



Youth series | Report 2

A GENERATION ON HOLD:

Youth Employment and
Education in Myanmar



October 2025

An illustration at the bottom of the cover shows six students from behind, walking away on a path. They are wearing backpacks and school uniforms. The background is a faded image of graduates in caps and gowns.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CATI	Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing
LFPR	Labour Force Participation Rate
MMK	Myanmar Kyat
NEET	Not in Education, Employment, or Training
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the first report in this series, *A Generation on the Move*, which highlighted the powerful migration pressures shaping youth aspirations, this report turns to the situation at home. Myanmar's youth (15–35 years), who make up over one-third of the country's population,¹ are navigating unprecedented challenges in education and employment. Amid political instability, economic contraction, and social disruption, pathways for learning and earning have been severely eroded — leaving many young people not only on the move abroad, but also “on hold” within their own country, unable to realize their potential. This stalled transition threatens both a generation's future and Myanmar's long-term development prospects.

Drawing on nationally representative data from the Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 and qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions, this report explores the education-to-employment journey of Myanmar's young people. It reveals how geography, gender, and systemic exclusion have created unequal and fragmented pathways, explaining why so many youth disengage from school, struggle to enter the labour market, or view migration as their only viable option.

One in four youth is not employed, with higher rates in conflict-affected regions such as Kayah and Rakhine. Young women are disproportionately excluded from the labour market, one-third are not employed, more than double the rate of young men. Nearly four in five rural youth aged 18–24 are no longer in education or training, particularly in Tanintharyi, Chin, Sagaing and Kayin, where economic necessity, access barriers, and insecurity drive school dropout. Caregiving responsibilities weigh heavily on women, with nearly one in four citing household duties as the reason for leaving education, compared to just five percent of men.

¹ Based on Myanmar's definition and the 2014 Census data, where youth are defined as those aged 15–35 years. For the purposes of this report, however, the analysis focuses on individuals aged 18–35 years. Within this range, two subgroups can be distinguished: younger youth (18–24), typically in the school-to-work transition, and older youth (25–35), who are more established in adult roles. Unless otherwise specified, references to “youth” in this report refer to the 18–35 age group.

The report finds a stark disconnect between education and work. While higher education yields significantly higher earnings, MMK 543,912 (~124 USD)² per month compared to MMK 354,979 (~81 USD) for those with no education, employment rates are paradoxically lower among highly educated youth, particularly women, showing divergent life paths. Non-employed young women are mainly absorbed by care economy (almost two-thirds, comparing to 25% male), while young men continue education (45%, compared to just 25% of women), exacerbating future inequalities. Among women who completed high school, 40 percent are not employed, compared to just 27 percent of those with only primary or no education. This highlights a labour market that fails to absorb educated youth, especially women, into meaningful, stable work.

Nearly half of all youth express a need for vocational training, with demand especially high among those with lower education levels and those in rural and conflict-affected areas. Among youth who are not looking for work, caregiving responsibilities and spousal disapproval are major constraints. In Tanintharyi, more than one-third of non-working women report being prevented from working by their spouse. Insecurity and pessimism about job prospects also discourage job-seeking, particularly in Kayah, Rakhine and Chin.

Youth earnings are uneven and unstable. Average monthly income varies widely by region, from MMK 686,928 (~156 USD) in Tanintharyi to MMK 208,017 (~47 USD) in Kayah. On average, young women earn 22 percent less than men. One in four youth changed their main source of income in the past two years, often due to layoffs, insecurity, or personal constraints, underscoring the fragility of livelihoods. Seventeen percent of youth are not in employment, education, or training (NEET), rising to one in four among women. Gender and disability are the strongest predictors of NEET status, with women facing over three times the odds compared to men, and youth with disabilities more than twice as likely. Kayah and Rakhine report the highest NEET rates, but Yangon also stands out as an urban paradox, where high aspirations meet saturated labour markets and limited opportunities.

Despite these challenges, the survey reveals a strong entrepreneurial drive among Myanmar's youth, especially in rural areas and among those with lower education levels. The widespread demand for vocational training reflects not only the pursuit of wage employment but also a desire for self-employment, micro-enterprise, and informal business activity. Many youth are already necessity-driven entrepreneurs, running small family businesses or informal services.

Investing in Myanmar's youth is a strategic imperative. Unlocking their potential requires more than education or job creation, it demands dismantling the barriers that prevent full participation in the economy and society. Supporting youth as both job seekers and opportunity creators can drive local recovery, resilience, and inclusive growth.

2 Based on a market exchange rate of MMK 4400/ USD.



1

INTRODUCTION

Myanmar's youth, defined in this report as individuals aged 15 to 35, represent both the country's largest demographic group and one of its most underutilized assets. Youth make up more than one-third of the total population,³ and over half of Myanmar's working-age population (15–64 years old) falls within the 15–34 age range.⁴ This cohort constitutes a potential demographic dividend capable of driving sustainable development, yet amid protracted crisis, that potential remains largely unrealized. This publication builds on the other reports in UNDP's Myanmar Youth Series, including *A Generation on the Move*⁵, which examined migration intentions and perceptions among young people. Together, the reports provide complementary insights into the factors shaping youth decisions, opportunities, and constraints.

The report focuses on the lived realities of youth in the areas of employment and education. Reflecting the urgency of their situation, it begins with employment outcomes and barriers, highlighting the growing disconnect between education and meaningful work. It explores the practical obstacles young people must navigate to secure decent livelihoods and provides essential context for the subsequent analysis of educational access, attainment, and skills development. Drawing on data from the Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (MYS), this report explores how both education and employment systems must adapt to unlock the full potential of Myanmar's youth.

At the same time, youth outcomes cannot be understood in isolation from wider labour market trends. Beyond the education–employment nexus, transitions are shaped by macroeconomic contraction, conflict-related dynamics, and entrenched social norms. Gender roles, caregiving responsibilities, displacement, and restricted mobility further constrain whether education translates into meaningful work. These dynamics underscore that improving education or expanding training alone cannot “fix” youth employment. Instead, a multifaceted approach is required, linking skills development with measures to stimulate job creation, address structural inequities, and strengthen resilience in an economy under strain. Anchored in the lived experiences of young people, the findings aim to inform targeted efforts by UNDP and development partners to strengthen resilience, unlock capabilities, and expand access to skills, livelihoods, and inclusion. While the current context limits formal institutional engagement, locally grounded, strategic support remains critical to prevent further erosion of human capital and ensure that Myanmar's youth are not left behind.

Labour Market Context

Lower-income countries tend to have high labour force participation rates (LFPR), as employment is a key avenue to escape poverty.⁶ However, according to the World Bank, both the LFPR for the population

³ In 2014, Myanmar's total population exceeded 50 million, with slightly over 17 million individuals aged between 15 and 34 years, classified as youth. Myanmar has yet to conduct a new nationwide population census, that is comprehensive across all the states and regions. According to estimated population data published by the Central Statistical Organization (CSO), Myanmar's population is projected to be around 55.77 million for the period of 2022–2023 (April to March). During this same period, the youth population is estimated to be over 18.3 million. However, Myanmar's population growth rate remains low, at just 0.7 percent per annum.

⁴ Department of Labour (2016). Report on Myanmar Labour Force Survey – 2015. Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization.

⁵ UNDP (2025) *A Generation on the Move: Youth Migration and Perceptions in Myanmar*. United Nations Development Programme.

⁶ ASEAN (2023). *ASEAN Employment Outlook: The Quest for Decent Work in Platform Economy*. ASEAN Secretariat.

aged 15 and over and the overall employment rate in Myanmar have declined, with the employment rate falling from 62.6 percent in 2017 to 54.5 percent in 2022, before recovering to 60.9 percent in 2024.⁷ The sharp drop in 2022 was due to widespread job terminations and dismissals in the public sector, along with business liquidations and temporary closures caused by the pandemic and the consequences of the military takeover.^{8,9} Myanmar's LFPR in 2024 stands at 62.9 percent.¹⁰ While this is broadly comparable to regional peers, the headline figure masks significant structural vulnerabilities. The majority of workers are employed in informal, low-productivity, or subsistence activities, and pronounced disparities persist across regions, genders, and other socio-economic characteristics. The situation is particularly alarming for young people, who, with less experience, struggle to compete for a shrinking pool of job opportunities. Data consistently show that youth unemployment is nearly three times higher than overall unemployment. The International Labour Organization (ILO)-modelled youth unemployment rate rose from 3.6 percent in 2017 to 12.7 percent in 2021, before easing to around 10.1 percent in 2022 and remaining at that level through 2024.¹¹ By comparison, overall unemployment was 1.7 percent in 2017, peaked at 4.3 percent in 2021, and declined again to about 3 percent thereafter.¹²

While unemployment figures are useful for international comparison, the non-employment rate provides a more accurate reflection of the lived experience of Myanmar's youth. The ILO defines an unemployed person as someone who (i) did not have work during the reference period, (ii) was available to start work, and (iii) was actively seeking work. The unemployment rate therefore measures the share of unemployed individuals within the labour force (employed plus unemployed). However, this report applies a broader "non-employment" measure to better capture the realities of Myanmar's youth. Non-employment refers to all youth who are not working at the time of the survey, regardless of whether they are actively seeking work. This distinction is important in Myanmar's context, where many young people —

especially women and those in conflict-affected areas — are outside the labour force due to caregiving, insecurity, or discouragement, and therefore are not actively seeking work.

Myanmar's labour market setbacks are compounded by disruptions in the education system, which limit young people's ability to gain the skills and qualifications needed to compete in an already constrained economy. In Myanmar, these disruptions stem from nationwide school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of the 2021 military takeover — including the Civil Disobedience Movement, political instability, armed conflict, and declining investment in public education.

Data and Methodology

The report draws on the Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (MYS), conducted with a nationally representative sample of 7,187 youth aged 18-35 across all states and regions. Data collection took place in the second half of 2024 using Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). The questionnaire included critical aspects such as economic conditions, access to basic services, security, governance, women's rights, environmental distress, mental health, education, and employment.

To ensure representativeness, survey weights based on the 2014 census were applied to further calibrate the results with population demographics and to account for non-responses. Appendix Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics of respondents, including urban/rural location, states/regions, gender, marital status, education, and age.

In addition to the quantitative survey, this report integrates qualitative insights from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These qualitative methods were used to triangulate the quantitative findings, ensuring greater validity and depth of understanding.

7 World Bank (2025). Triple Burden: Stagnant Labor Markets, Natural Disaster, and Learning Losses in Myanmar. The World Bank Group.

8 ILO (2023). Who Pays the Price of Unemployment? Employment Termination and Income Security in Myanmar. International Labour Organization.

9 ILO (2020). COVID-19 Impact on Employment and Labour Market in Myanmar. International Labour Organization.

10 World Bank (2025). Triple Burden: Stagnant Labor Markets, Natural Disaster, and Learning Losses in Myanmar.

11 World Bank data. Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate) - Myanmar | Data (accessed: 15 August).

12 World Bank data. Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate) - Myanmar | Data. (accessed: 15 August).

Limitations and Mitigation

The survey data collection employed the CATI method, whereby interviews were conducted via telephone. This approach was necessary due to security and access constraints across Myanmar. While CATI enabled broader geographic coverage under challenging conditions, it inherently excluded individuals without access to a telephone, potentially leaving out some of the most marginalized, poorest, displaced, and vulnerable individuals.

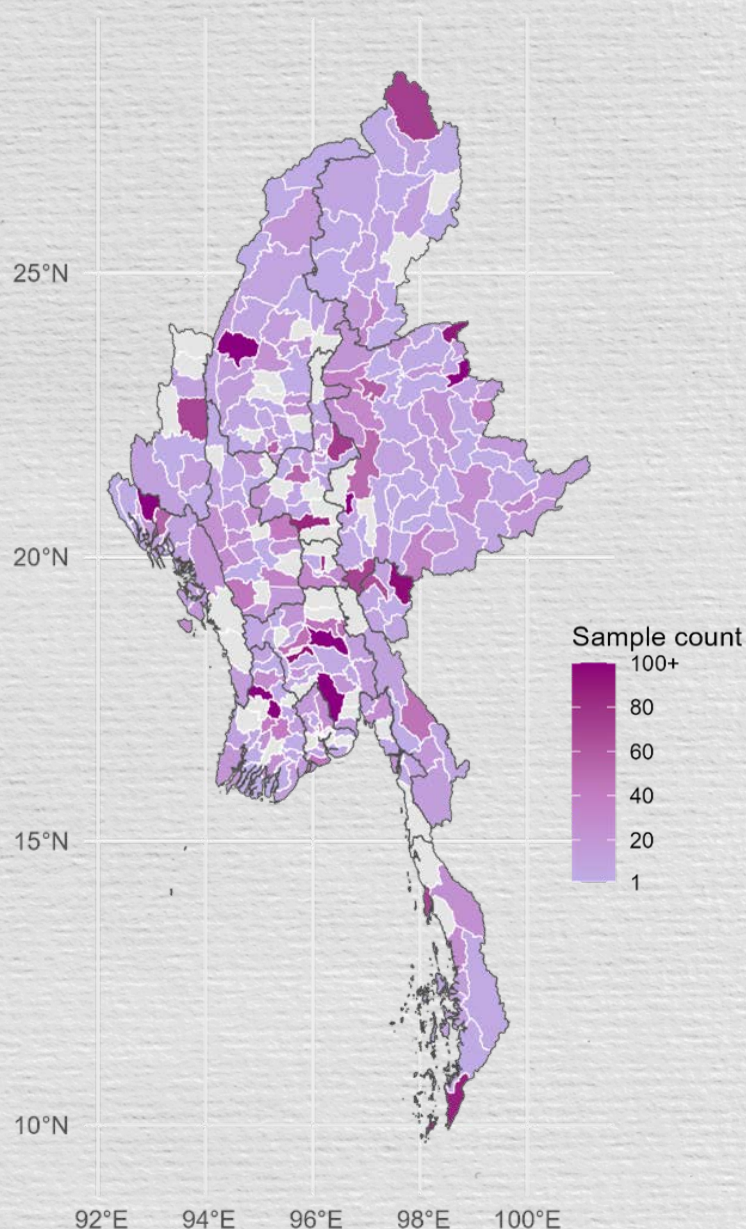
The security situation and connectivity restrictions limited data collection in several areas, most notably Kayah, where the sample was smaller than anticipated. In addition, the reliance on telephone interviews introduced potential sampling biases. For example, youth with higher education are over-represented in states such as Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine, likely reflecting the greater likelihood of phone access among better-educated populations. By contrast, indicators such as overall employment levels are less sensitive to this bias, as they capture broader patterns of youth participation in work and learning.

The survey also aimed to achieve a gender-balanced sample with an equal number of male and female respondents. Ultimately, women were slightly overrepresented, comprising 58 percent of the final sample, while men accounted for 42 percent.

To mitigate imbalances, survey weights were applied to better align the sample with national demographic proportions. In addition, the quantitative survey findings were systematically triangulated with qualitative insights from group discussions to enhance validity and depth.

Figure 1:

Sample allocation of survey data collection



2

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT: A LANDSCAPE OF DISPARITIES

Key takeaways:

- ➔ **Youth Employment is Unequal and Unstable:** One in four youth — nearly 4 million — is not employed, with significantly higher exclusion among women (33.7%) and youth in conflict-affected regions like Kayah, Rakhine, Chin and Tanintharyi. Employment is predominantly informal and rural, with nearly 40% of rural youth engaged in own-account farming. One in four youth changed their main source of income in the past two years, revealing deep livelihood instability.
- ➔ **Gender Inequities Run Deep:** Young women face systemic disadvantages across all indicators: lower employment rates, a 22% wage gap compared to young men, and greater barriers to job-seeking, such as caregiving duties and spousal disapproval. Meanwhile, young men report rising psychosocial barriers, including discouragement, insecurity, and anxiety, often linked to the conscription law.
- ➔ **Education Boosts Earnings — But Not Access to Jobs:** Higher education is linked to increased income (up to MMK 286,000 more per month), yet highly educated youth, especially women, are less likely to be employed. Women with high school education are more excluded from the labour market than those with less schooling, due to limited job opportunities and gendered social norms.
- ➔ **The Labour Market Rewards Low Skills with Low Wages:** Youth with little or no education are more likely to find work, mainly in agriculture and other informal sectors, but these jobs offer low and unstable income, perpetuating poverty traps rather than providing pathways to resilience or advancement.

Who Works and Who Doesn't

Youth employment across Myanmar remains marked by pronounced disparities, shaped by geography, gender, and education. Nationally, 25 percent of youth are not employed, accounting for nearly 4 million young people in Myanmar,¹³ a figure that conceals deeper structural inequalities. In Kayah (54.5%), Rakhine (43.4%), Chin (30.4%) and Tanintharyi (30.2%), more than a third of youth lack employment, often due to conflict, displacement, and limited economic diversification. Conversely, areas like Nay Pyi Taw (18.2%), Magway (20.4%) and Ayeyarwady (22.4%) fare better, reflecting relatively better economic stability and access to agricultural livelihoods. Nay Pyi Taw, the

administrative centre, reports one of the lowest youth non-employment rates, likely due to the presence of public sector jobs. Notably, it also shows a relatively smaller gender gap.

Gender disparities, however, remain pronounced. While 15.7 percent of young men are not employed, the figure rises to 33.7 percent for young women. Regions like Rakhine (50.4% not-employed women) and Tanintharyi (43.1%) reflect the cumulative impact of caregiving responsibilities, limited job opportunities, and other constraints on women's employment (see Figure 2).



"The ongoing political and armed conflicts in Rakhine have created significant challenges for both income-generating activities and daily life. Some businesses are importing goods from neighboring countries like Bangladesh and India, then selling and distributing them within Rakhine. However, for the poorer population, survival often means enduring hardships, such as digging bamboo shoots, chopping wood, and gathering vegetables from the forest. While economic conditions were somewhat better in previous years, the recent conflicts have brought all economic activities to a halt, leaving people to face increasingly difficult and negative changes in their daily lives."

Woman of 28 years, Rakhine

“1 in 4 are jobless,
rising to 1 in 3
for young women.”

¹³ The reported figure that “25 percent of youth are not employed” is derived from the MYS 2024, which defines youth as individuals aged 18–35 years. This age group differs from the ILO’s modelled employment-to-population ratio estimates, which use international standards and age groupings. According to ILO modelled estimates for Myanmar 2024, the national employment-to-population ratio for persons aged 15 and above is 53.5 percent, while the rate for youth (aged 15–24) is 43.1 percent and for adults (aged 25 and above) is 56.3 percent. Discrepancies between these statistics reflect differences in the underlying age definitions, data sources, and survey methodologies.

The 4 million is based on the UNFPA estimations of a total youth population (18-35) of 16 million in 2025.

Figure 2: Percentage of youth employed and not employed

	Both sex		Male		Female	
	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed	Employed	Not employed
Union	75.0%	25.0%	84.3%	15.7%	66.3%	33.7%
Urban	73.2%	26.8%	82.9%	17.1%	64.0%	36.0%
Rural	76.0%	24.0%	85.0%	15.0%	67.5%	32.5%
Kachin	73.7%	26.3%	88.9%	11.1%	66.1%	33.9%
Kayah	45.5%	54.5%	47.8%	52.2%	44.3%	55.7%
Kayin	74.9%	25.1%	86.0%	14.0%	64.1%	35.9%
Chin	69.6%	30.4%	77.3%	22.7%	64.8%	35.2%
Sagaing	77.9%	22.1%	81.7%	18.3%	73.9%	26.1%
Tanintharyi	69.8%	30.2%	89.2%	10.8%	56.9%	43.1%
Bago	74.9%	25.1%	83.7%	16.3%	65.2%	34.8%
Magway	79.6%	20.4%	85.8%	14.2%	71.7%	28.3%
Mandalay	77.4%	22.6%	87.4%	12.6%	69.9%	30.1%
Mon	72.4%	27.6%	83.6%	16.4%	60.8%	39.2%
Rakhine	56.6%	43.4%	64.3%	35.7%	49.6%	50.4%
Yangon	71.9%	28.1%	82.7%	17.3%	62.6%	37.4%
Shan	76.9%	23.1%	83.1%	16.9%	70.6%	29.4%
Ayeyawady	77.6%	22.4%	90.2%	9.8%	63.7%	36.3%
NayPyiTaw	81.8%	18.2%	90.5%	9.5%	74.5%	25.5%
18-24 yrs	65.4%	34.6%	74.0%	26.0%	56.9%	43.1%
25-35 yrs	81.6%	18.4%	91.8%	8.2%	72.4%	27.6%
Below primary education	82.6%	17.4%	92.5%	7.5%	73.3%	26.7%
Completed primary school	80.8%	19.2%	90.3%	9.7%	70.1%	29.9%
Completed middle school	71.0%	29.0%	80.7%	19.3%	61.4%	38.6%
Completed high school	68.6%	31.4%	79.0%	21.0%	59.8%	40.2%
Higher education	72.1%	27.9%	79.0%	21.0%	66.7%	33.3%
With disability	66.7%	33.3%	77.0%	23.0%	51.0%	49.0%
Without disability	75.4%	24.6%	84.8%	15.2%	66.9%	33.1%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Education and Employment: A Mismatched Trajectory

Youth employment outcomes in Myanmar reveal a complex relationship between educational attainment and labour market integration. Paradoxically, young people with lower levels of education are more likely to be employed, largely due to the demand for low-skilled labour in agriculture and informal sectors. Among those with no education or less than primary schooling, 82.6 percent are employed, rising to 92.5 percent among men. Similarly, youth who have completed primary education report an 80.8 percent employment rate.

By contrast, employment rates fall with higher levels of education. Only 72.1 percent of tertiary graduates and

68.6 percent of high school graduates are employed, compared to over 80 percent among youth with primary education or below. Many of those who do secure work are absorbed into low-paid, informal jobs unrelated to their studies, underscoring both the shortage of quality jobs and the disconnect between education and labour market needs. This paradox affects both men and women, but is especially pronounced for young women: one-third (33.3%) of women with higher education are not employed, rising to 40.2 percent among high school graduates. In contrast, non-employment is significantly lower among women with little or no education (26.7% for less than primary, 29.9% for completed primary). These counterintuitive patterns suggest that in Myanmar, higher education does not necessarily translate into better employment outcomes — particularly for women.

“Graduates face a harsh reality: low pay, informal jobs, or none at all.”

Several interrelated factors contribute to this dynamic. Gender norms and caregiving responsibilities continue to limit women’s access to formal employment, regardless of their qualifications. Additionally, the scarcity of professional or female-friendly job opportunities in rural and underserved regions exacerbates these barriers. Even where jobs exist, entrenched societal expectations often discourage or prevent women from entering or remaining in the workforce.

Importantly, these patterns are not isolated phenomena but are issues of a broader, multidimensional youth transition crisis that disrupts not only their immediate job prospects, but their entire lifetime trajectory, as recognized in recent ILO research.^{14 15} Disruptions in Myanmar’s learning-to-earning ecosystem, accelerated by conflict and instability, exemplify what international frameworks describe as systemic marginalization of youth. This underscores that addressing youth employment is not merely a matter of job creation, but requires comprehensive, cross-sectoral strategies that rebuild and reconnect the educational, social, and economic pathways critical to young people’s future.

Employment Patterns

Youth employment in Myanmar is shaped not only by whether young people work, but also by how, where, and under what conditions they work. A closer look at the employment landscape reveals persistent structural inequalities defined by geography, education, and gender, with rural economies dominated by subsistence agriculture and informality.

Informal work is the norm for young people in Myanmar: at the national level, 46.3 percent of youth are engaged in paid work, while 26.9 percent work in their own farming, and another 26.8 percent in other informal businesses. This means that the majority of

youth do not benefit from the protection or stability associated with formal employment.

According to the ILO, “informal employment” includes contributing family workers, self-employed workers in unregistered enterprises, and employees with no employer contribution to social security, paid leave or sick leave.¹⁶ Many young people are engaged in casual or daily wage work, unpaid family labour, and own-account businesses without legal registration, making them particularly vulnerable to shocks and exploitation.

The data show that urban-rural disparities are sharp in the experience of informality. In urban areas, 63.4 percent of youth report working for pay, compared to just 36.8 percent in rural areas, where nearly four in ten youth (39.3%) rely on own-account farming — often with no formal wage, social security, or legal protections. Regions like Chin, Magway, Ayeyarwady, Sagaing and Shan report some of the highest shares of youth in own farming, reinforcing the dependence on informal and subsistence livelihoods. In contrast, Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw show the highest share of youth working for pay (67% and 65.7%, respectively), reflecting comparatively better access to formal sector jobs but also urban concentration of labour supply. Kayah also records a high rate of youth working for pay (66.2%), but this stems from an absence of own-account farming rather than robust formal employment, with a third of youth (33.8%) engaged in other informal business activities (see Figure 3).

Gendered informality is pronounced: young women are more likely than young men to be engaged in unpaid or precarious work, such as domestic work

“4 in 10 rural youth work on their own farms, without wages, rights, or security.”

¹⁴ ILO (2022). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People. International Labour Organization.

¹⁵ ILO (2020). Youth Transitions and Lifetime Trajectory. International Labour Organization.

¹⁶ ILO (2022). An assessment of the social protection needs and gaps for workers in informal employment in Myanmar. International Labour Organization.

Figure 3: Types of employment

	Working for pay	Working in own farming	Working in other business
Union	46.3%	26.9%	26.8%
Urban	63.4%	4.4%	32.2%
Rural	36.8%	39.3%	23.9%
Kachin	49.8%	24.4%	25.8%
Kayah	66.2%		33.8%
Kayin	56.3%	12.6%	31.2%
Chin	30.0%	54.8%	15.1%
Sagaing	33.2%	39.1%	27.7%
Tanintharyi	53.9%	15.9%	30.1%
Bago	44.9%	28.0%	27.1%
Magway	40.4%	39.5%	20.1%
Mandalay	48.1%	23.3%	28.7%
Mon	51.8%	15.2%	33.0%
Rakhine	45.7%	19.3%	34.9%
Yangon	67.0%	4.3%	28.7%
Shan	38.4%	37.4%	24.2%
Ayeyawady	31.1%	42.5%	26.4%
NayPyiTaw	65.7%	17.5%	16.8%
Female	43.4%	23.2%	33.4%
Male	48.7%	30.0%	21.3%
18-24 yrs	55.7%	25.0%	19.4%
25-35 yrs	41.0%	28.0%	31.0%
Below primary education	40.5%	33.8%	25.7%
Completed primary school	40.3%	33.3%	26.3%
Completed middle school	40.9%	29.3%	29.8%
Completed high school	50.7%	22.5%	26.9%
Higher education	58.6%	16.0%	25.4%
With disability	46.1%	23.5%	30.4%
Without disability	46.3%	27.1%	26.7%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

(14.6% of young women vs. 1.9% of men). Women are also highly concentrated in informal retail (22.4%) and garment factory jobs (4.2%), where employment is often irregular, and contracts are rare.¹⁷

Sectoral trends reinforce informality: In rural areas, agriculture remains the dominant source of youth employment (45.7%), usually outside any form of formal contract or protection. In urban centres, while there is more paid work, informal service sector jobs such as wholesale/retail (24.4%), hospitality (8.4%), construction (8.4%) still dominate. Even within cities, youth, especially women, are concentrated in low-wage, insecure roles with few opportunities for advancement and caregiving roles.

Education does not fully shield youth from informality. Youth with higher education are more likely to work in the public sector (19.9%) or the private sector (12.6%)

and are less reliant on agriculture (18.8%). Conversely, youth with little or no education predominantly work in agriculture (46.2%) or in low-paying informal roles such as domestic work (8.3%) or construction (9.7%). However, a notable share of more educated youth still work in agriculture, usually informally: 25.1 percent of high school graduates and 18.8 percent of youth with higher education. Before the military takeover, youth generally preferred non-agricultural work, and parents often encouraged their children to pursue non-farm activities whenever alternative opportunities were available.¹⁸ However, due to the substantial contraction of employment opportunities, many educated youth have turned to agriculture. The World Bank's Myanmar Economic Monitor reports that the share of employment in agriculture rose from 42.9 percent in 2022 to 46.1 percent in 2023, and further to 47 percent in 2024 — marking a total increase of 4.1 percentage points over two years.¹⁹

¹⁷ UNDP (2025). Stitches of Struggle and Hope: The Realities of Garment and Apparel Workers in Myanmar. United Nations Development Programme.

¹⁸ IFPRI (2021). Women and Youth in Myanmar Agriculture. International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

¹⁹ World Bank (2025). Myanmar Economic Monitor: Economic Aftershock. The World Bank Group.

Figure 4: Sectors of employment

	Agriculture	Wholesale and retail trading	Domestic Work	Private sector	Public sector	Construction	Own business	Hospitality	Manufacturing	Garment	Others
Union	32.0%	18.0%	8.2%	7.7%	7.0%	6.2%	5.9%	4.7%	4.1%	2.7%	3.6%
Urban	7.2%	24.4%	9.1%	13.6%	8.8%	8.4%	7.5%	8.4%	5.1%	3.4%	4.0%
Rural	45.7%	14.4%	7.6%	4.5%	6.0%	5.0%	5.0%	2.6%	3.5%	2.3%	3.3%
Kachin	26.0%	12.8%	8.9%	6.0%	11.8%	4.5%	12.2%	4.4%	5.1%	1.8%	6.5%
Kayah	24.2%	28.7%	14.3%	2.0%		11.4%	4.9%		2.0%		12.5%
Kayin	16.9%	20.9%	8.1%	5.2%	10.4%	11.9%	5.4%	7.0%	3.4%	0.7%	10.0%
Chin	50.1%	4.9%	8.4%	1.3%	16.2%	4.2%	2.6%	3.7%	0.4%	0.3%	7.9%
Sagaing	49.8%	16.4%	5.4%	4.3%	2.6%	5.6%	5.6%	1.6%	3.9%	0.7%	4.2%
Tanintharyi	25.0%	25.5%	10.6%	4.3%	8.0%	9.9%	3.2%	5.5%	4.5%	0.8%	2.9%
Bago	31.1%	17.1%	10.0%	6.0%	8.2%	7.2%	4.2%	4.3%	4.9%	3.3%	3.7%
Magway	47.3%	11.3%	5.4%	7.1%	7.3%	5.3%	4.7%	4.1%	2.4%	1.0%	4.0%
Mandalay	28.4%	19.0%	7.7%	9.7%	5.1%	7.3%	7.4%	4.5%	6.3%	2.8%	2.0%
Mon	21.1%	20.6%	10.4%	4.7%	6.3%	9.6%	7.3%	8.3%	5.5%	1.2%	4.9%
Rakhine	20.8%	24.7%	16.6%	6.4%	7.8%	3.8%	2.3%	4.8%	1.9%	2.5%	8.4%
Yangon	7.6%	21.2%	10.1%	17.1%	5.6%	5.8%	7.8%	7.9%	6.5%	8.3%	2.0%
Shan	43.4%	17.0%	5.5%	4.6%	8.1%	7.3%	5.7%	3.9%	1.6%	0.5%	2.4%
Ayeyawady	47.1%	16.6%	7.9%	3.9%	9.0%	2.3%	4.0%	3.0%	1.9%	1.8%	2.6%
NayPyiTaw	27.5%	17.6%	5.1%	9.2%	11.0%	9.4%	6.1%	4.5%	3.0%		6.7%
Male	37.3%	13.6%	1.9%	9.5%	5.8%	11.3%	4.9%	6.4%	3.5%	1.3%	4.5%
Female	26.7%	22.4%	14.6%	5.9%	8.2%	0.9%	7.0%	2.9%	4.7%	4.2%	2.6%
18-24 yrs	30.8%	19.1%	8.9%	7.3%	5.3%	7.1%	5.6%	3.8%	4.8%	3.9%	3.5%
25-35 yrs	32.8%	17.3%	7.7%	8.0%	8.0%	5.6%	6.1%	5.2%	3.7%	2.0%	3.6%
Below primary education	46.2%	14.3%	8.3%	4.7%	0.7%	9.7%	3.2%	4.9%	3.3%	1.6%	3.1%
Completed primary school	40.2%	15.4%	8.0%	5.6%	0.9%	9.3%	5.6%	4.4%	4.2%	3.6%	2.6%
Completed middle school	33.1%	19.1%	9.8%	6.4%	2.3%	5.4%	6.7%	5.3%	4.4%	3.5%	3.4%
Completed high school	25.1%	22.9%	9.3%	7.6%	6.8%	4.8%	6.1%	3.9%	4.0%	3.4%	6.1%
Higher education	18.8%	19.3%	6.3%	12.6%	19.9%	2.6%	6.7%	4.6%	4.0%	1.3%	3.9%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Barriers to Youth Labour Market Entry

Among youth who are not currently employed, patterns of time use and labour market disconnect vary by gender, age, education, and geography, reflecting systemic barriers to employment. At the national

level, over half (53.6%) of non-employed youth report spending their time on household and caregiving responsibilities, while 30.7 percent are still studying, and 9.5 percent are actively looking for work.

Figure 5: Activities of youth who are not employed

	Caring family	Studying	Looking for work	Others
Union	53.6%	30.7%	9.5%	6.2%
Urban	46.1%	37.2%	10.8%	5.9%
Rural	58.3%	26.6%	8.6%	6.4%
Female	65.9%	24.5%	6.8%	2.8%
Male	25.4%	44.9%	15.6%	14.1%
18-24 yrs	37.4%	48.7%	9.0%	4.9%
25-35 yrs	74.7%	7.3%	10.1%	7.9%
Below primary education	81.5%		11.4%	7.1%
Completed primary school	76.4%	5.8%	10.0%	7.9%
Completed middle school	57.9%	27.3%	9.7%	5.1%
Completed high school	41.7%	41.5%	10.3%	6.5%
Higher education	32.2%	54.0%	8.1%	5.8%
With disability	49.9%	19.6%	12.6%	17.9%
Without disability	53.9%	31.5%	9.2%	5.3%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Gendered Barriers: Care Responsibilities and Job Search Disparities

Non-employed young women are far more likely than men to be engaged in unpaid care work: 65.9 percent of women report caring for family, compared to only 25.4 percent of men. This reflects the disproportionate burden of domestic responsibilities, which limits women's ability to pursue education, training, or employment opportunities. In contrast, young men are more engaged in unpaid internships (3%) and volunteering (3.1%), activities that can serve as stepping-stones into the labour market, opportunities to which young women appear to have more limited access.

These disparities point to a need for gender-responsive programmes that address unpaid care burdens, expand flexible and inclusive training opportunities, and create enabling environments for young women to transition into work.



Before the military takeover, a young woman name Phyu (alias) who lives in the heart of Kayah, wanted a stable job and the chance to provide a better life for her family. She briefly worked in her village, helping with farming and harvesting crops, but as violence crept closer, those opportunities vanished. With her husband's work being sporadic and unreliable, the burden of caregiving has largely fallen on Phyu's shoulders. She stays home, looking after their son, while her husband occasionally finds work when it is available, often in the fields or doing manual labour for minimal pay. One of Phyu's greatest challenges is the lack of opportunity to improve her life. Education, once a dream, was cut short at the fourth grade due to financial constraints. "I finished 4th grade, and I couldn't continue because we didn't have the money," she says. Now, her greatest aspiration is to start a small business—a venture that could provide her family with a steady income. Yet, the financial resources to get started remain out of reach.

Age-Specific Challenges: Study-to-Work Transitions

Young people aged 18–24 exhibit a distinct employment profile, with nearly half (48.7%) of non-employed youth in this age group still engaged in studies, and 37.4 percent involved in caregiving responsibilities. This reflects the transitional nature of the cohort, as they navigate the school-to-work stage.²⁰ Historically, Myanmar has recorded low school-to-work transition rates,²¹ with youth aged 15–24 approximately three times more likely to be unemployed than adults aged 25 and above.²² Finding from the MYS 2024 reaffirms this pattern: the non-employment rate for youth aged 18–24 stands at 34.6 percent, nearly twice as high as the rate for those aged 25–35 (18.4%).

For older youth (25–35 years), however, only 7.3 percent report studying, and a striking 74.7 percent are engaged in unpaid family care, a reflection of shifting life responsibilities and declining re-entry prospects into formal employment.

Education Level: Lower Education, Fewer Pathways

Barriers to entering the labour market are particularly high for youth with low levels of education. Among non-employed youth with no education or less than primary schooling, 81.5 percent reported caregiving as their main activity, suggesting limited options to begin the transition into work. In contrast, youth with higher education are more likely to be studying (54%) and less likely to be involved in unpaid domestic roles (32.2%). This trend suggests that higher education expands young people's opportunities to attempt entry into the workforce and pursue alternatives beyond household labour. However, as highlighted in Section 3, education alone does not guarantee access to decent or stable employment once they enter the labour market.

Caregiving keeps
81.5% of the least-
educated youth
locked out of work.

20 Individuals aged 15 to 24 are in the process of moving from education to the labour market, often delaying entry until later stages.

21 Department of Labour (2016). Report on Myanmar Labour Force Survey – 2015.

22 ILO (2022). Global Employment Trends for Youth 2022: Investing in Transforming Futures for Young People. International Labour Organization.

Job Seeking and Reasons for Inactivity

While 29.2 percent of non-employed youth nationwide report that they are actively looking for work, this figure masks significant variations across gender, geography, and education. Young men (37.2%) are considerably more likely than young women (25.6%) to be seeking employment, reinforcing earlier observations on unequal access to labour market entry points.

At the subnational level, Kayah (53.0%), Rakhine (39.1%), and Shan (37.3%) stand out with the highest rates of job-seeking among non-employed youth. These elevated rates may reflect heightened urgency for income earning in contexts affected by ongoing conflict. By contrast, youth in regions such as Kachin (22.3%) and Mandalay (23.2%) are less likely to report looking for jobs (see Figure 6).

Why Are Youth Not Looking for Work?

Among youth not seeking employment, the reasons cited reveal a complex set of hidden barriers that constrain economic participation. The most common reason, reported by 60.7 percent of non-job-seeking youth, is a lack of time, predominantly due to caregiving responsibilities. This burden is particularly acute among young women (62.1%), reflecting the entrenched gender roles and limited availability of support systems that restrict women's ability to engage in the labour market.

Spousal disapproval also emerges as a significant constraint, especially for women. Nationally, 20.4 percent of young women who are not looking for work report that their spouse does not allow them to do so. This figure rises sharply in certain regions, reaching 34.8 percent in Tanintharyi, 27.0 percent in Mon, 24.7 percent in Ayeyarwady, and 22.5 percent in Kayin — underscoring the powerful influence of social norms and intra-household dynamics on employment decisions.

In more fragile or conflict-affected areas, concerns around personal safety and pessimism about job prospects further inhibit job-seeking. Nationally, six percent of youth not looking for work cite security concerns. These proportions are significantly higher in regions like Kayah (40.1%), Rakhine (19.7%), Chin (18.7%), Sagaing (14.0%) and Kachin (12.3%), where insecurity and limited opportunities intersect. Taken together, these findings illustrate that the decision not to seek employment is often not a choice but a reflection of structural, social, and contextual constraints.

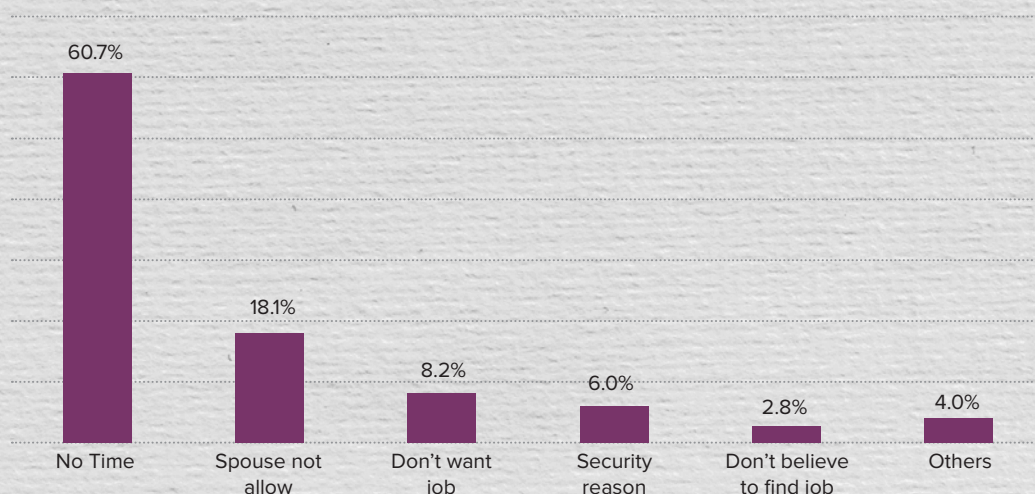
“6% of youth do not job-hunt at all as security fears push them out of the labour market.”

Figure 6: Percentage of not employed youth actively seeking jobs

Union	29.2%	Kachin	22.3%
Urban	29.2%	Kayah	53.0%
Rural	29.2%	Kayin	29.0%
Male	37.2%	Chin	31.5%
Female	25.6%	Sagaing	26.2%
18-24 yrs	29.5%	Tanintharyi	25.0%
25-35 yrs	28.8%	Bago	27.0%
Below primary education	31.5%	Magway	29.9%
Completed primary school	26.8%	Mandalay	23.2%
Completed middle school	27.7%	Mon	28.7%
Completed high school	33.6%	Rakhine	39.1%
Higher education	29.4%	Yangon	28.0%
		Shan	37.3%
		Ayeyarwady	28.8%
		NayPyi Taw	27.3%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Figure 7: Reasons why not employed youth are not actively seeking jobs



Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Gender differences are especially pronounced. Young men are twice as likely as women to say they “do not want a job” (13.0% vs. 6.3%), suggesting possible discouragement or disengagement. Men are also more likely to cite security risks (6.4%) and disbelief in finding work (3.8%), pointing to different psychosocial barriers in labour market integration.

At the same time, youth with lower education levels are more likely to be restricted by household obligations or discouraged from participation: 47.1 percent of youth with no education cite lack of time, and nearly one-quarter (24.9%) say they are not allowed to work by their spouse (see Appendix Table 3). This reaffirms the importance of intersectional vulnerabilities that layer education, gender, and socio-cultural norms.

Youth Income Instability and Changes

Youth employment in Myanmar is characterized not only by uneven access but also by significant disparities in income and notable instability in earnings. Income levels and transitions vary widely by region, education level, and gender, underscoring the precarious nature of many young people’s livelihoods.

Regional and Demographic Disparities in Income

The average monthly income for employed youth stands at MMK 459,695. However, this figure conceals large regional disparities. Youth in Tanintharyi earn

Figure 8: Average monthly earnings of employed youth, by geography

	(MMK)		(MMK)
Union	459,695	Kachin	390,265
Urban	482,136	Kayah	208,017
Rural	447,373	Kayin	659,164
Male	512,097	Chin	241,859
Female	397,400	Sagaing	490,507
18-24 yrs	399,317	Tanintharyi	686,928
25-35 yrs	493,271	Bago	503,719
Below primary education	354,979	Magway	399,495
Completed primary school	406,194	Mandalay	455,022
Completed middle school	467,136	Mon	395,219
Completed high school	511,383	Rakhine	420,696
Higher education	543,912	Yangon	447,156
		Shan	405,824
		Ayeyawady	511,500
		NayPyiTaw	380,069

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

an average of MMK 686,928 per month, followed by Kayin at MMK 659,164 — both substantially above the national average. In contrast, youth in Kayah earn just MMK 208,017, and those in Chin average MMK 241,859, the lowest levels nationally (see Figure 8).

These regional discrepancies highlight unequal earning potential across the country. However, the implications of income differences are also shaped by local cost of living. In regions where commodity prices are elevated, real income may be lower than nominal earnings suggest. A comprehensive assessment of regional price differences — particularly in essential goods — remains necessary to determine the actual purchasing power and economic well-being of youth.

Gender-based income disparities persist. While the average monthly income for employed young men is MMK 512,097, women earn MMK 397,400 — a 22.4 percent wage gap. This difference exists despite comparable levels of participation in many regions, reflecting the concentration of young women in lower-paying occupations and informal sectors.

Education appears to influence income positively. Youth with higher education earn an average of MMK 543,912 per month, compared to MMK 354,979 for those with little or no education. This income premium suggests

that skills and qualifications are rewarded in the labour market, although higher-paying opportunities may remain concentrated in urban centres or limited in conflict-affected regions.

While these findings confirm the income premium associated with higher education, they also underscore a paradox: many educated youth, particularly women, remain unemployed or NEET. This suggests that despite the economic value of education, systemic barriers continue to prevent educated youth from accessing stable employment.

Instability and Changes in Income Sources

Many youth experience instability in their income sources. Nationally, 24.7 percent reported changing their source of income over the past two years, with changes more common in urban areas (29%) than in rural areas (22.2%), as shown in Figure 9.

Education pays as graduates earn 50% more than those with little schooling.

Figure 9: Percentage of youth reporting changes in income sources over the past two years

	Both	Male	Female
Union	24.7%	27.2%	22.3%
Urban	29.0%	31.0%	27.1%
Rural	22.2%	25.0%	19.7%
Kachin	31.4%	44.2%	25.0%
Kayah	35.0%	62.4%	19.9%
Kayin	24.3%	28.5%	20.3%
Chin	15.6%	22.2%	11.4%
Sagaing	21.1%	19.2%	23.0%
Tanintharyi	19.0%	20.5%	17.9%
Bago	24.6%	28.6%	20.2%
Magway	22.9%	25.9%	19.2%
Mandalay	23.2%	27.9%	19.6%
Mon	21.5%	27.3%	15.6%
Rakhine	25.3%	29.0%	22.0%
Yangon	32.5%	33.2%	31.9%
Shan	24.0%	27.5%	20.5%
Ayeyawady	21.0%	21.8%	20.1%
Nay Pyi Taw	21.5%	24.1%	19.3%
18-24 yrs	25.7%	29.3%	22.1%
25-35 yrs	24.0%	25.6%	22.5%
Below primary education	22.8%	25.8%	19.9%
Completed primary school	23.3%	26.0%	20.4%
Completed middle school	24.8%	27.5%	22.1%
Completed high school	25.7%	27.0%	24.5%
Higher education	26.3%	28.9%	24.2%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

The reasons why youth change their income sources reveal deeper vulnerabilities (Appendix Table 4). Among youth who changed income sources, 21.9 percent reported doing so after being laid off and subsequently finding another job, while 17 percent transitioned into higher-skilled roles. Meanwhile, 7.4 percent of youth cited a lack of demand for their business, highlighting the volatility faced by small-scale entrepreneurs in a challenging economic environment. Security conditions were also a notable driver of income transitions. Nationally, 4.9 percent of youth cited security-related reasons for changing their income source. These responses pointed to the compounding effect of insecurity, which not only limits job availability but also forces young people to seek alternative livelihoods amid unstable conditions.

Gender differences were also evident in reasons for income changes. Among women who reported a change, 27 percent cited personal reasons — higher than the 21.6 percent among men. This may reflect household-related constraints such as caregiving responsibilities. Additionally, 11.9 percent of women reported being laid off and not finding subsequent employment, nearly double the rate of men at 5.5 percent.

These patterns highlight the fragility of income sources among youth in Myanmar. For many, especially those in economically marginalized or conflict-affected regions such as Kayah and Chin, income instability compounds existing challenges to labour market access. Addressing these disparities will require a focus on expanding stable, resilient employment opportunities that equitably include women and underrepresented youth populations.

Quantifying the Returns to Education

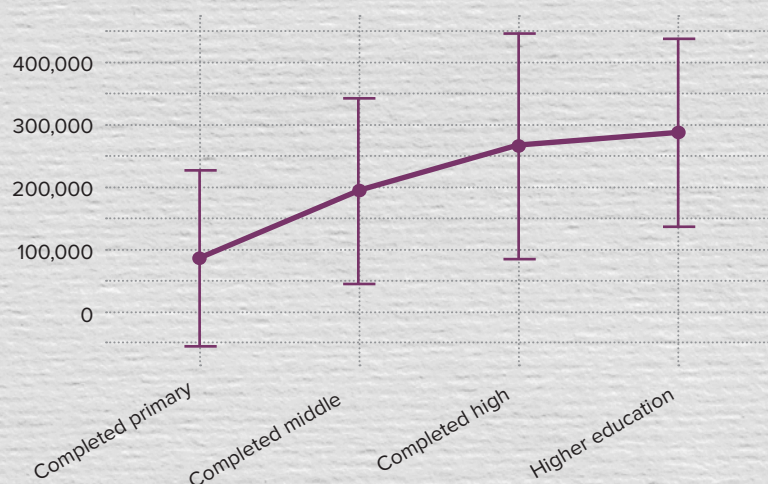
Descriptive analysis confirms the strong, positive association between educational attainment and income of youth. While youth with higher education earn 34 percent more than those with only primary level education (MMK 543,912 vs. MMK 406,194), a large share of young people remains excluded from the pathways that lead to higher-skilled, better-paying employment. A regression model estimating the marginal effect of education on monthly income — while controlling for gender, geographic locations, and age — offers further insight into the income differentials across education levels of youth.

The analysis finds that youth with higher education earn, on average, MMK 286,000 more per month than those with no formal education or less than primary schooling. This effect is highly significant, reinforcing the clear income premium associated with tertiary education. By comparison, completing only primary education is associated with a modest and statistically insignificant income increase of MMK 86,000, underscoring that the income advantage of higher education is more than three times greater than that of individuals with less than primary education.

Similarly, completing high school is associated with a MMK 264,000 increase in income, also statistically significant. The benefit of completing middle school is slightly lower, at MMK 193,000, though still statistically meaningful.

These findings are consistent with the income trends

Figure 10: Estimated effects of education level on monthly income (MMK)



presented in Section 3 and reinforce the conclusion that investment in secondary and tertiary education yields clear economic returns for youth. However, evidence from the World Bank suggests that this income premium has narrowed since the conflict, particularly when factoring in work experience or job tenure. It is also important to note that employment opportunities for highly educated youth remain limited, leaving a larger share of them unemployed compared to their less-educated peers, despite their higher potential earning capacity. While better-educated workers have largely regained employment at pre-crisis levels in 2024–2025, the returns to experience for these workers have not recovered, pointing to a weakening link between qualifications, experience, and earnings.^{23 24} This trend underscores the need to complement investments in education with broader economic recovery measures that expand demand for skilled labour.

As highlighted in the previous section, barriers to higher educational attainment remain widespread, particularly for rural youth and young women, who continue to face structural constraints that prevent them from translating educational qualifications into stable, well-paying jobs. The implications are twofold: while higher education significantly enhances earning potential, expanding equitable access to such education — and ensuring its alignment with labour market needs — remains critical to addressing income inequality and unlocking the youth’s potential.

Labour Market Contraction: The Demand-Side Context

While the core focus of this report is on the lived realities and barriers faced by youth, it is equally important to recognize that Myanmar’s employment crisis is also shaped by dramatic changes on the demand side of the labour market. Since the onset of COVID-19 and the 2021 military takeover, the economy has experienced a sharp contraction, leading to unprecedented job losses, business closures, and declining employer demand across nearly every sector. At the same time, international sanctions, supply chain disruptions, and reduced foreign investment have stifled job creation

and contributed to wage stagnation across much of the country.

Data from the September/October 2024 round of the World Bank Firm Survey underscores the severity of Myanmar’s economic contraction. During January–September 2024, firm sales declined by an average of 18 percent, while average profits fell by 25 percent. Only 30 percent of firms reported operating at full capacity, with most citing reduced sales, rising input costs, and supply shortages as key barriers to recovery. Notably, 23 percent of wholesale/retail firms reported a complete lack of sales, reflecting broader economic stagnation and rising consumer prices.²⁵

The agricultural sector has partially absorbed displaced workers, but often in roles that are less secure and offer limited upward mobility.²⁶ The garment sector, once a key employer for young women, has been particularly hard hit, with factory closures and reduced production.²⁷

Employers, facing continued uncertainty, have become more risk-averse, often preferring experienced workers or those with established social networks, and reducing new hiring altogether.²⁸ For many youth, especially recent graduates or those with only basic education, this has further narrowed pathways into formal employment.

The combined effect is a labour market marked by shrinking demand, growing informality, and heightened barriers to entry — trends that have disproportionately affected young people, particularly women and those in rural or conflict-affected areas. Any strategy to improve youth employment outcomes must therefore address these structural demand-side constraints alongside investments in youth skills and capabilities.

“ Shrinking demand and rising informality are shutting youth out, especially women. ”

23 World Bank (2024). Myanmar Economic Monitor: Livelihoods Under Threat. The World Bank Group.

24 World Bank (2025). Myanmar Economic Monitor: Economic Aftershock. The World Bank Group.

25 World Bank (2024). Myanmar Economic Monitor: Compounding Crises - Special Focus: International Migration from Myanmar. The World Bank Group.

26 World Bank (2023). A Growing Crisis: Work, Workers, and Wellbeing in Myanmar. The World Bank Group.

27 UNDP (2025). Stitches of Struggle and Hope: The Realities of Garment and Apparel Workers in Myanmar. United Nations Development Programme.

28 World Economic Forum (2025). The Future of Jobs Report 2025.



3 EDUCATION: BARRIERS TO LEARNING AND BEYOND

Key takeaways:

- ➔ **Access to Education is Deeply Unequal:** Youth in rural and conflict-affected areas face the steepest barriers to education, with only one in five rural youth attaining higher education. Economic hardship and school-related costs are the main drivers of early dropout, particularly in underserved regions.
- ➔ **Youth Disengagement from Learning is Widespread:** Three out of four youth aged 18–24 — over 5 million — are no longer in education or training, especially in rural regions like Tanintharyi, Chin, Kayin and Sagaing. This widespread disengagement severely limits long-term opportunities.
- ➔ **Gender and Social Norms Undermine Women's Educational Gains:** Despite slightly higher educational attainment, young women face greater challenges in translating education into employment, due to caregiving burdens, spousal restrictions, and exclusion from the labour market.
- ➔ **Skills Systems Fail to Match Youth Needs:** Demand for vocational and practical training is high, yet current systems fall short. Both low- and high-educated youth remain unprepared for available jobs, especially in Yangon, where urban youth face unmet expectations and saturated job market.
- ➔ **NEET is a Critical Vulnerability:** Nearly one in five youth — around 3 million — are disengaged from any employment, education or training. High NEET prevalence, particularly among young women, rural youth, and those in conflict-affected regions like Kayah and Rakhine, limits access to skills, income, and social mobility, creating long-term risks of poverty, exclusion, and underutilized human capital.

Educational Attainment and Inequalities

While the preceding section showed that young people in Myanmar face persistent barriers to securing meaningful employment, many — particularly women and those in rural or conflict-affected areas — struggle to translate educational attainment into decent work. This underscores a critical disconnect between education and the realities of the labour market. To fully understand these employment outcomes, it is essential to examine the educational landscape that shapes youth opportunities from the outset. This section complements the employment analysis by exploring the obstacles young people face in accessing and progressing through Myanmar's education system. Together, these findings reveal how gaps between education and the labour market ultimately

limit the potential of Myanmar's youth to secure stable livelihoods and contribute to national development.

Educational attainment remains a key determinant of youth employment outcomes in Myanmar, yet access and progression through the education system are deeply unequal. Nationally, over one-fourth (26.4%) of youth have completed only primary education, rising to 30.3 percent in rural areas compared to 19.5 percent in urban settings. Conversely, only 20.8 percent of rural youth attain higher education, compared to 37.4 percent in urban areas. These disparities closely mirror labour market realities, with rural youth less likely to access formal-sector jobs or secure employment aligned with their aspirations and skills.

Figure 11: Youth educational attainment²⁹

	Educational Attainment				
	Below primary	Completed primary	Completed middle	Completed high	Higher
Union	11.7%	26.4%	23.8%	11.2%	26.9%
Urban	6.9%	19.5%	23.6%	12.6%	37.4%
Rural	14.5%	30.3%	24.0%	10.4%	20.8%
Kachin	8.6%	25.2%	24.0%	12.5%	29.6%
Kayah	9.6%	38.5%	25.5%	9.8%	16.6%
Kayin	16.2%	27.2%	25.6%	11.0%	19.9%
Chin	3.4%	13.3%	30.6%	25.3%	27.3%
Sagaing	12.5%	30.1%	24.1%	11.1%	22.2%
Tanintharyi	10.9%	34.4%	24.3%	13.8%	16.5%
Bago	11.7%	24.5%	24.6%	11.8%	27.5%
Magway	14.9%	27.5%	22.9%	10.0%	24.7%
Mandalay	13.9%	29.6%	24.6%	8.7%	23.2%
Mon	14.4%	31.5%	21.7%	12.9%	19.5%
Rakhine	7.3%	16.8%	27.1%	17.6%	31.2%
Yangon	7.8%	21.0%	21.6%	10.6%	39.0%
Shan	12.4%	27.2%	25.3%	11.6%	23.5%
Ayeyawady	13.5%	27.3%	22.0%	10.2%	27.0%
Nay Pyi Taw	9.6%	25.9%	27.8%	13.2%	23.6%
Male	11.7%	28.8%	24.6%	10.6%	24.2%
Female	11.7%	24.0%	23.1%	11.8%	29.3%
18-24 yrs	6.3%	24.1%	30.2%	16.6%	22.8%
25-35 yrs	15.5%	27.9%	19.4%	7.5%	29.7%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

²⁹ Educational attainment figures are based on survey data for youth aged 18–35, collected via a telephone interview methodology. The distribution is as follows: 11.7% below primary education, 26.4% completed primary, 23.8% completed middle, 11.2% completed high school, and 26.9% higher education. For comparison, the 2019 Myanmar Intercensal Survey reports 3.8% below primary, 47.0% completed primary, 21.7% completed middle, 13.3% completed high school, and 14.2% higher education among population aged 25 years and over, via face-to-face interviews. Variations between these data may be attributable to differences in age groups, survey methodologies, and sampling frames.

Gender and Educational Attainment

Gender disparities in educational attainment are modest at aggregate level. For instance, 11.7 percent of both male and female youth have not progressed beyond primary education. However, a more complex picture emerges when education is linked to employment. While 29.3 percent of young women attain higher education — outpacing their male peers at 24.2 percent — this does not translate into equitable labour market outcomes. As outlined in Section 2, women continue to face lower employment rates and earn significantly less on average (MMK 397,400 for women vs. MMK 512,097 for men), despite their educational advantage.

“More young women (29%) earn degrees than men (24%), but equal opportunities remain out of reach.”

Intergenerational Shift in Education

The data reveals modest progress in educational attainment among younger youth. Youth aged 18–24 are more likely to have completed middle school (30.2%) and high school (16.6%) than those aged 25–35, among whom only 7.5 percent completed high school. However, fewer in the younger cohort transition to higher education (22.8%) compared to the older group (29.7%). This gap suggests persistent challenges in bridging secondary and tertiary education, especially for rural youth, where financial pressures and limited job prospects drive early school leaving. Educational disparities — by geography, gender, and income — reinforce existing inequalities in the labour market.

Youth Not in Learning: An Untapped Potential

A significant share of Myanmar's youth (aged 18–24) is no longer engaged in learning. This represents a major loss of human capital, particularly as the transition

from adolescence to adulthood should be a period of educational advancement and skill acquisition.

Nationally, 75.8 percent of youth aged 18–24 is not in education or training, accounting for over 5 million young people. This disengagement is more pronounced in rural areas (79.7%) than in urban centres (69%), mirroring the patterns seen in employment and income. Disparities are especially acute in Tanintharyi (85.9%), Sagaing (83.9%), Kayin (82.9%), and Chin (82.7%), where young people face significant structural and economic obstacles to continued learning (see Figure 12). In contrast, Kayah shows a relatively lower proportion of youth aged 18–24 not engaged in any form of education or training. This likely reflects the establishment of informal schools and educational initiatives after 2021, which have expanded access to learning in the region despite historically lower education completion rates among youth.

Drivers of Early School Leaving

Youth cited economic pressure as the primary reason for leaving education. Nationally, 41.5 percent of respondents pointed to the need to work. This reason was more prevalent in urban areas (49.6%), likely reflecting young people entering low-skilled formal jobs, than in rural areas (37.5%), where youth are more often drawn into informal or subsistence activities.

Affordability also played a role, about 12.7 percent of youth cited school fees or supply costs as a key reason for disengagement. These figures underscore the

Figure 12: Youth (aged 18–24) not engaged in education or training

Union	75.8%	Kachin	79.1%
Urban	69.0%	Kayah	63.7%
Rural	79.7%	Kayin	82.9%
Male	77.7%	Chin	82.7%
Female	74.0%	Sagaing	83.9%
		Tanintharyi	85.9%
		Bago	73.1%
		Magway	79.0%
		Mandalay	74.9%
		Mon	75.8%
		Rakhine	78.8%
		Yangon	66.8%
		Shan	77.4%
		Ayeyawady	73.7%
		Nay Pyi Taw	73.8%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

importance of household income in shaping education trajectories.

Gendered Patterns in Learning Disengagement

While 26 percent of young women aged 18–24 remain engaged in some form of learning, compared to 22.3 percent of young men, this apparent advantage masks deeper structural disadvantages. Among those who left education, 23.9 percent of young women reported doing so to fulfil household responsibilities such as caregiving and domestic chores — more than triple the rate reported by young men (7.2%). These figures reflect the continued influence of traditional gender roles and socio-cultural expectations that limit educational opportunities for young women.

The impact is particularly acute in rural areas, where gendered responsibilities intersect with geographic isolation, lower household income, and limited access to support services, reinforcing barriers to sustained educational engagement and compounding long-term employment disadvantages.

However, household duties are only part of the gendered barriers confronting young women's educational attainment. Recent analysis by UNFPA underscores that adolescent motherhood and early marriage are major drivers of educational disengagement for girls, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas.³⁰ Girls who become mothers as adolescents are significantly more likely to leave school permanently and remain outside both education and employment, thus exacerbating NEET rates for young women.

Regional Barriers to Learning

Youth in urban dominant Yangon most frequently cited work responsibilities as the reason for leaving school (57.9%). In rural areas, particularly in regions such as Tanintharyi, Sagaing, and Kayin, disengagement was shaped by access barriers — including the absence of nearby educational institutions and transportation challenges. Youth in rural areas were more likely to face the transportation challenge than their urban peers (8.6% vs. 3.8%).

In regions such as Chin and Rakhine, security was a dominant concern. Among respondents, 21.7 percent in Chin and 19.9 percent in Rakhine cited safety issues as a reason for not continuing their education, well above the national average of 8.2 percent (see Appendix Table 5). These findings reflect the compounding impact of on-going conflict, forced conscription and infrastructure deficits on youth learning.

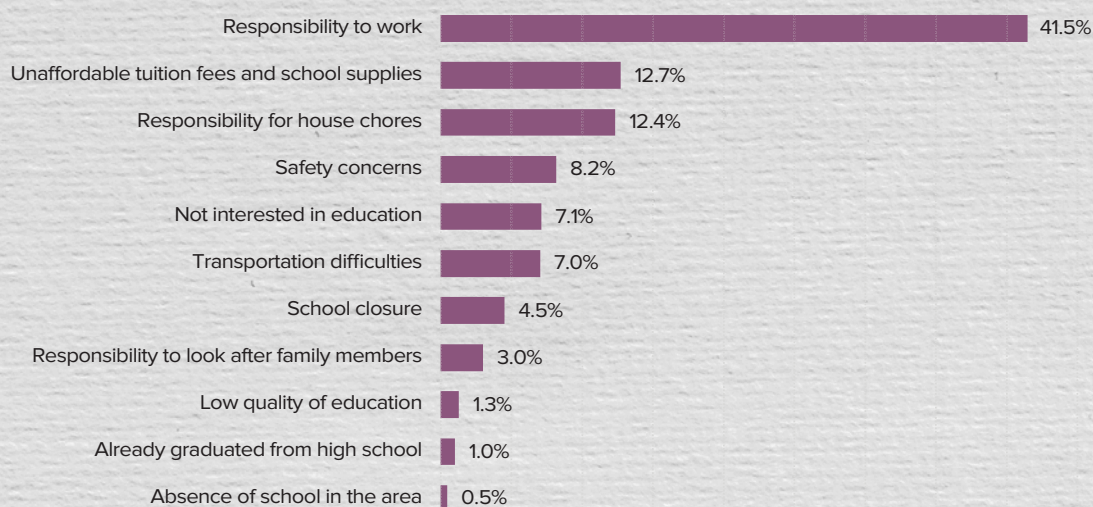
“1 in 4 young women leave school for care giving, triple the rate of young men.”



In the quiet town of Kyauktaw, located in Myanmar's Rakhine, lives 21-year-old Kyaw (alias). The political situation and ongoing unrest in his small bustling town has made transportation difficult, causing disruptions in education, and limiting access to opportunities that many young people in Myanmar yearn for. For Kyaw, this has meant putting his second year of university on pause, missing out on exams he had been preparing for, and sacrificing his ambitions for now. Despite the struggles of his community, he continues to serve, selling goods at the local market, and doing everything he can to ensure his family stays afloat. "I help with the work at home and in the shop," he says matter-of-factly, but his voice reflects the weight of this responsibility.

30 UNFPA (2024). Assessment of the Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability, and Quality of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights for Persons with Disabilities in Myanmar. United Nations Population Fund.

Figure 13: Reasons why youth (18-24) are not engaged in education or training



Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Implications for Workforce Readiness

The high proportion of youth not in learning limits the development of a skilled labour force. It reinforces the cycle of informal work, low pay, and underemployment. These effects are especially pronounced for rural youth and young women, who face overlapping challenges in both education and employment. As outlined earlier, disengagement from education reduces opportunities for upward mobility and restricts access to better jobs.

Quality of Education: An Overlooked Dimension

While the preceding analysis has focused on educational attainment, it is equally critical to examine the quality of education in Myanmar, an often overlooked but fundamental factor shaping youth employment outcomes. In parallel with access and attainment, the quality of education in Myanmar remains a critical missing link in the education-to-employment transition. Deficits in foundational learning, outdated curricula, and limited teaching capacity undermine the ability of young people to acquire the skills needed for decent work, leaving many graduates unprepared for the realities of the labour market.

Severe Learning Deficits: Despite years of schooling, most Myanmar's youth complete primary education without mastering basic literacy or numeracy, as highlighted by the 2019 SEA-PLM³¹ and World Bank study.³² Only 11 percent of Grade 5 students met minimum reading proficiency and just 12 percent achieved basic mathematical benchmarks. This lack of foundational learning contributes directly to workforce unpreparedness, hindering youth from securing decent jobs or adapting to the demands of a changing labour market.

Rote Memorization Dominates Teaching: Instruction remains largely teacher-centered and focused on memorization, rather than encouraging critical thinking, problem-solving, or communication. In Myanmar education system, high grades often reflect the ability to recall textbook content rather than demonstrate conceptual understanding or creativity. This approach not only discourages classroom discussion and student inquiry, but also stifles students' capacity to adapt, innovate, and communicate, competencies that are increasingly essential for success in modern, dynamic workplaces.³³

³¹ World Bank (2022). Learning in Myanmar: Pre and Post-Covid-19. The World Bank Group.

³² UNICEF (2019). Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics 2019 (SEA-PLM): Myanmar National Report. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund.

³³ Claire Allen (2023). Critical Thinking in Myanmar's Education System (Part I). Tea Circle Oxford.

Inadequate Teaching Capacity: A severe shortage of qualified teachers undermines learning quality. This issue was exacerbated by the dismissal of nearly 30 percent of public-school educators following their participation in the Civil Disobedience Movement. The resulting reduction in teaching capacity limits students' access to quality instruction and hinders overall learning outcomes.³⁴

Outdated Curriculum: Myanmar's basic education curriculum has seen limited change since the 1980s. The last major revision occurred in 1985. Although curriculum reform began in 2012, with new syllabi introduced gradually since 2016, implementation remains incomplete. As a result, many students lack exposure to digital literacy, language training, and soft skills — such as critical thinking and problem-solving — necessary for today's jobs.^{35 36}

Mismatch Between Higher Education and Labour Market Needs: Employers consistently reported that graduates lack essential practical and soft skills, including communication, adaptability, digital fluency, and job-specific competencies. Myanmar's higher education system remains heavily theoretical, leaving graduates ill-prepared for professional roles. Many are employed in fields unrelated to their qualifications or require substantial on-the-job training. Employers frequently cite deficits in English language, teamwork, and interpersonal communication as key hiring barriers.³⁷

“Over half of less-educated youth demand vocational training to improve their future.”

The Missed Opportunity: Skills Development Needs

Youth in Myanmar face a significant gap between their aspirations for skills development and the opportunities available. Skills acquisition remains the crucial link between education and employment, but the current technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system is not equipped to meet these needs. Myanmar's TVET system is highly fragmented, with spread responsibilities and limited coordination or oversight. As a result, training programmes often lack recognized accreditation, clear quality assurance, or meaningful pathways to formal employment or further study. Linkages with private sector and industry are limited, constraining innovation, relevance, and scale in training provision. These systemic challenges leave youth unable to translate training into decent work, perpetuating cycles of informality and underemployment.³⁸

What Skills Do Youth Want?

Vocational training is the most widely cited need, with 47.3 percent of youth across Myanmar identifying it as their top priority. The demand is particularly high among youth with limited formal education — 52.6 percent of those with below primary school and 51.1 percent of those who completed only primary school expressed a need for vocational training. Rural youth were more likely to prioritize these practical skillsets (50.4%) compared to urban youth (41.9%).

Among youth with higher education, the demand shifted toward language training and professional soft skills. Language proficiency was cited by 31.9 percent of youth overall, rising to 47.9 percent among those with tertiary education. Networking skills were also emphasized by 11.8 percent of this group, highlighting perceived barriers to accessing formal jobs requiring connections and communication competencies.

34 World Bank (2023). Education in Myanmar: Where are We Now? The World Bank Group.

35 Operational Data Portal (2017). Myanmar's basic education curriculum gets a makeover.

36 Oxford Business Group (2018). Myanmar seeks to raise standards across the education system.

37 Myanmar Insider (2020). Education and Employability – The Gap between College and the Workplace.

38 UNESCO-UNEVOC (2018). TVET Country Profile: Myanmar. UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

Figure 14: Types of opportunities requested by youth

	Vocational	Language	Soft skill	Volunteer	Internship	Networking	Others
Union	47.3%	31.9%	26.9%	21.8%	17.6%	10.2%	4.2%
Urban	41.9%	37.2%	26.5%	19.7%	15.5%	9.2%	4.2%
Rural	50.4%	28.9%	27.1%	23.0%	18.8%	10.8%	4.2%
Kachin	56.3%	33.2%	30.2%	30.2%	21.4%	10.7%	2.7%
Kayah	75.8%	25.8%	25.1%	23.3%	26.5%	13.6%	
Kayin	50.8%	29.9%	27.4%	24.7%	21.7%	13.2%	4.4%
Chin	51.7%	39.7%	24.6%	27.4%	22.6%	8.8%	1.4%
Sagaing	48.6%	24.2%	26.7%	22.9%	15.6%	8.0%	4.6%
Tanintharyi	45.3%	26.1%	26.2%	25.8%	24.1%	10.6%	4.4%
Bago	50.7%	35.8%	29.4%	22.9%	19.6%	14.5%	4.5%
Magway	48.8%	33.1%	28.7%	25.6%	18.6%	12.2%	5.1%
Mandalay	45.8%	29.3%	25.4%	23.1%	15.1%	8.5%	5.4%
Mon	48.1%	27.9%	22.2%	19.1%	19.4%	9.0%	6.9%
Rakhine	42.3%	35.5%	20.2%	22.6%	19.6%	7.4%	3.4%
Yangon	41.0%	38.5%	26.4%	16.2%	12.3%	8.0%	3.1%
Shan	47.6%	32.4%	29.2%	19.9%	20.4%	12.3%	4.8%
Ayeyawady	50.6%	28.3%	26.9%	22.1%	19.3%	10.9%	2.9%
Nay Pyi Taw	44.8%	35.4%	24.8%	22.9%	16.8%	9.1%	4.4%
Male	47.8%	29.4%	29.4%	20.6%	15.5%	12.1%	5.4%
Female	46.9%	34.2%	24.5%	23.0%	19.5%	8.4%	3.1%
18-24 yrs	45.6%	39.2%	24.2%	20.2%	21.3%	9.9%	3.5%
25-35 yrs	48.5%	26.8%	28.7%	23.0%	15.0%	10.4%	4.7%
Below primary education	52.6%	17.0%	26.6%	22.1%	18.6%	8.7%	7.7%
Completed primary	51.1%	21.3%	24.2%	21.0%	20.1%	9.3%	5.6%
Completed middle	49.9%	29.9%	25.0%	23.2%	19.2%	11.1%	3.6%
Completed high school	45.7%	38.4%	22.3%	21.5%	14.4%	8.2%	4.0%
Higher education	39.8%	47.9%	33.2%	21.5%	14.6%	11.8%	1.9%

Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

Regional Variations in Skill Demands

Skill preferences varied by region, reflecting local economies and opportunities. In Kayah, 75.8 percent of youth cited vocational training as a key need, suggesting a lack of formal employment avenues. In Chin and Kachin, over half of youth prioritized practical training to improve immediate livelihood prospects. In contrast, Yangon and Nay Pyi Taw youth prioritized language skills (38.5% and 35.4% respectively), aligning with greater access to formal, white-collar job markets.

A System Not Meeting Demand

Despite the strong demand for skill improvement, Myanmar's educational and vocational training systems remain ill-equipped to meet these needs. Existing programmes often lack accessibility, alignment with labour market demands, and scalability. Consequently, young people, both those with limited education and those with advanced degrees, struggle to secure

meaningful opportunities. Youth with limited education who are unable to access vocational training remain trapped in low-wage, informal work. Those with higher education, while academically qualified, are often underprepared for the soft skill requirements of formal-sector or international jobs.

The implication is clear: skills-building programmes must integrate inclusive strategies that cater to the diverse educational and regional contexts across Myanmar. This includes focusing on targeted vocational programmes for underserved rural populations while simultaneously building language and professional competency pathways for urban and higher-educated youth. Greater engagement of the private sector in educational and vocational training systems could enhance quality and relevance, while also easing the transition from learning to employment. Such engagement may take various forms — from shaping curricula and drafting training guides to delivering courses, apprenticeships, and internship programmes.

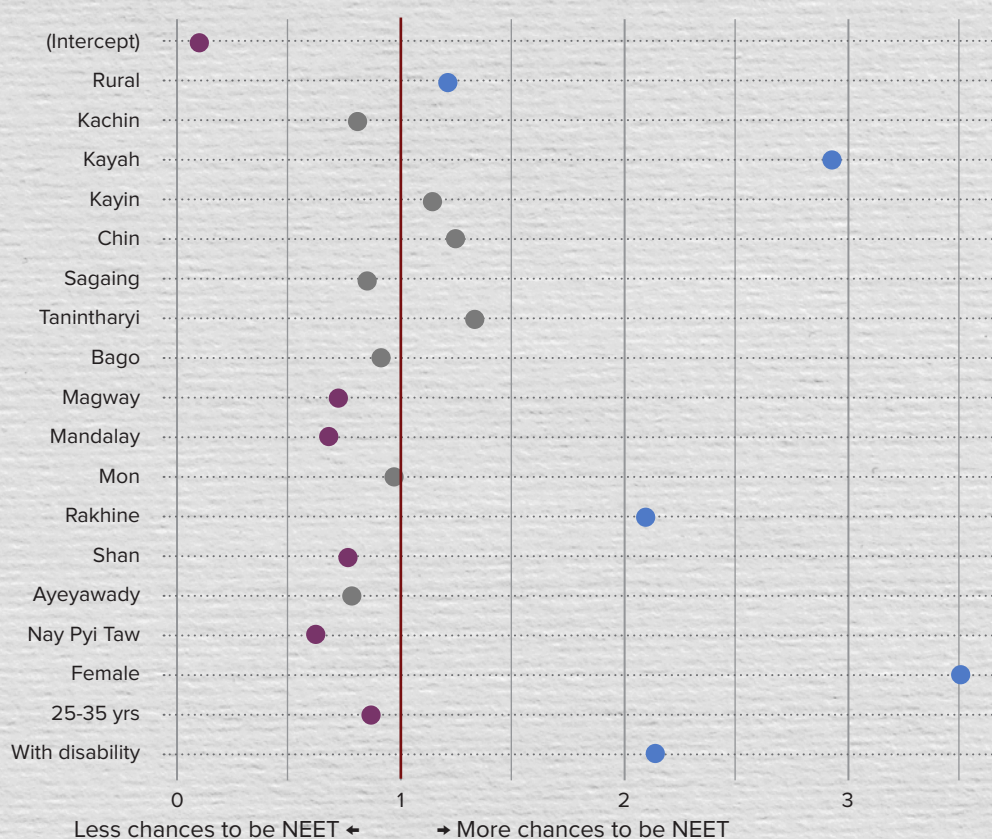
Predictors of Youth Disengagement from Learning and Employment

The youth population in NEET, those disengaged from learning and employment, represents one of Myanmar's most vulnerable demographics. According to the MYS 2024, 17.2 percent of youth are NEET, a figure that closely aligns with ILO's modelled estimate for Myanmar in 2025 (15.3%) and is comparable to NEET rates across South-East Asia (16.4%) and ASEAN (16.3%) for the same year.³⁹ The NEET rate is more pronounced for young women, reaching 24.9 percent, nearly three times higher than the rate for young men (8.9%). Young people in rural areas (17.8%) are also more likely to be disengaged from both learning and

work than their urban peers (16.0%). The NEET rate is particularly high in Kayah (42.2%), Rakhine (32.4%), Tanintharyi (25.7%), and Chin (25.0%), highlighting regions where economic disruption, conflict, and institutional gaps have left large segments of youth without pathways to education or employment.

“Young women are 3.5 times more likely than men to be NEET.”

Figure 15: Odds-ratios for predictors of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET)⁴⁰



Source: Myanmar Youth Survey 2024 (UNDP)

³⁹ ILOSTAT. Indicator and Data Tools International Labour Organization. Note: The ILO defines youth as individuals aged 15–24 years for the NEET indicator and other youth labour market statistics. In contrast, the MYS 2024 survey defines youth as those aged 18–35 years. As such, direct comparisons between these data sources should be interpreted with caution due to the differing age group definitions.

⁴⁰ Dots in blue indicate odds ratios (OR) greater than 1 with p-values less than 0.05; dots in dark purple indicate OR less than 1 with p-values greater than 0.05; dots in grey indicate p-values less than 0.05.

NEET status is not merely a statistic; it represents a critical developmental challenge. With nearly three million youth in Myanmar classified as NEET, this cohort faces significant barriers to acquiring skills, entering the labour market, and accessing income, social networks, and career progression. High NEET prevalence increases vulnerability to long-term unemployment, poverty, and social marginalization, particularly among young women and in rural and conflict-affected regions. Addressing NEET is therefore essential both to support individual youth trajectories and to strengthen the broader socio-economic development of the country.

To better understand the factors driving NEET status, a logistic regression analysis was conducted, examining how geography, gender, age, disability status, and rural residency influence the likelihood of being NEET. The results underscore how entrenched structural inequities, especially those related to gender, region, and rural access, shape educational and employment disengagement.

Gender and Disability: Strongest Predictors of NEET

Gender is the most significant predictor of NEET status. Young women are 3.5 times more likely to be NEET than their male peers, after controlling for education level, age, and geography. This finding reinforces earlier analysis showing that, despite often higher levels of educational attainment, young women face persistent barriers to entering labour market or continuing their education. Contributing factors include restrictive social norms, caregiving responsibilities, and limited access to suitable employment opportunities.

Youth with disabilities are also more than twice as likely to be NEET compared to those without disabilities. This highlights the exclusion faced by young people with disabilities in both educational and economic spheres, compounded by physical barriers, stigma, and lack of inclusive services.

Geographic Patterns: Kayah, Rakhine and the Urban Challenge in Yangon

Geography emerges as a significant determinant of NEET risk, with regional differences reflecting both conflict exposure and systemic disparities in opportunity. Youth in Kayah and Rakhine are significantly more likely to be NEET than youth in Yangon — the reference group in this model. These regions are characterized by ongoing conflict, displacement, and chronic underinvestment in public services, resulting in fewer pathways to continued education or formal employment.

In contrast, youth in Mandalay, Magway, Shan, and Nay Pyi Taw are significantly less likely to be NEET compared to Yangon. Rather than reflecting stronger systems of youth integration in these areas, this trend underscores a critical urban paradox. Despite being Myanmar's economic hub, youth in Yangon are more likely to be NEET than their counterparts in several other regions. Rising urban poverty,⁴¹ labour market saturation, and limited pathways into formal employment contribute to this dynamic, positioning Yangon as a focal point of unmet aspirations and exclusion. Another contributing factor is the heterogeneity of Yangon's youth population, which includes both local students and internal migrants, resulting in greater dispersion of experiences and opportunities compared with relatively more homogenous youth populations in other regions.

Rural Disadvantage and Age Effects

Youth in rural areas are also significantly more likely to be NEET than those in urban settings. This supports earlier findings that highlight how rural youth — especially women — face limited access to education beyond the primary level, fewer employment opportunities, and greater exposure to informal, unstable work.

The 25–35 age group shows a modestly lower likelihood of being NEET compared to those aged 18–24. However, the persistence of NEET status across age groups suggests deeper structural challenges in youth transitions from education to employment.

41 UNDP (2025), Urban Poverty: Unpacking Yangon. United Nations Development Programme.



4 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Myanmar's youth face an unequal and fragmented education-to-employment pathway shaped by intersecting geographic, demographic, and systemic factors. Structural inequities — including gaps in education access, labour market fragmentation, and persistent social barriers — continue to limit youth potential, shape career trajectories, and reinforce cycles of poverty, particularly for young women, rural populations, and those in conflict-affected areas.

Despite higher earnings in educational attainment among some youth, especially young women, employment outcomes remain heavily constrained. The labour market is dominated by informality, insecurity, and weak alignment with both education systems and job demands.

Today, Myanmar's young people may be a generation on hold — but with the right investments, they can become agents of recovery, resilience, and development. Opportunities for systemic reform are limited in the current context of political instability and institutional fragility, yet the stakes are too high to defer action. Unlocking the potential of Myanmar's youth requires immediate, targeted measures as well as sustained investment in equitable pathways that bridge education and employment. Interventions must be context-sensitive, community-rooted, and inclusive — strengthening vocational and technical training, aligning education with labour market demand, and addressing gendered and regional inequities. Greater engagement of the private sector, civil society, and local institutions will be essential to ensure both relevance and resilience.

Recommendations

Building on the findings of this study, the following recommendations outline targeted and practical pathways to improve youth access to education, skills, and decent work in Myanmar. The barriers are steepest for young women, displaced and conflict-affected youth, and those living with disabilities. Exclusion is not only driven by poverty and instability, but also by disrupted schooling, limited training opportunities, and weak links between education and the labour market. Without interventions, these challenges will continue to keep a generation on hold. The following recommendations are drawn from the focus group discussions with youth:

1. Expand Access to Learning for Youth

- Create flexible, community-based options — local hubs, mobile classes, alternative certification — so rural, displaced, and conflict-affected youth can continue their education.
- Design vocational learning programme to accommodate youth with caring responsibilities, integrating technical and soft skills with clear pathways into employment across public, private, and informal sectors.
- Tailor programmes to caregiving women, out-of-school girls, and displaced youth, and build partnerships with local employers and community groups to stay relevant.

2. Break Barriers for Young Women

- Remove the everyday obstacles that stop women from working: caregiving burdens, restrictive norms, and unequal job markets.
- Expand affordable childcare, flexible work opportunities, and targeted job placement for young women ready to enter or re-enter the workforce.

3. Connect Skills to Real Jobs

- Focus training on sectors where jobs are growing — digital work, agriculture and the green economy, including renewable energy, smart farming, sustainable forestry and environmental restoration.
- Strengthen TVET systems through coordination, quality assurance, and employer partnerships to ensure training leads to employment.
- Use labour market intelligence to keep curricula updated and prepare youth for both today's opportunities and future industries.

4. Support Youth Livelihoods in Fragile Contexts

- Provide income options that meet immediate needs while building long-term resilience — cooperatives, micro-businesses, and home-based enterprises.
- Recognize and strengthen the “entrepreneurship by necessity” many youth already practice by expanding access to finance, markets, peer networks, and mentoring.
- In urban areas like Yangon, create pathways out of underemployment through targeted upskilling, entrepreneurship support, and bridges into formal jobs.

5. Build Inclusive, Youth-Centred Systems

- Regularly listen to youth and collect disaggregated data on their realities — from street vending to mobile trades — to design responsive programmes.
- Ensure interventions work in fragile contexts with limited infrastructure or restricted finance.
- Foster inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems that give equal access to finance, mentors, and markets for young women, ethnic minorities, LGBTQIA+ youth, and youth with disabilities.

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APPENDIX TABLES

Appendix Table 1: Summary of the survey respondents' information

	Sample	%
Total Respondents	7,187	100%
Urban/Rural		
Urban	2402	33.42
Rural	4785	66.58
State/Region		
Kachin	118	1.64
Kayah	57	0.79
Kayin	420	5.84
Chin	404	5.62
Sagaing	557	7.75
Tanintharyi	459	6.39
Bago	584	8.13
Magway	604	8.40
Mandalay	601	8.36
Mon	562	7.82
Rakhine	525	7.30
Yangon	605	8.42
Shan	572	7.96
Ayeyarwady	600	8.35
Naypyitaw	519	7.22
Sex		
Male	3051	42.45
Female	4136	57.55
Marital status		
Single	3758	52.29
Married	3280	45.64
Living with partner	3	0.04
Widow	46	0.64
Divorced	60	0.83
Separated	40	0.56
Age group		
18-24 yrs	2972	41.35
25-35 yrs	4215	58.65
Education		
No formal education or less than primary	853	11.87
Completed primary school	1,859	25.87
Completed middle school	1,740	24.21
Completed high school	884	12.30
Higher education	1,851	25.75

Appendix Table 2: Summary of the focus group discussions respondents' information

State/Region	No. of FGDs	Type	Gender		No. of Participants
			Male	Female	
Kachin	1	Mixed	3	3	6
	2	Female		6	6
	3	Male	6		6
Kayah	1	Male	7		7
	2	Female		7	7
	3	Mixed	3	3	6
	4	PWD-Mixed	4	2	6
Bago-East	1	Male	6		6
	2	Female		6	6
	3	Mixed	2	4	6
Northern Shan State	1	Male	8		8
	2	Female		8	8
	3	Mixed	3	3	6
Kayin	1	Male	5		5
	2	Female		5	5
	3	Mixed	2	4	6
Rakhine	1	Male	7		7
	2	Female		7	7
	3	Mixed	3	4	7
	4	Male	5		5
	5	Female		5	5
	6	Mixed	3	2	5
Yangon	1	Male	5		5
	2	Female		5	5
	3	Mixed	1	3	4
	4	Mixed	3	2	5
	5	LGBTQIA	4	2	6
	6	PWD-Mixed	2	3	5
	7	PWD-Male	5		5
	8	PWD-Female		5	5
Mandalay	1	PWD-Mixed	3	3	6
Thai	1	Male	5		5
	2	Mixed	2	3	5
Total	33		97	95	192

Appendix Table 3:

Reasons why not employed youth are not actively seeking jobs

	Don't want job	No time	Don't believe to find job	Security reason	Spouse does not allow	Others
Union	8.2%	60.7%	2.8%	6.0%	18.1%	4.0%
Urban/Rural						
Urban	11.9%	63.9%	1.9%	5.0%	13.9%	3.3%
Rural	5.9%	58.7%	3.3%	6.7%	20.7%	4.5%
State/Region						
Kachin	7.2%	56.4%	7.6%	12.3%	7.7%	4.8%
Kayah		33.2%	7.9%	45.9%	7.9%	5.0%
Kayin	7.4%	53.9%	6.3%	2.8%	22.5%	7.1%
Chin	6.0%	55.5%	6.7%	18.7%	9.4%	3.7%
Sagaing	5.9%	63.3%	2.5%	14.0%	10.6%	3.7%
Tanintharyi	2.9%	51.1%	2.5%	1.6%	34.8%	7.2%
Bago	10.5%	58.2%	1.0%	6.8%	19.8%	3.8%
Magway	4.9%	60.5%	2.2%	8.9%	18.9%	3.6%
Mandalay	6.3%	68.0%	2.0%	1.7%	17.5%	4.5%
Mon	9.6%	54.1%	3.2%	1.8%	27.0%	4.4%
Rakhine	9.5%	50.5%	2.9%	19.7%	13.4%	4.0%
Yangon	10.0%	65.5%	2.5%	1.6%	16.9%	3.5%
Shan	13.8%	56.8%	4.1%	6.1%	16.7%	2.5%
Ayeyarwady	6.4%	61.9%	1.6%	0.7%	24.7%	4.7%
Naypyitaw	4.2%	68.6%	2.3%	2.8%	19.6%	2.4%
Sex						
Male	13.0%	57.0%	3.8%	6.4%	11.9%	8.0%
Female	6.3%	62.1%	2.4%	5.9%	20.4%	2.5%
Age Range						
18-24 yrs	9.8%	59.4%	3.3%	5.2%	19.5%	2.6%
25-35 yrs	6.3%	62.2%	2.1%	7.1%	16.3%	5.8%
Education						
No formal education or less than primary	8.0%	47.1%	3.9%	2.5%	24.9%	13.6%
Completed primary school	6.6%	52.5%	3.0%	7.6%	25.3%	4.9%
Completed middle school	5.0%	61.8%	4.0%	6.3%	20.1%	2.2%
Completed high school	10.3%	61.6%	3.8%	6.4%	14.3%	3.7%
Higher education	11.4%	68.9%	0.7%	5.5%	10.7%	2.6%

Appendix Table 4: Reasons of Income change

Categories	Got laid off and still not working	Got laid off and found another work	Natural career transition	No demand for my business	Security reason	Personal reason	Others	Prefer not to response
Union	8.5%	21.9%	17.0%	7.4%	4.9%	24.1%	15.6%	0.6%
Urban/Rural								
Urban	8.3%	27.8%	11.4%	6.6%	3.6%	23.7%	17.9%	0.7%
Rural	8.6%	17.6%	21.2%	7.9%	5.9%	24.5%	13.9%	0.4%
Sex								
Male	5.5%	22.7%	18.9%	6.2%	5.6%	21.6%	19.2%	0.2%
Female	11.9%	21.0%	14.9%	8.6%	4.1%	27.0%	11.5%	0.9%
Employment status								
Employed	1.9%	27.0%	21.0%	7.9%	4.7%	20.2%	16.7%	0.5%
Not employed	25.1%	9.1%	7.0%	5.9%	5.6%	34.0%	12.7%	0.7%
Education								
No education or less than primary	6.0%	15.3%	18.3%	10.6%	3.6%	23.5%	22.7%	-
Completed primary school	5.0%	19.6%	19.2%	8.7%	5.7%	24.1%	17.0%	0.6%
Completed middle school	8.4%	22.8%	17.3%	9.3%	5.0%	25.7%	10.7%	0.8%
Completed high school	12.4%	20.7%	21.3%	4.4%	6.0%	19.7%	15.1%	0.5%
Higher education	10.9%	26.2%	12.7%	4.5%	4.2%	24.9%	16.0%	0.6%

Appendix Table 5: Reasons why youth are not engaged in education or training

Categories	Already graduated from high school	Safety concerns	School closure	Absence of school in the area	Responsibility to work	Transportation difficulties	Low quality of education	Unaffordable tuition fees and school supplies	Responsibility for house chores	Responsibility to look after family members	Not interested in education
Union	1.0%	8.2%	4.5%	0.5%	41.5%	7.0%	1.3%	12.7%	12.4%	3.0%	7.1%
Urban/Rural											
Urban	0.8%	7.9%	4.2%	0.7%	49.6%	3.8%	0.9%	12.3%	10.2%	1.8%	6.6%
Rural	1.1%	8.3%	4.7%	0.4%	37.5%	8.6%	1.5%	12.9%	13.4%	3.6%	7.4%
State/Region											
Kachin	-	17.2%	6.7%	-	28.2%	5.6%	-	9.6%	22.3%	-	7.8%
Kayah	-	7.0%	7.9%	-	41.8%	10.1%	-		15.6%	8.1%	9.4%
Kayin	2.4%	8.8%	2.8%	1.3%	31.2%	7.3%	0.7%	13.3%	18.6%	3.9%	6.6%
Chin	1.2%	21.7%	5.5%	3.3%	14.2%	16.1%	2.1%	7.7%	10.3%	5.4%	11.3%
Sagaing	-	10.4%	6.3%	-	39.1%	12.7%	0.6%	12.1%	11.1%	2.9%	4.7%
Tanintharyi	1.0%	4.4%	1.6%	0.6%	34.7%	7.0%	0.5%	16.8%	17.8%	5.0%	8.9%
Bago	2.7%	8.0%	4.5%	-	35.4%	5.5%	1.8%	15.0%	14.6%	2.5%	9.1%
Magway	0.5%	10.4%	3.7%	-	38.1%	8.5%	1.2%	15.9%	10.2%	6.2%	4.2%
Mandalay	0.4%	5.8%	4.2%	-	44.8%	4.1%	2.8%	10.7%	14.9%	4.8%	6.9%
Mon	0.5%	5.4%	2.4%	0.5%	42.6%	10.3%	1.9%	15.4%	11.4%	2.8%	6.8%
Rakhine	2.2%	19.9%	13.9%	2.3%	16.1%	12.4%	2.6%	17.6%	5.7%	2.0%	3.9%
Yangon	1.4%	4.4%	3.0%	0.7%	57.9%	4.9%	0.7%	10.9%	7.1%	1.1%	8.0%
Shan	0.6%	5.7%	3.2%	0.6%	43.6%	5.6%	1.3%	14.1%	12.3%	3.2%	8.8%
Ayeyarwady	1.7%	6.8%	2.3%	0.6%	49.9%	4.1%	0.7%	8.9%	14.1%	1.8%	8.5%
Nay Pyi Taw	-	4.9%	7.2%	0.5%	45.9%	9.5%	0.7%	14.1%	9.9%	2.4%	-
Sex											
Male	0.9%	8.6%	3.2%	0.3%	49.8%	6.2%	1.6%	13.0%	5.2%	2.0%	9.0%
Female	1.2%	7.7%	5.9%	0.6%	32.9%	8.0%	1.0%	12.5%	19.8%	4.1%	5.2%



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