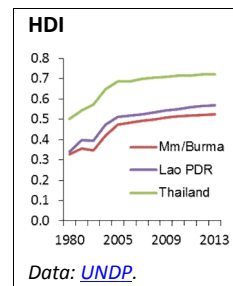


Myanmar/Burma: Social situation

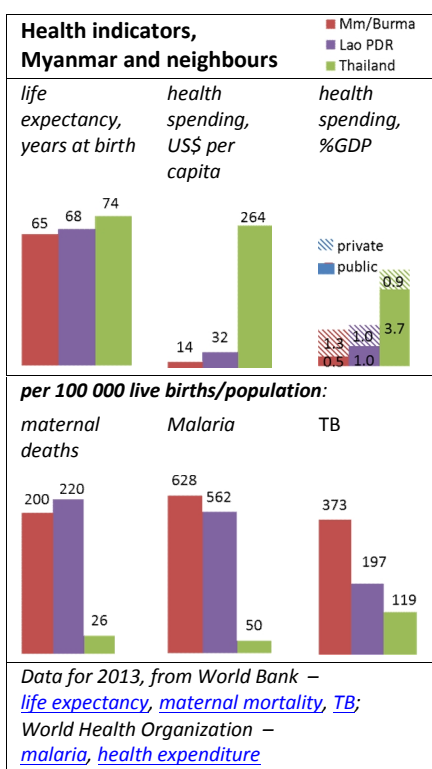
One of the least developed countries in Asia, Myanmar/Burma lags behind its neighbours in areas such as health and education. In the medium term, the country's improving economic situation should enable faster progress.

Human Development Index (HDI). The [HDI](#) provides a snapshot of Myanmar/Burma's socioeconomic situation. In 2013, this was 0.524 – the lowest in south-east/east Asia, 150th out of 187 countries, putting the country in the low human development category. Reflecting improvements in the three components of HDI (life expectancy, education and gross national income per capita), this score is slowly rising.



Poverty. Myanmar/Burma has the second lowest [per capita GDP](#) in south-east Asia after Cambodia, and an [estimated poverty rate](#) of 26%, higher than in most countries of the region. Food poverty – defined as the inability to meet basic nutritional needs – affected [5%](#) of the population in 2010; according to 2009 [figures](#), 23% of children aged under five were underweight. [14%](#) lack access to safe drinking water, [20%](#) to sanitation facilities, and [52%](#) to electricity.

Health. The health situation is improving slowly – life expectancy grew by six months, to [65.2 years](#), between 2010 and 2013, while maternal mortality fell by 9% during the same period. Nevertheless, Myanmar/Burma lags behind its neighbours in most areas. Poor health indicators correlate with one of the lowest levels of health expenditure anywhere in Asia – just US\$14 per capita or [1.8%](#) of GDP, only one third of which is government-funded. Many clinics lack [basic equipment and medicines](#), as well as qualified staff.

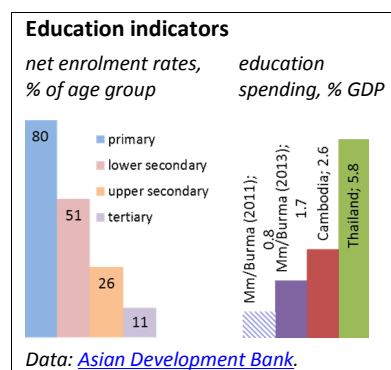


Education. Participation is low with just one quarter of the relevant age group completing basic education (primary to upper secondary, currently an 11-year programme). Quality is also an issue due to large class sizes (average pupil-teacher ratio in secondary education: [34](#)), as well as outdated teaching methods and curricula (e.g. corporal punishment and rote-learning are common practices). Secondary pupils are handicapped by the use of [English](#) as a medium of instruction in subjects such as maths and sciences.

While literacy rates are relatively high at [93%](#), [tests](#) carried out in primary schools found that just one in four pupils had achieved minimum competency in Myanmar language, and only one in five had achieved at least half the skills on the mathematics curriculum.

Again, these poor outcomes reflect insufficient spending, still very low

despite having tripled between 2011 and 2013. The [Global Competitiveness Report](#) identifies the lack of an adequately trained workforce as the [fourth most problematic factor](#) for doing business in the country, and this problem is likely to become more acute as industrial and service sectors expand.



Employment. Forced labour [continues](#), although on a smaller scale than in the past. Child labour is also [common](#). Culprits include the army, ethnic armed groups and, in the case of child labour, [human traffickers](#).

Agriculture is the main source of employment, with [70%](#) of the workforce on over [4 million](#) farms.

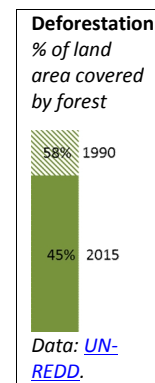
Unemployment. Reliable data are lacking, with estimates of the unemployment rate ranging from 3% ([World Bank](#)) to 37% (the country's first national [employment survey](#), 2013). In another [survey](#) carried out in 2014 by US-based NGO, International Republican Institute, unemployment was most frequently mentioned (by 19% of respondents) as one of the three biggest problems facing the country.

Social protection. Under a [Social Security Law](#) enacted in 2012, employees now enjoy benefits including invalidity, injury and unemployment insurance, as well as pensions. A new [minimum wage](#) is also an important step forward. However, these measures do not apply to the self-employed, casual workers and those working for family members – around [three quarters](#) of the workforce.

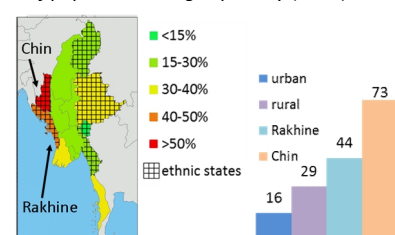
Environment. Myanmar/Burma has lost [one fifth](#) of its forest cover – an area almost three times the size of Belgium – since 1990. Nearly half of the country remains forested, but with [firewood](#) as the only energy source available to rural populations in the absence of electricity and unsustainably high levels of commercial logging, [deforestation](#) will continue, even if government measures such as a [ban](#) on exports of unprocessed wood may slow its pace.

Though good for the economy, rapid infrastructure development, a booming [construction sector](#) and foreign-financed [mining](#) and [energy](#) projects all come with environmental costs. With [three times](#) the number of cars and trucks on the road since 2007, air pollution in Yangon and other large cities is on the rise.

Climate change. Though Myanmar/Burma itself is not a major producer of greenhouse gases, it has been [identified](#) as the world's second most vulnerable country to climate change, blamed for natural disasters such as [Cyclone Nargis](#) in 2008 and the [worst flooding in decades](#) in 2015.



Regional disparities
% of population living in poverty (2010)



Data: [UNDP](#).

Inequality. All the above problems are exacerbated by severe disparities. Poverty is much more widespread in rural than urban areas, and there are huge regional variations, with areas inhabited by ethnic minorities such as Chin and Rakhine states the worst affected. These disparities are reflected in unequal access to health and education. Inhabitants of remote areas may have to travel [hours](#) to reach their nearest clinic. Rural mothers are much [less likely](#) to receive antenatal care and give birth in hospital – key factors in reducing maternal mortality. School attendance rates are also [lower](#) in poorer regions.

Most disadvantaged of all are the Rohingya, victims of [persecution](#) and a [humanitarian crisis](#). Many have lost their homes and live in [squalid camps](#); up to 7 000 a month [risk their lives](#) to flee the country in flimsy boats.

Gender. Gender equality is an area where Myanmar/Burma does comparatively well – participation rates for women in education and employment are close to or in some cases even exceed parity. Around one third of senior managers in the [civil service](#) and [private companies](#) are women – a surprisingly high number even by European standards. On the other hand, politics is still a male-dominated area, with just [6%](#) of parliamentary seats held by women, the lowest rate in ASEAN. That could change soon with the NLD and several other parties fielding record numbers of women candidates in the November 2015 elections.

Outlook

Myanmar/Burma may remain under-developed for many years to come, but brighter economic prospects should also bring social benefits, gradually closing the gap with the rest of the region. At the same time, the [experience](#) of neighbouring countries which are further ahead in development suggests that inequalities are likely to persist. Economic development will also put pressure on the environment.

