

MYANMAR – Country Profile

Overview

Myanmar (formerly “Burma”) is a majority Buddhist nation in Southeast Asia, and home to more than 135 different ethnic groups, each with its own history, culture and language. The majority Burmese ethnicity is the Burmans, making up approximately two-thirds of the population. The 2014 census, the first in three decades, put the population at 51.5 million, but accurate numbers are elusive; the government categorises people into ethnic designations based on geography, not all of which were counted in the most recent census. The country is divided into seven regions, mostly inhabited by Burmans, and seven states, each named after one of the minority ethnic categories: Chin, Kachin, Karenni, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and Shan. Approximately two million Rohingya people, living mostly in Rakhine and in neighboring countries, are not officially recognized by the Burmese government, and as a result, 1.2 million people in Rakhine were not counted in the census.

Both recognised and unrecognised religions include Buddhism (approximately 89%), Islam (4%), Christianity (4%), and other religions (3%) including Hinduism, Bahai, and indigenous Nat worshippers. Poverty is disproportionately concentrated in rural areas and less than one-third of the country has access to electricity. About one in five women aged 6 and older have no education. A relatively high proportion of women, 36%, have some secondary education or more.

Source: extracted from Myanmar Country Profile 2017; Myanmar Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) 2015-2016

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Key findings from the 2015-2016 MDHS on the situation of SRHR in Myanmar are as follows:

Maternal Health:

- The pregnancy-related mortality ratio is 227 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2008-2015.
- Just over 80 percent of women with a live birth in the five years before the survey received antenatal care (ANC) from a skilled provider
- Fifty-nine percent of women aged 15- 49 had four or more ANC visits throughout their pregnancy, and 40 percent had their first ANC visit in the first trimester of pregnancy, as recommended.
- 37 percent of births in Myanmar are delivered in a health facility. The majority of women in urban areas deliver in a health facility (70 percent), while only 28 percent of women in rural areas deliver in a health facility.
- 60 percent of births are delivered by a skilled provider. Delivery by a skilled provider is much more common in urban than rural areas, increases with a woman’s education and wealth, and varies by region, from 30 percent in Rakhine State to 83 percent in Yangon Region.
- Just over 70 percent of women who gave birth in the two years before the survey received a postnatal checkup within two days of delivery. Almost one quarter of women received no postnatal checkup within 41 days of delivery.

Contraception:

- Women in Myanmar have an average of 2.3 children.
- Fertility is slightly higher among women in rural areas (2.4) than women living in urban areas (1.9). Women in the poorest households have an average of 3.5 children compared with 1.6 children among women in the wealthiest households.
- Women have their first birth at a median age of 24.7. Age at first birth is relatively late in all states and regions, dropping below 23 in only Shan State and Rakhine State.
- 52 percent of married women use a method of contraception with 51% using a modern method and 1% using a traditional method.
- At the time of the report, the four most popular modern methods used by married women are injectables (28 percent), the pill (14 percent), and female sterilisation (5 percent).
- The public sector remains the major provider of contraceptive methods, catering to 54 percent of users.

HIV & AIDS:

- About 9 in 10 women aged 15-49 have heard of AIDS.
- Only 54% of women know that using condoms and limiting sex to an uninfected partner can prevent transmission of HIV.
- 18% of women have ever been tested for HIV and received the results of the test. 37% of women with more than secondary education have ever been tested for HIV and received the results compared with 9% of those with no education.
- 51% of women know that HIV can be spread by breastfeeding and that the risk of HIV transmission from mother to child can be reduced by the mother taking drugs during pregnancy.

Abortion:

- According to the UN Abortion Policies and Reproductive Health around the World (2014), abortion is permitted to save a women's life.

Sexual and Reproductive Rights

Child Early & Forced Marriage (CEFM):

- 60% of women aged 15- 49 are currently married. Nineteen percent of women aged 25-49 were married by age 18.
- The median age of marriage among women is 22.1 years.
- Women in urban areas get married more than three years later, on average, than women in rural areas (median ages of 24.5 and 21.3 respectively)
- On average, women initiate sexual intercourse just after marriage, at a median age of 22.5.

Violence Against Women (VAW):

- 51 percent of women agree with one or more reasons justifying wife beating.
- Neglecting the children is the most commonly cited justification for wife beating among both women and men in Myanmar.
- 21 percent of ever-married women aged 15-49 have experienced spousal violence (physical, sexual, or emotional violence).

Current initiatives in Myanmar

- In Myanmar, ARROW works with the Migrant Action Programme Foundation (MAP Foundation) and the Burma Medical Association (BMA). Both organisations are based in Thailand and focus their work on the migrant and refugee women along the Thai border with Myanmar and South Thailand. These women are especially vulnerable as many are not prepared with the knowledge or skill on how to protect themselves from HIV, STI's and unplanned pregnancies.
- ARROW is also engaged in **innovative advocacy programmes on SRHR and environmental sustainability** with rights-based climate change/environmental groups. The Women and Earth Initiative (WORTH) is an innovation programme and fund that aims to create a platform where civil society can unleash creativity and develop new integrated solutions to gender equality, SRHR and climate change adaptation challenges. For 2019, the programme is focused on climate change/environmental civil society organisations from four countries experiencing devastating consequences from climate change: Philippines, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Pakistan.