



Rapid Gender Analysis, Myanmar

Introduction

As of June 7, Myanmar has reported 7,228 COVID-19 cases and 6 deaths. These numbers have continued to climb steeply, and low testing rates indicate that COVID-19 cases are likely higher. As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, the government of Myanmar has acted quickly to institute quarantines, shutdowns, and other measures to prevent the spread of the disease. 25% of the Myanmar population was already below the poverty line, and an additional 33% were at risk of sliding back into poverty. COVID-19 has been particularly devastating for these people, and will likely push many more back into poverty. Men and women agree that income and food are their two biggest priorities right now.

In May and June 2020, CARE conducted 82 interviews with government officials, citizens, garment factory workers, and gender experts to understand the impacts COVID-19 and the corresponding measures are having for people of all genders. This [Rapid Gender Analysis](#) provides recommendations to improve COVID-19 response in Myanmar to protect women and girls rights and limit COVID's devastating impacts.

Key Findings

- **Job loss is critical, rising, and being used as a tool to roll back rights.** 52,000 women garment workers have already lost jobs, and 315,000 more are at risk of being laid off. Many garment factories are using layoffs to purge unionized workers and women who have spoken out for rights and against sexual harassment. 105 of 175 factories have stopped producing, and many garment factory workers have not been paid for days they have already worked. Women also make up 60% of employees in hotels and service industries hit hardest by COVID-19.
- **Women are not involved in decisions—especially locally.** While women make up less than 30% of leaders in national government bureaus, they are less than .25% of local officials. Childcare duties and lack of earlier investments in women's leadership are the primary barriers to women participating more. "In the village, women are also interested, however, their

"Because we have to eat, I am responsible to go outside for work. It is a challenge to buy face masks and soaps as we do not have enough cash to eat."

- *Female Sex Worker,
Yanqon*

responsibility of [caring for] parents and children at home, and financial constraints are barriers to participate in social matters.”

- **Women have less access to safety nets.** 90% of women work in the informal sector with no access to social safety nets (compared to 77% of men). Only 2.5% of the population has access to government healthcare benefits. 62% of adults say they have no savings to fall back on.
- **Women are losing access to healthcare, especially in rural areas.** Health centers are reporting stockouts of contraceptives, vaccinations have stopped, clinics are closing, and mobile health services have stopped. Patient numbers are falling because people are afraid to go to health centers, public transportation is limited, and women’s families are preventing them from leaving the home. Where the maternal mortality rate is already twice the average for Southeast Asia, and a major cause of maternal mortality is unsafe abortions, this lack of access to services is life threatening.
- **Sex work is likely to rise and become even more dangerous.** Poverty has always been a trigger for women entering sex work—especially as the young women (16-23) who make up the majority of garment factory workers lose their jobs. As businesses where sex workers operated close, sex workers are forced to work on the streets, which is much more dangerous and has higher risks of GBV.
- **Women’s burdens are rising, although sometimes men are helping.** In Myanmar, women work up to 6 hours a day on unpaid care, while men work an average of about 45 minutes. COVID-19 is causing more men to temporarily help at home. As one 45 year-old woman from Yangon put it: “While husbands are staying at home, they are helpful for wives.” This does not seem to reflect a change in underlying beliefs that unpaid care work is women’s sole responsibility.
- **Evidence on Gender Based Violence is unclear, although GBV services are severely limited.** GBV evidence is mixed—with some actors reporting rises and others reporting fewer cases. What is clear is that access to GBV services has dropped dramatically. Between being unable to report while trapped with their abusers, the overwhelmed judicial system closing GBV cases without responding to them, and the lack of access to health care, GBV survivors are in a very precarious position. There is also a risk that child marriage—already at 15%--and trafficking will rise to cope with economic constraints.
- **Access to information is a challenge for women.** Women are 28% less likely than men to own a mobile phone, and many women report they can no longer buy credit to make calls. The internet is blocked completely in Rakhine and Chin states—dramatically reducing the ability to share COVID-19 related information.

Recommendations

- **Make it easy for women and marginalized groups to qualify for aid.** Ensure eligibility criteria and targeting processes for activities 3.1 and 4.1 in the COVID-19 Economic Relief Plan are fully inclusive of women, informal sector workers and other marginalized groups, such as sex workers and migrant workers, including returnee migrant workers.
- **Expand short term and long term safety nets.** Continue to invest in extending social health protection, re-committing to the existing goal of achieving Universal Health Coverage by 2030, including Sexual Reproductive Health.⁵ In tandem with short-term emergency solutions (such as cash grants), solving the underlying challenges remains key.
- **Give women a seat at the table.** Ensure meaningful engagement of women and girls in all decision making on COVID-19 preparedness and response at all levels, to ensure efforts and response are not further discriminating and excluding those most at risk.⁶
- **Prioritize GBV response in legal services.** Ensure continuation and strengthening of support to court and legal service provision for gender-based violence cases.