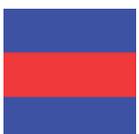




**The Republic of the Union of Myanmar**

2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census

# Policy Brief on Migration and Urbanization



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

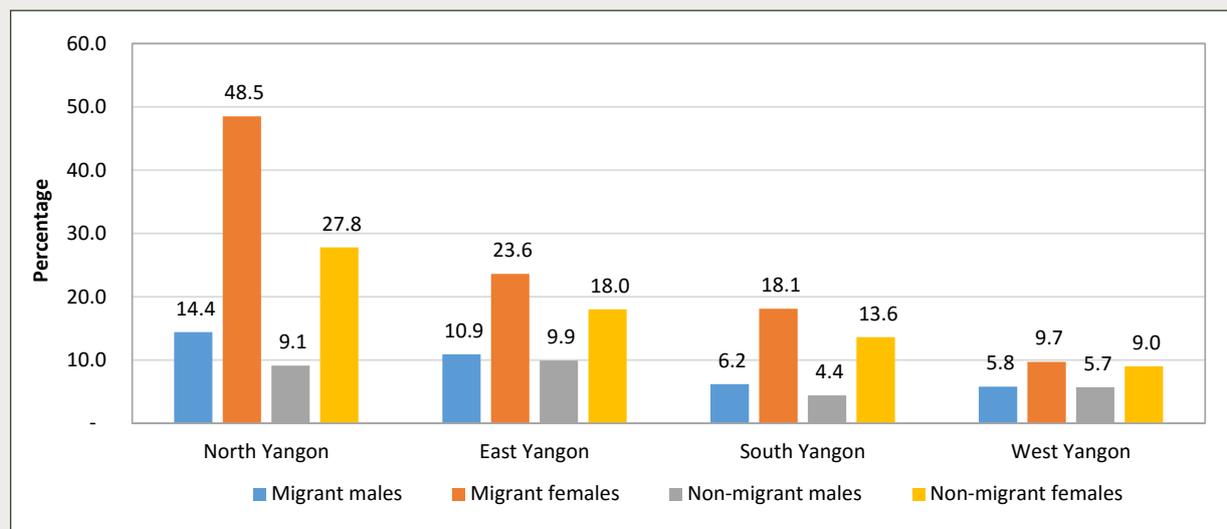




## Key points

- (1) One fifth (19.3 per cent) of the total population of Myanmar are lifetime migrants meaning that they have moved between townships at least once since their birth. A total of 3,359,342 persons were recent migrants having moved in the five years preceding the Census.
- (2) The profile of an internal migrant is a person who is young, with more years of completed schooling and working in an industrial sector job. More importantly, the impetus for movement was largely driven by economic considerations, especially for men, while for women it was 'to follow family'.
- (3) As Myanmar opens-up further and industrial development expands, there will inevitably be increased internal movements as people seek employment opportunities. Thus, the focus of policy should be on safeguarding migrants' rights, and assisting them to integrate into their new communities while at the same time maintaining linkages with their places of origin.
- (4) About half of all internal migration was urban to urban while one quarter was rural to rural migration. Yangon and its periphery received many of the recent migrants, many of whom were women employed in manufacturing especially in the industrial zones of North and East Yangon. Noting the relationship between the development of industrial zones and migration, policymakers could consider: (i) ensuring sufficient housing and social services to meet the needs of these migrants; and (ii) realigning migration streams to areas away from Yangon through the establishment of industrial zones in other states/regions with potential for economic development and employment creation.
- (5) According to figures reported by households during the Census, around 2 million persons or 4 per cent of the population live outside Myanmar, of whom 1.36 million were recent emigrants. Thailand (1.4 million persons) and Malaysia (304,000 persons) were two main destinations. Recognizing the positive benefits of international migration, policy recommendations include: (i) the establishment of a reliable system of remittances both to encourage remittances, as well as to quantify these resources; (ii) information dissemination on employment opportunities abroad or within the country to reduce the perceived risks of migration; (iii) the creation of employment opportunities within the country to provide alternatives to potential migrants and help them to decide whether to move or not; and (iv) the development of a comprehensive policy for international migration.
- (6) The share of the population living in urban areas is low at 30 per cent with concentrations in Yangon, Kachin and Mandalay. The pace of urbanization is however set to change with more rapid development and the reduced share of the labour force in agriculture. Much of the urban growth, especially in Yangon, was driven by internal migration by employment seekers. The development of a National Urban Policy together with urban planning guidelines (currently being considered) would be a first step towards more comprehensive and effective urban planning.

**Figure 1: Migration status of persons employed in the manufacturing sector, by districts of Yangon, by sex, 2014 Census (%)**



## Internal Migration

Internal migration is a movement between townships. One fifth of the population were lifetime migrants defined as having moved at least once between townships since birth. There were 3.36 million recent internal migrants in the five years prior to the Census. This large number of migrants can be attributed to the opening-up of Myanmar in 2011 and the consequent increase in people's movement arising from improved economic opportunities.

On average, the recent migrant was a young adult in the age-group 15-24; often unmarried especially if female; and had completed a level of schooling higher than high school. Female migrants outnumbered male migrants by 141,000 in recent migration.

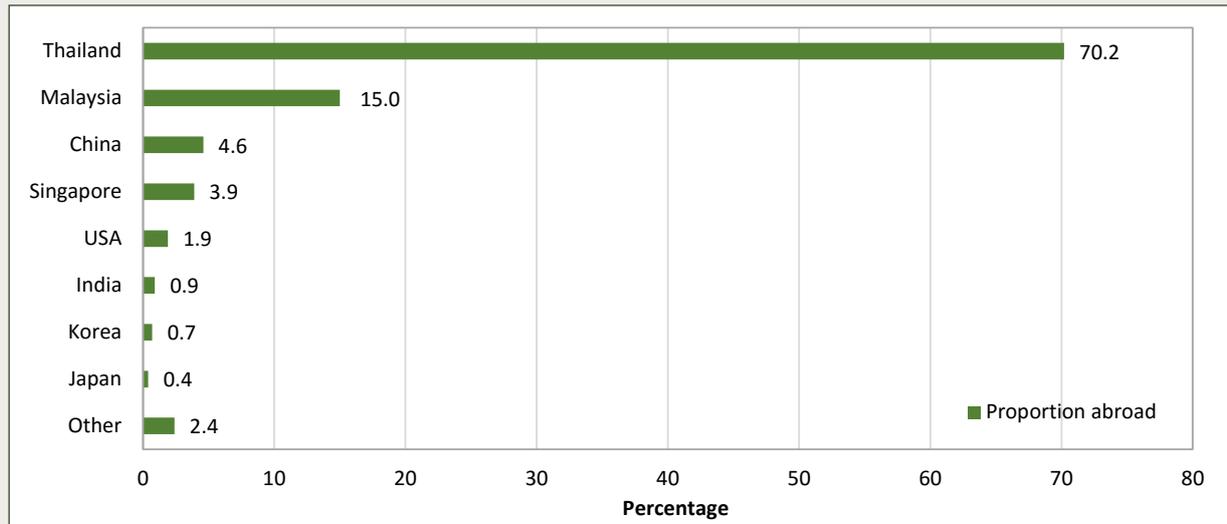
Around half of all migration flows was urban to urban, and one quarter was rural to rural. The direction of the main migration streams between districts or between states/regions was towards Yangon and in particular North and East Yangon. The major origins of the flows were other districts within Yangon or districts in Ayeyawady. As shown in Figure 1, a high proportion of migrants to Yangon were employed in the manufacturing sector, half of whom were females. The patterns of internal migration clearly point to the direction of migration flows being towards places with the most economic opportunities.

Internal migration will inevitably increase with the further opening-up of the country and as economic development picks up speed. It should not be discouraged but rather facilitated. Policy actions should focus on ensuring that the rights of migrants are protected, assisting the integration of migrants into their destination areas, and helping migrants maintain linkages with their communities of origin. The role of policy would be to make provision for housing and social services to meet the needs of recent migrants.

There was also migration to districts along the Myanmar-Thailand border as well as those adjacent to the Myanmar-China and Myanmar-India borders. A high level of recent migration was reported in Kachin, Kayah and Kayin, states located along the above mentioned borders. The cross-border trade as well as the migration to these states has given a strong boost to the local economies. A policy option could be to increase the number of cross-border entry points as this would provide increased employment and therefore migration opportunities.

Rural to urban flows accounted for only 10 per cent of all internal migration. One way to provide rural inhabitants with the opportunity to improve their lot through migration would be the provision of similar access to education that urbanites enjoy. Information regarding job opportunities in other locations should be shared with both rural and urban residents so that informed choices as to whether to migrate or not can be made.

**Figure 2: Proportion of reported emigrants by country of destination, 2014 Census**



## International Migration

According to numbers reported by households during the Census, there were about 2.02 million former household members living abroad during the Census. Of these, 70 per cent were reported to be living in Thailand and 15 per cent were in Malaysia, as shown in Figure 2. However, some entire households may have migrated, hence they could not be reported in the Census. Using demographic techniques for backward projections on the 2014 Census data, the estimate for Myanmar people living abroad is about 4.25 million.

Of those living abroad, more than two thirds were recent emigrants, that is, they emigrated in 2010 and after. The majority of recent migrants originated from states/regions adjacent to the Myanmar-Thailand border, such as Mon, Kayin, Shan and Tanintharyi. Among recent emigrants, females emigrate, on average, at slightly younger ages than men.

Emigration is male-dominated except in the case of migration to Singapore, where females outnumber males. Four times as many males as females are reported to be living in Malaysia, while three females for every four males live in Thailand. The lower degree of female emigration is to some extent due to the perceived risk of migration caused by the absence of information on employment and other opportunities in destination countries. Better dissemination of information on employment opportunities for females in destination countries by the Government could help to reduce barriers

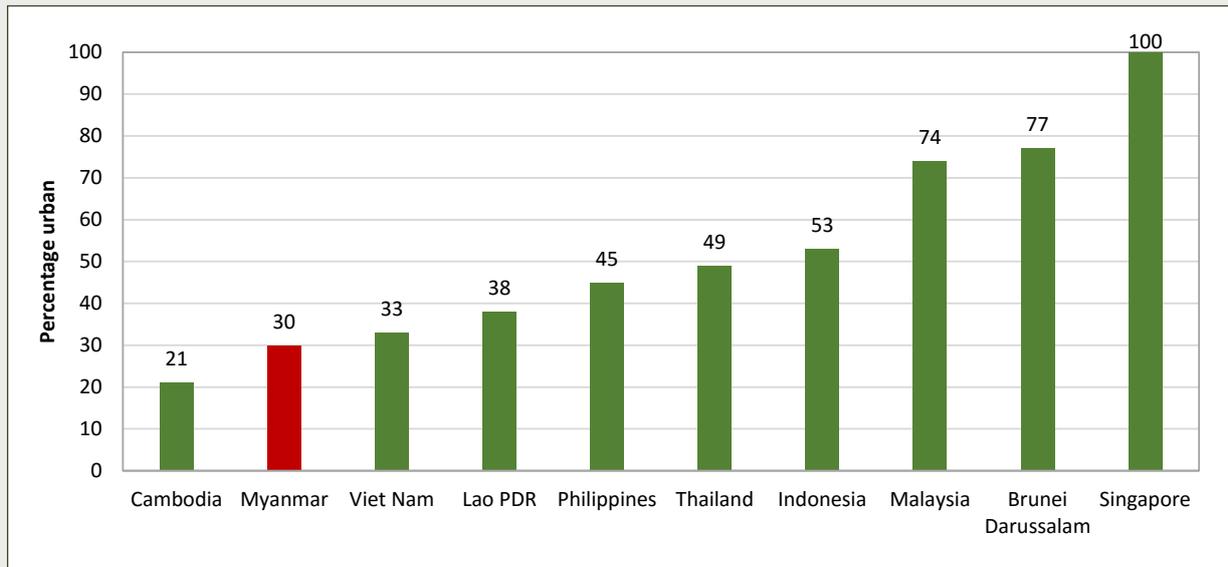
to female migration. Social networks also mitigate female's perceived risk of migration and foster movement, as in the case of female emigration to Thailand.

International migration generally makes a positive contribution to the economy of households through remittances and skill development. While there was no information on remittances, Census results showed that in states like Mon where households reported more emigrants, housing quality appeared to be of a higher level. The Government should implement a reliable system of remittance from abroad and within the country. This will not only encourage more remittances but also make it easier to quantify the resources being sent back to the country.

Little is known about the legal status of emigrants. If undocumented, these migrants face the risk of trafficking, exploitation and abuse. Given the large numbers of emigrants, the time may have come for a comprehensive policy and legislation on international migration that covers issues such as the rights of international migrants and their protection, the documentation process, etc.

Potential migrants should ideally be able to make decisions as to whether to migrate or not on the basis of choices. A thrust of national policy should be the creation of more and better employment opportunities so that potential migrants can choose whether or not to move, and where to move to.

Figure 3: Level of urbanization in selected ASEAN countries, 2014



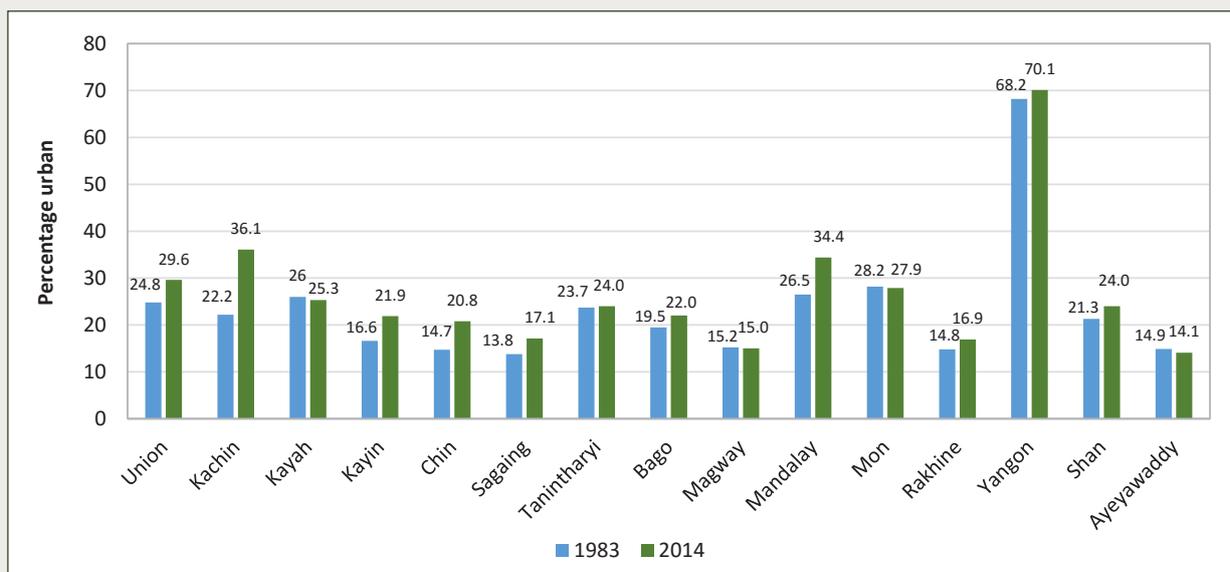
## Urbanization

The percentage of the population living in urban areas in 2014 was relatively low at 30 per cent. Within the ASEAN region, this level of urbanization is only higher than that of Cambodia, as shown in Figure 3. Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Lao PDR, the Philippines, and Thailand have levels of urbanization that are below 50 per cent reflecting the continued agricultural-based nature of their respective economies.

The country remains largely rural, although this is set to change with greater development and as agricultural employment declines. The increase in the urban share has been slow to date from 24.8 per cent in 1983 to 29.6 per cent in 2014, as shown in Figure 4. Yangon (70.1 per cent), Kachin (36.1 per cent) and Mandalay (34.4 per cent) currently have the highest shares of urban population. The growth of the urban population has been most pronounced in Kachin, Mandalay (including Nay Pyi Taw), Chin and Kayin.

Analysis of Census results raises several issues for consideration. First is the uneven size distribution of cities. Yangon has an urban population of 5.2 million which far exceeds the sum of the population of the next three cities, (i.e. Mandalay, Nay Pyi Taw, and Bago). This situation with one large urban centre that exceeds the rest of the country's hubs, is reflective of an imbalance in development across different parts of the country. The aim of current policy has been to develop more balance through the expansion of regional growth centres through, for example, establishing new industrial zones. In reality, however, of the 41 sites approved by 2010, 23 were located in the Yangon Region. The expansion of industrial zones in other parts of the country outside of Yangon could slow down urban growth in Yangon and generate more employment in other states/regions.

Figure 4: Share of urban population by State/Region, 2014 Census



There is presently no National Urban Policy. The Government has mainly focused on rural development in view of its concern for food security. While there have been recent initiatives at developing urban planning guidelines, the development of these guidelines will need to integrate the latest information provided by the 2014 Census as well as be part of a National Urban Policy, which should be developed.

Another challenge is the definition of urban and rural. For purposes of the Census, the Government's categorization of wards as urban, and village tracts as rural was used. In order to facilitate better international comparability, as well as for use in research and policy analysis, the classification of rural and urban will need to be revisited.

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