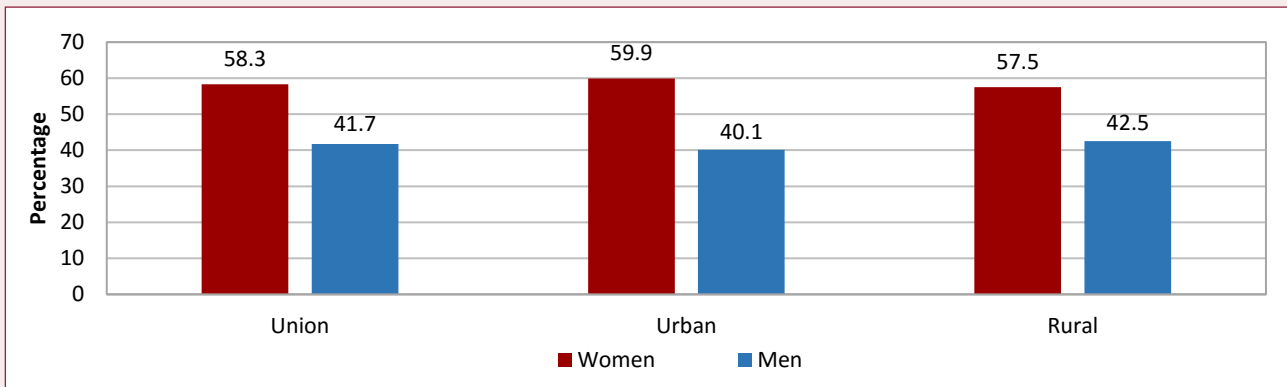
**Table 1: Gender Inequality Index by selected countries**

Country	GII Value*	Ranking
Indonesia	0.494	110
Cambodia	0.477	104
Philippines	0.420	89
Myanmar	0.413	85
Thailand	0.380	76
Viet Nam	0.308	60
Malaysia	0.209	42
Singapore	0.088	13

\*UNDP 2015 Human Development Report Annexes

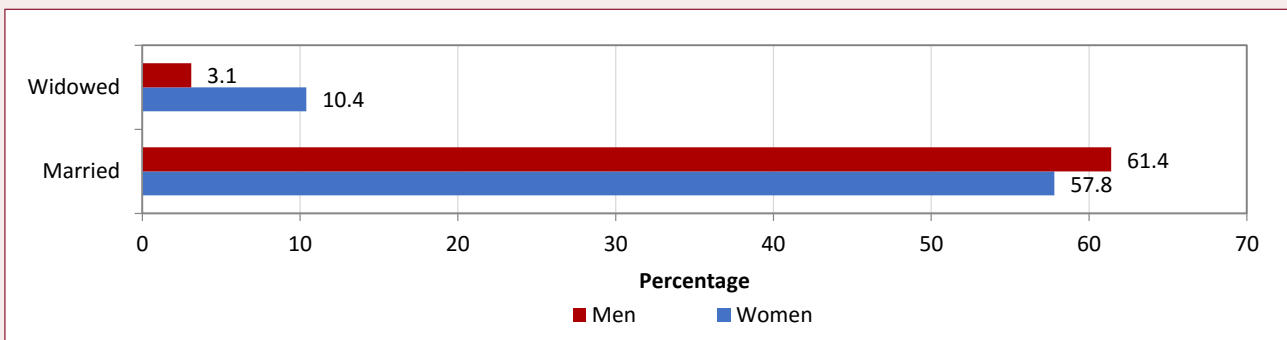
**Note:** GII values range from 0 to 1, whereby a value closer to 0 implies high equality, and a value of 1 signifies extreme inequality.

**Figure 1: Percentage of the population aged 65 and over by sex, urban and rural areas**



- (6) Given government's commitment to gender equality, increasing the political decision making power of women at all levels is critical.
- (7) The low level of female economic participation (51% compared to 85% of men) will impact on the country's growth. In the economically productive age group 15-64, 52% are women and 48% are men. Women must be actively encouraged to participate in the labour market. Potential barriers to their access need to be identified and removed.
- (8) At Union level the proportion of women aged 15 and over who were married was 57.8% lower than that for men at 61.4%.
- (9) Policy makers should ensure employment and educational opportunities are targeted towards unmarried women. Opportunities to enhance women's life choices and utilise them in the labour force are being missed.
- (10) Widowhood is 10% for women and 3% for men (this can be attributed largely to the lower life expectancy for men). This data points to the vulnerability of this group of women who will need additional support as they age.
- (11) Levels of adolescent fertility differ substantially between urban and rural areas and States/Regions. The highest numbers of births to adolescents were reported in Shan (59 births per 1,000 women) and Chin (50 births per 1,000 women), while the lowest rates were in Yangon (21) and Mandalay (23).
- (12) This has implications for the health of young mothers and their children, which should be of concern to health policymakers especially in those States/Regions where the rate is high. Secondary school curriculums should include reproductive health lessons.
- (13) Migration is on the increase with men and women migrating internally to similar percentages. Men migrate externally to a higher percentage than women.
- (14) Understanding the impact of rising migration on patterns of marriage, fertility and income will increasingly be important. If young women are choosing to migrate for work and delay marriage and childbearing this may have a positive economic impact. Policy makers should encourage this growth at least in the medium term whilst monitoring any negative impact on population growth.

**Figure 2: Percentage of men and women who are married and widowed, aged 15 and over**



## Education

Nationally more women than men are university graduates and hold post graduate qualifications. However this reality does not replicate in labour force statistics where women make up a significantly lower percentage. Policy is needed to encourage female graduates into the workforce. Similarly many men are missing out from higher education which will limit their employment options. These disparities should be addressed.

Adult (15 years old and over) male literacy is slightly higher at 93% compared to 87% of women. This gap is wider in rural areas, which calls for increased investment in literacy for girls in rural areas.

Close to 12% of women in the working-age population are illiterate, compared to only 7% of men. This could disadvantage many women in terms of accessing information related to employment opportunities.

Many boys drop out of school before completing secondary education in order to work. Policies focused on keeping boys and girls in school for longer are clearly needed.

According to the Department of Population 2017, 8.8% of males aged 25 and over had achieved higher than upper secondary level compared with 9.3% of women of the same age. Looking at age we can see higher gender gaps in literacy rates in the older population. For example in the age category 15-19 literacy in boys is only 0.5 percentage point higher than for girls, in the category 75-79 literacy is 22.3 percentage points higher in men. This data shows that attempts to improve literacy for girls are working. These interventions must continue until the gap has completely closed.

**Table 2: Adult literacy rates by sex by age and gender gap, 2014 Census**

Age Group	Male	Female	Gender Gap*
15 - 19	94.7	94.2	-0.5
20-24	94.2	92.8	-1.4
25-29	93.6	91.0	-2.6
30-34	93.1	89.8	-3.3
35-39	92.7	88.7	-4.0
40-44	92.6	87.6	-5.0
45-49	92.4	85.9	-6.5
50-54	91.2	83.9	-7.3
55-59	92.0	82.8	-9.2
60-64	90.2	78.3	-11.9
65-69	90.4	75.6	-14.8
70-74	87.3	68.5	-18.8
75-79	88.1	65.8	-22.3
80-84	84.2	60.7	-23.5
85-89	84.2	61.6	-22.6
90+	78.5	57.2	-21.3

\*Percentage point difference between women and men.

Literacy programmes should target older women which in turn will increase their labour force options.

Regionally Myanmar is not too far behind the countries with the highest literacy rates. A gender gap is consistent across ASEAN.

**Table 3: Adult literacy rate by sex, selected ASEAN countries**

Country	Both sexes	Male	Female
Malaysia	94.6	96.2	93.2
Indonesia	93.9	96.3	91.5
Myanmar	89.5	92.6	86.9
Cambodia	77.2	84.5	70.5

## Health

When looking at child mortality Magway Region emerges as the Region with the highest female child survival advantage over male children, with 4.7 deaths per 1,000 live births less for female children compared to male children. The Union wide results reveal better survival rates for female children than male in the first five years of their life. However there are significant variation among States/Regions. In Magway, child mortality overall is 16.7 whereas in Yangon, it is 6.1.

Interventions to improve health provision and remove inequalities among States/Regions are needed.

## Labour Force Participation

The Census data tells us that the education of girls is broadly supported but more effort is needed to narrow the literacy gap. However this educational picture does not translate into work opportunities. Women's lack of engagement in the labour force supports global research that points to a prevalence of strong patriarchal norms reinforcing men as 'bread winners'. This image needs to be challenged as it is acting as a barrier preventing women from being active in the labour market.<sup>i</sup>

In a 2008 United Nations (UN) report on Asian and Pacific countries, analysts estimated that the region was losing between \$42 billion and \$46 billion each year because of restricted job opportunities for women.<sup>ii</sup>

Women in employment tend to target professional occupations, which require, generally, higher levels of education than more manual work. It may also partly explain why a larger proportion of women than men have completed education levels higher than upper secondary school (73% of all professionals are women). The dominance of women in teaching

**Table 4: Percentage of employed population aged 15-64 by sex, occupation and gender status index**

	Male	Female	Gender Status Index*
Per cent employed	59.9	40.1	0.67
<b>Occupation</b>			
Managers	61.4	38.6	0.63
Professionals	27.1	72.9	2.69
Technicians and Associate Professionals	64.8	35.2	0.54
Clerical Support Workers	51.2	48.8	0.95
Services and Sale Workers	42.5	57.5	1.35
Skilled Agricultural Forestry and Fishery Workers	64.2	35.8	0.56
Craft and Related Trade Workers	64.3	35.7	0.56
Plant and Machine Operators and Assemblers	90.5	9.5	0.10
Elementary Occupations	63.2	36.8	0.58
Others	97.5	2.5	0.03
Not Stated	36.3	63.7	1.75

\*%female/%male

accounts in large for this statistic. Men dominate in more physically orientated sectors.

The table clearly illustrates the gendered nature of the labour market and the extent to which certain activities are either feminised or masculinised. Challenging these rigid boundaries is essential if the full market is to be equally available to men and women. Campaigns targeting male or female workers into specific underrepresented professions is one possible intervention. For example, could there be a national campaign to encourage more male graduates into teaching? Could mentoring of girls in school motivate them into employment?

The gap between high levels of women’s educational attainment compared with men and under representation in the workforce highlights that much needs to be done to promote women’s economic engagement. The market discriminates in wage rates, hiring practices and so forth (e.g. women working in the garment sector are notoriously badly paid).<sup>iii</sup> High levels of work based harassment and feelings of insecurity traveling to and from work all act as barriers and need to be addressed at policy and intervention levels.<sup>iv</sup>

Both economic growth and the empowerment of women will be hampered if women are not encouraged and supported into work in greater numbers.

Moves to secure a minimal wage will also be critical in supporting the economic empowerment of men and women.

## Working Children

In Myanmar, just over one fifth of children aged 15-17 are employed. The majority of these children are no longer in school. More boys than girls are employed and tend to be concentrated in unskilled agricultural, forestry, fishery and craft related work.

This data evidences the need for interventions designed to keep children in school longer. The data on education indicates that boys are losing out on education due to societal expectation that they will work from a young age. This lack of education will impact on their skill level and therefore also earning potential. Legislation to prevent children from working until they have completed secondary school is urgently needed and should be enforced robustly.

## Female Representation in Parliament

Women are underrepresented in Parliament. Only 13.6 % of women are in Pyithu Hluttaw (Upper house), 13.7% in Amyotha Hluttaw (Lower house) and 13.6 % in Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (Assembly of the Union). Regionally, Malaysia and Thailand are the only countries to have a lower rate of representation of women in the lower house. A quota system should be considered supported by mentoring of new female politicians.

Equal representation of men and women in parliament should be a key goal of the new strategic action plan for women.

## Disability

A little under 5% of the population has some form of a disability. The percentage is higher for women across all categories (mild, moderate and severe). A man with a disability is more likely to be employed than a woman. Some States/Regions have much higher rates, e.g. over 7% in Ayeyawady, Tanintharyi and Chin. Women over 65 are most likely to suffer with age related disability.

Women with disabilities above the age of 65 represent one of the most marginalised groups with high levels of financial dependency. Livelihood and health interventions should strategically extend to this group.

## Headship and Condition of Households

Whilst global data suggests that female headed households are more likely to be economically disadvantaged, it is difficult to draw this conclusion from the Myanmar Census data. In fact the report states that a higher proportion of female-headed households reported living in durable dwellings (roof, walls, and floors with permanent type of construction materials) with access to improved water and sanitation.

However caution is also given. Differences may be due to the variation in the characteristics of urban and rural dwellings. The results did reveal that slightly less than one quarter of households in Myanmar were headed by women. Out of a total of 10,877,832 households enumerated, 8,296,535 (76.3 per cent) were male-headed and 2,581,297 (23.7 per cent) were female-headed households. Household head was defined in the census as the person who makes the decisions regardless of whether she/he works or not. There are slightly more female headed households in urban than in rural areas. Overall the figure increases with age which can be explained by widowhood affecting women significantly more than men.

86% of male heads were economically active compared with only 47.9% of women. This can be explained in part by the fact that 26% of female heads reported having achieved no educational attainment compared to only 14.7% of male heads. Interventions to improve the economic and educational engagement of female heads is clearly needed.

## Conclusion

Key areas of policy priority:

- Increase the number of women in the workforce.
- Increase the number of female political representatives.
- Incentive across occupational categories to reduce gender bias in the labour market (i.e. so all occupations are open to both sexes).
- To continue to remove gender differences in education and literacy rates.
- To ensure that health delivery mechanisms are reaching both males and females and across all States/Regions.

---

<sup>i</sup> Connell, R. 1995. *Masculinities*. London: Routledge.

<sup>ii</sup> (R. Hausmann, L. Tyson, and S. Zahidi. 2008. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2008*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. p. 22. Cited at [www.ey.com/GL/en/Industries/Government---Public-Sector/Women-in-the-workplace---Unleashing-the-power-of-women-entrepreneurs](http://www.ey.com/GL/en/Industries/Government---Public-Sector/Women-in-the-workplace---Unleashing-the-power-of-women-entrepreneurs)).

<sup>iii</sup> (Anker et al 2003 Gender- based occupational segregation in the 1990s International Labour Organisation, Working Paper 16. Geneva: ILO).

<sup>iv</sup> Bradley, T. 2017. 'Women, Work and Violence in Myanmar', a research report. [www.genderinsouthasia.org/resources](http://www.genderinsouthasia.org/resources).