

MIGRATION AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN MYANMAR: OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHILD PROTECTION

FINDINGS FROM A SECONDARY ANALYSIS OF MYANMAR DATA

JUNE 2019

Myanmar census data shows that nearly one in five adolescents in Myanmar have migrated, either internally or externally, at some point and nearly one in every ten children between the ages of 5 and 17 years old are engaged in some form of work. The situation in Myanmar is unique in that many factors are contributing to varying migratory patterns for adolescents across the country. Conflict and natural disasters combined with weaker or fractured child protection systems in some states are key drivers of increased vulnerability for adolescents on the move.

As such, adolescent migration presents opportunities as well as challenges for keeping adolescents safe. Data shows that the most common reason for older adolescents (ages 15 to 19 years old) to migrate is for employment opportunities. It is important to note that certain types of work can expose young people to violence as well as affecting their education and exposing them to other health and social risks. Similarly, migration can also increase adolescent exposure to violence. It is vital to take a holistic approach to prevent violence against adolescents in the context of migration and to ensure safe work, access to social welfare as well as legal, health and education opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Myanmar has undergone rapid changes in the past decade. Now considered to be an 'emerging economy', a number of gradual political and economic reforms since 2011 promoted economic growth and opened the doors to the long-isolated country. This has led to more opportunities for youth employment and also youth migration.

Migration in its many forms impacts adolescents and their families in different ways, and can play an important role that contributes to adolescent's experiences of both protection from and vulnerability to violence (Maternowska, Potts, Fry & Casey, 2018). Adolescents may migrate on their own or with adults such as parents/caregivers and may also migrate with family members but then become separated during the process of moving. Migration may occur for reasons such opportunities for employment, in order to attend school or further educational opportunities; to live with relatives or in other households; as well

as to potentially escape from violence and conflict at home, school or in the community or situations of neglect.

Migration may be a structural driver of violence against children especially when it interplays with weak institutional and legal child protection frameworks that may not adequately protect children who are on the move (Maternowska, Potts, Fry & Casey, 2018). Myanmar has experienced both significant conflict and natural disasters that have caused migratory movements both internally within Myanmar and externally to other countries in the region. Migration takes different forms depending on the situation. For example, each of the ongoing conflicts, such as those in Rakhine, Shan and Kachin States and along the Southeast region of Myanmar, are all characterised by different migratory patterns for adolescents. In addition, Myanmar is the largest source country of migration for the region and adolescents have sought

immediate refuge in neighbouring countries, such as Thailand, China, and Bangladesh among others (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016).¹

A recent survey on child migration in Myanmar found that approximately 10% of children (those under 18 years old) are not accompanied by anyone to their migration destination (UNICEF, IOM, DSW and MSWRR, 2017).² This study also found that among all children surveyed (n = 1,525), as many as 36.7% of independent child migrants may have migrated and started engaging in work below the age of 14, which is the minimum age of entry into employment (UNICEF and IOM, Unpublished).

While migration may have many benefits in today's global world, it is important to also recognize the intersections with child protection as children and adolescents who migrate may be more vulnerable to sexual and gender based violence (SGBV); child labour; child trafficking as well as extortion; arbitrary arrest; statelessness (children traveling without documentation) and statuslessness (the most vulnerable children) among other issues. Identifying and protecting Myanmar migrant children in internal and cross-border migration contexts can be difficult given the wide range of actors that the children and adolescents will come into contact with while they are on the move. Documentation of abuses also becomes more difficult thus highlighting a range of areas in which migration should link with child protection systems.

This data brief will add to a body of growing research in this area by exploring key statistics from a secondary analysis of Census data around the frequency and nature of adolescent migration and work in Myanmar while exploring the intersections with child protection and opportunities for violence prevention.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population conducted the census in 2014, the first census in the country for 30 years. It aimed to gather demographic, social and economic information about the population. Census enumeration areas were mapped with the aim of counting everyone in Myanmar on the night of the 29th March 2014 (with the exception of some parts of northern Rakhine State and some areas of Kachin state and one township in Kayin State). The census data is very important for understanding national demographics, however, certain limitations exist with its use for fully understanding migration. First, because of sampling methodology, certain heavy conflict areas such as Northern Rakhine were not able to be included. Secondly, irregular and/or clandestine movement may not be fully captured. As a result, this may underestimate current migratory patterns of adolescents.

For this analysis, the Census provided crucial contextual data to explore the experiences of adolescents in Myanmar, specifically data on children involved in work and migration. Descriptive statistics were analysed, disaggregating by key variables such as age, gender, urban/rural location, education, State/Region and wealth index wherever possible.



¹ Norwegian Refugee Council, 2016, A fine line between migration and displacement: Children on the move in and from Myanmar. Briefing Note December 2016.

² UNICEF and IOM. Growing up in the time of increased mobility: Impact of migration on children in Myanmar. Yangon, UNICEF, unpublished.



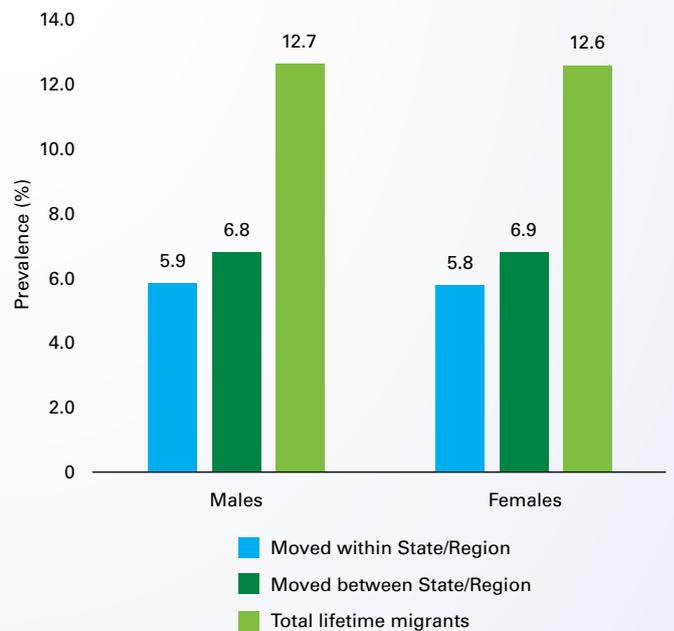
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KEY FINDINGS

Nearly 1 in every 5 young people (ages 15-24) in Myanmar have migrated from their place of birth

Migration both within and, more recently, outside Myanmar affects young people. Census data shows that almost 1 in 5 (19%) of young people ages 15-24 have moved from the township where they were born. Young people from urban areas are more likely to move between States/Regions than young people from rural areas. The prevalence of 10-18 year old females who have migrated within Myanmar is nearly identical to that of males (see following figure). There are also minimal gender differences when looking at internal lifetime migration rates among 15-24 year old males and females by State/Region. Migrating between States is most common among young people in Chin and Magway while moving within the State is more common in Yangon.³

Prevalence (%) of 10-18 year olds who migrated within and between State/Region by sex, 2014 census data



³ There are some limitations in the Census sampling, for example it does not cover areas of some parts of northern Rakhine State and some areas of Kachin state and one township in Kayin State

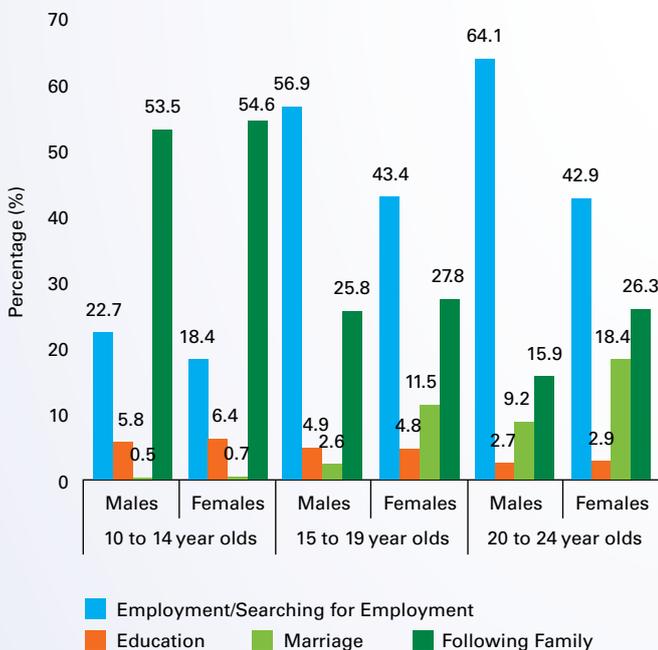
Migration among young people is increasing

The Census also gathered data on the time period when young people migrated. Some 1.7% of children aged 10-14 years and 3.6% of all youth (aged 15-29) had moved within Myanmar in the 12 month prior to the Census, and 5.2% and 10.8% respectively, had moved less than 5 years prior, suggesting that the rates have been increasing over the last several years.

Older adolescents (ages 15-19 years old) are more likely to migrate for employment opportunities

The following figure shows the reasons why young people migrated: 10-14 year olds primarily move with their family while 15-19 year olds are more likely to move for employment. This data shows that migration is a common coping livelihood strategy for many adolescents and families in Myanmar. Very few young people said they migrated because of conflict (<1% across age groups and genders). However, it should be noted that the census had limited sampling in conflict areas and this may be underrepresented in the data. Migrating because of marriage was also uncommon, though higher among adolescent girls. One in 10 females aged 15-19 years moved for marriage compared to less than 3% of males the same age.

Percentage (%) of young people who migrated within the year prior to the census by reason for migration, 2014 census data

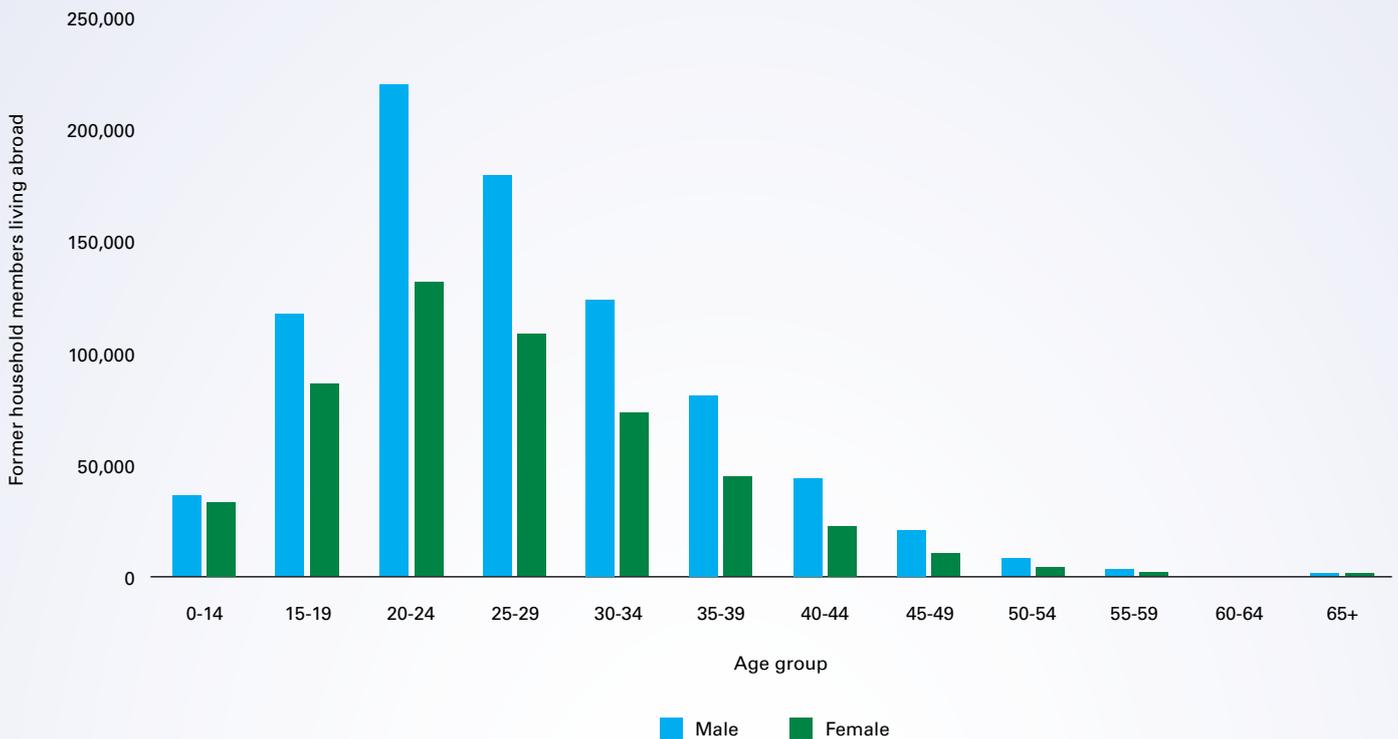


Wealthier male adolescents are more likely than females to migrate internationally

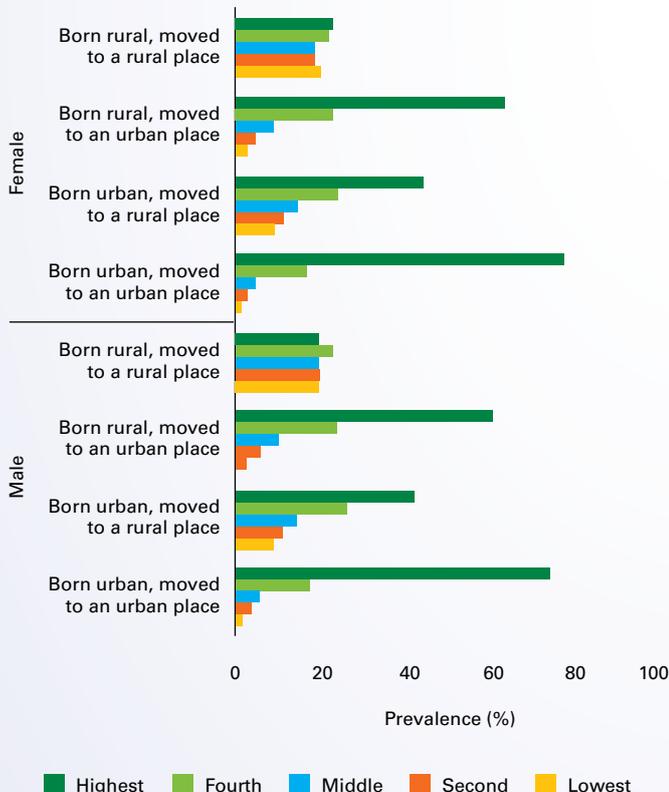
As Myanmar has opened its borders, young people have moved to other countries. 671,000 young people aged 15-24 were reported to have left Myanmar prior to the Census. This amounts to 8 adolescents and youth ages 15 to 24 years old living abroad for every 100 adolescent and youth residents in Myanmar. Of the young international migrants, 60% are male, and are from slightly higher wealth index families. The largest age group to move abroad are 20 to 24 year olds for both males and females. These findings may underrepresent adolescent migration among the poorer quintiles as these adolescents may revert to illegal measures such as smuggling and illegal border crossing to migrate, which are usually underestimated in self-reported surveys. The following figure shows that males are more likely to migrate than females across all age groups, which is different to other countries in the region such as Viet Nam and the Philippines which have recently seen a 'feminization' of migration where women migrate for work and send their wages back home (Anh et al., 2012; Maternowska, Potts, Fry & Casey, 2018).

Interestingly, the figure below that also shows that more young migrants come from the highest wealth quintile. As we have seen above, most young people in the 15-24 year old age group migrate for employment. Young people in lower wealth quintiles appear less likely to do so, which is different to other countries in the region where migration typically affects those in lower wealth quintiles who migrate to earn money to send back to their families. More research is needed on boys and girls who move from one rural place to another as the data shows very little difference between wealth quintiles for these young people.

Number of former household members living abroad who left Myanmar in 2010-2014 by sex by age at departure, 2014 census data



Prevalence of 15-24 year olds who migrated by wealth quintile



The left figure shows quite distinctive patterns. First, the movement from rural to urban and also urban to rural appears to be influenced by socio-economic factors. However, movement from rural to rural, which may be more prevalent in conflict areas, is less influenced by wealth quintile.

Keeping children safe who migrate

In a national qualitative study in Myanmar, some stakeholders referred to the many risks of violence associated with migrating to other locations for work, such as across the border (UNICEF Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning & Economic Development, & Ministry of Health, 2013). For example different stakeholders in Chin spoke of the risks for adolescent girls or young women to work on the Indian border in the timber and construction industry that primarily attracts and hires male workers or across the border in India as a domestic worker. Lashio health providers referred to adolescent girls being sold to China to work in the sex entertainment industry, placing them at risk of sexual violence and further exploitation. These kinds of situations were said to place these adolescents and young people at high risk of HIV. While adolescents in these situations did not participate in the study, it indicates that adolescents, especially girls, can be subjected to high risk and harmful situations.

Migration for Work

The Census data provides further analysis about adolescents who are working by age and sex (see previous figure). About 8% of 10-13 year olds and 21% of 10-17 year olds are working, and the prevalence of working children is similar among boys and girls. Adolescents who had no or little education or are far more likely to work than those who completed lower secondary school. In terms of location, rural adolescents being more likely to work than urban adolescents. Adolescents most often work in sales/services and craft-related work in urban areas, while adolescents in rural areas more commonly report working as skilled agricultural, forestry or fishery workers.

Census data also highlights that children in Shan are more likely to work than any other part of Myanmar among all age groups. Nearly half of all adolescents ages 14 to 17 years old report working in Shan State. The number of adolescents working in Shan State is nearly twice the amount of any other state for the younger age groups as well (13% of 10-11 years old and 22% of 12-13 years old) thus skewing the national average to appear much higher than it is in other states.

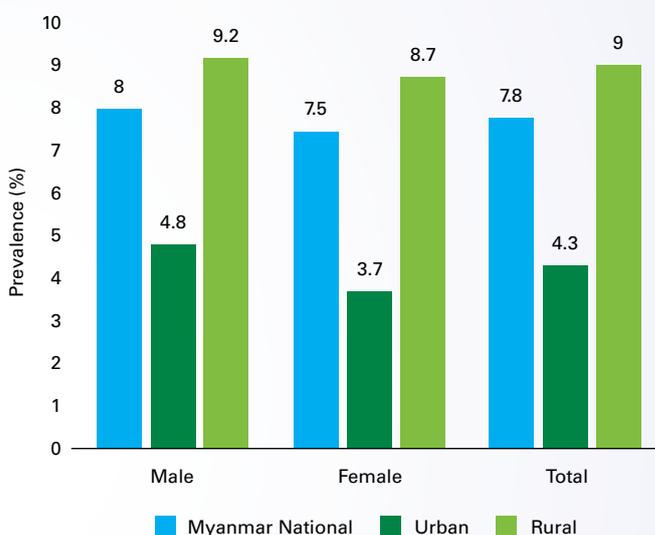
According to qualitative data, Chin, Lashio, Mon, Yangon and Bago adolescents, which includes a mixture of both adolescents who live and work in the area and those that migrated in for work, referred to not feeling safe sometimes in the community in the evening hours often associated with their participation in work activities. (UNICEF Myanmar, Ministry of National Planning & Economic Development, & Ministry of Health, 2013). In this study, Mon in-school adolescents were concerned that workplaces (e.g. rubber farms) are unsafe since they have heard of a

case of rape and murder. At the same time, the out-of-school adolescents working in these places said they feel safe because they are always with family, friends, co-workers and neighbors.

Programming Opportunities to Prevent Violence Against Children

Many UNICEF implementing partners engage in awareness raising and skills building activities related to safe migration and employability. There is a tremendous opportunity to actively incorporate violence prevention elements into existing programmes that work with young people.

Percentage of children aged 10-13 who were working by sex, urban and rural areas, 2014 census data



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The INSPIRE package is our current best understanding of ‘what works’ for the field – or interventions that are proven or highly likely to prevent VAC developed by 10 agencies including the World Health Organization (WHO), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children (GP EVAC, Co-Applicant), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Together for Girls (TfG), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank (WHO et al., 2016).

INSPIRE’s seven recommended strategies include: Implementation and enforcement of laws; Norms and values; Safe environments; Parent and caregiver support; Income and economic strengthening; Response and support services; and Education and life skills. INSPIRE’s seven evidence-base strategies, in addition to its focus on multi-sectoral engagement and strong measurement, is the current standard of practice globally.

Emerging evidence from the INSPIRE technical package – a set of strategies, indicators and implementation guide – suggests that income and economic strengthening (IES) efforts are more likely to have the intended impact when they:

- Are combined with interventions that strengthen social assets, such as parent support programmes, life-skills education, or gender-norms change and gender-equity training
- Are carefully monitored to assess implementation and impact, particularly the influence of unanticipated factors (including for children)
- Include staff with economic and business skills as well as social welfare backgrounds
- Seek to link to broader social services and systems

According to INSPIRE, income and economic strengthening programmes require “careful assessment of safety risks to children and women and the need for additional child protection efforts linked to the programme. It is important to monitor children’s safety and time-use patterns to make sure the programme is not harming them.” (INSPIRE guidelines, WHO et al., 2016). Besides income and economic strengthening programmes, linkages should also be ensured with the strategy on safe environments, under the INSPIRE framework.

By incorporating appropriate referral and response mechanisms for when violence does happen as well as primary prevention elements to prevent it from every happening in the first place – we can keep adolescents safe as they transition to adulthood and while they move and work for opportunities for successful livelihoods.



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About this Data Brief

This data brief was written by Dr. Deborah Fry from the University of Edinburgh.

The **Understanding Violence Against Adolescents in Myanmar Series** aims to contribute to this growing body of evidence to understand better why violence against children is happening and what is driving it. The Series draws data from both nationally representative data as is presented in this report and from the UNICEF-supported interventions where diverse information is being collected as part of programme monitoring. The Series attempts to give it a closer look at the data and information at hand and dig deeper the issue of violence against children in Myanmar. We hope to generate evidence, create deeper understanding of the issue and stimulate discussions – all to better inform programming to address violence against children in Myanmar.

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